In the course of human evolution, at a certain point in time, the idea of living in a group with mutual understanding and dependency became a very useful and practical lifestyle. From such small isolated groups, communities were formed. Then came the societies which in due time became a civilization. How the human mentality and psychology led to this huge change is still a popular topic among the historians and anthropologist, and a major discussion for another day. For now, let’s talk about some of the oldest civilizations to have ever existed in the world. We are talking about the civilizations that we know, as fact, existed for real, unlike the ones that are shrouded by myths and beliefs (Atlantis, Lemuria, and Rama civilizations to name a few). To correctly map the oldest of the civilizations in a chronological order, it becomes necessary to go the very cradle of civilization. Having said that, here is a list of top 10 oldest civilizations to ever exist in the world, starting with the most recent one first.

Contents

10. The Incas Civilization
9. The Aztecs Civilization
8. The Roman Civilization
7. The Persian civilization
6. Ancient Greek Civilization
5. Chinese Civilization
4. Mayan Civilization
3. Ancient Egyptian civilization
2. Indus Valley Civilization
1. Mesopotamian Civilization

10. Civilization Name: Incas Civilization

Period: 1438 A.D – 1532 A.D

Originated Location: Present day Peru
Current Location: Ecuador, Peru and Chile

Major Highlights: largest Empire in South America in the Pre-Columbian era

The Incas Civilization

The Incas was the largest Empire in South America in the Pre-Columbian era. This civilization flourished in the areas of present-day Ecuador, Peru, and Chile and had its administrative, military and political center located at Cusco which lies in modern-day Peru. The Incas had their societies pretty well established, and the empire was in a rapid bloom since it’s beginning.

The Incas were devout followers of the Sun God Inti. They had a king who was referred to as “Sapa Inca” meaning the child of the Sun. The first Inca emperor Pachacuti transformed it from a modest village into a great city laid out in the shape of a puma.

He went to expand the tradition of ancestor worship. When the king died, his son would get all the power, but all his wealth would be distributed among his other relatives, who would in return preserve his mummy and sustain his political influence. This significantly led to a sudden rise in power of the Incas. The Incas went on to become great builders and went on to build fortresses and sites like Machu Picchu and the city of Cusco that still stand to this day.

9. The Aztecs Civilization

Civilization Name: Aztecs Civilization

Period: 1345 A.D – 1521 A.D

Originated Location: South-central region of pre-Columbian Mexico

Current Location: Mexican

Major Highlights: Nahuatl became the major language

The Aztecs Civilization - oldest civilization in the world

The Aztecs came upon the scene pretty much around the time when the Incas were appearing as the powerful contenders in North America. Around the 1200s and early 1300s, the people in present-day Mexico used to live in three big rival cities – Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan. Around 1325, these rivals created an alliance and thus the new state was brought under the rule of the Valley of Mexico. Back then, the people preferred the name Mexico than to Aztecs. The rise of the Aztecs was within a century of the fall of another influential civilization in Mexico and Central America – the Mayans.

The city of Tenochtitlan was the military power, which spearheaded the conquest of new territory. But the Aztec emperor didn’t rule every city, the state directly. Local governments would remain in place but was forced to pay varying amounts of tribute to the Triple Alliance. In the early 1500s, the Aztec
civilization was indeed at the height of its power. But then, the Spanish arrived with their expansion plans.

This eventually led to a huge battle between the Incas and the alliance of Spanish conquistadors and the native allies they had assembled led by the famous (or rather infamous) Hernan Cortes in 1521. A defeat in this decisive battle eventually led to the fall of the once famous Aztec empire.

8. The Roman Civilization

Civilization Name: Roman Civilization

Period: 550 BC – 465 B.C

Originated Location: Village of the Latini

Current Location: Rome

Major Highlights: Most powerful Ancient Civilization

Roman civilization

The Roman Civilization came into the picture around the 6th century BC. Even the story behind the foundation of the ancient Rome is something of a legend, it’s full of myths. But at the height of its power, the Romans ruled over the biggest chunk of land in that era – all the present day counties surrounding the modern day Mediterranean sea were a part of ancient Rome.

Early Rome was governed by kings, but after only seven of them had ruled, the Romans took power over their own city and ruled themselves. They then instead had a council known as the ‘senate’ which ruled over them. From this point on one speaks of the ‘Roman Republic’.

Rome also saw the rise and fall of some of the greatest emperors in human civilization, like Julius Caesar, Trajan, and Augustus. But eventually, the empire of Rome became so vast that it simply was not possible to bring it within a single rule. The Roman empire, in the end, was overrun by millions of barbarians from the north and east of Europe.

