

Chapter 16

The Ancient World



Learning Objectives

- 16.1 Describe some ways in which prehistoric art reflects the social aspirations of early peoples.
- ~~16.2 Discuss the relationship between the gods and the people in Mesopotamian art.~~
- 16.3 Account for the stability of Egyptian art and culture.
- ~~16.4 Describe the growing technological sophistication of the river valley societies of India and China.~~
- 16.5 Explain the large size of so many artworks and cultural sites in the Americas.
- 16.6 Differentiate between Minoan and Mycenaean culture and describe how the Greek *polis* and its art differ from its Aegean predecessors.
- 16.7 Discuss how the art and architecture of Rome suggest the empire's power.
- ~~16.8 Compare and contrast Chinese militarism with Buddhist pacifism.~~

On a cold December afternoon in 1994, Jean-Marie Chauvet and two friends were exploring the caves in the steep cliffs along the Ardèche River gorge in southern France. After descending into a series of narrow passages, they entered a large chamber. There, beams from their headlamps lit up a group of drawings that would astonish the three explorers—and the world (**Fig. 16-1**). Most remarkably, the artists responsible for making them seem to have understood and practiced a kind of perspectival drawing—that is, they were able to convey a sense of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. In the painting reproduced here, several horses appear to stand one behind the other. The head of the top horse overlaps a black line, as if peering over a branch or the back of another animal. In no other cave yet discovered do drawings show the use of shading, or modeling, so

that the horses' heads seem to have volume and dimension. And yet these cave paintings, rendered over 30,000 years ago, predate other cave paintings by at least 10,000 years, and in some cases by as much as 20,000 years.

Since the late nineteenth century, we have known that prehistoric peoples—peoples who lived before the time of writing and so of recorded history—drew on the walls of caves. The Chauvet Cave, as it has come to be known, may have served as some sort of ritual space, in which a rite or ceremony is habitually practiced by a group, often in a religious or quasi-religious context. The cave, for instance, might be understood as a gateway to the underworld and death, or as a symbol of the womb and birth. The general arrangement of the animals in the paintings by species or gender, often in distinct areas of the cave, suggests to some that



Fig. 16-1 Wall painting with horses, Chauvet Cave, Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, Ardèche gorge, France, ca. 30,000 BCE. Paint on limestone, height approx. 6 ft.

Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication. Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles de Rhône-Alpes. Service Régional de l'Archéologie/akg-images.

the paintings may have served as lunar calendars for predicting the seasonal migration of the animals. Whatever the case, surviving human footprints indicate that the cave was a ritual gathering place and in some way served the common good.

From the earliest times, people have gathered together in just such cooperative ventures. As these groups become more and more sophisticated, we call them **civilizations**—social, economic, and political entities distinguished by their ability to express themselves through images and, later, written language. This chapter outlines the rise of civilizations up through the Roman Empire.

The Earliest Art

How do prehistoric artworks reflect the social aspirations of the earliest peoples?

Besides cave paintings, early artists also created sculptural objects—small carved figures of people (mostly women) and animals. These reflect a more abstract and less naturalistic approach to representation, as illustrated in a limestone statuette of a woman found at Willendorf, in modern Austria (**Fig. 16-2**). (Archeologists originally named it the *Venus* of Willendorf, but its makers



Fig. 16-2 *Woman* (formerly a.k.a. the *Venus of Willendorf*), Lower Austria, ca. 25,000–20,000 BCE. Limestone, height 4½ in. Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna. akg-image/Erich Lessing.

obviously had no knowledge of the Roman goddess.) Here, the breasts, belly, and genitals are exaggerated and the face lacks defining features, suggesting a connection to fertility and child-bearing. We know, too, that the figurine was originally painted in red ocher, symbolic of menses. And her navel is not carved; rather, it is a natural indentation in the stone. Whoever carved her seems to have recognized, in the raw stone, a connection to the origins of life. But such figures may have served other purposes as well. Perhaps they were dolls, guardian figures, or images of beauty in a cold, hostile world, where having body fat might have made the difference between survival and death.

As the Ice Age waned, around 8000 BCE, humans began to domesticate animals and cultivate food grains, practices that started in the Middle East and spread slowly across Greece and Europe for the next 6,000 years, reaching Britain last. Agriculture also developed in the southern part of China and spread to Japan and Southeast Asia; it arose independently in the Americas; and in Africa, herding, fishing, and farming communities dotted the continent. Gradually, Neolithic—or New Stone Age—peoples abandoned temporary shelters for permanent structures built of wood, brick, and stone. Religious rituals were regularized in shrines dedicated to that purpose. Crafts—pottery and weaving, in particular—began to flourish.

The Neolithic cultures that flourished along the banks of the Yellow River in China beginning in about 5000 BCE also produced large quantities of pottery (**Fig. 16-3**). These cultures were based on growing rice



Fig. 16-3 Basin, Majiayao culture, Majiayao phase, Gansu province, China, ca. 3000–2700 BCE. Earthenware with painted decoration, diameter 11 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Anonymous Loan, L. 1996.55.6. Dorling Kindersley Media Library. © Judith Miller/Doris Kindersley/Wallis and Wallis.



Fig. 16-4 Beaker with ibex, dogs, and long-necked birds, from southwest Iran, ca. 5000–4000 BCE. Baked clay with painted decoration, height 11¼ in.
Inv. SB3174. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre)/Droits réservés.

and millet (grains from the Near East would not be introduced for another 3,000 years), and this agricultural emphasis spawned towns and villages. In Gansu province, Neolithic potters began to add painted decoration to their work. The flowing, curvilinear forms painted on the shallow basin illustrated here include “hand” motifs on the outside, and round, almost eyelike forms that flow into each other on the inside.

Some of the most remarkable Neolithic painted pottery comes from Susa, on the Iranian plateau. The patterns on one particular beaker (Fig. 16-4) from around 5000 to 4000 BCE are highly stylized animals, the largest of which is an ibex, a popular decorative feature of prehistoric ceramics from Iran. Associated with the hunt, the ibex may have been a symbol of plenty. The front and hind legs are rendered by two triangles, the tail hangs behind it like a feather, the head is oddly disconnected from the body, and the horns rise in a large, exaggerated arc to encircle a decorative circular form. Hounds race around the band above the ibex, and wading birds form a decorative band across the beaker’s top.



