

# Early Peoples

## *The Neolithic Revolution*



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### Thematic Icons



Economics



Geography



Historical concepts



Government

### Icons



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)

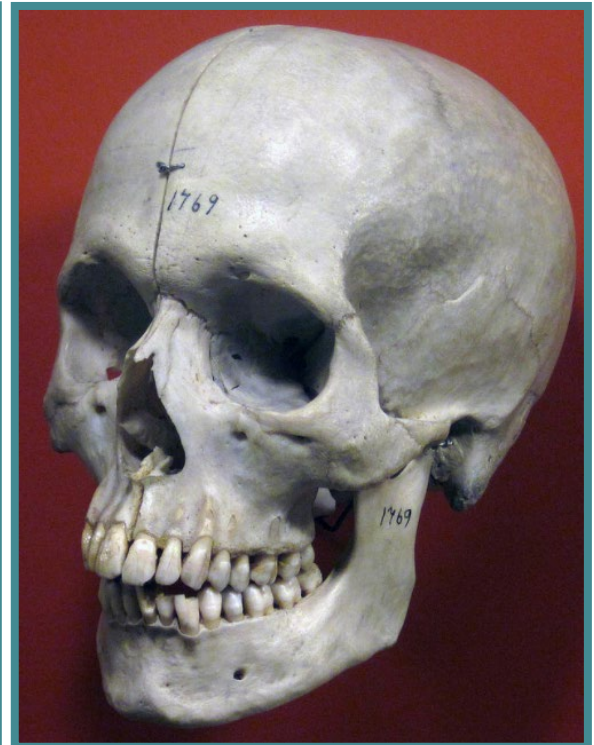
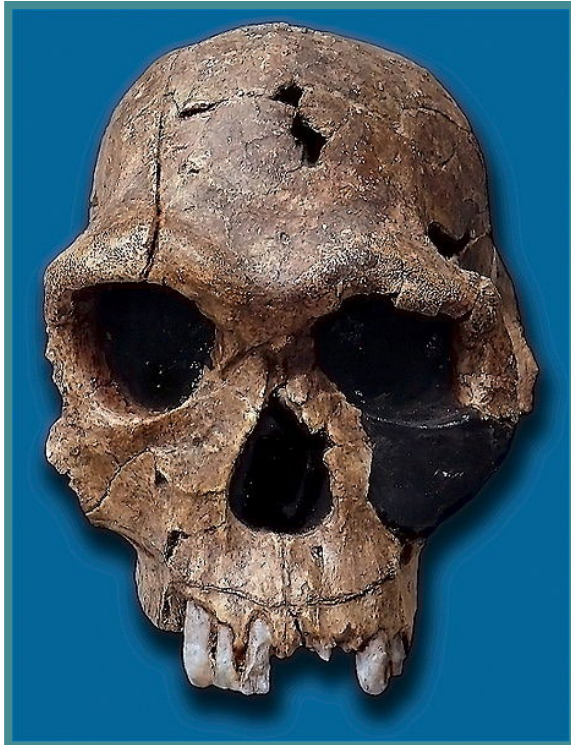


Teacher notes included in the Notes page

For more instructions, see the *User Guide*.



The first humans originated in East Africa and developed in hominid groups.



*Homo habilis* → *Homo erectus* → *Homo sapiens*



These tables show the meaning behind three major homidic group names. *Homo sapiens* is the scientific name for modern humans.

