

FIRST CIVILIZATIONS

Unit 9



THE FIRST CIVILISATIONS

- Archaeological discoveries have shown that around 3500 B.C., the Neolithic villages in some regions developed into cities. These were the first urban civilizations'. Large buildings were constructed and important changes occurred in politics, economics and culture. This first occurred in Mesopotamia and soon afterwards in Egypt, India and China.
- Cities appeared as a result of agricultural developments. These large rivers rose at certain times of the year. The flooded land was fertilised by the sediments in the water (silt) and when the water level decreased, large harvests were obtained. In order to make better use of the water and avoid uncontrollable flooding, hydraulic works were constructed, such as canals (artificial channels) and dykes (walls to contain the water)





In order to ensure the peaceful coexistence of their citizens and control their territory, the city governors surrounded themselves with a group of people to serve them, called government officials.

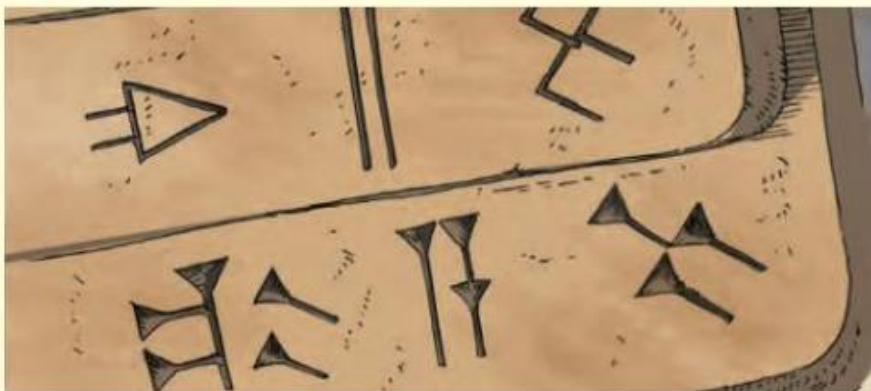


Some government officials carried out military duties (soldiers), some carried out administrative tasks (tax collectors) and others carried out judicial tasks, representing the king.

POLITICAL ORGANISATION



THE EMERGENCE OF WRITING



1. In Mesopotamia, objects were first represented through pictures (pictograms). Later these became more stylised.



2. They wrote on wet clay tablets with a reed stick. This type of writing is called cuneiform, from the Latin meaning 'wedge' because the signs were wedge-shaped.



3. They used a series of pictograms to express their ideas (ideograms). This is called ideographic writing.



4. First they wrote from top to bottom and later horizontally. They baked the tablets in an oven to harden them.

5. The Egyptians used an ideographic writing system called hieroglyphics, which gave the words a magical quality. They wrote on stones (in temples and burial structures), wooden tablets and papyrus (paper made from a plant which grows on the banks of the Nile). For administrative documents and routine tasks, the Egyptians used a more simplistic form of writing (first hieratic and later demotic).

Hieroglyphics were deciphered by Jean-François Champollion in the 19th century thanks to the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, where the same text appears in hieroglyphics, demotic and Greek.

Rosetta Stone,





Because the privileged social groups are smaller than the unprivileged, human society is usually represented by a pyramid consisting of different levels.

SOCIETY

- Increased agricultural production and trade resulted in prosperity, causing greater social differences and the creation of a hierarchical society. Society was composed of the following groups:
- The privileged minority consisted of rich and powerful families who lived in big houses or palaces and did not need to work. The most powerful position was held by the king in Mesopotamia and the pharaoh in Egypt. The next most influential group were the priests, followed by the government officials and then the landowners. The priests were considered the wisest. They performed religious duties, but also used their knowledge to maintain and increase their economic and political power.
- The unprivileged, that is the rest of the people, worked for the privileged minority. The majority of them were farmers, herdsmen and fishermen, and a small percentage were merchants or craftsmen. All the members of this group lived modestly in small adobe houses.
- Slaves were servants who were owned by other people and had no rights. The majority were prisoners of war or their descendants. The poor also became slaves when they could not pay their debts.





