

North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia

**Geography and History Activity**

**Mesopotamia—Cradle of Civilization**

The ancient Greeks spoke of the valley between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers as Mesopotamia, the land “between the rivers.” Mesopotamia, in what is today Iraq, was at the eastern end of a region known as the Fertile Crescent—an arc of land from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf.

The Fertile Crescent receives little rain-fall. Its soil, however, had been enriched over the years by layers of silt—material deposited by the two rivers. In late spring, the Tigris and Euphrates often overflowed their banks and deposited their fertile silt. This flooding depended on the melting of snows in the upland mountains of Turkey, where the sources of the two rivers are located.

**The Sumerians**

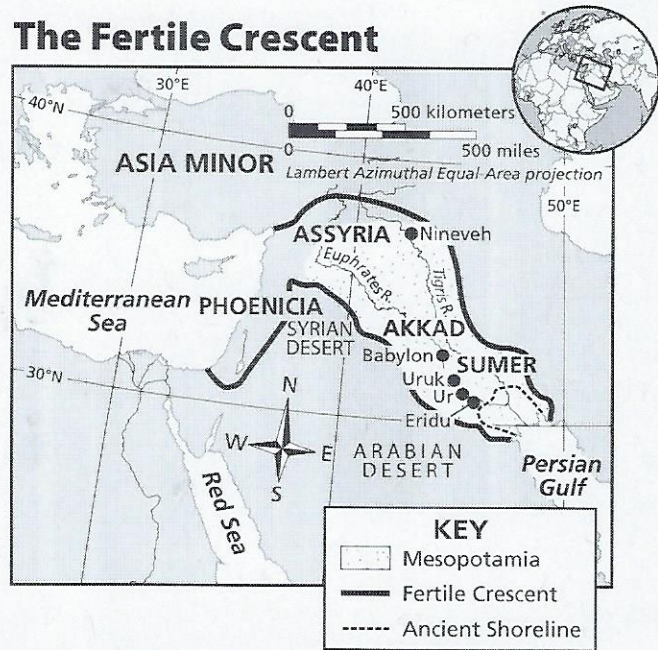
Ancient Mesopotamia included three general areas: Sumer, Akkad, and Assyria. The Sumerians were the first peoples to control the flow of the rivers. Irrigation and drainage ditches made it possible to grow crops on a regular basis. As the Sumerians developed agriculture and domesticated animals, they were able to stay in one place. By 3000 B.C., the Sumerians had established a number of independent cities in southern Mesopotamia, including Eridu, Ur, and Uruk.

**Sumerian Cities**

Sumerian cities were surrounded by walls. Uruk, for example, was encircled by a wall that was 6 miles (10 km) long with defense towers located along the wall every 30 to 35 feet (9 to 10 m).

Although Mesopotamia had little stone or wood for building purposes, it did have plenty of mud. City dwellings, built of sun-dried bricks, included both the small houses of peasants and the larger buildings of the city officials, priests, and priestesses. Mud bricks, easily shaped by hand, were left to bake in the hot sun until they were hard enough to use for building.

**The Fertile Crescent**



## Geography and History Activity

continued

People in Mesopotamia were remarkably creative with mud bricks. They invented the arch and the dome, and they built some of the largest brick buildings in the world. Mud bricks are still used in rural areas of Southwest Asia today.

### The First Traders

Although the economy of the Sumerian city-states was based mainly on farming, trade and industry became important as well. The Mesopotamians were well-known for their metalwork, but they also made woolen textiles and pottery. The Sumerians imported copper, tin, and timber in exchange for dried fish, wool, barley, wheat, and metal goods. Traders traveled by land to the eastern Mediterranean in the west and by sea to India in the east.



### Applying Geography to History

**Directions:** Read the information about Mesopotamia and examine the map. Then answer the questions below.

**1. Listing** What rivers defined the land of Mesopotamia?

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**2. Specifying** On what did the flooding of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers depend?

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**3. Analyzing** Why is irrigation so important for the rise of civilizations?

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**4. Naming** What plentiful resource was used by the Sumerians to build their cities?

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**5. Explaining** Why was the area shown on the map called the Fertile Crescent?

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**6. Critical Thinking** Study the locations of Eridu and Ur on the map. These were port cities in Sumer. Explain why they appear as inland cities on the map.

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