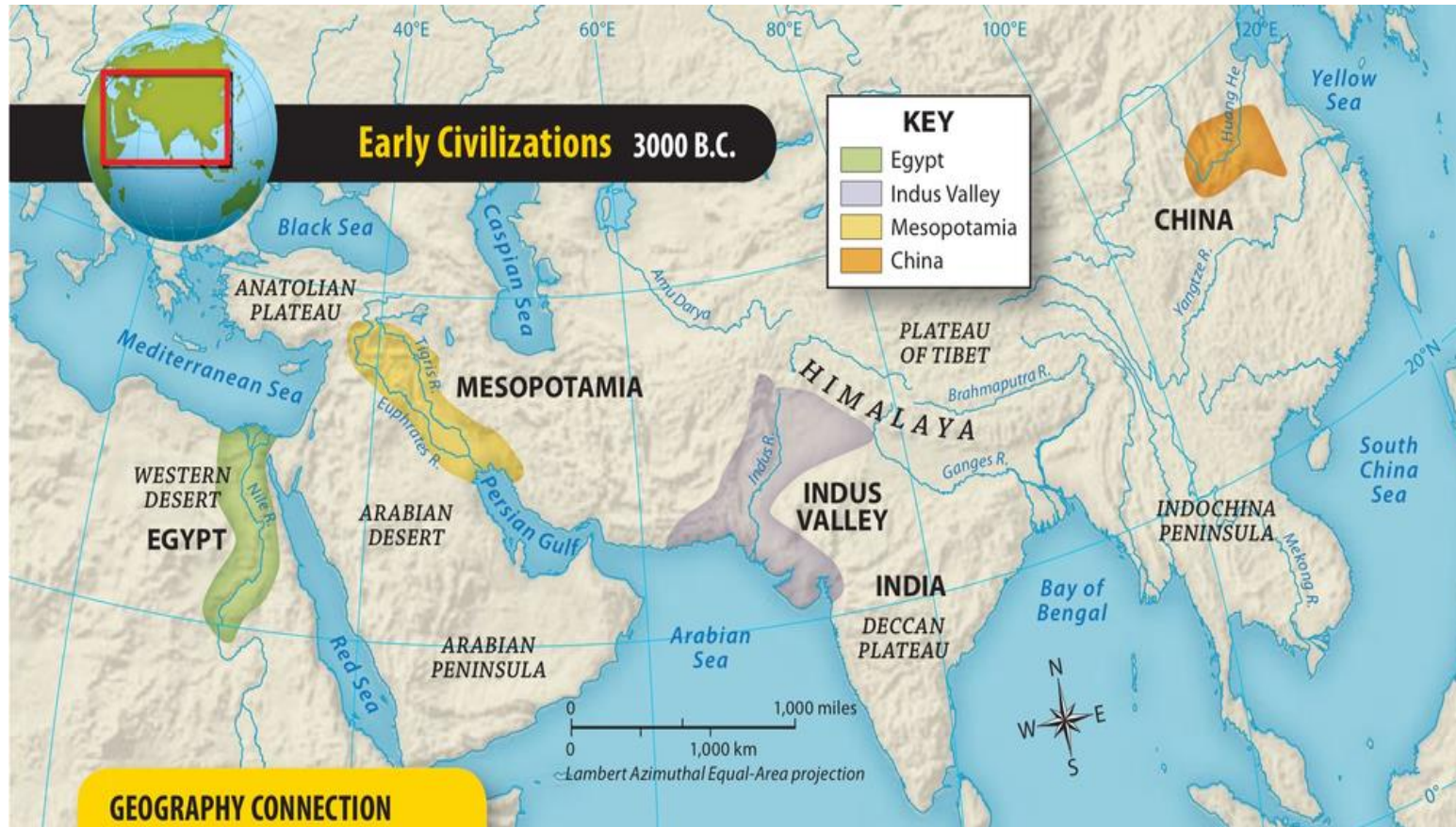


The Four Ancient River Valley Cultures



Each of these four ancient cultures would give birth to unique forms of art, rich and complicated religious practices, powerful rulers, and the expansion of their kingdoms.



There is more than luck here. The birthplaces of these ancient civilizations share some key characteristics. First, they are all at similar distances from the equator, so they share similar climates. Second, they arose around steady water sources. Many of these rivers provided the land them with fertile topsoil on which to grow crops. A reliable food supply led to steady populations and population growth.

Third, well-fed populations lead to invention and innovation. One common innovation of all four cultural areas is a written language. Although archaeologists have not been able to decipher the writing of the Indus Valley people, they did leave behind a written language. Egyptians invented hieroglyphs, the Mesopotamian people began with cuneiform, and the Chinese carved symbols into bone, and later, bronze.

Questions

1. What lines of latitude are all four civilizations within?
2. This area of latitude corresponds roughly with the same area of the United States. What would you hypothesize about the temperatures in these regions?
3. Of the four civilizations, which was least likely to have contact with – or be able to trade – the others?
4. What body of water might the people of Mesopotamia have used to trade with Egypt?
5. Which culture grew up between the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal?
6. China's position north of the equator is most similar to which other ancient culture?
7. What natural land formation might make a journey from the Indus Valley to China especially difficult?
8. Name four ways in which the ancient civilizations were similar.