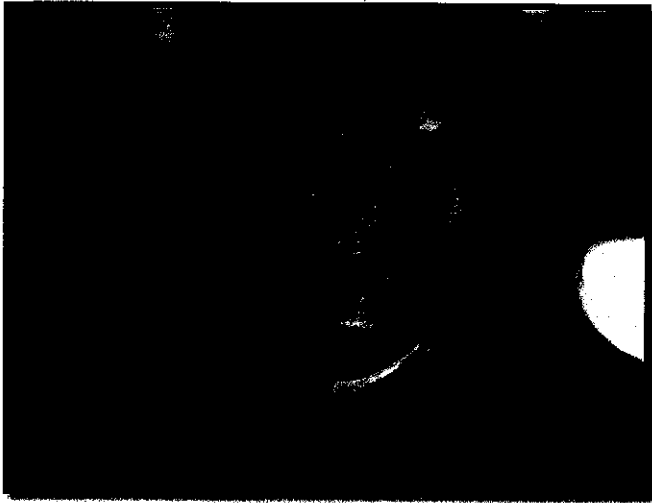


BEFORE HISTORY (Chapter 1)



The first chapter of Traditions and Encounters sets the stage for the drama of world history by presenting the major milestones in the development of humans from their earliest appearance on earth to the dawn of civilization. This chapter addresses the physical evolution of the species and their migrations throughout the globe as well as the revolutionary transformation from all humans surviving by hunting and gathering to the majority living in agricultural societies. The results of this remarkable transformation include

- * An unprecedented population explosion due to the increase in the food supply
- * Permanent settlement in villages and, later, in cities
- * The specialization of labor, which led to the development of craft industries and other professions
- * The opportunity to accumulate wealth and the resulting emergence of social class differences
- * The development of fertility-based religions and the increasing elaboration of religious institutions

THE CHAPTER IN PERSPECTIVE

The history of the earth itself stretches back around five billion years. However, the human chapter of this long story is a relatively short one; the first humanlike apes appeared roughly four million years ago. Relatively recently, the first modern human beings made their appearance about forty thousand years ago. This chapter examines that early period up through the increasing sophistication of the Paleolithic and Neolithic ages, when humans reached the dawn of the establishment of complex societies.

The Evolution of *Homo Sapiens*

The oldest known ancestor of humans is *Australopithecus*, whose remains have been found in the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania. *Australopithecus* ("southern ape") lived from around four million down to around one million years ago. They were hominids, or members of the family *Hominidae*, which includes humans and humanlike creatures. By walking on their hind legs they freed up their hands to produce simple tools. *Australopithecus* traveled distances up to fifteen kilometers and produced tools such as choppers and scrapers.

Eventually *Australopithecus* gave way to the more advanced *Homo erectus* ("upright-walking human"), the first representatives of the genus *Homo*. They existed from roughly 1.5 million years ago down to around two hundred thousand years ago. Possessing a much larger brain than *Australopithecus*, *Homo erectus* was more advanced in many areas. *Homo erectus* produced more sophisticated tools, such as cleavers and hand axes, and learned how to control fire. Their greatest accomplishment, however, was the development of language skills, which allowed for the exchange of complex concepts.

In the long term *Homo erectus* was replaced by a more intelligent human species: *Homo sapiens* ("consciously thinking human"). With a brain almost as large as that of modern humans and with a well-developed frontal region, *Homo sapiens* possessed the intelligence to have a profound impact on the world around them. *Homo sapiens* first appeared roughly 250,000 years ago and had spread to most of the habitable world by around fifteen thousand years ago. They produced knives, spears, and bows and arrows and made themselves such successful hunters that they helped to drive species such as mammoths, woolly rhinoceroses, and giant kangaroos into extinction.

