

Mesopotamia

First cities, first models for study

Fertile Crescent Map Additions

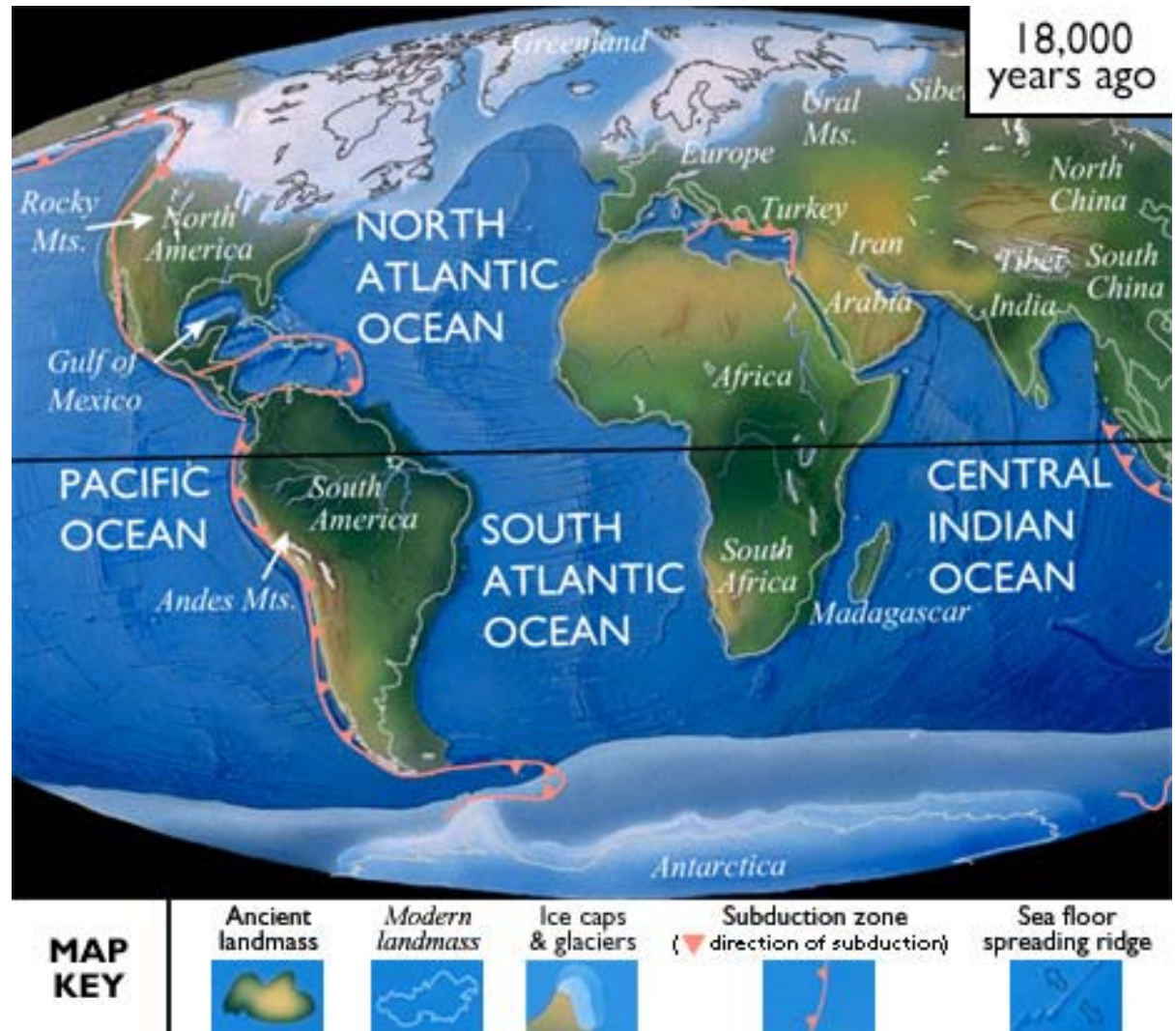
- Jericho
- Tigris
- Euphrates
- Zagros Mts

Defining the region

- “Middle East”, “Near East”: political definitions of relatively recent vintage
- “Fertile Crescent”: archaeological term from the 1920s describing a zone of innovation, “first” dates
- Mesopotamia: Greek word used to describe “land between two rivers”

