

On the back of this page create a representation of what you read in the Chapter 1 Overview to help you remember what Chapter 2 is about. You may make a flow chart, rap, poem, short story or a depiction. If you choose to do a written representation, it must at least be a paragraph long (5 sentences) or if a rap (6 lines). If it is a depiction, it must be colored and neat.

Chapter 2: Western Asia and Egypt

Chapter Overviews

Chapter 2 describes the rise of civilizations in a region stretching from the Persian Gulf to Egypt and from Asia Minor to central Asia.

Section 1 Civilization Begins in Mesopotamia

Located between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, Mesopotamia was the site of several of the earliest known civilizations—Sumer, Akkad, and Assyria. Rainfall was sparse, but unpredictable flooding of the two rivers deposited layers of fertile silt. Irrigation and drainage techniques made regular farming possible. By 3000 B.C., the Sumerians had developed city-states in southern Mesopotamia. They built walled cities and engaged in widespread trade. Like other Mesopotamians, the Sumerians believed gods and goddesses controlled the universe and owned the cities, which were supervised by priests and priestesses. Eventually power passed to kings. The Sumerians created the cuneiform system of writing and inventions such as the wagon wheel and bronze. The Akkadians overran the Sumerian city-states. Their leader, Sargon, created the first empire in world history. Hammurabi, the ruler of Babylon, eventually came to power. He is remembered for his strict code of law.

Section 2 Egyptian Civilization

Egyptian civilization centered on the Nile River and its delta. Historians divide early Egyptian civilization into three major periods: the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom. Religion was all-important to the Egyptians, who believed that their kings, called pharaohs, ruled by divine right. For thousands of years, Egyptian society maintained a simple structure in which the pharaoh was surrounded by an upper class of nobles and priests. Most of the lower classes were peasants who farmed the land and built the pyramids as tombs for mummified pharaohs. Art, science, and a form of writing called hieroglyphics also flourished. After the New Kingdom collapsed in 1084 B.C., Egypt was dominated by a succession of other empires.

Section 3 New Centers of Civilization

Recent evidence reveals a civilization that flourished in central Asia about 4,000 years ago. Pastoral nomads—especially the Indo-Europeans—interacted with the settled groups, trading and spreading technology. Around 1750 B.C., one group of Indo-Europeans moved into Asia Minor and formed the Hittite kingdom. The Phoenicians and Israelites established small kingdoms along the Mediterranean coast around 1200 B.C. The Phoenicians improved their ships and built an extensive trading empire with ports as far as Britain and West Africa. They invented an alphabet that was passed on to the Greeks. The Israelites created the kingdom of Israel, with its capital at Jerusalem. Their religion, Judaism, was the first monotheistic religion and later influenced Christianity and Islam. Religious teachers, or prophets, developed concepts of fairness that became a source for ideals of social justice.

Section 4 The Rise of New Empires

A large army equipped with iron weapons enabled the Assyrians to establish a new empire in Mesopotamia by 700 B.C. Brutal warriors, the Assyrians had an effective system of communication and also one of the world's finest libraries. After the collapse of the Assyrian Empire, the Persian Empire became the leading power. Under Cyrus the Great, the Persians created a state that stretched from Asia Minor to western India. Cyrus ruled with remarkable wisdom and compassion. His successors expanded the empire, relying on a system of provincial governors who collected taxes, provided justice and security, and recruited soldiers. The Persians' religion, Zoroastrianism, was monotheistic. Alexander the Great conquered the Persians in the 330s B.C.