

Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent



Essential Question

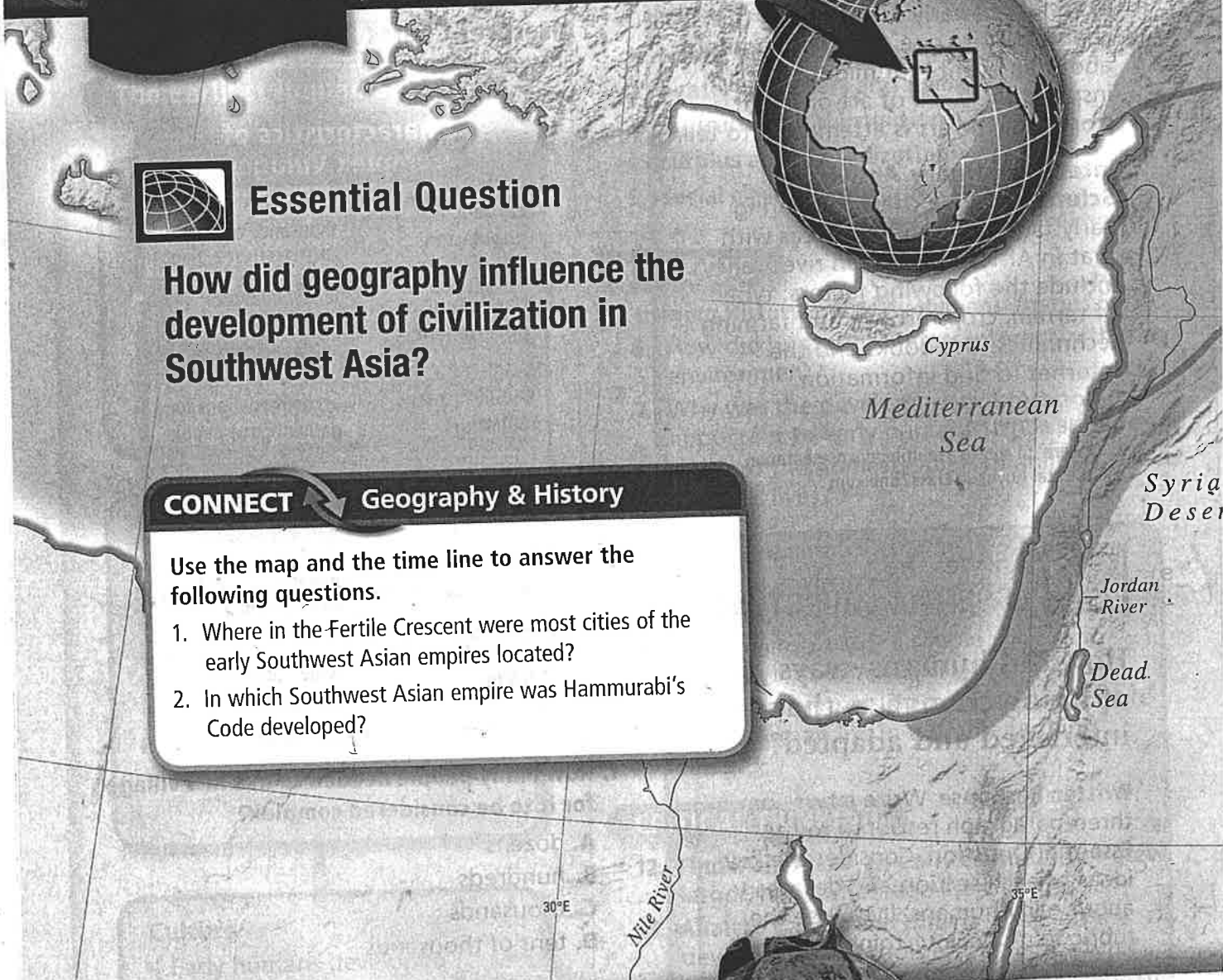
How did geography influence the development of civilization in Southwest Asia?

CONNECT

Geography & History

Use the map and the time line to answer the following questions.

1. Where in the Fertile Crescent were most cities of the early Southwest Asian empires located?
2. In which Southwest Asian empire was Hammurabi's Code developed?



MESOPOTAMIA

WORLD

5000 B.C.

People by the Euphrates River begin to irrigate crops. (early Mesopotamian jug) ▶

3000 B.C.

The first system of writing is in use in Sumer.

5000 B.C.

4200 B.C.

3400 B.C.

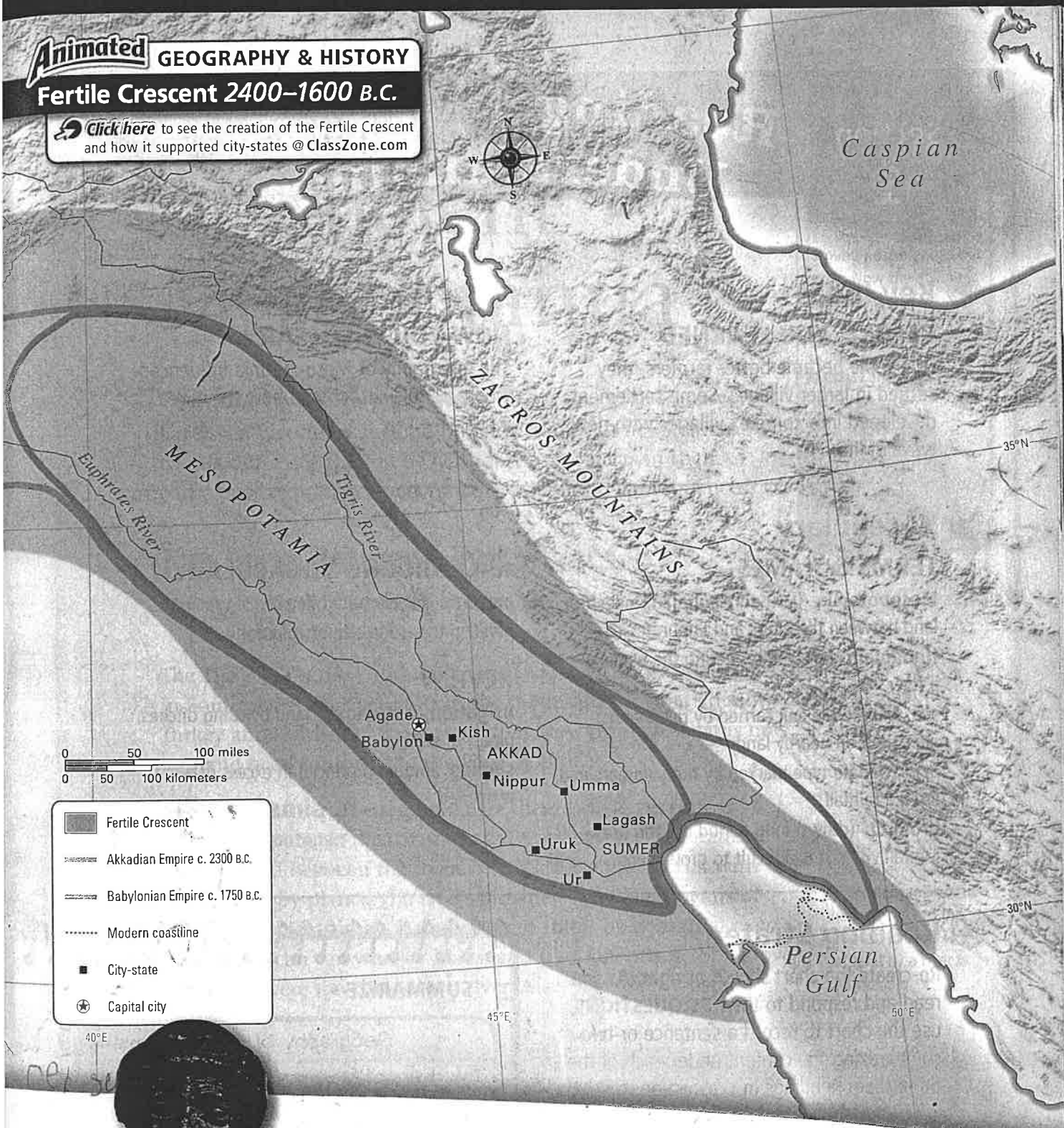
4000 B.C.

A dry period begins in Africa, causing the Sahara to spread. (the Sahara today) ▶



Fertile Crescent 2400–1600 B.C.

[Click here](#) to see the creation of the Fertile Crescent and how it supported city-states @ClassZone.com



1792 B.C.
Hammurabi's Code is developed in Babylonian Empire.
◀ (statue of Hammurabi)

550 B.C.
Persian Empire is largest in world.

2600 B.C.

1800 B.C.

1000 B.C.

200 B.C.

2600–2500 B.C.
People of the Indus Valley build cities.

1570 B.C.
The New Kingdom in Egypt begins.



500 B.C.
Zapotec civilization grows in Mexico.
◀ (Zapotec sculpture)

Section
1

Reading for Understanding

▶ Key Ideas

BEFORE, YOU LEARNED

As people became better farmers, they settled in larger villages. Some settlements developed into complex villages with new ways of life.

NOW YOU WILL LEARN

The geography of Mesopotamia influenced where people settled and how they lived.

▶ Vocabulary

TERMS & NAMES

Mesopotamia (MEHS•uh•puh•TAY•mee•uh)
land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers

floodplain flat land bordering the banks of a river

silt fine, fertile soil carried by rivers and deposited on nearby lands

arid climate type marked by hot summers and limited rainfall

drought (drowt) long period of little or no rainfall when it is difficult to grow crops

BACKGROUND VOCABULARY

currents concentrated flowing of water

swell increase in size or volume

REVIEW

irrigation watering dry land by using ditches, pipes, or streams

surplus amount produced in excess of what is needed

▶ Reading Strategy

Re-create the chart shown at right. As you read and respond to the **KEY QUESTIONS**, use the chart to record a sentence or two summarizing the content under each of the three main headings in the section.



