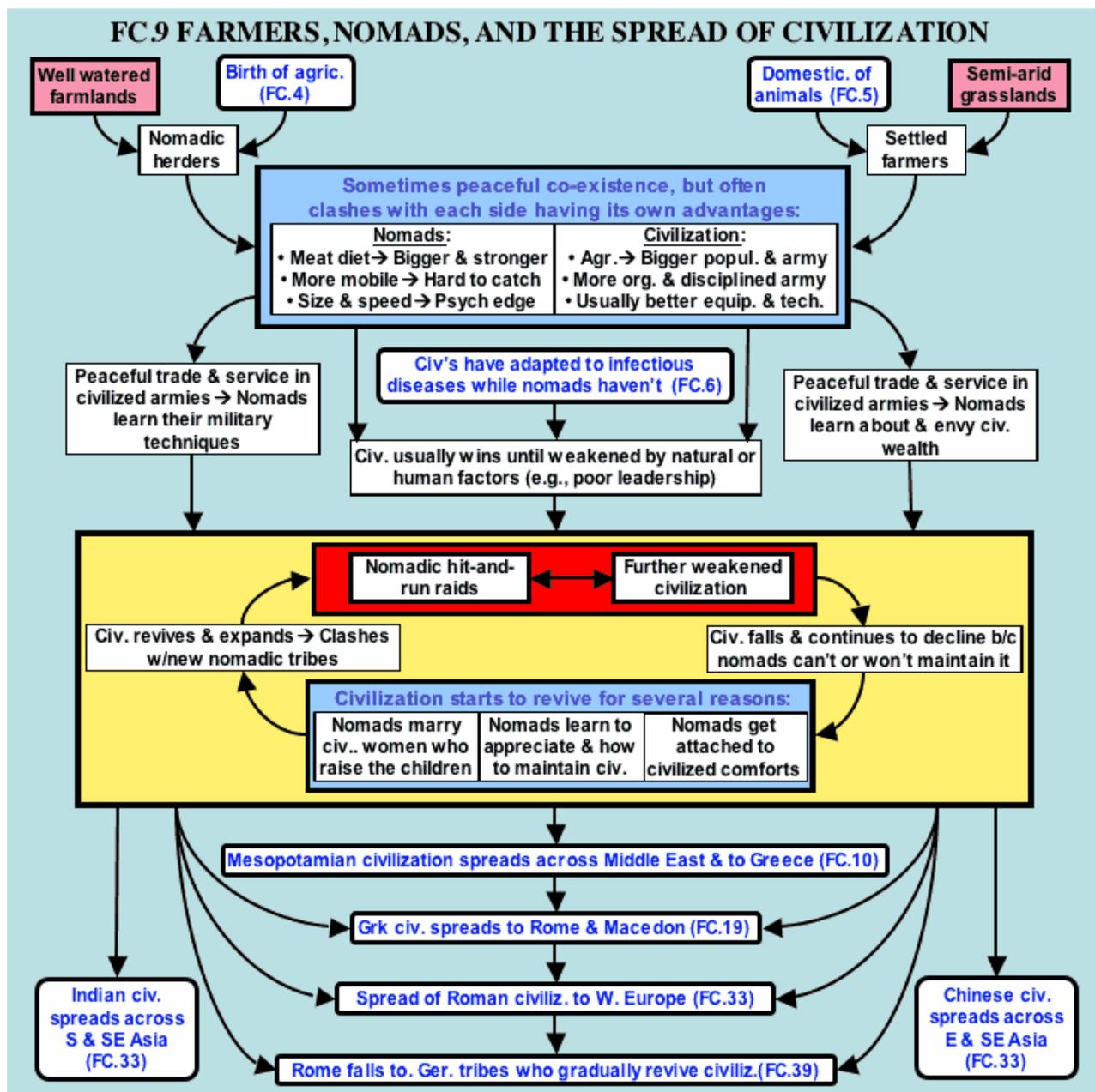


The ancient Middle East Unit 2: The ancient Middle East (c.3000-323 B.C.E.)

FC9 Farmers, Nomads, and the Spread of Civilization



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Until about 1500 C.E. history largely revolved around the relationship between two ways of life that people have followed since the birth of agriculture: nomadic herding and settled farming. Environment largely determined how these peoples lived, with wetter climates or river valleys favoring settled farming and drier climates leading to the nomadic way of life. These peoples often co-existed peacefully, exchanging goods and ideas in peaceful trade. But at other times, clashes would frequently occur either because of population pressures forcing the nomads to try to take more land, nomadic jealousy of the richer civilization's goods, or just mutual hostility between the two ways of life.

Each side had its own advantages in such conflicts. On the one hand, civilized peoples usually outnumbered the nomads since agriculture could support more people than nomadic herding could. Also, their armies generally had better organization, discipline, equipment and technology. On the other hand, the nomads, being more involved with animals, had more meat and protein in their diets, making them bigger and stronger than the farmers.

Probably even more decisive was the nomads' mobility, which let them choose the time and place in which to attack the more settled farmers and cities. Mobility also made it harder for slower civilized armies to catch them. Finally, since nomads often lived on land unsuited to farming, it was not usually worth the civilized armies' time and trouble to try and conquer them, even if they could catch them. This, plus their size, often gave nomads a psychological edge against the farmers, which in any given battle, could be the most decisive element in determining which army would break and run.

Still, as long as a civilization was well governed, its economy healthy, and its armies well trained and disciplined, it was very difficult for a few nomads to prevail. Not until civilization experienced internal troubles such as civil wars, famine, or a breakdown in the government and military organization, could the nomads strike effectively. Typically, they would do this in small-scale isolated attacks, not in one overwhelming wave. Repeatedly raiding the farms, stealing the livestock, and burning the crops, the underlying basis for civilization, over a period of years would trigger a further breakdown in the government, economy, and defense. This, of course, would lead to further raids, more serious breakdowns, and so on. At the same time, the nomads often infiltrated civilization as merchants, settlers, slaves, and mercenaries (professional soldiers). Eventually, the civilization would be so weakened that the nomads could take over. However, this was just the start of a cycle of civilized decline, revival, and expansion that would repeat itself throughout most of recorded history.

After a nomadic takeover, civilization would continue to decline either because the nomads did not care to keep it going, or they cared but just did not know how. What largely determined their attitude toward civilization was the length of contact they had had with it. Generally the longer the contact with civilization, the more it influenced the nomads and made them want to try to continue it. For example, the Saxons who conquered Roman Britain had little prior contact with the Romans and were quite willing to obliterate any signs of Roman civilization they found. On the other hand, such tribes as the Franks and Visigoths who had been exposed to Roman culture for two centuries tried to adopt Roman titles, copy Roman government, live in Roman style villas, wear Roman togas, and even speak Latin.

However, even if the new nomadic masters tried to carry on the old civilized ways, they usually failed because they did not fully understand how the government, record keeping, and technology worked. As a result, the civilization would continue to break down despite their efforts. The damaged economy might not be able to support schools to train civil servants, or the new masters might not even understand the schools' importance. Therefore as civil servants died off, there would be no new civil servants to take their place. Such vital public works as roads and irrigation canals would not be kept up, and the economy would further decline, making it even harder to maintain an efficient government. For whatever reasons, either neglect or the inability to understand how civilization worked, the decline would continue for decades, generations, or even centuries, as was the case with Europe after the fall of Rome.

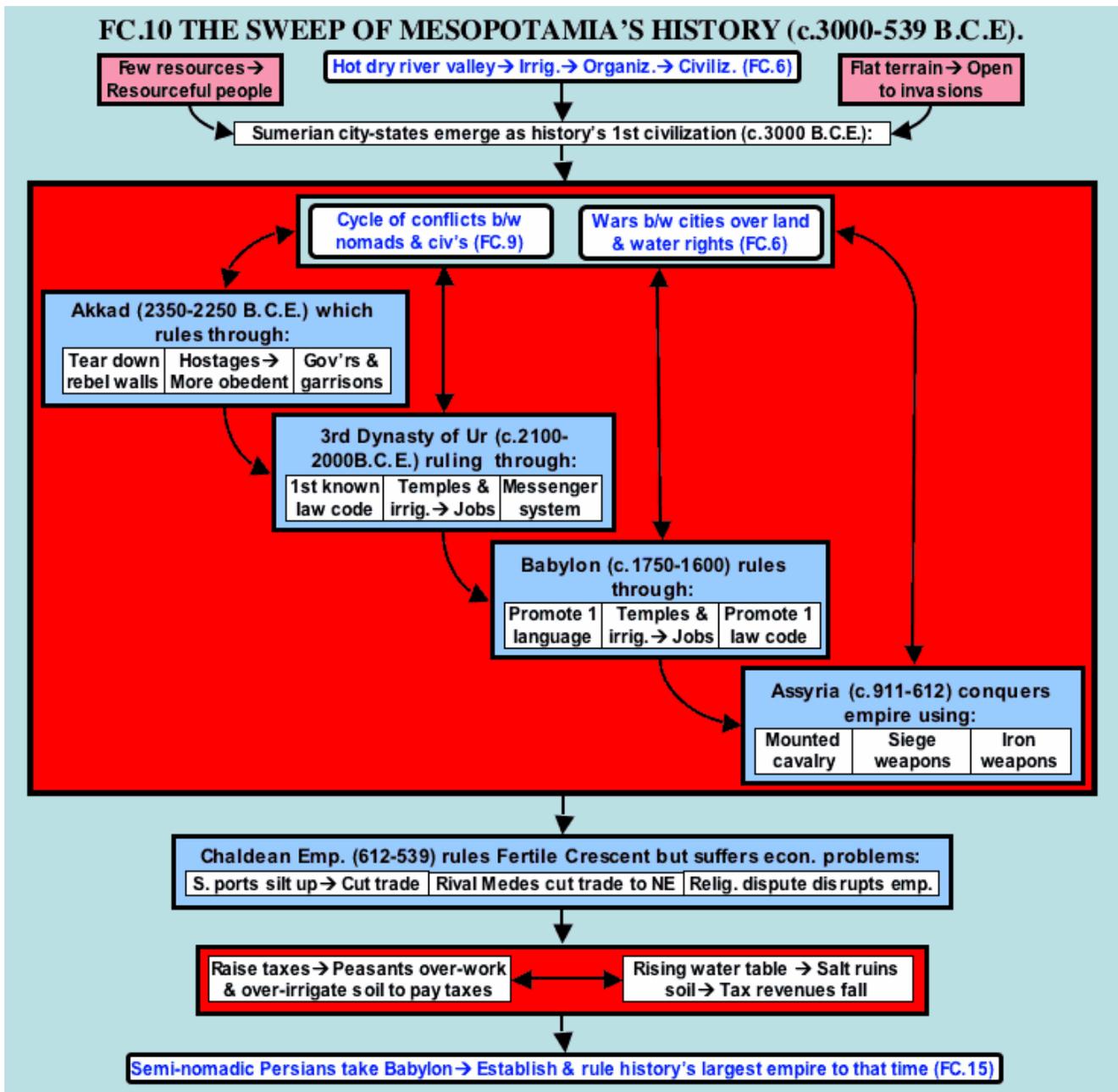
Despite all this, there were forces working in favor of civilization's recovery. First of all, extended contact with civilization gradually made the nomads more willing to try to preserve it. This at least slowed the rate of decline. Also, the greater material comforts of civilization, such as sleeping on a soft bed or in a warm dry house, might

change the nomads' attitudes toward civilized life. Finally, and possibly most important, many nomadic men would take civilized wives. Their sons, although part of the nomadic ruling class, would also be influenced by their civilized mothers to be more accepting of civilized ways. They might also marry civilized women and further dilute the nomadic influence in their children. Eventually, the distinction between the nomads and the civilized people they ruled would virtually disappear, and with it any nomadic hostility toward civilization.

Gradually, the semi-nomadic masters, with their still somewhat restless nomadic spirit, would rebuild civilization to its previous level and expand it beyond that to new frontiers, both culturally and geographically. Of course, the revived civilization would meet new nomadic tribes, and the process would start all over again: new clashes with nomads, their eventual victory in a time of civilized weakness, the further decline of civilization, its revival largely through intermarriage, and its further expansion to new frontiers.

This goes a long way toward explaining much of human history. Of course, each situation had its own particular twists and turns. But the pattern has repeated itself again and again, spreading civilization from such isolated centers as Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, China, Mexico, and Peru. For example, from Mesopotamia and Egypt, civilization would spread to Syria and Palestine, up to Asia Minor, and from there to Greece. The Greeks would bring civilization to Rome and the Western Mediterranean. From there it would spread to northern Europe, and eventually the Americas. If we add other important elements such as colonization and trade, we can view history as the gradual but steady march of civilization across the planet. Taken in that light, one might see history as progress rather than an endless series of wars.

FC10The Sweep of Mesopotamia's History (c.3000-529 BCE)



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Great powers die of indigestion — *Napoleon*

Introduction: the environment

In modern day Iraq, along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, lie the deserted ruins of a civilization that lay forgotten for centuries until its rediscovery in the 1800's. Looking at these ruins, one finds it hard to imagine a thriving civilization full of people haggling in the market place, fighting wars, dancing in festivals, celebrating births and marriages, mourning their dead, and going about their daily routines much as we do today. Yet, that is exactly what went on here when these were not ruins, but the center of the first human civilization.

Every culture is largely a product of its environment and must be understood within the context of that environment. We use the term *geopolitics* to describe an area's geography (physical and climatic) and the effects

of that geography on the area's history and politics. Mesopotamia, from the Greek words meaning "land between the rivers," presented a harsh environment to inhabit, but also an ideal one in which to build the first civilization. Its geopolitics consisted of three basic elements:

1. ***It was a hot dry river valley.*** This forced the inhabitants to organize irrigation projects that led to civilization.
2. ***It had virtually no natural resources except for mud and water.*** This forced its inhabitants to be very resourceful. Basically, just about everything about early Mesopotamian civilization was made from mud: its houses, temples, palaces, fortifications, writing tablets, and the crops which were traded for the resources needed to build up this civilization to new heights. Underlying all the glories of this civilization was mud.
3. ***It was flat and open terrain with virtually no natural barriers.*** This led to jealous nomadic neighbors constantly invading Mesopotamia, either breaking up already existing empires or forcing the Mesopotamians to build strong empires at each other's expense in self-defense. Mesopotamian history was nothing if not violent.

Sumer: myth and history (c.2800-2350 B.C.E.)

The Sumerians were the people who built the first civilization, living in the southeastern end of Mesopotamia known as Sumer. Our knowledge of the very early Sumerians is much like our knowledge of the early Hebrews in the Biblical book of Genesis. In each case, the dividing line between dim misty legends and a clear historical account was a great flood. In the Bible before the flood, we find patriarchs who loom larger than life, living for well over 900 years each and coming across more like stiff and lifeless statues than real human beings. The same is true of Sumerian heroes or patriarchs before their flood (c.2800 B.C.E.), except they live for tens of thousands of years and seem even more fantastic than the Biblical patriarchs. After the great flood of 2800 B.C.E., we see more written records and, consequently, real personalities emerge. The Bible is the same way after its great flood and Noah. The larger than life patriarchs give way to more human ones, such as Abraham.

The myths that often fill the gaps in the historical record can help us understand real history. If we carefully interpret them, they can tell us about historical events and the values that civilization held. For example, the story of Cain and Abel in the Bible is seen by some as symbolic of the ongoing struggle between farmers and nomads. Only this time it is told from the nomadic Hebrews' point of view rather than from the farmer's point of view. Thus the nomadic shepherd Abel is good and his farmer brother, Cain, is the murderer. In Mesopotamian myths, the roles are reversed. The many similarities between Biblical stories and Mesopotamian myths suggest early contacts between the two cultures. Both have stories of a great flood and of a paradise, or Garden of Eden, from which humans are driven because of their folly. If a new god replaces an older one, this often signifies that one culture has conquered another. Such was the case when the Babylonian Marduk replaced the Sumerian Enlil as the chief Mesopotamian god, signifying Babylon's conquest of Sumer.

