Chapter 1

Early Civilizations

Outline

I. Introduction

A. Legend of Babel

1. Our distance from the past

2. Myths

3. Civilization and the city

II. Before Civilization

A. Çatalhöyük—7000–9000 years ago (south-central Turkey)

1. A “city” of 8000 living in 2000 homes

2. An organized and technologically sophisticated society

3. Religious rites and burial of the dead

4. Domesticated plants and animals

5. Little division of labor

B. How do we explain the emergence of Çatalhöyük?

1. Understanding societies in the time before written records (3100 b.c.e.)

2. Newer sciences of climatology, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology help augment older sciences of paleontology, archaeology, and historical anthropology

3. Uncertainty of our knowledge about ancient history

C. Societies of the Stone Age

1. Tool-making hominids appear about 2 million years ago

a. Because tools made out of stone in this period, designated as “stone age”

b. Paleolithic “Old Stone” age—2 million to 11,000 b.c.e.

c. Neolithic “New Stone” age—11,000–3000 b.c.e.

2. Neanderthal (hominid)

a. Flourished 200,000 years ago

b. Jewelry, cave paintings, distinctive graces, music

3. *Homo sapiens*

a. Finely crafted/more effective tools

b. Cave paintings at Lascaux

c. Music; evidence of development of language

4. Increase in pace of development

a. Improved technologies result in better nutrition

b. Artistic achievements at Lascaux and Chauvet

5. Hunters and gatherers—constantly on the move

a. Small groups—bands of a few dozen people

b. Without domesticated animals, there were no significant material possessions

c. Disparities in wealth unlikely to occur

d. Undeveloped division of labor

III. The Building Blocks of Civilization

A. Neolithic Revolution: New Stone Age (post-11,000 b.c.e.)

B. Climate change

1. Cold Mediterranean conditions between 40,000 and 11,000

2. Climate warms and species change, as glaciers retreat

C. Major characteristics

1. Development of managed food production

2. Permanent settlements

3. Trade between settlements: long distance and local

4. Individuals and communities to accumulate and store wealth on a large scale

5. Specialization developed along with distinctions of status and rank

D. Changes and challenges of food production

1. Increasing birth rates

a. Women more specialized in roles

b. Men have less participation in child raising

2. More rapid spread of diseases

3. Necessity of developing storage capacity

4. Predictable surpluses allow for more animal domestication

E. The Emergence of Towns and Villages

1. Jericho

a. Seasonal grain-producing settlement

b. Massive building program (walls and towers)

c. Supported 3,000 inhabitants

d. Pottery used for storage, cooking, brewing beer

i. Identifiable pottery styles help archaeologists

2. Impact of stored agricultural surpluses

a. Stockpiling wealth

b. Tied people to a specific community

c. More stratified communities

3. Rise of priestly class

a. Dependence on agriculture required more attention to land, seasons, and weather

b. Rise of a priestly class

c. Spiritual power tied to more worldly power

4. Trade and the exchange of commodities

a. Accelerated exchange of commodities and new ideas

b. Increasing social stratification

c. Social elites

IV. Urban Development in Mesopotamia

A. Mesopotamia (“the land between the rivers”)

1. Tigris and Euphrates

2. Difficulties with rivers

B. The Ubaid culture

1. Sophisticated irrigation systems

2. Central structures/temples associated with religion, economics, and administration

3. Religious structure

a. Rise of a priestly class

b. Managing economic resources

C. Urbanism in the Uruk, 4300–2900 b.c.e.

1. Transition to Sumerian city-states

a. Temple architecture

b. Urbanization and expansion of trade routes

D. The Development of writing

1. Record-keeping

2. Pictographs

3. Cuneiform (“wedge-shaped writing”)

4. Reading/writing specialized skill

V. The Culture of Sumer

A. Sumerian cities: Uruk, Lagash, Eridu, and Kish

1. Shared culture and religion

B. Religious, political, and economic competition and strife

1. Redistributive economy and temple/warehouse complex

C. Stratification of society within the cities

1. Slavery

a. Prisoners of war

b. Slaves as form of property

D. The Early Dynastic Period, 2900–2500 b.c.e.

1. Conflict between city-states

2. War leadership and kingship

3. *Lugal* (big man)

