World History: Journey Across Time, The Early Ages

Chapter 1: The First Civilizations

Chapter Overviews
Historians tell us that history began about 5,500 years ago when people first began to write. The period before this, or prehistory, is called the Stone Age. Archaeologists have studied artifacts and fossils to learn more about the people from this earlier period. The Paleolithic, or Old Stone Age, people were nomads who adapted to their environment. They were the first people to use tools, technology, and fire for survival. The farming revolution occurred during the Neolithic Age, or New Stone Age, when people learned to domesticate animals and plants. These early farmers settled villages in Europe, India, Egypt, China, and Mexico.

Civilization in Mesopotamia arose on a flat plain bordered by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Farmers developed methods of irrigation, which allowed more than enough crops to support the population. City-states developed in the region of Mesopotamia known as Sumer. Around 2340 B.C., the Akkadian king Sargon conquered all of Mesopotamia and created the world’s first empire. Power in the region continued to switch hands as Babylonian king Hammurabi took control and established the Babylonian Empire. He is best known for his code of laws.

About 1,000 years after Hammurabi’s rule, Assyria’s military power and well-organized government helped it establish a new empire in Mesopotamia. Despite their strong government, rebellions against the Assyrians led to fighting. The Chaldeans seized the opportunity to rebel and captured Nineveh, the capital, in 612 B.C.

Under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar, the Chaldeans controlled Mesopotamia for more than 40 years. They rebuilt the city of Babylon, and it became the world’s largest and richest city. Much like the ones before it, the Chaldean Empire weakened under the strain of its conquered peoples. The Persians conquered Mesopotamia in 539 B.C.