

Mapping the World's First Empires

name: _____

Instructions: For each empire 1) Label your map 2) Read and annotate (main ideas, important details) 3) Complete the organizer with information about each empire

Kush Empire (1700 BCE-350 CE)



The Kush state was part of the region in Africa known as Nubia. Located in the desert sands near the Nile in modern Sudan, the ancient culture of Nubia played a decisive role in shaping Egypt from the eighth century B.C. This civilization grew in power just as Egypt's Middle Kingdom was in decline around 1785 B.C. By 1500 B.C., the Nubian empire roughly stretched from Wadi Halfa south to Meroë. Centered on its original capital at Napata, the Nubian ruling dynasty continued to flourish militarily and economically through the ninth century B.C. Around 730 B.C., the Nubian king, Piye, successfully invaded and conquered Egypt, extending his control to the whole Nile Valley. Piye became the first pharaoh of Egypt's 25th dynasty (ca 770-656 B.C.), the so-called Black Pharaohs.

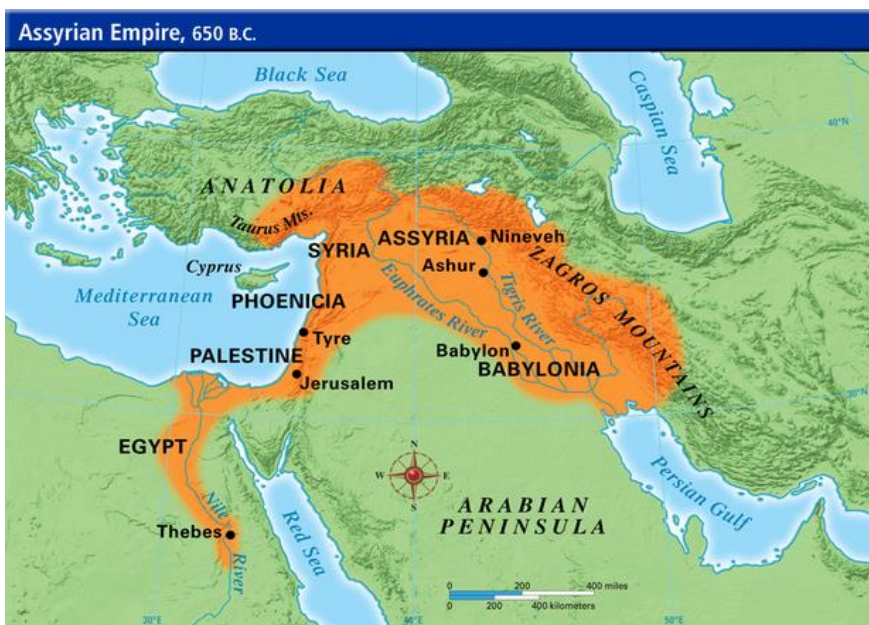
The 25th dynasty would last for three-quarters of a century. Its reign ended in turmoil when an Assyrian invasion of Egypt caused it to fall from power. The victors struck the names of the 25th dynasty from monuments across Egypt, destroying their statues and stelae to erase their names from history.

After the defeat, the Kushites moved south and designated the city of Meroë, which sat farther south along the Nile, as the new capital. This new location was carefully considered. Not only strategically positioned at the crossroads of inland African trade routes and caravan trails from the Red Sea, the land around Meroë was also fertile and blessed with significant natural resources—iron and gold mines that fostered the development of a metals industry, especially goldworking. With access to mines and minerals, the Meroites were expert goldworkers. They built temples, palaces, and royal baths in their capital. Perhaps their grandest achievements are the more than 200 pyramids built at the necropolis at Meroë, giving Sudan more pyramids than all of Egypt.

One of the most remarkable features of Meroitic civilization was its strong queens. In his *Geography*, Greek historian Strabo wrote of a queen called “Candace” who signed a peace treaty with the emperor Augustus. Candace, in fact, means “sister,” and was the title given to Kushite queens. There were many queens in Meroë, such as Amanirenas—the “Candace” Strabo was referring to—and her successor, Amanishakheto, whose treasure was looted in 1834.

Kush prospered for centuries, but Queen Cleopatra’s death in 30 B.C. brought change. Egypt became a part of the Roman Empire, straining the fragile truce that the Kushites had brokered with Rome. Tax revolts in Upper Egypt led to Roman invasions into Kushite territory, threatening their lucrative gold mines. Meroite forces attacked Roman troops in Aswan—the most southerly frontier of the Roman world—led by the fearsome Queen Amanirenas of Meroë. In his great work *Geography*, the Greek scholar Strabo describes her as Queen Candace, “a masculine woman ... who had lost an eye.” This memorable commander was eventually beaten back to Meroë, but from then on, the Meroitic civilization was largely left in peace. Meroë was abandoned in the fourth century A.D.

