

BEFORE ABRAHAM:

The Near East before 2000 BC

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The world of the Bible is also the world in which civilization first developed. True “civilization,” by most definitions, is not found until the Chalcolithic Period (about 4300-3200 BC), but the archaeological record goes much further back. While the earlier “prehistoric” periods¹ have a more limited interest for students of the Bible than the later ages, they do provide a foundation for the cultures which follow as well as some fascinating details.

To the Rise of Civilization

The Paleolithic Age

The earliest periods with evidence of human culture are referred to as the **Paleolithic** (meaning “old stone”) Age. Generally, cultural distinctions during this period are based on stone and flint tool typology, while the chronology has been assigned radiometrically. The dates for many sites are uncertain due to the inadequacy of Carbon 14 for remains older than about 40,000 years. At the same time, many Paleolithic sites are not old enough for the effective use of the Potassium-Argon method. Nevertheless, the period is generally divided into the following: Lower Paleolithic (before 120,000 BC); Middle Paleolithic (120,000-40,000 BC); Upper Paleolithic (40,000-17,000 BC); and Epi-Paleolithic (17,000-8300 BC). Archaeological evidence comes mainly from caves and demonstrates an economy based on hunting and gathering.

As it happens, some of the earliest and most significant Paleolithic sites are found in the land which produced the Bible, Palestine. The most notable of these are Ubeidiya, the Tabun and Kebara caves in the Carmel mountain range, and the Qafzah Cave near Nazareth. The caves have produced long stratigraphical sequences. One issue revolving around the evidence from these sites is the relationship between modern man and Neanderthal man.²

The last portion of the Epi-Paleolithic—formerly known by the term **Mesolithic** (“middle stone”) Age—(about 10,000-8300 BC) provides the earliest evidence for agriculture, the establishment of settled communities, and specific local cultures. An example of the latter is the **Natufian** culture in Palestine.³ Natufians lived in semi-permanent dwellings, consisting of circular huts as well as caves. Stone tools were typically **microliths**, small points and blades made to be attached to handles of wood or bone. Bone was used for a variety of artifacts and shells were strung together to form jewelry. Hunting and fishing appear to have remained important, but the presence of sickles and other objects for the processing of grains suggest organized harvesting.

Neolithic Age (about 8300-4300 BC)

The **Neolithic** (“new stone”) Age (dated in Palestine about 8300-4300 BC) saw sweeping changes in human existence throughout the Near East. Primary among these is the domestication of plants and animals with a resulting transition from a hunter-gatherer to herdsman-farmer economic base. This economic shift—sometimes referred to as the **Neolithic Revolution**—was accompanied by permanent settlements, an increasingly complex social structure, and further diversification of local culture. Artistic expression developed, while religious artifacts and burial customs

¹For cautions on the use of the term “prehistory,” see Walter E. Rast, *Through the Ages in Palestinian Archaeology: An Introductory Handbook* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 49.

²Rast, *Through the Ages in Palestinian Archaeology*, 47-53; for a skeptical view of how the evidence has been interpreted, see Neil Asher Silberman, *Between Past and Present: Archaeology, Ideology, and Nationalism in the Modern Middle East* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 209-27.

³Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible 10,000-586 B.C.E.* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 36-37.

seem to demonstrate spiritual concerns. Technological advances were made in many areas, including the invention of fired pottery around 6000 BC.

The Neolithic in Palestine is generally divided into Pre-pottery and Pottery Neolithic, each being subdivided into two (A and B) phases. This scheme is based on Kenyon's work at Jericho, easily the best known Neolithic site.⁴

The earliest remains at Jericho, sometimes called "the oldest city in the world," are of the Epi-Paleolithic **Natufian** Culture. In the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA), the settlement expanded to become a walled settlement—the earliest known thus far. The wall was supplemented by a thirty-foot stone tower with an internal staircase. The fortifications are datable (by uncalibrated Carbon 14 readings) to the late ninth or early eighth millennium BC and thus attest to a high degree of organization by Jericho's inhabitants at this early stage. Toward the end of the PPNA period, a macabre burial custom was introduced. Bodies were interred beneath the floors of dwellings or in open courtyards while the skulls were kept in groups within houses. During the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB) this practice continued, but in some cases the skulls were modeled with plaster, apparently to reproduce the facial features of the deceased. Painted highlights, shells imbedded in the plaster to represent eyes, and the delicate plaster rendering of the cheeks, eyebrows, and lips give an eerie lifelike appearance. The relationship between this practice and some kind of belief in an afterlife certainly seems probable but, of course, cannot be proven. It is often inferred that the plastered skulls give evidence of some kind of ancestor cult.⁵

Finds similar to those at Jericho have been made at other sites in Palestine. Ain Ghazal, a Pre-pottery site in Jordan, has also produced severed and plastered skulls. More imposing are two large caches of human statues and busts also made from plaster. The bodies are generally without detail, squat, and flat, having elongated necks. The flattened heads have detailed and individualized faces which share some features of the plastered skulls. The excavator interprets the statues as having a cultic function, perhaps involving ancestor worship.⁶ Fragments of such statues were found by Kenyon at Jericho (assigned by her to the Pottery Neolithic) and complete heads were recovered in the earlier work there by Garstang.⁷ Contemporary finds from a Judean Desert cave include skulls coated with asphalt on the top and back, apparently so as to represent hair. A stone mask at the cave and another found near Hebron add to the mystery of Pre-pottery Neolithic beliefs and practices.⁸

The invention of pottery is the high mark of the following Pottery Neolithic periods. Neolithic pottery is crude in comparison to that from later periods; handmade, fired at low temperatures, with lug-like protrusions or ledges for handles. Common decorations included zig zag and herringbone patterns, either by incision or paint. Because each group developed its own distinctive style, pottery becomes one of the major cultural indicators for archaeologists from this period onward. Despite the advance of pottery, the Pottery Neolithic culture in Palestine is not as rich as the PPN. Settlements appear to be smaller and sometimes non-existent on the fringes of the desert. In the north of the country the **Yarmukian** culture appears. A notable find (from Munhata) is a clay figurine of a seated woman with eyes resembling kernels of grain, perhaps a fertility goddess. Incised pebbles in the same style represent another Yarmukian art form perhaps related to a fertility cult. At the end of the Neolithic Age, the Wadi Rabah culture is the first to build rectangular structures with stone foundations.⁹

Brief mention should be made of the largest Neolithic site in the Near East—the seventh millennium BC village of Çatal Hüyük in Anatolia. Excavations uncovered a large number of mudbrick and wood structures, entered from above by ladder. Many of these were found to contain wall paintings, sometimes combined with molded decorations—some of which included skulls or horns of animals—apparently as some sort of shrine. The economy at

⁴For a full description, see Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Digging Up Jericho* (London: Benn, 1957); idem, "Jericho: Tell es-Sultan," in *NEAEHL*, 675-78.

⁵Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 47; Walter Rast, *Through the Ages in Palestinian Archaeology*, 56.

⁶The statues are described and illustrated in "1986 Annual Meeting," *BAR* 18 (March/April 1987): 50-51.

⁷Kenyon, *Digging Up Jericho*, 84.

⁸Ofer Bar-Yosef, Tamar Schick, David Alon, "Nahal Hemer Cave," in *NEAEHL*, 1082-84; Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 46-48.

⁹Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 49-54.

Çatal Hüyük was agriculture based, but the trade of obsidian from nearby sources was important as well. The site demonstrates a cultural sophistication unexpected in such early village life.¹⁰

In Mesopotamia, Neolithic cultures—named by archaeologists for the sites where they were first identified—were concentrated along the northern “hilly flanks.” The spread of irrigation techniques to the southern plains of Mesopotamia provided a catalyst for the rise of civilization in that region.

