ANCIENT RIVER VALLEY CIVILIZATIONS

The first civilizations appeared between the Tigris and the Euphrates River Valleys in Mesopotamia. The second was in the Nile River Valley in Egypt, then in the Indus Valley of India and the Shang River Valley of China. All are described as "Bronze Age Cultures": they had developed metals.

ANCIENT EGYPT

- Ancient Egyptian society developed around the Nile River, which was geographically different from the Tigris and Euphrates — it was a much more navigable and predictable river. The Nile flooded regularly but predictably, as opposed to the Tigris and Euphrates, which had more erratic schedules and more dangerous floods. However, the Nile's flooding season meant that crops had to be planted on an exact timetable. Egypt, unlike Mesopotamia, was also sitting in the middle of a desert, which made it much harder to attack. Egypt as a result was a much more peaceful society than ancient Mesopotamia.

- There were two distinct cultures at first — Lower Nile and Upper Nile. The extension of agriculture beyond the riverbed required a complicated system of irrigation ditches, which when completed resulted in the highest agricultural prosperity in the ancient world. The Nile River acted like a highway, and by 3100 BCE, the Upper and Lower Nile were one united kingdom. The span of Ancient Egyptian civilization is long: 3,000 years. Ancient Egyptian society is traditionally separated into three periods.

  - **Old Kingdom (2700-2200 BCE)**: Egyptian kings achieved complete control of their unified, prosperous, peaceful kingdom. They were seen as divinities. Rulers governed by using their families as administrators, and could place and remove officials at will. The peasants were carefully regulated and taxed heavily. All of the land belonged to the ruler; the people were his servants. Unlike in Mesopotamia, the kings had no need of law codes, since they were the source of all law and authority, and their authority was ultimately religious.

    - Religion was the dominant force in Egyptian life. Like the Mesopotamians, the Egyptians were polytheistic, and worshiped many gods. Egyptian gods took the forms of humans, animals, and natural forces. Eventually the sun god came to be dominant, but initially there was little order to the pantheon.

    - Egyptians developed writing not long after Sumerians, and apparently independently of them — the two forms don't seem to be related. Egyptian writing was called **hieroglyphics**. It was generally done with pen and ink on papyrus reeds, but most of the preserved writing was done on wall paintings and carvings.

  - **Middle Kingdom (2025-1786 BCE)**: The Old Kingdom collapsed about 2200 BC. After period of confusion ("The First Intermediate Period"), the Middle Kingdom was restored in about 2052 by rulers of Upper Egypt, centered in Thebes.

    - **Differences:**

      - The nobles and priestly classes had grown in power. Provincial Governorships ("nomes") became hereditary. Priests and nobles gained more power. Rulers of the nomes were never completely brought under control.

      - The Middle Period kings were no longer actually gods, but were seen more as representatives of the gods.
3. **New Kingdom (1575-1087 BCE):** From 1786-1575, the rise of the nobility led to a period of instability and collapse ("Second Intermediate Period"). Around 1700, a people called the **Hyskos** conquered Nile Delta. Around 1575, the Hyskos were driven out, beginning the period of the New Kingdom, or Empire.
   - Egyptians natives had learned military tools and tactics from the Hyskos — this resulted in a period of military might. Egyptian rulers built up the military and pushed back Egypt's borders. These were the first Egyptian kings to be referred to as **pharaohs** — it means "great house." The Egyptian Empire grew until it finally bumped up against the powerful Hittite empire of Asia Minor.
   - The New Kingdom of Egypt persisted until 1087 BC.

**CONTRAST IN CULTURES**

**Mesopotamia's history** was one long struggle between Indo-Europeans and Semitic peoples for control of the valley. Despite the parade of empires, civilization there remained basically the same. The civilization held strong property rights, and *cuneiform* writing was developed to record economic transactions.

**Egyptian life** in contrast to Mesopotamian life was imperial rather than urban, and had longer periods of unity. Like the Mesopotamians (with whom they traded), they had sophisticated architecture and artwork. Egyptian mathematics were highly advanced; from the Ancient Egyptians we get the 24-hour day. Their economy was much more heavily dominated by the king, who technically owned everything, as opposed to Mesopotamia, where a business class and private property existed. Egypt was unified in 3100 BCE; and not conquered until taken by the Persians in 525 BCE. In 2,500 years, there were only 3 empires, with relatively short intervening periods. Egyptian civilization was stable, conservative, and more optimistic than Mesopotamian civilization. Egyptian society was also religious to the core. Unlike in Mesopotamia, there was overwhelming state domination of all aspects of economic life.