

Introduction to the Roman world

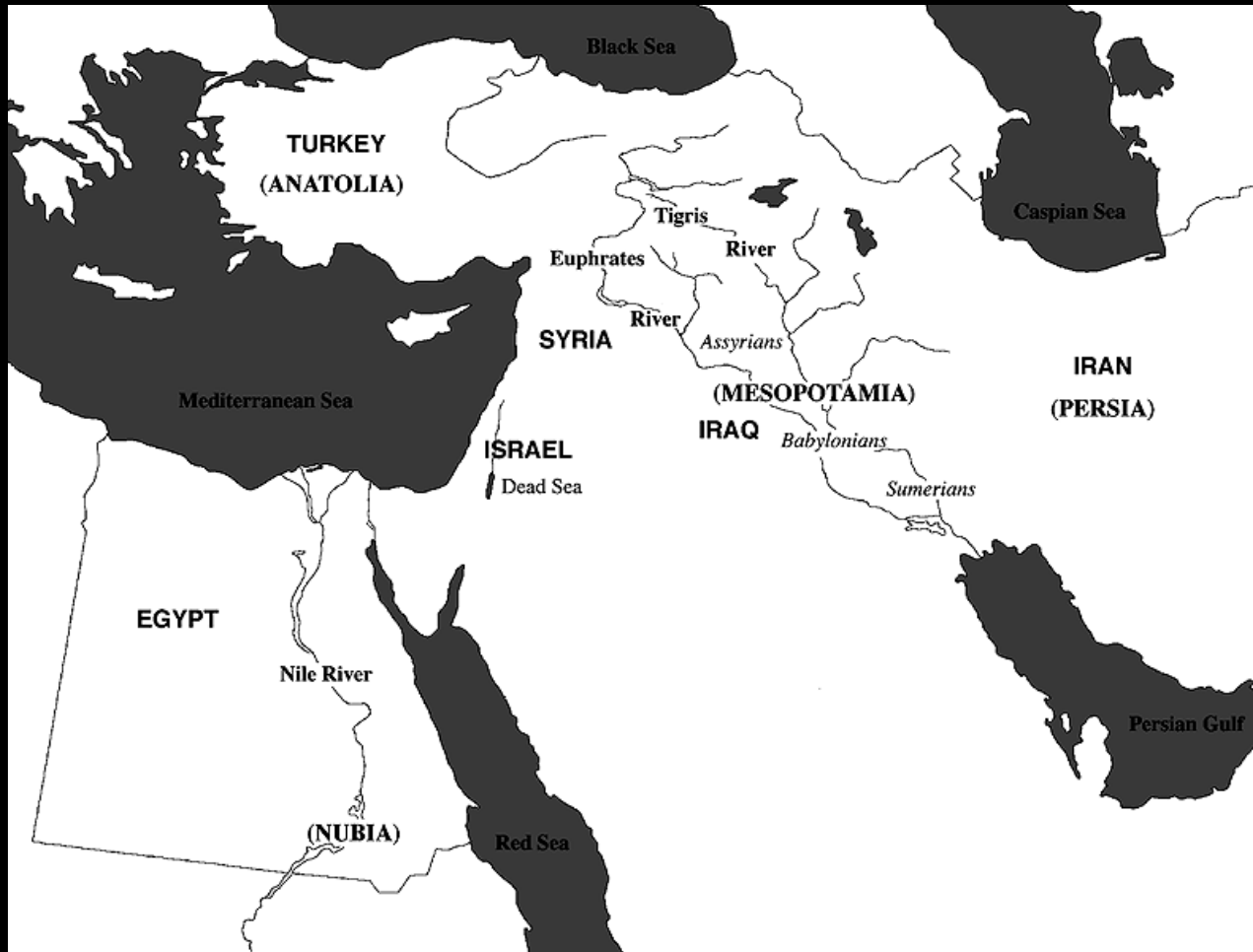
HIST 328 Lecture 1

Mediterranean geography

- Ancient Near East
 - Mesopotamia
 - Egypt
 - Levant (eastern Mediterranean seaboard)
- Mediterranean Basin
 - Peninsulas
 - Smaller seas
 - Key rivers

River valleys

- Geographical homes of first civilizations
 - Mesopotamia:
 - Tigris and Euphrates: irrigation of floodplain allows cultivation of rich soils
 - Egypt:
 - Nile: annual flooding brings water, fertilizes soil
- Similar patterns in other world regions (e.g. China)







Valley of the Nile

Water: Limit and Link

□ Seas:

- Smaller seas serve as links
- Central Mediterranean long a barrier

□ Rivers:

- Rhine, Rhone, Danube, Tigris, Euphrates
- Trade and transport where navigable (e.g. Nile)
- Barriers to invasion (esp. Rhine, Danube, Euphrates)

Limits of the Roman world

□ North

- Rivers: Rhine, Danube
- Forests: not rich enough to be worth conquering

□ South

- Sahara Desert: least permeable boundary

□ East:

- Zone of communication: Mesopotamia/Levant
- Area of vulnerability: Eurasian steppe
- Arabian Desert to southeast

The Mediterranean Basin



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Aegean coast of Turkey seen from the island of Chios (foreground)

Sub-regions of the Mediterranean

- West
 - Iberian Peninsula—Pyrenees, Meseta
 - Italy—Appenines, Alps
 - North Africa: Maghreb
- Northeast
 - Adriatic Sea
 - Balkan Peninsula—Hungarian Plain, various mountain ranges
 - Black Sea
 - Aegean Sea
 - Asia Minor—Anatolian Plateau
- Southeast
 - Levant
 - Egypt
 - Cyrene

The Mediterranean Basin



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Beyond the Mediterranean

- Northern forests
 - Thinly inhabited
 - Underdeveloped
 - Peasant farmers

- Eurasian steppe
 - Also thinly inhabited and underdeveloped
 - Nomadic pastoralists
 - Military threat!



The Eurasian Steppe—Eastern Mongolia



Climate and Weather

- Typical climate:
 - Dry and sunny in summer, often hot; little if any rain (dry season)
 - Wet, but usually mild in winter; snow at high elevations (wet season)
- Complex and unpredictable:
 - Regional and micro-regional variation
 - Topography creates microclimates
 - Year-to-year variation
 - “Typical” climate is an average of extremes

Agricultural zones

- “Wine line”
 - Northern boundary
- Olive trees
 - True Mediterranean climate
 - North: too cold
 - South: too hot and dry
- Date palms
 - Southern boundary: beginning of Sahara



Map 5.2
 The Making of the West: Peoples and Cultures: A Concise History, Second Edition
 © 2007 Bedford/St. Martin's

Mediterranean Agriculture

- “Mediterranean trinity”
 - Wheat, olives, and the vine
- Animal husbandry
 - Pigs; cattle for labor
- Pastoralism
 - Sheep, goats
- Tree crops
 - E.g. apples, figs, dates
- Hunting and gathering
- Labor-intensive
- Yields barely adequate
- Trade required for survival

