

UNIT 1: Transformations

Unit 1 covers the largest period of time, from whenever—no, seriously, "the beginning" refers to the beginning of *everything*—until 600 BCE. In this era, farming came into existence, mankind settled into a few well-traveled nooks (like Mesopotamia), writing was invented, and humans had to grapple with ideas like culture, politics, and new technology for the very first time.

Before 8000 BCE

Before 8000 BCE, every culture in the world was in their **Paleolithic** period, which means "Old Stone Age." During this period, humans migrated from Africa to Europe, Asia, the South Pacific, and the Americas.

Between 15000 BCE and 10000 BCE, things took a turn for the worse for early humans. Glacial ice sheets covered large areas in North America and Europe. Unlike the *Ice Age* movies, this did not lead to a shaky alliance between humans, mammoths, and saber-toothed tigers. Actually, as food sources became covered in ice, there was so little to go around that many species, including saber-toothed tigers, became extinct. Lower worldwide temperatures also made things a little dicey for humanity as a whole.

Luckily, our ancestors pulled through and the world started getting warmer after around 9000 BCE. Then things got really interesting.

8000 BCE to 600 BCE: Really Big Changes

Once the world warmed up, it was like the first day of spring. Humans got out into the sun and decided to do something productive. There was one big change to change them all: the introduction of agriculture, which allowed humans to transition from being nomadic hunter-gatherers to permanent settlers. When humans started settling together in large numbers, this led to the creation of complex social structures, economies, and cultures.

With all of the people living together, there had to be some sort of law and order, so laws and governments were made. When everyone lived close together, people who were good at some things, like tool making or farming, traded with people who were good at other things, leading to economies. In addition, many of the world's major religions were first established during this very long era, and artistic expression began to characterize the human experience. Forms of political organization also emerged. There were immense changes in how humans interacted with the environment, interacted with one another, built and organized their civilizations, regulated their economies, and managed social structures.

The geniuses—or writers, if you prefer—at Shmoop have benevolently divided and processed the trends of several thousand years into the following categories for your consumption:

- Humans and the Environment;
- Culture;
- State-Building;
- Economic Systems;
- and Social Structures.

Before we get started eating away at thousands of years of history, we have to make one major point of consideration. We'll keep it brief, as we don't want to spoil your appetite.

Big Continuities *Do* Exist

Remember when we mentioned how human civilization had been on a trajectory of growth and innovation since this time period? You should get it into your head that this era is when "the magic" starts happening.

As we explore the different facets of early human existence, we can see the foundations for future continuities such as the use of technology to master the environment, the challenges of ruling a large population, and the role of religion and philosophy on human society. The study of world history is one of great change but also one of great continuity. Think about these two variables as we go further, and you'll ace you're exam come springtime.

Humans and the Environment

One day, life was just dinosaurs and erupting volcanoes and primordial ooze, and then *poof*! Humanity. All humans, all the time.

Okay, maybe it didn't happen *quite* like that.

Researchers believe that Africa was the birthplace of mankind. About 200,000 years ago, after the appearance of several other human-like species, such as the inappropriate-giggle-inducing *Homo erectus*, *Homo sapiens* hit the scene. It took several thousand years—75,000, if you want to get specific about it—before humans worked up the nerve to migrate out of Africa and into Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Even more time passed before early humans made it into northern Europe and Asia, where there were still frequent Ice Ages. #coldweatherisnotconducivetoeasyliving

Even back then, early man knew that some places were more desirable than others. The prime real estate was where the weather was milder and more hospitable. Like a particularly primitive Goldilocks, anything that was too cold or too warm was out. Lands near large bodies of water—think lakes, rivers, oceans, and seas—were usually ideal for agriculture and had decent weather to boot.

However, as the population of humans increased and more and more large animals were hunted to extinction, early humans began to fan out to less desirable locations.

Humans spread out farther and farther until, sometime between 30,000 and 14,000 BCE, they made it to North America. Some historians think they crossed a land-and-ice bridge in what is now the Bering Strait between Siberia and Alaska. Some historians think that early humans had even more *chutzpah* and crossed the freezing North Pacific in primitive rafts. In any case, humans *definitely* used rafts to get to the South Pacific islands and Australia. Those guys (and ladies) had guts.

By 10000 BCE, humans were on every continent except Antarctica. But Antarctica wasn't exactly an ideal place to live, anyway. Ask the penguins. Better yet, ask Morgan Freeman. He knows everything. (Especially if it's about penguins.)

Fire and Tools: The BFFs of Ancient Man

Fire was—and still is—a pretty big deal. By "pretty big," of course, we mean colossally, monumentally, capaciously Brobdingnagian. Fire was so important to human civilization that we pulled out the Shmoop thesaurus. A rare occurrence indeed. (Actually, we do it all the time, but the point still stands.)

Oddly enough, humans didn't actually discover fire. *Homo erectus* may not have had our big smart human brains, but about 400,000 years ago they managed to figure out how to light stuff on fire just fine. It's not known if early humans learned how to make fire from *Homo erectus* before *erectus* went extinct, but either way...awesome. By 50,000 BCE, fire was everywhere. We use open flame today to cook delicious food (fine, "delicious" might be a bit of a stretch, depending on who's in charge of the Shmoop kitchen), stay warm, and get into a whole lot of trouble on camping trips, earliest humans actually used fire for all that and more. It even looks like they managed to resist their tendencies toward pyromania, which is more than we can say for some of our erstwhile camping buddies.

In most ecosystems, smaller brushes of undergrowth grew beside big trees. To keep their forests in tip-top shape, early humans would torch this undergrowth while usually leaving the trees in place. This actually improved the health of forests by allowing for new growth to sprout, while making forests easier for humans to get around and build huts in. Early humans also started controlled forest fires to drive wild animals towards their hunting grounds. And fire was also the early humans' best way of telling predators like tigers and wolves not to mess with them.

Interestingly, once wolves learned to fear humans enough to not try to eat them all the time, some of them started coming around to human campfires to beg for food. The wolves that were friendlier to humans got more food and had more children, so over thousands of years some groups of wolves selectively evolved into man's best friend.

Even though humans now had both fire *and* friendly, cuddly, snuggly, carnivorous predators to keep them company, things still weren't all that great.