Fig. 16-5 Stonehenge, Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire, England, ca. 2000 BCE.

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In northern Europe, especially in Britain and France, a distinctive kind of monumental stone architecture made its appearance late in the Neolithic period. Known as **megaliths**, or “big stones,” these works were constructed without the use of mortar and represent the most basic form of architectural construction. Without doubt, the most famous megalithic structure in the world is the cromlech—from the Celtic *crom*, “circle,” and *lech*, “place”—known as Stonehenge (Fig. 16-5), on Salisbury Plain, about 100 miles west of present-day London. A henge is a circle surrounded by a ditch with built-up embankments, presumably for fortification. The site at Stonehenge reflects four major building periods, extending from about 2750 to 1500 BCE. By about 2100 BCE, most of the elements visible today were in place—but many elements remain invisible, as was revealed by archeologist Vince Gaffney in 2014, whose Stonehenge Hidden Landscapes Project has produced an underground survey revealing more than 15 previously unknown monuments, including two large pits thousands of feet from the henge itself, but like the henge, aligned with sunrise and sunset at the summer solstice.

Other archeologists have uncovered a second cromlechlike circle at Durrington Wells, about 2 miles north of Stonehenge, consisting of a circular ditch surrounding a ring of postholes out of which very large timber posts would have risen. The circle was the center of a village consisting of as many as 300 houses. The two sites are connected by the River Avon. Archeologists speculate that Stonehenge was, in effect, one half of a huge monument complex, one made of timber and representing the transience of life, the other made of stone and signifying

the eternity of ancestral life. The orientation of Stonehenge toward the rising sun at the summer solstice also indicates a connection to planting and harvest and the passing of time. The fact remains that the effort required for the construction of Stonehenge suggests that the late Neolithic peoples who built it were extremely social beings, capable of great cooperation. They worked together not only to find the giant stones that rise at the site, but also to quarry, transport, and raise them. Theirs was, in other words, a culture of some magnitude and no small skill. It was a culture capable of both solving great problems and organizing itself in the name of creating a great social center.

Mesopotamian Cultures

How does Mesopotamian art portray the relationship between the gods and the people?

Between 4000 and 3000 BCE, irrigation techniques were developed on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Mesopotamia, allowing for more intensive agriculture and population growth. In the southern plains of Mesopotamia, a people known as the Sumerians developed writing,

schools, libraries, and written laws. Ancient Sumer consisted of a dozen or more city-states, each with a population of between 10,000 and 50,000, and each with its own reigning deity. Each of the local gods had the task of pleading the case of their particular communities with the other gods, who controlled the wind, the rain, and so on.

Communication with the god occurred in a ziggurat, a pyramidal temple structure consisting of successive platforms with outside staircases and a shrine at the top. An early Mesopotamian text calls the ziggurat “the bond between heaven and earth.” Visitors—almost certainly limited to members of the priesthood—might bring an offering of food or an animal to be sacrificed to the resident god and often placed a statue in the temple that represented themselves in a state of perpetual prayer. We know this from inscriptions on many of the statues. One, dedicated to the goddess Tarsirsir, protector of Girsu, a city-state near the mouth of the Tigris River, reads in part, “May the statue, to which let my mistress turn her ear, speak my prayers.” A group of such statues, found in the shrine room of the ziggurat at Tell Asmar, near present-day Baghdad, includes seven men and two women (Fig. 16-6). The men wear belted, fringed skirts. The two women wear robes. They all have huge eyes,



Fig. 16-6 Worshipers and deities from the Abu Temple, Tell Asmar, Iraq, ca. 2900–2600 BCE. Limestone, alabaster, and gypsum, height of tallest figure 30 in. Excavated by the Iraq Expedition of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, February 13, 1934. Courtesy of Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Photo: Anna Ressiman.

3000–2500 BCE
Sumerians brew beer
from barley



Fig. 16-8 Assurnasirpal II Killing Lions, from the palace complex of Assurnasirpal II, Kalhu (modern Nimrud, Iraq), ca. 850 BCE. Alabaster, height approx. 39 in. The British Museum, London.
akg-image/Erich Lessing.

Fig. 16-7 Stele of Hammurabi, ca. 1760 BCE. Basalt, height of stele approx. 7 ft., height of relief 28 in. Musée du Louvre, Paris.
Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre)/Franck Raux.

inlaid with lapis lazuli (a blue semiprecious stone) or shell. Their wide-eyed appearance is probably meant to suggest that they are gazing in perpetual awe at the deity. The figures clasp their hands in front of them, suggestive of prayer when empty and of making an offering when holding a cup. Some scholars believe that the two tallest figures represent Abu, god of vegetation, and his consort, due to their especially large eyes, but all of the figures are probably worshippers.

One of the most influential Mesopotamian cultures was that of Babylon, which rose to power under the leadership of Hammurabi in the eighteenth century BCE. The so-called Law Code of Hammurabi is inscribed on a giant stele—an upright stone slab, carved with a commemorative design or inscription. It is a record of decisions and decrees made by Hammurabi (Fig. 16-7) over the course of some 40 years of his reign. In 282 separate “articles,” which cover both sides of the basalt monument, the stele celebrates Hammurabi’s sense of justice and the wisdom

of his rule. Atop the stele, Hammurabi receives the blessing of Shamash, the sun god, notable for the rays of light that emerge from his shoulders. The god is much larger than Hammurabi; in fact, he is to Hammurabi as Hammurabi is to his people. Hammurabi’s Code was repeatedly copied for over a thousand years, establishing the rule of law in Mesopotamia for a millennium.

After the fall of Babylon in 1595 BCE, victim of a sudden invasion of Hittites from Turkey, only the Assyrians, who lived around the city of Assur in the north, managed to maintain a continuing cultural identity. By the time Assurnasirpal II came to power, in 883 BCE, the Assyrians dominated the entire region. Assurnasirpal II built a magnificent capital at Kalhu, on the Tigris River. Designed to assert the power and authority of the king, it was surrounded by nearly 5 miles of walls, 120 feet thick and 42 feet high. A surviving inscription tells us that 69,574 people were invited by Assurnasirpal to celebrate the city’s dedication. Many of its walls were decorated with alabaster reliefs, including a series of depictions of *Assurnasirpal II Killing Lions* (Fig. 16-8). The scene depicts several consecutive actions at once: As soldiers drive the lion toward the king from the left, he shoots it.

