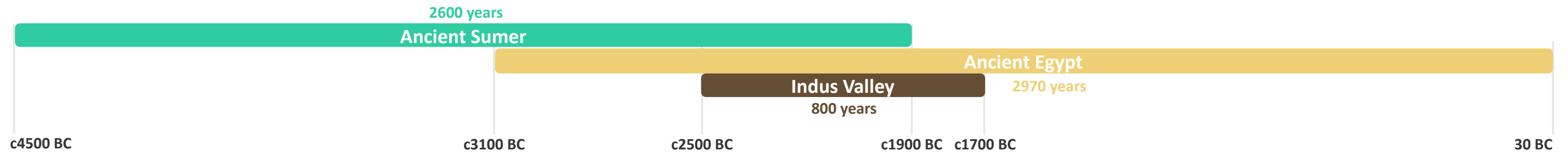


Ancient Civilisations

A civilisation is a developed society. Civilisations share common features, including cities, inventions, language, writing, hierarchy, leadership, infrastructure, arts and culture, trade and religion. Ancient civilisations first appeared over 6000 years ago in, or near, a semicircular area of land in the Middle East known as the Fertile Crescent. The climate, availability of water and variety of plants in the Fertile Crescent meant that nomadic hunter-gatherers could settle in one place and begin to farm for the first time.



Ancient Sumer



Ancient Sumer was the very first civilisation. It originated between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers in modern Iraq. Being near a river was important for early civilisations, providing water for drinking and fertile soil for agriculture. The ancient Sumerian civilisation began c4500 BC and lasted for around 2600 years.

Cities

After nomadic people settled down as farmers instead of hunter-gatherers, small villages grew into cities. Public buildings and temples were built, surrounded by a protective wall. Cities, such as Uruk and Ur, had ports on the river for trade and canals for irrigation. The ancient Sumerians used mud bricks to build homes and huge ziggurats.



Rulers

A series of city states grew up in ancient Sumer. The city states were often at war with each other. A king or queen ruled each city and lived in a palace. King Lugalzaggisi united the city states of ancient Sumer under one ruler, but then King Sargon, of the neighbouring kingdom of Akkad, conquered ancient Sumer. He forced everybody to speak the same language and crushed rebellions. Sumer became part of the Akkadian empire.

Inventions

The ancient Sumerians invented many things to make work easier and life more comfortable. They developed a type of writing, called cuneiform, and a numbering system to communicate and keep records. The ancient Sumerians also invented the wheel, the plough, astronomy, irrigation and beer.

Food and farming

The ancient Sumerians grew their food in the fertile soil next to the rivers. Plenty of food meant that the population grew and there were crops to trade. The plough made farming easier and allowed people time to develop new skills.



Ancient Egypt



The ancient Egyptian civilisation began on the banks of the Nile, in the Fertile Crescent. Egypt was initially split into Upper Egypt in the south and Lower Egypt in the north. It became one kingdom c3150 BC. The civilisation lasted for around 2970 years.

Cities

The ancient Egyptians built cities on the fertile banks of the Nile, with easy access to water for crops and drinking. Most cities had a surrounding wall and two entrances. A main road ran through the centre of the city. Smaller, narrower streets connected to the main road. People lived in mudbrick houses, which were often two storeys high, with an open courtyard.



Rulers

Pharaohs ruled over ancient Egypt with absolute power. The ancient Egyptians believed that the pharaoh was the earthly representative of the gods. The most well known pharaoh is Tutankhamun. His tomb was discovered in the Valley of the Kings by Howard Carter in 1922. The vast number of priceless artefacts found buried with the pharaoh provided a lot of information about life in ancient Egypt.

Inventions

The ancient Egyptians improved earlier innovations and invented many useful items to make life easier. They created clocks and calendars for telling the time. They made paper from the papyrus plants to record information. To help move water for their crops, they invented a *shaduf*, which used a lever mechanism to move a heavy bucket of water from a low to higher level.

Food and farming



The ancient Egyptians grew crops in the fertile soil next to the Nile. The most important crops were wheat and barley, which they used to make bread, porridge and beer. They also grew vegetables, fruits and flax to make into linen. Agriculture was essential to the ancient Egyptian economy. It provided food for the people, with enough left over to store for years of drought.

Indus Valley



The Indus Valley civilisation developed next to the Indus River in modern Pakistan and north-west India. The river provided the water needed for crops, drinking and transport. Historians know much less about the Indus Valley civilisation than those of ancient Sumer and ancient Egypt due to a lack of evidence. The civilisation began c2500 BC and lasted around 800 years.

Cities

The two largest cities that we know about are Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. Excavations have shown that both cities were well planned. Each city had a citadel, marketplace, granary, workshops and a sophisticated sewerage and drainage system. The houses were built from mud bricks and often had toilets and baths inside. Large buildings have been excavated, such as the Great Bath in Mohenjo-daro.

Rulers

Historians do not know how the Indus Valley civilisation was ruled. It is possible that there were kings or priests, or perhaps each city had a ruling council. During the excavations, archaeologists did not uncover any palaces or royal tombs.

