DBQ 1: ACHIEVEMENTS OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

**Historical Context:** Early civilizations arose in the river valleys of Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, and India. These earliest civilizations made important and lasting contributions to humankind.

**Directions:** The focus question is based on the accompanying documents. As you analyze each document, take into account both the source of the document and the author’s point of view. Be sure to do each of the following steps:

1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
2. Read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions that follow each document before moving on to the next document.
3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the question.
4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. You should present your essay logically. Include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge beyond the documents.

**Focus Question:**

Discuss and describe two contributions from each of the River Valley Civilizations that influenced future civilizations.

Before you begin reading the documents, brainstorm what you already know about the River Valley Civilizations in the box below.
Ancient Summer/Mesopotamia

Document 1
The Sumerians lived in southern Mesopotamia. They built a number of cities. Because they lacked stone and timber, they used mud bricks to build walled cities, temples, and palaces. Their architectural innovations included arches, columns, ramps, and the pyramid-shaped ziggurat. These new features and styles influenced building throughout Mesopotamia. In addition, the Sumerians developed copper and bronze tools and weapons. They also developed the world’s first known writing, cuneiform. They used it on clay tablets.

Source: Bech, Black, Krieger, Naylor, Shabaka, World History: Patterns of Interaction, McDougal Littell, 1999

What were three accomplishments of the Sumerians?

What impact did Sumerian accomplishments have on other civilizations?

Document 2
Sumerians created cuneiform script over 5000 years ago. It was the world's first written language. Sumerians invented this writing system to keep track of business dealings because they traded with people who lived in lands that were hundreds and even thousands of miles away. Writing was a giant leap forward in the development of civilization. People kept records and new ideas were now able to be passed easily from generation to generation. Cuneiform was written on clay tablets, and then baked hard in a kiln.

What was cuneiform and who invented it?

Object > pictogram > (sideways) > cuneiform
List three ways the Sumerians used cuneiform.

Describe the look of cuneiform. Why would they write in that way?

**Document 3**

In 1754 B.C., Hammurabi conquered and united all the cities of Mesopotamia under his rule. Although he was a brutal warrior, his greatest achievement was his code of laws, which he had engraved on a towering stone monument. Hammurabi’s Code was not the first, but it was the most complete set of laws that has survived. It is important because it created a set of rules that helped to govern a civilization while trying to protect people even if they had little political power. It covered almost everything that affected the community, including family relations, business conduct, and crime. Hammurabi wanted to unify his empire and provide order and protection for the weak. This provided a model for other far-flung empires. It called for different punishments based on the class of the lawbreaker and the victim of the crime. In the Code, punishments often fit the crime by demanding and “eye for an eye” or a “tooth for a tooth”. Some of the laws were:

- If a builder build a house for someone, and does not construct it properly, and the house which he built fall in and kill its owner, then that builder shall be put to death.
- If it kill the son of the owner the son of that builder shall be put to death.
- If it kill a slave of the owner, then he shall pay slave for slave to the owner of the house.
- If a man destroys the eye of another man, they shall destroy his eye.
- If a son strikes his father, they shall cut off his hand.
- If two people have a disagreement, both will go before a judge for a decision. If one of these people does not like the judge’s ruling, then he has the right to appeal to a higher court.

Why do you think Hammurabi’s Code was written on a stone pillar? (Hint, hundreds of them have been found) What might that say about culture in Mesopotamia?
What is the most important idea created by Hammurabi’s Code?

How were punishments different between people under Hammurabi’s Code?

How did Hammurabi’s Code influence other world cultures?

Egypt

Document 4
Egyptian kings in the Old Kingdom are best known for the huge structures they built, pyramids. Pyramids were built as a final resting place for the *ka*, or spirit, of the pharaoh. These large stone buildings served as houses or tombs for the dead kings. The embalmed body of the pharaoh was placed in a special room within the pyramid. Also in the room were gold, jewels, chariots, statues, and other objects the pharaoh might need in the afterlife. Pyramids were built of huge blocks of stone that were moved into place by groups of peasants and other workers. The government organized and directed these armies of workers. In order to build pyramids the Egyptians needed to learn the specialized skills of mathematics, geometry, engineering, and architecture.
Who built the pyramids of Egypt and what were they used for?

What specialized skills were needed to build the pyramids?

Document 5

Farmers in ancient Egypt developed a system of watering their fields using the water from the Nile River. They built dams and dug ditches or canals to move the water into their fields. The farmers also built reservoirs in which they collected water. They raised water from the pools into the irrigation ditches with a shaduf, a weighted pole with a bucket on one end. The bucket was filled with water and then swung around and emptied into the irrigation ditch. This technology continues to be used in many parts of the Middle East to increase the amount of arable [farmable] land.

According to the excerpt, what technology is being used?

How does this technology work?

