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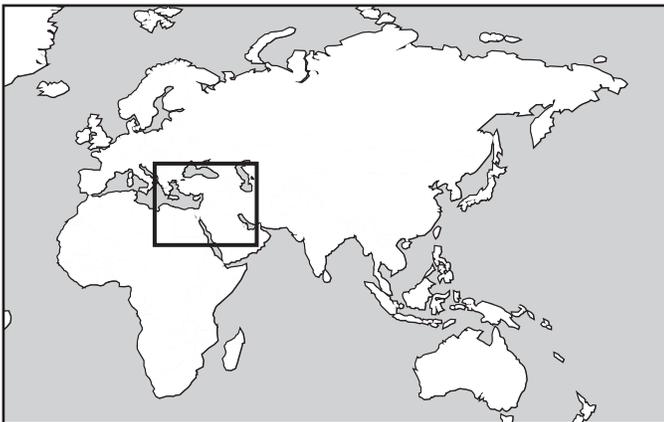
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5. The Fertile Crescent and the Sumerians

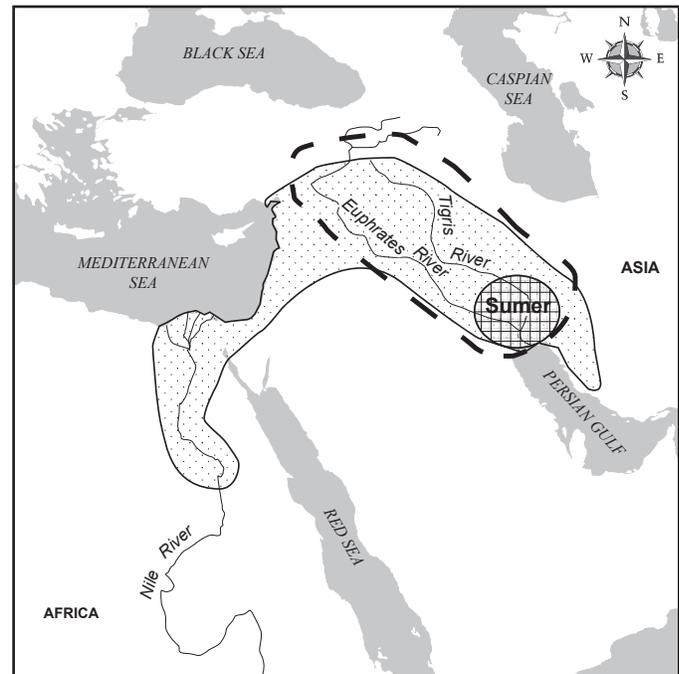


A ¹Some of the world's first "great civilizations" developed on the banks of rivers. ²"Civilization" is an urban settlement with a high development of agriculture (farming and domesticated animals). ³"Great" refers to civilizations that had a great impact on the civilizations that followed them.

B ⁴The first great civilizations existed in the Fertile Crescent, a crescent-shaped area in the Middle East stretching from the Nile River to the Tigris rivers. ⁵Within the Fertile Crescent, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was called Mesopotamia (the land between two rivers).

C ⁶Toward the end of the New Stone Age (c. 4000 B.C.), nomadic tribes settled in lower Mesopotamia and became the world's first farmers. ⁷These settlers began what many scientists believe is the world's first "advanced civilization", called Sumer. ⁸It was located where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers flow into the Persian Gulf. ⁹Scientists call Sumer an advanced civilization because it had urban settlements, agriculture, and a written language.

D ¹⁰Sumerians, the citizens who lived in Sumer, were great traders. ¹¹To better manage their trading, the Sumerians developed the first systems of writing, laws, and measurements. ¹²These innovations helped them develop a thriving trading business. ¹³These systems were also three of the greatest contributions to civilization the world has ever known.



Fertile Crescent
 Sumer
 Mesopotamia

E ¹⁴The Sumerians' writing system was called cuneiform. ¹⁵Cuneiform was made up of more than 700 symbols — called pictographs — that represented objects. ¹⁶At this time in history, paper did not exist. ¹⁷Sumerians wrote cuneiform with reed writing instruments on wet clay tablets that were then baked to preserve what was written.

