



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

History of Ancient Societies

Postgraduate Programme in History



SELF LEARNING MATERIAL

COURSE CODE: M21HS04DC

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

Vision

To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.

Mission

To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

History of Ancient Societies

Course Code: M21HS04DC

Semester- I

Master of Arts History Self Learning Material



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

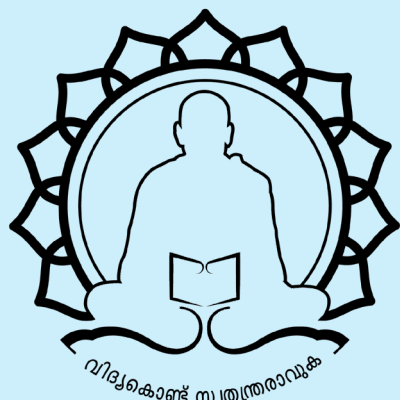
SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

Documentation

Course Code: M21HS04DC

History of Ancient Societies



**SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY**

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Printed and published on behalf of Sreenarayanaguru Open University by Registrar, SGOU, Kollam.

www.sgou.ac.in



ISBN 978-81-963283-1-3



Academic Committee

Dr. M.T. Narayanan

Dr. P. Sanal Mohan

Dr. Muhammad Maheen

Dr. Vinodkumar Kallolockal

Dr. K.S. Madhavan

Dr. Ram Das P.

Dr. Manjula Poyil

Dr. K.P. Rajesh

Dr. P.P. Abdul Razak

Dr. Shaji A.

Dr. C. Haridas

Vasisht M.C.

Dr. T. Mohammad Ali

Dr. C.H. Jayasree

Dr. Mujeeb Rahuman

Dr. Sri Parvathi

Development of the content

Raji M., Nasreena P.K., Asha P.P.

Review

Content: Dr.C. Francis

Format: Dr. I.G. Shibi

Linguistic: Dr. C. Ajayan

Edit

Dr.C. Francis

Scrutiny

Dr. Suraj G., Thahani Rezak, Dr. Reeja. R., Umesh Mani M., Zubin Antony Mehar Reynold, Dr. Preethi Chandran P.B.

Co-ordination

Dr. I.G. Shibi and Team SLM

Design Control

Azeem Babu T.A.

Production

June 2023

Copyright

© Sreenarayanaguru Open University 2023

Message from Vice Chancellor

Dear

I greet all of you with deep delight and great excitement. I welcome you to the Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University was established in September 2020 as a state initiative for fostering higher education in open and distance mode. We shaped our dreams through a pathway defined by a dictum 'access and quality define equity'. It provides all reasons to us for the celebration of quality in the process of education. I am overwhelmed to let you know that we have resolved not to become ourselves a reason or cause a reason for the dissemination of inferior education. It sets the pace as well as the destination. The name of the University centers around the aura of Sreenarayanaguru, the great renaissance thinker of modern India. His name is a reminder for us to ensure quality in the delivery of all academic endeavors.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University rests on the practical framework of the popularly known "blended format". Learner on distance mode obviously has limitations in getting exposed to the full potential of classroom learning experience. Our pedagogical basket has three entities viz Self Learning Material, Classroom Counselling and Virtual modes. This combination is expected to provide high voltage in learning as well as teaching experiences. Care has been taken to ensure quality endeavours across all the entities.

The university is committed to provide you stimulating learning experience. The PG programme in History is expected to expose the learners to the intricacies of historian's craft through modules on historiography and historical methods. The learners will be trained on the skills for understanding historical forces enabling them to move further in to the complexities of historical narration in order to revisit history with the right perspective. The modules derived multi-disciplinary flavour due to their cross border penetration. We assure you that the university student support services will closely stay with you for the redressal of your grievances during your studentship.

Feel free to write to us about anything that seems relevant regarding the academic programme.

Wish you the best.



Regards,

Dr. P.M. Mubarak Pasha

01.05.2023

Contents

BLOCK-01	From Nomads to Cultural Settlements	1
UNIT 1	Early Human Settlements	2
UNIT 2	Theories of Transition to Agriculture	18
UNIT 3	Domestication of Plants and Animals	27
UNIT 4	Features of Neolithic Revolution	40
BLOCK-02	Bronze Age Civilization	53
UNIT 1	Cultural and Natural Settings	54
UNIT 2	Social Structure	71
BLOCK-03	States and Empires	98
UNIT 1	Empires in the Ancient World	99
UNIT 2	Ancient Greece	125
UNIT 3	Ancient Rome	164
BLOCK-04	Alternative Social Formations	199
UNIT 1	Africa	200
UNIT 2	Latin America	220

From Nomads to Cultural Settlements

BLOCK-01



Early Human Settlements

Learning Outcomes

Upon conclusion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the factors that contributed to the transition from nomadic to settled lifestyles
- ◆ analyze the technological advancements that accompanied the shift towards settled life
- ◆ explore the social and cultural changes that occurred with the establishment of settled communities
- ◆ evaluate the significance of early human settlements in shaping human history

Background

Early humans established communities and began to live in a more settled manner, a substantial departure from the nomadic lifestyles of hunter-gatherer tribes. The development of settled communities marked a crucial turning point in human history and laid the foundation for the subsequent development of civilizations. The earliest human settlements date back to the Paleolithic period, also known as the Old Stone Age, which began around 2.6 million years ago and lasted until about 10,000 BCE. During this time, early humans, such as *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus*, lived in small groups and relied on hunting animals and gathering wild plants for sustenance. They moved frequently in search of food and resources, following the seasonal patterns of animal migrations and plant growth.

As the human population grew and environmental conditions changed, a gradual shift towards a more settled lifestyle took place. This transition is associated with the Mesolithic period, also known as the Middle Stone Age, which occurred between the end of the Palaeolithic and the beginning of the Neolithic period. During the Mesolithic, humans began to develop more sophisticated tools and techniques, such as blades and microliths, which increased their efficiency in hunting and gathering. With the development of settled communities, humans began to construct more permanent structures,



such as houses and storage facilities. They also developed more complex social structures, specialized skills, and the ability to create and exchange goods. These advancements paved the way for the rise of civilizations and the establishment of urban centres.

Keywords

Human Origins, Prehistoric, *Homo sapiens*, Neanderthals, Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic

Discussion

1.1.1 Origin of Humans

◆ Origin of Human Species

While we do not have a clear idea about the exact origin of the human species, there is archaeological evidence that suggests it may have originated in South-Central Africa. Archaeologists have learned about early humans by excavating, discovering, and studying traces of human history. In 1970, archaeologist Mary Leakey led a scientific and archaeological expedition to the region of Laetoli in Tanzania, East Africa. During this expedition, they made a significant discovery - prehistoric footprints that closely resembled those of modern humans, preserved in volcanic ash. These footprints were created by human-like beings now referred to as *australopithecines*. Humans and other creatures that walk upright, such as *australopithecines*, are categorized as hominids. The Laetoli footprints provide compelling evidence regarding human origins.

◆ More evidence on European Neanderthals

In 1921, a skull bearing superficial resemblance to European Neanderthals was discovered during mining operations in a place called Broken Hill in Northern Rhodesia. This discovery, known as 'Rhodesian Man', marked the recovery of the first in a long line of non-modern hominids from the African continent. Just four years later, Raymond Dart, an anatomist from the University of Witwatersrand, originally from Australia and trained in England, published a brief paper describing the fossil skull of a juvenile 'ape' found in a limestone quarry near Taung, South Africa. Dart identified certain facial, dental, cranial, and cerebral features



of *Australopithecus africanus* and made the startling claim that this essentially bipedal ape represented the beginning of the human lineage separate from the African great apes.

- ◆ Skeleton of an adult female hominid

While Mary Leakey was working in East Africa, U.S. anthropologist Donald Johanson and his team were also conducting fossil exploration in sites located about 1000 miles to the north in Ethiopia. In 1974, Johanson's team made a remarkable discovery—a remarkably complete skeleton of an adult female hominid. They affectionately nicknamed her “Lucy”. Lucy lived approximately 3.5 million years ago, making her the oldest known hominid at that time. Both Lucy and the hominids who left their footprints in East Africa belonged to the species *Australopithecus*. The ability to walk upright aided them in traveling longer distances with ease. It also allowed them to identify potential threats and carry food and children more effectively.

- ◆ Explanation on evolutionary change

Another crucial development that transformed the study of human evolution was of a theoretical nature. In essence, biologists reached a consensus that Darwinian natural selection, acting on variations arising from random mutations, was a sufficient mechanism to explain evolutionary changes. For anthropologists, although questions of taxonomy and phylogeny remained important, the intellectual consequences of the so-called neo-Darwinian synthesis led to the emergence of “New Physical Anthropology.” This approach viewed early hominid fossils not as representatives of some idealized archetype but as unique members of variable populations. As the scrutiny of species types continued, a clear distinction between apes and humans emerged. It became evident that at some point in the human lineage, members exhibited significant ape-like characteristics. This realization, which seems obvious in retrospect, led to the widespread acceptance of the South African *australopithecines* as human ancestors. It also highlighted the important corollary that bipedalism preceded the development of distinctive human attributes.

1.1.2 Geography and Migration

- ◆ First wave of human migration

The human species, in the first wave of human migration from Africa, was forced to retreat due to an approaching ice age and unfavourable climate. They were unable to travel beyond what is now south-eastern Arabia until approximately 60,000 to 70,000 years ago. According to Alexander Harcourt, an emeritus professor of anthropology, recent archaeological discoveries suggest that *Homo sapiens* may have arrived in

China between 80,000 and 1,20,000 years ago, and as early as 60,000 years ago in Australia.

◆ *Pleistocene Ice Age*

Anthropologists, who study land masses and climate, are aware that during the Pleistocene Ice Age, a land bridge formed over 13,000 years ago, connecting Asia and North America. It is widely accepted that people crossed this land bridge and eventually migrated into North and South America. This migration theory is evidence-based and widely accepted.

◆ *Various reasons and pressures for early human migration*

The prevailing theory, the 'Out of Africa Theory' states that Pre-human hominids likely developed in Africa and spread to Europe and parts of Asia. The first *Homo sapiens* appeared in Africa approximately 4,00,000 years ago. They migrated north out of Africa into the Middle East, eventually expanding into Europe and Asia. *Homo sapiens* coexisted with earlier hominids, competing for resources. They experienced greater reproductive success and eventually replaced these earlier hominids. The 'Out of Africa Theory' is widely accepted and is supported by substantial scientific evidence. The migration of humans is a crucial aspect of the development and social formation of mankind. The human species migrated due to various pressures, including population pressure, food availability, and weather and climatic conditions. When a population resides in a particular area, it faces specific challenges determined by factors such as population size, available resources, and the community's capacity to exploit those resources. Among these pressures, food is the most fundamental and likely drove the earliest migrations out of Africa. The ability of a given area of land to sustain a population depends on the food production in that area. While modern agricultural techniques and technologies have significantly increased food output, our ancestors surviving in the African forests and savannas 1,00,000 years ago relied on hunting and gathering for subsistence. Varying climatic conditions can compel a population to leave a particular area, heavily influencing migratory patterns.

There is no historical evidence documenting the migration patterns of the early humans. Scientists piece together the story of human migration by examining the tools, art, and burial sites left behind, as well as tracing genetic patterns. They achieve this by studying mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA), which is passed from a mother to her offspring without being mixed with the genetic code of the father.



◆ *Migratory pattern of early humans*

Scientists can analyze the number of mutations present and roughly determine the age of a particular genetic lineage. By comparing the number of mtDNA mutations found in people from different locations, we can infer where humans arrived first. The more mutations there are, the longer humans have lived in that area. Interestingly, all the mtDNA found in certain parts of Africa has more mutations than any other mtDNA in the world. This evidence strongly supports the “Out of Africa” theory.

◆ *Course of migration*

When humans first left Africa, they followed the coasts, where resources were abundant. The first wave moved across the Middle East, into Southern Asia, and eventually all the way down to Australia. This occurred roughly between 90,000 and 30,000 years ago. Additional waves of migration followed between 40,000 and 12,000 years ago, as humans moved north into Europe. However, their range was limited by an ice sheet that extended into the northern part of continental Europe.

◆ *Icy conditions that facilitated migration*

The icy conditions at the time also aided in the expansion of early humanity’s territory. A massive sheet of ice, combined with lower sea levels, formed the Beringia Bridge, which connects Siberia and Alaska. The first humans crossed over 30,000 years ago, moving down the west coast of North America. New evidence seems to keep pushing the date of the first North American settlements to about 15,000 years ago. Humans slowly spread into South America and pushed east into what is now the eastern United States and Canada. This theory of North America’s settlement is supported by mtDNA evidence and a similarity in the dental structures of the Siberian and North American populations in the area.

◆ *Different theories of migration*

There have long been competing theories that early humans crossed the Atlantic Ocean, either from Africa to South America or from the Caribbean or from Europe to Greenland to North America. While it may have been possible to make such a trip using available seafaring technology, it is unlikely that a large-scale migration occurred in such a way. The migration from Siberia to North America might not have been made over an ice bridge. Another theory suggests that the settlers used a sea route that hugged the coasts and islands along the way.

The initial spread of humanity across the Earth was primarily driven by food availability and climatic conditions.

◆ *Causative factors of migration*

Nomadic tribes, consisting of a few dozen people, likely followed the migration patterns of the herds they hunted. Climate change played a crucial role in opening up new areas for hunting, while advancements in technology such as the mastery of fire and meat preservation enabled humans to thrive in less-than-ideal environments. The ability of humans to adapt to diverse natural surroundings not only provided them with an advantage over *Homo erectus* but also paved the way for their global expansion as hunter-gatherers.

1.1.3 Food Gathering Mode

◆ *Humans as 'hunter-gatherers'*

Numerous interpretations of the term 'hunter-gatherers' can be found in scholarly literature, but a commonly accepted definition, such as the one proposed by Panter-Brick, Layton, and Rowley-Conway (2001), can be considered representative. Hunter-gatherers engage in a subsistence mode marked by the absence of direct human manipulation in the reproduction of exploited species, as well as limited control over other aspects of population ecology, including the behaviour and distribution of food resources. However, the minimal definition is merely a starting point in the characterization of hunter-gatherers. In fact, recent anthropological and archaeological studies have provided a more nuanced comprehension of the identities and persistence of these groups. Hunting and gathering represented the earliest and most resilient adaptive strategy of humanity in the natural world.

◆ *The three regional super categories*

African foragers are divided into three regional super categories in Central, East, and South Africa: the 2,00,000 Pygmies of Central Africa, the 1,00,000 hunter-gatherers of East Africa from various locations, and the approximately 1,00,000 Bushmen of Southern Africa's semi-arid savannas. Additionally, one can mention the Mikea Forest foragers of Madagascar. The Pygmy groups reside in the rainforest regions of ten countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Guinea, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, and perhaps Angola. Non-Pygmy hunter-gatherers are found in six East African countries: Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia. Meanwhile, Bushmen currently reside in six countries in Southern Africa: Angola, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

The toolkit of most hunter-gatherer people is relatively simple. They primarily utilize light killing weapons such as



◆ Tool -kit of hunter-gatherers

spears, atlatls, bows and arrows, as well as basic choppers and knives for processing carcasses. When it comes to food collection, they often rely on nothing more than a digging stick and a slab of bark or a simple wooden bowl. Food preparation is typically rudimentary, with the simplest method being roasting a small animal by throwing it, skin and all, into an open fire.

◆ Search for earliest stone tools

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, lithic artefacts were classified and systematized into successive cultural phases. The search for the earliest stone tools became a popular field of research from the outset, leading to various debates. Subsequent alleged discoveries claimed the existence of 'Tertiary man' assemblages that were older than those of the Paleolithic, suggesting the presence of humans in a much earlier period.

1.1.4 Development of Tools - Paleolithic and Mesolithic Age

◆ Paleolithic and Neolithic ages

The entire span of human history can be divided into two periods: prehistoric and historic. The preliterate age encompassed the vast majority of humanity's existence and lasted until around 3500 BCE, though some stone age cultures survived and a few tribes existed in remote areas. The prehistoric period is divided further into the Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods, which are named after the types of stone tools and weapons produced during each period.

Homo habilis

The Paleolithic period can be dated roughly from 2, 00,000 BCE to 10,000 BCE. It is commonly divided into two stages: an earlier stage and a later stage. During this time, at least four species of human-like creatures inhabited the earth. Significant discoveries regarding the earliest of these have been made recently by scientific teams working in East Africa. In 1961, the anthropologist Jonathan Leakey uncovered parts of a skull in Tanzania that were approximately 1.8 million years old. The species associated with these remains has been named *Homo habilis*, or "man having ability." *Homo habilis* can be considered a true ancestor of modern humans because they walked upright, had a brain larger than that of any ape, and possessed enough intelligence to use tools. However, their tools were relatively primitive, consisting mainly of natural objects such as animal bones, tree limbs, and chunks of stone, often broken or crudely shaped. Nevertheless, these tools allowed *Homo habilis* to survive as a hunter during times of food scarcity, rather than solely relying on gathering or

foraging. Survival for *Homo habilis* depended on cooperation, particularly in hunting, which made them the first truly social creatures and laid the foundation for the development of language. *Homo habilis* was therefore at the forefront of the human race.

♦ *Java Man and Peking Man*

Two subsequent inhabitants of the earlier Paleolithic period were Java Man and Peking Man. Java Man was once believed to be the oldest human-like creature, but it is now generally accepted that the date of its origin was around 5,00,000 BCE. The skeletal remains of Java Man were discovered on the island of Java in 1891. The remains of Peking Man were found in China between 1926 and 1930. Since then, fragments of at least 32 skeletons of the Peking type have been located, allowing for the possibility of a complete reconstruction of at least the head of this ancient species. Anthropologists generally agree that Peking Man and Java Man are approximately of the same antiquity and likely descended from the same ancestral type.

♦ *Emergence of Neanderthals*

During the last 25,000 years of the earlier Paleolithic period, a fourth species of ancient man made an appearance. This species was *Homo Neanderthals*, famous as an early cave dweller. Although they were first discovered a few years earlier in Gibraltar, Neanderthal man is named after a collection of skeletal fragments found in 1856 in the Neander valley, near Dusseldorf in Germany. Since then, numerous other discoveries have been made, including complete skeletons, in widely separated regions such as Spain, Italy, Yugoslavia, Russia, and Israel. Neanderthals closely resembled modern humans, to the extent that they are classified as a member of the *Homo sapiens* species. However, the resemblance was not perfect. On average, Neanderthals were only about five feet four inches in height. They had receding chins and heavy eyebrow ridges. Although their foreheads sloped back and their brain cases were low-vaulted, their average cranial capacity was slightly greater than that of modern Humans. Unlike *Homo habilis*, Neanderthals progressed by fashioning their own tools instead of solely using those they found. They discovered that stones could be chipped in a way that provided cutting edges. As a result, they developed spearheads, borers, and much more advanced knives and scrapers. Evidence of flint-working floors and stone hearths, where large fires were presumably made, has been discovered in the entrances to caves where Neanderthals lived or sought refuge. These



findings suggest the origins of group life and possibly the crude beginnings of social institutions.

1.1.4.1 Later Paleolithic Culture

◆ *Cro - Magnon people*

Around 30,000 years ago, the culture of the Old Stone Age transitioned to the later Paleolithic stage. This period lasted for approximately two hundred centuries, from 30,000 to 10,000 BCE. The prevailing breed of humans during the later Paleolithic period is known as *Cro-Magnon*, named after the Cro-Magnon cave in Southern France, where some of the most typical remains were discovered. These people relied on hunting reindeer, bison, and mammoths, which freely roamed through Southern Europe and Asia due to the cold climate dominated by glaciers. The *Cro-Magnon* people were tall and broad-shouldered, walking upright, with males averaging over six feet in height. They had broad brows, well-developed chins, and cranial capacity comparable to the modern average. Unlike earlier species, they lacked the thick brows that characterised their forefathers.

◆ *Features of Later Paleolithic Period*

Later Paleolithic culture exhibited significant advancements compared to the preceding period. Not only were tools and implements better crafted, but they also showed a greater variety. Other materials, such as reindeer horn and ivory, were abundantly used in addition to stone flakes and occasional bone shafts. Fish hooks, harpoons, and, near the end of the period, the bow and arrow were among the more complex tools. The invention of the needle demonstrates that the later Palaeolithic people wore clothing. Although they did not possess the knowledge of weaving cloth, they successfully sewed together animal skins as a suitable alternative. Cooking meat was undoubtedly practiced, as evidenced by the presence of enormous hearths that were clearly used for roasting meat. In the vicinity of one such hearth at Solutre in Southern France, a massive accumulation of hunted bones, estimated to contain the remains of numerous large animals, were discovered. While the *Cro-Magnon* people did not construct houses, except for a few basic huts in regions lacking natural shelters, their lifestyle was not entirely nomadic. Evidence found in caves, which served as their homes, indicates that these shelters were used seasonally for extended periods of time.

Social life in the later Paleolithic culture became more highly organized than ever before. The craftsmanship displayed in tools, weapons, and the techniques used to fashion them

◆ *Skills of Later-Paleolithic People*

suggest the possibility of some division of labour. In the later Paleolithic art, sculpture, painting, and carving were all represented. However, ceramics and architecture were absent, as pottery had not yet been invented. Cave painting was the pinnacle of Cro-Magnon art. The *Cro-Magnon* people clearly derived pleasure from the graceful lines, symmetrical patterns, and brilliant colors they employed. Later Paleolithic culture came to an end around 10,000 BCE due to a decline in food supply.

1.1.4.2 Mesolithic Age

◆ *Dating of Mesolithic period*

The period between the Paleolithic Age and the Neolithic Age is known as the Mesolithic period. While the beginning and ending dates of this time period may change based on the location, it is generally dated from approximately 10,000 BCE to 8,000 BCE. However, the most widely accepted chronology divides the Mesolithic period into early and later phases based on well-established typological and technological lithic criteria. It places the Early Mesolithic between 11,600 BCE and 9,450 BCE, and the Later Mesolithic between 9,450 BCE and 7,800 BCE, which encompasses the later and terminal phases.

◆ *Food diet followed by Mesolithic people*

Stable isotope analysis of human bone collagen can be utilized to measure the carbon and nitrogen levels, enabling the determination of the contribution of plant and animal protein in the diet of an individual and whether the animal protein is derived from land-based or marine sources. Investigations conducted on Mesolithic human remains suggest that Early Mesolithic diets predominantly comprised terrestrially sourced proteins. Moreover, these studies indicate that meat consumption was at a trophic level similar to that of carnivores. Although plant foods were also consumed, their presence in the archaeological record is relatively limited compared to traces of meat consumption.

Technology

The continued use of blade core reduction methods during the Mesolithic era shows continuity with the earlier Upper Palaeolithic period. However, there is a noticeable decrease in the size of the blanks, which continued throughout this period. The smaller blades or bladelets of the Mesolithic were often created through the “snapping” technique using micro bruins, resulting in the presence of a significant number of micro bruins at Mesolithic sites. As the

◆ *Tools and their specifications*

environment changed, Mesolithic tool technology began to feature an increased frequency of hafted wood-working tools, as well as the emergence of adzes and tranchet axes. These developments, along with evidence of vegetation cutting and burning, indicate a significant departure from previous practices and suggest a more deliberate manipulation of the environment compared to the Paleolithic period.

◆ *Upper Paleolithic traits*

Although originating from the Creswellian period, this technology has historically been considered somewhat enigmatic because it was unclear whether it was part of the early Mesolithic. However, with the aid of radiocarbon dating and lithic evidence, it is now apparent that the term “Epi-Paleolithic” is appropriate as the initial culture owes much to the preceding Upper Paleolithic era. Upper Paleolithic characteristics can be observed in the subsistence patterns, such as the habitation of caves and rock shelters. It is also visible in the flintwork involving the use of burins, backed bladelets, and microliths, as well as the utilization of antler and bone through the groove and splinter technique. Nonetheless, new developments are evident in the adaptation to the changing environment, particularly in the implementation of more complex food procurement systems and equipment.

◆ *Long blade Sites*

Long blade sites are primarily found in Southern England, along river valleys, and often in close proximity to high-quality flint sources. Similar assemblages have also been documented in North Yorkshire. Traditionally, this blade industry spanned from 11,600 to 9,500 BCE and was regarded as a distinct cultural entity with connections to the Maglemosian culture of Denmark and the Netherlands, indicating contact across the North Sea Plain. The microliths are typically obliquely truncated and take the form of isosceles triangles and trapezoids. Deep Carr-type assemblages, named after the Deep Carr site in Yorkshire, consist of obliquely truncated microliths that are typically longer and narrower. Isosceles triangles and trapezoids are rare in these assemblages, and there are only a few examples of axes or adzes.

◆ *Microliths*

Bone and antler artefacts recovered include barbed points, perforated antler mattock heads, bone awls, pins, antler chisels, wedges, and perforated antler sleeves used for hafting axes. In some cases, bone was knapped in a manner similar to flint. The industry originally referred to as “narrow blade” and “late geometric” is characterized by the presence of smaller geometric microliths. Narrow blade microliths

consist of straight-backed pieces, curved-backed pieces, and small scalene triangles. In the later Mesolithic period, tiny geometric forms such as rods, micro scalene triangles, micro tranchets, micro rhomboids, and micro lunates are found in various regions.

◆ *Wood working in Mesolithic period*

There is significant evidence of wood-working in the Mesolithic period, although it is not specific to a particular time frame. At Star Carr, a platform made of bush wood was discovered, extending into the ancient Lake Pickering, with birch timbers showing distinct signs of being worked. Birch bark rolls, likely used for extracting resin, as well as remnants of wooden shafts and a claimed wooden paddle, were also found at this site. While many dugout canoes have been discovered in waterlogged environments elsewhere in Britain, only a few have been dated to the Mesolithic period. European evidence suggests that wood was used for crafting spears, arrows, and bow shafts, a practice that originated in the Paleolithic and continued into the Mesolithic.

1.1.5 Early Pastoralism

◆ *Advent of agriculture and animal domestication*

Early pastoralism emerged as a significant cultural and economic development during the Stone Age. Pastoralism is a way of life that relies on domesticating and managing herds of animals for food and other resources. The hunter-gatherer way of life gave way to one that included managing livestock during this time. Early pastoralism began around 10,000 years ago during the Neolithic period, also known as the New Stone Age. This era was characterized by the advent of agriculture and animal domestication, leading to significant shifts in human society. The exact timing and location of the emergence of pastoralism varied across different regions of the world.

◆ *Features of pastoral societies*

In various parts of the world, early pastoralists relied on the domestication of animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, and horses. These animals provided a renewable source of food, including meat, milk, and dairy products. Additionally, pastoralists used the animals for their skins, fur, and bones, which had various practical applications. Pastoralism brought about significant changes in human settlements. Communities began to establish semi-permanent or even permanent settlements, as they needed to remain close to their herds. However, pastoralists still maintained a semi-nomadic or transhuman lifestyle, moving their livestock seasonally to ensure access to



fresh pastures and water sources. The shift to pastoralism impacted social structures as well. Pastoral societies often organized themselves around kinship ties, with family units forming the core of social organization. Leadership roles were often held by those who displayed expertise in managing herds and understanding animal behaviour.

Summarised Overview

During the Paleolithic period, early humans lived as hunter-gatherers, constantly moving in search of food and resources. However, as the population grew and environmental conditions changed, there was a gradual shift towards more settled lifestyles. This transition is seen in the Mesolithic period, characterized by the development of more sophisticated tools and techniques, which increased efficiency in hunting and gathering. The Neolithic period marked a pivotal turning point in human settlement patterns. With the emergence of agriculture and animal domestication, humans learned to cultivate crops and raise animals, leading to a more reliable and stable food supply. This agricultural revolution allowed for the establishment of permanent settlements, as people no longer needed to constantly move in search of food. The development of settled communities brought about significant changes in human society. People began constructing more permanent structures, such as houses, and developed complex social structures, specialization of labour, and the exchange of goods. The rise of settled communities laid the foundation for the growth of civilizations and the establishment of urban centers.

Self Assessment

1. What were the main factors that led to the transition from a nomadic life style to settled human settlements?
2. Identify and explain two technological advancements that accompanied the shift towards settled life during the Neolithic period.
3. Discuss the social changes that occurred with the establishment of early human settlements, including the emergence of complex social structures and the division of labour.
4. What were the two causative factors that led to the migration of ancient humans?

5. What was the composition of the Mesolithic diet?
6. What were the major types of tools used in the ancient period?
7. Long Blade sites are found in which region?
8. Name the culture that came after the old Stone Age.

Assignments

1. Write an assignment on the migratory patterns of ancient humans.
2. How did early human settlements impact the environment?
3. Distinguish between various stages of developments which the humans experienced in Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic Age accordingly.
4. Explain the tool technology followed during the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic period.
5. Evaluate the role of archaeological evidence and scientific analysis in the reconstruction of the prehistoric period.

Suggested Readings

1. Diamond, Jared, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997.
2. Gowlett, John, *Ascent to Civilization: The Archaeology of Early Humans*, London: Routledge, 2006.
3. Roberts, Alice, *The Incredible Human Journey*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010.
4. Scarre, Christopher, *The Human Past: World Prehistory and the Development of Human Societies*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2013.
5. Trigger, Bruce, *Understanding Early Civilizations: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.



References

1. Brian Hare and Vanessa Woods, *Survival of The Friendliest*, One World Publishers, 2020.
2. Lewis Dartnell, *Origins: How the Earth Made Us*, Vintage Publishers, 1992.
3. Richard Leakey, *The Origin of Humankind*. Basic Books, 1996.
4. Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, Vintage Publishers, 2017.
5. Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Mankind*, Vintage Publishers, 2015.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.







Theories of Transition to Agriculture

Learning Outcomes

Upon conclusion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ♦ understand the concept of the Neolithic revolution
- ♦ trace the the development of early human settlements
- ♦ identify and evaluate different theories and explanations proposed by scholars regarding the transition to agriculture

Background

Before the advent of agriculture, early human settlements were characterized by small, mobile groups of hunter-gatherers who relied on hunting animals and gathering wild plants for sustenance. However, around 10,000 years ago, humans began to engage in plant cultivation and animal domestication, leading to the emergence of agricultural practices. This transition brought about fundamental changes, including the establishment of permanent settlements, the development of farming techniques, the emergence of surplus food production, and the rise of complex social structures.

Keywords

Neolithic Revolution, Settled life, Domestication, Farming, Food Production

Discussion

1.2.1 From Foraging to Agriculture

The Mesolithic period lasted from 10,000 BCE to 500 BCE, with dates varying greatly depending on location. Now



◆ *Neolithic Age*

that most of the world was free of ice, people became more sedentary and discovered new food sources, such as shellfish and edible grasses. The Mesolithic stage was followed by the Neolithic or New Stone Age. This term is used because stone weapons and tools were fashioned for grinding and polishing, rather than through chipping or fracturing as in the preceding periods. Neolithic culture was carried by new forms of modern man who migrated into Southern Europe from Asia. Given that different human populations reached the Neolithic stage of development at different rates in different geographic regions, pinpointing the exact start and end dates for the Neolithic period is impossible. Recent archaeological findings on the west bank of the Jordan River provide evidence of Neolithic settlements in its earliest form around 7500 BCE. Fully developed Neolithic cultures existed in Mesopotamia and Egypt by 5000 BCE, but such development was not seen in Europe until around 3000 BCE. By the second millennium BCE, agriculture had become established as far south as equatorial Africa. In Mesopotamia and Egypt, it was surpassed by the emergence of the first literate civilizations around 3500 BCE. Some islands in the Pacific, the Arctic regions of North America, the jungles of Brazil, and isolated pockets in sub-Saharan Africa still retain a Neolithic cultural stage, with a few customs influenced by explorers and missionaries.

◆ *Nature of
Neolithic
Agriculture*

The advent of Neolithic agriculture is without a doubt one of the most important events in human cultural history. The transition to agriculture, also known as food production, resulted in the development of civilization and the acquisition of material wealth that surpassed the imagination of Neolithic hunter-gatherers. This period is characterised as the Neolithic Revolution. The evidence regarding the time and location of the initial domestication of wild plants and animals is relatively well-established, as are the theories on how hunter-gatherers domesticated them. It is widely accepted among scholars that Neolithic people were engaged in food production. Cultivating the land and raising livestock provided them with more reliable food resources and occasionally even resulted in a surplus. The development of agriculture, considered one of the most significant transitions in human history, facilitated a settled way of life and enabled population growth. These elements constituted a profound social and economic revolution, the significance of which is difficult to overstate.



1.2.2 Vere Gordon Childe

◆ Childe's groundbreaking ideas

V. Gordon Childe, the most influential archaeologist of the twentieth century, challenged prevailing archaeological models of European prehistory through his early fieldwork and research in the 1920s. He subsequently turned his attention to theory and synthesis, applying social models to archaeological data to understand the major transformations in human society. Childe's groundbreaking ideas were widely disseminated through two scholarly yet accessible books: "Man Makes Himself" (1936) and "What Happened in History" (1942). His concepts, such as the 'Neolithic Revolution' and the 'Urban Revolution', are fundamental to the discussion of transformative events in human history.

◆ 'Neolithic Revolution'

One of Childe's most renowned works is his paper "The Urban Revolution," first published in the *Town Planning Review* (1950), which remains one of the most cited papers by an archaeologist. Childe introduced the term "Neolithic Revolution" to describe the gradual and cumulative steps through which humans gained effective control over their food supply. They began cultivating and improving edible grasses, roots, and trees through selective breeding. In exchange for the fodder, protection, and foresight they provided, humans domesticated certain species of animals, marking a significant advancement. The interconnection between these two steps is evident. In regions like Central Europe and Western China, where mixed farming has long been the prevailing economy, ancient peasants relied primarily on agricultural produce and minimally on domesticated animals.

◆ Debate on the origin of agriculture

Quite a diverse range of plants is capable of providing a staple diet under cultivation. Rice, wheat, barley, millet, maize, and yams have historically supported significant populations. Both wheat and barley are domesticated forms of wild grasses that were extensively cultivated in prehistoric times, particularly in Central Europe, and are still grown in Asia Minor. The oldest wheat grains discovered in Mesopotamia, Turkestan, Persia, and Lydia belong to this group. The wild ancestors of barley, mountain grasses, are also reported in regions such as Marmarica in South Africa, Palestine, Asia Minor, Transcaucasia, Persia, Afghanistan, and Turkestan. According to research, the major centres of barley production were most likely in Abyssinia and Southeastern Asia. The precise origin of cultivation, as well as whether it took place in just one or more centres, is

unknown. Recent discoveries of sickles in Palestinian cave shelters, as well as a collection of equipment consistent with a food-gathering economy rather than the culture traditionally associated with the first agricultural revolution, show that cereal production may have originated in or near Palestine.

◆ *Food producing economy*

As a revolution, the introduction of a food-producing economy should have affected the lives of all those involved, as reflected in the population curve. They began practicing a form of primitive agriculture known as horticulture or garden culture. In the vast stretch of countries, now arid or desert, situated between the temperate forests of the north and the jungles of the tropics, the most suitable land for cultivation is often found on alluvial soils deposited by intermittent torrents that flow from the hills onto the plains, as well as in the valleys of rivers that periodically overflow their banks.

1.2.3 Kent Flannery

Kent Flannery is a North American archaeologist who has studied and published extensive research on Mesoamerican pre-Columbian cultures and civilizations, particularly those of central and southern Mexico. He has also written notable works on the origins of agriculture and village life in the Near East, Andean pastoralists, and cultural development, as well as several critiques of contemporary tendencies in archaeological method, theory, and practice. Flannery does not provide a cause for the beginning of food production, but he examines the mechanisms involved in the transition to food production. His hypothesis is based on three assumptions:

◆ *Increase of population prior to food production*

1. The hunting-gathering population had already increased prior to the advent of food production.
2. Food production began in marginal areas, such as the mountain zones of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, and the woodland zones of Palestine, which were not naturally well-provided for.
3. There were several centuries of food production from the outset. The pre-agricultural people were adapted not to specific environments but to the animals and plants available in various environments. They also carried seeds of mutant plant varieties and planted them in new territories.

- ◆ *'Systems theory' and 'negative feedback principle'*

Kent Flannery utilized the 'Systems' theory to elucidate the transition to agriculture in both the Zagros Mountains and the Southern uplands of Mexico. According to his analysis, the seasonal mobility of hunter-gatherer groups allowed them to encounter diverse flora and fauna across different zones. In the Southern uplands of Mexico, the principle of 'negative feedback' played a significant role. This natural law required that different plants ripened at different times in diverse locations. The hunting and gathering techniques of humans were consequently modified. The movement and size of the group were controlled by the abundance of a wide variety of plants and animals.

1.2.4 Other Theories

- ◆ *Robert Braidwood rules out climate as the causative factor*

Robert Braidwood, an eminent archaeologist from the University of Chicago, USA, conducted fieldwork in the western slopes of the Zagros Mountain region in the 1950s. His objective was to study the nature and impact of climatic changes during the immediate post-glacial period. Braidwood collaborated with specialists including botanists, earth scientists, zoologists, and archaeologists, conducting extensive investigations. Through their research, they concluded that there were no significant climate changes in the region during that time. However, they did find concrete evidence of plant and animal domestication in areas where these species were abundant in the wild. If climate change alone were responsible for the emergence of agriculture, a similar transition towards domestication would have occurred during the earlier periods of interglaciation in the Pleistocene, when the climate had significantly warmed up. Since no such cultural shift took place in those earlier periods, it was necessary to exclude climate as the primary determinant of change during the post-glacial period.

Robert Braidwood argued that there was a gradual evolution towards the stage of food production. According to him, farming began in the "nuclear zones," which were natural habitats with abundant animal and plant species. The availability of the Carbon dating method enabled Braidwood's team to determine the dates of various sites where early food production had taken place. It is important to note that this dating technique was not known when Childe conducted his analysis. At a site dating back approximately 11,000 years ago, Braidwood found wild but edible plants and animals, indicating that people were still dependent on hunting wild ancestors of sheep, goats, and

◆ *Gradual evolution of food production*

gathering wild wheat and barley. Around 9,000 years ago, Tarmo had developed into a village. Based on such evidence, Braidwood proposed the “Nuclear Zone” theory, which applied to various cultural levels in the origin of agriculture, starting from food gathering to the food-producing stage. He believed that the process of change should be understood in the context of changing human culture, characterized by an increasing cultural differentiation and specialization of human communities. Braidwood suggested that such a change had not occurred earlier because the culture was not ready to embrace it. Conversely, at the end of the Pleistocene, humans had developed cultural proficiency in exploiting their natural habitat for their advantage. Thus, the transition to agriculture was primarily due to a combination of changes in human culture. Most scholars, including Braidwood, regarded agriculture as a ‘revolution’ and a highly desirable human accomplishment that provided security and leisure for prehistoric people.

◆ *Binford's Ethnographic research*

Lewis R. Binford, one of the most influential American archaeologists of the 20th century, dedicated much of his time investigating stone tools and faunal remains from the Mousterian site of Combe Grenal, France. By the 1960s, a few archaeologists were conducting ethnoarchaeological research, primarily among hunter-gatherers in Africa and Australia. In 1969, Binford initiated his own ethnoarchaeological study among the Alaskan Nunamiut, one of the few remaining peoples who, similar to the Neanderthals of Combe Grenal, lived in an Arctic environment and hunted caribou.

◆ *J.T Myers' alternative demographic model*

Binford's proposition was that population tends to increase in areas with abundant plant and animal resources and successful environmental adaptation. However, the situation may change if the population surpasses the carrying capacity of the area. Binford suggested that partial solutions like population control and emigration were employed based on ethnographic examples from marginal areas such as coastal settlements. On the other hand, J.T. Myers' proposed alternative demographic model based on Binford's proposition argues for a more intensive exploitation of an optimal area where population control measures are not feasible. According to Myers, internal pressure would lead to the cultivation of plants and herding of animals as an intermediate stage between hunting-gathering and agriculture. Binford and Flannery distinguished between “food production” and “food procurement” practiced by hunter-gatherers, but they also highlighted the continuities



while explaining the transition using a systematic approach that analyzes the interaction of environmental, demographic, and cultural factors.

Summarised Overview

There have been various theories to explain the factors and processes involved in the transition to agriculture. The “Neolithic Revolution” views the adoption of agriculture as a revolutionary change that brought about fundamental shifts in society and people’s way of life. It emphasized on the domestication of key plant and animal species as enabling factors for the development of agriculture. Different regions and cultures have exhibited varying patterns and timelines in the transition to agriculture. Factors such as climate change, availability of resources, population growth, and cultural adaptations have been considered in these theories. Researchers have identified “nuclear zones,” which are areas with abundant plant and animal species, as potential starting points for the development of agriculture. The transition to agriculture had significant implications for human societies. It led to changes in settlement patterns, social organization, and the development of specialized skills and technologies. Agriculture provided a more reliable and abundant food supply, which enabled population growth, the establishment of permanent settlements, and the emergence of complex societies.

Self Assessment

1. What were the key factors that contributed to the transition from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to agriculture?
2. How did scholars like Robert Braidwood and Lewis R. Binford contribute to our understanding of the theories of transition to agriculture?
3. What are the main theories proposed to explain the origins of agriculture, and how do they differ in their interpretations?
4. What were the impacts of the transition to agriculture on early human societies, in terms of settlement patterns, social organization, and technological advancements?
5. What were the major causative factors responsible for settled life of early humans?
6. What factors regulate the size and movement of a population group?



Assignments

1. Analyze the key factors that led to the transition and revolution on early human settlements.
2. Compare and contrast the theories of transition to agriculture.

Suggested Readings

1. Braidwood, Robert J, *Prehistoric Men*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.
2. Childe, V. Gordon, *Man Makes Himself*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951.
3. Flannery, Kent V, *The Origins of Agriculture*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1973.
4. Harris, David R, *The Origins and Spread of Agriculture and Pastoralism in Eurasia*, London: Routledge, 1996.

References

1. Harari, Yuval Noah, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Mankind*, Vintage Publishers, 2015.
2. Hodder, Ian, *Religion at Work in a Neolithic Society: Vital Matters*, Cambridge University Press, 2013.
3. Jones, Tony, *Early Indians: The Story of Our Ancestors and Where We Came From*, Juggernaut Publishers, 2021
4. Meyer, Susan, *The Neolithic Revolution (The First Humans and Early Civilizations)*, Rosen Young Adult Reprint Edition, 2016.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



Domestication of Plants and Animals

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ♦ understand the significance of the Neolithic period in shaping human society through the domestication of plants and animals
- ♦ identify the key factors and processes involved in the transition from hunter-gatherer societies to settled agricultural communities
- ♦ explain the interdependence between agriculture and domestication, and how they mutually supported each other during the Neolithic era

Background

Human society as we see it today is largely shaped by the transition that occurred during the Neolithic period. This transition primarily involved the domestication of plants and animals, which led to the development of settled lifestyles and a flourishing economy. The early agricultural communities had to carefully manage this newfound way of life to ensure a balanced relationship between agriculture and domestication, as both were interdependent. Additionally, there were other contributing factors that played a significant role in the advancement of agriculture and domestication, ultimately leading to remarkable progress in human civilization. This unit provides detailed insights into these aspects.

Keywords

Neolithic period, Domestication, Plants, Animals, Agriculture

Discussion

1.3.1 Domestication of Plants

The transformation of hunter-gatherers into farmers is



◆ *Explanations for the development of agriculture*

generally heralded as a remarkable achievement, which reduced hunting to a ritual activity. It resulted from the process of domestication of plants and animals. This transformation can be identified through three primary classes of evidence. The process required human intervention and control over these species. Various explanations have been proposed for the development of agriculture. One explanation involves plant mutations, such as mutant maize. However, such mutations would have occurred multiple times before the development of agriculture. When agriculture did emerge, a wide variety of different crops were domesticated, and it is highly unlikely that they all experienced convenient mutations at approximately the same time without those mutations occurring many times previously.

◆ *Climate and human population*

Another explanation is that the favorable conditions for agricultural development were facilitated by preceding climate changes. An alternative explanation for the development of agriculture is that it was driven by population pressure. The human population during this period had the ability to expand into new lands, including America, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Northeast Asia. Local population pressures likely arose numerous times, prompting the need for agricultural practices to sustain growing populations.

◆ *Plant diet in ancient world*

Around 20,000 BCE, when hunter-gatherers sought to supplement their diet with edible plants, they found it advantageous to harvest plants with durable spikes and intact heads. Evidence suggests that wild grasses resembling modern cereal grains were present in various locations. Wild ancestors of wheat were found in the Near East and Southern Russia, while wild barley variants were reported in North Africa, the Near East, and Central Asia. Although these crops likely constituted the earliest agricultural practices of the Neolithic period, they were not the only ones. Millet, vegetables, and a variety of fruits were also cultivated. Flax was grown in the Eastern Hemisphere for its textile fiber, and in some areas, the cultivation of opium poppy had already begun. In the Western Hemisphere, maize was the primary cereal crop, but native American communities also cultivated a diverse range of crops, including tobacco, beans, squashes, tomatoes, and potatoes.

J.R. Harlan (1917-1998), an American Botanist, recognized the intricate nature of the biological, social, and environmental

◆ *Multidisciplinary approach on 'neolithic revolution'*

changes associated with the transition to agriculture, which spanned a time period of up to 10,000 years. He emphasized the need for a multidisciplinary approach to comprehend the factors and processes that contributed to the “neolithic revolution.” Various disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, climatology, ethnobiology, genetics, geography, linguistics, physiology, and others have all made significant contributions to the field of crop evolution. J.R. Harlan was also concerned about the potential loss of crop biodiversity resulting from the development and widespread adoption of improved crop varieties, even before the importance of biodiversity conservation became widely recognized. He emphasized the importance of understanding evolutionary processes in crops as a means to conserve biodiversity and utilize it in the development of improved crop varieties. By studying the evolutionary history of crops, valuable insights could be gained for the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable development of agricultural systems.

◆ *Main domestication centers*

Compared to the first Harlan Symposium, significant advancements have been achieved in our understanding of crop domestication and evolution, which warrant the organization of a second Harlan Symposium. This progress has led to the resolution of certain questions while simultaneously raising new ones, as is often the case in scientific endeavours. Although there are exceptions such as the eastern part of North America and Central Asia, most domestication centres are found in subtropical or tropical regions within 30° latitude of the equator. American geographer Jared Diamond highlighted the abundant presence of wild relatives of crops and farm animals in southwest Asia and attributed the earlier advancements in agricultural development in Western Eurasia to this favourable geographic distribution. The region's diverse environmental conditions and the availability of suitable wild species contributed to its agricultural head start compared to other areas.

European societies had access to this distribution of domestication centers, although not as prominently as other regions. It is observed that centers of domestication are often located in areas with high biodiversity, known as biodiversity hotspots. These regions offer a rich pool of potential ancestors for crops and farm animals. Additionally, other environmental factors, such as biomes with an extended dry season, have played a significant role in the domestication of many crops, as highlighted by Peake, Fleure, and Harlan. The ability to

- ◆ *Disproportionate distribution of domestication centers*

- ◆ *Environmental factors and agricultural development*

store harvests has been crucial in providing a reliable food supply during periods of scarcity, particularly towards the end of the dry season and the beginning of the subsequent rainy season. However, it is important to note that these broad patterns do not fully capture the significance of local environmental conditions and their spatial and temporal variability. Flannery, in his research, explored the role of marginal areas with suboptimal resources (in contrast to more central, resource-rich areas) in the origin of agriculture. Suboptimal conditions could arise due to local population increases or resource depletion, driving communities to explore alternative agricultural practices and adaptations.

- ◆ *Domestication process*

Out of approximately 4,00,000 plant species, only a small fraction, fewer than 500, have undergone partial domestication, although a larger number are utilized by humans in various ways. In many crop species, the genes associated with domestication traits are partially linked. This genetic linkage may have facilitated the maintenance of the domestication syndrome during the initial phase of domestication, particularly in crop species that undergo cross-pollination. Alternatively, it's likely that these species were domesticated as a result of historical occurrences, in which elements outside of the domesticated plants' intrinsic qualities – such as cultural improvements or environmental factors – played a key impact.

- ◆ *Challenge in the study of crop evolution*

Many of our primary staple crops are annual and self-pollinating species. This characteristic may have resulted from their domestication in regions characterized by distinct dry seasons, where such species were abundant. However, some argue that perennial plants could also be domesticated and serve as major staple crops, suggesting that the domestication of annual crops may be a historical contingency rather than a strict rule. This question remains intriguing and unresolved in the field of crop evolution studies. Overall, the understanding of why certain plant species were domesticated and others were not continues to pose a fascinating challenge in the study of crop evolution.

The number and geographical locations of crop domestications play a crucial role in understanding the origins of agriculture in specific regions and the overall genetic diversity of crops. A crop can have a single domestication event or multiple domestications, with the latter leading to the emergence of distinct domestication gene pools. Traditionally, the domestication of a crop has

◆ *Genetic diversity of the crop*

◆ *Geographic distribution of "wild ancestor"*

been determined by examining the geographic distribution of its wild ancestor, supplemented by archaeological evidence when possible. The introduction of the flotation technique has significantly increased the availability of archaeological remains, providing valuable insights into the domestication process. In recent years, the use of molecular markers has become an important tool for identifying more specific areas of domestication within the broader geographic range of the wild ancestor. Molecular markers enable researchers to analyze the genetic makeup of crop populations and compare them to their wild relatives, allowing for a more precise identification of the domestication centers.

◆ *Gene flow of the "wild ancestor" crop*

There are two caveats, however, in the search for the wild ancestor. First, the analyses are based on the current distribution of the wild ancestor, which may or may not be the same as during the initial phase of domestication. Second, the similarities identified by molecular markers may be due not only to ancestor-descendant relationships but also to gene flow from the domesticated to the wild gene pool. This type of gene flow is more frequent than generally assumed. Because agriculture represents a production system in which several crops (and farm animals) are involved, comprehensive information about the origins of both crop and animal components is necessary to fully comprehend the development of agriculture.

◆ *Domestication syndrome and its phase of development*

◆ *Transition phase*

Domestications in different centers of origin took place approximately 10,000 years ago. The transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture was clearly not an event but rather a more or less lengthy process. Due to the relatively simple overall inheritance of the domestication syndrome, geneticists have proposed that the domestication process could have occurred relatively quickly. In contrast, archaeologists and particularly archaeo-botanists have suggested a much more gradual transition spanning millennia. Addressing this question requires considering the actual selection pressure exerted by farmers and the inheritance of the traits involved. This transition included an important phase known as pre-domestic cultivation, which was a necessary condition for domestication. Determining the actual pace of domestication is a crucial element in our understanding of the development of agriculture.

Individual crop or animal species are the main focus of genetic investigations. Agriculture, however, is more

- ◆ *Studies on crop and animal species*

than just the sum of its constituent crops or farm animals. Agronomically and nutritionally complementary systems make up the agricultural system. For instance, most centers of domestication encompass a combination of protein-rich (legume) and starch-rich (cereal or root) staple crops, which offer more balanced nutrition. In comparison to hunting and gathering, agriculture represented a more efficient means, in terms of per unit land base, of acquiring food.

- ◆ *Agriculture and co-relation between economic footprint*

All things considered equal, one would expect agricultural societies to dominate the world, as they indeed did. Agriculture's ecological impact increased along with its economic growth. As a result, a more pressing need for an agriculture that protects its resource base emerged. Agriculture has the potential to influence human phenotypes such as lactose intolerance, starch consumption, and malaria resistance through selection pressures. As a result, the agricultural context offers more proof of ongoing human evolution. But more investigation is needed to learn more about human involvement and the spread of agriculture. The spread of agriculture has been attributed to two different modes of dispersal. In the first mode, agriculture was culturally disseminated through the adoption of technology (including crops) by non-migrating populations. The second mode suggests that population migration from the center of domestication played a significant role. This phenomenon has been extensively studied in Europe, where the second mode appears to have operated, at least in certain parts of the continent.

1.3.2 Domestication of Animals

- ◆ *Fundamental changes in the life of people and the society*

The domestication of animals is another significant aspect of the Neolithic Revolution as stated by Braidwood. Cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs were among the animals that were domesticated. Animal domestication offers a notable example of gradual domestication, characterized by several distinct intermediate stages. In the initial wild stage of domestication, a particular population of organisms typically has no prior exposure to direct or indirect human influence. Domestication reaches its completion at the domestic stage, where a population becomes entirely reliant on humans for survival, reproduction, and nutrition. Over time, certain Neolithic societies experienced another profound transformation with the emergence of the earliest states and cities.

- ◆ *Dog was the first animal to be domesticated*

An animal is considered domesticated when it is bred in captivity with the goal of bringing economic benefits to a human community, which retains complete control over the animal's breeding, habitat, and food supply. It is universally agreed that the first domesticated animal was the dog. Dogs are thought to have first started loitering around hunter's camps, scouring for bones and uncooked meat. Dogs were eventually found to be useful for hunting and camp security by humans. The history of animal domestication is currently being reconstructed using genetic and morphological evidence. It indicates that the process likely began among hunter-gatherer societies. Once the domestication of dogs proved successful, Neolithic people logically began domesticating other animals, particularly those that could be used for food. By the end of the Neolithic period, at least five species – the cow, the dog, the goat, the sheep, and the pig – had been domesticated to meet human needs.

1.3.3 Beginning of Food Production in South West Asia

- ◆ *Beginning of food production in South-West Asia region*

The increase in global temperatures after 15,000 BCE encouraged the expansion of open forests and grasslands in the Levant and Syria. Thus, at the beginning of the Holocene, the climate was cooler and more humid in this region, conditions that were particularly favorable for human settlement. The forest zone expanded throughout the coastal mountains of the Eastern Mediterranean region due to increased rainfall. The mountains and lower hills of modern Turkey, Syria, Israel, Iraq, and Iran received sufficient winter rainfall. Both the forests and the steppe beyond them were abundant in plant and animal species. For instance, the Levant could support two types of wild wheat and barley, as well as the wild ancestors of sheep and goats in the hilly areas. Animal herding began during the Late Kebaran period around 15,700 BCE. By 11,000 BCE, the Natufian community in the Jordanian valley, during the Mesolithic period, had managed to develop a broad subsistence base. They followed the migratory movements of wild sheep and goats as they moved uphill in mid-summer in search of grass. Being close to coastal waters, they could also exploit marine resources in the newly formed lakes of the region. The hunter-gatherers also collected wild cereals and other plants widely found here.

After 10,000 BCE, the Natufians migrated to regions that provided a more favorable environment, primarily



◆ *Natufians*

consisting of water sources and grazing land for their newly domesticated animals. The early Neolithic villages were primarily located in the upper and middle Euphrates regions, as opposed to the lower Euphrates where the first cities emerged several millennia later.

◆ *Domestication of plants and vegetables in South-West Asia*

In Southwest Asia, the domestication of plants and animals rarely occurred independently of each other. As mentioned earlier, the early Neolithic villages were established in areas that provided water, arable land, and grazing opportunities. Both Beidha and Jericho were located near water sources, which were essential for the growth of agricultural settlements. Archaeological excavations have revealed that in the Natufian region of Beidha, *Capra* comprised 76% of the total faunal assemblage, indicating it was the most commonly hunted species. In the subsequent early Neolithic period, starting around 10,000 BCE, goat herding began. The early Neolithic levels also contain vegetable sources of high-quality protein, such as field peas, lentils, and other leguminous plants.

◆ *Disappearance of Neolithic Villages in Beidha and Jericho*

The Neolithic villages at Beidha and Jericho ceased to exist after 8,000 BCE, except in the northern regions of Palestine, specifically the Damascus Basin and the Mediterranean coastline. This shift in settlement patterns occurred due to the abandonment of the steppe areas caused by environmental degradation and increased aridity. The process of plant domestication necessitated the clearance of small patches of land for cultivation.

