**Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia**

Imagine a life directly defined by roughly a third of a year of rain and flooding. The people of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt both lived that life: their economies, power, and simple survival depended on the seasons of the rivers that ran through each empire. Egyptian farmers divided their year into three seasons, based on the cycles of the Nile River:

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| Seasons of the Rivers | |
| **Akhet**  **(June-Sept.)** | The Flooding Season. No farming was done at this time, as all the fields were flooded. Instead, many farmers worked for the pharaoh (king), building pyramids or temples. Some of the time was spent mending their tools and looking after animals. |
| **Peret**  **(Oct.-Feb.)** | The Growing Season. In October the floodwaters receded, leaving behind a layer of rich, black soil. This fertile soil was then ploughed and seeded. |
| **Shemu**  **(March-May)** | The Harvesting Season. The fully grown crops had to be cut down (harvested) and removed before the Nile flooded again. It was also the time to repair the canals ready for the next flood. |

The Fertile Crescent

Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia made up parts of the area known as the Fertile Crescent, which experienced rain every year for about 100 days, beginning in the late spring or early summer. For ancient Egypt, this caused the Nile River to flood, which saturated (flooded) the normally arid (dry) land around it with water and nutrient‐rich, river‐born soil called silt. Ancient Egyptians are now revered as the masters of desert agriculture, for their irrigation technology allowed them to cultivate crops during the dry months, from a fall‐season sowing to springtime harvest. Their farming skills started with simply monitoring weather patterns and estimating the rise and fall of the Nile’s water levels, practices by which the nation’s people were able to plan their planting and harvest seasons accordingly.

Farming and Trade in Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egyptians grew a variety of crops, and they were able to build cities (urbanized areas) around the abundance. They traded grains like corn (and in surplus years, could store excess in granaries as well), made linen from flax, and sustained themselves on garden crops grown in smaller plots, often part of personal households. Cities thrived along the Nile, in large part because of the proximity (closeness) to the obvious transportation, which facilitated trade. As the fruits of farm labor were traded, city merchants grew wealthier, and the metropolis (city) thrived.

Mesopotamia—The Land Between Rivers

Framed by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, Mesopotamia - or the "land between rivers" - occupied what is now Iraq. The area experienced the same repeated flooding periods as ancient Egypt, and thus had to learn to adapt. The difference is, this “land between rivers” had the flooding of not just one waterway but an entire flowing border to control. However, like ancient Egypt, its location made it an ideal site for irrigation practices: as the people of the Nile did, Mesopotamians redirected water into typically drier regions with canals. The land was routinely fertilized by rich silt washed up by the rivers; Mesopotamia supported the harvest of barley, onions, grapes, apples, and turnips. Cattle and sheep grazed on fertile grassland, and fishermen made a living selling and trading their catch.

Success on the Water

Like the famous cities of Thebes, Meroe, and Napata, Mesopotamian cities such as Ur and Babylon sat near the rivers, again seeing success on the water because of the agricultural (farming) and trade possibilities making trade possible and merchants rich. In each city, and in each kingdom, success and power were made possible by both agricultural advancements (such as iron tools and irrigation) and the means to trade and sell a harvest (the rivers). Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia were both dependent on a cycle: the rivers provided the water needed to grow crops such as wheat and corn, technology made irrigation, plowing, and harvest possible, and trade generated income to the cities along the river.

The Downfall of Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia

The downfall of these cities was also woven with the success and failure of the agriculture of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. Generations of tough farming and overgrazing drained land of nutrients, and as land changed from oasis to desert, cities lost their power.  In other words, there was nothing left to grow, and nothing left to trade. In spite of their huge advances in agricultural technology, these ancient cultures could not combat dust for long, and when farms dried out, so too did the power and success of ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian cities.