When the Sumerians finally emerge into history, we find them divided into thirteen major city-states who spent a good deal of their time fighting each other. Although they shared a common religion centered around their holy city of Nippur, that religion seems to have done more to spark wars than prevent them. Each city-state had its own patron god or goddess that made it feel superior to the other city-states. Each city-state also wanted to control the holy city of Nippur, which led to constant fighting that caused Nippur to change hands nineteen times in twenty-four years! For centuries, Sumerian chariots and infantry battalions ranged across Mesopotamia, raising its dust in battle. Whenever one city-state, such as Kish, would gain the upper hand and seemed on the verge of conquering Sumer, the other cities would gang up on it and restore the balance of power. And so it went on for centuries.

The Akkadian Empire (c.2350 - 2250 B.C.E.)

It should come as no surprise that all this fighting wore down the Sumerians and left them open to attack from one of the many nomadic desert tribes surrounding them. In this case, it was a people known as the Akkadians. The story goes that its founder, Sargon of Kish, much like Moses, was set afloat in a reed basket as a baby to save his life. He was found by the royal gardener and raised in the palace where he rose quickly to power and influence as the king's cupbearer. At last, he murdered the king and seized the throne, calling himself Sargon, which meant "legitimate king." What this legend most likely tells us is that the Akkadian takeover of Sumer was a long process of gradual infiltration by the Akkadians into Sumerian society rather than the result of one big invasion. The fairly smooth transition to power also suggests that the Akkadians had absorbed much of Sumerian culture and become civilized. Thus the Akkadian Empire signified the spread of civilization more than its overthrow.

Sargon managed to take over all of Sumer and probably gave it a greater degree of peace than it had known for most of its history. He used Akkadian governors and garrisons (occupation armies) to keep the city-states in line. He would also take hostages and tear down the walls of any rebellious cities to ensure their good behavior.

Once his hold on the Sumer was secure, Sargon fought against the ever-troublesome Elamite tribes in the mountains to the east. He then marched northwestward, subduing all of Mesopotamia and even reaching the Mediterranean Sea, which seemed like the ends of the earth to people then. To commemorate this, Sargon took the title "King of the Four Quarters" (of the known world). His realm was history's first empire.

Sargon's grandson, Naramsin, further extended Akkadian power. However, he supposedly committed the fatal mistake of sacking the holy city of Nippur, which resulted in a series of revolts. These revolts weakened the Akkadian Empire enough to allow some other nomads, the Gutians, to attack and take over. Agade, the Akkadian capital, was so thoroughly destroyed in this turmoil that its location is still not certain.

Sumer's last flowering: the Third Dynasty of Ur (c.2100-2000 B.C.E.)

Partly, through a process of absorbing the nomadic Gutians and partly through popular revolts, Sumerian civilization revived in one final flowering known as the Third Dynasty of Ur. Much of Sargon's old empire was reunited, while new cities and expanded trade routes spread civilization northward. The most impressive monument of the age was the ziggurat of Ur. It was 120 feet high with a base of 260 feet by 175 feet. Even today, its mere ruins strike us with awe.

Once again, nomadic tribes, this time the Amorites, weakened and eventually overthrew the Sumerians. As with the earlier Sumerians, civil wars and revolts set them up for this. Gradually, the nomads settled down and new city-states rose up in the north. One of these city-states would build a new civilization grafted upon the old. That city was Babylon.

Hammurabi and the Babylonian Empire (c.1750-1600 B.C.E.).

Certainly one of the most famous figures in Mesopotamian history was the Babylonian king, Hammurabi. When he came to the throne around the year 1750 B.C.E., his city, Babylon, was just one of several city-states vying for power in Mesopotamia. Surrounded by aggressive and warlike rivals, and with a territory only fifty miles in diameter, Babylon needed a shrewd and tough king. Hammurabi fit the bill marvelously.

Over the next twenty-five years, this Babylonian king masterfully maneuvered his city-state among all its hostile neighbors. At one point, he would ally with one state to eliminate another. Later on, he would make a new ally to help him destroy the first. In such a way, he steadily expanded Babylon's borders and swelled its army's ranks with troops supplied by subject cities. One final showdown with the city-state, Larsa, left him master of Mesopotamia and "King of the Four Quarters."

It is one thing to conquer an empire. It is an entirely different thing to hold it together. Hammurabi proved himself an excellent ruler as well as a conqueror. Following the example of the Akkadians, he put governors and garrisons in the subject cities to prevent revolts. But he clearly saw that those measures alone would not be

enough to build a lasting empire. Therefore, he worked to establish a code of laws and one language for government and business to tie his empire together. He also constructed public works projects, such as temples and irrigation canals, throughout his empire. By providing jobs and a greater degree of prosperity, he hoped to build loyalty to Babylon or at least reduce resentment to his rule if they saw him working for their welfare.

Little is known about the Babylonian Empire after Hammurabi's death. It seems that his empire entered a period of decline after his death. Usually, the reasons for an empire's decline are numerous, and they interact with each other in a way that makes them feed back upon one another. This creates more problems, making them interact even more intensively, and so on. For example, Hammurabi's building and irrigation projects were very expensive and ate up a good deal of royal revenues. This left the crown with little money to pay its local officials. That led to a greater degree of freedom for those officials. As a result, their abuses grew, and royal revenues declined further. This process would then repeat itself with greater intensity again and again.

This feedback also led to even more problems. Extra officials were created to gather more taxes, which added further to the burdens of society. In order to pay those extra taxes, farmers started abandoning the two-field system, irrigating and planting both fields each year instead of leaving one fallow. The extra irrigation raised the water table and poisoned the soil with minerals such as salt, while the extra planting without giving the land any rest exhausted the soil's fertility. Crop yields, the underlying basis for civilization, went down and intensified all the other problems feeding into and off of the agriculture. Bit by bit, Babylon's empire crumbled to pieces. And waiting in the wings, as always, were the nomads. Only this time they had a new and frightening weapon with which to terrorize the Near East.

The horse and chariot (c.1650 B.C.E.)

As far back as the Sumerians, Mesopotamians had driven in war chariots pulled by wild donkeys, called onagers. However, the old Sumerian chariot had been quite cumbersome, with four solid wheels that added weight and reduced speed and mobility. As a result, such a chariot probably did not play too decisive a role in Mesopotamian warfare. Then, around 1650 B.C.E., nomads from the north appeared with a new type of chariot. It had two wheels mounted on the back, which made it more maneuverable. Also, its wheels were spoked, not solid, making it lighter and faster. Finally, it was pulled by a strange new beast, the horse, which was faster and more powerful than the onager.

Armed with the horse and chariot and the much more powerful composite bow, the northern nomads burst upon the civilized world with a ferocity that sent its kingdoms reeling back in confusion for a century or more. Peasant infantry were totally unprepared for the spectacle of maybe hundreds of chariots drawn by these strange beasts bearing down on them, stirring up clouds of dust, and making strange and terrifying noises. At times, they broke and ran at this sight alone, leaving their cities as open prey to the victorious nomads. All across the Near East, one civilization after another fell prey to the nomads armed with this terrifying new weapon. A people known as the Hyksos conquered northern Egypt. The Hittites overwhelmed the cities of Asia Minor and even raided as far as Babylon, sacking it in 1595 B.C.E. Another people, the Kassites, conquered Babylon and ruled it more permanently. Further east, the Indus River civilization fell to the Aryans, also armed with the horse and chariot. For a century or more civilization was thrown into turmoil.

Eventually, these nomads would follow the example of other nomadic conquerors by adopting civilized ways and merging their identities with the cultures they had conquered. Civilized people had also learned a lesson: the value of the horse and chariot. For several centuries, the elite corps of Near Eastern armies ruling the battlefields of the Near East would be their battalions of horse drawn chariots.

The First Assyrian Empire (c.1365-1100 B.C.E.)

Assyria lies at the northern end of Mesopotamia where many of the trade routes of the Fertile Crescent and the Near East converged. This made Assyria a prosperous land for trade. It also was a dangerous place, since trade routes are also convenient invasion routes. As a result, Assyria had an especially warlike history, and its people were known for two occupations: trade and warfare.

Since they lived in such a rough environment, the Assyrians became quite capable empire builders. Their first empire seems to have encompassed most, if not all, of Mesopotamia, and bordered the newly emerging civilization and empire of the nomadic Hittites. They also conquered the kingdom of Mitanni, originally founded by another chariot driving group of nomads, the Hurrians.

Once again, a new wave of nomads swept in with a devastating ferocity that toppled civilized empires and kingdoms far and wide. To the northwest, a mysterious people known as the Sea Peoples overwhelmed the Hittite Empire. Some of these Sea Peoples, the Peleset (the Biblical Philistines), seriously weakened the Egyptian Empire and conquered Palestine, thus giving Palestine its name. To the west of the Hittites, the Mycenaean Greeks fell to Dorian invaders from the north. The Trojan War was probably part of these upheavals. The Assyrians themselves were not immune, being conquered by the Aramaeans coming out of the desert. Among the results of these invasions, the trade routes bringing tin to the Near East were cut. This brought the Bronze Age to an abrupt halt and ushered in the Iron Age.

The Second Assyrian Empire (911-612 B.C.E.)

The Assyrians were a tough resilient people. Once the dust had settled from the latest round of upheavals and the nomads had started to assume a degree of civilization, the Assyrians reasserted themselves and built what amounted to the greatest Near Eastern Empire up to that point in history. At the height of their power, they ruled over Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. There were several reasons for their success as empire builders.

1. ***They had a plentiful supply of iron with which to equip their armies.*** Other less well-endowed peoples, such as those of Egypt, would be at a decisive disadvantage when fighting the Assyrians.
2. ***Refinements in siege warfare.*** Up to this point in history, about the only effective method for besieging a city was to starve it into submission. This made sieges long, tedious, and often unsuccessful endeavors. The Assyrians changed all that. They designed rolling siege towers from which they could assault city walls, and battering rams that could pound mud brick walls to dust. Armed with such weapons, the Assyrians were able to reduce city after city and establish a much firmer control over their empire.
3. ***A deliberate policy of terror to keep people obedient.*** The Assyrians are largely remembered in history as being extremely cruel. To a large extent, this reputation is justified. Cities daring to defy them in a siege or subject peoples desperate enough to revolt often suffered large-scale massacres. The Assyrians themselves who wanted to scare other people from defying them may have exaggerated the extent of this bloodshed. Also, the greater degree of success in besieging cities gave them more opportunities to sack cities than other peoples had. Keep in mind that most ancient peoples indulged in wholesale plunder and slaughter of cities that had tried to resist them and failed. Another Assyrian terrorist tactic was to uproot rebellious peoples enmasse and settle them away from their home in order to disorient them in strange surroundings and prevent further revolts. The Ten Lost Tribes of Israel were lost by this process of being resettled in a new land and gradually losing their culture and identity in the new cultures surrounding them. Contrary to their expectations, the Assyrians' terrorist policies seem to have inspired more revolts than fear.
4. ***Cavalry.*** At first the horse was seen as useful only for pulling chariots. Eventually, some nomads caught on to the fact that horses could be ridden. This involved solving several problems. First of all, the horse had to be bred up to a size where it was capable of carrying a man. Secondly, it had to get used to someone riding it, since no animal takes kindly to another animal jumping on its back. Finally, people had to figure out where to sit. For some reason, maybe height, men first rode the higher, but precarious, rump. Finally, someone figured out that the lower, but safer, back was a better place to ride.

Nomads to the north especially took to the horse. The speed with which the Plains Indians adapted to the horse when the Spanish introduced it to this continent shows what an impact it probably had on other nomads as well. Nomadic horse archers, controlling their horses with knee pressure, gained a mobility that civilized peoples could never match. Supposedly, a Comanche Indian could fire twenty arrows a minute while hanging under the protection of his horse's neck and moving at a full gallop.

When large civilized armies, such as that of the Persian King, Darius I, tried to conquer such nomads, they usually failed miserably in just trying to catch them. One measure to contain the nomads was the maintenance of long expensive fortified frontiers, such as the Great Wall of China, to stop their raids. Occasionally, the problem of nomadic raids would become a serious threat when various nomadic tribes would be united into one empire, such as that of Attila the Hun or Genghis Khan. Luckily for civilization, such empires were usually dependent on the personality and leadership of their founders and fell apart soon after their deaths.

The Assyrians were the first civilized people of the Near East to mount the horse for military purposes. Cavalry were more maneuverable and versatile than chariots. For one thing, they could operate on rougher ground than chariot wheels could. Possibly more important, riding the horse led to much faster communications. This allowed kings to build and hold much larger empires than before, since they could learn of revolts and react to them much more quickly. The fact that the Assyrian Empire was three times bigger than any empire, which preceded it, was probably due in large part to the horse.

Assyria administered its empire somewhat harshly but efficiently. States close to the Assyrian homeland answered directly to Assyrian governors and garrisons. States farther away, such as Egypt and Israel, could continue to exist under their own rulers as long as they paid tribute and loyally supplied troops for Assyrian wars. If they rebelled, massacres or mass deportations would result, followed by direct Assyrian rule.

Assyrian history was quite turbulent. It was under constant pressure from nomads to the north, and always quelling revolts within its empire. People objected as much to the Assyrian merchants who flooded their market places as they did to their army and ruling methods. As the Biblical prophet, Nahum put it: "Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of Heaven" (Nahum III, 16). Assyria's subjects apparently had a wide variety of complaints against their masters.

As long as the empire had able and energetic kings, it survived all these wars and revolts, although they must have been a terrible strain on Assyria's economy and resources. The death of the last strong king, Ashurbanipal, in 625 B.C.E., touched off one last round of popular revolts and invasions that the Assyrians were not destined to survive. An alliance of Babylon with the nomadic Medes to the north finally brought the Assyrian Empire crashing down in ruins. In 612 B.C.E., despite heroic resistance to the last, the Assyrian capital, Nineveh was taken and destroyed. The biblical prophet, Nahum, certainly expressed the feelings of many when he wrote: "Woe to the bloody city!...All who hear of your destruction shall clap their hands over you; for upon whom has your wickedness not passed continuously." Such celebrating was somewhat premature, for the Israelites and others like them would merely be trading one master for another. One state that recognized the danger was Egypt. Strangely enough, they allied with the hated Assyrians to stop the advance of a resurgent Babylon. The issue was decided at Carchemish in 605 B.C.E., the last great chariot battle in history. The result was a decisive victory for the Babylonians, who largely took the place of Assyria in the Near East.

The Neo-Babylonian or Chaldaean Empire (612-539 B.C.E.)

In dividing the spoils of victory, the Medes got the vast lands to the north, while Babylon got the more compact, but richer and civilized lands of the Fertile Crescent. The Neo-Babylonian or Chaldaean Empire, as it is variously called, encompassed most of the old Assyrian Empire with the exception of Egypt. This period saw Babylon at the height of its power and glory.

Babylon's most famous king during this period was Nebuchadnezzar. His main concern was controlling the Western end of the Fertile Crescent: Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine, and Egypt. He never did conquer Egypt, although it no longer presented a threat to him. The remaining two tribes of Israelites in Judah made the mistake of rebelling. As a result, Jerusalem was sacked and destroyed in 587, and the Jews were hauled to Babylon for a captivity that lasted some seventy years. Fortunately, they kept their identity and were allowed to return home by the Persians who overthrew the Babylonians.