◆ *Continuity of settlement pattern*

Some of the other agricultural sites in East Asia, such as those in the Zagros Mountains and Anatolia, also witnessed a continuity of settlements. Ganj-darch in the Zagros Mountains was occupied approximately 10,500 years ago as a seasonal camp for hunter-gatherers. Excavations at older sites in Kurdistan, like Karim Shahar, Shanidar, and Tepe Asiab (Iraq), reveal that hunter-gatherers cultivated and harvested wild cereals and other plants in these regions. Small villages like Jarmo in the Kurdish foothills were inhabited by around 8,750 BCE. In comparison to earlier periods, these settlements lasted a long time. Domesticated wheat, barley, field peas and lentil seeds have been discovered during archaeological excavations at these sites. Osteological evidence also indicates that early farmers had domesticated sheep, goats, and pigs.

Between approximately 8,250 and 7,000 years ago, significant progress can be seen in the advanced cultures of

- ◆ *Advanced cultures of Syria and Mesopotamia*

Syria and Mesopotamia. These cultures have been discovered in places like Halaf, Hassuna, Samarra, and Ubaid. Irrigation driven agriculture, cattle and sheep husbandry, date palm cultivation, and fishing had all developed in certain regions of Southern Mesopotamia, particularly Akkad and Sumer, by around 7,500 BCE.

1.3.4 Evidence from Europe, Anatolia, Meso-America and China

- ◆ *Improved human habitation conditions*

The conditions for human habitation in these regions improved later than in the Levant but lasted longer. The Neolithic period here can be divided into two stages: from 10,000 to 8,000 BCE, and a later stage that extended until approximately 7,000 BCE. The subsistence base of this period relied on the cultivation of cereals and plants, as well as the domestication of caprines, mainly sheep and goats. This indicates that early agricultural attempts were preceded by a lengthy period during which the transition from hunting and gathering to settled agriculture took place.

- ◆ *Catal Huyuk, the most prominent of the Neolithic sites*

Catal Huyuk, one of Anatolia's largest and most visible late Neolithic sites, was occupied in the early ninth millennium BCE and abandoned around 7,400 BCE. It was strategically located near a stream on fertile alluvial soil, providing ideal conditions for plant domestication and cereal hybridization. Cattle domestication was especially significant at this site. Large scale animal domestication occurred at Neolithic sites on the western Anatolian plateau and in Suberde, coinciding with the start of cereal production, providing a plentiful supply of rough fodder, which was necessary for the caprines, the dominant species in the early attempts at animal husbandry during the Neolithic period.

- ◆ *Nature of early farming methods*

In Europe, the earliest evidence of cultivated emmer wheat and barley, as well as the domestication of cattle and pigs, can be traced back to Greece in 9,000 BCE. The early agricultural endeavors in the fertile floodplains of the Balkans proved to be quite successful, with farmers cultivating wheat and barley while also domesticating sheep and goats. The Balkans, being in close proximity to Anatolia, likely played a role in the spread of farming practices in the region. However, the presence of Mesolithic hunter-gatherers in these areas suggests an indigenous development of early farming. It is possible that they had interactions with their West Asian counterparts.



◆ *The beginning of agriculture in China*

Agriculture began in China primarily with two regional cultures: the Yangshao and Longshan cultures. The Yangshao culture, which began around the confluence of the Fen and Wei rivers in the middle Huang Valley, dates back to around 6,000 BCE. It spread gradually eastward into central Shansi and eastern Kansu. This culture had a mixed economy that included hunting, fishing, gathering, and millet and later wheat cultivation. Domestication of dogs and pigs was common, whereas cattle, sheep, and goats were less common. Mulberry trees were used to produce silk. Around 5,200 BCE, the Longshan cultures succeeded the Yangshao cultures. KC Chang has proposed that it emerged from the Lang-Shao culture and expanded eastward and southward into regions such as Hunan, Shanhang, Hupel, Kiangsu, Chekiang, and Taiwan. The primary domesticated species in these cultures included millet, wheat, rice, soybean, chickens, sheep, and cattle.

Summarised Overview

The Neolithic Age marked a significant shift in human history with the advent of agriculture and the domestication of plants and animals. This period witnessed a transition from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to settled farming communities. The domestication of plants and animals played a crucial role in shaping human societies and establishing the foundations of civilization. The domestication of animals was a gradual process that involved selectively breeding wild species for specific traits and purposes. Animals such as sheep, goats, cattle, pigs, and chickens were among the earliest to be domesticated. These animals provide humans with a consistent source of food, labour, and materials like wool and leather.

Agriculture and domestication of plants were closely intertwined. Early farmers cultivated various crops, including wheat, barley, rice, millet, and maize. They developed techniques for sowing, harvesting, and storing crops, leading to more settled and stable communities. The domestication of plants allowed for surplus food production, which supported population growth and the development of complex societies. The beginning of food production in Southwest Asia, particularly the Levant and Mesopotamia, was critical in the spread of agriculture. The availability of suitable crops and domesticated animals, as well as favourable climatic conditions, contributed to the success of early farming communities in these regions. Evidence of domestication can also be found in other parts of

the world. Sites in Greece and the Balkans reveal early cultivation of wheat and barley, as well as the domestication of animals such as cattle and pigs. Anatolia, modern-day Turkey, saw the development of large-scale farming communities, whereas Meso-America saw maize, beans, and squash domestication. China was also instrumental in the domestication of plants and animals. The Yangshao and Longshan cultures were associated with the cultivation of millet, wheat, rice, soybean, and the domestication of animals such as chickens, sheep, and cattle.

Self Assessment

1. What are the major changes that occurred during the Neolithic Age?
2. Explain the process of domestication of animals during the Neolithic age.
3. How were agriculture and the domestication of plants related?
4. Which regions played a significant role in the beginning of food production in Southwest Asia?
5. Which were the factors that influenced agricultural development in the neolithic period?
6. What was the nature of the farming culture in Neolithic sites?
7. What were the basic characteristics of agriculture during the Neolithic age?

Assignments

1. Explain the significance of the Neolithic agricultural revolution in shaping human history.
2. Examine the domestication of plants and animals, changes in settlement patterns, advancements in agricultural techniques, and the resulting socio-economic transformations.

Suggested Readings

1. Diamond, Jared, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1999.



2. Dye, James M, *Plants and People: Choices and Diversity through Time*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2006.
3. Harris, David R, *The Origins and Spread of Agriculture and Pastoralism in Eurasia*, *Current Anthropology* 32, no. 3 (1991): 235-273.

References

1. Dartnell, Lewis, *Origins: How the Earth Made Us.*, Basic Books, New York, 2019.
2. Harari, Yuval Noah, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Mankind*, Vintage Publishers, 2015.
3. Hare, Brian, and Vanessa Woods, *Survival of the Friendliest*, One World Publishers, 2020.
4. Jones, Tony, *Early Indians: The Story of Our Ancestors and Where We Came From*, Juggernaut Publishers, 2021.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.





Features of Neolithic Revolution

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ identify the key features and characteristics of the Neolithic period
- ◆ analyze the social, economic, and cultural changes brought about by the Neolithic Revolution
- ◆ examine the role of technological advancements, such as the invention of tools and farming implements, in facilitating the transition to an agrarian society.

Background

Significant changes in human lifestyles were brought about by the domestication of plants and animals. The shift to a sedentary lifestyle was one of the main effects of food production. A site was once thought to be permanently inhabited if it had facilities like storage pits and artefacts like flint sickles, blades, and querns. However, studies have revealed that some villages lacked farmers and these tools. For instance, sophisticated hunter-gatherers who engaged in seasonal nomadism and an annual migratory cycle lived in camp-like structures during the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods. Early Neolithic settlements like Suberde in Turkey, Tel-Mureybet in Syria, and Mallaha in northern Israel were more reliant on the intensive gathering of wild food. Over time, the pattern of settlement changed. The Neolithic way of life had significant demographic consequences. In almost all Neolithic cultures, the number and size of settlements, as well as the number of cemeteries, increased considerably compared to earlier periods. In this particular unit, we will explore this aspect further.

Keywords

Neolithic Revolution, Tools, Wheels, Social Structure, Greeks, Towns, Polity



Discussion

1.4.1 Settlement Patterns

◆ *Excavations in Çayönü, Jericho and Jarmo*

Excavations in Çayönü, Jericho, Jarmo, and the Mediterranean islands of Crete and Cyprus have revealed successive layers of occupation at these sites. This is evidenced by the formation of mounds and the increase of the site's radius. The Neolithic settlement of Jarmo, which was occupied around 7,000 years ago, was about three to four acres in size. It was made up of a cluster of roughly 24 dwellings made of baked mud. These dwellings were perhaps renovated and rebuilt in the same position to maximise land usage and safeguard against flooding. The site has roughly 12 unique layers of habitation due to the periodic reoccupation of the area. The presence of mud-plastered walls in villages like Jarmo and stone pavements and walls in Çayönü suggests the existence of a relatively sophisticated village network, accommodating about 150 people

◆ *Two types of settlements of Beidha*

Beidha (Jordan) exhibits two distinct types of settlements. Natufian open-air settlement layers are easily distinguished, with living floors with post holes and sunken hearths indicating temporary habitation. In contrast, the Neolithic period reveals substantial semi-subterranean roundhouses with stone walls, measuring up to four metres in diameter. To prevent erosion, the village was built on sand dunes and surrounded by a terrace wall. A few stone steps made it easier to get to the village. Beidha's houses became freestanding and rounded after the transition around 8650 BCE, eventually adopting a rectangular shape.

◆ *Neolithic settlement of Catal Huyuk*

Catal Huyuk was a Neolithic settlement that spanned approximately 32 acres between 8000 and 7000 years ago. Many houses were built with sun-dried bricks of standard sizes and mud bricks for the foundation. These rectangular houses frequently had a small attached storage room and were built in such a way that they shared walls and were occasionally separated by small courtyards. The interiors of the houses had a consistent layout, with separate areas for resting, cooking, and worship. Access to the houses was most likely gained through the roof, possibly aided by movable ladders. This design could have been used to protect against external threats such as floods. Surprisingly, the only recorded destruction of Catal Huyuk was caused by fire.



◆ *Neolithic Age and Aegean world*

The Neolithic revolution in Europe began around 9000 years ago, primarily in the Aegean region, specifically Greece. This was roughly two thousand years after Anatolia's Neolithic development began. The structures in Greece were mostly made of sun-dried bricks, wood, and wattle and daub. The Yangshao culture established settlements in the Chinese province of Henan between 7100 and 4900 years ago. These settlements were characterised by sedentary lifestyles and covered areas ranging from tens to hundreds of thousands of square metres, with some villages even employing defensive moats. The houses in these settlements were either semi-subterranean or surface wooden structures, demonstrating the Yangshao culture's advanced house-building skills.

1.4.2 Tools

◆ *Tools used during Neolithic period*

Cultivation and all the associated processes, such as clearing forest land, turning over the soil, sowing seeds, harvesting, crushing, and grinding cereals, required special tools. The early tools used for preparing the ground for cultivation included a digging stick and a hoe. The hoe was useful for turning over the soil, while the digging stick was used to create furrows in the soil for planting seeds. Harvesting ripened plants was facilitated by the use of a reaping knife and a sickle. Cereals like wheat and barley needed to be separated from the husk through threshing and winnowing before being ground into flour.

◆ *Grinded and polished stone tools*

Grinding and polishing are characteristic features of Neolithic tools. Although Neolithic stone tools are shaped using various methods of percussion flaking and pecking, the rough surfaces resulting from flaking or pecking are further refined through grinding and polishing techniques to achieve smooth and polished surfaces. The Neolithic culture is characterized by the production of stone tools with smoothed surfaces, commonly known as Celts. These tools are created through the process of grinding and polishing. This technique consists of four stages: chipping, pecking, grinding, and finally polishing. Thus, after selecting a suitable piece of stone, it is shaped through flaking with a hammer and then ground on a coarse stone slab, often adding sand and water to smoothen the surfaces. To prepare the cutting edge, the stone is further ground either bifacially or unifacially to obtain the medial or lateral edge. Pecking is another stage of the technique adopted by Neolithic people to create Celts from very hard and tough rocks that are challenging to flake.

In this method, narrow-ended hammers were used to peck the surfaces of the stone, which were likely shaped pebbles. The ground tools were then polished to achieve smooth and glossy surfaces.

◆ *Drilling technique as part of tool making*

A ring stone was a type of tool used during the Neolithic cultural period that served as a weight for a digging stick or as the head of a mace. Drilling was used to make holes in the ring stones for mace heads. A suitable sized pebble was chosen for this drilling technique, and a depression was created on both surfaces at the centre by pecking with another stone hammer. Drilling on the depression was then started from the top using a bamboo tube rotated between the palms, often with the addition of sand and water for abrasive action. The stone was flipped over and the drilling process was repeated until the hole was completed.

◆ *Polished tools used in Neolithic era*

However, only certain artefacts used for cutting, such as axes or adzes, were polished. Moreover, the technique of polishing was merely a minor innovation, as it involved applying a previously established bone-working technique to stones. This technique had been in use since the Upper Paleolithic or even earlier. The focus of innovation was primarily on new technologies for manipulating and exploiting plants and other food sources. A specialized tool, like a sickle, was created by attaching sharpened blades made of flint onto a wooden handle. The sickle blades from the Zagros mountains were typically made of chipped flint. When used for harvesting grains, they could be mounted on a bone or wooden piece. Additionally, farmers in this region began utilizing tools made of obsidian for the first time. Obsidian, a volcanic glass, provided a cutting edge that was sharper and harder than stone. Axes were polished by rubbing their edges against stones, as people realized that a polished axe was more effective for tree felling compared to one made by roughly flaking the material into shape.

◆ *Pressure Flaking*
◆ *Tool making skills*

This was achieved by removing very small flakes from the surface through pressure flaking, which involved pressing a pointed bone or hardened wood against the edge of a flint or obsidian. This technique replaced the previous method of striking flakes, known as “callies.” Stone tools are the only preserved archaeological remnants of early human history, as many of their handworks have been lost over time. These stone tools represent the implements created by early humans and are categorized as artefacts. Archaeologists have coined



several terms to study the tool-making skills of prehistoric people. These techniques include block-on-block, stone hammer, hammer cycles, bipolars, step flaking, Clactonian flaking, Levalloisian flaking, discord core mousterian flaking, pressure flaking, fluting, backing or blunting, pecking, sawing, grinding, polishing, and shattering techniques.

1.4.3 Wheel

- ◆ *Wheel is one of the most significant inventions of mankind*

Next to controlled fire, the wheel was clearly one of early man's most significant inventions. It was utilized as pottery wheels and for chariots. Its early use can be traced back to ancient Mesopotamia around 3000 BCE. Furthermore, depictions of wagons found on eastern European pottery, as well as carbon dating, indicate that the use of wheels predates this period by thousands of years. Early humans would have been aware of the circular shapes of sun and moon, as well as the periodic circular movement of celestial objects. Furthermore, Cro-Magnon man would have noticed that certain spherical rocks found along beaches have an interesting feature known as conchoidal fractures around 20,000 years ago.

- ◆ *Different variants of wheels*

Someone would soon have made a log out of rockers by placing an axle into the centre of such stones and another person would soon realise that replacing the pierced spheroid pebbles with pound stones on hardwood discs shaped like the full moon and sun seen in the sky might make these rolling toys much more effective. With the onset of the agricultural age and the necessity for huge storage jars and long-distance grain transportation, someone undoubtedly discovered that logs with wheels could be fixed into the form of simple, steerable four-wheeled waggons hauled by horses or oxen. Around 3000 BCE, people in modern-day Russia realised that a two-wheeled waggon drawn by a horse would be an efficient mode of transportation. This breakthrough marked the creation of a useful agricultural tool.

- ◆ *Evolution of wheels over time*

In order to enhance the maneuverability of chariots, efforts were made to reduce the weight of the wheels while maintaining their structural integrity. This led to the development of the concept of wooden spokes for lightweight wheels, giving rise to the birth of the spoked wheel. Metal sheets were also introduced to reinforce the rims during this period. Pyramid hieroglyphics depict the use of spoked wheels by Ramses in 1270 BCE, although the Egyptians were not aware that wheels had been used by other civilizations

for thousands of years. The earliest Mesopotamian paintings from 3000-2700 BCE also hint at the presence of wheels. These wheels were made of wood and attached to a simple axle. Around 2000 BCE, the Egyptians began using spokes on their chariot wheels. Subsequently, the use of wheels spread among different groups of people across Europe and Asia. By 500 BCE, a wide variety of wheeled vehicles were in use, ranging from fast chariots to large, slow ones.

1.4.4 Social Structure

The Neolithic Revolution brought about a fundamental change in human lifestyles. The transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture resulted in the establishment of permanent settlements and the development of social classes, which eventually laid the foundation for civilizations. One of the significant outcomes of settled Neolithic life was the emergence of lasting institutions. An institution can be defined as a combination of collective beliefs and activities that exist in a relatively permanent manner to fulfill the needs of a group. The family is one of the oldest human institutions. Families made up of working groups of men and women most likely inhabited the villages that arose with the introduction of early farming practices. Families have always functioned as long-lasting units in charge of tasks such as caring for the young, dividing labour, and passing down beliefs and customs from generation to generation. In comparison to hunter-gatherer societies, early agriculture required a more communal social structure within Neolithic villages. Furthermore, the diverse range of activities, including farming, livestock breeding, pottery-making, weaving, and carpentry, necessitated a more intricate division of labor involving individuals from various sections of society.

◆ *Beginning of social life*



◆ *Role of women in developing agriculture*



In Gordon Childe's assessment, the discovery of suitable plants and appropriate cultivation methods was primarily accomplished by women. According to him, women were responsible for significant inventions and discoveries such as pottery-making, spinning, weaving, and more. However, recent studies indicate that determining which gender should receive "credit" for agricultural innovation in a particular region is largely irrelevant. Both men and women contributed to various aspects of agricultural activities, including working in the fields, pottery-making, tending to animals, collecting ripened seeds, grinding flour, cooking, and other household tasks. In farming societies, women's



roles expanded to encompass additional responsibilities, as they desired more children to support the agricultural labour.

◆ *Surplus led to distribution of land*

As seen in Jericho and Catal Huyuk, the emergence of a storable surplus gradually led to the need for land distribution and allocation among individual families within the larger framework of Neolithic societies. These families now sought individual ownership of previously shared facilities. This transition increased competition and the desire for economic security. Jericho had stone walls surrounding closely clustered houses, as well as an 8-meter-tall monumental stone tower. This tower is regarded as the first example of monumental architecture in the world. Similar village walls appeared during the Balo-Samarran period and in early Mesoamerica. Huts were arranged in regular sections along streets in Merimde, Egypt. In Catal Huyuk, some structures were found to be larger and more intricately designed than others.

◆ *Significance of families in formulating residential structures*

The design of the houses was influenced by the inhabitants themselves. During the early period, circular huts were small and their archaeological remains are scarce between 11,000 and 8500 BCE. These houses, constructed with thatched roofs, were easily portable. However, rectangular houses of the late Neolithic period, such as those found in early Mesoamerica and West Asia between 9,000 and 7500 BCE, could accommodate larger numbers of looms. These houses had wattle and daub walls, indicating their performance and functionality. The presence of individual storage bins, as opposed to common granaries or storage pits found in villages with circular huts, highlights the importance of families as independent units. The multi-room rectangular residences of Jarmo from 6750 to 6000 BCE demonstrate that some herding and farming families opted for larger family house structures that facilitated various agricultural activities.

1.4.5 Origin of Towns

◆ *Climax of Neolithic Revolution*

The culmination of the Neolithic Revolution resulted in the transformation of some villages into bustling cities, fostering secondary industries and long-distance trade, and establishing organized states. From 6000 BCE to 3000 BCE, mankind acquired the knowledge to harness the power of oxen and winds. Inventions such as the plough, wheeled carts, and sailing boats emerged. Furthermore, discoveries were made regarding the chemical processes involved in smelting copper ores and the physical properties of metals.

Additionally, the development of an accurate solar calendar took place. These advancements equipped early humans for a life that would pave the way for a civilization requiring writing, numerical systems, standards of measurement, and instruments to facilitate the transmission of knowledge and the pursuit of exact sciences.

◆ *Emergence of full-fledged cities*

Mesopotamia, which includes parts of modern-day Iraq, Syria and Iran, show clear evidence of the existence of thriving metropolitan towns and cities, each with its own distinct cultural and social formations. While scattered groups of hunters, fishers, migratory horticulturists, and nomadic pastoralists are likely to have lived in these areas, their specific communities are unknown. As a result, archaeologists have primarily studied the locations of villages that have evolved into cities over time. These settlements' populations have grown significantly, resulting in the establishment of colonies and walled towns. These smaller settlements housed skilled artisans and traders, and the presence of defensive walls suggests that warfare was common among them.

◆ *Towns and cities emerged*

According to Kingsley Davis, the emergence of towns occurred between 6000 BCE and 3000 BCE. The majority of scholars agree that ancient towns and civilizations developed near river valleys. The prominent rivers that supported and sustained these civilizations were the Nile, Euphrates, Tigris, Indus, and Yellow River.

◆ *First city in the world built by Sumerians*

Not surprisingly, the Sumerians, the people who established the earliest state-level society between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, were responsible for building the first cities in the world. These rivers played a vital role in nourishing and developing the Mesopotamian civilization. From 3600 to 3000 BCE, complex societal institutions such as centralized political control, a specialized economy, and class stratification were evolving. The population was growing, and numerous new settlements were established, most of which were small farming villages and hamlets. By the end of this period, the largest settlement, Uruk, covered three-quarters of a square kilometre and had a population of several thousand people. The transition to the Early Dynastic period (2900-2300 BCE) saw tremendous growth, with the establishment of several walled towns between 2800 and 2300 BCE. The presence of walls indicates that warfare was common in these small settlements, which housed craft specialists.



◆ *Origins of Major cities*

Urban development progressed at a faster pace in the great riverine depressions, specifically in the Nile Valley on the alluvial plains between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Major towns such as Hierakonpolis, Nekhen, Abydos, Memphis, and Heliopolis emerged in these regions. Similarly, along the Indus River and its tributaries in Sindh and Punjab, significant towns such as Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Chanhudaro, Ropar, Kalibangan, Lothal, Surkotada, and Banawali spontaneously emerged.

◆ *Carefully planned town system*

Mohenjodaro covered an area of two and a half square kilometers and had a population of approximately forty thousand people, while Harappa was slightly smaller, encompassing one and a half square kilometers with twenty-five thousand inhabitants. These cities not only differed in size compared to early Sumerian cities but also in terms of urban planning and the presence of impressive public buildings. The cities of the Indus Valley were meticulously planned, with all buildings following a strict grid pattern aligned to the north-south and east-west directions. The cities were divided into distinct sectors, surrounded by walls and accessed through formal gateways. Historical evidence suggests that kings who constructed carefully planned capitals aimed to achieve two main objectives. Firstly, they sought to establish a correspondence between the ordered heavens above and their capital city on earth. These ancient capitals, whether in the Indus Valley, Mexico, or China, were sacred cities designed to mirror the cosmic world and leave an impression on the gods. Secondly, rulers who planned cities with regular street patterns also aimed to impress their subjects on earth with the power and grandeur of the king and the capital. Ancient walls exhibited geographical diversity, as well as variations in form and function. Excavations at early urban cities reveal that some cities served as sparsely populated political capitals, while others functioned as trade centers. Additionally, certain cities had a permanent religious focus.

1.4.6 Towards Chiefdom Polity

The introduction of agriculture is the primary explanation for the development of chiefdoms during the Neolithic period. A chiefdom is a regional polity with institutional governance and some social stratification that organises a population of a few thousand to tens of thousands of people. A chiefdom, in other words, is a type of political organisation in which a central leader oversees several smaller political units. Many chiefdoms have hereditary social ranking and economic

◆ *Features of
chiefdom polity*



stratification systems, with social divisions separating the chief lineage or lineages from non-chiefly groups. Chiefs and their elites are thought to be superior to commoners, and intermarriage between the two classes is usually prohibited. Chiefs were expected to be generous, but they led more luxurious lifestyles than the rest of the people. Chiefdoms have existed in various parts of the world. Anthropologists are interested in understanding how and why chiefdoms evolved as an intermediary unit between tribes and states, as well as the political implications associated with them. Several political strategies supported the expansion of power within chiefdoms, including controlling internal and external wealth, hosting feasts and engaging in gift exchanges to create debt ties, improving local production systems, applying force internally, forging stronger and wider external connections, and establishing ideological legitimacy. Depending on local conditions, different strategies like these were employed.

◆ *Concept of
Chiefdom as
evolutionary
stage*



The majority of archaeologists researching pre-state populations in the Near East have avoided utilising the idea of chiefdom as an evolutionary stage or as a dynamic descriptive model for particular cultures. The realisation that the oldest complex civilizations in the Near East do not follow the redistributive model proposed by Elman Service, an American archeologist, in his initial description of chiefdoms in 1962 is the cause of this hesitation. Two significant developments, though, make the case for reevaluating this stance. First off, the majority of researchers have completely given up on the idea of redistribution in favour of a model where leaders mobilise food surpluses from commoners while giving them little to no material items in exchange. Instead, the only form of “redistribution” occurring in these groups is through the allocation of prestige goods, badges of rank, and limited food supplies given by chiefs to a restricted circle of low-ranking elites. This practice serves to reward them, validate their status, and reinforce the political hierarchy. Secondly, in a related development, researchers have moved away from the earlier typological perspective on chiefdoms and adopted a more flexible approach that acknowledges a wide range of variation in the political, economic, and ideological aspects of chiefdoms as an organizational form that is less complex than that of a state.



Summarised Overview

The Neolithic Revolution marked a transition from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to settled farming communities. It emphasizes the role of women in early agricultural practices and the importance of surplus food production, leading to the distribution of land among families and the growth of population. There was a focus on the development of towns and cities during this period, with specific examples from Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq, Syria, Iran) and the Indus Valley. The urban planning and architecture of these cities are described, highlighting their grid-like layouts, walled structures, and public buildings. The cities are viewed as sacred and symbolic representations of power and grandeur. The concept of chiefdoms means the regional political entities characterized by a central leader and social stratification. In the chiefdoms, there was a hereditary nature of leadership, economic divisions, and restrictions on intermarriage between strata. Different strategies were employed by chiefs to consolidate power, such as controlling wealth, forging alliances, and maintaining ideological legitimacy. Throughout this period, there was an emphasis on the significance of agriculture as the catalyst for societal changes, the growth of population, the emergence of complex political structures, and the development of urban centers. The Neolithic Revolution is portrayed as a transformative period in human history that laid the foundation for further advancements, including the eventual rise of states and civilizations.

Self Assessment

1. Describe the role of women in the Neolithic Revolution and their contributions to early agricultural practices.
2. How did the development of agriculture lead to the growth of settlements and cities during the Neolithic period?
3. Discuss the characteristics and significance of urban planning and architecture in Neolithic cities.
4. Explain the concept of chiefdoms and their role in Neolithic societies. How did chiefs consolidate power and maintain social stratification?
5. What was the main inspiration for the creation of towns, cities and streets in Indus valley civilization?
6. What were the other significant inventions of mankind after the discovery of 'fire'?



Assignments

1. Write an essay on the significant impact of the Neolithic Revolution on human societies.
2. Compare and contrast the political and social characteristics of chiefdoms and states. Identify the defining features of each form of organization, such as leadership structures, social stratification, economic systems, and mechanisms of power.
3. Discuss the geographical diversity and variations in the form and function of ancient walls in Neolithic cities.

Suggested Readings

1. Diamond, Jared, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, W.W. Norton & Company, 1999.
2. Mann, Charles C, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, Vintage Books, 2006.
3. Renfrew, Colin and Paul Bahn, *Archaeology: Theories, Methods, and Practice*, Thames & Hudson, 2016.
4. Scarre, Chris, *The Human Past: World Prehistory and the Development of Human Societies*, Thames & Hudson, 2018.
5. Trigger, Bruce G, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

References

1. Childe, V. Gordon, *The Story of Tools*, Aakar Book Publishers, 2017.
2. Dev, Arjun and Indira Arjun Dev. *History of The World: From the Late Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century*, Orient Blackswan, 2018.
3. Joseph, Tony, *Early Indians: The Story of Our Ancestors And Where We Come From*, Juggernaut Publishers, 2021.
4. Ray, N. *Ancient World and Its People*, Orient Black Swan, 2014.
5. Wells, H.G. *A Short History of the World*, Om Books International, 2019.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

Bronze Age Civilization

BLOCK-02



Cultural and Natural Settings

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the basic features of the Bronze Age
- ◆ trace the development of different civilizations
- ◆ make a comparative study about different civilizations that appeared at varying historical timelines

Background

It is a well-understood fact that humans and their cultures are evolving over time. Their culture evolved from that of wandering nomads to that of settled groups engaged in domestication and agriculture. As the population increased considerably with changing needs and necessities, the people began to form towns and cities with developments catering to their needs. These civilizations have various features that distinguish them from the cultures of their period in terms of perfect town planning, lifestyle, culture, religion, social structure, polity, administration, and military, among others. The development of these civilizations took place during the 'Bronze Age', and the characteristics of this age will be inherent in the emerging civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Assyrians, Sumerians, and China, respectively. In this unit, we will discuss more about these civilizations and their characteristics.

Keywords

Civilization, Agriculture, Urban planning, Irrigation system, Bronze metallurgy

Discussion

The world's early civilizations shared some fundamental core features along with many differences. The main feature



◆ *Stage of social development*

of both Sumerian and Mayan civilizations was the construction of cities. While both Egyptian and Mayan civilizations constructed pyramids to bury their monarchs. But one of the important distinctions between these early civilizations was based on city-states such as those of Mesopotamia, the Maya, or Greece and those such as Egypt, the Inka, and Shang China. To study early civilizations, archaeologists have brought a disciplined methodology which has produced clear information about ancient civilizations. Our knowledge of early civilizations results from a powerful synthesis of archaeology and data from historical and traditional sources. The prominent Indian archaeologist, Shereen Ratnagar, stated that the stage of social development encompasses the transition from one-room huts to the architecture of complex buildings, from oral traditions to literacy, from rural households to city life, and from reliance on stone to metals. 'Civilization' also refers to a geographical scale and a number of groups using the same writing system, art codes, metallurgy, and sets of craft techniques.

◆ *Ten attributes of Civilization*

Bruce Trigger, a Canadian archaeologist, anthropologist, and ethnohistorian who undertook a comparative analysis of early Civilizations, noted that 19th-century discussions of Civilization focused on writing as a key attribute, as it enabled the recording of complex commercial transactions. However, subsequently, the renowned archaeologist Gordon Childe preferred to list ten attributes of early civilizations or urban societies. These comprised a large dense population, a non-agricultural population supported through surpluses, primary producers paying surpluses to a deity or a ruler, monumental architecture, a ruling class, systems of recording, the development of exact sciences, monumental art, long-distance trade, and resident specialist craft workers controlled by an elite. While Gordon Childe's list can be recognized as a first step in understanding the concept of civilization.

2.1.1 Copper and Bronze as Source of Transition of Human Settlements

Copper, one of the earliest metals discovered by humans, played a crucial role in the transition of human settlements. Early humans recognized the malleability and conductivity of copper, leading to its use in tools, weapons, and ornaments. The discovery of copper marked a significant milestone in the development of human settlements as it allowed for

◆ *Discovery of copper*

more efficient agricultural practices and the construction of durable structures. Copper tools facilitated tasks such as clearing land, tilling the soil, and harvesting crops, leading to improved food production and the expansion of settlements. The use of copper brought about advancements in farming techniques, resulting in surplus food production, which in turn supported larger populations and the establishment of more permanent settlements.

◆ *Features of the Bronze Age*

The term 'Bronze Age' implies an age when humans used bronze to make their major tools. The implication here is of a sequence of materials in use. Humans first used stone, followed by copper-bronze, and eventually made the shift to iron. While it may be true that bronze came to be used for making major tools, the real significance of the term 'Bronze Age' lies in its correlation with a particular social formation, marked by urbanism and state societies, in other words, civilization. The Bronze Age, approximately 3300 BCE to 1200 BCE, marked the first time humans started to work with metal. Bronze tools and weapons soon replaced earlier stone versions. Ancient Sumerians in the Middle East may have been the first people to enter the Bronze Age. Humans made many technological advances during the Bronze Age, including the first writing systems and the invention of the wheel. Ancient Sumer may have been the first civilization to start adding tin to copper to make bronze. Bronze was harder and more durable than copper, which made bronze a better metal for tools and weapons. An ancient civilization is deemed to be part of the Bronze Age because it either produced bronze by smelting its own copper and alloying it with tin, arsenic, or other metals.

◆ *Evolution of human culture*

The urban revolutions of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and India were based on the same set of discoveries in metallurgy, transportation, etc. Moreover, it was not accidental that city life and writing emerged together. Yet, evolution and diffusion complement each other: human cultures 'evolve', but unlike organisms, can borrow from one another. Key developments like the smelting of copper, the wheeled cart, and the alphabet were invented only once but were subsequently learned and utilized by several groups. In this way, the forces of civilization spread from Egypt and Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean and southern Europe and, ultimately, to Western Europe. Thus, paradoxically, diffusion is unique to the evolution of human cultures. Evolution has come to mean the development of social

structures in a sequence of stages, from simple to complex. Complexity refers to internal differentiation, increasing division of labour and specialization, more and more tools and techniques for different tasks, and more social roles in the given society. The real significance of the term 'Bronze Age' lies in its correlation with a particular social formation, marked by urbanism and state societies. The major Bronze Age civilisations are;

1. Egyptian Civilization.
2. Mesopotamian Civilization.
3. Shang Civilization of Northern and Central China.
4. Harappan Civilization.

2.1.2 Egypt - The Gift of the Nile

◆ *Role of Nile River*

The world's first major civilization developed in Egypt more than five thousand years ago. It flourished longer than almost any society in human history, lasting for over 3000 years from 3150 BCE to 30 BCE. The civilization of ancient Egypt was located along the banks of the Nile River in Northeast Africa. The Nile flows through a vast desert, including the Sahara, which separates Egypt from most of Africa. The river's annual flooding ensured reliable and rich soil for growing crops. The settlements in the Nile Valley were mostly confined to within a few miles of the river itself.

◆ *Flooding of Nile River*

The Nile River flooded annually; this flooding was so regular that the ancient Egyptians organized their three seasons—Inundation, Growth, and Harvest—around it. This annual flooding was vital to agriculture because it deposited a new layer of nutrient-rich soil each year. In years when the Nile did not flood, the nutrient level in the soil was seriously depleted, and the chances of food shortages increased greatly. Food supplies had political effects as well, and periods of drought probably contributed to the decline of Egyptian political unity at the ends of both the Old and Middle Kingdoms.

Although we do not know the specific dates and events, most scholars who study this period believe that sometime around the year 3100 BCE, a leader named either Narmer or Menes united Egypt politically when he gained control of both Upper and Lower Egypt. Lower Egypt is the delta



◆ *Basic flooding pattern of River Nile*

region in the north. Upper Egypt refers to the southern portion of the country, which is upriver from the delta. The immensely long Nile receives most of its water in the high mountains of Ethiopia in the monsoon season so that the high flood reaches Aswan in June. The floods proceed north. In Upper Egypt, floodwater stands for four to six weeks in small basins on either side of the river channel, after which, in early October, the flood subsides, having left behind a layer of silt that is very fertile. Sowing of wheat or barley starts in November, and the crop usually needs no irrigation despite rainfall being less than 100 mm in a year because the standing flood water in the basins has moistened the soil adequately. Thus, Egypt is truly the gift of the Nile.

◆ *Irrigation based on flooding patterns*

The cultivation of wheat, barley, beans, gram, and other winter crops required little labour when compared with South Asia. For the irrigation of the soil before planting, Egyptians had to pay attention to their local natural basins, making cuts in or raising their walls according to need and guiding the flow of the flood from one place to another so that the maximum area was inundated. Occasionally, a natural basin might have to be subdivided with low mud walls, or the overflow channels deepened. Because of this and the fact that the gradient of the Nile is gentle, ancient Egyptian agriculture did not utilize radiating canal networks. In other words, 'irrigation' was neither labour-intensive nor a centralized system dependent on the state for its implementation. It was organized at the level of the local flood basin. Thus, the origins of the Egyptian state and kingship do not appear to have been connected with the need for irrigation.

◆ *Demands of the Egyptian population*

The Nile valley in Egypt was a highly productive region throughout the centuries, and even during the Roman period, it was the primary supplier of the wheat consumed by the city of Rome. Yields were high in terms of seed and labour inputs. Consequently, the population density was also high. It is worth noting that the construction of the colossal pyramids required a substantial labour force, possibly recruited from the entire valley, without impacting agricultural production. Moreover, dense populations could potentially lead to land scarcity at certain times and places, turning land into a contested resource. Land-based conflicts can result in the subjugation of one group by the leader of another group. However, in the case of Egypt, it is unlikely that population pressures accumulated just before

the emergence of the state. As a result, we currently lack a satisfactory explanation for the evidence of war heroes in the Archaic or pre-dynastic period.

2.1.2.1 Egyptian Chronology

◆ Timeline of Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egypt is well-known as the home of the pyramids, pharaohs, and Cleopatra. However, the Ancient Egyptian time period is longer and more complex. The timeline of ancient Egypt can be divided into multiple periods. The oldest of these, the Predynastic period, began around 4300 BCE. The final period, when Egypt was part of the Roman and Byzantine Empires, ended in 642 CE. Ancient Egypt began 6,300 years ago and lasted for around 5,000 years.

◆ Complex ancient chronology of Egyptians

Ancient Greece, and Ancient Rome began around 700 BCE. Greece fell to Rome in 31 BCE, just under 700 years after its beginning, while Rome declined by 476 CE, marking 1,100 years of existence. The dynasties of Ancient China had a long history, beginning around 2070 BCE and ending in 1911 – 4,000 years of history, but still fewer than Ancient Egypt. Less is known about Prehistoric Egypt, also called the Predynastic Period, than other periods in Ancient Egypt because fewer artefacts exist from this time. A culture now called the Naqadan lived in Prehistoric Egypt for around 2,000 years. They developed agriculture and stone tools. A Northern and Southern Kingdom developed along the Nile around 3400 BCE. The two kingdoms attempted to conquer each other, and the Southern kingdom succeeded around 3100 BCE. The area became a unified kingdom under the rule of King Menes, also called Narmer. The king, or pharaoh, set up his capital in Memphis, not far from the mouth of the Nile.

◆ Early Dynastic Period

The timeline of Ancient Egypt can be divided into three kingdoms and intermediate periods, which are further divided into 31 dynasties. Dynasties were a series of pharaohs from the same lineage, like a royal family, who ruled in succession. In popular culture, the most well-known of these periods is the Ancient Egypt Old Kingdom due to the architecture and art produced during this time. During the Early Dynastic Period, which included two dynasties, ancient Egyptians still lived in villages and were primarily subsistence farmers, as they had been in the Predynastic period. Everyday life began to change at the beginning of the Old Kingdom around 2675 BCE.

The Old Kingdom is commonly known as The Pyramid



◆ *Age of Pyramid*

Age, as the pyramids were constructed during this time. Pyramids were built as tombs for pharaohs, and the most famous pyramids were built in Giza during the 26th century BCE. The pharaohs Khufu, Khafra, and Menkaura were each laid to rest in their own massive pyramid. The pyramids were considered part of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The most striking elements of ancient Egyptian civilization are its material prosperity, exquisite writing, painting, and reliefs on the walls of temples and tombs, pyramid building, and cultural emphasis on mortuary memorials and the cult of dead kings, expert craftsmanship in various stones and metals, and continuous contacts with the world outside Nubia, Sinai, Palestine, and the Mediterranean islands.

◆ *The cradle of civilizations*

2.1.3 Mesopotamia and Its Cities

Mesopotamia, the land between the rivers, is the classical name for the ancient land that lies along the Tigris and Euphrates, encompassing ancient Assyria and Babylonia. Most of it is now within present-day Iraq, but it also includes parts of eastern Syria and small portions of Turkey and Iran. Conversely, the modern state of Iraq includes areas that were outside Mesopotamia in antiquity. Mesopotamia is often referred to as the cradle of civilization because some of the most influential early city-states and empires originated there. Its modern name comes from the Greek words for middle, 'mesos,' and river, 'potamos,' and literally means "a country between two rivers." Those two rivers are the Tigris and Euphrates. Unlike the more cohesive civilizations of Egypt or Greece, Mesopotamia was a collection of diverse cultures whose primary commonalities were their script, their gods, and their attitude towards women.

◆ *Cities*

During the fourth millennium BCE, Mesopotamia witnessed the emergence of urban societies. It implies a concentration of population and a network of villages in the surrounding area to meet its population needs. In return, the city serves as a political, religious and ceremonial centre of these villages. The cities are larger in area and population than in villages. They have markets, manufacturing zones and administrative machinery. A city wall was constructed to mark a clear division between the residents of a city and the rural population beyond. The cities of Mesopotamia were internally divided into separate zones based on kinship or occupation. Some of these cities may have been centrally planned with a regular layout of streets and buildings.

◆ *Neolithic Revolution*

The Mesopotamian Civilization is associated with ancient cultures like the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, and Assyrians. These terms can also be associated with city-states, languages, religions, or empires, depending on the time and context. The Sumerians and Akkadians (including Assyrians and Babylonians) dominated Mesopotamia from the beginning of written history (3100 BC) to the fall of Babylon in 539 BCE. Mesopotamia is the site of the earliest developments of the Neolithic Revolution. It has been identified as having “inspired some of the most important developments in human history, including the invention of the wheel, the planting of the first cereal crops, and the development of the cursive script, mathematics, astronomy, and agriculture”.

◆ *Cuneiform Literature*

The Mesopotamians were the first people to invent a system of writing using symbols. They are inscribed on clay tablets. Exquisitely carved cylinder seals that were rolled on clay tablets while they were still wet or on the clay sealing of jars or packages represent an extension of literacy. This is the new way of recording and storing information developed by Mesopotamian growing urban communities, and its main motivation was to assist their accounting procedures. It consists of a series of symbols and numbers. By 2800 BCE, this early use of symbols and numbers had developed into a system of regular cuneiform script. The word cuneiform originated from the Latin *cuneus* (a wedge) and referred to the wedge-shaped nature of the marks made by the wooden or bone stylus in the soft clay.

◆ *Development of agriculture*

Mesopotamia is one of the first places to develop agriculture. It was also at the crossroads of the Egyptian and the Indus Valley civilizations. During this period, some of the most significant advances in human history were either made or adapted for large-scale use. These include the plough, wheeled carts and draft animals, bricks, the arch, city life, industrialized manufacture of pottery on the potter's wheel, copper and bronze smelting, a great expansion of long-distance trade, sailboats, writing, an elaborate number system including positional notation, remarkable advances in astronomy, and to a lesser extent, in medicine, as well as fundamental changes in religious and social life.

The Mesopotamian civilization is known as one of the world's earliest civilizations. The climate of the region is semi-arid, with a vast desert in the north and regions of



◆ *Influence of Semi-arid Climate*

marshes, lagoons, mudflats, and reed banks in the south. In the extreme south, the Euphrates and the Tigris unite and empty into the Persian Gulf. The Euphrates and its tributaries, the Khabur and the Balikh, and the Tigris and its tributaries, including the Greater and Lesser Zab, also water cultivable areas. Springs and wells contribute to the local availability of water, which supports vegetation outside the cultivated areas. The arid environment ranges from the northern areas of rain-fed agriculture to the south, where irrigation of agriculture is essential.

◆ *Development of agriculture*
◆ *The invention of artificial irrigation*

The supply of water was irregular; as a result of the high average temperatures and very low annual rainfall, the ground is hard, dry, and unsuitable for plant cultivation for at least eight months in the year. Consequently, agriculture without the risk of crop failure, which seems to have begun in the higher rainfall zones and the hilly borders of Mesopotamia in the 10th millennium BCE, started in the river valleys only after artificial irrigation had been invented. This brought water to large stretches of territory through a wide branching network of canals. Since the ground is extremely fertile and, with irrigation and the necessary drainage, will produce abundantly, southern Mesopotamia became a land of plenty that could support a considerable population.

◆ *Nomadic pastoralism*

Agriculture throughout the region was supplemented by nomadic pastoralism, where tent-dwelling nomads herded sheep and goats. Due to specialized pastoralism within certain families, the animal wealth of ancient Mesopotamia was enormous, and wool, the primary fabric, was exported. Pastoral produce, such as milk and milk products, along with river fish, served as a reliable buffer against harvest failures. This diverse subsistence base was balanced by a lack of significant mineral wealth. Mesopotamia relied on imported wood from the Zagros and the Lebanon regions for carts, boats, and roof beams. Fishing played a crucial role in the economy, while birds and wild pigs were hunted in the marshes. Prior to the full development of agriculture, the earliest settlements of Sumer were situated in this southern marsh region.

◆ *Important dynasties*

2.1.3.1 Mesopotamian Chronology

The four important dynasties in ancient Mesopotamian Civilizations in their correct chronological order are the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, and Assyrians. Around 3000 BCE, the Sumerians had a significant cultural

interchange with a group in northern Mesopotamia known as the Akkadians, named after the city-state of Akkad.

2.1.3.2 Four Important Dynasties

Sumerians

◆ *First urban Civilization*

The alluvial plain of southern Mesopotamia was divided into two regions: Sumer, land of the Sumerians, in the south, and Akkad, land of the Akkadians, in the north. The Sumerian Civilization first took its form in southern Mesopotamia around 4000 BCE, marking the region's first urban civilization. There were at least two dozen major cities on the alluvial plains of southern Mesopotamia. Nippur was a Sumerian city, and it was the major religious centre of the region. The Sumerians were one of the major ethnic groups of early Mesopotamia, with their own language and cultural identity. The social customs, laws, and even language of the Sumerian people differ from the Akkadian Period. Some archaeologists considered the Sumerians were the sole founders of the Mesopotamian Civilization. But the later studies show that the Sumerians were, in fact, merely one of several peoples involved in the formation of the first Mesopotamian cities.

Akkadians

◆ *Akkadian Empire*

Akkad was the territory of the northern division of Babylonia, where today the Tigris and Euphrates converge in the neighbourhood of modern Baghdad. The Akkadian language is related to modern languages like Hebrew and Arabic, classified as Semitic languages. The Akkadian Empire was ruled over by both Akkadian and Sumerian speakers in Mesopotamia and the Levant. However, the empire collapsed in 2154 BCE, just 180 years after its founding.

Babylon

◆ *Reign of Hammurabi*

Babylon, initially a minor city-state in central Mesopotamia, existed for a century following its foundation in 1894 BCE. The situation changed with the reign of Hammurabi, from 1792 BCE to 1750 BCE. He proved to be an efficient ruler, establishing a centralized bureaucracy with a taxation system. Hammurabi freed Babylon from foreign rule and then expanded his conquest to the whole of southern Mesopotamia, bringing stability to the region and solidifying the name of Babylonia. One of the most significant accomplishments of the First Dynasty of Babylon was the compilation, around 1754 BCE, of a code of laws known as the Code of Hammurabi,



which built upon and improved the earlier written laws of Sumer, Akkad, and Assyria. Assyria derives its name from its original capital, the ancient city of Assur, also known as Ashur, located in northern Mesopotamia. Ashur was initially one of the Akkadian-speaking city-states ruled by Sargon and his descendants during the Akkadian Empire. Within a few hundred years of the Akkadian Empire's collapse, Assyria rose to become a major empire in the region.

Assyrians

The Assyrians came to the fore around 900 BCE. Their original capital city was Assur. Their military machines included chariots, archers, foot soldiers, and cavalry. They developed effective techniques to capture cities by siege. They ruled through a calculated policy of practising terror and instilling fear. Most surviving Assyrian inscriptions describe the cruelties that they inflicted on conquered peoples. The most famous artworks of the Assyrians are stone reliefs depicting Assyrian kings hunting lions. They believed that if the king were a great hunter, he would also be a mighty warrior. By around 600 BCE, a coalition of not fewer than 12 conquered peoples staged a coordinated uprising that led to the crashing down of the Assyrian empire.

◆ *Policy of practising terror*

2.1.4. The Shang Civilization of Northern and Central China

The Shang Dynasty was the earliest ruling dynasty of China to be established in recorded history. However, there were other dynasties preceding it. The Shang ruled from 1600 BCE to 1046 BCE and marked the emergence of the Bronze Age in China. They were known for their advancements in mathematics, astronomy, artwork, and military technology. Shang culture was based on that of the Neolithic farming communities. Presumably, the dynasty was initiated by the conquest of a military chieftain, with no significant displacement of the population. The material culture referred to as "Shang" is found at sites from Shaanxi to the Pacific Ocean, leading scholars to suggest that no single state could have encompassed such a vast region. Therefore, "Shang" refers to a period and a civilization that laid the foundations of classical Chinese civilization. It likely involved several state polities in contact with each other, with the Shang being the most powerful and holding ritual supremacy.

◆ *Classical Chinese civilization*

◆ *Features of the Shang Dynasty*

Distinctive aspects of the civilization included the construction of fortified cities, the use of horse-drawn chariots in warfare, a highly developed bronze metallurgy, an elaborate system of writing, and a sharply stratified society composed of an aristocracy, craftsmen, and farmers. The farmers were not only obliged to labour but also to render military services. The Shang Kingdom evidently controlled only a small part of China, specifically the plain surrounding the middle Yellow River valley, but its influence extended over a wide area. The Shang period is characterized by the extensive use of bronze, although stone sickles and bone tools and weapons such as arrowheads remained in use. Writing, the use of horses and chariots in warfare, and walled settlements were also prominent features of Shang culture.

◆ *Longshan Neolithic culture*

The tools used for cultivation were made of both bone and stone. Although specialized pastoralism, with an emphasis on milk products, was never important in China, animals such as buffalo, cattle (*Bos taurus*), goats, sheep, and pigs were kept, as well as poultry. (In the Shang period, buffalo bones were the most frequently found.) Grain was stored in sunken pit structures. Fine grey pottery was made in the Longshan Neolithic culture using the potter's wheel, although wheeled transport did not exist until the Shang period. The carving of jade, the exquisite but hard stone of China, began during the Neolithic phase. The sources for reconstructing the Chalcolithic stage in China were meagre.

◆ *Huang Ho Valley*

The Bronze Age sites were scattered along the Huang Ho Valley and its north (up to Beijing) and south (excluding the Yangtze), to a small extent along the coast as well. There were settlements on the Wei River, a tributary of the Huang Ho, in the Loess region, and on the Huai River as well. The range of animal species represented by bones at Anyang indicates the presence of dense forest growth in the Huang Ho basin during ancient times. Unlike the other major rivers mentioned above, the Huang Ho is not navigable in any stretch. While this river provides a vast expanse of cultivable alluvium, it is the Yangtze, flowing further south, that is the largest river in China. Rice cultivators took advantage of the higher rainfall in the Yangtze Valley, which has also become more urbanized in modern times.

The Huang Ho, known as the region for millet and wheat cultivation in China, is a turbulent river carrying a significant amount of yellow silt. It frequently experiences flooding

◆ *Bronze Age Sites in the Huang Ho Valley*

or changes in course. Most Bronze Age sites were settled near small tributaries rather than directly on the Huang Ho itself. For many centuries, two distinct agricultural traditions developed. The northern region of China's valley experiences harsh winters, with temperatures dropping to 8 degrees Celsius. The southern region of China is much warmer and better watered, with more equable winters and hot summers. This region is ideal for rice cultivation in waterlogged fields.

2.1.5. The Key Centres of the Shang Civilization

◆ *Erlitou*

The key centres of the Shang Civilization were Erlitou, Anyang and Zhengzhou. Erlitou, discovered by Chinese archaeologists in 1959, belongs to the Early Shang period. It is one of the major settlements of the Xia dynasty and was situated in southwest Shanxi on a tributary of the Huang Ho. The use of rammed earth for building the perimeter wall and house foundations was the major characteristic of the Erlitou settlement. They made fine grey pottery with hollow legs, similar to the bronze sacrificial vessels of the Shang. Metal tools such as knives were rare.

◆ *Anyang*

Anyang, located 150 km north of Changzhou, was built by the nineteenth Shang king as his capital. It lies on the plain of the Huai River, a tributary of the Wei River, which flows into the lower Huang Ho. The most extensively excavated area is Xiaotun, one of the villages in the Anyang area. The excavated remains include pit houses, structures on beaten-earth platforms, craft workshops, storage facilities, and elite graves containing ritual bronzes and jade, sometimes accompanied by human sacrifices. Sixteen elite burials in underground wooden chambers containing chariot trappings, weapons, and armour were also found. The two-horse, two-wheeled chariot arrived fully developed (probably from Central Asia) around 1200 BCE at Anyang and became a symbol of royalty. Chariot burials continued in China until around 400 BCE, when horse riding and cavalry warfare was developed. The horse chariot was an instrument of warfare, but its effectiveness is difficult to determine. A text from a later period refers to the injuries suffered by a prince when he fell out of one.

During this period, they used fine white pottery made of kaolin clay along with other potteries. Wooden furniture was lacquered with the sap of a tree. They wore coarse



◆ *Classical Chinese civilization*

hemp fabric and silk. Marine cowrie shells were also used. However, jade was considered the most prized material and was used for various ornaments and ritual objects. The material culture referred to as “Shang” is found at sites from Shaanxi to the Pacific Ocean, leading scholars to suggest that no single state could have encompassed such a vast region. Therefore, “Shang” refers to a period and a civilization that laid the foundations of classical Chinese civilization. It likely involved several state polities in contact with each other, with the Shang being the most powerful and holding ritual supremacy.

◆ *Zhengzhou*

Zhengzhou, another important site, stands south of the river Deboches. This is a rich farming country, with fertile loess soil brought down by the river from the higher lands to the west. In this site, the Shang remains consist of two separate but interrelated elements. The core is a central enclosure surrounded by a rammed-earth wall 7 kilometres long. The second element is an outer city around the main enclosure, including bronze workshops, pottery kilns, cemeteries, and ordinary dwellings. These are enclosed within an outer city wall. The Zhengzhou arrangement is also called an urban cluster, and the urban cluster seems to be typical of Shang centres. The same pattern of urban clusters is also found at Anyang.

◆ *Periodization of the Shang dynasty*

The earliest references to the existence of the Shang dynasty in China came from texts dating back to the end of the first millennium BCE, several hundred to a thousand years after the end of the Shang rule. The information provided about the Shang in those texts was very limited, and there was no other material evidence to support its existence. However, things began to change about a hundred years ago with the discovery of oracle bones and their inscriptions, followed by meticulous excavations at various sites, especially at Anyang.

◆ *Understanding of the Shang period*

The names of the Kings mentioned on the oracle bones matched those in the historical records, and the tomb of Lady Hao became the first one associated with a person mentioned in the historical narrative. As a result, the origin of Chinese civilization started to become clearer, gradually emerging from the realm of mythology. Due to the rapid pace of archaeological excavations and new discoveries in China, we can anticipate a further improvement in our

2.1.6.Chronology of Shang Civilization



understanding of the Shang in the foreseeable future. The alignment between the written historical narrative and the available archaeological evidence add significant credibility to the current understanding of the Shang.

Summarised Overview

Copper and bronze played crucial roles in the transition of human settlements. The advent of copper tools and weapons marked a significant advancement in technology, allowing for more efficient farming and construction. The development of bronze, an alloy of copper and tin, further revolutionized society, impacting warfare, trade, and artistic production. Meanwhile, the civilization of ancient Egypt thrived due to the Nile River, often referred to as the “gift of the Nile.” Its annual flooding provided fertile soil, enabling advanced farming techniques and a stable food supply. This allowed for the growth of a complex civilization with centralized authority, monumental architecture, and intricate religious beliefs. Similarly, Mesopotamia, located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, was home to early urban civilizations. Its cities flourished as centres of political, economic, and cultural activities. The Mesopotamians developed innovative irrigation systems and made significant contributions to writing systems, including the invention of the Cuneiform script. Lastly, the Shang Civilization emerged in Northern and Central China, leaving a lasting impact on Chinese history. They excelled in bronze metallurgy, writing, and military technology. The Shang capital at Anyang provides valuable archaeological insights, but our understanding of this civilization continues to evolve with new discoveries.

