

**COMPETENCY 1.1 ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS**

**Skill 1.1a Describe what is known of the early physical and cultural development of humankind from the Paleolithic era to the agricultural revolution, explaining how the methods of archaeology and anthropology contribute to the understanding of prehistory.**

**ANTHROPOLOGY** is the scientific study of human culture and humanity, the relationship between man and his culture. Anthropologists study different groups, how they relate to other cultures, and patterns of behavior, similarities and differences. Their research is two fold: **cross-cultural** and **comparative**. The major method of study is referred to as **participant observation**. The anthropologist studies and learns about the people being studied by living among them and participating with them in their daily lives. Other methods may be used but this is the most characteristic method used.

**ARCHAEOLOGY** is the scientific study of past human cultures by studying the remains they left behind--objects such as pottery, bones, buildings, tools, and artwork. Archaeologists locate and examine any evidence to help explain the way people lived in past times. They use special equipment and techniques to gather the evidence and make special effort to keep detailed records of their findings because a lot of their research results in destruction of the remains being studied.

The first step is to locate an archaeological site using various methods. Next, surveying the site takes place starting with a detailed description of the site with notes, maps, photographs, and collecting artifacts from the surface. Excavating follows either by digging for buried objects or by diving and working in submersible decompression chambers, when underwater. They record and preserve the evidence for eventual classification, dating, and evaluating their find.

Sources of knowledge about early humans:

- Fossils derived from burial pits
- Occasional bones found in rock deposits
- Archaeological excavations of tools, pottery, wall paintings
- Study of living primitives

Although written records go back about 4,500 years, scientists have pieced together evidence that documents the existence of humans (or “man-apes) as much as 600,000 years ago. The first manlike creatures arose in many parts of the world about one million years ago. By slow stages, these creatures developed into types of men who discovered fire and tools. These creatures had human-sized brains and inbred to produce ***Cro-Magnon*** type creatures (25,000 years ago), from which ***homo sapiens*** descended.

These primitive humans demonstrated wide behavior patterns and great adaptability. Little is known in the way of details, including when language began to develop. They are believed to have lived in small communities that developed on the basis of the need to hunt. Cave paintings reveal a belief that magic pictures of animals could conjure up real ones. Some figurines seem to indicate belief in fertility gods and goddesses. Belief in some form of afterlife is indicated by burial formalities.

Fire and weapons were in use quite early. Archaeological evidence points to the use of hatchets, awls, needles and cutting tools in the Old Stone Age, or **Paleolithic** (one million years ago). Artifacts of the New Stone Age, or **Neolithic**, (6,000-8,000 BCE) include indications of polished tools, domesticated animals, the wheel, and some agriculture. Pottery and textiles have been found dating to the end of the New Stone Age. The discovery of metals in the **Bronze Age** (3,000 BCE) is concurrent with the establishment of what are believed to be the first civilizations. The Iron Age, followed quickly on the heels of the Bronze Age.

By 4,000 BCE, humans lived in villages, engaged in animal husbandry, grew grains, sailed in boats, and practiced religions. Civilizations arose earliest in the fertile river valleys of the Nile, Mesopotamia, the Indus, and the Hwang Ho Valleys.

Prerequisites of civilization:

- Use of metals rather than stone for tools and weapons
- A system of writing
- A calendar
- A territorial state organized on the basis of residence in the geographic region

**Skill 1.1b Describe and analyze the impact of human interaction with the physical environment on the development of the ancient cultures of the Fertile Crescent.**

The earliest known civilizations developed in the **Tigris-Euphrates Valley** of Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) and the **Nile Valley** of Egypt between 4000 BCE and 3000 BCE. Because these civilizations arose in river valleys, they are known as **fluvial civilizations**. Geography and the physical environment played a critical role in the rise and the survival of both of these civilizations.

