



**UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT  
SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**M.A. HISTORY  
( I SEMESTER)**

**CORE COURSE : HIS1C04**

**EARLY BRONZE AND IRON  
AGE CIVILISATIONS  
(2019 ADMISSION)**

**190504**



**EARLY BRONZE AND IRON  
AGE CIVILISATIONS  
STUDY MATERIAL**

Semester I

CORE COURSE : **HIS1C04**

**M.A.HISTORY**  
*(2019 ADMISSION)*



**UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT**  
**SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**  
Calicut University- PO, Malappuram,  
Kerala, India - 673 635





**UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT  
SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**STUDY MATERIAL FIRST SEMESTER**

**M.A.HISTORY  
(2019 ADMISSION)**

**EARLY BRONZE AND IRON  
AGE CIVILISATIONS**

**CORE COURSE : HIS1C04**

*Prepared by*

**VIVEK. A. B**

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR ON CONTRACT (HISTORY)  
SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT.

*Scrutinized by*

**SARAVANAN. R**

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN HISTORY,  
PG AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY,  
PSMO COLLEGE, THIRURANGADI

<b>MODULE</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
<b>I</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>II</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>III</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>IV</b>	<b>133</b>

# MODULE I

## EGYPTIAN CIVILISATION

### THE BRONZE AGE

The Bronze Age marked the first-time humans started to work with metal. Bronze tools and weapons soon replaced earlier stone versions. Ancient Sumerians in the Middle East may have been the first people to enter the Bronze Age. Humans made many technological advances during the Bronze Age, including the first writing systems and the invention of the wheel. In the Middle East and parts of Asia, the Bronze Age lasted from roughly 3300 B.C.E. to 1200 B.C.E., ending abruptly with the near-simultaneous collapse of several prominent Bronze Age civilizations.

Humans may have started smelting copper as early as 6,000 B.C.E. in the Fertile Crescent, a region often called “the cradle of civilization” and a historical area of the Middle East where agriculture and the world’s first cities emerged. Ancient Sumer may have been the first civilization to start adding tin to copper to make bronze. Bronze was harder and more durable than copper, which made bronze a better metal for tools and weapons.

Archaeological evidence suggests the transition from copper to bronze took place around 3300 B.C.E. The invention of bronze brought an end to the Stone Age, the prehistoric period dominated by the use of stone tools and weaponry.

Different human societies entered the Bronze Age at different times. Civilizations in Greece began working with bronze before 3000 B.C.E., while the British Isles and China entered the Bronze Age much later—around 1900 B.C.E. and 1600 B.C.E., respectively.

The Bronze Age was marked by the rise of states or kingdoms—large-scale societies joined under a central government by a powerful ruler. Bronze Age states interacted with each other through trade, warfare, migration and the spread of ideas. Prominent Bronze Age kingdoms included Sumer and

Babylonia in Mesopotamia and Athens in Ancient Greece.

The Bronze Age ended around 1200 B.C.E. when humans began to forge an even stronger metal: iron.

### **THE IRON AGE**

The Iron Age was a period in human history that started between 1200 B.C.E. and 600 B.C.E., depending on the region, and followed the Stone Age and Bronze Age. During the Iron Age, people across much of Europe, Asia and parts of Africa began making tools and weapons from iron and steel. For some societies, including Ancient Greece, the start of the Iron Age was accompanied by a period of cultural decline.

Humans may have smelted iron sporadically throughout the Bronze Age, though they likely saw iron as an inferior metal. Iron tools and weapons weren't as hard or durable as their bronze counterparts. The use of iron became more widespread after people learned how to make steel, a much harder metal, by heating iron with carbon. The Hittites—who lived during the Bronze Age in what is now Turkey—may have been the first to make steel.

The adoption of iron and steel directly impacted changes in society, affecting agricultural procedures and artistic expression, and also coincided with the spread of written language. In historical archaeology, the earliest preserved manuscripts are from the Iron Age. This is due to the introduction of alphabetic characters, which allowed literature to flourish and for societies to record historic texts.

### **EGYPTIAN CIVILISATION**

The central theme of the Egyptian civilization, as all we know, is the river Nile. The people of Egypt recognised its importance in all the walks of their life. It created and sustained the civilisation. The reverent hymn to the Nile goes as *“The harbinger of food, rich in provisions, creator of all good, lord of majesty, sweet of fragrance.... He who fills the magazines, makes the granaries wide, and gives things to the poor. He who makes*

*every beloved tree to grow.”*

Till the Enlightenment, Egypt was known to the western world only as the land of lofty pyramids. Things changed when Egyptology as a new discipline of historical and archaeological exploration emerged during the early decades of the nineteenth century. The newfound interest in the studies regarding Egypt and its civilization spread to Europe, partly, as a result of military expeditions of Napoleon. In 1798 C.E., Napoleon led a group of archaeologists and geologists, of course in addition to his army, to the land of pyramids. They were tasked to map the land, which they did, and paved the way for the exploration of one of the most astounding civilisations ever existed on earth. Decipherment of the famous **Rosetta stone** containing inscription in hieroglyphics, demotic and the Greek script by Francois Champollion in 1822 C.E. resulted in discovery of the entire Egyptian alphabet and opened the way to the recovery of a lost world.

### **Egypt- The Gift of Nile**

The great civilization of Egypt, flourished on the flood plain of mighty Nile River, the longest river in the world. As a thin ribbon of water in a dry desert land, the great river brings its water to Egypt from distant mountains, plateaus and lakes in present-day Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Ethiopia. Egypt’s settlements arose along the Nile on a narrow strip of land made fertile by the river. As in the valley of Euphrates and Tigris in Mesopotamia, yearly flooding brought the water and enriches soil that allowed settlements to grow. Every year in July, rains and melting snow from the mountains of east-central Africa caused the Nile River to rise and spill over its banks. When the river receded in October, it left behind a rich deposit of fertile black mud. Before the scorching sun could dry out the soil, the peasants would hitch their cattle to ploughs and prepare their fields for planting. All fall and winter, they tended the wheat and barley plants. They watered their crops from an intricate network of irrigation ditches. At last came the welcome harvest. This cycle of flood, plant, harvest

repeated itself year after year. In an otherwise parched land, the abundance brought by the Nile was so great that the Egyptians worshiped it as a god who gave life and seldom turned against them. Hence, the ancient Greek historian Herodotus remarked in the fifth century B.C.E., Egypt was the "gift of the Nile."

Ancient Egyptians knew only the lower part of the Nile—the last 750 miles before the river meets the Mediterranean Sea. Their domain ended at a point where jagged granite cliffs and boulders turn the river into churning rapids called a cataract. Riverboats could not pass this spot, known as the First Cataract, to continue upstream to the south. Between the First Cataract and the Mediterranean lay two very different regions. Upper Egypt (to the south) was a skinny strip of land from the First Cataract to the point where the river starts to fan out into many branches.

Lower Egypt (to the north, near the sea) consisted of the Nile delta region, which begins about 100 miles before the river enters the Mediterranean. The delta is a broad, marshy, triangular area of land formed by deposits of silt at the mouth of the river. This rich land provided a home for many birds and wild animals. The Nile provided a reliable system of transportation between Upper and Lower Egypt. The Nile flows north, so northbound boats simply drifted with the current. Southbound boats hoisted a wide sail. The prevailing winds of Egypt blow from north to south, carrying sailboats against the river current. The ease of contact made possible by this watery highway helped unify Egypt's villages and promote trade.

The vast and forbidding deserts on either side of the Nile acted as natural barriers between Egypt and other lands. They forced Egyptians to stay close to the river, their lifeline, which reduced their interaction with other peoples. At the same time, the deserts also shut out invaders. For much of its early history, Egypt was spared the constant warfare that plagued the Fertile Crescent.

Egyptians were coming into contact with the people of Mesopotamia due to movement of goods and ideas by 3200

B.C.E. In the meantime, Egyptian traders were also traveling up the Nile on barges to the lands of Nubia and Kush to the south. They were in search of such goods and commodities as gold, ivory, cattle and granite blocks for their massive temples and tombs.

Whole groups of people seem to have moved freely from one region to another in search of better land for farming or grazing. The early Egyptians may have borrowed some ideas from the Mesopotamians in the early development of their cities and in their system of writing. However, the period of Mesopotamian influence ended quickly. From then on, Egypt followed its own cultural path, which was very different from Mesopotamia's. Egypt blended the cultures of the Nile Valley peoples with the cultures of peoples who migrated into the valley from other parts of Africa and from the Fertile Crescent. Egypt thus was a land of cultural, ethnic and racial diversity throughout its 3,000-year history.

The 3,000-year span of ancient Egyptian history is traditionally divided into thirty-one royal dynasties, from the first dynasty, said to have been founded by Menes, the king who originally united Upper and Lower Egypt, to the last, conquered by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.E. Ptolemy, one of Alexander's generals, founded the Ptolemaic Dynasty, whose last ruler was Cleopatra. In 30 B.C.E. the Romans defeated Egypt, effectively ending the independent existence of a civilization that had lasted three millennia. The unification of Upper and Lower Egypt was vital for it meant that the entire river valley could benefit from an unimpeded distribution of resources. Three times in its history, Egypt experienced a century or more of political and social disintegration, known as Intermediate periods. During these eras, rival dynasties often set up separate power bases in Upper and Lower Egypt until a strong leader reunified the land.

Dynastic history did not appear in Egypt all of a sudden, like other civilizations of the world. Nile valley also witnessed gradual accumulation of human from prehistoric age. It was Sir Flinders Petrie, who discovered the first flints in the valley of the Nile.

However, in 1895 C.E. De Morgan revealed an almost continuous gradation of Palaeolithic cultures. Slowly the Palaeolithic remains graduate into Neolithic at depths indicating an age 10,000-4000 B.C.E. The stone tools become more refined and reach indeed a level of sharpness, finish and precision unequalled by any other Neolithic culture known. Towards the end of the period metal work enters in the form of vases, chisels and pins of copper and ornaments of silver and gold. Finally, as a transition to history, agriculture appears. From that early age the inhabitants of the Nile valley began the work of irrigation, cleared the jungles and the swamps, won the river from the crocodile and the hippopotamus and slowly laid the groundwork of civilization. These and other remains give us some hints of Egyptian life before the first of the historic dynasties. It was a culture midway between hunting and agriculture and just beginning to replace stone with metal tools. The people made boats, ground corn, wove cloths, wore jewels and spray perfumes, barbers and domesticated animals and delighted to draw pictures chiefly of the prey they pursued.

They used painted pottery and had pictographic writing and Sumerian-like cylinder seals. But nothing is known about the source of migration of these early Egyptians. It is presumed that they were a cross between Nubian, Ethiopian and Libyan natives on one side and Semitic or Armenoid immigrants on the other; even at that date there were no pure races on the earth. Probably the invaders or immigrants from Western Asia brought a higher culture with them and their intermarriage with the vigorous native stocks provided that ethnic blend which is often the prelude to a new civilization. Slowly, from 4000 to 3000 B.C., these mingling groups became a people and created the Egypt of history.

## **Political History of Egyptian Civilisation.**

### **1. The Old Kingdom**

By the 4<sup>th</sup> Millenniums B.C.E., the early habitant of the Nile had forged a form of government. The population along the river was divided into *nomes*, in each of which the inhabitants were

essentially of one stock, obeyed the same chief and worshiped the same gods by the same rites. Throughout the history of ancient Egypt these nomes persisted. Their “nomarchs” or rulers having more or less power and autonomy according to the weakness or strength of the reigning Pharaoh.

The growth of trade and the rising costliness of war forced the nomes to organize themselves into two kingdoms one in the south, one in the north; a division probably reflecting the conflict between African natives and Asiatic immigrants. This dangerous condition of geographic and ethnic differences was resolved for a time when Menes, a half-legendary figure, brought the Two Lands of Egypt under his united power, promulgated a body of laws given him by the god *Thoth*, established the first historic dynasty, built a new capital at Memphis, taught the people to use tables and couches and introduced luxury and an extravagant manner of life.

What sorts of circumstance made the Fourth Dynasty the most important in Egyptian history is still a matter of puzzle. Perhaps it was the profitable mining operations and the ascendancy of Egyptian merchants in Mediterranean trade as well as the brutal energy of Khufu, first Pharaoh of the new house, which made the fourth dynasty a powerful one in the history of ancient Egypt.

The Old Kingdom represents the culmination of the cultural and historical developments of the Early Dynastic period. For over 400 years, Egypt enjoyed internal stability and great prosperity. During this period, the Pharaoh was a king who was also a god. From his capital at Memphis, the god-king administered Egypt according to a set of principles. Prime among these principles was *maat*, an ideal of order, justice, and truth. In return for the king’s building and maintaining temples, the gods preserved the equilibrium of the state and ensured the king’s continuing power, which was absolute. Because the king was obligated to act infallibly in a benign and beneficent manner. The welfare of the people of Egypt was automatically guaranteed and safeguarded.

The royal power of Old Kingdom was manifested in the pyramids built as pharaonic tombs. Beginning in the Early Dynastic period, kings constructed increasingly elaborate burial complexes in Upper Egypt. Djoser, a Third Dynasty king, was the first to erect a monumental six-step pyramid of hard stone. Subsequent pharaohs built other stepped pyramids until Snefru, the founder of the Fourth Dynasty, converted a stepped pyramid to a true pyramid over the course of putting up three monuments.

The pyramids were tombs, lineally descended from the most primitive of burial mounds. Apparently, the Pharaoh believed like any commoner among his people, that every living body was inhabited by a *ka*, which need not die with the breath. The *ka* would survive all the more completely if the flesh were preserved against hunger, violence and decay. The pyramid, by its height, in its form and position, sought stability as a means to deathlessness.

## **2. The First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom (2200–1630 B.C.E.)**

Toward the end of the Old Kingdom absolute pharaonic power waned as royal officials called *nomarchs* became more independent and influential. About 2200 B.C.E. the Old Kingdom collapsed and gave way to the decentralization and disorder of the First Intermediate period, which lasted until about 2025 B.C.E.

**Amunemhet I**, the founder of Dynasty-12 and the Middle Kingdom, probably began his career as a successful vizier under an Eleventh Dynasty king. After reuniting Upper and Lower Egypt, he turned his attention to making three important and long-lasting administrative changes.

First, he moved his royal residence from Thebes to a brand-new town, just south of the old capital at Memphis signalling a fresh start rooted in past glories. Second, he reorganized the *nome* structure by more clearly defining the nomarchs' duties to the state, granting them some local autonomy within the royal structure. Third he established a co-regency system to smooth transitions from one reign to another.

Amunemhet I and the other Middle Kingdom pharaohs sought to evoke the past by building pyramid complexes like those of the later Old Kingdom rulers. Yet the events of the First Intermediate period had irrevocably changed the nature of Egyptian kingship. Gone was the absolute, distant god-king; the king was now more directly concerned with his people. In art, instead of the supremely confident faces of the Old Kingdom pharaohs, the Middle Kingdom rulers seem thoughtful, careworn and brooding. Egypt's relations with its neighbours became more aggressive during the Middle Kingdom. To the south, royal fortresses were built to control Nubia and the growing trade in African resources. To the north and east, Syria and Palestine increasingly came under Egyptian influence. Even as fortifications sought to prevent settlers from the Levant from moving into the delta. The Twelfth Dynasty was powerful under Amenemhet I during which all the arts, excepting perhaps architecture, reached a height of excellence never equalled in known Egypt before or again.

3. The Second Intermediate Period and the New Kingdom (1630–1075 B.C.E.) During the period of dynasty-13, the kingship changed hands rapidly and the western delta established itself as an independent kingdom under dynasty-14, ushering in the Second Intermediate period. The eastern delta with its expanding Asiatic populations, came under the control of the Hyksos (Dynasty-15) and minor Asiatic kings (Dynasty-16). Meanwhile, the Dynasty-13 kings left their northern capital and regrouped in Thebes and re-established themselves as dynasty-17.

The Hyksos were almost certainly Amorites from the Levant, part of the gradual infiltration of the delta during the Middle Kingdom. After nearly a century of rule, the Hyksos were expelled a process begun by Kamose the last king of Dynasty-17 and completed by his brother Ahmose, the first king of the Eighteenth Dynasty and the founder of the New Kingdom.

During the Eighteenth Dynasty, Egypt pursued foreign

expansion with renewed vigour. Military expeditions reached as far north as the Euphrates in Syria with frequent campaigns in the Levant. To the south, major Egyptian temples were built in the Sudan, almost 1,300 miles from Memphis. Egypt's economic and political power was at its height.

Egypt's position was reflected in the unprecedented luxury and cosmopolitanism of the royal court and in the ambitious palace and temple projects undertaken throughout the country. The Eighteenth Dynasty pharaohs were the first to cut their tombs deep into the rock cliffs of a desolate valley in Thebes, known today as the Valley of the Kings. To date only one intact royal tomb has been discovered there that of the young Eighteenth Dynasty king Tutankhamun and even it had been disturbed shortly after his death. The thousands of goods buried with him many of them marvels of craftsmanship, give a glimpse of Egypt's material wealth during this period.

Following the premature death of Tutankhamun in 1323 B.C.E., a military commander named Horemheb assumed the kingship, which passed in turn to his own army commander, Ramses I. The Ramessides of Dynasty 19 undertook numerous monumental projects, among them Ramses II's rock-cut temples at Abu Simbel, which was moved to a higher location when the Aswan High Dam was built in the 1960s. There, Ramses II left textual and pictorial accounts of his battle in 1285 B.C.E. against the Hittites at Kadesh on the Orontes in Syria. Sixteen years later the Egyptians and Hittites signed a formal peace treaty formed an alliance against an increasingly volatile political situation in the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean during the thirteenth century B.C.E.

Merneptah, one of the offspring of Ramses II, held off a hostile Libyan attack as well as incursions by the Sea Peoples, a loose coalition of Mediterranean raiders who seem to have provoked and taken advantage of unsettled conditions. Despite Merneptah's efforts by the end of the Twentieth Dynasty, Egypt's period of imperial glory had passed. The next thousand years

witnessed the Third Intermediate period, a *Saite* renaissance, Persian domination, conquest by Alexander the Great, the Ptolemaic period and finally, defeat at the hands of the Roman Emperor Octavian in 30 B.C.E.

## **The Political Organisation**

### **The Pharaoh**

As ancient Egyptian rulers, pharaohs were both the heads of state and the religious leaders of their people. The word “pharaoh” means “Great House,” a reference to the palace where the pharaoh resides.

As the religious leader of the Egyptians, the pharaoh was considered the divine intermediary between the gods and Egyptians. Maintaining religious harmony and participating in ceremonies were part of the pharaoh’s role as head of the religion. As a statesman, the pharaoh made laws, waged war, collected taxes, and oversaw all the land in Egypt. As became so godlike a person, the Pharaoh was waited upon by a variety of aides, including generals, launderers, bleachers, guardians of the imperial wardrobe, and other men of high degree. Twenty officials collaborated to take care of his toilet, barbers who were permitted only to shave him and cut his hair, hairdressers who adjusted the royal cowl and diadem to his head, manicurists who cut and polished his nails, perfumers who deodorized his body, blackened his eyelids with eyeliner and reddened his cheeks and lips with rouge. So pampered, he tended to degenerate and sometimes brightened his boredom by manning the imperial barge with young women clad only in network of a large mesh.

### **The Egyptian Law**

Civil and criminal legislation were highly developed and already in the Fifth Dynasty the law of private property and bequest was intricate and precise. There was equality before the law whenever the contesting parties had equal resources and influence. The oldest legal document in the world is a brief inscription presenting to the court a complex case in inheritance.

Judges required cases to be pled and answered, reargued and rebutted, not in oratory but in writing which compares favourably with our windy litigation. Perjury was punished with death. There were regular courts, rising from local judgment-seats in the nomes to supreme courts at Memphis, Thebes or Heliopolis. Torture was used occasionally as a midwife to truth; beating with a rod was a frequent punishment, mutilation by cutting off nose or ears, hand or tongue, was sometimes resorted to, or exile to the mines or death by strangling, trampling, beheading, or burning at the stake. The extreme penalty was to be embalmed alive. Criminals of high rank were saved the shame of public execution by being permitted to kill themselves. The Egyptian don't have a system of police. Even the standing army always small because of Egypt's protected isolation between deserts and seas was seldom used for internal discipline. Security of life and property, and the continuity of law and government rested almost entirely on the prestige of the Pharaoh, maintained by the schools and the church.

### **The Bureaucrats**

It was a well-organized government with a better record of duration than any other in history. At the head of the administration was the *Vizier*, who served at once as prime minister, chief justice, and head of the treasury. He was the court of last resort under the Pharaoh himself. A tomb relief shows us the Vizier leaving his house early in the morning to hear the petitions of the poor, to hear, as the inscription reads, what the people say in their demands and to make no distinction between small and great.

### **Economic Condition**

#### **Agriculture**

The fertile bank of Nile deposited in its inundation and irrigated during farming seasons was the real cause behind the prosperity of this great civilization. Every acre of the soil in ancient Egypt belonged to the Pharaoh and other men could use it only by his kind indulgence. Every tiller of the earth had to pay him an annual tax of ten or twenty per cent in kind. Large tracts were owned

by the feudal barons or other wealthy men. Cereals, fish and meat were the chief items of diet.

In spite of large tract of fertile land, the lot of the peasant was hard. The free farmer was subject only to the middleman and the tax-collector who dealt with him on the most time-honoured of economic principles, taking all that the traffic would bear out of the produce of the land. The peasant was subject at any time to the exploitation, doing forced labour for the King, dredging the canals, building roads, tilling the royal lands or dragging great stones and obelisks for pyramids, temples and palaces. Probably a majority of the laborers in the field were moderately at ease, accepting their poverty patiently. Many of them were slaves, captured in the wars or bonded for debt. Sometimes slave-raids were organized and women and children from abroad were sold to the highest bidder at home. Thus, in ancient Egypt condition of farmer was in utter despair but owing to availability of fertile land agriculture was highly productive. The ruling class by exploiting the tiller of land led their life in luxury and built huge structure which still shows the glorious civilization which was once flourished on the bank of river Nile.

### **Industry**

The fertile land and hard work of the peasantry resulted in surplus production. The surplus food was laid aside for workers in industry and trade. Unavailability of minerals forced ancient Egyptian to import those from Arabia and Nubia. The great distances offered no temptation to private initiative and for many centuries mining was a government monopoly. Copper was mined in small quantities, iron was imported from the Hittites, gold mines were found along the eastern coast, in Nubia and in every vassal treasury.

In its early dynasties period Egypt learned the art of making Bronze by mingling copper with tin. They utilized bronze to manufacture different equipment. Egyptian workers made brick, cement and plaster of paris; they glazed pottery, blew glass and

glorified both with colour.

They were masters in the carving of wood; they made everything from boats and carriages, chairs and beds to beautiful coffins that almost invited men to die. Out of animal skins they made clothing, quivers, shields and seats. All the arts of the tanner are pictured on the walls of the tombs; and the curved knives represented there in the tanner's hand are used by cobblers to this day. From the papyrus plant Egyptian artisans made ropes, mats, sandals and paper. Other workmen developed the arts of enamelling and varnishing and applied chemistry to industry. Still others wove tissues of the subtlest weave in the history of the textile art. Specimens of linen woven four thousand years ago show today, despite time's corrosion, a weave so fine that it requires a magnifying glass to distinguish it from silk. The best work of the modern machine-loom is coarse in comparison with this fabric of the ancient Egyptian hand-loom.

The workers were mostly freemen, partly slaves. In general, every trade was hereditary in nature, as in India and sons were expected to follow and take over the occupations of their fathers. The great wars brought in thousands of captives, making possible the large estates and the triumphs of engineering. Rameses III presented 1,13,000 slaves to the temples during the course of his reign.

Egyptian engineering was superior to all the civilization and cultures before the Industrial Revolution. Sensusret III, for example, built a wall twenty-seven miles long to gather into Lake Moeris the waters of the Fayum basin, thereby reclaiming 25,000 acres of marsh land for cultivation, and providing a vast reservoir for irrigation. Great canals were constructed some from the Nile to the Red Sea; the caisson was used for digging and stones weighing a thousand tons were transported over great distances. Ships a hundred feet long by half a hundred feet wide plied the Nile and the Red Sea and finally sailed the Mediterranean.

Trade was comparatively primitive; most of it was by barter in village marketplace. Foreign commerce grew slowly, restricted

severely by the most up-to-date tariff walls. The various kingdoms of the Near East believed strongly in the “protective principle,” for customs dues were a mainstay of their royal treasuries. Nevertheless, Egypt grew rich by importing raw materials and exporting finished products Syrian, Cretan and Cypriote merchants crowded the markets of Egypt and Phoenician galleys sailed up the Nile to the busy docksides of Thebes. Coinage had not yet developed; payments, even of the highest salaries, were made in goods corn, bread, yeast, beer, etc. Taxes were collected in kind, and the Pharaoh’s treasuries were not a mint of money but storehouses of a thousand products from the fields and shops.

After the influx of precious metals that followed the conquests of Thutmose III, merchants began to pay for goods with rings or ingots of gold, measured by weight at every transaction; but no coins of definite value guaranteed by the state arose to facilitate exchange. Credit, however, was highly developed; written transfers frequently took the place of barter or payment. Scribes were busy everywhere accelerating business with legal documents of exchange, accounting and finance in the Ancient Egypt.

### **Social Condition**

#### **The Marriage System.**

The government of the Pharaohs resembled that of a dictator like Napoleon, even to the incest. Very often the king married his own sister occasionally his own daughter to preserve the purity of the royal blood. It is difficult to say whether this weakened the stock. The words brother and sister in Egyptian poetry, have the same significance as lover and beloved in the modern days. In addition to his sisters the Pharaoh had an abundant harem, recruited not only from captive women but from the daughters of the nobles and the gifts of foreign potentates. Some of the nobility imitated this tedious extravagance on a small scale, adjusting their morals to their resources.

#### **The Position of Women.**

The common people satisfied themselves with monogamy.

Family life was apparently as well ordered as wholesome in moral tone and influence as in the highest civilizations of our time. Divorce was rare until the decadent dynasties. The husband could dismiss his wife without compensation if he detected her in adultery; if he divorced her for other reasons, he was required to turn over to her a substantial share of the family property. The position of woman was more advanced than in most countries today. The monuments picture them eating and drinking in public, going about their affairs in the streets unattended and unharmed and freely engaging in industry and trade. Greek travellers were amazed at this liberty. Women held and bequeathed property in their own names. Hatshepsut and Cleopatra rose to be queens, and ruled and ruined like kings.

It is likely that this high status of woman arose from the mildly matriarchal character of Egyptian society. Not only was woman full mistress in the house but all estates descended in the female line. Men married their sisters not because familiarity had bred romance but because they wished to enjoy the family inheritance, which passed down from mother to daughter and they did not care to see this wealth give aid and comfort to strangers. The powers of the wife underwent a slow diminution in the course of time, perhaps through contact with the patriarchal customs of the Hyksos and through the transit of Egypt from agricultural isolation and peace to imperialism and war. Even then, however, the change was accepted only by the upper classes. The Egyptian commoner adhered to matriarchal ways. Possibly because of the mastery of woman over her own affairs, infanticide was rare. Families were large, and children swarmed in both hovels and palaces. The well-to-do were hard put to it to keep count of their offspring. Even in courtship the woman usually took the initiative. Hence modesty as distinct from fidelity was not prominent among the Egyptians. They spoke of sexual affairs with a directness alien to our late morality, adorned their very temples with pictures and bas-reliefs of startling anatomical candor and supplied their dead with obscene literature to amuse

them in the grave.

Dancing-girls, were accepted into the best male society as providers of entertainment and physical edification. They dressed in diaphanous robes or contented themselves with anklets, bracelets and rings. Evidences occur of religious prostitution on a small scale as late as the Roman occupation. The most beautiful girl among the noble families of Thebes was chosen to be consecrated to Amon. When she was too old to satisfy the god, she received an honourable discharge, married, and moved in the highest circles.

### **Character, Games, Appearance and Costumes etc.**

If we try to visualize the Egyptian character, we find it difficult to distinguish between the ethics of the literature and the actual practices of life. Very frequently noble sentiments occur and some of the elders give very laudable advice to their children. In general, the Egyptians were enamoured of size given to gigantic engineering and majestic building, industrious and accumulative practical even in the midst of many ultra-mundane superstitions. They were the arch-conservatives of history. The more they changed, the more they remained the same. Through forty centuries their artists copied the old conventions religiously. They had no sentimental regard for human life and killed with the clear conscience of nature. Egyptian soldiers cut off the right hand or the phallus of a slain enemy and brought it to the proper scribe that it might be put into the record to their credit. In the later dynasties the people long accustomed to internal peace and to none but distant wars lost all military habits and qualities until at last a few Roman soldiers sufficed to master all Egypt.

They played many public and private games, such as checkers and dice. They gave many modern toys to their children, like marbles, bouncing balls, tenpins and tops. They enjoyed wrestling contests, boxing matches and bullfights. At feasts and recreations, they were anointed by attendants, were wreathed with flowers, feted with wines, and presented with gifts.

From the painting and the statuary, we picture them as a physically vigorous people, muscular, broad-shouldered, thin-waisted, full-lipped and flat-footed from going unshod. The upper classes are represented as fashionably slender, imperiously tall with oval face, sloping forehead, regular features, a long, straight nose, and magnificent eyes. Their skin was white at birth, but rapidly darkened under the Egyptian sun. Their artists idealized them in painting the men red and the women yellow. Perhaps these colours were merely cosmetic styles. In many instances, the people and their rulers were of different races, the rulers of Asiatic and the people of African derivation. Women bobbed their hair in the most modern mode; men shaved lips and chin but consoled themselves with magnificent hairpiece.

According to their means they repaired the handiwork of nature with subtle cosmetic art. Faces were rouged, lips were painted, nails were coloured, hair and limbs were oiled; even in the sculptures the Egyptian women have painted eyes. The remains abound in toilet sets, mirrors, razors, hair-curlers, hair-pins, combs, cosmetic boxes, dishes and spoons made of wood, ivory, alabaster or bronze and designed in delightful and appropriate forms. Perfumes of all sorts were used on the body and the clothes, and homes were made fragrant with incense.

Their clothing ran through every gradation from primitive nudity to the gorgeous dress of Empire days. Children of both sexes went about, till their teens naked except for ear-rings and necklaces. The girls showed a beseeching modesty by wearing a string of beads around the middle. Servants and peasants limited their everyday wardrobe to a loin-cloth. Under the Old Kingdom free men and women went naked to the navel, and covered themselves from waist to knees with a short, tight skirt of white linen. When wealth increased, clothing increased. During the Middle Kingdom the Egyptian added a second and larger skirt over the first and it was under the Empire they added a covering for the breast. Women, in the prosperous dynasties, abandoned the tight skirt for a loose robe that passed over the shoulder and

was joined in a clasp under the right breast. Both sexes loved ornament and covered neck, breast, arms, wrists and ankles with jewellery. As the nation fattened on the tribute of Asia and the commerce of the Mediterranean world, jewellery ceased to be restricted to the aristocracy and became a passion with all classes.

### **Art of Writing and Literature**

The priests imparted rudimentary instruction to the children of the well-to-do in schools attached to the temples. In the ruins of a school which was apparently part of the Ramesseum a large number of shells has been found, still bearing the lessons of the ancient pedagogue. The teacher's function was to produce scribes for the clerical work of the state. The chief method of instruction was the dictation or copying of texts, which were written upon potsherds or limestone flakes. The subjects were largely commercial because the Egyptians were the first and greatest utilitarian; but the chief topic of pedagogic discourse was virtue and the chief problem, as ever, was discipline. Discipline was vigorous.

A large number of the temple students were graduated from the hands of the priest to high schools attached to the offices of the state treasury. There, in the first known School of Government, the young scribes were instructed in public administration. On graduating they were apprenticed to officials, who taught them through plenty of work. In this manner Egypt and Babylonia developed more or less simultaneously the earliest school-systems in history.

In the higher grades the student were allowed to use paper one of the main items of Egyptian trade and one of the permanent gifts of Egypt to the world. The stem of the papyrus plant was cut into strips, other strips were placed crosswise upon these, the sheet was pressed, and paper, the very stuff of civilization was made. Sheets were combined into books by gumming the right edge of one sheet to the left edge of the next; in this way rolls were produced which were sometimes forty yards in length.

Ink, black and indestructible, was made by mixing water with soot and vegetable gums on a wooden palette. The pen was a simple reed, fashioned at the tip into a tiny brush.

With these modern instruments the Egyptians wrote the most ancient of literatures. Their language had probably come in from Asia. The oldest specimens of it show many Semitic affinities. The earliest writing was apparently pictographic, where an object was represented by drawing a picture of it: e.g., the word for house was indicated by a small rectangle with an opening on one of the long sides. As some ideas were too abstract to be literally pictured, pictography passed into ideography, where certain pictures were by custom and convention used to represent not the objects pictured but the ideas suggested by them; so the forepart of a lion meant supremacy (as in the Sphinx), a wasp meant royalty, and a tadpole stood for thousands. As a further development along this line, abstract ideas, which had at first resisted representation were indicated by picturing objects whose names happened to resemble the spoken words that corresponded to the ideas; so the picture of a lute came to mean not only lute, but good, because the Egyptian word-sound for lute-*nefer* resembled the word-sound for good *nefer*. Hieroglyphics are as old as the earliest dynasties; alphabetic characters appear first in inscriptions left by the Egyptians in the mines of the Sinai Peninsula, variously dated at 2500 and 1500 B.C.E.

Whether wisely or not the Egyptians never adopted a completely alphabetic writing. They mingled pictographs, ideographs and syllabic signs with their letters to the very end of their civilization. In the course of time a more rapid and sketchy form of writing was developed for manuscripts as distinguished from the careful “sacred carvings” of the monuments. Since this corruption of hieroglyphic was first made by the priests and the temple scribes, it was called by the Greeks hieratic. It soon passed into common use for public, commercial and private documents. A still more abbreviated and careless form of this script was

developed by the common people and therefore came to be known as demotic. Most of the literature that survives from ancient Egypt is written in hieratic script. Little of it remains and we are forced to estimate it from the fragments that do it only the blind justice of chance. The oldest extant Egyptian literature consists of the “Pyramid Texts” pious matter engraved on the walls in five pyramids of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties. Libraries have come down to us from as far back as 2000 B.C.E. Papyri rolled, packed in jars, labelled and ranged on shelves. In one such jar was found the oldest form of the story of Sinbad the Sailor is a simple autobiographical fragment, full of life and feeling. Short stories are diverse and plentiful in the fragments that have come down to us of Egyptian literature. There are marvellous tales of ghosts, miracles and other fascinating concoctions, as credible as the detective stories that satisfy modern statesmen. There are high-sounding romances of princes and princesses, kings and queens. There are fables of animals illustrating by their conduct the foibles and passions of humanity and pointing morals. The early literature of the Egyptians is largely religious; and the oldest Egyptian poems are the hymns of the Pyramid Texts. As the Old passes into the Middle Kingdom, the literature tends to become secular and profane.

