

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT Fertile Crescent

Civilization began in the area known as the Fertile Crescent. (A civilization is a human organization that involves a central government, permanent buildings, food production, and sometimes a system of writing.) The Fertile Crescent was a piece of land that stretched from the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. It got its name because the soil was rich and it was shaped like a crescent.



The eastern section of the Fertile Crescent between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, was called **Mesopotamia**. Mesopotamia means “Land between two rivers.” The western part of the Fertile Crescent was called the **Mediterranean**.

The Sumerians

In the southern part of Mesopotamia was an area known as Sumer. The Sumerians were one of the first people known to live in the Fertile Crescent. They lived there from about 3500 to 2000 B.C.E.

Sumerians farmed and raised cattle. Many were trades people and artisans (craftspeople) who lived in cities. In the cities, the Sumerians built temples and monuments. They invented the arch and the **ziggurat**, a temple shaped like a pyramid with terraces and steps. One of their cities was called Ur. This city was found buried in sand in 1927, along with the many graves and artifacts. The graves that were found turned out to be the tombs of kings. The people who unearthed these tombs, called archeologists, discovered a number of things about the Sumerians:

- They were skilled builders and artists.
- They had an alphabet and knew how to write.
- Their army was supplied with weapons.
- Their metals, stones, and wood were obtained from trading with other peoples.
- Kings were treated as gods who had great power and wealth.



The Standard of Ur is an artifact, a hollow wooden box, inlaid with a mosaic of shell, red limestone, and lapis lazuli. It comes from the ancient city of Ur.

Sumer consisted of three classes of people. The upper class included Kings, nobles, priests, wealthy landowners, and government officials. The middle class was made up of merchants, farmers, tradespeople, and soldiers. The lowest class was made up of slaves.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE SUMERIANS

1. They developed the first written language, a system of writing called **cuneiform**. The alphabet consisted of about 500 characters, or wedge-shaped forms.
2. They studied science and mathematics. Their skills in mathematics were so developed that they created a system for subdividing a day and a year as well as dividing a circle into 360 parts.
3. They were skillful in using the wheel and made vehicles for farming, moving goods for trade, and fighting enemies.



Thousands of clay tablets with **cuneiform** writing have been recovered under the ziggurat ruins. Most were records of harvest and trade.

The Babylonians

The city of Babylon was located on the Euphrates River. It was founded about 2000 B.C.E. and is part of present-day Iraq. Babylon became the capital of the empire of Babylonia and was an important center for trade and religious worship. The city included splendid temples to the **deities** (the gods and goddesses they worshipped.)

One of the greatest kings of Babylon was **Hammurabi**, who ruled for forty-two years, from 1792 to 1750 B.C.E. He recorded a set of laws for his people. Hammurabi's Code of Laws consisted of 282 laws and was probably displayed in every Babylonian town. Hammurabi based his laws on the principle that the strong should not injure the weak. These laws created a reasonable tax system, set fair prices and wages, acknowledges the rights of women (including allowing them to own property), and set up a strong system of punishments for the guilty.

Another famous king was **Nebuchadnezzar II**. He ruled Babylonia for forty-three years, from 605 to 562 B.C.E., and is mentioned in the Bible. Nebuchadnezzar II conquered Jerusalem and forced thousands of people to move to Babylon to live in captivity. He also captured the cities of Tyre and Judah.

Nebuchadnezzar II enormous amounts of money in building up Babylon, and its Hanging Gardens eventually become a wonder of the ancient world. He is said to have gone mad toward the end of his; Babylon grew weaker when he died.



This is the top half of the **stèle** containing Hammurabi's 282 laws.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE BABYLONIANS

1. They established a code of laws known as Hammurabi's Code.
2. They believed in astrology, which holds that the movements of the stars and planets have a direct effect on human life. Their recognition of the different planets and stars led to the scientific study of astronomy, the study of the universe.

