

CHAPTER
1
SECTION 3

Section Summary

BEGINNINGS OF CIVILIZATION

READING CHECK

What is significant about the rise of cities?

VOCABULARY STRATEGY

What does the word *complex* mean in the underlined sentence? Notice the signal word *more* appears before *complex*. In what way do you think writing changed? Use the signal word to help you learn what *complex* means in the sentence.

READING SKILL

Summarize Explain what caused cultural diffusion.

The earliest civilizations developed near major rivers. Rivers provided water, transportation, and food. Floodwaters made the soil fertile. In such rich conditions, farmers produced **surpluses**, which allowed them to store food and feed growing populations. As populations grew, villages expanded into cities. Away from these cities, people lived in farming villages or as nomadic herders on grasslands, or **steppes**. Unlike these **traditional economies**, however, in the new cities some people had jobs other than farming.

The rise of cities is the main feature of **civilization**. In addition to this, historians distinguish other basic features of most early civilizations. They include organized governments, complex religions, job specialization, social classes, arts and architecture, public works, and writing.

In these early civilizations, central governments led by chiefs or elders coordinated large-scale projects such as farming or public works, established laws, and organized defense. Most people were **polytheistic**, believing in many gods. Usually, the gods were associated with natural forces such as the sun or rivers. Also, for the first time, individuals began to specialize in certain jobs. Some became **artisans**. In many civilizations, people's jobs determined their social rank. Priests and nobles usually occupied the top level. Wealthy merchants and artisans were next. Most people were peasants and held the lowest social rank. Art and architecture developed, reflecting the beliefs and values of the civilization. Skilled workers built large, ornate palaces and temples decorated with paintings and statues. Many civilizations also developed writing from **pictographs**. As writing grew more complex, only specially trained people called **scribes** could read and write.

Over time, early civilizations changed. Famine, drought, or other disasters sometimes led people to migrate. Migration, as well as trade and warfare, led to **cultural diffusion**. Trade introduced people to new goods or better methods of making them. In warfare, victorious armies forced their ways of life on conquered peoples while they incorporated aspects of the new cultures into their own. Rulers acquired more territory. This brought about the development of **city-states** and, later, the rise of the first **empires**.

Review Questions

1. Why did early civilizations develop near major rivers?

2. What roles did central governments have in early civilizations?
