# Ancient Civilizations

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To borrow from Dr. Seuss's book title, "Oh the Places You'll Go!

Here's a coming attraction of the people, places, ideas, and things coming at you: Your 3.2 million-year-old human ancestor Lucy, mummies, pyramids, Cleopatra, "an eye for an eye", the birth of major religions Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, the birth of democracy, the first Olympics, Julius Caesar, gladiators, the invention of writing, paper, and the wheel, kingdoms built of stone in Africa, the Great Wall of China, the introduction of such concepts as zero, time, and monotheism (the belief in one god), Samurai, martial arts, palaces of gold, and even the Sphinx. Whew!

The study of ancient civilizations and people raises some profound questions. Who are humans? Where did we come from? Where are we going?

As you explore these civilizations, see if you can make sense of this Sphinxlike statement from author William Faulkner: "The past is never dead. It's not even past." It may help you see where you are going.

Knowledge of history is empowering. An event is but the furthest ripple of an ever-expanding wave that may have started eddying outward hundreds of years ago. One who "sees" history is able to harness the power of that wave's entire journey.

The United States and our world today represents the latest chapter in the book that is history. This course presents many of the chapters that led up to our chapter. Here is much of the back-story that helps us all understand our historic inheritance and the choices we may make.

As Seuss promises later in that same book, "Will you succeed? Yes, you will indeed. (98¾% guaranteed.)"
1. How Do We Know?

"A black cloud rose...
Gathering speed as it blew, drowning the mountains,
Overcoming the people as in battle...
For six days and seven nights
The flood wind blew as the South Storm swept the land.
At sunrise in the seventh day...
The sea grew quieter, the storm subsided, the flood ceased." - Tablet XI, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

Archaeologists aboard a ship named *Northern Horizon* watched in amazement as a rectangular shape slid across their video screens. Here, eight miles off the Turkish shore, submerged beneath 300 feet of water, was the remains of a house. It was just what they had been searching for.

It was September 9, 2000. The pictures were relayed to the mothership by *Little Hercules*, a tiny submarine robot, which slipped through the murky waters of the Black Sea scrutinizing the sea floor.

"What we've done today is of world importance," Dr. Fredrik Hiebert, the expedition's chief archaeologist, solemnly announced. He might be right. The underwater house was startling evidence of a gigantic flood recounted in the Old Testament (Noah's Ark) and described above in the *Epic of Gilgamesh.*

**Reconstructing History**
How do we know about the past? Did a giant flood actually occur? Or were the stories of Gilgamesh and Noah folk tales intended to provide moral guidance?

Scientists today are helping to decide. It's hard, complicated work though. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* was lost for thousands of years. Recovering it took the patient excavation of the ruined cities of Mesopotamia; the discovery of libraries of clay tablets, then the deciphering of cuneiform writing and several ancient languages.
Gilgamesh, we now know, was a real king, ruler of the Sumerian city of Uruk, located on the Euphrates River in modern Iraq. His epic/fact/myth was first written down on clay tablets about 2000 B.C. It is the first great work of world literature — an adventure story, a story of morality and tragedy, and the vain search for eternal life.

Dozens of legends worldwide contain similar flood stories. In 1997, two Columbia University oceanographers, William Ryan and Walter Pitman, began wondering, could these tales have some basis in fact? Here is what they proposed:

Twelve thousand years ago, at the end of the last Ice Age, the Black Sea was an isolated freshwater lake. As the climate warmed, an enormous icecap covering much of the Northern Hemisphere started to melt. Sea levels rose everywhere. One ominous day around 5600 B.C. the swollen waters of the Mediterranean cut through the hills surrounding the Black Sea. A torrent cascaded toward the sea with the force of 200 Niagara Falls. Rising waters quickly flooded coastal plains, inundating farms and villages. Their terrified inhabitants fled to higher ground, carrying with them tales of a tremendous flood.

In 1999, an expedition to the Black Sea dredged up shells of two entirely different kinds of mollusks. Freshwater species lived there from 15,500 until 7,460 years ago. Suddenly, 6,820 years ago, saltwater species appeared. This made perfect sense if the Black Sea switched from a freshwater to a saltwater environment about 7,000 years ago.

**A New Discovery**

Now, in September 2000, came the first signs of human habitation: *Little Hercules*’ cameras revealed a rectangle of hewn wooden beams perhaps 12 feet across and twice as long, with "branches that seemed to be stuck in layers of mud."

"What we were looking at" explains archaeologist Hiebert, "was a melted building made out of wattle and daub. Now, this is the typical type of construction for the ancient inhabitants along the Black Sea coast. And here we're seeing it under 300 feet of water. It
was one of the most astonishing things I've ever seen."

Coming up with the theory of the Mediterranean flood took years of accumulated information about the earth's past climates and changing sea levels. Proving it is taking still more skill and effort. How do we know about the past? By ideas and imagination, shared knowledge, and sheer hard work.

Why study the past? The tale of the flood should make that obvious — it's fascinating. Stories about ourselves are always intriguing. Where did we come from? How did people from thousands of different cultures, over tens of thousands of years, live? How were their concerns different from or similar to our own? The past is full of surprises, but they never fall far from home. By learning more about who we were — and how we come to be here — we become more fully human.

1a. Archaeologists and Their Artifacts

"Archaeology is the science of rubbish." -archaeologist Stuart Piggot

The Forma Urbis Romae may just be the world's biggest jigsaw-puzzle. Carved across marble slabs 45 feet high and 60 feet long, it is a map ancient Rome showing every street, building, room, and staircase. Eighteen-hundred years ago it hung in the Roman census bureau, the most detailed map of the city ever produced.

At least, it used to be. Today it languishes in the basement of a museum, smashed. Now a team of American researchers have devised a novel way of pasting it together again — by scanning it into a computer.

For hundreds of years after the fall of Rome, hunks of marble were hacked off the map for building material. Then the building housing the map collapsed. In 1562, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese made a valiant attempt to collect the surviving sections. Since then every attempt to piece together the 1,163 fragments has failed. It is one of classical
archaeology’s great unsolved problems.

![Figure 4](image)

*Figure 4 This mock-up of an archaeological dig site gives an impression of what the important elements and basic tools are. Even in this age of computers and x-rays, archaeologists still have to use basic methods like digging and measuring to insure that they collect the best information possible.*

The first task of the American researchers was simple: 3-D scan each individual block into their computer. Now it gets harder. The computer must find a way to fit them together. So far the data base contains "8 billion polygons and 6 thousand color images, occupying 40 gigabytes." Solving the puzzle, says the team, "will take months, possibly years."

![Figure 5](image)

*Figure 5 You come across a buried staircase that leads down into the desert. You open the first doors you see — they lead to a long passageway and an antechamber. Thieves have ransacked it. But there are other doors, undisturbed for centuries. You press your ear to the door. All is silent. You reach for the handle...*

This approach is light-years away from the traditional methods of archaeologists who spend their time carefully sifting through the dirt. But today a battery of new tools is helping to bring the past back to life.

Archaeology, notes one of its practitioners, "has a long disreputable line of descent; its ancestors were, quite literally, grave robbers and adventurers." Foremost amongst them ranks the Italian Giovanni Belzoni. In the early 1800s he looted hundreds of ancient Egyptian tombs, candidly
admitting: "The purpose of my researches was to rob the Egyptians of their papyri." Papyri were the ancient papers of the Egyptians. They were made from a plant that grew along the Nile valley.

Modern archaeologists proceed with more caution. Still, few can claim the delicacy of Sir Leonard Woolley, who in the 1920s excavated the great Sumerian city of Ur. While digging in the royal cemetery he noticed a small hole just below where a small gold cap and some gold nails had been found. Woolley filled the hole with liquid plaster. When the soil was cleared away, the shaft of a lyre — preserved as a plaster cast — emerged. Woolley was able to reconstruct the entire instrument, even though its original wood had long since vanished.

**You Want a Date?**

Before starting a dig the first step is to map a site, dividing it into small squares. Careful notes are kept of changes in sediment, and of each object (however fragmentary) found within each square. The idea is to create a 3-D picture of the area — a picture through time. Younger remains usually lie closer to the surface, older ones beneath. Fortunately, archaeologists no longer have to rely on position alone for judging an object's age.

In the late 1940s, the physicist Willard Libby invented C-14 (radiocarbon) dating. It transformed the study of the past. For the first time organic material — charcoal, wood, shell and bone, even clothing — from 500 to 50,000 years old could be reliably dated. Through radiocarbon dating, archaeologists built a world-wide chronology of human activity.

**How C-14 dating works**

Carbon exists in the atmosphere in two forms — ordinary carbon, C-12; and carbon-14. This is radioactive and decays with a half-life of 5730 years (it takes 5730 years for half of the C-14 in a sample to become C-12). Plants and animals contain carbon in the same mixture as the atmosphere. When they die, C-14 continues to decay. By measuring how much — or, rather, how little — C-14 remains, researchers can calculate how much time...
has elapsed since death occurred.

There are traps, of course. An object may be contaminated by carbon from another source. Or, it may not "belong" at the level where the carbon-containing material was found. Perhaps it was carried there by erosion, or dislodged by a careless archaeologist. It happens. All this allows archaeologists to go on arguing about ages, for ages.

How do archaeologists know where to dig? Often they don't. They know where not to dig – where nothing interesting exists. But how do you tell one from the other? Excavation is expensive, and there is nothing an archaeologist likes less than staring at an empty hole. The ideal solution is to look underground before you start. Astonishingly, techniques are coming along to do just that.

Most archaeologists rely on buried buildings, bodies, ancient hearths, or iron tools, having different physical "signatures" from the surrounding soil. Ground penetrating radar, for example, pumps radio waves into the earth then measures the patterns reflected back. For example, by coupling his scanner to a special computer program anthropology professor Lawrence B. Conyers has produced striking images of otherwise invisible structures. One day, he promises, he will generate moving 3-D pictures and take us on underground video "tours" of archaeological sites.

The great English archaeologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler used to remind his students, "The archeologist is not digging up things, he is digging up people." Regardless of the changes in methods, archaeological aims remain the same: to illuminate the past and bring back to life the experiences and cultures of people long gone.

1b. Anthropologists and Their People

Finding them didn't come as much of a surprise. Not to David Roberts, anyway. Winding its way across an 117,000-year-old former sand dune was a trail of footprints made by human feet. They are the oldest human footprints ever found.

Roberts is a South African geologist. Previously, he had come across fossilized carnivore
tracks in the rock fringing Langebaan Lagoon 60 miles north of Cape Town. And he had noticed rock fragments which showed signs of human use. So: "On a hunch, I began searching for hominid footprints — and found them!"

"Hundreds of people had walked over that area and not noticed the prints," adds Roberts's colleague, Lee Berger. "Whoever left these footprints has the potential of being the ancestor of all modern humans."

The prints measure eight and a half inches in length. This early person would have taken size 4 shoes.

**The Beginning of Time?**

When did it all begin? If you had asked Dr. John Lightfoot in 1644, he would have given you a most precise answer. The world was created on October 23, 4004 B.C.E., promptly "at nine o'clock in the morning." Lightfoot, a Hebrew scholar, arrived at the date through exhaustive study of Scripture.

Today we know this underestimates our planet's true age a million-fold. The earth formed 4.6 billion years ago — an almost unimaginably long time. But what of our human past? How far back does it stretch? There are several answers — a series of "firsts":

- 2 million+ years: First Hominids
- 100,000+ years: First Humans
- 9,000 years: First Settlements
- 6,000 years: First Civilizations

All this and more is the province of anthropology. The word means literally "the study of man." We are a complicated species, and anthropologists poke into every aspect of our human nature.
The Caretakers of Culture

Some anthropologists live for years at a time with aboriginal peoples, recording how they organize their lives with the overlay of civilization absent. Margaret Mead, the most celebrated anthropologist of her generation, pioneered this approach in the 1920s when she lived among the Samoan Islanders of the South Pacific. She returned to tell a scandalized world that they practiced free love. Later experts have suggested her adolescent informants fooled the rather earnest young Mead. They were just leading her on.

Other researchers look to our nearest surviving relatives, the great apes, and seek clues to human behavior there. For 40 years Jane Goodall has lived alongside the chimpanzees of Gombe National park in Tanzania. Chimps may look cuddly and cute but they are not above thievery, infanticide, and murder.

Who owns the past? It may sound an odd question, but it is one anthropologists, especially in North America, are having to face. American museums are filled with the skeletons of Native Americans exhumed — looted, if you like — without the permission of their living descendants. In 1990, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) ordered that this material returned to the tribes.

Kennewick Man is at the center of the bitterest dispute. A near-complete human skeleton, it was found along the banks of the Columbia River in Kennewick, Washington, in July 1996. James C. Chatters, the forensic anthropologist who first examined it observed that its characteristics reflected European — not Native American — ancestry.

To Chatters’ astonishment when the skeleton was dated, it turned out to be over 9,000 years old. The story made headlines around the world — and a coalition of Indian tribes
immediately sued for possession. Ever since the case has been mired in court.

Kennewick Man may reveal fundamentally new facts about the earliest inhabitants of the Americas. If the tribal leaders have their way, he will be reburied at a secret site and his story lost to us all forever. What's the solution? To begin, more trusting relationships between researchers and the people they study must be forged.

1c. Historians and Their Time

"On the 24th of August ... between 2 and 3 in the afternoon my mother drew his attention to a cloud of unusual size and appearance...I can best describe its shape by likening it to a pine tree. It rose into the sky on a very long "trunk" from which spread some "branches"...The sight of it made the scientist in my uncle determined to see it from closer at hand." –Pliny the Younger describing his uncle's death in the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, 79 C.E.

There wasn't any history before 3000 B.C.E.

In a literal sense that is true. Historians mostly rely on written documents to reconstruct the past. Before 3000 B.C.E. writing did not exist, as far as we know. Accordingly, events earlier than this time are referred to as "pre-history," before written history!

Why C.E. and B.C.E.?
You may be used to seeing dates with B.C. or A.D. (for example, 2750 B.C. or A.D. 476). So why don't you see those abbreviations here?

The abbreviation B.C. stands for "Before Christ," and A.D. stands for the Latin phrase Anno Domini, which means, "the Year of Our Lord." Because history belongs to everyone, and because not everyone is a Christian, many historians have been using the new terms, B.C.E. and C.E

The abbreviation C.E. stands for the "Common Era" and is used in place of A.D. For
example, 1492 C.E. is the same as A.D. 1492 (which is sometimes incorrectly written as 1492 A.D.). The abbreviation B.C.E. stands for "Before the Common Era," and is used in place of B.C. The year 1625 B.C.E is the same as 1625 B.C.

Clay and the Sumerians

The Sumerians invented the first writing system. At first they used pictographs to represent words — little pictures drawn on wet clay. A picture of a bird represents mushen, "bird;" a fish, the word ha, "fish." Sumerian scribes quickly discovered how to write new words by joining pictures together: the signs for "woman" and "mountain" produced geme, "slave-girl" — the Sumerians took their slaves from the mountain tribes to the east. Eventually the pictures evolved into abstract patterns made by a wedge-shaped stylus. This is called cuneiform writing, from the Latin word cuneus = "wedge."

What did the Sumerians write? Mostly lists. Inventories of people and possessions, of goods to trade, of food rations for slaves. There are legal documents: marriage records, wills, contracts, deeds of sale — and tax returns by the score (one Sumerian proverb reads "You can have a lord, You can have a king, But the man to fear is the tax collector"). Of the 1500,000 clay tablets recovered so far, 75 percent deal with such matters.

Scattered amongst them, though, are poems and epics — the world's first literature. There is a farmer's almanac, even recipes. This one comes from Akkad around 1700 B.C.E. It is for "Tuhu Beets" — beets boiled in beer (don't knock it until you've tried it), and begins: Tuhu shirum saqum izzaz me tukan lipia tanadi tusammat tabaum... Roughly, you boil beets with onions in beer, add herbs, mush everything into a porridge, then sprinkle with raw shuhutinu. What's shuhutinu? — "an unidentified member of the onion family."

Figure 12 The Sumerians were among the first people to develop a written language. They recorded events and religious information on wet clay tablets using styluses.

Figure 13 Did they have laptop computers in 480 B.C.? Hardly. The youth in this image is writing on a folded tablet using a stylus (sort of like an ancient fountain pen).
The Sumerians never wrote history in the sense of trying to explain how the past happened, by the deed of men and women, economic factors, natural disasters or pestilence. They believed their society had been there since the universe began, planned and decreed by the gods. It never occurred to them that their land had once been scattered villages occupying desolate marshland, its greatness coming from human toil, invention, vision and determination.

**Interpreting the Past**

Credit as the First Historian goes to Herodotus, born c. 484 C.E., who lived in Athens while the Parthenon was being built. He seems to have been a trader, a compulsive story-teller, who traveled widely throughout the Greek empire. He must have made an enchanting companion, engaging in conversation everyone he met. "My business is to record what people say," he explains, "but I am no means bound to believe it." Officially he wrote an account of the war between the Persians and Greeks. Along the way he found time to be fascinated by ancient Egyptian religion, the flooding of the Nile — and gnats, on which he offers sound advice:

“All everyone provides himself with a net, which during the day he uses for fishing, and at night fixes up around his bed, and creeps in under it before he goes to sleep. For anyone to sleep wrapped in a cloak or linen would be useless, for the gnats would bite through them; but they do not even attempt to get through the net."

"What made him the first serious historian," says classical scholar and poet Peter Levi, "is his combination of great scope and precise focus, his imaginative power as a story-teller and his rationalism, his concern with truth."

**Vesuvius: A Case Study in History**

In Roman times, Pliny-the-Younger proved a worthy successor with his brilliant description of the eruption of Vesuvius quoted above. He was just 17 years-old when the volcano exploded, destroying the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum. His account has helped modern volcanologists reconstruct the event. It lasted about 18 hours, Pliny tells them.
There was a cloud shaped like "a pine tree" — a dense column of hot gas, rock and ash, tossed 20 miles up into the sky. After about 12 hours, the force of the blast slackened. The column collapsed hurling a gigantic surge cloud of hot ash down Vesuvius' western slope at 100 mph. Within 4 minutes it reached Herculaneum, blasting buildings, burning or suffocating the people. A second surge devastated Pompeii.

During the 1981 eruption of Mt. St. Helens scientists were amazed at the speed and power of these so-called "pyroclastic flows." They overturned forests and engulfed a car speeding away at 80 mph. Pliny reports one of these surges and was fortunate not have perished in it: "I look back: a dense cloud looms behind us, following us like a flood poured across the land... The fire itself actually stopped some distance away, but darkness and ashes came again, a great weight of them..." His uncle was not so lucky and died across the Gulf of Naples at Stabiae.

Vesuvius will erupt again. The only question is when. Millions of people now living in the shadow of the volcano will be at risk.

The philosopher George Santayana remarked: "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it." Henry Ford dismissed history as "bunk." Edward Waldo Emerson maintained "There is no history; only biography." Percy Bysshe Shelley put it poetically: "History is a cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of man." Shakespeare is briefest: "The past is prologue." The future begins here.

Herodotus, the first historian, claimed modest goals for his work: "that the doings of men may not be forgotten." On the title page he wrote Historia, Greek for "inquiries" or "researches." Inquiring into the past has been called history ever since.

1d. Geographers and Their Space

They set out on April 7, 1805, from Fort Mandan, North Dakota, near present-day
Bismarck. Two young army captains, 28 year-old Merriweather Lewis and his partner William Clark, rounded up their party and headed west. With them they took a map showing just three points — the Mississippi as far as Mandan, the position of St. Louis and the location of the mouth of the Columbia River in the Pacific Northwest. It was Lewis and Clark's task to fill in the rest.

"Your observations are to be taken with great pains and accuracy," President Thomas Jefferson instructed. "In all your intercourse with the natives, treat them in the most friendly and conciliatory manner." To this end, the expedition's supplies included 4,600 sewing needles, 144 small scissors, 8 brass kettles, 33 pounds of colored beads, and a quantity of vermilion face paint.

Traveling with Lewis and Clark were 32 men and a young Indian woman named Sacagawea. When the expedition limped into St. Louis on September 23, 1806, it had covered 8,000 miles, bringing back priceless information about the rivers and mountains of the region, the plants and animals and people.

Humans are curious creatures, always wondering what lies beyond the horizon. Lewis and Clark did not describe themselves as geographers, but they might well have. Geography is the study of the surface of the earth. It is about people and places. It is about the physical character of a country, its climates and landscapes, and its biological environment.

Eratosthenes was the first to use the word "Geographica" as the title of his book in the 3rd century B.C.E. Eratosthenes figured out the size of the earth. His method was rather simple. He knew that on the summer solstice in Aswan, the sun shines directly overhead at noon. In Alexandria, 500 miles to the north, he found it cast a shadow, giving an angle of about 7.2 degrees. Assuming the sun is sufficiently distant that its rays are parallel, he calculated the earth's circumference by the ratios: 7.2/360 = 500/x. His figure of 25,000 miles was very close to reality.
Mapping the World
The geographer's most important tool is the map. Mapmaking went through a revolution in 15th and 16th centuries when a marvelous age of exploration dawned. Bartolomeu Dias, who discovered the Cape of Good Hope in 1487, was followed by Vasco da Gama, who pioneered the route to India. In 1492, Columbus crossed the Atlantic. And in 1519, Magellan set out on his ambitious voyage to circumnavigate the planet.

Magellan’s venture was not a happy one. Approaching the tip of South America his crew mutinied, terrified by ferocious weather. Magellan executed some, imprisoned others, and marooned the ringleader on a remote shore of South America. Rounding Tierra del Fuego — the southern tip of South America — Magellan headed into the Pacific. He trusted his maps and thought it would take only a few days to cross. But his trip took four months. Drinking water became putrid and turned yellow. The crew almost starved. They were reduced to eating sawdust, leather strips, and rats.

As sailors returned and more information came in, more of the earth needed to be mapped. Cartographers — or mapmakers — faced a fascinating problem. How could the three-dimensional surface of the earth be represented on a two-dimensional page? They learned it could not be done without sacrificing shape, direction, or size.

Mercator Plots the Course
In 1569, Gerardus Mercator, a Flemish mapmaker, devised a brilliant solution and produced the earth’s most famous map. On a globe, lines of longitude meet at the poles. Mercator opened them up to make them parallel, intersecting at right angles with lines of latitude. In another adjustment, he placed latitude lines farther part as they approached north and south.
The map had certain drawbacks. Regions near the poles suffered gross distortions. Greenland, for example, appeared several times the size of South America. Sailors, for whom the map was prepared, did not much care. What mattered was that the map offered a simple way to plot a course.

In 1585, Mercator began to publish his maps in book form. Engraved on the title page appeared the Greek god, Atlas, carrying the earth upon his back. Ever since, a book of maps has been known as an atlas.

The science of mapmaking has continued. Cartographers followed in Mercator’s footsteps, continually trying to represent the earth on paper. Although few have had the adventurous spirit of Magellan or Lewis and Clark, the work of cartographers has led to improved communications and a broader understanding of the earth’s physical features.

2. Prehistoric Times

What did the earth look like four million years ago? Who lived here? What did they look like?

Humans are curious creatures. We want to know where we came from, in part, as a way of figuring out where we are going in the future.

Our need to know is sometimes overwhelming. Archaeologists and anthropologists dig through dirt, study DNA samples, examine artifacts, and try to construct a picture of the earliest human ancestors.
Artifacts, by the way, are not facts about art. Rather, artifacts are things created by humans (tools, vases, clothing) for practical purposes.

**Can You Dig It?**

Digging into our ancestors' past is hard work. Records of human life were not kept millions of years ago. What was life like for cavepeople in the Stone Age? Did Fred Flintstone actually wear leopard skin suits and eat brontosaurus burgers?

Evidence of life from about 30,000 years ago has been found in cave paintings, in burial chambers, and in the form of crude tools. But what about time dating earlier than that? This "Prehistoric" period — before writing and civilizations — is called the Stone Age and is extremely valuable to our understanding of our earliest hominid ancestors. Hominids comprise humans today, extinct ancestors, and apes that share similarities with humans.

The earliest and longest period of the Stone Age is called the Paleolithic Age. This comes from the Greek word *Palaios*, meaning "long ago" or "old," and *lithos*, meaning "stone" — put together, Paleolithic Age means Old Stone Age.

The Old Stone Age began approximately 4.5 million years ago. It lasted until about 25 thousand years ago — relatively recently in terms of the overall age of the earth. It was at the beginning of the Old Stone Age, approximately 4.4 million years ago, that the first human ancestors made their appearance on earth.

Approximately 3.5 million years ago, hominids began walking upright. What did they eat? Where did they live? The archaeological evidence is not clear. Those who study the earliest hominids do know, however, that these human ancestors physically changed in response to their environment.

**Chill Out**

Dramatic changes in world climate started taking place about 1.5 million years ago. Most
of the world became cold — really cold. This plunge in temperature began one of four distinct periods of frigid temperatures known as an Ice Age. Each of these frigid periods lasted from 10,000 to 50,000 years. The most recent chilled the Earth just over 10,000 years ago.

During this most recent Ice Age, the northern polar icecap moved so far south that massive sheets of ice were created over much of the northern hemisphere. In some areas the ice was several miles thick. About 1/3 of the earth's surface was encased in an icy layer — that's four times the amount of ice normally found on earth today. Naturally, hunting and gathering abilities were interfered with during the Ice Ages.

Once these frigid years were over, a revolution took place — humans started planting crops. This new way of life, which began about 10,000 years ago, led to permanent settlements and the world's first communities. Farming and the domestication of animals mark the beginning of the Neolithic Age, also called the New Stone Age.

So what then did Fred Flintstone wear and eat? What follows is a look at some of our earliest known human ancestors — how they lived, how they changed, and how they interacted with their environment.

Archeologists and anthropologists "meet the Flintstones" every time they unearth the remains of prehistoric people. Their work helps to answer profound questions:

- Who are humans?
- Where did we come from?
- Where are we going?
2a. "I Love Lucy"

Singer Elton John is connected to our original, ancient ancestors. In 1974, his cover of the Beatles hit "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," echoed throughout the night in the barren landscape of Hadar, Ethiopia.

Paleoanthropologist Donald Johanson and his team were blasting this song on their cassette player inside their work tent. (A paleoanthropologist studies fossil hominids.) They were celebrating the discovery of the oldest known hominid ancestor. Inspired by the song, the team named the partial skeleton, "Lucy."

Lucy was a newly discovered species named *Australopithecus afarensis* and lived 3.5 million years ago. Many scientists came to regard her as the mother of humankind. Who was Lucy? What was life like for her?
A more pressing question: What was Lucy? She had both ape and human characteristics. Which was she? She is actually related to both humans and apes.

Based on the partial skeleton that he assembled, Johanson concluded that Lucy had a receding forehead and prominent face, much like an ape. Her softball-sized brain was a little larger than a chimpanzee's, yet much smaller than a modern human's. Her dark skin and patchy hair protected her from the sun of tropical Africa. The lush, green environment near the Awash River seemed to be her home and this region was one of the few areas in which apes could live.

Yet Lucy's knee joint looked vaguely human. This joint was capable of locking straight up. Unlike the quadrupedal ape (which walked on all fours), Lucy seemed to be a bipedal (able to walk on two legs) with the capability of walking erect over long distances. She was thus able to travel in search of food.

Over thousands of years, Lucy and her ancestors physically adapted to their changing natural environment. Open grasslands replaced the shrinking dense forests of the Great Rift Valley. Since Lucy walked upright, she could stroll across the grasslands from forest to forest and use her free hands to gather food. This was a major development. Lucy's diet consisted of fruit, small animals (such as field mice), bird eggs, and even insects. Archaeologists believe Lucy was able to extract termites from their mounds using a blade of grass. This is an important capability because it demonstrates that Lucy, and others like her, were developing a more advanced use of their hands. And that ability bring Lucy a step closer to us — humans.
Lucy: In a Class by Herself
Lucy belonged to genus *Australopithecus* and the species *afarensis*, but she also belonged to the hominid family (*hominidae*) to which humans belong. Although humans are of the family *hominidae*, we are not of Lucy's genus or species. We are *Homo sapiens*. How then, can Lucy be our ancient ancestor if we belong to a different genus and species? It's because humans and Lucy share a taxonomy up to the point of genus and species; there are many shared characteristics, but there are differences and these differences place humans in our own genus and species.

What Is a Taxonomy?
A taxonomy or classification is an arrangement of plants and animals into hierarchical categories. Using a taxonomy, scientists are able to classify living beings according to characteristics they share in common. This is the human taxonomy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taxonomic Category</th>
<th>Human Taxonomy</th>
<th>Defining Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kingdom</td>
<td>Animalia</td>
<td>Humans are animals — not plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phylum</td>
<td>Chordata</td>
<td>Chordates have nerve fibers running along the midline of the back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subphylum</td>
<td>Vertebrata</td>
<td>Vertebrates have internal, segmented spinal columns. The right side of the vertebrate mirrors the left side.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Mammalia</td>
<td>Mammals have hair, mammary glands, and a constant internal temperature. They nurture their offspring after birth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>Primates</td>
<td>Primates have specialized structures in the ear region and an enhanced blood supply to the brain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suborder</td>
<td>Anthopoidea</td>
<td>Anthropoids are social animals that are active in the daylight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superfamily</td>
<td>Hominoidea</td>
<td>Hominoids have similar back teeth, shoulder muscles and bones. Hominoids do not have tails.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Hominids</td>
<td>Hominids walk on two feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genus Species</td>
<td>Homo sapiens</td>
<td>Homo sapiens share characteristics in the details of brain and tooth size.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Humans and apes are both in the Hominid family. As hominids, we share many physical similarities in bones, back teeth and shoulder muscles. Neither the apes nor the humans have tails and we all walk on two feet.

Now take Lucy. She is a hominid because she was bipedal, but she was of the genus species *Australopithecus afarensis*. Australopithecus represents her genus name (which is
always capitalized), and afarensis, is the species name (which is always in lower case). So, while Lucy and modern humans share some traits like the ability to walk upright, there are too many structural differences to classify us in the same genus.

The species is generally the smallest working unit in the classification of plants and animals. Lucy differed from the humans in both genus and species. We modern humans share some closer relatives that share our genus, Homo, but not our species, sapiens.

The Homo habilis lived about two million years ago. Like modern humans, they belong to the genus Homo which derives from the Latin word for "man." But they are of the species habilis, not sapiens. Homo habilis translates as handy man. Homo sapiens translates as "wise man." While the two species share many traits in common including similarities in skull and jaw shapes and the ability to make tools, there are also things that are different both physically and genetically. We've grown a lot along the way.

2b. Food, Clothing and Shelter

Could you survive in the wild? TV shows like "Gilligan’s Island" and "Survivor" and books and movies like "Lord of the Flies" ask this question. Small groups of people are set down on a deserted island and left to fend for themselves. They have none of the things we take for granted, such as easy access to food, shelter, clothing, or video games. There are no cities, no roads, no tools, no doctors, no computers — and no malls.

In part, these shows are so compelling because it is interesting to ponder how each one of us would do in such a setting. Could you create tools, make rules, gather food, or work with wood? Could you weave clothes, protect your toes, fight off a beast, or know which direction is east?

Now take yourself back 20,000 years. For Neanderthal Man, each and every day was a challenge. What was life like for Neanderthals? How did early humans find food, make
clothing, and seek shelter?

**Neanderthal or Neandertal?**
The first fossil of this type was found in 1856 near Germany’s Neander Thal. At that time, "thal" was the word for "valley" in German. The find became known as Neanderthal Man — named after the place where it was found.

In the early part of the 1900s, Germans began regularizing the spelling of many words. They changed the spelling of words to reflect their pronunciation. "Thal" is pronounced "täl" in German, so the "h" was dropped in the spelling of the word. Today, most scientists continue to use the "Neanderthal" spelling, while others have adapted to "Neandertal." In either case, the word is pronounced: "nee-an-der-täl."

 Appropriately, the word "Neander" translates to "new man" in Greek.

**Hominids, History, and Prehistory**
Before answering these questions, it will be useful to understand how we know what we know about early hominids. Hominids are from the family *hominiane*, and refer to primate mammals who could stand on two legs. We are hominids as were our ancestors, including Java Man, Neanderthal Man, Beijing Man, and Lucy.

When studying humans, historians strongly rely on written records to gather information about the past. History, as it pertains to mankind, is said to begin with the invention of writing, about 5,000 years ago.

But humans lived long before the invention of writing. *Prehistory* refers to this long time period before writing was invented. How do we know what life was like if there were no written records of prehistory? Anthropologists and archaeologists work together with other scientists in answering this question. They use artifacts and fossils — clues from ancient times. After testing and analyzing them, educated conclusions are
made about life in prehistoric times. Some of the conclusions are wrong, some are somewhat correct, and others may be entirely correct. Some theories will change as the next generations of scientists and historians glean more information.

Imagine yourself digging through a stranger's trash. You can draw some conclusions about his or her life based on what you find. While archaeologists don't exactly dig through trash, they do sift through fossil remains and artifacts and try to explain things.

**For the Ages**

Prehistory is divided into different time periods. The use of stone tools by early people led historians to apply the name Stone Age to the period before writing became established.

The Paleolithic, or Old Stone Age, began about 4.5 million years ago and lasted until about 8000 B.C.E. Many anthropologists believe that creatures vaguely resembling *Homo sapiens* (that's us today) may have lived at the onset of the Stone Age.

The Neolithic, or New Stone Age, lasted from 8000 B.C.E. until approximately 3000 B.C.E. By the end of this era, villages and farms had come into existence.

Scientists believe that the earliest hominids may have used caves as shelters. They probably ate vegetables and gathered seeds, fruits, nuts and other edible plants. Later, scientists speculate, meat was added to the diet as small animals were hunted. Eventually, humans hunted large animals.

In order to hunt successfully, early men had to work together. As humans became successful hunters, they migrated over great distances in search of food. For nearly a million years, however, periods of extremely cold weather during the Ice Age limited the areas to which early people could migrate. Prehistoric people learned how to use fire and make warm clothing in response to this cold climate.

**Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons**
In 1856, human remains were found in the Neander Valley of Germany. This is where the Neanderthal people lived some 60,000 years ago. They had stocky builds, heavy jaws, thick eyebrow ridges, and large noses. Unlike hominids who came before them, they made efficient tools and wore heavy clothing made of animal skins.

Most Neanderthals lived in groups of 50 people. Some may have dwelled in open-air camps along the shores of lakes and rivers. They cared for their sick and aged and may have been the first to practice a primitive form of medicine.

The Cro-Magnons were one of the earliest Homo sapiens. They lived in Europe and lived after the Neanderthals. They lived inside cave entrances while others built huts in forested areas. Long houses made of stone blocks were also used for communities of 30-100 people. Hunting weapons which allowed for a safe distance, such as the spear and bow, were used to hunt the woolly mammoth and bison.

How did early Homo Sapiens such as Cro-Magnons compare with humans of today? In essence, we are brainier and they were brawnier. But the similarities, despite the passage of thousands of years, are striking.

2c. A Page Right Out of History

Flintstones, Meet the Flintstones
They're a modern stone age family
From the town of Bedrock
They're a page right out of history
"The Flintstones" theme song

Figure 27 Mammoth bones were used to construct huts in Siberia during prehistoric times. Structures such as this one, reconstructed in France, were covered with hides and carpeted with mammoth fur.

Figure 28 The Lascaux Cave paintings, discovered in 1940 in France, are generally regarded as the best examples of prehistoric art.

Because there was no written language 50,000 years ago, we do not have much information on how a "modern stone age family" lived, what they ate, where they lived, what they
wore, or even what they looked like. Like Fred Flintstone, did they have leopard skin suits, go barefoot, and use a boulder for a bowling ball?

Archaeologists and anthropologist who study this time period do have artifacts upon which they can begin to draw some conclusions. Techniques like carbon dating can help scientists determine the age of objects and bones. Large human skulls, body bones, animal skeletons, cave paintings, and scientific ideas on ancient climate patterns allow scientists to draw a picture of what life may have been like for primitive people.

**Homo habilis**
Let's start our evolutionary journey with *homo habilis*, the nearly two million year old discovery of the Leakey family. Digging in Africa's Olduvai Gorge the Leakeys found Nutcracker Man, who shared many traits with humans of today. Nutcracker had a giant skull dominated by a wide face, big cheekbones, and bulging facial muscles. The skull also had enormous teeth — its molars are four times the size those of present humans.

What about brains? Paleoanthropologists have determined that the cranial capacity of the Nutcracker was nearly 50% larger than Lucy's. Nutcracker also had hands that began to look like ours.

How was Nutcracker different from us? Nutcracker was a hairy fellow and walked hunched over. Nutcracker wasn't all that smart either — our brains have far higher capacity. But because Nutcracker's teeth, hands, and brain power, he was proclaimed a new species *Homo Habilis* and in 1970 was accepted by scientists as an early member of the human family.
Neanderthals

Neanderthals mark the transition to early modern man. *Homo sapiens neanderthalensis* had a brain larger than many human brains today. While his brain was large, his intelligence was limited.

