

# 1 Ancient Civilizations: Prehistory to Egypt



1-4 Stonehenge, c. 2000 B.C.E., Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire, England

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Understand the distinctive artistic, literary, and cultural accomplishments of the ancient civilizations of Europe, Mesopotamia and Egypt.
- ◆ Appreciate the important role that religion played in the life of the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt.
- ◆ Discover what is known today about key historical figures, such as Gudea, Naram-Sin, Hammurabi, Ashurbanipal, Mycerinus, Hatshepsut, and Akhenaten, and their historical importance for ancient civilizations.
- ◆ Discover the legacies left by ancient civilizations—from the law code of Hammurabi to the Egyptian concept of the afterlife.

## PREHISTORY

### Background

*Homo sapiens*, who had come into being around 200,000 B.C.E. in Africa, began to supplant the Neanderthal *homo erectus* in Europe. Both *homo erectus*, said to have originated in Africa about 1.8 million years ago, and *homo sapiens* were toolmakers, who cooked with fire, wore skins for clothing, and buried their dead in ritual ceremonies. The first historical evidence of a culture—socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought—occurred about 35,000 years ago. Sometime between 35,000 and 10,000 B.C.E., at the end of the Paleolithic period, or Old Stone Age, the first objects that can be considered works of art began to appear. These objects expressed the values and beliefs of these early Paleolithic people.

### Paleolithic Period

The **Paleolithic** period corresponds to the geological Pleistocene era, known as the Ice Age. During this era, glaciers moved over the European and Asian continents, forcing people to move south, around the Mediterranean and into Africa. These early people were nomads. They followed herds of bison, deer, horses, and mammoths, depending on these animals for their existence.

### Neolithic Period

By 9500 B.C.E., during the **Neolithic** period, or New Stone Age, humans began to farm. They

plowed and planted seeds; they grew crops. They domesticated wild pigs, goats, sheep, and cattle. The former hunters and gatherers, thus, became herders and farmers, and more permanent societies began to develop.

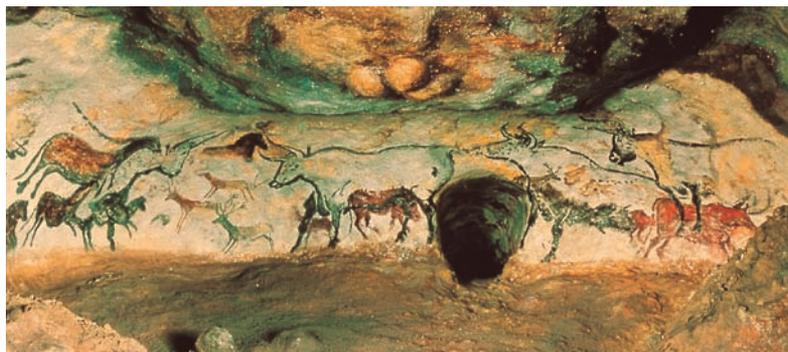
### Ritual and Religion

It is believed that prehistoric art, religion, and ritual were bound together, with images, words, and physical movement combined to improve the chance of achieving success in the hunt. Religion and ritual are thought to have been important for prehistoric peoples, used to provide some kind of control over nature and their survival. It is conjectured that prayer, art, and ritual enactments of the hunt fostered a kind of sympathetic magic.

### Art

Paintings in the cave at Lascaux in southern France are believed to have been created between 15,000 and 13,000 B.C.E., the images probably added over a long time (fig. 1-1). Extremely lifelike bison, horse, mammoth, reindeer, boar, and wolf demonstrate the artists' keen observation and ability to record an image remembered after the model was no longer before the eyes. These naturalistic objective documents convey a sense of the animals' animation. The paintings were created by people who depended on these animals for food.

The fact that the paintings are deep inside the cave, combined with the absence of evidence of habitation where the paintings are located and the subject matter of the animals on which



1-1 Wall paintings of animals, 15,000–13,000 B.C.E., Cave at Lascaux, Dordogne, France



## GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

### Australia: Paintings of Animals

Stone Age Australians lived a nomadic life of hunting and gathering. In northern Australia's Arnhem Land, “X-ray style” animals were painted on rocks from c. 2000 B.C.E. to today (fig. 1-2) by Aboriginals. The descriptively named style is characterized by the depiction of bones, internal organs, muscle, fat, and other physical details within the outlines of the bodies—a different form of realism than that found in the prehistoric cave paintings of France. However, in Australia, as in France, food animals were depicted. Particularly notable are the X-ray paintings on rocks at Ubirr.



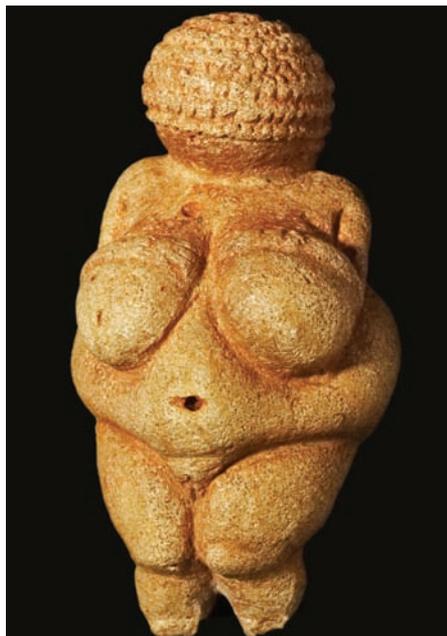
1-2 “X-ray style” animal painting, c. 2000 B.C.E.–present, Ubirr, Arnhem Land, Australia

people relied for survival, have given rise to the so-called mother earth theory—by creating these animals in paint in the “womb” of mother earth, more actual animals will be created, facilitating a successful hunt. The theory that animals were killed in effigy before the hunt, thereby gaining control over them, is supported by actual spearheads driven into some of the animals as well as the painting of spears on animals, shown to bleed as a result of their injuries. Handprints are found on animals, similarly suggesting human ability to obtain the animals.

Depictions of the human figure are rare in Paleolithic art, and most of the few known are sculpted female figures. Curiously, although animals are portrayed realistically, the same is not true of humans in spite of the greater possibility of working from a live model!