First, the rivers provided a source of water that would sustain life, including animal life. The hunters of the society had ample access to a variety of animals, initially for hunting to provide food, as well as hides, bones, antlers, etc. from which clothing, tools and art could be made. Second, the proximity to water provided a natural attraction to animals which could be herded and husbanded to provide a stable supply of food and animal products. Third, the rivers of these regions overflowed their banks each year, leaving behind a deposit of very rich soil. As these early people began to experiment with growing crops rather than gathering food, the soil was fertile and water was readily available to produce sizeable harvests. In time, the people developed systems of irrigation that channeled water to the crops without significant human effort on a continuing basis.

The **Fertile Crescent** was bounded on the West by the Mediterranean Sea, on the South by the Arabian Desert, on the north by the Taurus Mountains, and on the east by the Zagros Mountains.

The designation “Fertile Crescent” was applied by the famous historian and Egyptologist James Breasted to the part of the Near East that extended from the Persian Gulf to the Sinai Peninsula. It included Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine. This region was marked by almost constant invasions and migrations. These invaders and migrants seemed to have destroyed the culture and civilization that existed. Upon taking a longer view, however, it becomes apparent that they actually absorbed and supplemented the civilization that existed before their arrival. This is one of the reasons the civilization developed so quickly and created so such an advanced culture.

**Skill 1.1c Describe and analyze the religious, social, economic, and political structures of the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt, Kush, Greece, India, China, Rome, and pre-Columbian America, and describe and analyze their intellectual, ethical, scientific, and artistic accomplishments and values.**

Ancient civilizations were those cultures that developed to a greater degree and were considered advanced. There are a number of ancient civilizations worth examining, each with its own major accomplishments.

The ancient civilization of the **Sumerians** invented the wheel, developed irrigation through use of canals, dikes, and devices for raising water, devised the system of cuneiform writing, learned to divide time, and built large boats for trade. The **Babylonians** devised the famous **Code of Hammurabi**, the first written code of laws, which would later form the basis for our modern laws. **Egypt** made numerous significant contributions including construction of the great pyramids, development of hieroglyphic writing, preservation of bodies after death, making paper from papyrus, the invention of the method of counting in groups of 1-10 (the decimal system), completion of a solar calendar; and laying the foundation for science and astronomy.

The civilizations of the Sumerians, Amorites, Hittites, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Persians controlled various areas of the land we call Mesopotamia. The culture of **Mesopotamia** was definitely autocratic in nature. The various civilizations that criss-crossed the Fertile Crescent were very much top-heavy, with a single ruler at the head of the government and, in many cases, also the head of the religion. The people followed his strict instructions or faced the consequences, which were usually dire and often life-threatening.

For example, each Sumerian city-state (and there were a few) had its own god, with the city-state's leader doubling as the high priest of worship of that local god. Subsequent cultures had a handful of gods as well, although they had more of a national worship structure, with high priests centered in the capital city as advisers to the tyrant. With few exceptions, tyrants and military leaders controlled the vast majority of aspects of society, including trade, religions, and the laws.

Trade was vastly important to these civilizations since they had access to some but not all of the things that they needed to survive. Some trading agreements led to occupation, as was the case with the Sumerians, who didn't bother to build walls to protect their wealth of knowledge. Egypt and the Phoenician cities were powerful and regular trading partners of the various Mesopotamian cultures.

Legacies handed down to us from these people include:

- The first use of writing, the wheel, and banking (Sumeria);
- The first written set of laws (Code of Hammurabi);
- The first epic story (*Gilgamesh*);
- The first library dedicated to preserving knowledge (instituted by the Assyrian leader Ashurbanipal);
- The Hanging Gardens of Babylon (built by the Chaldean Nebuchadnezzar)

The earliest historical record of **Kush** is in Egyptian sources. They describe a region upstream from the first cataract of the Nile as “wretched.” This civilization was characterized by a settled way of life in fortified mud-brick villages. They subsisted on hunting and fishing, herding cattle, and gathering grain. Skeletal remains suggest that the people were a blend of Negroid and Mediterranean peoples. This civilization appears to be the second-oldest in Africa (after Egypt). Either the people were Egyptian or heavily influenced by Egyptians at a very early period in the development of the society. They appear to have spoken Nilo-Saharan languages. The area in which they lived is called Nubia. The capital city was Kerma, a major trading center between the northern and southern parts of Africa.

