

1

THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

FIND OUT

How has location affected the peoples of the Middle East?

What are the main physical regions of the Middle East?

What geographic factors influence population patterns in the Middle East?

Which ethnic and religious groups live in the Middle East?

Vocabulary **oasis**

What is the Middle East? Europeans invented the term to describe the region that lies between Europe and distant parts of Asia—what they once called the Far East. In fact, the Middle East lies in southwestern Asia. Today, some people use the term Southwest Asia instead of the term Middle East. The Middle East, they point out, is “Middle” only in relation to Europe. Still, most Americans, including the United States government, continue to refer to the region as the Middle East.

Often, the Middle East includes North Africa. North Africa has a double heritage. It is part of Africa, but it also has strong ties to the Middle East. As you will read in this unit, the religion of Islam and the use of the Arabic language make North Africa part of the cultural region known as the Muslim world.

Crossroads of the World

The Middle East stands at the crossroads of three continents: Africa, Asia, and Europe. Since ancient times, it has connected major trade routes, both overland and on the seas. Caravans from India and China brought goods to the busy markets of the Middle East. From there, traders carried the goods across the Mediterranean into Europe. Other routes

took traders across the Red Sea or down the coast of East Africa.

Cultural diffusion. Over thousands of years, migrating peoples, traders, and conquerors crossed the Middle East. They spread the ideas, inventions, and achievements of many civilizations. Some of these ideas, such as iron making, the alphabet we use today, and the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, originated in the Middle East. Others started in Asia and traveled to Europe by way of the Middle East. Examples include Arabic numerals from India and the lateen sail from Southeast Asia.

Strategic location. Today, Middle Eastern nations command vital sea routes. Some sit

atop vast reserves of oil. As a result, the Middle East has strategic importance—that is, it is important to the world for military and economic reasons.

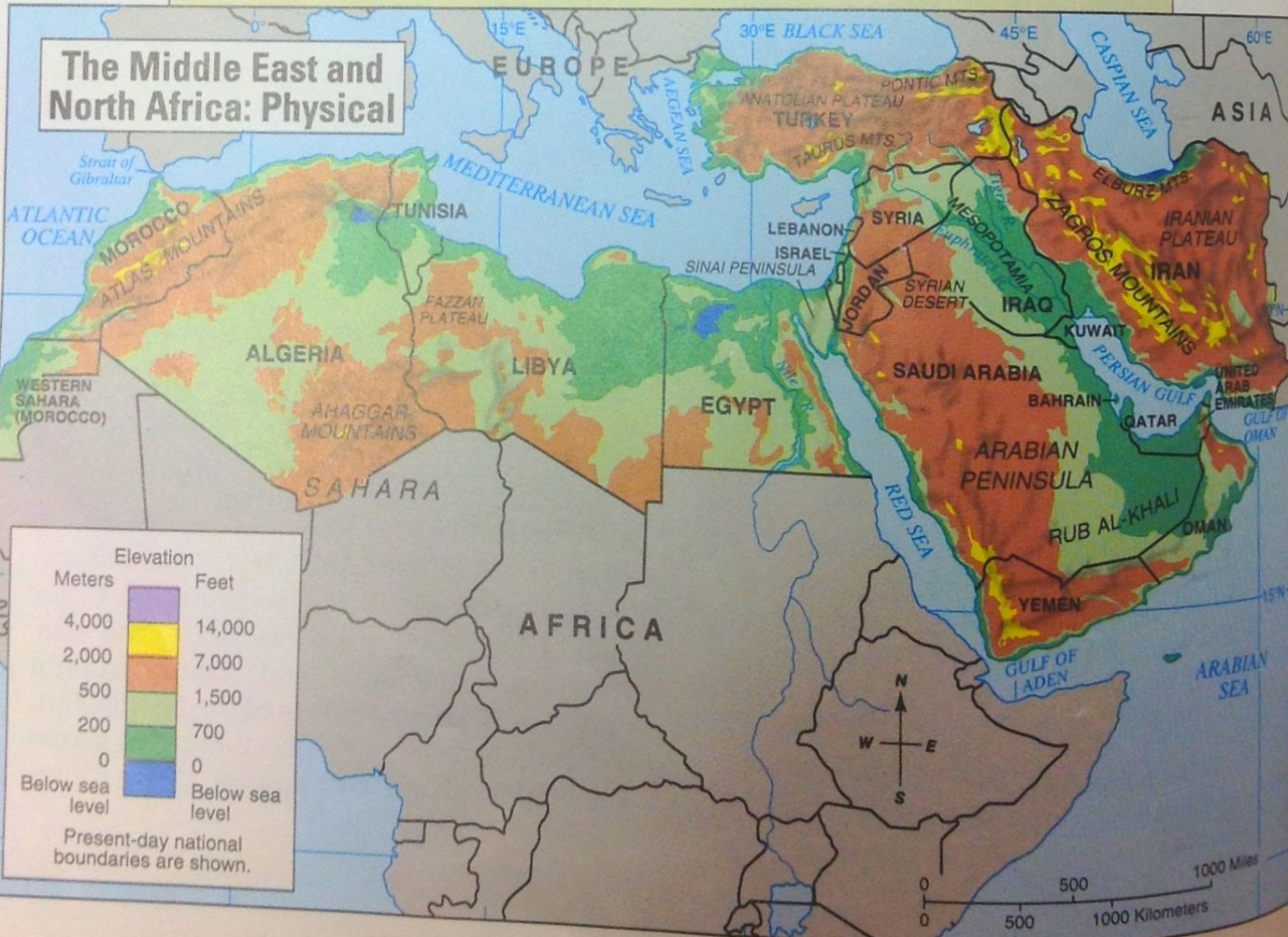
Egypt, for example, operates the Suez Canal. The canal links the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea, creating a water route to the Indian Ocean. Turkey controls the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, two vital straits that link the Black and Aegean seas. Geographers call these two waterways the Turkish Straits. The Strait of Hormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf is another strategic waterway. Through its waters travel huge tankers loaded with oil for industries and homes half a world away.

