

History Level 8

Chapter 1 — Overview: the early human world

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Theory

Part 1 — History before writing

For most of the human story, nobody was writing anything down. Writing is only about 5,000 years old, but the human story reaches back millions of years. So for almost all of that time there are no letters, no records, no documents. Historians and archaeologists still build accounts of those years the way detectives build a case: from traces that survive — bones, stone tools, layers of soil, patterns in DNA.

Three key words for this section:

- **Evidence** — the surviving traces of the past that we can observe and check: a fossil (the preserved remains of a living thing), an artefact (an object people made), a soil layer, a pattern in DNA — the molecule inside every living thing that carries its inherited instructions.
- **Interpretation** — an account built *from* evidence. Two historians can look at the same evidence and build different interpretations, because they weigh the evidence in different ways.
- **Hypothesis** — a testable interpretation, put forward so that evidence can be gathered for and against it. When evidence piles up on one side, a hypothesis becomes the accepted view — until new evidence shifts it.

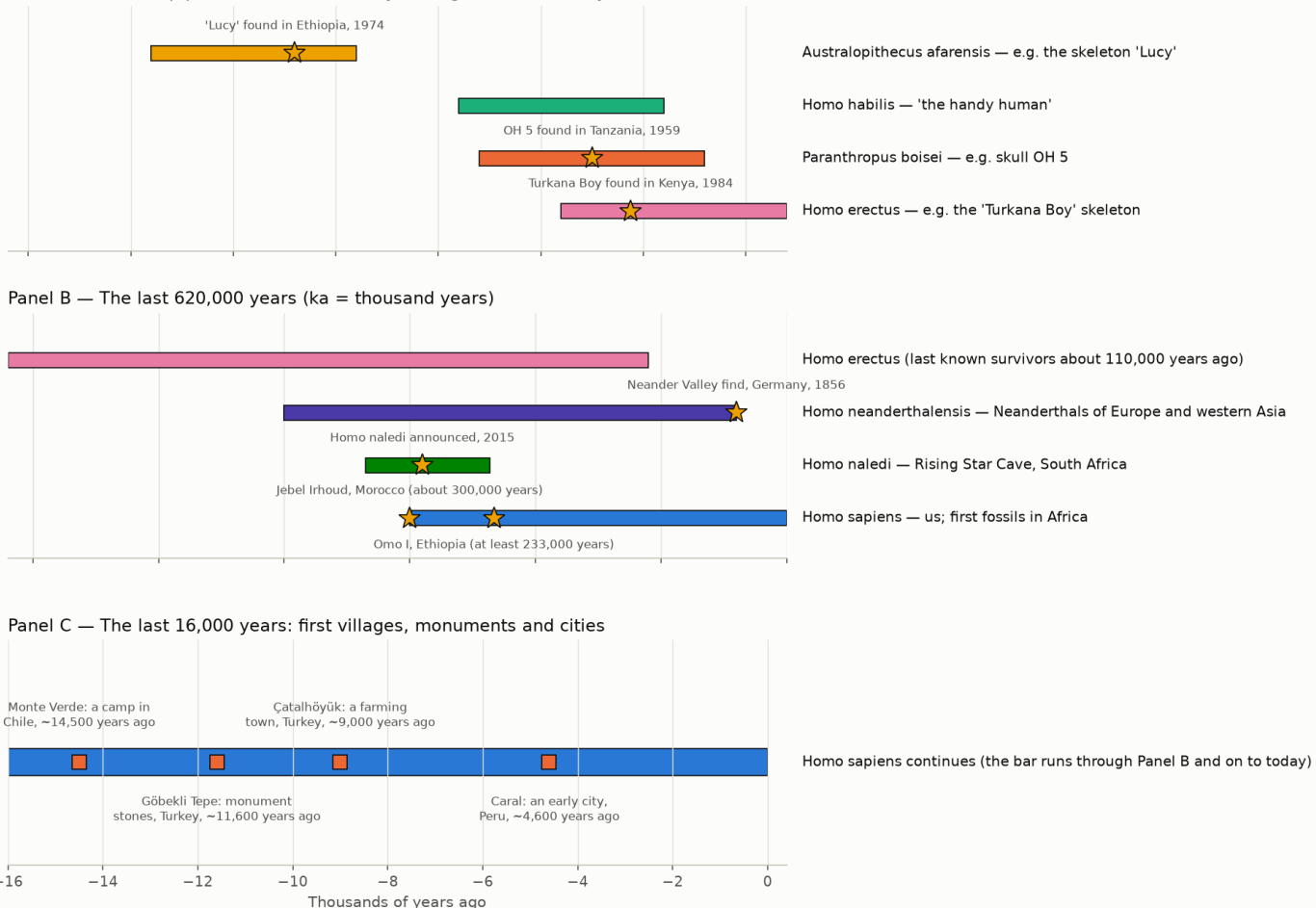
One more label needs care. Scientists who study human origins use the word **hominin** as their agreed label — a term fixed by definition, not a contested one — for the family group that includes modern humans, extinct human species, and close extinct relatives such as *Australopithecus*, all descended from the ancestors we share with chimpanzees. This is the standard usage in the field (for example, the Smithsonian Institution's Human Origins Program uses it this way).

Part 2 — The hominin story, in three zooms

Figure 1 is an illustrated timeline. It is drawn as three panels that zoom in, because the last 16,000 years would be invisible on the scale of the last 4 million. Bars show the approximate time range of each species; stars mark famous fossil finds; squares mark early societies.

A three-way zoom: hominin evolution and the first societies

Panel A — The deep past (4.6 to 0.8 million years ago; Ma = million years)



Three-panel timeline with bars showing the approximate time range of each hominin species, stars marking famous fossil finds such as Lucy and Turkana Boy, and squares marking early societies such as Göbekli Tepe and Caral

Read off the patterns:

- For most of the deep past, **several hominin species were alive at the same time**. *Homo habilis*, *Paranthropus boisei* and *Homo erectus* overlapped for hundreds of thousands of years (Panel A). We are the only hominin left alive today.
- Homo erectus* was the long-runner: from about 1.9 million to about 110,000 years ago, and the first hominin known to have spread out of Africa.
- Homo sapiens* — us — first appears in the African fossil record about 300,000 years ago (the Jebel Irhoud fossils, Morocco) and at least 233,000 years ago at Omo I, Ethiopia.

The named fossils on the timeline are **primary sources** — original objects from the past, each with a find spot, a finder and a museum that holds it:

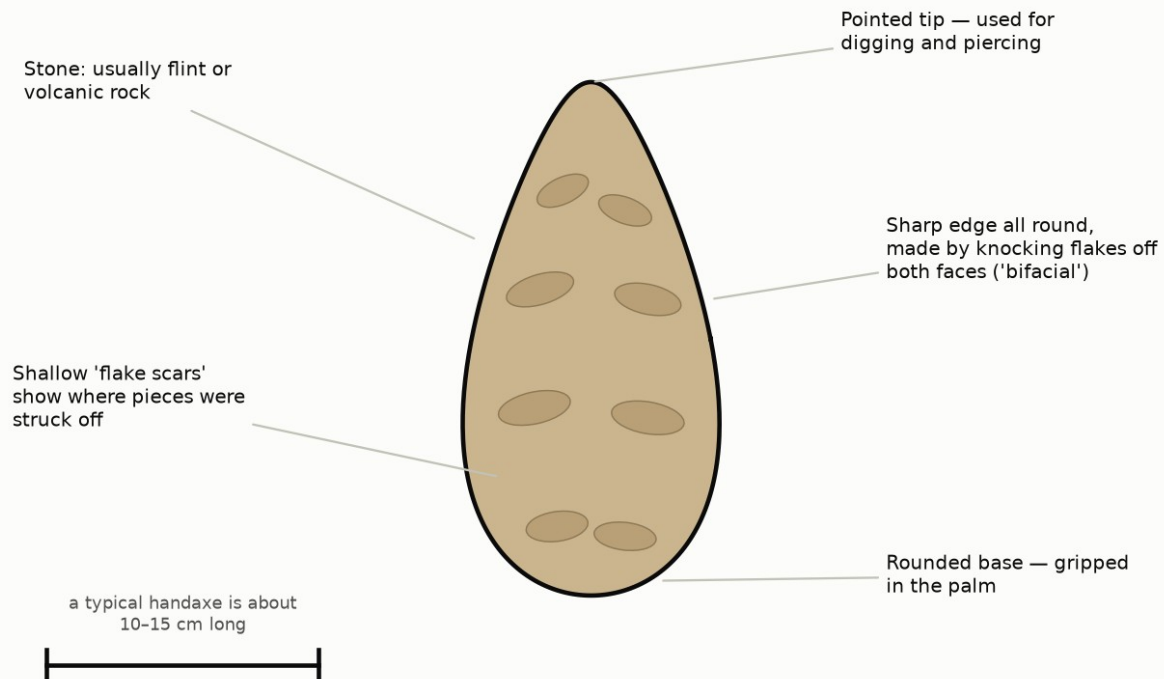
- '**Lucy**' (specimen AL 288-1), an *Australopithecus afarensis* skeleton about 3.2 million years old, found at Hadar, Ethiopia in 1974 by the team of Donald Johanson; the original is held in the National Museum of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
- '**Turkana Boy**' (KNM-WT 15000), a near-complete *Homo erectus* skeleton about 1.6 million years old, found at Nariokotome, Kenya in 1984 by Kamoya Kimeu; held in the Nairobi Museums, Kenya.
- OH 5**, a *Paranthropus boisei* skull found at Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania by Mary Leakey in 1959; held in the National Museum of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam.
- Neanderthal 1**, the 1856 Neander Valley find (Germany) that gave *Homo neanderthalensis* its name; held in the LVR-LandesMuseum Bonn.

Each of these is an *interpretation waiting to happen*: a skeleton is not a story. Turning Lucy's knee and pelvis into "she walked upright" is an inference from evidence — and inferences can be checked and contested.

Part 3 — Close study of a primary source: the handaxe

Some primary sources are objects, not documents. Figure 2 is an original drawing of one of the most successful objects ever made: the Acheulean handaxe — a fist-sized stone tool with a sharp edge worked all the way round. (“Acheulean” is the archaeologists’ agreed label for this handaxe tradition, named after Saint-Acheul in France, where early examples were identified.) Real handaxes sit in museum collections — the British Museum in London, for instance, holds many, from sites across Africa, Europe and western Asia.

An Acheulean handaxe — a primary source from the deep past



Original drawing for this section. Real handaxes have been found across Africa, Europe and western Asia.

Labelled original drawing of a teardrop-shaped Acheulean handaxe, showing the pointed tip, the sharp edge worked on both faces, the rounded base and shallow flake scars, with a scale bar

What can historians read from this one object?

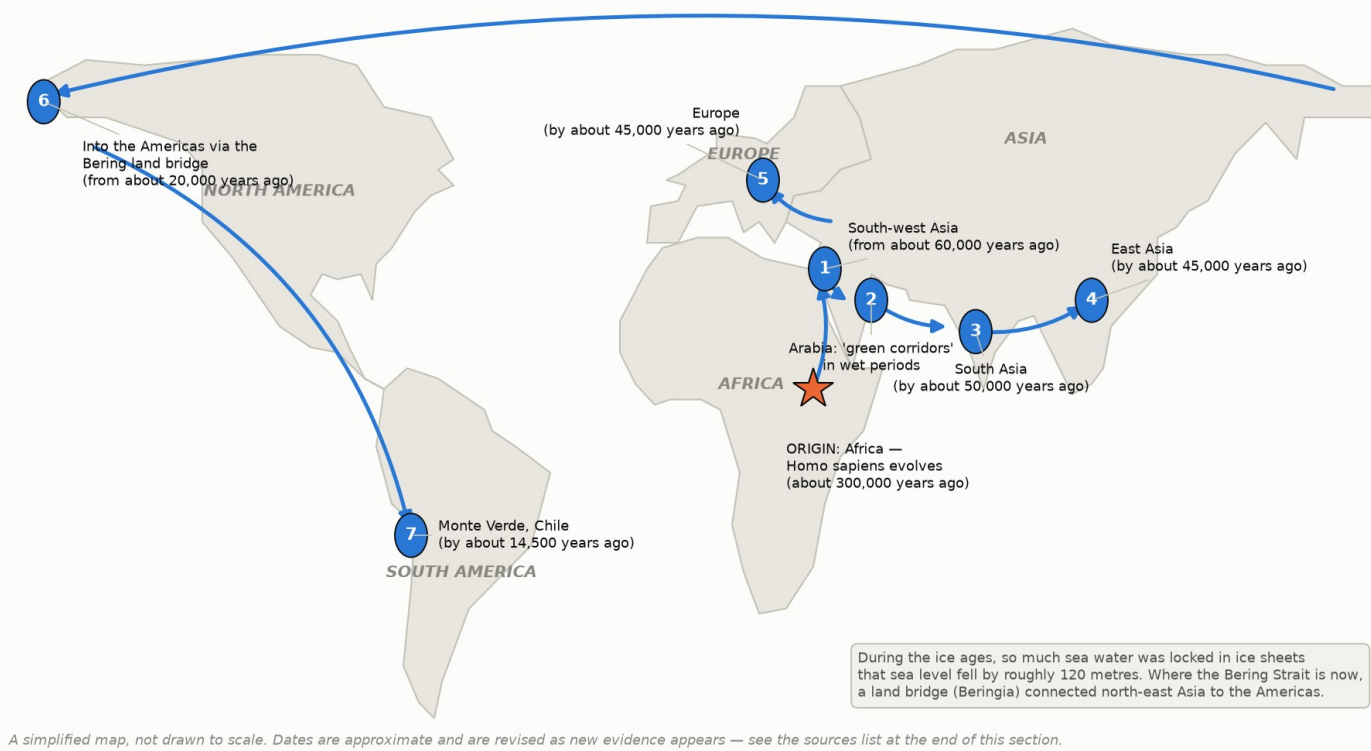
- **Skill and planning.** The stone was knapped (flaked) on both faces into a planned teardrop shape. That takes learning and practice — knowledge passed on.
- **A way of life.** The sharp all-round edge cuts, digs and butchers: a portable toolkit for a mobile hunter-gatherer life.
- **Continuity and change.** The same design was made for well over a million years, mostly by *Homo erectus* and their heirs. That is an astonishing continuity — and the slow change in it is itself evidence about how these minds worked.

A single object cannot tell us everything (it cannot speak, name its maker, or date itself). That is exactly why historians never lean on one line of evidence — a theme we return to in Part 6.

Part 4 — Out of Africa: mapping the spread of *Homo sapiens*

From about 60,000 years ago, small groups of *Homo sapiens* moved out of Africa and, over thousands of years, into every region on Figure 3. The map is a simplified model — one interpretation of the evidence — and every date on it is approximate and open to revision.

One model of the spread of Homo sapiens out of Africa



Simplified, not-to-scale map of Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas with numbered stops and arrows tracing one model of the spread of Homo sapiens out of Africa, across Asia and into the Americas by way of the Bering land bridge

- **South-west Asia (the Levant)** from about 60,000 years ago; **Arabia** could be crossed in wet periods, when monsoon rains turned it into green corridors.
- **South Asia** by about 50,000 years ago; **East Asia** and **Europe** by about 45,000 years ago.
- **The Americas last.** During the ice ages, so much sea water was locked up in ice sheets that sea level fell by roughly 120 metres. Where the Bering Strait is now, a broad land bridge (**Beringia**) joined north-east Asia to Alaska. People crossed on foot from about 20,000 years ago, and by about 14,500 years ago they were at **Monte Verde**, a camp site at the far south of Chile.

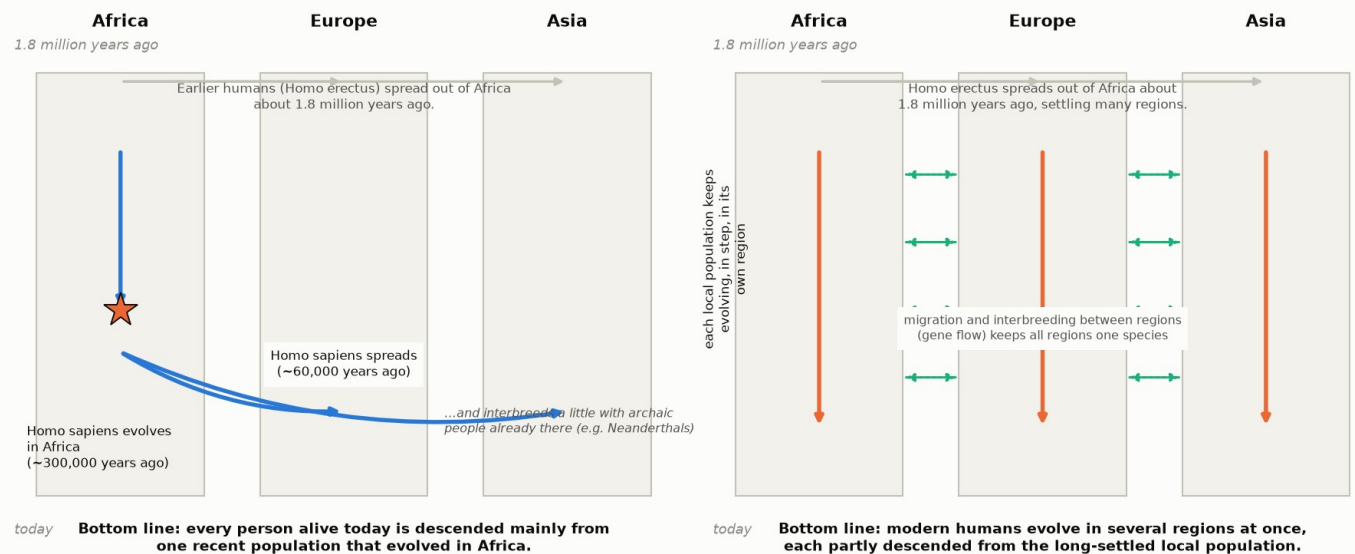
Notice the claim being made: reaching the tip of South America by 14,500 years ago means the whole of the Americas was peopled very quickly — and it means the dates of first arrival keep being pushed back as new sites are found. The map is the current best interpretation, not a finished fact.

Part 5 — Two hypotheses for where we came from

Scientists agree that our deep roots are in Africa with *Homo erectus*. They have disagreed about what happened *next*. Figure 4 sets the two rival hypotheses side by side, each in its strongest form.

Two competing hypotheses for where *Homo sapiens* came from
Out of Africa (recent African origin)

Multiregional hypothesis



Two side-by-side diagrams contrasting the Out of Africa hypothesis, in which *Homo sapiens* evolves in Africa and replaces older populations with a little interbreeding, with the multiregional hypothesis, in which local populations across Africa, Europe and Asia evolve into modern humans together, kept one species by gene flow

- **Out of Africa (recent African origin).** *Homo sapiens* evolved in Africa about 300,000 years ago and spread from about 60,000 years ago, mostly *replacing* the older people it met (Neanderthals and others), with only a little interbreeding. Its strongest points: the oldest *Homo sapiens* fossils are all African; and the DNA of living people is most diverse in Africa and traces back to a recent African root.
- **The multiregional hypothesis.** *Homo erectus* populations settled Africa, Europe and Asia from about 1.8 million years ago, and each region's people kept evolving towards modern humans *in step*, because migration and interbreeding between regions (gene flow — the passing of genes, the inherited instructions, between populations) tied them into one species. Its strongest points: some fossils outside Africa show features that look continuous from older local populations, suggesting local ancestors were not simply replaced; and gene flow between neighbouring populations is real and observable.

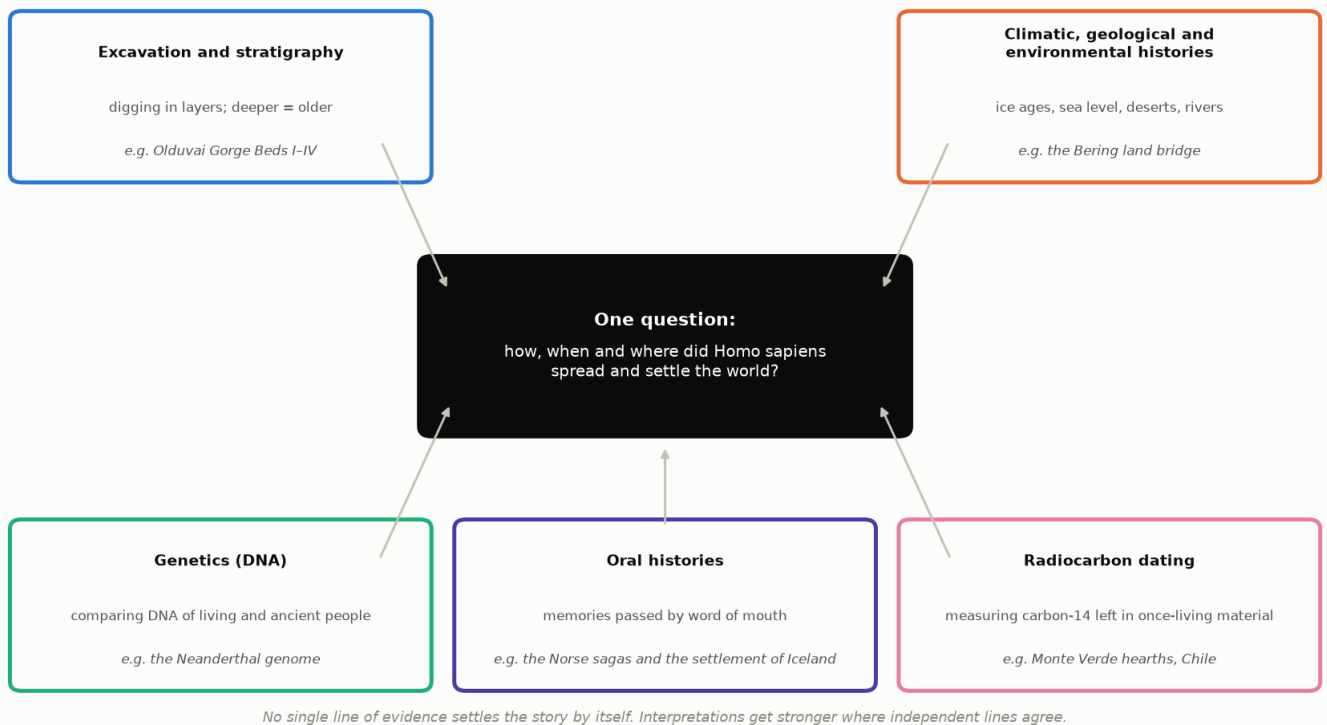
The key differences are: *where* modern humans evolved (one place, or several regions at once), and *how much* ancestry people outside Africa should carry from the long-settled older populations (a little, or a lot).

How was the argument weighed? Genetics tipped it. When the Neanderthal genome — the full set of DNA instructions — was read in 2010, people whose ancestors lived outside Africa were found to carry about 1–4% Neanderthal DNA — proof of **some** interbreeding, which the strictest Out-of-Africa version had not expected. But that share is tiny: the overwhelming majority of everyone's ancestry is recent and African. So today's accepted interpretation is neither hypothesis unchanged: it is mostly Out of Africa, with a small archaic contribution. That is how interpretations move — on the weight of evidence, not on who argued loudest.

Part 6 — Five lines of evidence, one investigation

Every claim in Parts 2–5 stands on several independent lines of evidence (Figure 5). Each line has its own methods and its own weaknesses, so where independent lines agree, the interpretation gets strong.

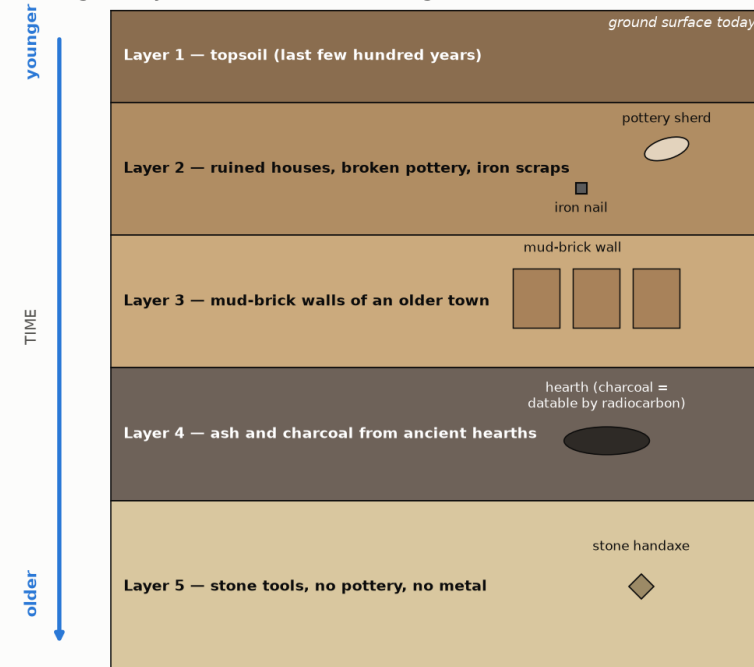
Five lines of evidence, one investigation



Concept map with five labelled boxes — excavation and stratigraphy; climatic and geological histories with environmental evidence; genetics; oral histories; radiocarbon dating — each arrowed to one central question about how, when and where *Homo sapiens* spread and settled

1. **Excavation and stratigraphy.** *Stratigraphy* (from Latin *stratum*, “layer”) is the subject term for reading the layers of a site: in undisturbed ground, deeper means older (the rule of superposition). Figure 6 shows how a settlement mound stores time. At Olduvai Gorge, Mary and Louis Leakey excavated fossils and stone tools from stacked geological layers, Beds I to IV, laid down over about 1.8 million years — the deeper beds holding the older, more apelike hominins.

Reading the layers: a cross-section through a settlement mound



The rule of superposition

In undisturbed ground, the deeper a layer lies, the older it is. Layers build up one on top of another as centuries pass.

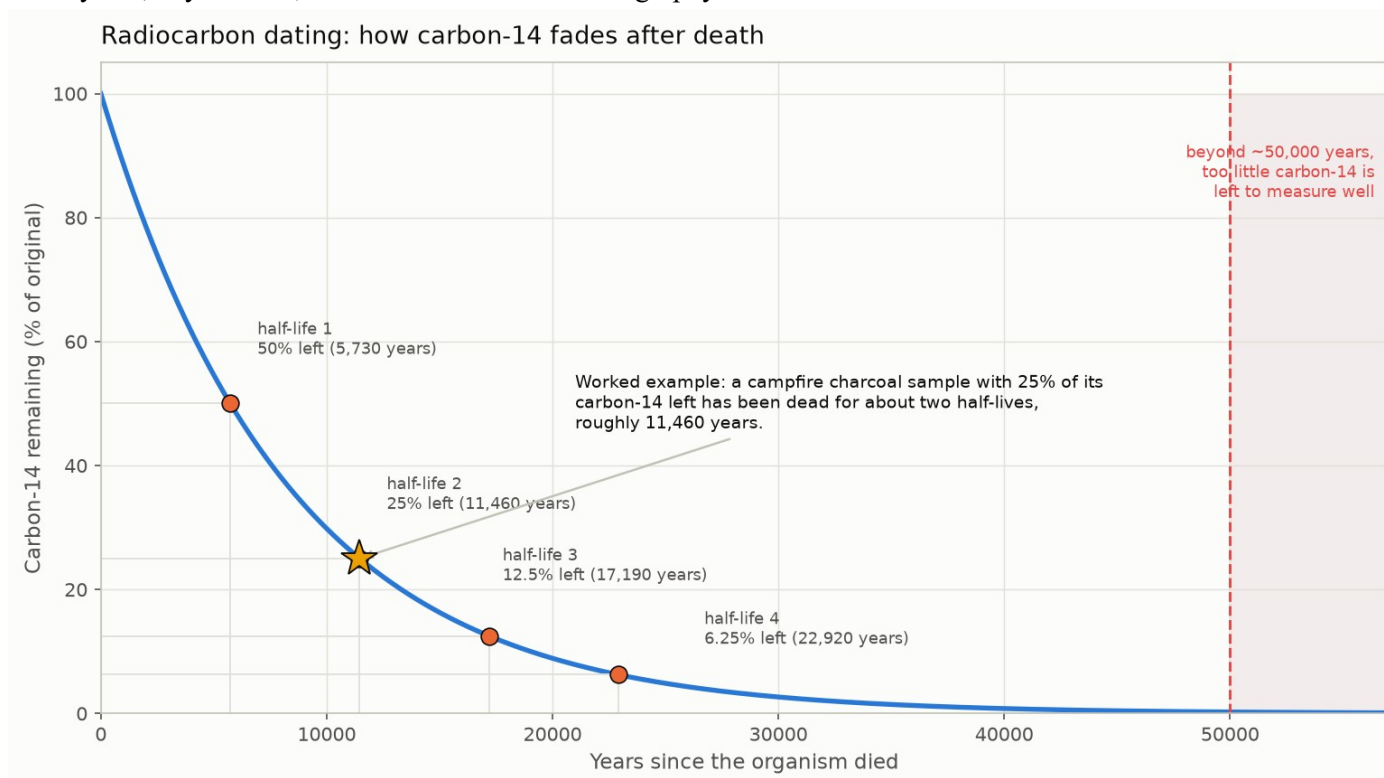
Real example

At Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania, Mary and Louis Leakey excavated fossils and stone tools from stacked geological layers, Beds I to IV, laid down over about 1.8 million years.