Formal letters, legal documents, historical narratives, magic formulas, laborious hymns, books of devotion, songs of love and war, romantic novels, moral exhortations, philosophical treatises everything is represented here except epic and drama. Historiography, in Egypt, is as old as history. Even the kings of the pre-dynastic period kept historical records proudly. Official historians accompanied the Pharaohs on their expeditions, never saw their defeats and recorded or invented, the details of their victories. Already the writing of history had become a cosmetic art. As far back as 2500 B.C.E. Egyptian scholars made lists of their kings, named the years from them, and chronicled the outstanding events of each year and reign. By the time of Thutmose III these documents became full-fledged histories,

eloquent with patriotic emotion.

In Egypt the language of everyday speech diverged gradually. For a long time, authors continued to compose in the ancient tongue. Scholars acquired it in school and students were

compelled to translate the “classics” with the help of grammars and vocabularies. In the fourteenth century B.C.E. Egyptian authors rebelled against this bondage to tradition and dared to write in the language of the people. Ikhnaton’s famous Hymn to the Sun is itself composed in the popular speech.

## **Religious Organisation and Philosophy**

### **Philosophy**

The most ancient fragments left to us by the Egyptians are writings that belong to the moral philosophy. The oldest work of philosophy known to us is the “*Instructions of Ptahhotep*,” which apparently goes back to 2880 B.C.E., 2300 years before Confucius, Socrates and Buddha. **Ptah-hotep** was Governor of Memphis and Prime Minister to the King, under the Fifth Dynasty.

Retiring from office, he decided to leave to his son a manual of everlasting wisdom. It was transcribed as an antique classic by some scholars prior to the Eighteenth Dynasty. Such periods do not endure; hope soon wins the victory over thought. The intellect is put down to its customary menial place and religion is born again, giving to men the imaginative stimulus apparently indispensable to life and work. We need not suppose that such poems expressed the views of any large number of Egyptians. The small but vital minority that pondered the problems of life and death in secular and naturalistic terms were millions of simple men and women who remained faithful to the gods and never doubted that right would triumph, that every earthly pain and grief would be atoned for bountifully in a haven of happiness and peace.

Ancient Egyptian philosophy was highly concerned with proper conduct and justice. Many texts were prescriptive, telling its readers how to behave. Although Egyptian philosophy did not

discuss epistemology, it did discuss how to teach justice. The political system was not written about, but some writings pessimistically considered the consequences when there is no legitimate king, and others offered advice to princes that were to become kings. Methods of persuasion, such as Greek rhetoric, were not discussed. Overall, Egyptian philosophies were flexible, pragmatic, and attentive to emotion.

## **Religion**

For beneath and above everything in Egypt was religion. We find it there in every stage and form from *totemism* to theology. We see its influence in literature, in government, in art, in everything except morality. We cannot understand the Egyptian until we study their gods. In the beginning, said the Egyptian, was the sky and to the end this and the Nile remained his chief divinities. All these marvellous heavenly bodies were not mere bodies, they were the external forms of mighty spirits. The sky itself was a vault, across whose vastness a great cow stood, who was the goddess *Hathor*; the earth lay beneath her feet and her belly was clad in the beauty of ten thousand stars. Constellations and stars might be gods: for example, *Sahu* and *Sopdit* (Orion and Sirius) were great deities. Occasionally some such monster ate the moon but only for a moment; soon the prayers of men and the anger of the other gods forced the greedy sow to vomit it up again. In this manner the Egyptian populace explained an eclipse of the moon.

The oldest god in Egypt was moon, but in the official theology the greatest of the gods was the sun. Sometimes it was worshiped as the supreme deity *Ra* or *Re*, the bright father who fertilized Mother Earth with rays of penetrating heat and light. Sometimes it was a divine calf, born at every dawn, sailing the sky slowly in a celestial boat and descending into the west, at evening, like an old man tottering to his grave.

So exuberant was this piety that the Egyptians worshiped not merely the source but almost every form of life. Many plants

were sacred to them. The palm-tree that shaded them amid the desert, the spring that gave them drink in the oasis, the grove where they could meet and rest; were holy things and to the end of his civilization the Egyptian worshipped them with offerings. Not only plant but also the animal gods were popular among the Egyptians. Egyptians worshiped the bull, the crocodile, the hawk, the cow, the goose, the goat, the ram, the cat, the dog, the chicken, the swallow, the jackal, the serpent and allowed some of these creatures to roam in the temples.

The bull as the incarnation of Osiris, received this honour and at Mendes, the most beautiful women were offered in coitus to the divine goat. The ancient Egyptian used to carry out sex worship, which is appear not only in the many cases in which figures are depicted on temple reliefs with erect organs but in the frequent appearance. In Egyptian symbolism the cross with a handle appear as a sign of sexual union and vigorous life.

The personal gods of Egypt were merely superior men and women, made in heroic mould, but composed of bone and muscle, flesh and blood; they hungered and ate, thirsted and drank, loved and mated, hated and killed, grew old and died. There was *Osiris*, the god of the beneficent Nile, Profound, too, was the myth of *Isis*, the Great Mother. She was not only the loyal sister and wife of Osiris; but also, she was the god of fecundity. She was, above all, the symbol of that mysterious creative power which had produced the earth and every living thing. The Egyptians worshiped her as the Mother of God. In ancient Egypt, the king was chief-priest of the faith, and led the great processions and ceremonies that celebrated the festivals of the gods. It was through this assumption of divine lineage and powers that he was able to rule so long with so little force. In effect, though not in law, the office of priest passed down from father to son, and a class grew up which, through the piety of the people and the generosity of the kings, became in time richer and stronger than the feudal aristocracy or the royal family itself.

What distinguished this religion above everything else was its

emphasis on immortality. If Osiris, the Nile and all vegetation, might rise again, so might man. The amazing preservation of the dead body in the dry soil of Egypt lent some encouragement to this belief, which was to dominate Egyptian faith for thousands of years.

For the most part, Egyptian religion had little to say about morality. The priests were busier selling charms, mumbling incantations and performing magic rites than inculcating ethical precepts. Even the *Book of the Dead* teaches the faithful that charms blessed by the clergy will overcome all the obstacles that the deceased soul may encounter on its way to salvation; and the emphasis is rather on reciting the prayers than on living the good life. At every step the pious Egyptian had to mutter strange formulas to avert evil and attract the good. The gods themselves used magic and charms against one another. The literature of Egypt is full of magicians of wizards who dry up lakes with a word, or cause severed limbs to jump back into place, or raise the dead. The king had magicians to help or guide him; and he himself was believed to have a magical power to make the rain fall or the river rise. Life was full of talismans, spells, divinations; every door had to have a god to frighten away evil spirits or fortuitous strokes of bad luck. Such was the state of religion in Egypt when Ikhnaton, poet and heretic came to the throne and inaugurated the religious revolution that destroyed the Empire of Egypt.

### **Ikhnaton -The Heretic King**

In the year 1380 B.C.E. Amenhotep III, who had succeeded Thutmose III, died after a life of worldly luxury and display and was followed by his son Amenhotep IV, destined to be known as Ikhnaton. A profoundly revealing portrait-bust of him, discovered at Tell-el-Amarna, shows a profile of incredible delicacy, a face feminine in softness and poetic in its sensitivity. He had hardly come to power when he began to revolt against the religion of *Amon*, and the practices of Amon's priests. The young emperor, whose private life was a model of fidelity, did

not approve of this sacred harlotry. The blood of the ram slaughtered in sacrifice to Amon stank in his nostrils; and the traffic of the priests in magic and charms, and their use of the oracle of Amon to support religious obscurantism and political corruption disgusted him to the point of violent protest. His youthful spirit rebelled against the sordidness into which the religion of his people had fallen. He hated the indecent wealth and lavish ritual of the temples and the growing hold of a mercenary hierarchy on the nation's life. With a poet's audacity he threw compromise to the winds, and announced bravely that all these gods and ceremonies were a vulgar idolatry, that there was but one god *Aton*.

Ikhnaton saw divinity above all in the sun, in the source of all earthly life and light. The new god filled the king's soul with delight. He changed his own name from Amenhotep, which contained the name of Amon, to **Ikhnaton**, meaning "**Aton is satisfied**"; and helping himself with old hymns, and certain monotheistic poems published in the preceding reign. He composed passionate songs to Aton of which this, the longest and the best, is the fairest surviving remnant of Egyptian literature and also the first outstanding expression of monotheism. Ikhnaton conceives his god as belonging to all nations equally, and even names other countries before his own as in Aton's care. This was an astounding advance upon the old tribal deities. Nevertheless, because of its omnipresent, fertilizing beneficence, the sun becomes to Ikhnaton also the Lord of love, the tender nurse that creates the man-child in woman, and fills the Two Lands of Egypt with love.

It is one of the tragedies of history that Ikhnaton, having achieved his elevating vision of universal unity, was not satisfied to let the noble quality of his new religion slowly win the hearts of men. He was unable to think of his truth in relative terms. The thought came to him that other forms of belief and worship were indecent and intolerable. Suddenly he gave orders that the names of all gods but Aton should be erased and chiselled from every public inscription in Egypt; he mutilated his father's name from a

hundred monuments to cut from it the word Amon. He declared all creeds but his own illegal, and commanded that all the old temples should be closed.

He abandoned Thebes as unclean, and built for himself a beautiful new capital at **Akhetaton- *City of the Horizon of Aton***. Rapidly Thebes decayed as the offices and emoluments of government were taken from it, and Akhetaton became a rich metropolis busy with fresh building and a Renaissance of arts liberated from the priestly bondage of tradition. The joyous spirit expressed in the new religion passed over into its art. Ikhnaton forbade the artists to make images of Aton, on the lofty ground that the true god has no form, for the rest he left art free, merely asking his favourite artists, Bek, Auta and Nutmose to describe things as they saw them and to forget the conventions of the priests. They took him at his word and represented him as a youth of gentle, almost timid, face and strangely dolichocephalic head. Taking their lead from his vitalistic conception of deity, they painted every form of plant and animal life with loving detail, and with a perfection hardly surpassed in any other place or time. For a while art, which in every generation knows the pangs of hunger and obscurity flourished in abundance and happiness.

At one blow he had dispossessed and alienated a wealthy and powerful priesthood, and had forbidden the worship of deities made dear by long tradition and belief. He had underestimated the strength of the priests, and he had exaggerated the capacity of the people to understand a natural religion. Behind the scenes the priests plotted and prepared; and in the seclusion of their homes the populace continued to worship their ancient and innumerable gods. A hundred crafts that had depended upon the temples muttered in secret against the heretic. Even in his palace his ministers and generals hated him and prayed for his death.

Meanwhile the young poet lived in simplicity and trust. He had seven daughters, but no son. Into this simple happiness prevailed during his reign, the dependencies of Egypt in the Near East were being invaded by Hittites and other neighbouring tribes.

The governors appointed by Egypt pleaded for immediate reinforcements. Ikhnaton hesitated; he was not quite sure that the right of conquest warranted him in keeping these states in subjection to Egypt; and he was reluctant to send Egyptians to die on distant fields for so uncertain a cause. When the dependencies saw that they were dealing with a saint, they deposed their Egyptian governors, quietly stopped all payment of tribute, and became to all effects free. Almost in a moment Egypt ceased to be a vast Empire, and shrank back into a little state. Soon the Egyptian treasury, which had for a century depended upon foreign tribute as its mainstay, was empty. Domestic taxation had fallen to a minimum and the working of the gold mines had stopped. Internal administration was in chaos. Ikhnaton found himself penniless and friendless in a world that had seemed all his own. Every colony was in revolt, and every power in Egypt was arrayed against him, waiting for his fall. He was hardly thirty when, in 1362 B.C.E., he died, broken with the realization of his failure as a ruler and the unworthiness of his race.

### **Art and Architecture**

The greatest element in this civilization was its art. At first the luxury of isolation and peace, and then, under Thutmose III and Rameses II, the spoils of oppression and war, gave to Egypt the opportunity and the means for massive architecture, masculine statuary and a hundred minor arts. The whole theory of progress hesitates before Egyptian art.

### **Architecture**

Architecture was the noblest of the ancient Egyptian arts, because it combined in imposing form mass and duration, beauty and use. It began humbly in the adornment of tombs and the external decoration of homes. Dwellings were mostly of mud with here and there some pretty woodwork and a roof strengthened with the tough and pliable trunks of the palm. Around the house, normally was a wall enclosing a court. From the court

steps led to the roof, from this the tenants passed down into the rooms. The well-to-do had private gardens, carefully landscaped; the cities provided public gardens for the poor, and hardly a home but had its ornament of flowers. Inside the house the walls were hung with coloured matting, and the floors.

Stone for building was too costly for homes; it was a luxury reserved for priests and kings. Even the nobles, ambitious though they were, left the greatest wealth and the best building materials to the temples. In consequence the palaces that overlooked almost every mile of the river in the days of Amenhotep III crumbled into oblivion, while the abodes of the gods and the tombs of the dead remained.

By the Twelfth Dynasty the pyramid had ceased to be the fashionable form of sepulture. Khnumhotep (ca. 2180 B.C.E.) chose at Beni-Hasan the quieter form of a colonnade built into the mountainside; and this theme, once established played a thousand variations among the hills on the western slope of the Nile. From the time of the Pyramids to the Temple of Hathor at Denderah i.e., for some three thousand years there rose out of the sands of Egypt such a succession of architectural achievements as no civilization has ever surpassed. At Karnak and Luxor, a set of columns were raised by monarchs from the Twelfth to the Twenty-second Dynasty. At Medinet-Ilabu (ca. 1300 B.C.E.) a vast but less distinguished edifice, on whose columns an Arab village rested for centuries. At Abydos the Temple of Scti I, dark and somber in its massive ruins. At Elephantine the little Temple of Khnum (ca. 1400 B.C.E.) near it the Ramcsseum, another forest of colossal columns and statues reared by the architects and slaves of Rameses II as well as at Philce the lovely Temple of Isis (ca. 240 B.C.E.) are sample fragments of the many monuments that still adorn the valley of the Nile and attest even in their ruins the strength and courage of the race that reared them. Here the art specimens show grandeur, sublimity, majesty and power with profusion of decorative designs. The Egyptians were the greatest builders in history.

## **Sculptures, Paintings and Minor Art.**

The ancient Egyptians were also the greatest sculptors. Here at the outset is the Sphinx, conveying by its symbolism the leonine quality of some masterful Pharaoh perhaps Khafre-Chephren; it has not only size as some have thought, but character. The cannon-shot of the Mamelukes have broken the nose and shorn the beard, but nevertheless those gigantic features portray with impressive skill the force and dignity, the calm and skeptical maturity, of a natural king. Across those motionless features a subtle smile has hovered for five thousand years. There is nothing finer in the history of sculpture than the diorite statue of Khafre in the Cairo Museum; as ancient to Praxiteles as Praxiteles to us, it nevertheless comes down across fifty centuries almost unhurt by time's rough usages; cut in the most intractable of stones, it passes on to us completely the strength and authority, the wilfulness and courage, the sensitivity and intelligence of the King.

In Egypt, except during the reign of the Ptolemies, painting never rose to the status of an independent art; it remained an accessory to architecture, sculpture and relief the painter filled in the outlines carved by the cutting tool. But though subordinate, it was ubiquitous; most statues were painted, all surfaces were coloured. It is a perilously subject to time, and lacking the persistence of statuary and building. Very little remains to us of Old Kingdom painting beyond a remarkable picture of six geese from a tomb at Medum; but from this alone we are justified in believing that already in the early dynasties this art, too, had come near to perfection. In the Middle Kingdom we find distemper painting of a delightful decorative effect in the tombs of Ameni and Khnumhotep at Beni-Hasan, and such excellent examples of the art as the "Gazelles and the Peasants," and the "Cat Watching the Prey"; here again the artist has caught the main point that his creations must move and live. Under the Empire the tombs became a riot of painting. The Egyptian artist had now developed every colour in the rainbow, and was anxious to display his skill. On the walls and ceilings of homes, temples,

palaces and graves he tried to portray refreshingly the life of the sunny fields, birds in flight through the air, fishes swimming in the sea, beasts of the jungle in their native haunts. Floors were painted to look like transparent pools, and ceilings sought to rival the jewellery of the sky. Around these pictures were borders of geometric or floral design, ranging from a quiet simplicity to the most fascinating complexity.

In the painting, the line is good and the composition poor; the participants in an action, whom we should portray as intermingled, are represented separately in succession; superposition is again preferred to perspective; the stiff formalism and conventions of Egyptian sculpture are the order of the day and do not reveal that enlivening humour and realism which distinguish the later statuary. But through these pictures runs a freshness of conception, a flow of line and execution, a fidelity to the life and movement of natural things, and a joyous exuberance of colour and ornament, which make them a delight to the eye and the spirit. With all its shortcomings, Egyptian painting would never be surpassed by any Oriental civilization until the middle dynasties of China.

The minor arts were the major art of Egypt. The same skill and energy that had built Karnak and the Pyramids, and had crowded the temples with a populace of stone, devoted itself also to the internal beautification of the home, the adornment of the body, and the development of all the graces of life. Weavers made rugs, tapestries and cushions rich in colour and incredibly fine in texture. The relics of Tutenkhamon's tomb have revealed the astonishing luxury of Egyptian furniture and vases that only China would excel. Tables bore costly vessels of silver, gold and bronze, crystal goblets and sparkling bowls of diorite so finely ground that the light shone through their stone walls. Finally, the jewellers of the Middle Kingdom and the Empire brought forth a profusion of precious ornaments seldom surpassed in design and workmanship.

Egyptian religion cooperated with Egyptian wealth to inspire and foster art, and cooperated with Egypt's loss of empire and

affluence to ruin it. Religion offered motives, ideas and the inspiration; but it imposed conventions and restraints which bound art so completely to the church that when sincere religion died among the artists, the arts that had lived on it died too.

### **Science and Technology**

The scholars of Egypt were mostly priests, who, despite all their superstitions, laid the foundations of Egyptian science. According to their own legends the sciences had been invented some 18,000 B.C.E. by *Thoth*, the Egyptian god of wisdom, during his three thousand year-long reign on earth and the most ancient books on science were composed by this learned deity.

### **Origins of Egyptian Science**

At the very outset of recorded Egyptian history, we find mathematics highly developed. The design and construction of the Pyramids involved a precision of measurement impossible without considerable mathematical lore. The dependence of Egyptian life upon the fluctuations of the Nile led to careful records and calculations of the rise and recession of the river; surveyors and scribes were continually re-measuring the land whose boundaries had been obliterated by the inundation, and this measuring of the land was evidently the origin of geometry. Nearly all the ancients agreed in ascribing the invention of this science to the Egyptians.

### **Mathematics, Astronomy and the calendar**

The ancient Egyptian used established numerals only fell just short of the decimal system. They had no zero and never reached the idea of expressing all numbers with ten digits. Their idea of multiplication and division tables are as old as the Pyramids. The oldest mathematical treatise known is the *Ahmes Papyrus*, dating back to 2000-1700 B.C.E. This refers to mathematical writings five hundred years more ancient than itself. Egyptian geometry measured not only the area of squares, circles and cubes, but also the cubic content of cylinders and spheres.

Regarding Egyptian physics and chemistry, we know nothing,

and almost as little of Egyptian astronomy. The star-gazers of the temples seem to have conceived the earth as a rectangular box, with mountains at the corners upholding the sky. They made no note of eclipses and were in general less advanced than their Mesopotamian contemporaries. The priests regarded their astronomical studies as an esoteric and mysterious science, which they were reluctant to disclose to the common world. For century after century they kept track of the position and movements of the planets, until their records stretched back for thousands of years. They distinguished between planets and fixed stars, noted in their catalogues stars of the fifth magnitude and charted what they thought were the planetary influences of the heavens on the fortunes of men. From these observations they built the calendar which was to be another of Egypt's greatest gifts to mankind. They began by dividing the year into three seasons of four months each: first, the rise, overflow and recession of the Nile; second, the period of cultivation; and third, the period of harvesting. To each of these months they assigned thirty days, as being the most convenient approximation to the lunar month of twenty-nine and a half days. At the end of the twelfth month they added five days to bring the year into harmony with the river and the sun.

### **Medical Science.**

The glory of Egyptian science was medicine. Like almost everything else in the cultural life of Egypt, it began with the priests, and dripped with evidences of its magical origins. Among the people amulets were more popular than pills as preventive or curative of disease. Disease was to them a possession by devils and was to be treated with incantations. Several papyri devoted to medicine have come down to us. The most valuable of them, named from the Edwin Smith who discovered it, is a roll fifteen feet long dating about 1600 B.C.E., and going back for its sources to much earlier works; even in its extant form it is the oldest scientific document known to history.

It describes forty-eight cases in clinical surgery, from cranial fractures to injuries of the spine. Each case is treated in logical

order, under the heads of provisional diagnosis, examination, diagnosis, prognosis, treatment, and glosses on the terms used. The Egyptians tried to promote health by public sanitation, by circumcision of males and by teaching the people the frequent use of the enema. In order to prevent sicknesses, they look after the health of their body by means of drenches, fasting and emetics, sometimes every day and sometimes at intervals of three or four days. For they say that the larger part of the food taken into the body is superfluous and that it is from this superfluous part that diseases are engendered. Herodotus mentions that the Egyptians purge themselves every month, three days successively, seeking to preserve health by emetics and enemas; for they suppose that all diseases to which men are subject proceed from the food they use.

### **Decline of Egyptian Civilization**

After the death of Tutankhamun, the romantic Rameses II, last of the great Pharaohs, mounted the throne. This handsome and brave monarch, added to his charms by his boyish consciousness of them and his exploits in war, which he never tired of recording, were equalled only by his achievements in love. After brushing aside, a brother who had inopportune rights to the throne, he resumed many expeditions to different regions such as Nubia and into many Asiatic provinces and extended the Egyptian boundary and replenishes the treasury of Egypt. He had his victories commemorated without undue impartiality on half a hundred walls commissioned a poet to celebrate him in epic verse and rewarded himself with several hundred wives. When he died, he left one hundred sons and fifty daughters to testify to his quality by their number and their proportion. He married several of his daughters, so that they too might have splendid children. His offspring were so numerous that they constituted for four hundred years a special class in Egypt, from which, for over a century, her rulers were chosen. He seems to have ruled Egypt well. He built so lavishly that half of the surviving edifices of Egypt are ascribed to his reign. He completed the

main hall at Karnak, added to the temple of Luxor, raised his own vast shrine, the Ramesseum, west of the river, finished the great mountain-sanctuary at Abu Simbel, and scattered colossi of himself throughout the land. Commerce flourished under him, both across the Isthmus of Suez and on the Mediterranean. He built another canal from the Nile to the Red Sea, but the shifting sands filled it up soon after his death. He yielded up his life in 1225 B.C.E, aged ninety, after one of the most remarkable reigns of history. After his death the decline of Egypt began. The following factors are responsible for the collapse of this mighty civilization of Nile.

### **Growing wealth of the clergy**

Throughout the reign of Ramses-II and those of his immediate successors, the spoils of every war, and the lion's share of taxes from the conquered provinces, went to the temples and the priests. This kind of generous gifts to the priestly class by the emperor of Egypt gradually emptied the treasury. When the time came to pay the workmen employed by the state, he found his treasury empty. More and more the people starved in order that the gods might eat. Under such a policy it was only a matter of time before the kings would become the servants of the priests. In the reign of the last Ramessid king the High Priest of Amon usurped the throne and ruled as openly supreme; the Empire became a stagnant theocracy in which architecture and superstition flourished, and every other element in the national life decayed. Omens were manipulated to give a divine sanction to every decision of the clergy. The most vital forces of Egypt were sucked dry by the thirst of the gods at the very time when foreign invaders were preparing to sweep down upon all this concentrated wealth. For meanwhile on every frontier trouble brewed.

### **Decline of Trade and Commerce**

The prosperity of the country had come in part from its strategic place on the main line of Mediterranean trade. Its metals and wealth had given it mastery over Libya on the west and over

Phoenicia, Syria and Palestine on the north and east. But now at the other end of this trade route in Assyria, Babylon and Persia new nations were growing to maturity and power, were strengthening themselves with invention and enterprise, and were daring to compete in commerce and industry with the self-satisfied and pious Egyptians. The Phoenicians were perfecting the trireme galley, and with it were gradually wresting from Egypt the control of the sea. The Dorians and Achaeans had conquered Crete and the Aegean (c.1400 B.C.E.), and were establishing a commercial empire of their own; trade moved less and less in slow caravans over the difficult and robber-infested mountains and deserts of the Near East; it moved more and more, at less expense and with less loss, in ships that passed through the Black Sea and the Aegean to Troy, Crete and Greece, at last to Carthage, Italy and Spain.

### **The conquest of Egypt**

The nations along the northern shores of the Mediterranean ripened and blossomed, the nations on the southern shores faded and rotted away. Egypt lost her trade, her gold, her power, her art, at last even her pride. One by one her rivals crept down upon her soil, harassed and conquered her and laid her waste. In 954 B.C.E. the Libyans came in from the western hills and laid about them with fury; in 722 the Ethiopians entered from the south, and avenged their ancient slavery; in 674 the Assyrians swept down from the north and subjected priest-ridden Egypt to tribute. For a time Psamtik, Prince of Sai's, repelled the invaders, and brought Egypt together again under his leadership. During his long reign, and those of his successors, came the "Sai'te Revival" of Egyptian art: the architects and sculptors, poets and scientists of Egypt gathered up the technical and aesthetic traditions of their schools, and prepared to lay them at the feet of the Greeks. But in 525 B.C.E. the Persians under Cambyses crossed Suez, and again put an end to Egyptian independence. In 332 B.C.E. Alexander sallied out of Asia, and made Egypt a province of Macedon. In 48 B.C.E. Caesar arrived to capture Egypt's new capital, Alexandria, and to give to Cleopatra the son and

heir whom they vainly hoped to crown as the unifying monarch of the greatest empires of antiquity.

### **Contributions Egyptian civilization**

In 30 B.C.E. Egypt became a province of Rome, and disappeared from history. For a time it flourished again when saints peopled the desert, and Cyril dragged Hypatia to her death in the streets (415 C.E.). Again, when the Moslems conquered it (ca. C.E. 650), built Cairo with the ruins of Memphis and filled it with bright-domed mosques and citadels it revived in a different manner. But these were alien cultures not really Egypt's own, and they too passed away. Today there is a place called Egypt, but the Egyptian people are not masters there. Long since they have been broken by conquest and merged in language and marriage with their Arab conquerors; and the feet of weary pilgrims who travel thousands of miles to find that the Pyramids are merely heaps of stones. Perhaps greatness could grow there again if Asia should once more become rich, and make Egypt the half-way house of the planet's trade.

On all sides gigantic ruins, monuments and tombs, memorials of a savage and titanic energy scattered. And on all sides the hostile, engulfing sands, blown about forever by hot winds and grimly resolved to cover everything in the end. Nevertheless, the sands have destroyed only the body of ancient Egypt. Its spirit survives in the lore and memory of our race. The improvement of agriculture, metallurgy, industry and engineering. The apparent invention of glass and linen, of paper and ink, of the calendar and the clock, of geometry and the alphabet.

The refinement of dress and ornament, of furniture and dwellings, of society and life. The remarkable development of orderly and peaceful government, of census and post, of primary and secondary education, even of technical training for office and administration. The advancement of writing and literature, of science and medicine. The first clear formulation known to us of individual and public conscience, the first cry for social justice, the first widespread monogamy, the first monotheism, the first

essays in moral philosophy; the elevation of architecture, sculpture and the minor arts to a degree of excellence and power never reached before and seldom equalled since. These contributions were not lost, even when their finest exemplars were buried under the desert or overthrown by some convulsion of the globe.

Through the Phoenicians, the Syrians and the Jews, through the Cretans, the Greeks and the Romans, the civilization of Egypt passed down to become part of the cultural heritage of mankind. The effect or remembrance of what Egypt accomplished at the very dawn of history has influence in every nation and every age. "It is even possible," as Faure has said, "that Egypt, through the solidarity, the unity, and the disciplined variety of its artistic products, through the enormous duration and the sustained power of its effort, offers the spectacle of the greatest civilization that has yet appeared on the earth.

### **Glossary**

1. Vizier: The vizier (/vjÈzjYr/ or /ÈvjzjYr/) was the highest official in ancient Egypt to serve the pharaoh (king) during the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms. The viziers were often appointed by the pharaoh.

2. ka: Ka, in ancient Egyptian religion, with the *ba* and the *akh*, is a principal aspect of the soul of a human being or of a god.

3. Nome: A nome- (/noŠm/, from Ancient Greek: ñïüð, nomós, "district") was a territorial division in ancient Egypt. Each nome was ruled by a nomarch.

4. Ma'at: Ma'at (pronounced may-et) is the ancient Egyptian goddess of truth, justice, harmony, and balance (a concept known as ma'at in Egyptian) who first appears during the period known as the Old Kingdom (c. 2613 - 2181 B.C.E.) but no doubt existed in some form earlier.

5. Thoth: The ancient Egyptians regarded Thoth as One, self-begotten, and self-produced. He was the master of both physical and moral (i.e. divine) law, making proper use of Ma'at.

6. Saite: a native or inhabitant of the ancient Egyptian city of Saïs.

7. Book of the Dead: Ancient Egyptian collection of mortuary texts made up of spells or magic formulas, placed in tombs and believed to protect and aid the deceased in the hereafter.

\*\*\*\*\*

## MODULE II

### ANCIENT CHINESE CIVILISATION

#### **Introduction**

In ancient China, civilization developed much like it did in Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Indus Valley. But while these other civilizations grew side by side, knew of each other and had trade relationship in between them, Chinese civilization developed independently, with very little influence from the cultures to the west. An urban civilization did not emerge in China until about 2000 B.C.E, about a thousand years later than in Mesopotamia, but it emerged as a large and highly developed kingdom.

The dynamic and rich civilization of the Chinese flourished at the eastern end of mainland China. Eastern China is a vast watershed drained by two large river systems which rise on the Tibetan plateau and Kunlun Mountains and flow eastward to the Pacific. The Yellow river traverses the north China plain. The Yangtze and its valley lie to the south. Smaller rivers and valleys converge on present-day Canton. The climate in the south is semi-tropical and monsoon-drenched. China has been protected by the Gobi Desert in the north, the Tibetan plateau and Pamir and Himalaya mountains in the west, the forests of Southeast Asia in the South and the Pacific Ocean in the east. From the Shang Dynasty in 1700 B.C.E. to the Ching (Qing) Dynasty (1644-1912 C.E) there were twenty four dynasties ruled over this vast stretch of land in the Chinese mainland.

With a dense population from early times, the Chinese have achieved high levels of productivity and exported many sought-after goods such as iron, porcelain, and silk. With a common language, paper to print it on, and a varied and distinctive cuisine, the people have been rightfully proud of their cohesive and distinctive culture. They have traditionally viewed themselves as living in "The Middle Kingdom" - that is, the centre of the known world, but have sometimes seen neighbours and outsiders as "barbarians" from whom they demanded tribute.

## **Growth of Civilisation in China: From Prehistory to Civilisation**

Like in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus River valley, civilization in China developed around a great river. The Yellow River carried floodwater and sediment to the land around it, making the area incredibly fertile and thus an excellent place for the Stone Age inhabitants of the area to experiment with agriculture. While the Yellow River was the main cradle of Chinese civilization, people also settled around other rivers, such as the Huai and the Yangtze. By around 4000 B.C.E., villages began to appear. They cultivated a number of crops, but most important was a grain called millet. Besides millet, they also cultivate soybeans, wheat, hemp and Rice. Although Rice was cultivated in this period, but it was not yet the important staple that it would later become in the Chinese diet. The Neolithic Chinese domesticated animals such as pigs, dogs, and chickens. Silk production, through the domestication of silk worms, probably also began in this early period.

The earliest cultivators lived in wattle-and-daub pit dwellings with wooden support posts and sunken, plastered floors. Their villages were located in isolated clearings along slopes of river valleys. Archaeological finds of weapons and remains of earthen walls suggest tribal warfare between villages. Little is known of the religion of these people, although some evidence suggests the worship of ancestral spirits. They practiced divination by applying heat to a hole drilled in the shoulder bone of a steer or the under shell of a tortoise and then interpreting the resulting cracks in the bone. They buried their dead in cemeteries with jars of food. Tribal leaders wore rings and beads of jade.

During the Neolithic period in China, there were multiple groups of people, mostly around the Yellow River, with separate emerging cultures. Some of these various cultures include the **Yangshao** culture (4800 to 3000 B.C.E.), the **Majjiayao** culture (3800 to 2000 B.C.E.), the **Dawenkou** culture (4300 to 2400 B.C.E.), the **Qijia** culture (2200 to 1800 B.C.E.), and the

Longshan culture (2600 to 2000 B.C.E.). Over time, they influenced each other more and more and pottery, art, and artefacts recovered by archaeologists show greater homogenization as time went on. By 2000 B.C.E a more unified Chinese culture was developing, and there is also evidence of urbanism and the use of early writing among the Chinese. All of this took place about a thousand years later than in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus River valley.

Chinese mythology tells a different story. It holds that the universe was created by *Pangu*, after which the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, a series of legendary sage emperors and heroes (such as the Yellow Emperor), helped create man and taught the ancient Chinese to speak, use fire, build houses, farm, and make clothing. While these events are mythological, at the root of them may be lies ancient memories of very early kings and rulers who emerged among the prehistoric Chinese. According to these myths, the last of the great Five Emperors left his throne to Yu the Great, who founded China's first dynasty, the Xia (or Hsia) dynasty. Yu supposedly began the practice of passing power from father to son, which was the necessary step for the creation of a dynasty. According to mythology, his ancestors ruled China for nearly five hundred years, until the last Xia king became corrupt and cruel. This led to his overthrow by Tang, who founded a new dynasty, the Shang dynasty.

There is much debate among scholars about how much of this mythology is true. Many argue that the Zhou (Chou) dynasty, which ruled China much later, invented the idea of the Xia dynasty. It was necessary because the Zhou created the idea of the Mandate of Heaven, which states that there could only be one legitimate ruler of China at one time. This meant that the various small states that comprised Neolithic and Bronze Age China, and which had probably been forgotten, were not useful for their concept of history. They had to create the idea that China had always had one ruler and thus they created the idea of an ancient Xia dynasty. Also, since the Zhou had overthrown the legitimate

Shang dynasty, they wanted to connect themselves to a more ancient line of kings, so they invented the Xia and gave them a history of ruling the country before the Shang.

However, the Xia dynasty may not be a complete fabrication. Archaeologists have discovered advanced Bronze Age culture in China, which they call the **Erlitou** culture. Its capital, Erlitou, was a huge city around 2000 B.C.E., with two possible palaces, a drainage system and what seems to have been a very high population. This may be the people referred to in Chinese mythology as the Xia. In addition, for a long time it was believed that the later Shang dynasty may also have been purely mythological, until archaeology proved that it had been real. Indeed, while the existence of the Shang dynasty was still in doubt, at the start of the twentieth century scholars realized that objects being sold by Chinese merchants as dragon bones, which were crushed to make a traditional Chinese medicine consumed to treat a variety of ailments, were actually important pieces of historical evidence called oracle bones. Oracle bones are pieces of bone or turtle shell used by the ancient Chinese, especially Chinese kings, in attempts to predict the future. The ancient kings would inscribe their name and the date on the bone, along with a question. They would then heat the bone until it cracked and then interpret the shape of the crack, which was believed to provide an answer to their question. Shang rulers long thought to be merely mythological figures had carved their names onto such oracle bones, attesting to their actual existence.

