

Reading Focus

- How did the first cities emerge?
- What are the basic features of civilizations?
- How do cultures spread and change?

Vocabulary

civilization
surplus
polytheistic
artisan
pictogram
scribe
city-state
empire
steppe
cultural diffusion

Taking Notes

As you read, prepare an outline of this section. Use Roman numerals to indicate the major headings of the section, capital letters for the subheadings, and numbers for the supporting details. The sample at right will help you get started.

- I. The rise of cities
 - A. River valley civilizations
 - 1.
 - 2.
- II. Features of civilization
 - A.
 - 1.
 - 2.

Main Idea

The rise of cities was a central feature in the development and spread of civilizations.

Setting the Scene

Perhaps the best-known monuments of the ancient world are the great pyramids of Egypt. More than 100,000 workers labored for years under the hot North African sun to build these giant tombs. Without modern machinery, they fit into place more than two million stone blocks weighing an average of 2½ tons each!

Pyramid building required a society more highly organized and technologically advanced than Neolithic farming villages. In Egypt, as elsewhere, people were taking a giant step from prehistory into history.

The Rise of Cities

The rise of cities was the main feature of civilization. A **civilization** is a complex, highly organized social order. The first cities emerged after farmers began cultivating fertile lands along river valleys and producing **surplus**, or extra, food. These surpluses in turn helped populations to expand. As populations grew, some villages swelled into cities.

River Valley Civilizations Cities rose independently in the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the Middle East, the Nile River in Egypt, the Indus River in India, and the Yellow River, or Huang He, in China. Conditions in these river valleys favored farming. Flood waters spread silt across the valleys, renewing the soil and keeping it fertile. The animals that flocked to the rivers to drink were another source of food. In addition, rivers provided a regular water supply and a means of transportation.

Rivers also posed challenges. Farmers had to control flooding and channel waters to the fields. To meet these challenges, cooperation was needed. Early farmers worked together to build dikes, dig canals, and carve out irrigation ditches. Such large-scale projects required leadership and a well-organized government.

Ancient cities were frequently surrounded by high walls. The walls of Babylon were so wide that a chariot could turn around on top of the wall without falling off. Early cities also boasted large temples and palaces and broad avenues used for public ceremonies. Still, most city streets were narrow and tangled, with houses as small as village huts.

Cities in the Americas Unlike the civilizations in Asia, Africa, and Europe, civilizations in the Americas often did not rise in river valleys. Two major civilizations, the Aztecs and Incas, eventually emerged in the highlands of Mexico and Peru.

Did You Know?

The Walls of Jericho

The city of Jericho was tiny—just about the size of eight football fields—but it was home to several thousand people. Jericho, in present-day Jordan, is the oldest city yet found. Archaeologists believe it was first settled a stunning 10,000 years ago. Even more striking is the fact that archaeologists have uncovered a huge wall, 12 feet high and 6 feet thick, that once surrounded the city.

What can we conclude from this great wall? Jericho must have had a powerful government to oversee the building of the wall. We can also conclude that there must have been a very good reason to undertake such a difficult task. One historian put it this way: "The citizens of Jericho felt they had wealth worth defending, and they lived in a world where others would try to take it from them by force."

Theme: Economics and Technology What might be the strategic advantages of a wall 12 feet high and 6 feet thick?

In the Americas, the first cities may have begun as religious centers. There, powerful priests inspired people from nearby villages to build temples to their gods. Villagers would gather at the temples for regular worship. In time, many may have remained permanently, creating cities like those elsewhere.

Features of Civilization

How did civilizations differ from smaller farming societies? What did the early civilizations that rose in different parts of the globe have in common? Historians distinguish eight basic features found in most early civilizations. These eight features are (1) cities, (2) well-organized central governments, (3) complex religions, (4) job specialization, (5) social classes, (6) arts and architecture, (7) public works, and (8) writing.

Organized Governments As cities grew, they needed a steady food supply. To produce large amounts of food and oversee irrigation projects, new forms of government arose. City governments were far more powerful than the councils of elders and local chiefs of farming villages.

At first, priests probably had the greatest power. In time, warrior kings emerged as the chief political leaders. They took over the powers of the old councils of elders and set themselves up as hereditary rulers who passed power from father to son. Almost always, rulers claimed that their right to rule came from the gods. Early Chinese kings took the title “Son of Heaven,” and Incan emperors declared that they were sons of the sun itself. Thus, political rulers gained religious power as well.

Government became more complex as rulers issued laws, collected taxes, and organized systems of defense. To enforce order, rulers relied on royal officials. Over time, separate government departments evolved that oversaw functions such as tax collection, irrigation projects, or the military.