F ¹⁸In most ancient Mesopotamian civilizations, people were polytheists (believing in many gods). ¹⁹Sumer was organized into city-states: independent cities with surrounding farms and villages. ²⁰Each city-state was like a little kingdom, with its own ruler. ²¹Sumerians believed each city-state was the property of a god and the people of each city-state prayed to their own god as well as other gods. ²²The political leader of each city-state was also the religious leader. ²³This "priest-king" was thought to be a god. ²⁴This affected how people wrote laws and viewed political rights. ²⁵If you were seen as a god or his relative, you enjoyed more rights than other people, and citizens believed they should obey you without question.

G ²⁶“The Epic of Gilgamesh,” a Sumerian story, is possibly the oldest written story. ²⁷It shows how Sumerians viewed their city-state leaders as imperfect gods who interacted with humans.

H ²⁸Sumerians made other contributions to civilization. ²⁹They created elaborate irrigation systems to bring river water to their fields. ³⁰They were the first people to use wheeled vehicles. ³¹In architecture, they developed the arch and the dome, which allowed them to build larger buildings.

I ³²Astronomy is the study of celestial objects, including stars and planets. ³³Sumerian astronomers created the 12-month lunar calendar.

³⁴Do you know why it is called a “lunar calendar?”

³⁵Lunar means it is based on the moon. ³⁶The lunar calendar helped the Sumerians plan the planting and harvesting of their crops, because it told them when the seasons would change.

J ³⁷Salt eventually ended the Sumerian civilization.

³⁸Rising water brought salt to the surface of the land. ³⁹Some writings indicate “the earth was turning white.” ⁴⁰The salt in the soil prevented the Sumerians from growing food (wheat), which caused the Sumerian people to suffer starvation and disease. ⁴¹This weakness allowed Semitic people to conquer them. ⁴²Semitic people are people who originated from the Arabian peninsula.

Questions

- What was the most important reason that the first urban civilizations were founded next to rivers?
 - Rivers were great sources of transportation.
 - Rivers provided food.
 - Rivers provided water for agriculture.
 - Rivers were used for the military.

Which sentence best supports the answer?

- Which of these is not a reason historians referred to the Sumerian civilization as highly developed?
 - It was founded next to a river.
 - It had cities.
 - Many Sumerians were literate.
 - Sumerians farmed.

Which sentence best supports the answer?

- According to the lesson, why did the Sumerians create systems for writing, laws, and weights and measures?
 - Sumerians wanted their people to be free.
 - Sumerians wanted their society to grow.
 - Sumerians thought it would help business.
 - Sumerians wanted to create standards for their society.

Which sentence best supports the answer?

- Write T for true or F for false for each statement.
 - _____ Carrying a written Sumerian message in 2000 B.C. was easier than carrying a message written in English today.
 Which sentence best supports the answers?

- _____ Cuneiform had fewer objects than English has words.

Which sentence best support the answers?

- _____ Sumerians used pencils to write with.
- Which sentence best supports the answers?

- _____ Cuneiform used drawings.

Which sentence best support the answers?

- According to the lesson, knowledge of this helped the Sumerians farm.
 - the Black Sea
 - the wheel
 - the moon
 - cuneiform

Which sentence best supports the answer?

6. Write T for true or F for false for each statement.

a. _____ Sumerians valued trading goods.
Which sentence best supports the answer?

b. _____ Sumerians believed all men were created equal.

Which sentence best supports the answer?

c. _____ Sumerians were excellent builders in their day.

Which sentence best supports the answer?

d. _____ Sumerians knew the best times of the year to plant and harvest.

Which sentence best supports the answer?

7. What can you infer about the character of Sumerian leaders?

- a. They were honest.
- b. They treated other Sumerians with fairness.
- c. They were good men.
- d. They believed others should obey them.

Which sentence best supports the answer?

8. What made it possible for Sumerians to move large items on land faster than any other civilization had before?

Which sentence best supports the answer?

9. Why would Sumerians not want to oppose their ruler?

- a. They knew he was fair and just.
- b. They knew he was the wisest.
- c. He was their god.
- d. He invented the calendar.

Which sentence best supports the answer?

Written Response Question

10. What were the three greatest contributions the Sumerians made to future civilizations? Explain how each contribution benefited future civilizations. Please use complete sentences to answer the question.

Complete the concept map by using the words from the choice box.

- Tigris River
- traders
- Euphrates River
- dome
- The Fertile Crescent
- vehicles
- cuneiform
- lunar
- city-states
- Nile River
- irrigation
- Sumer