During the period of Egypt’s **Old Kingdom** (ca. 2700-2180 BCE), this civilization was essentially a diffused version of Egyptian culture and religion. When Egypt came under the domination of the Hyksos, Kush reached its greatest power and cultural energy (1700-1500 BCE). When the Hyksos were eventually expelled from Egypt, the New Kingdom brought Kush back under Egyptian colonial control. The collapse of the **New Kingdom** in Egypt (ca. 1000 BCE), provided the second opportunity for Kush to develop independently of Egyptian control and to conquer all of the Nubian region. The capital was then moved to Napata.

For the most part, the Kushites apparently considered themselves Egyptian and inheritors of the pharaonic tradition. Their society was organized on the Egyptian model, adopting Egyptian royal titles, etc. Even their art and architecture was based on Egyptian models. But their pyramids were smaller and steeper. In what has been called “**a magnificent irony of history**” the Kushites conquered Egypt in the eighth century, creating the twenty-fifth dynasty. The dynasty ended in the seventh century when Egypt was defeated by the Assyrians.

In government, the king ruled through a law of custom that was interpreted by priests. The king was elected from the royal family. Descent was determined through the mother’s line (as in Egypt). But in an unparalleled innovation, the Kushites were ruled by a series of **female monarchs**. The Kushite religion was polytheistic, including all of the primary Egyptian gods. There were, however, regional gods which were the principal gods in their regions. Derived from other African cultures, there was also a lion warrior god. This civilization was vital

through the last half of the first millennium BC, but it suffered about 300 years of gradual decline until it was eventually conquered by the Nuba people.

The **Phoenicians** were sea traders well known for their manufacturing skills in glass and metals and the development of their famous purple dye. They became so very proficient in the skill of navigation that they were able to sail by the stars at night. Further, they devised an alphabet using symbols to represent single sounds, which was an improved extension of the Egyptian principle and writing system. The ancient **Assyrians** were warlike and aggressive due to a highly organized military and used horse drawn chariots.

The **Hebrews**, also known as the ancient Israelites instituted "monotheism," which is the worship of one God, Yahweh, and combined the 66 books of the Hebrew and Christian Greek scriptures into the Bible we have today. The ancient **Persians** developed an alphabet; contributed the religions and philosophies of **Zoroastrianism**, **Mithraism**, and **Gnosticism**; and allowed conquered peoples to retain their own customs, laws, and religions.

The **Minoans** had a system of writing using symbols to represent syllables in words. They built palaces with multiple levels containing many rooms, water and sewage systems with flush toilets, bathtubs, hot and cold running water, and bright paintings on the walls. The **Mycenaeans** changed the Minoan writing system to aid their own language and used symbols to represent syllables.

The classical civilization of **Greece** was based on the foundations already laid by such ancient groups as the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Minoans, and Mycenaeans. The modern **Olympic Games** are a revival of an ancient Greek tradition and many of the events are recreations of original contests. Greek mythology, centered around a pantheon of gods and the mortals they interact with, has been the source of inspiration for literature into the present day. Among the more important contributions of Greece were the Greek alphabet derived from the Phoenician letters which formed the basis for the Roman alphabet and our present-day alphabet. Extensive trading and colonization resulted in the spread of the Greek civilization.

Other important areas that the Greeks are credited with influencing include drama, epic and lyric poetry, fables, myths centered on the many gods and goddesses, science, astronomy, medicine, mathematics, philosophy, art, architecture, and recording historical events. The works of the Greek epic poet **Homer** are considered the earliest in western literature, and are still read and taught today. The tradition of the theater was born in Greece, with the plays of **Aristophanes** and others. In the field of mathematics, **Pythagoras** and **Euclid** laid the foundation of geometry and Archimedes calculated the value of pi. **Herodotus** and **Thucydides** were the first to apply research and interpretation to written history. In the arts, Greek sensibilities were held as perfect forms to which others might strive. In sculpture, the Greeks achieved an idealistic aesthetic that had not been perfected before that time.