The so-called *Willendorf Woman* (fig. 1-3), a tiny stone figure, only 4 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches high, dated c. 25,000–20,000 B.C.E., is named for the place where she was found in western Austria. Voluminous and voluptuous, she is emphatic and expressive. Because hair covers most of her head, she cannot have been intended to depict a specific recognizable individual. Perhaps she represents an ideal as well-fed at a time when food was scarce, or, if intended to be pregnant, to suggest fecundity.

Prehistoric architecture survives only from the Neolithic period, and very little survives at all. Only **megalithic**—huge stone—structures remain. The most famous example is Stonehenge (see fig. 1-4 on p.1) in Wiltshire, England, built c. 2000 B.C.E. A **henge** is a circle of stones or posts. Stonehenge is an example of a  **cromlech**,



**1-3** *Willendorf Woman*, c. 25,000–20,000 B.C.E., limestone, height  $4\frac{3}{8}$ " (11 cm). Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna

a henge having a religious purpose. The upright stones, which are approximately  $13\frac{1}{2}$  feet high, form an outer circle and two inner circles or U shapes around a central stone. Stonehenge is believed to have been an enormous sun clock, based on the rising and setting sun in the summer and winter solstices, respectively. Stonehenge is constructed using the **post and lintel** system. In its simplest form, two vertical posts support a horizontal lintel. This is a static system of architectural construction, subject only to the forces of gravity.

## MESOPOTAMIA

### Background

Mesopotamian civilization developed in the valley between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in what is present-day Iraq. The word *Mesopotamia* is Greek for “the land between the rivers.” Mesopotamia was the most fertile land in the Near East, and possibly in the world. It was here that agriculture, or land cultivation, first fully developed around 9000 B.C.E., Sometime around 6000 B.C.E., people learned to mine and use copper. By 3000 B.C.E., they were combining tin with copper to make bronze; this marked the beginning of the Bronze Age.

### Fundamentals of Civilization

Civilization requires many different components: technology, or tools, and special skills that give rise to trade; laws, for the regulation of society; governmental structures; cities, or permanent settlements; and writing, through which **culture** is transmitted. No one thing guarantees civilization. It is the combination and development of science, technology, agriculture, arts, architecture, law, literature, mathematics, science, and technology that constitute civilized life.

### Sumerians and Akkadians

The Sumerians lived at the southern end of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. They founded the Mesopotamian civilization between 3500 and 3000 B.C.E. The height of Sumerian culture was around 2800–2700 B.C.E. At that time,



### SPOTLIGHT

#### Beer

*The beer that people drink today is an alcoholic beverage made by fermenting grains and usually includes hops. However, the process of making beer was discovered nearly 8,000 years ago, around 6000 B.C.E. in Sumeria. The Sumerians made beer out of half-baked crusty loaves of bread, called bappir. They crumbled this bread into water, fermented it, and then filtered the liquid through a basket. Surviving records indicate that about half of each grain harvest was used for the production of beer, including kassi, a black beer; kassag, fine black beer; and kassagsaan, the finest premium beer.*

Gilgamesh, Sumer's most famous king, ruled Uruk, an important city-state. Each Sumerian city-state had its own local ruler and god. The king served as an intermediary between the local god and the people. The city's buildings were clustered around the god's temple.

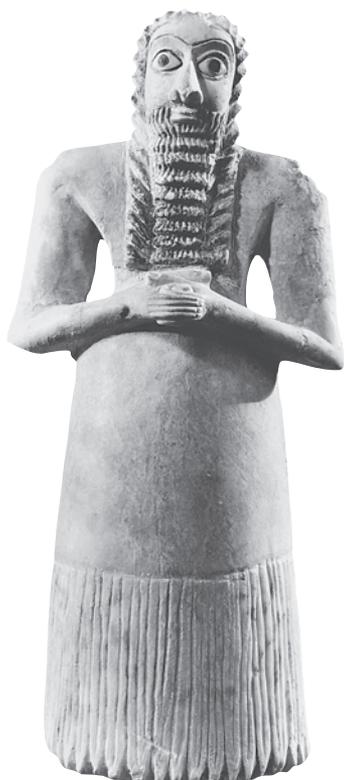
Under the leadership of King Sargon I, who ruled c. 2332–2279 B.C.E., and his grandson and successor, Naram-Sin, the Akkadian people conquered Sumer. The heads of the Sumerian city-states became slaves to the king of Akkad; he became a god to them.

## Art

Sumerian temples were built on raised stepped platforms made of brick known as **ziggurats**, as that at Ur [El Muqaiyar], Iraq (fig. 1-5) [View the image on myartslab.com](#), which was constructed c. 2500–2050 B.C.E. Because little stone was available, the ziggurat is constructed of sunbaked mud brick. The walls are **battered**, or sloping inward towards the walls, making them stronger than vertical walls, because they are self-buttressing. The walls are constructed with small, regularly placed **weeper holes**, through which water that collected in the masonry ran out. The ziggurat of Ur demonstrates the use of specific orientation in architecture because the corners point north, south, east, and west. The lower levels were originally covered with dirt and planted with trees, creating the effect of a mountain with a temple on top, a practice explained by the Sumerian belief that gods lived on mountaintops, bringing them closer to heaven.

Sumerian stone statues, as that seen in fig. 1-6, are readily recognizable: all are small in size, with large eyes, a continuous eyebrow, and a facial expression of astonishment. Most Sumerian figures are religious or commemorative in purpose. While some may represent gods, others may represent worshipers, for it appears that Sumerians might have a statue do their worshipping for them, in their place, as a sort of stone stand-in. An inscription on one such statue translates, “It offers prayers,” while another inscription says, “Statue say unto my king (god). . . .”

Known by name is *Gudea* (fig. 1-7) [View the image on myartslab.com](#), ruler of Lagash (Telloh) in Sumer. Gudea had statues of



**1-6** *Standing Man*, c. 2600 B.C.E., from Tell Asmar, white gypsum with limestone and shell insets, height c. 11¾" (29.8 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY

himself placed in the shrines—about twenty statues remain, all small in scale. Gudea may sit or stand, but his pose does not bend, twist, or suggest movement. He is always serene and forceful, his hands firmly clasped, the tension of the arms revealed by the carefully rendered muscles. The conventionalized face, typical of Sumerian sculpture, has huge eyes and a single eyebrow.