The Chalcolithic Age (about 4300-3150 BC)

The **Chalcolithic** Period (about 4300 to 3150 BC in Palestine) is distinguished from the Neolithic by the introduction of metal technology and thus begins at different dates in various parts of the Near East. In addition, there is no continuity of terminology between the various geographical areas and chronological correlation becomes quite confusing.

The Chalcolithic Age saw the origins of true “civilization” as opposed to the “cultures” of the earlier periods. Exactly what constitutes “civilization” is a matter of debate, but most definitions include the following characteristics: (1) subsistence by agriculture; (2) cities; (3) social organization; and (4) writing.¹¹

Mesopotamia. Although northern Mesopotamia was permanently settled long before, it was the southern area which would produce the first great city states and, with them, the flowering of civilization. The earliest permanent settlements in southern Mesopotamia represent the beginning of the **Ubaid** Period (about 5000-4000 BC), which is followed by the **Uruk** (about 4000-3200 BC), and the **Jemdet Nasr** (3200-3000 BC) Periods.¹²

Eridu, remembered in Sumerian tradition as the first city ruled by a king, contains the earliest identifiable religious building in Mesopotamia (about 4900 BC). Constructed of mud brick, it was the first in a long series of temples at Eridu, continuing throughout the Ubaid and into the Uruk period. The temples became increasingly monumental and, standing impressively on the filled-in ruins of their predecessors, served as prototypes for later Mesopotamian temples on **ziggurats**.¹³ Many features of the Eridu temples, including the characteristic buttressed facade, are found at other sites in the Uruk Period, notably Tepe Gawra and Uruk. These early temples indicate a commonality in South Mesopotamia and suggest that the temple assumed the dominant role in organizing and directing the emerging urban society.¹⁴

The Uruk Period saw significant development in art, best illustrated by the appearance of the **cylinder seal**, a barrel with carved designs which left an impression when rolled on wet clay. This device was used to establish ownership or record an agreement. The exquisite artwork of these early seals is of more than esthetic interest. Scenes of kneeling captives, massacres, naked priests performing mysterious ceremonies, and cattle herding provide glimpses into the life of the period.

The most significant innovation of the Uruk Period is writing. It has been recently and convincingly shown that writing developed from the use of tokens which signified debts or ownership of certain commodities such as sheep or grain. Such tokens were sealed inside a clay ball or “envelope.” At a later period, the envelopes came to have marks impressed on the outside, indicating the number of tokens contained within. Eventually, it was realized that the

¹⁰James Mellart, *Çatal Hüyük: A Neolithic Town in Anatolia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967); idem, *The Neolithic of the Near East* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 98-111.

¹¹A. Bernard Knapp, *The History and Culture of Ancient Western Asia and Egypt* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1988), 14. Other historians differ, however, on the requirements for civilization; see William W. Hallo and William Kelly Simpson, *The Ancient Near East: A History* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1971), 27.

¹²J. N. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia: Society and Economy at the Dawn of History*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 22. The dates and terminology differ among scholars, however; see, for example, Knapp, *The History and Culture of Ancient Western Asia and Egypt*, 42.

¹³Seton Lloyd, *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia*, rev. ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 41-43; James Mellaart, “The Earliest Settlements in Western Asia from the Ninth to the End of the Fifth Millennium B.C.,” in *CAH*, Vol. 1, part 1, *Prolegomena and Prehistory* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), 286-87.

¹⁴Knapp, *The History and Culture of Ancient Western Asia and Egypt*, 40-41.

marks could substitute for the tokens inside the envelope, and tablets appeared bearing combinations of numerals and signs corresponding to the earlier tokens. Ownership of items or authentication of a debt represented by the numerals and commodity signs was shown by sealing the wet clay of tablets with cylinder seals, unique for each individual. The abstract idea of representing tangibles by means of impressed symbols rapidly led to a fully developed system of writing. Drawn pictures of the tokens transformed into symbols made by wedge shaped indentions in the clay, while other “cuneiform” signs were invented.¹⁵

Some scholars combine the Late Uruk and following Jemdet Nasr periods, making a single “Protoliterate” period, and now several systems of terminology are in use. The Jemdet Nasr period corresponds to a pronounced phase in the history of writing, namely the first texts demonstrably written in a known language. Thus, Mesopotamia entered the historical age.

Palestine. In Palestine, as all over the Near East, cultural change was greatly accelerated during the Chalcolithic period. Formal temples and organized cemeteries appeared, and there is evidence for craft and metallurgical specialization. The material changes are accompanied by—or, perhaps, are a result of—significant social transformations and an apparent population increase.¹⁶

The first Chalcolithic discovery in Palestine was in the Jordan Valley at Teleilat Ghassul, which gave its name to the **Ghassulian** culture. The large unfortified village was composed of well-constructed houses, some of which contained wall murals depicting geometric designs and imaginary animals.¹⁷

An interesting variation of Ghassulian culture is found along the coast of the Sharon Plain, where burial urns in the form of miniature houses held the cremated bones of the deceased. These urns were apparently intended to represent actual houses, with highly individual details such as nose-like projections or human figures. A suggestion that these cemeteries served as burial grounds for a large region is strengthened by the relative dearth of settlements in the area, and by the transient nature of Chalcolithic sites throughout the country. In the Negev, for example, the earliest people of the so-called Beer Sheba culture lived in subterranean pit dwellings. Later, the pit dwellings were forsaken in favor of regular structures which were, in turn, mysteriously abandoned. Some houses contained neatly stacked vessels and utensils, apparently in anticipation of an eventual return that never occurred. Perhaps these people were semi-nomadic, leaving the region seasonally or during times of great drought. Underground granaries may have been intended to store and conceal supplies during seasonal absences.¹⁸ A well-developed copper industry (the earliest known in Palestine), and an ivory and bone carving workshop represent craft specializations of different settlements. Contacts with Egypt can be detected in the Beer Sheba culture and a variant to the west, around the Wadi Ghazzah.

From the Judean Wilderness come the most intriguing finds of Chalcolithic Palestine. A cave, now referred to as the “Cave of the Treasure,” in Nahal Mishmar contained a straw mat rolled around 429 objects. Some were of stone, ivory, or bone, but most were copper ceremonial objects including maceheads, hollow reed tubes, and diadems.¹⁹ Face-like decorations on some of these objects recall the projections on house ossuaries of the Sharon Plain. The origin of these objects may lie at a Chalcolithic temple found on the cliffs above the Dead Sea at En-Gedi. The sanctuary is a narrow room with an entrance on the long side opposite a semi-circular platform on which a stone base was found. Benches line the long walls in the center of the room and pits with charred remains of offerings fill either end. A courtyard in front of the sanctuary, with a large round installation in the center, was entered by two gates. The temple apparently served as a place of pilgrimage—perhaps for a nomadic population—as no settlement has been found in the area. The sanctuary contained no cult objects and seems to have been abandoned.²⁰

¹⁵see Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 51-55.

¹⁶For a review of the period, see Thomas E. Levy, “The Chalcolithic Period,” *BA* 49 (June 1986): 83-108.

¹⁷Thomas E. Levy, “Ghassul, Teleilat el-,” in *NEAEHL*, 2:510.

¹⁸Jean Perrot, Iris Eldar, and Yaacov Baumgarten, “Beersheba: The Chalcolithic Settlements,” in *NEAEHL*, 1: 161-66.

¹⁹Pessah Bar-Adon, *The Cave of the Treasure* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1980).

²⁰David Ussishkin, “The ‘Ghassulian’ Temple in Ein Gedi and the Origin of the Hoard from Nahal Mishmar,” *BA* 34 (February 1971): 23-39.

