Many ancient civilizations have added to our current knowledge, technology, and understanding of the world. Some provide the foundations of modern ideology. The ones covered in this chapter commenced the movement from the very ancient agrarian society to modern culture. They are all geographically located in the Mediterranean Basin or the Middle East and include Mesopotamia (Sumer, Babylonia, and Assyria), Egypt, the Hittite Empire, Persia, Greece, and Rome. (See Table 43.1, “Ancient Civilizations Timeline,” at end of chapter.)

**Mesopotamia**

Often called the cradle of civilization, Mesopotamia was the site of the world’s first cities. This urban development involved not only just a large group of people living in close proximity but also a revolution in social organization, in farming, and in technology. This cultural leap was a transition from the primitive settlement to the modern society.

Beginning around 5500 BCE and continuing for the next 2,000 years, people gradually began to move from the mountains into the Mesopotamian plain and settled in cities. In addition to the development of cities, these people developed irrigation, canals, and flood control. They learned how to drain marshes and to turn them into farmland. They also invented the plow, the wheel, and metallurgy (copper and bronze). During this time, the Sumerians moved to this area and became the dominate people.

**Sumer**

About 3100 BCE, the Sumerians developed writing. Initially, the writing took the form of pictographs or hieroglyphics, with each symbol representing a word. By 2500 BCE, the language had simplified and developed into cuneiform, that is, wedge-shaped symbols representing syllables of words. For over 3,000 years, various civilizations, such as the Hittites, Assyrians, and Babylonians, adopted and used this system of writing. Most of the early Sumerian texts were records of economic activity, but by 2500 BCE, they expanded to include religious and literary texts as well as historical documents.

As cities emerged, social and political complexity increased significantly and people developed specialized vocations. These developments led to interdependence. Thus, the people became dependent on outside trade and commerce to meet their everyday necessities. Leaders of cities emerged who sought to expand their influence and control into the surrounding villages, and social classes developed among the populations. These communities developed into city-states. Kings (or warlords) expanded their influence to include other city-states through military conquest. They also captured and enslaved people.

The Sumerians invented bronze, a copper and tin alloy. They developed sculpture (high-profile statues), religious imagery, literary styles, and views on kingship, law, and society. They laid the groundwork for various sciences including arithmetic, astronomy, botany, and medicine. Perhaps most notable, the Sumerians developed monumental architecture. Specifically, they developed temples that sat on ziggurat platforms. These temples, dedicated to a patron deity, functioned as more than just places of worship. They also served as banks, libraries of economic records, and trade and political centers.
Priests at these temples wielded enough power that they even rivaled the kings.

Around 2350 BCE, Sargon, an Akkadian from central Mesopotamia, overthrew the Sumerian city-states and began the world's first nation-state. The Akkadians adopted much of the Sumerian culture but used the Akkadian language for international business. They developed a national administration, with appointed officials administering, and military garrisons stationed in conquered cities. The Akkadians extracted tribute from subjected people, levied taxes, and expanded trade to as far away as the Indus Valley to the east and Anatolia to the west.

The Akkadian state was short-lived. Around 2150 BCE, the nation collapsed and individual city-states reemerged. Lagash and Ur were two of the more successful city-states. They expanded their control into small empires based on economics rather than military strength. Ur soon became the stronger state and ruled all of Mesopotamia by 2111 BCE. Ur inaugurated a massive building program, its crowning achievement the completed ziggurat dedicated to the moon-god Nanna. They improved transportation on land, on rivers, and on canals; developed law codes; established standardized dry weights and measures; and maintained a strong, centralized government. Influxes of people from the mountains and internal revolts led to the fall of the last Sumerian kingdom (around 2000 BCE).

**Babylonia**

A new group of Semitic people, the Amorites, moved into Mesopotamia around 1800 BCE, threw off Elamite domination, made the city of Babylon their capital (creating the Old Babylonian Empire), and elevated Babylon to the status of a holy city, a status it would retain throughout ancient history.

Hammurabi (1792-1750 BCE), king of Babylon, conquered the Assyrians and claimed to have extended his empire to the Mediterranean Sea. He is most renowned for his law code, which is a valuable source of information on the social structure of this time. His law code, carved on an 8-foot stela of black diorite, was based on an earlier Sumerian code except harsher. Furthermore, Hammurabi is known for his diplomacy and administration. He entertained foreign diplomats. He had advisers and noblemen to oversee his empire. He held court for his subjects, where he heard and acted on their grievances personally. Also, he maintained control of the military and oversaw public works building programs.

The glory of the kingdom was short-lived. The kings gradually lost their military power and authority. Around 1595 BCE, the Hittites plundered Babylon and returned to their land. Babylon never recovered from this blow and proved too weak to resist new invaders, the Kassites from the Zagros Mountains area.

The Babylonians developed complex mathematics, which included geometry and algebra. They developed a system of symbols representing the values of numbers (such as 100s, 10s, and 1s), knew the value of $\pi$ (a mathematical constant, 3.1415927, which is the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter), and developed a sexagesimal counting system (based on 60) that has survived until modern times. One Babylonian text has tables that give the square root of numbers to 59 and the cube root of numbers to 32. Also, they invented the abacus, a primitive calculator. The Babylonians applied their mathematics to commerce and large-scale building projects.