Careful: layers can be disturbed — by digging, burrowing animals or earthquakes — so archaeologists check that a layer is undisturbed before they date what is inside it.

Cross-section of a settlement mound with five labelled layers, from topsoil down to a stone-tools layer, finds such as a piece of broken pottery, an iron nail, mud-brick walls, a hearth and a handaxe drawn in place, and a younger-to-older time arrow

2. **Climatic, geological and environmental histories.** Ice ages are a dating tool and a story-shaper. The last glacial maximum (about 26,500–19,000 years ago) locked up sea water, dropping sea level about 120 metres — which is why a land bridge stood where the Bering Strait is now, and why the Americas could be reached on foot.
3. **Oral histories.** Memories handed on by word of mouth can carry real events across many generations, and historians use them carefully, cross-checking them against other lines. A well-known example: the Norse sagas — oral stories, written down in Iceland in the 1200s — tell of settlers reaching Iceland from Norway around the 870s CE; archaeology and dated volcanic-ash layers mostly agree with that remembered story.
4. **Genetics.** Comparing the DNA of living and ancient people gives the family tree and the mixing events: the recent African root of all living people (Cann, Stoneking and Wilson, 1987), and the 1–4% Neanderthal share outside Africa (Green and colleagues, 2010).
5. **Radiocarbon dating.** While alive, plants and animals take in carbon-14; after death, it decays at a known pace — its half-life, the time for half of it to decay, is about 5,730 years — so the fraction left is a clock (Figure 7). The method, developed by Willard Libby (Nobel Prize 1960), works reliably to about 50,000 years; beyond that, other methods and the stratigraphy around a find take over.



Decay curve showing the percentage of carbon-14 remaining after death, with markers at each half-life of 5,730 years, a worked example star at 25 percent remaining, and the zone beyond about 50,000 years shaded as too old to measure well

Part 7 — The establishment of societies

For most of the timeline in Figure 1, people lived in small, mobile bands. Then, in several regions, people began to settle, build and accumulate. Panel C of Figure 1 marks four famous stops in that change:

- **Göbekli Tepe** (south-east Turkey), from about 9600 BCE (about 11,600 years ago): huge carved stone pillars raised by **hunter-gatherers** — before farming.
- **Çatalhöyük** (Turkey), about 7100–5700 BCE: a large farming town of mud-brick houses packed so close together that people entered through the roofs.
- **Skara Brae** (Orkney, Scotland), about 5,000 years ago: a stone-built farming village at Europe's far north-west edge.
- Farming villages along the **Nile** from about 5000 BCE, whose descendants would see one of the world's first states, early Egypt, emerge around 3100 BCE.

- **Caral** (Supe Valley, Peru), from about 2600 BCE: an early city with platform mounds, on the other side of the Pacific from all the others.

Göbekli Tepe is a fine case study in interpretation changing. The old, sensible story ran: *farming first* (surplus food), *then* settled life, *then* monuments. But Göbekli Tepe's monuments were raised by people with no farming at all — so perhaps the urge to gather and build came first, and farming followed to feed the builders. New evidence did not just add a fact; it reversed a sequence. How these early villages turned into towns, states and written civilisations is the story Section 1B takes up.

The big idea of this section: the past we tell about human origins is an interpretation — the best account the current evidence supports. New bones, new genomes and new dates revise it, and the two-hypothesis debate shows the discipline arguing its way, on evidence, towards stronger accounts.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded: reading the layers (Figure 6)

A dig finds an **iron nail** in Layer 2 and a **stone handaxe** in Layer 5. The ground is undisturbed. Which object is older, and how do we know?

Working	Comment
The nail lies in Layer 2; the handaxe lies in Layer 5. Layer 5 is below Layer 2.	Read the find positions straight off Figure 6. In undisturbed ground, deeper = older (the rule of superposition).
So the handaxe is the older object — by a huge margin.	Layer 2 holds iron, which needs smithing (at most a few thousand years old); Layer 5 has stone tools and <i>no</i> pottery and <i>no</i> metal — a much older way of life.
Check first: no pits, burrows or earthquakes have turned the layers over.	The rule only works in undisturbed ground — checking for disturbance is part of the method.

Example 2 — scaffolded: a radiocarbon age (Figure 7)

Charcoal from an ancient campfire has **25%** of its original carbon-14 left. About how long ago did the wood die?

Working	Comment
After 1 half-life: 50% left. After 2 half-lives: 25% left. $2 \times 5,730 = 11,460$ years.	Each half-life halves whatever is left. The star on Figure 7 marks exactly this worked example.
The fire burned about 11,500 years ago.	Well inside radiocarbon's reliable range (under about 50,000 years).

Example 3 — unscaffolded model: weighing a secondary source

Secondary source (flagged summary). Green and colleagues (2010) read the genome of Neanderthal bones from a cave in Croatia and compared it with the DNA of living people. People whose ancestors lived outside Africa carry about 1–4% Neanderthal DNA; people whose ancestors stayed in Africa carry essentially none. They concluded that a little interbreeding happened between early *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals after *Homo sapiens* left Africa. (Source: Green et al., *Science*, 2010, doi:10.1126/science.1188021.)

Model response. This is a secondary source: a research team's interpretation of primary evidence (ancient DNA). Its claim is narrow but powerful — some interbreeding happened. Weighing it against the two hypotheses: it **cuts against the strictest Out-of-Africa view** (pure replacement, no mixing) and **grants the multiregional view part of its case** (older populations outside Africa did contribute ancestors). But the contribution is tiny — 1–4% — so the *main* story the DNA tells is still a recent African origin with mostly replacement. The source is strong evidence *within* one line (genetics); a historian would still want fossils, dates and stratigraphy to agree before calling the matter settled. That is the discipline working as it should: one source shifts the weights; several agreeing lines settle an interpretation.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Use Figure 1. (a) Which species' bar in Panel A covers the longest span of time? (b) Name two species shown alive at the same time as early *Homo sapiens*. (Starters: (a) compare the bar lengths... (b) look for bars level with the blue *sapiens* bar in Panel B...)

Q2. Match each line of evidence (i–v) to the question it best helps answer (a–e). (i) stratigraphy (ii) climatic/geological histories (iii) oral histories (iv) genetics (v) radiocarbon dating (a) Could people have walked from Asia to America 18,000 years ago? (b) Is this campfire charcoal 5,000 or 15,000 years old? (c) Are living people mainly descended from a recent African population? (d) In this mound, is the pottery older or younger than the mud-brick wall? (e) What do remembered stories say about where a people came from?

Q3. A new, undisturbed dig: a pottery sherd (a piece of a broken pot) at 1.2 m depth, a stone handaxe at 2.5 m. Copy and complete: “The _____ is deeper, so by the rule of _____, it is _____.”

Q4. Use Figure 7. (a) A bone has 50% of its carbon-14 left. How many half-lives have passed, and about how old is it? (b) Another has 12.5% left. How old is that one?

Q5. Complete with *evidence*, *interpretation* or *hypothesis*: (a) “The Jebel Irhoud fossils are _____ for an African origin.” (b) “‘We are mainly descended from one recent African population’ is a testable _____.” (c) “The Out-of-Africa account is an _____ built from fossils and DNA.”

Q6. Use Figure 3. (a) List stops 1–7 in order of the journey. (b) Explain, in one sentence, why stop 6 was possible on foot.

Unscaffolded

Q7. Two historians examine the same set of hominin fossils and write different accounts of them. Using the words *evidence* and *interpretation*, explain how this can happen.

Q8. Give the strongest form of each side: name the single strongest point *for* the Out-of-Africa hypothesis and the single strongest point *for* the multiregional hypothesis. Then name the line of evidence that shifted the debate after 2010, and say which way it shifted the weights.

Q9. Göbekli Tepe's monuments were built by hunter-gatherers before farming existed. Explain why this find challenged the old sequence “farming first, then monuments”, and what this case shows about how historical interpretations change.

Q10. “No single line of evidence settles the story by itself.” Choose **two** lines of evidence from Figure 5 and show how they agree on one claim about the peopling of the Americas.

Answers

- Q1.** (a) *Homo erectus* (about 1.9 million to about 800,000 years ago in Panel A — the longest bar). (b) Any two of: Neanderthals, *Homo naledi*, late *Homo erectus*.
- Q2.** (i)–(d); (ii)–(a); (iii)–(e); (iv)–(c); (v)–(b).
- Q3.** “The **handaxe** is deeper, so by the rule of **superposition**, it is **older**.”
- Q4.** (a) One half-life; about 5,730 years (about 5,700–6,000). (b) Three half-lives; about 17,190 years (about 17,000).
- Q5.** (a) evidence; (b) hypothesis; (c) interpretation.
- Q6.** (a) 1 Levant / south-west Asia → 2 Arabia → 3 South Asia → 4 East Asia → 5 Europe → 6 Beringia into the Americas → 7 Monte Verde, Chile. (b) With sea level about 120 m lower in the ice ages, a land bridge (Beringia) stood where the Bering Strait is now.
- Q7.** Evidence is shared; interpretations are accounts built from it. Historians weigh finds in different ways, bring different questions and extra lines of evidence, and fill gaps in different ways — so the same fossils can support different, checkable accounts until further evidence tips the balance.
- Q8.** Out of Africa: oldest *Homo sapiens* fossils are all African, and living people’s DNA traces back to a recent African root. Multiregional: some fossils outside Africa look continuous with older local populations, and gene flow between neighbours is real. The shift after 2010 came from **genetics** (the Neanderthal genome): it showed a little interbreeding (1–4%), so the accepted view became mostly Out-of-Africa *with* a small archaic contribution.
- Q9.** The old sequence said surplus farming had to come before big shared building works. Göbekli Tepe reverses that: monuments first, farming later — so the old interpretation was revised, not because it was foolish, but because new evidence left it behind. The case shows interpretations are provisional: they stand only as long as the evidence supports them.
- Q10.** Example pair: climatic/geological histories (sea level about 120 m lower ⇒ a Beringia that could be crossed on foot) and radiocarbon dating (Monte Verde hearths about 14,500 years old; other camps in North America older still). Independent methods, same story: people entered the Americas on foot in the late ice age and spread fast. (Other pairings accepted if both lines genuinely bear on the claim.)
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Fully-worked solutions

- Q1.** (a) In Panel A, compare bar lengths: *afarensis* about 3.9–2.9 Ma (about 1 million years), *habilis* about 2.4–1.4 Ma, *boisei* about 2.3–1.2 Ma, *erectus* about 1.9–0.8 Ma — just over 1.1 million years, the longest in the panel (and Panel B shows *erectus* surviving to about 110,000 years ago). (b) In Panel B the blue *sapiens* bar (from about 300,000 years ago) runs level with the purple Neanderthal bar (to about 40,000 years ago), the green *naledi* bar (about 335,000–236,000 years ago) and the tail of the *erectus* bar (to about 110,000 years ago). Any two score.
- Q2.** (i) Stratigraphy orders layers, so it answers (d) pottery vs wall. (ii) Ice-age sea level decides whether a sea crossing was a walk, so (a). (iii) Remembered stories are (e). (iv) DNA family trees answer descent, (c). (v) The carbon-14 clock dates once-living material, (b).
- Q3.** Depth is the clue: 2.5 m > 1.2 m, and in undisturbed ground the deeper object lay down earlier. So the handaxe is older — exactly the Figure 6 pattern (handaxes sit in the deepest, metal-free layer).
- Q4.** (a) 50% left = exactly one half-life has passed: $1 \times 5,730 \approx 5,700\text{--}6,000$ years. (b) $12.5\% = 50 \rightarrow 25 \rightarrow 12.5$, three halvings: $3 \times 5,730 = 17,190$, so about 17,000 years. Both are inside the method’s reliable range, so the dates can be trusted.
- Q5.** (a) The fossils are things we can observe and check → **evidence**. (b) A testable account offered for weighing → **hypothesis**. (c) An account *built from* fossils and DNA → **interpretation**. (Note the family resemblance: a well-tested hypothesis hardens into the accepted interpretation.)

Q6. (a) The numbered route: out of east Africa into the Levant (1), through a green Arabia (2), along the south-Asian coast (3), up into east Asia (4), into Europe (5), much later across Beringia (6), and down the Americas to Monte Verde (7). (b) Ice-age sea level about 120 m lower exposed the Bering land bridge, so the crossing needed no boats.

Q7. A fossil is a trace, not a story: it becomes a story only through interpretation. Two historians share the evidence but may weigh a feature in a different way (skull shape as kinship, or as adaptation), draw on different extra lines (DNA vs stratigraphy), or set different weights on the same finds. Both accounts must still face the evidence — that is what keeps interpretation honest — and when a new line arrives (as the Neanderthal genome did), the better-supported account gains ground.

Q8. Strongest Out-of-Africa point: the oldest *Homo sapiens* fossils (Jebel Irhoud about 300,000; Omo I at least 233,000 years ago) are African, and living people's DNA is most diverse in Africa and traces back to a recent African root. Strongest multiregional point: some fossils outside Africa show features continuous with older local populations, and gene flow between neighbouring groups plainly happens, so local ancestors need not have been wiped out. The 2010 shift: ancient DNA (Green et al.) showed 1–4% Neanderthal ancestry outside Africa — real interbreeding, but a small share. The weights therefore moved to a blended-but-mostly-African account: replacement with a little mixing.

Q9. The old interpretation was a causal chain: farming → food surplus → settling → monuments. Göbekli Tepe breaks the first link: its great carved enclosures (from about 9600 BCE) were raised by people who did not farm. Faced with that evidence, historians revised the chain — perhaps shared ritual building came first and farming followed to feed the builders. The case shows what interpretation is: not a fixed story but the best account the evidence currently supports, revised when new finds leave it behind.

Q10. Take the claim “the Americas were peopled on foot in the late ice age, and quickly.” Line 1, climatic/geological histories: with about 120 m of sea level locked in ice (last glacial maximum about 26,500–19,000 years ago), Beringia was dry land — a route exists. Line 2, radiocarbon dating: hearths and tools at Monte Verde date to about 14,500 years ago, and other North American camps are older — so once the route opened, people moved fast. Two independent methods (climate and sea-level science; carbon-14 decay) converge on one account, which is precisely why historians trust it more than any single line could earn.

Sources for this section (all retrieved 2026-08-25)

- Victorian Curriculum F–10 (Version 2.0), History, Levels 7–8: VC2HH8K01 and elaborations VC2HH8K01.E01–E03.
- ‘Lucy’ (AL 288-1): Johanson’s 1974 Hadar discovery; original held in the National Museum of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.
- ‘Turkana Boy’ (KNM-WT 15000): found by Kamoya Kimeu, 1984; Brown, Walker, Ward & Leakey, *Nature* 316 (1985); held in the Nairobi Museums, Kenya.
- OH 5: Leakey, *Nature* 184 (1959); *Homo habilis* named by Leakey, Tobias & Napier, *Nature* 202 (1964); held in the National Museum of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam.
- Neanderthal 1 (1856, Neander Valley): held in the LVR-LandesMuseum Bonn.
- Jebel Irhoud (~300,000 years): Hublin et al., *Nature* 546 (2017), doi:10.1038/nature22336; dating by Richter et al., *Nature* 546 (2017), doi:10.1038/nature22335.
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- All figures in this section are original drawings produced for this workbook.

Section 1A · VC2HH8K01 · Draws on VC2HH8K01.E01 (partial, §2A), VC2HH8K01.E02, VC2HH8K01.E03

How early societies developed: tools, farming, trade, groups, beliefs and laws

History 8 · Chapter 1 — Overview: the early human world · Section 1B

Curriculum links

Owns	VC2HH8K02 (Levels 7 and 8 band)
Draws on	VC2HH8K02.E01 · VC2HH8K02.E02 · VC2HH8K02.E03 · VC2HH8K02.E04 · VC2HH8K02.E05 · VC2HH8K02.E06

Note for teachers: VC2HH8K02.E02 and .E05 are taught here with case studies drawn from Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe — never from the Australian continent — as explained in the note at the front of this book.

In this section you will learn to:

1. define the shared terms historians use for the early past — **palaeolithic**, **neolithic**, **pre-history**, **nomadism**, **settlement**, **society** and the rest;
 2. describe one early society in terms of its economy, politics and culture — Sumer, in the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers;
 3. map where and when **herding**, crop cultivation and **aquaculture** developed, and the methods each region used;
 4. put the steps from stone to copper, bronze and iron in order, and explain why different societies changed at different rates;
 5. explain why **trade** grew, and read a whole trade network from one shipwreck;
 6. compare how early societies organised their people into **social groups**, and how **laws** — from spoken custom to written codes — held those groups together.
-

1.1 Words we share: defining the early past

History has a door in it, and the door is writing. On one side is the past we can read about in written records — **history**. On the other side is the much longer past before writing existed — **pre-history**. For pre-history there are no letters, no lists, no law codes to read; there is only what people left in the ground. (Section 1C shows how archaeologists read that evidence.)

Within that long past, historians use two names for the great divide in how people lived:

- **palaeolithic** — the Old Stone Age: the long time when people lived by hunting, fishing and gathering wild plants, using chipped stone tools. Almost the whole human story up to about 12 000 years ago is palaeolithic.
- **neolithic** — the New Stone Age: the time after people began to farm — growing crops and keeping animals — while still using stone tools. “Neolithic” therefore names a way of getting food, not a set of dates: different parts of the world became neolithic at different times, as Section 1.3 maps.

The way of life that goes with the palaeolithic is **nomadism** — moving from place to place as wild food comes into season, carrying what you own, living in small bands. The way of life that goes with the neolithic is **settlement** — living permanently in one place, which farming makes possible because the food now stays in one place too: sown, tended, harvested and stored.

Three more words complete the kit:

- **society** — a community of people who share rules, roles and a way of life, and who see themselves as belonging together. A band of twenty hunters is a society; a city of twenty thousand is a society. The word points to the ties, not the size.
- **social groups** — the smaller ranks and roles inside a society: rulers and ruled, priests and farmers, elders and young, free and enslaved. Every society divides its people somehow; the divisions are one of the clearest things archaeologists look for.

- **technology** — the tools, materials and methods people make and use. A stone sickle, a dug canal, a hot furnace and a sailing boat are all technology. Technology is not machines alone; it is know-how turned into things.
- **agriculture** — growing crops and keeping animals for food: what this section calls farming. It includes herding (keeping and moving animals), crop cultivation (sowing, tending and reaping plants) and aquaculture (keeping water animals and water plants for food, such as fish in ponds).
- **trade** — exchanging goods between groups or societies, whether by barter (swapping goods for goods), by gift, or later by money. Trade begins the moment one group wants what another group has.

Two of the curriculum's words are worth a special box, because they are contested — people genuinely disagree about what they mean — and the curriculum does not settle the disagreement for us.

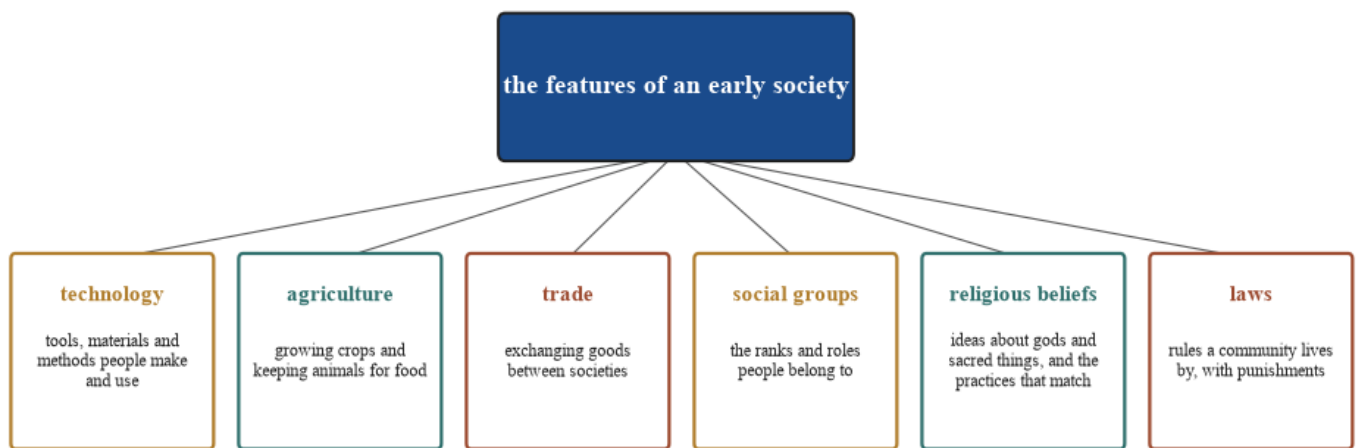
A word about words — *culture* The Victorian Curriculum uses the term *culture* but does not define it. This section therefore treats culture as the shared ways of life a group learns and passes on — its food, tools, beliefs, customs, stories and manners — and every question here is answerable on that definition alone. Other definitions exist and are not interchangeable with this one.

A word about words — *religion* The Victorian Curriculum uses the term *religion* (and “religious beliefs”) but does not define it. This section therefore treats religion as a group's ideas about gods and sacred things, together with the practices that match — offerings, festivals, burial rites, prayers — and every question here is answerable on that definition alone.

A third word gets its box in Section 1.7, where it does the most work: *law*.

The reason these definitions matter is that they let us ask the same questions of any society, in any part of the world. This section asks six — the six features named in the content description: what could they **make** (technology)? what did they **eat and grow** (agriculture)? what did they **exchange** (trade)? how were they **divided and ruled** (social groups)? what did they **believe** (religious beliefs)? and what rules did they **live by** (laws)? Figure 1 holds the whole kit in one place.

What we mean by “early society”: six features and eight key terms
(each term is defined in full in the text that follows)



The historian's key terms for the early past

palaeolithic	= the Old Stone Age: life before farming	nomadism	= moving from place to place for food
neolithic	= the New Stone Age: the first farming villages	settlement	= living permanently in one place
pre-history	= the past before writing existed	society	= a community sharing rules, roles and ways of life
history	= the past we can read in written records	culture	= the shared ways of life a group learns and passes on

A concept web with “the features of an early society” at the centre joined to six boxes — technology, agriculture, trade, social groups, plus religious beliefs and laws — above a band listing eight key terms (palaeolithic, neolithic, pre-history, history, nomadism, settlement, society, culture) with a short gloss for each

Figure 1 — The six features this section studies, and the eight key terms for the early past. Each term is defined in the text around this figure.

The chain that connects the terms is the story of the whole section: farming (**agriculture**) made **settlement** possible; settlement let societies grow larger; larger societies needed more **technology**, more **trade**, clearer **social groups**, shared **religious beliefs** and stronger **laws**. One change pulled the rest behind it. That is a **cause and consequence** chain — and noticing it is the first historian’s habit this section builds.

Check point. A group herds goats and moves with them to new grazing each season, living in the same camp only for a few months at a time. Using the definitions above: is this nomadism or settlement? Is herding agriculture? Give your reasons from the definitions, not from a feeling.

1.2 A whole society: Sumer

Definitions are easier to hold once they are attached to a real society. The first society we know that shows all six features at once — including writing, which opens its history — is **Sumer**, in the flat floodplain between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, in what is now southern Iraq. Sumer’s villages grew into towns from about 4500 BCE, and its writing appears from about 3200 BCE. For Sumer we can therefore cross the door from pre-history into history.

Figure 2 describes Sumer under the three headings historians use for the features of any society: economic (how people got their living), political (who made the rules) and cultural (what people believed and made).

Sumer, c. 3500–2000 BCE (southern Iraq): one early society described under three headings (supports VC2HH8K02.E02)

ECONOMIC — how people got their living	POLITICAL — who made the rules	CULTURAL — what people believed and made
• barley, wheat and dates grown on the Tigris–Euphrates floodplain • canals and dikes dug and cleaned by shared labour to feed the fields • temple and palace storehouses collected, counted and shared out grain • no stone, timber or metal at home — so wool cloth and grain were traded for them • the plough, the wheel and the sailing boat all in use	• city-states (Uruk, Ur, Eridu, Lagash, Nippur), each with its own king and patron god • kings led war, judged cases and kept the canals working • scribes and officials counted grain, taxes and workers on clay tablets • cities fought each other for land and water — and sometimes joined under one king • laws written down so everyone could hear the same rules (see the law-code figure)	• cuneiform: the first writing we know of, pressed into clay with a reed, from c. 3200 BCE • ziggurats — stepped temple towers raised for each city’s patron god • stories written down and kept, like the Epic of Gilgamesh • cylinder seals rolled across wet clay to sign and seal things • the dead buried with goods, showing belief in a world beyond

A three-column table describing Sumer under the headings economic (how people got their living), political (who made the rules) and cultural (what people believed and made), with five bullet points in each column

Figure 2 — One early society under three headings (the task named in VC2HH8K02.E02). Read the columns across, not down: Sumer’s lack of stone and metal (economic) is exactly why it traded (Section 1.5), and its written laws (political) reappear in Close study 1.

Three things in Figure 2 deserve a closer look.

The city-state. Each Sumerian city — Uruk, Ur, Eridu, Lagash, Nippur — was its own state, with its own king, its own walls and its own patron god. There was no single “king of Sumer” for most of Sumer’s history; the cities fought and made peace with each other like neighbours who share a fence and argue about it. Historians call this pattern a **city-state**: a city that rules itself and the farms around it.

The scribe. Writing began as accounting — counts of grain, sheep and workers pressed into clay with a cut reed. The people who did it, **scribes**, trained for years in school. Writing gave a society a memory outside the human head: a list that does not forget, a law that does not change when the speaker dies. It also divided society in a new way — into the few who could read and the many who could not.

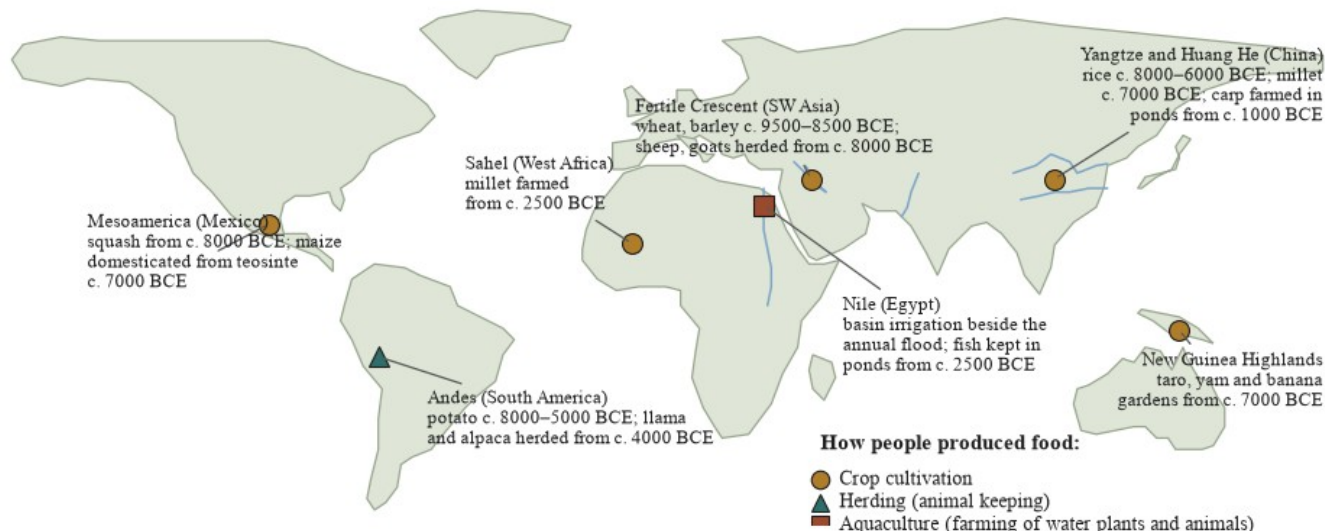
Continuity and change. Sumer shows both at once. Continuity: for centuries the same canals were dug out, the same barley sown, the same gods fed. Change: villages became walled cities, accounting became literature, and the rules of the city were written down so that, in time, even a stranger could hear them. Section 1.7 returns to that last change, because it is one of the great changes in human history.

Check point. Pick one bullet from each column of Figure 2. For each, say which of the six features of Section 1.1 it belongs to, and whether it shows continuity (the old way continuing) or change (something new appearing).