Neo-Assyrian Empire (911-612 BCE)



The neo-Assyrian Empire was one of the first major empires. The Neo-Assyrians perfected techniques of imperial rule that others imitated and that became standard in many ancient and modern empires. In particular, the Neo-Assyrian State revealed the raw military side of imperial rule: constant and harsh warfare, brutal exploitation of subjects, and an ideology that glorified masters and justified the terrible treatment of their subjects. Neo-Assyrians were legendary for their ruthless efficiency, reliance on terror (such as cutting off ears, lips, and fingers; castration; and mass executions), deportations, and intimidation to crush their adversaries.

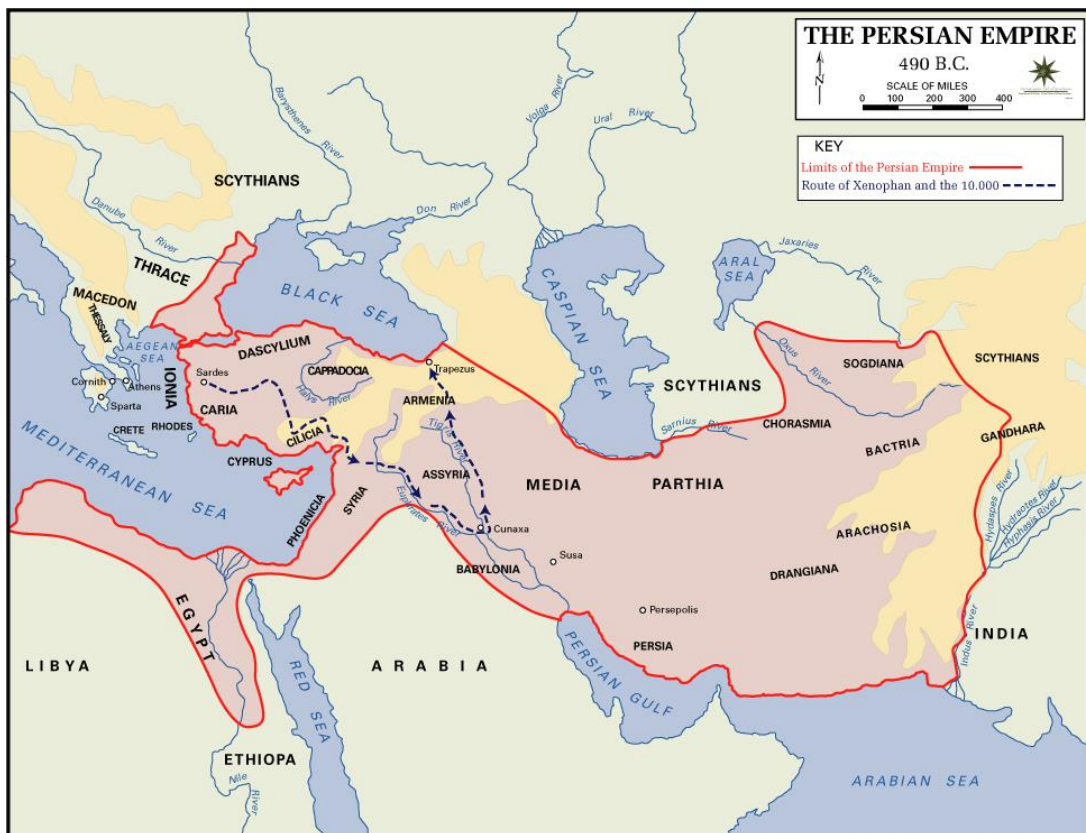
They used professional armies of up to 120,000 soldiers led by officers who were chosen by merit, not

because they were someone's son or relative, and used horse-mounted warriors (called cavalry), horse-drawn chariots, iron weapons, and expert archers (people who used bows and arrows as weapons).

The Neo-Assyrians also wanted to control the people in other areas and control those areas' resources, trading cities, and trade routes. They succeeded by the mid-seventh century BCE with the conquest of Southwest Asia and parts of North Africa, including Egypt. By the ninth century BCE, it dominated the lands and peoples all the way to the Mediterranean, controlling trade and tribute (taxes) from the entire area. They demanded that conquered people do the work of farming and building huge building projects. Over three centuries, the Neo-Assyrian state forced 4 million people to move from their homes to do this kind of labor for the empire. Other conquered people had to pay huge taxes in gold and silver that went directly to the king.

