PART ONE
The Ancient World

The roots of Western Civilization are to be found in the area around the Mediterranean Sea, a region that gave rise to a series of civilizations that formed the artistic, religious, philosophical, and political basis of Western culture. The valley of the Nile River and the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers were the locations of some of the earliest agriculturally based urban societies.

About 3,500 years before Christ, a civilization flourished in the region that the Greeks would later call Mesopotamia, “the land between the waters” (the Tigris and Euphrates), which approximates modern-day Iraq. This region became the home of a people called the Sumerians. Over the next 2,500 years, the center of civilization and the site of political power spread gradually northward into Babylonia and Assyria.

The first civilization that was established at Sumer developed the city-state, the first example of urban planning, including cobbled streets and multistory buildings (the Tower of Babel); a system of canals for irrigation; and, most importantly, a form of writing. During the Babylonian domination of Mesopotamia, the first written collection of laws was drafted, the Code of Hammurabi, and a level of mathematics was achieved that was unsurpassed until the Renaissance.

Concurrently, about 3000 BCE in the Nile River Valley, the Egyptians were developing another center of culture, a civilization that endured for almost 3,000 years. Also between 2000 and 1400 BCE, the island of Crete (the home of a people known as the Minoans) became the center of an important Mediterranean civilization. Minoan civilization was marked by a high standard of housing and material possessions; organized production of food, textiles, and other products; and a vigorous trade with remote regions. The Minoans eventually extended their cultural influence to mainland Greece. This mainland area included the town of Mycenae, home of a people called the Mycenaean. After about 1400 BCE, the Mycenaean in a reversal of power, came to dominate not only the mainland but also Crete.

Soon after 1200 BCE, the Dorians, a wave of invaders that historians believe came from regions to the north, overwhelmed the Mycenaean civilization, and Greece entered a Dark Age about which little is known. During the Archaic Age of the seventh through fifth centuries BCE Greek colonists left their homes to found colonies in the Mediterranean area. The Classical Age of Greece in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, the period of the great philosophers and playwrights and Greek democracy, ended in the early 300s after the Greeks, led by Alexander
the Great, conquered much of the eastern Mediterranean regions.

The westward colonization that extended Greek art and culture influenced the Etruscans, who were a people living in the Italian peninsula. The Etruscans dominated central Italy from 800 BCE until they were absorbed by the Romans in the third century BCE. The Romans went on to triumph over the other civilizations surrounding the Mediterranean. Eventually the Roman legions conquered not only North Africa and the Middle East but also the lands extending as far northeast to the Danube River and northwest into much of Britain.

Table 1.1 compares the periods and duration of each of these civilizations. As the table shows, some of these peoples reached their peak of power and development at the same time. Others flowered and then declined while new centers of influence were rising. Some cultures borrowed liberally from one another, such as the Greeks, the Etruscans, and the Romans, while others, such as Egypt and Mesopotamia, although in contact, evolved in different directions.

Figure 1.1 shows the locations of the most important of the civilizations of antiquity.

Although each of the Mediterranean cultures had its own distinctive forms of various items of dress, a number of basic garment types can be identified that were common to most of these cultures. The Mediterranean basin possesses a warm climate in which draped clothing is more comfortable than fitted clothing. With a few notable exceptions, garments of the region consisted of a draped length of square,
rectangular, or semicircular fabric. When fastening was required, these draped garments were closed with pins or by sewing. The general term used by archeologists for a pin that was used in holding a garment together is a Roman word, **fibula**.

These draped garments can be further subdivided into loincloths, skirts, tunics, shawls, cloaks, and veils. The **loincloth** was a length of cloth wrapped to cover the genitals. The **skirt**, in the ancient world, began at the waist or slightly below and hung loosely around the body. Skirts were worn by both men and women and varied in length. **Tunics** were simple, one-piece, and often T-shaped garments with openings for the head and the arms. Tunics were usually long enough to cover the torso and, like skirts, were made in many different lengths.

Rectangles, squares, or ovals of fabric were commonly combined with skirts or tunics. These shawl-like garments ranged from pieces that covered only the upper body to larger squares that were wrapped to cover the entire body. Large squares of fabric tied or pinned at the neck, rather like a modern cape, served as a **cloak** or outdoor covering. **Veils**, smaller rectangles than either shawls or cloaks, were worn to cover the head and, sometimes, part of the body. Veils were worn almost exclusively by women.

Terminology from these periods can be confusing, as different authorities use different phonetic terms for words that modern people have never heard pronounced and with which readers are unfamiliar. For this reason descriptions of dress must rely upon using the closest modern equivalent for the garment in order that the reader can relate the unfamiliar term to one that is more familiar. Sometimes modern terms have taken on connotations that are misleading or confusing when that term is applied to historic dress. For example, the term **skirt** is associated with an item of women’s clothing. In the ancient world, however, both men and women wore what could be described as skirts. As a result, many sources will refer to the skirt as worn by men as a **kilt**, even though **kilt** is actually a Scottish word for a specific style worn by men. For this reason the authors have chosen to use the nearest equivalent modern word descriptive of the form of the item of dress. This is with the exception of those instances where an ancient word has come into modern usage, such as **toga** (from Latin) or **chiton** (from the Greek).
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CHAPTER TWO

The Ancient Middle East
c. 3500–600 BCE

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Skilled artisans work with ivory veneers and ebony wood.

[Image of a chair and a fresco of a warrior]
The first civilizations in the Middle East were located in Mesopotamia, in the region between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (the name Mesopotamia means “between rivers”). At the same period that the early Mesopotamian civilization was developing between these rivers, the Nile River became the site of the Egyptian civilization.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

**Mesopotamia**

The greater part of ancient Mesopotamia occupied the area extending from the Persian Gulf to near the borders between modern Iraq and Turkey. Towns and cities first developed in the southern parts of the region. Thanks to the rich, fertile plains created by the deposits from the two rivers, agriculture and herding produced sufficient food to enable the establishment of towns and cities where residents developed complex social organizations.

The people called the Sumerians entered the area from the northeast about 3500 BCE. They founded the first cities in southern Mesopotamia. The Sumerian civilization (3500–2500 BCE) invented a form of writing that enabled them to keep records of their activities, codify laws, and transmit knowledge (Figure 2.1). The Sumerians never developed a strong political organization and remained only a loose confederation of city-states that came under the domination of a northern neighbor, Akkad, led by Sargon (c. 2334–2279 BCE), who extended Akkadian influence into Asia Minor. The Amorites, new invaders from the west, conquered Sumer and Akkad and established a new empire with the capital at Babylon. These Babylonians created an autocratic state. During the reign of King Hammurabi (c. 1792–1750 BCE), they extended their control northward. His famous law code, dealing with almost every facet of life, influenced later Middle Eastern law codes, including Mosaic law.

Babylonian power declined after about 1700 BCE as a series of invaders attacked the empire. Control of the region seesawed back and forth among the invaders until after 1000 BCE, when a powerful Assyrian army from the upper Tigris River conquered Babylonia. The Assyrians developed the first great military machine consisting of a large standing army equipped with superior weapons, including iron swords. Their empire, which stretched into Syria, Palestine, and even Egypt, was the largest the Near East had seen. The cruelties of the hated and feared Assyrians led their enemies to conspire against them. This brought about their downfall. In 612 BCE, the armies of the Chaldeans, who now ruled Babylonia, destroyed Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, thereby ending the Assyrian empire. In time, Chaldean Babylon fell to a new and greater power, the Persians under Cyrus in 539 BCE.

Chaldean Babylon was notorious for its luxury and wealth. The Chaldeans constructed the Hanging Gardens, a terraced roof garden considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Motivated by their religion, the Chaldeans became the most competent astronomers in Mesopotamian history. Their records of the movements of the heavenly bodies were maintained for more than 350 years.

![Figure 2.1 As the civilization of the Sumerians grew more complex, they invented a form of writing known as cuneiform to keep records and transmit knowledge. This tool was very useful to manufacturers and merchants of textiles.](http://www.kindersley.com/gettyimages)
**Egypt**

Deserts and seas protected the land of Egypt from foreign invaders. Agriculture flourished thanks to the annual flooding of the Nile, which left behind a rich deposit of soil that made fertilizers unnecessary. These factors enabled the development of an advanced civilization.

The ancient Egyptian kingdoms flourished from about 3200 BCE until about 300 BCE, when Greeks led by Alexander the Great conquered Egypt. Historians have divided Egyptian history into six periods: the early dynastic period, the Old Kingdom, the first intermediate period, the Middle Kingdom, the second intermediate period, and the New Kingdom. Within each period are a number of dynasties or sequences of rule by members of the same family.

During the early dynastic period (c. 2925–2575 BCE), two separate kingdoms that bordered the Nile were united under the first pharaoh, or king. The first pyramid, a step pyramid, was constructed (Figure 2.2). Pyramids were intended not only to be the tombs of the pharaohs but also a sign that the Egyptian state was indestructible. The newly unified state required that records be kept. To meet this need the earliest form of Egyptian writing was invented.

