



LIFE the World's Great Civilizations: The Rise and Fall of Nations, from the Ancients to Today

Editors of Life

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This is the pictorial history of the rise (and fall) of great nations, from the ancients to today. But this is not just Rome and the Incas and British imperialism-though it certainly includes them-but lesser known civilizations that are often relegated to a footnote, or forgotten altogether. The ancient Anasazi Indians of the American Southwest apparently enjoyed an agrarian lifestyle that, after they mysteriously disappeared, would not be realized again on this continent for many generations. The natives of Easter Island sealed their own doom with a kind of communal hysteria that remains unclear. Several cultures put their mark on England's Stonehenge, and peeling the layers of that story is like parsing the experience of a very old tree, ring by ring. Of course the ages of empire are recounted: Egypt, Greece, Rome, China, Russia, Great Britain. We journey, photographically and archeologically, through Troy, and also the Mediterranean islands of Gnosos and Santorini (was this where Plato's Atlantis thrived before the cataclysm)? We climb to Machu Piccu, and trek to Australia to revisit the island continent when it belonged to its Aborigines. Obviously, many of the great civilizations belong to history, experiencing their glory before the advent of photography. There are no pictures of Alexander the Great or Genghis Khan or Napoleon beyond the painted ones. But there are many photographs of the civilizations they built and ruled, many of which were made for LIFE magazine, which looked at this story often. Near our book's end, we arrive at the ongoing narrative that is the United States of America: today's great civilization, built on a system called democracy. Our history and prospects are all the more fascinating when put in relief against the stories of all previous great civilizations.

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