Archaeologists have also found ancient cities that correspond with the Shang dynasty. A city at Zhengzhou appears to have been a Shang capital and it contained palaces, workshops, and city walls. Another important but slightly later Shang city that has been excavated is Anyang.

This site yielded large numbers of oracle bones, which describe the travels of eleven named kings, and the names of these kings and the order of their reigns match traditional lists of Shang kings. This was the decisive period when a truly Chinese culture

emerged, a culture that would continue to thrive and evolve, and which considers itself continuous up to the modern day. In the subsequent paragraphs this chapter will discuss the early ruling dynasties of Chinese civilization in brief.

### **Dynastic Rule in China**

The first three dynasties to rule China were the Xia (or Hsia) dynasty, the Shang dynasty, and the Zhou (or Chou) dynasty. They did not yet rule the huge area that makes up modern China, but they controlled a massive swath of territory around the Yellow River. While the first Chinese emperors did not rule until China was unified under the later Qin (Ch'in) dynasty, in this early period China was ruled by kings. For the most part, there was only one king at a time, who effectively ruled of all of China. Under the Zhou dynasty, however, the power of the kings weakened and many powerful men called themselves "kings at the same time, as they vied for control of the country. It was only at this point that there emerged the concept of a Chinese emperor, or Huangdi (a term that had previously been used for the mythological leaders who were said to have ruled China at the beginning of time), who would rule over all these various kings. In the above section in brief we have discussed about the Xia dynasty, let's have a brief look in to the various aspects of the Shang and Zhou Dynasty and the subsequent history of Chinese civilization.

### **Shang Dynasty**

While scholars still debate whether the Xia dynasty-according to traditional legends the first Chinese dynasty-actually existed or not but almost no one doubts anymore that the Shang dynasty existed and ruled China during its Bronze Age. Thus, the Shang dynasty is generally considered China's first historical dynasty. It was under the Shang that writing first emerged among the Chinese, making it the beginning of the historical China. The Shang ruled from around 1600 to 1046 B.C.E.

### **The Discovery of the Shang: The Oracle Bones**

For a long time, scholars doubted that the Shang dynasty ever actually existed. It was only with the discovery of the Shang oracle

bones, pieces of bone or shell used for divination, that it was confirmed that the Shang dynasty really did exist. After this, archaeologists started searching out Shang sites, and in the middle of the twentieth century began to excavate Shang cities. Both archaeology and oracle bones are important sources of evidence about the Shang dynasty. The oracle bones are especially useful, as they provide the bulk of the writing we have about the Shang. The king or professional diviners employed by the king would carve the name of the king and the date onto the bones, and write questions such as "Will we win the upcoming battle?" or "How many soldiers should we commit to the battle?" Such questions reveal a great deal about what was important to Shang society. Many of the oracle bones ask questions about war, harvests, and childbirth. Once the question was inscribed in the oracle bone, the bone was heated until it cracked. The cracks were then interpreted, and on the other side of the bone the king or diviner would write his interpretation of the crack. Later, they would record on the bone whether the prediction came true. These interpretations and verifications present even more information about the Shang. In addition, the names on the bones verify the reigns of historic Shang rulers long thought to be legendary.

### **Shang Writing**

The inscriptions on Shang oracle bones are the oldest surviving form of Chinese writing. The writing on the oracle bones shows evidence of complex development, indicating that the written language had been around for a long time before the first evidence of it appears. In fact, we can read the writing on the oracle bones because the language was already very similar to the modern Chinese writing system. Unfortunately, however, there are only few examples of Shang writing outside of the oracle bones. There are some inscriptions on bronze objects but most documents, such as government paperwork, receipts, and books, were written on bamboo strips and silk. These decomposed long ago and are lost to us forever.

## **Shang Cities**

According to legend, the Shang dynasty was founded when Cheng Tang overthrew the evil last king of the Xia dynasty. Tang supposedly founded a new capital for his dynasty at a town called Shang, near modern-day Zhengzhou. It seems to have functioned as a sacred capital, where the most sacred temples and religious objects were housed. However, the effective capital of the kingdom moved from city to city, as different kings ruled from different cities, probably as a result of regional power struggles within the kingdom.

The last and most important of these was a city called Yin, near modern-day Anyang, which acted as capital for the last 300 years or so of the dynasty, from about 1400 to 1046 B.C.E. Anyang was a huge city, about 2,400 hectares in size. It was spread out in a multitude of different sectors, each one more like an individual village. Anyang also had an extensive cemetery with thousands of graves of what seem to have been nobles, along with eleven particularly large tombs, which may have belonged to the eleven Shang kings, who apparently ruled from Anyang. All of the kingS'tombs were looted long ago, but some smaller graves escaped looting long enough for archaeologists to excavate, and even these small graves were filled with enormous numbers of jade, bronze and bone objects. They point to the enormous wealth of the rulers of the city, and many of the tombs would have required huge numbers of laborers in order to construct. These aristocratic tombs were also surrounded by the bodies of human sacrifices, sometimes just skulls, and the bones of human sacrifices have also been found inside of the tombs of Shang elites.

## **Shang Religion**

The human sacrifices found in Shang cities, particularly in the tombs of powerful Shang figures, indicate that they believed their servants would continue to serve them in the afterlife. For this reason, when a Shang aristocrat or ruler died, his or her servants would be killed and buried with the aristocrat. Alternatively, human

sacrifices may have been enemy warriors captured in battle.

For the Shang, what a person was buried with was important because they believed that a person would live on in the afterlife and take along the things they were buried with. The Shang believed the dead had great powers, and they worshipped their ancestors. They believed that failing to properly do this would mean that the ancestors would remove their protection from the living, allowing disaster to strike. People who lived under the Shang would consult their ancestors through oracle bones to seek their approval for any major decision and to learn about their future success in harvesting, hunting, or battle. They believed that the ancestors could confer good fortune in these things, and in order to appease the ancestors they made offerings of food and drink.

In addition to their ancestors, the Shang worshipped a supreme god called *Shangdi*, who ruled over lesser gods who embodied the sun, the moon, the wind, the rain, and other natural forces and places. Nonetheless, they believed that *Shangdi* was distant from man, and for the most part *Shangdi* could only be reached through the worship of their ancestors. Shang kings, however, believed they could communicate with *Shangdi*, and many oracle bones seek out his approval for the decisions of the kings.

### **Shang Technology**

Since the Shang ruled China during its Bronze Age, perhaps the most important technology at the time was bronze casting. They cast bronze objects by creating moulds out of clay, carving a design into the clay, and then pouring molten bronze into the mould. They allowed the bronze to cool and then broke the clay off, revealing a completed bronze object.

The upper class had the most access to bronze, and they used it for ceremonial objects, such as ritual vessels used to make offerings to the ancestors. Bronze objects were also buried in the tombs of Shang elite. The Shang government also used bronze for military weapons such as swords and spearheads.

Bronze weapons gave the Shang a distinct advantage over their enemies.

Another military technology that allowed the Shang to excel at war was the chariot. Under the Shang, the Chinese domesticated the horse. The horse would still have been too small to ride at the time, but the Chinese gradually developed the chariot, which harnessed the power of the horse. The chariot was a devastating weapon in battle, and it also allowed Shang soldiers to move vast distances with great speed.

These military technologies were important, because it seems that the Shang were constantly at war. A significant portion of oracle bones used by Shang kings were concerned with battle—how many men to commit, whether the king could expect victory, etc. These armies pushed the borders of the Shang kingdom further and brought back with them precious resources and prisoners of war, who could be enslaved or used for human sacrifice. The oracle bones also show a deep concern about the barbarians living outside the empire, who were a constant threat to the safety and stability of the kingdom, and the military had to be constantly ready to fight them.

### **Fall of the Shang**

The Shang dynasty was overthrown in 1046 B.C.E. by the Zhou (Chou). The Zhou were a subject people living in the western part of the kingdom. Supposedly, they rebelled against the last kings of the Shang and overthrew them. The Zhou founded a new dynasty. Under their rule, they moved away from worship of *Shangdi* in favour of Tian (heaven). They created the idea of the Mandate of Heaven. According to this idea, there could be only one legitimate ruler of China at a time, and this king reigned with the approval of heaven. A king could, however, lose the approval of heaven, which would result in his downfall. The Zhou claimed that the Shang kings had become immoral, that because of their excessive drinking, luxuriant living and cruelty, the Shang had lost heaven's approval of their rule. The Zhou dynasty claimed

to be replacing the Shang and they would rule China for the next eight hundred years.

### **The Zhou Dynasty**

To the west of the area of Shang rule, in the valley of the Wei River, a tributary of the Yellow River, lived the Zhou people. Culturally closer to the Neolithic black-pottery people, they were less civilized and more warlike than the Shang. References to the Zhou in the Shang oracle bones indicate that the Shang had relations with them- sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile. According to the traditional historical record, the last Shang kings were weak, cruel, and tyrannical.

By 1047 B.C.E., they had been debilitated by campaigns against nomads in the north and rebellious tribes in the east. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the Zhou made alliances with disaffected city-states and swept in, conquering the Shang. In most respects, the Zhou continued the Shang pattern of life and rule. The agrarian-based city-state continued to be the basic unit of society, and it is estimated that there were about 200 of them in the eighth century B.C.E. The Zhou social hierarchy was not unlike that of the Shang, with kings and lords at the top, officials and warriors below them, and peasants and slaves at the bottom. Slaves served primarily as domestic servants. The Zhou assimilated Shang culture, continuing without interruption the development of China's ideographic writing. The Zhou also maintained the practice of casting bronze ceremonial vessels, but their vessels lack the fineness that set the Shang above the rest of the Bronze Age world. King Wu, the leader of the Zhou (Chou), overthrew the last king of the Shang Dynasty. King Wu died shortly after this victory, but his family, the Ji, would rule China for the next few centuries. Their dynasty is known as the Zhou Dynasty.

### **The Mandate of Heaven**

After overthrowing the Shang Dynasty, the Zhou propagated a new concept known as the Mandate of Heaven. The Mandate of Heaven became the ideological basis of Zhou rule, and an

important part of Chinese political philosophy for many centuries. The Mandate of Heaven explained why the Zhou kings had authority to rule China and why they were justified in deposing the Shang dynasty. The Mandate held that there could only be one legitimate ruler of China at one time and that such a king reigned with the approval of heaven. A king could, however, lose the approval of heaven, which would result in that king being overthrown. Since the Shang kings had become immoral—because of their excessive drinking, luxuriant living and cruelty—they had lost heaven’s approval of their rule. Thus, the Zhou rebellion, according to the idea, took place with the approval of heaven, because heaven had removed supreme power from the Shang and bestowed it upon the Zhou.

### **Western Zhou**

After his death, King Wu was succeeded by his son Cheng, but power remained in the hands of a regent, the Duke of Zhou. The Duke of Zhou defeated rebellions and established the Zhou Dynasty firmly in power at their capital of Fenghao on the Wei River (near modern-day Xi’an) in western China. The period in which the Zhou held undisputed power over China is known as the Western Zhou period. A number of important innovations took place in this period.

The Zhou moved away from worship of *Shangdi*, the supreme god under the Shang, in favour of Tian (heaven). New advances in irrigation allowed more intensive farming, which in turn allowed the lands of China to sustain larger populations. Lands were farmed by peasants, who were controlled by the feudal system, the development of which was one of the most important innovations of this period.

After the Duke of Zhou stamped out local rebellions, he gave large holdings of land to nobles and generals who had proved loyal. These lands were similar to medieval fiefs in that they belonged to nobles, who in turn were under the authority of the king. This feudal system was known as the *fengjian* system,

and allowed the Zhou to govern the huge expanse of China's territory by giving regional power to nobles who would rule their lands in the name of the king. The land would be passed down within the family of the nobles, and the nobles could grant control of parts of their lands to lesser nobles in exchange for service and loyalty.

When the Duke of Zhou stepped down as the adviser and regent of King Cheng, China was united and at peace, leading to years of prosperity. This strong and prosperous state only lasted for about seventy-five years. Slowly, over time, the central power of the Zhou monarchs weakened. The lords of the fiefs originally bestowed by the Zhou came to equal the kings in wealth and power. The old bonds of loyalty weakened and the lords of the fiefs actively competed with the Zhou kings for power. These fiefs became largely independent, and known as individual states. In 711 B.C.E., a rebellious noble, the Marquess of Shen, joined forces with invading barbarians, known as the Quanrong, to defeat the Zhou King You. Supposedly none of the nobles came to the king's defense. The last Zhou King was killed and the Zhou capital was sacked by the barbarians. This brought an end to the Western Zhou period.

### **Eastern Zhou: Spring and Autumn Period**

With this disaster, the capital was moved east to Chengzhou, near modern-day Luoyang, and the Zhou abandoned the western regions. Thus, this period is known as the Eastern Zhou period. The new kings of the Zhou continued to lose power and their authority became limited to the area around the capital. They were still the nominal kings of China, but in reality, the local nobles ruled their own lands as kings in all but name. China had split up into a patchwork of small states, with the Zhou king as ceremonial leader but having no real power. The Mandate of Heaven, which specified that there could only be one supreme leader of China, was widely accepted, so no one overthrew the Zhou Dynasty. However, the dynasty simply became irrelevant. In the meantime, many of the local nobles went to war with each other as they

vied for power.

Though there are a total of 148 states mentioned in historical sources in this period, four states-**Qi, Qin, Jin, and Chu**-dominated China in the early Eastern Zhou period. They constantly changed alliances as they vied for control. China was nearly always at war. Despite political fragmentation, this was also a period of great intellectual development in China. The Spring and Autumn period, the first half of the Eastern Zhou period, is named after the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, an important Chinese history text which narrated events on a year by year basis. This marks the beginning of China's recorded history, and we can rely on written sources, instead of legend, from this time on. The Spring and Autumn period was also the time of the Hundred Schools of Thought-the golden age of Chinese philosophy. This was the period in which some of the most important Chinese philosophers lived, many of whom were patronized by the rulers of the small states that dominated China. Perhaps foremost among these philosophers was Confucius. He looked back on the Western Zhou period, with its strong centralized state, as an ideal. He was pragmatic, and sought to reform the existing government, encouraging a system of mutual duty between superiors and inferiors. Confucius stressed tradition and believed that an individual should strive to be virtuous and good mannered and to fit into his place in society.

Another important philosopher in this period was Laozi, who founded **Daoism (Taoism)**. It is uncertain if Laozi actually existed, but the philosophy attributed to him certainly developed during this time. Daoism advocated that the individual should follow the way (*dao*) of the universe and act in accordance with nature. Daoism stressed passivity and **wu wei**-that is, non- action. Daoism was strictly individualistic, as opposed to Confucianism, which advocated acting as society expected.

Although Confucianism and Daoism are the most enduring Chinese philosophies to this day, even more important in this early period was a lesser-known philosophy called **Legalism**,

which held that humans are inherently bad and need to be kept in line by a strong state.

According to *Legalism*, the state was everything, far more important than the individual. While Legalism held that laws should be clear and public, and that everyone should be subject to the law, it also contended that rulers had supreme power and must use secret techniques and tactics to remain in power. *Legalism* was generally in competition with Confucianism, which advocated a just and reciprocal relationship between the state and its subjects.

Another major competitor with Confucianism was the philosophy of *Mohism*, developed by Mozi during the Spring and Autumn period. *Mohism* advocated universal love—that is, deep concern for all people. It held that all were equal, and that power should be based not on ancestry or tradition, but on merit. Developing in a period of constant rivalry between states, Mohists were opposed to offensive warfare, believing that it was the cause of many of the contemporary problems in China, and many adherents of the philosophy travelled widely, offering their services to defend any state that was being attacked by another.

The Spring and Autumn Period is generally held to have come to an end when the state of Jin, one of the most powerful at the time, collapsed. The state broke up into three smaller states: Han, Wei, and Zhao. About the same time, the state of Yue (a new state) became powerful. Thus, with seven rival states—Han, Wei, Zhao, Yue, Chu, Qi, and Qin—China entered a period known as the Warring States period, as each state fought for complete control. In the middle of all this, the Zhou kings could only look on, powerless. The Zhou kings continued to hold the Mandate of Heaven, and thus acted as the sacred rulers of China, but by the Warring States period the rulers of the independent states had begun to use the title of king (wang).

### **Eastern Zhou: Warring States Period**

The Warring States period gets its name from a history, called

Strategies of the Warring States, written about the period during the later Han Dynasty. The seven major Chinese states were in constant competition in this period. Since none of the states wanted any one rival to become too powerful, if one state became very strong, the others would join forces against it, so no state could achieve dominance. This led to nearly 250 years of inconclusive warfare. In this period, warfare became larger and larger in scale. Expensive chariots became less useful, while the invention of the crossbow (which was cheap to make and required little training) meant that masses of expendable infantry became more desirable. As a result, peasants were conscripted into the military more often. This period also saw the widespread adoption of iron tools and weapons, which were significantly stronger than their bronze counterparts. Thus, the Warring States period is the time when China fully entered the Iron Age. The Warring States period also saw the further development of the philosophical movements that originated in the Hundred Schools of Thought of the Spring and Autumn period. Mencius further developed Confucian philosophy, expanding upon its doctrines. Daoism, Mohism, Legalism and other philosophies that had their earliest origins in the Spring and Autumn period became more developed. It was also in this period that archaic writing gave way to a far more recognizable form of Chinese script.

Though the military rivalries and alliances in the Warring States period were complex and ever changing, over time the Qin state slowly emerged as the most powerful. Qin was in the westernmost part of China, controlling the area where the old Western Zhou capital had been. In 249 B.C.E., the Zhou line died out, leaving no more kings to hold the Mandate of Heaven. However, within less than thirty years of this event, the Qin state led by Ying Zheng (later known as Qin Shi Huang) would conquer all its rivals, and by 221 B.C.E. united China once more. With the Zhou gone, Ying Zheng claimed the Mandate of Heaven and created a new dynasty, the Qin Dynasty. Instead of taking on the title of king, however, he bestowed upon himself a far grander title- Emperor of China.

## **The Imperial Era of China**

Though China was nominally ruled by the Zhou kings for centuries, in reality, from 711 B.C.E. to 221 B.C.E., a period of nearly 500 years, China was divided between rival kingdoms ruled by various warlords. Though this period saw the birth of many important aspects of Chinese culture, such as philosophy, literature and scientific discoveries, it was also a very difficult time, as China struggled with disunity and constant fighting. The rise of the Qin Dynasty in 221 B.C.E. united China for the first time in centuries and began the imperial era of Chinese history. From this period, rulers of China called themselves Huangdi-emperors and ruled a much expanded and more centralized Chinese state.

The Qin Dynasty hardly outlasted its first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, but the imperial system created by the Qin dynasty established the form in which China would be ruled for the next two millennia. The Qin Dynasty was followed by the Han Dynasty, which continued many of the Qin policies, while modifying some of the harsher aspects of the previous dynasty with Confucian ideals of government. Built on such an imperial model, the Han Dynasty ruled China for over four hundred years.

### **The Qin Dynasty**

Emerging from the chaos of the Warring States period, the Qin (or Chin) Dynasty conquered its rivals and unified the country. The Qin dynasty was one of the shortest in all of Chinese history. It lasted only about fifteen years. But it was one of the most important dynasties, because it united China for the first time in centuries as a single state—in many ways.

### **Foundations of the Unification**

The forces that allowed the Qin to grow from a small state to a power that dominated China had developed before the first Qin emperor was born. The state started out as a fief in the west bestowed by King Ping, the first of the Eastern Zhou kings, from the lands around the old Zhou capital in the west. As one of the powerful states of the time, Qin competed with its rivals during

the Eastern Zhou period. But for centuries it was just one of several states, none of which could overpower the others.

Qin was home to perhaps the strongest traditions of Legalism, however, which advocated the importance of the state at the expense of the individual. Rooted in Legalist philosophy, the Qin were known for being ruthless and ignoring gentlemanly etiquette and proper battlefield protocol in order to win at all costs. Perhaps one of the most important figures in building the Qin state into a force capable of dominating China was the Legalist statesman Shang Yang. In the fourth century B.C.E. he became the adviser to the Qin king and from this position embarked on a number of reforms. As a Legalist, he believed that all people should be loyal foremost to the state, and enacted laws to force subjects of the kingdom to act in ways that helped the state. He forced them to marry early, have many children and produce certain quotas of food. He discouraged commerce in favour of agriculture. Most importantly, he stripped the nobility of power, and centralized authority in the king.

Thus, the independent and disloyal nobility that had plagued the Zhou would not pose a problem. Ironically, Shang Yang was executed for suspicion of disloyalty to the state, the very crime he most ardently opposed. Nonetheless, his reforms were kept in place, and they meant that the Qin state was the most centralized and efficient of all the Chinese states. By 246 B.C.E., when Ying Zheng ascended the throne, the state of Qin was the most powerful state in China and had already begun to conquer its neighbours. Under Ying Zheng, who was assisted by his cunning adviser Li Si, the remaining states of China would be rapidly subdued and integrated into the expanding Qin Empire.

### **The First Emperor of China**

By 221 B.C.E., Ying Zheng had completed his conquest of China. With the entire country under his rule, he claimed the Mandate of Heaven and ruled over all China. Instead of taking the traditional title of king (wang), Ying Zheng claimed a loftier

title, Huangdi, which is usually translated as “Emperor. Huangdi was previously a title reserved for the ancient, semi-divine rulers of China from the legendary past, and the title had connotations of divinity, literally meaning “Holy Emperor. Ying Zheng was above a king and he is henceforth known by his new name—Qin Shi Huang, or First Qin Emperor.

With the firm Legalist roots of the Qin Dynasty, Qin Shi Huang presented himself as the unchallenged leader of China and ruled as a totalitarian autocrat. All schools of philosophy besides Legalism were suppressed. Qin Shi Huang’s adviser, Li Si, advised the emperor to burn all books that were not beneficial to maintaining Qin power. Philosophical texts were destroyed, especially Confucian texts, as well as historical works that covered any history that was not about the Qin state. Later, Qin Shi Huang ordered scholars of non-Legalist philosophical schools to be buried alive, supposedly in revenge for being deceived by a pair of alchemists, but perhaps also to unite China under Legalist thought. Qin Shi Huang’s burning of books and execution of philosophers marks the end of the Hundred Schools of Thought. The philosophy of Mohism was completely wiped out.

Qin Shi Huang instituted a number of grand building projects. After inconclusive warfare with the pastoralist nomad tribes that lived to the north of China, Qin Shi Huang had a large defensive wall built in the north. This wall served as the foundation from which, in later centuries, the Great Wall of China would eventually be built. Qin Shi Huang also ordered the construction of the Lingqu canal, a massive, man-made waterway that connected the Xiang and the Li Rivers and allowed the emperor to more easily transport soldiers and supplies. Thousands of workers died in order to quickly create such building projects, but this was in line with Legalist philosophy, which held that the interest of the state was worth the lives of its subjects. With the guidance of Li Si, Qin Shi Huang set about standardizing weights and measures, creating a single currency, and expanding roads and other methods of travel and communication.

A standardized system of writing was created for all of China, and the burning of books helped eliminate the old, outdated scripts. Everything in the kingdom was standardized, down to the approved size of a chariot's axle. Qin Shi Huang and Li Si also continued to weaken the nobility, to keep them from becoming too powerful, as had happened under the Zhou. In place of the nobility, they developed an organized bureaucracy, all under the authority of the emperor. The bureaucrats carried out the emperor's will, and they were rewarded with influence, but not land.

### **The Collapse of the Qin**

The most obvious weakness of the Qin Empire centered on Qin Shi Huang, was that it was his authority and personality that kept China unified. He survived numerous assassinations attempts but his death, and the disintegration of his empire was a major threat. Perhaps he worried about this, for he started to become obsessed with finding ways to prolong his life and achieve immortality. He employed alchemists and sorcerers and went on journeys with his court in search of a life-giving elixir. In the end, his desire to live forever is what killed him. He died ingesting a poisonous concoction in hopes that it would give him immortality.

Perhaps the greatest building project of Qin Shi Huang was the one built for his death. Before he died, he had created a massive tomb for himself on Mount Li, near modern-day Xi'an, and after he died and was buried there. The tomb was filled with thousands upon thousands of life-sized (or larger) terracotta soldiers, meant to guard the emperor in his afterlife. This terracotta army, which was armed with real weapons, had been long forgotten when it was rediscovered in the twentieth century. After Qin Shi Huang died in 210 B.C.E., his death was initially kept secret by Li Si and Zhao Gao, the emperor's chief eunuch. They knew the empire would fragment on news of Qin Shi Huang's death. Qin Shi Hunag's eldest son and heir apparent, Fusu, had been sent off to fight a campaign in the north, because he had argued with his father about executing scholars. Li Si and Zhao

Gao knew that they could not control Fusu, so they quickly took steps to make Qin Shi Huang's younger son, Huhai, emperor. Fusu was killed, and Huhai was made the new emperor-called Qin Er Huang, the Second Qin Emperor- before anyone really knew what happened.

Li Si and Zhao Gao started fighting over power. Subsequently, Zhao Gao managed to get Li Si, along with his entire family, executed. He forced the new, young emperor to do as he said, but his orders ended up being cruel and inefficient. With people angry at Emperor Qin Er Huang's mismanagement, and claiming that Fusu should have been emperor, a number of rebellions broke out. The states of Chu and Han, which had been conquered by Qin Shi Huang, declared themselves independent once more, and sought to overthrow the Qin Dynasty. Although initially in denial, Qin Er Huang soon had to face the fact that the empire was slipping from his hands. He tried to blame Zhao Gao and remove him but Zhao Gao had the loyalty of the soldiers and forced Qin Er Huang to kill himself.

The new emperor, Ziyi, finally executed Zhao Gao, but by then the rebellions had grown too powerful. Ziyi tried to negotiate with the rebels by declaring himself one king among many but the rebels had no reason to agree to this. The armies of Chu attacked and defeated Ziyi and he was killed. Within a year, the Qin capital of Xianyang was destroyed, and the Qin Dynasty was no more.

Despite Qin Shi Huang's boast that his dynasty would last 10,000 generations, it survived only fifteen years. But that fifteen-year period was of immense importance to Chinese history. It saw a standardization and unification of Chinese society that enabled the Chinese to think of themselves as members of a single kingdom. It also proved that one dynasty could effectively rule all of China. Though the fall of the Qin Dynasty plunged the state into civil war, it was not long before others learned from these lessons and unified China under a more enduring dynasty.

The Han Dynasty, which soon replaced the Qin, would rule for over four hundred years and usher in the golden age of ancient China.

### **The Han Dynasty**

The short-lived Qin Dynasty was succeeded by one of the most important and long-lasting dynasties in all of Chinese history: the Han Dynasty. The Han ruled China from 206 B.C.E.– 220 C.E., roughly the same time as the Roman Empire ruled the entire Mediterranean world, and like the Romans, the Han Dynasty ushered in a period of peace and prosperity during which progress and cultural development took place.

### **The Birth of a New Dynasty**

The Qin Dynasty did not last four years after the death of its founder, Qin Shi Huang. After the first emperor's death, intrigue at the court and incompetent leadership gave rise to rebellion, which led to the collapse of the dynasty, followed by more rebellion throughout China.

One of the rebels was Liu Bang. A man from a peasant background, he achieved a minor provincial rank and was escorting prisoners to work on the tomb of Qin Shi Huang when some of the prisoners escaped. Knowing that his failure to prevent the escapes meant he would be executed by the merciless Qin rulers; Liu Bang became a fugitive and leader of one of the many bands of rebels fighting the Qin. Through luck and victories over Qin soldiers, Liu Bang eventually acquired control over lands. He defeated the last Qin king in battle, and became king of the old state of Han.

Though eighteen separate kingdoms had declared their independence from the Qin, after the fall of the dynasty the states of Han and Chu were the two most powerful and all the other states formed coalitions around one or the other. In the Chu-Han contention, a four-year civil war prevailed in China. The state of Han, under the leadership of Liu Bang, fought against Chu for control of China and in the end Han emerged victorious.

Liu Bang reunified China by 202 B.C.E., and was declared Huangdi, the new emperor of China and founded the Han Dynasty. From that point on he was known as Emperor Gaozu. Though he was born a mere peasant, Gaozu established one of the great empires in history. Unlike Qin Shi Huang's dynasty, which did not last long after him, Gaozu's dynasty lived on for over four centuries and saw the height of ancient Chinese power and culture.

### **The Western Han**

The Han Dynasty, under Emperor Gaozu and his successors, established themselves in a new capital, Chang'an, in western China. They largely continued the policies of the Qin, and did not differ significantly from the Qin in how they governed China. Like the Qin, they continued to expand the bureaucracy and encouraged a centralized state. There were, however, minor differences between the two dynasties, and it was perhaps these differences that allowed the Han to rule so much longer than the Qin. First, the Han were more interested in the lives of the Chinese masses, in the wellbeing of their subjects. The Han promoted Confucianism, which had been persecuted by the Qin, in order to promote harmony among the classes.

However, the Han faced many challenges. After his victory over Chu, Emperor Gaozu rewarded his prominent supporters with grants of land to be ruled as fiefs. This started the same danger that brought down the Zhou Dynasty. Powerful local lords controlling their own petty kingdoms. Gaozu soon replaced these lords with members of his family, in hopes that his family would be loyal and govern these far-flung territories in the name of the emperor. Still, these local kings began minting their own coins, making their own laws, levying their own taxes, maintaining their own armies and soon they saw little need to listen to the emperors in Chang'an. Several rebellions broke out against the Han dynasty, the most serious being the Rebellion of the Seven States. Nonetheless, the Han emperors were able to put down these rebellions; they defeated the most prominent warrior-landlords,

and they gradually reduced the power of the small kingdoms.

Besides these internal threats, another major danger to the Han was the external threat of the barbarians. The most dangerous barbarians in this period were the Xiongnu (Hsiung-nu), or Huns, a nomadic-pastoralist warrior people from the Eurasian steppe. The Han Dynasty was able to face these threats and survive because of a strong centralized state. The state was funded primarily by a poll tax (a set tax on every individual) and land taxes (a portion of the harvest). This meant that the prosperity of the agricultural estates determined the prosperity of the Han government. It was in the Han period that the Chinese system of class hierarchy became well developed. This hierarchy, called the "four occupations, gave aristocratic scholars (called *shi*) the highest status, followed by farmers (who were precious to the state, both because they produced food and paid the land tax), followed by craftsmen and artisans, and finally merchants at the bottom of society (because, according to the thinking of the time, they did not produce anything, they merely sold what others produced).

Perhaps the most important early Han emperor was Emperor Wu of Han (141–87 B.C.E.), the seventh emperor of the Han Dynasty. During his fifty-four-year reign, the Han Dynasty reached its height. The Xiongnu were driven back and the borders were pushed farther than ever before, roughly doubling the size of the empire. As the Chinese pushed farther west, trade contacts were established with Persia, India, and the Roman Empire. At home, Emperor Wu attempted to weaken the authority of the regional aristocracy by giving more authority to handpicked governors drawn from the *shi* class. Emperor Wu centered the state on Confucian teachings. Although the first few Han emperors promoted Confucianism along with Daoism and Legalism, Emperor Wu promoted Confucianism exclusively, abandoning state support for other philosophies. The Confucian ideals that order and harmony were the result of good government and that social harmony depended on each person accepting his social

position helped legitimize the state and make people more willing to accept state power over them. At the same time, these ideals encouraged the state to act justly toward its people. From the time of Emperor Wu on, of the Han Dynasty accepted Confucianism as the state philosophy.

### **Confucianism as the state philosophy.**

In another important move, Emperor Wu created civil-service examinations, in which potential government officials were tested on their knowledge of the Confucian classics. The exams were designed to ensure that bureaucrats would be chosen for their intelligence, instead of their birth or connections. While the civil-service exams would not be the most important factor in selecting officials until after the Han Dynasty, Emperor Wu's program was an important first step. In addition, by making the Confucian classics the subject of the exams, Emperor Wu ensured that these texts would remain the most important Chinese texts for centuries to come.

Finally, Emperor Wu reformed the Chinese economy. Although merchants had the lowest status in classical China, some had grown exceedingly rich by selling salt and iron, which were produced by peasants who would otherwise farm and thus be subject to the land tax. Emperor Wu nationalized the salt and iron industries, but avoided unrest and inefficiency by employing the former businessmen as government officials in charge of the industries. Emperor Wu also promoted officials who were experts in agriculture, and initiated reforms that made farming more efficient.

### **The Eastern Han**

In the meanwhile, some important political incidents happened in China. Rebellion and political chaos briefly brought down the Han Dynasty from 9 to 25 C.E. Wang Mang, who ruled as regent to the young Emperor, overthrew the child emperor and claimed that the Han Dynasty had lost the divine support of the Mandate of Heaven. He proclaimed his own new dynasty, the Xin Dynasty. Wang Mang attempted a number of radical reforms, such as

introducing new forms of currency, outlawing slavery and a return to old models of land distribution. A series of major floods on the Yellow River, displaced thousands of peasants, which caused massive unrest. A rebel army called the *Chimei* (Red Eyebrows) developed out of the peasantry and they defeated Wang Mang's armies, and stormed the capital of Chang'an. They killed Wang Mang and put their own puppet ruler on the throne.

Meanwhile, in the east a member of the Han royal family, Liu Xiu, later known as Emperor Guangwu (r. 25-57 C.E.), was declared emperor and ruled from Luoyang. He defeated the Chimei rebels, and then went on to defeat rival warlords, thus reunifying China under the Han Dynasty. Since Emperor Guangwu and his successors kept the capital at Luoyang, his reign is considered the beginning of the Eastern Han period. Under Emperor Guangwu, the empire was strengthened and reunified. Areas that had fallen away from Chinese control (such as Korea and

Vietnam) were re-conquered and the Xiongnu Confederation, which had grown strong during China's period of instability, was pacified. Emperor Guangwu was succeeded by Emperor Ming and then Emperor Zhang. The Rule of Ming and Zhang, as it is called, is remembered for being an era of prosperity. Taxes were reduced, Confucian ideals were encouraged, and the emperors appointed able administrators. It was also in this period that paper-one of China's most important inventions-emerged. Though early forms of paper had existed for centuries, around 100 C.E. the Chinese eunuch Cai Lun perfected the papermaking process. With paper, Chinese texts could circulate on a durable and relatively inexpensive medium, instead of on clay, silk, or bamboo, as before. This allowed Chinese texts to become more readily available and encouraged learning.

Another important invention of this time was porcelain, which also had existed in previous forms for centuries but was perfected in the Eastern Han period, allowing for durable, high quality, and attractive ceramic ware.

## **The Fall of the Han**

After Emperor Zhang's death in 88 C.E., corrupt officials increasingly gained control of the state, while family feuds tore the dynasty apart. The emperors became more and more dependent on their officials. Eunuchs became increasingly powerful at court and Chinese histories have asserted that their thirst for money and power, and their willingness to sow dissension, fatally weakened the Han. At the same time, as the power of the emperor weakened, military commanders acted more independently and tried to secure power for themselves. Often the eunuchs and the generals competed for influence and position.

In 184 C.E., two major Daoist rebellions-the Yellow Turban Rebellion and the Five Pecks of Rice Rebellion-broke out. In order to fight these rebellions and in an attempt to avoid further rebellions, the Emperor gave much wider powers to military commanders, giving them control over their own provinces. These military commanders ended up using their provinces and their armies for their own ends in a long power struggle.