By the time of the Old Kingdom (2575–2130 BCE), the powers of the pharaohs had become unlimited, and pyramid building had become the chief activity of the monarchy. The pyramids were astounding feats of engineering, dwarfing monuments from other eras. The great pyramid of Cheops, which reached the height of 481 feet, contained more than two million limestone blocks fitted together with great precision. Some weighed more than 15 tons. But pyramid building exhausted the government’s revenues. Weak pharaohs lost control of the government, and local nobles, usurping power, began to act like petty kings.

The succeeding first intermediate period (c. 2130–2050 BCE) was a time of turmoil, civil war, and disorder. Tombs of the pharaohs were looted, and bandits robbed travelers; desert tribes invaded Egypt.

Pharaohs of the 11th and 12th dynasties established the Middle Kingdom (c. 1938–1650 BCE) and united the country after ending the period of anarchy. A stronger central government was restored; public works that benefited the population replaced pyramid building. Egyptian influence was extended into Palestine and south along the Nile. As prosperity returned, wealth became more widespread among the Egyptian people. This period ended with the first serious threat from abroad.

The second intermediate period (c. 1630–1540 BCE) brought revolts by the nobility and a weakening of the pharaohs’ power. About 1630 BCE, a nomadic people from western Asia, the Hyksos, seized control of Egypt. The Hyksos, who brought horse-drawn chariots and new weapons, soon adopted Egyptian customs and ways, including the power and title of pharaoh. The Egyptians launched a revolt against the hated Hyksos under the leadership of the founder of the 18th dynasty, finally driving them from Egypt. In the period of the New Kingdom (1470–11th century BCE, also called the period of Empire), Egypt became a strong, military power under the pharaoh Thutmose III (1504–1450 BCE). His leadership of 17 military campaigns expanded Egyptian rule eastward to the Euphrates.

Thutmose III made Egypt a powerful force in the
eastern Mediterranean region. The new monarchy restored temples and built luxurious palaces. Earlier art forms that had been stylized and monumental became more natural and realistic.

By the 12th century, Egyptian power had declined and society had decayed; the empire was disappearing as foreign powers conquered Egypt. The Persians invaded in 525 BCE. Egypt stagnated, its glory far in the past. In 332 BCE, Alexander the Great, a Greek from Macedonia, conquered Egypt, ending Persian rule. Successive periods of Egyptian history were marked by domination first by Greece and then by Rome. A truly native Egyptian civilization had ended (Figure 2.3).

Details of the life and history of Egypt are more complete than those for Mesopotamia over the same period. Like the Mesopotamians, the Egyptians had a form of writing, known as hieroglyphic, which historians have deciphered. Written records provide an abundant source of information about Egyptian life and religion. The Egyptians not only believed in life after death but also buried personal possessions (e.g., tools, furniture, food, and drink) with the dead so that they might use them in the afterlife. The hot, dry climate of the desert where prominent Egyptians were buried preserved these objects, often in excellent condition. In addition, many of the temples and tombs contained paintings and sculpture, but unlike the Mesopotamians whose art generally emphasized the ceremonial aspects of life, the Egyptians painted and sculpted individuals engaged in a variety of daily tasks (see Figure 2.12).

DIFFERENCES IN THE EGYPTIAN AND MESOPOTAMIAN CIVILIZATIONS

One of the most outstanding aspects of Egyptian civilization is the relative slowness with which changes occurred. It is not that there were no significant changes in the 3,000 years during which this civilization existed, but they took place so gradually that they seemed almost

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**FIGURE 2.3** As Egyptian civilization declined, other states ruled Egypt. During the period that Greece under Alexander the Great was the ruling power, Egyptians adopted Greek styles of dress. (Alinari/Art Resource, NY)
imperceptible, even over several hundred years. For almost 3,000 years, Egyptian civilization was scarcely affected by foreign cultural and political influences. According to historian Fairbairns (1962), “Between the Egypt of the Pyramid Age and that of Cleopatra were many differences, but many of these seem superficial, for much of the hard core of Egyptian thought and institutions was comparatively unchanged after some 25 centuries” (84–85).

The civilizations of Mesopotamia display greater diversity when viewed over a period of 3,000 years. One reason for these differences may be the geographical unity of the landscape in Egypt, in contrast to a variety of landscapes and types of terrain in Mesopotamia. Egypt was a narrow strip of land set in the valley of the Nile where annual floods maintained the fertility of the land. Deserts on either side provided security from invasion, while throughout Egypt farmers carried on the ceaseless routine of agriculture. In Mesopotamia, regions differed more. Each area supported specific crops, and each crop required special skills and care. The necessary labor force, the investment of capital, and the organization of agriculture were different in each region. For example, flocks had to be moved seasonally, but grain crops required long-term storage and distribution throughout the year. Some crops required long-range planting and planning, while others could be sown and harvested in a short time.

These differences also accounted for some variations between the dress of the two cultures. While the climate in Egypt was relatively warm and uniform throughout the year, that of Mesopotamia was more variable, including both high-altitude areas where warm clothing was required at some times of the year and hot, desert areas.

Another difference was the degree to which each culture was subjected to outside influences. Both traded abroad to obtain raw materials unavailable within the boundaries of the region. With trade came outside influences. Egypt, however, was less open to outside influences because of the sea and the desert, natural barriers that provided security from foreigners. Mesopotamia lacked natural barriers to invasion, and foreign invaders entered periodically. Some came to dominate the region and adopted many traditions of the native people. In this way traditions were perpetuated, but at the same time new ideas were also incorporated into the culture. Egypt maintained a continuity in political and religious tradition that was seriously threatened from outside only once, by the Hyksos.

**MESOPOTAMIAN CIVILIZATION**

This review of the history of the Mesopotamians is divided into three periods: Early Sumerian (c. 3500–2500 BCE), Late Sumerian and Babylonian (c. 2500–1000 BCE), and Assyrian (c. 1000–600 BCE). Relatively little is known of the earliest period of Sumerian history. The record is clearer during the latter part of the period and it is possible to obtain a better picture of some aspects of life, in general, and of dress in particular.

**Social Structure**

The Babylonian culture was based on the earlier Sumerian civilization, and the social structure of the Babylonians was similar to that of the Sumerians. Social classes were clearly defined. The nobility stood far above all the rest of society. Babylonian society was divided into those who were free; an intermediate class of people who might be called “the poor,” who were “worth little”; and the slaves, who were “worth nothing.” The free made up a sort of middle class of artisans, tradesmen, lesser public officials, and laborers. Farmers were generally part of the intermediate or poor class. Slaves were relatively few in Sumer, but by the time of the Babylonians they had grown in number as they became an increasingly necessary part of the workforce. Slaves could be foreign captives, the children of slaves, or wives or children of free men sold into slavery to meet the debts of the father of the family. Adopted children who disgraced their adoptive parents could also be sold into slavery (Contenau, 1954).

**The Family**

The family was patriarchal in structure. Marriage was a contractual arrangement generally made to cement
an economic alliance between two families. By this contract, a man had a principal wife but could, and usually did, keep one or more concubines as well. Divorce was easily obtained if the principal wife was unable to have children.

The art that remains from Sumer and Babylonia indicates that the position of women was a subordinate one. Representations of men predominate, and illustrations of women—usually goddesses, priestesses, or queens—are relatively rare. Women were not completely without rights, however, as Babylonian legal codes extended to them the right to testify in court cases and provided some degree of economic protection in the case of the death of a husband.

Although children had no legal rights, letters written on clay tablets and sent from children of the upper classes to their parents reveal that they felt free to demand the clothing or jewelry that they considered appropriate to their rank. One boy wrote to his mother:

*From year to year the clothes of the young gentlemen here become better, but you let my clothes get worse from year to year. Indeed you persisted in making my clothes poorer and more scanty. At a time when in our house wool is used up like bread, you have made me poor clothes. The son of Adididdinam whose father is only an assistant of my father has two new sets of clothes while you fuss even about a single set of clothes for me. In spite of the fact that you bore me and his mother only adopted him, his mother loves him, while you do not love me.* (Oppenheim, 1967, 67)

Another boy wrote to his father:

*I have never before written to you for something precious I wanted. But if you want to be like a father to me, get me a fine string full of beads, to be worn around the head it should be full [of beads] and it should be beautiful. If I see it and dislike it, I shall send it back! Also send the cloak, of which I spoke to you.* (Oppenheim, 1967, 85)

**Fabrics and Cloth Production**

The cloak and the new sets of clothes these boys asked for were most likely made of wool. The chief products of Mesopotamia are described as barley, wool, and oil. These fabrics were produced not just for domestic consumption, but were traded to other regions as well. Flax is occasionally mentioned in the ancient records, but although fragments of linen have been found in excavations and there were skilled linen weavers, linen was clearly less important than wool, which is mentioned often along with quotes for current prices. Clothes, tapestries, and curtains were made of wool. One contract has been found that describes the period of apprenticeship for a weaver as 5 years, an exceptionally long time when compared with the training of other artisans. However, the variety of fabrics and the decorations applied to them seem to have been quite complex, so the weaver may have had to master quite a complicated system of manufacture (Leix, 1938).

