SAMPLE CHAPTER 11
Urban States
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Urban States

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11.4 THE URBAN STATE

IN MESOPOTAMIA, MESOAMERICA, AND CHINA, the emergence of the state and urban centers are closely linked. After reading this chapter, you should understand:

- The characteristics of the urban centers of the three civilizations studied.
- The nature of the social organizations of these three early states.
- The development of Mesopotamian cuneiform, Mayan hieroglyphs, and early Chinese writing.

Recording Maya glyphs.
The Epic of Gilgamesh is a poem recounting the exploits of Gilgamesh, king of the city Uruk, located in ancient Mesopotamia. Gilgamesh is a partly historical and partly mythical figure whose adventures carry him through a world of both gods and humans. The core of the tale is Gilgamesh’s search for the source of eternal life, triggered by his grief over the death of his companion Enkidu. Gilgamesh’s quest takes him to Utnapishtim, the survivor of the great flood, who gives him a plant that grants immortality. Gilgamesh then tragically loses this plant and is left to struggle with his own mortality. It is telling that in this story Gilgamesh, the king of a great city, is left to struggle with the inevitability of death. Gilgamesh is a human king. The epic of Gilgamesh is also the story of the friendship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Gilgamesh embodies the power of the city, while Enkidu is a wild man, a man living outside of civilization.

Did Uruk need Gilgamesh? Did Gilgamesh need Uruk? Or did both hero and city emerge as one? Many archaeologists argue that cities require the organization provided by state bureaucracy. In large population centers, roads need planning, laws need enforcement, and violence must be controlled. Some claim that state bureaucracy developed only in response to the organizational challenges of urban life.

In this chapter, we explore cases in which state bureaucracy emerged together with cities. We begin in
Gilgamesh’s homeland, Mesopotamia, which saw the emergence of the first state societies in the world. We then move to Mesoamerica, focusing on the Mayan civilization. In the last section, we briefly consider the archaeological evidence for state formation in China.

11.1 MESOPOTAMIA

Mesopotamia, the land between the two rivers, covers the region along the course of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The heartland of Mesopotamia is in southern Iraq, where the Tigris and Euphrates flow into the Arabian Gulf. However, Mesopotamia extends to the north into Syria and Turkey and to the east into Iran. Archaeologists working in Mesopotamia have recovered a rich and complex archaeological record, as well as documents that include the earliest written epics and legal systems in the world. The earliest stages of state formation appear to have been focused in southern Mesopotamia, also known as Sumer.

The Physical Setting

The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers flow through a geological depression formed where the Arabian Shield ploughs into and under the Asian Shield. This powerful geological process has pushed up the Zagros Mountain chain that runs along the eastern edge of the Tigris floodplain. As they flow through the area defined by the geological depression, the Tigris and Euphrates dump their load of waterborne silts on the valley floor.

There are three important consequences of the geological position of Mesopotamia. The first is that many early sites are deeply buried by the deposit of river silts. As a result, little is known about the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods of the Tigris and Euphrates River Valley. The second consequence is that there are no mineral resources in southern Mesopotamia. The only locally available building materials were the alluvial silts and the stone of local cliffs.
Materials are reeds from marshes and the ubiquitous mud. The third consequence of the geological situation of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers is that the soils of Mesopotamia are extremely fertile. This fertility is in sharp contrast to the desert regions along the western edge of the Euphrates River floodplain.

In southern Mesopotamia, crops can be grown only with irrigation, which draws water from the rivers out onto agricultural fields. Dry farming, which depends on rainfall, is possible just in areas with over 200 mm of rain per year. The 200-mm isohyet (a line on a map that connects areas of equal rainfall) defining the limit of the dry farming region runs through northern Iraq and Syria.

Many of the early cities of southern Mesopotamia today lie in what appears to be a desert wasteland. Archaeological surveys, along with aerial photographs, have shown that when these sites were occupied, they lay either within or at the edges of extensive marshlands. However, as the Euphrates River has shifted course, ancient cites have been left isolated far from the river channel. The degraded state of the modern landscape is also the result of the farming practices of the early cities, which caused salt to be concentrated in soils near the surface. As a result of this process of salination, crops can no longer be grown in the fields that once supported great cities.
The Fate of Iraq’s Antiquities

The devastation of the Iraq Museum in the days following the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq was a traumatic event. Pictures of looted storerooms and display cases provoked fears that the cultural heritage of Iraq had been irreparably damaged. The exact extent of the loss and the precise sequence of events is still being determined years after the event. It is likely that the repercussions of this event will shape the field of archaeology for decades to come.

Before trying to assess the implications of the events in Iraq, it is important to give some details of what happened to the Iraq Museum. Press stories have varied enormously and much remains unknown. However, Matthew Bogdanos, the U.S. Marine charged with investigating the events, has presented a useful time line and parameters of the looting. U.S. forces entered the area around the museum on Tuesday, April 8, 2003, three days after first reaching Baghdad. At that point, the museum became a battleground as Iraqi troops took up positions in it and the staff was forced to leave. With two exceptions, U.S. troops refrained from shelling the museum, and damage to the museum from military operations was minimal. The museum staff returned on April 12, and after that time no further looting took place. U.S. forces entered the museum on April 16. The looting appears to have taken place between April 8 and April 12. There were three separate lootings. In the public galleries, forty objects were stolen, and the looters were organized and careful in their choice of objects. In the aboveground storage rooms, there was extensive looting, apparently carried out by a disorganized mob. The number of objects stolen from these storage rooms is hard to calculate but is in the thousands. In the basement, a collection of small valuable objects, including thousands of cylinder seals, were stolen. This appears to have been an inside job, and the objects chosen were both valuable and easy to transport. Close to 10,000 objects were stolen from the basement storage.

Chronology

Most Paleolithic and Neolithic sites in southern Mesopotamia are inaccessible to archaeologists because they are deeply buried by the accumulation of river silts. The earliest well-represented period in southern Mesopotamia is the Ubaid period, 5000 B.C.–4000 B.C. The first urban sites appeared in the subsequent Uruk period, 4000 B.C.–3200 B.C. The Uruk period is followed by the Early Dynastic period, during which a series of city-states developed in southern Mesopotamia. The rulers of
The site of Uruk in southern Iraq is the oldest known city in the world. The city grew from the unification of two towns dating to the Ubaid period built along opposite banks of a channel of the Euphrates River. During the Uruk period, the city grew to cover an area of 2.5 square kilometers with an estimated population between 20,000 and 40,000 (Nissen 2002). Surveys in the area around Uruk show that the city was by far the largest site in a landscape densely settled with smaller towns and villages.