4. Epic of Gilgamesh

a. Legendary king of Uruk

b. Military conquest, heroism, and arrogance

c. Gilgamesh versus Enkidu—city versus wilderness

d. Irresistibility of nature and impossibility of human immortality

E. Sumerian Religion

1. Uruk period—Sumerian gods identified with hostile forces of nature

2. Early Dynastic period—Sumerians saw gods in more human terms

3. Humans exist to provide good life for their gods

4. A reciprocal relationship between humanity and divinity

5. Kings ruled by divine sanction

a. But still had to serve the gods

b. Offerings, sacrifices, festivals, building projects

c. Failure meant disaster

F. Sumerian Science, Technology, and Trade

1. High degree of self-reliance and ingenuity

2. Produced copper weapons and tools

3. Discovered bronze (subsequently named “Bronze Age”)

4. Invention of the wheel (chariots, carts, and pottery wheels)

5. Seed drill

6. Mathematics

a. Surveying and measuring

b. Lunar calendar

c. Divided time into multiples of sixty

d. Domes and arches for architecture

7. Trade

a. Contacts from Egypt to the Indus Valley

b. Spread of ideas, stories, art, use of writing

VI. The First Empires?

A. Changes in Sumer

1. Increased civic competition

2. Incomplete source evidence

3. Increased power of elites

4. Sumer remained a collection of independent city-states

B. Sargon and the Akkadian Realm, 2350–2160 b.c.e.

1. Sumerians consider Akkadians uncivilized

2. Program of conquest—conquers Sumer by 2350 b.c.e.

3. Appointed governors in all Sumerian cities

4. Created unified kingdom

5. Reduced rivalry between Sumerians and Akkadians by merging religions and civilizations

C. The Dynasty of Ur and the Amorites, 2100–1800 b.c.e.

1. Successor Naram-Sin extended empire

2. Empire dissolves into rival city-states

3. Ur-Nammu and Shulgi

a. Pursued military conquests, levied tribute

b. Commercial expansion

c. Centralization of government

4. Rise of the Amorites

D. The Empire of Hammurabi

1. Hammurabi—ruler of Babylon (1792 b.c.e.)

2. Uses military intelligence, diplomacy, and strategic planning as weapons

3. Divides and conquers neighbors

4. Uses Marduk as a patron deity for political integration

a. Interweaves political power with religious practice

b. Wars of aggression in deity’s name

5. Collection of laws to rule over empire

E. Law and Society in Hammurabi’s Code

1. Code of Hammurabi

a. 282 laws

b. Regulate commerce, resources, social interactions, criminal law

2. Free commoners make up majority of population

3. Aristocratic class that controls community wealth

4. “Dependents” of the palace or temple

5. Laborers, artisans, small merchants, farmers, and officials

6. Slaves

7. Punishments for crimes varied according to one’s social class

8. Treatment of women

F. Hammurabi’s Legacy

1. Creation of a durable state

2. Helped establish a conception of kingship

3. Established importance of archives and writing for control

4. Concept of kings as arbiters of justice

VII. The Development of Civilization in Egypt

A. General observations

1. Geography and the Nile

2. Black Land—Red Land

3. Nile is the center of the cosmos

4. Powerful, centralized state controlled by pharaohs

5. Kingdoms and periods

B. Predynastic Egypt, c. 10,000–3100 b.c.e.

1. Difficulties in research

a. Hunter/gatherer stage

2. First settlement at Merimde Beni Salama (4750 b.c.e.)

a. Egyptian settlements begin to diversify rapidly

b. Trade contacts established

c. Cultural cohesiveness and uniformity begins

3. Upper Egyptian towns (3200 b.c.e.): Nekhen, Naqada, This, and Abydos

a. High degrees of social specialization

b. Sophisticated fortifications

c. Elaborate temples

i. Establishment of permanent sites for religious worship

d. Attracted industry and travelers

C. The Power of the Pharaoh, c. 3100–c. 2686 b.c.e.

1. Recording of dynasties

a. Archaic Period

b. Manetho

2. “King Scorpion” and Narmer

3. Administrative capital at Memphis

4. Pharaoh

a. *Pharaoh* means “great household”—linked to whole ruling apparatus

b. Identified with divine forces

c. By end of Archaic Period—pharaoh was Egypt personified

D. The Old Kingdom, c. 2686–2160 b.c.e.

1. Difficulty of interpreting records

2. Centralized power of pharaoh—pharaoh was intermediary between Egyptians and gods

a. All resources belonged to him

3. Appointed local governors (nomarchs)

4. Extensive bureaucracy

E. The Power of Writing

1. Hieroglyphs (“sacred carvings”)

2. Champollion and the Rosetta Stone

3. Writing as tool for government and administration

4. Hieratic script—used for everyday business of government and commerce

5. Papyrus

F. Imhotep and the Step Pyramid

1. Right-hand man to Djoser (Third Dynasty pharaoh)

2. Learned medicine, astronomy, theology, mathematics, and architecture

3. Step Pyramid

a. Build west of Memphis

b. Symbol of pharaoh’s power

c. Based on the *mastaba*, stacked one on top of the other

d. Surrounded by mortuary complex

i. Housed spirit or *ka*

ii. Thwart grave robbers

4. Fourth Dynasty (2613–2494 b.c.e.)

a. Great pyramids of Giza

b. Account of Herodotus

c. Pyramids built not by slaves, but by tens of thousands of peasant workers

d. Tensions increase between pharaoh and Egyptian society

G. The End of the Old Kingdom

1. Fifth and Sixth dynasties (2494–2181 b.c.e.)

2. Less monumental architecture

3. Rise of power of priesthood of Ra

a. Loss of status of pharaoh—“earthly son” not god

4. Nomarchs evolved into hereditary nobility

5. Draining resources and changing climate possible reasons

6. Nubian restrictions on Egyptian economy

7. Central authority of Memphis collapses

8. Rapid diffusion of cultural forms and economic resources

VIII. Egyptian Culture and Society

A. Religion and Worldview

1. Life, creation, and renewal

2. Myth of Osiris and Isis—life from death

3. Life from death—the yearly renewal of Egypt

B. Life and Death in Ancient Egypt

1. Death was a rite of passage

2. Ka and the *Duat*

3. Final judgment

4. Egyptian funerary rites

a. Embalming and mummification

b. Items for the dead

5. Anubis and *ma’at*—binding together the endless cycle of life, death, and the return of life

6. Confidence and optimism

C. Egyptian Science

1. Lagged far behind Sumerians and Akkadians in science and math

2. Significant advances in calculation of time