In writing about women’s work in the ancient world, Barber (1994) noted that in the 19th century BCE women often played an important role in producing Mesopotamian textiles. Women seem to have been responsible for spinning and weaving, while men may have completed the dyeing and finishing (Figure 2.4). Although men traveled long distances to trade in textiles, women often supervised local textile production and took care of aspects of business close to home.

![Figure 2.4 Back strap looms were an early technology for weaving textiles. With the yarns wrapped around the waist, the weaver could increase or decrease the tension needed on the lengthwise by changing position. (© Gianfr Dagi Otti/Corbis)
SOURCES OF EVIDENCE ABOUT SUMERIAN COSTUME

The evidence for details of the costume of Mesopotamia is largely derived from visual materials. Depictions of individuals are found on seals (small engraved markers used to press an identification into clay and wax). These seals had scenes of Sumerian mythology incised or cut into them. A few wall paintings survive, as do small votive statuettes of worshippers left at shrines as substitutes for the worshippers themselves, to provide a sort of perpetual presence of the individual at the temple. Some impressions of Sumerian dress can be gained from these rather limited remains and from the excavation of Sumerian tombs.

MESOPOTAMIAN/SUMERIAN COSTUME: c. 3500–2500 BCE

Costume Components for Men and Women

Garments

Skirts, worn by both men and women, were the major item of dress seen in the art of this era. In the earliest period, these were probably made of sheepskin with the fleece still attached. A Greek word, kaunakes, has been applied to this fleece or fleecelike fabric. Lengths varied: Servants and soldiers wore shorter lengths; royalty and deities were depicted in longer lengths. Skirts apparently wrapped around the body. When fabric ends were long enough, an end of the fabric length was passed up, under a belt, and over one shoulder (Figure 2.5). Even after sheepskin had been supplemented by woven cloth, the cloth was fringed at the hem or constructed to simulate tufts of wool on the fleece (Figure 2.6).

Fragments of cloth from an excavation of the tomb of a queen showed that she and her attendants wore a bright red, heavy woolen fabric at the time of their deaths.

Belts were located at the waist to hold skirts in place. They appear to have been wide and padded.

Cloaks were probably made from animal skins, leather, or heavy, felted cloth and covered the upper part of the body.

Hair and Headdress

Shaving the head was a practice of several Mediterranean cultures, including the early Mesopotamian and the Egyptian. Very likely this was a means of discouraging vermin and for comfort in the hot climate. Mesopotamian men are depicted both clean shaven and bearded. Sometimes their heads are bald (see Figure 2.6).

Both men and women might have pulled their long hair into a chignon (sheen'yon), a bun of hair at the back of the neck, which was held in place by a fillet (fil'it), another name for a headband. Alternatively, they also wore their hair falling straight to the shoulders and held in place by a fillet. Over their heads, soldiers wore closely fitted helmets with pointed tops that may have been made of leather.

Jewelry

From archeological evidence it appears that some royal women apparently wore elaborate gold jewelry. An excavation at the city of Ur from c. 2800 BCE unearthed a beautiful gold and jeweled crown (Figure 2.7), made

FIGURE 2.5 Praying figure. Mesopotamian, Sumerian, c. 2200 BCE. Sumerian man wearing a kaunakes garment in the form of a wrapped skirt. The end of the skirt is thrown over his left shoulder. Both men and women wore the same type of garment. (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)
with delicate leaves and flowers, and massive gold necklaces and earrings. Comparable items have not been found for later periods, nor are they depicted in the art of the period.

**COSTUME OF MESOPOTAMIAN/LATER SUMERIANS AND BABYLONIANS:**

C. 2500–1000 BCE

Styles evolved slowly, and sharp distinctions cannot be made between garments of the later Sumerian and early Babylonian periods. Costume generally increased in complexity. Although men's and women's dress continued to utilize similar elements, evidence indicates a trend toward greater distinctions in the clothing for each gender. Skirts continued in use. Shawls, woven rectangles or squares of fabric, were draped in various ways. Tunics were worn.

**FIGURE 2.7** Woman's headdress and jewelry, including a comb, hair rings, hair ribbons, and earrings found during the excavation of the tomb of what was probably a royal woman in Ur, Mesopotamia, about 2800 BCE. The ornaments were made of gold and the gemstones lapis lazuli and carnelian. (Courtesy of Penn Museum. Image #152100)
Costume Components for Men

Garments
Skirts, loincloths, and tunics probably made up the most common items of dress for the poor. The nobility or mythological figures were depicted wearing a draped garment described by Houston (1964) as made from a square of fabric about 18 inches wide and 56 inches long. Figure 2.8 depicts Ur-Ningirsu, son of Gudea, a ruler of c. 2120 BCE wearing a draped cloth. Sumerian and Babylonian art depicts these garments as smooth surfaced, without draped folds, but this is probably an artistic convention. Not only do the woven fabrics appear to fall without folds, but even faces, skin, and arms have smooth planes and lack detail. Fabrics are fringed or have woven or embroidered edging.

Hair and Headdress
Before 2300 BCE, men are shown both clean shaven and with beards. Later, men are depicted only with beards. Hats are turbanlike and closely fitted at the crown, with a small brim or padded roll at the edge (see Figure 2.8).

Footwear
Feet usually are shown as bare or with sandals, which would have provided covering in rough terrain. Archeologists have found a clay model of a leather shoe that dates from c. 2600 BCE with a tongue, upward curve to the toe, and a pompom on the toe. Born (1940) suggested that such shoes may have originated in mountainous areas where there was snow and that they may have been brought from there to Mesopotamia. This style of shoe seems to have taken on a ceremonial function, being reserved in sculpture for a heroic figure representing the king. "The peaked shoe with a pompom,"
said Born (1940), "is probably to be regarded as a regal attribute" (1210).

Costume for Specialized Occupations

Military Dress
From depictions of armies and military leaders, we can identify the elements of the dress of soldiers. Skirts were probably made of woven fabric. Fringed decoration around the lower edge persisted in military dress. Shawls were worn with skirts. The center of the shawl was placed across the left shoulder, with the ends crossing the chest and carried back to be knotted over the right hip.

Soldiers wore helmets made of leather or metal, sometimes with horn-shaped decorations. Footwear consisted of sandals, which were worn when rough terrain made foot coverings necessary.

Costume Components for Women

Garments
The kaunakes garment persisted for a time for women, but gradually became associated with religious figures (goddesses, priestesses, or minor deities). In this period, garments were cut to cover the entire body, not just one shoulder as in earlier periods. Evidence is inadequate to be certain of the specific design, but possible constructions were a skirt in combination with a short cape cut with an opening for the head or a tunic with openings for the head and arms.

FIGURE 2.8 Statuette of Ur-Ningirsu, Son of Gudea. Mesopotamia, Neo-Sumerian, c. 2100 BCE. The garment shown here was probably made from a rectangular length of fabric wrapped around the body. On his head is a closely fitted hat with a small brim or padded roll. (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)
Houston (1964) reconstructed two additional garment forms (Figure 2.9). Her suggestions are based on evidence from statues such as those in Figure 2.10 in which the lines shown on the statue are also visible in the proposed reconstruction. This statue wears a head covering characteristic of one of the areas in this region. This headdress covers all of the hair except for a narrow section across the forehead. The woman wears a closely fitted necklace; the statue originally had earrings of precious metal or shell, which have not survived.

Hair and Headdress
The chignon held in place with a fillet continued in use; in some representations, hair appears to be confined in a net.

Footwear
Bare feet were common. The well-to-do wore sandals.

Jewelry
A tightly fitted, dog-collar type of necklace made from several rings of metal was shown most often. Archeologists have found beads that originated from as far away as the Indus Valley of India (see Global Connections).

