Chapter 7

Geography and the Early Settlement of Egypt, Kush, and Canaan

*How did geography affect early settlement in Egypt, Kush, and Canaan?*

### 7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, you will explore how geography affected three civilizations that arose in northern Africa and southwestern Asia. These were the civilizations of the ancient Egyptian, Kushite (KUH-shite), and Israelite peoples.

The Egyptians settled along the Nile River, in the northeast corner of Africa. Their civilization lasted from around 3100 B.C.E. to 350 C.E. The Kushites settled to the south of Egypt, along the southern part of the Nile River. Their civilization began around 2000 B.C.E. and lasted until 350 C.E. The Israelites, later called Jews, settled northeast of Egypt, along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, in about 1800 B.C.E. Although the Jews were forced from their homeland in 70 C.E., their civilization continues to flourish today.

Environmental factors greatly affected where people settled. Three important factors were water, topography (the shape and elevation of the surface features of the land), and vegetation (plant life). These three factors were determined by each area’s physical geography. Physical geography includes mountains, rivers, valleys, deserts, climate, and the fertility of the soil.

In this chapter, you will learn why water, topography, and vegetation were important to early human settlement. You will explore the physical geography of the lands of the ancient Egyptians, Kushites, and Israelites. You’ll find out how environmental factors in these places affected people’s choices of where to live.

*The Nile River provided people with fresh water and fertile land.*

![Satellite photograph](image)
7.2 Environmental Factors and Early Human Settlement

In ancient times, environmental factors influenced people’s choices of where to settle. Three important environmental factors were water, **topography**, and **vegetation**.

**Water**  The most important environmental factor in early human settlement was water. Physical features like rivers, lakes, and inland seas were good sources of fresh water.

Water was important for many reasons. People needed fresh drinking water to live. They also bathed and washed things in fresh water. Bathing and washing helped prevent disease.

Water was a source of food. People caught fish from rivers, lakes, and seas. They hunted water birds and other animals that gathered near water.

In addition, farmers needed water to grow their crops. For this reason, farmers often settled near rivers. A river’s natural flooding could help irrigate their farms. Farmers could also dig canals or trenches to direct river water to their crops. For example, farmers in Mesopotamia dug canals for this purpose.

Water was also used for transportation. Cities and towns often used rivers as “highways.” People traveled in boats to visit relatives and trade goods. Towns near the sea could trade goods with countries far away.

**Topography**  A second environmental factor was topography. Topography refers to the shape and elevation of the land. It includes features like mountains, hills, plains, valleys, and deserts.

The topography of an area was important for early human settlement. Farmers preferred to settle in flat, open areas such as plains and valleys. Large, flat spaces gave farmers room to plant crops. Also, the rich soil in coastal plains and river valleys was excellent for growing these crops.

Mountains were less friendly to human settlement. Steep mountains were hard to cross. Their jagged peaks, cold temperatures, and rocky land made farming difficult.

Deserts also discouraged settlement. They were hot and dry. They contained very little water for farming. Sandstorms occurred when strong winds carried dense clouds of sand that could block out the sun. The intense heat, lack of water, and sandstorms made travel and living in the desert difficult.
Vegetation  A third environmental factor was vegetation, or plant life. There are many kinds of vegetation, such as trees, bushes, flowers, grass, and reeds. The crops people grow are also a type of vegetation.

Many aspects of physical geography affect vegetation. A climate with mild weather and regular rain is good for plant life. Fresh water supports the growth of vegetation. The areas around rivers and lakes are usually green and lush. Mountains are often covered with thick groves of trees. Dry and hot deserts have very little vegetation.

The vegetation in an area influenced early human settlement in several ways. Most important, plants were a source of food. People could eat the wild plants available and also the crops they planted. Vegetation had other uses as well. People learned to make many useful products out of plants, including baskets, tools, medicine, rope, and even paper. Trees provided shade from the hot sun. And plants and flowers added natural beauty to a place.

Wherever people settled in the ancient world, water, topography, and vegetation were important factors. Let's look at how these environmental factors influenced the early settlements of the Egyptians, Kushites, and Israelites.
7.3 Environmental Factors and the Early Settlement of Egypt and Kush

The Egyptians and Kushites both settled near the Nile River. The Egyptians lived along the northern part of the river. The Kushites lived to the south.