Complex Religions Like their Stone Age ancestors, most ancient people were **polytheistic**, that is, they believed in many gods. People appealed to sun gods, river goddesses, and other spirits that they believed controlled natural forces. Other gods were thought to control human activities such as birth, trade, or war.

In ancient religions, priests and worshipers sought to gain the favor of the gods through complex rituals such as ceremonies, dances, prayers, and hymns. To ensure divine help, people built temples and sacrificed animals, crops, or sometimes other humans to the gods. Sacrifices and other ceremonies required the full-time attention of priests, who had special training and knowledge.

Job Specialization The lives of city dwellers differed from those of their Stone Age ancestors. Urban people developed so many new crafts that a single individual could no longer master all the skills needed to make tools, weapons, or other goods. For the first time, individuals began to specialize in certain jobs. Some became **artisans**, or skilled craftworkers, who made pottery or finely carved or woven goods. Among the crafts that developed in cities, metalworking was particularly important. People learned to make tools and weapons, first out of copper, then later out of bronze, a more durable mixture of copper and tin.

Cities had other specialists, too. Bricklayers built city walls. Soldiers defended them. Merchants sold goods in the marketplace. Singers, dancers, and storytellers entertained on public occasions. Such specialization made people dependent on others for their various needs.

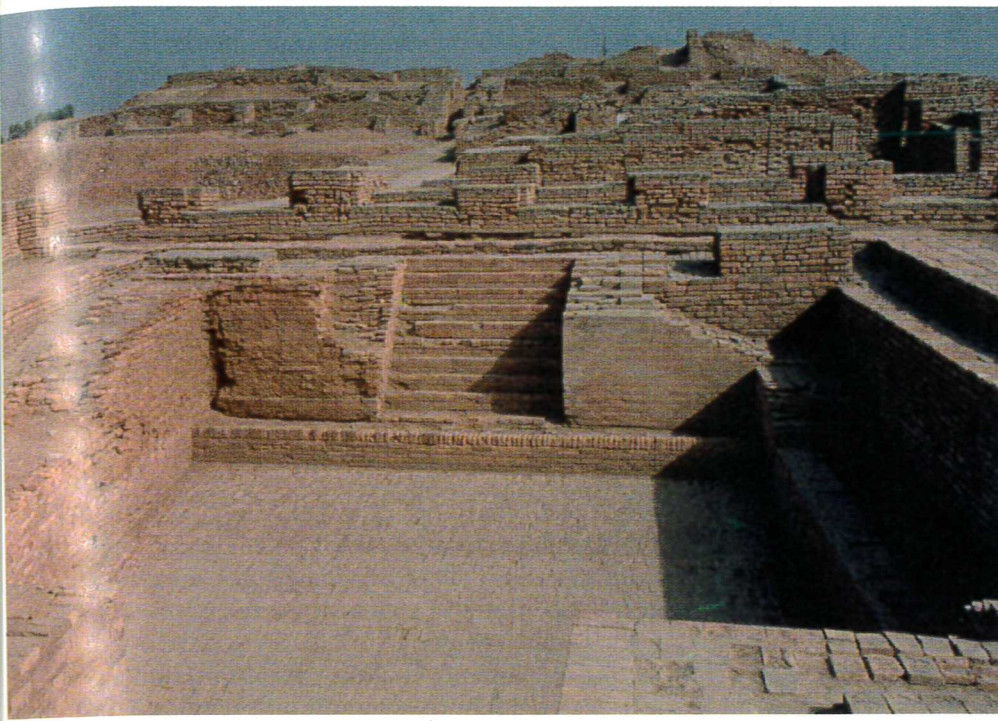
Social Classes In cities, social organization became more complex. People were ranked according to their jobs. Such ranking led to the growth of social classes. Priests and nobles usually occupied the top level of an



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**Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro
Pakistan**

To see other views and artifacts from these ancient cities, use the Internet address above to link to an ancient Indus Valley site.



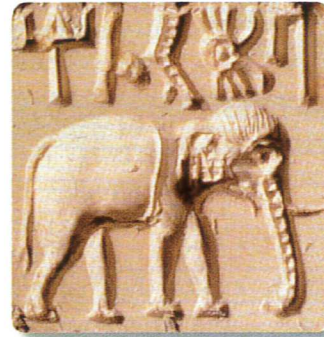
Remains of an Ancient Civilization

One early civilization emerged in the Indus River valley. The Indus city of Mohenjo-Daro included a huge public water tank (left). Indus Valley artifacts (below) include stone seals with writing and a small statue of a priest-king.

