

# History and the state

Disclaimer – There are many definitions of the state and many interpretations of state formation. There is not a cut and dried history of how or why 'the state' came about and eventually evolved into what we understand as the modern state.

Civilisation pre-supposes the existence of cities and since the first states were city states, there must be an assumption at least that a state can only be created within the ambit of a civilisation. We can attempt to build a timeline of the evolution of state formation by following a timeline of worldwide civilisation.

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## Some early world civilisations

### Gobekli Tepe

This was the first known sizable human-made structure of the ancient world, located in Anatolia, Turkey. Not a city, but possibly a temple whose function has been guessed at. Certainly it was a public building with a probable ritualistic purpose. It is a massive structure formed of successive concentric circular stones walls engraved with animal motifs, begun it is thought between 11,000 and 12,000 years ago, which makes it older by 7,000 years than Stonehenge and by 5,500 years the first cities of Mesopotamia. It was built or at least begun, by people who were still foragers, hunting and gathering their food. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSG1MsQSo\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSG1MsQSo_A)

### Çatalhöyük

The oldest known city in the world, located like Gobekli Tepe in Anatolia, south-eastern Turkey, it is thought to be at least 9,000 years old. It seems to have begun when villages in the region coalesced to form a larger settlement which eventually grew in area and population to become a true city. Read more about its fascinating history here: <https://www.goturkiye.com/blog/catalhoyuk-the-worlds-first-city>

It was discovered by archaeologist James Mellaart in 1961 who quickly realised that what he and his team found shook the established view that the 'cradle of civilisation' was not after all located solely in the fertile crescent in the region of Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. It would be more correct now to consider that there was no one cradle but several different stages of what we consider to be civilisation. It seems to have been an egalitarian place as between the sexes and people in general, with no outstanding public buildings.

### Jericho

The fabled city of Jericho known today as Tell-es Sultan (Hill of the Sultan), located in what is now the Palestinian West Bank, is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world and has been dated to 7,000 – 8,000 years ago. It competes with Catalhoyuk as the oldest city depending on when it was considered to be fully a city as opposed to what would have been its origins as a village and then a town. Famously it was walled, although what the purpose of the wall was, is still being debated. <https://time.com/5597069/jericho-history/>

## Mesopotamia

One of the oldest known civilisations from around 3,500-550 BCE which was followed closely by the rise of Egyptian civilisation. Mesopotamia saw the building of the city of Uruk with a population of around 50,000 and the emergence of forms of state rule.

Ancient cultures associated with Mesopotamia were the Sumerians, Assyrians, Akkadians and the Babylonians. The Sumerians were responsible for developing the Cuneiform script, one of the oldest forms of the written word.

Mesopotamia became influential not only because of these powerful empires but also due to its location at the crossroads of the Egyptian and the Indus Valley civilisations. The region has been described as a melting pot of "languages and cultures that had a major impact on the development of writing, technology, trade, religions and law". More on these civilisations: <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-middle-east/mesopotamia> and <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/ancient-egypt>

The **Indus** civilisation and its various ages arose ca. 2,500-1500 BCE With the Indian Kingdom age lasting 500 BCE–1,200 CE. An account of the rise and the eventual collapse of the once mighty Indus civilisation can be read here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zxn3r82/articles/z8b987h>

**Ancient China** (Xia-Shang-Western Zhou-Han dynasties) arose and declined from ca.2,000 BCE-500 CE. The unique feature of the formation of the ancient Chinese dynasties is that they arose independently of the Middle Eastern empires which emerged more or less in parallel with one another and with knowledge of one another's existence. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9SGpnheXek>

Alongside the European tradition we can cite the Chinese state tradition, with its Confucian state project and hegemonic vision and its interactions with nomadic empires and other states; a distinct Indian state tradition dating from the first Mauryan Empire (c. 300 BC), in which the emperor implemented Brahman law and promoted pragmatic realism among local rulers and the Islamic world, which blurs the line, drawn in Europe after the Peace of Westphalia (1648), between state and religion. **The state, past, present and future. Jessop 2016**

### **Minoan Crete**

Centred in Knossos the Minoan civilisation of 3000–1100 BCE was a matriarchal, goddess worshipping and as far as can be discerned a peaceful culture. It flourished until the combined effects of the massively destructive volcanic eruption on the island of Thera (Mykonos) and the resultant tsunami Later the arrival of the militaristic Mycenaeans from mainland Greece saw to its decline.

