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**Ways of the World: A Brief Global
History with Sources**
Second Edition

Chapter 2

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

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Raherka and Mersankh
Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY
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1. Who does this statue represent? Describe the figure.

This statue shows Raherka, an “inspector of the scribes” of Egypt’s Fifth Dynasty, with his wife, Mersankh, around 2350 B.C.E. The couple wears their hair in similar traditional styles and is dressed modestly in tunics. Mersankh stands slightly behind her husband on his left and holds onto his left arm with her left hand. The hair of the figures is colored black, and the skin and clothing shows remnants of ochre and yellow colors.

2. What made the person represented in this statue significant in his time?

The ability to write was a defining feature of early civilizations, and those who mastered it enjoyed exceptional respect and influence. As a scribe, Raherka assumed an unusual position in the Fifth Dynasty, and the inclusion of his wife suggests that his prestige and significance also reflected on his family.

3. How does this statue reflect one of the new qualities of early civilizations?

Figurative art of the Paleolithic era usually did not represent specific individuals. As a statue with features depicting specific individuals, this statue is an example of the art of early civilizations.

I. Something New: The Emergence of Civilizations

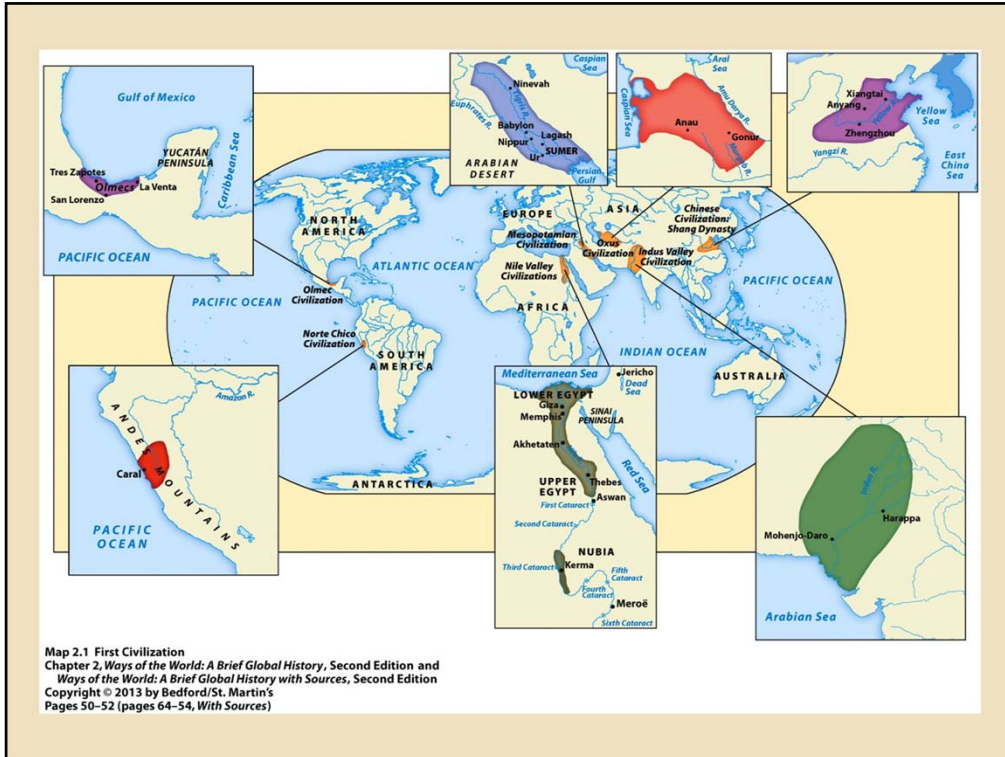
A. Introducing the First Civilizations

1. Sumer, Egypt, & Nubia, 3500–3000 B.C.E.
2. Norte Chico, 3000–1800 B.C.E.
3. Indus Valley and Oxus, 2200 B.C.E–1700 B.C.E.
4. Xia, Shang, & Zhou, 2200–771 B.C.E.
5. Olmec, 9000 B.C.E.

