

# Ancient Near East

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## WHAT'S COVERED

Around 5000 BC, the first true civilization started to develop in Mesopotamia, which was nestled between two rivers in an area called the Fertile Crescent. The Fertile Crescent influenced the development of civilization and helped prompt some of the important social, cultural, and technological innovations of the Ancient Near East. In this lesson, you will learn about:



### BIG IDEA

The Fertile Crescent of the Middle and Near East was one of the first major areas of cultural and artistic growth in history.



### DID YOU KNOW

BC is before Christ, and AD is Anno Domini, which is Latin for “in the year of our Lord.” Remember, there is no year 0, so the year 1 AD follows immediately after 1 BC.

## 1. Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent

**Mesopotamia**, which translates to “land between rivers,” is an area of land located where Iraq is now. The **Fertile Crescent** was an area concentrated around three rivers: the Nile in Africa and the Tigris and Euphrates in present-day Middle East. Due to the geography of the region, these areas saw some of the greatest population surges and subsequent cultural developments in the ancient world.



### DID YOU KNOW

While these were lands of rich soil and many resources long ago, the environment has since changed. Mesopotamia today is largely desert.

### IN CONTEXT

Take a look at the image below. The modern-day borders of Iraq are superimposed, so you can see how these countries' borders correspond to the borders of the Fertile Crescent.



The next image shows the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Between them is Mesopotamia, an area that saw tremendous growth in the ancient world and development of some of the earliest known civilizations on the planet.



Once again, here's the border of modern-day Iraq for comparison.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Fertile Crescent

An agricultural region in the Middle and Near East, in the past it was fertile but is now partly desert.

##### Mesopotamia

Ancient area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers

## 2. The Growth of Civilization

The Neolithic Revolution is an important period of time in human history. Its focus for humans shifted from a largely nomadic, or hunter-gatherer, lifestyle to an agrarian, or agricultural, lifestyle. In other words, we went from predominantly hunting and finding our food to growing it and farming it.

### IN CONTEXT

Agriculture was one of the most important developments in human history, because communities could now develop into civilizations where the exchange of ideas and interdependence allowed for tremendous cultural and technological growth.

The concept of civilization is a complicated one. A civilization is a human community that exhibits a range of complexity in terms of social stratification (how people are divided up); technological achievements, such as the use of the wheel, the development of a form of writing, and the use of flood control devices; and cultural development. A civilization is more than just a group of people hanging out.

The use of **controlled space** is a common theme of the architecture in the Middle East. Often, rulers used this type of architecture as a way of posturing or expressing authority and power over subjects, while also intimidating opponents.

➔ EXAMPLE This is a reconstruction of one of the Ishtar Gates. This gate was the eighth gate to the walled city of ancient Babylon.



Reconstruction of Ishtar Gates

575 BC

Glazed brick



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Controlled Space

A type of civic design intended to impress or intimidate the viewer



#### SUMMARY

The first true civilization started to develop in Mesopotamia around 5000 BC. Some of the important social, cultural, and technological innovations of the Ancient Near East came during this time. The Fertile Crescent influenced the development of civilization in many ways.

Today you learned about **Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent**. The geography of this region, situated between two rivers, helped shape this civilization. You learned about this rapid **growth of civilization**.



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**Controlled space**

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**Mesopotamia**

Ancient area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.