COSTUME OF MESOPOTAMIANS/LATER BABYLONIANS AND THE ASSYRIANS:
c. 1000–600 BCE

The Assyrians adopted Babylonian costume; thus, a clear break between the late Babylonian and early

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**FIGURE 2.9** Houston suggests these reconstructions for Babylonian women's costume. (a) Costume is draped from a rectangle of fabric. Point 2 is placed at center front, points 1 and 3 are drawn under the arms, segment 2–3 crossing over 1–2 in back. Points 1 and 3 are pulled over the shoulder to hang down at each side in front. (b) Costume is draped from a rectangle with one end curved. A small fold of fabric (shaded area) is made at the top. Square corner at point 1 is draped across the right shoulder to the back, across the back and under the left arm, across the front again, passing under the drape of point 1. Point 3 is pulled across the back again and pinned over the shoulder to point 2 in the front. Section 3–4 falls in a drape behind the shoulder to the ground. (Courtesy of Fairchild Publications, Inc.)
Global Connections

The Mesopotamians traded with people living on the coast of what is now India during the Indus Valley civilization (2500–1500 BCE). The beads of this necklace would have been part of that trade, which included not only jewelry made of gold, copper, lapis lazuli, ivory, and various types of shells, but also cotton textiles. A prized commodity made in the Indus Valley, cotton samples found by archaeologists indicate that the weavers were highly skilled and understood how to dye the cloth using mordants, substances that improved the intensity and performance of the dyestuff. In return, the Mesopotamians shipped wool to cities on the Indus Valley coast. (© RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY)

Assyrian styles cannot be seen. Patterns of change in costume history are generally evolutionary. In these early periods, lack of detailed knowledge gives the impression that changes occurred slowly over time.

Although the Assyrian leaders adopted the styles of the Babylonians, they added to their decoration. Woven or embroidered patterns are seen in great profusion on the costumes of the king and his chief officials. Cross-cultural contacts through trade or warfare may have had the effect of introducing new style ideas or new materials, thereby having an impact on dress.

FIGURE 2.10 Head and upper body of woman wearing the kind of garment shown in Figure 2.9a. The edges of the neck and drape covering the shoulders are ornamented with what appears to be a type of braid or embroidery. She wears a closely fitted necklace of several strands, and her wavy hair is visible around the edges of the head covering. (© RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY)
Although the Assyrians continued the tradition of wearing wool garments, King Sennacherib (c. 700 BCE) is said to have introduced cotton to Assyria. He spoke of having “trees bearing wool” in his botanical garden, but there is no solid evidence for the use of cotton by the Assyrians (Barber, 1991).  

Costume Components for Men

Garments

The word *tunic* has come into English from Latin and is used here, and subsequently, as a generic term for a T-shaped garment with openings at the top for the head and arms. Textile historian and linguist Elizabeth Barber (1994) suggested that the Latin word *tunica* derived from a Middle Eastern word for linen. She noted that the earliest tunics seem to have been made of linen and that in some areas tunics first appeared just after wool came into use. She concluded that linen tunics were probably adopted as an underlayer to prevent irritation of the skin by wool garments.

Tunic-type garments were an essential part of dress in all of the civilizations of antiquity. Tunics from different civilizations showed variations in cut, construction, and fit; in length; in whether or not they had sleeves; and in the length of those sleeves. Tunics could be made from any type of fabric, although when worn next to the body, they were more likely to be linen.

At some point, the Assyrians replaced the skirts and draped garments characteristic of the earlier Babylonian period with tunics. Perhaps the tunic, a closely fitting garment more suitable for cooler climates, was borrowed from nearby mountain people (Figure 2.11).

Royalty wore floor-length tunics beneath several long, fringed shawls. Draping of shawls around the body juxtaposed horizontal, vertical, and diagonal arrangement of fringes and was sufficiently complex to inhibit movement. It is likely that these costumes were for state occasions and that everyday clothing, even for royalty, may have been simpler. In scenes depicting hunting or warfare, the king’s costume has less encumbering drapery.

In any civilization, the dress of royal figures is set apart by differences in style, costlier materials, greater elaboration in its decoration, or by the emblems of power in the form of a special headdress, a staff, or a scepter. Often the costume of royalty is specified by tradition and does not necessarily reflect current styles. Mesopotamian artists depicted the garments of the king as covered with what appears to be embroidery, although some authors have suggested that these designs may have been woven. Priests determined the specific garment worn by the king on any given day. The Assyrians believed that some days were favorable and some unfavorable; therefore, a priest would prescribe the most auspicious garment, including its color and fabric. On some unfavorable days, the king was not permitted to change his clothing at all.

Tunics for the laboring classes were worn with a belt and little

**FIGURE 2.11** Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II, c. 883–859 BCE, wears his hair long in the style of his period. He is bearded. Over his long tunic he wears a fringed shawl that wraps around his body. He holds a mace, a symbol of his authority, in his left hand and a sickle, a weapon related to Assyrian mythology, in his right hand. (© The Trustees of The British Museum/Art Resource, NY)
decoration and ended above the knee. Soldiers wore them knee length with armor.

Hair and Headdress
Men were bearded, with the hair and beard arranged in small curls thought to have been achieved with the help of curling irons. The king's beard was longer than that of other men, and supplemented with a false section (see Figure 2.11). Lower class men had shorter beards and hair.

Among the hat styles was a high brimless hat similar to the fez or tarbush, a modern-day, traditional Arab style worn in southwest Asia or northern Africa that is shaped like a truncated cone. In Assyrian art this hat is sometimes depicted with broad bands of fabric hanging down the back. The king wore a higher, straighter version similar to hats worn in later centuries by Persian royalty and by Eastern Orthodox Christian priests in the 20th century.

Footwear
Sandals, depending on whether they were to be given heavier or lighter use, had thicker or thinner soles, respectively. Closed shoes are depicted, though less commonly than sandals. High boots are shown on horsemen, probably as protective footwear for the aggressive Assyrian military forces.

Jewelry
Earrings, bracelets, and armlets were worn. Decorative motifs used for jewelry often resembled those seen on patterned fabrics.

Costume for Specialized Occupations

Military Dress
Soldiers wore a short tunic, a corselet of mail, and a wide belt. The mail of this period was probably made by sewing small metal plates onto leather or heavy cloth. Representations of soldiers indicate that sometimes mail covered only the upper torso, while at other times entire tunics were covered in mail. Helmets fit the head closely, coming to a peaked point at the back of the head. Both sandals and high boots were worn.

Costume Components for Women
Few representations of women are found in Assyrian art. Although the status of women in Sumer and Babylon had been relatively low, Babylonian wives did participate actively when families were engaged in commercial production of textiles. Under Assyrian law, women's right to testify in court was taken away, and some of the Babylonian protection extended to women in regard to property rights was removed. Historians see this as evidence of a possible influx of new people whose customs differed from those of the native population.

Garments
Women wore tunics that were cut with somewhat longer sleeves than those for men. Fabrics used for women's tunics were elaborately patterned. Women also wore fringed shawls draped around the body.

Hair and Headdress
Population and attitude changes may have affected customs surrounding the wearing of veils by women. Assyrian legal codes contained references to wearing veils. In Assyrian and late Babylonian times, the veil was considered to be the distinguishing mark of a free, married woman. Slaves and prostitutes were not permitted to wear veils, and a concubine could wear a veil only when she accompanied the principal wife. Some representations show the veil hanging over the hair on either side of the face, but apparently veils covered the face in public. This custom persists today in some areas of the Middle East, and although the reasons for veiling women are no longer specifically related to marital status, one can see that wearing the veil is a tradition of long duration in the area.

Hairstyles show considerable variety. Earlier styles for Assyrian women are elaborately arranged. Later styles were simplified to curly, shoulder-length hair.

Footwear
Both sandals and closed shoes are depicted.
Jewelry

Jewelry consisted of necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and armlets.

Costume for Children: c. 3500–600 BCE

Sources do not provide any solid information about children's clothing. Children occupied a subservient position in the family. In Babylonia, the father of the family had the right to sell his children into slavery or leave them on deposit with a creditor as security for repayment of a loan. Their costume was probably minimal. When clothing was worn, it may have consisted of the simplest of the adult garments: a loincloth, a skirt, or a tunic. Children of the upper classes probably wore clothing like that of their parents.

EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION

Egyptian culture and dress developed in quite different ways from that of the Mesopotamian civilizations. Researchers can use extensive evidence about Egyptian life and dress from works of art, real objects, and written records.

Social Structure

The hierarchy of Egyptian society has been compared to the shape of the pyramids. The pharaoh (a hereditary king) was at the top of this pyramid. His chief deputies and the high priests were at the next level. Below them were a host of officials of lesser status who were associated either with the court or the administration of towns and cities.

Other important positions were occupied by the scribes, comparable to the white-collar workers of today, such as department managers, bookkeepers, accountants, clerks, and bureaucrats. They were attached to the courts, city administrations, religious organizations, and the military. These occupations provided an avenue of upward mobility within Egyptian society.

The artisans, a vast throng of skilled workers, such as painters, sculptors, architects, furniture makers, weavers, and jewelers, were a step below the scribes.

Servants, laborers, and the large number of peasants who tilled the land provided the agricultural base on which the upper levels of the social pyramid rested. Slaves were foreign captives, not native Egyptians. Some, like the Hebrew slave Moses, were able to attain freedom and rise to relatively high station, but this was rare (Figure 2.12).

The Upper Classes

Costume served to delineate social class, even though much of Egyptian costume was relatively simple. The draping, the quality of the fabrics, and the addition of costly jewelry and belts distinguished the garments of the upper from those of the lower classes.