Excavations at Uruk have focused on the two massive temple precincts located in the center of the city, where a sequence of temple structures stretching back to the Ubaid period has been uncovered. The city of Uruk grew around this central temple precinct. Among the materials the temples were built of were limestone and bitumen, both of which had to have been imported from outside of southern Mesopotamia. Many of the temple structures were built on platforms, evidently the precursor of the stepped pyramid or ziggurat that is at the center of Mesopotamian temple precincts from later periods. The temples were often elaborately decorated. One method of decoration was the use of colored cones inserted into mud brick walls to form a mosaic.

Unfortunately, we know little about the organization of the city of Uruk outside of the temple area. From excavations at other sites, we know that houses were usually built around a central courtyard and were sometimes grouped together into large enclosures (Postgate 1994: 91). It is likely that they were the houses of extended families. Surprisingly, few palace structures have been found from early cities in southern Mesopotamia. Extensive surveys around Uruk have provided some information about the regional setting of this city. On the basis of these surveys, it appears that the growth of the urban center took place at the expense of rural villages. By the Early Dynastic period, there was a sharp drop-off in the number of village sites, suggesting that a migration occurred from rural villages to the urban center.

**Government**

Mesopotamian society revolved around three sources of authority: the temple, the palace, and the city council. The temple was a permanent installation at the heart of the city, and the deity to which the temple was dedicated was a basic element of the identity of the city. The temple compounds were quite large, and the temples owned land and fulfilled economic functions. Excavations of temple complexes have uncovered the remains of both workshops and storage rooms.
The relationship between the palace and the temple in Mesopotamia was complex and, for the Uruk and Early Dynastic periods, poorly understood. It is possible that during these periods, the chief priest of the temple was the ruler of the city. The duties of the king, or ensi, included maintenance of the temple and military leadership of the city. Kingship was not determined strictly by descent, and there is evidence that the king was selected by a city council. Unfortunately, little is known about the powers of this council.

During the Early Dynastic period, there were over thirty independent cities in southern Mesopotamia. Although the cities cooperated on military and economic ventures, there were also rivalries between cities, and not all rulers were equal.

The Code of Hammurabi, which dates to the period around 1800 B.C., is the most extensive of a series of early Mesopotamian legal documents. The laws set out in the code of Hammurabi cover a wide range of domains, including penalties for perjury, robbery, and murder; the regulations surrounding adoption, marriage, and the ownership of slaves; and more mundane issues, such as the cost of hiring an ox or an ass. From the Code of Hammurabi, it appears that the king had jurisdiction over the regulation of commercial activities, punishment for violent acts, and aspects of family life.

**Surplus and Specialization**

The growth of the cities of Mesopotamia was based on the production of agricultural surplus. This surplus depended on irrigation agriculture, which required the organization of large work crews to build and maintain canals. Already by the Uruk period, there were people who specialized in various aspects of craft production. One of the most interesting artifacts found on Uruk sites is also one of the most modest. Bevel-rim bowls are small, undecorated bowls made of a very coarse clay fabric (see Figure 11.1). Both complete and broken sherds of bevel-rim bowls are found in enormous quantities on Uruk-period sites. It is possible that these bowls were simply the “styrofoam cups” of the Uruk period, cheap and easy-to-manufacture containers that were rapidly discarded. However, archaeologists have puzzled about their function and particularly why the size of the bowls is very regular. Why would such simple vessels be consistently made the same size?

One proposal is that bevel-rim bowls were vessels in which grain rations were distributed to workers. The standardized vessel size would then reflect the standard ration for a day of work. If this proposal is correct, it implies that the rulers...
had tight control over the distribution of agricultural surplus to workers. Some archaeologists have pointed out that the shape of the bowls is not appropriate for carrying around a ration of grain: One is forced to imagine thousands of laborers carefully trying to avoid having any grain spill from their bowls as they carried their rations home. An alternative is that these vessels were used as molds for baking bread. If this is the case, then the bevel-rim bowls indicate that baking in the Uruk period was carried out by specialists who produced bread in very large quantities, perhaps to be paid out as a ration for work.

Inequality

Mesopotamian society included kings, priests, craft specialists, merchants, laborers, and slaves. There were clear disparities in wealth and privilege among the various members of society. It appears that clothing and hairstyle were often used to mark status. The king in the Uruk period is often shown wearing a flat hat and a netted skirt. Slaves are described as bearing a distinguishing mark known as an *apputum*, which might have been a particular hairstyle.

In the 1920s, Leonard Wooley excavated a cemetery at the site of Ur that provides a vivid picture of the wealth and power of the rulers of an Early Dynastic city.
In the Royal Tombs at Ur, dated to the Early Dynastic period, the dead were buried with a spectacular array of precious artifacts and sacrificial victims.

Reconstruction of a death pit at Ur just before the attendants and animals were killed.

The cemetery includes hundreds of burials, most of which are simple interments of individuals with a few pottery vessels. The chambers known as the Royal Tombs present a startling contrast. These tombs contain staggering deposits of wealth, including tools, jewelry, musical instruments, and vessels made from a wide range of metals (gold, silver, copper, and electrum) and precious stones (lapis lazuli, carnelian, steatite, and calcite). These materials were brought to Ur from considerable distances: Lapis lazuli comes from Afghanistan, carnelian from Pakistan. The Royal Tombs are associated with chambers Wooley called death pits that contained the skeletons of men and women together with the remains of oxen attached to carts. These people and animals appear to have been slaughtered as part of the burial ritual. Many of the skeletons are still adorned with lavish jewelry and ornaments; many clutch weapons in their hands. Among the most famous objects is the headdress of one of the main figures buried, which consists of leaves made of thinly hammered gold. Other impressive artifacts include a series of lyres inlaid with elaborate scenes and a sculpture of a ram peering out from behind some branches.

It is probable that the rich burial goods found in the Royal Tombs and the sacrificial victim were meant to accompany the deceased to the afterlife; perhaps the goods were used to provide offerings to the gods. The woman buried with an elaborate headdress appears to be a queen by the name of Puabi. Another tomb is thought to have been the burial chamber of a king.

The Royal Tombs illustrate the wealth concentrated in the hands of the king and his close family. This wealth included access to large quantities of precious materials imported from a wide geographical region outside of the areas directly controlled by the Mesopotamian state. How did the king come to be the focal point of such an extensive trade network? One possibility is that the king controlled the production of textiles in Mesopotamia and that the surplus textiles produced were traded for the precious material that the king used as the expression of his power.
The king not only controlled the flow of precious materials, but also was able to sponsor the highly skilled artisans who produced the spectacular objects found in the burials. The sacrificial victims point to another facet of the ruler’s power: the ability to control the life and death of his subjects. It is hard not to conclude from the Ur burials that Mesopotamian rulers had immense power. The riddle remains why so much wealth was buried with the dead. Such a squandering of resources seems at odds with the accumulation of power found in Mesopotamian kingship. Why sacrifice not only people, but also prestigious objects? One possibility is that the destruction of wealth fueled the continuing effort to accumulate wealth and that this effort was the key to the ruler’s power. The king’s power might have been based, not simply on a wealth of goods, but on the ability to maintain a system of trade, tribute, and specialized craft production that continuously created wealth.