Self Assessment

1. Explain the concept of the ‘Bronze Age’.
2. Compare the agricultural production of Egyptian and Mesopotamian Civilizations.
3. Explain the Key Centres of the Shang Civilization.
4. Evaluate the features of writing in Mesopotamian Civilizations.
5. Compare the burial methods in Egyptian and Shang Civilizations.
6. Bring out the salient features of Shang Civilization.
7. “Mesopotamia is often considered as the cradle of civilizations” - Justify.
8. State the evolution of human settlements in Egypt with reference to the Bronze Age.



Assignments

1. Explore the significance of rivers in the development and sustenance of the ancient civilizations.
2. Analyze the religious beliefs and practices of the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Shang Civilizations.
3. Compare the political structure of the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Shang civilizations.
4. Investigate the advancements in metallurgy and its impact on the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Shang Civilizations.

Suggested Readings

1. Bagley, Robert, *Shang Ritual Bronzes in the Arthur M. Sackler Collections*, Arthur M. Sackler Foundation, 1987.
2. Liverani, Mario, *Uruk: The First City*, Equinox Publishing, 2006.
3. Shaw, Ian, *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, 2003.
4. Van de Mieroop, Marc, *A History of the Ancient Near East: ca. 3000-323 BC*, Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
5. Wilkinson, Toby, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010.

References

1. Burckhardt, Jacob, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, St. Martin's Griffin, 1999.
2. Childe, V. Gordon, *The Bronze Age*, Aakar Books, 2019.
3. Feuerstein, Georg, *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization*, Motilal Banarsidass, 2008.
4. Gupta, Rupa, and Gautam Gupta, *Forgotten Civilizations: The Rediscovery of India's Lost History*, Hachette India, 2021.
5. Kriwaczek, Paul, *Babylon: Mesopotamia and the Birth of Civilization*, Grove Atlantic, 2012.
6. Wilkinson, Toby, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



Social Structure

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ learn about the social structure of Bronze Age civilizations
- ◆ provide a brief sketch of the religious system of the civilizations
- ◆ describe the various phases of Bronze age civilizations
- ◆ illustrate the kinship of various civilizations

Background

The Bronze Age is a period of prehistoric human history characterized by the widespread use of alloy and bronze. Bronze was first used for making tools and weapons around 3000 BCE in the Northeast, and this technology soon spread to other parts of the world as well. The Bronze Age witnessed the emergence of complex societies and the development of early civilizations in various regions, including Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, and China. During this time period, agriculture became more advanced, leading to the growth of larger settlements and the development of social hierarchies. Trade networks also expanded, allowing for the exchange of goods and ideas over long distances. The people of these Bronze Age civilizations developed their own writing systems, which facilitated record-keeping, communication, and the spread of existing knowledge. The Bronze Age came to an end around 1200 BCE, with the widespread collapse of major civilizations across the world. The reasons for its decline are not clearly understood; however, it is presumed to have been due to a combination of factors such as economic instability, environmental changes, cataclysmic events, and invasions by outside groups.

Keywords

Urbanization, Vizier, Class system, Patriarchal society, Sacral kinship



Discussion

2.2.1 Urbanization

◆ *Advancement in metallurgy*

Urbanization in Bronze Age Civilizations brought about profound changes in the social, economic, and cultural fabric of the era. It represented a fundamental shift from predominantly rural communities to the rise of sprawling urban centres. This transition was driven by remarkable advancements in metallurgy, with the production of bronze playing a pivotal role in driving technological innovations and facilitating the growth of urban areas. The advent of bronze, a durable and versatile alloy, revolutionized the capabilities of Bronze Age societies. Its introduction led to the development of superior tools, weapons, and implements that greatly enhanced productivity and efficiency. The ability to forge and utilize bronze tools, such as axes, chisels, and ploughs, enabled significant improvements in agriculture, construction, and other vital economic activities. This, in turn, facilitated increased agricultural output and the construction of sophisticated infrastructure, contributing to the rise of urban centres.

◆ *Trade and Commerce*

The utilization of bronze also had far-reaching implications for trade and commerce. The newfound ability to produce and exchange bronze goods became a driving force behind the expansion of regional and interregional trade networks. As urban centres emerged and flourished, they became focal points for trade, attracting merchants and artisans from far and wide. The exchange of goods, ideas, and cultural practices thrived in these urban hubs, fueled economic growth and fostered cultural diversity.

◆ *Impact on society*

Urbanization also brought about significant social changes as communities shifted from predominantly agrarian societies to urbanized settings. Social structures underwent a transformation as the concentration of people in urban centres created a more complex social fabric, with the emergence of distinct social classes and hierarchies. Elites and rulers gained prominence within these urban settings, wielding power and influence over the urban population.

Culturally, urbanization gave rise to new forms of artistic expression, architectural marvels, and religious practices. Urban centres became vibrant cultural hubs, showcasing the achievements and beliefs of the Bronze Age civilizations.

◆ *Impact on culture*

Monuments, temples, and palaces were constructed, showcasing the architectural prowess and religious devotion of societies. These urban centres became the epicentre of artistic and intellectual pursuits, fostering the exchange of ideas and the development of cultural achievements. Trade networks played a crucial role in the urbanization process. Urban centres became important nodes in extensive trade networks that connected distant regions. The exchange of goods, ideas, and cultural practices enriched the urban environments and contributed to their vibrant and cosmopolitan nature.

◆ *Impact on religion*

The urbanization process also left its mark on cultural and religious practices. Urban centres often housed important religious and ceremonial sites, becoming centres of spiritual and cultural significance. Temples, palaces, and monumental structures were built to honour deities and serve as symbols of religious devotion and political authority. However, urbanization was not free from its challenges.

◆ *Decline of urban centres*

There were several assumptions regarding the decline of major bronze age civilizations. The decline of urban centres in some Bronze Age civilizations can be attributed to factors such as environmental changes, political instability, or the collapse of trade networks. These factors disrupted the delicate balance upon which urbanization depended, leading to the eventual abandonment or transformation of once-thriving urban centres.

2.2.2 The Social Structure of Bronze Age Societies- Egypt

The social system of ancient Egypt was structured hierarchically, resembling a pyramid. At the top of this social pyramid was the pharaoh, the supreme ruler whose authority was reinforced by Egyptian religion. The pharaohs were considered the representatives of the god, and their commands held the ultimate legal authority throughout the entire country. Following the pharaoh, there were several layers of social classes, with some sections near the top enjoying higher status while those closer to the bottom had larger populations. Beneath the pharaoh, the next two highest classes in the social pyramid were government officials and priests, who held significant power in Egypt. Government officials carried out the pharaoh's orders, with many of them hailing from noble families and enjoying

◆ *Pyramidal social structure*

wealth and privileges. Priests also held considerable influence as religion permeated every aspect of people's daily lives. They were responsible for overseeing temples, religious rituals, and important ceremonies related to death and burial practices. Scribes occupied the subsequent position on the social pyramid and held a respected status in society. They played a crucial role in recording information for government and religious leaders, requiring many years of schooling to acquire the necessary skills. Artisans comprised the next layer, encompassing skilled craftsmen such as carpenters, metalworkers, painters, sculptors, and stone carvers. Although highly skilled artisans had relatively low social status compared to other classes. The base of the social pyramid comprised the peasants, who constituted the largest social class. Peasants were engaged in agricultural work, ensuring a steady food supply for the Egyptian population. Additionally, they actively participated in the pharaoh's grand construction projects when they were not tending to the land.

◆ *Male-dominated society*

The social structure of Ancient Egypt was not rigid, allowing individuals from lower or middle classes to ascend to higher positions. The People primarily improved their status through marriage or achieving success in their professions. Even the slaves possessed certain rights, including the ownership of personal belongings, the ability to marry and inherit the land, and the potential for emancipation. Different social classes shared some commonalities, but their lifestyles were generally distinct. Family life was highly valued across all social classes in Egypt. Marriages often occurred within the same social group, and children held great importance. Men served as the heads of their households and worked to provide food for their families. Fathers often initiated the training of their sons from a young age, passing on their respective trades. Egyptian society was predominantly male-dominated.

◆ *Women enjoyed more freedom and rights*

Women enjoyed more freedom and rights compared to their counterparts in other ancient civilizations. Women enjoyed extensive rights and could own, inherit, and trade property. They even had the right to divorce. While most individuals inherited their social class from their parents, there were limited opportunities for upward mobility. Women typically managed the household and raised the children, with upper-class women having the assistance of servants or slaves, while lower-class women handled the

responsibilities themselves. Some women in the middle and upper classes even held professions as physicians, government officials, or priestesses. Both men and women experienced an improved quality of life as they ascended the social pyramid. The Egyptians believed that their class system fostered a stable and well-organized society, with each group fulfilling its designated role.

◆ *Pharaoh and Government Officials:*

They belonged to the highest class on Egypt's social pyramid, following the pharaoh. Their role was to aid the pharaoh as the supreme ruler of Egypt. Government officials often came from the pharaoh's family or other upper-class families, inheriting their positions in most cases. However, trusted servants from the royal court sometimes ascended to positions of power. Three crucial officials were the vizier, the chief treasurer, and the general of the armies, each with their own responsibilities. The vizier held considerable power, second only to the pharaoh. They offered counsel to the pharaoh and executed their commands.

◆ *Role of Vizier*

The vizier appointed and supervised many other government officials and also served as the chief judge. Other judges would present their most challenging cases to the vizier, who was expected to be impartial and fair, showing no favoritism to either side in a dispute. The chief treasurer was responsible for overseeing the government's wealth, with the primary duty of collecting taxes. Egypt's economy relied on goods rather than money, and people paid their taxes in the form of grain, cows, cloth, and silver. Following the pharaoh, the highest-ranking military commander in Egypt was the general of the armies. They guided the pharaoh regarding matters of warfare and national security, including the protection of Egypt's borders from invaders. Additionally, they assisted the pharaoh in forming alliances with other kingdoms.

High-ranking government officials led lives of luxury, many of them being nobles with great wealth, splendid residences, and ample leisure time for socializing. The extravagant feasts enjoyed by these affluent Egyptians epitomized their lavish lifestyle. Hosts took pride in the banquet preparations, with cooks roasting a variety of meats such as duck, goose, pigeon, quail, antelope, sheep, and goat. The tables were adorned with an abundance of delicacies, including figs, dates, grapes, and coconuts, while an assortment of bread, cakes, and honey completed

◆ *Social life of Egyptian*

the opulent feast. Guests at these banquets dressed in fine linen attire, both men and women adorning themselves with perfume and women often accessorizing with bead necklaces. They embellished their nails, enhanced their eyes with makeup, and applied lipstick. The guests were attended to by servants, mostly women, who waited on them. As there were no forks or spoons, people were using their fingers. While the guests indulged in the meal, musicians, dancers, and acrobats provided entertainment. The musicians, typically women, played instruments such as flutes, harps, rattles, and lutes (guitar-like instruments). Guests often joined in by clapping along to the music.

◆ *Role of priests in ancient Egyptian society*

Priests: Similar to government officials, priests held significant power and commanded great respect in Egyptian society. A vast network of priests served under the pharaoh, who held the highest rank among all priests. Priests had various responsibilities, with the High Priest advising the pharaoh and overseeing all religious ceremonies. Temple priests were responsible for the management of temples spread across Egypt, while others addressed common concerns and provided guidance and healing. In Egypt, women were allowed to become priestesses and were generally considered equal to male priests. Their primary role was to supervise temples dedicated to music and dance. Temple priests played a crucial role in Egyptian religion, as each temple housed one or more gods. The main duty of a temple priest was to care for the temple's designated god. It was believed that the god resided in a statue placed within a sacred room known as the sanctuary. Only a priest who had undergone purification rituals could enter the sanctuary. The purification process involved abstaining from certain foods associated with the lower classes, bathing multiple times a day in holy pools, shaving off body hair, and wearing linen garments since animal products like leather and wool were considered impure. Once purified, the priest could perform his sacred duties.

The Egyptians believed that the heart was used by the gods to judge a person's soul after death. The organs were preserved by placing them in jars, and the body was desiccated using a special salt called natron. After approximately 70 days, the embalmers washed and anointed the body before wrapping it in hundreds of yards of linen. The mummified body, adorned with jewellery and protective charms, often had a mask placed on the head. Finally, a black, resinous substance

◆ *Mummification procedure*

was applied over the body, and the wrapping process was completed. The mummy was then ready for burial. First, it was placed in a wooden box. The box was then stored inside a large stone coffin called a sarcophagus. Because the ancient Egyptians believed that the afterlife was much like life in this world, they buried other items along with the box or coffin. These included food and drink, furniture, statues, jewellery, gold, clothes, games, and mirrors. Not all Egyptians could afford such elaborate burials. But even poor Egyptians wrapped their dead in cloth and buried them with loaves of bread and other items they thought would be needed in the afterlife.

◆ *Record keepers in Egypt*

Scribes: In the social pyramid, scribes were a level below priests. Scribes were Egypt's official writers and record keepers. They were highly respected and well-paid. Most scribes worked for the government, while others worked for priests or nobles. Only men were allowed to be scribes, and they came from various social classes. Becoming a scribe was one of the few ways for men to elevate their social status beyond that of their parents. To become a scribe, boys had to attend scribe schools, which were overseen by the priests. The duties of scribes were diverse due to the extensive record-keeping in ancient Egypt. They documented accounts of the grain and food supply, recorded the results of the government census, and were involved in tax calculation and collection. Legal scribes played a role in recording court cases and aiding in law enforcement, while military scribes kept track of soldiers, food supplies, and enemy casualties in battles. Every scribe utilized the same set of tools. They used finely sharpened reeds as pens and wrote on sheets of papyrus placed on wooden or stone writing tablets. Each tablet had two compartments, one for black ink and one for red ink. A small container carried water for wetting the ink. Scribes carried their tools with them wherever they went, with their tablets hanging from cords slung over their shoulders. The Egyptians manufactured paper by cutting the inner part of the papyrus plant into strips. These strips were soaked in water until soft, then laid out in a crisscross pattern and pressed between two sheets of cloth to remove excess water. Finally, the papyrus strips were pressed again to form a sheet of paper.

Artisans: On the social pyramid of ancient Egypt, the artisans occupied a position below the scribes. These highly skilled labourers were responsible for creating some of the

◆ *Skilled artisans in Ancient Egypt*

most breathtaking art objects in the ancient world. However, unlike the scribes, they were seldom given the respect they deserved from the higher classes of society. Only a select few artisans who reached a mastery level in their craft would occasionally receive recognition and honour for their exceptional work. The class of artisans encompassed various skilled workers, including carpenters, jewellers, leather workers, metal workers, painters, potters, sculptors, and weavers. Their craftsmanship extended to a wide range of creations, from intricate jewellery pieces to elegant furniture. Painters specialized in depicting scenes of daily life in Egypt, providing a glimpse into the culture and customs of the time. While the majority of artisans were men, some women contributed to this class by weaving fabric, creating beaded clothing, and crafting perfume. Among the artisans, the stone carvers held a particularly esteemed position. They played a pivotal role in the construction of tombs, temples, and monuments. These skilled craftsmen produced statues, engravings, and reliefs that adorned these sacred structures, perpetuating the memory of the deceased and honouring their legacy. Collaboration was a common practice among artisans, who often worked side by side in large workshops. These shared spaces fostered a sense of community and provided opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and skill development. Through their collective efforts, the artisans contributed significantly to the artistic and cultural landscape of ancient Egypt, leaving behind a rich legacy that continues to captivate and inspire. The belief in the afterlife motivated affluent Egyptians to commission elaborate tombs. The stone carvers were instrumental in adorning these final resting places with exquisite artworks.

◆ *Daily life of Ancient Egyptians*

In terms of their daily life, artisans resided in modest homes alongside their families. These houses were typically rectangular, measuring approximately 10 yards in length. The interior was divided into three rooms extending from the front to the back. The first room often served as a workspace or a shelter for animals. The living room followed, providing a communal area for the family. The final room was divided into a kitchen and a bedroom, fulfilling the essential domestic functions. In some cases, the roof of the house served as an additional space for work or rest.

Peasants: Peasants made up the lowest and largest class in Egypt's social pyramid. They are generally considered as unskilled labourers, yet the Egyptian society totally

◆ *Role of peasants in cultivation*

depended on their work. Peasants grew the crops that supplied everyone with food, and when not busy working the fields, they helped to build monuments like the pyramids. Peasant life revolved around the Nile River, which had three seasons: the flooding season, the planting season, and the harvest season. During the flooding season from June to September, the Nile overflowed its banks and fertilized the fields. Farmers had to wait for the waters to recede before working the fields and would labour on royal projects in the meantime. In October, the planting season began, and farmers sowed their fields with wheat and barley, the main crops used for bread. Farmers worked in pairs, with one using a plough pulled by cattle to soften the earth while the other scattered the seeds. Throughout the season, farmers diligently irrigated the land. The harvest season involved cutting down plants with sickles and gathering the grain stalks, with the entire family assisting in the process.

◆ *Life of Peasants*

Peasants lived in plain houses made of mud bricks and had sparse furniture, often consisting of woven mats. Their diet was simple, including onions, cucumbers, fish, homemade bread, peas, and lentils, while meat was rarely consumed. During times of famine, they resorted to boiling tough papyrus plants for food. Despite their challenging lives, peasants found moments of enjoyment, such as engaging in river games on papyrus rafts. However, they also faced hardships, as they had to pay taxes in the form of crops, and failure to meet the required tax could result in brutal beatings.

2.2.2.1 The Social Structure of Mesopotamian Society

◆ *Patriarchal society*

Mesopotamian society was primarily patriarchal in nature. However, in many early textual sources, the gender of the individuals mentioned is not always clear. It appears that during the Uruk period, there was a complementary role between males and females, at least in a ritualistic sense. In the Early Dynastic period, women were also capable of holding highly prestigious positions, as evidenced by the grave goods found in the “Royal Tombs” at Ur (a Sumerian city-state in ancient Mesopotamia) and inscribed votive gifts. According to the Sumerian King List, there was even a female ruler who ruled over the region of Kish. However, it seems that the status of women in prominent positions gradually declined after the Early Dynastic period. Written documents provide insights into the legal rights of women in



Mesopotamia. They could own and acquire property, slaves, and other valuable assets, invest their dowries as they saw fit, engage in various business ventures, and initiate legal proceedings. However, they were not permitted to serve as witnesses in legal disputes. Marriages were generally monogamous and arranged by parents, with girls marrying at a younger age than men. In widowhood, women had the opportunity to remarry.

◆ *Condition of high-status women*

In Mesopotamian society, some high-status women held privileged positions and even had their own female secretaries. These women had significant control over wealth, which came from their dowries, gifts from their husbands, or their own business endeavours. They had the autonomy to manage and allocate these resources as they saw fit.

◆ *Role of ordinary women*

While the primary role of women in Mesopotamia was to bear and raise children, they also actively participated in the workforce. The extensive administrative texts from institutions like temples and palaces provide evidence of the presence of countless “ordinary” women who were employed in various occupations. These women were involved in a diverse range of tasks and responsibilities. Some women were engaged in domestic work, which involved laborious activities such as the continuous grinding of grain using millstones, towing heavy barges along canals, and performing demanded agricultural tasks like cutting reeds. They also took on household chores and played a crucial role in textile workshops, where they contributed to the production of textiles through weaving and related activities. Women were also involved in temple services, where their duties encompassed not only administrative responsibilities but also spiritual practices. They actively participated in praying, dancing, singing, and other rituals within the temple context. These examples highlight the multifaceted roles and contributions of women in Mesopotamian society. While their primary responsibilities centred around family and child-rearing, they also played a significant role in the economic and cultural spheres, actively participating in various occupations and making valuable contributions to their communities.

In Mesopotamia, slaves were primarily employed in domestic settings rather than in large-scale public projects like in the Roman Empire. The cuneiform symbol for slaves referred to someone “from the mountains,” indicating a

◆ *Slave Markets*

foreigner who could be captured as a prisoner of war during military expeditions. These captives were often sold or given as personal gifts to individuals, while commercial slavery also existed through slave markets in major cities. Slaves were marked with special tonsures and skin marks, becoming the property of their owners, and any children born to slaves were also considered as slaves. Only affluent households could afford slaves, with male slaves fulfilling various roles, including agricultural and artisans' work, as well as serving as scribes and clerks. Female slaves had similar duties but were also utilized as concubines. The duration of bondage for slaves corresponded to their debts, and amnesties could be decreed by kings to free people from debt.

◆ *Priestly functions*

There was no general distinction between those who worked in the "secular" sector and those who performed "priestly" functions in Mesopotamia. Certain sacerdotal duties could be carried out part-time, known as 'prebends'. Individuals who had access to the sacred areas of the temple were required to maintain ritual purity through ablutions and the recitation of purificatory formulas. Priests involved in direct contact with divine statues had to meet specific physical, ethical, and psychological criteria to qualify for their role. Similar to scribes, particular high-status priestly positions were hereditary, passing from father to son. Most cult specialists were required to be literate and well-versed in liturgical procedures, chants, and prayers. Skilled staff members conducted exorcisms, healing rituals, and divination and provided counsel to the king. Some temple personnel belonged to distinct classes and wore distinctive clothing, hats, and accessories, as depicted in cylinder seals and Assyrian reliefs. Ritual nudity, as seen on Early Dynastic plaques, ceased after the Akkadian period. Daily temple servants included musicians, singers, performers, and both male and female dancers. A wide range of professional titles for temple personnel has been documented in administrative records and lexical lists, although determining the specific functions associated with each title.

The social structure of Mesopotamian society was predominantly patriarchal, meaning that men held positions of power and authority. However, it is important to note that women were not considered mere possessions or property of men. They had certain rights and freedoms that allowed them to own property and engage in business activities independently. This indicates a level of autonomy and legal

◆ *Marriage*

recognition for women in Mesopotamian society. Marriage in Mesopotamia held great significance as an institution that facilitated the establishment of a socially accepted union between a man and a woman. Its primary purpose was to ensure procreation, emphasizing the importance of female fertility within society. The ability to bear children was highly valued, and infertility or barrenness could potentially lead to divorce as it hindered the fulfilment of the fundamental role of marriage. In situations where a wife was unable to conceive, Mesopotamian society allowed for a unique practice where the husband had the option to invite another woman into the household, typically as a second wife or concubine, with the explicit purpose of bearing him offspring. This practice provided an alternative means to ensure the continuity of the family line and satisfy the desire for progeny. It highlights the collective need for maintaining lineage and the significance placed on the continuation of the family through offspring.

◆ *Polytheistic religion*

In ancient Mesopotamia, a polytheistic religion was practised, and it involved the worship of a vast number of deities. Throughout different periods, the people of Mesopotamia had a strong belief in multiple gods and goddesses. It was common for individuals to have names that incorporated the names of these deities, which provided insight into the popularity of specific gods during this period. To establish a hierarchical order among the gods, lists were created, starting with the most significant deities and ending with lesser-known ones. Major gods such as Anu, Ea, Enlil, and Inanna or Ishtar held prominent positions in these lists. These lists preserved not only ancient names but also added new ones over time, giving a comprehensive view of the diverse deities worshipped by the Mesopotamians. Each city in Mesopotamia had its own patron deity, a god or goddess that was particularly revered and associated with that specific city. The major gods had distinct areas of responsibility and expertise. Anu, the patriarchal head of the pantheon, held authority over the heavens. Enki, the god of water, was known for his wisdom and creative powers. Nannar-Suen, also known as Akkadian Sin, was the moon god and was closely linked to the fertility of cattle. The sun god, Shamash, played the role of a “judge” and ensured justice and fairness prevailed on Earth. The worship and reverence of these deities were integral to the religious and cultural fabric of Mesopotamian society. The belief in multiple gods and their diverse roles contributed to the complex spiritual worldview

of the ancient Mesopotamians.

2.2.2.2. The Social Structure of Harappan Civilization

◆ *Heterogeneous society*

Urban societies are characterized by social heterogeneity, where various forms of inequality exist among individuals and social groups. This diversity stems from the phenomenon of nucleation, wherein unrelated individuals gather and reside together in urban areas. While urban societies consist of multiple kinship groups, the majority of interactions within urban spaces occur between strangers. Due to the large-scale urban centres, the social relations often lack face-to-face or direct interactions. When studying periods with written records, understanding the nature of relationships in urban settings becomes relatively easier. However, in periods where only archaeological evidence is available, it becomes more challenging to determine how people related to one another and the basis of their relationship. Nevertheless, several approaches are employed to propose possible social connections and assess status distinctions among individuals and communities. Physical aspects, such as variations in individual residences, occupations, and the diverse styles and uses of artefacts, can indicate a certain degree of heterogeneity. Additionally, differences in burial practices can also provide insights into social hierarchies.

◆ *Caste-based social structure*

In a caste-based social order, individuals in society are assigned to specific groups based on their birth and occupational tasks. It is obligatory for members to marry within their own caste (endogamy), while any contact outside the caste is considered impure and requires ritual purification. This system entails a rigidly predetermined social position without the possibility of changing group identity or status. The Harappan seals possibly reflect this social organization by linking their owners to their respective caste or kinship group, as the inscriptions on the seals provide names and positions within the group. The widespread distribution of these seals in residential areas, rather than administrative contexts, as seen in Sumer, suggests their function was more symbolic of group membership rather than personal possession or economic significance.

The presence of hierarchical classes in the Harappan cities is supported by the layout and organization of the cities. Various other forms of evidence, including ritual objects, ornaments, seals, and weights, provide additional support



◆ *Hierarchical classes in the Harappan Phase*

for social stratification. While there seems to have been occupational specialization in the Indus cities, the absence of separate burial areas or highly differentiated living spaces and material culture suggests that rigidly defined social strata, such as the later varna system or hereditary castes (*jati*), were not prevalent. Previous generalizations about uniformity in artefacts have emphasized the authoritative nature of Harappan culture. Still, most of the uniformity can be explained by the presence of a shared belief system or conservative ideology that necessitated specific symbols and artefacts for rituals and to define class affiliations. These symbolic objects also reinforced the social hierarchy and helped to legitimize the socio-economic and political order. Harappan cities likely consisted of competing elites whose centres of power were located within the individual walled mounds at Mohenjodaro and Harappa. These walled mounds served to reinforce the distinct communities of ruling elites and facilitated complete economic control over specialized goods produced by artisans in specific sectors.

◆ *Worship and sacrifices*

Religious practices and beliefs are represented in symbols and narrative scenes depicted on seals, pottery, and other objects. The most important narrative scenes show sacrifice and worship. The worship of trees and deities in trees suggests that most rituals were carried out in the open or at the foot of a sacred tree, such as the banyan, pipal, or acacia. Some large buildings may have been used as temples, but their precise function cannot be confirmed. Terracotta figurines of possible horned male deities and elaborately decorated females may represent deities or worshippers. Stone sculptures of male figures who are sitting on one bent leg, with the other leg bent in front, have been widely referred to as representing deities or priest-kings, but the specific kneeling posture suggests a supplicant rather than a deity. Abstract symbols such as the swastika and endless knot motifs, and other enigmatic symbolic objects are also thought to reflect ideology. Still, their precise meaning cannot be known without the aid of readable texts. Harappan religion or socio-ritual belief systems reflect a multiplicity of levels ranging from local cults to what could be called an established “state” religion practised by the elites of the different cities and emulated by the lower classes.

Most prominent religious figures are the Unicorn, also known as Pashupati or Proto-Shiva, the seven mothers (*sapta matrika*), and compound creatures. The latter three are now

◆ *Pasupati Siva
and Sapta
Matrika*

incorporated into the Hindu religion. The dominance of the mother goddess suggests that the society was predominantly matriarchal. The Proto-Shiva, or Pashupati, seems to be the only male deity depicted on seals. He is surrounded by four wild animals: an elephant, a tiger, a buffalo, and a rhinoceros. Additionally, there are two deer beneath the seat of the deity. The deity's headdress has two horns, and it wears a number of bangles. There is an inscription of seven letters on the top. This representation has at least three concepts which are usually associated with Shiva, viz., that he is Trimukha (three-faced), Pashupati (Lord of animals), and Yogisvara or Mahayogi. The first two aspects are apparent from the seal itself. The deity is sitting cross-legged in a Padmasana posture with eyes turned towards the tip of the nose, which is evidence of the Yogisvara aspect of the deity. The deity is always nude, saved by a cincture around the waist. Mother Goddesses have been found in major urban centres like Mohenjodaro. Pits with evidence of burning, sometimes associated with animal bones, were found in Kalibangan and Lothal and have been interpreted as fire altars.

◆ *Harappan
burials*

Interestingly, Harappan burials show little evidence of social hierarchies, unlike Mesopotamian, Egyptian, or Chinese Bronze Age burials, where some instruments may indicate considerable wealth. Moreover, Harappan burials were confined to cemeteries located away from habitation. It is not yet known if these cemeteries were limited to particular social groups. Inferences about Harappan religion and beliefs remain conjectural due to our reliance on material evidence alone.

◆ *Shamanistic
beliefs*

An image, depicted on a seal and tokens, of a seated male in a yogic posture was initially considered as a proto-Shiva. However, this same figure has more recently been interpreted as evidence of shamanistic beliefs prevailing in Harappan culture. Ritual practices may be depicted through certain motifs on steatite seals, such as the narrative scenes. The Great Bath at Mohenjo-Daro itself has been considered as the location of a public or royal ritual. This is interesting to note that religious beliefs or practices may not have been homogeneous for the Harappan civilization as a whole.

The Harappan period witnessed a dramatic transformation in society, reflecting considerable social heterogeneity. However, there was a sense of cohesiveness, possibly achieved through a common set of rules and regulations

◆ *Social
heterogeneity of
the Harappan
period*

imposed from above. One can envision this as a great tradition encompassing multiple little traditions. Interestingly, this solidarity or cohesion appears to have been temporary, as the disintegration of the Harappan state led to a reversion of the social structure to a tribal form. This suggests that kinship groups in society retained their significance even in urban settings with the emergence of new social institutions. Harappan society was composed of groups connected through kinship ties and shared ideology. The paramount leaders or chiefs would have received regular tributes, even from distant settlements. These chiefs likely resided in larger and more elaborate settlements such as Mohenjodaro or Harappa. Migration would have fragmented their power, making it increasingly challenging to maintain traditional controls, especially in more distant dependent settlements. Eventually, the centrality of the chiefdom weakened and disappeared. At the same time, the Harappan cultural style declined and assimilated into new cultural styles that emerged in the eastern and southern regions of the Indian subcontinent. There is still much to explore and investigate regarding this ancient Indian culture. However, the evidence increasingly emphasizes that cattle played a central role in the prosperity of the Indus chiefdoms and paradoxically contributed to the downfall of this society.

◆ *Occupational
differences in
society*

As mentioned earlier, there is enough evidence to show that there was occupational differentiation in the society. At the same time, we need to note that certain skills, particularly in crafts, may have been promoted, but these need not have meant full-time occupations. We need not presume that specialists would not have engaged in subsistence-procurement activities. The diversity of types and materials of artefacts may indicate differences in consumption patterns: spindle whorls of terracotta or faience, vessels of terracotta or bronze, bangles and beads of clay, stone, bone, shell, faience, metal, and so forth. At the same time, it should be pointed out that there is no simple correlation between, for example, the sizes of residences and seemingly wealthy objects. The practices of disposal of the dead largely comprise burials, though there may have been other methods that are less archaeologically identifiable. Even within burials, one finds some amount of variation: there is evidence of extended burials, burials in urns or large pots, in coffins, and burials that may also have been secondary or symbolic.

2.2.2.3. Social Structure of Shang Civilization

◆ *Social clan system of China*

Ancient China was governed by clans or extended families, which frequently engaged in conflicts to safeguard their authority over the different regions. When a clan attained enough strength to control the others, it would be recognized as a dynasty. The Shang Dynasty, originating from the Yellow River region, serves as an example of a clan that grew powerful enough to establish a dynasty. It is believed to have ruled from 1600 BCE to 1046 BCE. The social class system of the Shang Dynasty began with the ruling family. The king was the apex of the ruling class. In the Shang Dynasty, kings resided in grand palaces constructed on elevated platforms within the royal cities. Maintaining strong armies was crucial for protecting the power of clans since kings spent a significant portion of their time engaged in warfare against other clans. The king's younger brothers and nephews also played a vital role in the governance of the dynasty. The king would grant them control over smaller kingdoms within China. These men were also in line to inherit the throne in case anything happened to the king.

◆ *Nobles as a high-ranking class*

The next highest-ranking social classes were the nobles. The nobles played a vital role in supporting the king by providing weapons and foot soldiers for military purposes. Often, the nobles themselves would fight in the king's army. Many served as chariot warriors and were renowned for their exceptional warfare skills. In recognition of their crucial service to the king, they had the freedom to control their land as they pleased. The noble class enjoyed a life of luxury, spending their days overseeing the lives of the lower classes from grand palaces. One of their favourite pastimes was engaging in fox and badger hunts, and on occasion, they were even invited to accompany the king himself. Following the kings and the aristocrats, the Shang military held a respected and honourable social status. The military comprised two divisions: the infantry, consisting of foot soldiers, and the chariot warriors. The chariot warriors, in particular, were renowned for their prowess in warfare and hunting.

The artisans, or craftsmen, fell below the nobles in social rank. This class included skilled workers in bronze, jade, ceramics, stone, and silk. They were responsible for creating exquisite decorations, jewellery, and clothing for the upper classes. The bronze workers, in particular, were highly esteemed for their craftsmanship in producing weapons for



◆ *Artisans and craftsmen*

the king's military wing. Artisans and craftsmen formed the middle class of the Shang society. They were patronized by rulers and aristocrats who sought luxury goods for personal use and ceremonial purposes. Their significant contribution was in the field of bronze work, specifically in crafting ritual vessels and treasures. Many of these artefacts were unearthed through archaeological excavations in the 1920s and 1930s. The Shang aristocrats and royalty were likely buried with a substantial number of bronze valuables, particularly wine vessels and other intricately designed structures.

◆ *Trading System*

Sharing an equal middle-class status with the artisans were the traders and merchants, who were engaged in selling goods within the society and beyond. In fact, it is believed that the Shang traders conducted extensive trade, reaching distant regions. This belief is supported by archaeological discoveries of cowrie seashells and turtle shells, both originating from tropical areas thousands of miles away from the Shang kingdom. Cowrie shells were highly valuable, partly due to the long-distance trade involved in acquiring them, and they were even used as a form of currency during the Shang dynasty.

◆ *Feudal structure*

The Shang implemented a feudal system in which responsibilities were linked to land ownership, resulting in distinct class divisions based on lineage. The aristocracy centred around Anyang, which served as the administrative hub for the surrounding regions. Wealthy individuals also exerted control over regional territories located further away from the capital. Numerous local rulers held hereditary titles in the imperial system. The elite classes benefited from the labour of peasants and the implementation of large-scale projects under elite control, often employing various forms of forced labour. Evidence also indicates the existence of a class of proto-bureaucrats, many of whom held titled positions and had managerial responsibilities, including extensive record-keeping. Their duties likely involved inventory management of ritual materials, coordination of ritual performances, supervision of major construction projects and bronze workshops, as well as tracking incoming tributes.

The peasants belonged to the lower category of the social hierarchy. They constituted the majority of the population and were primarily engaged in farming and selling crops within the confines of a restrictive feudal system. Archaeological discoveries have revealed that large numbers of peasants

◆ *The peasants*

were buried alongside aristocrats, leading some scholars to conclude that they were akin to slaves. However, others have argued that they might have been more similar to serfs, who were bound to land owned by aristocrats and had to give a portion of their harvest as a tribute. The Peasants were directly governed by local aristocrats. One method employed by historians to discern these social hierarchies is the examination of cemeteries, which were often clustered in distinct neighbourhoods and exhibited varying degrees of quality based on the social status of the individuals interred there.

2.2.3. Shang Religion

◆ *Shamanism*

The Shang religion held immense significance, permeating both the political and economic realms. The connection between the Shang religion and state power was profound, as the consolidation of state power relied on an intense veneration of the royal Shang ancestors. Towards the end of the Shang dynasty, the exclusive ability to interpret oracle bones, thus assuming the role of the head Shaman, was vested solely in the king. The Shang religion encompassed a blend of animism, the belief that all things possess a soul; shamanism, which centred on shamans who possessed the ability to communicate with the spiritual realm; ancestor worship; and divination. Various gods represented natural and mythological symbols, such as the moon, the sun, the wind, the rain, the dragon, and the phoenix. The Peasants offered prayers to these gods and sought plentiful harvests. Festivals dedicated to the gods were also common. Notably, the Shang kings, who perceived themselves as divine rulers, sought counsel and wisdom from the great god, 'Shangdi', the Supreme Being, governing humanity and nature. The Shang firmly believed that the ancestors held the power to bestow good fortune. Therefore, the Shang consulted their ancestors through oracle bones to obtain approval for significant decisions and gain insight into future prosperity in areas such as farming, hunting, and warfare.

The Shang also believed in life after death. Archaeologists have discovered the Shang tombs surrounded by the skulls and bodies of human sacrifices. Some of these tombs contain jade, which was believed to ward off decay and bestow immortality. Similar to the Egyptian pyramids, the Shang tombs are believed to have included the burial of servants. The Chinese archaeologists propose that, like the ancient Egyptians, the Shang believed that their servants would



◆ *Belief in the afterlife*

continue to serve them in their afterlife. Consequently, when aristocrats were deceased, their servants would be killed and interred with them. Another interpretation suggests that these kinds of burials were practised with the enemy warriors captured in battles. One remarkable tomb that has been unearthed belongs to 'Lady Hao', a consort of a Shang King who reigned around 1200 BCE. The artefacts discovered in her tomb indicate that she held a prominent social status and wielded significant power within the Shang society. This leads historians to speculate on the role of women in the Shang dynasty. The artefacts found in Lady Hao's tomb show that she possessed personal wealth and political influence in society. Furthermore, it is possible that she played a prominent role in the military warfare, as numerous bronze weapons were buried along with her.

2.2.4. The Institution of Sacral Kinship

◆ *The king equivalent to God*

Sacral Kinship is the religious and political concept by which a ruler is seen as an incarnation, manifestation, mediator, or agent of God. This concept originated in prehistoric times, but it continues to exert a recognizable influence in the modern world. At one time, when religion was closely intertwined with the entire existence of both individuals and communities and when kingdoms were to varying degrees associated with religious powers or institutions, there could be no kingdom that was not, in some sense, sacral. Among the many possible kinds of sacral kingdoms, there was a special type in which the king was regarded and revered as a god – the God-Kingdom. There were three forms of such polities: preliminary, primary, and secondary. The preliminary form exists in cultures where the chieftain is considered as divine. The primary form was seen in the god-kingdoms of the vast empires of ancient Middle East and East Asia, ancient Iran, and pre-Columbian Meso-America and South America. The secondary form emerged in the Persian, Hellenistic (Greco-Roman cultural), and European empires. Between these three forms, there exist many transitional types.

People perform rituals in order to purify either themselves or a particular place, to predict what will happen, to propitiate a divine being, or to create abundance. Early kings, too, had little coercive force at their command and little privilege regarding ownership of land or irrigation. An Egyptian text from the Middle Kingdom states, "What is the King of Upper and Lower Egypt? He is a god by whose actions one lives, the father and mother of all men, alone by himself,



◆ *The unique cult of 'Sacral Kingship'*

without equal." During the Bronze Age period, there were numerous rebellions, wars of succession, and assassinations of rulers were held in Egypt and Mesopotamia. This paradox provides a perspective on the issue of sacral kingship. The anthropologist Webster pointed out that theocracy never meant that the early king was exclusively a cult figure or that the polity was entirely religious, or that sacral kingship rendered physical domination and warfare unnecessarily. He emphasized that we should not let the ceremonial facade obscure the true nature of kingship or, worse, believe that religion was the source of royal power. Power stemmed from commanding the labour of others, military might, and the ability to enforce the obedience of others.

◆ *Pharaoh as the incarnation of Horus*

The word "Pharaoh" derives from an Egyptian root word meaning "Great House." Wearing both crowns in succession, the Pharaoh unified the land of Egypt. The Pharaoh was considered as an incarnation of Horus the Falcon, and when a ruler died, it was said, "The falcon has flown to the horizon." By the time of the Old Kingdom, the rulers of Egypt had acquired a series of titles associating them with various deities and engaged in rituals to safeguard cosmic order. However, they were not gods themselves, and it is believed that their subjects understood this distinction.

◆ *Pyramids of the Old Kingdom*

Let us now turn our attention to the pyramids of the Old Kingdom. Many of these monumental structures were constructed on the edge of the valley and the western desert, near the capital city of Memphis, facing the direction of the setting sun. The Great Pyramid of Khufu (or Cheops) from the Fourth Dynasty, located in Giza, represents the pinnacle of pyramid construction. Remarkably, the base of this pyramid is perfectly level, deviating by only half an inch between corners. The Great Pyramid was built using approximately 2,300,000 blocks of limestone, each weighing around 2.5 tons. Within this immense structure (built without the use of iron tools), a series of chambers and corridors were constructed, with the King's chamber and sarcophagus(coffin) having been looted by ancient tomb raiders, depriving them of the royal remains and offerings. Other pyramids in Giza have revealed that funerary offerings included copper vessels, gold vessels, razors and knives, stone statues, alabaster vases, miniature perfume bottles, silver jewellery adorned with malachite and carnelian, and more. Clearly, these extraordinary structures were intended to safeguard the body of the Pharaoh and ensure his happiness in the

afterlife. However, their significance extends beyond this, encompassing a far more intricate and profound meaning.

◆ *Life cycle transition rituals*

As we mentioned earlier, rituals hold great importance during life-cycle transitions. When a Pharaoh died and the process of installing his successor was underway, the dangers of discontentment or rebellion became tangible. During that time, the death ritual, which involved washing the corpse, presenting offerings, burial processions, animal sacrifices, and the final sealing of the pyramid, would have symbolized the continuity and cosmic nature of kingship. It would have provided the public with a grand spectacle. Subsequently, the cult of the deceased king was established, with regular offerings and associated rituals. As for the symbolism of the colossal pyramid, we can only touch upon it briefly here. The pyramid represented the highest structure to capture the first rays of the sun at the beginning of each day, and it also symbolized the celestial rays upon which the Pharaoh could ascend to heaven and become a star.

◆ *Divinity of kingship*

According to Mesopotamian belief, “kingship came down from heaven,” and therefore, kingship was considered a divinely decreed institution. The notion that kings were chosen for their office by the gods of the land is expressed in the royal inscriptions of all historical periods. There were special rituals at the time of coronation that confirmed the ruler’s responsibility towards the deities and his subjects, whom he was meant to shepherd. Kingship was hereditary in the male line, thus forming dynasties, but the common man could also ascend to the throne through violent means or by usurping the throne. Babylonian kings during the second millennium BCE saw themselves as arbiters of justice.

◆ *Centrality of chieftdom among the Harappans*

The Harappan society consisted of groups bound together by ties of kinship and ideology. The paramount leader or leaders, known as chiefs, would have been entitled to regular tributes, even from distant settlements. These chiefs likely resided in larger, more elaborate settlements such as Mohenjodaro or Harappa. Migration would have caused the fragmentation of their power. The farther the dependent settlement, the more challenging it was to maintain traditional control. Over time, the centrality of the chiefdoms weakened and declined, and the Harappan cultural style diminished, becoming integrated into new cultural styles that emerged in the eastern and southern regions of the Indian subcontinent. While there is still much to explore about this ancient Indian

culture, the evidence increasingly emphasizes that cattle were central to the prosperity of the Indus chiefdoms and paradoxically played a significant role in the downfall of the society.

◆ *Ancestor worship*

According to Chinese belief, certain wise and discerning individuals possess the ability to perceive the celestial and terrestrial realms and have insight into distant matters. These individuals oversee the spiritual realm during rituals and are the sole intermediaries with heaven. The rulers of the Shang dynasty also communicated with the heavens and conveyed prayers and songs from various rituals to the earthly realm. The ruling dynasty belonged to the Tzu clan, whose ancestors were consulted periodically for guidance. Cattle bones and turtle shells were heated, and the resulting cracks were studied by the kings to seek answers about the future. These answers were then inscribed on the bones or shells. Questions such as, "Should an army of 5,000 men be raised?" or "Will there be rain for the millet crop?" were posed to the ancestors. Consultations were made regarding journeys, wars, illnesses, hunting, and the prospects of a bountiful harvest. It was the king who possessed the gift of divination, as only he held the status and ability to establish contact with the ancestral spirits. The ritual bronze vessels previously mentioned were used for sacrificial feasts. The intricate decorations on these vessels depicted a wide array of real and mythical creatures in a highly stylized manner. These creatures were believed to aid the kings in transcending into the heavens and establishing connections with their ancestors. Animal and human sacrifices were also offered. As you may recall, such vessels were buried alongside deceased kings.

◆ *Royal Burials*

In the case of Mesopotamia, the royal burials in Ur involved the inclusion of various lavish and skillfully crafted items. Considerable quantities of silver, gold, precious stones, and shells, as well as numerous works of art, were placed within royal burials. Additionally, guards armed with weapons, musicians, and household staff were also interred with the deceased. Similarly, rituals of royal rejuvenation were practised in other regions as well.



Summarised Overview

The Bronze Age witnessed significant developments in urbanization, the social structure of societies, and the institution of sacral kinship. Urbanization refers to the growth and development of cities, marked by the concentration of people with specialized occupations and the emergence of complex infrastructure. In the Bronze Age period, the societies were hierarchical and stratified. There was a clear division of labour, with distinct roles and responsibilities assigned to different social groups. The ruling elite held power and authority, often based on divine or sacred beliefs. They were responsible for governance, protection, and overseeing religious rituals. Below the ruling elites were various classes, including artisans, merchants, farmers, and labourers, each with their specific roles and contributions to society. The institution of sacral kinship played a crucial role in Bronze Age societies. It revolved around the belief that rulers were divine or had a special connection to the sacred. They were seen as incarnations, manifestations, mediators, or agents of the divine. This concept originated in prehistoric times and continued to influence the ancient world. The king's role extended beyond political leadership; they were responsible for maintaining cosmic order, ensuring the prosperity of their kingdom, and representing the religious beliefs of their society. The institution of sacral kinship varied across different cultures and regions. There were different forms of sacral kingdoms, including preliminary, primary, and secondary forms. The preliminary form existed in cultures where chieftains were regarded as divine. The primary form was observed in large empires of the ancient Middle East, East Asia, Iran, and pre-Columbian Mesoamerica and South America. The secondary form was found in the Persian, Hellenistic, and European empires. The institution of sacral kinship had a complex relationship with political power. While religion played a significant role, the power of the ruler derived from their command over labour, military might, and their ability to enforce obedience. It was not solely dependent on religious authority.

Self Assessment

1. Describe the hierarchical social structure of Egyptian Civilization.
2. Explain the peculiar features of the Mesopotamian social system.
3. Analyze the religious features of the Harappan society.
4. What was the significance of bronze in Shang society?
5. Evaluate the features of the social system in the Shang dynasty.
6. Write a short note on the Egyptian burial system.
7. What kind of hierarchies existed in the Shang society, and how do we know about them?



8. Write a comparison between the sacral kingships in the Bronze Age civilizations.

Assignments

1. Analyze the relationship between urbanization and the social structure of the Bronze Age societies.
2. Define the institution of sacral kinship and its significance in the Bronze Age civilizations.
3. Explore the role of urbanization in shaping gender dynamics and the status of women in the Bronze Age societies.
4. Examine the economic systems and trade networks that supported urban development in Bronze Age societies. How did the availability of resources, technological advancements, and trade influence urbanization processes?

Suggested Readings

1. Anthony, David W. *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World*, Princeton University Press, 2010.
2. Assmann, Jan, *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, Harvard University Press, 2003.
3. Cohen, Mark Nathan, *The Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East*, CDL Press, 2013.
4. Hall, Tim, and Marcus Doel, (ed.IV), *Urban Geography*, Routledge, 2018.
5. Smith, Michael E, *The City in Early Historical India*, University of Oklahoma Press, 2018.

References

1. Amanda, H. Podany, *The Ancient Near East: A Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2013.
2. George, Cottrell, *The Shang Dynasty*, Kidhaven Publishers, 2016.



3. Roger, D. Woodward, *The Indo-European Sacred Space: Vedic and Roman Cult*, University of Illinois Press, 2006.
4. Salima, Ikram, *Death and Burial in Ancient Egypt*, The American University in Cairo Press, 2015.
5. Shereen, Ratnagar, *The Indus Civilization: Origins, Problems and Issues*, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



States and Empires

BLOCK-03



Empires in the Ancient World

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ♦ evaluate the accomplishments of the Babylonian Empire
- ♦ comprehend the provisions of Hammurabi's Code of Law
- ♦ recognize the basic features of the Assyrian Empire and its achievements in various spheres of development

Background

During the latter half of the third millennium BCE, several migratory movements among tribal communities were observed in West Asia and the eastern regions of central Asia. Over time, these migrations contributed to social differentiation and the formation of states, leading to the emergence of numerous polities within the region. By approximately 2350 BCE, the southern Mesopotamian region, comprising Sumer and Akkad, underwent a brief period of political unification under the Akkadian ruler Sargon. The Akkadian Empire established a precedent with its centralized power and administrative mechanisms. Similarly, the Egyptian Empire flourished along the banks of the Nile River, deriving stability from its agricultural practices while leaving an enduring legacy through remarkable architectural accomplishments and a rich belief system. Under the leadership of Alexander, the Macedonian Empire assimilated Greek culture with the territories it conquered, thereby shaping the Hellenistic world. The Roman Empire, renowned for its economic prowess, efficient governance, and military might, facilitated extensive trade networks. Subsequently, the territories previously under the dominion of the Median kingdom fell under the Achaemenid rule, resulting in the establishment of the Persian Empire, which emerged as the preeminent power within the region. Overall, the rise of these ancient empires was characterized by their ability to consolidate power, implement effective administrative systems, and leverage economic resources.

Keywords

Assyrians, Babylonians, Code of Law, Hammurabi, State Formation, Ziggurat



Discussion

3.1.1 Expansion of Economic Base and State Formation

◆ Trade and commerce

Empires such as the Roman Empire, the Mauryan Empire, and the Han Dynasty experienced significant economic development through various means. Trade and commerce were crucial drivers of economic expansion in ancient empires. These empires established extensive trade networks that connected regions within their territories and extended to neighbouring areas. The Roman Empire, for instance, controlled a vast network of roads, seas, and rivers, facilitating the movement of goods and enabling extensive trade across its dominions. Trade routes like the Silk Road in Asia and the Mediterranean Sea in the Roman Empire became major centres of economic activity, fostering the exchange of goods, ideas, and cultures.

◆ Role of agriculture and infrastructure

Empires focused on expanding agricultural production to sustain growing populations and generate surpluses for trade and taxation. They developed advanced agricultural techniques such as irrigation systems, crop rotation, and the domestication of new plants and animals. These innovations helped increase productivity and support the needs of expanding empires. Ancient empires recognized the importance of infrastructure for economic expansion. They invested in the construction of roads, bridges, canals, and harbours to facilitate trade and transportation. The Roman Empire, in particular, built an extensive network of well-maintained roads, such as the famous Appian Way, which connected different parts of the empire and facilitated the movement of goods, troops, and information. Similarly, the Mauryan Empire in ancient India developed a network of roads and water management systems to promote trade and agriculture.

◆ Urbanization and manufacturing

The growth of cities and the development of manufacturing industries also played a major role in the economic expansion. Urban centres emerged as hubs of economic activity, attracting traders, artisans, and skilled labourers. These cities became centres of production for various goods, including textiles, pottery, metalwork, and luxury items. Specialized industries thrived, creating employment opportunities and driving economic growth. Strong state control and efficient administrative systems became crucial in expanding the

economic base of ancient empires.

◆ *Factors contributed to the growth of the empire*

The governments established standardized systems of weights, measures, and currency. They facilitated commerce and ensured fair trade practices. Additionally, the collection of taxes and tribute from conquered territories provided empires with the necessary resources for economic expansion and military campaigns. These factors contributed to the growth and prosperity of empires, fostering economic interdependence and laying the foundations for their political and cultural dominance.

◆ *Tribal migration*

During the period from 2500 to 2000 BCE, significant tribal migrations occurred in West Asia and the eastern region of Central Asia. These migrations involved numerous tribes, ethnic groups, and linguistic communities, resulting in a mingling of populations and displacement of earlier settlers. Among these groups were nomadic communities in search of improved means of subsistence or seeking fresh grazing lands for their herds. Many were displaced by other tribal groups, while others were compelled to leave their original habitats due to pressure from settled agrarian societies. This process of migration persisted for around 1500 years and brought about substantial transformations in West Asia, Egypt, and the lands of the eastern Mediterranean zone.

◆ *Patterns of Tribal movements*

The historical records pertaining to these tribes are often obscure. However, their interactions and conflicts with the great civilizations of the region find some reflection in contemporary historical accounts. Historians have relied on the available clues in these records to reconstruct the patterns of tribal movements. A convenient approach has been the classification of these tribes based on linguistic affinities. The languages spoken by these tribes can be broadly grouped into two divisions: Indo-European and Semitic. Some linguistic groups do not neatly fit into either of these categories. Among the prominent Semitic tribes were the Amorites, who inhabited Syria and parts of Mesopotamia, and the Canaanites in Syria and Palestine. One branch of the Canaanites, known as the Phoenicians, settled along the coast of Lebanon and played a pivotal role in the expansion of Mediterranean trade. The Indo-European tribes included the Indo-Aryans, the Nesians, the Greeks, and the Mitanni. Additionally, there were the Hurrians and the Kassites, whose languages did not belong to either Indo-European or Semitic origins.

The process of tribal migration and subsequent social



◆ *Formation of empires*

differentiation and state formation among these tribes gave rise to a multitude of new states in northern Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, Anatolia, the eastern Mediterranean (Crete), and later Iran. From around 1800 BCE onwards, various states in West Asia endeavoured to establish large empires, with such attempts occurring periodically in different parts of the region. The newly formed ethnic groups constituted a significant component of the ruling classes within these states. Drawing inspiration from Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations, these states assimilated several features such as writing systems, military techniques, and administrative structures. Initially, the Babylonian state in Mesopotamia and, subsequently, the Hittite state in Anatolia succeeded in consolidating extensive territories under their control. The Amorites played a crucial role in the establishment of the Babylonian empire in Mesopotamia, while the Nesians founded the Hittite empire in Anatolia. The Phoenician settlements along the Lebanese coast developed into prosperous city-states. However, Hittite incursions led to the downfall of the first Babylonian empire. The Assyrians, among the settled peoples of northern Mesopotamia, went on to establish the Assyrian empire.

3.1.2 The Babylonian Empire

◆ *Babylon*

The Babylonian Empire was an ancient civilization that flourished in Mesopotamia. Babylon, its most renowned city, was located approximately 59 miles southwest of Baghdad. This civilization emerged and developed along the banks of the Euphrates River. Generally, Babylonia is considered the result of the amalgamation of Akkadians and Sumerians. Palaces and temples were built in Babylon, and a bridge spanned the Euphrates, allowing the city to expand on both banks. As early as 2000 BCE, Babylon was already one of the wealthiest cities in history. The Kassites, a non-Semitic people who may have been descendants of European immigrants from the Neolithic era, occupied Babylonia. The ethnic and political disorganization hindered the development of science and art.

