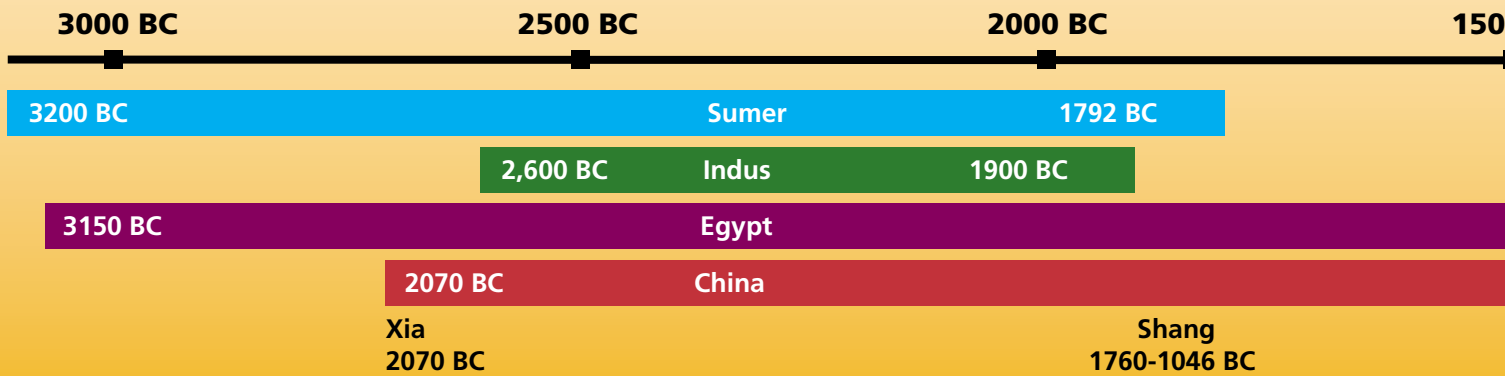


A comparative time-line of the first civilisations



So was everyone an ancient Egyptian?

Developing an understanding of the world in ancient times

Paul Bracey

I will be honest – no child has actually asked me if the world was ever full of Ancient Egyptians! Having said that, by focusing on one part of the world, children are left with either this impression or the idea that nothing was happening elsewhere in the world. Clearly, concerns related to this issue have underpinned National Curriculum 2014 which requires the following:

the achievements of the earliest civilizations – an overview of where and when the first civilizations appeared and a depth study of one of the following: Ancient Sumer; The Indus Valley; Ancient Egypt; The Shang Dynasty of Ancient China (DfE, 2013, p192)

This clearly requires children to be aware of what was happening in different parts of the world so that they appreciate that there was more to human development than the achievements of a single culture. At the same time teaching topics without a sense of chronology could leave children with the

impression that the Egyptians, Vikings and Tudors occupied comparable time periods. The National Curriculum requires that:

Pupils should continue to develop a chronologically secure knowledge and understanding of British, local and world history ... [and] combine overview and depth studies to help pupils understand both the long arc of development and the complexity of specific aspects of the content.

(DfE, 2013 pp189-90)

This is particularly important when considering the length of time which early civilisations lasted as well as their significance in human development up to the twenty-first century.

How can we go about this? A useful starting point is to look at the time-line at the top of this page which shows Ancient Sumer, the Indus Valley, Ancient Egypt

0 BC

1000 BC

500 BC

0

AD 30

220 AD

Zhou
1046-256 BC

Qin Western Han Eastern Han
221-207 BC 206 – 9 AD 25-220 AD

and the Shang Dynasty. They existed at the same time, although the duration of each of them differed.

The following summarises each of them. Fuller details are available in recent editions of *Primary History*.

- Ancient Sumer has been called ‘the cradle of civilisation’. It developed around the Tigris-Euphrates rivers which are in modern Iraq from 3200 BC until it became part of the Babylonian Empire in 1792 BC. Sumer was associated with the development of the first cities, writing and the wheel.
- The Indus Valley Civilisation emerged from about 2600 BC beside a river which flows through modern Pakistan and began to decline in about 1900 BC. It was also associated with towns, trade, early drainage systems and rich remains including early writing.
- Ancient Egypt evolved around the River Nile from about 3150 BC and ultimately declined as an individual culture in the reign of Cleopatra in 30 BC, becoming part of the Roman Empire. It is often associated with writing, trade and the pyramids.

- The Shang Dynasty developed around the Yellow River in China from about 1760-1046 BC and is associated with the development of writing, the calendar, chariots, large underground tombs, bronze bowls and weapons.

Besides the time frame, there are other common features. All of these civilisations emerged by rivers in warmer parts of the world and were supported by agricultural communities. There is also evidence that each developed a stratified social structure, a belief in the afterlife as well as innovations which have had a long-lasting legacy. It is possible to compare what was happening in these civilisations with what was happening in Britain by looking at the poster in *Primary History* 69 (Spring 2015).

