



Physical Geography

TERMS & NAMES

fertile
hunter-gatherer
irrigation

MAIN IDEA

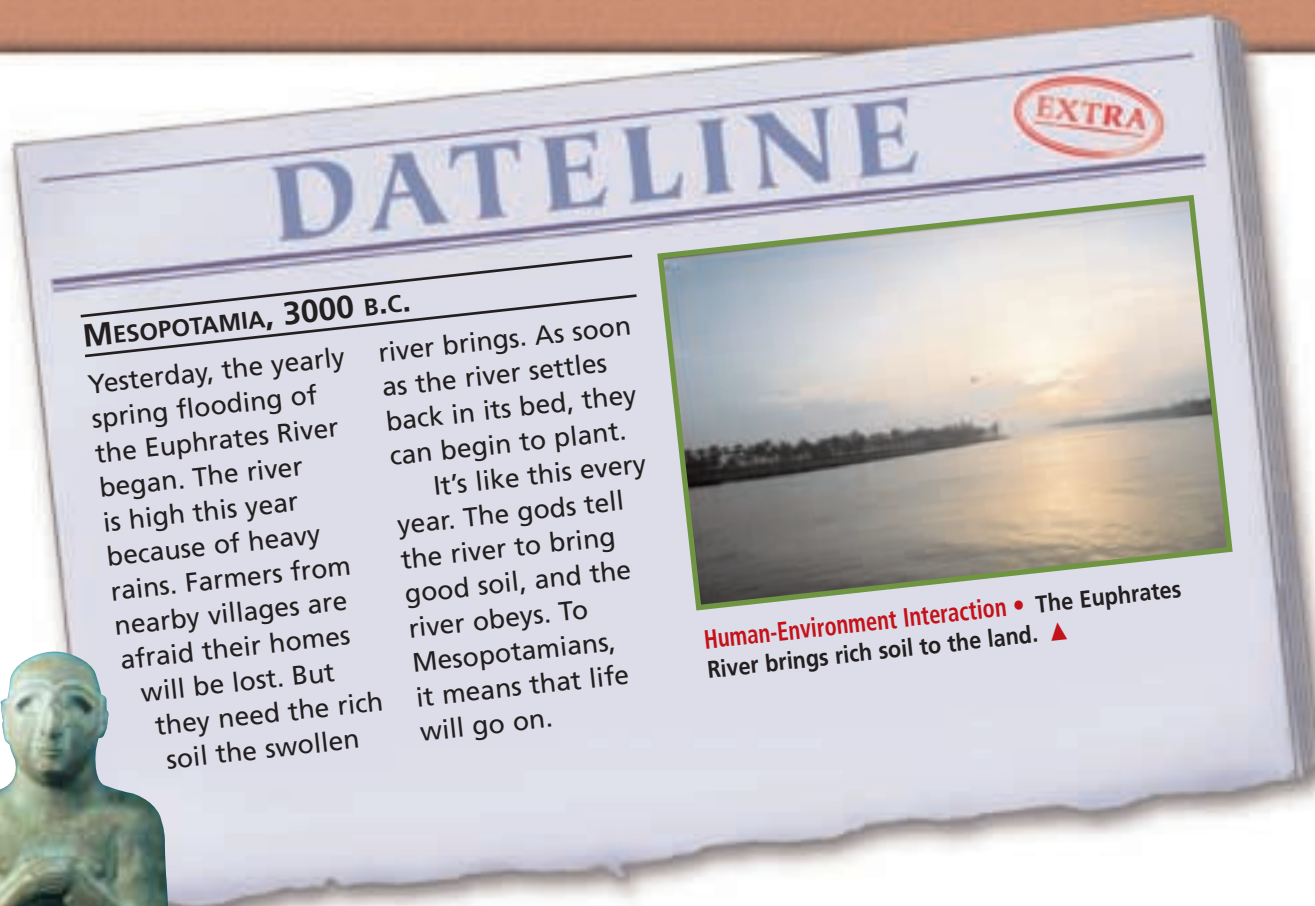
Water and the lack of it has shaped this region of flooding rivers, little rainfall, and surrounding seas.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Today the region enjoys the benefits of rich oil resources, but its people continue to struggle with problems of both dry land and flooding rivers.

