First Age of Empires, 1570 B.C.–200 B.C.

Previewing Themes

**EMPIRE BUILDING** Groups from Africa to China sought to conquer other groups and spread their influence across vast regions. These societies built the world’s first great empires.

**Geography** On the map, locate the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers, where many of the early empires arose. Why do you think the empire builders fought over these regions?

**CULTURAL INTERACTION** For a long period, Egypt ruled Kush and the two cultures interacted. When the Kush Empire conquered Egypt, therefore, the Kushites adopted many Egyptian cultural values and ideas.

**Geography** Study the map and time line. What other cultures might have adopted Egyptian values?

**RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL SYSTEMS** After the warring states period, Chinese philosophers developed different ethical systems to restore China’s social order.

**Geography** How might China’s location have affected the spread of the ethical systems that began there?

What You Will Learn

In this chapter you will learn about the development of the early empires in Egypt, Nubia, Assyria, Persia, and China.

**SECTION 1 The Egyptian and Nubian Empires**

Main Idea Two empires along the Nile, Egypt and Nubia, forged commercial, cultural, and political connections.

**SECTION 2 The Assyrian Empire**

Main Idea Assyria developed a military machine and established a well-organized administration.

**SECTION 3 The Persian Empire**

Main Idea By governing with tolerance and wisdom, the Persians established a well-ordered empire that lasted for 200 years.

**SECTION 4 The Unification of China**

Main Idea The social disorder of the warring states contributed to the development of three Chinese ethical systems.
First Age of Empires, 1570 B.C.–200 B.C.

Ramses’ Egyptian Empire

HISTORY

850 B.C.
Assyrian Empire begins its rise to power.

751 B.C.
Nubian kingdom of Kush conquers Egypt (Nubian pottery)

550 B.C.
Persian Empire flourishes.

202 B.C.
The Qin Dynasty collapses. Civil war follows.

750 B.C.
Greek city-states begin colonization.

509 B.C.
Rome becomes a republic.

334 B.C.
Alexander starts to build his empire.
How will the empire help you or harm you?

As a merchant traveling with your camel caravan, your life has become increasingly difficult. Bandits and thieves roam the roads, attacking traders like you. A new military empire is advancing through your region, putting down the outlaw bands. However, the military empire is also imposing harsh laws and heavy taxes on the regions it conquers.

EXAMINING the ISSUES

• Why might a merchant welcome the expansion of a strong empire?

• How might the empire oppress the region?

In small groups, answer the questions, then report back to the class. In your discussion, remember what you’ve learned about military conquest and the behavior of such groups as the Sumerians, Egyptians, and Hittites. As you read about the empires in this chapter, consider how the winners treat the people under their power and how the conquered people respond.
The Egyptian and Nubian Empires

**MAIN IDEA**

**CULTURAL INTERACTION**

Two empires along the Nile, Egypt and Nubia, forged commercial, cultural, and political connections.

**WHY IT MATTERS NOW**

Neighboring civilizations today participate in cultural exchange as well as conflict.

**TERMS & NAMES**

- Hyksos
- Ramses II
- New Kingdom
- Hatshepsut
- Thutmose III
- Nubia
- Kush
- Piankhi
- Meroë

**SETTING THE STAGE**

As you learned in Chapter 2, Egyptian civilization developed along the Nile River and united into a kingdom around 3100 B.C. During the Middle Kingdom (about 2080–1640 B.C.), trade with Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley enriched Egypt. Meanwhile, up the Nile River, less than 600 miles south of the Egyptian city of Thebes, a major kingdom had developed in the region of Nubia. For centuries, the Nubian kingdom of Kush traded with Egypt. The two kingdoms particularly influenced each other culturally.

**Nomadic Invaders Rule Egypt**

After the prosperity of the Middle Kingdom, Egypt descended into war and violence. This was caused by a succession of weak pharaohs and power struggles among rival nobles. The weakened country fell to invaders who swept across the Isthmus of Suez in chariots, a weapon of war unknown to the Egyptians. These Asiatic invaders, called **Hyksos** (HIHK•sohs), ruled Egypt from about 1640 to 1570 B.C. The Hyksos invasion shook the Egyptians’ confidence in the desert barriers that had protected their kingdom.