## *Homo habilis*

*homo* = human

*habilis* = handy,  
skilled

Appeared 2.4  
million years ago

## *Homo erectus*

*homo* = human

*erectus* = upright

Appeared 1.5  
million years ago

## *Homo sapiens*

*homo* = human

*sapiens* = wise

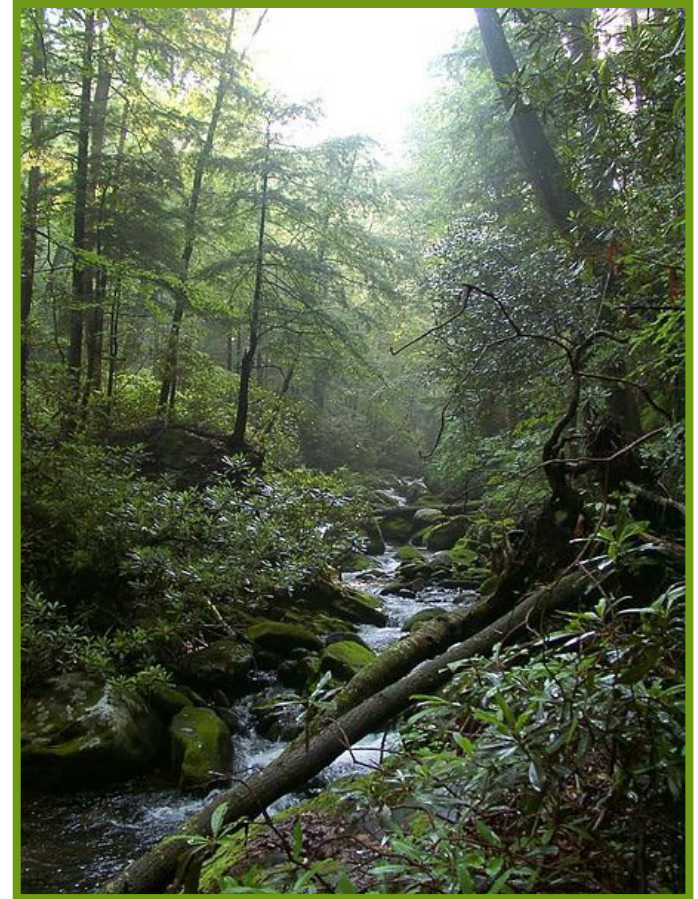
Appeared about  
200,000 years ago



The first humans were **hunter-gatherers**.

Their food supply depended on hunting animals and collecting food from plants (**foraging**).

This means they had to rely on their environment for survival. Food shortages caused by drought or flooding could be deadly.



What conditions do you think were needed to make an environment habitable?



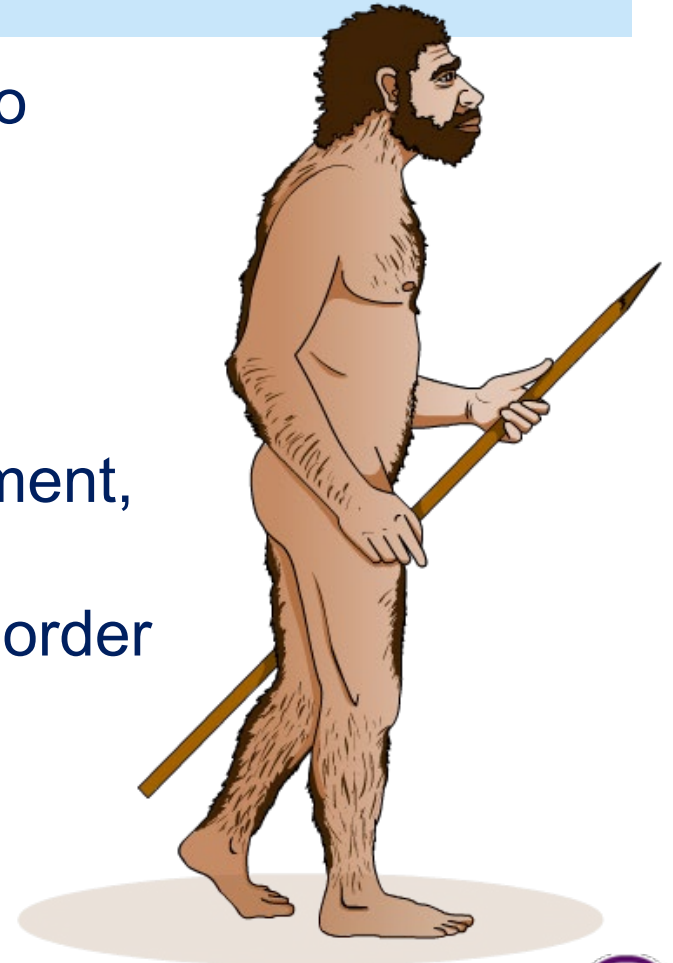
**Hunter-gatherers** would often live in small communities of 25–70 people.