**Assyria**

One of the results of the Amorite invasions around 2000 BCE was the establishment of a dynasty around three Assyrian cities—Nineveh, Arbela, and Ashur. This event marked the beginning of the Old Assyrian period (2000-1363 BCE). Little is known about the Assyrians during this period except that

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they had trade relations with the Hittites and that Babylon was already a rival kingdom. Assyria began expanding and developing into an empire during Assyria's Middle Kingdom (1363-1000 BCE). They defeated the neighboring Mittani kingdom. They had an ongoing war with Babylonia and at times were able to control Babylon. Also, they fought against tribes to their north and west. The Middle Kingdom ended as Assyrian strength succumbed to the increasing Aramean pressure.

Assyria began to exert its might at the end of the 2nd millennium BCE, beginning the New Kingdom (1000-609 BCE) and what historians call the Assyrian Empire. The empire reached its zenith in the 8th and 7th centuries BCE. Tiglathpileser III incorporated Syria into his kingdom, as well as set himself up as king of Babylon. His successor, Sargon II, added Palestine. In 663 BCE, Esarhaddon conquered Egypt and expanded Assyrian influence and control to its greatest extent. The Assyrian Empire fell to a Mede and Babylonia coalition through a series of battles. The coalition defeated Nineveh in 612 BCE and Haran in 609 BCE, and it won the final battle fought at Carchemish in 605 BCE.

The last great Assyrian king was Ashurbanipal (669-627 BCE), who had the Babylonian library texts copied and then deposited in Nineveh. The discovery of this library in the 1800s proved to be one of the most important Assyrian archaeological discoveries as the library contained many texts from earlier civilizations, including a copy of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a 3rd-millennium Sumerian story.

Assyria is noted for its practice of exiling captured people. They moved entire populations, including the Israelites, Babylonians, Persians, and Arabians. This policy was not only to control the populations to prevent uprisings but also to maximize skills of certain peoples. For example, some foreign people worked for the Assyrians as scribes, interpreters, artisans, architects, and skilled laborers.

The Assyrians were also known for their proficiency in warfare. They incorporated the war chariot, the use of a cavalry, and iron weapons into their warfare. However, the Assyrian army preferred siege warfare, which they developed to an art. They circled a city, closing off any escape. They shouted at the population, telling them to surrender. After the city weakened from a lack of water and supplies, they attacked the city walls with siege engines and battering rams, contraptions that they had invented. Also, they used psychological warfare. They displayed flayed, defeated warriors; burned people alive; impaled warriors on tall poles in front of a city after a siege; and cut off hands, ears, and noses. These displays served to dissuade others from rebelling.

Babylon experienced a revival under King Nabopolassar (626-605 BCE). He, in a coalition with the Medes, defeated the Assyrians and permanently ended their dominance. Nabopolassar established a short-lived empire (the Neo-Babylonian Empire, or Chaldean Empire) of the once Assyrian-controlled lands. His son Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BCE) expanded and consolidated the empire. Nebuchadnezzar is renowned for defeating Judah, destroying Jerusalem, and carrying the Jews into exile (586 BCE). After Nebuchadnezzar died, the empire deteriorated under the rule of inept leaders until Cyrus the Persian (also known as Cyrus the Great) captured Babylon in 539 BCE.

**Egypt**

A cursory look at the monuments of ancient Egypt reveals that this ancient civilization was not only impressive but also important to regional cultural development. The mere mention of ancient Egypt brings to mind Pharaohs, gigantic pyramids, elaborate temple complexes, and hieroglyphics-Egypt's picture language. Not only was ancient Egypt the longest existing ancient civilization, but also it was a unique civilization in that, unlike Mesopotamia, desert and the Mediterranean Sea surrounded its arable
land and isolated the Egyptians from other groups of people. Also, Egypt was unique in that life and culture centered on, depended on, and were shaped by the Nile River.

Although people lived in the area from 5500 BCE, historians usually define the kingdom of ancient Egypt as the time between the beginning of the dynastic period around 3100 BCE and the conquest of Alexander the Great in 332 BCE. The dynastic period began with the unification of Lower and Upper Egypt under one ruler. Little is known about this ruler (usually associated with Menes, or Narmer) or the unification of the two kingdoms due to a lack of written and physical evidence. What is known is that Early Dynastic Egypt (ca. 3100-2640 BCE) was a peaceful kingdom in which the rulers established a standard for the following dynastic periods. They traded as far south as Nubia and into the Levant as far as Syria and had already begun to exploit turquoise mines. During this time, the Egyptians advanced religion, promoted the notion of kingship, centralized governmental administration, developed sophistication in art and architecture, introduced hieroglyphic writing, and initiated the building of pyramids as funerary monuments.

In the Old Kingdom period (ca. 2640-2160 BCE), the Egyptians advanced monumental architecture to levels never seen before and rarely reached afterward. During this period, the pharaohs built the Great Pyramids at Giza, Saqqara, and elsewhere. Such building feats demonstrate that the pharaoh had centralized control of a willing population in addition to having a highly developed bureaucracy needed to undertake such projects. This development also demonstrates that the Egyptians had knowledge of higher mathematics and skill in moving extremely heavy building materials.