Babylon (Bab-ilani, meaning “gate of the gods”) was one of the Amorite settlements that arose in Akkad, located in northern Mesopotamia and Syria. The Amorites, a part of the larger tribe known as the Western Semites, played a crucial role in the development of the Old Babylonian Empire. Akkadian was the official language of the empire and remained the main language in Mesopotamia for a

- ◆ *Role of Amorites in the development of the Old Babylonian Empire*
- ◆ *Adoption of monarchical traditions*

considerable period. The Amorites adopted religious practices and features such as the cuneiform script from the Sumerian and Akkadian civilizations. The Babylonian Empire inherited its monarchical traditions from the powerful Sumerian and Akkadian rulers, including Sargon (c. 2334 BCE) and the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur (c. 2094-2047 BCE). The Old Babylonian Empire gained prominence during the reign of its first dynasty, founded by Sumu-abum (c. 1894-1881 BCE). Under the rule of the sixth king, Hammurabi (reigned 1792-1749 BCE), southern Mesopotamia was unified, and the empire extended to large parts of northern Mesopotamia. Hammurabi's dominion encompassed cities such as Eridu, Ur, Lagash, Zabalam, Larsa, Uruk, Adab, Isin, Nippur, Keshi, Dilbat, Borsippa, Babylon, Kish, Malgium, Mashkam, Shapir, Kutha, Sippar, Eshnunna, Mari, and Tultul. His successor, Samsu-iluna (c. 1749–c. 1712 BCE), made several attempts to expand the empire, particularly in the south, targeting Ida-Maras, Metal, Uruk, and Isin. However, the empire declined soon after, primarily due to the Hittite raids (c. 1600 BCE) in southern Mesopotamia.

- ◆ *Code of Hammurabi*

Hammurabi was one of the most prominent and influential figures in the ancient world civilizations. Under his rule, the petty warring states in the lower valley were united and brought peace, order, and security through the historic Code of Hammurabi. This code, engraved on a diorite cylinder that had been taken from Babylon to Elam as a war trophy, was considered a gist of legislation from heaven. It combined enlightened laws with severe punishments and included both primitive trial by ordeal and elaborate judicial procedures, as well as an attempt to limit marital tyranny. The code covered various topics, including personal property, trade and business, family matters, injuries, and labour. One of Hammurabi's grand achievements was the construction of a canal between Kish and the Persian Gulf, which irrigated a large area of land and protected the cities in the south from devastating floods of the Tigris River. He also built temples and forts, and to please the clergy, he constructed a colossal sanctuary for Marduk in Babylon and a massive granary to store wheat for the gods and priests. Palaces and temples were erected in Babylon, and a bridge spanned the Euphrates, enabling the city to extend on both sides of the river. Disorder persisted until the rising power of Assyria in the north extended its influence and brought Babylonia under the rule of the kings of Nineveh.

- ◆ *Commercial plutocracy*
- ◆ *Penalties based on the principle of equivalent retaliation*

The Babylonian Empire experienced a transition from a landed aristocracy to a commercial plutocracy under the rule of Hammurabi. This shift helped maintain social control and served as a mediator between the people and the king. The government was primarily administered by central and local lords or administrators appointed by the king. During Hammurabi's time, secular courts accountable only to the government began replacing judgment seats presided over by the clergy. Penology was based on the law of equivalent retaliation, where a person who caused harm to a patrician would suffer the same injury. The Code of Hammurabi also provided regulations for various professions, such as builders, brickmakers, tailors, stonemasons, carpenters, boatmen, herdsman, and labourers. The first law of the Code stated that if someone accused another person of a crime but failed to prove it, the accuser would be put to death.

- ◆ *Beautification of the city under Nebuchadnezzar*

Nebuchadnezzar succeeded the Babylonian kings after Hammurabi. Rather than solely focusing on conquest, Nebuchadnezzar made Babylon the unrivalled capital of the Near East and the largest and most magnificent metropolis in the ancient world. Throughout his forty-three-year reign, he strived to reconstruct and beautify the city. The palm-fringed Euphrates River ran through the centre of Babylon, bustling with commerce and connected by an elegant bridge.

- ◆ *Ziggurat*

The buildings constructed by Nebuchadnezzar were unique to Mesopotamian civilization. The bricks were often adorned with colourful glazed tiles in brilliant blue, yellow, or white, featuring figures of animals and other designs in relief. Many of the bricks found at the site of Babylon bear the inscription "I am Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon." During its glorious days, Babylon boasted a towering ziggurat, a massive and lofty structure rising in seven stages covered in gleaming enamel, reaching a height of 650 feet. The ziggurat contained a shrine with a massive table made of solid gold and an ornate bed where a woman slept each night, awaiting the pleasure of the god. This monumental structure, taller than the pyramids of Egypt, is likely the legendary "Tower of Babel" mentioned in Hebrew mythology.

Adjacent to the ziggurat stood the enormous Temple of Marduk, the patron deity of Babylon. The sacred way leading to the temple was flanked by walls adorned with coloured tile, featuring one hundred and twenty vividly enamelled

- ◆ *Construction of buildings*

roaring lions in low relief, serving as deterrents to the impious. At one end of the sacred way stood the magnificent Ishtar Gate, a massive double portal embellished with vibrant enamelled flowers and animals, displaying remarkable colour, vitality, and artistic skill. Nebuchadnezzar also constructed his grand palace called Kasr, situated near the "Tower of Babel." The central part of Kasr was his primary residence, with walls made of finely crafted yellow brick and floors of white and mottled sandstone. Vivid blue glaze reliefs adorned the surfaces, and gigantic basalt lions guarded the palace entrance. These lions were built by Nebuchadnezzar for one of his wives, the daughter of Cyaxares, the King of the Medes.

3.1.2.1 Economy

- ◆ *Peasants as main proprietors of the fertile land*

Peasants were the main proprietors of the fertile land in Babylonia. Each farm was protected from floods by ridges of the earth, and the overflow water was either stored in reservoirs or directed through canals. Nebuchadnezzar distinguished his reign by constructing numerous canals and gathering the surplus waters into a reservoir that was one hundred and forty miles in circumference. These canals and reservoirs nourished vast areas of land, allowing for the cultivation of various cereals, pulses, and orchards of fruits and nuts. Meat and fish were highly valued, and even the poorest had access to the fish from the great streams.

- ◆ *Diet of Babylonians*

The inhabitants of Babylonia also engaged in mining, extracting metals such as copper, lead, iron, silver, and gold from the earth. Initially, these metals were used in stone tools, but later they were transformed into bronze and other alloys. The Babylonians were skilled in weaving textiles using cotton and wool, and these fabrics were dyed and embroidered to such a degree of craftsmanship that they became highly valued exports. The weaving loom and the potter's wheel were the primary machines used by them. The buildings in Babylonia were mostly made of clay mixed with straw or sun-dried bricks stacked on top of each other to form solid walls. During the time of Hammurabi, artisans and craftsmen organized themselves into guilds of masters and apprentices. Local transportation relied on wheeled carts pulled by donkeys. The first mention of horses in Babylonian records dates back to around 2100 BCE, indicating the existence of foreign trade.

- ◆ *Metal mining and textile production*
- ◆ *Use of donkeys and horses*

The development of industries in Babylonia made it



- ◆ *Improved highways*
- ◆ *Different mediums of exchange*
- ◆ *Loans with high-interest rates*

one of the wealthiest commercial centres in the Near East. Nebuchadnezzar further facilitated trade by improving the highway infrastructure. Countless caravans brought products from all over the world to the bazaars and shops of Babylon. The Babylonians did not have coinage, but even before Hammurabi, they used gold and silver ingots, as well as barley and corn, as standards of value and mediums of exchange. Loans were given in goods or currency but at high-interest rates. The state set the interest rate at 20% per annum for loans of money and 33% for loans in kind. However, lenders often surpassed these rates by employing clever scribes to circumvent the law. Even though there were no banks, powerful families specialized in lending money and financing industrial enterprises across generations.

- ◆ *Recruitment of slaves*

One notable aspect of trade during Nebuchadnezzar's era was the presence of contracts of sale involving slaves. Slaves were primarily recruited from captives taken in battle or through slave raids conducted by marauding Bedouins in foreign states. Female slaves were entirely at the mercy of their purchasers and were expected to provide both beds and board.

3.1.2.2 Religion

- ◆ *King as the representative of the city gods*

In Babylonia, the king was generally regarded as the representative of the city god. Taxation was collected in the name of the god, either directly or indirectly, and it was deposited into the treasuries of the temples. The king did not hold authority in the eyes of the people until he received the investiture of royal power from the priests. The monarch would dress as a priest, symbolizing the union of the church and state and perhaps indicating the priestly origins of kingship. The wealth of the temples could not be directly utilized or consumed by the priests. Numerous gods were worshipped in the land of Babylonia. Each town had its own patron deity. Anu (the unmoving firmament), Shamash (the Sun), Nannar (the Moon), and Bel (Baal) are among the oldest gods in Babylonia. Offerings of food and drink were commonly made to the gods. One of the frequent sacrifices on Babylonian altars was the lamb.

3.1.2.3 Women

Women in Babylonia enjoyed a considerable amount of freedom to move about in public, much like men. They had the right to own property, enjoy its income, engage in buying and selling, and inherit and bequeath assets. Some women

◆ *Privileges and rights*

played active roles in shops and commerce, and those who were educated could occupy high positions in the stratified society. However, lower-class women were primarily considered for their roles as mothers and caretakers. In Babylonia, some women engaged in prostitution within the temple precincts. This practice allowed them to have considerable premarital experience. Legal marriages were arranged by the parents and formalized through an exchange of gifts, which likely originated from the ancient practice of marriage by purchase.

3.1.2.4 Writings

◆ *Cuneiform writing on damp clay tablets*

The Babylonians used cuneiform writing to inscribe their texts onto damp clay tablets using a stylus. Once the tablets were filled, they were dried and baked to create durable brick-like manuscripts. When writing letters, they would dust the tablet with powder and enclose it in a clay envelope, which was then stamped with the sender's cylinder seal. The tablets were stored in jars and organized on shelves in the numerous libraries found in the temples and palaces of Babylonia. The language of Babylonia was a Semitic development derived from the ancient languages of Sumeria and Akkad. Although Babylon never developed its own alphabet, it relied on a "syllabary" consisting of approximately three hundred signs.

3.1.2.5 Art

◆ *Sculptures constrained by Sumerian conventions*

The artistic achievements of the Babylonians were evident in various forms, such as glazed tiles, shimmering gemstones, intricately crafted bronze, iron, silver, and gold objects, delicate embroideries, soft rugs, and richly dyed robes, as well as luxurious tapestries, pedestal tables, beds, chairs, and more. Painting, however, played a relatively subordinate role and did not emerge as an independent art form. Babylonian sculpture, similarly, remained underdeveloped and seemed to have been constrained by conventions derived from Sumerian influences and enforced by the priests. Unfortunately, there are no surviving carved or painted representations that provide us with a clear understanding of the form and structure of palaces and temples. Houses in Babylonia were constructed using dried mud or, for the wealthy, brick. The doors and windows of these houses opened onto an interior courtyard, which provided shade from the sun. Decorative elements, both inside and outside the buildings, were mostly limited to enamelling certain brick surfaces with vibrant glazes of yellow, blue, white, and red, occasionally featuring

tiled figures of animals or plants.

3.1.2.6 Science

- ◆ *Calculation using tables*
- ◆ *Astronomy*

Babylonian mathematics relied on a division of the circle into 360 degrees and the year into 360 days. Based on this foundation, they developed a system of calculation using sixty, which later influenced reckoning systems based on twelve. Computation was made easier through the use of tables that included not only multiplication and division but also the halves, quarters, thirds, squares, and cubes of basic numbers. The Babylonians also placed great importance on the science of astronomy. Their study of the stars was not solely for the purpose of charting the courses of caravans and ships but primarily to divine the future fates of individuals, indicating that they were astrologers before they became astronomers. During Nebuchadnezzar's reign, astronomical progress was resumed. The astronomers plotted the orbits of the sun and moon, noted their conjunctions and eclipses, calculated the courses of the planets, and made the initial clear distinction between a planet and a star.

- ◆ *Division of year based on lunar months*

The Babylonians divided the year into twelve lunar months, with six months consisting of thirty days and the other six consisting of twenty-nine, totalling 354 days. Occasionally, a thirteenth month was added to align the calendar with the seasons. Each month was divided into four weeks based on the four phases of the moon. An attempt was made to establish a more convenient calendar by dividing the month into six weeks of five days each, but the lunar phases proved more effective than human convenience. The day was divided into twelve hours, and each of these hours was further divided into thirty minutes, making the Babylonian minute four times as long as its name might suggest.

3.1.3 The Assyrian Empire

- ◆ *Four periods of Assyrian history*

Assyria was one of the prominent cities in the Mesopotamian civilization, similar to Babylonia. The Assyrian Empire, also known as Assyria, was a Mesopotamian kingdom and one of the empires of the Ancient Near East. It existed as a state from as early as the 2nd millennium BCE until its collapse between 612 BCE and 609 BCE. It was located in the northern part of Mesopotamia. As evident, the empire spanned the early to middle Bronze Age periods, as well as the late Iron Age. This extensive time span is divided into several periods: the Early Period (2500-2025 BCE), the Old Assyrian

Empire (2025-1378 BCE), the Middle Assyrian Empire (1392-934 BCE), and the Neo-Assyrian Empire (911-609 BCE).

3.1.3.1 The Development of the Empire

◆ *Transformation of Assyria as a geopolitical entity*

Assyria, a Semitic-speaking realm, was centred on the Tigris River in Mesopotamia, which corresponds to present-day northern Iraq, southeast Turkey, and northeast Syria. After the end of the 7th century BCE, when the Neo-Assyrian state declined, Assyria managed to survive as a geopolitical entity until the mid-7th century CE. This period was largely ruled by foreign powers, such as the early Sassanid and Parthian Empires, from the mid-2nd century BCE to the late 3rd century CE. Simultaneously, a variety of independent Assyrian states, including Osroene, Adiabene, Beth Garmai, and Beth Nuhadra, emerged. In the later part of this period, Mesopotamia became a significant centre of Syriac Christianity, giving birth to the Church of the East and the Syriac Orthodox Church. The lands of the Assyrian Empire came under the control of the Romans, Greeks, Ottomans, and Arabs. Around 900 BCE, the empire began campaigns to expand its territory and dominate other people. They exacted tribute, conquered lands, and constructed new palaces, temples, and towns. The name 'Assyria' comes from the original capital of the Assyrian state, the ancient city of Assur, which dates back to 2600 BCE. The term 'Assur' is derived from the god Ashur. Assur was one among several Akkadian-speaking city-states in the region. During this period, the Assyrian kings were pastoral leaders. In the 24th century BCE, they were conquered by Sargon of Akkad, who united all the Akkadian and Sumerian-speaking people of Mesopotamia within the Akkadian Empire. Following the decline of the Assyrian Empire, the remaining parts formed a geopolitical region as well as provinces of other empires.

◆ *Empires of the Assyrian region*

The region of Assyria experienced successive dominance by various empires, including the Median Empire from 620 to 549 BCE, the Macedonian Empire in the late 4th century BCE, the Achaemenid Empire from 550 to 330 BCE, the Parthian Empire from 247 BCE to 224 CE, the Seleucid Empire from 312 to 63 BCE, the Sasanian Empire from 224 to 651 CE, and the Roman Empire from 116 to 118 CE. Eventually, the Arab Islamic conquest in the mid-7th century dissolved Assyria as a single entity. However, the remnants of the Assyrian people became a linguistic, ethnic, religious, and cultural minority in their homeland.



- ◆ *The cultural symbiosis between Akkadians and Sumerians*

- ◆ *Adoption of the Sumerian language*

During the 3rd millennium BCE, a cultural symbiosis emerged between the Akkadians and Sumerians throughout Mesopotamia, leading to the spread of bilingualism. Gradually, Sumerian replaced Akkadian as the spoken language of Mesopotamia during the 3rd and 2nd millennia BCE. It is worth mentioning that the early history of the kingdom of Assyria is not known, but the earliest recorded king, as indicated by the sources, was Tudiya.

- ◆ *Development of the Assyrian Kingdom*

The earliest kings are recorded as independent semi-nomadic pastoralist rulers who lived in tents. Over time, these kings underwent full urbanization and established the city-state of Assur in the mid-2nd millennium BCE. Like all Akkadian-speaking Mesopotamians, the Assyrians became dependent on Akkad and had no choice but to join. The rulers of the Assyrian Empire became subjects of Sargon, and the city of Ashur served as a regional administrative centre of the Empire, as implied by the Nuzi tablets. By this time, Assyria had already established trade relations in Asia Minor territories. Assyrian traders spread the use of writing, in the form of Mesopotamian cuneiform script, to the Levant and Asia Minor. When the Akkadian Empire was destroyed due to internal civil war and economic decline after the attacks by the Gutian people, the rulers of Assyria once again regained full independence. Most of Assyria became part of the Neo-Sumerian Empire, which was founded in 2112 BCE.

- ◆ *Three fold division of the Assyrian period*

The history of Assyria is divided into four periods: the Old Assyrian Period, the Early Assyrian Period, the Middle Assyrian Period, and the New Assyrian Period. Ushpia is regarded as one of the first fully urbanized independent kings of the Empire. His successors were Sulili, Kikkiya, and Akiya, but little is known about them. Kikkiya constructed various buildings in the city of Assur. The next significant king was Puzur-Ashur I; however, scholars are uncertain whether he was a descendant of Ushpia or the founder of a new dynasty. He initiated building projects in Assur, and during this time, Assyria began expanding its trading colonies, known as Karum, into Hurrian and Hattian territories in Anatolia. Subsequent kings conducted military campaigns in southern Mesopotamia. Ilu-shuma, for example, is known to have built the old temple of Ishtar in Assur. Another powerful king, Erishum I, developed the earliest examples of written legal codes and expanded Assyrian trade relations in Anatolia. The goods exchanged included textiles, tin, iron, lapis lazuli, copper, antimony, bronze, grain, and wool, while gold

and silver were used as currency. This approach was also followed by Ikunum and subsequent kings, despite some challenges. When the Babylonian Empire faced difficulties, Adasi, the king of Assyria, restored stability and strength to the Empire, ushering in a peaceful and prosperous period in Assyrian history. Rulers such as Libaya, Sharma-Adad I, Bazaya, Iptar-Sin, Lullaya, Sharma-Adad II, and Shu-Ninua enjoyed peaceful reigns.

◆ *Rise of the Hurri-Mitanni Empire and decline of the Assyrians*

During this time, Assyria remained strong and secure. However, a decline began around 1450 to 1393 BCE with the emergence of the Hurri-Mitanni Empire in the 16th century BCE. They extended their influence from the north into Anatolia, conquering and forming a ruling class over the local people. Although the Assyrian monarchy survived, the impact of the Hurri-Mitanni Empire was short-lived. They did not interfere in the internal and international affairs of the Assyrian Empire. Ashur-Bel-Nisheshu even achieved full independence from them and signed a mutually beneficial treaty with Karaindash. Massive rebuilding work was undertaken in Ashur, and Assyria underwent redevelopment of its highly sophisticated economic and financial systems during his reign. The walls of the capital were strengthened, and Assyria received gold tribute and diplomatic overtures from Egypt. The Middle Assyrian Empire saw the rise of great kings such as Arik-den-ili, Ashur-uballit, Tukulti-Ninurta I, and Tiglath-Pileser I. Tiglath-Pileser I, in particular, had a long reign and conquered vast territories, solidifying the position of Assyria as the world's leading military power. However, a civil war erupted later in his reign, sparked by aspirations of Tukulti-Mer to claim the Assyrian throne. This civil war had a destructive impact on the Empire, depleting resources, causing numerous casualties, and leading to dire consequences.

◆ *Strength of Assyria*

Towards the end of the Bronze Age, like other empires, Assyria also faced some challenges due to mass movements of people. However, compared to other realms, Assyria fared relatively well. By 1020 BCE, Assyria had control over regions near its borders, which were crucial for maintaining open trade routes in eastern Aramea, central Mesopotamia, southeastern Asia Minor, and northwestern Iran. Despite its weaknesses, Assyria remained a strong and well-defended country, with its warriors being the most prominent in the world. It can be rightly said that Assyria, with its stable monarchy, secure borders, and powerful army, was stronger



than potential rivals such as Babylonia, Egypt, Elam, Urartu, Phrygia, Persia, Media, and Lydia. The kings adopted a policy of defending and maintaining alliances to secure colonies and nations.

◆ *Impact of the Bronze Age Collapse on Assyria*

The Neo-Assyrian Empire is generally considered to have started with the ascension of Adad-nirari and lasted until the fall of Nineveh in 609 BCE. During this period, Assyria expanded its territories, conquering Anatolia, the Levant, ancient Iran, and Babylonia. The King Ashurbanipal, known for his education, was able to speak, write, and read in three languages: Sumerian, Aramaic, and Akkadian. He further expanded the empire, conquering regions including the Caucasus Mountains, which include modern-day Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, as well as Egypt, Arabia, Libya, Cyprus, and other countries.

3.1.3.2 Government

◆ *Reign of Tiglath-Pileser and other notable Assyrian kings*

Tiglath-Pileser I was the first prominent figure in Assyrian history, and his reign can be seen as a reflection of Assyrian history. Ashurnasirpal II, Shalmaneser III, Sammuramat, Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal are important rulers of the Assyrian Empire. The kings often portrayed themselves as gods, with Shamash, the sun god, being a common deity associated with the king. The army played a vital role in the government, as the government relied on the nationalization of force. The Assyrian army consisted of chariots, cavalry, and infantry. Important weapons included arrows, lances, cutlasses, maces, clubs, slings, and battle axes. Ashurnasirpal introduced the use of cavalry to support chariots, which proved decisive in many battles.

◆ *Inhumane law and punishment system of Assyria*

The laws of Assyria were known for their harshness and were considered inhumane. Punishments included public displays, forced labour, floggings ranging from twenty to a hundred lashes, mutilations such as the slitting of noses and ears, castration, tongue-pulling, eye-gouging, impalement, and beheading. Capital crimes under Assyrian law included adultery, rape, and certain forms of theft. Generally, Assyrian law was considered less secular and more primitive compared to the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, which predates it.

3.1.3.3 Society

It is worth noting that the Middle Assyrian kingdom

◆ *Significance of the priesthood*

was well-organized, and the king had firm control over everything, functioning as the High Priest of Ashur. His main goal was to provide resources for the temples. In Assyrian society, the priesthood held significant power, as evidenced by documents and letters that emphasized their importance.

◆ *Law system and the position of women*

All free male citizens were required to serve in the army for a period of time, known as the ilku-service. The legal code created indicates that women held a lower social position compared to neighbouring societies. In Assyrian society, wives were not allowed to go out in public without veils. Prostitution was accepted as inevitable and regulated by the state. However, abortion was considered a capital crime. Men could divorce their wives without any compensation. In general, Assyria had harsher laws compared to other empires in the region.

◆ *Industry*

◆ *Coinage system*

The southern part of Assyria was more focused on commerce, while the northern part was primarily involved in agriculture. The wealthiest individuals were often landed gentry who actively managed large estates. Similar to the Babylonian Empire, Assyria relied on methods such as irrigation for agriculture and had a thriving industrial and commercial sector. During this time, iron replaced bronze as the primary metal for industry and weaponry. Nineveh, the capital, had well-equipped houses, and various industries thrived, including metal casting, glass blowing, textile dyeing, and enamelling of earthenware. Industry and trade were partially financed by private bankers who charged a 25% interest rate for loans. Lead, copper, silver, and gold served as currency, and around 700 BCE, Sennacherib introduced official silver half-shekel coins, representing one of the earliest examples of an official coinage system.

◆ *Language*

◆ *Division of society*

The language of the Empire adopted a mixture of Akkadian, Assyrian, and Hittite languages. However, the Aramaic language gained popularity during the Neo-Assyrian period. The Assyrian society categorized people into different groups, including patricians or nobles, craftsmen or master artisans organized in guilds, and unskilled but free workers and peasants in towns and villages.

◆ *Assyrian religion*

Ashur, the national deity, was a solar god known for his warlike and merciless nature towards his enemies. The Assyrian people believed that he took divine satisfaction in the execution of prisoners before his shrine. The primary function of the Assyrian religion was to instil patriotic



obedience in future citizens and teach them the art of gaining favour from the gods through magic and sacrifice.

3.1.3.4 Art and Architecture

- ◆ *The craftsmanship and artistry in Balawat*

The best example of their richness and beautiful engraving can be seen in the great gates at Balawat, which consist of elaborately carved furniture made from costly woods and adorned with precious stones and metals such as gold, silver, and bronze. Tempera painting in bright colours under a thin glaze became one of the characteristic arts of Assyria. Generous patronage of the arts was provided by rulers like Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal. The palaces covered extensive areas of land and were typically limited to two or three stories in height. The roofs were reinforced with massive beams, sometimes covered with leaves of silver or gold, and the ceilings often featured painted representations of natural scenery.

3.1.3.5 Decline of the Assyrian Empire

- ◆ *Factors that led to the decline*

Ashurbanipal died in 627 BCE, and this event had dire consequences for the development of the Empire. A series of civil wars erupted among three rival kings: Sin-shar-ishkun, Ashur-etililani, and Sin-shumu-lishir. As a result, the 26th dynasty of Egypt, although initially installed as vassals, left the Empire. Taking advantage of the internal conflicts, the Cimmerians and Scythians waged war against Assyria. By 614 BCE, the Medes were in a vulnerable state, making it difficult for them to maintain their power. The enemies formed a coalition and launched a massive combined attack. This led to the fall of Nineveh in 612 BCE, followed by the fall of Harran in 609 BCE. King Ashur-uballit II attempted to mount a counteroffensive, but it ended in failure, marking the final defeat of the Assyrian Empire. In the late seventh century, the proud Assyrian empire fell under the assault of the Babylonians from southern Mesopotamia and the Medes, as well as a coalition of rebels. The conspiracy among generals and officials paved the way for the swift decline of Assyria.

3.1.4 The Persian Empire

The Achaemenids, pioneers of the first Iranian world empire, transformed the region of Fars (Parsa) in Iran into the heart of a vast dominion including West Asia, Anatolia, and Egypt. In a remarkable span of time, Achaemenid rule replaced Median rule, propelling Fars to prominence and establishing one of the most expansive empires in ancient

- ◆ *The rise and expansion of the Achaemenid Persian Empire*

history. The Greeks referred to Parsa as Persis, as it served as the ancestral homeland of the Achaemenids. Consequently, their empire became known as the Persian Empire, and Persia became synonymous with Iran (until recent times when Iran became the commonly used term). Over a span of more than fifty years, the Persian Empire witnessed remarkable territorial expansion and consolidation. Among them, Cyrus the Great and Darius I emerged as prominent figures who played pivotal roles in the growth of the empire. Their contributions were instrumental in shaping the empire and ensuring its stability and unity.

3.1.4.1 Cyrus

- ◆ *Expansion of the Achaemenid Empire*

The victory of Cyrus the Great over Astyages led to the fusion of the Median and Persian tribes. Initially, the Persians were part of a confederation settled in Parsa, akin to the Medes. Cyrus skillfully integrated both tribal confederacies, allowing the Medes to retain political power within the newly formed Achaemenid state. As time passed, Persian influence grew, resulting in a more centralized government and a strong monarchy. With stability secured, Cyrus embarked on an ambitious expansion campaign. Seizing the opportunity created by the fall of the Assyrian empire, the Achaemenids surpassed the Babylonians in territorial conquests. They succeeded the Medes as the true heirs to the Assyrian empire. The initial focus of Cyrus was Anatolia, where Lydia, under Croesus, held sway as the dominant power. Through direct invasion, Cyrus annexed Lydia and western Anatolia into the Achaemenid empire. Subsequently, the Ionian states on the Anatolian coast also came under Achaemenid control. Over the next fifty years, the Achaemenids launched military campaigns to extend their dominion over the Aegean and mainland Greece.

- ◆ *The next phase of Achaemenid expansion*
- ◆ *Decline of Babylonian empire*

The next phase of Achaemenid expansion targeted Mesopotamia, the declining Neo-Babylonian Empire. In 539 BCE, Cyrus captured Babylon. Renowned for his just and tolerant rule, Cyrus allowed deported Jews to return to their homeland and respected Babylonian traditions. The incorporation of Mesopotamia and Babylonian territories in Syria-Palestine shifted the political centre from Mesopotamia to Iran. The details about eastern expansion under Cyrus are limited. However, it is believed that Bactria and regions extending to the Hindu Kush mountains also fell under Achaemenid rule by the time of Cyrus's death.



3.1.4.2 Cambyses

- ◆ *Cambyses' military campaign and conquest of Egypt*

Cambyses, the son of Cyrus the Great, ascended to the throne in 529 BCE following his father's death. His reign, although brief, focused primarily on military campaigns in Egypt. Cambyses swiftly conquered Egypt in 525 BCE, defeating the Egyptian ruler Psamtik III of the Saite dynasty, which was already facing internal troubles. Greek accounts of Cambyses depict him as a tyrannical ruler, but recent Egyptian evidence contradicts this portrayal. Cambyses, in fact, adopted Egyptian symbols and traditions to legitimize his authority as a pharaoh. Persian rule over Egypt endured for nearly two centuries until the conquest of Alexander of Macedonia, with the Achaemenids designated as the 27th Dynasty.

- ◆ *Succession crisis and power struggle*

Cambyses is believed to have undertaken unsuccessful military expeditions in the regions surrounding Egypt, which weakened his position in Iran. His last days were marked by revolts in his homeland, likely fuelled by his prolonged absence and reports of military failures. Cambyses died in 522 BCE amid the ongoing unrest. After the death of Cambyses, a different branch of the Achaemenids seized power. However, there are different opinions on the succession struggle. The conspiracy involving prominent Achaemenid officials, known as the "conspiracy of seven nobles," led by Darius I, resulted in Darius becoming the ruler of the Achaemenid empire in 522 BCE.

3.1.4.3 Darius I

- ◆ *Territorial expansion, rebellions, and failed campaigns in Greece*

Darius I, ruler of the Achaemenid Empire from 522 to 486 BCE, was known for organizing and stabilizing the vast territories acquired by his predecessors. He faced rebellions early in his reign, notably suppressing a revolt by the Medes. Under the leadership of Darius, the Persian Empire expanded eastward to the Hindu Kush mountains and westward, gaining control over a significant portion of the Aegean Sea. While Persian influence was strengthened in coastal regions, their military strength primarily relied on their land-based army. Darius conducted campaigns in Greece but failed to annex the mainland city-states, remaining a constant political and military presence during the classical period.

Herodotus, a renowned historian born around 485 BCE in an Achaemenid territory, provides valuable insights into the Persian-Greek encounters and the westward expansion

◆ *Works of Herodotus*

◆ *Behistun inscription*

of the empire. He drew information from Greek sources and individuals connected to the Persian court. Another Greek source, Ctesias's *Persica*, is considered less reliable. Darius left behind a significant record of his early reign through the Behistun inscription, a trilingual inscription in western Iran that facilitated the decipherment of cuneiform script. The inscription, accompanied by a massive relief carving of Darius, serves as a primary written source alongside Herodotus's history.

◆ *Persian-Greek conflicts*

◆ *Ionian Revolt*

Greece encompassed various states from Anatolia to southern Italy, including the Aegean islands, Thrace, the Greek peninsula, Crete, and Sicily. Sparta and Athens were prominent states on the Greek mainland. While Anatolia was already part of the Achaemenid Empire, the Persians gained influence by subjugating the Ionian city-states. The Persian quest for supremacy over Greece persisted throughout the classical period, with military campaigns primarily concentrated at its beginning. Darius embarked on an expedition to Thrace in 513 BCE, establishing a garrison and demanding submission from Greek city-states. However, the Greek response was unfavourable, leading Darius to shift his focus to the Ionians.

3.1.4.4 Administrative Reorganization

◆ *Tribute collection*

◆ *Court ceremonies*

Darius I implemented significant reorganization efforts to consolidate the vast territories he inherited. His actions transformed the empire into a cohesive political entity, encompassing regions such as Asia Minor, Armenia, Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Persia, and parts of Arabia, Afghanistan, and Turkistan. To sustain the centralized administration and maintain a formidable army, Darius introduced a system of tribute collection. This resulted in wealth concentration among a small ruling elite, predominantly composed of influential Persian families. The authority and grandeur of the king played a crucial role in legitimizing the immense power of this imperial elite, which was further emphasized through elaborate court ceremonies.

The Achaemenid Empire was divided into provinces known as satrapies, each governed by satraps appointed by the king. These satrapies, named after the dominant ethnic groups residing in them, enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy while being subject to supervision by civil and military officials directly appointed by the king. The satrapy system, initially established before Darius, was

◆ *Formalisation of the Satrapy system*

◆ *Army*

formalized during his reign and endured with modifications for centuries, even during the conquest of Alexander of Macedonia and the subsequent successor states. To effectively govern such a vast empire, Darius relied on a powerful army, with Persian soldiers forming the core and troops from other nationalities joining their ranks. The king maintained absolute control over the empire through the military and the appointment of loyal satraps, who were required to maintain regular correspondence. Special officials known as 'listeners' provided reports on provincial affairs. However, due to the immense size of the empire, constant vigilance was necessary to prevent rebellions and maintain stability.

◆ *Relocation of administrative centres*

Administrative centres of the empire shifted over time, with early Achaemenid rulers frequently relocating major capitals. However, under Darius and his successors, Susa became the favoured administrative capital in southwestern Iran. Babylon retained its prominence due to its strategic location and historical significance. Persepolis, also known as Takht-i-Jamshid, held a ceremonial role and served as the site for grand palaces where the kings celebrated the New Year festival and received tribute offerings. Persepolis exemplified impressive Achaemenid art and architecture, characterized by large stone blocks, relief carvings, and rows of pillars. Despite its eventual destruction by Alexander of Macedonia, the remaining ruins of Persepolis testify to the grandeur of the palace. The Achaemenid rulers were buried near Persepolis at Naqsh-e Rostam. Additionally, Sardis played a crucial role as the main centre of the Achaemenid government in western Anatolia.

3.1.4.5 System of Coinage

◆ *Reforms under Darius*

The Achaemenid Empire, with its diverse ethnic and linguistic groups, maintained unity through reforms introduced by Darius I. These reforms included a uniform coinage system, standardized weights and measures, and the promotion of a new script. The adoption of a uniform coinage symbolized political authority and facilitated economic activities. The conquest of Lydia, the first state to issue regular coins, greatly influenced the Achaemenid monetary development. Coinage, a new practice at the time, involved stamping precious metal pieces with symbols of government authority and guaranteed value. This was closely linked to the standardization of weights and measures inherited from earlier empires. The Babylonian weight standard, based on a sexagesimal system, used silver as the primary standard

for measuring worth. Darius I revised this standard and minted coins based on the revised shekel. The Achaemenids borrowed the concept of coinage from the Lydians, who initially used gold as the standard of worth. Lydia introduced bimetallic currency, issuing gold and silver coins with a fixed exchange rate.

◆ *Promotion of trade and economic interactions*

After annexing Lydia, the Achaemenids continued minting 'light Croeseids', the prevalent gold and silver coins in the region. However, under Darius I, new Achaemenid coins were introduced, including the siglos (silver) and Darics (gold), with different designs and weights. The circulation of these coins was primarily in the western portions of the empire, especially Anatolia. Coin hoards indicate that uncoined precious metals remained the medium of exchange in other parts of the empire. The standardization of coinage, weights, and measures promoted trading activities within the Achaemenid Empire. The large size of the Empire and relative security provided markets for extensive trade. The reforms brought about a generally accepted system for determining the worth of goods, strengthening economic interactions and fostering the production of high-quality artisanal goods by craftsmen of various nationalities.

3.1.4.6 Language and Communication

◆ *The adoption and promotion of Aramaic as the lingua franca*

To effectively govern an empire with diverse linguistic groups, the Achaemenids recognized the need for a common language that would facilitate communication. They actively encouraged the development of such a lingua franca, and Aramaic emerged as the most widely spoken language within the empire. Aramaic had already gained popularity in northern Mesopotamia and had spread throughout the Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires. It had become the language of trade in West Asia. It was also spoken by a significant portion of the population in Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine even before the establishment of the Persian empire. Given its widespread usage and simplicity, Darius and his successors promoted the use of Aramaic throughout the empire, supported by its evolving alphabetic script derived from the Phoenicians.

While Aramaic served as the language of the common people and the language of trade, the Achaemenid elite used a form of Persian known as Old Persian. Old Persian, designated as the official language of the Achaemenid state, was employed in inscriptions and royal proclamations. The

◆ *Linguistic diversity in the Achaemenid Empire*

cuneiform script of the Mesopotamians was modified for writing Old Persian, with Darius claiming to have invented a new cuneiform script in one of his inscriptions. However, Aramaic, both in language and script, became the primary medium for official documents and day-to-day imperial communication. The Aramaic script was occasionally used to write Old Persian. It is important to note that several other languages, such as Elamite, Babylonian, and Egyptian, were routinely utilized for official purposes, as exemplified by the trilingual Behistun inscription.

3.1.4.7 Religion

◆ *Religious tolerance*

The Achaemenid Empire, renowned for its religious tolerance, encompassed territories with diverse faiths and beliefs. While Zoroastrianism had become the dominant religion among the Persian elite during the time of Darius I, the Achaemenid state allowed the religious traditions of the conquered communities to flourish. This policy of respecting and protecting local cults was established by Cyrus the Great, who supported the Jews and aided in the reconstruction of Babylonian shrines. Although Cyrus may have personally embraced some Zoroastrian rituals, little information is available on this matter. However, under Darius, Zoroastrianism gained prominence among the Persian ruling class.

◆ *Zoroastrianism*

Zoroastrianism originated in northeastern Iran, with the prophet Zarathustra teaching its main tenets. Initially embraced by the semi-nomadic people of the region, Zoroastrianism gradually spread throughout Iran, particularly among the Medes. As the religion evolved, it incorporated elements of older Iranian religious traditions and developed a monotheistic doctrine centred around the worship of Ahura Mazda. Zoroastrianism viewed the universe as governed by two opposing forces, with Ahura Mazda representing light and goodness in a constant struggle against darkness and evil. Fire worship became an important aspect of Zoroastrian rituals, symbolizing the battle between light and darkness. While Darius presented himself as a worshipper of Ahura Mazda, he also patronized ancient Iranian cults.

Darius is known to have respected Greek deities, as evidenced by an inscription expressing his regard for Apollo. The succeeding Achaemenid rulers generally left non-Iranian cults undisturbed, while Zoroastrianism became the official religion of the state and integrated into the state apparatus.

- ◆ *Growing influence of the Magi*

This development was linked to the growing influence of the Magi, a hereditary priestly class that monopolized Zoroastrian rituals, especially at the official level. Although the Magi gained significant power under Xerxes and continued to exert influence, the religious outlook of the Achaemenid state remained diverse and eclectic until the end.

3.1.4.8 Decline of the Empire

- ◆ *The conquest of Alexander of Macedonia*

The Achaemenid Empire experienced occasional revolts and border skirmishes throughout its more than 200-year existence, but overall, it remained largely intact. However, its downfall came with the invasion by Alexander of Macedonia. Darius III was the ruling Achaemenid monarch during this period (336-331 BCE). Alexander achieved a series of victories over the Persian army, starting with the Battle of Granicus in western Anatolia. He then proceeded to conquer western Anatolia, Syria, and Egypt. Moving further east, Alexander crossed the Tigris River and defeated Darius III at the Battle of Gaugamela. As Alexander advanced, he captured Babylon, Susa, and Persepolis, where he symbolically ravaged the city. Darius III was eventually assassinated in 330 BCE, and Alexander effectively conquered the Achaemenid Empire, marking the end of its reign. The consequences of these conquests will be further explored in the context of ancient Greek history.

Summarised Overview

Mesopotamia, the land between the rivers, derives its name and existence from the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. These two rivers created the Fertile Crescent in the midst of the surrounding inhospitable territory. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the ruler of Babylon was Hammurabi (1792-1750). In a short period, he conquered and unified the whole of Mesopotamia, and Babylon became its greatest city. It was during this time that the majority of mathematical tablets were produced. This period also saw the emergence of distinct professional groups among the literate elites, such as scribes, doctors, and teachers of language, literature, and mathematics, who were not solely priests or administrators. The Hittites, under Mursilis, captured and plundered Babylon but did not establish a long-term presence in the region. In their absence, the Kassites from the Zagros mountains to the northeast took control. The Kassite rule of Babylon lasted for four hundred years, some of which were relatively peaceful, but their influence left little trace. The Assyrians emerged as the next empire in the northeast, occupying

a narrow strip of land with their own unique administrative practices and lifestyle, distinct from the other cultures.

Cyrus and Darius I played pivotal roles in the expansion and consolidation of the Persian Empire, which emerged as the largest empire of its time. The empire's stability was ensured through the division of its territories into administrative units known as satrapies. These satraps functioned as an organized bureaucracy, contributing to the empire's sustainability. Moreover, the introduction of standardized coinage and the establishment of secure trade routes facilitated economic growth and activity. Darius and his successors also promoted Aramaic as a common language for communication throughout the empire. Religiously, Zoroastrianism, incorporating elements of older Iranian traditions, emerged as the dominant faith within the empire. However, it is important to note that the adoption of Zoroastrianism was not compulsory for all regions, as the state pursued a policy of religious tolerance to a significant extent. After flourishing for over two centuries, the Persian Empire experienced a decline following the invasion of Alexander of Macedonia in 334 BCE.

Self Assessment

1. Bring out the significant contributions of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires to the ancient world.
2. What was the impact of Hammurabi's code of law on the people of Babylonia?
3. Differentiate between Babylonian and Assyrian administration patterns.
4. State the privileges enjoyed by women in the Babylonian period.
5. Enumerate the reasons that were responsible for the decline of the Babylonian empire.
6. What were the basic characteristics of an Assyrian society?
7. Provide a brief report on the economy of the Babylonian empire.
8. Elucidate the functionalities of the Assyrian Government.

Assignments

1. Discuss the reasons that were responsible for the Empire formation in the ancient world.

2. Explain the evolution of Assyria as an empire through the ages.
3. Discuss the satrapy system in the Achaemenid empire.
4. "Babylonia is considered as the richest and most prosperous city or empire in the ancient period" - Justify by stating their accomplishments in each sector.
5. Prepare a note on the expansion of the Persian empire under Cyrus and Darius I.

Suggested Readings

1. Boardman, John, I.E.S. Edwards, E Sollberger, N.G.L. Hammond, *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Cambridge University Press, 1925.
2. Jones, Lloyd Llewellyn, *The Persians*, Wildfire Publishers, 2022.
3. Kriwaczek, Paul, *Babylon: Mesopotamia and The Birth of Civilization*, Atlantic Books, 2012.
4. Radner Karen, *Ancient Assyria: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2015.

References

1. Darst, Diane W., *Western Civilization*, McGraw Hill Publishing Company, New York, 1990.
2. Davies, H.A., *An Outline History of the World*, Oxford University Press, London, 1968.
3. Fair, Eugene, *An Introduction to the Study on the Babylonians and Assyrians*, Kirksville, Missouri, Journal Printing Company, 1907.
4. Morris, Jastrow, *The Civilization of Babylonia and Assyria; Its Remains, Language, History, Religion, Commerce, Law, Art, and Literature*, J.B Lippincott Company Philadelphia, London, 1915.
5. Kumar, Rakesh, *Ancient and Medieval World – From Evolution of Humans to the Crisis of Feudalism*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2018.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



Ancient Greece

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ trace the causative factors that were responsible for the emergence of ancient Greek civilization
- ◆ evaluate the nature of Greek civilization through various phases
- ◆ summarize the developments in Greek society through the study of political institutions, such as city-states
- ◆ know about the institution of slavery in ancient Greece

Background

Ancient Greece is a civilization that flourished from the 8th century BCE to the 4th century BCE, primarily in the Mediterranean region. It is considered one of the most influential civilizations in the development of western culture and civilization. Ancient Greece is known for its intellectual and artistic achievements, political systems, philosophy, literature, architecture, and sports. The period of ancient Greece is divided into several eras, including the Archaic period, the Classical period, and the Hellenistic period. During the Archaic period, the Greeks established many city-states, which were independent and had their own form of government. The most famous among the city-states were Athens and Sparta. In the Classical period, Athens became the cultural centre of Ancient Greece, and the city-state developed a democracy, which was one of the first democratic systems in the world. This period also witnessed the rise of great philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Furthermore, one could also see the genesis of some of the world's finest works of literature and drama from this period, including the plays of Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus. The Hellenistic period saw the spread of Greek culture and influence throughout the Mediterranean and the Middle East as a result of the conquests of Alexander of Macedonia. During this time, there was a significant expansion in the fields of trade, art, and architecture.

Keywords

Minoan, Mycenaean, Dark Age, Aegean sea, Trojan War, Homer, Polis (city-states), Athens, Sparta, Thetes



Discussion

3.2.1 Geographical Features

- ◆ *Geographical divisions comprised coasts, lowlands, mountains, and islands*

Ancient Greece was a northeastern Mediterranean civilization, existing from the Greek Dark Ages of the 12th-9th centuries BCE to the end of classical antiquity. The ancient Greeks were certainly a mixture of races, who ultimately evolved a remarkably unified idea of culture. Geographically, the coasts, lowlands, and mountains are the basic divisions of Ancient Greece, which was surrounded by water on three sides, turning Greece into a peninsula. The uniqueness of the sea, mountains, and islands played a vital role in the strong establishment of the Greek economy, as well as the growth and development of politics and society as a whole. The homeland of Greece did not comprise landscapes of rivers, irrigated land, and deserts like other civilizations such as Egypt and Mesopotamia. Landlocked valleys, hills, plains, peninsulas, and islands set a pattern of fragmentation that was followed and even surpassed by the political divisions of the Greeks.

- ◆ *Influence of physical geography*

Greece is surrounded by the Aegean Sea in the east, the Ionian Sea in the west, and the Mediterranean Sea in the south. Several small peninsulas protrude from Greece, turning it into an irregular peninsula with numerous ports and harbours. Ancient Greece primarily consisted of a mountainous peninsula that extended into the Mediterranean Sea. It also encompassed approximately 2,000 islands in the Aegean and Ionian Seas. Lands on the eastern edge of the Aegean were also part of ancient Greece. The physical geography of the region directly influenced Greek traditions and customs. The accessibility to the sea allowed for economic growth in ancient Greece and facilitated trade through its ports. People used the Aegean Sea to travel from city to city, and it provided a source of fish for sustenance. Moreover, it was the first settled region of the Greeks in the Mediterranean.

- ◆ *The role of the sea*

Just as rivers shaped the ancient civilizations of Egypt, the Fertile Crescent, India, and China, Greek civilization was shaped by the ocean. In other words, the Greeks did not merely inhabit the land; they revolved around the sea. The Greek coastline extends for more than eighty-five miles. The Aegean Sea, Ionian Sea, and neighbouring seas like the Black Sea served as significant trade routes for ancient

Greece. Sea travel formed connections between Greece and other societies. The Aegean Sea served as the geographical nucleus of the ancient Greek world and contained a large number of islands of varying sizes. The Aegean Sea is home to over a thousand islands, including Crete, Rhodes, Chios, and Delos.

◆ *The role of mountains in Greece*

Given that a significant portion of Greece consists of rocky terrain and farming was primarily possible in mountain valleys, agriculture constituted a small proportion of the economic activity. Around 80% of the Greek mainland is mountainous, which poses a challenge for long journeys by land. The mountains, covering four-fifths of the mainland of Greece, divided the country into several regions. The rugged mountainous terrain made land travel between regions difficult and contributed to the development of independent city-states in Greece. Furthermore, the mountains acted as natural barriers between the major city-states. Mount Olympus was the tallest mountain, and the people believed it to be the abode of their gods, who resided at its peak. Generally, the climate in Ancient Greece consisted of hot summers and mild winters. Greece experienced an average amount of rainfall, ranging from 20 to 50 inches, with the exception of some larger inland valleys.

◆ *City-states*

Ancient Greece did not have one large empire but rather a number of powerful city-states that shared similar cultures. The geographical features of Greece, such as its mountains, played a significant role in the political development of the region by contributing to the growth of independent city-states. The highest mountains presented challenges for travel and communication, leading communities to form independent polis or city-states. These city-states were distributed across nine important geographical regions: Aegean Islands, Crete, Peloponnese, Central Greece, Ionian Islands, Epirus, Thessaly, Macedonia, and Thrace. Athens and Sparta were prominent city-states in ancient Greece. Macedonia and Thrace are two major regions located in the northern and northeastern parts of Greece. Macedonia was the homeland of Alexander of Macedonia and encompassed large mountainous areas along with extensive plains. The Greeks referred to the region of Thrace as famous for its wine production since ancient times, in addition to its rich gold and silver reserves. Thessaly, also known as Thessalia, was another significant geographical region located along the Aegean Sea coast. It was blessed with fertile alluvial soil



suitable for the cultivation of wheat and cattle herding. The Aegean Sea region of Greece consists of a group of islands known as the Cyclades, and its inhabitants are known as Eastern Greeks. Crete, the home of the great Bronze Age Minoan civilization, was situated between the Peloponnese and the Cyclades.

- ◆ *Development of Greek culture*
- ◆ *Different names of the Greeks*

During the 'Dark Age' in the Aegean region, it was isolated from the rest of the Mediterranean, which paved the way for the growth of a well-defined Aegean culture and the development of the Greek language. The Greek-speaking people, during this period (1200-800 BCE), colonized the Aegean region and the areas along the west coast of Anatolia, leading to a cultural unification of the Aegean, Crete, and western Anatolia. The word 'Greek' is derived from 'Graikoi' or 'Graeci,' as the Romans called the people living in these territories. Various names like Achaeans, Argives, Panhellenes, and Hellenes were used to identify themselves. Among these, 'Hellenes' was the most popular, serving as a collective name through which people of the Greek civilization identified themselves, and their territory came to be referred to as Hellas. This name has persisted until the present day, as the official name of the Greek territory is still Hellas.

3.2.2 The Early Greek Civilization

The early Greek civilization can be divided into three main parts: the Minoan Civilization, the Mycenaean Civilization, and the Dark Age.

3.2.2.1 The Minoan Civilization

- ◆ *Division of the Minoan civilization*

The Minoan civilization is considered the first Bronze Age civilization in the region. It emerged towards the end of the third millennium BCE and thrived until around 1400 BCE. Around 3000 BCE, a wave of people migrated westward to the Aegean islands and mainland Greece from Asia Minor, Syria, and Palestine. This migration marked the beginning of a Bronze Age civilization that spread throughout Greece. The Minoan civilization represented an advanced society in Europe, characterized by impressive building complexes, art, and a writing system. The civilization was rediscovered in the early 20th century by the English archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans, who conducted excavations at major Minoan sites such as Knossos, the legendary city of King Minos in Cretan mythology. Other important Minoan ruins can be

found in towns like Phaistos and Mallia. Palaces were the most prominent structures in these centres. Evans divided the Minoan civilization into three periods based on the sequence of pottery styles found at Knossos: **Early Minoan** (c. 3000-2200 BCE), **Middle Minoan** (c. 2200-1500 BCE), and **Late Minoan** (c.1500-100 BCE). Although the Minoans did not speak the Greek language, their influence strongly impacted the development of the first true Greeks. Historian Will Durant has referred to the Minoans as 'the first link in the European chain.'

◆ *Notable palace complexes at Crete*

The island of Crete was the site of the first settlements of the Minoan civilization, and its unique geographical characteristics played a crucial role in the development of maritime trade. While Crete was under Egyptian influence, especially after 2100 BCE, the Minoans created a highly distinctive and individual culture that differed significantly from other ancient near eastern civilizations. The civilization of Crete achieved remarkable levels of technical and artistic excellence, particularly in the construction and decoration of palace complexes. The major palace complexes included Knossos, Phaistos, and Mallia, with numerous smaller complexes scattered across the valleys and plains of Crete. The palaces were complex structures consisting of interconnected residential and storage rooms organized around a central courtyard. The largest of these palaces was Knossos, followed by Phaistos, which covered an area of over three acres. Additionally, there were other buildings situated outside the main palace. The Minoans also had a penchant for dance, games, and sports, which were popular among the Cretans.

◆ *Script and language of the Minoans*

The writing system used in Crete was initially in the form of pictographic symbols and later developed into a syllabic script known as Linear A. Although Linear A remains undeciphered, its successor, Linear B, which appeared with the arrival of the Mycenaean mainlanders, has been identified as Greek. Both Linear A and B were used for recording palace transactions and keeping inventories of food, clothing, weapons, and other items. Most of the written records have been lost over time since they were inscribed on clay tablets, skins, and bark. The script used at Knossos was employed to record possessions and manage accounts. The language spoken by the Minoans is unknown, but it is believed to be non-Hellenic and likely a non-Indo-European language.

◆ *Town planning and craftsmanship*

The construction of Minoan buildings on Crete featured lower courses made of stone and upper portions primarily consisting of mud brick with timber reinforcement to withstand earthquakes, which were frequent in the region. The water supply and drainage systems were well-developed. The Minoans stored olive oil, wine, and grain in large jars, while perishable items like clothing were kept in lead-lined stone chests. Many rooms and passageways were adorned with vibrant frescoes depicting various aspects of Cretan life. The Minoans accumulated substantial wealth through trade in products such as olive oil, wine, metalware, pottery, and more. Their palaces were grand and intricate, featuring sturdy walls, running water, and even flush toilets. Men were depicted as beardless, wearing codpieces or kilts, while women had elaborate hairstyles and wore dresses with flounce sleeves and pinched waists. They also adorned themselves with jewellery and makeup. The Minoan artists excelled in crafting delicate carvings using materials such as ivory, faience, gold, silver, and precious and semi-precious stones. Their mastery extended to vase painting, particularly when depicting marine themes.

◆ *Significance of Minoan wall paintings*
◆ *Evidence for extensive trade connections*

The famous scene of acrobats grabbing a bull's horns and performing backflips onto its haunches, depicted in Minoan wall paintings, likely had religious significance. The Minoans engaged in extensive trade, and their presence is notable in Egyptian art. Cretan artefacts have been discovered throughout Asia Minor, indicating trade connections with the tribes residing on the Greek mainland. Sheep rearing and wool production were significant components of the rural economy, while wheat, grapes, and olives were the main agricultural products. Goods were transported from rural areas to cities for redistribution and trade. The Minoans maintained trade links with Egypt, Anatolia, the Lebanese Coast, Cyprus, and the Aegean through sea routes. Surprisingly, the palaces and towns of the Minoans lacked defensive structures for much of their history.

Women held a prominent position in Minoan society, surpassing their counterparts in other ancient Near Eastern civilizations. Upper-class women played important roles in Minoan religious and social life, participating in athletic events and bull-leaping ceremonies. Women were involved in various occupations and trades alongside men, contributing to the remarkable growth of Cretan industries, entrepreneurship, and bureaucracy. The priesthood was

◆ *Position of Cretan women*

predominantly composed of women, and Crete was known as a loosely defined matriarchy where male gods held supremacy. This stands in contrast to the later Greek society, where women had a diminished status. The intermingling of religious and civic life was apparent, with female deities being common. Among them, the prominent figure was the Great Mother Goddess, depicted in various forms, including that of a huntress known as the 'Lady of the Beasts.' Temple remains are scarce, but numerous terracotta statuettes of elegantly depicted, bare-breasted women, often holding snakes, suggest that the Minoans worshipped fertility goddesses at open-air shrines or within their homes and palaces.

◆ *Minoan religion*
◆ *The role of the Minoan king*

Bulls held a significant role in Minoan religion, and there is no evidence of a powerful priestly class. Trees and pillars were also objects of worship, and the sanctuaries situated atop mountains indicate the presence of 'high places' criticized by the Old Testament prophets. The enjoyment of the earthly world was a defining characteristic of Minoan culture. In Minoan society, the king assumed the roles of both ruler and religious figure. The primary function of the monarch, referred to as the 'Mino,' was that of a chief entrepreneur within the Cretan state. The king at Knossos exercised sovereignty over all Cretan cities, several of which possessed large palaces. The king likely held a trade monopoly and maintained a significant bureaucracy to manage it.

