VOLUME ONE

PERSONALITIES & PROBLEMS

INTERPRETIVE ESSAYS IN WORLD CIVILIZATIONS

SECOND EDITION

KEN WOLF

Personalities and Problems

Interpretive Essays in World Civilizations

Second Edition

VOLUME ONE

Ken Wolf
Murray State University

Illustrations by John Stephen Hatton

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About the Author

KEN WOLF is Professor of History at Murray State University in Murray, KY, where he has taught since 1969. He was born in Davenport, Iowa, and received his B.A. from St. Ambrose College (1965) and his M.A. and Ph.D. in history from the University of Notre Dame (1966, 1972). Professor Wolf helped design Murray State's required World Civilizations course and has taught it since its inception. He also teaches German history and Development of Historical Thinking on a regular basis. Professor Wolf has published articles on European nationalism, historiography, intellectual history, and the teaching of history in *The Journal of the History of Ideas, The International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences—Biographical Supplement, Teaching History,* the *Illinois Quarterly, The Journal of Kentucky Studies,* and the *AHA Perspectives.* For five years (1987–1991), Wolf served as one of two deans of the Kentucky Governor's Scholars Program, a state-sponsored summer enrichment program for 700 high-achieving, rising high school seniors. He was selected as a Pew Faculty Fellow in International Affairs for 1993–1994. He and his wife Deanna have three children, only one of whom (alas) majored in history.

To my family, my colleagues at Murray State,
and
the students, faculty, and staff of the
Kentucky Governor's Scholars Program,
1987–1991

for helping me give meaning to the phrase
"life-long learning."

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Preface

Dear Reader:

The people you meet in these pages illustrate the richness and variety of human history from the earliest civilizations to the seventeenth century C.E. The personalities range from one of the key figures in the creation of what we call the Judeo-Christian tradition, Moses, to one of the strongest rulers of modern China, Kangxi. If history is the study of human beings who make it, *Personalities and Problems* is an introduction to world civilizations which focuses upon some of the most interesting men and women which the written records of these civilizations allow us to meet. This book assumes no previous knowledge of history; it does assume that the lives of exciting people have a certain magic which captures our attention across the boundaries of space and time.

But most of you know that history is more (sometimes less) than the study of interesting people. If all the interesting historical figures were included in our history texts, the books would be too large to carry, much less read. The people we choose to include in our histories must also be considered interesting or important—by someone. Whether great in the traditional textbook sense of the term or not, these personalities were included in this work because I found them interesting and thought their lives could help you better understand some of the issues which historians and other scholars have struggled with in their teaching, research, and writing. Before you can assess their importance for yourselves, it will be helpful for you to begin to classify or organize them.

Eight of the people you will meet in these pages were primarily political leaders—people such as Hammurabi, Asoka, Irene, and Genghis Khan. Another nine were primarily thinkers and/or religious leaders; this list includes Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Confucius, Plato, Mahavira, Diogenes, Desiderius Erasmus, and Martin Luther. You will also meet four men best described as explorers: Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta, Prince Henry, and Zheng He. Putting people in such broad categories is, of course, only one way to describe them—and not necessarily the best way. For one thing, in history as in life, people have a way of breaking through our neat categories. Moses, for example, was both a religious leader and a ruler of his people. People such as Asoka, Elizabeth, and Akbar were also rulers who tried to influence the religious lives of their people. In the period before 1500 C.E., in particular, it is very difficult to separate religion and politics. In a larger sense, this book is interdisciplinary; its author is committed to the idea that whatever lines we might draw between subjects in schools, we cannot understand human beings adequately if we separate their political behavior from their religious beliefs, their social position, or their economic concerns.

A second way of classifying people is to ask about the nature and extent of the impact they made on their society. Some, such as Hammurabi and Mansa Musa, were important because their actions reflected the dominant values of their society. Others, such as Martin Luther, were significant because they challenged those values. Occasionally, we find people who both reflected the beliefs of their time and place and tried to change the way people thought about the world. Chinese mariner Zheng He did not change the direction of Chinese history in the fifteenth century, but his voyages of exploration offer a fascinating look at what might have been. His counterpart, Prince Henry of Portugal, reflected European attitudes toward overseas exploration and, by his work, helped Europeans become even more outward-looking. Greek Cynic Diogenes and his Indian counterpart, religious reformer Mahavira, challenged people in their respective societies to live up to the standards they professed.

These are only two ways of classifying the personalities in world history. As you read these essays, I invite you to devise some of your own. Your determination of what makes an individual a success or a failure, admirable or deplorable, will necessarily

be influenced by your personal values, and those prominent today. I ask, however, that you also consider the times in which these individuals lived, as well as the problems they faced, when judging them. If you consider both their problems and the values they brought to bear in trying to solve them, you will begin the process of thinking historically. You will become historically minded.

