

As the World Turns: Beginning of Time - 450 CE

Beginning of Time

When looking for a place to begin a World History course, it is good to begin at... well... the beginning. In this case, it is the beginning of time. The problem is that we are a little short on details and primary sources of how everything began. What we are left with are the creation stories of the major religions and the leading scientific theory. Based upon these sources, here are the “common themes” that they all share.



- *From Nothing to Something*. There was a point where there was “nothing,” followed by some event, and then the beginning of everything. In the Bible, it was Elohim speaking into the darkness. In the Vedas, it was a lotus flower blooming from the endless dark coils of a snake. To modern scientists, there was a “singularity” that expanded/exploded to create the universe.
- *Creation Pattern*. Each religion and scientific theorem follow a similar development pattern: Planets, [on earth] sky-land separation, dirt-water separation, fish-animals-birds, and, finally, humans. The method and processes are different but the pattern/order is the same.

The Great Migration

According to archeologists, the first humans (as in Homo Sapiens) appeared in Central/East Africa. From the heart of Africa, humans began the process of migrating, following food and water sources. According to our best estimates, the pattern went as follows:

- 50,000 BCE: Humanity begins in Central/East Africa
- 40,000 BCE: Humans migrate to Western Africa, as well as North into the Middle East and Europe
- 35,000 BCE: Humans arrive in Southern Africa, as well as East Asia
- 30,000 BCE: Humans navigate water to arrive in Australia
- 20,000 BCE: Humans brave the cold to arrive in Northern Europe and Russia.
- 12,000 BCE: Humans cross from Russia to North America (Alaska)
- 11,000 BCE: Humans rapidly travel south, spreading across North and (finally) South America

Hunting, Gathering, and Herding

As humanity spread across the world, they did so in “Hunting and Gathering” tribes. These consisted of tight-knit family groups that followed their plant and animal food sources. When the food was gone, the tribe migrated (moved) to a new place. If there was too much competition with another tribe for food, they moved. Some tribes developed into herders, where they followed and cared for domesticable animals. The first tribes developed tools and weapons made of stone. They developed gods to worship, hoping for supernatural assistance with their hunting, military victories, and fertility in childbirth. As time progressed, tribes developed common regional meeting areas to hold religious gatherings, trade goods, and exchange sons/daughters in marriage.



Middle East - Part 1 (10,000 BCE - 300 BCE)

Neolithic Revolution & Mesopotamia

Around 10,000 BCE hunting and gathering groups began the most significant revolution, or change, in the history of the world: they began to farm. This was not something that happened overnight, but instead took thousands of years. One of the first places where farming developed was in Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq) between the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys. The abundance of domesticable plants and large mammals, plus the rich soil brought in with the annual floods, made it an ideal location to develop farming (agriculture). With the development of irrigation, or ditches that bring water from rivers to the farms, tribes settled down and invested in growing their own food instead of following it around.

Farming changed everything.

Development of City-States and Society

Families settled down and began to claim fertile land. The collection of farms turned into villages. The villages had two problems. The first problem was that they were easy targets for hungry hunting/gathering tribes (think of it as the ancient version of fast food). The second was that because there is a limited amount of fertile land, competition and fighting developed for who would control it. Farmers joined together to help protect each other. They selected a leader to organize to govern and protect them. These actions led to the creation of city-states.

By 4,500 BCE the first city-states appeared, called the Sumerians. A city-state is an independent city that is run by its own government. A city-state only controls and governs the land and people within the city limits. With the surplus of food, populations grew rapidly, causing people to look for new areas to start new cities. As the good, fertile land was quickly claimed, people had to travel farther away. Soon, city-states were set up throughout the Middle East all along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Kingdoms, as in collections of cities under one government, began to form. As the city-states and kingdoms grew in number, they began to trade with each other. A trade network developed with cities as far away as India.



The increase in trade led to the development of the first written language, Cuneiform. Cuneiform was a series of wedges in clay that was used to keep track of sales and trade agreements. Soon, writing was used to record histories, important messages, stories, and poetry. A later kingdom, The Phoenicians, transformed language further by creating the first alphabet; a set of letters that can be rearranged to create words.



