Approximate date of the earliest writing (3,500 BC = 5.5 ka)

- Early writing:
  - Appearance of cuneiform writing in Sumer (2700-2500 BC)
  - Protoliterate period in Mesopotamia (35th to 32nd centuries)
  - Earliest (questionable) date on hieroglyphics in Egypt (ca. 3200 BC)
  - Undeciphered writing from Harappa, in the Indus Valley (ca. 3000 BC)
  - Oldest Chinese script, on oracle bones (ca. 1200-1050 BC)

- Volcanic eruptions, Plagues, Population
  - Thera (Santorini) eruption: end of Minoan civilization
  - Vesuvius (79 AD): destroyed Pompeii and Herculaneum
  - Krakatoa (1883 AD): >30,000 dead
  - Tambora (1815 AD): >17,000 dead
  - Great Drought in SW U.S.: destroys Anasazi, Hohokam towns (1276-1279)
  - The Plague of Athens: 430 BC
  - The Plague of Justinian: 541-542
  - The Black Death: 1347-1353

- Tool materials
  - Dramatic end of the Near-East Bronze Age (ca. 1200 BC)
  - Near-East Iron Age (ca. 1200 BC - now)

- Near-East Bronze age (ca. 3300 BC - 1200 BC)
  - Oldest writing in Mesoamerica (early first millennium BC)
  - Oldest Chinese script, on oracle bones (ca. 1200-1050 BC)

- Near-East Iron Age (ca. 1200 BC - now)
  - Chalcolithic: Tool materials
  - Radiocarbon age 1600-1627 BC: Thera (Santorini) eruption
  - *Archaeological age ~1500 BC: Thera (Santorini) eruption
  - Radiocarbon age 1900-1800 BC: Babylonian Empire (1900 BC-1600 BC)
  - Radiocarbon age 1400-1300 BC: Hittite Empire (1460 BC-1180 BC)

- Panel 8: LAST 5,500 YEARS – civilization and writing (3,500 BC to now)

- For population since 1500, see Panel 9

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ka = thousand years ago