I. Something New: The Emergence of Civilizations

A. Introducing the First Civilizations

1. Sumer, Egypt, & Nubia: City states emerged in Sumer in Southern Mesopotamia around 3500–3000 B.C.E. and produced the first written language. Egypt developed along the Nile and had a clear territorial base, unlike the fluid city states of Mesopotamia. Egypt's architectural monuments, such as the pyramids, are obviously very well known. Nubia developed as a distinct civilization further south on the Nile.
2. Norte Chico: From roughly 3000 to 1800 B.C.E. in a coastal area in central Peru, some twenty-five urban centers developed. While lacking rainfall, the area was watered by snowmelt-fed rivers from the Andes. These small cities engaged in specialized production, such as cotton nets, and exploited the rich fisheries. They did not develop farming based on grain but grew beans and fruit. Without protective walls or archeological signs of warfare, these cities seem to have been very peaceful. While they did not develop writing, they may have used knotted cords to record information. While isolated from the rest of the world, at some point maize from Central America arrived.
3. Indus Valley and Oxus: In South and Central Asia, two distinct cultures developed in the Indus Valley and in the Oxus Valley. The Indus saw the development of large and planned cities but did not produce lasting monumental architecture as in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Throughout the region there seems to have been a system of standardized weights and measures, as well as architectural style, but there is little indication of a political hierarchy or a centralized state. While environmental degradation led to the collapse of this civilization, some cultural patterns, such as religious rituals and yoga positions, remain to this day. Further north in the Oxus Valley, a culture emerged that blended both irrigated agriculture and stock raising with long-distance trade connections.
4. Xia, Shang, & Zhou: In China, a series of dynasties established cultural and political patterns such as the centralized state, the concept of the Mandate of Heaven, and a character-based writing system, that would last until the early twentieth century.
5. Olmec: Along the Gulf of Mexico, the Olmec civilization took shape around 1200 B.C.E. and set the cultural patterns for centuries in Mesoamerican, as seen by the survival of architectural styles, rituals, and ceremonial ball games.



I. Something New: The Emergence of Civilizations

B. The Question of Origins

1. Roots in Agricultural Revolution
2. Growing population density, competition, and subordination

I. Something New: The Emergence of Civilizations

B. The Question of Origins

1. Roots in Agricultural Revolution: While agriculture was essential to the rise of these civilizations, not all agricultural societies developed into civilizations. There is much debate over the missing factor that led to increased social complexity.
2. Growing population density, competition, and subordination: Increased population growth led to increased population density, which resulted in both an increased need for cooperation and organization on public works projects such as irrigation but also increased competition and conflict over resources. Strong and organized state systems provided an obvious advantage. Losers were incorporated into these growing societies as a subordinated class.

I. Something New: The Emergence of Civilizations

C. An Urban Revolution

1. Uruk, Mohenjo Daro, Harappa, & Teotihuacán
2. Centers of politics, administration, culture, and economics
3. Impersonal and unequal

I. Something New: The Emergence of Civilizations

C. An Urban Revolution

1. Uruk, Mohenjo Daro, Harappa, & Teotihuacán: Examples of urban centers in Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, and Mesoamerica that would have stunned individuals from non-urban societies.
2. Centers of politics, administration, culture, and economics: Main functions of cities.
3. Impersonal and unequal: Due to size and specialization of labor, cities would have been alienating because no one could know everyone in the city and social hierarchies would have created clear divisions among various social groups. This would be in sharp contrast to the relative equality of the world of the gather/hunters or villagers.

II. The Erosion of Equality

A. Hierarchies of Class

1. Inequalities of wealth, status, & power
2. Impact of urbanization
3. Elite privileges
4. Wealth producers
5. Slaves

B. Hierarchies of Gender

1. Sex versus gender
2. Patriarchal ideal versus reality
3. Farm labor, warfare, and property

II. The Erosion of Equality

A. Hierarchies of Class

1. Inequalities of wealth, status, & power: Class distinctions were based on access to wealth, social status, and the ability to control and use power.
2. Impact of urbanization: Urbanization decreased village egalitarianism and increased social inequality.
3. Elite privileges: Elites enjoyed privileges based on wealth and power but also enjoyed the legal, ceremonial, and symbolic trappings of status.
4. Wealth producers: The vast majority of humans were commoners who produced most of the surplus wealth. Commoners felt wealth was extracted by the elites, often producing resentment.
5. Slaves: Enslaved by war, crime, or debt, slaves were at the bottom of social hierarchies and they worked a variety of tasks.

B. Hierarchies of Gender

1. Sex versus gender: Sex refers to the biological distinctions between male and female in a given species but gender refers to the social construction of male and female identities.
2. Patriarchal ideal versus reality: Most cultures expressed a patriarchal ideal of male supremacy, but reality often reflected a much wider diversity of experiences. Women could often find ways to exercise agency outside of the ideal form.
3. Farm labor, warfare, and property: In trying to explain the origins of gender inequality, some scholars have looked to heavy farm labor while others have stressed a class of male warriors. Still

others point toward concerns about property inheritance and lineage.

II. The Erosion of Equality

C. Patriarchy in Practice

1. Law and female sexuality
2. Respectable and non-respectable women
3. Decline of the goddesses

II. The Erosion of Equality

C. Patriarchy in Practice

1. Law and female sexuality: Because male law makers were so concerned with property and inheritance, early laws developed that governed women's sexual behavior with harsh punishments for female transgressors.
2. Respectable and non-respectable women: Social ideals often focused on respectable women (who might be veiled as in Assyria), yet there were frequently classes of non-respectable women such as prostitutes and slaves who lived outside the controlling social norms.
3. Decline of the goddesses: In many early societies, male deities tied to wisdom and warfare began to replace female goddesses tied to agriculture.