**Israelites Migrate to Egypt**

Some historians believe that another Asiatic group, the Israelites, settled in Egypt during the rule of the Hyksos. According to the Hebrew Bible, Abraham and his family first crossed the Euphrates River and came to Canaan around 1800 B.C. Then, around 1650 B.C., the descendants of Abraham moved again—this time to Egypt. Some historians believe that the Hyksos encouraged the Israelites to settle there because the two groups were racially similar. The Egyptians resented the presence of the Hyksos in their land but were powerless to remove them.

**Expulsion and Slavery**

Around 1600 B.C., a series of warlike rulers began to restore Egypt’s power. Among those who helped drive out the Hyksos was Queen Ahhotep (ah•HOH•tehp). She took over when her husband was killed in battle. The next pharaoh, Kamose (KAH•mohs), won a great victory over the hated Hyksos. His successors drove the Hyksos completely out of Egypt and pursued them across the Sinai Peninsula into Canaan. According to some Biblical scholars, the Israelites remained in Egypt and were enslaved and forced into hard labor. They would not leave Egypt until sometime between 1500 and 1200 B.C., the time of the Exodus.
The New Kingdom of Egypt

After overthrowing the Hyksos, the pharaohs of the New Kingdom (about 1570–1075 B.C.) sought to strengthen Egypt by building an empire. As you may recall, an empire brings together several peoples or states under the control of one ruler. Egypt entered its third period of glory during the New Kingdom era. During this time, it was wealthier and more powerful than ever before.

Equipped with bronze weapons and two-wheeled chariots, the Egyptians became conquerors. The pharaohs of the 18th Dynasty (about 1570–1365 B.C.) set up an army including archers, charioteers, and infantry, or foot soldiers.

Hatshepsut’s Prosperous Rule  Among the rulers of the New Kingdom, Hatshepsut (hat•SHEHP•SOOT), who declared herself pharaoh around 1472 B.C., was unique. She took over because her stepson, the male heir to the throne, was a young child at the time. Unlike other New Kingdom rulers, Hatshepsut spent her reign encouraging trade rather than just waging war.

The trading expedition Hatshepsut ordered to the Land of Punt (poont), near present-day Somalia, was particularly successful. Hatshepsut sent a fleet of five ships down the Red Sea to Punt in search of myrrh, frankincense, and fragrant ointments used for religious ceremonies and in cosmetics. In addition to these goods, Hatshepsut’s fleet brought back gold, ivory, and unusual plants and animals.

Thutmose the Empire Builder  Hatshepsut’s stepson, Thutmose III (thoot•MOH•suh), proved to be a much more warlike ruler. In his eagerness to ascend to the throne, Thutmose III may even have murdered Hatshepsut. Between the time he took power and his death around 1425 B.C., Thutmose III led a number of victorious invasions eastward into Canaan and Syria. His armies also pushed farther south into Nubia, a region of Africa that straddled the upper Nile River. Egypt had traded with Nubia and influenced the region since the time of the Middle Kingdom.

Egypt was now a mighty empire. It controlled lands around the Nile and far beyond. In addition, it drew boundless wealth from them. Contact with other cultures brought Egypt new ideas as well as material goods. Egypt had never before—nor has it since—commanded such power and wealth as during the reigns of the New Kingdom pharaohs.

The Egyptians and the Hittites  The Egyptians’ conquest of parts of Syria and Canaan around 1400 B.C. brought them into conflict with the Hittites. The Hittites had moved into Asia Minor around 1900 B.C. and later expanded southward into Canaan.

After several smaller battles, the Egyptians and Hittites clashed at Kadesh around 1285 B.C. The pharaoh Ramses II (RAM•SEEZ) and a Hittite king later made a treaty that promised “peace and brotherhood between us forever.” Their alliance lasted for the rest of the century.