Theme: Diversity Describe how these pictures reflect some of the eight features of civilization.

ancient society. Next came a small class of wealthy merchants, followed by humbler artisans. Below them stood the vast majority of people, peasant farmers who lived in the surrounding villages and produced food for the city.

Slaves occupied the lowest social level. Slaves sometimes came from poor families who sold themselves into slavery to pay their debts. Others were prisoners captured in war. Because male captives were often killed, women and children made up the largest number of these slaves.



Arts and Architecture The arts and architecture of ancient civilizations expressed the beliefs and values of the people who created them. Temples and palaces dominated the city scenery. Such buildings reassured people of the strength and power of their government and religion.

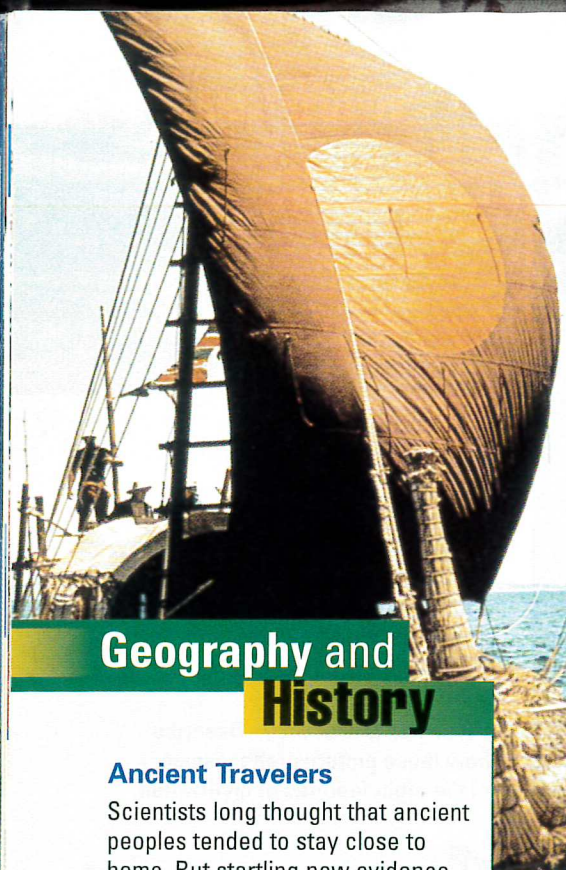
Skilled workers built and decorated massive buildings. In museums today, you can see statues of gods and goddesses, temple or palace wall paintings, and furniture and jewelry found in ancient tombs from around the world. They give ample evidence of the artistic genius of the first civilizations.

Public Works Closely linked to temples and palaces were vast public works that strong rulers ordered to be built. Such projects included irrigation systems, roads, bridges, and defensive walls. Although they were costly in human labor and even lives, such projects were meant to benefit the city, protecting it from attack and ensuring its food supply.

Writing A critical new skill developed by the earliest civilizations was the art of writing. It may have begun in temples, where priests needed to record amounts of grain collected, accurate information about the seasons, and precise rituals and prayers.

Archaeologists have found masses of ancient writings, ranging from treaties and tax rolls to business and marriage contracts. The earliest writing was made up of **pictograms**, or simple drawings that looked like the objects they represented. In time, symbols were added. They might stand for sounds of words or for ideas that could not be expressed easily in pictures.





Geography and History

Ancient Travelers

Scientists long thought that ancient peoples tended to stay close to home. But startling new evidence from around the world has cast doubt on this idea.

In Europe, archaeologists found the remains of a sophisticated canoe that is 8,500 years old. In Oceania, we have learned that early people sailed small boats across hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of miles of open ocean. In Asia, scientists have mapped out ancient trade routes that crossed hundreds of miles of some of the most rugged terrain on the planet. These discoveries show that early peoples were much more mobile than anyone had ever imagined.



Theme: Geography and History What might have motivated early peoples to travel?

As writing grew more complex, only specially trained people called **scribes** learned to read and write. Scribes were educated in temple schools and kept records for priests, rulers, and merchants. In only a few societies were women permitted to attend temple schools. As a result, women were generally excluded from becoming scribes, an occupation that could lead to political power.

Spread of Civilization

As ancient rulers gained more power, they conquered territories beyond the boundaries of their cities. This expansion led to the rise of the **city-state**, a political unit that included a city and its surrounding lands and villages. Rulers, nobles, and priests often controlled the land outside the city and forced peasants to grow crops on it. A large portion of each harvest went to support the government and temples.

The First Empires Rival leaders often battled for power. Sometimes, ambitious rulers conquered many cities and villages, creating the first empires. An **empire** is a group of states or territories controlled by one ruler. For the conquered people, defeat was painful and often cruel. At the same time, empire building also brought benefits. It helped end war between neighboring communities and created common bonds among people.

