CHAPTER 2

The International Bronze Age and Its Aftermath: Trade, Empire, and Diplomacy, 1600 - 550 B.C.E.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. The Egyptian Empire

Over a period of 500 years after the end of the Middle Kingdom, Egyptians made use of new military technology to create a vast multi-ethnic empire. Combining military expansion with diplomacy and the encouragement of foreign trade, the pharaohs made Egypt a major international force.

A. The Hyksos and the Revolution in Military Technology

Invading Egypt at the end of the Middle Kingdom, the Hyksos linked Egypt to an emerging international network of commerce, technology, and diplomacy. The Hyksos also introduced a new, advanced military technology: horse-drawn chariots and archers firing composite bows.

A. Administration and Government During the New Kingdom

The expulsion of the Hyksos around 1550 B.C.E. marked the beginning of the New Kingdom, a period in which Egypt extended its territories. Taking the title of “pharaoh” for the first time, Egypt’s rulers were now the supreme commanders of a permanent army. Pharaoh’s powers were wide-ranging and absolute, representing the divine will of Heaven on Earth, and these powers were exercised through a highly organized bureaucratic administrative system. Temples also played an essential part in the government of Egypt.

B. Military Expansion: Building an Empire in Canaan and Nubia

Chariot warfare and Egypt’s great wealth allowed the pharaohs to conquer Canaan and Nubia. Egyptians supported the extension of pharaoh’s power throughout the world, believing it was his responsibility to establish order in the world. Centralized administration allowed Egypt to gain enormous wealth from its empire, which fostered economic and cultural exchange. By the end of the New Kingdom, Egyptians had borrowed much from those they had conquered and they viewed non-Egyptians more positively.
C. Pharaohs: The Source of Egypt’s Success

Egypt’s success depended above all on its pharaohs.

1. Hatshepsut the Female Pharaoh and Thutmose III the Conqueror

Hatshepsut carefully adapted to the male images of kingship and pursued policies that brought Egypt great prosperity, while the reign of her successor Thutmose strengthened Egypt’s control of its territories and brought military glory.

2. The Amarna Period: Religious Ferment and the Beginnings of Diplomacy

Pharaoh Akhenaten’s attempts to impose the worship of the sun god as a sole, universal god were resented and did not outlast him. More productive, but not always successful, were the attempts by pharaohs at diplomacy, recognizing other rulers’ authority and creating a sense of international community.

3. The Age of Ramesses

The pharaohs of this dynasty put down revolts and confronted threats on their frontiers. Most importantly, they clashed with the Hittite kingdom, a conflict that eventually gave way to a treaty and almost a century of peace and flourishing commerce.

D. Women in the New Kingdom

Women in Egypt enjoyed many rights and played an important role in religious worship. Female divinities in Egyptian religion reflected Egyptian reverence for women and Egyptian families valued daughters as much as sons.

II. The Hittite, Assyrian, and Babylonian Empires

Other large, highly centralized empires developed during the International Bronze Age.

A. The Growth of Hittite Power: Conquest and Diversity

The Hittites extended their power through military conquest, establishing cities as administrative centers in an increasingly multiethnic empire. Those centers gathered the products that the Hittites used to gain wealth in long-distance commerce, which in turn prompted them to use diplomacy to try and create peaceful conditions in which trade flourished.

1. The Great King

Ruling in the name of the supreme God of Storms, the Hittite Great King tried to foster unity by becoming the chief priest of all the gods worshiped by the many peoples in the Hittite empire and worked hard to provide uniform justice as well.

To foster unity, the Hittites deliberately incorporated the gods of those they had conquered into their own religious system. The Hittites believed that their gods protected them and punished moral transgressions. They also believed in an afterlife.

B. The Mesopotamian Empires

The two empires emerged in Mesopotamia, Babylonia in the south and Assyria in the north, both of which controlled their subjects’ economic production and maintained diplomatic ties with other empires. Meanwhile, the seminomadic Hapiru offered a contrast to these empires’ tightly controlled societies.

1. The Kingdom of Babylonia: Prosperity under Kassite Rule

Under Kassite rule, Babylonia enjoyed a golden age as a center of trade, culture, and learning. Ruling fairly and generously gained Babylonia’s kings loyalty and popularity, and the kingdom became especially renowned for its science, medicine, and literature.

2. The Kingdom of Assyria: Expansion and Trade

While the Assyrian kings understood the value of diplomacy, they also knew that Assyria’s power depended on control of natural resources and trade routes and they were willing to use war to safeguard their economic interests.

3. The Hapiru: On the Edges of Settled Life

Just beyond and between the borders of the great empires were the seminomadic and diverse peoples called the Hapiru, one of whom, entering Canaan about 1100 B.C.E., might have been the ancestors of the Hebrews.

III. The Civilizations of the Mediterranean

The Minoan civilization on the island of Crete and the Mycenaean civilization on mainland Greece were the first civilizations in Europe, developed from native peoples and prospering from agriculture and long-distance trade. Mediating between these first European civilizations and the Egyptian and Hittite empires were small coastal states, the most prosperous of which were Ugarit and Troy.

