

3

RIVER VALLEY CIVILIZATIONS

7000 B.C.E. – 750 B.C.E.

THE RISE OF CITIES AND STATES ALONG THE NILE AND INDUS

COMMENTARY

The third chapter is, in many respects, a continuation of the second. In “River Valley Civilizations,” Spodek briefly surveys “what we know” and “how we know it” regarding the civilizations of ancient Egypt and the Indus Valley, making explicit comparisons between the two and also with contemporaneous developments in Mesopotamia. Such comparisons are relevant for, while it has been noted that significant similarities exist among all early civilizations, each “created quite separate and distinct patterns of urbanization and political life” (p. 62). This is an especially important point, because of the ongoing debate among scholars concerning the relative balance between **invention** and **diffusion** in the evolution of early urban civilizations. In the case of Egyptian and **Harappan** civilizations, there exists considerable evidence that the two societies, which flanked Mesopotamia on the west and east, respectively, had continuous trade contact with the cities of Sumer and, in the case of Egypt, political and military contacts as well. So the channels for the diffusion of technology and ideas certainly were there. It should probably be stressed at this point that a certain amount of diffusion and cross-fertilization is critical to the development of any civilization and no society has developed in total isolation. Whatever the degree of borrowing, however, every civilization adapts and applies ideas, technologies and institutions to its own physical environment and cultural heritage.

Regarding Sumer, Egypt and the Indus Valley, Spodek is of the opinion that, at least in their earliest days, the three civilizations developed relatively independently of one another and he notes significant differences among them. Allowing for the problem that, for reasons explained in the chapter, we know much less about Harappan civilization than we do about the others, the text makes the following comparisons. First, while Sumerian city-states and their neighbors maintained a high degree of autonomy (and rivalry), Egyptian cities tended to exist in a much more cooperative relationship with one another and were unified under larger political state organizations at a very early date. The exact nature of the interrelationship of the many Indus Valley cities is not known, but two of them **Harappa** and **Mohenjo-Daro**, were quite large (about 40,000 inhabitants each) and very similar in structure and one or both of them could have served as a capital of some sort of larger unified state. Second, while the larger Harappan cities possessed certain structures and amenities of daily life (markets, baths, irrigation systems, schools, residences) equal or superior to those in Sumer or Egypt, they seem to have lacked the **monumental structures** (temples, tombs, statues, pyramids) of the latter. Scholars are divided on the significance of this void, but some have argued that, for better or worse, Indus Valley civilization may have been less stratified and characterized by a more equal distribution of wealth. Third, the extensive written records of Egypt generally portray a society very much at peace with itself and its gods; one which stressed *ma’at* (order and justice), conciliation, and harmony with the natural environment of the Nile Valley. In contrast, much of the literary evidence from Mesopotamia reveals tension and conflict between the inhabitants and their environment, their capricious deities and their equally powerful and arbitrary rulers. Finally, while the later history and causes of decline of Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations and their influences on their successors are understood fairly well by historians, the causes of the fall of Harappan society and its influence on later Indian civilization are subjects of intense debate.

The following chapter, entitled “A Polycentric World,” will extend the comparative study of primary innovative urban civilizations to areas outside the “Fertile Crescent” and southwest Asia: northern China, west Africa and the Americas.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

A. Introduction: the Rise of Cities and States along the Nile and Indus

1. Comparisons with Mesopotamian city-state
2. Comparisons between Egypt and the Indus Valley

B. Egypt: the “Gift of the Nile”

1. Earliest Egypt: How Do We Know?
 - a. Hieroglyphics and the Rosetta Stone
 - b. SPOTLIGHT: Writing: Inventing It, Deciphering It
 - c. Archaeological excavations
2. Earliest Egypt: What Do We Know?
 - a. Upper and Lower Egypt: Narmer
 - b. God-kings and *ma'at*
 - c. Ancient Egyptian dynasties
 - d. The cities
 - i. the *nomes*
 - ii. irrigation systems
 - iii. the debate over city-states in earliest Egypt
 - iv. purposes of the cities: political capitals, trade cities, burial sites
 - e. PROFILE: Akhenaten and His City, Akhetaten
 - f. FOCUS: The Legend of Isis, Osiris, and Horus
 - g. The state and its architecture: the Old Kingdom
 - i. the tomb of Djoser
 - ii. the pyramids and the Sphinx
 - h. From state to empire
 - i. the Middle Kingdom expands into Nubia
 - ii. invasions of the Hyksos and the fall of the Middle Kingdom
3. SOURCES
 - a. SOURCE: The Egyptian Book of the Dead and the “Negative Confession”
 - b. SOURCE: The Autobiography of Si-nuhe and the Glorification of Court and Capital