Interactions With Nomadic Peoples The first cities were scattered islands in a sea of older, simpler ways of life. Most peoples lived as their Stone Age ancestors had. They hunted, gathered food, or lived in simple farming villages. On some less-fertile lands or on sparse, dry grasslands, called **steppes**, nomadic herders tended cattle, sheep, goats, or other animals. Because the lands were poor in water and grass, these nomads had to keep moving to find new pasture.

Nomadic cultures were not “civilized,” in the sense that they did not exhibit the characteristics of civilization. They built no cities and their governments were simpler than those of settled city-states or empires. However, many nomadic peoples developed sophisticated traditions in oral poetry, music, weaving, jewelry making, animal raising, and other areas of the arts and sciences.

Throughout history, relations between nomads and city dwellers have been complex. At times, the two groups cooperated in political, economic, or military matters. At other times, they have been in conflict, with cities subduing nomadic peoples or nomads overrunning cities. You will read about such encounters in later chapters.

Civilizations and Change

All societies and civilizations change. In fact, history itself might be defined as the story of these changes. Ancient civilizations changed in many ways over the centuries. Among the chief causes of change were shifts in the physical environment and interactions among people.

Environmental Changes Like their Stone Age ancestors, people of early civilizations depended heavily on the physical environment. They needed rain and fertile soil to produce crops. Resources such as stone, timber, or metals were also essential. Changes in the environment could have an immediate impact on people’s lives.

At times, sudden, drastic events devastated a community. A tremendous volcano may have wiped out Minoan civilization on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea. Overfarming could destroy soil fertility, or rivers might become too salty. Cities would then suffer famine, and survivors would be forced to move away.

If people used up nearby timber or ran out of other building resources, they would have to adapt to this scarcity. They might, for example, trade with areas where such resources were available. Or they might use alternate building materials such as reeds.

Interactions Among People An even more important source of change was **cultural diffusion**, the spread of ideas, customs, and technologies from one people to another. Cultural diffusion occurred through migration, trade, and warfare.

As famine, drought, or other disasters led people to migrate, they interacted with others whose lives differed from their own. As a result, people often shared and adapted customs. Trade, too, introduced people to new goods or better methods of producing them. In ancient times, skills such as working bronze and writing, as well as religious beliefs, passed from one people to another.

Warfare also brought change. Often, victorious armies forced their way of life upon the people they defeated. On other occasions, the victors adopted the ways of a conquered people. Sometimes, nomadic rulers would become absorbed in city life.

Looking Ahead

In the next two chapters, you will read about the earliest civilizations that developed in the river valleys of Africa and Asia. They differed from one another in significant ways, each developing its own culture and traditions. At the same time, the civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, and China all fit our definition of a civilization.

Cause and Effect

Long-Term Causes

- Silt deposits create fertile soil in river valleys
- Neolithic people learn to farm
- Hunters and gatherers settle into farming communities

Immediate Causes

- New technologies improve farming
- Food surpluses support rising populations
- First cities built in fertile valleys
- Farmers cooperate to control flooding and channel water

Rise of River Valley Civilizations

Immediate Effects

- Complex forms of government develop
- Arts become more elaborate
- Job specialization leads to social classes
- Writing is invented

Long-Term Effects

- Government bureaucracies emerge
- Early civilizations conquer neighboring lands
- Civilizations clash with nomadic peoples

Connections to Today

- Archaeologists mine rich stores of information in Egypt, Middle East, India, and China
- Large cities such as Cairo and Baghdad still flourish in river valley regions

Skills Assessment

Chart Although river valley civilizations rose in different places, they shared many important features. **How did the rise of civilizations lead to the development of more complex governments?**

SECTION 3 Assessment

Recall

1. **Define:** (a) civilization, (b) surplus, (c) polytheistic, (d) artisan, (e) pictogram, (f) scribe, (g) city-state, (h) empire, (i) steppe, (j) cultural diffusion.

Comprehension

2. How did conditions in some river valleys favor the rise of early civilizations?
3. How were government and religion closely linked in early civilizations?

4. What are three causes of cultural change?

Critical Thinking and Writing

5. **Recognizing Causes and Effects** How did job specialization lead to the emergence of social classes in early civilizations?
6. **Linking Past and Present** (a) Give three examples that show cultural diffusion in today's world. (b) Why do you think that cultural changes occur more quickly today than in the past?



Activity

Take It to the NET

Use Internet sources to find out more about how early people learned to measure time. Then, use the information to create a time line about the evolution of time measurement.