The Neanderthals, who lived from 30,000-100,000 years ago, did things that we think only modern humans do. For instance, they cared for their sick. One skeleton is that of a man who was 40 years old. His bones showed that he suffered from severe arthritis and had lost most of his teeth. It would have been almost impossible for him to survive unless someone had cared for him. And even a Neanderthal needed caring. Neanderthals often lived in freezing temperatures amidst hostile animals and endured many severe physical ailments.

They are the first group we know who buried their dead. The dead were buried with tools, weapons, and food. We assume they expected these items to be useful in the afterlife. It is possible these were the first to believe in a god or gods.

Neanderthals seem somewhat familiar to us, because they did things we can understand. They lived in caves, wore clothing made of animal skins, and used fire. They also may have been the first people to cook their food in order to thaw it in their frigid environment. They may have even played music. An 80,000 year-old bone was found to produce musical tones of the diatonic scale ("do, re, mi, fa").

What did Neanderthals look like? They had a very strong build, powerful jaws, sharply receding chins, low foreheads, and heavy eyebrow ridges. Chances are you would not want to date one.

According to Dr. Tim White, an anthropologist at the University of California, Neanderthals and those who lived before them practiced cannibalism, or eating fellow humans. Some Neanderthal skulls show cuts consistent with cannibalism. Human bones from 800,000
years ago that were found in Atapuerca, Spain, had cut marks that were stripped of their flesh.

Neanderthal disappeared without a trace at about the time of the appearance of the Cro-Magnon people — around 30,000 to 35,000 years ago.

**Cro-Magnons**

Cro-Magnons are *homo sapiens* (man with wisdom) just as we are. They lived mostly in southern France and Northern Spain. They have stirred our imagination in part because of their elaborate cave paintings in places such as Lascaux and Vallon-Pont-d'Arc in France. Paintings of bulls tossing their heads, wounded bison charging a hunter, herds of reindeer escaping and schools of swimming trout and salmon were just some of the pictures that we can still see today.

From these paintings, we know that hunting was important. One group of people, the Magdalenians, left ample evidence about their hunting practices. They lived in France and Western Europe some 15,000 years ago. To get close to the herds of animals, they dressed in animal skins and antlers. Groups of hunters worked together in a variety of ways to get their meat, killing not just one animal at a time, but often a whole herd. They would surround their quarry in the open, stampede them over cliffs, or even herd them into natural corrals. There the hunters easily killed the animals by stabbing them with lances or piercing them with spears, which they had carefully carved with harpoon-like tips. The biggest animals were sometimes driven into pits, falling upon a trap of sharpened stakes.

With high, arched foreheads, well-defined chins, and small brow ridges, Cro-Magnon people looked somewhat like you and me. They lived on earth for thousands of years. For some unknown reasons — scarcity of food, perhaps — they were gone by the end of the Paleolithic period.

**Long and Evolved Story**
People living in Africa and advances in agriculture sparked the beginning of the Mesolithic Age or Middle Stone Age. This period lasted from 12,000 till about 10,000 years ago in Africa and Asia, although this date varies according to region. Raising crops for food signifies the beginning of a new way of life for people.

The Neolithic Age or New Stone Age was revolutionary. About 10,000 years ago people learned to make better tools and weapons, establish permanent villages and domesticate animals for food and work. They were beginning to live like "modern" people.

This "Neolithic or Agricultural Revolution," did not happen overnight. It took several millennia after the first discovery of agriculture for people to form settled societies.

Jarmo in present day Iraq was one of the oldest. At 8750 years old this little town was home to 200 inhabitants. Catal Huyuk in present day Turkey was an even larger society with almost 3000 residents 8000 years ago.

Slowly but surely modern human beings had evolved.

**2d. First Technologies: Fire and Tools**

People of the Stone Age did not have the luxury of turning on the TV and watching Tim "Rock" Taylor host "Tool Time" or Bob Vilastone giving home-building tips in "This Old Cave." Nor could they dial 911 when a fire threatened them. Rather, they had to invent tools and harness the power of fire. But it was their experiments in tool-making that ultimately led to TV, cell phones, and computers.

Living in the computer-driven Information Age, we don't necessarily think of fire or tools as technologies. But by definition technology refers to the "practical application of knowledge in a certain area." Learning how to tame and
use fire proved an invaluable technological advance in human development.

Learning how to sharpen a flint, attach a flint to a piece of wood to create a spear, then understanding how to use flint on other pieces of wood to create digging tools were all technological leaps.

Playing With Fire
Uncontrolled fire terrified our ancestors and still has the power to terrify today. Forest fires, or houses being burnt to the ground are still vexing problems. However, take time to think of all of the practical uses of fire or its subsequent substitutes. Where would we be today without it? What was its importance to early people?

There is heavy debate as to exactly when humans first controlled the use of fire. If early humans controlled it, how did they start a fire? We do not have firm answers, but they may have used pieces of flint stones banged together to created sparks. They may have rubbed two sticks together generating enough heat to start a blaze. Conditions of these sticks had to be ideal for a fire.

The earliest humans were terrified of fire just as animals were. Yet, they had the intelligence to recognize that they could use fire for a variety of purposes. Fire provided warmth and light and kept wild animals away at night. Fire was useful in hunting. Hunters with torches could drive a herd of animals over the edge of a cliff.

What's Cooking?
People also learned that they could cook food with fire and preserve meat with smoke. Cooking made food taste better and easier to swallow. This was important for those without teeth!

The early humans of 2 million years ago did not have fire-making skills, so they waited until they found something burning from a natural cause to get fire. A nightly campfire became a routine. What was once comfort and safety, was now also a social occasion. People would collect around the fire each night to share stories of the day's hunt and activities, to laugh and to relax.

The earliest evidence found in Swartkrans, South Africa and at Chesowanja, Kenya Terra
and Amata, France suggests that fire was first used in stone hearths about 1.5 million years ago.

**Tooling Around**

Archaeologists have found Stone Age tools 25,000-50,000 year-old all over the world. The most common are daggers and spear points for hunting, hand axes and choppers for cutting up meat and scrapers for cleaning animal hides. Other tools were used to dig roots, peel bark and remove the skins of animals. Later, splinters of bones were used as needles and fishhooks. A very important tool for early man was flakes struck from flint. They could cut deeply into big game for butchering.

Cro-Magnons, who lived approximately 25,000 years ago, introduced tools such as the bow and arrow, fishhooks, fish spears and harpoons that were constructed from bones and antlers of animals. Logs were hollowed out to create canoes. Crossing rivers and deep-water fishing became possible.

**Farm System**

Advances in tool-making technology led to advances in agriculture. And farming revolutionized the world and set prehistoric humans on a course toward modernity. Inventions such as the plow helped in the planting of seeds. No longer did humans have to depend on the luck of the hunt. Their food supply became much more certain. Permanent settlements were soon to follow. Animals were raised for food as well as to do work. Goats, for instance, were sources of milk and meat. Dogs were used to aid in hunting wild animals.

Modern, civilized societies began to emerge around the globe. Human life as we know it started to flourish.

3. **Ancient Egypt**
Hieroglyphics, pyramids, mummies, the Sphinx of Giza, King Tut, and Cleopatra.

The sands of the Nile River Valley hold many clues about one of the most mysterious, progressive, and artistic ancient civilizations. A great deal of evidence survives about how the ancient Egyptians lived, but questions remain. Even the wise sphinx would have trouble answering some of them. How were the pyramids built? Who came up with the idea for mummies and why? What was a typical day like for a pharaoh?

In De-Nile

In 3,000 B.C.E., Egypt looked similar geographically to the way it looks today. The country was mostly covered by desert. But along the Nile River was a fertile swath that proved — and still proves — a life source for many Egyptians.

The Nile is the longest river in the world; it flows northward for nearly 4,200 miles. In ancient times, crops could be grown only along a narrow, 12-mile stretch of land that borders the river. Early Egyptians grew crops such as beans, wheat, and cotton. Despite the lack of many natural resources, such as forests or an abundance of land for farming, a great society emerged.
Earlier in history, Neolithic (late Stone Age) people thrived in the Nile Valley. The remains that have been uncovered date back to about 6,000 B.C.E. But it wasn't until 3,800 B.C.E. that the valley's inhabitants began to form a cohesive civilization.

The road to civilization required more organization and increased efficiency. Farmers began producing surplus crops that allowed others not only to concentrate on farming but also to pursue other trades, such as mercantilism or skilled craftwork.

Egyptian artisans created copper tools such as chisels and needles — all new inventions — which allowed them to fabricate ornamental jewelry. Artisans also discovered how to make bronze by mixing copper and tin, which marked the beginning of the Bronze Age.

Evidence suggests that ancient Egyptians invented the potter's wheel. This tool made it easier to create pots and jars for storage, cooking, religious needs, and decoration.

**Pharaohs and the Legacy of Ancient Egypt**

The pharaohs who ruled Egypt for about 3,000 years were by and large capable administrators, strong military leaders, sophisticated traders, and overseers of great building projects.

**A Brief Timeline of Ancient Egypt: Foundation to Demise**

Ancient Egypt's great civilization spanned thousands of years, from c. 3000 B.C. until the annexation by Rome in 30 B.C.E.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE (B.C.E.)</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6000</td>
<td>First inhabitants settle along the Nile Delta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2900</td>
<td>King Menes unites Upper and Lower Egypt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2772</td>
<td>365-day calendar is invented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2750</td>
<td>The Old Kingdom is established with its capital in Memphis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2560</td>
<td>King Khufu (Cheops) builds the Great Pyramids of Giza.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2181</td>
<td>Instability and corruption weaken the empire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2050</td>
<td>The Middle Kingdom is established and the capital moves to Thebes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750</td>
<td>The Hyksos, a group of Semitic-Asiatics, invade and rule Egypt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1550</td>
<td>The Hyksos are expelled and the New Kingdom established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500</td>
<td>Queen Hatshepsut expands the empire south (Nubia) and east (Palestine).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1380</td>
<td>Amenhotep IV (&quot;Akhenaton&quot;) supports worship of only one god, the sun-disk god Aton.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1336</td>
<td>Tutankhamun (&quot;King Tut&quot;) revives polytheism and returns to the capital to Thebes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1290</td>
<td>Ramses II (&quot;The Great&quot;) begins a 67-year reign and completes Temple of Luxor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1283</td>
<td>Egyptians and Hittites sign the first recorded peace treaty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>712</td>
<td>Egypt is invaded from the south by the Nubian Empire, which starts an &quot;Ethiopian Dynasty.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>670</td>
<td>Assyrians conquer Egypt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>525</td>
<td>The Persian Empire conquers Egypt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>343</td>
<td>Nectanebo II, the last Egyptian-born pharaoh, dies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>332</td>
<td>Alexander the Great of Macedonia invades Egypt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>331</td>
<td>The city of Alexandria is established and the Macedonian general Ptolemy begins new dynasty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>The Ptolemaic queen Cleopatra VII rules Egypt, assisted by Julius Caesar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Cleopatra commits suicide, and Egypt is annexed by the Roman Empire.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Writing also set the Egyptians apart from some of their neighbors. Egyptians used hieroglyphics or pictures to represent words or sounds. This early form of writing was discovered by the Western world after Napoleon's army invaded Egypt in 1798. The Rosetta Stone, a black tablet containing inscriptions, was deciphered and became crucial in unlocking the mystery of hieroglyphics and understanding Egyptian history.

Ancient Egyptian civilization lasted for several thousand years. Many of its discoveries and practices have survived an even greater test of time.

In fact, one of the ancient Egyptians' inventions, the calendar, has helped define time itself.

3a. Life along the Nile
None of the achievements of the remarkable ancient Egyptian civilization would have been possible without the Nile River. There is always a connection between landscape and how a people develop. It does not take the wisdom of a sphinx to understand why.

Archaeologists and historians don’t know exactly how Egyptian civilization evolved. It is believed that humans started living along the Nile’s banks starting in about 6,000 B.C.E. For the earliest inhabitants of the Nile Valley food was not easy to find. There were no McTut’s selling burgers, and, though there were a lot of crocodiles, those critters were pretty hard to catch.

Food for Thought
Over time, however, despite being in the midst of desert surroundings, people discovered that the Nile River provided many sources of food. Along the river were fruit trees, and fish swam in the Nile in great numbers.

Perhaps most importantly, they discovered that, at the same time each year, the Nile flooded for about six months. As the river receded, it deposited a rich, brown layer of silt that was suitable for growing wheat, beans, barley, or even cotton. Farmers learned to dig short canals leading to fields near the Nile, thus providing fresh water for year-round irrigation. Planting immediately after a flood yielded harvests before the next year’s flood.

Prime Time
In order to know when to plant, the Egyptians needed to track days. They developed a calendar based on the flooding of the Nile that proved remarkably accurate. It contained a year of 365 days divided into 12 months of 30 days each. The five extra days fell at the end of the year.
Here's a problem that the sphinx might have trouble answering: how did the ancient Egyptians make their calendars? What material did they use? Remember, there was no paper. Need a clue? Take a dip in the Nile.

Large reeds called papyrus grew wild along the Nile. The Egyptians developed a process that turned these reeds into flattened material that could be written on (also called papyrus). In fact, the English word "paper" has its root in the ancient Greek word "papyrus." Among the first things written on papyrus were calendars that tracked time.

Papyrus had many other uses. Boats were constructed by binding the reeds together in bundles. Baskets, mats, rope, and sandals were also fashioned from this multipurpose material.

**Sand, Land, and Civilization**

Even today, the world around the Nile is quite barren. Outside of the narrow swath of greenery next to the river, there is sand as far as the eye can see. To the Nile's west exists the giant Sahara Desert, the largest desert in the world.

From north to south, the Sahara is between 800 and 1,200 miles wide; it stretches over 3,000 miles from east to west. The total area of the Sahara is more than 3,500,000 square miles. It's the world's biggest sandbox.

And, as if there weren't enough sand in the Sahara, east of the Nile are other deserts.

Although sand had limited uses, these deserts presented one tremendous strategic advantage: few invaders could ever cross the sands to attack Egypt — the deserts proved too great a natural barrier.

After learning to take advantage of the Nile's floods — and not having to fear foreign attacks — the Egyptians concentrated on improving farming techniques. As the years passed, Egyptians discovered that wheat could be baked into bread, that barley could be
turned into soup (or even beer), and that cotton could be spun into clothing.

With many of life's necessities provided, the Egyptians started thinking about other things, such as art, government, religion, and philosophy — some of the basics needed to create a civilization. Eventually, pyramids, mummies, Cleopatra, and the Sphinx of Giza became touchstones of this flourishing culture.

3b. Egyptian Social Structure

Egyptian society was structured like a pyramid. At the top were the gods, such as Ra, Osiris, and Isis. Egyptians believed that the gods controlled the universe. Therefore, it was important to keep them happy. They could make the Nile overflow, cause famine, or even bring death.

The Egyptians also elevated some human beings to gods. Their leaders, called pharaohs, were believed to be gods in human form. They had absolute power over their subjects. After pharaohs died, huge stone pyramids were built as their tombs. Pharaohs were buried in chambers within the pyramids.

Because the people of Egypt believed that their pharaohs were gods, they entrusted their rulers with many responsibilities. Protection was at the top of the list. The pharaoh directed the army in case of a foreign threat or an internal conflict. All laws were enacted at the discretion of the pharaoh. Each farmer paid taxes in the form of grain, which were stored in the pharaoh’s warehouses. This grain was used to feed the people in the event of a famine.

The Chain of Command
No single person could manage all these duties without assistance. The pharaoh appointed a chief minister called a vizier as a supervisor. The vizier ensured that taxes were collected.

Working with the vizier were scribes who kept government records. These high-level employees had mastered a rare skill in ancient Egypt — they could read and write.

**Noble Aims**
Right below the pharaoh in status were powerful nobles and priests. Only nobles could hold government posts; in these positions they profited from tributes paid to the pharaoh. Priests were responsible for pleasing the gods.

Nobles enjoyed great status and also grew wealthy from donations to the gods. All Egyptians — from pharaohs to farmers — gave gifts to the gods.

**Soldier On**
Soldiers fought in wars or quelled domestic uprisings. During long periods of peace, soldiers also supervised the peasants, farmers, and slaves who were involved in building such structures as pyramids and palaces.

Skilled workers such as physicians and craftspersons made up the middle class. Craftspersons made and sold jewelry, pottery, papyrus products, tools, and other useful things.

Naturally, there were people needed to buy goods from artisans and traders. These were the merchants and storekeepers who sold these goods to the public.

**The Bottom of the Heap**
At the bottom of the social structure were slaves and farmers. Slavery became the fate of those captured as prisoners of war. In addition to being forced to work on building projects, slaves toiled at the discretion of the pharaoh or nobles.
Farmers tended the fields, raised animals, kept canals and reservoirs in good order, worked in the stone quarries, and built the royal monuments. Farmers paid taxes that could be as much as 60 percent of their yearly harvest — that's a lot of hay!

Social mobility was not impossible. A small number of peasants and farmers moved up the economic ladder. Families saved money to send their sons to village schools to learn trades. These schools were run by priests or by artisans. Boys who learned to read and write could become scribes, then go on to gain employment in the government. It was possible for a boy born on a farm to work his way up into the higher ranks of the government. Bureaucracy proved lucrative.

3c. Dynasties

What's a dynasty?

It's a powerful group or family that maintains its position for a number of years. The New York Yankees baseball team of the 1920s is considered a dynasty because they went to the World Series almost every year and had great leaders, such as Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig.

Ancient Egypt, also had dynasties. They were families who often ruled for a considerable number of years and did impressive things — such as building pyramids — during their rule.

The history of ancient Egypt is divided into three main periods: the Old Kingdom (about 2,700-2,200 B.C.E.), the Middle Kingdom (2,050-1,800 B.C.E.), and the New Kingdom (about 1,550-1,100 B.C.E.). The New Kingdom was followed by a period called the Late New Kingdom, which lasted to about 343 B.C.E. (Intermediate kingdoms — those without strong ruling families — filled the gaps of time in between the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms.)
During these periods, power passed from one dynasty to another. A dynasty ruled until it was overthrown or there were no heirs left to rule. Each kingdom ended in turmoil either after a period of infighting or after being invaded.

There were more than 30 dynasties in Egyptian history. Dynasties helped keep Egypt united, which was no easy task. Leaders faced periods of chaos, ambitious rivals, and also foreigners who wanted to conquer the region.

The Earliest Dynasties
Beginning in about 4,000 B.C.E., all of Egyptian society existed in two kingdoms, Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. Around 3,100 B.C.E., Menes, the king of Upper Egypt, started the long string of dynasties by conquering Lower Egypt. He unified the regions and built his capital city at Memphis, near the border of these two kingdoms. Because Memphis was located on an island in the Nile, it was easy to defend.

So began the first dynasty, an age appropriately called the Early Dynastic Period. Little is known of the pharaohs (rulers) of the early dynasties. The Egyptian word "pharaoh" literally means "great house."

Pharaohs were more than just rulers. They were considered gods and were believed to possess the secrets of heaven and earth. Pharaohs led the government and the army and wielded unlimited power.

The Old Kingdom
About 300 years after Menes united Egypt, its rulers formed a central government in which they held supreme power. This was the beginning of the Old Kingdom. (Kings tend to rule
from a central place, which is why the early dynastic period is not considered a kingdom.)

During the Old Kingdom, pyramid building flourished. Cheops had the six-million-ton Great Pyramid of Giza constructed as his tomb. Under Chephren, a Fourth Dynasty ruler, the Great Sphinx was built.

The end of the Old Kingdom was marked by civil wars between pharaohs and nobles.

**The Middle Kingdom**

Montuhotep II (2,007-1,956 B.C.E.), an Eleventh dynasty pharaoh, was the last ruler of the Old Kingdom and the first ruler of the Middle Kingdom. He and his successors restored political order.

The Middle Kingdom is remembered as a time of flourishing arts, particularly in jewelry making. Egypt became a great trading power during this period and continued massive construction projects. Eventually, the long reign of prosperity gave way to old problems: crop failures, economic woes, dynastic power struggles, and foreign invaders.

Amenemhet III (1817-1772 B.C.E.), of the Twelfth Dynasty, was responsible for the construction of two great projects. He completed the building of the giant waterwheels of the Faiyum region that diverted the floodwaters of the Nile. Amenemhet also constructed the Pyramid of Hawara, which became known as the Labyrinth. It contained about 3,000 rooms.

Trouble struck when a group of foreigners, the Hyksos, a Semitic-Asiatic group, invaded the Nile Delta region. These advanced warriors used new tools for war: bronze weapons and horse-drawn chariots. They defeated the Egyptians, who fought on foot with copper-and-stone weapons.

**The New Kingdom**
Early pharaohs of the New Kingdom evicted the Hyksos. The New Kingdom is remembered as a time of renaissance in artistic creation, but also as the end of dynastic rule. This period was also marred by corrupt priests and tomb-robbing by government officials.

A famed pharaoh of the new period was Amenhotep IV, who triggered a religious revolution. Before Amenhotep's rule, Egypt was a polytheistic society that believed in many gods, the most important named Amon. But, Amenhotep believed only in Aton, the sun god. Belief in only one god (monotheism) was a radical notion. To show his devotion to Aton, the pharaoh changed his name to Akenhaton ("he who is loyal to Aton"). Akenhaton moved his capital from Thebes, where Amon was worshipped, to Tell el Amarna.

Naturally, the priests who represented the other gods did not like this change one bit. Many Egyptians also did not like the pharaoh discrediting their gods. After the death of Akenhaton, the powerful priests forced the new capital to be moved back to Thebes.

**Tut-Tut**
The pharaoh who moved the capital back to Thebes was a boy-king. He ruled for nine years, attempted to pacify the priests, and was responsible for some modest building projects. He began his reign at the age of 10 but died of a head injury at 19.

But, his name is famous: Tutankhamun, or more familiarly, King Tut. Tut is mostly remembered because of his beautiful tomb — one of the very few that was not pillaged by grave robbers.

Ramses II, or Ramses the Great, was another important ruler during this period. He reigned for 67 years and died in about 1,213 B.C.E. at age 96. His nearly 200 wives and concubines bore 96 sons and 60 daughters. Not only did Ramesses build a great family, he also built two temples at Abu Simbel, a covered hall of giant pillars at Karnak, additions at the Luxor Temple, and the Ramesseum, a compound consisting of two temples and a
After Ramses' rule, Egypt fell into steady decline. Today, his 3,000-year-old mummy lies in a display case on the second floor of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, Egypt's capital.

Over the course of the next nine centuries, the Nubians, the Assyrians, and the Persians bounded into Egypt and ravaged the area. When Pharaoh Nectanebo II retreated to Memphis to avoid death at the hands of oncoming Persian invaders in 343 B.C.E., he became the last Egyptian-born pharaoh, ending over 2,500 years of Egyptian self-rule.

3d. Mummies

A dead noble stands trembling in the Hall of Truth. Behind the noble, Horus, the half-falcon, half-man ruler of Earth, unleashes a piercing stare at the quivering man. Thoth, the sharp-beaked, ibis-headed deity of scribes, sharpens his quill — poised to record a verdict of divine judgment.

Seated before the noble on a golden throne is Osiris, the king of the dead. Upon his head rests a glittering crown with a gorgeous white feather plume on either side. Behind Osiris stands Isis, the revered goddess of nature, who is responsible for bringing the dead earth back to life each year. She holds an ankh, a cross with a loop above the bar. An ankh guarantees that a dead person will live forever.

The noble wonders if he will live forever. Or will he be fed to the hideous crocodilelike god called the Eater of the Dead and forever cease to exist. (How can the noble wonder about all this if he’s already dead? The noble is actually in limbo, a place where the souls of dead people go while being judged.)

Osiris begins the process of judging the noble’s life. On one side of a scale, Osiris places the heart of the noble, which bares the secrets of the soul. Had the soul lied, cheated, or lived an evil life? The soul defends itself before a variety of interrogating gods.
The noble thinks about his second self, called the ka. The ka lives within every human being. When the physical body expires, the ka goes on to enjoy eternal life, where it can hunt, fish, live with its family, be entertained, and eat favorite foods.

Now Osiris holds up the sacred feather, the emblem of truth, and places it on the other side of the scale. If the scales balance, eternal life awaits. If not, the Eater of the Dead has his favorite food for lunch: noble.

My heart, my mother! My heart whereby I came into being! May nought stand up to oppose me at [my] judgment, may there be no opposition to me in the presence of the Chiefs; may there be no parting of thee from me in the presence of him that keepeth the Balance! Thou art my ka, which dwelleth in my body; the god Khnemu who knitteth together and strengtheneth my limbs. Mayest thou come forth into the place of happiness whither we go. May the Sheniu officials, who make the conditions of the lives of men, not cause my name to stink, and may no lies be spoken against me in the presence of the God.

-"Prayer of Ani," from the Book of the Dead (c. 1,700 B.C.E.)

The Egyptian Pantheon
Alternate names are in (parentheses). Some of the duties and animals of the Egyptian gods overlapped. The gods listed below were most popular during the Age of the Pyramids.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of god or goddess</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Role or Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amun</td>
<td>&quot;the hidden one&quot;</td>
<td>god of the atmosphere, sun, sky, and empire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti (Anty)</td>
<td>hawk, falcon</td>
<td>guardian of the living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anubis</td>
<td>jackal, dog</td>
<td>guardian of the dead, mummification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atum</td>
<td>&quot;the complete one,&quot; setting sun</td>
<td>creator of the universe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babi</td>
<td>baboon</td>
<td>demon god of the underworld</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Image</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bastet</td>
<td>cat</td>
<td>goddess of the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bat (Bata)</td>
<td>buffalo, cow</td>
<td>ancient goddess of kingship, became Hathor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geb (Keb, Seb)</td>
<td>goose</td>
<td>god of the Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hapi (Hapy)</td>
<td>large bearded human with a crown of plants</td>
<td>god of the Nile flood, abundance, fertility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hathor</td>
<td>cow</td>
<td>goddess of love, music, song, and dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heket (Heqet)</td>
<td>frog</td>
<td>goddess of childbirth, fertility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heh</td>
<td>kneeling man holding two palm ribs</td>
<td>god of eternity, longevity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horus (Har, Hor)</td>
<td>falcon</td>
<td>warrior-king of the gods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isis (Aset, Eset)</td>
<td>Sirius, the brightest star in the sky</td>
<td>goddess of resurrection, announcer of the flood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khnum (Khnemu)</td>
<td>ram</td>
<td>creator of the Nile flood, builder of the Great Pyramid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maat (Ma'at, Mayet)</td>
<td>female wearing an ostrich feather</td>
<td>goddess of truth, justice, order, and balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min (Minu, Menu)</td>
<td>white bull</td>
<td>god of fertility, protector of the eastern mines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neith (Neit)</td>
<td>two crossed arrows behind a shield</td>
<td>goddess of northern Egypt, hunting, warfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nekhbet(Nekhebet, Nechbet)</td>
<td>vulture</td>
<td>goddess of Upper Egypt, protector of the king</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nephthys</td>
<td>royal palace, kite</td>
<td>goddess of the dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nut (Neuth, Nuit)</td>
<td>sky</td>
<td>mother-goddess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osiris (Usire)</td>
<td>man wrapped in the linens of mummification</td>
<td>god of the dead, underworld, agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ptah</td>
<td>bull</td>
<td>ancient creator-god of Memphis, patron of craftsmen and artisans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re (Ra)</td>
<td>sun</td>
<td>king of the gods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renenutet(Emutet, Renenet)</td>
<td>cobra</td>
<td>mother-goddess, witness at births</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakhmet(Sachmet)</td>
<td>&quot;the powerful one,&quot; lioness</td>
<td>goddess of war, protector of the people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth (Set, Setekh, Setesh, Seti, Sutekh, Setech, Sutech)</td>
<td>oryx, boar, crocodile, hippopotamus</td>
<td>god of the desert, chaos, and storm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shu (Su)</td>
<td>male wearing an ostrich feather</td>
<td>god of air and light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sobek (Sebek, Sebeq, Sebk, Sabk)</td>
<td>crocodile</td>
<td>god of kingship, decisive action, and violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sokar (Seker)</td>
<td>hawk</td>
<td>patron of the Memphis royal cemetery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tefnut (Tefnet, Tefenet)</td>
<td>lioness</td>
<td>goddess of moisture, dew, rain, and mist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoth (Thot, Thout, Tehuti, Djhowtey, Djehtui, Zehuti)</td>
<td>ibis, baboon</td>
<td>god of scribes, writing, justice, truth, wisdom, knowledge, and the moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wadjet (Uto)</td>
<td>snake</td>
<td>one of the king's protector goddesses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mummification
Before being judged by Osiris, the noble's soul had undertaken a journey that lasted over two months. When the noble died he was brought to the Beautiful House, where an embalmer (often a priest with knowledge of rituals, wrapping, and anatomy) prepared the body to cross to the afterlife.

Egyptians believed that the afterlife would be much like life on Earth and that the soul would want use of its body in eternity. That's why Egyptians made an art out of mummification, or the preservation of the dead.

The process of embalming took great skill and required many steps. What follows is a crash course on Egyptian embalming technique.

1. **Removal of the Brain**
   With long hooks, the brain is extracted through the nasal passage. The Egyptians didn't think that the brain had any special use.

2. **Organ Removal (Evisceration)**
   A cut is made on the left side of the body, and the liver, lungs, and other organs are removed, dried out, and stored in sacred vessels called canopic jars. The heart is left in the body, because it will be needed to be weighed in judgment by Osiris.

3. **Dehydration with Natron Crystals**
   Now the body must be dehydrated (have the liquids removed) to stop decay. A type of salt called natron is used. Natron crystals are packed around the body. The crystals absorb body fat and fluids and keep the body from decaying. After being treated for about 40 days, the corpse is washed and dried.

Figure 51 This is an example of an Egyptian coffin made of wood, painted, then gilded. Created during the Ptolemaic Period (305-30 B.C.E.), the lid is adorned with images from the Book of the Dead, a text believed to lead the dead into the lands of Osiris, the god of the underworld.
4. **Stuffing**  
Because the body has lost much of its mass, resin-stained clothes or bits of sawdust are used to pack the corpse, which by now has also lost its eyeballs. Pieces of cloth are stuffed in the eye sockets and painted black. At this point, the corpse's lips and cheeks are painted.

5. **Oiling the Body**  
This elaborate process includes, massaging, perfuming, and anointing (blessing with oil) the corpse.

6. **Coloring**  
After the nose and mouth are filled with cloth scraps to restore the shape of the face, the body is colored. Men are colored red; women are colored yellow. After the coloring, resin is poured into body cavities.

7. **Arrangement of the Body**  
Depending on which period of Egyptian history the deceased lived in, the arms are either placed to the side of the corpse, folded on its chest, or placed with hands on shoulders.

8. **Wrapping**  
The body is wrapped in several layers of fine linen; and various body parts receive particular attention. This process takes two weeks, after which a resin is added to the bandages.

9. **Funerary Mask**  
A mask, sometimes made entirely of gold, is fitted to the mummy's body. Symbols of gods often adorned masks.

10. **Burial of Waste**  
All materials used to prepare the corpse (such as natron and bloody linen) are placed in a jar and buried away from the mummy's tomb.
Finally, the time has come to entomb the mummy. Jewelry, games, furniture, food, clothing, and cosmetics might be entombed with the corpse. These things would be used in the afterlife. The Book of the Dead, a collection of hymns and prayers, might also be included in the tomb to protect the body on its journey to the realm of the dead.

3e. Pyramids

For centuries, they were the tallest structures on the planet. The Pyramids of Giza, built over 4,000 years ago, still stand atop an otherwise flat, sandy landscape.

One of the Seven Wonders of the World, the pyramids defy 21st-century humans to explain their greatest secrets. How could a civilization that lacked bulldozers, forklifts, and trucks build such massive structures? Why would anyone have spent the time and energy to attempt such a task? What treasures were placed inside these monuments?

Only a powerful pharaoh could marshal the necessary human resources to build giant pyramids. During the flood seasons, farmers became builders. Huge stone blocks averaging over two tons in weight were mined in quarries and transported to the pyramid site.

Egyptologists theorize that the workers used either rollers or slippery clay to drag the blocks from the quarries to their eventual placement on the pyramid. Construction of the larger pyramids took decades.
Why Pyramids?
Pyramids were built for religious purposes. The Egyptians were one of the first civilizations to believe in an afterlife. They believed that a second self called the ka lived within every human being. When the physical body expired, the ka enjoyed eternal life. Those fortunate enough to pass the test of Osiris wanted to be comfortable in their lives beyond earth. The Great Pyramids were simply grand tombs of powerful pharaohs.

Three pyramids were built at Giza, and many smaller pyramids were constructed around the Nile Valley. The tallest of the Great Pyramids reaches nearly 500 feet into the sky and spans an area greater than 13 acres. The Great Sphinx was sculpted nearby to stand watch over the pyramids. It stands 65 feet tall and consists of a human head atop the body of a lion.

Many believe that the Sphinx was a portrait of King Chefren (Khafret), who was placed in the middle Pyramid. The lion symbolized immortality.

You Can Take It with You
Egyptians who ranked high in status often wanted to take their most prized possessions with them in death, so the ka could enjoy them in its next life. Gold, silver, and bronze artifacts were loaded into the interiors of the great tombs. Fine linens and artwork adorned the secret chambers.

In the early days, dead nobles were often interned with their living slaves and animals. Because this practice eventually proved too costly, artists instead depicted scenes of human activity on the inside walls. Some pyramids were even equipped with a rest room for the pharaoh.
Great precautions were taken to protect the tombs from looters. Egyptians believed that a defiler of a pharaoh’s resting place would be cursed for eternity. The entrance to the inner chambers was carefully hidden. The pharaoh’s mummy was placed in a huge coffin called a sarcophagus, which was made of the hardest known stone blocks. But despite such warnings and precautions, tombs were raided over the years by grave robbers.

The pyramids, however, have stood the test of time. Although their outer limestone layers have long since been stripped or passed into dust, the pyramids still stand. About 80 dot the horizons of modern Egypt. They remain as time capsules cast forward by a once-great civilization.

3f. Women of Ancient Egypt

Women in ancient Egypt were ahead of their time. They could not only rule the country, but also had many of the same basic human rights as men.

One of the first women to hold the rank of pharaoh was Hatshepsut, who began her rule in about 1,500 B.C.E.
Hatshepsut took care of her people and built temples to the gods as well as other public buildings. Egyptian custom dictated that a pharaoh, who was considered a god, could not marry a mortal. As a result, pharaohs chose spouses from within the royal family. Her husband, Thutmose, was her half-brother.

Nefertiti was another Egyptian ruler. She married Amenhotep IV, who preached and supported monotheism, or the belief in only one god.

![Figure 57 Found in the chapel of Merya at Armana, this drawing depicts Queen Nefertiti accompanying her husband, the pharaoh Akhenaton, from the royal palace to the temple. Because of exceptionally high status, Nefertiti rode in her own chariot.](image)

![Figure 58 The Egyptian goddess Isis was one of the most important deities of the ancient world. Originally the goddess of motherhood and fertility, Isis became the mother of all gods and was worshipped throughout Egypt until the 6th century C.E.](image)

![Figure 59 The bust of Nefertiti, the Queen of Egypt, is legendary for its beautiful and mysterious depiction of the queen during the Amarna period. This portrait was sculpted in the workshop of Thutmose in Akhet-Aton.](image)

*The Hereditary Princess,*

*Great of Favor,*

*Mistress of happiness,*
Gay with the two feathers,
At hearing whose voice one rejoices,
Soothing the heart of the King at home,
Pleased at all that is said,
The great and beloved wife of the King,
Lady of the two lands, Neferfebruaten Nefertiti,
Living forever.

-Amenhotep IV, poem about his wife, Queen Nefertiti

Cleopatra became the most famous of Egypt's female leaders. She was extremely intelligent, and ambitious and spoke several languages — she even studied astronomy. At 18, she became queen of Egypt.

Romance and Tragedy in Cleopatra's Court
Cleopatra constantly battled jealous, ambitious people who wanted to kill her and occupy her throne. For a time, she was removed from power and banished. She sought help from Julius Caesar, the leader of the powerful Roman Republic.

When Caesar visited Alexandria, a large Egyptian city, Cleopatra saw her chance. She could not even enter the city to see Caesar because her jealous brother hired spies to kill her on sight. Craftily, she sneaked into the city rolled in a carpet. She was brought to Caesar, and the two developed a relationship. The couple had a son named Caesarion, and Caesar helped her recapture the throne. The relationship ended abruptly when rival Roman rulers murdered Caesar in the Roman Senate.

I'm Dying to See You
When Marc Antony became leader of Rome, he too, fell in love with Cleopatra. The two had children and together ruled the most powerful empires of the Mediterranean. Eventually, a rival defeated Antony's armies, and Antony drew a sword on himself in despair. As he was dying, he wanted to see Cleopatra one last time. He died in her arms. Later, Cleopatra killed herself by placing a poisonous snake on her chest. The greatest political soap opera of the age was now over.
These were examples of elite Egyptian women. But what about the common folk? A woman's role as mother and wife still came first in Egyptian society. Some professions in which women worked included weaving, perfume making, and entertainment.