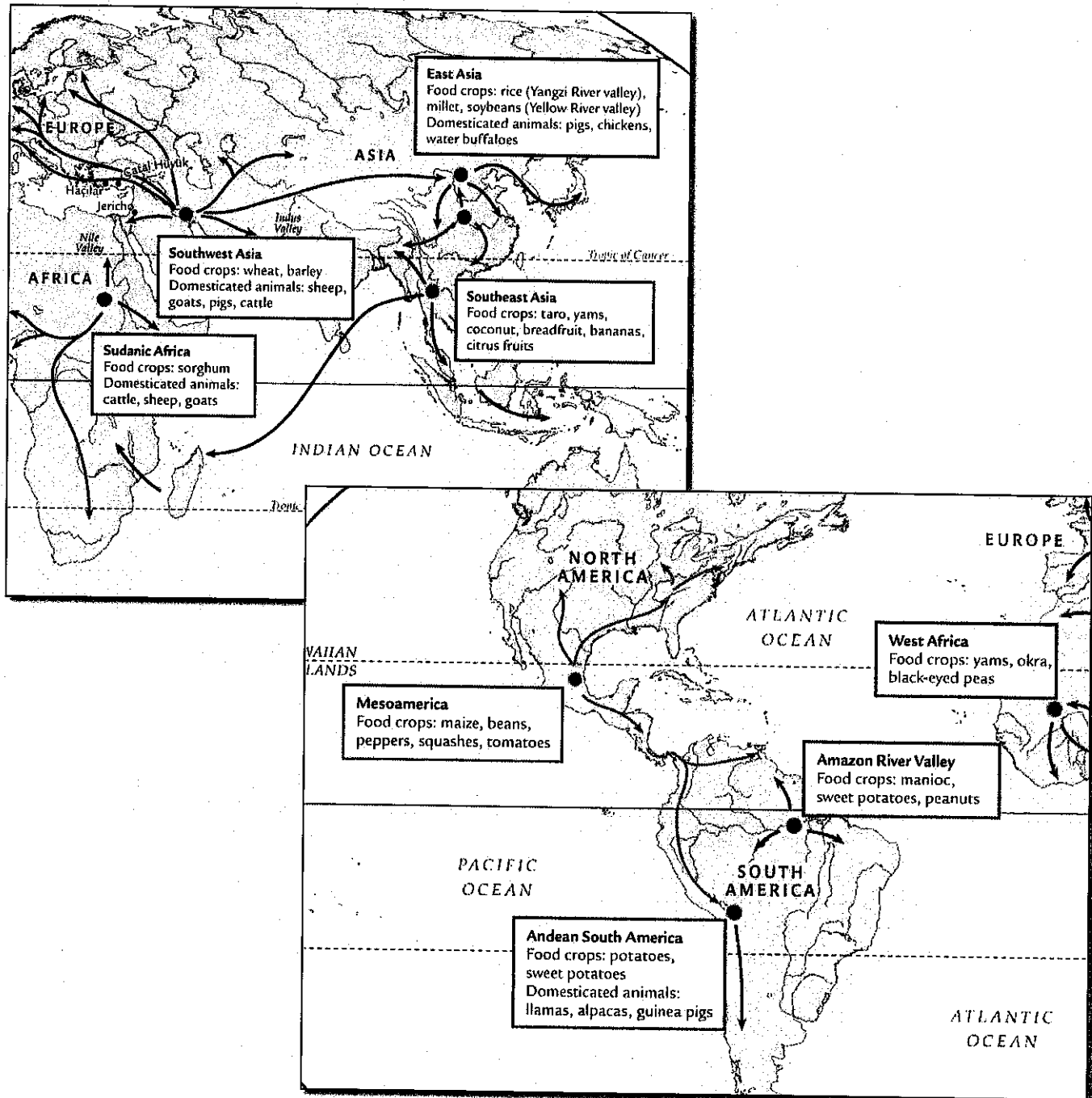
Paleolithic Society

Most of human existence falls into the period known as the Paleolithic age ("old stone age"). This period, ranging from the first appearance of the hominids down to around twelve thousand years ago, is characterized by the existence of humans as hunters and gatherers. Because of their nomadic lifestyle, Paleolithic groups never reached beyond thirty to fifty members. Archeologists and anthropologists believe that there was very little social inequality or gender distinction during this period. Late in the Paleolithic age the Natufian society of the eastern Mediterranean, the Jomon society of central Japan, and the Chinook society of the American Pacific northwest made an early transition from a nomadic to a more settled existence. The most sophisticated people during this time were the Neandertal (one hundred thousand to thirty-five thousand years ago) and the Cro-Magnon (forty thousand years ago). Elaborate Neandertal burial sites like the one at Shanidar cave in Iraq seem to indicate that humans during this period may have wanted to honor their dead; they may also have been preparing them for an existence after death. Cro-Magnon, classified as *Homo sapiens sapiens*, were the first human beings of the modern type. The existence of Venus figurines and the elaborate cave paintings at

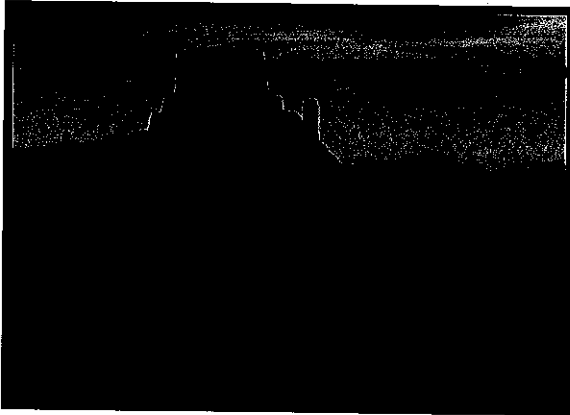
Lascaux in France and Altamira in Spain tell us much about their view of the world. While some of the paintings may have been done for purely aesthetic enjoyment, it is more likely that the depiction of animals was a form of sympathetic magic to ensure success in the hunt.

The Neolithic Era and the Transition to Agriculture

Despite the sophistication of the Neandertal and Cro-Magnon, the Paleolithic age people were still limited by their hunting and gathering existence. The discovery of agriculture (and to a lesser extent the domestication of animals) around twelve thousand years ago helped give rise to the Neolithic age ("new stone age"). Women may have played the most important role in the development of agriculture. This fundamental discovery changed humans from food gatherers to food producers and helped set the stage for the rise of civilization. The mastery of agriculture ensured a more stable food supply and helped fuel a population explosion. It is estimated that the population of the earth increased from five million in 5000 B.C.E. to fourteen million in 3000 B.C.E. Neolithic villages such as Jericho and Çatal Hüyük display an accelerated pace of development, with the rise of such prehistoric craft industries as pottery, metallurgy, and textile production. The eventual rise of true cities, larger and more complex and influential than Neolithic villages, left early humans with all the pieces necessary for the construction of complex societies.



EARLY SOCIETIES IN SOUTHWEST ASIA AND THE INDO-EUROPEAN MIGRATIONS (Chapter 2)



Because of the agricultural transition, societies could sustain larger populations and could become increasingly complex. Thus urban societies emerged in the fourth millennium B.C.E., particularly in the region known as Mesopotamia ("the land between the rivers") along the fertile river valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates. Some of the world's earliest cities developed and prospered in that region. Mesopotamian prosperity and sophisticated culture attracted many migrants and influenced many neighbors, including the Hebrews, the Phoenicians, and the Indo-Europeans. Some of the characteristics of Mesopotamian societies were

- * The establishment of governmental institutions to provide order and stability and to resolve disputes. These institutions evolved into hereditary kingships and, at times, into empires when states sought to expand their dominion to neighboring lands.

- * The emergence of social classes as the result of specialization of labor and accumulation of wealth. The agricultural surplus and the accompanying specialization allowed individuals and groups to produce goods of high quality. The desire for these goods, in turn, helped to stimulate trade with other societies, greatly expanding intercultural contact.

- * Distinctive cultural traditions that developed including a system of writing that would endure for thousands of years and more elaborate religious institutions than had previously existed.

THE CHAPTER IN PERSPECTIVE

Few events in all of history can rival the significance of the rise of the first complex societies in Mesopotamia. Although these early Mesopotamian societies relied on an agricultural foundation, they also developed true cities and lived a thoroughly urban existence. Mesopotamia developed sophisticated political, religious, and social structures that influenced their neighbors and have survived the millennia since.

OVERVIEW

The Quest for Order

Mesopotamia, "the land between the rivers"—in this case the Tigris and Euphrates—was the birthplace of the world's first complex society. The Sumerians of southern Mesopotamia were first in a series of early brilliant cultures in southwest Asia. The cultural and linguistic landscape was enriched and complicated by Semitic migrations. The rapidly growing population of Mesopotamia in the fourth millennium b.c.e. required the establishment of political and social organizations. Without the benefit of earlier examples the Mesopotamians built sophisticated political, social and military structures that allowed them to survive and in fact extend their influence over surrounding regions. Although they never achieved political unification, the Mesopotamian city-states of Eridu, Ur, Uruk, Lagash, Nippur, and Babylon dominated the land between the Tigris and Euphrates for a thousand years. Warfare was common among the Mesopotamian city-states, and occasionally one ruler would temporarily dominate his neighbors and create short-lived empires. In the twenty-fourth century b.c.e. Sargon of Akkad was the first to unite all of Mesopotamia. A more impressive and long-lasting state would arise during the time of Hammurabi (1792–1750 b.c.e.) and the Babylonians. Hammurabi was a powerful ruler, but he is mainly known for his sophisticated law code. Hammurabi's code was based on *lex talionis*, or the "law of retribution," but it was also shaped by class distinctions. Eventually a new power, the Assyrians, rose to dominate Mesopotamia and beyond. Babylon briefly reasserted its prominence in the sixth century b.c.e. under Nebuchadnezzar.