At this point, being a human was really hard work. Our primary food sources were roots and tubers we dug out of the ground by hand and big honkin' animals much tougher and meaner than us. Because food was so scarce, humans lived far apart, in smaller

bands, only meeting every now and then to trade or meet new people. Like a prehistoric singles' mixer (we imagine). This put humans at an even bigger disadvantage because each small band had only itself to rely on when the going got rough. However, early humans had those big human brains. With some tactical thinking and plenty of fire, humans made it to the top of the food chain.

However, humans still needed an *edge*, as it were. It was a big step for peoplekind when our ancestors first started to get a *handle* on the whole tool thing.

Humans weren't the first species to make tools. We weren't even the first to manufacture tools for sale; that honor goes to an enterprising group of *Homo erectus* from East Africa in 600,000 BCE. But humans were the best at it. Early humans developed general hunting, gathering, and fishing tools, such as spears, spades, baskets, and traps. We also developed tools specially suited to different climates. Humans in cold climates made sewing needles so the animal fur they wore would fit closer to their bodies. Humans in forests and jungles made axes and scrapers to harvest the trees for resources. They made these tools out of almost anything. You name it, they tried to make something out of it. For the purposes of this exam, just know stone was the most important and most commonly used material. This is why historians call the period before 8000 BCE the Paleolithic, or "Old Stone Age."

Naturally, all of this leads us to the Neolithic, or "New Stone Age."

The Neolithic Revolution: Slowest. Revolution. Ever.

The Neolithic Revolution is all about farming. Because nothing says "farming" like "new stone." Or...not. But it does point to the relationship between fire, tools, and agriculture.

The Neolithic Revolution counts as one of the most important developments in all of human history because it marks the debut of the three biggies of prehistory: growing crops, raising livestock, and living together as a society.

It's tough to be exact, but most people agree that agriculture started *cropping* up (sorry, we couldn't resist) sometime around 8000 BCE. However, the Neolithic Revolution began with less of a bang and more of a whimper: in fact, it took thousands of years to actually get going. The Middle East got the ball rolling by selectively breeding and replanting a type of grass. By replanting the seeds that took the longest to fall off, early Middle Easterners eventually "domesticated" the grass to make a new plant, wheat, where the seeds stayed on long enough to be harvested. About a thousand years later, humans living near the Yellow River in China did the same thing to some other plants, creating millet and rice. Other regions followed suit, with domesticated plants being bred in Papua New Guinea and Mexico. The last region to make a new staple crop was Africa, in 3000 BCE, which means that the Neolithic Revolution took about 5000 years—or about as long as all of human history since. Perspective...it's a thing.

In addition to new domesticated plants, humans also developed a whole bunch of different tools and techniques to help their plants grow. If all you know about farming is what you learned on FarmVille, developing agricultural techniques might seem as easy as harvesting foals. Not so much. In reality, it took early humans hundreds of years of trial and error to develop effective farming techniques.

One such technique was slash-and-burn agriculture, which cleared out space to be used for the cultivation and the domestication of plants. While this helped create space for new fields in the short term, early slash-and-burners weren't exactly thinking about things like carbon footprints and environmental sustainability.

After squeezing out every last nutrient from their plots of land, early humans would take a look at their dead fields, shrug, and move on. It wasn't until the invention of plows that could mix nutrients back into the soil that cultures using slash and burn started staying in one place.

However, some lucky humans managed to get around this by settling permanently on the banks of muddy, flooding rivers like the Nile in Egypt and the Yellow River in China. These rivers carried so much nutrient-rich mud that farmers on their banks just had to wait around for a flood to give them a brand new layer of topsoil.

Even rivers that weren't muddy or flooding became major boons to early settlement. Rivers provided fresh water for crops and easy transportation by boat. It is no coincidence that the world's core civilizations, such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, Shang, Harappa, Olmec, and Chavín, all arose on riverbanks.

The moral of the story? Agriculture takes massive amounts of organization, innovation, discipline, and communication, which is why farming spurred mankind to organize itself more efficiently into civilizations.

However, in areas where farming wasn't possible or hadn't developed, many humans kept living a nomadic lifestyle. Some groups continued to live as hunter-gatherers. Other people, called pastoralists, domesticated animals to use for food. Like dogs, the first domesticated sheep and pigs were originally wild animals selectively bred over centuries by rewarding the ones friendly and obedient to humans while eating the ones who were surly and unruly. Over time, sheep and pigs developed into separate strains naturally docile towards humans. After sheep and pigs became domesticated, humans applied the same process to cows, goats, horses, llamas, and camels.

Raising livestock did not produce the same kinds of returns per acre as agriculture. In order to raise large herds, pastoralists had to move their herds every few months to greener pastures. As a result, cultures built on pastoralism rarely built large cities or complex societies like the cultures built on agriculture did.

However, because they moved around so much, pastoralists were often the ones who actually spread technology, ideas, religions, and trade goods between settled agricultural regions. And despite pastoralists' low numbers, their lifelong training at chariot riding or horseback riding often made them a very significant military threat to agricultural regions.

One thing that agriculturalists and pastoralists had in common is that they drastically affected their environments—much more so than hunter-gatherers. In addition to creating and disseminating new strains of plants and animals, they also reshaped the ecosystems around them. Agriculturalists slashed and burned large tracts of forest to make way for their crops, and pastoralists raised huge herds that wiped out a lot of the plant and animal life they encountered. Both contributed to erosion, so that the bodies of water near humans quickly became clogged with silt.

Technology: Fire 2.0?

When you were younger, you were probably asked the question, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" Historians are often posed a question in similar form: "Which came first, agriculture or new technology?"

Historians are still debating this, but the general consensus is that they seem to have arisen simultaneously. Humans needed to work the soil and the more advanced tools became, the easier it was to plant.

The first metal that was discovered was copper, which was not only used for tools, but also for artistic and ritual purposes. How early humans figured out that if you melt some types of rock they turned into shiny, useful metal is unknown, but you have to admit it was pretty impressive for people with virtually no science or technology. Around 4,000 BCE, humans in Iran made the extremely advanced conceptual leap that if you mix molten copper with arsenic or tin, you get a material stronger than any of the three by themselves, called bronze. This process spread across Afro-Eurasia. As cultures began to produce bronze in large quantities, they left the Neolithic and entered the Bronze Age.