One other people Nebuchadnezzar had trouble with were the Phoenicians who had helped the Jews in this revolt. Although most Phoenician cities surrendered, Tyre did not. This city sat on an island about one-half mile from

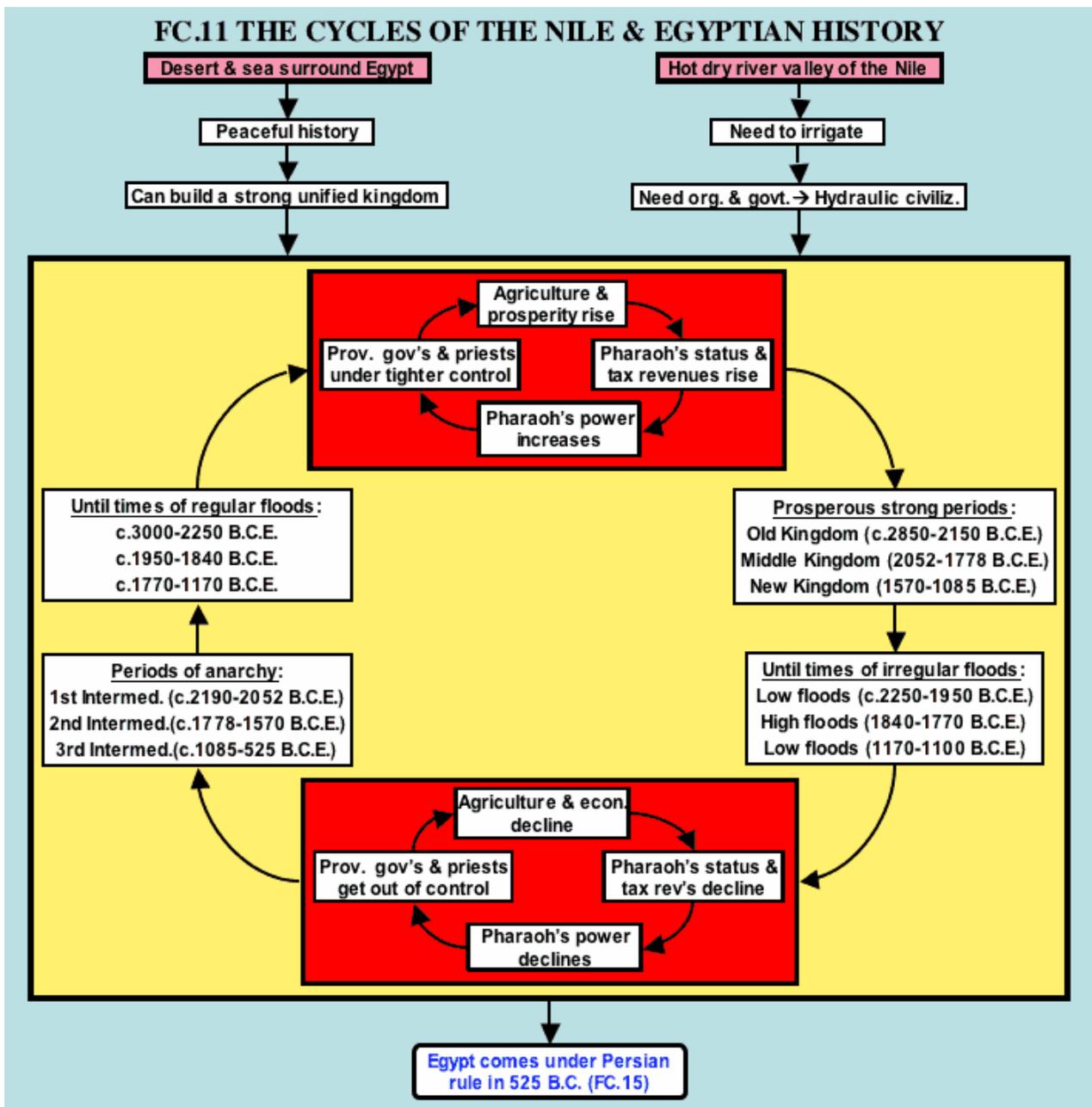
shore. Supposedly, Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Tyre for thirteen years without taking it. The main reason was he had no navy with which to blockade Tyre and cut off its supplies. Finally, the Tyrians paid Nebuchadnezzar some tribute if he would leave them alone.

The showpiece of the empire was Babylon, which contained some of the most wondrous sights of the ancient world. The Greek historian, Herodotus, has given us a second hand description of the city at its height. Even taking into account that Herodotus exaggerated a bit, we get a picture of a marvelous city. The Euphrates River split the city into two halves that were connected by a 400-foot long masonry bridge. A massive double set of walls protected the city from invaders and floods. Herodotus claimed a four-horse chariot could drive on top of the battlements and have enough room to turn around! The main ceremonial gateway was the beautiful Ishtar Gate. It was made of blue glazed bricks and decorated with relief sculptures of various animals. The palace complex covered thirteen acres and supposedly the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon were placed here. Their purpose was to comfort the queen who was homesick for the lush hills of her homeland. Finally, there was the fabled Tower of Babel, the largest and most elaborate ziggurat of its day. It was eight stories high and, according to Herodotus, the sanctuary on top was filled with tons of gold.

Babylon's final glory was short lived. Various factors combined to weaken it and set it up for a final fall. For one thing, religious disputes over trying to replace Marduk with the moon god split the empire. Even more important were economic factors. Babylon seems to have lost much of its trade because the Medes cut the overland routes to the north. The southern sea routes also suffered when the ports were silted up, preventing ships from coming in or going out. All of these triggered a feedback cycle much like that which wrecked Babylon after Hammurabi's death some 1200 years before. Heavy expenses from building projects and declining revenues from trade caused the government to raise taxes. This extra burden on the peasants caused them to abandon the two-field system and farm and irrigate both fields each year. The soil again became salinated as a result of too much irrigation, which raised the water table and brought salt with it, poisoning the crops in the process. This damaged the economy and lowered tax revenues even further, bringing on more tax increases and so on.

The final blow came in 539 B.C.E. when the Persians took Babylon in a night attack. The center of power shifted away from Babylon to the Persian Empire in the north. Mesopotamia's glory days were over, although its culture heavily influenced the Persians, who in turn heavily influenced Muslim civilization, the dominant culture in the Near East today. As a result, Mesopotamia is very much with us. Its culture has just changed and evolved with the times.

FC11The Cycles of the Nile & Egyptian History



[FC11](#) in the [Hyperflow of History](#);
Covered in multimedia lecture [#2581](#).

Hail to thee, O Nile, that issues from the earth and comes to keep Egypt alive! When he rises, then the land is in jubilation, then every belly is in joy.

Egypt was the scene of the other great hydraulic or river civilization of the ancient Near East. Like its Mesopotamian counterpart, it evolved in a hot dry river valley that required irrigation which in turn required organization and a strong government that led to civilization. In fact, Egyptians depended so much on the irrigation and the high level of organization and authority needed to maintain it that they considered their rulers, the pharaohs, gods. The power and effectiveness of these god-kings corresponded directly to Egypt's prosperity, which itself depended on the floods' regularity and the effectiveness of the irrigation system.

However, Egypt, unlike Mesopotamia, which had no natural barriers and was open to attack, was isolated by desert to the east and west and the Mediterranean Sea to the north. As a result, its history was relatively peaceful compared to Mesopotamia's, allowing the Egyptians to build a strong centralized state without external

disruptions. Egypt's more peaceful environment tended to make the Egyptians optimistic about life, but also suspicious of strangers and new ideas.

More than anything else, the Egyptians realized quite well that their prosperity and welfare depended on the Nile which provided its people with most of what they needed to survive: fish and wildlife, mud for building materials, a "highway" for easy transportation, and papyrus for paper. Most importantly, the Nile floods annually from June to October, watering the ground and replenishing the soil with a rich fertile layer of silt. The Egyptians called their land *kmt* ("the Black land") after this layer of silt. The real essence of Egypt consisted of a long thin strip of land along the Nile that was never more than a few miles wide. Outside of this strip was the "Red land", the desert. Today one can still stand literally with one foot in the "Black land" and one foot in the "Red land". To the ancient Egyptians, this symbolized the sharp contrast between life and death.

The Egyptian peasant's yearly schedule revolved around the Nile's cycle. During the flood season, he might work on the pharaoh's projects, such as pyramids. When the floods subsided, he would repair any damage to his home and the irrigation canals and then plant his crops. Harvest time would come in time to gather the crops right before the Nile flooded, and the cycle would start all over again.

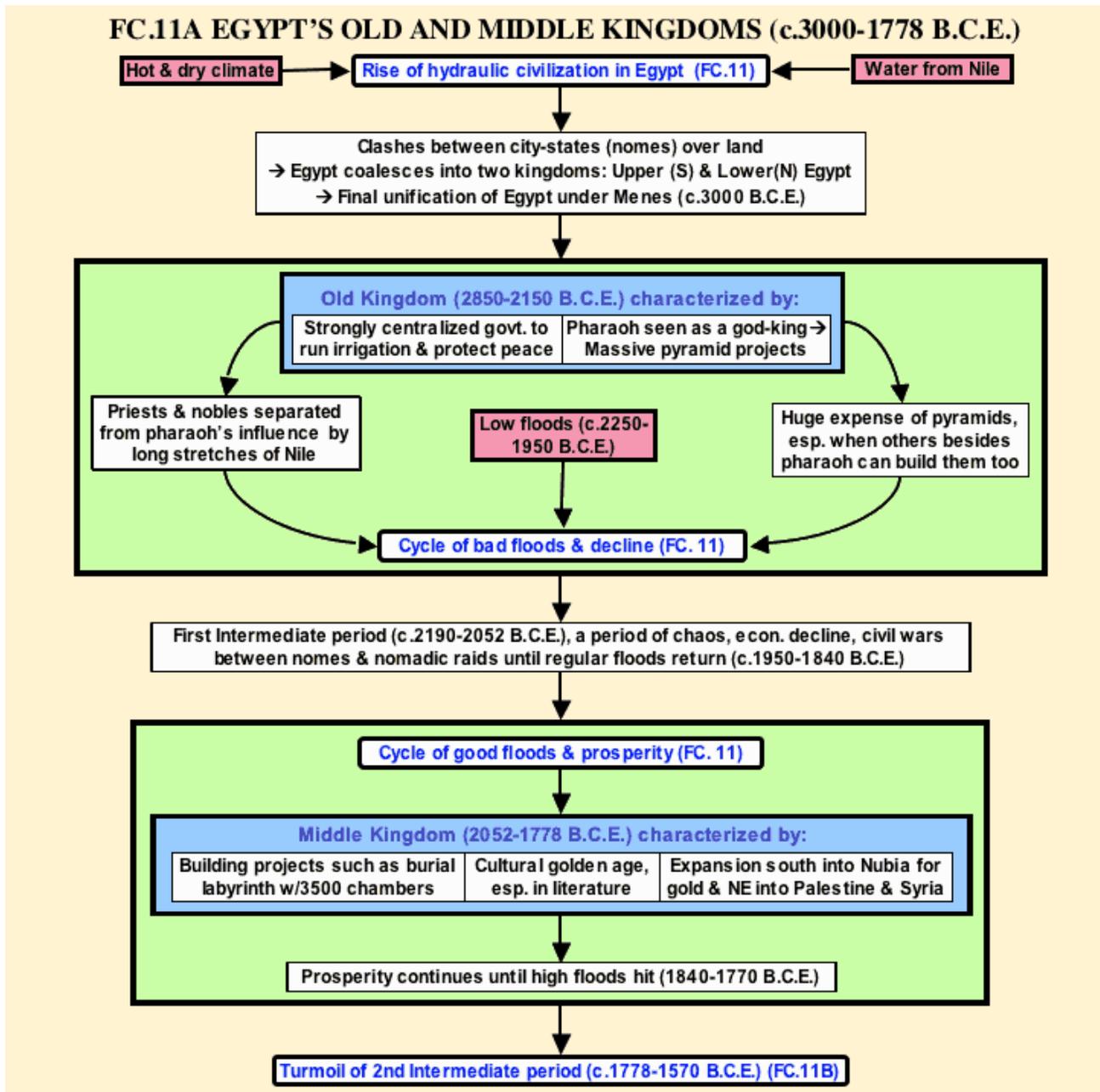
Egyptian history overall followed a basic cycle corresponding to and ruled by the Nile's flood cycles. Regular floods led to prosperous agriculture, which would increase the pharaoh's tax revenues and his status in the eyes of his subjects who saw him as responsible for the floods as well as irrigation. As a result, his power and the ability to control the local governors and priests in the various city-states (*nomes*) stretched out along the length of the Nile River valley would grow. Pharaoh's increased authority would bring the irrigation system under even tighter and more efficient control, which would further improve Egypt's agriculture and prosperity. This cycle would keep repeating itself as long as regular floods continued.

However, when irregular floods started, the cycle would reverse itself. The agriculture would decline, lowering the pharaoh's tax revenues and discrediting him in the eyes of his subjects. His power and status would decline, as would his control over the provincial governors and priests. As they got increasingly out of control, the efficiency of the irrigation system would decline, further damaging the agriculture and so on. This cycle would also keep repeating until regular floods would return, and the first part of the cycle would start over.

As a result, Egypt's history is divided into six periods whose prosperous times corresponded roughly to regular floods of the Nile and whose troubled times corresponded to periods when the Nile's annual floods were either too high or too low:

The Old Kingdom (c.2850-2150 B.C.E.)	Regular floods (c.3000-2250 B.C.E.)
The First Intermediate Period (c.2190-2052 B.C.E.)	Low floods (c.2250-1950 B.C.E.)
The Middle Kingdom (c.2052-1778 B.C.E.)	Regular floods (c.1950-1840 B.C.E.)
The Second Intermediate Period (c.1778-1570 B.C.E.)	High floods (c.1840-1770 B.C.E.)
The New Kingdom (c.1570-1085 B.C.E.)	Regular floods (c.1770-1170 B.C.E.)
The Final Decline (c.1085-525 B.C.E.)	Low floods (c.1170-1100 B.C.E.)

FC11AEgypt's Old and Middle Kingdoms (2850-2052 B.C.E.)



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The Old Kingdom (c.2850-2190 B.C.E.)

Egyptian civilization started much as Mesopotamian civilization did, with the rise of independent city-states, called *nomes*, organized around irrigation projects. These city-states often fought each other for land and power. Bit by bit, different nomes absorbed each other in these wars until there were only two kingdoms left: Upper Egypt in the south, and Lower Egypt in the north. Finally, a king of Upper Egypt, known variously as Menes or Narmer, conquered Lower Egypt and united the land. Soon afterwards, the period of Egyptian history known as the Old Kingdom began. Generally, during periods of prosperity such as the Old Kingdom, Egypt would be united under one pharaoh. However, during times of turmoil, it would split back into Upper and Lower Egypt until a strong ruler reunited the land.

The Old Kingdom was a peaceful and prosperous period. It was also the great age of building pyramids, massive tombs to preserve and protect the dead for the afterlife. Tied in with this was the involved and expensive process of mummification, which preserved the body for the next world. Contrary to popular belief, the pyramids were not built using slave labor, but rather the labor of peasants who were free for such work during the flood season. At this time, the pharaoh was seen as a god who embodied all of Egypt and was the only one entitled to an afterlife. However, Egyptian peasants could feel that they were sharing in some of that afterlife by working on the pyramids. Pyramid building also provided peasants with employment and some income from the pharaoh during the flood season when they could do little else anyway.

There were about eighty of these monumental structures built. The largest of these, the Great Pyramid at Gizeh, contained some 2.3 million limestone blocks, each weighing several tons. Even in the best of times, building such structures would be a huge burden on the economy. In times of low floods, such as started around 2250 B.C.E., the strain proved to be too much. As a result, the Old Kingdom went into a period of decline.

The First Intermediate Period (2190-2052 B.C.E.)

There were several reasons for this decline. The huge cost of the pyramids coupled with low floods and the resulting poor crops have already been mentioned. There were also religious, economic, and political factors. Since the pharaoh mainly worshipped Re, the sun god, at Heliopolis, the priests of Re gained power and prestige. Eventually, they undermined the divinity and status of the pharaoh himself, referring to him merely as the "Son of Re". The pharaohs' status also diminished because they often married women of non-royal blood, which made them seem closer to the people and less god-like.

