chapter two: armies and empires, 3500-300 b.c.e.

chapter outline

power and civilization
  kings, queens, and priests
  weapons and warriors
  waging war

bronze age kingdoms: in egypt, and mesopotamia
  egypt and its pharaohs
  mesopotamian kingdoms

bronze age kingdoms: in the aegean, and the near east
  the arrival of the indo-europeans
  civilizations of the aegean and asia minor
  near eastern rivalries and the end of the bronze age

iron age empires of the middle east
  philistines, israelites, and phoenicians
  assyria, babylon, and persia

bronze and iron age kingdoms: in east and south asia
  heaven's mandate in china
  aryans and emperors in india

the birth of the west
  greece, europe, and the west
  from city-state to empire

chapter summary

this chapter focuses attention on the creation of new kingdoms and empires throughout europe, asia, the middle east, and the subcontinent of india. the first type of government discussed is a theocracy, that is, a society where people believe they are governed by their gods, who are represented by their priests. in addition to priests, other important members of society were warriors, who began to develop more advanced weaponry to enable them to be successful on the battlefield. these warriors represented their kings on the battlefield, and enslaved the defeated populations to serve the king. warfare led to the destruction of numerous societies and civilizations throughout the ages.

the leaders of egypt, the pharaohs, came to power by uniting the many different small communities of the nile region, and unifying them against outside aggressors. egyptian society grew in size, prestige, and power, and the kingdom expanded dramatically. however, despite their natural barriers, after 1700 b.c.e., egypt was frequently attacked and conquered, and the country found itself under foreign domination repeatedly.

the mesopotamian idea of kingship was quite different from that of the egyptians. the early kings of mesopotamia ruled cities, rather than kingdoms, and their kingship was passed from one city to the next. eventually, despite their many successes as rulers, the mesopotamian kings were conquered, and sumer became another in a long line of kingdoms to be conquered.

other kingdoms developed in the aegean region. the two most powerful, the mycenaeans and the hittites, controlled the area known today as asia minor. the mycenaeans focused on military power, and their trappings of wealth could be found in swords, shields, chariots, and other implements of war. in fact, the major source of wealth for the mycenaeans was the booty they took during their conquests. the hittites were also a powerful, war-dominated civilization, the first to establish themselves somewhere other than near water. their civilization, located in the mountainous interior of asia minor, was notable for its innovations in iron technology and its skills with chariots. eventually, the hittites challenged egypt for control of the near eastern region known as canaan.

the egyptians had been weakened by the invasion and expulsion of the hyksos. the battle between the hittites and the egyptians for control of palestine lasted for over 150 years, and resulted in the promulgation of the first known written treaty of peace.
The agreement established separate spheres of influence in Palestine.

The Aegean region was not nearly so peaceful during this time. The Mycenaean cities on the mainland were destroyed or had crumbled by 1100 B.C.E. It is possible that, prior to the devastation of the Mycenaean cities, they joined together to raid Troy, the tale told in Homer's epic poem *The Iliad*. By 1200 B.C.E., a series of Sea Peoples had begun to raid the Aegean area, destroying civilizations including the Hittites. With their destruction, all of the great Bronze Age civilizations were gone, and the new Iron Age civilizations were in place to supplant them as the powers of the ancient world.

These Iron Age empires included the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Persians, among others. The Assyrians were the first to exploit iron as a weapon, and they used their advantage to seize enormous amounts of land in the name of their war god, Assur. The Assyrians were primarily known for their cruelty and power, but they also made important cultural contributions to the ancient world, including sculpture and literature. Other peoples, including the Babylonians, attempted to take advantage of the power of iron, but were less successful, achieving only brief moments of supremacy. The people who stepped into the void left by the defeat of the Assyrians were their conquerors, the Persians. The Persians excelled at domination, and led by a series of highly effective kings, their conquest of the Middle East was decisive.

The arrival of two different peoples, the Philistines and the Israelites, to the land of Canaan altered the political structure of that area. The Philistines, a military people, established themselves in Palestine, while the Israelites, who believed their homeland to be Canaan, fought the settlers there to establish themselves. The two powers came into conflict with each other, with the Israelites establishing themselves in the south and the Philistines in the north. Another of the Canaanite people, the Phoenicians, possessed the most advanced culture of the region. The Phoenicians were traders, sailors, and explorers, but they could not escape domination by the later Mediterranean and Middle Eastern empires.

On the other side of the world, the Chinese monarchs struggled to do what the Persians had done: build a strong, centralized monarchy. These kings tended to be weak and dominated by nobles, but under one dynasty, the Zhou, China flourished. The Zhou reign lasted for over 800 years, to be replaced by the short lived Qin dynasty, whose greatest achievement was the construction of the Great Wall of China. The civilization to which the Chinese are often compared, the Indian, also developed a strong hierarchy during this period, one led by religion rather than by military strength.

A century before the ascendancy of the great rulers of China or India, the Europeans had produced their first major leader, a Balkan prince who came to be known as Alexander the Great. His conquest of Persia, coupled with his control of Greece and his march through the ancient Middle East, made him the most powerful ruler of his time. His reign was firmly grounded in the traditions of classical Greece, and he helped to spread the ideas of that culture throughout the ancient world. The Greeks had been forged out of the remnants of the ancient Mycenaean culture, and struggled with the Persians to maintain control of their territory. The Athenian victory over Persia established the Greeks as a power to be contended with, and the Athenians as their most powerful city-state, although they would have serious competition from the Spartans. Into this confusion marched Alexander the Great, who successfully captured the Greek peninsula on his way to controlling most of the ancient world.

**KEY POINTS**

**Power and Civilization:** Kings wage war to enlarge their kingdoms, win glory, and establish dynasties that last for decades or centuries.

**Bronze Age Kingdoms: Egypt, Mesopotamia:** Akkadians, Amorites supplant Sumerians in Mesopotamia; Egypt’s pharaohs struggle for power.

**Bronze Age Kingdoms: the Aegean, the Near East:** Newly formed Mycenaean and Hittite civilizations compete with older states until the region suffers calamities c. 1200 B.C.E.

**Iron Age Empires of the Middle East:** Assyria and Babylon are overcome by the Persians, who subdue the entire Middle East.

**Bronze and Iron Age Kingdoms: East and South Asia:** The Chinese Shang dynasty is followed by the Zhou and the Qin; Aryans conquer India.

**The Birth of the West:** Aegean peoples (later called Greeks) defeat the Persians, the first time a Western civilization gains supremacy.
SUGGESTED FILMS

*The Glory That Was Greece: The Age of Minos.* Time-Life Films, 40 minutes

*The Powerful Gods of Mt. Olympus.* A & E, 50 minutes.

*The Ancient World--Greece.* NYU Film Library, 66 minutes

*The Search for Ulysses.* Carousel Films, 53 minutes

*Cities of the Ancient World: Athens and Ancient Greece.* Questar, 70 minutes

*The Glory that Remains--Persia.* Time-Life Films, 30 minutes

*Mystery of the Minoans.* Discovery Channel, 50 minutes

*Greece: A Moment of Excellence.* Time-Life Films, 48 minutes