Despite the mysterious abandonment of many Chalcolithic sites in Palestine, there is evidence for the Chalcolithic culture's continuity with and evolution into the highly urbanized Early Bronze Age culture which follows it.²¹

Chalcolithic Egypt. The Chalcolithic, or **Predynastic** Period, in Egypt is divided into the Badarian, Amratian, and Gerzean phases.²²

One interesting feature of Predynastic Egypt is funerary practice. With no other people of the ancient, or perhaps even the modern world, has the concept of life after death left such a profound mark as on the ancient Egyptians. Earlier burials were typically circular or oval pits in which the body was placed in a near fetal position, loosely contracted on its left side as if asleep. Occasionally, the body was wrapped in a reed mat. In many cases, a remarkable state of preservation has been afforded by the complete desiccation of the body by the hot sands. It has been suggested that the idea of an afterlife arose in Egypt as a result of this natural preservation of the body. It certainly would not have been unusual for one to accidentally uncover the well-preserved remains of a long dead relative.²³ Concentrated tombs on the west side of the Nile anticipate the mythology and cemeteries of Pharaonic times. While the poor continued to be buried in oval pits in the Gerzean period, trench tombs began to be used by the upper class. These structures were often brick lined and compartmented, foreshadowing the elaborate tombs of the following periods.²⁴

Despite the continuity of the Gerzean culture, Upper and Lower Egypt remained politically separate. Each was composed of a series of small and originally independent districts which retained their identity and became the **nomes** or administrative units of later Egypt. These districts were apparently bound together into two separate kingdoms. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Upper and Lower Egypt shared a common language and the same material and spiritual culture. A kind of antithesis and duality developed: while Lower Egypt led culturally, Upper Egypt provided the political direction. In late Gerzean times, a pattern began to emerge which would lead ultimately to the unification of the Two Lands: the ambition of the southern princes to extend their sway over larger tracts of the valley, binding the fragmented nomes into one kingdom.²⁵

Mesopotamia in The Early Bronze Age

The Early Dynastic Period (about 3000-2350 BC)

The First City States. In the third millennium BC, persons living in the southernmost part of Mesopotamia called that region **Sumer**. **Sumerian** is the term given by scholars to the predominant language of that area, and also to the people who spoke it. Sumerian is not related to any other known language of the past or present. It is therefore considered non-**Semitic**, and it is assumed that the speakers were not **Semites**. In the meantime, another language, Semitic in nature, was spoken in the region known slightly later as **Akkad**, just north of Sumer. The language and the supposed Semites using it are called **Akkadian**.²⁶

It is the Sumerians who, continuing the great advances of the Late Uruk and Jemdat Nasr periods, brought Mesopotamia into the light of history. The period from about 3000 to 2350 BC is usually known as the Early Dynastic (ED) Period and is generally reduced to three phases: the ED I (about 3000-2750 BC), ED II (about 2750-2600 BC), and ED III (about 2600-2350 BC). It is only the last of these phases that is truly historical, for only then are genuine records naming contemporary kings found. In the meantime, non-contemporary texts shed some light on the earlier periods.

²¹Ruth Amiran, "The Transition from the Chalcolithic to the Early Bronze Age," in *BAT*, 108-12.

²²The most comprehensive review of the period is found in Michael A. Hoffman, *Egypt Before the Pharaohs: The Prehistoric Foundations of Egyptian Civilization*, rev. and updated (Austin: Texas, 1991).

²³James Henry Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), 49-51.

²⁴Hoffman, *Egypt Before the Pharaohs*, 109-10, 122-24, 329-32.

²⁵Cyril Aldred, *The Egyptians*, rev. ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 77-79.

²⁶see Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 35-40; also Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, 80-82.

The land was divided into city states, each of which consisted of a major city, its satellites, villages, and a well defined territory of agricultural land. Perhaps the most prominent feature of each major city was the sanctuary of its patron deity, a matter of local pride and veneration. The Sumerian ideal seems to have envisioned that land divided among equal city states, each home to a major deity.²⁷ Reality, however, is reflected in the characteristic feature of the period: city states at war.

The Sumerians were among the first to struggle with the problem of the relationship between the palace and the temple—or, to put it in modern terms, politics and religion—a problem faced at a later time by the biblical Israelites. There is evidence that in the beginning, priest and king were one. Indeed, the same word is used for temple and palace.²⁸ The ruler of a Sumerian state is called variously: *en*, (“lord”), *ensi* (“governor”) or *lugal* (“great man” or “king”). The former seems to have been mainly a priestly title, while *ensi* and *lugal* were primarily secular.²⁹ It should be noted, however, that the exact nature of the titles is disputed.³⁰

A fascinating document related to kingship is the Sumerian King List, which purports to be a comprehensive list of kings in Sumer from earliest times. Dated to the beginning of the second millennium BC, it relates that kingship was first “lowered from heaven” in the city of Eridu. Then, after two incredibly long reigns totaling 64,800 years, kingship was carried in turn to the cities of Bad-tibira, Larak, Sippar, and Shuruppak, where six more kings are assigned similarly lengthy reigns. These figures are often compared to the long lives attributed to the generations immediately following Adam in the Genesis account. But a more striking parallel to the Bible is the Sumerian King List’s laconic remark just after the reign of Ubar-Tutu of Shuruppak: “The Flood swept thereover.”³¹ This brings up the question of evidence for the Flood, a subject to which we shall turn for a moment.

The Flood. In Addition to the Sumerian King List, the memory of a great Flood was preserved in a Sumerian text dating from about 1700 BC, where the hero is called Ziusudra. Better preserved is the slightly later **Atrahasis Epic**, which preserves details of why the Mesopotamia gods chose to bring a deluge upon mankind. The hero’s name (Atrahasis) means “exceedingly wise,” an epithet also used of Utnapishtim, the “Noah figure” in the most famous Mesopotamian flood account, the Babylonian **Gilgamesh Epic**, known from texts of the seventh century BC. In all of these accounts, a few people survive a gigantic flood, brought on by whim of the gods, by means of a boat. The Atrahasis and Gilgamesh Epics, in particular, have remarkable parallels with the biblical story of Noah.

The quest for archaeological evidence of the Flood has been interesting. Woolley, in his excavation of Ur (1929 to 1934), discovered a thick layer of water-laid silt between phases of the Ubaid period. Though he took this to be a confirmation of the biblical Flood, Woolley’s initial claim³² has not been sustained by results from other sites. For example, only fifteen miles away at Eridu, no flood layer has been detected. Sterile layers indicating flood deposits at Kish, Uruk, Lagash, and Shuruppak date from the end of the Jemdat Nasr or the Early Dynastic periods. All these flood deposits, appearing at various chronological periods at different sites, are apparently the result of local inundations. In short, there is no evidence for a universal deluge in the archaeological strata of Mesopotamia. Therefore many scholars conclude that a particularly disastrous local flood gave rise to the tradition so prevalent in Mesopotamian literature and, in turn, to the biblical account. Based on correlations between silt layers at certain sites,

²⁷The ideal of equal city states, each housing the temple of its national deity is revealed by a collection of poems called the Sumerian Temple Hymns; see Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 25-26.

²⁸Lloyd, *Archaeology of Mesopotamia*, 105-106; Gosta W. Ahlstrom, *The History of Ancient Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 117.

²⁹Knapp, *The History and Culture of Ancient Western Asia and Egypt*, 70-72.

³⁰Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 74. The exact meaning of the titles has been the subject of controversy, as has the nature of the kingship itself; Cf. H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that was Babylon* (New York: Hawthorn, 1962), 58-60.

³¹Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List*, Assyriological Studies 11 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 77.

³²Leonard Woolley, *Ur of the Chaldees*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 1950), 22-23. The claim is removed from the revised version, idem, *Ur ‘of the Chaldees’*, rev. and updated by P. R. S. Moorey (London: Herbert Press, 1982).

some consider “before the Flood” as a reference to protohistoric time—specifically the Jemdat Nasr period and before—while others place the Flood at the end of the ED I period.³³

Another approach has been to seek evidence for the Flood of Noah in the geological record; that is, in the layers of sedimentary rock found across the globe. Claims that all of the fossil-bearing geological strata were laid by the Flood of Noah have great appeal to many Christians, but find little or no support among informed geologists. While such arguments lie beyond the scope of this work, it is appropriate to comment on a related effort, the search for the Ark of Noah.