MAP STUDY

The Middle East is a region in Southwest Asia that is located at the crossroads of three continents.

- 1. Location** (a) Name the three continents that meet in the Middle East. (b) What bodies of water border the Middle East?
- 2. Region** (a) In which two countries are plateaus the dominant landform? (b) Which mountain ranges have elevations over 7,000 feet (2,000 m)?
- 3. Understanding Causes and Effects** Why do you think early civilizations arose in the valleys of the Nile and of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers?

The Middle East and North Africa: Physical



Major Regions

As elsewhere around the world, physical features have affected human settlement in the Middle East. The five main physical regions of the Middle East are the Northern Tier, Arabian Peninsula, Fertile Crescent, Nile Valley, and the Maghreb.

Northern Tier. The Northern Tier stretches across present-day Turkey and Iran. It is a region of mountains and plateaus. In the west lies the Anatolian Plateau, ringed by the Pontic and Taurus mountains. The Anatolian Plateau has fertile soil and receives enough moisture to support farming. As a result, it has a large population.

The Anatolian Plateau is located in Asia Minor, a large peninsula that connects Asia and Europe. As you will read in Chapter 26, the Ottoman Empire flourished in this region for hundreds of years.

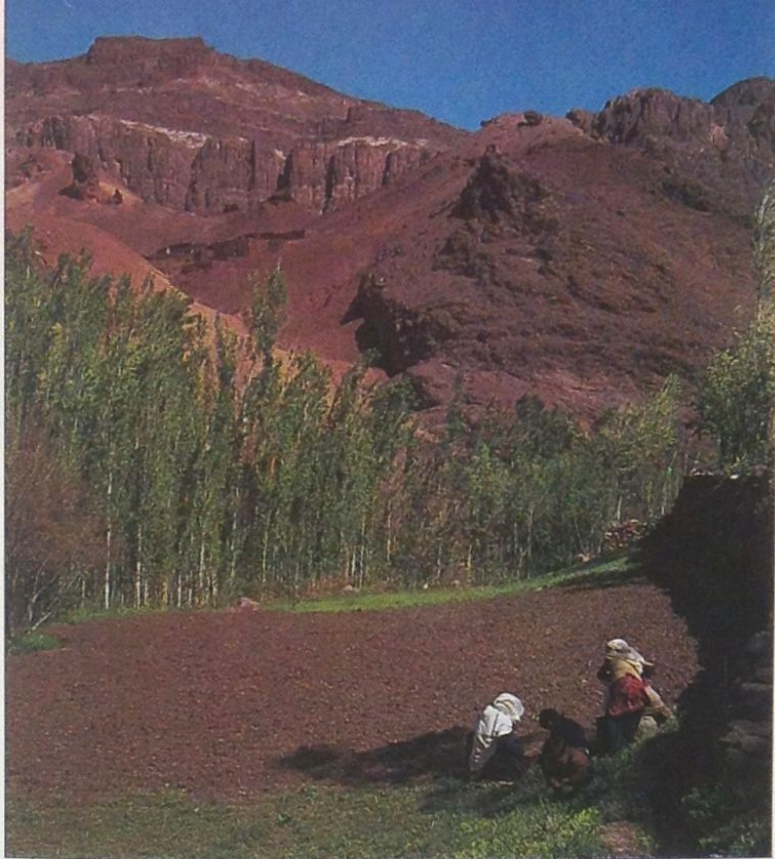
To the east lies the Iranian Plateau. Like Anatolia, it is ringed by mountains, including the Elburz and Zagros ranges. Unlike Anatolia, however, most of the region is dry and the population remains small. Still, several major empires, such as the Persian Empire, were founded on the Iranian Plateau. These empires controlled large parts of the Middle East.