Teachers are likely to want to depict these societies on a map of the world, but there are other aspects that need to be considered. First, these were not the only places where developments were taking place and it is important that children do not think that this was the case. For example, in South

and Central America early cultures developed in the Andes from 3000 BC and pre-classic the Mayan Civilisation developed from 2000 BC.

Moreover, even within China, the Shang was one of several dynasties even if it was the first important one. The Zhou dynasty introduced the use of coins, while the short reign of the Qin is associated with the Great Wall and the tomb containing the Terracotta Army and the Han developed the use of paper and iron tools. Ancient China civilisation represents over two thousand years of history which may provide a more appropriate way of comparing this part of the world with the other civilisations than focusing on a single dynasty.

How can we enable children to appreciate the links and connections between these civilisations as well as developing their broader understanding of the past?

The following might well engage children in relating an early civilisation to its broader historical and spatial context:

- **Use time-lines to relate a civilisation to its spatial and chronological context** – use web-based timelines and/or the

card activity associated with this article to find out when the civilisation took place, how this compared with other early civilisations and more recent developments such as the Roman, Saxon and Viking migrations to Britain, the Tudors, Victorians and World War II –the comparatively short time periods of the latter. Hopefully children will appreciate that the length of time associated with a civilisation does not necessarily reflect its significance.

- **Compare the location and basic characteristics of the chosen early civilisation with the other three civilisations.** The children could locate pictures and basic information about each civilisation on a world map and be asked to find where they developed. Hopefully they will deduce that each emerged close to the Equator and by rivers – so helping trade and agriculture. They could use enquiry questions such as: How were they ruled? What did they believe? What were their most important achievements? This could begin with the activity on p. 17, followed by research using the web (see list of website) and textbooks related to each of the civilisations (see *Primary History* articles in the reference list).
- **Make meaningful comparisons between the chosen depth civilisation and what was happening elsewhere at appropriate points in this civilisation.** For example, the pyramids in Egypt can be compared with the large underground

burials, such as that of Fu Hao in Shang China and the terracotta warriors from the Qin Dynasty. Children might point out that both indicate a belief in the afterlife, as well as the wealth of powerful individuals at that time. Both cultures initially buried slaves to help in the next world, a costly practice which gave way to the use of clay replicas, represented by ushabti in Egypt and the clay warriors in China. This could be developed more fully by exploring an alternative civilisation through visits to places such as the British Museum or Compton Verney in Warwickshire (www.comptonverney.org.uk), which have extensive collection of Ancient Chinese bronzes.

- **Relate the depth civilisation to its 'bigger picture'.** The legacy of achievements made by early civilisations can also be compared with other times in the past. For example, the children could investigate the Lascaux caves (18000 BC) early writing in Ancient Egypt (3300 BC) Caxton's printing press (475 AD) and computers (twentieth Century) looking at issues such as: What did people do before them? How did they change people's lives? Which has had the most important impact?

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Resources

DfE (2013) *The National Curriculum in England Key Stages 1 and 2: framework document*.

Recent editions of *Primary History* contain a number of important and relevant articles including:

Doull, K. (2014) 'Teaching about Ancient Egypt' in *PH 67*, pp. 16-21.

Aronovsky, I. (2014) 'Investigating the Indus Valley' in *PH 68*, pp. 30-35.

Parker Heath, C. (2015) 'Ancient Sumer' in *PH 69*, pp. 28-33.

Wilkinson, A. (2015) 'The Shang: what can we tell about an ancient civilisation from one tomb?' in *PH 70*, pp. 32-38.



Websites

The following sites are helpful in relating an early civilisation to its bigger picture:

www.timemaps.com/history

This provides an excellent opportunity to look at different societies in the world over time – allowing for comparison and a sense of time.

www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk/home

This is located on the British Museum website and provides opportunities to find information to compare different civilisations around themes such as cities.

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/indus_valley/

This looks at the Indus Valley and also provides some information about the location of the early civilisation

Classroom activities:

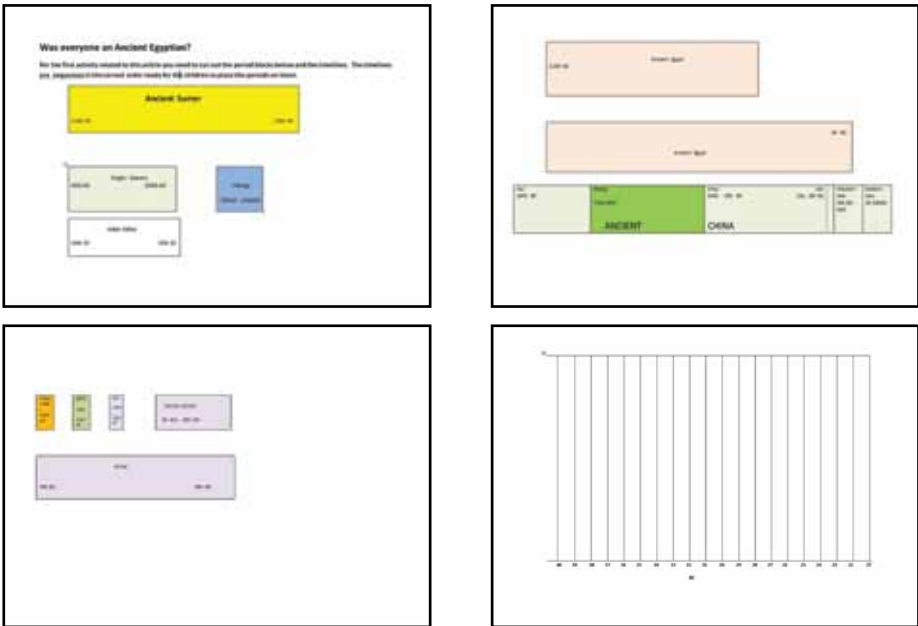
what can we find out about the ancient world?