Perhaps it is wrong to see the Royal Burials from only an economic perspective. If we look back to the Epic of Gilgamesh, we see that despite his power as the ruler of Uruk, Gilgamesh struggled with his own mortality. It seems likely that the elaborate rituals of the Ur Royal Burials tapped into the same desire for immortality.

The Development of Writing

The origins of some of the symbols used by Mesopotamian scribes have been traced to clay tokens found on Neolithic sites in the Zagros Mountains. The cuneiform writing system in Mesopotamia first developed during the Uruk period. Mesopotamian scribes wrote on clay tablets, using a stylus to impress the signs into the wet clay. The cuneiform writing system originated as a pictographic script in which each “picture” represented a term or concept. By the Early Dynastic, the...
Cylinder seals were one of the methods developed by Mesopotamian scribes to mark ownership.

Bullae are clay envelopes that enclose small tokens like those shown on the right. The surface of the bulla was marked with seals before the clay dried.
Uruk period, mirror the function of the bulla, but discard the need for the concrete tokens. If bullae are one level of abstraction from reality—the sealed tokens representing real objects—the earliest written documents take this abstraction one step further to replace the tokens with marks in clay. The development of syllabic script extended the economic functions that texts could fulfill still further. One of the most interesting types of documents from the Early Dynastic period is the kuduru texts that record transactions involving the exchange of land for goods such as bread, oil, beer, cloth, and silver. The kuduru make it clear that land was privately owned in Early Dynastic Mesopotamia and give insight into the relative values of commodities. The economy of early Mesopotamian cities included the wealth of the king and the temple, as well as private wealth. Written documents played an essential role in the operation of this complex system of ownership and exchange.

Over the course of over two thousand years, the use of the cuneiform writing system was expanded to include texts as varied as epics, histories, dictionaries, and mathematical treatises, as well as letters, treaties, and accounts.

**Warfare and Expansion**

From the wealth and power displayed in the Royal Tombs of Ur, one might assume that early Mesopotamian cities were highly militaristic societies. Archaeology and texts combine to suggest that, although warfare between cities was common, the extent of the violence was quite limited. Cities were walled and the texts often speak of wars between cities. Perhaps even more telling are cylinder seals from the Uruk period depicting bound prisoners. However, the tools of war were limited, and the wars described in the texts appear to be more a display of power than conflicts resulting in massive numbers of casualties. The main tools of war were axes, spears, arrows, and carts drawn by asses or oxen. The earliest mention of a standing army comes from the time of Sargon, when there is mention of an army of over 5,000 sol-
diers. In later periods, the power of the Mesopotamian military expanded significantly, allowing for far-ranging campaigns of conquest in foreign lands.

Given the apparently limited extent of military might during the Uruk and Early Dynastic periods, the discovery of Uruk colonies far from southern Iraq has come as a surprise. The most completely excavated Uruk colony is the site of **Habuba Kebira**, located on the upper reaches of the Euphrates River in northern Syria (see Figure 11.2) (Algaze 1993). Habuba Kebira was occupied only during the Uruk period, and there has been very little subsequent accumulation of sediments. As a result, archaeologists have been able to open up a large horizontal excavation, uncovering an almost complete plan of the settlement. The site of Habuba Kebira is a walled town of densely packed houses running for about half a kilometer along the banks of the Euphrates. All of the artifacts found on the site are made in the styles found in the Uruk heartland in southern Iraq. Bullae with Uruk seal impressions and a temple in classic Uruk style have also been found on the site. There is very little evidence of artifacts made in the styles of the surrounding local communities. Habuba Kebira and similar sites present a challenging enigma. They are clearly evidence of the expansion of people out from the Uruk heartland, but there is no evidence that the expansion was a military one. Some archaeologists have argued that Habuba Kebira was a trading post or a settlement built to protect trade routes for critical mineral resources coming from northern Syria and Turkey. However, it remains unclear whether the people coming from southern Iraq actually dominated and controlled these exchange routes or whether there was a more subtle relationship between the people coming from the southern cities and local groups.

Recent excavations at the Uruk-period site of Hamoukar in Syria provide some of the first evidence that the Uruk expansion involved violent conflict. The excavators have found evidence for the bombardment of the site by clay sling stones leading to the collapse of walls and an ensuing fire.

**Summing Up the Evidence**

The development of state societies in southern Mesopotamia is closely linked with the emergence of large urban centers. The Royal Tombs at Ur give a sense of the extensive power of the ruler of the early Mesopotamian cities. The rapid expansion of Uruk-period settlements into northern Mesopotamia provides an indication of the dynamism of these early cities. Much of the power of the cities and their rulers can be linked to economic factors, the organization of large-scale irrigation systems, and the control of surplus production of textiles. The development of the cuneiform writing system served the need of this economy to control and regulate trade and ownership. However, the growth of the Mesopotamian cities was not simply the product of economic forces. In fact, the core around which the city grew was not the palace, but the temple precinct. Still, in ancient Mesopotamia the boundary between the temple and the palace is difficult to draw. Ultimately, the power of the early
Mesopotamian state seems to flow from a blending of the power of the temple and the power of the palace.

11.2 THE MAYA

The modern Maya live in an area stretching from southern Mexico through Guatemala and Belize, as well as parts of Honduras and El Salvador. Beginning around 2,000 years ago, the Maya developed a state society with a complex writing system and large urban centers. Much of the rich history of the Maya was lost under Spanish rule, which brought with it devastating disease and the systematic imposition of European culture, including the burning of most Mayan books (Coe 1999). However, archaeology has made major strides in reconstructing the Mayan past. The decipherment of Mayan hieroglyphics has afforded a spectacular insight into the detailed history of the early Mayan cities. The study of modern Mayan oral traditions and cultural practices also plays a significant role in understanding the remains of the Mayan past.

The Mayan region is part of Mesoamerica, which covers the area from northern Mexico through Honduras. Mesoamerica is not a geographically defined region, but rather a region whose indigenous inhabitants share a number of cultural traits, including a complex calendar, a ball game played on a special court with a rubber ball, and an emphasis on bloodletting (Coe 1993).

