TEXTBOOK IN HISTORY FOR CLASS XI

11090

राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
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FOREWORD

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005, recommends that children's life at school must be linked to their life outside the school. This principle marks a departure from the legacy of bookish learning which continues to shape our system and causes a gap between the school, home and community. The syllabi and textbooks developed on the basis of NCF signify an attempt to implement this basic idea. They also attempt to discourage rote learning and the maintenance of sharp boundaries between different subject areas. We hope these measures will take us significantly further in the direction of a child-centred system of education outlined in the National Policy on Education (1986).

The success of this effort depends on the steps that school principals and teachers will take to encourage children to reflect on their own learning and to pursue imaginative activities and questions. We must recognise that, given space, time and freedom, children generate new knowledge by engaging with the information passed on to them by adults. Treating the prescribed textbook as the sole basis of examination is one of the key reasons why other resources and sites of learning are ignored. Inculcating creativity and initiative is possible if we perceive and treat children as participants in learning, not as receivers of a fixed body of knowledge.

These aims imply considerable change in school routines and mode of functioning. Flexibility in the daily time-table is as necessary as rigour in implementing the annual calendar so that the required number of teaching days are actually devoted to teaching. The methods used for teaching and evaluation will also determine how effective this textbook proves for making children's life at school a happy experience, rather than a source of stress or boredom. Syllabus designers have tried to address the problem of curricular burden by restructuring and reorienting knowledge at different stages with greater consideration for child psychology and the time available for teaching. The textbook attempts to enhance this endeavour by giving higher priority and space to opportunities for contemplation and wondering, discussion in small groups, and activities requiring hands-on experience.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) appreciates the hard work done by the textbook development committee responsible for this book. We wish to thank the Chairperson of the Advisory Group in Social Science, Professor Hari Vasudevan, *Chief Advisor*, History, Professor Neeladri Bhattacharya and the Advisor for this book, Professor Narayani Gupta, for guiding the work of this committee. Several teachers contributed to the development of this textbook; we are grateful to their principals for making this possible. We are indebted to the institutions and organisations, which have generously permitted us to draw upon their resources, material and personnel. We are especially

grateful to the members of the National Monitoring Committee, appointed by the Department of Secondary and Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development under the Chairpersonship of Professor Mrinal Miri and Professor G. P. Deshpande, for their valuable time and contribution. As an organisation committed to systemic reform and continuous improvement in the quality of its products, NCERT welcomes comments and suggestions which will enable us to undertake further revision and refinement.

Director
National Council of Educational
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New Delhi
20 December 2005

Rationalisation of Content in the Textbooks

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative to reduce content load on students. The National Education Policy 2020, also emphasises reducing the content load and providing opportunities for experiential learning with creative mindset. In this background, the NCERT has undertaken the exercise to rationalise the textbooks across all classes. Learning Outcomes already developed by the NCERT across classes have been taken into consideration in this exercise.

Contents of the textbooks have been rationalised in view of the following:

- Overlapping with similar content included in other subject areas in the same class
- Similar content included in the lower or higher class in the same subject
- Difficulty level
- Content, which is easily accessible to students without much interventions from teachers and can be learned by children through self-learning or peer-learning
- Content, which is irrelevant in the present context

This present edition, is a reformatted version after carrying out the changes given above.

ON READING WORLD HISTORY

How is it possible, you may ask, to study the history of the world within one year? There is so much that has happened in different countries and so much that has been written about each country. How can we choose a few themes for study from a vast and boundless corpus?

These are valid questions. Before we read any book on world history we need answers to such questions. A syllabus needs to make clear how it is organised. A book should explain what it is seeking to do.

We need to remember that in studying or writing history the historian is always involved in a process of selection. This is a point that E. H. Carr made many decades ago in a wonderful small book *What is History?* After wading through an enormous pile of records in a musty archive, a historian notes down those facts which appear important to him. He relates them to other evidence that he has similarly collected from some other archive, from some other place. He cannot possibly copy down everything he has read, nor use all the evidence he has collected. The evidence that does not make sense to the historian goes unnoticed. At a later date, some other historian reads the same records with new questions in mind. She now discovers evidence that had earlier gone unnoticed. She interprets this evidence, makes new connections, and writes a new book of history.

History writing cannot do away with this element of selectivity. So in reading history we need to see what events a historian chooses to focus on and how he interprets them. We need to understand the larger argument the historian is developing, the broader framework through which he makes sense of particular events.

Till recently the history of the world that we read was often a story of the rise of the modern West. It was a story of continuous progress and development: the expansion of technology and science, markets and trade, reason and rationality, freedom and liberty. Individual histories of specific events were very often structured within this larger story of the triumphal march of the West. Imperial domination of the world was premised on this conception of the past. The West saw itself as the bearer of progress: civilising the world, introducing reforms, educating natives, expanding trades and markets.

Should we not question this perception today? To do that we need to re-look at world history, travel across continents and long chronological periods, and see whether we can think of this history in a new way. *Themes in World History* will help you in this journey.

It will do so in three different ways.

First: it will introduce you to the darker histories that lie behind the glorious stories of development and progress. You will see how the arrival of explorers and traders in South America in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries did not simply open up the place for western commerce and culture; it led to the spread of disease, destruction of civilisations and the decimation of populations. Later, when white settlers moved into North America and Australia, what we had was not just progress (Theme 6). Behind the history of the development of modern capitalist societies in these places lie the disturbing stories of displacements of indigenous populations, and even genocide.

Second: when you read about the making of states and empires in Section II, you will see that the drama unfolds not only in Rome (Theme 2), that is in Europe, but in the Central Islamic states (Theme 4), and the land of the Mongols (Theme 3). These chapters will tell you about the very different ways in which society and polity are organised in these places.

Third: in reading Section IV you will see that there are different paths to modernisation. There was a time when it was believed that industrialisation first occurred in Britain and other countries tried to replicate this model in various ways. So the developments of all countries were judged in relation to the British model. Such an argument once again sees the West as the centre of the world. But we know today that it is certainly not true that all creativity flowed in only from the West. In opposition to this, however, we cannot simply assert that the West had no influence on what was happening elsewhere, or that historical developments in each country have to be seen in isolation, that we should only look at the indigenous roots of all developments. That would be a narrow and limited perspective, a form of parochialism. Instead we need to recognise that in different countries people act creatively to shape the world in which they live, and these developments in turn have impact on other countries and continents, including Europe. Theme 5 will help you see how even the cultural developments in Renaissance Europe were so significantly influenced by developments in other parts of the world.

Your journey will begin with the early cities (Theme 1). You will then see how large states and empires developed in three different parts of the world, and how these societies were organised (Section II). In the next section, you will have a close look at how European society and culture changed between the ninth and the fifteenth centuries, and what European expansion meant for the people of South America (Section III). Finally, you will read about the complex history of the making of the modern world (Section IV). Many of the themes will introduce you to the debates in the field and show how historians continuously rethink old issues.

Each section begins with an Introduction and a Timeline. These timelines are not for you to memorise for exams. They are meant to give you some idea of what was happening in different places at any one point of time. They will help you situate the history of one place in relation to another.

Constructing a timeline is always difficult. How do we choose the dates to focus on? Not all historians would agree on the choices made. In fact, if you compare different timelines, given in different books, for the same period, you may find that the issues highlighted in them are different. So we need to read each timeline critically, see what it tells us and what it does not. Timelines frame history in particular ways.

This year you are not reading about the history of South Asia. The book you read next year will be on 'Themes in Indian History'. Over these two years (Classes XI and XII) you will learn not only about some of the critical events and processes in the history of the world, you will also discover how historians come to know about the past. You will see what sources they use and how they make sense of these; you will see how historical knowledge develops through re-interpretations and debates.

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CONTENTS

I

EARLY SOCIETIES

Writing and City Life

EARLY SOCIETIES

IN this section, we will read about early societies which is often traced to the beginnings of human existence, from the remote past, millions of years ago. Your teachers will inform you how humans first emerged in Africa and how archaeologists have studied these early phases of history from remains of bones and stone tools.

Archaeologists have made attempts to reconstruct the lives of early people – to find out about the shelters in which they lived, the food they ate by gathering plant produce and hunting animals, and the ways in which they expressed themselves. Other important developments included the use of fire and of language. And, finally, you can find out whether the lives of people who live by hunting and gathering today can help us to understand the past.

Theme 1, included in the section, deals with some of the earliest cities – those of Mesopotamia, present-day Iraq. These cities developed around temples, and were centres of long-distance trade. Archaeological evidence – remains of old settlements – and an abundance of written material are used to reconstruct the lives of the different people who lived there – craftspeople, scribes, labourers, priests, kings and queens. You will notice how pastoral people played an important role in some of these towns. A question to think about is whether the many activities that went on in cities would have been possible if writing had not developed.

You may wonder as to how people who for millions of years had lived in forests, in caves or temporary shelters and rock shelters began to eventually live in villages and cities. Well, the story is a long one and is related to several developments that took place at least 5,000 years before the establishment of the first cities.

One of the most far-reaching changes was the gradual shift from nomadic life to settled agriculture, which began around

10,000 years ago. As you will be informed by your teacher, prior to the adoption of agriculture, people had gathered plant produce as a source of food. Slowly, they learnt more about different kinds of plants – where they grew, the seasons when they bore fruit and so on. From this, they learnt to grow plants. In West Asia, wheat and barley, peas and various kinds of pulses were grown. In East and Southeast Asia, the crops that grew easily were millet and rice. Millet was also grown in Africa. Around the same time, people learnt how to domesticate animals such as sheep, goat, cattle, pig and donkey. Plant fibres such as cotton and flax, and animal fibres such as wool were now woven into cloth. Somewhat later, about 5,000 years ago, domesticated animals such as cattle and donkeys were harnessed to ploughs and carts.

These developments led to other changes as well. When people grew crops, they had to stay in the same place till the crops ripened. So, settled life became more common. And with that, people built more permanent structures in which to live.

This was also the time when some communities learnt how to make earthen pots. These were used to store grain and other produce, and to prepare and cook a variety of foods made from the new grains that were cultivated. In fact, a great deal of attention was given to processing foods to make them tasty and digestible.

The way stone tools were made also changed. While earlier methods of making tools continued, some tools and equipment were now smoothened and polished by an elaborate process of grinding. New equipment included mortars and pestles for processing and grinding grain, as well as stone axes and hoes, which were used to clear land for cultivation, as well as for digging the earth to sow seeds.

In some areas, people learnt to tap the ores of metals such as copper and tin. Sometimes, copper ores were collected and used for their distinctive bluish-green colour. This prepared the way for the more extensive use of metal for jewellery and for tools subsequently.

There was also a growing familiarity with other kinds of produce from distant lands (and seas). This included wood, stones, including precious and semi-precious stones, metals and shell, and obsidian (hardened) volcanic lava. Clearly, people were going from place to place, carrying goods and ideas with them.

With increasing trade, the growth of villages and towns, and the movements of people, in place of the small communities of early people there now grew small states. While these changes took place slowly, over several thousand years, the pace quickened with the growth of the first cities. Also, the changes had far-reaching consequences. Some scholars have described

this as a revolution, as the lives of people were probably transformed beyond recognition. Look out for continuities and changes as you explore these two contrasting themes in early history.

Remember too, that we have selected only some examples of early societies for detailed study. There were other kinds of early societies, including farming communities and pastoral peoples. And there were other peoples who were hunter-gatherers as well as city dwellers, apart from the examples selected. Timeline I gives you some hints about those societies and people.

How to Read Timelines

You will find a timeline like this one in every section.
Each of these will indicate some of the major processes and events in world history.

As you study the timelines, remember—

- Processes through which ordinary women and men have shaped history are far more difficult to date than events such as a war between kings.
- Some dates may indicate the beginning of a process, or when it reaches maturation.
- Historians are constantly revising dates in the light of new evidence, or new ways of assessing old data.
- While we have divided the timelines on a geographical basis as a matter of convenience, actual historical developments often transcend these divisions.
- Also, there is a chronological overlap in historical processes.
- Only some landmarks in human history have been shown here – we have highlighted the processes dealt with in the themes that follow, which also have separate timelines.
- Wherever you see a*, you will also find an illustration related to the date along the column.
- Blank spaces do not mean that nothing was happening – sometimes these indicate that we do not as yet know what was happening.
- You will be learning more about South Asian history in general and Indian history in particular next year. The dates selected for South Asia are only indicative of some of the developments in the subcontinent.

TIMELINE I

(6 MYA TO 1 BCE)

This timeline focuses on the emergence of humans and the domestication of plants and animals. It highlights some major technological developments such as the use of fire, metals, plough agriculture and the wheel. Other processes that are shown include the emergence of cities and the use of writing. You will also find mention of some of the earliest empires – a theme that will be developed in Timeline II.

DATES	AFRICA	EUROPE
6 mya-500,000 BP	*Australopithecus* fossils (5.6 mya) Evidence of use of fire (1.4 mya)	
500,000-150,000 BP	*Homo sapiens* fossils (195,000 BP)	Evidence of use of fire (400,000 BP)
150,000-50,000 BP		
50,000-30,000		*Homo sapiens* fossils (40,000)
30,000-10,000	Paintings in caves/rock shelters (27,500)	Paintings in caves/rock shelters (especially France and Spain)
8000-7000 BCE		
7000-6000	Domestication of cattle and dogs	
6000-5000		Cultivation of wheat and barley (Greece)
5000-4000		
4000-3000	Domestication of donkey, cultivation of millet, use of copper	Use of copper (Crete)
3000-2000	Plough agriculture, first kingdoms, cities, pyramids, calendar, hieroglyphic script*, writing on papyrus (Egypt)	Domestication of horse (eastern Europe)
2000-1900		Cities, palaces, use of bronze, the potter's wheel, development of trade (Crete)
1900-1800		
1800-1700		
1700-1600		Development of a script (Crete)*
1600-1500		
1500-1400	Use of glass bottles (Egypt)	
1400-1300		
1300-1200		
1200-1100		
1100-1000		Use of iron
1000-900		
900-800	City of Carthage established in North Africa by the Phoenicians from West Asia; growing trade around the Mediterranean	
800-700	Use of iron (Sudan)	First Olympic games (Greece, 776 BCE)
700-600	Use of iron (Egypt)	
600-500		Use of coins* (Greece); establishment of the Roman republic (510 BCE)
500-400	Persians invade Egypt	Establishment of a 'democracy' in Athens (Greece)
400-300	Establishment of Alexandria, Egypt (332 BCE), which becomes a major centre of learning	Alexander of Macedonia conquers Egypt and parts of West Asia (336-323 BCE) 
300-200		
200-100		
100-1 BCE		

DATES	ASIA	SOUTH ASIA
6mya-500,000 BP	Use of fire (700,000 BP, China)	Stone age site in Riwat (1,900,000 BP, Pakistan)
500,000-150,000 BP		
150,000-50,000 BP	*Homo sapiens* fossils (100,000 BP, West Asia)	
50,000-30,000 BP		
30,000-10,000 BP	Domestication of dog (14,000, West Asia)	Cave paintings at Bhimbetka (Madhya Pradesh); *Homo sapiens* fossils (25,500 BP, Sri Lanka)
8000-7000 BCE	Domestication of sheep and goat, cultivation of wheat and barley (West Asia)	
7000-6000	Domestication of pig and cattle (West and East Asia)	Early agricultural settlements (Baluchistan)
6000-5000	Domestication of chicken, cultivation of millet and yam (East Asia)	
5000-4000	Cultivation of cotton (South Asia); use of copper (West Asia)	
4000-3000	Use of the potter's wheel, wheel for transport (3600 BCE), writing (3200 BCE, Mesopotamia), use of bronze	Use of copper
3000-2000	Plough agriculture, cities (Mesopotamia); silk-making (China); domestication of horse (Central Asia); cultivation of rice (Southeast Asia)	Cities of the Harappan civilisation, use of script* (c.2700 BCE) 
2000-1900	Domestication of water-buffalo (East Asia)	
1900-1800		
1800-1700		
1700-1600		
1600-1500	Cities, writing, kingdoms (Shang dynasty), use of bronze (China)*	
1500-1400	Use of iron (West Asia) 	Composition of the *Rig Veda*
1400-1300		
1300-1200		
1200-1100		Use of iron, megaliths (Deccan and South India)
1100-1000	Domestication of the one-humped camel (Arabia)	
1000-900		
900-800		
800-700		
700-600		
600-500	Use of coins (Turkey); Persian empire (546 BCE) with capital at Persepolis; Chinese philosopher Confucius (c. 551 BCE)	Cities and states in several areas, first coins, spread of Jainism and Buddhism
500-400		
400-300		Establishment of the Mauryan empire (c. 321 BCE)
300-200	Establishment of an empire in China (221 BCE), beginning of the construction of the Great Wall	
200-100		
100-1 BCE		

DATES	AMERICAS	AUSTRALIA/PACIFIC ISLANDS
6 mya-500,000 BP		
500,000-150,000 BP		
150,000-50,000 BP		
50,000-30,000 BP		*Homo sapiens* fossils, earliest indications of sea-faring (45,000 BP)
30,000-10,000 BP	*Homo sapiens* fossils (12,000 BP)	Paintings (20,000 BP)
8000-7000 BCE		
7000-6000	Cultivation of squash	
6000-5000		
5000-4000	Cultivation of beans	
4000-3000	Cultivation of cotton, bottle gourd	
3000-2000	Domestication of guinea pig, turkey, cultivation of maize	
2000-1900	Cultivation of potato, chilli*, cassava, peanut, domestication of llama* and alpaca	
1900-1800		
1800-1700		
1700-1600		
1600-1500		
1500-1400		
1400-1300		
1300-1200		
1200-1100	Olmec settlements around the Gulf of Mexico, early temples and sculpture	Settlements in Polynesia and Micronesia
1100-1000		
1000-900	Development of a hieroglyphic script	
900-800		
800-700		
700-600		
600-500		
500-400		
400-300		
300-200		
200-100		
100-1 BCE		

ACTIVITY

Choose one date from each of the six columns and discuss the possible significance of the process/ event for men and women living in the region.

THEME 1

WRITING AND CITY LIFE

11090CH02

CITY life began in Mesopotamia, the land between the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers that is now part of the Republic of Iraq. Mesopotamian civilisation is known for its prosperity, city life, its voluminous and rich literature and its mathematics and astronomy. Mesopotamia's writing system and literature spread to the eastern Mediterranean, northern Syria, and Turkey after 2000 BCE, so that the kingdoms of that entire region were writing to one another, and to the Pharaoh of Egypt, in the language and script of Mesopotamia. Here we shall explore the connection between city life and writing, and then look at some outcomes of a sustained tradition of writing.*

In the beginning of recorded history, the land, mainly the urbanised south (see discussion below), was called Sumer and Akkad. After 2000 BCE, when Babylon became an important city, the term Babylonia was used for the southern region. From about 1100 BCE, when the Assyrians established their kingdom in the north, the region became known as Assyria. The first known language of the land was Sumerian. It was gradually replaced by Akkadian around 2400 BCE when Akkadian speakers arrived. This language flourished till about Alexander's time (336-323 BCE), with some regional changes occurring. From 1400 BCE, Aramaic also trickled in. This language, similar to Hebrew, became widely spoken after 1000 BCE. It is still spoken in parts of Iraq.

Archaeology in Mesopotamia began in the 1840s. At one or two sites (including Uruk and Mari, which we discuss below), excavations continued for decades. (No Indian site has ever seen such long-term projects.) Not only can we study hundreds of Mesopotamian buildings, statues, ornaments, graves, tools and seals as sources, there are thousands of written documents.

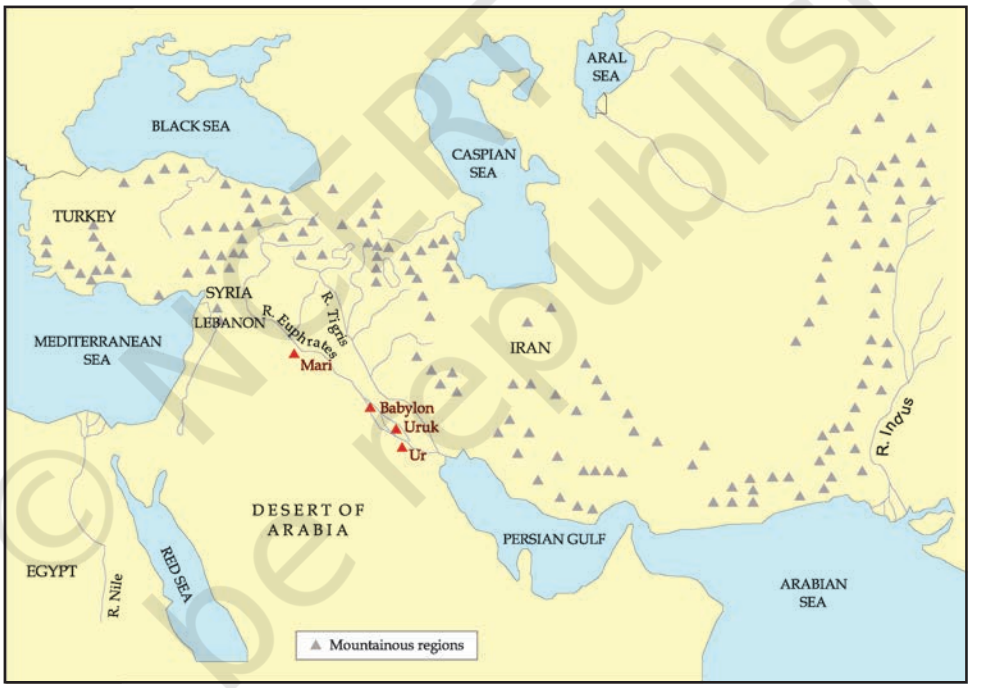
Mesopotamia was important to Europeans because of references to it in the Old Testament, the first part of the Bible. For instance, the Book of Genesis of the Old Testament refers to 'Shimar', meaning Sumer, as a land of brick-built cities. Travellers and scholars of Europe looked on Mesopotamia as a kind of ancestral land, and when archaeological work began in the area, there was an attempt to prove the literal truth of the Old Testament.

Mesopotamia is derived from the Greek words *mesos*, meaning middle, and *potamos*, meaning river.

According to the Bible, the Flood was meant to destroy all life on earth. However, God chose a man, Noah, to ensure that life could continue after the Flood. Noah built a huge boat, an ark. He took a pair each of all known species of animals and birds on board the ark, which survived the Flood. There was a strikingly similar story in the Mesopotamian tradition, where the principal character was called Ziusudra or Utnapishtim.

From the mid-nineteenth century there was no stopping the enthusiasm for exploring the ancient past of Mesopotamia. In 1873, a British newspaper funded an expedition of the British Museum to search for a tablet narrating the story of the Flood, mentioned in the Bible.

By the 1960s, it was understood that the stories of the Old Testament were not literally true, but may have been ways of expressing memories about important changes in history. Gradually, archaeological techniques became far more sophisticated and refined. What is more, attention was directed to different questions, including reconstructing the lives of ordinary people. Establishing the literal truth of Biblical narratives receded into the background. Much of what we discuss subsequently in the chapter is based on these later studies.



MAP 1: West Asia

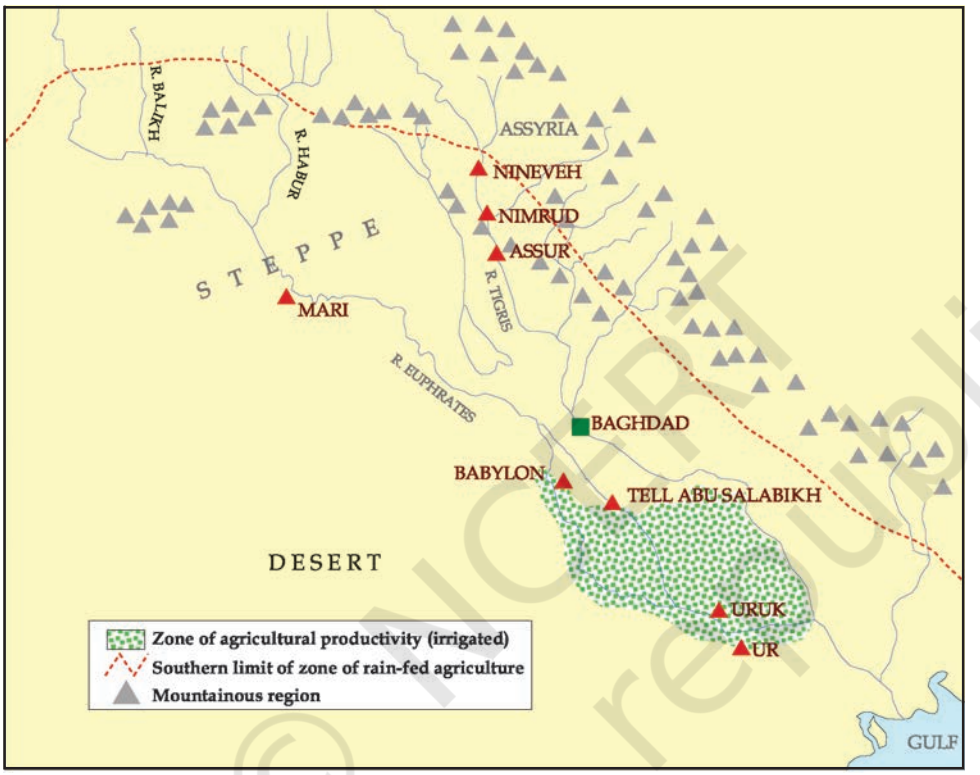
ACTIVITY 1

Many societies have myths about floods. These are often ways of preserving and expressing memories about important changes in history. Find out more about these, noting how life before and after the flood is represented.

Mesopotamia and its Geography

Iraq is a land of diverse environments. In the north-east lie green, undulating plains, gradually rising to tree-covered mountain ranges with clear streams and wild flowers, with enough rainfall to grow crops. Here, agriculture began between 7000 and 6000 BCE. In the north, there is a stretch of upland called a steppe, where animal herding offers people a better livelihood than agriculture – after the winter rains, sheep and goats feed on the grasses and low shrubs that grow here. To the east, tributaries of the Tigris provide routes of

communication into the mountains of Iran. The south is a desert – and this is where the first cities and writing emerged (see below). This desert could support cities because the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, which rise in the northern mountains, carry loads of silt (fine mud). When they flood or when their water is let out on to the fields, fertile silt is deposited.



MAP 2: Mesopotamia: Mountains, Steppe, Desert, Irrigated Zone of the South.

After the Euphrates has entered the desert, its water flows out into small channels. These channels flood their banks and, in the past, functioned as irrigation canals: water could be let into the fields of wheat, barley, peas or lentils when necessary. Of all ancient systems, that of the Roman Empire (Theme 3) included, it was the agriculture of southern Mesopotamia that was the most productive, even though the region did not have sufficient rainfall to grow crops.

Not only agriculture, Mesopotamian sheep and goats that grazed on the steppe, the north-eastern plains and the mountain slopes (that is, on tracts too high for the rivers to flood and fertilise) produced meat, milk and wool in abundance. Further, fish was available in rivers and date-palms gave fruit in summer. Let us not, however, make the mistake of thinking that cities grew simply because of rural prosperity. We shall discuss other factors by and by, but first let us be clear about city life.