a. Solar calendar based on close observations of the sun

3. Some irrigation and water-control systems

4. Developed wheel much later than Sumerians

D. The Social Pyramid

1. Elite: Royalty and nobility

a. Small minority

b. Nobles served as priests, officials, and scribes

c. Lived in luxury

i. Pets, exotic possessions, and furniture

2. Everyone else

a. Some artisans, skilled workers—no real middle class

b. Vast majority were laborers

c. Slaves

3. Lack of written evidence creates historical difficulties

E. The Status of Women

1. Enjoyed more freedoms

2. Had certain rights

a. Own property, divorce, and act as witnesses

3. Barred from high office

4. Gender divisions less clear for lower classes

5. Men of all classes had more sexual freedoms than women

F. The Widening Horizons of the Middle Kingdom, 2055–c. 1650 b.c.e.

1. Mentuhotep II declares himself ruler

2. Unified government at Thebes

3. Amenemhet (Twelfth Dynasty)

a. Exploitation of trade to the south

b. Nubia under Egypt’s control

c. Contacts into Syria and Palestine

4. Construction of fortifications along border to the northeast

5. Changing nature of the pharaohs

6. Literature reflects changing worldview, anxiety about outside world

a. The instruction of Ptah-Hotep

IX. Conclusion

A. From hunter-gatherers to permanent settlements

B. Use of evidence to recover the past

C. Similarities between Mesopotamia and Egypt

1. Development of writing

2. Political alliances, long-distance trade, transmission of information

3. Political consolidation, melding of spiritual and political leadership

4. Building and irrigation

D. Few significant political or cultural interactions

General Discussion Questions

1. What is civilization? How would you define it? How does it differ from culture or society?

2. Was the rise of kingdoms and empires a “natural” phenomenon? Do human beings need the leadership of a strong ruler to form a civilized society? Or were there special factors in the ancient Near East that favored monarchies?

3. What aspects of life in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt made them the first Western civilizations? To what extent does civilization depend on urban life? What are the general characteristics of urban life that can be identified regardless of historical period?

4. Hydraulic theories emphasize the importance of water—access, control, and distribution—in forming the earliest governments and civilizations. Does the rise of ancient Near Eastern civilizations in river valleys support such theories? How can you argue against these theories?

5. What ideas and factors made it possible for the ancients to believe in many different gods simultaneously? Why did monotheism tend to develop after polytheism?

6. We are fortunate that we have the Code of Hammurabi at our disposal. Does the code have any modern aspects, or does it seem to be a specifically ancient document? Was *justice* defined by the code identically to the way it is defined today?

7. During his lifetime, every pharaoh was Horus-Ra; at death he became Osiris. How did the evolution of Egyptian funeral customs demonstrate a “democratization of death”?

8. How does ancient history suggest that progress is often the result of war or invasion?

9. What is the main contribution of ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian civilizations to Western civilizations?

Document Discussion Questions

The Flood: Two Accounts

1. What are the similarities and differences between these two accounts?

2. What do these differences or similarities reveal about the two societies that told these stories? Does one seem to derive from the other? Why or why not?

3. How did the geography and climate of Mesopotamia affect the Sumerian version of the story?

The Code of Hammurabi

1. On the basis of these excerpts, what conclusions can you draw about the values of Old Babylonian society? For example, what types of crimes are punishable by death, and why?

2. In what ways does the Code of Hammurabi exhibit the influences of the urban civilization for which these laws were issued? What are some characteristics and consequences of urbanization? What, for example, do we learn about economic developments?

3. Examine the photographs of the stele preserving the code. What is the significance of the image that accompanies the laws, Hammurabi’s conference with the enthroned god Shamash? What is the significance of the stele itself as the medium that conveyed these laws to the people?

The Narmer Palette

1. This artifact has been called “the first historical document in the world,” but scholars are still debating its meanings. For example, does it represent something that actually happened, or is it political propaganda? In your view, is this proof that Narmer has united two kingdoms? Why or why not?

2. Do the two sides of the palette tell a coherent story, and if so, on which side does that story begin?

3. What might be significant about the site where the palette was found? Should the palette be interpreted as belonging with the mace, found nearby? If so, how might that change your interpretation of the palette’s significance?

The Instructions of Ptah-Hotep

1. According to Ptah-Hotep, what are the most important attributes of a man engaged in public life? What are the most dangerous pitfalls and temptations he will encounter?

2. Why does Ptah-Hotep emphasize the importance of acting in accordance with *ma’at*? How does this idea of *ma’at* compare with that in the “Prophecies of Neferty” (see p. 35)?

3. Recall what you have learned about the changes in Egyptian politics and society. What might indicate that Ptah-Hotep lived during the prosperous Fifth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom? How might these instructions have resonated differently with later readers of the Middle Kingdom?

The Prophecies of Neferty

1. In what ways does the “Prophecies of Neferty” highlight the anxieties of Middle Kingdom Egypt? What caused these anxieties?

2. Why would the author of this document choose to present it as a prophecy about the future, rather than as a description of current events?

Lecture Objectives

1. The study of the distant past is challenging because written sources are rare. What other sources of information do historians use?