Objective: identifying and explaining similarities and differences across different civilisations.

Preparation for the lesson: The time-line and cards provided in the poster can be used for Activity 1. You will need to print off four copies of the time-line and label centuries from 5000 BC to the present day so that children can place the civilisation strips on them as a basis for your discussion. The dates allocated to each civilisation vary between sources but here they are based on that given in the recent *Primary History* articles listed on p. 14 (see Resources). You also need to photocopy Figures 2 and 3 and obtain world maps for Activity 2.

Activity 1: What does our interactive time-line tell us?

The children put the four civilisation strips on the time-line, together with strips showing more recent periods such as the Anglo-Saxons, Vikings and Tudors and consider the following questions - What does this tell us? What questions do we think are worth asking about these civilisations and societies?



The full version of this resource can be downloaded from the online version of this issue at: www.history.org.uk

Activity 2: Matching places and pictures

The children put maps/information cards of Ancient Egypt, Sumer, the Shang Dynasty and the Indus Valley Civilisations on to a world map. Working in groups, they use textbooks or websites to answer their questions.

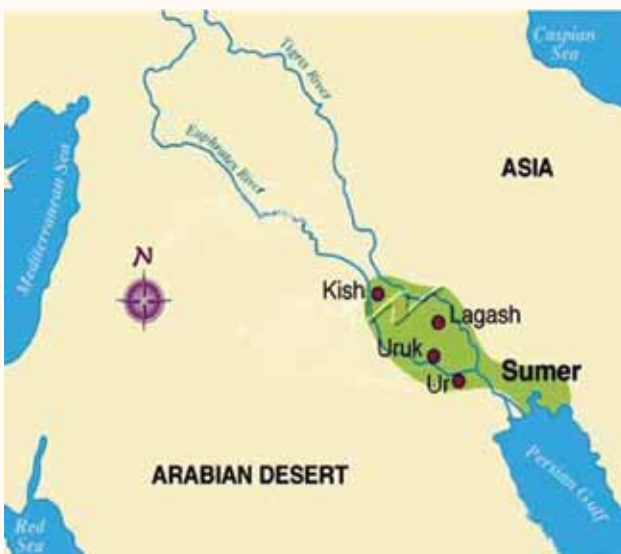
Ancient Egypt



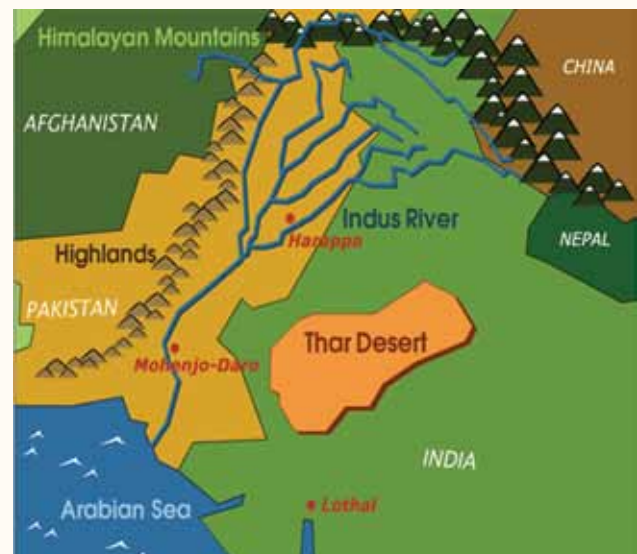
The Shang Dynasty



Ancient Sumer



Ancient Indus Valley



1. Ancient Egypt

3500 BC The Egyptians settled by the River Nile and ruled from about 3500 BC to 500 BC.



2. The Shang Dynasty

The Shang lived in the area by the Yellow River in China and ruled from 1600 BC to 1100 BC. Anyang was one of their capital cities.



3. Ancient Sumer

They lived by the River Tigris and Euphrates (in modern Iraq) between about 4500 BC and 2000 BC. They built cities by the rivers.

They could weave, write, and make pots and use things made out of metal.



4. Ancient Indus Valley

People settled by the River Indus which flows through modern Pakistan. The Indus Valley Civilisation was important by 2600 BC and ended in 1500 BC. They built great cities like Mohenjo Daro.