Inventions

The people of the Indus Valley made many new inventions. Their impressive sanitation system included flushing toilets and wastewater pipes. They were the first to use a standardised system of weights and measures. They also invented dice so that they could play games.

Food and farming

Farming was very important in the Indus Valley. The fertile floodplains beside the Indus River meant that they grew more than enough food to feed the population. Crops, such as wheat, barley, peas and lentils, were grown and used for bread and porridge.

Similarities and differences

The ancient Sumerians, ancient Egyptians and Indus Valley civilisation all developed next to rivers, which they used to provide water, transport and irrigation systems. They all made good use of the fertile land for growing crops. Each civilisation invented new things to advance their society. It is likely that these civilisations shared similarities because they coexisted for a period of time and were connected by trade. However, there were differences. Kings ruled individual city states in ancient Sumer, whereas pharaohs ruled all of ancient Egypt. Also, the Indus Valley civilisation planned their cities, whereas the cities of ancient Sumer and ancient Egypt grew and changed over time.

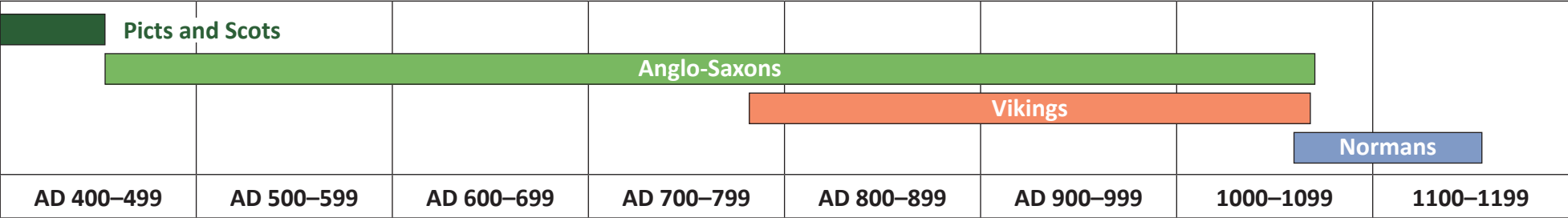
Glossary

civilisation	The developed culture and way of life of a society.
Fertile Crescent	The semicircular area of land where the first ancient civilisations began.
irrigation	The digging of channels to allow water to flow through a field to water crops.
nomadic	A lifestyle involving moving from place to place.
ziggurat	A large pyramid made from mud bricks, with a temple on top.

Invasion

After the Romans

After the Romans left Britannia in AD 410, many towns fell into disrepair and the country became vulnerable to attack. This marked the beginning of a period of invasions from different groups: Picts and Scots from Scotland and Ireland; Anglo-Saxons from Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark; Vikings from Scandinavia and Normans from France. This time in history is called the early Middle Ages.



Timeline showing the periods of invasion and settlement in Britain from AD 410–1199

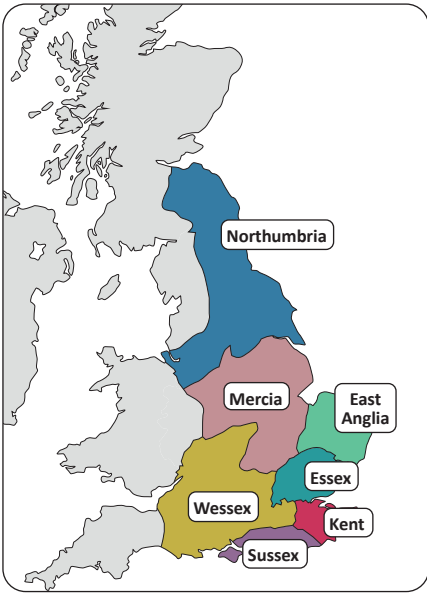
Anglo-Saxons

Invasion

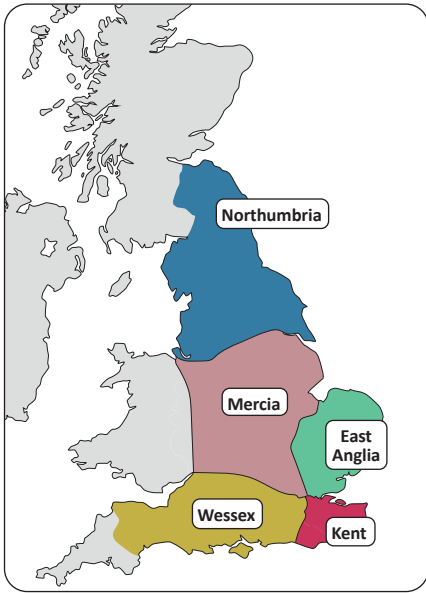
The Picts and Scots tried to invade England after AD 410, because the Britons were undefended. In AD 449, a British leader, Vortigern, asked Hengist and Horsa, two Jutes, to come to England to help the Britons. However, the Jutes realised that the land in England was good for farming, so they, along with the Angles and Saxons, invaded England.