The Assyrian Empire had to use their armies and military force to keep people in their empire in line. As their empire grew, they had to stretch this military power across a large area, which made them unstable. Eventually, rebellions from the ruled people challenged Assyrian power enough that the empire fell.

Persian Empire (911-612 BCE)



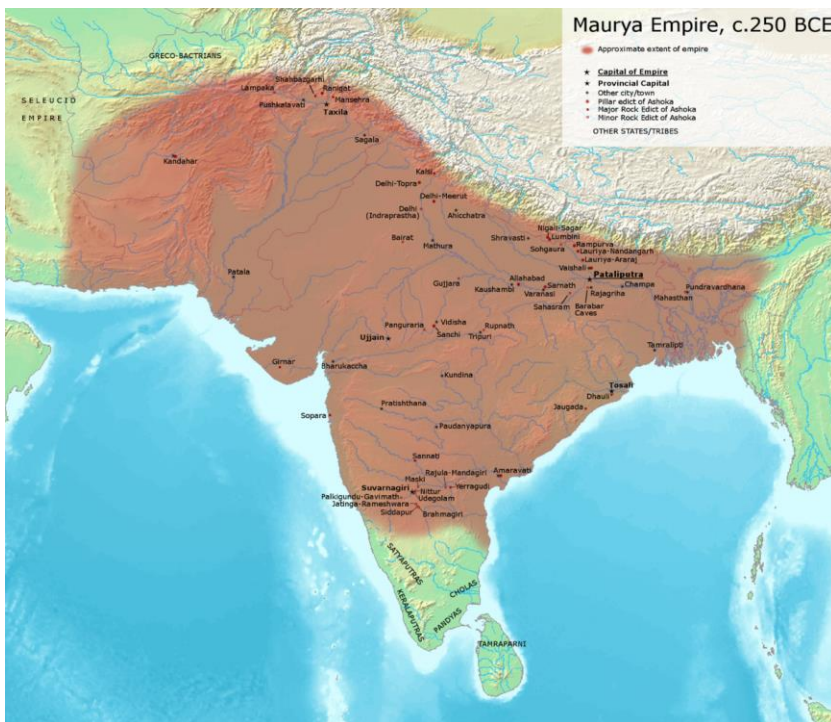
The Persians were the successors to the Neo-Assyrians. They created a gentler form of imperial rule, based on more on persuasion and mutual benefit than on violent power. Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire, traced his ancestry back to a legendary king and used that heritage to legitimize his claim to empire-building. From their base on the Iranian plateau, over the next 200 years the Persian rulers

developed an enormous empire that reached from the Indus Valley to northern Greece and from central Asia to the south of Egypt.

Cyrus presented himself as a kind ruler who freed his subjects from the oppression of their own kings. After Cyrus died, Darius I helped to expand the empire. He conquered territories held by 70 different ethnic groups. To manage this huge area, Darius introduced new kinds of governing systems that helped the empire succeed for 200 years. They combined central governments that ran the whole empire with local governments that already existed. This allowed the Persian Empire to make use of the strengths of local tradition, economies, and rule, rather than forcing Persian customs on subject people through control, like the Assyrians had done. The Persians believed that all people were equal; the only requirement was to give the king their loyalty and pay tribute (taxes), which was considered an honor, not a burden.

Eventually, numerous rebellions started throughout the Persian empire, especially as new migrations of people moved into the area, setting off fights over who controlled resources. At the same time, the Greeks began to increase their power, and began to fight Persia for territorial control. The end of the Persian Empire came from one area of Greece, Macedonia, led by Alexander the Great.

Mauryan Empire (911-612 BCE)



Alexander the Great also took over part of the Indus Valley, but only for a short time. His invasion, though, paved the way for Chandragupta Mauryan to take over what is now Northern India. Chandragupta maintained his government with a systematic use of spying, brutality and intimidation. The area that he took over contained rich iron ores and fertile rice paddies. The woods supported herds of elephants, which were used by the armies in war and conquest. Chandragupta's takeover of this area was the first empire in South Asia.

The Mauryan Empire reached its height during the reign of the third king, Asoka, Chandragupta's grandson. In the last effort he made to get more land for his empire, 100,000 soldiers died in battle,

many more died after the fighting ended, and 150,000 people were forcibly moved from their homes. Asoka himself, when he learned of the devastation, was shocked at what he had done, and issued an edict that renounced his brutal ways.