Men collected food by forming groups to hunt animals.

Women gathered plants and berries as another source of food.

Their survival relied upon their environment, so people who lived in areas lacking in animals and vegetation had to move in order to find a more stable food source.

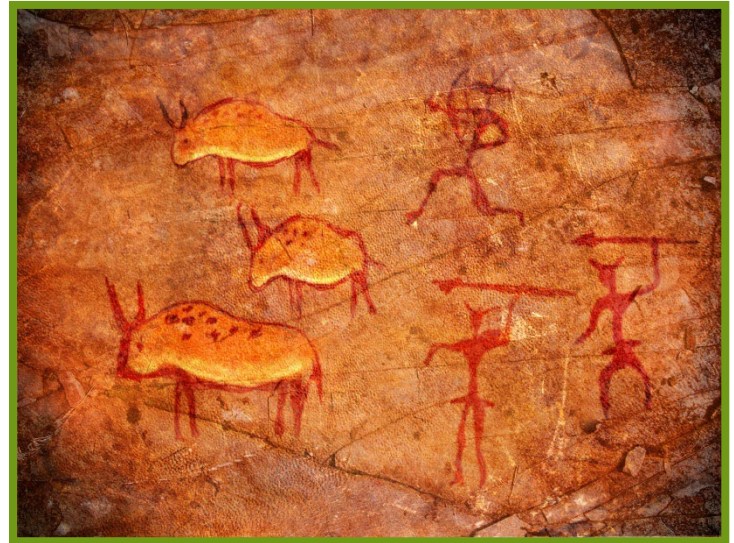
Consequently, hunter-gatherers can be referred to as **nomadic** groups.



Advancements in technology increased the survival of **hunter-gatherers**.

They invented tools such as digging sticks that allowed plants to be dug from the roots and spears that enabled people to hunt from a safer distance.

The development of tools dramatically changed the way early humans interacted with their environment.



What can the use of tools tell us about a society?

Initially, the lives of early humans revolved around surviving their environments, from finding enough food sources to being able to shelter from extreme weather conditions.

About 2.6 million–10,000 years ago, the world experienced periods of very low temperature called the **Ice Ages**. These resulted in a harsh environment of snow and ice.

Homidic groups such as *homo erectus* had to live in caves or build temporary shelters in order to survive. If an environment did not provide conditions suitable for living, people were forced to move to a new area.

**How do you think the relationship between humans and the environment changed during this period?**





With continued technological development, humans began to gain some control over their environment.

Bows and arrows allowed them to hunt animals from a distance, which proved more successful than using spears.