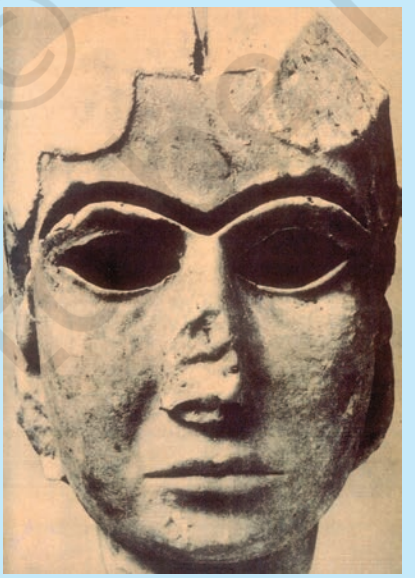
The Significance of Urbanism

Cities and towns are not just places with large populations. It is when an economy develops in spheres other than food production that it becomes an advantage for people to cluster in towns. Urban economies comprise besides food production, trade, manufactures and services. City people, thus, cease to be self-sufficient and depend on the products or services of other (city or village) people. There is continuous interaction among them. For instance, the carver of a stone seal requires bronze tools that he himself cannot make, and coloured stones for the seals that he does not know where to get: his 'specialisation' is fine carving, not trading. The bronze tool maker does not himself go out to get the metals, copper and tin. Besides, he needs regular supplies of charcoal for fuel. The *division of labour* is a mark of urban life.

Further, there must be a social organisation in place. Fuel, metal, various stones, wood, etc., come from many different places for city manufacturers. Thus, organised trade and storage is needed. There are deliveries of grain and other food items from the village to the city, and food supplies need to be stored and distributed. Besides, many different activities have to be coordinated: there must be not only stones but also bronze tools and pots available for seal cutters. Obviously, in such a system some people give commands that others obey, and urban economies often require the keeping of written records.

The earliest cities in Mesopotamia date back to the bronze age, c.3000 BCE. Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin. Using bronze meant procuring these metals, often from great distances. Metal tools were necessary for accurate carpentry, drilling beads, carving stone seals, cutting shell for inlaid furniture, etc. Mesopotamian weapons were also of bronze – for example, the tips of the spears that you see in the illustration on p. 18.

The Warka Head



This woman's head was sculpted in white marble at Uruk before 3000 BCE. The eyes and eyebrows would probably have taken lapis lazuli (blue) and shell (white) and bitumen (black) inlays, respectively. There is a groove along the top of the head, perhaps for an ornament. This is a world-famous piece of sculpture, admired for the delicate modelling of the woman's mouth, chin and cheeks. And it was modelled in a hard stone that would have been imported from a distance.

Beginning with the procurement of stone, list all the specialists who would be involved in the production of such a piece of sculpture.

ACTIVITY 2

Discuss whether city life would have been possible without the use of metals.

Movement of Goods into Cities

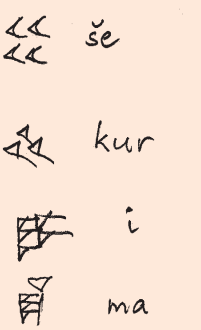
However rich the food resources of Mesopotamia, its mineral resources were few. Most parts of the south lacked stones for tools, seals and jewels; the wood of the Iraqi date-palm and poplar was not good enough for carts, cart wheels or boats; and there was no metal for tools, vessels or ornaments. So we can surmise that the ancient Mesopotamians could have traded their abundant textiles and agricultural produce for wood, copper, tin, silver, gold, shell and various stones from Turkey and Iran, or across the Gulf. These latter regions had mineral resources, but much less scope for agriculture. Regular exchanges – possible only when there was a social organisation – to equip foreign expeditions and direct the exchanges were initiated by the people of southern Mesopotamia.

Besides crafts, trade and services, efficient transport is also important for urban development. If it takes too much time, or too much animal feed, to carry grain or charcoal into cities on pack animals or bullock carts, the city economy will not be viable. The cheapest mode of transportation is, everywhere, over water. River boats or barges loaded with sacks of grain are propelled by the current of the river and/or wind, but when animals transport goods, they need to be fed. The canals and natural channels of ancient Mesopotamia were in fact routes of goods transport between large and small settlements, and in the account on the city of Mari later in the chapter, the importance of the Euphrates as a 'world route' will become clear.

The Development of Writing

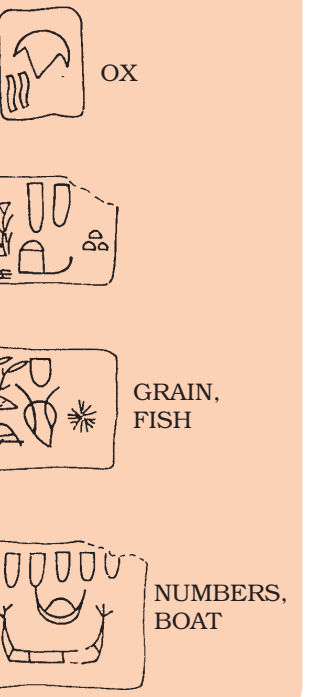
All societies have languages in which certain spoken sounds convey certain meanings. This is verbal communication. Writing too is verbal communication – but in a different way. When we talk about writing or a script, we mean that *spoken sounds* are represented in *visible signs*.

The first Mesopotamian tablets, written around 3200 BCE, contained picture-like signs and numbers. These were about 5,000 lists of oxen, fish, bread loaves, etc. – lists of goods that were brought into or distributed from the temples of Uruk, a city in the south. Clearly, writing began when society needed to keep records of transactions – because in city life transactions occurred at different times, and involved many people and a variety of goods.



Cuneiform syllabic signs.

Clay tablets c.3200 BCE. Each tablet is 3.5 cm or less in height, with picture-like signs (ox, fish, grain, boat) and numbers ( )



Mesopotamians wrote on tablets of clay. A scribe would wet clay and pat it into a size he could hold comfortably in one hand.

A clay tablet written on both sides in cuneiform. It is a mathematical exercise – you can see a triangle and lines across the triangle on the top of the obverse side. You can see that the letters have been pressed into the clay.

He would carefully smoothen its surfaces. With the sharp end of a reed cut obliquely, he would press wedge-shaped ('cuneiform*') signs on to the smoothened surface while it was still moist. Once dried in the sun, the clay would harden and tablets would be almost as indestructible as pottery. When a written record of, say, the delivery of pieces of metal had ceased to be relevant, the tablet was thrown away. Once the surface dried, signs could not be pressed on to a tablet: so each transaction, however minor, required a separate written tablet. This is why tablets occur by the hundreds at Mesopotamian sites. And it is because of this wealth of sources that we know so much more about Mesopotamia than we do about contemporary India.

* Cuneiform is derived from the Latin words *cuneus*, meaning 'wedge' and *forma*, meaning 'shape'.

By 2600 BCE or so, the letters became cuneiform, and the language was Sumerian. Writing was now used not only for keeping records, but also for making dictionaries, giving legal validity to land transfers, narrating the deeds of kings, and announcing the changes a king had made in the customary laws of the land. Sumerian, the earliest known language of Mesopotamia, was gradually replaced after 2400 BCE by the Akkadian language. Cuneiform writing in the Akkadian language continued in use until the first century CE, that is, for more than 2,000 years.

The System of Writing

The sound that a cuneiform sign represented was not a single consonant or vowel (such as *m* or *a* in the English alphabet), but syllables (say,-*put*-,or-*la*-,or-*in*-). Thus, the signs that a Mesopotamian scribe had

to learn ran into hundreds, and he had to be able to handle a wet tablet and get it written before it dried. So, writing was a skilled craft but, more important, it was an enormous intellectual achievement, conveying in visual form the system of sounds of a particular language.

Literacy

Very few Mesopotamians could read and write. Not only were there hundreds of signs to learn, many of these were complex (see p. 33). If a king could read, he made sure that this was recorded in one of his boastful inscriptions! For the most part, however, writing reflected the mode of speaking.

A letter from an official would have to be read out to the king. So it would begin:

> 'To my lord A, speak: … Thus says your servant B: … I have carried out the work assigned to me …'

A long mythical poem about creation ends thus:

> 'Let these verses be held in remembrance and let the elder teach them;
> let the wise one and the scholar discuss them;
> let the father repeat them to his sons;
> let the ears of (even) the herdsman be opened to them.'

The Uses of Writing

The connection between city life, trade and writing is brought out in a long Sumerian epic poem about Enmerkar, one of the earliest rulers of Uruk. In Mesopotamian tradition, Uruk was the city par excellence, often known simply as The City.

Enmerkar is associated with the organisation of the first trade of Sumer: in the early days, the epic says, 'trade was not known'. Enmerkar wanted lapis lazuli and precious metals for the beautification of a city temple and sent his messenger out to get them from the chief of a very distant land called Aratta. 'The messenger heeded the word of the king. By night he went just by the stars. By day, he would go by heaven's sun divine. He had to go up into the mountain ranges, and had to come down out of the mountain ranges. The people of Susa (a city) below the mountains saluted him like tiny mice*. Five mountain ranges, six mountain ranges, seven mountain ranges he crossed…'

The messenger could not get the chief of Aratta to part with lapis lazuli or silver, and he had to make the long journey back and forth, again and again, carrying threats and promises from the king of Uruk. Ultimately, the messenger 'grew weary of mouth'. He got all the messages mixed up. Then, 'Enmerkar formed a clay tablet in his hand, and he wrote the words down. In those days, there had been no writing down of words on clay.'

*The poet means that once the messenger had climbed to a great height, everything appeared small in the valley far below.

Given the written tablet, 'the ruler of Aratta examined the clay. The spoken words were nails*. His face was frowning. He kept looking at the tablet.'

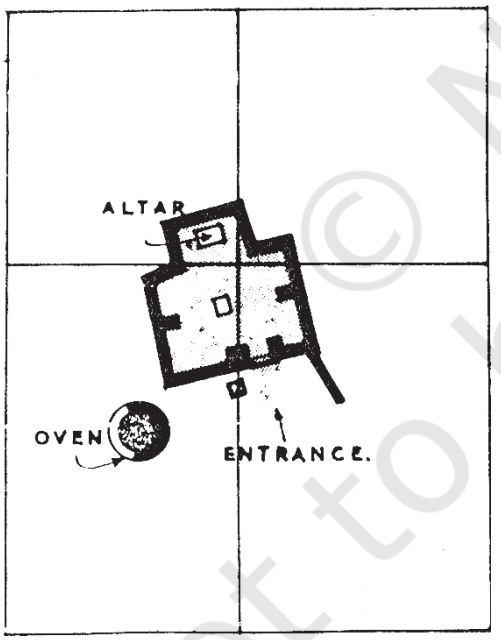
*Cuneiform letters were wedge shaped, hence, like nails.

This should not be taken as the literal truth, but it can be inferred that in Mesopotamian understanding it was kingship that organised trade and writing. This poem also tells us that, besides being a means of storing information and of sending messages afar, writing was seen as a sign of the superiority of Mesopotamian urban culture.

Urbanisation in Southern Mesopotamia: Temples and Kings

From 5000 BCE, settlements had begun to develop in southern Mesopotamia. The earliest cities emerged from some of these settlements. These were of various kinds: those that gradually developed around temples; those that developed as centres of trade; and imperial cities. It is cities of the first two kinds that will be discussed here.

Early settlers (their origins are unknown) began to build and rebuild temples at selected spots in their villages. The earliest known temple was a small shrine made of unbaked bricks. Temples were the residences of various gods: of the Moon God of Ur, or of Inanna the Goddess of Love and War. Constructed in brick, temples became larger over time, with several rooms around open courtyards. Some of the early ones were possibly not unlike the ordinary house – for the temple was the house of a god. But temples always had their outer walls going in and out at regular intervals, which no ordinary building ever had.



The earliest known temple of the south, c.5000 BCE (plan).

The god was the focus of worship: to him or her people brought grain, curd and fish (the floors of some early temples had thick layers of fish bones). The god was also the theoretical owner of the agricultural fields, the fisheries, and the herds of the local community. In time, the processing of produce (for example, oil pressing, grain grinding, spinning, and the weaving of woollen cloth) was also done in the temple. Organiser of production at a level above the household, employer of merchants and keeper of written records of distributions and allotments of grain, plough animals, bread, beer, fish, etc., the temple gradually developed its activities and became the main urban institution. But there was also another factor on the scene.

In spite of natural fertility, agriculture was subject to hazards. The natural outlet channels of the Euphrates would have too much water one year and flood the crops, and sometimes they would change course altogether. As the archaeological record shows, villages were periodically relocated in Mesopotamian history. There were man-made problems as well. Those who lived on the

A temple of a later period, c.3000 BCE, with an open courtyard and in-and-out façade (as excavated).

upstream stretches of a channel could divert so much water into their fields that villages downstream were left without water. Or they could neglect to clean out the silt from their stretch of the channel, blocking the flow of water further down. So the early Mesopotamian countryside saw repeated conflict over land and water.

When there was continuous warfare in a region, those chiefs who had been successful in war could oblige their followers by distributing the loot, and could take prisoners from the defeated groups to employ as their guards or servants. So they could increase their influence and clout. Such war leaders, however, would be here today and gone tomorrow – until a time came when such leadership came to increase the well-being of the community with the creation of new institutions or practices. In time, victorious chiefs began to offer precious booty to the gods and thus beautify the community's temples. They would send men out to fetch fine stones and metal for the benefit of the god and community and organise the distribution of temple wealth in an efficient way by accounting for things that came in and went out. As the poem about Enmerkar shows, this gave the king high status and the authority to command the community.

We can imagine a mutually reinforcing cycle of development in which leaders encouraged the settlement of villagers close to themselves, to be able to rapidly get an army together. Besides, people would be safe living in close proximity to one another. At Uruk, one of the earliest temple towns, we find depictions of armed heroes and their victims, and careful archaeological surveys have shown that around 3000 BCE, when Uruk grew to the enormous extent of 250 hectares – twice as large as Mohenjo-daro would be in later centuries – dozens of small villages were deserted. There had

Top: Basalt stele showing a bearded man twice. Note his headband and hair, waistband and long skirt. In the lower scene he attacks a lion with a huge bow and arrow. In the scene above, the hero finally kills the rampant lion with a spear (c.3200 BCE).*

been a major population shift. Significantly, Uruk also came to have a defensive wall at a very early date. The site was continuously occupied from about 4200 BCE to about 400 CE, and by about 2800 BCE it had expanded to 400 hectares.

War captives and local people were put to work for the temple, or directly for the ruler. This, rather than agricultural tax, was compulsory. Those who were put to work were paid rations. Hundreds of ration lists have been found, which give, against people's names, the quantities of grain, cloth or oil allotted to them. It has been estimated that one of the temples took 1,500 men working 10 hours a day, five years to build.

With rulers commanding people to fetch stones or metal ores, to come and make bricks or lay the bricks for a temple, or else to go to a distant country to fetch suitable materials, there were also technical advances at Uruk around 3000 BCE. Bronze tools came into use for various crafts. Architects learnt to construct brick columns, there being no suitable wood to bear the weight of the roof of large halls.

Hundreds of people were put to work at making and baking clay cones that could be pushed into temple walls, painted in different colours, creating a colourful mosaic. In sculpture, there were superb achievements, not in easily available clay but in imported stone. And then there was a technological landmark that we can say is appropriate to an urban economy: the potter's wheel. In the long run, the wheel enables a potter's workshop to 'mass produce' dozens of similar pots at a time.

*Steles are stone slabs with inscriptions or carvings.

Impression of a cylinder seal, c.3200 BCE. The bearded and armed standing figure is similar in dress and hairstyle to the hero in the stele shown above. Note three prisoners of war, their arms bound, and a fourth man beseeching the war leader.*

The Seal – An Urban Artefact

In India, early stone seals were stamped. In Mesopotamia until the end of the first millennium BCE, cylindrical stone seals, pierced down the centre, were fitted with a stick and rolled over wet clay so that a continuous picture was created. They were carved by very skilled craftsmen, and sometimes carry writing: the name of the owner, his god, his official position, etc. A seal could be rolled on clay covering the string knot of a cloth package or the mouth of a pot, keeping the contents safe. When rolled on a letter written on a clay tablet, it became a mark of authenticity. So the seal was the mark of a city dweller's role in public life.

Five early cylinder seals and their impressions.
Describe what you see in each of the impressions. Is the cuneiform script shown on them?

Life in the City

What we have seen is that a ruling elite had emerged: a small section of society had a major share of the wealth. Nothing makes this fact as clear as the enormous riches (jewellery, gold vessels, wooden musical instruments inlaid with white shell and lapis lazuli, ceremonial daggers of gold, etc.) buried with some kings and queens at Ur. But what of the ordinary people?

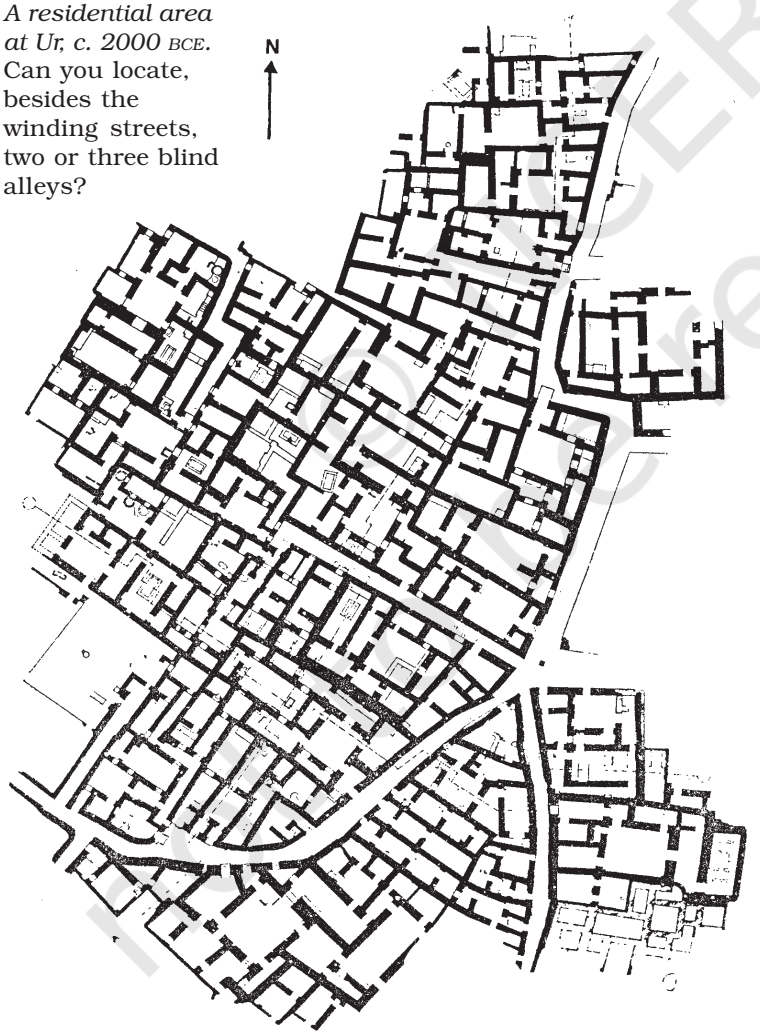
We know from the legal texts (disputes, inheritance matters, etc.) that in Mesopotamian society the nuclear family* was the norm, although a married son and his family often resided with his parents. The father was the head of the family. We know a little about the procedures for marriage. A declaration was made about the willingness to marry, the bride's parents giving their consent to the marriage. Then a gift was given by the groom's people to the bride's

*A nuclear family comprises a man, his wife and children.

people. When the wedding took place, gifts were exchanged by both parties, who ate together and made offerings in a temple. When her mother-in-law came to fetch her, the bride was given her share of the inheritance by her father. The father's house, herds, fields, etc., were inherited by the sons.

Let us look at Ur, one of the earliest cities to have been excavated. Ur was a town whose ordinary houses were systematically excavated in the 1930s. Narrow winding streets indicate that wheeled carts could not have reached many of the houses. Sacks of grain and firewood would have arrived on donkey-back. Narrow winding streets and the irregular shapes of house plots also indicate an absence of town planning. There were no street drains of the kind we find in contemporary Mohenjo-daro. Drains and clay pipes were instead found in the inner courtyards of the Ur houses and it is thought that house roofs sloped inwards and rainwater was channelled via the drainpipes into sumps* in the inner courtyards. This would have been a way of preventing the unpaved streets from becoming excessively slushy after a downpour.

*A sump is a covered basin in the ground into which water and sewage flow.



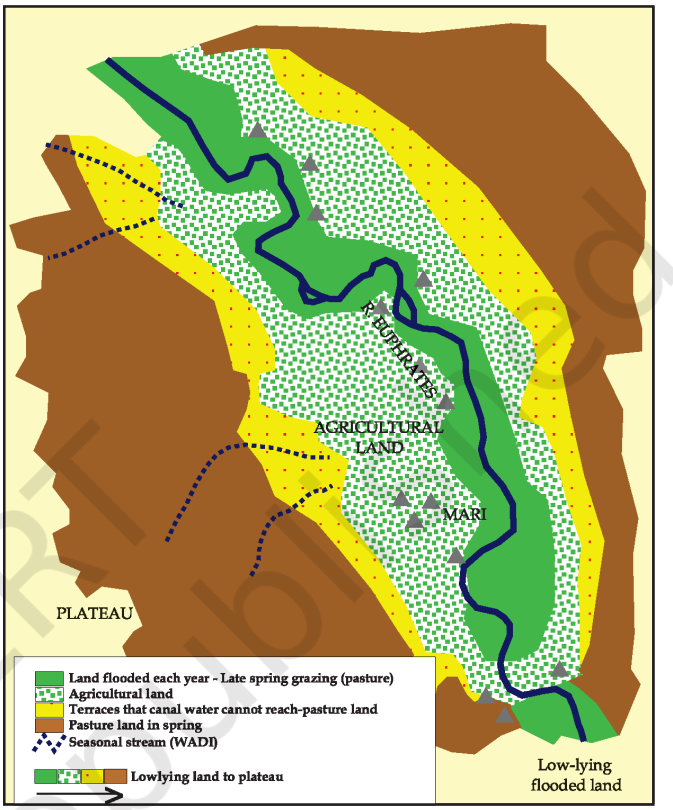
A residential area at Ur, c. 2000 BCE. Can you locate, besides the winding streets, two or three blind alleys?

Yet people seem to have swept all their household refuse into the streets, to be trodden underfoot! This made street levels rise, and over time the thresholds of houses had also to be raised so that no mud would flow inside after the rains. Light came into the rooms not from windows but from doorways opening into the courtyards: this would also have given families their privacy. There were superstitions about houses, recorded in omen tablets at Ur: a raised threshold brought wealth; a front door that did not open towards another house was lucky; but if the main wooden door of a house opened outwards (instead of inwards), the wife would be a torment to her husband!

There was a town cemetery at Ur in which the graves of royalty and commoners have been found, but a few individuals were found buried under the floors of ordinary houses.

A Trading Town in a Pastoral Zone

MAP 3: The Location of Mari



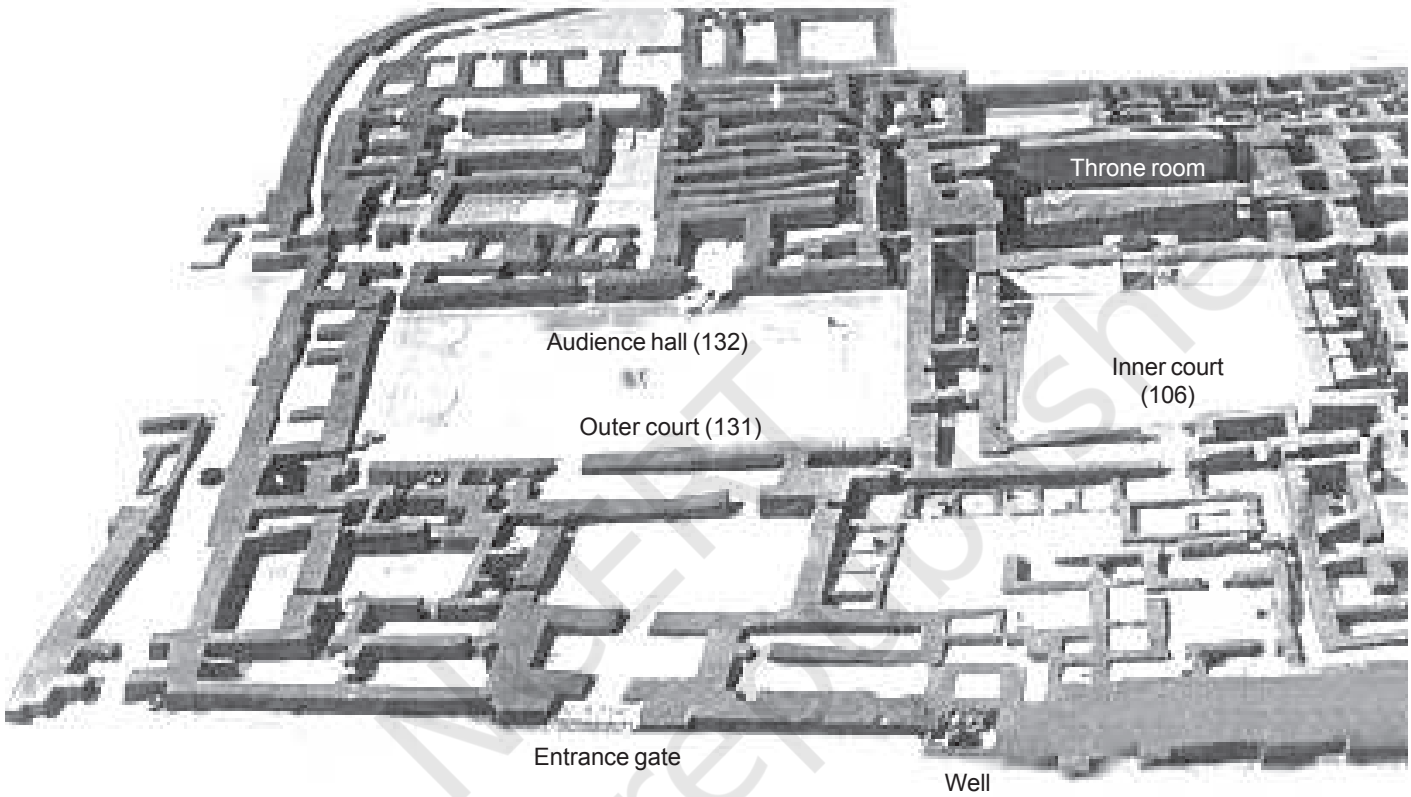
After 2000 BCE the royal capital of Mari flourished. You will have noticed (see Map 2) that Mari stands not on the southern plain with its highly productive agriculture but much further upstream on the Euphrates. Map 3 with its colour coding shows that agriculture and animal rearing were carried out close to each other in this region. Some communities in the kingdom of Mari had both farmers and pastoralists, but most of its territory was used for pasturing sheep and goats.

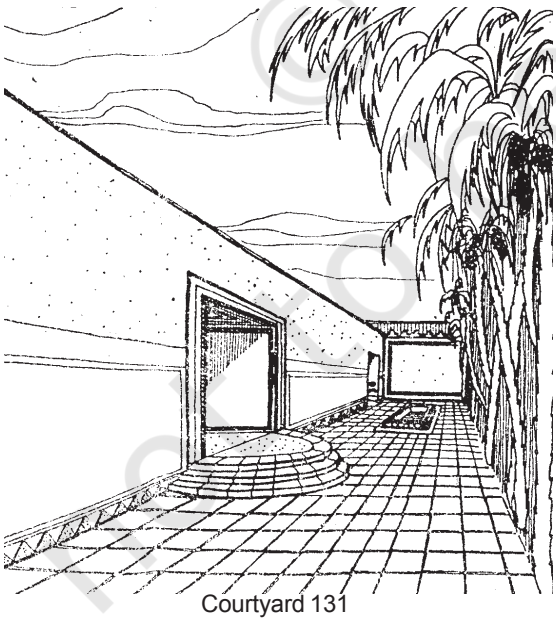
Herders need to exchange young animals, cheese, leather and meat in return for grain, metal tools, etc., and the manure of a penned flock is also of great use to a farmer. Yet, at the same time, there may be conflict. A shepherd may take his flock to water across a sown field, to the ruin of the crop. Herdsmen being mobile can raid agricultural villages and seize their stored goods. For their part, settled groups may deny pastoralists access to river and canal water along a certain set of paths.