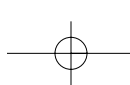


Culture • Utu was one of the gods the Mesopotamians prayed to. ▲



Rivers and Deserts

Water and the lack of it has shaped North Africa and Southwest Asia, a region where little rain falls. Seas of sand cover the deserts, which are dry all year. In these deserts, water is found only in oasis areas. Other areas have depended on the annual flooding of the rivers to make the soil **fertile**, or productive. Fertile soil provides the nutrients that plants need to grow.



Three Rivers

Some of the ancient peoples who lived in North Africa and Southwest Asia benefited from three major rivers in the region—the Nile, the Tigris (TY•gris), and the Euphrates (yoo•FRAY•teez). The 4,000-mile-long Nile, the longest river in the world, flows from its source in east central Africa to the Mediterranean in northeast Egypt. The Tigris and Euphrates flow to the southeast from Turkey into the northern end of the Persian Gulf. (See the Unit Atlas map on page 202).

From Hunter-Gatherers to Farmers Thousands of years ago, **hunter-gatherers** roamed the east coast of the Mediterranean and the valleys formed from the rivers. These people found food by hunting, fishing, and gathering wild grains, fruits, and nuts. For 99 percent of the time human beings have been on Earth, they have been hunter-gatherers. Eventually, hunter-gatherers settled permanently in places where they could raise animals and grow crops. Some places where hunter-gatherers may have first become farmers are the valleys of the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers about 8,000 years ago.



Human-Environment Interaction •

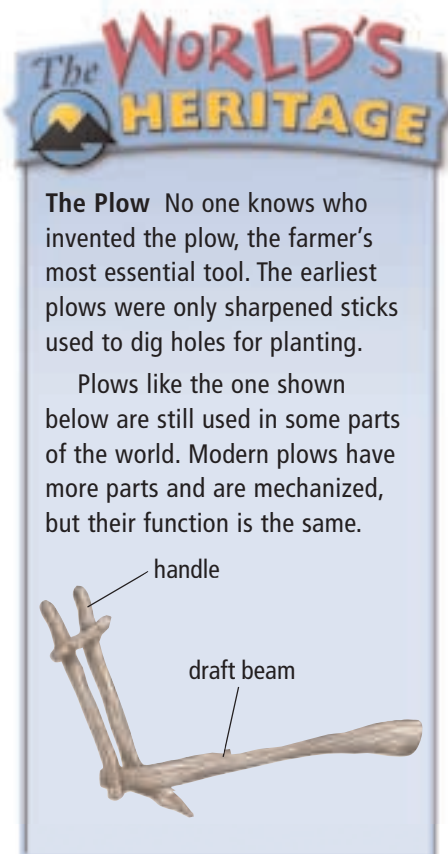
Hunter-gatherers lived off the food they found in the natural world. ▲

Reading Social Studies

A. Finding Causes Why might farming have begun in the valleys of the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers?

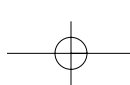
How Rivers Enrich the Soil Most of the soil in the desert regions of North Africa and Southwest Asia is not good for farming. It contains a lot of salt or sand. Only the rivers make farming possible. In summer, when melted snow flowing from the Ethiopian mountains raises the level of the Nile, the river floods. Heavy spring and summer rains also cause the Nile to flood. When these flooding waters flow over the riverbanks, they leave behind fertile soil that has been carried from one area to another.

Snows also melt in the Turkish highlands, where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers begin. As a result, these rivers also flood yearly, bringing fertile soil into the river valleys.



The Plow No one knows who invented the plow, the farmer's most essential tool. The earliest plows were only sharpened sticks used to dig holes for planting.

Plows like the one shown below are still used in some parts of the world. Modern plows have more parts and are mechanized, but their function is the same.



Human-Environment Interaction • For thousands of years farmers in the region have used simple irrigation tools, such as this shadoof, to water the land. ▲



Human-Environment Interaction • This modern irrigation system is in the Draa Valley in Morocco. ▼

Irrigation Few places in the region are close enough to the three major rivers to depend on them for deposits of fertile soil. Farmers in other areas have had to develop **irrigation** methods, or ways of bringing water to dry land.

Surrounding Waters

The Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf have shaped the climate, resources, and societies of the region. The Mediterranean is the largest body of water in the region. The mild climate of the lands around the Mediterranean attracted settlers. Early civilizations formed on its eastern shores.

Trade Routes Since ancient times, the Red Sea has been an important trade route. Goods and ideas that have traveled through the Red Sea have shaped the cultures that lie on either side of it. The Persian Gulf has also been an important trade route. Today, it draws the interest of the world because of its key position in the middle of oil-rich Southwest Asia.

