

Abraham

See *Patriarchs and Matriarchs of Israel*.

ABU SIMBEL

Abu Simbel (A•boo sim•BEL) is the site of two magnificent temples cut into high sandstone cliffs during the rule of the Egyptian pharaoh* RAMSES II. Today these temples are considered to be the best-preserved examples of the grand art and architecture of Ramses II.

The site is located on the west bank of the Nile River in southern Egypt. Construction was completed and the temples were in use in the 1250s B.C.

The larger of the two temples was built for Ramses. Four huge statues of the king seated on a throne flanked the entrance, two on each side. Each statue was about 67 feet high—about as tall as a six-story building. Inside the temple, three great halls extended into the cliff. The halls held eight more giant statues of the pharaoh, with BAS-RELIEFS representing his life and achievements covering the walls.

The smaller of the two temples was built for Queen Nefertari, the wife of Ramses. In front of this temple were six statues of Nefertari and Ramses, each about 33 feet tall. Inside the temple was a large hall adorned with decorations related to fertility.

An earthquake severely damaged the temples in the 1230s B.C., and both temples eventually were buried under sand. They were not rediscovered until A.D. 1813, when a Swiss traveler found them. They were first entered and explored four years later. In the mid-1960s, the Egyptian government was building a dam that would have flooded the temple site. The temples were cut into blocks, moved, and rebuilt on higher ground. The tremendous project, which took four years, saved two magnificent examples of Egyptian architecture.

* **pharaoh** king of ancient Egypt

ABYDOS

Located in the desert to the west of the southern Nile River, Abydos (uh•BY•dus) was one of the most sacred sites in ancient Egypt. It was believed to be the entrance to the underworld, that is, the place of departed souls. It was also believed to be the burial place of OSIRIS, the Egyptian god of the dead. As a result, Abydos became an important cemetery site and the center of the cult* of Osiris.

During the first two dynasties*, between about 3000 and 2650 B.C., Abydos was primarily a burial place for royalty, and many of the early kings of Egypt probably were buried there. During the Fifth Dynasty (ca. 2500–2350 B.C.), kings built a temple to Osiris at Abydos. This structure was enlarged and decorated by later rulers.

During the Middle Kingdom (ca. 1980–1630 B.C.), Abydos grew in importance. People came to the city from throughout Egypt to take part in an annual ceremony that brought the god Osiris from the river to his tomb. By this time, common people were being buried near Abydos, which had a growing number of cemeteries. Those who could not afford to be buried there set up stelae*, which were carved with their names and

* **cult** system of religious beliefs and rituals; group following these beliefs

* **dynasty** succession of rulers from the same family or group

* **stela** stone slab or pillar that has been carved or engraved and serves as a monument; *pl.* stelae



THE NEAR EAST IN PREHISTORIC TIMES

by Ronald Wallenfels

* **artifact** ornament, tool, weapon, or other object made by humans

* **domestication** adaptation for human use

* **city-state** independent state consisting of a city and its surrounding territory

Historians—people who study events of the past—try to put events in chronological order, from the past to the present, and try to explain the causes of those events. Historians learn about the ancient world by reading and studying inscriptions that have survived from those times and by examining other physical remains, such as palaces, temples, houses, burial sites, and tombs, along with the pottery, tools, jewelry, sculpture, and other artifacts* that these sites might contain. A historian's ability to understand the past is limited by the quality and quantity of objects available to study. Few ancient artifacts have survived the wear and tear of thousands of years, and fewer still have been found.

This encyclopedia will help you learn about the history of the ancient Near East, a time and place where most of the inventions needed for a civilized life were first developed. As you use this encyclopedia, you might read about the development of agriculture, irrigation, and metalworking, and the domestication* of animals. You might turn to articles about the inventions of pottery, the wheel, and writing. You then might read how these developments and inventions helped create new social institutions that led to the growth of cities and city-states*, which in turn led to developments in government and law, the outbreak of wars, and the need for RECORD KEEPING. These events brought growth in mathematics, science, and technology. You might also read about the people who made this history, from kings, queens, priests, and priestesses to soldiers, peasants, and slaves.