In 189 C.E., at the capital, Luoyang, the general He-Jin became embroiled in a power struggle with the court eunuchs for control of the emperor. He Jin plotted to kill all the eunuchs, but the eunuchs found out and killed him. In response, He-Jin's soldiers massacred all of the court eunuchs. With a power vacuum and political chaos in the capital, the general Dong Zhou marched on the city, deposed the reigning emperor and raised his own puppet emperor, Emperor Xian. Xian would be the last emperor of the Han Dynasty.

Dong Zhou ruled the state through the young Emperor Xian, but eventually he became too arrogant in his use of power. A number of other generals, ruling from their provinces, rebelled. Soon, they harboured plans of ruling their provinces as their own kingdoms, free from the authority of Dong Zhou or the emperor. Dong Zhou was eventually assassinated, and Emperor Xian fell under the control of another warlord, Cao-Cao. Cao-Cao ruled

over Emperor Xian just as Dong Zhou had, and Cao-Cao wanted to reunite the Han Empire by defeating the rebellious warlords. He came close to succeeding over the course of a twelve-year war of re-conquest. In the end, however, Cao-Cao was defeated in 208 C.E. at the Battle of Red Cliffs, an important turning point in history. With this defeat, all hope that the Han Empire would be reunited disappeared. When Cao-Cao died in 220 C.E., Emperor Xian abdicated the throne, claiming that he had lost the Mandate of Heaven. He gave the throne to Cao Cao's son, Cao Pi.

With this act, the Han Dynasty was no more. Since many did not accept Cao Pi as the new emperor, China splintered into three kingdoms ruled by warlords. This marks the beginning of the Three Kingdoms period of Chinese history.

When the Han Dynasty collapsed in 220 C.E., no one was powerful enough to reunify China under a single emperor. The result was the era of the Three Kingdoms. These three kingdoms (Wei, Shu, and Wu) battled for control in a long series of wars. This was one of the bloodiest periods of Chinese history, but it also has long been romanticized and remembered as a time of chivalry and honour. China was briefly reunified by the Jin Dynasty from 265 to 420 C.E., but early in the fourth century, nomadic tribes overwhelmed the northern borders. In 311 C.E., the capital, Luoyang, was captured by the invaders, and little more than a hundred years later the dynasty was no more. China was once again divided into a patchwork of independent kingdoms. It would take more than a century for another dynasty to reunite China under imperial rule but by that time China had passed from the ancient to the medieval era.

### **The Chinese Polity**

The social and political order of ancient China was one of the most stable and most highly organised among the old-world civilisations. It would not be wrong to say that seldom have so many people over such a wide geographical area been bound

together by a single political structure and set of social and cultural norms, values and traditions, for such a length of time. The capacity of this order to withstand the shocks of civil war, natural calamities and alien invasion and to accommodate significant social and economic development and growth of population, was truly remarkable. Because of its unusual stability, continuity and sophistication, no student of world history and civilization can afford to be ignorant of the political structure and social system of traditional China, or of the ideological and spiritual outlook on which these were based. In the subsequent paragraphs, we will only discuss the main features of the Imperial State of ancient China.

Polity in ancient China has been characterised in many different ways. It has been called a form of “oriental despotism”, or a bureaucratic society. While none of these characterisations by themselves is adequate, in the course of reading this section you will find that they all refer to various key features of China’s traditional polity that distinguish it most clearly from other river valley civilisations.

The State Perhaps the most remarkable product of Chinese civilization was the Imperial State. With a tradition of more than 2000 years, and lasting in basically unchanged form for nearly 1000 years. Its iron frame held China together as a single political unit through most of its recorded history down to modern times. Presiding over it was the Emperor, *the Son of Heaven*, whose authority and prestige was acknowledged by peoples even outside China’s administrative boundaries. However, its most distinctive feature was rule through a highly structured bureaucracy or elite corps of officials, the so-called mandarins, who were in the main recruited through a system of examinations based on scholarship.

This state came into being in a recognisable form in 221 B.C.E., when the ruler of Qin, one of the many feudal states competing for supremacy at that time, unified China and proclaimed himself the First Emperor. For the first time, the entire

realm was divided into standard administrative units and ruled directly by the Emperor through his officials. Although this system underwent substantial modifications under later dynasties and even collapsed altogether for a period of three and a half centuries after the fall of the Han dynasty (around 220 C.E.), it remained the norm and the basic pattern of governing in ancient China.

### **The Scope of the Chinese Empire**

One of the basic tensions in the Chinese Empire was the contradiction between its universalist self-image and the actual territorial limits of its administrative power. Being the pre-eminent power in East Asia and separated by natural barriers such as formidable mountains, desert wasteland and seas from any other power comparable in size and strength, it was natural that the Chinese considered their Empire to be inclusive of "all under Heaven" (*Tian Xia*). The Emperor of China was seen not just as the ruler of those provinces directly governed by him, but as a benevolent authority presiding over peoples far and near. This image was reinforced by the theory and practice of the so-called tribute system, in which envoys of a wide variety of non-Chinese states arrived more or less regularly at the Imperial court to pay their respects to the Emperor bearing gifts that were considered a form of tribute.

The net result was that the boundary between what constituted China and what China was outside China was never as clearly demarcated as it would have been, say, in Europe, or as it is in modern times. For the most part, the pattern was as follows: the Emperor directly ruled over a core area of about 18 provinces through a bureaucracy. Regions around the periphery continued to govern themselves according to their own systems, and were by and large left to themselves as long as they did not pose a threat to or openly challenge the authority of the Chinese Emperor. In certain periods under a particularly ambitious Emperor, the political and military power of the Chinese Empire was extended into these regions to the west and north. At other times, it was

the rulers of these regions who took advantage of conditions of crisis or decay in China proper and who invaded the Chinese Empire either fully or in part.

### **The Emperor**

The basic function and responsibility of the Emperor in China was to maintain order-both the political-social order and also the natural order of things. In the first sense, the Emperor was the supreme civil and military head. All officials were directly appointed by him and were directly accountable to him. In all periods, severe punishments could be and were often imposed on officials who fell out of favour with the Emperor. He was expected to personally go through the staggering number of documents and proposals put before him on all matters connected with government, and to take decisions on those. He was the supreme lawmaker and the final court of appeal in all cases. He also commanded the armed forces. The Emperors made sure that military power was highly centralised and no regional warlords were allowed to emerge. He was also, in a significant sense, the cultural head of his people, and great importance was attached to his role as the patron of learning and art.

For these reasons, the political system in China has been characterised as a despotism or autocracy. There were, however, some restraints on the arbitrariness of an Emperor. In the first place, because of the great veneration paid to ancestors, the Emperor could not be seen as acting contrary to the precedent set by the Emperors before him, particularly those of his own ruling house. Secondly, there was a tradition of high officials criticising an Emperor who strayed from the accepted norms, and the Emperors were expected to respect their words or at least let them speak without punishment. There was even a specific group of officials known as the censors whose job was to criticise the Emperor when they thought it necessary.

The cosmological role ascribed to the Emperor also put some restraints on his freedom of action. The Emperor was considered

to be the intermediary between Heaven and Earth. Not only was he held responsible for maintaining order among men, but he was also held responsible for maintaining the natural order of things. Unusual natural disturbances, such as major earthquakes, floods, the appearance of comets, and so on, were interpreted as omens that all was not well on earth and that the Emperor was failing in his duties. Very often, natural disasters went hand in hand with social and political unrest, resulting in widespread belief that the Emperor had lost the mandate given to him by Heaven to rule and that his subjects were justified in rebelling against him. The Emperor may have been the "Son of Heaven"; but unlike in some other ancient societies, the special relationship with Heaven was not enjoyed by the individual who was the Emperor, but was the prerogative of the institution—in other words, whoever occupied the imperial throne was considered to be the Son of Heaven and to enjoy Heaven's Mandate. All Emperors and ruling houses were thus aware of the impermanence of their position, and the theory of the Mandate of Heaven was often skilfully manipulated by their advisors and officials to get an Emperor to adopt a particular course of action or to change his ways.

### **The Bureaucracy**

Throughout its long history, China was subjected to as much warfare, internal rebellion, foreign invasions, and changes of the ruling house, as any other society. In spite of these unrests there was an unusual stability of its unified imperial state and of the institutions that were part of it. And the factor behind this stability was the tradition of rule by an established, centrally-directed bureaucracy, that survived even the most violent upheavals.

Over the course of a long period, the bureaucracy in China acquired its own distinctive method and style of functioning, its own elaborate set of rules governing recruitment, promotion, transfer and even appearance and behaviour. Individually, a bureaucrat or official could be treated most arbitrarily by his Emperor and even be put to death. But collectively, the imperial

bureaucracy survived even the most tyrannical Emperors, and no Emperor could rule without their expertise in managing the affairs of a realm as vast and complex as China.

The bureaucrats were indeed experts, but they were experts in the management of men and human affairs in general and by and large were not technocrats with specialised knowledge of certain subjects. They presided over the key posts in the administration. The civil administration in China was divided into the central and the provincial administration. At the Centre, the highest officials were those who directly dealt with the Emperor—the officials of the Grand Secretariat, and later, of the Grand Council. The routine business of state was divided between the Six Boards, dealing with civil appointments, revenue, rites, war, punishments and public works. The provinces were headed by governors or governors-general, below whom were the officials in charge of circuits, prefectures and districts. Newly appointed officials usually began by presiding over the administration of a district, and worked their way up the provincial administration or else were appointed to work in one of the Six Boards in the capital.

By far the most distinctive feature of the Chinese bureaucracy was its method of recruitment. The majority of officials were recruited through a series of gruelling examinations that tested the candidates' mastery of Confucian scholarship. Examinations were open to all males, irrespective of their background, and were conducted with absolute impartiality, with the identity of the candidate unknown to the examiner. Except for years of acute political crisis, they were held regularly once every three years. Preparation for the exams often took twenty years of a man's life, but success at the examinations conferred such immense social prestige on the candidate, besides making him eligible for office, that the entire educated class considered success at the examinations their highest aspiration. Since only exceptionally able and well-educated persons succeeded in passing the examinations, the government of imperial China has sometimes

been called a meritocracy, in which only the most talented and competent persons were given the opportunity to govern. However, it must be remembered that the examinations tested only the mastery of the Confucian classics and the literary style of the candidates.

Just as the Emperor needed his officials in order to rule, the officialdom needed the Emperor to set in motion and preside over the examination system that legitimised their position.

However, tension between the Emperor and his bureaucrats was a recurrent theme in China's history. Emperors constantly sought to control the bureaucrats and prevent them from becoming too powerful. Various regulations, such as that which forbade an official from serving in his own district or another which prevented him from remaining at one post for more than three years, were clearly designed to curb the powers of the bureaucrats. Apart from this, Emperors tended to resort to various means, such as the use of spies or eunuchs, to bypass regular official channels.

Overall, however, the two institutions of Emperor and bureaucracy worked closely together, and it is this that accounts for the stability and longevity of the imperial Chinese state. The prestige of the bureaucracy also helped to establish the tradition of civilian rule as being preferable to military rule in China. At the same time, bureaucratic rule was inherently conservative. While officials were trained to be careful in discharging their duties, innovation was by and large discouraged, and most officials tended to literally rule by the book. This worked well much of the time, but had grave implications for the bureaucracy's ability to function when faced with crisis or challenges of an unprecedented nature.

### **Chinese society**

Social order and harmony were highly valued in China, and each social group knew what was expected of them, and how to behave with other groups. In this section, we will explore ancient China's social structure, and the roles and daily life of key groups

in Chinese society.

### **The Social Hierarchy in China**

Ancient China's society was dominated by loyalty to the family unit. The group was more important than the individual. Like most ancient societies, China had a strict social hierarchy. At the top were the wealthy and privileged - the emperor and imperial family. Next came the scholars, eunuchs and officials (*shi*). This social class arose in order to provide the large number of educated officials needed to govern an empire the size of China. In spite of their wealth, merchants were not next in line in the social hierarchy. That place was held by peasants and farmers (*nong*), who were considered more socially important, as they provided the food for all in the community. Next in line were the artisans and craftsmen (*gong*) who created items for general use and beauty. The merchants (*shang*), whose only role was to make money, were last on the list.

### **The emperors**

The rulers at the top of ancient China's social structure were powerful family groups, as in ancient Egypt. A period ruled by the same family is known as a dynasty, and China was ruled by a series of dynasties for almost 4000 years. From 221 B.C.E., when China was united under Qin Shi Huang Di, China's rulers were emperors. The personality of the emperor, his intelligence and energy (or lack of it) had a major influence on the age. Often, a dynasty ended because the ruler was corrupt, cruel or weak. That ruler had a problem if there was flood, famine or defeat in war.

The people would see this as a sign from heaven that the emperor (the son of heaven) no longer had divine permission to rule. This idea is known as the mandate of heaven. At these times, it was considered natural that the people should rebel, and that a new dynasty would be installed.

### **Scholars and eunuchs**

The civil scholars were the administrators who ran the day-

to-day government of the empire. Scholars had to pass rigorous examinations (open to men only) and were schooled in the teachings of Confucius. During some of the later Chinese dynasties, power struggles developed in the court of the emperor between the civil scholars and the eunuchs. Eunuchs were originally part of the emperor's palace staff to guard his many wives. Boys were brought up specifically to be eunuchs. As children, they had their testicles removed to ensure that they would not pose a sexual threat to the emperor's wives. Living in the palace, they became close to the imperial family and some eunuchs gained great political influence. They became the political rivals of the civil scholars, and both competed for influence in the emperor's decisions. Hostility from scholars also came from their resentment of the eunuchs' influence without having gone through the rigorous examinations. Eunuchs generally came from poorer, uneducated backgrounds.

Records were kept by civil scholars, who also wrote the histories of ancient China. Generally, the result was praise for other civil scholars, while eunuchs were often depicted as evil and dishonest, and were blamed for periods of bad government. Many of the surviving historical accounts dealing with the eunuchs are biased. This is another example of why historians must always read their sources carefully and look for potential bias in historical reports.

### **Peasant farmers**

Peasant farmers in ancient China were poor, but their role and work ethic were highly respected. They worked hard to provide the country's people with food. Planting and harvesting rice, in particular, is back-breaking work. By contrast, wealthier merchants were seen to contribute very little to society. Land in ancient China was owned by the emperor or nobles. Farmers could live on the land in return for working it. They also had to pay heavy taxes (in the form of produce, such as rice), and provide other services such as serving in the army or labouring on building projects and in salt mines.

Chinese civilization first arose on the basis of settled agricultural communities in the North China plain. The bulk of Chinese society consisted of peasants. From early times these tillers of the soil were not serfs but had the status of freeholders who were obliged to pay taxes directly to the state. Over time, however, the burdens of paying taxes, dealing with greedy government agents and living from diminishing plots of land caused increasing numbers of peasants to become rent-paying tenants on the lands of big landowners. As tenants, they continued to be intensely exploited, with rents in some areas amounting to half of the harvest.

Peasant farmers in ancient China were poor, but their role and work ethic were highly respected. They worked hard to provide the country's people with food. Planting and harvesting rice, in particular, is back-breaking work. By contrast, wealthier merchants were seen to contribute very little to society. Land in ancient China was owned by the emperor or nobles. Farmers could live on the land in return for working it. They also had to pay heavy taxes (in the form of produce, such as rice), and provide other services such as serving in the army or labouring on building projects and in salt mines.

### **Artisans and craftsmen**

At various times in China's long history, its arts and crafts led the world, particularly in the Song and Ming dynasties. Craftsmen were not always rich but they were generally held in higher regard than merchants and traders. They were respected for their skills and the quality of their products. From the time of the Han Dynasty, Chinese craftsmen produced porcelain.

Chinese porcelain became so well-known that in many English-speaking countries, porcelain plates and cups have always been referred to as 'china'. Chinese craftsmen also produced silk and invented and produced a range of other important manufactured goods, including, paper and the printing press.

### **Merchants**

The merchant class included traders, animal breeders and

moneylenders. They were a wealthy group, but were considered the lowest social class in ancient China. People believed that they did not contribute to the whole society but worked only for their own gain. Some merchants would buy land to farm to improve their social status.

### **Role of Women in Ancient China**

Ancient China was very much a male-dominated society. The family name and family line could only be carried on by sons. A woman and her family would always hope for a good pregnancy where the new born would be a boy. During the Han Dynasty, a well-educated woman named Ban Zhao wrote a text called Lessons for Women. The lessons were based on the idea that women should always obey the men, and their own wishes would take second place to those of men. They included this set of rules:

- As young girls, women were first meant to obey their fathers.
- As grown women, they were then meant to obey their husbands.
- As widows in later life women were meant to obey their sons.
- In ancient China, it was felt that the best age for a girl to marry was 16. Once a couple was married, there were seven acceptable reasons why a man could divorce his wife
  - Disobedience – a woman had to obey her husband and her parents-in-law
  - Infertility – a woman was obliged to have children, especially boys
  - Adultery – a woman had to be faithful to her husband
  - Jealousy – a woman could not act in a jealous manner
  - Illness – if a woman had an incurable illness, her husband could find a new wife
  - Theft – if she stole anything, her husband could demand that she leave him

Women had more respect in families where their work was important to the survival and prosperity of the family group. In peasant families, women earned respect as workers, although they were still subordinate to men. In richer families, women were seen more as servants and even playthings for men. The status of women in wealthy families is evident in the introduction of foot binding for women from the time of the Song Dynasty.

### **Marriage in Ancient China**

A wedding was arranged by parents in an effort to advance themselves socially, politically, or financially. In traditional Chinese society a girl married into her husband's family and gave up all contact with her own parents. A bride was subservient to everyone in the new household but especially to her husband's mother, for whom she worked without rest. Wife and mother-in-law were jealous rivals for the affection of the husband and son. Publicly a husband and wife were indifferent toward each other, never openly acknowledging the existence of the other. In private the wife would have to struggle to win her husband's respect, and only through her grown sons did she have any real hope of security. No wonder she then exhibited little affection toward her son's bride, and the cycle repeated itself.

### **Everyday Life in Ancient China**

The daily experiences of people in ancient China depended on whether they were male or female, wealthy or poor, and whether they had the opportunity to receive an education. It also depended on where they lived, considering the range of climates and geographical features across China; and when they lived, considering the long span of China's ancient history. However, some generalisations can be made about everyday life in Chinese society.

### **Family and Clan**

The basic unit of Chinese society was the family or household rather than the individual. This was so even in government records and tax registers. The Chinese family was patriarchal, with a

strict hierarchy of relationships. Filial piety, or obedience to one's parents, was one of the cardinal social virtues. This was reinforced by the practice of venerating one's ancestors, a very important tradition in Chinese society.

The average size of the family in China was not big, particularly among the peasantry. But the ideal of the large joint family, presided over by the family patriarch and with all the sons and their families living under one roof, was cherished and implemented where feasible particularly among the upper class. Even where all members did not live together, kinship links were zealously maintained. This accounted for the typically Chinese phenomenon of large clans, consisting of all those who could trace their kinship with each other through the male line. Clans had certain definite functions in the society. Clan members jointly observed rituals, administered common property such as burial plots and ancestral halls, looked after the welfare of members in need, sponsored the education of talented younger males, settled disputes among themselves, maintained genealogies, imparted moral-ethical training and education to younger members and enforced discipline. Clans often transcended class lines, containing both wealthier and poorer members, but the existence of clans nevertheless did not mitigate the class divisions in the society as a whole. In theory, the State approved of large and well-knit families. Families were where people were taught the qualities of obedience, loyalty and respect for hierarchy – all qualities which the imperial government liked to see among its subjects. Families could also be expected to keep in check deviant tendencies among its members, and thus helped the State to maintain order. However, in practice, the State was also wary of clans emerging as rival centres of power, and kept a close watch on the activities and behaviour of the more powerful clans.

### **Lifestyles of the Chinese**

Although many emperors lived in constant fear of traitors, they enjoyed a pampered life of great luxury. Food was plentiful, as were priceless treasures and beautiful embroidered or painted

silk garments. It was not unusual for emperors to have several wives and concubines.

Nobles and their families also led very privileged lives. Their palaces were likely to be two storeys or more, and have bathrooms and beds. The price paid for such wealth and comfort was total obedience to the emperor. Leisure time might be spent drinking tea or rice wine while playing board games or being entertained by dancers and musicians. Music, thought to have special powers, was a regular part of palace life. Instruments included bronze bells, chimes, harps, flutes, drums and a stringed instrument called a *zither*.

The poor were mostly the peasant farmers. They wore simple clothing that was practical for farm work, made out of hemp or cotton in summer and wool in winter. Farmers typically lived in single-storey mud-brick huts with straw roofs. Usually there was only one room and sanitation was poor. Like the farmers of ancient Egypt, they used a device similar to a shaduf to raise water from rivers and canals. Very few could afford an ox or horse to help them plough the fields, so much of the work had to be done by hand.

In southern China, rice was the staple crop. It was eaten as a food and it was made into wine. In the cooler, drier north, millet (a type of grain) and sorghum (a cereal grass) were harvested. Wheat took much longer to become part of the Chinese diet. It was not until about 1500 years ago that it became a popular food, second only to rice.

Meat was costly and only a common dish for the wealthy. For the less wealthy, meat was eaten only on special occasions. Normally, the daily diet was simple: grains such as wheat, millet or rice mixed with soy beans, vegetables and sometimes fish. Chopsticks were used as an eating utensil in ancient China, possibly since Stone Age times. They were made from bamboo, ivory or bones. In wealthy households, they were made of precious metals.

Fresh water was stored in communal wells, and cooking was done in the open. Because timber was in short supply in many parts of China, food was typically chopped into smaller pieces, as they are in stir fries today, which needed less heat to cook quickly and therefore less fuel.

The diet of people in ancient China was also influenced by their beliefs. For example, some forms of Buddhism forbade eating meat so their protein came from foods such as soy bean curd (*tofu*). Eating habits were also linked with Daoist beliefs about the balance in nature, the yin and yang. Foods were categorised as ‘heating’ or ‘cooling’, and were eaten and combined in ways that were thought to preserve a balance in the body. Tea has been drunk in China for over 2000 years. It was first drunk for medicinal qualities, and become more of a social tradition from the time of the Tang Dynasty.

### **Martial arts**

Martial arts or kung fu can be traced back to the Xia Dynasty, and was originally a self-defence and combat technique practised by the military. *Kung fu* can be translated as skill achieved through hard work. Confucius considered martial arts to be one of the ideal practices, and his influence spread the practice of martial arts outside of the military.

Different schools and styles of martial arts developed over time, influenced by other aspects of Chinese culture such as religious beliefs. Martial arts took in the Daoist belief in striving for a balance of yin and yang. *Kung fu* masters of martial arts strive to keep opposites in balance—fast and slow, sharp and gentle, loud and soft—and learn to use the chi (the energy force of the universe).

One of the most famous styles of kung fu originated from a travelling Buddhist monk from India. Legend has it that he reached the Shaolin temple (a Buddhist monastery) soon after it was established in the 5<sup>th</sup> century ad. He taught martial arts to the monks to improve their health, and the temple and its warrior

monks have been famous throughout China ever since. In later dynasties, weapons and fighting techniques were modified so that kung fu became a common activity, as a sport or exercise. Various forms are now practised in China and around the world.

### **The Religious Tradition**

The prevalence of religion in ancient China is one of the most debated subjects among historians, sociologists and anthropologists. On the one hand, by far the most influential and dominant belief system of the Chinese was Confucianism, which was totally unconcerned about questions such as the existence of God or an afterlife, and which had a pronounced this-worldly orientation. China also lacked a tradition of a strong, centrally organised religion or priesthood.

On the other hand, no one can deny the Chinese fascination with the supernatural, or the proliferation of gods, goddesses and spirits who were venerated with great devotion by Chinese from all walks of life in countless temples and shrines in every corner of the land. The Chinese had both a profound moral tradition, as well as a rich tradition of religious worship, but their most important moral and ethical beliefs did not derive from an organised religion.

In this section, we will discuss some of the early religion prevailed during most ancient period. This sections also discuss Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in China and their influence in the society and culture of ancient China.

### **Early Chinese Religion**

During the Bronze Age (2205-256 B.C.E.) in China, the Chinese worshipped many gods and spirits. One of the most important deities during the Shang Dynasty was *Ti*. *Ti* means “*Deity Above*” or “the Lord on High.” He was believed to punish people who offended him and reward those who pleased him.

*Ti* was in charge of all the gods and spirits in the pantheon. The Chinese had spirit gods that represented things found in nature, from specific mountains and streams to the stars in the

sky. There were also two gods of the earth, “*the God of the Soil*” and “*Sovereign Earth*”. They were subject to *Ti*.

*Ti* had a royal court in heaven made up of all of the worthy ancestors who had died. These ancestors served *Ti* and helped him govern. The Chinese worshipped their ancestors, who acted as intermediaries between the gods and humanity. They believed that after death, they would experience a celestial court life very much like the court life they lived on earth. Some of the kings of the first dynasties wanted to bring their servants and officials with them to the afterlife to ensure that their quality of life would be the same. Accordingly, servants and officials were often sacrificed at the funerals of their lords. For example, the Count Wu, who lived during the Ch’in Dynasty (256-206 B.C.E.), ordered 66 people sacrificed at his funeral.

Only the noble Chinese who died could become objects of worship. This meant that only the nobility had ancestors to whom they could pray, while the dead of the poor were simply forgotten. However, the Chinese saw worship not as an individual exercise, but one performed for the good of the entire society. For this reason, the poor also enjoyed the benefits of the ancestors’ intercession.

The ancient Chinese also had people on earth who acted as mediums for communication between the divine and human beings. Among these intermediaries were priests, who did a number of jobs, from reading prayers to conducting sacrifices or funerals. Priests were highly specialized. Some knew the specific ceremonies performed for hunters before leaving on an expedition. Other priests knew ceremonies for sacrificing to a certain god.

Another type of intermediary in ancient Chinese religion was the augur. An augur asked questions of the gods on behalf of humans, and then used various techniques of divination, such as oracle bones, to find the answers. The augur would ask a question about the future, such as how the harvest would turn out or who was going to win a battle. He would then punch holes in certain

places of a tortoise shell or the shoulder-bone from an ox. Then the bone was held over a fire for a short time, until the bone cracked from the heat. Ink was rubbed on the bone to make the cracks more evident, and allow the augur to read the pattern and discern the god's answer.

During the early stages of their religion, the Chinese developed the concept of the Tao or nature. All things found in nature contained two conflicting forces, the *yin* and the *yang*. Objects that contained more yin, a female force, were characteristically passive, dark, and cold. To the Chinese, the moon had more yin than yang. Objects that contained more yang, the male force, were hot and full of light like the sun. The yin and the yang were concepts that were carried over into the ideologies of Taoism and Confucianism.

### **Confucianism**

The term Confucianism refers to the teachings of the philosopher Confucius who lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. Living in an age of great turbulence and the breakdown of social and political institutions, Confucius' primary concern was to find a way out of the chaos and to restore order and moral values. The centre-piece of his philosophy was the notion that this could be achieved if truly moral men were to emerge. Such men were not born with the right moral qualities, however, but actively cultivated these through education and the observance of rites, propriety and proper relationships. The cardinal relationships in society were considered to be those between parents and child, sovereign and subject, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother—all relationships between superiors and inferiors – and between friends.

Confucius stressed the supreme importance of certain qualities, such as benevolence, filial piety, loyalty, sincerity, and so on. If the right men were in charge of all affairs, Confucius believed, then peace and harmony and virtue would be restored in the society.

Even during his lifetime, Confucius gathered around him a number of devoted disciples. But it is with the adoption of the teachings of Confucius and his school as the official orthodoxy several centuries later, from the time of the Han dynasty (203 B.C.E. to 220 C.E.), that Confucianism became an all-pervasive influence. It moulded the behaviour and thinking of Chinese and reinforced their key institutions in various significant ways. **In the first place**, it lent a positive, or pro-active, element to the Chinese outlook. The solution to man's problems lay not in escape from earthly life or the denial of desires, but in actively cultivating the right qualities and rectifying things on this earth. **Secondly**, it placed great emphasis on education and on public service. The upright scholar-official was the model of the Confucian gentleman. **Thirdly**, it stressed the need for order and performance of one's social and public duties. This made it a most suitable philosophy to reinforce the imperial State. **Fourthly**, it accepted hierarchy in the social order and preached the need for obedience and submission to authority, equating the relationship of a sovereign to his subject with that of parent to child. **Finally**, by stressing the notion of rule based on virtue or moral authority rather than military power or rules and regulations, it worked to temper or soften the harsher aspects of imperial power, and reinforced the tradition of civilian rule.

### **Religious Traditions Associated with Confucianism**

Confucius himself was hardly concerned with notions of God or an afterlife. Nevertheless, Confucianism as it grew developed a cosmology and metaphysics, some elements of which were derived from ancient pre-Confucian religious traditions, and some of which developed later, partly as a response to the challenge posed by Buddhism and Taoism. The practice of ancestor worship, observed by Chinese from all walks of life was an ancient Confucian tradition. The memory of ancestors was kept alive in numerous tangible ways, through various forms of veneration. Apart from this was the notion of Heaven and of Fate. It was believed that Heaven determined destiny on all matters ranging

from affairs of State to the most personal aspects of an individual's life. However, because Heaven, Earth and Man were considered to part of a single trilogy, the actions of men were considered capable of influencing the course imposed on them by Heaven. Trying to predict or understand what Heaven had in store for men, or the practice of divination, was another feature of the Chinese religious tradition. The concept of Yin and Yang, or the unity of negative and positive elements, and of the Five Elements, were also part of the Confucian belief system.

### **Taoism**

The concept of Tao existed in China since the early stages of its religious development. **Tao is literally translated as “the path” or “the way.”** The term has no conclusive definition, but refers to a wide force in nature and is considered the source of all things. Taoism developed around the same time as Confucianism. According to legends, the most consequential Taoist writing was composed by Lao-tzu. Lao-tzu was born c. 600 B.C.E. and later became a librarian for the royal court in Loyang. He was wise enough to see that the Chou Dynasty was nearing its downfall, so he packed up his things and headed west. As he approached the boundary of Chinese territory, a border guard stopped Lao-Tzu and asked him to write down his wisdoms.

Lao-Tzu obliged him by writing a book. Then the sage left China for good. This book, which scholars possess today, contains profound sayings written in a simple style.

Taoism in its purist form calls the follower to pursue Tao. This means that he or she should not try to alter nature or force it to do something it was not meant to do. Instead, a follower must remain inactive and avoid making plans. For example, actions considered contrary to Tao included building a house or damming a river. It was also against Tao to deny the good nature of humanity. This meant that the artificial rules made by Confucianism were unnecessary.

Most Taoists were members of the educated elite. However,

some of the less educated classes learned about Taoism and altered it somewhat. Their beliefs included more magic and alchemy than the purest form of Taoism.

Undoubtedly, the great variety of gods and goddesses and spirits in the Chinese pantheon and the rich tradition of religious worship, owed its origins not to Confucianism but to the influence of Taoism. Taoism began roughly in the same period that Confucius lived, as a simple mystical philosophy put forward by its founder, Lao-Zi. In contrast with Confucianism, Taoism was not concerned with the affairs of society or the State or moral values, but with the exact opposite—with Nature, with spontaneity and a whimsical attitude towards life. However, as it evolved, Taoism took on a variety of elements, including a pantheon of gods and a group of priests which helped it to spread among the masses, though it never became an organised religion on the lines of Buddhism. It exerted a profound influence on Chinese poetry and painting, with their lyrical quality and recurrent theme of man in Nature. Among the scholar official class, it offered a kind of philosophical retreat from the rigidity as well as the unending cares and responsibilities of social and public life. It was often said that a scholar-official was a Confucian when in office and a Taoist when out of office.

### **Buddhism**

Buddhism was absorbed gradually into China after its first introduction from India around the 1st century A.D. Its influence peaked in the 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., when it enjoyed the patronage of Chinese rulers, and the Buddhist sangha became very powerful. Both Buddhism and Taoism gained ground precisely in those periods when the imperial system was in severe crisis and when Confucianism, as the ideology of the imperial system, suffered from a loss of credibility. In particular, Mahayana Buddhism, with its profound philosophy about the nature of suffering in this world, and its uplifting concept of compassion and salvation for mankind through sacrifice, filled a philosophical

and spiritual need among Chinese in this period in a way that Confucianism could not. In the centuries of political chaos and mass dislocation that followed the breakup of the Han dynasty, the Buddhist sangha that extended beyond the confines of the family and the State provided a vital form of social integration.

### **Some General Characteristics of Religion in China**

So far as important features of religion in ancient China is concerned following are noteworthy. Religion in ancient China was very eclectic. In other words, as it was practised by the people, the different religious traditions were not considered mutually exclusive. An individual could follow Confucianism, Taoism and later Buddhism without feeling the need to identify himself with one only. This permitted different traditions to remain in the background, but not disappear completely, when another tradition was on the rise. Full-fledged religious wars among groups of people were almost non-existent.

The State in general tolerated different religious faiths, and persecuted them only when it was feared that they were becoming rival centres of power or were undermining established social norms. Rarely were persecutions unleashed on the grounds of doctrinal heresy alone. Thus, the 3 or 4 major instances of persecution of Buddhism usually resulted in the disbanding of the monasteries and their lands, and the return of monks and nuns to lay life, rather than in wholesale extermination or reconversion. The moral dimension of Chinese deities was not strong. Rather, gods and goddesses were worshipped because of their believed power to help or harm an individual or group.

### **Science and Technology of Ancient China**

Education was available only to a privileged few in ancient China. However, the Qin and Han periods still saw dramatic developments in science and technology. Many technological and scientific, inventions and developments were brought about in ancient China. These technological inventions were way before the whole world started using them. So far as science and

technologies in ancient period of China under discussion is concerned, the Chinese achieved some remarkable steps in medicine, astronomy, navigation and metallurgical advancement and many more. This section will discuss these advancements in brief in the subsequent paragraphs.

### **Metallurgy**

Like other river valley civilisation, ancient Chinese also have knowledge regarding casting of Bronze and Iron. While bronze was the most advanced mode of technology throughout the late Shang and early Zhou, sometime during the sixth century B.C.E., China developed iron technology. The spread of iron technology improved agricultural techniques and yields, thus making greater populations possible, and also improved technologies of war. It is possible to trace many of the differences between Chinese social patterns of the Spring and Autumn period and those of the Warring States era to the entrance of China into the Iron Age. For example, the abandonment of chariot warfare and the mobilization of huge infantry forces grew in part from the availability of iron weaponry, and in fact this type of transition in warfare is linked to the advent of the Iron Age in societies other than China.

Ancient China developed both wrought (hammered) and cast-iron processes. From an early date, perhaps about 500 B.C.E., the bellows-driven smelter became common. Large forges equipped with a line of bellows could drive temperatures extremely high, allowing advances in iron technology which placed China from one to two millennia in advance of European technologies, which employed relatively brittle wrought iron until a much later date.

Sophisticated experimentation resulted in an ability to forge steel, which was used in the highest quality weaponry, such as famous swords from the states of Han and Chu, the colourful names of which appear periodically in contemporary accounts.