Egyptian art became standardized into “Egyptian” form during the Old Kingdom. It became elegant in style, with attention given to linear and rectilinear control and to baselines. The artists paid close attention to natural forms. For example, they drew animals in a common posture as found in the wild so that they looked realistic. Egyptian artists drew humans in an ideal form. They depicted men as being tall, lean, and fit, having broad shoulders and a narrow waist. They depicted women as young, slender, and well shaped, without any excess fat. Artists portrayed both men and women as having an air of self-confidence, balance, and proper proportions.

After a period of war and disunity (First Intermediate period, ca. 2160-2040 BCE), Egypt entered the Middle Kingdom period (ca. 2040-1650 BCE). Provincial lords held much power during much of this period in Egypt. However, the government did regain enough internal stability so that it could reestablish trade with the Levant (Byblos and Ugarit) and Lower Nubia.

During the Second Intermediate period (ca. 1670-1550 BCE), an Asiatic people that Manetho (an Egyptian priest and historian from the 3rd century BCE) called the “Hyksos” ruled Egypt. Eventually, the Thebans ran them out of the country and reunited Egypt. Battle with the Hyksos marked the beginning of a warrior culture in Egypt that led to its rise as a military power that had an organized, standing army. Also, the Egyptians made several innovations in weapons and military technology. They incorporated the chariot as a fighting platform into their ranks as well as the composite bow. This warrior mentality and a predisposition toward expansionism predominated the New Kingdom period (1550-1070 BCE), a time when ancient Egypt reached the height of its influence, wealth, and power. The pharaohs, particularly Thutmose III, made multiple campaigns into Nubia and into Asia as far as the Euphrates River, amassing the largest empire of ancient Egypt.

Almost all pharaohs of the 18th and 19th dynasties made military campaigns outside of Egypt's traditional borders and then returned home to have their exploits written down and put on public display.
at temples and at their elaborately built mortuary complexes. The most famous of these campaigns is the battle of Rameses II with the Hittite Empire at Kadesh on the Orontes River. These two chariot armies fought for 2 days before the battle ended in a stalemate. On returning home from the battle, Rameses II had accounts written of the battle, portraying him as the victor, and displayed these accounts at various places throughout his empire. Gifted with a long, 67-year reign, he had more cities, temples, statues, and monuments built than any other pharaoh.

The end of the New Kingdom marked the end of Egypt's empire and her golden years. After the death of Rameses III (1152 BCE), Egypt lost control of the Levant and much of Nubia, due mainly to the invasion of the Sea Peoples and internal struggles. Papyri dating to this time indicate widespread corruption and internal strife. Although a few pharaohs exerted power, none could build an empire. After falling to the Libyans, Nubians, Assyrians, and Persians, Egypt fell finally to Alexander the Great, the Macedonian, in 332 BCE. Egypt did have some glory in the Ptolemaic period (323-30 BCE). Egyptian religions were popular throughout the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, especially mystery religions. Furthermore, the Egyptian coastal city of Alexandria, founded by Alexander, became the learning center of the ancient world during this time, having a library with a vast collection of writings.

One of the more interesting anthropological developments unique to ancient Egypt is the influence of women. Egypt had two women pharaohs for certain: Hatshepsut (18th Dynasty, 1479-1458 BCE) and Cleopatra VII (69-30 BCE). Hatshepsut ruled for 22 years and engaged in warfare in Nubia, the Levant, and Syria. She established trade relations with the land of Punt when she brought back 31 live frankincense trees, the first recorded attempt to transplant a foreign plant. Also, she engaged in a massive building campaign at Karnak and Beni Hasan, with her greatest project being her mortuary temple complex at Deir el-Bahri. Egypt possibly had other women pharaohs; however, the Egyptian records are not clear as to their role or function. These women include Merneith (1st Dynasty), Nimaethap (3rd Dynasty), Ankhesenpepi II (6th Dynasty), Nitocris (6th Dynasty), Sobeknefru (12th Dynasty), Ahhotep I (17th Dynasty), Meritaten (18th Dynasty), Neferneferuaten (18th Dynasty), and Twosret (19th Dynasty). Whether pharaohs or not, these were women of great influence. Also, Egyptians held the belief that women carried the royal bloodline. Men had to marry a royal woman, usually the eldest daughter of the previous pharaoh, in order to be pharaoh. Furthermore, ancient Egyptian women had more rights than women in other contemporary cultures. They could own land, inherit from family members, and even go to court to defend their rights.

Ancient Egypt’s imprint on humanity continues to be visible today. The Great Pyramids of Giza, Rameses colossal statues, numerous hieroglyphic texts, and Bible stories of the Hebrews’ struggle in Egypt are all markers of this past great civilization. Archaeological discoveries, such as Tutankhamun's gold-filled tomb, a plethora of mummies (and the so-called mummy’s curse), and ornate temples and buildings, combined with the ancient Egyptian obsession with the dead, have fueled the storyline of many modern novels and movies. Ancient Egyptian art continues to impress upon modern culture and continues to be appreciated for its simplistic yet sophisticated elegance.

**The Hittites**

The Hittites were an Indo-European people of mysterious origins who peacefully arrived in central Anatolia around the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE. The Hittite kingdom centered on the city of Nesa and the capital city of Hattusa (located near Boghazköy in modern Turkey). These cities also are significant in that the Hittites called their language “Nesite,” named after the city of Nesa, and called
their kingdom “the land of Hatti,” named after the capital city of Hattusa.