III. The Rise of the State

A. Coercion and Consent

1. The need for organization
2. Monopoly on the legitimate use of violence
3. Religion and political power

B. Writing and Accounting

1. Literacy and social status
2. Tracking wealth and property

III. The Rise of the State

A. Coercion and Consent

1. The need for organization: Collective projects such as building irrigation systems and fighting other communities required someone with the authority to organize and control the effort. Thus, increased social complexity required authority.
2. Monopoly on the legitimate use of violence: The early state systems reserved the sole right to use physical force, leading to a decrease in interpersonal violence.
3. Religion and political power: In addition to force, belief in the spiritual powers of the rulers could be a source of authority.

B. Writing and Accounting

1. Literacy and social status: Access to literacy was often revered as an almost magical skill and gave the literate increased social power.
2. Tracking wealth and property: The earliest uses of writing were to track and account for taxes and the exchange of goods and labor. This gave more power to the bureaucracy.

III. The Rise of the State

C. The Grandeur of Kings

1. Lifestyles of the rich and famous
2. Death styles of the elite

III. The Rise of the State

C. The Grandeur of Kings

1. Lifestyles of the rich and famous: Elites used their wealth as symbols of power. They and their families lived in luxurious palaces and enjoyed fancy clothes and jewelry.
2. Death styles of the elite: Elaborate burial rituals marked the passing of important rulers. These could include being buried with material wealth and later the construction of elaborate tombs. Like palaces, they communicated the power of the elite to commoners.



Olmec Head
Danny Lehman/Corbis
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1. What is this statue, and where is it located?

This statue is one of seventeen large figures in the territory of the ancient Olmec civilization in Mesoamerica. At six feet in height and seven feet in width and with very specific facial features, they represent individual Olmec rulers.

2. What do you think was the purpose of these statues?

At this massive scale, these statues were not only supposed to impress the spectator with the size and powerful presence of the represented rulers; they also marked the rulers' unmovable claims on the territory since these facial statues were too big to remove.

3. Consider the work involved in the creation of these statues. What does this tell us about the authority of these rulers?

Carving these massive heads out of rock must have required considerable work and skill. These rulers' authority was considerable enough to compel the creation of these monuments and demand a very personal representation of power in their territories.

IV. Comparing Mesopotamia and Egypt

A. Environment and Culture

1. Different rivers
2. Pessimistic Mesopotamia & Optimistic Egypt
3. Soil health

B. Cities and States

1. Violent and unstable city-states
2. Security, stability, and political longevity

IV. Comparing Mesopotamia and Egypt

A. Environment and Culture

1. Different rivers: The unpredictable and dangerous Tigris and Euphrates stood in sharp contrast to the regular and predictable Nile. The Nile was also isolated from invaders by deserts, while Mesopotamia was a crossroads and thus saw many invasions.
2. Pessimistic Mesopotamia & Optimistic Egypt: This dangerous geography created a pessimistic culture and dim view of the after life in Mesopotamia. Egyptians, however, were an optimistic culture that expected the comfortable life cycles of Egypt to continue in the next life.
3. Soil health: The Mesopotamians experienced soil degradation due to overuse, but the Nile rejuvenated Egypt's soil every flood season.

B. Cities and States

1. Violent and unstable city-states: The numerous Mesopotamian city-states engaged in rivalries and warfare. Cities rose and fell over the centuries.
2. Security, stability, and political longevity: In contrast, isolated and geographically coherent (thanks to the Nile's gentle current running against the prevailing winds) Egypt enjoyed striking security and political longevity.



Map 2.2 Mesopotamia
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IV. Comparing Mesopotamia and Egypt

C. Interaction and Exchange

1. Long-distance trade
2. Cultural influences
3. Migrations, rivalries, and diplomacy

IV. Comparing Mesopotamia and Egypt

C. Interaction and Exchange

1. Long-distance trade: Trade connected Egypt and Mesopotamia south to Nubia and Punt and east to the Indus Valley civilization.
2. Cultural influences: Religious and philosophical ideas spread with trade, as did social and military practices. The Phoenicians serve as an excellent example of this process.
3. Migrations, rivalries, and diplomacy: As people came into contact as states or in periods of migration, conflicts arose, resulting in both military engagements and systems of diplomacy.



V. Reflections: “Civilization”: What’s in a Word?

- A. Debate on terminology
- B. Ambiguous views of civilization
- C. Are civilizations solid?

V. Reflections: “Civilization”: What’s in a Word?

- A. Debate on terminology:** Many scholars do not use the term “civilization.”
- B. Ambiguous views of civilization:** Some critics do not believe that civilization was necessarily a good thing.
- C. Are civilizations solid?:** Some critics points out that there are no clear definitions of civilization or distinctions between civilized and non-civilized societies.



Visual Source 2.1 A Seal from the Indus Valley
J. Mark Kenoyer/Harappa Images
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Visual Source 2.2 Man from Mohenjo Daro
Department of Archaeology and Museums, Karachi, Pakistan
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Visual Source 2.3a Dancing Girl
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