Teachers notes for the Premium TimeMaps Unit

Ancient Middle East II: Age of Empires

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Introduction

This Premium TimeMaps unit The Ancient Middle East, II: 1275 to 500 BCE, is a sequence of maps showing the history of the most important region of the ancient world.

The unit’s aim is to quickly and clearly show the main episodes in that history, as well as the key developments in these civilizations.

For teachers of AP World History, the unit - including the maps and these accompanying teacher notes - provides comprehensive coverage of all the thinking skills, theme and key concepts relevant to this Period 1 topic.

How to use this unit

The unit can be used in two ways:

1. Whole-class presentation

and/or

2. Student-based enquiry work

Teachers may wish to use only one of these approaches. Alternatively they could use both, perhaps using (1) as a quick introduction, and then (2) for students to carry out a more in-depth enquiry using the student-based questions; or (if you feel your students can manage this) starting them off with (2), to allow them to find out for themselves what happened at this period, before using (1) as a reinforcement exercise.

How this unit fits in with other Premium TimeMaps units

The main unit relevant to the period 3500 to 600 BCE is Ancient Civilizations. This unit is the first of two to take a closer look at the most significant of all the regions in the Ancient World. The second one, The Ancient Middle East II, 1275 to 500 BCE, takes the story forward to the rise of the Persian Empire.

Many teachers will wish to move quickly on to Period 2, but for those who don't, the Middle East in these millennia offers by far the most fruitful study for period of early civilization. A quick run through of these two Middle Eastern units should be a rewarding exercise.

Section 1: Whole-class presentation notes
Using a projector/whiteboard system, you can show the map sequence to your class, talking through each map.

To help you do this, we have prepared accompanying Presentation Notes, which you can use as a script or an aide-memoire.

This activity could be used as a stand-alone exercise; or as an introduction to this period of world history; or as a wrap up/reinforcement exercise.

For each map, these notes mostly follow the same formula:

1. Date and introduction
   The date to which the map refers, followed by a small introductory paragraph which seeks to encapsulate in a sentence or two what's going on in the map. These are in **bold**.

2. Bullet points
   One or more bullet points, covering different points of interest in the map, or in the period it covers.

3. Additional notes
   These give more in-depth support to the bullet points.

   Much of the information they contain may be superfluous to your needs, especially if you are covering a topic quickly. However, we have included it so that it is there for you if you want it. We suggest that, prior to using the Presentation with your class, you go through these additional notes and highlight any you wish to use.

   Some key words or phrases are in **bold**; these are often referencing points covered in the AP World History document, but they are also there to help you see at a glance the key points in a paragraph.

4. Questions
   The notes for several of the maps end with one or more suggested questions. These are in *italics*. They are designed to be tackled as part of the Presentation, and as a class activity. They will help to break the Presentation up, stop the students from drifting off to sleep, give them the opportunity to engage with the subject and give your voice a rest.

   They are aimed either at reinforcing points made in the Presentation, or at provoking discussion; they do not necessarily have a “correct” answer.

   Some (though not all) of the questions will work just as well if used as reinforcement exercises at the end of the Presentation.

   The Presentation commentary notes are followed by a short quiz, as a quick way of refe

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**Presentation Notes**
1275 BCE: This period marks the high point of Bronze Age civilization in the Middle East.

- Egypt and the Hittite Empire are the two great powers of the region (1).
- In Mesopotamia, Assyria and Babylon are the leading kingdoms (2).
- To the north, the kingdom of Urartu has emerged in the Armenian highlands (3).
- Beyond the frontiers of these organized states, Indo-European pastoralists have been moving southward from the steppes for centuries (4).

Additional notes:

1. The Hittites and Egyptians
Over the past couple of centuries the warlike Hittite empire has emerged in Asia Minor, and Egypt has been experiencing the most glorious period of its history under the able and aggressive pharaohs of the New Kingdom.

These two great powers compete to dominate the small states of Syria and Canaan. Far to the south, New Kingdom Egypt has brought much of Nubia under its rule.

2. Mesopotamia
In north-west Mesopotamia, Assyria is a powerful kingdom. In southern Mesopotamia, Babylonia is under the rule of the Kassites, a foreign group of Indo-European origin under whom Babylonia is prosperous and stable.

