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Ways of the World: A Brief Global History

First Edition

CHAPTER 3

First Civilizations:
Cities, States, and Unequal Societies
3500 B.C.E.–500 B.C.E.

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Something New: The Emergence of Civilizations

OP: For you does the term *civilization*

- a. conjure up images of superiority?
- b. suggest refined behavior?
- c. bring to mind only positive associations?
- d. bring to mind a mixed or ambivalent set of associations?

Introducing the First Civilizations

1. one of the earliest civilizations emerged in Sumer (in southern Mesopotamia) between 3500 and 3000 B.C.E.
 - a. first written language
 - b. appearance of Egyptian civilization in Nile River Valley (northeast Africa) and smaller Nubian civilization to its south at about the same time
2. Norte Chico (central coastal Peru), emerged between 3000 and 1800 B.C.E.
 - a. twenty-five urban centers
 - b. Norte Chico differed in several ways from Mesopotamia and Egypt
 - c. unusually self-contained; only import was maize, derived from Mesoamerica

Introducing the First Civilizations

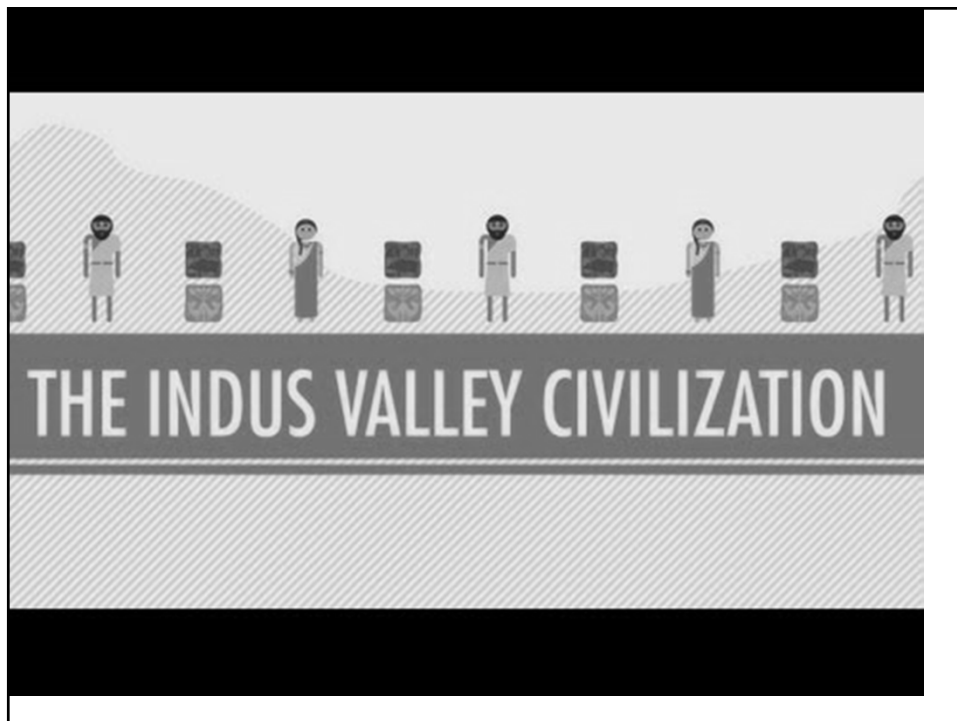
3. Indus Valley civilization in Indus and Saraswati river valleys of present-day Pakistan arose between 3000 and 2000 B.C.E.
 - a. Elaborately planned cities and standardized weights, measures, architectural styles, and brick sizes
 - b. Written script that remains thus far undeciphered
 - c. unlike other civilizations, it generated no palaces, temples, elaborate graves, kings, or warrior classes
 - d. scholars remain uncertain as to how society was organized; theories include a series of small republics, rule by priests, or an early form of the caste system
 - e. environmental degradation led to the collapse of this civilization by about 1700 B.C.E., but several aspects of its culture shaped later Indian societies

Introducing the First Civilizations

4. Around 2200 B.C.E., a First Civilization took shape in China
 - a. from the start, China was defined by the ideal of a centralized state
 - b. the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties enlarged the Chinese state
 - c. ruler was the “Son of Heaven,” an intermediary between heaven and earth
 - d. early written language with oracle bones as early documents
 - e. China has maintained impressive cultural continuity into modern times

Introducing the First Civilizations

5. The Olmec produced a First Civilization much later (around 1200 B.C.E.) on coast of Gulf of Mexico, near present-day Veracruz
 - a. Cities arose from competing chiefdoms and produced elaborate ceremonial centers
 - b. Created the first written language in the Americas by about 900 B.C.E.
 - c. Culture influenced later civilizations in Mesoamerica, including the Maya and Teotihuacán
6. Other smaller civilizations also flourished
 - a. Nubian civilization south of Egypt was distinctive and independent
 - b. City of Sanxingdui in China arose separately from the more well-known Shang Dynasty