The Assyrians

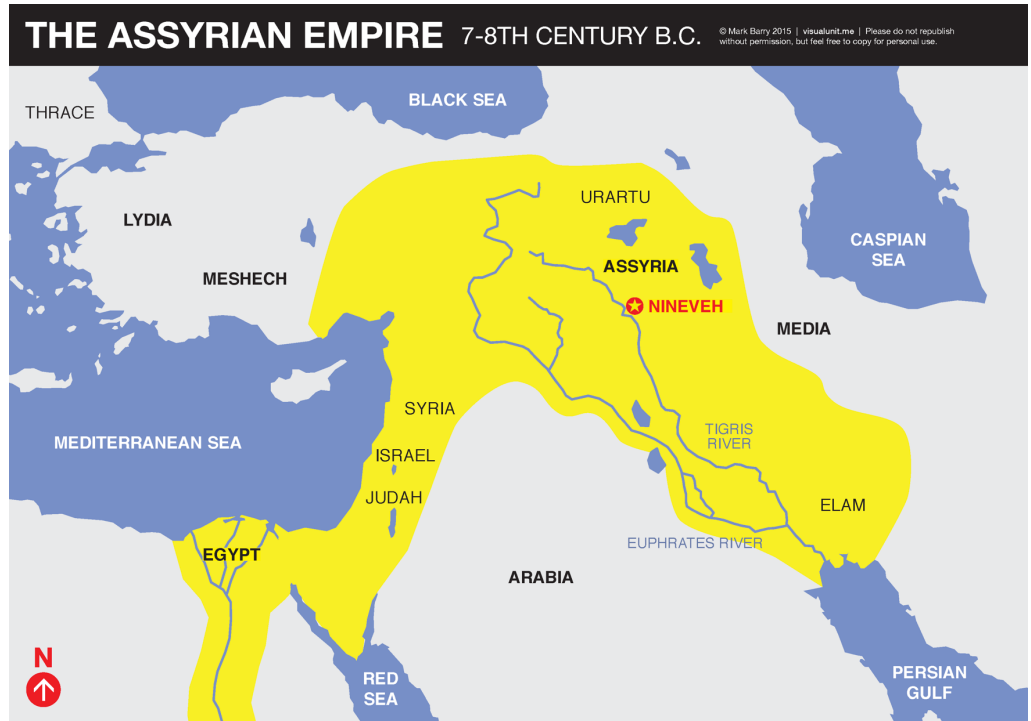
Starting about 1350 B.C.E., the Assyrians lived in the area where the Sumerians had once lived. They were traders and fierce warriors who built a mighty empire by conquering others with their highly skilled army. When enemies were captured they were either taken as slaves or murdered. Sometimes the Assyrians destroyed entire cities, such as the city of Elam, conquered in 640 B.C.E.

The Assyrians conquered the Fertile Crescent, including Babylon and Egypt.

Their capital was at Nineveh. The empire grew wealthy from the cities the Assyrians captured and the taxes they collected from the defeated peoples.

The last great king of Assyria was **Ashurbanipal**. His library held a great deal of information about Assyria. It was the first known library and contained more than 22,000 clay tablets written in Sumerian cuneiform. These tablet "books" included proverbs, fables, and folktales, as well as writings on religion, science, law, and magic.

The Assyrian Empire lasted more than 700 years, to 612 B.C.E., when the Babylonians and the Medes destroyed Nineveh.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE ASSYRIANS

1. They built a system of roads.
2. They instituted a form of government for the provinces in which a governor was appointed to oversee the king's territory.
3. They established the first library.



A *lamassu* is an Assyrian protective deity, often depicted as having a human's head, bull's body, and bird's wings.

The Phoenicians

The Phoenicians lived small city-states along the Mediterranean coast, in present-day Lebanon, from about 1200 to 800 B.C.E. Tyre and Sidon were their chief cities. The Phoenicians were the most famous traders of the ancient world. They turned to trade because they had little land to farm. They were skilled shipbuilders and master sailors, becoming the first people to sail at night by the stars. The Phoenicians were also explorers. They sailed across the Mediterranean and built colonies such as Carthage in North Africa.

