

Early Civilizations

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Mesopotamia

3500B.C. - 1600B.C.

Location



Cities

- Ur
- Sumer
- Babylon
- Akkad

Environment

- The Fertile Crescent includes the lands facing the Mediterranean sea and Mesopotamia.
- The swampy plain had fertile soil for farming.
- Though of some swampy areas, most of the land was a desert.
- The summer is dry and full of scorching heat, while the winter is freezing and moist.

Conflicts

- Unpredictable flooding destroys crops and houses.
- The environment does not supply the Mesopotamians with natural resources.
- There were no barriers present to defend from marauders.

Government

- In the beginning when Mesopotamia was a city state, temple priests control the government. Priests managed irrigation by praying to their gods. This is done at the ziggurat.
- After 3000 B.C., wars became more frequent, priests and some people gave permanent control to military leader. Because of this action, Mesopotamia was ruled by dynasties.
- Around 2000B.C. , nomadic warriors called Amorites, invaded Mesopotamia. This is the beginning the Babylonian empire which was ruled by Hammurabi and his codes.

Religion

- Many people believed in more than one god. This type of belief is called polytheism.
- Farmers believed that the success of their crops came from the blessings of gods.
- Ziggurats were made keep the gods happy.
- Many Mesopotamians believe that the souls of the dead went to a dismal, gloomy place between the Earth's crust and the ancient sea. They work hard to earn the gods' protection in life.

Technology and Uniqueness

- The Mesopotamians were able to control the rivers by creating levees.
- The Mesopotamians invented the wheel, sail, and the plow.
- Their number system was based on 60 and 360 degrees of a circle.
- There were no natural barriers.
- They had limited natural resources, so they traded.
- Their language was cuneiform, which was written on clay tablets.

Egypt

3200 B.C.-600 B.C.

Location

- Memphis
- Thebes



Environment

- The Nile River flows north across Africa for over 4100 miles.
- The Nile had very predictable flooding that produced silt for farming.
- The desert shut out invaders, thus Egypt was spared from wars.

Conflict

- Low floodwaters reduced the amount of fresh silt and water for crops.
- High floodwaters destroyed houses and precious seeds for farming.
- The two deserts forced Egyptians to live on a very small portions of land and reduced interactions with others.

Government

- At 3200 B.C., Egypt was divided into Upper and Lower Egypt.
- Upper Egypt's crown was white, while Lower Egypt was red.
- Eventually, the two kingdoms were united by Narmer. He wore red and white crown to celebrate Egypt's unity.
- Pharaohs were kings who were gods. This makes Egypt a theocracy.
- The pharaoh held full responsibility for the kingdom's well-being.

Religion

- A pharaoh's eternal life force called *ka*.
- *Re* was the sun god. *Osiris* was god of the underworld. *Isis* represents the ideal mother and wife.
- Pharaohs were buried in pyramids to spend their afterlives.
- Pharaohs were preserved by mummification.
- The weight of someone's heart determined their afterlife. If the soul passed the test of purity and truth, it would live forever in the beautiful Other World.

Technology and Uniqueness

- They created a calendar with 365 days. They created it by observing the stars.
- Egyptians developed a number system for counting, adding, and subtracting. The mathematics helped engineers and architects make accurate measurements to construct pyramids and palaces.
- Egyptians were famous for their medicines. They performed some surgery, set broken bones with splints, and could check a heart rate.
- The social classes were like a pyramid. The top was the royal family. Below them included wealthy landowners, government officials, priests, and army commanders. Next were merchants and artisans. The lowest class consisted of peasant farmers and laborers.
- The Egyptian form of writing was hieroglyphics, which was written on papyrus. Hieroglyphics means “sacred carving.” This system of writing changed so that pictures stood for sounds and ideas.