Chronology

The Maya were not the first state society in Mesoamerica. The earliest evidence of emerging political complexity in Mesoamerica is found on Olmec sites along the Gulf Coast of Mexico (Benson et al. 1996). Between 1200 B.C. and 300 B.C., the
I am Fred Valdez, an archaeologist with a research focus on Mesoamerican/Mayan civilizations. My current status is professor of anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin. Between 1983 and 1991, Dr. R.E.W. Adams of the University of Texas at San Antonio was directing the Río Azul Project in northeastern Guatemala and invited me to participate. At the time, I was a graduate student and saw the project as a way to contribute to original research and expand my archaeological experiences.

The Río Azul project was located in an isolated area in Guatemala that required traveling a very long, rough road that passes the great sites of Tikal and Uaxactún. The project was studying the site in part because of extreme looting there in the early 1980s that exposed significant architecture and painted tombs of the Classic Maya.

During the first phase of the project, a large truncated “pyramid”—a pyramidal building that is flat topped—was mapped and numbered G-103. I was asked to test (conduct small excavations into) the building. In doing so during the 1986 season, I found what I thought were several well-preserved plaster-faced buildings. In the 1987 season, I expanded the research into larger excavations and found that there were not several small structures on the pyramidal platform, but rather one very large building measuring approximately 30 meters on each side. The style and construction of the building allowed for an interpretation that this monument dated to the Late Preclassic, about 200 B.C.—A.D. 200. This was a very exciting find!

The size of G-103 suggested that there might be an earlier building within it. In 1990 I placed an excavation unit behind the staircase, and at 3 meters deep we came upon a plastered surface that I believed to be the top of an earlier building. Our season ended, and I was able to persuade Dr. Adams that G-103 needed more work. He agreed, but made it clear that 1991 would be our last season at Río Azul (G-103). Towards the end of the season, with time running out, I decided to tunnel into G-103. By chance, and perhaps with a little luck, we came down a face of an interior structure. This earlier building was stuccoed and modeled with an incised decoration reminiscent of earlier styles. Indeed, we had found the earliest decorated building in the Mayan lowlands. I estimate the date of this early decorated building to be about 400 B.C.—500 B.C.
Teotihuacán was an enormous city with a population of over 80,000 people.

Monte Albán, located in the Oaxaca Valley, is the oldest city in Mesoamerica.

Olmec constructed a series of major ceremonial centers in towns with populations numbering in the thousands. The Olmec developed a highly sophisticated artistic tradition that included monumental sculptures of human heads carved out of volcanic rock. These sculptures give a vivid sense of the power of the leaders of Olmec society. Particularly significant is the headgear found on the sculptures, possibly related to competition in a ball game. Hollow clay sculptures of infants with what appear to be adult heads are often found on Olmec sites. These disconcerting figures stand in sharp contrast to the raw power expressed in the monumental stone sculpture, raising the question of whether they depict leaders or divinities. The Olmec also produced spectacular sculptures from jade and other hard stones. At the site of La Venta, a cache was found of sixteen male figures carved from jade and serpentinite, standing in front of a series of polished stone axes (Lauck 1996). It is possible that this scene represents a town council, a balance to the power of the rulers depicted on the monumental sculptures.

The first city in Mesoamerica was located at the site of Monte Albán in the Oaxaca Valley in the Mexican highlands. Between 500 B.C. and 350 B.C., the population of Monte Albán grew first to 5,000 and then 17,000 people living in neighborhoods built around a central plaza (Blanton et al. 1993). In the period between 350 B.C. and 250 B.C., Monte Albán was surrounded by a defensive wall. The central plaza became the focus of monumental construction, including a ball court.

Beginning around two thousand years ago (A.D. 1–A.D. 100), Teotihuacán, in the highland Valley of Mexico, grew into an enormous city covering an area of twenty square kilometers with a population of more than 80,000 people (Sugiyama 2004). Teotihuacán was built along a north–south orientation and housed up to twenty temple complexes. Extensive fieldwork at the site has
uncovered evidence of large-scale specialized craft production. Three massive stepped pyramid structures were built in the center of the city. The largest, the Pyramid of the Sun, rises to a height of 64 meters and encompasses a volume of over one million cubic meters.

The Mayan cities developed during the Classic period, which dates to between 250 A.D. and 900 A.D. Around 900 A.D., many of the large Mayan cities were abandoned in what is known as the Maya Collapse. During the subsequent Postclassic period, which lasted from 900 A.D. to the arrival of the Spanish in 1519, most large Mayan sites were located in the northern Yucatán peninsula.

The Setting

The Mayan cities developed in the lowland zones that run from the foothills of the Sierra Madre Mountains in the south to the Caribbean Sea in the north. The Mayan lowlands are divided into the tropical rain forests of the southern zone and the flat scrublands of the Yucatán in the northern zone. Most of the early cities developed along rivers and swamps in the southern zone. The northern zone became the dominant focus of Mayan settlement in later periods. Mayan sites in the northern zone are located near cenotes—sinkholes that were a critical source of water.

The main agricultural method used in the Mayan region is slash-and-burn cultivation, in which the forest is cleared by burning. After a number of growing seasons, the field is abandoned and the forest is allowed to regenerate. Slash-and-burn cultivation is a shifting system of agriculture in which field systems move over time as fields are cleared, exploited, and then left fallow. The Maya also developed methods for growing crops on extensive raised fields in swamps. The use of raised fields
I started college in my midtwenties at a community college in Seattle and then transferred to the University of Texas at Austin to complete my B.A. During my first semester at UT, Austin, I enrolled in “Introduction to Archaeology.” A requirement of the course was to complete a certain number of hours excavating at a prehistoric hunter–gatherer site. I loved the work and was invited to help process artifacts. At the laboratory, I noticed a long table covered with hundreds of stone tools, grouped into various clusters. The clusters, I was informed, represented change through time, reflecting the different people that had moved through the area, adapting their tools to changes in the resources they were utilizing. I was amazed by the depth of information that could be derived from stone tools, and that experience led me to pursue that type of material as a focus of my future research.

That summer, I enrolled in a Mayan archaeology field school. Mayan archaeology was completely different from everything I had done before, and I knew immediately that the subject was for me. For the first time, I was excavating the ruins of a complex society. I was struck by the fact that constructing the masonry architecture, modifying the landscape, cutting stone out of the bedrock, shaping stone, digging the fields, felling trees, and more were all accomplished with stones, as the Maya lacked metal tools. I have returned every year since my first visit as an undergraduate ten years ago. For the past few years, I have been the field director for the field school, teaching the students who come in as I did years before.

Having worked so many years at a number of large ceremonial centers in the same area, I became interested in the hinterland settlement. was a critical component of the intensified agriculture needed to support large population centers. There is little evidence that Mayan agriculture rested on the kind of large-scale irrigation projects essential to the cities of southern Mesopotamia. However, some evidence exists for large-scale projects, particularly poorly understood canal systems found around some cities (Demarest 2004).