2. All civilizations require the same basic conditions for survival and share certain characteristics. What are they?

3. The cities of Mesopotamia remained largely independent from one another yet shared a common culture. Why was this the case?

4. Hammurabi’s efforts created a new precedent for governance in Mesopotamia. How did he achieve this?

5. The civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt differ in profound ways. What were the major causes of their differences?

Topics for Discussion and Further Elaboration

• Discuss the challenges inherent in studying ancient history.

• Define civilization and culture. Describe how and why historical study is focused on civilizations.

• Define myth. Explore the relationships between myth and history in the development of the historical narrative in the ancient period.

• Discuss how history can be used as an important tool to help understand and provide a reference for important contemporary events.

• Discuss how civilizations enable human interactions.

• Define *surplus*. Discuss the important role of a reliable agricultural surplus in the development of civilizations.

• Define *Stone Age*.

• Define *hunter-gatherer*. Discuss the characteristics of hunter-gatherer groups.

• Define and draw the distinctions between the Paleolithic and Neolithic eras. Discuss the changes in climate that fostered the Neolithic Revolution.

• Discuss how climatic changes enable better-managed food production, the development of agricultural surpluses, and the ability to store wealth. Explain the emergent distinctions in status and wealth that follow this change.

• Trace the transition of humans from food gatherers to food producers. Discuss the possibility that this is the most significant development in human history.

• Describe how the domestication of animals and the cultivation of plants result in significant population increases. Discuss the impact of population growth.

• Discuss the impact of revolutionary change in history in context of the Neolithic Revolution.

• Define *city*. Discuss the textbook definition of city.

• Describe the emergence of Jericho. Explain why it is significant.

• Describe how the presence of an agricultural surplus contributes to social stratification.

• Explain the significance of the trade networks.

• Discuss the emergence of Mesopotamia. Describe the development of a surplus, the specialization of labor, and the nature of economic and religious life. Describe how Mesopotamian buildings highlight what the group valued.

• Define *pictograph*. Discuss the development of Sumerian cuneiform and how it further enabled the evolution of communication in the region. Discuss the emergence of literacy as a rare and valuable skill.

• Describe the transition from priestly rule to rule by the lugals in Sumer. Discuss the implications of this change.

• Discuss the Epic of Gilgamesh. Explain how the Epic of Gilgamesh allows historians to learn valuable information about the individuals who read it.

• Define *divine right rule*. Explain the transition in religious belief and practice that took place from the Uruk period to the Early Dynastic period.

• Discuss how the environmental characteristics of the region informed religious beliefs and practices among the Sumerians.

• Explain the important developments in metallurgy made by the Sumerians. Explain the significance of these developments.

• Discuss the importance of technological developments (the wheel, seed drill, surveying, mapmaking, and the ability to tell time) in the prosperity of the Sumerians.

• Discuss the impact of long-distance trade and the spread of knowledge among and between cultures.

• Define *empire*. Discuss Sargon as an early empire builder. Describe the characteristics of empire and the important role that empires (and empire builders) play in history. Discuss how Sargon governed his empire. Explain how the model he developed was used by many other empire builders.

• Describe the process by which Hammurabi came to power. Discuss the use of intelligence, diplomacy, and strategic planning in Hammurabi’s rise to power.

• Define *codified law*. Discuss the role of Hammurabi as lawgiver. Describe how the Code of Hammurabi reflects the values of that society. Discuss how class and status were codified in the code; discuss the protections for women in the code.

• Compare and contrast the nature of the environmental advantage in Mesopotamia and the environmental advantage in Egypt. Describe how that difference led to the development of very different civilizations.

• Explain how the Nile River is the backbone of Egyptian agricultural civilization.

• Discuss the long history of Egypt from the development of surplus-level agriculture through the end of the Roman Empire. Describe how Egyptian history is broken up into distinct time periods.

• Describe the unification of the Upper and Lower Kingdoms in Egypt and the emergence of the pharaoh.

• Define *pharaoh*. Describe the significant political, economic, and religious nature of the pharaoh’s power.

• Explain the development of hieroglyphics and the use of papyrus in ancient Egypt. Describe how the use of papyrus contributes to the lack of knowledge about the Old Kingdom. Compare the relative longevity of papyrus with the relative longevity of Sumerian cuneiform on stone tablets.

• Discuss the theories about how the pyramids were built. Discuss the great cultural significance of the pyramids.

• Describe the unique features of Egyptian society.

• Discuss the emergence of the Egyptian worldview, with the Egyptians at the center of the world.

• Compare and contrast the development of early civilizations in Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Suggested Readings

Algaze, Guillermo. *Ancient Mesopotamia at the Dawn of Civilization: The Evolution of an Urban Landscape*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Ascalone, Enrico. *Mesopotamia: Assyrians, Sumerians, Babylonians (Dictionaries of Civilizations)*. University of California Press, 2007.

Barker, Graeme. *The Agricultural Revolution in Prehistory: Why Did Foragers Become Farmers?* Oxford University Press, 2009.

Black, Jeremy. *Gods, Demons, and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary*. University of Texas Press, 1992.

Bottero, Jean. *Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Bottero, Jean. *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia*. University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Brewer, Douglas J. *Egypt and the Egyptians*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Dalley, Stephanie. *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

David, Rosalie. *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt*. Penguin (Non-Classics), 2003.