Scholars divide Hittite chronology into two periods: the Old Kingdom (ca. 1750-1500 BCE) and the Hittite Empire, or the New Kingdom (ca. 1430-1180 BCE), with a time of turmoil in between sometimes called the Middle Kingdom. During the Old Kingdom, the Hittites expanded from being colonies of merchants to a kingdom incorporating much of Asia Minor and northern Syria. The most notable event and demonstration of Hittite power came in 1595 BCE when the Hittites under Mursili I took northern Syria, the city-state of Aleppo, and then sacked Babylon, ending the Old Babylonian Kingdom.

After a period of internal struggling for control of the throne, the Hittites once again exerted their power and thus began the New Kingdom. This kingdom expanded to include most of Anatolia and northern Syria. During this time, the Hittites rivaled Egypt in power and influence. In 1274 BCE, these two kingdoms met at Kadesh to fight one of the greatest chariot battles of the ancient world. Although the battle ended in a draw, Rameses II had accounts of the battle describing his great victory written in public places all over Egypt. A few years later, the Egyptians and Hittites made a peace-and-mutual-protection treaty, one of the first of its kind in history. The Hittite Empire ended suddenly around 1180 BCE with the mass migration of the Sea Peoples.

Although nearly forgotten for 3,000 years, the Hittites were one of the most significant civilizations in the ancient Near East. Archaeological excavations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries turned up tens of thousands of texts on clay tablets. Although many of the texts were written in Assyrian or Babylonian cuneiform and could be translated, scholars could not read the Hittite hieroglyphic texts for almost a century after their discovery. Once deciphered, these texts divulged a wealth of information about the Hittite civilization, including laws, treaties, business transactions, correspondences, and religious rites. Also, these texts show that the Hittites excelled at commerce. They traded throughout the ancient Near Eastern world, connecting the Mesopotamian world to Palestine, Egypt, Greece, and the eastern Mediterranean area. The Hittites adopted and modified Sumerian and Old Babylonian culture, including laws, political and economic structures, and ideas, and they passed this culture to their commercial partners. Also, Anatolia was rich in raw ores and metals, which were the Hittites, main items of trade. Particularly, the Hittites developed technology in working with iron thereby leading the transition of this region into the Iron Age. Furthermore, they invented the war chariot and were among the first people to use iron weapons. The combination of the war chariot and iron weapons made them formidable in battle.

Hittite texts also included many laws and treaties. In terms of laws, Hittite laws tended to be fairer than the harsh Babylonian laws, with much fewer capital offenses. The most famous treaty, and the oldest known nonaggression document in history, was one made between Hattusili III and Rameses II of Egypt in 1258 BCE. In this treaty, both sides agreed to cease hostilities against each other and come to the other’s aid in the event of external or internal aggression. They sealed the treaty by Rameses II marrying the daughter of Hattusili III; thus, they became in-laws. Such marriage alliances were a common practice in the ancient Near East.

Also, the Hittites are known for their architecture. Hattusa was a heavily fortified, 300 acre city with massive walls, monumental administrative buildings, and grand temples. Recent discoveries show that the Hittites initiated the creation of the underground cities in Cappadocia. Authorities believe that the Hittites began carving underground chambers for storage. The Phrygians expanded these areas into underground cities for protection against the Assyrians.

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The Hittites were very accepting of the culture and traditions of other peoples, even their gods and religions. The religious shrine at Yazilikaya, a site located about one kilometer northeast of Hattusa, best demonstrates this incorporation of foreign deities. The Hittites carved this shrine from a natural outcropping of rock that formed two natural chambers. The Hittites carved a parade of Hurrian deities down the side walls of the larger chamber. The two processions of carved figures, one of male and one of female deities, converge on the back wall. All totaled, they number about 70 figures. Because of their tolerance and incorporation of foreign deities, the Hittites became known as the “kingdom of thousands of gods.”

Future research in Hittite studies, particularly of the Hittite texts and continuing archaeological excavations of the main sites, will further illuminate this once lost and remarkable civilization. One of the most exciting areas of current research is the study of the Hittite development of and influence on the Cappadocian underground cities.