During the last century, reports of the Ark’s existence on the present Mt. Ararat, Agri Dagi in eastern Turkey, have greatly intensified in the Christian West. A number of popular books and films in the past two decades have documented the efforts of certain “arkeologists.” Despite evidence against early belief that Agri Dagi was in fact the landing place of Noah, many are convinced that the ship not only rests there, but that sections of wood from its structure have been recovered and are on display in France. The first person to verifiably make the perilous climb to the summit of Mount Ararat was J. J. Friedrich Parrot, using the Monastery of St. James as his headquarters in 1829. Shortly thereafter, on June 20, 1840, a major earthquake destroyed the monastery and the nearby town of Ahora, both in the Ahora Valley at the foot of the mountain. This earthquake (and one in 1882), it is supposed by modern Ark researchers, exposed the remains of Noah’s Ark which previously had been hidden by the ice cap. Since that time, many supposed sightings of the Ark have been made public and several expeditions to the mountain undertaken, always with no result other than embarrassment.³⁴

Kish. Following the Flood, the Sumerian King List says that kingship was again lowered, this time to the city of Kish.³⁵ The earliest Sumerian king identified in contemporary inscriptions (two of them) is Mebaragesi, who appears in the King List as Enmebaragesi, the twenty-second king of the First Dynasty of Kish. Interestingly, excavations at Kish have revealed the earliest known secular palaces.³⁶ The city is located among the Semitic-speaking peoples of Akkad and, in the King List, some of its rulers prior to Mebaragesi bore Semitic names. To conquer Kish apparently was to unite the two ethnic groups, so the title “King of Kish” was used by those who claimed sovereignty over the whole land.³⁷

According to the legendary “Uruk Cycle,” Mebaragesi’s son Akka was confronted by the famous hero-king of Uruk, Gilgamesh. Indeed, the King List indicates that “kingship” passed from Kish to Uruk, the biblical Erech (Gen 10:10). The extensive Uruk Period religious precinct may have continued into the ED Period, but evidence is scanty. The King List, in the meantime, indicates Uruk was “smitten with weapons” and that “kingship” was removed to Ur.³⁸

Ur. Some of the most spectacular finds from Early Dynastic Sumer were discovered at Ur, a city of special interest to students of the Bible, as it is apparently the place named as the original home of Abraham (Gen 11:28-31).

The royal cemetery at Ur has produced a great wealth of objects having the highest standards of craftsmanship, along with the remains of male and female attendants apparently sacrificed at the funerals of their masters. The most famous of these burials is that of Queen Puabi which escaped the attention of tomb robbers. In a sloping ramp leading down from the surface, a wagon and the bodies of five men, ten women, and two oxen were found. Inside the tomb chamber lay the queen, wearing elaborate gold jewelry, with two companions. Her headdress of gold and semi-precious stones has been reconstructed in various ways. Surrounding the bodies were vessels of gold and silver, an inlaid gaming table, a electrum ring, a harp decorated with a cow’s head, and 267 other valuable objects. A tomb directly below was found to contain 59 bodies including six soldiers, six oxen behind two chariots, and 19 court

³³For the former, see Hallo and Simpson, *Near East*, 35-36; on the latter, Lloyd, *Archaeology of Mesopotamia*, 91-93.

³⁴For a comprehensive review of efforts related to the Flood account, see Lloyd R. Bailey, *Noah: The Person and the Story in History and Tradition* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

³⁵Jacobsen, *Sumerian King List*, 77.

³⁶see P. R. S. Moorey, *Kish Excavations 1923-1933* (Oxford: University Press, 1978).

³⁷Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 29-32.

³⁸Jacobsen, *Sumerian King List*, 85-93.

ladies in gold headdresses. Elsewhere in the shaft were found a lyre with the head of a bull on the sounding box, a silver boat model, and a shell-inlaid gaming table. Another tomb, belonging to a king named Meskalamdug, produced a magnificent gold helmet. Another yielded fine ceremonial daggers. In a plundered tomb was found the remarkable “royal standard,” with inlaid scenes of war and peace. A final tomb bears mentioning; it was a “death pit” associated with another royal tomb and held 74 bodies, 68 of them finely dressed women. From this Death Pit comes two statues of lapis and gold he-goats standing against bronze foliage, which reminded Woolley of the “ram caught by its horns” (Gen 22:13).³⁹

Other Sumerian Sites. A number of other Sumerian sites have been excavated. Khafaje, ancient Tutnub, yielded a series of temples to the moon god Sin and an impressive “Oval Temple.”⁴⁰ A temple at Eshnunna (modern Tell Asmar) contained a large collection of wide-eyed votive statues. These statues, and parallels elsewhere, have become emblematic of the Sumerian culture.

The city of Nippur held a special place as it was the city of Enlil, the chief god of the Sumerian pantheon. A text found at both Nippur and Ur indicates that Akka, Gilgamesh, and a king of the First Dynasty of Ur, Mesannipadda, all piously repaired a shrine called “Tummal.” That shrine has not been located, but a temple of Inanna was discovered which had been rebuilt throughout all three ED phases. The mound of Telloh, ancient Girsu (a religious center belonging to the city Lagash) has yielded many important inscriptions, including the famous “Stele of the Vultures” which shows the victory of Eannatum, king of Lagash, over the city of Umma. He is depicted on wearing a helmet similar to that of Meskalamdug at Ur.⁴¹

A history of events during the Early Dynastic Period is difficult to construct at best, and such efforts vary widely. The exact course of events need not concern us here.⁴² It will suffice to say that the period is characterized by wars between the various Sumerian city states, with dominance passing between cities, primarily Kish, Uruk, Ur, and Lagash. Near the end of the period, a king claimed the throne of Uruk and the conquest of all of Sumer. His rule was all that would be of a “Sumerian Empire,” however, as the Semites to the north rallied around a new figure, Sargon of Akkad.

Semitic Domination (about 2350-2150 BC)

The Akkadian Dynasty. About 2334 BC,⁴³ a Semite cup-bearer of the King of Kish—according to later accounts—revolted against his master, formed a substantial army, and marched on Uruk, capturing its king. This man was *Sharru-kin*, “the righteous king;” better known as Sargon of Akkad. All of Sumer subsequently fell to the new ruler, who established a new capital at Agade (which gave its name to the region of Akkad). Most information about Sargon comes from later copies of historical texts and heroic legends written of his birth and life by later peoples of Mesopotamia. Of these, the most interesting is a text from the seventh century BC that describes Sargon’s birth and his being placed in a “basket of rushes” sealed with bitumen, and placed in a river,⁴⁴ quite like the biblical account of Moses (Exod 2:3). However one evaluates such legendary stories about him, there is good reason to accept the wide range of conquests attributed Sargon: as far as Elam in the southeast to Anatolia in the northwest.⁴⁵

Throughout its history, Mesopotamia oscillated between decentralized political control, as reflected in the city-state system, and centralized national government.⁴⁶ It was Sargon who created the first true Mesopotamian empire, enjoying a commercial exploitation of lands unknown before, at least from the Mediterranean coast to the Persian

³⁹Woolley, *Ur ‘of the Chaldees’*, 51-103.

⁴⁰Mallowan, *Early Mesopotamia*, 84-86; idem, “The Early Dynastic Period in Mesopotamia,” in *CAH*, vol. 1, part 2, *Early History of the Middle East*, 246-57, 270-72; Lloyd, *Archaeology of Mesopotamia*, 93-96.

⁴¹Lloyd, *Archaeology of Mesopotamia*, 92-97, 106-107.

⁴²For two reconstructions, see Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 1992), 138-45; and Hallo and Simpson, *Ancient Near East.*, 52-53.

⁴³The dates used here follow Roux, *Ancient Iraq*.

⁴⁴*ANET*, 119.

⁴⁵For more detail, see Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, 151-55.