### **Greece and the city state**

The city states of Athens, Sparta, Syracuse and others first appeared around 750 BCE and marked a new period in historical development. In ancient Greek, the states were known as [polis](#), a name derived from the citadel (acropolis), which marked its administrative centre. There grew to be over 1,000 city-states in Ancient Greece

According to [Britannica](#), the polis centered on one town, usually walled, but included the surrounding countryside. The town contained a citadel on raised ground (acropolis) and a marketplace (agora). "Ideally, the polis was a corporation of citizens who all participated in its government, religious cults, defense, and economic welfare and who obeyed its sacred and customary laws. The citizens actually governed in varying degrees, depending upon the form of government—e.g., tyranny, oligarchy, aristocracy,

or democracy. Usually the government consisted of an assembly of citizens, a council, and magistrates.”

Each polis also contained substantial numbers of noncitizens (women, minors, resident aliens, and slaves). As they grew in population and commercial activity, they sent out bands of emigrants who created similar city states on the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea, mainly between 750 and 550 BCE.

### **The Roman Republic to Empire**

During the early Roman Republic (509-264 BCE), new political institutions were created. Two consuls replaced the deposed king. They were usually generals who led Rome’s armies. At times they themselves were replaced with a dictator, who held supreme power for a maximum of six months.

A Senate, although nominally an advisory body, wielded enormous political power. There were two popular assemblies during the republic. The centuriate voted on war and peace while the tribal assembly did most law making and sat as a court.

Imperial Rome established in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE established a form of government known as a principate, which was a mixture of the republic’s institutions and monarchy. Roman law was ultimately codified and became the basis of European law in later periods of history.

### **The Medieval world**

After the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> CE, Europe saw an extensive period of political and social change, accompanied by long wars and invasions, known variously as the Middle Ages, the Dark Ages, Medievalism and Feudalism, which lasted the best part of a millennium.

Also during this period we see the arising of the Caliphates and the Islamic civilisations as well as the empires of Medieval China (Tang-Song-Yuan) the Mesoamerican, middle Andean and the Turkic and Mongol empires and the Shogunate of Japan, all-encompassing the centuries from ca. 650 CE right up to 1870 CE rising, falling and overlapping with one another.

By the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, Europe was ruled by territorial monarchies, soon accompanied by varying degrees of political control through institutions like Parliament in England where the Normans had created a centralised state. The first city states grew in power and influence.

### **From monarchy to liberal democracy**

Beginning in England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and lasting until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, revolutionary changes swept aside absolute monarchy. Various forms of parliamentary systems of rule eventually established the basis for the modern, capitalist type of state. Access to the state by way of the franchise followed, after bitter struggles for the right to vote by men and women.

### **The Modern World – a rough timeline**

- 1649 - Charles 1 of England executed for crimes against the people
- 1688 - Parliamentary rule confirmed in England in Glorious Revolution
- 1776 - American Declaration of Independence
- 1788 - US constitution adopted
- 1789 - Fall of the Bastille and start of the French Revolution
- 1829 - Greece wins independence from the Ottoman Empire
- 1848 - Revolutions throughout Europe

1858 - Britain imposes direct rule on India  
1860 - Unification of Italy  
1870-1871 - Proclamation of German Empire  
1870 - Paris Commune  
1914-1918 First World War  
1917 - Russian Revolution  
1922 - End of Irish War of Independence and partition of Ireland  
1922 - Fascist takeover in Italy by Mussolini  
1924 - First Labour government in UK  
1929 - Wall Street Crash and beginning of the Great Depression  
1933 - Nazis led by Hitler come to power in Germany  
1936-1939 Spanish Civil War  
1939-1945 Second World War  
1947 - India wins independence  
1948 - Mao leads Chinese revolution  
1955-1975 Vietnam War  
1956 - Soviet invasion of Hungary  
1956 - Anglo-French invasion of Suez  
1957 - Treaty of Rome creates the European Economic Community (EEC)  
1975 - Democracy restored in Spain after death of Franco  
1979 - Shah of Iran deposed and Islamic republic declared  
1985 - Mikhail Gorbachev in power in USSR leading to perestroika  
1989 - Fall of the Berlin Wall and political revolutions across Eastern Europe  
1990 - Unification of Germany  
1991 - Fall of the Soviet Union  
1991 - First Gulf War between Iraq and USA  
1992 - Breakup of Yugoslavia after civil war  
1993 - Single market created in Europe Union  
2001 - Terrorist attacks in the US and destruction of the World Trade Centre  
2002 - America leads invasion of Afghanistan  
2002 - Most EU states adopt the euro  
2003 - America and UK attack and occupies Iraq  
2008 - Global financial crash  
2011 - Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East  
2020 - Covid pandemic begins  
2020 - UK leaves European Union  
2021 - US and its allies quit Afghanistan