



Linking Past and Present

The Legacy of North Africa and Southwest Asia

Religion

Three major religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—began in Southwest Asia. Judaism is based on the laws Moses received from God, which are written in the Torah. Christianity is based on the teachings of Jesus, which appear in the New Testament. Islam is based on the teachings of the prophet Muhammad and the sacred text called the Qur'an. The teachings and beliefs of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam spread east and south through Asia, north and west to Europe, south through Africa, and west to the Americas. All three religions share a belief in one God and encourage people to live a life of tolerance and peace.

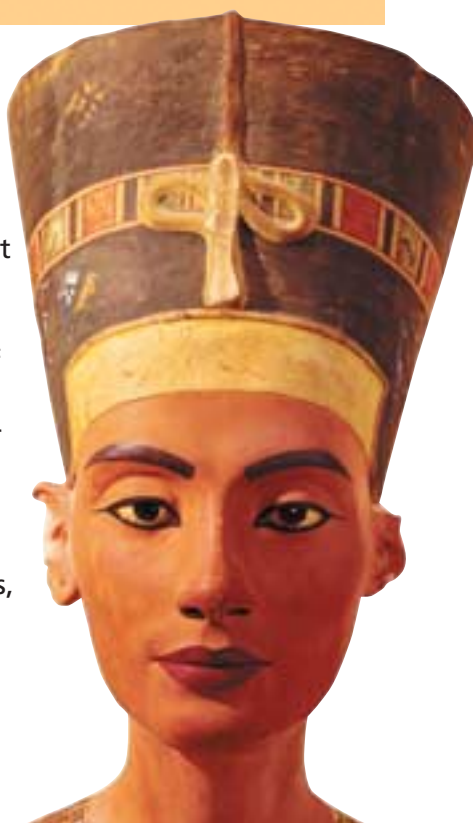


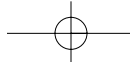
Writing

About 5,500 years ago, Mesopotamians began to use what is considered the first developed system of writing. They made marks that represented words on wet clay tablets, some of which survive today. Two thousand years later, the Egyptians developed a sophisticated writing system, known as hieroglyphics, in which pictures were used to represent sounds and words. Today, people continue to communicate, not only by writing with pen and paper but also by using electronic mail.

Cosmetics

Archaeologists believe that cosmetics were used as early as 4000 B.C. Ancient Egyptians used plants and powdered minerals to make cosmetics. During and after the Renaissance, the use of cosmetics flourished in Europe, as both men and women made up their faces. Italy and France became cosmetic-manufacturing centers. By the 1900s, people of all social classes were using cosmetics. Since the 1930s, the cosmetic industry has developed into a big business.





Banking

Almost 5,500 years ago, before the invention of coins or paper money, a form of banking existed in ancient Mesopotamia. In Italy in the 1200s, banking took place on benches in the street. In fact, the word *bank* comes from the Italian word *banco*, which means "bench." By the 1600s, customers of banks in England were using written drafts, or checks, to make payments. Modern banking is electronic. Though some people use written checks, many take advantage of automated teller machines and telephone-banking systems to meet their banking needs.



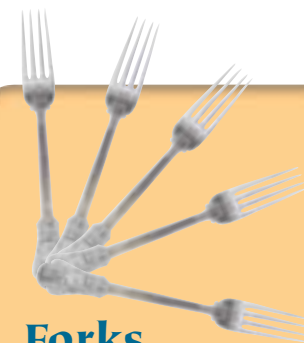
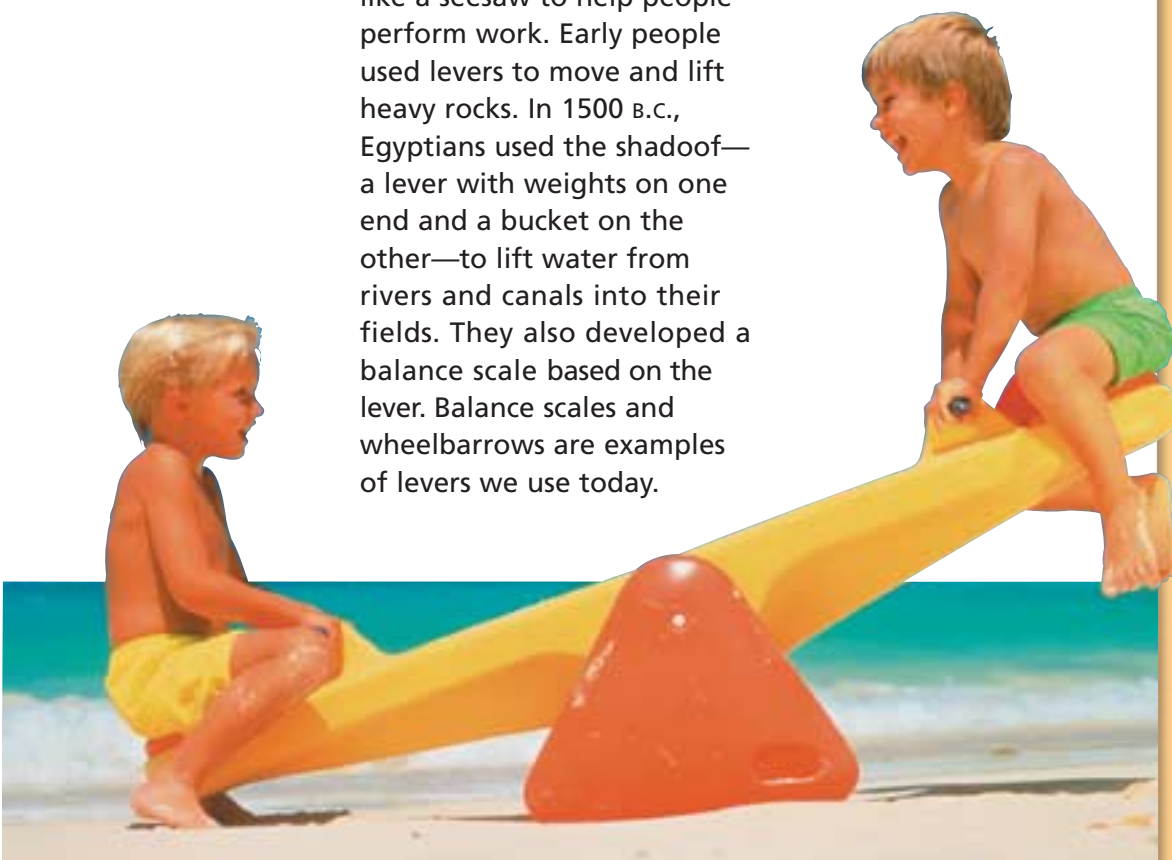
Find Out More About It!

Study the text and photos on these pages to learn about inventions, creations, and contributions that have come from North Africa and Southwest Asia. Then choose the item that interests you the most and, in a short essay, describe how your life would be different if it did not exist.



Lever

A lever is a rod or bar that pivots on a fulcrum, acting like a seesaw to help people perform work. Early people used levers to move and lift heavy rocks. In 1500 B.C., Egyptians used the shadoof—a lever with weights on one end and a bucket on the other—to lift water from rivers and canals into their fields. They also developed a balance scale based on the lever. Balance scales and wheelbarrows are examples of levers we use today.



Forks

Though the ancient Greeks first used kitchen forks for carving and serving meat, it was not until the 800s that nobles in Southwest Asia used forks for dining. For the next 900 years, wealthy people continued to use forks for eating. Because the common people believed forks were unnecessary and even odd, they continued to use their hands, knives, and spoons for eating. Forks were not commonly used in the West until the 1800s.