Upper class families lived in luxuriously furnished houses. By today's standards, the quantity of furniture was small, but pieces were decorated with beautiful inlays and worked metal (Figure 2.13). Homes were spacious with carefully tended gardens.

Artists often depicted social gatherings at home during the New Kingdom. Men and women dressed lavishly for these occasions, wearing long, full, pleated gowns, vivid cosmetics, and brightly colored jewelry and headdresses. Musicians, acrobats, and dancing girls entertained. Cones of scented wax were set on the heads of guests. As the evening progressed these wax cones would melt, run down over the wigs, and perfume the air (see Figure 2.14, page 39).

The hot climate made cleanliness essential for comfort. Upper class Egyptians had high standards of personal cleanliness, bathing two or more times each day. In some periods, heads were shaved and wigs worn, possibly as a means of keeping the head clean and free from vermin. Class distinctions in grooming practices are evident in Egyptian art. Higher standards of grooming were expected of the upper classes. Workmen are shown in paintings with a stubbly growth of beard, while upper class men are invariably clean shaven.

The Family

Marriage was a civil contract; divorce was easy to obtain. Multiple marriages were not common, although many well-to-do men had a harem or at least several
concubines. Some wall paintings show scenes of warm, close family life. Fathers and mothers caress the young, and small children play happily with toys or pets.

**SOURCES OF EVIDENCE FOR EGYPTIAN COSTUME**

**Egyptian Art**

Many of the buildings of ancient Egypt are gone, the stones used by subsequent generations for building later structures. The massive pyramids remain, as do a number of temples. Statues and carved wall reliefs are still found in these buildings. Although art historians identify various styles that changed over
time in Egyptian art, these changes are hard for the nonspecialist to detect. Fortunately for the costume historian, Egyptian artists depicted people going about their daily activities; much of the information about Egyptian costume has been gained through such art.

Artists probably did not always depict costume with absolute fidelity. Artists followed strict guidelines that governed the proportions of sculpture and relief depictions of important figures. These conventions derived from the Egyptian system of measurement. In relief carvings and wall paintings the conventional pose shows shoulders to the front, head and legs facing to the right or left. Clothing is often shown frontally, while legs face to one side (Iversen, 1975). It is likely that the representation of some costume forms in art may have lagged behind their actual adoption; others may not have been depicted at all.

Then, too, artists depicted lower status individuals as smaller in size than those who were more important. As a result, these figures sometimes have been mistakenly identified as children.

**The Contents of Tombs**

Much of Egyptian art has been preserved in tombs where painters decorated the walls with scenes from daily life and the afterlife. Personal possessions and models of useful objects were placed in tombs. The dead, awakening to the afterlife, would be well supplied with everything necessary for a comfortable existence.

Private housing has not survived, because houses were made from mud brick that erodes. Homes and workplaces and the activities that took place there can be seen, because some paintings in the tombs do show private houses.

Archeologists made a particularly valuable discovery when the tomb of King Tutankhamen was excavated in the 1920s. The tombs of many pharaohs had been robbed of much of their treasure, but this tomb of a young king dating from c. 1350 BCE had remained undisturbed for thousands of years.

Egyptian tombs have sometimes yielded items of dress that seem to have no counterpart in paintings or statuary, such as the multicolored garments and elaborately decorated sandals found in the excavation of the tomb of Tutankhamen. These might have been ceremonial garments, special funeral garments, or actual items from the king’s wardrobe.

During the periods of Greek and Roman dominance, pharaohs were represented in art dressed in the styles of the Old Kingdom, and yet records indicate that the rulers of the period actually dressed in Greek and Roman styles (Mertz, 2008). One of the basic costumes for women is a straight, fitted garment of tubular form. Paintings and statues show this garment fitting so tightly around the body that the wearer would be virtually unable to walk. Woven fabrics do not cling so closely to the body, and as far as research can ascertain, the Egyptians had not developed techniques such as knitting that would permit such a close fit; consequently, we can hypothesize that artistic convention required the garment be shown as exceptionally tight fitting.

Research by Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood (1993), a textile archeologist, has added significantly to what is known of Egyptian costume. Combining evidence from actual garments excavated by archeologists with a careful study of Egyptian artists’ depictions of clothing, she has published the most complete summary of what is known about Egyptian depictions of dress, just as Vogelsang-Eastwood also reproduced garments and had students put on copies in order to see how they might actually have been worn. The result has been some new ideas that challenge certain prevailing views of Egyptian dress. Many of her proposals are discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter. In spite of the wealth of evidence available and continuing research, our knowledge about the clothing of Egypt is still incomplete.

**Egyptian Decorative Motifs**

In any historic period, certain similarities can be observed in the various art forms (see Chapter 1, pages 8–9, for a discussion of clothing as an art form). In Egypt these similarities are most obvious in decorative motifs, most of which are derived either
from the natural world or from religious symbolism. These motifs appear in the decoration of temples and tomb chambers, on furniture and utilitarian objects, and in clothing, most often in jewelry or decorative accessories of clothing.

The Egyptians had an abiding faith in magic and believed that by representing symbols of religious figures in jewelry, the positive qualities of the deity would be transferred to the wearer. The scarab, a symbol of a beetle that represented the sun god and also rebirth, was a popular motif. The hawk appears often as another symbol of the sun god. The sacred cobra, called the uraeus, was the symbol of Lower Egypt, and the vulture was the symbol of Upper Egypt. Used together on royal headdress and in jewelry, the two symbolized the unification of Lower and Upper Egypt under the pharaohs. The eye of Horus, a stylized representation of the human eye, symbolized the moon. The lotus blossom, papyrus blossom, and animal forms that were native to the area were also translated into decorative motifs.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF ARTISANS TO COSTUME

The workmanship of artisans was of exceptional quality. Of special interest to the study of historic costume are the weaving and jewelry-making crafts.

Textile Production and Technology

Thanks to the hot, dry climate of Egypt, actual pieces of fabric have been preserved in Egyptian tombs. Linen, the fiber most used by Egyptians, is cloth made from a fiber that is removed from the stems of the flax plant. The fiber may be called flax until it has been removed and cleaned for use in spinning, after which it is usually called linen. Wool was considered ritually unclean and was not worn by priests or by visitors to sanctuaries, or for burial. Herodotus, a Greek historian of the fifth century BCE who traveled in Egypt, reported that wool was used for some outer garments. Although a recent archeological find indicated that silk may have been present in Egypt as early as 1000 BCE, silk was not widely used in Egypt until the fourth century CE, well after the periods discussed here (Wilford, 1993). Cotton cloth, too, reached Egypt only after Egyptian power had declined.

Linen is difficult to dye to colors that will not fade unless substances called mordants are used to fix the colors. Egyptian dyers were apparently unfamiliar with mordants until the New Kingdom period; therefore, most Egyptian clothing was made in the natural, creamy-white color of linen or bleached to a pure white.

Spinning and weaving techniques were well developed as early as the Old Kingdom. During the Old and Middle Kingdoms, Egyptians used a horizontal ground loom to weave fabrics of varying widths. Weaving consists of interlacing lengthwise (called warp yarns) and crosswise (called weft or filling) yarns. The place at the sides of a fabric where a weft yarn turns to make its return trip across the fabric is called the selvage. By looping or adding extra yarns, decorative elements can be introduced at the selvage. At each end of the cloth, where the weaving has stopped, the ends of the warp yarns remain. These can be cut off, can remain as fringe, or can be tied into tassels. Egyptian weavers used these decorative selvages, fringes, and tassels to ornament their clothing.

Flax was raised on the large estates owned by wealthy Egyptians where cloth needed by the estate was also woven. Lacking a cash economy, the Egyptians used textiles as a type of currency when trading for other goods (Barber, 1994, 200). Men processed the flax stems to remove the fibers; then women spun the fibers into yarns and wove the yarns into cloth. Men did a final cleaning of the finished cloth by either boiling it or washing it in the river, where they had to be on the lookout against attack by dangerous crocodiles.

Some fine, closely woven fabrics have been found with thread counts as high as 160 threads in the lengthwise direction and 120 threads in the crosswise direction (Casson, 1975). The finest sheer organy fabrics of the 19th and 20th centuries rarely have thread counts as high as 150 in the lengthwise and 100 in the crosswise directions (American Fabrics Encyclopedia, 1972).
Pleated linen fabrics appear in art and in actual garments. Pleats were probably made on a grooved board or other surface. Cloth would have been pressed into the grooves, and the pleats fixed by the application of starch or sizing (Stead, 1986). Pleats were made horizontally, vertically, or in a sort of herringbone effect that was produced by pleating a fabric in one direction, then turning the fabric and pleating it again in the other direction.

The earliest fabrics decorated with ornamental tapestry-woven designs date from after 1500 BCE, as do wall paintings of a new type of loom, a vertical loom. Barber (1994) suggested that this new technology may have been taught to the Egyptians by foreign captives. Although the vertical looms did not replace the older horizontal looms, they did make weaving of more elaborately patterned fabrics possible.