Egyptian women could have their own businesses, own and sell property, and serve as witnesses in court cases. Unlike most women in the Middle East, they were even permitted to be in the company of men. They could escape bad marriages by divorcing and remarrying. And women were entitled to one third of the property their husbands owned. The political and economic rights Egyptian women enjoyed made them the most liberated females of their time.

4. The Early Middle East

"The cradle of civilization."

Throughout the centuries, historians have used these powerful words to describe the Middle East.

In the ancient Middle East, many great civilizations rose and fell. The religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam each trace their origins back to this part of the world.

All of these civilizations arose in the area known as the Fertile Crescent. The Fertile Crescent stretches from the Mediterranean Sea in the west to the Zagros Mountains in the east. It is bordered in the north by the Taurus Mountains and in the south by the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Desert. Its shape resembles a crescent moon.

One area within the Fertile Crescent gave rise to the region’s most powerful empires and grandest cities. This area was Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

From Farming to Empires
Figure 61 Many great civilizations arose from the first farming cultures of the Fertile Crescent.

The Fertile Crescent is the region in which humans first began farming and herding around 8,000 B.C.E. This dramatic change from nomadic hunting and gathering allowed early humans to settle into permanent villages and to begin accumulating a surplus of food.

With such a surplus, early villagers could begin to focus on developing the skills associated with civilization. Some of them became priests, scribes, merchants, artists, teachers, and government officials. They began to build cities, and before long, they were establishing empires. The Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians, and Phoenicians all built great empires, each of which rose to glory in the Middle East.

Figure 62 A timeline of Mesopotamia history, from the founding of Sumer to the beginning of the Common Era. Abstracted from Akkadian Language by John Heise.
Because they were constantly interacting through war and trade, the societies in the Middle East borrowed from each other. They modified newly acquired ideas and technologies to suit their own needs. Often, these changes were improvements. Over time, many aspects of various societies throughout the ancient Middle East began to resemble each other.

The Middle East is also the crossroads of the ancient world. It is located at the merging point of three continents: Europe, Africa, and Asia. Many travelers who journeyed from one continent to the next passed through the Middle East, absorbing its culture and introducing new ideas to the region. Throughout the centuries, its prized location became the source of conflict. Its goods became the source of envy.

And its ideas became the source of faith.

4a. Life in Sumer

The first writing system. The plow. The sailboat. The first lunar calendar.

These accomplishments and more were the products of the city-states of Sumer, which arose on the flood plains of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in what is now modern-day Iraq. The Sumerians began to build their walled cities and make significant advances beginning around 3500 B.C.E.

Their domination of this region lasted until around 2000 B.C.E., when the Babylonians took control. Sumerian culture and technology did not disappear but were adopted by its conquerors.

Located in what the ancient Greeks called Mesopotamia, which literally means "the land between the rivers," Sumer was a collection of city-states that occupied the southernmost portion of Mesopotamia. Most were situated along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, lying just north of the Persian Gulf.
Figure 64 Bordered by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, ancient Sumer was located in southern Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia is a Greek word meaning "between two rivers."

The physical environment there has remained relatively the same since about 8000 B.C.E. The landscape is flat and marshy. The ground is primarily made up of sand and silt, with no rock. The climate is very dry, with only about 16.9 centimeters of rain falling per year. Natural vegetation is sparse, and no trees other than palm trees grow there. The rivers overflow their banks in the spring, sometimes violently and destructively. During this process, they deposit a rich layer of silt on the surrounding floodplain.

The Cradle of Civilization
Considering the harsh and forbidding natural environment, how did the first civilization arise in Sumer? Surprisingly, the environment was part of what made civilization possible.

The silt carried by the rivers down from the northern mountains provided rich fertilizer for growing crops when the rivers overflowed. The constant sunshine was also good for crops. But without water, they would have easily dried up and died. Through the leadership of priest-kings, Sumerians organized farmers in each city-state to build extensive irrigation systems of canals and dams. Before long, the desert was blooming with a surplus of barley, dates, and other crops.

This surplus allowed many people to pursue occupations other than farming, while still being able to meet their basic needs. These people became artisans, merchants, and craftspeople. They helped build the cities and increase the wealth of the city-states through trade with neighboring societies.
Sumerians also developed high-quality crafts, evidence of which was found in the royal tombs of Ur, excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley in the 1920s. Trade also helped the Sumerians to secure vital items such as timber from Lebanon and luxury goods such as the semiprecious stone lapis lazuli from the Indus River Valley.

**Gettin' Ziggy with It**

Because of the surplus grain, the government could grow in size to support numerous officials and priests. It could also pay thousands of workers with barley while they were building canals, city walls, and ziggurats or while they were fighting to defend their city-state or extend its influence over the region. The barley was collected as a tax from the farmers. Farmers were also required to give some time to the government to work on projects. Slaves and hired workers also contributed.

As the government and economy grew in size and complexity, officials and merchants required a sophisticated writing system to record transactions. First came number markings and simple pictograms, the writing system began to incorporate pictures representing a physical object or idea (such as a picture of the sun to represent the sun).

As trade and government activity increased, the writing system began to incorporate more abstract pictograms and phonograms, or symbols representing sounds. These new forms provided greater flexibility and speed in writing. They were adopted by other cultures (such as the Assyrians) who did not even speak Sumerian.

**Sumerian Wisdom**

The Sumerians wrote on clay tablets, using a reed pen called a stylus. Once dried, these tablets became hard and, fortunately for today’s researchers, endured for millennia in the hot, dry climate.

Thousands of these tablets have been unearthed. Some libraries have even been discovered with over 10,000 of these clay tablets. And although the vast majority of these tablets contain records of goods collected and distributed by the governments and trade...
transactions, some contain myths, stories, and letters. These documents have provided much information about the culture and history of the Sumerian people.

With their ingenuity, the Sumerian people developed complex irrigation system and a written language. They were the first people to use the plow to lift the silt-laden soil of their crop fields and they invented the sailboat. They were the first people to design a calendar based on the phase of the moon and they developed a numerical system, based on the number 60, which is still used to measure seconds and minutes.

**Gilgamesh**

Gilgamesh was likely an actual king of Uruk in Babylonia who lived about 2700 B.C.E.

Sumerians recorded stories and myths about Gilgamesh, which were written on clay tablets. The stories were combined into an epic tale. Versions of this tale were translated into other languages including Akkadian, which was spoken by the Babylonians.

The fullest surviving version is derived from twelve stone tablets, in the Akkadian language, which were found stored in the famous library at Nineveh of Assyrian King Assurbanipal.

The epic relates the heroic deeds of Gilgamesh, who is the king of Uruk. His father is mortal and his mother is a goddess. Since Gilgamesh is part mortal, he knows he must die one day. However, he longs for immortality, whether through doing great deeds or discovering the secret of eternal life. He roams the earth on this quest and meets Utnapishtim, the only human granted eternal life by the gods. He tells Gilgamesh many stories, including one of a great flood that covered the Earth.

What happens to Gilgamesh? Read the tale and find out. The following is an excerpt from Gilgamesh.

> O man of Shuruppak, son of Ubartutu:  
> Tear down the house and build a boat!  
> Abandon wealth and seek living beings!  
> Spurn possessions and keep alive living beings!  
> Make all living beings go up into the boat.
The boat which you are to build,
its dimensions must measure equal to each other:
its length must correspond to its width.
Roof it over like the Apsu.

From Tablet XI — translation by Maureen Gallery Kovacs, 1998

A culture of many firsts, the Sumerians led the way for other societies that followed them.

4b. Babylonia

The Babylonians used the innovations of the Sumerians, added to them, and built an empire that gave the world, among other things, codified laws, a tower that soared above the earth, and one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

Geographically, the empire of Babylonia occupied the middle and southern part of Mesopotamia. Situated between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, it stretched from the present-day city of Baghdad south to the Persian Gulf.

The first written mention of Babylonia’s famous capital city, Babylon, dates to about 3800 B.C.E. During that time, most of Mesopotamia was made up of Sumerian city-states. The king of Babylonia Sargon I, however, was of Semitic background. During his reign, Semitic literature, art, and architecture flourished. He ruled from Susa and conquered lands as far away as Syria.
The First Empire

Over the next 1,500 years, the Mesopotamia city-states vied with each other for power and influence. It was not until Hammurabi (ruled 1792-1750 B.C.E.) united most of this area after a triumphant military campaign that the city of Babylon reached its first great glory. In the years during and following Hammurabi’s reign (known as the First Empire), Babylonian rulers constructed temples, roads, and an extensive canal system. They also codified laws.

The rule of the Babylonian kings contrasts favorably with the rule of the Assyrian kings who destroyed the first Babylonian Empire and left a legacy of war and destruction. After Assyrian dominance in Mesopotamia, which lasted from approximately 1400-600 B.C.E., the Babylonians established a second great Empire.

King Nabopolassar, a Chaldean, (Chaldea was a region of southern Mesopotamia), helped to conquer the Assyrian capital of Nineveh in 606 B.C.E. and used the opportunity to establish his own kingdom in Babylon.

Nabopolassar’s son, Nebuchadnezzar, succeeded his father in 604 B.C.E. During Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, the Tower of Babel reached its apex, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon were constructed, Babylonians destroyed the Great Temple in Jerusalem and 7,000 Jews were brought back to Babylonia in captivity.

The Tower of Babel
The Tower of Babel was a ziggurat, a pyramid-shaped temple built to a local god. The most important god of Babylon was Marduk, who outshone all other gods in the Babylonian pantheon.

Figure 68 Sargon I, known as Sargon the Great, was a Semitic king who ruled the earliest Babylonian Empire.

Figure 69 According to legend, the magnificent ziggurat known as the Tower of Babel needed constant maintenance to keep the baked bricks from eroding away in the rain. When King Xerxes of Persia took over Babylon in 478 B.C.E., the tower began its descent into history as a pile of debris and broken bricks on the ground.
Construction on the Tower of Babel had begun about 1100 B.C.E., and when Nebuchadnezzar finished it, the tower reached a height of 91 meters (295 feet). According to a tablet left by the king, the tower was made of "baked brick enameled in brilliant blue."

**The Hanging Gardens**
Nebuchadnezzar built the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, for his wife who missed her lush homeland.

The gardens did not "hang" literally — that is, its plants or trees didn't dangle from ropes. "Hanging" refers to the garden's terraces which overhung one another.

But what makes a terraced garden special enough to be one of the Seven Wonders of the World?

Babylon received little rain, and stone slabs needed to hold terraces in place were almost nonexistent in the region. Ingenious engineers devised a chain pump that brought water from the nearby Euphrates River to irrigate the gardens. Specially designed bricks kept the flora in place.

The result was a green oasis that today's scholars believe rose between 80 and 300 feet into the air. The gardens were a lush mountain of foliage in the middle of a flat, dry desert.

Ultimately, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon disappeared, and the Tower of Babel and the Babylonian Empire were destroyed by the Persians around the year 478 B.C.E.

But the sands of time cannot hide the magnificent accomplishments in engineering, law, art, and architecture that the

*Figure 70 Babylonian language evolved from pictographs to cuneiforms throughout the life of the civilization.*
Babylonians left as their legacy to the world.

4c. Hammurabi's Code: An Eye for an Eye

"An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

This phrase, along with the idea of written laws, goes back to ancient Mesopotamian culture that prospered long before the Bible was written or the civilizations of the Greeks or Romans flowered.

"An eye for an eye ..." is a paraphrase of Hammurabi's Code, a collection of 282 laws inscribed on an upright stone pillar. The code was found by French archaeologists in 1901 while excavating the ancient city of Susa, which is in modern-day Iran.

Hammurabi is the best known and most celebrated of all Mesopotamian kings. He ruled the Babylonian Empire from 1792-50 B.C.E. Although he was concerned with keeping order in his kingdom, this was not his only reason for compiling the list of laws. When he began ruling the city-state of Babylon, he had control of no more than 50 square miles of territory. As he conquered other city-states and his empire grew, he saw the need to unify the various groups he controlled.

A Need for Justice
Hammurabi keenly understood that, to achieve this goal, he needed one universal set of laws for all of the diverse peoples he conquered. Therefore, he sent legal experts throughout his kingdom to gather existing laws. These laws were reviewed and some were changed or eliminated before compiling his final list of 282 laws. Despite what many people believe, this code of laws was not the first.

Oldest Code Known
The oldest known evidence of a law code are tablets from the ancient city Ebla (Tell Mardikh in modern-day Syria). They date to about 2400 B.C.E. — approximately 600 years before Hammurabi put together his famous code.
The prologue or introduction to the list of laws is very enlightening. Here, Hammurabi states that he wants "to make justice visible in the land, to destroy the wicked person and the evil-doer, that the strong might not injure the weak." The laws themselves support this compassionate claim, and protect widows, orphans and others from being harmed or exploited.

The phrase "an eye for an eye" represents what many people view as a harsh sense of justice based on revenge. But, the entire code is much more complex than that one phrase. The code distinguishes among punishments for wealthy or noble persons, lower-class persons or commoners, and slaves.

The Laws

Hammurabi's Law Code

"Anu and Bel called by name me, Hammurabi, the exalted prince, who feared God, to bring about the rule of righteousness in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil-doers; so that the strong should not harm the weak; so that I should rule over the black-headed people like Shamash, and enlighten the land, to further the well-being of mankind ..."

So begins the Law Code of Hammurabi, a list of nearly 300 laws etched into a two and one-half meter high black diorite pillar, discovered in 1902 but dating back to the time of Hammurabi himself (1792-1750 B.C.E). Some laws were quite brutal, others rather progressive. Members of the upper-class often received harsher punishments than commoners, and women had quite a few important rights. Most of the nearly 300 laws written on the pillar pertain to property rights of landowners, slave masters, merchants, and builders.

Here are some of the more unusual laws that seem very foreign to a modern society:

- If anyone finds runaway male or female slaves in the open country and bring them to their masters, the master of the slaves shall pay him two shekels of silver.
• If anyone is committing a robbery and is caught, then he shall be put to death.

• If a tavern-keeper (feminine) does not accept corn according to gross weight in payment of a drink, but takes money, and the price of the drink is less than that of the corn, she shall be convicted and thrown into the water.

• If a son of a paramour or a prostitute say to his adoptive father or mother: "You are not my father, or my mother," his tongue shall be cut off.

• If a son strike his father, his hands shall be hewn off.

• If a man knock out the teeth of his equal, his teeth shall be knocked out.

• If a man strike a free-born woman so that she lose her unborn child, he shall pay ten shekels for her loss.

• If a barber, without the knowledge of his master, cut the sign of a slave on a slave not to be sold, the hands of this barber shall be cut off.

• If a slave says to his master: "You are not my master," if they convict him his master shall cut off his ear.

Hammurabi's own words illustrate this point: "If a man has destroyed the eye of a man of the gentleman class, they shall destroy his eye .... If he has destroyed the eye of a commoner ... he shall pay one mina of silver. If he has destroyed the eye of a gentleman's slave ... he shall pay half the slave's price." The Babylonians clearly did not live under a social system that treated all people equally.

The code deals with many topics of concern other than assault. It outlines rules for witnesses and those making accusations of crimes. For example, "If any one bring an accusation of any crime before the elders, and does not prove what he has charged, he shall, if it be a capital offense charged, be put to death." It details how theft or destruction of property should be handled and gives guidelines for dealing with trade and business problems.

In some cases, these rules are quite reasonable and fair: "If any one owe a debt for a loan,
and a storm prostrates (kills) the grain, or the harvest fail, or the grain does not grow for lack of water, in that year he need not give his creditor any grain; he washes his debt-tablet in water and pays no rent for this year."

The code also gives rules for family matters, such as marriage, divorce, incest, and adoption. Payment amounts for the work of doctors and other professionals are outlined. Although the pay for doctors was good, they suffered severe punishments for fatal errors. The code states that "if a physician make a large incision with the operating knife, and kill him ... his hands shall be cut off." (Talk about a need for malpractice insurance!)

The Code covers all types of issues related to farming and herding animals, and it also lays out rules on the ownership and sale of slaves.

**Go Jump in a River!**
Hammurabi's Code may not seem very different from more recent laws and precedents that guide the processes of a trial. But, there are a few major differences between ancient Babylonians and today's laws. Hammurabi's Code required accusers to bring the accused into court by themselves.

A number of the laws refer to jumping in the Euphrates River as a method of demonstrating one's guilt or innocence. If the accused returned to shore safely, they were deemed innocent; if they drowned, they were guilty. This practice follows the Babylonians’ belief that their fates were controlled by their gods.

From the code, it is evident that the Babylonians did not believe all people were equal. The code treated slaves, commoners, and nobles differently. Women had a number of rights, including the ability to buy and sell property and to obtain a divorce. The Babylonians understood the need for honesty by all parties in a trial and for court officers to be free of corruption so that the justice system could function effectively.

Hammurabi’s Code serves as a window into the prevailing values of ancient Babylon.

### 4d. Assyrians: Cavalry and Conquests
Much of Assyria’s history is closely tied to its southern neighbor, Babylonia. The two Mesopotamian empires spoke similar languages and worshipped most of the same gods. They were often rivals on the battlefield for influence in the ancient Middle East.

The history of Assyria spans mainly from about 2000 B.C.E, when the cities of Nineveh and Calah were founded, to the destruction of Nineveh in 606 B.C.E.

Whereas Babylonia is best remembered for its contributions in literature, architecture, and the law, Assyria is chiefly remembered for its military prowess, advances in weaponry, and meticulously recorded conquests.

Geographically, Assyria occupied the middle and northern part of Mesopotamia. It was situated between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, and its major cities were Calah, Zab, Ashur, and the capital, Nineveh.

**The Power and the Gory**

"I am powerful, I am all-powerful .... I am without equal among all kings."

This was the boast of King Esarhaddon (680-669 B.C.E.), who expanded the Assyrian empire to its greatest extent. At the height of his great power, in 671 B.C.E., he conquered Egypt in less than a month.

The Egyptian kingdom was considered one of the most impenetrable in the Middle East. The Egyptians had ruled over their own land virtually undisturbed for 2,500 years.

Once Egypt was captured, Esarhaddon and his successor, Assurbanipal (680-626 B.C.E.), ruled an empire that stretched over 1,000 miles from the Nile River to the Caucasus Mountains. In its time, the Assyrian Empire was the greatest the world had ever seen. The
center of the empire was located in what is now northern Iraq, and its capital was called Nineveh.

**Tiglath-pileser I**

Tiglath-pileser I was an early Assyrian king who began his reign in about 1100 B.C.E. He mounted several successful military campaigns against the Babylonians, Syrians, and many others.

He claims to have conquered 42 kings and peoples and wrote, "I carried away their possessions, burned their cities with fire, demanded from their hostages tribute and contributions, and laid on them the heavy yoke of my rule."

The Assyrian ruler also claimed great expertise as a hunter who on one expedition killed over 900 lions and captured several elephants alive.

In the city of Asshur he kept a hunting park in which to prey on animals. At Nineveh, he started a botanical garden in which he planted trees and fauna gathered during his military campaigns.

How did the Assyrians establish such a large empire over such formidable foes? Their armies were highly trained and professional. And their troops had a great deal of experience in battle. They were well organized into various units of charioteers, cavalry, bowmen, and lancers.

Assyrian armies also had a corps of engineers who employed movable towers and iron-headed battering rams for sieges on walled towns.
Soldiers used iron weapons, which were much stronger than the bronze weapons of some of their foes. The Assyrians also built roads for the quick and easy movement of troops, so that conquered rebelling kingdoms could easily be brought back under control.

Fear was another tool used by the Assyrians. Although all wars are cruel, the Assyrians were notorious for their widespread use of torture. The words of an early Assyrian king, Assurnarsipal, reveal just how cruel the Assyrians could be:

I built a pillar over against his gate, and I flayed all the chief men ... and I covered the pillar with their skins ... some I impaled upon the pillar on stakes. Many captives ... I burned with fire ... From some I cut off their hands and their fingers, and from others I cut off their noses, their ears ... of many I put out the eyes.

-Assurnarsipal (c.875 B.C.E.)

The Spoils of Victory
In ancient times, kings usually led their troops into battle and were highly skilled soldiers themselves. It was the custom of Assyrian kings to record their victories on the walls of their immense and extravagant palaces. The relief sculptures on the walls of King Assurbanipal's palace in Nineveh are some of the most elaborate. These sculptures, along with an important collection of cuneiform clay tablets — 25,000 of them — were discovered by Austen Henry Layard and his colleagues in the 1840s.

Empires meant power. This power led to extravagant wealth for the victors, who forced the conquered peoples into paying them tribute or taxes. The Assyrian kings had no end of such wealth.

Paying Tribute
The Assyrian king Sennacherib (704-681 B.C.E.) describes the tribute he exacted from the Hebrew king Hezekiah. Hezekiah withstood the Assyrians' siege in the capital city of
Jerusalem in an event that is also recounted in the Bible. But the Hebrews still had to give enormous tribute and presents to the Assyrians.

Sennacherib explains in his own words on a tablet that was discovered by archaeologists: "He sent [a convoy] after me to Nineveh, my royal city with 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, jewels, antimony ... couches of ivory, easy chairs inlaid with ivory, elephants' hides, elephants' tusks ... all kinds of valuable treasures, and his daughters, his harem, and male and female singers."

More than Warriors
With the wealth they obtained from war and tribute, the Assyrian kings built the well-fortified and beautiful cities of Nineveh, Calah, (present-day Nimrud).

In these cities, they placed their grand palaces, some of which spanned several acres. In these places, Assyrian kings showed their more cultured side.

The first glassmaking, the invention of backgammon, the ancestor of the lock and key, even therapeutic massage, are thought by many scholars to be Assyrian inventions.

But the Assyrian Empire's grandeur did not last. Just as it reached its peak, it began to crumble. Fighting between King Assurbanipal and his brother weakened the empire and opening it up to foreign invaders. The Assyrian Empire was eventually destroyed in 612 B.C.E. by the Medes from the Iranian Plateau and the Chaldeans of Babylonia.

It never rose again.

4e. Persian Empire

The Persian Empire spanned from Egypt in the west to Turkey in the north, and through Mesopotamia to the Indus River in the east.

More Information ...
Persia is today the country of Iran.

By the 5th century B.C.E., it was the largest empire the world had ever seen, surpassing the size of their Assyrian predecessors.
Cyrus Is Desirous

In 539 B.C.E., King Cyrus decided to expand the boundaries of Persia. He began by conquering Babylon. Unlike Assyrian kings, Cyrus was known for his mercy rather than his cruelty.

For example, he allowed the Hebrews, who had been captives in Babylon for over fifty years to return to the holy city of Jerusalem, instead of turning them into slaves. He returned sacred items that were stolen from them and allowed the rebuilding of their capital and the temple.

Cyrus also allowed the Hebrews to continue living and worshiping as they chose. The Jewish prophet, Isaiah, called Cyrus “God's shepherd,” and said that “God would go before him and level the mountains.”

Cyrus's generosity toward the Jews was not an isolated event. He and his successors employed a policy of adaptation and reconciliation toward all of their new subjects. They cooperated with local rulers and interfered as little as possible in matters that did not directly relate to their rule. They respected local traditions and even adopted some of their subjects' religious practices for themselves.

A Kinder, Gentler Kingdom

Rather than destroy local economies for their own selfish gain, the Persians worked to increase trade throughout their kingdom. They standardized weights, developed official coinage, and implemented universal laws.
The Persian leaders required cooperation and imposed a 20 percent tax on all agriculture and manufacturing. They also taxed religious institutions, which despite their wealth had previously not been taxed.

The Persians themselves paid no taxes.

The Persian kings — especially Cyrus and, later, Darius I (522-486 B.C.E.) — developed a model for the administration of a large empire that was copied by others in the future. Laws were carried out fairly and evenly among all of the various subject peoples.

The Persians divided their empire into 20 provinces that were managed by governors. In addition, they provided land to feudal lords in exchange for loyalty and guarantees of soldiers for the Persian army. Most of the people in the empire, including average Persians, simply remained struggling farmers or craftspeople.

Cyrus built the foundations of a courier, or mail, system. Darius I built a communication network that connected most of the empire. A 1,600-mile-long royal road was built from Sardis to Susa, one of the administrative capitals. Along this road, were numerous places for lodging, where royal couriers could obtain fresh horses and supplies.

Thus Spake Zarathustra

The Persians also developed a religion based on monotheism, the belief in one god. It was founded by the prophet Zoroaster, called Zarathustra in Old Iranian. Many of his ideas were collected in a series of poems called the Gathas, which became part of the religion’s most sacred book, the Avesta.

Zoroaster believed that people were training for a future life. He taught that the earthly world was torn by a constant struggle between good and evil. Humans would have to choose between the two in preparation for a final judgment when good would triumph over evil. When this happened, all earthly existence would disappear. The Zoroastrian god, Ahura Mazda, embodied goodness and wisdom. Some religious scholars believe that

Figure 80 A Bedouin man on a camel wears clothing that shields him from the heat of the hot desert sun.
Zoroaster's ideas strongly influenced on the development of the Hebrew and Christian religions.

Despite the Persians' effective and conciliatory leadership, their empire did not last. Under King Xerxes in 480 B.C.E., the Persians made an attempt to expand their empire into Greece. The Greek city-states cooperated and held off the Persian threat and even succeeded in almost obliterating the Persian navy.

When Alexander the Great rose to power in 331 B.C.E., he put an end to Persian dreams of expanding their empire. Only in his early twenties, Alexander had no equal as a military strategist. He swept through the ancient world, conquering all of the Persian Empire.

4f. Phoenicians: Sailing Away

A-B-C-D-E-F-G ...

This famous sequence of letters known to much of the world dates back to the 16th century B.C.E.

A fairly small group of traders and merchants known as the Phoenicians created the foundation for the modern English alphabet and other alphabets. They organized a system of 22 consonants into what became the alphabet used not only by English speakers, but by speakers of many of the world's languages.

The Phoenicians lived along the Mediterranean coast in what is now Lebanon. They inhabited a number of different city-states, the most famous of which were Tyre, Byblos, and Sidon. These Phoenician places were often in conflict with each other for domination of the region. Because of this lack of cooperation, the Phoenicians were conquered and forced to pay tribute to the virtually every empire in the region, including the Egyptians, Hittites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks.
Alphabet Soup
When the Phoenicians created their new alphabet, they worked from symbols that were already in use among the Semitic-speaking peoples of Canaan and Mesopotamia. As early as 3000 B.C.E., the Sumerians and the Egyptians had already invented writing systems based on symbols. These early scripts were primarily used by merchants and traders to record contracts, receipts, and lists of goods.

The merchants and traders of Phoenicia wanted something that would not be too difficult to learn and would be quick and easy to use. Unfortunately, both the Egyptian and Sumerian writing systems did not meet these criteria very well. They used hundreds of different complex symbols to represent ideas (ideograms) and syllabic sounds (phonograms).

The Phoenicians realized that most words were made up of only a small number of simple sounds. They found that these sounds could be represented in only 22 symbols and their various combinations. In their newly created alphabet, the Phoenicians used symbols or letters only for consonants, although their spoken language did contain vowel sounds. The modern Hebrew and Arabic alphabets, which were directly influenced by the Phoenician one, still do not contain symbols for vowels.

The Phoenicians spread their alphabet through their vast trading network that stretched throughout the entire Mediterranean region. The Greeks adopted it and by the 8th century B.C.E. had added vowels. Later, the Romans also used a version of this same alphabet that is virtually identical to the one used today in the English-speaking world.
Trading on the High Seas
The Phoenicians were the greatest traders in the ancient world for the period between 1000 B.C.E. and 600 B.C.E. These were highly skilled shipbuilders and sailors built strong and fast sailing vessels to carry their goods. They learned how to navigate and how to use the North Star to sail at night. It is possible that they even sailed as far as Britain and around the southern tip of Africa.

To fight off pirates who often harassed trading ships, the Phoenicians designed special warships to accompany their trading fleets. Oarsmen would propel a sharp ramming device at the front of the boat into an enemy's vessel, putting a hole into it that would cause it to sink.

To expand in trading, the Phoenicians also built outposts that later became great cities in their own right. The most famous of these outposts was Carthage (located in modern-day Tunisia). Carthage eventually became wealthy and powerful enough to challenge the Roman Republic.

Phoenician merchants acted as middlemen for their neighbors. They transported linen and papyrus from Egypt, copper from Cyprus, embroidered cloth from Mesopotamia, spices from Arabia, and ivory, gold, and slaves from Africa to destinations throughout the Mediterranean.

The Phoenicians also had valuable resources and highly skilled artisans. From a small shellfish called the murex they produced a brilliant purple dye. This dye was applied to woolen garments, which were highly prized not only for their beauty, but also for their high cost. It took 60,000 murex to produce one pound of dye. The dye became known as royal purple and was worn by Roman emperors.

Skilled artists also produced beautiful glass, pottery, textiles, woodwork, and metalwork that were desired by people all over the ancient world. King Solomon of Israel even used Phoenician artisans and resources to build the great
Hebrew Temple to Yahweh.

By 572 B.C.E., the Phoenicians fell under the harsh rule of the Assyrians. They continued to trade, but encountered tough competition from Greece over trade routes. As the 4th century B.C.E. approached, the Phoenicians' two most important cities, Sidon and Tyre, were destroyed by the Persians and Alexander the Great. Many Phoenicians left the Mediterranean coast for their trading colonies, and Phoenicia people and ideas were soon assimilated into other cultures.

4g. Hebrews and the Land of Milk and Honey

Empires rose and empires fell. The Babylonians, the Assyrians, and the Persians accumulated immense wealth and power that allowed them to build capital cities of striking beauty.

But their cities and palaces eventually fell into decay and were covered by thousands of years of sand and dust.

One of their relatively powerless contemporary groups outlived those great empires. These people were the Hebrews, known also as Israelites or, later, Jews.

Their early contribution to humankind was not wealthy empires or groundbreaking technology. Rather, it was the revolutionary idea that there was only one god, a belief known as monotheism. This one Hebrew god was called Yahweh. To the Hebrews, Yahweh was all powerful and all knowing, yet beyond human understanding. The religion based around this god influenced the founding of Christianity and Islam.

Abraham and the Torah
The history of the early Hebrews is known primarily from one of their sacred texts, the Torah, which comprises the first five books of the Old Testament of the Bible. According to the Torah, Abraham is the ancestral patriarch of the Hebrew people.

Abraham was born in the Sumerian city of Ur. After Abraham's father died, Yahweh visited Abraham and instructed him to smash the idols of his father's gods, to worship the one and only true god, Yahweh, and to move his family to Canaan. Yahweh promised Abraham that if he followed these laws, he would found a great nation that would live in a land flowing with milk and honey.

This land, known as Canaan in ancient times, is roughly located in the same place as modern-day Israel.

Abraham's migration took place sometime between 2000 B.C.E. and 1700 B.C.E. It occurred at a time when the Canaanites lived in relatively small, independently governed, walled cities. They were accustomed to outsiders coming into their territory. The Hebrews, who were nomadic herders, were tolerated by the Canaanites.

The land that Abraham and his followers found did not flow so easily with milk and honey. The dry climate and rough environment required considerable effort to survive. Drought forced Abraham and his family to move to Egypt.

**The Twelve Tribes**
The Torah tells how Abraham had two sons: Isaac by his wife Sarah, and Ishmael by his concubine Hagar. The Hebrews trace their heritage through Isaac. Isaac had a son Jacob, who in turn had 12 sons. These sons became the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob's most beloved son, Joseph, was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. While in captivity, Joseph rose to be the Egyptian pharaoh's chief minister of the land.
When a severe drought plagued Canaan, his same brothers came to Egypt, begging for grain. Ignoring their past mistreatment of him, Joseph gave them grain and convinced them to stay in Egypt.

There, the Hebrews prospered and became a great nation. They became so numerous, that a pharaoh "who did not know Joseph" enslaved the Hebrews. This pharaoh is believed to be Ramses II (1290-1224 B.C.E.)

The Exodus to Canaan
The Torah then recounts the story of Moses, who led the Hebrews out of Egypt and slavery. This event, known as the Exodus, most likely occurred during the reign of the pharaoh Merneptah, between 1224 and 1211 B.C.E. Archaeologists have found an Egyptian document written on papyrus from this time period that describes Jews being forced to leave, further authenticating this story. After what the Hebrews believed were a series of acts by Yahweh on their behalf, including various plagues on the Egyptians and their crops and livestock, Moses led his people out of Egypt. The Egyptian Exodus lasted approximately from 1600 to 1200 B.C.E.

According to the Old Testament, the Hebrews wandered in the desert of the Sinai Peninsula (which is between Egypt and Canaan) for 40 years. Moses received the Ten Commandments during this time, which outlined some basic laws governing behavior. He also struggled to keep his people from worshiping gods other than Yahweh. Moses died before he could enter Canaan.

Joshua led the Hebrews back into Canaan, where they settled among the Canaanites and the Philistines. The Old Testament tells of Joshua's victorious battles against these people. Archaeologists have found that a number of towns were destroyed around this time. But, they do not agree as to whether such destruction was the work of the Hebrews or others. Over time, the
Hebrews began to learn the ways of the Canaanites and settled down to a life of farming and herding.

In 722 B.C.E., the northern half of Hebrew lands known as Israel was invaded and mostly destroyed by the Assyrians. The southern half, known as Judea, survived until around 597 B.C.E., when the Babylonians defeated the Judeans and carried most of them back as captives to Babylon.

During their captivity in Babylon, Hebrew scribes recorded the history of their people and their relationship with their god Yahweh. After 539 B.C.E., the Persians under Cyrus II conquered Babylon. He allowed the Hebrews to return to their holy city of Jerusalem. But, the Hebrews continued to fall under the domination of other empires. In 70 C.E., the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and sent most of the Jews into an exile that lasted until the 20th century.

4h. Birth of Christianity

Crucifixions were common in the Roman Empire. They were so common that the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth was noticed only by a small group of dedicated followers.

To understand the life and death of Jesus and the birth of Christianity, one must understand the context of the Roman Empire. Jesus was a Jew, as were almost all of his early followers. By 30 C.E., Rome's empire had expanded to cover virtually all of the lands adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea, including the land occupied by the Hebrews.

The Romans had no tolerance for sedition or rebellion against their government. But the Jews had a religious reason for resisting Roman control. The Romans expected the Jews to worship the emperor as a god. But the Jews' religion commanded them to worship only one god: Yahweh. Their refusal to

Figure 88 Despite the fact that no record exists of Jesus' physical appearance, many paintings — all created after his death — depict his face. Here, Jesus (center) presides over the Last Supper.
worship any of the Roman emperors, infuriated those rulers. The emperors were used to getting their way, and they did not take the Jewish resistance lightly.

In 26 B.C.E., the Romans established direct rule over the Jews. They appointed Pontius Pilate as governor of the territory in that year. Pontius Pilate had little tolerance for Jewish traditions. More than once, he pushed the Jews to the brink of revolt by violating their religious beliefs in their holy city of Jerusalem. He even took money from their holy temple's treasury to build an aqueduct. This action led to a suppressed rebellion that resulted in many Jewish deaths.

According to Hebrew texts, it was believed that humans' time on earth was temporary. It was to be replaced by God's triumph over all human sins and the establishment of God's everlasting kingdom. They believed that this apocalypse, or end to the earthly world, would be brought about by a messiah. Many Jews were awaiting this messiah to deliver them from Roman rule and their earthly burdens. For some, this messiah was Jesus of Nazareth.

**Jesus of Nazareth**

Jesus began to teach in the Jewish tradition. He preached love and tolerance, and he was also believed to have performed miracles of healing the sick, walking on water, and even raising the dead.

Jesus claimed that the kingdom of Yahweh would never be realized on earth, but in a life after death. Jesus taught to love even enemies, because in light of the coming kingdom of God, there was no reason for hatred. A small group of disciples believed he was the promised messiah who would bring an end to Roman rule.

Jesus' ideas were rejected by most of the Jews in Galilee, an area in northern Israel, where he first preached his ideas. Many Jews believed that Jesus was a troublemaker who was violating Yahweh's sacredness. He chose to go to Jerusalem to spread his word.
sometime between 30 and 33 C.E.

Gaining followers in Jerusalem was not easy for Jesus. Not all Jews saw their religion or their relationship with the Romans in the same way. In fact, some of the high priests of the Jewish Temple supported the Romans. The high priest was appointed by Pontius Pilate to control Jewish affairs and to keep the Jewish population in line. It is argued by some historians that the priests received wealth and power for their cooperation with the Romans.

Jesus decided to target these priests and their control of the Temple of Yahweh. It is believed that he saw them obstructing the conversion of the Jewish populace to his ideas. He coordinated an attack on the trading activities of the Temple, which were a great source of wealth to the priests.

At the very least, this gave the Roman authorities the excuse they needed to arrest Jesus for sedition. On the night of the Passover Seder, known to Christians as the Last Supper, Jesus was arrested. Jesus had been hiding, and Judas of Iscariot, one of his disciples, told Roman authorities where he would be.

Crucifixion and the Growth of Christianity

Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate, who was uncertain how to proceed. Jesus' disciples were only a small minority, and the crowds demanded crucifixion. Pilate condemned Jesus to death. He was beaten and crucified.