The Question of Origins

1. First Civilizations had their roots in the Agricultural Revolution
2. First Civilizations tended to develop from earlier, competing chiefdoms that already had some social rank and economic specialization
3. Process was gradual and evolutionary

The Question of Origins

4. Why did some chiefdoms develop into civilizations and others did not?
 - a. One argument: the need to organize large-scale irrigation projects (archeologists have found that these projects appeared long after civilizations began)
 - b. Another argument: the needs of elite groups, warfare, and trade all played roles as well
 - c. Robert Carneiro's argument: population density created competition, especially when agricultural land was limited

The Question of Origins

5. The creation of the First Civilizations was quick by world history standards but was an unconscious undertaking for those involved
6. All First Civilizations relied on highly productive agriculture



An Urban Revolution

1. Cities were one of the most distinctive features of First Civilizations
2. The scale, layout, and specialized industries of cities would have impressed visitors from villages

An Urban Revolution

3. Cities lay at the heart of all First Civilizations because they were:
 - a. Political/administrative capitals
 - b. Centers of cultural production—art, architecture, literature, ritual, and ceremony
 - c. Places of local and long-distance exchange
 - d. Centers of manufacturing activity
4. Cities produced new societies with greater specialization and inequality

The Erosion of Equality

Hierarchies of Class

1. First Civilizations had vast inequalities in wealth, status, and power
2. Civilizations multiplied and magnified inequalities that already existed in complex gathering and hunting societies and agricultural chiefdoms
3. These new levels of inequality represent one of the major turning points in the social history of humankind

Hierarchies of Class

4. Upper classes:
 - a. Enjoyed great wealth
 - b. Avoided physical labor
 - c. Had the finest in everything
 - d. Occupied the top positions in political, military, and religious life
 - e. Frequently distinguished by their clothing, houses, manner of burial, and treatment under the law

Hierarchies of Class

5. Free commoners formed the vast majority of the population and included artisans of all kinds, lower-level officials, soldiers and police, servants, and farmers
 - a. Their surplus production was appropriated to support the upper classes
 - b. Some members of these classes recognized and resented their situation

Hierarchies of Class

6. Slaves were at the bottom of social hierarchies everywhere
 - a. Slavery and civilization seem to have emerged together
 - b. First-generation slaves were prisoners of war, criminals, and debtors
 - c. Worked in fields, mines, homes, and shops
 - d. More rarely, they were sacrificed
 - e. Slavery varied from place to place
 - f. Most ancient slavery differed from the more recent American variety

OP: Which of the following is for you the least appealing development that accompanied First Civilizations?

- a. Slavery
- b. Patriarchy
- c. Social stratification
- d. Wide-scale warfare

The Rise of the State

Coercion and Consent

1. The state fulfilled a variety of roles in coordinating and regulating the First Civilizations, including:
 - a. Organizing irrigation systems
 - b. Adjudicating conflicts
 - c. Defense
2. the state served the needs of the upper classes by:
 - a. Protecting the privileges of the elites
 - b. Requiring farmers to give up a portion of their product to support city people
 - c. Demanding labor on large public projects

Coercion and Consent

3. The state frequently used force to secure its will
4. Force was not always necessary because the state often claimed that its authority was normal, natural, and ordained by the gods
 - a. Rule by divine right
 - b. Deference to religion restrained or even undermined the right to rule as in the rule of Chinese emperors by the Mandate of Heaven

Writing and Accounting

1. Writing provided support for the state and emerged in all of the First Civilizations except the Andes (though some scholars now regard their knotted strings, or quipus, as a kind of writing)
2. Writing sustained the First Civilizations by:
 - a. defining elite status and conveying prestige on those who wrote
 - b. allowing some commoners to join the elite through literacy
 - c. providing a means for propaganda
 - d. providing a means to keep accurate accounts and complex calendars
 - e. giving weight to regulations and laws

Writing and Accounting

3. Writing also served functions beyond the state
 - a. Fostered literature, philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, and history
 - b. Sometimes threatened rulers