Although well-preserved examples of Sumerian painting do not survive, related is a double-sided commemorative panel (fig. 1-8), from Ur, dated c. 2700–2600 B.C.E. The figures are made of shell or mother-of-pearl, inlaid in bitumen, with the background formed from pieces of lapis-lazuli and bits of red limestone. Scenes of war are portrayed, with events arranged in horizontal rows. On the top row, the king—taller than anyone else, his head breaking through the border—steps out of his chariot to inspect the



**1-8** Double-sided panel, c. 2700–2600 B.C.E., from Ur, shell or mother-of-pearl, bitumen, lapis-lazuli, red limestone, c. 8 × 19" (20.3 × 48.3 cm). British Museum, London



**1-9** *Victory Stele of Naram-Sin*, c. 2300–2200 B.C.E., limestone, height 6' 6" (1.98 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris

captives. On the two lower rows are soldiers wearing metal helmets, cloaks, and fleece kilts, and riding in four-wheeled chariots. On the other side of the panel, the victory feast is shown on the top row.

The king, again largest, and his officers sit in chairs and drink. On the two lower rows, booty taken in battle, including animals, is paraded before them.

An important example of art from Akkad, located north of Sumer in the Valley of the Tigris River, is the *Victory Stele of Naram-Sin* (fig. 1-9), c. 2300–2200 B.C.E. A **stele** is a vertical slab of stone

that serves as a marker; this stele is 6½ feet high and glorifies King Naram-Sin, shown in triumph. He is depicted as larger than anyone else, above everyone else, and wearing the horned crown of the gods. The setting consists of mountains, trees, and starlike emblems of Naram-Sin's protecting gods.

## Religion

Like most early religions, Sumerian religion focused on seasonal fertility and was **polytheistic**, having many gods and goddesses. These divinities possessed human forms and personalities. Though they were **anthropomorphic**, they were immortal. The four chief gods were Anu, the heaven god; Ninhursag, the mother goddess; Enlil, the god of air; and Enki, the god of water.

## Literature

### Gilgamesh

The oldest major literary work in the world is the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which dates c. 1900–1600 B.C.E. Legends about Gilgamesh were told but not recorded until hundreds of years after his death. The Gilgamesh stories were written down by the Akkadians, a people who spoke a language related to both Hebrew and Arabic. The earliest version of the epic was not discovered until the seventh century B.C.E., when it was found in the library of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (669–627 B.C.E.).



## SPOTLIGHT

### The First Poet: Enheduanna

*The earliest known poet was from Mesopotamia and wrote in the Sumerian language. Her name was Enheduanna, and she was the daughter of the Akkadian king Sargon. Her best-known poems are hymns to gods and goddesses, most notably to Inanna, the Sumerian goddess of love.*

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* includes elements of folklore, legend, and myth. The work is compiled of what were at first separate stories. Some were about Gilgamesh. Others concerned Enkidu, a primeval human figure; Utnapishtim, an early version of the biblical Noah; and a number of other figures. The epic describes the positive influences that Gilgamesh and Enkidu have on one another, their developing friendship, and their heroic adventures. An additional section concerning Gilgamesh in the underworld forms a kind of epilogue.

Gilgamesh's adventures raise a number of questions, including:

1. What is the relationship between humans and their gods?
2. How are human beings linked with the world of nature?
3. What are the obligations of friendship, family, and public duty?
4. How should humans deal with their mortality?

### Gilgamesh and the Bible: Two Flood Stories

There are strong parallels between Sumerian mythology and the stories in the biblical book of Genesis. For instance, an episode in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* describes a huge flood that inundated Mesopotamia around 2900 B.C.E. This is similar to the story of Noah and the flood in Genesis.

#### Enheduanna's Hymn to Inanna

Lady of all powers,  
In whom light appears,  
Radiant one  
Beloved of Heaven and Earth,  
Tiara-crowned  
Priestess of the Highest God,  
My Lady, you are the guardian  
Of all greatness.

### Critical Thinking

**How might you account for the fact that two stories of great floods appear in the literary and religious writings of two different civilizations and cultures?**

### The Oldest Love Poem

In the Istanbul Museum of the Ancient Orient, there is a 4,000-year-old cuneiform tablet that contains a Sumerian love poem. Part of it translates: "Bridegroom dear to my heart, goodly is your beauty, honeysweet. You have captivated me, let me stand trembling before you; Bridegroom, I would be taken to the bedchamber." This may very well be the oldest written expression of sexual desire.

## Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians

The Akkadian kingdom lasted less than 200 years. For the next 300 years, until about 1900 B.C.E., Mesopotamia was in a state of constant conflict. In 1792 B.C.E., Hammurabi [hamoo-RAH-bee], the first great king of Babylon, united the city-states of Akkad and Sumer under his rule. One of Hammurabi's great accomplishments was to create a code of laws, which is the earliest known written body of laws. The 282 laws are arranged in six chapters:

1. personal property
2. land
3. trade
4. family
5. mistreatment
6. labor, including wages

### Some Laws from the Code of Hammurabi

If anyone brings an accusation of any crime before the elders, and does not prove what he has charged, he shall, if a capital offense is charged, be put to death.

If a builder builds a house for someone, and does not construct it properly, and the house which he built falls in and kills its owner, the builder shall be put to death.

If a son strikes his father, his hands shall be hewn off.

If a man takes a woman as a wife, but has no intercourse with her, this woman is no wife to him.

If a man strikes a free-born woman so that she loses her unborn child, he shall pay ten shekels for her loss.

If a man puts out the eye of an equal, his eye shall be put out.

If a man knocks the teeth out of another man, his own teeth will be knocked out.

A stele was inscribed with the *Law Code of Hammurabi* (fig. 1-10), c. 1760 B.C.E. Both a legal document and a work of art, the **relief** at the top shows enthroned Shamash, the sun god who controlled plant life and weather, dispelled evil spirits of disease, and personified righteousness and justice—appropriate for a law code. Hammurabi appears to converse with Shamash, from whom he receives the laws.