◆ *Theories on the decline of Minoan civilization*

Between 1600 and 1400 BCE, the Minoan culture reached its peak, but around 1450 and 1350 BCE, this vibrant civilization came to a significant and unexpected end. The destruction of the palace of Minos occurred under mysterious circumstances, sparking debates similar to those surrounding the decline of the Indus Valley Civilization. Many scholars agree that the decline was likely due to the devastating effects of a volcanic eruption on a neighbouring island. After five centuries of prosperity, the palace centres were destroyed by an earthquake in 1400 BCE. The discovery of Linear B at Knossos and Cydonia in the west of the island suggests that the Mycenaeans had taken control of Crete, generally believed to have occurred around 1450 BCE. However, there is disagreement regarding the extent to which the Minoan prosperity was affected by the volcanic explosion of the nearby island of Thera. Some historians argue that Thera's destruction was caused by a massive eruption, which showered volcanic debris on the towns of the island, leading their inhabitants to migrate overseas. The volcano then

exploded with tremendous force, releasing clouds of gas, ashes, and huge tidal waves.

◆ *Shift of cultural supremacy from Crete to the Greek mainland*

However, there is also disagreement, with some scholars suggesting that the destruction of the eastern palaces could be attributed to human violence, possibly resulting from the Greek occupation of Knossos. Another theory proposes that the Greeks peacefully arrived at Knossos, potentially through intermarriage between the ruling groups of the Mycenaean and Minoan dynasties. From Knossos, they ruled the rest of the island with little or no interference. The adaptation of the syllabic Linear A script to Linear B and the introduction of the Late Minoan II pottery style support this theory. According to this view, all the palaces were destroyed around 1400 BCE. After this period, cultural dominance shifted from Crete to the Greek mainland. The notion that the Mycenaeans were responsible for the Late Minoan II period is not widely accepted. If the Minoan fleet were the main victim of the Thera eruption, this would explain the sudden appearance of the Greeks at the surviving unfortified palaces of Crete. However, the exact reasons for the ultimate demise of the palaces remain shrouded in mystery.

3.2.2.2 The Mycenaean Civilization

◆ *Mycenaean sites*

The Mycenaean civilization succeeded the Minoan civilization of Crete and originated from mainland Greece. It endured for a much longer period than the classical age of Greek history. The important settlement of Mycenae, located in the northwestern corner of the Peloponnese, gave its name to the civilization. The Mycenaeans were the first inhabitants of Greece to speak the Indo-European language, Greek, which descended from a group that migrated from the north. These newcomers settled in the region and gradually merged with the native population. In 1876, the renowned archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann conducted pioneering excavations and discovered a series of extraordinary royal graves and the first remains of a palace. Mycenae was situated on a steep, rocky ridge in southern Greece and was protected by a thick defensive wall over 20 feet in thickness. The fortified city of Mycenae was virtually impregnable and could withstand almost any attack. Other prominent Mycenaean sites include Tiryns, Pylos, Thebes, Orchomenos, and Knossos.

The first phase of the Mycenaean civilization, known as the 'shaft grave era', lasted from approximately 1600 to 1500

◆ *Phase of the Mycenaean civilization*

◆ *Evidence of graves and tombs*

BCE. This period is primarily known from the contents of the five shaft graves excavated by Schliemann in 1876 and the 24 graves discovered by Greek archaeologists in 1951-52. Apart from the graves themselves, which indicate the continuous occupation of the site over an extended period, there is little evidence of the palaces or dwellings associated with them. In the second phase, which occurred around the mid-fifteenth century BCE, the Mycenaeans continued to bury their dead communally. Still, now they placed them in large beehive-like tholos tombs, scattered from Thessaly to the Peloponnese. Examples of these tombs can be found in Vaphio, Myrsinochorion, and Dendra. These tombs contained an array of weapons, including greaves and a boar-tusk helmet with metal cheek pieces, demonstrating the growing power and technical abilities of the Mycenaeans. The Treasury of Atreus, dating from the end of the tholos-tomb period, represents the pinnacle of Mycenaean architectural capability. Intact for over 3,000 years, it is considered one of the architectural wonders of the world. Its vault, over forty feet high, was the largest in the world until the construction of the Pantheon by Hadrian in Rome in the second century CE.

◆ *Mycenaean palaces*

The palaces at Mycenae, Tiryns, Athens, Thebes, and Pylos typically consisted of a central hall known as a megaron, which housed the central hearth. The megaron was accessed through a wide, columned portico leading to a courtyard. The megaron served as a central meeting place where the king held court, received reports, hosted banquets, and conducted public business. The residential quarters and storage houses for oil, grain, textiles, metals, and war materials were located outside the great hall. Various functions were fulfilled within the palaces, including the work of smiths, masons, potters, chariot builders, wheelwrights, tailors, and textile workers, who had their workshops supervised by a group of administrators.

◆ *Foreign trade*

Like the Minoans, the Mycenaeans relied on trade. Between 1500 and 1400 BCE, their trade increased, along with their contacts with Knossos. Although between 1400 and 1200 BCE, the Mycenaeans became undisputed leaders of the Greek world, they came into contact with the Minoan civilization through trade and, at times, warfare. By the fifteenth century BCE, the assimilation of the Cretan civilization was complete. Around 1400 BCE, the Mycenaean world entered its third and most developed phase, known as the 'period of the palaces'.



The Mycenaeans engaged in foreign trade with Europe and the East, and their goods began to appear in Egypt, Syria, Phoenicia, Sicily, and southern Italy. The Mycenaeans engaged in extensive foreign trade, with their main exports being oil, pottery, and textiles. They imported gold, copper, and tin.

◆ *Palaces as economic centres*

The palaces served as significant economic centres. For instance, the Pylos palace controlled the production of up to 26 groups of four hundred smiths. In Mycenaean Knossos, there were nearly 600 textile workers. The production of smiths in Pylos was overseen by central administrators. Excavations at Pylos and Thebes have uncovered thousands of stored pots ready for use or distribution. The tablets discovered at these sites indicate large-scale production of wool on Crete and flax on the mainland, as well as common products like oil, wine, fruits, spices, honey, and livestock. The Mycenaean economy also relied on a network of roads, bridges, and culverts.

◆ *Mycenaean society*
◆ *Warrior aristocracy and bureaucracy*

The Mycenaean society featured a hierarchical structure with a king at the top. It employed a large section of craftsmen, scribes, merchants, and others. The majority of the Mycenaean people worked on the land and lived in small villages in the countryside. Mycenae, unlike Knossos, was not a typical city but rather a heavily fortified palace that overlooked a few homes of the well-to-do commercial class. The king, known as the 'wanax', served as the head of the society and was supported by a number of officials who assisted the aristocracy. The people, referred to as 'demos,' were the chief landowners and had access to public land. Records of landholdings were meticulously kept, and a complex system of tenancies and sub-posessions existed. Slavery was common in Mycenaean society, with slaves occupying the lowest social position. They played important roles in the industrial and storage activities of the palaces. The ruling elite comprised a powerful warrior aristocracy and an elaborate bureaucracy. The fortified palace complexes exercised extensive control over the economies of the Mycenaean states through centralized bureaucratic structures, regulating virtually every aspect of the economy.

The Mycenaeans used the Linear B script on tablets found in the palace. These tablets recorded goods stored in palace storerooms, wages paid to craftsmen, and taxes collected in kind from the people. However, there is no evidence that writing in Mycenaean society was used for literary purposes.

◆ *Resemblance to the Minoan writing system*

The Mycenaeans adapted the Minoan writing system to the Greek language and decorated vases with Minoan designs. The individuals who supervised the administration and were able to write were not professional scribes but palace administrators with other functions. The decipherment of the Linear B script was achieved in 1952 by Michael Ventris, who determined that it represented an early version of the Greek language. The Mycenaeans were among the earliest Greek-speaking people to settle in the peninsula. They belonged to the Indo-European group, and their migrations should be understood in the context of tribal movements during the third millennium BCE. The Mycenaean language differed somewhat from the later Greek spoken by subsequent settlers and is referred to by scholars as “proto-Greek.” The surviving Linear B records, primarily clay tablets, mainly consist of inventories and accounts, lacking references to political history or religious practices.

◆ *Mycenaean architecture*

The architecture of the Mycenaeans drew inspiration from the Near East, and their notable contributions included impressive palace structures and beehive (tholos) tombs. The largest of these tombs, according to Schliemann, featured an inner room measuring fifty feet in diameter and forty-five feet in height, earning it the name ‘Treasury of Atreus’ after Agamemnon’s father. These tombs were primarily used for burials and may have had sealed entrances. The conical and shaped tombs of the Mycenaeans appear to be unique to their civilization. While there are influences from Egypt, such as the careful burial of the dead, much of the art is distinctively Mycenaean, characterized by a fascination with violent narrative scenes and fantastical creatures. However, the influence of Minoan artists and craftsmen is evident throughout.

◆ *The role of religion in palace-related activities*

The gods worshipped by the Mycenaeans included Zeus, Poseidon, Artemis, Hermes, Apollo, and Dionysus, as documented in the Linear B tablets. Religion played a vital role in palace activities, with both male and female priests and priestesses serving the gods. Altars were located near the great halls, indicating a traditional association of throne, hearth, and altar. The most revered deity throughout Greece, particularly during the Minoan period on Crete, was the Great Mother Goddess.

Trojan War

According to Homer, the Mycenaeans engaged in a ten-



◆ *Archaeological evidence on the occurrence of the Trojan War*

year war against the people of Troy, a war that began shortly after 1200 BCE. Troy was an independent trading city located in Anatolia. Legend had it that a Greek army besieged and destroyed Troy because a Trojan prince had kidnapped Helen, the beautiful wife of a Greek king. Historians generally considered the story of the Trojan War to be purely fictional. However, excavations conducted in northwestern Turkey during the 1870s by German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann suggested that the tales of the Trojan War might have been based on real cities, people, and events. Subsequent archaeological studies conducted in the 20th century have supported Schliemann's findings. The exact cause of the Trojan War remains unclear, but it is regarded as one of the last military campaigns of the Mycenaeans.

◆ *Evidence of trade connections*

According to Homer's Iliad, the Trojan prince Paris abducted Helen, the wife of King Menelaus of Sparta, and refused to return her, leading to the Greek-Trojan War. After a prolonged conflict, the Greeks successfully sacked Troy through a ruse: they concealed their soldiers inside a large wooden horse, which the unsuspecting Trojans brought within their walls. The present-day site, Hissarlik, located in Turkey, is identified as ancient Troy. Excavations by Heinrich Schliemann revealed the remains of the ancient city. Archaeologists have since uncovered nine layers of continuous habitation at Troy, with the seventh layer, known as Troy VII A, corresponding to the period from 1250 to 1200 BCE. Troy was a prosperous city, and the discovery of Mycenaean pottery at the site indicates past trade connections. While much of Homer's epic is mythological, it appears to contain elements of truth that allow the inclusion of the Trojan War as a plausible part of early Greek history.

◆ *Tribal migrations and the collapse of Bronze Age civilizations*

◆ *Decline of the Mycenaean civilization*

The Mycenaean trade gradually diminished in the face of Phoenician competition, and the 'sea peoples' made sea travel unsafe. This prominent civilization came to an end around 1100 BCE when the palace at Mycenae was attacked by the Dorian Greeks and destroyed by fire. The Mycenaean civilization lasted until approximately 1200 BCE. Another round of tribal migrations coincided with the simultaneous collapse of Bronze Age civilizations in the eastern Mediterranean by 1200 BCE. Mycenaean cities entered a period of decline, the Linear B script disappeared, and trade was disrupted.

The palace at Pylos was destroyed, and the site was

◆ *Destruction of Greece and the entire Aegean world*

never reoccupied. The population of the region dropped to perhaps ten per cent of what it had been previously. The surviving inhabitants either withdrew to more defensible places or fled to other parts of Greece, such as Achaia or Attica, or even overseas. By the end of the century, Greece had entered a period of socio-economic and technological backwardness. The arts, including writing, fresco painting, seal engraving, faience making, ivory carving, and stone shaping, were lost. The Mycenaean people believed that the fall of Troy marked the beginning of a period of trouble for all of Greece. When the returning heroes reached their homelands, they found them unsettled by famine, political disruption, and invasions from outside. The latter half of the thirteenth century witnessed disturbances and destruction not only in Greece but also throughout the Aegean world and the eastern Mediterranean.

Dark Age

◆ *'Greek Dark Age'*

During the period between the Mycenaean civilization and the beginning of Classical Greece, it is referred to as the 'Greek Dark Age'. The very little and scattered archaeological evidence has made it difficult to explain this period. The period between 1200-800 BCE is considered the 'Dark Age' in the history of the Mediterranean world due to the decline of the Mycenaean civilization, the disappearance of the script, trade disruptions, and other factors. In short, this time is characterized by a lack of complete information, both archaeologically and literally. The decline of the Greek lands resulted in people fleeing to the southern portion of Greece or towards the coastal areas of Anatolia.

◆ *Early phase*

The early phase of the Dark Age witnessed a decline in material culture throughout Greece. The society was based on tribal principles, with informal political leadership provided by individuals referred to as 'kings' or 'big men' (chiefs) who exchanged gifts and led the tribe into war to increase their resources. According to the two Greek epics, most of the kings ruled small territories.

In the latter phase of the Dark Age, Greek isolation came to an end, and there was a progressive transformation characterized by the breakdown of tribal and clan ties and a reduction of their role in the socioeconomic structure of Greece. The household or 'oikos' became the basic socio-economic unit during the later Dark Age. It consisted of a family that owned and cultivated a piece of land and included

◆ *Later phase*

individuals involved in production and household work, such as servants, hired labourers, and occasionally slaves. The head of the family was responsible for making decisions on behalf of the 'oikos', and male members of the family had the duty to defend both the land and cattle. Scholars define the 'oikos' as both a social and self-sufficient economic unit that encompassed production and consumption within the household. In the later phase of the Dark Age, a clear distinction between the aristocratic elite and ordinary people emerged. The aristocracy owned the larger estates, while the ordinary peasants belonged to smaller 'oikos'. The structured social units during the Dark Age included 'genos' (clans), 'phyle' (tribes), 'demos' (consisting of interrelated members of a village), and 'phratritai' (brotherhoods and a subdivision of 'demos' consisting of warriors who fought for the 'demos'). The number of 'thetes', who were generally considered landless people without an 'oikos', was not significant in Greece during the Dark Age.

◆ *The Dorian invasion and its impact*

The Dorian invasion was a new wave of Indo-Europeans who spoke the Doric dialect. Around 1200 BCE, for unknown reasons, the Dorians and other allied tribes moved southward and began destroying the Mycenaean centres. The scattered Mycenaean centres attempted to settle in the Peloponnese and other places. Prominent Mycenaean centres such as Corinth, Argos, and Sparta settled around the Peloponnese. Sparta is generally considered to be descended from the Dorians. Mycenaean refugees migrated to Athens and Ionia, along with the Aegean coast of Asia Minor, between 1000-900 BCE.

◆ *Emergence of the geometric pottery style*

The Dark Age is considered a period witnessing the complete destruction and transition of a culture. An important artistic development of this period is the emergence of the geometric pottery style. This style, characterized by abstract linear patterns and simple geometric forms, marked a distinct departure from the curvilinear and naturalistic designs of Mycenaean pottery.

The end of the Dark Age saw the revival of writing in Greece. Towards the end of the 8th century BCE, two great Greek epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey, were written, attributed to the poet Homer. These epics are significant landmarks and extremely rich historical sources for the history of Greece. Both the Iliad and the Odyssey are part of the tradition of epic poetry in Greece and present two fascinating puzzles. The Iliad revolves around the war of a Greek coalition

- ◆ *Revival of the Greek writings: Iliad and Odyssey*

against the city of Troy (located in the northwestern corner of Anatolia). It is a tragic tale. On the other hand, the Odyssey tells the story of the adventures of the Greek hero Odysseus, who struggles for ten years to return home after the Trojan War, and the story ends happily. Homer is widely regarded as one of the most eminent poets of Greece. These two epics were composed orally, following the tradition of oral poets who wove their heroic tales from fragments of ancient sagas. The epics have been a source of inspiration for later Greek literature. Homer's lasting greatness lies in his deep understanding of human nature. His sympathetic and believable presentation of characters' personalities and problems makes the Iliad and the Odyssey timeless reservoirs of knowledge about humankind. The Homeric songs held immense importance in the minds of the ancient Greeks, and they were singularly impersonal. The authors of these songs were the first Greeks to put their thoughts about gods and men into permanent literary form, and the songs can rightly be regarded as the 'Bible of the Greeks' of that time.

- ◆ *Modification of the Phoenician script*

The Linear B script had disappeared with the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization, but towards the end of the Dark Age, the Greeks adopted a new script borrowed from the Phoenicians. The Phoenician script, developed around 1500 BCE, was based on the phonetic principle, with symbols representing different sounds. The Greeks modified the Phoenician script to suit their language, and the Homeric epics were written using this new Greek alphabet.

3.2.3 The Archaic Period

- ◆ *The Archaic Age was characterized by two revolutions*

The Archaic Age of Ancient Greece occurred between 800-500 BCE and is considered an era of experimentation in the realms of society, politics, and religion following the end of the Dark Age. This period encompassed a significant span of Ancient Greek history when Greek populations settled across the Mediterranean and Black Seas. The Archaic Age began with a substantial increase in the Greek population. According to Anthony Snodgrass, two revolutions defined this period: **the structural revolution**, which led to the establishment of the 'Polis' (city-state), and **the intellectual revolution** of Ancient Classical Greece. Throughout the Archaic Age, various aspects experienced growth, including socio-economic and political development, cultural advancements, international relations, and warfare.



◆ *Greek colonial expansion*

During the Archaic Age, the Greek alphabet, which developed around 800 BCE, was a result of contact with other nations and the adoption of the Phoenician alphabet. Despite tremendous economic growth during this period, including the expansion of villages, towns, and trading activities. Overpopulation became a driving force behind Greek colonial expansion. The rugged mountainous terrain and poor soil were inadequate to sustain the growing population. Consequently, many impoverished farmers sought new lands, particularly in the fertile regions of the Mediterranean. Others settled in new areas with hopes of engaging in trade and improving their social standing. Each colony established by these migrants eventually became a new and independent Greek city-state. Colonial endeavours had numerous outcomes, including the increased expansion and prosperity of Greece. The colonies provided valuable resources such as iron and grain in exchange for finished products from the mainland, particularly pottery and woollen goods. The introduction of the Lydian coinage system facilitated these exchange systems. By 500 BCE, the Greeks had become masters of Mediterranean trade. Greek colonization also led to the widespread dissemination of Greek culture through continuous contact with new peoples and their ideas. This lengthy process of colonization involved the establishment of colonies spanning from the Black Sea to the western Mediterranean, including Anatolia, Egypt, Sicily, southern Italy, southern Gaul, and the eastern coast of Spain.

◆ *Greek gods and goddesses*

The Greeks worshipped gods and goddesses as a means of seeking protection from diseases, and destruction and to promote increased prosperity. These deities embodied various aspects such as love (Aphrodite) and wisdom (Athena), which originated from Indo-European sources like the Minoans, Mycenaeans, Egyptians, and Near Eastern civilizations. The ancient Greek people believed in a pantheon of gods and goddesses, including Zeus, the father of gods who ruled from Mount Olympus and served as the sky god of the Indo-European invaders in Greece around 2000 BCE. Hera, his wife and a fertility goddess of the neolithic inhabitants of Greece symbolized the union of these two cultures. Other revered deities included Apollo, the god of the sun and archery, Pallas Athena, the goddess of the arts, Aphrodite, the goddess of love, Ares, the god of war, Hermes, and Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility; who possessed contradictory legends. Dionysus, in particular, embodied the

emotional, impulsive, and creative aspects of human nature, contrasting with Apollo, who represented rationality, harmony, and order. Demeter, known as the Earth mother and goddess of grain, was worshipped through secretive ceremonies held at Eleusis near Athens. Religious and civic life intersected at Olympia in the western Peloponnese, where the Olympic Games were conducted. These games held great significance in Greek society and were associated with both religious and civic practices.

◆ *The development of the Polis*

The development of the 'Polis', or 'Poleis', which means city in Greek, is generally considered the Renaissance of Greece. The Polis, also known as a city-state, was a fundamental unit of Greek governance. It referred to an administrative and religious city centre that was distinct from the surrounding areas. The Polis encompassed both the urban complex and the territory it governed. The meeting place, gathering spot, or marketplace of the inhabitants was called the 'Asty' and was located within the Polis. The agricultural hinterland of the Polis was commonly referred to as 'Khora'. The most notable characteristic of the Polis was the active involvement of its inhabitants in the decision-making process of the city-state. Scholars have debated the exact origin of the Polis, but most agree that its formation and growth can be traced back to the 8th century. According to Raul Lonis, the archaic Greek age saw the Polis consisting of three essential elements: internal consensus among the people, territorial implantation of the Polis, and external acknowledgement of its identity. During the Archaic Age of Greece, the Polis was characterized by political equality among its inhabitants in terms of decision-making processes and strict social justice.

◆ *The significance of Polis*

The soldiers of the Polis, known as 'hoplites', carried shields (hoplon) in their left hands to protect the soldier standing to their left. They wielded weapons such as spears and short swords in their right hands to attack the enemy. The hoplite army mainly comprised the middle class, who could afford specialized weapons and a range of armour. The Polis initially functioned as an elevated and fortified citadel to which the neighbouring countryside would retreat in times of hardship. Gradually, the Polis developed into a full-fledged city and became synonymous with political independence. It often featured a 'high city' or an 'Acropolis.' Most Polis followed a similar pattern of political development, transitioning from monarchy to oligarchy, then to tyranny, and back to oligarchy or democracy. During

the time of Homer, Greece was divided into various clans, each ruled by kings who were considered first among equals. Councils of nobles and popular assemblies existed to check monarchical abuses. The Ionians shifted political power from the king to the Polis, which came under the control of the aristocracy. The transition from clans to the Polis, with a shift from monarchy to oligarchy, occurred somewhat later on the Greek mainland. The mid-8th to mid-7th century witnessed a period of oligarchy, fuelled by the scarcity of good land, which led to widespread popular discontent. The founding of the colonies helped alleviate some of these tensions.

◆ *Fundamental characteristics of the Polis*

During times of economic and social conflicts, Polis often turned to tyrants for resolution. In the original Greek sense, tyranny simply referred to one-man rule and did not carry the negative connotations it does today. Greek tyrants were typically wealthy and talented individuals who rose to power by championing the lower and middle classes against the aristocracy. Many Polis gradually reformed their constitutions to institute democratic government, allowing citizens to participate directly in the rule. However, the democracy of Athens was limited, as women, slaves, and resident non-natives were disqualified from citizenship. Eventually, some Polis returned to oligarchy by the end of the fourth century. Democracy proved unable to prevent the devastating warfare that plagued Greek history, leading Polis to consider and pressure for a return to tyranny or oligarchy.

3.2.3.1 Athens

◆ *The significance of Athens*

The present capital and largest city of Greece is Athens, which is also the most renowned Polis. It dominates the Attica region and is one of the oldest cities in the world. The city-state is considered an elegant city-state and was the home of arts, learning, and philosophy, particularly the influential role of Plato and Aristotle. It is widely recognized as the birthplace of democracy and is often referred to as the cradle of Western civilization due to its contributions to culture and politics. The name of the city-state, Athens, is derived from the patron goddess Athena. It was a prominent city-state during the 'Dark Age.' During the Archaic age, the landed aristocracy of Athens not only controlled a larger portion of land but also established a political monopoly as part of the oligarchic rule that emerged after the decline of monarchy in the mid-eighth century BCE. This period witnessed intense conflict between the landed aristocracy and the peasantry.

throughout Greece. The origin of this struggle can be traced back to the latter half of the Dark Age when landowning aristocrats held a strong position in society.

◆ *Situation of the peasants*

The economic inequality created a severe economic crisis for the peasants, who were now forced to work on the landed estates of the aristocrats. The poorest peasants were compelled to borrow money from the landed aristocrats. Many members of the land-owning class had invested their income from the land in trade and had become moneylenders. When the debtors failed to repay the borrowed payments, they would fall into debt slavery. Hesiod's poems, 'Theogony' and 'Works and Days,' written around the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, illustrate the worsening situation of the mass peasantry, which led to social tensions and disturbances, often resulting in violence. Sections of the aristocracy realized that unless they found a way out of the crisis, their own prosperity would be threatened. As a result, they were compelled to initiate reforms that included concessions to the peasants.

◆ *Development of Athens into a polis*

◆ *Draco's laws*

The people of Athens gradually developed into a Polis, initially conquering the largest part of the Attica territory. The first ruling kings of Athens, who escaped the Dorian attack, had most of their powers stripped away by the powerful aristocratic families, retaining only their religious functions. The Areopagus, composed of the heads of the clans or the council of nobles, exerted unchallenged control over affairs until the end of the seventh century. The archons or magistrates were elected members of the council who controlled executive tasks. In Athens, there was a disturbance caused by the attempted takeover by Cylon, a nobleman. After this event, a special commissioner named Draco was appointed, and his primary task was to codify a set of laws. The punishment commanded by Draco's law, termed draconian, has come to mean extremely harsh or cruel.

Solon, an Athenian statesman, constitutional lawmaker, arbiter, and poet, is credited with laying the foundations for Athenian democracy. He introduced a series of reforms that succeeded in overturning the laws established by Draco. In 594 BCE, Solon served as archon for one year with supreme powers, during which he implemented Athenian reforms. His primary responsibility was to address the period of social struggle and reorganize the Athenian government.



◆ *Foundation of Athenian democracy*

The peasants demanded land redistribution, abolition of debt bondage, an end to aristocratic monopoly in politics, and participation in the political decision-making process within the Athenian polis. Solon was the first to express sympathy and seek rectification for the suffering of the poor. He attempted numerous reforms in the socioeconomic, political, and legal aspects of Athens, gradually laying the groundwork for the growth and development of Athenian democracy. His reforms were characterized by moderation and compromise and were implemented without violence.

◆ *Solon's reforms*

Solon's most significant reform was the abolition of debt bondage. He cancelled all debts and arranged for the return of debt slaves who had been sold abroad. Solon also implemented economic reforms aimed at promoting the production of cash crops such as olives and grapes. He encouraged industrial production, including pottery, oil production, shipbuilding, and silver mining. Additionally, Solon promoted the intensive cultivation of economically profitable olive trees, discouraging the export of grains. In terms of political reforms, Solon sought to increase participation in the political process. He believed that the Athenian polis should be governed by the council of elders, known as the 'Areopagus', which included aristocrats. Another important body was the people's assembly, known as the 'Ekklesia', where citizens could participate and vote. The Ekklesia comprised the nine magistrates, known as 'Archons', who ruled over the polis. The advisory body consisted of the Council of Elders, which operated under the monarchical system. However, after the decline of monarchy in Athens, political power shifted to an oligarchical council that worked through smaller committees known as 'probouloi'.

◆ *The probouleutic system*

According to Antony Andrews, the probouleutic system in the Athenian government was described as an attempt to restrict the actual functioning of the assembly. On the other hand, Solon's reforms aimed to broaden people's participation in political matters by creating a new council called the boule, comprised of four hundred members. This new council was granted supreme powers, and the functions of the older council were limited. Unlike the Areopagus, which had restricted membership exclusive to the aristocracy and was hereditary, membership in the new council was based on property qualifications.

In Athens, the native population was divided into four

◆ *Division of society based on property value*

classes based on their property value. The highest class was the Pentakosiomedimni, who had an income worth five hundred or more medimnoi¹. The next class was the Hippeis (horsemen), the Zeugitai (yoked men) formed the third class, and the Thetes were the lowest and poorest class. Only the first three classes of people were allowed membership in the boule, while the impoverished peasants, artisans, and landless individuals included in the last and lowest division could participate in the assembly but did not have the right to vote.

◆ *The Council of Four Hundred*

The position of a warrior in the military was also determined by the affordability of horses and armour. While the Zeugitai (peasants of small and middle means) could participate in the warrior groups, the lowest section of society, the Thetes, could only serve as light infantry or rowers in the navy. The Council of Four Hundred was a newly established political body that worked alongside the older council, the Areopagus. It consisted of one hundred members from each of the four tribes. Unlike the Areopagus, the Council of Four Hundred was less dominated by the great families and played a significant role in the management of political affairs. Legislation prepared by the new council required its approval. Several courts were established where individuals from different classes served as peers, thereby ending the privilege of aristocracy in the field of arbitration. The introduction of appeals against offences by any person was an important part of the new judicial system, ensuring equality before the law for all individuals.

◆ *Drawbacks of Solon's reforms*

Most of Solon's reforms focused on the interests of the common people. However, he did not take the initiative to completely end the financial dominance of the aristocracy. His reforms followed a middle way, considering the demands of the wealthy and preserving the interests of the impoverished, including the redistribution of land from large landowners. However, the issue of the unresolved social struggle was a drawback of Solon's reforms. In short, Solon's reforms put an end to debt slavery, but the aristocracy continued to accumulate wealth through land ownership. As a result, another round of social conflict soon emerged, involving the peasantry and the landed aristocracy.

¹ The term "medimnoi" refers to a unit of measurement for grain, with an equivalent value in oil or wine (1 medimnoi = 52.5 litres).

◆ *The phase of Athenian tyranny*

In 546 BCE, a group of aristocrats seized political power in Athens through a civil war. This marked a new phase in Athenian governance known as 'tyranny,' which referred to a government run by a single ruler without constitutional authority. The ruler in such a system was called a tyrant, derived from the Greek word 'tyrannos.' Peisistratus, a general in Athens, saw the class conflict as an opportunity to establish himself as a tyrant. With the support of a bodyguard provided by the assembly, Peisistratus seized power, particularly with the backing of poor farmers from the hill country. During Peisistratus' rule, Athens experienced a period of self-government. Peisistratus held all major offices and improved the conditions of small farmers by providing loans on favourable terms. He also initiated public works projects for the lower-class population. As a patron of the arts, he oversaw the construction of several elegant Athenian temples. One of his most radical reforms was the illegal confiscation of wasteland occupied by the aristocracy and the lands of banished oligarchs who opposed his rule. These lands were then redistributed among peasants and landless individuals. Peisistratus pursued two main objectives with his land policies: stabilizing the condition of the peasantry and undermining the political monopoly of the aristocracy, thereby strengthening democratic institutions. Although he attempted to establish a hereditary monarchy, the masses did not accept this idea.

◆ *Beginning of democracy under Cleisthenes*

Hippias succeeded Peisistratus but was overthrown in 510 BCE. According to Geoffrey de Ste, tyranny was a necessary phase in the history of Greek city-states. Greece had never experienced any democratic institutions that could maintain power without a hereditary ruling class. If there was no representation through institutions, the alternative was an aristocratic rule or the dictatorship of a single individual and their family. Gustave Glotz argued that the acceptance of tyranny by the people of Athens was merely a matter of convenience. The year 510 BCE is generally considered as the establishment of democracy in Athens. Scholars have pointed out that tyranny acted as a catalyst in the transition from oligarchy to democracy. Cleisthenes is generally considered the founder of democracy as he served under Peisistratus and gained popularity among the common masses (demos) after the fall of tyranny.

Cleisthenes introduced significant democratic reforms that transformed Athenian society and brought a large

- ◆ *Democratic reforms*
- ◆ *The practice of ostracism*

measure of democracy to the political system. One of his reforms was the increase in the size of the council from four hundred to five hundred members. Each tribe contributed fifty councillors chosen by lot from lists of candidates elected in the demes. The impoverished people of the fourth-class society did not have the right to sit on the council, but adult males were able to vote in the assembly. Cleisthenes divided the year into ten periods known as prytaneis, with each tribe having the chance to supervise the affairs of the polis during their assigned period. The chairmanship rotated on a daily basis according to a lottery system. Cleisthenes was also responsible for the well-known Athenian practice of ostracism. If at least 6,000 citizens voted overwhelmingly against a certain individual by writing their names on ostraca (pieces of broken pottery), that person would be sent into exile for ten years while their family and property remained unharmed. The Athenian citizens were organized into four tribes, each having a common ancestor for their descendants.

- ◆ *Formation of demes*
- ◆ *Boule membership was extended to include 'thetes'*

Cleisthenes reorganized the Athenian citizens into ten voting tribes based on their place of residence. Another reform implemented by Cleisthenes was the formation of territories known as 'demes' or 'demoi.' These demes served as geographical and political units within the Athenian polis. The demes were divided into three categories: coastal, rural, and urban. To ensure a balance of economic and natural resources, each deme consisted of one-third of each component. Cleisthenes extended boule membership to include the lowest social category, the 'thetes.' The boule, also known as the Council of Five Hundred, conducted various administrative, judicial, and executive functions. Traditional responsibilities of the boule included tax collection, foreign relations, ship and port maintenance, and trade regulation. The membership of the boule became a more static and influential position within the Polis of Athens.

Briefly, significant reforms were introduced by Solon, Peisistratus, and Cleisthenes, which granted Athenian citizens the right to participate in the political process. However, there were limitations to these reforms. Citizenship rights were restricted to indigenous male adults of the polis, excluding women, foreigners, outsiders, and slaves from citizenship. Undoubtedly, women's roles were primarily confined to home and city activities. They remained under the guardianship of the male head of the household, known as "kyrios," before marriage and their husbands after

◆ *Position of women in Athenian Greek society*

marriage. In the event of widowhood or marital breakdown, they returned to the guardianship of their fathers. While women had the right to hold inherited properties, receive gifts, or obtain dowries, they were unable to sell or transfer them to others. The passing down of property was limited to their sons. Nonetheless, women enjoyed certain religious rights, such as priesthood and the freedom to participate in civic festivals like Panathenaea in Athens. Comparatively, the role of women was less prominent than that of foreigners ('matoikoi') in Athenian society. Foreigners played a vital role in the economic activities of the society, with many arriving for trade or settling after being banished from their own lands. Scholars, including Raoul Lonis, have highlighted the hospitality extended to foreigners in Greece. However, foreigners were not permitted to participate in the political process of Athens. Furthermore, eligibility for the 'ekklesia', the assembly of citizens, required a two-year military service experience.

3.2.3.2 Sparta

◆ *Sparta founded by Dorian Greeks*

Sparta was a prominent city-state in ancient Greece. It was located on the banks of the Eurotas River in Laconia and Peloponnese in the southeast and was founded by the invading Dorian Greeks. Due to its geographical position, Sparta was not easily threatened by sea, as the nearest harbour was situated approximately twenty-five miles away, surrounded by rough Mediterranean waters. According to Greek mythology, the people of Sparta, known as the Dorians, originated from central Greece and settled in Peloponnese after defeating the original inhabitants of Laconia. However, clear evidence of this is still lacking. The Polis of Sparta was composed of five agricultural villages that were joined together. Unlike other city-states, Sparta did not develop into an urban space and did not seem to have been fortified. It had a unique political system.

◆ *Mixed nature of the Political system*

Lycurgus, a legendary figure, is credited with establishing the required oligarchic system of government in Sparta. Other historians suggest the presence of a limited democracy as well. According to Aristotle, the political structure of Sparta can be described as 'mixed,' with the kings representing monarchy, the council representing oligarchy, and the assembly representing democracy. The Gerousia, consisting of twenty-four members who were elected for life, played a crucial role in advising the government. These members had to be male citizens over the age of sixty. The body of

ephors supervised military training, enforced justice, and performed other important duties. Despite presumptions of equality, political rights were limited to a small portion of the Spartan population, while the majority had no political rights.

◆ *The persistence of dual monarchy*

The unique feature followed by the Spartans was the dual monarchy. Although it created some problems related to leadership, they intelligently solved them by deciding to follow only one command from one king, especially during times of war. In Sparta, the kings simply acted as oligarchic leaders of the institution rather than demonstrating their authority as absolute monarchs. The ruling oligarchy, known as the Council of elders (Gerousia), consisted of 30 members, all above the age of 60, including the two kings who were ex-officio members. The role of the Gerousia was to prepare proposals to be passed in the assembly. Apart from the kings, other members of the council were from aristocratic families. Initially, membership in the council was for life, but later it changed to annual terms.

◆ *The functionalities of the assemblies and ephors*

The Apella, or assembly, in Sparta consisted of all free adult male citizens but did not possess much power. All decisions, such as approval and disapproval, were made solely by the Gerousia through voting. The Spartan assembly can be considered an important part of their political structure. The Ephors, a board of five officials, were overseers in Sparta. They were selected from the male citizens of the polis and served for one year. Their primary duties included maintaining the supremacy of the law and reducing the political power and privileges enjoyed by the members of the council and the king to some extent. They were also responsible for convening meetings of the Gerousia and Apella. The constitution of Sparta incorporated elements of monarchy, democracy, and oligarchy, with oligarchy being the dominant characteristic.

◆ *The Spartan economy thrived on agriculture*

Agriculture formed the foundation of the Spartan economy, and most of the arable land in Laconia was owned by the aristocracy. As a result, there was a shortage of land for the rest of the Spartan citizens. To compensate for this, the Spartans attacked and conquered the entire region of Messenia, a fertile country located west of the Peloponnese. The land of the Messenian population was taken over by the Spartans, and the inhabitants were enslaved and referred to as helots. Every male child in Sparta underwent



rigorous training from an early age to become a citizen-soldier. They underwent inspections and were subjected to demanding physical activities such as gymnastics, hunting, military training with weapons, and communal meals. This disciplined training aimed to instil loyalty to the state and community. Only adult males were eligible to participate in the political process.

◆ *The status of men and women in Spartan society*

According to Raoul Lonis, 'Men educated in this manner became citizens who were remarkably effective in defending the city and maintaining the established social order. Martial values were highly emphasized in Sparta, to the extent that citizens were prohibited from engaging in commercial activities, as it was believed that wealth generation would distract them from their primary duty of militarily defending the polis.' The role of women in Spartan society was relatively better compared to Athens and other Greek city-states. Girls in Sparta received training alongside boys, and women were spared from domestic labour to maintain their physical fitness for bearing healthy children. Spartan artwork, including paintings and scenes on vases, provides evidence that women had more flexibility in their roles and were involved in tasks beyond the household. They also participated in public ceremonies and religious festivals, and sacrifices.

◆ *Formation of the Delian League*

The expansion of the Persian Empire into western Anatolia, the Aegean, and mainland Greece coincided with the rise of tyranny and the beginning of the Classical period in Athens. The confederation of Greek city-states known as the Delian League took its name from the island of Delos. Its primary objective was to maintain a powerful navy in the Aegean Sea. Over time, the Athenians transformed this league, initially a voluntary confederation, into an empire ruled by Athens. Traditionally, the citizens of Athens were divided into four Ionian tribes, tracing their ancestry back to the tribes or clans that originally settled in Attica.

◆ *The concept of deme*

Cleisthenes introduced the concept of the 'deme' as the basic unit of the democratic structure. Each citizen belonged to a deme, which can be considered the smallest geographical unit in Athens for political purposes. There were approximately 139 demes in Athens. The demes were responsible for maintaining registers of their members and had their own local elected governments and assemblies. The 'demarchos' served as the head of the local government. Cleisthenes also reformed the 'boule', or council. The

council's membership was increased from four hundred to five hundred members. Fifty members were selected from each of the ten 'phylai' (tribes). Membership in the boule was open to all citizens, including thetes. Any citizen over the age of thirty was eligible for membership. The archons served as the main executive and military officials of the polis. During the Classical period, the archonship gradually became an elective position, allowing ordinary citizens to hold these offices.

3.2.4 The Classical Period

The Classical period of Greece is generally considered to have occurred between the 5th and 4th centuries BCE. It followed the Greek Dark Age and the Archaic Age and was succeeded by the Hellenistic Age. Athens emerged as the leading Greek polis after the Persian Wars, boasting a strong navy, prosperous maritime trade, robust democratic institutions, and a vibrant cultural life. The Persian ruler Xerxes devised an elaborate plan to conquer the entire Greek territory with the support of a large fleet of 600 warships and an army of 150,000 to 300,000 men. However, the Athenian navy managed to defeat the Persian fleet. This battle marked a turning point in the Greek struggle against the Persians, as the latter, following their losses at Salamis, lost hope of controlling the Aegean Sea.

◆ *Key features of the Classical Period in Greece*

During the reign of Pericles, a prominent Athenian leader, the government became fully democratized, and Athens thrived as a naval empire. Pericles was known for his clear and visionary thinking, incorruptible morals, and persuasive abilities. Under his administration, all offices were open to every citizen, regardless of social class. He introduced the practice of paying jurors and later other officials for their services. Pericles restricted citizenship to those whose parents were both Athenian citizens, reducing the number of eligible recipients. He endeavoured to make Athens great in all aspects and supported the economic growth of the Athenian empire. He also backed military actions against the Persians in Egypt and the Spartans and their allies within Greece. Pericles played a pivotal role in transforming the Acropolis into an architectural masterpiece.

◆ *Changes brought by Pericles*

Greek political history during both the late Archaic and Classical periods were greatly influenced by the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars. The Peloponnesian War, which took place between 431 and 404 BCE, began with Sparta's



- ◆ *The Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta*
- ◆ *The devastating plague in Athens*
- ◆ *Transformation of the Delian League into an empire*

strategy of invading Attica in an attempt to engage Athens in a decisive battle. Following the advice of Pericles, Athens avoided direct confrontation with Sparta's superior army and instead relied on its navy for offensive actions. The war continued until 426 BCE, when a devastating plague struck Athens, killing a third of its population, including Pericles. Despite the demoralizing effects of the plague, Athens maintained an advantage during the early years of the war due to its damaging sea raids against the Peloponnese. In 421 BCE, after the deaths of key war leaders and widespread war fatigue, the Peace of Nicias was signed, marking a period of relative peace for the next six years. During this time, Sparta and Athens worked to discipline their unruly allies. The formation of the Delian League, later known as the Confederation of Delos, played a significant role in Greek politics. The league's treasury was transferred from Delos to Athens in 454 BCE, confirming Athens' transformation of the Delian League into an empire.

- ◆ *Impact of the Peloponnesian War on Greece*

The Peloponnesian League was also a close ally of Sparta. The conflict between Sparta and Athens, initially over the dominance of the Peloponnese and later extending to entire Greece, escalated into a full-fledged war known as the Peloponnesian War. The war was fought in two phases, spanning nearly three decades. While Sparta proved unbeatable on land, it lacked the strength to defeat Athens in a naval battle due to the latter's naval prowess. Athens, led by Pericles, achieved significant early victories. However, Pericles' death from a typhoid epidemic and the subsequent rise of power-hungry successors plunged Athens into a crisis. The ultimate victory of Sparta marked the end of the Peloponnesian War, but the overall impact on Greece was largely negative.

- ◆ *Downfall of the Athenian political supremacy*

During the peace interval, Alcibiades, a nephew of Pericles, rose to prominence as the leader of the popular party in Athens. Although intelligent and charismatic, Alcibiades was also power-hungry, morally corrupt, and emotionally unstable. In 415 BCE, when the town of Segesta in Sicily sought Athenian assistance against Syracuse, Alcibiades convinced Athens to launch a massive naval expedition against Syracuse, the largest and most important city-state in Sicily. The Athenian fleet became trapped within the harbour, forcing the sailors to attempt an escape through the interior. The Sicilian expedition proved to be a costly failure and marked the end of the political supremacy of Athens. The city was plagued

by anarchy and factional discord. Alcibiades, seizing the opportunity, returned as commander of the Athenian navy and served until 406 BCE. In 405 BCE, the Spartans delivered the final blow by capturing the unattended Athenian fleet. Athens had no choice but to surrender, and surprisingly, the terms imposed by Sparta were moderate. The Spartans did not slaughter or enslave the Athenian population.

The Classical Period came to an end in 338 BCE when the Macedonians subjugated the poleis of the Greek peninsula and the Aegean Sea. Macedonia, along with other regions located north of mainland Greece, had been relatively less developed in comparison.

- ◆ *End of the Classical period*

3.2.5 Religion

The religion of the Greeks was mainly based on Greek mythology. The earliest references to Greek religion can be found in the epics of Homer, namely the Iliad and the Odyssey. These works provide a detailed picture of Greek mythology during the so-called 'Dark Ages.' Along with Hesiod's Theogony, they offered a systematic blueprint of Greek religion. The Olympian gods were the earliest Greek deities and were worshipped on Mount Olympus in Thessaly. Zeus, the most prominent among the twelve deities worshipped by the Greeks, was attributed various qualities by the Athenians, such as saviour (Soter), protector of the household (Herkeios), and guardian of property (Ktesios). Similarly, Athena, the chief goddess, was worshipped in multiple roles, including the goddess of the virgin (Parthenos), protector of the city of Athens, and a high-ranking warrior (Promachos). Apollo, the son of Zeus, was associated with archery, song, and music.

- ◆ *Based on Greek mythology*

Among the twelve Olympian deities, there were also Poseidon (god of the sea), Hera (originally a mother goddess), Demeter (originally a mother goddess and later goddess of grain, especially wheat), Ares (god of war), Hephaestus (god of blacksmiths, artisans, and craftsmen), Hermes (messenger of the gods, god of trade, travellers, and thieves), Artemis (goddess of the hunt and wildlife), Hestia (the virgin goddess of the hearth, the right ordering of domesticity, architecture, and family), and Aphrodite (goddess of love, beauty, sexuality, and procreation). Dionysus, known as a fertility god and also the god of wine and drunkenness, presided over sober festivals, joyous processions, and cultural events when Greek tragedy and comic theatre were organized.

- ◆ *Twelve important Olympian gods*



◆ *Influence
of Oriental
religious beliefs*

Rituals were another notable aspect of Greek religion. In Athens, the transition from adolescence to adulthood was marked by young men offering their hair to Artemis while young women devoted a year of their lives to the service of Artemis in the sanctuary. By the time of the classical age, Greek drama had become a significant feature of these festivals, with plays being enacted and attracting a large audience. The Greeks also constructed sanctuaries for their deities, although their purpose was more to house the gods and goddesses rather than for prayer. The priests had the freedom to enter the main sanctuary. At the same time, devotees were not allowed to proceed beyond a sacred point known as the 'temenos', where the sacrificial altar was also located. According to Claude Mosse, the large sanctuaries symbolized the religious unity of Greece despite its political divisions, as people from different parts of Greece flocked to these temples during festivals. The Eleusinian Mysteries, a ceremony that included various purification rituals, fasts, and retreats, were also part of Greek religious practices. In short, Greek religion was influenced by Oriental religious beliefs, primarily because the Greeks had maintained links with Anatolia since ancient times. The Anatolian mother goddess had great similarities with Demeter, and Sabazios had similarities with Dionysus.

3.2.6 Slavery

◆ *Slave mode of
production*
◆ *Chattel slavery*

Initially, slaves in ancient Greece were primarily women and prisoners of war. They often worked within the Mycenaean palaces, with approximately 550 women employed in the textile industry. The general term used for slaves in the Linear B tablets was 'Doeri.' The epics of Homer also mention women slaves used during times of war. In addition to agriculture and mining, slaves dominated handicraft production and engaged in various forms of domestic and menial work. Slavery, as an institution, existed in different forms across various ancient societies, including the Near East, ancient Greece, and Rome. In Greece and Rome, slaves were primarily used as producers in crucial economic activities such as agriculture, manufacturing, and mining. The slave mode of production can be defined as a system where surplus extraction takes the form of slavery, with slaves serving as the primary producers and their owners, or masters, extracting surplus from them. Chattel slavery, where slaves were considered commodities, was widely practised in Greece and Rome, representing an extreme form of servitude.

in which slaves were treated as property. The sheer number of slaves in relation to the population and their significant economic roles are two principal characteristics of a slave society. Additionally, three other elements define slavery: the status of slaves as property, the total power exerted over them, and their lack of kinship ties.

During the Classical Age in Greece, Athens had a significant number of slaves, with estimates ranging between 150,000 and 400,000. Slavery was considered an integral part of Athenian life. The influx of slaves increased notably after the Persian wars, and this was further sustained through cooperation with non-Greek states on the periphery of Greece, which involved the exchange of slaves for commodities. Athens was renowned for its handicrafts, including pottery, woodworking, and the production of woollen and linen cloth. Skilled slaves with professional knowledge were primarily employed in these sectors of the economy. Independent slaves were more commonly found in the manufacturing and service sectors rather than agriculture, and they received money as wages instead of goods. A significant number of skilled slaves were also employed in the construction of public buildings, including both those owned by the state- and privately-owned structures. The presence of these slaves also contributed to the growth of urban life. Mining was another sector where a large number of slaves were engaged, and they often acted as managers overseeing the slave labour involved in the mining process.

◆ *Employment of slaves in different sectors*

- ◆ *Role of women slaves*
- ◆ *Impact of slavery on Athenian society*

Slaves in Athens were also employed in routine administrative work. This included jobs such as policemen, prison guards, clerks for financial officers, executioners, and labourers for public construction projects such as temples, sewage removal, and assaying silver for new coins. These slaves were mostly owned by the state. Women slaves in Athens were primarily employed in domestic roles, as they were not physically suited for strenuous manual labour. In addition to cooking, women were engaged in spinning and weaving, activities that were viewed with pride by the women of wealthy aristocratic families. Chattel slavery was practised, where slaves were bought and sold individually in the market as commodities. The majority of slaves in Athens during the Classical Age were outsiders. Slavery had social, psychological, and political impacts on Athenian society. Socially, there was a close relationship between



status and land ownership, with only citizens having the right to own land. Land ownership allowed the people of Athens to challenge the political and economic monopoly of the aristocracy. Psychologically, slavery instilled a sense of superiority among Athenians. Politically, slavery played a significant role in the functioning of Athenian democracy. Slaves worked in various areas, fields, businesses, and homes, allowing Athenian citizens the time to engage in politics.

According to Perry Anderson, 'the classical polis was based on a new conceptual discovery of liberty, which was accompanied by the systematic institution of slavery. As a result, free citizens stood out prominently against the backdrop of slave labour.' Slavery in Sparta, on the other hand, was entirely different from Athens and was referred to as 'Helotry'. Helots were slaves owned by the state, and the state provided citizens (known as perioeci) with slaves according to their needs. After the conquest of Laconia and Messenia by Sparta, the entire population of these Greek states was enslaved and became Helots. This meant that Sparta had a much larger population of slaves compared to Athens. Plato noted, 'No one could doubt that their land in Laconia and Messenia is superior to Athenian land, both in extent and quality, not to mention the number of their slaves, especially the Helots.'

◆ *Public slaves or Helots in Sparta*

Helots were public slaves, unlike the chattel slaves of Chios or Athens, and they belonged to the same ethnic group and spoke the same native language. The state allocated Helots to each landowner according to their labour requirements, and they were not considered the private property of Spartan citizens. Scholars suggest that while slaves could be commonly used or sold individually within Sparta, they could not be taken beyond its borders. Helots lived collectively in villages rather than on isolated farms. Due to the fact that Helots were allowed to maintain their kin relations, Sparta had to make special military arrangements to control such a large population of slaves and their families within the state. Helots were required to pay a compulsory rent of 50 percent of their produce to their masters for each plot they farmed. This amounted to 70 measures of barley for the male master and 12 measures for the mistress each year. Helotry is considered a primitive form of slavery since Sparta did not have a slave market where slaves could be individually bought and sold. Additionally, the element of kinlessness was absent, as Helots lived with their blood relatives as part

◆ *Role of helots*
◆ *Practice of helot slavery*

of an ethnic community. The system of helot slavery was also practised in other Greek states like Thessaly and Crete, where the slaves were referred to as 'penestae' and 'mnoiti', respectively.

3.2.7 Legacies

The cultural growth during both the Archaic and Classical periods was initiated by the aristocracy, who possessed wealth, power, and prestige. According to Josiah Ober, the Classical age of Greek cultural growth was termed the 'Greek efflorescence,' characterized by a larger population enjoying higher levels of welfare and cultural production.

- ◆ 'Greek efflorescence'

3.2.7.1 Greek Thought

The earliest Greek philosophy was called the Ionian school of thought, also known as the Milesian school. It was propagated by a group of thinkers residing in Miletus in Asia Minor. They introduced a new way of studying the cosmos, which was previously the domain of poets inspired by divinity. Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, are prominent thinkers of this school. Thales considered 'moistness' or water as the primary element constituting nature, while Anaximander proposed the theory of opposing elements. Anaximenes emphasized air as the chief element and the driving force of the universe.

- ◆ Ionian school of thought or the Milesian school

Pythagoras represented another school of thought originating from the island of Samos in Eastern Greece. The exact dates of his birth and death are uncertain, but they are approximately estimated to be around 569 BCE and 500-475 BCE, respectively. He founded a new religious sect that functioned as a secret society. Pythagoras' sect was heavily influenced by the Orphic sect, borrowing the concept of the immortality of the soul and developing the theory of the transmigration of souls. Pythagoras and his followers emphasized the harmony of souls and advocated for following a middle path, which was connected to numbers and symmetry. This led to a focus on the study of mathematics and musical theory. Pythagoras' theory was widely popular and based on ancient Babylonian assumptions. According to this theory, in a right-angled triangle, the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides.

- ◆ Pythagoras's sect and theory

Anaxagoras, a resident of Anatolia, is considered to be the first to introduce philosophy in Athens. He rejected the



- ◆ *Anaxagoras and philosophy*
- ◆ *Democritus's atomism*

notion of the generation of matter, suggesting that matter is not created or destroyed but rather undergoes combinations and decompositions of existing things. Democritus, a pre-Socratic thinker originally from Abdera in Thrace, further developed rationalist thought related to nature. His famous theory proposed that nature is composed of atoms, although it was more philosophical than scientific in nature. This atomic hypothesis is also known as atomism.

- ◆ *Ideas of Socrates and Plato*
- ◆ *Focus shifted from nature to human existence*

During the Classical Age, Athens served as the centre of intellectual activity and was the first city-state to experiment with democracy. Socrates played a pivotal role in transforming Greek thinking from a focus on the study of nature to the study of human existence. Plato, the founder of the renowned Athenian institution for the study of philosophy called the Academy, was also a teacher there. He presented his ideas in the form of dialogues, with Socrates consistently portrayed as the primary speaker. The essence of Plato's philosophy lies in the relationship between mind and matter. He posited that experiences are illusory while ideas alone are real and that this reality can only be apprehended through contemplation.

- ◆ *Aristotle's philosophy*

Greek philosophy reached its zenith through the intellectual brilliance of Aristotle, who was a disciple of Plato but later left the Academy after Plato's death. Aristotle's philosophy diverged from his teachers in his belief that the human mind could comprehend the universe solely through experience. He upheld the objective reality of material things and argued that a comprehensive understanding of the natural world and humanity's place in it could be attained by studying their functions. Aristotle possessed extensive knowledge in areas such as biology, plant life, logic, metaphysics, ethics, poetics, and political science. Additionally, he held the view that the universe was in a constant state of motion.

3.2.7.2 Literature and Drama

During the Archaic and Classical periods, lyric poetry and drama, including both tragedy and comedy, dominated the cultural scene. The Archaic age is commonly referred to as the 'Lyric age.' Songs were sung accompanied by instruments such as the lyre or aulos, which were used for solo and choral performances. Tragedies and comedies were performed in open-air theatres. The origins of Greek drama can be traced back to Athens, where it later spread to other city-states during the Classical Age. Peisistratus is believed to have introduced solemn plays at the great Dionysia festival, which

- ◆ 'Lyric Age'
- ◆ *Tragedies and comedies*

was later transformed into a regular event by Cleisthenes. Aeschylus, one of the greatest Greek tragedians, is credited with turning Dionysian odes into genuine drama with fleshed-out characters. Sophocles and Euripides were other prominent tragedians of the fifth century. Comedy in Greek culture was often a political commentary infused with satire targeting contemporary politics, politicians, thinkers, and even tragic events. Only eleven comedies by Aristophanes have survived, and he is considered the greatest playwright of Athenian comedy. He was also a social critic who harshly criticized politicians and their warmongering, which he believed would lead Athens to ruin.

