

Lecture Notes: Chapter 21, Section 1 (Landforms & Resources)

Southwest Asia includes parts known as the “Middle East”

Why is it called the “Middle East”???? LAND BRIDGE between Europe & Asia.

Long ago Americans & Europeans referred to

- ...areas near China and Japan as the “Far East”
- ...areas in Eastern Europe as the “Near East”
- ...areas in the middle (Southwest Asia) as the “Middle East”

PENINSULAS AND WATERWAYS

Arabian Peninsula = most distinctive landform (easily identified on a map)

- Red Sea in the west
- Persian Gulf in the east
- Indian Ocean to the south

Saudi Arabia is the major nation on this peninsula

Anatolia = peninsula containing Turkey

NOTE: Part of Turkey is in Europe. Many in Turkey consider themselves more European in culture than Middle Eastern.

Suez Canal = canal built in the mid-1800’s (see map p. 480)

- Connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea
- Allows for easier shipping between Europe and the “Far East” (China, Japan, etc.)

The various seas, gulfs, and waterways are extremely important. They are the key access points to the large oil fields, and allow for large ships to transport the oil around the world.

PLAINS AND HIGHLANDS

1. Arabian Peninsula = covered in plains

- Dry, sandy, and windy...few activities using the land take place because it's so barren.

Wadis – dry river beds, EXCEPT during the rainy season.

2. Iran has a central plateau that is surrounded by mountains.

- The plateau has lots of salt in the earth (not good for crops).
- Areas of the plateau are also either very sandy (desert) or contain lots of rocks.

Thankfully, the areas on the edges of the plateau are able to produce crops for the people.

3. Anatolian Peninsula = large plateau too

- Agriculture is plentiful here: crops and herding

4. Afghanistan = Northern Plain gets lots of rain and snow-melt for agriculture (illegal poppy trade – heroin)

- Surrounded by high mountains that isolate it from the rest of Southwest Asia (which is why it isn't as modernized as much as the rest of the region)

MOUNTAINS

The northern areas of the Middle East = very mountainous. (p. 479)

Natural protective border against northern invasion!!!

The mountains have many different names, but are essentially all connected in some way: ((Zagros Mtns., Elburz Mtns., Pontic Mtns., Taurus Mtns.)

HOWEVER, the Hindu Kush Mtns. of Afghanistan is different. This group of mountains is connected to the Himalayas of central Asia.

TRADE: Although the mountains make travel difficult from place to place over land, for thousands of years the people have moved goods and ideas to other parts of the region by using the large bodies of water surrounding it.

WATER BODIES

Southwest Asia is almost completely surrounded by water.

These have allowed for trade throughout the region and the rest of the world.

Remember: Persian Gulf oil!

Much of the water in the region is SALT WATER. Few rivers in this region (too dry – “arid”)...but the few rivers that exist are extremely important because they provide VITAL fresh water for the people and agriculture.

Jordan River (western part of the region)– Provides vital fresh water to the surrounding area. It flows from the highlands of Lebanon into the Dead Sea.

Dead Sea – ((really a large lake)) extremely notable because it’s talked about a lot in religious texts.

- Called the Dead Sea because it contains no fish...TOO SALTY...only bacteria.
- So salty that people can float on it with ease (see p. 489)
- Completely landlocked (like the Aral Sea of Russia).
- Lowest elevation on the surface of the Earth...1,349 feet below sea level.

Tigris & Euphrates Rivers

However, there are two rivers that are the most important for the region...both because of the water they provide but also because of history. They were the seats of many ancient civilizations. These rivers were the foundation of what is known as the “Fertile Crescent.” They are the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. (see p. 479)

This area is also known as the Cradle of Civilization because it is regarded as the birthplace of...

- agriculture,
- urbanization (living in cities),
- writing,
- trade,
- science,
- mathematics (the beginnings of algebra)
- history
- organized religion

Was first populated c.10,000 BCE when agriculture and the **domestication** of animals began in the region.

“Agriculture”:::

By...

- 9,000 BCE the cultivation of wild grains and cereals was wide-spread
- 5,000 BCE, irrigation of agricultural crops was fully developed.
- 4,500 BCE the cultivation of wool-bearing sheep was practiced widely.
- 3,500 BCE images of domesticated dogs were appearing on vases, plates, and walls.
- 2300 BCE, soap was produced from tallow and ash and was in wide use because personal hygiene was extremely valued in relation to one’s standing with one’s community and with the gods.
- Some of the earliest beer in the world was brewed here.

TODAY, the once fertile marshlands are nearly all dried up in comparison to its previous size. Drain projects (draining the marshes to make solid land for buildings) and dams on the rivers for various water projects have shrunk the amount of agricultural land from appx. 6,000 square miles down to only 600 sq. miles. Much of the land is dried and cracked, sun-baked clay.

Middle Eastern countries are VERY concerned about their access to fresh water. Dam projects in one country might prevent fresh water from getting to another country. This causes lots of conflict!