Through Mesopotamian history, nomadic communities of the western desert filtered into the prosperous agricultural heartland. Shepherds would bring their flocks into the sown area in the summer. Such groups would come in as herders, harvest labourers or hired soldiers, occasionally become prosperous, and settle down. A few gained the power to establish their own rule. These included the Akkadians, Amorites, Assyrians and Aramaeans. (You will read more about rulers from pastoral societies in Theme 3.) The kings of Mari were Amorites whose dress differed from that of the original inhabitants and who respected not only the gods of Mesopotamia but also raised a temple at Mari for Dagan, god of the steppe. Mesopotamian society and culture were thus open to different people and cultures, and the vitality of the civilisation was perhaps due to this intermixture.

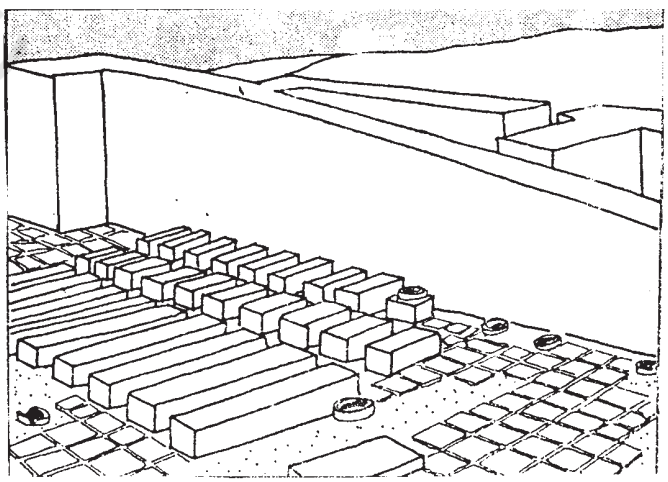
A warrior holding a long spear and a wicker shield. Note the dress, typical of Amorites, and different from that of the Sumerian warrior shown on p. 18. This picture was incised on shell, c.2600 BCE.

The Palace at Mari of King Zimrilim (1810-1760 BCE)

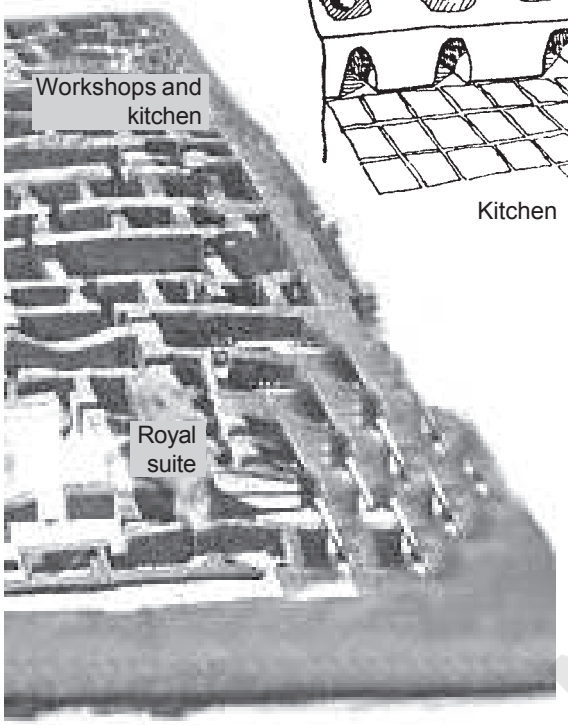


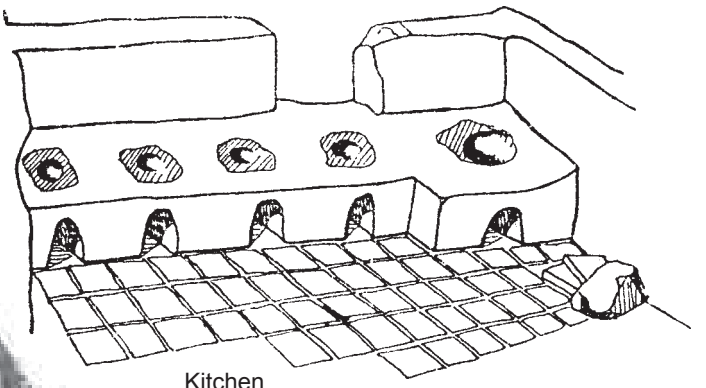


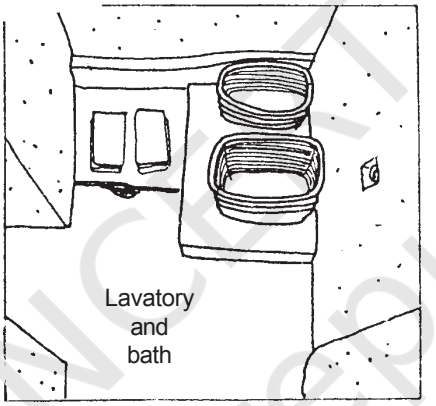
Courtyard 131

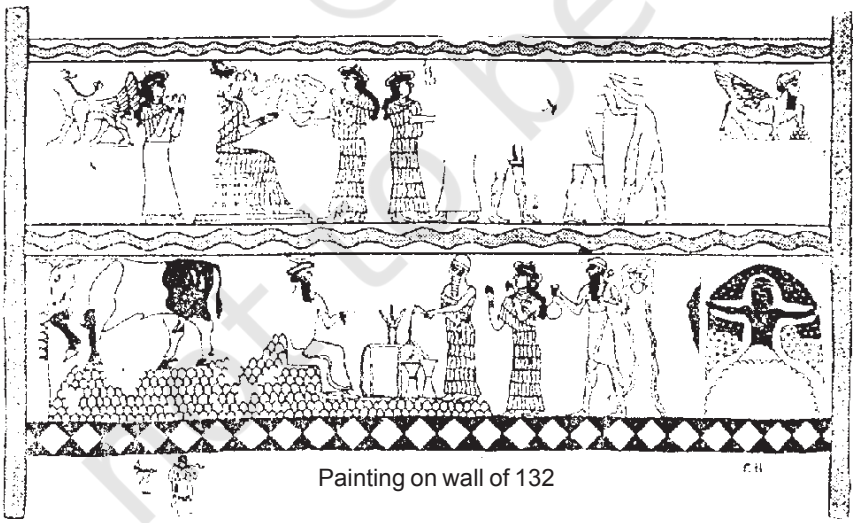


Scribes' office with benches and clay bins for storing tablets




Kitchen




Painting on wall of 132

The Palace at Mari of King Zimrilim (1810-1760 BCE)

The great palace of Mari was the residence of the royal family, the hub of administration, and a place of production, especially of precious metal ornaments. It was so famous in its time that a minor king came from north Syria just to see it, carrying with him a letter of introduction from a royal friend of the king of Mari, Zimrilim. Daily lists reveal that huge quantities of food were presented each day for the king's table: flour, bread, meat, fish, fruit, beer and wine. He probably ate in the company of many others, in or around courtyard **106**, paved white. You will notice from the plan that the palace had only one entrance, on the north. The large, open courtyards such as **131** were beautifully paved. The king would have received foreign dignitaries and his own people in **132**, a room with wall paintings that would have awed the visitors. The palace was a sprawling structure, with 260 rooms and covered an area of 2.4 hectares.

ACTIVITY 3

Trace the route from the entrance to the inner court. What do you think would have been kept in the storerooms?
How has the kitchen been identified?

The kings of Mari, however, had to be vigilant; herders of various tribes were allowed to move in the kingdom, but they were watched. The camps of herders are mentioned frequently in letters between kings and officials. In one letter, an officer writes to the king that he has been seeing frequent fire signals at night – sent by one camp to another – and he suspects that a raid or an attack is being planned.

Located on the Euphrates in a prime position for trade – in wood, copper, tin, oil, wine, and various other goods that were carried in boats along the Euphrates – between the south and the mineral-rich uplands of Turkey, Syria and Lebanon, Mari is a good example of an urban centre prospering on trade. Boats carrying grinding stones, wood, and wine and oil jars, would stop at Mari on their way to the southern cities. Officers of this town would go aboard, inspect the cargo (a single river boat could hold 300 wine jars), and levy a charge of about one-tenth the value of the goods before allowing the boat to continue downstream. Barley came in special grain boats. Most important, tablets refer to copper from 'Alashiya', the island of Cyprus, known for its copper, and tin was also an item of trade. As bronze was the main industrial material for tools and weapons, this trade was of great importance. Thus, although the kingdom of Mari was not militarily strong, it was exceptionally prosperous.

Excavating Mesopotamian Towns

Today, Mesopotamian excavators have much higher standards of accuracy and care in recording than in the old days, so that few dig huge areas the way Ur was excavated. Moreover, few archaeologists have the funds to employ large teams of excavators. Thus, the mode of obtaining data has changed.

Take the small town at Abu Salabikh, about 10 hectares in area in 2500 BCE with a population less than 10,000. The outlines of walls were at first traced by scraping surfaces. This involves scraping off the top few millimetres of the mound with the sharp and wide end of a shovel or other tool. While the soil underneath was still slightly moist, the archaeologist could make out different colours, textures and lines of brick walls or pits or other features. A few houses that were discovered were excavated. The archaeologists also sieved through tons of earth to recover plant and animal remains, and in the process identified many species of plants and animals and found large quantities of charred fish bones that had been swept out on to the streets. Plant seeds and fibre remained after dung cakes had been burned as fuel and thus kitchens were identified. Living rooms were those with fewer traces. Because they found the teeth of very young pigs on the streets, archaeologists concluded that pigs must have roamed freely here as in any other Mesopotamian town. In fact, one house burial contained some pig bones – the dead person must have been given some pork for his nourishment in the afterlife! The archaeologists also made microscopic studies of room floors to decide which rooms in a house were roofed (with poplar logs, palm leaves, straw, etc.) and which were open to the sky.

Cities in Mesopotamian Culture

Mesopotamians valued city life in which people of many communities and cultures lived side by side. After cities were destroyed in war, they recalled them in poetry.

The most poignant reminder to us of the pride Mesopotamians took in their cities comes at the end of the Gilgamesh Epic, which was written on twelve tablets. Gilgamesh is said to have ruled the city of Uruk some time after Enmerkar. A great hero who subdued people far and wide, he got a shock when his heroic friend died. He then set out to find the secret of immortality, crossing the waters that surround the world. After a heroic attempt, Gilgamesh failed, and returned to Uruk. There, he consoled himself by walking along the city wall, back and forth. He admired the foundations made of fired bricks that he had put into place. It is on the city wall of Uruk that the long tale of heroism and endeavour fizzles out. Gilgamesh does not say that even though he will die his sons will outlive him, as a tribal hero would have done. He takes consolation in the city that his people had built.

The Legacy of Writing

While moving narratives can be transmitted orally, science requires written texts that generations of scholars can read and build upon. Perhaps the greatest legacy of Mesopotamia to the world is its scholarly tradition of time reckoning and mathematics.

Dating around 1800 BCE are tablets with multiplication and division tables, square- and square-root tables, and tables of compound interest. The square root of 2 was given as:

$$1 + 24/60 + 51/60^2 + 10/60^3$$

If you work this out, you will find that the answer is 1.41421296, only slightly different from the correct answer, 1.41421356. Students had to solve problems such as the following: a field of area such and such is covered one finger deep in water; find out the volume of water.

The division of the year into 12 months according to the revolution of the moon around the earth, the division of the month into four weeks, the day into 24 hours, and the hour into 60 minutes – all that we take for granted in our daily lives – has come to us from the Mesopotamians. These time divisions were adopted by the successors of Alexander and from there transmitted to the Roman world, then to the world of Islam, and then to medieval Europe (see Theme 5 for how this happened).

Whenever solar and lunar eclipses were observed, their occurrence was noted according to year, month and day. So too there were records about the observed positions of stars and constellations in the night sky.

None of these momentous Mesopotamian achievements would have been possible without writing and the urban institution of schools, where students read and copied earlier written tablets, and where some boys were trained to become not record keepers for the administration, but intellectuals who could build on the work of their predecessors.

We would be mistaken if we think that the preoccupation with the urban world of Mesopotamia is a modern phenomenon. Let us look, finally, at two early attempts to locate and preserve the texts and traditions of the past.

An Early Library

In the iron age, the Assyrians of the north created an empire, at its height between 720 and 610 BCE, that stretched as far west as Egypt. The state economy was now a predatory one, extracting labour and tribute in the form of food, animals, metal and craft items from a vast subject population.

The great Assyrian kings, who had been immigrants, acknowledged the southern region, Babylonia, as the centre of high culture and the last of them, Assurbanipal (668-627 BCE), collected a library at his capital, Nineveh in the north. He made great efforts to gather tablets on history, epics, omen literature, astrology, hymns and poems. He sent his scribes south to find old tablets. Because scribes in the south were trained to read and write in schools where they all had to copy tablets by the dozen, there were towns in Babylonia where huge collections of tablets were created and acquired fame. And although Sumerian ceased to be spoken after about 1800 BCE, it continued to be taught in schools, through vocabulary texts, sign lists, bilingual (Sumerian and Akkadian) tablets, etc. So even in 650 BCE, cuneiform tablets written as far back as 2000 BCE were intelligible – and Assurbanipal's men knew where to look for early tablets or their copies.

Copies were made of important texts such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, the copier stating his name and writing the date. Some tablets ended with a reference to Assurbanipal:

> 'I, Assurbanipal, king of the universe, king of Assyria, on whom the gods bestowed vast intelligence, who could acquire the recondite details of scholarly erudition, I wrote down on tablets the wisdom of the gods … And I checked and collated the tablets. I placed them for the future in the library of the temple of my god, Nabu, at Nineveh, for my life and the well-being of my soul, and to sustain the foundations of my royal throne…'

More important, there was cataloguing: a basket of tablets would have a clay label that read: '*n* number of tablets about exorcism, written by X'. Assurbanipal's library had a total of some 1,000 texts, amounting to about 30,000 tablets, grouped according to subject.

And, an Early Archaeologist!

A man of the southern marshes, Nabopolassar, released Babylonia from Assyrian domination in 625 BCE. His successors increased their territory and organised building projects at Babylon. From that time, even after the Achaemenids of Iran conquered Babylon in 539 BCE and until 331 BCE when Alexander conquered Babylon, Babylon was the premier city of the world, more than 850 hectares, with a triple wall, great palaces and temples, a ziggurat or stepped tower, and a processional way to the ritual centre. Its trading houses had widespread dealings and its mathematicians and astronomers made some new discoveries.

Nabonidus was the last ruler of independent Babylon. He writes that the god of Ur came to him in a dream and ordered him to appoint a priestess to take charge of the cult in that ancient town in the deep south. He writes:

'Because for a very long time the office of High Priestess had been forgotten, her characteristic features nowhere indicated, I bethought myself day after day …'

Then, he says, he found the stele of a very early king whom we today date to about 1150 BCE and saw on that stele the carved image of the Priestess. He observed the clothing and the jewellery that was depicted. This is how he was able to dress his daughter for her consecration as Priestess.

On another occasion, Nabonidus's men brought to him a broken statue inscribed with the name of Sargon, king of Akkad. (We know today that the latter ruled around 2370 BCE.) Nabonidus, and indeed many intellectuals, had heard of this great king of remote times. Nabonidus felt he had to repair the statue. 'Because of my reverence for the gods and respect for kingship,' he writes, 'I summoned skilled craftsmen, and replaced the head.'

ACTIVITY 4

Why do you think Assurbanipal and Nabonidus cherished early Mesopotamian traditions?

TIMELINE	
c. 7000-6000 BCE	Beginning of agriculture in the northern Mesopotamian plains
c. 5000 BCE	Earliest temples in southern Mesopotamia built
c. 3200 BCE	First writing in Mesopotamia
c. 3000 BCE	Uruk develops into a huge city, increasing use of bronze tools
c. 2700-2500 BCE	Early kings, including, possibly, the legendary ruler Gilgamesh
c. 2600 BCE	Development of the cuneiform script
c. 2400 BCE	Replacement of Sumerian by Akkadian
2370 BCE	Sargon, king of Akkad
c. 2000 BCE	Spread of cuneiform writing to Syria, Turkey and Egypt; Mari and Babylon emerge as important urban centres
c.1800 BCE	Mathematical texts composed; Sumerian no longer spoken
c.1100 BCE	Establishment of the Assyrian kingdom
c. 1000 BCE	Use of iron
720-610 BCE	Assyrian empire
668-627 BCE	Rule of Assurbanipal
331 BCE	Alexander conquers Bablyon
c. 1st century CE	Akkadian and cuneiform remain in use
1850s	Decipherment of the cuneiform script

Exercises

ANSWER IN BRIEF

1. Why do we say that it was *not* natural fertility and high levels of food production that were the causes of early urbanisation?
2. Which of the following were necessary conditions and which the causes, of early urbanisation, and which would you say were the outcome of the growth of cities:
   (a) highly productive agriculture, (b) water transport, (c) the lack of metal and stone, (d) the division of labour, (e) the use of seals, (f) the military power of kings that made labour compulsory?
3. Why were mobile animal herders not necessarily a threat to town life?
4. Why would the early temple have been much like a house?

ANSWER IN A SHORT ESSAY

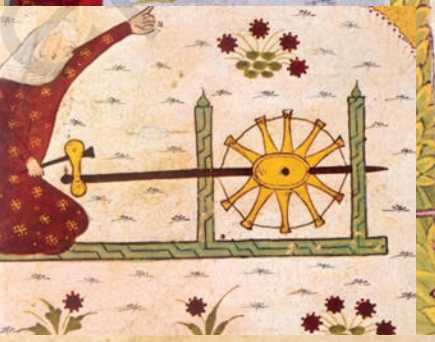
5. Of the new institutions that came into being once city life had begun, which would have depended on the initiative of the king?
6. What do ancient stories tell us about the civilisation of Mesopotamia?

II

EMPIRES

An Empire Across Three Continents

Nomadic Empires



EMPIRES

OVER the two millennia that followed the establishment of empires in Mesopotamia, various attempts at empire-building took place across the region and in the area to the west and east of it.

By the sixth century BCE, Iranians had established control over major parts of the Assyrian empire. Networks of trade developed overland, as well as along the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea.

In the eastern Mediterranean, Greek cities and their colonies benefited from improvements in trade that were the result of these changes. They also benefited from close trade with nomadic people to the north of the Black Sea. In Greece, for the most part, city-states such as Athens and Sparta were the focus of civic life. From among the Greek states, in the late fourth century BCE, the ruler of the kingdom of Macedon, Alexander, undertook a series of military campaigns and conquered parts of North Africa, West Asia and Iran, reaching up to the Beas. Here, his soldiers refused to proceed further east. Alexander's troops retreated, though many Greeks stayed behind.

Throughout the area under Alexander's control, ideals and cultural traditions were shared amongst the Greeks and the local population. The region on the whole became 'Hellenised' (the Greeks were called Hellenes), and Greek became a well-known language throughout. The political unity of Alexander's empire disintegrated quickly after his death, but for almost three centuries after, Hellenistic culture remained important in the area. The period is often referred to as the 'Hellenistic period' in the history of the region, but this ignores the way in which other cultures (especially Iranian culture associated with the old empire of Iran) were as important as – if not often *more* important than – Hellenistic notions and ideas.

This section deals with important aspects of what happened after this.

Small but well-organised military forces of the central Italian city-state of Rome took advantage of the political discord that followed the disintegration of Alexander's empire and established control over North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean from the second century BCE.

At the time, Rome was a republic. Government was based on a complex system of election, but its political institutions gave some importance to birth and wealth and society benefited from slavery. The forces of Rome established a network for trade between the states that had once been part of Alexander's empire. In the middle of the first century BCE, under Julius Caesar, a high-born military commander, this 'Roman Empire' was extended to present-day Britain and Germany.

Latin (spoken in Rome) was the main language of the empire, though many in the east continued to use Greek, and the Romans had a great respect for Hellenic culture. There were changes in the political structure of the empire from the late first century BCE, and it was substantially Christianised after the emperor Constantine became a Christian in the fourth century CE.

To make government easier, the Roman Empire was divided into eastern and western halves in the fourth century CE. But in the west, there was a breakdown of the arrangements that existed between Rome and the tribes in frontier areas (Goths, Visigoths, Vandals and others). These arrangements dealt with trade, military recruitment and

Ruins at Greek city of Corinth.

settlement, and the tribes increasingly attacked the Roman administration. Conflicts increased in scale, and coincided with internal dissensions in the empire, leading to the collapse of the empire in the west by the fifth century CE. Tribes established their own kingdoms within the former empire, though, with the prompting of the Christian Church, a Holy Roman Empire was formed from some of these kingdoms from the ninth century CE. This claimed some continuity with the Roman Empire.

Between the seventh century and the fifteenth century, almost all the lands of the eastern Roman Empire (centred on Constantinople) came to be taken over by the Arab empire – created by the followers of the Prophet Muhammad (who founded the faith of Islam in the seventh century) and centred on Damascus – or by its successors (who ruled from Baghdad initially). There was a close interaction between Greek and Islamic traditions in the region. The trading networks of the area and its prosperity attracted the attention of pastoral peoples to the north including various Turkic tribes, who often attacked the cities of the region and established control. The last of these peoples to attack the area and attempt to control it were the Mongols, under Genghis Khan and his successors, who moved into West Asia, Europe, Central Asia and China in the thirteenth century.

All these attempts to make and maintain empires were driven by the search to control the resources of the trading networks that existed in the region as a whole, and to derive benefit from the links of the region with other areas such as India or China. All the empires evolved administrative systems to give stability to trade. They also evolved

The Great Mosque, Damascus, completed in 714.

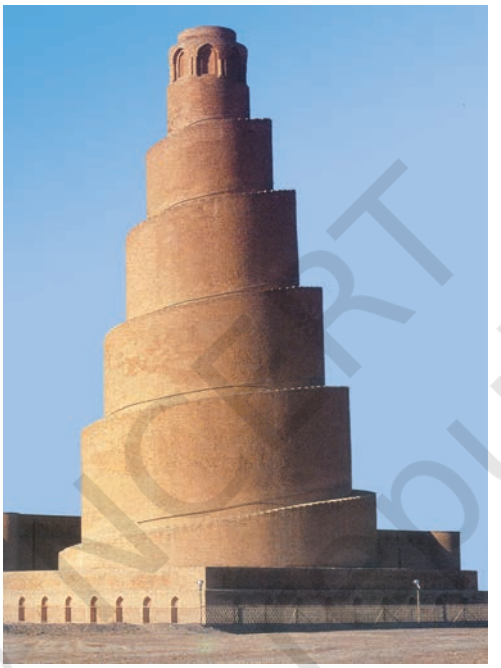
different types of military organisation. The achievements of one empire were often taken up by its successor. Over time, the area came to be marked by Persian, Greek, Latin and Arabic above many other languages that were spoken and written.

The empires were not very stable. This was partly due to disputes and conflict over resources in various regions. It was also due to the crisis that developed in relations between empires and pastoral peoples to the north – from whom empires derived support both for their trade and to provide them with labour for production of manufactures and for their armies. It is worth noting that not all empires were city-centric. The Mongol empire of Genghis Khan and his successors is a good example of how an empire could be maintained by pastoral people for a long time and with success.

Religions that appealed to peoples of different ethnic origins, who often spoke different languages, were important in the making of large empires. This was true in the case of Christianity (which originated in Palestine in the early first century CE) and Islam (which originated in the seventh century CE).

TIMELINE II

(c. 100 BCE TO 1300 CE)



This timeline focuses on kingdoms and empires. Some of these such as the Roman Empire were very large, spreading across three continents. This was also the time when some of the major religious and cultural traditions developed. It was a time when institutions of intellectual activity emerged. Books were written and ideas travelled across continents. Some things that are now part of our everyday lives were used for the first time during this period.

DATES	AFRICA	EUROPE
100-50 BCE	Bananas introduced from Southeast Asia to East Africa through sea routes	Spartacus leads revolt of about 100,000 slaves (73 BCE)
50-1	Cleopatra, queen of Egypt (51-30 BCE)	Building of Colosseum in Rome
1-50 CE		
50-100		
100-150	Hero of Alexandria makes a machine that runs on steam	Roman Empire at is peak*
150-200	Ptolemy of Alexandria writes a work on geography	
200-250		
250-300		
300-350	Christianity introduced in Axum* (330)	Constantine becomes emperor, establishes city of Constantinople
350-400		Roman Empire divided into eastern and western halves
400-450	Vandals from Europe set up a kingdom in North Africa (429)	Roman Empire invaded by tribes from North and Central Europe
450-500		Conversion of Clovis of Gaul (France) to Christianity (496)
500-550		St Benedict establishes a monastery in Italy (526), St Augustine introduces Christianity in England (596), Gregory the Great (590) lays the foundations of the power of the Roman Catholic Church
550-600		
600-650	Emigration (*hijra*) of some Muslims to Abyssinia (615)	
650-700	Muslim Arabs sign treaty with Nubia, south of Egypt (652)	Bede writes the *History of the English Church and People*
700-750		
750-800		
800-850	Rise of kingdom in Ghana	Charlemagne, king of the Franks, crowned Holy Roman Emperor (800)
850-900		First Russian states founded at Kiev and Novgorod
900-950		Viking raids across western Europe
950-1000		
1000-50		Medical school set up in Salerno, Italy (1030)
1050-1100	Almoravid kingdom (1056-1147) extends from Ghana to southern Spain	William of Normandy invades England and becomes king (1066); proclamation of the first crusade (1095)
1100-50	Zimbabwe (1120-1450) emerges as a centre for production of gold and copper artefacts, and of long-distance trade	
1150-1200	Christian churches established in Ethiopia	Construction of the cathedral of Notre Dame begins (1163)
1200-50	(1200), kingdom of Mali in West Africa, with Timbuktu as a centre of learning	St Francis of Assisi sets up a monastic order, emphasising austerity and compassion (1209); lords in England rebel against the king who signs the Magna Carta, accepting to rule according to law
1250-1300		Establishment of the Hapsburg dynasty that continued to rule Austria till 1918

DATES	ASIA	SOUTH ASIA
100-50 BCE	Han empire in China, development of the Silk Route from Asia to Europe	Bactrian Greeks and Shakas establish kingdoms in the north-west; rise of the Satavahanas in the Deccan
50-1		Growing trade between South Asia, Southeast and East Asia, and Europe
1-50 CE	Jesus Christ in Judaea, a province of the Roman Empire; Roman invasion of Arabia (24)	
50-100		Establishment of the Kushana state in the northwest and Central Asia
100-150	Paper invented in China (118); development of the first seismograph (132)	
150-200		
200-250	End of Han empire (221); Sasanid rule in Persia (226)	
250-300	Tea at the royal court, China (262), use of the magnetic compass, China (270)	
300-350	Chinese start using stirrups while riding horses* 	Establishment of the Gupta* dynasty (320)
350-400		Fa Xian travels from China to India (399)
400-450		
450-500		Aryabhata, astronomer and mathematician
500-550		
550-600	Buddhism introduced in Japan (594); Grand Canal to transport grain built in China (584-618), by 5,000,000 workers over 34 years	Chalukya temples in Badami and Aihole
600-650	Tang dynasty in China (618); Prophet Muhammad goes to Medina; the beginning of the Hijri era (622); collapse of the Sasanian empire (642)	Xuan Zang travels from China to India; Nalanda emerges as an important educational centre
650-700	Umayyad caliphate (661-750)	
700-750	A branch of the Umayyads conquers Spain; Tang dynasty established in China	Arabs conquer Sind (712)
750-800	Abbasid caliphate established and Baghdad becomes a major cultural and commercial centre	
800-850	Khmer state founded in Cambodia (802)	
850-900	First printed book, China (868)	
900-950		
950-1000	Use of paper money in China	
1000-50	Ibn Sina, a Persian doctor, writes a medical text that is followed for centuries	Mahmud of Ghazni raids the north-west; Alberuni travels to India; Rajarajesvara temple built at Thanjavur
1050-1100	Establishment of the Turkish empire by Alp Arsalan (1075)	
1100-50	First recorded display of fireworks in China	Kalhana writes the *Rajatarangini*
1150-1200	Angkor empire, Cambodia, at its height (1180), temple complex at Angkor Wat	
1200-50	Genghis Khan consolidates power (1206)	Establishment of Delhi sultanate (1206)
1250-1300	Qubilai Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan, becomes emperor of China	Amir Khusrau (1253-1325) introduces new forms of poetry and music*; Sun Temple at Konark

DATES	AMERICAS	AUSTRALIA/PACIFIC ISLANDS
100-50 BCE		
50-1		
1-50 CE		
50-100		
100-150		
150-200		
200-250		
250-300		
300-350	City-state of Teotihuacan established in Mexico, with pyramid temples, Mayan ceremonial centres*, development of astronomy, pictorial script*	
350-400		
400-450		
450-500		
500-550		
550-600		
600-650		
650-700		
700-750		
750-800		
800-850		
850-900		
900-950		
950-1000	First city is built in North America (c.990)	Maori navigator from Polynesia 'discovers' New Zealand
1000-50		
1050-1100		Sweet potato (originally from South America) grown in the Polynesian islands
1100-1150		
1150-1200		
1200-50		
1250-1300		

ACTIVITY

Try and identify at least five events/processes that would have involved the movement of peoples across regions/ continents. What would have been the significance of these events/ processes?