The items excavated from the tomb of King Tutankhamen included robes made of beaded fabric, others with woven and embroidered patterns, and still others with appliqué. These artifacts reveal that the arts of fabric construction included skill in beading, pattern weaving, embroidery, and appliqué.

Jewelry

Gold jewelry was prized by the Egyptians. Silver was not found in Egypt and had to be imported; therefore, its use was limited. The Egyptians did not make glass until after the 18th Dynasty, but glazes made from ground quartz, natural volcanic glass, and imported glass were used in jewelry (Stead, 1986). Semiprecious and precious stones such as carnelian, lapis lazuli, feldspar, and turquoise were worked into large, multicolored round collars, pectorals (decorative pendants), earrings, bracelets, armlets, and hair or head ornaments. Religious symbols appear often in jewelry, as well as in art. Archeological finds attest to the high level of skill of jewelers and to the widespread use of jeweled personal ornaments.

EGYPTIAN COSTUME: c. 3000–300 BCE

Costume may express the relationships between the individual and his or her natural and social environments. As the social structures of society evolved, dress was one means of manifesting visually one's personal power, dignity, or wealth. The climate of Egypt did not require clothing for warmth. Most garments consisted of pieces of fabric, usually square or rectangular, that were draped and tied around the body. Raw, unfinished edges of cut cloth were turned under and hemmed. Clothing forms for all ages and classes were relatively simple, with minimal sewing and construction required. Only a few garments actually had seams (places where one piece of cloth was joined to another by sewing).

Clothing identified distinctions in social status. These were evident not so much in the types of clothing worn but rather in the quality of the materials used and in the amount of clothing owned by the individual. Slaves, peasants, and lower class people lacked personal wealth, power, and status (hence they would not have needed a great variety of clothing items). But what clothing they did have was not different in shape or construction from that of the upper classes. Table 2.1 summarizes the types of garments worn during the various Egyptian periods.

Costume Terminology

Although the Egyptians had a written language, hieroglyphics, it is not possible to ascertain what names Egyptians gave to individual garments. Costume historians have assigned names to some of these garments. In some cases those names derive from words that have been associated with Egyptian civilization in some way; in other cases names have been made up based on the style or the function of garments. In this text the authors use descriptive modern English terms for costume items but also mention those names that appear frequently in costume histories so that readers will know what is meant if they encounter these words in other publications.

The term kalasiris (or calasiris) serves to illustrate some of the problems of terminology. As readers can see in Contemporary Comment 2.1, the Greek historian Herodotus mentioned a garment which he said the Egyptians called a calasiri. He described it as a fringed tunic. Many costume historians apply this term to a closely fitted garment, also called a sheath dress, which
was worn by women; others apply it to tunics; and still others apply it to both tunics and closely fitted dresses.

**Costume Components for Men**

**Loincloth**
Linen loincloths were under or outer garments shaped and worn like triangular diapers. Strings were attached for tying the garment around the waist, although sometimes a separate sash was also wrapped around the waist. Often loincloths were the sole garment worn by laborers (Figure 2.12). Actual examples of leather loincloths have also been found. A few are solid leather, but most of them consist of a network of leather with solid sections of leather as reinforcement at the waist and over the buttocks. These network loincloths were generally depicted worn over cloth loincloths.

**Apron**
Vogelsang-Eastwood (1993) defined aprons as separate items that covered the genital area and were worn alone over a skirt or some other garment or over a loincloth and under a skirt. She described them as being made of one or more pieces of cloth attached to a belt, sash, or band that fastened around the waist. No actual examples of this garment have been found in Egypt, although examples exist in the nearby region of Nubia, which was subject to Egyptian influences. Illustrations show men dressed only in aprons, but when these garments are combined with skirts (see Figure 2.13), it is difficult to ascertain whether they are separate garments or a part of the skirt construction. Art from the Middle and New Kingdoms, especially, frequently showed men wearing skirts with large, projecting triangular aprons. Because no actual examples of such garments have been found, the question of whether these were separate aprons or simply the way that the ends of the wrapped skirt were arranged remains unanswered.

**Wrapped Skirt**
A wrapped skirt, the length, width, and fit of which varied with different time periods and social classes, served as a major garment for men throughout all of Egyptian history. Costume historians have called this costume a schenti, shent, skent, or schent. Others use the term kilt. (A kilt is a short skirt worn by Scotsmen, and some authors use this term as a means of distinguishing between male and female dress, calling the same garment a skirt when worn by women). A number of different skirts for men can be seen in Figures 2.12 and 2.14. The following variations can be identified:
- In the earliest periods, the skirt was generally knee length or shorter and fitted closely around the hips. Some were pleated and some had a diagonal line across the front, which sources have suggested was achieved by rounding one end of the fabric. No curved fabrics have been found, however,
Contemporary Comments 2.1

EGYPTIAN COSTUME AS DESCRIBED BY HERODOTUS

The Greek historian Herodotus (484-425 BCE) traveled extensively. One of the places he visited was Egypt. The following are his observations on the clothing practices of the Egyptians.

In other countries the priests have long hair, in Egypt their heads are shaven; elsewhere it is customary, in mourning for near relatives to cut their hair close; the Egyptians, who wear no hair at all at any other time, when they lose a relative, let their beards and the hair of their heads grow long. . . .

. . . Their men wear two garments apiece, their women but one. [Book II, Chapter 36]

. . . They wear linen garments, which they are specially careful to have always fresh washed. . . .

. . . [Of priests] Their dress is entirely of linen, and their shoes of the papyrus plant: it is not lawful for them to wear either dress or shoes of any other material. . . . [Book II, Chapter 37]

. . . They wear a linen tunic fringed about the legs, and called calasiris; over this they have a white woollen garment thrown on afterwards. Nothing of woollen, however, is taken into their temples or buried with them, as their religion forbids it. [Book II, Chapter 81]


and Vogelsang-Eastwood (1993) pointed out that by taking the end of a square piece of fabric and pulling it up to tuck into the waist, a curved shape is produced. Thus, it seems likely that the ornamental effect was achieved through draping.

- Middle Kingdom styles show the skirt elongated, sometimes reaching to the ankle, with shorter versions for work, for soldiers, or for hunters. A double skirt, the underlayer opaque and outer layer sheer, appeared and continued in use into the New Kingdom. Some depictions show what appear to be pleats.

- New Kingdom styles had pleated skirts, both shorter examples that tended to fit more closely and long skirts that were quite full. Large, triangular decorative panels were located at the front of some skirts.

By following the lines of pleats in garments shown on statues, it is possible to gain some understanding of how the fabrics were draped. In one version, a length of fabric appeared to have been pleated along its long direction. The pleats were arranged horizontally across the back, then pulled up, diagonally, to the waistline in front where the ends were tied or passed over each other. They hung downward at center front to form a pleated panel (Houston, 1964).

Upper Body Coverings

In very early representations, we may see the skin of a leopard or lion fastened across the shoulders of men. In later periods, fabric replaced skins for the construction of upper garments. Wearing animal skins was reserved for the most powerful element in society: kings and priests (Figure 2.14). Finally, even the skins were no longer worn, but were replaced by ritual garments made from cloth simulating animal skins. Leopard spots were painted onto the cloth. The Egyptian belief in magic seems to underlie this practice. The Egyptians believed that wearing the skin
of a fierce beast magically transferred the powers of the animal to the wearer.

In the Middle and New Kingdoms men wore a short fabric cape that fastened at center front. Not unlike a cape, a wide necklace made from concentric circles of precious or semiprecious stones might have been worn alone, over a linen gown, or over a short cape, or with a corselet (see Figure 2.14). The corselet was sleeveless, probably a decorative form of armor, and might be either strapless or suspended by small straps from the shoulders (see Visual Summary Table, page 48).

Men were sometimes depicted wearing narrow straps wrapped around the upper part of the body. The method of wrapping varied. Sometimes straps ran diagonally over one shoulder, sometimes across both shoulders, and sometimes they were also wrapped around the waist or at various points on the chest. They were most likely a practical garment used to prevent perspiration from running down the body. Women were only rarely shown wearing straps, and then usually when engaged in physical activity, such as dancing or acrobatics.

Tunic
During the New Kingdom a number of new elements entered dress, probably as a result of cross-cultural contacts with the Near East, the invasion of the Hyksos, or the expansion of the Egyptian empire into the area west of Egypt.

Longer tunics, similar to those of Mesopotamia, appeared in Egypt about the time of the New Kingdom. As depicted on wall paintings, they are made with or without sleeves and often of sheer, almost transparent, linen. Artists showed loincloths or a short skirt underneath or skirts wrapped over tunics (see Figure 2.13).

Long, Wrapped Garments
The earliest wrapped garments appeared on depictions of both men and women of all classes from the earliest period up until the Middle Kingdom. Later, wrapped
garments seem to be associated only with women, gods, and kings. Possible ways of wrapping the fabric are depicted in Figure 2.17.