See Skillbuilder Handbook, page R4.

SUMMARIZE

Geography of Mesopotamia

The rivers of Mesopotamia were important because . . .

Mesopotamians watered their crops by . . .

Because of a lack of resources, . . .



GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

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The Geography of Ancient Mesopotamia

Connect to What You Know Think of a time when you have seen pictures of a flood on television or in newspapers. Floods cause destruction by washing away objects in their path. Do you think a flood can also have good consequences?

The Land Between Two Rivers

▼ **KEY QUESTION** How did the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers support farming?

The Tigris (TY•grihs) and Euphrates (yoo•FRAY•teez) rivers are in Southwest Asia. They start in the mountains of what are now Turkey and Kurdistan. From there they flow through what is now Iraq and head southeast to the Persian Gulf.

Mesopotamia The region where these two rivers flow is called **Mesopotamia** (MEHS•uh•puh•TAY•mee•uh). The name means "land between the rivers." This land is mostly flat with small, scrubby plants. The rivers provided water and means of travel. In ancient times, it was easier to travel by boat than over land. Boats can carry heavy loads, and river **currents** helped move boats that were traveling down river. Also, few roads existed.

Starting with a Story

Imagine you are a farmer living near a river in Southwest Asia. The yearly flood, which makes farming possible, has not come. Now the village is fighting for its life!

Click here to listen to the story @ ClassZone.com



Euphrates River

Even today, people of Mesopotamia farm the land next to the Euphrates River. The flat land by a river is a floodplain. ▼



Fertile Soil Almost every year, rain and melting snow in the mountains caused the rivers to **swell**. As the water flowed down the mountains, it picked up soil. When the rivers reached the plains, water overflowed onto the **floodplain**, the flat land bordering the banks. As the water spread over the floodplain, the soil it carried settled on the land. The fine soil deposited by rivers is called **silt**. The silt was fertile, which means it was good for growing crops.

An Arid Climate Less than 10 inches of rain fell each year in southern Mesopotamia, and summers were hot. This type of climate is called **arid**. Although the region was dry, ancient people could still grow crops because of the rivers and the fertile soil. Farming villages were widespread across southern Mesopotamia by 3500 B.C.

▲ **ANALYZE EFFECTS** Explain how the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers supported farming.

Controlling Water by Irrigation

▼ **KEY QUESTION** Why was irrigation so important for farmers?

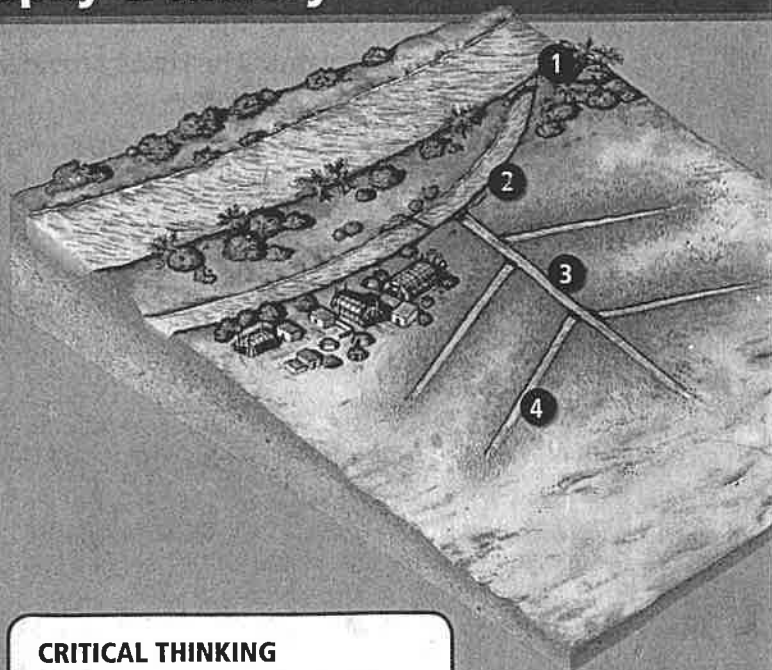
The work of a farmer is difficult. Crops need the right amount of water to thrive. The floods and the arid climate in Mesopotamia meant that farmers often had either too much water or too little.

CONNECT Geography & History

Ancient Irrigation

The model shows how an ancient irrigation system worked.

- 1 Gates controlled how much water flowed from the river.
- 2 Main canals led from the river. They sloped gently downward to keep the water flowing.
- 3 Medium-sized branch canals led away from the main canals.
- 4 Small feeder canals led water directly to the fields.



CRITICAL THINKING

Draw Conclusions Why do you think it was important to control how much water flowed from the river?



Floods and Droughts The yearly floods of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers were unpredictable. No one was sure when the floods would occur. They might come in April, or they might not happen until June, well after farmers had planted their crops. The extent of the floods depended on how much snow melted in the mountains in spring and how much rain fell. Heavy rains and snow melt brought violent floods that washed everything away. Too little rain and melting snow, however, meant that there would be no flood.

A long period when too little rain falls is called a **drought** (drowt). In an arid region such as Mesopotamia, drought is a constant danger. During a drought, the level of the Tigris and Euphrates would drop, making it hard for farmers to water their crops. If crops failed, the people of Mesopotamia starved.

Irrigation As early as 6000 B.C., Mesopotamian farmers began to take steps to control the water supply. They built earthen walls along the riverbanks to hold back excess water during floods. They also built canals to carry water from the rivers to their fields. Such a system for watering dry land is called **irrigation**.

Water from the Tigris and Euphrates was muddy, and silt often clogged the canals. Keeping canals clean and the water flowing was a constant challenge for Mesopotamian farmers.

▲ **Irrigation** This detail from an Egyptian mural shows how farmers used buckets to move water during the summer months, when the water level in the rivers was low.

▲ **DRAW CONCLUSIONS** Describe the importance of irrigation to farmers.

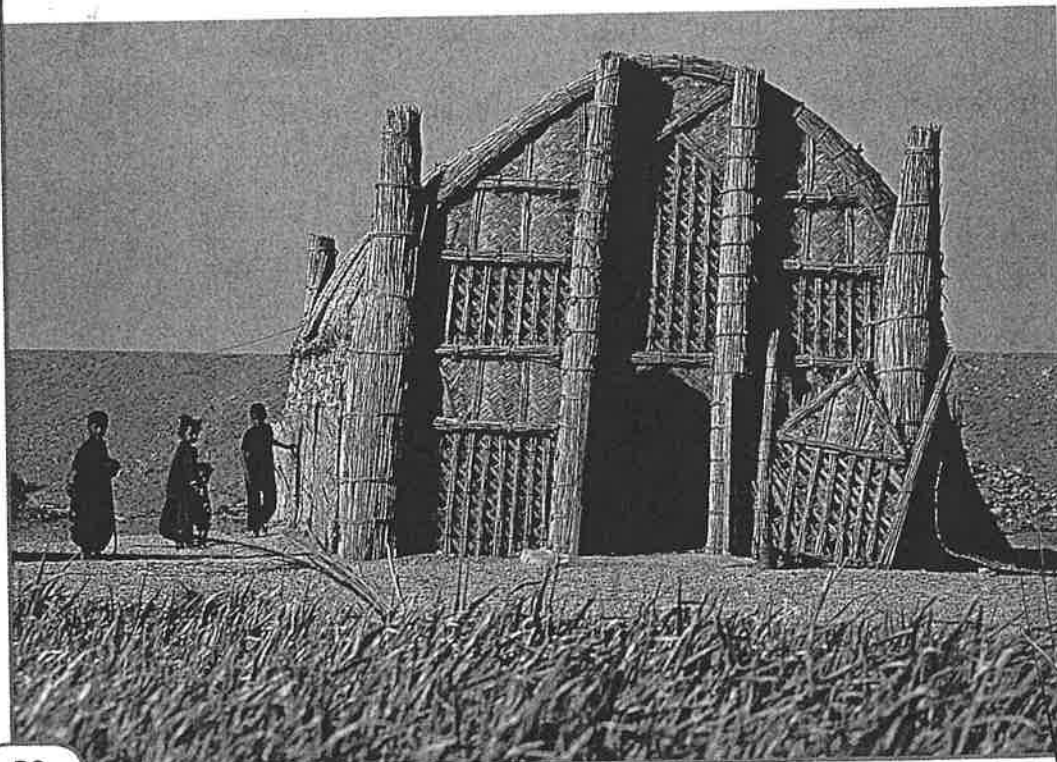
A Land of Few Resources

KEY QUESTION How did Mesopotamians cope with a lack of resources?

Humans have always had to solve problems in the environment. Some problems result from lack of resources. For example, Mesopotamia had no forests to provide wood. The region also had little stone and lacked minerals, such as metals.

Reed and Brick Houses Because of that lack of resources, the ancient Mesopotamians had few conventional building materials. Since the Mesopotamians could not build with wood or stone, they used what was readily available—reeds and mud. They formed bundles of reeds into “pillars” and inserted them into holes in the ground. They bent the pillars over and bound them together, forming a roof. They plastered the walls with mud to strengthen them. The Mesopotamians also mixed mud and straw together to make bricks. They hardened the bricks by drying them in the sun. Buildings constructed with these bricks were much sturdier than reed and mud houses. Even so, both types of buildings crumbled easily in bad weather and had to be repaired often.