The conquests of **Alexander the Great** spread Greek ideas to the areas he conquered and brought to the Greek world many ideas from Asia. Above all, the value of ideas, wisdom, curiosity, and the desire to learn as much about the world as possible was a major objective of the conquests.

The ancient civilization of **Rome** lasted approximately 1,000 years including the periods of Republic and Empire, although its lasting influence on Europe and its history was for a much longer period. There was a very sharp contrast between the curious, imaginative, inquisitive Greeks and the practical, simple, down-to-earth, no-nonsense Romans, who spread and preserved the ideas of ancient Greece and other culture groups. The contributions and accomplishments of the Romans are numerous but their greatest included language, engineering, building, law, government, roads, trade, and the "**Pax Romana**." Pax Romana was the long period of peace enabling free travel and trade, spreading people, cultures, goods, and ideas all over a vast area of the known world.

A most interesting and significant characteristic of the Greek, Hellenic, and Roman civilizations was "**secularism**" where emphasis shifted away from religion to the state. Men were not absorbed in or dominated by religion as had been the case in Egypt and the nations located in Mesopotamia. Religion and its leaders did not dominate the state and its authority was greatly diminished.

In **India**, Hinduism was a continuing influence along with the rise of Buddhism. Industry and commerce developed along with extensive trading with the Near East. Indian goods found their way to western ports through trade with the ancient Mediterranean civilizations, including Rome. The resulting cultural exchange was good for both sides of the equation. Outstanding advances in the fields of science and medicine were made along with being the first to be active in navigation and maritime enterprises during this time. The caste system was developed, the principle of zero in mathematics was discovered, and the major religion of Hinduism was begun.

**China** is considered by some historians to be the oldest, uninterrupted civilization in the world and was in existence around the same time as the ancient civilizations founded in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Indus Valley. The Chinese studied nature and weather; stressed the importance of education, family, and a strong central government; followed the religions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism; and invented such things as gunpowder, paper, printing, and the magnetic compass.

**China** began building the **Great Wall**, practiced crop rotation and terrace farming, increased the importance of the silk industry, and developed caravan routes across Central Asia for extensive trade. Also, they increased proficiency in rice cultivation and developed a written language based on drawings or pictographs (there is no alphabet symbolizing sounds, as each word or character had a form different from all others). Chinese people became very proficient at producing beautiful artworks and exporting them, along with silk, to the rest of the world along the **Silk Road**. China was also the birthplace of many of the world's most familiar inventions, including paper, printing, paper money, and gunpowder.

The civilization in **Japan** appeared during this time having borrowed much of their culture from China. It was the last of the classical civilizations to develop. Although they used, accepted, and copied Chinese art, law, architecture, dress, and writing, the Japanese refined these into their own unique way of life, including incorporating the religion of Buddhism into their culture.

The civilizations in **Africa** south of the Sahara were developing the refining and use of iron, especially for farm implements and later for weapons. Trading was overland using camels and at important seaports. The Arab influence was extremely important, as was their later contact with Indians, Christian Nubians, and Persians. In fact, their trading activities were probably the most important factor in the spread of and assimilation of different ideas and stimulation of cultural growth.

The people who lived in the Americas before Columbus arrived had a thriving, connected society. The civilizations in North America tended to spread out more and were in occasional conflict but maintained their sovereignty for the most part. The South American civilizations, however, tended to migrate into empires, with the strongest city or tribe assuming control of the lives and resources of the rest of the nearby peoples.

**Native Americans** in North America had a spiritual and personal relationship with the various Spirits of Nature and a keen appreciation of the ways of woodworking and metalworking. Various tribes dotted the landscape of what is now the United States. They struggled against one another for control of resources such as food and water but had no concept of ownership of land, since they believed that they were living on the land with the permission of the Spirits. The North Americans mastered the art of growing many crops and, to their credit, were willing to share that knowledge with the various Europeans who eventually showed up. Artwork made of hides, beads, and jewels was popular at this time.