THEME 2

AN EMPIRE ACROSS THREE CONTINENTS

11090CH03

THE Roman Empire covered a vast stretch of territory that included most of Europe as we know it today and a large part of the Fertile Crescent and North Africa. In this chapter we shall look at the way this empire was organised, the political forces that shaped its destiny, and the social groups into which people were divided. You will see that the empire embraced a wealth of local cultures and languages; that women had a stronger legal position then than they do in many countries today; but also that much of the economy was run on slave labour, denying freedom to substantial numbers of persons. From the fifth century on, the empire fell apart in the west but remained intact and exceptionally prosperous in its eastern half. The caliphate which you will read about in the next chapter built on this prosperity and inherited its urban and religious traditions.

Roman historians have a rich collection of sources to go on, which we can broadly divide into three groups: (a) texts, (b) documents and (c) material remains. Textual sources include histories of the period written by contemporaries (these were usually called 'Annals', because the narrative was constructed on a year-by-year basis), letters, speeches, sermons, laws, and so on. Documentary sources include mainly inscriptions and papyri. Inscriptions were usually cut on stone, so a large number survive, in both Greek and Latin. The 'papyrus' was a reed-like plant that grew along the banks of the Nile in Egypt and was processed to produce a writing material that was very widely used in everyday life. Thousands of contracts, accounts, letters and official documents survive 'on papyrus' and have been published by scholars who are called 'papyrologists'. Material remains include a very wide assortment of items that mainly archaeologists discover (for example, through excavation and field survey), for example, buildings, monuments and other kinds of structures, pottery, coins, mosaics, even entire landscapes (for example, through the use of aerial photography). Each of these sources can only tell us just so much about the past, and combining them can be a fruitful exercise, but how well this is done depends on the historian's skill!

Papyrus scrolls

Two powerful empires ruled over most of Europe,North Africa and the Middle East in the period between the birth of Christ and the early part of the seventh century, say, down to the 630s. The two empires were those of Rome and Iran. The Romans and Iranians were rivals and fought against each other for much of their history. Their empires lay next to each other, separated only by a narrow strip of land that ran along the river Euphrates. In this chapter we shall be looking at the Roman Empire, but we shall also refer, in passing, to Rome's rival, Iran.

If you look at the map, you will see that the continents of Europe and Africa are separated by a sea that stretches all the way from Spain in the west to Syria in the east. This sea is called the Mediterranean, and it was the heart of Rome's empire. Rome dominated the Mediterranean and all the regions around that sea in both directions, north as well as south. To the north, the boundaries of the empire were formed by two great rivers, the Rhine and the Danube; to the south, by the huge expanse of

MAP 1: Europe and North Africa

desert called the Sahara. This vast stretch of territory was the Roman Empire. Iran controlled the whole area south of the Caspian Sea down to eastern Arabia, and sometimes large parts of Afghanistan as well. These two superpowers had divided up most of the world that the Chinese called *Ta Ch'in* ('greater Ch'in', roughly the west).

The Early Empire

The Roman Empire can broadly be divided into two phases, 'early' and 'late', divided by the third century as a sort of historical watershed between them. In other words, the whole period down to the main part of the third century can be called the 'early empire', and the period after that the 'late empire'.

A major difference between the two superpowers and their respective empires was that the Roman Empire was culturally much more diverse than that of Iran. The Parthians and later the Sasanians, the dynasties that ruled Iran in this period, ruled over a population that was largely Iranian. The Roman Empire, by contrast, was a mosaic of territories and cultures that were chiefly bound together by a common system of government. Many languages were spoken in the empire, but for the purposes of administration Latin and Greek were the most widely used, indeed the *only* languages. The upper classes of the east spoke and wrote in Greek, those of the west in Latin, and the boundary between these broad language areas ran somewhere across the middle of the Mediterranean, between the African provinces of Tripolitania (which was Latin speaking) and Cyrenaica (Greek-speaking). All those who lived in the empire were subjects of a single ruler, the emperor, regardless of where they lived and what language they spoke.

The regime established by Augustus, the first emperor, in 27 BCE was called the 'Principate'. Although Augustus was the sole ruler and the only real source of authority, the fiction was kept alive that he was actually only the 'leading citizen' (*Princeps* in Latin), not the absolute ruler. This was done out of respect for the Senate, the body which had controlled Rome earlier, in the days when it was a Republic.* The Senate had existed in Rome for centuries, and had been and remained a body representing the aristocracy, that is, the wealthiest families of Roman and, later, Italian descent, mainly landowners. Most of the Roman histories that survive in Greek and Latin were written by people from a senatorial background. From these it is clear that emperors were judged by how they behaved towards the Senate. The worst emperors were those who were hostile to the senatorial class, behaving with suspicion or brutality and violence. Many senators yearned to go back to the days of the Republic, but most must have realised that this was impossible.

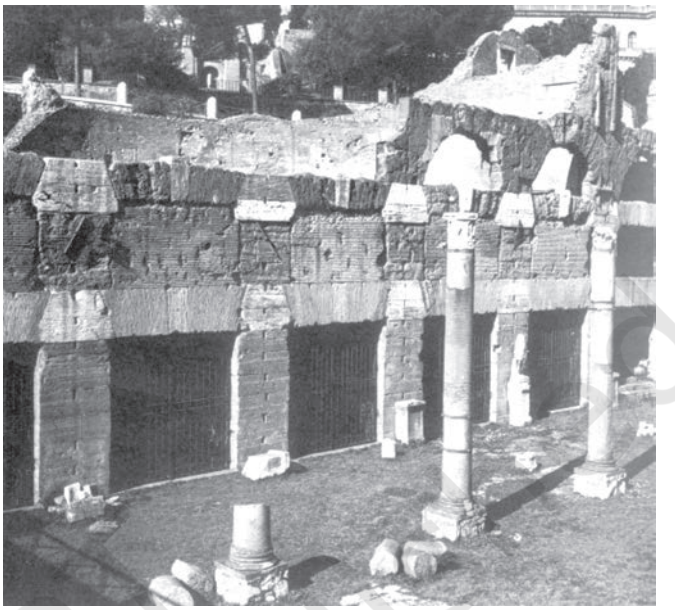
Next to the emperor and the Senate, the other key institution of imperial rule was the army. Unlike the army of its rival in the Persian empire, which was a conscripted** army, the Romans had a paid professional army where soldiers had to put in a minimum of 25 years of service. Indeed, the existence of a paid army was a distinctive feature of the Roman Empire. The army was the largest single organised body in the empire (600,000 by the fourth century) and it certainly had the power to determine the fate of emperors. The soldiers would constantly agitate for better wages and service conditions. These agitations often

*The Republic was the name for a regime in which the reality of power lay with the Senate, a body dominated by a small group of wealthy families who formed the 'nobility'. In practice, the Republic represented the government of the nobility, exercised through the body called the Senate. The Republic lasted from 509 BC to 27 BC, when it was overthrown by Octavian, the adopted son and heir of Julius Caesar, who later changed his name to Augustus. Membership of the Senate was for life, and wealth and office-holding counted for more than birth.

**A conscripted army is one which is forcibly recruited; military service is compulsory for certain groups or categories of the population.

took the form of mutinies, if the soldiers felt let down by their generals or even the emperor. Again, our picture of the Roman army depends largely on the way they were portrayed by historians with senatorial sympathies. The Senate hated and feared the army, because it was a source of often-unpredictable violence, especially in the tense conditions of the third century when government was forced to tax more heavily to pay for its mounting military expenditures.

To sum up, the emperor, the aristocracy and the army were the three main 'players' in the political history of the empire. The success of individual emperors depended on their control of the army, and when the armies were divided, the result usually was civil war*. Except for one notorious year (69 CE), when four emperors mounted the throne in quick succession, the first two centuries were on the whole free from civil war and in this sense relatively stable. Succession to the throne was based as far as possible on family descent, either natural or adoptive, and even the army was strongly wedded to this principle. For example, Tiberius (14-37 CE), the second in the long line of Roman emperors, was not the natural son of Augustus, the ruler who founded the Principate, but Augustus adopted him to ensure a smooth transition.



Shops in Forum Julium, Rome. This piazza with columns was built after 51 BCE, to enlarge the older Roman Forum.

External warfare was also much less common in the first two centuries. The empire inherited by Tiberius from Augustus was already so vast that further expansion was felt to be unnecessary. In fact, the 'Augustan age' is remembered for the *peace* it ushered in after decades of internal strife and centuries of military conquest. The only major campaign of expansion in the early empire was Trajan's fruitless occupation of territory across the Euphrates, in the years 113-17 CE abandoned by his successors.

*Civil war refers to armed struggles for power within the same country, in contrast to conflicts between different countries.

The Emperor Trajan's Dream – A Conquest of India?

'Then, after a winter (115/16) in Antioch marked by a great earthquake, in 116 Trajan marched down the Euphrates to Ctesiphon, the Parthian capital, and then to the head of the Persian Gulf. There [the historian] Cassius Dio describes him looking longingly at a merchant-ship setting off for India, and wishing that he were as young as Alexander.'

– Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East*.

The Near East. From the perspective of someone who lived in the Roman Mediterranean, this referred to all the territory east of the Mediterranean, chiefly the Roman provinces of Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia, and in a looser sense the surrounding territories, for example Arabia.

Much more characteristic was the gradual extension of Roman direct rule. This was accomplished by absorbing a whole series of 'dependent' kingdoms into Roman provincial territory. The Near East was full of such kingdoms*, but by the early second century those which lay west of the Euphrates (towards Roman territory) had disappeared, swallowed up by Rome. (Incidentally, some of these kingdoms were exceedingly wealthy, for example Herod's kingdom yielded the equivalent of 5.4 million *denarii* per year, equal to over 125,000 kg of gold! The *denarius* was a Roman silver coin containing about 4½ gm of pure silver.)

In fact, except for Italy, which was not considered a province in these centuries, *all* the territories of the empire were organised into *provinces* and subject to taxation. At its peak in the second century, the Roman Empire stretched from Scotland to the borders of Armenia, and from the Sahara to the Euphrates and sometimes beyond. Given that there was no government in the modern sense to help them to run things, you may well ask, how was it possible for the emperor to cope with the control and administration of such a vast and diverse set of territories, with a population of some 60 million in the mid-second century? The answer lies in the *urbanisation* of the empire.

*These were local kingdoms that were 'clients' of Rome. Their rulers could be relied on to use their forces in support of Rome, and in return Rome allowed them to exist.

The great urban centres that lined the shores of the Mediterranean (Carthage, Alexandria, Antioch were the biggest among them) were the true bedrock of the imperial system. It was through the *cities* that 'government' was able to tax the provincial countrysides which generated much of the wealth of the empire. What this means is that the local upper classes actively collaborated with the Roman state in administering their own territories and raising taxes from them. In fact, one of the most interesting aspects of Roman political history is the dramatic shift in power between Italy and the provinces. Throughout the second and third centuries, it was the *provincial* upper classes who supplied most of the cadre that governed the provinces and commanded the armies. They came to form a new elite of administrators and military commanders who became much more powerful than the senatorial class because they had the backing of the emperors. As this new group emerged, the emperor Gallienus (253-68) consolidated their rise to power by *excluding* senators from military command. We are told that Gallienus forbade senators from serving in the army or having access to it, in order to prevent control of the empire from falling into their hands.

Pont du Gard, near Nimes, France, first century BCE. Roman engineers built massive aqueducts over three continents to carry water.

To sum up, in the late first, second and early third centuries the army and administration were increasingly drawn from the provinces, as citizenship spread to these regions and was no longer confined to Italy. But individuals of Italian origin continued to dominate the senate at least till the third century, when senators of provincial origin became a majority. These trends reflected the general decline of Italy within the empire, both political and economic, and the rise of new elites in the wealthier and more urbanised parts of the Mediterranean, such as the south of Spain, Africa and the east. A city in the Roman sense was an urban centre with its own magistrates, city council and a 'territory' containing villages which were under its jurisdiction. Thus one city could not be in the territory of another city, but villages almost always were. Villages could be upgraded to the status of cities, and vice versa, usually as a mark of imperial favour (or the opposite). One crucial advantage of living in a city was simply that it might be better provided for during food shortages and even famines than the countryside.

ACTIVITY 1

Who were the three main players in the political history of the Roman Empire? Write one or two lines about each of them. And how did the Roman emperor manage to govern such a vast territory? Whose collaboration was crucial to this?

Doctor Galen on how Roman Cities Treated the Countryside

'The famine prevalent for many successive years in many provinces has clearly displayed for men of any understanding the effect of malnutrition in generating illness. The city-dwellers, as it was their custom to collect and store enough grain for the whole of the next year immediately after the harvest, carried off all the wheat, barley, beans and lentils, and left to the peasants various kinds of pulse – after taking quite a large proportion of these to the city. After consuming what was left in the course of the winter, the country people had to resort to unhealthy foods in the spring; they ate twigs and shoots of trees and bushes and bulbs and roots of inedible plants…'

– Galen, *On Good and Bad Diet.*

Public baths were a striking feature of Roman urban life (when one Iranian ruler tried to introduce them into Iran, he encountered the wrath of the clergy there! Water was a sacred element and to use it for *public* bathing may have seemed a desecration to them), and urban populations also enjoyed a much higher level of entertainment. For example, one calendar tells us that *spectacula* (shows) filled no less than 176 days of the year!

Amphitheatre at the Roman cantonment town of Vindonissa (in modern Switzerland), first century CE. *Used for military drill and for staging entertainments for the soldiers.*

The Third-Century Crisis

If the first and second centuries were by and large a period of peace, prosperity and economic expansion, the third century brought the first major signs of internal strain. From the 230s, the empire found itself fighting on several fronts simultaneously. In Iran a new and more aggressive dynasty emerged in 225 (they called themselves the 'Sasanians') and within just 15 years were expanding rapidly in the direction of the Euphrates. In a famous rock inscription cut in three languages, Shapur I, the Iranian ruler, claimed he had annihilated a Roman army of 60,000 and even captured the eastern capital of Antioch. Meanwhile, a whole series of Germanic tribes or rather tribal confederacies (most notably, the Alamanni, the Franks and the Goths) began to move against the Rhine and Danube frontiers, and the whole period from 233 to 280 saw repeated invasions of a whole line of provinces that stretched from the Black Sea to the Alps and southern Germany. The Romans were forced to abandon much of the territory beyond the Danube, while the emperors of this period were constantly in the field against what the Romans called 'barbarians'. The rapid succession of emperors in the third century (25 emperors in 47 years!) is an obvious symptom of the strains faced by the empire in this period.

Gender, Literacy, Culture

One of the more modern features of Roman society was the widespread prevalence of the nuclear family. Adult sons did not live with their families, and it was exceptional for adult brothers to share a common household. On the other hand, slaves *were* included in the family as the Romans understood this. By the late Republic (the first century BCE), the typical form of marriage was one where the wife did not transfer to her husband's authority but retained full rights in the property of her natal family. While the woman's dowry went to the husband for the duration of the marriage, the woman remained a primary heir of her father and became an independent property owner on her father's death. Thus Roman women enjoyed considerable legal rights in owning and managing property. In other words, in law the married couple was not one financial entity but two, and the wife enjoyed complete legal independence. Divorce was relatively easy and needed no more than a notice of intent to dissolve the marriage by either husband or wife. On the other hand, whereas males married in their late twenties or early thirties, women were married off in the late teens or early twenties, so there was an age gap between husband and wife and this would have encouraged a certain inequality. Marriages were generally arranged, and there is no doubt that women were often subject to domination by their husbands. Augustine*, the great Catholic bishop who spent most of his life in North Africa, tells us that his mother was regularly beaten by his father and that most other wives

*Saint Augustine (354-430) was bishop of the North African city of Hippo from 396 and a towering figure in the intellectual history of the Church. Bishops were the most important religious figures in a Christian community, and often very powerful.

in the small town where he grew up had similar bruises to show! Finally, fathers had substantial legal control over their children – sometimes to a shocking degree, for example, a legal power of life and death in exposing unwanted children, by leaving them out in the cold to die.

What about literacy? It is certain that rates of casual literacy* varied greatly between different parts of the empire. For example, in Pompeii, which was buried in a volcanic eruption in 79 CE, there is strong evidence of widespread casual literacy. Walls on the main streets of Pompeii often carried advertisements, and graffiti were found all over the city.

By contrast, in Egypt where hundreds of papyri survive, most formal documents such as contracts were usually written by professional scribes, and they often tell us that X or Y is unable to read and write. But even here literacy was certainly more widespread among certain categories such as soldiers, army officers and estate managers.

The cultural diversity of the empire was reflected in many ways and at many levels: in the vast diversity of religious cults and local deities; the plurality of languages that were spoken; the styles of dress and costume, the food people ate, their forms of social organisation (tribal/non-tribal), even their patterns of settlement. Aramaic was the dominant language group of the Near East (at least west of the Euphrates), Coptic was spoken in Egypt, Punic and Berber in North Africa, Celtic in Spain and the northwest. But many of these linguistic cultures were purely oral, at least until a script was invented for them. Armenian, for example, only began to be written as late as the fifth century, whereas there was already a Coptic

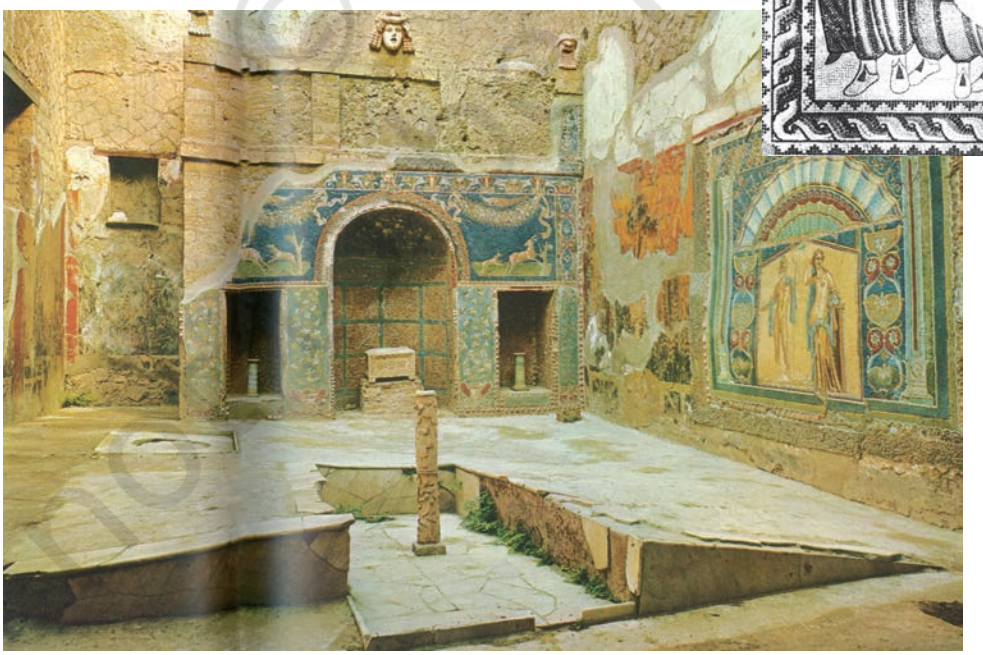
*The use of reading and writing in everyday, often trivial, contexts.

One of the funniest of these graffiti found on the walls of Pompeii says:

'Wall, I admire you for not collapsing in ruins

When you have to support so much boring writing on you.'

Mosaic in Edessa, second century CE. The Syriac inscription suggests that those depicted are the wife of king Abgar and her family.



Pompeii: A wine-merchant's dining-room, its walls decorated with scenes depicting mythical animals.

translation of the Bible by the middle of the third century. Elsewhere, the spread of Latin displaced the written form of languages that were otherwise widespread; this happened notably with Celtic, which ceased to be written after the first century.

ACTIVITY 2

How independent were women in the Roman world? Compare the situation of the Roman family with the family in India today.

Economic Expansion

The empire had a substantial economic infrastructure of harbours, mines, quarries, brickyards, olive oil factories, etc. Wheat, wine and olive-oil were traded and consumed in huge quantities, and they came mainly from Spain, the Gallic provinces, North Africa, Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Italy, where conditions were best for these crops. Liquids like wine and olive oil were transported in containers called 'amphorae'. The fragments and sherds of a very large number of these survive (Monte Testaccio in Rome is said to contain the remnants of over 50 million vessels!), and it has been possible for archaeologists to reconstruct the precise *shapes* of these containers, tell us *what* they carried, and say exactly *where* they were made by examining the clay content and matching the finds with clay pits throughout the Mediterranean. In this way we can now say with some confidence that Spanish olive oil, to take just one example, was a vast commercial enterprise that reached its peak in the years 140-160. The Spanish olive oil of this period was mainly carried in a container called 'Dressel 20' (after the archaeologist who first established its form). If finds of Dressel 20 are widely scattered across sites in the Mediterranean, this suggests that Spanish olive oil circulated very widely indeed. By using such evidence (the remains of amphorae of different kinds and their 'distribution maps'), archaeologists are able to show that Spanish producers succeeded in capturing markets for olive oil from their Italian counterparts. This would only have happened if Spanish producers supplied a better quality oil at lower prices. In other words, the big landowners from different

Shipwreck off the south coast of France, first century BCE. The amphorae are Italian, bearing the stamp of a producer near the Lake of Fondi.

regions *competed* with each other for control of the main markets for the goods they produced. The success of the Spanish olive growers was then repeated by North African producers – olive estates in this part of the empire dominated production through most of the third and fourth centuries. Later, after 425, North African dominance was broken by the East: in the later fifth and sixth centuries the Aegean, southern Asia Minor (Turkey), Syria and Palestine became major exporters of wine and olive oil, and containers from Africa show a dramatically reduced presence on Mediterranean markets. Behind these broad movements the prosperity of individual regions rose and fell depending on how effectively they could organise the production and transport of particular goods, and on the quality of those goods.

The empire included many regions that had a reputation for exceptional fertility. Campania in Italy, Sicily, the Fayum in Egypt, Galilee, Byzacium (Tunisia), southern Gaul (called Gallia Narbonensis), and Baetica (southern Spain) were all among the most densely settled or wealthiest parts of the empire, according to writers like Strabo and Pliny. The best kinds of wine came from Campania. Sicily and Byzacium exported large quantities of wheat to Rome. Galilee was densely cultivated ('every inch of the soil has been cultivated by the inhabitants', wrote the historian Josephus), and Spanish olive oil came mainly from numerous estates (*fundi*) along the banks of the river Guadalquivir in the south of Spain.

On the other hand, large expanses of Roman territory were in a much less advanced state. For example, transhumance* was widespread in the countryside of Numidia (modern Algeria). These pastoral and semi-nomadic communities were often on the move, carrying their oven-shaped huts (called *mapalia*) with them. As Roman estates expanded in North Africa, the pastures of those communities were drastically reduced and their movements more tightly regulated. Even in Spain the north was much less developed, and inhabited largely by a Celtic-speaking peasantry that lived in hilltop villages called *castella*. When we think of the Roman Empire, we should never forget these differences.

We should also be careful not to imagine that because this was the 'ancient' world, their forms of cultural and economic life were necessarily backward or primitive. On the contrary, diversified applications of water power around the Mediterranean as well as advances in water-powered milling technology, the use of hydraulic mining techniques in the Spanish gold and silver mines and the gigantic industrial scale on which those mines were worked in the first and second centuries (with levels of output that would not be reached again till the nineteenth century, some 1,700 years later!), the existence of well-organised commercial and banking networks, and the widespread use of money are *all* indications of how much we tend to *under*-estimate the sophistication of the Roman economy. This raises the issue of labour and of the use of slavery.

ACTIVITY 3

Archaeologists who work on the remains of pottery are a bit like detectives. Can you explain why? Also, what can amphorae tell us about the economic life of the Mediterranean in the Roman period?

*Transhumance is the herdsman's regular annual movement between the higher mountain regions and low-lying ground in search of pasture for sheep and other flocks.

Controlling Workers

Slavery was an institution deeply rooted in the ancient world, both in the Mediterranean and in the Near East, and not even Christianity when it emerged and triumphed as the state religion (in the fourth century) seriously challenged this institution. It does not follow that the bulk of the labour in the Roman economy was performed by slaves. That may have been true of large parts of Italy in the Republican period (under Augustus there were still 3 million slaves in a total Italian population of 7.5 million) but it was no longer true of the empire as a whole. Slaves were an investment, and at least one Roman agricultural writer advised landowners against using them in contexts where too many might be required (for example, for harvests) or where their health could be damaged (for example, by malaria). These considerations were not based on any sympathy for the slaves but on hard economic calculation. On the other hand, if the Roman upper classes were often brutal towards their slaves, ordinary people did sometimes show much more compassion. See what one historian says about a famous incident that occurred in the reign of Nero.

On the Treatment of Slaves

'Soon afterwards the City Prefect, Lucius Pedanius Secundus, was murdered by one of his slaves. After the murder, ancient custom required that every slave residing under the same roof must be executed. But a crowd gathered, eager to save so many innocent lives; and rioting began. The senate-house was besieged. Inside, there was feeling against excessive severity, but the majority opposed any change (....) [The senators] favouring execution prevailed. However, great crowds ready with stones and torches prevented the order from being carried out. Nero rebuked the population by edict, and lined with troops the whole route along which those condemned were taken for execution.'

– Tacitus (55-117), historian of the early empire.

