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# Week 3

## Cradles of civilization: Mesopotamia, Egypt, Indus Valley

HIST-221  
History of Civilization

Atılım University

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# Content of today's class

- |                                                 |                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1) Urban revolution</b>                      | Transition into urban life                               |
| <b>2) Mesopotamian civilizations</b>            | First civilizations in the Fertile Crescent              |
| <b>3) Ancient Egypt</b>                         | The early Egyptian civilization along the Nile           |
| <b>4) Indus Valley civilization</b>             | Traces of early civilizations in the Indian subcontinent |
| <b>5) Common aspects of early civilizations</b> | A look at the common features of early civilizations     |



# 01

## Urban revolution

## Transition into urban life

Just like the Agricultural Revolution, **transition into urban life** was a turning point for humanity. In this revolution, environmental, social, technological and economic factors played a part.

First urban settlements emerged in Mesopotamia.

Urban centers developed due to agricultural novelties, centralization and cultural interaction.



The first examples of urbanization and civilization always appear along the riverbanks. Among the reasons for this are agriculture, transportation and trade, communication and interaction, defense and security, and religious and cultural significance.

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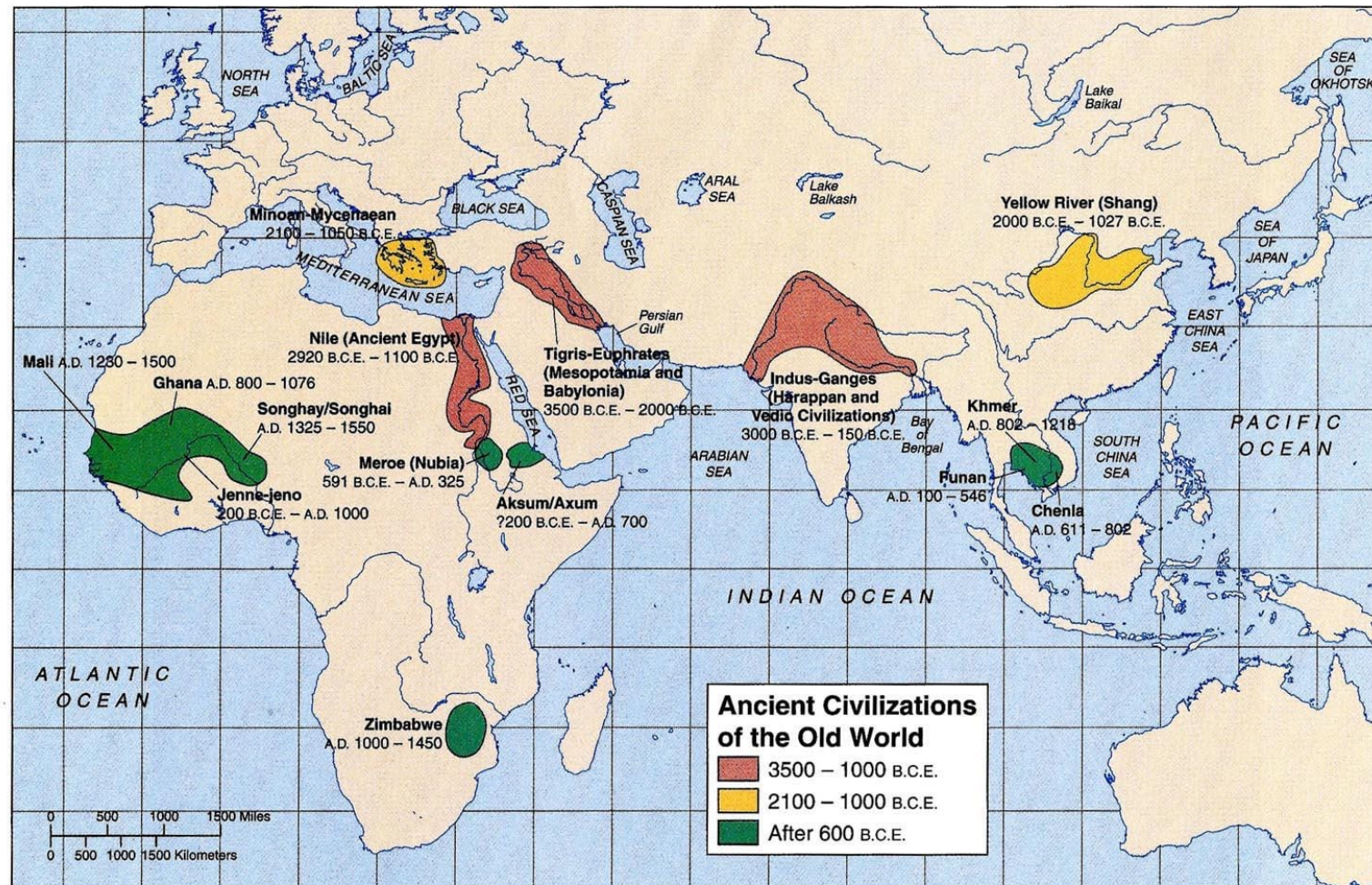