Three days after his death, Jesus' tomb was found empty. For the next 40 days, his disciples claim that they saw visions of Jesus having risen from the dead in the tradition of Moses and other great Jewish prophets. The resurrection story is central to the Christian beliefs of the divinity of Jesus and life after death.

Most Jews rejected the notion of Jesus as their messiah. In the years that followed Jesus' death, the Romans treated the early Christians as a small, Jewish sect. This all changed with Paul of Tarsus.
Paul began to spread Christianity ideas more to non-Jews. Many of the poor, destitute people in the region took solace in the notions of a loving god and a life after death. The Romans persecuted these Christians who rejected Roman polytheism. But Paul traveled far and wide, and his successors did a remarkable job reaching converts. After almost four centuries of existing on the margins, Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire in 395 C.E.

4i. Muhammad and the Faith of Islam

A man meditating alone in a cave near Mecca received a religious vision. This vision laid the foundations for a new religion. The year was 610 and the man's name was Muhammad.

And the belief system that arose from Muhammad’s ideas became the basis of one of the world’s most widely practiced religions:

Islam.

Muhammad was born around 570 in the city of Mecca, located on the Arabian Peninsula. Both of his parents died before Muhammad was six and he was raised by his grandfather and uncle. His family belonged to a poor clan that was active in Mecca politics.

Following the traditions of wealthy families, he spent part of his childhood living with a Bedouin family. Bedouins led fairly isolated lives as nomadic herders in the harsh Arabian Desert. Muhammad's experiences among these people most likely had a strong influence on the development of Islam.

In his twenties, Muhammad began working as a merchant and soon married his employer, a rich woman named Khadijah. Over the next 20 years he became a wealthy and respected trader, traveling throughout the Middle East. He and his wife had six children — two boys (who did not live into adulthood) and four girls. By the time he was 40, he began having religious visions that would change his life.
A Revelation of Faith
While meditating in a cave on Mount Hira, Muhammad had a revelation. He came to believe that he was called on by God to be a prophet and teacher of a new faith, Islam, which means literally "submission."

This new faith incorporated aspects of Judaism and Christianity. It respected the holy books of these religions and its great leaders and prophets — Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and others. Muhammad called Abraham "Khalil" ("God's friend") and identified him as Islam's ancient patriarch. Islam traces its heritage through Abraham's son Ishmael.

Muhammad believed that he himself was God's final prophet.

Central to Islamic beliefs are the Five Pillars of Faith, which all followers of Islam — called Muslims — must follow:

1. There is only one universal God: Allah.
2. Followers of Islam (Muslims) are expected to pray five times each day while facing Mecca.
3. All Muslims are expected to pay a yearly tax that is mostly intended to help the poor and needy.
4. For the entire month of Ramadan, Muslims must not eat, smoke, drink, or have sexual relations from sunrise to sunset.
5. All able Muslims must make a pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca at least once in their lifetimes.

The Kaaba
Mecca houses Islam's holiest site, the Kaaba, which was believed to have been built for Yahweh by Abraham and his son Ishmael.
Muhammad's message was especially well received by the poor and slaves. But many people were opposed to his message. This opposition only seemed to make him more determined. After years of publicly promoting his ideas, he became so disliked that some began plotting his murder.

From Mecca to Medina and Back
In 622, fearing for his life, Muhammad fled to the town of Medina. This flight from Mecca to Medina became known as the Hegira, Arabic for "flight." The Muslim calendar begins on this year.

In Medina, the local people welcomed Muhammad and his followers. There, Muhammad built the first mosque, or Islamic temple, and began to work to separate Islam from Judaism and Christianity, which had originally influenced him.

Whereas his followers had originally prayed while facing toward Jerusalem, he now had them face toward Mecca. Muhammad continued to have revelations from Allah. The ideas from these revelations formed the basis of a poetic text called the Koran, which contains the fundamental ideas of Islam.

Muhammad fought a number of battles against the people of Mecca. In 629, Muhammad returned to Mecca with an army of 1500 converts to Islam and entered the city unopposed and without bloodshed. Before his death two years later, he forcefully converted most of
the Arabian Peninsula to his new faith and built a small empire.

Unfortunately, Muhammad had not designated a successor. The struggle over leadership that followed his death has divided Muslims to this day, creating a division in Islam between the Sunnis and Shiites.

Despite these problems, a vast Islamic empire was created over the next 12 centuries that would build a base of worshipers unrivaled by any other religion.

**Jihad**

Belief in *jihad* is a common thread to many Islamic sects. Although the exact meaning of the Arabic is difficult to express in English, *jihad* is most accurately translated as "struggle."

For most Muslims, jihad is a personal struggle against evil. The holy battles of this spiritual struggle are fought inside Muslims' minds and souls.

Sometimes, the struggle can take the form of a physical war against non-believers. Although this kind of jihad is referred to in English as a "holy war," most Muslims believe there is nothing holy about war and that wars should only be fought against oppressors and aggressors.

A minority of Muslims, however, places great importance on holy war jihads. This minority feels that Muslims must wage war against all nonbelievers. It is this conception of jihad that inspires Islamic extremist terrorism. Unfortunately, due to media coverage, this is the interpretation of jihad that most Westerners are familiar with.

It should be reiterated that mainstream Islam is peaceful and rejects the idea of unprovoked war. Although the concept of jihad is widespread, it has not been accepted by the general Islamic community as one of the Pillars of Islam.

5. Ancient Greece

Many of the fundamental elements of Western culture first arose more than 2000 years ago in ancient Greece.

After conquering the Greeks, the ancient Romans spread Greek ideas throughout their empire, which included much of Europe.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, these ideas lost their prominence in European society during most of the Middle Ages (500-1500 C.E.). It was not until the Renaissance (1350-1500 C.E.) that the ancient Greek and Roman origins of many European institutions and practices were rediscovered.

One prominent element of Greek thought was the concept that humans are the measure of all things. The ancient Greeks wanted to know how the universe works. To probe such questions, the Greeks turned to philosophy, mathematics, and science.

**All Things Human**

The glorification of the human form and of human accomplishment defined ancient Greek art, philosophy, literature, and religion. Even their gods were created in the image of humans. The Greek gods had human emotions, looked like humans, and behaved more like people than infallible gods.

The Greeks' emphasis on the individual is one major cornerstone of Western Civilization. Indeed, the spirit of individualism as defined by the Greeks is still alive and well in modern American culture and society.

The Greeks were the first in the West to experiment with the concept of democratic government. Many successful modern democratic governments in the world today are heirs to the Greek model. It must be pointed out that though the Greeks developed the notion of "government by the people," most people were still excluded from the political process.
The First Greeks
Two major groups of people, the Minoans and the Mycenaean, were the first to populate the Greek peninsula. Not much is known about either of these groups because they did not leave an abundance of written or physical evidence to provide clues about their civilization. However, it is known that by 1650 B.C.E., the Minoans occupied the island of Crete that is south of the Greek mainland. The Minoans were named for the legendary ruler of Crete, King Minos. Historians believe that the Minoans were seafaring traders who developed a rich, diverse culture.

The Mycenaean came from a group of people who migrated from India through the Middle East and into Greece around the year 2000 B.C.E. These Indo-Europeans mixed with the native population of Greece to become the Mycenaean. Over time, both the Minoans and Mycenaean expanded and conquered territory until the two civilizations ran into one another.

Historians suspect that in the ensuing conflict the Mycenaean wiped out the Minoans, whose civilization and culture disappeared somewhat mysteriously. By 1200 B.C.E., the Mycenaean were in turn wiped out by another group known as the Dorians. This ushered in a Dark Age that lasted from 1150 to 800 B.C.E. During this time, economic activity ground to a halt, and literacy disappeared. Not much is known about this period in Greek history.

But a highly developed civilization resurfaced. From politics and philosophy to art, medicine, and science, the ancient Greeks generated thoughts that shaped the record of humankind for the next 2,500 years.

5a. Rise of City-States: Athens and Sparta
Geography plays a critical role in shaping civilizations, and this is particularly true of ancient Greece.

The Greek peninsula has two distinctive geographic features that influenced the development of Greek society. First, Greece has easy access to water. The land contains countless scattered islands, deep harbors, and a network of small rivers. This easy access to water meant that the Greek people might naturally become explorers and traders.

Second, Greece's mountainous terrain led to the development of the polis (city-state), beginning about 750 B.C.E. The high mountains made it very difficult for people to travel or communicate. Therefore, each polis developed independently and, often, very differently from one another. Eventually, the polis became the structure by which people organized themselves. Athens and Sparta are two good examples of city-states that contrasted greatly with each other.

Athens: The Think Tank
The city-state of Athens was the birthplace of many significant ideas. Ancient Athenians were a thoughtful people who enjoyed the systematic study of subjects such as science, philosophy, and history, to name a few.

Athenians placed a heavy emphasis on the arts, architecture, and literature. The Athenians built thousands of temples and statues that embodied their understanding of beauty. Today the term "classical" is used to describe their enduring style of art and architecture.

Athenians also enjoyed a democratic form of government in which some of the people shared power.
Sparta: Military Might
Life in Sparta was vastly different from life in Athens. Located in the southern part of Greece on the Peloponnisos peninsula, the city-state of Sparta developed a militaristic society ruled by two kings and an oligarchy, or small group that exercised political control.

Early in their history, a violent and bloody slave revolt caused the Spartans to change their society. A Spartan, Lycurgus, drafted a harsh set of laws that required total dedication to the state from its people. The laws' goal was to train citizens to become hardened soldiers so that they could fight off potential enemies or slave revolts. The result was a rigid lifestyle unlike any seen in Greece at the time. The devotion of Spartans to developing a military state left little time for the arts or literature.

A Spartan baby had to be hardy and healthy. To test a baby's strength, parents would leave their child on a mountain overnight to see if it could survive on its own until the next morning. By age seven, Spartan boys were taken from their families and underwent severe military training. They wore uniforms at all times, ate small meals of bland foods, exercised barefoot to toughen their feet, and were punished severely for disobedient behavior. Boys lived away from their families in barracks until the age of 30, even after they were married. Men were expected to be ready to serve in the army until they were 60 years old.

Women, too, were expected to be loyal and dedicated to the state. Like men, women followed a strict exercise program and contributed actively to Spartan society. Although they were not allowed to vote, Spartan women typically had more rights and independence than women in other Greek city-states.

Winning by Losing
The differences between Athens and Sparta eventually led to war between the two city-
states. Known as the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.E.), both Sparta and Athens gathered allies and fought on and off for decades because no single city-state was strong enough to conquer the others.

_The whole of Hellas used once to carry arms, their habitations being unprotected, and their communication with each other unsafe; indeed, to wear arms was as much a part of everyday life with them as with the barbarians._ [2] _And the fact that the people in these parts of Hellas are still living in the old way points to a time when the same mode of life was once equally common to all._ [3] _The Athenians were the first to lay aside their weapons, and to adopt an easier and more luxurious mode of life; indeed, it is only lately that their rich old men left off the luxury of wearing undergarments of linen, and fastening a knot of their hair with a tie of golden grasshoppers, a fashion which spread to their Ionian kindred, and long prevailed among the old men there._

-Thuycidides, The Peloponnesian War, (1910 translation by Richard Crawley)

With war came famine, plague, death, and misfortune. But war cannot kill ideas. Despite the eventual military surrender of Athens, Athenian thought spread throughout the region. After temporary setbacks, these notions only became more widely accepted and developed with the passing centuries.

**5b. Democracy Is Born**

The men wearing red paint were in big trouble.

In fact, they would probably have to pay a fine for not appearing at the assembly meeting. After being caught shirking their duty as citizens of Athens, they had been marked with red paint as punishment.
In Athenian democracy, every citizen was required to participate or suffer punishment. This practice stands in stark contrast to modern democratic governments in which citizens can choose whether or not they wish to participate. In Athenian democracy, all citizens pulled their weight.

Not everyone in Athens was considered a citizen. Only free, adult men enjoyed the rights and responsibility of citizenship. Only about 20 percent of the population of Athens were citizens. Women were not citizens and therefore could not vote or have any say in the political process. They were rarely permitted out in public and were even restricted as to where they could be within their own homes. Slaves and foreigners were not citizens and also could not participate in the democracy. In the end, democracy existed only for the free men who were originally from Athens.

A Worthy Contribution

Nevertheless, the idea of democratic government is one of the most significant contributions of the ancient Greeks. The city-state of Athens had one of the largest democracies in terms of population.

Early in Athens' history (around 594 B.C.E.), a man named Solon enacted reforms that helped reduce the growing gap between the rich and the poor. Poor citizens gained the right to sit in the assembly and to vote.

Later, Cleisthenes expanded the democracy by giving every citizen equal rights. He also created a legislative body whose members were picked randomly from the general population of citizens.
Typically, the citizens of Athens would gather in the agora when there was an assembly meeting. The agora, a fixture of every major Greek city-state, was a large open space in the middle of the city-state that contained a marketplace as well as government buildings. There, citizens would mingle and discuss the issues of the day before gathering for the assembly meeting.

During the meeting, citizens were free to express their opinions and cast their votes. It was in these meeting that people could be marked with red paint if they were not fulfilling their civic duty.

The courts, too, were usually in the agora. The juries in court cases were very large, often numbering in the hundreds and sometimes in the thousands. To be fair, Athenians wanted their juries to reflect the general population. There were no lawyers. Each citizen was expected to make his own case.

Athenian democracy depended on every citizen fulfilling his role. All citizens were expected to vote, but they were also expected to serve in the government if necessary. In Athens, the people governed, and the majority ruled. All citizens had equal rights and powers.

In a city-state as small as Athens, a pure democracy was possible. As states grew larger, the notion of electing representatives to make decisions for the public became more practical. But the idea that every citizen has a voice important enough to be heard originated in ancient Athens.

5c. Gods, Goddesses, and Heroes

The ancients Greeks were polytheistic — that is, they worshipped many gods. Their major gods and goddesses lived at the top of Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece, and myths described their lives and actions. In myths, gods often actively intervened in the day-to-day lives of humans. Myths were used to help explain the unknown and sometimes
teach a lesson.

For example, Zeus, the king of the gods, carried his favorite weapon, the thunderbolt. When it rained and there was thunder and lightning, the ancient Greeks believed that Zeus was venting his anger.

Many stories about how the Greek gods behaved and interacted with humans are found in the works of Homer. He created two epic poems: the Iliad, which related the events of the Trojan War, and the Odyssey, which detailed the travels of the hero Odysseus. These two poems were passed down orally over many generations.

_Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus’ son Achilleus and its devastation, which put pains thousandfold upon the Achaians, hurled in their multitudes_
to the house of Hades strong souls of heroes, but gave their bodies to be the delicate feasting of dogs, of all birds, and the will of Zeus was accomplished since that time when first there stood in division of conflict Atreus’ son the lord of men and brilliant Achilleus.

-Homer, the Iliad (1951, translation by Richard Lattimore)

A Soap Opera from Hellas
The Greeks created gods in the image of humans; that is, their gods had many human qualities even though they were gods. The gods constantly fought among themselves, behaved irrationally and unfairly, and were often jealous of each other. Zeus, the king of the gods, was rarely faithful to his wife Hera. Hera plotted against Zeus and punished his mistresses.

The Greek gods were highly emotional and behaved inconsistently and sometimes immorally. Greek religion did not have a standard set of morals, there were no Judaic Ten Commandments. The gods, heroes, and humans of Greek mythology were flawed.

In addition to Zeus and Hera, there were many other major and minor gods in the Greek religion. At her birth, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, sprang directly from the head of Zeus. Hermes, who had winged feet, was the messenger of the gods and could fly anywhere with great speed. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, was the most beautiful being in the universe. Her brother, Ares, the god of war, was sinister, mean, and disliked. Poseidon, ruled the sea from his underwater place and Apollo rode his chariot across the sky, bringing the sun with him.

Hades was in charge of the dead in the underworld. Almost all people went to Hades after they died whether they were good or bad. To get there, the dead had to cross the river Styx. Charon was the name of the boatman who ferried the souls of the dead across the river Styx to Hades.
Typically, the gods punished those who were bad. For example, Tantalus who killed his own son and served him to the gods for dinner was sent to Hades and made forever thirsty and hungry. Although there was a pool of clear, fresh drinking water at his feet, whenever Tantalus bent down to drink, the pool would dry up and disappear.

Likewise, over his head hung the most delicious fruit. However, whenever Tantalus reached for them, a wind would blow them just out of his reach. The English word "tantalize" derives from the name Tantalus.

**Pandora’s Box and Hercules’ Labors**

Myths helped explain how the world came to be the way it was. In one myth, Zeus created an incredibly beautiful and nearly perfect woman named Pandora. Her one flaw was that she was very curious and suspicious. Hermes, Zeus’s messenger, gave Pandora a golden box. He warned her never to open it because terrible things would occur if she did.

But Pandora could hardly contain her curiosity and eventually broke down and opened the special box. Out from the box flew all the evils that plague humanity: famine, greed, pain, sorrow, etc. Only one thing remained in the box — hope — which humans managed to hold on to. This myth explains the origins of human misfortune. At the same time, it teaches a moral lesson by warning of the dangers of curiosity.

In addition to myths about gods, the ancient Greeks also told stories about heroes. One of the most famous Greek heroes was Hercules, the world's strongest man. Hercules was the illegitimate son of a mortal woman and Zeus, who tricked the woman by disguising himself as the woman's husband. Hera, Zeus's wife, was angry about Zeus' affair and sought to punish Hercules. Hera tricked Hercules into believing that his entire family were dangerous beasts, which Hercules then proceeded to kill. When Hercules realized that he had killed his entire family, he agreed to perform 12 tasks to atone for his terrible actions. For one of the tasks, Hercules had to slay the nine-headed monster called the Hydra.

For another task, he had to clean the filth from Augean stable, which had not been attended to in 30 years. To do this, Hercules diverted the course of a river that washed away the mess. In the end, he completed the so-called 12 Labors of Hercules and made up for the murder of his family.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God/Goddess</th>
<th>Important Attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zeus</td>
<td>King of the gods, Zeus killed his father Chronos. He is also the god of thunder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hera</td>
<td>The wife of Zeus, Hera is the goddess of fertility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poseidon</td>
<td>The god of the sea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hades</td>
<td>The god of the underworld.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hestia</td>
<td>A little-known goddess, she is a sister of Zeus and goddess of the hearth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronos</td>
<td>The leader of the Titans and father of the Olympians, Chronos ate all his children except for Zeus, who killed him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demeter</td>
<td>Goddess of the harvest and mother of Persephone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apollo</td>
<td>God of the sun, music, and art, one of the most versatile gods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artemis</td>
<td>Goddess of the hunt, Moon, and childbirth. The sister of Apollo, she is also a very versatile Olympian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aphrodite</td>
<td>The goddess of love and the mother of Eros, known to the Romans as Cupid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ares</td>
<td>The god of War.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Sprang full-grown from Zeus's head. She is the Goddess of wisdom. The city of Athens is named for her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haephestos</td>
<td>The god of the forge. Thrown from the top of Mount Olympus by Zeus, Haephestos is also crippled. The husband of Aphrodite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermes</td>
<td>The messenger god wears a winged helmet and winged sandals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persephone</td>
<td>The daughter of Demeter, Persephone was kidnapped by Hades to be his bride. Because she ate three pomegranate seeds, she is forced to spend three months of the year in Hades. This period of time is known as winter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dionysos</td>
<td>The god of wine and revelry. Dionysos had an enormous following throughout the Greek world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eros</td>
<td>The god of love. Often depicted as a young child, Eros used magical arrows could to cause people to fall in love.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 5d. Greek Literature

Thousands would come from far and wide to see the opening of the latest drama by Aeschylus, the most famous of Athenian playwrights. The citizens of Athens felt it was a part of their civic duty to attend as many dramas as possible.

The dramas typically dealt with important issues of the day, posed tough questions, and educated the theatergoers. Attendance at dramas was considered such a valuable experience that sometimes the government would pay for the tickets.
**Iliad, Theogony, and Poetry**

Among the earliest Greek literature was Homer's epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The *Iliad* is a detailed telling of the Trojan War while the *Odyssey* recounts Odysseus' 20-year journey home following the Trojan War.

Created as early as 900 B.C.E., Homer's poems were not written down since Greek civilization lacked a written language at that time. Instead, these massive poems were passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth.

**An Excerpt from the "Iliad"**

The passage which follows is from Book XXII of the Iliad. It describes a scene from the Trojan War that occurs just before Achilles, the Greek warrior, slays the Trojan hero, Hector.

> Old King Priam was the first to see Achilles rushing towards the Trojans over the fields. As Achilles ran, the bronze on his breast flashed out like the star that comes to us in autumn, outshining all its fellows in the evening sky — they call it Orion's Dog, and though it is the brightest of all the stars it bodes no good, bringing much fever, as it does, to us poor wretches. The old man gave a groan. He lifted up his hands and beat his head with them. In a voice full of terror he shouted entreaties to his beloved son, who had taken his stand in front of the gates in the fixed resolve to fight it out with Achilles.

> "Hector!" the old man called, stretching out his arms to him in piteous appeal. "I beg you, my dear son, not to stand up to that man alone and unsupported. You are courting defeat and death at his hands. He is far stronger than you, and he is savage. The dogs and vultures would soon be feeding on his corpse (and what a load would be lifted from my heart!) if the gods loved him as little as I do — the man who has robbed me of so
many splendid sons, killed them or sold them off as slaves to the distant isles. So come inside the walls, my child, to be the savior of Troy and the Trojans; and do not throw away your dear life to give a triumph to the son of Peleus. Have pity too on me, your poor father, who is still able to feel.

As he came to an end, Priam plucked at his gray locks and tore the hair from his head; but he failed to shake Hector's resolution. And now his mother in her turn began to wail and weep. "Hector, my child," she cried, "deal with your enemy from within the walls and do not go out to meet that man in single combat. He is a savage; and you need not think that, if he kills you, I shall lay you on a bier and weep for you, my own, my darling boy; nor will your richly dowered wife; but far away from both of us, beside the Argive ships, you will be eaten by the nimble dogs."

-Translated by Reverend William T. McNiff, The Pageant of Literature: Greek and Roman Writers

Another poet, Hesiod, wrote the Theogony around 700 B.C.E. The Theogony is a genealogy of the gods. Some scholars credit Hesiod with being one of the first to actually write down his work.

Around the same time of Hesiod, there was another growing group of writers known as the Lyric poets. One of the most famous of the Lyric poets was Sappho. Sappho wrote about the world around her and focused particularly on the themes of love and sexuality. Sappho, who was bisexual, frequently wrote about her homosexual love affairs. The ancient Greeks were completely tolerant of homosexuality and did not discriminate. The word "lesbian" comes from the name of Sappho's island of birth, Lesbos.

"To Aphrodite" by Sappho
You know the place: then Leave Crete and come to us waiting where the grove is pleasantest, by
precincts sacred to you; incense smokes on the altar, cold streams
murmur through the apple branches, a young rose thicket shades the
ground and quivering leaves pour down deep sleep; in meadows where
horses have grown sleek among spring flowers, dill scents the air. Queen!
Cyprian! Fill our gold cups with love stirred into clear nectar.

–Translated by Reverend William T. McNiff, The Pageant of Literature:
Greek and Roman Writers

The Age of Pericles
The years between 461 and 429 B.C.E. marked the Age of Pericles. Named after an
Athenian leader, arts and literature flourished in this era. Outdoor theaters were built in
Athens and other city-states for performances of the latest dramas. Made of stone, the
theaters were positioned so that scenes of natural beauty served as backdrops for the
stage.

For example, the Greek theater at Taormina in Sicily is built high upon a rocky hill. Behind
the audience's back lay the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Perfectly centered
behind the stage and facing the audience, sits the active, smoldering volcano, Mount Etna.

The Greeks held drama festivals in which plays competed against one another for the
audience's favor. During these festivals, the Greeks performed the plays as a tribute to the
gods. The first major drama festival of the spring in Athens honored Dionysus, the god of
grapes and wine. This festival celebrated the renewal of the grape vines.

On stage, actors could play several roles by wearing different masks A chorus of several
people in the background chanted from time to time, serving as a kind of narrator, and
helping move the plot along.

Tragic Literature
All three of the most famous ancient Greek writers specialized in tragedies. Tragedy is a
form of drama in which a strong central character or hero ultimately fails and is punished
by the gods. Usually, the hero has a fatal flaw that causes his undoing.

For many years, Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.E.) was the most successful dramatist in Athens
winning several competitions. One of his rivals, the Athenian writer Sophocles (496-406 B.C.E.), wrote the famous play Oedipus Rex, (Oedipus the King). In this play, the main character, Oedipus is fated by the gods to kill his father and marry his own mother. Despite Oedipus's efforts to avoid this outcome, it happens just as the gods predicted. In shame, Oedipus blinds himself and is then banished.

A third major writer named Euripides (484-406 B.C.E.) focused more on people than gods in his writing. Among Euripides most famous works are Electra and The Trojan Women

An Excerpt from "Medea" by Euripides
In this tragic story, Medea has been deserted by her husband, Jason, who has left to marry the daughter of King Creon. In revenge, Medea ultimately kills the two children she and Jason share and then herself.

The chorus enters. The following lines between the Nurse, Chorus, and Medea are sung:

| Chorus | I heard the voice, uplifted loud, of our poor Colchian lady, nor yet is she quiet; speak, aged dame, for as I stood by the house with double gates I heard a voice of weeping from within, and I do grieve, lady, for the sorrows of this house, for it hath won my love. |
| Nurse | 'Tis a house no more; all that is passed away long since; a royal bride keeps Jason at her side, while our mistress pines away in her bower, finding no comfort for her soul in aught her friends can say. |
| Medea (from within) | Oh, oh! Would that Heaven's levin bolt would cleave this head in twain! What gain is life to me? Woe, woe is me! O, to die and win release, quitting this loathed existence! |
| Chorus | Didst hear, O Zeus, thou earth, and thou, O light, the piteous note of woe the hapless wife is uttering? How shall a yearning for that insatiate resting-place ever hasten for thee, poor reckless one, the end that death alone can bring? Never pray for that. And if thy lord prefers a fresh love, be not angered with him for that; Zeus will judge 'twixt thee and him herein. Then mourn not for thy husband's loss too much, nor waste thyself away. |
| Medea (from within) | Great Themis, and husband of Themis, behold what I am suffering now, though I did bind that accused one, my husband, by strong oaths to me! O, to see him and his bride some day brought to utter destruction, they and their house with them, for that they presume to wrong me thus unprovoked. O my father, my country, that I have left to my shame, after slaying my own brother. |
| Nurse | Do ye hear her words, how loudly she adjures Themis, oft invoked, and Zeus, whom men regard as keeper of their oaths? On no mere trifle surely will our mistress spend her rage. |
| Chorus | Would that she would come forth for us to see, and listen to the words of counsel we might give, if haply she might lay aside the fierce fury of her wrath, and her temper stern. Never be my zeal at any rate denied my friends! But go thou and bring her hither outside the house, and tell her this our friendly thought; haste thee ere she do some mischief to those inside the house, for this sorrow of hers is mounting high. |
Nurse  This will I do; but I doubt whether I shall persuade my mistress; still willingly will I undertake this trouble for you; albeit, she glares upon her servants with the look of a lioness with cubs, whenso anyone draws nigh to speak to her. Wert thou to call the men of old time rude uncultured boors thou wouldst not err, seeing that they devised their hymns for festive occasions, for banquets, and to grace the board, a pleasure to catch the ear, shed o'er our life, but no man hath found a way to allay hated grief by music and the minstrel's varied strain, whence arise slaughters and fell strokes of fate to o'erthrow the homes of men. And yet this were surely a gain, to heal men's wounds by music's spell, but why tune they their idle song where rich banquets are spread? For of itself doth the rich banquet, set before them, afford to men delight.

Chorus  I heard a bitter cry of lamentation! loudly, bitterly she calls on the traitor of her marriage bed, her perfidious spouse: by grievous wrongs oppressed she invokes Themis, bride of Zeus, witness of oaths, who brought her unto Hellas, the land that fronts the strand of Asia, o'er the sea by night through ocean's boundless gate.

--Translated by Reverend William T. McNiff, The Pageant of Literature: Greek and Roman Writers

Another type of play was the comedy. The most significant writer of comedies in ancient Greece was Aristophanes, whose works included The Frogs and The Clouds.

An Excerpt from "The Frogs"
Enter Dionysus on foot dressed in the skin of the Nemean Lion, and the club of Heracles in his hand, and Xanthias heavily laden on a donkey:

Xanthias  Master, should I tell one of those usual jokes which always make the audience laugh?

Dionysus  By Zeus, say what you want--except "I'm hard pressed." Forget that one, it's really quite annoying.

Xanthias  Nothing else witty either?

Dionysus  Anything but "What a strain!"

Xanthias  What then? Can I say the really funny one?

Dionysus  Of course, Go right ahead--but don't let me catch you saying this.

Xanthias  What's that?

Dionysus  That you must shift your pack to ease yourself.

Xanthias  Well, can't I say I've got such a load on me, unless someone takes it off, I'll bust a gut?

Dionysus  Please don't, unless you wish to make me sick.

Xanthias  So why should I have to carry all this stuff, without doing any of the jokes that Phrynichus and Lycis and Ameipsias always make the baggage-carriers say in all their comedies?

Dionysus  Just don't. Since when I'm in the theater and hear any of these stupid jokes, I go away just older by a year.

Xanthias  Alas, poor wretched me! My neck is really strained, but can't crack the joke.

Dionysus  Now is this not outrage and utter insolence, That I myself, Dionysos, son of Winejug, must walk, and let this fellow ride, so he might feel no pain and bear no burden?
Xanthias  What? I bear no burden?

Dionysus  How can you bear anything? You're riding.

Xanthias  But I've got all this!

Dionysus  How so?

Xanthias  Most heavily!

Dionysus  The weight you carry--isn't it carried by the donkey?

Xanthias  Absolutely not; not what I'm holding and carrying.

Dionysus  How can you carry, for God's sake, when you yourself are carried by another?

Xanthias  I don't know, but my shoulder's sure hard pressed.

Dionysus  Well, since you say the donkey doesn't help, suppose you take your turn, and carry him.

Xanthias  Unhappy wretch! Why didn't I join the navy? Then I'd tell you to whistle a different tune!

Dionysus  You scoundrel, get on down! Here's the door I'm walking to, the first place I must stop.--Ho, porter! Porter there, I say.

--Translated by Reverend William T. McNiff, *The Pageant of Literature: Greek and Roman Writers*

His plays were witty and sarcastic. More often than not, comedies poked fun and made light of the major political figures of the day. Fortunately, the government of Athens tolerated this style of criticism.

**5e. Art and Architecture**

The arts reflect the society that creates them. Nowhere is this truer than in the case of the ancient Greeks. Through their temples, sculpture, and pottery, the Greeks incorporated a fundamental principle of their culture: *arête*. To the Greeks, *arête* meant excellence and reaching one's full potential.

[Figure 109 One popular form of Greek art was pottery. Vases, vessels, and kraters served both practical and aesthetic purposes. This krater depicts Helios, the sun god, and dates from the 5th century B.C.E.]

Ancient Greek art emphasized the importance and accomplishments of human beings. Even though much of Greek art was meant to honor the gods, those very gods were created in the image of humans.
Much artwork was government sponsored and intended for public display. Therefore, art and architecture were a tremendous source of pride for citizens and could be found in various parts of the city. Typically, a city-state set aside a high-altitude portion of land for an acropolis, an important part of the city-state that was reserved for temples or palaces. The Greeks held religious ceremonies and festivals as well as significant political meetings on the acropolis.

**Greek Excellence: The Acropolis**

In ancient Athens, Pericles ordered the construction of several major temples on the acropolis. Among these was a temple, the Parthenon, which many consider the finest example of Greek architecture.

Built as a tribute to Athena, the goddess of wisdom for whom the city-state Athens was named, the Parthenon is a marvel of design, featuring massive columns contrasting with subtle details.

![Figure 110 The Parthenon was built in honor of the goddess Athena, who represented the human aspiration for knowledge and the ideal of wisdom. Photograph courtesy of www.sacredsites.com and Martin Gray](image)

Many barely noticeable enhancements to the design of the Parthenon contribute to its overall beauty and balance. For example, each column is slightly wider in the middle than at its base and top. The columns are also spaced closer together near the corners of the temple and farther apart toward the middle. In addition, the temple's steps curve somewhat — lower on the sides and highest in the middle of each step.

Sadly, time has not treated the Parthenon well. In the 17th century, the Turks, who had conquered the Greeks, used the Parthenon to store ammunition. An accidental explosion left the Parthenon with no roof and in near ruin. In later years, tourists hauled away pieces
of the Parthenon as vacation souvenirs.

**Beauty in the Human Form**

Ancient Greek sculptures were typically made of either stone or wood and very few of them survive to this day. Most Greek sculpture was of the freestanding, human form (even if the statue was of a god) and many sculptures were nudes. The Greeks saw beauty in the naked human body.

Early Greek statues called *kouros* were rigid and stood up straight. Over time, Greek statuary adopted a more natural, relaxed pose with hips thrust to one side, knees and arms slightly bent, and the head turned to one side.

Other sculptures depicted human action, especially athletics. A good example is Myron's *Discus Thrower*, another famous example is a sculpture of Artemis the huntress. The piece, called "*Diana of Versailles,*" depicts the goddess of the hunt reaching for an arrow while a stag leaps next to her.

Among the most famous Greek statues is the *Venus de Milo*, which was created in the second century B.C.E. The sculptor is unknown, though many art historians believe Praxiteles to have created the piece. This sculpture embodies the Greek ideal of beauty.

The ancient Greeks also painted, but very little of their work remains. The most enduring paintings were those found decorating ceramic pottery. Two major styles include red figure (against a black background) and black figure (against a red background) pottery. The pictures on the pottery often depicted heroic and tragic stories of gods and humans.

5f. Thinkers

The citizens of Athens were fed up with the old "wise" man.

Socrates, one of ancient Greece's most learned philosophers, found himself on trial for his teachings. The prosecution accused Socrates of corrupting the youth of Athens. A jury of hundreds found Socrates
guilty and sentenced him to death.

At the age of 70, Socrates willingly drank hemlock, a powerful poison that put an end to his controversial life. How did it happen that Athenians put to death a great philosopher such as Socrates?

Throughout his entire life, Socrates questioned everything from Athenian government to Greek religion and the gods themselves. His ultimate goal was finding the truth, which he believed could be reached through reason and knowledge. Socrates was a teacher, but he did not have a classroom, any books, or even a school. Instead, Socrates lectured publicly. Anyone interested in what he had to say was invited to listen.

Socrates practiced a style of teaching that has since become known as the Socratic Method. Essentially, Socrates taught through questioning. He started with simple questions, then progressed to more complex, deeper questions. Through the application of reason and logic, Socrates revealed answers to many questions that led to a greater understanding of the world.

Problems arose because Socrates often questioned the very fundamentals and traditions of Greek society. His constant questioning and searching for the truth were seen as dangerous by many and ultimately led to his death.

**Plato's Republic**

Plato, a student of Socrates, also achieved greatness as a philosopher. Unlike Socrates, however, Plato chose to write his ideas down. In one of his most renowned works, The Republic, Plato outlined his vision of the ideal state.

Surprisingly, Plato's republic was not very democratic. Plato was greatly disturbed at the way the mass of Athenians had
agreed to put to death his brilliant teacher and mentor, Socrates. Plato believed that uneducated people should not have right to make important decisions for everyone.

Instead, Plato envisioned a society with many classes in which each class contributed what it could. In his ideal society, farmers grew the food for the republic, soldiers defended the republic, and a class of intelligent, educated philosophers ruled the republic. Not surprisingly, Plato lived at a time when democratic society in Athens was in decline.

Such then, I said, are our principles of theology --some tales are to be told, and others are not to be told to our disciples from their youth upwards, if we mean them to honour the gods and their parents, and to value friendship with one another.

Yes; and I think that our principles are right, he said.

But if they are to be courageous, must they not learn other lessons besides these, and lessons of such a kind as will take away the fear of death? Can any man be courageous who has the fear of death in him?

Certainly not, he said.

And can he be fearless of death, or will he choose death in battle rather than defeat and slavery, who believes the world below to be real and terrible?

Impossible.

Then we must assume a control over the narrators of this class of tales as well as over the others, and beg them not simply to but rather to commend the world below, intimating to them that their descriptions are untrue, and will do harm to our future warriors.

That will be our duty, he said.

Then, I said, we shall have to obliterate many obnoxious passages, beginning with the verses...
Plato, "The Republic," (360 B.C.E.), Book III excerpt, translated by Benjamin Jowett

One of Plato's students, Aristotle, also distinguished himself as a thinker. Aristotle wrote about and studied many subjects, including biology, physics, metaphysics, literature, ethics, logic, art, and more. He emphasized the importance of observation and the gathering of data.

Although Aristotle made important discoveries in many areas, his explanation concerning the movement of heavenly bodies was wrong. Aristotle believed that the Earth was the center of the universe, and that all heavenly bodies revolved around the Earth. This makes sense from a strictly observational standpoint. Looking up at the sky, it looked to Aristotle like everything (sun, moon, stars) circled the earth. In this case, Aristotle's reliance on observation led him astray. In reality, the Earth revolves on its own axis, causing the illusion of it being the center of everything.