THE EARLIEST LAWS

- Occasionally, conflicts between people resulted in violence. Some powerful people also abused their power, causing the people to rebel against them. To stop this, the kings in Mesopotamia and the pharaohs in Egypt created laws with the help of their government officials.
- The oldest surviving set of written laws is called the code of Hammurabi. The code was very strict because it was based on the principle of 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'





MESOPOTAMIA

- Mesopotamia means 'land between rivers'. This is the name the Greeks gave the region situated between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.
- Mesopotamia was surrounded by the Persian Gulf to the south, the Syrian Desert to the west, the Zagros Mountains to the east and the Taurus Mountains to the north-west.





POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

- Thanks to agricultural and commercial prosperity, Neolithic villages became independent city-states.
- The most important city states in Sumer were **Ur**, **Uruk** and **Lagash**.
- Need for defense led to an increase in the importance of military commanders and, finally, to the creation of **monarchies**.
- He was advised by civil servants and scribes (bureaucracy) that collected taxes, applied the orders and the laws...





The Mesopotamians made important scientific advances



They performed complex mathematical calculations and invented the sexagesimal system. They also created a calendar based on the cycles of the moon.



In Mesopotamia, **religion** was polytheistic, which means they believed in several gods. They worshipped them in sacred buildings called temples.

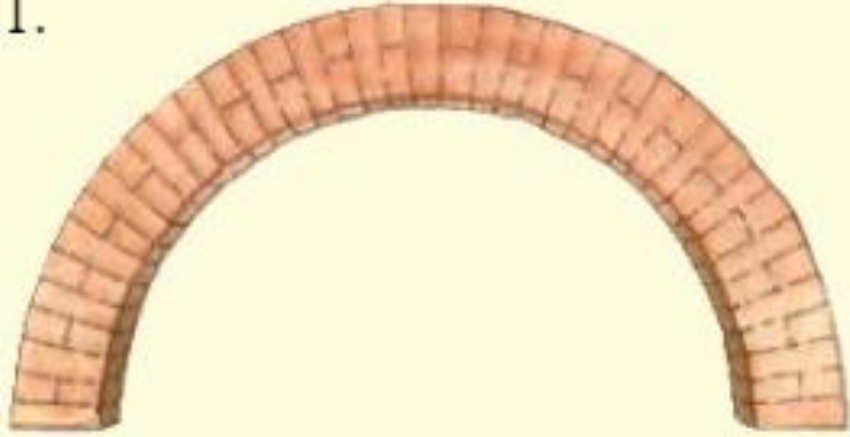


They depicted their gods with human forms and associated them with the forces of nature. When Babylon became the most important city, its god, Marduk, became the main deity.

MESOPOTAMIAN CULTURE AND RELIGION



1.



2.



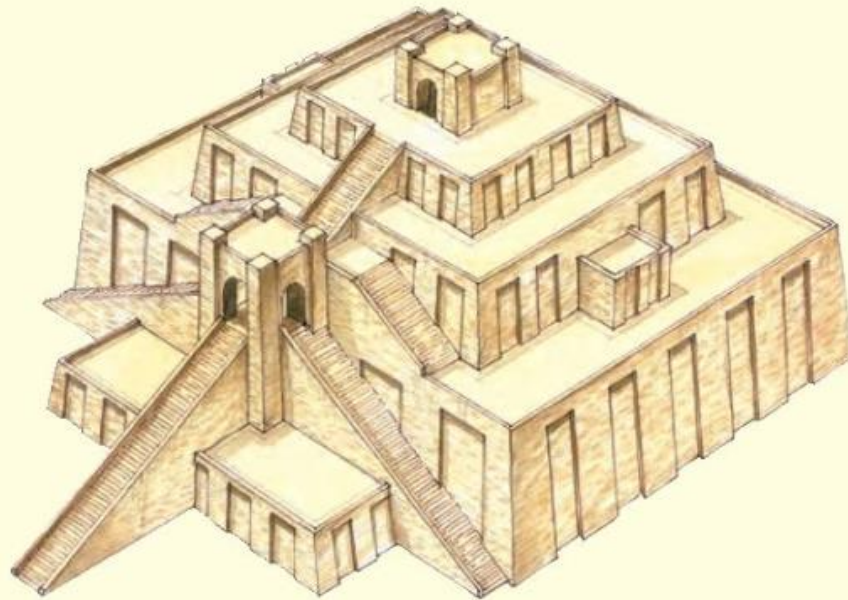
The semicircular arch (1) and the vault (2) are characteristic features of Mesopotamian art