How did this technology contribute to later societies?
We know about the pharaohs of ancient Egypt because of the written records that were left. These records were kept in hieroglyphics, a system of writing that was based on pictures. Unlike Sumerian cuneiform writing, hieroglyphics represented ideas or objects but could also stand for sounds. They could be carved into clay or stone but could also be written onto papyrus, the first paper which was developed by the Egyptians which made it easier to keep records. Hieroglyphics have also been found painted on the walls of tombs.

What was hieroglyphics and who invented it?

How was hieroglyphics different from cuneiform?

What invention did Egyptians develop which made keeping records in hieroglyphics easier?
How would you describe the Chinese system of writing?

What impact did a written language have on China?

Document 8

In China, Confucius wrote down his philosophy which explained how people should live their lives. Confucianism teaches that each person should accept his or her role in society. Confucianism became the basis for order and respect and was central in governing China. The relationships and teachings of Confucius were studied for “civil service” exams. These exams were taken by Chinese citizens in hopes of scoring well and getting a good paying job in the Chinese government.

Central to Confucius’ teaching are relationships and social roles. There are five great relationships:

1. Kindness in the father and obedience in the son
2. Kindness in the older brother and respect by the younger brother
3. Good behavior by the husband and respect by the wife
4. Gentle respect by seniors and admiration and respect for them by young people
5. Generosity by rulers and loyalty to the ruler by their subjects

If these attitudes are practiced there will be harmony among all.
What is Confucianism?

Explain two reasons why people studied Confucianism in China?

What did Confucius teach was the proper relationship between rules and their subjects?

Document 9

Many inventions were made during the Han dynasty of China which contributed to its culture and led to trade with other civilizations. China invented porcelain, paper, ink and gunpowder (which was used in fireworks). China traded these goods along a trade route they developed called the Silk Road which helped to create wealth and prosperity in China. Trade along the Silk Road led to cultural diffusion or the spread of ideas and inventions amongst peoples. Cultural diffusion led to great progress for China and other civilizations as ideas and inventions spread and led to advances in many societies throughout the world.

What were three of the most important inventions of early Chinese civilization?
Document 10
Archaeologists have found ruins of many cities along the Indus River. They date these cities back to about 2000 B.C.E. The largest cities were Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. These cities were laid out along a precise grid with a fortified citadel and a separate section for residential housing. Engineers provided indoor plumbing and sewer systems so that most houses had private bathrooms and toilets.
Source: Bech, Black, Krieger, Naylor, Shabaka, World History: Patterns of Interaction, McDougal Littell, 1999 (adapted)
How does the photograph of Mohenjo-Daro support the document?

What impact did this urban planning have on later civilizations?

Document 11
The Indus people did not engrave inscriptions on stones or place papyrus scrolls in the tombs of their dead; all we know of their writing is derived from the simple inscriptions on their seals. Several efforts have been made to decipher the Indus seals, but none have truly succeeded this far; there is some notion that these seals could have been used as markers in trade situations, or that some may have represented family names. What we do know of this civilization comes from the intense archaeological excavation of the area. Anthropologists do know that these cities were highly developed for their period in history; the structure of their cities were so far advanced that it was not surpassed until the late nineteenth century in Europe. The genius behind the advanced architecture of the Indus civilization carried over into a thriving agricultural and trade based economy. The Indus people used the plentiful rivers surrounding them much to their advantage, the Indus the most spectacular of the three rivers. From every crop that a farmer grew, a large portion of it had to be paid into public granaries. At the Mohenjo-daro site, there was a high loading platform above a lower spot intended for carts where the farmers would dump their grain. It is assumed that this cart was small and powered by an ox, similar to those used in the area today. Terracotta models of bull driven carts have been excavated from the Mohenjo-daro site, and it appears that these carts have changed very little over some 4000 years.

Aside from the subsistence of agriculture and hunting, the Indus people supported themselves by trading goods. Through trade, the Indus Civilization expanded its culture, coming into regular contacts with faraway lands. The long coastline and many rivers provided the people of the Indus territories with consistent trafficking by water. Archaeologists have turned up imports including gold from southern India, copper from Afghanistan, jade like fuchsite probably from southern India, and turquoise from Iran. Trade with Mesopotamia has been noted, as Indus pottery has been discovered in the ancient city of Tell Asmar. A number of typical Indus seals have also been found in Sumer, seals dating back to between 2300 and 2000 BC. The finding of Indus seals in Mesopotamia suggests that people of Indus may have resided in this territory; possibly merchants who were keeping up a constant trade with the Mesopotamian people (cotton was a staple export of Indus, and could have been the crop that brought these two civilizations into contact).

Source: Adapted from Economics of the Indus Valley Civilization by Chad Greenwood
What is known about the writing of the Indus River Valley? How do we know about the people of the Indus River Valley?

In what two ways did the people of the Indus River Valley make a living?

How do we know that the people of the Indus River Valley traded with the rest of the ancient world?

What can you guess about the Indus Valley based on the inscriptions and pictures on the seals?

Now that you’ve read the documents, use this space to make any notes you need to in order to answer the focus question. Discuss and describe two contributions from each of the River Valley Civilizations that influenced future civilizations.