The Formation of a Complex Society and Sophisticated Cultural Traditions

The mastery of agriculture allowed for the development of economic specialization and the expansion of trade. Technological advancements such as innovations in bronze (4000 b.c.e.) and iron metallurgy (1300 b.c.e.), as well as the creation of wheeled vehicles (3000 b.c.e.), also played a role in the expansion of the societies. The Mesopotamians actively pursued long-distance trade with merchants in Arabia, Anatolia, Lebanon, Egypt, Afghanistan, and India.

Another aspect of these developing areas was the increasing distance between the haves and have-nots of society. Agriculture made it possible for individuals to become wealthy. The gulf between rich and poor steadily increased, with the kings and nobles positioning themselves at the top because of their status as warriors. A powerful priestly class, acting as intermediaries

between humans and the gods, also emerged. In addition, there arose a large slave population, drawn mainly from prisoners of war, criminals and indebted individuals. These societies were also highly patriarchal.

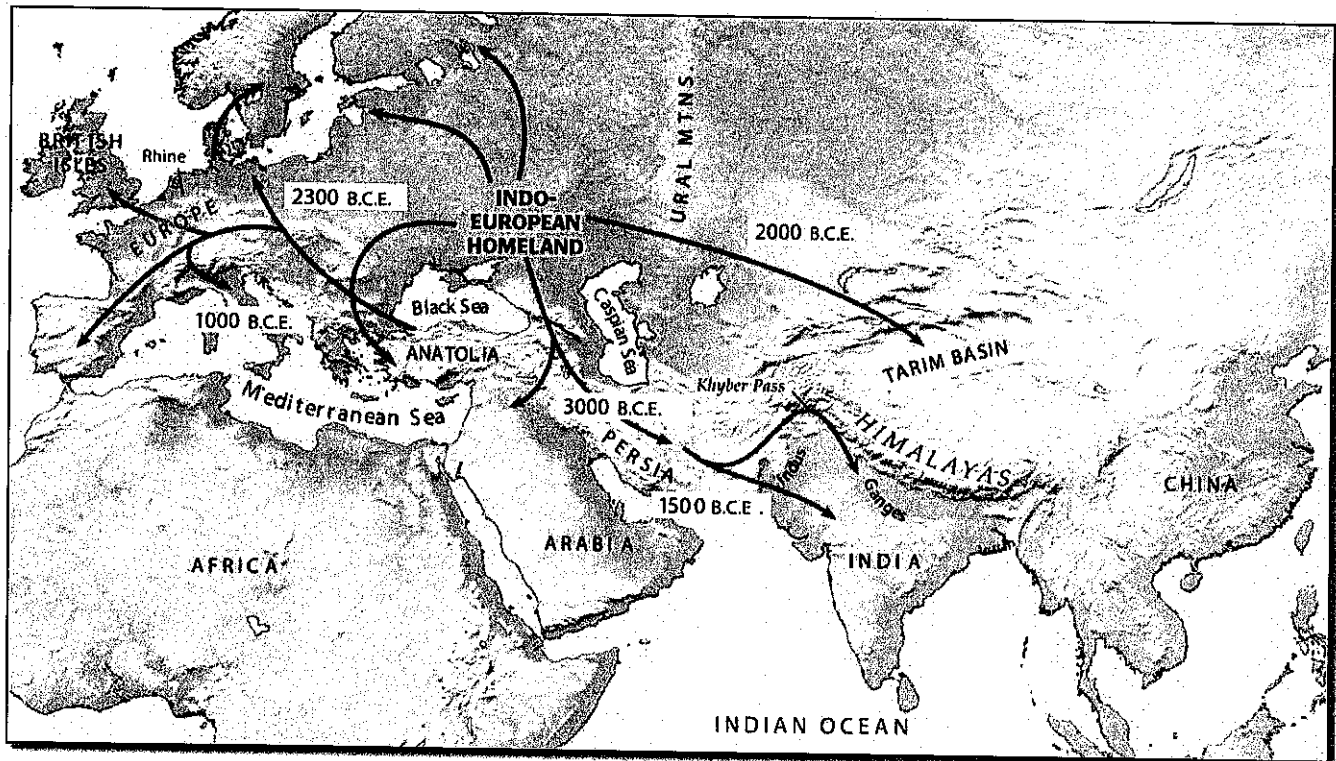
In many ways the evolution of writing formed the foundation of the cultural achievements of these early societies. The Mesopotamians, through cuneiform, began to experiment with a written language during the fourth millennium. The significance of a written language is clearly seen in Hammurabi's law code as well as in early work in mathematics and astronomy and the masterful literary and mythological achievement of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. At the same time, because of the complexity of these systems, writing would for the most part remain the province of the courtly scribes. The written records also give a glimpse at the creation of organized religion in the region. As was the norm in the ancient world, the Mesopotamians were polytheistic, with the gods mainly representing forces of nature. The pessimistic Mesopotamian view of the gods and of people's place in the universe represents the precarious existence of life between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

The Broader Influence of Mesopotamian Society

Seldom in history has a society been as influential as the Mesopotamians. Their relationship with the Hebrews is a classic example. The Hebrew law code was clearly influenced by Hammurabi's code. At the same time, these later societies built their own unique cultural achievements. The staunch monotheism of Moses was unlike anything that came from the Mesopotamians. Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, was both a powerful and a personal God. This view of God would later shape the development of Christianity and Judaism. The Phoenicians, in addition to their role as maritime explorers and merchants, invented alphabetic writing.

The Indo-European Migrations

The Mesopotamians were also influenced by other societies, some from regions far beyond the boundaries of the Tigris and Euphrates. The most important were tribes, speaking a variety of Indo-European languages, who migrated into the region at various times during the second and third millennium b.c.e. The Indo-Europeans, originally from the steppe region of southern Russia, left a common linguistic foundation from India through Western Europe. Languages such as Sanskrit, Old Persian, Greek, Latin, Hindi, and Farsi as well as most European languages were descendants of the Indo-European language. These tribes had domesticated the horse by around 4000 b.c.e. The most influential Indo-European migrants into the area around Mesopotamia were the Hittites, who settled in central Anatolia around 2000 b.c.e. Their construction of light, horse-drawn chariots and their mastery of advanced iron metallurgy made them formidable warriors. These innovations did not exist in a vacuum, however, and other peoples quickly borrowed them. The Indo-Europeans eventually traveled east to the Tarim Basin in western China, west to Greece, Italy, Germany, and France, and south into Persia and India.