Asoka was a follower of Buddhism, and he built stupas, a kind of monument, marking burial sites of relics of Buddha all over the empire. He claimed to rule over all of his subjects according to dharma. He wanted all people, whatever their religious practice, social class, or cultural backgrounds, to consider themselves

his subjects, to respect him as their father, and to conform to his moral code. He warned the hunters and gatherers beyond the reach of his government that they should be worried about his punishments if they caused trouble. He regularly issued edicts in local languages that explained to people how they should act within his empire. These rules brought cohesion and legal consistency across the empire, as the Code of Hammurabi did for the Babylonians. Thus Ashoka relied on both a bureaucracy and a codified legal system to centralize his rule. He also built art projects that combined the cultures of Indians, Persians and Greeks. When Ashoka died the Mauryan empire soon crumbled.

When Ashoka died the Mauryan empire soon crumbled. After a period of disorder and regional kingdoms, the Gupta Dynasty emerged and once again united India under a single government. The Gupta empire never grew to the size of the Mauryan. The organization of their empire was considerably different as well. Ashoka used the bureaucracy to manage most details of the empire. The Gupthas, on the other hand, let most decisions and policy making up to local leaders. They also preferred to negotiate or intermarry with local rulers to keep the peace. Although they ruled over a smaller area than the Mauryans, the Gupta era was the greatest period of political stability in classical India, and they made incredible advances in science and math, including a numbering system that we use a version of today, the concept of zero, chess, and medical advances. However, this lack of centralized rule came with an eventual price. The various regions of India had their own distinctions and were never integrated into the whole as they were under Ashoka. In fact, the Gupta empire would break along these regional divisions as the empire was threatened by internal corruption and nomadic invaders. After the fall of the Gupta dynasty, the Indian subcontinent would remain fragmented into regions for over 1500 years.

Mayan Empire



The process of settlement and expansion in Mesoamerica differed from that in the large empires of Afro-Eurasia. Mesoamerica had no giant river and its floodplain, and so it didn't have the same resources that other states could use. The area they lived in was hot, infertile, and vulnerable to hurricanes. What Mesoamerica achieved was therefore remarkable. In the case of the Mayans, we witness the emergence of a common culture that ruled over large stretches of Mesomerica under a series of kingdoms built around ritual centers rather than cities. They established hundreds, possibly thousands, of farming villages scattered across present-day Mexico to El Salvador. In this region of diverse ecology and people, they shared the same Mayan language and benefits of trade. The Mayans aggressively engaged in warfare and trade, expanding their borders through tributary relationships. A tributary relationship is when a less powerful civilization or states has to pay regular taxes, or tribute, to the more powerful state. They made amazing scientific and mathematical innovations, including very accurate calendars and studies of astronomy, and were great artists and builders. At their peak, the Mayans may have numbered as many as 10 million. Bigness in a cultural system without big cities made them unique.

The extraordinary feature of Mayan society was that its people were defined not be a great ruler or a great capital city, but by their shared religious beliefs, worldview, and a sense of purpose. The Mayan culture had about a dozen kingdoms, which were similar to city-states. Each had a clear social hierarchy, with a shamanistic king who claimed his power because of his family background, which was said to originate with the gods. The job of the kings was to make sure that the gods got the attention and reverence that they needed.

Writing developed very early, though the language has been only recently translated. Scribes were an important part of society. They wrote grand epics about dynasties and their founders, major battles, deaths, marriages, and sacrifices. Such writings taught generations of Mayan subjects that they shared common histories, beliefs, and gods--always associated with the narratives of ruling families. The inscriptions reflected elaborate narratives that were ritually performed for commoners and rulers. These took the form of dances, and costumes that were made of shells, feathers, and hides for dancers so they looked like gods, enemies, or royal neighbors. The combination of writing and performance made a historic memory to serve rulers' power and to pray to the gods who they needed.

The Mayans were obsessed with blood, and spilling blood was a way to honor ruling families and the gods. This led to continual warfare between different kingdoms within the Mayan Empire, so they could capture victims for the bloody rituals. Rulers would also shed their own blood--royal wives drew blood from their tongues, and men had their penises perforated by a stingray spine or a sharpened bone. Overall, the endless wars doomed the Mayans. They continued to raise larger armies and increased the numbers of people who were sacrificed. Crops failed. People fled. Food supplies dwindled. Entire states fell, and people abandoned their spiritual centers, which were rediscovered hundreds of years later as ghost towns in ruins.

Source: Tignor, R. L., et al (2008). Worlds together, worlds apart: A history of the world from the beginnings of humankind to the present (2nd ed.). New York: W.W. Norton.