The most well-known empires of South America were the Aztec, Inca, and Maya. Each of these empires had a central capital in which lived the emperor, who controlled all aspects of the lives of his subjects. The empires traded with other peoples; and if the relations soured, the results were usually absorption of the trading partners into the empire. These empires, especially the **Aztecs**, had access to large numbers of metals and jewels, and they created weapons and artwork that continues to impress historians today. The **Inca Empire** stretched across a vast period of territory down the western coast of South America and was connected by a series of roads. A series of messengers ran along these roads, carrying news and instructions from the capital, Cusco. The Incas, however, did not have the wheel. The **Mayas** are most well-known for their famous pyramids and calendars, as well as their language, which still stumps archaeologists.

**Skill 1.1d Describe and analyze the foundations of western political and philosophical thought in ancient Greek, Roman, and Judeo-Christian traditions.**

Ancient Greece is often called the "**Cradle of Western Civilization**" because of the enormous influence it had not only on the time in which it flourished, but on western culture ever since. Early Greek institutions have survived for thousands of years, and have influenced the entire world.

The **Athenian form of democracy**, with each citizen having an equal vote in his own government, is a philosophy upon which all modern democracies are based. In the United States, the Greek tradition of democracy was honored in the choice of **Greek architectural** styles for the nation's government buildings. In philosophy, **Aristotle** developed an approach to learning that emphasized observation and thought, and **Socrates** and **Plato** contemplated the nature of being and the origins and ideals of government and political relations.

Greece was responsible for the rise of independent, strong city-states. Note the complete contrast between independent, freedom-loving Athens with its practice of pure democracy i.e. direct, personal, active participation in government by qualified citizens and the rigid, totalitarian, militaristic Sparta.

The Greek civilization served as an inspiration to the **Roman Republic**, which followed in its tradition of democracy, and was directly influenced by its achievements in art and science. Later, during the Renaissance, European scholars and artists would rediscover ancient Greece's love for dedicated inquiry and artistic expression, leading to a surge in scientific discoveries and advancements in the arts.

The ancient **Israelites** and **Christians** created a powerful legacy of political and philosophical traditions, much of which survives to this day. In law and religion, especially, we can draw a more or less straight line from then to now.

Israel was not the first ancient civilization to have a series of laws for its people to follow. However, thanks to the staggering popularity of the **Ten Commandments**, we think of the Israelites in this way. This simple set of laws, some of which are not laws at all but societal instructions, maintains to this day a central role in societies the world over. Such commandments as the ones that prohibit stealing and killing were revolutionary in their day because they applied to everyone, not just the disadvantaged. In many ancient cultures, the rich and powerful were above the law because they could buy their way out of trouble and because it wasn't always clear what the laws were. Echoing the Code of Hammurabi and preceding Rome's Twelve Tables, the Ten Commandments provided a written record of laws, so all knew what was prohibited.

The civilization of Israel is also known as the first to assume a worship of just one god, or **monotheism**. The Christian communities built on this tradition, and both faiths exist and are expanding today, especially in western countries. Rather than a series of gods, each of which was in charge of a different aspect of nature or society, the ancient Israelites and Christians believed in just one god, called Yahweh or God, depending on which religion you look at. This divine being was, these peoples believed, the "one, true god," lord over all. This worship of just one god had more of a personal nature to it, and the result was that the believers thought themselves able to talk (or, more properly, pray) directly to their god, whereas the peoples of Mesopotamia and Egypt thought the gods distant and unapproachable.

Modern western societies owe a tremendous debt to both the legal and religious aspects of these ancient societies.

**(See also Skill 1.1c)**

**Skill 1.1e Describe and analyze the foundations of Asian political and philosophical thought found in ancient Chinese and Indian traditions.**

Large elements of ancient times resonate today in both India and China, most prominently in the areas of philosophy and politics. **India** in ancient times had the shining light of Mohenjo-Daro, which was a planned community that had wide, straight streets and modern plumbing, among other comforts that we would consider "modern" innovations. The city-state, made so famous by the ancient Greeks, could be found in India as well, in the period after the Aryan invasion. The idea of a united India, which exists now, was realized very early on in the country's history, although the vast majority of rulers have been strong-handed and strong-willed emperors and kings.