EARLY AFRICAN SOCIETIES AND THE BANTU MIGRATIONS

(Chapter 3)



Cultivation and domestication of animals transformed African cultures, like cultures in southwest Asia, into distinctive societies with more formal states, specialized labor, and more elaborate cultural traditions. The region around the Nile River, Egypt to the north and Nubia to the south, supported the fastest growing and most complex societies in Africa. These societies were noted for their

- * Centralized political authority embodied in the absolute ruler the pharaoh in Egypt and the person of the King in the region of Kush (Nubia)
- * Imperialist expansion in the second millennium B.C.E. as the Egyptian army pushed into Palestine, Syria, and north Africa and south into Nubia and as the Kushites later conquered Egypt and expanded their influence to the south
- * Highly stratified and patriarchal societies based on an agricultural economy
- * Development of industries, transportation, and trade networks that facilitated economic growth and the intermingling of cultural traditions
- * Writing systems: hieroglyphic, hieratic, demotic, and Coptic scripts in Egypt and the yet-to-be-translated Meroitic inscriptions in Nubia
- * Organized religious traditions that include worship of Amon and Re, sun gods, the cult of Osiris, pyramid building, and in Egypt, mummification of the dead

At the same time that Egypt and Nubia were becoming increasingly complex societies, the Bantu-speaking peoples to the south were undertaking gradual migrations from their homeland in west central Africa and displacing or intermingling with the foraging peoples of the forests. These migrations, and others, helped to spread both agricultural technology and, after 1000 B.C.E., iron metallurgy throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

THE CHAPTER IN PERSPECTIVE

It could be argued that no society in the ancient world possesses the mystique of Egypt. The image of the pyramids is indelibly etched in our collective imagination. However, Egypt's relation to its African neighbors, most notably Nubia, is often overlooked. Both societies developed an agricultural foundation and later large cities. Both areas developed sophisticated political, religious and social structures. Eventually the Bantu migrations would transform most of Africa.

Early Agricultural Society in Africa

Twelve thousand years ago the area we now recognize as the Sahara Desert was a grassy steppe region with agricultural potential. By around 8000 B.C.E. early inhabitants of the Sudan stretch began to cultivate sorghum and yams. Eventually a climatic change around 5000 B.C.E. forced the inhabitants into the Nile valley. From this point it's really impossible to separate the history of the Nile from that of the Egyptians and Nubians. The Nile fostered trade and early unification. Around 4000 B.C.E. small kingdoms developed in southern Egypt and Nubia. The Egyptians, unlike their contemporaries the Mesopotamians, unified early under the legendary king Menes and eventually created the political and cultural grandeur of the Old (2660-2160 B.C.E.) and Middle (2040-1640 B.C.E.) Kingdoms. As far back as the Old Kingdom Egypt traded, and sometimes fought, with Nubian kingdoms like Ta-Seti and Kush. The Hyksos arrived at the end of the Middle Kingdom and introduced new concepts such as horse-drawn chariots and bronze weapons. Egypt rose to the level of empire during the New Kingdom (1550-1070 B.C.E.). In the eighth century B.C.E. a revival of Kushite power saw King Kashta conquer and rule Egypt for over a century. Eventually a new power, the Assyrians, pushed out the Kushites and brought Egypt into their expanding empire.

The Formation of Complex Societies and Sophisticated Cultural Traditions

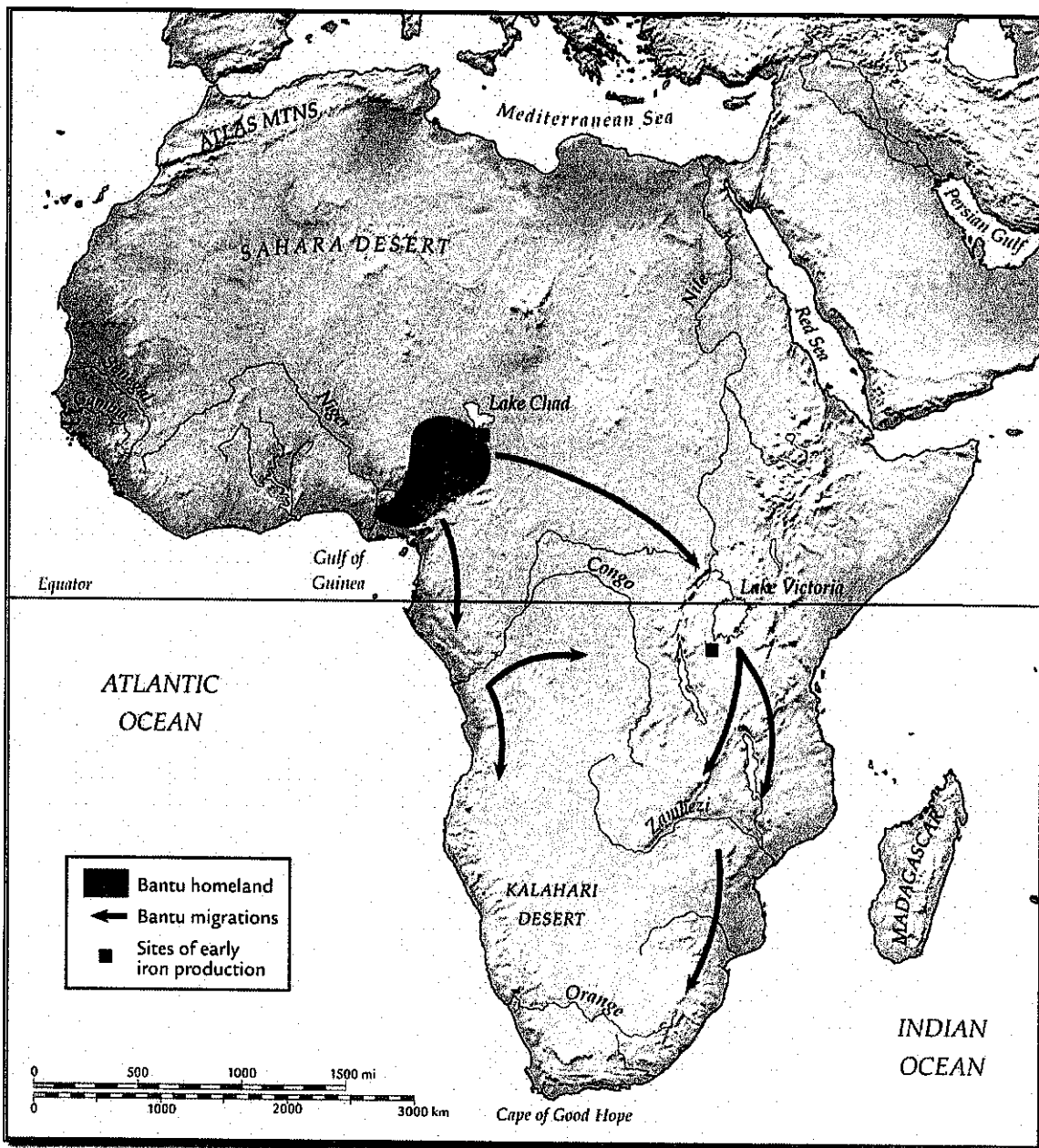
Although the picture is less distinct in Nubia, we know that both societies developed true cities and lived an urban existence. Social classes developed as the gulf between rich and poor steadily increased. As with Mesopotamia, the kings and nobles claimed power and prestige because of their status as warriors. A large slave population developed. Both Egyptian and Nubian societies were highly patriarchal. Some women however, most notably Hatshepsut, became pharaohs in Egypt. Nubia had many female rulers, both through direct rule and indirectly through serving as a regent (*kandake*). The mastery of agriculture allowed for the development of economic specialization and the expansion of trade. Innovations in bronze and iron metallurgy were key. Egyptians actively pursued long-distance trade, ranging from Harappan India to the East African land of Punt.