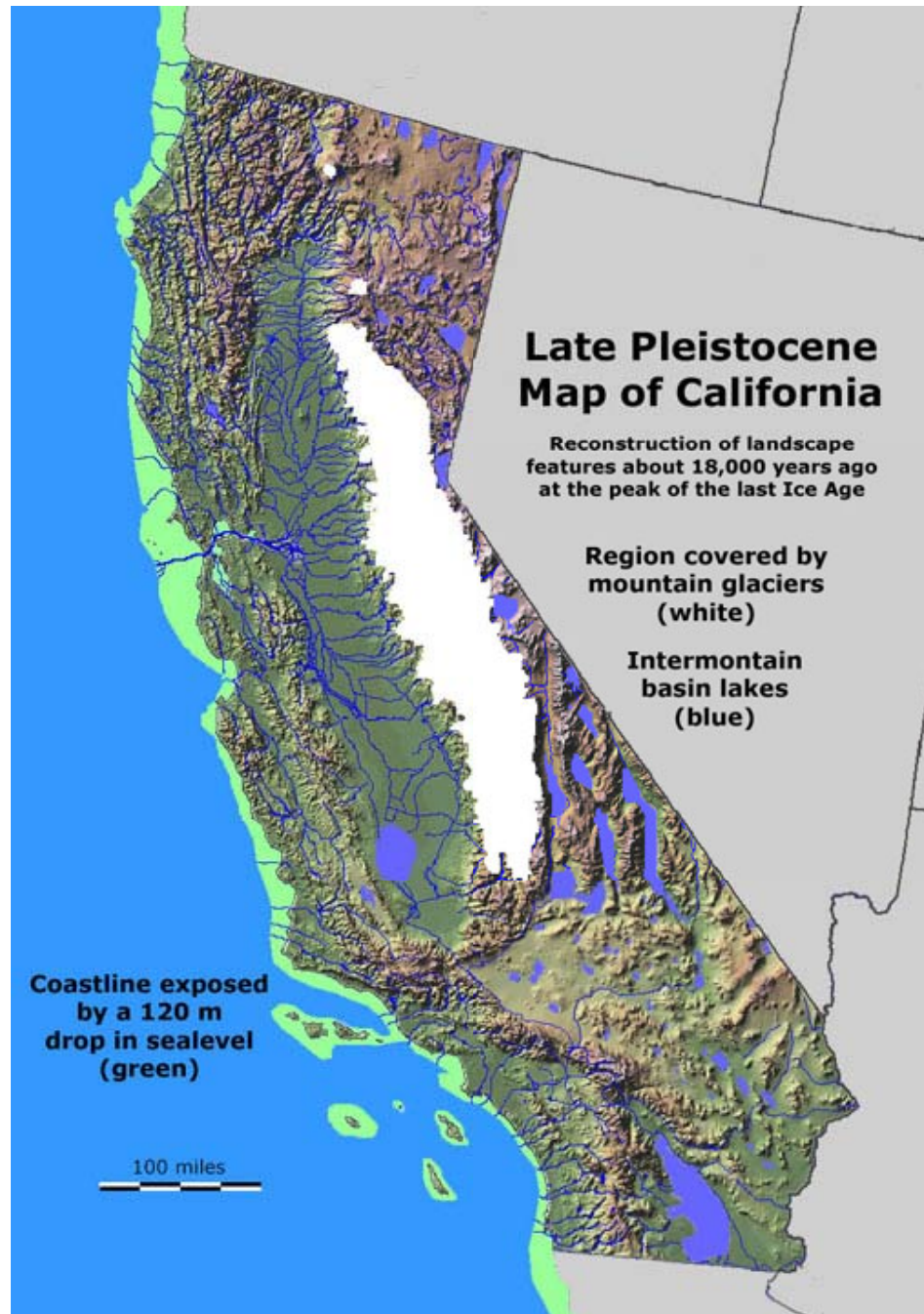
Antecedents to Civilization

- Holocene Transition and Climate Changes
- Sedentism
- Domestication
- Village Life



Pleistocene world map

Pleistocene CA map



Holocene Transitions

- End of the “Ice Ages”
- Climatic changes: warmer, drier in the temperate, subtropic zones
- Loss of “Pleistocene megafauna”
- Global shift to more sedentary, intensive hunting and gathering
- Time frame: begins around 14,000 to 12,000 years ago

Sedentism and Domestication

- Sedentism PRECEDES agriculture in most places, usually by a long time
- “Pushing” wild resources: plants and animals
- Domestication a process archaeologically “seen” only when it’s complete
- Primary vs. secondary domestication
- In Middle East, transition begins 11-9,000 years ago

Early Village Life

- Small settlement size
- (Often) long occupation period
- Evidence for some trade
- Evidence for some ritual life, particularly surrounding burial
- Continued use of wild resources

On the threshold of urbanization:

- Trade
- Settled village life
- Early irrigation agriculture
- Craft production (but not necessarily specialization?)
- Elaborate ritual life (but not necessarily ritual specialists?)

Mesopotamia and the region



Map of Mesopotamian Region

Defining the time frame

Village to City

- Hassuna/Samarra: 8500-8000 years ago
- Ubaid phase: 7900-6200 years ago
- Uruk phase: 6200-5100 years ago

City to Empire

- Early Dynastic/Sumerian period: 4900-4350 years ago
- Akkadian Empire: 4334-4230 BCE
- Imperial Ur: 2112-2004 BCE

Hassuna/Samarra and Ubaid

8500 – 6200 years ago

- Continuous development from phase to phase
- Elaboration of technology, art: pottery, irrigation, architecture
- Elaboration of trade networks
- Movement into the (drier) southern Mesopotamian plains from the (wetter) north

Uruk: Mesopotamia's first city

- Dated 6200-5100 years ago
- Built on local antecedents (esp. Ubaid), but a big break from earlier patterns
- Emergence of the city-state as a political, economic unit
- “Temple economies” and decline of kin-based groups
- Writing
- Social classes
- Specialized labor
- Monumentality: architecture, public works

The Archaeology of Urbanization

Site-based approaches

- Defining features of a city
- Looking for population sectors within the city: class, occupation
- Establishing site history: origins, expansion, abandonment

Regional approaches

- Looking for patterns of interaction between city and hinterland
- Looking for relations between cities
- Looking for cultural, ethnic diversity at regional level
- Cycles of unification, fragmentation

Mesopotamians and their environment(s)

- Moving out of the foothills, and into the river deltas
- Rivers in deserts
- Irrigation
- Intensification
- Climatic cycling