Unlike copper, bronze was strong enough to plow a mostly dry field, helping humans to settle permanently in locations other than river floodplains. However, while many early humans realized that with a bronze plow and a lot of hard work they could make a permanent farm, many other humans realized that with a bronze sword and very little hard work they could take someone else's farm. The evolution of metalworking also led to the evolution of warfare. War became incredibly fierce and extremely bloody. This is a trend that has unfortunately continued right up to the present.

Bronze eventually gave way to iron, which was not only stronger but also simpler and cheaper to produce. Iron was so plentiful that societies who knew how to work it were able to supply iron tools and weapons to virtually all their people. This made farming massively easier and helped to launch the next period of human history. The end of this unit, 600 BCE, is also when iron production really took off in most of the world's cultures.

Architecture also advanced throughout this era, and even with only the basics like the wheel and domesticated animals, early civilizations were able to build some incredibly impressive structures. More on this in a little bit.

Mankind, Beware: Nature Always Has the Upper Hand

You can think of farming as the game changer for humanity during this prehistoric era, but one shouldn't underestimate the powers of Mother Nature. While humans began to impact the environment, they also became more dependent on it and were susceptible to its unpredictability. While rivers gave life, they could also take away life, and frequently they did just that. Flooding often deposited new topsoil, but unpredictably severe floods also caused tremendous damage to the new civilizations.

And with little food to spare and no reliable ways to preserve it, humans were very vulnerable to food shortages caused by drought.

It's no coincidence that while most civilizations were born on the banks of rivers, many of them crumbled when nature turned against them. This is a theme to take notice of and watch out for as we move forward in the next units.

Culture

Culture is the result of people expressing their intellect (brains) and identity (everything else about who they are) through activities like speaking, writing, religious worship, and artistic production. Culture is also collective, which means that one person does not a culture make. The AP World History exam might ask you to consider the work of a certain individual, but thinking about culture requires considering everything *else* that influenced that individual too.

Just to make things clearer, culture (art, music, composition, etc.) can serve a purpose for either individual pleasure or for society as a whole. For example, someone might paint a picture for personal reflection or paint a masterpiece in honor of a great king or deity with the hope of achieving fame and fortune.

Basically, culture is broad, important, and tricky to pin down. With that incredibly helpful tip in mind, let's take a look at some examples as to what constituted culture in the ancient world.

Writing Civilization in Existence....

One of the most important innovations during this era was the invention of writing. Its introduction officially moved the human experience from *pre-history* to *history*. The invention of writing—and indeed, the need for it too—revolutionized cultural life.

In prehistoric times, as you might surmise from the previous chapter, there was no time and no need for writing. All right, you caught us...that statement is a bit of a stretch, but you get what we mean: writing simply didn't exist in earlier times, as society was less advanced and less cohesive before the Neolithic Revolution. It's not that prehistoric man was an idiot; he was merely focused more on survival than culture.

Writing allowed the transmission of ideas over large areas with clarity. Imagine for a few seconds trying to communicate with someone across a crowded auditorium through a series of random hand gestures and how confused the other person might be as to what you are actually trying to convey. Now, think about how simple it is to write a note and just hand it to the person to read. This is the joy and expediency of writing!

Most ancient civilizations developed some form of writing, but not all of them did. The first known form of writing came from the land of Mesopotamia, in the Middle East, around 3300 BCE. It is called "cuneiform" and was basically straight lines and triangles scratched into clay with a bronze knife. It was mostly used for record keeping and determining who owed who how much wheat, but it was also used to write humanity's first known piece of literature, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. In this epic poem from about 2000 BCE, Gilgamesh, a king from Iraq, walks around with his friend and kills a bunch of monsters. Yeah, we like basically the same stuff now. A cuneiform tablet even includes what historians believe to be the world's oldest "yo mama" joke (seriously), showing just how far we've come in culture since then.

Soon after the Babylonians figured out how to immortalize their off-color humor, the ancient Egyptians developed their fabulous hieroglyphics (basically fancy stick figures with awesome hats). Hieroglyphs were written on stone walls or on sheets of pressed reeds, called papyrus. This allowed for the creation of scrolls that were easy to move around and transport. The number one bestseller among hieroglyphic scrolls in ancient Egypt was the *Book of the Dead*, a guide to the afterlife.

The Shang Dynasty of China produced thousands of pictographic characters, some of which formed the basis for the Chinese characters we still see today. In time, Sanskrit was developed in India. These writing systems looked very different from one another. Unfortunately, if any epics or books were written prior to 600 BCE, they've never been found. Most of the pictographs found so far are on bones used to tell fortunes called "oracle bones."

In north India, a script called Sanskrit was developed. Sanskrit is the basis of not only modern Indian languages but is also distantly related to all modern Middle Eastern and European languages. If an English speaker went back in time 5000 years, India would be the place where it would be easiest to learn the local language. Sanskrit is also notable because it is the language of the *Rig Veda*, a book of hymns that is one of the foundational texts of Hinduism.

The Olmecs had a script similar to the later Maya script, but no linguist has managed to decipher it yet. In South America no script developed, and records were kept by a system called quipu, where knots were tied on a rope indicating numbers.

Architecture and Urban Design: Grandiosity in Structure

When you think about ancient civilizations, you might default to Egypt and the Pyramids of Giza. Yes, those magnificent structures rising out of the Sahara.

Did you know that the famous pyramids of ancient Egypt were the tallest man-made structures in the world until the Eiffel Tower was completed in the 1800s? Can you imagine building the pyramids without cranes or trucks? Workers had to drag those massive rocks up wooden scaffoldings to build those massive structures.

Elsewhere, we can observe similar structures built on a grand scale. The city-states of ancient Mesopotamia were keen on ziggurats (they were sort of like step-pyramids). The conventional image of the Tower of Babel, a pyramidal tower winding up to the sky, is based on ancient Mesopotamian ziggurats. The ancient civilizations of the Americas—the Olmec in Mexico and the Chavín in Peru—went gaga for large mounds and structures made from stone.

