

Early Civilizations

Student's Slideshow Commentary

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Introduction

For each slide, this commentary mostly follows the same formula:

1. Slide number and date

2. Introductory paragraph (in bold)

This seeks to encapsulate in a sentence or two what's going on in the map. These are in bold.

3. Bullet points

One or more bullet points, giving very brief points of interest in the map, or in the period it covers.

4. Additional note(s)

For most slides there are additional notes. These give more in-depth support to the bullet points. Much of the information these contain may be superfluous to your needs, especially if you are covering the topic quickly. However, we have included it so that it is there for you if you want it.

We suggest that, prior to using the Presentation with your class, you go through these additional notes and highlight any you wish to use.

Sometimes there are notes in italics - these are simply hints and tips for teachers. They don't occur very often.

A suggestion:

To keep your students more engaged (and, by the way, if your students are not engaged or benefitting from these maps, then let us know and we'll refund your money!), why not start each new map with a question, such as, "How is this map different from the previous one?"

Commentary

You might find it helpful to print these notes out.

Map 1: 3500 BCE

At this date farming is spreading around the Eastern Hemisphere, but there are as yet no urban, literate civilizations, and no large-scale states.

- **Agriculture** originated about 9,000 BCE, in the Middle East. Since then it has been gradually spreading over an ever larger area (1).
- In a handful of places, farming villages are growing into towns, and even cities. **Civilizations** - urban, literate societies with organized states - are on their way (2).

Additional Notes:

1. Different economies

Hunter-gatherers

Hunter-gathering is the oldest kind of **economy** of all. It has been practiced human societies for tens of thousands of years. At this date hunter-gatherer populations still cover vast eras of the **Eastern Hemisphere**: most of **Africa** south of the Sahara desert, most of **South East Asia**, much of **central Asia**, and large parts of **South Asia**, **East Asia** and **northern Europe**,

Hunter-gatherers live together in **small family groups**. Most build encampments of temporary shelters, as they are constantly moving from place to place in search of plants to gather (or **forage**), and animals to hunt.

Farmers

By this date, more and more land has been taken over by **farmers**, in a process that has been going on for several thousand years.

Growing crops like wheat, barley or rice, and keeping animals such as sheep, goats, cattle and pigs, allows a given area of land to provide food for a much larger number of people than hunting and gathering does. Farmers live in permanent settlements, **villages**, much larger than most hunter-gatherer encampments. These dot the landscape in much of the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, South Asia and East Asia, and are still spreading. Modern scholars think that the frontiers of agricultural settlement are moving forward at a rate of about one mile a year.

Pastoralists

In the grasslands and hilly areas of the Middle East and central Asia, the dry climates and poorer soils makes growing crops difficult. Here, people have developed lifestyles based on keeping herds of sheep, goats and cattle.

Many of these groups are **nomads**, tending their flocks and herds as they roam across the land in search for fresh grazing lands.

When near farming settlements, pastoralists **exchange** their animal products - meat, milk, leather, wool and horn - for any surplus crops grown by the farmers, and for craft goods.

At this point in history, pastoralist groups are making key advances such as domesticating **horses** and developing the first **wheeled vehicles**.

2. Moving towards civilization

Irrigation

In most places, the farmers' primitive **Stone Age** technology does not enable them to grow much more food than they can eat themselves. Within some areas, however, things are different.

In **river valleys**, people can grow much more food, with the help of **irrigation**. This involves digging **pools** and **tanks** for storing spring flood waters, and building **dykes** and digging **channels** to distribute it to fields over a wide area.

Once irrigated, these river valleys are very fertile. Not only is the water vital for growing crops, but the spring floods bring rich mud down from the hills, making ideal soil for growing crops on. As a result, more and more people can be fed, and **populations** grow. Villages grow larger and more numerous. Some expand into **towns** with thousands of inhabitants.

The farmers can also grow more food than they can eat themselves. This **food surplus** can support a growing group of non-farmers, such as **craft workers, traders, priests, officials** and **soldiers**. It is these groups, when organized and controlled by powerful leaders - **proto-kings** - which are required for the emergence of civilizations.

It is they who will direct and supervise the **labour force** which goes into extending the irrigation systems, and building the town walls, temples and palaces which the new towns and cities demand; who create or trade the beautiful pottery, metalwork and other **luxury products** which the rulers and their retinues demand; and enforce rulers' **control** over populations to a level needed to create properly functioning states; and foster the **religious practices and ideas** which underpin the new social and political structures.

In short, it is these non-farming groups who will build the **first civilizations**.

Map 2: 3500 BCE

In the Middle East the first civilization has now appeared.