An Age of Builders  Like the rulers of the Old Kingdom, who built the towering pyramids, rulers of the New Kingdom...
erected grand buildings. In search of security in the afterlife—and protection from
grave robbers—they hid their splendid tombs beneath desert cliffs. The site they
chose was the remote Valley of the Kings near Thebes. Besides royal tombs, the
pharaohs of this period also built great palaces and magnificent temples. Indeed, the
royal title *pharaoh* means “great house” and comes from this time period.

Ramses II, whose reign extended from approximately 1290 to 1224 B.C., stood
out among the great builders of the New Kingdom. At Karnak, he added to a mon­
umental temple to Amon-Re (AH•muhn•RAY), Egypt’s chief god. Ramses also
ordered a temple to be carved into the red sandstone cliffs above the Nile River at
Abu Simbel (AH•boo SIHM•buhl). He had these temples decorated with enormous
statues of himself. The ears of these statues alone measured more than three feet.

**The Empire Declines**

The empire that Thutmose III had built and Ramses II had ruled slowly came apart
after 1200 B.C. as other strong civilizations rose to challenge Egypt’s power. Shortly
after Ramses died, the entire eastern Mediterranean suffered a wave of invasions.

**Invasions by Land and Sea** Both the Egyptian empire and the Hittite king­
dom were attacked by invaders called the “Sea Peoples” in Egyptian texts. These
invaders may have included the Philistines, who are often mentioned in the Hebrew
Bible. Whoever they were, the Sea Peoples caused great destruction.

The Egyptians faced other attacks. In the east, the tribes of Canaan often
reballed against their Egyptian overlords. In the west, the vast desert no longer
served as a barrier against Libyan raids on Egyptian villages.

**Egypt’s Empire Fades** After these invasions, Egypt never recovered its previous
power. The Egyptian empire broke apart into regional units, and numerous small
kingdoms arose. Each was eager to protect its independence.

Almost powerless, Egypt soon fell to its neighbors’ invasions. Eventually, Libyans
crossed the desert to the Nile Delta. There they established independent dynasties.
From around 950 to 730 B.C., Libyan pharaohs ruled Egypt and erected cities.
But instead of imposing their own culture, the Libyans adopted Egypt's. When the Nubians came north to seize power, they too adopted Egyptian culture.

**The Kushites Conquer the Nile Region**

For centuries, Egypt dominated Nubia and the Nubian kingdom of Kush, which lasted for about a thousand years, between 2000 and 1000 B.C. During this time, Egyptian armies raided and even occupied Kush for a brief period. But as Egypt fell into decline during the Hyksos period, Kush began to emerge as a regional power. Nubia now established its own Kushite dynasty on the throne of Egypt.

**The People of Nubia** Nubia lay south of Egypt between the first cataract of the Nile, an area of churning rapids, and the division of the river into the Blue Nile and the White Nile. Despite several cataracts around which boats had to be carried, the Nile provided the best north-south trade route. Several Nubian kingdoms, including Kush, served as a trade corridor. They linked Egypt and the Mediterranean world to the interior of Africa and to the Red Sea. Goods and ideas flowed back and forth along the river for centuries. The first Nubian kingdom, Kerma, arose shortly after 2000 B.C.

**The Interaction of Egypt and Nubia** With Egypt’s revival during the New Kingdom, pharaohs forced Egyptian rule on Kush. Egyptian governors, priests, soldiers, and artists strongly influenced the Nubians. Indeed, Kush’s capital, Napata, became the center for the spread of Egyptian culture to Kush’s other African trading partners.

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**History in Depth**

**Egyptian Influence on Nubian Culture**

Nubia was heavily influenced by Egypt. This influence is particularly apparent in Nubian religious practices and burial traditions. But even though the Nubians adopted Egyptian ways, they didn’t abandon their cultural identity. In many of these religious and funeral practices, the Nubians blended Egyptian customs with their own traditions.

**Temples** This stone ram, representing the Egyptian god Amen, lay at the entrance to a Nubian temple dedicated to that god. Although the Nubians worshiped many Egyptian gods, Amen’s temple was located near another dedicated to Apedemak, a Nubian god.

