



Ethical Atheist

THE FLAT EARTH

A Detailed Study of Personal Bias and Historical Thinking.

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CHAPTER 5

Analysis of 7000 Years of Thinking Regarding Earth's Shape

The following table presents a summary of historical thinking regarding the shape of the earth over the past 7000+ years. Where possible, we've attempted to locate and cite original translated works such as:

- *De Caelo* (On the Heavens), by Aristotle, written in 350 BCE.
- *De Rerum Naturâ* (On the Nature of Things), by Lucretius, written in 50 BCE
- *Divinæ Institutiones* (Divine Institutes), by Lactantius, written approx. 320 CE
- *Christian Topography*, by Cosmas Indicopleustes, written approx. 547 CE

An author being included in this table DOES NOT necessarily mean they believed the earth was flat. In fact, you will find many spherical views in this table. The table represents a chronology of the various views. It also includes quotations which have caused confusion in the past. In these cases, the material is presented along with a discussion of why the misinterpretations exist.

We consider this a work in progress which will be updated as new facts are found. **You will notice excruciating detail and a huge list of references here.** The reason is that we want everyone to know where we found our information and we request that anyone wanting to add or correct this work do the same. Rash correspondence containing personal opinions *without references* will not be acknowledged.

Note on time references:

- **CE** stands for "Common Era." New term expected to replace AD, which

stands for "Anno Domini" in Latin or "the year of the Lord" in English, referring to the approximate birth year of Christ.

- **BCE** stands for "Before the Common Era." Expected to replace BC, which means "Before Christ."
 - **Common** simply refers to the most frequently used calendar system: the Gregorian Calendar. This removes the misnomer of the calendar being based on Christ's birth. Historians currently believe his birth was anywhere between 12-4 BC.
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HISTORICAL NOTES RELATIVE TO EARTH'S SHAPE

(Flat, Spherical, Cylindrical, Etc.)

Circa	Discussion
5000 BCE	<p>Sumer (now southern Iraq) was one of the world's first civilizations; it may have actually been the first. It lasted for about three millennia, until finally collapsing under the Amorites circa 2000 BCE. They developed the concept of a multi-layered universe. "The boundary between heaven and earth was a solid (perhaps tin) vault, and the earth was a flat disk. Within the vault lay the gas-like 'lil', or atmosphere, the brighter portions therein formed the stars, planets, sun, and moon." [1] Variations of this belief spread across the Middle East and Mediterranean regions. One version is seen in the <i>Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament)</i>. In Mesopotamia, the 3500 BCE Sumerian civilization, "The first and simplest astronomical instrument, the gnomon, was able to give some indication of the time of day and the season of the year; it consisted of a straight vertical rod and is based on the same principle as the modern sundial." [56]</p>
4500 - 500 BCE	<p>Babylonians - "According to the cosmology of Eridu, water was the origin of all things; the inhabited world sprung from the deep and is still encircled by Khubur, the ocean stream." The sun comes out of a door in the east every morning and leaves through a door in the west every evening. The world had the form of a mountain, the heaven was a solid vault, "the foundation of which rested on a vast ocean, "the deep" which also supported the earth." "Inside the crust of the earth is the abode of the dead, the entrance to which is in the west." [15] Note: Numerous verses in the Old Testament detail these same ideas. Dreyer's book provides many biblical references to this on p.3. We can thank the Babylonians for developing the first known studies in credulous <i>astrology</i> (ugh!). In many ways, however, Babylonians were surprisingly advanced with their work in calendars and study of the planets. They knew of at least 5 planets and with the Sun and Moon derived our 7-day calendar. The Babylonians & Mesopotamians generally believed in the "theory that the earth was a flat circular disk surrounded by a primordial sea." [17]</p>
2100 BCE	<p>Abraham, Hebrew Wanderer - Credited as the Father of Three Religions (see "Origins of Christianity, Islam and Judaism"). Abraham led his tribe out of Ur and began the monotheistic (single god) view of religion. Christianity and its strict literal interpretation of the Bible, which is based on the flat Sumerian/Babylonian view of the earth, would later have a profound impact on science, geography, astronomy, etc.</p>
640- 545 BCE	<p>Thales of Miletus - Believed the earth was flat [16] and was "a circular disc floating like a piece of wood on the ocean." [15] "The earth rests on water... to the effect that it rests on water, floating like a piece of wood or something else of that sort." (Aristotle referring to Thales) [47]</p>
611- 547 BCE	<p>Anaximander of Miletus (Anaximandros) (pupil of Thales) - Believed it was flat, or convex, on the surface, but made it a "cylinder or stone column". Homeric poems present a picture of the earth as "a flat circular disc surrounded by the mighty river Okeanos". [15] "He says that the earth is cylindrical in form, and that its depth is as a third part of its breadth." Ps.-Plut. Strom. fr. 2 (R. P. 19) [43], [46]</p>

So, that's Europe... what about other parts of the World.

It is important to note that the entire question of the shape of the earth during the early Medieval Age appears to be isolated to Europe where *some* Christian belief in a flat earth existed, as did opposition to the antipodes. In other parts of the world such as **China, India** (Romaka Siddhanta - 400 CE, Ibn al Adami - 920 CE), **Egypt** (Ibn Junis - 1009 CE), and **Islam** in general, where there was a complete absence of intolerant hostility towards science. There was not the issue of literal interpretation of Scriptures to hinder the work of geographers and scientists who were trying to answer questions on the shape of the earth and astronomy theories. (Note: The Chinese were so advanced in astronomical observation that they recorded the **supernova of 1054 CE** which caused the **Crab nebula**. This has been very important in helping modern astronomers to estimate ages of objects and formation in the universe.)

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[Revision history can be found at end of References page.]

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