The **Sumerian civilization** is located in the river valley of two great rivers, the **Tigris** and **Euphrates**. This is the land of **Mesopotamia** ("Mesopotamia" is a Greek word meaning "between the Rivers": meso = between, potamus = river).

- **Irrigation** has played a key role in the development of this civilization (1).
- The first **cities** in world history have grown up, each the centre of its own **city-state** (2).
- The earliest **writing system** is being developed (3).
- Sumerian society has reached a **complexity** unknown anywhere else in the world up to this time (4).

Additional Notes:

1. Irrigation systems

Irrigation has played a key role in the development of Mesopotamian civilization (see above, note 2).

This has allowed a **surplus** of food to be grown, which supports a **hierarchy of classes** who are not directly engaged in farming. These include soldiers, craft workers, priests and officials.

2. Cities

The non-farming groups live in the first true cities. The largest of these have **tens of thousands** of inhabitants, and already have the typical characteristics of ancient Mesopotamian cities:

- Temple complexes centered on **Ziggurats** (large, brick-built terraced structures resembling artificial hills)
- Royal **palaces**
- Defensive **walls**
- Wide **streets** and spaces for public ceremonies

The Sumerian cities are the centers of the first **city-states** in history. These are governed by ruling **elites** of **priests** and **officials**, headed by powerful **priest-kings**. The Sumerians practice a **polytheistic** religion, and the kings are seen as the earthly representative of the cities' patron **deities**.

These small city-states are constantly at war with one another.

3. Writing

In each city-state a group of priest-officials organize the religious life of the people, and also have a tight grip over their **economic** activities. This is required to collect and store the surpluses that the farmers grow, and distribute it to the temple priests, officials, craft workers and so on.

For this, they need to keep track of a whole host of transactions. They are developing methods of record keeping which will evolve into the earliest **writing**. This uses a pictographic script called **cuneiform**. This is imprinted on clay tablets using a wedge-shaped stylus.

They have also developed a **base-60** number system. This mathematical notation is used in the design and construction of large buildings, canals and other **engineering** projects, and also for the development and maintenance of astronomical **calendars**.

4. A complex society

Specialization of labour is well developed in Sumerian city-states. Professional artisans produce beautiful **paintings**, **sculptures**, **friezes**, **ceramics**, **jewelry** and **woven textiles**. These are used in the temples and royal palaces, but some are also traded for raw products not available locally, such as timber, copper and precious stones. Professional **merchants** have appeared in history for the first time.

Slavery exists within Sumerian society, but is not a major feature; it is farmers, not slaves, who provide the **forced labor** needed by their rulers.

Map 3: 2500 BCE

More major civilizations have appeared, both located on the flood plains of great rivers. In both, irrigation has played a key part in their development.

- The land of **Egypt** is located in the **Nile river valley**. Already by this date, some of the most iconic structures in all world history, the **Great Pyramids of Giza**, are being built here (1).
- In the **Indus Valley** in South Asia (the Indian Subcontinent), a number of large and well laid-out cities have emerged, notably at **Harrapa** and **Mohenjo-daro** (2).
- Bronze Age **trade routes** had brought other areas within the orbit of civilization, such as Asia Minor, Syria and Canaan (3).

Additional Notes:

1. Egyptian civilization

Unlike Mesopotamia, Egypt is not divided into numerous city states. Since around 3000 BCE it has been unified into a single **kingdom**.

The kingdom is ruled by a succession of divine kings called **pharaohs**. These are regarded as the earthly incarnations of Amun, the chief god in their **polytheistic** religion.

A nation-wide irrigation system

As in Mesopotamia, **irrigation** is crucial to allowing Egyptian civilization to flourish. The fact that the upper Nile valley forms a single kingdom has allowed a nation-wide system of irrigation to be built up under unified control.

Maintaining and extending this system requires Egypt's rulers to **mobilize labor** on a national scale. It is this that has given them the capability to build such truly massive monuments as the Great Pyramids of Giza.

A complex society

Egyptian society has a **hierarchy of classes**:

- Farmers, who form the great majority, are at the base.
- Artisans, traders and soldiers are above the farmers.
- Overseers, scribes and priests form an upper layer.
- Ministers, provincial governors and chief priests make up the top rung.
- The pharaoh and his family are right at the pinnacle.

As in Mesopotamia, **slaves** do not form a large class. It is the "free" farmers who provide the **taxes** and **forced labour** required by the ruling elite.

Egyptian writing

The Egyptians have developed their own writing systems. A **hieroglyphic** script is mostly used for public inscriptions on stone monuments. For everyday purposes Egyptian scribes have developed a closely-related but much easier to use script, the **hieratic**. This is written in ink on **papyrus** leaves (so not much has survived).