Spectacular temples were built in ancient India, while the Shang Dynasty had a penchant for gigantic bronze cauldrons and elaborate royal tombs. Architecture was designed to impart the power of a king, his government, and, in the case of religious structures, the power of the priestly elite and the gods. Grand structures and monuments also could showcase military might or be used for entertainment purposes (theaters, racing arenas, etc.). Major building projects were also undertaken for practical reasons. Societies built fences to keep out wild animals, walls to keep out other humans, irrigation systems to bring water, and sewage systems to take waste away.

We'd like to stress that architecture helped ancient peoples realize the importance of urban planning. The better the system of organization, the more smoothly things would run in centers of population. For example, Egyptian and Olmec cities were created with urban planning in mind, and there were designated spaces for religious buildings and economic zones for marketplaces. The elite and the monarchs were given prime real estate away from the common riff raff. Merchants tended to cluster together to attract shoppers already out buying things—an instinct similar to that of stores that open up near Walmarts.

Religion: Praise Be

Early mankind practiced primitive rituals, including burial rites and prayers. Many groups had dedicated holy men and/or women who were believed to possess magical powers and knowledge.

As religious beliefs and practices became increasingly complex and formal, new sites and centers of worship and burial were built. People attempted with great frequency to connect with "the divine" through various means.

Most ancient civilizations and peoples were **polytheistic**, meaning they worshipped many gods, goddesses, and other divinities. The ancient Hebrews and Persians were something of unusual exceptions as they worshipped only one deity and were therefore **monotheistic**. This fact really baffled their neighbors in the Near East for centuries.

The variety of early human beliefs was extremely broad. Most cultures believed in deities connected to the physical forces of the world. Most cultures also developed some means of communicating with these deities. Additionally, most ancient peoples practiced formal burial rituals or ancestor worship. Researchers have discovered evidence of human burials at some of the oldest archeological sites, which indicates that early people attached at least some type of significance to death and the afterlife. Many peoples mummified their dead to preserve them for the afterlife. We think of the Egyptians immediately when we think of mummies, but mummies are also common in Peru—the Chavín mummified the remains of their deceased, as did other Andean civilizations—and in Central Asia.

Some belief systems became extremely popular and got codified in writing. These religions came to unify beliefs across wide geographic areas and had very significant effects on the world's culture. Here's a brief—and dare we say beneficial—snapshot of the three big ancient religions you need to know about for the AP World History Exam,

Vedic Religion: Namaste, India

The Vedic religion can be thought of as a precursor to Hinduism (the dominant religion of modern India). Vedism originated in the north of India. It is generally assumed that foreign invaders from outside of India—tribes of Indo-European peoples—brought these beliefs to the subcontinent around the year 1500 BCE.

Sacred books called the *Vedas* formed the basis of the Vedic religion. There was no central prophet, central authority, or orthodoxy. This led to a lot of diversity in beliefs—so much so that it might be helpful to think of Vedism, and later Hinduism, as groups of related religions rather than individual religions. Some common features held them all together:

1. Vedic religions were all polytheistic. While different groups focused on different gods, they all agreed that everyone's gods existed.
2. All forms of Vedism also placed emphasis on the importance of ritual recitation of the *Vedas*. Those who had memorized the *Vedas*, or who could read them in Sanskrit, often found high roles in society.
3. Vedic religions share concepts with modern-day religions, such as karma, a divine cycle of cause and effect, and reincarnation.

Judaism: Shalom, Hebrews

Judaism is the world's oldest monotheistic religion. You won't find many gods in Judaism; they live in India, Egypt, and Mesoamerica. The origins of the Hebrew faith are still debated, and it's tough to be certain with dates, but historians believe that Abraham, one of the founding figures of the religion, probably lived some time around 3000 BCE.

He was originally from a city-state in Mesopotamia but migrated to the future site of Israel as instructed by the god Yahweh (translated either as "I am that I am" or "he causes to be"). There, the Hebrews (they aren't called "Jews" until much later) lived off the land as shepherds and farmers, migrating later to Egypt in a time of famine. Another important Hebrew figure is Moses, who led the Jews out of Egypt around 1200 BCE. Thereafter, the Hebrews returned to what is present-day Israel.

Despite the leadership of well-known rulers like King David and King Solomon, the struggle to achieve a homeland has largely defined Hebrew history. In this early period, the Hebrew people had to endure the destruction of their sacred temples, countless invasions, and several foreign occupations. A central tenet of Judaism was that, as Adonai's chosen people, they had received the area of what is now Israel as a Promised Land.

At the core of Judaism is the unique covenant that Hebrew people have in their relationship with Yahweh. Believers are expected to uphold their commitment to God by following a certain set of rules as explained in the *Torah*, or the Hebrew Bible. The most famous of these aren't limited to Judaism alone: as we'll see later, the Ten Commandments also play an instrumental role in Christianity.

Ancient Hebrews were also notable for large annual temple rituals, usually involving animal sacrifice. These rituals were presided over by a hereditary caste of priests. These rituals and the priest caste became central to governance of the Hebrew state.

Fortunately for the purposes of this module, the Hebrew covenant is fairly simple: if people follow the rules, God will favor them. Pretty straightforward, right? One of the major perks of God's relationship with the Jews was the promise of the aptly named Promised Land, where Hebrews could live under their own rule.

Zoroastrianism: Chetori, Persians

It's likely that this is one ancient religion that you have never heard of before now. Although Zoroastrianism was once one of the most widely practiced religions in the world, there aren't all that many practicing Zoroastrians left today. The largest populations of Zoroastrians are in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and India, but there are smaller communities scattered around the world.

In Persia, this was a different kind of monotheistic religion. The prophet Zoroaster (aka Zarathustra) in the 7th century BCE taught that the universe was the battleground between two cosmic principles—one of purity and the other of corruption. The central figure of purity was the creator god, Ahura Mazda ("light of wisdom"), while the central figure of corruption was Ahriman ("destructive spirit"). Zoroastrians called for a strict code of personal morality to prevent personal corruption.

The Zoroastrian holy text prescribed hundreds of rules for people to follow at home, on the job, and at prayer to maintain purity. Notable among these was a rule prohibiting the corruption of fire, water, or earth with dead flesh. Because of this rule, Zoroastrians shunned the practice of animal sacrifice, which was popular in the rest of the Middle East. They also buried their dead in big stone towers instead of in the earth, and many of those towers have survived to this day.