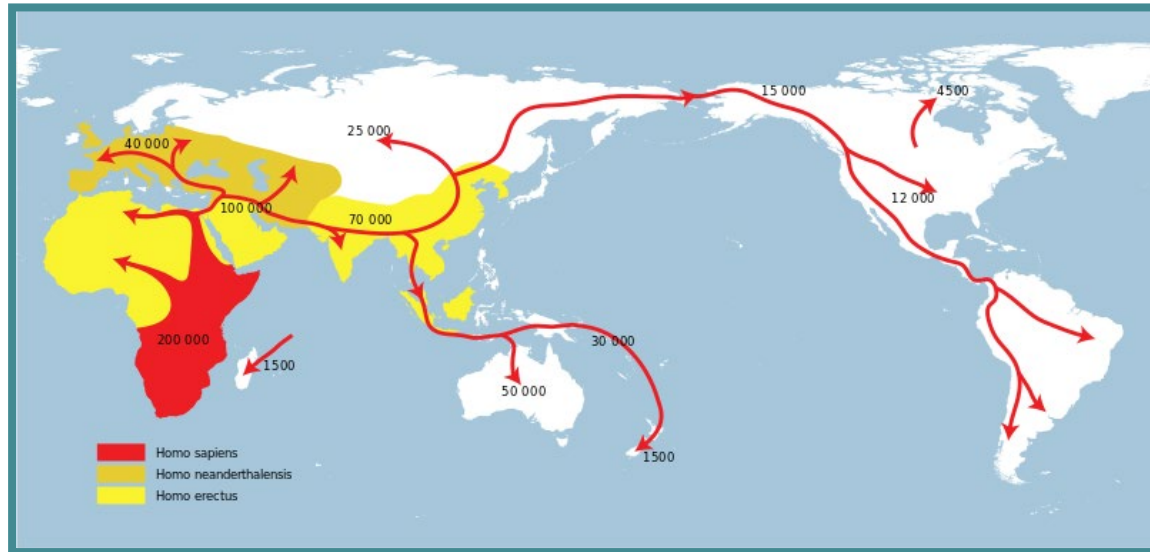


Fire greatly improved survival. It provided warmth, enabled them to forge better tools, and allowed them to cook meat. Fire could also be used to scare off dangerous animals.

These advancements led to the creation of human **settlements**, which altered the previous trend of **migration**.

**What effect could human settlements have on the environment?**

The Out of Africa theory proposes that modern humans originated in East Africa 200,000 years ago and **migrated** to other parts of the world in two waves of African **dispersal**.



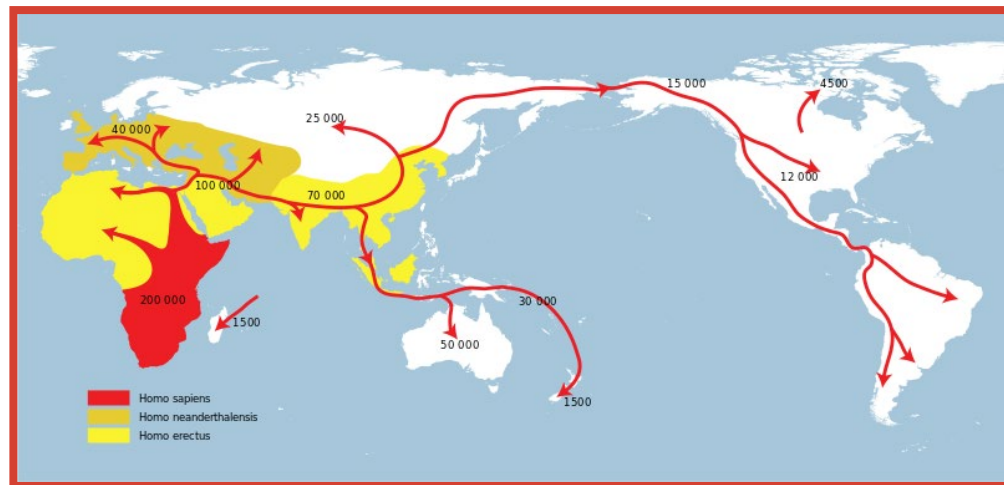
Humans originally migrated for survival, with *homo erectus* moving for new food sources or to avoid the ice age winters.



The first wave of human dispersal from Africa was about 130,000–115,000 years ago through North Africa.

Many scientists believe *homo erectus* eventually died out. The different migration paths for *homo erectus* and *homo sapiens* are illustrated in the image below.

The second wave was 70,000–80,000 years ago via the southern coastline of Asia, which led to the **colonization** of Australia and Europe by *homo sapiens*.





