

## **New Empires and Ideas**

Later empires shaped the Middle East in different ways. Some conquerors, such as the Hittites, brought new skills to the region. Others uprooted the peoples they defeated. By forcing people to move elsewhere, these upheavals led to the spread of ideas. Even as warfare disrupted lives, trade continued, further helping the exchange of products and ideas.

### **Hittites and the Secret of Ironworking**

The Hittites pushed out of Asia Minor into Mesopotamia in about 1400 B.C. They had learned to extract iron from ore—an important new technology. Tools and weapons made with iron were harder and had sharper edges than those made out of bronze or copper. Because iron was plentiful, the Hittites were able to arm more people at less expense.

The Hittites tried to keep this valuable technology secret. But as their empire collapsed around

1200 B.C., Hittite ironsmiths migrated to serve customers elsewhere.

Migration, trade, and conquest slowly spread ironworking technology across Mesopotamia. In time, the use of iron weapons and tools was carried even farther across Asia, Africa, and Europe, ushering in the Iron Age.



**Analyze Maps** The Assyrian empire controlled much of the land in the ancient Middle East. What earlier empires did the Assyrians conquer in order to build their large empire?

## **Assyrian Warriors Build a Warrior Empire**

Among the many peoples who invaded the Fertile Crescent were the Assyrians. They were hardy nomads who had settled on the upper Tigris as early as 2000 B.C. There, they built a city-state named after their chief god, Assur, and acquired iron technology. Beginning about 1100 B.C., the Assyrians began expanding their empire across Mesopotamia. For 500 years, they spread terror among the peoples they conquered, earning a reputation as one of the most warlike people in history.

To frighten their enemies and ensure their power, Assyrian rulers boasted of their brutal treatment of the peoples they conquered. One told of capturing Babylon. He proclaimed, “The city and its houses, from top to bottom, I destroyed and burned with fire.” The Assyrians collected tribute, or payments from conquered people, amassing great riches in this way.

## **Assyrian Society**

Despite their fierce reputation, Assyrian rulers encouraged a well-ordered society. Riches from trade, tribute, and loot from war paid for splendid palaces in the well-planned cities. Assyrians were also the first rulers to develop extensive laws regulating life within the royal household. Under these rules, women of the palace were confined to secluded quarters and had to be veiled when they appeared in public.

At Nineveh (NIN uh vuh), King Assurbanipal (ahs ur BAH nee pahl) founded one of the world's first libraries. There, he kept cuneiform tablets that he ordered scribes to collect from all over the Fertile Crescent. Those tablets have provided modern scholars with a wealth of information about the ancient Middle East. The Assyrians did more than simply amass information from other people; they are often credited with developing glassmaking technology and making the first lock and key device.

## **The New Babylonian Empire**

In 612 B.C., shortly after Assurbanipal's death, neighboring peoples joined forces to crush the once-dreaded Assyrian armies. Before long, an aggressive and ruthless king, Nebuchadnezzar (neb yuh kud NEZ ur), revived the power of Babylon. His new Babylonian empire stretched from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea.

Nebuchadnezzar oversaw the rebuilding of the canals, temples, walls, and palaces of Babylon. Near his main palace, Nebuchadnezzar is said to have built the famous Hanging Gardens—known as one of the “seven wonders of the ancient world.” Although no remains have yet been found, the gardens were probably made by planting trees and flowering plants on the steps of a huge ziggurat. According to legend, Nebuchadnezzar had the gardens built to please his wife, who was homesick for the hills where she had grown up.

Nebuchadnezzar turned Babylon into a magnificent capital city. Centuries later, writers in the ancient world still spoke of it with awe and wonder. Surrounding the city was a moat and an 85-

foot thick wall. Streams of people passed through nine great gateways dedicated to different gods. The famous Ishtar Gate, uncovered by modern archaeologists, was made of bright blue glazed bricks and decorated with lions symbolizing the goddess Ishtar, mythical dragons symbolizing the god Marduk, and bulls symbolizing the god Hadad. In the center of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar enlarged and beautified ziggurats to the gods and restored the temple honoring Marduk, the city's chief god.

## **Babylonian Astronomy**

Under Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians pushed the frontiers of learning into new areas. Priest-astrologers were especially eager to understand the stars and planets, which they believed had a great influence on all events on Earth. Their observations of the heavens contributed to the growing knowledge of astronomy.

**Identify** Name a significant contribution made by the Hittites, Assyrians, and Babylonians after each group's conquest in the Middle East.