7. The Persian civilization

Civilization Name: Persian Civilization

Period: 550 BC – 465 B.C

Originated Location: Egypt in the west to Turkey in the north, and through Mesopotamia to the Indus River in the east.

Current Location: Modern Day Iran

Major Highlights: Concept of Democracy and Senate, AnSenateOlympics
The Persian civilization

There was a time when the ancient Persian civilization was, in fact, the most powerful empire in the world. Though only in power for a little over 200 years, the Persians conquered lands that covered over 2 million square miles. From the southern portions of Egypt to parts of Greece and then east to parts of India, the Persian Empire was known for its military strength and wise rulers. Now before you even start to contemplate the fact that they created such a vast empire just within a period of 200 years, before 550 BC, Persian (or Persis as it was called back then) used to be divided into factions among a number of leaders.

But then King Cyrus II, who later on came to be known as Cyrus the great, came into power and unified the entire Persian Kingdom. Then he went on to conquer ancient Babylon. In fact, his conquest was so rapid that by the end of 533 BC, he had already invaded India, far in the east. And even when Cyrus passed away, his bloodline continued the ruthless expansion and even fought in the now legendary battle with the brave Spartans. At its prime, ancient Persia ruled all over central Asia, much of Europe and Egypt. But it all changed when the legendary soldier of Macedon, Alexander the great, brought the whole Persian Empire down to its knees and effectively ended the civilization in 530 BC.

6. Ancient Greek Civilization

Civilization Name: Greek Civilization

Period: 2700 BC – 1500 BC

Originated Location: Italy, Sicily, North Africa and as far west as France

Current Location: Greece

Major Highlights: Concept of Democracy and Senate, AnSenateOlympics

Ancient Greece civilization

The ancient Greeks may not have been the oldest civilization, but they are doubtlessly one of the most influential civilizations to have ever existed in the world. Even though the rise of ancient Greece came from the Cycladic and Minoan civilization (2700 BC – 1500 BC), there is evidence of burials found in the Franchthi Cave in Argolid, Greece that dates back to around 7250 BC. The history of this civilization is scattered over such a huge period of time that historians had to divide it over different periods, the most popular of them being the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic period.

These periods also saw a number of ancient Greeks come into the limelight – many of them changed the ways of the world forever. Many of them are still talking about this to this day.

The Greeks created the ancient Olympics, the concept of democracy and a senate. They created the base for modern geometry, biology, physics, and whatnot. Pythagoras, Archimedes, Socrates, Euclid, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the great... the history books are full of such names whose inventions, theories, beliefs, and heroics have had a significant influence on subsequent civilizations.
5. Chinese Civilization

Civilization Name: Chinese Civilization

Period: 1600 BCE-1046 BCE

Originated Location: Yellow River and Yangtze region.

Current Location: Country of China

Major Highlights: Invention of Paper and Silk

Ancient China – also known as Han China, comes in at number 5 and has doubtlessly one of the most diverse histories. In fact, if you consider all the dynasties from the very first to the very last that ever ruled in China, you get a significantly huge period of time that needs to be covered concisely.

The Yellow river civilization is said to be the cradle of the entire Chinese civilization as this is where the earliest dynasties were based. It was around 2700 BC that the legendary Yellow Emperor began his rule, a point in time that later led to the birth of many dynasties that went on to rule mainland China.

In 2070 BC, the Xia dynasty became the first to rule the entire China as described in ancient historical chronicles. From then on, there came a number of dynasties that held control over China in different periods of time until the end of Qing dynasty in 1912 AD with the Xinhai revolution. And thus ended more than a four millennia history of ancient Chinese civilization that fascinates historians and commoners alike to this day. But it did not happen before they gave the world some of the most useful inventions and products such as gunpowder, paper, printing, compass, alcohol, cannons and many more.

4. Mayan Civilization

Civilization Name: Mayan Civilization

Period: 2600 BC-900 A.D

Originated Location: Around present day Yucatan

Current Location: Yucatan, Quintana Roo, Campeche, Tabasco, and Chiapas in Mexico and southward through Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador and Honduras

Major Highlights: Complex understanding of Astronomy

Mayan civilization 2600 BC

The ancient Mayan civilization flourished in Central America from about 2600 BC and has been much talked about in recent times because of the timeline of the calendar they had created. Once the civilization was established, it went on to prosper and become one of the most sophisticated civilizations
with a booming population of about 19 million at its peak. By 700 BC, the Mayans had already devised their own way of writing which they used to create their own solar calendars carved in stone. According to them, the world was created on August 11, 3114 BC, which is the date from which their calendar counts. And the supposed end was on December 21, 2012.