1.3 Food making: herding, crop cultivation and aquaculture

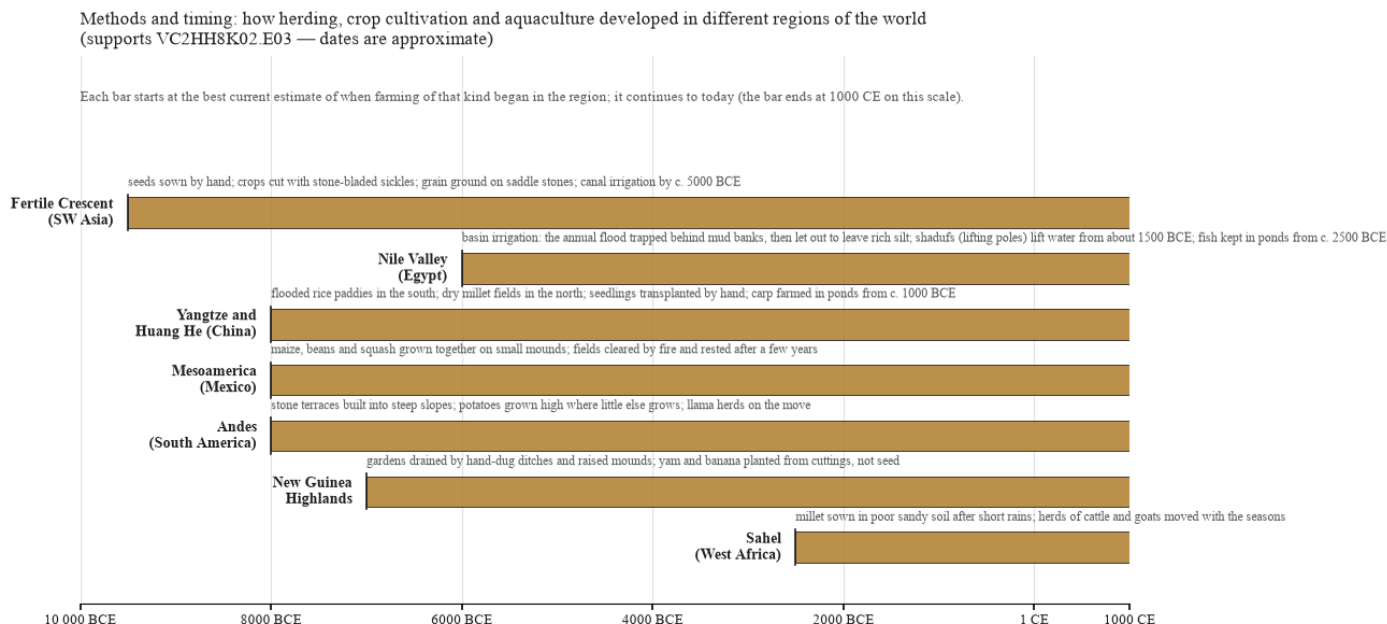
Farming was not invented once and carried everywhere. It began **separately, in several parts of the world**, at different times, with different plants and animals. Figure 3 maps seven of those beginnings; Figure 4 adds the methods and the timing.

Where farming, herding and aquaculture developed independently
(simplified map; shapes and sizes are approximate; dates are approximate, “c.” = about)



A simplified world map marking seven regions where herding, crop cultivation or aquaculture began, with a different symbol for each kind and an approximate starting date; continent shapes are approximate, and no markers are placed on Australia

Figure 3 — Where food making began: seven regions, each with its own plants and animals. (Simplified map; shapes and sizes are approximate; dates are approximate, “c.” = about.)



A timeline chart with one bar per region, each bar starting at the approximate date farming began there, and a note above each bar naming the methods used — sowing by hand and stone-bladed sickles in the Fertile Crescent, basin irrigation and shadufs on the Nile, rice paddies and millet fields in China, maize mounds in Mesoamerica, stone terraces and llama herds in the Andes, drained ditch-and-mound gardens in New Guinea, and millet with moving herds in the Sahel

Figure 4 — Methods and timing: how herding, crop cultivation and aquaculture developed in different regions of the world (the mapping task named in VC2HH8K02.E03).

Read Figures 3 and 4 together and three things stand out.

Different places, different kits. Each region farmed with what it had: wheat and barley with sheep and goats in the Fertile Crescent; rice in the wet south of China and millet in its dry north; maize, beans and squash in Mesoamerica; potatoes high in the Andes with llama herds; yam and banana in the drained gardens of the New Guinea highlands; millet in the poor sandy soils of the Sahel, with cattle and goats moving with the rains. No single region supplied the others. Farming is a story of many inventors.

Methods matched the water. Where rivers flooded, people learnt to manage the flood: on the Nile, **basin irrigation** — trapping the yearly flood behind mud banks, then letting it out to leave its rich silt on the fields. Where rivers had to be lifted, Egypt added the **shaduf**, a lifting pole with a bucket, from about 1500 BCE. In the Andes the method was stone **terraces** built into steep slopes; in New Guinea it was hand-dug ditches to drain wet ground; in China it was flooded rice paddies in the south and dry fields in the north. The same problem — water, in the wrong place or at the wrong time — met different answers.

Aquaculture is part of farming too. Egypt kept fish in ponds from about 2500 BCE; China farmed carp in ponds from about 1000 BCE. Keeping water animals for food is farming of the water, and it appears, like crop farming, in more than one region.

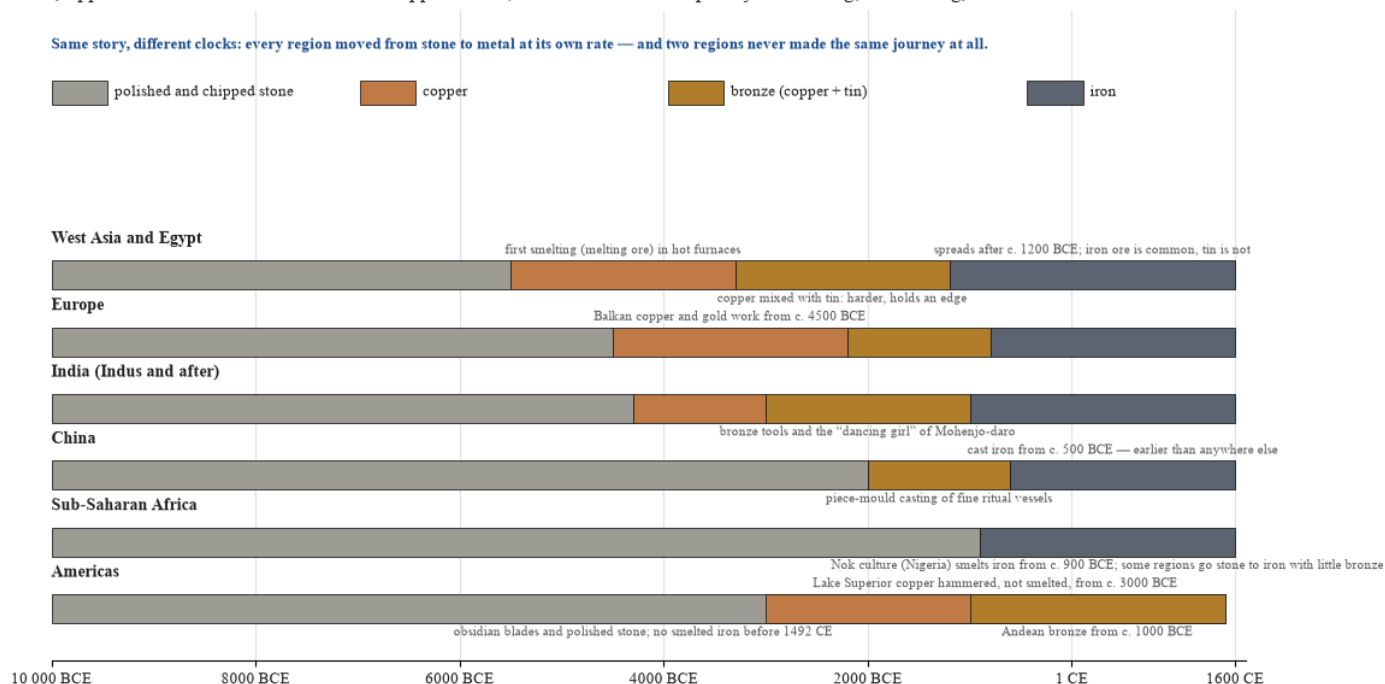
The **consequences** of farming are the chain from Section 1.1: food from one piece of ground fed more people than gathering ever had, and stored grain carried a village through a bad season. People could stay — and staying, over centuries, built towns like those of Sumer. But notice the historian's caution: farming also brought new work (digging canals, weeding, guarding stores), new worries (drought, flood, raiders) and new divisions (who owns the field? who keeps the storehouse?). It was a change with costs as well as gains — and saying so is part of describing it honestly.

Check point. Figure 4 shows the Andes and the New Guinea highlands both farming on difficult land. Name the method each used, and say what problem each method solved. Then name one region from the figure where herding, not crops, was the heart of the way of life.

1.4 Technology: from stone to metal, at different rates

The neolithic was still a stone age: polished and chipped stone, wood, bone and fibre did the work. Metal changed that — but not every region at once, and not in the same order. Figure 5 is the timeline the curriculum asks for, with notes on methods and timing: the same steps, taken in different orders, at different rates.

Stone, copper, bronze and iron: the same steps in a different order, at different rates
(supports VC2HH8K02.E05 — dates are approximate; “cold-worked” = shaped by hammering, not melting)



A timeline chart with one bar per region showing when stone, copper, bronze and iron tools were in use from 10 000 BCE to 1600 CE, with notes: first smelting of copper in West Asia from about 5500 BCE, bronze there from about 3300 BCE, iron spreading after about 1200 BCE; Balkan copper and gold work in Europe from about 4500 BCE; bronze tools and the “dancing girl” of Mohenjo-daro in India; cast iron in China from about 500 BCE; Nok iron smelting in Africa from about 900 BCE; and in the Americas obsidian blades, cold-worked Lake Superior copper and Andean bronze but no smelted iron before 1492 CE

Figure 5 — Stone, copper, bronze and iron: the same steps in a different order, at different rates (the timeline named in VC2HH8K02.E05).

Three materials, three tricks. **Copper** can be hammered as found, but the real step is **smelting** — melting metal out of its ore in a hot furnace — first done with copper in West Asia from about 5500 BCE. **Bronze** is copper mixed with tin: harder than copper, holding an edge — but tin is rare in the ground, so bronze tied a society to long-distance trade (Section 1.5). **Iron** needs a hotter furnace still, and better skill with the ore; once mastered, it is the cheapest of the three to make, because iron ore is common.

Now the question the curriculum sets: **why did regions change at different rates?** Two explanations carry most of the weight, and each deserves its strongest form.

Explanation 1 — geography and resources. A society can only use what its ground holds. Tin is rare: a region without tin nearby either trades for it or stays with copper and stone. Iron ore is common, but iron needs more fuel and a hotter furnace, so regions with ore and wood could leap ahead — as sub-Saharan Africa did, where the Nok culture of modern Nigeria smelted iron from about 900 BCE and some regions moved almost straight from stone to iron, with little bronze between. On this view the map of metal is mostly a map of geology, climate and fuel.

Explanation 2 — contact, need and choice. Ideas move with people and goods. Regions in close contact with West Asia — Egypt, the Indus Valley — took up smelting and bronze early; regions far from those networks invented their own ways on their own clocks, or not at all. And some societies did not need metal: in the Americas, obsidian takes an edge finer than most steel, and polished stone, cold-worked copper and (in the Andes) bronze served societies that never smelted iron before 1492 CE. On this view the map of metal is mostly a map of contact and of what each society actually needed and chose.

The honest answer uses both: resources set the menu, and contact, need and choice set the pace. That is why “different rates” is not a mystery to be sorry about — it is evidence. The rates themselves tell us who was in contact with whom, and what each region’s ground could give.

Check point. Figure 5 shows China casting iron from about 500 BCE, earlier than any other region, and the Americas making fine blades of stone with no smelted iron before 1492 CE. For each case, say which of the two explanations above fits it better — and what one piece of evidence from the figure supports your choice.

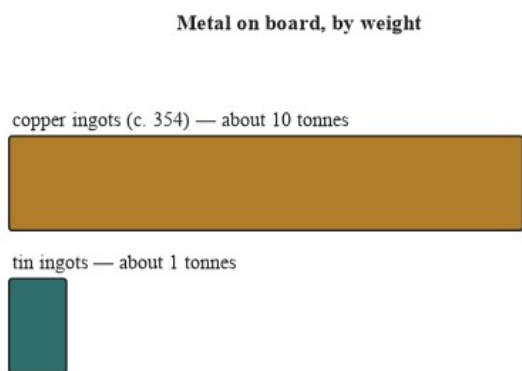
1.5 Trade: what one place lacks, another has

No region has everything. Sumer had grain and wool but no stone, timber or metal of its own. Egypt had gold and grain but wanted timber. The answer to “lacking” is **trade**: exchanging what you have in plenty for what you do not have at all.

Trade in the early world moved over surprising distances. Blue **lapis lazuli** stone from Afghanistan reached Sumerian graves and, later, Egyptian masks; **obsidian** for fine blades crossed hundreds of kilometres of sea and land; **amber** from the Baltic coast reached the Mediterranean; cedar timber floated down from the mountains of the Levant to treeless Egypt and Sumer. None of this was accidental luxury alone: much of it was the raw material of daily life — stone for blades, timber for beams and boats, metal for tools.

The best single witness to this trade is a shipwreck. Around 1300 BCE a ship went down off the south coast of what is now Turkey, loaded with goods from at least seven regions. It lay there until a sponge diver found it in 1982, and archaeologists lifted its cargo between 1984 and 1994. Figure 6 shows what was on board.

SOURCE B — a whole trade network in one shipwreck
(primary source: the ship and its cargo, found exactly as they sank)



Copper and tin are the two metals of bronze. One ship was carrying enough of them to equip a small town's workshops — evidence of trade at long distance by sea.

Also on board

- ebony logs and hippopotamus ivory (Africa)
- Baltic amber (northern Europe)
- a gold scarab naming Nefertiti, queen of Egypt
- ostrich eggshells and tortoise shells
- raw glass ingots (among the oldest known)
- Canaanite jars of olives and spices
- swords, daggers and tools for the crew

Source: Uluburun shipwreck, sunk c. 1300 BCE off the south coast of modern Turkey; dug up 1984–1994; finds kept at the Bodrum Museum of Underwater Archaeology. Cargo list checked 25 August 2026.

A primary-source card for the Uluburun shipwreck: two bars comparing the weight of copper (about 10 tonnes) and tin (about 1 tonne) on board, and a panel listing the rest of the cargo — ebony and hippopotamus ivory from Africa, Baltic amber, a gold scarab naming the Egyptian queen Nefertiti, ostrich eggshells, raw glass ingots, Canaanite jars of olives and spices, and weapons

Figure 6 — SOURCE B: a whole trade network in one shipwreck (primary source: the ship and its cargo, found as they sank).

Read the cargo as an argument. The copper and tin together are the two metals of bronze — one ship carried enough of them to equip a small town's workshops. The ebony, ivory, amber, scarab and glass come from Africa, northern Europe and Egypt at once. A single hull held the output of a whole connected world. And because a shipwreck sinks in a moment and is sealed by the sea, it is a primary source of unusual honesty: nothing was later added, removed or tidied up. (The habit of asking what a source can and cannot prove is taught in Sections 6C and 6D; here the point is simpler — the cargo is the network, caught in the act.)

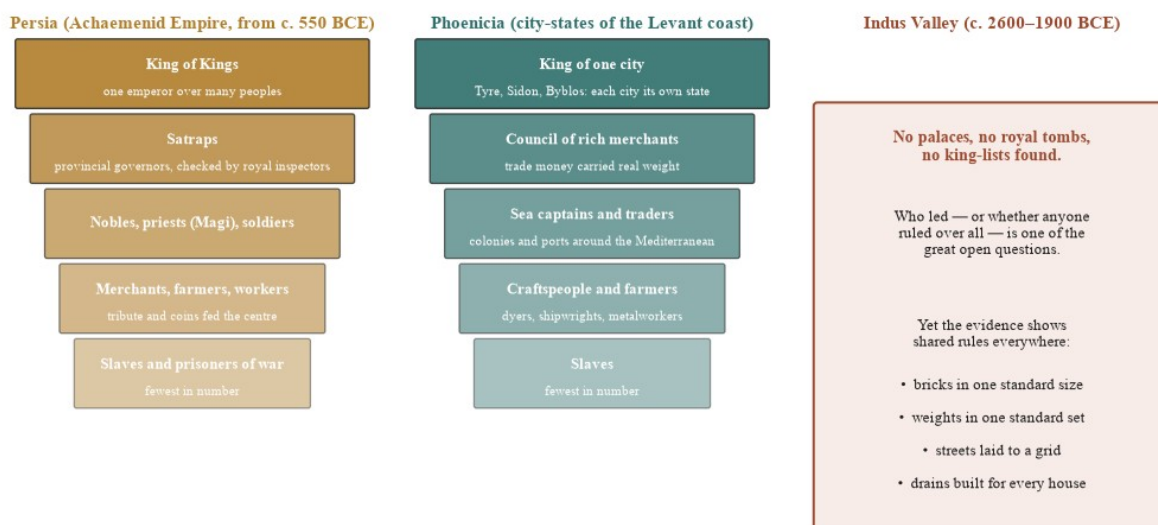
Trade did more than move goods. With goods went ideas, styles, weights and measures, and sometimes writing and beliefs. Traders were a bridge between societies — and a reason why the features in Figure 1 rarely develop alone.

Check point. From SOURCE B, choose two cargo items from two different regions. For each, say what region it came from and what it was probably wanted for. Then answer in one sentence: what does the ship as a whole prove that a single object could not?

1.6 Social groups: ranks and roles

As societies grew from bands to villages to cities and empires, they divided into **social groups** — ranks with different work, wealth and power. How a society arranged its ranks is called its **social and political organisation**, and Figure 7 compares three very different arrangements.

Social and political organisation compared (VC2HH8K02.E06)
(the Celts, Nubians and early Andean cultures appear in the text)



Two of these societies left us names and ranks; the third left us only its habits. Comparing them is the point: social organisation is something we read off the evidence, and the evidence is not always talkative.

Three panels comparing social ranks: Persia as a five-step pyramid from the King of Kings down through satraps, nobles and workers to slaves; Phoenicia as a five-step pyramid from the king of one city and a council of rich merchants down to slaves; and the Indus Valley as an open question — no palaces or royal tombs found, but shared standards of bricks, weights, streets and drains everywhere

Figure 7 — Social and political organisation compared (the comparison named in VC2HH8K02.E06). Two societies left names and ranks; the third left only its habits.

Persia. From about 550 BCE the Achaemenid Persian Empire ruled from the Indus to the Aegean under one “King of Kings”. Its trick was organisation: provinces under governors called **satraps**, checked by royal inspectors the Greeks later nicknamed “the king’s eyes and ears”; below them nobles, priests and soldiers; below them the farmers, merchants and workers whose tribute and coins fed the centre; and at the bottom, slaves and prisoners of war. A pyramid of ranks, held together by roads, coins and inspection.

Phoenicia. On the Levant coast, cities like Tyre, Sidon and Byblos were each its own state, each with a king — but real weight sat with a council of rich merchants, because trade paid for everything. Phoenician sea captains carried cedar, purple dye and metalwork around the Mediterranean and planted colonies as far as North Africa and Spain. Their greatest gift to the future was a simple alphabet of about two dozen letters, ancestor of the Greek and Latin alphabets — and of the letters on this page. In Phoenicia, money and ships sat nearer the top of the pyramid than birth did.

The Indus Valley. The cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro (about 2600–1900 BCE) show none of the usual marks of rank: no palaces, no royal tombs, no king-lists, no art praising a ruler. Yet their bricks, weights and streets follow one

shared standard across hundreds of kilometres, and every house had a drain. Who set those standards — priests, merchants, councils, or no one at all — is one of the great open questions of archaeology, and Close study 2 makes you argue it.

Three more societies fill the picture the curriculum names:

- **The Celts** of Europe (from about 800 BCE) organised in tribes led by chiefs and honoured warriors, with feasts and gift-giving holding the ranks together. The Roman writer Julius Caesar, who fought and watched them, says their learned class — the **druids** — kept the law and the gods' matters by memory and judged disputes.
- **The Nubians** of the middle Nile, at Kerma (about 2500–1500 BCE), built a rich cattle-herding kingdom: kings were buried in great mounds with cattle skulls around them and, in the oldest custom, with hundreds of people buried at the same time — wealth, rank and belief pressed into one grave.
- **Early Andean cultures**, at Caral on the coast of Peru (from about 2600 BCE), raised huge earth pyramids and sunken plazas with no walls and no sign of war, feeding the builders with cotton traded to fishing communities — a society whose power seems to have rested on ceremony and trade rather than on soldiers.

The **perspective** point: ranks look different from different steps of the pyramid. A king's inscription reads order and glory; a labourer's bones read work and wear. When you compare organisations, ask whose eyes the evidence comes through — and who in each society left no record at all.

Check point. Figure 7 and the text give six societies. Sort them into two groups: those whose power rested mostly on force and rule from the top, and those whose power rested mostly on trade, agreement or ceremony. Place each society where the evidence puts it, and name the evidence you used.

1.7 Beliefs and laws

Beliefs. Most early societies were **polytheistic** — they believed in many gods: gods of the sky, the sun, the river, the harvest, the city. Religion, in the sense defined in Section 1.1, shows up in the record in four reliable ways: **temples** built and rebuilt on the same sacred spot (Sumer's stepped temple towers, the **ziggurats**, and Caral's pyramids); **offerings** of food, drink and precious things; **festivals** in the calendar; and **burial** — the dead laid with goods for a life beyond, which is how we know a society believed in some **afterlife**. Religion was not a private corner of life: it explained the flood, blessed the harvest, and gave the king his right to rule — in Sumer as the god's steward, in Persia as the great god Ahura Mazda's chosen king.

Laws before writing. Before writing, law did not disappear — it was spoken. Rules lived in memory and custom: wrongs repaid by fixed payments, disputes judged by elders or chiefs, oaths sworn before the gods. The Celts' druids, judging by memory, are one example from this section; customs passed by word of mouth are law too, because a community still lives by rules with punishments. Writing changed law the way it changed everything else it touched: a written rule is the same rule every time it is read, for the strong and the weak alike.

Three written codes. The curriculum names three of the oldest bodies of written law, from three different worlds. Figure 8 compares them.

Three early codes of law, compared (VC2HH8K02.E04)
(summarised from the surviving inscriptions and tablets; see the source notes in the text)

	Code of Ur-Nammu	Edicts of Ashoka	Laws of Moses
Written down	c. 2100–2050 BCE (Sumer, city of Ur)	c. 260–230 BCE, across Ashoka's reign (Mauryan Empire, India)	set down and edited over many centuries (exact dates debated); the finished text is the Torah
Material and language	clay tablets, Sumerian; the tablets we have are student copies made later	cut into natural rock faces and polished stone pillars; Prakrit in the Brahmi script, and also Kharosthi, Greek and Aramaic	written on scrolls in Hebrew; read aloud and copied by hand generation after generation
Who gives the law	the king, Ur-Nammu, acting (as he says) for the moon god Nanna, patron of Ur	the emperor Ashoka in his own voice, titled “Beloved of the Gods”, speaking to officials and people	God, speaking to the people through Moses; law as a covenant (binding promise) with God
Sample rule	“If a man cuts off the foot of another man, he shall pay ten shekels of silver.”	No animals were to be killed in sacrifices in the royal kitchen; people of every belief were to be honoured (Rock Edicts I and XII)	“You shall not steal.” Rules on paying for damage, on rest days, and on protecting strangers, bereaved mothers and orphans
Typical punishments	money payments for injury; death for murder and robbery	persuasion more than punishment: the edicts teach, warn and praise good conduct	a mix: repayment “life for life, eye for eye”, fines, and offerings putting wrongs right with God
Who it protects	the widow and the orphan against the rich and strong (the prologue says so)	all subjects — and even animals — with care for the sick and for people of every belief	the stranger, the orphan and the widow, named again and again
What survives today	broken tablet pieces; of about 57 laws, around 31 can be read	more than 30 inscriptions still standing where they were cut; read again from 1837 (Prinsep)	the text was never lost: oldest pieces among the Dead Sea Scrolls, over 2 000 years old

A comparison table of three early law codes — the Code of Ur-Nammu, the Edicts of Ashoka and the Laws of Moses — across seven rows: when each was written down, its material and language, who gives the law, a sample rule, its typical punishments, who it protects, and what survives today

Figure 8 — Three early codes of law, compared (the comparison named in VC2HH8K02.E04), summarised from the surviving tablets and inscriptions; the source notes live in “Sources for this section”.

Read the table across and three findings stand out.

Who gives the law differs. In Ur the king Ur-Nammu gives the law, acting, as he says, for the moon god Nanna. In India the emperor Ashoka speaks in his own voice — “Beloved of the Gods” — teaching officials and people alike. In the Laws of Moses, God speaks through Moses, and law is a covenant — a binding promise — between a people and their God. Three sources of authority: king, emperor, god.

Yet who the law protects is strikingly alike. All three codes name the weak against the strong: the widow and the orphan in Ur-Nammu’s prologue; the stranger, the orphan and the widow again and again in the Laws of Moses; and in Ashoka’s edicts even the sick and people of every belief. That three different worlds protect the same figures is evidence that early law had a purpose beyond power: to shield those with no family or muscle to shield them.

Punishment teaches what a society values. Ur-Nammu mostly answers injury with payments of silver — a cut foot costs ten shekels, a knocked-out tooth two — while murder and robbery cost the killer’s life. The Laws of Moses mix payments with the famous rule of equal repayment, “life for life, eye for eye”. Ashoka is the odd one out: his edicts persuade more than they punish, teaching right conduct, honouring people of every belief, and even sparing animals in the royal kitchen.

And here is the word that was waiting for its box:

A word about words — law The Victorian Curriculum uses the term *law* but does not define it. This section therefore treats law as rules a community lives by, with punishments for breaking them — whether spoken in custom or written in stone — and every question here is answerable on that definition alone.

On that definition, the druids' spoken judgments and Ur-Nammu's clay are both law. The difference writing made was not that rules began, but that rules could be checked — by anyone, against anyone.

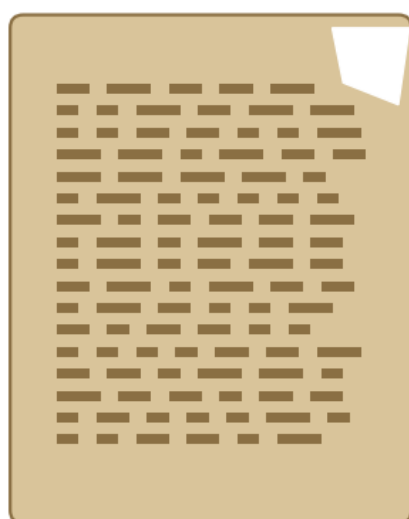
Check point. Figure 8 gives a sample rule from each code. In your own words, say what the three sample rules have in common, and one way the codes' punishments differ. Which code would you say teaches rather than punishes? Quote the row of the table that supports your answer.

Close study 1 — a primary source: reading the oldest law code

The oldest surviving code of written laws we know of is the **Code of Ur-Nammu**, set down in Sumer around 2100–2050 BCE — some three centuries before the more famous code of Hammurabi of Babylon. The original clay tablets were dug up in pieces at Nippur, and what we read today leans on copies made later by school scribes who practised by copying the old laws — schoolwork, accidentally, preserving a code.

Figure 9 presents the code the way a historian meets it: a broken clay original, and four of its laws in meaning.

Reading the oldest law code (primary source)
(close study for VC2HH8K02.E04)



A clay law tablet of the kind school scribes copied
(drawing is a model; the real tablets are broken)

SOURCE A — the Code of Ur-Nammu, in meaning

the oldest surviving code of written laws we know of

- Law 1.** If a man commits murder, that man must be killed.
- Law 2.** If a man commits robbery, he will be killed.
- Law 3.** If a man cuts off the foot of another man, he shall pay ten shekels of silver.
- Law 4.** If a man knocks out the tooth of another man, he shall pay two shekels of silver.

Source: Code of Ur-Nammu, Sumerian, c. 2100–2050 BCE; clay-tablet pieces dug up at Nippur (now in Iraq); the best-preserved copy is kept in the Ancient Orient Museum, Istanbul Archaeology Museums.
Meaning summarised by the author; object and institution checked 25 August 2026.

A primary-source card showing a model of a clay law tablet beside the meaning of four laws of the Code of Ur-Nammu — murder and robbery punished by death, a cut foot paid for with ten shekels of silver, a knocked-out tooth with two shekels — with a source line naming the Nippur tablets and the Ancient Orient Museum, Istanbul Archaeology Museums

Figure 9 — SOURCE A: the Code of Ur-Nammu, in meaning. The drawing of the tablet is a model of the kind of object the real tablets are; the real ones are broken.

Work with the source.

1. What material is the real code written on, and why do pieces of it survive when wood, cloth and paper from the same age do not?
2. Compare Law 1 and Law 2 with Law 3 and Law 4. What is the difference in punishment, and what does that difference suggest about how the code weighed taking a life against causing an injury?
3. The code's prologue says it stands for the widow and the orphan against the rich and the strong. Give one reason why writing the law down — rather than leaving it in a judge's memory — helps the weak.
4. Our best copy is a school scribe's practice copy, and the original is broken. What does that tell you about (a) how the code survived, and (b) how complete our knowledge of its laws can be? (Think about what a broken tablet and a student's copy each leave uncertain.)

Close study 2 — a secondary interpretation: who ruled the Indus Valley?

A **primary source** is evidence made at or near the time — the Uluburun cargo, the Ur-Nammu tablets. A **secondary interpretation** is a later historian's reading of that evidence. Two honest readings of the same Indus evidence disagree, and the disagreement is the lesson. (Sections 6C and 6D teach these terms and the checking of interpretations properly; here you meet them at work.)