The Grandeur of Kings

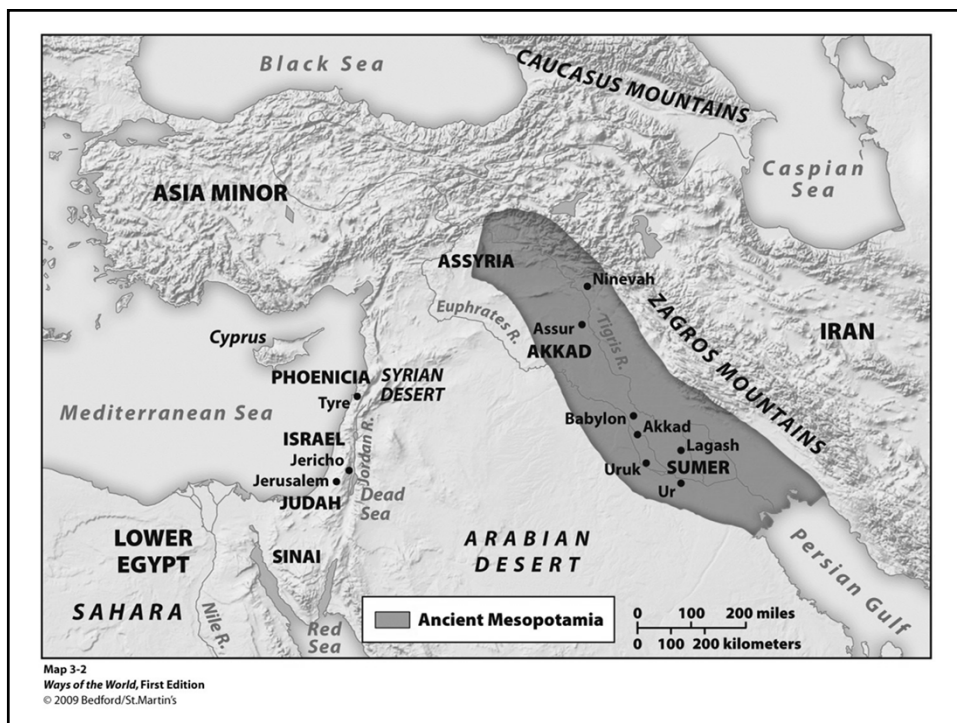
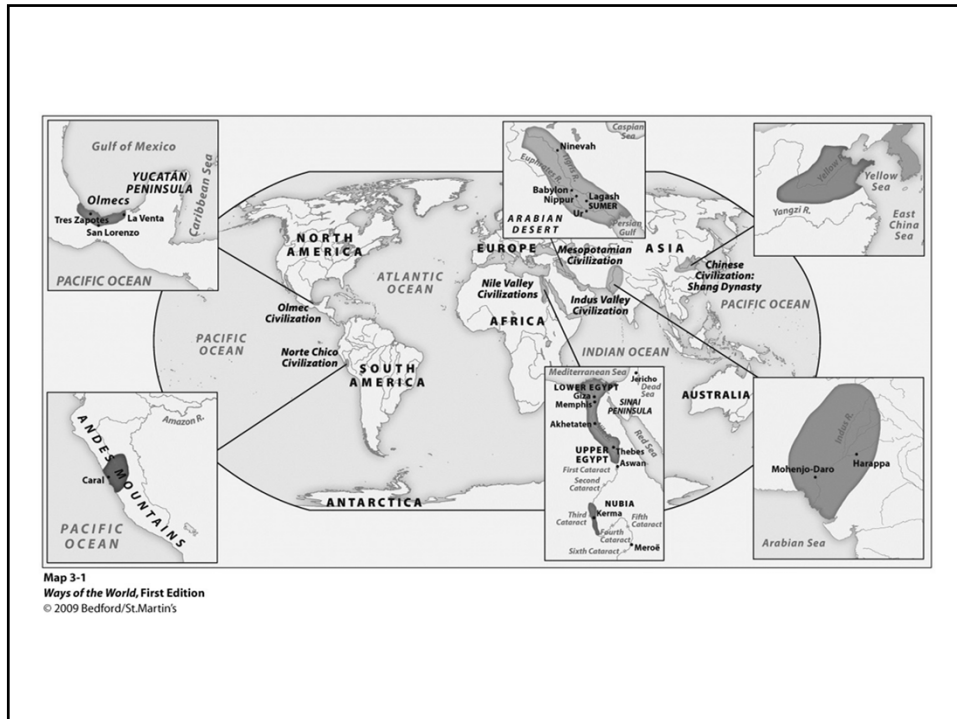
1. Source of state authority
2. Monumental residences and temples
3. Luxurious dress
4. Elaborate burials