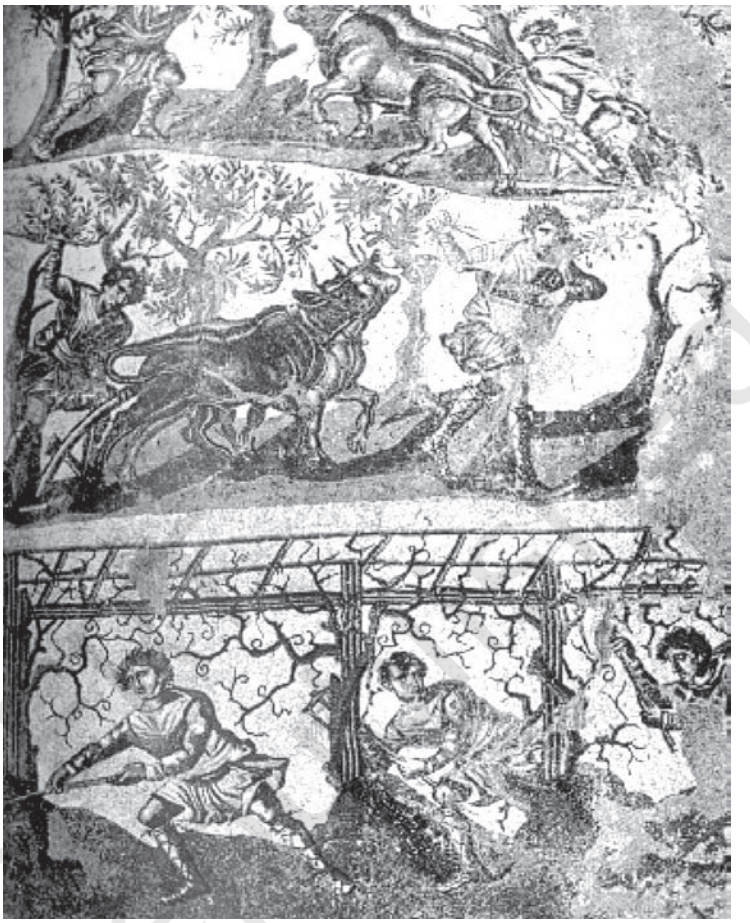
As warfare became less widespread with the establishment of peace in the first century, the supply of slaves tended to decline and the users of slave labour thus had to turn either to slave breeding* or to cheaper substitutes such as wage labour which was more easily dispensable. In fact, free labour was extensively used on public works at Rome precisely because an extensive use of slave labour would have been too expensive. Unlike hired workers, slaves had to be fed and maintained throughout the year, which increased the cost of holding this kind of labour. This is probably why slaves are not widely found in the agriculture of the later period, at least not in the eastern provinces. On the other hand, they and freedmen, that is, slaves who had been set free by their masters, *were* extensively used as business managers, where, obviously, they were not required in large numbers. Masters often gave their slaves or freedmen capital to run businesses on their behalf or even businesses of their own.

The Roman agricultural writers paid a great deal of attention to the management of labour. Columella, a first-century writer who came from the south of Spain, recommended that landowners should keep a reserve stock of implements and tools, twice as many as they needed, so that production could be continuous, 'for the loss in slave labour-time exceeds the cost of such items'. There was a general presumption

*The practice of encouraging female slaves and their partners to have more children, who would of course also be slaves.

Opp page: Mosaic at Cherchel, Algeria, early third century CE, with agricultural scenes.
Above: Ploughing and sowing.
Below: Working in vineyards.

among employers that without supervision no work would ever get done, so supervision was paramount, for both free workers and slaves. To make supervision easier, workers were sometimes grouped into gangs or smaller teams. Columella recommended squads of ten, claiming it was easier to tell who was putting in effort and who was not in work groups of this size. This shows a detailed consideration of the management of labour. Pliny the Elder, the author of a very famous 'Natural History', condemned the use of slave gangs as the worst method of organising production, mainly because slaves who worked in gangs were usually chained together by their feet.



All this looks draconian*, but we should remember that most factories in the world today enforce similar principles of labour control. Indeed, some industrial establishments in the empire enforced even tighter controls. The Elder Pliny described conditions in the frankincense** factories (*officinae*) of Alexandria, where, he tells us, no amount of supervision seemed to suffice. 'A seal is put upon the workmen's aprons, they have to wear a mask or a net with a close mesh on their heads, and before they are allowed to leave the premises, they have to take off all their clothes.' Agricultural labour must have been fatiguing and disliked, for a famous edict of the early third century refers to Egyptian peasants deserting their villages 'in order not to engage in agricultural work'. The same was probably true of most factories and workshops. A law of 398 referred to workers being branded so they could be recognised if and when they run away and try to hide. Many private employers cast their agreements with workers in the form of debt contracts to be able to claim that their employees were in debt to them and thus ensure tighter control over them. An early, second-century writer tells us, 'Thousands surrender themselves to work in servitude, *although they are free.*' In other words, a lot of the poorer families went into debt bondage in order to survive. From one of the recently discovered letters of Augustine we learn that parents sometimes sold their children into servitude for periods of 25 years. Augustine asked a lawyer friend of his whether these children could be liberated once the father died. Rural indebtedness was even more

*Draconian: Harsh (so-called because of an early sixth-century BCE Greek lawmaker called Draco, who prescribed death as the penalty for most crimes!).

**Frankincense – the European name for an aromatic resin used in incense and perfumes. It is tapped from Boswellia trees by slashing the bark and allowing the exuded resins to harden. The best-quality frankincense came from the Arabian peninsula.

widespread; to take just one example, in the great Jewish revolt of 66 CE* the revolutionaries destroyed the moneylenders' bonds to win popular support.

Again, we should be careful not to conclude that the bulk of labour was coerced in these ways. The late-fifth-century emperor Anastasius built the eastern frontier city of Dara in less than three weeks by attracting labour from all over the East by offering high wages. From the papyri we can even form some estimate of how widespread wage labour had become in parts of the Mediterranean by the sixth century, especially in the East.

*A rebellion in Judaea against Roman domination, which was ruthlessly suppressed by the Romans in what is called the 'Jewish war'.

ACTIVITY 4

The text has referred to three writers whose work is used to say something about how the Romans treated their workers. Can you identify them? Reread the section for yourself and describe any two methods the Romans used to control labour.

Social Hierarchies

Let us stand back from the details now and try and get a sense of the social structures of the empire. Tacitus described the leading social groups of the *early* empire as follows: senators (*patres*, lit. 'fathers'); leading members of the equestrian class; the respectable section of the people, those attached to the great houses; the unkempt lower class (*plebs sordida*) who, he tells us, were addicted to the circus and theatrical displays; and finally the slaves. In the early third century when the Senate numbered roughly 1,000, approximately half of all senators still came from Italian families. By the *late* empire, which starts with the reign of Constantine I in the early part of the fourth century, the first two groups mentioned by Tacitus (the senators and the *equites**) had *merged* into a unified and expanded aristocracy, and at least half of all families were of African or eastern origin. This 'late Roman' aristocracy was enormously wealthy but in many ways less powerful than the purely military elites who came almost entirely from non-aristocratic backgrounds. The 'middle' class now consisted of the considerable mass of persons connected with imperial service in the bureaucracy and army but also the more prosperous merchants and farmers of whom there were many in the eastern provinces. Tacitus described this 'respectable' middle class as clients of the great senatorial houses. Now it was chiefly government service and dependence on the State that sustained many of these families. Below them were the vast mass of the lower classes known collectively as *humiliores* (lit. 'lower'). They comprised a rural labour force of which many were permanently employed on the large estates; workers in industrial and mining establishments; migrant workers who supplied much of the labour for the grain and olive harvests and for the building industry; self-employed artisans who, it was said, were better fed than wage labourers; a large mass of casual labourers, especially in the big cities; and of course the many thousands of slaves that were still found all over the western empire in particular.

One writer of the early fifth century, the historian Olympiodorus who was also an ambassador, tells us that the aristocracy based in the City of Rome drew annual incomes of up to 4,000 lbs of gold

*The *equites*, ('knights' or 'horsemen') were traditionally the second most powerful and wealthy group. Originally, they were families whose property qualified them to serve in the cavalry, hence the name. Like senators, most 'knights' were landowners, but unlike senators many of them were shipowners, traders and bankers, that is, involved in business activities.

from their estates, not counting the produce they consumed directly!

The monetary system of the late empire broke with the silver-based currencies of the first three centuries because the Spanish silver mines were exhausted and government ran out of sufficient stocks of the metal to support a stable coinage in silver. Constantine founded the new monetary system on gold and there were vast amounts of this in circulation throughout late antiquity.

The late Roman bureaucracy, both the higher and middle echelons, was a comparatively affluent group because it drew the bulk of its salary in gold and invested much of this in buying up assets like land. There was of course also a great deal of corruption, especially in the judicial system and in the administration of military supplies. The extortion of the higher bureaucracy and the greed of the provincial governors were proverbial. But government intervened repeatedly to curb these forms of corruption – we only know about them in the first place because of the laws that tried to put an end to them, and because historians and other members of the intelligentsia denounced such practices. This element of 'criticism' is a remarkable feature of the classical world. The Roman state was an authoritarian regime; in other words, dissent was rarely tolerated and government usually responded to protest with violence (especially in the cities of the East where people were often fearless in making fun of emperors). Yet a strong tradition of Roman law had emerged by the fourth century, and this acted as a brake on even the most fearsome emperors. Emperors were *not* free to do whatever they liked, and the law was actively used to protect civil rights. That is why in the later fourth century it was possible for powerful bishops like Ambrose to confront equally powerful emperors when they were excessively harsh or repressive in their handling of the civilian population.

Incomes of the Roman Aristocracy, Early Fifth Century

'Each of the great houses of Rome contained within itself everything which a medium-sized city could hold, a hippodrome, fora, temples, fountains and different kinds of baths... Many of the Roman households received an income of four thousand pounds of gold per year from their properties, not including grain, wine and other produce which, if sold, would have amounted to one-third of the income in gold. The income of the households at Rome of the second class was one thousand or fifteen hundred pounds of gold.'

– Olympiodorus of Thebes.

Late Antiquity

We shall conclude this chapter by looking at the cultural transformation of the Roman world in its final centuries. 'Late antiquity' is the term now used to describe the final, fascinating period in the evolution and break-up of the Roman Empire and refers broadly to the fourth to seventh centuries. The fourth century itself was one of considerable ferment, both cultural and economic. At the cultural level, the period saw momentous developments in religious life, with the emperor Constantine deciding to make Christianity the official religion, and with the rise of Islam in the seventh century. But there were equally important changes in the

structure of the state that began with the emperor Diocletian (284-305), and it may be best to start with these.

Overexpansion had led Diocletian to 'cut back' by abandoning territories with little strategic or economic value. Diocletian also fortified the frontiers, reorganised provincial boundaries, and separated civilian from military functions, granting greater autonomy to the military commanders (*duces*), who now became a more powerful group. Constantine consolidated some of these changes and added others of his own. His chief innovations were in the monetary sphere, where he introduced a new denomination, the *solidus*, a coin of 4½ gm of pure gold that would in fact outlast the Roman Empire itself. *Solidi* were minted on a very large scale and their circulation ran into millions. The other area of innovation was the creation of a second capital at Constantinople (at the site of modern Istanbul in Turkey, and previously called Byzantium), surrounded on three sides by the sea. As the new capital required a new senate, the fourth century was a period of rapid expansion of the governing classes. Monetary stability and an expanding population stimulated economic growth, and the archaeological record shows considerable investment in rural establishments, including industrial installations like oil presses and glass factories, in newer technologies such as screw presses and multiple water-mills, and in a revival of the long-distance trade with the East.

Part of a colossal statue of Emperor Constantine, 313 CE.

All of this carried over into strong urban prosperity that was marked by new forms of architecture and an exaggerated sense of luxury. The ruling elites were wealthier and more powerful than ever before. In Egypt, hundreds of papyri survive from these later centuries and they show us a relatively affluent society where money was in extensive use and rural estates generated vast incomes in gold. For example, Egypt contributed taxes of over 2½ million *solidi* a year (roughly 35,000 lbs of gold) in the reign of Justinian in the sixth century. Indeed, large parts of the Near Eastern countryside were *more* developed and densely settled in the fifth and sixth centuries than they would be even in the twentieth century! This is the social background against which we should set the cultural developments of this period.

The traditional religious culture of the classical world, both Greek and Roman, had been polytheist. That is, it involved a multiplicity of cults that included both Roman/Italian gods like Jupiter, Juno, Minerva and Mars, as well as numerous Greek and eastern deities worshipped in thousands of temples, shrines and sanctuaries throughout the

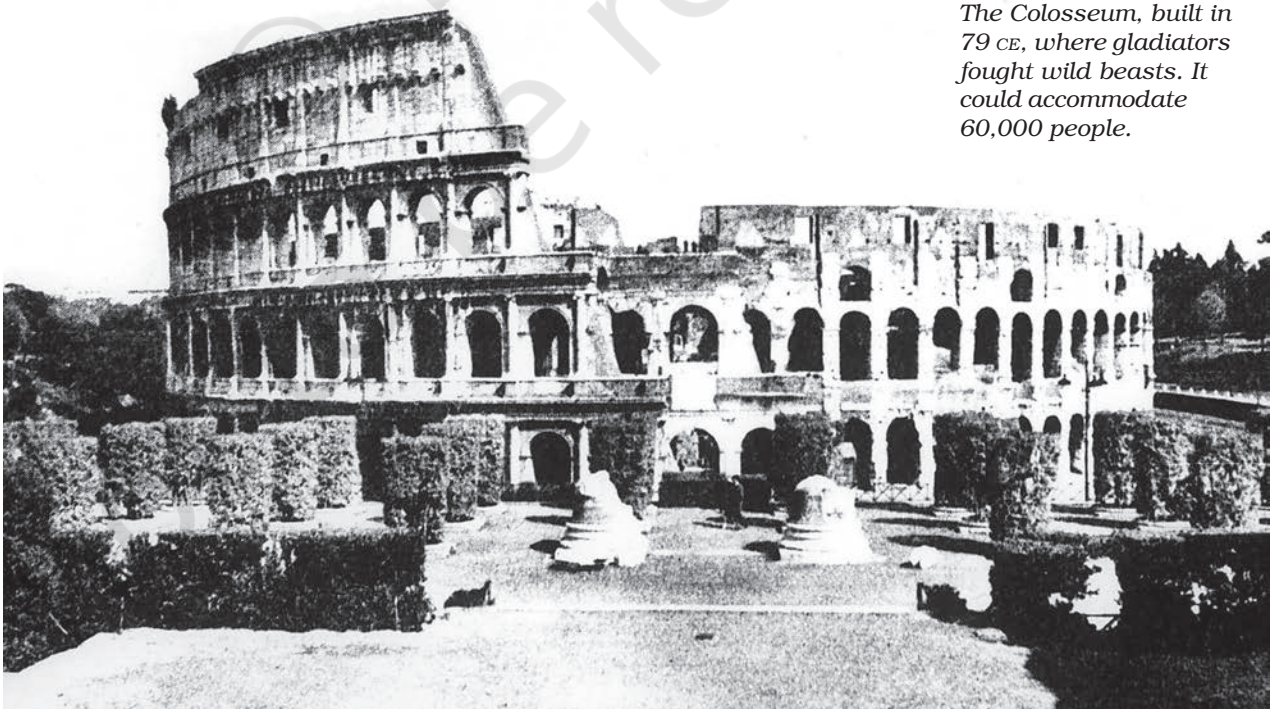
empire. Polytheists had no common name or label to describe themselves. The other great religious tradition in the empire was Judaism. But Judaism was not a monolith* either, and there was a great deal of diversity within the Jewish communities of late antiquity. Thus, the 'Christianisation'** of the empire in the fourth and fifth centuries was a gradual and complex process. Polytheism did not disappear overnight, especially in the western provinces, where the Christian bishops waged a running battle against beliefs and practices *they* condemned more than the Christian laity*** did. The *boundaries* between religious communities were much more fluid in the fourth century than they would become thanks to the repeated efforts of religious leaders, the powerful bishops who now led the Church, to rein in their followers and enforce a more rigid set of beliefs and practices.

The general prosperity was especially marked in the East where population was still expanding till the sixth century, despite the impact of the plague which affected the Mediterranean in the 540s. In the West, by contrast, the empire fragmented politically as Germanic groups from the North (Goths, Vandals, Lombards, etc.) took over all the major provinces and established kingdoms that are best described as 'post-Roman'. The most important of these were that of the Visigoths in Spain, destroyed by the Arabs between 711 and 720, that of the Franks in Gaul (c.511-687) and that of the Lombards in Italy (568-774). These kingdoms foreshadowed the beginnings of a different kind of world that is usually called 'medieval'. In the East, where the empire remained united, the reign of Justinian is the highwater mark of prosperity and imperial ambition. Justinian

*Monolith – literally a large block of stone, but the expression is used to refer to anything (for example a society or culture) that lacks variety and is all of the same type.

**Christianisation – the process by which Christianity spread among different groups of the population and became the dominant religion.

***Laity – the ordinary members of a religious community as opposed to the priests or clergy who have official positions within the community.



The Colosseum, built in 79 CE, where gladiators fought wild beasts. It could accommodate 60,000 people.

recaptured Africa from the Vandals (in 533) but his recovery of Italy (from the Ostrogoths) left that country devastated and paved the way for the Lombard invasion. By the early seventh century, the war between Rome and Iran had flared up again, and the Sasanians who had ruled Iran since the third century launched a wholesale invasion of all the major eastern provinces (including Egypt). When Byzantium, as the Roman Empire was now increasingly known, recovered these provinces in the 620s, it was just a few years away, literally, from the final major blow which came, this time, from the south-east.

The expansion of Islam from its beginnings in Arabia has been called 'the greatest political revolution ever to occur in the history of the ancient world'. By 642, barely ten years after the Prophet Muhammad's death, large parts of *both* the eastern Roman and Sasanian empires had fallen to the Arabs in a series of stunning confrontations. However, we should bear in mind that those conquests, which eventually (a century later) extended as far afield as Spain, Sind and Central Asia, began in fact with the subjection of the Arab tribes by the emerging Islamic state, first within Arabia and then in the Syrian desert and on the fringes of Iraq. As we will see in Theme 4, the unification of the Arabian peninsula and its numerous tribes was the key factor behind the territorial expansion of Islam.

MAP 2: West Asia

RULERS	EVENTS	
27 BCE-14 CE Augustus, first Roman emperor	27 BCE	'Principate' founded by Octavian, now calls himself Augustus
14-37 Tiberius	c. 24-79	Life of the Elder Pliny; dies in the volcanic eruption of Vesuvius, which also buries the Roman town of Pompeii
98-117 Trajan	66-70	The great Jewish revolt and capture of Jerusalem by Roman forces
117-38 Hadrian	c. 115	Greatest extent of the Roman Empire, following Trajan's conquests in the East
193-211 Septimius Severus	212	All free inhabitants of the empire transformed into Roman citizens
	224	New dynasty founded in Iran, called 'Sasanians' after ancestor Sasan
241-72 reign of Shapur I in Iran	250s	Persians invade Roman territories west of the Euphrates
	258	Cyprian bishop of Carthage executed
253-68 Gallienus	260s	Gallienus reorganises the army
	273	Caravan city of Palmyra destroyed by Romans
284-305 the 'Tetrarchy'; Diocletian main ruler	297	Diocletian reorganises empire into 100 provinces
	c. 310	Constantine issues new gold coinage (the 'solidus')
312-37 Constantine	312	Constantine converts to Christianity
309-79 reign of Shapur II in Iran	324	Constantine now sole ruler of empire; founds city of Constantinople
	354-430	Life of Augustine, bishop of Hippo
408-50 Theodosius II (compiler of the famous 'Theodosian Code')	378	Goths inflict crushing defeat on Roman armies at Adrianople
	391	Destruction of the Serapeum (temple of Serapis) at Alexandria
	410	Sack of Rome by the Visigoths
	428	Vandals capture Africa
	434-53	Empire of Attila the Hun
490-518 Anastasius	493	Ostrogoths establish kingdom in Italy
527-65 Justinian	533-50	Recovery of Africa and Italy by Justinian
531-79 reign of Khusro I in Iran	541-70	Outbreaks of bubonic plague
	568	Lombards invade Italy
610-41 Heraclius	c. 570	Birth of Muhammad
	614-19	Persian ruler Khusro II invades and occupies eastern Roman territories
	622	Muhammad and companions leave Mecca for Medina
	633-42	First and crucial phase of the Arab conquests; Muslim armies take Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq and parts of Iran
	661-750	Umayyad dynasty in Syria
	698	Arabs capture Carthage
	711	Arab invasion of Spain

Mosaic at Ravenna, 547 CE, showing Emperor Justinian.

Exercises

ANSWER IN BRIEF

1. If you had lived in the Roman Empire, where would you rather have lived – in the towns or in the countryside? Explain why.
2. Compile a list of some of the towns, cities, rivers, seas and provinces mentioned in this chapter, and then try and find them on the maps. Can you say something about any three of the items in the list you have compiled?
3. Imagine that you are a Roman housewife preparing a shopping list for household requirements. What would be on the list?
4. Why do you think the Roman government stopped coining in silver? And which metal did it begin to use for the production of coinage?

ANSWER IN A SHORT ESSAY

5. Suppose the emperor Trajan had actually managed to conquer India and the Romans had held on to the country for several centuries. In what ways do you think India might be different today?
6. Go through the chapter carefully and pick out some basic features of Roman society and economy which you think make it look quite modern.

THEME 3

NOMADIC EMPIRES

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THE term 'nomadic empires' can appear contradictory: nomads are arguably quintessential wanderers, organised in family assemblies with a relatively undifferentiated economic life and rudimentary systems of political organisation. The term 'empire', on the other hand, carries with it the sense of a material location, a stability derived from complex social and economic structures and the governance of an extensive territorial dominion through an elaborate administrative system. But the juxtapositions on which these definitions are framed may be too narrowly and ahistorically conceived. They certainly collapse when we study some imperial formations constructed by nomadic groups.

In Theme 4 we studied state formations in the central Islamic lands whose origins lay in the Bedouin nomadic traditions of the Arabian peninsula. This chapter studies a different group of nomads: the Mongols of Central Asia who established a transcontinental empire under the leadership of Genghis Khan, straddling Europe and Asia during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Relative to the agrarian-based imperial formations in China, the neighbouring nomads of Mongolia may have inhabited a humbler, less complex, social and economic world. But the Central Asian nomadic societies were not insulated 'islands' that were impervious to historical change. These societies interacted, had an impact on and learnt from the larger world of which they were very much a part.

This chapter studies the manner in which the Mongols under Genghis Khan adapted their traditional social and political customs to create a fearsome military machine and a sophisticated method of governance. The challenge of ruling a dominion spanning a melange of people, economies, and confessional systems meant that the Mongols could not simply impose their steppe traditions over their recently annexed territories. They innovated and compromised, creating a nomadic empire that had a huge impact on the history of Eurasia even as it changed the character and composition of their own society forever.

The steppe dwellers themselves usually produced no literature, so our knowledge of nomadic societies comes

mainly from chronicles, travelogues and documents produced by city-based litterateurs. These authors often produced extremely ignorant and biased reports of nomadic life. The imperial success of the Mongols, however, attracted many literati. Some of them produced travelogues of their experiences; others stayed to serve Mongol masters. These individuals came from a variety of backgrounds – Buddhist, Confucian, Christian, Turkish and Muslim. Although not always familiar with Mongol customs, many of them produced sympathetic accounts – even eulogies – that challenged and complicated the otherwise hostile, city-based tirade against the steppe marauders. The history of the Mongols, therefore, provides interesting details to question the manner in which sedentary societies usually characterised nomads as primitive barbarians*.

Perhaps the most valuable research on the Mongols was done by Russian scholars starting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the Tsarist regime consolidated its control over Central Asia. This work was produced within a colonial milieu and was largely survey notes produced by travellers, soldiers, merchants and antiquarian scholars. In the early twentieth century, after the extension of the soviet republics in the region, a new Marxist historiography argued that the prevalent mode of production determined the nature of social relations. It placed Genghis Khan and the emerging Mongol empire within a scale of human evolution that was witnessing a transition from a tribal to a feudal mode of production: from a relatively classless society to one where there were wide differences between the lord, the owners of land and the peasant. Despite following such a deterministic interpretation of history, excellent research on Mongol languages, their society and culture was carried out by scholars such as Boris Yakovlevich Vladimirtsov. Others such as Vasily Vladimirovich Bartold did not quite toe the official line. At a time when the Stalinist regime was extremely wary of regional nationalism, Bartold's sympathetic and positive assessment of the career and achievements of the Mongols under Genghis Khan and his successors got him into trouble with the censors. It severely curtailed the circulation of the work of the scholar and it was only in the 1960s, during and after the more liberal Khruschev era, that his writings were published in nine volumes.

The transcontinental span of the Mongol empire also meant that the sources available to scholars are written in a vast number of languages. Perhaps the most crucial are the sources in Chinese, Mongolian, Persian and Arabic, but vital materials are also available in Italian, Latin, French and Russian. Often the same text was produced in two languages with differing contents. For example, the Mongolian and Chinese versions of the earliest narrative on Genghis Khan, titled *Mongqol-un niuèa tobèa'an* (*The Secret History of the*

*The term 'barbarian' is derived from the Greek *barbaros* which meant a non-Greek, someone whose language sounded like a random noise: 'bar-bar'. In Greek texts, barbarians were depicted like children, unable to speak or reason properly, cowardly, effeminate, luxurious, cruel, slothful, greedy and politically unable to govern themselves. The sterotype passed to the Romans who used the term for the Germanic tribes, the Gauls and the Huns. The Chinese had different terms for the steppe barbarians but none of them carried a positive meaning.

Mongols) are quite different and the Italian and Latin versions of Marco Polo's travels to the Mongol court do not match. Since the Mongols produced little literature on their own and were instead 'written about' by literati from foreign cultural milieus, historians have to often double as philologists to pick out the meanings of phrases for their closest approximation to Mongol usage. The work of scholars like Igor de Rachewiltz on *The Secret History of the Mongols* and Gerhard Doerfer on Mongol and Turkic terminologies that infiltrated into the Persian language brings out the difficulties involved in studying the history of the Central Asian nomads. As we will notice through the remainder of this chapter, despite their incredible achievements there is much about Genghis Khan and the Mongol world empire still awaiting the diligent scholar's scrutiny.

Introduction

In the early decades of the thirteenth century the great empires of the Euro-Asian continent realised the dangers posed to them by the arrival of a new political power in the steppes of Central Asia: Genghis Khan (d. 1227) had united the Mongol people. Genghis Khan's political vision, however, went far beyond the creation of a confederacy of Mongol

MAP 1: The Mongol Empire

tribes in the steppes of Central Asia: he had a mandate from God to rule the world. Even though his own lifetime was spent consolidating his hold over the Mongol tribes, leading and directing campaigns into adjoining areas in north China, Transoxiana, Afghanistan, eastern Iran and the Russian steppes, his descendants travelled further afield to fulfil Genghis Khan's vision and create the largest empire the world had ever seen.

It was in the spirit of Genghis Khan's ideals that his grandson Mongke (1251-60) warned the French ruler, Louis IX (1226-70): 'In Heaven there is only one Eternal Sky, on Earth there is only one Lord, Genghis Khan, the Son of Heaven... When by the power of the Eternal Heaven the whole world from the rising of the sun to its setting shall be at one in joy and peace, then it will be made clear what we are going to do: if when you have understood the decree of the Eternal Heaven, you are unwilling to pay attention and believe it, saying, "Our country is far away, our mountains are mighty, our sea is vast", and in this confidence you bring an army against us, we know what we can do. He who made easy what was difficult and near what was far off, the Eternal Heaven knows.'

These were not empty threats and the 1236-41 campaigns of Batu, another grandson of Genghis Khan, devastated Russian lands up to Moscow, seized Poland and Hungary and camped outside Vienna. In the thirteenth century it did seem that the Eternal Sky was on the side of the Mongols and many parts of China, the Middle East and Europe saw in Genghis Khan's conquests of the inhabited world the 'wrath of God', the beginning of the Day of Judgement.

The Capture of Bukhara

Juwaini, a late-thirteenth-century Persian chronicler of the Mongol rulers of Iran, carried an account of the capture of Bukhara in 1220. After the conquest of the city, Juwaini reported, Genghis Khan went to the festival ground where the rich residents of the city were and addressed them: 'O people know that you have committed great sins, and that the great ones among you have committed these sins. If you ask me what proof I have for these words, I say it is because I am the punishment of God. If you had not committed great sins, God would not have sent a punishment like me upon you'... Now one man had escaped from Bukhara after its capture and had come to Khurasan. He was questioned about the fate of the city and replied: 'They came, they [mined the walls], they burnt, they slew, they plundered and they departed.'