The Egyptians, through hieroglyphics (Greek for "holy inscriptions"), began to experiment with a written language during the fourth millennium. At the same time, because of the complexity of these systems, writing would for the most part remain the

province of the courtly scribes. Still, education carried the potential for a profitable profession. The Kushites, from their capital at Meroe, copied the Egyptian hieroglyphs and adapted them to create Meroitic writing. Unfortunately, this form of writing cannot be read. Egyptian written records give us glimpse of their religious beliefs. With one brief exception, the Egyptians were polytheistic with the gods mainly representing forces of nature. The stable life of the Egyptians in the isolated Nile valley is expressed in their optimistic view of the gods. Even mummification expressed the Egyptians' desire to continue the pleasure of this life in the next. Pharaoh Akhenaten introduced the revolutionary concept of monotheism with his worship of the god Aten, but this belief was quickly squelched after his death. The lack of written records limits our knowledge of the Nubian religious beliefs, although we get a glimpse at gods such as the lion-god Apedemak and the creator god Sebiuameker. The Nubians, like their northern neighbors, worshipped Amon and built pyramids, albeit small ones.

Bantu Migrations and Early Agricultural Societies of Sub-Saharan Africa

The Bantu, probably because of population pressures, began to migrate out of an area near modern Nigeria and Cameroon around 3000 B.C.E. A mastery of agriculture gave the Bantu an advantage over their hunting and gathering rivals. Agricultural surpluses, along with a mastery of the canoe, obviously benefited the Bantu. During the middle of the first millennium B.C.E. the Bantu mastered iron metallurgy and they spread this skill throughout Africa by their migrations. In the same way the Bantu spread the cultivation of grains and yams throughout east and South Africa. The Bantus also spread their belief in a single impersonal divine force that had created the world and then stepped back from it.



EARLY SOCIETIES IN SOUTH ASIA

(Chapter 4)



An agricultural economy and its accompanying Neolithic communities emerged on the Indian subcontinent some time after 7000 B.C.E. Eventually some of the Neolithic villages further evolved into urban societies. The earliest such society was Dravidian and was known as the Harappan society. It flourished along the Indus River valley in the third millennium B.C.E. Coinciding with the decline of the Harappan society, large numbers of Indo-European migrants were moving into India from central Asia beginning around 1900 B.C.E.. These peoples, known as Aryans, brought with them cultural traditions sharply different from the earlier societies. After a period of turmoil the Aryan and Dravidian cultures merged to generate a distinctive Indian society characterized by

- * Regional states with kingship (rajas) as the most common form of government.
- * The caste system, a complex social class system that served as a vehicle for imparting a powerful sense of group identity, as a stabilizing influence in Indian society and as a foundation for the religious belief system.
- * A distinctive set of religious beliefs encompassing the doctrines of *samsara* and *karma* along with the notion of a universal soul, or *Brahman*.
- * A rich literary religious tradition based on centuries of oral transmission that included such classics as the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*.

THE CHAPTER IN PERSPECTIVE

India is a country with an extraordinarily brilliant, in some ways almost unmatched, cultural and religious tradition. At the same time the Indian political world, marred by fragmentation and invasion, has been chaotic. India is also one of the oldest societies, with the unique Harappan civilization stretching back to at least 2500 B.C.E. The arrival of the Indo-European Aryans around 1500 B.C.E. brought profound political, religious and cultural change. Eventually the combination of native Dravidian and Aryan concepts gave rise to a rich and varied intellectual world. Hinduism, the dominant religion in India, is the best example of this evolving process.

Harappan Society

The Harappan society, centered around the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, extends back to around 3000 B.C.E. While their written records can not yet be read with any certainty, it is assumed that they spoke a Dravidian language. These sites, in relation to their size and layout, are the largest for their age and unlike any other cities of the ancient world. Mohenjo-Daro possessed a population of up to 40,000. Religiously their main gods and goddesses were fertility deities, and there is evidence that these figures and concepts survived in various forms in later Hinduism. Population pressures and ecological degradation led to their decline around 2000 B.C.E.