MESOPOTAMIAN ART

- A brick is a piece of clay baked in an oven. Although it was not very strong, it was used as the main building material, as there was very little stone.
- Glazed ceramics or tiles were used to decorate the brick walls.
- A semicircular arch is a semicircular structure with a supporting point at each end.
- A vault is a roof in the form of an arch. The main sacred building was the ziggurat. These buildings were composed of several levels of brick terraces in the form of a step pyramid. The processions (groups of worshippers) climbed the flights of stairs to the sanctuary, which was situated in the highest terrace and contained the statue of a god or goddess. The ziggurats mainly had a religious function, but also economic and political.



MESOPOTAMIAN ART



Recreation of a ziggurat



The *Wounded Lion*, an Assyrian relief which decorated the royal palace in the city of Nineveh. Top right: Freestanding statue of the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II (British Museum, London). Right: *Victory Stele* commemorating the victory of the Akkadian king Naram-Sin over his enemies.

Beard and long hair, following the Assyrian fashion of that era

Mace, symbol of authority

Curved sword to fight monsters

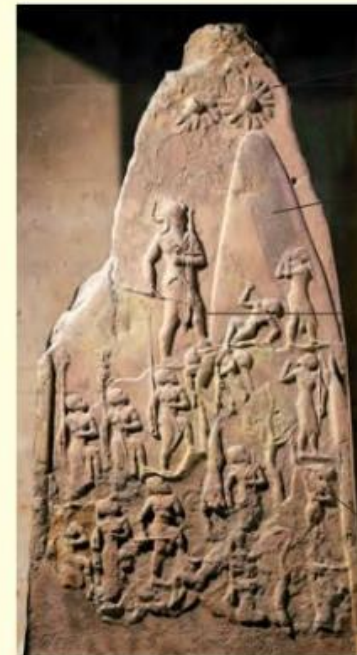


Solar discs: these represent the gods

Mountain: where gods and men were united

The king: Naram-Sin, depicted on a large scale, ruthlessly standing on his enemies

The Akkadian soldiers follow their king's orders





ANCIENT EGYPT

On the banks of the Nile in north east Africa, a fascinating civilisation developed.

Many things have been discovered about its history and culture by egiptologists





GEOGRAPHICAL ENVIRONMENT

- During the summer the river floods due to the torrential rains that fall in the upper course.
- The Mediterranean Sea to the north and the desert which surrounds it, protected Egypt up to a certain point, from external enemy attacks.
- The river Nile crosses the large Sahara Desert (red lands), fertilising the narrow strip of land which it flows across (black lands).



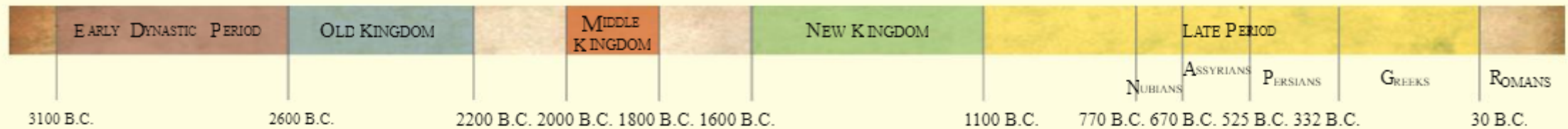
HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- During the fourth millennium B.C., Neolithic villages built hydraulic works (canals and dykes) in the Nile valley. The water was used for agricultural purposes and these settlements eventually grew into cities.
- Some of these cities took control of others and, in time, two kingdoms were created:
- Upper Egypt, halfway along the river, and Lower Egypt, at the river mouth in the north. In around 3100 B.C., the legendary king Narmer or Menes unified Upper and Lower Egypt.



- Egypt has a long history (almost three thousand years), which is divided into four main periods: the Old Kingdom , the Middle Kingdom , the New Kingdom and the Late Period. The ruler of Egypt was called a pharaoh and was considered a god. He held absolute religious and political power. He governed with the help of government officials, such as viziers (or ministers) and nomarchs (provincial governors, called nomes), priests and military leaders

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ANCIENT EGYPT



In the Early Dynastic Period, there was the first unification. During the Old Kingdom the capital was established in Memphis. The first work of this period of Egyptian history was the building of the pyramids of the pharaohs Khufu, Khafra and Menkaure, near the capital. The Old Kingdom ended due to a series of internal rebellions and battles among the nomarchs.