During the New Kingdom, men appeared in long, loose, flowing garments of sheer pleated linen (see Figure 2.14). The precise construction of these garments is not clear from most of their representations. The following alternatives have been suggested:
- full tunic worn loose or belted,
- skirt with cape or shawl, or
- wrapped shawl.

Shawls and Cloaks

Shawls, consisting of squares or rectangles of fabric that wrapped around the upper part of the body and did not extend below the waist, were shown on both men and women. Longer cloaks, which probably were worn for warmth, also appeared. Some of these were wrapped around the body in various ways, while others had ends tied together over one shoulder.

Costume Components for Women

Skirts

Paintings often show skirts on lower class women at work. Slaves and dancing girls are also depicted occasionally without clothes or with a small cloth strip covering the genitals and held up with a narrow waistband (see Figure 2.18).

Wrapped Dress or Sheath and Bead-Net Dresses

Costume historians have described the most common garment for women of all classes as a sheath dress. This garment appears as a closely fitted tube of fabric beginning above or below the breasts and ending around the lower calf or ankle (Figure 2.15). It appears to have had one or two straps holding it over the shoulders. Many authors have commented about the tightness of this garment and have noted that it fits so tightly that it would have been difficult not only to get into but also to wear. For this reason it has been suggested that artists depicted the garment in a conventional rather than a realistic manner.

Vogelsang-Eastwood (1993) argued persuasively that this garment was probably a wraparound dress (see Figures 2.15 and 2.17a) and that the shoulder straps were separate garments. As evidence, she noted that no sheath dresses have been found in any excavations but that lengths of cloth with patterns of wear consistent with wraparound dresses have been found in fairly substantial numbers. This assertion also solves the problem of the varying placements of the top of the garment, because the cloth could have been wrapped around the body at any point above or beneath the breasts or at the waist. Separate straps could have been placed in any of a variety of ways.

Scholars are uncertain about the techniques used to decorate the fabrics of sheath dresses, which were often elaborately patterned. Speculations include painted designs, appliqués, leather, feathers, beadwork, or woven designs. From the evidence in the Tutankhamen tomb, we know that skill in beadwork was well developed. A pair of gloves of woven fabric with a design similar to those seen on many of the sheaths was discovered in the same tomb. Actual bead-net dresses have been found in tombs (Figure 2.16). Some of the patterned effects seen on closely fitting dresses (see Figure 2.15) could have been achieved by placing a bead-net dress over a wrapped dress.

Pleated and Draped Wrapped Long Dress

Though at first glance, the sheer, pleated robes of men and women look alike, careful examination reveals that their draping and arrangement were different. Some women's styles covered the breasts, and others left them exposed (see Figure 2.4). These garments were the most complex worn by Egyptian women. A number of scholars have suggested ways in which these sheer, pleated garments may have been wrapped. See Figure 2.17b and c for some of these suggestions.

Tunics and V-Necked Dresses

Women, like men, wore loosely fitted tunics. Women of a lower economic class, such as musicians, often wore these garments (Figure 2.18).
Among the most numerous garments found in women’s tombs are V-necked dresses, with or without sleeves. The simple sleeveless version of this dress, which may be either pleated or plain, began to appear during the Old Kingdom. The sleeved version is more complex, with a tubular skirt joined to a yoke. Figure 2.19 shows two examples of this dress.

Shawls and cloaks of similar types were worn by women and men.

With so much of Egyptian clothing being made from lengths of cloth wrapped around the body, sashes helped to hold clothing in place. Both men and women are depicted wearing sashes, although men seem to wear sashes more often. Surviving examples are made of rope; plain-weave linen, sometimes with fringes or tassels; and elaborately designed tapestry or double-weave fabrics. For upper class individuals dressed in white linen, sashes and men’s decorated aprons are sometimes the only ornamentation and color, other than that provided by jewelry.

**Costume Components for Men and Women**

As a result of the relatively simple styles of clothing and the limited range of colors of fabrics, elements of dress and ornamentation—such as jewelry, footwear,
FIGURE 2.17 Suggested ways of draping some items of Egyptian wrapped costume: (a) The wraparound garment for men or women; (b) and (c) two alternatives for creating a woman's draped gown. (Courtesy of Fairchild Publications, Inc.)
hairstyles, cosmetics, and tattoos—are particularly noticeable. Some evidence that tattooing was not uncommon, especially for women, has been found on clay statuettes and on mummies. The earliest tattoos were abstract, geometric forms. Later tattoos were generally motifs or figures related to religion, particularly the god Bes, known as a protector of the home and of women’s and children’s concerns (Pointer, 2005). Evidence of tattooing for men is absent.

Hair and Headdress

Men were usually clean-shaven. However, the beard was a symbol of maturity and authority and was, as a consequence, worn (or at least depicted on paintings and sculpture) not only by adult male rulers but also by young kings and even by Queen Hatshepsut, who ruled around 1500 BCE. During some periods, men shaved their heads as well. It was less common, though not unknown, for women to shave their heads.

Wigs were worn over the shaved head or over the hair. The shape, length, and arrangement of wigs varied from period to period. More expensive wigs were of human hair; cheaper ones were made of wool, flax, palm fiber, or felt. Most wigs were black in color, although blue, brown, white, or some gilded examples exist. Even when wigs were relatively short, women's tended to be longer than men’s. Their styling ranged from simple, long flowing locks to complex braiding, curls, or twists. It is likely that wigs were worn because they were decorative and could more easily be made into complicated styles than could real hair. Furthermore, in the hot Egyptian climate some individuals probably found it comfortable and convenient to wear wigs over shaved heads or short hair. This also made it easier to avoid getting head lice (see the wigs in Figures 2.14 and 2.15).

Much of Egyptian headdress was ceremonial or symbolic. See Illustrated Table 2.1 (page 46) for depiction and summary of the major head-covering styles and their functions.

Footwear

Only high-status persons wore sandals, while low-status individuals went barefoot. Sandals were made of rushes woven or twisted together. Some examples from royal burials are elaborately decorated. The high status of the wearer was demonstrated by superior workmanship, increased decoration, and finer materials (Figure 2.20; see also Figure 2.14).
Some diadems (crowns) or fillets placed on the head held flowers. Others copied flowers in metal and polished stones. Armlets, bracelets, and anklets were all worn, though only in the New Kingdom were they all worn simultaneously.

Possibly another of the contributions of the Hyksos to Egyptian styles, earrings are a late addition to Egyptian jewelry. First worn by women, they seem eventually to have also been used by men. In the 1977–1978 exhibit of artifacts from the tomb of Tutankhamen, it was suggested that earrings may have been worn by young boys but abandoned in manhood (“Treasures of Tutankhamen,” 1972, 39).

Cosmetics

Both men and women decorated their eyes, skin, and lips. Red ochre pigment in a base of fat or gum resin was used to color lips. Fingernails and toenails were polished and buffed. Henna, a reddish hair dye, may have been used to color nails. Scented ointments were applied to the body.

Eye paint had cosmetic, symbolic, and medicinal functions. Eye painting represented the eye of the god Horus, considered a powerful charm, and the line formed around the eye helped to protect against the glare of the sun. Some written records include medical prescriptions for eye paints. In the Old Kingdom green eye paint predominated; in the Middle Kingdom both green and black paints were used; by the New Kingdom black kohl (made of galena, a sulfide of lead) had replaced green. Red ochre was used as rouge and probably a lip color (Pointer, 2005).

Costume Components for Children

The children who are depicted in Egyptian paintings were generally the offspring of wealthy or royal families. These representations and the numerous toys found in Egyptian tombs indicate that children were regarded with interest and warm affection. Education was provided for boys—the very rich had private tutors, the less affluent went to temple schools. Children of the lower classes were taught a trade or craft, while sons of peasants labored in the fields with their fathers.
Dress for the very young was minimal. Little boys are depicted as naked except for an occasional bracelet or amulet; little girls wear necklaces, armlets, bracelets, anklets, and sometimes earrings. Some pictures show girls wearing a belt at the waist (see Figure 2.18). After beginning school, boys apparently were dressed in skirts or tunics or, among the lower classes, probably in a loincloth. Girls apparently continued to go naked until close to the time they reached puberty, after which they dressed like their mothers.

Special hairstyles for children appear. In some representations, the head is completely shaved; in others part is left unshaven. The long locks of hair that grew in the unshaven part of the head were arranged in curls or braids. The children of the pharaoh wore a distinctive hairstyle called the lock of Horus or the lock of youth in which one lock of hair remained on the left side of the head. This lock was arranged carefully in braids over the ear (Illustrated Table 2.1, page 46).

**Costume for Specialized Occupations**
Costume for specialized occupations showed some minor variations from the basic Egyptian styles.

