CHAPTER 1

The Origins of Western Civilization in the Ancient Near East, 3000–1200 B.C.E.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. Before History, 2,000,000–3000 B.C.E.
   A. The Old Stone Age
      1. The name *Old Stone Age* is from the materials used to make stone and bone tools.
      2. Increasingly complex early humans included:
         a) Homo habilis (“skillful human”) evolved in Africa, two million B.C.E.
         b) Homo erectus (“upright human”) evolved in Africa, one million B.C.E. and learned how to use fire
         c) Homo sapiens (“thinking human”) appeared in Africa, 400,000 B.C.E.
         d) Cave-dwelling Neanderthals appeared in Europe, 150,000 B.C.E.
      3. Old Stone Age characteristics included a division of labor based on gender (men hunting, women gathering), religious and fertility rituals, and cave paintings.
   B. The Neolithic Revolution
      1. The Neolithic Revolution began in the Near East about 8000 B.C.E. by pastoralism (domestication of animals) and agriculture (domestication of plants).
      2. Neolithic people developed megaliths (massive standing stones) such as at Stonehenge (4000 B.C.E.) and large villages such as Jericho (7000 B.C.E.) where they spread disease, social inequality, environmental destruction such as the buildup of salt and deforestation, and religious practices.
   C. The Emergence of Near Eastern Civilization
      1. The Emergence of Near Eastern Civilization occurred in the Fertile Crescent from the Nile River valley in Egypt through the Levant (Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine) and into the Tigris and Euphrates River valleys of Mesopotamia.
      2. By about 3000 B.C.E., the first civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, and China had economies based on agriculture, cities, different social classes, specialization of labor, metal technology and a system of writing.

II. Mesopotamian Civilization, 3000–1200 B.C.E.
   A. Sumerian Gods and Legends
      1. Mesopotamians had a pessimistic outlook, fearing the uncertainty from floods and nomadic raids from the mountains to the north, as well as desert raiders from the south.
      2. The Sumerians sought to control their unpredictable, anthropomorphic (humanlike) gods through divination (finding signs in dreams, animal entrails, and wisps of smoke) and numbering them.
      3. The Sumerian hero Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, upset by the death of his friend Enkidu, tried to escape death by seeking magic fruit on the tree of life. He found it, but a serpent stole it.
      4. Ut-Napishtim built an ark (boat) and filled it with animals to survive a flood the sky god Enlil brought down to destroy humanity, an event that may have happened around 2600 B.C.E., according to silt at Ur and court records.
   B. Sumerian Government and Society
1. Sumerian society had a hierarchical (ranked) structure, from highest to lowest: priest-kings ruling from a ziggurat (a massive step-pyramid), nobles, priests, civil servants and soldiers, middle-class artisans, farmers, and slaves.

2. Sumerians were patriarchal (favoring men), although women had control over a dowry and could engage in business in their own name. Children had no rights.

C. Semitic and Indo-European Peoples
1. Pastoralist Semitic peoples included the Akkadians who assimilated the culture of the Sumerians after 3000 B.C.E. and established the first Near Eastern empire under Sargon in 2350 B.C.E.

2. Around 2000 B.C.E., the Amorites moved into Mesopotamia, which included the Assyrians (upper Tigris River valley) and Babylonians (central Mesopotamia).
   a) The Babylonian King Hammurabi (r. 1790–1750 B.C.E.) created the Old Babylonian Empire, the second Near Eastern empire, as well as standard weights, a standard legal code, mathematics, and astronomy/astrology.

3. Pastoralist Indo-European peoples came from the grassy steppes of central Asia north of the Black and Caspian Seas
   a) Aryans settled in Iran (2000 B.C.E.) and India (1500 B.C.E.), Hittites in Anatolia, and Kassites in Mesopotamia.

D. The Code of Hammurabi
1. Forty-nine of 282 laws had to do with marriage, which favored men.
   a) Men could have two wives but had to provide child support if they divorced.
   b) Women who left their husbands were drowned.

2. Violation of criminal laws resulted in death or mutilation.

III. Egyptian Civilization, 3000–1200 B.C.E.
A. The Gift of the Nile
1. Egyptians, very different from the pessimistic Mesopotamians, were geographically isolated, optimistic, unified, trusting of their gods, and beneficiaries of a regularly flooding Nile River.

