

Agriculture in the Fertile Crescent

By Ancient History Encyclopedia,
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08/02/2017

1- The Fertile Crescent is in the region that is now known as the Middle East and Mediterranean

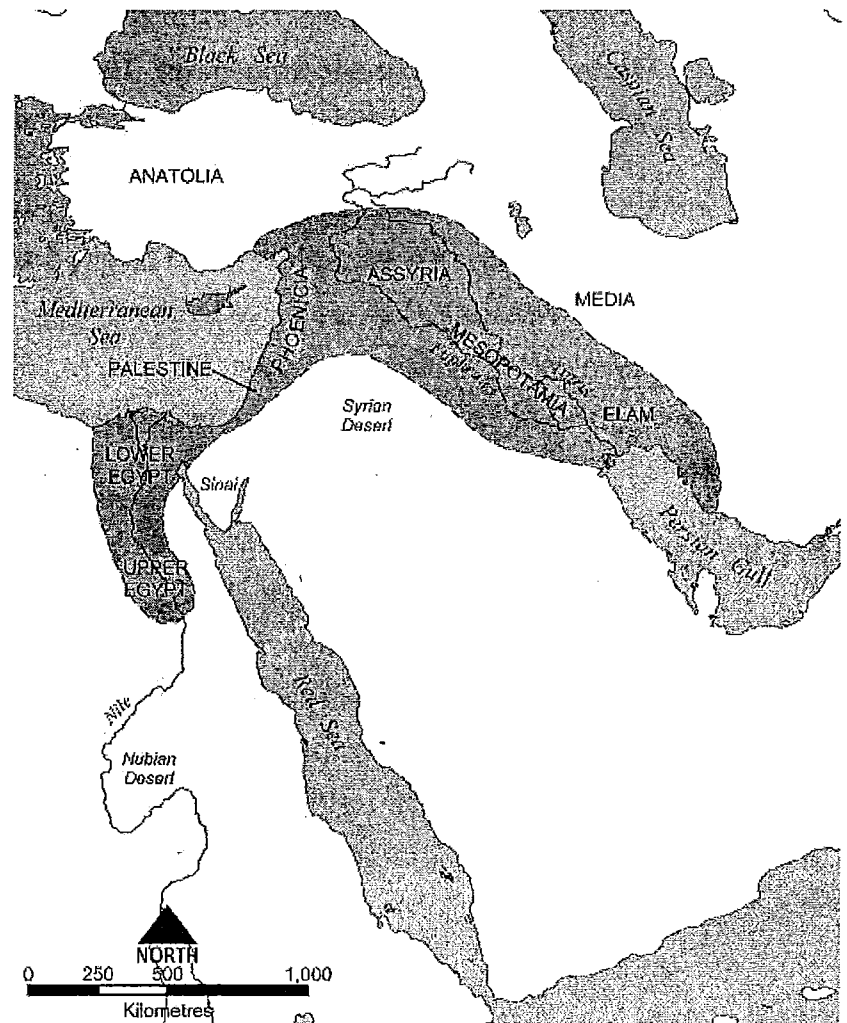
Basin. Today it is the countries of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian areas and Egypt. Even parts of Turkey and Iran were in the Fertile Crescent.

2-This area is seen as the birthplace of agriculture. Seven thousand years ago, this area was not as dry as it is today. It was blessed with fertile soil, two great rivers (the Euphrates and the Tigris), and hills and mountains to the north.

Geography

3-This map shows the location of the Fertile Crescent, a region in the Middle East including Ancient Egypt; the Levant; and Mesopotamia [Click to enlarge]

4-The region produced many different crops. In very good years, up to 100 times more grain was harvested than in an average year. Many harvests were destroyed by drought or flooding. Some farmers used irrigation systems, but most people preferred to rely on the rainy, hilly areas. They felt this ensured a more even spread of rainfall.