Egyptian Civilization

How do we account for the stability of Egyptian art and culture?

At about the same time that Sumerian culture developed in Mesopotamia, Egyptian society began to flourish along the Nile River. The Nile flooded almost every year, leaving behind rich deposits of fertile soil that could be easily



Fig. 16-9 *Palette of King Narmer (front and back), Hierakonpolis, Upper Egypt, ca. 3000 BCE.*
Slate, height 25 in.
akg-image/Erich Lessing.

planted once the floodwater receded. The cycle of flood and sun made Egypt one of the most productive cultures in the ancient world and one of the most stable. For 3,000 years, from 3100 BCE until the defeat of Mark Antony and Cleopatra by the Roman general Octavian in 30 BCE, Egypt's institutions and culture remained remarkably unchanged. Its stability contrasted sharply with the conflicts and shifts in power that occurred in Mesopotamia.

Egyptian culture was dedicated to providing a home for the *ka*, that part of the human being that defines personality and that survives life on earth after death. The enduring nature of the *ka* required that artisans decorate tombs with paintings that the spirit could enjoy after death. Small servant figures might be carved from wood to serve the departed in the afterlife. The *ka* could find a home in a statue of the deceased. Mummification—the preservation of the body by treating it with chemical solutions and then wrapping it in linen—provided a similar home, as did the elaborate coffins in which the mummy was placed. The pyramids (see Fig. 14-2) were, of course, the largest of the resting places designed to house the *ka*.

The enduring quality of the *ka* accounts for the unchanging way in which, over the centuries, Egyptian figures, especially the pharaohs, were represented. A canon of ideal proportions was developed that was almost universally applied. The figure is, in effect, fitted into a grid. The feet rest on the bottom line of the grid, the ankles are placed on the first horizontal line, the knee on the sixth, the navel on the thirteenth (higher on the female), elbows on the fourteenth, and the shoulders on the nineteenth. These proportions are used in the *Palette of King Narmer* (Fig. 16-9). A palette was an object designed for grinding pigments and making body or eye paint, but this particular example was not meant for actual use but rather was a gift to a deity placed in a temple. The tablet celebrates the victory of Upper Egypt, led by King Narmer, over Lower Egypt, in a battle that united the country. Narmer is depicted holding an enemy by the hair, ready to finish him off. On the other side, he is seen reviewing the beheaded bodies of his foes. Narmer's pose is typical of Egyptian art. The lower body is in profile, his torso and shoulders

1900 BCE
Egyptians begin trading with
Aegean civilizations



Fig. 16-10 King Khafre, Giza, Egypt, ca. 2530 BCE. Diorite, height 5 ft. 6 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.
© Jürgen Liepe, Berlin.

fully frontal, his head in profile again, though a single eye is portrayed frontally.

The rigorous geometry governing Egyptian representation is apparent in the statue of Khafre (Fig. 16-10). Khafre's frontal pose is almost as rigid as the throne upon which he sits. It is as if he has been composed as a block of right angles. If it was the king's face that made his statue recognizable, it is also true that his official likeness might change several times during his reign, suggesting that the purpose of the royal sculpture was not just portraiture but also the creation of the ideal image of kingship.

For a brief period, in the fourteenth century BCE, under the rule of the emperor Akhenaten, the conventions of Egyptian art and culture were transformed. Akhenaten declared an end to traditional Egyptian religious practices, relaxing especially the long-standing preoccupation with the *ka*, and introducing

a form of monotheism (the worship of a single god) into polytheistic Egypt. The sun god, manifested as a radiant sun disk—the Aten—embodied all the characteristics of the other Egyptian deities, and thus made them superfluous. Though the traditional standardized proportions of the human body were only slightly modified, artists seemed more intent on depicting special features of the human body—hands and fingers, the details of a face. Nowhere is this attention to detail more evident than in the famous bust of Akhenaten's queen, Nefertiti (Fig. 16-11). Both the graceful curve of her neck and her almost completely relaxed look make for what seems to be a stunningly naturalistic piece of work, though it remains impossible to say if this is a true likeness or an idealized portrait.



Fig. 16-11 Queen Nefertiti, Tell el Amarna, ca. 1365 BCE. Painted limestone, height 19 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin. Acc. No. AM21300. Photo: Margarete Buesing. © 2015. Photo Scala, Florence/bpk, Bildagentur fuer Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Berlin.



Map. 16-1 The Great River Valley Civilizations, ca. 2000 BCE.



~~River Valley Societies in India and China~~

What technological innovations reflect the growing sophistication of the river valley societies of India and China?

Indian civilization was born along the Indus River around 2700 BCE in an area known as Sind—from which the words India and Hindu originate. The earliest Indian peoples lived in at least two great cities in the Indus

Valley, Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, the best preserved of the two. Built atop a citadel is a complex of buildings, presumably a governmental or religious center, surrounded by a wall 50 feet high. Set among the buildings on the citadel is a giant pool (Fig. 16-12). Perhaps a public bath or a ritual space, its finely fitted bricks, laid on edge and bound together with gypsum plaster, made it watertight. Outside the wall and below the citadel, a city of approximately 6 to 7 square miles, with broad avenues and narrow side streets, was laid out in a rough grid. It appears to have been home to a population of



Fig. 16-12 Large water tank, possibly a public or ritual bathing area, from Mohenjo-Daro, Indus Valley civilization, ca. 2600–1900 BCE. akg-images/Gerard DeGeorge.

between 20,000 and 50,000. A network of covered drainage systems ran through the streets, channeling waste and rainwater into the river. The houses were built with standard sizes of baked brick, each measuring $2\frac{3}{4} \times 5\frac{1}{2} \times 11$ inches, a ratio of 1:2:4. A brick of identical ratio but larger— $4 \times 8 \times 16$ inches—was used in the building of platforms and city walls. Unlike the sun-dried bricks used in other cultures at the time, Mohenjo-daro's bricks were fired, which made them much more durable. All of this suggests a civilization of considerable technological know-how and sophistication. As the stone sculpture torso of a "priest-king" (Fig. 16-13) found at Mohenjo-daro demonstrates, the people of the city were also accomplished artists. This figure, with his neatly trimmed head, is a forceful representation of a powerful personality, although his half-closed eyes suggest that this might have been made to commemorate the figure's death.

