Ancient Civilization Outline

- **Understanding Western History**
  - **Describing the West**
    - The "West" as a concept has a very long history, one that began with the Greeks and Romans.
    - Greco-Roman ideas about the West were passed on to people who lived in western and northern Europe.
    - In the early twentieth century, many intellectual and educational leaders encouraged the establishment of college and university courses focusing on “western civilization.”
    - After World War II, divisions between East and West changed again.
  - **What Is History, and Why?**
    - The term “history” comes from the Greek word *historie*.
    - Historians examine a variety of evidence.
    - Historians receive help from both literary and nonliterary sources.
    - Historians must try to distinguish between reliable and unreliable evidence.
    - Historians use evidence to establish facts or to explain the meaning of their findings.
    - A number of factors complicate our efforts to arrive at an accurate understanding of the past.

- **From Caves to Towns**
  - **The Neolithic Contribution**
    - From perhaps 400,000 to 7,000 b.c., early human beings survived as hunter-gatherers in extended family units.
    - This period is known as the Paleolithic, or “Old Stone Age,” from the primitive stone tools and weapons these people produced.
    - Around 7,000 b.c., an obvious transformation began: some hunter-gatherer societies began to rely chiefly on agriculture for their subsistence.
    - Neolithic peoples contributed a great deal to the development of human society, including systematic agriculture, writing, sedentary living, and improved tools and weapons.
    - Stonehenge and other stone circles scattered throughout Great Britain, Ireland, and Brittany were built by Neolithic societies that must have been prosperous, well organized, and centrally led.

- **Mesopotamian Civilization**
  - **The Invention of Writing and the First Schools**
    - Writing appears to have begun at Sumer.
    - The Sumerian pictographic form evolved by the fourth millennium into cuneiform (“wedge-shaped”) writing.
    - The signs in the cuneiform system later became ideograms and evolved into an intricate system of communication.
    - The writing system was so complicated that only professional scribes mastered it.
    - Scribal schools flourished throughout Sumer.
    - Although practical, scribal schools were also centers of culture and learning. These schools set the standard for all of Mesopotamia.
  - **Mesopotamian Thought and Religion**
    - Mesopotamians made great strides in mathematics, medicine, and religion.
    - Mesopotamian religion was polytheistic; gods and goddesses existed to represent almost everything in the cosmos.
    - The gods were much like human beings, only with supernatural powers.
    - In Mesopotamian religion, we find attempts to explain the origins of mankind.
    - There are numerous myths woven into the Mesopotamian religious tapestry.
    - Additionally, there is the Sumerian epic of creation, The Epic of Gilgamesh. Its hero, Gilgamesh, is a wandering king who seeks immortality.
  - **Sumerian Social and Gender Divisions**
    - The arid and harsh environment of Sumer fostered a religion based on placating a pantheon of harsh and capricious gods and goddesses.
Sumerian society was a complex arrangement of freedom and dependence. Sumerian society was organized into four classes of people: nobles, free clients of the nobility, commoners, and slaves. Each of these social classes included both men and women, but their experiences were not the same. Sumerian society was patriarchal. The states that developed in the ancient Middle East further heightened gender divisions.

**The Spread of Mesopotamian Culture**

- **The Triumph of Babylon**
  - The Babylonians united Mesopotamia politically and culturally.
  - Babylon’s best-known king, Hammurabi (ca 1792–1750 b.c.), forged a vibrant Sumero-Babylonian culture through conquest and assimilation.

- **Life under Hammurabi**
  - Hammurabi also created one of the world’s earliest comprehensive law codes, which today provides much useful information on daily life in ancient Mesopotamia.
  - Under the code, the law differed according to social status and punishments were meant to fit the crime.
  - The code dealt with all aspects of daily life.

- **Egypt, the Land of the Pharaohs (3100–1200 b.c.)**
  - **The God-King of Egypt**
    - Egyptian society revolved around the life-giving waters of the Nile River.
    - The regularity of the Nile’s floods and the fertility of its mud made agriculture productive and dependable.
    - By around 3100 b.c., there were some forty agricultural communities along the Nile.
    - The Nile, deserts, and the Mediterranean Sea isolated Egypt. This isolation afforded centuries of peace for Egypt.
    - During this pacific period, Egypt developed a vital civilization.
    - Sometime around 3100 b.c., Egypt was united under the rule of a single great king, or “pharaoh.”
    - Egyptian religion was a complex polytheism rooted in the environment.
    - The most powerful gods were Amon, associated with the annual floods of the Nile, and Ra, the sun god.
    - Central to the religion was pharaoh’s place in the pantheon of gods and goddesses—his presence assured the people that the gods cared for them.
    - The pharaoh’s ostentation reflected his power.
    - The famous pyramids attest to the power and prestige of the pharaoh.

- **The Pharaoh’s People**
  - Common people were at the mercy of government officials.
  - The agricultural year was routine and dependable.
  - Egyptian society featured a mixture of freedom and constraint.
  - To ancient Egyptians, the pharaoh embodied justice and order.

- **The Hyksos in Egypt (1640–1570 b.c.)**
  - Around 1800 b.c., people whom the Egyptians called the Hyksos began to settle in the Nile Delta.
  - The Egyptians portrayed the Hyksos as a conquering horde, but they were probably just nomads looking for good land.
  - The Hyksos brought with them skill in bronze making and casting.

- **The New Kingdom: Revival and Empire (1570–1075 b.c.)**
  - Following a period of domination by the Hyksos, a new line of pharaohs extended Egyptian rule into Palestine and Syria.
  - Akhenaten (r. 1367–1350 b.c.) was more concerned with religion than conquest.
  - He developed a kind of monotheism.

- **The Hittites and the End of an Era (ca 1640–1100 b.c.)**
  - **The Coming of the Hittites (ca. 1640–1200 b.c.)**
    - The Hittites, an Indo-European people settled in Anatolia, became a major power in the Near East around 1600 b.c., conquering the northern part of the Babylonian empire.
After about 1300 B.C. and the Battle of Kadesh in Syria, the Hittites, the Egyptian New Kingdom, and the Babylonian empire cooperated in a kind of détente.

- **The Fall of Empires and the Survival of Cultures (ca 1200 B.C.)**
  - In the late thirteenth century B.C., invaders destroyed the Hittite Empire and severely disrupted Egypt.
  - Egyptians and Mesopotamians established basic social, economic, and cultural patterns in the ancient Near East.