# How did humans migrate?



Migration was easier during ice ages. At the end of an ice age, land masses that had been flattened under the weight of glaciers began to rise as temperatures rose and ice melted. This process is called **post-glacial rebound**.

Consequently **land bridges**, which are now covered by water, were exposed. Humans used land bridges, such as the **Bering** land bridge, to migrate to new lands.

These maps show how the Bering land bridge connected Chukotka, Asia and Alaska before sea levels rose.



Not all scientists believe the Out of Africa theory. One alternative is the **multiregional origin hypothesis**.

This hypothesis proposes that *homo sapiens* developed from *homo erectus* in a continuous world population rather than two dispersals of different hominid groups.

This would mean that *homo sapiens* originated separately in many different parts of the world.

However, this theory has been largely disproved. Scientists, who collected global **archeological** and **genetic** evidence, found that connections to non-African human **lineage** were up to 50,000–60,000 years old. This suggests that people most likely migrated out of Africa as *homo sapiens*.





Humans gradually discovered that the scattering of seeds led to crops growing in their place.

This led to humans purposefully growing crops as a food source by controlling the environment for their own needs. This is also referred to as the **domestication** of plants.

This discovery increased the chances of survival in an environment and encouraged people to stay in one place, creating greater human settlements.

The start of humans using **agriculture** to create food sources is called the **Neolithic revolution**.

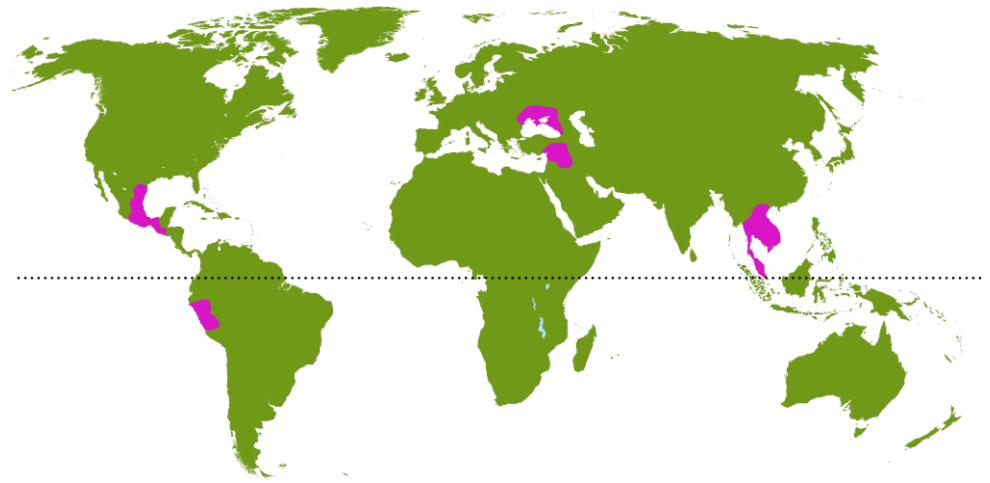
**What impacts do you think the Neolithic revolution had on settlements?**



There is no absolute reason for the beginning of the **Neolithic revolution**.

In addition to the realization that seed scattering led to crop growth, global temperatures rose, which provided longer growing seasons. This made the food source more stable.

