Mesopotamia, Greek for “land between the rivers” describes the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Tributaries originating in the mountains feed the “land between the rivers.” Rain fed agriculture in the northwest part of Mesopotamia is gradually replaced by irrigation to support more intensive farming further downstream.

The two rivers and their drainage basins are almost completely within the region that has come to be known as the Fertile Crescent, an area that supported early agriculture because of the fertile river valley soils and adequate precipitation and river flow.

The rivers now meet at Basra and flow into the Persian Gulf via the Shatt al Arab waterway. In ancient times, each river had a separate mouth at the Persian Gulf, and the shore line was further north.

Definitions
An arid area or desert receives less than 10 inches of rain a year.
A semi-arid area generally receives between 10 and 20 inches of rain per year.
Framed by deserts, the northward-flowing Nile River is fed by two major tributaries, the Blue Nile and the White Nile that meet at the city of Khartoum.

The **Blue Nile** contributes about two-thirds of the Nile’s volume and flows through narrow gorges on its way to Khartoum. The upper part of the river is characterized by rapids, waterfalls, and water that is anything but blue. The combination of mountain rain and snowmelt from the Ethiopian Highlands in the summer months resulted in erosion and transported soil to the Nile’s downriver floodplain.

The **White Nile** originates south of the equator at Lake Victoria. Water flow and associated silt load from its tributaries are larger than that of the Blue Nile, but much of the silt is lost in small lakes or is spread over floodplains and lowland swamps.

Sedentary agriculture along the Nile was supported by predictable seasonal flooding that deposited fertile soil for agriculture. The Egyptians are credited as being one of the first groups of people to practice agriculture on a large scale. This was possible because of the ingenuity of the Egyptians as they developed basin irrigation. Their farming practices allowed them to grow staple food crops such as wheat and barley, and “industrial” crops such as flax and papyrus.

**The Nile Today**

The completion of the Aswan High dam in 1970 changed the historic influence of the Nile River in many ways. Most significant in those changes was the control of flooding and the almost total elimination of the soil renewing qualities of sediment deposition on its floodplain. The soil-renewing silt is now trapped behind the dam. Nile Delta formation has also been slowed.

**Definitions**

An arid area or desert receives less than 10 inches of rain a year. A semi-arid area generally receives between 10 and 20 inches of rain per year.
With its source in the glaciers of the Himalaya and Karakoram mountain ranges, the Indus River flows 1,980 miles to the Arabian Sea. River flow is the highest during the summer months as the snow melts and the summer monsoon arrives. About 70% of the area's precipitation falls between July and September.

Sediment transported by the Indus has accumulated in an off-shore undersea fan, one of the largest sediment bodies on Earth. In the aerial image to the right, many tidal creeks penetrate the Indus' delta plain along the Arabian Sea.

Since ancient times irrigation has supported agriculture during the drier months. The water of the Indus and the sediment it transports and deposits have supported agriculture for over 4,000 years in an area where water is generally scarce.

Definitions
An arid or desert area receives less than 10 inches of rain a year.
A semi-arid area receives between 10 and 20 inches of rain a year.
The Huang He (Yellow River in translation) is the second-longest river in China and the sixth-longest in the world, with an estimated length of 3,395 miles. The Huang He’s length has changed over the years because the delta on the Bohai Sea has wandered up and down several hundred miles of coastline over the past two thousand years.

At various points in time, the accumulation of silt has raised the water level above surrounding land. “China’s Sorrow,” “Yellow Fear”, and “Scourge of the Sons of Han” all refer to the many floods that have plagued the people along the lower reaches of the Huang He. A high silt load from the Loess Plateau, a low gradient across the plain, and excessive precipitation have all contributed to disastrous flooding in the past and present.

Definitions
An arid area or desert receives less than 10 inches of rain a year.
A semi-arid area generally receives between 10 and 20 inches of rain per year.
Loess is a fine silt material carried by wind, probably originating from the Gobi Desert.