Of all the occurrences in the ancient Near East, historians often consider the practice of agriculture the most important development. Beginning about 10,000 years ago, agriculture led our hunter-gatherer ancestors to settle so that they could care for their crops as they grew, protect what they harvested and stored, and prepare the land for the next season of planting. However, the beginning of agriculture was not the beginning of human history. Our history goes much further back than that.

Anthropologists—scientists who study human origins—believe that fossils found in east Africa show that there were small bands of hominids—humanlike creatures—walking erect on their hind legs more than 2.5 million years ago. Although the brains of these hominids were less than half the size of the brains of modern humans, they were able to make simple recognizable stone tools. During the next 2 million years, the fossil record shows that as the brain size of the hominids increased, so did their ability to make complex stone tools. The fossil record also indicates



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that these creatures began to explore new environments, with some leaving Africa by way of the Near East and moving into Asia and Europe.

During this long period when the hominids were developing, the earth's climate became unstable. Beginning about 1 million years ago, the earth began to experience the first of several Ice Ages. The reasons for the climate changes are not well understood, but many astronomers believe that they resulted from slight variations in the earth's orbit around the sun that made the earth warmer during some periods and cooler at others. During an Ice Age, which usually lasted about 100,000 years, the earth became much colder, drier, and dustier, causing dramatic environmental changes across the planet. These Ice Ages ended as suddenly as they began, allowing the earth to warm again. The interglacial periods—years between Ice Ages—appear to have lasted between 10,000 and 20,000 years.

The first fully modern humans, identical to us in every way, appeared in east Africa between about 150,000 and 200,000 years ago. The arrival of the last Ice Age, about 120,000 years ago, did not stop these humans from expanding out of Africa. They eventually replaced their older Asian and European hominid cousins. They became the first people to enter the Americas by way of a land bridge that connected Siberia and Alaska.

From the beginning, these modern humans possessed spoken language. They developed and constantly improved new toolmaking technologies that included instruments made of bone, antler, and probably wood as well as stone. These people became expert hunters, gatherers, and fishermen. They developed art and music and adorned themselves with beads and shells. They buried their dead with grave goods, which suggests that they took part in rituals and believed in an AFTERLIFE. Differences in grave goods may indicate distinctions in social status, with more numerous and elaborate objects being buried with members of society who were considered more important.

By about 14,000 years ago, the ice was melting at a steady yet rapid pace, again causing widespread environmental changes. Still living by hunting and gathering, the scattered bands of humans found it necessary either to move and follow the herds they hunted or to adapt themselves, where possible, to the new environments.

The number of archaeological* sites for this period are rare and are often quite difficult to date. One group of people from this period stands out. Living in the Levant* and SYRIA between about 10,000 and 8,000 B.C., these people—now known as the Natufians—gathered wild cereal grasses such as the barley and wheat that grew in the region. They cut these grasses with tools that used tiny flint blades called microliths. These peoples took the edible seeds of these grasses and ground them into meal, which they probably mixed with water to make gruel*. The Natufians also gathered nuts, berries, and snails for food. They fished, fowled, and occasionally hunted and ate goat, gazelle, deer, and bear. They also had dogs, which they possibly used for maintaining their herds of wild goats. Living in small circular huts made of plant materials, the Natufians established and maintained permanent villages.

Trade routes existed throughout the region where the Natufians lived. One type of goods they exchanged, seashells, was traded across great distances from their sources along the shores of the Mediterranean and Red Seas. Other luxury trade items included carved stone and bone objects and engraved ostrich eggshells. As successful as these Natufian hunter-gatherers

* **archaeological** referring to the study of past human cultures, usually by excavating material remains of human activity

* **Levant** lands bordering the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea (present-day Syria, Lebanon, and Israel), the West Bank, and Jordan

* **gruel** thin porridge



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appear to have been, however, they seem to have moved away or died out after about 2,000 years in the region, perhaps as a result of changes in the still-shifting climate.

* **Neolithic period** final phase of the Stone Age, from about 9000 to 4000 B.C.

Shortly before about 8000 B.C., the earliest Neolithic period* farmers appeared. Living in places across Syria and the Levant, they planted seeds for cereal grasses that they would harvest later. Most of the harvested seed was stored for consumption throughout the year and for planting the following year's crop.