The first civilizations that blossomed along riverbanks include the Mesopotamian civilizations along the Tigris and Euphrates, Egyptian civilization along the Nile river, the Indus valley civilization along the Indus river and its tributaries, and the early Chinese civilization along the Yellow River (Huang He).

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# Ancient Civilizations of the Old World



02

## Mesopotamian civilizations





Illustrative representation of a Mesopotamian city-state, Jeff Brown

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# The Sumerians

(ca. 3500–2000 BCE)

The Sumerians were the first people who established the first civilization in Mesopotamia.

Approximately 5500 years ago, they built the first city-states in Lower Mesopotamia, such as Eridu, Uruk, Ur, Lagash, and Kish.

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The Sumerian city-states were established along the banks of the **Tigris and Euphrates rivers**, in the southern regions of present-day Iraq.

These city-states were autonomous and each had their own government, but together they formed the Sumerian civilization.



*The Sumerian city states spoke a common language and worshipped the same gods and goddesses. Their religion was polytheistic, meaning they believed in multiple gods.*

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→ Ziggurats were the structures used as temples and worship centers dedicated to gods and goddesses.

→ Each city-state had a patron deity and the ziggurat in the city was dedicated to this god/goddess.

→ Priests performed rituals at the top to communicate with the gods.

→ Ziggurats were usually located in the **center of the city**, and they served as **administrative and economic centers** as well as temples.

→ The concept of ziggurat was not exclusive to Sumerians, but all other Mesopotamian civilizations adopted this structure.

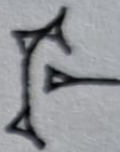
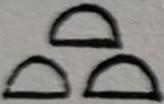
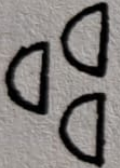
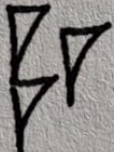
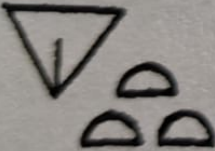
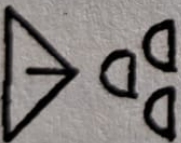
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The Sumerians began using one of the earliest writing systems, known as «cuneiform script» around the end of the 4th millenium BCE. They kept trade and administrative records, wrote their legal codes, epics and myths, poems, letters, and prayers with this writing system.

This script was eventually adopted by other civilizations of Mesopotamia.

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*The evolution of the Sumerian cuneiform.*





→ Sumerians were ahead of their times in terms of culture and technology:

**Agriculture:**

- irrigation canals, levees, dams, etc.
- plow
- wheel

**Mathematics and astronomy:**

- Base 60 numeral system
- Multiplication, division, extraction, square root
- Calendar: solar year of 360 days
- Observation of the phases of the Moon and eclipses
- The basis of the Babylonian mathematics and astronomy.

→ **Art, music, literature:**

- The first epic of the world: Epic of Gilgamesh
  - Sculpturing
  - Instruments (lyre, harp, drums) and note system
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# The Akkadians

(ca. 2500–2100 BCE)

It was founded North of the Sumerian city states in the 3rd millennium BCE. The civilization reached its peak during the reign of King Sargon and **became the first empire in history: he unified the Sumerian city states.** The empire used a Semitic language that was called Akkadian, which was related to modern Hebrew and Arabic.

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**The Taylor Prism.** It is named after the archaeologist who discovered it in 1830. This hexagonal prism was made of clay and featured Akkadian language written using cuneiform script.