Brick Walls Lack of resources caused other problems for the people of Mesopotamia. The region was easy to invade because it was not surrounded by mountains or other natural barriers. As a result, people from other areas often came to steal from the Mesopotamians or conquer them. The Mesopotamians wanted to protect themselves.



◀ **Building of Mud and Reeds** This style of building has been used in the region for at least 5,000 years and is still used today. **How did the Mesopotamians use reeds as a building material?**

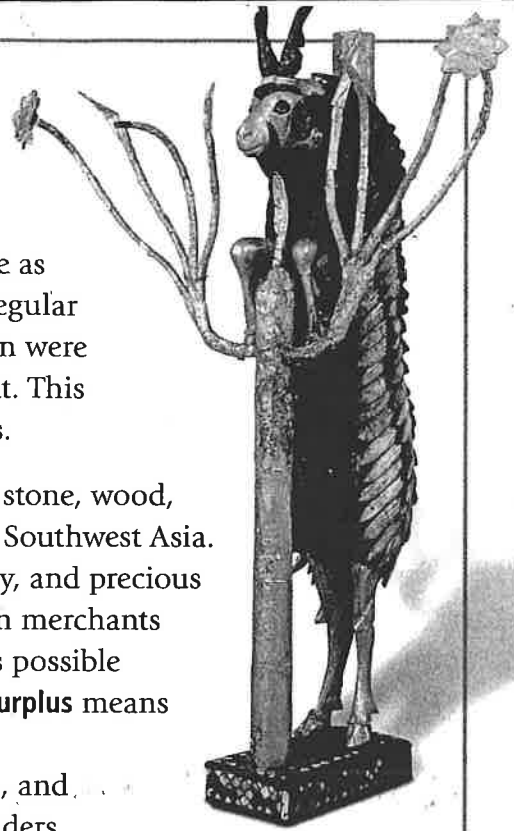
However, they lacked the trees or stone needed to build strong defensive barriers. So they built brick walls around their towns and villages.

Around the bigger towns, the walls sometimes were as much as 25 feet thick. The walls had guard towers at regular intervals along their length. In addition, the walls often were surrounded by a wide open ditch or a water-filled moat. This provided a formidable defense against invading armies.

Trading for Resources Mesopotamians obtained stone, wood, copper, and tin through trade with people throughout Southwest Asia. They also traded for luxuries, such as gold, ivory, ebony, and precious stones. In exchange for these goods, the Mesopotamian merchants offered grain, dates, and other farm products. This was possible because the Mesopotamians grew a surplus of crops. **Surplus** means more than they needed for themselves.

Jobs such as trading, digging canals, building walls, and farming had to be done over and over. Community leaders began to organize groups of people to do the work at the right time. Section 2 explains more about the organization of Mesopotamian society.

ANALYZE EFFECTS Explain how the Mesopotamians overcame their lack of natural resources.



▲ Trade Goods This figurine shows a ram caught in a thicket. It is made with gold, shell, and a blue stone called lapis, which were obtained through trade.

1 Section Assessment

ONLINE QUIZ
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Terms & Names

1. Explain the importance of

Mesopotamia silt drought
floodplain arid

Use Your Reading Notes

2. Summarize Use your completed chart to answer the following question:

How did the Mesopotamians change the environment to deal with geographic challenges?

Geography of Mesopotamia
The rivers of Mesopotamia were important because . . .
Mesopotamians watered their crops by . . .
Because of a lack of resources, . . .

Key Ideas

- What did the Tigris and Euphrates rivers provide for ancient Mesopotamians?
- How did Mesopotamian farmers obtain the right amount of water for their crops?
- How did the lack of natural resources affect Mesopotamians?

Critical Thinking

- Analyze Causes** How was irrigation connected to trade?
- Draw Conclusions** How did Mesopotamians create a successful society?

Activity

Write Job Descriptions Create a job description for a worker in Mesopotamia. Some possible jobs include irrigation system planner, canal digger, wall builder, trader, and project scheduler. Form a small group, and share your job descriptions.

Section 2

Reading for Understanding

▶ Key Ideas

BEFORE, YOU LEARNED

The geography of Mesopotamia influenced where people settled and how they lived.

NOW YOU WILL LEARN

A complex way of life, called civilization, developed in Sumer, a region in southern Mesopotamia.

▶ Vocabulary

TERMS & NAMES

civilization advanced form of culture that developed in cities

city-state political unit made up of a city and its surrounding lands

ziggurat (ZIHG•uh•RAT) temple built atop a series of increasingly smaller platforms

polytheism belief in many gods and goddesses

king highest-ranking leader of a group of people

pictographs pictures or drawings that represent a word or an idea

cuneiform (KYOO•nee•uh•FAWRM) first known writing system, which used wedge-shaped symbols

scribes people who specialized in writing and record keeping



Visual Vocabulary pictograph

▶ Reading Strategy

Re-create the chart shown at right. As you read and respond to the **KEY QUESTIONS**, use the chart to record generalizations about various aspects of the civilization of Sumer.



See Skillbuilder Handbook, page R12.

MAKE GENERALIZATIONS

Civilization in Sumer	
Advanced cities	
Specialized workers	
Complex institutions	
Record keeping	
Advanced technology	



GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

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The First Civilizations

Connect to What You Know Cities today have a wide range of cultural options. Their residents enjoy sports, entertainment, museums, theaters, and restaurants. Cities also offer people the chance to gain a good education or a promising job. As you are about to read, even the earliest cities were places of opportunity and culture.

The Rise of Civilization

▼ **KEY QUESTION** How did civilization develop in the region of Sumer?

As you recall, as people became better farmers, they settled in larger villages. Over time, these villages grew larger and larger. Eventually, some of them grew into cities.

City leaders had to start organizing workers to solve problems, such as building and cleaning irrigation canals. As a result, society and culture grew more complex. These changes led to an advanced form of culture called **civilization**. Most historians believe the first civilization rose about 3300 B.C. in Sumer, which was a region in southern Mesopotamia.

▲ **SUMMARIZE** Explain how civilization developed in the region of Sumer.



▲ **Votive Statues** Sumerian artists made these statues to worship the gods when people were busy doing other things. Notice how big their eyes are from gazing at the gods.

Ruins of Ur The ancient Sumerian city of Ur once stood on the banks of the Euphrates. The river has shifted over time. Now it is ten miles away. ▼



COMPARING Traits of Civilization

Five traits characterize civilization: advanced cities, specialized workers, complex institutions, record keeping, and improved technology. As you read about new civilizations, compare their characteristics to this list.

Advanced Cities

Civilization is closely linked to life in cities. At first, cities became important because farmers needed a place to store and trade their surplus grain. As cities grew, they began to offer other advantages. For example, the cities of Sumer had large temples where people prayed.

Ancient city scene ▶



Specialized Workers

Having a food surplus allows people to do work other than farming. Workers can specialize, or do a job that requires special skills. For example, some Sumerians made armor and weapons while others became priests or kings. When people specialize, the quality of their work improves because they can develop their skills.

◀ *Statue of King*



Complex Institutions

In time, religion and government became institutions. An institution is a group of people who have a specific purpose. Often it exists to help society meet its needs. For example, schools are institutions that exist to educate children.

Ziggurat, or Mesopotamian temple ▶



Record Keeping

Societies must keep track of many things. For example, rulers may want to measure the food supplies stored in the city. Keeping records usually involves writing, but not always. Mesopotamia invented the world's first writing system.

◀ *Cuneiform writing*



Improved Technology

Societies advance as people develop technology, or learn better ways to do things. The people of Sumer created new tools and used new materials. For example, Sumerians began to make tools and weapons of bronze (a mixture of copper and tin) rather than copper, a softer metal.

Warrior's helmet ▶



CRITICAL THINKING

Draw Conclusions Refer to the traits above to show how Sumer was a good example of civilization.

Sumerian City-States

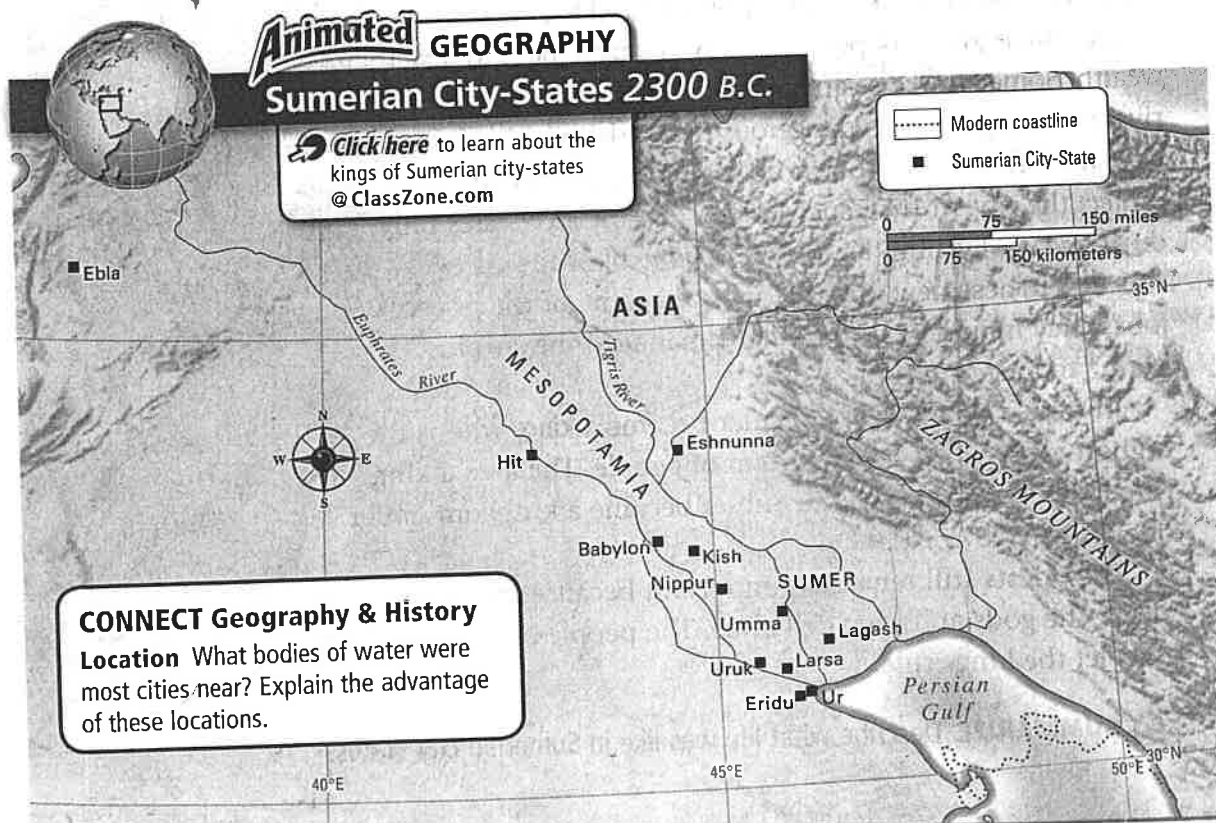
KEY QUESTION What was life like in Sumerian city-states?

