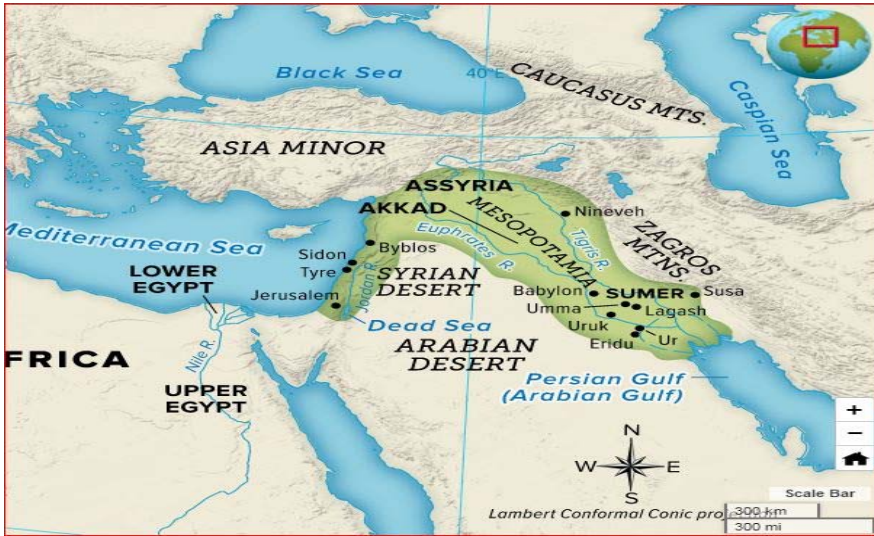


Mesopotamia



Location: Present-day Iraq, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers

Government & Administration: Mesopotamia built many city-states (a city and the surrounding areas that are governed by it) such as Ur, Uruk, and Babylon. These city-states had their own rulers and local gods. Eventually, several of these city-states were united under one common ruler and empire.

Religion: Mesopotamians were polytheistic, and they believed in as many as 2000 different gods! Mesopotamian religions are considered to be the world's earliest existing faiths. Mesopotamia was also a theocracy, since priests also served as government leaders.

Urban Centers: The Mesopotamians were the world's first city-builders; they used mud-bricks and crushed reeds to build temples, dwellings, and walls around their borders. Mesopotamians were also known for square pyramids called ziggurats, which had steps and levels that were slightly smaller than the ones below it.

Social Hierarchy: As crop cultivation and animal domestication provided reliable food sources, Mesopotamian farmers eventually produced surpluses, extra amounts of food that people didn't need to consume. This allowed people to specialize in activities other than farming, like weavers, potters, and other artisanal crafts. Some men sought special educations to become warriors and priests.

Contributions: Some of the world's most important inventions were developed in Mesopotamia. Farmers figured out how to reroute floodwaters from the rivers and irrigate fields that were far away from a water source. In the city-state of Sumer, workers invented the wheel, sailboat, and developed tools made of bronze and copper.

Nile River Valley



Location: Modern Egypt in northeast Africa

Government & Administration: Pharaoh was the most powerful person in Egypt, and he governed as an absolute ruler. He owned all lands, commanded the army, wrote laws, controlled irrigation and kept track of supplies, and defended Egypt from foreign invaders. Power was hereditary; each pharaoh inherited his power from his father.

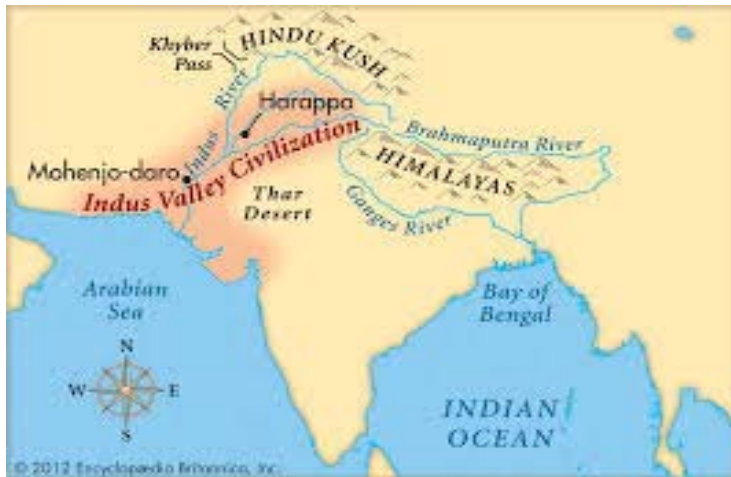
Religion: Pharaoh was considered to be like a god; his body was preserved (embalmed and mummified) and buried in a pyramid that was filled with riches he had acquired through his life, which people believed he would need in the afterlife. Egyptians believed in many gods who controlled different portions of daily life. Egyptian gods were combinations of animal and human parts, and dedicated priests performed daily prayer rituals to please them.