**Pyramids** Unlike the Egyptian pyramids, the pyramids of Nubia had steeply sloping sides and were probably designed with a flat top.
Kushite princes went to Egypt. They learned the Egyptian language and worshiped Egyptian gods. They adopted the customs and clothing styles of the Egyptian upper class. When they returned home, the Kushite nobles brought back royal rituals and hieroglyphic writing.

With Egypt's decline, beginning about 1200 B.C., Kush regained its independence. The Kushites viewed themselves as more suitable guardians of Egyptian values than the Libyans. They sought to guard these values by conquering Egypt and ousting its Libyan rulers.

**Piankhi Captures the Egyptian Throne** In 751 B.C., a Kushite king named **Piankhi** overthrew the Libyan dynasty that had ruled Egypt for over 200 years. He united the entire Nile Valley from the delta in the north to Napata in the south. Piankhi and his descendants became Egypt's 25th Dynasty. After his victory, Piankhi erected a monument in his homeland of Kush. On the monument, he had words inscribed that celebrated his victory. The inscription provided a catalog of the riches of the north:

**PRIMARY SOURCE**

Then the ships were laden with silver, gold, copper, clothing, and everything of the Northland, every product of Syria and all sweet woods of God's-Land. His Majesty sailed upstream [south], with glad heart, the shores on his either side were jubilating. West and east were jubilating in the presence of His Majesty.

**PIANKHI, monument in Cairo Museum**

**Statues** These figurines represented Nubian slaves. They were buried with Nubian kings and meant to serve them in death. The figurines reflect traditional Egyptian style. The human faces, however, reveal Nubian features.

**SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Visual Sources**

**Forming Opinions** Why did the Nubians combine Egyptian culture with elements of their own culture?
However, Piankhi’s dynasty proved short-lived. In 671 B.C., the Assyrians, a war-like people from Southwest Asia, conquered Egypt. The Kushites fought bravely, but they were forced to retreat south along the Nile. There the Kushites would experience a golden age, despite their loss of Egypt.

### The Golden Age of Meroë

After their defeat by the Assyrians, the Kushite royal family eventually moved south to Meroë (MEHR•ee). Meroë lay closer to the Red Sea than Napata did, and so became active in the flourishing trade among Africa, Arabia, and India. (See the map on page 93.)

#### The Wealth of Kush

Kush used the natural resources around Meroë and thrived for several hundred years. Unlike Egyptian cities along the Nile, Meroë enjoyed significant rainfall. And, unlike Egypt, Meroë boasted abundant supplies of iron ore. As a result, Meroë became a major center for the manufacture of iron weapons and tools.

In Meroë, ambitious merchants loaded iron bars, tools, and spearheads onto their donkeys. They then transported the goods to the Red Sea, where they exchanged these goods for jewelry, fine cotton cloth, silver lamps, and glass bottles. As the mineral wealth of the central Nile Valley flowed out of Meroë, luxury goods from India and Arabia flowed in.

### The Decline of Meroë

After four centuries of prosperity, from about 250 B.C. to A.D. 150, Meroë began to decline. Aksum, another kingdom located 400 miles to the southeast, contributed to Meroë’s fall. With a seaport on the Red Sea, Aksum came to dominate North African trade. Aksum defeated Meroë around A.D. 350.

Centuries earlier, around the time the Kushite pharaoh sat on the Egyptian throne, a new empire—Assyria—had risen in the north. Like Kush, Assyria came to dominate Egypt.

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**SECTION ASSESSMENT**

**1. TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Hyksos
- New Kingdom
- Hatshepsut
- Thutmose III
- Nubia
- Ramses II
- Kush
- Piankhi
- Meroë

**USING YOUR NOTES**

2. Which empire was invaded more often? Why?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1570 B.C.</th>
<th>A.D. 350</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian Aksum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Kingdom Meroë</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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**MAIN IDEAS**

3. How did the New Kingdom of Egypt become so powerful and wealthy?
4. What cultural aspects of Egyptian civilization did the Kushites adopt?
5. Why was Kush able to thrive after losing Egypt to the Assyrians?

**CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING**

6. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS What role did geography play in Egypt’s rise and fall?
7. MAKING INFERENCES How did trade help both Egypt and Nubia maintain their dominance in the Nile region?
8. HYPOTHESIZING What might have happened if the Kushites had imposed their own culture on Egypt?
9. WRITING ACTIVITY [CULTURAL INTERACTION] How did Egypt and Nubia strengthen each other at various times in their histories? Support your ideas in a one-paragraph analysis.
The Assyrian Empire

MAIN IDEA

**EMPIRE BUILDING** Assyria developed a military machine and established a well-organized administration.

**WHY IT MATTERS NOW** Some leaders still use military force to extend their rule, stamp out opposition, and gain wealth and power.

**TERMS & NAMES**
- Assyria
- Sennacherib
- Nineveh
- Ashurbanipal
- Medes
- Chaldeans
- Nebuchadnezzar

SETTING THE STAGE

For more than two centuries, the Assyrian army advanced across Southwest Asia. It overwhelmed foes with its military strength. After the Assyrians seized control of Egypt, the Assyrian king Esarhaddon proclaimed, “I tore up the root of Kush, and not one therein escaped to submit to me.” The last Kushite pharaoh retreated to Napata, Kush’s capital city.

A Mighty Military Machine

Beginning around 850 B.C., Assyria (uh•SEER•ee•uh) acquired a large empire. It accomplished this by means of a highly advanced military organization and state-of-the-art weaponry. For a time, this campaign of conquest made Assyria the greatest power in Southwest Asia.

The Rise of a Warrior People

The Assyrians came from the northern part of Mesopotamia. (See the map on page 96.) Their flat, exposed land made them easy for other people to attack. Invaders frequently swept down into Assyria from the nearby mountains. The Assyrians may have developed their warlike behavior in response to these invasions. Through constant warfare, Assyrian kings eventually built an empire that stretched from east and north of the Tigris River all the way to central Egypt. One of these Assyrian kings, Sennacherib (sih•NAK•uhr•ihb), bragged that he had destroyed 89 cities and 820 villages, burned Babylon, and ordered most of its inhabitants killed.

Military Organization and Conquest

Assyria was a society that glorified military strength. Its soldiers were well equipped for conquering an empire. Making use of the ironworking technology of the time, the soldiers covered themselves in stiff leather and metal armor. They wore copper or iron helmets, padded loincloths, and leather skirts layered with metal scales. Their weapons were iron swords and iron-pointed spears.

Advance planning and technical skill allowed the Assyrians to lay siege to enemy cities. When deep water blocked their passage, engineers would span the rivers with pontoons, or floating structures used to support a bridge. Before attacking, the Assyrians dug beneath the city’s walls to weaken them. Then, with disciplined organization, foot soldiers marched shoulder to shoulder. The foot soldiers approached the city walls and shot wave upon wave of arrows. Meanwhile, another group of troops hammered the city’s gates with massive, iron-tipped battering rams.
When the city gates finally splintered, the Assyrians showed no mercy. They killed or enslaved their victims. To prevent their enemies from rebelling again, the Assyrians forced captives to settle far away in the empire’s distant provinces and dependent states.

**The Empire Expands**

Between 850 and 650 B.C., the kings of Assyria defeated Syria, Israel, Judah, and Babylonia. Eventually, the Assyrians ruled lands that extended far beyond the Fertile Crescent into Anatolia and Egypt.

**Assyrian Rule** At its peak around 650 B.C., the Assyrian Empire included almost all of the old centers of civilization and power in Southwest Asia. Assyrian officials governed lands closest to Assyria as provinces and made them dependent territories. Assyrian kings controlled these dependent regions by choosing their rulers or by supporting kings who aligned themselves with Assyria. The Assyrian system of having local governors report to a central authority became the fundamental model of administration, or system of government management.

In addition, the military campaigns added new territory to the empire. These additional lands brought taxes and tribute to the Assyrian treasury. If a conquered people refused to pay, the Assyrians destroyed their cities and sent the people into exile. Such methods enabled the Assyrians to effectively govern an extended empire.