Egyptian achievements in **medicine**, **science** and **mathematics** are very advanced for the time; for example they have developed a 365-day **calendar**.

2. The Indus Valley civilization

This civilization is based on a number of large cities, notably at **Harrapa** and **Mohenjo-Daro**.

These cities are laid out on a rigid **street plan**, which shows how highly organized their societies were. Not only did these cities have wide **roads** laid out in a grid pattern, but they also boasted the earliest **sewage and water systems** yet found.

Trade routes traveling along the coast between north-west India and Mesopotamia may well have resulted in the transmission of skills in engineering, metalwork and so on from the Sumerians to the Indus Valley people.

The Indus Valley people have a **writing system**, but modern scholars have been unable to decipher it. As a result, far less is known about their civilization than is the case with those of the Egyptians and Sumerians.

3. The Bronze Age

This is the period known as the **Bronze Age**.

Metals have been known about for thousands of years. The most commonly-used of these has been **copper**, but this is too soft for anything other than decorative jewelry.

Mixed with tin, however, copper becomes a hard, resilient metal called **bronze**, which can be used in **weapons** and **armor**. The king whose warriors are equipped with bronze armour and weaponry has an advantage over those whose soldiers are not. The constant wars in Mesopotamia mean that the Sumerian kings all make sure that their armies are supplied with bronze.

Trade routes

Deposits of copper and tin are not common, and are seldom found in the same place. The Sumerians have to import them from distant locations. **Trade routes** have therefore fanned out from Mesopotamia, and by this date reach into Asia Minor, Syria and Canaan (modern day Israel and Jordan). Small trading cities have appeared in these regions. Trade routes also run from Mesopotamia into Iran, and from **Mesopotamia to the Indus Valley**, along the coast and also through Iran and Afghanistan.

Egypt does not have the same appetite for metals, because it is not divided into small states constantly at war with each other.. As it is one of the chief centers of wealth in the early Bronze Age world, however, it also is a centre of long-distance trade. Trade routes now run down the river Nile from **Egypt to Nubia**, where gold, ivory and slaves are to be had.

Local trade is often carried on through a system of **barter** - the direct exchange of different goods for one another - but valued **tokens** such as sea shells and, later, gold dust, are also used. Long-distance trade is largely carried out as an exchange of gifts between rulers. It is an important feature of the **diplomacy** between different states.

Map 4: 1700 BCE

Civilizations are now emerging in regions outside river valleys.

- Trade routes spreading westwards from the Middle East have stimulated the rise of the **Hittite** civilization in Asia Minor, the **Minoan** civilization on the island of Crete, and the **Mycenaean** civilization on the Greek mainland (1).
- Developments amongst the pastoral nomads of the **steppes** of **central Asia** have had a major impact on the great centers of civilization in Eurasia (2).
- One major civilization, the **Indus Valley civilization**, has vanished, for reasons still not properly understood by modern scholars (3).
- Urban civilization has now emerged in northern **China**, where the earliest historical Chinese dynasty, the **Shang**, rules (4).

Additional Notes:

1. The Eastern Mediterranean

Asia Minor is now covered by several small kingdoms under Indo-European rulers. One of these is the **Hittite kingdom**, which will, over the coming centuries, become a leading power in the Bronze Age world.

On Crete the **Minoan civilization** is at the centre of a maritime trading network. The wealth that this brings results in the construction of magnificent palaces, above all at their chief city, **Knossos**.

The **Mycenaean civilization** is based on a number of small kingdoms on the Greek mainland and scattered along the coasts and islands of Greece and Asia Minor. One of the most famous cities in the area is Troy, in today's northwest Turkey.

2. Central Asian nomads and the old centres of civilization: Mesopotamia and Egypt

The Indo-Europeans

A group of related peoples whose origins lie on the **steppes** north of the Black Sea, are now spreading far and wide across the steppes of central Asia. They are nomads, who speak a language from which a large group of modern languages would eventually evolve. These are what modern scholars call the "Indo-European" languages, as they are spoken in a huge area stretching from Europe to India.

By this date different groups of them have migrated into Europe, northern Asia Minor, Syria, Mesopotamia, Iran, and now even the Indian Subcontinent.

It was Indo-European peoples who first domesticated the horse. They were also probably the first to develop horse-drawn vehicles. By around 2000 BCE these had evolved into the **war chariot**.

This is a battle-winning weapon of war, and it enables Indo-European groups to conquer several kingdoms in Asia Minor, Syria and Mesopotamia. The most famous of these is the **Hittite kingdom**.

Now all the kingdoms of the Middle East are beginning to equip their armies with chariots.