The Indo-European Migration and Early Aryan India

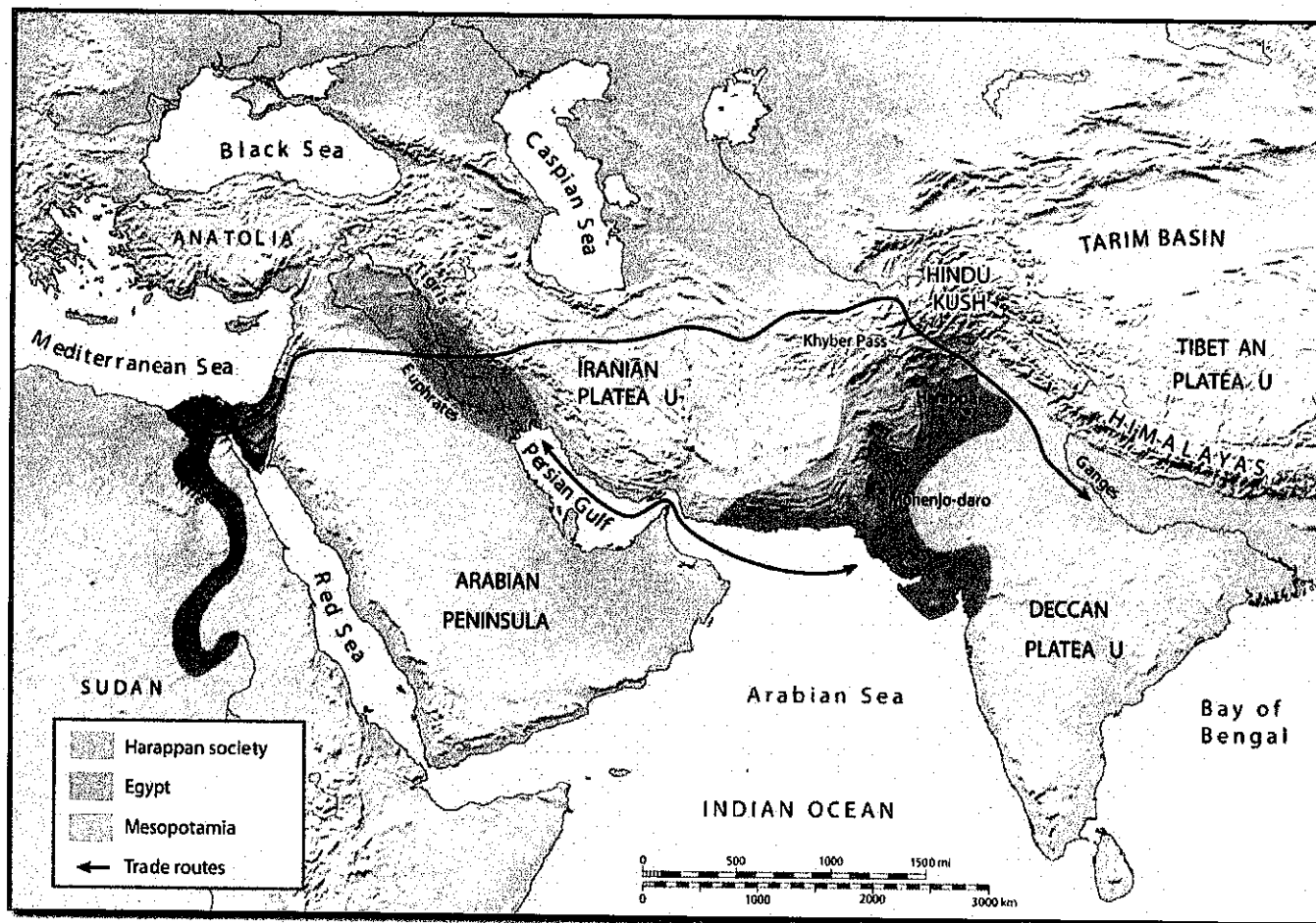
The total collapse of the Harappan society coincided with the arrival into India of an Indo-European tribe, the Aryans ("noble people"). The Indo-Europeans, originally from the steppe region of southern Russia, left a common linguistic foundation from India through Europe. Languages such as Sanskrit, Old Persian, Greek, Latin, Hindi, Farsi, and most European languages are descendants of Indo-European. Aryans subdued the native Dravidians, but also fought amongst themselves. Eventually the Aryans, arguably the first people to domesticate horses, came to rely more on agriculture than herding. They also began to establish more structured political institutions and built regional kingdoms, but never came close to substantial political unification. Much of our information about the Aryans comes from the collection of religious hymns known as the *Vedas*, especially the *Rig Veda*.

Eventually the Aryans established the caste system in India. The Aryans used the term *varna*, meaning color, to refer to the different social classes, which leads scholars to assume that the first distinctions may have been based on race. By around 1000 B.C.E. the four main castes were the *brahmins* (priests), *kshatriyas* (warriors and nobles), *vaishyas* (artisans and merchants), and *shudras* (peasants and serfs). A few centuries later the untouchables were added. Eventually thousands of sub-castes (*jati*), based mainly on occupation, would arise. The society would remain staunchly patriarchal as expressed in the *Lawbook of Manu* and by the practice of *sati*.

Religion in the Vedic Age

The religious views of the Aryans at the time of their entry into India are best expressed in the *Rig Veda*. Indra, a violent and militaristic storm god, was the main god in the early days of the Aryans. Questions of ethical behavior were not completely ignored. Varuna watched over human behavior and sent sinners to the House of Clay and rewarded the virtuous by admitting them into the World of the Fathers. The most important aspects of these early religious views centered around the performance of rituals, many of them dealing with sacrifice.

Eventually some Aryans, both dissatisfied by the rituals and inspired by Dravidian notions such as reincarnation, brought about a startling transformation of religious thought. The best indication of this evolution of Aryan religion is the collection of writings known as the *Upanishads*. The emphasis shifted away from the heroic adventures of Indra and towards an examination of the relationship between every individual and Brahma, the universal soul. Concepts such as *samsara*, the transmigration of the soul, and *karma*, the sum of good and bad deeds that would determine one's position in the next life, came to dominate Indian thought. As expressed in the *Upanishads*, the main goal was to escape the pain and suffering of eternal rebirth and reach the state of *moksha*. Asceticism and meditation were the two principal means of achieving this goal. Indian religious thinkers emphasized that the material world was an illusion and stressed the virtues of self-control, mercy and honesty. Pacifism and vegetarianism played a role in this life.



EARLY SOCIETIES IN EAST ASIA (Chapter 5)



The cultures of East Asia had relatively little direct contact with the complex societies to the west; nevertheless, powerful states (the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties), sophisticated technologies, and highly stratified societies developed along the banks of the Yellow and Yangzi rivers in China. These early societies were built on a foundation that would endure for millennia, some of the significant components of which include

- * The belief in the principle that the emperor was granted the power to rule through "the mandate of heaven." Thus the emperor, known as the son of heaven, served as a crucial link between the heavenly powers and the people on earth.

- * The extended family as the primary institution of society. The patriarchal head of the family wielded tremendous power and shouldered great responsibilities. It was his job to see that appropriate religious rituals were observed in the worship of the family's departed ancestors. Those ancestors were believed to have control over the living family's well-being.

- * A writing system that spread widely throughout China and still persists in its basic form, although modified through time. Consequently Chinese society has experienced a virtually uninterrupted literary tradition.

- * Sharp distinctions and clearly defined roles within the society based on class, gender, and age.