2. Kemet (the “black land”) consisted of Lower Egypt, the Nile Delta in the north, and Upper Egypt, the rest of the river valley south to Nubia.

B. Egyptian Government and Society
1. Egyptian society was hierarchical, including pharaohs, the vizier, governors of upper and lower Egypt, nomarchs, nobles, skilled workers, farmers, and slaves.

2. Egyptians enjoyed family life living in egalitarian marriages.

C. The Age of the Pyramids
1. Egyptian history has Old (2700–2200 B.C.E.), Middle (2050–1786 B.C.E.), and New Kingdoms (1570–1070 B.C.E.).

2. The Old Kingdom was a period of all-powerful pharaohs who built pyramids that served as their tombs. Only pharaohs were thought to have an afterlife.

3. Large pyramids took fifteen years or more to complete.

4. Pharaohs gave private estates, tax exemptions, and special privileges to nomarchs, who built the pyramids, which in turn strengthened the noble class.

D. The Age of Osiris
1. During the breakdown and famines of the First Intermediate Period (2200–2050 B.C.E.), the bull god Amon became the most important god of Egypt and the afterlife became available to everyone through mumification.

2. Semitic Hyksos people ended the Middle Kingdom and began the Second Intermediate Period (1730–1570 B.C.E.), though they assimilated well, preserved Old Kingdom documents, and ruled indirectly through vassels.

E. The New Kingdom
1. Characterized by strong pharaohs, a standing army, and an Egyptian Empire with Nubian mercenaries
2. Rulers, including the female pharaoh Hatshepsut (r. 1498–1483 B.C.E.), no longer built pyramids. They were buried in underground stone tombs and ruled through vassels like the Hyksos.
3. Amenhotep IV (r. 1350–1334 B.C.E.) controversially insisted on monotheistic worship of Aton, a minor sun god, and became Akhenaton.
4. Several short-lived boy pharaohs followed, including Tut-ankh-aton, changed to Tut-ankh-amon (r. 1334–1325 B.C.E.), “King Tut.”

IV. Lost Civilizations of the Bronze Age, 2500–1200 B.C.E.

A. Ebla and Canaan
1. Semitic Ebla, a Syrian city, was a thriving commercial center as early as 2500 B.C.E., until 2250 B.C.E., when Akkadians sacked it.
2. On the coast of Canaan, trading cities such as Byblos, Sidon, Tyre, and Ugarit arose around 1500 B.C.E.

B. The Minoans of Crete
1. Minoan civilization (3000–1400 B.C.E.) was named after the legendary King Minos and centered on coastal towns such as Knossos and Phaistos.
   a) Palaces were small administrative centers, built without defensive walls, that depended on trade with trading colonies such as Thera in the Aegean Sea.
   b) Minoans had their own writing system, the not-as-yet deciphered Linear A.
2. Minoans had no high-profile gods, worshipping the forces of nature.
3. Minoan art showed natural themes such as octopuses and bulls, as well as men and women participating equally in sporting events such as boxing and leaping over bulls.

C. The Mycenaeans of Greece
1. Mycenaeans were descendants of Indo-Europeans who settled in the Balkans beginning around 2000 B.C.E.
2. Though they destroyed the Minoans around 1400 B.C.E., the wealthy Mycenaeans assimilated much of Minoan culture, including adapting Minoan Linear A to Mycenaean Linear B.
3. Warlike Mycenaeans built independent cities such as Mycenae, Pylos, and Athens on defendable hills away from the coast, surrounded by massive walls.

D. The Sea Peoples and the End of the Bronze Age
1. After 1200 B.C.E., the Bronze Age ended in chaos and destruction.
2. Indo-European Sea Peoples participated in widespread warfare in the eastern Mediterranean, including the Mycenaean ten-year siege of Troy in 1184 B.C.E. by King Agamemnon’s 1,000 ships, as depicted in Homer’s Iliad.
3. Pharaoh Ramses III (r. 1182–1151 B.C.E.) successfully defended Egypt against the Sea Peoples when they attacked the Nile delta in 1180 B.C.E.