Mesopotamia

Notice that the label **Sumerian civilization** has been replaced by **Babylonian civilization** in Mesopotamia. This is because the Sumerian city states have lost a lot of their power, while the more recent city of **Babylon** is now the leading city in Mesopotamia. A king of Babylon called **Hammurabi** conquered neighboring city-states to form an **empire** (not the earliest one, though: **Sargon, king of Akkad**, had built a short-lived empire in the late 3rd millennium BCE).

Hammurabi is famous for the **law code** he issued. This has survived into modern times to give scholars a fascinating insight into many aspects of ancient Mesopotamian life. This code built on previous ones, issued by different Sumerian rulers. This illustrates the fact that the Babylonians base their **culture**, including their **art**, **architecture** and **literature**, firmly on that of the Sumerians.

Egypt

The kingdom of Egypt now dominates territory well beyond the confines of the long, narrow Nile valley.

The Egyptians have a rich **literature**. Much of it is concerned with life after death.

3. The disappearance of the Indus Valley civilization

The Indus civilisation has now vanished. Modern scholars don't really know why. Various theories have been suggested - **climate change** resulting in famine or floods (or maybe both); overuse of water and soil **resources**; or pressure from **invaders** from outside. The last theory has been suggested as most scholars think that around this time tribes from central Asia, who called themselves the **Aryans** ("nobles"), started moving into the Indian Subcontinent.

The Aryans probably drifted into the subcontinent in small groups, rather than conquering in one massed invasion. Even so, their **migration** could have caused severe disruption for the inhabitants of the Indus Valley cities, and so been a factor in their decline.

4. Northern China: the Shang dynasty

In northern China, the mighty **Yellow River** spreads out over a vast area each spring, depositing rich mud brought down from the mountains. This enriches the soil, making this region one of the most fertile places in Earth. It is home to a large, dense farming population.

By this date, a well-organized kingdom with a Bronze Age civilization covers much of the region. Its **kings** belong to the **Shang dynasty**. These kings have the title "Son of Heaven" and are seen as specially chosen by Heaven (or God) to rule earth.

They are the first of a long succession of **dynasties** to rule China.

The **Chinese script**, composed of pictographic characters, is by now almost fully developed. Texts from the period show that **ancestor veneration** is already an important practice in China.

Metalworking skills have arrived in northern China. Modern scholars think that these skills travelled to China through central Asia. Here, a scattered chain of small oases run from west to east, and over the centuries their inhabitants have exchanged precious goods, along with ideas and skills, from one to another. By this means technological innovations which first appeared in the Middle East have gradually spread to China.

Map 5: 1300 BC

This era marks the high point of the Bronze Age world.

- In the Middle East, **Egypt** is now an aggressive, expansive empire, and the **Hittite** empire, Egypt's main rival, is a formidable power (1).
- The **Mycenaean** civilization continues to flourish, though the **Minoan** civilization of Crete has been destroyed, probably by a great earthquake (2).
- The **Shang** dynasty is at its height in China (3).
- **Indo-European groups** are spreading across northern India, conquering the indigenous people and establishing themselves as the ruling class there (4).

Additional Notes:

1. The Middle East

The Middle East is dominated by two regional powers, Egypt, under a series of ambitious kings, and the Hittite Empire.

Egypt is the centre of the largest **empire** ancient Egypt ever possessed. It rules much of Canaan, and has expanded its control deep into **Nubia**.

The **Hittite empire** is Egypt's main rival. Egypt and the Hittites contest control of Canaan, a land of small **city-states**.

2. The Eastern Mediterranean

The **Minoan civilization** of the island of Crete was gravely affected by earthquakes, in 1600 BCE and possibly again in 1400 BCE. These may have seriously weakened it, making it vulnerable to raids and invasions from Greece.

The **Mycenaean civilization**, however, has continued to flourish. The kings of **Mycenae** lead a confederation of other small states in Greece and the Aegean. Sometime about now this confederation may be fighting the **Trojan War**, immortalized centuries later by the Greek poet **Homer**.

3. China

The **Shang dynasty** is at its height at this time. Its kings rule a large part of northern China, and dominate an even larger area.

By this date, the **chariot** has arrived in China, presumably via the central Asian nomads. Chariots form the core of the Shang army.

Under the Shang, the Chinese are manufacturing some of the most beautiful **bronze vessels** ever produced.

4. South Asia

Pastoralist Indo-Europeans from central Asia, who in South Asia call themselves the “Aryans” (nobles), are now spreading across northern India. They form tribal kingdoms ruled by warrior **aristocracies**.

The Aryan religion is **polytheistic**, with roots far back in early Indo-European times. It is related to the religions of the Ancient Greek, Iranians and Germans. It is characterized by elaborate religious rituals, presided over by a hereditary priesthood called the **Brahmins**.