**Assyrian Culture** Some of Assyria’s most fearsome warriors earned reputations as great builders. For example, the same King Sennacherib who had burned Babylon also established Assyria’s capital at Nineveh (NIHN•uh•vuh) along the Tigris River. This great walled city, about three miles long and a mile wide, was the largest city of its day. In the ruins of Nineveh and other Assyrian cities, archaeologists found finely carved sculptures. Two artistic subjects particularly fascinated the Assyrians: brutal military campaigns and the lion hunt.

Nineveh also held one of the ancient world’s largest libraries. In this unique library, King Ashurbanipal (AH•shur•BAH•nuh•PAL) collected more than 20,000 clay tablets from throughout the Fertile Crescent. The collection included the ancient Sumerian poem the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and provided historians with much information about the earliest civilizations in Southwest Asia. The library was the first to have many of the features of a modern library. For instance, the collection was organized into many rooms according to subject matter. The collection was also cataloged. Europeans would not use a library cataloging system for centuries.
The Assyrian army used sappers—soldiers who dug tunnels to sap, or undermine, the foundations of the enemy’s walls so that they would fall.

**Weapons**
Troops were armed with the best weapons of the time, iron-tipped spears, as well as iron daggers and swords. They were also protected with armor and large shields.

**Tactics**
The Assyrians were savage in their treatment of defeated opponents. Those who were not slaughtered in the initial attack were often impaled or beheaded, while women and children were sometimes murdered or sold into slavery.

**Tunnels**
The Assyrian army used sappers—soldiers who dug tunnels to sap, or undermine, the foundations of the enemy’s walls so that they would fall.

**The Empire Crumbles**
Ashurbanipal proved to be one of the last of the mighty Assyrian kings. Assyrian power had spread itself too thin. Also, the cruelty displayed by the Assyrians had earned them many enemies. Shortly after Ashurbanipal’s death, Nineveh fell.

**Decline and Fall** In 612 B.C., a combined army of Medes (meedz), Chaldeans (kal•DEE•uhnz), and others burned and leveled Nineveh. However, because the clay writing tablets in Nineveh’s library had been baked in a pottery oven, many survived the fire.

Most people in the region rejoiced at Nineveh’s destruction. The Jewish prophet Nahum (NA Y•huhm) gave voice to the feelings of many:

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**PRIMARY SOURCE**
All who see you will recoil from you and will say, "Nineveh has been ravaged!" Who will console her? Where shall I look for anyone to comfort you? . . . Your shepherds are slumbering, O King of Assyria; your sheepmasters are lying inert; your people are scattered over the hills, and there is none to gather them.

NAHUM 3:7, 18 (Hebrew Bible)

Rebirth of Babylon Under the Chaldeans After defeating the Assyrians, the Chaldeans made Babylon their capital. Around 600 B.C., Babylon became the center
of a new empire, more than 1,000 years after Hammurabi had ruled there. A Chaldean king named Nebuchadnezzar (NEH•uh•kuhd•NEHZ•uhr) restored the city. Perhaps the most impressive part of the restoration was the famous hanging gardens. Greek scholars later listed them as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. According to legend, one of Nebuchadnezzar’s wives missed the flowing shrubs of her mountain homeland. To please her, he had fragrant trees and shrubs planted on terraces that rose 75 feet above Babylon’s flat, dry plain.

Indeed, the entire city was a wonder. Its walls were so thick that, according to one report, a four-horse chariot could wheel around on top of them. To ensure that the world knew who ruled Babylon, the king had the bricks inscribed with the words, “I am Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon.”

The highest building in Babylon was a great, seven-tiered ziggurat more than 300 feet high. It was visible for miles. At night, priests observed the stars from the top of this tower and others in the city. Chaldean astronomers kept detailed records of how the stars and planets seemed to change position in the night sky. They also concluded that the sun, moon, Earth, and five other planets belonged to the same solar system. The Chaldeans’ observations formed the basis for both astronomy and astrology.

Nebuchadnezzar’s empire fell shortly after his death. The Persians who next came to power adopted many Assyrian military, political, and artistic inventions. The Persians would use the organization the Assyrians had developed to stabilize the region.