The ancient kingdom of Elam, in what is today south-west Iran, is also a strong and wealthy kingdom.

3. Urartu
At this stage Urartu is apparently more a confederation of warlike tribes than a unified kingdom. It poses a continual threat to the Assyrians and Hittites.

4. The Indo-Europeans
Beyond the frontiers of the organized states of the Middle East, Indo-European pastoralists have been moving southward from the steppes for centuries. The Hittites of Asia Minor and the Kassites of Babylonia are descended from such groups, and Indo-European tribes occupy northern Iran. Further afield, other Indo-European peoples have occupied much of Europe and northern India.

One group, ancestors of the Celts and the Germans, are at this time expanding outwards from their homeland in central Europe. This is causing other populations to be on the move.

These will soon spill over into the Middle East with disastrous effect. These migrants becoming known to history as the “People of the Sea”.

950 BCE: The centuries between the late 13th and the late 11th were ones of turbulence of the Middle East - but also ones when foundations for the future were laid.
In the late 13th century BCE, population movements in Europe caused groups - the “People of the Sea” - to take to their boats and raid the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean. They destroyed the Hittite Empire (1).

The coasts of Syria were ravaged by the Sea Peoples. Ancient cities vanished or new cities arose. The great Phoenician trading cities of Tyre and Sidon are now at their peak (2).

Further south, a group of the Sea People settled in five small kingdoms on the coast of Canaan. These were the Philistines (3).

Inland, the small kingdoms of Syria and Canaan fell victim to invaders from further east. Aramaean tribes from the desert occupied the Syrian interior, and to their south the Canaanites gradually succumbed to a people new to history, the Israelites. The Israelites bring with them their monotheistic religion (4).

Egypt was also attacked by the Sea Peoples, and was severely weakened in the process. The country later divided into several separate kingdoms (5).

In northern Mesopotamia, the Assyrians have come under heavy attack from the Aramaeans, To the southeast, Babylonia has fallen into complete chaos, and Elam has been gravely weakened (6).

A new people appear in history as a separate group around now - the Arabs. This development may be linked to the domestication of the camel (7).

These troubled centuries have been ones in which the Bronze Age has come to an end in the Middle East, and the Iron Age has begun. The spread of cheap, abundant iron weapons and farming tools will have enormous consequences for later world history (8).

Additional notes:

1. People of the Sea
The “People of the Sea” originated in places such as Italy, Sicily and the Aegean. They have probably been impelled by population movements deep in Europe to take to migrate across the eastern Mediterranean. As they travel they attack ancient cities and leave devastation in their wake.

Their impact was devastating. By the end of the century the Hittite empire had been destroyed. Several Indo-European groups such as the Lydians and Phrygians crossed over from Europe into western Asia Minor, taking advantage of the vacuum left by the Hittites. Hittite traditions were maintained on a smaller scale by several small kingdoms whom modern scholars label “Neo-Hittite”.

2. The Phoenicians
The Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon have become wealthy by pioneering new trade routes across the Mediterranean and beyond. They are a branch of the Canaanites - and their traders will spread literacy to western peoples, such as the Greeks and Etruscans, based on their version of the Canaanite alphabet, which was developed some centuries before.

3. The Philistines
As these are the people whom the Greeks will later encounter in the region, the land of Canaan would come to be called “Palestine” after them.

4. Aramaeans and Israelites
The Aramaeans are a pastoral people who traditionally have herded their flocks in the arid borderlands between Syria and Mesopotamia. They establish a number of small kingdoms in eastern Syria and western Mesopotamia.

The Israelites moved into Canaan from the early 13th century onwards, at first divided into different tribes. They worship the One God, Yahweh. They have a back-story which tells of their origins as desert nomads who had settled in Egypt, and later migrated into the Sinai Desert and thence to Canaan, guided by Yahweh.

Sometime in the 11th century they formed themselves into a kingdom, and prospered under their famous kings, David and his son Solomon. They are from the capital, Jerusalem. This city is not only the political centre of the Israelites, but their spiritual centre too. Here Solomon has built a temple to Yahweh, which is the focus of Israel’s monotheistic religion.