Persia

The Persians went from being a group of nomadic tribes to a first-rate empire in the span of a generation. At its height, the empire stretched from the islands of the Aegean Sea and Libya in North Africa in the west, to India in the east, to the Aral Sea and the Jaxartes River in the north, and to the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean in the south. Cyrus II the Great began expanding Persia, originally located in the Zagros Mountains of what is modern Iran, in 550 BCE by conquering their overlord to the north, Media. This event began the Achaemenid Empire, or Persian Empire, and propelled the Persians on their way to building the largest empire of the ancient world. This empire endured until Alexander the Great of Macedonia defeated Darius III, the last Persian king, in 331 BCE. After Media, Cyrus turned his attention west where he defeated Lydia (in modern Turkey) in 546 BCE, then central Asia, and then Babylon in 539 BCE. Cyrus died in 530 BCE and left the empire to his son Cambyses. Cambyses continued Persian expansion by conquering Egypt in 525 BCE. Darius I the Great usurped the throne after the untimely death of Cambyses in 522 BCE. After stabilizing the empire, Darius instituted many reforms that made Persia great, including improvements in roads, better communications, building programs, the introduction of coinage, and so on. Darius sought to add Greece to the empire, thus beginning the Persian/Greek Wars, but died before he could accomplish this task (486 BCE). Darius’s son Xerxes launched a massive land and sea invasion into Greece only to be defeated by a much smaller Greek army and navy. This defeat ended Persian expansionism and marks the height of the Persian Empire. Artaxerxes, Xerxes’s son, sued for peace with the Greeks in 449 BCE. Subsequent Persian kings, not being great military generals like Cyrus and Darius I, dealt mostly with internal issues. The Persian Empire fell to the young, ambitious king of Macedonia, Alexander the Great, in 331 BCE. Politically, the Persians did not follow some of the practices of preceding empires. They allowed exiled peoples to return to their homelands. They encouraged and often paid for the rebuilding of foreign temples. They allowed local rulers to govern their own territories by their own laws. Also, they incorporated foreign armies, usually of defeated foes, into the Persian army; thus, they could amass vast armies at will. For example, Darius III's army numbered over one million when he battled Alexander the Great.

The Persians also brought innovation to the ancient world. They made paved roads, with small relay stations spaced out about one day’s journey, so that people could travel in comfort and safety. However, travel on Persian roads required a travel document—a pass. The Persians had an express postal system along these roads. News from the Aegean Sea, for example, could reach Susa, some...
1,200 miles away, in less than 2 weeks. The Persians learned about and adopted the use of minted coins (standardized currency) from the Lydians and spread it throughout the eastern part of the ancient world. Darius I particularly promoted coins, even to the extent of having a denomination of gold coin named after him-the *daric*. Darius used coinage to standardize the payment of tribute from subjugated nations and people groups. Because of the efficient tribute system, the Persian Empire was one of tremendous wealth. The Persians also introduced the first known team sport-polo. It was a fast-paced game with few rules to the extent that fatal injuries were common. They also played a game similar to modern chess.

Studies of the Persian Empire have increased in recent years. Scholars have recognized that the Persian and Greek wars were a defining point for East/West relations. They were not only a clash of militaries but also a clash of cultures, social customs, and worldviews as well. Had Persia won those wars, Europe and the West would look vastly different today. This clash of cultures is still a sticking point as demonstrated by the terror attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, and subsequent attacks on Western nations.

**Greece**

The ancient Greeks, especially those of Archaic and Classic Greece, influenced modern Western culture more than any other ancient civilization. Philosophy, democracy, architecture, theater, art (particularly sculpture), literature, and loan words (English words derived from Greek) are just a few contributions the Greeks made to Western culture.

Greece, being a mountainous country with small plains and valleys and a plethora of islands, naturally lent itself to the development of semi-isolated city-states. Furthermore, given the mountainous terrain, the Greeks found the sea to be well suited for communication and travel, and it became their primary means of contact with other cultures.

**The Mycenaean Civilization**

Often referred to as representing the first civilization of modern Europe, the ancient Greeks were an Indo-European group that moved into the area around 1900 BCE. By 1600 BCE, the Greeks had developed into a warrior society, and they had begun to expand their influence into the Aegean and Mediterranean seas. They captured Knossos, the palatial capital of the Minoan civilization on Crete. About a century later, the palaces at Knossos lay destroyed; however, the Mycenaeans began building palaces on the Greek mainland at sites such as Mycenae, Tiryns, Thebes, Orchomenos, Pylos, and Athens. The Mycenaeans constructed megalithic fortifications around these cities with thick walls and massive gate complexes. This period is also known for large *tholos* (cone shaped) tombs and chamber tombs. The Mycenaeans mastered hydrology as demonstrated through their building of dams and dikes and their channeling of water via aqueducts into their cities where it collected in underground chambers. Perhaps their greatest hydrological feat was draining the valley area called the Kopais basin-formerly the largest lake in central Greece, a natural, shallow marshy lake measuring about 18-by-11 kilometers-and turning it into farmland. They developed a series of canals leading to a central canal that funneled the water into the northern Euboean Gulf. The Mycenaeans heavily fortified a site called Gla, a former island in Lake Kopais, to protect this drainage system. Gla, the largest of Mycenaean sites in land area, had cyclopean walls measuring up to 6.75 meters thick 5 meters high, and stretching over 2.8 kilometers around the site.

Archaeologists have discovered many Mycenaean period texts, written in a script linguists call Linear B.
These texts are concerned mostly with business matters including taxation, sale of slaves, distribution of rations, descriptions of textile and furniture production, lists of weapons, estate holdings, and so on. Some of the texts also deal with social matters and politics.

The Mycenaeans were a seafaring people. Items discovered in tombs show that they traded at sites all over the Mediterranean Sea area, including Egypt, Phoenicia, Syria, Asia Minor, Crete, Sardinia, Sicily, Spain, and southern Italy.

For unclear reasons, the Mycenaean civilization came to an abrupt end around 1200 BCE. The palatial cities were destroyed, and the people migrated away from these cities to other areas near the Mediterranean Sea or to naturally defensible positions. Political organization changed radically, and writing stopped. This upheaval moved Greece into the Dark Ages (ca. 1100-776 BCE).