Age of Empires

Around 2200 BCE, Sargon of Akkad led his army to begin conquering surrounding city-states, building the first empire. An Empire is created when one people group conquers and rules over another or other people groups. This set off the Age of Empires, where a seemingly endless number of people groups attempted to conquer as much land as possible and control it for as long as possible. At first, the empires were small and regional. But by 2000 BCE, empires were conquering thousands of miles of territory. Famous empires like the Hittites, Assyrians, and Babylonians ruled over the Middle East for hundreds of years. Each empire lost its power when the next great kingdom developed the next great technology, using it to rise to military and political greatness. Geography played a role, as droughts and famines would cause there to be food shortages; causing the empire to collapse. By 300 BCE, the Persian Empire was in the height of its glory, ruling from Egypt to Greece, and as far east as Afghanistan and continuing to expand westward.

As the empires grew, the governments became more complex. They developed bureaucracies, or support staffs, to help them rule over the lands and people they conquered. They also developed new laws. The most famous ancient legal code was Hammurabi's Code. Hammurabi was king of Babylon around 1770 BCE. He created the first set of fixed rules and put copies throughout the empire to unify the people and to create order.



With more expansive empires came great advancements in technology and architecture. People lived in cities, interconnected by roads, rivers, or sea ports. City planning began to involve channeling water from rivers into the cities for people to drink and for plumbing to take peoples' natural waste out of the city. Kings built large and exquisite palaces. Cities built massive walls for protection. This was made possible by the advancement of tools made out of bronze and iron.

Religions became more complex, as well. Gods were worshipped in extensive temple complexes. Statues were built 30 to 50 feet tall out of bronze. Written language allowed for the creation of official religious texts to record the words from the gods and their prophets. Priests led elaborate ceremonies with music, costumes, and massive sacrifices of animal or human life (or both).

In a mere 10,000 years, societies in the Middle East developed from wandering tribes and chasing food to massive empires, controlling thousands of miles of land and ruling over the people of the entire region.

Africa (4,000 BCE - 300 BCE)

Egypt

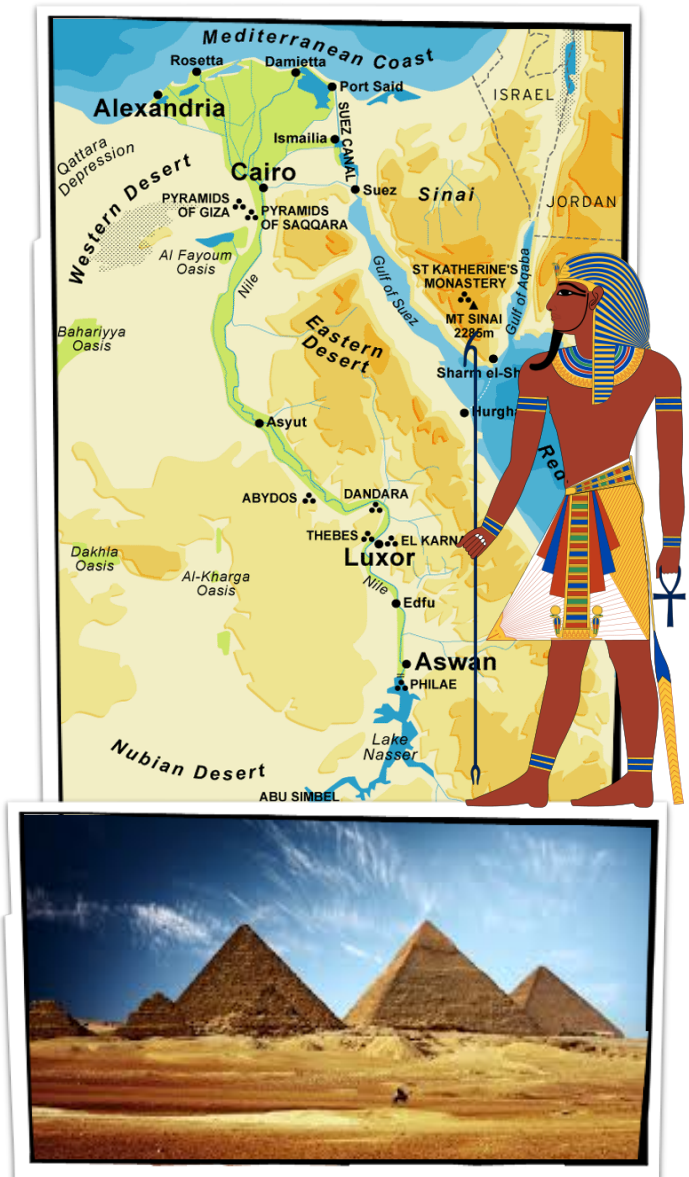
In North-East Africa flows the Nile River, the longest river in the world. The Nile River was followed by the first humans who migrated north and has played a vital role in the history of the region because of how robust yet predictable its flood patterns. Along the Nile, a civilization flourished for almost 3,000 years: the Egyptians.