5. Egypt
Modern scholars call these centuries of weakness and division the “Third Intermediate Period” of ancient Egypt (1075-664 BCE). The first two were between the Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom, and between the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom.

6. Mesopotamia
The weakening of Assyria has allowed the Aramaean tribes to move on into eastern Mesopotamia, Here, they join with the Kuldu (Chaldeans), from the south, in harassing the ancient cities of southern Mesopotamia. Babylon, now ruled by a native line of kings, loses control of all territory except in near the city itself.

The Chaldeans occupy the famous city of Ur - hence it is known in the Bible as “Ur of the Chaldees”.

In the 12th century Elam had experienced a brief period of expansion, but then, like Babylonia, fell into anarchy. Its kings have lost control of much of the east of their ancient kingdom.

7. Arabs
The domestication of the camel makes life in the deep desert far more practicable. Some clans are now pioneering a new form of desert lifestyle which would endure right up to the present day, that of the Bedouin.

8. A New Age
Bronze is far too expensive to be used extensively in farming. Effectively, farmers (i.e. the great majority of the population) have lived in the Stone Age up to now, using implements made of wood, stone and bone.

Iron implements are much more efficient, and cheap enough for ordinary farmers to buy and use. This makes clearing land for fields, and farming it, much more productive. This in turn will make urban civilization possible in places (for example, away from river valleys) where it has not been able to flourish before.

Bronze is also too costly to arm ordinary soldiers with. Fighting has been the preserve of elite warriors. But iron weaponry makes mass armies possible. The scale of warfare will soon start to rise.

Possible discussion:
It has been suggested that less powerful peoples, such as the Phoenicians and the Israelites, were only able to come to the fore because the great powers of the region were going through a period of weakness. Does this sound like a good hypothesis to you?

824 BCE: The Assyrians are a growing power in the Middle East.
• The Assyrians have driven out the Aramaeans and expanded their territory over northern Mesopotamia and Syria (1).

• Aramaic, the language of the Aramaeans, is coming into common use. Its spread is aided by the use of its alphabetic script, adopted from the Canaanites of southern Syria (2).

• By this time the Israelite kingdom has split into two: the northern kingdom of Israel, and the southern kingdom of Judah (3).

• The break-up of Egypt as a single kingdom has allowed the Nubians to form their own state, the Kingdom of Kush (4).

• The spreading practice of horse-riding, which has been pioneered by pastoralist groups on the steppes, has allowed the true nomadic lifestyle of the horse nomads to appear (5).

Additional notes:

1. The Assyrians
The Assyrian kings have overhauled their armies, with mass infantry armed with inexpensive iron weaponry, plus mass formations of horse-riding cavalry (see below, note 5). This has helped them repulse the Aramaean invaders.

The impact of the Assyrian armies is felt over a much wider area than the territory they directly control, as year by year the Assyrian kings lead huge raids well beyond the borders of their kingdom. A policy of ruthless terrorization of any state or city which resists them means that many small kingdoms meekly capitulate to Assyrian demands for tribute.

2. The Alphabet
Although victorious over the Aramaean tribes, the Assyrians have adopted many of their ways. For example, the Assyrian language, a form of the ancient Mesopotamian language Akkadian, is falling out of everyday use and is being replaced by Aramaic, the language of the Aramaeans.

The spread of Aramaic is aided by the use of its alphabetic script, adopted from the Canaanites. In comparison with the cuneiform scripts of ancient Mesopotamia, this script is easy and quick to learn. This makes it a natural medium of communication for international trade. This is testified by the fact that the Aramaic alphabet would become the basis for the Sanskrit script in India.

Two other alphabets derive from the Canaanite script. One is the Phoenician alphabet, which at this time is being spread around the Mediterranean by Phoenician traders and sailors, and will become ancestral to Greek, Etruscan, Latin and all later European scripts. The other is the Israelite, or Hebrew, script. This is used in texts which are just beginning to be written, and which will later form the Jewish scriptures (the Old Testament of the Christian Bible).

3. Israel and Judah
The northern kingdom, Israel, is ruled from the city of Samaria, and experiences repeated bouts of political instability which bring a succession of short-lived dynasties to power.