**Archaic and Classical Greece**

The Archaic Age (776-500 BCE) was a time of immense change in Greece. People began to resettle the cities throughout the Greek mainland, which developed into autonomous city-states. They also scattered throughout the Mediterranean world, settling colonies in southern Italy; southern France; on Sicily; on the islands of Rhodes, Cyprus, Lesbos, Crete, and Samos; in Asia Minor; and along the shores of the Black Sea. Although scattered, the Greeks had some commonalities that promoted loyalty. They were of the same race, spoke the same language, worshipped the same pantheon of gods, held many of the same religious and national myths, and participated in pan-Hellenic cult centers located at Delphi, Delos, and Olympia. Monarchs, members of families of nobility, ruled the city-states at the beginning of the Archaic Age; however, tyrants (Greek tyrannoi) ousted the monarchs and were the primary rulers by the end of the age. In conjunction with, and in contrast to, the move toward tyranny was the extension of citizen rights to people outside nobility, usually expressed in the form of city councils.

Athens began developing its democratic form of government in the early 6th century BCE, but it did not reach its fullest form until the 5th century BCE. This city-state was unique in that its citizens could elect political leaders, military generals, and other government officials. They could even vote to banish someone from the city. During this election, the people wrote on a piece of broken pottery, called an ostracon, the name of a person they wanted removed from the city. The person receiving the most votes then had 10 days to permanently leave the city; hence, they were “ostracized.”

In general, Greek city-states flourished during the Archaic Age. They traded extensively with each other and with barbaroi, that is, non-Greek-speaking cultures. The Greeks adopted and spread the use of coins, a Lydian invention, which aided in commerce and trade. They also began the tradition of making coins in the shape of flat, round discs with impressions and texts on both sides (heads and tails). Two confederations of city-states dominated this age: the Thessalian League in the north and the Peloponnesian League led by Sparta in the south. The Spartans dominated the Peloponnesian League to the point that they invaded their neighbor, Messenia, and enslaved them (whom they called Helots). Athens did not join either league but rather chose to be independent, eventually creating its own league. Growing tensions between Athens and Sparta tended to dominate national politics late in the Archaic Age. Although related, the Greeks tended to mistrust and fight each other as exemplified by Athens and Sparta’s dubious relationship. However, they tended to join together against a common external foe, as they did against the Persians in the 5th century BCE.

In addition to politics, the Greeks excelled in art, architecture, philosophy, and literature in the Archaic
Age. They began to paint pottery with lifelike scenes, depicting both real and mythical events and settings. The two most popular types of pottery painting styles were black figure and red figure where the painters depicted the principle people or characters in either black paint or as the natural red color of the pottery. Both skillfully depicted human and mythic figures in fine detail. This period saw the beginning of monumental sculpture. Sculptors carved humans in life-size or larger than life-size forms in the round. Architecture incorporated symmetrical design and columns using mostly stone for building material. This marks the beginning of “classical architecture,” a style highly influential up to modern times. Persian and Babylonian thought influenced Greek philosophers living in Miletus, such as Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes. They began to ponder the nature of man and the universe as well as mathematical and astronomical principles. Some of the philosophers, like Pythagoras, developed schools and trained followers (students). Although much poetry is attributed to this period, the greatest literary works are the writings of Homer and Hesiod. These works shaped Greek mythology, and scenes described in their literature became common themes in Greek art.

The Classic Age (500-338 BCE) was more a refining of Archaic traditions and customs than a distinct age. War, both external and internal, dominated this period. The Greeks fought the Persians (499-479 BCE) in several key battles-Marathon (in 490 BCE), Thermopylae (480 BCE), Salamis (480 BCE), and the final battle at Plataea (479 BCE). The Persians vastly outnumbered the Greeks in each battle, and the fact that the Greeks won every battle except Thermopylae (which was a psychological victory) is amazing. The Greeks’ surprising victories can be attributed to their using heavily armed infantry who fought as a unit against a lightly armed enemy who fought as individuals, their selection of strategically advantageous locations for battle, their making fewer mistakes than the Persians, and luck. The Spartans, under oligarchic rule, won on land, and the Athenians, under democratic rule, won on sea. These differences in political ideology set the stage for a later clash between these two city-states and their allies. Furthermore, the defeat of the Persians was one of the most defining events of Western civilization, galvanizing a conflict between the East and the West that is still present today. If the Greeks had lost, then the Persians would have taken most of Europe thus radically changing history and the modern world.

Greece enjoyed peace for nearly 50 years after the Persian defeat. Athens grew to be the largest city in the world and created a seafaring empire. Athenians began electing juries to courts and electing and paying magistrates. They even allowed poor people to participate in politics, a move that promoted the fledgling democracy. Sparta continued in its traditional ways. This difference between Athenian and Spartan rule and customs led to growing mistrust and ultimately conflict. In 431 BCE, the Corinthians asked the Spartans for assistance against Athenian oppression. Sparta agreed. This act began the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE), a civil war that nearly tore Greece apart and began the decline of the Greek civilization. Sparta came out victorious but even Sparta fell to Thebes in 371 BCE. Greek power continued to wane until Philip II, king of Macedonia, defeated the Greeks at Chaeronea in 338 BCE and incorporated them into the Macedonian kingdom.