A Golden Age of Thought
Besides the three great philosophers described above, ancient Greece produced many other important thinkers. In the realm of science, Hippocrates applied logic to the field of medicine and collected information on hundreds of patients. His work helped advance people's understanding of the causes of disease and death and swayed people from believing in supernatural reasons.

Greek thinkers applied logic to mathematics as well. Pythagoras deduced multiplication tables as well as the Pythagorean Theorem relating to right triangles. Euclid revolutionized the field of geometry, and Archimedes worked with the force of gravity and invented an early form of calculus.

In the realm of the social sciences, Herodotus, is often credited with being the first modern historian. Another historian, Thucydides, tried to be as objective as possible in reporting the history he recorded.

Many of these advancements and revelations seem obvious by today's standards. But 2,500 years ago, most humans were concerned with providing food and protection for their families and little else. Most of them were ruled by kings or pharaohs who had supreme
decision-making power. The Athenian democracy encouraged countless innovative thoughts among its citizens.

To the ancient Greeks, thinking was serious business.

5g. Alexander the Great

Was Alexander the Great really great?

A great conqueror, in 13 short years he amassed the largest empire in the entire ancient world — an empire that covered 3,000 miles. And he did this without the benefit of modern technology and weaponry. In his day, troop movements were primarily on foot, and communications were face to face. Not bad for a kid who became the King of Macedon at the age of 20.

Many of Alexander's accomplishments were made possible by his father, Philip of Macedon. Macedon, which existed roughly where the modern country of Macedonia lies today, was a kingdom located that lay geographically north of the Greek city-states. Alexander's the Great's tutor was the Greek philosopher Aristotle.

In 338 B.C.E., King Philip of Macedon invaded and conquered the Greek city-states. Philip took advantage of the fact that the Greek city-states were divided by years of squabbling and infighting. Philip succeeded in doing what years of fighting between city-states had not done. He united Greece.

Conquering the World

Philip's next goal was to defeat Greece's age-old enemy to the east: Persia. For years, the massive Persian Empire threatened the very existence of the Greek way of life. But before he was able to pursue his second goal, Philip was assassinated.
When his son, Alexander, took the throne in 336 B.C.E., he vowed to complete the plans of his father. In 334 B.C.E., Alexander invaded Persia, which lay across the Aegean Sea in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).

After three grueling years of warfare and three decisive battles, Alexander smashed the Persian armies at the Tigris River and conquered the mighty Persian Empire, including the legendary city of Babylon. For many Greeks, this victory marked a moment of sweet revenge against a bitter foe.

At this point, at the age of 25, Alexander ruled an expansive empire. Nevertheless, his ambitions were not satisfied. While fighting the Persians, Alexander conquered Egypt and founded a city at the mouth of the Nile River. This city, which he named Alexandria after himself, became a cosmopolitan, diverse, bustling center of trade, the arts, and ideas.

But Alexander was not done. He continued his campaign, driving farther east, until he reached India and the Indus River in 326 B.C.E. At this point, his exhausted troops refused to fight further. They told Alexander that a truly great leader knows when it is time to stop fighting.
Without the support of his army, Alexander had no choice but to turn back and begin consolidating and organizing his far-flung empire. On his way home, Alexander died from disease in 323 B.C.E.

**Alexander in Hindsight**

Alexander the Great's legacy is both far reaching and profound. First, his father was able to unite the Greek city-states, and Alexander destroyed the Persian Empire forever. More importantly, Alexander's conquests spread Greek culture, also known as Hellenism, across his empire. In fact, Alexander's reign marked the beginning of a new era known as the Hellenistic Age because of the powerful influence that Greek culture had on other people. Without Alexander's ambition, Greek ideas and culture might well have remained confined to Greece.

Many historians see Alexander the Great in a different light. Although Alexander was both intelligent and handsome, he also had a darker side. He possessed a ferocious temper and from time to time would arbitrarily murder close advisors and even friends. Also, toward the end of his many campaigns, he senselessly slaughtered thousands whose only crime was being in his way.

Was Alexander the Great really great?

**5h. The Olympic Games**

The ancient Greeks loved competition of all sorts. Each year, the various city-states of Greece sent athletes to festivals of games, which were held to honor the gods.

The most important and prestigious were the games held at Olympia to honor Zeus, the king of the gods. These Olympic Games took place in the summer only once every four years.
The earliest recorded Olympics occurred in 776 B.C.E. It is very likely, however, that Olympic Games took place for hundreds of years before then.

The last ancient games were held in 394 C.E. Then the Romans, who had conquered the Greeks, outlawed them. The modern Olympic Games began in 1896.

**The Competitors**

In the beginning, the participants in the Olympic Games were all men. Women were not allowed to compete or even to watch.

Over time, the Greeks held a festival of games to honor the goddess Hera, Zeus's wife. Only unmarried women could participate in the competitions, which consisted mainly of foot races. Eventually, women were able to participate in and attend the Olympic Games.

Contestants could compete in many different events. Athletes were completely naked and covered in oil as they competed.

First, there were the four types of running events. Distances covered include 192 meters (the length of the stadium), 384 meters and a long-distance run of anywhere between 1,344 and 4,608 meters.

In the most demanding event runners raced between 384-768 meters — in an armor outfit that weighed between 50 and 70 pounds!

Then, there were the combative events, boxing and wrestling. Boxers wrapped their hands in leather and metal, making the contests brutal and bloody. The object in wrestling was to touch the opponent’s shoulders to the ground. All these skills were considered important for military training.

Next, there were the equestrian events, which involved horses and sometimes chariots and took place in a separate arena called the hippodrome.
Finally, there was the most prestigious and important of all events: the pentathlon, a combination of five different events. Each contestant threw the javelin, did the long jump, wrestled, ran a foot race, and threw the discus. The person who had the best overall effort in all these five events was declared the winner.

**War and Peace**
At the Olympics, the winners received wreaths made of olive leaves. Over time, more and more prizes were added such as a bronze tripod or olive oil. Winners received even greater rewards when they returned to their home city-states.

Triumphant athletes were given not only large monetary awards, but also free meals for the rest of their lives. The citizens and leaders of the city-state took great pride in their athletes and publicized their accomplishments far and wide.

During the Olympics, leaders from the various city-states discussed important political and economic matters. In the ancient world, major leaders rarely met the same place at the same time. As the games approached, everyone generally agreed to an Olympic truce, a time when warfare usually ceased. Athletes and spectators were granted immunity to travel to and from the games.

In 2004, the Summer Games returned to their original birthplace of Athens, Greece.

### 6. Ancient Rome

The Romans built an empire of gigantic proportions. At its height, it encompassed nearly the entire European continent as well as parts of the Middle East and Africa.

The Roman Empire's tentacles stretched from England to Egypt, from Spain to Iraq, and from southern Russia to Morocco.
significantly, ancient Roman civilization thrived for nearly one thousand years. The influence of the Romans over all of those peoples over that span of time defies measure.

After adopting Christianity in the 4th century C.E., the Romans spread it to every corner of their empire. They also brought their brand of law and order to all of the territories that they conquered. Latin, the language of the Romans, became the basis for several modern European languages, including Italian, French, and Spanish.

Figure 124 At the height of its expansion (around 120 C.E.), the Roman Empire comprised nearly all of the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

The Romans were particularly skilled in administration, organization, and engineering. They had a highly trained and disciplined military and an efficient bureaucracy. Without these qualities, the Romans would never have been able to manage their sprawling empire. They were not, however, as driven or original when it came to other intellectual pursuits.

In fact, the Romans basically adopted and copied much of Greek art, literature, philosophy, and even religion. The Romans had the same set of gods as the Greeks, but with different names. In Roman mythology, Zeus became Jupiter, Hera became Juno, Ares changed to Mars, and Athena was Minerva, to name a few examples. The Romans did, however, spread these borrowed ideas everywhere they went.
Romulus and Remus
According to Roman mythology, twin brothers played an important part in the founding of Rome. These brothers, named Romulus and Remus, were the sons of Mars, the Roman god of war. Abandoned at birth, the twins were raised by a wolf.

When they became older, they decided to found a city along the Tiber River near the spot where they had been abandoned. Each chose a hill upon which to begin a settlement.

As often happens among brothers, disputes led to quarreling and fighting. Angered by Remus's taunting, Romulus killed his brother in a fit of rage. Romulus went on to build the city that eventually became Rome — named, of course, after Romulus.

As it turned out, Romulus chose a very good spot for his city. Rome was located on the Tiber River about 15 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. The Romans had easy access to the sea, and were somewhat protected from seaborne invasion. Also, Rome lay in the middle of the Italian peninsula, the boot-shaped landmass to the west of Greece. From this central position, the Romans could easily access and control all of what is today the modern country of Italy.

Finally, the Italian peninsula's central location within the Mediterranean Sea made it possible for the Romans to trade and communicate with every part of the Mediterranean world.

6a. The Roman Republic

The Romans established a form of government — a republic — that was copied by countries for centuries. In fact, the government of the United States is based partly on Rome's model.

It all began when the Romans overthrew their Etruscan conquerors in 509 B.C.E. Centered north of Rome, the Etruscans had ruled over the Romans for hundreds of years.

Once free, the Romans established a republic, a government in which citizens elected representatives to rule on their behalf. A republic is quite different from a democracy, in which every citizen is expected to play an active role in governing the state.
Citizen
The Roman concept of the citizen evolved during the Roman Republic and changed significantly during the later Roman Empire. After the Romans freed themselves from the Etruscans, they established a republic, and all males over 15 who were descended from the original tribes of Rome became citizens. Citizens of Rome distinguished themselves from slaves and other noncitizens by wearing a toga; most wore a white toga. During the Empire, each emperor wore a purple toga to distinguish himself as the princeps, or "first citizen."

Citizenship varied greatly. The full citizen could vote, marry freeborn persons, and practice commerce. Some citizens were not allowed to vote or hold public office, but maintained the other rights. A third type of citizen could vote and practice commerce, but could not hold office or marry freeborn women.

In the late Republic, male slaves who were granted their freedom could become full citizens. Around 90 B.C.E., non-Roman allies of the Republic gained the rights of citizenship, and by 212 C.E, under the Edict of Caracalla, all free people of the Roman Empire could become citizens.

The aristocracy (wealthy class) dominated the early Roman Republic. In Roman society, the aristocrats were known as patricians. The highest positions in the government were held by two consuls, or leaders, who ruled the Roman Republic. A senate composed of patricians elected these consuls. At this time, lower-class citizens, or plebeians, had virtually no say in the government. Both men and women were citizens in the
Roman Republic, but only men could vote.

Tradition dictated that patricians and plebeians should be strictly separated; marriage between the two classes was even prohibited. Over time, the plebeians elected their own representatives, called tribunes, who gained the power to veto measures passed by the senate.

Gradually, the plebeians obtained even more power and eventually could hold the position of consul. Despite these changes, though, the patricians were still able to use their wealth to buy control and influence over elected leaders.

**The Roman Senate**
The history of the Roman Senate goes as far back as the history of Rome itself. It was first created as a 100-member advisory group for the Roman kings. Later kings expanded the group to 300 members. When the kings were expelled from Rome and the Republic was formed, the Senate became the most powerful governing body. Instead of advising the head of state, it elected the chief executives, called consuls.

Senators were, for centuries, strictly from the patrician class. They practiced the skills of rhetoric and oratory to persuade other members of the ruling body. The Senate convened and passed laws in the curia, a large building on the grounds of the Roman Forum. Much later, Julius Caesar built a larger curia for an expanded Senate.

By the 3rd century B.C.E., Rome had conquered vast territories, and the powerful senators sent armies, negotiated terms of treaties, and had total control over the financial matters of the Republic.

Senatorial control was eventually challenged by Dictator Sulla around 82 B.C.E. Sulla had hundreds of senators murdered, increased the Senate's membership to 600, and installed many nonpatricians as senators. Julius Caesar raised the number to 900 (it was reduced after his assassination). After the creation of the Roman Empire in 27 B.C.E., the Senate became weakened under strong emperors who often forcefully coerced this ruling body. Although it survived until the fall of Rome, the Roman Senate had become merely a ceremonial body of wealthy, intelligent men with no power to rule.
Occasionally, an emergency situation (such as a war) arose that required the decisive leadership of one individual. Under these circumstances, the Senate and the consuls could appoint a temporary dictator to rule for a limited time until the crisis was resolved. The position of dictator was very undemocratic in nature. Indeed, a dictator had all the power, made decisions without any approval, and had full control over the military.

The best example of an ideal dictator was a Roman citizen named Cincinnatus. During a severe military emergency, the Roman Senate called Cincinnatus from his farm to serve as dictator and to lead the Roman army. When Cincinnatus stepped down from the dictatorship and returned to his farm only 15 days after he successfully defeated Rome’s enemies, the republican leaders resumed control over Rome.

The Twelve Tables
One of the innovations of the Roman Republic was the notion of equality under the law. In 449 B.C.E., government leaders carved some of Rome’s most important laws into 12 great tablets. The Twelve Tables, as they came to be known, were the first Roman laws put in writing. Although the laws were rather harsh by today’s standards, they did guarantee every citizen equal treatment under the law.

Laws from the Twelve Tables
- Females shall remain in guardianship even when they have attained their majority (except Vestal Virgins).
- A spendthrift is forbidden to exercise administration over his own goods.
- It is permitted to gather fruit falling down on another man’s farm.
- If any person has sung or composed against another person a song such as was causing slander or insult to another, he shall be clubbed to death.
- Quickly kill ... a dreadfully deformed child.

With respect to the law and citizenship, the Romans took a unique approach to the lands that they conquered. Rather than rule those people as conquered subjects, the Romans invited them to become citizens. These people then became a part of Rome, rather than
enemies fighting against it. Naturally, these new citizens received the same legal rights as everyone else.

The Punic Wars
The early Roman Republic often found itself in a state of constant warfare with its surrounding neighbors. In one instance, when the Romans were fighting the Carthaginians, Rome was nearly conquered. The people of Carthage (a city in what is today Tunisia in North Africa) were a successful trading civilization whose interests began to conflict with those of the Romans.

The two sides fought three bloody wars, known as the Punic Wars (264-146 B.C.E.), over the control of trade in the western Mediterranean Sea. In the second war, Hannibal, a Carthaginian general, successfully invaded Italy by leading an army — complete with elephants — across the Alps. He handed the Roman army a crushing defeat but was unable to sack the city of Rome itself. After occupying and ravaging Italy for more than a decade, Hannibal was finally defeated by the Roman general Scipio at the Battle of Zama in 202 B.C.E.

Why "Punic"?
How did the word "Punic" become an adjective meaning "relating to the people of Carthage"? "Punic" is derived from the Latin word Poenicus, meaning "an inhabitant of Carthage." Carthage was founded by Phoenicians, and Poenicus is the Latin word for "Phoenician."

By the Third Punic War, Rome was ready to end the Carthaginian threat for good. After a successful several-year siege of Carthage, the Romans burned the city to the ground. Legend has it that the Romans then poured salt into the soil so that nothing would ever grow there again. Carthage was finally defeated, and the Roman Republic was safe.

6b. Julius Caesar
The first conspirator greeted Caesar, then plunged a knife into his neck. Other stabbers followed suit. One by one, several members of the Senate took turns stabbing Julius Caesar (100-44 B.C.E.), the dictator of the entire Roman Empire.

Stunned that even his good friend Brutus was in on the plot, Caesar choked out his final words: "'kai su, teknon?" ("You too, my child?").

On the steps of the Senate, the most powerful man in the ancient world died in a pool of his own blood.

**About "Et tu, Brute?"
**
In William Shakespeare's play Julius Caesar, the title character manages to utter "*Et tu, Brute?*" ("and you, Brutus?") as he is slain. This is not historically accurate.

According to the 1st century C.E. Roman historian Suetonius, Julius Caesar spoke mainly Greek and not Latin, as was the case with most patricians at the time. In his history about the life of Julius Caesar, Suetonius writes that as the assassins plunged their daggers into the dictator, Caesar saw Brutus and spoke the Greek phrase *kai su, teknon*, meaning "you too, my child."

There is still debate whether or not it was shouted in shock or said as a warning. On one hand, Caesar may have been amazed to find a close friend like Brutus trying to kill him; on the other hand, he may have meant that Brutus would pay for his crime in the future for this treachery. Either way, the words were Greek, so leave "*Et tu, Brute*" for Shakespeare.
Long before Julius Caesar became dictator (from 47-44 B.C.E.) and was subsequently murdered, the Roman Republic had entered a state of rapid decline. The rich had become wealthier and more powerful as a result of Rome's many military successes.

Meanwhile, life for the average Roman seemed to be getting worse. Attempts to reform the situation by two brothers, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, were met with opposition that eventually resulted in their deaths. In addition, slavery was on the rise, and violent slave revolts were commonplace.

**Figure 131** Julius Caesar led his Roman legions as far north as Britain in 55 B.C.E. He and his army may have seen this view upon landing at Deal Beach.

A Revolting Development

Spartacus (109-71 B.C.E.) was a captured soldier who was sold into slavery to be a gladiator. But he escaped his captors and formed an army of rebel slaves. Against great odds, Spartacus's slave army defeated two Roman battalions.

Spartacus wanted to leave Italy, but his army and supporters of the slave revolt urged him to attack Rome. A Roman army led by Crassus finally defeated Spartacus and his men.

Over 5,000 men from Spartacus's army were crucified along Rome's main road, the Appian Way, as a warning to other slaves not to revolt.

**Figure 130** Roman coins celebrated Caesar's military victories in Gaul (present-day France).

**Figure 132** In this 19th-century painting by Abel de Pujol, Caesar leaves his wife on the Ides of March, the day of his murder.
Finally, a new practice developed in which the army was paid with gold and land. Soldiers no longer fought for the good of the Republic but fought instead for tangible rewards. Gradually, soldiers became more loyal to the generals who could pay them than to the Roman Republic itself. It was within this changing atmosphere that military leaders such as Julius Caesar were able to seize control of and put an end to the Roman Republic.

Julius Caesar was a man of many talents. Born into the patrician class, Caesar was intelligent, educated, and cultivated. An excellent speaker, he possessed a sharp sense of humor, charm, and personality. All of these traits combined helped make him a skilled politician.

Moreover, Caesar was a military genius. His many successful military campaigns gained him broad support and popularity among the common people. Caesar also won the undying loyalty of his soldiers, who supplied him with the necessary muscle to seize power.

Julius Caesar began his rise to power in 60 B.C.E. by forging an alliance with another general, Pompey, and a wealthy patrician, Crassus. Together, these three men assumed control of the Roman Republic, and Caesar was thrust into the position of consul. Historians have since dubbed the period of rule by these three men the First Triumvirate.

Over time, however, the triumvirate broke down. Crassus was killed in battle, and Pompey began entertaining ideas of ruling without the dangerously popular Caesar. While Caesar was fighting in Gaul (modern-day France), Pompey and the Senate ordered Caesar to return to Rome without his army. But when Caesar crossed the Rubicon River in northern Italy, he brought his army with him in defiance of the senate's order. This fateful decision led to a civil war. Caesar defeated Pompey's forces and entered Rome in 46 B.C.E., triumphant and unchallenged.

Upon his return, Caesar made himself dictator and absolute ruler of Rome and its territories. During his rule, he enacted several reforms. Caesar founded many colonies in newly conquered territories and provided land and opportunity for poor Romans who chose to migrate there. He reduced the number of slaves and opened citizenship up to people living in the provinces. Finally, he created a new calendar named the Julian
calendar. This very calendar, with a few minor adjustments, is the same one used around the world today.

In 44 B.C.E., Julius Caesar ordered the Senate to make him dictator for life. Typically, dictators served for a limited time (usually six months), then stepped down. Caesar’s actions threatened to end the Republic once and for all. Fearing this change, a group of senators plotted and executed the murder of Caesar on the Ides of March. Although the senators succeeded in ending Caesar’s life, they did not realize at that time that the Republic had died with him.

Rome would now become an empire.

**Timeline for General Gaius Julius Caesar (100-44 B.C.E.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Born in Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Marries Cornelia, daughter of the powerful consul Cinna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Captured and ransomed by Mediterranean pirates. After his release, Caesar fulfills his promise to crucify the pirates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Marries Pompeia after Cornelia’s death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Elected Pontifex Maximus (High Priest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Becomes governor of Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Forms triumvirate with Crassus and Pompey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Elected consul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Becomes governor of Gaul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Crassus killed at Battle of Carrhae in Mesopotamia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Caesar and his army cross the Rubicon into Italy, sparking civil war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Pompey murdered in Egypt; Caesar has affair with Cleopatra and makes her queen of Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Cleopatra gives birth to Caesar’s son, Caesarion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Wins title of dictator for life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Assassinated on the Ides of March by Brutus and Cassius</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**6c. The Pax Romana**

The term "Pax Romana," which literally means "Roman peace," refers to the time period from 27 B.C.E. to 180 C.E. in the Roman Empire.

This 200-year period saw unprecedented peace and economic prosperity throughout the
Empire, which spanned from England in the north to Morocco in the south and Iraq in the east. During the Pax Romana, the Roman Empire reached its peak in terms of land area, and its population swelled to an estimated 70 million people.

Nevertheless, Rome's citizens were relatively secure, and the government generally maintained law, order, and stability. The Pax Romana began when Octavian became the leader of the Roman Empire.

**Civil War and More**

After the murder of Julius Caesar, a period of civil war erupted in Rome. Out of this turmoil emerged the Second Triumvirate, consisting of Lepidus, Antony, and Octavian, who was Julius Caesar's nephew. This new triumvirate ruled Rome for a decade, but as happened with the First Triumvirate, differences among the leaders eventually emerged.

Octavian defeated Lepidus in battle, and then turned his armies against the more powerful Mark Antony. Antony had fallen in love with and married the spellbinding queen of Egypt, Cleopatra. At the Battle of Actium off the coast of Greece in 31 B.C.E., Octavian's navy defeated the navy of Antony and Cleopatra, who later both committed suicide.
Octavian returned to Rome triumphant and gave himself the title of princeps or "first citizen." Octavian was careful not to upset the Senate by declaring himself dictator as his uncle Julius Caesar had done. Even though Octavian ruled as a de facto dictator, he maintained the Senate and other institutions of the republican government.

In 27 B.C.E., the Senate bestowed the holy title of Augustus upon Octavian. Augustus, as he became known, ruled for 41 years, and the policies he enacted lay the groundwork for the peace and stability of the Pax Romana.

**All Roads Lead to Rome**
The 200 years of the Pax Romana saw many advances and accomplishments, particularly in engineering and the arts. To help maintain their sprawling empire, the Romans built an extensive system of roads. These durable road facilitated the movement of troops and communication. The Romans built aqueducts to carry water overland to cities and farms.

![The Roman Road](image)

*Figure 135 The Roman army built the roads that connected the vast Roman Empire. By layering sand, cement, and stone, they created durable roads that lasted long after the fall of Rome.*

Many of the advances in architecture and building relied upon the Romans’ discovery of concrete. Concrete made possible the creation of huge rounded arches and domes.

One of the most famous structures built during the Pax Romana, the Pantheon in Rome, has one of the largest freestanding domes in the world to this day.

During the Pax Romana, many of Rome's finest writers (such as Horace, Virgil, Ovid, and Livy) produced literary and poetic masterpieces. Rome became the economic, political,
and cultural capital of the entire Western world.

**Bald Is Not Beautiful**

After Augustus's death in 14 C.E., other Roman emperors ruled with varying effectiveness. One emperor, Caligula, was mentally ill and regularly abused his power. He was so sensitive about his baldness that he prohibited anyone from looking down upon his head and shaved some people who had a full heads of hair.

Caligula was a vicious sadist who took great pleasure in watching people being put to death. In fact, he often requested that killings be prolonged as much as possible. Caligula also had a tremendous sexual appetite and committed incest with his sisters.

He even invited his favorite horse to eat at formal state dinners.

Eventually, his bizarre and tyrannical behavior turned the Romans against him, and in 41 C.E., Caligula was assassinated by members of his own Praetorian guard.

Not all emperors were unfit to rule. In fact, a series of leaders known as the Five Good Emperors ruled in succession and presided over a prolonged period of peace and prosperity.

The last of these emperors, Marcus Aurelius, was the final emperor of the Pax Romana. His reign was followed by the disastrous reign of his brutal son Commodus (160-192 C.E.). By this time, the Empire was struggling to hold off attacking tribes on the frontiers.

**6d. Life of the People**
The quality of life in the Roman Empire depended upon where one fell within society.

During the Pax Romana, the wealthy built huge, lavishly decorated houses and usually had servants or slaves to tend to their every need. The average citizen worked hard and lived reasonably comfortably in modest housing. Despite the riches of the Roman Empire, the largest class lived in what can only be described as poverty.

Roman family life was a patriarchy — that is, the oldest male wielded considerable power over the rest of the family. The patriarch made all of the major decisions for the family. He had the power to divorce his wife or even kill her if she committed adultery.

Likewise, the patriarch had the right to kill his own children. In fact, the patriarch routinely decided if a newborn baby would survive and be raised by the family. Depending on how many children the family already had and the sex of the child, the patriarch might choose to have the baby killed. Infanticide was a widespread problem in the Empire, especially among female babies.

The wife of the patriarch was expected to manage the household and to remain loyal and obedient to her husband. Women could not hold political office, but in later years of the Empire women gained more rights, such as the right to own property.
Jellyfish and Fungus — Yum!
The Roman diet revolved around three Mediterranean staples: grain, grapes, and olives. Everyone in the Italian peninsula ate these foods daily. The grain (mainly wheat) was used to make bread, the grapes to make wine, and the olives to make olive oil. Bread made up the majority of many meals, especially for the poor. Wine was served with almost every meal and was often mixed with water to reduce the effect of the alcohol. Olive oil provided an important source of fat.

The rich ate whatever they wanted. Their tastes leaned toward the exotic. The more unusual the food seemed, the better. They ate jellyfish, peacock, ostrich, pork, and fungus, to name just a few of their favorites. The wealthy held huge banquets that lasted all day. When guests became full, they sometimes purged themselves so that they could continue eating.

The diet of the poor relied on bread, vegetables such as cabbage, and porridge. The poor met their protein needs by eating some meat (usually pork) and cheese.

Toga Party
Although the toga is the item of clothing most associated with Roman culture, not all Romans could wear it. Only citizens were allowed to wear togas. As togas were status markers, citizens wore them with pride, even though they were not very comfortable. The
toga consisted of a very large (18 feet by 6 feet) rectangular or semicircular piece of wool cloth that was carefully draped and wrapped around the body. A properly wrapped toga required no buttons, pins, clasps, or any other fastening device.

The average citizen wore a white toga, but a person in a position of importance wore a toga with a purple stripe whose appearance varied according to the significance of the person's position. The emperor's toga was completely purple.

The basic item of clothing for an unmarried women was a tunic. Depending on the design of the garment it was called either a peplos or chiton. Married women wore a garment called a stola.

Rub-a-dub-dub
Togas are no longer popular attire — except at frat parties — but some Roman practices have endured to this day. Going to a club for a workout and a sweat in the sauna, for example, was originally a Roman idea. Romans like to go to the public baths. The baths were places where men and women (separately) could go to socialize, exercise, read, and relax, as well as get clean.

A typical trip to the public baths was quite an event. It might begin with some exercise in the gymnasium, followed by a trip to a warm room, where an attendant would rub oil all over the visitor's body.

Next came a visit to the tepidarium, where another attendant scraped the oil, dirt, and sweat off the body with a metal tool. When clean, the Romans took a swim in the actual baths, which included both hot water pools and cold water pools. The waters of the public baths were continuously refreshed by aqueducts and heated by underground furnaces.

Finally, drinking special mineral waters alleged to have healing powers completed a visit to the baths.

During the entire experience, visitors to the baths interacted with fellow citizens. This
social function may have been the most important purpose of the baths.

6e. Gladiators, Chariots, and the Roman Games

Two men ready their weapons. An excited crowd of Romans cheer loudly in anticipation. Both combatants realize full well that this day might be their last. They are gladiators, men who fight to the death for the enjoyment of others.

As the two gladiators circle each other, each knows that his objective is to maim or trap his opponent rather than to kill him quickly. What's more, the fight must last long enough to please the crowd.

The gladiators jab swords and swing maces. They sweat in the hot sun. Sand and dirt fly. Suddenly, one gladiator traps the other with a net and poises to kill him with a three-pronged trident. The victor waits for a sign from the crowd. If the losing gladiator has put up a good fight, the crowd might choose to spare his life — and the vanquished gladiator will live to fight another day. But if the crowd is dissatisfied with the losing fighter — as was usually the case — its dissatisfaction meant slaughter.

In ancient Rome, death had become a form of entertainment.

Let the Games Begin

The Etruscans of northern Italy originally held public games, *ludi*, which featured such events as gladiator battles and chariot races, as a sacrifice to the gods.

The Romans continued the practice, holding games roughly 10 to 12 times in an average year. Paid for by the emperor, the games were used to keep the poor and unemployed entertained and occupied. The emperor hoped to distract the poor from their poverty in the hopes that they would not revolt.
Over time, the games became more spectacular and elaborate as emperors felt compelled to outdo the previous year’s competitions. The games involved more participants, occurred more frequently, and became more expensive and more outlandish.

**The Coliseum**
In Rome, the gladiatorial contests were held in the Coliseum, a huge stadium that first opened in 80 C.E. Located in the middle of the city, the Coliseum was circular in shape with three levels of arches around the outside. In height, the Coliseum was as tall as a modern 12-story building; it held 50,000 spectators.

Like many modern professional sports stadiums, the Coliseum had box seats for the wealthy and powerful. The upper level was reserved for the commoners. Under the floor of the Coliseum was a labyrinth of rooms, hallways, and cages where weapons were stored and animals and gladiators waited for their turn to perform.

The Coliseum was also watertight and could be flooded to hold naval battles. Special drains allowed water to be pumped in and released. But, naval battles were rarely held there because the water caused serious damage to the basic structure of the Coliseum.

The gladiators themselves were usually slaves, criminals, or prisoners of war. Occasionally, the gladiators were able to fight for their freedom. Criminals who were sentenced to death were sometimes thrown into the arena unarmed to serve their sentence. Some people, including women, actually volunteered to be gladiators.
They were willing to risk death for the possibility of fame and glory. Many gladiators went to special schools that trained them how to fight. A few gladiators boxed. They used metal gloves to increase cutting and bleeding.

Some gladiatorial contests included animals such as bears, rhinos, tigers, elephants, and giraffes. Most often, hungry animals fought other hungry animals. But sometimes hungry animals fought against gladiators in contests called *venationes* ("wild beast hunts"). On rare occasions, the animals were allowed to maul and eat a live human who was tied to a stake.

**Bread and Circuses**

Romans loved chariot races, which were held on special racetracks called circuses. The most famous circus, which was in Rome, was the Circus Maximus. In chariot races, two- or four-horse chariots ran seven laps totaling anywhere from three to five miles.

Roman games included other type of equestrian events. Some races with horses and riders resemble today's thoroughbred horseracing. In one type of race, riders began the competition on horseback but later dismounted and ran on foot to the finish.

As the Roman Empire started its decline, the author Juvenal (55-127 C.E.) noted, "The people are only anxious for two things: bread and circuses."

**6f. The Fall of the Roman Empire**

The invading army reached the outskirts of Rome, which had been left totally undefended. In 410 C.E., the Visigoths, led by Alaric, breached the walls of Rome and sacked the capital of the Roman Empire.

The Visigoths looted, burned, and pillaged their way through the city, leaving a wake of destruction wherever they went. The plundering continued for three days. For the first time
in nearly a millennium, the city of Rome was in the hands of someone other than the Romans. This was the first time that the city of Rome was sacked, but by no means the last.

**Constantine and the Rise of Christianity**

One of the many factors that contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire was the rise of a new religion, Christianity. The Christian religion, which was monotheistic ran counter to the traditional Roman religion, which was polytheistic (many gods). At different times, the Romans persecuted the Christians because of their beliefs, which were popular among the poor.

In 313 C.E., Roman emperor Constantine the Great ended all persecution and declared toleration for Christianity. Later that century, Christianity became the official state religion of the Empire. This drastic change in policy spread this relatively new religion to every corner of the Empire.

By approving Christianity, the Roman state directly undermined its religious traditions. Finally, by this time, Romans considered their emperor a god. But the Christian belief in one god — who was not the emperor — weakened the authority and credibility of the emperor.

Constantine enacted another change that helped accelerate the fall of the Roman Empire. In 330 C.E., he split the empire into two parts: the western half centered in Rome and the eastern half centered in Constantinople, a city he named after himself.

**Why Two Empires?**
In 324, Constantine's army defeated the forces of Licinius, the emperor of the east. Constantine became emperor of the entire empire and founded a new capital city in the eastern half at Byzantium. The city was his New Rome and was later named Constantinople (the "city of Constantine").

Constantinople was advantageously situated for two reasons. First, it was on a peninsula that could be fortified and defended easily. Further, because Constantinople was located on the frontiers of the empire, imperial armies could respond more easily to external attacks or threats.

Some scholars also believe that Constantine established a new city in order to provide a place for the young religion of Christianity to grow in an environment purer than that of corrupt Rome.

The western Empire spoke Latin and was Roman Catholic. The eastern Empire spoke Greek and worshipped under the Eastern Orthodox branch of the Christian church. Over time, the east thrived, while the west declined. In fact, after the western part of the Roman Empire fell, the eastern half continued to exist as the Byzantine Empire for hundreds of years. Therefore, the "fall of Rome" really refers only to the fall of the western half of the Empire.
Other fundamental problems contributed to the fall. In the economically ailing west, a decrease in agricultural production led to higher food prices. The western half of the empire had a large trade deficit with the eastern half. The west purchased luxury goods from the east but had nothing to offer in exchange. To make up for the lack of money, the government began producing more coins with less silver content. This led to inflation. Finally, piracy and attacks from Germanic tribes disrupted the flow of trade, especially in the west.

There were political and military difficulties, as well. It didn't help matters that political amateurs were in control of Rome in the years leading up to its fall. Army generals dominated the emperorship, and corruption was rampant. Over time, the military was transformed into a mercenary army with no real loyalty to Rome. As money grew tight, the government hired the cheaper and less reliable Germanic soldiers to fight in Roman armies. By the end, these armies were defending Rome against their fellow Germanic tribesmen. Under these circumstances, the sack of Rome came as no surprise.

**Goth Rockers**

Wave after wave of Germanic barbarian tribes swept through the Roman Empire. Groups such as the Visigoths, Vandals, Angles, Saxons, Franks, Ostrogoths, and Lombards took turns ravaging the Empire, eventually carving out areas in which to settle down. The Angles and Saxons populated the British Isles, and the Franks ended up in France.

In 476 C.E. Romulus, the last of the Roman emperors in the west, was overthrown by the Germanic leader Odoacer, who became the first Barbarian to rule in Rome. The order that the Roman Empire had brought to Western Europe for 1000 years was no more.

**7. Africa**

Upon Africa's soils our prehistoric relatives have walked side by side. From its territories, great civilizations have risen to glory. Through its peoples, astounding cultures have grown and flourished. Yet many myths remain about Africa.

Why is such an important place so stigmatized and misunderstood?
Many factors have contributed over time to the degradation of Africa and its peoples. Stories and pictures in the news, the legacies of European colonialism and the slave trade, and attitudes conjured up through racial dissention within America have all distorted modern perceptions of the African continent and its people. But one of the biggest reasons for the perpetuation of negative ideas and misinterpretations is the simple neglect or avoidance of the continent's ancient history.

Figure 150 Africa’s Great Rift Valley is the largest landform on Earth, and the only one visible from the moon. It was here our earliest ancestors evolved.

Figure 151 This is Sao Jorge da Mina, a 17th-century Portuguese and Dutch fort in Ghana, as it looks today. Influence of European colonization in Africa is still felt both culturally and linguistically.

New-Found Treasures
For years, educators have either bypassed Africa altogether, or pointed to prehistoric, colonial, and present times. However, times have changed, and of course, continue to change. Every day new discoveries are made about Africa and new artifacts are displayed to enrich the community through their historic and cultural value. The lack of serious and positive attention that has been given to Africa's ancient and medieval civilizations makes them even more important and exciting to study today. They are treasures that should not be hidden from the world.

So what were these civilizations all about and why are they so important? From the beginnings of the Common Era to the period of European imperialism, worlds of great empires, royal courts, pastoral nomads, tribal chiefs, stone palaces, intricate art, and
glorious gold emerged, collapsed, and intertwined. Powerful states were built from small
towns and villages and a great network of regional and overseas trade was established.
Wars were waged, territories were seized, kings became rich, and Islam was spread
across the continent.

Different Kingdoms, Similar Stories
These kingdoms or cultural groups have unique traits,
but similar patterns can be found in the development
and decline of each. The resources, locations,
economies, governments, and social divisions that
heightened each society are linked to a common
foundation. And the repeated patterns that are evident
in the kingdoms' downfalls make it clear that the
movement from stateless to state societies is often a
very difficult transition.