State-Building

This era saw some major changes in the ways that people lived together and interacted with each other. The earliest humans lived almost entirely in clans and tribes, but in time, humans began to settle down into **sedentary** communities as civilization advanced. Before long, they were dealing with giant and occasionally unwieldy things called states and empires. We'll take a closer look at a few of them in this section.

From 4500 BCE to 750 BCE, four major civilizations developed concurrently in Afro-Eurasia: Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, and China. Two others of importance developed, in deep isolation, in the Americas: the Olmec in present-day Mexico and the Chavín in present-day Peru and Bolivia. These civilizations are known as "core civilizations" because of the major influence they had on other societies. Think of them as the Beatles of the Bronze Age.

Mesopotamia: Home Base of Civilized Man

While it's true that you cannot book a plane ticket to "Mesopotamia," it's still a significant agricultural region. Literally meaning "between two rivers," Mesopotamia is the name given to the area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in present-day Iraq.

Mesopotamia served as home to a series of states and kingdoms; for the purposes of the AP World History exam, you'll need to know that these included the empires of the Sumerians, Babylonians, and the Assyrians.

It's difficult to generalize too much about Mesopotamia, thanks to the parade of states that succeeded each other in the region, but we can say categorically that Mesopotamia was one of the first areas in the world to sustain civilization. This area was settled as long ago as 8000 BCE, and the earliest cities here date back to 5300 BCE.

First came the Sumerians, who lived in city-states like Babylon and Ur. They flourished from c. 3700 BCE to 2350 BCE. They are famous for their ziggurat buildings, inventing **cuneiform** (their script is the oldest in the world), the first literary epic of *Gilgamesh*, and for inventing the wheel. It's perhaps their most enduring gift to world civilization. Can you imagine life without it? We think not.

Over time, the Sumerians were conquered and subdued by other neighboring peoples. However, the fall of the Sumerians was just the first step in the creation of a bigger, better empire: the Babylonians.

The first Babylonian king was Hammurabi (ruled 1792–1750 BCE), who overthrew a previous empire to rule over Mesopotamia from his capital, Babylon. During the rule of the Babylonian king, a series of laws were established which listed certain punishments for certain crimes. You've likely heard one of your elders say "an eye for an eye" or an "ear for an ear." What you probably didn't realize is that they came directly from the **Code of Hammurabi**. The system wasn't exactly fair, though: the rules and the punishments tended to favor the elite at the expense of the poor (including slaves), and women had virtually no legal rights. Still, it set a pretty impressive precedent by being the first law code to actually be written down. This made it possible for the king's judgments to extend even to places he didn't visit. Babylonians also practiced some of the world's first written mathematics.

However, every empire—even those with math and written laws—has to fall eventually. Babylonians had bronze technology and only truly appreciated the advantages of iron when an army of Central Asian nomads called Hittites showed up and started jabbing them with it, in 1500 BCE. Their empire fell soon after.

The next empire to know is the Assyrians. They were from northwest Mesopotamia and were known for their ferocity and archers. Famed for their military might, they conquered much of the Middle East between 1000 BCE and 750 BCE. Let's just say that they weren't the most popular kids on the block and fell out of power rather quickly because of their cruelty.

Be aware that each of these cultures—Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian—built upon the glories and culture(s) of their predecessors. There was great cultural continuity in Mesopotamia, which led to great advances in the arts and sciences.

Egypt: Walk Like An Egyptian

Ahhhh, Egypt...where the warm sands of the Sahara meet the glistening waters of the Nile River. Ancient Egypt owes its wealth and prestige to the flowing waters of the Nile. As the river is super muddy and floods like clockwork every few seasons, Egyptians had the richest farmlands in the ancient world.

Today, what we call "Ancient Egypt" actually refers to three distinct kingdoms: the Old Kingdom (c. 2575–2134 BCE), Middle Kingdom (c. 2040–1640 BCE), and New Kingdom (c. 1600–1070 BCE). Moral of the story: Never let a historian name your pets.

The Egyptians left behind a lot of writings, so historians have a broad insight into their religion, philosophy, and general thoughts about the world. Egyptians feared and respected the sun god, which you'd have to after getting sunburned in the Sahara. As a result, they based their calendar on the solar cycle. It is from the Egyptians that we received our western calendar—with a few minor modifications—based on a 365-day solar cycle.

Egyptians believed that their **pharaohs**, or rulers, were incarnations of divinities, so the ruler usually got to call most of the shots. In fact, the polytheistic religion of ancient Egypt drove the civilization's well-known focus on making their rulers' afterlives as cushy and awesome as possible. Yes, we're talking about mummies. After they died, pharaohs went through the complex embalming process to preserve their bodies for posterity. In fact, the most famous buildings from the civilization, the pyramids, are simply huge tombs that were meant to get pharaohs into the afterlife safely and peacefully.

For a long time, historians thought that the pyramids were built entirely by slave labor. However, new translations of Egyptian records have shown that it was actually more complex. Most workers on the pyramids were actually farmers who had nothing to do during the dry season and so worked for low wages on whatever giant useless thing the government happened to be building at the time. The pyramids were kind of like ridiculously large "make-work" programs for unemployed Egyptians.

As you might expect, priests were pretty important in ancient Egypt. In addition to conducting rituals, they also kept records and advised the kings. Ancient Egypt was the opposite of the idea of "separation of church and state."

Two ancient Egyptian pharaohs you should know are **Hatshepsut** and **Ramses II**. They are legendary and both reigned in the New Kingdom, but they were completely different in personality and gender.

Hatshepsut was a female pharaoh. She ruled Egypt for many years as pharaoh until her son came of age. Compared to Egypt's neighbors, women in Egypt had many rights including inheritance of money and property, divorce, and the management of business. Egypt was not exactly a feminist paradise: although Hatshepsut was a fair and wise ruler, records of her existence were almost eliminated by order of her son and heir. Talk about family drama.

Ramses II was a military man who was eager for Egypt to expand into Nubia to the south, Libya to the west, and into Syria to the northeast. In Syria, the Egyptians clashed with another formidable empire, the Hittites, who were based in what is today Turkey. The two empires exhausted themselves due to constant warfare. Ramses II won many battles, but his successors lacked his acumen for warfare. This left Egypt vulnerable to future attacks.