Interpretation A — a ruled state. The first excavators in the 1920s, and after them **Sir Mortimer Wheeler**, saw a single, tightly run state. Their evidence: one standard of bricks and weights across hundreds of kilometres, planned grid streets, and a carved stone head the diggers named the “Priest-King”. Order on that scale, they argued, does not make itself; someone — a king who was perhaps also a priest — must have commanded it.

Interpretation B — shared rule, or no rulers at all. Later scholars, among them **Jonathan Mark Kenoyer**, read the same ground differently. Their evidence: no palaces, no royal tombs, no king-lists, no art of conquest — nothing, in short, that every other early state left behind to shout about its rulers. Perhaps, they suggest, power was shared — among merchants, landowners or priests of several cities — and the shared standards came from agreement and the habit of trade, not from command. A society, on this view, can be orderly without being ruled from the top.

Both readings respect the evidence; they weigh it differently. Interpretation A says order of that scale implies a commander. Interpretation B says a commander of that scale would have left a trace, and left none. That is what a real historical disagreement looks like: not one side careless, but two sides weighting the same silence differently.

Work with the interpretation.

1. List two pieces of evidence the two interpretations share, and say what each interpretation makes of one of them.
 2. Steelman task: write the strongest two-sentence case you can for Interpretation A, then the strongest two-sentence case for Interpretation B. Each case must use evidence from this section, and neither may be written to lose.
 3. Which interpretation do you find stronger, and why? Name the one piece of evidence on the other side that your answer must explain away.
-

Practice

Scaffolded

Q1. Match each term to its definition. Copy the table and draw your lines.

Term	Definition
palaeolithic	living permanently in one place
neolithic	the past before writing existed
pre-history	exchanging goods between groups
nomadism	the Old Stone Age: life by hunting and gathering
settlement	the New Stone Age: the first farming life
trade	moving from place to place as food comes into season

Q2. Use Figures 3 and 4.

- a) Which region's bar begins first, at about 9500 BCE, and what grew there?
- b) Name two regions that farmed difficult land by reshaping it (terraces, mounds or ditches), and the method each used.
- c) Name two examples of aquaculture from Figure 4, with their regions and approximate starting dates.

Q3. Complete the sentence frame in your own words.

“Because farming produced more food from one piece of ground, people could ..., and over centuries this led to One new problem the bigger settlements faced was”

Q4. Use Figure 5.

- a) Put the four materials of West Asia and Egypt in the order they appear in the figure.
- b) Which region moved almost straight from stone to iron, with little bronze between?
- c) Bronze is copper mixed with tin, and tin is rare in the ground. Explain in one sentence why that fact made bronze a trade metal.

Q5. Use SOURCE B (Figure 6).

- a) Name three cargo items and the region each came from.
- b) The gold scarab names Nefertiti, a queen of Egypt. What does one Egyptian object on a ship sunk off Turkey suggest?
- c) Give one reason why a shipwreck is an unusually honest primary source.

Q6. Match each society to the feature of its organisation. Copy the table and draw your lines.

Society	Feature
Persia	chiefs and warriors, with druids judging by memory
Phoenicia	provinces under satraps checked by royal inspectors
Indus Valley	shared standards, but no palaces or kings found
Celts	a king in each city, with real weight in a merchant council
Nubia (Kerma)	earth pyramids and plazas, with no walls and no sign of war
early Andean (Caral)	cattle-rich kings buried in great mounds

Un scaffolded

Q7. Explain how the change to farming caused societies to grow larger and more divided. In your answer name one change and one continuity from this section.

Q8. “*The different rates at which societies moved from stone to metal are best explained by geography and resources.*” Discuss this claim using two regions from Figure 5. Give the claim its strongest case — and give the strongest case of the rival explanation (contact, need and choice) as well.

Q9. Compare any two of the three law codes in Figure 8. Give one similarity, one difference, and say who each of your two codes protects.

Q10. Who ruled the Indus Valley? Use Close study 2 to argue for Interpretation A or Interpretation B. State the evidence on your side, and answer the best evidence against you.

Answers

Q1. Palaeolithic → the Old Stone Age. Neolithic → the New Stone Age. Pre-history → the past before writing existed. Nomadism → moving from place to place as food comes into season. Settlement → living permanently in one place. Trade → exchanging goods between groups.

Q2. a) The Fertile Crescent (SW Asia); wheat and barley. b) Any two of: the Andes — stone terraces on steep slopes; New Guinea — drained ditch-and-mound gardens; China — flooded paddies. c) Fish kept in ponds in the Nile Valley from about 2500 BCE; carp farmed in ponds in China from about 1000 BCE.

Q3. Model: *Because farming produced more food from one piece of ground, people could stay in one place and feed more mouths, and over centuries this led to villages growing into towns with storehouses, ranks and rules. One new problem the bigger settlements faced was defending the stored grain from raiders (or drought, flood, disease, or quarrels over who owned the fields).*

Q4. a) Stone, then copper, then bronze, then iron. b) Sub-Saharan Africa (Nok iron from about 900 BCE). c) Because few regions have tin, most societies that wanted bronze had to obtain tin from far away — so bronze carried trade with it.

Q5. a) Any three of: copper and tin (from mines in Cyprus and beyond), ebony and hippopotamus ivory (Africa), Baltic amber (northern Europe), the Nefertiti scarab (Egypt), Canaanite jars (the Levant). b) That the ship's network reached Egypt — that goods, and perhaps the ship's route, touched the Egyptian world. c) It sank in a moment and was sealed by the sea: nothing later added, removed or tidied.

Q6. Persia → provinces under satraps. Phoenicia → a king in each city with a merchant council. Indus Valley → shared standards, no palaces or kings found. Celts → chiefs and warriors with druids. Nubia (Kerma) → cattle-rich kings in great mounds. Early Andean (Caral) → pyramids and plazas without walls.

Q7–Q10. See the model responses below. Marks rest on defined terms, correct evidence and clear reasoning — not on reaching any one conclusion.

Model responses

Model for Q7 (cause and consequence):

Farming changed what one piece of ground could feed. Where gathering fed a small moving band, a sown and tended field fed many more people in one place, and stored grain carried them through a bad season — so people stayed, and staying built villages that grew into towns like Uruk. That is the change. But much stayed the same for centuries — a continuity: the same barley was sown and reaped each year, the same canals dug out, the same gods thanked. Growth also divided: storehouses meant someone must guard and share them, and ranks appeared between those who owned and those who worked. So one cause — more food from fixed ground — pulled settlement, growth and division behind it.

Model for Q8 (discussion with both sides steelmanned):

Geography and resources carry a strong case. Tin is rare, so bronze arrived only where trade or local tin allowed; and iron, though its ore is common, needs a hotter furnace and more fuel — which fits sub-Saharan Africa, where Nok smiths smelted iron from about 900 BCE and some regions passed almost straight from stone to iron. The Americas support the same view from the other side: fine obsidian and polished stone met the need, and no smelted iron appeared before 1492 CE. But the rival explanation — contact, need and choice — also fits real evidence: Egypt and the Indus Valley, in close contact with West Asia, took up copper and bronze early, while regions far from those networks ran on their own clocks; and China's early cast iron smells of choice and skill, not merely of ore. The best answer uses both: resources set the menu of what was possible, and contact, need and choice set the pace at which each society took what it wanted from that menu.

Model for Q10 (argued interpretation):

The evidence supports Interpretation B more strongly. The Indus cities show no palaces, no royal tombs, no king-lists and no art of conquest — the four marks every other early state left behind; and the “Priest-King” head is one small carving that proves at most that someone important sat for a sculptor. Yet the same cities share one standard of bricks and weights and a drain for every house across hundreds of kilometres, which Interpretation A rightly says is remarkable order. Interpretation B can answer that order without a king: agreement, trade habit and shared custom can set standards, as shared coin weights later did between independent Greek cities. Interpretation A must answer the silence: a command strong enough to plan every street would surely have honoured itself somewhere in stone — and it did not.

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Retrieval date for all web sources: 2026-08-25.

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How we know about early societies: methods, evidence and protecting the past

History 8 · Chapter 1 — Overview: the early human world · Section 1C

Curriculum links

Owns	VC2HH8K03 (Levels 7 and 8 band)
Draws on	VC2HH8K03.E01 · VC2HH8K03.E02 · VC2HH8K03.E03 · VC2HH8K03.E04 · VC2HH8K03.E05

Note for teachers: VC2HH8K03.E04 and .E05 are taught here with the Australian examples in VCAA's elaborations left out, as explained in the note at the front of this book.

In this section you will learn to:

1. explain how archaeologists read the layers of the ground (**stratigraphy**) and what those layers reveal about change over time;
 2. describe the methods used to investigate the ancient past, from the ordering of styles to **carbon-14 dating** and **DNA** (the chemical code inside every living thing) testing;
 3. explain why conserving the remains and **heritage** of the past matters;
 4. examine what happens when modern **infrastructure** meets heritage — at Abu Simbel in Egypt and at Stonehenge in Britain;
 5. describe the roles of governments and bodies like UNESCO in protecting sites, and use **world heritage criteria** to investigate six ancient sites.
-

1.1 Who investigates the past?

A **historian** is a person who asks questions about the past and looks for answers in what survives. An **archaeologist** is a person who studies the past through the things people left behind — buildings, tools, pots, bones, seeds and rubbish. The study of the past in this way is called **archaeology**.

The two jobs overlap. Where there are no written records — true for most of the human story — historians must lean on what archaeologists find. And where writing does exist, archaeologists read it alongside the objects. Much of what follows is done by both.

Many early societies left no writing at all. Their whole story survives only in the ground. That makes the methods of this section the only way to hear them.

Archaeologists often work by **excavation** — digging a site with great care, recording every layer and every find before it is lifted. An object found this way is called an **artefact**. Once a layer is dug away, it is gone for ever. That is why archaeologists record as they go: the digging destroys the evidence, so the record must be made first. (You will see how much care one archaeologist took with this in Close study 1.)

Real investigators, real methods

Person	When	Contribution
Flinders Petrie	1890s	Ordered prehistoric Egyptian graves by the changing styles of pots in them — a way of dating before any scientific method existed
Howard Carter	1920s	Excavated the tomb of Tutankhamun in Egypt's Valley of the Kings, recording every object with notes, drawings and photographs
Willard Libby	1940s	Developed carbon-14 dating at the University of Chicago, a way of measuring how long ago something was alive (Nobel Prize in Chemistry, 1960)
Kathleen Kenyon	1950s	Digging at Jericho, one of the world's oldest towns, she showed how to excavate layer by layer so that each layer keeps its story
Zahi Hawass	2000s	Led DNA studies of Egypt's royal mummies, including Tutankhamun and his family
Verena Schuenemann	2010s	Led the team that recovered DNA from the remains of 90 people from one Egyptian cemetery, spanning about 1300 years

1.2 The evidence: sources and their kinds

A **source** is anything that can tell us something about the past. **Evidence** is the information we draw from sources to answer a question. One object can be a source for many questions, and one question usually needs many sources.

Four kinds of source do most of the work:

Kind	Examples	Strength	Limit
Material remains	pots, tools, walls, bones, seeds, coins	survive even when no writing exists; hard to “lie” about daily life	cannot speak; we must infer what they mean
Written records	letters, laws, tax lists, inscriptions on stone	can tell us names, dates, reasons	only exist where writing was used; usually show the view of the literate few
Oral accounts	stories, songs and knowledge passed by word of mouth across generations	keep memories alive where nothing was written down	change over time as they are retold
Pictures and art	tomb paintings, carvings, statues	show how people saw themselves and their world	made for a purpose — often to flatter a ruler or honour a god

You will meet two more words for sorting sources — **primary source** (made at or near the time of the event it shows) and **secondary source** (made later, often by someone who was not there) — covered in full in Section 6C. Keep them in mind here: the difference between a diary written on the day and a book written the next year matters a lot.

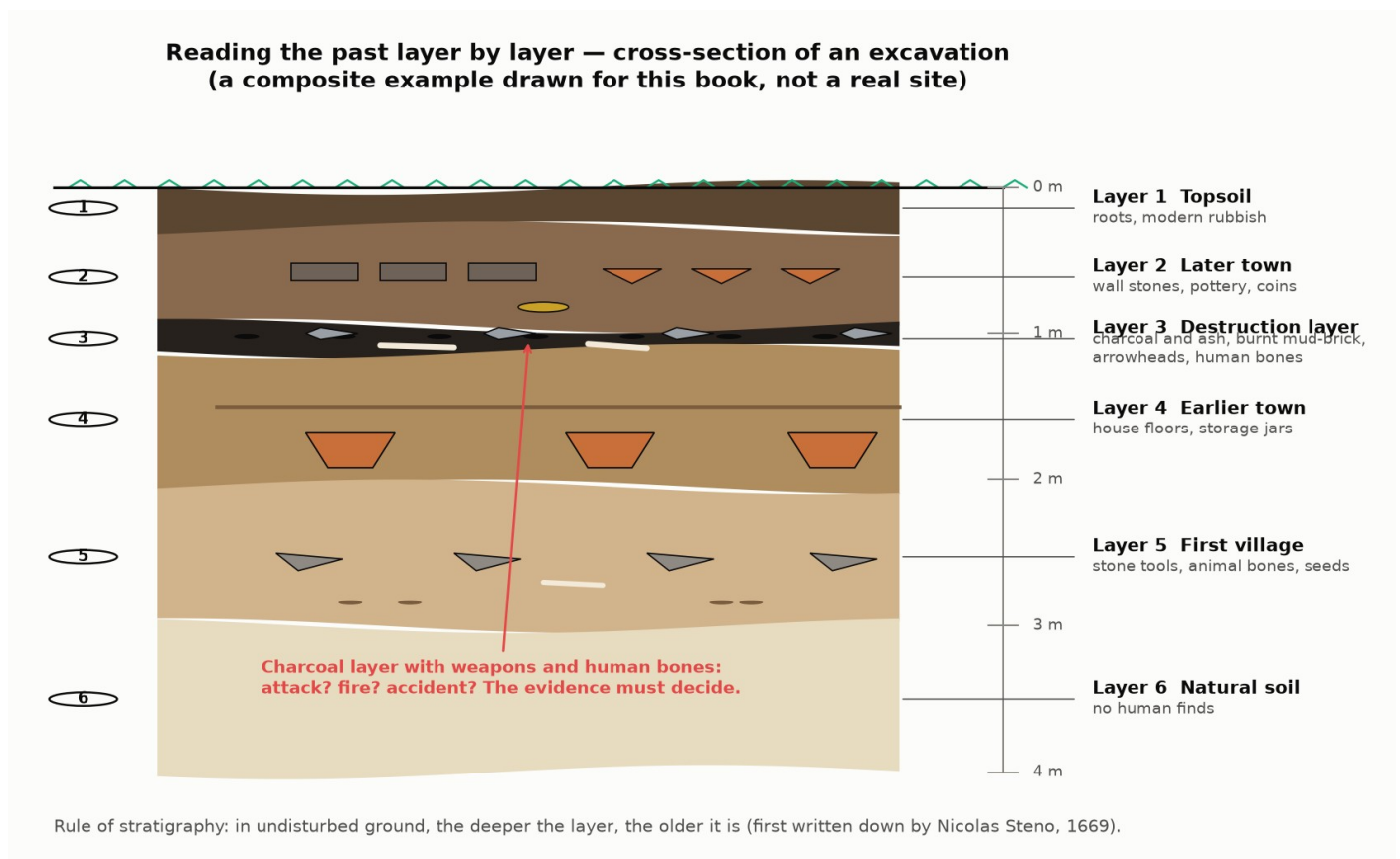
From evidence to answer is a step called an **inference** — a conclusion drawn from evidence, not stated by it. A burnt layer does not say “we were attacked”. We infer attack, or fire, or accident — and then we check which inference the evidence fits best. Section 6D teaches the checking.

1.3 Reading the ground: stratigraphy

Where people settle, the ground rises. Walls fall, floods drop mud, rubbish piles up, and new floors are laid on top of old ones. Over centuries a mound builds up, layer by layer. Each layer is called a **stratum** (plural: strata).

Stratigraphy is the method of reading these layers. Its basic rule is simple: in a mound that has not been disturbed, **the deeper the layer, the older it is**. This rule was first written down by the Danish scholar Nicolas Steno in 1669.

An excavation cuts through the mound so the layers can be seen from the side, like the layers of a cake. Figure 1 shows a cross-section from a dig. It is a made-up example drawn for this book — no real site — but it is built the way real sections look.



A labelled cross-section diagram of an excavation through a mound, showing five layers from topsoil down to natural soil, with the finds in each layer marked and named

Figure 1 — Reading the past layer by layer: a cross-section of an excavation. Each darker band is a layer of soil holding the remains of one period. (Original figure for this book; the site is a made-up example.)

Now read the section with the table below.

Reading each layer of Figure 1 — every inference has a rival to rule out

Layer	Found in it	It may show	Rival idea to check first
1 — Topsoil	roots, modern rubbish	the land as it is today	nothing deeper — it is the present
2 — Later town	wall stones, glazed pottery, coins	a settled town with trade and crafts	a short-lived camp could leave stones too — count the finds
3 — Destruction layer	charcoal and ash, burnt mud-brick, arrowheads, human bones	the settlement was captured and destroyed in an attack	a great fire begun by accident, or burning of rubbish, with bones and weapons arriving another way
4 — Earlier town	house floors, hearths, storage jars	a peaceful, well-organised town before the destruction	floors can be re-used across centuries — check what sits above and below
5 — First village	stone tools, animal bones, seeds	the first settlers: farming, hunting, simple tools	tools can wash down from above — is the layer undisturbed?
6 — Natural soil	no human finds	the ground before people settled here	none — this is the end of the human story at this spot

Method: stratigraphy — in undisturbed ground, the deeper the layer, the older it is.

A table matching each layer of the excavation cross-section to what was found in it, what it may show, and another explanation to check before deciding

Figure 2 — Reading each layer of Figure 1. Notice the last column: every inference has a rival to rule out.

Layer 3 is the one that excites archaeologists. It is a thin, dark band of **charcoal** and ash holding burnt mud-brick, arrowheads and human bones. A layer like this across a whole site can indicate that the settlement was captured and destroyed in an attack. But notice the discipline: the same layer could come from a terrible house fire, or from a fire that burned rubbish, with the bones and weapons arriving some other way. The inference “destruction by enemies” is worth holding only while the evidence keeps fitting it and nothing else does.

Stratigraphy tells **relative** dates: it says which layers are older and younger than others, not how many years old they are. For that we need the scientific methods of 1.4. But stratigraphy has a gift no other method matches: it shows **change over time** in one place. Reading down Figure 1, you watch a village become a town, burn, be rebuilt, and change hands — continuity and change, pressed into a few metres of soil.

Check point. In Figure 1, which layer holds the oldest human finds? What in layer 2 suggests life there was quieter and richer than in layer 5?

1.4 The toolkit: methods of investigation

Different questions need different tools. Figure 3 sets out the methods you need to know.

Five methods for investigating early societies — each answers different questions

Method	How it works	What it can tell us	Its limits
Stratigraphy	Read the layers of a site: in undisturbed ground, the deeper the layer, the older it is.	Which finds and layers are older or younger than others; change over time in one place.	Relative dates only — not a number of years. Disturbed layers can mislead.
Seriation	Sort finds by changing styles (as Flinders Petrie did with Egyptian pots) and put them in order.	An order from oldest to newest for styles of pots, tools or art.	Also relative. Needs styles that actually changed over time.
Carbon-14 dating	Measure the carbon-14 left in once-living material; it fades at a steady rate after death (Willard Libby, late 1940s).	A real age in years for wood, bone, seed, skin or hair — up to about 50 000 years old.	Only works on once-living things; very old samples hold too little carbon-14 to measure.
DNA analysis	Read the chemical code in bones, teeth, skin or hair, and compare it with other remains or with people alive today.	Family links, where peoples' ancestors came from, diseases they carried.	Needs cool, dry conditions to survive; easy to spoil with modern DNA; preserved bodies are not everyone.
Survey	Walk the land, study air photos and satellite images, and measure the ground without digging.	Where sites are, how big they are, and how they sit in the landscape — before any digging.	Shows shape and position, not date; answers still need excavation to confirm.

Claims are strongest when several methods point the same way.

A table of five investigation methods — stratigraphy, seriation, carbon-14 dating, DNA analysis, and survey — with how each works, what it can tell us, and its limits

Figure 3 — Five methods, side by side. Each one answers different questions, and each has limits.

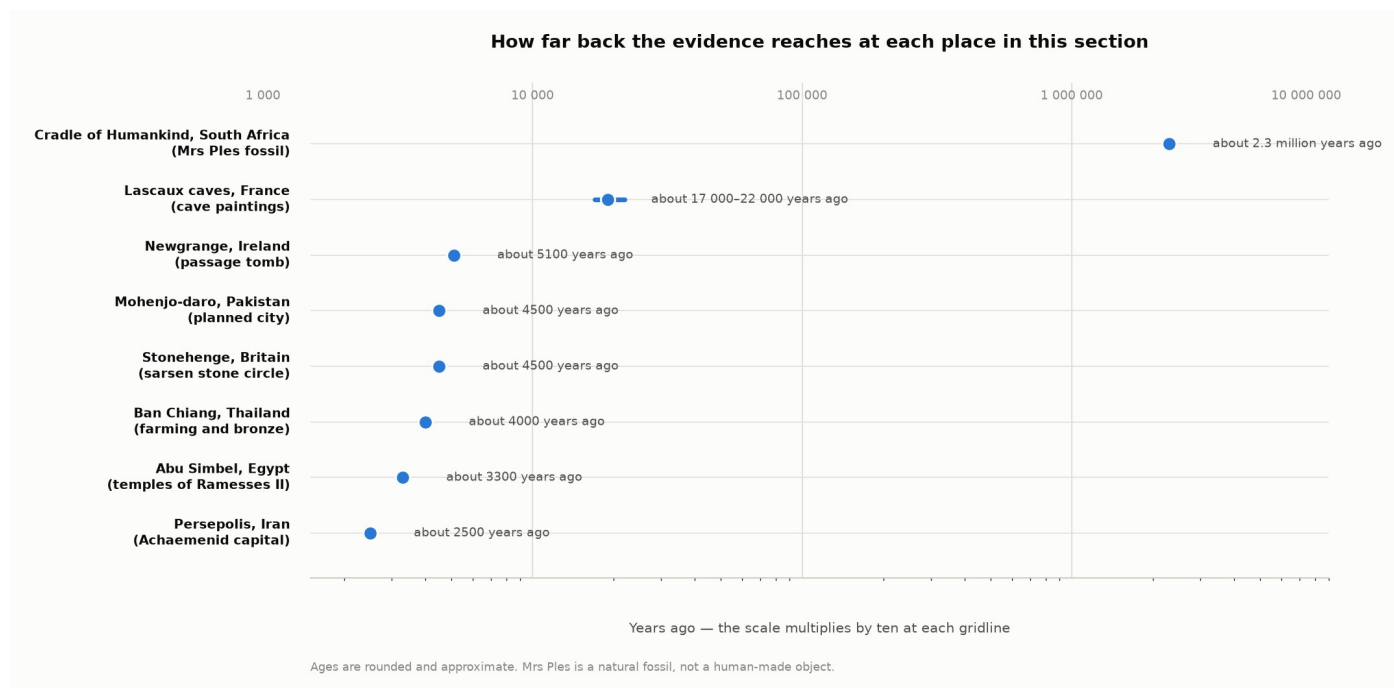
Three of the methods deserve a closer look.

Seriation — ordering by style. In the 1890s, **Flinders Petrie** faced thousands of Egyptian graves with no writing in them. He noticed that the styles of pots in the graves changed slowly over time. By sorting graves according to which pot styles they shared, he put them in order from oldest to newest — without knowing a single date. This method is called **seriation**. It gives a relative order, not a number of years.

Carbon-14 dating — measuring time in once-living things. In the late 1940s, **Willard Libby** found that all living things take in a form of carbon called carbon-14, and that when they die, the carbon-14 in them fades at a steady rate, halving roughly every 5700 years. Measure what is left, and you can work out how long ago the thing died. Carbon-14 dating works on once-living material — wood, bone, seed, skin, hair — up to about 50 000 years old. It turned archaeology from an ordering science into a dating science.

DNA analysis — reading the body itself. Every person's body carries **DNA**, the chemical code that builds a living thing. DNA survives in bones, teeth, skin and hair long after death — sometimes for thousands of years, if conditions are cool and dry. By reading ancient DNA and comparing it with DNA from other remains or from people alive today, scientists can ask who was related to whom, where families came from, and even which diseases a person suffered.

These methods work together. Stratigraphy says which layer a bone came from. Carbon-14 dating says how old the bone is. DNA says whose bone it was and who their family was. A claim is strongest when several methods point the same way.



A dot chart on a multiplying scale of years, plotting how long ago the evidence dates from at each of the eight places studied in this section, from the Lascaux cave paintings at about 19 000 years ago back to Mrs Ples at about 2.3 million years

Figure 4 — How far back the evidence reaches at the places in this section. The scale multiplies by ten at each step — Mrs Ples is about a hundred times as old as the Abu Simbel temples. (Original figure; ages are rounded and approximate.)

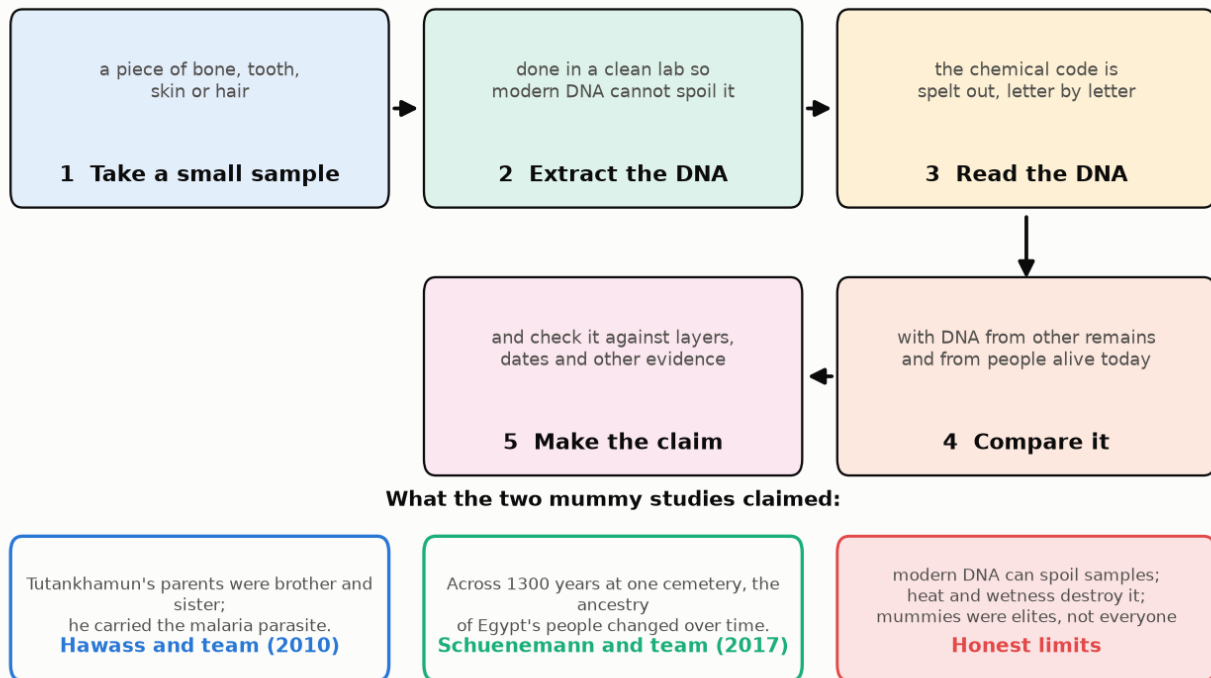
1.5 Close study of a method: DNA from Egyptian mummies

Egypt's dry desert air preserved bodies — and the DNA inside them — better than almost any other place on Earth. That makes Egyptian mummies one of the best places to see what DNA can do.

In 2010, a team led by **Zahi Hawass** published a DNA study of the mummy of Tutankhamun, the boy-king who died around 1324 BCE, and of mummies believed to be his family. The DNA showed that one mummy (from tomb KV55) was his father and another (known as “the Younger Lady”) was his mother — and that the two were brother and sister. The team also found the DNA of the malaria parasite in Tutankhamun's body: proof of the disease he carried, written in his own cells.

In 2017, a team led by **Verena Schuenemann** recovered DNA from the remains of 90 people buried at one cemetery, Abusir el-Meleq, between about 1400 BCE and 400 CE. Comparing the ancient DNA across those 1300 years, and with people alive today, the team found that the ancestry of Egypt's people had changed over time: the ancient individuals were closer to the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean, and later Egyptians carried more ancestry from further south in Africa. Mummies had revealed a story of movement and connection that no text had told in full.

From bone to claim: the steps of an ancient DNA study



A flow diagram showing the five steps of an ancient DNA study, from taking a small sample to making a historical claim, with the two named mummy studies attached to the claim step and a warning box about contamination and preservation

Figure 5 — From bone to claim: the steps of an ancient DNA study, with the two mummy studies above attached to the final step.