These rites are transmitted orally from generation to generation, and will later form part of the great collection of hymns, poems and ceremonial rites called the **Vedas** (the most famous of which is the **Rig Veda**, composed around this time but which, like other compositions of the period, would not be written down until well over a thousand years later). These tell us much about the beliefs and practices of the early proto-**Hinduism** of the time, and this period of South Asian history is sometimes called the **Vedic** period of ancient India.

Map 6: 1000 BCE

This has been a time of great upheaval, especially in the Middle East: civilizations have been damaged, or even destroyed altogether. It is also a time of great advances.

- The great states of the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean - the Hittites, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and the Mycenaeans - have all come under attack from **migrating** peoples. Some have been destroyed altogether, while others are severely weakened (1).
- The Middle East is also seeing a number of key advances for world history, however. These include the spread of **iron** technology, the **alphabet**, and the emergence of **monotheist** religion (2).
- The **Vedic** (early Hindu) religion is taking shape in **Aryan**-dominated northern India (3).
- In China, the **Shang dynasty** has been replaced by the **Zhou dynasty** (4).

Additional Notes:

1. The Middle East and Mediterranean

The great civilizations of these regions came under attack from different **migrations** of peoples:

- In Greece and the Aegean, the **Dorians**, a people originally living in northern Greece, move south into central and southern Greece; they set in motion more migrations in the Aegean Sea, and in the resulting turbulence the **Mycenaean civilization** perishes.
- The “**Peoples of the Sea**” migrated from points in southern and eastern Europe and, traveling along the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean, destroyed the **Hittite empire**, sacked many cities in Syria and gravely weakened **Egypt**. A group of them settled on the coast of Canaan and became known to history as the **Philistines** (from whom we get the label “Palestine”).
- With the old centres of power weakened, new civilizations have come to the fore. The **Phoenicians** survived the attacks of the Sea Peoples, and are now growing wealthy through

trade. They pioneer sea routes across the Mediterranean and beyond (as far as Britain by some accounts).

- Desert tribes called **Aramaeans** set up kingdoms in Syria and northern Mesopotamia. In the following centuries Aramaic will become the *lingua franca* of the Middle East.
- The **Israelites** have occupied much of Canaan. They have brought with them their monotheistic religion (see below, Advances). Until recently divided into different tribes, the Israelites are now united under their king, David. He has made the city of Jerusalem his capital.
- In Mesopotamia, the **Chaldeans** invaded in from the desert and occupied much of southern **Babylonia**.
- **Indo-European** speaking peoples called the **Iranians**, already established in northern Iran, are now occupying the central parts of the country. In the coming centuries they will move down into the south as well. Amongst their number are tribes which will become well-known to history - the **Medes** and **Persians**.

2. Advances

This period sees a series of advances as the **Bronze Age** gives way to the **Iron Age**.

- Iron smelting technology has improved to the point that the metal is tough and flexible. It is also much cheaper than bronze, as iron is plentiful and can be found in many locations. Iron **farming tools** and **weapons** are beginning to come into common use. This is a huge advance, as agriculture will become more productive, and more soldiers can be armed with iron weapons and armor. This will bring political power to a larger section of the population. This creates the potential for new political arrangements, including **republics** and **democracies**.
- The spread of **alphabets** brings literacy to many more people. The Canaanites seem to have developed the alphabet first, and a Canaanite people, the **Phoenicians**, will spread use of this new script to the west. At the same time, the **Aramaeans** (see above, The Middle East and Mediterranean, third bullet point) will adopt the Canaanite alphabet and spread it across the Middle East and into the Indian Subcontinent.
- In religion, **monotheism** brings about a revolution. The **Israelites** (see above) worship of the one God, **Yahweh**, and their religion will be ancestral to the three great monotheistic faiths of the modern world, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. A second monotheistic religion, **Zoroastrianism**, had also probably appeared by this date, in Iran.
- In central Asia, **horseback riding** has become easier with the larger animals being bred by the steppe peoples. This development will lead to a revolution in warfare, and take the threat from the nomads to a new level.
- In Arabia, the **camel** has been domesticated. This will make the **Bedouin** (desert nomads) lifestyle possible, and open deserts up to **trade routes** as never before.

3. India in the Vedic Age

The **Vedic** (early Hindu) religion is taking shape in **Aryan**-dominated northern India. It promotes the concepts of **karma** and **reincarnation**, which in turn underpin the rise of a hierarchy of hereditary **castes**: the **brahmins** (the priestly caste) at the top, warriors and rulers just below them, then the ordinary farmers, craftsmen and traders, and then the menial laborers. Outside the caste system are the “outcasts”, the **untouchables**, who do the unclean tasks in society.