Urban Centers: While the Nile River Valley didn't have large cities, it did have two urban centers that served specific purposes. Memphis was located at the connection of the Nile Delta and its smaller rivers, and it became a bustling marketplace that used those waterways for transport. Thebes was further down the Nile, and it was where Pharaoh, government officials, and religious priests lived and worked.

Social Hierarchy: Pharaoh, as absolute ruler, was at the top of the Egyptian social pyramid. The priests and nobles came next, and were the only ones who received educations and served in government. The next social group was made up of soldiers, scribes, merchants, and craftsmen. The bottom, and largest group, of Egyptian society were the peasants and slaves, who farmed, herded cattle, and worked on building projects for Pharaoh.

Contributions: Ancient Egyptians wrote an alphabet called hieroglyphics, which used pictures as symbols to keep records and history. They also invented papyrus, scrolls made of reeds to replace clay tablets. They developed geometry to help build pyramids, and astronomy to develop a 365-day calendar.

Indus River Valley



Location: Western India

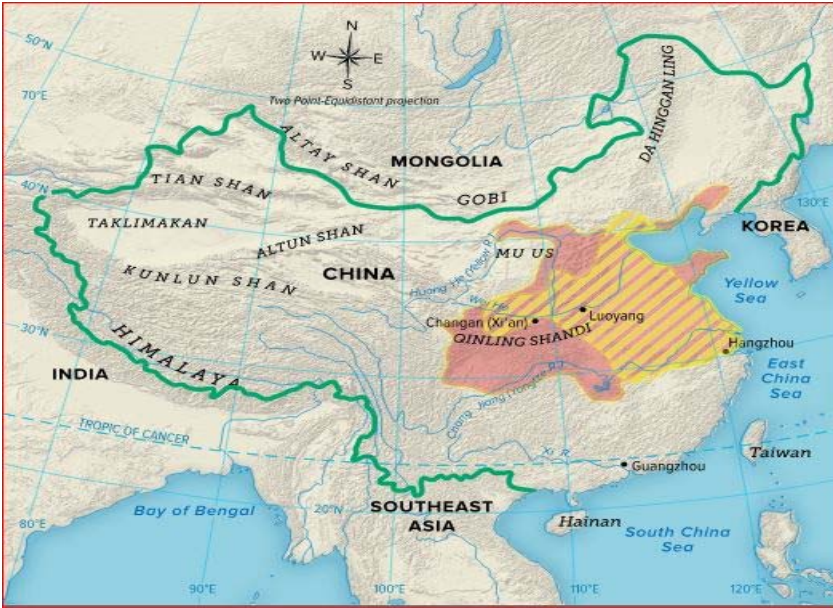
Government & Administration: Government workers in the Indus River Valley were among the first city planners, who maintained public sewer systems and clean water supplies. City planners also built dockyards, granaries, warehouses and protective walls around their cities.

Religion: Not much is known about religion in the Indus River Valley, mostly due to the fact that historians have been unable to decipher the language written on their artifacts. However, many symbols of Hinduism and Buddhism, which were developed around 500 BCE, can be found on those artifacts.

Urban Centers: Citizens of the Indus River Valley, called Harrappans, built many large cities. Two cities, Harrappa and Mohenjo-Daro, had more than 30,000 people living there. Archaeologists have excavated over 1000 different ancient cities. Even though they had many urban centers, the Harrappan civilization collapsed suddenly, for unknown reasons, around 1500 BCE.

Contributions: In addition to waste management, clean water, and dockyards for water transport, Harrappans also cultivated cotton, an abundant crop in India, and wove it into cloth. They also built extensive trade networks with each other, and it was considered to be an important part of Harrappan society.

Huang He (Yellow) River Valley



Location: East China

Government & Administration: In 1700 BCE, the Shang family took power and became the first known dynasty in Chinese history. Power was kept in the same family for many generations over hundreds of years. They helped manage their territories with help from powerful nobles who maintained their policies.

Religion: In addition to governing the Huang He, Shang kings also served as high priests who offered sacrifices to please their ancestors, who they believed guided the forces around them and protected them. This belief will contribute to the future development of Daoism and Confucianism, philosophies that emphasize treating elders with respect and honoring your ancestors.

Urban Centers: The Shang established their capitol city at Anyang, located on the Huang He river. This helped them build and maintain an extensive trade network along the river.

Social Hierarchy: The Shang had a complex social structure that was very similar to the Egyptian social pyramid. The king, who inherited his power, was at the top, followed by his nobles and government administrators. Then came the soldiers, who received extensive training to defend their territory. The largest social class were the farmers, peasants, and craftsmen, who invented silk created from woven cocoons and experimented with bronze metals.

Contributions: People in the Huang He valley created a system of writing that used characters to represent words (one symbol per word). These characters, although they are slightly modified, are still used in the different Chinese dialects in the modern era.