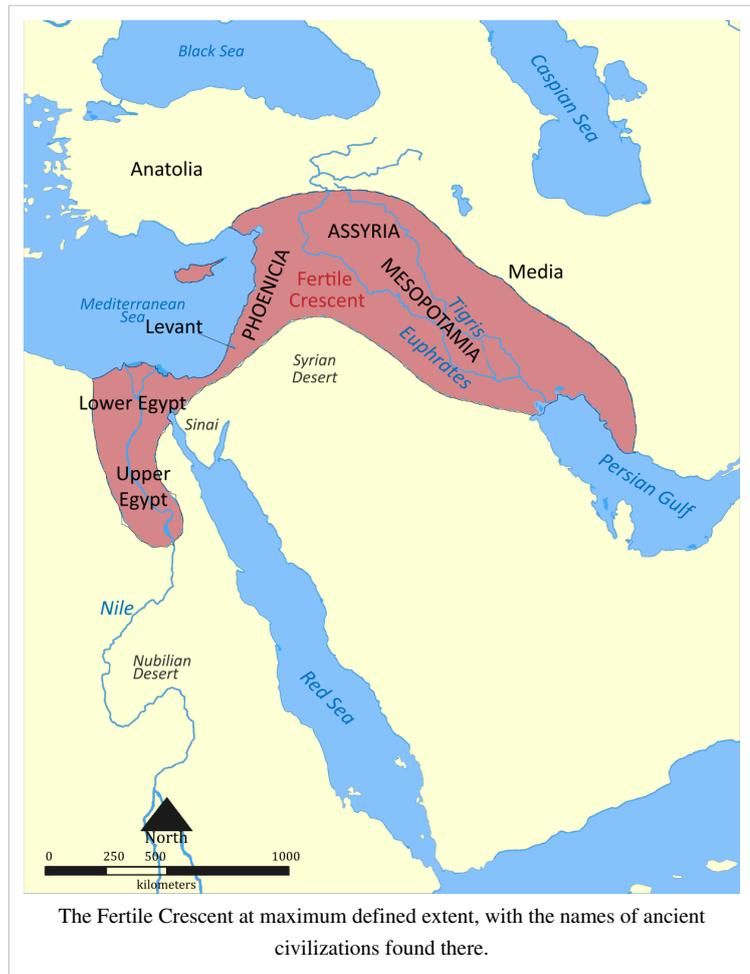


Fertile Crescent

The **Fertile Crescent** is a crescent-shaped region containing the comparatively moist and fertile land of otherwise arid and semi-arid Western Asia. The term was first used by University of Chicago archaeologist James Henry Breasted. Having originated in the study of ancient history, the concept soon developed and retains today meanings in international geopolitics and diplomatic relations.

In current usage the Fertile Crescent has a maximum extent and a minimum extent. All definitions include Mesopotamia, the land in and around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The major nation in this region is Iraq, with small portions of Iran near the Persian Gulf and Turkey in the north. More typically the Fertile Crescent includes also the Levantine coast of the eastern Mediterranean, with Syria, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon and the West Bank. Water sources include the Jordan River. Finally, at maximum extent, the Fertile Crescent also may include Egypt and the Nile Valley within it.



The inner boundary is delimited by the dry climate of the Syrian Desert to the south. Around the outer boundary are the arid and semi-arid lands of the Zagros Mountains to the east, the Anatolian highlands to the north, and the Sahara Desert to the west.

The region was defined to be the cradle of civilization; it saw the development of many of the earliest human civilizations. Some of its technological inventions (but not necessarily first or uniquely) are writing, glass, and the wheel. The earliest known western civilizations manifestly arose and flourished using the water supplies and agricultural resources available in the Fertile Crescent. They were not necessarily the first or the only source of civilization, as Breasted believed. Moreover plants and animals were not domesticated there, but in the surrounding nuclear area, where the original plant species still grow wild. There are several other known nuclear areas in the world, with which Breasted was not acquainted.

(PPNA)), which date to around 9,000 BC (and includes sites such as Jericho). This region, alongside Mesopotamia (which lies to the east of the Fertile Crescent, between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates), also saw the emergence of early complex societies during the succeeding Bronze Age. There is also early evidence from this region for writing, and the formation of statelevel societies. This has earned the region the nickname "The Cradle of Civilization."

Both the Tigris and Euphrates start in the Taurus Mountains of what is today Turkey. Farmers in southern Mesopotamia had to protect their fields from flooding each year, except Northern Mesopotamia which had just enough rain to make some farming possible. To protect floods from coming, they made levees.^[5]

Since the Bronze Age, the region's natural fertility has been greatly extended by irrigation works, upon which much of its agricultural production continues to depend. The last two millennia have seen repeated cycles of decline and recovery as past works have fallen into disrepair through the replacement of states, to be replaced under their successors. Another ongoing problem has been salination — gradual concentration of salt and other minerals in soils with a long history of irrigation.

In the contemporary era, river waters remain a potential source of friction in the region. The Jordan lies on the borders of Israel, the kingdom of Jordan and the areas administered by the Palestinian Authority. Turkey and Syria each control about a quarter of the river Euphrates, on whose lower reaches Iraq is heavily dependent. In Syrian nationalism, the region is held to be a natural nation and is referred to as the **Syrian Fertile Crescent**.^[6]

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“Our Syria has distinct natural boundaries and extends from the Taurus range in the northwest and the Zagros mountains in the northeast to the Suez canal and the Red sea in the south and includes the Sinai peninsula and the gulf of Aqaba, and from the Syrian sea in the west, including the island of Cyprus, to the arch of the Arabian desert and the Persian gulf in the east. This region is also known as the Syrian Fertile Crescent.”^[7]

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External links

- *Ancient Fertile Crescent Almost Gone, Satellite Images Show* (http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2001/05/0518_crescent.html) - from National Geographic News, May 18, 2001

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