Sumerian cities were centers of trade, learning, and religion. Most people still lived in the countryside. Even so, over time the cities began to rule the surrounding lands and villages. A community that included a city and its surrounding lands was called a **city-state**.

By 3000 B.C., Sumer had at least 12 city-states. Some of the more famous ones were Babylon, Kish, Nippur, and Ur. As the map below shows, most of these city-states were located near the mouths of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The land was especially fertile there. As a result, farmers were able to grow more food. Food surpluses could support a larger population.

A Sumerian City The cities of Sumer grew gradually, so they did not look the way many U.S. cities look today. Instead of broad, straight streets that cross at right angles, Sumerian cities had narrow, winding streets. As you learned in Section 1, walls surrounded the city. Gates in the walls allowed people to come and go.

People built their houses of reeds and mud or brick. The walls were very thick to keep out the heat. A house consisted of a series of rooms arranged around a courtyard. This central courtyard was covered with a loose roof of palm leaves over wooden planks. Like the walls, the roof was designed to keep the house cool.



The Ziggurat: Center of the City The largest and most important structure in a Sumerian city was the **ziggurat** (ZIHG•uh•RAT). Ziggurats were first built about 2200 B.C.

The ziggurat stood at the center of a huge temple complex. The complex functioned as a sort of city hall. This was because the priests ran the irrigation system and other important aspects of city life. People came to the temple complex to pay the priests for their services with grain and other items. As a result, the priests managed the storage of surplus grain and controlled much of the city-state's wealth.


Priests Become Leaders As you just read, priests played an important political role in Sumer. The Sumerians also went to them to ask the gods for help. The priests advised the people on how to act to please the gods.

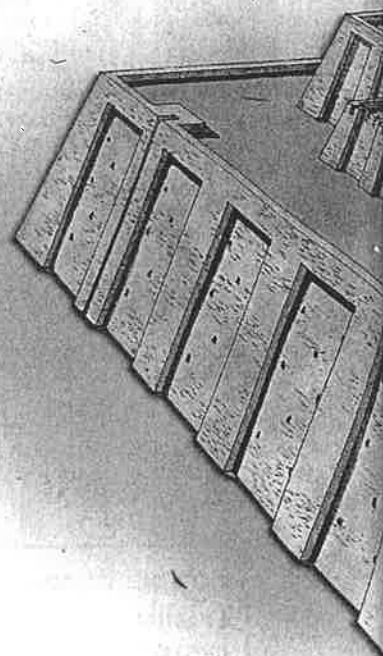
The Sumerians believed in many gods and goddesses, a belief called **polytheism**. According to Sumerian religion, four main gods created and ruled over the world: the gods of the sky, wind, hills, and fresh water. Each city-state worshiped its own main god. In addition, the Sumerians had thousands of lesser gods and goddesses. The Sumerians believed their gods could prevent bad things from happening. So to protect themselves and their cities, the Sumerians tried to please the gods. Each god had many priests. The priests worked to satisfy the gods and claimed to have influence with them. Because of this claim, people accepted the priests as leaders.

New Leaders in Sumer Around 3000 B.C., as city-states became richer, other groups of people began to attack them to take their wealth. Some attackers came from far-off lands. Others came from rival city-states. In such dangerous times, the people of the city-state often asked a powerful man to rule them and protect the city. At first, such leaders led the city-states only during wars. Eventually, they took control of the cities full-time. These new leaders took over some of the priests' jobs. They maintained the canals, managed the surplus grain, and acted as judges.

In time, this new type of ruler became a **king**, who is the highest-ranking leader of a group of people. The area a king ruled was called a **kingdom**. Sumer became a kingdom under one king by 2375 B.C.

The priests still remained important because their job was to please the gods and keep evil away. The people believed that the gods let the kings rule.

 **SUMMARIZE** Describe what life was like in Sumerian city-states.



Sumerian Society

KEY QUESTION What social classes made up Sumerian society?

As Sumerian society grew more complex, it divided into several social groups, or classes. Class systems often define who usually has power and who usually does the less desirable jobs.

Social Classes The king and the priests were at the top of the upper classes of Sumer. The Sumerians believed their kings and priests had a link to the gods, so they had great influence over people. The upper class also included landowners, government officials, and rich merchants.

The middle classes included all other free people. Most Sumerians were in this group, including farmers and artisans. Slaves made up the lowest class, but they had some rights. Slaves could conduct business and borrow money. They could also buy their freedom.

Animated HISTORY

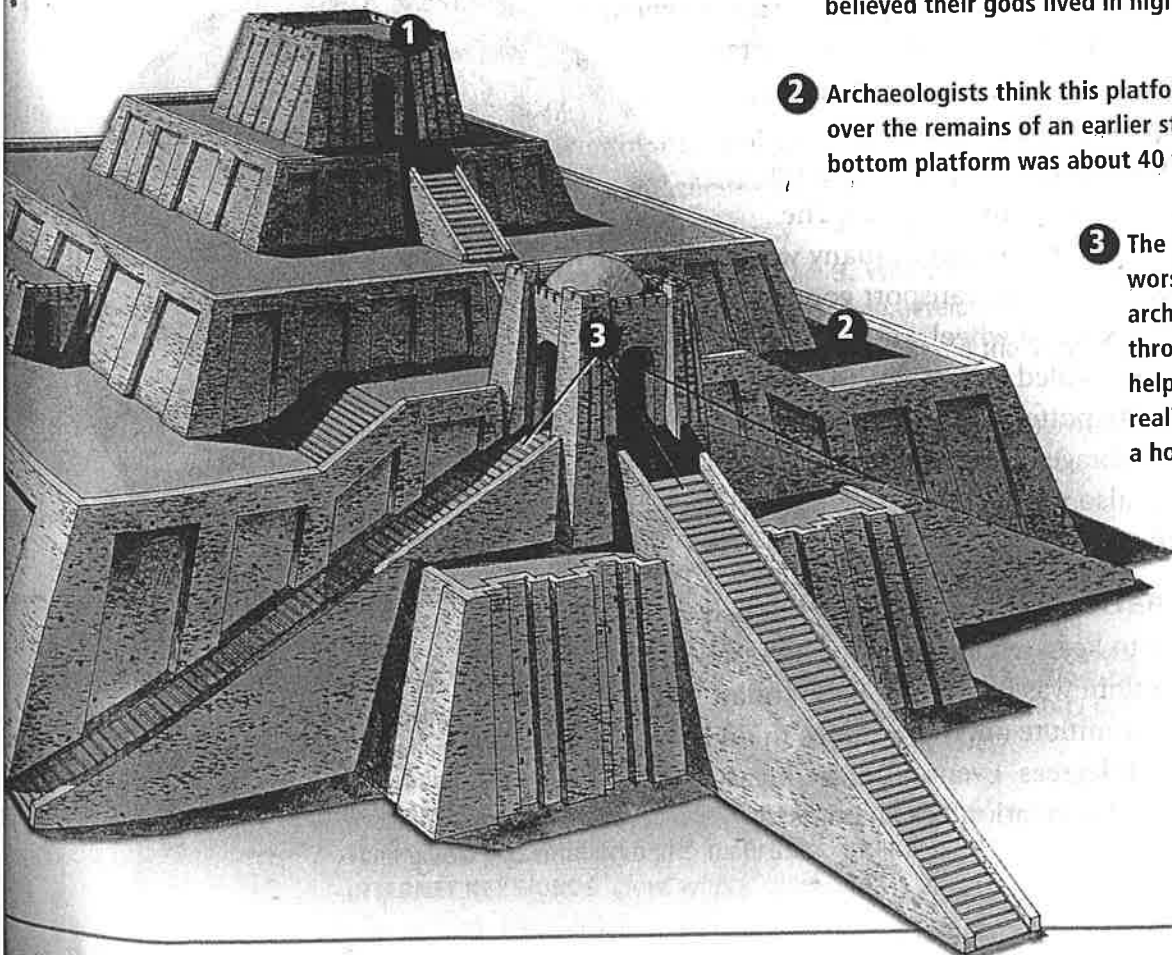
A Ziggurat in Ur

[Click here](#) to learn more about ziggurats and see photographs of the structures today @ClassZone.com

1 The shrine, or holy place, was in this small structure at the top. Ziggurats were built to look like mountains because the people of Mesopotamia believed their gods lived in high places.

2 Archaeologists think this platform was built over the remains of an earlier structure. This bottom platform was about 40 feet high.