A. Minoan Crete

Becoming highly skilled navigators, the Minoans made Crete a thriving center of long-distance trade.

1. Palace Administration: Collecting and Redistributing Wealth

Four major urban administrative centers, called palaces, controlled the Minoan economy, suggesting a highly centralized political authority. These centers
gathered in agricultural produce and housed craftsmen and artists, providing the goods that fueled the Minoan merchants’ extensive trade and producing the wealth that allowed the elites to live in great luxury.

2. The Mystery of Minoan Religion

Minoan religion is not well understood because although the Minoans used a form of writing to keep records, no religious writings have been found that would shed light on what historians believe was a religion dominated by female divinities.

3. The Collapse of Minoan Prosperity

The sudden collapse of Minoan power and prosperity around 1450 B.C.E. is also not fully understood, nor the possible role in it of the Mycenaean Greeks.

B. Mycenaean Greece

Mycenaean civilization is the term applied to the culture of perhaps six kingdoms on the Greek mainland that existed from around 1600 to 1100 B.C.E.

1. Mycenaean Civilization

Evidence suggests that there was no political unity and frequent war in Mycenaean Greece where, as in Crete, palaces functioned as administrative and economic centers. However, records indicate that by 1400 B.C.E. there was a uniform Mycenaean civilization and that the Mycenaes used an early form of the Greek language and worshiped Greek gods.

2. The Warrior Kingdom of Mycenae

Excavations at the most influential kingdom, located in southern Greece at Mycenae, suggest a highly warlike people, dominated by a wealthy and well-fed elite of kings and aristocratic warriors who greatly valued military prowess.

3. Overseas Trade and Settlement

After the fall of Minoan Crete, the Mycenaes took over and extended the Minoans’ trade routes. To foster this commerce, Mycenaean rulers forged diplomatic ties with Egyptian and Hittite monarchs, but undermined the latter with settlements in Hittite territory.

C. Two Coastal Kingdoms: Ugarit and Troy

In the border regions between empires, independent cities survived by affiliating with one of the empires; the most notable of these were Ugarit and Troy.
1. Ugarit: A Mercantile Kingdom

Canaanite in culture, Ugarit rose to prominence due to its possessing rich natural resources and a fine natural harbor that made the city a hub of international trade, reflected in the Ugarit elite’s literacy in both their own and others’ languages. The city’s independence was maintained by the clever diplomacy of Ugarit’s kings.

2. Troy: A City of Legend

Famous from Homer’s epic poems, Troy prospered from trade, but its greatest days had already been ended with an earthquake by the time Homer’s Trojan War would have taken place.

IV. The End of the International Bronze Age and Its Aftermath

Between 1200 and 1100 B.C.E., the era of prosperity and international interconnection ended as the civilizations of the Bronze Age plunged into a period marked by invasions, migrations, and the collapse of stable governments.

A. The Raiders of the Land and Sea

Mycenaean civilization collapsed from within as overpopulation led to warfare that caused the kingdoms and the economy to collapse. The Greek language and some religious beliefs survived, as did an oral tradition commemorating Mycenaean fighting. Invasion and economic decline triggered the collapse of the Hittite empire’s government. This economic and political decline, combined with earthquakes, plague, and climate change, spurred migrations of peoples known as “Raiders” to the Egyptians, who destroyed Ugarit and other coastal cities. The Raiders failed to destroy Egypt, but that kingdom slipped into a long economic and military decline. Invasions also severely weakened Assyria and Babylonia.

B. The Phoenicians: Merchants of the Mediterranean

Two hundred years after the International Bronze Age ended, the independent cities of the Phoenicians along the eastern Mediterranean emerged with a vibrant mercantile and seafaring culture.

1. Economic Expansion

Motivated by the search for metal ores, the Phoenicians, legendary for their navigational and ship-building skills, crisscrossed the Mediterranean and even ventured into the Atlantic in search of trade. They thus became important cultural mediators between the Middle East and the western Mediterranean, symbolized in their chief city in the west, Carthage, which controlled trade between the eastern and western Mediterranean.
2. Religion and Culture

Showing remarkable continuity through time and across the Mediterranean, Phoenician religion emphasized rebirth and fertility, and often adopted the gods of the other peoples they encountered. The most lasting cultural contribution of the Phoenicians was the phonetic alphabet.

B. Mesopotamian Kingdoms: Assyria and Babylon, 1050 - 550 B.C.E.

Although they declined, Assyria and Babylonia survived and began to reassert themselves around 1050 B.C.E.

1. Neo-Assyrian Imperialism

Believing that expansion and war were a divine command, the Neo-Assyrians developed a highly militarized empire. They used cruelty and deportation to subdue and keep subdued the peoples they conquered. They did not interfere in those peoples’ traditions or religious practices, although the ruler Ashurbanipal did attempt to create a uniform culture for the empire’s elites.

2. Neo-Babylonian Empire

Seizing and supplanting the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the wealthy Neo-Babylonian Empire consisted of wealthy cities that maintained complex relationships with the king. In addition to loyalty to the king, these cities were bound together by religion, especially the worship of the all-powerful god Marduk. Believing that earth and sky were interrelated, Babylonian religion fostered astronomy and mathematics.