Besides the economic strain of building pyramids and maintaining priests for the benefit of previous pharaohs, the royal treasury also suffered from giving out lands to various priesthoods and nobles. Consequently, they could establish their positions more independently of the pharaoh. The king's officials ruling the different nomes were often of royal blood themselves. Many of them established hereditary positions in their nomes, passing the governorships on to their sons. In time, they became virtually independent rulers, splitting Egypt up into a number of separate city-states. Symbolic of the pharaoh's decline was the fact that these governors started claiming afterlives for themselves, building their own tombs in their home provinces rather than in the shadow of the pharaoh's pyramid.

As often happens, decline bred further decline. The poor harvests hurt the pharaohs' power and prestige since they were supposedly responsible for good crops. This bred turmoil and civil war, further weakening the agriculture and economy. Nubian tribes from the south and Libyans from the western desert seized the opportunity to raid and add to this anarchy. Contemporary accounts reflect this situation. "The dead are thrown in the river...Laughter has perished. Grief walks the land." According to one Egyptian historian, "Seventy kings ruled for seventy days." The truth is that for nearly two centuries no king ruled all of Egypt. Five dynasties are listed from this period, but none of them could control more than just part of the land.

The Middle Kingdom (2052-1778 B.C.E.)

Eventually, a strong dynasty arose around the city of Thebes in the south and reunited Upper and Lower Egypt in 2052 B.C.E. The new pharaohs faced three major problems in restoring order to Egypt: powerful local governors, the powerful priesthood of the sun god Re, and agricultural turmoil. The new pharaohs replaced local governors with their own men and rotated them occasionally so they could not establish their power in one area. They also created many of their officials from the middle class of artisans and traders. These men would depend on the pharaoh for their positions since they were from humble origins. As a result, they would be more obedient to the pharaoh.

The priests of Re were dealt with by replacing Re with Amon, the patron god of Thebes, as the main state deity. This broke the power of one priesthood by putting another less threatening one in its place. However, over time

the priests of Amon would gather huge amounts of land and power into their own hands, controlling an estimated thirty percent of Egypt's real estate by the time of the New Kingdom.

Agriculture and prosperity revived as the pharaohs repaired the complex irrigation system that the Egyptian peasants relied on. One major engineering project was the restoration of Lake Moeris in the desert west of the Nile Delta. Over the years the channel feeding this lake had silted up, causing the lake to dry up. In the Middle Kingdom, the channel was dredged, the lake was restored, and new farmland was developed around it. The lake also served as a reservoir since its channel could be opened up or blocked off in times of high or low floods respectively.

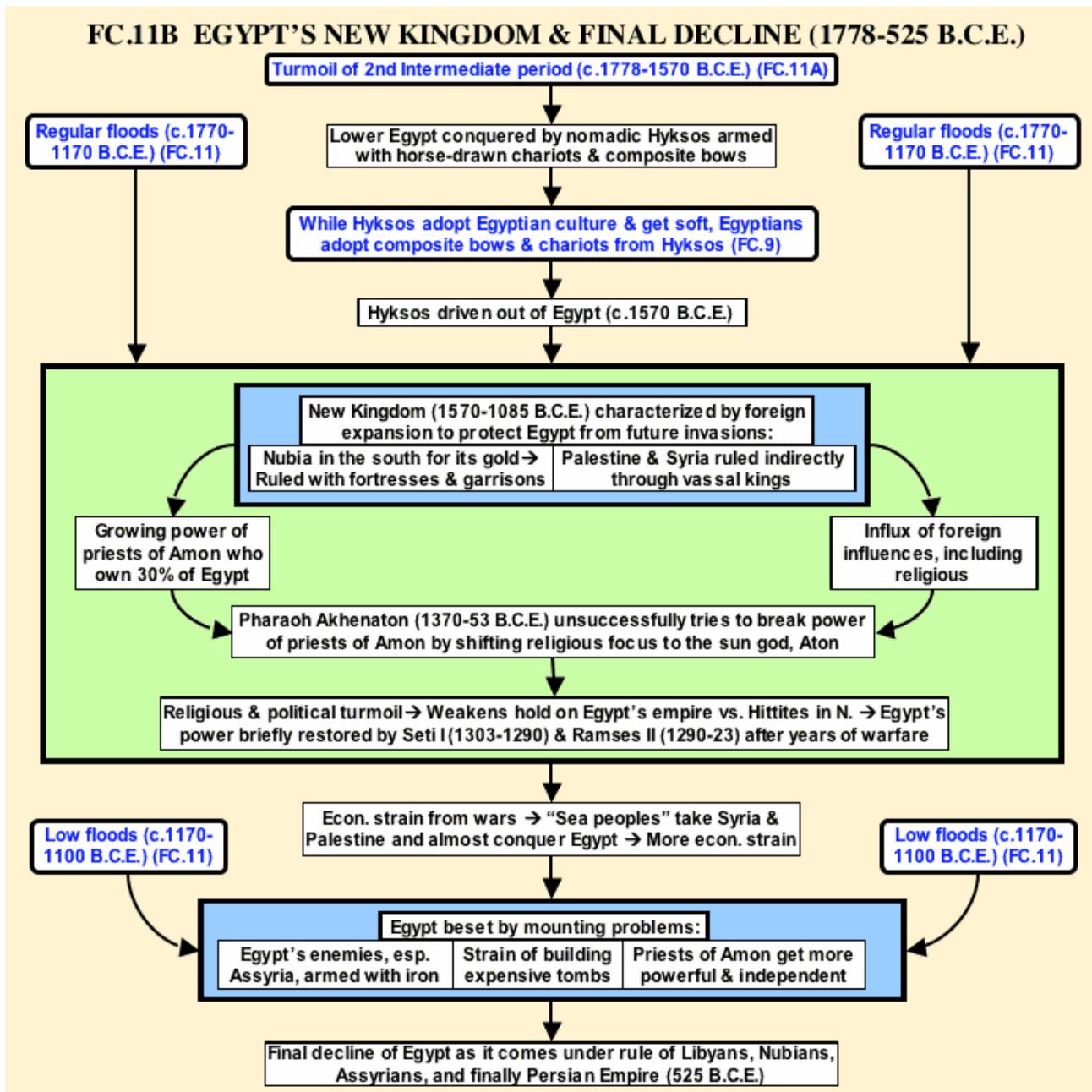
The Middle Kingdom also saw Egyptian power expand beyond its borders. During the Old Kingdom, no major enemies threatened Egypt's security. As a result, the pharaohs had been content to stay mostly within Egypt's borders along the Nile, just safeguarding their gold supply from Nubia to the south and the copper mines in the Sinai Desert to the east from nomadic raiders. The pharaohs of the Old Kingdom had not even kept a permanent standing army, relying on civil officials to lead peasant recruits whenever campaigns were necessary.

The anarchy of the First Intermediate Period changed that a bit. The rulers of the Middle Kingdom extended Egypt's power southward into Nubia. This land was important to Egypt as its primary source of gold and had been loosely controlled during the Old Kingdom. Now the pharaohs built a string of massive fortresses along the Nile in Nubia to secure their hold over it. Egypt's influence was also felt to the northeast in Palestine in order to protect its copper mines in the Sinai. Its control here was not nearly as tight as it was over Nubia, which the Egyptians saw as especially vital to their interests.

This period also saw Egyptian trade with the outside world increase in importance. Commercial contacts extended to Cyprus for bronze and copper, Phoenicia for cedar wood, the Minoan civilization on Crete for pottery, and the legendary land of Punt (probably the Somali coast of East Africa) for incense.

Culturally, the Middle Kingdom was a golden age in Egyptian history. Art (especially statuary and jewelry) and literature reached a high point of development. In architecture, pyramids were still built, but not on the grand scale of the Old Kingdom. A burial complex known as the "Labyrinth" was built. It had some 3500 burial chambers and was meant to stop grave robbers with its bewildering complexity rather than with a pyramid's mass. Unfortunately, neither method succeeded in foiling the thieves, and only one tomb from 2500 years of Egyptian history, that of Tutankhamen, escaped being looted. When the Greek historian Herodotus saw the Labyrinth, it was more than just ruins, and he claimed it was more impressive than the pyramids.

FC11BEgypt's New Kingdom and Final Decline (1778-525 BCE)



FC11B in the [Hyperflow of History](#).

The Second Intermediate Period (1778-1570 B.C.E.)

Around 1800 B.C.E., Egypt entered another period of decline. Once again, irregular floods, this time being too high, probably played a role in undermining the pharaoh's power and authority. A series of pharaohs, ending with the rare rule of a woman, Nitocris, marked the end of the Middle Kingdom and the beginning of another period of anarchy, the Second Intermediate Period.

Agricultural decline and political anarchy followed much the same pattern as during the First Intermediate Period, with Egypt splitting back into its upper and lower halves. One new factor added to the confusion: foreign invasion. A group of peoples known to the Egyptians as Hyksos, or "foreign kings", came thundering into Egypt with the horse drawn chariot and the more powerful composite bow. These new weapons allowed them to conquer Lower Egypt, although Thebes in the south remained independent under the priests of Amon. The

Biblical Hebrews were probably not among the Hyksos invaders, but they probably entered Egypt during the time of Hyksos rule as reflected in the Biblical story of Joseph, a foreigner who rises to very high status in Egypt.

The Hyksos, like so many other nomadic invaders, adopted the ways of their civilized subjects. Their rulers used Egyptian titles and customs, wrote their names in hieroglyphics, and worshiped the Egyptian god Seth. They also used Egyptian officials and tried to maintain the administrative machinery. Still, Hyksos rule was a shock to the Egyptians. When rulers from Thebes finally drove them out of Egypt, their attitude toward the outside world had been radically changed by the experience of foreign domination. The new era which dawned, the New Kingdom, would see the pharaohs actively pursue a policy of foreign conquest and empire building. Egypt's age of glory had arrived.

The New Kingdom (1570-1085 B.C.E.)

Egyptian history is traditionally divided into thirty-one dynasties or ruling families. The most famous of these are the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties who established Egypt as a great imperial power in the Near East. The eighteenth dynasty in particular saw a succession of able rulers.

Amenhotep I (1545-1525 B.C.E.) spent much of his reign securing his realm against the desert tribes who had caused so much trouble during the recent period of turmoil. He realized that it was futile to try to hold the entire desert. Instead he seized various oases scattered throughout the Sahara along Egypt's flanks. This deprived the nomads of places from which to launch raids and refresh themselves. It also gave the Egyptians advanced bases so that they could intercept any nomads trying to slip through for raids.

Thutmose I (1525-1490 B.C.E.) was the pharaoh who really established Egypt's empire. He extended Egyptian power into Nubia once again. This meant Egypt controlled a thin strip of river valley some 1200 miles long. Thutmose also advanced into Palestine and Syria to protect Egypt against any "Hyksos" there. The various independent city-states there, such as Byblos and Ugarit, fell before the onslaught of the pharaoh's army, which fought its way all the way to the upper Euphrates River. There many of the Egyptian soldiers experienced rain for the first time, which they could only describe as "the Nile falling from the sky."

Egyptian rule in Palestine and Syria was more lenient than that of such peoples as the Assyrians and Babylonians. For one thing, any cities that fell to the pharaoh were considered the property of the gods (including pharaoh). As a result, they were not usually allowed to sack a city since that would be a sacrilege. Some strategic or especially rebellious cities were left with Egyptian governors and garrisons. However, for the most part, the pharaohs left native rulers in power as long as they remained loyal to Egypt. Taking the sons of these rulers as hostages back to Egypt insured such loyalty. There they were educated in Egyptian ways so that by the time they assumed the reins of power, they saw things from a very Egyptian point of view.

After Thutmose I and the brief reign of his son Thutmose II, we encounter the first woman to make a major mark in history, Hatshepsut (1590-1560 B.C.E.). Technically, she was only a regent, or temporary ruler, for the young king, Thutmose III. However, she liked the feeling of power and decided to keep the throne for herself. Since the Egyptian people probably would not take kindly to a woman's rule, she styled herself as a "king".

Her statues sported a beard and obscured her more feminine features. Hatshepsut did not push her luck trying to lead the army, and her reign was generally peaceful as a result. The most famous event of her reign was a trading expedition to the exotic land of Punt, which brought back myrrh, incense, ivory, monkeys, and a panther.

Hatshepsut's peaceful reign was followed by that of the great warrior pharaoh, Thutmose III (1469-1436 B.C.E.). It is a tribute to Hatshepsut's ability that she had been able to keep this able young soldier under her thumb even after he came of age. The new king's frustration at having been kept from his rightful throne for so long was quickly shown by his having Hatshepsut's name erased from all public inscriptions and replaced either with his own name or those of his ancestors. Thutmose III spent much of his reign restoring Egyptian power in Syria and Palestine where it had slipped during Hatshepsut's less aggressive reign. He waged six campaigns there and another eleven against the Hurrians who had settled down to found the powerful kingdom of Mitanni. Much of this required long drawn out sieges, such as that of Megiddo, which lasted eleven months and involved building a

wooden palisade and moat to completely cut the city off from outside help. Sometimes trickery was used. At the siege of Joppa, Egyptian troops supposedly got into the city by hiding in grain bags going in through the gates. At other times, the Egyptians found themselves involved in some pretty hard fighting.

Such extended campaigning so far from home forced the Egyptians to build a large professional army. Most recruits were Egyptians, but foreign mercenaries, and even captives of war made up larger proportions of the army over time. The Egyptian army was divided into divisions of about 5000 men each. The infantry were armed either with bows and arrows or large shields and axes. The most illustrious branch of the army was the chariot corps, organized into groups of twenty-five chariots each. These were light two man chariots that would sweep in front of the enemy while firing arrows into their ranks to disrupt them. After several such passes, the infantry could move in to finish off the enemy. Egypt also developed a navy whose main purpose was to transport the army by sea between Egypt and Palestine, a much easier trip than marching through the Sinai Desert.

Thutmose III's three successors, Amenhotep II, Thutmose IV, and Amenhotep III, ruled Egypt for some seventy years. They were all able warriors and generals, and maintained Egypt's power in the Near East. However, they added little or nothing to the size of the empire, probably feeling it was already about as big as they could effectively rule.

Egypt at the height of its power and glory must have been a fascinating place to visit. Wealth poured into its treasury, allowing the pharaohs to build the massive temples of Karnak and Thebes, the magnificent tombs cut out of cliffs in the Valley of the Kings along the Nile, and gigantic statues of themselves, some of them up to sixty-five feet in height. Another popular kind of monument was the obelisk, or needle. This was a tall thin piece of granite, carved into a pyramid shape at the top. This peak was then covered with gold to reflect the brilliance of the sun god to whom it was dedicated. The Washington Monument is in the form of an obelisk, although it is not made out of a single piece of stone.

Egypt's cities also reflected the influx of wealth and new peoples that its empire brought in. Thebes, the capital, was especially renowned for its wealth and splendor. Even the Greek hero, Achilles, in the great epic of the Trojan War, *The Iliad*, mentions "Egyptian Thebes, the world's great treasure house...Thebes with its one-hundred gates where two-hundred men issue from each gate with horses and chariots." The influx of foreign peoples also meant the influx of foreign ideas, and that may have been a factor influencing the next great pharaoh, Amenhotep IV, known to us as Akhenaton.

The reign of Akhenaton (1370-1353 B.C.E.) was a turning point in Egyptian history. Originally, this new ruler was named Amenhotep in honor of Amon, the primary state god. However, he changed his name to Akhenaton in honor of Aton, the sun god, whom he wanted his people to worship instead. Why he wanted to change the religion is a matter of dispute. Some people think he was influenced by the simpler religious beliefs of his wife, a princess from Mitanni, or even the Hebrews, then captive in Egypt. Others see a more practical motive: trying to break the power of the priests of Amon, who had gradually gathered huge amounts of land and power into their hands over the last 700 years. Some historians estimate that they owned about thirty percent of all the land in Egypt by Akhenaton's reign. This was tax-free land, which deprived the pharaohs of money and created a growing threat to their own power. This in itself would have been enough motive to change the religion, although purer religious motives may have been mixed in as well. It also shows the importance of religion to a society that feels so helpless before the forces of nature.