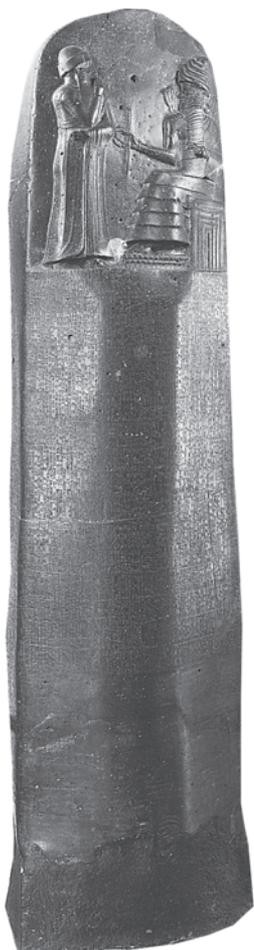
Babylon fell to the Kassite people about 1550 B.C.E. After a short period, the Assyrian culture began around the middle of the second millennium B.C.E. The Assyrians achieved significant power around 900 B.C.E. Their rule lasted until 612 B.C.E., when Nebuchadnezzar II [ney-book-ad-NEZ-zahr], r. 604–562 B.C.E., defeated them. In his reign the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, was created.

In 539 B.C.E., the king of Persia, Cyrus II (r. 559–530 B.C.E.), took over Babylon. The Persians had risen to power by the sixth century B.C.E. By 480 B.C.E., their empire extended from the Indus River in the east to the Danube in the north.

Perhaps the most lasting innovation made by Persian culture was in religion. The prophet Zoroaster, or Zarathustra (c. 600 B.C.E.), developed a **dualistic religion**, or one that is based on two opposing ideas. In dualistic religion, two forces, light and darkness, good and evil, contended for supremacy. Some ideas from the Zoroastrian religion influenced Christianity later in the writings of St. Augustine.

## Art

Between the ninth and seventh centuries B.C.E., stone guardians (fig. 1-11), placed at gateways, were an Assyrian style. These composite creatures combine the body of a lion, wings of a bird, and head of a man. Further, they are a curious combination of relief and sculpture in the round. When viewed from the front, two front legs are visible. Seen from the side, four legs are visible and the creature



**1-10** Stele with *Law Code of Hammurabi*, c. 1760 B.C.E., basalt, height c. 7' (2.13 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris

appears to be walking. But, to make this monster appear correct both from the front and the side, the sculptor has generously endowed him with five legs! A great quantity of stylized, carefully incised ornament encrusts the surface; the love of surface pattern seen here is typically Assyrian.

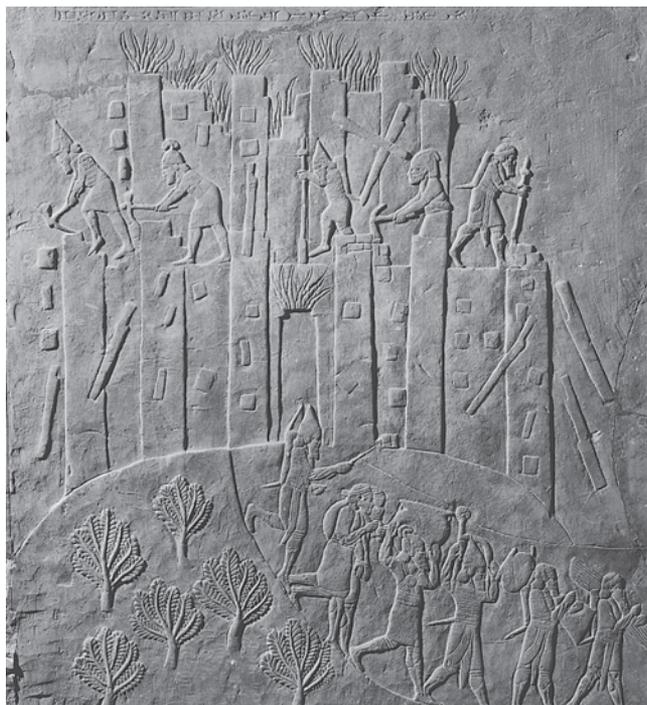
Other than gateway guardians, Assyrian sculpture consists mostly of carved stone reliefs set into the walls of the buildings. The instability of life in ancient Assyria is reflected in the emphasis on military subjects in art, which are historical documents of actual events, often arranged chronologically. The limestone relief of



**1-11** *Human-headed Winged Lion*, 883–859 B.C.E., Neo-Assyrian period, reign of Ashurnasirpal II, from palace, Nimrud, gypsum alabaster, height 10' 3½" (3.14 m). Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY

the *Sack of the City of Hamanu* by Ashurbanipal (fig. 1-12) from his palace at Nineveh (Kuyunjik) was carved c. 650 B.C.E. The Assyrians were the first to attempt large-scale narrative reliefs depicting specific events. The story is clearly told: buildings burn; soldiers tear down buildings with pick axes; and pieces of the buildings fall through the air. Soldiers carry contraband down the hill.

Persian art is found in a large geographical area, a portion of which is known today as Iran—yet the art continues to be referred to as Persian. The huge Palace at Persepolis was decorated with stone reliefs, including that depicting *Tribute Bearers Bringing Offerings*, carved c. 490 B.C.E. Twenty-three different nations of the empire are represented by people of various racial types wearing their local costumes. The groups of



**1-12** *Sack of the City of Hamanu by Ashurbanipal*, c. 650 B.C.E., stone relief, from the palace of Ashurbanipal, Nineveh. British Museum, London

figures are divided by cedar trees, the ancient tree of life. Remaining traces of pigment indicate that the reliefs were once brightly colored. The ancient Persian preference was for precise technical execution, pattern, and symmetry. The Palace of Persepolis was burned in 330 B.C. by Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.E.), who defeated Persia.

## EGYPT

### *Background*

Ancient Egyptian civilization developed slowly from about 5000 B.C.E. to approximately 3100 B.C.E. without a central government. Egypt was divided into an Upper Egypt and a Lower Egypt, which were united by King Narmer around 3100 B.C.E. This historical event is documented on the *Palette of Narmer* (fig. 1-13), carved of slate, c. 3100 B.C.E. On the front, Narmer and his troops examine the decapitated enemy dead. On the back, Narmer is about to strike an enemy.

Narmer is depicted wearing the crown of Upper Egypt on one side and of Lower Egypt on the other. After unification, Egyptian history is divided into thirty dynasties. Life was usually secure in ancient Egypt. The fertility of the Nile River valley contributed to a permanent agricultural society. The surrounding deserts made invasion difficult. The king, later called “pharaoh,” was the absolute ruler and was considered divine. A class of priests and government bureaucrats administered the country. Stability was ensured by a highly centralized organizational structure. A sense of order and continuity pervaded Egypt for thousands of years.

### *Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms*

The Old Kingdom (c. 2686–c. 2181 B.C.E.) was a time of political turmoil and social instability in Egypt.