3 The triple stairway led worshipers up to three arched doorways. Passing through those doorways helped worshipers to realize they were entering a holy place.



Role of Women All of the social classes included women, so their social positions varied widely. In general, women in early Sumer had more rights than they did in later Mesopotamia.

Some upper-class women became priestesses, which was a role of honor. Free women could own land, and they could work as merchants and artisans, such as weavers. Still, the main role for most women was raising their children.

▲ **CATEGORIZE** Identify the classes that made up the Sumerian social system.

Sumerian Scientific Developments

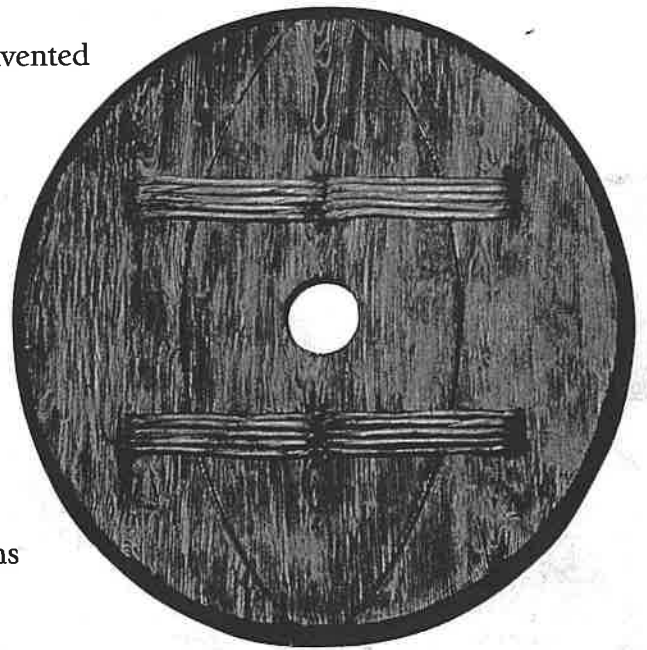
▼ **KEY QUESTION** What scientific developments did the Sumerians make?

Sumerians were good at solving problems. They invented tools and developed special knowledge to improve their lives. They were first to invent some of the things we use daily.

Early Inventions Historians believe that the Sumerians may have invented the plow sometime around 6000 B.C. and the wheel around 3500 B.C. These inventions helped the Sumerians a great deal in their everyday lives.

The plow was the first important tool invented to help farmers. The first plows were often simple digging sticks with handles. They could be pulled or pushed, first by people, then by animals. Plows broke up hard soil, which made planting easier. The Sumerians used the wheel in many ways, such as on wagons to transport goods. One special kind of wheel was the potter's wheel. This enabled Sumerians to make better quality pottery faster. Pots were important storage containers for surplus food. They also were an item that Sumerians could trade.

Mathematics The Sumerians developed arithmetic to keep records of crops and trade goods. Their number system was based on 60. So today, we have 60 seconds in a minute and 60 minutes in an hour. Circles contain 360 degrees. Eventually, the measurement of time helped with the creation of calendars.



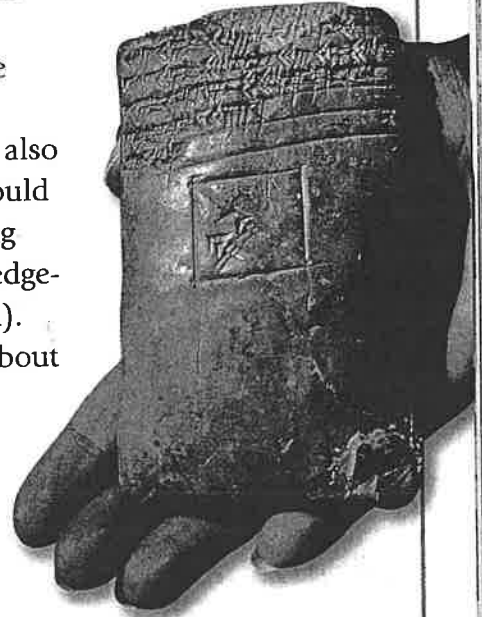
▲ **Wheel** Early wheels were usually made from wood with tires made of leather. **Why was the wheel such a useful invention?**

A Written Language By 3000 B.C., the Sumerians had invented writing to meet business needs. As trade expanded, merchants needed records of exchanges. They also wanted to label goods. So, they marked the outside of containers with a symbol of the product inside. Such symbols are known as **pictographs**, which means "picture writing." In time, the Sumerians began drawing the pictographs on clay tablets.



At first, pictographs showed actual objects. Later, they also stood for ideas and sounds. By combining sounds, they could write more words. Over time, the Sumerians stopped using pictures and began to use wedge-shaped symbols. This wedge-shaped writing is called **cuneiform** (KYOO•nee•uh•FAWRM).

The writing system was very complex and contained about 600 different symbols. Learning all those symbols took years. As a result, few people were able to read and write. The people who specialized in writing were called **scribes**. They were professional record keepers. Other people in Sumerian society respected them highly.




Initially, the Sumerians used writing for business purposes. Later, they started writing about wars, floods, and the reigns of kings. These records are Sumer's written history.

▲ **Cuneiform** Scribes used a sharpened reed, called a stylus, to write. Because of its shape, the stylus made wedge-like marks.

▲ **SUMMARIZE** Identify important scientific developments made by the Sumerians.

2 Section Assessment

 **ONLINE QUIZ**
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Terms & Names

1. Explain the importance of

civilization ziggurat pictographs
city-state polytheism cuneiform

Use Your Reading Notes

2. Make Generalizations

Use your completed chart to answer the following question:

What is the relationship between specialized workers and complex institutions? State your answer as a generalization.

Civilization in Sumer	
Advanced cities	
Specialized workers	
Complex institutions	
Record keeping	
Advanced technology	

Key Ideas

- Why are food surpluses necessary for civilization to develop?
- What did the Sumerians think their gods were like?
- Why was the plow such an important tool for farmers?

Critical Thinking

- Draw Conclusions** Why do historians identify the beginnings of history with the beginning of writing?
- CONNECT to Today** How does the role of Sumerian priests compare to the role of clergy today?

Activity

Internet Activity Choose one of the Sumerian inventions and use the Internet to research it. Then give a presentation on its importance. Include visuals with captions in your presentation.
INTERNET KEYWORDS *plow, wheel, cuneiform*

Mesopotamian Inventions

The ancient Mesopotamians are a good example of people who solved problems—and changed history by doing so. They invented technology that helped to grow crops and to create pottery more efficiently. Ever since, people all over the world have used those inventions. But don't think that ancient Mesopotamians were so serious that they thought only of inventions that would help them in their work. They also thought about play and invented some ways to have fun!

Plow

► **Past** The sun can bake the soil as hard as a brick. Seeds thrown on top of such hard ground usually don't sprout. Because of this, early farmers had to find a way to loosen the soil. They invented the plow, which has a blade that cuts into soil and turns it over. The plow helped farmers to grow surplus crops.

▼ **Present** Today's plows are bigger and use metal blades to turn over the soil. Now tractors instead of animals pull plows. Even there, we owe a debt to the ancient Mesopotamians. We wouldn't have tractors without the wheel—and they invented that too.



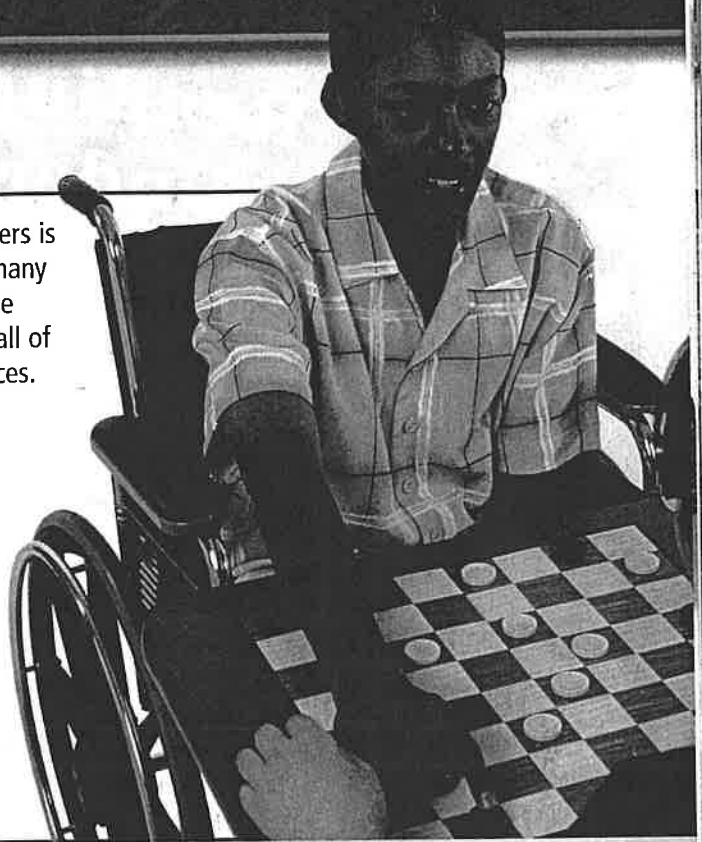
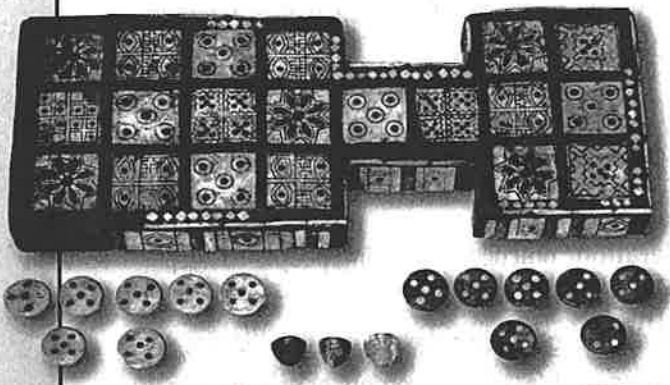
plow



Board Game

▼ **Past** This game comes from a tomb at Ur. Scholars think the goal was to move your pieces from one end to the other while an opponent blocked the narrow bridge.