3.2.7.3 History

- ◆ *Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon*

Through the works of Herodotus and Thucydides in the Classical Age, the writing of history underwent significant development. They brought an element of inquiry into a field that had previously been a mundane mix of fiction and facts, heroes, myths, legends, fables, and anecdotes. Herodotus, considered the 'Father of History,' not only pioneered the writing of history but also introduced the concept of historiography. He travelled widely and meticulously gathered historical information. Only after verifying and evaluating the gathered information did he record the evidence. Thucydides, the first Athenian prose writer, provided a descriptive account of the Peloponnesian War in his work 'The History of the Peloponnesian War' as an eyewitness. Thucydides focused on history as it related to war and the political struggles surrounding it. He also extensively wrote about the contemporary political situation in Greece. Xenophon inherited the legacy of Thucydides and represented the historiographical transition from Classical Greece to the Hellenistic Age.

3.2.7.4 Science and Technology

The Ionians were also considered the earliest scientists, all of whom were natives of Miletus, an Anatolian city. Hippocrates utilized pure scientific ideas to treat diseases, moving away from magical cures. He believed that all diseases are caused by nature and their causes can be studied through scientific investigation. Hippocrates founded the Hippocratic School of Medicine and is therefore known as the 'Father of Modern Medicine.' According to Claude Mosse, 'health was identified with 'isonomic' and disease with 'monarchic' disequilibrium, thus hinting at politics as

◆ *Hippocrates and Aristotle*

the model for Greek science.’ Aristotle, in the Classical Age, remained the most renowned scholar in Greece, even in matters of science. Building on the theories of his predecessors that matter is composed of four basic elements—air, water, earth, and fire—and that there are four basic qualities of matter—hot, cold, wet, and dry—Aristotle introduced ether as the fifth constituent of matter, taking into account the existence of celestial bodies. He became the first scientist to deal with dynamics and is credited with initiating animal dissection with his students.

3.2.7.5 Architecture

◆ *Increased emphasis on austerity*

The Greek poleis remained independent and developed their own distinctive artistic styles. The potters of Corinth, for example, dominated the Greek pottery trade, with their large vessels replacing the smaller Corinthian vases in the export market. Around 530 BCE, Athenian potters invented a new style of pottery making, known as ‘red-figure’ pottery. During the Archaic age, the sculpture was influenced by the techniques used in free-standing Egyptian figures. Many statues from this period were highly stylized, particularly the naked ‘young male’ (kouros) and clothed ‘young maiden’ (kore) figures. In the Classical Age, sculptors moved away from stylized forms and focused more on naturalistic representations of the human body. Additionally, there was an increased emphasis on austerity compared to the stylistic orientation of the Archaic age.

◆ *‘Golden Age’ in the history of Greece*

Athenian sculptors were known for creating naturalistic nude figures out of marble. Many of these sculptures adorned the walls of temples, such as the Parthenon on the Athenian Acropolis. Built between 447-438 BCE under the order of Pericles, the Parthenon was dedicated to the patron goddess Athena. The temple’s walls were decorated with profuse sculptures, with symbolic allusions meant to glorify and promote Athenian democracy. In terms of architecture, a major change during the Classical Age was the use of limestone and marble instead of mudbrick and wood for the construction of temples. This period is often referred to as the ‘Golden Age’ of Greek history, particularly in terms of art and architecture. The civic buildings around the agora included the city council chamber (‘bouleuterion’), executive chambers, and law courts. These buildings were adorned with decorative images, such as bronze and marble statues.

Summarised Overview

Greece, home to two great Bronze Age civilizations, Minoan and Mycenaean, was shaped like an irregular peninsula surrounded by the sea on three sides. The city-states of Greece were spread across nine major geographical regions. Athens and Sparta were prominent city-states, while Corinth, Thebes, and Macedonia were other significant ones. During the 'Dark Ages', Greek-speaking people colonized the Aegean region and areas along the west coast of Anatolia. The 'Dark Age' was characterized by the decline of great empires such as the Mycenaeans and the Hittites, a decline in the script, disruption of trade, and a lack of archaeological and literary sources. The Persian and Peloponnesian Wars had a significant impact on Greek political history. Darius and his successor Xerxes devised an elaborate plan for the Persian conquest of Greece. The Classical period of Greece followed the 'Greek Dark Age' and the Archaic Age and was succeeded by the Hellenistic Age. Greek literature originated from the Homeric epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey. However, the growth of the Polis led to the development of a new literary genre in Greece, represented by lyric poetry and drama. Lyric poetry was also used for staging drama. Mysticism was another aspect of Greek religion, represented by the cult of Dionysus. The philosophical-mystical aspect of Greek religion found expression through the Orphic and Pythagorean traditions.

Self Assessment

1. Discuss the factors that contributed to the emergence of the ancient Greek empire.
2. What were the significant empires during the early phase of Greek civilization?
3. How does aristocracy differ from oligarchy?
4. What were the contributions of Solon and Cleisthenes to the development of Athenian democracy?
5. Discuss the political institutions of Greece, focusing on Athens and Sparta.
6. How did the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars impact political developments in Greece?
7. Explore the significance of the Trojan War in Greek history.
8. Enumerate the characteristics of the Mycenaean empire and its accomplishments as an ancient civilization.



Assignments

1. Write an assignment on Minoan Civilization by detailing every aspect of the same.
2. Write an assignment on the condition of women in ancient Greece.
3. Elaborate on the legacy of Greece, highlighting its achievements in various sectors.
4. What were the main features of the Dark Age, and how did it impact the lives of people?
5. Discuss the major features of Greek slavery.

Suggested Readings

1. Anderson, Perry, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, London, 1978.
2. Darst, Diane W, *Western Civilization*, McGraw – Hill Publishing Company, New York, 1990.
3. Davies, H.A., *An Outline History of the World*, Oxford University Press, London, 1968.
4. Durant, Will, *The Life of Greece*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1966.
5. Finley, M.I., *The Ancient Greeks*, Harmondsworth, 1963.
6. Kumar, Rakesh, *Ancient and Medieval World – From the Evolution of Humans to the Crisis of Feudalism*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2018.

References

1. Austin, M. M., *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman Conquest*, Cambridge, 1981.
2. Badian, E., *Studies in Greek and Roman History*, Oxford, 1964.
3. Burns, Edward Macnall and Ralph, Philip Lee, *World Civilizations*, New York, 1991.
4. Farooqui, Amar, *Early Social Formations*, Delhi, 2001.
5. James. I., Porter, *Classical Pasts: The Classical Traditions of Greece and Rome*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2005.
6. Nagle, D. Brendan, *The Ancient World – A Social and Cultural History*, Prentice-hall, INC Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, United States of America, 1979.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.





Ancient Rome

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ♦ generate awareness about the ancient Roman Empire and its expansionist policies
- ♦ have an insight into the then Roman society and administrative apparatus that governed over them
- ♦ trace the legacy of Roman Empire through its accomplishments in various sectors

Background

Ancient Rome, spanning from 753 BCE to 476 CE, is a captivating civilization that shaped history. It began as a humble village in present-day Italy, evolving into a powerful empire across three continents. The Roman Republic set the stage for its future trajectory, marked by military conquests and political manoeuvring. The empire flourished under centralized governance, but internal conflicts and external threats posed challenges. The Roman Empire expanded its influence through military might and assimilated diverse cultures into its tapestry. Highly centralized governance and successive emperors wielding absolute power brought stability, yet political intrigue and social unrest persisted. Economic difficulties, such as inflation and wealth inequality, added to the internal struggles of the empire, while barbarian tribes posed threats from the north and east.

The contributions of Ancient Rome endure in various aspects. Roman law, emphasizing justice and individual rights, continues to shape modern legal systems. Ingenious engineering feats, like aqueducts and roads, transformed the physical landscape. Roman literature, philosophy, and language, particularly Latin, influenced Western traditions. Despite its grandeur, Ancient Rome faced decline due to political instability, economic decline, and invasions. The fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 CE marked the end of this remarkable era, leaving a legacy of governance, law, infrastructure, art, literature, and philosophy.



Keywords

Carthage, Punic Wars, Consuls, Patricians, Plebeians, Roman Law, Slavery

Discussion

- ◆ *Roman Empire
- Geographical
location and
origin*



The Roman Empire could be considered the prominent and largest classical empire in ancient civilizations. The centre of the empire lay in Italy, in the city of Rome, and subsequently, it encompassed the entire Mediterranean world. Rome, a settlement of Latin-speaking people located on the banks of the Tiber River in the central part of Italy, was traditionally supposed to have been founded in 753 BCE. The geographical location of Italy, especially Rome, contributed greatly to the creation of a Mediterranean-wide empire controlled by Rome. It was surrounded by the Tyrrhenian Sea to the west, the Ionian Sea to the southeast, and the Adriatic Sea to the east. The Roman Empire, at its height, was the most extensive political and social structure in Western civilization. Ancient Italy was a wide and densely populated region in the world, and it was also surrounded on three sides by the sea, with the other side bounded by some of the highest mountains. This geographical location could be considered a natural barrier. The people of Rome were descendants of Indo-European tribes, and they settled in Italy towards the end of the second millennium BCE.

3.3.1 The Roman Expansion

- ◆ *Expansionist
policies of Rome*
- ◆ *Military
expeditions
and political
manoeuvres*



The Roman Empire extended to regions such as the Italian peninsula and both the eastern and western Mediterranean. The Roman Republic lasted around 500 years, from c. 510 to 27 BCE, and it was during this period that the city-state grew into a huge and powerful empire. The growth and development occurred gradually through wars and conflicts. In the first phase of its expansion, from c. 500 to 280 BCE, Rome focused on bringing the entire Italian peninsula under its control. Rome formed alliances with the Latin-speaking people of the area and subjugated the non-Latin states. By the end of this phase, the entire peninsula was directly or indirectly subject to Rome. The Romans began their pursuit of dominance through expeditions to gain control over the Italian peninsula, initially focusing on central Italy in the



Latium region. The Foedus Cassianum treaty, named after the Roman signatory, was established in 493 BCE to form an alliance with the towns in the region. The ultimate goal of Roman hegemony in central Italy was almost achieved by 330 BCE. Eventually, Rome seized hegemonic power over the most fertile lands of the ancient world, including southern Italy and the entire Italian peninsula, and set its sights on the Mediterranean. It is often challenging to distinguish fact from fiction in accounts of the early wars of Rome.

◆ *Phases of Roman Expansion*

The Romans concluded a treaty of alliance with the League of Latin Cities in order to provide for mutual defence. The skilful diplomacy of Rome in gaining allies helped it to defeat its rivals in Latium and gain control of the important Etruscan city of Veii by the early fourth century. This key victory made Rome the most powerful city in Latium and opened the way to its eventual conquest of Etruria. The first phase of expansion won for Rome the fertile area of Campania around Naples but prompted the defection of Latin allies of Rome, who were uneasy about Roman expansion. The second phase of Roman expansion aimed at extending Roman hegemony over the Mediterranean. For several centuries, control of Sicily had been divided between the Carthaginians in the west and Greek city-states such as Syracuse in the east. By the third century BCE, the ancient Phoenician city of Carthage, located on the coast of North Africa near modern Tunis, was the foremost mercantile power in the western Mediterranean. For over a century, Rome fought a series of wars known as the Punic Wars against the Carthaginians. The Romans themselves referred to the Carthaginians as 'Poeni' (i.e., Phoenicians). There were three Punic Wars: **The First Punic War** (264-241 BCE), **the Second Punic War** (218-201 BCE), and **the Third Punic War** (149-146 BCE).

◆ *Punic wars*

The first Punic War was fought due to Rome's fear of Carthaginian control over the Sicilian port of Messina, which is situated directly across the Italian mainland. Rome also had an interest in Spain and was alarmed by the rapid expansion of Carthaginian power there. In 241 BCE, the first Punic War ended with a peace treaty, making Sicily the first overseas province of the Roman Republic. This war quickly escalated into a major conflict between the Romans and the Carthaginians, with each vying for supremacy over the entire island. The defeat of Carthage required Rome to become a rival naval power. The second Punic War, considered the fiercest of the three, saw Rome suffer early setbacks due to

the brilliance of Carthage's general, Hannibal, following his declaration of the struggle. This war was the most dramatic and decisive, with Hannibal exhibiting fearless character and outstanding tactical genius. Although he failed to seize the Roman city, the Romans gradually regrouped and launched a counter-attack against Carthage in Italy, Sicily, and Spain. The Second Punic War eventually ended with a peace treaty, solidifying Rome as the undisputed champion and overlord of the western Mediterranean region.

◆ *Hannibal's invasion of Italy and its consequences*

In the fall of 218 BCE, Hannibal's invasion of Italy crossed the Alps with an army of about 40,000 soldiers and a number of elephants to transport needed supplies. The city of Rome escaped conquest partly because the temporary dictator, Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus, used delaying tactics such as harassing the Carthaginians without engaging them in a pitched battle. Despite his supremacy, Hannibal was unable to carry out his plan of conquest. Rome lost the important cities of Capua and Syracuse during this war, which resulted in Carthage being displaced as the strongest power in the western Mediterranean. After the Second Punic War, Rome also focused on the eastern Mediterranean, where the balance of power was dominated by the Hellenistic states of Macedonia (under the Antigonids), Egypt (under the Ptolemies), and West Asia (under the Seleucids). Whenever this balance was threatened, some of these states, such as Egypt, sought Roman help to restore it. Moreover, these states themselves were losing their influence in their respective areas. This provided Rome with the opportunity to extend its imperialistic designs in the region. Finally, Rome consolidated its control over the Mediterranean.

◆ *Destruction of Carthage*

Rome accused the Carthaginians of violating the peace treaty, leading to the start of the third Punic War in 149 BCE. After a three-year siege, Scipio Aemilianus conquered and completely destroyed Carthage. The motive behind the third Punic War was the complete destruction of Carthage as a political entity in the region. By the end of the war, the Carthaginian empire had been completely destroyed, and the city of Carthage itself was occupied. The Roman distress caused by Hannibal and the increasing demand in the Roman Republic to annihilate Carthage completely resulted in this third Punic War. The territories annexed by Rome during the wars were reorganized into Roman provinces. Macedonia also became a Roman province, and the Greek states were placed under indirect Roman rule,



supervised by Macedonia. In 146 BCE, the city of Carthage was completely destroyed, and the territory of Carthage became the new Roman province in Africa. By the middle of the second century BCE, the entire Mediterranean was under Roman control. The Roman Empire continued to expand for more than two centuries after this, but the Mediterranean Sea remained the core of the empire.

◆ *Macedonian wars*

The first Macedonian War was fought by Rome to protect Italian trade routes, where Roman ships cleared the Adriatic of pirates in 229 and 219 BCE, establishing a foothold in Illyria and gaining the friendship of several Greek city-states. After the Second Macedonian War, Philip remained on the throne but became an ally of Rome, paying a large indemnity, scaling back his armed forces, and relinquishing control over Greece. While Rome proclaimed the Greek city-states as free and independent, its influence still persisted. In the third Macedonian War, Rome abolished the Macedonian monarchy, captured Perseus, and dismantled his kingdom, but the solution proved temporary. In the fourth Macedonian War, Rome finally annexed Macedon, transforming it into its first Hellenistic province by 146 BCE. In the Syrian war, Antiochus III of Syria sought to restore the Seleucid empire. But Rome's legions defeated him from Greece, winning their first victory on Asian soil. It greatly reduced the Syrian army while dividing Antiochus' holdings in Asia Minor between Rhodes and Pergamum, imposing reparations.

3.3.2 Political Structure and Society

◆ *Kinship, Senate, and aristocracy*

The early structure of the Roman polity was characterized by kinship, the existence of the Senate, and the assembly. The Senate held more power and conducted conflicts among the kings. The monarchy in Rome came to an end by 510 BCE, and the republican state was established, lasting until 27 BCE. The Roman aristocracy monopolized political power in the republic. The origin of the Senate can be traced back to the monarchical period, and it functioned as a council of elders during the republic. Although it had limited constitutional powers, it exercised wide-ranging informal power by issuing decrees to the magistrates of the assemblies. The Senate was the chief authority in the Roman Republic, composed mainly of experienced ex-magistrates who served for life. It gradually assumed control over public expenditure, foreign affairs, military matters, and provincial governance. According to P.A. Brunt, 'the true government organ of the Republic was

the Senate, which acted through annual magistrates elected by the people but drawn from its own ranks. The Senate itself was dominated by a few noble families whose power was based on their wealth and past services to the state.'

◆ *Roman society
- Patricians and
Plebeians*

Roman society was mainly divided into two classes or orders: Patricians and Plebeians, which represented the permanent inhabitants of early Roman society. Patricians constituted a small, close-knit hereditary elite, while the Plebeians were considered the common people, and both groups were included in the category of citizens. Simply put, Patricians were descendants of the first one hundred senators appointed to the Roman aristocratic Senate by King Romulus. According to modern historians, this classification was more complex than a simple oversimplification. Roman society was vertically organized into families, clans, tribes, and communities, and in the performance of religious and civic duties, these divisions cut across generational and economic boundaries. The term 'order' (ordo) generally indicates the socio-political rank of citizens. It was not possible for a Plebeian to become a Patrician solely through wealth or political power. For a long time, intermarriage between the two orders was prohibited by law.

◆ *Patricians -
High-class
nobles*

Patricians formed a socio-economic and politically dominant group in Roman society, with automatic access to wealth, political power, and high social and ritual status; they exerted extensive control over Roman religion, comprising the noble families of Rome. In 509 BCE, a group of patricians expelled the Etruscan king and established the Roman Republic, a form of government with elected officials, where patricians elected senators to serve their interests. Until the end of the Republic, many important priesthoods remained closed to the plebeians. Initially, the patricians monopolized the Republican senate, with only male members participating, while plebeians and women were excluded. The early republic had 300 senate members, which later increased to 600. The senators, mostly significant landowners, held the majority of power, indicating that the Roman Republic was likely governed by a landed patrician aristocratic oligarchy. Patricians thus constituted the dominant social group, influencing socio-economic, political, and religious matters. The order of the Patricians was based on patriarchal kinship groups called 'gentes' or clans, originating from warrior bands led by elite leaders known as 'curia'. The term 'patrician' itself derived from



the words 'pater' (father) or 'patres' (fathers), collectively referred to as 'patricii' or 'patricians'.

◆ *Plebeians-
Roman citizens*

The Plebeians, also known as plebs, represented an undifferentiated group of citizens comprising the vast majority (likely around 90%) of Roman citizens. As Roman citizens, the plebeians served in the army, paid taxes, participated in the assemblies, and were protected by Roman law. The plebeian class in Rome was divided into three segments: the plebeian elite, the small peasantry ('assidui'), and the landless ('proletarii'). The plebeians, consisting of small farmers and propertyless citizens, were subject to various forms of exploitation by the aristocracy. Their main demands included political inclusion, an end to the economic exploitation of the peasantry by the aristocracy, and the codification of laws that were previously unwritten and subject to interpretation by the patricians for their own benefit. The plebeians formed the backbone of the Roman army, making it impossible for the aristocracy to ignore their grievances. They had their own political assembly called the Plebeian Council, and all Roman citizens, including plebeians, belonged to the Centuriate Assembly, which was responsible for annual elections to top political offices. Generally, plebeians were merchants, farmers, artisans, and others. They were granted the right to vote, while the patricians had the right to vote in the Senate.

3.3.2.1 Officials of the Republic

◆ *Consuls, censors
and junior
magistrates*

Consuls were the elected magistrates and the highest officials of the republic, responsible for the executive, judicial, and military functions. The plebeian assembly elected citizens to serve as consuls. Until 367 BCE, only patricians were eligible to become consuls, but there was a prolonged conflict that led to one of the consulships being opened to plebeians. However, this provision remained largely symbolic as the patricians controlled the electoral process and could manipulate the selection of candidates. It was only in the late Republic that plebeians actually started getting elected as consuls, which eventually paved the way for their entry into the Senate. Another group of elected officials known as 'censors' were chosen every five years and held office for eighteen months at a time. The censors were responsible for overseeing public morality and taking action against citizens who violated moral norms. They also had additional functions, such as leasing public lands and granting state contracts. In the early Republic, only patricians could be elected as censors, but later plebeians also became

eligible for this position. Alongside the consuls and censors, numerous junior magistrates were elected as well.

- ◆ *Consuls' power*
- ◆ *Election and appointment of consuls and censors*

The authority of the Roman Republic was vested in two consuls, who served as the army commanders of the formal field army known as 'legions'. Initially, there were two legions. The consuls were the highest officials and chief magistrates of the Roman Republic, wielding supreme power that included the ability to consult the gods on behalf of the state. They were elected and appointed for a one-year term by the citizen assembly called the 'comitia centuriata', with each consul having veto power over the other. Their primary responsibility was a military command, and they were supported by numerous magistrates, each with their own duties. Censors were a distinct group of magistrates responsible for conducting the census, which determined the eligibility of adult male citizens for elective positions. Censors were appointed by the consul after a five-year election cycle and held office for eighteen months. Initially, only patricians could serve as censors, but later the position was opened to plebeians as well, reflecting the social struggle between the classes.

- ◆ *Citizen assemblies*

The Roman political system included the tribal assembly dating back to the ancient monarchy. It consisted of adult males as members of this assembly. The 'comitia curiata' served as the assembly for all citizens in Rome, preceding the Republic under the Etruscan monarchy. But it lost its effectiveness when an oligarchical state was established by the patricians, although it formally continued to exist without real power. Following the struggle between plebeians and patricians, the plebeians formed a new assembly called the 'comitia centuriata'. 'Comitia centuriata' is where citizens were grouped into 'centuries' and became an important assembly during the republican period. It is responsible for electing consuls and censors, as well as approving legislation. The name 'comitia centuriata' derives from 'comitium' and 'curiae,' meaning 'meeting place' and 'smaller districts', respectively. The 'comitia curiata' or curiate Assembly included all adult arm-bearing male citizens from both the patrician and plebeian orders.

The patricians also played a role in controlling the proceedings of the 'comitia curiata' by occupying relevant presiding positions and exerting influence over the judgments made by the respective curiae. All matters were presented or



- ◆ *Patricians controlled comitia curiata*

participated in front of the curiata. These men were divided into three tribes, which represented three districts of the city, each further subdivided into ten smaller districts called 'curiae'. Consequently, the 'comitia curiata' consisted of 30 curiae, which were later divided into four urban tribes and 26 rural districts. Each curia elected its own leader, called a 'curio,' who held the position for life and was typically a patrician. This assembly was organized based on kinship-based social curiae, which extended to clans encompassing both patricians and plebeians. The 'comitia centuriata', created during the monarchical period and reformed during the republic, was an assembly of armed men organized into centuries, the smallest unit of the Roman army consisting of adult males.

- ◆ *'Curiae' for community affairs and festivals*

The villages had their own internal 'curiae', which served as forums for discussing community affairs and hosting banquets and religious festivals dedicated to specific gods. Each curiae was presided over by a president, the curio, who was assisted by two attendants, a lictor, and a flamer. Each curia was expected to provide a hundred men, resulting in a total army size of three thousand-foot soldiers. Additionally, three hundred cavalymen were directly recruited from the tribes. The infantry commanders, known as military tribunes ('tribune militum'), number three. The forum served as the focal point of Roman commercial, political, and legal activities. It evolved from a marketplace to a central meeting place surrounded by temples, monuments, shopping arcades, the senate house, law courts, and other government buildings. Following Julius Caesar, the emperor constructed six additional fora in Rome to accommodate the expanding size of the city and enhance their own prestige.

- ◆ *Establishment of 'Concilium Plebis'*
- ◆ *The election procedure of tribunes*

Since technically, the term 'populus' (people) was applied to the Romans in a military sense to describe the armed people of the city. Outside the organization of the clans was another group known as the plebs. Several decades later, the plebeians were granted their own assembly, the 'Concilium Plebis' (assembly of the plebs), which was based on tribal or geographic divisions. It mostly discussed issues related to plebeians. Gradually, it developed its own structure and became an institutionalized plebeian assembly with regular procedures and elected officials. In 494 BCE, the plebeians forced the Roman state to formally accept two officers elected by the 'Concilium Plebis', known as Tribunes or 'tribuni plebis' as spokesmen of the plebeians.

With the assistance of tribunes, 'Concilium Plebis' passed resolutions. By the end of 448 BCE, there were ten tribunes who were elected annually by the 'Concilium Plebis'. The tribunes of the plebeian assembly were also co-opted by the oligarchy, as wealthy tribunes dominated the popular assembly. They were recognized by the Senate. Rome was thus an aristocratic republic.

3.3.2.2 Struggle between Patricians and Plebeians

In the early history of the Republic of Rome, there was a continuous conflict between patricians and plebeians. The cause of this struggle was the patricians' demand to hold all political power exclusively in their hands, while the Plebeians demanded participation in the political process. From 510 to 287 BCE, a period of intense struggle between patricians and plebeians was observed. In 494 BCE, one of the phases of this struggle was marked by the recognition accorded to the tribunes. The social conflict, known in Roman sources as the 'conflict of orders,' arose between the patricians and plebeians. There were several causes of this social conflict, including the debt bondage or enslavement of the poorer section of the plebeians in the event of their failure to repay loans, the abuse of the law by the aristocrats, and the ambition of elite plebeians to gain access to offices monopolized by the patricians. Eventually, the plebeians gained some political power through constant conflict, as the Roman military organization heavily depended on the peasants, who constituted the main fighting force. The Roman aristocracy had to seek the support of the peasantry for defending the city and, subsequently for expansion in Italy. The patrician aristocracy held the majority of power within the Roman Empire.

◆ 'Conflict of orders'

The expansion of the empire resulted in the aristocracy amassing wealth and widening the gap between the rich and the poor. The initial phase of the conflict of orders lasted until the third century BCE when most of the plebeians' demands were fulfilled. The establishment and recognition of public assemblies such as the 'comitia centuriata', 'concilium plebis', and 'comitia tributa', as well as the appointment of plebeian officers known as 'tribunus plebis', can be considered early victories for the plebeians in this social struggle. As a result, plebeians became eligible to become consuls, and the first plebeian consul was elected in 367 BCE.

◆ First Plebeian Consul



◆ *Genesis of 'Code of the Twelve Tables'*

The plebeian struggle was marked by four major aspects. The first aspect involved the plebeians demanding the creation of a written code of law to prevent the arbitrary exercise of judicial authority, as the absence of such a law could lead to misuse. The plebeians threatened the Senate, stating that they would refuse to perform military service unless steps were taken to establish a proper legal framework for the Roman state. In response, the Senate formed a commission consisting of ten members, presided over by Appius Claudius, with the task of creating a written law for the Romans. This law is widely known as the 'Code of the Twelve Tables' and was produced around 450 BCE. Although the full text of this law has not been preserved and is considered lost, the codification of laws took the form of the famous 'law of twelve tables.' These laws were inscribed on twelve wooden tablets, which were displayed in a public area near the forum, the central area of the city. The codification of laws into written form aimed to bring customary laws under a unified system and establish the principle of equality before the law as a fundamental feature.

◆ *Social equality through intermarriage*
◆ *Creation of 'Comitia tributa'*

In 445 BCE, the plebeians moved closer to achieving social equality with the patricians when a law was passed allowing intermarriage between the two classes. The code of laws, known as the Twelve Tables, created by the decemvirs, has come down to us in a fragmentary manner. The second significant development occurred in 367 BCE when the consulships were opened to plebeians. The Consuls were elected by the 'comitia centuriata', and the names of candidates had to be proposed by senators. It was not easy for a plebeian to be elected to the highest magistracy of the Roman state. Another important reform involved the reorganization of the army and its political branch, the Centuriate Assembly ('comitia centuriata'). 'Comitia tributa' was another assembly created, encompassing all citizens, including patricians and plebeians, grouped according to tribes or 'tribus'. The 'comitia tributa' elected the tribunes and the minor officers of the state while also functioning as a judicial body to try offences against the 'majesty of the people.' These plebeian Consuls became members of the Senate through their consulship. By following this path, a few influential plebeian families rose to prominence in the late Republic.

The crucial demand of the plebeians was the abolition of 'nexum'. 'Nexum' was the strict enforcement of formal contracts, which was a harsh provision in Roman law.

◆ *Abolition of 'nexum'*

In 'nexum', if a Roman entered into a formal agreement while contracting a loan, with the debtor's person pledged as security, failure to honour the agreement led to debt bondage. Peasants and the poor often incurred debts due to participation in wars or various economic needs, leading to chronic indebtedness. When they were unable to repay the loans, they faced enslavement. 'Nexum' thus became a means for big landowners to convert free peasants into unfree labour. 'Nexum' was abolished. The abolition of 'nexum' meant that no free Roman citizen could be subjected to debt bondage.

◆ *End of Plebeian struggle*
◆ *Full magisterial powers to the Plebian tribunal*

Another significant milestone was reached in 287 BCE during the struggle between the patricians and the plebeians in the early Republic. The plebeian Tribunes were granted full magisterial powers, leading to a forceful threat by the plebeians to withdraw from military service. These events are believed to have brought an end to the conflict of the orders. In the initial phase of the republic, most peasants were plebeians, but over time, the plebeians themselves became socially differentiated. A small faction of plebeian elites gained power and wealth through political concessions, attaining a status equal to the patricians. This group became fully integrated into the ruling oligarchy of Rome during the late Republic and no longer shared the same interests as the rest of the plebeians, showing little concern for the rights of the peasantry. The common peasants of Rome, known as 'assidui', formed the majority of the Roman infantry. The abolition of debt bondage in 326 BCE placed restrictions on the enslavement of peasants for non-repayment of loans. However, the peasants continued to face the loss of their landholdings.

3.3.3 Conflicts and Expansion

◆ *Rebellion of peasant soldiers and shortage of soldiers*

The creation of a professional army loyal to its commanders was a significant development in Roman society. The small landholding poor peasants formed the strong pillars of the army. The rebellion of these poor soldiers, who constituted the majority of the professional armies, was a result of their demands for privileges in Roman society. This rebellion led to a shortage of soldiers because landless citizens could not afford to render military service without their own resources. Paid soldiers were permanently engaged in campaigns and stationed for long periods outside Italy in distant parts of the empire. Notable commanders during the period between 100 BCE and 27 BCE included Marius, Sulla, Crassus, Pompey,



Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, and Augustus. The army often played a significant role in Roman politics.

♦ *Victory of Sulla in the Civil War*

The intervention of the Roman army in the affairs of Rome during the late Republic coincided with major military campaigns in West Asia. The Romans had to maintain a large army in the east to consolidate their position and suppress resistance. Marius was given charge of the campaigns in the East for some time. However, he faced opposition from Sulla, who headed the most conservative group within the patrician aristocracy at that time. Sulla, stationed in the east, refused to hand over command to Marius. Instead, he marched to Rome with his army and attempted to seize power by force. This led to a Civil War between the supporters of Sulla and Marius. After the death of Marius, Sulla gained power and conducted military campaigns in Anatolia and Greece, successfully quelling resistance to Roman occupation in the region. Sulla returned to Rome in 82 BCE and brutally suppressed his opponents with the help of the army. He defied the rule that dictated a maximum six-month period for a Roman Dictator to hold office during an emergency, extending his dictatorship indefinitely until his retirement in 79 BCE. Sulla's dictatorship had a profound impact on the history of the Republic. The position of Dictator was another significant official in the Roman Republic. The Dictator was appointed by the consul at the senate's request for a six-month period, particularly during serious differences between the two consuls or during significant military or domestic crises.

♦ *Dictatorial power of Sulla and his successors*

The first great dictator in Roman history was Quintus Fabius Maximus, whose policy of delay was instrumental in bringing about the defeat of Hannibal. Sulla and Julius Caesar are important figures in Roman history who held the position of dictator. Sulla, whose full name is Lucius Cornelius Sulla, was one of the greatest military personalities and came to prominence as a result of renewed conflict. He was considered the most successful general in Rome and was elected consul in 88 BCE. The Senate chose Sulla, a patrician, but his role was challenged by Marius, who gained the backing of the tribal assembly. Sulla ultimately won the position in 88 BCE by moving his soldiers into the capital and expelling his adversaries. It was the first time a Roman army marched against Rome. Sulla defeated Mithridates in 84 BCE and quickly returned to Rome. In 82 BCE, he revived and occupied the old office of dictator, abolishing the traditional six-month limitation of tenure.

◆ *Pompey's reign in Rome*

Other prominent figures in Roman politics include Lucullus, Crassus, Pompey, and Julius Caesar. Pompey, responsible for the defeat of Sertorius, was sent to replace Lucullus and given extensive powers surpassing those of any previous Roman military commander. He was fully authorized to settle the east in any manner he deemed appropriate. By 63 BCE, Roman authority over Anatolia was fully established. Pompey managed to annex Seleucid territories in Syria, making Syria a Roman province with its headquarters at Antioch. These developments solidified Rome as a major political power in West Asia.

◆ *Conflicts between the Generals and the Senate of Rome*

The Senate of Rome faltered in the face of the power wielded by Pompey, Julius Caesar, and Crassus, as they held significant influence during these conflicts. This struggle between the commanders and the Senate created a political crisis. In response, Pompey, Julius Caesar, and Crassus formed a coalition in 60 BCE known as the First Triumvirate, which was later renewed in 56 BCE. However, after Crassus's death, Pompey and Julius Caesar continued their power struggle. Pompey was defeated in 48 BCE and sought refuge in Egypt, where he was eventually assassinated. Julius Caesar became the dominant military leader in Rome and gradually assumed the role of dictator, amassing more power over a period of nearly ten years.

◆ *Assassination plot and murder of Julius Caesar*

◆ *Formation of the Second Triumvirate*

◆ *Expansion of Rome under the Principate*

The aristocracy posed challenges to the dictatorship of Caesar, leading to his assassination in 44 BCE. The conspirators responsible for plotting and executing the murder of Caesar, belonged to a faction within the aristocracy that aimed to prevent the transformation of the Republic into a monarchy. Mark Antony, a prominent ally of Julius Caesar, and Lepidus, the 'master of the horse' (an important office associated with the Dictator), formed a new triumvirate with Octavian, Julius Caesar's grand-nephew and adopted son, known as the Second Triumvirate in 43 BCE. The combined forces of Mark Antony and Cleopatra were defeated by Octavian at Actium in 31 BCE, resulting in the deaths of Mark Antony and Cleopatra by 30 BCE. Octavian gained a virtual monopoly over political power in Rome. The Roman Empire continued to expand under the Principate until 117 CE, reaching its greatest territorial extent. The Mediterranean region remained politically unified under Roman rule for several centuries and played a vital role in sustaining the empire's economy.

3.3.4 Slavery

- ◆ *'Slave Revolt'*

Slavery was a widespread and significant institution in ancient Rome, playing a crucial role in the economy. Roman civilization heavily relied on slave labour, and the decline in the supply of slaves by the end of the second century CE had a critical impact. The consolidation of Roman rule in the western provinces led to the expansion of agriculture and slavery in Spain and Gaul under Augustus and his successors. The slave revolt of 73 BCE, led by the gladiator Spartacus, originated from a training school in Capua, central Italy, attracting a large number of slaves. Slaves were treated as commodities and bought and sold in markets, being utilized in various sectors of the Roman economy, including agriculture, mining, handicraft production, and even clerical roles in government offices. The Roman state exerted control over slaves and took measures to disperse them and prevent solidarity among them, as well as limiting kinship ties. Several slave revolts occurred, such as the one in Sicily between 136-132 BCE and the significant Spartacus revolt in 73-71 BCE, which originated in Capua.

- ◆ *Division of slave categories*

- ◆ *Emergence of the concept of a 'slave society' in ancient Rome*

All forms of slave revolts were inhumanely suppressed by the Roman state. In Roman society, slaves were classified into skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled categories. Female slaves were few in number and primarily confined to domestic work due to their perceived unsuitability for manual labour. The majority of the slaves worked on 'latifundia', the huge landed estate that dominated the agrarian economy of western Europe. The quality of life for slaves varied greatly. While the food ration provided to slaves was meant for basic survival, evidence suggests that landlords recognized the need to adequately feed slaves for efficient labour, especially in agriculture. Domestic slaves were housed in cells within their master's household. The concept of a 'slave society' refers to a community where slaves constitute the primary labour force and, in some cases, the majority of the population. The proportion of slaves in a society to qualify as a 'slave society' is arbitrarily fixed between 20 and 35 per cent of the total population. Both Greek and Roman societies developed slavery as a systematic mode of production, profoundly impacting their respective societies.

In Roman law, slaves were referred to as 'Servus' and were considered absolute property, comparable to commodities that could be bought and sold in the market. The Roman Empire unfolded the full potential of the slave mode of

◆ *The growth of slavery as a mode of production*

production, surpassing the experiences of Greece, according to Perry Anderson. The growth of slavery as a mode of production in both Greece and Rome was influenced by similar socio-economic conditions. Keith Bradley argued that a major source of slave labour supply was the influx of war captives from military campaigns, who were then employed in landed estates. Roman slavery, from its inception, was a product of Roman imperialism. P.A. Brunt estimated that in 225 BCE, out of the 5 million population of Italy, 4,400,000 were free citizens, and 600,000 were slaves. However, by 43 BCE, out of a population of 7.5 million, there were 3 million slaves and 4.5 million free citizens. Ellen M. Wood argued that the Roman Empire was the only social formation that could be characterized as a slave social formation. In the later imperial period, Rome was no longer a slave society, as slavery no longer dominated large-scale production in rural areas, and large-scale production in cities had been reduced to state factories.

◆ *Scarcity of slaves*

During the later Roman Empire, two significant changes occurred. The scarcity of slaves led to a steep rise in their market value, making it increasingly difficult to acquire and maintain them. Simultaneously, villages inhabited by small landholders and free peasants, which had coexisted alongside slaves in the empire, sought the protection of powerful landowners against state-imposed taxes and conscription. As a result, they occupied an economic position similar to that of former slaves. The unification of the Roman Empire and the subsequent establishment of Pax Romana, also known as Roman Peace, marked a period of approximately two centuries in the late Roman period. While Pax Romana facilitated the dissemination of Latin as a common language, implemented a standardized coinage system, and introduced a uniform legal code, it also carried significant political and economic implications. The advent of Roman Peace disrupted the supply of war captives, which had been the primary source of slave labour. The Roman slave economy relied heavily on this supply, and the interruption of such captives posed substantial challenges. Throughout history, slave labour has proven incapable of self-reproduction, and this inherent limitation within the Roman slave economy contributed to its eventual collapse. However, slavery did not completely vanish. It persisted in late Roman society and remained prevalent in certain regions. Even in the 5th century CE, some wealthy landowners owned thousands of slaves.

3.3.5 The Late Roman Empire

- ◆ *The introduction of Pax Romana*
- ◆ *Rulers of the Late Roman Empire*

Octavian succeeded after the death of Julius Caesar around 31 BCE. It was very difficult for him to crown himself as a monarch due to the traditions of the republic. Eventually, he called himself 'princeps' or the first citizen. The Senate honoured him with the title 'Augustus the revered,' and he ruled over Rome for four decades until he died in 14 CE. During his reign, the Senate acted as a puppet, and all the power was under his control. Another significant feature of his reign was the introduction of a long and glorious era known as 'Pax Romana' or the peace of Rome. In 14 CE, Augustus died and was succeeded by his adopted son Tiberius, who ruled until 37 CE. Between 14 CE and 68 CE, four rulers governed Rome. In 68 CE, Nero, the last king, committed suicide, bringing an end to the dynasty's rule. This was followed by a brief civil war, and in 69 CE, Vespasian gained control of the Roman Empire (69-79 CE). He was succeeded by his sons Titus and Domitian. Domitian was assassinated in 96 CE. The Senate then chose Nerva, who ruled for only two years. Trajan, the governor of upper Germany, succeeded Nerva and ruled from 98 to 117 CE. The period from 98 to 180 CE. witnessed rulers such as Trajan (98-117 CE), Hadrian (117-138 CE), Antoninus Pius (138-161 CE), and Marcus Aurelius (161-180 CE).

- ◆ *Tetrarchy system under Diocletian*

This period is considered the most powerful and prosperous one in Roman history. The growth and development of infrastructure, such as roads, harbours, and irrigation, facilitated agriculture and trade. However, the prosperous period of Pax Romana eventually came to an end. From 180 CE to 284 CE, Rome experienced anarchy and instability. After a prolonged period of instability, Diocletian (284-305 CE) brought about political stability and better administration. His greatest implementation was dividing the state into four autonomous parts to ensure efficient stability, with each part under the rule of an emperor. Diocletian received the eastern parts (Nicomedia), Maximian ruled Italy and Africa, Constantius governed Spain, Gaul, and Britain, and Galerius presided over Illyricum, Macedonia, and Greece. The tetrarchy (rule of four) did not pose any problems due to the forceful personality of Diocletian. After Diocletian's retirement, Constantine I (306-337) became the emperor of the empire. Dynastic ambitions led to the end of the tetrarchy. Around 324 CE, Constantine became the sole emperor and exerted absolute power, making him the

most powerful monarch. Constantine, I founded the city of Constantinople, now Istanbul in Turkey, which became the capital of the eastern parts of the Roman Empire. His significant achievement was shifting the seat of the emperor to the east. Rome gradually underwent significant changes under his rule, with Diocletian and Constantine being the key figures driving these changes.

Constantine I was the first Roman emperor to adopt Christianity before his death. After Constantine's death, the main emperors who ruled were Constantius (337-361 CE), Valentinian I (364-375 CE), Valens (375-378 CE), and Theodosius (379-395 CE). During their rule, heathen sects were prohibited. In 395 CE, after the death of Theodosius, the Roman Empire was mainly divided into two: the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire. The Eastern Roman Empire, with its capital at Constantinople, and the Western part under the control of Honorius, with Rome as its capital. In the middle of the 4th century, central Asian tribes increased their incursions into Eastern Europe, which resulted in the movement of Germanic tribes into Roman territories. By the end of the 4th century and the beginning of the 5th century, the attacks of Germanic tribes on Roman territory caused the collapse of the borders. The most serious blow came in 410 CE when the Visigoths, a Germanic tribe, attacked Rome and plundered the city. In the middle of the 5th century, the Huns, led by Attila, launched vigorous invasions that included Italy and Gaul. The Germanic tribes joined forces with the Romans to defeat them. In 455 CE, Rome was invaded by the Vandals.

- ◆ *Division of the Roman Empire*
- ◆ *Constant attacks from Germanic tribes*



- ◆ *Downfall of the Western Roman Empire*
- ◆ *Continuation of Eastern Roman Empire as Byzantine Empire*



In 476 CE, the Western Roman Empire came to an end with the downfall of Romulus Augustulus. The Eastern Roman Empire, although weakened and having lost many territories, continued as the Byzantine Empire, claiming to be the legitimate successor of the great Roman Empire. They attempted to maintain their existence but could not achieve their goals. The Byzantine Emperor Justinian I made an effort to revive and unify the empire by conquering Italy, but this effort was only partially successful. New socio-economic structures emerged in the West as a result of the occupation and ruled over Roman territories by the Germanic tribes. The existing Roman institutions and structures were not completely removed, and most civil and judicial institutions continued to coexist with the new structures for a long time. However, the army was completely under the control of the

new rulers.

3.3.5.1 Society

◆ *Patriarchal society*

In the Roman family system, the father was the head of the family and had control over all other family members. The role of women in the early days of the republic was miserable as they were not allowed to hold property, and upon marriage, they transferred their submission from father to husband. The children learned to obey paternal commands unquestioningly and adhere to ancestral customs. The hierarchical Roman family, led by the *paterfamilias* (patriarchal head of the family), also shaped the early Roman state by fostering obedience to authority. After the death of the father, his role was taken over by his own son, and he would become the head of the family.

◆ *Class-based division*

Equestrians were the wealthy class people of the late Roman Empire. Members of this class were settled for business reasons in imperial headquarters and provincial towns, occupying magistracies and priesthoods in their cities and providing commanders for the army. The position of the upper class changed during the period between the middle of the 4th century to the end of the 6th century. The higher bureaucrats emerged as a new hereditary aristocracy. The important role of the lower class was to serve their upper-class people, which consisted of peasants, potters, teachers, entertainers, prostitutes, etc. Peasants were the biggest group among them. The worst situation for the peasants was that they tried to escape to the army, church, and as workmen into cities. This created an unprecedented shortage of farm labour. In addition to that, skilled workers such as bakers, silversmiths, and wool workers were also included.

Collegia were their trade associations that followed social and religious functions at times. Apart from that, other trade guilds were also active. The hereditary system was introduced in many professions by the late Roman emperors. This system became a general feature of the societal order, resembling a caste-based transfer from father to son. It was visible in the later army and civil administration as well. As mentioned earlier, slavery became an inevitable part of society. Slaves provided lavish household services for the rich classes in the Western and Eastern parts of the empire. From the third century CE, the slave mode of production began to face a crisis. During the period until 180 CE, the Roman territories expanded, and the monarchy as an institution

◆ *Elective method
and hereditary
principle*

strengthened. By the end of the 2nd century, the army played a significant role in the selection of the emperor, becoming an inevitable aspect of Roman society. This continued for a long time but gradually weakened the relationship between the Senate and the Army. Until the middle of the 3rd century CE, the Roman state remained theoretically a republic. The hereditary principle remained weak, and there were very few dynastic successions. The monarchy was essentially elective in nature, where the emperor was elected by the authority of the senate and the consent of the soldiers.

◆ *Organization
of state on
monarchical
pattern*

In the later Roman Empire, Diocletian was the first emperor who organized the state in a monarchical pattern. Diocletian's traditions of the monarchical system continued for the next hundred years. Before Diocletian, he did not hold any monarchical title or wear royal attire. However, during his reign, he began to dress in elegant and opulent royal garments, and a crown was placed on his head. He adopted the title of 'dominus et deus' (divine lord and master). Additionally, he introduced various ceremonies to ensure the dignity and authority of the court. He built a spectacular palace at Salona (modern Yugoslavia) and enjoyed his retirement life there. The glorification of the emperor and their military abilities remained an enduring feature of the Roman emperor. Ordinary citizens were regularly reminded of the victorious campaigns in various ways. The Senate played a vital role in the administration of Rome under the republic and even during the reign of the emperors. However, after the emergence of absolute monarchy during the reign of Diocletian and Constantine I, the Senate became a non-functioning political body.

3.3.5.2 Religion

In the early Roman Empire, both the elites and the common people worshipped various deities, gods, and goddesses. Jupiter was revered as the god of kings and the divine protector of the city of Rome. Roman state religion revolved around the worship of anthropomorphic gods, with Jupiter being one of the most prominent. Mars, the god of war, held a significant position as well. The religion of the Roman Empire was polytheistic, and different regions, particularly in the western part of the empire, followed diverse religious cults. Initially, the early Roman religion consisted of animistic beliefs, which held that spirits or 'numina' governed all aspects of human life and manifested

- ◆ *Polytheistic religion*
- ◆ *The presence of the Pontifex or priest*

themselves in natural phenomena. The religious affairs of the Roman state were organized and overseen by the 'Pontifex' (priest). During the early republic, the Pontifex was elected from among the plebeians and was responsible for performing all the religious rituals of the state. In later periods, the chief priest, known as the 'Pontifex Maximus', held the role of the head of the state religion of Rome, wielding significant political and religious authority. Augustus, the first Roman emperor, declared himself 'Pontifex Maximus', and many subsequent emperors also adopted this title. The eastern part of the empire witnessed remarkable cults such as Atargatis, Cybele, and Serapis, originating in Syria, Anatolia, and Egypt, respectively.

- ◆ *Assimilation of various cultures and religious beliefs*

The people of Syria believed in the god Atargatis, and as the Romans stationed in Syria, they gradually adopted and followed this deity, praying for protection. Eventually, they brought this god back with them as they left Syria, and the cult gained popularity in other parts of the Roman Empire. Cybele, the famous cult from Anatolia, worshipped the mother goddess. It became part of the Roman religion, particularly after the Second Punic War (218-201 BCE). The cult was associated with bull sacrifices and gradually spread throughout the Roman Empire. During Pompey's reign, the cult of Mithras, originating in Iran and representing both light and the sun, entered Rome. Roman soldiers stationed in the eastern region of the empire embraced this cult, and it also gained popularity among Romans residing in the Roman territories of Western Asia.

- ◆ *Conversion to Christianity*

When the Romans converted to Christianity, they refused to worship the idols of Roman gods, deities, and the statues of deceased emperors. The Roman ruling class grew suspicious of Christians, and St. Peter was executed under the rule of the Roman emperor Nero. St. Peter is believed to be the founder of the Roman Church in Rome.

3.3.5.3 Civil Administration

During the later Roman period, the officials were referred to as magistrates, and they served as the heads of various departments. Most of the officials were appointed separately by the emperors starting from the year 396 CE. Each metropolis had its own police force and judicial system, and they appointed their own annually elected magistrates called praetors and quaestors. The quaestors were primarily responsible for financial matters and assisted senior

- ◆ *Higher officials*
- ◆ *Division of the entire empire into provinces*

magistrates in carrying out their duties. With the decline of the Senate's power, the senatorial provinces disappeared, and their administration became the exclusive domain of the emperor. Diocletian implemented radical reforms in the provincial administration by dividing the entire empire into a hundred provinces. The number of officials increased, and they became more efficient in governing the empire. Diocletian consolidated several provinces into a single diocese, which was administered by an official acting on behalf of the praetorian prefect and under the military control of a leader. In the late empire, the governor of the provinces played a key role in the administration.

- ◆ *Functions of officials*

Praetors, whose number gradually expanded from one to eight, were elected annually to handle judicial functions, assist in commanding the army, and, after 277 BCE, to administer several of Rome's provinces. They acted as junior colleagues to the consuls, and the praetor was appointed by the consul for one year through voting in the 'comitia centuriata'. 'Aediles' were another group of junior officials appointed for a year to oversee public works, markets, roads, archives, and food supply. They were also responsible for organizing public festivals and annual games. The four Aediles included two plebeian Aediles elected in the 'comitia tributa'. 'Apparitores', a group of officials appointed for a year, originated from the original quaestors and served as scribes, secretaries, and accountants to assist the priests and magistrates. Over time, various minor officials collectively known as 'apparitores' were included. Unlike magistrates, who held honorary positions, they were salaried employees recruited from the ordinary citizens. Magistrates played a vital role in the republican form of Roman government.

3.3.5.4 Judicial System

The civil law of Rome formed the foundation of the imperial Roman state. It protected the interests of the wealthy classes and ensured property rights for these classes from the outset. On the other hand, criminal law was primarily designed for the lower classes and remained arbitrary and despotic. During Constantine's reign, the criminal law was exceptionally severe. His 'Corpus Juris Civilis' (Body of Civil Laws) became the basis for legal systems subsequently developed throughout Europe, playing a crucial role in the process of political integration in the continent. Roman law was based on three important principles. First, an accused person was presumed innocent until proven guilty. Second,

◆ *Three types of laws*

the accused had the right to confront their accuser and provide a defence against the charges. Lastly, guilt had to be established through “clearer than daylight” social evidence. The Roman legal system included criminal courts, lawyers, and juries, allowing individuals accused of crimes to defend themselves. Romans created a body of laws rooted in broad principles of justice, extending it across their vast empire. Roman law encompassed three main forms: ‘ius civile’ (law of the citizen), ‘ius gentium’ (law of the peoples), and ‘ius naturale’ (natural law). The oldest, ‘ius civile’, derived from ancient customs and religious practices, encompassing enactments that applied exclusively to Roman citizens. The law of the peoples, ‘ius gentium’, was developed to regulate transactions, often of a commercial nature, with non-citizens. The final form, ‘ius naturale’, referred to the Stoic ideal of a universal law of nature, believed to originate from God and thus considered eternal, universally applicable, and binding on all people.

3.3.5.5 Economy

◆ *Urbanization and ruralization*

◆ *Heavy taxation of the population*

Urban growth was largely concentrated in new military and administrative centres, which were favoured by the emperors. Some of the most important urban centres were Milan, Sardica, and Constantinople. While some historians argue that de-urbanization occurred during the late Roman Empire, with a gradual shift towards ruralization, there was also a simultaneous growth of rural markets (fora), which served as meeting places for the exchange of goods and ideas, contributing to urban development. Urbanization in Roman cities was exemplified by the presence of amenities such as baths, temples, amphitheatres, aqueducts, and roads. According to P. Garnsey and R. Saller, urbanization played a crucial role in the process of Romanization, resulting from both government initiatives and local efforts. In the later Roman Empire, the military and bureaucratic apparatus expanded significantly, necessitating the imposition of various taxes to sustain the vast state machinery. The tax collectors, known as ‘decuriones’ and ‘curiales’, were responsible for collecting taxes from peasants, artisans, and traders on behalf of the state. However, collusion between ‘curiales’ and landlords often led to the embezzlement of state taxes. Even in the third century CE, this practice of tax theft was prevalent. Diocletian implemented legal measures to curb these malpractices by ‘curiales’.

The Roman economy was predominantly agrarian and



◆ *Primary economic activities*

centred around the trade of commodities such as grain and wine. Agricultural activities formed the foundation of the Roman economy, with large farms operated by slaves. Romans also derived wealth from mining, and affluent individuals could purchase luxurious goods from various parts of the world. Agriculture was the primary occupation, comprising both small-scale farmers and wealthy landowners who employed numerous peasants and slaves to work on their extensive lands. The main crops cultivated were wheat, grapes, and olives. The agrarian economy focused on cereal production, interspersed with vineyards and olive groves, as well as the rearing of sheep, goats, and cattle. Pastoral activities held more significance than crop cultivation in other parts of Italy.

3.3.5.6 Army

◆ *Transformation of the Roman army*

Since the beginning of the Roman Empire, the army has been a fundamental component of the state. It expanded and protected the empire under the command of the emperor. During the Roman Republic, soldiers often had to leave their homes to fight in distant battlefields, resulting in the loss of their properties. However, from the first century CE, the Roman army became instrumental in placing various generals on the throne as emperors. Augustus implemented measures to allocate land to thousands of soldiers, instilling discipline and loyalty within the army and transforming it into a permanent and professional force. The military command was held by the 'magister equitum', with the duces of the 'limitanci' and the 'comites' of the 'comitatus' serving as military commanders. The army's size doubled, growing from three thousand to six thousand men. The number of commanders correspondingly increased, with the two consuls being replaced by military tribunes with consular power. The basic units consisted of approximately 4,000 infantry and 300 cavalry soldiers.

In the late Roman Empire, Diocletian introduced new enrollment regulations, resulting in an army strength of around 450,000 during the 3rd and 4th centuries. Sons of soldiers gradually became customary recruits for the army. The top military commands were primarily given to men of equestrian rank. Furthermore, the highest-ranking officials were selected from the senatorial aristocracy. However, Diocletian systematically displaced officials of the senatorial aristocracy from both the military and civil administration. Marius's victories were greatly influenced by his army



◆ *Marius's reforms*

reforms in Rome, which included changes in military strategy and the introduction of more systematic weaponry. The transformation of the Roman army from a citizen militia to a professional fighting force had profound consequences.

The era of 'Pax Romana' marked the initial stages of decline for Roman military dominance. The excessive territorial expansion and compulsive expenditure on the military proved to be irreparable. It also began to undermine the system. Moreover, the gradual weakening of the legions and the increasing reliance on mercenaries affected the army.

◆ *Military decline*

3.3.5.7 Trade

Not only agriculture but Roman trade and industry were also greatly stimulated by the presence of a large slave labour force. Trade articles included agricultural and non-agricultural items such as cereals, olives, wine, pottery, textiles, metalware, and glass objects. Italian traders exported grains from Africa and Sicily while exchanging Italian wine, pottery, and metalware for silver and slaves from regions beyond the Alps Mountains. The network of roads and waterways developed under Augustus Caesar encouraged increased production in various centres for a broader market. Roman commerce, although described as marginal to the overall economy, played a significant role. The Romans constructed a vast road network, which included the largest and longest roads in the ancient world. These Roman roads spanned 56,000 miles and comprised 29 major highways. They built numerous roads throughout the empire, facilitating improved travel and trade with distant provinces and enhancing tax collection. The construction of Roman roads followed a straight pattern and adhered to precise design principles.