4. Zou dynasty China

In China, the **Zhou dynasty** has replaced the Shang, and is more warlike and expansionist than its predecessor had been.

The Zhou kings exercise control over their kingdom through numerous local **lords**, each ruling one of the many small fiefs into which the kingdom is divided.

The change of dynasty has resulted in little change in terms of Chinese civilization. For example, the Shang tradition of **bronze-making** continues under the Zhou.

Map 7: 700 BCE

New civilizations and empires have appeared

- In the Middle East, the past few centuries have seen the rise of the first truly multinational **empire** in world history, the **Assyrian** Empire. This now dominates much of the region (1).
- One of the peoples now under the thumb of the Assyrians are the **Phoenicians**. A trading people, they are having a huge impact on Mediterranean peoples further west (2).
- Another people under Assyrian domination are the **Israelites**. Despite the troubles they have experienced, they are developing their monotheistic faith towards modern Judaism (3).
- The **Greeks** are beginning to developing their own civilization (4).
- In the **Indian subcontinent**, urban civilization is returning to the subcontinent more than a millennium after the fall of the Indus Valley cities (5).
- In China, the **Zhou** kingdom is fragmenting as the kings lose authority (6).

Additional notes:

1. The Assyrian empire

The Assyrian conquests have been the work of a large, well-organized **army** complete with massed infantry armed with **iron weapons**; a cavalry arm of **horseback**-riding soldiers as well as chariots; a well-developed **siege train**; and the first professional **logistical organization** to keep the army supplied. Assyrian conquests are also aided by a fearsome reputation for cruelty.

The Assyrian policy of uprooting conquered peoples and relocating them in far away lands has turned large areas of the Middle East into a melting pot of many cultures. A common language, **Aramaic**, has come into use over much of the region. This in turn has aided the spread of the Aramaic **alphabet**.

2. Phoenicians

In the past centuries Phoenician **merchants** have pioneered **trade routes** right across the Mediterranean, and beyond. They have had a huge influence on western peoples, such as the Greeks, by spreading the use of the **alphabet** and other elements of ancient Middle Eastern civilization to them.

3. The Israelites

The Israelite kingdom of David and his son Jonathan divided into two in the mid-10th century BCE. The northern part was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BCE. The southern part, forming the kingdom of **Judah**, remains in existence but is subordinate to the Assyrian Empire.

In this period the **monotheistic** religion of the Israelites has developed, as a succession of **prophets** have called on the people to remain loyal to their faith by worshipping God (**Yahweh**) and showing **compassion** to others, especially the less fortunate in society.

4. The Greeks

The Greeks lived in hundreds of **city-states**, most of which are **republics** under the control of groups of **aristocrats**.

The Greeks are a nation of seafarers and traders, and they have established **colonies** right round the Mediterranean Sea. The great days of Greek civilization lie in the future, but already the remarkable oral epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, attributed to a blind poet called **Homer**, have been composed. These are still regarded as among the finest works in **Western literature**.

5. India

In the **Indian Subcontinent**, trade routes from the Middle East are bringing in cultural and technological influences. **Iron** technology and the **alphabet** are two of these. Iron tools help farmers clear land for crops.

The huge Ganges river plain, until now marshy and densely wooded, is being increasingly settled, and is seeing a large upswing in population. As trade routes spread and some villages grow into towns and cities, **urban civilization** is returning to the subcontinent, more than a millennium after the fall of the Indus Valley cities.

6. China

The Chinese population has been expanding as **iron farm tools** make agriculture more productive; and the borders of the Zhou kingdom have pushed outwards as neighbouring peoples have been absorbed into the Chinese cultural area.

Politically, however, the **Zhou** kingdom has become divided as the authority of the kings has weakened. The more powerful local lords have conquered their neighbours, and are becoming virtually independent rulers of their own states. They only nominally owe allegiance to the Zhou kings.

Map 8: 600 BCE

The different civilizations are all experiencing economic growth, social transformation and political change.

- In the Middle East, the **Assyrian Empire** has now vanished, replaced by three large states - the **Babylonian Empire**, the **empire of the Medes**, and a revived **Egypt** (note 1).
- The **Greeks** are experiencing big changes in their societies (note 2).

- In **India**, urban, literate civilization is re-emerging, after a gap of more than a thousand years (note 3).
- **China** is now divided into many independent states, constantly at war with one another (note 4).

Additional Notes:

1. The Middle East

The **Assyrian Empire** collapsed as peoples within the empire, especially the Babylonians and the Egyptians, rose in revolt. Peoples from beyond its border, such as the **Scythians** (a nomadic people from the steppes of central Asia) and the **Medes**, also attacked.

