

Four River Valleys

Several early civilizations that had a direct impact on western society began to develop about six thousand years ago. They centered around four river valleys: the Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia, the Nile in Egypt, the Indus in India, and the Hwang Ho (Yellow) in China.

The first humans did not live in organized communities near these bodies of water. For hundreds of thousands of years, humans were hunters and gatherers, wandering from place to place in search of food. Eventually, however, people learned to plant seeds and grow crops. They also learned how to tame and raise animals. These developments allowed people to stop roaming and settle together in one place. This led to the growth of communities, which in turn led to the development of laws and government. Once government was established, other aspects of civilization, such as art and education, soon followed.

Why did the first civilizations spring up near rivers? The soil near rivers was fertile, making it favorable for farming. The overflow of rivers from time to time brought rich soil to the area, and water from the rivers could be used to water crops. Rivers also provided a means of transportation and a way to move goods in and out of an area.

Label each of the following locations on the map below. Use your textbook or another book for reference if necessary.

Tigris River

Nile River

Euphrates River

Indus River

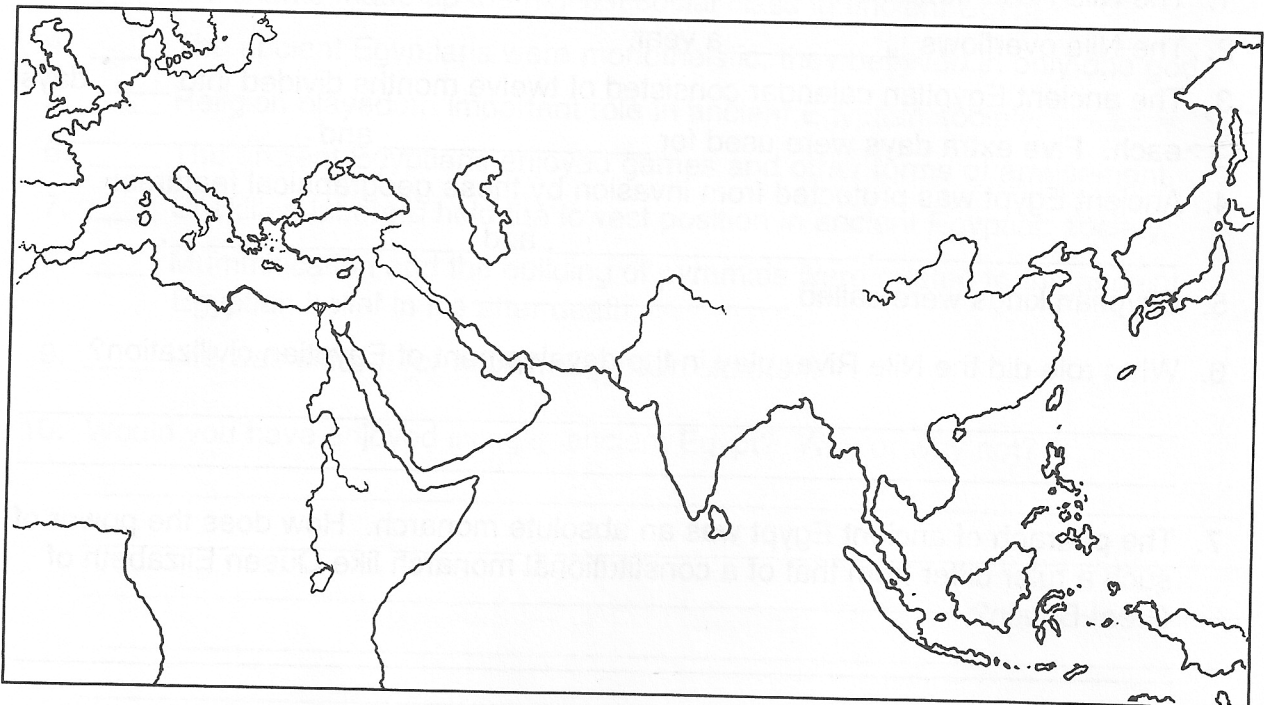
Hwang Ho (Yellow) River

Mesopotamia (roughly present-day Iraq)

India

Ancient Egypt

China

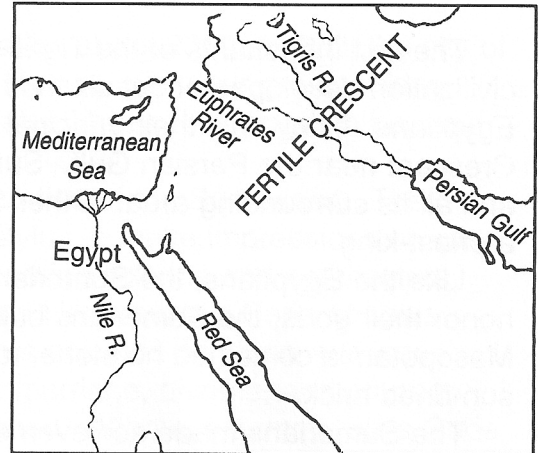


Mesopotamia

Between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the Middle East lies a fertile land once called Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia, in fact, means "land between the rivers." Today, most of this region makes up the nation of Iraq.

Mesopotamia was part of a larger area referred to as the Fertile Crescent. The Fertile Crescent extends from the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea in a huge arc to the Persian Gulf. In this narrow strip of land, eight great civilizations rose and fell between the years 3000 B.C. and 331 B.C.

Unlike Egypt, which was protected by natural barriers, Mesopotamia lay open to invaders. Wave after wave of ancient peoples moved into the area over a period of roughly three thousand years, each conquering the other in turn. The first inhabitants were the Sumerians; the last were the Persians. Each of the civilizations of Mesopotamia made lasting contributions to western civilization.



Circle the letter of each correct answer.

- The land once called Mesopotamia is located in
 - the Far East
 - Eastern Europe
 - the Middle East
- The term *Mesopotamia* means
 - fertile land
 - land between the rivers
 - gift of the gods
- The western end of the Fertile Crescent touches the
 - Mediterranean Sea
 - Persian Gulf
 - Red Sea
- The first civilization to arise in Mesopotamia was that of the
 - Persians
 - Egyptians
 - Sumerians
- The Tigris and Euphrates rivers run through present-day
 - Iran
 - Iraq
 - Egypt
- The peoples of Mesopotamia
 - made no lasting contributions to later civilizations
 - were open to invasion
 - had armies so strong that invaders dared not attack them
- Suppose Mesopotamia had been protected by natural barriers as Egypt was. Do you think so many different civilizations would still have arisen there? Why or why not?