Davis, James C. *The Human Story: Our History, from the Stone Age to Today*. Harper Perennial, 2005. Chapters 1–3.

Gamble, Clive. *Origins and Revolutions: Human Identity in Earliest Prehistory*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

George, Andrew, ed., trans. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Penguin Classics, 2003.

Grimal, Nicolas. *A History of Ancient Egypt*. Blackwell Publishers, 2001.

Harper, Robert Francis. *The Code of Hammurabi, King of Babylon*. University Press of the Pacific, 2002.

Hornung, Erik. *History of Ancient Egypt: An Introduction*. Cornell University Press, 1999.

Ikram, Salima. *Ancient Egypt: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Leick, Gwendolyn. *Mesopotamia*. Penguin, 2003.

MacGregor, Neil. *A History of the World in 100 Objects*. Viking Press, 2011.

Manley, Bill. *The Penguin Historical Atlas of Ancient Egypt*. Penguin (Non-Classics), 1997.

O’Brien, Cormac. *The Fall of Empires: From Glory to Ruin, an Epic Account of History’s Ancient Civilizations*. Fall River Press, 2009.

Oppenheim, A. Leo. *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*. University of Chicago Press, 1977.

Schick, Kathy. *Making Silent Stones Speak: Human Evolution and the Dawn of Technology*. Touchstone, 1994.

Shaw, Ian. *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

Smith, W. Stevenson. *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt (The Yale University Press Pelican History of Art)*. Yale University Press, 1999.

Standage, Tom. *A History of the World in Six Glasses*. Walker & Company, 2005.

Stokstand, Marilyn. *Art History*. Pearson Publishing/Prentice Hall, 2008.

Van De Mieroop, Marc. *King Hammurabi of Babylon: A Biography*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2004.

Wade, Nicholas. *Before the Dawn: Recovering the Lost History of Our Ancestors*. Penguin, 2007.

Suggested Feature Films

■ *Ancient Cultures of Mesopotamia*. 75 min. Color. 1989. Insight Media. Three-part series includes: *The Sumerian Kingdom of Ur; Babylon: The Gate of the Gods; and Assurnasirpal: The Assyrian King*.

■ *Ancient Egypt Unearthed*. 525 min. Color. 2009. Discovery Channel. Presents many of ancient Egypt’s long-lost mysteries—pyramids and temples, pharaohs and mummies.

■ *Egypt Uncovered: The Complete Ancient Epic*. 247 min. Color. 2010. Kultur Video. Using modern technology and the latest archaeological findings, world-renowned Egyptologists breathe life into one of history’s most fascinating cultures.

■ *Mummies and the Wonders of Ancient Egypt*. 200 min. Color. 2001. A & E Home Video. Uses computer technology to bring the world of ancient Egypt to life. Includes discussions of mummification, hieroglyphics, and Egyptian religious beliefs.

■ *Mysteries of Egypt* Boxed Set*—Ramesses II, The Pharaohs, Ancient Egypt*. 150 min. Color. 2007. Kultur Video. This unique series provides an authoritative and entertaining look at the wonders of Ancient Egypt. Each program in the series features on-location footage and specially filmed reconstructions, plus historic images and expert commentary and analyses.

■ *Time Life’s Lost Civilizations*. 500 min. Color. 2002. Time Life Records. Combines cutting-edge digital effects technology with powerful dramatization. Dazzling spectacles re-create rituals and events—from the bloodletting of Maya kings and a pharaoh’s last journey to the secret pleasures of a Roman empress.

■ *When the Goddess Ruled the Earth*. 135 min. Color. 2008. Stand Up/Mega Rock Productions. Focuses on the mysterious ancient people of five thousand years ago who worshipped the Earth Mother Goddess as their primary deity on earth. The film presents new evidence of the supremacy of the Goddess in this culture and takes a historical look at the Neolithic/Megalithic stone monuments built to honor her.

Suggested Classroom Films

■ *The Agricultural Revolution: Man as a Food Producer*. 19 min. Color. 1982. McGraw-Hill. Explores the transition from hunting to farming.

■ *Ancient Egypt*. 47 min. Color. 1997. Films for the Humanities and Sciences. Numerous interviews with Egyptologists, as well as computer graphic re-creations of pyramids, temples, and the Sphinx.

■ *Ancient Egypt: Modern Medicine*. 50 min. Color. 2009. A & E Home Video. Journeys into the past to explore the amazing medical achievements from the age of the pharaohs.

■ *Ancient Egypt: The Sun and the River*. 58 min. Color. 1971. University Films Library Holder. Explores the art and architecture of Egyptian culture.

■ *The Ancient Egyptian*. 27 min. Color. 1967. Insight Media. Uses art and artifacts to explore religious beliefs and cultural values. Winner of the Blue Ribbon, American Film and Video Festival.

■ *Ancient Mesopotamia*. 10 min. Color. 2008. Phoenix Learning Group, Inc. The contributions of the Sumerians, Semites, Babylonians, and Assyrians are depicted against authentic locales, including the cities of Babylon, Ur, and Nineveh.

■ *Ancient Mysteries—Tombs of the Gods—The Great Pyramids of Giza*. 50 min. Color. 2006. A & E Home Video. The film tells the stories of the Great Pyramid at Giza, Hatshepsut’s Temple in Thebes, and the Temple of Amun at Karnak.