The City

The ruins of Classic-period Mayan cities are covered by dense forest undergrowth. On many excavations, machetes are as important as trowels. Steep pyramids, their apexes often visible above the forest canopy, are the defining feature of Mayan cities. These pyramids sit in the central area of the city together with royal residences, ball courts, and open plazas. Extensive survey work and excavation on Mayan sites has demonstrated that these cities stretched far beyond the central area.
Since so little work has been done in the hinterlands, some of our preconceived ideas of what to expect are constantly being reevaluated. There are always expectations of what will be found when digging, and I was pleasantly surprised to uncover a Late Preclassic round structure in the excavation of the rural Medicinal Trail site. This type of structure is generally found in much larger centers. The work at the Medicinal Trail site gives us a much different perception of the social organization of these hinterland groups. Mayan society is more complex than a simple dichotomy of elites and commoners.

As a field archaeologist, I spend a considerable amount of my time away from home in a very challenging working environment. In the field, there is no electricity or running water. There are lots of biting bugs, and I am isolated from the rest of the world for extended periods. The counter to that, however, is the excitement of unearthing something for the first time, knowing that no one has seen this building, ceramic pot, or plaster floor for more than a thousand years. Understanding ancient Mayan society is not about marveling over the plaster floor or the beautiful ceramic vessel, but rather about finding out who walked on that plaster floor, what the pot was used for, and how those individuals made their living.

The central area of Copán, Honduras, has been the focus of intensive research. The center of Copán includes two large pyramids and an elaborate ball court. An inscription recounting the dynastic history of Copán runs down the entire face of the northern pyramid in what is known as the hieroglyphic stairway (see Figure 11.5 page 341 and photo page 342). This feature led from an altar at the base of the pyramid to a temple structure at the top. The inscription of the history of Copán in such a powerful setting has been interpreted as an effort to connect the troubled rulers of the late periods with the glorious achievements of the great ancestral kings (Fash 1991).

The Mayan pyramids were built up over centuries as new rulers tore down and built over the temples of their predecessors. The top of the pyramids served as temple platforms, while the rulers and their families were buried within the expanding structures. Research on the Mayan pyramids involves not only mapping the surface,
The first true king of Tikal appears to have had links to Teotihuacán. He established his rule in A.D. 378.

but also tunneling into the pyramid to find the earlier structures that were encased as the pyramid was expanded and rebuilt. At the southern pyramid of Copán, the archaeological tunneling has resulted in the discovery of a completely intact temple from the early stages of the city's history. Unlike other structures that were destroyed before being built over, this structure, known as Rosalila, appears to have been so revered that it was encased in pristine condition. Rosalila was a rectangular edifice elaborately decorated with painted stucco figures. These sculptures present fantastic depictions of gods, birds, and snakes. In the floor of one of the rooms in Rosalila, a cache of spectacular flint artifacts chipped in the shape of a deity were found. These objects, known as eccentric flints, are among the finest objects of chipped stone ever made.

**Government**

Mayan cities were ruled by dynasties of powerful kings. The exact timing of the emergence of kingship among the Maya is the subject of debate. The earliest king documented at the site of Tikal is Yax Ehb’ Xook, who appears to have lived around A.D. 100 (Martin 2003). However, it is not clear that Yax Ehb’ Xook was the ruler of a city. He might well have been the head of a society that anthropologists would classify as a chiefdom or a stratified society. It appears that the year 378 marked a major change in the history of Tikal. The glyphs speak of the arrival
of a new ruler coming from outside and ending the dynastic line. This new ruler either came from the highland Mexican city of Teotihuacán or was in some way heavily influenced by Teotihuacán. This break in the history of Tikal also appears to mark the emergence of a state.

The foundation of the royal dynasty at the city of Copán dates to A.D. 426. The first king of Copán, named Yax K’uk’ Mo’, came from outside of Copán, possibly with links to Teotihuacán. One of the burials at Copán appears to be the remains of Yax K’uk’ Mo’. Skeletal analysis has shown that this individual had suffered several traumas during his life, perhaps as the result of warfare or participating in ball games (Buikstra et al. 2004).

On the basis of the evidence from Tikal and Copán, the founding of the Mayan cities was linked in some cases with the arrival of a ruler connected to Teotihuacán. Once established, the ruling dynasties maintained their power for generations, often hundreds of years. Monuments were frequently used to connect the ruler with the prestige of the dynasty. The hieroglyphic staircase at Copán is the most spectacular example of such monuments. The rulers of the Mayan cities only rarely claimed to be gods themselves; however, they were viewed as uniquely sacred individuals (Houston 2000). There is no sense of a strong distinction between the palace and the temple. The dynasty was closely identified with the temple complexes at the core of the Mayan city.
Although the rulers of Mayan cities were able to draw on the prestige of their dynastic lineage and the sacred aspect of their office, their power was not absolute or unchallenged. There is evidence that, particularly during the later part of the Classic period, a broader aristocracy came to challenge the power of the ruler. A particularly intriguing discovery made at Copán was a building known as Popol Na, literally a mat house, which appears to have been the locale for meetings of a council of aristocrats. The tension between the power of the aristocracy and the royal lineage appears to have been a critical dynamic in the history of Mayan cities.

**Inequality**

The burials of Mayan royalty do not contain large quantities of elaborate goods. The tomb of Yax K’uk Mo’, the founder of the Copán dynasty, included jade and shell ornaments, the remains of a headdress made of shells, a number of pottery vessels, and a cache of eccentric flints. These are clearly high-status objects, but they are not an overwhelming display of wealth. It is possible that much greater wealth, including textiles and feathers that have not survived, were originally buried with Yax K’uk Mo’.

The development of household archaeology has begun to make an important contribution to understanding the structure of Mayan society. By moving away from the monuments of the center, household archaeologists cast light on
the lives of ordinary people and of diversity among households (Robin 2003). Excavations of Mayan houses have found that not all people had equal access to high-status objects. Particularly as one moves out to small agricultural hamlets, the range of artifacts becomes limited mostly to locally produced objects used in daily life. However, household archaeologists have also found evidence that high-status trade items were not restricted to elite residences.

