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EARLY CIVILIZATIONS

The first signs of civilization developed in the fertile land of Mesopotamia in around 5000 BC. Thereafter civilizations grew along the banks of the Nile, culminating in Ancient Egypt, and along the Indus River and in China. In Europe, the great city-states of Ancient Greece developed into a civilization rich in culture. Drawing heavily on its Greek forebears, Ancient Rome grew into a vast empire whose cultural legacy is still felt today. Germanic tribes eventually took over the western Roman Empire and occupied most of Europe while the eastern half flourished and became the Byzantine Empire.

PRE-CLASSICAL CIVILIZATIONS

Sumer

In about 5000 BC farmers settled on the fertile land of southern Mesopotamia (now Iraq) known as Sumer, and from these humble beginnings the world's first great civilization formed. By 3000 BC a number of city-states had developed, the largest being Ur (with a population in excess of 40,000). The Sumerians developed the first system of writing, traded in metals and wood, had skilled craftsmen, developed wheeled vehicles and had a



complex administrative and legal system. Sumerian rule stretched from Syria to the Persian Gulf and lasted until about 2000 BC.

MONOTHEISM

Monotheism – the worship of one God – is thought to have emerged when the herdsman Abram, or Abraham, had a vision of the ‘one true God’ in the early half of the second millennium BC. The figure of Abraham is a shared spiritual forebear in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: in the Torah, Abraham is named as the ancestor of all Jews, in the Bible Jesus is descended from Abraham, the ‘father of faith’, and in Muslim tradition Abraham (Ibrahim) was the ‘Father of the Prophets’ and the ancestor of both the Jewish and Arabic peoples.

Babylon

After 2000 BC the city of Babylon (south of present-day Baghdad) grew in strength, conquering Sumer and for the first time unifying the whole of Mesopotamia. Babylon was, in all likelihood, the first city to boast



a population of over 200,000. It is also known for its unashamed cult of luxury, its fortifications and the celebrated Hanging Gardens, thought to have been built by King Nebuchadnezzar II in around 605 BC. In 539 BC Babylonia was invaded and fell to the Persians.

Persia

In 550 BC Cyrus the Great conquered Assyria and became the first king of Persia. He went on to capture Babylon and by 486 BC Persia had become the biggest empire up to that point in history, covering 2 million square miles from northern India to the Mediterranean Sea, and extending through Turkey and Egypt. King Darius I introduced an effective system of administration and taxes, and the capital Persepolis (north-east of Shiraz in modern Iran) became a wealthy hub of culture and commerce. Defeat in the Persian Wars with the Greek states in the fifth century BC marked the beginning of its decline, however, and in 330 BC Persia was conquered by Alexander the Great of Macedonia.

Other early civilizations

- Minoan civilization: The Minoans founded a trading and seafaring empire, named after the legendary King Minos, centred on Crete and flourishing between 3000 and 1100 BC, making it the earliest civilization of modern Europe. They were