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# The Babylonians

(ca. 1900 BCE–6<sup>th</sup> century BCE)

The Babylonians were located within the borders of present-day Iraq. The peak of the civilization was during the reign of **Hammurabi, who wrote one of the oldest known written codes of history**. They adopted numerous cultural and religious features from the Sumerians.

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# The Assyrians

(ca. 2500 BCE–7<sup>th</sup> century BCE)

The Assyrians were an ancient civilization of Mesopotamia, mainly known for their military power. They also founded an empire like the Akkadians and Babylonians. They developed **new warfare tactics and made extensive conquests.**

=> Library of Ashurbanipal (Around 30,000 clay tablets were stored here, including the Epic of Gilgamesh)

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03

**Ancient  
Egypt**  
(ca. 3300–30  
BCE)





→ The Ancient Egyptian civilization was born approximately 1500 km southwest of the Sumerians.

→ It was a civilization that developed along the Nile River. The river provided **water, fertile land, and transportation**. Annual flooding deposited rich **silt** and **allowed better agriculture**.

→ The civilization lasted from around 3100 BCE to 30 BCE, ending with the Roman conquest.



*Around 3000 BCE, Egypt was unified under a single rule by King Scorpion (Menes). This occurred long before the era of the pharaohs in Egypt.*

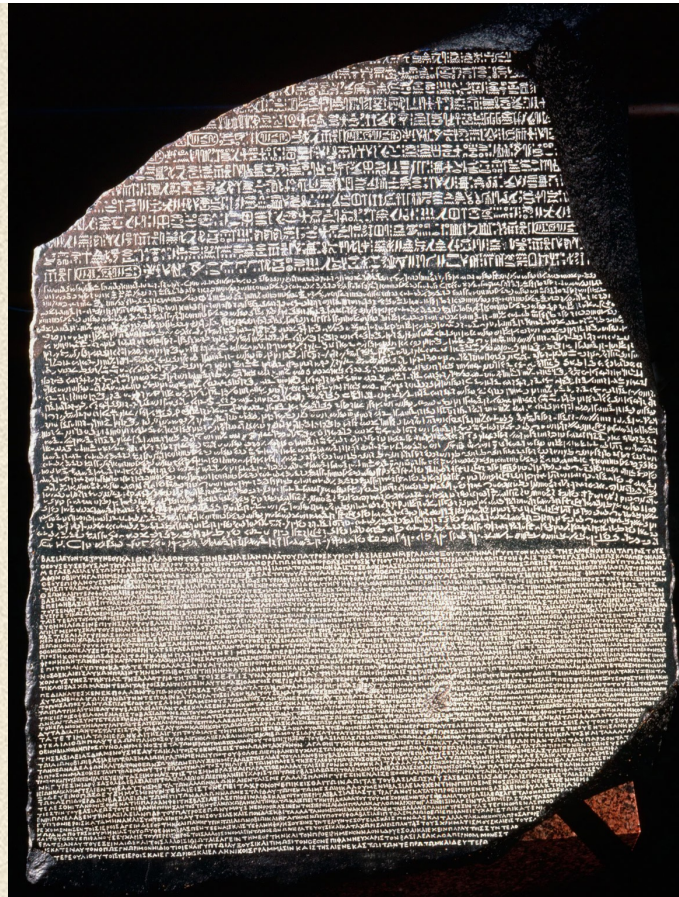


→ Egyptians developed a writing system: **hieroglyphics**. It consisted of over 700 symbols that represent sounds, object, and ideas.

→ They recorded history, religious texts, and daily life mainly on **papyrus scrolls (made from papyrus plant)** and **temple walls**.

→ It is believed that they adopted the concept of writing from the Sumerians.