ACTIVITY 1

Assume that Juwaini's account of the capture of Bukhara is accurate. Imagine yourself as a resident of Bukhara and Khurasan who heard the speeches. What impact would they have had on you?

How did the Mongols create an empire that dwarfed the achievements of the other 'World Conqueror', Alexander? In a pre-industrial age of

poor technological communications, what skills were deployed by the Mongols to administer and control such a vast dominion? For someone so self-confidently aware of his moral, divinely-dispensed right to rule, how did Genghis Khan relate to the diverse social and religious groups that comprised his dominion? In the making of his imperium what happened to this plurality? We need to start our discussion, however, with a humbler set of questions to better comprehend the social and political background of the Mongols and Genghis Khan: who were the Mongols? Where did they live? Who did they interact with and how do we know about their society and politics?

Social and Political Background

The Mongols were a diverse body of people, linked by similarities of language to the Tatars, Khitan and Manchus to the east, and the Turkic tribes to the west. Some of the Mongols were pastoralists while others were hunter-gatherers. The pastoralists tended horses, sheep and, to a lesser extent, cattle, goats and camels. They nomadised in the steppes of Central Asia in a tract of land in the area of the modern state of Mongolia. This was (and still is) a majestic landscape with wide horizons, rolling plains, ringed by the snow-capped Altai mountains to the west, the arid Gobi desert in the south and drained by the Onon and Selenga rivers and myriad springs from the melting snows of the hills in the north and the west. Lush, luxuriant grasses for pasture and considerable small game were available in a good season. The hunter-gatherers resided to the north of the

Onon river plain in flood.

pastoralists in the Siberian forests. They were a humbler body of people than the pastoralists, making a living from trade in furs of animals trapped in the summer months. There were extremes of temperature in the entire region: harsh, long winters followed by brief, dry summers. Agriculture was possible in the pastoral regions during short parts of the year but the Mongols (unlike some of the Turks further west) did not take to farming. Neither the pastoral nor the hunting-gathering economies could sustain dense population settlements and as a result the region possessed no cities. The Mongols lived in tents, *gers*, and travelled with their herds from their winter to summer pasture lands.

Ethnic and language ties united the Mongol people but the scarce resources meant that their society was divided into patrilineal lineages; the richer families were larger, possessed more animals and pasture lands. They therefore had many followers and were more influential in local politics. Periodic natural calamities – either unusually harsh, cold winters when game and stored provisions ran out or drought which parched the grasslands – would force families to forage further afield leading to conflict over pasture lands and predatory raids in search of livestock. Groups of families would occasionally ally for offensive and defensive purposes around richer and more powerful lineages but, barring the few exceptions, these confederacies were usually small and short-lived. The size of Genghis Khan's confederation of Mongol and Turkish tribes was perhaps matched in size only by that which had been stitched together in the fifth century by Attila (d. 453).

Unlike Attila, however, Genghis Khan's political system was far more durable and survived its founder. It was stable enough to counter larger armies with superior equipment in China, Iran and eastern Europe. And, as they established control over these regions, the Mongols administered complex agrarian economies and urban settlements – sedentary societies – that were quite distant from their own social experience and habitat.

Although the social and political organisations of the nomadic and agrarian economies were very different, the two societies were hardly foreign to each other. In fact, the scant resources of the steppe lands drove Mongols and other Central Asian nomads to trade and barter with their sedentary neighbours in China. This was mutually beneficial to both parties: agricultural produce and iron utensils from China were exchanged for horses, furs and game trapped in the steppe. Commerce was not without its tensions, especially as the two groups unhesitatingly applied military pressure to enhance profit. When the Mongol lineages allied they could force their Chinese neighbours to offer better terms and trade ties were sometimes discarded in favour of outright plunder. This relationship would alter when the Mongols were in disarray. The Chinese would then confidently assert their influence in the steppe. These frontier wars were more debilitating to settled societies. They dislocated agriculture and plundered cities. Nomads, on the other hand, could retreat away from the zone of conflict with

Listed below are some of the great Central Asian steppe confederacies of the Turks and Mongol people. They did not all occupy the same region and were not equally large and complex in their internal organisation. They had a considerable impact on the history of the nomadic population but their impact on China and the adjoining regions varied.

Hsiung-nu (200 BCE) (Turks)

Juan-juan (400 CE) (Mongols)

Epthalite Huns (400 CE) (Mongols)

T'u-chueh (550 CE) (Turks)

Uighurs (740 CE) (Turks)

Khitan (940 CE) (Mongols)

marginal losses. Throughout its history, China suffered extensively from nomad intrusion and different regimes – even as early as the eighth century BCE – built fortifications to protect their subjects. Starting from the third century BCE, these fortifications started to be integrated into a common defensive outwork known today as the 'Great Wall of China' a dramatic visual testament to the disturbance and fear perpetrated by nomadic raids on the agrarian societies of north China.

The Great Wall of China.

The Career of Genghis Khan

Genghis Khan was born some time around 1162 near the Onon river in the north of present-day Mongolia. Named Temujin, he was the son of Yesugei, the chieftain of the Kiyat, a group of families related to the Borjigid clan. His father was murdered at an early age and his mother, Oelun-eke, raised Temujin, his brothers and step-brothers in great hardship. The following decade was full of reversals – Temujin was captured and enslaved and soon after his marriage, his wife, Borte, was kidnapped, and he had to fight to recover her. During these years of hardship he also managed to make important friends. The young Boghurchu was his first ally and remained a trusted friend; Jamuqa, his blood-brother (*anda*), was another. Temujin also restored old alliances with the ruler of the Kereyits, Tughril/Ong Khan, his father's old blood-brother.

Through the 1180s and 1190s, Temujin remained an ally of Ong Khan and used the alliance to defeat powerful adversaries like Jamuqa, his old friend who had become a hostile foe. It was after defeating him

that Temujin felt confident enough to move against other tribes: the powerful Tatars (his father's assassins), the Kereyits and Ong Khan himself in 1203. The final defeat of the Naiman people and the powerful Jamuqa in 1206, left Temujin as the dominant personality in the politics of the steppe lands, a position that was recognised at an assembly of Mongol chieftains (*quriltai*) where he was proclaimed the 'Great Khan of the Mongols' (*Qa'an*) with the title Genghis Khan, the 'Oceanic Khan' or 'Universal Ruler'.

Just before the *quriltai* of 1206, Genghis Khan had reorganised the Mongol people into a more effective, disciplined military force (*see following sections*) that facilitated the success of his future campaigns. The first of his concerns was to conquer China, divided at this time into three realms: the Hsi Hsia people of Tibetan origin in the north-western provinces; the Jurchen whose Chin dynasty ruled north China from Peking; the Sung dynasty who controlled south China. By 1209, the Hsi Hsia were defeated, the 'Great Wall of China' was breached in 1213 and Peking sacked in 1215. Long-drawn-out battles against the Chin continued until 1234 but Genghis Khan was satisfied enough with the progress of his campaigns to return to his Mongolian homeland in 1216 and leave the military affairs of the region to his subordinates.

After the defeat in 1218 of the Qara Khita who controlled the Tien Shan mountains north-west of China, Mongol dominions reached the Amu Darya, and the states of Transoxiana and Khwarazm. Sultan Muhammad, the ruler of Khwarazm, felt the fury of Genghis Khan's rage when he executed Mongol envoys. In the campaigns between 1219 and 1221 the great cities – Otrar, Bukhara, Samarqand, Balkh, Gurganj, Merv, Nishapur and Herat – surrendered to the Mongol forces. Towns that resisted were devastated. At Nishapur, where a Mongol prince was killed during the siege operation, Genghis Khan commanded that the 'town should be laid waste in such a manner that the site could be ploughed upon; and that in the exaction of vengeance [for the death of the prince] not even cats and dogs should be left alive'.

Estimated Extent of Mongol Destruction

All reports of Genghis Khan's campaigns agree at the vast number of people killed following the capture of cities that defied his authority. The numbers are staggering: at the capture of Nishapur in 1220, 1,747,000 people were massacred while the toll at Herat in 1222 was 1,600,000 people and at Baghdad in 1258, 800,000. Smaller towns suffered proportionately: Nasa, 70,000 dead; Baihaq district, 70,000; and at Tun in the Kuhistan province, 12,000 individuals were executed.

How did medieval chroniclers arrive at such figures?

Juwaini, the Persian chronicler of the Ilkhans stated that 1,300,000 people were killed in Merv. He reached the figure because it took thirteen days to count the dead and each day they counted 100,000 corpses.

Opp. page: 'Barbarians' as imagined by a European artist.

Mongol forces in pursuit of Sultan Muhammad pushed into Azerbaijan, defeated Russian forces at the Crimea and encircled the Caspian Sea. Another wing followed the Sultan's son, Jalaluddin, into Afghanistan and the Sindh province. At the banks of the Indus, Genghis Khan considered returning to Mongolia through North India and Assam, but the heat, the natural habitat and the ill portents reported by his Shaman soothsayer made him change his mind.

Genghis Khan died in 1227, having spent most of his life in military combat. His military achievements were astounding and they were largely a result of his ability to innovate and transform different aspects of steppe combat into extremely effective military strategies. The horse-riding skills of the Mongols and the Turks provided speed and mobility to the army; their abilities as rapid-shooting archers from horseback were further perfected during regular hunting expeditions which doubled as field manoeuvres. The steppe cavalry had always travelled light and moved quickly, but now it brought all its knowledge of the terrain and the weather to do the unimaginable: they carried out campaigns in the depths of winter, treating frozen rivers as highways to enemy cities and camps. Nomads were conventionally at a loss against fortified encampments but Genghis Khan learnt the importance of siege engines and naphtha bombardment very quickly. His engineers prepared lightportable equipment, which was used against opponents with devastating effect.

c. 1167	Birth of Temujin
1160s-70s	Years spent in slavery and struggle
1180s-90s	Period of alliance formation
1203-27	Expansion and triumph
1206	Temujin proclaimed Genghis Khan, 'Universal Ruler' of the Mongols
1227	Death of Genghis Khan
1227-60	Rule of the three Great Khans and continued Mongol unity
1227-41	Ogodei, son of Genghis Khan
1246-49	Guyuk, son of Ogodei
1251-60	Mongke, son of Genghis Khan's youngest son, Toluy
1236-42	Campaigns in Russia, Hungary, Poland and Austria under Batu, son of Jochi, Genghis Khan's eldest son
1253-55	Beginning of fresh campaigns in Iran and China under Mongke
1258	Capture of Baghdad and the end of the Abbasid caliphate. Establishment of the Il-Khanid state of Iran under Hulegu, younger brother of Mongke. Beginning of conflict between the Jochids and the Il-Khans

1260	Accession of Qubilai Khan as Grand Khan in Peking; conflict amongst descendants of Genghis Khan; fragmentation of Mongol realm into independent lineages – Toluy, Chaghatai and Jochi (Ogodei's lineage defeated and absorbed into the Toluyid) Toluyids: Yuan dynasty in China and Il-Khanid state in Iran; Chaghataids in steppes north of Transoxiana and 'Turkistan'; Jochid lineages in the Russian steppes, described as the 'Golden Horde' by observers
1257-67	Reign of Berke, son of Batu; reorientation of the Golden Horde from Nestorian Christianity towards Islam. Definitive conversion takes place only in the 1350s. Start of the alliance between the Golden Horde and Egypt against the Il-Khans
1295-1304	Reign of Il-Khanid ruler Ghazan Khan in Iran. His conversion from Buddhism to Islam is followed gradually by other Il-Khanid chieftains
1368	End of Yuan dynasty in China
1370-1405	Rule of Timur, a Barlas Turk who claimed Genghis Khanid descent through the lineage of Chaghatai. Establishes a steppe empire that assimilates part of the dominions of Toluy (excluding China), Chaghatai and Jochi. Proclaims himself 'Guregen' – 'royal son-in- law' – and marries a princess of the Genghis Khanid lineage
1495-1530	Zahiruddin Babur, descendant of Timur and Genghis Khan, succeeds to Timurid territory of Ferghana and Samarqand, is expelled, captures Kabul and in 1526 seizes Delhi and Agra; founds the Mughal empire in India
1500	Capture of Transoxiana by Shaybani Khan, descendant of Jochi's youngest son, Shiban. Consolidates Shaybani power (Shaybanids also described as Uzbeg, from whom Uzbekistan, today, gets its name) in Transoxiana and expels Babur and other Timurids from the region
1759	Manchus of China conquer Mongolia
1921	Republic of Mongolia

The Mongols after Genghis Khan

We can divide Mongol expansion after Genghis Khan's death into two distinct phases: the first which spanned the years 1236-42 when the major gains were in the Russian steppes, Bulghar, Kiev, Poland and Hungary. The second phase including the years 1255-1300 led to the conquest of all of China (1279), Iran, Iraq and Syria. The frontier of the empire stabilised after these campaign.

The Mongol military forces met with few reversals in the decades after 1203 but, quite noticeably, after the 1260s the original impetus of campaigns could not be sustained in the West. Although Vienna, and beyond it western Europe, as well as Egypt was within the grasp of Mongol forces, their retreat from the Hungarian steppes and defeat at the hands of the Egyptian forces signalled the emergence of new political trends. There were two facets to this: the first was a consequence of the internal politics of succession within the Mongol family where the descendants of Jochi and Ogodei allied to control the office of the great Khan in the first two generations. These interests were more important than the pursuit of campaigns in Europe. The second compulsion occurred as the Jochi and Ogodei lineages were marginalised by the Toluyid branch of Genghis Khanid descendants. With the accession of Mongke, a descendant of Toluy, Genghis Khan's youngest son, military campaigns were pursued energetically in Iran during the 1250s. But as Toluyid interests in the conquest of China increased during the 1260s, forces and supplies were increasingly diverted into the heartlands of the Mongol dominion. As a result, the Mongols fielded a small, understaffed force against the Egyptian military. Their defeat and the increasing preoccupation with China of the Toluyid family marked the end of western expansion of the Mongols. Concurrently, conflict between the Jochid and Toluyid descendants along the Russian-Iranian frontier diverted the Jochids away from further European campaigns.

The suspension of Mongol expansion in the West did not arrest their campaigns in China which was reunited under the Mongols. Paradoxically, it was at the moment of its greatest successes that internal turbulence between members of the ruling family manifested itself. The next section discusses the factors that led to some of the greatest successes of the Mongol political enterprise but also inhibited its progress.

Social, Political and Military Organisation

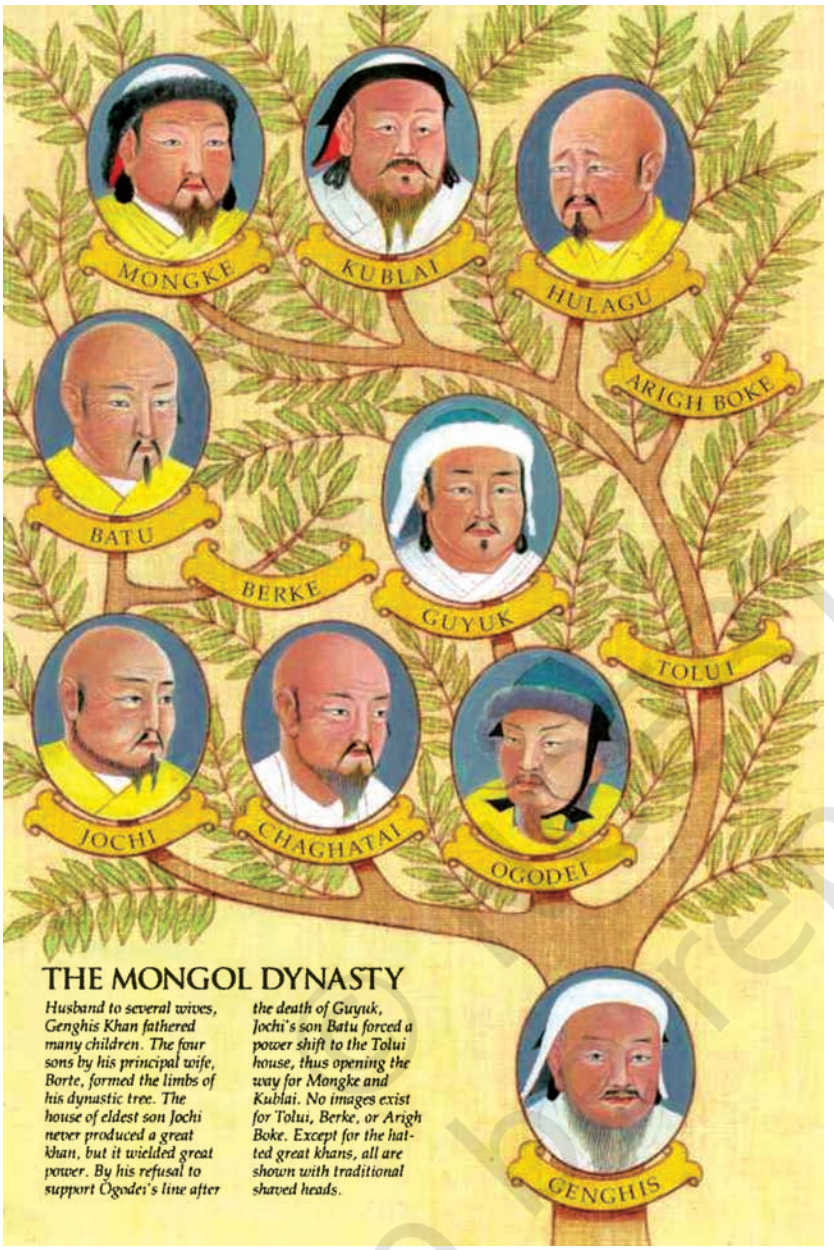
Among the Mongols, and many other nomadic societies as well, all the able-bodied, adult males of the tribe bore arms: they constituted the armed forces when the occasion demanded. The unification of the different Mongol tribes and subsequent campaigns against diverse people introduced new members into Genghis Khan's army complicating the composition of this relatively small, undifferentiated body into an

incredibly heterogeneous mass of people. It included groups like the Turkic Uighurs, who had accepted his authority willingly. It also included defeated people, like the Kereyits, who were accommodated in the confederacy despite their earlier hostility.

Genghis Khan worked to systematically erase the old tribal identities of the different groups who joined his confederacy. His army was organised according to the old steppe system of decimal units: in divisions of 10s, 100s, 1,000s and [notionally] 10,000 soldiers. In the old system the clan and the tribe would have coexisted within the decimal units. Genghis Khan stopped this practice. He divided the old tribal groupings and distributed their members into new military units. Any individual who tried to move from his/her allotted group without permission received harsh punishment. The largest unit of soldiers, approximating 10,000 soldiers (*tuman*) now included fragmented groups of people from a variety of different tribes and clans. This altered the old steppe social order integrating different lineages and clans and providing them with a new identity derived from its progenitor, Genghis Khan.

The new military contingents were required to serve under his four sons and specially chosen captains of his army units called *noyan*. Also important within the new realm were a band of followers who had served Genghis Khan loyally through grave adversity for many years. Genghis Khan publicly honoured some of these individuals as his 'blood-brothers' (*anda*); yet others, freemen of a humbler rank, were given special ranking as his bondsmen (*naukar*), a title that marked their close relationship with their master. This ranking did not preserve the rights of the old clan chieftains; the new aristocracy derived its status from a close relationship with the Great Khan of the Mongols.

In this new hierarchy, Genghis Khan assigned the responsibility of governing the newly conquered people to his four sons. These comprised the four *ulus*, a term that did not originally mean fixed territories. Genghis Khan's lifetime was still the age of rapid conquests and expanding domains, where frontiers were still extremely fluid. For example, the eldest son, Jochi, received the Russian steppes but the farthest extent of his territory, *ulus*, was indeterminate: it extended as far west as his horses could roam. The second son, Chaghatai, was given the Transoxianian steppe and lands north of the Pamir mountains adjacent to those of his brother. Presumably, these lands would shift as Jochi marched westward. Genghis Khan had indicated that his third son, Ogodei, would succeed him as the Great Khan and on accession the Prince established his capital at Karakorum. The youngest son, Toluy, received the ancestral lands of Mongolia. Genghis Khan envisaged that his sons would rule the empire collectively, and to underline this point, military contingents (*tama*) of the individual princes were placed in each *ulus*. The sense of a dominion shared by the members of the family was underlined at the assembly of chieftains, *quriltais*, where all decisions relating to the family or the state for the forthcoming season – campaigns, distribution of plunder, pasture lands and succession – were collectively taken.



Family tree of Genghis Khan.

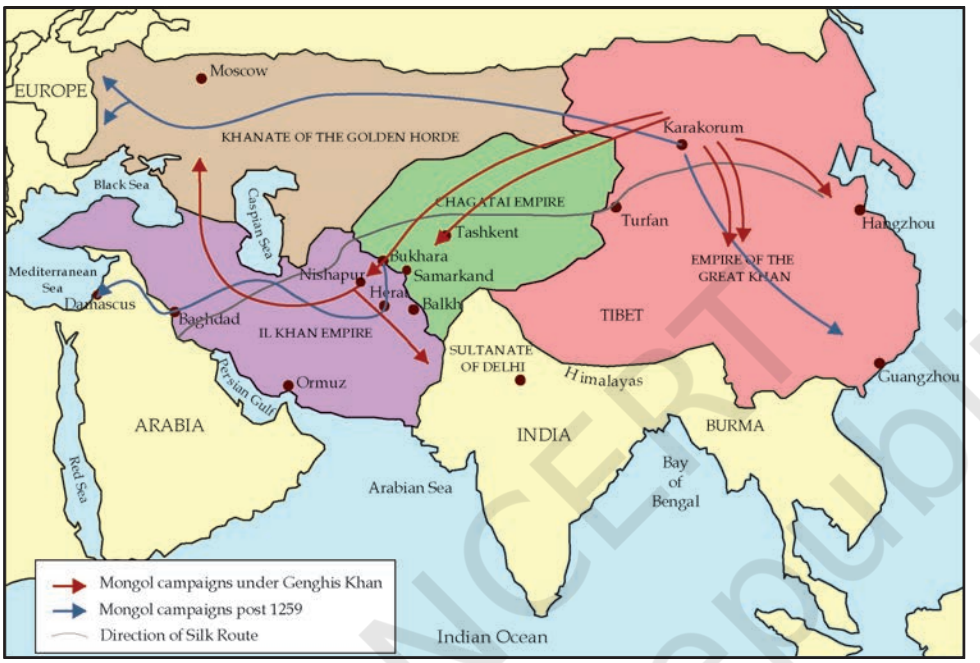
Genghis Khan had already fashioned a rapid courier system that connected the distant areas of his regime. Fresh mounts and despatch riders were placed in outposts at regularly spaced distances. For the maintenance of this communication system the Mongol nomads contributed a tenth of their herd – either horses or livestock – as provisions. This was called the *qubcur* tax, a levy that the nomads paid willingly for the multiple benefits that it brought. The courier system (*yam*) was further refined after Genghis Khan's death and its speed and reliability surprised travellers. It enabled the Great Khans to keep a check on developments at the farthest end of their regime across the continental landmass.

The conquered people, however, hardly felt a sense of affinity with their new nomadic masters. During the campaigns in the first half of the thirteenth century, cities were destroyed, agricultural lands laid waste, trade and handicraft production disrupted. Tens of thousands of people – the exact figures are lost in the exaggerated reports of the time – were killed, even more enslaved. All classes of people, from the elites to the peasantry suffered. In the resulting instability, the underground canals, called *qanats*, in the arid Iranian plateau could no longer receive periodic maintenance. As they fell into disrepair, the desert crept in. This led to an ecological devastation from which parts of Khurasan never recovered.

Once the dust from the campaigns had settled, Europe and China were territorially linked. In the peace ushered in by Mongol conquest

(Pax Mongolica) trade connections matured. Commerce and travel along the Silk Route reached its peak under the Mongols but, unlike before, the trade routes did not terminate in China.

They continued north into Mongolia and to Karakorum, the heart of the new empire. Communication and ease of travel was vital to retain the coherence of the Mongol regime and travellers were given



MAP 2: The Mongol Campaigns

a pass (*paiza* in Persian; *gerege* in Mongolian) for safe conduct. Traders paid the *baj* tax for the same purpose, all acknowledging thereby the authority of the Mongol Khan.

The contradictions between the nomadic and sedentary elements within the Mongol empire eased through the thirteenth century. In the 1230s, for example, as the Mongols waged their successful war against the Chin dynasty in north China, there was a strong pressure group within the Mongol leadership that advocated the massacre of all peasantry and the conversion of their fields into pasture lands. But by the 1270s, when south China was annexed to the Mongol empire after the defeat of the Sung dynasty, Genghis Khan's grandson, Qubilai Khan (d. 1294), appeared as the protector of the peasants and the cities. In the 1290s, the Mongol ruler of Iran, Ghazan Khan (d. 1304), a descendant of Genghis Khan's youngest son Toluy, warned family members and other generals to avoid pillaging the peasantry. It did not lead to a stable prosperous realm, he advised in a speech whose sedentary overtones would have made Genghis Khan shudder.

ACTIVITY 2

Note the areas traversed by the Silk Route and the goods that were available to traders along the way. This map does not reflect one of the eastern terminal points of the silk route during the height of Mongol power.

Can you place the missing city? Could it have been on the Silk Route in the twelfth century? Why not?

ACTIVITY 3

Why was there a conflict of interests between pastoralists and peasants? Would Genghis Khan have expressed sentiments of this nature in a speech to his nomad commanders?

Ghazan Khan's Speech

Ghazan Khan (1295-1304) was the first Il-Khanid ruler to convert to Islam. He gave the following speech to the Mongol-Turkish nomad commanders, a speech that was probably drafted by his Persian *wazir* Rashiduddin and included in the minister's letters:

'I am not on the side of the Persian peasantry. If there is a purpose in pillaging them all, there is no one with more power to do this than I. Let us rob them together. But if you wish to be certain of collecting grain and food for your tables in the future, I must be harsh with you. You must be taught reason. If you insult the peasantry, take their oxen and seed and trample their crops into the ground, what will you do in the future? ... The obedient peasantry must be distinguished from the peasantry who are rebels...'

From Genghis Khan's reign itself, the Mongols had recruited civil administrators from the conquered societies. They were sometimes moved around: Chinese secretaries deployed in Iran and Persians in China. They helped in integrating the distant dominions and their backgrounds and training were always useful in blunting the harsher edges of nomadic predation on sedentary life. The Mongol Khans trusted them as long as they continued to raise revenue for their masters and these administrators could sometimes command considerable influence. In the 1230s, the Chinese minister Yeh-lu Ch'u-ts'ai, muted some of Ogedei's more rapacious instincts; the Juwaini family played a similar role in Iran through the latter half of the thirteenth century and at the end of the century, the *wazir*, Rashiduddin, drafted the speech that Ghazan Khan delivered to his Mongol compatriots asking them to protect, not harass, the peasantry.

The pressure to sedentarise was greater in the new areas of Mongol domicile, areas distant from the original steppe habitat of the nomads. By the middle of the thirteenth century the sense of a common patrimony shared by all the brothers was gradually replaced by individual dynasties each ruling their separate *ulus*, a term which now carried the sense of a territorial dominion. This was, in part, a result of succession struggles, where Genghis Khanid descendants competed for the office of Great Khan and prized pastoral lands. Descendants of Toluy had come to rule both China and Iran where they had formed the Yuan and Il-Khanid dynasties. Descendants of Jochi formed the Golden Horde and ruled the Russian steppes; Chaghatai's successors ruled the steppes of Transoxiana and the lands called Turkistan today. Noticeably, nomadic traditions persisted longest amongst the steppe dwellers in Central Asia (descendants of Chaghatai) and Russia (the Golden Horde).