Iron mine technology was also very advanced. Likely sites

were identified by land configurations and iron-related surface minerals. Perpendicular shafts were driven up to 150 feet down, with horizontal shafts, supported by wood-beam frameworks, dug at various levels.

Systems of ropes and pulleys allowed the ore to be raised to the surface, and other debris was lifted to higher, exhausted shafts, where it was deposited as fill to stabilize the mine and to facilitate proper air flow. During the Warring States period, virtually every state possessed domestic mines and ironworks, where weaponry and agricultural tools, such as spades, adzes, hoes, and so forth, were manufactured.

### **Astronomy**

Early Chinese astronomers learned that the year was slightly longer than 365 days. Han dynasty astronomers further refined these calculations. In 28 B.C.E. astronomers in China first observed sunspots; Europeans did not make similar observations until the C.E. 1600s. Sometime before C.E. 100 Chinese astronomers-built instruments to track the movements of planets.

### **Medical Sciences**

Chinese scholars, especially the Daoists, were very interested in chemistry. They discovered substances for dyeing cloth and glazing pottery. They also developed medicines based on herbs and minerals. Perhaps the most widely known Chinese contribution to medicine is the therapy known as acupuncture. Its development stemmed from the Daoist belief that good health depends on the movement of life-force energy through the body. Illness or pain results when something interferes with that movement. In acupuncture the doctor inserts needles into certain points of the body to enable the life-force energy to move properly. Some modern researchers believe that these needle insertion points may have less electrical resistance than other parts of the body and thus may affect the nervous system. Medicine in China was a characteristic mixture of empirical wisdom and popular superstition. It had its beginnings before recorded history, and

produced great physicians long before Hippocrates. Already under the Chous the state held yearly examinations for admission to medical practice, and fixed the salaries of the successful applicants according to their showing in the tests. In the fourth century before Christ a Chinese governor ordered a careful dissection and anatomical study of forty beheaded criminals; but the results were lost in theoretical discussion, and dissection stopped. Chang Chung-ning, in the second century, wrote treatises on dietetics and fevers, which remained standard texts for a thousand years. In the third century Hua-Tu wrote a volume on surgery, and made operations popular by inventing a wine which produced a general anaesthesia; it is one of the stupidities of history that the formula for mixing this drink has been lost. About 300 C.E.

Wang Shu-ho wrote a celebrated treatise on the pulse.” Towards the beginning of the sixth century T’ao Hung-ching composed an extensive description of the 730 drugs used in Chinese medicine; and a hundred years later Ch’ao Yuan-fang wrote a classic on the diseases of women and children. In ancient China soap was a rare luxury, but lice and vermin were easily secured. The simpler Chinese learned to itch and scratch with Confucian equanimity. Medical science made no ascertainable progress from Shih Huangti to the Dowager. European medicine invaded China as an annex to Christianity; but the sick natives, until our own time, confined their use of it to surgery and for the rest preferred their own physicians and their ancient herbs.

### **Magnetic Compass**

About 2000 years ago, the Chinese noted that a magnetic rock (a lodestone) always pointed the same way (north–south) when suspended or floated. It was then discovered that by rubbing fine metal pointers on a lodestone, its magnetic properties were transferred to the pointers. It is unknown when this knowledge was used to create the first magnetic compass.

However, it is thought that the concept had been brought to

Europe by the 10<sup>th</sup> century C.E., through Arab traders and the Silk Road. Until then, consulting the stars was the only way of working out directions at sea.

As mentioned above, compass was one of the most important technological developments in ancient China, as it promoted and aided exploration that was initiated by Chinese rulers. The development of compass made China the first imperial power in the world. Chinese empire indeed was termed as an imperial power till the end of monarchy in China and the royal place was also known as Imperial Palace. Origins of manufacturing compass can be traced to 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., China. The book titled Book of the Devil Valley Master aptly describes the property of lodestone, the lodestone makes iron come or rather it attracts iron. Lodestone was the first material that was used to make the compass in China.

The first properly developed compass that was made from lodestone probably appeared during Song dynasty. Records survived from the dynasty dated 1040-44 C.E., describes the device made from lodestone as a direction finder. This device or rather the first compass made from lodestone, was shaped like a small fish and was kept on a piece of wood, floating in a bowl of water. Official records from the Song dynasty describe it as a “fish-shaped stone pointing to south”. Chinese explorers used this compass for many centuries, facilitating trade with far off lands bringing prosperity to Chinese merchants. The compass was also widely used in land explorations. Chinese writers describe it as an orientation in obscurity of night.

The compass is of much greater antiquity. If we may believe Chinese historians, it was invented by the Duke of Chou in the reign of the Emperor Cheng Wang (1115-1078 B.C.E.) to guide certain foreign ambassadors back to their home lands; the Duke, we are told, presented the embassy with five chariots each equipped with a “south-pointing needle. Very probably the magnetic properties of the lodestone were known to ancient

China, but the use of it was confined to orienting temples. The magnetic needle was described in the **Sung-shu**, an historical work of the fifth century C.E., and was attributed by the author to the astronomer Chang Heng (139 C.E.), who, however, had only rediscovered what China had known before. The oldest mention of the needle as useful for mariners occurs in a work of the early twelfth century, which ascribes this use of it to foreign probably Arab navigators plying between Sumatra and Canton.

### **Paper Making and Printing**

The exact era or dynasty, during which the Chinese invented technology of paper manufacturing, is uncertain. But the technology certainly led to many more advancements as it facilitated scholars, philosophers and writers of Chinese civilization. Paper that was invented in ancient China was not only used as a medium of writing, but creative Chinese innovators also used it as a raw material for manufacturing bags as well as paper currency. History of paper making can be traced to Han dynasty, which ruled from 202 B.C.E. to 220 C.E., when court official Cai Lun set to the task of making paper. He deployed mulberry fibres, waste material such as old rags and hemp waste. He also made use of fishing nets to bind the materials together. Some archaeological findings however, suggest that paper in ancient China may have been invented during the 8th century B.C.E. Initially this crude form of paper was not used for writing. It was deployed as a means of wrapping and padding. By the end of 3rd century C.E., it had become a popular medium of writing, and by 6th century it was even used as toilet papers. Paper was first produced in about 150 B.C.E. The earliest paper was made from fishing nets, hemp, old rags, and tree bark. By the middle of the C.E. 700s, the use of paper had spread throughout Central Asia and the Middle East, where it replaced papyrus as the main writing material.

The invention of printing is regarded as one of the most important inventions, due to the fact that it made books cheaper. Cheaper books ensured an educated society. Many dynasties,

courtiers and scholars from ancient China contributed to the development of printing press. Printing technology started evolving from sometime around 868 B.C.E., with the printing of the first printed book the Diamond Sutra. The book was printed with the help of the wood block printing. It had become a very advanced technology by the end of the Song dynasty. Writer Shen Kuo, who was also a courtier of Songs, promoted the use of printing for the spread of knowledge. Bi Sheng, who was an artisan, invented the movable ceramic printing. Inventors like Hua Sui also attempted to invent the metal castings and rollers for movable printing.

### **Gunpowder**

Although a late discovery and not coming under the period under discussion, one of the few destructive inventions of ancient Chinese civilization was that of gunpowder. Discovery of gunpowder led to invention of firearms and revolutionized battlefields in Asian Continent.

Chinese alchemists, who were searching for an elixir of life, accidentally discovered the explosive property of gunpowder, sometime around 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E. By the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century Asian powers had introduced grenades, crude bombs and firearms on battlefields. Use of cannons and bigger fire arms also became prevalent. Among the technologies of ancient China, gunpowder and firearms is regarded as most useful, popular and also most destructive.

Besides the above mentioned inventions and discoveries the ancient Chinese also to their credit have some other scientific innovation such as the first seismograph (to detect earthquakes), made by the astronomer Zhang Heng, (C.E. 78–139) and was named as Houfeng Didong Yi, who is also said to have been the first to use a grid system on maps. The Chinese innovate the knowledge of silk weaving, manufactured wooden wheel barrow, created rudder on their lighter boats, manufactured mechanical clocks six centuries earlier than in Europe, produced matches, umbrellas and kites.

Thus, the Chinese invented a seismograph that registered even the faintest of earthquakes. They also invented paper, which was first produced and used in China in or about 150 B.C.E. and had spread throughout Central Asia and the Middle East, where it replaced papyrus as the main writing material. The Chinese also invented the sundial, the water clock, and the process of printing. Many more inventors and scientists have played significant roles in development of many different technologies of ancient China. The Chinese have displayed their technological capabilities in many other disciplines like manufacture of arms, agriculture, textile industry, civil engineering, medicine and even archaeology. Many of these technologies have been lost with advancement of time.

### **Estimates of the Chinese Civilisation**

The intellectual discovery of China was one of the achievements of the Enlightenment. As Diderot wrote of the Chinese, - *“these peoples are superior to all other Asiatics in antiquity, art, intellect, wisdom, policy, and in their taste for philosophy”*. And Voltaire said - *“The body of this empire has existed four thousand years, without having undergone any sensible alteration in its laws, customs, language, or even in its fashions of apparel. The organization of this empire is in truth the best that the world has ever seen”*. This respect of scholars has survived closer acquaintance and in some contemporary observers it has reached the pitch of humble admiration.

Will Durant while introducing the Chinese civilisation in his monumental work on the Oriental Heritage remarked that - *“like most other peoples of the earth the Chinese consider themselves the most polished and civilized of all nations. Perhaps they are right, despite their political corruption and chaos, their backward science and sweated industry, their odorous cities and offal-strewn fields, their floods and famines, their apathy and cruelty, their poverty and superstition, their reckless breeding and suicidal wars, their*

*slaughters and ignominious defeats. For behind this dark surface that now appears to the alien eye is one of the oldest and richest of living civilizations: a tradition of poetry reaching as far back as 1700 B.C.; a long record of philosophy idealistic and yet practical, profound and yet intelligible; a mastery of ceramics and painting unequalled in their kind; an easy perfection, rivalled only by the Japanese, in all the minor arts; the most effective morality to be found among the peoples of any time; a social organization that has held together more human beings, and has endured through more centuries, than any other known to history; a form of government which, until the Revolution destroyed it, was almost the ideal of philosophers; a society that was civilized when Greece was inhabited by barbarians, that saw the rise and fall of Babylonia and Assyria, Persia and Judea, Athens and Rome, Venice and Spain, and may yet survive when those Balkans called Europe have reverted to darkness and savagery”.*

Thus, while estimating the isolated civilisation of China we can say that most perfect type of humanity as a normal phenomenon has been elaborated in ancient China and China has created the highest universal culture of being hitherto known and the greatness of Chinese civilisation visible in all circumstances.

### **Glossary**

1. Autocracy: A system of government in which a supreme power is concentrated in the hands of one person
2. Confucianism: An ethical and philosophical system developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius
3. Contention: The act or an instance of striving in controversy or debate.
4. Daoism: A philosophical and religious tradition that emphasizes living in harmony with the Tao.

5. Despotism: A form of government in which a single entity rules with absolute power. That entity may be an individual, as in an autocracy, or it may be a group

6. Huangdi: Huangdi lays the foundation of Chinese civilization and from whom everyone can find the merits of Chinese people living since ancient times. Used by the Zhou as the title of Chinese Emperor.

7. Legalism: In Chinese history, Legalism was a philosophy emphasizing strict obedience to the legal system. It was one of the main philosophic currents during the Warring state period.

8. Lodestone: A naturally magnetized piece of the mineral magnetite. This metal is used by the ancient Chinese for manufacturing of navigational compass.

9. Meritocracy: A political philosophy that holds power should be rest upon an elite group of people whose progress is based on ability and talent rather than on class privilege or wealth.

10. Mohism: The doctrines of Mo-Tze, Chinese sage of the 5th century B.C., who advocated government by an absolute monarch and universal love

11. Oracle Bones: Are pieces of shell or bone, normally from ox scapulae or turtle plastrons, which were used for pyromancy - a form of divination -in ancient China, mainly during the late Shang dynasty

12. Porcelain: Porcelain is a ceramic material made by heating materials.

13. Quanrong: Invading barbarians in ancient China.

14. Shangdi: A supreme god called Shangdi worshipped during Shang dynasty, who ruled over lesser gods who embodied the sun, the moon, the wind, the rain, and other natural forces and places.

15. Wang: In Warring States period the rulers of the independent states had begun to use the title of king or wang.

## **MODULE III**

### **THE GREEK CIVILISATION**

In ancient times, Greece was not a united country. It was a collection of separate lands where Greek-speaking people lived. By 3000 B.C.E., the Minoans lived on the large Greek island of Crete. The Minoans created an elegant civilization that had great power in the Mediterranean world. At the same time, people from the plains along the Black Sea and Anatolia migrated and settled in mainland Greece. Greece was unique in that it was the centre of a great civilization but did not develop into an empire or even a territorially large political state. The historical experience of Greece therefore needs to be examined from the point of view of its distinctiveness.

Circa 500 B.C.E. marks the beginning of the classical age of Greece, the most glorious phase of ancient Greek civilization. The classical age lasted from c. 500 B.C.E. to the Macedonian conquest of the Greek states in 338 B.C.E. The classical age represented the culmination of a long historical process during which the foundations of Greek civilization were laid. By about 2000 B.C.E. the large island of Crete in Greece had emerged as the centre of the first Bronze Age civilization in Europe. This was the Minoan civilization which flourished between 2000 and 1400 B.C.E.

#### **Geographical Features**

The ancient Greece refers to an area that was much larger than the present-day state of Greece. The Greek world in antiquity encompassed western Anatolia, Thrace, the islands of the Aegean Sea, Crete, Cyprus, mainland Greece, southern Italy and Sicily.

Ancient Greece consisted mainly of a mountainous peninsula jutting out into the Mediterranean Sea. It also included about 2,000 islands in the Aegean and Ionian seas. Lands on the eastern edge of the Aegean were also part of ancient Greece. The region's physical geography directly shaped Greek traditions and customs.

The sea shaped Greek civilization just as rivers shaped the

ancient civilizations of Egypt, the Fertile Crescent, India, and China. In one sense, the Greeks did not live on a land but around a sea. Greeks rarely had to travel more than 85 miles to reach the coastline. The Aegean Sea, the Ionian Sea, and the neighbouring Black Sea were important transportation routes for the Greek people. These seaways linked most parts of Greece. As the Greeks became skilled sailors, sea travel connected Greece with other societies. Sea travel and trade were also important because Greece lacked natural resources, such as timber, precious metals, and usable farmland. The Aegean Sea was the geographical nucleus of the ancient Greek world. In the Aegean Sea itself there are a large number of islands of varying sizes. Off the west coast of Anatolia are some large islands such as Lemnos, Lesbos, Chios, Samos and Rhodes. Then there is a group of islands concentrated in the southern Aegean. The islands of this group are collectively called the Cyclades. The large rectangular island of Crete is situated south of the Peloponnese and the Cyclades. It may be mentioned here that Greek settlers had also colonized some areas of southern Italy and Sicily. These settlers are collectively referred to as Western Greeks.

Rugged mountains covered about three-fourths of ancient Greece. The mountain chains ran mainly from northwest to southeast along the Balkan Peninsula. Mountains divided the land into a number of different regions. This significantly influenced Greek political life. Instead of a single government, the Greeks developed small, independent communities within each little valley and its surrounding mountains. Most Greeks gave their loyalty to these local communities.

In ancient times, the uneven terrain also made land transportation difficult. Of the few roads that existed, most were little more than dirt paths. It often took travellers several days to complete a journey that might take a few hours today. Much of the land itself was stony, and only a small part of it was arable, or suitable for farming. Tiny but fertile valleys covered about one-fourth of Greece. The small streams that watered these valleys

were not suitable for large-scale irrigation projects. With so little fertile farmland or fresh water for irrigation, Greece was never able to support a large population. Historians estimate that no more than a few million people lived in ancient Greece at any given time. Even this small population could not expect the land to support a life of luxury. A desire for more living space, grassland for raising livestock, and adequate farmland may have been factors that motivated the Greeks to seek new sites for colonies.

Climate of Greece was the third important environmental influence on Greek civilization. Greece has a varied climate, with temperatures averaging 48 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter and 80 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer. In ancient times, these moderate temperatures supported an outdoor life for many Greek citizens. Men spent much of their leisure time at outdoor public events. They met often to discuss public issues, exchange news, and take an active part in civic life.

### **The early Greek Civilizations**

The Bronze Age Greek Civilizations could be divided in to three parts, the Minoan Civilization, Mycenaean Civilization and the Dark Age.

#### **The Minoan Civilization**

In the chronology of ancient Greece, the Minoan Civilization can be considered as the first Bronze Age civilization of the region. The civilization emerged towards the end of third millennium B.C.E. and flourished till around 1400 B.C.E. The civilization came to light in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century through the efforts of Sir Arthur Evans who excavated the ruins of this civilisation. This was named after the legendry king Minos of the Crete mythology. The ruins are available in a number of towns the most prominent being Knossos, Phaistos and Mallia. It seems that palaces were the most prominent structures in these centres. Besides being centres of political authority the palaces were also centres of economic activity.

We know of the Minoans only through their ruins. Splendid

as they are, with their remarkable architectural logic, their hypnotic art, and the richness of cultural artefacts, they spoke a language we don't understand and the Minoans had developed writing. The script remains undeciphered. It has been named "Linear A script". It seems to have been used for trade and exchange. So, the voices of the Minoans, their stories, their history as they understood it, are lost to us. They built magnificent palace centers at Knossos, Phaistos, and Kato Zakros; these palaces seem to have dominated Cretan society. We have no idea what language they spoke, but they certainly spoke a non-Hellenic language and probably spoke a non-Indo-European language.

All archaeological evidence suggests that the Cretan states of the first half of the second millennium B.C.E. were bureaucratic monarchies. While the government was dominated by priests and while the monarch seemed to have some religious functions, the principle role of the monarch seemed to be that of "chief entrepreneur," of the Cretan state. In order to facilitate trade, the Cretans and their Aegean relatives developed the most advanced navy that had ever been seen up until then. While scholars earlier believed that Crete must have been a "**thalosso-cracy**" that is, a "sea power," that view has been seriously challenged. The Cretans probably did not develop a military and navy, as did the Egyptians, but concentrated solely on trade and mercantilism. They did build what looks like warships, but it seems that these warships were most likely mercantile ships with the capability of defense against pirates.

Their trade was extensive. The Egyptians were highly familiar with the Cretans, who even appear in Egyptian art. Cretan artefacts turn up all over Asia Minor, and they seem to have been involved in trade with the tribal clans living on the Greek mainland. Sheep rearing and wool production were main produce of rural economy. Wheat, grapes and olives were main agricultural products. The goods were brought from rural areas to the cities for redistribution and trade. It seems that the Minoans had trading links with Egypt, Anatolia, the Lebanese Coast,

Cyprus and Aegean through the sea routes.

The Cretans seem to be the only people in the ancient world that would construct multi- room buildings for a large part of society including even the poorest people. The Cretans were the first to build a plumbing system in their buildings (a technology that was forgotten when Cretan society collapsed. And Cretan society seems to be the first “leisure” society in existence, in which a large part of human activity focused on leisure activities, such as sports. The most popular sports were boxing and bull-jumping. Women actively participated in both of these sports. The immense concentration of wealth in such a small population led to an explosion of visual arts, as well. Unlike the bulk of the ancient world, the Minoans developed a visual culture that seems to have been solely oriented around visual pleasure, rather than visual utility, political, religious, or otherwise.

The concentration of wealth produced another singular phenomenon in the ancient world: social equality. In general, the move to urbanization is a traumatic move. Society ceases to be organized around kinship lines and begins to be organized around “class,” that is, economic function. This always means social inequality, as the more “professional” classes (usually bureaucrats) enjoy more privileges and wealth. In Crete, however, the wealth seems to have been spread pretty liberally. In the excavated city of Gournia, we can discern easily the “poor” parts of town; even there, however, people are living in four, five, and six room houses. So, life was pretty good for just about everyone. In addition, there seems to have been no inequality along gender lines, although we cannot fully construct the gender relations in ancient Crete. The architecture of the palaces and cities have one more singularity. Unlike any other major cities or palaces, the palaces and towns of the Cretans seem to have no defensive works whatsoever throughout much of their history. Women also seem to have participated in every occupation and trade available to men. The rapid growth of industry on Crete included skilled craftswomen and entrepreneurs, and the large, top-heavy

bureaucracy and priesthood seems to have been equally staffed with women. In fact, the priesthood was dominated by women. Although the palace kings were male, the society itself does not seem to have been patriarchal. Evidence from Cretan-derived settlements on Asia Minor suggests that Cretan society was matrilineal, that is, kinship descent was reckoned through the mother. While we can't be sure that Cretan society was matrilineal, it is a compelling conclusion since the religion was goddess-oriented.

The downfall of the Cretans was a slow and painful process as near as we can tell. After five centuries of prosperity, the palace centers were destroyed by an earthquake in 1400 B.C.E. The cataclysm may have been more serious. Natural calamities, triggered by a major volcanic eruption in the southern Aegean, might have caused its sudden collapse. The eruption itself would have produced tidal waves that would have destroyed all the palaces and cities on the northern coast of Crete, including Knossos. Whatever happened, the Minoans, weakened by this catastrophe, seem to have been conquered by the Myceneans, who, influenced by the Aegean civilizations, had developed their own civilization on the Greek mainland. We know the Myceneans control the show after 1500 B.C.E. because a new style of writing dominates Cretan culture sometime between 1500 and 1400 B.C.E. Called "Linear B" script, this writing is conclusively an early form of Greek, but it employs the earlier script (Linear A) of the Minoans.

### **The Mycenaean Civilization**

The Mycenaean civilization succeeded the Minoan of Crete and was a product of mainland Greece. This civilization, which flourished between c. 1600 and 1200 B.C.E., came to light as a result of the pioneering excavations of famous archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann. The civilization is named after the site of Mycenae situated in the north-western corner of the Peloponnese. Mycenae was located in southern Greece on a steep, rocky ridge and surrounded by a protective wall more than 20 feet thick.

The fortified city of Mycenae could withstand almost any attack. From Mycenae, a warrior-king ruled the surrounding villages and farms. Strong rulers controlled the areas around other Mycenaean cities, such as Tiryns and Athens. These kings dominated Greece from about 1600 to 1100 B.C. Other major Mycenaean sites are Tiryns, Pylos, Thebes, Orchomenos and Knossos.

Sometime after 1500 B.C., through either trade or war, the Mycenaean came into contact with the Minoan civilization. From their contact with the Minoans, the Mycenaean saw the value of seaborne trade. Mycenaean traders soon sailed throughout the eastern Mediterranean, making stops at Aegean islands, coastal towns in Anatolia, and ports in Syria, Egypt, Italy, and Crete.

The Minoans also influenced the Mycenaean in other ways. The Mycenaean adapted the Minoan writing system to the Greek language and decorated vases with Minoan designs. The Minoan influenced culture of Mycenae formed the core of Greek religious practice, art, politics, and literature. Indeed, Western civilization has its roots in these two early Mediterranean civilizations.

When we speak of the Mycenaean, we are not referring to a single political entity but several distinct settlements which formed separate states. These states were ruled by warrior chiefs. The chiefs usually bore the royal title *wanax (oranax)* and ruled over their territories from fortified palace complexes which dominated the Mycenaean urban centres. A powerful warrior aristocracy and an elaborate bureaucracy constituted the ruling elite. The fortified palace complexes exercised extensive control over the respective economies of the Mycenaean states through centralized bureaucratic structures. This bureaucracy regulated virtually every aspect of the economy. The Mycenaean's had an extensive foreign trade. Oil, pottery and textiles were their main exports. They imported gold, copper and tin. Society was highly stratified with the ruling elite having access to a large surplus. The Mycenaean chiefs were buried in large beehive shaped tombs (tholoi) or in large chamber tombs. The resources that would

have to be mobilized for constructing these tombs, as well as the fine craftsmanship of the objects found in them, leave us in no doubt as to the wealth possessed by many of the Mycenaean chiefs/kings.

The Mycenaean have left behind abundant written records which provide us with details about the role played by the palaces in the economy. The Mycenaean's evolved a script which is referred to as the 'Linear B script'. The 'Linear B script' was deciphered in 1952 by Michael Ventris. Ventris found that the language of the script was an early version of the Greek language.

The Mycenaean's were among the earliest Greek-speaking people to settle in the peninsula. The Greeks were a branch of the Indo-European people and their migrations must be viewed in the context of the tribal movements of the third millennium B.C.E. The language of the Mycenaean's was somewhat different from that spoken by later Greek settlers and is labelled by scholars as proto-Greek. This is the language of the 'Linear B script'.

The 'Linear B' records that have survived are mainly in the form of clay tablets. They are invariably inventories or accounts and contain no references to political history or religious practices. They were obviously compiled by palace officials to keep track of the surprisingly large number of transactions that the palace had to undertake in order to regulate a wide range of economic activities. The fact that the script exhibits a great deal of uniformity throughout the Mycenaean area shows that the bureaucracy, or at least the professional scribes, were drawn from a close-knit group with links extending over several parts of the peninsula.

During the 1200s B.C.E., the Mycenaean fought a ten-year war against Troy, an independent trading city located in Anatolia. According to legend, a Greek army besieged and destroyed Troy because a Trojan prince had kidnapped Helen, the beautiful wife of a Greek king.

For many years, historians thought that the legendary stories told of the Trojan War were totally fictional. However,

excavations conducted in north western Turkey during the 1870s by German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann suggested that the stories of the Trojan War might have been based on real cities, people, and events. Further archaeological studies conducted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century support Schliemann's findings. Although the exact nature of the Trojan War remains unclear, this attack on Troy was almost certainly one of the last Mycenaean battle campaigns.

The Mycenaean civilization lasted till c. 1200 B.C.E. Another round of tribal migrations coincided with the simultaneous collapse of Bronze Age civilizations in the eastern Mediterranean by 1200 B.C.E. In the traditional periodization of ancient Greek history, the four centuries from 1200 to 800 B.C.E. are referred to as the Dark Age. Mycenaean cities went into decline, the 'Linear B script' disappeared and trade was disrupted. It was traditionally believed that Dorian invasions (Dorians were a Greek-speaking tribe which settled in the southern Peloponnese where Sparta is located) were responsible for the destruction of the Mycenaean civilization, although this picture has now been completely revised. Source material for this period is rather scanty. Hence this period is called the Dark Age.

### **The Dark Age**

The Dark Age lasted for nearly four centuries, coming to an end in c. 800 B.C.E. The significance of this date is that around this time two great Greek epics, *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were written. Their composition is attributed to a poet by the name of Homer. These epics mark a turning point in Greek history. With *Iliad* and *Odyssey* written records are once again available for ancient Greece after a long gap. Apart from their great literary merit, these epics are a very rich historical source. The two works are part of the tradition of epic poetry. The main theme of *Iliad* is the war of a coalition of Greek states against the state of Troy (the ruins of ancient Troy are located in the north-western corner of Anatolia). According to the story narrated in the epic this war, known as the Trojan war, lasted for ten years. *Odyssey* recounts the adventures encountered by Odysseus, one of the heroes of

the war, on his homeward journey after the conclusion of the campaign. The epics give us some idea about various aspects of contemporary religion, mythology, beliefs, food habits and dress.

Scholars earlier held the view that *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were inspired by events which had taken place in the Mycenaean age and spoke about that period. There can be no doubt that some of the stories in these epics are derived from the Mycenaean era. They show an awareness of an earlier civilization in which great heroes, kings and warriors lived. It was therefore thought that the Homeric epics were essentially a portrayal of Mycenaean society. The reinterpretation of these poems, particularly in the light of the more exhaustive archaeological evidence, has allowed scholars to view *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as compositions of the Dark Age. The actual details of everyday life contained in them relate to the closing phase of the Dark Age and these indicate a break with the Mycenaean social formation.

Historians now divide the Dark Age into two sub-periods: i) 1200 to 1050 B.C.E. and ii) 1050 to 800 B.C.E. In the first sub-period Mycenaean urban centres declined and there are signs of extensive depopulation. The archaeological evidence reveals a sharp decline in population between 1300 and 1100 B.C.E. Settlements are fewer and are smaller in size. Tribal migrations, at times violent, were also taking place in this period. The Mycenaean economy based on centralized regulation by the palace bureaucracy collapsed around 1200 B.C.E. With it written records in the 'Linear B' script also disappeared. Long distance trade was disrupted making it difficult to procure copper and tin for producing bronze objects. The reasons for this kind of widespread disintegration are still not clear and continue to be debated by scholars.

A little before 1000 B.C.E. a new economy and social structure began to emerge in Greece. By this time tribal migrations had resulted in Greek speaking people occupying the entire peninsula. Simultaneously the Aegean islands and the western coast of Anatolia were incorporated in the Greek linguistic zone.

Southern Italy was also in the process of being colonized. The major Greek dialects evolved in this period. There were three major dialects: **Ionic**, which included the sub-dialect Attic spoken in Athens; **Doric**; and **Aeolic**. A significant feature of this period was the introduction and dissemination of iron technology from c. 1000 B.C.E. onwards. This period marks the transition to the iron age. The origins of iron technology remain obscure. However, the archaeological evidence that has accumulated over the years indicates that Anatolia and northern Mesopotamia pioneered the use of this metal. It is not difficult to explain the rapid advance of iron in Greece once the technology became available. The people of the area had to depend wholly on imports for their supplies of copper and tin. The decline of eastern Mediterranean trade after 1200 B.C.E. created problems for Greek metallurgy because the supply of copper and tin could not be maintained. The introduction of iron offered a viable alternative.

Since Greece had adequate deposits of iron ore the Greek states with their limited resources would have preferred the use of this metal rather than exchange their meagre surpluses for imported copper and tin. Iron technology became one of the factors that contributed to the recovery which took place in the period between 1050 and 800 B.C.E.

The end of the Dark Age saw the revival of writing in Greece. We have seen that the Linear B script had already disappeared with the collapse of Mycenaean civilization. When the Greeks began using a script towards the end of the Dark Age it was a new script. This script was borrowed from the Phoenicians. The Phoenicians had evolved a script (c. 1500 B.C.E.) which was based on the phonetic principle. The symbols in this script stood for different sounds, i.e. it was an alphabetic script. The Greeks adopted the Phoenician script and modified it to suit their language. The Homeric epics were written in the new Greek alphabet.

Greek society as reflected in the Homeric epics was very different from that of the Mycenaean period. It was simpler, largely self-sufficient with little trade or exchange, and did not

have powerful kings. During the Dorian period, Greek civilization experienced decline.

However, two things changed life in Greece. First, Dorians and Mycenaeans alike began to identify less with the culture of their ancestors and more with the local area where they lived.

Second, by the end of this period, the method of governing areas had changed from tribal or clan control to more formal governments-the city-states. In these circumstances in the latter half of the Dark Age the Greeks were divided into a large number of petty-states. These states were ruled by kings or chiefs with limited authority. They had to share political power with other members of the elite. In many states, such as Athens, monarchical rule had come to an end by the beginning of the Archaic Period and was replaced by oligarchical political structures.

### **The Archaic and Classical Period**

The Dark Age is followed by a period known as the archaic period (C.800 – 500 B.C.E.). In this period the foundations of classical Greek Civilization were laid. The period from 500 B.C.E. to 338 B.C.E. is generally referred as the classical age of Greece. A number of important changes take place in archaic and classical period. However, the division into these two periods is not always very sharp and there is lot of overlapping and continuity in various aspects of society, economy and culture. This is one broad period of ancient Greece. In the subsequent paragraphs the developments and institutions of the whole period would be analysed.

### **Conflict of Landed Aristocracy and Peasantry: Reforms**

The Archaic Period (c.800-500 B.C.E.) witnessed an intense conflict between the landed aristocracy and the peasantry throughout Greece. The origins of this struggle may be traced to the latter half of the Dark Age when landowning aristocrats occupied a strong position in the society. Between c. 800 and 600 B.C.E. the landed aristocracy consolidated its hold over

land and the political structures of the Greek states. This led to the impoverishment of the small landholders. In their desperation the small landholders put up a tough fight against the aristocracy. The constant upheavals caused by this struggle reached a point of crisis by c. 600 B.C.E. Sections of the aristocracy realized that unless some way was found out of the crisis their own prosperity would be threatened. Consequently, they were forced to initiate reforms which incorporated concessions to the peasants.

In this juncture many reforms were undertaken at Athens. The evidence from Athens is supplemented by references to other states and shows that similar historical developments were taking place in large parts of Greece. In 594 B.C.E. the Athenians resorted to the solution of nominating an arbitrator, named Solon, to carry out reforms. On the basis of a consensus Solon was vested with wide ranging powers for a specified duration. The most radical reform of Solon was the abolition of debt bondage. This had emerged as one of the most serious problems faced by the peasantry. Impoverished peasants, who often small holdings had located in difficult terrain such as hillsides, had to take loans from wealthy landowners. When poor peasants failed to repay their debts, they were forced into bondage. Laws pertaining to repayment of loans had stringent provisions which required a person who was unable to pay back a loan to accept bondage to the creditor. Peasants were thus simultaneously being deprived of their land and were being reduced to the status of slaves. The major demands of the peasantry were redistribution of land and abolition of debt bondage. The abolition of debt bondage under Solon implied that henceforth Athenian free peasants could not be enslaved if they failed to repay their loans. The existing debt of the peasants was cancelled.

However, Solon did not carry out redistribution of land. He did, however, introduce changes in the political system which gave ordinary Athenians the right to participate in government. The abolition of debt bondage prevented the enslavement of the impoverished peasants, but in the absence of land reforms the

aristocracy continued to possess a disproportionately large share of cultivable land. After 594 B.C.E. there was a shortage of rural labour. The big landowners, who required labour to cultivate their large holdings, solved this problem by increasingly employing slaves brought from outside.

Not surprisingly there were fresh upheavals in Athens within a few decades of Solon's reforms. Similar conditions prevailed in other states where incomplete reforms or no reforms had taken place. In these disturbed conditions some political leaders carried out a series of coups and assumed dictatorial powers in their respective states. This development completely altered the nature of governance in a large number of Greek states. The events at Athens typify the process. Peisistratus was the person responsible for the coup at Athens. He first attempted to seize power in 561, but was unsuccessful and had to flee from the city. He eventually managed to succeed in 545 B.C.E. Peisistratus installed himself as supreme ruler of the city, setting aside existing constitutional arrangements and defying oligarchical institutions.

What was emerging was a new form of government for which contemporaries used the term 'tyranny'. Rulers like Peisistratus who had usurped power in this manner were called tyrants. A significant aspect of Greek tyranny was that it had considerable popular support, mainly from among the impoverished peasantry and from groups which had accumulated wealth through trade but had traditionally no access to political power. When Peisistratus seized power, he took over public wastelands that had been occupied by the aristocracy and distributed these among the small or dispossessed peasants. He also confiscated the property of some of the rich landowners who had gone into exile following the establishment of tyranny and gave these to needy farmers. The policies pursued by Peisistratus had a twofold outcome. First, the position of the peasantry was stabilized. Second, the monopoly of the entrenched landed aristocracy over the political structure was broken. Peisistratus died in 527 B.C.E. He was succeeded by his son Hippias.

This appeared to be an attempt to transform tyranny into dynastic rule and caused much resentment among the people. In any case, the historical relevance of tyranny was now over. In 510 B.C.E. Hippias was overthrown. This date marks the beginning of classical democracy at Greece.