C. The Indus Valley Civilization and Its Mysteries

1. Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro
2. The Indus Valley: How Do We Know?
 - a. Archaeological excavations
 - b. Age and extent of the civilization
 - c. Harappan civilization and Mesopotamia
 - d. The lack of written records
3. The Indus Valley: What Do We Know?
 - a. Bureaucratic governments
 - b. The plan of the cities
 - c. Crafts and trade: cotton
 - d. Harappan civilization and the Aryans
4. Legacies of the Indus Valley on Indian civilization

IDENTIFICATION TERMS

For each term, students should be able to provide an identification or definition, an approximate date, a geographical location (if relevant) and, most important, a concise explanation of its significance in the context of the chapter. Terms that appear in the *Study Guide* are listed in **bold** font in the first column.

Aryans	Mesopotamia	<i>The Book of the Dead</i>
Narmer	Tigris-Euphrates Valley	Hyksos
Rosetta Stone	Giza	Nile River
<i>ma'at</i>	hieroglyphs	Djoser
<i>nomes</i>	Middle Kingdom	Great Pyramid of Khufu
Old Kingdom	New Kingdom	Sphinx
Mehrgarh	Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten)	Indus River
Isis	Akhetaten (Amarna)	Punjab
citadels	Osiris and Horus	Harappa
papyrus	Amon-re	Mohenjo-Daro

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After students have read and studied Chapter 3, they should be able to:

1. Demonstrate a basic understanding of the outlines of early Egyptian history and the relative chronological order of the unification of Egypt, the building of the pyramids and the decline of the Old Kingdom.
2. Understand the significance of different forms of urbanization and be able to compare the cities of ancient Egypt with those of Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley.
3. Make broad comparisons, based on the available evidence, between the three river valley civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Indus Valley; and to fit all three of them into the general model of “civilization” that was outlined in Chapter 2.
4. Demonstrate a familiarity with the basic forms of evidence for the study of early civilizations and the advantages and problems inherent in each type of source.
5. Understand the importance of the Rosetta Stone for the study of ancient Egypt and the significance of the lack of such a key to the writing of Harappan civilization for archaeologists studying the Indus Valley.
6. Understand the historical significance of the debate over the causes of the “decline and fall” of the Indus Valley civilization and its contributions to the subsequent development of India after the Aryan invasions.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LECTURE TOPICS

1. Discuss and compare the differences between the Tigris-Euphrates, Nile and Indus River systems and their respective impact on the development of Mesopotamia, Egyptian and Harappan civilizations.
2. Discuss the different forms urbanization assumed in the three river valley civilizations, citing archeological evidence and explaining the different viewpoints of historians and archaeologists regarding the origins, nature and purposes of cities in Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Indus Valley.
3. Summarize the major time periods of ancient Egyptian history, locating important historical events, figures and monumental structures in their proper period.
4. Explain and clarify the identity of the “Aryan” invaders of India and review the controversy regarding their contribution to subsequent Indian history, relative to that of the Indus Valley civilization.

TOPICS FOR ESSAYS OR CLASS DISCUSSIONS

1. Discuss the academic debate on the interaction between the Harappan, or Indus Valley civilization and the nomadic Aryan invaders. What did scholars previously think happened to the cities of the Indus Valley. Why? What is the

current opinion on the interchange between the two peoples and the “legacy of the Indus” civilization? What sort of evidence is it based upon?