The gradual separation of the descendants of Genghis Khan into separate lineage groups implied that their connections with the memory

and traditions of a past family concordance also altered. At an obvious level this was the result of competition amongst the cousin clans and here the Toluyid branch was more adept in presenting their version of the family disagreements in the histories produced under their patronage. To a large extent this was a consequence of their control of China and Iran and the large number of literati that its family members could recruit. At a more sophisticated level, the disengagement with the past also meant underlining the merits of the regnant rulers as a contrast to other past monarchs. This exercise in comparison did not exclude Genghis Khan himself. Persian chronicles produced in Il-Khanid Iran during the late thirteenth century detailed the gory killings of the Great Khan and greatly exaggerated the numbers killed. For example, in contrast to an eyewitness report that 400 soldiers defended the citadel of Bukhara, an Il-Khanid chronicle reported that 30,000 soldiers were killed in the attack on the citadel. Although Il-Khanid reports still eulogised Genghis Khan, they also carried a statement of relief that times had changed and the great killings of the past were over. The Genghis Khanid legacy was important, but for his descendants to appear as convincing heroes to a sedentary audience, they could no longer appear in quite the same way as their ancestor.

Following the research of David Ayalon, recent work on the *yasa*, the code of law that Genghis Khan was supposed to have promulgated at the *quriltai* of 1206, has elaborated on the complex ways in which the memory of the Great Khan was fashioned by his successors. In its earliest formulation the term was written as *yasaq* which meant 'law', 'decree' or 'order'. Indeed, the few details that we possess about the *yasaq* concern administrative regulations: the organisation of the hunt, the army and the postal system. By the middle of the thirteenth century, however, the Mongols had started using the related term *yasa* in a more general sense to mean the 'legal code of Genghis Khan'.

We may be able to understand the changes in the meaning of the term if we take a look at some of the other developments that occurred at the same time. By the middle of the thirteenth century the Mongols had emerged as a unified people and just created the largest empire the world had ever seen. They ruled over very sophisticated urban societies, with their respective histories, cultures and laws. Although the Mongols dominated the region politically, they were a numerical minority. The one way in which they could protect their identity and distinctiveness was through a claim to a sacred law given to them by their ancestor. The *yasa* was in all probability a compilation of the customary traditions of the Mongol tribes but in referring to it as Genghis Khan's code of law, the Mongol people also laid claim to a 'lawgiver' like Moses and Solomon, whose authoritative code could be imposed on their subjects. The *yasa* served to cohere the Mongol people around a body of shared beliefs, it acknowledged their affinity to Genghis Khan and his descendants and, even as they absorbed different aspects of a sedentary lifestyle, gave them the confidence to retain their ethnic

identity and impose their 'law' upon their defeated subjects. It was an extremely empowering ideology and although Genghis Khan may not have planned such a legal code, it was certainly inspired by his vision and was vital in the construction of a Mongol universal dominion.

ACTIVITY 4

Did the meaning of *yasa* alter over the four centuries separating Genghis Khan from 'Abdullah Khan? Why did Hafiz-i Tanish make a reference to Genghis Khan's *yasa* in connection with 'Abdullah Khan's prayer at the Muslim festival ground?

Yasa

In 1221, after the conquest of Bukhara, Genghis Khan had assembled the rich Muslim residents at the festival ground and had admonished them. He called them sinners and warned them to compensate for their sins by parting with their hidden wealth. The episode was dramatic enough to be painted and for a long time afterwards people still remembered the incident. In the late sixteenth century, 'Abdullah Khan, a distant descendant of Jochi, Genghis Khan's eldest son, went to the same festival ground in Bukhara. Unlike Genghis Khan, however, 'Abdullah Khan went to perform his holiday prayers there. His chronicler, Hafiz-i Tanish, reported this performance of Muslim piety by his master and included the surprising comment: 'this was according to the *yasa* of Genghis Khan'.

Conclusion: Situating Genghis Khan and the Mongols in World History

When we remember Genghis Khan today the only images that appear in our imagination are those of the conqueror, the destroyer of cities, and an individual who was responsible for the death of thousands of people. Many thirteenth-century residents of towns in China, Iran and eastern Europe looked at the hordes from the steppes with fear and distaste. And yet, for the Mongols, Genghis Khan was the greatest leader of all time: he united the Mongol people, freed them from interminable tribal wars and Chinese exploitation, brought them prosperity, fashioned a grand transcontinental empire and restored trade routes and markets that attracted distant travellers like the Venetian Marco Polo. The contrasting images are not simply a case of dissimilar perspectives; they should make us pause and reflect on how one (dominant) perspective can completely erase all others.

Beyond the opinions of the defeated sedentary people, consider for a moment the sheer size of the Mongol dominion in the thirteenth century and the diverse body of people and faiths that it embraced. Although the Mongol Khans themselves belonged to a variety of

different faiths – Shaman, Buddhist, Christian and eventually Islam – they never let their personal beliefs dictate public policy. The Mongol rulers recruited administrators and armed contingents from people of all ethnic groups and religions. Theirs was a multi-ethnic, multilingual, multi-religious regime that did not feel threatened by its pluralistic constitution. This was utterly unusual for the time, and historians are only now studying the ways in which the Mongols provided ideological models for later regimes (like the Mughals of India) to follow.

The nature of the documentation on the Mongols – and any nomadic regime – makes it virtually impossible to understand the inspiration that led to the confederation of fragmented groups of people in the pursuit of an ambition to create an empire. The Mongol empire eventually altered in its different milieus, but the inspiration of its founder remained a powerful force. At the end of the fourteenth century, Timur, another monarch who aspired to universal dominion, hesitated to declare himself monarch because he was not of Genghis Khanid descent. When he did declare his independent sovereignty it was as the son-in-law (*guregen*) of the Genghis Khanid family.

The Capture of Baghdad by the Mongols, a miniature painting in the Chronicles of Rashid al-Din, Tabriz, fourteenth century.

Today, after decades of Soviet control, the country of Mongolia is recreating its identity as an independent nation. It has seized upon Genghis Khan as a great national hero who is publicly venerated and whose achievements are recounted with pride. At a crucial juncture in the history of Mongolia, Genghis Khan has once again appeared as an iconic figure for the Mongol people, mobilising memories of a great past in the forging of national identity that can carry the nation into the future.

Qubilai Khan and Chabi in camp.

Exercises

ANSWER IN BRIEF

1. Why was trade so significant to the Mongols?
2. Why did Genghis Khan feel the need to fragment the Mongol tribes into new social and military groupings?
3. How do later Mongol reflections on the *yasa* bring out the uneasy relationship they had with the memory of Genghis Khan.
4. 'If history relies upon written records produced by city-based literati, nomadic societies will always receive a hostile representation.' Would you agree with this statement? Does it explain the reason why Persian chronicles produced such inflated figures of casualties resulting from Mongol campaigns?

ANSWER IN A SHORT ESSAY

5. Keeping the nomadic element of the Mongol and Bedouin societies in mind, how, in your opinion, did their respective historical experiences differ? What explanations would you suggest account for these differences?
6. How does the following account enlarge upon the character of the Pax Mongolica created by the Mongols by the middle of the thirteenth century?

   The Franciscan monk, William of Rubruck, was sent by Louis IX of France on an embassy to the great Khan Mongke's court. He reached Karakorum, the capital of Mongke, in 1254 and came upon a woman from Lorraine (in France) called Paquette, who had been brought from Hungary and was in the service of one of the prince's wives who was a Nestorian Christian. At the court he came across a Parisian goldsmith named Guillaume Boucher, 'whose brother dwelt on the Grand Pont in Paris'. This man was first employed by the Queen Sorghaqtani and then by Mongke's younger brother. Rubruck found that at the great court festivals the Nestorian priests were admitted first, with their regalia, to bless the Grand Khan's cup, and were followed by the Muslim clergy and Buddhist and Taoist monks…

III

CHANGING TRADITIONS

The Three Orders

Changing Cultural Traditions

CHANGING TRADITIONS

WE have seen how, by the ninth century, large parts of Asia witnessed the growth and expansion of great empires – some nomadic, some based on well-developed cities and trading networks that centred on them. The difference between the Macedonian, Roman and Arab empires and the ones that preceded them (the Egyptian, Assyrian, Chinese, Mauryan) was that they covered greater areas of territory, and were continental or transcontinental in nature. The Mongol empire was similar.

Different cultural encounters were crucial to what took place. The arrival of empires was almost always sudden, but they were almost always the result of changes that had been taking place over a long time in the core of what would become an empire.

Traditions in world history could change in different ways. In western Europe during the period from the ninth to the seventeenth centuries, much that we connect with modern times evolved slowly – the development of scientific knowledge based on experiment rather than religious belief, serious thought about the organisation of government, with attention to the creation of civil services, parliaments and different codes of law, improvements in technology that was used in industry and agriculture. The consequences of these changes could be felt with great force outside Europe.

As we have seen, by the fifth century CE, the Roman Empire in the west had disintegrated. In western and central Europe, the remains of the Roman Empire were slowly adapted to the administrative requirements and needs of tribes that had established kingdoms there. However, urban centres were smaller in western Europe than further east.

By the ninth century, the commercial and urban centres – Aix, London, Rome, Sienna – though small, could not be dismissed. From the ninth to the eleventh centuries, there were major developments in the countryside in western Europe. The Church and royal government developed a combination of Roman institutions with the customary

rules of tribes. The finest example was the empire of Charlemagne in western and central Europe at the beginning of the ninth century. Even after its rapid collapse, urban centres and trading networks persisted, albeit under heavy attack from Hungarians, Vikings and others.

What happened was called 'feudalism'. Feudalism was marked by agricultural production around castles and 'manor houses', where lords of the manor possessed land that was cultivated by peasants (serfs) who pledged them loyalty, goods and services. These lords in turn pledged their loyalty to greater lords who were 'vassals' of kings. The Catholic Church (centred on the papacy) supported this state of affairs and itself possessed land. In a world where uncertainties of life, poor sense of medicine and low life expectancy were common, the Church showed people how to behave so that life after death at least would be tolerable. Monasteries were created where God-fearing people could devote themselves to the service of God in the way Catholic churchmen thought fit. Equally, churches were part of a network of scholarship that ran from the Muslim states of Spain to Byzantium, and they provided the petty kings of Europe with a sense of the opulence of the eastern Mediterranean and beyond.

The influence of commerce and towns in the feudal order came to evolve and change encouraged by Mediterranean entrepreneurs in Venice and Genoa (from the twelfth century). Their ships carried on a growing trade with Muslim states and the remains of the Roman Empire in the east. Attracted by the lure of wealth in these areas, and inspired by the idea of freeing 'holy places' associated with Christ from Muslims, European kings reinforced links across the Mediterranean during the 'crusades'. Trade within Europe improved (centred on fairs and the port cities of the Baltic Sea and the North Sea and stimulated by a growing population).

The Palace of the Popes, in Avignon, a fourteenth-century town in south France.

The Palace of the Doge, in Venice, fifteenth century.

Opportunities for commercial expansion coincided with changing attitudes concerning the value of life. Respect for human beings and living things that marked much of Islamic art and literature, and the example of Greek art and ideas that came to Europe from Byzantine trade encouraged Europeans to take a new look at the world. And from the fourteenth century (in what is called the 'Renaissance'), especially in north Italian towns, the wealthy became less concerned with life after death and more with the wonders of life itself. Sculptors, painters and writers became interested in humanity and the discovery of the world.

By the end of the fifteenth century, this state of affairs encouraged travel and discovery as never before. Voyages of discovery took place. Spaniards and Portuguese, who had traded with northern Africa, pushed further down the coast of western Africa, finally leading to journeys around the Cape of Good Hope to India – which had a great reputation in Europe as a source of spices that were in great demand. Columbus attempted to find a western route to India and in 1492 reached the islands which the Europeans called the West Indies. Other explorers tried to find a northern route to India and China via the Arctic.

European travellers encountered a range of different peoples in the course of their journeys. In part, they were interested in learning from them. The papacy encouraged the work of the North African geographer and traveller Hasan al-Wazzan (later known in Europe as Leo Africanus), who wrote the first geography of Africa in the early sixteenth century for Pope Leo X. Jesuit churchmen observed and wrote on Japan in the sixteenth century. An Englishman, Will Adams, became a friend and

counsellor of the Japanese Shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, in the early seventeenth century. As in the case of Hasan al-Wazzan, peoples that the Europeans encountered in the Americas often took a great interest in them and sometimes worked for them. For example an Aztec woman – later known as Dona Marina – befriended the Spanish conqueror of Mexico, Cortes, and interpreted and negotiated for him.

In their encounters, Europeans were sometimes cautious, self-effacing and observant, even as they frequently attempted to establish trade monopolies and enforce their authority by force of arms as the Portuguese attempted to do in the Indian Ocean after Vasco da Gama's arrival in Calicut (present-day Kozhikode) in 1498. In other cases, they were overbearing, aggressive and cruel and adopted an attitude of superiority to those they met, considering such people ignorant. The Catholic Church encouraged both attitudes. The Church was the centre for the study of other cultures and languages, but encouraged attacks on people it saw as 'un-Christian'.

From the point of view of non-Europeans, the encounter with Europe varied. For much of the Islamic lands and India and China, though, Europeans remained a curiosity until the end of the seventeenth century. They were perceived as hardy traders and seamen who had little to contribute to their sense of the larger world. The Japanese learnt some of the advantages of European technology quickly – for instance, they had begun large-scale production of muskets by the late sixteenth century. In the Americas, enemies of the Aztec empire sometimes used Europeans to challenge the power of the Aztecs. At the same time the diseases the Europeans brought devastated the populations, leading to the death of over 90 per cent of the people in some areas by the end of the sixteenth century.

TIMELINE III

(c. 1300 to 1700)

The period under consideration witnessed several major developments in Europe, including changes in agriculture and the lives of peasants. It was also marked by a range of cultural developments. This timeline draws attention to contacts between continents, stimulated in many instances by the growth of trade. The impact of these contacts was varied – while ideas, inventions and goods were shared across continents, there was also constant warfare between kingdoms to control land, resources and access to trade routes. As a result, men and women were often displaced and enslaved, if not exterminated. In many ways, the lives of people were transformed beyond recognition.

DATES	AFRICA	EUROPE
1300-25		Alhambra and Granada emerge as important cultural centres in Spain
1325-50	Plague* in Egypt (1348-55)	Hundred Years War between England and France (1337-1453); Black Death (a form of plague) spreads throughout Europe (1348)
1350-75	Ibn Batuta explores the Sahara	French peasants protest against high taxes (1358)
1375-1400		Peasant revolt in Britain (1381); Geoffrey Chaucer writes *The Canterbury Tales*, one of the earliest compositions in English (1388)
1400-25		
1425-50	Portuguese begin slave trading (1442)	
1450-75	Songhai empire in West Africa established based on trading networks across the Sahara; Portuguese expeditions and settlements along the west coast of Africa (1471 onwards)	First printed book appears in Europe; Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), painter, architect, inventor in Italy
1475-1500	Portuguese convert the king of Bokongo to Christianity	Establishment of the Tudor dynasty in England (1485)
1500-25	African slaves taken to work on sugar plantations in America (1510); Ottoman Turks conquer Egypt (1517)	Coffee from South America is drunk in Europe for the first time (1517) and tobacco, chocolate, tomatoes and turkey are also introduced; Martin Luther attempts to reform the Catholic Church (1517)
1525-50		Copernicus propounds theory about solar system (1543)
1550-75		William Shakespeare (1564-1616), dramatist in England
1575-1600		Zacharias Janssen invents the microscope (1590s)
1600-25	Oyo kingdom of Nigeria at the height of its power, centres for metal-working*	One of the first novels, *Don Quixote*, written in Spanish (1605)
1625-50		William Harvey demonstrates that blood is pumped through the body by the heart (1628)
1650-75	Portuguese destroy the Kongo kingdom (1662)	Louis XIV, king of France (1638-1715)
1675-1700		Peter the Great (1682-1725) attempts to modernise Russia

DATES	ASIA	SOUTH ASIA
1300-25		
1325-1350		Establishment of the Vijayanagara empire* (1336)
1350-75	Ming dynasty* in China (1368 onwards)	
1375-1400		
1400-25		Emergence of regional sultanates
1425-50		
1450-75	Ottoman Turks capture Constantinople (1453)	
1475-1500		Vasco da Gama reaches India (1498)
1500-25	Portuguese entry into China opposed, driven out to Macao (1522)	
1525-50		Babur establishes Mughal control over north India, first battle of Panipat (1526)
1550-75		Akbar (1556-1605) consolidates Mughal rule
1575-1600	First Kabuki play staged in Japan (1586); Shah Abbas (1587-1629) of Persia introduces European methods of military training	
1600-25	Tokugawa Shogunate established in Japan (1603)	Establishment of the British East India Company (1600)
1625-50	All European traders with the exception of the Dutch forbidden to trade with Japan (1637); Manchu rule in China, (1644 onwards) which lasts for nearly 300 years; growing demand in Europe for Chinese tea and silk	Construction of the Taj Mahal (1632-53)
1650-75		
1675-1700		

DATES	AMERICAS	AUSTRALIA/PACIFIC ISLANDS
1300-25	Aztec capital at Tenochtitlan, Mexico (1325), building temples, development of irrigation systems and accounting system (quipu)*	
1325-50		
1350-75		
1375-1400		
1400-25		
1425-50		
1450-75	Incas establish control over Peru (1465)	
1475-1500	Columbus reaches the West Indies (1492)	
1500-25	Spanish conquest of Mexico (1521)	Magellan, a Spanish navigator, reaches the Pacific Ocean (1519)
1525-50	French explorers reach Canada (1534)	
1550-75	Spanish conquest of Peru (1572)	
1575-1600		Dutch sailors reach Australia by accident
1600-25	England sets up its first colonies in North America (1607); the first slaves are brought from West Africa to Virginia (1619)	Spanish sailors reach Tahiti (1606)
1625-50	Dutch found New Amsterdam, now called New York (1626); first printing press is set up in Massachusetts (1635)	Dutch navigator Abel Tasman sails around Australia without realising it. He then lands on Van Diemen's land, later called Tasmania. He also reaches New Zealand, but thinks it is part of a huge landmass!
1650-75	First sugar plantations are established in the West Indies (1654)	
1675-1700	French colonise the Mississippi basin, naming it Louisiana after King Louis XIV (1682)	

ACTIVITY

You may have noticed that the column on Australia/Pacific Islands has very few recorded dates. This is because the peoples in these areas often used other forms of recording, including paintings such as the one shown above*. List at least one event/process from each of the preceding five columns which an Australian painter may have found worth recording. List another five which may have seemed irrelevant to her/him.

THEME 4

THE THREE ORDERS

11090CH06

IN this chapter, we shall learn about the socio-economic and political changes which occurred in western Europe between the ninth and sixteenth centuries. After the fall of the Roman Empire, many groups of Germanic people from eastern and central Europe occupied regions of Italy, Spain and France.

In the absence of any unifying political force, military conflict was frequent, and the need to gather resources to protect one's land became very important. Social organisation was therefore centred on the control of land. Its features were derived from both imperial Roman traditions and German customs. Christianity, the official religion of the Roman Empire from the fourth century, survived the collapse of Rome, and gradually spread to central and northern Europe. The Church also became a major landholder and political power in Europe.

The 'three orders', the focus of this chapter, are three social categories: Christian priests, landowning nobles and peasants. The changing relationships between these three groups was an important factor in shaping European history for several centuries.

Over the last 100 years, European historians have done detailed work on the histories of regions, even of individual villages. This was possible because, from the medieval period, there is a lot of material in the form of documents, details of landownership, prices and legal cases: for example, churches kept records of births, marriages and deaths, which have made it possible to understand the structure of families and of population. The inscriptions in churches give information about traders' associations, and songs and stories give a sense of festivals and community activities.

All these can be used by historians to understand economic and social life, and changes over a long period (like increase in population) or over a short period (like peasant revolts).

Of the many scholars in France who have worked on feudalism, one of the earliest was Bloch. Marc Bloch (1886–1944) was one of a group of scholars who argued that history consisted of much more than just political history, international relations and the lives of great people. He emphasised the importance of geography in shaping human

history, and the need to understand the collective behaviour or attitudes of groups of people.

Bloch's *Feudal Society* is about European, particularly French, society between 900 and 1300, describing in remarkable detail social relations and hierarchies, land management and the popular culture of the period.

His career was cut short tragically when he was shot by the Nazis in the Second World War.

An Introduction to Feudalism

The term 'feudalism' has been used by historians to describe the economic, legal, political and social relationships that existed in Europe in the medieval era. Derived from the German word 'feud', which

The term 'medieval era' refers to the period in European history between the fifth and the fifteenth centuries.

MAP 1: Western Europe

means 'a piece of land', it refers to the kind of society that developed in medieval France, and later in England and in southern Italy.

In an economic sense, feudalism refers to a kind of agricultural production which is based on the relationship between lords and peasants. The latter cultivated their own land as well as that of the lord. The peasants performed labour services for the lords, who in exchange provided military protection. They also had extensive judicial control over peasants. Thus, feudalism went beyond the economic to cover the social and political aspects of life as well.

Although its roots have been traced to practices that existed in the Roman Empire and during the age of the French king Charlemagne (742-814), feudalism as an established way of life in large parts of Europe may be said to have emerged later, in the eleventh century.

France and England

Gaul, a province of the Roman Empire, had two extensive coastlines, mountain ranges, long rivers, forests and large tracts of plains suited to agriculture.

The Franks, a Germanic tribe, gave their name to Gaul, making it 'France'. From the sixth century, this region was a kingdom ruled by Frankish/French kings, who were Christian. The French had very strong links with the Church, which were further strengthened when in 800 the Pope gave King Charlemagne the title of 'Holy Roman Emperor', to ensure his support*.

*The head of the Eastern Church, in Constantinople, had a similar relationship with the Byzantine emperor.

Across a narrow channel lay the island of England–Scotland, which in the eleventh century was conquered by a duke from the French province of Normandy.

Early History of France

481	Clovis becomes king of the Franks
486	Clovis and the Franks begin the conquest of northern Gaul
496	Clovis and the Franks convert to Christianity
714	Charles Martel becomes mayor of the palace
751	Martel's son Pepin deposes the Frankish ruler, becomes king and establishes a dynasty. Wars of conquest double the size of his kingdom
768	Pepin succeeded by his son Charlemagne/Charles the Great
800	Pope Leo III crowns Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor
840 ONWARDS	Raids by Vikings from Norway

The Three Orders

French priests believed in the concept that people were members of one of the three 'orders', depending on their work. A bishop stated, 'Here below, some pray, others fight, still others work...' Thus, the three orders of society were broadly the clergy, the nobility and the peasantry.

> In the twelfth century, Abbess Hildegard of Bingen wrote: 'Who would think of herding his entire cattle in one stable – cows, donkeys, sheep, goats, without difference? Therefore it is necessary to establish difference among human beings, so that they do not destroy each other ... God makes distinctions among his flock, in heaven as on earth. All are loved by him, yet there is no equality among them.'

'Abbey' is derived from the Syriac *abba*, meaning father. An abbey was governed by an abbot or an abbess.

The Second Order: The Nobility

Priests placed themselves in the first order, and nobles in the second. The nobility had, in reality, a central role in social processes. This is because they controlled land. This control was the outcome of a practice called 'vassalage'.

The kings of France were linked to the people by 'vassalage', similar to the practice among the Germanic peoples, of whom the Franks were one. The big landowners – the nobles – were vassals of the king, and peasants were vassals of the landowners. A nobleman accepted the king as his *seigneur* (senior) and they made a mutual promise: the *seigneur*/lord ('lord' was derived from a word meaning one who provided bread) would protect the vassal, who would be loyal to him. This relationship involved elaborate rituals and exchange of vows taken on the Bible in a church. At this ceremony, the vassal received a written charter or a staff or even a clod of earth as a symbol of the land that was being given to him by his master.

French nobles starting for a hunt, fifteenth-century painting.

The noble enjoyed a privileged status. He had absolute control over his property, in perpetuity. He could raise troops called 'feudal levies'. The lord held his own courts of justice and could even coin his own money.

He was the lord of all the people settled on his land. He owned vast tracts of land which contained his own dwellings, his private fields and pastures and the homes and fields of his tenant-peasants. His house was called a manor. His private lands were cultivated by peasants, who were also expected to act as foot-soldiers in battle when required, in addition to working on their own farms.

The Manorial Estate

A lord had his own manor-house. He also controlled villages – some lords controlled hundreds of villages – where peasants lived. A small manorial estate could contain a dozen families, while larger estates might include fifty or sixty. Almost everything needed for daily life was found on the estate: grain was grown in the fields, blacksmiths and carpenters maintained the lord's implements and repaired his weapons, while stonemasons looked after his buildings. Women spun and wove fabric, and children worked in the lord's wine-presses. The estate had extensive woodlands and forests where the lords hunted. They contained

A manorial estate, England, thirteenth century.

pastures where his cattle and his horses grazed. There was a church on the estate and a castle for defence.

From the thirteenth century, some castles were made bigger for use as a residence for a knight's family. In fact, in England castles were practically unknown before the Norman Conquest, and developed as centres of political administration and military power under the feudal system.

The manor could not be completely self-sufficient because salt, millstones and metalware had to be obtained from outside sources. Those lords who wanted a luxurious lifestyle and were keen to buy rich furnishings, musical instruments and ornaments not locally produced, had to get these from other places.

ACTIVITY 1

Discuss social hierarchies based on different criteria: occupation, language, wealth, education. Compare medieval France with Mesopotamia and the Roman Empire.

The Knights

From the ninth century, there were frequent localised wars in Europe. The amateur peasant-soldiers were not sufficient, and good cavalry was needed. This led to the growing importance of a new section of people – the knights. They were linked to the lords, just as the latter were linked to the king. The lord gave the knight a piece of land (called 'fief') and promised to protect it. The fief could be inherited. It extended to anything between 1,000 and 2,000 acres or more, including a house for the knight and his family, a church and other establishments to house his dependants, besides a watermill and a wine-press. As in the feudal manor, the land of the fief was cultivated by peasants. In exchange, the knight paid his lord a regular fee and promised to fight for him in war. To keep up their skills, knights spent time each day fencing and practising tactics with dummies. A knight might serve more than one lord, but his foremost loyalty was to his own lord.

In France, from the twelfth century, minstrels travelled from manor to manor, singing songs which told stories – partly historical, partly invented – about brave kings and knights. In an age when not too many people could read and manuscripts were few, these travelling bards were very popular. Many manors had a narrow balcony above the large hall where the people of the manor gathered for meals. This was the minstrels' gallery, from where singers entertained nobles while they feasted.

'If my dear lord
is slain, his fate
I'll share,
If he is hanged,
then hang me
by his side.
If to the stake he
goes, with him
I'll burn;
And if he's
drowned, then
let me drown
with him.'

– *Doon de Mayence,*
a thirteenth-century
French poem
(to be sung)
recounting the
adventures of
knights.

The First Order: The Clergy

The Catholic Church had its own laws, owned lands given to it by rulers, and could levy taxes. It was thus a very powerful institution which did not depend on the king. At the head of the western Church was the Pope. He lived in Rome. The Christians in Europe were guided by bishops and clerics – who constituted the first 'order'. Most villages had their own church, where people assembled every Sunday to listen to the sermon by the priest and to pray together.

Everyone could not become a priest. Serfs were banned, as were the physically challenged. Women could not become priests. Men who became priests could not marry. Bishops were the religious nobility. Like lords who owned vast landed estates, the bishops also had the use of vast estates, and lived in grand palaces. The Church was entitled to a tenth share of whatever the peasants produced from their land over the course of the year, called a 'tithe'. Money also came in the form of endowments made by the rich for their own welfare and the welfare of their deceased relatives in the afterlife.

Some of the important ceremonies conducted by the Church copied formal customs of the feudal elite. The act of kneeling while praying, with hands clasped and head bowed, was an exact replica of the way in which a knight conducted himself while taking vows of loyalty to his lord. Similarly, the use of the term 'lord' for God was another example of feudal culture that found its way into the practices of the Church. Thus, the religious and the lay worlds of feudalism shared many customs and symbols.