### **Transition to Democracy**

In the Classical Period, and subsequently, the Greeks referred to the age of tyranny with intense dislike. Yet it should be borne in mind that tyranny speeded up the transition from oligarchical rule to democracy. The tyrants helped to undermine the institutions through which the aristocracy has so far exercised political power. This phenomenon was not confined to Athens alone. At Corinth the tyrant Periander came to power c. 600 B.C.E. A little before Periander, Cypselus had overthrown the Bacchidae—the ruling aristocratic group at Corinth. We also have information about other tyrants. Polycrates became tyrant of Samos c. 545 B.C.E. and Lygdamis seized power at Naxos around the same time.

The tyrants were instrumental in doing away with the traditional hereditary basis of political power. The Greek aristocracies were close-knit hereditary elites. They enjoyed power not merely because of their wealth but more significantly by virtue of their birth. The aristocratic families automatically held all executive, judicial, and military positions. That is why we refer to the political structures of the Greek states during the Archaic Period as being oligarchical in nature. The tyrants struck at the roots of this oligarchical control, thereby creating conditions for the transition to democracy. During the course of the Archaic Period a number of Greek states evolved into democracies. Some of the earliest democracies that we have information about were those of Chios and Megara where democratic institutions had come into existence around c. 600 B.C.E.

Even though the degree of democratization varied from state to state, it would not be incorrect to say that in Greece by the beginning of the Classical Period common people participated in

the political process to a much greater degree than what we find in other contemporary societies. This was a fundamentally new system of government, especially for societies with class differentiation. Polis was the term most frequently used to denote those political entities in ancient Greece which had some aspects of democratic functioning. The forms of government of the various polis (plural poleis) ranged from purely oligarchical on the one hand, to the mature democracy of Athens on the other. In between stood the states, probably the majority, with elements of oligarchy combined in varying proportions. The states about which we have information do not show any homogeneity in the structure of the polis. Athens and Sparta had emerged as the two leading poleis in Greece by the beginning of the Classical Period.

The historical evidence is also quite uneven. While we have many details about Athens, and to a lesser extent Sparta, contemporary sources tell us very little about important democracies such as Corinth and Syracuse.

The polis was territorially a small political entity. The size of the population was also relatively small. Given the constraints of ancient society, democracy would not have been functional had the polis been large either territorially or in terms of its inhabitants. This point needs to be emphasized because Greek democracy was a direct democracy. In modern democracy the people choose their representatives who then legislate and govern on their behalf.

In ancient Greece, democracy implied participation by all the citizens in the basic organ of the democratic system, namely the assembly. The concept of citizenship was a restricted one. Only the indigenous, native, residents of a polis (and their descendants) were recognized as citizens. Citizenship rights did not extend to all inhabitants, not even all the free inhabitants. Firstly, women were excluded. Only male adults enjoyed the privilege of being citizens in the political sense. Secondly, all those who were not original residents of the polis, or were considered outsiders for some reason or the other (e.g. if they were a conquered community

and had been deprived of their political rights), did not form part of the citizen body. In Sparta the free non-citizens were called *perioikoi*; at Athens they were known as **metics** (*metoikoi*). Many of the traders settled at Athens were metics. Of course, slaves had no rights whatsoever.

One should add here that only citizens could own land. There was also a close link between citizenship rights and military service. The Greek states did not maintain standing armies of professional soldiers. To a large extent this was because they lacked the resources for financing such an army. All free adult males of the community were expected to render military service. In other words, the citizens were simultaneously soldiers. Citizens had to equip themselves with their fighting gear out of their own resources, something that was possible only if they possessed some land. The backbone of the Greek armies was the hoplite infantry (foot-soldiers). The overwhelming majority of the hoplites were small and middle farmers. We could say that Greek armies were essentially armies of peasant-citizens.

The citizens of the Greek polis could exercise their right to participate and vote in the assembly, which was the basic right of citizenship, by personally attending the meetings of the assembly. One had to actually go to the meetings of the assembly, usually held in some open space in the city-centre, in order to exercise this right. Such a conception of democracy would have been unworkable if the respective Greek states possessed a big area or a large population.

The actual task of governance was carried out through a smaller body, the council. With the decline of monarchy, real power had passed into the hands of oligarchical councils dominated by the hereditary landed elite. Given its nature and large size the assembly could not meet very frequently. Even when it met it could only debate and vote on few issues. This gave the council wide ranging authority for intervening in the functioning of the assembly. Usually the council convened the assembly (unless dates were traditionally

fixed), prepared its agenda, and guided its sessions. To some extent this was intended to be a check on the assembly. The council was a very powerful body in most states and though in many cases its membership was monopolized by the landed aristocracy yet at least at Athens it had become genuinely representative by c. 500 B.C.E.

Athens has a special significance in any discussion on Greek democracy due to the scope of its accomplishment. Moreover, our knowledge about the political structure of Athens is more extensive than that of other states. It may be stated at the outset that in terms of the development of its democratic structure Athens was an exception rather than the rule in ancient Greece. We have already stated that Solon made changes in the political system which gave ordinary

Athenians the right to participate in the government. His reforms (594 B.C.E.) represent an important stage in the evolution of Athenian democracy. Solon revived the Athenian assembly which had not met for a long time and had ceased to function. He simultaneously constituted a new Athenian council called the *boule*. This council had four hundred members and it superseded the old oligarchical council. The old Athenian council, called *Aeropagus*, was an organ of the aristocracy. Membership of the latter body was traditionally monopolized by a hereditary elite known as the *Eupatridae*. The *Aeropagus* was not abolished, but its functions were curtailed till eventually it ceased to play an important role. The *boule* now became the main centre of political power. Membership of the *boule* was based on property qualifications and not on hereditary right, which in itself was an innovation.

Solon divided the Athenian citizens into four classes. The property or wealth possessed by a citizen determined the class in which he was placed. Right at the top were the *pentakosiomedimni*, who possessed land which yielded at least 500 *medimnoi* (a unit for measuring the quantity of grain) of

wheat, or its equivalent value in wine or oil. Next were the citizens whose land yielded at least 300 **medimnoi** (*hippeis*). The third category was that of owners of land yielding at least 200 *medimnoi*. Those belonging to this class were called the *zeugitai*. The *zeugitai* were small and middle peasants who also constituted the main strength of the Athenian hoplite infantry and could not therefore be easily ignored. Right at the bottom were the *thetes* who had property yielding less than 200 *medimnoi*. The *thetes* were the poor peasantry. We can see that political participation was intimately tied up with landownership and the amount of land owned by a citizen determined his place within the political structure.

Membership of the *boule* was open only to the first three classes. The impoverished sections, i.e. the *thetes* were excluded from the council. In other words, the council was essentially a body of the rich and middle peasantry. Qualifications for public offices corresponded to the four-fold class division. The first two classes held the principal political and military offices. The *zeugitai* held minor offices. The *thetes* only had the right to participate in the meetings of the assembly.

After the overthrow of Hippias in 510 B.C.E. the political structure was further reformed. The crucial democratic reforms at the beginning of the classical period are attributed to Cleisthenes, who for some years was the most important political figure at Athens following the end of tyranny. A brief outline of some of the key political events in Greece during the Classical Period might be useful for a better understanding of the evolution of the political structure of Athens in this era.

### **Conflict with Persia: Formation of Delian League**

Greek history in the latter half of the sixth century B.C.E. has to be viewed against the backdrop of the westward expansion of the Persian empire. Persian expansion into western Anatolia, the Aegean and mainland Greece coincided with the phase of tyranny and the beginning of the Classical period at Athens.

Between c. 500 and 480 B.C.E. the states of the Greek peninsula were locked in a fierce contest with the Achaemenids. Sparta was at this time the foremost military power on land. Athens was the main naval power, though it also had a fairly strong army. The Athenians had built a strong navy which played a leading role in the conflict with Persia. Themistocles was the architect of Athenian naval strength. The Greeks pooled together their resources under the leadership of Athens and Sparta in order to resist the Persian onslaught.

Whereas the decisive battles of Salamis (480 B.C.E.) and Plataea (479 B.C.E.) had halted the Persian advance into the Aegean Sea, the threat of further Persian campaigns still remained. The Greek states were aware of the need to pool together resources on a long-term basis to thwart further invasions. No state had the capacity to fight the Persians entirely on its own. On the Peloponnese there was a strong military alliance under the leadership of Sparta. With this arrangement the Peloponnesians were better placed to defend themselves. The problem was much more serious for the Aegean islands and the coastal states since they had no such mechanism. It was as a solution to this problem that Athens, after Salamis and Plataea, took the initiative to form a confederation of states under its own leadership (487 B.C.E.). This confederacy has come to be known as the Delian League. The Delian League derived its name from the island of Delos where the common treasury of the confederacy was located. The primary objective of forming this confederacy was to maintain a strong navy in the Aegean Sea. The members of the Delian League made regular contributions for this purpose.

Once the Persian threat receded, the Athenians transformed the character of the League. They used their dominant position within the League to utilize its resources for promoting its own interests. From a voluntary confederation the Delian League gradually became an empire ruled by the Athenians. The contributions to the League now became enforced tribute payable to Athens. The wealth that the empire, and control over the

Aegean Sea, brought to Athens was crucial for sustaining its democratic institutions in the Classical Period and keeping discontent in check.

Having established its hegemony over the Aegean, Athens tried to expand its empire by including the Peloponnese in it. This brought it into conflict with Sparta. A prolonged military contest between the two states ensued. This is known as the Peloponnesian War which lasted from 431 to 404 B.C.E. By 404 B.C.E. Athens had been defeated by Sparta and its navy was destroyed.

For several decades after that Sparta remained the major Greek power, though it was subsequently challenged by Thebes. The conflicts among the Greek states after the Peloponnesian War gave the Persians an opportunity to interfere in their affairs, and thus to become politically dominant in Greece.

### **Democratic Political Structure: Emergence of Deme**

The hundred years between the overthrow of Hippias and the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian war witnessed the growth of a highly evolved democratic political structure at Athens. This structure owed a lot to the initiatives of Cleisthenes (c. 507 B.C.E.). Athenian citizens had been traditionally divided into four Ionian tribes. These traced their descent from the tribes or clans which had originally settled in Attica. Following the political reforms of Solon, each tribe sent one hundred members to the boule. Cleisthenes did away with the kinship principle for grouping the citizens, and replaced it with ten residential tribes or *phylai*. These new *phylai* were based on a radically new concept. The phyle to which a citizen belonged was determined by the place where he resided and not by his kinship ties.

The primary unit of the democratic structure established by Cleisthenes was the *deme*. Every citizen was first and foremost a member of a particular *deme*. The *deme* was the smallest geographical unit into which the polis of Athens was divided for political purposes. There were 139 *demes* in all. The *demes*

were responsible for maintaining registers of citizens. They had their own local elected governments, including an assembly and officials. The local governments were headed by the *demarchos*. Cleisthenes reformed the boule as well. The strength of the council was raised from four hundred to five hundred members. Fifty members were selected from each of the ten *phylai*. Membership of the boule was thrown open to all citizens, including thetes. Any citizen over the age of thirty was eligible for membership of the boule. The main executive and military officials of the polis were the archons. Ever since monarchy had come to an end in Athens the archons had been the chief executive and military officers. Throughout the Archaic Period the aristocracy had monopolized these posts. During the Classical Period the archonship was gradually made an elective post and it became possible for ordinary citizens to hold these positions. Despite its limitations, Athenian democracy was an outstanding achievement.

### **Slave Labour**

A distinctive feature of ancient Greek civilization was the widespread use of slave labour in various sectors of the economy. There is evidence of the presence of large numbers of slaves in other ancient civilizations, such as those of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia and the Hittites. The Mesopotamian and Hittite law codes indicate that institutionalized slavery existed in these civilizations. However, the scale of slavery was qualitatively different in ancient Greece. Here for the first time in history slave labour was used extensively for production. The initial pool of slaves was formed of prisoners of war. This source was supplemented from within the community by those who were enslaved due to their inability to pay loans (debt bondage).

Nevertheless, wars brought captive slaves in much larger numbers. The earliest slaves in Greece, as in other societies, were women. Women slaves formed a significant portion of the workforce in Mycenaean palaces. For example, the palace at Pylos had at least 550 women engaged in textile production. In

the 'Linear B' tablets the term used for slaves is *doeri*. The Homeric epics also contain numerous references to women being enslaved during wars.

By the Archaic and Classical Periods slaves were to be found in every sector of production, especially in mining, handicrafts and agriculture. Some historians are of the view that the role of slavery in Greek agriculture has been exaggerated and that the agrarian economy depended mainly on the peasantry and free labour.

At the end of the Dark Age Sparta was already using slave labour on a scale that was unprecedented. Sparta had annexed the territory of Messenia located in the southern Peloponnese and had converted the entire population of this area into slaves. The Spartans introduced a peculiar form of slavery called *helotry*. Helots were slaves who were owned collectively by the entire Spartan community. Agricultural land in Messenia was divided into holdings called *kleroi* and allotted to Spartan citizens. These holdings, along with the land already possessed by the Spartans, were cultivated with the labour of helots. Since there was considerable social differentiation in Sparta, the kleroi were not distributed equitably. The aristocracy got a much bigger share. The distribution of *helots* was regulated by the state. The state assigned a certain number of slaves to each family depending upon its requirements for labour. Moreover, they were allowed to maintain family ties. The children born to the helots had the same status as their parents.

This meant that Sparta was able to meet its requirements of slave labour from among the Messenians for several generations. It should not be assumed that helotry was a more humane form of slavery as some scholars have suggested. *Helotry* was a more primitive form of slavery which in turn reflected the relative backwardness of Spartan economy. Private property was not fully developed in Sparta and there were many tribal survivals in its social organization. *Helotry* was prevalent in other Greek

states as well, as for instance in Thessaly, Crete and Argos. In other parts of Greece privately owned slaves increasingly became a typical feature of Greek society and economy. Several terms were used to describe such slaves, the most common being *doulos*.

In Athens slaves were mostly privately owned. These slaves were regarded as property and bought and sold in the market as commodities. The prosperity of Athens during the Classical Period rested on the expansion of slave labour. Historians have offered figures for Athenian slaves during the fifth century B.C.E. ranging from 60,000 to 110,000. It has been estimated that of these, nearly 20,000 to 30,000 worked in the Athenian silver mines. Besides agriculture and mining, slaves dominated handicraft production and were engaged in various kinds of domestic and menial work. It is necessary to emphasize that while there was slave labour in every sector of the economy, free labour was also to be found in all types of production.

### **Development of Philosophical Thought**

The ancient Greece may be credited with a very rich intellectual contribution. Due to constraints of space it would not be possible for us to go into detailed analysis of the Greek philosophical tradition. We intend to familiarise you with some basic factual information on the philosophical thought that developed in Greece. Their intellectual tradition touched many aspects of human society and knowledge. History, Philosophy, Mathematics and Medicine were some of the main areas influenced by the ideas of the Greek thinkers. The development of democratic traditions in Greece helped in creating an environment conducive to intellectual discourse and growth.

The Ionian School of thought (c. 600 B.C.E.) was one of the earliest philosophic tradition. Thales, Anaximandes and Anaxemenes were the main proponents of this school. They were mainly concerned with the basic elements of nature (air, water earth) and their driving force.

Pythagoras, an outstanding thinker believed in the transmigration of the soul and laid emphasis on achieving harmony for the soul. He was involved with the study of nature, musical scale and mathematics. However, he is most famous for his geometrical theorem which states that, in a right-angled triangle, the square of the length of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides. Hippocrates was one of the outstanding thinkers of the classical period in the area of medicine. He gave medicine a scientific foundation replacing magical cures. He believed in treating diseases by diagnosing on the basis of examining the symptoms scientifically.

Herodotus (c.484-425) is called the ‘father of history’ for giving it a distinct identity as a branch of knowledge. History which was treated as a mix of facts, fiction, myths, legends, fables and anecdotes was given a new meaning based on authentic facts and their verification. He wrote detailed accounts of Persian wars. He widely travelled and gathered information about various countries. He always verified and evaluated his information before writing his accounts.

Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are considered as the most towering thinkers of the classical Greek Philosophy. Socrates (469 - 399 B.C.E.) is credited with a shift from thinking about nature to thinking about the nature of human existence. The refinement of various categories of philosophy was his major contribution. His student Plato (427-347 B.C.E.) established an academy at Athens and taught philosophy. He is regarded as an ‘idealist’. He argued that things have no independent existence outside our minds and believed that experience is unreal, only ideas are real. He influenced later Arab and Western thought in a big way. Plato’s disciple Aristotle (384- 322 B.C.E.) held ideas which were different from those of his teacher. He disagreed with Plato’s view that experience was unnecessary to understand reality. He was a keen student of Science and studied plants and animals. Both Plato and Aristotle were opposed to the idea of involving masses in all decision-making processes. They held the

view that people have a limited role to play in the government. This was, to some extent, a reflection of the thinking of the elite in Athens who believed in curtailing democratic rights.

### **The End of the Classical Period**

The Classical Period came to an end in 338 B.C.E. when the Macedonians subjugated the poleis of the Greek peninsula and the Aegean Sea. Macedonia, just as other regions located north of mainland Greece, had been a relatively backward area. Using improved military techniques and the resources of the Macedonian plains, king Philip II (382-336 B.C.E.) created an empire which eventually included the Greek states of the peninsula and the Aegean. In 338 B.C.E. Philip defeated the Greek city-states at Chaeronea and placed them under Macedonian rule. With the Macedonian conquest the era of the polis came to an end. As a political entity the polis ceased to exist after 338 B.C.E. Philip II was succeeded in 336 B.C.E. by his son Alexander the Great who founded a vast empire.

Alexander launched a massive expansionist programme following his accession. His primary aim was to destroy Persian power in West Asia so as to consolidate Macedonian rule over the entire region. By 330 B.C.E. Alexander had conquered the Persian empire after defeating the last of the Achaemenid emperors (Darius III). His subsequent campaigns brought him to the banks of the Indus. Alexander died at Babylon in 323 B.C.E. The eastward expansion of the Macedonian empire under Alexander had made Anatolia, Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Iran, Afghanistan and some parts of Central Asia and northwest India, Macedonian-ruled territories.

Following the death of Alexander some of the outlying regions of the empire were lost but the greater part of Alexander's territories remained under Macedonian control.

Alexander had left no heir to his vast empire and had made no arrangements for appointing a successor. A bitter power struggle among his leading officials and military commanders

(referred to as the *Diadochi* or successors) broke out after his death. This struggle lasted almost till 275 B.C.E. The empire was eventually partitioned among three of the *Diadochi*-Seleucus, Ptolemy and Antigonus. The dynasties of these successors ruled over their respective portions of the empire: the Seleucids in Iran, Mesopotamia and Syria; the Ptolemies in Egypt; and the Antigonids in Macedonia.

The period from the death of Alexander and the founding of the Seleucid, Ptolemaic and Antigonid empires down to the time when Rome became the supreme power in the eastern Mediterranean (c. 300 to 30 B.C.E.) is referred to as the Hellenistic age. The successor states which came into existence as a result of the division of Alexander's empire are called Hellenistic kingdoms. The Hellenistic kingdoms were governed by a Macedonian/Greek ruling elite and Greek became the official language of Iran, West Asia, Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean.

Greek also became the chief language of intellectual discourse in this area. The Hellenistic kingdoms created conditions for disseminating the accomplishments of classical Greek civilization over a large part of West Asia and in Egypt. Since the Asian and north African territories of the Hellenistic kingdoms were centres of grand ancient civilizations, the Greek ruling classes of these empires adopted several customs of their subjects. This gave rise to a dynamic cultural tradition which may be conveniently labelled as Hellenistic civilization.

### **Contribution of Greek Culture**

Ancient Greeks made many influential contributions to western civilization such as in the areas of philosophy, art and architecture, and math and science. In philosophy, Greek philosophers were great thinkers who were determined to seek truth to a certain subject or question no matter where it led them. Three famous philosophers include Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato. Socrates, who lived from around 470 to 399 B.C.E. believed that life was not worth living unless it was examined and the truth about life

was sought out. He also believed that there had to be certain standards for justice and punishment. In order to solve problems in life, Socrates invented a method for solving these problems called the Socratic Method. In the world today this method is commonly known as the Scientific method and is used widely in the area of science.

Pluto, a student of Socrates, believed that society is like one big family and that if one person in a society needed help in some sort of way, the whole society should be there to help.

Pluto also had many democratic ideas which he expressed through the book, *The Republic*. Lastly, Aristotle, who lived in Greece from around 384 to 322 B.C.E., was a philosopher who believed strongly that human reason was very important. He says that a life guided by human reason is superior to any other and that someone's ability to reason distinguishes them from anyone else. Many other ideas came from philosophers and two of these includes the thought that divine power ruled the universe and that human desire is dangerous and should be controlled. These ideas along with the ideas of human reasoning, standards for justice, and a democracy are still used in modern world, therefore showing Greece's influence and contribution.

Another area of Greek achievement is theatre. Plays began to become important in ancient Greece and two types of plays which were written and performed were comedies and tragedies. A comedy in ancient Greece was usually a play that marked or made fun of a certain topic, person, or group of people. One famous comedy writer was Aristophanes. He wrote the plays *The Birds* and *Lysistrata*. Tragedy in ancient Greece usually dealt with a moral or social issue, human suffering, and almost always ended in disaster. Three famous Greek tragedy writers are Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles. Aeschylus wrote the play *The Oresteia*, Euripides wrote the play *Medea*, and Sophocles wrote the plays *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*. The ideas of comedies and tragedies are used in western civilization except

expanded and twisted around a little. A lot of famous play writers today are also inspired by the works of play writers from ancient Greece.

The most important areas of Greek achievement were math and science. They achieved all kinds of things in the areas of psychology, astronomy, geometry, biology, physics, and medicine. In astronomy they formulated the ideas that the sun was 300 times larger than the earth, the universe was composed of atoms, and they calculated the true size of the earth.

Someone greatly involved in astronomy was Aristotle. In geometry, ancient Greeks found the value of pi, and a man named Euclid, who wrote the book Elements around 300 B.C., theorized that if two straight lines cut one another, the vertical, or opposite, angles shall be equal. In physics, the lever and pulley was invented along with a force pump which eventually evolved into a steam engine. Important people in this area were Archimedes and Pythagoras who were two of the many influential Greek citizens. Ancient Greece has definitely made many influential contributions to western civilization. Not only to the Western Civilisation but also to the mankind as a whole the Greek Civilisation gives many things from state craft to warfare, philosophy and religion such as writing/art Phoenician, the polis (city-state), the rise of democracy, sovereign, intellectual inheritances, sophrosyne (moderation, self-control), hubris (pride, arrogance, unbridled ambition), Greek, Philosophy, Sophists, Socrates (470-399 B.C.E.), Plato (427-347 B.C.E.), ideas of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) doctrine of the mean , medicine, Hippocrates, the writing of history, Herodotus (484-425 B.C.E.) and Thucydides (460-400 B.C.E) etc.

### **Glossary**

1. Archons: Executive and military officials of the polis in Greek civilisation.

2. Boule: An Athenian assembly consisting four hundred members.

3. Demarchos: Local government head during Greek civilisation.

4. Kleroi: A lot of land distributed to each citizen in Ancient Greece.

5. Metoikoi: A resident alien, one who did not have citizen during ancient Greece.

6. Oligarchical: A Government by a few, especially by a small fraction of persons or families.

7. Patrilineal: A system whereby one belongs to his/her father's lineage in terms of inheritance.

8. Pentakosiomedimni: Top class of citizens set out by the Politician Solon in ancient Greece.

9. Phylai: A citizen in ancient Greece. Polis: literally means city in Greek.

10. Thetes: The lowest of Solon's four property classes in ancient Greece.

11. Tholoi: A beehive-shaped stone tomb of Mycenaean Greece, roofed by corbeling and usually built into the side of a hill.

12. Wanax: A local monarch in the Mycenaean world.

13. Zeugitai: Members of the third census division created by Solon's constitutional reforms in ancient Athens.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **MODULE IV**

### **ANCIENT AMERICAN CIVILISATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The American continent came in touch with the Europeans around the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Very little was known about the history, polity and society of these regions. It was believed that the history of the region cannot be traced to early civilizations as in case of Asia, Africa and Europe. Later on, archaeological excavations and researches have shown the existence of human habitation which is more than 10,000 years old. It has also come to light that from around 2500 B.C.E. to the first century C.E. a number of cultures flourished in the region.

Many of these grew into civilizations of substantial size. We have chosen three important civilizations as representative of Latin America and we will discuss each of these civilisations in three separate chapters in this unit. These are Mayas and Aztecs in Central America and the Incas in the Andes in South America. There are other civilizations also whose remains have been found in both these places. But we chose these ones for the following reason. First of all, the Maya and the Incas are the most extensively studied ones so far. And in cultural representation of Latin American life mostly these are invoked. The Aztecs have been chosen, as they were the ones whose destruction has been witnessed by the colonial powers of Europe. These are the civilizations about which extensive literature exists in European languages and mostly in English.

#### **The Maya Civilization**

Mayan Civilization is one of the most mysterious ancient civilizations of all time. Until now, no one is certain on who the Mayan were, how they lived, and the reason behind the sudden collapse of their civilization.

Mayans are believed to have developed their country and their civilization towards the north of the Gulf of Mexico, which is situated in between North and South America, called the

Peninsula of Yucatan. With respect to modern day geography, the region that was occupied by the ancient Maya comprised of the states of Yucatan; Campeche; Tabasco; the eastern half of Chiapas; the territory of Quintana Roo; the Republic of Mexico; the Department of Peten in Guatemala; and the adjacent highlands to the south; the contiguous western section of the

Republic of Honduras; and all of British Honduras. It covers 125,000 square miles. The whole area of the Maya region lies south of the tropic of cancer and north of the equator. The region is mostly covered by rainforest and with a tropical climate except for the Guatemalan Highlands that has lower temperatures.

The Maya civilization flourished between 500B.C.E. and 1000 C.E. The Maya Civilization did not present itself as an empire or unified political entity, but was a cultural unit of scattered urban and rural centres, both small and big, though many of the centres were related or rather connected with causeways. Also, the political influence of some of the large centres was evident from the use of their emblem glyphs on the monuments at smaller centres. The administrative structure also suggests that some centres were subordinate to larger city-states.

At certain stage, four huge primary regional centres were emerging, each with its own emblem glyph and ruling dynasty. These were Tikal, Calakmul, Copan, and Palenque. In fact, throughout their history the Mayan recognized only four centres as paramount, each representing one of the cardinal directions. Their monumental architecture, fine art, hieroglyph or writing, astronomy and calendar make them one of the most sophisticated civilizations of the world.

### **The Origins and Development of Mayan Civilization**

While the Roman Empire was declining in western Europe, the Maya were creating an advanced civilization in the Americas. Mayan civilization reached its height between B.C.E 300 and 900 C.E. During this time, Mayan culture spread over much of Mesoamerica, including part of present-day southern Mexico,

Belize, most of Guatemala, and parts of Honduras and El Salvador. The landscape in which the Maya lived varied greatly. In the south, pine forests covered the mountain highlands. In the northern and central regions were rainforests, grasslands, and swamps. These areas are known as the lowlands. Thick jungle covered the southern part of the lowlands. This is where Mayan civilization reached its highest development. Today this area is called the Peten region of Guatemala.

The Maya built their civilization in part on ideas they inherited from a people called the *Olmec*. The *Olmec* lived in the jungle areas on the east coast of Mexico. Their civilization reached its peak between 1200 and 500 B.C.E. Like early civilizations in other parts of the world, the *Olmec* civilization was based on agriculture. By 2000 B.C.E., people in parts of Mexico had turned from hunting and gathering to farming as their main source of food. A particularly important crop was maize, or corn. Farming allowed the *Olmec* to create permanent settlements. The *Olmec* established farming villages throughout the region. They also created trade routes that stretched for hundreds of miles. By 1400 B.C.E., the *Olmec* had a capital city that boasted palaces, temples, and monuments. They were the first Mesoamericans to develop large religious and ceremonial centers. They were also the first to use a solar calendar. The Maya would build on all these achievements.

Around 1500 B.C., the Maya began to establish villages in the highlands and lowlands of Meso-America. Most of their highland villages were located in what is now southern Guatemala. This mountainous region contained many minerals. In general, this area had a dry, cool climate.

The lowland villages of the Maya were located in what is now northern Guatemala, Belize, and the Yucatán Peninsula in southern Mexico. The Yucatán lowlands tended to be hot and dry. Hot, humid rain forests covered the lowlands farther to the south. This area had fertile soil that was good for farming. The development

of Mayan society was similar to the development of *Olmec* society. As farming thrived in the Mayan homelands, the Maya were able to grow more food. With more food, the Maya became healthier and their population grew. In time, some Mayan farming villages grew into great cities.

Three Periods of Mayan Civilization Mayan civilization began to arise in eastern and southern Mexico around 2000 B.C.E. Historians divide the history of Mayan civilization into three main periods: **Pre-Classic, Classic, and Post-Classic**. The long Pre-Classic period lasted from about 2000 B.C.E. to 300 C.E. During this time, the Maya farmed the land and lived in simple houses and compounds, or groups of buildings.

Gradually, Mayan culture became more complex. As the Mayan population grew, settlements became larger. The Maya began constructing public buildings for governmental and religious purposes. About 50 B.C.E., they began to adapt the writing system of the *Olmec* and develop their own system of hieroglyphic writing. Mayan civilization reached its peak during the Classic period, from around 300 to 900 C.E. The achievements upon which we will discuss in this chapter date from this time.

During the Classic Period, the Maya adapted and developed ideas they had learned from the *Olmec*. For example, they improved on *Olmec* building techniques. Even though the Maya lacked metal tools and had not discovered the wheel, they built enormous stone cities that boasted elaborate and highly decorated temple-pyramids and palaces. The Maya also built observatories for studying the heavens. They charted the movements of the moon, stars, and planets. They used their knowledge of astronomy and mathematics to create complex and highly accurate calendars.

Mayan society during the Classic period consisted of many independent states. Each state had farming communities and one or more cities. At its height, the Mayan Empire included over 40

cities, including Tikal, Copan, Chichen Itza, and Palenque.

Around 900 C.E., the Classic civilization collapsed. The Maya abandoned their cities in the southern lowland area, and the great cities fell into ruin in the jungle. No one knows for certain why this happened. At the end of this chapter, we will look at some theories that may explain the mystery. To the north, on the Yucatan Peninsula, Mayan cities continued to prosper during the Post-Classic period. This period lasted from about 900 C.E. to 1500 C.E. During this time, the Maya continued their warfare and empire building, but they had fewer great artistic and cultural achievements.

Even at the height of their empire, the Maya were not one unified nation. Instead they lived in many city-states with separate governments. What united them as Maya was their common culture: their social system, languages, calendar, religion, and way of life. Let's take a closer look at some aspects of Mayan culture, starting with class structure.

## **Society of the Maya Civilisation**

### **Class Structure**

Because the Maya produced surplus food, some people could focus on tasks other than farming. Some became craftspeople. Others became priests or teachers. This division of labour resulted in the development of a class system. During the Classic period, the Maya lived in independent city-states, like Tikal. Within each state, Mayan society was structured like a pyramid. The ruler of each city-state was at the top of the social pyramid. The rest of Mayan society was organized in a series of layers below him.

### **The Ruler**

The highest authority in the state was the *halachuinic*, a Mayan word that means "true man. He ruled the state with the help of his advisors. He decided when and where to go to war.

The Mayan ruler was considered a god-king. During religious ceremonies, he wore a headdress that was as tall as a person.

When he died, a son or other close male relative succeeded him. Mayan rulers were almost always men, but scholars believe that women had considerable influence, probably through family relationships.

### **Nobles and Priests**

The next layer in the social pyramid was made up of nobles and priests. They were the only members of Mayan society who knew how to read and write. The nobles served as officials, and oversaw the administration of the states. They gathered taxes, supplies, and labour for projects like the construction of temples. Nobles led peasant armies in times of war. During battles, they wore elaborate costumes, including gold jewellery and animal robes made from the skin of jaguars.

Priests were important because they maintained favour with the gods. Like nobles, they inherited their position from their fathers. Priests led rituals, offered sacrifices, and foretold the future. They were consulted to determine the best days for going into battle. In addition to their religious duties, priests were often mathematicians, astronomers, and healers.

### **Merchants and Artisans**

Although the Mayan economy was based mostly on farming, trade and crafts were also important. These functions were carried out by merchants and artisans. The Maya were accomplished traders. They travelled by sea, river, and well-constructed roads to trade with other city-states. Merchants in the lowlands imported valuable products from the highlands. These products included stones such as obsidian and jade; copal, a tree sap that the Maya used as incense during religious ceremonies; and quetzals, birds with shiny green feathers used in headdresses.

Mayan artisans made a wide variety of objects, many of them designed to pay tribute to the gods. They painted books on paper made from the bark of fig trees. Artists painted murals, or wall paintings, of Mayan life and important battles. They created sculptures for temples and decorative designs on palace walls.

The Maya were also skilled weavers and potters.

### **Peasants**

The peasants were the backbone of Mayan society. They worked hard on the land, growing maize, squash, beans, and other crops to feed the population. During the growing season, men spent most of the day in the fields, farming with wooden hoes. Women usually stayed closer to home, preparing food, weaving, and sewing. When they were not working on the land, peasants spent time building pyramids and temples. In exchange for their work, they sometimes attended royal weddings and religious events. Peasants also served as soldiers during wars.

Most Mayan peasants worked as farmers. Farm families lived in small villages near the big cities. Their homes were simple buildings made of mud or wooden poles with roofs of palm leaves or grass. Mayan farmers grew maize, beans, squash, chili peppers, avocados, pineapples, and cacao. Maize was the most important crop. In fact, the Maya believed that they had been created out of maize.

Mayan farmers used a variety of techniques to grow their crops. In the rain forests, they used slash-and-burn agriculture. In the highlands, they increased the land available for farming by building terraces. In drier areas, they dug irrigation canals that carried water from streams and rivers to their fields. Some Mayan farmers still use these techniques today.

### **Slaves**

At the bottom of the social pyramid were the slaves. Slaves performed manual labour for their owners. Some were born into slavery, but free people sometimes became slaves. Some children became slaves when their parents sold them for money to feed the rest of the family. War prisoners of humble origin were made slaves. Those of higher rank were sacrificed to the gods. And some people were made slaves as a punishment for serious crimes.

In general, slaves were not treated badly. Sometimes they actually had easier lives than peasants, depending on what job they did and where their masters lived. But slaves were not free to come and go as they pleased. Often they were sacrificed when their masters died.

### **Family Life**

In city-states like Copan (in present-day Honduras), Mayan peasants lived in one-room huts built of interwoven poles covered with dried mud. Several family houses were often grouped around a courtyard. A house containing the kitchen was often placed directly behind the main house. Peasant families worked hard, but ceremonies and rituals provided a break from work and a chance to honour important events.

### **Duties of Family Members**

Life for Mayan peasant families was not easy. Mayan women rose before dawn to get the fire burning in the fireplace. With the help of her daughters, a Mayan woman cleaned the corn that had been boiled and left to soak and soften overnight. Then she set to work at the grinding stone, pounding corn into meal. She patted the meal into *tortillas* (a Spanish word meaning "little breads") or *tamales* and cooked them over the fire. These might serve as the morning meal, or they might be saved for dinner. On special days, they might also have hot chocolate, a drink the Maya made from cacao beans. During the day, women and older girls cared for small children and for the family's few animals, like ducks and turkeys. They swept their homes, and they gathered, spun, and wove cotton into cloth.