⁴⁶For a discussion on this subject, see Knapp, *History and Culture of Ancient Western Asia and Egypt*, 65-66.

Gulf. More significant, for our purposes, Sargon initiated the pattern of conquering empires which would so impact Israel and Judah in a later age. Another enduring legacy is found in the fact that Akkadian was the dominant language for trade and diplomacy in the Near East for the next millennium.

Agade, unfortunately, has not been identified, and relatively few structures of the Akkadian Dynasty period remain, as later rebuildings have obscured them. A magnificent bronze head found at Nineveh, which adorns the cover of so many books, is very possibly a representation of Sargon himself.⁴⁷ Of special note is the “Stela of Naram-Sin,” showing Sargon’s grandson and third successor (2254-2218 BC) at the head of his victorious army.⁴⁸ Naram-Sin is pictured as a god, wearing a horned crown.

The fall of the Akkadian Empire ensued from many factors, including resentment of the imperialism of Naram-Sin. His own inscriptions mention a revolt of the principal cities of Sumer. A Sumerian text blames Naram-Sin’s allowing his troops to sack and loot the Ekur, the temple of Enlil in Nippur, for the downfall. The wrath of the god was seen in the descent of the Gutians, who overran the Akkadian homeland.

Ebla. A city by the name of Ebla was already known in various Hittite, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian writings when the excavations at the site of Tell Mardikh, in northern Syria, were begun in 1964. It was not known, however, how important the site was in the third millennium BC. In 1975 a room in the royal palace was found to contain thousands of clay tablets written in a hitherto unknown language in cuneiform script. Eblaite, as the language is now called, is the oldest known Northwest Semitic language, and becomes a chronological counterpart to Old Akkadian of the East Semitic language group. Because of its position among the Semitic languages, Eblaite will greatly facilitate the study of Ugaritic, Phoenician, and most importantly for this context, Hebrew.

The language of Ebla shows marked differences from the Amorite of the semi-nomads of the region.⁴⁹ Almost nothing is known of the occupants of Tell Mardikh from the first half of the third millennium, but the presence has been detected of the Khirbet Kerak pottery known in Palestine in the EB III period. Ebla emerged as a large city in the period about 2400 BC. The stratum of this period (Mardikh IIB1) produced the archives of the royal palace. A heavy destruction around 2250 BC, probably at the hands of Naram-Sin of Akkad, marks the end of this phase. The second great city at Ebla (Mardikh IIB2 period; about 2250-2000 BC) paralleled the last years of the Akkadian Dynasty, the Gutian domination, the Lagash II Dynasty, and finally Ur III. No break in culture is evident between this and the preceding phase. This city also ended in destruction.⁵⁰ All of the tablets so far have come from the Mardikh IIB1 period. They demonstrate that a large pre-Canaanite empire flourished in northern Syria about 2400-2250 BC.

The importance of the Ebla texts for biblical studies is great. Aside from the linguistic opportunities they provide, the texts contain much valuable geographic information. Some early reports have suggested that the names of the biblical cities of Jerusalem, Hazor, Gaza, Megiddo, and even Sodom and Gomorrah are mentioned. In addition, it is claimed by some that the personal names of Abraham, Esau, Saul, Israel, Eber, and David occur in the tablets. Such claims are widely disputed, however, and the leaders of the expedition have backed away from almost all biblical associations.⁵¹

⁴⁷Andre Parrot, *Sumer: The Dawn of Art*, trans. S. Gilbert and J. Emmons, The Arts of Mankind (New York: Golden, 1961), 170-73, pls. 206, 208.

⁴⁸Parrot, *Sumer*, 174-78.

⁴⁹Giovanni Pettinato, *The Archives of Ebla: An Empire Inscribed In Clay* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 59, 65-66.

⁵⁰Paolo Matthiae, *Ebla: An Empire Rediscovered*, trans. Christopher Holme (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), 161-62.

⁵¹See James D. Muhly, “Ur and Jerusalem Not Mentioned in Ebla Tablets, Say Ebla Expedition Scholars,” *BAR* 9 (November 1983):74-75. Unfortunately, the texts in question remain unpublished. A suspicion has lingered that the attitude of the Ebla excavators is due, at least in part, to the political realities of working in Syria, where “confirmations” of biblical traditions or associations with the Jews are not held in the highest regard.

Neo-Sumerian Revival: The Ur III Period (about 2150-2000 BC)

The period of Gutian domination, about which virtually nothing is known, continued for approximately a century. In about 2120 BC the ensi of Uruk raised an army and defeated the hated foreigners. But the governor of Ur, a certain Ur-Nammu (about 2112-2095 BC), in turn revolted and began the Third Dynasty of Ur, claiming the titles “King of Ur, King of Sumer and Akkad.” The period dominated by this dynasty is usually referred to as the Ur III Period. In the meantime, a Sumerian ruler in Lagash, Gudea, was destined to hold a prominent place in the history of Mesopotamia. This is due to the great number of inscriptions dealing with his reign that have survived, and to the ubiquitous and likenesses of him carved in hard stone. The statues are some of the most remarkable works of Mesopotamian sculpture known. Seated or standing, sometimes over half life-size, each is identified by an inscription.⁵²

The Ur III period is poor in historical inscriptions, making it difficult to trace the expansion of Ur-Nammu’s kingdom. It seems that most of Mesopotamia fell into his hands during a short period of conquest, after which attention was turned to the restoration of order and rebuilding of the homes of the gods. The law code of Ur-Nammu, the most ancient of such collections known, is of interest as it requires monetary compensation for certain crimes as opposed to corporal punishment. Other interesting details are the regulation of weights and measures (cf. Lev 19:35), and the forbidding of the exploitation of widows and orphans (cf. Ex 22:22; Deut 14:29). The text of this law, unfortunately, is fragmentary and late. The most permanent of Ur-Nammu’s works is his construction of the ziggurat at Ur [fig. 4-*]. A contemporary record of this undertaking is preserved in a fragmentary stele [fig. 4-*]. The ziggurat is only one part of a larger sacred precinct. Ur-Nammu was succeeded by his sons, Shulgi and Amar-Sin, both of whom were worshipped as gods during and after their lifetimes. The three kings were buried side by side in the royal mausoleum at Ur. Unfortunately, this structure was looted in antiquity.⁵³

Beginning in the reign of Shu-Sin (2037-2029 BC), the calm of a well organized empire began to be shaken. The first serious incursion of the **Amorites**, known to the Sumerians as MAR.TU and to the Akkadians as *Amurru*, struck at that time, and Shu-Sin was forced to build a huge fortified wall. Early in the reign of Ibbi-Sin (about 2028 BC) the empire disintegrated, with the Amorites making major inroads. The Elamites, taking advantage of the situation, attacked and destroyed Ur in 2004 BC, bringing the period of Sumerian revival to a close.

Egypt to the 1st Intermediate Period

Archaic Egypt: Dynasties 1-2 (about 3100-2700 BC)

The First Dynasty of Egypt apparently developed out of the late predynastic culture, when rulers of Upper Egypt came to subjugate Lower Egypt. A few ceremonial objects allow some reconstruction of this obscure period. A limestone macehead pictures a victorious king named only by a pictogram of a scorpion. On a slate cosmetic palette, the name Narmer appears over a figure wearing the Red Crown of Lower Egypt on the obverse and the White Crown of Upper Egypt on the reverse, the first evidence of a ruler claiming sovereignty over both lands.⁵⁴ This Narmer may be the legendary King Menes, named in the later king lists as the first pharaoh, who unified Upper and Lower Egypt.⁵⁵ Indeed, an inscription is known in which the name Narmer occurs in conjunction with the name “Men.” Another, however, has Men adjacent to the name of Aha, the son of Narmer’s queen. Some see this latter inscription as evidence for the identification of Aha with Menes.⁵⁶ Thus, some Egyptologists list Narmer as the first ruler of

⁵²On the Ur III period, see Kramer, *Sumerians*, 68-72; Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, 161-68.