The **Babylonian Empire** is ruled by the famous king, Nebuchadnezzar, who in a few years time will destroy Judah, the surviving kingdom of the Israelites (587 BCE). He will take its elite into captivity to his capital, Babylon.

The Medes are **Iranians**, an Indo-European people who, until a few centuries before, were nomadic pastoralists on the steppes of central Asia. The Medes have forged their own empire in Iran.

For a time, **Egypt** was ruled by the Assyrians. However, it has shaken off Assyrian domination and is now under a native dynasty of pharaohs. They are intent on reviving the glories of their ancient civilization.

In Asia Minor, the kingdom of **Lydia** has become wealthy and powerful. It starts to use stamped **metal coinage** the first state to do so. Its close ties with the Greeks mean that the use of metal coinage soon spreads westwards.

2. The Greeks

Greek sailors and traders now **dominate the trade routes** of the eastern Mediterranean, though In the western Mediterranean they face competition from the Phoenician colony of Carthage, located in North Africa.

The expansion of commerce is increasing **inequality** within Greek society, raising social tensions and causing political instability. This has led to rise of **tyrants** in many city-states, at the expense of the old aristocratic families who used to control government. The changes in Greek society have also led some thinkers to start questioning old beliefs, and to ask questions about...everything!

3. India

The urban, literate civilization of the **Indian Subcontinent** is not located in the Indus Valley, as the first civilisation to develop there had been, but on the great plain of the **River Ganges**.

Northern India is divided between several **powerful states**: most are ruled by kings, but some are under oligarchies of nobles (**oligarchies**). Some modern scholars see them as types of republics.

4. China

In China, the **independent states** into which the Zhou kingdom has now divided are constantly at war with one another. The competition between them is intense. The princes of the best-run states select officials for their loyalty and capability rather than aristocratic birth, and appoint experienced soldiers, some of humble origin, to lead their armies.

As a result of these changes, the more efficiently-run states are conquering the less well-run ones.

Map 9: 500 BC

The Greek, Indian and Chinese civilizations are now all entering their classical ages.

- The **Persian Empire** now rules much of the Middle East. It is the largest state that the ancient world would ever see (in terms of territory, at least) (1).
- The Persians have allowed the **Jewish** captives in Babylon to return to their homeland. There they have set about rebuilding their historic capital of **Jerusalem** and its temple (2).
- **Egypt** has become a province of the Persian empire (3).
- The **Greek city-states** are waking up to the threat posed by the Persian Empire (4).
- In India, Gautama Siddhartha (the **Buddha**) is laying the foundations for the great world religion of Buddhism (5).
- In China, the philosopher **Confucius** is developing teachings that will influence Chinese and other East Asian thinking right up to the present day (6).

Additional Notes:

1. The Persian Empire

The Persians are an **Iranian people**, closely related to the Medes. They were subject to the Medes until their king, **Cyrus the Great**, rebelled and took over Medean empire. He and his successors then greatly expanded its borders.

The Persians follow the **Zoroastrian** religion. It teaches that the universe is the setting for a clash between a good god and an evil god.

Zoroastrianism will never gain the adherents of the millions of people which Christianity, Islam and Buddhism will do; however, it will influence all those great religions with its belief in angels and devils.

The Persian empire is now ruled by **Darius the Great**. He has organized the empire along more stable lines by dividing its huge area into provinces (or **satrapies**, as they are called); and causing a comprehensive **road system** to be built which allows royal messages to reach distant places quickly, and Persian troops to hurry to where they are needed.

2. Judaism

The Persian rulers' act of allowing the **Jewish exiles** to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple in Jerusalem has preserved the Jewish religion.

The experience of the exile in Babylon has had a major impact on the Israelite faith. **Prophets** struggled with the idea that God could let such a catastrophic event happen to his "Chosen People". They developed the idea that people show their obedience to God by acting towards others with justice and generosity - to foreigners as well as Jews, poor as well as rich. It has thus taken important strides towards its transformation into modern **Judaism**.

3. Egypt and Nubia

For the next fifteen hundred years, Egypt will be controlled by a succession of **alien rulers**, often governing from far-away places like Persia, Rome, Constantinople and Baghdad. The great days of ancient Egyptian civilization are over.

Nubia

Unlike its more famous neighbor to the north, **Nubia** remains independent, under its own line of kings.

Nubia's culture has begun to evolve away from its Egyptian roots, though these remain strong. A more "**African**" culture is emerging here. They worship gods which have the characteristics of African animals (for example an elephant god and a lion god), they develop a distinctive architecture with steep-sided pyramids, and have a political culture which gives a much more prominent place to female rulers.