Arabian Peninsula. The Arabian Peninsula is a vast plateau that is about one third the size of the United States. It borders on several important bodies of water, including the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, and the Persian Gulf. Saudi Arabia is the largest nation in the region.

Despite its size, the Arabian Peninsula has a small population. The reason is lack of water. Except for some fertile areas on the mountainous southern coast, the peninsula is a barren desert. Most people in the region live around scattered oases. An **oasis** is a fertile desert area that has enough water to support plant and animal life.

The Arabian Peninsula plays a major role in the world economy. Beneath its desert surface lie huge amounts of oil. Due to the growing demand for oil, some countries in the region have gained great wealth.

The Arabian Peninsula is important for other reasons, too. It is the birthplace of Islam,



Farming in a Dry Land The Elburz Mountains along Iran's northern border block winds that carry moisture from the north. Thus, the land south of the mountains is generally dry. However, melting snow from the hillsides provides enough water for farmers to grow limited crops of wheat and barley. **Geography** What other geographic features shown in this photograph would make farming difficult?

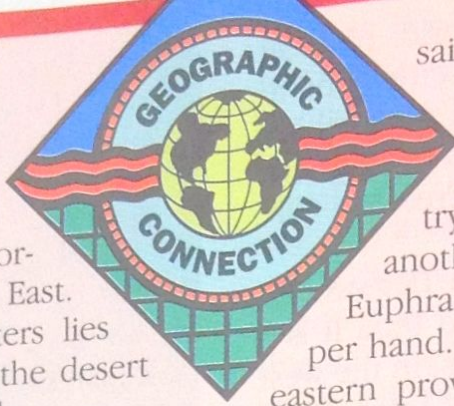
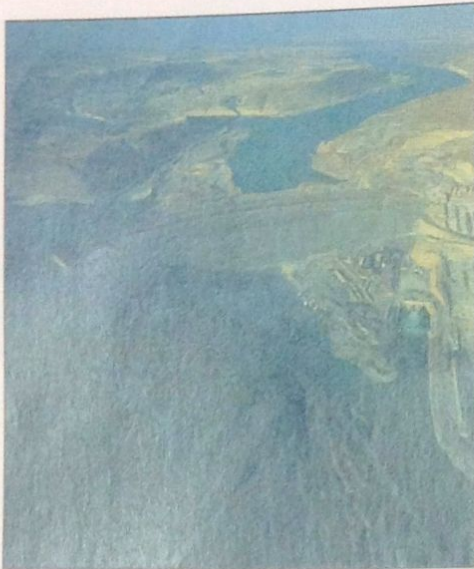
and the holy city of Mecca attracts Muslims from around the globe.

Fertile Crescent. The Fertile Crescent is an arc-shaped region that stretches from the eastern Mediterranean along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to the Persian Gulf. Rich soil and abundant water have made it a major population center. One of the world's earliest civilizations emerged in the fertile Tigris-Euphrates Valley.

The Fertile Crescent has few natural barriers. Throughout history, invaders have conquered its fertile lands and rich cities. The wealthiest settlements lay in Mesopotamia, the "land between the rivers." Other cities grew up in Syria and Palestine, along the Mediterranean coast.

Clash Over the Euphrates

A narrow band of green borders the rivers in the Middle East. Beyond the reach of the waters lies barren desert. Without water, the desert will expand its hold on the land.



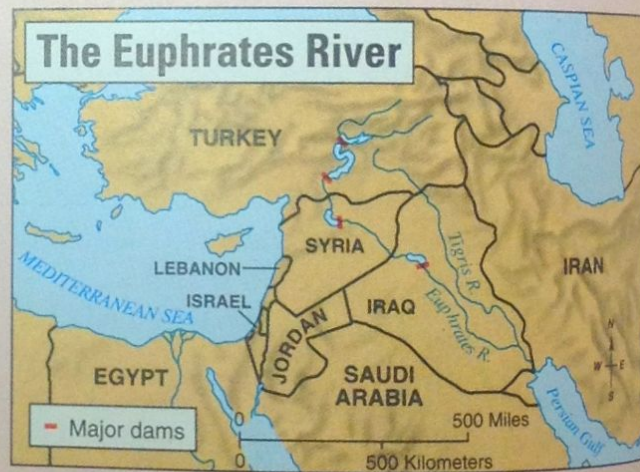
For nearly 6,000 years, the Euphrates River, which rises in the mountains of eastern Turkey and flows south through Syria and Iraq, has been the source of life along its fertile banks. Today, it is also a source of strife.