The southern kingdom is ruled from Jerusalem, and remains under a line of kings descended from king David. This royal family has close ties with the priesthood of the temple to Yahweh in Jerusalem. Probably as a result of this, Israel's monotheistic religion is a great deal more robust in Judah than in its northern brother, Israel.

4. Egypt and Nubia
The kingdom of Kush is centred on the southern city of Napata, once the residence of the Egyptian viceroy of the south. Kush’s culture is thoroughly Egyptianized, and at this period the kingdom regards itself as one amongst several competing Egyptian states.

5. Horse-riding
The Indo-European pastoralists of the steppes have been breeding larger and larger horses for centuries, but it seems to be only in the late second or early first millennium BCE that the breakthrough to being able to ride these animals occurs.

Soon after this, horse-borne nomads are striking terror into the settled peoples of the Middle East. A group of Indo-European steppe nomads are coming down from the region north of the Black Sea. These would in time become known to history as the Scythians and Cimmerians.

Located as they are in the northern part of the region, the kingdoms of Urartu and Assyria take the brunt of their attack. This leads them to adopt horse-riding warfare for themselves. The Assyrian army is the first to have a major cavalry arm, relegating the less manoeuvrable chariots to a secondary position on the battlefield (and eventually off it altogether).

**Suggested exercise:**

Draw a simple “family tree” of alphabets, from the information given here.

**Suggested question:**

What factors are spreading the use of the alphabet?

The most important factor, underlying the others, is its ease of use compared with the cuneiform scripts which precede it.

Other factors are:

- **Trade**: the maritime trade to the west, in the Mediterranean, dominated by the Phoenicians, and the overland trade across Mesopotamia and to the east.
- **Assyrian power**: the Assyrians have adopted the Aramaic language and alphabet for everyday use, and their growing power will have gone hand in hand with the spread of the alphabet.
722 BCE: Assyria is now by far the dominant power in the Middle East.

- It has expanded its empire to take in most of Mesopotamia, all of Syria, some of Asia Minor (1).

- To secure their power, the Assyrians deport conquered peoples and scatter them to different parts of their empire. The most notable example of this is the northern Israelite kingdom, in 722 BCE (2).

- The Iranian peoples have spread throughout what is present-day Iran. Two of their tribes are of particular note at this time: the Medes and the Persians (3).

- The Kingdom of Kush has united the whole of Egypt under its rule (4).

Additional notes:

1. The Assyrian empire
The Assyrians have continued to refine their imperial techniques. They have perfected the finest military supply system so far seen in history. This includes the building of a network of roads. Along these, troops can march quickly, supplies can move efficiently, and couriers can speed messages from Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, to any part of the empire (and vice versa).

The Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser (744-727 BCE) annexed Babylonia, partly to save it from the chaos into which it had fallen. He proclaimed himself king of Babylon, and from his time until the end of the Assyrian empire the throne of Babylon is usually held by a member of the Assyrian royal family.

Many subject peoples, such as the Phoenicians, continue to be ruled by their own kings but as vassals under the supervision of powerful Assyrian governors. These ensure that they remain obedient and continue paying tribute. Permanent military garrisons are stationed in different locations around the empire to reinforce the governors’ authority.

2. A melting pot
In place of the deported people, colonists from elsewhere would be brought in - in the Israelite case, most seem to have come from Mesopotamia.

This policy of deportation has led to the mixing up and mingling of many peoples in the Middle East, which has become a melting pot in which ancient cultures have lost their identities and a new international Aramaic-speaking culture is spreading across the region.

4. The Medes and the Persians
The Medes are the most powerful group of Iranians; they have settled in western-central Iran. Their close relatives, the Persians, are settling in the highlands of south-west Iran, in lands once ruled by the kings of Elam.

5. Kings from Kush
Kush has become a powerful kingdom, not only ruling the whole of Egypt but also extending its control a long way southward. In due course this will alter the character of its civilization.

Possible question
Look at the discussion point for the map for 950 BCE. Does what has happened to the Phoenicians and northern Israelite kingdom back up this suggestion? The answer is, that with the emergence of a new regional super-power, the room for manoeuvre of the smaller powers has been closed down.
664 BCE: The Assyrian empire is now at its height, and has conquered Egypt.

- For the first time in their long history, the Egyptians experience being just another province within a large empire (1).