◆ *Establishment of trading centres and roads*

3.3.6 Legacies

The late Roman Empire left behind a significant legacy that had a profound impact on subsequent history. One of the most enduring legacies was the emergence of the Byzantine Empire, also known as the Eastern Roman Empire. The Byzantine Empire continued the traditions and institutions of the late Roman Empire, lasting for over a thousand years and becoming a major power in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. It preserved and further developed many aspects of Roman culture, law, and administration. Another key legacy of the late Roman Empire was the adoption of Christianity as

- ◆ *Adoption of Christianity as the official religion*

the official religion. This shift was spearheaded by Emperor Constantine I and had a profound and lasting impact on the religious and cultural landscape of Europe. Christianity became deeply ingrained in the social fabric of the empire and continued to shape European civilization for centuries to come. By the 9th century, Christianity spread throughout Europe.

- ◆ *Administrative reforms*
- ◆ *Architectural marvels*

The late Roman Empire also witnessed significant administrative reforms aimed at improving governance and maintaining stability. Emperors like Diocletian and Constantine I implemented administrative divisions, such as the tetrarchy, to manage the vast empire more effectively. Roman military tactics, organization, and discipline were influential in shaping medieval warfare and the development of European armies. The empire continued the grand traditions of Roman architecture and engineering, constructing iconic buildings and structures that showcased remarkable skills and techniques. The architectural marvels of the late Roman Empire, such as the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, left a lasting impact on the history of architecture.

- ◆ *Preservation and transmission of classical knowledge and literature*

The late Roman Empire played a crucial role in preserving and transmitting classical knowledge and literature. Despite its decline, Roman scholars and writers preserved many ancient Greek and Roman texts, which were later studied and built upon by scholars during the Renaissance. The decline of the late Roman Empire also had a lasting impact on the political and social landscape of Europe. As central authority weakened, local elites and nobles gained more power and autonomy, leading to the emergence of feudalism. The transition from a centralized imperial system to decentralized feudalism shaped the course of European history.

3.3.6.1 Literature

Let us have a detailed look at the Roman contributions to literature, science and technology. The Latin language was used by early Rome for ancient Roman literature, and the Romans were known for their written records. Latin and Greek served as the official languages of the Roman Empire, while other languages were also spoken in various regions of the empire. Initially spoken only in the city of Rome, Latin later became the official language of business and government as the empire expanded throughout most

◆ *Official languages*

of Western Europe. However, many people in the Roman provinces also spoke their local languages.

◆ *Writing tools*

The Romans employed a variety of writing tools. Everyday writing could be done on wax tablets or thin wooden leaves. Important documents such as legal contracts were usually written with pen and ink on papyrus or parchment. Stoicism, a philosophy of both Greek and Roman origin, greatly influenced Roman literature. One notable example is the *Aeneid*, written by Virgil. The epic poem tells the story of Aeneas, who embarks on a journey across the Mediterranean, encountering various adventures before eventually settling in Rome.

◆ *Phases of Latin literature*

Latin literature flourished during the final century of the Republic. The golden age of Latin literature encompasses the last decades of the Republic and the early years of the Empire. It is typically divided into two parts: one dominated by Cicero and the other known as the 'Augustan Age.' During the 'Augustan Age,' the works of Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and Livy emerged. Augustus, the emperor of Rome, encouraged the arts and letters not only because he recognized their importance in establishing a stable government but also to support his own rule.

◆ *Major works of Virgil and Horace*

Virgil was in harmony with the aspirations of his age. He initially gained fame with two books of verse imitating Greek models: the *Eclogues*, a pastoral poem idealizing country life. The *Georgics* is a didactic work that beautifully portrays various aspects of farming and animal husbandry. However, his greatest and most famous work is the *Aeneid*, a patriotic epic. In it, he narrates the wanderings of Aeneas after the fall of Troy and his ultimate settlement on the Tiber, where he battles native rulers and establishes the foundations of the Roman state. Horace, a contemporary and friend of Virgil, had an interesting background as the son of a slave who gained freedom. He wrote in various styles, including *Satires* and *Epistles*, which humorously depict daily Roman life while advocating a philosophy of tolerance and moderation. His odes are masterfully crafted lyric poems covering a wide range of subjects.

Ovid, another renowned poet of the Augustan age, are best known for his work called 'The Art of Love,' which provides advice on pursuing and maintaining romantic relationships. His *Metamorphoses* is a delightful collection of tales about transformations, starting from the creation of the universe

◆ *Notable works of
Ovid and Livy*

out of Chaos and including stories about legendary Greeks like Orpheus and Eurydice. Livy dedicated forty years of his life to writing a history of Rome, spanning from its foundation in 753 BCE to the death of Drusus in 9 CE. Livy's 'History' is often compared to the Aeneid as an epic in prose. The brilliant narrative style of the work and a sweeping panorama of Roman history, viewed through the eyes of a patriot, compensate for its inaccuracies.

◆ *Works of
Quintus
Ennius, Plautus,
Catullus and
Lucretius*

Quintus Ennius also wrote Latin imitations of Greek tragedies, with his most memorable work being the epic poem called the 'Annales,' a patriotic history of Rome. He is considered the 'father of Latin poetry'. Plautus was the most popular and greatest dramatist in Rome. His jovial comedies were filled with lively plots, slapstick situations, indecent language, and stock comic characters such as the clever slave, the nagging wife, and the ill-fated lovers. Catullus represents the peak of Roman lyric poetry. He drew inspiration from the poets of Alexandria and incorporated his own experiences, particularly his failed love affair with the unfaithful Clodia (whom he referred to as Lesbia), to create love lyrics of great beauty and deep emotion. Lucretius, one of the greatest poets of the Republican period, wrote a philosophical work called 'On the Nature of Things.' In poetic form, he described the Epicurean philosophy, asserting that the universe operates based on mechanistic natural laws without the need for divine intervention.

◆ *Polybius
on Roman
constitution*

Polybius, a Greek historian, wrote the earliest extant history of Rome. He was among the Greeks exiled to Rome in 167 BCE for advocating the Achaean Leagues' neutrality in the Third Macedonian War. According to Polybius, the constitution of the Roman Republic assimilated three elements: monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy. The monarchy was represented by the magistrates or consuls, the oligarchy by the senate, and democracy by the tribunes of the 'concilium plebis' and other popular assemblies. These three elements formed the foundation of the Roman constitution's stability. Fergus Millar, using the word democracy in a neutral sense, stated, 'It is undeniable that the constitution of the Roman Republic was that of a direct democracy.'

Marcus Tullius Cicero, the greatest orator and prose stylist in Rome, delivered famous speeches known as the 'Orations against Catiline,' in which he denounced the Catiline conspiracy. Tacitus, another notable historian, wrote the



◆ *Tacitus*

monumental work 'Germania.' In it, he depicted the Germans as simple people whose primitive and heroic ways sharply contrasted with the luxurious and degenerate lifestyle of the Romans. Tacitus's moral purposes, incisive character analysis, and caustic, epigrammatic prose make him perhaps the greatest historian of Rome. Juvenal, known for his bitter satires, addressed topics such as the vanity of human desires and the immorality of women. His works are well-known and served as models for later satirists like Swift and Pope. Seneca, a popular playwright and stoic philosopher wrote nine plays that were particularly appreciated by Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, who shared his predilection for horror and melodrama.

3.3.6.2 Science and Technology

◆ *Scientific contributions*

Pliny the Elder, Galen, and Ptolemy were among the greatest scientists of their time. Pliny the Elder was known for his tireless observation of natural phenomena. His most significant work, 'The Natural History,' compiled a vast amount of scientific knowledge from antiquity, covering topics such as astronomy, geography, anthropology, and botany. Marcus Aurelius, also known as Galen, was a Greek physician who wrote hundreds of treatises synthesizing past medical scholarship with his own findings. Ptolemy was an astronomer, mathematician, and geographer. His book 'Almagest' served as a standard reference for astronomers during medieval times. The Ptolemaic system proposed that the Earth was stationary at the centre of the universe, while the other planets, stars, and sun revolved around it in circular epicycles. This geocentric theory dominated the study of astronomy until it was overturned by Copernicus in the sixteenth century.

◆ *Universally accepted calendar system*

The Romans adopted and further developed the Solar Calendar from the Egyptians. They made modifications to create a universally accepted calendar system. The new calendar, known as 'Julian Calendar', consisted of 365 days, with an extra day added every fourth year in what became known as a 'leap year'. The month of July was added to honour Julius Caesar after his death.

The Roman contribution in the field of technology is also notable. They built a vast network of paved roads that covered the empire. To meet the growing needs of urban civilization, they constructed bridges, aqueducts, sewer systems, harbours, tunnels, and dams. Rome's public water

- ◆ *Town planning, public water supply and warfare technologies*



supply system, the largest in the ancient world, remained unmatched until the nineteenth century. The main sources of power utilized by the ancient Romans were human, animal, and water power. Additionally, the Romans made significant contributions to battlefield technologies. Warfare played a crucial role in Roman society and culture. The military served not only for territorial acquisition and defence but also as a means for civilian administrators to staff provincial governments and aid in construction projects. The Romans adopted, improved, and developed military technologies for foot soldiers, cavalry, and siege weapons, both on land and at sea. Stone, wood, and marble were the primary building materials employed by the Romans. These materials were used in the construction of civil engineering projects within their cities and for transportation devices used on land and sea.

3.3.6.3 Architecture

- ◆ *Roman architectural features*



Romans were remarkable builders who enhanced Greek designs by incorporating two architectural features: arches and domes. One of the most notable and practical engineering achievements of the Romans was the channelling of water to their towns and cities. Roman architecture showcased innovative qualities stemming from their development of various building techniques, such as the use of cement, mortar, and fired brick. Roman bridges, aqueducts, and domed structures all employed the simple arch and its variations. The barrel vault, a series of arches placed side by side to form a tunnel-like roofed structure, was one such variation. By assembling multiple arches over a circular space, meeting at the centre, the Romans created impressive domed structures. The widespread use of concrete, a material introduced by the Etruscans, enabled construction on an ambitious scale and facilitated the replication of their distinctive style throughout the Empire.

The Pantheon stands as a remarkable surviving example of Roman architecture. The immense dome of this awe-inspiring circular temple symbolizes the success of Rome in creating spacious interiors without the need for columnar support. The vast Roman baths, known as 'thermae', far surpassed the size and conception of the Greek gymnasia that may have served as their inspiration. Another significant architectural contribution of the Romans was the Basilica, which housed law courts and other civic offices. Christians

◆ *Architectural contributions*

later adopted its essential features for their churches. Moreover, the wealthy Romans resided in luxurious villas with elaborate gardens, while the urban poor lived in multi-storied apartment houses notorious for their hazards and slum-like conditions. The engineers of Rome constructed aqueducts, which served as pipelines bringing water into the city. Nine aqueducts supplied the people of Rome with a staggering thirty-eight million gallons of water daily. The Romans excelled in the decorative arts, particularly mosaic work, showcasing their craftsmanship. The empire is adorned with exquisite mosaics, often depicting marine life.

Summarised Overview

The city of Rome is located on the river Tiber in central Italy. Through the Punic Wars and the Macedonian Wars, Rome expanded its territory into the Italian Peninsula, Western Mediterranean, and Eastern Mediterranean. Augustus Caesar became the first emperor of Rome. The Roman Empire expanded across three continents – Europe, Asia, and Africa. It was divided into several provinces, each ruled by a governor who had various officers under him to oversee different administrative affairs.

Roman society was primarily divided into two orders: the Patricians and the Plebeians. The Patricians were the wealthy aristocratic class who held their status based on birth, while the Plebeians encompassed all those who were not part of the governing class and constituted the common masses. Generally, the Patricians held dominant socio-economic and political power. The Roman Republic was governed by the Senate, composed of a group of elders known as senators. Each year, they elected two Consuls to lead them. By 200 BCE, Rome emerged as the dominant power in Italy, defeating rivals like Carthage for control of the Mediterranean world. The Senate did not possess legislative power but issued decrees to the magistrates and assemblies on important matters such as military affairs, war, foreign policy, finance, and legislation. Magistrates, such as the Consuls, held exact powers in civil and military affairs. Other important magistrates included Censors, Praetors, Aediles, Quaestors, and Apparitores, who assisted the Consuls.

The earliest assembly for Roman citizens was the *Comitia Curiata*, which functioned under the monarchy but was later replaced by the *Comitia Centuriata*

under the Republic. The *Centuriate* Assembly was dominated by the aristocracy, with the plebeians having little influence. The plebeians established their own assembly called the *Concilium Plebis*, where they appointed their own magistrates known as Tribunes. Another assembly, the *Comitia Tributa*, included all citizens and represented both social orders. A significant social struggle, often referred to as the 'conflict of orders,' took place between the patricians and plebeians. One major outcome of this struggle was the codification of laws known as the 'Law of Twelve Tables,' as well as the abolition of 'nexum,' which ended debt bondage. The passing of the Lex Hortensia made laws enacted by the *Concilium Plebis* binding on the Senate.

The 'patricians' (aristocrats), 'plebeians' (commoners), and slaves were the important classes in Roman society. Slavery played a crucial role in Roman society, with wealthy Romans owning their own slaves. Rome also experienced frequent slave revolts. Slavery in Rome developed under specific socio-economic circumstances and became a systematic mode of production. The large population of slave labourers employed in agriculture, handicrafts, mining, construction, administration, and domestic work, transformed Rome into a true 'slave society' rather than just a society with slaves. The Roman civilization relied heavily on slave labour to such an extent that the decline in the supply of slaves by the conclusion of the second century CE posed significant challenges to the economy. These economic difficulties coincided with a political crisis that ultimately contributed to the decline of the Roman Empire itself.

By the fourth century CE, the Roman Empire underwent a formal division, resulting in the establishment of the Eastern Roman Empire, with its capital situated in Constantinople (Istanbul), and the Western Roman Empire, which maintained its seat of power in Rome. Nevertheless, by the fifth century, the existence of Western Roman Empire as the empire came to an end, and the Eastern Roman Empire survived. During the third century CE, Christianity experienced a surge in popularity within the Roman Empire, ultimately culminating in its recognition as the official state religion by the end of the fourth century CE. Over time, Christian doctrine gradually replaced numerous cults and deities. The transformations observed in the realms of governance, economy, society, and religion during the twilight years of the Roman Empire exerted a profound influence on the contemporary Roman World, ultimately yielding far-reaching consequences for the histories of Europe and Asia during the early Middle Ages.

Self Assessment

1. Briefly explain the different types of officials from the Roman Republic.
2. Differentiate between 'Comitia Centuriata' different from 'Comitia Curiata'.



3. Who were the Patricians and the Plebeians?
4. Enumerate the basic features of Roman religion.
5. Discuss the condition of women in early Roman society.
6. What were the main achievements of Romans in the literature field?
7. What is 'Pax Romana'?
8. How did the administrative machinery function with the aid of the Roman Legal system?
9. Explain the spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire.

Assignments

1. Write an assignment stating the origins and expansion of the ancient Roman empire.
2. Explain the system of slavery that persisted in ancient Rome.
3. Describe the power struggle that went on through the ages between the Patricians and Plebeians in ancient Roman society.
4. Discuss the main causes of the decline of the Roman empire.
5. Prepare a note on the legacy of the Roman empire.

Suggested Readings

1. Anderson, Perry, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, London, 1978.
2. Berger, Eugene, George L. Israel, Charlotte Miller, et al., *World History - Cultures, States and Societies to 1500*, University of North Georgia, Dahlonega, Georgia, 1978.
3. Brendan, D. Nagle, *The Ancient World – A Social and Cultural History*, Prentice-hall, INC Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, United States of America, 1979.
4. Brunt, P. A., *Social Conflicts in the Roman Republic*, London, 1971.
5. Darst, Diane. W, *Western Civilization*, McGraw – Hill Publishing Company, New York, 1990.
6. Davies, H.A, *An Outline History of the World*, Oxford University Press, London, 1968.



References

1. Burns, Edward Macnall and Ralph, Philip Lee, *World Civilizations*, New York, 1991.
2. Farooqui, Amar, *Early Social Formations*, Delhi, 2001.
3. Gransey, P., R. Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture*, Bristol Classical Press, London, 1987.
4. James, I., Porter, *Classical Pasts: The Classical Traditions of Greece and Rome*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2005.
5. Kershaw, Stephen. P, *The Roman Empire: Rise and Fall*, Robinson Publishing, United Kingdom, 2013.
6. Kumar, Rakesh, *Ancient and Medieval World – From Evolution of Humans to the Crisis of Feudalism*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2018.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

Alternative Social Formations

BLOCK-04





Africa

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ♦ assimilate knowledge pertaining to the origin of various cultures in Africa
- ♦ summarize the religion, culture and society in ancient Egyptian civilization
- ♦ comprehend the nature of society, polity, culture and economy that persisted in ancient African regions
- ♦ analyse and evaluate the nature of ancient African communities

Background

For a long period of time, knowledge about Africa was limited to some areas of North Africa, which came into contact with Asia and Europe from ancient times. On the other hand, nothing was known about the vast regions of sub-Saharan Africa. Europeans first entered Africa in the 15th century, but their main goal was the slave trade. These slaves were taken captive and sent to the Americas to labour on plantations. Large portions of Africa were first colonised in the 19th century, and Europeans reigned over them for most of the 19th and early 20th centuries. They had a preconceived notion of Africa as being less developed and less civilized in the early stage of its historical development.

In this unit, the first section focuses on the society, polity and religion of Egypt under the Pharaohs. In the second section, we will examine West Africa, with a particular emphasis on Ghana, Mali, and Kanem and the monarchies in this region, as well as their society, economy, and political structure. In the third section, we will explore South Africa, paying attention to different communities, societies, economies, and systems of governance.

Keywords

North Africa, Egypt, Pharaoh, Mummification, South Africa, West Africa, Nomes



Discussion

4.1.1 North Africa

- ◆ *African and Arabian influence on Nile civilization*

The culture of the Nile Valley has fascinated visitors as well as archaeologists and historians. Architectural wonders of the region's ancient culture include the Pyramids and the Sphinx. Some have argued that rather than being an African culture, Egypt was more closely associated with the Arab world, but this idea has been disproved. It has been asserted that Egypt was African in its writing system, culture, and way of thinking while being geographically at a nexus of many influences.

- ◆ *Threefold division of Ancient Nile civilization*

The Ancient Civilization of the Nile Valley traces back to before 3000 BCE. For convenience, historians have divided the history of the area into the following historical eras. Pre-dynastic settlements came first, then Pharaonic Egypt, which included the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms and lasted for 31 dynasties until 332 BCE. The Ptolemaic or Hellenic period, which started after Alexander's conquest, was the one that followed. Egypt was under Roman control from 30 BCE to 345 CE. After that, the Byzantine emperors took control of Egypt. Egypt was ruled by Arabs from 642 CE until when the Ottoman Turks assumed control in 1517 CE. In 1798 CE, Egypt was briefly occupied by the French, and from 1882, British troops occupied it.

4.1.1.1. Egypt under the Pharaohs

- ◆ *Emergence of the Old Kingdom under the Pharaoh*

Egypt under the pharaohs has been drawn out historically; the Old Kingdom, which was the first era, was established by Djoser or Zoser of the Third Dynasty. During this period, there was no standing army for the King or Pharaoh. The Sixth Dynasty began approximately 2200 BCE, marking the end of the Old Kingdom. The first pyramids were built during the Old Kingdom period. The First Intermediate Period, which was the period immediately after the Old Kingdom and lasted roughly two centuries, was marked by rivalry and conflict between the nobility of many realms.

Centralised governance was reinstated by the Eleventh Dynasty in 2050 BCE and remained maintained until 1786 BCE. The capital of the Middle Kingdom was Thebes in Upper Egypt. The Middle Kingdom is renowned for emphasising pragmatic initiatives like the development of irrigation and drainage infrastructure. During this time,



◆ *Centralized rule of the Middle Kingdom*

only a few pyramids were constructed. During this period, the Egyptian religion gave emphasis to life in the present rather than the afterlife. The West Asian tribes, the Hyksos, challenged the Pharaohs' rule between 1786 BCE and 1560 BCE. Hyksos used chariots and horses in battle. This period of foreign invasion and uncertainty came to be known as the Second Intermediate period.

◆ *The emergence of the New Kingdom*

Upper Egyptian rulers rose against the Hyksos and in the year 1560 BCE. Ahmose, the founder of the Eighteenth Dynasty, was able to drive the invaders out and restore Egyptian control. The New Kingdom or Empire, which lasted until 1087 BCE, officially began at this time. This period was ruled by the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Dynasties. The Pharaohs of the New Kingdom or Empire had a standing army in contrast to their progenitors.

4.1.1.2 Egyptian Religion and Architecture

◆ *Significance of Pyramids*

The pyramids are the first thing that comes to our mind when we think about Egypt. Even though they were constructed as pharaohs' graves, pyramids serve as a reminder of how ancient Egyptians glorified life beyond death. The first pyramid is attributed to Djoser, the second monarch of the Third Dynasty. The Step Pyramid of Saqqara is the common name for the pyramid he built. This revolutionized Egyptian architecture, made fully of stones which were skillfully placed and large steps formed on each of the four sides of the building. The more sophisticated rhomboidal pyramid at Dahshur, constructed by King Snefru of the Fourth Dynasty, is located not far south of Saqqara. The pharaohs Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure built the other well-known pyramids at Giza. Sphinx is an unusual piece of sculpture carved on a single rock, which depicts a lion with a human body and the head representing a pharaoh.

◆ *Construction of pyramids*

The pyramids were built as a resting place for the deceased ruler. Other tombs and a complex of temples devoted to the gods and the departed monarchs were located around the ruler's burial chamber. The ruler's wives, servants, and occasionally even children were interred in these graves. Numerous goods, including furniture, jewellery, handmade objects, and the dead person's personal belongings, were buried inside the graves. Later, the nobles also started to create mastabas, which were rectangular stone tombs situated next to the kings' pyramids. Civil conflicts, political unrest, and a collapse in the economy made the construction of pyramids difficult during the demise of the Old Kingdom. However,

the New Kingdom (1539–1075 BCE) saw a renaissance in the architecture of pyramids. The Valley of the Tombs of the Kings at Thebes was developed during this time.

◆ *Belief in after death*

The Egyptians held the idea that life continued beyond death. When a king died, it was thought that he would continue to rule as the god of the dead, Osiris, in the afterlife. As a result, the pyramid honouring the late monarch contained a large number of precious and useful artefacts. The departed rulers were given cults and were worshipped in temples alongside other deities.

◆ *Guardian Deities and local cults of Egypt*

There were several local cults and guardian deities before the political unification in 2925 BCE. Syncretism developed after unification, permitting the affiliation of several gods without apparent conflict. Due to his omnipresence, the sun god Ra or Re was venerated by all. Temples functioned as places of worship and served to represent the region and the community. The temple of Ra in Heliopolis during the Old Kingdom and the temple of Neith in Sais during the Twenty-sixth dynasties were two examples of local temples that occasionally served as official emblems. Temples become important political and economic institutions over time. As the New Kingdom drew to an end, the Amon Ra temple at Karnak rose to prominence as the main seat of power in Upper Egypt. Along with fulfilling their religious duties, the temple's priests also handled administrative tasks, including overseeing the flocks, mines, granaries, treasuries, river transportation, and administering justice.

◆ *Pharaohs as the representative of God*

The Pharaohs, also known as Horus, exercised power as God's representatives or sons on Earth. Maa't, which stood for justice, fairness, and the perfect order created by the gods for humans on Earth, was maintained by Horus. Themes of a chaotic society brought on by natural calamities, foreign invasion, and a lack of justice are common in the literature of the late Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom. As a herdsman in such a community, the ruler was supposed to be kind and devout. However, given the relatively small number of texts that have been discovered so far, tracing the evolutions in the idea and understanding of the Egyptian pharaoh across the whole Pharaonic period is difficult.

4.1.1.3 Egyptian Polity and Society

The kingship was regarded as a heavenly position by the Egyptians. But even this supernatural position was



- ◆ *Belief regarding kingship*

susceptible to takeover the other earthly power struggles. Although usurpation has been shown in at least one instance, the dynastic shifts in the history of pharaonic governments have not been entirely explained. The Vizier of the preceding king was King Amenemhat I, the founder of the Twelfth Dynasty.
- ◆ *Rule of succession*

The possibility of succession disputes was not minimal. The probability of the primogeniture rule by which the son or eldest son succeeds the king was ignored by some scholars. The practice of co-regency or overlapping reigns existed, and it shows that the laws were not always rigorously observed. Some additional kings were purportedly chosen by their fathers as heirs to the throne despite the existence of stronger contenders, like Seti I, Ramses II, Ramses III, and Ramses IV.
- ◆ *Status of women*

While women (queens, princesses, and concubines) of the monarch found a place in royal pyramids and had distinctive tombs, the princes' tombs were neither noteworthy nor appropriate for their rank. Even the princes were not mentioned in the Old Kingdom's administrative writings; possibly, this was because they did not hold positions of authority.
- ◆ *Reason for the fall of the Old Dynasty*

The powerful provincial governors and officers occasionally challenged the Pharaohs' divine office's power and authority. The great chiefs of the southern provinces were primarily responsible for the Old Dynasty's demise. In a similar vein, the power of the Theban priests and southern military generals proved to be the cause of the ruin of the New Kingdom. It is unknown how this royal crisis affected the common people of Egypt.
- ◆ *Important officials*

The king served more than just the god's purpose of 'herding' the Egyptians. Additionally, he was in charge of justice and upheld the 'maat', or order. The prime minister or vizier was his primary advisor and consultant. They were quite powerful because they held this position for prolonged periods of time under various kings. The list of titles and genealogies makes it clear that the prince or temple priests were responsible for maintaining law and order and organizing production and revenue generation. Nefer-Seshem-Shesat, a prince from the 5th dynasty, was the vizier and was in charge of the King's work. Another prince is referred to as the commander of an army and the supervisor of the king's works. It might be challenging to

understand the responsibilities of authorities with names like 'the elder of the portal.' Not every official was a prince or a member of the royal family. However, they were all scribes or literate. One distinct contribution that the Egyptians made to human civilization was the flexible scribal medium known as papyrus, which was made from a tree that bears the same name. There were writing schools that taught people how to write under strict rules. Any office in Pharaonic Egypt required this writing proficiency.

◆ *Contributions of scribes*

Additionally, the officialdom was a caste in itself, enjoying privileges and power that were unavailable to their society's illiterate peasants. Scribes included architects, engineers, military commanders, religious ritualists, and accountants. These scribes had demonstrated extraordinary aptitude in managerial and accounting roles. The texts prevailed tell a lot about how organized and systematic the Pharaonic state was. We also get information about the provincial government's structure, the various types of priests and their responsibilities, farming, mining, river transportation, granaries, rituals, justice, and other topics.

◆ *Efficient administrative apparatus*

The evidence found in the Pyramids speaks about their opulence. The administration was very well-organized. The entire kingdom was split into 'nomes', and a hierarchy of administrators, many of whom were members of the royal families, was in charge of overseeing the 'nomes'. It also indicates the hierarchy of priests. The Pharaoh's only counsellor and the prime minister was known as the 'vizier' ('tjaty').

◆ *Agriculture*

The lower classes were the primary source of work and labour. They didn't use the wheel. As a result, following floods, they used to drag heavy loads for building and other purposes across the slush and mud. The agricultural potential of both high flood and low flood was harnessed. Due to the abundance of food available in the flood plains, one harvest per year was sufficient to support the running of institutions like temples, royalty, and scribes as well as the construction of enormous constructions. The Egyptians had developed a network of waterways and constructed boats of varying sizes and tonnage. Agricultural products and food grains were transported from the fields to granaries and markets primarily through this transportation network.

4.1.2 West Africa

West Africa, like other parts of Africa, was dotted



◆ *Stone Age and Iron Age civilizations of West Africa*

with human settlements from Stone Age and Iron Age civilizations, according to available archaeological evidence. Along with archaeological evidence, we have the writings of Arab geographers and scholars about West Africa from the 11th century. This section focuses primarily on the arrival of Europeans during the 11th to 16th centuries CE. Generally speaking, West Africa includes the region between the eastern boundaries of contemporary Nigeria and the western borders of contemporary Mauritania.

◆ *Monarchical states of West African regions*

There were a few monarchical states in this region prior to the Arab influence. Kawkaw, which may have served as the foundation for the Songhai kingdom of Gao, which was south of Ghana and which later became the Mande kingdom of Mali, Ghana (not present-day Ghana, but situated further west), and Kanem, in the east, near Lake Chad, were the most significant of these.

◆ *Developed state systems*

Despite appearing smaller in size than subsequent kingdoms, these had sophisticated governmental structures and well-established towns and cities. A well-developed agricultural hinterland supported their extensive markets and trade centres. By at least 4000 BCE, an African “black” agricultural population and a mixed population of Libyan Berbers established a cattle-herding. They followed a settled agricultural economy in the Sahara around the same time that the civilization of the Nile Valley was developing. There was a population exodus by 2000 BCE, as the Sahara dried up and changed into the desert it is today. The “blacks” appear to have concentrated in the savannahs south of the Sahara during this process.

◆ *Methods of expansion of the Kingdom*

The pharaohs established dramatic kingdoms and remarkable civilizations through conflicts over land, water rights, and the exploitation and control of agricultural surpluses in the extremely fertile Nile Valley. In the savannahs of West Africa, less impressive monarchies emerged around the same time. In reality, the great West African monarchs emerged between the southern Sahara’s margins and the Senegal and Niger river basins, not around Lake Chad or in those areas. These monarchies engaged in trans-Saharan trade, which also had a significant impact on their size and character. In exchange for the essential salt, which could only be found along the coast, the West African communities offered gold, ivory, and other agricultural products. They also had a lot of iron, which they had been using for their work since 500 BCE. They got Arab horses,

copper, and other metals in return for iron. They could also sell slaves as a product.

◆ *Trans-Saharan trade*

The trans-Saharan trade may have existed long before the desert itself. Some Saharan rock carvings that have survived depict the usage of horses for raiding and horse-drawn chariots for long-distance trade. The engravings also show a route that connected Fezzan and South Morocco to the Senegal and Niger river valleys, indicating that northerners were interested in the alluvial gold there. The mighty ancient kingdom of Ghana in West Africa rose to power as a result of control over this commerce and the trading routes and centres. The 'Hamitic hypothesis,' which asserted that Berbers who spoke Hamitic and were nomadic pastoralists from Libya were responsible for infiltrating the 'blacks' and establishing political structures, is unfounded. Not only Hamitic people, 'Black' dynasties like Kanem also existed as well. The fact that infiltration occurred is undeniable, but the infiltrators' success was largely a result of their integration into pre-existing civilizations and cultures and their seizure of political institutions.

4.1.2.1 Kingdoms of West Africa

◆ *Kingdom of Ghana*

Ghana was a powerful kingdom. Archaeologists believe that Kumbi Saleh in southern Mauritania may be the capital city as described by Abu Ubayd al-Bakr, the Cordoban geographer. Kumbi Saleh has been divided into two different parts, i.e., the king's palace was surrounded by a wall in one section, which had circular mud homes built in the African regional style. Stone homes and a few mosques could be seen in the city's other section, which was probably populated by Northern traders. The city had a footprint of more than two square kilometres, and there were large cemeteries nearby. There were more residential areas, and the two sides of the city were joined.

◆ *Authority of the king*

Al-Bakr explained how the king exercised divine authority while ruling on Earth. Sewn garments, turbans, necklaces, and bracelets were reserved for the monarch or the heir apparent, as well as ritual garb. People from the lower classes would bow down to the king and cover their heads in powdered soil. This custom has been prevalent for a while and was also practised under the Mali Empire. The monarch was succeeded by his sister's son, and when he died, he was buried alongside the bodies of his dependents beneath a large mound of earth. The king had an extensive military, which guaranteed the submission of the subordinate rulers.



◆ *Long-distance trade*

The kingdom's links to North Africa and its involvement in long-distance commerce is shown through archaeological artefacts. This trade, which mainly involved copper from North Africa, salt from the Sahara, various manufactured commodities, and gold from the south, was crucial to the economy of ancient Ghana. This trade was governed by the king, who also levied taxes. Most of the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Ghana were probably of northern Mande ancestry.

◆ *Expansion of Ghana over Sanhaja*

The Sanhaja, a group of Berber pastoral tribes in the area of Audaghost, came under the control of the rulers of Ghana in the tenth century when they expanded their rule over that country. The Sanhaja brought goods and salt to Ghana from North Africa. A Sanhaja counter-dominance resulted from this dominance, which upset the economic equilibrium between the pastoralist Sanhaja and agricultural Ghana. The largely Islamized Sanhaja tribes, like the Berbers, embraced the aggressive and puritanical Almoravid Islamic movement. Through cooperation and the resolution of tribe disputes, they were able to increase their control over the agricultural lands in the surrounding areas. The beginning of Almoravid rule was marked by their complete dominance of the ancient Kingdom of Ghana by the end of the 11th century. Almoravid's authority began around the end of the 11th century when they acquired total control over the former Kingdom of Ghana. Although the native traders and rulers were converted to Islam, they kept up their land cults and ancestor rites to gain control over their non-Muslim subjects.

◆ *Almoravid conflicts*

However, by the beginning of the 13th century, the Almoravids' plundering and conflict within had undermined Ghana's agricultural economy and power. The Mande-speaking regions to the south, which had been Ghana's vassal states, started to threaten their supremacy. Suniata, the Mande-speaking Keita King of Mali, absorbed Ghana into his realm in the fertile upper Niger valley in 1235 CE. Timbuktu and Gao, two important hubs of trade in gold with the North, were the targets of the Keita clan's efforts to increase their dominance along the Niger bend. However, the Almoravids of Ghana's internal power struggle, which led to the establishment of the Keitas, hampered trade with the North. Ifriqyah (Tunisia and eastern Algeria) became the northern terminus of the trade routes when they relocated from south Morocco. As a result, the southern centres

like Bambuk lost importance while the river Niger gained importance for trade with the North. Dyula (Dioula) Mande traders were conducting trade with Hausa in the far east by the fourteenth century. The Niger rivers were crucial to the prosperity of the Mande merchants and the Mali monarchy, which weakened the latter.

◆ *Songhai rule*

The Songhai community, a non-Mande population that had been paddling and fishing in the middle Niger, asserted authority over the rivers in the late 15th century. They were also the Mali kingdom's vassals. Gao became the capital of the Songhai kingdom in the late 15th century when Songhai King, or Sultan Sonni Ali, consolidated his rule over the Mali kingdom. In West Africa, the Songhai rule persisted for a while, although their expanded empire was short-lived. As Ghana and Mali had done, they were unable to seize authority over other monarchies or states in the West. In the east, the Kingdom of Kanem, whose leaders had converted to Islam in the 11th century, saw a fall in authority and control over resources, people, and commerce by the 14th and 15th centuries as a result of civil wars among its ruling class. However, it partially recovered in the old province of Bornu.

◆ *Songhai Invasion*

The Songhai had increased territory under their control by the 16th century, including Kanem in the east and Taghza's salt mines, which are close to the Moroccan border in the north. As a result of this provocation, in 1591, the Saadian dynasty of Morocco invaded Songhai. Gao and Timbuktu were taken by the Moroccans, and they also got a lot of loot. They lacked the resources necessary to hold onto and govern the conquered regions nevertheless. Idris Alawma of Bornu ruled over minor Hausa kingdoms like Kano and Katsina after temporarily reviving the Kanem-Bornu empire at the end of the 16th century. Europeans also started to exchange their land for money and slaves throughout the 16th century. The rise of the Fulanis dominated West African history prior to the arrival of Europeans.

4.1.2.2 Society, Polity and Economy

There is very little information available regarding the societies and economies in West Africa under the Songhai, Mali, and Ghanaian governments. A prosperous agricultural sector supported and helped to consolidate the Kingdom of Ghana, which was also maintained by it. However, Ghana's economic strength came from levies on trade with the Sahara. While copper and gold were in high demand in the south,



◆ *Polity and society under the Mali Empire*

salt from the north was carried there. Up to the time of the Songhai Empire, this trading system was in use. Within Ghanaian society, the monarch had a divine position. Clans and other ethnic groups each have their own traditions and customs. The society was structured into matrilineal families at the height of the Mali Empire, which was governed by the largely Islamized Keita clan in the 12th century. Children belonged to their mother's lineage in these households. Families with similar traditions established villages. Dugu-Tigi, or village leaders, were the head of the smallest unit of government. The clan units, each headed by a chief, were located above them. A province was made up of several clans and was commanded by a farin, or provincial governor. Under the control of the mansas, or Mali emperors or kings, the provinces, which mainly were organised along ethnic lines, maintained their native customs, legal structures, and religious beliefs. The Mali Empire benefited from the power of this confederation of several ethnic tribes, each with its own distinctive religion, way of life, and legal system.

◆ *Agriculture and craft*

In short, the regular people served as the empire's producers. They worked in agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, mining, and non-agricultural producing crafts. Crafts were passed down through the generations, and specialisation was promoted throughout the Mansa period. Even though the Mali Empire was known for its gold, agriculture was the mainstay of the economy, and many nobility were engaged in it. Millet, beans, and rice were the main crops grown in the western provinces of Mali and irrigated by rivers and rains. Fishing-related tribes such as the Somono in the upper Niger, the Bozo in the middle Niger, and the Sorko in Timbuktu exported smoked and dried fish throughout the empire. The Siaki tribe worked with gold, whereas the Mabo clan was skilled in weaving and dyeing. The Mali Empire imported salt and kola nuts in addition to being a significant supplier of gold and copper. In caravans of donkeys and other pack animals, the Dioula and Wangaras dealers transported these products.

◆ *Mali empire during Songhai ascendancy*

The situation appears to have remained unchanged in the Mali Empire during the Songhai supremacy. There is little evidence of any novel advances in government or technology that would have resulted in changes to taxes or the exploitation of the primary producers in society. Peasants lived in hamlets close to their fields and engaged in intensive farming. Similar to earlier regimes, the rural population

was dense and engaged in the cultivation of crops such as rice, millet, beans, and different vegetables. Fishermen took care of their own fields and worked as farmers with other tradesmen. This was a periodic division of labour.

◆ *Towns*

Towns were also highly populated; not only nobles and aristocrats but also craftsmen lived in the towns. Towns were generally trade hubs with a variety of blacksmiths living there. The bulk of the traders were foreigners, which added to the multicultural character of the cities. During the Songhai era, notable towns were Jenne, Gao, and Timbuktu. Large homes and ornate clothing are clear signs of the aristocracy's lavish lifestyle. The large number of courtesans is a reflection of both the aristocracy's riches and the moral laxity that pervaded the upper class. All West African governments used slaves as a labour force, which they obtained through conflict and other ways.

4.1.3 South Africa

The southernmost part of Africa, Southern Africa, is made up of Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

4.1.3.1 Early Communities in Southern Africa

◆ *Human settlements existed in the southern region*

There is evidence to suggest that there were human settlements in the southern region prior to the Common Era. Their existence suggests that they were primarily hunter-gatherers, making their living by fishing, harvesting fruits and vegetables, and hunting and gathering wild animals. These people were alluded to as "Bushmen" by the European colonizers of Africa when they showed up in the district in the 17th century. The subsequent development of pastoralists in South Africa is, therefore, historically plausible. It is unclear whether some of the hunting-gathering communities imported pastoralists from the north or began domesticating sheep or cattle as a result of external or internal dynamics and transitioned into pastoralism. The European colonizers referred to these pastoralists as "Hottentots."

◆ *Mixed-farmer communities emerged*

Following that, mixed-farmer communities arose, blending the aspects of established farming and pastoralism. These mixed farmers built permanent villages, produced ceramics, and used iron to make digging sticks. They were known to the Europeans as "Kaffirs." Despite the historical order in which we have described the hunter-gatherers, pastoralists, and mixed farmers, they probably coexisted for



a considerable amount of time, as evidenced by observations made by European colonists in the 18th and 19th centuries.

◆ *Ethno-linguistic communities in South Africa*

These societies might be identified by their distinctive ethnolinguistic traits. The San were primarily hunters and gatherers, and they were the region's first settlers west of Algoa Bay. The Khoikhoi were mainly pastoralists and lived just north of the San. The Nguni were mixed farmers who lived in the confined coastal plain between the Drakensberg mountains and the ocean. The high veld was home to the Sotho-Tswana people. The dialects of the Nguni language that are spoken in the north and south, respectively, are Zulu and Xhosa. These mutually comprehensive languages served as the inspiration for the names of the settlements. In comparison to the Nguni languages, the high veld languages Sotho, Tswana, and Pedi showed more pronounced linguistic differences.

◆ *Various communities*

It has been said that the Khoikhoi were pastoralists while the San were hunters and gatherers. However, it appears that some pastoralists returned to hunting and gathering after losing their herds, either as a result of a cow plague or wars with other tribes. When some of them eventually acquired herds, primarily through banditry, they resumed their pastoralist lifestyle. It has been noted that established San communities existed in northern Namibia; these groups stood out from other San communities because they possessed villages and copper mines. The Nguni and Sotho-Tswana, two southern Bantu speakers, also could travel and integrate into various tribes, acquiring new cultures and languages. As a result, it becomes extremely challenging to classify these individuals as solely Ngunis or Sans, pastoralists, settled mixed-agriculturists, or hunter-gatherers.

◆ *Mixed farming practices*

4.1.3.2 Economy and Society

The most productive economy was mixed farming, which outperformed both pastoralists and hunter-gatherers. In addition to agriculture and metallurgy, the mixed agricultural methods included some pastoralism (cow raising), some hunting, and some gathering (extra food from the many wildlife available and harvesting native plants and plant products). As a result, mixed farmers had a more stable and abundant food supply than pastoralists or hunters, and they lived in denser communities that formed political chiefdoms.

The Nguni, Xhosa, and Zulu, who are Bantu speakers,

◆ *Use of metals*

made use of the magnetite deposits on the surface. They would melt it, reheat it, and then hammer it into the shape of spearheads, hatchets, and hoes. In addition to being used for tools, magnetite was an important trading commodity. They also could deal with copper resources located in northern Transvaal and northern Botswana, employing it to make a variety of objects, including hair decorations, earrings, necklaces, bells, anklets, and crowns.

◆ *Ownership of cattle influenced social hierarchies*

Southern Bantu societies' economies relied heavily on cattle. The cultural significance of cattle was made clear in idioms, proverbs, and songs, such as the Mosotho proverb, 'Cattle are the bank of a Mosotho.' More than fifty names were used in Mpondo to characterise cattle, and there were at least five phrases used to describe their horns. Because it was thought that "Cattle beget children," cattle were regarded as a kind of wealth and utilised as a means of transaction to obtain women and children. Cattle ownership led to financial inequalities and could have had an impact on gender roles, as seen by the ruins of Zimbabwe in the fifteenth century. Bride-wealth payments, referred to as "bogadi" in Sesotho and Setswana and 'labola' in Nguni, were always made in cattle. Elite Khoikhoi herders could amass sizable herds, enabling them to marry several wives, provide for their sons, amass clientele, and gain political leadership. The Khoikhoi culture was a plutocracy in which a ruler's power was based on their riches. Their power would likewise wane if their money dropped or was stolen by a rival. Until the introduction of colonial powers, the ruler's position of authority was stable.

◆ *Agro-pastoralism transformed the landscape*

The Bantu populations in the whole eastern half of South Africa, as well as northern Namibia, gradually adopted agro-pastoralism. The agro-pastoralists removed the shrubs and made the ground cultivable, helping to control further the deadly tsetse fly that threatened both people and cattle.

◆ *Division of labour based on gender*

4.1.3.3 Gender Relations and Division of Labour

In agro-pastoralist communities, there was a distinct distribution of labour based on gender. In times of peace, younger boys would assist the men who were in charge of managing and herding the animals. Young boys would begin caring for cattle and learn tasks like milking, making 'amasi' from milk, slaughtering animals, and working with leather, that men have typically carried out. Men also used poles and brushwood to build kraals and cow byres.



◆ *Role of men in smithing and salt production*

Another activity that was exclusively for males was smithing. Copper and iron were widely available in the eastern Transvaal region, where they were processed by men who had been skilled in this trade for decades. Some men were experts at producing salt from crusts created by seepage from salty springs in the Olifants River drainage basin. These areas traded with other areas when such commodities were in short supply. Villages in South Africa were not self-sufficient, despite what European visitors said. The chiefdoms of the Xhosa traded cattle for copper and iron items, and the Ngunis also engaged in similar trade. Hunter-gatherers and agro-pastoralists also exchanged copper objects or decorations for meat and livestock. The inhabitants placed a high value on metal products. A Dutch traveller reported in 1689 that it was never safe to carry metal objects.

◆ *Swidden agriculture*

They used swidden agriculture, which means they farmed a field for a while, let it lay fallow for a while, and then switched to another field. Hence clearing the soil was necessary on a regular basis. They also grew a variety of watermelons, pumpkins, and calabashes, a form of tobacco. They cultivated yams and beans in various locations. South Africa first encountered maize during the 18th century.

The women were responsible for taking over the field the men cleared. Hoeing, planting, weeding, harvesting, and threshing were all performed by women. Women also had to take care of the children and do the chores around the house. Girls were expected to help their mothers from a young age, learning how to cook and work in the field. Women's work was unquestionably more strenuous and continuous than men's. They were subordinate to men and excluded from public life. Women's role in agriculture and household chores

◆ *Bridewealth*

In the Bantu-speaking culture of South Africa, the bride's wealth was a special institution. After being married, a woman relocated from her parents to her in-laws' home. She was expected to take on the burden of agricultural production, food preparation, housekeeping, childbirth, and childrearing. A bride-wealth, usually in the form of cattle, was traditionally given by the husband to the wife's family as compensation for this loss of labour and reproductive duties. Clan chiefs and other affluent elites were able to acquire a greater number of wives and pay brides more money by owning more cattle. The bride's parents were

willing to give their daughters to wealthy men or chiefs in exchange for substantial bride wealth. In turn, the chiefs gave feasts and sealed his authority with the labour of their numerous wives.

4.1.3.4 Polity

◆ *Political institutions*

People living south of Limpopo had unique political identities and organisations. 'Kings' or chiefs were present in the majority of the villages. They possessed all the traits of kingdoms. These kingdoms, or 'principalities,' as historian Elizabeth Isichei liked to describe them, varied in size. Nguni principalities appeared to be dispersed and smaller due to the abundance of water and proximity of the two types of pastures – sweet and sour veld. The states of southern Sotho were similarly more compact and mostly situated along Caledon-like lush river valleys.

◆ *The role of clan*

These tribes' or communities' chiefs were tasked with bringing in good rain to ensure a bountiful crop. When there was a drought, the chief's authority was questioned, and his people and animals did leave him. The chief's position was mostly passed down through the family, but some people could get it by claiming a chiefly lineage. A clan might become small or large depending on how many new adherents it gains or loses. Traditions among the Sotho-Tswana date back to 1500 CE and speak of the division of two principal lineages. Another factor in the merging of lesser polities into larger ones was intermarriage between prominent families. The cattle resources can aid in the establishment of new chieftains. Intermarriage and the existence of blended totems both helped smaller polities merge into bigger ones.

◆ *Political units*

Political units south of the Limpopo River was small until the middle of the 18th century, especially in KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. The principalities or kingdoms in the Eastern Cape and on the high veld were large and had a hierarchy of Confederate chiefs. As was the case in other parts of the continent, the people of southern Africa experienced significant change when colonial powers arrived in the 16th century.



Summarised Overview

Egypt is considered to be the preeminent civilisation in North Africa. In Egypt, the kingship was regarded as divine and passed down through the generations. Dynastic transitions, however, were also frequent. In Egyptian society, religion had a significant influence. There was a growth of rituals connected with the worship of Pharaoh. The mummification of the body, the reciting of enchantments, and the personal belonging of the deceased ruler in the burial grave show their belief in life after death, and the construction of Pyramids shows their belief in life after death. Scribes were highly valued, and the script and writing were both well-developed.

We observe a developed state structure in West Africa, complete with towns and cities. Ghana was an important region in West Africa. Their primary occupation was agriculture, which produced a sufficient surplus. Additionally, several crafts were practised. Within Ghanaian society, the monarch had a divine position. Clans and other ethnic groups have their own traditions and customs. The society was structured into matrilineal families at the height of the Mali Empire, which was governed by the largely Islamized Keita clan in the 12th century.

There is evidence to suggest that human settlements predated the Common era in the southern region. They were mostly hunter-gatherers who subsisted on wild animal hunting, fishing, and the harvesting of berries and other food-producing plants. While some of these villages were purely pastoral, others were also engaged in farming. In pastoral societies, the social and political structure was determined by cattle ownership. Women played a low position in these patriarchal communities. These societies might be identified by their distinctive ethnolinguistic traits. The San were primarily hunters and gatherers, and they were the first settlers west of Algoa Bay. The Khoikhoi were mostly pastoralists and lived just north of the San. The Nguni were mixed farmers who lived in the confined coastal plain between the Drakensberg Mountains and the ocean. The high veld was home to the Sotho-Tswana people. The dialects of the Nguni language that are spoken in the north and south, respectively, are Zulu and Xhosa. These mutually understandable languages served as the inspiration for the names of the communities. The economy, polity, and society of various regions in South Africa were fundamentally altered by the 19th-century colonization of Africa.

Self Assessment

1. What were the main characteristics and achievements of the Old Kingdom under the Pharaohs?
2. How did the Middle Kingdom differ from the Old Kingdom?



3. Can you explain the nature and significance of the Hyksos invasion during the Second Intermediate Period of Egyptian history?
4. What led to the emergence of the New Kingdom?
5. How did the New Kingdom differ from previous periods?
6. What were the main characteristics of the ancient Kingdom of Ghana?
7. How did the domination of the Sanhaja Berber tribes and the rise of the Almoravids impact the Kingdom of Ghana?
8. How did the gender-based division of labour manifest in agro-pastoralist societies in South Africa?
9. What was the significance of cattle in the economy and social hierarchy of Southern Bantu societies?
10. How did the institution of bride-wealth function in South African Bantu-speaking societies?

Assignments

1. Discuss the significance of the Nile Valley civilization. Explain why it is considered an African civilization.
2. Explain the emergence of the Old Kingdom under the Pharaohs. Discuss the architectural achievements of this period, particularly the pyramids.
3. Explore the beliefs of the ancient Egyptians in the continuity of life after death.
4. Discuss the concept of the Pharaohs as the representatives of gods.
5. How did the trans-Saharan trade contribute to the rise and power of the ancient Kingdom of Ghana in West Africa?
6. Describe the political and social structure of the Kingdom of Ghana.
7. Investigate the role of trade and exchange in South Africa during the ancient period.

Suggested Readings

1. Davidson, B. *West Africa before the Colonial Era: A history to 1850*. Longman, 1991.
2. Leonard Collrell, *Life under the Pharaohs*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1960.



3. Levtzion, N., & Hopkins, J. F. P. *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, Cambridge University Press, 2000.
4. Mason, W.A, *History of the Art of Writing*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1920.
5. Parkington, J., Hall, M., & Smith, A. B. (Eds.). *The Archaeology of Prehistoric Coastlines*, Cambridge University Press, 1998.
6. Plug, I. *The Archaeology of Ancient South Africa*, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

References

1. Aldred Cyril, *The Egyptians*, Praeger, New York, 1961.
2. H. James, Breasted., *The History of Egypt*, Bantam Books, Inc., New York, 1964.
3. Huffman, T. N. *Handbook to the Iron Age: The Archaeology of Pre-Colonial Farming Societies in Southern Africa*, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007.
4. McIntosh, S. K. *Beyond Chiefdoms: Pathways to complexity in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, 1995.
5. Moret, Alexandre, *The Nile and Egyptian Civilisation*, ECA Associates, Chesapeake, 1991.
6. Sampson, C. G. *The Archaeology of African Farming Systems*, Routledge, 2005.
7. Shinnie, P. L. *Ancient African Civilizations*, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2008.
8. Shorter. A.W, *An Introduction to Egyptian Religion: An Account of Religion in Egypt During the Eighteenth Dynasty*, Kegan Paul. 1931.
9. Smith G.E, *Ancient Egyptians and the Origin of Civilisation*, Gorgias Press, 2007.
10. T. Maggs, *Prehistory of South Africa*, Witwatersrand University Press, 2008.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.





Latin America

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ analyse and evaluate the origin and development of the Mayan civilization and its invaluable contributions to the world
- ◆ trace the significance of Olmec culture among the ancient Mesoamerican civilizations
- ◆ discover and comprehend more about the rise and fall of Inca civilization
- ◆ bring out the evolution of Aztecs as a culture having a profound impact upon the then society

Background

South America had a rich tradition of civilization and culture, centuries before the arrival of the Europeans on the continent. Pre-Columbian civilizations were the aboriginal American Indian cultures that developed in Mesoamerica (part of Mexico and Central America) and the Andean region (western South America) prior to Spanish exploration and conquest in the 16th century. The pre-Columbian civilizations represented great advances in human society and culture, comparable to the early civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China. Like the ancient civilizations of the Old World (Europe, Asia, and parts of Africa), those in the New World (North and South America) were characterized by kingdoms and empires, magnificent monuments and cities, and advancements in the arts, metallurgy, and writing. The ancient civilizations of the Americas also exhibited similar cyclical patterns of growth and decline, unity and disunity in their histories.

In the New World, the origins of civilization can be traced back to a native agricultural way of life. These agricultural beginnings date back several millennia to approximately 7000 BCE when early Americans began experimenting with plant cultivation. The domestication of plants for food was a long and gradual process, and it was not until much later that a condition of permanent village farming life was achieved in the tropical latitudes of the two continents.

Sedentary village farming in Mesoamerica emerged around 1500 BCE. The most important crops were corn (maize), beans, squashes, chilli peppers, and cotton. These early villagers engaged in cloth weaving, pottery making, and other



typical Neolithic skills. These villages seemed to be economically self-sufficient and politically autonomous, with an egalitarian social order. However, between approximately 1200 and 900 BCE, significant changes occurred in this previously simple social and political order, marked by the construction of large earthen pyramids and platforms, as well as the carving of monumental stone sculptures. These changes first appeared in the southern Gulf Coast region, which is now part of Mexico.

Over time, these societies evolved into powerful empires that thrived for several centuries, predating the Spanish conquest. The most notable among them were the empires of the Maya, the Inca, and the Aztecs.

Keywords

Aztec, Architecture, Culture, Classic Period, Maya, Olmec, Calendar, Religion, Script, Inca, Polity

Discussion

4.2.1 The Maya Civilization or Mayan Civilization

♦ *Maya -
Indigenous
people of Mexico
and Central
America*

The Maya are an indigenous people of Mexico and Central America who have long lived in the regions that make up the contemporary Mexican states of Yucatan, Quintana Roo, Campeche, Tabasco, and Chiapas as well as in Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras to the south. The name 'Maya' is derived from Mayapan, an ancient city in Yucatan and the final post-classical capital of the Mayan Kingdom. The Mayan identify themselves according to regional ethnic and linguistic ties, such as Quiche in the south or Yucatec in the north. Since John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood discovered the 'Mysterious Mayan' in the 1840s, civilization has fascinated people all around the world. Contrary to popular belief, the Mayans did not disappear, and the descendants of the people who constructed the great cities of Chichen Itza, Bonampak, Uxmal, and Altun Ha still reside on the same lands as their forebears and continue to perform the same rituals that a native of the region would have recognised a thousand years ago, occasionally in a modified form.