One day in January 1990, the president of Turkey proudly began the process of filling the new Atatürk Reservoir with water from the Euphrates. For several weeks, Turkey siphoned off 75 percent of the water that usually flowed through Syria and Iraq. Syria and Iraq reacted angrily to this move, which they

said endangered both their agriculture and their industry. Water security is a vital issue in the Middle East. One country's source of water often lies in another country. In the case of the Euphrates, it is Turkey that has the upper hand. Turkey's plan to turn its southern eastern provinces into the breadbasket of the Middle East threatens Syria's supply of drinking water as well as its irrigation systems and hydroelectric power plants.

As population grows in the Middle East, the demands will become even greater and the shortages more acute. Tensions in the region, already high because of political differences and age-old rivalries, will be heightened.

1. Why will the question of water rights continue to be an issue in the Middle East?
2. **Synthesizing Information** Using the map and the information in the text, explain why Syria is concerned about the security of its water supply.



In the spring or early summer, melting snows from surrounding mountains sometimes cause the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to flood. The flood waters spread fertile soil over Mesopotamia. The flooding is unpredictable, however. Some years, tremendous flood waters sweep over farmlands, bringing disaster and death. In other years, the rivers

carry little water, which makes irrigation difficult and causes crops to wither. Today, as in the past, governments help farmers to build dikes and canals to control the flooding.

Nile Valley. As you have read, the fertile Nile Valley in northeastern Africa was a cradle of ancient civilization. The Nile Valley enjoyed geographic advantages that Mesopotamia did

not possess. Forbidding deserts in the east and west protected it from invaders, and the flooding of the Nile River was both predictable and dependable.

In ancient times, trade and other contacts linked Egyptians in the Nile Valley with the peoples of the Fertile Crescent. From Egypt, caravans and armies crossed the Sinai Peninsula, while ships sailed from Nile delta ports to lands adjoining the Mediterranean.

The Maghreb. The Maghreb includes the North African nations of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. Five other African nations—Libya, Chad, Niger, Mali, and Mauritania—share geographic and cultural links with the Maghreb.

Maghreb comes from an Arab term meaning “western isle.” To the early Arabs, this region, which lies west of the Arabian Peninsula, seemed like an isolated land surrounded by water, mountains, and deserts. During the 600s and 700s, Arab armies carried the religion of Islam to this “western isle.”

Among the chief features of the Maghreb are the vast Sahara and the rugged Atlas Mountains. Because of the scarcity of water, both areas have few inhabitants. Most people live along the Mediterranean coast, which has fertile soil and plenty of rain.

The Maghreb has long been a major crossroads. It commands the southern rim of the Mediterranean as well as the gateway to the Atlantic. Traders from the Maghreb exchanged goods from West Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.

Climate and Resources

Climate has dictated where people live in the Middle East. Nearly all of the region is desert. People have clustered in well-watered areas along the coasts and in river valleys where they irrigate and farm the land. Settlements were scattered. Many separate nations developed throughout the Middle East.

Adapting to scarcity. Lack of rainfall and scarcity of water have shaped the cultures of the Middle East. Less than 10 percent of the land receives enough water to make farming possible.

From earliest times, people built irrigation systems to carry water from rivers to

crops. Ancient Egyptians used the shaduf, a simple water hoist, to transfer water from ditches and canals to their fields. Modern technology has improved on older irrigation methods, and people have developed new ones such as drip irrigation, which delivers a measured amount of water to each plant. The nations of the Arabian Peninsula also have invested huge amounts of money in desalination plants, which convert the water from the surrounding seas into fresh water. (See the feature on page 613.)

