

Science in a broad sense existed before the modern era and in many historical civilizations.[37] Modern science is distinct in its approach and successful in its results, so it now defines what science is in the strictest sense of the term.[3][5][38] Science in its original sense was a word for a type of knowledge, rather than a specialized word for the pursuit of such knowledge. In particular, it was the type of knowledge that people can communicate to each other and share. For example, knowledge about the working of natural things was gathered long before recorded history and led to the development of complex abstract thought. This is shown by the construction of complex calendars, techniques for making poisonous plants edible, public works at a national scale, such as those which harnessed the floodplain of the Yangtse with reservoirs,[39] dams, and dikes, and buildings such as the Pyramids. However, no consistent conscious distinction was made between knowledge of such things, which are true in every community, and other types of communal knowledge, such as mythologies and legal systems. Metallurgy was known in prehistory, and the Vinča culture was the earliest known producer of bronze-like alloys. It is thought that early experimentation with heating and mixing of substances over time developed into alchemy.