Contrary to popular imagination, Akhenaton did not create a monotheistic religion worshipping only one god. Instead, he made Aton the primary focus of worship in Egypt, with the royal family worshipping him for all of Egypt's benefit. This eliminated the need for any extensive priesthood, which certainly angered the priests of Amon. They in turn played upon people's fears of what would happen if the old gods who had protected Egypt for so long were neglected. In a traditional society such as Egypt, these fears were a powerful force to overcome. Akhenaton tried to escape these problems by moving the capital from Thebes, the center of Amon's worship, to a new city, Tell-el-Amarna, dedicated to Aton. In the end, Akhenaton's experiment failed and barely outlived him. The nine-year-old Tutankhaton, better known to us as Tutankhamon after he changed his name to please the old state deity, Amon, and his powerful priests, succeeded him. Ironically, Tutankhamon is the best known of the pharaohs, although he was probably just a puppet of the resurgent priests of Amon and died before he was even

old enough to rule on his own. However, it was his tomb alone that was destined to survive the ravages of grave robbers and give us a clue to the wealth and splendor of Egypt at its height.

The internal turmoil caused by Akhenaton's reforms and the reaction against them weakened Egypt's hold on its empire and brought its golden age and the eighteenth dynasty to an end. The empire did experience a revival under the nineteenth dynasty, which was founded by Ramses I (1304-1303 B.C.E.). By this time, Egypt's main rival for power in the Near East, the kingdom of Mitanni, had been replaced by an even more dangerous power, the Hittite empire. Once again, the pharaoh's chariot corps rolled northward to defend Egypt's interests. Seti I (1303-1290 B.C.E.) met the Hittites and defeated them, but they still remained a power in Palestine. Seti's successor, Ramses II (1290-1223 B.C.E.), took up the struggle and met the Hittites at Kadesh, one of history's great chariot battles. After being routed by a Hittite surprise attack, Ramses rallied his troops and struck back at the Hittites who had stopped to loot the Egyptian camp. The battle ended basically as a draw that led to a peace treaty and marriage alliance between the two powers. It is remarkable that, after such bitter fighting, the Egyptian and Hittite empires settled down to a peaceful co-existence that lasted until the fall of the Hittite Empire around 1200 B.C.E. At one point, Egypt even sent grain to the Hittites during a famine.

Ramses II was the last Pharaoh to see Egyptian power at its height. After his death, Egypt entered a period of slow but steady decline. The first major shock to its power was the invasion by a mysterious people known to us only as the Sea Peoples. Who they were is not exactly clear, but some of them seem to have come from the area of the Aegean Sea around Greece. Their path of conquest followed the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean. The Hittite Empire crashed down in ruins before their onslaught and disappeared from history. Syria and Palestine were hit next as the Sea Peoples passed on to Egypt where the first recorded naval battle in history was fought. The Egyptians won, but it took a tremendous effort that sapped their strength. The *Peleset*, as the Egyptians called the Sea Peoples, made their way to Palestine (which gets its name from them), settled down, and became the Biblical Philistines. This period may also be the time of the Exodus when the Israelites made good their escape from Egypt to the Promised Land.

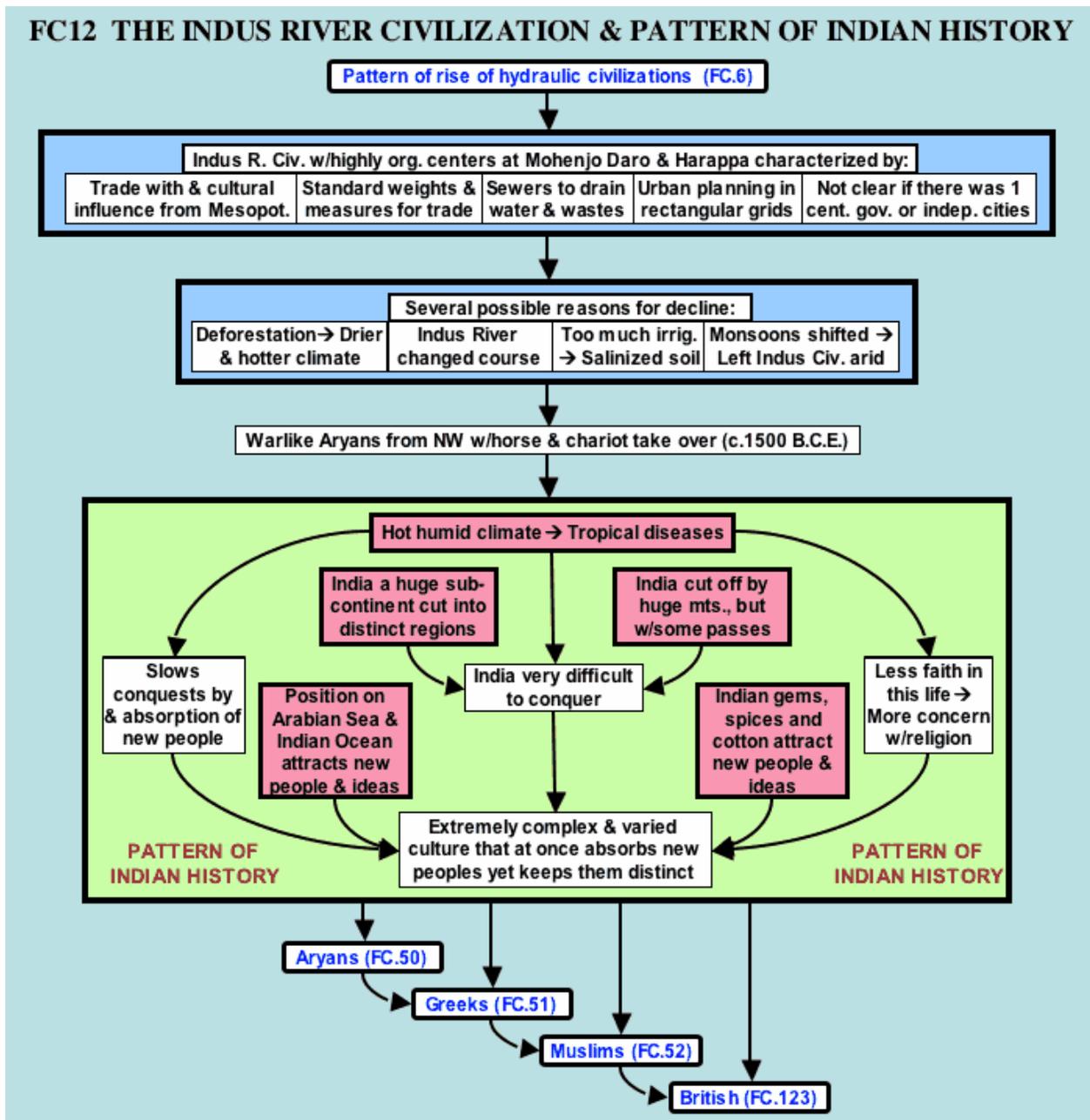
Final decline (c.1085-525 B.C.E.)

By 1085 B.C.E., Egypt was clearly in decline. It had lost its possessions in Palestine to the Philistines and Israelites, while revolts and raids in Nubia were destroying its grip on that vital part of its empire. It also suffered from various internal problems. For one thing, low floods had damaged its economy and weakened its ability to recover from other troubles. For another thing, the powerful priesthood of Amon was a greater threat than ever to the pharaoh's power, especially after Akhenaton's attempt to destroy them had soured relations between king and priests. Finally, the increased reliance on foreign mercenaries created problems since the pharaohs often did not have the money to pay them. This made the troops restless and put the pharaohs into a very dangerous position.

Egypt's internal troubles added to the problems outside its borders. In 940 B.C.E., a Libyan general by the name of Sheshonk forced his way into the royal family through marriage, overthrew his in-laws, and founded the twenty-second dynasty. Around 750 B.C.E., Nubians coming up from the south founded another foreign dynasty, the twenty-fifth. The fact that these foreign rulers had absorbed Egyptian culture can be seen in the pyramids that the Nubians built in their kingdom of Kush to the south. Egypt was destined to fall under the rule of other peoples even less friendly to its civilization. In 652 B.C.E., the Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, conquered Upper and Lower Egypt. Although the Egyptians drove the hated Assyrians from their land a few years later, their freedom was short-lived. In 525 B.C.E., the Persian king, Cambyses, overwhelmed any resistance to his armies and took over the Egyptian kingdom. It is at this point that we can say that the age of the pharaohs came to an end, as a long succession of Persian, Macedonian, Roman, Arab, Turkish, and British powers would rule it for the next 2400 years. Not until the modern era would a native Egyptian again rule over the Gift of the Nile.

FC12 The Indus River Civilization and the Pattern of India's History

FC12 THE INDUS RIVER CIVILIZATION & PATTERN OF INDIAN HISTORY



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The Indus River Civilization (c.2500-1700 B.C.E.)

, evolving in modern Pakistan, was the third of history's great civilizations and would be the basis for India's culture. Like Egypt and Mesopotamia, this was a hydraulic civilization based upon highly organized irrigation and flood control projects requiring a strong central authority to govern their construction and maintenance. Although the Harappan civilization (named after one of its main sites, Harappa) had writing, too little has survived to be deciphered. Therefore, we are not even clear whether there was one central government for the entire region or a number of independent city-states.

However, archaeological evidence clearly shows this was a highly organized civilization. The main cities, Harappa and Mohenjo Daro, had sophisticated urban planning and were built on immense mounds of earth and

rubble as protection against floods. Harappa's citadel mound was forty feet high, reinforced against erosion by a forty-five foot thick brick-facing wall, and topped by strong fortifications. Another, slightly smaller mound probably contained graineries, threshing floors, and furnaces for bronze smelting. Altogether the entire complex of mounds covered an area three miles in circumference. Other towns and cities were almost identical to Harappa in layout, each having a west-facing citadel surrounded by blocks of houses and a north-south grid of main streets. The houses were also of a standard design, having a central courtyard surrounded by smaller rooms and corridors. Even the bricks were of two standard types: oven fired for foundations and public buildings and sun dried for private homes. Possibly the most impressive feature was the sophisticated sewage and drainage systems, with brick drain pipes issuing from each home to city-sewers which led to main sewers.

Harappan trade extended as far as Mesopotamia, exporting jewelry made from clay, gold, silver, and semi-precious stones, cotton fabrics (a product unique to this area then), and ceramic toy wagons and animals. A system of standard weights and measures promoted trade between the cities of the Indus. The weights were based on units of 16, much like India's present currency, the rupee, which consists of sixteen *annans*.

Crudely made statuettes suggest a religion devoted to a mother goddess. Stamp seal inscriptions show the Harappans probably revered such animals as the elephant, tiger, rhino, and buffalo. Large brick lined baths indicate that another feature of their religion was ritual bathing. Both this and a reverence for animals are features of present day Hinduism, suggesting its roots extend back to the Harappan civilization.

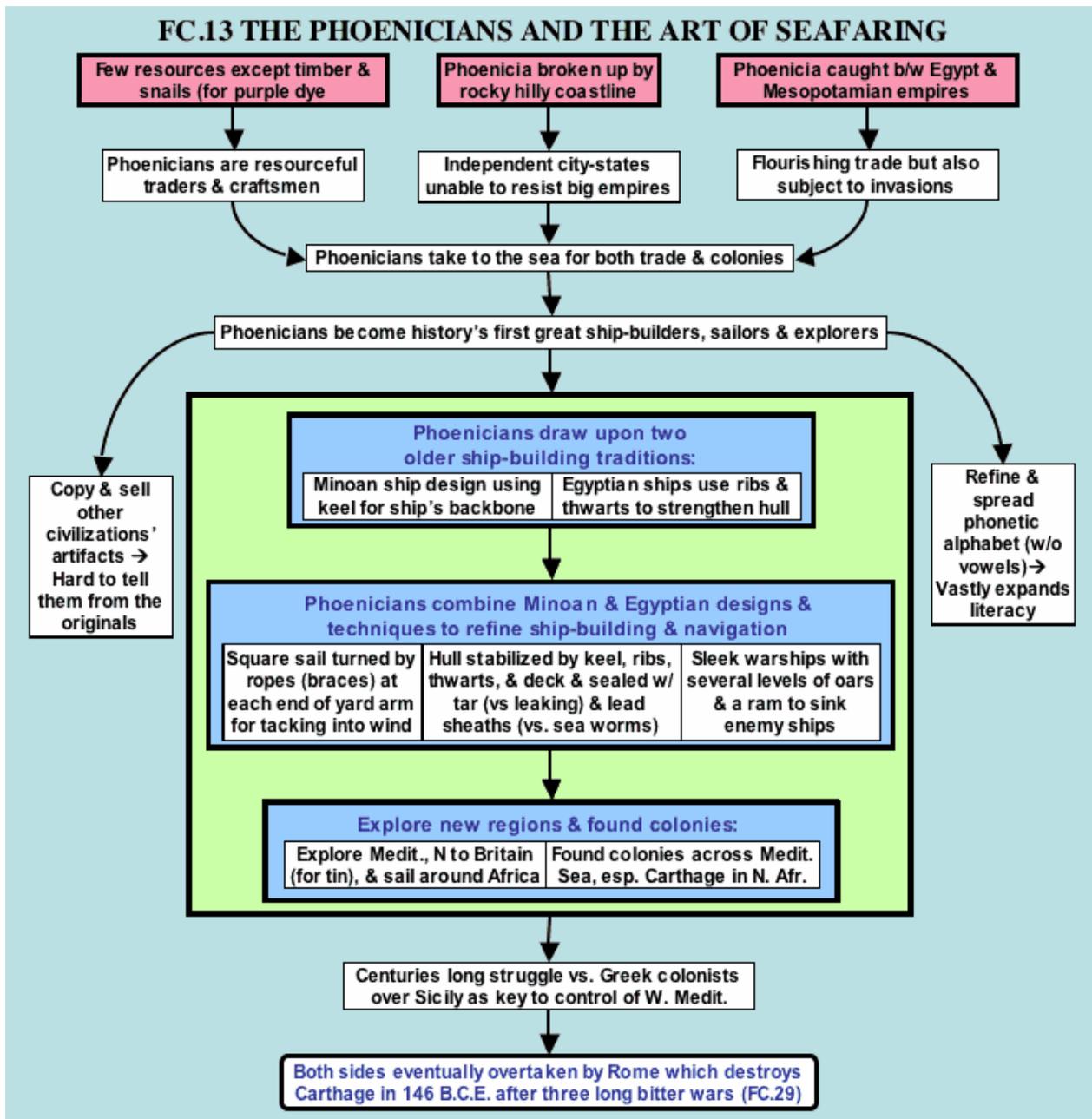
There are several theories about the end of the Harappans. Two focus on the climate turning more arid, either from deforestation or a shift of the monsoons away from the river valley. Another suggests that too much irrigation raised the water table and salinated the soil, much as happened in Mesopotamia several times. A fourth theory is that the Indus River changed its course, leaving the Harappan cities high and dry. Whatever the reasons, the Harappans abandoned their cities around 1700 B.C.E., being replaced by new settlers producing much cruder artifacts. Then, around 1500 B.C.E. new invaders, the Aryans armed with the horse and chariot, took over. They would gradually expand to the south-east and develop the civilization we call Indian. However, various aspects of Harappan civilization, especially religious, would survive as integral parts of Indian culture.