- To secure their position in Egypt, the Assyrians bring the southern Israelite kingdom of Judah into vassalage (2).

- The conquest of Egypt has brought the Assyrian empire to its largest extent. However, new threats are emerging, both outside the empire and within (3).

Additional notes:

1. The Assyrians and Egypt
Having conquered the whole of Egypt, the Kings of Kush then unwisely attack the Assyrian empire. The Assyrian king Earshaddon responds by invading Egypt and driving the Kushite kings back into their native Nubia.

The Assyrians control Egypt through puppet local princes who they set up in different parts of the country.

2. The kingdom of Israel
After the destruction of the northern Israelite kingdom, in 722, the Assyrians made at least one serious attempt to conquer the southern Israelite kingdom, Judah. According to both Jewish and Assyrian sources, this was not a success. Nevertheless, the kings of Judah have effectively become vassals of the Assyrians. Their territory is strategically vital for Assyria’s position in Egypt, as the overland routes between Assyria and Egypt pass through Judah.

However, the old royal line of David has been allowed to keep its throne.

3. Storm clouds are gathering
Dangers are growing for the Assyrians. Outside its borders, the kings of the Medes have established a powerful confederation in Iran, and in Asia Minor, the Lydians have founded a wealthy kingdom. Some time around now their kings start issuing the first metal coinage in world history.

The Medes and Lydians, together with Urartu, now form a group of potentially hostile kingdoms around the Assyrian empire. By this date, too, Scythian and Cimmerian nomads have taken to raiding deep into the northern regions of the Middle East, and are a growing source of anxiety for the Assyrian monarchs.

Within the empire itself, things are not much better. The Assyrian position is weakened by major revolts, especially in Babylonia and Egypt (which the Assyrians never really pacify fully).
611 BCE: The Assyrian empire is no more: its enemies have all fallen on it and destroyed it.

- The Medes, Babylonians, Egyptians, Scythians and Cimmerians all played a part in tearing the Assyrian empire to bits (1).

- Egypt has taken advantage of these events to regain its independence (2).

**Additional Notes**

1. The Fall of Assyria
Mede armies, Scythian and Cimmerian raiders, Babylonian rebels and Egyptian insurgents have joined together to attack the Assyrians on all fronts. The Assyrian forces have been overwhelmed and their empire destroyed. The Assyrian homeland has been devastated and the great Assyrian cities of Nineveh and Assur laid waste.

Most of its territory has been taken over by the Babylonians. The Lydians, Egyptians and Medes - who have expanded their territory to include much of present-day Iran - remain strong kingdoms on the Babylonians’ flanks.

Most of the less powerful peoples of the region, for centuries under Assyrian domination, see little change in their circumstances - they have merely swapped one imperial master for another.

2. Egypt
Egypt is now under a dynasty which had been first established by the Assyrians as puppet rulers of a part of northern Egypt. When the opportunity arose, they turned on their masters and, under their leadership, the Egyptians drove the Assyrians out of their country.

They have established a line of pharaohs who rule an Egypt more powerful than at any time since the end of the New Kingdom, half a millennium before.

**Suggested question:**
The Assyrian empire has collapsed in the face of multiple invasions and revolts. What underlying reasons for the fall of this great empire does this suggest?

*It seems that the Assyrians relied too much on their fine military machine, and the fear that this inspired. They failed to build widespread support for their rule. It was probably inevitable, therefore, that subject peoples would combine with external invaders to bring Assyrian power down.*

*Later empires, such as the Persians, and, more so, the Romans, would not be so careless.*
585 BCE: The Babylonian empire, under its famous king Nebuchadnezzar, is now the wealthiest and most powerful state in the Middle East.

- Under Nebuchadnezzar, the ancient city of Babylon reaches the peak of its glory (1).
- Nebuchadnezzar’s main action, so far as later history is concerned, is his destruction of the kingdom of Judah in 587 BCE (2).
- The Medes have expanded their borders enormously, and have annexed the ancient kingdom of Urartu (3).
- Egypt is, for the first time in centuries, one of the great powers of the Middle East (4).

Additional notes:

1. Babylon, the imperial city
Nebuchadnezzar adorns his capital with magnificent temples, vast palaces and the fabled Hanging Gardens of Babylon (though its whereabouts have yet to be discovered by modern scholars).