At the site of Aguateca, Guatemala, archaeologists have discovered a unique window into the lives of the Maya at the very end of the Classic period (Inomata and Stiver 1998). The town of Aguateca was burned and abandoned, most probably the result of a military attack. The people were forced to flee their homes, leaving behind much of what they owned. After the houses burned, their walls collapsed, sealing the floors under rubble. In one of the houses, the tools of a scribe were discovered, providing a vivid picture of the position of scribes in Mayan society (see photo above and Figure 11.6, page 342). The scribe’s room included a large number of high-status artifacts, indicating that scribes were members of the Mayan elite. It is interesting that the scribe’s room contrasts with the southern part of the building, where cooking vessels and tools used in weaving were found. The excavators suggest that this was the home of a nuclear family in which the male was a scribe and the female, probably his wife, carried out tasks related to food preparation and weaving in the southern part of the building. The excavation of the house at Aguateca points to the many levels of differentiation found in state societies. On a broad scale, there are significant differences between groups within society; however, on a smaller scale, there is also differentiation within households.

One aspect of wealth that is largely invisible archaeologically is richly woven cloth and other elaborate items of clothing. The contemporary Maya are renowned for their colorful clothing containing many design elements that can be found on Classic Mayan sculptures and paintings. Depictions of the Mayan rulers show that, in addition to wearing beautifully woven garments, they donned highly elaborate headdresses made of flowers and feathers (see the Yaxchilán lintel, page 347).

Mayan Hieroglyphics

Like the cuneiform writing system of Mesopotamia, the Mayan hieroglyphic writing system developed from pictographic signs that represent concepts to a system that uses these same signs to represent syllables (see Toolbox, page 348). However, Mayan scribes never discarded the pictographic meaning of signs, resulting in a highly complex writing system in which the same sign could represent either a
The development of Mayan script was not purely the outgrowth of economic functions. The major drive behind the development of written script was recording the timing of ritual events in the lives of rulers. Whereas cuneiform developed out of the economic needs of the ruling elite of the cities of Mesopotamia, the Mayan hieroglyphic writing developed out of the connection between rulers and ritual.

Mayan script first appeared during the Early Classic period through the coalescence of three distinct traditions dating back to the end of the Olmec period (Houston 2000). The first tradition was the use of a segment of an image to represent the whole. An example found in Olmec art is the use of the eye of a jaguar to represent the animal. The progressive abstraction of these forms lies behind many of the Mayan hieroglyphs.

The second tradition was the recording of a complex calendar (Fash 1991). The earliest-recorded calendar date comes from Stela C from the Olmec site of Tres Zapotes, dated to 300 B.C. The Mayan calendar was an extraordinarily complex system of multiple overlapping systems. The Long Count records time from a zero date (August 13, 3114 B.C. according to our calendar). In place of days, weeks, and years, the Maya used a series of four units for measuring time:

- 1 kin = 1 day
- 20 kins = 1 uinal = 20 days
- 18 uinals = 1 tun = 360 days
- 20 tuns = 1 katun = 7,200 days
- 20 katuns = 1 baktun = 144,000 days

The Maya also used a 260-day ritual calendar with 23 numbers and 20 named days, a 365-day solar calendar, and at least two other systems. The complexity of the

Geophysical methods are used to gain an idea of what lies below a surface without excavating that surface. In effect, geophysical methods allow archaeologists to detect invisible features. The two main geophysical methods used by archaeologists are magnetometry and ground-penetrating radar.

Magnetometry works by detecting magnetic anomalies in the soil. These anomalies are often evidence of buried features such as tombs, pit houses, channels, and roadways (Pasquinucci and Trément 2000). In practice, a magnetometry survey involves walking along a landscape with an instrument that records magnetic readings. The data obtained are collated by computer to present a picture of subsurface anomalies that are interpreted by the archaeologist and used to guide further research.

Ground-penetrating radar (GPR) involves transmitting an electromagnetic pulse into the ground (Conyers 1997). Depending on what the pulse encounters as it travels through the ground, either it is reflected back to the surface or it continues to travel until it is completely dissipated. The analyst uses GPR instruments to build up a reflection profile that provides a picture of any variation in the sediments below the ground. The reflection profile can provide information about the depth and extent of anomalies that might indicate buried archaeological features.

At the Mayan site of Kaminaljuyu, Guatemala, GPR was used as a response to the pressures of excavating under salvage conditions (Valdes and Kaplan 2000). The site today is in a modern urban setting that has been heavily affected by development.
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The Popol Vuh is a Mayan myth written after the Spanish conquests. It tells the epic tale of the hero twins and their battle with the lords of the underworld.

Racial, Violence, and Warfare

Rituals of bloodletting and sacrifice were central to Mayan kingship (Schele and Miller 1986). Some of the most vivid scenes of bloodletting are found on a series of carvings from the site of Yaxchilán. In these scenes, the ruler and his wife are seen...
drawing blood from their tongues and collecting the dripping blood on special paper (see photo on page 347). The bloodletting brings on spectacular visions of enormous snakes with the heads of gods.

The ball game also played a central role in Mayan society. The epic battle between the hero twins of the Popul Vuh and the lords of the underworld appears to be at the heart of much of Mayan ritual practice. Echoing the centrality of the ball game to Mayan ritual is the position of the ball court at the core of the Mayan city. The ball courts consist of a bare patch of ground, flanked on either side by a banked structure. The game was played with a heavy rubber ball that, apparently, had to be shot through a ring without the use of the hands. Some archaeologists have argued that, as it was in the myth of the Popol Vuh, in real life the ball game was played to the death.

However, violence in the Mayan world went beyond ritual and sport. From sites such as Aguateca, there is clear evidence that cities were conquered and
burned. Inscriptions record the capture of cities and the death of their rulers, and a vivid series of murals from the site of Bonampak shows scenes of prisoners being tortured and killed. It is not clear how the Maya carried out their warfare. There is no evidence of standing armies, and Mayan weaponry appears to have been limited to flint spears and armor made from skins.

The Mayan Collapse

In the period around A.D. 870, the cities of the southern Mayan lowlands collapsed. New construction ended and the cities were gradually deserted. The collapse of the classic Mayan cities was the result of a combination of factors internal to Mayan society and external environmental factors. One factor that played a role in weakening

Limestone lintel from Yaxchilán, Mexico. Lady Wak Tuun is shown during a bloodletting ritual. She holds a stingray spine and rope used in bloodletting and bloodied paper. In front of her, a vision serpent emerges from a bowl containing strips of paper.
The decipherment of the Mayan hieroglyphs is a triumph of modern scholarship. As with many such ventures, breaking the Mayan code was the result of the combined efforts of numerous scholars. Ironically, one of the most despised figures in colonial history provided the essential key. Bishop Landa is known for the brutality of his term in the Yucatán in the mid-sixteenth century, a term that featured the notorious burning of many Mayan books and codices. However, Bishop Landa also recorded the history of the Maya, including a list of signs and their phonetic readings that turned out to be the key to unlocking the Mayan script.