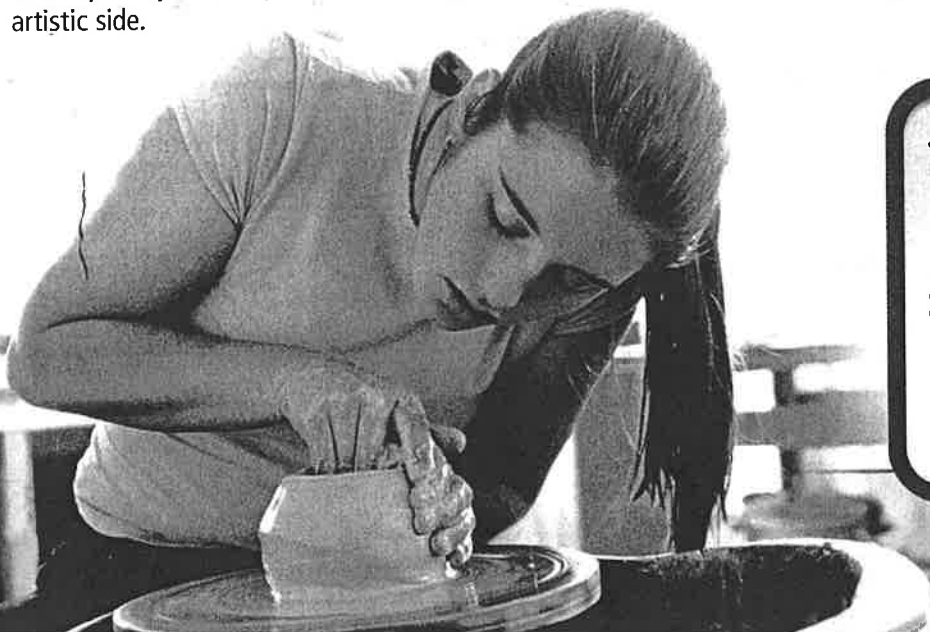
► **Present** Checkers is a board game that many people still enjoy. The object is to capture all of your opponent's pieces.



Pottery

► **Past** It is possible to create pottery entirely by hand, but the potter's wheel provides several advantages. Artisans can make pots with more even, streamlined shapes. And the process is much faster, so artisans can produce more pots than before.

▼ **Present** If you go to any craft fair, you can still find pottery that artisans make on a simple potter's wheel. Many people create pottery as a way to express their artistic side.



Activities

1. **TALK ABOUT IT** Which of these inventions has had the greatest effect on your life? Explain.
2. **WRITE ABOUT IT** Create instructions for the ancient board game shown above. Write them out, using a numbered, step-by-step format.

Section
3

Reading for Understanding

▶ **Key Ideas**

BEFORE, YOU LEARNED

A complex way of life, called civilization, developed in Sumer, a region in southern Mesopotamia.

NOW YOU WILL LEARN

Successive empires rose and fell in Mesopotamia and the lands to the east.

▶ **Vocabulary**

TERMS & NAMES

empire group of territories and peoples brought together under one supreme ruler

Fertile Crescent region stretching from the Persian Gulf northwest up the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and west over to the Mediterranean Sea

code of law written rules for people to obey

justice fair treatment of all the people, based on the law

tribute payment made in return for protection

exile forced removal from one's homeland, often to lands far away

toleration practice of allowing people to keep their traditions and beliefs

provinces governmental divisions like states

satraps (SAY•TRAPS) governors of provinces in the Persian Empire

Royal Road road used for government purposes in ancient times

BACKGROUND VOCABULARY

emperor person who rules an empire

governor person chosen to rule over a territory

policy course of action chosen by a government

minted coins coins that are issued by the government and are official money

▶ **Reading Strategy**

Re-create the chart shown at right. As you read and respond to the **KEY QUESTIONS**, use the chart to identify the issues and problems that faced the various empires that developed in Southwest Asia.



See Skillbuilder Handbook, page R9.

IDENTIFY PROBLEMS

Issues and Problems Faced by the Empires of Southwest Asia

Akkadians

Babylonians

Assyrians

Chaldeans

Persians



GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

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Empires of the Fertile Crescent

Connect to What You Know How big is the state where you live? What kinds of activities take place in the state capital? Most of the Mesopotamian city-states were smaller than the state you live in. Yet, the city-states were centers of culture and power.

The First Empire Builders

▼ **KEY QUESTION** Which early empires ruled the Fertile Crescent?

From about 3000 to 2000 B.C., ambitious kings of the city-states of Sumer fought over land. The land was flat and easy to invade. More land would give more wealth and power to the king. During this time, however, no single king was able to control all of Mesopotamia.

The Akkadian Empire Around 2371 B.C., a powerful leader named Sargon of Akkad took control of the whole region! Sargon is known as the creator of the first empire in world history. An **empire** brings together many different lands and peoples under the control of one ruler. The person who rules is called an **emperor**. Sargon's empire was called the Akkadian Empire.

Eventually, Sargon ruled over lands that stretched in a curve from the Persian Gulf through Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean Sea. This region is called the **Fertile Crescent**. (See map on page 25.) The Fertile Crescent had rich soil and water that made the area good for farming.

The creation of an empire is a pattern that repeats throughout history. Empires are important because they change the way people live. They may bring peace to the peoples there. They encourage trade, which makes more goods available. Empires often include people from several cultures. The ideas, technology, and customs of the different peoples may be shared by all.

Bust of Sargon Sargon's name means "the rightful king." **Why is Sargon an important historical figure?** ►



▲ **Statue of Hammurabi** This statue from about 1760 B.C. shows the great Babylonian leader Hammurabi praying.



Primary Source

Background Hammurabi's Code is sometimes called the "eye for an eye" code. It included 282 laws covering business, property, and conduct toward other people. The laws help us understand what was important to the people in Hammurabi's empire.

This scene is from the upper section of a pillar with the law code of Hammurabi written on it. The laws were written on the lower section so that people could see them. ►



from Code of Hammurabi

Translated by L. W. King

195. If a son strike his father, his hands shall be hewn [cut off].
196. If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out.
197. If a man break another man's bone, his bone shall be broken.
202. If any one strike the body of a man higher in rank than he, he shall receive sixty blows with an ox-whip in public.
204. If a freed man strike the body of another freed man, he shall pay ten shekels in money.
205. If the slave of a freed man strike the body of a freed man, his ear shall be cut off.


DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION

What do the laws tell you about justice at the time?

The Babylonian Empire and Hammurabi The Akkadian Empire lasted for about 200 years. It fell apart largely because of attacks by outside peoples. Around 2000 B.C., people known as Amorites invaded and took control of the city-states of Sumer. They chose the city of Babylon on the Euphrates River as their capital.

From 1792 to 1750 B.C., a powerful king named Hammurabi (HAM•uh•RAH•bee) ruled the Babylonian Empire. He believed that a **code of law** would help him control all his lands. A code of law is a set of written laws for people to obey. Hammurabi reviewed all the existing laws in the empire. From these he drew up a single code of law that was displayed on a huge pillar in Babylon.

The code's goal was to bring **justice**, or fair treatment of people, to everyone in the empire. It identified acts of wrongdoing and their punishments. Hammurabi's Code established the idea that society should be run by the rule of law. This means that the law should apply to all the people, not just a few. By displaying the code, Hammurabi also established the idea that people have a right to know the laws and the punishments for breaking them.

 **SUMMARIZE** Identify the early empires that ruled the Fertile Crescent.

Assyrians and Chaldeans

KEY QUESTION How were the Assyrians and the Chaldeans able to build empires?

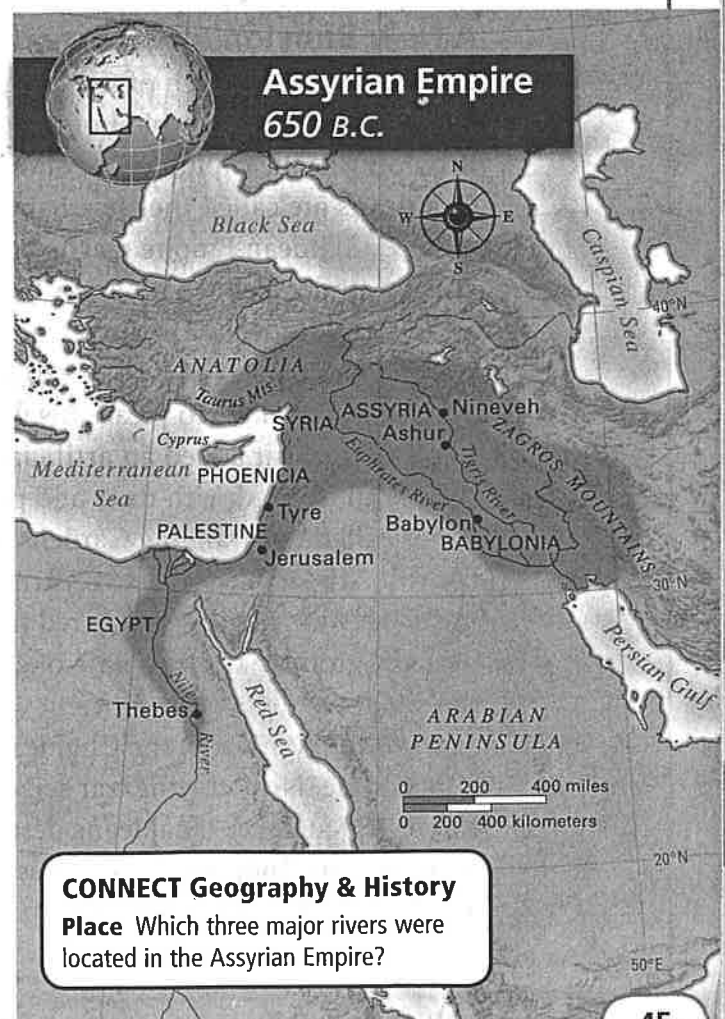
The Babylonian Empire fell around 1500 B.C. About 200 years later, another empire—Assyria—arose to control the Fertile Crescent. Assyria was located in northern Mesopotamia, an area of rolling hills. To protect their lands, the rulers built a powerful army and set out to control the neighboring lands.