Mayan fathers and sons ate their morning meal quickly before leaving to work the fields. When they weren't busy with the crops, men and boys hunted and trapped animals. They also helped construct large buildings such as palaces and temples. In times of war, peasant men served as soldiers.

### **Special Occasions**

Although Mayan families worked hard, they also took time to

celebrate the important events in their lives. The birth of a child was a time of rejoicing. As soon as possible after the birth, the family called in a priest to perform a ceremony much like baptism. The priest forecast the baby's future and gave advice to help guide the parents in raising the child.

At three months of age, girls went through another ceremony. The number 3 was special to Mayan women because it represented the three stones of the fireplace. In the three-month ceremony, the baby girl was introduced to the tools she would use throughout her life. Small items were placed in the baby's hands, such as tools for spinning and weaving, carrying water and cooking, and soaking and grinding maize.

A similar ceremony was held for boys at four months of age. The number 4 was special to Mayan men. It represented the four sides of the plot of land where a boy would spend his life.

The baby boy was given farmer's tools, such as axes and planting sticks, and the spears, knives, and traps of a hunter. Another important ceremony in every Mayan child's life was the coming-of-age ceremony. Girls went through this ceremony at the age of 12, boys at 14. The long ceremony involved confessions, cleansing with water, and reciting the rules of behaviour. Finally, the priest cut a white bead from the boys' hair and removed a string of red shells from around the girls' waists. Boys and girls had worn these symbols of innocence since they were quite young.

### **Marriage Customs**

The next big event for a Mayan youth was marriage. Men usually married around the age of 20. Girls married when they were as young as 14. The bride and groom did not choose each other. Instead, marriages were negotiated by the village *atanzahab*, or matchmaker. These negotiations were not simple. Families had to agree on how much food and clothing would be given to the bride's family. They also had to agree on the number of years a young man would work for his new wife's family.

Once the details of a marriage were worked out, the villagers built a hut for the couple behind the home of the bride's parents. When the home was ready, the bride and groom put on clothing woven for the occasion. After a priest blessed the marriage, the villagers celebrated. Clearly, rituals and ceremonies were an important part of daily life to the Maya.

### **Religious Beliefs and Practices**

Religion was very important to the Maya. The Maya built their cities around ceremonial and religious centers. Their magnificent temple pyramids rose high above the jungle canopy, like mountains reaching into the sky. Temple plazas provided gathering places for people to attend rituals and ceremonies. Scholars have learned about the Mayan religion from studying present-day Mayan practices, ancient artefacts, and documents written during the Post-Classic period. Here are some of the things they have discovered.

### **Beliefs and Rituals**

The Mayan religion was polytheistic, which means it included many gods. In fact, the Maya believed in more than 160 gods. The primary Mayan gods were forces or objects in nature that affected people's daily lives, like the god of rain, the god of corn, and the god of death.

Many gods had animal characteristics. The jaguar was especially important to the Maya. The main god was called *Itzamna*. The Maya believed that this god created the world. They also worshiped a sun god, a moon goddess, and the gods of death, war, rain, and maize. The Maya often represented these gods as animals. The Maya believed that the gods had created the world and could influence or even destroy it. The same god that sent life-giving rain could also ruin the crops with hailstones. So, it was extremely important to honour the gods. To get help from the gods, the Maya fasted, prayed, and offered sacrifices. Most of these sacrifices were animals, such as turkeys or deer. Occasionally, the Maya made human sacrifices. In addition, the

Maya expected their rulers to communicate with the gods on their behalf. Unlike the ancient Egyptians, who looked forward to life after death, the Maya viewed the afterlife as an unhappy existence.

According to Mayan beliefs, only priests could explain signs and lead people through rituals aimed at pleasing the gods. Priests performed sacrifices and conducted ceremonies. They consulted sacred books, read omens, interpreted signs, and predicted the future. No decision was made without seeking the gods' advice. No action was taken without first honouring the gods.

The Maya honoured their gods with offerings such as plants, food, flowers, feathers, jade, and shells. The Maya believed that blood gave the gods strength, so they also made blood offerings by sacrificing animals and, sometimes, humans. The people who were sacrificed were usually orphans, slaves, and nobles captured during war.

In the ancient city of Chichen Itza, on the Yucatan Peninsula, humans were sacrificed by being thrown into a sacred well whose water level was 60 feet below the ground. Any victims who survived the fall were pulled from the water and asked what message they had brought back from the gods.

Human sacrifice played a role in an ancient Mayan game called *pok-a-tok*. Every Mayan city had at least one ball court where the game was played. Scholars believe that there were two teams of nobles. Players tried to hit a solid rubber ball through a stone ring by using their leather-padded elbows, wrists, and hips. People from all levels of Mayan society watched and placed bets on the outcome of the game. Slaves, land, and homes could be won and lost during a game. Surviving art from the ball courts shows members of the losing team being sacrificed and the captain of the defeated team being beheaded.

### **The Sacred Calendar**

The Maya used their knowledge of mathematics and astronomy to develop a complex calendar system. The Maya had three

different calendars. The *haab* year was of 18 periods or months, of twenty days each, plus a terminal period of five days called *Uayeb* (the empty or unlucky days). The second was the *tzolkin*, a sacred calendar of 260 days. The third calendar was the *long count*, which reckoned the number of days since the mythical beginning of the Maya era, which was dated **4Ahau 8 Chamhu** for reasons inexplicable till date (equivalent to B.C.E. 3111). In this calendar, 20 *kins* or days made a Maya month (*uinal*). 18 *Uinals* and 5 *Uayeb* made a *tun* (year) of 365 days. Next came the *katun*, a period of 7200 days or 20 years. And 52 years made a cycle of years. The nine known Maya time periods, such as days, months etc., had corresponding *glyphs*. *Glyph* actually was their language to record, which has so far not been completely deciphered. Only those *glyphs*, which pertain to calendars etc., have been somehow read.

Two main calendars were used for religious and other purposes. The first was a daily calendar, based on the solar (sun) year. It divided the year into 18 months of 20 days each, plus 5 unlucky days. This totalled 365 days, as in our calendar.

The second calendar was the sacred or ritual calendar. It was called the *tzolkin*, or *Sacred Round*. The *Sacred Round* was based on 13 months of 20 days each, making 260 days in all. It had two cycles that worked together to identify a particular day. One cycle was made up of the numbers 1 to 13. The other cycle was a set of 20-day names. Each of the day names represented a particular god. Every 260 days, a given combination of numbers and day names, such as *Ik*, would occur.

Only priests could read the hidden meaning of the *Sacred Round*. Priests used the sacred calendar to determine the best days to plant, hunt, cure, do battle, and perform religious ceremonies. To this day, there are calendar priests in southern Mexico who use the 260-day calendar in this way. Like Mayan art and architecture, the calendar system reflects a highly advanced civilization. This civilization was made possible by the

ability of the Maya to create a stable food supply.

Recording an event is important for every civilization. The Egyptians used the papyrus; the Sumerians used the clay tablets and others. Mayans have their own books to record events. However, most of the books were destroyed during the invasion of the Spaniards. Around four are spared and is being kept at libraries at various locations. Besides the books, there is the stela, which can be considered as a stone monument erected to commemorate certain important events.

A date in the Mayan calendar is specified by its position in both the *Tzolkin* and the *Haab* calendars. This creates a total of 18,980 unique date combinations, which are used to identify each day within a cycle lasting about 52 years. This period is called the *Calendar Round*.

In practice, the date combinations are represented by two wheels rotating in different directions. The smallest wheel consists of 260 teeth with each one having the name of the days of the *Tzolkin*. The larger wheel consists of 365 teeth and has the name of each of the positions of the Haab year. As both wheels rotate, the name of the *Tzolkin* day corresponds to each *Haab* position.

The date is further identified by counting the number of days from the “**creation date**”, using the Long Count calendar. A typical *Long Count* date has the following format: *Baktun-Katun-Tun-Uinal-Kin*.

*Kin* = 1 Day.

*Uinal* = 20 *kin* = 20 days.

*Tun* = 18 *uinal* = 360 days.

*Katun* = 20 *tun* = 360 *uinal* = 7,200 days.

*Baktun* = 20 *katun* = 400 *tun* = 7,200 *uinal* = 144,000 days.

The *kin*, *tun*, and *katun* are numbered from 0 to 19; the *uinal* are numbered from 0 to 17; and the *baktun* are numbered from

1 to 13. The Long Count has a cycle of 13 baktuns, which will be completed 1.872.000 days (13 baktuns) after 0.0.0.0.0. This period equals 5125.36 years and is referred to as the Great Cycle of the Long Count.

The Mayans were actually obsessed with time. They built a lot of monuments including altars and stela to mark the passage of time. Inscribed on the monuments would be the series of glyphs that record the date, the gods and lunar information. In addition to that, Venus is rather important in Mayan culture. Information on Venus can be found also among the glyphs.

The Mayans considered the days as divine whereby gods are assigned to the days. This is evident in certain villages in Guatemala where some form of the Mayan calendar still survives up to this day. They conceive the dates and time as burdens to be carried by their various gods. As there are a lot of numbers and date in the Mayan calendar, the system actually employed many divine bearers together for a day.

One thing that inevitably emerges when talking about the Mayan calendar is the enormous influence of astronomy. As already mentioned, the Mayans of Mesoamerica considered measurement of time a crucial part of their religious and social lives: almost each visible astronomical object had a corresponding deity or god associated with it; the movements of the Sun, the Moon, planets and constellations implied certain consequences on people's normal day-to-day concerns. Furthermore, it was important to tell apart one season from another to determine when the right time for agriculture was; otherwise the people would simply starve.

Thus, it can be inferred that astronomical observations were of great importance to the success of the Mayan civilization: from their agriculture to theology to time keeping, the prevalence of astronomical and cosmological observations was widespread.

### **Agricultural Techniques**

The Maya were creative, skilful farmers. They used their

knowledge of calendars and seasonal change to help them become even better at growing food. But Mayan farmers faced many challenges. In the end, crop failure may have played a key role in the collapse of the Classic Mayan civilization.

The primary Mayan food was maize, or corn. Other typical Mayan crops were beans, squash, and chili peppers. Fortunately, beans and squash, when eaten with corn, supply people with a naturally healthful and balanced diet.

One of the most difficult challenges the Maya faced was how to grow enough food to feed their growing population. Farming was not easy in the regions where they lived. Their land included dense forests, little surface water (such as lakes or streams), and poor soil.

The Maya responded to this challenge by developing different agricultural techniques for the various environments in which they lived. In the mountainous highlands, they built terraces, or earth steps, into the hills to create more flat land for planting. In the swampy lowlands, the Maya constructed raised-earth platforms surrounded by canals that drained off extra water. This technique helped them to grow more food without having to increase the amount of land they used.

A different technique was used in the densely forested lowland areas. In city-states like Palenque (in present-day Mexico), the Maya used slash-and burn agriculture. First, they cleared the land by cutting and burning plants and trees. Then they planted their crops. Unfortunately, this kind of farming wears out the soil. Lowland soil was not very rich to begin with, so land that was planted for 2 to 4 years had to be left to rest for 2 to 10 years. Slash-and-burn farmers had to have a lot of land, since each year some areas were planted while others were recovering.

The Mayan agricultural system worked as long as settlements were spread out and not too large. As populations increased, the Maya had trouble raising enough food to feed everyone. In the constant quest for land, they drained swamps and cleared

hillsides. They also used household gardens in the cities to increase the amount of land available for growing food.

The commoners or the peasants used to serve the men of upper class in many ways. As labourers, both skilled and unskilled, they built the enormous plazas and pyramids; as skilled artisans they needed to cut and lay stones, to plaster, to carve and cast and as unskilled labourers they filled the ditch with mud and helped the skilled craftsmen in numerous ways. They were the primary producers also. The Maya agriculture was quite varied with innumerable kinds of crops, fruit bearing plants, dye producing plants etc., all of which needed different kinds of attention and labour, though maize was the primary crop. Beside maize, they planted beans, grew squash and pumpkin, sweet potato, sweet cassava, a kind of turnip. Land and salt pits were communally owned. Individual community members were assigned plots of land to cultivate and grow food.

Availability of water was a regular problem for the Maya in spite of the fact that the entire zone used to get high rainfall. Except the settlements, which were near rivers, availability of water was difficult. In the lowland settlements, the surface soil was thin and could not retain water, the rainwater used to seep into the subsoil, due to the porous limestone. Tikal repeatedly suffered droughts though it was in the wettest area. There the engineers had cemented an entire ravine of porous lime stones near the plaza and had created a giant-sized reservoir.

There was *Chac*, the rain god, who had to be propitiated (appeased) before the agricultural operations. There was also *Yum Kaax* or the corn god, who had to be worshipped.

There was a ritual for every activity of planting, sowing and harvesting. In the ninth month, *Chen* (moon), and the tenth *Yax* (Venus), planting was to be done during certain lucky days. The scribe-priest or the *chilan*, used to guide the peasants on this, yet much of this was based on the observation of earth-bound man or the peasant, who related them to the priests. The priest in turn put it all down in glyph script so that it could be remembered.

The high priest, called *Ahkin*, was also the teacher in Maya society. A Bonampak mural details the role and power of the High priest in the Maya society. He used to teach how to compute years, months, days, festivals and ceremonies, fateful days and seasons, in short, to read glyph and to interpret the almanac. But this was not taught to the men of the lower class. It was reserved for the nobles and the priests' sons. The Maya peasants used to store food grains for rainy days. The lower section of the Maya society was also made to pay the tax or tribute. Maize was the first tax. Part of a farmer's surplus was turned over to the state depositories. Then, as a form of work-service tax, the personal maize fields of priest and nobility were cultivated and harvested. Construction was also a part of personal tax. The houses of the upper classes were built by the common men at their own expense. The causeways were built as part of the work service; it was carried out by *corvee* (forced labour) by the clans that lived near the road. Working for the construction of Public building, was the principal labour tax. It is quite evident that enormous religious centres, temple cities, causeways, ball courts, etc. presupposed a complex social organization with mechanism to appropriate work/service and products. The nobles, priests, and civil and military officials lived on the tax-tribute of the man of the lower rungs of society. In addition, a sizeable number of artisans, who decorated the temples, carved the stelae, were supported out of the accumulated surplus brought to the official storage chambers by the tax-paying Maya. Whether the necessity of labour made the Maya people to fight and capture slaves is not known. But they used to go into wars, capture slaves and employ them for various tasks as well as sacrifice some of them to propitiate their gods.

Beside working in the fields, weaving was one of the main occupations of the Maya. Both men and women were engaged in this. They used to carve and make baskets, rope, mat, and pots. Exchange of goods and trade with other people was a regular activity.

## Settlements and Architecture

Cities and ceremonial centres are found almost in all Maya settlements and the number of remains of huge structures are staggering. The layout of the cities was somewhat as follows; the central ceremonial court, surrounded by a large plaza where markets were held, then were arrayed the houses of chiefs, priests, and other functionaries, and further away from these were the houses of the common people. There were other structures also from small plazas to enormous reservoirs, broad causeways, ball courts, and smaller monuments. In the highland Maya settlements, there were cenotes (pits or wells) for procuring usable water.

The use of lime mortar and corbelled arch, was the distinguishing characteristic of the Maya architecture. In the corbelled arch, the stones are so placed that each projects a little beyond the one below it; eventually the walls meet and a vault is created. To support this type of arch, a weight mass was necessary. As a result of this a comb like design developed into the roof. This also because an overhanging to act as cantilever to the vaulting. Maya architectural façades, thus had lavish and intricate designs. Besides the spectacular Pyramids the Mayas also constructed ball courts, gateways, sweat/steam baths, vaulted bridges and raised platforms where plays were performed.

Uaxactun (A.D.328) was one of the oldest, though not one of the most elaborate instances, of the cities of the Maya. This city represents the general character of Maya Civilization. The principal temple pyramid, although only 27 feet high, is interesting since it shows the evolution of the pyramid form, which in the nearby Tikal was to reach a height of over 200 feet. The wide stairway was ornamented by stucco-masks some of which were even 8 feet high. In a series of isometric drawings, the evolution of the temple complex can be seen. The first structure was a raised stone platform on which rested a wooden house. In the next stage of development, three identical temples were built with similar stairways and decorated roof-crests facing each other.

There is evidence of a high priest, buried in the plaza; the floor level was raised to contain his tomb and a similar temple, presumably above the grave, was added. Slowly with the passage of years and evolution of techniques, the temple developed into a complex of buildings.

At Tikal, around first century C.E. three large platforms and two smaller ones were built on the North Acropolis. The large platforms, whose earth and rubble cores were faced with stucco, were about 4 to 4.5 metres high. Their stairways were decorated with painted stucco- masks, probably representing supernatural jaguars. Similar stucco masks were used to ornament the facades of the platforms at Cerros and at other sites. Monumental buildings were also constructed during the Late formative phase at El Mirador, Lamanai, Cuello, and Alter de Sacrifices in Peten, and at Dzibilchaltun in the northern Yucatan. The deities whose representations were carved on the stucco masks and who were worshipped in the temples on the platforms, may have been claimed as ancestors by the chiefly lineages. The rich burials found within Tikal's North Acropolis hint at this sort of special relationship between deities and rulers. Besides the monumental structures that the Mayas built, they had simple native houses for the peasants and other plebeians, called the *na*. It was a type of house where the material used was wood for the wall and palm leaf for thatch.

The Mayas had a system of raised causeways or a road system called *scabe* or *scabeob*. These used to connect ancient cities of the Maya. The straight causeways even traversed jungles and swamps. The height of these causeways varied from 2 to 4 feet, the width from 15 to 33 feet and the length from 600 feet to 60 to 70 miles at a stretch. These roadways or causeways were ceremonial, economic and administrative in function. Pilgrims, who had a 'right of asylum', must have walked along these causeways from the hinterland to the elite/ceremonial/urban centres carrying offerings, tributes, as also goods for trade. The causeways did not only connect the hinterland with the centre but also connected different many centres. The Mayas also used

the sea-route. The first things that Columbus encountered when he landed at Guanaja in 1502 were the Maya boats. At one island he saw and examined one – as long as a galley, 8 feet in breadth, rowed by 25 Indian paddlers, and laden with commodities – cocoa, copper-bells, flint-edged swords, cotton cloth- brought from the mainland, twenty miles distant.

### **Maya Polity**

The head of the Maya city-states were the –real men, or the *halach uinic*. This office was neither elective nor selective. It was hereditary. The office descended from father to son. If the lord died, then it was the eldest son who succeeded him. However, if the sons of the chief were not fit to rule then, a brother or relative of the ruler became the chief. The *halach uinic* were both the spiritual and temporal authority of their city-states. Subordinate to him and chiefs of other cities, or in other words local governors under the *halach uinic*, were a set of officials who were known as *ahau* or more commonly *batabob*. The *batabobs* were, more than likely, related to the halach uinic by blood ties.

A *batabob* was responsible for the governance of his own resident city. He also had a retinue of deputies to assist him. Besides this there was a town council constituted of the chiefs of the various subdivisions of the town. Though nominally under the *batabob*, they could veto any move by the *batabob*. These councillors were called *ahcuch cabob*. The *batabob* settled disputes, usually contract violations and land disputes. And when the priests made known their oracles (prophesies or advice) as to when the people should sow, reap, or make merry, the *batabob* saw to it that the functions were carried out. In the time of war, although the *batabob* was the de facto head of the province, actual command was in the hands of a war captain, known as *nacom*, who was elected for three years. But at times of necessity the *batabob* also used to lead his army as against the Spaniards. The *batabobs* also collected tax and tribute. The

commoners used to carry the *batabob* in a litter (an Indian palki), wherever he used to go. They also used to serve him in many other ways. There were a great many people who made up a bureaucracy, which was quite exacting; governors, bailiffs, war captains, and down to the lowest, the tupil, or a constable. All these officials constituted the upper class and never paid any tax.

### **Achievements of the Maya**

Many of the greatest achievements of the Maya date from the Classic Period. Hundreds of years later, their ideas and practices continued to influence other Mesoamerican groups.

### **Science and Technology**

The Maya made important breakthroughs in astronomy and mathematics. Throughout Mayan lands, priests studied the sky from observatories. They relied on simple methods, such as looking through a forked stick. Still, they were able to track the movements of stars and planets with striking accuracy.

The Maya used their observations to calculate the solar year. The Mayan figure of 365.2420 days was amazingly precise. These calculations allowed the Maya to create their solar calendar of 365 days. Recall that they also had a sacred 260-day calendar. Every 52 years, the first date in both calendars fell on the same day. This gave the Maya a longer unit of time that they called a Calendar Round. For the Maya, this 52-year period was something like what a century is to us today.

Mayan astronomy and calendar making depended on a good understanding of mathematics. In some ways, the Mayan number system was like ours. The Maya used place values for numbers, just as we do. However, instead of being based on the number 10, their system was based on 20. So instead of place values for 1s, 10s, and 100s, the Maya had place values for 1s, 20s, 400s (20 times 20), and so on.

The Maya also recognized the need for zero a discovery made by few other civilizations. In the Mayan system for writing numbers, a dot stood for one, a bar for five, and a shell for zero.

To add and subtract, people lined up two numbers and then combined or took away dots and bars.

### **Arts and Architecture**

The Maya were equally gifted in arts. They painted using colours mixed from minerals and plants. We can see the artistry of Mayan painters in the Bonampak murals, which were found in Chiapas, Mexico. The murals show nobles and priests, as well as battle scenes, ceremonies, and a human sacrifice. These pictures have helped scholars learn about Mayan life.

The Maya also constructed upright stone slabs called steles, which they often placed in front of temples. Most steles stood between 5 and 12 feet tall, although some rose as high as 30 feet. Steles usually had three-dimensional carvings of gods and rulers. Sometimes the Maya inscribed them with dates and hieroglyphics in honour of significant events.

Another important art was weaving. We know from steles and paintings that the Maya wove colourful cloths in complex patterns. Women made embroidered tunics called *huipiles* and fashioned lengths of cloth for trade. Mayan women use similar techniques today. They still make their *huipiles* in traditional designs. People from different towns can be distinguished by the colours and patterns of their garments.

In architecture, the Maya built temple-pyramids from hand-cut limestone bricks. An unusual feature of Mayan buildings was a type of arch called a corbel vault. Builders stacked stones so that they gradually angled in toward each other to form a triangular archway. At the top of the arch, where the stones almost touched, one stone joined the two sides. The archway always had nine stone layers, representing the nine layers of the underworld (the place where souls were thought to go after death).

### **Language and Writing**

The Maya developed the most complex system of writing in the Americas. They used hieroglyphics to represent sounds, words, and ideas. Hieroglyphic inscriptions have been found on

stoneware and other artefacts dating from as early as 50 B.C.E.

Over time, the Maya created hundreds of glyphs. Eventually, scribes could write down anything in the spoken language. They often wrote about rulers, history, myths and gods, and astronomy. Not all Mayan groups shared the same language. Instead, they spoke related dialects. Today, about four million Mesoamericans still speak one of 30 or so Mayan languages.

### **Decline of the Maya Civilization**

Creative agricultural techniques were not enough to save the Classic Mayan civilization. For about 600 years, the great cities of the southern lowlands thrived. Then, in the space of 50 to 100 years, the civilization that supported these centers fell apart. By 900 C.E., the Maya had abandoned their cities to the jungle.

Around the 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E., the Mayan construction of buildings seems to have stopped, marking the beginning of the collapse of the civilization. There are many explanations offered by scholars speculating on this question. Some scholars have argued that it was an epidemic such as malaria or yellow fever, or it might have been the social consequence of some calamity such as a drought or earthquake. Some others have suggested that the reason was an agricultural collapse, or peasant uprisings, or severing of trade routes, even an invasion by the Mexicans.

There was a demographic change during the Late Classic phase due to growth of population. Consequently, there was a pressure on the limited agricultural resource of the region.

There is some archaeological evidence, of the Late Classic time, in the form of human skeletons of commoners mostly. The skeletons attest stunted growth, scurvy, anaemia, and periodontal disease, suggesting malnutrition, which in turn, implies food shortages. To overcome the food shortage, the people might have intensified the use of the natural resources available as shortening of the interval of leaving land fallow or burning forest to clear land to extend cultivation. Such agricultural activities must have led, in the long run, to change in rain-fall pattern, fertility of the

soil and so on. It is suggested that this caused agricultural exhaustion and ecological disaster.

Thus, leading to the decline of the civilization. But such explanation fails to answer the question as to why the growing population did not increase the kind of agriculture, which they used to practice. Why did they change over to a different and detrimental practice? Some other ways of looking at the agricultural crisis and the decline of the Mayas have to be found. This question becomes more important in the light of the recent archaeological discoveries of the practice of a very intensive agriculture in this civilization. Peasant rebellion being one of the causes of the decline of the Maya civilization has been largely derived from a reading of the Bonampak (a Maya site) murals (which apparently depicts captured peasant rebels) and the evidence of attacks on the monuments and consequent mutilation and destruction of those monuments, (which were symbols of the elite power and domination). This explanation has its protagonists and detractors. The detractors would say that Bonampak murals may be representing any captured commoners or nobles and not necessarily that of peasant rebels; and that the rebels could not be upsetting the demography of the place if they eliminated the nobles, who were a small fraction only. But the fact is that the elite centre did not constitute the Maya culture or civilization. It was only a part of the culture. And the rebel peasant did not intend to make difference in population figures but must have tried to reconstitute the social relationship.

That is why we have flourishing villages even after the collapse of elite centres, as in Belize valley. The relation established between the finding of Fine paste pottery and Mexican invasion seems quite tenuous, if not untenable. The decline and demise of the Maya civilization was no doubt a complex process. It involved the competition between different settlements over the control of trade routes of the west and war for the same. Rebellion from within can never be ruled out as various nobilities to remain in power used to extract immense amount of surplus from the

peasants and producers. These exploited groups might have remained as disgruntled elements of the society. They were no more willing to bear the burden in the name of the divine and were ready to overthrow the system. Here one can ascribe a role for the Aztec or Mexicans, who came as merchants and traders and taking advantage of the situation started dominating over the centres and then controlling and displacing them as well. The decline and demise, however cannot be put as a uniform story for all the settlements, certain variation between settlements might have existed. Perhaps a combination of factors brought an end to the Classic period. What we do know is that the great cities disappeared. The Maya migrated away from the old Mayan heartland and returned to village life. Stone by stone, the jungle reclaimed the great pyramids and plazas.

Although the great Mayan cities are ruins today, Mayan culture lives on. About 2 million descendants of the ancient Maya still live in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. Millions more are spread throughout the Yucatan Peninsula and the cities and rural farm communities of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

### **The Incas**

The Incas, a small ethnic group from the southern Peruvian highlands, created the greatest empire ever seen in the independent Americas. There were about 100,000 of them in 1532. Inca also means-ruler, as in *Sapa Inca* (unique Inca). The Incas appeared on the archaeological landscape by about AD 1000 to 1200, and became imperial rulers in the fifteenth century C.E. They called their language *runasimi* (human speech), but today we know it as Quechua. The Inka (or Inca) civilization territorially spread over parts of modern Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina, or the central Andean highlands, and for a substantial part of their history they were under a single Inca state called *Tawantinsuyu*, between 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E. The Inka civilization or more correctly, the Inka Empire had dominated over other lesser pre-Incan societies and settlements from 13<sup>th</sup>

Century till the coming of the Spanish Conquistadors in 1532 C.E. The Incas of Cusco had dominated over various ethnic communities in the entire region. The ethnic communities had tension and conflict among themselves, which was probably advantageous to the Spanish conquistadors (Spanish conquerors of Peru & Mexico). The pre-Incan communities, who were settled agriculturists were the Chavin, Mochica, Nazca, Paraca, and Chimu amongst others.

### **Sources of Information about the Incas.**

Since the Incas had no written language, we have to depend heavily on Spanish documents. The first conquistadores gave us impressions written without time for reflection or understanding of the civilization they were observing. They were followed by soldiers, administrators, and priests, who prepared their manuscripts as part of their duties or for personal gain through publication. Colonial court cases also provide a rich source of information. By the time that the Spaniards took a real interest in the Inca realm, their witnesses provided memories coloured by time, political and economic objectives, and wariness of Spanish repression. Native Andeans did not begin to write their own accounts until the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Their writings mixed Christian history and theology with rose-coloured accounts of the ancient past. Inca archaeology has a long history, but it has usually been focused in the Cuzco heartland. In the last couple of decades, studies in the provinces have greatly enhanced our understanding of the empire. Thus, history of the lost empire of the Incas is being reconstructed on the basis of literary and archaeological sources.

### **The Land and Its People**

The Andean environment is moulded by a conjunction of geography, geology, and climate. The entire land covers geographical division such as coastal desert, mountain valleys, and snow-capped peaks to the tropical Amazonian forest. The Andes are young, active mountains, consisting primarily of parallel eastern and western ranges. The land experiences frequent

earthquakes, and active volcanoes are found along the length of the range.

The highly varied climate conditions drive the annual activities of farmers and herders. The western slopes are dry, while the eastern slopes form part of the warm jungles. A rich coastal marine biome provides small fish and shellfish. Periodically, the global climatic event *El Niño* (named after the Christ child because it hits the Peruvian coast near Christmas) causes torrential rains to fall along the coast, destroying crops and irrigation systems.

The central Andean environment has five basic zones that can be exploited for human use: (a) the coastal valleys, which can be irrigated to grow maize, squash, cotton, and other crops; (b) the yungas, or piedmonts, which were coveted for their coca lands; (c) quechua, the highland valleys, productive for maize in their lower reaches, and for potatoes and quinoa above about 3,600 m; (d) the puna, or high grassland, which is the habitat for the two domesticated camelids (llama and alpaca) and their two wild relatives (guanaco and vicuna); and (e) the montana and eastern forests, productive in maize, coca, and fruits. In prehistoric age, as remains show today, about two-thirds of the population lived above 3,300 m (10,000 ft).

### **Predecessors**

The Inca empire was built on thousands of years of predecessor societies, who developed many of the features that the Incas adopted into their empire. Societies based on marked social classes existed from the beginning of the first millennium C.E. among the Moche of Peru's north coast. The foundations of state political organization date to this era or a little earlier, as do economies that were both highly specialized and interdependent. Highland states with urban centers arose at Wari, in southern Peru, and Tiwanaku, on the south (Bolivian) side of Lake Titicaca in the mid-first millennium C.E. The Wari developed a number of features that the Incas adopted into their empire, including provincial centers linked by a road network and a method of

accounting that depended on a kind of knot-record called a *khipu*.

### **The Origins and Early History of Inca Society**

According to the Inca histories, the original eight Incas were called forth from the origin cave called the Inn of Dawn (*Pacariqtambo*) by the creator god *Wiraqocha*. The ancestral four brothers and four sisters—paired up as couples—emerged from the central of three caves, while two other ethnic groups appeared from the lateral mouths. The principal pair were **Manqo Qhapaq** and his sister/wife **Mama Oqllu**. The Incas and their companions slowly made their way north. Along the way, one belligerent brother was tricked into being sealed in the origin cave, another was turned into a pillar of stone, and a third was transformed into a pillar at the site of Cuzco. The Incas recognized Cuzco as their promised land when they saw a grand rainbow traversing the valley and threw a golden rod that stuck in the soil. After winning a series of conflicts with the area's inhabitants, the Incas settled into their new home.

The second ruler, Zinchi Roq'a, succeeded his father and married a local woman, initiating a practice that allowed the Incas to expand their influence in the region through political/marital alliances. The succeeding five rulers slowly consolidated their power through political sagacity, intrigue, and warfare.

Wiraqocha Inka, the eighth ruler, involved the Incas in the conflictive politics of the Lake Titicaca area by forming an alliance with the Lupaqa. During his reign, the Incas were attacked by a neighbour to the west, the Chankas, the resolution of which in the Incas' favour touched off the imperial era about C.E. 1438.

The pre-imperial Inca era, known as the Killke phase, began about C.E. 1000. It featured small communities occupying an area about 60 km across, centred on Cuzco. The largest Killke towns probably housed a few thousand people. By about C.E. 1200, the area seems to have been an island of relative peace in an Andean landscape troubled by internecine warfare. Recent

archaeological investigations indicate that the Incas had begun to dominate the Cuzco basin early in the fourteenth century C.E.. The beginning of the transition from the pre- imperial to imperial styles of material culture and architecture at that time suggests that the region was becoming integrated within a single polity about a century before the narrative histories recalled.

The imperial-era accounts were mournful histories filtered through translators, scribes and Spanish views. So, the tales of the meteoric rise of Inca power are filled with all the heroics and exaggerations of the grand sweep of history as told by the victors. Even though many oral histories coincided on important points, there were many contradictions among sources on the nature and timing of crucial events and on the roles of central characters.

The conventional story on this regard goes like that, during the reign of Wiraqocha Inka (eighth ruler on Conventional King List), the Incas were involved in alliances and clashes with several neighbouring societies. When they were attacked by the Chankas, Wiraqocha retreated to a fort, but one of his younger sons, named Inka Yupanki, successfully defended Cuzco against the onslaught with supernatural help. This son then usurped the throne and took the name *Pachakuti*, meaning 'cataclysm'. Modern scholars often follow the chronicler Cabello Valboa by citing AD 1438 as the milestone date when Pachakuti seized the throne. His actions reportedly launched a brilliant string of rapid conquests, so the empire is usually conceived as having endured a scant century. Through a combination of conquest, diplomacy, and enticements, the Incas under Pachakuti dominated Peru's southern highlands and much of the Bolivian altiplano, and ventured to the central Peruvian coast. He ceded military command to his son Thupa Inka Yupanki about C.E. 1463 and applied his energies to building Cuzco.

Under Thupa Inka Yupanki's military leadership, the Incas dominated the peoples north to central Ecuador. They took the Peruvian north coast. He was elevated to the throne upon

Pachakuti's death in C.E. 1471. During the last years of his father's life and under his own rule, Thupa Inka Yupanki put down rebellions in the Bolivian altiplano, secured northwest Argentina and northern Chile, and took the south and central Peruvian coasts once and for all.

The era of his son, Wayna Qhapaq, lasted from C.E. 1493 to 1526. It featured suppression of new revolts, expansion of Inca rule in the montana and north Ecuador, efforts to take western Ecuador, and solidification of the south-eastern frontier in Bolivia and Argentina. Much of his reign was dedicated to improving imperial administration. He died in Ecuador during an epidemic of smallpox that preceded the Spanish invasion.

Two of his sons, Waskhar and Atawallpa, waged a horrific dynastic war that Atawallpa won just as the Spaniards arrived in 1532. Despite the dates often cited above, radiocarbon dating suggests that the rise of Inca power probably took more than a century in the Cuzco heartland, beginning by the early fourteenth century, and that the imperial expansion began near the start of the fifteenth century, not in the mid-fifteenth century.

