

# ANCIENT RIVER VALLEYS

Explore Mesopotamia

Explore the Huang He River Valley

Explore the Nile River Valley

Explore the Indus River Valley

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3000 B.C.E. to 30 B.C.E.

# NILE RIVER VALLEY

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## Area

The Nile River Valley Civilization was located in present day Egypt, in Africa. Egyptians used the annual flooding of the Nile River as irrigation for crops and silt in the river, which contains minerals, to fertilize the soil for crop production. Egyptians also constructed canals which re-routed river water for crop irrigation.



## Political System

The government was an absolute monarchy with a pharaoh as the head of state. Pharaohs were believed to be gods in human form. Pharaohs appointed supervisors, called viziers, to collect taxes. Scribes were trained to keep records of tax collection for the viziers.



## Religion

Egyptians were polytheistic and believed the gods could influence Egyptians lives by causing natural disasters or illness. The Egyptians believed in an afterlife and built pyramids to serve as tombs for upper class citizens. They filled the tombs with items the dead could use in the afterlife such as food, tools, and games.



## Social Structure

In Egypt, social structures were very strict. Although it was possible for people to elevate or change social status, this was very rare. The pharaoh sat at the top of society, followed by priests, then soldiers and scribes. The next roles in society were the merchants and craftsmen, with farmers and slaves at the bottom.



## Arts/Intellectual

Egyptians developed a writing system called hieroglyphics. Ancient Egyptians are well known for their architectural skills, having built the great pyramids that have stood for thousands of years. They made papyrus for writing, from a reed that grew on the banks on the Nile. Egyptians created an annual calendar based on the seasons which helped with crop production. With the knowledge they gained from their mummification burial process, Egyptians had a good understanding of anatomy. They also developed medicine to treat illness.



## Economy

Egyptians developed a trading system and had many ports on the Nile River. Ancient Egypt did not use currency, but instead bartered for goods. Egyptians exported items such as grain, papyrus, and pottery. They imported items such as gold, wood, and a gemstone called lapis.



4000 B.C.E. to 539 B.C.E.

# MESOPOTAMIA

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## Area

Mesopotamia was located in the middle east region of the world. This civilization resided in several present day countries including Iraq and Syria between the Tigris River and Euphrates River. The fertile land between the rivers was beneficial for growing crops and the rivers were used for irrigation. This area was the location of several different civilizations, the first was the Sumerians and the last was Babylonia.



## Political System

Throughout the many empires that existed in ancient Mesopotamia, the government structure was consistently an absolute monarchy with a king in charge. One king, Hammurabi, wrote the first recorded instance of a legal code known as the Code of Hammurabi.



## Religion

The religion was polytheistic with over 1,000 gods. Temples called ziggurats were built to honor their gods. These structures are similar to pyramids and would have taken many people to build. The king was believed to communicate with the gods and if the empire grew it was thought that the gods favored the king.



## Social Structure

The king and nobility were at the top of the social class system, followed by priests and priestesses. The upper class included soldiers, scribes, architects, and astrologers. The lower class included farmers, pottery makers, carpenters, and construction workers. People could move up to a higher class depending on their skill at their craft. Slaves were at the bottom of the social structure and could buy their freedom. Slaves were sometimes captured in war or sold by a family member to pay a debt.



## Arts/Intellectual

Mesopotamia is credited with the invention of the wheel and they also built ships to use for trade. They used a writing system called cuneiform and records of sales and purchases have been found on clay tablets. The oldest story written, *Epic of Gilgamesh*, comes from a Mesopotamian civilization. They created a mathematical system using 60 seconds for a minute and 60 minutes for an hour and also created a seven day week.



## Economy

Mesopotamia civilizations traded jewelry, cloth, and leather goods with the Indus River Valley Civilization. Clay tablets of cuneiform have been found that detail trade between different cities.



3300 B.C.E. to 1300 B.C.E.

# INDUS RIVER VALLEY

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## Area

The Harappan Civilization was located in present day India and Pakistan. They used the Indus River to irrigate crops such as wheat and barley.



## Political System

Little is known about the government structure of the Indus River Valley Civilization. It is widely assumed that there was a form of government that would have existed for the complex cities to have been built.



## Religion

The religious details of the Indus valley are unknown. However, numerous figurines have been found that appear to depict deities. Graves have been found with items placed in the tombs similar to other civilizations which hints that they believed in an afterlife.



## Social Structure

The social structure of this society is unknown but specialized labor is evident from the different tools, pottery, and figurines that have been found. There is little evidence that weapons were made and it does not appear the Harappan people participated in warfare but this is not known conclusively.



## Arts/Intellectual

Although we know the Indus Valley used a written language, it has not been deciphered yet. This leaves a lot unknown about this civilization. Ruins include large multi level homes which appear to have been constructed to survive flooding of the river. The streets were in a grid pattern that organized complex cities. Indoor plumbing systems were in the homes and carried raw sewage away from the city. A large 900 square foot area is thought to have been a large bathing area for citizens. The Indus people developed a uniform system of weights and measurements and also made pottery and figurines out of terracotta.



## Economy

The Harappan traded with Mesopotamia, another ancient civilization. They created "seals" as a type of currency that has been found in other areas of the world. The main export was cotton which was turned into cloth. Jade has been found in the Harappan ruins suggesting trade with China.



1766 B.C.E. to 1046 B.C.E.

# HUANG HE VALLEY SHANG DYNASTY

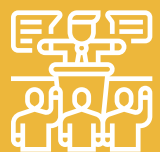
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## Area

The Shang Dynasty was located in present day China. The Huang He River, also known as the Yellow River, contained silt which was rich in nutrients and good for irrigating crops. The Chinese used water from the river to irrigate the crops they grew. They also built irrigation canals and dams to control the flow of water.



## Political System

The first civilization that existed in the Huang He Valley was the Shang Dynasty. The government was an absolute monarchy with the king as the head of state. The king helped rule with the help of high ranking government officials.



## Religion

The belief system of the Shang Dynasty was polytheistic, meaning they believed in many gods or deities. Spiritual leaders, called diviners, would use animal bones to ask the gods and ancestors questions. These bones were called oracle bones. Questions would be written on the bones and heated in fire. The cracks revealed during the fire were interpreted by diviners. Inside ancient tombs, tools and other artifacts were found. Ancient tombs also contained many skeletons of other people and animals. This suggests that they believed servants and animals could follow the dead into the afterlife.



## Social Structure

A social structure existed with set roles for people in the civilization. At the top of society was the emperor or king. Followed by the aristocrats and the military, were the artisans and craftspeople. At the bottom of society were peasants. There is some evidence that peasants were traded as slaves.



## Arts/Intellectual

Chinese people living in the Huang He Civilization developed a lunar calendar with 365 days. The writing system used was very similar to the modern Chinese system of writing. Metal workers used bronze to create tools and ceremonial objects. Musical instruments, such as the ocarina, were made out of clay.



## Economy

The economy was largely based on agriculture. The Shang Dynasty made cloth out of silk and traded it to nearby regions.

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