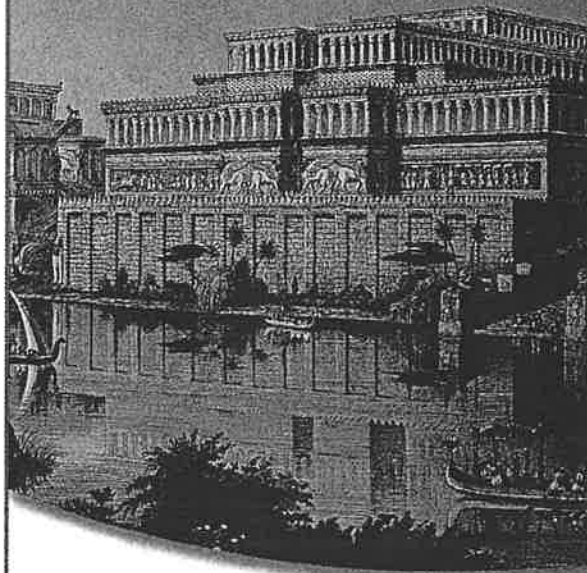
A Powerful Empire Assyrian soldiers used the latest inventions for war. They carried iron swords and iron-tipped spears. Few of their enemies had iron weapons. The Assyrians attacked city walls with battering rams. They used ladders to scale the walls of cities. They even dug tunnels under city walls to get soldiers inside.

Over time, the Assyrians conquered many lands. They added Syria, Babylonia, Egypt, Phoenicia, and Palestine to the empire. Assyria reached its peak of power under Ashurbanipal (AHSH•ur•BAHN•ee•PAHL) from 668 to 627 B.C. From his capital of Nineveh, he ruled almost all of the Fertile Crescent.

The Assyrians governed the lands they conquered by choosing a **governor** from that land to rule under their direction. Each governor had to send **tribute** to the Assyrian emperor. This meant that the governor had to pay for protection given by the Assyrian army. If any governor failed to pay tribute, the army destroyed cities in his land. People of the land usually were forced into **exile**, or driven out of their homelands, often to faraway places.

Assyria Crumbles In 609 B.C., the Assyrian Empire fell. Two of its enemies, the Medes (meedz) and the Chaldeans (kal•DEE•uhnz), joined forces to defeat the Assyrians. These forces completely destroyed Nineveh by burning it to the ground. For centuries afterward, only mounds of earth marked the location of the once great capital.





Ashurbanipal (c. 668–627 B.C.)

Assyrian ruler Ashurbanipal sent people to find and bring back copies of writings from throughout the empire. His collection contained over 20,000 cuneiform tablets on subjects such as science, geography, medicine, and religion.

Ashurbanipal set up a huge library in the capital at Nineveh. (An artist's impression of the library in Nineveh is shown at the left.) The library organized the collected texts by subject, like books in a modern library. However, Nineveh's enemies leveled the library. When archaeologists dug up the library's ruins, they found many tablets. These tablets became the main source of information about ancient Mesopotamia.

CRITICAL THINKING

Make Inferences Why do you think Ashurbanipal wanted to collect writings from throughout the empire and store them at his library?

A New Babylonian Empire In time, Assyria's neighbors, the Chaldeans, ruled much of the former Assyrian empire. The city of Babylon became the capital of the Chaldeans' new empire. Recall that Babylon was the capital of the first Babylonian empire. Sometimes the Chaldeans are called the New Babylonians.

The Chaldean Empire reached its peak under Nebuchadnezzar II (NEHB•uh•kuhd•NEHZ•uhr), who ruled from 605 to 562 B.C. He rebuilt the city of Babylon. To please his wife, Nebuchadnezzar added an artificial mountain covered with trees and plants. It was called the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. The gardens were constructed in such a way that they appeared to float over the ground. They became one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Like the Assyrians, the Chaldeans were cruel rulers. In 587 B.C., for example, Nebuchadnezzar seized Jerusalem, the capital city of the Hebrews. Later, the Chaldeans destroyed the Hebrews' sacred temple in Jerusalem. They also held thousands of Hebrews captive in Babylon for about 50 years. (You will learn about the Hebrews in Chapter 3.)

Seven Wonders of the Ancient World

Temple of Artemis at Ephesus (present-day Turkey)
Hanging Gardens of Babylon (present-day Iraq)
Colossus of Rhodes (present-day Greece)
Mausoleum at Halicarnassus (present-day Turkey)
Lighthouse at Alexandria (present-day Egypt)
Pyramids at Giza (present-day Egypt)*
Statue of Zeus at Olympia (present-day Greece)

* still standing

Weak rulers followed Nebuchadnezzar II. One ruler upset some Chaldeans by trying to replace their main god, Marduk. The followers of Marduk may have helped Cyrus of Persia conquer Babylon.

- ▲ **ANALYZE EFFECTS** Explain how the Assyrians and the Chaldeans were able to build empires.

Persia Controls Southwest Asia

- ▼ **KEY QUESTION** How did the reigns of Cyrus and Darius compare?

To the east of the Fertile Crescent was the land of the Medes, which was called Media. The Medes controlled lands where the Persians lived. This region was bounded by mountain ranges. These three ranges are the Zagros, the Caucasus (KAW•kuh•suhs), and the Hindu Kush. Modern-day Iran lies in this area.

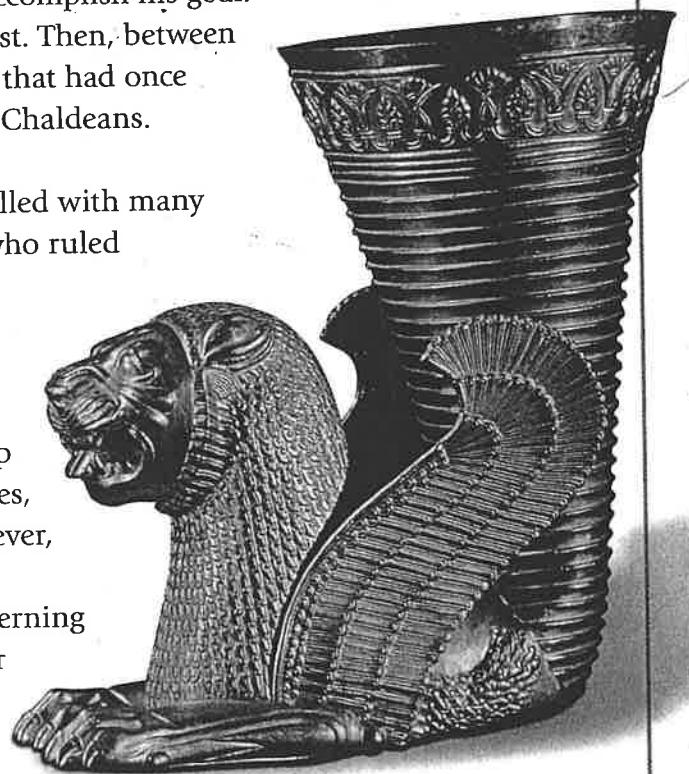
The Persians, who were nomads from the plains of Central Asia, arrived in Media around 1000 B.C. They created many tiny kingdoms that thrived through trade. These kingdoms grew in power and began to threaten the Medes' control of the land.

Cyrus Finds the Persian Empire The Medes ruled Persia until a brilliant, powerful Persian king named Cyrus (SY•ruhs) took control. He was known as Cyrus the Great. Cyrus had a vision of conquering the lands around Persia and uniting these lands as one large empire. He set out to accomplish his goal. First, Cyrus conquered Anatolia to the west. Then, between 550 and 539 B.C., he conquered the lands that had once been controlled by the Assyrians and the Chaldeans. His empire was immense.


Cyrus needed ways to control lands filled with many different peoples. Unlike the Assyrians, who ruled through cruelty, Cyrus set up a **policy**, or government action, of **toleration**. This meant allowing people to keep their customs and beliefs. Cyrus allowed the conquered peoples to continue to worship their own gods, speak their own languages, and practice their own ways of life. However, they did have to pay tribute.

Cyrus's policy of toleration made governing the empire much easier. There were fewer revolts, and the people lived in peace.

