

Early Human Fossil Finds



Early Humans and the Rise of Civilization

Our study of the ancient world begins with a look at the roots of human life and the beginnings of civilization. Many scientists believe that the earliest ancestors of humans first appeared in eastern Africa. Scientists have studied fossils and bones left by these early humans. This evidence has led scientists to believe that five major groups of early humans developed over millions of years. The places where the remains of these groups were discovered are shown on the map on the opposite page.

From these beginnings, humans spread to other parts of the world. Over time, these early people learned to grow crops. The first human settlements grew in regions where people found the resources they needed to survive.

One of these regions, in North Africa, is mostly desert. Through the desert flows the Nile River—the longest river in the world. The Nile had an enormous impact on the development of civilization. The Nile River begins in East Africa. The river flows north and empties

into the Mediterranean Sea. Along the way, the Nile picks up lots of rich, dark soil. Each year, the river overflows its banks, flooding the land around it. Beginning in ancient times, the floodwaters left behind soil that was perfect for growing crops. This factor greatly influenced early human settlement in the Nile River valley.

Another region in which ancient people settled was in an area of land stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea. This region is known as the Fertile Crescent because of its rich (fertile) soil and its curved (crescent) shape when drawn on a map.

Ancient people living in the Fertile Crescent were able to grow plenty of wheat and barley. No longer needing to move constantly in search of food, people could settle down and build communities. Permanent shelters and a dependable food supply allowed people to advance in important ways. They learned to make stone and metal tools; to raise animals such as cows, sheep, and pigs; and to develop a system of writing. In time, settlements began trading with nearby groups. An exchange of people, goods, and ideas blossomed. The first civilizations had begun.

Cradles of Civilization in North Africa and the Middle East