After the collapse of the Old Kingdom, a period of political and social turmoil followed. For more than 150 years, no dynasty could reunite the country as Narmer had a thousand years earlier. In about 2040 B.C.E., Mentuhotep II, from Thebes, subdued Upper and Lower Egypt, inaugurating the Middle Kingdom. The country prospered during this period, as much authority was delegated to regional governors.

Following the collapse of the Middle Kingdom, another period of instability occurred. In 1674 B.C.E., a Mediterranean tribe, the Hyksos, invaded northern Egypt with bronze weapons and horse-drawn chariots. For over 200 years, Egypt was again divided, with order reestablished in 1552 B.C.E. It is believed that through contact with the Hyksos, Egypt entered the Bronze Age. The New Kingdom that resulted was the most



**1-13** *Palette of Narmer*, front and back, c. 3100 B.C.E., first dynasty, slate, height 25" (63.5 cm). Egyptian Museum, Cairo

brilliant period in Egyptian history. It lasted more than 300 years, when it came under the influence of Assyria, and later lost its independence to Persia about 525 B.C.E.

### Ancient Writing: Cuneiform and Hieroglyphics

By about 3000 B.C.E., the people of ancient Mesopotamia were using a type of writing called **cuneiform**, characterized by wedge-shaped characters. The original purpose of this writing was to keep agricultural records. Cuneiform writing began as a system of simple symbolic pictures. For example, the symbol for cow was an abstract picture of a cow's head:



But the pictographs were abstracted further. And so the symbol for cow changed:

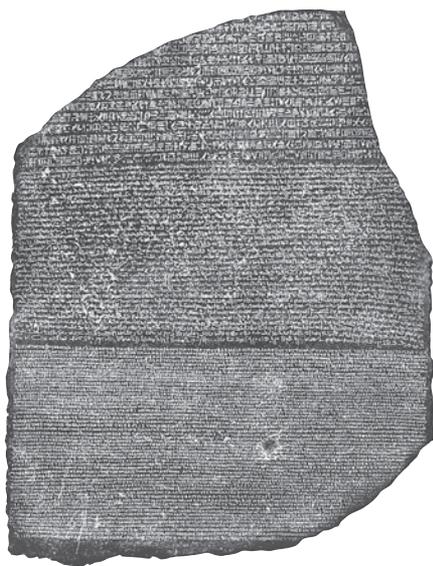


By combining pictograms like these with others, more complex ideas—**ideograms**—could be represented. A bird next to an egg symbolized fertility. Two crossed lines meant “hatred” or “enmity”; two parallel lines signified “friendship”:



Around 2000 B.C.E., pictograms became associated with sounds. This was the basis for the development of phonetic writing, which we use today.

Ancient Egyptians used a pictographic writing called **hieroglyphics**. For centuries, scholars thought that the “glyphs” used in hieroglyphics represented complete ideas rather than units of sound. Until 1822, the meaning of the hieroglyphics was unknown. In that year, a Frenchman, Jean François Champollion, deciphered the *Rosetta Stone* (fig. 1-14), a large stone fragment found near the town of Rosetta in the Nile Delta. Incised on the stone is a decree in honor



**1-14** Rosetta Stone, c. 196 B.C.E., basalt. British Museum, London

of the Egyptian pharaoh Ptolemy V (196 B.C.E.) in three different languages, one of which is Egyptian hieroglyphics.

### Critical Thinking

**Why do you think writing became so important in the ancient world? What was gained with the invention of writing? What do you think was lost?**

### Religion

Ancient Egyptian religion was polytheistic, meaning there were several gods. Among the most important gods were those of the cosmic forces, including the sun, earth, sky, air, and water. The Nile River was worshipped as a deity. These natural forces were often depicted as animals or humans, or as combinations of the two. The sun, for example, was portrayed sometimes as a falcon and other times as a falcon-headed man wearing a sun disk as a crown.

Among the most important of the Egyptian gods was Osiris, whose worship spread throughout the country. The legend of Osiris's death at the hands of his brother Set, and the search for the corpse by Isis, Osiris's wife, plays an important part in Egyptian mythology. It is also connected with Egyptian belief in the afterlife.

The one exception to Egyptian polytheism is the attempt to develop a **monotheistic** religion, or the belief in a single supreme being, by the ruler Amenhotep IV, also known as Akhenaten. This monotheistic religious direction was linked with Akhenaten's desire to consolidate power, thereby providing an early historical example of how religion and political power were connected.

### Karma

*Karma* means action; it involves a kind of moral cause and effect, in which one's actions affect moral development. The form in which a person is reincarnated depends on one's actions; karma places responsibility for one's actions on one's self. The law of *karma* suggests that the present condition of one's life has been determined by actions in previous existences.

### The Afterlife

Egyptians prepared themselves during life for the hereafter—the afterlife. Old Kingdom Egyptians believed that the body of the deceased needed to be preserved so that his *ka*, or vital spiritual essence, akin to the Christian concept of the soul, could live on. This is why the Egyptians embalmed and bound their dead as mummies. The process of mummification involved emptying the bodily cavities of their organs, refilling them with spices and Arabic gums, and then wrapping the body in layers of cloth strips. A likeness of the person was made in stone, as a backup, should anything happen to the mummy. The need to house the dead in a tomb that would last forever gave rise to Egypt's conception of architecture, most notably in their monumental pyramids.

### Ethical Considerations: *Book of the Dead*

The Egyptian *Book of the Dead* spells out the procedures the dead had to use before being admitted to the Field of Reeds, the eternal realm of the god Osiris. There the soul of the deceased was weighed against how well he or she had treated others and respected the gods. A favorable judgment meant that the soul would join other living souls in a place of peace and joy.



## GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

### India: Hindu Gods

At the center of Hindu religious thought is the concept of Brahman [BRAH-man], the indivisible spiritual reality and the divine source of being. In ancient Hinduism, Brahman is the essence of the universe, manifested in creation, preservation, and destruction. Early Hinduism is thus a monolithic religion, perhaps even a monotheistic one. The Brahman essence unifies all existence. However, Brahman is an intellectual idea, a spiritual concept rather than what we might think of as a "god." There develops, thus, a tension in Hinduism with its monotheistic roots and its later polytheistic pantheon of gods. In later Hinduism, the three functions of the Brahman essence (creation, preservation, and destruction) are divided among three gods: Brahma [BRAH-ma], the creator; Vishnu [VEESH-noo], the preserver; and SHIVA [SHEE-vah], the destroyer. Later Hindu worship focuses on a pantheon of gods who personify natural forces. Vishnu is the god of benevolence, forgiveness, and love. His consort and companion is Lakshmi [LAHK-shmee]. Among Vishnu's avatars, or appearances in earthly form, is Krishna [KREESH-na], believed by some Hindus to have been later reincarnated as the Buddha. Shiva represents the complementary oppositions of life: motion and calm, male and female, light and dark. He is also the god of the dance. His most frequent consort is Parvati, who bore him several sons. Their most popular son is Ganesha, the elephant-headed deity associated with prosperity. Hindu gods and goddesses are often depicted with multiple arms and legs to show their immense power. One example is the dancing Shiva (fig. 1-15).



**1-15** Shiva Nataraja, Chola, eleventh to the twelfth centuries, bronze, height 32½" (82 cm), Von der Heydt Collection. Museum Tietherg, Zurich



## GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

### India: Hindu Religious Concepts

*In Hinduism the ideal life has four basic goals:*

1. **dharmā:** the pursuit of righteousness, duty, and cosmic order
2. **artha:** the pursuit of worldly success
3. **kama:** the pursuit of spiritual love
4. **moksha:** release from empty pleasures and suffering

An unfavorable judgment meant that the soul's heart would be devoured by the monster Ament. For those who had not led a good life, the *Book of the Dead* (fig. 1-16) [View the image on [myartslab.com](http://myartslab.com)] contained incantations to protect against an unfavorable judgment.

### Architecture

The Great Pyramids (fig. 1-17) at Giza were built during the fourth dynasty of the Old Kingdom. The three pyramids are of the pharaohs Cheops (c. 2530 B.C.E.); Chefren (c. 2500 B.C.E.); and Mycerinus (c. 2470 B.C.E.). Extraordinary accomplishments of engineering, accommodating the Egyptian need for permanence, the pyramid is the most stable geometric form, except perhaps for the cone. The pyramids are built of solid limestone masonry, the blocks cut with metal tools in the eastern Nile cliffs, marked by the masons with red ink to indicate their eventual location, floated across the river during the seasonal floods, dragged up temporary ramps, and moved into their final positions. Egyptian builders used no cement, relying instead on the weight of

huge stones. With characteristic Egyptian mathematical precision, the three Great Pyramids are aligned, their corners oriented north, south, east, and west. The ratio of the width at the base to the height of each pyramid is eleven to seven. Inside each pyramid, corridors lead to the burial chamber. The largest and oldest pyramid, that of Cheops, contains approximately 2,300,000 blocks, each averaging 2½ tons, and covers thirteen acres. The exteriors of the pyramids were once entirely encased in polished pearly white limestone—a few blocks remain in place on the pyramid of Chefren.

The concern for concealment brought about the end of monumental mortuary architecture. In the New Kingdom, instead, the funerary Temple of Queen Hatshepsut (fig. 1-18), constructed against a cliff at Deir-el-Bahari, Thebes, c. 1480 B.C.E. in the early eighteenth dynasty by the architect Senmut, is far from her actual burial. The huge complex includes three terraces, once filled with gardens, with columnar porticoes and halls, connected by ramps to chapels cut into the cliff. Like all Egyptian buildings, the Temple of

Hatshepsut was roofed with stone, the result being rooms filled with forests of supports, because the distance between supports must be small enough to span with a stone lintel. Square or sixteen-sided columns as well as statues support the



1-17 Great Pyramids, Giza, mid-third millennium B.C.E., fourth dynasty

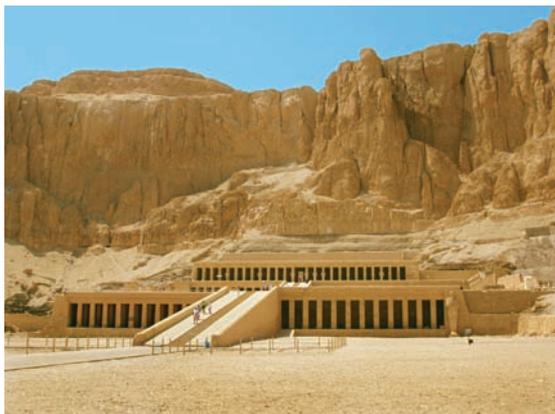
[View an **Architectural Simulation** on the **Pyramid** on [myartslab.com](http://myartslab.com)]

ceiling. In the cliff are chapels to the deities Amen, the creator; Hathor, the cow-headed protectress of the city of the dead; Anubis, god of embalming who protects the dead; and Queen Hatshepsut.

Many temples dedicated to the gods were constructed during the New Kingdom. That of Amen-Mut-Khonsu (fig. 1-19) at Luxor, built mostly in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C.E., is one of the largest. Amen and his wife Mut, goddess of heaven, were the parents of Khonsu. The plan (fig. 1-20) indicates that the **pylon**, a massive gateway, leads to a forecourt, followed by a hall with pillars, another court, and finally the actual temple, which is a small room surrounded by halls, chapels, storerooms, and other small rooms. The entire temple is organized along a longitudinal axis and is essentially bilaterally symmetrical; axiality is a characteristic of Egyptian temples, most of which had similar plans. Because the temple was considered the home of the gods, the plan was based on those used for homes—made larger and more permanent.

The columns, in the form of lotus and papyrus reeds bound together, are used for both structure and decoration. All Egyptian columns are believed to have been painted originally. In addition, papyrus, lotus, and palm leaves were carved on the walls.

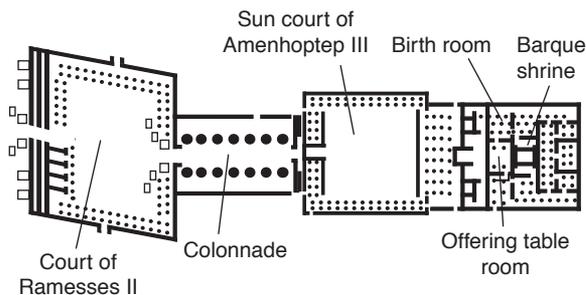
The Temple of Rameses II (fig. 1-21) at Abu Simbel was built c. 1260 B.C.E., during the nineteenth dynasty, the façade and inner rooms cut into the sandstone on the west bank of the Nile. The temple was erected in honor of



1-18 Senmut, Funerary Temple of Queen Hatshepsut, Deir-el-Bahari, Thebes, c. 1480 B.C.E.