The discovery that Mayan inscriptions recorded historical events was a major breakthrough in the path to deciphering Mayan hieroglyphs. In an article published in 1961, Tatiana Proskouriakoff presented a reading of stelae from the site of Piedras Negras. Proskouriakoff noticed that a series of stelae had one sign, known as the “toothache sign,” associated with a particular date, and another sign, the “upended frog,” associated with a date twenty to thirty years earlier. On the basis of this observation, she came to the conclusion that the toothache sign actually indicated that the date which followed was the date a ruler ascended to the throne and that the upended frog indicated that the date which followed was the ruler’s birth date. Using this principle, she was able to find the glyphs that were the names of the rulers of Piedras Negras.

Proskouriakoff then turned to three stelae, known as stelae 1–3. On the front of these stelae the inscription is badly eroded, but on the back there is the well-preserved carving of a figure wearing a robe. Proskouriakoff found that stelae 1 and 2 showed the upended-frog glyph (indicating the date of birth), followed by the name of a woman. It was clear that the name was a woman’s name the power of the Mayan rulers was the ratcheting up of cycles of violence and warfare. By the end of the Classic period, warfare was widespread and its consequences often catastrophic. The burned town at Aguateca shows these consequences. Excavations at the large urban center of Dos Pilas have uncovered a radical transformation of the site beginning in A.D. 761, when a defensive palisade was built around the central area with stones ripped from the temples and pyramids (see Figure 11.9 on page 350). The residents built a tightly packed siege village in the open plazas and began living in the
area once reserved for ritual and ceremony (Demarest 2004). A number of archaeologists argue that the increasing power of the nobility led to a further weakening of the power of the rulers or even resulted in a “nobles revolt” (Fash 1991).

External environmental factors also contributed to the Mayan collapse. The need to feed the large populations of the Mayan cities led to damage to the agricultural lands, and the resulting decrease in agricultural productivity put stress on the cities. Also, a series of severe droughts occurred during the period of the Mayan collapse (Haug et al. 2003). It is likely that these intense short-term climatic events played a role in the abandonment of the Classic Mayan cities.
Summing Up the Evidence

Mayan kings ruled over large urban centers. The emergence of both cities and state society among the Maya is closely linked with external influences, particularly from the highland city of Teotihuacán. The power of the Mayan kings was based on the prestige of the royal lineage and was reinforced by the critical ceremonial role of the king. The prestige of the royal lineage was literally built into the city in the form of monumental inscriptions and the pyramids that encased the burials of the kings. The hieroglyphic writing system was developed as a central tool in recording the timing of ritual events in the lives of rulers. The eventual collapse of the Mayan cities appears to have been the result of a number of factors, including warfare, ecological degradation, and external climatic events. Of these factors, the emergence of warfare between cities seems to have played a decisive role.

11.3 SHANG CHINA

According to Chinese historical texts, three powerful dynasties—the Hsia, the Shang, and the Zhou—emerged in northern China during the period between 2000 B.C. and 500 B.C. Unfortunately, it is difficult to trace the
archaeological record of the Hsia and early Shang dynasties. Some archaeologists have gone as far as to argue that the Hsia dynasty never really existed. The oldest archaeological site that can be securely correlated with the historical documents is the impressive site of An Yang, the capital of the Late Shang dynasty (1200 B.C.–1045 B.C.).

An Yang was discovered when inscribed bones began to appear on the antiquities market and the source of the bones was tracked to a small village in northern China. Intensive excavations at the site recovered the remains of an immense city. The inscribed bones that first led archaeologists to the site are oracle bones, which were used to predict the outcomes of events ranging from battles to the weather. After a question was posed in an oracle bone ceremony, the bone was burned and the king interpreted the meaning of the resulting crack. Beginning in the late Shang period, the question posed, the divination, and the eventual outcome were carefully inscribed on the bone. In total, over 150,000 inscribed oracle bones have been recovered, providing a unique perspective on the lives of the rulers of the Shang dynasty (Keightley 2000).

It is likely that historical records and economic transactions were recorded on silk and bamboo slips; however, none of these documents have survived from the Shang period. The other source of inscriptions from An Yang is elaborate bronze vessels that often bear inscriptions. The richly decorated bronze vessels of the Shang dynasty have been described as “the politically all-important ritual symbols” (Chang 1994: 68). The importance of these vessels went beyond the considerable effort involved in acquiring tin and copper and the skill needed to cast such elaborate forms. The bronze vessels were of central importance in carrying out rituals that were the exclusive domain of royalty and nobility. The significance of bronze vessels is expressed in the legend of the Nine Bronze Tripods first cast by Yu, the founder of the Xia dynasty. These tripods became the essential symbols of royalty transferred to the Shang after the fall of the Xia and later passed along to the Zhou dynasty.

The legitimacy of the rulers of the Shang dynasty rested on the unique role they fulfilled in the performance of rituals. The power of divination was reserved for the ruler, and the ruler possessed the vessels necessary for such performance. The power of the rulers flowed not from their identification with a god, but with their essential role in connecting the human world with the divine world.

It is interesting that the Shang used bronze for ritual vessels and for weapons. Bronze was not used for agricultural implements or the tools of daily life. Shang warfare involved the use of horse-drawn chariots, and one oracle bone

Oracle bone from An Yang, China. The inscription records the prediction made as well as the actual course of events.
records a fighting force 13,000 strong. Clearly, the power of the ruler in Shang society also involved military strength.

The excavations at An Yang have uncovered the remains of a massive burial ground with over 1,000 simple burials and eleven deep burial pits reached by ramps. Large numbers of sacrificial victims, some with their heads buried separately from their bodies, are found in the pits. In the one tomb that had not been robbed in antiquity, an enormous quantity of burial goods, including 440 bronzes and almost 600 jades, were discovered.

An Yang was a large city with a palace area surrounded by neighborhoods and areas with workshops and tombs. The elite area of the site consists of large structures built on platforms of stamped earth laid out on a clear grid. The buildings themselves were made of very simple materials. The excavators believe that some of the structures are divided into a residential area, a temple area, and a ceremonial area. In contrast to the elite houses built on platforms, most of the people lived in small houses dug into the ground.

The power of the rulers of An Yang stretched far beyond the city. It is estimated that the Shang state controlled an area of about 230,000 square kilometers (Trigger 2003). There appears to have been another center near Shangqiu, in eastern Henan province, 215 kilometers from An Yang. The Shang ruler appears to have moved around the kingdom, journeying for business transactions, hunting, feasting, rituals, and warfare against local rebellions and foreign groups.