As few written records exist for reference, the entire story of early Africa is difficult to
unravel. But, through clues that range from art to oral accounts, a remarkably complete
picture of its early landscape has already been drawn. Together, the tales of the
successive reigns of the Ghana, Mali, and Benin kingdoms, the invasions of the Bedouin
nomads, and the mysterious rocky ruins of Great Zimbabwe close the gap between the
missing pieces and bring much of Africa's cultural heritage closer to light.

7a. Kingdom of Ghana

Between the 9th and 11th centuries C.E., the kingdom of
Ghana was so rich that its dogs wore golden collars, and its
horses, which were adorned with silken rope halters, slept on
plush carpets. Based on animal luxuries alone, it is no wonder
that foreigners touted Ghana's kings as the richest men in the
world.

Certainly they were living the high life ... but how did they do it?
Located within the present-day borders of Mauritania, Mali, and Senegal, medieval Ghana literally sat on a gold mine. The land's abundance of resources allowed Ghana's rulers to engage in years of prosperous trading. Strategic governing coupled with great location led to the rapid emergence of a very wealthy empire.

**Gold in Wagadugu**

Most of what we know about ancient Ghana — which is more accurately called Wagadugu — is based on writings of Arab travelers who came in contact with the nation's peoples. "Ghana" was actually the title given to Wagadugu kings and was used by the Islamic "reporters" to describe the rich and mysterious place they observed.

Evidence of Ghana's occupation dates back to the 4th century, but it was several hundred years later that it became established as a nation by a tribe known as the Soninke, whose leaders have been credited with the early strengthening of the Wagadugu state and the expansion of its territories.

By 1000 B.C.E., the nation had undergone strategic expansion and taken control of a large pocket of land between the upper Niger and Senegal Rivers. The region was rich in gold, and its acquisition meant that Ghana would become a leading force in the trans-Saharan trade network.

**Ghanaian Politics**

The leader of all leaders was the king, who was also known as the *ghana*, or war chief. His word was law. He served as the commander in chief of a highly organized army, the controller of all trade activities, and the head administrator of justice. Mayors, civil servants, counselors, and ministers were appointed by the king to assist with administrative duties — but at all times, the king was in charge.

Each day, the king assembled his court and allowed people to publicly voice their complaints. Beating drums that resounded throughout the area signaled the courts assemblage and people gathered to speak their minds. Whether they were neighborly conflicts, or cases of violated rights, the king listened
to the complaints and gave his judgment.

Such hearings were reportedly peaceful, unless they involved issues of criminal nature. Two of the most serious criminal offenses were the denial of debt and the shedding of blood. These crimes were tried by ordeal.

According to Islamic reports, the criminally accused was given a foul concoction to drink that consisted of sour and bitter-tasting wood and water. If he vomited after tossing back the nasty brew he was declared innocent and was congratulated for passing the test. If he did not vomit, and the beverage remained within, he was considered guilty as charged and suffered the king's wrath.

Ghanaian citizens were not the only ones put to the king's test. Inhabitants of its conquered lands were examined for their good behavior and loyalty as well. In territories where order and obedience prevailed, and taxes were properly paid, autonomy was granted. But in areas which struggled for independence or defied the king's laws, Ghanaian governors were appointed as watchdogs and little went unreported to the king.

**Trans-Saharan Trade**
When the king was not busy enforcing his power among the people, he was spreading it internationally through trade. At its peak, Ghana was chiefly bartering gold, ivory, and slaves for salt from Arabs and horses, cloth, swords, and books from North Africans and Europeans.

As salt was worth its weight in gold, and gold was so abundant in the kingdom, Ghana achieved much of its wealth through trade with the Arabs. Islamic merchants traveled over two months through the desert to reach Ghana and "do business." They were taxed for both what they brought in and what they took out.

With this system, it is no wonder that Ghana got rich quickly. The wealth that the kingdom acquired did not, however, serve in its favor forever. Competition from other states in the gold trade eventually took its toll.
Jealousy, fear, and anger of Ghana's power prompted its neighbors to stand up against the kingdom. Their efforts were at first weak and insignificant, but eventually, in the mid-11th century, a Muslim group known as the Almoravids launched a devastating invasion on the capital city of Koumbi Saleh. Though territories were seized, and a tribute tax was enforced, Ghana recovered and forced the invaders to withdraw.

A little less than 200 years later, however, Ghana was not so lucky. Weakened by subsequent attacks, and cut-off from international trade, the kingdom was vulnerable and unable to prevent defeat. In 1240 C.E., Ghana was absorbed into the growing nation of Mali, which would soon become the next great empire.

7b. Mali: A Cultural Center

What would life be like if a magician ruled the land? The history of ancient Mali gives us some hints. The founder of this West African kingdom was well known among his people as a man of magic with more than a few tricks up his sleeve.

Before the sorcerer's reign, and the Malian kingdom's birth, years of competition and fighting took place in the lands west of the upper Niger River. A series of fierce battles took place, and in the 13th century C.E., a group known as the Soso emerged victorious. The Soso's new lands, which had once belonged to the kingdom of Ghana, were like giant pots of gold. But before the Soso could settle in and enjoy the wealth, the great "sorcerer-king" Sundiata moved in to take over.

The Lion King
Sundiata claimed that Mali was his by right of inheritance and in 1230 A.D he defeated the Soso and took back the land. According to legend, Sundiata's rival, King Sumanguru, was also a sorcerer. Sumanguru conjured up the heads of eight spirits for assistance. Sundiata had stronger magic. He defeated the eight heads and then shot an arrow, which grazed Sumanguru's shoulder, draining him of all remaining magic. With a pat on the back, Sundiata declared himself ruler, or mansa, of the region and set up capital in the city of
Sundiata, also known as the "Lion King," was determined to make changes, and indeed he did. He decided to assign specific occupations to particular kin groups and developed a social organization similar to a caste system. For example, if born into a family of warriors, one was destined to be a warrior. If born into a family of djeli, or storytellers, one was destined to join the djeli tradition. Choice of destiny was not an option.

This system conveniently meant that if born into a family of mansa, one was part of the ruling dynasty — the Keita. It was one of Sundiata's "tricks" to keep power in the family.

For the most part, the system worked. However, for a short time, power escaped the Keita hands and landed in those of a former slave. The disruptive reign of the ex-slave, known as Sakura, paved the way for Sundiata's nephew, Mansa Kankan Musa, to back the throne. Best known for his wealth, his generosity, and his dedication to Islam, Mansa Musa took the kingdom to new heights.

A Golden Pilgrimage
Through involvement in the gold trade that swept through Africa and reached all the way to Europe, Mansa Musa led Mali to great riches. The region's prosperity was nothing new, but based on Egyptian records, Mansa Musa's display and distribution of the wealth was unprecedented.

In 1324, the great Mansa Musa set out on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Decked out in his finest clothes, he passed through Cairo with 500 slaves, each of whom carried a six-pound staff of gold. Backing them up were 100 camels, carrying in sum over 30,000 more pounds of the precious metal.
Surely this was a sight to behold, and the accounts left behind say that the show got even better. While cruising through Cairo, Mansa Musa reportedly handed out gifts of gold to bystanders. He entertained the crowds and made a lucky few suddenly rich.

**In Mansa Musa's Hands**

Aside from being generous, Mansa Musa made an important mark in Mali by introducing the kingdom to Islam and making it one of the first Muslim states in northern Africa. He incorporated the laws of the Koran into his justice system. Cities such as Timbuktu and Gao were developed into international centers of Islamic learning and culture. Elaborate mosques and libraries were built. The university arose in Timbuktu might well have been the world's first. The cities became meeting places for poets, scholars, and artists.

Though not everyone accepted the new faith and culture, a strong relationship between religion and politics quickly developed. Mansa Kankan Musa ruled with all the ideals of a fine Muslim king. He died in the mid-14th century, and Mali was never quite the same. Internal squabbling between ruling families weakened Mali's governing and its network of states started to unravel. Then, in 1430, a group of Berbers seized much of Mali's territory, including Timbuktu.

Though the wealth and power that Mali possessed was swept up quickly by the next great empire, its legacy stands proudly. The pioneering spirit and groundbreaking accomplishments of Mali's kingdom make its rise and fall an important chapter of African history.

**7c. Benin and Its Royal Court**

In a small, tribal village nestled in the dense forestlands of northwest Africa, an important meeting is called by the chief. Villagers anxiously assemble and chatter nervously as they await the news. A fire crackles as the chief and village elders deliver the proposal of an alliance. Several neighboring villages are soon to be united, and they feel it will be prosperous to join the new group.
With fear, wonder, and excitement, the villagers consider the alliance. Though confused, they realize one thing for sure: life in Benin will never be the same.

While there are no written records documenting Benin's early history, historians speculate that meetings like this were the beginnings of its rise to statehood. Based on archaeological evidence and stories passed on through many generations, it is known that clusters of villages preceded the great kingdom. They embodied its territories from about 900 to 1300 C.E., when Benin officially became a city-state.

**Rise to Power**

Shortly after statehood was established, a foreign official named Oranyan became leader of Benin. Was he invited? No one knows for sure. According to oral tradition, Oranyan came to power because he married a local chief's daughter and formed a kinship connection that led to ruling rights. Others argue that this story is just a cover-up and that Oranyan's rise to power was most likely the result of an invasion. In either case, during Oranyan's rule, he fathered a son who was called Ekewa. Historians agree that Ekewa was considered the first king, or *oba*, of Benin.

While these events solidified Benin's transformation to a unified state, it was Eware the Great (1440-73) who launched Benin to its greatest height. Under his rule, and the successive reigns of his son and grandson, Benin changed dramatically.

**An Empire Emerges**

Government structure was the biggest reform as bureaucracy replaced the kin-based system. Supreme power was held by the oba, who ruled through an assembly of chiefs and advisors representing various districts.

The system was one in which competition for leadership grew strong and much was accomplished. New territories were acquired through strategic military expansion, vibrant commercial activities arose, the economy boomed, and the arts flourished. Benin, with its
royal court, joined the ranks of the largest, most powerful empires of the region.

One of the most crucial events of this prosperous period was the arrival of Portuguese mariners in 1486. Through contact with the Portuguese, Benin established important trade relations in Europe and became the chief exporter of cloth, pepper, and ivory. Trade also brought copper and brass into the empire, allowing metalworkers to refine their traditional techniques of sculpting and casting.

Eware established great guilds for Benin's artists and craft workers. The activities and facilities were open only to privileged artists who were chosen by the king and highly esteemed in the royal court. The casting of brass was monitored carefully. Upon Eware's command, anyone found casting brass without royal permission faced execution.

Benin's art formed a central part of the kingdom, and for that reason, it is important today as a historical record. Many bronze, ivory, and wood carvings give a glimpse of life in the royal court through their depiction of historical personages and events.

**Sold into Slavery**

While the growth of trade and strengthening of European relations brought Benin great prosperity, it also led gradually to the kingdom's collapse. The European slave trade began in the early 16th century and swept through the region boasting of great wealth and prosperity. Many sources credit Benin for opting out of the slave trade completely, but it is important to consider facts that are often disregarded.

Although Benin did not engage in full-fledged slave trade until the 18th century, it never abstained from the system entirely. Its leaders prohibited the export of male slaves during the 16th and 17th centuries, but women, as they did not play a role in the political system, were considered expendable and traded freely. Benin officials also became involved in the importing and reselling of slaves from other regions during this period.
The commercial gains brought to West Africa through the slave market were immense but the prosperity quickly led to competition and war. Incessant fighting driven by hunger for human captives destroyed much of Benin's civilization and weakened its economy.

Despite these trials, Benin survived through the late 19th century. Though on the road to demise, the kingdom held resistance as European powers swept through the region in search of prime territories to seize as colonial real estate.

Like many great civilizations, Benin's rise to power was filled with excitement and wonder, but its eventual social crises and political instability displayed the effects of greed, inhumanity, and love of power.

7d. Great Zimbabwe

The House of Rock.

It's not the name of a dance club or a new band. It's actually a translation of the Shona word, "Zimbabwe." Though not the best illustration of the modern African nation, this phrase is a perfect description of the ancient city within its borders known as Great Zimbabwe. Sixty acres of immense stone ruins comprise the city and tell the story of the people who created and resided in it some 900 years ago.

For a long time, many Westerners argued that such amazing structures could not have been crafted in Africa without European influence or assistance. These notions reflect ethnocentrism, or the tendency to view one's own culture as the best and others as inferior. With the help of modern dating techniques, today's archaeologists have been able to disprove these arguments and expose the truth. Africans, and Africans alone, were responsible for building this astounding and complex city.

Shona Settlement
The first inhabitants of Great Zimbabwe were Shona-speaking peoples who likely settled in the region as early as 400 C.E. Back then, the land was full of possibilities: plains of fertile
soil to support farming and herding, and mineral rich territories to provide gold, iron, copper, and tin for trading and crafting. It was fine place for the Shona to call home.

Over the years, descendants of the Shona made transitions from simple farming communities to more complex, stratified societies. By 1000 C.E., the population of Great Zimbabwe was divided and ranked by status — from elite leaders and their cattle to the peasants who did all the work. Cattle were very desirable and actually more valuable than most of the workers.

**Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous**

In response to the changing social, political, and economic landscape, new buildings were gradually built. Tremendous stone houses were constructed by the peasants for their kings. Sophisticated workplaces were designed for conducting trades such as blacksmithing.

The buildings were made of heavy granite blocks, stacked tightly together. Stones were arranged carefully, and no mortar was used to seal them together. The largest and most impressive building was an elliptical structure known today as the Great or Western Enclosure. The remains of its outer wall measure over 800 feet long and up to 32 feet high. The wall enclosed several huts and a tall, cone-shaped tower. Archaeologists and anthropologists believe that the enclosure was the city's center and was occupied only by the elite. It was the dividing line between the rich and the rest.

Several clues led to this theory. First, remnants of exotic items from overseas were found within the enclosure. Second, no evidence of cooking was found within the walled area. Most likely, this means that food was prepared elsewhere by servants and delivered to the wealthy inhabitants upon demand. And third, evidence of only 100-200 residents is shown, while many thousands occupied the city.

Where did everyone else live? They lived in mud huts surrounding the enclosure. Although the huts were not quite as glamorous as the granite "palaces," they were well constructed.

**Long Live Rock**

By 1200 C.E., the city had grown strong, and was well known as an important religious and trading center. Some believe that religion triggered the city's rise to power, and that
the tall tower was used for worship. The people of Great Zimbabwe most likely worshipped Mwari, the supreme god in the Shona religion.

![Image of Great Zimbabwe ruins](image)

*Figure 162 Long looted by treasure hunters, thrill-seekers, and lay archaeologists, it has been only in past two decades that the ruins of the stone city of Great Zimbabwe have begun to reveal their secrets of past African culture and history.*

Discoveries of Chinese porcelain, engraved glass from the Middle East, and metal ornaments from West Africa provide evidence that Great Zimbabwe participated in a comprehensive trade network during the 13th and 14th centuries. Gold was probably its chief export and East African cities — especially those along the coast that had overseas connections — were most likely its primary trading partners.

Zimbabwe's prosperity continued until the mid-15th century. At this time, the city's trade activity declined and the people began to migrate elsewhere. The exact cause of the evacuation remains a puzzle, but many scientists agree that a decline in soil quality and fertility was probably a major factor. The Kingdom of Great Zimbabwe has declined, but the House of Rock still stands.

### 7e. Life on the Desert

"There's no place like home." To the Bedouin people, this "home" meant the entire Sahara desert.

Traditional Bedouin are pastoral nomads, or wanderers who travel with herds of domesticated animals. They are constantly on the move, with no permanent camping
place. Their staple belongings include camels and tents, and they frown upon agriculture and all types of trades and crafts. Any type of settled life is traditionally considered beneath Bedouin dignity.

While it may seem like the Bedouin lack order, this is far from true. Tribes are the basic unit of their social organization, and though simple, they are highly structured. For wandering purposes, tribes break into smaller clans and family units. Traveling and exploiting the land is much more efficient this way.

Most of what is known about the Bedouin today involves Middle Eastern tribes and lands, but it is important to recognize that much of Bedouin history also took place in northern Africa. In fact, the Sahara was one of the first Bedouin territories.

**Islam Comes to Africa**
The first Arab invasion of North Africa was led by ancestors of the Bedouin and occurred in 643 C.E. At the time of the invasion, northern Africa already had a long history of foreign attack and cultural infusion. The Greeks, Romans, and Phoenicians had previously left their marks, and it was time for the Arab Muslims to do the same.

Followers of the prophet Muhammad emerged from the Arabian Peninsula and moved westward across Berber-occupied areas of northern Africa. Their goals were to teach the fundamentals of Islam and establish regional, political, and religious unity under the rule of a Muslim leader, or *caliph*.

The invasion was intense, and by the 8th century, the primary goals were accomplished. Muslims had succeeded in saturating the region, but they had also encountered internal conflict that led to big changes. Hostile disagreement between two Arab tribes...
leaders had divided Islam into two branches — Sunni and Shia.

A long chain of events resulted from this division, and one important link led to the invasion of the Bedouin. Around 1040 C.E., a group of Islamicized Berbers who had become affiliated with the Shia decided to take revenge. They neglected lands given to them by their caliph, defied the creeds of the Shia, and launched a rebellion among other Berbers to convert to the Sunni branch.

These events no doubt led to vengeful reactions. The angry Shia caliph invited two tribes of Arabian Bedouin, known collectively as the Hilalians, to travel west and issue the Berbers’ punishment.

**Invasion and Arabization**
The Bedouin groups agreed to the task and carried it out well. They moved in aggressively, making their way mercilessly through Egypt and Libya — and some even continued on to the coast of Morocco. This was their chance to acquire new territory through conquest.

The Hilalian invasion was devastating to the region. The Bedouin and their herds left little behind. Towns were quickly demolished. Great cities were sacked and literally trampled to dust. Farmlands were defaced. Some Berbers eventually decided to join the Bedouin invaders — they obviously could not beat them, so this was probably a survival choice.

The Bedouin invasion of northern Africa was obviously one of destruction, but it was also one of introduction. As the nomads swept through the region, they continued the process of Arabization — the teaching and spreading of Islamic culture.

The early Bedouin left behind much more than a good story. They left the ideals of strength and endurance that have allowed their culture and peoples to survive today. Modern Bedouin tribes have been forced over the years to adapt to modern conditions. Gradually they have become more sedentary, but their foundation of pastoral nomadism is still firm and the desert is still the place they call home.
8. South Asia: India and Beyond

Peaceful coexistence of diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups has historically been a hallmark of South Asian cultures. For this reason, many have referred to the region as a "salad bowl" of culture: a hodgepodge of different peoples, beliefs, and behaviors.

In South Asia — which includes the land that makes up the modern-day nations of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka — colorful distinctions are apparent and even celebrated.

Under the layers of diversity lies a solid core of South Asian tradition. Traditions have endured for over 5,000 years — from the earliest known Indian civilization to the present day.

The Indus Valley civilization dates back to about 3000 B.C.E. The archaeological evidence from this period provides exemplary evidence that many aspects of South Asian culture have endured through changing times.

Remnants of ancient bathhouses and sophisticated sanitation systems point to the long history of South Asian culture — admiration of purity and cleanliness, and abhorrence of all things polluted. Ancient statues representing the god Shiva are proof that the religious traditions of today's South Asia, too, have been around for millennia.

The Soul of South Asia

To understand the history and cultures of ancient South Asia, it is essential to consider the development of Hinduism and Buddhism. These two religions encompassed far more than spirituality. They became the lifeblood of the people and the backbone of social, political, and economic structures. These religions pervaded all aspects of life and shaped the
evolution of the region.

Some have called Hinduism the "soul of India." One of the most powerful and influential developments of ancient Hinduism was the institution of the caste system. The caste system became deeply incorporated into Hindu tradition and created an enduring framework of ascribed social status.

Buddhism emerged as a rejection of the injustices created by caste system sanctioned by Hinduism. It was a response to discontentment and a search for new answers to the mysterious and complex questions that define human experience.

Organized power structures arose from the conflict and confusion that followed the growth of new religions and the challenging of social structures. These power structures led to the formation of state systems and even triggered the development of vast empires.

Few regions in the world have histories as ancient and diverse as South Asia's. And few people realize that South Asia's roots can be traced to the beginnings of human civilization. Marked by integration, intellectualism, and spirituality, South Asia's ancient history begs to be explored.

8a. Early Civilization in the Indus Valley

The phrase "early civilizations" usually conjures up images of Egypt and Mesopotamia, and their pyramids, mummies, and golden tombs.

But in the 1920s, a huge discovery in South Asia proved that Egypt and Mesopotamia were not the only "early civilizations." In the vast Indus River plains (located in what is today Pakistan and western India), under layers of land and mounds of dirt, archaeologists discovered the remains of a 4,600 year-old city. A thriving, urban civilization had existed at the same time as Egyptian and Mesopotamian states — in an area twice each of their sizes.
The people of this Indus Valley civilization did not build massive monuments like their contemporaries, nor did they bury riches among their dead in golden tombs. There were no mummies, no emperors, and no violent wars or bloody battles in their territory.

Remarkably, the lack of all these is what makes the Indus Valley civilization so exciting and unique. While others civilizations were devoting huge amounts of time and resources to the rich, the supernatural, and the dead, Indus Valley inhabitants were taking a practical approach to supporting the common, secular, living people. Sure, they believed in an afterlife and employed a system of social divisions. But they also believed resources were more valuable in circulation among the living than on display or buried underground.

Amazingly, the Indus Valley civilization appears to have been a peaceful one. Very few weapons have been found and no evidence of an army has been discovered.

Excavated human bones reveal no signs of violence, and building remains show no indication of battle. All evidence points to a preference for peace and success in achieving it.

So how did such a practical and peaceful civilization become so successful?

The Twin Cities
The ruins of two ancient cities, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro (both in modern-day Pakistan), and the remnants of many other settlements, have revealed great clues to this mystery. Harappa was, in fact, such a rich discovery that the Indus Valley Civilization is also called the Harappan civilization.
The first artifact uncovered in Harappa was a unique stone seal carved with a unicorn and an inscription. Similar seals with different animal symbols and writings have since been found throughout the region. Although the writing has not yet been deciphered, the evidence suggests they belonged to the same language system. Apparently, Mesopotamia's cuneiform system had some competition in the race for the world's first script.

The discovery of the seals prompted archaeologists to dig further. Amazing urban architecture was soon uncovered across the valley and into the western plains. The findings clearly show that Harappan societies were well organized and very sanitary.

For protection from seasonal floods and polluted waters, the settlements were built on giant platforms and elevated grounds. Upon these foundations, networks of streets were laid out in neat patterns of straight lines and right angles. The buildings along the roads were all constructed of bricks that were uniform in size.

The brick houses of all city dwellers were equipped with bathing areas supplied with water from neighborhood wells. Sophisticated drainage systems throughout the city carried dirty water and sewage outside of living spaces. Even the smallest houses on the edges of the towns were connected to the systems — cleanliness was obviously of utmost importance.

The Fall of Harappan Culture
No doubt, these cities were engineering masterpieces of their time. The remains of their walls yield clues about the culture that thrived in the Indus Valley. Clay figurines of goddesses, for example, are proof that religion was important. Toys and games show that even in 3000 B.C.E., kids — and maybe even adults — liked to play. Pottery, textiles, and beads are evidence of skilled craftsmanship and thriving trade.
It was this intensive devotion to craftsmanship and trade that allowed the Harappan culture to spread widely and prosper greatly. Each time goods were traded or neighbors entered the gates of the cities to barter, Indus culture was spread.

Eventually, though, around 1900 B.C.E, this prosperity came to an end. The integrated cultural network collapsed, and the civilization became fragmented into smaller regional cultures. Trade, writing, and seals all but disappeared from the area.

Many believe that the decline of the Harappan civilization was a result of Aryan invasions from the north. This theory seems logical because the Aryans came to power in the Ganges Valley shortly after the Indus demise of the Indus Valley Civilization. Because there is little evidence of any type of invasion though, numerous historians claim that it was an environmental disaster that led to the civilization's demise. They argue that changing river patterns disrupted the farming and trading systems and eventually led to irreparable flooding.

Although the intricate details of the early Indus Valley culture might never be fully known, many pieces of the ancient puzzle have been discovered. The remains of the Indus Valley cities continue to be unearthed and interpreted today. With each new artifact, the history of early Indian civilization is strengthened and the legacy of this ingenious and diverse metropolis is made richer.

8b. The Caste System

If a Hindu person were asked to explain the nature of the caste system, he or she might start to tell the story of Brahma — the four-headed, four-handed deity worshipped as the creator of the universe.

According to an ancient text known as the Rigveda, the division of Indian society was based on Brahma's divine manifestation of four groups.
Priests and teachers were cast from his mouth, rulers and warriors from his arms, merchants and traders from his thighs, and workers and peasants from his feet.

**What does "Caste" Mean?**

Even today, most Indian languages use the term "jati" for the system of hereditary social structures in South Asia. When Portuguese travelers to 16th-century India first encountered what appeared to them to be race-based social stratification, they used the Portuguese term "casta" — which means "race" — to describe what they saw. Today, the term "caste" is used to describe stratified societies based on hereditary groups not only in South Asia but throughout the world.

Others might present a biological explanation of India's stratification system, based on the notion that all living things inherit a particular set of qualities. Some inherit wisdom and intelligence, some get pride and passion, and others are stuck with less fortunate traits. Proponents of this theory attribute all aspects of one's lifestyle — social status, occupation, and even diet — to these inherent qualities and thus use them to explain the foundation of the caste system.

**The Origins of the Caste System**

According to one long-held theory about the origins of South Asia's caste system, Aryans from central Asia invaded South Asia and introduced the caste system as a means of controlling the local populations. The Aryans defined key roles in society, then assigned groups of people to them. Individuals were born into, worked, married, ate, and died within those groups. There was no social mobility.

The Aryan Myth
The idea of an "Aryan" group of people was not proposed until the 19th century. After identifying a language called Aryan from which Indo-European languages are descended, several European linguists claimed that the speakers of this language (named Aryans by the linguists) had come from the north — from Europe.

Thus, according to this theory, European languages and cultures came first and were therefore superior to others. This idea was later widely promoted by Adolf Hitler in his attempts to assert the "racial superiority" of so-called light-skinned people from Europe over so-called dark-skinned people from the rest of the world — and thus provide justification for genocide.

But 20th-century scholarship has thoroughly disproved this theory. Most scholars believe that there was no Aryan invasion from the north. In fact, some even believe that the Aryans — if they did exist — actually originated in South Asia and spread from there to Europe. Regardless of who the Aryans were or where they lived, it is generally agreed that they did not single-handedly create South Asia's caste system.

Thus, it has been impossible to determine the exact origins of the caste system in South Asia. In the midst of the debate, only one thing is certain: South Asia's caste system has been around for several millennia and, until the second half of the 20th century, has changed very little during all of that time.

**Time for Class**

In ancient India, the ranked occupational groups were referred to as *varnas*, and the hereditary occupational groups within the *varnas* were known as *jatis*. Many have immediately assumed that ascribed social groups and rules prohibiting intermarriage among the groups signify the existence of a racist culture. But this assumption is false. *Varnas* are not racial groups but rather classes.

Four *varna* categories were constructed to organize society along economic and occupational lines. Spiritual leaders and teachers were called Brahmins. Warriors and
nobility were called Kshatriyas. Merchants and producers were called Vaishyas. Laborers were called Sudras.

The Untouchables
In addition to the varnas, there is a fifth class in Hinduism. It encompassed outcasts who, literally, did all the dirty work. They were referred to as "untouchables" because they carried out the miserable tasks associated with disease and pollution, such as cleaning up after funerals, dealing with sewage, and working with animal skin.

Brahmins were considered the embodiment of purity, and untouchables the embodiment of pollution. Physical contact between the two groups was absolutely prohibited. Brahmins adhered so strongly to this rule that they felt obliged to bathe if even the shadow of an untouchable fell across them.

Struggling against Tradition
Although the political and social force of the caste system has not disappeared completely, the Indian government has officially outlawed caste discrimination and made widespread reforms. Particularly through the efforts of Indian nationalists such as Mohandas Gandhi, rules preventing social mobility and cross-caste mingling have been loosened.

Gandhi renamed the untouchables Harijans, which means "the people of God." Adopted in 1949, the Indian Constitution provided a legal framework for the emancipation of untouchables and for the equality of all citizens.

In recent years, the Untouchables have become a politically active group and have adopted for themselves the name Dalits, which means "those who have been broken."

8c. The Rise of Hinduism


Brahma. Shiva. Vishnu.

Not many things have endured without interruption or major transformation for over 5,000 years. Hindu traditions such as these are great exceptions. Arguably, Hinduism is the oldest religion on Earth.
To understand how Hinduism has withstood the tests of time, it is important to know the principles upon which it is grounded. And to understand the principles, it is necessary to know their historical foundations.

Archaeologists have determined that highly developed civilizations flourished throughout the Indus Valley between 4000 and 1500 B.C.E. But for still unknown reasons, the valley’s inhabitants appear to have moved out rather suddenly. They resettled among new neighbors in northwestern India and encountered a group of people from central Asia who brought with them warrior ethics and a religion called Vedism.

Within the ruins of the ancient Indus Valley civilization, archaeologists have discovered many artifacts of modern Hinduism that were not found in any Vedic civilizations. These include statues and amulets of gods and goddesses, huge temple tanks for bathing, and sculptures of people in yoga postures.

Based on this evidence, it seems that when the people from central Asia settled in India, their Vedic beliefs were mingled with the beliefs of indigenous Indians. Thus, it is likely that the Indus Valley tradition and Vedic gods and beliefs combined to form the foundations of Hinduism.

One Faith, Many Paths

Hinduism stands apart from all other religions for several reasons. It has no single founder, no single book of theological law and truth, no central religious organization, and no definition of absolute beginning and end.

Hinduism is a code of life — a collection of attitudes, personal experiences, and spiritual practices. It is, in essence, defined...
by behaviors rather than beliefs.

According to Hindu philosophy, there is one divine reality, and all religions are simply various interpretations of it. Because of this, Hinduism allows and even encourages individuals to choose a religious path that best suits their social, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual needs.

One Hindu devotee might worship well-known gods such as Vishnu and Shiva in a large, public temple, whereas another might worship less common deities in a private shrine within his or her own home. Yet they would both be considered good Hindus, provided that they honored each other's choices.

This tolerance makes Hinduism difficult to understand and define, but it does explain why so many gods, goddesses, and rituals are described in the numerous Hindu scriptures.

**The Vedas and the Upanishads**

Despite the fact that Hindus characteristically believe and do different things, several concepts and traditions bind them together. Many of these beliefs were compiled in a set of scriptures written around 1300 B.C.E. known as the Vedas. It is believed that the Vedas are the eternal truths that were heard, then written down by holy seers.

According to the Vedas, time and life are cyclical. After death, one's soul leaves the body and is reborn, or reincarnated, into a new form.

The constant cycle of birth and rebirth is known as *samsara* and the measurement by which the quality of new birth is determined is known as *karma*. Karma, the accumulated result of one's actions in various lives, can be good or bad. Righteous and moral conduct, known as *dharma*, is the road to good karma.

Examples of traditional good conduct included marrying within one's caste, revering upper castes, doing good deeds, and abstaining from meat, particularly that of cows.
The writings known as the Upanishads appeared six to eight hundred years after the Vedas and focus mostly on how to escape the cycle of rebirth. The Upanishads explain how to leave Samsara through a release and ultimate enlightenment known as moksha. The appearance of the Upanishads marked the beginning of a period known as the Vedantic Age.

**The End of the Vedas?**

Literally, "Vedantic" means "end of the Vedas." But the Vedic beliefs never really disappeared. Gods of the Vedic tradition became less commonly worshipped, but the Vedic philosophies recorded in the books were surely not forgotten. The principles of karma and dharma were too popular (especially among members of the lower castes) to fade away.

Scholars continue to debate over the beginning of Hinduism, but most agree that during the Vedantic Age (between 800 and 400 B.C.E.) there was a shift to the widespread worship of the gods Vishnu and Shiva. They also agree that this shift coincided with the emergence of new religions in India that sought enlightenment, such as Buddhism and Jainism.

In the years to come, Hinduism became divided into many sects. But true to the foundations of Hinduism, the new sects' beliefs and practices were accepted. Because of such tolerance, Hinduism thrives today, millennia after it began.

### 8d. The Birth and Spread of Buddhism

What is humanity's place within the universe?

For millennia, people around the world have asked this question. In 6th-century South Asia, this question stirred up a small revolution.

The answers provided by traditional Hindu teachings and practices made Indian philosophers and religious sages increasingly upset. Many members of the Vaishya class...

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*Figure 180 The Buddha preached his first sermon at Sarnath, shown here. He believed that freedom from desires set people free from the cycle of rebirth.*
spoke against the injustices of the Hindu caste system and the overwhelming power of the priestly class, known as the Brahmins.

Many Brahmin priests were considered corrupt because they performed animal sacrifices and practiced other Vedic rituals. Resentment of such rituals and continued anger about unbalanced social power prompted the development of new intellectual teachings and philosophies. These new ideas maintained that some aspects of Hindu tradition and ritual had merit. They never directly challenged Vedic gods or beliefs.

But Siddharta Gautama did.

**Buddha: Spiritual Revelation**

Siddharta was born about 563 B.C.E. in the foothills of the Himalayas. A prince, he lived a sheltered life amid luxury, wealth, and comfort. But at age 29, Siddharta fled from his palace and discovered something new.

For the first time, he saw poverty, misery, and illness. At home, he soon felt discontented with his materialistic life and the conditions that surrounded him. In response to the emotions triggered by his experience outside the palace, he gave away all his belongings and searched for enlightenment through the abandonment of basic needs.

Siddharta began his quest with a period of starvation. According to legend, he grew so thin during this time that he could feel his hands if he placed one on the small of his back and the other on his stomach. These methods of self-denial eventually led him to a revelation.

Siddharta discovered that he needed to find another way — something in between his rich and impoverished lifestyles. He resolved to follow the Middle Path.

Siddharta sought enlightenment through concentration. He sat under a pipal tree, practiced intense meditation, and fought off all worldly temptations. After 40 days, he reached the ultimate goal — nirvana.

*Figure 181 Siddharta Gautama was a prince in a kingdom near the present day border of India and Nepal. Upon his enlightenment, his followers began to call him Buddha, which means, "Enlightened One."*
He came to understand his previous lives and finally gained release from the cycle of suffering. When he attained Enlightenment he became known by the title of Buddha, or "Awakened One."

The Buddha set out to share his experience and to teach others to follow the Middle Path. He traveled throughout northeastern India for several decades, spreading his philosophy to anyone who was interested, regardless of gender or caste. Even Brahmans and members of the nobility were converted.

The Buddha died in 483 B.C.E., after 45 years of traveling and teaching. Upon his death, the Buddha passed into a state of nirvana, the ultimate release from suffering in which the self no longer exists and salvation is achieved. Included in his last breaths were four words of inspiration: "Strive on with awareness." And his followers did.

**Buddhism: Spiritual Revolution**

Small communities of monks and nuns, known as *bhikkus*, sprung up along the roads that Buddha traveled. Devoted to his teachings, they dressed in yellow robes and wandered the countryside to meditate quietly. For almost 200 years, these humble disciples were overshadowed by the dominant Hindu believers. But the rise of a great empire changed all that.

In the 3rd century B.C.E., several ambitious leaders built the expansive Mauryan Empire and fought many bloody battles were fought to extend its boundaries of control. One king, named Ashoka, was so troubled by the effects of the conquests on humanity that he converted to Buddhism. Adopting a code of nonviolence, he renounced all warfare and incorporated principles of Buddhism in his ruling practices.

Ashoka promoted Buddhist expansion by sending monks to surrounding territories to share the teachings of the Buddha. A wave of conversion began, and Buddhism spread not only through India, but also internationally. Ceylon, Burma, Nepal, Tibet, central Asia, China, and Japan are just some of the regions where the Middle Path was widely accepted.

With the great spread of Buddhism, it traditional practices and philosophies became redefined and regionally distinct. Only a small minority practiced the earliest forms of
Buddhism, and Buddhist influence as a whole began to fade within India. Some scholars believe that many Buddhist practices were simply absorbed into the tolerant Hindu faith. Today there are approximately 350 million Buddhists in the world.

8e. The Gupta Period of India

The Gupta Period of India was not characterized by enormous material wealth or by elaborate trade activity.

It was defined by creativity. Flourishing arts, fabulous literature, and stupendous scholars are just a few of the things that marked the period.

In 185 B.C.E., the Mauryan Empire collapsed when the last of the Mauryan kings was assassinated. In its place, small kingdoms arose throughout India.

For nearly 500 years, the various states warred with each other. In the northern territories, a new empire arose when a ruler named Chandragupta I ascended the throne in 320 C.E. He revived many principles of Mauryan government and paved the way for his son, Samudragupta, to develop an extensive empire.

Victory at Any Cost

Samudragupta was a great warrior and conquest was his passion. He sought to unite all of India under his rule and quickly set out to achieve this goal by waging wars across much of the Indian subcontinent.