Human beings have inhabited east Asia since at least two hundred thousand years ago. The domestication of rice began around 7000 B.C.E., and Neolithic societies such as the Yangshao rose in the valley of the Yellow River by approximately 5000 B.C.E. Early dynasties such as the Xia, Shang, and Zhou saw the rise of a distinctive and in many ways uniquely secular society. Politically, none of the early dynasties achieved centralization until the Qin unification in 221 B.C.E. Nevertheless, despite centuries of unstable political decentralization and at times outright warfare, the Chinese moved inexorably toward the establishment of a remarkably sophisticated political and social structure. Works such as the Zhou classics, and especially the *Book of Songs*, remained the foundations of Chinese thought for centuries.

OVERVIEW

Political Organization in Early China

The first societies in China developed along the fertile banks of the Yellow River, despite the fact that its long history of devastating flooding has earned it the nickname "China's Sorrow." The Yangshao society, centered around the neolithic village at Banpo, provides the earliest complete archeological evidence. Around 2200 B.C.E. the first recognized dynasty in Chinese history, the Xia, began in the Yellow River valley. Until the recent discovery of sites such as Erlitou, however, this dynasty has been more legend than reality. Much more is known about the Shang dynasty, which lasted from 1766 to 1122 B.C.E. Sites such as Ao and Yin provide valuable information, especially the large and elaborate tombs of the rulers. At the heart of Shang power was their monopolization of bronze metallurgy, which allowed for the rise of a powerful military state.

With the rise of the Zhou dynasty (1122–256 B.C.E.) the main streams of Chinese civilization come into much sharper focus. Many of the foundations of Chinese thought and society came into existence during the Zhou period. One of the most important is the concept of the mandate of heaven, which proposed that heavenly powers, although indistinct, granted emperors the power to govern. Consequently, the emperors served as a connection between heaven and earth and had to therefore maintain high standards of honor and justice as well as provide order. In practice this theory never achieved more than decentralized authority during the Zhou period. Eventually the Zhou emperors lost control to regional princes, best shown through the imperial failure to monopolize iron metallurgy, and this loss of power resulted in a long period of political decline. As early as 771 B.C.E. the western half of the empire collapsed, and the last two centuries are known as the "Period of the Warring States." Order was not restored until the rise of the Qin dynasty in 221 B.C.E.

Society and Family in Ancient China

As early as the Xia dynasty the royal family rose to a prominent social position. The largely decentralized political structure of the Shang and Zhou periods allowed for the rise of a powerful aristocratic element. Craftsmen and merchants, fueled by a long-distance trade that extended back to the Xia period, held important positions in society. In this society, as in other early societies, the vast majority of the population was made up of peasants and slaves. The extended family unit played a crucial role in Chinese society, partly because of the profound influence of the veneration of ancestors. This practice led to a strong sense of family solidarity and eventually translated into a strong patriarchal system. Without an organized religion or powerful priestly class, it fell to the patriarchal leader to carry out the rites designed to honor the family's ancestors.

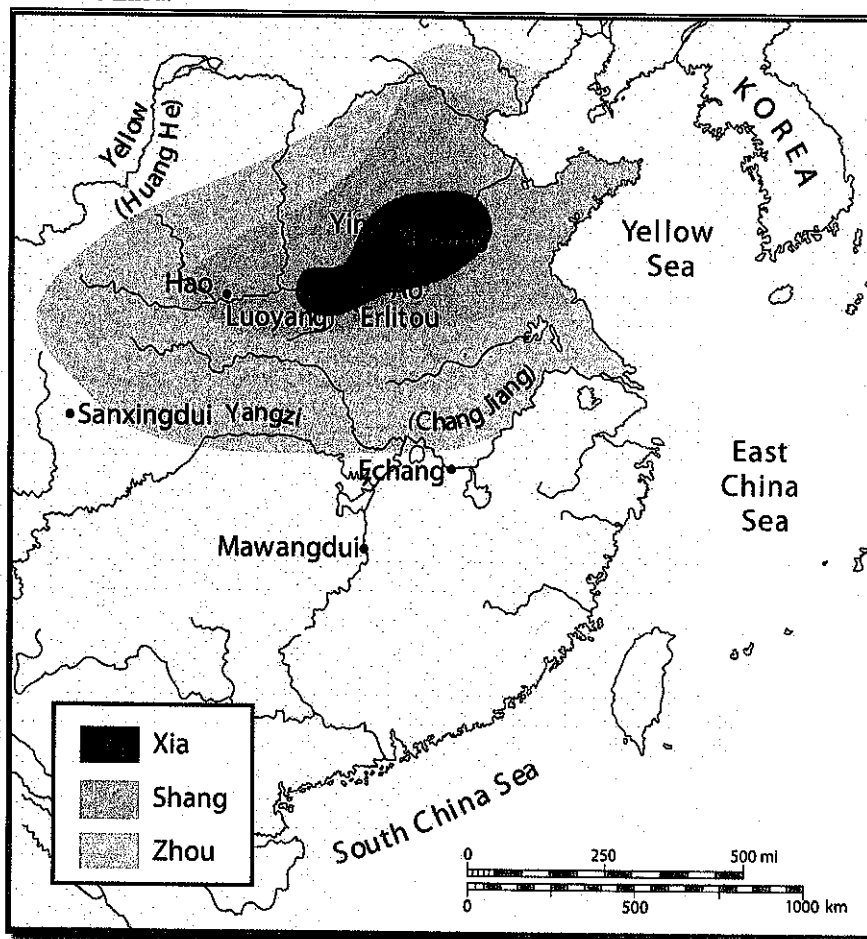
Early Chinese Writing and Cultural Development

China, unlike most of the other ancient societies studied so far, created a distinctive secular cultural tradition. While recognizing the importance of heavenly support for the emperor, the early Chinese never developed these ideas into a firmly structured religious tradition. This attitude is seen clearly in Confucius's admonition to revere the gods while also keeping a distance from them. Writing, which goes back to at least the Shang period, played an important role in the formation of the Chinese cultural framework. Most of the early evidence of Chinese writing comes from the hundreds of thousands of Shang oracle bones. Although they were designed as a means of divination, the bones also provide valuable information about Chinese writing and thought.