To help you with this task, all of these personalities are presented to you in relation to a particular issue or issues which they had to face or which their careers raise for us—as thoughtful citizens of an increasingly interdependent world. These issues—noted by the questions which begin each essay—include such things as the role of religion as a social force, the problems faced by female leaders in male-dominated societies, and the way the structures and values of a society affect the way people feel about contact with other cultures. Also, in all but one case (that of the incomparable Genghis Khan), each personality is paired with a contemporary or near-contemporary who had to face a similar problem or deal with a similar issue, either in the same civilization or country or in another one. These pairings are often cross-cultural and should help you understand that human problems really do transcend the boundaries of race, creed, or nation. When we begin to see that individuals as different as Kangxi and Louis XIV had to face similar problems in creating a strong dynastic state, we can appreciate the fact that our history is world history and not only a history of individual nations or even civilizations.

Historical greatness, then, is not just a matter of how talented we are (or how lucky) but also a matter of when and where we live. History helps make us as surely as we help make history, as the careers of the two ancient historians, Thucydides and Sima Qian, illustrate. If this book challenges you to think about just how and why this happens, it will have served its purpose.

Because this book assumes no prior knowledge of history, or even prior college-level work, I use brackets [ ] to define terms which might be unfamiliar to a beginning student. You also should know that each chapter is designed to stand independently; chapters need not be read in order. You can start at any point and read in either direction, after checking with your teacher, of course!

This second edition of *Personalities and Problems* has been enlarged in direct response to teachers who used the first edition and requested the addition of Confucius and Plato, Thucydides and Sima Qian, and Elizabeth and Akbar. To save space, one chapter, which appeared in the first edition, "Constantine and Julian: How the Galileans Won," has been removed from the text but has been placed on the McGraw-Hill World History Website at [www.mhhe.com] for those who might wish to download it. All the remaining chapters have been corrected and new information added where appropriate. With the new chapters, this volume now contains more ancient Greeks and Chinese than one might expect in a work of this sort. I offer no apology for this imbalance, both because the new chapters were suggested by readers and because I am persuaded that comparisons between such figures as Confucius and Plato and Thucydides and Sima Qian do highlight some of the major issues in world history, as well as some of the crucial differences between Eastern and Western ways of viewing the world. As in the Preface to the first edition, I repeat my invitation to readers to suggest who ought to be included or omitted in any future edition. Your comments have been taken seriously, and will be again, should this work appear in a third edition.

In addition to all those hard-working colleagues, Murray State staff, and students whom I thanked in the first edition of *Personalities and Problems*, I would like to add the names of Terry Foreman and Franklin Robinson, who helped me deal fairly with Plato; all the teachers in the Department of History, especially Marcia Vaughan, whose name was omitted in the first edition, who remain willing to read and critique my work and whose comments always improve it; and Scott Bailey, whose hard work as my graduate assistant made the job of revision much easier. I would also like to thank the reviewers of the first edition whose comments helped shape this second edition: Robert Blackey, California State University, San Bernardino; Myles L. Clowers, San Diego City College; Nancy Erickson, Erskine College; Norman O. Forness, Gettysburg College; Paul E. Gill, Shippensburg University; David Grier, Erskine College; Dane Kennedy, University of Nebraska, Lincoln; Fred Nielsen, University of Nebraska, Omaha; Melvin E. Page, East Tennessee University; Jon Stauff, Saint Ambrose University; and Steven F. White, Mount Saint Mary's College. My thanks as well to the fine

librarians at Murray State and at the Hesburgh Library at the Universtiy of Notre Dame, where I have been privileged to work the past several summers. Leslye Jackson and Amy Mack at McGraw-Hill have been very supportive and helpful in suggesting revisions and in surveying users of the first edition. Any errors which remain after all this help can only be due to my own carelessness or stubbornness—and all those mentioned above should be absolved of any errors and credited with trying to save me from myself. We all join, however, in hoping that this work offers you pleasant reading, new insights into the past, and intellectual excitement.

Sincerely,

Ken Wolf

Department of History
Murray State University
Murray, KY 42071

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CHAPTER 1

Hammurabi and Moses: Law as a Mirror of Civilization

What do the laws of a society tell us about the lives and beliefs of the people who write, enforce, and obey those laws? What was the chief difference between the law codes of these two leaders?

Early civilizations were both fragile and gradual. We often make lists of their qualities as if they were chemical compounds or recipes: take several Neolithic farming villages and a river valley; add a group of nomadic herdsmen; stir briskly with bronze weapons. Blend in language, cities, writing, a system of class differentiation with warriors and priests at the head of the list, and simmer until a civilization emerges. Garnish with trade and conquest before serving.