1-19 Temple of Amen-Mut-Khonsu, Luxor, major construction under Amenhotep III, c. 1390, and Rameses II, c. 1260 B.C.E.



1-20 Plan



1-21 Temple of Rameses II, Abu Simbel, c. 1260 B.C.E.



1-22 *Chefred*, seated, c. 2500 B.C.E. Cairo Museum

the sun, represented by a statue in a niche in the center of the façade. A row of dog-headed apes sacred to the worship of the rising sun is carved at the top of the façade. And reliefs and hieroglyphs tell of Rameses II's respect for the sun god. But all this is dominated by, and diminished by, the four enormous statues of Rameses II. The much smaller figures around and between the legs of these statues are members of his family. And inside the temple, all praise goes directly to Rameses II, represented by many standing figures carved directly from the stone.

## Sculpture

Egyptian sculptors focused on the human figure, depicted, with few exceptions, in one of four poses:

1. sitting on a block
2. standing
3. sitting cross-legged
4. kneeling

Further, each pose is shown according to specific conventions. These poses were established in the Old Kingdom and continued largely unchanged through the three millennia of ancient Egyptian culture.

The sculpture of *Chefred* (fig. 1-22), builder of the second pyramid at Giza, is of the first type in which the figure is depicted seated on a block. The pharaoh is idealized, his individual characteristics minimized and his features carved in general terms to suggest power and immortality. He wears a simple kilt and a linen headdress. The hawk or falcon with its wings protecting *Chefred*'s head is a sign of the sun god Horus or Ra, indicating that *Chefred* is the divine son of the god and is under this god's protection.

*Mycerinus and his Queen* (fig. 1-23) represent the second pose, standing with one foot forward. Yet, because their weight is equally distributed on both feet, these tense, stiff people do not appear to walk. The physical types established in the Old Kingdom to represent royalty and nobility continued through Egypt's three millennia. Shown in their physical prime, men and women have narrow hips, broad shoulders, sharp shins, and thick ankles.

Less common is the third pose in which the figure sits cross-legged on the floor, usually found on scribes (fig. 1-24). While members of the nobility are routinely idealized and shown in their physical prime, those who served the nobility were permitted by artists to age, to be physically imperfect, and were individualized.

The very rare fourth pose, kneeling on both knees, is seen in a depiction of *Queen Hatshepsut* (fig. 1-25) [View the image on myartslab.com](https://myartslab.com) wearing a ceremonial beard.



**1-23** *Mycerinus and his Queen*, standing, c. 2490–2472 B.C.E., fourth dynasty, stone, height 56" (1.4 m). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

## Painting

The paintings preserved on the walls of ancient Egyptian tombs document daily life of the time. Artists gave greater importance to the clarity with which information is conveyed than to realistic representation. Egyptian art does not portray what is seen, but what is known, each person and object shown in its most characteristic form. No attempt is made to create an illusion of three-dimensional space.

*Ti Watching a Hippopotamus Hunt* (fig. 1-26)

**View** the **image** on [myartslab.com](http://myartslab.com) was painted on a wall of Ti's tomb in Saqqara, c. 2500–2400 B.C.E., during the fifth dynasty of the Old Kingdom. Ti stands on a small boat and directs his servants, who hold harpoons. He is distinguished from them by his larger size. The water of the Nile River is represented by wavy



**1-24** *Scribe*, sitting cross-legged, fourth dynasty, c. 2400 B.C.E., limestone, rock crystal eyes. Musée du Louvre, Paris

lines with fish and hippopotami, while the ribbed background indicates papyrus plants growing along the riverbank with buds and flowers at the top, and birds of various kinds—some being stalked by foxes.

A New Kingdom painting of a *Nobleman Hunting in the Marshes* (fig. 1-27), from a tomb at Thebes, c. 1400 B.C.E., eighteenth dynasty, shows him to be animated and agile as he holds three birds in one hand and a wand in the other. Equally as impressive is the acrobatic accomplishment of the cat sitting on the bending lotus stems, for she catches one bird with her teeth, another with her claws, and a third with her tail! Different species are drawn with great accuracy. All people, animals, birds, and fish are shown in profile. The synchronized birds held by the nobleman overlap neatly. Use of relative size to indicate importance is demonstrated by the small figure between the nobleman's legs; she cannot be interpreted as being in the distant background, because she grasps his shin.

Although approximately one millennium separates these tomb paintings, the similarities are striking. Both men are long-haired and wear white skirts. Perhaps they were able to stand *on* their boats—rather than *in* their boats—but their boats are *on* the water rather than *in* the water.



**1-27** *A Nobleman Hunting in the Marshes*, from a tomb at Thebes, c. 1400 B.C.E., eighteenth dynasty. British Museum, London

Figures are drawn with their heads and legs from the sides, but eyes and chest from the front.

### **Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) and Nefertiti**

The sole significant change in Egypt's long history of consistency occurred during the eighteenth dynasty under the reign of Amenhotep IV (r. 1352–1336 B.C.E.). He moved the capital from Thebes to Tell-el-Amarna; closed the Amen temples; replaced the sun god Amen-Ra with the sun disk, Aten; and changed his name to Akhenaten, which means “It is well with Aten.”

His queen was Nefertiti (fig. 1-28) [View the image on myartslab.com](#), whose appearance was recorded in a life-size portrait sculpture. The individualization is characteristic of the more informal, relaxed style of Akhenaten's reign.

A relief depicts *Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and Their Children Worshipping the Sun God Aten* (fig. 1-29) [View the image on myartslab.com](#). Akhenaten and Nefertiti are shown with their three daughters, portrayed as if they are miniature adults. Akhenaten kisses one of his children, a rare display of affection in Egyptian art. Departing from the rigidity and formality of earlier Egyptian art, royalty are now depicted in domestic situations, casual and intimate. Although members of the royalty, Akhenaten and his family are not physically idealized. All

depictions of Akhenaten show the same exaggerated physique: If the bones believed to be his actually are, he suffered from a rare but recognized pathological condition that results in the elongated skull, broad hips, and slouching posture, requiring a staff for support, as shown in this relief.

Egypt, set in thousands of years of tradition, did not accept the revolutionary ideas of Akhenaten. When he died, Egypt returned to a polytheistic faith and the capital returned to Thebes.