The story of Egypt follows very closely with the Middle East. Egypt was one of the first river valley civilizations, founded soon after the Mesopotamians. The Egyptians were able to transplant the domesticable plants and animals from Mesopotamia, to grow along the extremely fertile Nile River. The Egyptians developed a complex system of government and writing soon after the Sumerians, as well.

While the Middle East saw endless wars between rising and falling empires, the Egyptians were remarkably stable. Their civilization lasted 3,000 years (minus two disastrous droughts) before finally being defeated by the Assyrians. There were three key factors that led to their remarkable success.

- First, they had an abundance of dependable food and fresh water, thanks to the Nile River.
- Second, the Egyptians were protected by natural barriers. To the West was the world's largest desert: the Sahara Desert. Their northern border was protected by the Mediterranean Sea. To the East was the Red Sea. Only a small strip of land connected Egypt to the Middle East and that made the Egyptian land easy to defend.
- Third, the Egyptians developed a powerful government system that allowed them to keep peace and order: the god-king. To the Egyptians, the Pharaoh served as their king who was also a living god. To disobey the Pharaoh was to disobey an actual god, putting your life at stake in both this life and in the afterlife. This tied religion in with politics in a very profound way that would be copied and emulated for centuries to come.

Egypt (and the neighboring kingdom of Kush to the south) served as an economic and cultural powerhouse during its 3,000-year reign. The pyramids, tombs of the Pharaohs, were both an engineering marvel as well as a sign of a well-organized society. The temple complexes and their pillars were duplicated throughout the Mediterranean. Their art, pottery, and literature were traded and distributed throughout the Middle East and Europe. Their religion, in particular their view of the afterlife, has been emulated in other major world religions. Even though the Egyptians were defeated by the Assyrians and Persians, Egyptian culture continued to impact the region for millennia.



The Rest of Africa (until ~200 CE)

Africa was home to a rich tapestry of human culture during a world that looked very different. Much of the history of humanity took place during the Wisconsin Ice Age (from 75,000 BCE to 11,000 BCE) when the climate of the world was quite different. At the end of the ice age, the Sahara (which is now the world's largest desert), was a lush savannah. This savannah supported large communities of pastoralists who managed and cared for their herds - from Nigeria to Egypt. They formed semi-nomadic communities, who both cultivated (managed or altered) the plants for food while also moving with their herds - a mixture of early farming and herding. Unfortunately, climate change caused the Sahara to turn from a savannah into an unforgiving desert. This caused the people to migrate, isolating the people living along the Nile from the people living south of the Sahara (that is now called "Sub-Saharan Africa").

The Bantu nation formed in Western-Central Africa. Although their exact origin is not known (some pointing to the River Niger, others saying Cameroon or Congo), they were a remarkable civilization that developed small-scale agriculture. Their chief accomplishment was the development of smelting iron ~1500 BCE; quite possibly the first humans to ever do so. The Bantu eventually grew so large in their population that groups began to leave and settle throughout the Eastern and Southern parts of Africa. This is referred to as the Bantu migration, as they brought their Bantu language, culture, and technology with them.

The rest of sub-Saharan Africa possessed minimal domesticable plants and native domesticable large mammals. While the Bantu, Kush, Swahili, and Egyptian societies achieved great technological and cultural wonders, much of the rest of the continent thrived as nomadic hunters and gatherers or semi-nomadic animal pastoralists.

Assignment

- 1) Read & Update the Content Matrix
- 2) Fill out this chart with the strengths/positives and weaknesses/negatives of each region.

Region	Strengths	Weaknesses	Impact
Africa			
Middle East			