

UNIT 2

Ancient World Civilizations up to c. 500 Adv

Introduction: Ancient Civilizations

This unit explores major ancient civilizations across Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe. It consists of five lessons, each covering different regions and their significant contributions.

Ancient Civilizations of Africa

- **Ancient Egypt:** Flourished around 3000 BC in the Nile Valley. Key features:
 - **Economy:** Based on agriculture, with the Nile providing fertile soil for growing wheat and barley. Livestock and trade were also crucial.
 - **Government:** Ruled by pharaohs who were seen as both kings and gods, with officials called Viziers managing daily affairs.
 - **Religion:** Polytheistic, with beliefs in an afterlife leading to the practice of mummification and advances in medicine.
 - **Achievements:** Hieroglyphics writing system and the use of papyrus.
- **Nubia:** Located along the Nile in what is now Sudan, flourishing from around 2000 BC to 350 AD. Key features:
 - **Economy:** Based on agriculture, pastoralism, and trade. Meroe was known for its metal industry.
 - **Government:** Ruled by divine kings and queens similar to Egyptian pharaohs.
 - **Conquest:** Nubia conquered Egypt at times but was later destroyed by the Aksumite king Ezana.

Ancient Civilizations of Asia

- **Mesopotamia:** Located between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, encompassing parts of modern-day Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Key features:
 - **Sumerians:** The earliest civilization, known for building the first cities and temples called Ziggurats. They developed cuneiform writing, mathematics, and astronomy.
 - **Persia:** Spanned from the Balkan Peninsula to the Indus Valley. The Persian Empire, founded by Cyrus the Great, contributed to governance, law, and the first postal service. Their religion was Zoroastrianism.
- **India:** The Indus Valley Civilization (2500–1500 BC) had advanced urban planning, trade, and craftsmanship. Key features:
 - **Social Structure:** Hierarchical and based on work and birth.
 - **Religion:** Hinduism originated here, and Buddhism emerged as a reform movement.
- **China:** Developed along the Yellow River. Key features:
 - **Shang Dynasty:** Known for bronze vessels, war chariots, and an early writing system.

- **Confucianism:** Founded by Confucius, emphasizing a well-ordered society. The Great Wall of China was built to protect against invasions.

Ancient Civilizations of the Americas

- **Maya:** Flourished from 250-900 AD in present-day Mexico and Central America. Key features:
 - **Achievements:** Advanced architecture, astronomy, mathematics, and writing. Known for their pyramids and calendar.
 - **Decline:** Spanish conquest in the 16th Century.
- **Inca:** Expanded their empire in South America around 1438. Key features:
 - **Engineering:** Built a network of roads and fine artifacts. Capital was Cusco.
- **Aztecs:** Ruled in Mexico during the 15th and 16th centuries. Key features:
 - **Economy:** Based on agriculture. Known for their large city, Tenochtitlan, and their pictographic writing.

Ancient Greece

- **City-States:** Greece was divided into city-states like Athens and Sparta. Key features:
 - **Achievements:** Developed democracy, philosophy (Plato and Aristotle), drama, and monumental architecture (e.g., the Parthenon).
 - **Historians:** Herodotus and Thucydides wrote about Greece's history and wars.

Ancient Rome

- **Early Rome:** Founded around 753 BC. Key features:
 - **Government:** Transitioned from a monarchy to a republic and then an empire.
 - **Achievements:** Roman law, engineering (roads, aqueducts), and Latin literature.
 - **Legacy:** The Julian calendar and Latin influenced many modern languages.

Christianity

- **Origins:** Began in Palestine in the first century AD with the teachings of Jesus Christ.
- **Spread:** Initially persecuted but became the official religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine in 313 AD. The church split into the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Church in 1054 AD.

Unit Summary

This unit covered ancient civilizations from Egypt and Nubia in Africa to Mesopotamia, Persia, India, and China in Asia. It also explored the Maya, Inca, and Aztecs in the Americas, and the contributions of Greece and Rome to Western civilization. The rise and spread of Christianity marked a significant transformation in the ancient world.