Drinking Vessel A winged lion decorates a gold drinking vessel. Winged lions symbolizing speed and power were associated with Persia. ▼

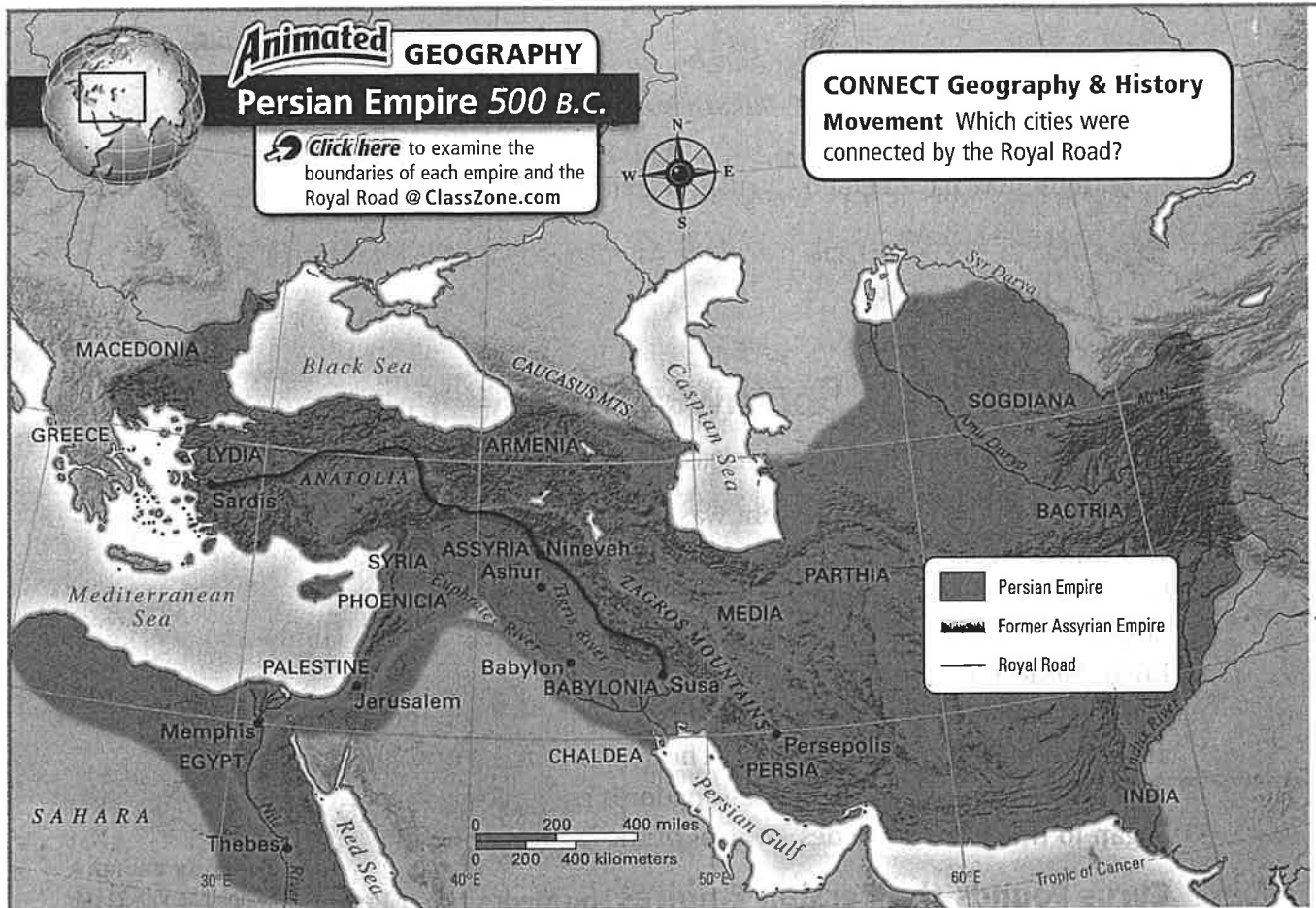




 [Click here](#) to examine the boundaries of each empire and the Royal Road @ClassZone.com

CONNECT Geography & History

Movement Which cities were connected by the Royal Road?



Darius Expands the Empire Cyrus built a stable empire of many peoples through his policy of toleration. Cyrus's successor, Cambyses (kam•BY•sez), expanded the empire but he ruled through harsh means. When he died, rebellions broke out across the empire. Then a strong leader named Darius (duh•RY•uhs) came to power.

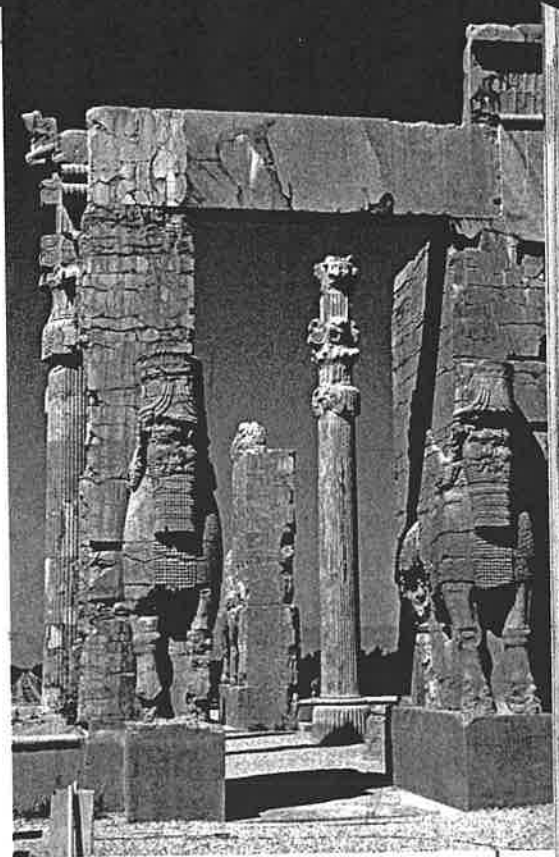
Darius spent the first years of his reign dealing with rebellious peoples. After he put down the revolts, he moved to extend the boundaries of his empire. Over time, he conquered lands as far east as India. Under his rule, the Persian Empire grew to measure some 2,800 miles from east to west. (The distance from New York City to Los Angeles is about 2,500 miles.)

The empire was so large that Darius added new policies to those set up by Cyrus. Darius divided the empire into 20 **provinces**. Each province, which was an area of land like a state, had a local government. Darius set up governors called **satraps** (SAY•TRAPS) to carry out his orders in the provinces and to collect taxes. He appointed a military commander for each satrap. He also sent out spies called "king's eyes and ears" to be sure his satraps followed orders. These policies allowed him to have greater control over all the lands in the empire.

The policy of provinces ruled by satraps was only one way that Darius united the empire. He also built a **Royal Road**, or road for government purposes. The Royal Road was 1,775 miles long. The eastern end of the road was in Susa in Babylonia, and the western end was in Sardis in Anatolia. Royal messages were sent along the road by a relay of messengers. Military troops and mail also moved along it from all parts of the empire.

Darius took other steps to unite the empire. He set up a code of law based on Hammurabi's model. From the Lydians, a conquered people, he took the idea of **minted coins**. These coins, issued by the government as official money, promoted business and made it easy to pay taxes.

Darius planned a march against Egyptian rebels in 486 B.C., but he died that year. His son Xerxes (ZUHRK•seez) had to deal with Egypt. You will read about Egypt in Chapter 4. Xerxes would also have to deal with the Greeks. You will read about them in Chapter 7.



▲ **Ruins at Persepolis**
Winged and bearded bull-like figures guard the Gate of All Nations in the Persian capital, Persepolis.

▲ **COMPARE** Compare the policies that Cyrus and Darius adopted during their reigns.

3 Section Assessment

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Terms & Names

1. Explain the importance of

empire	justice	toleration
code of law	tribute	satrap

Use Your Reading Notes

2. Identify Problems

Use your completed chart to answer the following question:

What common problems did the empires of Southwest Asia face?

Issues and Problems Faced by the Empires of Southwest Asia

Akkadians	
Babylonians	
Assyrians	
Chaldeans	
Persians	

Key Ideas

- Which empires gained control of the Fertile Crescent?
- How did the Assyrians and the Chaldeans maintain control of their lands?
- In what ways did the Royal Road and minted coins help Darius unite the Persian Empire?


Critical Thinking

- Draw Conclusions** Why is the development of Hammurabi's Code an important landmark in the growth of civilization?
- Contrast** How did the policies of Cyrus and Darius contrast with those of the Assyrians?

Activity

Make a Map Use the map on pages A24–A25 of the Atlas to sketch a world outline map. Use the maps on pages 45 and 48 to mark the extent of the Assyrian and Persian empires.

Interactive Review

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Early Empires

Government

- First empire is created.
- Code of law is developed.
- Empire is divided into smaller units for easier rule.
- Policies of toleration are used to control captured peoples.



Culture

- System of writing helps record keeping.
- Ashurbanipal collects writings and builds a library.
- Nebuchadnezzar builds Hanging Gardens.



Economics

- Tribute is used to support the empire.
- Minted coins help business and the government.
- Royal Road links the Persian Empire.



VOCABULARY

Explain why the words in each set below are linked with each other.

1. **floodplain** and **silt**
2. **ziggurat** and **polytheism**
3. **province**, **satrap**, and **Royal Road**

KEY IDEAS

The Geography of Ancient Mesopotamia (pages 26–31)

4. How did the flooding of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers both help and hurt farmers?
5. Why was irrigation so important to Mesopotamian farmers?
6. How did the Mesopotamians overcome their lack of resources?

The First Civilizations (pages 32–41)

7. What are the five traits of civilization?
8. What role did the temple play in Sumerian society?
9. What roles did women and slaves play in Sumerian society?

Empires of the Fertile Crescent (pages 42–49)

10. Why were the Assyrians able to build such a large empire?
11. Why was Hammurabi's Code a step toward better government?
12. What policies did Cyrus and Darius use to keep the Persian Empire under control?

CRITICAL THINKING

13. **Analyze Effects** How did inventions support farming in Sumer?
14. **Make Inferences** How does a uniform code of law improve a leader's ability to rule effectively?
15. **Compare and Contrast** How successful were the policies of Assyria as compared with those of Persia?