DNA is powerful, but it is honest about its limits:

- **Contamination** — modern DNA from hands, breath or tools can swamp the ancient signal, so samples are taken in clean labs with strict care.
- **Preservation** — heat and wetness destroy DNA. Hot Egypt keeps it; hot, wet places usually do not. Where DNA does not survive, it simply cannot be used.
- **Whose story survives** — mummies were made for the rich and powerful. Their DNA tells us about elites, not about everyone. A history built only on preserved bodies would be a history with most people missing.

That last limit is a **perspective** point. The evidence that survives shapes whose story we can tell. Keep asking: *who is missing from this evidence, and why?*

1.6 Why conserve the past?

Before we meet the threats, two words need fixing. The curriculum uses both without defining them, so this section states the meanings it uses.

A word about words — *heritage* The Victorian Curriculum uses the word *heritage* but does not define it. In this section, *heritage* is used in the sense given by the UNESCO convention of 1972: the monuments, buildings, places and natural features that people judge worth protecting and passing on to those who come after them. Other definitions exist and are not interchangeable with this one.

A word about words — *conservation* The Victorian Curriculum uses the word *conservation* but does not define it. This section therefore treats conservation as the careful work of looking after objects, places and remains so that they survive into the future, and every question here is answerable on that definition alone.

Why does this work matter? Historians and archaeologists give several reasons, and they are worth learning as **causes** — causes of the care we take:

1. **Memory and identity.** Places and objects connect living people to those who came before them. Losing them cuts a thread that cannot be re-spun.
2. **Learning.** The past is the only place we can study what humans have actually done — their choices, their mistakes, their consequences. Every site lost is a page torn out before it is read.
3. **Evidence for questions not yet asked.** Each generation asks new questions of old things. DNA methods read mummies in ways nobody imagined in 1922. If Carter had thrown the “unimportant” bones away, the 2010 study could never have happened.
4. **Beauty and skill.** The temples of Abu Simbel and the paintings of Lascaux are works of art. Their makers deserve the same respect we give any great artist.

The threats are as varied as the value. Time, weather, flood and fire wear sites down. Looting steals objects from their layers, destroying the information about where they lay. Careless tourism wears floors and walls. War and big building works can end a site in a day. The rest of this section is about the last threat of all — and what the world does about it.

1.7 When infrastructure meets heritage: Abu Simbel and Stonehenge

Infrastructure means the big built things a society needs to run — roads, railways, dams, bridges, power lines. Infrastructure serves the living. Heritage serves the memory of everyone who ever lived. When the two meet at one place, a hard question follows: *what do we save, what do we spend, and who decides?*

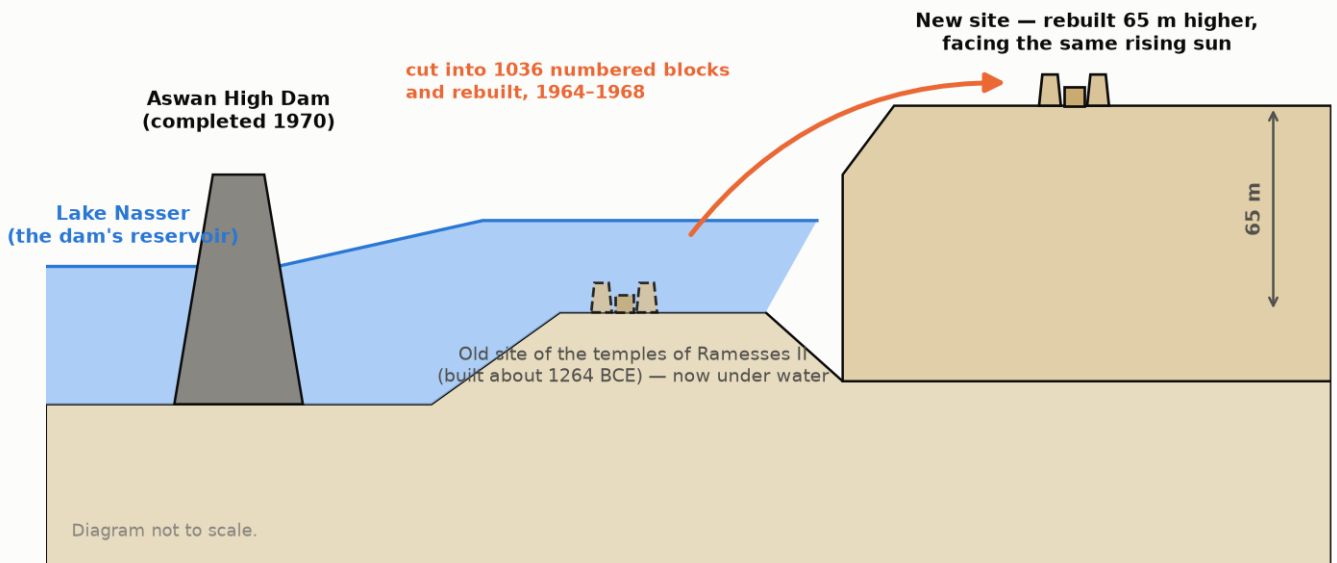
Two real cases show the tension — and two very different endings.

Case 1 — Abu Simbel and the Aswan High Dam (Egypt, 1960s). Egypt built the Aswan High Dam across the River Nile, completed in 1970, to stop the floods that came every year and destroyed crops and homes, to store water for dry years, and to make electricity from falling water for millions of people. The dam’s case was strong: living people needed food, water and power. But the dam created Lake Nasser, a huge reservoir whose rising waters would drown temples thousands of years old — among them the two temples the king **Ramesses II** carved into the cliff at Abu Simbel around 1264 BCE.

The world refused to choose one against the other. From 1960 to 1980, **UNESCO** ran a campaign to save the monuments of Nubia. About 48 countries gave money and skill. At Abu Simbel, between 1964 and 1968, engineers cut the temples into 1036 numbered blocks, lifted them with cranes, and rebuilt them on higher ground, 65 metres above the old site and facing the same rising sun. Around them, other temples — including the temple island of Philae — were saved the same way. The dam was built. The temples survived. Infrastructure and heritage both won, because money, skill and goodwill were found.

Saving Abu Simbel: the dam, the rising lake, and the move to higher ground

UNESCO's Nubia campaign (1960–1980), funded by about 48 countries, saved Abu Simbel and other temples of the Nile valley the same way.



A labelled cross-section diagram of the Nile at Abu Simbel, showing the Aswan High Dam, the rising waters of Lake Nasser, the temples of Ramesses II at their old position below the water line, and their new position on higher ground where they were rebuilt from 1036 blocks

Figure 6 — Saving Abu Simbel: the dam, the rising lake, and the move of the temples to higher ground, 1964–1968. (Original figure; not to scale.)

Case 2 — Stonehenge and the A303 road (Britain, now). Stonehenge, the famous stone circle raised on Salisbury Plain about 4500 years ago, sits inside the World Heritage property “Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites”, listed by UNESCO in 1986. A busy trunk road, the **A303**, passes close to the stones. Drivers meet congestion; visitors hear and see traffic inside a place valued for its peace and mystery.

The strongest case **for** a fix: burying the road in a tunnel near the stones would remove the sight and noise of traffic from the heart of the site, ease a choked route used by thousands of vehicles each day, and give visitors back something of the setting in which the circle was built.

The strongest case **against**: the tunnel’s entrances, and the digging for them, would cut through the World Heritage property itself — ground holding burials and other remains that have never been studied. You cannot dig up what has not yet been read. In 2021, UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee warned that the scheme could damage what makes Stonehenge valuable to all the world.

Here there was no tidy win-win. In July 2024, Britain’s government refused permission for the tunnel scheme, naming its fast-rising cost — reported at about three billion pounds — and the harm to the heritage site. The decision ended nothing: the road is still congested, the stones still stand beside it, and the argument about what to do next continues.

The A303 near Stonehenge — the strongest case on each side

Strongest case FOR fixing the road	Strongest case AGAINST the tunnel scheme
THE ROAD AND TRAFFIC The A303 is a busy trunk road; thousands of vehicles a day pass close to the stones, bringing noise and fumes into the World Heritage property.	Stonehenge, raised about 4500 years ago, sits inside the World Heritage property 'Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites' (listed 1986). Its buried surroundings are part of the evidence.
THE HERITAGE HARM Burying the road in a tunnel would remove the sight and sound of traffic from the heart of the site and give visitors back some of its peace.	The tunnel's entrances, and the digging for them, would cut through ground holding burials and remains that have never been studied. What is dug up unread is lost for ever.
THE MONEY The upgrade would ease a choked route, shorten journeys and improve safety for drivers.	The scheme's cost grew fast — reported at about three billion pounds, far beyond its first budget.
SO FAR Successive governments have tried to fix the road for decades; doing nothing leaves the problem where it is.	In 2021 UNESCO's World Heritage Committee warned the scheme could damage what makes the site valuable to all the world.
July 2024: Britain's government refused permission for the scheme, naming its fast-rising cost and the harm to the World Heritage Site. The debate continues.	

A two-column table presenting the strongest case for fixing the A303 road near Stonehenge and the strongest case for protecting the site, with the July 2024 decision recorded underneath

Figure 7 — The strongest case on each side of the Stonehenge road debate, set out side by side before any decision is judged. (Original figure.)

Check point. Compare the two cases. What allowed Abu Simbel's story to end with both sides winning? Why could Stonehenge's story not end the same way — at least, not yet?

Notice the shape of both debates. Each side has a case that deserves to be stated as strongly as its own supporters would state it, because a weak version of the other side proves nothing. Judging between real goods — food and power for the living, the past for everyone — is what makes these questions worth studying. Section 7C gives you the criteria for judging **significance** itself; here it is enough to see that “significant” means *judged important enough to protect*, and that the judgement is argued, not assumed.

1.8 Who protects the past?

The short answer: many bodies, at many levels, with different jobs.

Body	Role
UNESCO (the United Nations' body for education, science and culture, founded 1945)	Runs the 1972 world heritage convention — a treaty in which countries agree to protect places of outstanding value for all humanity; keeps the World Heritage List; campaigns when sites are threatened, as at Abu Simbel
Governments	Make the laws that protect sites inside their own borders; grant or refuse permission for works such as roads and dams, as Britain's government did at Stonehenge in 2024
Museums and universities	House, study and care for objects and records — such as Howard Carter's excavation journals, kept at the Griffith Institute of the University of Oxford
Local groups and campaigners	Watch sites, raise alarms and argue cases; at Stonehenge, local and national groups kept the heritage case in front of the public for years
Visitors — including you	Follow the rules that keep sites safe; every footstep off the path, every touch of a painted wall, is a small act of damage or of care

The World Heritage List and its criteria. Under the 1972 convention, countries can put places forward for the World Heritage List. A committee judges them against ten **criteria** — six for culture and four for nature. In student terms, a place must show one or more of:

1. a masterpiece of human creative skill;
2. an important interchange of human values between peoples;
3. a unique witness to a way of life or culture;
4. an outstanding example of a kind of building or landscape;
5. an outstanding example of how people lived on and used the land;
6. a strong connection to living beliefs, ideas or events (usually used with another criterion); 7.–10. natural wonders, earth history, and the homes of wild plants and animals.

The six ancient sites in Figure 8 are all on the list. They come from VCAA's own guidance for this content, spread across four continents, and they are the raw material for the group investigation in Q6.

Six ancient sites on the World Heritage List (from VCAA's guidance for this content)

Site	Country	Listed	What its evidence shows
Mohenjo-daro	Pakistan	1980	A planned Bronze Age city of about 2500 BCE: streets on a grid, covered drains along the main roads, and the Great Bath.
Newgrange	Ireland	1993	A passage tomb built about 3100 BCE — older than Stonehenge and the Egyptian pyramids. At midwinter sunrise, light passes through a roof-box into the chamber.
Cradle of Humankind	South Africa	1999	Caves holding a huge collection of early human-family fossils, including Mrs Ples, about 2.3 million years old.
Ban Chiang	Thailand	1992	A village showing early farming, painted pottery and bronze-working, from about 2000 BCE into the early centuries CE.
Persepolis	Iran	1979	The ceremony capital of the Achaemenid (Persian) empire, begun by King Darius I about 515 BCE; its wooden halls burned when Alexander the Great's army took it in 330 BCE.
Lascaux caves	France	1979	Paintings of horses, deer and great cattle made 17 000–22 000 years ago. The cave has been closed to visitors since 1963 to protect the art.

Criteria are UNESCO's ten tests for the List: creative genius; shared values; witness to a culture; outstanding building; land use; living connections; plus four nature tests. Each site above meets at least one.

A table of six World Heritage ancient sites — Mohenjo-daro, Newgrange, the Cradle of Humankind, Ban Chiang, Persepolis and the Lascaux caves — giving the country, the year each was listed, and what its evidence shows

Figure 8 — Six sites on the World Heritage List, with the year each was listed and what its evidence shows. (Original figure.)

Check point. Look at Figure 8. Which site is the oldest by the age of its evidence? Which two sites were listed in the same year? Which criterion from the list above fits Mohenjo-daro's planned streets and drains best — criterion 3 (a witness to a way of life) or criterion 4 (an outstanding example of a kind of building)?

The preamble of the 1972 convention states the idea behind all of this in one sentence: the deterioration or disappearance of any item of the cultural or natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all the nations of the world. In plain words: when any place is lost, everyone is poorer. You will meet that sentence again as a source in Close study 2.

Close study 1 — a primary source: Carter's moment at the sealed door

On 4 November 1922, workmen in Egypt's Valley of the Kings found a step cut into the rock. Within days the steps became a stairway, and the stairway ended at a sealed door. On 26 November, **Howard Carter** made a small hole in that door, darkened the room behind it with a candle, and peered in. His patron, Lord Carnarvon, asked the most famous question in archaeology: "*Can you see anything?*"

Two records of Carter's answer survive:

Version	The words	Where recorded
A	" <i>Yes, it is wonderful.</i> "	Carter's excavation journal, written during the dig (kept at the Griffith Institute, University of Oxford)
B	" <i>Yes, wonderful things.</i> "	Carter's published book, <i>The Tomb of Tut-Ankh-Amen</i> , written with A. C. Mace and released in 1923

Both are records of the same moment by the same man. One was written in the dust of the work, close to the event. The other was written months later for readers around the world, when the discovery had become a sensation.

Work with the source.

1. Who made version A, and in what circumstances was it written?
 2. What exactly changes between version A and version B?
 3. Which version was written closer to the moment? Give one reason why the wording might have changed between journal and book.
 4. Carter also had the photographer **Harry Burton** take photographs of every stage, and he wrote catalogue notes on every object. Why do archaeologists record as they dig, rather than dig first and write it all up later? (Hint: think about what happens to a layer once it is dug away — Section 1.3.)
-

Close study 2 — a secondary interpretation: the past as a conversation

In 1961, the British historian **E. H. Carr** published *What Is History?*, a short book about how historians work. In it he wrote:

History is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past.

Carr was not there when Tutankhamun died. Neither are you. Yet both of you can ask the evidence new questions — and the answers change as the questions change. In 1922, Carter's team asked: *what is in this tomb?* In 2010, Hawass's team asked the same bones: *whose child was he, and what illness did he carry?* Same facts, new dialogue. That is Carr's point: the past is fixed, but our conversation with it never ends.

The UNESCO convention of 1972 holds a view of the same kind — that the past belongs, in a sense, to everyone. You met its preamble in Section 1.8. Now read it as a source.

Work with the interpretation.

1. What does Carr mean by calling history a “dialogue”? Who are the two speakers?
 2. The UNESCO sentence says that losing heritage harms “all the nations of the world”. Whose perspective speaks here? Can you think of someone — in 1960s Egypt, say, or near any busy road — who might weigh the same question in a different way? Give their strongest case, not a weak one.
 3. Using Carr’s idea, explain why two historians could write different — but honest — accounts of the same excavation.
-

Practice

Scaffolded

Q1. Use Figure 1 (the cross-section) and Figure 2 (the layer table).

- a) Which layer is the oldest human layer, and how do you know?
- b) Name two finds in layer 3.
- c) Complete this sentence frame: “*Layer 3 may show that the settlement was ..., but it could also have been caused by ...*”
- d) Why are no human finds marked below layer 5?

Q2. Match each method to the question it answers best. Copy the table and draw your lines.

Method	Question
stratigraphy	Were these two people related?
seriation	In about what year did this piece of wood stop growing?
carbon-14 dating	Is the pottery from the lower layer older than the pottery above it?
DNA analysis	These pots carry no dates — can we put them in order by their styles?

Q3. Use the mummy studies in Section 1.5.

- a) Write two things DNA showed about Tutankhamun (Hawass’s team, 2010).
- b) Write one thing DNA could not tell us about him.
- c) Schuenemann’s team (2017) found that Egypt’s ancestry changed across 1300 years. What does that suggest about the movement of people?

Q4. Complete the gaps with your own words, using Section 1.7.

“The Aswan High Dam was built to ..., to ..., and to The temples at Abu Simbel were threatened because UNESCO and about 48 countries responded by”

Q5. The A303 near Stonehenge. Write:

- a) one strong reason **for** fixing the road with a tunnel;
- b) one strong reason **against**;
- c) what Britain’s government decided in July 2024, and the two reasons named for it.

Q6. Group investigation. With a partner, take one site from Figure 8. Research and prepare a two-minute report for the class answering: Where is it? What does its evidence show? Why is it on the World Heritage List — which criterion or criteria does it meet? What threatens it today? Share your findings with the class.

Un scaffolded

Q7. Explain how stratigraphy helps an archaeologist tell a story of change over time at one site. Use one example from this section.

Q8. *“New methods such as DNA testing mean we no longer need old methods such as stratigraphy.”* Do you agree? Give reasons and use evidence from this section.

Q9. Choose **one**: Abu Simbel **or** Stonehenge. Explain the tension between infrastructure and heritage at your site, and describe how one body (for example UNESCO or a government) responded.

Q10. E. H. Carr called history “an unending dialogue between the present and the past”. Explain what this says about the work of a historian, using one example from this section to show it.

Answers

Q1. a) Layer 5; in an undisturbed mound the deepest layer is the oldest. b) Any two of: burnt mud-brick, charcoal and ash, arrowheads, human bones. c) Example: *Layer 3 may show that the settlement was captured and destroyed in an attack, but it could also have been caused by a great fire that began by accident.* d) Layer 6 is natural soil laid down before people settled there; it holds no human finds.

Q2. Stratigraphy → older-or-younger pottery question. Seriation → ordering undated pots by style. Carbon-14 dating → when the wood stopped growing. DNA analysis → were the two people related.

Q3. a) Any two of: his father was the mummy from tomb KV55; his mother was “the Younger Lady”; his parents were brother and sister; he carried the malaria parasite. b) Any one sensible limit, e.g. DNA cannot say what he thought, believed, or what kind of king he was. c) That people moved into and through Egypt over many centuries — its population was not shut off from the rest of the world.

Q4. Model: *The Aswan High Dam was built to stop the Nile’s floods, to store water for dry years, and to make electricity from falling water. The temples at Abu Simbel were threatened because the dam’s reservoir — Lake Nasser — would drown them. UNESCO and about 48 countries responded by running a campaign in which the temples were cut into numbered blocks and rebuilt on higher ground.*

Q5. a) Example: a tunnel would remove the sight and noise of traffic from the stones and ease a congested route. b) Example: the digging for the tunnel portals would destroy buried remains inside the World Heritage property that have never been studied. c) In July 2024 the government refused permission for the scheme, naming its fast-rising cost and the harm to the heritage site.

Q6. Answers will vary by site. Check that the report names the country, describes the evidence, matches the site to at least one criterion correctly, and names a real threat.

Q7–Q10. See the model responses below. Marks rest on defined terms, correct evidence and clear reasoning — not on reaching any one conclusion.

Model responses

Model for Q8 (agree/disagree question):

I disagree. New methods like DNA testing are powerful, but they work best alongside the older methods, not instead of them. First, DNA depends on context: a bone only tells us what its DNA says if we know which layer it came from, and stratigraphy is what supplies that layer. Second, DNA only survives in some conditions — cool and dry — so at many sites there is no DNA at all, and the layers, pots and bones are the only evidence we have. Third, the methods check each other: at Abusir el-Meleq, the DNA story of changing ancestry made sense only against dates and layers worked out by other means. New methods add to old ones. They do not replace them.

The Q8 model paragraph, taken apart: every sentence has a job

Question: "New methods such as DNA testing mean we no longer need old methods such as stratigraphy." Do you agree?

POSITION	I disagree. New methods like DNA testing are powerful, but they work best alongside the older methods, not instead of them.
REASON 1 + EVIDENCE	First, DNA depends on context: a bone only tells us what its DNA says if we know which layer it came from, and stratigraphy is what supplies that layer.
REASON 2 — A LIMIT	Second, DNA only survives in some conditions — cool and dry — so at many sites there is no DNA at all, and the layers, pots and bones are the only evidence we have.
REASON 3 — CHECKING	Third, the methods check each other: at Abusir el-Meleq, the DNA story of changing ancestry made sense only against dates and layers worked out by other means.
JUDGEMENT	New methods add to old ones. They do not replace them.

Use these moves in your own answers. Order can change, but a strong answer always takes a position, gives reasons with evidence, names a limit, and ends with a judgement.

A labelled version of the Q8 model paragraph, with each sentence labelled to show its job: position, reason with evidence, limit, check, and final judgement

Figure 9 — The Q8 model paragraph, taken apart. Every sentence has a job. Use these moves in your own answers. (Original figure.)

Model for Q9 (Abu Simbel version):

At Abu Simbel in southern Egypt, infrastructure and heritage collided over the same stretch of the Nile. Egypt built the Aswan High Dam, finished in 1970, to stop deadly floods, store water and make electricity. The strongest case for the dam was the living: food, water and power for millions. The strongest case against was the past: the rising waters of Lake Nasser would drown temples thousands of years old, including the temples Ramesses II had carved at Abu Simbel around 1264 BCE. UNESCO responded with a campaign from 1960 to 1980, funded by about 48 countries. Engineers cut the temples into 1036 blocks and rebuilt them 65 metres higher, facing the same sun. The case shows that with enough money, skill and cooperation, both the needs of the living and the heritage of the world can be saved. The Stonehenge case shows what happens when that money and agreement are not found.

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The changing world, 600–1750 CE: Rome, empires and spreading worldviews

Content description: VC2HH8K04.

This section draws on elaborations VC2HH8K04.E01–VC2HH8K04.E05.

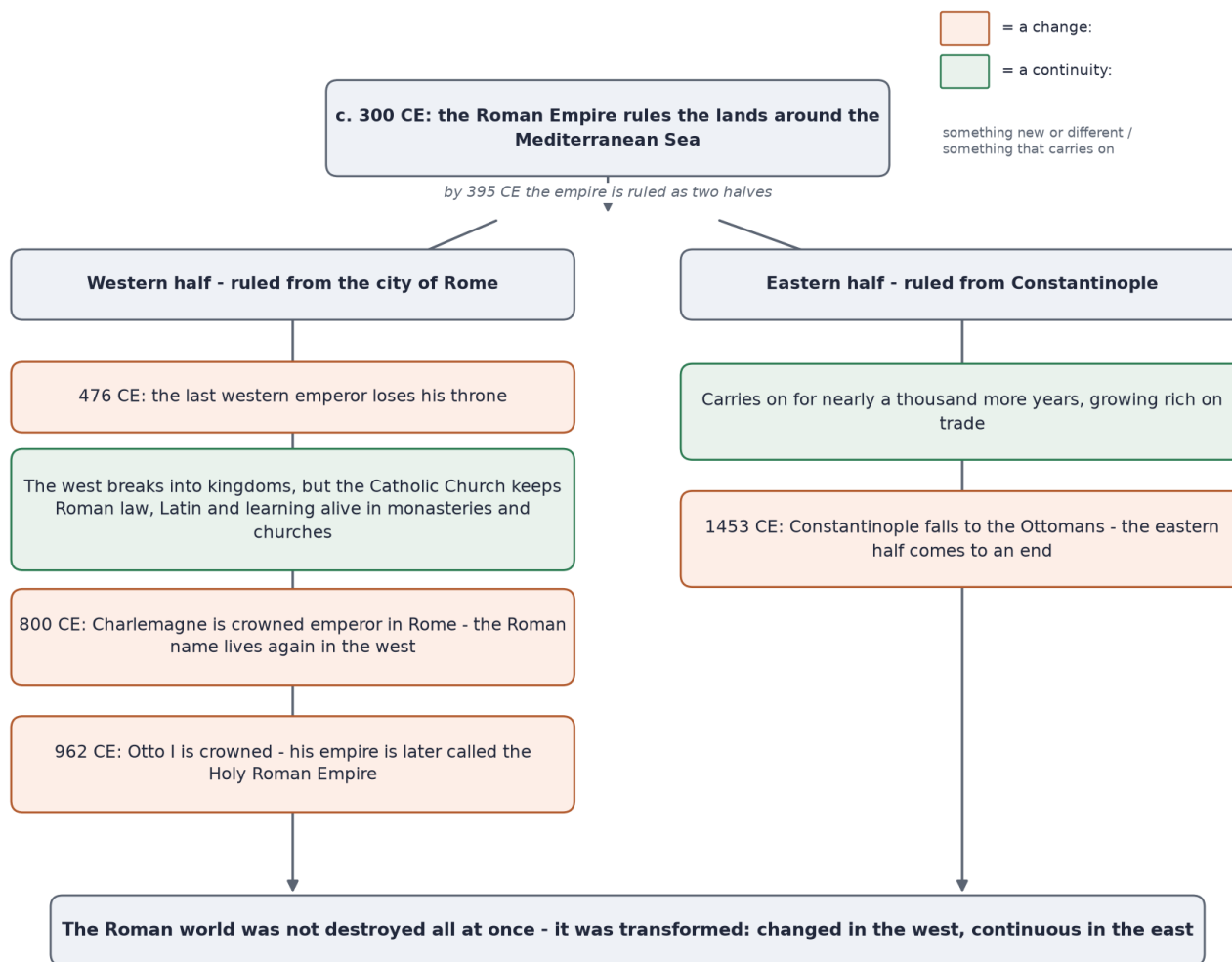
From 600 CE to 1750 CE, empires rose and fell on every continent, four great worldviews spread across whole regions, and new ways of thinking changed art, religion, science, farming and government. Yet much also carried on: old laws, old languages and old festivals lived on inside the new world. Historians study this span by holding two questions in mind at once — *what changed?* and *what carried on?* — and then asking *how much did each change matter?* That is the work of this section.

Theory

1. Change, continuity and pattern (VC2HH8K04). A **change** is something new or different in a society — a new ruler, a new law, a new way of farming. A **continuity** is something that carries on while other things change — a language still spoken, a festival still kept, a law still used. A single event can be both at once: when Charlemagne was crowned in 800 CE, that was a change (a new emperor in the west) built on a continuity (the old Roman title and the old faith). When changes and continuities are placed in order on a timeline, they form a **pattern** — and the pattern of 600–1750 CE is a world transformed, not a world wiped clean.

2. How the Roman world was transformed (VC2HH8K04.E02). Around 300 CE the Roman Empire ruled most of the lands around the Mediterranean Sea. By 395 CE it was ruled as two halves: a western half led from the city of Rome, and an eastern half led from Constantinople. In 476 CE the last western emperor lost his throne, and the west slowly broke into kingdoms. But much carried on: the Catholic Church kept Roman law, the Latin language and learning alive in its churches and monasteries. In 800 CE Charlemagne was crowned emperor in Rome, and in 962 CE Otto I was crowned too — his empire later became known as the Holy Roman Empire. The eastern half carried on for nearly a thousand more years, growing rich on trade, until Constantinople fell to the Ottomans in 1453 CE. So the Roman world ended in the west as a single state, yet its law, language and faith lived on — that is why historians speak of *transformation* rather than simple destruction.