In the 21st century B.C., Egypt became unified again, marking the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. The capital was moved to Thebes and the kingdom expanded to the lands of the south (Nubia). This period came to an end when Egypt was invaded by an Asiatic people, the Hyksos. These people created their own dynasties and established their capital in Avaris in the Nile delta.

The New Kingdom began when the pharaoh of Thebes expelled the Hyksos. The rulers of this period were Queen Hatshepsut and the pharaohs Akhenaten (Amenophis IV) and his queen Nefertiti, Tutankhamun, Ramesses II (who was famous for fighting against the Hittites at the Battle of Kadesh, Syria) and Ramesses III (who defeated the Sea Peoples when they tried to invade Egypt). The pharaohs were buried in the Valley of the Kings.

During the Late Kingdom, Egypt broke up and was invaded by the Nubians, Assyrians and Persians. In 332 B.C., it was conquered by the Macedonian Alexander the Great and governed by the Ptolemaic Dynasty. Egyptian culture mixed with Greek culture and the capital was moved to Alexandria. Cleopatra VII was the last queen of Egypt. In 30 B.C. Egypt became a Roman province.



LIFE IN ANCIENT EGYPT

- The Nile was also the main means of transport for people and goods. The Egyptians traded with Mesopotamia, Phoenicia (present-day Israel, Syria and Lebanon) and Canaan (present-day Jordan and part of Libya and Syria) to the east; with Nubia to the south; with Crete and Greece to the north and with Libya to the west
- The ruling class were the pharaoh, priests and important government officials. They lived in large houses or palaces made of adobe or stone. Many people served them, including slaves. Their children went to school, where they were taught the hieroglyphic script and mathematics.



CULTURE AND RELIGION IN EGYPT

- The Egyptians, like the Mesopotamians, made important advances in mathematics and astronomy to predict the flooding of the Nile and increase agricultural production.
- The religion was polytheistic. Their gods often had a human body and the head of an animal. Their appearance and characteristics varied over time. Each city had its own patron deity.
- The Egyptians believed that after someone died, the god Anubis accompanied the *Ka* (the departed soul), across the serpent river and into the Afterlife. The *Ka* had to pass various tests and face the judgement of Osiris, during which their heart was weighed to discover if they had sinned. A feather was placed on one side of the scales and the heart of the deceased (dead person) on the other. If the heart was heavier, it was full of sin and the deceased could not enter the kingdom of Osiris. If the opposite was true, it lived eternally in paradise.

HATHOR

SET

TAWERET

AMUN

THOTH

PTAH





ART IN ANCIENT EGYPT

- Egyptian monumental architecture is characterised by the use of stone (which is stronger than adobe), the massive constructions, and the use of flat roofs supported on lintels
- Temples were buildings dedicated to the gods. Only the priests could enter. The most famous ones are in Karnak and Luxor. A special type of temple, a rock temple, was carved out of the rock. The most famous examples can be found in [Abu Simbel](#), such as the one dedicated to Ramesses II.






- Tombs were buildings that contained burial chambers or rooms where the sarcophagus (decorated coffin) was placed with the mummy (the pharaoh or important officials) inside. Some also had false empty chambers to confuse tomb robbers. There were three types of tomb



- Mastaba: a one storey rectangular building with sloping walls.