4. The Greeks

The Greek city-states have continued to experience **economic growth**, as well as growing **social inequality**. As noted above (600 BCE, additional note 1) tyrants came to power in many city-states; however, in most places their rule lasted barely more than a generation. Many cities have seen power pass to small groups of powerful families, not only members of old aristocratic families but also wealthy merchants and their descendants.

One city is different, however. **Athens** is now ruled by all its male citizens, meeting together in a large assembly to make laws and select magistrates (most of whom are also ordinary citizens). The city has developed the first **democracy** in Greece - and in world history.

The other leading Greek city-state is **Sparta**. This has turned itself into the most **militarized** of all Greek states. As a result, it has made itself the leader of a league of city-states in southern Greece.

The economic, social and political changes experienced by the Greek city-states have created an environment in which many **original thinkers** flourish. These include **Pythagoras** the mathematician and mystic, **Xenophanes** who taught that there was only one god, not many; **Heracitus**, who said that all things are always changing; and **Anaxagoras**, who pioneered the idea that the universe is made up of atoms.

5. India

The **expansion of trade** throughout northern India is creating new **urban classes** of merchants and craftsmen. These do not fit easily into traditional Aryan caste-based society. They feel excluded and disparaged by the priestly (Brahmins) and warrior castes, who seek to retain their

monopoly on status and power. They are increasingly dissatisfied with traditional Aryan religion, based on obscure rituals which only the priests can carry out.

This makes them attentive to the teachings of two great philosophers who are alive at this date, and who are challenging the old beliefs and practices. These are **Gautama Siddhartha** (the “Buddha”) and **Mahavira**.

They are collecting groups of disciples around them, who will pass on their teaching to future generations; the Buddha’s teaching will become the great world religion of **Buddhism**, while Mahavira will found **Jainism**.

6. China

This is a period of **great instability and change** in China. The old nobility is being challenged by a new social group, the **gentry**. A strong expansion of trade is leading to larger **towns and cities**, and to the emergence of new classes of **merchants and artisans**.

As society changes, old beliefs come under examination. People feel confused, morality seems to have gone out of the window. **New schools of thought** arise, to offer ideas for new times. This is the period of the “100 Schools”.

Two of the most influential of these schools are **Legalism**, which teaches that an ordered society will come about only if everyone serves the state without question. A teacher called **Confucius** opposes this idea. He believes that morality will only be restored when everyone obeys their seniors - children their parents, wives their husbands, subjects their rulers. On the other hand, seniors must treat their juniors with kindness and justice.

Confucius’ teachings will come to dominate Chinese thought right up to the 20th century.

Questions

1. Who were the first people to live in cities and develop writing?
2. On what agricultural technique did the rise of the earliest civilisations depend?
3. On what river did Egyptian civilization depend?
4. On what river did the first civilization in the Indian Subcontinent depend?
5. On what river did the state ruled by the earliest dynasty in China depend?
6. What was this dynasty called?
7. What label do we give to a group of closely related languages, spoken by peoples whose ancestors originally lived on the plains of central Asia before moving southwards into the Middle East, westwards into Europe and south-eastwards into the Indian Subcontinent?
8. Name one of the peoples who invaded the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean at the end of the Bronze Age, around 1000 BCE.
9. Name one of the advances and innovations (whether technological, cultural or social) that took place around this time.
10. In which region of the world did the Vedic belief system take shape, with its concepts of Karma, reincarnation and castes?
11. Which dynasty came to power in China around 1000 BCE?
12. What was the empire that rose to dominate the Middle East in the centuries after 1000 BCE?
13. Which people spread alphabetical writing to the Greeks and other peoples in the Mediterranean region?
14. Which people, who come to prominence after 1000 BCE, have a monotheistic religion centred on the God, Yahweh?
15. What was the name of the Greek poet to whom the great epic poems of the Iliad and Odysseus have been attributed?
16. Who was the Babylonian king who sacked Jerusalem and forced the Jewish elite to leave their homeland and live in the city of Babylon?
17. Which was the first kingdom to mint metal coinage?
18. Which great empire succeeded the Babylonian Empire?
19. Which Greek city state was the first in world history to adopt democracy as its form of government?
20. Who founded one of the great religions of the world in India around 500 BCE?
21. Who was the great Chinese thinker who developed a teaching that would be followed by millions of people, right up to the present day?

Further reading

A list of all TimeMaps articles for Period 1 can be found on the Encyclopedia home page. Here is a selected list of the key articles which students should find most helpful.

[Hunter-Gatherers](#)

[The Coming of Farming](#)

[Early Pastoralists](#)

[The Origins of Civilization](#)

[Ancient Mesopotamia](#)

[Ancient Egypt](#)

[Ancient Israel](#)

[Ancient India](#)

[Ancient China](#)