11.4 THE URBAN STATE

In Mesopotamia, Mesoamerica, and China, state societies emerged as part of the same process that led to the emergence of large urban centers. We go back to the image of Gilgamesh and the emergence of the hero together with the city. Civilization and the city are here one and the same. However, using the term “hero” for Gilgamesh raises some questions about the rulers of these early cities. Can we really picture them as the heroes of their societies, or did they sit at the top of a chain of exploitation causing misery for the people living under their control? In Mesopotamia, the despotic ruler is visible in the Ur burials, the seemingly senseless waste of resources and human lives speaking volumes about the power of the elites of Early Dynastic society. However, governmental institutions such as the Code of Hammurabi attest to the ability of the elites to provide justice to a society that thrived at an unprecedented scale. Certainly, few would have predicted that early Mesopotamia had a dynamic economy that involved the private sale of lands recorded in the Kuduru texts.

The Mayan elite ruled over thriving cities and impressive developments in the arts and sciences. However, the horror of warfare shown on the Bonampak murals depicts another side of the activities of these elites. The elites of these early states
made possible a degree of social complexity and concentrations of populations that were unprecedented. Yet they did so through a system that involved the control of violence and through the exploitation of the labor of those over whom they ruled.

Mesopotamian and Mayan cities developed around a sacred core. However, there was a significant difference between the sacred cores of the cities in those two areas. The Mesopotamian temple was identified with a deity, who was the source of identity and power for the city. The relationship between the palace and the temple was often ambiguous. In the Mayan cities, the sacred core was closely associated with the ruling dynasty and included the physical remains of rulers buried within the accreting levels of pyramids, as well as their deeds, recorded in carved stone monuments.

In all three civilizations, writing played a critical role in society. On the basis of the available evidence, it appears that, for the Maya and in Shang China, writing was used primarily in a ritual context and to record the actions of the rulers. By contrast, in Mesopotamia, writing was essential to the economy. It is likely that some economic texts were kept by the Maya on organic materials that have not survived. Similar documents written on fragile organic material might have also existed in Shang China.

A critical distinction emerges in comparing the Maya and Mesopotamia with Shang China. For the Maya and in Mesopotamia, each city was an individual polity, a state in and of itself. We refer to cases in which the state is identical to the individual city as city-states. The rivalry between the Mayan city-states evidently contributed to the Mayan collapse. In Mesopotamia, warfare between cities existed but appears to have never reached the magnitude found among the Maya. The tensions between Mesopotamian cities were balanced by a loose confederacy with paramount rule circulating between cities. It is possible that the differences between the Maya and Mesopotamia can be traced back to the sacred spaces at the core of their cities. Among the Maya, the prestige of the city was the expression of the power of the ruling dynasty. It was perhaps inevitable that competition would emerge between dynasties and, as a result, between the cities that were in a sense the incarnation of the dynasty. In Mesopotamia, the temple was dedicated to a divinity rather than a lineage. The city in Mesopotamia was the incarnation of the power and benevolence of a god, and the gods of each city-state made up a part of the Mesopotamian pantheon, providing a divine model for the rulers to follow in developing a system of confederation.

Shang China appears to have been starkly different from the Mayan and Mesopotamian civilizations. An Yang was not one among several city-states, but rather one of perhaps two cities at the core of a large area controlled by a single ruler who traveled frequently across the kingdom. Shang China is an example of a territorial state, a state in which the ruler controls a large territory through provincial and local administrators. It is interesting that the picture in Shang China of the ruler was as the intermediary between the divine and the earthly realms. Through divination rights and the possession of sacred symbols such as bronze tripods, the ruler took the position as the connection between heaven and earth. The power of the ruler flowed not from a place in the city, but from his place in the cosmos.

In all three cases considered in this chapter, states, cities, and clearly marked and powerful elites are closely connected. All of these societies fit well with V. Gordon Childe’s (1942) definition of the “Urban Revolution.” However, taking up the questions posed by Bruce Trigger about the regularity of the transition to urban state societies, we find significant variation among the cases despite some very general similarities. In the next chapter, we consider three cases that do not fit in easily with the idea of an “Urban Revolution.” By casting our net more broadly, we find an even wider diversity of pathways taken in the transition to state society.
CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Mesopotamia covers the region along the course of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, a region where large-scale agriculture is possible only with irrigation.
- Urban sites appear in Mesopotamia during the Uruk Period, 4000 B.C.–3200 B.C. These cities were developed around temple precincts dating back to the earlier Ubaid period.
- The cuneiform writing system developed in Mesopotamia to record economic information. Cuneiform came to be used for a wide variety of texts, including epics and legal codes.
- The Royal Tombs at Ur demonstrate the power and wealth of early Mesopotamian kings.
- There is little evidence of extensive warfare in early Mesopotamia; however, Uruk sites such as Habuba Kebira, did develop far to the north on the Euphrates River.
- The Olmec sites of 1200 B.C.–300 B.C. on the Gulf Coast of Mexico are the earliest evidence of political complexity in Mesoamerica.
- By 500 B.C., the site of Monte Albán in the Oaxaca Valley had grown into a large city with a population of 5,000 people. Beginning around two thousand years ago, Teotihuacán, in the Valley of Mexico, had grown into a city with a population of more than 80,000 people.
- The Mayan hieroglyphic writing system developed out of the connection between rulers and rituals.
- The core of the Mayan city included royal residences, open plazas, pyramids, and ball courts.
- Mayan cities were ruled by powerful dynasties. The power of the king derived from the prestige of the dynasty and the sacred aspect of kingship.
- Violence and warfare in Mayan society were closely linked to rituals of bloodletting. There is clear evidence of warfare between Mayan cities.
- Around 870 A.D., cities in the southern Mayan lowlands collapsed.
- The emergence of state societies in China is linked to three dynasties known from historical texts: the Hsia, the Shang, and the Zhou.
- The site of An Yang was the Shang capital. Excavations at An Yang have uncovered a large city laid out on a grid. The royal tombs at An Yang include evidence of human sacrifice and a great wealth of burial goods.
- The power of the rulers of the Shang dynasty rested on their role in performing rituals.

KEY TERMS

- Aguateca, 343
- An Yang, 351
- Bevel-Rim Bowls, 327
- Copán, 339
- Cuneiform, 330
- Cylinder Seals, 331
- Habuba Kebira, 333
- Mayan Hieroglyphs, 343
- Mesopotamia, 323
- Monte Albán, 336
- Olmec, 334
- Oracle Bones, 351
- Popol Vuh, 345
- Royal Tombs, 329
- Teotihuacán, 336
- Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, 323
- Tikal, 340
- Uruk, 326
- Uruk Period, 325
- Ziggurat, 326

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the reasons for the development of writing systems in the three civilizations studied? Are there similarities between the civilizations, or is each unique?
2. How does the role of violence in Mayan society compare with that in Early Mesopotamia?
3. Is the association of the Shang ruler with the performance of rituals unique, or are there similarities to the roles of the rulers of Mesopotamian and Mayan cities?
FOR FURTHER READING