## **Settlement Pattern and Cities**

### **Cuzco: The Navel of the Universe**

A small mountain city, Cuzco consisted mostly of temples, plazas, and housing for the empire's royalty, nobility, and their retainers. Our knowledge of Cuzco is patchy, because it was damaged by fire and earthquake in the Colonial period and was periodically renovated by the Spaniards. Even so, we know that the capital formed a spatial metaphor for Inca society and their world. Laid out in the form of a puma, the urban core (40 hectares) was reportedly designed by the first imperial ruler, Pachakuti. The fortified complex called *Saqsawaman* formed the head, while the body consisted of Upper and Lower Cuzco-sectors occupied by the upper and lower halves of Inca royalty.

Ethnic lords and colonists were settled nearby in a dozen neighbourhoods that echoed their position in the empire. Within

the next 60 km lay country homes for living and dead emperors, their kin, other Inca nobility, and privileged ethnic groups. The heartland also housed service personnel-domestic staff, temple attendants, artisans, accountants, and farmers-bringing the total population of greater Cuzco to about 100,000. The street plan consisted of straight roads that were irregularly arranged to fit the topography of the sloping land and perhaps the puma figure. The central district contained two main avenues that ran the length of the city and were crosscut by six other streets.

Two adjoining plazas lay at Cuzco's center: *Awkaypata* (terrace of repose) and *Kusipata* (fortunate terrace). Containing a central platform and covered with sand in which offerings were buried, Awkaypata often hosted the mummies of the dead emperors for ceremonies of state. Royal palaces and religious compounds dominated the central architecture. The compounds facing Awkaypata were probably the most impressive. *Hatunkancha* (great enclosure), *Amarukancha* (serpent enclosure), and Q'asana were royal palaces.

The ten royal kin groups (*panaqa*) maintained residences in Cuzco, while the non-royal kin lived in settlements beyond the center. The most important religious complex was the *Qorikancha*, or Golden Enclosure, more commonly known today as the Temple of the Sun. Located a couple of blocks to the southeast of Awkaypata, the temple was the focal point in the Incas' sacred geography. The temple's rooms housed many effigies, most importantly *Punchao*, or the image of the Sun itself. Nearby lay a maize garden with birds interspersed among the plants; the garden was accompanied by a herd of camelids attended by their keepers. All were executed in precious metals. The Creator God's temple (*Kiswarkancha*) and *Pukamarka* (Red Town) were also important shrines.

*Saqsawaman*, the grandest architectural complex in the empire, lay on a rocky promontory above Cuzco. The facility was actually a combination of ceremonial complex, fortress, and

magazine. The zig-zag walls today provide a vantage point for re-enactments of Inca Sun ceremonies. A series of sacred agricultural fields were scattered throughout the city, and Cuzco's outskirts boasted a great quantity of storehouses (*qollqa*), from which the inhabitants were provisioned.

Cuzco's organization was also closely tied to both the landscape and the cosmos through an array of at least 332, and probably more than 400, shrines (*waq'a*). Many of the shrines were springs, stones, and mountain peaks, each with its own name and link to Inca history.

### **The Royal Estates**

Every ruler from Wiraqocha Inka onward owned countryside properties and provincial estates. Earlier monarchs may have also had manors. Inca Roq'a and Yawar Waqaq's descendants lived in villas near Cuzco, where they venerated the mummies of their ancestors. Rulers claimed their properties in many ways, including carving out new estates and commandeering expanses that were already developed. Pachakuti and Thupa Inka Yupanki held estates at locations that commemorated their military victories. Waskhar converted state lands and personnel into his own estate east of Huánuco, and Thupa Inka Yupanki won some estates through a game of chance played with the Sun himself. Rulers also appropriated properties when the dust settled from political conflicts.

Some estates were created through formidable engineering works, as when Wayna Qhapaq's holdings in Yucay were reclaimed from swamp and Waskhar's estate at Pomabamba was developed by diverting a river to create new land.

The Incas' penchant for melding land forms and structures is one of the most distinctive features of their approach to designing the manors. All exhibit elegant terracing, waterworks, and masonry that are seldom seen in the rest of the empire. The estates were designed to provide access to a wide range of farmed, gathered, and hunted resources. As many as 4,000 to 4,500 workers were

settled at the manors to serve their lords. Several of the most spectacular Inca sites have been identified as royal estates of Pachakuti, most prominently Pisac, Ollantaytambo, and Machu Picchu. Pisac's main architecture consists of a set of residential structures and a temple complex built around a large carved rock.

The slopes below the settlement are graced with splendid terraces that cascade hundreds of meters down slope. Ollantaytambo, 40 km downriver, exhibits a striking combination of regular layout and architecture tailored to rugged land forms. The site was a planned residential settlement with palaces, religious and defensive structures, storehouses, roads and bridges, terraces, and waterworks. To the west, above a grand set of terraces, lie the complexes now called the Fortaleza and its Temple of the Sun.

**Machu Picchu** is celebrated as one of the world's archaeological splendours. Brought to the world's attention in 1912 by Hiram Bingham of Yale University, the site's spectacular setting on jungle cliffs imparts enormous grandeur to the manor. The site contains a main, lower area called Machu Picchu (old hill) and an upper area on a sugarloaf peak called Huayna Picchu (young hill). Machu Picchu itself contains sets of agricultural terraces and two complexes of elegant architecture flanking a main plaza. Among the site's most striking features are the sixteen fountains and many carved granite outcrops incorporated into the architecture. The most prominent rocks are the *intiwatana*—thought by some to be a sun gnomon—at the peak of the temple complex on the site's west side, the nearby monolith carved to imitate the eastern horizon, and the carved bedrock within and underneath the so-called *torreón*. The *torreón* was probably used to record the June solstice and Pleiades' rise. Recent archaeological research shows that the settlement's residents formed a typical population cross section, and were not dominated by young virgin women, as was mistakenly reported by the early expedition. Most residents were probably occupied in a combination of farming, craftwork, household service, and

ceremony.

Other Well-known Estates includes Wiraqocha's main estate lay at Juchuy Cuzco (Little Cuzco), about 30 km north of Cuzco, where his son Pachakuti built him a manor to live out his life after being deposed. Thupa Inka Yupanki's best-known estate was a rural villa at Chinchero, about 30 km northwest of Cuzco. Chinchero was a planned residential settlement that contained a large central plaza and platform mound along with agricultural and residential terraces.

Wayna Qhapaq's main estate in Yucay was centered at the residence called *Quispiguanca* (white rock). Its holdings included forty named parcels where maize, sweet potatoes, and the warm-weather crops of coca, chili pepper, cotton, and peanuts were cultivated. It included woods that were home to deer, while fish and reeds were grown in an artificial pond.

Overall, the royal estates exemplify elite life in the heartland during the imperial era. Their designs, which were modified and adapted to natural features, symbolize an intensive interaction between humanity and the powers of the cosmos. They epitomize how prime resources were converted into private domains held first by the ruler and, after his death, nominally held in a trust for his reverence.

### **Inca Polity**

The Inca emperor ruled his peoples through a homogeneous political system in which all activities, from birth to death, were regulated. The ruler was a wise, benevolent, and valiant man who took care that no one in his domain went hungry.

That view is largely propaganda, since the land was made up of hundreds of different societies, ranging in their political organization from independent villages to the full-fledged empire of Chimor on Peru's north coast. In practice, the Incas tailored a standardized package of policies to local conditions, producing a variegated political landscape, and left subject communities largely to their own devices for their welfare. As a result, Inca

government was really an umbrella overlying a highly diverse subject terrain. The intensity of rule in any given region varied according to Cuzco's interests, the local conditions, and the response to Inca dominion.

### **Political Geography in Outline**

The name Incas gave to their domain was *Tawantinsuyu*, which means "The Four Parts Together. The four parts were *Chinchaysuyu* (i.e., the northwest and most prestigious part, which took most of highland Peru and Ecuador and the coast); *Antisuyu*, the northeast part, which took in the eastern jungles and slopes of the Andes; *Kollasuyu*, the southeast and largest part, which took in south-eastern Peru, highland Bolivia, the northern half of Chile, and part of northwest Argentina; and *Cuntisuyu*, the smallest part to the southwest, which took in the area from Cuzco to the south Peruvian coast.

### **Political Organization**

In its simplest form, Inca government was a monarchy in which rule passed from father to son. The ruler was assisted, counselled, opposed, and perhaps even deposed by the ten royal Inca kin groups, called *panaqa*. They were the descendants of the past Inca rulers, whose mummies continued to participate in political affairs through mediums assigned to speak and listen to them.

The structure of government beyond the royalty was a highly stratified affair, based on kinship, class, ethnicity, and hereditary access to positions of power. The ruler was called the *Sapa Inca* (unique Inca) and was expected to be generous, wise, and valiant. He took an honorific name upon ascending the throne, marrying his sister at the same time. Both his enthronement and death were celebrated with grand ceremonies, including sacrifices of camelids and children.

Women, especially the queen (*qoya*), were powerful figures in Inca politics. They brought counsel, status, and their own wealth into their marriages. Just like their husbands, their mummies continued to participate in politics after their death.

The royal descent groups (*panaqa*) were formed upon the death of the ruler, through a practice called split inheritance. In this practice, the throne passed on to the most able son, while the remaining descendants of the deceased king formed a kin group that attended his mummies and cared for his estates in perpetuity.

In order to reduce conflict over successions, the Incas instituted the practice of royal incest, marrying the ascending ruler to a sister and thus reducing the pool of potentially legitimate candidates for the next transition. They also established a co-regency, in which a designated son took on some of the role of ruler while his father was still alive. Even so, every imperial succession was attended by intrigue, coup or coup attempt, and murder, even of the ruler himself.

### **Inca Religious practices and beliefs**

Inca ideology combined history, religion, belief, and politics. It was built on traditional Andean beliefs, but elevated the Incas, their ancestors, and gods over all others. The Incas believed in an animate landscape in which spirits inhabited the hilltops, springs, rocky promontories, caves, and other natural features. They attended to omens seen in the heavens and made sacrifices to many gods and sacred locations. They used one term—*waq'a*—to describe anything, person, or place with transcendent power.

### **The Inca Pantheon**

Wiraqocha was the creator god, but was not worshiped directly to a great extent. The principal Inca god was *Inti*, the Sun, who was the center piece of the official religion. He was married to *Mama-Quilla*, "Mother Moon, and was the father of the sitting ruler. The Sun was represented as a small seated boy made of gold (*Punchao* or *Day*). The High Priest of the Sun (*Willaq Umu*) was probably the second most powerful man in the empire. The Sun had its own set of resources, including farms, herds, and service personnel. Gold was thought to be the sweat of the Sun and silver the tears of the Moon.

*Inti-Illapa* (the thunder or weather god) was the third most important deity, while *Mamacocha* (Mother of the Lakes and Sea), *Pachamama* (Earth Mother), and *Pachacamac* (Maker of the Earth, deity of earthquakes, and a coastal oracle of great antiquity) were all important members of the pantheon. The Incas built up an elaborate mythology around the stars and constellations. One group of three stars were known as the granary because their appearance signalled the beginning of the agricultural season.

### **Calendar and Astronomical Observations**

The Incas knew a great deal about solar and lunar calendar and maintained calendars based on the cycles of each. They probably adjusted the calendars on a monthly basis, so that they remained coordinated over time. The Incas did not understand the nature of eclipses and the appearance of comets, so those were frightening events that required a vigorous response of sacrifice and ceremony.

### **The Ceremonial Cycle**

The Incas maintained an elaborate ceremonial calendar, based on the solar and lunar cycles. The most important ceremonies were for the June solstice (*Inti Raymi or Sun Festival*) and the December solstice (*Qhapaq Raymi, or Magnificent Festival*). *The Queen's Festival*, in July or August, featured a purification ritual (*citua*).

### **Cuzco's Network of Shrines: the Zeq'e System**

The *zeq'e* (line) system was an elaborate ritual complex. It contained at least 328 and probably more than 400 shrines (*waq'a*) linked by imaginary lines radiating out from the Golden Enclosure or Terrace of Repose in central Cuzco. The shrines consisted largely of natural features of the landscape (e.g., springs, stones, mountain passes), the built environment (e.g., buildings, burials), and objects (e.g., the brother images of the rulers).

The most common offerings were *Spondylus* princeps (thorny oyster) shell, cloth, coca, and camelids. Human sacrifice was

owed to thirty one of Cuzco's shrines and was also practiced for the investment and death of a ruler, among other momentous events. The chroniclers wrote that as many as 4,000 individuals—generally children chosen for their beauty—could be sacrificed at a time, but no archaeological evidence supports this scale of sacrifice.

### **Mountaintop Shrines**

Mountaintop shrines have gained importance recently, as archaeologists have found a series of shrines with offerings of gold, silver, and shell statuettes of humans and camels, along with occasional human sacrifices. Among those sites is Lulllaillaco, Argentina, the world's highest archaeological site (6,739 m), and the better-known **Nevado Ampato**, Peru. The shrines seem to have been dedicated to the Sun, the Moon, and the sea gods.

### **Inca Society**

#### **The Stages of Life**

The Incas charted the progression of life stages according to people's perceived ability to contribute. According to Inca census categories, there were ten stages, or roads of life for males and ten stages for females. The first road for a male was an adult married man (warrior), holding the decapitated head of an enemy. The female counterpart was a married woman, industriously weaving on a back-strap loom. Then came two categories of increasingly older people, followed by the infirm. The last six categories ran in descending order of age, from adolescent boy messengers and marriageable girl spinners down to infants in the cradle. Childbirth was not an especially celebrated event, but at the age of about two, a child's hair was cut and he or she was given a childhood name.

Education for most children consisted of learning the crafts of their parents, such as weaving for girls and hunting for boys. Male children of the nobility were apparently taught more formally in intellectual, cultural, and military affairs. The only girls who were formally trained were the Chosen Women (*aqllakuna*),

who were taken from their families at the age of about 10. They lived in separate quarters (*aqllawasi*), were taught religion and to make fine cloth and beer, and were generally given in marriage to favoured men or joined the adult women's religious order (*mamakuna*).

A girl celebrated the passage to a marriageable state at her first menstruation. Boys celebrated their rite of passage through puberty as a group, at the age of about 14. The male children of the Inca aristocracy went through an elaborate series of processions, sacrifices, races, and other ceremonies; they received their large ear spools at this time.

Marriage bonded both individuals and kin groups. Brides and grooms generally selected their partners from the opposite side of a large group of their kin, called an ayllu, which owned and exploited resources collectively. Death signified a change of status, but not disappearance from the social group, as mummies of the deceased were tended and consulted for many years—even centuries—after death. The status and ethnic identity of the deceased were frequently represented in their burial goods or in aspects of their burial treatments.

### **Gender Complementarity**

Male and female roles were inseparable complements in Inca social life. This relationship was found at the core of economic activities, such as farming and herding, and ceremonial activities. It was also enshrined in Inca mythology and in the Inca pantheon. Kin terms were used to conceive relations between humans and the supernatural.

### **Inca Administration**

By the end of their run of power in 1532, the Incas ruled a population that outnumbered them by about a hundred to one and whose political formations varied widely. The Incas ruled the central part more intensively than the far north and south, and much of the north Peruvian coast. They also built an extensive system of provincial installations linked by a vast road network.

## Provincial Rule

The Inca provincial administration is often called a bureaucracy, but it consisted more of an umbrella of ethnic Incas directing regional ethnic lords who would likely have succeeded to office among their own peoples. There were at least eighty provinces, with the most found in the northwest part (*Chinchaysuyu*). A province was thought of more as a population than a region. Each province was divided into two or three parts, each of which was supposed to contain close to 10,000 households.

A province was usually governed by an ethnic Inca, assisted by a variety of functionaries. He was supposed to supervise the census, apply labour requirements, maintain the infrastructure, and pass judgment on disputes. A decimal administration lay at the heart of provincial rule. In this system, heads of household were organized into a hierarchy that included units of 10, 50, 100, 500, 1,000, 5,000, and 10,000. Each unit from 100 households upward was directed by a hereditary local lord, called a *kuraka*. The decimal administration seems to have been applied in the central part of the empire, where the society most closely resembled the Incas themselves. Periodically, a census was taken of the provincial populations; it was supposed to be updated annually. The census accounted for males and females separately, according to their age grades and marital status.

## The Knot-record (*kipu*) Recording System

The Incas kept their records primarily through an ingenious mnemonic device known as a *kipu*, or knot-record. A single *kipu* consisted of a longitudinal cord to which a series of multi-colour pendent cords were tied. The position and colour of each cord held particular significance. Knots were tied at positions along each pendent string. The knot-record keepers (*kipu kamayuq*) memorized additional information that allowed them to interpret each *kipu*'s meaning. We have not yet broken the code of the *kipu*, but scholars think that most *kipu* were dedicated to recording numerical information (for example,

census records, tax accounts, military organization, and calendrics). About a third of the *kipu* were more literary in their content, including histories and even poetry.

In 1923, Leland Locke showed that the system was based on a decimal (base-10) system. He found that units (i.e., 0-9) were recorded at the bottom of the pendent strings, where a single granny knot marked 1, and knots with a certain number of loops recorded that number (e.g., four loops for the number 4). Zero was marked by the lack of a knot in the unit's position. Tens (i.e., 10, 20, . . . 90) were recorded at the next position up, and so forth through hundreds, thousands, and finally ten thousand. Testimony to the Spaniards about labour obligations shows us the cultural ordering of information on the *kipu*.

### **Regulating Social Life**

The Incas did not have a formal legal code, but applied aspects of their own culture to subject societies. Most of the strictures were intended to protect the rights and perquisites of the elites. Others provided sanctions for sexual misbehaviour, stealing, witchcraft, or disobeying state orders. Some rules were intended to protect the subject populace against abuse by the elites

### **Provincial Installations**

The Incas managed provincial affairs of state through a network of regional centers and secondary facilities, called *tampu*. John Hyslop estimates that there may have been 2,000 or more *tampu*. The archaeologist Craig Morris (1972) points out that the provincial centers fell into disuse following the Inca collapse, because they formed a kind of artificial urbanism. He observes that they were usually founded in locations without significant local occupation and lacked independent craft, residential, or market activity. Their positioning often reflects more concern for interregional contacts than local affairs. During most of the year, no more than about a quarter of the housing may have been used. The architecture often used local techniques and materials, but the designs were Inca. The great storage facilities and

emphasis on temporary housing underscore that they were designed to support travelling armies and part-time occupants.

Morris concludes by noting that none of the centers on the main highway had a significant cemetery, indicating that even the Inca personnel felt that they were present only temporarily. The provincial system met several needs, including administration, ceremony, production and storage facilities, and military requirements. The grandest centers lay along the main mountain highway between Lake Titicaca and Quito. North of Cuzco were Vilcaswaman, Hatun Xauxa, Pumpu, Huanuco Pampa, Cajamarca, Tumipampa, and Quito. South of Cuzco lay Hatunqolla, Chucuito, Chuquiabo (La Paz), Paria, and Charkas.

### **The Architecture of Power**

Inca centers were designed around what Gasparini and Margolies (1980) call the "architecture of power-buildings and large plazas intended to reinforce the image of the empire's might. The Incas did not dedicate buildings to purely administrative functions, such as accounting or holding audiences. Most centers reflect an intense preoccupation with ceremony and sacred space. At least six sites were called "New Cuzcos, built in the conceptual, if not actual, image of the capital such are Huanuco Pampa, Inkawasi, and Hatunqolla in Peru; Quito and Tumipampa in Ecuador; and Charkas in Bolivia. The two main kinds of architecture were enclosed compounds (*kancha*) used for residence and craft production and enormous one-room, elongated halls (*kallanka*) used for hospitality and temporary housing. Other important architectural forms were religious structures, such as the temples to the Sun, and sequestered sectors devoted to the Chosen Women (*aqllakuna*).

### **The Road System**

The Inca royal highway (*qhapaq nan*) unified the empire physically and conceptually. The network linked together about 40,000 km of roadway, based on a highland and coastal route, joined by transverse routes that crossed from the coast to the

highlands and into the eastern lowlands. Much of the highway was based on traditional routes, including some that had been built centuries earlier.

The roads provided conduits for rapid communication, personnel movement, and logistical support, while stamping imperial domination on the countryside. Soldiers, porters, and llama caravans were prime users, as were nobles and other individuals on official duty. Other subjects were allowed to walk along the roads only with permission. Relay messengers (*chaski*) were stationed at intervals of about 6 to 9 km to carry everything from news from the battlefield to fresh marine fish for the ruler in the sierra.

The highway has a reputation for straightness, but straight stretches rarely run for more than a few kilometres and the roads are filled with minor adjustments to the terrain. The grandest highways were neatly paved with cobbles or flagstones, but the majority of the roads employed dirt, sand, grass, and other natural surfaces. The finest paved roads were concentrated between the altiplano and Ecuador and along the routes that linked that stretch of highway and the coast.

### **Inca Economy**

The standard view of the Inca economy is that all productive resources—farmlands and herds—were divided into three parts: state, Sun, and community. The influential mestizo author, the Inca Garcilaso, asserted that no one went hungry, because the state and community took care of everyone. Those views contain elements of truth, but they also simplify things and gloss over the difficulties of making a living in the complex Andean environment and the wide variety of economic systems that were drawn into Tawantinsuyu. The Inca economic system did not have an efficient transportation system for bulk goods and did not have a major population center that sucked up the produce of the empire, so the state and Sun provisioning system had to be replicated from each province to the next.

Although there were some kinds of special-purpose money and markets within their domain, the Incas relied primarily on a labour tax for the production of their agro-pastoral and craft products.

### **Foundations of the Inca Economy**

The Incas claimed all resources in the land and created an economy that was independent of the household and community economies, whose products were not taken. Lands and herds were set aside for the state and the state religion, while many communities retained many of their ancestral resources. Some provinces were converted wholesale into state or church domains, while others were barely touched. All wild and mined resources were ostensibly property of the Inca, but in practice many remained in the hands of local societies.

### **Labour Taxes**

The Incas underwrote their economy by requiring that all hale heads of household (*hatun runa*, 'big men) render rotating labour service, which took about two to three months a year. There were about thirty-seven to forty-two different kinds of duties that needed to be fulfilled, ranging from farming and herding to military service, guard duty, and portage to mining and making craft goods.

The rationale for the labour tax was that the Incas claimed all resources in the empire. People were provided with leadership and were given access to their traditional resources in return for their labour duty. Many people were exempt from the general tax, including lords whose households numbered 100 or more and entire ethnic groups that were given over to particular tasks, such as military duty, dancing, and litter-bearing.

### **Specialized Production**

Over time, the Incas came to rely on specialized colonies of farmers, herders, and artisans, resettled from their home communities to lands especially productive in particular kinds of goods. In this way, the Incas produced vast quantities of cloth,

pottery, and other craft products. A large number of individuals were separated from their home communities and converted to lifelong servants.

### **State and Agriculture**

Large state farms were founded in several locations, notably Cochabamba (Bolivia), Arica (Chile), and Arequipa and Abancay (Peru), where maize, cotton, coca, fruits, and other crops were grown for state use. Up to 14,000 workers were devoted to individual farms (Cochabamba). Farms for the Sun were also set up, but they were smaller than those of the state. The entire province of Chuquicache, on the north side of Lake Titicaca, may have been given over to the Sun. The Incas had an elaborate ceremonial sequence tied to the agricultural cycle. There is a standard sequence in which the plots were reportedly cultivated: the state, the Sun, and the community. That may have been more elite ideology than practice, however, since the ecology of the Andes requires that crops be put in according to the local conditions, not according to state edict.

### **Pastoralism**

The Incas initially requisitioned most of their llama and alpaca herds from existing flocks, drawing heavily from the peoples of the Titicaca basin. Overall, state herds may have numbered in the millions. Prime uses of the herds were for cloth, food, and provisioning and transportation for the military.

### **Storage**

A vast storage system, replicated in Cuzco and throughout the provinces, bridged the gap between production and use. The largest facilities had over 2,500 buildings that contained everything from food to military supplies to feathers for decorating cloth. Local lords kept the system operating for about twenty years after the fall of the empire, not only to supply the Spaniards, but also because they feared the Incas would return and call them to account.

## **Artisan and Artistry**

In a land with no writing and where people spoke scores of languages and subscribed to a wide variety of cultural values, there was no common symbolic system. Standardized Inca craft products thus served the dual role of imprinting the state's presence on the social landscape and transmitting messages of power and status. The Incas don't seem to have created many objects for display, but had a clear artistic style and aesthetic represented in their artisanry. The Incas relied on the existing craft and artistic capabilities of their subjects to meet their demands. Inca material objects and architecture were not personalized. There were few representations of humans, even in portable objects. The built environment seems to have provided spaces for ceremony and other activities rather than providing representations of human or godly accomplishments.

Weaving was probably the most highly valued craft, and textiles were the most important ceremonial and status objects. Metal objects were also highly significant, because gold was the sweat of the Sun and silver the tears of the Moon. Regrettably, most objects of precious metals were melted down in the Spanish furnaces. Cuzco-style polychrome pottery is the archaeological hallmark of Inca presence throughout the Andes, but it was probably not especially high in the Inca hierarchy of craft objects, except for its value in underwriting state-sponsored hospitality. Inca stone working was one of the great wonders of the empire, but it was probably mostly accomplished with simple stone and maybe bronze tools. Blocks were shaped in the quarry, dragged to their final positions, and finished in place.

## **Decline of the Inka Empire**

### **The Spanish Invasion**

The invasion of South America that brought down the Inca empire was an extension of the occupation of Mexico and Central America that began soon after C.E. 1500. Until 1527, a series of expeditions, some led by Francisco Pizarro and his partner Diego de Almagro, had worked their way into Colombia and

down the Ecuadorian coast to little profit. In 1528, Bartolomé Ruiz captured a treasure-laden raft along the Ecuadorian coast and a number of boys who would later serve as interpreters for the first encounters with the Incas. News of Ruiz's success helped Pizarro to obtain a royal concession as governor of the unknown land and to assemble a force of 168 men, most of whom had already spent ten to twenty years in the Americas. After founding a series of settlements along the coast, Pizarro led his troops to Cajamarca, an Inca provincial center in the Peruvian high-lands, where the Inca prince Atawallpa was resting after just winning an extended dynastic war with his half-brother Waskhar. On November 15, 1532, Pizarro's surprise attack captured Atawallpa in Cajamarca's main plaza, killing about 7,000 Andeans in the process, without the loss of a single Spaniard. After eight months of captivity, during which he made good on paying a ransom of about \$50 million for his release, Atawallpa was garrotted on July 26, 1533, ending independent Inca dominance.

#### On to Cuzco

Atawallpa's death triggered grief in half the empire and rejoicing in the remainder. The Spaniards immediately installed another brother, named Thupa Wallpa, as a puppet through whom to rule. They set south toward Cuzco, overcoming periodic armed resistance, but Thupa Wallpa died along the way, probably of a Spanish-introduced illness. Near Cuzco, yet another prince, named Manqo Inka, joined the Spaniards as co-ruler, and they entered the capital triumphantly on November 15, 1533. Manqo Inka was installed as ruler in December in a grand ceremony, attended by the mummies of his royal ancestors. By 1536, Manqo Inka had become disenchanted with Spanish co-rule, as the conquistadores pillaged the capital and treated the Incas badly. He raised a rebellion that included failed sieges of Cuzco (1536-37) and Ciudad de Los Reyes (i.e., Lima, 1536).

**The Spanish victories can be attributed to a coincidence of factors:**

- (a) the Incas' initial underestimation of the threat; (b) the

political split caused by the civil war, which created a ready-made host of Spanish supporters; (c) the technological superiority of the European arms, armour, and horses; (d) the greater Spanish flexibility and aggressiveness in military encounters; (e) the temporary nature of Andean military service by soldiers and herders drafted into service; and (f) the inability of the Incas to find a leader who could marshal a unified resistance.

### **The Neo-Inca State**

The early Inca defeats did not end their aspirations for self-rule, but simply sent the resistance into the eastern forests at Vilcabamba, where they maintained a neo-Inca state until 1572. Under successive Inca rulers Manqo Inka, Titu Cusi, and Thupa Amaru, the Incas mounted campaigns that harassed the Spaniards from the eastern slopes and punished their Andean collaborators through raids and massacres. Vilcabamba finally fell in 1572 to an expedition mounted by Viceroy Toledo, who executed the last Inca ruler, Thupa Amaru, in Cuzco, despite appeals on the captive's behalf by many Spaniards. On September 24, 1572, the last of the Inca kings was marched into the plaza of his ancestors' majesty and beheaded, bringing an end to the lineage that had descended from the Sun to rule the Earth.

### **Spanish Rule**

Over the first two decades of Spanish rule, the Andes were driven by civil wars among the conquistadores, which resulted in the murders of both Francisco Pizarro and his estranged partner, Diego de Almagro. Major reformatations were imposed by Viceroy Francisco de Toledo in 1570-72, which included moving vast numbers of Andean peoples from their traditional communities to new settlements (*reducciones*) near points of Spanish control. The Spanish civil wars, forced labour, and pestilence wrought devastation on the Andean populace, reducing it by about 50 percent in many places within about forty years of the invasion; in some coastal valleys, the population ultimately fell to as little as 5 percent of its 1532 size.

The Incas and other Andean peoples raised a series of

rebellions throughout colonial rule, including a clandestine movement called the *Taki Onqoy* or "Dancing Sickness. As memory of the Incas as living, oppressive rulers began to fade from the popular consciousness, another image of late prehistory as a glorious epoch began to coalesce among Andean peoples, not just the Incas themselves. Over the centuries, the myth of *Inkarrí* took form. He was a syncretic figure who blended the Inca with the **rey** (Spanish king), a man who would return to the Andes to free the native peoples from the bondage into which the Spanish conquest had cast them.

### **The Inca Legacy**

The legacy of *Tawantinsuyu* continues to shape the people and cultures of western South America, especially in the Peruvian highlands where many communities still follow traditional ways of life. Most importantly, life is still defined by links among close kin and an ethic of mutual support. The relationship of the people to the land and sky still retains a vibrancy that is expressed in the knowledge, beliefs, and cycles of ceremonies practiced by many communities.

The Incas still retain enormous potency in the self-image of the Peruvian nation. For a time in the 1980s, the national currency was called the inti, named after the Sun god of the Incas, and the currency of recent times is still named the sol, that is, the Spanish word for the Sun. There is no more compelling reminder of the cultural weight of the Incas in modern society than the protests surrounding the presidential election in Peru in 2000. When a massive rally was staged in Lima to protest the political process, it was called "The March of the Four Parts, that is, "The March of the Inca Empire.

### **Glossary**

1. Ahkin: The high priest and the teacher in Maya society called Ahkin.
2. Atanzahab: Village matchmaker.
3. Batabob: A set of officials who were known as ahau or

more commonly batabob.

4. Chac: The rain god, who had to be propitiated (appeased) before the agricultural operations.

5. Chen: In the ninth month, Chen or Moon in Mayan calendar.

6. Chilan: The scribe-priest called as chilan.

7. Corvee: Forced labour

8. Glyphs: Ancient Script of the Maya.

9. Haab: A Maya calendar year of 18 Months.

10. halachuinic: a Mayan word that means "true man's" spiritual and temporal authority of their city-states

11. Itzamna: The Creator God, Maya believed that this god created the world.

12. Katun: A period of 7200 days or 20 years in Maya calendar.

13. Nacom: A war captain in ancient Maya.

14. tamale: A Spanish word means a little breads.

15. tortillas: A Spanish word meaning "little breads"

16. tzolkin: A sacred calendar of 260 days

17. Uayeb: The empty or unlucky days, terminal period in Maya calendar.

18. Uinals: The Maya Month.

19. Yax : Venus

20. Aqllakuna: Chosen Women.

21. Chankas: The resolution.

22. Chinchaysuyu: The northwest and most prestigious part, which took most of highland Peru and Ecuador and the coast.

23. Cuntisuyu: The smallest part to the southwest, which took in the area from Cuzco to the south Peruvian coast.

24. Inti-Illapa: The thunder or weather god of Inca.

25. Kallanka: Enormous one-room, elongated halls used for hospitality and temporary housing.

26. Khipu: A kind of knot-record called a khipu.
27. Killke: The pre-imperial Inca era.
28. Kollasuyu: The southeast and largest part, which took in south-eastern Peru, highland Bolivia, the northern half of Chile, and part of northwest Argentina.
29. Kuraka: A hereditary local lord.
30. Mamacocha: Mother of the Lakes and Sea.
31. Mamakuna: Adult women's religious order in Inca society.
32. Pacariqtambo: Origin cave called the Inn of Dawn among the Inca.
33. Panaqa: Royal kin groups.
34. Puna: High grassland.
35. Qollqa: Storehouses.
36. Quechua: Language of the Incas.
37. Saqsawaman: Fortified complex in Inca settlements.
38. Tawantinsuyu: A single Inca state

\*\*\*\*\*

**For further reading.**

**MODULE I**

Adolf Erman – Life in Ancient Egypt

Alexander Moret – The Nile and Egyptian Civilisation,  
New York.

Alfred Cyril – The Egyptians, New York

Jarries breasted.H – The History of Egypt, New York ———

————— Ancient Records of Egypt

Leonard Collrell – Life under the pharaohs, New York

Mason. W.A. - History of the art of writing.

Maspero. G.C – Art in Ancient Egypt

Petric. W.M.F – Social Life in Ancient Egypt, Boston

Shorter. A.W – Introduction to Egyptian Religion ———

————— Everyday life in Ancient Egypt

Smith GE - Ancient Egyptias and the origin of civilisation.

**MODULE II**

A.F. Wright – Buddhism in chinese history

H.G. Creel – The Birth of Chaina —————

Confucius, the man and the myth.

K.A. Wittfogel –History of Chinese Society

Latourette –The Chinese, their history and culture ———

————— A short history of the far east.

O. Siren – A history of early chinese art

W.H.Mallory Chaina, land of famine

W.M. Mc Govern –The Early Empires of Central Asia

Y.L.Fung – history of chinese philosophy

**MODULE III**

A.R. Burn – Pericles and Athence

Abbot Evelyn- Pericles and the Golden age of Athence.

Bamb Gascoigne – 2003 -The Dynastics of China

C P Fitzgerald -2006- Ancient China  
Dale Anderson – 2005-Ancient China  
Earest Barker–Greek Political Philosophy  
Elaine Landan – 2005-Exploring Ancient china  
Fowler H.N –A history of ancient Greek Literature  
Glorer. T.R – Democracy in the ancient world  
H.Mitchell – Sparta  
Latourette - A short history of the forcast  
Livingston R.W (ed) – The Legacy of Greece  
Mahaffy.J.P – Social life in Greece from homer to  
menandev  
Gresy Wolf, 2005-Ancient African Civilisations (ed)  
T.GTucker – Life in ancient Athence.  
Trieuer. A.A – History of Ancient Civilisations

#### **MODULE IV**

Leonard Everttee Fisher – 2009- Gods and Goddess of  
Ancient mayas

Sunita Apte – 2010- The Aztic Empire  
Sheila Wybormy – 2004-The Coreal civilisations  
Sandra Newmen -2010- The Inca Empire  
Source &Reference

1. Ancient History Encyclopaedia, <https://www.ancient.eu/>
2. Encyclopaedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/>
3. William J Duiker, Jackson J Spielvogel, *World History to 1500*, Wadsworth Thomson Learning, USA, 2001.
4. [https://ddceutkal.ac.in/Download\\_Course\\_Materials.asp](https://ddceutkal.ac.in/Download_Course_Materials.asp)
5. <https://www.timeanddate.com/calendar/mayan.html>