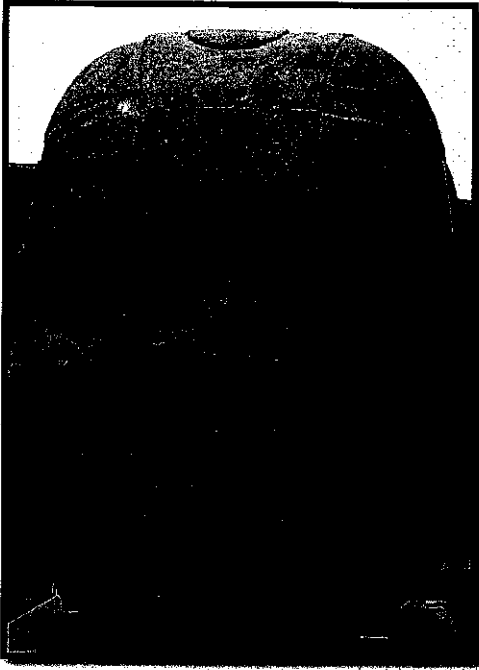
Despite (or maybe because of) the political chaos of the Zhou dynasty, this period served as the foundation for many of China's cultural and literary traditions. Thinkers during this period tried to find order in a seemingly anarchic world and produced important contributions such as the Zhou classics. Collections such as the *Book of Changes*, the *Book of History*, and the *Book of Rites* remained seminal works for thousands of years. The most important of these Zhou classics is the *Book of Songs*, that dealt with famous kings and heroes, but also crucial social and political issues that were near to the hearts of the common people.

Ancient China and the Larger World

Although geographical isolation stood in the way of the establishment of long-lasting or stable long-distance trade, China nevertheless influenced its neighbors. The nomadic tribes of the north and west, the early ancestors of the Turks and Mongols, traded and sometimes warred with the Chinese. Because of environmental differences, however, the nomadic tribes of the north and west did not imitate Chinese traditions as thoroughly as did the peoples of southern China. Eventually peoples in the south such as the state of Chu grew to be competitors to the Zhou.



EARLY SOCIETIES IN THE AMERICAS AND OCEANIA (Chapter 6)



The cultures of the Americas and Oceania developed in relative isolation to the other early complex societies. Nevertheless, they too developed an agricultural base sufficient to support growing populations, specialized labor, political institutions, diverse societies, and long-distance trading networks. Less is known of these cultures than those in other parts of the world primarily because either writing systems did not develop or written documents perished or were destroyed. The fragments of writing and archeological findings indicate that these societies were complex and developed rich cultural traditions.

The early societies in the Americas

- * Built elaborate ceremonial centers that reflected both a complex religion and a powerful political authority
- * Left a rich artistic legacy that included pottery, sculpture, metalwork, and painting
- * Developed sophisticated knowledge of astronomy and mathematics

The early societies of Oceania

- * Saw the gradual dissemination of agricultural technology spread by Austronesian seafarers who traded and settled throughout the Pacific
- * Formed a well-integrated society known as Lapita that stretched from New Guinea to Tonga

THE CHAPTER IN PERSPECTIVE

Seldom in history have societies been as influenced by changing climatic conditions as the early cultures of the Americas and Oceania. The lowering of water levels allowed for the initial exploration and settlement of these areas, whereas the melting of the glaciers around twenty thousand years ago worked to leave these societies isolated. The result was the rise of totally unique and fascinating societies. It would be centuries before a downside to this unmatched isolation—increased susceptibility to disease—would manifest itself with the appearance of invaders.

OVERVIEW

Early Societies of Mesoamerica

The Olmecs were the first recognized society in Mesoamerica. Olmec civilization stretches as far back as 1200 B.C.E. and featured important political and religious centers such as San Lorenzo, La Venta, and Tres Zapotes. Colossal humanlike heads, sculpted from basalt, remain their most characteristic creation. Their invention of a calendar was later copied by succeeding Mesoamerican societies. There is no evidence of a complete system of writing, although scholars suspect that the Olmecs experimented with writing and used written symbols to store information. Although the situation is still a mystery, it is believed that the Olmecs destroyed their own centers at San Lorenzo and La Venta. By 400 B.C.E. the Olmecs were clearly in a state of decline.

Mesoamerican civilization reached its peak with the flowering of the Maya from 300 to 900 C.E. Tikal, with a population of around forty thousand, was one of several important Mayan capitals in a politically fragmented landscape. The Maya made important contributions in astronomy, which played a pivotal role in their efforts to foretell the future. Their calendar was the most precise in the Americas and was one of the most accurate and complex in the world. Math, based on a vigesimal system, proved to be a strong point for the Maya. Like the ancient Babylonians and the Hindu scholars of India, the Maya invented the concept of zero. The Maya also developed the most sophisticated and comprehensive writing system in the Americas. Tragically, many of the Mayan books were destroyed by the later *conquistadores*. Fortunately the Mayan epic of creation and heroism, the *Popol Vuh*, survived in an oral tradition. While probably related to constant warfare, overpopulation, and ecological degradation, the collapse of the Maya after 900 C.E. still remains in many ways a mystery.

Along with the Maya, the other great Mesoamerican heir to the Olmecs were the people of the massive city of Teotihuacan. At its peak, between 400 and 600 C.E., Teotihuacan had a population of almost two hundred thousand people. Included in the city was the Pyramid of the Sun, the single largest building in Mesoamerica; it was two-thirds the size of the great pyramid of Khufu in Egypt. It is thought that these people developed a complete system of writing, but only a few examples remain in stone carvings to hint at the complexity and sophistication.

Early Societies of South America

By as early as 12,000 B.C.E. people had begun to migrate into South America and by 7000 B.C.E. they had made it all the way to the southern tip. Still, much of this early history remains shrouded in mystery. For example, historians know that a new religion, the Chavin cult, became very popular in the years after 1000 B.C.E. However, the true nature of the Chavin cult is still not completely known. The Chavin cult, with its emphasis on maize and fertility, does show the increasing importance of agriculture in the lives of the early South American tribes.

The earliest South American state was the Mochica. Although these people had no system of writing, which was typical for South America, the brilliant artwork of the Mochica tells us much about their culture and society. Mochica pottery remains among the most expressive and sophisticated ever created. Elaborate ceramic heads represent portraits of individuals' heads as well as those of the gods and demons. The artwork also speaks of the complexity of Mochica society, with representations of people ranging from aristocrats to beggars.

Early Societies of Oceania

Australia and New Guinea were visited by humans as early as forty thousand to fifty thousand years ago. Limited migration, mainly because of low water levels, also stretched out as far as the Solomon Islands. The aboriginal population of Australia remained hunters and gatherers while the tribes of New Guinea developed agriculture. Exploring and settling Oceania fell to Austronesian-speaking tribes from southeast Asia. This language group is related to Malayan, Indonesian, Filipino, Polynesian, and the Malagasy language of Madagascar. By as early as 4000 B.C.E. these tribes began to sail out into the Pacific, eventually reaching Vanuatu (2000 B.C.E.), Samoa (1000 B.C.E.), Hawai'i (first century B.C.E.) and New Zealand (middle of the first millennium C.E.). The Austronesians, arguably the most skilled and daring sailors in history, established agricultural societies and left political, religious, and cultural influences.