Akhenaten's successor was Tutankhamen, popularly known today as King Tut, who reigned at the end of the eighteenth dynasty

(r. 1336–1327 B.C.E.). He married one of the daughters of Akhenaten and Nefertiti when both were children. Tutankhamen's fame today derives from the discovery of his tomb in the Valley of the Kings near Thebes in the early 1920s, nearly intact and containing an extraordinary treasure. From this tomb comes the cover of the coffin of Tutankhamen (fig. 1-30) [View the image on myartslab.com](#). On his forehead is a serpent, emblem of the authority of the Egyptian gods and kings.

### **Music and Dance**

Music was important to the ancient Egyptians. In addition to songs, instrumental music accompanied Egyptian poems, making them songs of celebration, mourning, or love. Small musical ensembles performed at rituals of birth, death, and harvest.

Among Egyptian instruments, the harp, one of the most prominent, looks much like a bow and arrow, with gut strings of varied lengths. Pictures of harps being plucked several strings at a time suggest that harmony as well as melody could be created on the instrument. Pictures of metal instruments being struck and of actual wood and brass instruments preserved in tombs give an idea of the music's tonal qualities.

Egyptian wall paintings portray dancers as well as musicians. Many modern Egyptians as



## GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

### China: Burial of the First Emperor of China



**1-31** Warriors, 215 B.C.E. f., terra cotta, in tomb of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi, Xi'an, China

The first emperor of China was Qin Shi Huangdi (259–210 B.C.E.) (r. 246–221 B.C.E.). Qin's mausoleum, near Xi'an, is described in ancient literature as consisting of many rooms surrounded by landscaping, yet all concealed under a huge earthen mound, as was the fashion of the era. The tomb is guarded by terra cotta warriors (fig. 1-31), which were always below ground, always meant to be hidden from view, and were discovered only by accident in 1974. The sculpted soldiers once carried actual spears, halberds, bows, and crossbows and were accompanied by chariots and horses. The soldiers are individualized with different faces and various hair, beard, and mustache styles, suggesting that actual soldiers modeled for these figures.

well as scholars believe that contemporary belly dancing derives from dances such as that seen in the wall paintings on the tomb of Nebamun at Thebes, which dates from c. 1400 B.C.E. The ancient dances may have been designed to create a sense of physical and emotional rhapsody, much like contemporary belly dances.

## Literature

### Ancient Egyptian Poetry

The oldest Egyptian poems, dated c. 2650 B.C.E., are religious. Most are incantations and invocations to the gods. One of the most important is the pharaoh Akhenaten's "Hymn to the Sun." In this poem, Akhenaten presents himself as the son of Aten, and then describes the sun rising: "At dawn you rise shining in the horizon, you shine as Aten in the sky and drive away darkness by sending forth your rays." Another important early poem, "The Song of the Harper" (1160 B.C.E.), is not religious. This poem emphasizes the joys and pleasures of life in an attitude of *carpe diem*, Latin for "seize the day."

The earliest Egyptian love poems date from the thirteenth to the eleventh century B.C.E. These poems reveal a range of characters, situations, and feelings. They suggest

#### Ancient Egyptian Love Poem Excerpts

I love you through the daytimes,  
in the dark,  
Through all the long divisions of the night,  
those hours  
I, spendthrift, waste away alone,  
and lie, and turn, awake 'til whitened dawn.

.....  
For god's sake, sweet man,  
it's me coming at you,  
My tunic  
loose at the shoulder!



## GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

### China: Ancient Poetry

*The earliest known Chinese literature is lyric poetry. The earliest collection is The Book of Songs, which contains material passed down orally from as early as the tenth century B.C.E. First written down in the sixth century B.C.E., The Book of Songs is one of five Confucian classics. The poems in it are concerned with love and war, sorrow and celebration; they reflect the perspectives of all social strata of ancient Chinese society. The Book of Songs remains essential reading for educated Chinese people to the present day.*

how universal is the theme of love, having changed very little over thousands of years.

### Legacy of Early Civilizations

Ideas seen in prehistoric art reappear in later eras. Certain depictions of animals, as in the cave paintings at Lascaux, make evident that the fundamental ability to create a recognizable image has a long history. The distortion evidenced in the depiction of humans, exemplified by the *Woman of Willendorf*, indicates that abstraction for symbolic purposes began in prehistoric times. Intentional and meaningful deviation from absolute visual reality is seen also in the steles of Naram-Sin and of Hammarubi. Throughout the

history of art, in fact, artists have created images with varying degrees of realism and abstraction.

Ancient Egypt remains a powerful influence on the modern imagination. The appeal of Egypt's pyramids persists in our own time, most notably by the architect I. M. Pei in his 1988 design for the entry to the Musée du Louvre in Paris (fig. 1-32). Unlike the Egyptian massive stone pyramids, Pei's pyramid is constructed of transparent glass. Another legacy of the Egyptians is the use of large-scale sculpture to glorify and to immortalize political leaders. The use of art to convey a political message can be seen in many cultures, as, for example, in the sculpture of the ancient Roman emperor Augustus (c. 20 B.C.E., see Chapter 3, fig. 3-14), and

in Houdon's portrait of the first American president, George Washington (1788–1792, see Chapter 9, fig. 9-13).

Among the ideas we find in ancient civilizations are the religious concept of the afterlife and the political idea of a ruler's supreme power and glory. Each of these concepts would appear in varied manifestations and permutations throughout the course of successive centuries and millennia in all parts of the world.



**1-32** I. M. Pei, Pyramidal entrance to Musée du Louvre, Paris, 1988, metal and glass

## Critical Thinking

- ◆ Of all the ideas you have encountered in this discussion of ancient civilizations, which one or two made the strongest impression on you? Why? Which are closest to and farthest from your own belief system?
- ◆ Why do you think the literature of the ancient world was centered on ideas about religion and the gods?
- ◆ The question, “What is art?” has yet to be answered to the satisfaction of all. Is a work of art that serves a purpose, as the Egyptian *Scribe* (see fig. 1-24), any less “art” than a work that is purely aesthetic? Do you think that an aesthetic approach involving visual beauty is a criterion for a work to be regarded as “art”?

## TERMS

**anthropomorphism** p. 6

**battered** p. 5

**cromlech** p. 3

**culture** p. 4

**cuneiform** p. 11

**dualistic religions** p. 8

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# TIMELINE