The pattern of Indian history

India's geography and climate are varied and have largely determined the course of its history. There are five main features of the environment to consider. First, India is hot and humid, breeding many diseases, which both slowed conquest and absorption of India by newcomers and gave people less faith in this life and reason to explore more spiritual paths. Secondly, the Himalaya and Hindu Kush mountains, two of the tallest ranges in the world, cut India off from the rest of Asia. Also, India is a huge subcontinent cut into very distinct regions ranging from the mountains in the north through the tropical river valley of the Ganges to the barren deserts of the Deccan. All these factors have made it a very difficult country to conquer. Finally, two other factors, India's position on the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea plus its abundance of spices, gems, and cotton, attracted trade, new peoples, and ideas to its shores.

Together, these factors have made Indian culture and history extremely complex and varied. At the same time it has resisted conquest and attracted new peoples, both keeping them distinct from one another yet absorbing them into the greater unifying fabric of its culture. As a result, Indian history defies treatment as a mere succession of empires, since it has rarely been completely unified by one power. However, there is a certain unity to India's history as seen in its main religion, Hinduism, which has as many variations as India has peoples, yet still maintains a common core that lets us speak about India as a culture that has at once resisted and absorbed a long succession of invaders from Aryans and Greeks to Muslims and the British.

FC13Masters of the Sea: The Phoenicians (c.1200-500 BCE)



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It is easy for us today to take sea-borne trade and travel for granted. But what if no one had dared to venture across the sea? After all, humans do not take naturally to water, and it is conceivable that a natural fear would have kept us complete landlubbers. If that had been the case, the Americas, Australia, Britain, Japan, and numerous other islands would have been completely outside the mainstream of history. Even contact between points within the vast land mass of Asia, Europe, and Africa would have been much more restricted when one considers how much of that contact has been by way of rivers and seas. The lack of water travel might have slowed the progress of human civilization to a virtual snail's pace. Of course, we cannot know for sure how severe the impact would have been, but it certainly would have been significant. However, people with their natural curiosity did take to the water. Although the Phoenicians were not the first to do so, they advanced the art and technology of seafaring to the point that they are considered the premier sailors of antiquity.

Geopolitics

As with other civilizations, the Phoenicians' environment, or geopolitics, largely influenced their history. First, ancient Phoenicia, modern day Lebanon, was a hilly coastal area whose rough terrain made it hard to unite. As a result, independent city-states such as Byblos, Ugarit, Tyre, and Sidon emerged along the coast.

Secondly, the Phoenicians did not have the sort of rich soil that one found in Egypt and Mesopotamia. In fact, they had only two major natural resources that were useful for trading: timber and snails. Their timber, the fabled cedars of Lebanon, was highly prized for use on the building projects and navies of the ancient Near East. Unfortunately, all that remain are a few isolated clumps of trees, since the cedar forests on the hillsides were clear-cut to meet the demands of ancient customers. The result has been the serious and most likely irreversible erosion of Lebanon's soils. Most likely, the absence of trees to transpire moisture and moderate temperatures also produced a hotter drier climate. The other, rather unlikely resource was the murex snail. This creature, when left to rot in a pool of water under the hot Near Eastern sun, secreted a hormone that produced a precious colorfast dye of scarlet (ancient purple) color. It took 60,000 of these rotting snails to produce one pound of this dye, making it very expensive. As a result, purple is still seen as the color of royalty, since kings were about the only ones who could afford to dye anything purple. All those decaying snails must have also made it imperative to place the dye works downwind from the cities.

With virtually only these two things to trade, the Phoenicians had to become shrewd traders and, indeed, they were among the sharpest businessmen in the ancient world. Part of their cleverness was the ability to copy other peoples' art and manufacturing styles in order to produce and sell those goods at a cheaper price. It is difficult to identify a distinctive Phoenician artistic style since they were such brilliant copycats. Another example of their business acumen is how they adapted an Egyptian script into the alphabet we use today, minus the vowels. This allowed each merchant to keep his own records rather than having to rely on an expensive scribe to do it for him.

The third and final geopolitical factor of Phoenicia was its position between the two great civilizations of the time: Egypt and Mesopotamia. This brought a lot of trade their way, but also left Phoenicia caught in wars between its powerful neighbors, a situation that modern Lebanon still faces today. For example, the city of Tyre supposedly withstood a siege of five years by the Assyrians and another siege of thirteen years by the Babylonians. Hemmed in and harassed by these empires, the Phoenicians found themselves with only one way to go: across the sea.

The evolution of the sailing ship

Like so many other developments, the sailing ship was largely the fusion of other people's ideas, although the result bore the distinctive mark of Phoenician genius. There were two main shipbuilding traditions the Phoenicians would draw upon: those of the Minoans on Crete and the Egyptians.

The Minoans who flourished from around 2000 to 1500 B.C.E. were the first real sailors of the ancient Near East. Their ships evolved from dugout canoes to larger craft, with the canoe itself serving as a backbone or keel to which other planks were fastened to build up the sides. The Egyptians did most of their sailing in the safe waters of the Nile or on short excursions along the coast between Egypt and Palestine. Unfortunately, they only had the short stubby acacia tree from which to make planks. As a result, their ships were patchworks of boards resembling a jigsaw puzzle and requiring a lot of internal support. So the Egyptians put in ribs and cross braces, called thwarts, to hold their ships together.

The Phoenicians, in deciding between using the Minoan keel or Egyptian ribs and thwarts, chose both. This resulted in a rather bulky, but sturdy sailing vessel. In order to seal it against leaking, a layer of tar or pitch covered the lower part of the hull, which is what the Greek poet, Homer, was referring to this when he spoke of the "black ships". Ships' hulls also often had lead or copper sheaths to guard against sea worms eating into the wood.

For short journeys, men could row these ships, but that was tiring, labor intensive, and expensive in wages and food (which would also take valuable cargo space from trade items). Eventually people figured out how to use wind power, an especially ingenious way of harnessing free energy from nature. Sailing with the wind was no problem. Sailing with a cross or headwind was an entirely different matter. The Phoenicians learned the technique of tacking, turning the sails at an angle to the wind in order to go in the general direction desired. This involved a good deal of zigzagging at different angles to the wind, but it beat rowing, and became a basic part of the sailor's art from then on.

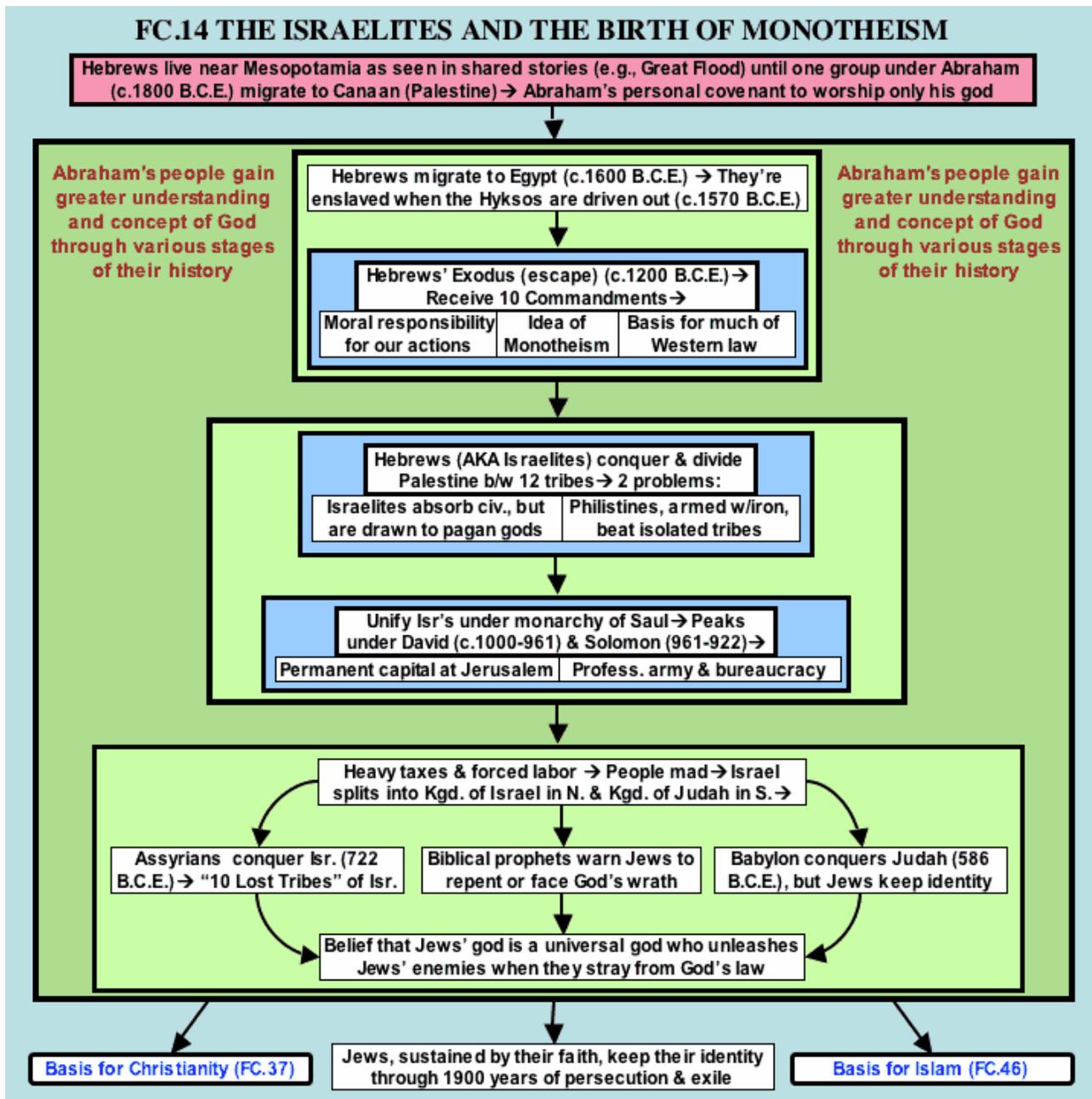
Unfortunately, sea travel and trade also brought piracy, which led to designing specialized warships and naval tactics to meet this threat. At first, naval fights consisted of firing arrows at each other and then grappling enemy ships with hooks to board them for hand-to-hand combat. This mode of fighting at sea continued to be used all the way up through the 1500's C.E. However, around 1000 B.C.E., someone got the idea that sinking enemy ships was a much easier and safer way of disposing of the enemy than fighting them face to face. To this end ships were made much sleeker and more maneuverable with rams attached below the waterline on the bows (fronts) of the ships. The goal now was to ram a hole in the side of the enemy ship and sink it. If that failed, sweeping the enemy ship to shear off its oars with one's ram was the next best thing, since it crippled the other ship and set it up for getting rammed on the next pass. Eventually, a new type of warship evolved, the trireme, a streamlined, low lying ship powered by three banks of oars. It was the most lethal weapon on the high seas, especially when powered by highly trained expert crews. Slaves were not generally used in ancient fleets, since they were too unreliable, and the main difference between two fleets was often the quality of their rowing crews.

Phoenician exploration and colonies

Equipped with reliable ships and sailing techniques, the Phoenicians took to the sea in search of new markets, resources, and homes. In the process, they explored new lands where they often founded colonies. Their travels took them across the Mediterranean and through the Pillars of Hercules (Straits of Gibraltar), which most people considered the ends of the earth. From there, they sailed to Britain, which to most people was no more than a legend, but for the Phoenicians was a valuable source of tin. Even more astounding, they probably sailed around Africa two thousand years before Vasco da Gama did it for Portugal. Unfortunately, we have few details of Phoenician voyages since they wanted to keep geographic knowledge secret from any competition, in particular the Greeks, who might want to invade their markets. We do know that their method of exploration involved coast hopping rather than open sea sailing, since there were no reliable ways to navigate in open waters at this time.

The Phoenicians also founded colonies around the Mediterranean, in particular along the coast of North Africa. The most famous of these colonies was Carthage, founded by refugees from Tyre who were led by a woman known variously as Elissa, the Biblical Jezebel, and Dido in the Roman epic, the *Aeneid*. Carthage commanded the passage between the Eastern and Western Mediterranean and soon surpassed its mother city in power and wealth. The Carthaginians claimed the Western Mediterranean was their "lake" and tried to keep other peoples out. This led to centuries of bitter warfare between the Carthaginians and Greeks over the island of Sicily. In the end, both sides wore each other out and left the way open for another power, Rome, to take over. After three long and bitter wars, the Romans finally destroyed Carthage in 146 B.C.E., pronouncing a curse on anyone who dared settle there again. However, a century later the Romans themselves, recognizing the Phoenicians' excellent eye for a site for a city, re-founded a new city on that site, even naming it Carthage. Ironically, some 500 years later, a Germanic tribe, the Vandals, seized Carthage and used it as a base from which to launch a raid and sack Rome in 455 C.E.

FC14 The Israelites (c.2000-500 BCE)



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Introduction

Another people who had an even greater impact on history without building a great empire were the Israelites, also known as the Hebrews or Jews. In the course of their history, they would establish Judaism as the first great monotheistic religion and also heavily influence Christianity and Islam. Together these are the three dominant religions throughout the Near East, Europe, much of Africa, the Western Hemisphere and Australia. In addition, these faiths have also shaped the law codes, art, culture, social customs, economics, and histories of their respective societies. Yet if it had not been for their religion, the Jews probably would not have been any more than a footnote in the history books.

The Patriarchal period (c.2000-1650 B.C.E.)

The Jews first appear as the *Habiru*, a Mesopotamian word referring generically to any nomads whom they came into contact with. It was only much later that the *Habiru*, or Hebrews, were associated specifically with the Jews. Evidence of contact between Mesopotamia and the early Hebrews can be seen in the various stories shared by the two cultures, such as the Great Flood. Around 2000 B.C.E., various groups of *Habiru*, known as Amorites, gradually weakened and overthrew the Sumerian empire of the Third Dynasty of Ur. Among these tribes was a patriarchal clan that would come to be known as the Jews. One leader of this clan was Abraham, whom Jews, Christians, and Muslims all look back upon as their spiritual ancestor. While many of his Amorite kinsmen and allies were settling down and adapting to the civilized ways of their subjects, Abraham continued in his nomadic ways. His travels took him over much of the civilized world from Mesopotamia to various places in Palestine, then known as Canaan. He even made his way to Egypt during a famine before returning to Canaan. Thus Abraham's travels put him in contact with the great civilizations of the ancient Near East. Several Biblical stories, such as that of the Great Flood, seem to reflect this contact.

Abraham is especially remembered for his **covenant**. This was an agreement with his god to follow and worship him exclusively in exchange for his protection. Such a covenant was apparently not unique among Semitic tribes. For example, Abraham refers to the god of his brother Nahor (Genesis 31: 53), implying Nahor and his people had a similar covenant with their own particular god. This also seems to imply that Abraham and his people believed in other gods at this time, but refused to worship them. Instead, they were the "chosen people" of their god, a distinction that would grow in importance as they came to see their god in more universal and cosmic proportions as the only god.

The Egyptian Period and Exodus (c.1650-1200 B.C.E.)

Around 1650 B.C.E., the Hebrews' history became intertwined with that of Egypt. It was at this time that the Semitic people known as the Hyksos overran and ruled much of Egypt. Although the Hebrews were probably not part of the actual invasion, they do seem to have been related to the Hyksos. For example, Hyksos names with "Jacob", a Hebrew name, occur. The story of the quick rise to power of Joseph, Abraham's descendant, probably could not have occurred under native Egyptian rule. And when Joseph's family migrated to Egypt, they went to Goshen, a Hyksos city.

There is about a 400-year lapse between the end of Genesis, when Joseph is at the height of his power, and the beginning of the next book of the Bible, Exodus. At that point we find Joseph's people, the Israelites, enslaved by the Egyptians. What has happened in between has been a resurgence of Egyptian power that drove the Hyksos out of Egypt. Naturally, the Israelites did not fare too well in this change of masters.

It was during this time, probably in the reign of Egypt's last great warrior pharaoh, Ramses II, that the next great figure in Jewish history, Moses, was born. Although he grew up in the upper ranks of Egyptian society, Moses kept, or regained, touch with his unfortunate kinsmen. Pitying an Israelite slave who was being beaten by his Egyptian master, Moses killed the Egyptian and then fled into the desert. It was there that he found what he saw as a sign from God: a burning bush that was not consumed in its flames. This inspired him to lead his people out of Egypt.