Of course, it did not happen that way. The ideas, customs, and material things which constituted early civilizations came together slowly over centuries. Only after the fact, when the cities or settlements with their kings, priests, beliefs, shops, and soldiers were all in place, do we speak of a particular civilization. And this complex social, political, and economic creation was both strong and weak, strong enough to engage in wars of conquest, weak enough to be destroyed by the death of a powerful leader, or by a famine caused by a drop of two degrees in the average annual mean temperature.

While it lasted, each great early civilization was held together by power and traditions: the power of political and social elites and the traditions which are embodied in the great religious and philosophical value systems that mark all major civilizations.

These traditions give meaning to political and social institutions—to family life, education, government, and the marketplace. Though it is not always mentioned (because it is taken for granted),

the power and traditions of any society or civilization are reflected in its laws.

We see such reflections in two early, but very different, civilizations in the ancient near east: the Babylonian and the Hebrew. The first developed in the early part of the second millennium B.C.E. in the Tigris and Euphrates valley, while the second came together in the thirteenth century B.C.E. when Moses led the Hebrew people out of Egypt east into the Sinai Desert. The most famous ruler of the Babylonians was Hammurabi, who ruled from 1792–1750 B.C.E. After long wars in which he conquered the older Sumerian cities such as Larsa, Erech, and Ur in the southern part of Mesopotamia, Hammurabi published a list of 300 laws by carving them into a black basalt pillar seven feet high and two feet in diameter, which he erected near the site of the modern city of Baghdad in Iraq. Moses claimed to have received at least some of his laws directly from God while the Hebrews wandered through the Sinai desert after leaving Egypt. Nearly all the Hebrew laws are recorded in their holy book, the Torah (the Law), which makes up the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament.

Although both Hammurabi and Moses are famous as lawgivers, scholars are quick to point out that Hammurabi's famous "Code" was not really a modern collection of laws, nor were the laws in it particularly new. The same is true of the "laws of Moses" found in the Torah. In both cases, the laws and traditions ascribed to these men were derived in part from earlier traditions. Hammurabi's Code is a collection of time-honored Mesopotamian legal principles developed earlier in the Sumerian cities. Many of the laws in the Mosaic, or Covenant Code of the Hebrews found in Exodus borrow heavily from Hammurabi's code; others, especially those in Deuteronomy, were developed in the late seventh century B.C.E., long after the Hebrews had left the desert and established themselves in Palestine. Although Hammurabi and Moses were real people, their names became symbols of the traditions and values of their respective civilizations; Moses, in particular, became a nucleus around which legends formed.

It was easy for legends to form because so little was known about the lives of Hammurabi and Moses. Hammurabi was an active ruler who spent the last fourteen years of his reign in continuous warfare, attempting to control the people along the Euphrates

River. He wanted "to make justice appear in the land, to destroy the evil and the wicked [so] that the strong might not oppress the weak."[1] We know the familiar story of Moses told in Exodus: how the infant was found by the Pharaoh's daughter in a basket made of bulrushes (the same story is told of an early Sumerian king); how the adult Moses killed an Egyptian, then fled to Midian, where he became a shepherd and the son-in-law of a Midian priest; how God called him from a burning bush to lead his people out of Egypt; and how he did this, probably during the reign of Pharaoh Rameses II (1304–1237 B.C.E.).

It is interesting that Moses is presented throughout this book as a fully human person on whom God "imposes" his will. This reflects the unique relationship between God and humankind in the Hebrew tradition. The Hebrew God was so different from humans that his image could not be drawn nor his name spoken or written in full except on special occasions, yet he made agreements with a weak and fallible people. Other ancient peoples, unlike the Hebrews, often depicted their gods in human or animal form rather than seeing humans as made in the image of God. The book of Exodus also shows Moses to be a man passionately concerned with social justice and what we call today "national liberation." No nonscriptural source of that time speaks of him, and so our knowledge of Moses is limited by what scriptures tell us about Moses as the leader, prophet, and liberator of his people.[2]

The actual lives of these men are less important than what the laws ascribed to them tell about the lifestyle of their peoples. The laws of Hammurabi as well as those in the Old Testament tell us much about what the Babylonians and Hebrews considered important; reading them allows us to look into their law courts, temples, businesses, homes, and even their hearts and minds. We can see how their values differed from ours, as well as how they were similar. In the final analysis, the laws of the Babylonians, a commercial, city-oriented people who worshipped many gods, differed significantly from those of the Hebrews, a pastoral people who worshipped a single deity called Yahweh.

Initially, however, the similarities between the laws of these two peoples are more striking than the differences. The most famous feature of Hammurabi's Code is its emphasis on the law of retaliation *(lex talionis)*. This demands, in the words of laws 196 and

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