* **mud brick** brick made from mud, straw, and water mixed together and baked in the sun

One such group of farmers settled around a spring at JERICHO near the Jordan River in the present-day West Bank. These people built rectangular houses out of mud brick*. They also erected a thick circular stone tower, more than 30 feet tall, behind a massive stone wall. Their success in all these undertakings required new heights of imagination and long-term planning. To accomplish tasks no individual could possibly manage alone, it was necessary for the 2,000 or so members of this town to work together, some giving and others taking direction.

Many further developments occurred during the centuries that followed. Around 7600 B.C. the people who lived at the site of Mureybet, Syria, were making baked-clay objects—vases and female figures. By about 7000 B.C. the animal herders at Jericho had begun to mate their goats to bring out desirable traits—long hair and greater milk production. The breeding of cattle and other animals soon followed. Around the same time at Çayönü in southeastern ANATOLIA (present-day Turkey), the earliest copper artifacts found to date were being produced.

* **vermin** small harmful animals that are difficult to control

At Bouqras in Syria, archaeologists have uncovered ceramic pottery dating as far back as about 6500 B.C. Used for cooking and serving food, this pottery, the oldest yet found, could also be closed with a clay plug to store and ship grain or other products. Earlier, food products had been stored in stone- and plaster-lined pits and had been transported in leather bags or woven baskets that were susceptible to attack by vermin*.

* **seventh millennium B.C.** years from 7000 to 6001 B.C.

By the end of the seventh millennium B.C.*, craftspeople from northern Mesopotamia were decorating their handmade pottery by attaching small clay pellets or by scratching designs onto the pot's surface. Shortly thereafter, they began to paint the surface of the pottery with simple geometric designs. Over time, the designs became more complex and began to include animal and human figures.

The need to prevent others from tampering with the contents of storage containers brought about a new use for stamp SEALS—small pieces of bone, stone, wood, or clay with a flat surface on which a design was engraved—which had until then been used for imprinting designs on plaster, cloth, and bread. By about 6000 B.C. seals were being pressed into the soft clay plugs used to close the mouths of jars. The seal impression on the plugs signified that the contents of the jar were untouched; a broken or missing seal impression meant that the contents had been tampered with. Clay seals and seal impressions found at the Syrian site of Sabi Abyad show that they were applied to baskets, stone bowls, and leather bags as well as to ceramic vessels.

* **sixth millennium B.C.** years from 6000 to 5001 B.C.

Early in the sixth millennium B.C.*, farming communities began to appear farther and farther south on the plains along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Although the region had extremely fertile soil, its rainfall was not sufficient to grow cereal crops. As a result, the farmers turned to the rivers



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for water. By digging channels and canals away from the rivers' banks, farmers could divert water to their fields and irrigate them throughout the year. Although irrigation had been used much earlier, these farmers in southern Mesopotamia faced special problems. In the autumn, which was when the newly planted crops required the most water, the rivers were at their lowest levels. In the spring, when the crops needed to be dry while forming their seeds, the rivers flooded, often violently. To better control the flow of water, farmers dug longer, wider canals. The construction of these canals and their constant maintenance—artificial river channels tended to become clogged with silt very quickly—required new levels of decision-making and cooperation within the community. Among other consequences, the lack or excess of water could lead to a famine*, which could destroy a community.

* **famine** severe lack of food due to failed crops

As societies grew, new social and religious institutions began to develop, enabling people to lead closer and more interdependent lives. The roles that people played within society changed as responsibilities for different tasks were divided among the people who were now becoming increasingly specialized. Religion became more organized and centralized as is evident at the site of ERIDU, which is situated at the edge of the marshes near the Persian Gulf. Archaeologists have excavated buildings at the site dating to about 5400 B.C. and have identified them as shrines or temples. These are the oldest temple-like structures found to date. Priests probably performed rituals in these locations and directed the members of the community to bring offerings and make sacrifices.

* **fifth millennium B.C.** years from 5000 to 4001 B.C.

During the fifth millennium B.C.*, the people of southern Mesopotamia belonged to what is called the Ubaid culture, named for Tell al-Ubaid, the site where their pottery was first found. The Ubaid culture spread as no other culture before it had. Ubaid pottery from about 4000 B.C.—made on a slow wheel—has been found throughout ancient Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq), as well as in neighboring Syria, IRAN, and the Arabian peninsula. Some scholars believe that the Ubaid people were trying to control the trade routes leading to such raw materials as stone and wood. This was especially necessary for them because the flat alluvial* plains of Mesopotamia lacked natural sources of these materials.