The Olmec period (500-200 BCE) is the Pre-Classic or



◆ *Oldest culture in Mesoamerica*

Formative Period when the Olmecs, the oldest culture in Mesoamerica, thrived. The Olmecs established themselves along the Gulf of Mexico and began erecting magnificent brick and stone cities. The first signs of shamanic religious practices may be found throughout this time period, and the famed Olmec heads clearly reflect extremely skilled sculptural talent. The immense size and scope of Olmec ruins led to the notion that the land was once inhabited by giants. The Olmecs laid the groundwork for all subsequent Mesoamerican civilizations, but neither their origin nor their fate is known.

◆ *Significance of El Tajin*

The great city complex on the Gulf of Mexico, which has been recognized as one of the most significant Mesoamerican sites, is referred to by the name 'El Tajin.' The Mayan population reached millions during this time period, which saw the emergence of large urban centres. More ball courts have been found in and around El Tajin than anywhere else in the region, and the significant game of Poc-a-Toc was developed there. Despite the fact that El Tajin was home to more than fifty distinct ethnic groups and that the Mayan and the Totonac were thought to have dominated, it was unknown who were the actual inhabitants of the city.

◆ *Consolidation of power in Yucatec towns*

Power was consolidated during this period at the important Yucatec Mayan towns like Chichen Itza and Uxmal. While some sites exhibit a distinct and original culture (such as Chichen Itza, where evidence of cultural borrowing coexists with a significantly different art and architectural style), others exhibit direct cultural influences from the Olmecs, Zapotecs, Teotihuacan, and El Tajin. The Mayan civilization reached its pinnacle during this time, with developments in mathematics, astronomy, architecture, the visual arts, and the calendar. The earliest documented date for this period is found on Stele 29 at Tikal (292 CE), while the most recent is found in an inscription on a stele in the location of Tonina (909 CE). The Mayan civilization had city-states that extended from Piste in the north to modern-day Honduras.

◆ *Decline of Mayan cities*

The Post-Classic Period (950-1524 CE) : By this time, the largest Mayan cities had been abandoned. Although overpopulation and climate change have been proposed as probable causes, the reasons for the widespread flight to rural regions remain unexplained. A new tribe in the area called the Toltecs seized control of the ruined cities and colonised them. Cities like Tula and Chichen-Itza arose as major centres.

Since the Mayan towns had already been abandoned before the arrival of the Spanish, it is crucial to refute the myth that the Spanish Conquest forced the Mayans out of their cities. It is said that the Spanish conquerors were not aware that the beautiful city complexes were built by the aboriginal people they encountered. The Battle of Utatlan, won by the Quiche Mayan in 1524 CE, is usually seen as the demise of the Mayan Civilization.

4.2.1.1 Mayan Culture

The height of the Mayan Civilization in the Classic Period gave rise to remarkable cultural advancements that have made them renowned. The Mayans hold a deep belief in the cyclical nature of life, where nothing was truly 'born' or 'died.' This worldview influenced their understanding of the gods and the cosmos, which, in turn, fuelled their achievements in architecture, mathematics, and astronomy. According to their cosmology, beneath the earth lay the dark realm of Xibalba (meaning 'place of fear'), from which sprouted the majestic 'Tree of Life'. This tree extended through thirteen levels, piercing the heavens to reach the paradise of Tamoanchan ('place of the misty sky'), where exquisite flowers bloomed. In Mayan belief, death did not lead to a conventional 'heaven' or 'hell'; instead, it marked the beginning of a journey towards Tamoanchan. This journey commenced in the treacherous 'Underworld' of Xibalba, where the inhabitants were more inclined to deceive and harm souls rather than offer assistance."

◆ *Cultural advancements*

4.2.1.2 Cities and Architecture of Mayans

Cities in the Mayan culture served as the focus of ceremonial and administrative activity for areas that encompassed both the city and a rural hinterland. Many people lived in the major Mayan cities. For instance, there were more than 10,000 distinct structures within a six-square-mile area at the main centre of Tikal, ranging from temple pyramids to thatched roof huts. Up to 60,000 people live in Tikal, which has a population density several times higher than that of a typical European or American city at the same time.

◆ *Mayan cities*

A Mayan city from the Classic Period was typically made up of a series of stepped platforms that were topped by masonry structures. These structures could be huge temple-pyramids, palaces, or small house mounds. Each of these structures was centred on broad plazas or courtyards. The wall paintings and bas-relief carvings of Mayan architecture

◆ *Stepped platforms with various structures*



demonstrate a sophisticated taste in art and decoration. Stone roads or causeways may have connected large buildings and complexes at major sites like 'Tikal'.

◆ *Development of cities*

Temples and palaces were repeatedly demolished and rebuilt over the course of centuries in Mayan cities, which lacked a regular grid layout and appeared to have grown haphazardly. It is frequently challenging to ascertain the boundaries of Mayan cities due to this apparent erratic pattern of settlement. Some cities had defensive earthworks surrounding them and were surrounded by a moat; this was, however, unusual. City walls are uncommon at Mayan sites, with the exception of a few recently discovered cities, where defensive walls were abruptly built around cities under assault from outside enemies.

◆ *Temple-pyramids*

The most striking feature of a Classic Mayan city was its temple-pyramid structure. They towered over all of the surrounding structures and were constructed of hand-cut limestone blocks. Even though the temples themselves typically had one or more rooms, the rooms were so small that they could only have been used for private ceremonies. It is possible that the alignments of ceremonial structures are important. Although temples were the most impressive structures in a Mayan city, the majority of the site's development consisted of palaces, which were single-story buildings designed to resemble temple pyramids but were erected on considerably lower platforms and included as many as several dozen plastered chambers. Palaces, in contrast to temple pyramids, typically had one or two interior courtyards.

◆ *Mayan palaces*

The actual purpose of the palaces was unknown. Despite being cramped and sparse, the rooms may have been used by rulers and other elites. Archaeologists say that nobles were more likely to live in buildings that were less permanent and hadn't survived. Although there is little evidence of ecclesiastical or monastic orders among the ancient Mayans, archaeologists also suggest that the cell-like rooms of the palaces could indicate that monks, nuns, or priests lived there. Groundwater was scarce in some areas, so large cities like Tikal would have had substantial man-made reservoirs to supply water for their residents during the dry season. Ball courts and sweat baths, probably originated in Mexico, were found at several Mayan sites. Plazas in significant cities also included several stelae, or pillars, facing significant

temples and palaces. The stelae were frequently placed in front of short, circular, flat-topped altars and occasionally on platforms that held up temple pyramids.

The corbel vault and the roof comb were typical Mayan architectural features. The Mayan vault looks more like a narrow triangle than an archway due to the absence of a keystone, unlike European arches. It has been suggested that the Mayans were unable to master keystone technology, which is why this unusual form exists. Others assert that the absence of a keystone was intentional since the Mayan vault always had nine stone layers, each one symbolising one of the nine levels of the 'Underworld'. A tenth layer outside of the Mayan cosmology would have been constructed by a keystone. Despite the height of the temple pyramids, a lattice of stone was built for the Mayan roof. Both the temple facade and the roof comb were always lavishly adorned with painted stucco reliefs. Mayan buildings also had doors, door jambs, and facades that were heavily embellished with stone or wood sculptures.

- ◆ *Corbel vaults and roof combs*

4.2.1.3 Mayan Society

The Yucatan Peninsula was initially inhabited by hunters and gatherers some 11,000 years ago. These nomads sprang from little family groupings. They began growing maize around 2500 BCE, giving up their nomadic lifestyle to establish themselves in settlements surrounded by cornfields. The Mayans cleared the woodlands employing a "slash-and-burn" method to produce fertile land. They grew maize along with supplementary crops, including beans, squash, and tobacco. They terraced the mountainside slopes in the highlands to the west and cleared the forest for agriculture in the lowlands. They relocated their fields after a two-year interval, leaving the previous ones barren for ten years before being used again.

- ◆ *Hunting and gathering to settled agriculture*
- ◆ *Slash-and-burn techniques*

The Mayans resided in small villages made up of compounds of houses inhabited by large families. Their one-room, thatched-roof homes often had walls made of interlaced wooden poles that were coated with dried mud. The main purpose of these huts was for sleeping; everyday activities like cooking were done outside in the central communal complex. The roles of men and women have clearly separated: the males were responsible for building huts and maintaining the cornfields. In contrast, the women provided meals, manufactured clothes and took care of the

- ◆ *Gender roles*



family's household requirements. These traditional family and farming practices have survived the ages and are being practised in many rural areas today.

◆ *Hierarchical social structure*

Olmec beliefs and concepts regarding hierarchical social structures had undoubtedly permeated the Mayan people by the Middle Preclassic Period. The majority of the lowland Mayans resisted the temptation to conform and preferred tribal confederacies that recognised no power beyond their village patriarchs. The southern Mayans in the mountain valleys made the decision to unify under high-ranking chiefs or kings. The 'ahau', or high monarch, emerged during the Late Preclassic era, and kingdoms spread over the Mayan territories. The Mayans lived according to the principles of kingship for the next 1,000 years. There were kings, nobles, instructors, scribes, soldiers, architects, administrators, artisans, merchants, labourers, and farmers in each Mayan kingdom's hierarchical social structure. In addition to the capital, outlying subsidiary settlements included large towns, hamlets, and extended-family farming holdings.

◆ *Expansion of urban and rural activities*

The Mayans moved away from the small farming communities governed by local officials to the complex kingdoms of the Classical period for a number of possible reasons. These changes were largely brought about by developing more arable land for agriculture and finding methods to collect rainwater. Both the cornfields and the waterworks – reservoirs, cisterns, and canals – were built and maintained by a substantial workforce. These innovations paved the way for increased food production, resulting in a surplus that facilitated increased trade with states nearby and subsequent population expansion. The Mayans may have selected the monarch as the head of state because they needed a government to handle the complexities of expanding urban and rural activities.

4.2.1.4 Mayan Religion

◆ *Mayan belief in cyclical eras*

The prehistoric Mayans saw periods spanning around 5,200 years and believed in cyclical patterns of creation and destruction. It is anticipated that the current cycle, which started around 3114 or 3113 BCE, would come to a close around 2011 or 2012 BCE. Although Mayan cosmology is complicated, they thought the Earth was flat and had four corners. The cardinal points were given colour values, with red denoting east, white denoting north, black denoting west, and yellow denoting south. The colour green stood in for the

centre. Some Mayans believed that the sky was held up by four mighty gods known as 'Bacabs,' while others thought that it was sustained by four trees, the green ceiba tree being the central one.

◆ *Mayan belief in multiple gods*

The gods of the Mayan pantheon are little-known. With at least 166 identified gods, the Mayans possessed an overwhelming number of deities. This is partially due to the belief that every god has several facets. Every deity who represented a celestial body had a unique 'Underworld' face that manifested after the god 'died' in the twilight. Some Mayan traditions also mention Itzamna, a single supreme god who invented writing and was the patron deity of art and sciences. Ix Chel, the ancient goddess of the Moon and the goddess of weaving, healing, and childbirth, was his wife. Priests had a crucial role in astronomy and the calendar. Calculating the time, festivals, ceremonies, fateful days and seasons, divination, events, disease cures, writing, and genealogies were all under the control of priests, who also controlled learning and ritual. Sons frequently succeeded fathers in the Mayan clergy who were not married.

◆ *Ceremonial activities*

The 260-day Sacred Round calendar served as the basis for all Mayan ceremonial activities, and each performance had a symbolic value. Before and during such occasions, sexual abstinence was strictly enforced, and self-mutilation was encouraged in order to give blood for anointing holy objects. The aristocracy had a profound obsession with blood – their own, and that of captives – and ritual bloodletting played a significant role in significant calendar events. Additionally, bloodletting was done to feed and please the gods. As the Mayan civilization waned, kings in charge of large lands hurried from city to city, executing bloodletting ceremonies to protect their eroding kingdoms.

◆ *Human and animal sacrifices in Mayan culture*

Prisoners, slaves, and children in particular were sacrificed, with orphans and children born outside of marriage being deliberately sought out for this reason. The practice of animal sacrifice, however, may have been more common prior to the Toltec era because the Mayan believed quail, iguanas, dogs, squirrels, and turkeys to be proper sacrifices to their gods. Four senior males who accompanied priests during human sacrifices were referred to as 'chacs,' after the Rain God Chac. The sacrificial victim's chest would be opened by another person known as a 'nacom', and a shaman figure known as the 'chilam' would enter a trance



to hear divine messages and give predictions that the priests would interpret.

- ◆ *Belief in the afterlife and rebirth*
- ◆ *Burial customs based on social status*

The Mayans thought that after passing away, individuals reached the 'Underworld' via 'a cave' or 'cenote'. When monarchs passed away, they followed a route connected to the sun's cosmological motion and fell into the 'Underworld'; but, because of their superhuman abilities, they were reincarnated into the Sky World and were elevated to the status of gods. Because the deceased did not necessarily enter paradise, death from natural causes was widely dreaded among the Mayans. Ordinary people were buried beneath the flooring of their homes, together with religious items and personal items they had used while living, with their mouths stuffed with food and a jade bead. The grave of the priest contains books. The practice of cremating great lords, which has Mexican roots, was followed, and burial shrines were erected over their urns. In the past, sepulchres under mausoleums have been used for the burial of nobles. Some Mayan people even mummified dead lords' heads. Then, these were 'fed' at regular intervals while being maintained in family oratories.

4.2.1.5 Mayan Script

- ◆ *Hieroglyphic script*

The Mayans employed a sophisticated Hieroglyphic script as their writing system. This form of writing consisted of approximately 800 distinct signs or glyphs. These glyphs were organized into columns and read from left to right and top to bottom. Each glyph represented a word, a syllable, or a concept in the Mayan language, allowing the Mayans to express a wide range of information, including numbers, periods, names, events, and more. The hieroglyphic inscriptions were carved into stone monuments and structures or painted onto paper, plaster walls, and pottery.

The core of the Mayan writing system is the glyphic cartouche, which may be compared to words and sentences in a modern language. Mayan cartouches made use of at least three or four glyphs and maybe as many as fifty. Each cartouche included a unique set of glyphs, prefixes, and suffixes. Mayan people lack an alphabet. For a number of reasons, it is difficult to interpret the Mayan writing. First off, it might be difficult to decide how each sign or cartouche should be interpreted because glyphs can represent both sounds and concepts. Additionally, there are several methods to express various Mayan concepts, and many Mayan glyphs

◆ *Glyphic
cartouches*

might have more than one meaning. For example, numbers can be expressed using Mayan numerical symbols, a picture of the god associated with that number, or a combination of the two. In certain symbols, the representation of the concept is combined with a variety of phonetic sounds. This suggests that there are several ways to communicate the same idea. For instance, Pacal, the ruler of Palenque whose name means 'Hand-shield,' occasionally manifests as a hand-shield symbol, occasionally as pa-cal-la when spoken phonetically, and occasionally as a combination of these two.

◆ *Art of writing*

The Mayans regarded the art of writing as a divine gift. Because reading and writing were fiercely guarded by an elite class, who thought they alone could communicate directly with the gods and function as a middleman between the gods and the common people, as the majority of the ancient Mayans were illiterate. The Maya did not record historical events accurately; rather, they used it as a propaganda weapon. The writing was employed to reinforce a ruler's military might and legitimise his heritage from honourable ancestors and the gods in a hierarchical society where the elite sought status and leadership positions. Writings on stone monuments were intended to portray kings and other dynasties in the best possible light, and historical events, weddings, births, military battles, and triumphs are the main subjects of ancient sculptural inscriptions.

◆ *Glyphs on
codices*

Codices made of bleached fig-tree paper or deer hide was also used to paint Mayan glyphs. These codices were then folded accordion-style and plastered on top. The highly skilled scribes who painted the inscriptions in the codices recorded important events, chronologies, and rituals. During their attempt to convert the Mayans to Christianity in the sixteenth century, the Spanish set fire to the majority of the Mayan codices. However, the few codices that have survived are a valuable source of information about the Mayan religious beliefs and ritual cycle. They also contain astronomical tables that describe the cycles of Venus and other celestial bodies, as well as information about the gods associated with each day in the Mayan calendar.

4.2.1.5 Mathematics

The most advanced mathematical system ever developed in the Americas was Mayan mathematics. There were only three symbols needed for the Mayan counting system: a dot with a value of one, a bar with a value of five, and a shell with

◆ *Mayan mathematics*

a value of zero. These three symbols were used in a variety of combinations to keep track of past and future calendar events and to make it possible for even people without formal education to perform the basic math required for trade and commerce. It is remarkable that the Mayans understood the value of zero, given that the majority of previous civilizations had no idea of it. For their calculations, the Mayans used the vigesimal system, which was based on 20 rather than 10. This indicates that the Mayans utilized 1, 20, 400, 8,000, and 160,000 as opposed to our system's 1, 10, 100, and 10,000.

◆ *Mayan numbers written vertically*

Numbers in Mayan writings, including dates on the calendar, were written vertically rather than horizontally. Even those without formal education were able to add and subtract using the Mayan system of mathematical symbols for the sake of trade and commerce. The Mayans considered some numbers more sacred than others. One of these special numbers was 20, as it represented the number of fingers and toes a human being could count on. The Mayans also used head glyphs as number signs. Number one, for example, is often depicted as a young earth goddess; two is represented by a god of sacrifice, and so on. Numerical head glyphs could also be combined with the usual dots, bars and shells.

◆ *Mathematics depicted in Mayan art*

Some numbers were more precious to the Mayan than others. One of these unique numbers was 20, which stood for the total number of fingers and toes on a human body. Five was another unique number since it indicated the number of fingers on a hand or foot. The early Mayans considered the number thirteen to be sacred. 52 was another holy number, signifying the span of a 'bundle' of years, which is conceptually equivalent to a century. The Mayans additionally employed head glyphs as numerals. For instance, number one is frequently portrayed by a youthful earth goddess; number two is symbolised by a deity of sacrifice; and so on. These characters resemble those of other deities, which has complicated the process of deciphering them. Number glyphs were occasionally compounded, which made matters much more confusing. For instance, the head symbol for 10 and the head glyph for three might both be used to write the number 13. The standard dots, bars, and shells might be paired with numerical head glyphs. The Mayans placed such importance on mathematics that it can be seen in their artwork, such as murals, where mathematic scribes or mathematicians may be identified by the number of scrolls that trail from under their arms. Interestingly, the first mathematician shown on a

glyph was a woman.

4.2.1.6 Mayan Calendar

◆ Complexity of Mayan calendar

The final version of the Mayan calendar probably dates from around the first-century BCE., and may have its roots in the Olmec culture. It is incredibly accurate, and Mayan priests' calculations were so perfect that their calendar correction is 10,000th of a day more accurate than the one that is currently in use across the world. The Mayan and other Mesoamerican calendars are the most complicated and intricate of all the ancient calendars. They had two calendar years and used months with 20 days each: the 365-day Haab and the 260-day Sacred Round, respectively. Every 52 years, these two calendars coincide. The Mayan referred to the 52-year period as a 'bundle,' and it had the same meaning for them as it does for us today.

◆ 260 day Sacred Round

The 260-day Sacred Round is divided into two smaller cycles made up of the numerals 1 through 13 and 20 separate day names. Each of the day names is symbolised by a deity who travels across space, marking the change from day to night. Imix, Ik, Akbal, Kan, Chicchan, Cimi, Manik, Lamat, Muluc, Oc, Chuen, Eb, Ben, Ix, Men, Cib, Caban, Eiznab, Cauac, and Ahau are the names of the days. Archaeologists have noted that the Mayan order of animals may be linked in a similar sequence to the lunar zodiacs of several East and Southeast Asian civilizations. Some of these are animal gods, such as Chuen (the dog) and Ahau (the eagle). Important events pertaining to the gods and humanity were recorded on the 260-day calendar. It was used to name people, predict the future, pick good dates for marriages, battles, and other events. Each day had its own omens and connotations, and the 20-day march was like a never-ending fortune-telling machine that directed the Mayan's fates.

◆ The Mayan Haab calendar

The 365-day Vague Year, or 'Haab', is similar to our modern calendar in that it has 18 months of 20 days each and a five-day unlucky period in the end. The solar cycle served as the foundation for the 365-day secular calendar, which focused primarily on agriculture and the seasons. In order, the 18 Maya months are known as Pop, Uo, Zip, Zotz, Tzec, Xuc, Yaxkin, Mol, Chen, Yax, Zac, Ceh, Mac, Kankin, Maun, Pax, Kayab, and Cumku are the other names for this group. The unfortunate five days were called 'uayeb' and were thought to be ominous because they could bring danger, death, and bad luck. It is believed that the Mayan



solar new year began somewhere during the Mayan month of Pop, which corresponds to our current month of July.

◆ *Dates using five figures*

The date of this creation is set at either 3114 BCE or 3113 BCE in our modern calendar. To indicate a date, the Mayan calendar used five figures in this order: baktun, katun, tun, uin, kin. This would be written as, for example: 9.10.19.5.11 10 Chuen 4 Kumku, which translates as 9 baktuns (1,296,000 days), 10 katuns (72,000 days), 19 tuns (6,840 days), 5 uinals (100 days), 11 kins (11 days). This gives us a total of 1,374,951 days (approximately 3,764 solar years) since the beginning of the last Creation, at the Mayan calendar round position of 10 Chuen, 4 Kumku. This would be equivalent to a date sometime in our year 651 or 652 CE.

◆ *Correlated ruler's actions to historic events*

Although it did not accurately specify dates in time, one of the calendar's most important roles was to connect the Mayan monarchs' actions to historical and mythical occurrences. Mayan rulers regularly performed the mythological gods' acts on the anniversary of the original act, whose date was exactly calculated by Mayan priests. The calendar also included the dates of current and upcoming events. For instance, some Mayan monuments have dates for events that happened 90 million years ago, while others contain prophecies for things that will happen 3,000 years from now.

◆ *Foretelling the future*

Similar to our astrological zodiac, the calendar also predicts the future. The Mayans believed that a person's destiny was determined by their day sign or birthday. Each newborn was associated with a particular god whose influence shaped their lives. A few divine beings were better, bringing karma, while others required consistent submission, particularly during the sad uayeb period. The Mayan calendar's complexity stems from the priests' authority to set sacred dates and agricultural cycles, making it impossible for the average person to comprehend and allowing the calendar to be as intricate as the priests desired.

4.2.1.7 Astronomy

The Mayan and other Mesoamerican calendar systems are the most elaborate, precise, and complicated ancient calendar systems in existence. With only a margin of error of 19 minutes, the congruence of the 260-day and 365-day Maya cycles is almost exactly the same as the actual solar year in the tropics. Astronomers and priests of the Mayan looked to the stars for direction. They utilized observatories, shadow-

◆ *Maya and Mesoamerican calendars*

projecting gadgets, and perceptions of the skyline to follow the mind boggling movements of the sun, the stars and planets to notice, work out and keep this data in their annals, or 'codices'. The Mayans created calendars to keep track of the passage of time and the movements of the heavens based on these observations. The Mayans also recorded the moon in detail, but these do not appear to be part of a formal lunar calendar.

◆ *The Mayan observatory*

Astronomer priests made observations with only their naked eyes and a forked stick, which they then used to calculate the paths of Venus and other celestial bodies. With the use of their observational records, they were able to predict phenomena like solar eclipses precisely. Ceremonial structures were carefully oriented with compass directions in Mayan towns. A Mayan observatory may have been designed to allow the Sun to shine through small openings at the spring and autumn equinoxes, illuminating the observatory's inner walls. The exteriors of temples and palaces may correspond to other alignments. The main Mayan metropolis of the Yucatan Peninsula, Chichen Itza, is home to the most well-known instance of this form of alignment. People still congregate there every year, as they have for millennia, to see the sunshine on the steps of a pyramid devoted to the Feathered Serpent god Quetzalcoatl. The serpent head at the foot of the pyramid and the stairs are progressively illuminated by the Sun at the spring and autumnal equinoxes, giving the impression that a snake is crawling down the holy mountain to Earth.

◆ *Mayan aligned temples with celestial events for veneration*

To honour the gods, the Mayans went to great efforts to arrange their temples and ceremonial plazas with the Sun and stars. For instance, Pacal's tomb in Palenque's Temple of the Inscriptions is oriented towards the Sun. In line with the centre of the temple roof, the Sun sets behind the high ridge at the winter solstice. The Sun appears to descend the temple stairs into Pacal's tomb as it crosses the sky, enters a doorway in the temple, strikes the rear wall, and moves on to the horizon beyond the temple. Thus, Pacal's passing and entrance into the 'Underworld' are comparable to those of the Sun.

The Mayans constructed observatories in several of their towns and positioned significant buildings in accordance with astronomical motions. A few of them are clusters of temples, such as a trio at Uaxactun that represents the Sun's



◆ *Observatories*

rising position for the summer solstice, the two equinoxes, and the winter solstice. The Caracol at Chichen Itza, for example, was built in a way that complemented the appearance of Venus and the Pleiades, two celestial planets. Numerous emblems of Venus may be seen in another temple at Uxmal.

◆ *Celestial events for rituals*

The Mayan rulers' ritual landscape was dominated by celestial events and metaphors. At certain points, royal power transfers appear to have been timed with the summer solstice. An inscription at Palenque states that Chan-Bahlum, Pacal's son, consecrated the Cross Temple complex on July 23, 690, which was scheduled to correspond with the alignment of Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, and the Moon. This occasion may have symbolised to the Maya the primordial union of the three ancestor gods of the Palenque dynasty with the First Mother (the Moon), making it an appropriate time to dedicate an accession monument.

◆ *Usage of celestial symbols*

Mayan monarchs are seen wearing heavenly emblems, such as a belt or sky band formed of a chain of images representing the Moon, the Sun, Venus, day, night, and the sky in murals and sculptures. In order to show that they held the authority of heaven, rulers are frequently seen bearing bars that are ornamented with sky bands. Rulers also enjoyed associating with favourable sky gods like the Sun God, and Maya priests and kings frequently "clothed themselves with the heavens" in real life by donning jaguar pelts, whose spots were removed to stand in for the stars.

◆ *Sacred rituals and sacrifices*

The Mayans believed that the sun and moon were guided by the gods, and the Sun and Moon continued their journey through the 'Underworld' even in the dead of night, under constant threat from evil gods who wanted to halt their progress. The Mayans believed that self-mutilation, torture, and human sacrifice were sacred rituals that were performed to assist the heavenly bodies. In Mayan mythology, the recurrent cycles of creation and destruction served as a reminder of the consequences that humans would face if they failed to fulfil their responsibilities to the gods. The gods, who made it possible for humanity to continue existing, owed something to humans. When the gods and other forces of creation and chaos would fight in the world of mortals and decide the fate of all earthly creatures, this was thought to be a terrifying time.

The Mayan considered Venus to be particularly significant. Throughout Mesoamerica, wars based on Venus' movements

◆ *Significance of Venus*

were actually well-established. The Mayan belief system includes mythology, astrology, and the calendar. The Mayans used calendars and observations of the sky to foretell solar and lunar eclipses, Venus' cycles, and constellations' movements. It was believed that gods were reenacting mythical events from the beginning of time through these occurrences, which were much more than merely mechanical movements of the heavens.

4.2.1.8. Decline

Growing cities began to take up more and more arable land as a result of the influx of people from outside the region. These cities continued to grow in size. There may have been severe food shortages and malnutrition as a result of a growing population, a drought, and crop failure. People may have had to relocate elsewhere to survive when crops failed. Other factors that contributed to the fall of the cities in the southern lowlands around 900 CE, may have been:

◆ *Causes for the decline*

- ◆ the intensification of conflict later in the Classical era;
- ◆ the high cost of escalating warfare;
- ◆ the cost of maintaining kings and nobles and building temples that were higher and more elaborate;
- ◆ the practice of sacrificing commoners (in the Early Classical period, only kings and captured nobles were used as human sacrifices).

4.2.2 The Inca Civilization

Between 1400 and 1533 CE, the ancient Inca civilization flourished in Peru. Their empire eventually spread across western South America, from Quito in the north to Santiago in the south. It was the world's largest empire at the time, and the largest ever seen in the Americas. They were famous for their art and architecture, and wherever they conquered, they built finely impressive buildings. Their amazing adaptation of natural landscapes with terracing, highways, and mountaintop settlements continues to impress modern visitors at places like Machu Picchu, which is world-famous.

◆ *Characteristics of the Inca empire*

It is difficult to separate the founding myths that the Incas themselves created from their historical origins. The sun and all ethnic groups were supposedly created by the creator deity Viracocha in Lake Titicaca when he emerged from the



◆ *Myths regarding the origin of the Inca*

Pacific Ocean in the beginning. The god buried these first people, and it wasn't until later that they came back into the world from springs and rocks (sacred *pacarinas*). The sun deity *Inti* deliberately created the Incas in *Tiwanaku* (*Tiahuanaco*). Therefore, they saw themselves as the chosen few, the 'Children of the Sun,' and the Inca monarch as *Inti's* embodiment and representative on earth. According to another version of the legend, the first Incas emerged from the *Tampu T'oqo*, also known as 'The House of Windows,' a sacred cave located south of *Cuzco*. *Manco Capac*, also known as *Manqo Qhapaq*, and his sister, *Mama Oqllu*, also known as *Ocillo*, were the first human couple. The group set out together to establish their civilization after the birth of three more brothers and sisters. The early Incas arrived in the Valley of *Cuzco* after defeating the *Chanca* people with the aid of stone soldiers (*pururaucas*), and *Manco Capac* founded *Cuzco* by driving a golden rod into the earth.

◆ *Hunter-gatherer settlements in Cuzco Valley*

The first settlements in the *Cuzco Valley* actually date back to 4500 BCE, when the area was inhabited by communities of hunter-gatherers, according to more specific archaeological evidence. *Cuzco*, on the other hand, did not become a significant centre until the Late Intermediate Period (1000–1400 CE). With the arrival of the first great Inca leader, *Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui*, and the defeat of the *Chanca* in 1438 CE, the Incas began to expand their empire in all directions and conquer various civilizations along the way. This process of regional unification began in the late 14th century CE. To consolidate their power, they established a uniform tax and administrative system.

◆ *Emergence of Inca Empire*

The Inca Empire rose dramatically quickly. All *Quechua* (or *Runasimi*) speakers in the Inca Empire were initially granted privileged status, and this noble class then dominated all important roles within the empire. *Pachacuti's* successor, *Thupa Inca Yupanqui* (also known as *Topa Inca Yupanqui*), is credited with enlarging the empire by a whopping 4,000 km beginning in 1471 CE. The empire of the Incas was referred to as *Tawantinsuyo* or *Tahuantinsuyu*, which translates to 'Land of the Four Quarters' or 'The Four Parts Together.' *Cuzco* was regarded as the world's navel, with highways and sacred sighting lines (*ceques*) connecting each region: *Antisuyu* (east), *Collasuyu* (south), *Chinchaysuyu* (north), and *Cuntisuyu* (west). 40,000 Incas ruled a vast territory that extended 5,500 kilometers north to south and encompassed ancient *Ecuador*, *Peru*, northern *Chile*, *Bolivia*, upland *Argentina*, and southern *Colombia*. Their subjects spoke



more than 30 languages, and the territory was governed by 40,000 Incas.

4.2.2.1 Inca Polity

- ◆ *Opulent rule, mummification, and ceremonial practices*

We are aware of names like Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui (1438–1463), Thupa Inca Yupanqui (1471–1493), and Wayna Qhapaq (the final pre-Hispanic king (1493–1525 CE) because the Incas preserved lists of their rulers (Sapa Inca). The Spanish records are unclear on these points, so it's plausible that there were several kings in charge at once and that queen held important positions of authority. The Sapa Inca was an absolute monarch who lived a lavish lifestyle. The Sapa Inca was lavishly pampered, drinking from cups made of gold and silver, wearing silver shoes, and living in a palace covered in the finest fabrics. Because the Inca mummified their rulers, he continued to draw attention long after his death.

- ◆ *Hierarchical units*

The foundation of Inca law was compartmentalised, interconnecting units. The king was at the top, along with 10 panaca, or related groupings of nobility. Ten additional kindred groups, more distantly connected to the king, were placed behind them, followed by a third group of nobles who were not of Inca descent but were given the privilege of becoming Incas. In charge of settlements and the smallest Andean population unit, the ayllu, which was a group of households, typically of related families who worked a plot of land, lived together, and offered mutual support in times of need, were locally recruited, administrators. A small number of nobles or curacas, who might include women, were in charge of each ayllu.

- ◆ *Local administrators*

Over 80 regional-level administrators reported to local administrators, who in turn reported to a governor who was in charge of each quarter of the empire. In Cuzco, the four governors were accountable to the supreme Inca ruler. The heirs of local rulers were also kept in well-kept prisons at the Inca capital to guarantee loyalty. The Inca elite, who were referred to by the Spanish as 'orejones' or 'big ears' due to the fact that they wore large ear spools to indicate their status, held the most important political, religious, and military positions within the empire. New administrative centres were constructed throughout the empire, particularly at Tambo Colorado, Huánuco Pampa, and Hatun Xauxa, in order better to ensure this elite's control over their subjects. Garrisons were also scattered throughout the empire.



4.2.2.2 Economy

- ◆ *Taxes paid in kind and labour service*
- ◆ *Quipu used for statistical records*

Censuses were taken for tax purposes, and populations were divided into groups using multiples of ten (Inca mathematics was nearly identical to our current system). Since there was no money in the Inca world, taxes were paid in kind, generally in the form of foodstuffs, rare metals, textiles, exotic feathers, dyes, and spondylus shells. Still, they might also take the form of labourers known as 'mit'a' service, which could be moved across the empire to be utilised where they were most needed. Herds and agricultural land were divided into three sections: production for the gods and state religion, the Inca ruler, and the farmer himself. Local populations were also required to contribute to the construction and upkeep of large-scale imperial initiatives like the extensive road network. The Incas used the quipu, a complicated network of knotted cords that could record decimals up to 10,000, was highly portable, and was used to keep track of all of these statistics.

- ◆ *State-sponsored projects and religious feasts*

Although the Incas imposed their religion and administration on conquered peoples, demanded tribute, and even relocated loyal populations (mitmaqs) in order to integrate new territories into the empire better, Inca culture also brought a number of benefits, including the ability to redistribute food during environmental disasters, improved food storage facilities, work through state-sponsored projects, state-sponsored religious feasts, roads, irrigation systems, terrace farms, military assistance, and luxury goods, particularly art pieces that the local elite.

4.2.2.3 Inca Religion

- ◆ *Reverence for earlier civilizations*
- ◆ *Focus on controlling natural disasters*

The Wari and Tiwanaku, two prior civilizations that occupied much of the same territory, were highly revered by the Inca. As we have seen, the Inca creation myths gave Tiwanaku and Lake Titicaca a significant role, so they were especially revered. Inti, the sun god and supreme Inca deity, and Mama Kilya, the moon goddess, were the subjects of two shrines built at Tiwanaku and the lake's islands by Inca rulers. Additionally, these deities were represented in the Coricancha complex at Cuzco by massive metal sculptures that were worshipped by priests and priestesses under the direction of the second most powerful individual after the king- the Sun's High Priest, Willaq Umu. As a result, the Inca religion was focused on controlling the natural world and avoiding disasters like earthquakes, floods, and drought. These natural cycles of change, which the Inca called

‘pachakuti’ and involve death and renewal, were inevitable.

◆ *Religious rituals*

Additionally, sacred sites were established, frequently making use of prominent natural features like springs, caves, and mountain tops. At specific times of the year, these huacas might be utilised to make astronomical observations. Religious rituals were conducted in accordance with the astronomical calendar, particularly the motions of the Milky Way, the moon, and the sun (Mayu). There is a possibility that agricultural events, particularly the planting and harvesting seasons, are linked to procession and ceremony. Pachacamac, a temple city built in honour of the god with the same name, who created humans, and plants, and caused earthquakes, was the most sacred Inca site alongside Titicaca’s Island of the Sun. Pachacamac was visited by devotees from all over the Andes because of a massive wooden statue of the god that was regarded as an oracle. Shamans played an important role in the religion of the Incas and were present in every settlement. There were 475 in Cuzco (Inca Capital), the most important of which was the yacarca, the ruler’s personal advisor.

◆ *Ancestor worship through mummification*

The mummification of ancestors and the offering of food, drink, and precious materials to the gods were also part of the religious practices of the Incas. In order to pacify and honour the gods and guarantee the king’s health, sacrifices of both animals and humans, including children, were also made. In addition, an essential part of the religious ceremonies held by the Incas was the serving of beverages like chicha beer or water. The Incas built their own temples and sacred sites to impose their religion on the local population. They also took sacred objects from conquered peoples and kept them in Cuzco. As they were kept in the Coricancha, they might have been taken as hostages to conform to the Inca’s worldview.

4.2.2.4 Inca Architecture

◆ *Puma-shaped design and impressive temples*

The Inca empire’s religious and administrative centre, Cuzco, which derives from the word qosqo, which means ‘dried-up lake bed,’ or maybe from cozco, a specific stone marker in the city, had a peak population of up to 150,000 people. Its most notable structures were attributed to Pachacuti and were dominated by the holy Coricancha complex, also known as the Temple of the Sun and covered in emeralds and gold. The temples built in honour of Inti and Mama Kilya were the most magnificent. Although some scholars dispute this and interpret the metaphor, the entire



capital was laid out like a puma, with the imperial metropolis of Pumachupan serving as the tail and the temple complex of Sacsayhuaman (or Saqsawaman) serving as the head. The splendour of Inca Cuzco, which included vast plazas, parklands, shrines, fountains, and canals, unfortunately only survives in the eyewitness accounts of the first Europeans who were awestruck by its architecture and wealth.

◆ *Skilled craftsmen in construction*

The Incas were master stonemasons who used regular or polygonal finely worked blocks to build large buildings, walls, and fortifications without the use of mortar. These buildings have easily withstood the powerful earthquakes that frequently strike the region because they place an emphasis on straight lines, trapezoidal shapes and incorporating natural features into their design. In addition to their obvious aesthetic value, Inca buildings, with their distinctive sloping trapezoid shape and fine masonry, were also used as a recognizable symbol of Inca dominance throughout the empire.

◆ *Construction of buildings*

The ubiquitous one-room storage warehouse known as the qollqa was one of the most typical Inca structures. They were either square for potatoes and tubers or round for maize storage. They were made of stone and had good ventilation. The 'kallanka' was a huge hall that was used for gatherings of the community. The kancha is a group of small rectangular buildings (wasi and masma) with thatched roofs and one room built around a courtyard surrounded by a high wall. The 'kancha' was a typical Inca architectural element that was introduced to conquered areas. Another practice that the Incas carried with them everywhere they went was terracing, to make most of the land area under agriculture, particularly maize. The Incas were skilled at diverting water, transporting it over great distances, channelling it underground, and creating spectacular outlets and fountains; these terraces frequently incorporated canals.

◆ *Inca road network*

There were no wheeled vehicles; instead, llamas and porters were used to convey goods along specially constructed routes across the empire. The nearly 40,000 km long Inca road system not only made it possible for soldiers, officials, and commerce products to move around freely, but it also served as a highly potent visual representation of the Incas' dominance over their vast empire. Along with rest stations, the roadways included a relay system of runners (chasquis) who might go up to 240 km in a single day

carrying messages from one settlement to another.

4.2.2.5 Inca Art

- ◆ *Standardized designs representing specific communities*

Despite being influenced by the Chimu civilization's art and techniques, the Incas did develop their own distinct style, which served as an instantly recognizable symbol of imperial dominance throughout the empire. Inca craftsmanship is best seen in exceptionally cleaned metalwork (in gold - thought about the perspiration of the sun, silver - thought about the tears of the moon, and copper), earthenware production, and materials, with the last being viewed as the loftiest by the actual Incas. Geometric shapes are frequently used in designs which are also technically proficient and standardised. The checkerboard design sticks out as being fairly common. Because pottery and textiles were frequently produced for the state as a tax, artworks were representative of specific communities and their cultural heritage. This was one of the reasons for the repeated designs. Andean art provided recognizable motifs that either represented the specific communities that produced them or the imposed designs of the ruling Inca class that ordered them, just as modern coins and stamps do.

- ◆ *Metal Works and Ceramics*

Some fabrics were reserved for Inca aristocrats' usage alone; precious metal works, such as discs, jewellery, figurines, and daily items, were manufactured especially for them. Additionally, only the ruler of the Inca Empire could own vicuna herds, and goods made from luxuriously soft wool were also restricted. The urpu, a bulbous vessel with a long neck and two small handles low on the pot that was used for storing maize, was the most common shape for ceramics. It is noteworthy that the Incas seldom portrayed themselves, their ceremonies, or typical Andean imagery like monsters and half-human, half-animal characters in their ceramic decorating, textiles, or architectural sculpture.

- ◆ *Textiles, ceramics, and metal sculpture*

Despite fierce competition from masters of metalwork like the skilled craftsmen of the Moche civilization, the Inca produced textiles, ceramics, and metal sculptures that were technically superior to those of any previous Andean culture. The Inca imposed standard Inca forms and designs on their conquered subjects in the same way that they did on their art. However, they did allow local traditions to keep their preferred colours and proportions. Women who were particularly skilled at weaving and gifted artists from Chan Chan and the Titicaca region were brought to Cuzco so that they could produce beautiful items for the Inca rulers.



◆ *Causes for the decline of Inca civilization*

4.2.2.6 Decline

In the middle of the 16th century CE, the Spanish conquerors (conquistadores) led by Francisco Pizarro would take full advantage of the fact that the ruling Incas were frequently unpopular with their subjects, particularly in the northern territories, as the Inca Empire was founded and maintained by force. When it confronted its greatest challenge, the Inca Empire had not yet attained a state of consolidated maturity. The Incas were engaged in a war in Ecuador, where a second Inca capital, Quito, had been established, and there were numerous rebellions. Even worse, the Incas were hit by a wave of European diseases, like smallpox, that spread from central America even faster than the Europeans did, which resulted in the death of 65 to 90 per cent of the people who lived there. Wayna Qhapaq was killed by this disease in 1528 CE, and his two sons, Waskar and Atahualpa, engaged in a bloody civil war for control of the empire just as the Europeans arrived. The powerful Inca Empire, which was the largest and wealthiest in the Americas at the time, was wiped out by a storm of rebellion, disease, and invasion. A sizable number of structures, artefacts, and written records have also withstood the ravages of conquest, looting, and time. Despite the fact that they are insignificant in comparison to the vast wealth that has been lost, these remains remain indisputable evidence of the wealth, inventiveness, and high cultural achievements of this great but brief civilization.

◆ *Aztec dominance*

4.2.3 The Aztec Civilization

The Aztec Domain (c. 1345-1521 CE) covered the greater part of northern Mesoamerica. Aztec rulers like Montezuma were able to impose Aztec ideals and religion across Mexico. The last of the great Mesoamerican civilizations was well-known for its art and architecture as well as its accomplishments in agriculture and trade. The Aztec civilization is actually the most well-documented Mesoamerican civilization, with Tenochtitlan, or Mexico City, as its capital city. Sources for the study of Aztec civilization include archaeology, native books (codices), and detailed accounts from their Spanish conquerors—both military personnel and Christian clergy. Our understanding of the Aztecs, their institutions, religious practices, warfare, and daily life is constantly expanding with regular additions of new details, even though the latter sources may not always be reliable.

Around 1100 CE, the central Mexican city-states, or

◆ *Competition over resources and regional supremacy*

altepetl, began competing with one another for resources and regional supremacy. Each state had its own ruler or tlatoani who led a council of nobles. Still, these small urban centres surrounded by farmland quickly sought to increase their wealth and power, resulting in several small empires in the Valley of Mexico by 1400. These included Azcapotzalco, the Tepenec capital, and Texcoco, the capital of the Acolhua region. The Tepanec War in 1428 brought these two empires face to face. The Azcapotzalco powers were crushed by an alliance of Texcoco, Tenochtitlan (the capital of the Mexica) and a few other more modest urban communities. Tlacopan, a rebel Tepanec city, and Texcoco, Tenochtitlan, formed a Triple Alliance following the victory, where these three great cities shared the war's spoils, usually in the form of tributes from the conquered, a campaign of territorial expansion began. Tenochtitlan's ruler became the Alliance's supreme ruler, the huey tlatoque (literally 'high king'), and the city became the Aztec empire's capital over time.

◆ *Aztec military expansion*

From 1430 onwards, the empire continued to grow, and the elite members of Aztec society like the Eagle and Jaguar warriors, bolstered by conscription of all adults, men from allied and conquered states, and the Aztec military, defeated their rivals. Major cities were the focus of battles, and the victorious side took control of the entire region after they fell. Captives were brought back to Tenochtitlan for the purpose of ritual sacrifice, and regular tributes were collected. Along these lines, the Aztec realm came to cover a large portion of northern Mexico, a region of nearly 135,000 square kilometres. While the states outside of the empire served as helpful buffer zones against more hostile neighbours, particularly the Tarascan civilisation, certain states underwent greater integration than others.

4.2.3.1 Aztec Religion

◆ *Interconnection of Aztec mythology and religion*

The Aztecs, like the majority of ancient cultures, had a strong connection between religion and mythology. The idea that people from the mythical land of plenty Aztlan—literally 'Land of White Herons'—in the far northwest had first settled in the Valley of Mexico was the foundation of Tenochtitlan. There is a common belief that their god, Huitzilopochtli, had sent an eagle perched on a cactus to show them the way, telling them exactly where to build their new home. The god also gave these people the name 'Mexica'. Together with other ethnic groups who spoke Nahuatl in a similar way, they became the people who are



commonly referred to as the Aztecs.

◆ *Important God worshipped by the Aztecs*

There was a mix of older Mesoamerican and Mexican deities in the Aztec pantheon. Huitzilopochtli, the war and sun god, and Tlaloc, the rain god, were the two main gods worshipped. Both of these gods had temples on top of the Templo Mayor pyramid in the centre of Tenochtitlan. Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent god of many Mesoamerican cultures, Tezcatlipoca, the supreme god at Texcoco, Xipe Totec, the god of spring and agriculture, Xiuhtecuhtli, the god of fire, Xochipilli, the god of flowers and summertime, Omoteotl, the god of the dead, and Coatlicue, were also significant gods.

◆ *Variety of calendars*

Every aspect of human existence was governed by this extensive pantheon of gods. The celebrations held in honour of these deities were timed according to a variety of calendars. The Aztecs used a calendar with names like 'Crocodile and Wind' that was 260 days long and divided into 20 weeks of 13 days. Additionally, they used a solar calendar with 18 months, each with 20 days. Apart from these, the sun's 52-year cycle and Venus' 584-day cycle were significant factors. Even though the Mayan did not observe the motion of the planets and stars as well as they did, it affected agricultural practices and religious ceremonies took place.

◆ *Rituals, including human sacrifice*

Aztecs gave great importance to the Sun. They believed that the world went through a series of cosmic ages, each of which had its own sun, until the fifth and final age, which is where the Aztecs live today, was reached. This progression through space and time was beautifully depicted in the well-known Sun Stone, but it can also be found in numerous other places. Festivals, banquets, music, dancing, statue decoration, incense burning, the rite of burying valuables, penances like giving blood, and animal sacrifices were used to honour the gods. Adults and children were regularly sacrificed as a means of metaphorically 'feeding' the gods so that they would not become enraged and make life difficult for humans by causing droughts, storms, and other calamities. The captives of the war were the victims of human sacrifice. In fact, the purpose of the so-called 'Flowery Wars' was to collect sacrificial victims. Warriors who had shown great bravery in battle were the most opulent offerings.

4.2.3.2 Art and Architecture

Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital, flourished on the western shore of Lake Texcoco, which is now Mexico City. By the

◆ *Features of Aztec capital city*

beginning of the 16th century, Tenochtitlan had at least 200,000 residents, making it the largest city in the Pre-Columbian Americas. There were a number of social classes that these inhabitants belonged to, and local rulers (teteuhctin) occupied the highest position, followed by nobles (pipiltin), commoners (macehualtin), serfs (mayeque), and slaves (tlacohtin). Tenochtitlan was not only the centre of politics and religion, but it was also a major trading hub for commodities like gold, greenstone, turquoise, cotton, cacao beans, tobacco, pottery, tools, weapons, food (such as tortillas, chile sauces, maize, beans, and even insects), and slaves. Slaves were also brought in and out of the city. The city's magnificent architecture and art, particularly the Templo Mayor pyramid and massive stone sculptures, left the Spanish invaders speechless. Overwhelming the city was the immense Sacrosanct Area with its sanctuaries and fantastic ball court. The water management of Tenochtitlan was also impressive. Water management at Tenochtitlan was particularly amazing, with extensive canals crisscrossing the city, which was bordered by chinampas, or raised and flooded fields, considerably enhancing the Aztecs' ability to cultivate their land. Around the city were also beautiful flower gardens, artificial freshwater reservoirs, and flood-control dykes.

◆ *Fine artworks*

Fine art was a passion for the Aztecs. The art of the Aztecs was nothing short of eclectic, and it included everything from small, engraved treasures to massive stone temples.

◆ *Artisans specialized in metalworks*

Craftsmen could specialize in metalwork, wood carving, or stone sculpture, using materials like amethyst, rock crystal, gold, silver, and exotic feathers. Their guilds were attached to the main palaces. The famous Xuihtecuhtli mask, for example, is one of the turquoise mosaic-covered artefacts that stands out the most. Vases with anthropomorphic figures and bright colours are common forms of pottery vessels. The Cholula ware from Cholollan, which is finely crafted and highly prized, deserves special mention.

◆ *Significance of Aztec art*

Animals, plants, and gods were popular subjects in Aztec art, particularly those associated with agriculture and fertility. Art could also be used as propaganda to promote Tenochtitlan's imperial dominance. The ideology of the Aztecs is depicted in the Sun Stone, the Stone of Tizoc, and the Throne of Motecuhzoma II, all of which attempt to closely link political rulers to cosmic events and even the



gods themselves. The Templo Mayor pyramid, for instance, attempted to replicate the sacred snake mountain of Aztec mythology, Coatepec. Additionally, Aztec-themed temples and statues were constructed throughout the empire.

4.2.3.3 Decline

◆ *Causes for the decline*



The Aztec empire witnessed minor uprisings from time to time, usually when new rulers came into power at Tenochtitlan, but they were always swiftly put down. However, in 1515, when the Aztecs were severely defeated by the Tlaxcala and Huexotzingo. Some of these rebel states would once more seize the opportunity to gain independence with the Spanish arrival. When the conquistadors finally arrived from the Old World in their floating palaces, led by Hernan Cortes, their first interactions with Motecuhzoma II, the leader of the Aztecs, were friendly, and they exchanged valuable gifts. However, when a small group of Spanish soldiers were killed at Tenochtitlan while Cortes was away at Veracruz, things took a bad turn. Cuitlahuac was chosen as the new tlatoani by the Aztec warriors, who were dissatisfied with Motecuhzoma's passiveness and overthrew him. Cortes returned to the city to relieve the remaining besieged Spanish. He was forced to withdraw on June 30, 1520, in what became known as the 'Noche Triste', which was exactly what Cortes needed. Cortes returned ten months later, and in 1521, he gathered local allies and laid siege to the city. On the fateful day of August 13, 1521, the Aztecs, now led by Cuauhtemoc, finally collapsed due to a lack of food and disease. Tenochtitlan's monuments were looted and destroyed. The new capital of the colony of New Spain emerged, and the long line of Mesoamerican civilizations that had begun with the Olmec came to an abrupt and brutal end.

Summarised Overview

The Mayan civilization was the earliest and survived the longest period of time. The Mayan settlements were widely spread with developed architectural styles. They had a network of raised roads built, uniquely connecting all the main centres and hinterland (with arterial roads). The polity was organized in a sort of city-state ruled by hereditary officers. The society was stratified with peasantry at the lower strata, and their surplus produce was the main source of the state's revenue. This civilization declined after 900 CE. There are various opinions about the causes of its downfall. It is difficult to ascribe a single factor to it.

Both Incas and Aztecs were nearly contemporary, and their fall was caused by the conquest of these regions by Europeans, and they were subordinated. However, certain social features and languages could survive even after long colonial rule. The Incas had Cusco as their principal city, well connected with other parts of the empire with a defined system of administration and governance. The provincial lords provided the revenue and military services to the central authority. The Incas developed agricultural techniques with canals for irrigation. Large areas were cultivated with common land holdings. The Aztecs were mainly a warrior tribe. They realized taxes from the subjugated tribes. They established the city of Tenochtitlan as their Capital. The city had separate residential areas for the ruling group and plebeians. They had organized economic life with developed inland trade.

Self Assessment

1. What is the significance and symbolism of the 'Tree of Life' in Mayan civilization?
2. What were the architectural features of Mayan cities during the Classic Period?
3. How did the emergence of kingship and hierarchical systems impact Mayan society during the Middle Preclassic and Classic periods?
4. What are the theories regarding the decline of Mayan cities during the Post-Classic period?
5. How did the religious beliefs and cosmology of the Maya influence their culture, art, and architecture?
6. Who were the Inca rulers, and what kind of power did they hold?
7. What is the significance of Lake Titicaca in Inca mythology?
8. When did the Inca civilization flourish, and how far did their empire extend?
9. Where did the Inca civilization build their capital city, and what were its important features?
10. How did the Inca civilization adapt to natural landscapes with terracing, highways, and mountaintop settlements?

Assignments

1. Analyze the role and significance of the astronomical knowledge and observations of the Mayan civilization.



2. Compare and contrast the political and social structures of Mayan society during the Middle Preclassic and Classic periods.
3. Investigate the factors contributing to the collapse of Mayan civilization during the Terminal Classic period. Evaluate various theories proposed by scholars and provide evidence and arguments to support your analysis.
4. Examine the artistic expressions of the Mayan civilization.
5. Explore the advancements and achievements of Mayan mathematics and hieroglyphic writing.
6. Discuss the origins and myths surrounding the creation of the Inca civilization. How did the Incas view themselves as the 'Children of the Sun'?
7. Explain the political structure of the Inca Empire. How was power distributed among the ruling elite and local administrators?

Suggested Readings

1. Cunliffe, Barry, *The Scythians: Nomad Warriors of the Steppe*, Oxford University Press, 2019.
2. Jackson, Peter, *The Mongols and the West: 1221 – 1410*, Routledge, 2005.
3. M. Anatoly, Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984.
4. W. David, Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World*, Princeton University Press, 2007.

References

1. Bartlett, Robert, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950 – 1350*, Princeton University Press, 1993.
2. Curtin, Jeremiah, *The Mongols: A History*, Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 1908.
3. Jin, Hyun, Kim, *The Huns: Rome and the Birth of Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 2014.
4. J. Otto, Maenchen, *The Huns: The Peoples of Europe*, Wiley Blackwell, 1973.
5. 'Maya Civilization', <https://www.academia.edu>.



6. W. Kenneth, Harl, *The Barbarian Empires of the Steppes*, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കുരിശുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പാറണം

ശാസ്ത്രവ്യാപ്തിയെന്നുമേകണം
ജാതിഭേദമാകെ മാറണം
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ
ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണേ

കുരിപ്പുഴ ശ്രീകുമാർ

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

Regional Centres

Kozhikode

Govt. Arts and Science College
Meenchantha, Kozhikode,
Kerala, Pin: 673002
Ph: 04952920228
email: rckdirector@sgou.ac.in

Thalassery

Govt. Brennen College
Dharmadam, Thalassery,
Kannur, Pin: 670106
Ph: 04902990494
email: rctdirector@sgou.ac.in

Tripunithura

Govt. College
Tripunithura, Ernakulam,
Kerala, Pin: 682301
Ph: 04842927436
email: rcedirector@sgou.ac.in

Pattambi

Sree Neelakanta Govt. Sanskrit College
Pattambi, Palakkad,
Kerala, Pin: 679303
Ph: 04662912009
email: rcpdirector@sgou.ac.in

History of Ancient Societies

COURSE CODE: M21HS04DC



Sreenarayanaguru Open University

Kollam, Kerala Pin- 691601, email: info@sgou.ac.in, www.sgou.ac.in Ph: +91 474 2966841

ISBN 978-81-963283-1-3



9 788196 328313