The Egyptian kingdoms dominated North Africa and the Middle East for a long time, starting from around 3500 BCE until roughly 300 BCE. Not too bad for a civilization. The downfall of ancient Egypt was gradual, but invasions by the Persians, Assyrians, Greeks, and Romans certainly sped things along.

Indus Valley: A Passage to India

The Indus Valley is in modern-day Pakistan. Like Egypt, the people of the Indus River Valley were seemingly blessed by the gods, being so fortunate to have such fertile agriculture lands at their disposal. While people lived all along the Indus Valley, the two most important centers of civilization were Mohenjo-Daro, in the southwest near the Indian Ocean, and Harappa, in the northeast region of Punjab.

Less is known about these cultures than about Mesopotamia or Egypt. They rose and fell without leaving much of a historical record, which makes it hard to piece together too many details, and archaeologists have still not been able to decipher their written script. We do know that cities were located on distant sides of the valley and they were there from about 2500 BCE to 1900 BCE. Some important artifacts still remain, like statues and layouts of city streets, but there is no clear consensus on what might have caused the collapse of this civilization.

Environmental factors seem to be a likely cause for their tragic demise: it has been suggested that the people of the Indus River Valley suffered through a series of droughts and never recovered. Severe flooding has also been listed as a likely cause of decline.

Around 1400 BCE, Persian settlers with iron technology began to move into the region. These settlers intermarried with and shared cultural traits with the previous people from Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. They formed a new culture with a new written

language, Sanskrit. The Sanskrit word for "non-barbarian" was *arya*, so the successors to Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro are sometimes called the Indo-Aryan civilization.

Shang Dynasty: China's Golden Dawn

The Shang Dynasty (1600 BCE–1046 BCE) is traditionally considered the second Chinese dynasty. However, the first dynasty, the Xia, either did not exist or did not leave behind any written records. The Shang did leave historical records, so it is considered the first historical dynasty of China. Fun fact: Historians use dynasties to mark varying periods in Chinese history just as they use kingdoms for ancient Egyptian history.

The Shang heartland was the Yellow River Valley, though their empire spread over most of central China and included a portion of the fertile southern Yangtze River Valley. The Shang was a Bronze Age civilization. Even more so than in other civilizations, in Shang China, bronze was restricted to the wealthy. Shang aristocrats used bronze weapons and armor, and their shamans built giant bronze ritual vessels, but the commoners were usually left to eke out a living with stone tools.

At the top of this highly stratified social structure were kings who held tremendous political and religious power. The rulers of ancient China were thought to have a special connection to the gods and heavens: the Shang kings were believed to be necessary for many rituals attempting to communicate with the gods. This granted them immense respect from all levels of society and great political authority.

In 1046 BCE, the Shang were conquered by militarily advanced pastoralists to the northwest, who founded the Zhou Dynasty. The Zhou kept many aspects of Shang culture and civilization, including a written language based on Shang pictograms.

Olmec: Giant Heads

As the earliest civilization in the Americas, the Olmec thrived in present-day Mexico from 1500 BCE to 400 BCE. The Olmec are considered the precursor for other notable civilizations that arose, including the Maya and the Aztec. They had several cities located near the Gulf of Mexico (near the modern-day city of Veracruz).

They also had a written language, but no scholar as of yet has been able to decipher it. When it is at last deciphered, we will know a whole lot more about this intriguing civilization. What we do know is that they traded extensively and were skilled architects. They also seem to like heads...a lot.

If the Shang Dynasty was famous for scratched-up bones, the Olmec had a calling card of their own: crazy-big head statues, or, if you want to get technical, "colossal head" statues. As you may have been able to guess by now, these statues were exactly what they sound like: they were big (think 5 to 10 feet tall), and they were heads. Seventeen of them have been discovered to date.

The one question researchers can't answer is what these giant heads actually represent? Gods and goddesses? Warrior heroes? We may never know.

The Olmec were also known for a few other innovations: They invented a sophisticated calendar, though we can't read anything on it. They also invented a ball game that was kind of a cross between soccer and basketball. This ball game would continue to be a central feature of Gulf of Mexico civilizations for thousands of years.

Chavín: Peru's Mysterious Civilization

Most people know nothing about the Chavín civilization. This is a shame, as they appear to be just as sophisticated as the other civilizations we have discussed in this unit. Based high in the Andes of central Peru, the Chavín civilization emerged around 1000 BCE and they were dependent on trade. This might sound a little random, but llamas made it possible for the Chavín to trade and live in the Andes. Llamas were strong and had a good sense of balance, which meant they were perfect for hauling goods around the Andes Mountains, facilitating trade between the Chavín and distant groups. They were also sheared for wool to make toasty warm clothes. Without them, the Chavín would have been completely isolated.

Long-distance trade enriched the Chavín and in turn gave them the resources to build impressive systems of irrigation and transportation. The Chavín were skilled artisans and metal workers who lived in cities along the Pacific Ocean and into the Andean mountains.

There is spotty evidence for the decline of the Chavín around 100 BCE, but this is a subject of debate. As the **Chavín** had no alphabet—just a system of record keeping by means of tying knots and strings together—we know very little about them.

And Now, the Rest

We've given you the low-down on the important civilizations in the ancient world. We'd like to conclude this lesson with a few more words about some other peoples you might encounter on your AP World History exam.

Nubia was a wealthy kingdom along the Nile River, just to the south of Egypt in what is today Sudan. The Egyptians and the Nubians warred, traded, and exchanged culture with one another for over two thousand years. Rumor has it that the Egyptians coveted the large quantities of gold in Nubia, hence their continued interest. Large quantities of slaves were also taken from Nubia to work in Egypt.

Minoans were people who lived on the island of Crete off the coast of Greece. Flourishing from 2250 BCE to 1450 CE, they traded avidly with their neighbors, especially with Egypt.

Mainland Greeks developed their civilization very slowly compared to the ones we went over in this module. Between 1800 and 1200 BCE, the Mycenaean culture dominated the Greek mainland. Think about the Trojan War (*Iliad* and *Odyssey* ring a bell?). • Don't worry about **Rome** until later...it wasn't even established until sometime around 753 BCE.