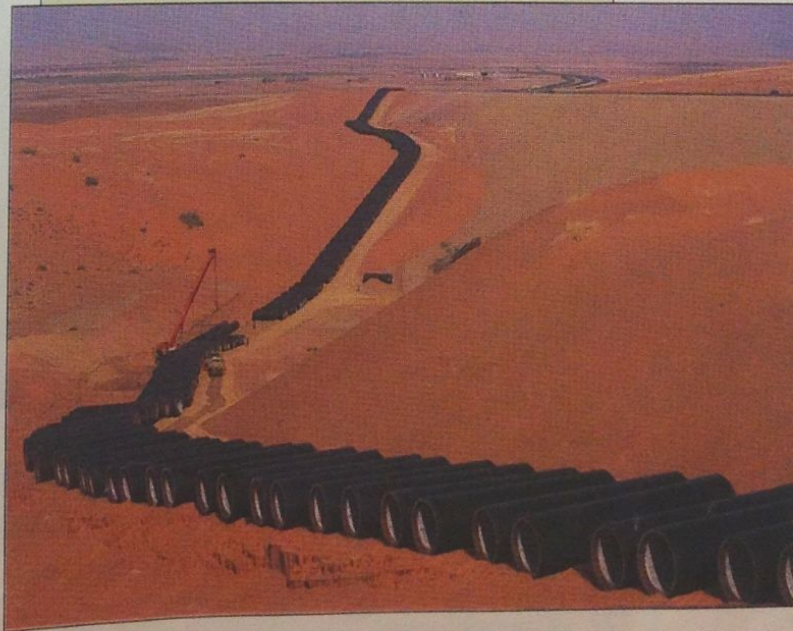
Oil. The Middle East has a variety of resources, including salt, phosphate—which is used in fertilizers—and copper. The most valuable resource, however, is oil.

Oil is unevenly distributed across the region. As a result, great economic differences exist between oil-rich countries and those that lack oil.

Peoples

The Middle East is home to many different peoples with a variety of languages, religions, and traditions. Among the major languages of the region are Arabic, Turkish, Hebrew, Kurdish, Persian, Greek, and Armenian. Religions

Water in Saudi Arabia Sections of a pipeline are waiting to be hooked up to carry fresh water from a desalination plant. Pipelines carry millions of gallons of treated water to such inland cities as Riyadh. **Scarcity** How has scarcity of water affected the development of nations in the Middle East?



include Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. The region—including the Maghreb—consists of 19 countries and almost 350 million people.

Ethnic diversity. Arabs are the majority group in many Middle Eastern countries. But what is an Arab? Beginning in the mid-600s, Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula conquered many different peoples in the Middle East and North Africa. Over time, the conquered peoples adopted the Arabic language and many adopted the religion of Islam. They, too, became known as Arabs. Today, the term Arab is used to describe anyone whose native language is Arabic. Within this large group, however, Arabs may differ greatly from one another.

Besides Arabs, the Middle East is home to other ethnic groups such as Turks, Iranians, and Kurds. Some of these groups migrated to the Middle East from other parts of Asia. They all have their own languages and traditions.

Religious diversity. Islam is the religion observed by the majority of people in the Middle East. Most Arabs are Muslims. Many non-Arabic people are also Muslims. For example, most Iranians, Turks, and Kurds are Muslims. Yet Islam itself is divided into different sects, or groups. (See Chapter 26.)

A significant number of Christians live in Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria. Like Muslims, these Christians belong to different sects. They include Coptic, Greek Orthodox, and Maronite Christians.

Judaism is the most ancient of the three religions of the Middle East. In Israel, the majority of the people are Jewish. Many are descended from recent European, Asian, and North African immigrants.

SECTION 1 REVIEW

- 1. Locate:** (a) Red Sea, (b) Persian Gulf, (c) Tigris River, (d) Euphrates River, (e) Nile River.
- 2. Identify:** (a) Suez Canal, (b) Strait of Hormuz, (c) Asia Minor, (d) Fertile Crescent, (e) Mesopotamia.
- 3. Define:** oasis.
- 4.** Why does the Middle East have strategic importance?

- 5.** (a) What are the five main physical regions in the Middle East? (b) Describe two features of each region.
- 6.** (a) Where do most people in the Middle East live? (b) Why is the population so unevenly distributed?
- 7. Understanding Causes and Effects** How has location contributed to cultural diversity in the Middle East?
- 8. Writing Across Cultures** Keep a record of your use of water for one day. Then list five ways in which your life would be different if water were as scarce in your area as it is in parts of the Middle East.

2

EARLY CIVILIZATIONS

FIND OUT

What civilizations developed in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley?

What were the major achievements of ancient Mesopotamian civilizations?

How did trade and warfare affect Middle Eastern civilizations?

How did the Greek and Roman cultures blend with the culture of the Middle East?

Vocabulary ziggurat, scribe, cuneiform, satrap

“Whatever I had of gold I loaded aboard the ship; Whatever I had of the seed of all living creatures I loaded aboard. After I had caused all my family and relations to go up into the ship, I caused the game of the field, the beasts of the field, and all the craftsmen to go into it. . . . I entered the ship and closed my door.”