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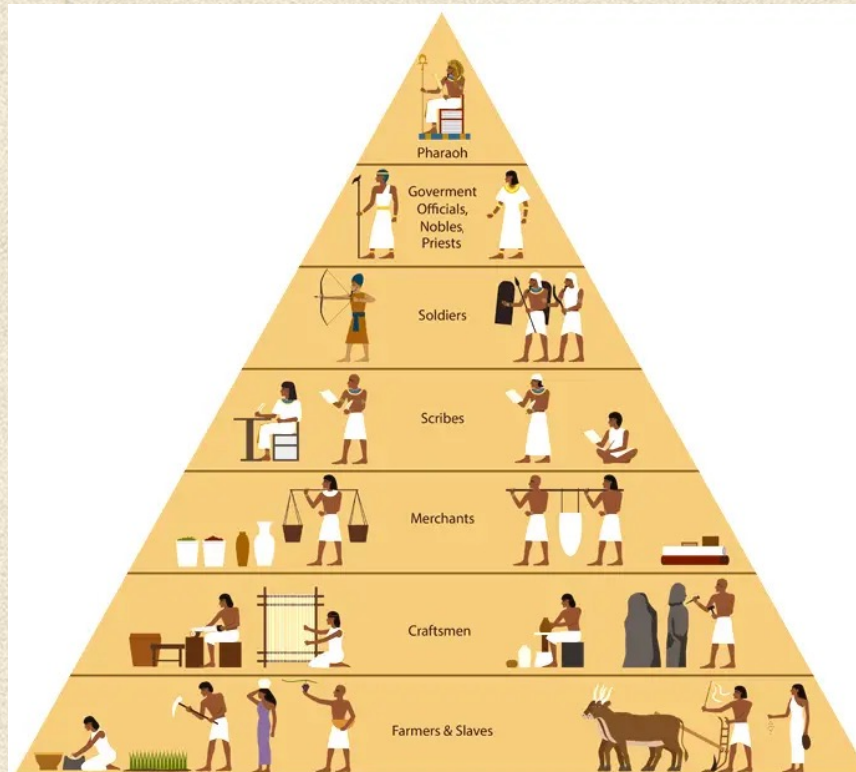
→ Hieroglyphic

→ Demotic

→ Ancient Greek

**Rosetta Stone** is a stele from 196 BCE and has three scripts on it, which enabled researchers to decipher the ancient Egyptian writing system.

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→ The Egyptian society was **highly stratified** with the ruling elite at the top of the hierarchy and slaves at the bottom.

→ This hierarchy was strict and social mobility was very limited.

→ Egyptian society included priests, scribes, artisans, and farmers, each playing a role in maintaining **Ma'at** (harmony and balance).



*The concept of the pharaoh held Egyptian society together. The Egyptians believed that the pharaoh was a living god.*

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→ Pyramids were designed as grand **burial sites** for Egyptian rulers.

→ Pharaohs were considered divine, and their tombs reflected their **eternal status**.

→ The pyramid shape was believed to help the soul (ka) **ascend to the heaven**.

→ Only **pharaohs and high elites** had pyramid tombs.

→ The pyramids housed the pharaoh's **mummy, treasures**, and **religious texts**.

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➔ **Mummification** was a complex and detailed process practiced by the ancient Egyptians for over 3000 years.

➔ It was associated with beliefs about the afterlife and the preservation of the body for eternity.



*Medicine in ancient Egypt was usually practiced by priests who also had a hierarchy among each other.*