The Indus Valley civilizations began to collapse around 1800 BCE, perhaps as the result of a prolonged drought, and by 1000 BCE its cities had been abandoned. During its decline, the Vedic people, who called themselves Aryans, moved into the Indus Valley. Over time, their numbers increased and they spread east to the Ganges River Valley as well as north and south. Their cultural heritage would provide the basis for the development of Hinduism and Hindu art (see Chapter 17).

The North China Plain lies in the large, fertile valley of the Yellow River (see Map 16-1). Around 7000 BCE, when the valley's climate was much milder and the land more forested than it is today, the peoples inhabiting this fertile region began to cultivate the soil, growing



Fig. 16-13 Torso of a "priest-king," from Mohenjo-daro, Indus Valley civilization, ca. 2000–1900 BCE. Steatite, height 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi, Pakistan. Photo Scala, Florence.

primarily millet. Archeologists recognize at least three separate cultural groups in this region during this period, distinguished by their different pottery styles and works in jade. As Neolithic tribal people, they used stone tools, and although they domesticated animals very early on, they maintained the shamanistic practices of their hunter-gatherer heritage. Later inhabitants of this region would call this area the “Central Plain” because they believed it was the center of their country. During the ensuing millennia, Chinese culture in the Central Plain coalesced in ways that parallel developments in the Middle East and Greece during the same period, as China transformed itself from an agricultural society into a more urban-centered state.

For most of the second millennium BCE, the Shang dynasty ruled the Yellow River Valley. Shang kings displayed their power with treasures made of jade, shells, bone, and lacquer. Through the manufacture of ritual vessels such as the *guang*, or wine vessel, illustrated here (Fig. 16-14), the Shang developed an extremely sophisticated bronze-casting technology, as advanced as any ever used. Coiled serpents emerge from the vessels wings, with tiger-dragons just above them. Serving as a handle is a horned bird that is transformed into a dragon-serpent—all figures symbolizing royal authority and strength. Made for offerings of food, water, and wine during ceremonies of ancestor worship, these bronze vessels were kept in the ancestral hall and brought out for banquets. Leaders made gifts of bronze as tokens of



Fig. 16-14 Spouted ritual wine vessel (*Guang*), Shang dynasty, early Anyang period, 13th century BCE. Bronze, height 8½ in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Rogers Fund, 1943. 43.25.4. Photo: Lynton Gardiner. © 2015. Image copyright Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence.



Fig. 16-15 Ritual disk (*bi*) with dragon and phoenix motif, from Jincun, Henan province, Eastern Zhou dynasty (771–256 BCE). Jade, diameter 6¼ in. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 33-81. Photo: Matthew Pearson.

political patronage, and strict rules governed the number of bronzes a family might possess according to its rank and social position.

This ritual jade disk, or *bi*, made sometime in the fourth or third century BCE (Fig. 16-15), is emblematic of the continuity of Chinese historical traditions and ethnic identity. The earliest *bi* disks are found in burials dating from around 4000 BCE, and are thought to be part of the archaic paraphernalia of the shaman. While their original significance is unknown, by the time this one was made they were said to symbolize heaven. This example is decorated with a dragon and two tigers, auspicious symbols likewise emerging from China’s prehistoric past.

~~Complex Societies in the Americas~~

What is the reason for the giant size of so many artworks and cultural sites in the Americas?

As early as 1500 BCE, a group known as the Olmec came to inhabit most of the area that we now refer to as Mesoamerica, from the southern tip of Mexico

to Honduras and El Salvador. They built huge ceremonial precincts in the middle of their communities and developed many of the characteristic features of later Mesoamerican culture, such as pyramids, ball courts, mirror-making, and a calendar system.

The Olmec built their cities on great earthen platforms, probably designed to protect their ceremonial centers from rain and flood. On these platforms, they erected giant pyramidal mounds, where an elite group of ruler-priests lived, supported by the general population that farmed the rich, sometimes swampy land that surrounded them. These pyramids may have been an architectural reference to the volcanoes that dominate Mexico, or they may have been tombs—excavations may eventually tell us. At La Venta, very near the present-day city of Villahermosa, three colossal stone heads stood guard over the ceremonial center on the south end of the platform (Fig. 16-16), and a fourth guarded the north end by itself. Each head weighs between 11 and 24 tons, and each bears a unique emblem on its headgear, which is similar to old-style American leather football helmets. At other Olmec sites, as many as eight of these heads have been found, some up to 12 feet tall. They are carved of basalt, although the nearest basalt quarry is 50 miles to the south in the Tuxtla Mountains.

They were evidently at least partially carved at the quarry, then loaded onto rafts and floated downriver to the Gulf of Mexico before going back upriver to their final positions. The stone heads are generally believed to be portraits of Olmec rulers, and they all share the same facial features, including wide, flat noses and thick lips. They suggest that the ruler was the culture's principal mediator with the gods, literally larger than life.

Equally large and complex cultures arose later in the Mississippi Basin in North America. The great mound

