TEACHING WITH PRIMARY SOURCES—MTSU

PRIMARY SOURCE SET: World History and Geography: Early Civilizations through the Decline of the Roman Empire (5th century C.E.)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Covering the entire history of the world from the very beginning of human life up to the 5th century C.E. is a gargantuan task! Teachers have to pack almost 400,000 years of the human story into one short academic year, including 10,000 years of human settlement and 1,500 years of complex civilization. What are the main themes of this vast duration of history?

The evolution in complexity of human settlement has taken us from hunter/gatherers, to agriculturalists, to members of advanced civilizations. The culmination of this chronology is the development of empires, in which one civilization expands to control others across diverse geographic regions. This process happened differently in different parts of the world.

The geographic diversity of the world and how geography has impacted the development of civilizations is another major theme. For instance, the productive soil of the Fertile Crescent and its location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa compelled Mesopotamia to a highly advanced status among early civilizations. Greece’s rocky islands and peninsulas, moreover, influenced the development of independent city-states.

This period of world history also witnessed the development and growth of important trade routes, the birth of democracy and republican government, and the emergence of many of the world’s important religions. Giving students a thorough overview of these major themes is a challenge, but also a wonderful opportunity to broaden their perspectives on the world and its rich cultures.

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

This primary source set is geared towards the 6th grade Social Studies curriculum standards. The curricular units, such as “Mesopotamia: 3500-1200 B.C./B.C.E.” and “Ancient China,” are retained here in the subheadings, about two per page, and follow the order in the standards. Sixth grade teachers can use this set throughout the year as they cover different civilizations and events.

Several of the following primary sources are parts of online exhibitions that would make good secondary source reading assignments for students, due to the explanatory narrative and development of world history themes.

Because most primary sources created during this early time period were created so very long ago, very few of them have survived to the present day. Many of the following sources are therefore creations of later time periods that depict a building or cultural tradition that represent an earlier era. Talk to your students about what kinds of sources remain, and what they (and later ones) can reveal about early civilizations.

ADDITIONAL LINKS

- World Digital Library
- World History Links Guide
- World History & Cultures newsletter (September 2009)
- The Ancient World newsletter (January 2011)
- The Legacy of Greece and Rome primary source set
- Browse by Topic: World History and Cultures
**Human Origins in Africa through the Neolithic Age**

*Rock Painting S00176, Bethlehem, Dihlabeng District Municipality, Free State, South Africa* [1986 CE]

**Mesopotamia: c. 3500-1200 BC/BCE**

*The archaeological map of Iraq*. [1967, detail]

*School exercise tablet* [2200-1900 bc; translation and drawing included]

**Ancient Egypt: c. 3000-1200 BC/BCE**

*Pyramides de Chéops et de Cheffren, le sphynx, et la temple de Cheffren* [between 1869 and 1899]

*The Great Temple of Aboo-Simble, Nubia* (Head of Ramses II) [between 1846-1849]

*Mummy, Ramses II* [between 1898 and 1946]

*Thèbes. Bas-relief dans l'interieur du Rhamesséion* [between 1867 and 1899]
ANCIENT INDIA

Mahābhārata

Bhāratavarṣā nakāśā. [19-?]  
Compare to modern political map of India.

Bhagavad-gīta: "The songs of the master" / translated with an introduction and commentary by Charles Johnston... [1908; p. 26]

ANCIENT CHINA

Liu sheng Huang He sao ba he dao quan tu. [between 1824 and 1825]

The Analects of Confucius [1533]

[1851]

[Images of Bhraman priest, in India, painting his forehead with the red and white marks of his sect and caste] [between 1900 and 1923]

[Images of Mahābhārata nakāśā. Bhāratavarṣā]  
[Bird's-eye view of the Great Wall of China along mountain ridges, disappearing into the haze in the distance]  
[China]
**ANCIENT ISRAEL, c. 2000 BC/BCE-70 AD/CE**

[Caves of Qumran where Dead Sea scrolls were found] [1958]

Palestine, Tribes, and Jerusalem [1783, detail]

*Pesher Hoshe’a, 4Q166 [Copied late first century B.C.E.] Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority (6) Translation*

**ANCIENT GREECE, c. 800-300 BC/BCE**

[Asia Minor, Corinth, ruins of the Temple of Apol (i.e., Appollo) [between 1950 and 1960]

[The Empire and Expeditions of Alexander the Great [1833, depicting events from 356-323 BCE]

[Iraq, Babylon, Basalt lion marking Daniel’s den [1932]]


[Greece - Athens - The Parthenon - near view [ca. 1925]]
ANCIENT ROME, c. 500 BC/BCE-500 AD/CE

Veduta dell’ arco di Costantino, e dell’ anfiteatro Flavio detto il colosseo [between 1746 and 1760] (Translation: “View of the Arch of Constantine and the Flavian Amphitheatre called the Colosseum”)

History and Ethnology of Ancient Rome: 4 illus: fig. 1 Exhibition of captives in the forum; fig. 2 Gladiators in the theatre; fig. 3 Gladiators at funerals; fig. 4. Funeral of Emperors [1851]

Rome, Baths of Caracalla [between 1860 and 1890]

Stone bridge and San Giorgia (i.e., Giorgio), Verona, Italy [between ca. 1890 and ca. 1900]

Rome par la voie du Mont-Cenis / Geo Dorival [ca. 1920; poster of Roman Forum, advertising train line that runs through Mont-Cenis, France, to Rome]

The Metamorphoses of Publius Ovidius Naso / translated in English blank verse by Henry King. [1871]

Theatrum historicum ad annum Christi quadringentesimum : in quo tum Imperii Romani tum Barbarorum circum incolentium status ob oculosponitur pars orientalis / [1712] (Translation: “The Historical Theater in the Year 400 AD, in Which Both Romans and Barbarians Resided Side by Side in the Eastern Part of the Roman Empire” and blurb)
Teachers: Providing these primary source replicas without source clues may enhance the inquiry experience for students. This list of citations is supplied for reference purposes to you and your students. We have followed the Chicago Manual of Style format, one of the formats recommended by the Library of Congress, for each entry below, minus the access date. The access date for each of these entries is June 24, 2014.

**Human Origins in Africa Through the Neolithic Age**


**Mesopotamia: C. 3500-1200 BC/BCE**

“School exercise tablet.” Photograph. Between 2200 and 1900BCE. From Library of Congress, Cuneiform Tablets: From the Reign of Gudea of Lagash to Shalmanassar III. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/r?intldl/cunei:@field(DOCID+@lit(AMCUNE000004))] (http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/r?intldl/cunei:@field(DOCID+@lit(AMCUNE000004))


**Ancient India**

“[Brahman priest, in India, painting his forehead with the red and white marks of his sect and caste].” Photograph. Between 1900 and 1923. From Library of Congress, Carpenter Collection. [http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/94509889/](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/94509889/)


**Ancient China**


CITATIONS (CONT.)


ANCIENT ISRAEL, C. 2000 BC/BCE-70 AD/CE


ANCIENT GREECE, C. 800-300 BC/BCE


ANCIENT ROME, C. 500 BC/BCE-500 AD/CE


“History and Ethnology of Ancient Rome: 4 illus: fig. 1 Exhibition of captives in the forum; fig. 2 Gladiators in the theatre; fig. 3 Gladiators at funerals; fig. 4. Funeral of Emperors.” 1 print : engraving. 1851. From Library of Congress, Miscellaneous Items in High Demand. http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2006679885/