■ *The Birth of Civilization: 6000 b.c.–2000 b.c.* 26 min. Color. 1985. Insight Media. Traces the birth of civilization in the fertile valleys of the Near East and China.

■ *Civilization and Writing*. 23 min. Color. 1998. Insight Media. Explores the ancient river valley civilizations and traces the move from oral traditions to written literature.

■ *Colliding Continents and the Age of Bronze*. 55 min. Color. 1991. Insight Media. This BBC production explores the interaction between the use of bronze and the history of early humanity.

■ *The Harvest of the Seasons*. 52 min. Color. 1973. BBC-TV. The lifestyle of the Bakhtiari tribe of central Iran serves as an example of how nomads lived and waged war during the Neolithic Age. Part of Jacob Bronowski’s *The Ascent of Man* series.

■ *Human Prehistory and the First Civilizations*. 36 segments, 30 min. each. Color. 2002. Insight Media. The latest scientific and archaeological research on the origins of human populations.

■ *Hunters and Gatherers*. 60 min. Color. 1989. Insight Media. A look at the arrival and dispersal of the first human beings in Australia.

■ *Iraq: Cradle of Civilization*. 60 min. Color. 1991. Insight Media. Michael Wood traces the growth of civilization along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. He looks at the growth of Ur, Nineveh, and Babylon and discusses the religions that arose in the region.

■ *Life under the Pharaohs*. 21 min. Color. 1989. Insight Media. Uses ancient paintings to depict everyday life.

■ *Mesopotamia: I Have Conquered the River*. 59 min. Color. 2000. Insight Media. Profiles the Sumerian city-states, showing how they built a vibrant agricultural economy. Also discusses cuneiform writing, the Code of Hammurabi, and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

■ *Mesopotamia: Return to Eden*. 52 min. Color. 1995. Time-Life. Examines the roots of the world’s major religions in the valleys of Mesopotamia’s Fertile Crescent.

■ *National Geographic’s Egypt—Quest for Eternity*. 60 min. Color. 2002. National Geographic Video. Guides viewers through the greatest and most striking of the long-standing treasures, including favorites like the Sphinx and the Great Pyramids of Giza, as well as lesser-known sites and artifacts.

■ *NOVA: America’s Stone Age Explorers*. 60 min. Color. 2005. WGBH Boston. Discusses theories about the origins of the first Americans.

■ *Out of the Ice*. 55 min. Color. 1991. Insight Media. A BBC production that chronicles the story of humanity from the end of the last Ice Age to the first civilizations.

■ *Secrets of Ancient Empires: The First Civilizations*. 50 min. Color. 2006. Kultur Video. The great ancient cities of Babylon and Jericho are explored as the program compares the lives of humanity’s ancestors and their nomadic contemporaries.

■ *Sumer, Babylon, Assyria: The Wolves*. 26 min. Color. 1991. Films for the Humanities. Uses collections of Near Eastern antiquities to explore the militarism of ancient civilizations.

■ *Where Did It Come From? Ancient Egypt—The Iconic Structures*. 50 min. Color. 2009. A & E Home Video. Shows how the Great Pyramid, the Library at Alexandria, the Temple of Karnak, the Sphinx, and the obelisks were built using only primitive tools and brute labor.

Solutions to Chapter Questions

The Flood: Two Accounts

1. The similarities: A god/God warned one human of what was to come; there is a description of the construction of the boat/ark; there is a provision to bring in animals; there is a massive flooding; there is a sending out of birds to determine the extent of the flooding; the human makes an offering where the god/God is pleased; there is a blessing of the human after the event is over. The differences: Many gods versus one God; all mankind is meant to die/all mankind except one and his family is meant to die; the order of the birds released is different.

2. The Gilgamesh story focuses around multiple gods (polytheistic society); Noah’s version had one God (monotheistic culture telling the story). Both stories seem very similar; it would seem that they might have a common prior version.

3. The Sumerian version of the story seems to focus on the description of the flood (the wind, the frightening aspect of the water—likening the flood to an attack). The hostile, unforgiving nature of geography in Mesopotamia might help explain this focus on the negative, hostile description of the flood.

The Code of Hammurabi

1. Wealth and possession have importance (theft of items or wrongful sale is punishable by death); the death penalty is widely applied, for false accusations, for involvement in theft from palaces or temples, and for adultery (unless the husband waives the penalty), among other things.

2. With the development of cities and urban life, there arose the possibility of acquiring/keeping wealth and important possessions. With possession of goods came the possibility that someone could take those things; at this point, laws dealing with theft have to be formalized.

3. The significance of the image is that Hammurabi is working with Marduk, enforcing his will. This way the laws promulgated by Hammurabi do not appear to be of a personal nature of Hammurabi, but are based on his efforts to enforce divine will. This lends greater authority to the laws themselves.

The Narmer Palette

1. The palette could be both. Just because it is political propaganda does not mean it did not actually happen. Many kings often had monuments and other symbols erected depicting their conquests and victories. This seems to suggest that Narmer did achieve the unification of the two kingdoms, at least physically. The palette could have been intended as a way to further reinforce the fact to a less than compliant Lower Egypt, because if he depicted this event and it had not happened, it would have lessened his authority to advertise something that never happened.