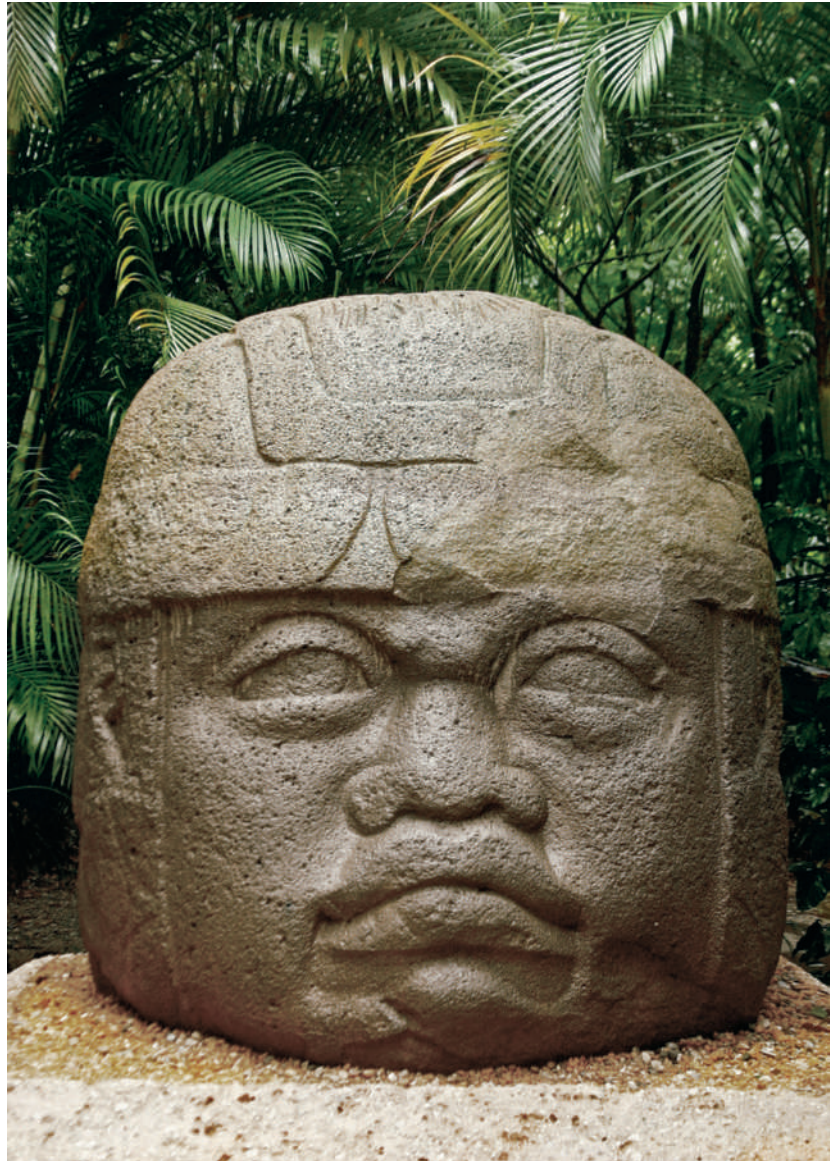


Fig. 16-16 Colossal head, Olmec culture, ca. 900–500 BCE.
Basalt, height 7 ft. 5 in. La Venta Park, Villahermosa, Tabasco, Mexico.
© Carlos S. Pereyra/age Fotostock.

at Cahokia (Fig. 16-17), near the juncture of the Illinois, Missouri, and Mississippi rivers at present-day East St. Louis, Illinois, required the moving of over 22 million cubic feet of earth and probably three centuries to construct, beginning about 900 CE. It was the focal point of a ritual center that contained as many as 120 mounds, some of which were aligned with the position of the sun at the equinoxes, as well as nearly 400 other platforms, wooden enclosures, and houses. A stockade, or fence, surrounded the mound and a large area in front of it, suggesting that warfare probably played an important



Fig. 16-17 Monks Mound, the centerpiece of Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, Illinois, Mississippian culture, ca. 1150 CE–1650 CE.

Art Archive/Ira Block/NGS Image Collection.

role in Mississippian life. Evidence also suggests that the Mississippians worshiped the sun: The Natchez people, one of the Mississippian peoples who survived contact with European culture, called their chief the Great Sun, and their highest social class the Suns.

~~Aegean and~~ Greek Civilizations

What distinguishes Minoan from Mycenaean culture and the culture of the Greek polis from both these predecessors?

The later Greeks thought of the Bronze Age Aegean peoples as their ancestors—particularly those who inhabited the island of Crete, and Mycenae, on the Peloponnese—and considered their activities and culture part of their own prehistory. They even had a word for the way they knew them—*archaiologia*, “knowing the past.” They did not practice archeology as we do today, excavating ancient sites and scientifically analyzing the artifacts discovered there. Rather, they learned of their past through legends passed down, at first orally and then in writing, from generation to generation. Interestingly, the modern

practice of archeology has confirmed much of what was legendary to the Greeks.

~~Aegean~~ Cultures

The early Aegean cultures were impressive centers of power and wealth. The origins of the Minoan peoples on the island of Crete are unclear—they may have arrived there as early as 6000 BCE—but their culture reached its peak between 1600 and 1450 BCE. The so-called “*Toreador*” fresco (**Fig. 16-18**) does not actually depict a bullfight, as its modern title suggests. Instead, a youthful acrobat can be seen vaulting over the bull’s back as one maiden holds the animal’s horns and another waits to catch him (traditionally, as in Egyptian art, women are depicted with light skin, men with a darker complexion). The three almost nude figures appear to be toying with a charging bull in what may be a ritual activity, connected perhaps to a rite of passage, or in what may simply be a sporting event, designed to entertain the royal court.

In Minoan culture, the bull was an animal of sacred significance. Legend has it that the wife of King Minos, after whom the culture takes its name, gave birth to

1200 BCE
Decline of Mycenaean and
Minoan civilizations



Fig. 16-18 The “Toreador” fresco, Knossos, Crete, ca. 1500 BCE. Height, including upper border, approx. 24½ in. Archaeological Museum, Iraklion, Crete.
© Craig & Marie Mauzy, Athens.

a creature half-human and half-bull—the Minotaur. Minos had a giant labyrinth, or maze, constructed to house the creature, to whom Athenian youths and maidens were sacrificed until it was killed by the hero Theseus. The legend of the labyrinth probably arose in response to the intricate design of the palaces built for the Minoan kings.

Ample archeological evidence tells us that the Minoans worshiped female deities. We do not know much more than that, but some students of ancient religions have proposed that the Minoan worship of one or more female deities is evidence that in very early cultures the principal deity was a goddess rather than a god.

It has long been believed that one of the Minoan female deities was a snake goddess, but, recently, scholars have questioned the authenticity of most of the existing snake-goddess figurines. Sir Arthur Evans (1851–1941), who first excavated at the Palace of Minos on Crete, identified images of the Cretan goddess as “Mountain Goddess,” “Snake Goddess,” “Dove Goddess,” “Goddess of the Caves,” “Goddess of the Double Axes,” “Goddess of the Sports,” and “Mother Goddess.” He saw all of these as different aspects of a single deity, or Great Goddess. A century after Evans introduced the Snake Goddess (Fig. 16-19) to the world, scholars are still debating its authenticity. In his book *Mysteries of the Snake Goddess* (2002), Kenneth Lapatin makes a convincing case that craftspeople employed by



Fig. 16-19 Snake Goddess or Priestess, from the palace at Knossos, Crete, ca. 1500 BCE. Faience, height 11⅞ in. Archaeological Museum, Iraklion, Crete.
© Craig & Marie Mauzy, Athens.