The ancient Mayans were culturally richer when compared to many of the contemporary civilizations. The Mayans and Aztecs both built pyramids, many of which are larger than those in Egypt. But their sudden decline and an abrupt end had long been one of ancient history’s most intriguing mysteries: Why did the Maya, a remarkably sophisticated civilization made up of more than 19 million people, suddenly collapse sometime during the 8th or 9th centuries? Although the Mayan people never entirely disappeared—their descendants still live across Central America.

3. Ancient Egyptian civilization

Civilization Name: Egypt

Period: 3100-2686

Originated Location: Bank of the Nile River

Current Location: Egypt

Major Highlights: Construction of Pyramid

Ancient Egyptian civilization

Ancient Egypt is one of the oldest and culturally richest civilizations in this list. The ancient Egyptians are known for their prodigious culture, the ever standing pyramids and the sphinx, the Pharaohs and the once a majestic civilization that resided by the banks of the river Nile.

The civilization coalesced around 3150 BC (according to conventional Egyptian chronology) with the political unification of Upper and Lower Egypt under the first Pharaoh. But this could not have been possible had there not been early settlers around the Nile valley in early 3500 BC.

The history of ancient Egypt occurred in a series of stable Kingdoms, separated by periods of relative instability known as Intermediate Periods: the Old Kingdom of the Early Bronze Age, the Middle Kingdom of the Middle Bronze Age and the New Kingdom of the Late Bronze Age.

Ancient Egypt gave us the ever standing pyramids, the mummies that preserve the ancient Pharaohs to this day, the first of the solar calendars, Hieroglyphics and much more. Ancient Egypt reached its pinnacle toward the New Kingdom, where Pharaohs like Rameses the Great ruled with such authority that another contemporary civilization, the Nubians, also came under Egyptian rule.
2. Indus Valley Civilization

Civilization Name: Indus Valley Civilization

Period: 3300 BC -1900 BC

Originated Location: Around the basins of the Indus River

Current Location: Northeast Afghanistan to Pakistan and northwest India

Major Highlights: One of the most widespread civilization, covering 1.25 km

Indus Valley Civilization

One of the oldest civilizations in this list, the Indus valley civilization lies at the very cradle of subsequent civilization that arose in the region of the Indus valley. This civilization flourished in areas extending from what today is northeast Afghanistan to Pakistan and northwest India. Along with Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, it was one of three early civilizations of the Old World, and of the three the most widespread, covering an area of 1.25 million km.

Entire populations of people were settled around the basins of the Indus River, one of the major rivers in Asia, and another river named Ghaggar-Hakra which once used to course through northeast India and eastern Pakistan.

Also known as the Harappan civilization and the Mohenjo-Daro civilization – named after the excavation sites where the remains of the civilization were found, the peak phase of this civilization is said to have lasted from 2600 BC to around 1900 BC. A sophisticated and technologically advanced urban culture is evident in the Indus Valley Civilization making them the first urban centers in the region.

The people of the Indus Civilization achieved great accuracy in measuring length, mass, and time. And based on the artifacts found in excavations, it is evident the culture was rather rich in arts and crafts.

1. Mesopotamian Civilization

Civilization Name: Mesopotamia

Period: 3500 BC -500 BC

Originated Location: northeast by the Zagros Mountains, southeast by the Arabian Plateau

Current Location: Iraq, Syria, and Turkey

Meaning: land between rivers [Ancient Greek]

Major Highlights: First civilization in the world

Mesopotamian Civilization- oldest civilization
And here it is, the first civilization to have ever emerged on the face of planet earth since the evolution of humans. The origin of Mesopotamia dates back so far back in the, there is no known evidence of any other civilized society before them. The timeline of ancient Mesopotamia is usually held to be around 3300 BC – 750 BC. Mesopotamia is generally credited with being the first place where civilized societies truly began to take shape.

It was somewhere around 8000 BC that people found the concept of agriculture and slowly started to domesticate animals for both the purpose of food as well as to assist in agriculture.

People had already been creating art much before all that. But all this was part of human culture, not a human civilization. And then the Mesopotamians rose, refining, adding and formalizing all these systems, combining them to form the first civilization. They prospered in the regions of modern-day Iraq – then known as Babylonia, Sumer and Assyria highlands.