* **alluvial** composed of clay, silt, sand, gravel, or similar material deposited by running water

Around 4000 B.C. further social and economic developments began to transform the landscape. The once numerous and evenly spread Ubaid villages of southern Mesopotamia were replaced by a few large settlements that would, in less than 1,000 years, become the world's first true cities. This marked the beginning of the Uruk period which was named after the ancient city of URUK, where the changes were first apparent. New developments there include the mass production of simple wheel-made pottery, the use of the wheel for transport, the creation of carved stone vessels and cylinder seals, the use of the ox-drawn plow, and increased production of copper for tools. The need for complex record keeping to coordinate production and consumption of food, clothing, and the wealth of new luxury goods brought about the development of writing, which replaced the clay-token counting system that had been in use since about 8000 B.C. At the center of Uruk, an enormous temple complex developed and its chief priest appears to have governed the city. By the end of the period, around 3200 B.C., *history* had truly begun for the residents of southern Mesopotamia, whom we can now truly identify as Sumerians after their own name for their land, Sumer.



Achaemenid Dynasty

* **bas-relief** kind of sculpture in which material is cut away to leave figures projecting slightly from the background

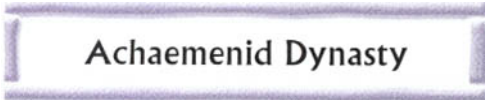
* **archaeological** referring to the study of past human cultures, usually by excavating material remains of human activity

titles and prayers to Osiris. The cemeteries of Abydos eventually became filled with thousands of these stelae.

While increasingly popular with the common people, Abydos continued to be favored by the rulers of Egypt. Many kings, though they did not intend to be buried at Abydos, nevertheless built monuments and temples there. The temple of SETY I, from the early 1200s B.C., was one of the grandest and most beautiful. It is famous for a bas-relief*, called the Abydos list of kings, that depicts 76 of the Egyptian kings who preceded Sety.

Eventually, even animals were buried at Abydos. Animal cemeteries dating from the Late Period of Egyptian history (664–332 B.C.) have been found there. Abydos continued to be used for burials into the period of the Roman occupation of Egypt, which began in 30 B.C.

Abydos was first excavated in the late A.D. 1850s by Auguste Mariette, who was searching for the tomb of Osiris. Many excavations have been undertaken at the site since then, and new discoveries are still being made. Recent archaeological* digs have found evidence of burials that took place before the First Dynasty. Abydos is considered one of the most important archaeological sites of ancient Egypt. (*See also Egypt and the Egyptians.*)



See Persian Empire.



Many cultures throughout the ancient Near East honored the weather god Adad (A•dad). Like the natural force he represented, Adad had a dark side and a bright side. He was thought to be responsible for deadly, destructive storms but also for the rains that nourished crops and supported life.

* **deity** god or goddess

Adad was just one of many names that people used for this god of weather and storms. To the Sumerians of MESOPOTAMIA, he was Ishkur. The Akkadians called him Adad. The same name was used in EBLA; a list of gods from that city dating from between 2450 and 2250 B.C. includes Adad as the second most important god. The people of northern Syria called the weather god, who was their main deity*, Addu or Hadad. He also appeared in various local forms, such as Addu of Aleppo and Hadad of Damascus. Other Near Eastern cultures called him Addu and Ramman. He appears in the Hebrew Bible as Rimmon, “the Thunderer.” Adad was also closely identified with the god BAAL. Indeed, at one time they were the same god, and in UGARIT between about 1350 and 1200 B.C., Baal-Haddu was the principal god.

* **drought** long period of dry weather during which crop yields are lower than usual

Inscriptions and SEALS often depict Adad as a warrior holding forked lightning. Sometimes he is shown standing on the back of a winged bull or a creature that is part lion and part dragon. In one early myth, Adad created the blinding storms that led to a great flood. In another, he punished the world with drought*. People hoped to ensure good rains by worshiping him and building temples in his honor. As this positive force,