The **Phoenicians** are a curious bunch, flourishing from 1700 BCE to 400 BCE. Originally from what is today Lebanon, they were the mercantile neighbors of the ancient Hebrews. As sailors and merchants, they crisscrossed the Mediterranean in search of trade and wealth. Their cities—Carthage, Byblos, Tyre, and Beirut—became dynamic centers of commerce and exchange. We get our alphabet from the Phoenicians.

6000 BCE to 600 BCE is marked by the migrations of peoples. We've mentioned the movement of Indo-Aryans into Northern India following the collapse of the Indus River Valley Civilization, but we haven't talked about the **Bantu migrations** in sub-Saharan Africa beginning around 1500 BCE. The Bantu people, based originally along the Niger River, began to settle other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Their migration is one of the most important events in African history, as they came to compose the dominant ethnic group south of the Sahara Desert.

Economic Systems

We don't want to sound like a broken record or anything, but this era basically saw the creation of the economy, like it did so many other things. When we talk about early economies, though, we're not talking about prehistoric job losses or how stocks were doing on Rock Street. (Get it? Because rocks came before walls? Okay, we'll stop.)

Instead, "the economy" refers to any system where different people interact to provide and buy different goods and services. Basically, if anything exchanges hands, you're looking at an economy. That's why hunting and gathering didn't really count, since most early societies hunted and gathered for their own consumption.

The main thing worth emphasizing about the economy during this period is that it began, which seems fairly straightforward.

Job Specialization: My Early Civilization For a Horse?

The Neolithic Revolution—otherwise known as farming—led to a food surplus, plain and simple. While humans once had to work together to get their food, farming meant that only a few could feed the many. This, of course, left a lot of other people with free time to work in the "fields" of religion, government, and, yes, the economy.

People used to barter for gain, which meant exchanging, say, a particularly splendid pumpkin from your patch in return for your neighbor's handsome young cow. Once job specialization came on the scene, though, this model gave way to what we think of today as a thriving economy. If certain people were better at doing certain things, the feeling went, they should just do these things *all* the time. This worked particularly well in urban areas, where workers could specialize and create goods to sell in the marketplace.

As it turned out, specialization went hand in hand with trade...which was basically a fancier version of the barter system. If you couldn't produce something yourself, you got it from someone else and gave them either money or your own goods in return.

On a broader scale, ancient civilizations decided that they were totally going to get in the game. The Greek city-states, for example, were so small that they lacked major resources of their own, so they resorted heavily to trade in order to get the goods...and get rich in return.

Social Structures

As it turns out, the invention of agriculture and the development of civilization had an enormous impact on the way the earliest societies were organized. The food surplus from farming and the subsequent population increase meant that the world no longer consisted of a bunch of families who roamed around in clans. People settled into cultures characterized by sophisticated institutions and social complexities.

Social Stratification: We're All in This Together, But Differently

Because this period covers all of human existence prior to 600 BCE, there were some pretty big social changes. In Paleolithic hunter-gatherer bands, there wasn't a lot of social stratification because there weren't a lot of jobs. You could be a hunter, a gatherer, or both. And both kinds of people were indispensable to a band's survival. There wasn't a lot of room for different ranks or pay grades.

But after the inventions of agriculture and pastoralism, things got complex fast. When thousands of people could live together, it began to make sense to split work up into more specialized tasks. Some people farmed, some fought, some preached, some made tools. Over time, the more powerful people in societies developed systems of social control to make sure that other people did enough of the terrible jobs to keep society functioning. As a result, society in the Neolithic, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age tended to be fairly rigid and stratified. All things considered, once you were put in a rung on the social ladder (read: born), you were basically positioned there for life. For centuries, there was little a person could do to avoid this fact.

The famous pyramids provide a handy model for thinking about stratification in the ancient world and social hierarchy more generally: At the top was the king or ruler; below him were the priests, advisors, and warriors; then came the merchants and farmers; finally, at the bottom of the pyramid came slaves. Parallel to and supporting this hierarchy was something called patriarchy, the elevation of hyper-masculine men over less masculine men and women. While many societies had vastly different ideas of what masculinity was, they all agreed that important people should have it.

Hail to the King, Religious Elite, and Nobility

A government with a king at the top of the hierarchical pyramid is called a monarchy. This is just a fancy way of saying that governance comes from the rule of a single individual. More often than not, these individuals were believed to be the representative of the gods on earth.

The Zhou Dynasty claimed that their kings held a "Mandate from Heaven," which allowed them to rule with absolute power. Heaven was believed to be the supreme moral force of nature, and it was thought that if Heaven removed its mandate, then natural disasters and hunger would strike the state. On the plus side, because of this ideology, the Zhou and later Chinese rulers worked extra hard to keep everyone fed so that it would not appear that Heaven was upset with their regimes. The ancient Egyptians believed that the kings and queens of their country were the incarnations of the gods on earth. The kings of the region of Mesopotamia were thought of a little differently: they were the emissaries of the gods rather than gods themselves. In Judaism, many of the Hebrew kings were believed to be prophets of Yahweh. Rulers often justified their power and place within society in religious terms.

Beneath royalty, we find a small upper class, which aided the ruler. Many of these people were warriors who protected the ruler's authority from both foreign invasions and local rebellions. Others were priests or scholars who helped the government in everyday management, such as those relating to law, finance, administration, and tax collection. Royals and their noble subjects worked in tandem, but things did not always run smoothly. Often, these elites resented the power of a royal family or house and sought to seize power for themselves. Many empires were overthrown by angry military forces.; others, like ancient Egypt, were occasionally overthrown by priests and scholars. However, most societies ended up returning to the rulership of one individual.

What About the Riffraff and Everyone Else?

As society became increasingly complex and civilized, various distinctions marking class and societal position emerged. Societies needed certain roles to be fulfilled and performed. We've noticed how trendy it was to be in positions of power: royalty, the religious elite, and political/military leaders all fought to be top dog. What about everyone else though?

Among commoners, there was still a significant social hierarchy. People generally learned all their job skills from their parents, so those born into low-paying occupations like farm work or palace cleaning were likely to stay there. Meanwhile, children whose parents could do high-paying work, like reading and writing, fighting, merchant-ing, or goods manufacturing were likely to do well for themselves. This trend was believed to be natural and even desirable in many societies.