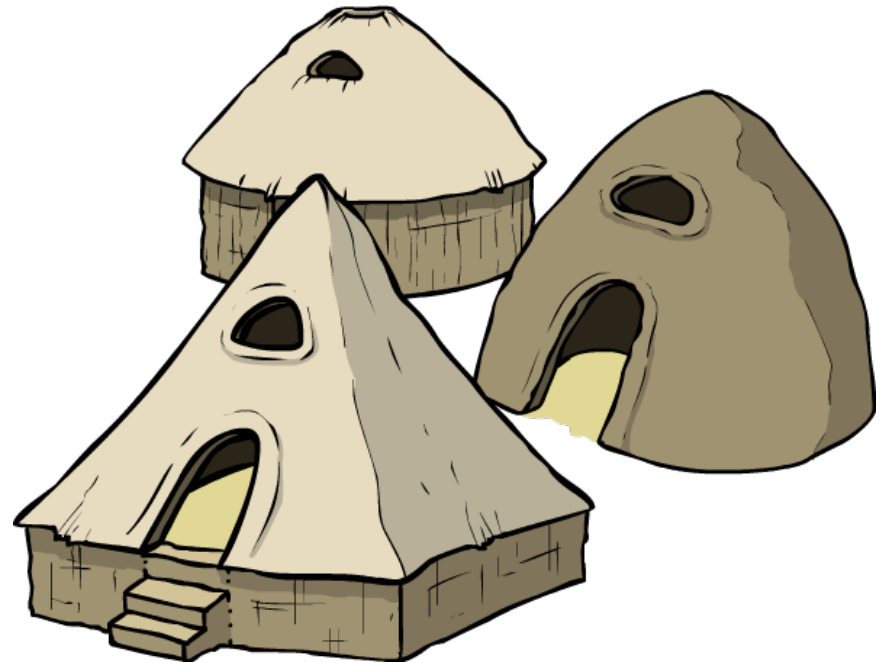
Agriculture developed independently in South America, Asia, Mesopotamia and Europe.



Why do you think the advent of agriculture is considered a huge turning point for humanity?

The settlements created by the **Neolithic revolution** gradually developed into agricultural villages due to the increase in populations.

The slash and burn technique was commonly used to create areas for specific crop growth. This method involved cutting down trees and other vegetation, then burning them to clear land.

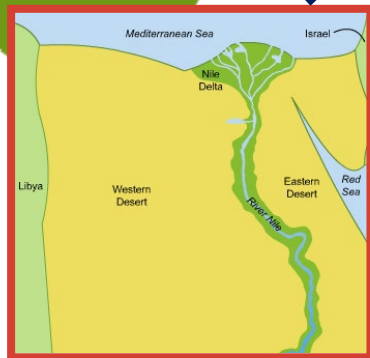


Where do you think would be a good location for an agricultural village? Why?



# The earliest river civilizations

Some of the earliest examples of river civilizations are in Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Indus Valley and China.



The agricultural villages created by the Neolithic revolution were located in areas suitable for crop growth. Lands next to rivers provided a water source and the soil was kept **fertile** from the silt brought in by flooding.

However, the river plain location meant that crops could be destroyed by excessive flooding in warmer seasons.

This led to the development of **irrigation** systems.

In 5,000 BC, Ancient Egyptians built canals to drain the River Nile when its water levels increased.



The growth of crops on a large scale led to **surpluses**.

With more than enough food to feed a growing population, some people were left with the time to develop and hone other skills, such as tool making, art and building some more sophisticated dwellings.

Over time, river settlements grew into towns and cities. Customs and traditions were established, and trade emerged.

This image shows the remains of the city, Mohenjo-daro, built by people of the Indus Valley civilization.





Early civilizations were **traditional economies**.

A traditional economy consisted of long-established customs and traditions. It relied on agriculture and hunting, and traded in produce rather than money. Farmers might exchange their excess grain for cloth or tools.

Communities that had a surplus of produce soon discovered the benefits of long-distance trade. This produced wealthy cities such as Sumer, in Mesopotamia.

**How could technological advancements have affected trade in early civilizations?**





To maintain order and control, leaders emerged to try and ensure that trade systems were efficient and fair.

One of the earliest forms of government developed in Sumer, Mesopotamia, during the Uruk period. Priests and elders ran the government from temples, cementing a link between religion and power.

The **Warka vase** shows the Sumerian goddess Inanna receiving an offering of grain. It illustrates the important link between religion and agriculture.