ACTIVITY 2

Discuss examples of expected patterns of behaviour between people of different social levels, in a medieval manor, a palace and in a place of worship.

Monks

Apart from the Church, devout Christians had another kind of organisation. Some deeply religious people chose to live isolated lives, in contrast to clerics who lived amongst people in towns and villages. They lived in religious communities called abbeys or monasteries, often in places very far from human habitation. Two of the more well-known monasteries were those established by St Benedict in Italy in 529 and of Cluny in Burgundy in 910.

Monks took vows to remain in the abbey for the rest of their lives and to spend their time in prayer, study and manual labour, like farming. Unlike priesthood, this life was open to both men and women – men became monks and women nuns. Except in a few cases, all abbeys were single-sex communities, that is, there were separate abbeys for men and women. Like priests, monks and nuns did not marry.

From small communities of 10 or 20 men/women, monasteries grew to communities often of several hundred, with large buildings and landed estates, with attached schools or colleges and hospitals. They contributed to the development of the arts. Abbess Hildegard (see p.135) was a gifted musician, and did much to develop the practice of community singing of prayers in church. From the thirteenth century, some groups of monks – called friars – chose not to be based in a monastery but to move from place to place, preaching to the people and living on charity.

The word 'monastery' is derived from the Greek word '*monos*', meaning someone who lives alone.

St Michael's Benedictine abbey in Farnborough, England.

In Benedictine monasteries, there was a manuscript with 73 chapters of rules which were followed by monks for many centuries. Here are some of the rules they had to follow:

Chapter 6: Permission to speak should rarely be granted to monks.

Chapter 7: Humility means obedience.

Chapter 33: No monk should own private property.

Chapter 47: Idleness is the enemy of the soul, so friars and sisters should be occupied at certain times in manual labour, and at fixed hours in sacred reading.

A Benedictine monk working on a manuscript, woodcut.

Chapter 48: The monastery should be laid out in such a way that all necessities be found within its bounds: water, mill, garden, workshops.

By the fourteenth century, there was a growing uncertainty about the value and purpose of monasticism. In England, Langland's poem, *Piers Plowman* (c.1360-70), contrasted the ease and luxury of the lives of some monks with the 'pure faith' of 'simple ploughmen and shepherds and poor common labourers.' Also in England, Chaucer wrote the *Canterbury Tales* (see box below) which had comic portraits of a nun, a monk and a friar.

The Church and Society

Though Europeans became Christian, they still held on to some of their old beliefs in magic and folk traditions. Christmas and Easter became important dates from the fourth century. Christ's birth, celebrated on 25 December, replaced an old pre-Roman festival, the date of which was calculated by the solar calendar. Easter marked the crucifixion of Christ and his rising from the dead. But its date was not a fixed one, because it replaced an older festival to celebrate the coming of spring after a long winter, dated by the lunar calendar. Traditionally, on that day, people of each village used to make a tour of their village lands. With the coming of Christianity, they continued to do this, but they called the village the 'parish' (the area under the supervision of one priest). Overworked peasants welcomed 'holy days'/holidays because they were not expected to work then. These days were meant for prayer, but people usually spent a good part of them having fun and feasting.

Pilgrimage was an important part of a Christian's life, and many people went on long journeys to shrines of martyrs or to big churches.

'When in April the sweet showers fall
And pierce the drought of March to the root
And the small birds are making melody
That sleep away the night with open eye…
(So Nature pricks them and their heart engages);
Then people long to go on pilgrimages,
And palmers* long to seek the foreign shrines
Of far-off saints, revered in various lands.
And especially from every shire
Of England, to Canterbury they make their journey.'

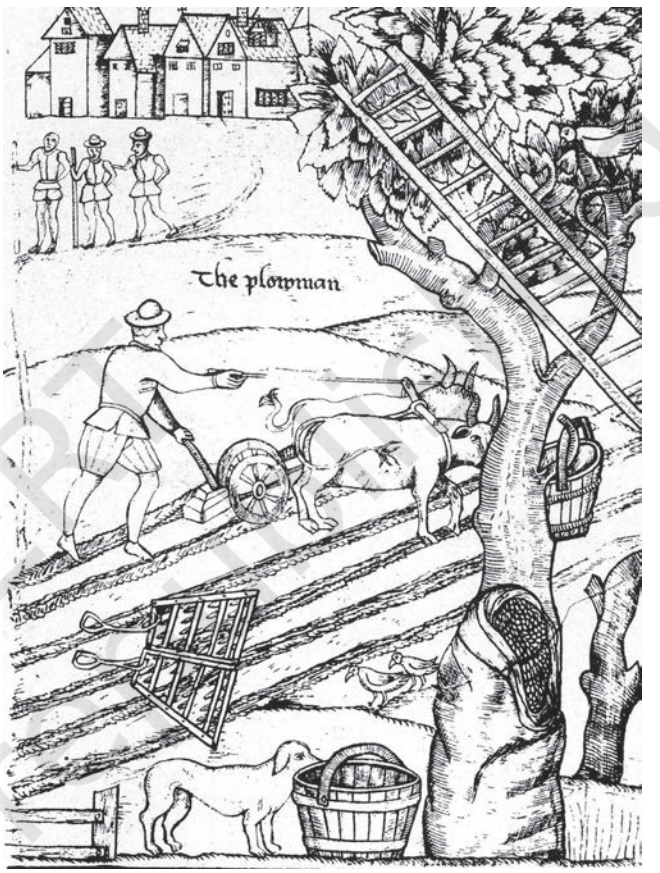
– Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340–1400), *The Canterbury Tales*. This was written in Middle English, and the verse is a translation in modern English.

*A monk who travels to distant shrines.

The Third Order: Peasants, Free and Unfree

Let us now turn to the vast majority of people, namely, those who sustained the first two orders. Cultivators were of two kinds: free peasants and serfs (from the verb 'to serve').

Free peasants held their farms as tenants of the lord. The men had to render military service (at least forty days every year). Peasant families had to set aside certain days of the week, usually three but often more, when they would go to the lord's estate and work there. The output from such labour, called labour-rent, would go directly to the lord. In addition, they could be required to do other unpaid labour services, like digging ditches, gathering firewood, building fences and repairing roads and buildings. Besides helping in the fields, women and children had to do other tasks. They spun thread, wove cloth, made candles and pressed grapes to prepare wine for the lord's use. There was one direct tax called 'taille' that kings sometimes imposed on peasants (the clergy and nobles were exempted from paying this).



An English ploughman, sixteenth-century sketch.

Serfs cultivated plots of land, but these belonged to the lord. Much of the produce from this had to be given to the lord. They also had to work on the land which belonged *exclusively* to the lord. They received no wages and could not leave the estate without the lord's permission. The lord claimed a number of monopolies at the expense of his serfs. Serfs could use only their lord's mill to grind their flour, his oven to bake their bread, and his wine-presses to distil wine and beer. The lord could decide whom a serf should marry, or might give his blessing to the serf's choice, but on payment of a fee.

England

Feudalism developed in England from the eleventh century.

The Angles and Saxons, from central Europe, had settled in England in the sixth century. The country's name, England, is a variant of 'Angle-land'. In the eleventh century, William, the Duke of Normandy*, crossed the English Channel with an army and defeated the Saxon king of England. From this time, France and England were often at war because of disputes over territory and trade.

*The present Queen of England is descended from William I.

Hever Castle, England, thirteenth century.

William I had the land mapped, and distributed it in sections to 180 Norman nobles who had migrated with him. The lords became the chief tenants of the king, and were expected to give him military help. They were obliged to supply a certain number of knights to the king. They soon began to gift some of their own lands to knights who would serve them just as they in turn served the king. They could not, however, use their knights for private warfare, which was forbidden in England. Anglo-Saxon peasants became tenants of various levels of landholders.

Factors Affecting Social and Economic Relations

While members of the first two orders saw the social system as stable and unchanging, there were several processes which were transforming the system. Some of these, such as changes in the environment, were gradual and almost imperceptible. Others were more dramatic, like the changes in agricultural technology and land use. These in turn were shaped by and had an effect on the social and economic ties between lords and vassals. Let us examine these processes one by one.

The Environment

From the fifth to the tenth centuries, most of Europe was covered with vast forests. Thus the land available for agriculture was limited. Also, peasants dissatisfied with their conditions could flee from oppression and take refuge in the forest. Europe was undergoing an intensely cold climatic spell in this period. This led to severe and prolonged winters, a shortened growing season for crops, and reduced yields from agriculture.

From the eleventh century, Europe entered a warm phase. Average temperatures increased, which had a profound effect on agriculture. Peasants now had a longer growing season and the soil, now less subjected to frost, could be more easily ploughed. Environmental historians have noted that there was a significant receding of the forest line in many parts of Europe. This made expansion of the area under cultivation possible.

Land Use

Initially, agricultural technology was very primitive. The only mechanical aid available to the peasant was the wooden plough, drawn by a team of oxen. This plough could at best scratch the surface of the earth and was unable to fully draw out the natural productivity of the soil. Agriculture was therefore very labour intensive. Fields had to be

dug by hand, often once in four years, and enormous manual labour was required.

Also, an ineffective method of crop rotation was in use. The land was divided in half, one field was planted in autumn with winter wheat, while the other field was left fallow. Rye was planted on this piece of fallow land the next year while the other half was put to fallow. With this system, the soil slowly deteriorated, and famines were not uncommon. Chronic malnutrition alternated with devastating famines and life was difficult for the poor.

Despite these hardships, the lords were anxious to maximise their incomes. Since it was not possible to increase output from the land, the peasants were forced to bring under cultivation all the land in the manorial estate, and spend more time doing this than they were legally bound to do. The peasants did not bow quietly to oppression. Since they could not protest openly, they resorted to passive resistance. They spent more time cultivating their own fields, and kept much of the product of that labour for themselves. They also avoided performing unpaid extra services. They came into conflict with the lords over pasture and forest lands, and saw these lands as resources to be used by the whole community, while the lords treated these as their private property.

New Agricultural Technology

By the eleventh century, there is evidence of several technological changes.

Instead of the basic wooden ploughs, cultivators began using heavy iron-tipped ploughs and mould-boards. These ploughs could dig much deeper and the mould-boards turned the topsoil properly. With this the nutrients from the soil were better utilised.

The methods of harnessing animals to the plough improved. Instead of the neck-harness, the shoulder-harness came into use. This enabled animals to exert greater power. Horses were now better shod, with iron horseshoes, which prevented foot decay. There was increased use of wind and water energy for agriculture. More water-powered and wind-powered mills were set up all over Europe for purposes like milling corn and pressing grapes.

There were also changes in land use. The most revolutionary one was the switch from a two-field to a three-field system. In this, peasants could use a field two years out of three if they planted it with one crop in autumn and a different crop in spring a year and a half later. That meant that farmers could break their holdings into three fields. They could plant one with wheat or rye in autumn for human consumption. The second could be used in spring to raise peas, beans and lentils for human use, and oats and barley for the horses. The third field lay fallow. Each year they rotated the use among the three fields.

With these improvements, there was an almost immediate increase in the amount of food produced from each unit of land. Food availability

doubled. The greater use of plants like peas and beans meant more vegetable proteins in the diet of the average European and a better source of fodder for their animals. For cultivators, it meant better opportunities. They could now produce more food from less land. The average size of a peasant's farm shrank from about 100 acres to 20 to 30 acres by the thirteenth century. Holdings which were smaller could be more efficiently cultivated and reduced the amount of labour needed. This gave the peasants time for other activities.

Some of these technological changes cost a lot of money. Peasants did not have enough money to set up watermills and windmills. Therefore the initiative was taken by the lords. But peasants were able to take the initiative in many things, such as extending arable land. They also switched to the three-field rotation of crops, and set up small forges and smithies in the villages, where iron-tipped ploughs and horseshoes were made and repaired cheaply.

From the eleventh century, the personal bonds that had been the basis of feudalism were weakening, because economic transactions were becoming more and more money based. Lords found it convenient to ask for rent in cash, not services, and cultivators were selling their crops for money (instead of exchanging them for other goods) to traders, who would then take such goods to be sold in the towns. The increasing use of money began to influence prices, which became higher in times of poor harvests. In England, for instance, agricultural prices doubled between the 1270s and the 1320s.

A Fourth Order? New Towns and Townspeople

Expansion in agriculture was accompanied by growth in three related areas: population, trade and towns. From roughly 42 million in 1000, Europe's population stood at 62 million around 1200 and 73 million in 1300. Better food meant a longer lifespan. By the thirteenth century, an average European could expect to live 10 years longer than in the eighth century. Women and girls had shorter lifespans compared to men because the latter ate better food.

The towns of the Roman Empire had become deserted and ruined after its fall. But from the eleventh century, as agriculture increased and became able to sustain higher levels of population, towns began to grow again. Peasants who had surplus grain to sell needed a place where they could set up a selling centre and where they could buy tools and cloth. This led to the growth of periodic fairs and small marketing centres which gradually developed town-like features – a town square, a church, roads where merchants built shops and homes, an office where those who governed the town could meet. In other places, towns grew around large castles, bishops' estates, or large churches.

In towns, instead of services, people paid a tax to the lords who owned the land on which the town stood. Towns offered the prospect

Reims, French cathedral-town, seventeenth-century map.

ACTIVITY 3

Look carefully at this map and the drawing of a town. What would you notice as special features of medieval European towns? How were they different from towns in other places and other periods of time?

of paid work and freedom from the lord's control, for young people from peasant families.

'Town air makes free' was a popular saying. Many serfs craving to be free ran away and hid in towns. If a serf could stay for one year and one day without his lord discovering him, he would become a free man. Many people in towns were free peasants or escaped serfs who provided unskilled labour. Shopkeepers and merchants were numerous. Later there was need for individuals with specialised skills, like bankers and lawyers. The bigger towns had populations of about 30,000. They could be said to have formed a 'fourth' order.

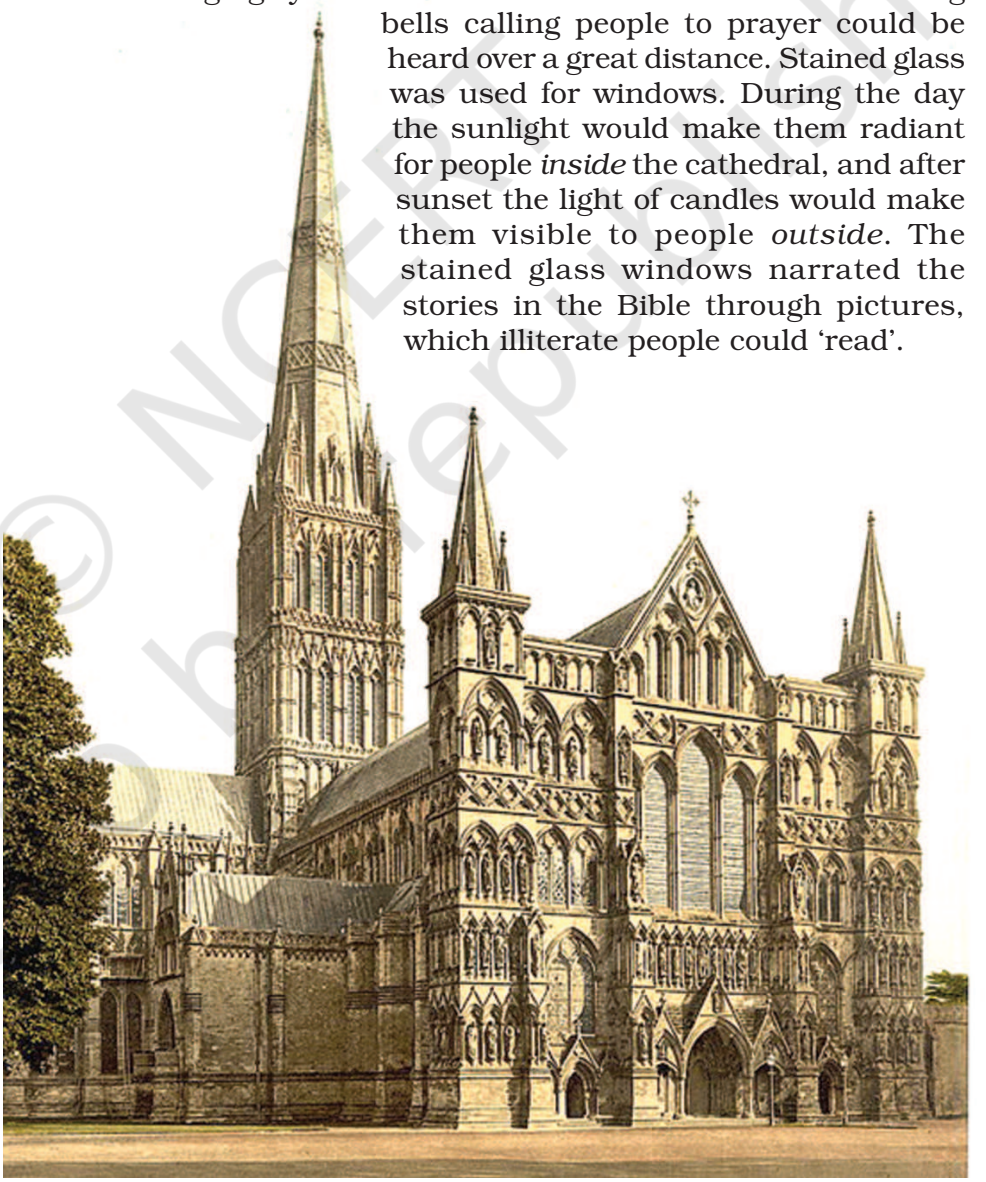
The basis of economic organisation was the guild. Each craft or industry was organised into a guild, an association which controlled the quality of the product, its price and its sale. The 'guild-hall' was a feature of every town; it was a building for ceremonial functions, and where the heads of all the guilds met formally. Guards patrolled the town walls and musicians were called to play at feasts and in civic processions, and innkeepers looked after travellers.

By the eleventh century, new trade routes with West Asia were developing (see Theme 5). Scandinavian merchants were sailing south from the North Sea to exchange furs and hunting-hawks for cloth; English traders came to sell tin. In France, by the twelfth century, commerce and crafts began to grow. Earlier, craftsmen used to travel from manor to manor; now they found it easier to settle in one place where goods could be produced and traded for food. As the number of towns grew and trade continued to expand, town merchants became rich and powerful, and rivalled the power of the nobility.

Cathedral-towns

One of the ways that rich merchants spent their money was by making donations to churches. From the twelfth century, large churches – called cathedrals – were being built in France. These belonged to monasteries, but different groups of people contributed to their construction with their own labour, materials or money. Cathedrals were built of stone, and took many years to complete. As they were being built, the area around the cathedrals became more populated, and when they were completed they became centres of pilgrimage. Thus, small towns developed around them.

Cathedrals were designed so that the priest's voice could be heard clearly within the hall where large numbers of people gathered, and so that the singing by monks could sound beautiful and the chiming bells calling people to prayer could be heard over a great distance. Stained glass was used for windows. During the day the sunlight would make them radiant for people *inside* the cathedral, and after sunset the light of candles would make them visible to people *outside*. The stained glass windows narrated the stories in the Bible through pictures, which illiterate people could 'read'.



Salisbury Cathedral, England.

'Because of the inadequacy which we often felt on feast days, for the narrowness of the place forced the women to run towards the altar upon the heads of the men with much anguish and noisy confusion, [we decided] to enlarge and amplify the noble church…

We also caused to be painted, by the exquisite hands of many masters from different regions, a splendid variety of new windows… Because these windows are very valuable on account of their wonderful execution and the profuse expenditure of painted glass and sapphire glass, we appointed an official master craftsman for their protection, and also a goldsmith…who would receive their allowances, namely, coins from the altar and flour from the common storehouse of the brethren, and who would never neglect their duty, to look after these [works of art].'

– Abbot Suger (1081-1151) about the Abbey of St Denis, near Paris.

Stained-glass window, Chartres cathedral, France, fifteenth century.

The Crisis of the Fourteenth Century

By the early fourteenth century, Europe's economic expansion slowed down. This was due to three factors.

In northern Europe, by the end of the thirteenth century the warm summers of the previous 300 years had given way to bitterly cold summers. Seasons for growing crops were reduced by a month and it became difficult to grow crops on higher ground. Storms and oceanic flooding destroyed many farmsteads, which resulted in less income in taxes for governments. The opportunities offered by favourable climatic conditions before the thirteenth century had led to large-scale reclamation of the land of forests and pastures for agriculture. But intensive ploughing had exhausted the soil despite the practice of the three-field rotation of crops, because clearance was not accompanied by proper soil conservation. The shortage of pasturage reduced the number of cattle. Population growth was outstripping resources, and the immediate result was famine. Severe famines hit Europe between 1315 and 1317, followed in the 1320s by massive cattle deaths.

In addition, trade was hit by a severe shortage of metal money because of a shortfall in the output of silver mines in Austria and Serbia. This forced governments to reduce the silver content of the currency, and to mix it with cheaper metals.

The worst was yet to come. As trade expanded in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, ships carrying goods from distant countries had started arriving in European ports. Along with the ships came rats – carrying the deadly bubonic plague infection (the 'Black Death'). Western Europe, relatively isolated in earlier centuries, was hit by the epidemic between 1347 and 1350. The modern estimate of mortality in that epidemic is that 20 per cent of the people of the whole of Europe died, with some places losing as much as 40 per cent of the population.

> 'How many valiant men, how many fair ladies, (had) breakfast with their kinfolk and the same night supped with their ancestors in the next world! The condition of the people was pitiable to behold. They sickened by the thousands daily, and died unattended and without help. Many died in the open street, others dying in their houses, made it known by the stench of their rotting bodies. Consecrated churchyards did not suffice for the burial of the vast multitude of bodies, which were heaped by the hundreds in vast trenches, like goods in a ships hold and covered with a little earth.'
>
> – Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-75), Italian author.

As trade centres, cities were the hardest hit. In enclosed communities like monasteries and convents, when one individual contracted the plague, it was not long before everyone did. And in almost every case, none survived. The plague took its worst toll among infants, the young and the elderly. There were other relatively minor episodes of plague in the 1360s and 1370s. The population of Europe, 73 million in 1300, stood reduced to 45 million in 1400.

This catastrophe, combined with the economic crisis, caused immense social dislocation. Depopulation resulted in a major shortage of labour. Serious imbalances were created between agriculture and manufacture, because there were not enough people to engage in both equally. Prices of agricultural goods dropped as there were fewer people to buy. Wage rates increased because the demand for labour, particularly agricultural labour, rose in England by as much as 250 per cent in the aftermath of the Black Death. The surviving labour force could now demand twice their earlier wages.

Social Unrest

The income of lords was thus badly hit. It declined as agricultural prices came down and wages of labourers increased. In desperation, they tried to give up the money-contracts they had entered into and revive labour-services. This was violently opposed by peasants, particularly the better-educated and more prosperous ones. In 1323, peasants revolted in Flanders, in 1358 in France, and in 1381 in England.

Though these rebellions were ruthlessly crushed, it is significant that they occurred with the most violent intensity in those areas which had experienced the prosperity of the economic expansion – a sign that peasants were attempting to protect the gains they had made in previous centuries. Despite the severe repression, the sheer intensity of peasant opposition ensured that the old feudal relations could not be reimposed. The money economy was too far advanced to be reversed. Therefore, though the lords succeeded in crushing the revolts, the peasants ensured that the feudal privileges of earlier days could not be reinvented.

Eleventh to Fourteenth Centuries	
1066	Normans defeat Anglo-Saxons and conquer England
1100 ONWARDS	Cathedrals being built in France
1315–17	Great famine in Europe
1347–50	Black Death
1338–1461	Hundred Years War between England and France
1381	Peasants' revolts

ACTIVITY 4

Read through the events and processes listed with dates, and connect them into a narrative account.

Political Changes

Developments in the political sphere paralleled social processes. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, European kings strengthened their military and financial power. The powerful new states they created were as significant for Europe as the economic changes that were occurring. Historians have therefore called these kings 'the new monarchs'. Louis XI in France, Maximilian in Austria, Henry VII in England and Isabelle and Ferdinand in Spain were absolutist rulers, who started the process of organising standing armies, a permanent bureaucracy and national taxation and, in Spain and Portugal, began to play a role in Europe's expansion overseas.

Queen Elizabeth I of England at a picnic, late sixteenth century.

The most important reason for the triumph of these monarchies was the social changes which had taken place in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The dissolution of the feudal system of lordship and vassalage, and the slow rate of economic growth had given the first opportunity to kings to increase their control over their powerful and not-so-powerful subjects. Rulers dispensed with the system of feudal levies for their armies and introduced professionally trained infantry equipped with guns and siege artillery (see Theme 3) directly under their control. The resistance of the aristocracies crumbled in the face of the firepower of the kings.

The New Monarchy	
1461–1559	New monarchs in France
1474–1556	New monarchs in Spain
1485–1547	New monarchs in England

By increasing taxes, monarchs got enough revenues to support larger armies and thus defended and expanded their frontiers and overcame internal resistance to royal authority. Centralisation, however, did not occur without resistance from the aristocracy. A common thread running through all types of opposition to the monarchies was the question of taxation. In England, rebellions occurred and were put down in 1497, 1536, 1547, 1549 and 1553. In France, Louis XI (1461-83) had to wage a long struggle against dukes and princes. Lesser nobles, often members of local assemblies, resisted this royal usurpation of their powers. The 'religious' wars in France in the sixteenth century were in part a contest between royal privileges and regional liberties.

Nemours Castle, France, fifteenth century.

The nobility managed a tactical shift in order to ensure their survival. From being opponents to the new regimes, they quickly transformed themselves into loyalists. It is for this reason that royal absolutism has been called a modified form of feudalism. Precisely the same class of people who had been rulers in the feudal system – the lords – continued to dominate the political scene. They were given permanent positions in the administrative service. But the new regimes were different in some important ways.

The king was no longer at the apex of a pyramid where loyalty had been a matter of personal dependence and trust. He was now at the centre of an elaborate courtier society and a network of patron–client relationships. All monarchies, weak or powerful, needed the cooperation of those who could command authority. Patronage became the means of ensuring such cooperation. And patronage could be given or obtained by means of money. Therefore money became an important way in which non-aristocratic elements like merchants and bankers could gain access to the court. They lent money to the kings, who used it to pay the wages of soldiers. Rulers thus made space for non-feudal elements in the state system.

The later history of France and England was to be shaped by these changes in the power structures. In the reign of the child-king Louis XIII of France, in 1614, a meeting was held of the French consultative assembly, known as the Estates-General (with three houses to represent the three estates/orders – clergy, nobility, and the rest). After this, it

was not summoned again for nearly two centuries, till 1789, because the kings did not want to share power with the three orders.

What happened in England was very different. Even before the Norman Conquest, the Anglo-Saxons had a Great Council, which the king had to consult before imposing any tax. This developed into what was called the Parliament, which consisted of the House of Lords, the members of which were the lords and the clergy, and the House of Commons, representing towns and rural areas. King Charles I ruled for 11 years (1629–40) without calling Parliament. When he was forced to call it, because he needed money, a section of Parliament decided to go to war against him, and later executed him and established a republic. This did not last long, and monarchy was restored, but on the condition that Parliament would be called regularly.

Today, France has a republican form of government and England has a monarchy. This is because of the different directions that the histories of the two countries took after the seventeenth century.

Exercises

Answer in brief

1. Describe two features of early feudal society in France.
2. How did long-term changes in population levels affect economy and society in Europe?
3. Why did knights become a distinct group, and when did they decline?
4. What was the function of medieval monasteries?

Answer in a short essay

5. Imagine and describe a day in the life of a craftsman in a medieval French town.
6. Compare the conditions of life for a French serf and a Roman slave.