The Exodus, as this mass migration is called, is probably the most important single event in the history of the Jews, since it won them their freedom and gave them their identity as a people. It probably occurred after Ramses II's reign, when the strain of extended warfare and the burden of supporting the powerful priesthood of Amon were starting to take their toll on Egypt. The Biblical ten plagues that forced the pharaoh to let the Israelites go may reflect Egypt's internal troubles at that time. Also, more than the Israelites escaped at this time, as reflected in the Bible's reference to a "mixed multitude".

The Exodus was also important in the development of the Jewish religion. The climactic event of the Exodus was receiving the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. The revolutionary nature of these laws is easily obscured by the

fact that they have become an essential part of our culture. This makes them commonplace, and thus taken for granted. However, the idea that people are morally responsible for their own actions rather than just being at the mercy of fickle gods who act unpredictably dates from the time of the Ten Commandments. Also, the idea of worshipping only one god and not making idols that one can touch and feel was a radical departure from most other peoples' practice up to that point in history. Since that time, the Ten Commandments have served as the religious, moral, and ethical foundations for the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic cultures.

Israel (c.1200-586 B.C.E.)

The Bible tells us the Israelites wandered for forty years in the wilderness. This may seem like a long time, but for a nomadic people used to wandering, that might be a reasonable figure. Archaeology and the Bible tend to support each other here, giving us a date of around 1200 B.C.E. for the Israelites' entrance into the Promised Land when Jericho and other Canaanite cities seem to have been destroyed by invaders. Also the Sea Peoples, or Peleset as the Egyptians called them, probably arrived in Palestine about this time. Although they would later be the Israelites' archenemies, the Philistines, their raids at this time probably helped the Israelites by weakening the Egyptian Empire.

The Bible gives two very different versions of the conquest of Israel. One version has Joshua, Moses' successor, winning one spectacular victory that delivered the whole land into the Israelites' hands. The other version gives the impression of a piecemeal conquest. This is probably closer to the truth. The nomadic Israelites were divided into twelve tribes loosely held together by their common religion. Most likely, each tribe took over its own part of Israel independently of the other tribes. It was a fairly drawn out process that involved fighting here and peaceful absorption there. Many of the inhabitants were Habiru, akin to the Israelites, but who had stayed behind when Joseph and his clan went to Egypt.

Israel's geopolitics did not mark it out as the ideal place to settle. It was a hot dry land with scattered areas that had enough fertile soil and water to make them worth settling in. It had few natural resources besides some copper and iron in the south. Worst of all, it was in between the great empires of Egypt to the south and Mesopotamia to the north. This made it a constant battleground or highway for invading armies. That situation has not changed too much to the present day.

Settling in Israel created two very different problems for the Israelites. Like other nomadic peoples who conquered civilized areas, the Israelites found themselves drawn to adopt the ways of their more settled subjects. However, their transition to civilization was particularly difficult, because the Canaanites' polytheistic religion attracted many Israelites to its rituals. Since the Israelites saw themselves as God's chosen people, and felt that their survival and success depended on God's favor, they took very harsh measures against anyone, Israelite or Canaanite, they found practicing pagan religions.

Another problem the Israelites faced was hostile neighbors, especially the Sea Peoples, or Philistines, who had settled in the coastal areas of Palestine. These people, possibly from contact with the Hittites, whom they had conquered, had iron technology and weapons. This gave them a decisive edge in battle that allowed them to deal some fairly serious beatings to the different Israelite tribes. As long as the tribes remained separate and did not cooperate, the Philistines could do just about as they pleased. They even captured the Israelites' holiest object, the Ark of the Covenant, in battle. Because of this outrage, the Israelites started agitating for a king to unite them against the common enemy.

Up to this point, the main officials of the Israelites had been tribal leaders called judges. These men, such as Samson and Gideon, often served as military leaders as well as performing judicial functions. There was at least one woman judge, Deborah, who was renowned for her wisdom. The most influential of the judges at this time was Samuel. He tried to convince the Israelites that a king would be a bad idea, since he would demand military service and forced labor, just as they had endured when in Egypt. Nevertheless, the people insisted and Samuel chose Saul as Israel's first king.

Saul's reign (c.1020-1000 B.C.E.) was not a happy one. Besides facing the formidable Philistines and other enemies in battle, he also had to deal with the different tribes refusing to cooperate with each other. He even had

trouble with the judge Samuel, who may have been jealous of the power this new king was taking at the expense of the judges. In the end, Saul's reign ended in a military disaster at the hands of the Philistines. His reign was important, nonetheless, because, once the Israelites had taken that fateful step towards civilized monarchy, they never went back to their old nomadic ways.

The reigns of the next two kings, David (c.1000-961 B.C.E.) and Solomon (961-922 B.C.E.), saw Israel's power at its height. The Israelites during this time were able to extend their sway directly or indirectly over the Eastern Mediterranean coast from the Sinai Desert in the south to the Euphrates River in the north. Much of their success was a result of timing, because both Egypt and Assyria were experiencing internal problems at the time. This created a power vacuum which the Israelites could fill.

The reigns of David and Solomon saw further signs of the transition from nomadic to civilized life. David founded, or refounded, the city of Jerusalem and built a splendid palace there. Solomon built a magnificent temple in which the Ark of the Covenant could reside rather than in a tent. Both kings built up a standing army and bureaucracy to protect and rule the land. Of course, there was a price for all this: heavy taxation and even forced labor. True to Samuel's prediction, many Israelites did grumble about how this was just like their forced labor in Egypt.

The divided kingdom (922-586 B.C.E.)

Dissatisfaction with Solomon's high taxes and forced labor led to the kingdom splitting after his death in 922 B.C.E. The ten tribes in the north, feeling they had borne more than their fair share of the burden, broke away and founded the kingdom of Israel, while David's line continued to rule the remaining two tribes in the southern kingdom of Judah. Neither kingdom had the power and resources to maintain itself in the style of David and Solomon. A growing gap between rich and poor led to social turmoil, while corruption and internal quarrels further weakened each kingdom. And all the while, the spreading shadow of the Assyrian Empire was approaching the Israelites.

Both kingdoms gave in to Assyrian rule and were allowed to govern themselves as long as they loyally supplied the Assyrians with money and troops. Unfortunately, the northern kingdom of Israel made the mistake of rebelling. The Assyrian lion descended with typical speed and ferocity, killing much of the population and dragging the rest off into mass exile. There, the ten tribes of Israel became the "ten lost tribes of Israel", being absorbed by the surrounding cultures and losing their identity as a people. The southern kingdom of Judah managed to hang on until 586 B.C.E., when it rebelled against the Babylonian successors to the Assyrian Empire. Babylonian vengeance was also swift and deadly. Jerusalem was sacked and burned, and the remaining two tribes were dragged into captivity in Babylonia. However, these two tribes managed to survive and keep their identity, largely because the Persians, who conquered the Babylonians in 539 B.C.E., allowed them to return to their homeland before they were totally absorbed and had lost their identity.

Ironically, this time of troubles saw the Jewish religion achieve new heights. Since the time of David, a succession of prophets had emerged in order to chastise the people for their sins and warn them of God's retribution. When that retribution came at the hands of outside powers, such as Assyria and Babylon, the idea emerged that the Jewish god was the god of all peoples. For example, the prophet Jonah was sent to warn the Assyrians to mend their ways, showing a concern for **Gentiles** (non Jewish peoples) that had not appeared previously.

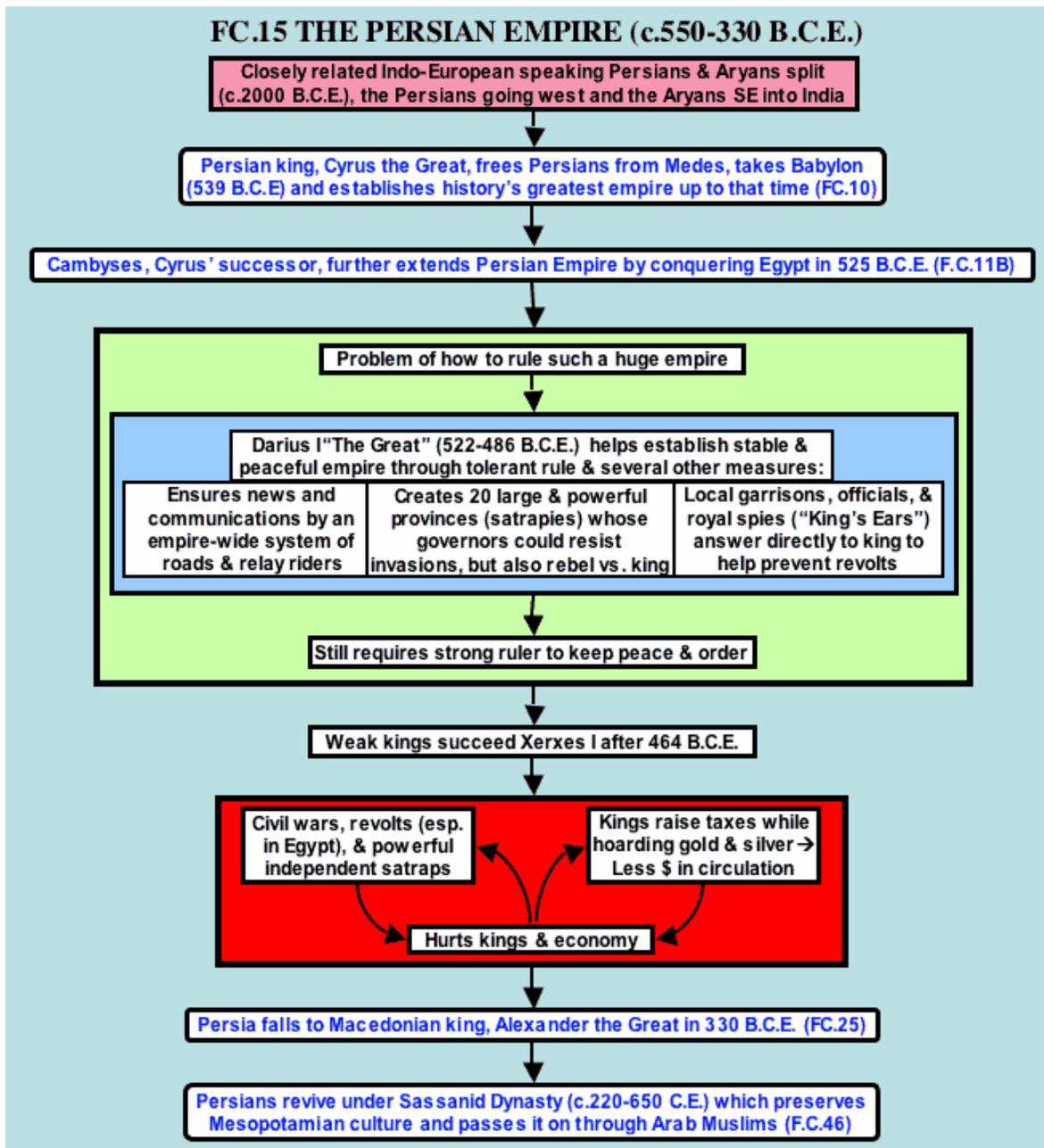
Also, in the midst of all these troubles, a messianic idea evolved of a day when divine grace would put an end to human conflict and suffering. Unlike most ancient peoples, such as the Greeks and Romans, who put their golden ages in the past, the Jews saw theirs in the future. The Jews passed this idea on to Christianity and Islam. In later centuries, it would become one of the most dynamic forces in the history of human thought. The Jews were fortunate to have such an optimistic view of the future, for they would need it. Few, if any, people, have endured the suffering and displacement that they were destined to undergo in the 2500 years after the fall of Jerusalem while still maintaining their identity as a people. Although the Persians let them return home from Babylon, fate would not let them stay there.

In 66 C.E., the Jews rebelled against another master, this time Rome. Four years later, Roman legions broke into, sacked, and destroyed Jerusalem. This was the start of the **Diaspora**, or dispersal of the Jews. For the next 1900 years, the Jews would be a people without a home. Scattered across Europe and the Near East, they would experience alternating periods of tolerance and intense persecution at the hands of the people under whom they lived. The low point of all this was the methodical execution of 6,000,000 Jews by the Nazis in World War II. Remarkably, the Jews kept their identity as a people, and in 1948 finally regained a homeland in Israel. Seeing them through all these centuries of trials and tribulations was the vision of a better day to come when

“Nation shall not lift up sword against nation
Neither shall they learn war anymore.”

(Isaiah 2:4)

FC15The Persian Empire (c.550-330 BCE)



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Introduction

Few people today can boast a longer and prouder history than the Iranians, descendants of the ancient Persians. Not only did they build the greatest empire of the ancient Near East, but they also absorbed the ancient civilizations they ruled, in particular that of Mesopotamia. They then added their own distinctive touches and passed them on to Islamic civilization, still one of the main cultural traditions of modern times. Therefore, this remarkable people who have survived and flourished from antiquity to the present have been a major connecting link with our past.

We first encounter the Persians around 2000 B.C.E. emerging from the grassy steppes of Central Asia in the north. At that point, they were closely associated with two other peoples: the Medes and Aryans. The latter of these turned eastward, crossed the Hindu Kush Mountains, and overthrew the Indus River civilization.

Eventually these nomads would settle down and build Indian civilization upon the foundations laid by the Indus culture. Meanwhile the Persians and Medes were turning westward where they encountered the Elamites, a people whose extended contact with Mesopotamia had influenced them to absorb the culture of the "Cradle of Civilization".

The Medes and Persians in turn started absorbing Elamite culture. One need only look at the relief sculptures of the Persians, with their curly beards and stiff formal poses, to see the connection with Mesopotamia. However, the process of becoming civilized was a long one for these people, since they were still on the northeastern fringes of the older Near Eastern cultures. When they emerge fully into the light of history in the pages of the Greek historian Herodotus, they are still very nomadic in their customs and values. According to Herodotus, the nomadic Persians had only three simple goals in educating their sons: "to ride a horse, to draw a bow, and to speak the truth." What more did nomads need? The Medes were actually the first of these nomadic peoples to establish an empire when they joined forces with Babylon to overthrow the Assyrian Empire in 612 B.C.E. In the aftermath, Babylon took the richer civilized lands of the Fertile Crescent, while the Medes took the more extensive but wilder lands to the north. Among their subjects were their compatriots, the Persians. It is here that we encounter the founder of the Persian Empire.

Cyrus the Great and the Rise of Persia (c.550-522 B.C.E.)

Herodotus gives us a detailed and somewhat fanciful account of Cyrus the Great's rise to power. As in the stories of so many great men and legendary figures in history, from Sargon of Kish and Moses to Oedipus and Romulus and Remus, Cyrus barely survived infancy due to a royal death sentence from a king nervous about the child's destiny. In each story, someone saves the baby, who grows up and comes back to overthrow the king who tried to do him in. What does seem clear is that Cyrus led the Persians in revolt against the Medes and overthrew them around 550 B.C.E.

Although the Medes' old neighbors were certainly glad to see the powerful Median state overthrown, they soon found their new neighbor, Persia, was an even more dangerous foe. Cyrus first turned westward against Croesus, king of Lydia in Asia Minor, a land renowned for its wealth, as seen in the old saying "rich as Croesus" to denote how wealthy someone is. In order to deal with the tough Lydian cavalry, Cyrus placed camels in front of his lines. The Lydian horses, unused to the camels' strange smell, panicked and bolted, giving Cyrus the victory and Lydia. Cyrus next turned south against Babylon, whose empire was seething with revolt. Herodotus claims that Cyrus had his troops divert the course of the Euphrates so they could march into the city's unguarded river gates. However true that may be, Babylon's empire collapsed like a house of cards, leaving Cyrus the master of a huge empire. Still, he pressed onward, this time into the vast and wild expanses of Central Asia. His intentions here were probably defensive, to protect the frontiers of civilization from the swarms of nomadic horsemen to the northeast. It was here in 530 B.C.E. that Cyrus died in battle against a tribe known as the Massagetae. In his twenty-nine year reign, he had built the largest empire in history up to that time.