2. Yes, the first panel suggests that he fights a war to conquer Lower Egypt. The second panel suggests that he seems to enjoy more power and recognition, as shown by the greater number of figures. Also, the ten dead bodies suggest the extent of devastation of the defeated Lower Egypt. The two mythical creatures held together and tended by two men suggest an allegory of the two kingdoms, both being held by the two men (in this case, both kings—that of Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt).

3. The palette was found near the temple dedicated to Horus in the city of Nekhen, the capital of Upper Egypt. It would make sense for it to be kept here as this was the center of power for Narmer. The mace appears to go along with the palette, as the mace would represent the legal union of the two kingdoms through marriage. The marriage could have been a legal way to represent the union of both kingdoms—an additional claim to Narmer’s power over both Upper and Lower Egypt. The palette would be an advertisement to those who lived in Lower Egypt that they had been conquered; it could also be a vanity item, celebrating his victory now that the conflict was over; it could be an item for posterity, as the Egyptians took the concept of legacy very seriously.

The Instructions of Ptah-Hotep

1. His advice is not to be arrogant; do not be dismissive of those with less learning than oneself; keep your mind focused on your job (working for your lord); follow the path of right (*ma’at*), because that will not let you down. The temptations and pitfalls he dwells on are illicit relations with women.

2. Ptah-Hotep’s emphasis on *ma’at* is revealing because *ma’at* was seen as truth, order, and justice. The Egyptians saw the universe as a well-ordered place, regular and comforting. To go against the order of the world was to jeopardize that justice and order. In the second reading, the author is detailing and complaining against all of the disorders of the world because *ma’at* has been abandoned. The ideas are similar: the first reading talks about the importance of following *ma’at*, the second shows what happens to Egyptian society when *ma’at* is missing.

3. In the reading, Ptah-Hotep warns of what would happen to one who did not follow the right rules. There is a certainty that justice would always prevail and that those who lived wrongly would be punished. Evil never really flourishes. As seen in the second reading, “The Prophecies of Neferty,” the author complains about all the evil that is not being punished, but rather continues with impunity. If this reading was written in the later period, it would probably lack that certainty of justice.

The Prophecies of Neferty

1. It tells of the natural disasters, the invasion of foreigners, and the breakdown of social order; it tells of the repressive rule of those in charge. Essentially, it sums up all of the problems of the First Intermediate Period. The anxieties were caused by the collapse of the old order; the loss of power of the pharaoh; the civil war amongst the nomarchs; and the resulting death, disease, natural disasters, and loss of life, stability, and order.

2. By presenting these events as a prophecy (possibly divine in nature), these events would then seem to be part of plan (possibly divine in nature), which means that there is order to what is happening. It is part of a bigger plan. Also, if there is an element of the divine in this plan, then it lends legitimacy to the new ruling house that has just established itself as the new rulers of Egypt.

Reviewing the Objectives

1. Historians use architecture, burial mounds, grave excavations, pottery, jewelry, art, tools, human forensic analysis, climatology, dendrochronology, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology to bolster their study of early civilizations.

2. All civilizations require food. Humans also require shelter, rules for living together, and knowledge of how to live within their environment. They need to defend themselves from animals, the environment, and other bands of humans. It seems that they also need to have a feeling of controlling their universe, whether it means placating gods or controlling water resources. There is a universal urge to religion—which other species do not share with us—in human societies across recorded history and around the globe. As the civilizations develop, they require more things. As the civilization grows, it needs more organization; the more complex a civilization, the more specialized needs and specialized persons/classes are needed.

3. The cities remained separate because they each had a hierarchical society with their own leadership. Also based on the text, there was not really a mechanism available to make these separate city-states coordinate and organize themselves until much later. They share a common culture because of a common language base, shared   
  
environmental experiences, and the exchange of ideas and stories through trade. In addition, Mesopotamian geography did not exert a unifying imperative in the way Egyptian geography did.

4. He used military intelligence, diplomacy, and strategic planning; he encouraged enemies to fight one another, leaving them exhausted and easier for him to conquer; he used the idea of one god to unify all of the other gods, then applied that to the cities on earth. By placing himself as the enforcer of God’s will, he was able to put divine justice as his reason for ruling. He also established a set of rules for the population in order to maintain order.

5. Firstly, the roots of the differences lay in geography and its impact. Where life was unpredictable and harsh in Mesopotamia because of the flooding, droughts, and lack of impediments to invading armies, life in Egypt was well ordered and regular. The Nile worked to help provide one of the most agriculturally abundant societies in the ancient Mediterranean world. Life was orderly and just, and therefore the worldview of the Egyptians was a great deal more positive. Secondly, the constant struggle for power amongst the various empires in Mesopotamia created a constant strife and a drive for military innovation that were not really in place in Egypt. Thirdly, because of the relative wealth of resources in Egypt, there was not the same level of drive for innovation. Fourthly, because of the divine nature of the rules laid down by the pharaohs, there was not as much use for written laws in Egypt. And finally, the two societies differed in their outlook on life. Mesopotamia was fundamentally pessimistic and anxious, while Egypt was much more optimistic about life and reality in general.