**Military Dress**
The ordinary foot soldier of ancient Egypt wore a short skirt. In the New Kingdom representations, an additional stiffened triangular panel is shown at the front, possibly to protect the vulnerable genitals. A helmet, made of padded leather, covered the head. The soldier carried weapons and a shield. In some instances a sleeveless armored corselet supported by straps was shown. This garment covered the chest and is thought to have been made of small plates of bone, metal, or leather sewn to a linen body. Most soldiers are depicted as barefooted.

When the pharaoh dressed for war, he wore the costume typical of his era plus the special insignia of his rank: a special crown, called the blue war crown (see Illustrated Table 2.1) and a false beard. When at war, the king carried weapons. After the adoption of chariots for warfare, the pharaoh was often represented riding in a chariot while a servant preceded him, carrying his sandals.

**Religious Dress**
The costume of priests did not differ much from that of ordinary Egyptians. Priests were usually depicted with shaven heads. One of the insignias of the priesthood was either a real or simulated leopard skin draped over the shoulders.

Gods and goddesses are shown in Egyptian art dressed as ordinary mortals but wearing special headdresses or carrying symbols of their divinity. In the New Kingdom, goddesses were dressed in the older, fitted sheath style, and they often appeared alongside mortals dressed in the pleated robe. It may have been a convention to show these divinities in costumes that emphasized their timelessness. The pharaoh, who was considered to be divine, frequently appears wearing the special headdress or insignia of the gods.
### Illustrated Table 2.1

Some of the Headdresses Worn in Ancient Egypt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headdress</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Red crown of Lower Egypt</strong></td>
<td>Worn by pharaohs to symbolize rule over Lower Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White crown of Upper Egypt</strong></td>
<td>Worn by pharaohs to symbolize rule over Upper Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pschent crown of Lower and Upper Egypt</strong></td>
<td>Worn by pharaohs to symbolize rule over Lower and Upper Egypt; consisted of a combination of the crowns of Lower and Upper Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hemhemet crown</strong></td>
<td>Worn by pharaohs who used it only rarely, on ceremonial occasions, possibly because it was so awkward and unwieldy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blue or war crown</strong></td>
<td>Worn by pharaohs to symbolize military power or when going to war; in the New Kingdom, this headdress was worn more often than the double crown; made of molded leather and decorated with gold sequins, it had a uraeus at the center front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nemes headdress</strong></td>
<td>Worn by rulers from the Old to the New Kingdom; a scarflike construction that completely covered the head, was fitted across the temple, hanging down to the shoulder behind the ears, and with a long tail at center back that symbolized a lion's tail; the shape of the Nemes head covering is similar to a simple, scarflike head covering owned by the Metropolitan Museum (see Figure 2.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Falcon or vulture headdress</strong></td>
<td>Worn by queens or goddesses; shaped like a bird of prey with the wings falling down at the side of the head and framing the face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flat crown</strong></td>
<td>Appears on depictions of Queen Nefertiti, a New Kingdom queen, who apparently wore this head covering over a shaved head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lock of youth</strong></td>
<td>Worn by children of the royal family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uraeus</strong></td>
<td>Worn by kings and queens; a representation of a cobra, which was a symbol of royal power; could be worn on a headband, or as part of another headdress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dress for Musicians, Dancers, and Acrobats
Entertainers, such as dancers and acrobats, are often shown naked or wearing only a band around the waist. Musicians, both male and female, wore the simpler costume forms of the period. During the New Kingdom this would have been a full, very sheer tunic, or calasiri (see Figure 2.18).

Summary

Themes
Although we are separated from the Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures by thousands of years and we do not have a complete view of the lives of these ancient peoples, some of the themes discussed in Chapter 1 emerge in this broad overview of 3,000 years of Mesopotamian and Egyptian costume.

The stability of costume in Egypt compared with more frequent changes in Mesopotamia can be related to themes such as political conflict with its accompanying wars and invasions, economic events such as patterns of trade, and the cross-cultural contacts that resulted from warfare and trade. Mesopotamia, more open geographically to both invaders and traders, showed more frequent costume changes, whereas Egypt, more geographically isolated, experienced important changes only in relatively rare instances, such as the adoption of the tunic after the invasion of Egypt and subsequent political control by the Hyksos, a foreign people.

Social life, social roles, social class structure, and changes or patterns in social behavior undoubtedly shaped clothing practices in both of these civilizations. The most obvious examples are in the differences in the quality and variety of apparel worn by upper classes and lower classes and in those items such as headdresses that designated status (Illustrated Table 2.1, page 46). However, because our knowledge of social life of these periods is limited in many ways, we undoubtedly overlook nuances in dress that must have been obvious to people living at the time.

In Egypt and Mesopotamia, the themes of production of textiles, ecology, and the arts and dress come together. Linen, a fabric that was comfortable in the heat of a tropical climate and that could be made into soft, sheer, drapable fabrics, was the primary material from which garments were made throughout the history of this civilization. Mesopotamian costume, too, continued to utilize one fiber to a considerable extent: wool, which made a fabric of greater bulk and warmth than did linen. (In the later periods, both cotton and linen seem also to have been added to the materials from which Mesopotamians made their clothes.)

Egyptian costume began with the simple loincloth or skirt for men and a straight, closely fitted, wrapped dress (sheath) or a skirt for women. Throughout the history of this civilization, although the forms of these costumes grew more elaborate and more decorative and although additional types of garments were added, the basic aesthetic preference for clothing that complemented the natural lines of the body was retained. By contrast, Mesopotamian clothing was designed not to complement the body but to cover it. The early kaunakeskins and full-length garments, the draped styles of the later Babylonians, and the shawls that wrapped the Assyrian kings covered the body with layers of fabric that obscured its natural lines. These differences have been attributed not only to geographical or ecological differences but also to differences in standards of taste. Leix (1938) pointed out that Egyptians loved clarity of form in life and art, while the Babylonians loved pomp and luxury. This latter preference is reflected in the heavy fabrics, rich patterns, and elaborate fringes of Mesopotamian styles. Furthermore, moral reasons, possibly expressed as different views of modesty in dress, may also have influenced styles. Mesopotamian religions show a greater preoccupation with ethical problems than do those of Egypt.
## Visual Summary Table

### Major Mesopotamian and Egyptian Garments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Garment Description</th>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Time Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sumerian man and woman in kaunakes-type garments (3300–2500 BCE)</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Sumerian Garment" /></td>
<td>(3300–2500 BCE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babylonian man (2500–1000 BCE)</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Babylonian Garment" /></td>
<td>(2500–1000 BCE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assyrian ruler (1000–600 BCE)</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Assyrian Garment" /></td>
<td>(1000–600 BCE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Egyptian boy in draped skirt, corselet, and wearing his hair in the lock of youth (New Kingdom)</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Royal Egyptian Boy" /></td>
<td>(New Kingdom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian women in (a) draped gown (New Kingdom) and (b) sheath dress (Old Kingdom through New Kingdom)</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Egyptian Women" /></td>
<td>(Old Kingdom through New Kingdom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian wearing a tunic (New Kingdom)</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Egyptian Tunic" /></td>
<td>(New Kingdom)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LEGACIES OF MESOPOTAMIAN AND EGYPTIAN DRESS

The decline of the Assyrian civilization did not totally obliterate all traces of Mesopotamian costume. At least one element of dress persisted in the region and, eventually, found its way into other parts of the world. The high-crowned headdress worn by Assyrian kings was adopted by the Persians. From its use in Persia, it eventually found its way into the costume of the Eastern Orthodox Christian priests.

Certain other aspects of Mesopotamian costume utilized not only by the Sumerian, Babylonian, or Assyrian people but also more generally throughout the Near East have survived into more recent times. The custom of requiring women to wear a veil outside of the home is one example. It has also been suggested (although it cannot be documented) that the kaunakes fabric in the form of a garment worn by shepherds and other rustic folk may have come into European art to symbolize people from little known or distant lands of the Middle East.

Egyptian dress did not long survive the Greek and Roman domination of Egypt, although it was used for the formal portraits of the last pharaohs and Queen Cleopatra. Instead, the Egyptians adopted first Greek, then Roman, styles. In several instances, however, ancient Egyptian fashions have influenced 20th-century styles. The first was in 1920 when the discovery of the tomb of King Tutankhamen gave rise to a short-lived vogue for Egyptian-inspired fabrics, jewelry, and to a lesser extent, women's fashions. The exhibit of artifacts from this same tomb in 1977–1978 also motivated fashion and jewelry designers to orchestrate a revival of Egyptian-inspired products. This, too, proved to be a short-term fashion. Individual fashion designers may find inspiration in elements of Egyptian dress, as in the couture design in Modern Influences (page 49).

REFERENCES

MODERN INFLUENCES

Egyptian dress and decorative motifs have inspired contemporary fashion designers. This spring 2004 design by John Galliano for Christian Dior shows clear Egyptian influences, especially in the colorful necklace.

(Charles Platiau/Reuters/Corbis)