5-In the drier regions, agriculture was only possible with irrigation canals. The Urartians were from Urartu. They were the masters of canal building. Many of their irrigation systems still exist. The main canals were generally built by the government, and the small ones by the farmers or the communities themselves. Irrigation could cause soil to become too salty for plants to grow. When farmers use irrigated water, salt comes along for the ride. That can stay behind when the water evaporates. Salt can then build up to high levels that make it more difficult for plants to get water from the soil. It may even kill the crops.

6-The soil often dried up, hardened and cracked. This problem was greatest in the flood plains of Babylonia and Assyria. In order to keep the soil healthy, the plow had to be used. By 3000 B.C. plows were known and in wide use. Many Assyrian kings boasted of having invented a new, improved type of plow.

Crops

7-The main types of grain that were used for agriculture were wheat, barley and millet. In Babylonia, Assyria and the Hittite lands, barley was the main grain for human use. It was widely used to buy other goods. Flat bread was also made from barley. The smallest unit of weight was the equivalent of one grain of barley. Beer and fine foods were made from wheat.

8-Other agricultural products included sesame, which was widely grown and used to make oil. Olive oil was produced in the mountains. A plant called flax was used to make linen cloth. Peas were farmed in Mesopotamia. In Palestine, they preferred lentils. Figs, pomegranate, apple and pistachio groves were found in many places within the Fertile Crescent. In villages and cities of southern Mesopotamia, groves of date palms were common. The dates were eaten either fresh or dried. Palm wood was also used in crafts, but not in construction.

Harvest and storage

9Many workers were required at harvest time. There was great time pressure to complete the harvest before winter set in. Grain was cut with a sickle, dried in shacks and threshed by driving animals who walked over the grain. This removed the husk from the grain. The grain was then either stored in granaries, or transported away along the waterways. Sometimes it was even exported to other countries. In the granaries, cats and mongooses were used to protect the stored grain from mice.

Quiz

- 1 Read the section "Geography."

Select the paragraph from the section that shows WHY irrigation could sometimes have negative impacts on the land.

- 2 Read the introduction [paragraphs 1-2].

Which sentence from the section shows WHY a large variety of crops were able to be grown in the Fertile Crescent?

- (A) The Fertile Crescent is in the region that is now known as the Middle East and Mediterranean Basin.
- (B) This area is seen as the birthplace of agriculture.
- (C) Seven thousand years ago, this area was not as dry as it is today.
- (D) It was blessed with fertile soil, two great rivers (the Euphrates and the Tigris), and hills and mountains to the north.

- 3 Read the sentence from the introduction [paragraphs 1-2].

This area is seen as the birthplace of agriculture.

Which sentence uses "birthplace" in the SAME way as the sentence above?

- (A) Detroit is the birthplace of the American car.
 - (B) On his travels he discovered a new birthplace.
 - (C) They entered the birthplace, not knowing what to expect.
 - (D) It became the birthplace in his mind where ideas grew.
- 4 Read the following sentence from the section "Crops."

The smallest unit of weight was the equivalent of one grain of barley.

What is the meaning of the word "equivalent" as it is used in the sentence above?

- (A) having a similar size
- (B) having the same position
- (C) having the same potential
- (D) having the same measure

NAME: _____

PERIOD: _____

Focus Sheet

Ten Percent Summary

After you have read and marked up the article, this focus sheet may help you get started.

Step One: Create a topic sentence with "T" S A T

In _____
TITLE of the article in quotes, capitalize all "big" words, over five letters long, and all nouns and verbs.

from _____,
SOURCE from name of magazine, newspaper (Don't forget to underline if handwritten, italicize if typed.)

AUTHOR or authors (In general, you can use just the last names of authors.)

Verb, for example: *
describe(s)
argue(s)
explain(s)
propose(s)
discuss(es)
interview(s)

TOPIC (A few words that describe, in general terms without details, what the article is about.)

Step Two: In your own words, briefly list the two to four central ideas in the order they appear in the article.

Central Idea One _____

Central Idea Two _____

Central Idea Three _____

Central Idea Four _____

*Other verbs that may describe the purpose of the article include report, assert, claim, insist, recommend, demand.