

# CIVILIZATIONS OF THE NEAR EAST

THE CRADLE OF CIVILIZATION

## What came before?

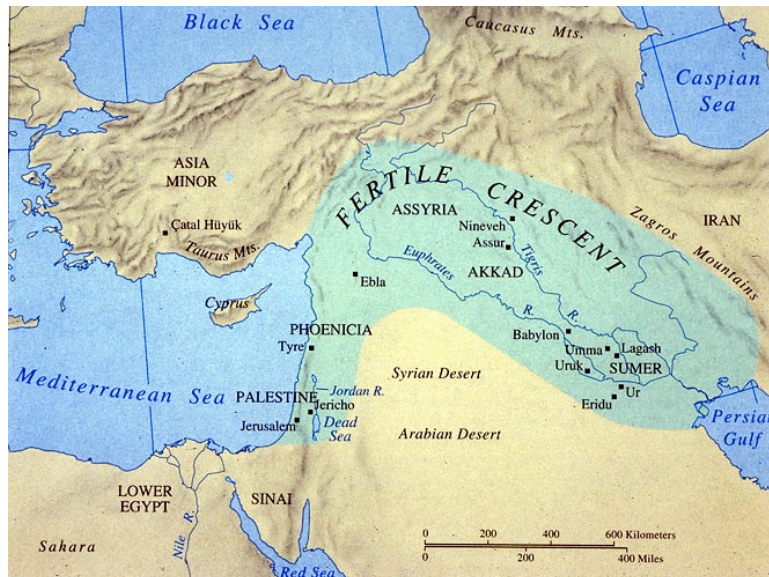
### PALEOLITHIC AGE

- Old Stone Age
  - until ca. 10000 BC
  - Hunter gatherer societies
  - Small, nomadic groups

→ NEOLITHIC AGE

# NEOLITHIC AGE

- New Stone Age, ca. 9,500–4,000 BC
- FERTILE CRESCENT: SW ASIA
- FIRST AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION
  - Cultivation of wild grains
  - Domestication of animals
  - New technologies: irrigation
- → SURPLUS of food
  - Formation of VILLAGES
  - Population growth



## The First Cities

- ca. 5000 BC
- In Southern MESOPOTAMIA, between the Tigris and Euphrates river
- Known collectively as SUMER
- By 3000 BC, these included the important cities of URUK, ERIDU and UR
- These cities were actually CITY-STATES

## The City State

Independent urban center exercising  
political and economic control over  
the city and the surrounding  
countryside

Home to:

- Populations of 20,000+ people by 2500 BC
- SPECIALISTS: Kings, priests, craftsman, traders, scribes, soldiers
- SOCIAL CLASSES: elite, freemen and slaves

Center for :

- Government & Law – royal palaces
- Trade and Crafts – first marketplaces
- Religion – Huge temple complexes
- Defense – City walls and armies

## Mesopotamian Religion

- POLYTHEISTIC
- Different cities focused on specific gods
  - included a sky, agriculture and sun gods
  - earth, mother, fertility and sea goddesses
- Temples known as ZIGGURATS



## New Technological Ages

- COPPER AGE
  - 4000–2500 BC
- BRONZE AGE
  - 3000–1100 BC
  - Alloy of Copper and Tin
  - Harder, more durable than Copper
  - Better tools, stronger armor, WEAPONS

## New Technologies

- Metal edged plows and tools
- Brick architecture
- Simple mathematics
- Calendars
- Glass
- WHEELED carts
- CUNEIFORM



## CUNEIFORM

- from the Latin *cuneus*, for “wedge”
- wedge-shaped marks impressed in clay tablets
- not an alphabet: symbols represented syllables or entire words
- taught to a limited number of SCRIBES



## Uses of Writing

ECONOMY – recording stores and trades

→

- Official records for kings
- Religion
- Literature
  - Oldest literature is EPIC of GILGAMESH
- Transmission of CULTURE

## The First Empire

a single political unit in which a single ruler controls multiple cities and all the resources of the land in between

- larger population & army, more resources
- control of yet more resources

## The Akkadian Empire

- King SARGON of AKKAD
- Akkad was in central Mesopotamia
- Lasted from 2350–2200 BC
- Shared culture with Sumer
- Spoke Akkadian, a SEMITIC language



## The SEMITES

- SEMITIC group of AFRO-ASIATIC family
  - Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic
  - dominant language group of near east
- not only Akkadians but also HEBREWS
  - tribes rather than city-dwellers
  - emigrated to CANAAN and then EGYPT
  - Returned to Canaan ca. 1200 BCE
    - Urban kingdoms
    - MONOTHEISTIC and the OLD TESTAMENT

## Post-Akkadian Mesopotamia



- ASSYRIA
  - Originated in the North, city of ASHUR
  - Merchants and Soldiers
- BABYLONIA
  - Originated in the South, city of BABYLON
  - HAMMURABI (ruled ca. 1780–1750)

## Code of Hammurabi

- King's power from GODS
- Three classes in society: nobility, commoners, slaves
- Punishment for crimes included an EYE FOR AN EYE
- Different penalties for different classes
- PRIVATE PROPERTY

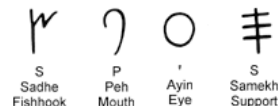


## The End of Assyria and Babylonia

- Controlled Mesopotamia for the rest of the Bronze Age and into the **IRON AGE**
- From ca. 2000 to 560 BC
- After 1100, spread of IRON tools and weaponry
- Replaced by a new Empire – PERSIA – in 560 BC

## The PHOENICIANS

- Reached Mediterranean coast ca. 1200 BC
- Important MERCHANTS and sea explorers
- Invention of the ALPHABET
  - a writing system that assigns a single symbol for each phoneme
  - ca. 1050 BC
  - Precursor to the alphabet we use today



## The HITTITES



- Centered in ANATOLIA
- Indo-European language
  - early adopters of IRON weaponry
- raided Mesopotamia from 1600–1100 BC
- finally destroyed by the SEA PEOPLES