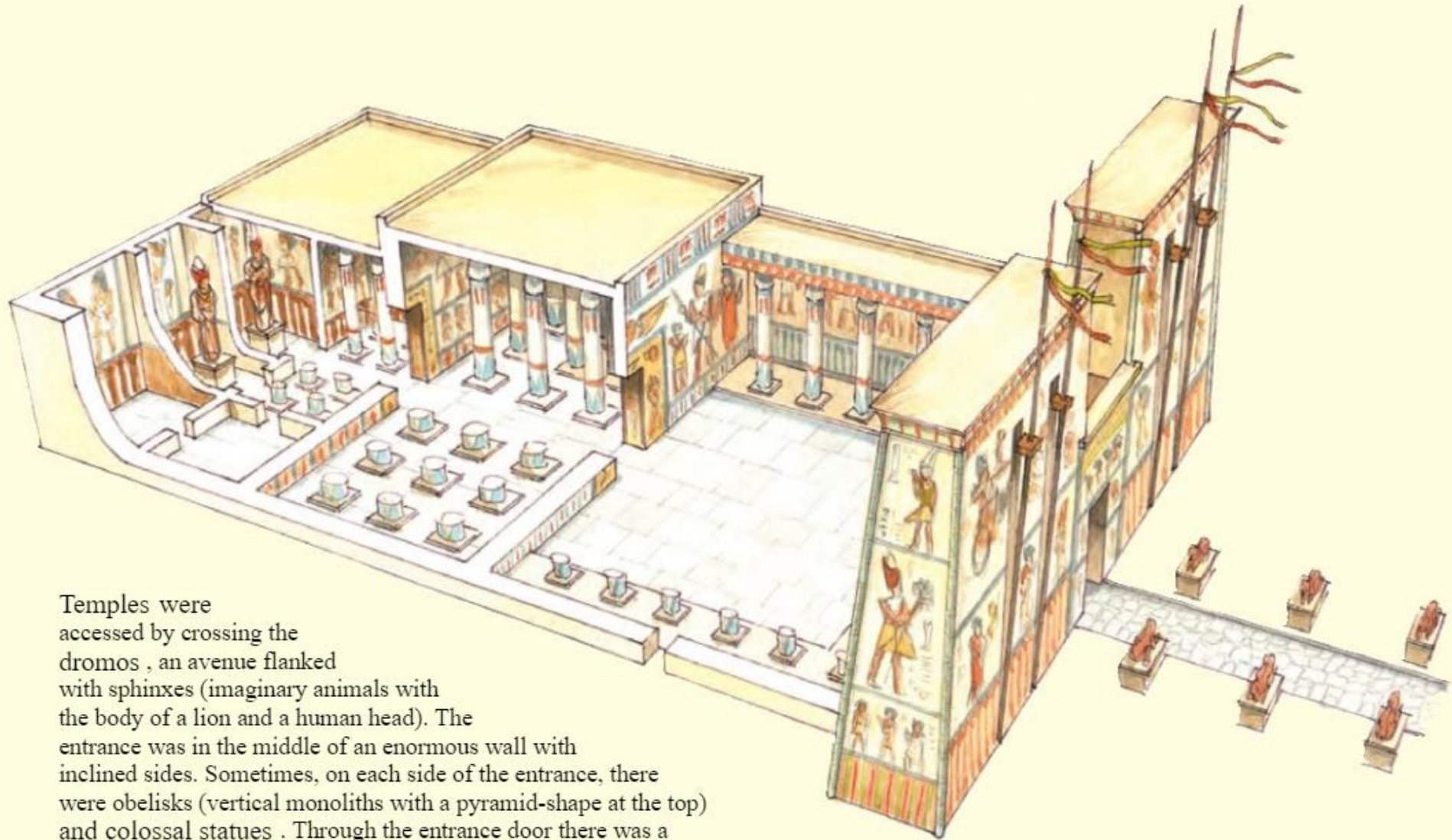
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- Pyramid: when there was a division of levels, it was called a step pyramid. The most famous one is Zoser in Saqqara (near Memphis), which was built during the Old Kingdom. Later, the classical pyramids with smooth sides were built in Giza: Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure.



- Hypogeum: a tomb cut out of the rock and hidden to prevent robbery. Most of these were discovered in the Valley of the Kings (near present-day Luxor). The most famous one is Tutankhamun's tomb.



TOMBS AND FUNERAL CONSTRUCTIONS



Temples were accessed by crossing the dromos , an avenue flanked with sphinxes (imaginary animals with the body of a lion and a human head). The entrance was in the middle of an enormous wall with inclined sides. Sometimes, on each side of the entrance, there were obelisks (vertical monoliths with a pyramid-shape at the top) and colossal statues . Through the entrance door there was a courtyard surrounded by columns, which led into the hypostyle hall²². At the back of the temple there was the sanctuary with the statue of the god or goddess. Nearby there was a large pond symbolised the origin of life.