Why did settlements in these areas cluster around the Nile River? Let’s look at the physical features of Egypt and Kush to see how environmental factors favored settlement near the Nile.

Physical Features of Egypt and Kush  The most important physical feature in ancient Egypt and Kush was the Nile River. Flowing north from east Africa, the Nile created a long, fertile valley that ended in a marshy delta where the river emptied into the Mediterranean Sea.

The Nile River valley was bordered by the Libyan Desert to the west and the Nubian Desert to the east. These sandy deserts were extremely hot and dry. Most people avoided these areas, although the deserts did play one important role in the settlement of Egypt and Kush. They formed a natural barrier that helped protect people living in the Nile River valley. The deserts did not support large settlements, and few invaders wanted to risk crossing these harsh places.

On the north, Egypt was bordered by the Mediterranean Sea. Settlers could not drink its sparkling salt water, but the sea was rich in fish and other kinds of seafood. It was also a waterway that linked ancient Egypt to other civilizations.

To the east of Egypt and Kush was a long channel of very salty water called the Red Sea. The climate in this area was hot and dry. Much of the land near the Red Sea was desert.

This map shows bodies of water that encouraged settlement and travel in parts of ancient Egypt and Kush. It also shows deserts, which made life and travel hard.
Environmental Factors and Human Settlement in Egypt and Kush  Environmental factors in ancient Egypt and Kush greatly favored settlement near the Nile River. Most important, the Nile was a source of fresh water in an area that was mostly desert.

The lack of water in the deserts made them unfit for farming. But in the Nile River valley, the river provided natural irrigation and fertilization. Every summer, the river overflowed its banks. The floodwaters soaked the dry ground for several weeks. As the water level decreased, a thin layer of silt (very fine particles of rock) was left behind. This soil was perfect for farming.

Also, where there was fresh water, people were more likely to find fish to catch and animals to hunt. The abundant wildlife in the Nile region included fish, ducks, geese, hippos, crocodiles, giraffes, and ostriches.

The topography of the river valley also encouraged human settlement. In the south, parts of the Nile ran through narrow valleys between steep hills. But there were also wide, flat areas of land around deep bends in the river. These flat areas were good for farming. In the north, wide plains were watered by the Nile’s annual flooding.

Vegetation was rare in the dry deserts, but it was plentiful in the Nile River valley. Useful plants included reeds and a tough water plant called papyrus. People wove reeds into baskets, and roofs for their huts. Papyrus was used to make rope and paper. And the rich farmland was good for growing crops like wheat and barley.

Africa’s Nile River is the longest river in the world. It is more than 4,100 miles long and flows from south to north, emptying into the Mediterranean Sea.

Deserts are natural barriers against invaders. Would you spend days crossing this hot, dry desert to fight those who live on the other side?
7.4 Environmental Factors and the Early Settlement of Canaan

The ancient Israelites settled in Canaan (KAY-nen), a diverse land along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Canaan’s physical features and environmental factors made settlement easier in some parts of the region than in others.

Physical Features of Canaan  Canaan’s physical features included plains and valleys, hills and mountains, deserts, and bodies of water.

In the west, coastal plains bordered the Mediterranean Sea. To the north, the Lebanon Mountains rose steeply from the coast. The southern part of this range gave way to the lower hills of Galilee.

The Jordan River flowed down from a mountain range through the middle of Canaan, heading south through the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. The land around the narrow river valley included hills, grassy slopes, and mountains. To the east lay the hot, dry Syrian Desert. In southwestern Canaan was the Negev (NEH-gehv) Desert. Rain soaked this area during the winter months, supplying the Negev with more water than most deserts receive.

Environmental Factors and Human Settlement in Canaan  In Canaan, as in Egypt and Kush, water was a key environmental factor. In very ancient times, the wet, fertile plains near the Mediterranean Sea were farmed. The Mediterranean also enabled traders from many lands to visit Canaan.

Other bodies of water also played a role in the settlement of Canaan. The Sea of Galilee was actually a freshwater lake. It had plentiful fish, and fertile land was nearby. Another large lake, the Dead Sea, was so salty that nothing grew in it, not even plants. The area near the Dead Sea was hot and dry, making it unsuitable for farming.

The main source of fresh water was the Jordan River. People living near the river hunted, fished, and farmed along its banks.
But unlike the Nile River, the Jordan River did not flood regularly, so its valley was not as fertile as the Nile's.