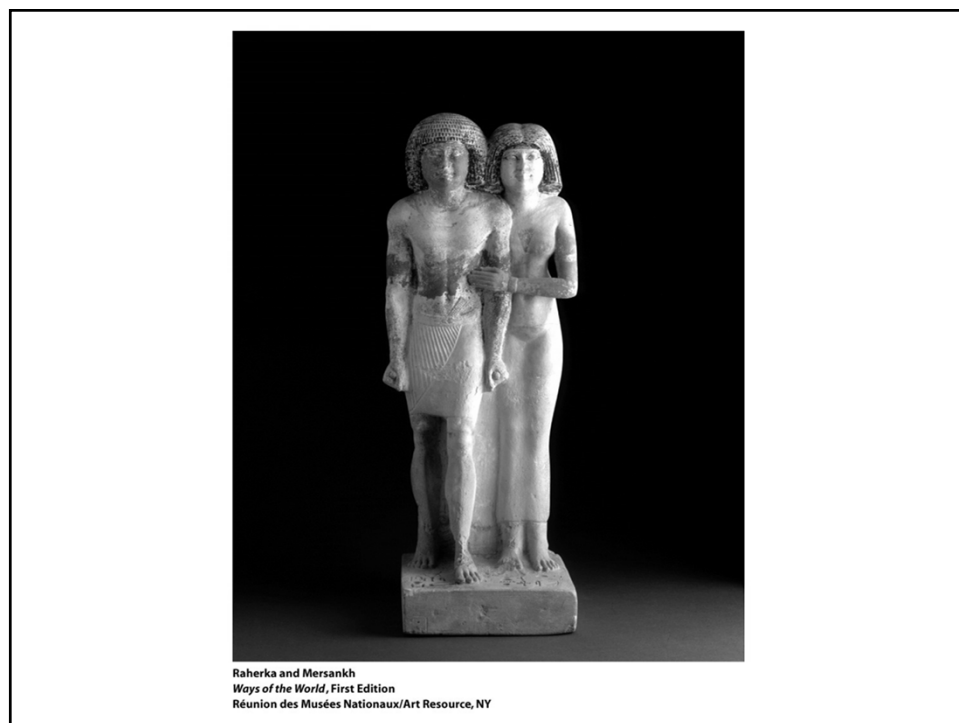
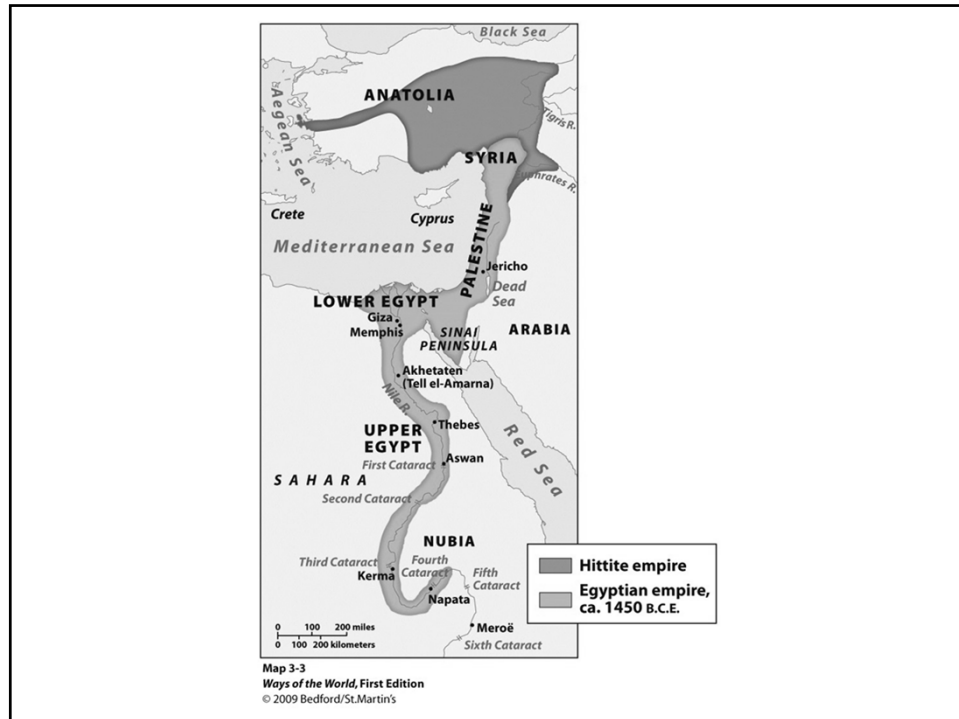
Comparing Mesopotamia and Egypt

Chapter 3

First Civilizations: Cities, States, and Unequal Societies, 3500 B.C.E.–500 B.C.E.

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- Mohenjo Daro (p. 63)
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Shang Dynasty Bronze
Ways of the World, First Edition
Jiangxi Provincial Museum, Nanchang/Visual Connection Archive



Mohenjo Daro
Ways of the World, First Edition
Paolo Koch/Photo Researchers, Inc.



A Mesopotamian Ziggurat
Ways of the World, First Edition
Richard Ashworth/Robert Harding World Imagery/Corbis



Olmec Head
Ways of the World, First Edition
Danny Lehman/Corbis



Egypt and Nubia
Ways of the World, First Edition
Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

OP: On the whole, was the emergence of First Civilizations a positive or negative development for humankind?

- a. The emergence of First Civilizations was a positive development for humankind.
- b. The emergence of First Civilizations was a negative development for humankind.