Hoping for mercy, many potential victims offered tribute and presents to Samudragupta as he swept through the territories. But little mercy was granted. One by one, he defeated nine kings in the north and twelve in the south. In addition to the human devastation, countless horses were slaughtered to celebrate his victories.

The Gupta territories expanded so greatly under Samudragupta’s reign that he has often...
been compared to great conquerors such as Alexander the Great and Napoleon. But of course he did not achieve military success singlehandedly. Local squads — which each consisted of one elephant, one chariot, three armed cavalrymen, and five foot soldiers — protected Gupta villages from raids and revolts. In times of war, the squads joined together to form a powerful royal army.

**Gupta Achievements**

But Samudragupta was more than a fighter; he was also a lover of the arts. Engraved coins and inscribed pillars from the time of his reign provide evidence of both his artistic talent and his patronage. He set the stage for the emergence of classical art, which occurred under the rule of his son and successor Chandragupta II.

Chandragupta II gave great support to the arts. Artists were so highly valued under his rule that they were paid for their work — a rare phenomenon in ancient civilizations. Perhaps it is due to this monetary compensation that such considerable progress was made in literature and science during the period.

Much of the literature produced during the Gupta dynasty was poetry and drama. Narrative histories, religious and meditative writing, and lyric poetry emerged to enrich, educate, and entertain the people. Formal essays were composed on subjects ranging from grammar and medicine to math and astronomy. The best-known essay of the period is the *Kamasutra*, which provides rules about the art of love and marriage according to Hindu laws.

Two of the most famous scholars of the era were Kalidasa and Aryabhatta. Kalidasa, the greatest writer of the empire, brought plays to new heights by filling them with humor and epic heroism. Aryabhatta, a scientist ahead of his time, went out on a limb and proposed that earth was a rotating sphere centuries before Columbus made his famous voyage. Aryabhatta also calculated the length of the solar year as 365.358 days — only three hours over the figure calculated by modern scientists.
Alongside these scholarly achievements, magnificent architecture, sculpture, and painting also developed. Among the greatest paintings of this period are those that were found on the walls of the Ajanta Caves in the plains of southern India. The paintings illustrate the various lives of the Buddha. An 18-foot statue of the Hindu god Shiva was also found within a Gupta-dynasty rock temple near Bombay.

A Lasting Inspiration
Although the Gupta rulers practiced Hindu rituals and traditions, it is clear from these discoveries that the empire was characterized by religious freedom. Evidence of a Buddhist university within the region is further proof of the peaceful coexistence between Hindus and Buddhists.

The Gupta dynasty flourished immensely under Chandragupta II, but rapidly weakened during the reign of his two successors. A wave of invasions launched by the Huns, a nomadic group from central Asia, started in 480 C.E. Two decades later, Gupta kings had little territory left under their control. Around 550 C.E., the empire perished completely.

Though India was not truly unified again until the coming of the Muslims, the classical culture of the Guptas did not disappear. The flourishing arts of the region, which were unrivaled in their time, left more than a legacy. They left descendants of the Guptas with continuous inspiration to create.

9. China

Figure 184 When 13-year-old Qin Emperor Shi Huangdi came to power in 221 B.C.E., one of his first acts was to begin preparing for his death. In addition to his army of over 8,000 clay soldiers, his tomb was lined in bronze and contained a vast wealth of jewels and artifacts beyond imagination. Courtesy of Judith Serrao, UAE
In 1974, researchers uncovered the tomb of Shi Huangdi, the legendary Ch'in (Qin) emperor who unified China and reigned from 221-207 B.C.E. Inside of the tomb were life-sized soldiers made of terracotta (Italian for "baked earth"), lined up neatly in 38 rows. The soldiers were amazing in their detail, with each having different facial features, likely modeled after actual soldiers. They even carried real bronze weapons, with blades that remained razor sharp after 2,200 years.

However, what truly left archaeologists and the rest of the world watching on TV in awe was this: There were over 8,000 soldiers lined up in the tomb! Infantrymen, chariots pulled by life-sized clay horses, crossbowmen, it was a complete army, armed and armored. Stretching 650 feet back into the chamber, these soldiers were created to guard the emperor in the afterlife. Ordered by the emperor at age 13, it took 36 years and 700,000 workers to complete construction of the massive tomb and its army.

**A Lesson in Paradoxes**

Welcome to the mystery and wonder that is ancient China. In the subsequent readings, you will learn that Chinese culture developed differently from any other ancient civilization. Chinese history is a lesson in paradoxes. Their past is full of natural disasters and wars; yet some of the most beautiful art, literature, and architecture have been created and preserved through the 13 dynastic periods, spanning 4,000 years into the 20th century. These trends are reflected by three of the most influential dynasties of China: the Shang, Han, and Tang.

Written language began in China with the oracle bones and tortoise shells of the Shang dynasty, and the beauty of their bronze work was unrivaled for hundreds of years. The Han dynasty will always be remembered for opening up to the Western world through its use of the Silk Road. Ideas such as Buddhism were exchanged as freely as silk and spices with lands as far west as India and the Roman Empire.
China’s most enduring landmark, the Great Wall, was built primarily during the Han period. Its earthen walls protected the Chinese people from foreign invasions throughout the centuries. It was during the Tang dynasty that the most beautiful poetry of dynastic China was written, as were the civil examinations that remained in use into the 20th century. China was, and is, truly a land of invention and discovery.

The major philosophies originating in China, Taoism and Confucianism, will be examined in the hope that we may learn from their vast wealth of knowledge. Brilliant thinkers such as Lao Tzu and Confucius molded the political and religious landscapes of dynastic China with their radical ideas about the nature of man.

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<td>1644-1911</td>
<td></td>
<td>further land expansion, restoration of ancient text</td>
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9a. The Middle Kingdom

From the misty veil of prehistory emerged the myths of ancient China. Heroes turned to gods, and men and beasts performed miraculous feats. Their myths explain the discoveries of the tools and practices used by the Chinese to the present-day.

Yet Chinese mythology has never contained any clear-cut creation stories. The people of China existed long before creation myths became popular. Instead, the earliest Chinese myths center on issues that everyday people had to face. One example involves a man named Yu.

The Legend of Yu

Flooding worried Emperor Shun. The Yellow River and its springs had overflowed, destroying farmland and putting people in danger. So the emperor consulted his advisors to find a way to stop the flooding. They all agreed that a man by the name of Yu, who could transform into a dragon or a bear, was the only one who could succeed where others had failed.

Yu's own father, Kun, had tried for ten years to build dams and dig ditches without success, the waters always overflowing any attempts to tame them. Upon the emperor's request, Yu came up with a plan. Yu knew that in Heaven there was a special "swelling soil" that multiplied when it touched water. He humbly asked the gods for the soil, and received it with their blessings. With the help of a winged dragon, Yu flew all over the land, using the soil to plug 250,000 springs, the sources of the water.

That problem solved, Yu turned his attention to the Yellow River and the flood waters that still remained. Amazingly, the solution came not from the mind of Yu, but in the form of a map on the back of a tortoise shell. Using the map, and later the help of the gods, Yu and his dragon were able to dig irrigation ditches that finally diverted the water off the farmland.

Figure 187 To prevent flooding of the north China plain by the Yellow River, Yu the Great organized large-scale projects in irrigation and dike-building. Yu then went on to found the first dynasty of China, the Xia.
and saved the day. As a reward for his diligence, upon the death of Shun, Yu the Great became the first emperor of the Xia dynasty.

The Real Xia

Although the myths of Yu and others made great stories, for centuries they had no archaeological evidence to support them. So what is actually known about ancient China? Until 1928 when archaeologists excavated a site at Anyang in the Henan Province of China, no one knew what parts, if any, of these ancient tales were true. However at Anyang, remnants of cities, bronze tools, and tombs were found in the same places spoken of in ancient Chinese myths. These sites and artifacts proved the existence of the first dynasty established by Yu.

The Xia were able to harvest silk for clothing and artwork, created pottery using the potter’s wheel, and were very knowledgeable about farming practices such as irrigation. The Xia dynasty lasted approximately five hundred years, from the 21st to the 16th century B.C.E. It connected the Longshan people, who were the earliest culture of China known for their black-lacquered pottery, with the Shang dynasty that came much later.

An Impenetrable Land

The Chinese are the longest continuous civilization in the world, spanning 7,000 years of history. How could Chinese civilization survive when so many other cultures have come and gone? One possible answer lies in the physical geography of the region.

With vast mountain ranges including the Himalayas standing impositively to the southwest, the Gobi Desert to the north, and the Pacific Ocean stretching out to the east, the Chinese were in relative isolation from the rest of the world until the 1800s. In fact, because they believed they were in the middle of the
world, surrounded by natural barriers on all sides, the Chinese thought of themselves as "Zhong Guo" — the Middle Kingdom.

Foreign invaders had great difficulty reaching China, and many of the most important discoveries, inventions, and beliefs of the West remained unknown to the Middle Kingdom. In the early years of their civilization, the Chinese developed a unique writing system, began using bronze for both tools and art, and created folk religions that later evolved into the philosophies of Taoism and Confucianism. These discoveries enabled the Chinese to develop a culture unlike any other the world has ever known.

9b. Shang Dynasty — China's First Recorded History

Recorded history in China begins with the Shang dynasty. Scholars today argue about when the dynasty began, with opinions ranging from the mid-18th to the mid-16th century B.C.E. Regardless of the dates, one event more than any other signaled the advent of the Shang dynasty — the Bronze Age.

It was during the Shang dynasty that bronze working became common. Thousands of artifacts from the ruins of Yin, the last capital of the Shang, were unearthed in the late 1920s and '30s. Bronze vessels for drinking were used in ritual ceremonies, while bronze chariots and axes were used in battle. As the metal was associated with royalty, the tombs of Shang kings contained hundreds of small bronze objects, even including hairpins.

One of the few undisturbed tombs was that of the legendary Fuhao, wife of Wu-ting. Her tomb by itself contained 468 works of bronze and 775 pieces of jade. Some of the bronze objects found contained the first Chinese characters ever written. Very simple in nature, these characters often represented the name of the object's owner.
Them Bones

In addition to bronze, examples of the early Chinese writing system can be found on oracle bones, another type of artifact characteristic to the Shang dynasty. Ancient Chinese priests commonly used tortoise shells and cattle bones to answer questions about the future. They interpreted the cracks formed by holes punched in the bones. Oracle bones also served as a way for the priests to write down the history of the dynasty and the timeline of kings.

Today, over 150,000 oracle bones have been recovered. Unfortunately, many more artifacts containing early Chinese writing have been lost. Writing made on books of bamboo strips and silk could not survive centuries of burial in the earth. Many of those that did survive were burned by the first emperor of the Ch'in dynasty in approximately 100 B.C.E.

Shang Society

From what has survived archaeologists and historians have learned much of the Shang culture. The Shang were skilled workers in bone, jade, ceramics, stone, wood, shells, and bronze, as proven by the discovery of shops found on the outskirts of excavated palaces. The people of the Shang dynasty lived off of the land, and as time passed, settled permanently on farms instead of wandering as nomads.

To guard against flooding by the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers, the ancient Shang developed complex forms of irrigation and flood control. The farming of millet, wheat, rice, and barley crops provided the major sources of food, but hunting was not uncommon. Domesticated animals raised by the Shang included pigs, dogs, sheep, oxen, and even silkworms.

Like many other ancient cultures, the Shang created a social pyramid, with the king at the top, followed by the military nobility, priests, merchants, and farmers. Burials were one way in which the social classes were distinguished. The elite were buried in elaborate pit tombs with various objects of wealth.
for a possible use in the afterlife. Even an elephant was found among the ruins of an ancient tomb. The people who built these tombs were sometimes buried alive with the dead royalty. The lesser classes were buried in pits of varying size based on status, while people of the lowest classes were sometimes even tossed down wells.

**Beginning to Believe**

All of the classes however had one thing in common — religion. The major philosophies to later shape China — Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism — had not yet been formed. Folk religion during the Shang dynasty was polytheistic, meaning the people worshipped many gods.

Ancestor worship was also very important to the Shang. It was thought that the success of crops and the health and well-being of people were based on the happiness of dead ancestors. If the ancestors of a family were pleased, life for that family would be prosperous. If the spirits were not pleased however, great tragedies could occur.

In addition, the god worshipped by everyone during the Shang dynasty was Shang Ti, the "lord on high." Shang Ti was believed to be the link between people and heavenly beings. The souls of ancestors, it was thought, visited with Shang Ti and received their instructions from him. It was therefore very important to make sure that Shang Ti was happy. This was done with various rituals and prayers, offerings, and sometimes even human sacrifices.

The last king of the Shang dynasty, Shang Chou, was a cruel man known for his methods of torture. The dynasty had been weakened by repeated battles with nomads and rivaling tribes within China. Shang Chou was ousted by the rebel leader Wu-Wang in 1111 B.C.E.

**9c. Han Dynasty — Cultural Heights**
After the fall of the Shang dynasty in 1111 B.C.E., the succeeding dynasties of the Chou (1111-221 B.C.E.) and the Ch'in (221-206 B.C.E.) continued the great advances made by the early Chinese. Building techniques improved, and the use of iron became common. A system of hydraulics was used to dig riverbeds deeper, reducing the number of floods that destroyed farmland and endangered lives.

However, during these dynasties there were also times of great disunity. Feudalism became popular during the Chou dynasty, a practice in which the king shared his power with lords, who in turn paid the king for their lands and titles. As the Chou dynasty weakened, lords fought among themselves. This Warring States period (403-221 B.C.E.) only ended when all of northern China was united under the Ch'in regime.

Although the Ch'in created needed change in China's government, they were harsh leaders. They supported the idea of Legalism, which taught that human nature could not be trusted, and only with strict laws and severe penalties could society be successful. After only fifteen years, the Ch'in dynasty collapsed, replaced by Liu Pang of the Han. It was he who gained control over the border states, and established one of the most successful periods in Chinese history, the Han dynasty, in 202 B.C.E.

The Rise of the Han
The Han dynasty immediately restored feudal lords to their positions of power. The Chinese people prospered in peace once again. Paper and porcelain were invented during the Han dynasty, as was the wheelbarrow. Legend states that paper was first created in 105 C.E.,
but archaeological evidence suggests that it was in use up to 200 years earlier. In comparison, paper was not widely circulated in the West until 1150 C.E., over one thousand years later.

![Figure 196 The 7,000-mile Silk Road flourished during the Han dynasty, allowing trade between China and India. - Mike Dowling, "The Electronic Passport to the Silk Road."](image)

The major achievements of the early Han dynasty revolve around the first emperor to reign under the Mandate of Heaven, Wu Ti. Emperors were under heaven's rule according to the mandate. Their success was based on the opinion of the gods. If the gods became unhappy with an emperor's rule, it was believed that signs would be sent to the Chinese people, usually in the form of natural disasters. In this event, the emperor lost the Heavenly Mandate, and was usually overthrown.

The gods must have looked upon Wu Ti favorably, as he reigned for 54 years from 140-87 B.C.E, expanding the borders of China into Vietnam in the south and Korea in the north. However, it was his westward expansion that most influenced what became the Han Empire.

**Westward Ho!**
Wu Ti had heard rumors of powerful and wealthy lands to the west. In 138 B.C.E. the emperor sent the explorer Chang Ch’ien with a party of 100 men to search the western frontier. Thirteen years later, Chang Ch’ien returned with only one of the original 100 men and told amazing stories of capture and
imprisonment in central Asia. Although he did not succeed in reaching the lands of Persia, Arabia, or the Roman Empire, Chang Ch’ien did learn plenty about them.

Wu Ti sent Chang Ch’ien to central Asia again a few years later, this time to make alliances using gifts of cattle, gold, and silk. Wu Ti’s chief historian, Ssu-ma Ch’ien, later kept a record of these journeys and much more in his work called the Shiji (Records of the Historian). The Shiji chronicles the history of China from the Xia dynasty up to the reign of Wu Ti.

Chang Ch’ien’s journeys began the widespread use of the trade route known as the Silk Road. Reaching as far west as the Caspian Sea, goods such as ivory, glass, wool, tapestries, exotic fruits and vegetables, precious metals and stones, even animals such as elephants and lions were imported into China. In return, foreign traders received furs, spices, jade, iron, ceramic, and bronze objects, as well as the much sought after silk. By the 1st century C.E., silk clothing became the style and obsession of Roman citizens.

**Another Brick in the Wall**

Arguably the greatest achievement in all of Chinese history continued during the Han dynasty — the construction of the Great Wall of China. Originally begun during the Ch’in dynasty, Wu Ti restored the wall, and continued it another 300 miles into the Gobi Desert to protect against attacks from central Asia. The Gobi Desert section was made with stamped earth and reinforced with willow reeds.

Yet the Great Wall has survived 2,000 years of invasion and erosion, spanning over 4,500 miles through northern China at the time of its completion. It is now regarded as one of the wonders of the world. The Great Wall came at a high price. At the height of its construction, one mile of wall was created each day, at an average cost of 10 lives per mile.

**Highs and Lows**

Acupuncture, the piercing of needles into the skin, became popular in the 2nd century C.E. along with herbal medicine as a treatment for common illnesses. The Han also studied
in astronomical matters. They believed comets, eclipses, and other unusual celestial events were ominous signs that could be used to predict future disasters. They created atlases depicting the shapes of 29 different types of comets as well as the accurate positions of Venus, Jupiter, and Saturn. Sunspots and exploding stars called nova were also first discovered during the Han dynasty.

With only a short interruption by the reformer Wang Mang from 9-24 C.E., the Han dynasty lasted for well over 400 years. But by the beginning of the 3rd century C.E., the corruption in government that signaled the decline of nearly every Chinese dynasty had taken its toll. This corruption combined with political struggles and an increasing population, making a unified China impossible. The Han dynasty of China finally lost its Heavenly Mandate in 220 C.E., beginning nearly 400 years of political chaos.

9d. Tang Dynasty — The Golden Age

In the chaos that reigned after the fall of the Han dynasty in 220 C.E., no one knew if a unified China would ever again be possible. Warring clans, political murders, and foreign invaders characterized the next four centuries in which the Three Kingdoms (220-280 C.E.), the Western and Eastern Jin (265-420 C.E.), and the Northern and Southern dynasties (420-588 C.E.) did little to build upon the accomplishments of earlier Chinese culture.

The feuding clans of China were finally united once again in 589 C.E. by Wen-ti and the Sui dynasty (581-617 C.E.), a ruthless leadership often compared to the Legalist Ch'in regime. The Sui dynasty accomplished great feats, including another restoration of the Great Wall of China and the construction of the Great Canal linking the eastern plains to the northern rivers. However, the Sui taxed peasants heavily, and forced them into hard labor. Lasting only 36 years, the Sui dynasty weakened after suffering heavy losses in fighting against Korea. It fell apart when the general population lost faith in the government and revolted.
History Repeating
The rise of the Tang dynasty in China mirrored the rise of the Han over 800 years earlier. Like the Han dynasty before them, the Tang dynasty was created after the fall of a ruthless leadership. And like the Han before them, the Tang dynasty had their own powerful leader, Emperor Tai-tsung.

The first emperor of the Tang dynasty, Kao-tsu (618-626 C.E.), continued many of the practices begun during the Sui dynasty. He granted equal amounts of land to each adult male in return for taxes and continued the trend of local government rule. Kao-tsu also created a monetary system of copper coins and silk ribbons. He wrote a set of laws, revised every two decades that lasted into the Ming dynasty of the 14th century.

One of Kao-tsu’s sons, General Li Shih-min, succeeded in eliminating all political rivals of the Tang and established firm control of the Tang dynasty over the newly reunified China. He then proceeded to murder his brothers, and forced his father to abdicate the throne to him. Preferring his temple name, Tai-tsung took the throne in 626 C.E. The Golden Age of China had begun.

The Fruits of Labor
Tai-tsung maintained many of the political policies already in place. He shrank the government at both the central and state levels. The money saved by using a smaller government enabled Tai-tsung to save food as surplus in case of famine and to provide economic relief for farmers in case of flooding or other disasters. Civil exams based on merit were used once again and resulted in wise court officials.

The only major military pressure came from the Turkish frontier, but the Turks were defeated by 657 C.E., beginning 150 years of Tang control over the region. As a result of these improvements and victories, the common people were successful and content. It was during this successful era that woodblock printing and gunpowder were invented.
Meanwhile, the borders of the Tang dynasty expanded far into Korea and central Asia. China became even larger during the Tang dynasty than it had been during the Han. The Chinese regularly communicated with lands as far west as Persia, present-day Afghanistan, and the Byzantine Empire. Goods and, more importantly, ideas continued to be exchanged on the Silk Road.

The Melting Pot Boils Over
The capital cities of the Tang dynasty, Ch'ang-an and Loyang, became melting pots to many cultures and a large number of beliefs such as Zoroastrianism and Islam. Buddhist missionaries had begun the difficult journey from northern India to China as early as the 1st century C.E., but it was not until the Tang dynasty that Buddhism reached its height of popularity in China. By the mid-7th century, new Buddhist schools of thought had developed a distinctly Chinese flavor, including the Ch’an school, which later evolved into Zen Buddhism.

However, during the late Tang period the economy was suffering. The emperor Wu-tsung, a devout Taoist, attempted to eliminate Buddhism from 843 to 845 C.E. by closing thousands of temples in order to take control of their wealth. Although the attempt to destroy Buddhism lasted only a short time, the religion never recovered, instead beginning a steady decline in China. The decline of Buddhism and conflicts between the Chinese and foreign traders marked the beginning of a change in Chinese attitudes. After hundreds of years of cultural exchange, by 836 C.E. no foreigners would be welcome in China.
Figure 202 The Tang dynasty was a period of expansion, especially in trading with foreign lands. Caravan routes traveled as far as Syria for items ranging from glassware and tapestries to jasmine and other exotic herbs.

Poetic Justice
A great contribution of the Tang dynasty came years after the death of Tai-tsung, when the dynasty was at its political and economic height. The Tang dynasty was a golden age of art and literature for the Chinese. Li Po, Tu Fu, and Wang Wei were poets renowned for the simplicity and naturalism of their writings. The poetry and art of the times however were deeply affected by the rebellion of northeastern troops against court officials in the capital city of Ch'ang-an in 756 C.E. Named after the leader of the rebel troops, the An Lushan Rebellion caused the deaths of countless people, including members of the royal family, and marked the beginning of the end for the Tang dynasty.

The decline of the dynasty increased during the second half of the 9th century as factions within the central government began feuding. These feuds led to political plots and scandals, with assassinations not uncommon. The dynasty split into ten separate kingdoms as the central government weakened. After a series of collapses beginning around 880 C.E., northern invaders finally destroyed the Tang dynasty. The Golden Age was over.

9e. Taoism and Confucianism — Ancient Philosophies
"Those who know do not say; those who say do not know." - Lao-tzu

"The superior men are sparing in their words and profuse in their deeds." - Confucius

The 6th century B.C.E. was an amazing time of philosophical growth for ancient China. It was during that time that the two most influential spiritual leaders native to China, Confucius and Lao-tzu, are thought to have lived and taught. The philosophies that they practiced, Taoism and Confucianism, existed simultaneously in dynastic China, attracting countless numbers of followers over the past 2,500 years. The fascination of both the Eastern and Western worlds with these two legendary figures and the philosophies that they created remains strong.

The Old Master

Lao-tzu, translated as either "Old Master" or "Old Boy," is believed to be the author of Taoism. Very little is known of his life; he may not even have existed. According to myth, at his birth around 604 B.C.E., Lao-tzu came from the womb as an old man, white-haired and full of wisdom. He eventually took a position as head librarian of the Imperial Archives.

Saddened by society's lack of goodness, Lao-tzu decided to leave his home in Luoyang to live out the rest of his life in quiet and solitude somewhere beyond the Great Wall of China, possibly near Tibet. As he passed through the city gates for the final time, the gatekeeper asked Lao-tzu to write down his parting thoughts. The "Old Master" agreed, and three days later returned with a small book. Lao-tzu then left civilization, never to return. His writings were titled the Tao Te Ching, and became the most important text of Taoism.

According to Taoism, the entire universe and everything in it flows with a mysterious, unknowable force called the Tao. Translated literally as "The Way," the Tao has many different meanings. It is the name that describes ultimate reality. The
Tao also explains the powers that drive the universe and the wonder of human nature. Taoists believe that everything is one despite all appearances. Opinions of good and evil or true and false only happen when people forget that they are all one in the Tao. Therefore, it is the aim of Taoists not to forget, and if forgotten to remember that oneness. However, Lao-tzu reminds believers that the Tao is difficult to grasp: "the Tao that can be spoken is not the true Tao."

Over time a Taoist religion evolved, becoming somewhat different from the philosophy of Taoism just described. While religious Taoism held some of the same beliefs, it also called for worship of many gods and ancestors, a practice that began during the Shang dynasty. Other religious practices included the cultivation of bodily energy called "chi," the creation of a system of morals, and use of alchemy in attempts to attain immortality. The folk religion of Taoism became popular after its adoption by China as the state religion in 440 C.E., and continues to be practiced even to the present-day.

**Confucius and the Analects**

The other driving philosophy of dynastic China was created by a politician, musician, and philosopher named Confucius. Born in 551 B.C.E., Confucius wandered throughout China, first as a government employee, and later as a political advisor to the rulers of the Chou dynasty. In later life, Confucius left politics to teach a small group of students. After his death in 479 B.C.E., the ethics and moral teachings of Confucius were written down by his students to become the *Lun-yü*, or *Analects*. Many of his clever sayings are still followed today. "It is as hard to be poor without complaining as to be rich without becoming arrogant."

Learning to be human was the goal of Confucianism. According to Confucius, each person should act with virtue in all social matters; family, community, state, and kingdom, to ensure order and unity. Man's virtue in all its forms is called "jen." "Jen" is all encompassing and unable to be defined, in some respects similar to the Tao. Confucian ceremonies contained many rituals based in the Five Classics, especially the *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*. Procedures for birth, marriage, and death were rigid and specific. For
example, according to Confucian funeral tradition, a willow branch is always carried behind the body of the deceased symbolizing the soul of that person.

However, by far the most influential aspect of Confucianism remains the Analects: "Not to teach a man who can be taught, is to waste a man; to teach a man who cannot be taught, is a waste of words. The wise will lose neither men nor words." It was sayings such as this one that made Confucianism the social philosophy of China from the Han dynasty in 202 B.C.E. until the end of dynastic rule in 1911.

Rival Philosophies
Taoism and Confucianism have lived together in China for well over 2,000 years. Confucianism deals with social matters, while Taoism concerns itself with the search for meaning. They share common beliefs about man, society, and the universe, although these notions were around long before either philosophy. Both began as philosophies, each later taking on religious overtones. Legend states that Confucius and Lao-tzu did in fact meet to discuss the Imperial Archives. Lao-tzu was unimpressed by the beautiful robes worn by Confucius, and did not agree with looking back on the past. "Put away your polite airs and your vain display of fine robes. The wise man does not display his treasures to those he does not know. And he cannot learn justice from the Ancients."

Regardless of the disagreements between Lao-tzu and Confucius, both Taoism and Confucianism have served as guides. They have led China through the peaks and valleys of its vast history, the longest continuing story on the planet.

10. Japan: An Island Nation

Japan is a land of contrasts.

Ultramodern skyscrapers tower over ancient shrines and temples. The latest styles from Paris or Milan are tastefully displayed alongside traditional silk kimonos. The high-speed
Shinkansen bullet train thunders past a medieval castle that still looks fit enough to house a feudal lord and his devoted retainers.

Are these signs of a culture that cannot make up its mind? Hardly. Although high technology and modern conveniences have come to dominate Japanese life, the past is alive and well in the so-called Land of the Rising Sun.

But what's behind this sobriquet? Surprisingly, quite a lot. The name "Japan" (Nihon in Japanese) is a European mispronunciation of the Chinese term for "Land of the Sun's Origin," the old name by which the ancient Chinese referred to the islands lying to their east, the direction from which the sun seemed to rise.

The Archipelago

Today, this chain of almost 7,000 large and small islands, collectively called the Japanese archipelago, sweeps down from the eastern tip of Siberia in the north to the northern edge of Taiwan in the south.

Comparing this impressive stretch to the lengthy eastern coast of the United States, Japan would extend from Maine to Miami. With a total land area that is slightly smaller than California, Japan is a very long but also very skinny country.

The largest and most notable parts of the island chain are the vast agricultural island of Hokkaidô, the main island of Honshû, the small but spirited island of Shikoku, the historically significant island of Kyûshû, and the tropical paradise of Okinawa.

As part of the volcanic Ring of Fire that encircles the Pacific Ocean, Japan has its share of volcanoes, earthquakes, and tsunami. Mountains define the lay of the land: 80 percent of
the country is too mountainous to be suitable for agriculture.

Japan's rocky terrain impeded smooth transportation and easy communication among different parts of the land, especially in earlier times. These difficulties contributed to a sense of regionalism that later played a significant role in Japan's feudal period.

**Perfect Proximity**
Japan's location just off the fringe of continental Asia made it an ideal place for its unique culture to develop. The islands are situated close enough to China and Korea to benefit from the cultural and technological innovations of those great civilizations, but far enough removed across perilous seas to resist significant political and military domination from the two powers.

Japan has been commonly viewed as an isolated island nation with a single language and culture shared by a uniform population. From ancient times, though, Japan has been home to more than one ethnic group.

The Ainu, a race of Caucasoid peoples whose origins are still shrouded in mystery, settled a significant portion of the north.

Korean immigrants have been crossing the sea to reside in Japan ever since they learned the islands existed. Japan's rich history of cultural exchange is not limited to interactions with its Chinese and Korean neighbors. Since the 16th century C.E., Portuguese and Dutch visitors brought European trade and culture to the Japanese isles. This vibrant tradition of international commerce and communication significantly shaped Japan's history and culture.

So, what of this land where the ancient and the present collide every day? Pokémon and fuel-efficient cars are aspects of Japanese culture that can be seen in the modern world. But the ancient history of Japan reveals innovations and traditions that run much, much deeper.

**10a. Japanese Religion and Spirituality**

If a tree falls in the woods and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?
Since ancient times, Japanese philosophers have pondered basic, unanswerable questions about their natural environment. The early Japanese believed that the world around them was inhabited by gods and spirits, from streaks of mist obscuring jagged mountain peaks to water cascading over secluded waterfalls. Almost every aspect of Japan’s stunning natural beauty evoked a sense of awe and wonder among its people.

The Way of the Gods

Ancient Japanese elevated this fascination with nature into what was later called Shinto, the Way of the Gods. This belief system that imbued every mountain, every stream, and even impressive trees with a spirit. These deities, known as kami, were considered cheerful and friendly to humans. If kept satisfied, they would watch over human affairs and refrain from causing natural disasters.

But the kami also would not hesitate to unleash their wrath if humans violated their cardinal rule of physical and spiritual cleanliness. To appease the kami, worshipers avoided defiling holy places by undergoing thorough ritual purification before passing beneath the torii, the gate leading into the sacred precinct of a Shinto shrine. Clean humans meant happy kami, and happy kami meant a peaceful realm.

Although its origins are obscure, Shinto helped forge national and political unity by emphasizing Japan’s divine beginnings through myths and legends. For example, the Shinto creation myth tells of a pair of deities called Izanagi and Izanami who created the islands of Japan when droplets of water dripped down from Izanagi’s spear. After the couple descended from the heavens to live on the islands, they had numerous divine offspring, including the sun goddess Amaterasu, the most important deity in Shinto.

Later generations of Japanese emperors claimed their divinity — and therefore their right to rule — by tracing their imperial lineage back to Amaterasu herself. As a direct descendent of the sun goddess, the emperor became a Living God who was to be worshiped along with his all-illuminating divine ancestor.
The Buddha Has Landed

Shinto was already well established as the national religion when Buddhism was transmitted from China (via Korea) to Japan in the 6th century C.E. As Buddhism gained popularity, it occasionally clashed with Shinto, but it did not displace the pre-existing religion. Rather, the two overlapped and complemented each other.

With its abundant scripture and rigid ethical code, Buddhism used precise terms to articulate concepts that Shinto had left vague. Whereas Shinto was generally life-affirming and flexible about human conduct (except in matters of purity), Buddhist philosophy provided a moral framework for the universe and addressed questions about death, reincarnation, and punishment for wrongdoing that Shinto failed to answer in detail.

The Buddhist teachings of impermanence (that nothing lasts forever) and emptiness (that nothing really has its own substance) became ingrained in Japanese thought and shaped subsequent philosophy, art, and literature.

One Hand Clapping

As in China, Buddhism developed in Japan with numerous sects vying for supremacy. Of the schools that did not die out and still exist today — such as Tendai, Shingon, Nichiren, and Zen — the Zen sect is probably the most distinctive.

The word "Zen" comes from the Sanskrit word dhyana (absorption), which reflects the attitude with which the practitioner should approach his or her pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. This goal is achieved through zazen (sitting Zen), a form of meditation in which the practitioner sits for hours on end in an attempt to free the mind from the fetters of worldly concerns.

A Zen master tries to help a novice break through the delusions and illusions of the mind to discover the true nature of things by employing kôans, seemingly paradoxical or
nonsensical riddles intended to disrupt the mind's normal thinking process. "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" Anyone who has ever been asked this question has experienced the conundrum of a kôan.

A Chinese Flavor
Although Shinto and the various sects of Buddhism have dominated the hodgepodge that is Japanese spiritual life, other belief systems — mostly of Chinese origin — have influenced the way in which the Japanese have viewed the world.

Confucianism, the philosophy and religion based on the ethical and humanitarian teachings of Confucius, gained a foothold in Japan in the 7th century C.E. Its political theories and family values have persisted for centuries, and even became the official ideology of the state during the Tokugawa period (1600-1868).

Other significant belief systems have been Chinese astrology and feng-shui (earth study), as well as a host of other Chinese folk beliefs and practices.

10b. Early History and Culture

With all the technological innovations coming from modern Japan, it's easy to forget that even they had a Stone Age.

From around the middle of the 11th century B.C.E. to 300 B.C.E., Japan was populated by a Neolithic civilization called the Jômon (rope pattern) culture.

This group of hunters and gatherers decorated their pottery by twisting rope around the wet clay, to produce a distinctive pattern. Remnants of their pit-dwellings and enormous mounds of discarded shells mark the locations of their settlements, which were scattered throughout the islands.

But it wasn't until the Yayoi period (300 B.C.E. to 250 C.E.) that Japan became a rice-loving culture. With the transmission of wet-field rice cultivation from the continent,
the Yayoi people followed techniques for irrigation, planting, and harvesting that are still used in modern agriculture.

The Tomb period (250 C.E.-552 C.E.) gets its name from the massive tombs that dot the landscape to this day. The most impressive of these is the awe-inspiring tomb of Emperor Nintoku, who may have reigned from about 395 to 427 C.E. Measuring 2,695 feet long and covering an area of 80 acres, this tomb near Osaka has a distinctive keyhole shape and is encircled by a moat.

**The Land of Wa**

The first written records about and by the Japanese date from this time. Contemporary Chinese histories describe Japan (or the "Land of Wa") as a tributary nation ruled by an unmarried queen named Pimiko who occupied herself with magic and sorcery. Japanese historical chronicles explored the country's origins and elaborated on the legendary roots of the Japanese rulers through stories.

By the Yamato period (552-710), the hundreds of clans scattered throughout the country were unified under a single clan, the Yamato, who traced their lineage to the sun goddess Amaterasu. This connection made them powerful political and religious leaders with the divine responsibility to protect the nation.

**Ten Thousand Leaves**

A notable figure of the late Yamato period was Prince Shôtoku (573-622), a patron of Buddhism and man of letters who governed as regent. Under his rule, Japan based its first centralized government and constitution on Confucian models, Buddhist temples multiplied, and official relations with China expanded through frequent delegations.

The twin influences of Chinese culture and Buddhism define the late Yamato and Nara (710-84) periods. A writing system was developed by adopting Chinese characters to represent the native Japanese language. With this advancement, literature flourished, culminating in the *Manyôshû*, (*Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*), a compilation of
poetry gathered from across the realm.

The expanding impact of Buddhism led to the crowning achievement of Nara culture: the casting of the Great Buddha, a statue 53 feet high and made up of 1,000,000 pounds of metal.

**Vying for Power**

The shift of the capital from Nara to what is now Kyoto marks the beginning of the Heian period (794-1185), a time of increasing political uncertainty but also great cultural achievement. The emperor and various aristocratic families of the court ruled Japan but were often more concerned with aesthetics and political and romantic intrigue than with governing the realm.

The most influential of these families were the Fujiwara, a powerful faction that engaged in marriage politics and manipulated emperors to hold sway at court.

As aristocratic government eroded under the Fujiwara, new forces emerged: the warrior class, headed by the mighty Taira and Minamoto families, slowly extended its power through the provinces and later Kyoto itself. An increasingly powerful Buddhist clergy also asserted itself: politically, by allowing former emperors to take control of temples, and militarily, by organizing armies of "warrior monks" who fought to preserve a temple's interests.