Canaan's varied topography greatly influenced patterns of settlement. Farmers found it easiest to live on the Mediterranean's coastal plains and near the Jordan River. In other areas, the hilly land and dry soil made growing crops difficult. As a result, many people, including the ancient Israelites, became herders rather than farmers. Herders tended flocks of sheep, goats, cattle, donkeys, and camels. Unlike farmers, herders were nomads, wandering from place to place in search of good land for their animals to graze.

People found it hardest to settle in the mountains and deserts. Mountainous land and dry desert land were both difficult to farm. Still, some people did live in these areas. Nomads sometimes herded cattle and camels in the Negev and Syrian deserts.

In general, Canaan's hot, dry climate discouraged abundant plant life. Vegetation was most plentiful near the Jordan River. Some areas had small forests. Others had only short, scrubby plants. Grasslands were common, though, and herders made good use of them to feed their animals.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you learned how three environmental factors influenced the early settlement of ancient Egypt, Kush, and Canaan.

**Environmental Factors** Three important environmental factors are water, topography, and vegetation. These factors greatly affected where ancient people settled.

**Early Settlement of Egypt and Kush** In Egypt and Kush, most people farmed in the fertile Nile River valley. The Nile River provided fresh water in an area that was mostly desert. The topography of the Nile River valley made the land good for farming. The valley also supported useful vegetation like reeds and papyrus.

**Early Settlement of Canaan** In Canaan, the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee were important sources of fresh water. Much of the land, however, was too hot, dry, or hilly for farming. As a result, many people, including the ancient Israelites, were herders rather than farmers. Herders were nomads who moved from place to place to find grasslands where their animals could graze.
Chapter 8

The Ancient Egyptian Pharaohs

*What did the pharaohs of ancient Egypt accomplish, and how did they do it?*

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, you will visit ancient Egypt. You will meet four leaders, called pharaohs.

In 1922, archaeologists discovered the tomb of a pharaoh known as King Tutankhaten (too-tan-KAH-tin), or King Tut. Inside a small burial chamber, they found three coffins nested inside each other. The smallest coffin was made of solid gold. It held the king’s mummy. (A mummy is a body that has been preserved after death to keep it from decaying.) On the mummy’s head was a magnificent golden mask. Jewelry and good luck charms lay on the mummy and in the wrappings that protected it. Other rooms of the tomb were filled with statues, weapons, furniture, and even a chariot.

The treasures in King Tut’s tomb provided an amazing glimpse into ancient Egypt. Other pharaohs also left behind fabulous riches and artwork. Many of these pharaohs had great monuments built to celebrate their lives and their accomplishments. Like King Tut’s tomb, these artifacts have much to teach us about this ancient civilization.

In this chapter, you will learn about three important periods in ancient Egyptian history. Then you will meet four pharaohs who ruled during these periods, learn what they accomplished, and explore some of the monuments they left behind.

This view of the inside of King Tut’s tomb, discovered in 1922, shows the pharaoh’s coffin and some of the chamber’s detailed wall paintings.

This is King Tutankhaten’s funeral or death mask.
8.2 Ancient Egypt and Its Rulers

Ancient Egypt enjoyed three long periods of stability and unity under the rule of pharaohs. Historians call these periods the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom.

The Old Kingdom lasted from about 2700 to 2200 B.C.E. During this time, early pharaohs set up a strong central government. They also had great pyramids built as tombs for themselves. Some historians call this time the Age of the Pyramids.

The Middle Kingdom (about 2000 to 1800 B.C.E.) is sometimes called the Period of Reunification because it followed years of chaos and disunity. During this era, Egyptians enjoyed many great achievements in literature, art, and architecture.

The New Kingdom (about 1600 to 1100 B.C.E.) is often called Egypt’s Golden Age. During this time of peace and stability, ancient Egypt’s power reached its height. Pharaohs increased trade and had huge monuments built.

As in Mesopotamia, religion played a central role in Egypt’s social and political order. Pharaohs were believed to be gods. They owned all the land and were responsible for their people’s well-being. They were kings, generals, and religious leaders, all combined.

After they died, pharaohs were thought to enter an afterlife that would never end. Their tombs were built to last. Many objects were buried with the pharaoh for use in the next world.