⁵³Lloyd, *Archaeology of Mesopotamia*, 151-55.

⁵⁴W. B. Emery, *Archaic Egypt* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1961), 30-49. The Narmer Palette is one of the earliest specimens of Egyptian writing known, using pictograms and the principle of rebus.

⁵⁵On the subject of royal names in general, see Alan H. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), 50-52; and Emery, *Archaic Egypt*, 105-109.

⁵⁶For a detailed discussion of the arguments, see Emery, *Archaic Egypt*, 33-37, who prefers the identification of Menes with the Horus Aha; and Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 404-408, who prefers Narmer.

Dynasty 1 while others give the honor to Aha, placing the “Scorpion King” and Narmer in Dynasty 0. The First and Second Dynasties are generally referred to as the **Archaic Period** of Egypt.

During the Archaic period, construction of a permanent tomb became a priority for those in Egypt with the means to do so. In the tomb the body of the deceased was preserved, and the individual was provided with a sort of “perpetual care,” including food and drink offerings. The royal tombs, of course, were the most elaborate and the most interesting. Royal tombs of the Archaic Period typically consisted of a deep pit with tunnels leading to subterranean rooms covered by a great brick superstructure, subdivided into storage magazines on the inside and decorated with the recessed panel facade outside. Such tombs are called **mastabas**, from a local Arabic word for similar appearing brick benches. Royal tombs of First Dynasty kings were discovered both in Abydos (ancient Thinis) and at Saqqara, the ancient cemetery of Memphis—one set representing the actual tombs, the others cenotaphs. Some of these royal tombs are surrounded by subsidiary graves which contained the bodies of persons possibly sacrificed at the ruler’s burial, a feature reminiscent of the Early Dynastic tombs at Ur in Sumer. The large mastaba tombs represent a natural development of the upper class late predynastic tombs and a precursor of the famous pyramids that would follow.⁵⁷

The Old Kingdom: Dynasties 3-6 (about 2700-2200 BC)

Egyptian religion consists of a myriad of local gods and myths fused into a complex and contradictory system, never rendered coherent by the priesthood. Nevertheless, development of the “official” religion began during the **Old Kingdom** (2700-2200 BC). By the dawn of this period, the king was officially recognized as a god. This fact, coupled with the development of mortuary practices paved the way for the gigantic monuments created by the pharaohs of Dynasties 3-6.

The Pyramid Builders. By far the most obvious legacy of Old Kingdom Egypt are the pyramids, so that the period is often called the “Pyramid Age.” Few monuments have produced the level of wonder, awe, and bizarre speculation as have these striking monuments. The earliest, the Step Pyramid of the Third Dynasty king Djoser (about 2668-2649 BC), was part of a complex featuring a mortuary temple, shrines, and a ceremonial court, all surrounded by a massive wall with a colonnaded entrance. The pharaohs of the Fourth Dynasty produced the most impressive and famous of the pyramids. Snofru, first king of the dynasty apparently built three such monuments, including the first true pyramid at Meidum, originally a step pyramid supplied with an outer casing that later collapsed. The collapse of the Meidum pyramid may explain the other two monuments of Snofru at Dashur, the Bent Pyramid, the angle of which decreases at half its height (perhaps because of the collapse of the Meidum pyramid?), and the Red pyramid. While the shape was perfected, the pyramid complex had evolved to include three distinct parts aside from the pyramid itself: a Valley Chapel at the edge of the cultivation, accessible by boat during the inundation; a covered causeway; and a Mortuary Temple abutting the east side of the pyramid.⁵⁸

Though massive, Snofru’s monuments were eclipsed by the work of his son, Khufu, also known by the Hellenized version of his name, Cheops. His “Great Pyramid” at Giza represents the greatest achievement of the pyramid builders, in quality as well as size. Its mass is greater than any other building in history, and its height (481 feet) greater than any other made entirely of stone save the Ulm cathedral. Despite its appearance at a distance, it has suffered greatly through the centuries. Many buildings of Moslem Cairo are constructed of its smooth casing stones and little remains of the valley and mortuary temples and the causeway. All the same, several interesting discoveries have been made in the vicinity. Three subsidiary pyramids lie to the east, probably intended for Khufu’s wives. Intact cedar boats were found in two of the boat pits visible around the pyramid. In the shadow of the pyramid, the tomb of Queen Hetepheres, Khufu’s mother, contained a fine sarcophagus, a canopic chest with her visera, furniture, a carrying chair, vessels, and gold objects which testify to the artistic excellence of the age. Despite these impressive finds, it is the Great Pyramid itself which many find so intriguing.

The interior of the Great Pyramid contains three chambers connected by mysterious passages. These apparently testify to changes in plans which moved the intended burial chamber from a subterranean pit at the bottom of a long

⁵⁷For details, see Emery, *Archaic Egypt*, 49-91, 128-30.

⁵⁸For surveys of the Egyptian pyramids, see I. E. S. Edwards, *The Pyramids of Egypt*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961; reprinted with revisions, 1980); and Ahmed Fakhry, *The Pyramids*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

descending passage to a the so-called “Queen’s Chamber” in the body of the pyramid and ultimately to the “King’s Chamber” higher in the structure. The details and measurements of the “Grand Gallery” and other passages connecting these chambers has been the fuel for “pyramid theorists,” who seek to attach mystical, comological, or prophetic significance to the Great Pyramid.

The Great Pyramid Theorists. One of the most bizarre spinoffs of archaeology is the curious phenomenon of wild speculation about the Great Pyramid. Despite clear evidence that the pyramids were designed as tombs for the kings of Egypt, serious claims have been made that the Great Pyramid in particular served as a: secret initiation chamber, astronomical observatory, energy concentrating lens, landing place for alien spaceships, guide to divinely given systems of measurement, and prophetic guide to the ages.⁵⁹ Such ideas continue to surface in popular forum of archaeological discussion, yet they are only rarely addressed by mainline scholars or in works like this one. Certainly all these theories cannot be dealt with here, nor do they all merit consideration. But it is surely appropriate to comment on those ideas which combine archaeological data with ideals claiming biblical support.

Following the Renaissance, tremendous interest in measuring the Great Pyramid resulted from the supposition that the ancient Egyptians built it using a unit of measurement based on an accurate knowledge of the Earth’s circumference. It was eventually discovered that the twice the height of the pyramid relates to the perimeter of its base in nearly the same proportion as the diameter of a circle to its circumference; that is, remarkably close to the value of π (approx. 3.14159). Further measurements led some to the conclusion the Egyptians employed a cubit of 25 “pyramid inches” a thousandth longer than the standard British inch. It was claimed that, using a cubit of “pyramid inches,” the measurements of the pyramid reveal some facinating multiples of 366 (quite close to the number of days in a solar year). As twice this supposed sacred cubit would be 1/10,000,000 of the polar axis of the Earth, the theorists concluded that the pyramid builders knowingly incorporated geometric data in the construction. Whoever built the pyramid, therefore, must have done so under divine guidance. And since the British unit of measurement is so close to the supposed “pyramid inch,” the theory was easily developed to suggest that the British people represent God’s chosen race, the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel! In the wake of the French Revolution and its adoption of the “godless” metric system of measurement, the seeds of this theory had found fertile ground in a nervous England.