How the Roman world was transformed

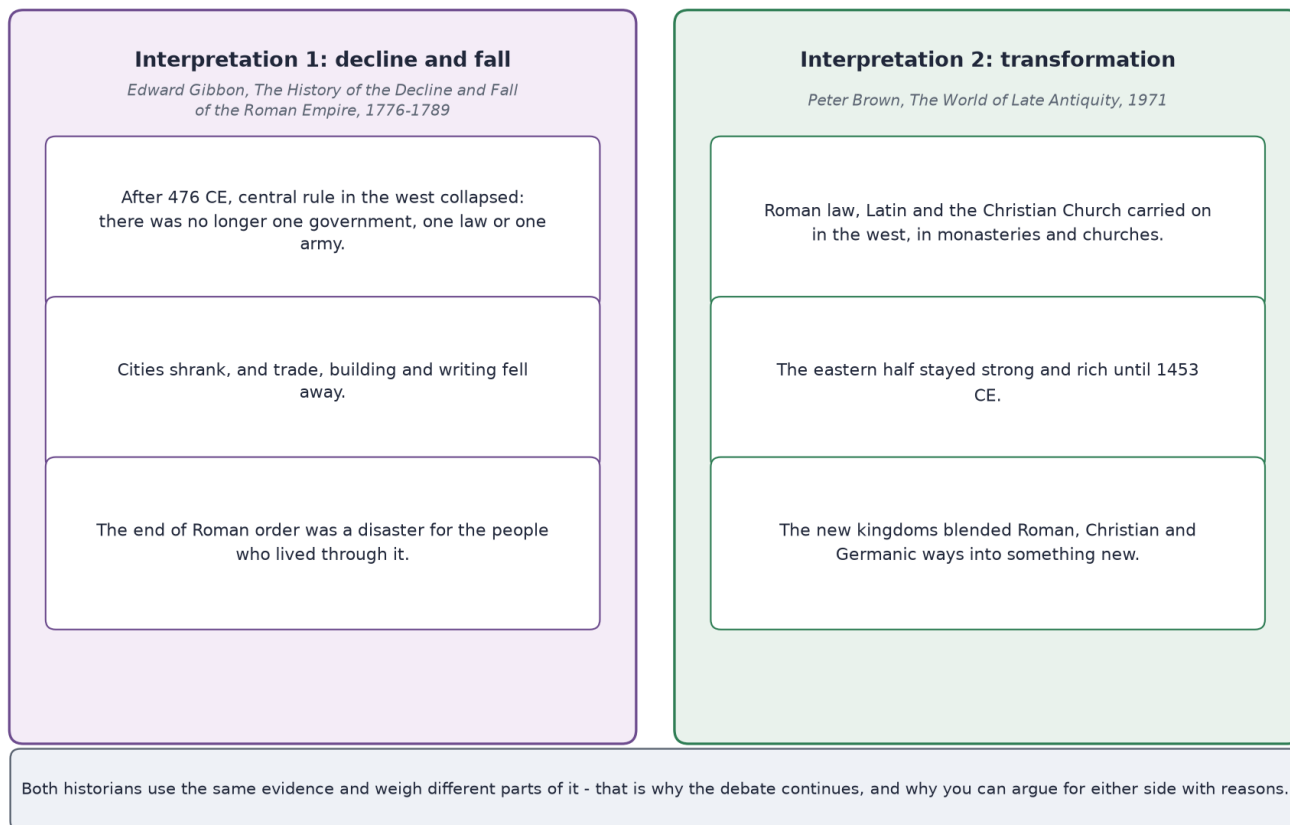


Flow diagram of how the Roman world was transformed: one empire ruled as two halves by 395 CE; the western half breaks into kingdoms after 476 CE while the Catholic Church keeps Roman law and Latin alive; Charlemagne is crowned in 800 CE and Otto I in 962 CE; the eastern half carries on as a rich trading world until Constantinople falls to the Ottomans in 1453 CE; boxes are tagged as a change or a continuity.

Sources: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Ancient Rome', 'Charlemagne', 'Holy Roman Empire' and 'Ottoman Empire', retrieved 25 August 2026.

3. Two readings of the same events (VC2HH8K04.E02). Historians agree on the dated events above, but they give different weight to them. Edward Gibbon, in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1789), read the story as **decline and fall**: central rule collapsed, cities shrank, and ordinary people suffered. Peter Brown, in *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971), read the same story as **transformation**: law, Latin and faith carried on, and new kingdoms blended Roman, Christian and Germanic ways into something new. Both readings are argued in good faith from the same evidence, with different weight given to each part — that is what makes this a live historical debate, and why you may argue for either side as long as you give reasons.

Two readings of the same events: what happened to the Roman world?

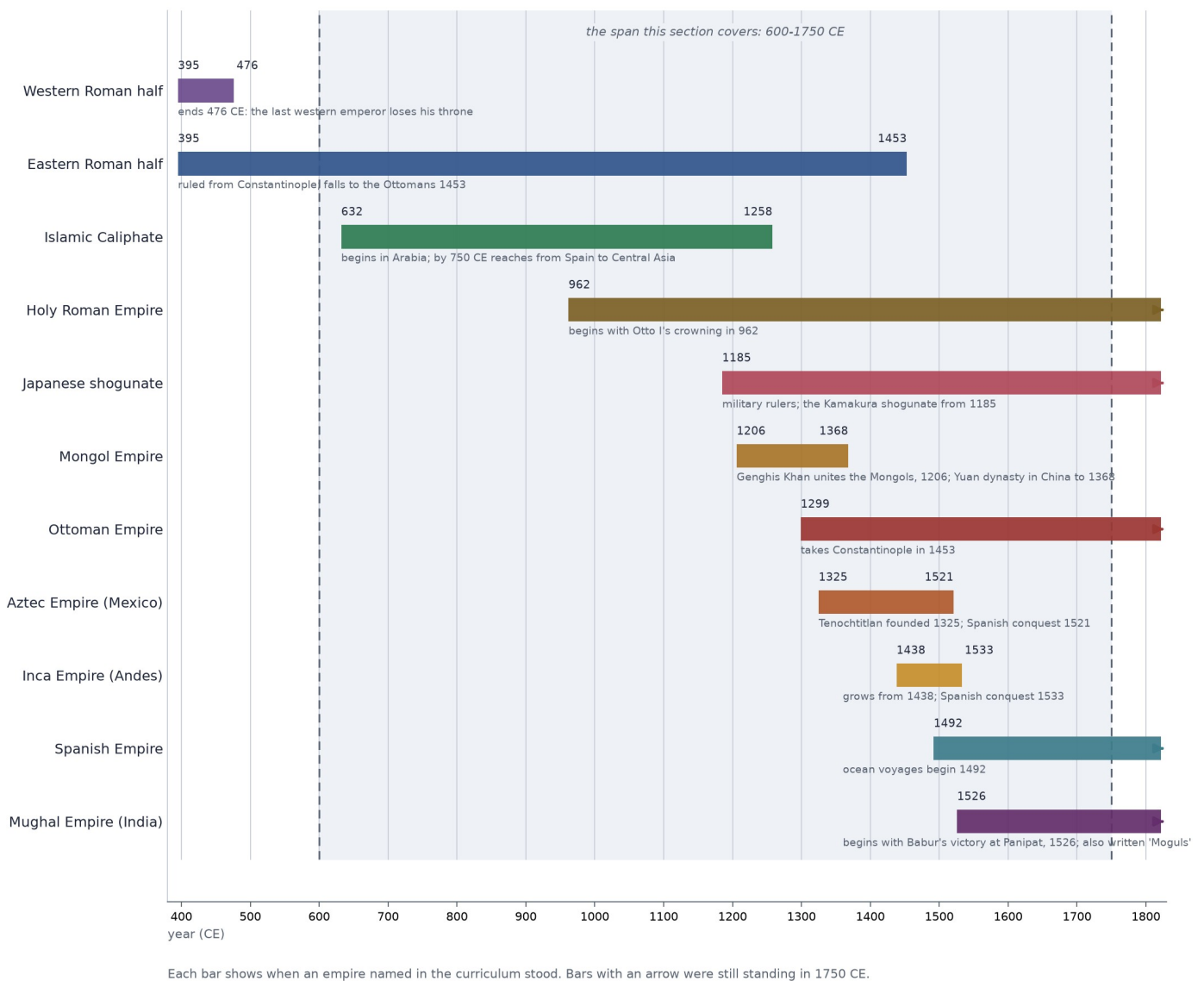


Two-panel comparison of historians' readings of the Roman world's end: Interpretation 1, decline and fall, after Edward Gibbon, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, 1776-1789, with three claims about collapsed central rule, shrinking cities and suffering; Interpretation 2, transformation, after Peter Brown, The World of Late Antiquity, 1971, with three claims about law, Latin and the Church carrying on, the strong eastern half, and new blended kingdoms; a footer notes that both give different weight to the same evidence.

Sources: Edward Gibbon, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, 1776-1789; Peter Brown, The World of Late Antiquity, 1971; summaries are this book's own words, retrieved 25 August 2026.

4. Empires across the span (VC2HH8K04.E01). The empires of this span rose and fell on every continent. The Islamic Caliphate began in Arabia in 632 CE and by 750 CE reached from Spain to Central Asia. The Holy Roman Empire began in 962 CE. In Japan, military rulers called shoguns held real power: the first shogunate began in 1185 CE. Genghis Khan united the Mongols in 1206 CE and built the largest land empire in history. The Ottoman Empire began around 1299 CE and took Constantinople in 1453 CE. In the Americas, the Aztec Empire grew from 1325 CE and the Inca Empire from 1438 CE, until both were conquered by the Spanish after 1492 CE. The Mughal Empire began in India in 1526 CE. As a class activity, build the timeline below together: one group takes one empire, and the bars are joined into a single timeline of the world.

Empires rising and falling, 600-1750 CE

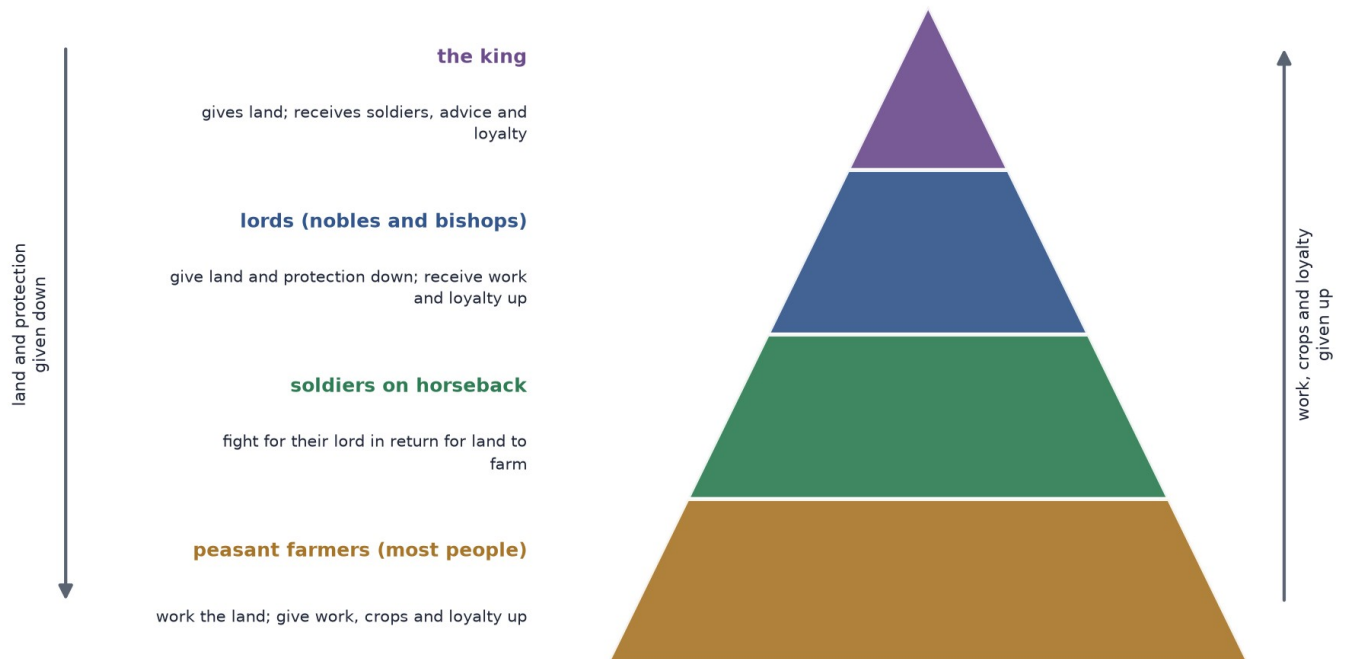


Horizontal bar timeline of empires between 400 CE and 1800 CE, with the span 600-1750 CE shaded: the western Roman half 395-476 CE; the eastern Roman half 395-1453 CE; the Islamic Caliphate 632-1258 CE; the Holy Roman Empire from 962 CE; the Japanese shogunate from 1185 CE; the Mongol Empire 1206-1368 CE; the Ottoman Empire from 1299 CE; the Aztec Empire 1325-1521 CE; the Inca Empire 1438-1533 CE; the Spanish Empire from 1492 CE; and the Mughal Empire from 1526 CE.

Sources: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Islamic world', 'Holy Roman Empire', 'Kamakura period', 'Mongol Empire', 'Ottoman Empire', 'Aztec', 'Inca', 'Spain' and 'Mughal dynasty', retrieved 25 August 2026.

5. Feudalism in western Europe (VC2HH8K04.E01). With the western empire gone, kings struggled to defend and rule their lands. In the Middle Ages (about 500–1500 CE) a way of ruling grew up that historians call **feudalism**: the king gave land to lords, and in return the lords gave the king soldiers, advice and loyalty. Society stood in a pyramid: the king at the top; then lords (nobles and bishops); then soldiers on horseback; and at the bottom peasant farmers, who were most people. Land and protection were given down the pyramid; work, crops and loyalty were given up. A word of caution: *feudalism* is a label historians invented much later, and some warn it hides real differences between places — this book uses it the way the curriculum does, as a handy label for this way of ruling.

The feudal order in western Europe



Feudalism is the label historians use for this way of ruling. Some historians warn that the word was invented much later and hides real differences between places.

Pyramid diagram of the feudal order in western Europe with labels in a left-hand column: the king gives land and receives soldiers, advice and loyalty; lords (nobles and bishops) give land and protection down and receive work and loyalty up; soldiers on horseback fight for their lord in return for land to farm; peasant farmers (most people) work the land and give work, crops and loyalty up; arrows show land and protection given down and work, crops and loyalty given up; a footnote notes that feudalism is a label historians use.

Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Feudalism', retrieved 25 August 2026.

6. The spread of major worldviews (VC2HH8K04.E01–E02). A **worldview**, as this book uses the word, is a faith and its picture of the world and how to live. Four named in the curriculum spread widely in this span. Christianity was already the faith of the Roman Empire by 600 CE; missionaries carried it across Europe and, after 1492 CE, to the Americas; in 1054 CE the Church split into the western Catholic and eastern Orthodox churches. Islam began in Arabia in 622 CE with the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad; by 750 CE it reached from Spain to Central Asia, and traders carried it into Africa, India and South-East Asia. Hinduism grew from the older beliefs of India and spread with the kingdoms and trade of South and South-East Asia. Buddhism began in northern India with the teaching of the Buddha and spread along trade routes such as the Silk Road, into China, Korea, Japan, Tibet and South-East Asia. All four are still lived in Australia today — in festivals such as Christmas and Easter, Eid, Diwali and Vesak, in places of worship and in daily life.

The four worldviews named in the curriculum

worldview	began	how it spread, 600-1750 CE	still part of life in Australia today
Christianity	already the religion of the Roman Empire by 600 CE	missionaries carried it across Europe; after 1492 CE, to the Americas too; in 1054 CE the Church split into the western Catholic and eastern Orthodox churches	Christmas and Easter are public holidays
Islam	Arabia, from 622 CE (the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad)	by 750 CE it reached from Spain to Central Asia; traders carried it into Africa, India and South-East Asia	Eid is celebrated across Australia
Hinduism	grew from the older beliefs of India	grew with the kingdoms and trade of South and South-East Asia	Diwali is celebrated across Australia
Buddhism	northern India (the teaching of the Buddha)	spread along trade routes such as the Silk Road, into China, Korea, Japan, Tibet and South-East Asia	Vesak is celebrated across Australia

Each worldview named in the curriculum is still lived in Australia today - in festivals, places of worship and daily life.

Table of the four worldviews named in the curriculum: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, with columns for where each began, how it spread from 600 CE to 1750 CE, and how it is still part of life in Australia today through festivals such as Christmas and Easter, Eid, Diwali and Vesak.

Sources: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Christianity', 'Islam', 'Hinduism' and 'Buddhism', retrieved 25 August 2026.

7. Phases of expansion (VC2HH8K04.E01). **Expansion** means one people spreading its rule or settlements into new lands. Three phases stand out in this span. The Vikings, seafarers from Scandinavia, raided and then settled from c. 793 to c. 1066 CE — Britain, Ireland, Iceland, Greenland, and around 1000 CE they reached North America (Vinland). The Mongols, horse-riding herders united under Genghis Khan from 1206 CE, built an empire from China to eastern Europe. European navigators sailed from 1492 CE: across the Atlantic to the Americas (Columbus, 1492), around Africa to India (Vasco da Gama, 1498), and around the world (Magellan's voyage, 1519–1522). Expansion connected the world's oceans and trade routes — and conquest brought great suffering to peoples already living in those lands: lost land, forced work and disease. Both sides belong in the pattern.

Three phases of expansion, 600-1750 CE

phase	who they were	when	where they went	what happened as a result
the Vikings	seafarers from Scandinavia	c. 793 to c. 1066 CE	raided, then settled: Britain, Ireland, Iceland, Greenland; reached North America (Vinland) c. 1000 CE	new settlements and trade routes; Viking settlers mixed with the peoples they met
the Mongols	horse-riding herders united under Genghis Khan	from 1206 CE	from China to eastern Europe - the largest land empire in history	Europe and Asia connected; trade grew along the Silk Road; conquest brought death and destruction to conquered peoples
European navigators	sailors from Spain, Portugal, England and the Netherlands	from 1492 CE	across the Atlantic to the Americas (Columbus, 1492); around Africa to India (Vasco da Gama, 1498); around the world (Magellan's voyage, 1519-1522)	the world's oceans linked by sea routes and trade; conquest brought great suffering to peoples already living in those lands - lost land, forced work and disease

Expansion connected the world - and conquest also caused great suffering. Both are part of the pattern.

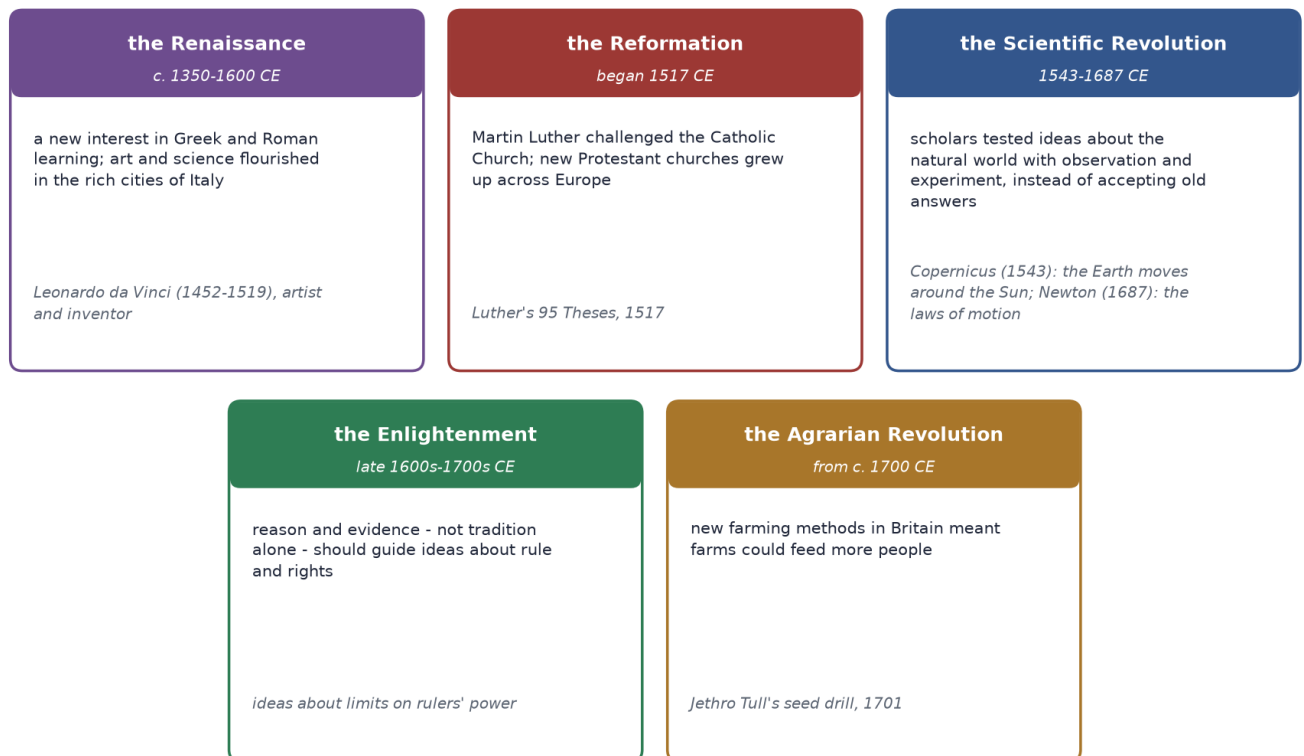
Comparison table of three phases of expansion, 600-1750 CE: the Vikings (seafarers from Scandinavia, c. 793 to c. 1066 CE, raiding and settling from Britain to Vinland); the Mongols (horse-riding herders united under Genghis Khan from 1206 CE, from China to eastern Europe); and European navigators (from 1492 CE, Columbus, Vasco da Gama and Magellan's voyage); columns give who they were, when, where they went and what happened as a result, including the suffering conquest brought to peoples already living there.

Sources: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Viking', 'Mongol empire' and 'Age of Exploration', retrieved 25 August 2026.

8. Towns, trade and the movement of peoples (VC2HH8K04.E02). Not all change came from empires and armies. From about 1000 CE, towns and cities grew in Europe, Asia and Africa as trade picked up; markets, banks and new trades appeared, and cities such as Baghdad, Chang'an, Venice and Timbuktu became meeting points of the world. Peoples moved too — Viking settlers, Mongol horsemen, traders along the Silk Road, and later European sailors — carrying goods, faiths, technologies and ideas with them. New ideas travelled with trade: that is how worldviews and inventions spread without a single army marching.

9. Periods of new ideas (VC2HH8K04.E01, VC2HH8K04.E05). Historians name several periods of big change in thinking, and the individuals who drove them. The **Renaissance** (c. 1350–1600 CE) began in the rich cities of Italy: a new interest in Greek and Roman learning, and a flowering of art and science — Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) is its most famous artist-inventor. The **Reformation** began in 1517 CE, when Martin Luther challenged the Catholic Church and new Protestant churches grew up. The **Scientific Revolution** (1543–1687 CE) tested ideas about nature with observation and experiment: Copernicus (1543) showed that the Earth moves around the Sun, and Newton (1687) described the laws of motion. The **Enlightenment** (late 1600s–1700s CE) argued that reason and evidence, not tradition alone, should guide rule and rights. The **Agrarian Revolution** (from c. 1700 CE) changed farming in Britain, as with Jethro Tull's seed drill (1701). These labels overlap, and not everyone lived them — but the individuals named here really did cause change.

Periods of new ideas, 1300-1750 CE



These are labels historians use: the periods overlapped, and not everyone experienced them.

Five cards for the periods of new ideas, 1300-1750 CE: the Renaissance with Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519); the Reformation with Martin Luther from 1517; the Scientific Revolution with Copernicus (1543) and Newton (1687); the Enlightenment with the claim that reason and evidence should guide rule and rights; and the Agrarian Revolution with Jethro Tull's seed drill of 1701.

Sources: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Renaissance', 'Reformation', 'Scientific Revolution', 'Enlightenment' and 'Agricultural Revolution', retrieved 25 August 2026.

10. Ranking historical significance (VC2HH8K04.E03). Not every change matters equally. **Significance**, as this section measures it, is judged against four criteria you must state when you use them: how many lives changed at the time; how long the effects lasted; whether it still matters today; and how much change it caused. Historians disagree about rankings — significance is judged, not read off the page — so the reasons you give matter more than the order you choose.

Ranking developments for historical significance - a model

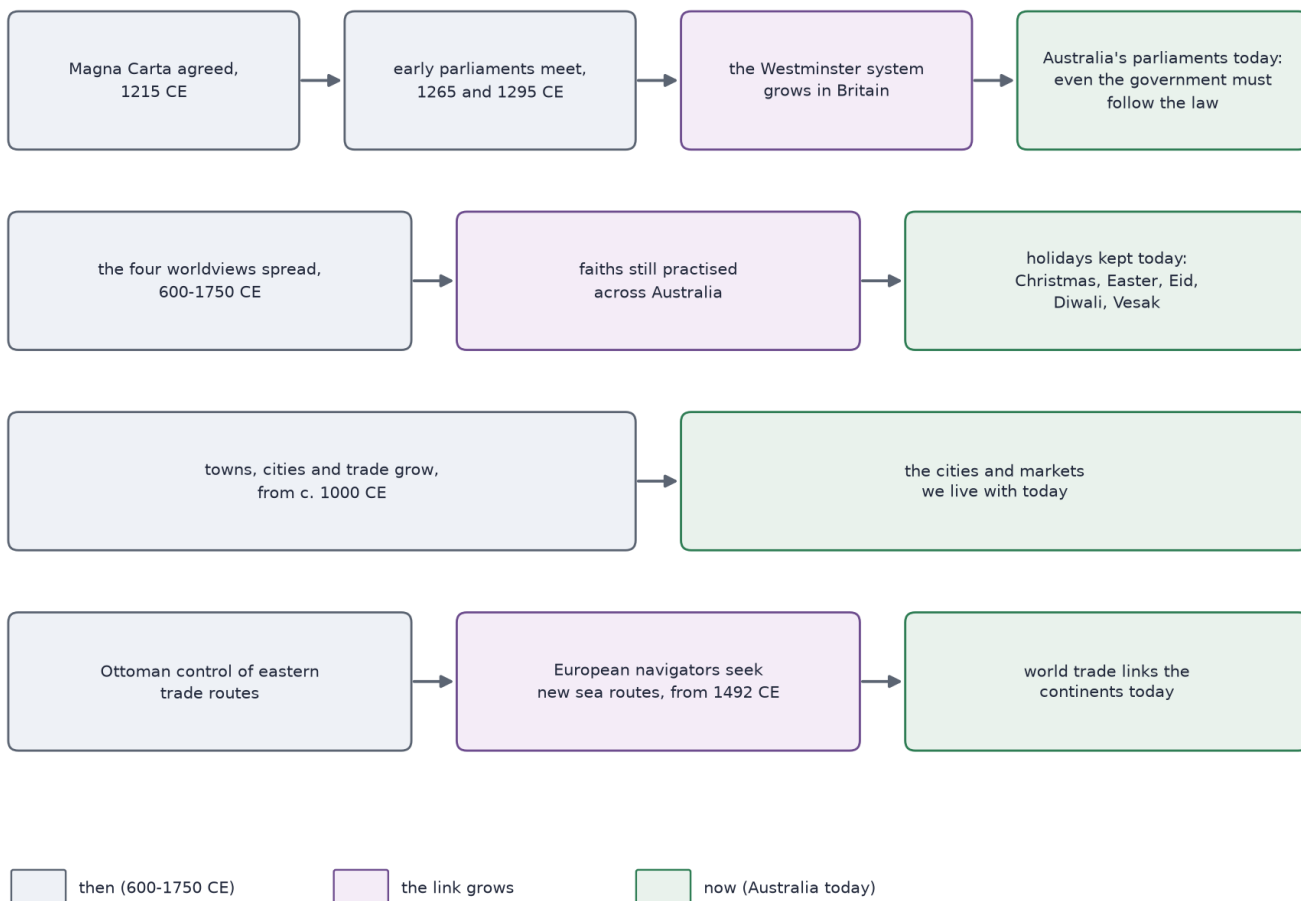
critterion	the fall of Constantinople (1453 CE)	the printing press (c. 1450 CE)	Magna Carta (1215 CE)
How many lives changed at the time?	high - an empire ended; people fled west	medium - books became cheap, so more people could learn	low - at first it protected only free men in one kingdom
How long did its effects last?	high	high	high
Does it still matter today?	high - south-east Europe reshaped	high - books, schools and newspapers	high - the rule of law and parliaments
How much change did it cause?	high - Ottoman power grew; European sailors looked for new sea routes	high - helped the Reformation and the new science to spread	medium
Rank	2nd	1st	3rd
Model reason: 'I rank the printing press first. Books became cheap, so learning spread to thousands of people across Europe, and that change helped the Reformation and the new science. Its effects can still be seen today in our books, schools and newspapers.'			

Another student could put these in a different order and still argue well - the reasons are what count.

Model ranking table scoring three developments - the fall of Constantinople (1453 CE), the printing press (c. 1450 CE) and Magna Carta (1215 CE) - against four significance criteria (lives changed at the time, lasting effects, still matters today, amount of change), ranked 2nd, 1st and 3rd with a model reasons sentence and a note that another student could argue a different order.

11. Connections to today, and a primary-source close study (VC2HH8K04.E04). Much of life in Australia today grew out of this span. In 1215 CE, King John of England agreed to **Magna Carta** at Runnymede under pressure from rebellious barons, promising to rule according to the law; early parliaments (1265 and 1295 CE) grew from the same idea, and that idea leads to the **Westminster system** under which Australia's parliaments make law today. The worldviews that spread in this span give Australia the festivals it still keeps. The towns and trade that grew from c. 1000 CE lead to the cities and markets we live with now. And Ottoman control of eastern trade routes helped push European navigators to seek new sea routes — the beginning of today's world trade.

Connections: the 600-1750 span and life in Australia today



Connections diagram with four chains from the 600-1750 span to Australia today: Magna Carta (1215 CE) and early parliaments (1265 and 1295 CE) to the Westminster system and the rule of law in Australia's parliaments; the four worldviews to festivals kept today (Christmas, Easter, Eid, Diwali, Vesak); the growth of towns, cities and trade to today's cities and markets; and Ottoman control of eastern trade routes to European voyages from 1492 CE and today's world trade.