Settlement

The Anglo-Saxons invaded the east and south coasts of England and pushed the Celtic Britons west. They split England into seven kingdoms, which became known as the heptarchy. The rulers of these kingdoms fought each other for land and power. By AD 800, there were five main kingdoms: East Anglia, Kent, Mercia, Northumbria and Wessex. Celtic Britons still lived in Wales, Cornwall, Scotland and Ireland.



The heptarchy



The five English kingdoms cAD 800

Christianity

Christianity declined in England after the Romans left, so Irish and Roman Christians were sent to Britain to reestablish Christianity. Monks like St Columba, St Aiden and St Augustine converted the Anglo-Saxon kings, and then their people, to Christianity. They also established churches and monasteries.

Monasteries

Monasteries were significant in Anglo-Saxon England because they spread Christianity, promoted reading and writing and provided help for the poor. Monasteries were usually built in isolated places and were rich with money and precious objects.



Image from: Getty Images/Heritage Images

Everyday life

Anglo-Saxon society had a hierarchy, with a king at the top. Landowners, called thegns, were below the king and peasant farmers worked on the thegn’s land. Slaves were at the bottom of the hierarchy. Most Anglo-Saxons were farmers or craftspeople. They lived in homes made from wood or wattle and daub, with a single room and central fireplace. Settlements were surrounded by high fences to protect animals and villages from thieves and attack.

Legacy

There are still aspects of life in modern England that date back to the Anglo-Saxons, including the English language, the rule of law, place names, Christianity and even the layout of England itself.

Uniting England

Alfred the Great’s grandson, Athelstan, was a successful Anglo-Saxon warrior. During his reign from AD 924–939, he defeated Welsh, Scottish, Celtic and Viking kings to become the first King of all England. England has been united since the reign of Athelstan.



Images from: Wikimedia Commons/Public domain



Vikings

Invasion

The Vikings first visited England in AD 789, when they sailed from Norway to the Isle of Portland on the south coast and killed the reeve, who had greeted them on the shore. However, their first major raid was four years later, on the monastery at Lindisfarne.

Viking raid on Lindisfarne

In AD 793, the Vikings arrived on Lindisfarne and destroyed the monastery buildings, stole precious objects, killed and injured the monks and took some as slaves. The Christian world was shocked by this raid on a remote monastery and monks wrote about the attack.

Resisting the Vikings

Over the next 60 years, the Vikings continued to raid England in the spring and summer, before returning to Scandinavia in the winter. To try to stop the raids, some Anglo-Saxon kings paid the Vikings money, called *Danegeld*, to leave. However, the Vikings returned, and *Danegeld* became another way for them to make money.

Great Heathen Army

After 60 years of summer raids, a huge army of 3000 Vikings arrived on the south coast to invade England in AD 865. They conquered every kingdom other than Wessex and took control of Jorvik (York).

Everyday life

The Vikings lived in a similar way to the Anglo-Saxons. Most Vikings were farmers or craftspeople, but they were also warriors who carried out frequent raids. Men and boys trained in boat building, weapon making, crafts and combat. They lived in longhouses, with a central fire and thatched roof. When the Vikings first invaded, they were pagans and worshipped many gods. Over time, they converted to Christianity.

Alfred the Great

Alfred the Great was the King of Wessex from AD 871–899. He defeated the Viking leader, Guthrum, at the Battle of Edington in AD 876. He made peace with Guthrum and insisted that he was baptised as a Christian. Alfred the Great split England into Viking Danelaw and Anglo-Saxon Wessex.



Normans

Invasion

When the King of England, Edward the Confessor, died in 1066, he left no successor to the throne. His adviser, Harold Godwinson, was crowned king, but the King of Norway, Harald Hardrada, and William, Duke of Normandy, also claimed the throne. Harold Godwinson defeated Harald Hardrada at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in the north of England and then marched south to fight William, Duke of Normandy at the Battle of Hastings. William, Duke of Normandy won the battle and Harold Godwinson was killed. He was crowned king on Christmas Day in 1066 and became known as William the Conqueror. This was the end of Anglo-Saxon or Viking rule in England.



Bayeux tapestry, depicting the Battle of Hastings

Glossary

Christianity	A religion based on the teachings of Jesus Christ.
conquer	Overcome and take control of a place or people.
<i>Danegeld</i>	A tax collected from the Anglo-Saxon people paid to the Viking invaders in exchange for peace.
invasion	When a foreign army enters a country by force.
monastery	A building where monks live, work, study and pray, separate from the outside world.
monk	A member of a male religious community who lives in a monastery.
pagan	A person who believes in many gods, or does not follow one of the world’s major religions.
raid	A sudden attack, which aims to cause damage.
reeve	A local official in Anglo-Saxon England.
Scandinavia	An area of Europe, which includes Sweden, Norway and Denmark.
wattle and daub	A traditional building material made from woven twigs or sticks and mud.