2. Citing specific examples, compare the relationship between the growth and relative importance of individual cities and the development of the state in the three river valley civilizations surveyed thus far: Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Indus Valley.
3. How do archaeologists and geographers explain the establishment and growth of towns and cities along the Nile? Citing specific examples, explain the different primary purposes which seem to have been served by Egyptian cities.
4. Compared with the history of Sumer and later Mesopotamian civilizations, that of ancient Egypt is relatively peaceful, with very little evidence of internal strife and relatively few invasions from outside. What might have been the reasons for this? What evidence has been cited by some archaeologists in support of this view?
5. What can we infer about both daily life and concepts of the afterlife in ancient Egypt from the monumental tomb structures such as the Great Pyramid of Khufu at Giza or the *mastaba* of Djoser at Saqqara and their contents? What would have been required for the construction of such monuments? Why would they have been built?
6. How do the physical layout and the design of various buildings at Mohenjo-Daro compare with those at Egyptian sites? What have some archaeologists inferred about the nature of Indus Valley civilization from these differences?
7. **Group activity:** Construct a comparative chart presenting what you have learned about the geography, social structure, cities, religion, government, economic life and standard of living of ancient Sumer, Egypt and the Indus Valley using only the various primary sources (documents, photographs, diagrams) at your disposal in Chapters 2 and 3.
8. **Current events & issues:** Given modern communications and transportation technology and the consequent decentralization of populations and business, are cities as they have existed for the last 5000 years becoming obsolete? What are the implications of such a trend for human society?

TEXT RESOURCES (Spodek, 2nd ed.)

Timetables, charts and graphs:	Ancient Egypt	(p. 63)
	Gods of the Egyptians	(p. 73)
	The Indus Valley	(p. 78)
	Early Science and Technology (7000-1000 BCE)	(p. 82)
Large photographs or illustrations:	The Great Sphinx and Pyramid of Khefren, Giza	(p. 64)
	Figurine of bone and ivory, Nagada I period	(p. 69)
	Pyramids of King Djoser and Khufu	(p. 74)
	Limestone bust from Mohenjo-Daro	(p. 79)
	The Citadel of Mohenjo-Daro	(p. 83)
	Steatite seal of seated “yogi”	(p. 84)
Maps:	Land of the Nile	(p. 65)
	Cities of the Indus/Planned Cities	(p. 81)
SPOTLIGHT:	Writing: Inventing It, Deciphering It	(pp. 66-67)
PROFILE:	Akhenaten and His City Akhetaten	(p. 70)
FOCUS:	The legend of Isis, Osiris and Horus	(p. 72)
SOURCES:	<i>The Egyptian Book of the Dead</i> and the	(p. 75)

ADDITIONAL PRIMARY SOURCES (*Documents Set & www.prenhall.com/Spodek*)

- 3-1 A humble farmer pleads his own case: the workings of Ma’at
- 3-2 The prestige and privileges of education in ancient Egypt [from two New Kingdom papyri]
- 3-3 Advice on statecraft: Pharaoh Amenemhet to his son Senusert
- 3-4 The “heretic” pharaoh’s hymn to a fellow-god [Akhenaten’s “Great Hymn to Aten”]
- 3-5 Some common-sense advice from the scribe Any to his son [the “Instruction of Any”]
- 3-6 Tutankhamen overturns the Atenist reform
- 3-7 The most intense struggle; the soul’s triumph over death
- www Ptah-Hotep: the voice of certainty

AUDIO-VISUAL RESOURCES (videos, DVD’s and CD-ROM and web-sites)

Ancient Egypt: <http://www.memst.edu/egypt.html> [web-site]

Provides a guided historical tour of ancient Egypt, in color.

Egypt Uncovered: Discovery Channel. [five videos; 260 minutes, color]

Examines archaeological discoveries, controversies and mysteries pertaining to ancient Egypt’s origins; its relationship with the Nile; and its monumental tombs and temples.

Exploring Ancient World Cultures: <http://eawc.evansville.edu> [web-site]

The site includes information on a number of ancient cultures, including Mesopotamia, Egypt and India.

Great Builders of Egypt: A&E. [video; 100 minutes, color]

An Egyptologist-guided tour through the great monument sites: the Great Pyramid at Giza, the Temple of Karnak, Hatshepsut’s tomb at Thebes and others.

Great Pharaohs of Egypt: A&E. [four videos; 200 minutes, color]

Surveys the history of the greatest Egyptian rulers, from Narmer to Cleopatra; including Djoser, Akhenaten, Tutankhamen, Nefertiti, and Ramses II.

The Pyramids and the Cities of the Pharaohs, 1995. [video; 75 minutes, color]

Portrays Egypt’s awakening over 5,000 years ago.

Reeder’s Egypt Page: <http://www.sirius.com/~reeder/egypt.html> [web-site]

This site contains scholarly articles on the history and archaeology of ancient Egypt, plus links to other sites.