Energy from an Ancient Sea Millions of years ago, a huge sea covered North Africa and Southwest Asia. When sea creatures died, their remains sank to the bottom.

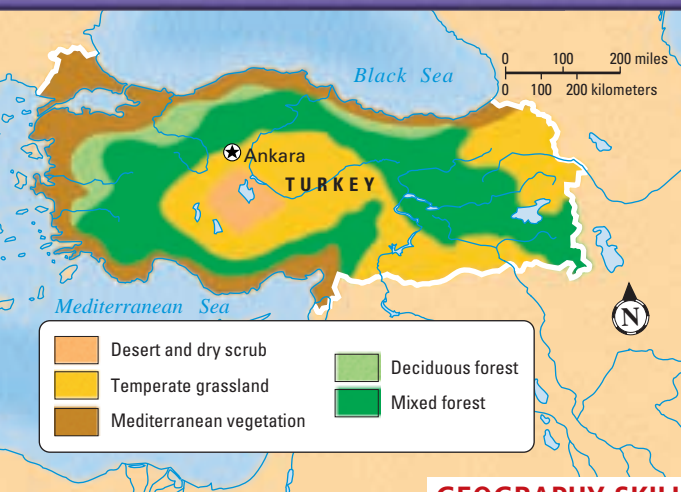
Strange but TRUE

The Dead Sea It's not actually a sea—it's a lake—and it's not completely dead—some bacteria can survive in its salty depths. The Dead Sea has an area of about 394 square miles. At 1,312 feet below sea level, it is the lowest point on Earth, and it is about ten times saltier than any ocean. Salt and minerals make the water so dense, you can easily float on it.

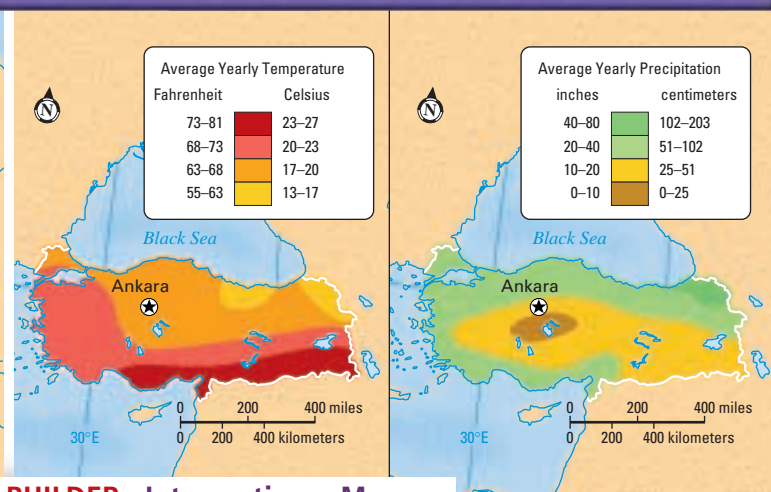




Turkey: Vegetation Map



Turkey: Climate Map



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting a Map

- Place** • How does the amount of yearly precipitation affect the type of vegetation that grows?
- Location** • What is the average yearly temperature in Ankara?

Over long periods of time, mud and sand and other materials were deposited on top of them. Heat and pressure from these materials changed the dead matter into petroleum, or oil.

Turkey Not all of North Africa and Southwest Asia is hot and dry. Turkey is cooler than the rest of the region and gets more rain. As a result, instead of deserts, Turkey has grasslands and even forest areas.

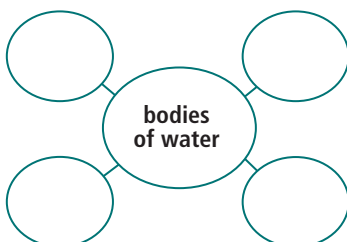
SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

Terms & Names

- Identify:** (a) fertile (b) hunter-gatherer (c) irrigation

Taking Notes

- Use a spider map like this one to map the importance of water in North Africa and Southwest Asia.



Main Ideas

- (a) How did the area around the Persian Gulf come to be a rich source of petroleum?
(b) How did hunter-gatherers in North Africa and Southwest Asia become farmers?
(c) How did rivers in Southwest Asia enrich the soil?

Critical Thinking

4. Analyzing Causes

Why might the earliest farming communities have developed along the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers?

Think About

- ♦ needs of farmers
- ♦ annual flooding

ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Make a **chart** of the major rivers and bodies of water discussed in this section and list the effects each has had on the region.