The period between the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars were the golden years of ancient Greece and perhaps the time of greatest influence for modern Western culture. Architecture, literature, and art thrived. The Athenians, under the supervision of the great sculptor Phidias, constructed the famous temple to Athena on the acropolis at Athens, containing a large statue of Athena. The gold plating on the statue of Athena reflected the wealth Athens brought in from its empire. During this time, the great playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides wrote tragedies while Aristophanes wrote...
comedies. Herodotus and Thucydides wrote histories, which are significant sources for the modern understanding of ancient events. People listened to great orators, such as Pericles, and a little over a century later, Demosthenes. Socrates, followed by Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, and Aristophanes, laid the foundation for Western philosophy. In the Hellenistic Age (323-31 BCE), Greece also excelled in discoveries in science and mathematics.

Fortunately, Greek culture did not end with the fall of the Greek city-states. Alexander the Great, Philip II’s son, adopted Greek culture and spread it eastward throughout his empire. A few centuries later, the Romans also adopted and spread Greek culture except this time throughout the Mediterranean Basin and into Western Europe.

Rome

The Roman civilization was the last major ancient civilization before Europe and North Africa plunged into the Dark Ages. Modern Western civilization owes much to the Romans, including the influence of the Roman legal system, tactics in warfare, monumental architecture, the spread of Christianity, and the pax Romana—the peace of Rome. The Roman civilization was also one of the most enduring civilizations, lasting over 1,200 years.

The city of Rome lay north of the Greek colonies in southern Italy and south of the metal-producing cultures of Central Europe; thus, both cultures influenced it and traded with it. Furthermore, the city was far enough away from the sea to avoid pirates but sat at the first practical crossing of the Tiber River. Being located in the center of the Mediterranean Basin made Rome strategically located to be the capital of a Mediterranean/European empire.

According to tradition, Romulus founded the city of Rome in 753 BCE. However, historians know little about the early history of Rome, except that it was a part of a collection of individual communities in Latium. During its early years, kings ruled Rome and established its political and religious institutions. Rome grew to be a prominent city, partially due to its geographic location, and eventually became the capital of Latium.

In 509 BCE, patrician nobles overtook the government, ousted the king, and began the Roman Republic (509-48 BCE). Under the Republic, the Senate ruled the people and selected magistrates to oversee various administrative functions, including the military. The Senate could appoint a temporary dictator (for up to 6 months) in times of crisis or war. Roman society also contained groups other than the patricians, including the plebeians, who were free-born commoners. For 200 years after the beginning of the Republic, these social classes struggled for power. In the end, the plebeians won equal rights with the patricians, including the right to vote, hold offices, and make law and the right to intermarry with patricians.

Rome’s realm of control and influence spread during the Republic years. In 338 BCE, Rome began to fight with other members of the Latin League and defeated them. Then, the Romans fought the Samnites in the mountains of central Italy, and they had subdued them by 295 BCE. Twenty-five years later, they controlled the entire Italian peninsula, having defeated the Etruscans, the Gauls, and the Greek colonies in southern Italy.

Rome rapidly expanded its land holdings during the three Punic wars (wars against Carthage). During the First Punic War (264-241 BCE), Rome made Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica their first provinces. They added the eastern and southern sections of Spain during the second war (218-201 BCE, also called the
Hannibal. The Hannibal Wars (218-201 BCE) and annexed North Africa during the third war (149-146 BCE). These wars left no doubt that Rome was the supreme power in the Mediterranean area. Between the wars, Rome defeated the tribes of southern Gaul and began to spread to the Greek-controlled territories to the east. Contact with the Greeks brought Hellenization to the west (Alexander the Great had spread Hellenistic culture as far as India to the east and Egypt to the south). Rome adopted much of Hellenistic culture, including its religion, art, architecture, literature, and language. The Romans even stole sculptures and objects of art from Greece and took them to Rome. They effectively spread a common culture, the process of Hellenization, into all areas of the ancient Mediterranean world.

A fast-growing population in Rome provided the need for efficiency and promoted the seed of invention. The Romans invented the screw and various kinds of gears, devices they used to make grain mills more productive. They developed aqueducts to bring water from mountains many kilometers away to supply their many fountains and baths with fresh water. They created waterwheels to power olive presses, winepresses, or presses to crush metal ores. Also, they created animal-powered machines similar to the ones powered by water. They developed ceramic technology so that they could mass-produce terra-cotta items, such as fine tableware, roof tiles, and fired bricks. In the late 1st century BCE, they invented glassblowing. The Romans used shipping to move goods cheaply throughout the republic; thus, all kinds of goods flowed throughout the Mediterranean Basin. They built protected ports and lighthouses to aid their maritime interests.

The Roman Republic ended when the Roman system of government (the Roman Senate) could no longer effectively rule the vast region that Rome controlled. Therefore, powerful men began to serve as tribunes for the people, usually having their own armies and serving over a geographical region within the republic. This led to the Senate's appointment of the First Triumvirate: Julius Caesar, Pompey the Great, and Licinius Crassus in 60 BCE. These men added vast areas to the empire-Caesar added Gaul and Pompey added Syria and Palestine; however, Crassus died in battle fighting the Parthians in southwest Asia. Civil war broke out between Julius Caesar and Pompey when Caesar brought his army south of the Rubicon River and into Rome in 49 BCE. Caesar defeated Pompey in 48 BCE and became sole ruler, thereby ending the Roman Republic. Senators who supported oligarchic rule assassinated Caesar on March 15, 44 BCE, the famous "Ides of March."