V. Conclusion: The International Bronze Age and the Emergence of the West

During the International Bronze Age, a crucial phase in the formation of Western civilization, an intricate network of political, commercial, and cultural ties among cities and kingdoms created a complex pattern of cultural diffusion over a vast geographic area.
TIMELINE

Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.

- Phoenicians begin competing with Greek colonists in Sicily and Italy
- Ramesses II reigns
- Troy Vlla falls: Raiders of the Land and Sea burn Ugarit
- Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) rules; Amarna period
- Mycenaeans control Crete and eastern sea routes

___ 1375 B.C.E.
___ 1351-1334 B.C.E.
___ 1279-1213 B.C.E.
___ 1150 B.C.E.
___ 730s B.C.E.

TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one.

- Bronze
- Empire
- Battle of Kadesh
- Lapis lazuli
- Raiders of the Land and Sea
- Hittite Empire
- Hyksos
- Hatshepsut
- Akhenaten
- Hittites
- Knossos
- Mycenae
- Ugarit
- Troy
- Phoenicians
- Ishtar Gate
MAP EXERCISE

The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in this chapter. Locate the following places on the map.

Pylos
Troy
Knossos
Mycenae
Sidon
Tyre
Cyrene
Carthage
Gades
Sidon

Pickup map from Kishlansky Study Guide, page 53
MAKING CONNECTIONS

The following questions are intended to emphasize important ideas within the chapter.

1. How did Egypt during the New Kingdom take advantage of a technological revolution to expand its imperial system?
2. What enabled the Hittites to rise to power? How did Hittite religion reflect the diversity of their empire?
3. Where did Minoan civilization develop? What variables account for its rise? What role did female divinities play in Minoan religion?
4. Why is Troy referred to as a “city of legend”? What was its chief claim to power and influence in the Mediterranean world? What, according to archaeologists, were the causes of its demise?
5. What were the causes of the end of the International Bronze Age? Why is the International Bronze Age considered such a “crucial phase” in the formation of Western civilization?

DOCUMENT QUESTIONS

1. In the Millawanda Letter, is the Hittite king negotiating from a position of strength or weakness? Look for evidence in the language he uses.

2. The Hittite warrior purification ritual has very exact requirements. What might each requirement (the person and animals who are sacrificed, the hawthorn, the rope, etc.) symbolize?

PUTTING LARGER CONCEPTS TOGETHER

1. What characteristics did the seafaring states of the Mediterranean have in common? How did this influence the commerce and diplomacy of the region? Why were these states so important to the continuing evolution of western civilization?

2. What was the impact of Phoenician expansion throughout the Mediterranean region? What does the spread of Phoenician culture tell us about the ways cultural traits, ideas, and beliefs are transmitted from one place to another?
**SELF-TEST OF FACTUAL INFORMATION**

1. Which civilization is correctly matched with its geographical core area?
   
   A. Hittite – Anatolia  
   B. Minoan – Canaan seacoast  
   C. Mycenean – African desert  
   D. Phoenician – Greek mainland

2. The International Bronze Age (1600-1100 B.C.E.) was characterized by
   
   A. All of these  
   B. multiethnic empires.  
   C. trade.  
   D. diplomacy and peace.

3. Which Egyptian promoted a monotheistic religion with a deity expressing both masculine and feminine traits?
   
   A. Nefertiti  
   B. Thutmose III  
   C. Akhneton  
   D. Ramesses I

4. The great Egyptian Empire-builder was
   
   A. Hattusili.  
   B. Nut.  
   C. Suppiluliuma I.  
   D. Ramesses II.

5. The Battle of Kadesh (1274 B.C.E.)
   
   A. was a major victory for the Egyptians.  
   B. resulted in a period of peace and cooperation between the Egyptians and Hittites.  
   C. ended the Kassite dynasty.  
   D. was fought against pirates on the Mediterranean coast.

6. Archaeologists believe that the Minoans had a prosperous and creative civilization after discovering the
   
   A. mortuary temple of Ramesses III.  
   B. remains of the palace at Knossos.  
   C. Lion Gate to Hattushas.  
   D. death mask of Agamemnon.
7. Ugarit was a(n)
   A. Egyptian pharaoh.
   B. Minoan mystery religion.
   C. mercantile kingdom in Canaan.
   D. site of Troy.
   E. early form of Greek writing.

8. The Phoenicians
   A. developed an alphabet.
   B. founded colonies in North Africa and Spain.
   C. worshiped Baal and sometimes practiced child sacrifice.
   D. All of these.

9. The Chaldean king who expanded his empire and built the Hanging Gardens of Babylon was
   A. Schliemann.
   B. Nebuchadnezzar II.
   C. Tiglath-Pileser III.
   D. Nebmertuf.

10. Babylonians were noted for
    A. dark red dye for textiles.
    B. perfumed olive oil exports.
    C. monotheism.
    D. contributions to astronomy and mathematics.