The pharaohs built other monuments to glorify their power and success. The map shows the locations of some of the greatest monuments. Let’s find out more about these structures and the pharaohs who ordered their creation.
8.3 Pharaoh Khufu: The Pyramid Builder

The pharaoh Khufu (KOO-foo) ruled from about 2551 to 2528 B.C.E., during the Old Kingdom period. Today, he is best known as the builder of a famous pyramid.

Not much is known about Khufu. Some stories describe him as a cruel, harsh ruler. Others say that he was powerful but kind.

We do know that Khufu helped establish the pharaoh as a central authority. For example, he kept strict control over Egypt's food supply. He oversaw the harvest and the storage of extra grain. He also controlled a large network of government officials who carried out his laws. Khufu emphasized his supreme power by declaring himself a god.

Khufu and other Old Kingdom pharaohs had magnificent pyramids built as tombs for themselves and their families. Khufu was responsible for the building of the Great Pyramid at Giza. It is one of the wonders of the ancient world.

The Great Pyramid sat at the center of a huge complex of temples, statues, monuments, and smaller tombs. It was made of more than 2 million stone blocks, perfectly fitted together. Inside, tunnels led to several burial chambers. The king's chamber had six roofs to hold up the weight of the stone layers above it.

Building the Great Pyramid was an amazing feat. No one knows exactly how the Egyptians did it. The pyramid took about 20 years to complete. Khufu had strict control of the building project. He organized and fed thousands of workers. The finished pyramid was a stunning monument to Egyptian engineering.
8.4 Pharaoh Senusret I: Patron of the Arts

The pharaoh Senusret I (SEHN-ooz-ret) ruled from about 1971 to 1926 B.C.E., during the Middle Kingdom. He was a strong leader who ruled a stable, unified Egypt. Art, literature, and architecture flourished during his reign.

The arts thrived under Senusret’s rule. The pharaoh controlled mines filled with gold, copper, and gems such as purple amethyst. Artisans fashioned these materials into beautiful pieces of jewelry. Bracelets and necklaces were often highly detailed. They were also decorated with stones like turquoise.

Some of the greatest works in Egyptian literature were written during Senusret’s reign. “The Story of Sinuhe” tells of a young official named Sinuhe who overhears a plot to kill the pharaoh. Fearing for his own life, Sinuhe flees Egypt. He thrives in his new land, but he grows very homesick. When a new pharaoh calls him home, Sinuhe returns joyfully to Egypt.

Senusret’s greatest accomplishments were in religious architecture. He had many temples, shrines, and religious monuments built and improved.

Perhaps Senusret’s finest architectural achievement was the White Chapel. (A chapel is a small temple.) It was made of alabaster, a hard white stone. Some historians think that the chapel was originally covered in a thin layer of gold.

Beautiful artwork decorated the chapel’s pillars. Carved scenes showed the pharaoh with various gods. Birds, animals, and Egyptian symbols were also depicted.

Senusret wanted his memory to live on through his monuments. But few of his buildings survived the passage of time. A later pharaoh took the White Chapel apart and used the pieces in a monument of his own. Archaeologists later discovered the pieces and reconstructed the White Chapel.
8.5 Pharaoh Hatshepsut: Promoter of Egyptian Trade

During the New Kingdom, the pharaoh Hatshepsut (haht-SHEP-soot) ruled Egypt from about 1473 to 1458 B.C.E. Hatshepsut was Egypt’s first female pharaoh. Under her rule, Egyptian art and architecture flourished. Hatshepsut was also known for encouraging trade.

One of her greatest accomplishments was her rise to power. Never before had a woman pharaoh ruled Egypt. At first, she shared power with her male relatives. However, she soon took over as sole ruler.

Hatshepsut strengthened her position in several ways. She filled her government with loyal advisers. She demanded the same respect shown to male rulers. Sometimes, she dressed in men’s clothing. She even put on the fake beard worn by male pharaohs. Artists were often instructed to portray her as a man. She also spread stories that her father was a god.

As pharaoh, Hatshepsut promoted trade with other countries. Her biggest trade expedition was to the African kingdom of Punt, at the southern end of the Red Sea. Over 200 men in five ships brought gifts and trade goods to Punt.