At the bottom of the social hierarchy were slaves. The practice of slavery varied considerably across the world, but all six core civilizations practiced it. People became slaves by being captured in wartime or punished for crimes. In some societies, you could fall into slavery if you didn't pay your debts. Rough times. Depending on where you lived, it was sometimes possible to pay back your debt to society through slavery and eventually return to society as a free man or woman.

Role of Women: Not a Great Precedent

Contrary to popular belief, in hunter-gatherer societies, women both hunted and gathered. There is little evidence to suggest that there were any hard or fast gender-based divisions of labor.

With the rise of social stratification, women in almost every society ended up low on the social heap. Early law codes afforded very few legal rights to women, and they were treated more like property than people. In most ancient societies, women could be sold by their male relatives into slavery or forced marriages without their consent. Even women in societies where they had some rights of their own were generally relegated to unpaid domestic work. However, there were occasional exceptions, such as Hatshepsut, the female ruler in ancient Egypt.

Unfortunately, this particular trend stuck around for the next several thousand years. Patriarchy, by attaching so much importance to hyper-masculine men, generally attached very little importance to women. In some cultures, women did have more power than in others. Remember the examples from ancient Egypt? Women *sometimes* assumed positions of power and authority, but it was quite rare, and these instances were the exceptions to the rule.

Key Terms

We've created a list of terms that you should definitely know for this era. The terms include the names of individuals, empires, key events, and ideas. Think of this list as a useful bank of terms to jog your memory and stimulate those brain cells. Then, you can look back through the module and read more about a term in question if need be.

Neolithic Revolution: The major shift nearly 12,000 years ago that marks the beginning of the transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture.

Agriculture: Simply put, the domestication or cultivation of plants for the purposes of food and money.

Cuneiform: The world's first system of writing. Originated in Mesopotamia and was invented by the Sumerians.

Hieroglyphics: The form of writing used by the ancient Egyptians.

Fertile Crescent: A large crescent of fertile land in the Middle East and North Africa. It begins in the Nile River Valley in Egypt, goes up along the Mediterranean coast, and swings back down into Mesopotamia. The land immediately adjacent to this crescent is mostly hilly, rocky desert.

Judaism: The religion of the ancient Hebrew people (later called the Jews). Judaism differs from other religions as it mandates the belief in one god called Yahweh. It is filled with complex rituals concerning everyday life and worship.

Zoroastrianism: A monotheistic religion extremely popular in ancient Persia. Like the ancient Hebrews, the Zoroastrians worshipped one god that they called Ahura Mazda.

Vedic religion: The religion that formed in northern India following the invasions of Persian peoples. This religion is the precursor of Hinduism and emphasizes the role one is supposed to play within society.

Torah: The holy book of the Hebrew (Jewish) People.

Vedas: The holy books of the Vedic religion. They are often composed as hymns to be sung.

Book of the Dead: A book of burial rituals, listing the preparations that should be made for the deceased from ancient Egypt.

Avesta: The holy book of the Zoroastrian faith.

Epic of Gilgamesh: The world's first literary masterpiece. It is a story that narrates the adventures, triumphs, and failure of the mythical Sumerian King Gilgamesh.

Hammurabi's Code: The world's first and oldest legal code. Put into place by King Hammurabi of Babylon.

Oracle bones: Bone fragments from oxen or turtles that are the primary source of written evidence from the Shang Dynasty. They bear witness to the beginning of the Chinese writing system.

Theocracy: A form or system of government in which members of the religious elite have the most power.

Monarchy: A form or system of government in which a single individual holds the most power.

Nobility: A small social class of elite people and families who perform political, military, and administrative duties for a ruler or king. This class had immense power and social influence over the other classes.

Specialization of labor: A social phenomenon that occurred when mankind became sedentary, settling down into civilized life. Different groups of people entered into different occupations of specialization.

Patriarchy: This term denotes societies or cultures in which masculinity is held to be more valuable than femininity. This term even applies to societies where masculinity and femininity were defined very differently than in the modern age. For example, in medieval China, writing poetry was considered a masculine trait, while wanting to have sex was considered a feminine trait. Nonetheless, the term patriarchy still applies to medieval China because masculine things like poetry were considered more important.

Mesopotamia: Located in present-day Iraq, Mesopotamia is the site of the world's first civilization. Later empires and kingdoms, such as Sumer, Akkad, Babylonia, and Assyria, all occupied this rich and fertile area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

Egypt: A major civilization in North Africa, located between the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, and along the Nile River. Long lasting and influential, Egypt was a rich and dynamic civilization.

Indus River Valley Civilization: The major civilization of the Indian subcontinent located along the Indus River Valley. It flourished and then disappeared mysteriously. Characterized by many cities like Harrapa, it may have been the most urban of all the ancient civilizations.

Shang: The first dynasty in Chinese history to leave records of itself. This dynasty marks the beginning of an organized and powerful Chinese state along the Yellow River.

Zhou: The second historical dynasty of China. The Zhou were pastoralists from the northwest of China who conquered the Shang. They established the ideology of the Mandate of Heaven. In 770 BCE, the Zhou kings lost most of their influence and became powerless figureheads of an increasingly disunited empire.

Olmec: An ancient civilization based in Mexico (near present-day Veracruz). This civilization is mysterious, as scholars have been unable to decipher the Olmec system of writing. Scholars are also puzzled by the presence of large heads that were created by Olmec craftsmen.

Chavín: A civilization emerging along the Peruvian Pacific coast and stretching into the highlands of the Andes. This civilization was distinguished by the ingenuity of its craftsmen and traders.

Mandate of Heaven: An ideology established by the Zhou Dynasty in China. The basic gist was that Chinese rulers only ruled through the permission of Heaven, the supreme moral force of nature. If a Chinese ruler were a bad ruler, Heaven would react with natural disasters, disease, and famine. As a result, it became extra important for Chinese rulers to mitigate famines and natural disasters.

Bantu migration: A millennia-long migration of the Bantu ethno-linguistic group across Africa. Lasted from 1000 BCE to 500 CE.