After another period of civil war, Caesar's chosen heir, Octavian Augustus, became the first Roman emperor in 31 BCE. He reorganized the Roman Republic into an empire, consolidating power under the emperor (the principate) and away from the senate although he kept the magistratures in place. Through good administration, he brought organization and efficiency to the empire. He placed the army along the borders of the empire to protect it, and he changed the policy from treating conquered territories as such to treating them as peaceful provinces. He instituted a system of taxation that replaced extortion as a means of collecting revenues. By the end of his 44-year rule (CE 14), Augustus had reorganized Roman politics and laid the foundation for the institution that would govern the Roman world for the next 400 years. Augustus brought peace (pax Romana) to the Mediterranean world thereby allowing commerce, literature, and the arts to flourish. During the 1st century CE, Christianity, a new sect out of Judaism, began to spread throughout the empire. Christians tended to maintain their own culture and traditions, and that attracted suspicion. Under Nero (CE 54-68), they became the object of persecution.

Perhaps one of Rome's greatest achievements, and certainly an icon of its strength, was the Roman Colosseum. Vespasian (CE 69-79) began building the colosseum about CE 71, but it was not
completed until the reign of Titus (CE 79-81) in CE 80. This elliptical structure measured 189 meters long, 156 meters wide, and 48 meters high and had a seating capacity of around 50,000. The colosseum floor covered underground rooms and tunnels where performers and animals remained until elevators and pulleys raised them up. The colosseum hosted a variety of shows, including battles with gladiators. The colosseum is a major tourist attraction in modern times.

The Roman Empire reached its largest extent under the emperor Trajan (CE 99-117). Trajan conquered Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Dacia. A few years later, Hadrian (CE 117-138) had to evacuate Mesopotamia thus starting the shrinking of the empire. Trajan's reign began a "golden age" for the empire that lasted until the death of the "philosopher emperor" Marcus Aurelius (CE 161-180). The empire enjoyed good rule, relative peace, and cooperation between the senate and the emperor. During this time, many people became Roman citizens. Architecture flourished such as the building of Hadrian's Wall across Britain. The Romans invented concrete at this time. Concrete allowed for the construction of structures that spanned wide spaces. Literature also flourished, as exemplified by Tacitus's writing of history and Juvenal's writing of satire.

The 3rd century CE saw the beginning of great change. Caracalla (CE 211-217) granted Roman citizenship to all people within the empire. This move shifted the tensions between citizens and noncitizens to a struggle between the upper and lower classes. Internal struggles and foreign invasion began tearing the empire apart. The Roman emperors blamed the Christians for the empire's plight and began widespread persecutions. Although persecutions had been carried out sporadically and locally before, Decius (CE 250) and Valerian (CE 257) carried out general, empirewide persecutions of the Christians. Interestingly, Christianity became a tolerated religion under Constantine I the Great (CE 306-337) and made the official religion of the empire under Theodosius I (CE 379-395).

Diocletian (CE 284-305) realized that the empire was too large for one person to control. He created the tetrarchy in CE 285 thereby dividing the empire in half into the West and East. In CE 324, Constantine I established the city of Constantinople as the Eastern capital. Afterward, the East (Byzantine) Empire prospered while the West disintegrated. The city of Rome finally fell to Germanic tribes in CE 476 thus ending the Roman Empire. The East (Byzantine) Empire continued to exist and thrive until the Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople in CE 1453 and ended the empire.

The Roman civilization set the foundation for Western culture. It introduced and spread the Latin language, provided a legal system that many modern Western governments would emulate, and spread or produced many inventions that aided in mass production. Also, the Roman Empire saw the development and expansion of Christianity. Interestingly, the church was the means that provided continuity of culture into Europe's Medieval Age.

**Conclusion**

Modern Western civilization owes much to the civilizations of the Mediterranean Basin and the Middle East. They provided the foundation for art, architecture, science, mathematics, literature, religion, philosophy, law, and technology. One can hardly walk in a modern, Western city and not see evidence of this influence in architecture or hear it in the words people speak. Even the names of the stars and planets have links to these ancient cultures.

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### Table 43.1 Ancient Civilizations Timeline

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<th>The Hittites</th>
<th>Persia</th>
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<td>- Sumerians establish city of Eridu (ca. 3100 BCE)</td>
<td>- Menes unifies Egypt (ca. 3100 BCE)</td>
<td>- Old Kingdom (ca. 2686–2181 BCE)</td>
<td>- Minimal civilization on Crete (ca. 2700–1800 BCE)</td>
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<td>1800 BCE</td>
<td>- hammurabi establish his empire (ca. 1750 BCE)</td>
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<td>1400 BCE</td>
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<td>- Hittite kingdom (1750–1200 BCE)</td>
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<td>1000 BCE</td>
<td>- Rise of the Assyrian Empire (ca. 1000 BCE)</td>
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<td>800 BCE</td>
<td>- Exekias invades Egypt (673 BCE)</td>
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<td>- Assyrian Empire (605 BCE)</td>
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**References and Further Readings**

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