Many Phoenicians became wealthy. They controlled trade throughout the Mediterranean area for nearly 300 years. They traded their wool, papyrus, ivory, and glass for goods they needed. One of the products the Phoenicians were most known for was a vivid purple dye made from tiny shells. It was so expensive to make that only very wealthy people could buy cloth. It became the favorite color of royalty.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE PHOENICIANS

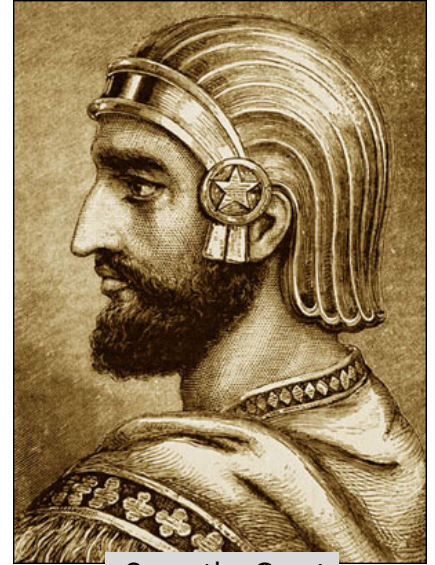
1. They invented an **alphabet**. In order to keep business records of their trade, the Phoenicians developed a system of writing. The Phoenician alphabet contained 22 letters and, unlike cuneiform and hieroglyphics, the letters represented the sounds of the human voice. This made it much easier to read and write. Because the Phoenicians traveled so much, they spread the use of the alphabet to many places.
2. They developed artistic skills, such as carving ivory figures and making colored glass ornaments.
3. They traded all over the Mediterranean, spreading both their own goods and those of their trading partners.



The Persians

The Persians lived east of the Fertile Crescent on the plateau of present-day Iran. They were warriors on horseback who came from central Asia. Their capital city was Persepolis. The **Achaemenid** family, who ruled the Persian Empire from 550 to 330 B.C.E, built it. As rulers, the Persians were generous to the people they conquered.

Cyrus the Great ruled from 559 to 330 B.C.E. and expanded the Persian Empire by conquering Asia Minor and eventually the Fertile Crescent. Under **King Darius I**, the empire was extended eastward as far as the Indus River in India. It was during his reign that the building of Persepolis began. He was often called **Darius the Great** because he restored order and made many improvements to the empire. Because the empire was so large, Darius divided it into twenty provinces, each ruled by an official called a **satrap**. The government built roads to improve trade and movement of the army.



Cyrus the Great

Persia fought several wars with the Greek city-states. In 330 B.C.E., Persia fell to the army of **Alexander the Great**.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE PERSIANS

1. They divided their empire into provinces for easier rule.
2. They built roads and canals.
3. They wrote the **Avesta**, a religious book based on the beliefs of the prophet **Zoroaster**.



Faravahar is one of the primary symbols of Zoroastrianism, believed to be the depiction of **Fravashi** (Guardian Spirit.).

The Hittites

The Hittites lived in the mountains near modern Turkey. Their empire was established by 1750 B.C.E. and was known as **Hatti**. Its capital was **Hattusa**. Hattusa was 3,000 feet above sea level and surrounded by mountains as well as a stonewall up to twenty-six feet thick. The Hittites built a powerful empire that lasted about 550 years.

The Hittite rulers were the first to use a treaty to settle differences with other peoples. **King Hattusili III** and **King Ramses II** of Egypt signed a treaty in 1259 B.C.E. They agreed not to make war on each other, to help each other if attacked by a third party, and to respect each other's borders. It was one of the first treaties signed by two great empires.



Rock Relief of Hattusili III

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE HITTITES

1. They were among the first people to use iron. Before this, people used copper and bronze to make tools and weapons, but these soft metals bent and broke easily. Since iron is harder, it makes better weapons. This was one of the most important accomplishments of the ancient world.
2. They signed some of the first treaties.