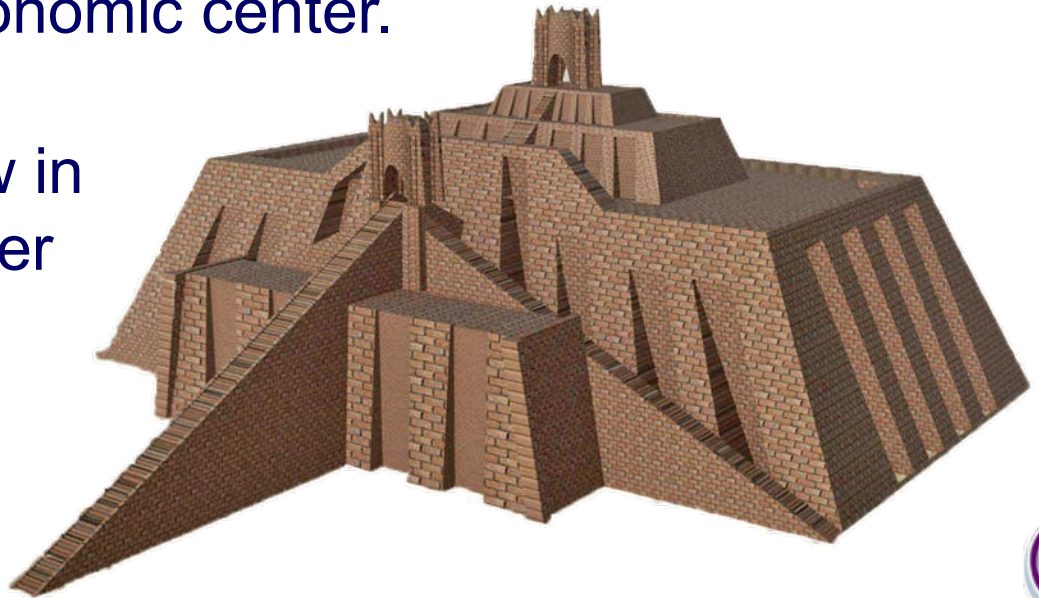
Why were items like this vase made?



Seeking an explanation for nature and the elements, early people turned to the divine. They worshipped gods and goddesses to ask for rain or a successful harvest.

Beliefs and rituals became lasting tradition. Religion was formalized and priests managed religious and governmental issues in purpose built temples. In Sumer, Mesopotamia, the temple was also an economic center.

Temples gradually grew in size in Sumer. The larger temples were called **ziggurats**.





The **Code of Hammurabi** was an early legal system used in Babylon, Mesopotamia.

Developed in 1754 BC under the reign of Hammurabi, the code consisted of laws that were then inscribed on 7.4 ft steles and stone tablets.

The 282 laws covered economic issues such as trade and wages, family issues such as marriage and divorce as well as penalties for criminal activities.

Punishments were based on social status – being a slave or a free person. For example, noblemen would receive lesser punishments for injuring slaves than another in their class.

**Can you think of any similarities between this and the laws of other historical empires?**



Between 1,000 BC to 500 AD the Bantu population of Western Africa **migrated** to eastern, central and southern Africa. The reasons for this migration have been debated.

They moved because they could not survive in their environment.

Increases in population meant they had to find new farming land.

They wanted to exploit new areas and materials to farm.

Can you think of any other reasons?



Bantu migration left several impacts on Sub-Saharan Africa.

One impact was a change in language. The languages of Sub-Saharan Africa are very similar to those of West Africa, where the Bantu peoples migrated from.

Another impact was bringing new technology and ideas to Sub-Saharan Africa. Bantu migration brought iron and agriculture to areas still based on a hunter-gatherer society. Some historians also argue that the migration helped develop religion, government and art.

Can you think of any negative impacts of civilizations migrating?



# Keywords