Evans manufactured artifacts for the antiquities market. He believes that the body of the statue is an authentic antiquity, but the form in which we see it is largely the imaginative fabrication of Evans’s restorers. Many parts were missing when the figure was unearthed, and so an artist working for Evans fashioned new parts and attached them to the figure. The snake in the goddess’s right hand lacked a head, leaving its identity as a snake open to question. Most of the goddess’s left arm, including the snake in her hand, was absent and fabricated later. When the figure was discovered, it lacked a head, and this one is completely fabricated. The cat on the goddess’s head is original, although it was not found with the statue. Lapatin believes that Evans, eager to advance his own theory that Minoan religion was dedicated to the worship of a Great Goddess, never questioned the manner in which the figures were restored. As interesting as the figure is, its identity as a snake goddess is at best questionable. We cannot even

say with certainty that the principal deity of the Minoan culture was female, let alone that she was a snake goddess. There are no images of snake goddesses in surviving Minoan wall frescoes, engraved gems, or seals, and almost all of the statues depicting her are fakes or imaginative reconstructions.

It is unclear why Minoan culture abruptly ended in approximately 1450 BCE. Great earthquakes and volcanic eruptions may have destroyed the civilization, or perhaps it fell victim to the warlike Mycenaeans from the mainland, whose culture flourished between 1400 and 1200 BCE. The Mycenaeans built stone fortresses on the hilltops of the Peloponnese (see Fig. 14-9), and theirs was a culture dominated by military values. In *The Warrior Vase* (Fig. 16-20), we see Mycenaean soldiers marching to war, perhaps to meet the Dorian invaders who destroyed their civilization soon after 1200 BCE. The Dorian weapons were made of iron and therefore were superior to the softer bronze Mycenaean spears. But it was representatives of Mycenaean culture, immortalized by Homer in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, who sacked the great Trojan city of Troy. They buried their dead in so-called beehive tombs, which, dome-shaped, were full of gold and silver, including masks of the royal dead, a burial practice similar to that of the Egyptians. One of the most famous of these masks was believed to be the funerary mask of Agamemnon (Fig. 16-21), the Mycenaean king who led the Greeks to Troy in pursuit of Helen, the wife of his brother King Menelaus of Sparta. Helen had eloped with Paris, son of King Priam of Troy. Scholars have subsequently determined that the mask predates the Trojan War by some 300 years.

In about 1200 BCE, just after the fall of Mycenae, the Greek world consisted of various tribes separated by the geographical features of the peninsula, with its deep bays, narrow valleys, and jagged mountains (see Map 16-2 of Greece and its city-states). These tribes soon developed into independent and often warring city-states, with their own constitutions, coinage, and armies. We know that in 776 BCE these feuding states declared a truce in order to hold the first Olympic Games. Although the Greeks thought of the Aegean peoples, particularly



Fig. 16-20 *The Warrior Vase*, Mycenae, ca. 1200 BCE. Ceramic, height 16 in. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.
© Craig & Marie Mauzy, Athens.



Fig. 16-21 Funerary mask (Mask of Agamemnon), from Grave Circle A, Mycenae, Greece, ca. 1600–1550 BCE. Gold, height approx. 12 in. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.
© Craig & Marie Mauzy, Athens.



Map 16-2 The City-States of Ancient Greece.

the Minoans and Mycenaeans, as their ancestors and considered their activities and cultures part of their own prehistory, the Olympic Games represented a moment so significant that the Greeks later took it as the starting point of their history.

Greek Civilization

The rise of the Greek city-state, or *polis*, marks the moment when Western culture begins to celebrate its own human strengths and powers—the creative genius of the mind itself—over the power of nature. The Western world’s gods now became personified, taking human form and assuming human weaknesses. Though immortal, they were otherwise versions of ourselves, no longer angry beasts or natural phenomena such as the

earth, the sun, or the rain. In fact, if their gods looked and acted like people, that is because the Greeks were great students of human behavior and of the human form as well, which they portrayed in highly naturalistic detail. By the fifth century BCE, this interest in all aspects of the human condition was reflected throughout Greek culture. The physician Hippocrates systematically studied human disease, and the historian Herodotus, in his account of the Persian Wars, began to chronicle human history. Around 500 BCE in Athens, all free male citizens were included in the political system, and democracy—from *demos*, meaning “people,” and *kratia*, meaning “power”—was born. It was not quite democracy as we think of it today: Slavery was considered natural, and women were excluded from political life. Nevertheless, the concept of individual



Fig. 16-22 The Acropolis, Athens, Greece, rebuilt in the second half of the 5th century BCE.

© Craig & Marie Mauzy, Athens.

freedom was cherished. And by the fourth century BCE, the philosopher Plato had developed theories not only about social and political relations but also about education and aesthetic pleasure.

The values of the Greek city-state were embodied in its temples. The temple was usually situated on an elevated site above the city, and the acropolis, from *akros*, meaning “top,” and *polis*, “city,” was conceived as the center of civic life. The crowning achievement of Greek architecture is the complex of buildings on the Acropolis in Athens (Fig. 16-22), designed to replace those destroyed by the Persians in 480 BCE. Construction began in about 450 BCE under the leadership of the great Athenian statesman Pericles. The central building of the new complex, designed by Ictinos and Callicrates, was the Parthenon, dedicated to the city’s namesake, Athena Parthenos, the goddess of wisdom. A Doric temple of the grandest scale, it is composed entirely of marble. At its center was an enormous ivory and gold statue of Athena, sculpted by Phidias, who was in charge of all the ornamentation and sculpture for the project. The Athena is long since lost, and we can imagine his achievement only by considering the sculpture on the building’s pediment (see Fig. 12-2) and its friezes, all of which reflect Phidias’ style and maybe his design.



Fig. 16-23 Nike, from the balustrade of the Temple of Athena Nike, ca. 410–407 BCE. Marble, height 42 in. Acropolis Museum, Athens.

© Craig & Marie Mauzy, Athens.