Hatshepsut left behind a stunning monument to her reign—a great temple at Dayr al-Bahri (deer ahl-BAH-ray). The main part of the temple was built into a cliff above the Nile River. At the entrance were two tall, thin monuments called obelisks. The entrance was also graced by 200 sphinx statues. The sphinx is a mythical creature with the body of a lion and the head of a man.

Scenes from Hatshepsut’s reign decorated the temple walls. Detailed carvings portrayed the great voyage to Punt. The carvings showed the valuable things that the pharaoh’s traders had brought back to Egypt.

Hatshepsut actively encouraged trade. During her reign, trade helped spread Egyptian influence along the Nile and in nearby lands in the Middle East (western Asia).

Hatshepsut the first woman pharaoh of ancient Egypt
This painting shows Ramses II in battle. He was a brilliant military leader who became a captain in his father’s army at the age of ten.

**Ramses II** an ancient Egyptian pharaoh, known as “Ramses the Great”; skilled as a military leader; and responsible for building many monuments, including the temple at Abu Simbel

**treaty** a written agreement by which two or more states agree to peaceful relations

### 8.6 Pharaoh Ramses II: Military Leader and Master Builder

The pharaoh Ramses II (RAM-seez) ruled from about 1290 to 1224 B.C.E., during the New Kingdom. Called Ramses the Great, he is one of the most famous pharaohs. He reigned for more than 60 years, longer than almost any other pharaoh. He is best known for his military leadership and for building numerous monuments.

Ramses used his power to excess. He had over 100 wives, and more than 100 children. Never shy about his importance, he had hundreds of statues of himself erected throughout Egypt. Some of them were over 60 feet high.

From a young age, Ramses was a fearless soldier. He fought alongside his father in various battles. At the age of ten, Ramses was made a captain in the Egyptian army.

Ramses tried to defend an Egyptian empire that extended north into Canaan. His most famous military campaigns were against the Hittite Empire in Anatolia (present-day Turkey). The Hittites constantly threatened Egypt’s northern borders. In his best known battle, Ramses reached a standoff with the Hittites, even though he was greatly outnumbered.

Ramses was also a peacemaker. He and the Hittites signed the world’s first peace treaty. This peace lasted until the Hittite Empire collapsed around 1190 B.C.E.

One of Ramses’ greatest projects was the temple complex at Abu Simbel. The main temple was carved into the side of a cliff. The cliff was on a bank of the Nile River. A smaller temple honored his favorite wife, Nefertari.
Four giant statues of a seated Ramses framed the entrance to the main temple. The figures were carved right out of the rock face of the cliff. They are among the finest examples of the artistic skill of Egyptian sculptors.

The inside of the temple was also remarkable. Visitors passed through three large rooms, called halls, to reach the temple’s main room. This room's altar contained statues of Ramses and three Egyptian gods. The temple was built so that, twice a year, the sun lined up with the entrance. Beams of sunlight would shine down the halls and light up the statues.

Ramses ordered more temples and monuments built than any other pharaoh in history. When he died, he was buried in the tomb that he had ordered workers to construct solely for him. His mummy is one of the best-preserved bodies ever found.

This is a view, from below, of one of the four 66-foot statues of Ramses II, seated at the entrance of the main temple at Abu Simbel.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, you learned about the accomplishments of four of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt who ruled during three long periods of stability.

**Ancient Egypt and Its Rulers** Ancient Egypt enjoyed three periods of stability and unity under the rule of pharaohs. These periods were the Old Kingdom (Age of the Pyramids) from about 2700 to 2200 B.C.E.; the Middle Kingdom (Period of Reunification) from about 2000 to 1800 B.C.E.; and the New Kingdom (Golden Age) from about 1600 to 1100 B.C.E.

**Pharaoh Khufu** During the Old Kingdom, Khufu set up a strong central government. He also had the Great Pyramid built at Giza. It was an amazing construction feat and one of the wonders of the ancient world.

**Pharaoh Senusret** During the Middle Kingdom, Senusret encouraged Egyptian art and literature. Artisans and architects created fine works, including White Chapel.

**Pharaoh Hatshepsut** Hatshepsut, Egypt's first female pharaoh, promoted Egyptian trade during the New Kingdom. She had a great temple built at Dayr al-Bahri.

**Pharaoh Ramses II** Ramses the Great was a superior military leader and builder of monuments during the New Kingdom. He signed the world’s first peace treaty with the Hittites. He had the temple complex at Abu Simbel built.