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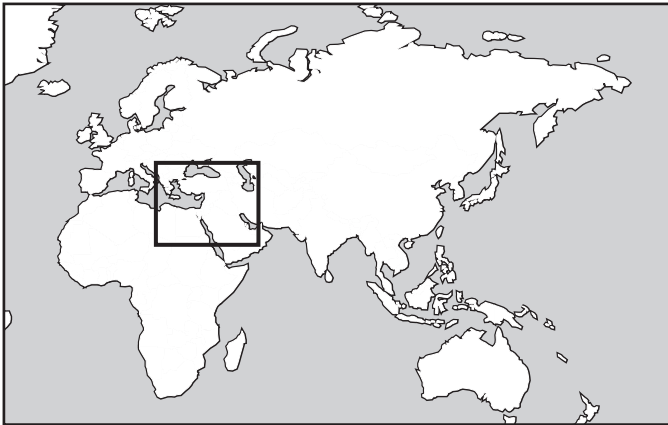
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## 5. The Fertile Crescent and the Sumerians

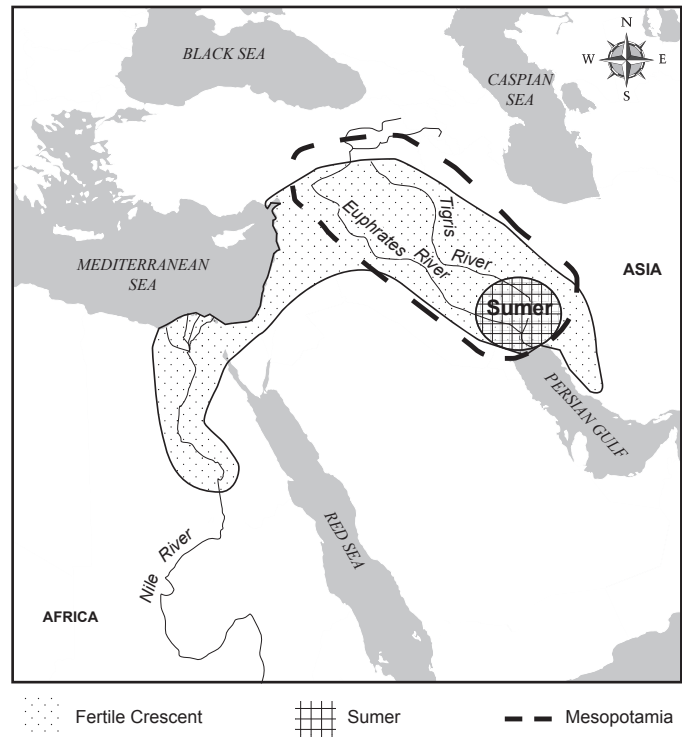


**A** <sup>1</sup>Some of the world's first "great civilizations" developed on the banks of rivers. <sup>2</sup>"Civilization" is an urban settlement with a high development of agriculture (farming and domesticated animals). <sup>3</sup>"Great" refers to civilizations that had a great impact on the civilizations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

**B** <sup>4</sup>The 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. <sup>5</sup>Within the Fertile Crescent, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was called Mesopotamia (the land between two rivers).

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

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



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

**F** <sup>18</sup>In most ancient Mesopotamian civilizations, people were polytheists (believing in many gods). <sup>19</sup>Sumer was organized into city-states: independent cities with surrounding farms and villages. <sup>20</sup>Each city-state was like a little kingdom, with its own ruler. <sup>21</sup>Sumerians 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. <sup>22</sup>The political leader of each city-state was also the religious leader. <sup>23</sup>This "priest-king" was thought to be a god. <sup>24</sup>This affected how people wrote laws and viewed political rights. <sup>25</sup>If 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** <sup>26</sup>“The Epic of Gilgamesh,” a Sumerian story, is possibly the oldest written story. <sup>27</sup>It shows how Sumerians viewed their city-state leaders as imperfect gods who interacted with humans.

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

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

<sup>34</sup>Do you know why it is called a “lunar calendar?”

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

**J** <sup>37</sup>Salt eventually ended the Sumerian civilization.

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

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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

