Development and Interaction of Cultures (CUL)

Early Civilizations
Mesopotamia

Culture (Religion)

Polytheistic
- Believed the gods controlled the natural forces around them
- Priests explained the gods’ will to the people
- Because the floods were so important, satisfying the gods was very important.
  - Devoted much effort and wealth to monumental architecture (ziggurats)
- Believed the dead simply turned to dust - no reward or punishment after death
The Hebrews

- Their descendants became known as Israelites and later as Jews
- Lived in Canaan (present-day Israel, Palestine, and Lebanon)
  - Founded by Abraham who had left Mesopotamia to settle there in approximately 2000 BCE
- A severe drought forced them to move to Egypt where they were enslaved for several centuries before Moses led them back to Canaan about 1300 BCE.
  - Moses also introduced the **Ten Commandments** (code of conduct)
- Over several centuries, they divided into two separate kingdoms. They were conquered by the Assyrians and Babylonians who enslaved them for a second time in their history.
Mesopotamia

Culture (Religion)

The Hebrews

- Many fled or were driven from their homes
  - **Jewish Diaspora** (the spreading of Jews throughout the Mediterranean World and the Middle East)
- Returned to their homeland after the arrival of the Persians who were more tolerant of religious diversity (539 BCE)
- Persian rule was short-lived and many fled discrimination once again.
  - Their ideas and culture spread
  - They no longer had their own country but they maintained a strong sense of identity
Mesopotamia
Culture

Sumerian Contributions

- Cuneiform - first writing system
  - Scribes were needed to keep records and eventually write history and myths
- Carts and metal plows
- Sundials
- 12-month calendar to predict floods
- Sumerian number system based on 60 (still used today for time and 360 degrees)
- *The Epic of Gilgamesh* - oldest written story
  - Tells the story of a real Sumerian king who ruled the city-state of Uruk (2750-2500 BCE)
Mesopotamia

Culture

Babylonian Contributions
● Skilled astronomers = lunar calendar
  ○ Linked to the religious practice of fortune-telling and astrology

Phoenician Contributions
● Alphabetic script - a system of symbols (letters) to represent the sounds of speech
● The 22-letter alphabet is used by much of the Western world today
Egypt

Culture (Religion)

Polytheistic

- Gods were represented by statues and small idols (believed the god was present in these objects)
- Believed in life after death (originally only to pharaohs but later to all people and animals)
  - Body must be preserved (mummification for the rich; buried in the desert for the poor)
Contributions

- Hieroglyphics (picture-writing on papyrus)
- *The Book of the Dead* - a paper book put in the coffins of pharaohs and nobles that told the story of the dead person
- Monumental architecture = pyramids
  - required math and engineering skills
- Number system based on 10
  - Also the concept of fractions
- Calendar with 365 days
- Mummification gave knowledge of the human body
Indus Valley

Culture (Religion)

The Vedas (Sanskrit for “knowledge”)
- a collection of Aryan religious hymns, poems, and songs
- Rig-Veda is most famous - tells of conflict between Aryans and Dravidians; also outlines priestly (brahmin) behavior

By about 500 BCE, there was a mixing of Aryan and Dravidian beliefs
- The result was the Upanishads, a collection of religious thoughts
  - Brahma = universal soul
  - Dharma = righteous duties and deeds that are necessary to escape the cycle of rebirth and join brahma
  - Karma = fate in the next life
  - Moksha = eternal peace and unity with brahma (a soul’s ultimate goal)
    - Can be achieved through intense meditation and the casting off of worldly pleasures
Polytheistic
- Believed that several different gods controlled the forces of nature
- Efforts to communicate with the gods produced the first examples of writing
  - Inscribed questions for the gods on **oracle bones**. A heated pin was inserted which caused cracks - these were interpreted as answers to the questions
- **Ancestor Veneration** - believed the spirits of the ancestors could speak to the gods for them so they made offerings to their ancestors to try to win their favor
- No organized priesthood
- Believed in life after death
Shang Contributions

- Pictographs - graphic symbols that represented an idea, concept, or object
  - Complicated so only scribes could read or write it
- Standard system of measurement
- 12-month calendar
- Artisans made bronze castings, ivory carvings, silk garments, and white clay pottery
- First Chinese musical instruments
Zhou Contributions

- Invention of the crossbow and iron sword
- Armies began using mounted cavalry
- Plows and improved irrigation systems
- Roads were improved
Americas

Culture

Chavin Contributions
- Impressive techniques in gold, silver, and copper metallurgy
- Artistry of their pottery and cotton textiles
- Fishnets made from cotton thread
- United by their religion
  - Chavín de Huántar = elaborate temple with many sculptures and carvings

Olmec Contributions
- Carved enormous basalt monuments of human heads (17 have been found)
- Also known for jade and obsidian jewelry, sculptures, and religious symbols
- Built large earthen pyramids and arenas for playing a ball game that is assumed to have had religious significance
- Developed a calendar and an number system (that included zero)
- First writing system in the Americas using glyphs (pictures)
- Use of feathered serpents in art pieces
- Developed double-hull canoes for traveling far distances
- Easter Island
  - Constructed large stone statues that represented ancestor-gods