The Phidian style is marked by its naturalness. The human figure often assumes a relaxed, seemingly effortless pose, or it may be caught in the act of movement, athletic or casual. In either case, the precision with which the anatomy has been rendered is remarkable. The relief of Nike (Fig. 16-23), goddess of victory, from the balustrade of the Temple of Athena Nike on the Acropolis in Athens, is a perfect example of the Phidian style. As Nike bends to take off her sandal, the drapery both reveals and conceals the body beneath. Sometimes appearing to be transparent, sometimes dropping in deep folds and hollows, it contributes importantly to the sense of reality conveyed by the sculpture. It is as if we can see the body

399 BCE
Death of Socrates

literally push forward out of the stone and press against the drapery.

The Greek passion for individualism, reason, and accurate observation of the world continued even after the disastrous defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War in 404 BCE, which led to a great loss of Athenian power. In 338 BCE, the army of Philip, King of Macedon, conquered Greece, and after Philip's death two years later, his son, Alexander the Great, came to power. Because Philip greatly admired Athenian culture, Alexander was educated by the philosopher Aristotle, who persuaded the young king to impose Greek culture throughout his empire. **Hellenism**, or the culture of Greece, thus came to dominate the Western world. The court sculptor to Alexander the Great was Lysippus, known to us only through later Roman copies of his work. Lysippus challenged the Classical canon of proportion created by Polyclitus (see Fig. 7-23), creating sculptures with smaller heads and slenderer bodies that lent his figures a sense of greater height. In a Roman copy of a lost original by Lysippus

known as the *Apoxyomenos* (Fig. 16-24), or *The Scrapper*, an athlete removes oil and dirt from his body with an instrument called a strigil. He seems detached from his circumstances, as if recalling his victory, both physically and mentally uncontained by the space in which he stands.

In the sculpture of the fourth century BCE, we discover a graceful, even sensuous, beauty marked by *contrapposto* and three-dimensional realism (see Fig. 12-11). The depiction of physical beauty becomes an end in itself, and sculpture increasingly seems to be more about the pleasures of seeing than anything else. At the same time, artists strove for an ever-greater degree of realism, and in the sculpture of the Hellenistic Age, we find an increasingly animated and dramatic treatment of the figure. The *Nike of Samothrace* (Fig. 16-25) is a masterpiece of Hellenistic realism. The goddess has been depicted as she alights on the prow of a victorious war galley, and one can almost feel the wind as it buffets her, and the surf spray that has soaked her garment so that it clings revealingly to her torso.



Fig. 16-24 *Apoxyomenos* (*The Scrapper*), Roman copy of an original Greek bronze by Lysippus, ca. 350–325 BCE. Marble, height 6 ft. 8½ in. Vatican Museums, Vatican City. © 2015 Photo Scala, Florence.



Fig. 16-25 *Nike of Samothrace*, ca. 190 BCE. Marble, height approx. 8 ft. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Inv. MA2369. Photo © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/Thierry Ollivier.

The Roman World

How do Roman art and architecture suggest the empire's power?

Although the Romans conquered Greece (in 146 BCE), like Philip of Macedon and Alexander, they regarded Greek culture and art as superior to any other. Thus, like the Hellenistic Empire before it, the Roman Empire possessed a distinctly Greek character. The Romans imported thousands of original Greek artworks and had them copied in even greater numbers. In fact, much of what we know today about Greek art we know only through Roman copies. The Greek gods were adapted to the Roman religion, Jupiter bearing a strong resemblance to Zeus, Venus to Aphrodite, and so on. The Romans used the Greek architectural orders in their own buildings and temples, preferring especially the highly decorative Corinthian order. Many, if not most, of Rome's artists were of Greek extraction, though they were "Romanized" to the point of being indistinguishable from the Romans themselves. In making Greek culture their own, they in essence asserted their power and domination over it.

Roman art derives, nevertheless, from at least one other source. Around 750 BCE, at about the same time as the Greeks first colonized the southern end of the Italian



Fig. 16-26 *The Laocoön Group*, Roman copy, perhaps after Agesander, Athenodorus, and Polydorus of Rhodes, 1st century CE. Marble, height 7 ft. Vatican Museums, Vatican City. © 2015 Photo Scala, Florence.

The swirl of line that was once restricted to drapery overwhelms the entire composition of *The Laocoön Group* (Fig. 16-26), in which Laocoön, a Trojan priest, and his two sons are overwhelmed by serpents sent by the sea god Poseidon. We are caught in the midst of the Trojan War. The Greeks have sent the Trojans a giant wooden horse as a "gift." Inside it are Greek soldiers, and Laocoön suspects as much. And so Poseidon, who favors the Greeks, has chosen to silence Laocoön forever. So theatrical is the group that to many eyes it verges on melodrama, but its expressive aims are undeniable. The sculptor is no longer content simply to represent the figure realistically; sculpture must convey emotion as well.



Fig. 16-27 *Portrait of a Boy*, early 3rd century BCE. Bronze, height 9 in. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence. Nicolo Orsi Battaglini/Ikona.

260 BCE

The Greek Archimedes lays the foundations
of calculus in Syracuse, Italy

27 BCE–14 CE

Rule of Augustus



Fig. 16-28 *She-Wolf*, ca. 500 BCE. Bronze, height 33½ in. Museo Capitolino, Rome.
© 2015 Photo Scala, Florence, courtesy of the Sovraintendenza di Roma Capitale.

peninsula, the Etruscans, whose language has no relation to any known tongue, and whose origin is somewhat mysterious, established a vital set of city-states in the area between present-day Florence and Rome. Little remains of the Etruscan cities, which were destroyed and rebuilt by Roman armies in the second and third centuries BCE, and we know the Etruscans' culture largely through their sometimes richly decorated tombs. At Veii, just north of Rome, the Etruscans established a sculptural center that gave them a reputation as the finest metalworkers of the age. They traded widely, and from the sixth century on, a vast array of bronze objects, from statues to hand mirrors, were made for export. Etruscan art was influenced by the Greeks, as this life-size bronze head (Fig. 16-27), with its almost melancholy air, makes clear.