The leading proponent of this system was “pyramidologist” Piazzzi Smyth, a gifted mathematician and Astronomer Royal of Scotland, who based his conclusions on measurements taken at the pyramid in 1865.⁶⁰ It was in reaction to Smyth’s theory that one of the giant figures of Egyptology (and archaeology in general) began his work. W. M. F. Petrie, whose father was enamored with Smyth’s work, first went to Egypt to more accurately measure the Great Pyramid. Petrie’s measurements effectively debunked Smyth’s claim that the external dimensions of the structure reflected the solar year. But new observations by David Davidson, a skeptic who became mesmerized by the details of the pyramid, led to a revival of Smyth’s ideas and a new generation of “pyramidologists.”⁶¹ Building on an idea from Smyth’s day, Davidson and his successors asserted that the Great Pyramid’s passages represent a divine chronological plan for the ages, coinciding with biblical prophecies (especially Daniel), at the scale of one “pyramid inch” per solar year. Thus it was claimed that the pyramid predicted significant event of the early twentieth century, including the First World War, and—after several recalculations—a final cataclysm on August 20, 1953. Though this date passed without incident, the idea that the pyramid contains a chronological “prophecy in stone” is still perpetuated, primarily by groups who claim that English-speaking people are the remnants of the “Lost Tribes of Israel” and, therefore, God’s true chosen people.

Khufu’s Successors. Khufu’s son and second successor, Khafre, built the second pyramid at Giza, only slightly smaller than his father’s. Much remains of his funerary complex, including a splendidly preserved valley temple which held a very fine statue of Khafre. Adjacent lies the famous Sphinx, an enormous lion with the head of Khafre, probably carved from a knoll left by quarrying for the Great Pyramid. Menkaure is not known from any contemporary records, save an inscription which confirms his ownership of the third pyramid at Giza, the southernmost of the group. It was much smaller than the other two, but had a magnificent appearance due to the red

⁵⁹For the numerous “theories,” see Peter Thompkins, *Secrets of the Great Pyramid* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), for the best one volume survey and bibliography.

⁶⁰see, for example, Piazzzi Smyth, *Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramid* (London: Straham, 1864).

⁶¹David Davidson, *The Great Pyramid, Its Divine Message* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1932).

granite casing of its lowest courses. Very fine statues showing Menkaure with the goddesses of the nomes and his wife were found in the Valley Building.

Shepsekaf, who completed his father Menkaure's pyramid, did not build one for himself, but built a unique mastaba at South Saqqara. This change may have resulted from political considerations. It has long been suspected that the shape of the pyramids represented the rays of the sun, and that their construction and maintenance increased the power of the priests of Ra, the sun god. A conflict between the palace and the priestly hierarchy may account for dynastic difficulties which arose during Shepsekaf's reign.

The Fifth and Sixth Dynasties. Under Dynasty 5, the priesthood of Ra began to wield unprecedented influence. This is evident in the cartouche names of Dynasty 5 kings, which frequently included the element *re*. More striking is the monumental evidence, as six kings of this dynasty erected sun temples in addition to their pyramids.⁶²

The pyramids of Dynasties 5 and 6 are inferior in size and quality to their predecessors, being constructed of a core of small stones with a smooth limestone casing. The pyramid of Unis (sometimes Wenis), last king of the Fifth Dynasty, was found to contain extensive inscriptions in its subterranean chambers. These and like texts from Dynasty 6 pyramids are known as the **Pyramid Texts**. They are composed of a collection of magic spells designed to provide the king with a happy afterlife. Versions of these texts, modified for common persons and written on coffins in the First Intermediate Period, are known as the **Coffin Texts**. By Middle Kingdom times, similar texts were written on papyrus and placed in the coffin. The latter version has become known as the **Book of the Dead**.⁶³

In Dynasties 5 and 6, the extreme centralization of the earlier periods faded away, while the importance of the provinces and nobility increased. In contrast to the shoddy workmanship of the pyramids, the tombs of the nobles reveal a remarkable increase in wealth. No longer vying for a favored spot beneath the king's pyramid, they were decorated with reliefs showing scenes of everyday life in the belief that such pictures would enable the dead tomb owner to enjoy all the good things represented. Another innovation in these private tombs is the increase in varieties of private statuary, often depicting the deceased as a scribe sitting cross legged, his short skirt forming a writing table.

Egyptian interests in Palestine were reawakened in the Old Kingdom. Several texts mention Egyptian campaigns to the east against "sand dwellers" and "Asiatics" (Egyptian *c3mw*). The most interesting and longest of these comes from the tomb of Weni (or Uni), a noble who led an expedition against the "sand dwellers." By ship, he travelled beyond the "Nose of the Antelope"—apparently a reference to Mt. Carmel—to attack villages in the Jezreel Valley.⁶⁴

First Intermediate Period (about 2200-2050 BC)

With the breakdown of centralized control at the end of the Old Kingdom, Egypt entered a period of chaos called the **First Intermediate Period**. Each of Dynasties 7 through 11 ruled only part of Egypt and much of the period is dominated by a struggle between rulers of Herakleopolis (Dynasties 9 and 10) and Thebes (Dynasty 11). This disunity allowed incursions by Asiatics—inhabitants of Western Asia—into the Nile Delta region, which contributed to the great dislike of these people by the Egyptians.

This state of anarchy perhaps served as the catalyst for early examples of Egyptian wisdom literature which reflect on the difficult conditions of the period. Among them are: the Admonitions of Ipuwer; the Protests of the Eloquent Peasant; the poignant Dispute over Suicide, in which a man argues with his soul over whether or not to take his own life; and Instructions for King Merikare.⁶⁵ The latter, allegedly written for the Herakleopolitan pharaoh Merikare by his father, is remarkable for its description of pastoral Asiatics of Sinai and Palestine in this period.

⁶²In addition, the "Son of Ra" name became a regular part of the king's titulary in this period; Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 84-85; on the Sun-temples, see Edwards, *Pyramids of Egypt*, 171-74.

⁶³Edwards, *Pyramids of Egypt*, 175-78, 191-94; Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 86-89.

⁶⁴*ANET*, 227-28; *ARE I*, §§ 291-94, 306-324.

⁶⁵For English translations see, respectively, *ANET*, 441-44; 405-407; 407-10; and 414-18.

Early Bronze Age Palestine

For whatever reason, Palestine lagged behind Mesopotamia and northern Syria in the development of a complex society. Nevertheless, the rise of urbanism is a hallmark of the **Early Bronze Age** (3200-2200 BC) in Palestine. The chronology of Early Bronze Palestine is tied to that of Egypt, but there is disagreement over the terminology and dates for the period.⁶⁶ Egyptian finds in Palestine indicate that the Early Bronze (EB) I correlates to the late Predynastic Period and the beginning of the First Dynasty in Egypt, while the EB II correlates to the remainder of the Archaic Period (Dynasties 1-2), and the EB III corresponds to the Old Kingdom (Dynasties 3-6).⁶⁷

The Rise of Urbanism: The EB I Period (3200-3000 BC)

True urbanism only arose after an initial transitional phase, usually called EB I (3330-3000 BC), in which most settlements were unfortified villages. These were generally in different locations than in the preceding Chalcolithic period. Many of the buildings of this period have rounded, oval, circular, or apsidal wall plans. The apsidal buildings seem to represent a tradition known from northern Anatolia, also home for the “gray burnished” pottery common in the period.⁶⁸ It is not clear if these and other features indicate the incursions of new peoples to the land.⁶⁹

Another innovation is the introduction of tombs in which large numbers of skeletons are found together in a natural or hewn-out rock cave. Such tombs, in fact, are the main source of data for the period. Often, the skeletons are found disarticulated—perhaps indicating secondary burials—usually with the skulls lined up next to a central bone pile. The latter feature recalls the special treatment of skulls in Neolithic Palestine (see above) and may indicate some cultural continuity.⁷⁰ A huge cemetery at Bab edh-Dhra^c, at the Lisan peninsula on the east side of the Dead Sea, represents the largest burial ground of this type known in the Near East. A settlement nearby seems too small to accommodate such a cemetery. This has led to the hypothesis that Bab edh-Dhra^c served as a regional cemetery with sacred associations. Another theory holds that the cemetery served the “cities of the Plain,” including the lost cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 13:10-12), but this is quite uncertain. At Bab edh-Dhra^c, two types of EB I tombs are known. Earlier “shaft tombs,” with multiple secondary burials in an artificial cave reached by a vertical shaft, give way to built up structures of mud brick containing multiple primary burials. Similar to the latter are round stone-built tombs with corbelled roofs found in the southern Sinai, called nawamis, apparently built by pastoral nomads.