People, Ideas, and Events in Context

1. There was a change in climate that allowed wild grains to flourish, increasing the food supply geometrically; this enabled the humans to cultivate plants and animals for a regular food supply. As a result, human settlements began to grow. Well-nourished women were able to produce more offspring, which resulted in a population increase. This increase in population required new methods of increasing food production to support this new population. Also, storage of grain was necessary. Humans began deliberate cultivation of food that could be used against the inevitability of short-term disasters (such as flooding). This increase in grains also allowed for the support of more domesticated animals that provided a host of other materials for humans (meat, milk, leather, bone, wool, and horn).

2. One of the most important technologies that the Sumerians developed was irrigation. This ability to control water allowed them to irrigate fields for planting. Dykes and levees allowed them to control season flooding, channeling the water to irrigation canals and pools. Eventually this system was so successful, it allowed for the development of specialists in different areas of construction, weaving, pottery making, metalwork, and trade.

3. The development of life in Egypt was different from that of Mesopotamia. In Sumer, the people had to develop technologies that would allow them to change and control nature in order to benefit from it. In Egypt, the habit of the Nile overflowing its banks and fertilizing the land on either side was seen as part of a natural order brought about for their benefit. Nature, in this case, worked to the benefit of humans. Because of what the Egyptians saw as a part of the divine plan, pharaohs, as the living embodiment of the gods, were able to capitalize on this. Because life was made easier by the efforts of the gods (pharaohs), all things belonged to the pharaohs. Living in an enclosed valley created a unifying, centralizing tendency in Egyptian life.

4. Writing in Mesopotamia was developed as a practical recording technique to support economic pursuits. Because it existed to represent real things, its system of symbols, called pictograms, were realistic. Over time, these symbols came to represent not only actual items, but ideas associated with actual items. Also, the symbols became associated with certain sounds called phonemes. Eventually the use of a *stylus* changed the depictions because the stylus could not always draw something accurately; the symbols became more abstract. The development of hieroglyphics differed in Egypt, where this writing style was more for government and administration. This form of writing was used more for control and administration of the wealth of the Egyptian kingdom.

5. The Epic of Gilgamesh describes one of the powerful rulers in Mesopotamia. Gilgamesh is considered powerful through his many military conquests (reflecting the new idea that the rulers were rulers because of their military prowess). The story tells of the many sacrileges Gilgamesh commits against society (thus depicting what the society thought was pious and what was not); also, Gilgamesh’s loss of the means to gain immortality reveals the Mesopotamian explanation for why mankind is mortal.

The Code of Hammurabi tells a great deal about the structure and values of Babylonian society. It offers insight into the type of litigation that Hammurabi and his officials had to handle frequently and the relative importance of these cases. It begins with laws regarding false testimony and theft, followed by laws regulating business deals, laws regulating the use of public resources, laws relating to debt and slavery, laws dealing with marriage and inheritance, and laws punishing murder and violent assault.

6. The ziggurats of Mesopotamia were massive temples dedicated to the majesty of the gods, but in reality they reflected the centralized power of the priestly class. The temples were the places from which the priests acted as the managers of the city’s stored wealth and controlled the complex irrigation systems. The priestly class also controlled the trade from the cities. The pyramids were the epitome of the divine power and majesty of the pharaohs. The amount of resources that went in to the building of the pyramid is only possible with the understanding that the pharaoh is god. The purpose of the building and the treasure in it enabled the spirit of the pharaoh to find its place in the afterlife.

7. It was evident to the Egyptians that their land was the center of a regular, ordered, balanced universe. The special environment of Egypt and the special benefits it conferred were construed as divine gifts granted to the people of Egypt. This perfect order was seen as a reflection of *ma’at*. *Ma’at* was the serene order of the universe with which each human had to remain in harmony. The benefits of the environment were renewed each year through the meditation of the pharaoh. The pharaoh was the embodiment of the concept of *ma’at* on earth. Throughout the Old Kingdom, there was a long period of successful harvests and peace guaranteed by Egypt’s isolation from the outside world. This idyll was shattered by the period of anarchy, civil war, and natural disasters that occurred during the First Intermediate Period, but in general, Egyptians enjoyed a feeling of superiority over their neighbors.

Thinking about Connections

1. No historical account is going to be perfect. The less information there is to draw upon leads naturally to a less perfect account. The more information there is, the greater degree of depth, complexity, and cross-checking there is to draw conclusions from the historical record. There have been great strides in utilizing more avenues of research like climatology, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology that add to our collective knowledge of the past. All sources of information can have value and can contribute to the construction of a historical narrative. The lack of surviving evidence from the ancient world, however, should lead us to be cautious of making dogmatic assertions about the period.

2. Modern and ancient civilizations share many important features, including food collection and distribution; laws to control the manner in which people live with each other; efforts to control the environment in order to make life easier for people; the continued domestication of animals and plants to feed, clothe, and work for us. There is also a need to understand the universe around us and our place in that universe. These shared ideas might indicate certain elements that are a part of human nature. It may be the result of the larger structure of our brain. There is a possibility that these things came with the greater measure of intelligence that *Homo sapiens* have.

3. The human ability to manipulate our environment has taken us from primitive hunter-gatherers to the highest form of dominant life on the planet. It seems to be in our nature. Although other animals also try to change their environments, we appear to be the most successful. This environmental engineering could sometimes have devastating and unsustainable effects. The evidence would seem to suggest that we should take a long-term use of our resources because we know of the long-term consequences of poor resources management.