Cyrus' son and successor, Cambyses (530-522 B.C.E.), is mainly remembered for his conquest of Egypt in 525 B.C.E. His attempts to conquer the Nile further south and the desert oases of the Sahara met with less success. Supposedly, one of Cambyses' armies was swallowed up by a desert sandstorm. Cambyses was especially unpopular with the Egyptians, who claimed he committed various atrocities, including the slaying of the sacred bull of Apis. Since our main source for his life is Herodotus, who relied heavily on Egyptian sources for his book, we have a picture of Cambyses as a drunken lunatic. Cambyses died in 522 B.C.E. on his way to Babylon to crush a revolt led by his cousin, Darius, who then succeeded him as the next Great King of Persia.

Darius I "the Great" and the consolidation of the Persian Empire

Although Cyrus had founded the Persian Empire, Darius I (522-486 B.C.E.) gave it the internal organization and structure that allowed it to last for 200 years. His accomplishment is all the more impressive when we consider the empire's enormous size, the scale of which no one had ever dealt with before. Darius dealt especially with three areas: organization of the empire's provinces, keeping the provincial governors under control, and maintaining communications with his far flung empire.

Organizing the provincial government presented two options. Darius could either create small provinces with governors too weak to rebel, but also too weak to defend their provinces against invasion. Or he could create large provinces able to defend themselves, but also more capable of defying his authority. He created about twenty large provinces, called *satrapies*. These ensured that he would not have to race from one end of his empire to the other defending it against every little tribe that decided to attack. Each such campaign might involve years of preparation, marching and fighting. Meanwhile, other frontiers would be vulnerable to attack, involving more years of campaigning and leaving the king with little time for other duties.

Since larger provinces gave the governors, known as *satraps*, a lot of power, Darius took several precautions to keep his satraps from rebelling. For one thing, he had the provincial treasury officials, secretaries, and garrisons answer directly to him, not to the satraps, except in emergencies. This generally deprived the satraps of the money and troops they needed to revolt while ensuring the defense of the satrapies. There were also officials known as the "King's Ears". These personal agents of the king would travel to the various satraps' courts to check up on their behavior and official records. The King's Ears commanded a great deal of fear and respect, sometimes showing up with no armed escort, but still being able to put down rebellious satraps before the revolts went beyond the planning stages.

Communications in such a far-flung realm was another major problem. Here the Persians adopted the Assyrian practice of setting up a system of relay riders, much like the old Pony Express in American history. Each horse and rider would carry a message for a day and then pass it on to the next horse and rider. In order to speed things along, the Persians established a road system to tie the empire together. The most famous of these was the King's Highway, which stretched 1677 miles from the Persian capital of Susa to Sardis in Asia Minor. It had patrols against bandits, relay stations with fresh horses for the royal messengers, and 111 inns for travelers, placed about one day's journey apart from each other. Another road going through the desert to Egypt had underground cisterns with water for travelers. Although these roads helped trade and travel, their main priority was for the relay riders who could carry a message from Sardis to the king in Susa within seven days, an amazing speed for back then. As Herodotus described these riders: *"Nothing stops these couriers from covering their allotted stops in the quickest possible time--neither snow, rain, heat, nor darkness."*

In general, Darius took existing practices and institutions and adopted them on a larger scale. However, in one respect, he differed quite markedly from previous Mesopotamian rulers. That was in his treatment of Persia's subjects. Darius realized that there was no way his far-flung empire could survive constant revolts such as had plagued the Assyrians. Therefore, he followed a policy of tolerance toward his subjects' customs and religions. For example, the Jews were allowed to return to Israel from their Babylonian captivity, causing them to sing the Persians' praises in the Bible.

Darius and other Persian kings also adopted local titles, such as pharaoh in Egypt, to win popular support. Sometimes they also kept local rulers in power as Persian vassals, such as in the Greek cities in Asia Minor. This hopefully would ensure them more loyalty, although it could backfire if those rulers were unpopular to begin with. While Persian rule may not have been wildly popular, most people tolerated it as an improvement over the harsher rule of the Assyrians and Babylonians. Keeping their subjects happy went a long way toward keeping the Persian Empire intact. It also ensured the cooperation of the Syrians and Babylonians, whose scribes and administrative skills were badly needed to keep the government running smoothly.

The Persians also worked hard to promote economic prosperity. Their roads, strong government, and stable coinage encouraged trade. They also promoted agriculture with irrigation projects and the introduction of new crops to different areas, such as sesame to Egypt and rice to Mesopotamia. Of course, increased prosperity also generated more taxes. The Persians also kept their subjects happy by charging moderate tax rates, about twenty per cent of a person's income. Despite this modest tax rate, the Persian kings were fabulously wealthy. By the time Alexander the Great took over the Persian Empire in 330 B.C.E., the Persian kings had reportedly amassed a treasury of 5500 tons of silver.

Darius and other Persian kings further enhanced their authority by assuming divine or semi-divine status to overawe their subjects. In certain provinces, such as Egypt, they took the titles of local rulers who were often seen as gods. They also built a fabulous capital, Persepolis, in the middle of the desert, and adorned it with

magnificent government buildings. The Persians also adopted the elaborate court ritual of their subjects. One had to go through a virtual army of officials before getting an audience with the king. When one approached the king, he performed a rite known as *proskynesis*, which involved throwing oneself at the king's feet. It was a great honor just to be allowed to kiss the hem of his garment and a serious offence for anyone outside the king's closest friends and advisors to look him in the eye. Such elaborate ritual could enhance the king's authority, but it could also cut him off from the day-to-day realities of empire.

Religion

The Persians, like most ancient peoples, started out with a polytheistic religion to account for the forces of nature. However, around 600 B.C.E., a new religion emerged, called *Zoroastrianism* after its founder, Zoroaster. This was a dualistic religion, which meant it saw life as a constant struggle between the forces of good and evil. In the end people would all be held accountable for their deeds in a judgment day when they would go to heaven as a reward for good deeds or suffer eternal punishment for their sins. Zoroastrianism seems to have had some influence on Judaism. In the book of Daniel, which takes place at the Persian court, the ideas of Heaven and Hell and of Satan as a force always opposed to God first appear in the Bible. Both of these ideas have become central to Christianity and Islam as well as Judaism.

Decline and fall (c.464-330 B.C.E.)

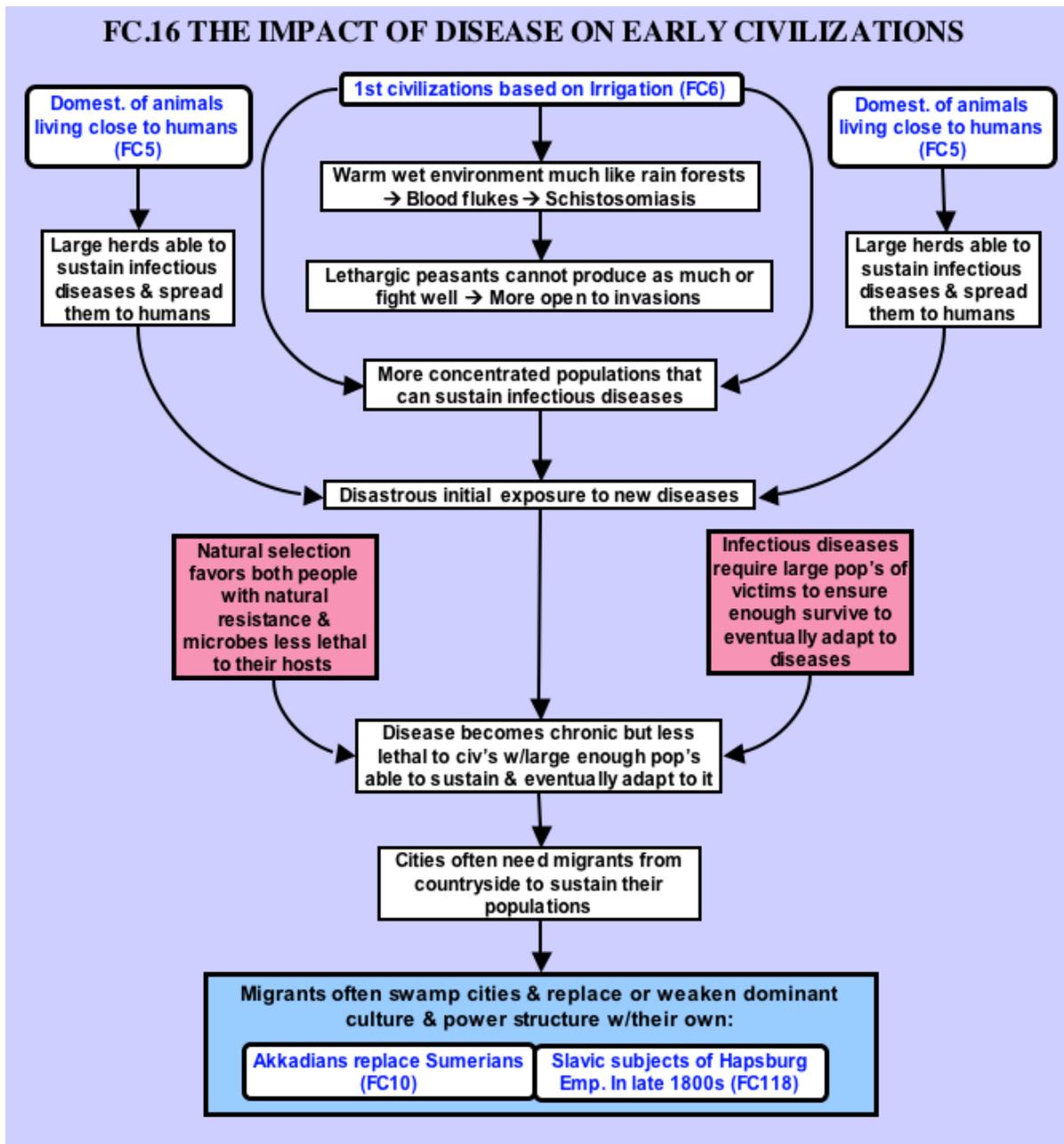
Any state needs a strong ruler to keep things running smoothly. After the death of Xerxes (486-464 B.C.E.), the Persian Empire lacked that strong hand. As a result, various problems developed that fed back upon one another and led to Persia's decline and fall. For one thing, weak rulers led to numerous provincial revolts, especially in Egypt, which always had detested Persian rule. Secondly, the provincial satraps also became more independent, ruling their satrapies more as kings than as the king's loyal subjects. They even carried on their own foreign policies and waged war on each other, which only added to Persia's problems.

Revolts and unruly satraps caused serious economic problems for the empire. Persian taxes became heavier and more oppressive, which led to economic depression and revolts, which in turn led to more repression, heavier taxes and so on. The Persian kings also started hoarding gold and silver rather than re-circulating it. This created economic turmoil without enough gold and silver for doing business. As a result of this economic turmoil, the Persian kings got weaker still, which fed back into the problem of revolts and powerful satraps and so on.

Around 400 B.C.E., Cyrus the Younger, a royal prince, rebelled against his brother and king, Artaxerxes. Although Cyrus was killed in battle, his force of 10, 000 Greek mercenaries survived only to find themselves stranded in the heart of Persia. In order to get home, they marched and fought their way through a good part of the Persian Empire. This exploit, known as the March of the Ten Thousand, exposed the weakness of the Persian Empire. This encouraged Alexander the Great to invade Persia, which he conquered in a remarkably short time and with a remarkably small army.

Nevertheless, the Persians survived and reestablished their empire under the Sassanid dynasty around 200 C.E. Around 650 C.E., they fell once again, this time to the Arabs inspired by their new religion, Islam. Still, Persia survived, passing its culture on to the Arabs. Thus the Islamic culture which emerged was very much Persian, and ultimately Mesopotamian, in origin. The Persian Empire revived once again around 1500 under the Safavid dynasty, and its culture and traditions live on today in modern Iran.

FC16 The Impact of Disease on Early Civilizations



Agriculture and cities brought many changes, but not all of them were good. Two things in particular led to problems: irrigation and domestication of animals. The problem with irrigation was that it was transforming a naturally hot and dry environment into a hot and wet one. This brought with it a number of water-borne parasites native to the area, such as the blood fluke that causes Schistosomiasis by burrowing into the skin, entering a new larval stage (schistosomula), then migrating to the liver or lungs, where it matures into the adult form. The overall effect for a society heavily infected with such diseases was a lethargic peasantry unable to produce as much or fight as well against invading enemies.

The second, and more dramatic effect came with the domestication of animals and the subsequent frequent contact with them, because microbes for infectious diseases the animals carried often mutated into forms that were lethal to humans. There are at least 26 diseases we share with poultry, 35 with cattle, 42 with pigs, 46 with sheep and goats, 35 with cattle, 50 with horses, 65 with dogs, and even 32 with rats and mice who typically live in close proximity with humans. The first outbreaks of any of these diseases were often catastrophic, since people had no prior exposure to them and thus had no chance to develop immunities.

The rise of cities was both good news and bad news in this respect. The good news was that the more concentrated populations made possible by cities meant that despite the huge mortality, at least a small percentage of the population could survive and develop resistance to the new disease. The bad news was that the civilization would be more vulnerable to attack by enemies.

In the long run, two things helped populations to develop at least partial immunity to diseases. One was that natural selection favors people with natural resistance to the disease, so they can pass that resistance on to future generations. By the same token, natural selection favors organisms less lethal to their hosts so that they don't have to keep looking for new hosts in order to survive. Therefore the more lethal strains of a disease will typically reach a dead end, literally, when it has killed off all its potential. After six generations or so, a population was able to adapt enough to keep damage from new outbreaks of a disease from doing too much harm. Oftentimes, the disease becomes a chronic, but less lethal "childhood" sickness that, once people have had it, usually as children, they are immune to any recurrence. Even in their less lethal chronic state, such diseases can have dramatic effects in three ways.

First of all, once adapted to a disease, a civilization could turn it into a lethal weapon, although usually unknowingly, since people didn't understand what caused diseases until the 1800s. Still, people from a civilization could carry a disease to other previously uninfected populations, in particular nomads. This would have one of two results. Either it would virtually wipe out the nomads whose small populations could not sustain the disease long enough to adapt to it. Probably the most dramatic instance of this happening was when Europeans brought infectious diseases, such as smallpox, to the Americas. Within a century, as much as 90% of the Native American population had perished, mostly from European diseases.

On the other hand, the nomads might manage to adapt to the disease and eventually conquer the civilization. The ability to sustain the necessary numbers might come from civilized women captured in raids who could pass on their immunity to their children.

A second effect was that even in their less lethal form, diseases would still kill some people in the cities. Compounding this was the cramped and filthy living conditions typically found in pre-industrial cities. Together these would often prevent cities from sustaining their populations through natural increase. Therefore, people from the countryside and beyond that state's borders would migrate there looking for job opportunities, and often finding them as a result of disease killing previous residents. If something happened that drastically reduced the city's population, there could be a sudden influx of foreign migrants who might replace the older civilization's culture with their own. A likely example of this was the takeover of Sumerian civilization by the foreign Akkadians, not by conquest but by infiltration led by Sargon of Kish who held the position of cupbearer to the king.

Finally, there was the effect of civilized diseases on relatively isolated outlying villages that didn't have the numbers to withstand the initial outbreak of a disease. Such outbreaks would be less frequent, but when they hit, could be much more severe in their effects. An example of this was the American Civil War where big strong soldiers from the countryside died at a much greater rate from diseases than their comrades from the cities who had already been exposed to them and developed some resistance.