Sources: British Library, 'Magna Carta' (translation of the 1215 text); UK Parliament, 'History of Parliament'; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Westminster system' and 'Ottoman Empire'; retrieved 25 August 2026.

Now read Source A slowly. It is a primary source — made in 1215 CE, at the time of the events it records — and it is the section's close study.

Source A - Magna Carta, clauses 39 and 40

Agreed by King John at Runnymede, England, on 15 June 1215 CE, under pressure from rebellious barons

(39) *No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any other way, nor will we proceed with force against him, or send others to do so, except by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land.*

(40) *To no one will we sell, to no one deny or delay right or justice.*

Translation of the 1215 text: British Library.

Primary source - made in 1215 CE, at the time of the events it records.

Source A card: Magna Carta, clauses 39 and 40, agreed by King John at Runnymede, England, on 15 June 1215 CE under pressure from rebellious barons; clause 39 promises that no free man shall be seized, imprisoned or stripped of his rights except by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land; clause 40 promises that to no one will the king sell, deny or delay right or justice; labelled as a primary source made in 1215 CE.

Source: Magna Carta, 1215, clauses 39 and 40; translation of the 1215 text: British Library, retrieved 25 August 2026.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded

Build a finished timeline of the span with these eight developments, and add one continuity band: 622 CE, Islam begins in Arabia; 800 CE, Charlemagne crowned emperor in Rome; 1054 CE, the Church splits into Catholic west and Orthodox east; 1206 CE, Genghis Khan unites the Mongols; 1215 CE, Magna Carta limits the king's power; 1453 CE, Constantinople falls to the Ottomans; 1492 CE, Columbus reaches the Americas; 1517 CE, Luther begins the Reformation. Continuity band: the Catholic Church keeps Roman law and Latin alive through the whole span.

Working

Draw a line from 600 CE to 1600 CE with a tick every 100 years.

Place the eight dots in order: 622, 800, 1054, 1206, 1215, 1453, 1492, 1517.

Tag each dot change or continuity.

Comment

Equal spacing matters: 100 years = the same gap, every time.

Watch the close pairs: 1206/1215 and 1453/1492/1517 need room.

Seven are changes; 800 CE is a change with continuity

Draw the green band under the whole span: the Church keeps Roman law and Latin alive.

Title the timeline and check the order against the list.

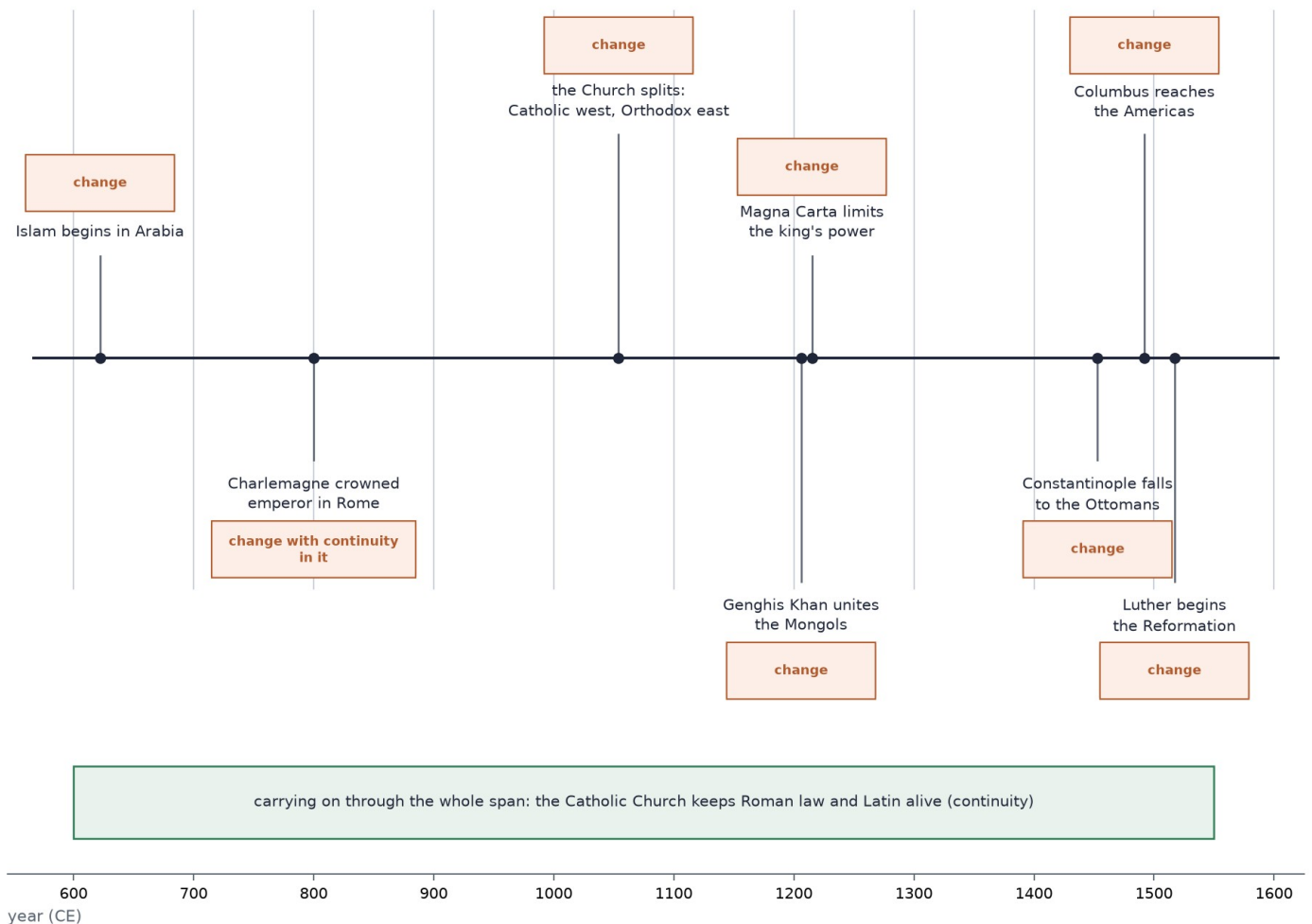
in it (a new emperor, an old Roman title).

A continuity is not a dot — it is a line that carries on while the dots happen.

Check: $622 < 800 < 1054 < 1206 < 1215 < 1453 < 1492 < 1517$. ✓

The finished timeline looks like this:

Worked Example 1 - a finished timeline, 600-1550 CE



Eight developments placed in order and tagged. The green band marks one thing that carried on through the whole span.

Finished timeline for Worked Example 1, 600-1550 CE: eight developments placed in order and tagged - Islam begins in Arabia (622, change); Charlemagne crowned emperor in Rome (800, change with continuity in it); the Church splits into Catholic west and Orthodox east (1054, change); Genghis Khan unites the Mongols (1206, change); Magna Carta limits the king's power (1215, change); Constantinople falls to the Ottomans (1453, change); Columbus reaches the Americas (1492, change); Luther begins the Reformation (1517, change) - with a green continuity band across the whole span for the Catholic Church keeping Roman law and Latin alive.

Sources: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Islam', 'Charlemagne', 'Eastern Orthodox church', 'Mongol Empire', 'Magna Carta', 'Fall of Constantinople', 'Christopher Columbus' and 'Reformation', retrieved 25 August 2026.

Example 2 — scaffolded

Rank these three developments for historical significance: the fall of Constantinople (1453 CE); the printing press (c. 1450 CE); Magna Carta (1215 CE). Use the four criteria from Theory step 10.

Working	Comment
How many lives changed at the time? Constantinople: high (an empire ended; people fled west). Printing press: medium at first, then high (books became cheap). Magna Carta: low at first (it protected only free men in one kingdom).	Judge each development against each criterion, one at a time.
How long did the effects last? All three: high.	Each is still talked about more than 500 years on.
Does it still matter today? All three: high.	South-east Europe reshaped; books, schools and newspapers; the rule of law and parliaments.
How much change did it cause? Constantinople: high (Ottoman power grew; European sailors sought new sea routes). Printing press: high (helped the Reformation and the new science spread). Magna Carta: medium at first.	Weigh cause and consequence as well as reach and lasting power.
Rank with reasons: 1st the printing press, 2nd Constantinople, 3rd Magna Carta.	Model reason: “I rank the printing press first. Books became cheap, so learning spread to thousands of people across Europe, and that change helped the Reformation and the new science. Its effects can still be seen today in our books, schools and newspapers.”
A model of the finished ranking is shown in the figure at Theory step 10. Another student could put these in a different order and still argue well — the reasons are what count.	

Practice questions

Scaffolded

- Q1.** Say whether each item is a **change** or a **continuity** in this span. (a) In 1054 CE the Church splits into the Catholic west and the Orthodox east. (b) Monasteries and churches keep Latin and learning alive after 476 CE. (c) In 622 CE Islam begins in Arabia. (d) Christmas and Easter are still kept as festivals today.
- Q2.** Use the empires timeline figure (Theory step 4). (a) Which empire began when Genghis Khan united his people in 1206 CE? (b) Which two halves of the Roman world does the figure show, and when did each end (or did it carry on)? (c) Name one empire from the figure that was still standing in 1750 CE.
- Q3.** Match each worldview to a festival kept in Australia today: (1) Christianity, (2) Islam, (3) Hinduism, (4) Buddhism — (a) Diwali, (b) Christmas, (c) Vesak, (d) Eid.
- Q4.** Use the feudal pyramid figure (Theory step 5). (a) Which group was the largest, and where does it sit? (b) What do the lords give down, and what do they receive up? (c) Why does the figure warn about the word *feudalism* itself?
- Q5.** Put these moments in order, first to last: (a) Magna Carta limits the king’s power; (b) Islam begins in Arabia; (c) Luther begins the Reformation; (d) Constantinople falls to the Ottomans; (e) Columbus reaches the Americas.
- Q6.** Use the expansion figure (Theory step 7). (a) Which phase reached North America around 1000 CE? (b) Which phase is described as the largest land empire in history? (c) Name one thing the figure lists as suffering caused by conquest.

Un scaffolded

- Q7.** Theory step 3 gave two readings of the Roman world’s end: Gibbon’s *decline and fall* and Brown’s *transformation*. Choose one reading and argue for it in three to four sentences, using at least two dated facts from Theory step 2.
- Q8.** Rank the printing press (c. 1450 CE) and the voyages of the European navigators (from 1492 CE) for historical significance. Use at least two of the four criteria from Theory step 10, and give reasons for your order.

Q9. Choose one development from this section and describe its connection to life in Australia today in three to four sentences.

Q10. Extended response (use the writing steps from Chapter 7, section 7D — Communicating): “*The spread of worldviews was the most significant change of 600–1750 CE.*” Do you agree? Write one well-built paragraph: a topic sentence, two pieces of dated evidence, and a linking sentence that answers the question. You may argue either side.

Inquiry task (source-based)

Study Source A (Theory step 11), then answer parts (a)–(e). Use the source skills from Chapter 6 (sections 6C–6F) to check your reasoning.

Q11. (a) Is Source A a primary or a secondary source? Give one reason from the card itself. (b) In your own words, what does clause 39 promise to “free men”? (c) What does clause 40 say the king will not do? (d) Who put pressure on King John in 1215 CE, and what does that tell you about why the promises were written down? (e) Describe one connection between the promises in Source A and the Westminster system in Australia today.

Answers

Q1. (a) Change. (b) Continuity. (c) Change. (d) Continuity. **Q2.** (a) The Mongol Empire. (b) The western half, ending in 476 CE; the eastern half, carrying on until 1453 CE. (c) Any one of: the Holy Roman Empire, the Japanese shogunate, the Ottoman Empire, the Spanish Empire, the Mughal Empire. **Q3.** 1–(b), 2–(d), 3–(a), 4–(c). **Q4.** (a) The peasant farmers, at the bottom. (b) Down: land and protection; up: work and loyalty (and crops from the farmers). (c) Because it is a label historians invented much later, and it can hide real differences between places. **Q5.** b, a, d, e, c (622, 1215, 1453, 1492, 1517 CE). **Q6.** (a) The Vikings (Vinland). (b) The Mongols. (c) Any one listed: lost land, forced work, disease, death and destruction. **Q7.** Any argued choice with two dated facts, e.g. for transformation: the Church kept Roman law and Latin alive after 476 CE, and the eastern half carried on until 1453 CE. **Q8.** Any order with reasons tied to at least two criteria. **Q9.** Any true link, e.g. Magna Carta and early parliaments → the Westminster system and the rule of law in Australia today. **Q10.** Any well-built paragraph with a topic sentence, two dated pieces of evidence and a linking sentence, e.g. agree, citing the spread of Islam by 750 CE from Spain to Central Asia and the festivals kept in Australia today. **Q11.** (a) Primary — made in 1215 CE, at the time of the events it records. (b) No free man may be punished except by the law of the land or the lawful judgement of his equals. (c) He will not sell, deny or delay justice to anyone. (d) Rebellious barons — the promises were written down because the king had to bargain, not because he chose to. (e) In Australia's Westminster system too, even the government must follow the law.

Fully-worked solutions

Q1. A change is something new or different; a continuity is something that carries on. (a) One Church becoming two is a new split — **change**. (b) Latin and learning carrying on from the Roman world — **continuity**. (c) A new faith beginning — **change**. (d) Festivals from the past still kept now — **continuity**.

Q2. (a) The bar beginning at 1206 CE is the Mongol Empire. (b) The western half (395–476 CE), which ended when the last western emperor lost his throne; and the eastern half (395–1453 CE), which carried on until Constantinople fell. (c) Bars running past 1750 CE include, for example, the Ottoman Empire.

Q3. Christianity keeps Christmas (1–b); Islam keeps Eid (2–d); Hinduism keeps Diwali (3–a); Buddhism keeps Vesak (4–c).

Q4. (a) The peasant farmers — most people — sit at the bottom, the widest band. (b) The lords give land and protection down, and receive work and loyalty up. (c) The word was invented much later than the Middle Ages, and one tidy label can hide how different real places were — so the figure uses it carefully, as the curriculum does.

Q5. From first to last: (b) 622 CE, Islam begins; (a) 1215 CE, Magna Carta; (d) 1453 CE, Constantinople falls; (e) 1492 CE, Columbus; (c) 1517 CE, Luther. So b, a, d, e, c.

Q6. (a) The Vikings — they reached North America (Vinland) around 1000 CE. (b) The Mongols — from China to eastern Europe. (c) For example: conquest brought lost land, forced work and disease to peoples already living in those lands.

Q7. Model answer (transformation side): Brown's reading is stronger because so much carried on. After 476 CE the Catholic Church kept Roman law and Latin alive in churches and monasteries, and in 800 CE Charlemagne claimed the Roman title itself. In the east there was no fall at all: the eastern half ruled from Constantinople until 1453 CE. The pattern is therefore transformation — old roots growing into new kingdoms — not simple destruction. (A Gibbon answer arguing collapsed central rule, shrinking cities and suffering also scores, if it too uses two dated facts.)

Q8. Model answer (one of many): rank the printing press first. *Lives changed at the time*: printed books became cheap, so learning spread to thousands across Europe — high. *Change caused*: cheap print helped the Reformation and the new science to spread — high. The navigators' voyages also score high (they linked the world's oceans and began world trade), but at the time their voyages touched fewer lives directly than printed words touched in Europe. Reasons, not the order, are what count.

Q9. Model answer: Magna Carta (1215 CE) promised that even the king must rule according to the law. Early parliaments (1265 and 1295 CE) grew from that idea, and it leads to the Westminster system in Australia today: parliaments make the law, and even the government must follow it.

Q10. Model answer (agree side): The spread of worldviews was the most significant change of the span because it reshaped daily life for millions and never went away. Islam began in Arabia in 622 CE and by 750 CE reached from Spain to Central Asia; Buddhism spread along the Silk Road into China, Korea and Japan. Linking sentence: laws, festivals and daily habits changed with these faiths, and they still shape Australia today in Christmas, Easter, Eid, Diwali and Vesak — so no other change of the span reaches as far or lasts as long. (A disagree side ranking, say, the printing press or the voyages above the worldviews scores equally if the paragraph is well built.)

Q11. (a) Source A is a **primary source**: the card says it was made in 1215 CE, at the time of the events it records — it is the original agreement's text, not a later account. (b) Clause 39 promises that no free man may be seized, imprisoned or stripped of his rights except by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land — punishment must follow the law, not the king's mood. (c) Clause 40 says the king will not sell justice, deny it or delay it to anyone. (d) Rebellious barons put pressure on King John at Runnymede; the promises were written down because the barons forced a bargain — a king who makes such promises of his own choice has no need to seal them. (e) The same promise lives in Australia's Westminster system today: parliament makes the law and even the government must follow it, so justice is not sold, denied or delayed at the ruler's will.

What the pre-modern world had in common: social structures, contact, conflict

What we teach here — VC2HH8K05 (History, Levels 7 and 8).

Draws on elaborations (linkage, not teaching order):

- VC2HH8K05.E01 — what these societies had in common — taught in Parts 2 and 4.
- VC2HH8K05.E02 — ranked social structures, roles and status — taught in Part 3.
- VC2HH8K05.E03 — why these societies went to war — taught in Part 5.
- VC2HH8K05.E04 — why people moved, expanded and explored — taught in Parts 4 and 6.
- VC2HH8K05.E05 — what this world left behind — taught in Part 9.

In our words: this section zooms out and looks at the whole world between about 600 and about 1600 CE. Instead of studying one society in depth, we look for the features most societies shared — farming-based economies, growing towns, ranked social ladders, long-distance trade and faith at the centre of life — and we study how contact between societies brought trade, ideas and disease, and how conflict broke out over beliefs, wealth and the right to rule.

Chapter note: 1E surveys the pre-modern world’s common features (farming-based economies, urban growth, social hierarchies, faith systems) so Chapters 4–5 can assume the vocabulary.

Teaching sequence

Part 1 — Naming the world we are studying

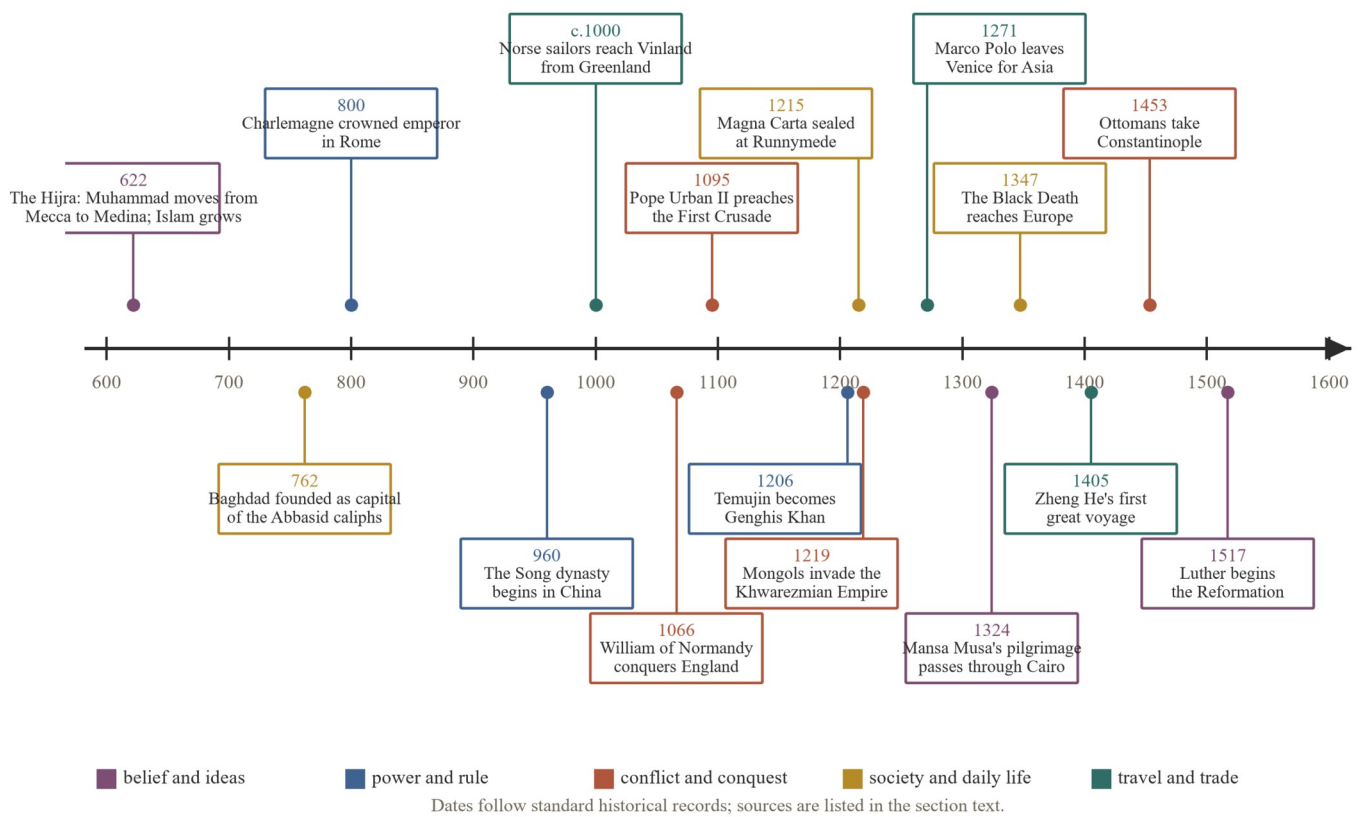
Historians need labels for the past, and two labels do heavy lifting in this section. Both are useful, and both are debated — which is exactly how history works.

- **Pre-modern** means “before the modern world”, and historians usually cut the line somewhere around 1750, when machines, factories and revolutions began to remake life. The label is a *frame*, not a fact: it is very useful for comparing societies across the world at once, but critics point out that it quietly makes “modern” (which began in Europe) the goal that every story is measured against. A historian of Song China or the Mali Empire might answer that those societies were not “waiting to become modern” — they were complete worlds of their own. We use the label for its comparing power, and we keep the criticism in mind.
- **Medieval** means “of the middle age” — the middle period, in European writing, between the ancient world of Rome and the modern one. It fits Europe well (roughly 500–1500 CE), but it fits other places badly or not at all: China’s history is usually told through dynasties, and the Islamic world through caliphs and sultans. So when this section says “medieval and pre-modern”, read it as “the world of these six centuries, in every region”.

One last framing word: the dates. We use **CE** (“Common Era”) for years. The period this section surveys runs from the rise of Islam in 622 to the early 1500s, with a few later markers.

The pre-modern world, c. 600–1600 CE: key moments

six centuries of empires, faiths, trade routes and wars — the world this section surveys



A horizontal timeline from 600 to 1600 CE with sixteen dated event boxes above and below the axis, colour-coded by theme: belief and ideas, power and rule, conflict and conquest, society and daily life, and travel and trade.

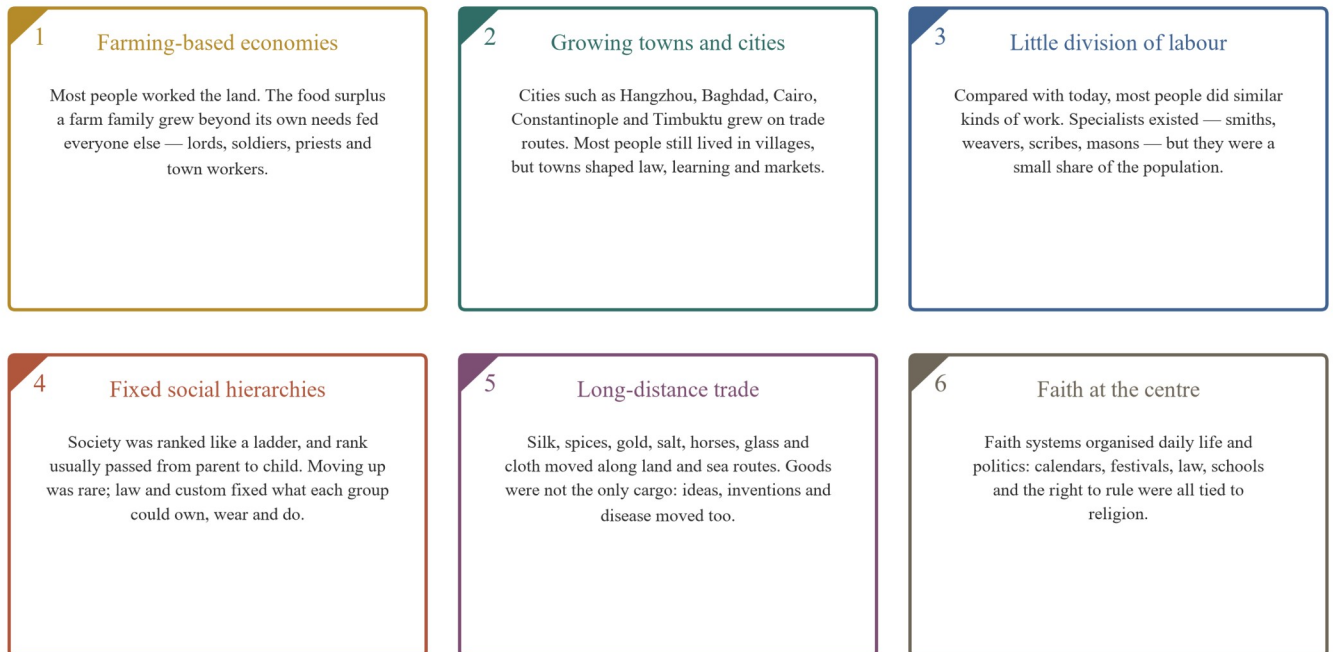
Read the timeline across: no single empire dominates all six centuries. Power, faith and trade keep moving between regions — that movement *is* the story of the pre-modern world.

Part 2 — The common shape of pre-modern societies (E01)

Very different societies, on every continent, kept producing the same basic shapes. Six features appear again and again:

Six features shared by most pre-modern societies

the common shape of the world before c. 1750 — farming, towns, ranks, trade and faith



Not every society had all six in the same measure — the point is how often they appear together, on every continent.

Six numbered panels listing the features shared by most pre-modern societies: farming-based economies; growing towns and cities; little division of labour; fixed social hierarchies; long-distance trade; and faith at the centre of daily life and politics.

Two of those features need unpacking.

Division of labour means how many different kinds of work a society has. In a pre-modern village, almost every family did the same work — growing food. A small share of people were specialists: smiths, cloth workers, scribes, stone builders. Compare that with today, where hundreds of job titles exist in a single street.

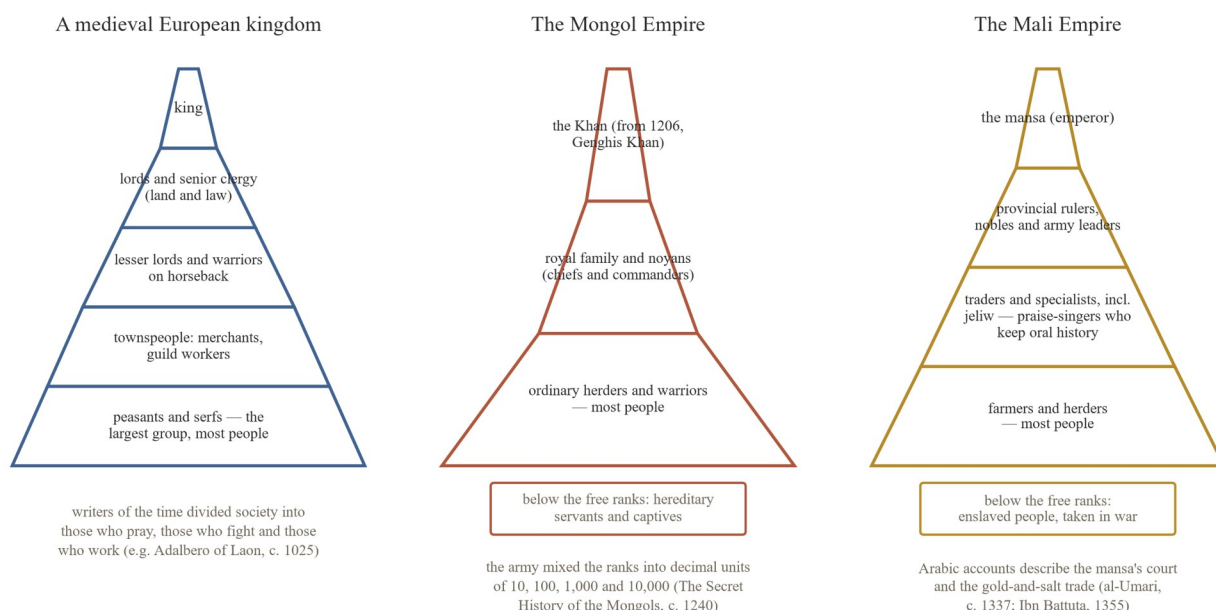
Faith at the centre does not only mean that people believed. It means faith systems ran the calendar (when to work, when to rest, when to fast or feast), the law (marriage, inheritance, oaths), learning (schools and universities grew up around temples, mosques, cathedrals and monasteries), and rule itself (kings claimed the right to rule from heaven or from God).

Part 3 — Social structures: ladders of rank (E02)

A **hierarchy** is a society ranked like a ladder: each group sits above or below the others, with different rights, duties and status. In most pre-modern societies, rank passed from parent to child, so the ladder was hard to climb.