**High Art**

Culture and the arts, however, benefited from the lax rule of the aristocracy. Poets perfected the waka, or Japanese verse, as a literary form, and made it a basis for courtly communication and competition. *The Tale of Genji (Genji Monogatari)* by Murasaki Shikibu, considered the world's first novel, paints a detailed and delicate picture of life and love at court.
Daini no Sanmi

As Mount Arima
Sends its rustling winds across
Ina's bamboo plains,
I will be just as steadfast
And never will forget you.


Aristocratic refinement shaped Japanese etiquette and aesthetics in ways that persist even today. Modern Japanese sigh just as wistfully as their aristocratic Heian ancestors about *mono no aware*, "the fleeting nature of things," even as they make merry and watch cherry blossoms scatter in the breeze.

**10c. Feudal Japan: The Age of the Warrior**

Being a warrior in feudal Japan was more than just a job. It was a way of life. The collapse of aristocratic rule ushered in a new age of chaos — appropriately called the Warring States period (c.1400-1600) — in which military might dictated who governed and who followed.

The samurai warriors, also known as *bushi*, took as their creed what later became known as the "Way of the Warrior" (*Bushidō*), a rigid value system of discipline and honor that required them to live and die in the service of their lords.

If commanded, true bushi were expected to give their lives without hesitation. Any form of disgrace — cowardice, dishonor, defeat — reflected poorly on the lord and was reason enough for a bushi to commit suicide by *seppuku*, or ritual disembowelment. In return for this devotion, the lord provided protection, financial security, and social status —
in short, a reason to live.

The bushi swore unwavering loyalty to their immediate masters in the chain of command. But this wasn't always easy. Frequently, switched loyalties and shifting alliances forced the bushi to decide between obeying the daimyo (baron), or following their more immediate lord.

**Shôgun Might**
The daimyô reported to the shôgun, more out of political and military necessity than out of loyalty. The shôgun became the most dominant feudal lord by subduing the other daimyô and receiving from the emperor the impressive title "Barbarian-Quelling Generalissimo." Not that the emperor wielded any sort of political power — the awesome military might of the shôgun often left the emperor little choice but to grant the title.

The shogunal rule of the bakufu, (tent government) began in earnest with the Kamakura period (1185-1333), when the Minamoto clan defeated its bitter rival, the Taira family.

When Mongol invaders tried to land in western Japan, they were repelled by the Kamakura bakufu — with the help of kamikaze, powerful storms thought to be of divine origin. Despite this seeming divine favor, though, the bakufu could not withstand the unstable political situation on the domestic front.

The next to ascend to power were the Ashikaga, who established the Muromachi bakufu (1336-1573). The third Ashikaga shôgun, Yoshimitsu (1358-1408), was a patron of the arts and oversaw such cultural achievements as the construction of the picturesque Kinkakuji (Golden Pavilion) and the flowering of Nô drama as the classical theater of Japan. The greatest figure in Nô was Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443), whose aesthetic and critical theories defined the genre and influenced subsequent performing arts.

The downfall of the Ashikaga came about with the rise of the first of three "Great Unifiers" who sought to consolidate power. Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582) was a minor daimyô who...
embarked on a ruthless campaign for control that culminated in the removal of the last Ashikaga shōgun.

**Western Influence, Feudal Struggle**

It was under Nobunaga’s watch that Europeans first arrived in Japan, and he took full advantage of their presence. Part of his military success came from his use of firearms, brought to Japan by the Portuguese, which allowed him swift and complete dominance.

Nobunaga’s hostility toward Buddhism, which he expressed by burning countless monasteries and slaughtering monks, made him receptive to the influx of Jesuit missionaries from Spain and Portugal.

When Nobunaga’s tenure ended in betrayal and death, the next leader who rose from the ensuing chaos was Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598), one of Nobunaga’s loyal vassals.

Originally a peasant of humble origins, Hideyoshi surged through the ranks to become a leading general. His hunger for power knew no bounds. He organized two invasions of Korea (both failed) and schemed to make the Spanish Philippines, China, and even India part of his empire.

Hideyoshi’s obsession with complete control pushed him to execute Christian missionaries and even to order the great master of the tea ceremony, Sen no Rikyū (1522-91), to commit suicide for no apparent reason. But because of his peasant origins, Hideyoshi was never able to become shōgun, and instead he became regent to the emperor.

After Hideyoshi’s death, another power struggle ensued, in which two factions battled over the realm. The side led by the powerful daimyō Tokugawa leyasu (1542-1616) prevailed, and within a short time the mighty Tokugawa bakufu was established in Edo — now known as Tokyo. Centuries of strife were finally over; for the next 300 years, peace and order
would rule the land.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tennō (Emperor)</th>
<th>Symbolic ruler of Japan, descended from and representative of Shintō deities; during the feudal period, mostly a figurehead.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shōgun (Generalissimo)</td>
<td>Head of bakufu military government, with the power to oversee national affairs; receives title from emperor; usually the strongest daimyō.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daimyō (Lord of a domain)</td>
<td>Powerful warlord with control over territories of varying size; strength frequently determined by the domain’s kokudaka (tax based upon rice production).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerai or Gokenin (Vassal)</td>
<td>Loyal to the daimyō; receives fiefs or rice stipends from the daimyō; some comparable in strength to lesser daimyō.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bugyō (Magistrate)</td>
<td>Appointed by the shōgun to oversee a specific government post (e.g., finance, construction), a large city (e.g., Edo, Nagasaki), or a region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daikan (Intendant)</td>
<td>Appointed by the daimyō or the shōgun to collect taxes and oversee administration of local regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shōya (Village headman)</td>
<td>Commoner appointed by the daimyō or the shōgun to represent the bakufu at the village level.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**10d. The Martial Arts**

It slices, it dices, it chops, it skewers. The samurai’s sword, or katana, was one of the most elegant and deadly weapons in military history. A warrior’s sword was his most prized possession. More than just the means of his livelihood, it was a symbol of his status.

No true samurai would enter combat by flailing his katana around wildly. A graceful weapon calls for an equally sophisticated way of handling it. Swordsmanship was a crucial skill that required not only combat prowess

![Figure 217 Many of the throwing, grappling, choking, and falling techniques in the martial art of judo were culled from the various forms of jujitsu that existed in Japan since the medieval period.](image)
but also strict discipline and philosophical balance. This made Zen Buddhism, with its emphasis on spontaneity and physical and mental toughness, the ideal philosophical backdrop for a swordsman's training.

**The Mind Is Sharper Than the Sword**

Zen not only helped a warrior solidify his resolve to do battle, it also helped him keep his wits about him. This anecdote about the master swordsman, Tsukahara Bokuden (1489-1571), illustrates the samurai's quick thinking.

As Bokuden was crossing a lake on a ferry, another samurai challenged him to demonstrate his skill. Bokuden coolly responded that he was an adept of the "no sword" method. *"My method consists not in defeating others,"* he said, *"but in not being defeated."*

The other samurai had the ferryman pull ashore to test Bokuden's claim. When the boat reached land, the braggart hopped off and drew his sword. Bokuden took the boatman's pole and shoved the boat back into the lake, stranding the samurai on dry land. Bokuden called to him, *"Here is my no-sword school. I have just defeated you without a sword."*

Although warriors were also expected to be handy with the bow and arrow, the spear and the quarterstaff, it was sword handling that set the elite samurai apart from the common foot soldier.

The fascination with swordsmanship persists to this day. Because waving around an authentic katana is expensive, dangerous, and probably illegal, today people have been get their sword fighting fix through *kendo*.

In this less lethal martial art, opponents wear heavy padding and solid headgear and strike each other with bamboo sticks instead of swords. This way, they can escape combat with only bruises and aches instead of slashes and gashes.
No Sword, No Problem

But the sword wasn't the only weapon in a Japanese warrior's arsenal. The samurai were also proficient in hand-to-hand combat, using ancient techniques collectively known as *jujitsu*. The objective of the various forms of jujitsu was to use an opponent's strength against him by employing handholds and deft maneuvers to throw the opponent off balance.

Judo and aikido, popular throughout the world as techniques for self-defense, were derived from older forms of jujitsu as practiced by samurai masters.

Other forms of martial arts that took root in Japan were imported from Asian neighbors. Most notably, karate, (empty hands), originated in China or India and was transmitted to Japan via the Ryukyu Empire (present-day Okinawa). When that once-independent kingdom was taken over by a daimyo from Kyushu in 1609, the Ryukyuan people were forced to surrender their weapons.

Instead of remaining defenseless, they secretly developed a fighting style that combined their native martial arts with forms from China, such as Shaolin Temple kung fu, to create an effective method of unarmed combat. This did not remain a secret for long, though, and the art of karate spread far beyond the island.

Many of the martial arts that were either developed in Japan or adopted by the Japanese from elsewhere have become a global pastime. Judo is an Olympic sport, and aikido and karate have devoted practitioners throughout the world.

Although the samurai of old have become the new corporate "warriors" of Japanese big business, the flickering embers of the samurai spirit are fanned when someone in the world bows to their sensei (teacher), and learns a grip or form that a Japanese master developed centuries ago.
10e. Life During the Edo Period

Busy streets crowded with pedestrians. Shopping opportunities for all budgets, from large merchant houses that pamper their clientele to vendors hawking their wares on the street. Events for all during the day followed by a vibrant nightlife after the sun goes down. A lively theater scene, with superstars in top acts playing to packed houses.

Sound like a guidebook description of New York, London, or Paris? Perhaps. But these images also depict a typical day in Edo, the bustling capital of the Tokugawa shogunate.

Before Tokugawa Ieyasu, Edo was a remote fishing village of little significance. But once the Tokugawa bakufu moved in, Edo became the center of political and cultural life — so much so that the duration of Tokugawa rule is also known as the Edo period (1600-1868).

A Closed-Door Policy

For the first time in centuries, Japan was relatively peaceful. The strict political and social policies of Ieyasu and subsequent shoguns ushered in a golden age of economic and cultural prosperity. To maintain this so-called Pax Tokugawa, the bakufu instituted its sakoku (closed-country) policy in an attempt to keep foreign powers out of Japan. The Spanish, the English, and the Portuguese were expelled as subversive influences. Christianity was banned, and Japanese Christians were hunted down and persecuted.

But sakoku was far from pure isolationism. Japan still conducted frequent but strictly regulated trade with Korea and China. And not all Europeans were driven out: the Dutch were allowed to maintain a small trading post on an artificial island in Nagasaki harbor.
Figure 221 Dutch traders were the only Europeans allowed to remain in Japan under the Tokugawa shogunate’s sakoku policy, but even they were restricted to Dejima, an artificial island constructed in Nagasaki harbor.

**Samurai Growing Soft**
With peace came a growing problem: a large population of warriors with nothing to do. The official class system sanctioned by the bakufu placed samurai at the top, followed by farmers and artisans, with merchants at the bottom.

![Image of puppet theater](image-url)

Figure 222 Of the many popular entertainments available to the residents of Edo, kabuki was perhaps the most spectacular. Lavish costumes, colorful sets, catchy music, and engrossing plots meant theaters packed with devoted fans.

But social reality contradicted this hierarchy. With growing boredom and shrinking stipends, lower-ranking samurai often found themselves borrowing money from wealthy merchants. Although traditional ideas of status still held, the actual balance of power was beginning to shift.

Merchant prosperity fostered the rise of commoner culture, giving rise to popular entertainments and diversions that even the samurai class couldn't resist.

**Puppets, Poems, Sumo, and Sushi?**
The jōruri, or puppet theater, offered elaborate plots and masterful puppeteering. Puppet theater is one of the most entertaining but technically demanding performing arts.
The greatest jôruri playwright, Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1724), crafted historical dramas and tragic romances that were wildly popular, in his day and beyond.

The flash and excitement of the Kabuki theater drew throngs of enthusiasts, and many performers became full-fledged celebrities. Lead actors were heartthrobs, and male actors who performed female roles — called onnagata — also enjoyed a die-hard following.

Stories of star-crossed romance, betrayal, political intrigue, and love suicides kept the crowds hungry for more.

The likenesses of pop icons such as favorite Kabuki actors and sumo wrestlers could be widely distributed thanks to the development of the woodblock print.

This innovation allowed for mass reproductions of images and text, such as ukiyo-e paintings of the "floating world" — referring to the pleasure quarters of Edo — as well as works of popular fiction.

The more serious literary arts also flourished. The haiku poem — a short verse made up of only 17 syllables — was perfected by Matsuo Bashô (1644-1694) as an elegantly simple way to express subtle and elusive emotions.

An old pond
A frog leaps in
The water resounds.

-Matsuo Basho, 1644-1694
Culinary history was forever altered by the ingenuity of an Edo street vendor named Yohei who came up with the idea of serving raw fish on little slabs of vinegared rice. Although different types of this dish — sushi — had existed in Japan since ancient times, the modern version got its start in Edo, and since then has spread over the globe.

11. Central and South American Empires

"In the romance of the world's history nothing ever impressed me more forcibly than the spectacle of this once great and lovely city overturned, desolate and lost; discovered by accident, overgrown by trees, it did not even have a name to distinguish it." - John Lloyd Stephens, 1839 on first seeing Copan

In 1839, lawyer and writer John Lloyd Stephens plunged into the jungle of Guatemala in search of a lost city. With him he took his English friend, Frederick Catherwood, an artist and architect who could draw ancient ruins with unparalleled precision and grace. Fanciful reports of ruined cities, buildings encrusted with carvings, and stone sculptures of mythical creatures had circulated for years. Catherwood and Stephens came to check if such marvels really existed.

Figure 225 The Inca civilization had a great abundance of gold and silver, even by today's standards. They used this precious metal for art and decoration rather than for coins.

Figure 226 The Maya civilization is renowned for its splendid architecture. Cities and ceremonial centers like the Great Plaza at Tikal are filled with pyramids and ceremonial platforms that required precise planning and sophisticated engineering skills.

They did. In *Incidents of Travel in Central America* published in 1841, Stephens gave a
delightful, touching account of their journey to the ruined sites. Catherwood's engravings provided peerless views of their astonishing discoveries. The book became an immediate bestseller, bringing worldwide attention to the existence of sophisticated civilizations in Central America.

Stephens bought Copan, the first ruined city he encountered, for $50 from a man on whose land the ruined city stood. "I think he was not more surprised than if I had asked to buy his poor old wife," remarked Stephens.

With considerable insight, Stephens grasped that all the sites belonged to a single civilization. Those people were the Mayas, ancestors of the people still living in the Yucatan. And he understood that the strange "glyphs" — boxy images — engraved everywhere, were a form of writing. It took 150 years before experts fully accepted Stephens' ideas and began deciphering what the Mayas had written.

Long Before the Europeans
Today, thousands of ancient sites have been uncovered in Central and South America. Beginning about 9,000 years ago, small bands of hunter-gatherers inhabited much of Mexico. By 2000 B.C.E., they had learned to farm corn, beans, squash, and other foodstuffs.

Along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico between 1200 B.C.E. and 400 C.E., the Olmecs flourished. The first to build ceremonial pyramids, the Olmecs carved portraits of their kings in colossal boulders 6 feet across. By 500 C.E., the people of Teotihuacan in the Valley of Mexico, built the massive Temple of the Sun. Rising 200 feet, its base of 600 feet equaled that of the pyramid of Khufu in Egypt — although it was only half Khufu's height.
These and dozens of others cultures flourished in the centuries before the arrival of Europeans. Although there were differences, all were united by common cultural traits — sun worship, twin calendars of 260 and 365 days, and ritual murder to a pantheon of blood-thirsty gods. And all built their palaces and pyramids using the labor of their people. None had domesticated animals or the use of the wheel.

In the 1500s, when Spanish conquistadors appeared, two vast empires, those of the Aztecs and the Incas, dominated Central and South America. Both possessed divine kings, both were fractured by internal dissent, and both quickly succumbed to the Spanish onslaught. The physical remains of all these cultures lay dormant for centuries, until science and curiosity demanded their exploration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MESOAMERICAN EMPIRE</th>
<th>TIME PERIOD</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>200-900 C.E.</td>
<td>The Yucatan Peninsula, present-day Mexico, Belize, Guatemala</td>
<td>hieroglyphic writing, astronomy, calendar, mathematics, team sports, step pyramids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inca</td>
<td>1200-1532</td>
<td>The Andean region, present-day Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Andes Mountains</td>
<td>Machu Picchu, highway system, Temple of the Sun, efficient central government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aztec (Mexicas)</td>
<td>1345-1521</td>
<td>The central Mexican basin, the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan is present-day Mexico City</td>
<td>historical codices, monetary system, surgical advances, Great Temple of Tenochtitlan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 229 This map shows the major sites of the Olmec and Maya civilizations in Mesoamerica and the modern countries in which they lie.

11a. Blood of Kings: The World of the
Maya

One day in the final century B.C.E., the people of Cerros made a momentous decision. Cerros was a tiny settlement at the edge of Chetumal Bay in what is now Belize. Its inhabitants were traders, fishermen, and farmers. Two thousand years ago, they decided to become a kingdom.

They demolished houses, smashed pottery and other possessions, scattering flowers over them. Amid the ruins they built a brand new city — a sparkling ceremonial center with pyramids, plazas, temples, ornamented stairways and ball courts, presided over by a king and royal court. On the temple terrace they mounted snarling masks of the Jaguar Sun God.

Cerros did not last long. But other great Maya cities soon flourished all across the Yucatan Peninsula. For 700 years — from 900 to 200 B.C.E. — a mighty civilization generated great art, as well as the most brilliant architecture, astronomy, and mathematics the Americas had ever seen.

Maya? Mayan? Mayas?
Which term(s) should be used?

Ethnographers and linguists agree that "Maya" is the best translation from the Spanish and Maya languages, and can be used as either a noun or an adjective.

For example: "Ritual sacrifice was a part of Maya religion." and "Maya temples are masterpieces of ancient architecture."

There’s just one exception to the rule. When discussing more than one Maya, use the plural form "Mayas," as in: "There were five Mayas on each team."

We now return you to your regularly scheduled program, already in progress.
The Maya were a collection of people clustered in city-states. What united them was an idea. For the Maya the world of ordinary living and the Otherworld populated by gods, ancestors, and monstrous things, were equally real. There existed three regions, intricately bound together: the heavens, the earth, and the waters of the Underworld.

At particular places, the power to influence the Otherworld was concentrated. Here the Maya built temples and "mystic mountains" or pyramids at Tikal, Uaxactun, Palenque, Calukmul, Caracol, and Chitzen Itza. At each the Tree of Life sprouted, its roots buried in the dreaded Underworld, its leaves reaching to the gods. Blood of kings or captives provided the sap. In rites performed atop pyramids — those at Tikal reach over 250 feet into the sky — kings spilled their own blood, dragging stingray spines through their tongues to cement their relationship with the powers above. War captives were strapped to altars, their hearts torn from their breasts and offered up as sacrifices.

Even their leisure activities had religious implications. In U-shaped arenas with sloping wall, the Maya played ball. These, too, were religious rites. The ball — one foot across and made of solid rubber — apparently could not be handled. Murals show players wearing protective head- and waistbands, bouncing the ball with bodies and feet across the court. This was no mere sport, but ritualized battle. Losers stood to forfeit more than the lucrative contracts of today's athletes. Often they were destined for the sacrificial altar.

**It's About Time**
Time obsessed the Maya. They recorded the cycles of Venus, which repeats its 'wanderings' across the heavens every 584 days. They measured the length of the solar year to 365.242000 days, very close to the true value of 365.242198 days. This they called the Vague Year.

Alongside ran their Sacred Round of 260 days — 13 months of 20 days each. Their solar year consisted of 18 of these months, totaling 360 days. The five days remaining were considered times of extreme bad luck.

Most modern math uses the base 10 decimal system, one digit for each finger and thumb. The Maya used a base 20, employing both fingers and toes. Unial, the word for their 20-day month, is derived from unic, which meant "human being." To measure longer time periods, Maya mathematicians invented the Long Count, which they expressed as a series of five numbers. For example, 13.0.0.0.0 represented August 13, 3114 B.C. This was 'zero day,' when, they believed, the world began.

Your Average Maya

Such matters preoccupied the kings, scribes, and noble elite. But what of the ordinary people? What manner of lives did they lead? They lived in oval-shaped houses thatched with palm leaves — an efficient design that served to keep out both torrential rain and the summer heat. They farmed the land, raising crops of corn, beans, tomatoes and squash. Dog, deer, rabbit, and hot peppers rounded out their diet.

By the time the first European explorers arrived in the 1500s, Maya civilization had largely run its course. Most major sites had vanished, reclaimed by the forest's enveloping arms. Why? Historians can only speculate. But the story of Copan may hold one answer.

By 700 B.C.E., Copan was entering its greatest period of political and artistic expansion. Building proceeded at such a great pace that precious farmland was consumed. Farmers were forced to grow crops in terraced fields on the surrounding hills. Copan's king conquered nearby Quirigua and installed a Copan lord there. This lord turned on his king and launched a rebellion.

On May 3, 738 B.C.E., the Copan king was captured in battle and sacrificed at Quirigua. Copan never recovered. The building of monuments soon ceased. The land was so
ravaged that only in the 20th century — 1300 years later — have population levels grown back to their former levels.

Too much destruction, too much neglect of the environment, and too much blood.

11b. Deciphering Maya Glyphs

On June 15, 1952, Mexican archaeologists broke through a passageway within the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque. They stumbled into an underground crypt holding a limestone sarcophagus. Inside lay the bejeweled body of a ruler of Palenque, his face covered by a haunting jade mask. Who was this great leader? No one knew. They could not read the hieroglyphics carved on the sarcophagus.

In the past 25 years archaeologists have learned to read what the Mayas wrote. Today we know the names of kings and queens, how they lived, and when they died, transforming our view of Maya culture.

The Mayas covered their buildings and monuments with fascinating signs called glyphs. They also wrote books. Known as codices, they constructed them from fig tree bark, hammered thin. They coated the surface with lime, then folded it back-and-forth like an accordion. Some codices stretched for more than 20-feet. In 1562, at Mani, Bishop Landa destroyed 5000 Maya idols and burned every book he could find. Only a handful have survived.

While destroying Maya culture, Landa also recorded it. He even wrote down their alphabet — 27 Maya glyphs accompanied by their equivalent letters in 16th-century Spanish:

Three As, two Bs, two Xs — it is a curious collection. In the early 1950s a Russian researcher, Yuri Valentinovich Knorosov, figured it out. Bishop Landa had given the name of each Spanish letter and asked his Maya informant to draw its sign.

**Breaking the Codex**

No one took much notice. It was the height of the Cold War and Knorosov was a Communist. Besides the view in the West was that glyphs represented ideas directly. They were "memory-joggers," not words.

The next breakthrough came from another Russian, Tania Proskouriakoff, who grew up in the United States. At Piedras Niegras she studied stelae — carved stone slabs — which the Mayas placed at the foot of important buildings. Each showed a figure, presumably a god, seated in a niche. Proskouriakoff noticed a curious pattern of numbers on them: a date, another date accompanied by a Frog glyph, and a third date with a Toothache glyph. Proskouriakoff grasped their significance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Upended Frog</th>
<th>birth date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Upended Frog" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maya words can be written as a single glyph representing the word, a set of glyphs for each syllable, or a combination of the two. Pakal is the Maya word for shield.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toothache</th>
<th>date of becoming king</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Toothache" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construction</th>
<th>date of placement of stelae</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Construction" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures in the niches were kings — not gods. These were real people, real places, and real events. The Mayas were recording their past. This was their history.

And a bloody history it has turned out to be. There are tales of artfully plotted wars, of battles and the capture of prisoners, of kings dying at their enemies' hands in ritual sacrifice. They have altered our idea of the Mayas from a peace-loving people, ruled by contemplative kings and astronomer-priests, to a collection of fiercely warring city-states.
11c. The Inca Empire: Children of the Sun

When Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro landed in Peru in 1532, he found unimaginable riches. The Inca Empire was in full bloom. The streets may not have been paved with gold — but their temples were.

The Coricancha, or Temple of Gold, boasted an ornamental garden where the clods of earth, maize plants complete with leaves and corn cobs, were fashioned from silver and gold. Nearby grazed a flock of 20 golden llamas and their lambs, watched over by solid gold shepherds. Inca nobles strolled around on sandals with silver soles protecting their feet from the hard streets of Cuzco.

The Inca called their empire Tahuantinsuyu, or Land of the Four Quarters. It stretched 2,500 miles from Quito, Ecuador, to beyond Santiago, Chile. Within its domain were rich coastal settlements, high mountain valleys, rain-drenched tropical forests and the driest of deserts. The Inca controlled perhaps 10 million people, speaking a hundred different tongues. It was the largest empire on earth at the time. Yet when Pizarro executed its last emperor, Atahualpa, the Inca Empire was only 50 years old.

The true history of the Inca is still being written. According to one story, four brothers emerged from Lake Titicaca. During a long journey, all but one disappeared. Manco Capac survived to plunge a golden staff into the ground where the Rios Tullamayo and Huantanay meet. He founded the sacred city of Cuzco.

The Sacred City of Cuzco

Cuzco is nestled in a mountain valley 10,000 feet above sea level. It formed the center of the Inca world. The first emperor, Pachacuti transformed it from a modest village to a great city laid out in the shape of a puma. He also installed Inti, the Sun God, as the Incas' official patron, building him a wondrous temple.

Figure 236 This mummified girl was discovered in 1995 on Mount Ampato in the Andes Mountains of Peru at an altitude of over 20,000 feet. She was sacrificed by Inca priests nearly 500 years ago. The Mountain Institute, West Virginia
And he did something else — which may explain the Inca’s sudden rise to power. He expanded the cult of ancestor worship. When a ruler died, his son received all his earthly powers — but none of his earthly possessions. All his land, buildings, and servants went to his panaqa, or other male relatives. The relatives used it to preserve his mummy and sustain his political influence. Dead emperors maintained a living presence.

A new ruler had to create his own income. The only way to do that was to grab new lands, subdue more people, and expand the Empire of the Sun.

Figure 237 From the heights of Machu Picchu, the entire Urabamba Valley in the Andes Mountains can be seen.

How was this done? Life in traditional Andean villages was fragile. One married couple would help another planting or harvesting crops. They would receive help in their own fields in return. The Inca tailored this practice of reciprocity — give-and-take — to their own needs.

Their cities centered on great plazas where they threw vast parties for neighboring chiefs. Festivities continued for days on end, sometimes lasting a month. Dignitaries were fed, and given gifts of gold, jewels, and textiles. Only then would the Inca make their requests for labor, to increase food production, to build irrigation schemes, to terrace hillsides, or to extend the limits of the empire.

Machu Picchu and Empire
The Inca were great builders. They loved stone — almost as much as they revered gold.
At magical Machu Picchu, a frontier fortress and a sacred site, a mystic column, the hitching post of the Sun, is carved from the living rock. Another slab is shaped to echo the mountain beyond.

Temples and fortifications at Machu Picchu were constructed from vast, pillowy boulders, some weighing 100 tons or more. Constructed without mortar, the joins between them are so tight as to deny a knife-blade entry. A vast labor force was required. There are records of 20 men working on a single stone, chipping away, hoisting and lowering, polishing it with sand, hour-by-hour for an entire year.

A network of highways allowed Inca emperors to control their sprawling empire. One ran down the spine of the Andes, another along the coast. Inca builders could cope with anything the treacherous terrain required — steep paths cut along mountain sides, rope suspension bridges thrown across steep ravines, or treacherous causeways traversing floodplains. Every mile and a half they built way stations as resting points. Bands of official runners raced between them covering 150 miles a day. A message could be sent 1200 miles from Cuzco to Quito in under a week.

Everyone was expected to contribute to the empire. Land was divided in three. One third was worked for the emperor, one third was reserved for the gods, and one third the people kept for themselves. All were required to pay taxes as tribute.

The Inca could not write. Tax collectors and bureaucrats kept track of things with quipu, knotted strings. Varying lengths, colors, knot-types, and positions, enabled them to store enormous quantities of information.

Despite its glory, the Incas was a brittle empire, held together by promises and threats. When Pizarro executed the last emperor, it
rapidly collapsed. Catholic priests demanding allegiance to a new Christian god soon replaced the Children of the Sun. As they had for thousands of years, the hardy peoples of the Andes adapted. They took what they must from their new masters, and held onto as many of their old ways as they could.

11d. The Aztec World

A kingdom of blood.

In 1978, while digging in the basement of a bookstore, workers for Mexico City's power company hit a huge stone disk. Almost 11 feet across, engraved on its surface was the dismembered body of Coyolxauhqui, the Aztec moon goddess. In the center lay her torso, naked but for a belt of snakes. Around the edges were scattered her severed arms, legs and head. She had been slain and cut to pieces by her brother Huitzilopochtli moments after his birth.

Huitzilopochtli, God of the Sun, was the Aztec principal god. He had an insatiable appetite for blood. Under his urging, the Aztecs rose from a band of primitive farmers to become the bloodiest civilization of the early Americas. Many Central America cultures indulged in human sacrifice. The Aztec practiced it on an industrial scale, sacrificing tens of thousands of victims each year.

Tenochtitlan: A Legendary City

The Aztecs dominated the Valley of Mexico for 100 years, until their downfall at the hands of Hernan Cortez and his conquistadors in 1521. They built their capital in the most unlikely of places — the center of a lake. Tenochtitlan was a city surrounded by water, with temples and pyramids — sparkling white monuments and ceremonial squares gleaming in the tropical sun. It sat in Lake Texcoco, crisscrossed by canals and connected by three broad causeways to the shore. Along the lake edge the Aztec created chinampas, or raised fields of rotting vegetation and lake-mud. Extraordinarily fertile, they yielded many...
crops per year.

Figure 241 The Aztec empire of 1519, shown in orange, ruled over vast expanses of central Mexico.

One story central to the Aztec belief system was the tale of their origins. Aztecs believed that one day while doing housework, the ancient Earth goddess Coatlicue (Serpent Skirt) was impregnated by a ball of feathers. Coyolxauhqui and the 400 stars of the southern sky, her children of the night, grew jealous and determined to kill her. They sliced off her head.

Her unborn child, Huitzilopochtli, learned of the plot. He leapt from her body fully grown. In his hand he brandished a club lined with slivers of razor-sharp black volcanic glass called obsidian. He chopped up Coyolxauhqui and her brothers — a metaphor for the way the sun overwhelms the moon and stars when it rises at dawn each morning.

Huitzilopochtli commanded the Aztecs to travel south until they found a cactus with an eagle nesting in its branches. After many adventures and much misery, they discovered an
island with a prickly pear cactus in the year 1 Flint (1324 AD). Sitting upon it was an eagle with outstretched wings and a snake held tightly in its talons. This became the site of Tenochtitlan, now Mexico City. The Aztecs believed the oval red fruit of the cactus symbolized the human heart. Today an eagle, cactus, and snake are the national emblems of the Republic of Mexico.

Rise and Fall of an Empire
Within 50 years of founding Tenochtitlan, the Aztec had extended their rule all across the valley. They formed political alliances with other states, skillfully intermarried with their nobles, and fought tenaciously in battle. Their empire was created by a culture of war. Boys were taught from an early age to be warriors. A warrior who captured four or more prisoners could become a Jaguar or Eagle Knight, and wear brightly colored body-suits of feathers. Girls were prepared for the battle of childbirth. Women who died in labor became goddesses, accompanying the sun across the sky each day from noon until sunset.

By 1519, the Aztec cycle of conquest and exploitation was at its peak. More and more conquered peoples provided tribute, the basis of the Aztecs' immense wealth. More and more prisoners were captured for human sacrifice. Conquistadors were astonished by Aztec marketplaces. They found dealers in gold, silver and precious stones. They saw embroidered clothing and cotton goods and cacao beans for chocolate drinks. Jaguar pelts and deerskins, as well as the brilliant blue plumes of the cotinga bird lined the marketplace. Food included vegetables and fruits, turkeys, young dogs, wild game and many kinds of honey. There were sellers of tobacco, liquid amber, and herbs. All this and more poured into Tenochtitlan. At the same time, the conquistadors heard tales of the day 20,000 captives, some roped together through their noses, wound through the streets to be sacrificed at the top of the Great Temple steps.
Within two years, the Aztec culture was destroyed by the Spanish. Tenochtitlan lay in ruins. There would be no more human sacrifices. And, as the Aztec feared, without life-sustaining blood their gods deserted them and darkness descended on their cosmos.

11e. Clash of Cultures: Two Worlds Collide

Montezuma was the unluckiest of kings. History elected him to oversee the ruin of the last great Central American empire. Other Aztec rulers had encountered setbacks in their conquests. For Montezuma it was different. He confronted an alien empire from across the sea. In its leader, the Spaniard Hernan Cortez, he faced an opponent as astute and skillful as himself. In the end, Cortez proved the more determined of the two.

In the wake of Columbus' historic voyage in 1492, expeditions, especially from Imperial Spain, swarmed into Aztec territory. They came in search of gold and souls — gold to enrich the coffers of the Spanish king (and their own), and heathen souls to rescue for Christianity. Within a generation, America's ancient civilizations were crushed. Both the Aztec and Inca Empires collapsed after campaigns lasting just a couple of years. How did they fall so fast? Historians suggest many causes.

Cannons vs. Clubs

The Spanish army was the most ruthless fighting force on earth. It had not suffered a single defeat for 150 years. The Spaniards possessed cannon and arquebus (primitive muskets) which terrified the American tribes. Horses, which the Aztecs had never encountered, gave the Spaniards greater mobility. Above all there was the Spanish sword. It could kill with a single lightning thrust. Against all this, the Aztec's primary weapons were wooden clubs studded with obsidian glass.

Wars were religious rituals to the Aztecs. A prime objective was the capture of prisoners for sacrifice. During the siege of Tenochtitlan, conquistadors watched from a distance. They were horrified as Aztecs dragged captives up the steps of the Great Temple and ripped out their hearts. The Spanish viewed the Aztecs as savages.
Aztec warriors had several opportunities to kill Cortez. Each time they tried to capture him alive — and each time he escaped. Spaniards killed Aztec leaders whenever they could. Prominent in their brightly feathered costumes, they often led the warrior ranks. With their deaths, ordinary soldiers became demoralized and fled.

**Dissention and Disease**
The Aztec Empire was a loose confederation of allies and subject states. Many deeply resented Aztec rule, their dreaded tax collectors, and the massive tributes they paid. In the Spanish, they saw their saviors. Cortez exploited this unrest with great skill. In his final assault on Tenochtitlan, his band of 900 Spanish soldiers was joined by perhaps 150,000 natives.

The Europeans brought with them diseases such as measles and smallpox against which the American tribes had no natural immunity. They spread like wildfire, killing rulers of both the Aztecs and Incas, along with millions of other people. Finally, the personalities of Montezuma and Hernan Cortez must be considered. Both were gifted generals and wily politicians. But while Cortez was a hardheaded realist, Montezuma was mired in magic and superstition.

**Self-Fulfilling Prophecy**
Long before Cortez landed at Vera Cruz on Good Friday, 1519, portents of doom appeared. A comet "bright as to turn night into day" lit the sky. Dismayed soothsayers and astrologers maintained they did not see it. For this unhelpful approach, Montezuma cast them into cages where they starved to death. Then, an important temple burned. Lastly, hunters brought Montezuma a bird with a mirror strapped to its head. In it he saw large numbers of people "advance as for war; they appeared to be half men half deer."

How much of this is fact? How much is myth? By the time spies brought tales of mountains floating upon the sea (Spanish galleons), and men with "flesh very white...a long beard and hair to their ears," Montezuma's nerves were shattered. Was this the legendary
feathered serpent god, Quetzalcoatl, who having vanished into the eastern ocean, now returned?

Montezuma half-convinced himself Cortez was a god. He sent Cortez the feathery costume of Quetzalcoatl with other gifts, including "twenty ducks made of gold, very natural looking." Cortez took the bold move of marching on Tenochtitlan. With a force of 500 Spanish soldiers and whatever warriors he recruited along the way, he faced Montezuma on the city's southern causeway on November 8, 1519. Montezuma invited him in.

The Ancient Civilizations Crumble
Was this a political blunder or a shrewd tactical move? Once inside the city, Cortez found himself isolated, at the mercy of the Aztec Empire. He quickly rectified matters. In another bold stroke, he kidnapped Montezuma. With 30 seasoned soldiers, he entered the royal palace and gave the Emperor a stark choice — come with us, or die. Montezuma, fearful, puzzled, dejected, disorientated by these men-gods, submitted.

Months later, while trying to calm a rebellion against the interlopers, Montezuma was killed in a firestorm of rocks and javelins. Cortez and his crew barely escaped with their lives.

Nine months later he returned with a huge army of Spaniards and native recruits. First they set siege to Tenochtitlan, denying it food and fresh water. On August 13, 1521, Tenochtitlan fell. A decade later, the Incas, plagued by civil war and decimated by smallpox, faced Francisco Pizarro. They suffered a similar fate.

These great civilizations live on — in their legends, their art and architecture, lovingly reclaimed by archaeologists and historians. Their foods transformed Europe — tomatoes, corn, and potatoes became staple foods of much of the Old World's growing population. A new Atlantic World that incorporated elements of European, African, and American cultures was taking shape.