The major public buildings known from EB I Palestine are temples. A double sanctuary at Megiddo, separated from dwellings by a walled courtyard, may have served as a central shrine for the area. Temples are known from other sites,⁷¹ including Hartuv, where a large broad hall sanctuary incorporating a row of standing stones (Hebrew *massebot*) may have developed from an open-air sacred area. This development may indicate a central role for the sanctuaries in the process of sedentation in the last part of the fourth millennium⁷²—a process leading to full urbanization in the following period.

⁶⁶For discussions, see Paul W. Lapp, “Palestine in the Early Bronze Age,” in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Nelson Glueck*, ed. by J. A. Sanders (New York, 1970), 101-131; Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 92-110. The system used here is that found in *NEAEHL*, 4:1529.

⁶⁷Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 105-109.

⁶⁸Yohanan Aharoni, *The Archaeology of the Land of Israel*, trans. Anson F. Rainey (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 49-52; Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 96-99.

⁶⁹see Suzanne Richard, “The Early Bronze Age: The Rise and Collapse of Urbanism,” *BA* 50 (March 1987): 22-25; and especially Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 104-105.

⁷⁰Richard, “The Early Bronze Age,” 24-25; Mazar *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 104-105.

⁷¹see Aharon Kempinski, “Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age Temples,” in *The Architecture of Ancient Israel: From the Prehistoric to the Persian Periods* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1992).

⁷²Mazar, *Archaeology and the Land of the Bible*, 98.

Urban Palestine: The EB II-III Period (3000-2200 BC)

With the Early Bronze II period urbanism fully arrived in Palestine, spurred on, no doubt, by peaking trade relations with Egypt, evidenced already in the EB I period.⁷³ Large walled cities appeared at Ai, Arad, Beth Yerah, Megiddo, Tell el-Farrah, Yarmuth, and other sites.

The fortifications at EB II-III sites are quite impressive. EB II walls were usually entered through narrow gates and reinforced with projecting semi-circular towers as seen in an excellent example at Arad, in the eastern Negev. In the late EB II and EB III periods walls were generally thickened, at Ai and Beth Yerah (Khirbet Kerak) eventually reaching a width of eight meters. At Yarmuth, continued constructions swelled the defensive perimeter enclosing forty acres to a width of forty meters!⁷⁴

The period features some other interesting public works. At Beth Yerah, a large rectangular building with twelve circular depressions in its broad foundation has been interpreted as a public granary.⁷⁵ Arad, built on the slope of a horseshoe shaped hill in the arid Negev, quite to the south of the other EB cities of Palestine, was not directly on any water source. The shape of the slope, however, allowed runoff water to be collected in a large strategically placed pool. Thus, the ancient inhabitants of Arad could subsist on rainwater stored in cisterns throughout the year.⁷⁶

Public buildings offer limited assistance in reconstructing EB Palestine. At Ai, an acropolis area centered on a large broad-room building which must be a temple or palace.⁷⁷ An interesting series of temples of the Early Bronze age are known at Megiddo. Beginning with a long room with an altar about 3000 BC, a large round stone altar was added about one hundred years later. Other temples were subsequently built in the precinct.⁷⁸

A common implement of the period is the "Canaanite sickle blade," consisting of rectangular segments of flint fitted into a bone or wooden handle. These were a distinctive feature of Canaanite civilization until the Israelite period.⁷⁹

In contrast to Mesopotamia, the actual history of the cities in EB Palestine is completely unknown, as no inscriptional material has yet been found. There may have been some connection between Egyptian incursions in the south of Palestine and their construction, but the cities of EB Palestine seem never to have developed a unified political system. Indeed, the fortifications and other features imply a system of large city-states. They were, apparently, the beginnings of the royal Canaanite system of independent, rival states which continued into the next millennium. They may have been in mutual competition or conflict, as occasional destruction levels seem to indicate. The city wall at Jericho, for example, was rebuilt seventeen times during the Early Bronze Age.

The Fall of Urbanism: The EB IV/MB I Period (2200-2000 BC)

The last two centuries of the third millennium BC in Palestine are marked by the wholesale destruction or abandonment of every major EB III site in Palestine. The subsequent period, in contrast to those great city-states, is

⁷³Richard, "The Early Bronze Age," 27.

⁷⁴for a review, see Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 119-22. For Arad, see Ruth Amiran, *Early Arad* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1978); for Ai, see Joseph A. Callaway, *The Early Bronze Age Citadel and Lower City at Ai* (Cambridge, Mass.: ASOR, 1980); for Yarmuth, see Pierre de Miroschedji, *Yarmouth I: Rapport sur les trois premières campagnes de fouilles a Tel Yarmouth (Israel) (1980-1982)* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988).

⁷⁵Ruth Hestrin, "Beth Yerah," in *NEAEHL*, 258.

⁷⁶Aharoni, *Archaeology of the Land of Israel*, 60-61.

⁷⁷J. A. Callaway, "Ai," in *NEAEHL*, 41-44.

⁷⁸see Kathleen Kenyon, *EI 5* (1958): 51*-60*; Richard, "The Early Bronze Age," 31-32.

⁷⁹Steven Rosen, "The Canaanite Blade and the Early Bronze Age," *IEJ* 33/1-2 (1983): 20, 22, fig. 3.

characterized by a seminomadic, pastoral way of life. This period is comparable to the First Intermediate Period of Egypt, and represents a dark age for Palestine.

Whether this period should be identified with the following Middle Bronze Age, or assigned to a late phase of the Early Bronze Age is a matter of great debate. Albright originally designated the period Middle Bronze I (MB I). The MB I pottery shows more characteristics in common with the preceding Early Bronze than with the Middle Bronze IIA which follows. Therefore, some have preferred to call this period EB IV. Kenyon designates the period “Intermediate Early Bronze-Middle Bronze.”⁸⁰ While not accepting a Middle Bronze identification, she maintains a clear cultural break, which she identifies with the arrival of the Amorites in Palestine.⁸¹ Kenyon’s hypothesis has gained much acceptance, but is not the last word. To add confusion to the picture, Albright long ago identified an EB IV culture, distinct from his MB I,⁸² which recently has been “rediscovered” in the Transjordan. Dever has suggested a combination of the MB I with the EB IV as phases under the heading of the latter. He sees the period, not as an invasion, but as the “brief triumph of the ‘desert’ over the ‘sown,’” and suggests that the indigenous population had always been “Amorite.”⁸³

As we have seen, the interlude of the MB I period also saw a disruption of centralized control in Egypt. The transhumant population of Palestine was feared and loathed by Egyptians. An remarkable, but unflattering, description of them is found in the contemporary Instructions for King Merykare:

Lo, the wretched Asiatic—it goes ill with the place where he is, afflicted with water, difficult from many trees, the ways thereof painful because of the mountains. He does not dwell in a single place, (but) his legs are made to go astray. He has been fighting (ever) since the time of Horus, (but) he does not conquer, nor yet can he be conquered.⁸⁴

Negative though it may be, there are similarities between this description and the lifestyle described of the Patriarchs in the Bible. Although there have been attempts to place Abraham in the MB I Period, it is far more likely that the age of the Patriarchs should be sought in the early 2nd millennium BC—the Middle Bronze Age.

⁸⁰For the various terminologies, see Patty Gerstenblith, *The Levant at the Beginning of the Middle Bronze Age*, ASOR Dissertation Series, 5 (Winona Lake, IN: ASOR, 1983), 2-3.

⁸¹Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land*, 4th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 145-46.

⁸²William Foxwell Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), 77-83.

⁸³William G. Dever, “New Vistas on the EB IV (“MB I”) Horizon in Syria-Palestine,” *BASOR* 237 (1980):35-64.

⁸⁴*ANET*, 416.