Indus River Valley

2500 B.C.-1500 B.C.

Location



• Mohenjo-Daro
• Harappa

Environment

- The Indus was located on the Indian subcontinent.
- The Hindu Kush, Karakorum, and Himalayan ranges formed a barrier.
- The Ganges and Indus Rivers provided rich soil for farming.
- Part of the Indo-Gangetic Plain formed the Deccan Plateau.
- Monsoons dominated the climate.

Conflicts

- Floods along the Indus were unpredictable.
- The river sometimes changed course.
- The wet and dry monsoon seasons were unpredictable.
- The monsoons brought in so much moisture that flooding occurs.
- If there was too little rain, plants would wither and die.

Government

- They had a well-organized central government.
- The writing is impossible to decipher.
- Because of many archaeological discoveries made at the site, it is called the Harappan civilization.
- It was based on theocracy.

Religion

- Priests prayed for good harvest and safety from floods.
- Artifacts revealed links to modern Hinduism.
- Figures show the representations of Shiva, a major Hindu god.

Technology and Uniqueness

- They built strong levees to keep water out of their cities.
- They built their cities on a grid system.
- Citadels were created to protect major buildings.
- They also created sophisticated plumbing and sewage systems.
- Their language uses animals as symbols.
- Scientists believed the symbols are used to depict an object and to represent phonetic sounds.
- Some signs stand alone, while others seemed to be combined into words.
- Animals were an important part of their culture.
- Brightly colored cotton cloth was a desirable trade item.
- The Indus River provided excellent transportation for trade goods.

China

2000 B.C.-400 B.C.

Location



Environment

- The two major rivers are the Huang He and the Yangtze.
- The Huang He deposits yellowish silt called loess.
- Only ten percent of China's land is suitable for farming. This is known as the North China Plain, or "China's Heartland."

Conflict

- The Huang He is called "China's Sorrow" because sometimes floods destroyed villages.
- Because of the geographic isolation, the settlers had to supply their own resources rather than trade.
- The natural boundaries didn't protect the settlers from invasions.

Government

- The first dynasty was the Xia Dynasty. The leader was an engineer and mathematician named Yu.
- The next dynasty was the Shang Dynasty. It lasted from 1700-1027 B.C. They established their capital at Anyang. The higher classes lived in timber framed houses with walls, while the peasants lived in huts outside the city. Society was sharply divided between nobles and peasants.
- The Zhou leaders declared that the Shang's had lost their Mandate of Heaven, and thus the Zhou Dynasty was born.
- This pattern of the rise, decline, and replacement of dynasties was called the Dynastic Cycle.
- They used feudalism to grant land to other nobles.

Religion

- Family was very important to the Chinese society. The elders controlled the property and important decisions, while the women were treated as inferiors.
- They believed that the spirits of family ancestors had the power to bring good fortune or disaster.
- The Shang kings consulted the gods through oracle bones. The priests applied a hot poker to animal bones and tortoise shells which will then crack. The priest then interprets the cracks to see how the gods had answered.

Technologies and Uniqueness

- Because of the many invasions, the Chinese created the chariot, one of the major tools of war.
- During the Zhou Dynasty, roads and canals were built to stimulate trade and agriculture.
- To improve trade, coined money was produced.
- Blast furnaces were built to produce cast iron.
- Iron was used to create weapons such as swords. It was used to make agricultural tools such as the dagger and spade.
- A Homo Erectus skeleton was found near Beijing. This was known as the Peking man, whose remains proved that people had settled in the river valley as much as 500,000 years ago.
- The Chinese developed a method of writing. One could read Chinese without being able to speak a word of it. The language helped unify a large and diverse land, which made it easier to control. However, the characters were hard to memorize because there were over 1500 characters.

Sites

- <http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/gaddis/HST210/Sept11/NearEastMap.jpg>
- <http://bruceowen.com/worldprehist/3250s11.htm>
- <http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/MUS/ED/TRC/MESO/law.html>
- <http://hubpages.com/hub/Ancient-Mesopotamia>
- [Ancient World History Chapter 2: Early River Valley Civilizations and page S15.](#)