The Romans traced their ancestry to the Trojan prince Aeneas, who escaped after the sack of Troy and who appears in Homer's *Iliad*. The city of Rome itself was founded early in Etruscan times—in 753 BCE, the Romans believed—by Romulus and Remus, twins nurtured by a she-wolf (Fig. 16-28). Though the figures of Romulus and Remus are Renaissance additions to the bronze, the image served as the totem of the city of Rome from the day on which a statue of a she-wolf was dedicated on the Capitoline Hill in Rome in 296 BCE—although almost certainly not this one, which scholars now believe dates from medieval times. The she-wolf reminded the Romans of the fiercely protective loyalty and power of their motherland.



Fig. 16-29 *Augustus of Primaporta*, ca. 20 BCE. Marble, height 6 ft. 8 in. Vatican Museums, Vatican City.
© Araldo de Luca/Corbis.

Beginning in the fifth century BCE, Rome dedicated itself to conquest and created an empire that included all areas surrounding the Mediterranean and that stretched as far north as present-day England (see Map 16-3 of the Roman Empire). By the time the Romans conquered Greece, their interest in the accurate portrayal of human features was long established, and Hellenistic art only supported this tendency. A great ruler was fully capable of idealizing himself as a near-deity, as is evident in the *Augustus of Primaporta* (Fig. 16-29), so known because it was discovered at the home of Augustus' wife, Livia, at Primaporta, on the outskirts of Rome. The pose is directly



Map 16-3 The Roman Empire at its Greatest Extent, ca. 180 CE.

indebted to the *Doryphoros* (*The Spear Bearer*) of Polyclitus (see Fig. 7-23). The extended arm points toward an unknown, but presumably greater, future—a symbol of the empire’s political aspirations. The military garb announces his role as commander-in-chief. The small Cupid riding a dolphin at his feet makes claim to Augustus’ divine descent from Venus.

The perfection of the arch and dome and the development of structural concrete were the Romans’ major architectural contributions (see Chapter 14). But they were also extraordinary monument-builders. Upon the death of the emperor Titus, who defeated rebellious Jews in Palestine and sacked the Second Temple of Jerusalem

in 70 CE, his brother, Domitian, constructed a memorial arch at the highest point on the Sacred Way in Rome to honor his victory (Fig. 16-30). Originally, this Arch of Titus was topped by a statue of a four-horse chariot and driver. Such **triumphal arches**, as they were called since triumphant armies marched through them, composed of a simple barrel vault enclosed within a rectangle, and enlivened with sculpture and decorative engaged columns, would deeply influence later architecture of the Renaissance, especially the facades of Renaissance cathedrals.

Another remarkable symbol of Roman power is the Column of Trajan (Figs. 16-31 and 16-32). Encircled by a spiraling band of relief sculpture 50 inches high and,

180 CE
Pax Romana begins
to break down



Fig. 16-30 Arch of Titus, Rome, ca. 81 CE. Concrete with marble facade, height 50 ft., width 44 ft. 4 in. Canali Photobank, Milan, Italy.



Figs. 16-31 and 16-32 Attributed to Apollodorus, Column of Trajan, Rome, 113 CE, and detail. Marble, height originally 128 ft., length of frieze approx. 625 ft.

Fig. 16-31: © Vincenzo Pirozzi, Rome.

Fig. 16-32: © 2015. Photo Scala, Florence, courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali.



if it were unwound and stretched out, 625 feet long, the column details the emperor Trajan's two successful campaigns in present-day Hungary and Romania in the first century BCE. The 150 separate episodes celebrate not only military victories, but Rome's civilizing mission as well.

As the empire solidified its strength under the *Pax Romana*—150 years of peace initiated by Augustus in 27 BCE—a succession of emperors celebrated its glory in a variety of elaborate public works and monuments, including the Colosseum and the Pantheon (see Figs. 14-16 and 14-18). By the first century CE, Rome's population approached 1 million, with most of its inhabitants living in apartment buildings (an archival record indicates that, at this time, there were only 1,797 single-family homes in the city). They congregated daily at the Forum, a site originally developed by the Etruscans as a marketplace, but which, in a plan developed by Julius Caesar and implemented by Augustus, became a civic center symbolic of Roman power and grandeur, paved in marble and dominated by colonnaded public spaces, temples, basilicas, and state buildings such as the courts, the archives, and the Curia, or senate house.

Although Rome became extraordinarily wealthy, the empire began to falter after the death of the emperor Marcus Aurelius in 180 CE. Invasions of Germanic tribes from the north, Berbers from the south, and Persians from the east wreaked havoc upon the empire's economic, administrative, and military structure. By the time the emperor Constantine decided to move the capital to Byzantium in 323 CE—renaming it Constantinople, today's Istanbul—the empire was hopelessly divided, and the establishment of the new capital only underscored the division.

~~Developments in Asia~~

How would you compare Chinese militarism to Buddhist pacifism?

At about the same time that Rome began establishing its imperial authority over the Mediterranean world, one of several warring states in China, the Qin (the origin of our name for China), conquered the other states and unified them under the leadership of Qin Shihuangdi, who declared himself "First Emperor" in 221 BCE. The Qin worked very quickly to achieve a stable society. To discourage nomadic invaders from the north, particularly the



Fig. 16-33 The Great Wall, near Beijing, begun late 3rd century BCE.

© Steve Bloom Images/Alamy.

Huns, they built the Great Wall of China (Fig. 16-33). The wall was constructed by soldiers, augmented by criminals, civil servants who found themselves in disfavor, and conscripts from across the countryside. Each family was required to provide one able-bodied adult male to work on the wall each year. It was made of rammed earth, reinforced by continuous horizontal courses of brushwood, and faced with stone. Watchtowers were built at high points, and military barracks were built in the valleys below. At the same time, the Chinese constructed nearly 4,350 miles of roads, linking even the farthest reaches of the country to the Central Plain. By the end of the second century CE, China had some 22,000 miles of roads serving a country of nearly 1.5 million square miles.

Soon after the death of Qin Shihuangdi, whose tomb was another massive undertaking (see Fig. 12-12), the Qin collapsed and the Han dynasty came to power, inaugurating over 400 years of intellectual and cultural growth. What we know of everyday life in Han society comes mostly from surviving poetry, but our understanding of domestic architecture derives from ceramic models such as that of a house found in a tomb, presumably created for use by the departed in the afterlife (Fig. 16-34). It is four stories high and topped by a watchtower. The family lived in the middle two stories, while livestock,