Hierarchies: three pre-modern societies compared

top = the most powerful; the widest band holds the most people — boxes below the base sit outside the free ranks



Reconstructions from written sources of the period. Ranks were usually inherited, and most people stayed in the rank they were born into.

Three pyramid diagrams comparing the social ranks of a medieval European kingdom, the Mongol Empire and the Mali Empire. Each pyramid has the most powerful group at the top and the largest group at the base; under the Mongol and Mali pyramids a small box marks people held outside the free ranks.

Europe — three orders. Around 1025, a church writer named Adalbero of Laon described society as three groups: *those who pray* (clergy — priests, monks and bishops), *those who fight* (lords and warriors on horseback), and *those who work* (peasants). It was never the whole truth — townspeople and traders kept growing into a fourth group the three-order picture could not fit — but it tells us how people of the time *wanted* society to look. At the bottom were peasants, and among them **serfs**: farm workers bound by law to the land and to their lord, free to marry and work their own strips of field, but not free to leave.

Historians often label the European arrangement **feudalism**: a web of deals in which a lord granted land in return for military service and loyalty, all the way down the ladder. Use the word, but know the debate: many historians argue “feudalism” tidies a messy, varied reality into one neat system that never truly existed in that form. The debate is about the *label*, not about the facts — lords, land, oaths and warriors on horseback were very real.

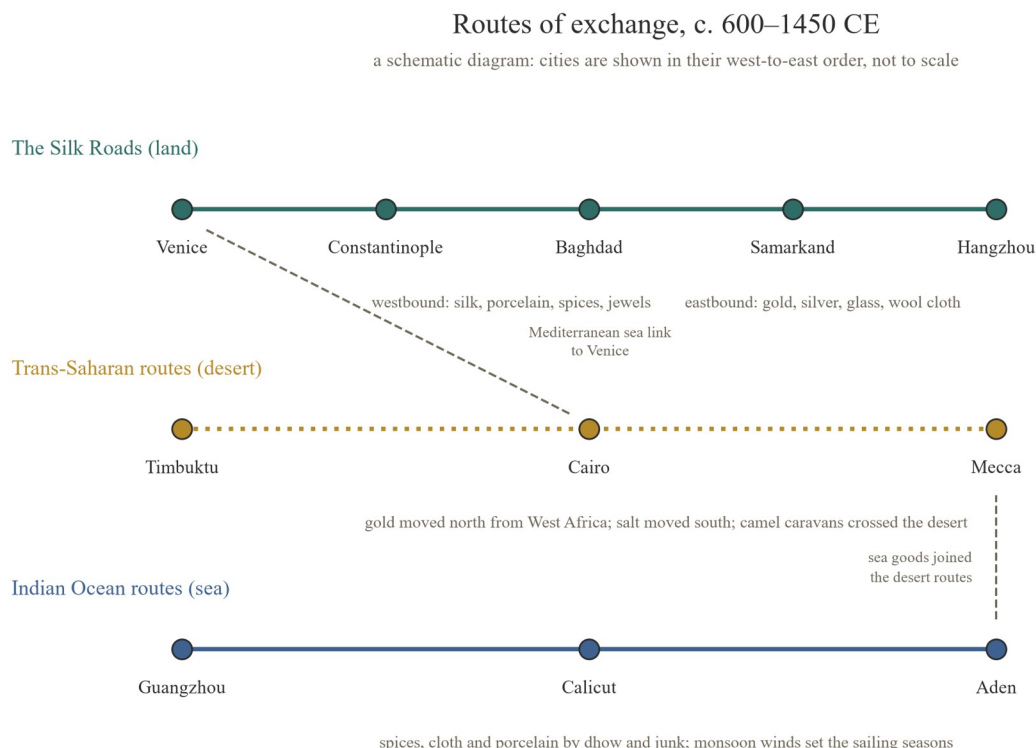
The Mongol Empire. On the steppe — the great grassland of inner Asia — rank ran from the Khan down through the royal family and **noyans** (chiefs and commanders) to ordinary herders and warriors, who were the vast majority. Below the free ranks were hereditary servants and captives taken in war. What made the Mongol ladder unusual is that the army mixed it up on purpose: *The Secret History of the Mongols* (a Mongol chronicle written about 1240) describes soldiers organised in decimal units of 10, 100, 1,000 and 10,000, with commanders promoted for ability, not only birth.

The Mali Empire. In West Africa, the **mansa** (emperor) stood at the top, above provincial rulers, nobles and army leaders, then traders and specialists — including **jeliw**, the trained praise-singers and oral historians who carried the empire’s story in memorised speech — and finally farmers and herders, most people. Below the free ranks were enslaved people, mostly taken in war. Arabic-language accounts let us see the court: al-Umari (writing about 1337) and Ibn Battuta (visiting in 1355) both describe the mansa’s wealth and the gold-and-salt trade that fed it.

Compare the three. Different faiths, different continents — and yet the same shape: a tiny top, a huge farming base, rank inherited, and people held below the free ranks. That shared shape is exactly the kind of *feature* this content description asks you to see.

Part 4 — Contact: the routes that tied the world together (E01, E04)

Pre-modern societies were far more connected than the word “medieval” suggests. Three great route systems moved goods, ideas, faiths and germs between them:



Along these routes moved not only goods but ideas, inventions, faiths — and disease. The Black Death of the 1340s spread west along them.

A schematic diagram of three route systems between about 600 and 1450 CE: the overland Silk Roads from Venice through Constantinople, Baghdad and Samarkand to Hangzhou; the trans-Saharan desert routes joining Timbuktu, Cairo and Mecca; and the Indian Ocean sea routes joining Guangzhou, Calicut and Aden, with dashed links showing how the systems joined into one network.

Notice what moved in each direction. Westbound on the Silk Roads went silk, porcelain, spices and jewels; eastbound went gold, silver, glass and wool cloth. Across the Sahara, gold went north from West Africa and salt went south, in camel **caravans** — long columns of pack animals that made desert crossings possible. On the Indian Ocean, **monsoon** winds (seasonal winds that reverse direction with the seasons) set the sailing calendar: a ship that missed the wind waited half a year.

Trade routes needed infrastructure: ports, wells, markets and **caravanserais** — walled inns where caravans rested, repaired and traded. And the routes carried more than goods:

- **Ideas and faiths** moved with merchants. Islam spread along both the Sahara routes and the sea routes; Buddhism travelled the Silk Roads into China and beyond.
- **Inventions** moved too: paper and printing spread west from China; the numerals 0–9, invented in India, travelled through the Islamic world into Europe.
- **Disease** moved at the speed of trade. The Black Death reached Europe in 1347 along the same routes that carried silk and spice — a brutal example of *consequence* following *contact*.

Cities grew where routes met: Baghdad, Constantinople, Cairo, Timbuktu, Hangzhou, Venice. Most people still lived in villages, but these cities set prices, law, learning and fashion for whole regions.

Part 5 — Conflict: three cause types (E03)

Pre-modern wars had many triggers, but most sort into three cause types. The skill in this elaboration is *sorting*, because real wars almost never had a single cause.

Why did conflict happen? Three cause types, each with a real case

Cause type	What it means	Worked example	What happened
Religious	war over beliefs, holy places or religious authority	The First Crusade, 1095–1099	At Clermont (1095) Pope Urban II called on Christians to take Jerusalem. Armies marched east and took the city in 1099. Faith drew people in; land and loot kept them there.
Economic	war over wealth, resources or trade routes	The Mongol–Khwarezmian war, 1219–1221	After a Khwarezmian governor killed Mongol trade envoys at Otrar, Genghis Khan invaded. Control of the Silk Roads' profits was at stake.
Dynastic	war over who has the right to rule	The Norman Conquest of England, 1066	William of Normandy claimed the English throne had been promised to him. When Harold II took it instead, William invaded and defeated Harold at Hastings.

Most pre-modern wars mixed causes: the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) was dynastic (a claim to the French throne) and economic (control of the wealthy wool trade with Flanders). Sorting causes is the skill of Example 1.

A four-column table defining three cause types of conflict — religious, economic and dynastic — each paired with a worked example: the First Crusade of 1095 to 1099, the Mongol invasion of the Khwarezmian Empire of 1219 to 1221, and the Norman Conquest of England in 1066.

A note on perspective for the First Crusade: at Clermont in 1095, Pope Urban II called Christians to take Jerusalem, and the armies that marched saw a holy war blessed by the Church. From the other side — the cities invaded — the same events were an invasion to be resisted. One war, two readings: that is what *perspective* means in practice. (A **crusade** is the European name for these Church-blessed wars; the word itself carries the European point of view.)

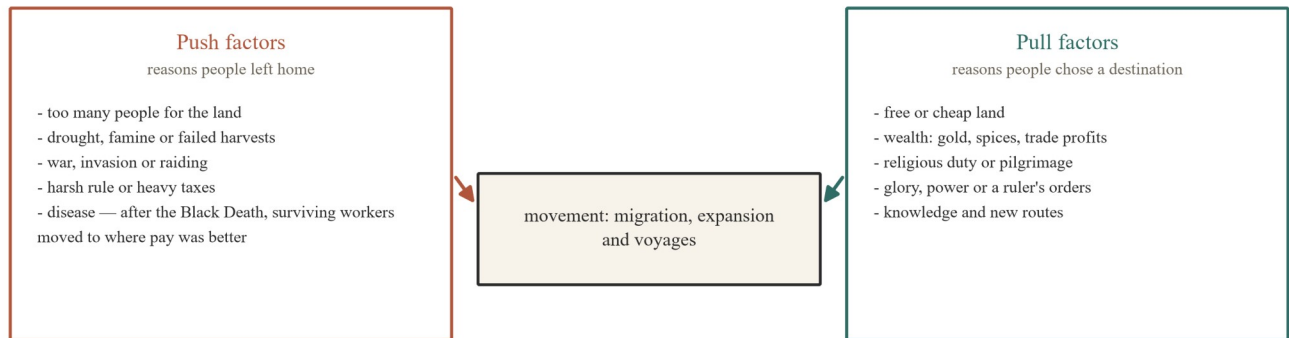
And remember the footer of the table: the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) was dynastic (a claim to the French throne) *and* economic (control of the rich wool trade with Flanders). Sorting causes is analysis; weighing how causes mixed is even better analysis.

Part 6 — Movement: migration, expansion and journeys of discovery (E04)

People in the pre-modern world moved — whole peoples, armies, pilgrim trains, fleets. Historians sort the reasons into **push factors** (things that drove people away from home) and **pull factors** (things that drew them somewhere new).

Why did people move? Push and pull factors

migration, empire-building and voyages of discovery all had causes — sort them into push and pull



Five real journeys, and the factors behind them

Norse to Greenland and Vinland, c. 985–1000	pull: farmland; warmer North Atlantic conditions made the sea crossings possible
Mongol expansion, 1206–1259	push: pasture, rival tribes; pull: trade wealth and tribute
Polynesian voyages across the Pacific	pull: new islands and prestige; skilled navigation by stars, swell and birds
Mansa Musa's pilgrimage, 1324–1325	pull: religious duty, learning and diplomacy
Zheng He's voyages, 1405–1433	pull: trade, diplomacy and showing Ming power

A two-panel diagram listing push factors (too many people for the land, drought and famine, war and raiding, harsh rule and heavy taxes, disease) and pull factors (free or cheap land, wealth, religious duty, glory and power, knowledge and new routes), with five named journeys matched to the factors behind them: the Norse voyages to Greenland and Vinland, the Mongol expansion, Polynesian voyages across the Pacific, Mansa Musa's pilgrimage, and Zheng He's voyages.

Five journeys, five mixes of cause:

- Norse sailors to Greenland and Vinland, c. 985–1000.** Pull: farmland for a growing population, and a warmer North Atlantic that made the crossings possible. The Norse reached the coast of North America around the year 1000; the site at L'Anse aux Meadows, in what is now Canada, preserves the remains of their settlement.
- The Mongol expansion, 1206–1259.** Push and pull together: rival tribes and scarce pasture on the steppe, plus the pull of trade wealth and tribute. In four decades the Mongols built the largest land empire the world had seen.
- Polynesian voyages across the Pacific.** Pull: new islands and prestige, achieved with skilled navigation by stars, ocean swell and birds — among the greatest seafaring feats in human history.
- Mansa Musa's pilgrimage, 1324–1325.** Pull: religious duty. Musa made the **hajj** — the pilgrimage to Mecca that every Muslim is called to make — with a huge train carrying so much gold that, in al-Umari's account, the price of gold in Cairo fell for years afterwards.
- Zheng He's voyages, 1405–1433.** Pull: trade, diplomacy and the showing of Ming power. The Chinese fleets reached South-East Asia, India, the Persian Gulf and East Africa.

One framing word needs care: **discovery**. Europeans later called their ocean voyages “discoveries”, but the phrase hides the people already living in every “discovered” place. When the Norse reached Vinland, people were already there; from the point of view of those people, the arrival was not a discovery but an intrusion. Historians keep the old word for the *European* experience (lands new *to them*) and name the other perspective alongside it.

Part 7 — Primary source close study: Magna Carta (1215)

A **primary source** comes from the time being studied. Ours is the most famous legal document of the European middle ages.

Source close study — a primary source: Magna Carta, clauses 39 and 40 (1215)

MAGNA CARTA — “THE GREAT CHARTER”

39. “No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any other way, nor will we proceed with force against him, except by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land.”

40. “To no one will we sell, to no one deny or delay right or justice.”

Rebel barons forced these terms on King John of England. Sealed at Runnymede, 15 June 1215. Translated from the Latin (one standard modern rendering).
Surviving 1215 copies: two at the British Library (incl. Cotton Augustus II.106), one at Lincoln Castle, one at Salisbury Cathedral.

Reading the source

1. Which words in clause 39 show that the charter limits the king's power?
2. Clause 39 protects every “free man”. In this society's hierarchy, who was not free — and therefore not covered?
3. Clause 40 says justice cannot be sold or delayed. Why would the barons want that in writing?

A source card presenting Magna Carta clauses 39 and 40 in translation with a note on the document's sealing at Runnymede on 15 June 1215 and where the surviving 1215 copies are kept, followed by three reading prompts.

Clause 39 — “No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any other way, nor will we proceed with force against him, except by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land.”

Clause 40 — “To no one will we sell, to no one deny or delay right or justice.”

(Our rendering from the Latin. Rebel barons forced these terms on King John of England; the charter was sealed at Runnymede on 15 June 1215. Four 1215 copies survive: two at the British Library — one of them catalogued as Cotton Augustus II.106 — one at Lincoln Castle and one at Salisbury Cathedral.)

Read it like a historian:

- **Who made it, and why?** Not a gift from a kind king. John was pushed to the table by rebel barons after years of heavy taxes and failed wars. The charter is a peace deal between a king and his most powerful subjects.
- **What does clause 39 limit?** The king's power to punish by his own word alone. From now on — in principle — even the king must act “by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land”. That phrase is an ancestor of the **rule of law**: the idea that rulers themselves stand under the law.
- **Who is left out?** “No *free* man”. In the hierarchy of Part 3, serfs were not fully free, and enslaved people were not free at all. The charter's protection stopped at the ladder's lower rungs. A source's *silences* are evidence too.

- **Why would the barons want clause 40 in writing?** Because John had treated justice as a revenue stream — selling verdicts, delaying them, charging for what should have been a right.

The value of the source is that it shows, in the words of 1215, a ruler being told he is not above the law. Its limitation is that it records the demands of one powerful group (the barons), not the wishes of the whole society.

Part 8 — Secondary source close study: two interpretations of the pre-modern economy

A **secondary source** is written after the period, by someone interpreting it. Two historians built big, competing pictures of the pre-modern economy — a perfect pair for comparing interpretations.

Interpretation A — Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (1974). Wallerstein argued that before about 1500 there was no single world economy, only separate regional ones. The true “world-system”, he said, began when Europe tied the Americas, Africa and Asia into one network with Europe at the core: Europe extracted wealth from the edges and grew rich on it, and the modern gap between rich and poor regions was born. In its strongest form, the argument explains something real and painful — the rise of European empires and the extraction of wealth from colonised regions — and it makes the modern world’s inequality historical, not natural.

Interpretation B — Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony* (1989). Abu-Lughod answered Wallerstein directly. By 1250–1350, she argued, a single world system *already* existed: eight overlapping trade circuits running from north-west Europe to China, with the Islamic world and the Indian Ocean at the centre of the web, and Europe a player on the edge, not the core. In its strongest form, the argument rests on the sheer volume of trade the sources show moving across Asia and Africa long before Europe’s rise — and it removes Europe from the centre of the story, treating Europe’s later dominance as a brief and unusual episode, not the natural order of things.

Compare them the way a historian would:

	Wallerstein (1974)	Abu-Lughod (1989)
When did one world system begin?	After about 1500, with Europe at the core	By about 1250–1350, centuries earlier
Where was Europe?	The core, from the start of the system	One edge player among many
What is the evidence emphasised?	Extraction of colonial wealth after 1500	Trade volumes across Asia and Africa before 1350
What does it explain well?	Modern global inequality	The connected, wealthy pre-modern world of Parts 4–6

The term they argue over — **world system**, meaning one network of trade so closely joined that a price rise in one region moves markets in another — is itself contested. Wallerstein says a true system needs a core extracting wealth; Abu-Lughod says linked circuits are enough. You do not have to pick a side to use the debate: being able to say *where two interpretations differ, and what each explains well*, is the skill.

Which fits the evidence of this section? The routes of Part 4 — goods, ideas and disease moving from Hangzhou to Venice — look much closer to Abu-Lughod’s connected pre-1350 world than to a world of separate regions. That is an interpretation, and you are allowed to make it, as long as you can point to the evidence.

Part 9 — Legacies: what the pre-modern world left us (E05)

A **legacy** is something handed down from the past that still shapes the present. The pre-modern world left plenty:

Legacies: what the pre-modern world left the world today

In the pre-modern world		Its legacy today
Limits on rulers' power: Magna Carta, 1215, and the parliaments that grew from it	→	the rule of law in modern courts, parliaments and constitutions
Universities: al-Qarawiyyin in Fez (founded 859 by Fatima al-Fihri); Bologna (1088)	→	today's universities and degrees
The numerals 0–9: invented in India, carried through the Islamic world to Europe	→	the number system the whole world now uses
Song China's inventions: gunpowder, printing, the magnetic compass	→	technologies that reshaped warfare, books and navigation worldwide
Trade practices: bills of exchange, caravanserais, organised markets	→	the banking and trade systems behind today's economy
Great pre-modern cities: Baghdad, Hangzhou, Constantinople, Timbuktu, London	→	cities that are still major centres today

A legacy is something handed down from the past that still shapes the present. Which of these can you see in your own day?

A two-column table matching six pre-modern developments to their legacies today: limits on rulers' power to the rule of law; early universities to today's universities; the numerals 0 to 9 to the world's number system; Song China's inventions to modern technology; pre-modern trade practices to modern banking and trade; and great pre-modern cities to major cities today.

Two of these deserve a closer look. **Universities** as degree-giving institutions are a pre-modern invention: al-Qarawiyyin in Fez was founded in 859 by Fatima al-Fihri, and Bologna's university dates from 1088 — both still teaching today. And **the numerals 0–9** were invented in India, carried through the Islamic world (where scholars refined them and the idea of zero), and reached Europe through trade and scholarship — the number system the whole world now uses.

Worked examples

Example 1 — Sorting the causes of a war (scaffolded)

Use the table in Part 5. Account: *In 1218 a governor of the Khwarezmian Empire seized and killed a caravan of Mongol traders and envoys at the city of Otrar. Genghis Khan then invaded; the war of 1219–1221 ended with the Khwarezmian Empire destroyed.* Sort the causes.

Working	Comment
Step 1 — List what happened: traders and envoys killed; goods seized.	Envoy = a person sent to speak for a ruler. Killing an envoy was an insult to the Khan himself.
Step 2 — Match to cause types. Seized goods and control of the Silk Roads' profits → economic.	The Silk Roads passed through both empires; their tolls and profits were worth a war.
Step 3 — Look for other types. The Khan's claim that an insult to him must be answered → about honour and the right to rule, shading into dynastic. No religious cause is visible here.	Sorting includes noticing a cause type that is <i>absent</i> , not just ones present.

Working	Comment
Step 4 — Weigh: which cause did the most work? Economic — the war decided who controlled the trade routes.	A sorted list is good; a weighed list is better.

Example 2 — Reading clause 39 like a historian (scaffolded)

Working	Comment
Step 1 — Origin: made in 1215 by King John under pressure from rebel barons.	Origin tells you whose interests a source serves first.
Step 2 — Protection: “no free man” punished except “by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land”.	The key limit: the king cannot punish by personal whim.
Step 3 — Silences: who is not a “free man”? Serfs and enslaved people sit outside the protection.	Silences are evidence. Cross-check the source against the hierarchy in Part 3.
Step 4 — Value and limit: value = a ruler told he stands under the law, in the words of the time; limit = it records the barons’ demands, not the whole society’s.	Every source is both useful and partial. Say both.

Example 3 — Building an extended response (scaffolded)

Question: *Which feature of the pre-modern world most shaped people’s daily lives? Use one named example.* The model below shows the shape your paragraph should have: claim, evidence, explanation, link back.

Model paragraph: an extended response built from claim, evidence, explanation, link

Question: Which feature of the pre-modern world most shaped people's daily lives? Use one named example.

Claim

Faith was the feature that most shaped daily life in the pre-modern world.

Evidence

In medieval Europe the Church set the calendar of work and rest, and most people attended services every week.

Explanation

The Church also kept records of births and deaths, ran schools and hospitals, and crowned kings, so its reach stretched from worship into law and rule.

Link back

Because faith shaped time, learning and power all at once, it touched more people's lives than any other feature.

Notice the shape: one clear point, named evidence (who, where, when), an explanation of how the evidence supports the point, and a final sentence that answers the question asked.

A model paragraph broken into four labelled parts — claim, evidence, explanation, link back — answering the question “Which feature of the pre-modern world most shaped people’s daily lives?” with the example of faith in medieval Europe.

Working	Comment
Claim: one clear point, one sentence.	Do not list features; choose one and say so.
Evidence: named — who, where, when.	“The Church set the calendar of work and rest” names a real, checkable fact.
Explanation: <i>how</i> the evidence supports the claim.	This is where marks live: connect the dots for the reader.
Link back: answer the exact question asked.	Mirror the question’s words so the reader sees the answer.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Look at the six features in Part 2. (a) Name the feature that put most people’s work on farms. (b) Name the feature that explains why a village smith was rare but valuable. (c) Which feature made the calendar of work and rest a religious matter in most societies?

Q2. Use the three pyramids in Part 3. (a) In each society, name the group at the top and the largest group at the base. (b) What did all three societies have *below* the free ranks? (c) Give one way the Mongol army mixed its ranks, according to *The Secret History of the Mongols*.

Q3. Use the routes diagram in Part 4. (a) Name one good that moved west on the Silk Roads and one that moved east. (b) Which two cities joined the desert routes to the other systems in the diagram? (c) Explain in one sentence how monsoon winds shaped trade on the Indian Ocean.

Q4. Sort each cause into religious, economic or dynastic (use the table in Part 5 as your key): (a) a king claims a neighbouring throne was promised to him; (b) two powers fight over a salt route; (c) a ruler calls for war to seize a city his faith holds holy.

Q5. Sort these into push and pull factors: (a) failed harvests and hunger; (b) the chance of free land; (c) raiding along the border; (d) a ruler’s order to sail and show his power; (e) heavy taxes under a harsh ruler.

Q6. Read clause 40 of Magna Carta in Part 7. (a) What two abuses of justice does it promise to end? (b) Which group forced King John to seal the charter, and why would *they* want justice kept free and prompt?

Unscaffolded

Q7. Historians debate the word “feudalism”. Explain, in two or three sentences, what the debate is about, and say whether the word should still be used.

Q8. Compare the hierarchies of medieval Europe and the Mali Empire. Give one similarity and one difference, using named groups from each pyramid.

Q9. Choose one war from the table in Part 5. Explain how two different cause types were at work in it.

Q10. Choose one journey from the diagram in Part 6. Explain its causes using at least one push factor or one pull factor, and say whether “discovery” is a fair word for it, giving a reason.

Extended response

ER1. “Contact between pre-modern societies brought as much harm as good.” Do you agree? Write a response of one to two paragraphs using at least two named examples from this section. Use the claim–evidence–explanation–link shape from Example 3.

Answers

Q1. (a) Farming-based economies — most people worked the land, and the surplus beyond each family's needs fed everyone else. (b) Little division of labour — because almost everyone farmed, specialists like smiths were a small, needed share of the population. (c) Faith at the centre — faith systems set the calendar of work, rest, fast and festival.

Q2. (a) Europe: king at the top, peasants and serfs at the base. Mongol Empire: the Khan at the top, ordinary herders and warriors at the base. Mali: the mansa at the top, farmers and herders at the base. (b) All three held people below the free ranks — enslaved people or hereditary servants, mostly taken in war. (c) The army organised soldiers in decimal units of 10, 100, 1,000 and 10,000, with commanders chosen for ability as well as birth.

Q3. (a) West: silk (or porcelain, spices, jewels). East: gold (or silver, glass, wool cloth). (b) Cairo (linked to Venice by the Mediterranean sea link) and the desert route's southern end joined to the Indian Ocean system at Aden and Mecca — goods that arrived by sea joined the desert caravans. (c) Because the monsoon winds reverse with the seasons, sailors could only cross at certain times of year, so the winds set the sailing calendar and the rhythm of trade.

Q4. (a) Dynastic — a claim about who has the right to rule. (b) Economic — war over a resource and trade route. (c) Religious — war over beliefs and a holy place.

Q5. Push: (a), (c), (e). Pull: (b), (d).

Q6. (a) Selling justice, and denying or delaying it. (b) The rebel barons. John had used justice as a way to raise money — selling verdicts and making people pay for prompt judgement — so the barons wanted the promise written down where the king could not quietly break it.

Q7. Sample: The debate is about the label, not the facts: lords, land grants, oaths and warriors on horseback were real, but many historians argue that “feudalism” packs a messy, varied reality into one neat system that never existed in that form. The word can still be used if it is treated as a shorthand with limits, not as a description of a real, single system. (Accept any answer that separates the label from the facts and takes a reasoned side.)

Q8. Sample similarity: both societies had a single ruler at the top (king / mansa) and a huge farming base at the bottom, with rank usually inherited. Sample difference: Mali's ladder included a prominent band of traders and specialists — including jeliw, the praise-singers who kept oral history — reflecting the gold-and-salt trade, while Europe's ladder gave the clergy a formal place as “those who pray”, reflecting the Church's role. (Accept other named groups correctly used.)

Q9. Sample (First Crusade): religious — Pope Urban II called the war at Clermont in 1095 as a holy war to take Jerusalem, and faith drew people in; economic — land and loot kept armies in the east, and some who joined sought land and wealth they lacked at home. (For the Mongol–Khwarezmian war: economic control of Silk Road profits plus the dynastic/honour cause of answering an insult to the Khan. For 1066: dynastic — a claim to the throne — with the economic pull of England's land and wealth behind it.)

Q10. Sample (Norse to Vinland): pull factors — farmland for a growing population and a warmer North Atlantic that made crossings possible. “Discovery” is not a fair word from the point of view of the people already living there: the land was new only to the Norse, so the word carries a European perspective and hides the people already at home. (Accept other journeys with factors correctly sorted and a reasoned view on “discovery”.)

ER1. Points a strong response may use: good — trade spread goods, ideas, faiths, inventions (paper, printing, the numerals 0–9) and learning, and cities such as Baghdad and Timbuktu grew rich where routes met; harm — the same routes carried the Black Death to Europe in 1347, and contact brought conquest (the Mongol wars, the Crusades) to the people on the receiving end. A strong response takes a position, names at least two examples with who/where/when, explains how each supports the position, and links back to the question.

Sources for this section

- **Magna Carta (1215)**, clauses 39–40, our rendering from the Latin; sealing at Runnymede on 15 June 1215 and the four surviving 1215 copies (British Library, including Cotton Augustus II.106; Lincoln Castle; Salisbury Cathedral) — checked against the Wikipedia article “Magna Carta”, retrieved 25 August 2026.

- **Adalbero of Laon**, *Carmen ad Rotbertum regem* (c. 1025), for the three orders of those who pray, fight and work.
- *The Secret History of the Mongols* (c. 1240), for the decimal units of the Mongol army.
- **al-Umari** (c. 1337) and **Ibn Battuta** (1355), Arabic-language accounts of the Mali Empire and Mansa Musa's hajj.
- **Janet Abu-Lughod**, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (1989), and **Immanuel Wallerstein**, *The Modern World-System* (1974), for the two interpretations in Part 8.
- **UNESCO World Heritage listings** for L'Anse aux Meadows (Norse site, c. 1000 CE) and the Medina of Fez (including al-Qarawiyyin, founded 859 by Fatima al-Fihri) — retrieved 25 August 2026.
- Standard reference dating for the events on the timeline (Hijra 622; Baghdad 762; Charlemagne 800; Song 960; Hastings 1066; Clermont 1095; Otrar 1218–1219; Zheng He 1405–1433; Constantinople 1453; Luther 1517) — checked against the Wikipedia articles for each event, retrieved 25 August 2026.