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04

**Indus Valley  
civilization**  
(ca. 3300–1300  
BCE)

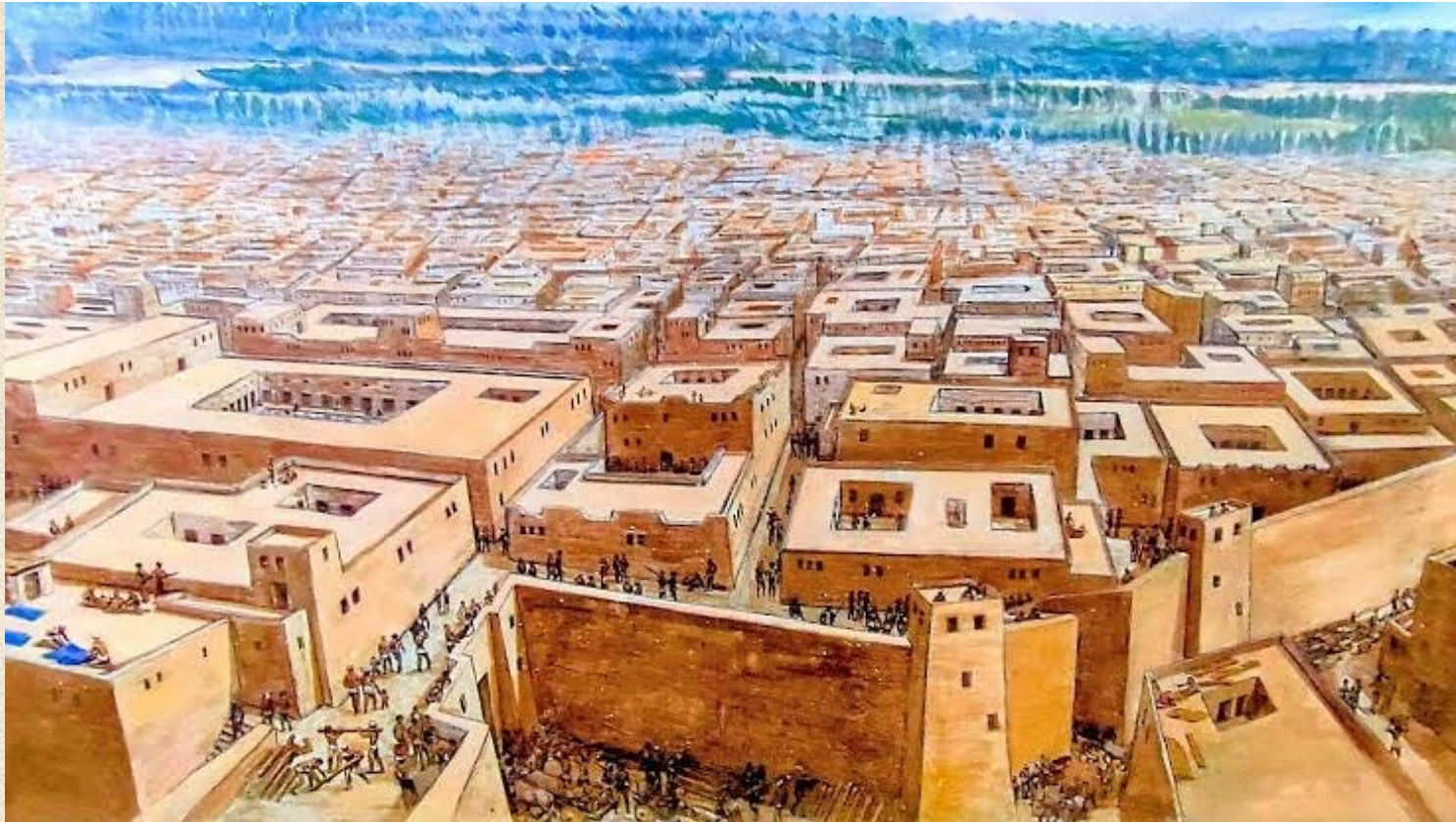


# Indus Valley Civilisation

## -Mature Phase-

(c. 2600-1900 BCE)





Harappo, Mohenjo-Daro, Dolavira and Lothal  
were the leading city-states of this civilization.  
Urban planning and infrastructure systems were  
highly developed.

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It was a society based on **agriculture and trade**. The archaeological evidence shows they established close networks of interaction with Mesopotamian civilizations and engaged in trade with them.

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They used a writing system (the Indus script) that remains **undeciphered** to this day. Our inability of understanding this system also makes it difficult for us to understand the **reasons** that led to the decline of the Indus civilization.

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# 05

## Common features of the Bronze Age civilizations



# Common features of the Bronze Age civilizations - 1

## Agriculture

The methods learned during the Agricultural Revolution continued to be there and were developed further. Advanced irrigation systems began to be used, resulting in surplus production.



The first civilizations were each established on the banks of rivers. The rivers provided water for irrigation, facilitated transportation, and increased the fertility of soil.

## Valley civilizations

# Common features of the Bronze Age civilizations - 2

## Emergence of social classes

Social stratification became increasingly evident. Labor exploitation, slavery, and the marginalization of women became more prevalent.



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Government, trade, religion, and cultural activities were now largely conducted in cities.

## Urbanization

# Common features of the Bronze Age civilizations - 3

## Religions and rituals

The emergence of gods, goddesses, religious practices, temples, rituals, and religious classes (clergy) became more prevalent.



Trade and commerce began with other communities, and cultural interaction networks intensified.

## Development of trade networks



# Common features of the Bronze Age civilizations - 4

## Writing systems

Each early civilization developed its own writing system: Cuneiform in Mesopotamia, hieroglyphs in Egypt, and the still undeciphered Indus script in the Indus civilization.



Significant advancements were made in metalworking (usage of bronze by merging copper and alloy), pottery, agriculture, and architecture. These developments increased productivity and trade, creating wealth.

## Technological advancements