2. The destruction of Jerusalem
Nebuchadnezzar deported Judah’s priestly and political class to his capital, Babylon. Here, unlike all the other peoples who had been deported by the Babylonians, and before them the Assyrians, they retained their religious beliefs and practices.

It was in exile that they set about codifying their religion, and start the process of developing a largely oral belief-system into the sophisticated teachings embodied in the Jewish scriptures (the Christian Old Testament).

3. The Medes
The Medes conquered north into Armenia and then attacked the kingdom of Lydia Here they were held to a draw in an inconclusive war. This ended with an agreement on a border between the two states in eastern Asia Minor.

4. Egypt and Kush
Egypt has attempted to bring Nubia under its control. In this it has failed, but Egyptian forces have sacked the Nubian capital, Napata. The Nubians have therefore move their capital to Meroe, further upstream along the Nile. Napata will remain the spiritual centre for Nubians for some time to come, with their kings and queens being buried there, but the “Egyptian” traditions it represents will get steadily weaker as time goes by. The rulers and their courtiers in Meroe will gradually become increasingly “Africanized” in their culture.

Suggested question:
If you were an alien scout investigating the Middle East at this time, would you be prepared to gamble on the Babylonian empire enduring for a long time?

Probably not. The Babylonians have picked up their strain of imperialism from the Assyrians (as the fate of the kingdom of Judah suggests), and so are unlikely to be building up widespread support for their rule.

Also, unlike the Assyrians before them until towards the end of their period of power, they share the region with other powerful and ambitious states, Media, Lydia and Egypt, and any one of these could turn into a real threat.
545 BCE: Cyrus, the king of the Persians, has gained control of the Mede's empire.

- Cyrus was a vassal of the Mede “King of Kings” Astyages, ruling the Persians, an Iranian tribe based in southwest Iran. He rose in rebellion against Astyages in c. 560 BCE, and within a few years Cyrus had established himself as ruler of the Median empire.

- He then quickly overran the kingdom of Lydia, along with the Greek city-states of western Asia Minor over which it had gained control.

- Cyrus has thus established the Persian empire. This is also known to modern scholars as the Achaemenid empire, after the dynasty to which Cyrus belonged.

- Egypt, meanwhile, has enjoyed some successes against the Babylonian empire, and has taken the island of Cyprus from them. They will not be so fortunate against the Persians.
500 BCE: The Persian empire has grown into the largest empire the ancient world would ever see.

- Cyrus and his successors have conquered the entire Babylonian empire, Egypt, far into central Asia, and even into western India (1).
- The current ruler, Darius the Great, has set in motion the wars against the Greek city states (2).
- Darius is also establishing the empire on sound administrative foundations (3).
- The Persian monarchs have taken steps to allow those Jews who had been exiled to Babylon to return to their homeland (4).

Additional notes:

1. The expansion of the Persian empire
After conquering all of Asia Minor, Cyrus turned on the Babylonian empire. In a swift campaign he completed the conquest of this large state. He also fought several campaigns against the nomadic tribes of central Asia, extending Persian control over a huge territory. However, it was whilst on campaign here that he was killed (530 BCE).

Cyrus has gone down in history as one of the great conquerers of all time.

His son Cambyses (reigned 530-522 BCE) conquered Egypt, before dying, probably as the result of an accident.

By the time of Cambyses' death a major rebellion had broken out in central Iran. Since this was located in the heartland of the former Mede empire, it was very possibly the result of Median nobles wishing to reassert their power against the Persian upstarts.

The revolt was put down quickly by a relative of Cambyses, Darius, who would go down in history as Darius the Great (reigned 522-486 BCE).

Darius has further expanded the borders of the empire, mostly in central Asia and into India. By the end of his reign, the Persians ruled by far the largest empire that the world had yet seen (and was to see for many centuries).

2. War with the Greeks
The Greek city-states of Asia Minor had been conquered by the Lydians in c. 550 BCE. When Cyrus defeated the last king of Lydia, Croesus, and annexed his kingdom, he also took over control of these Greek city-states.

These Greeks would revolt against the Persians in 499 BCE, and this would be the beginning of the wars between the Greeks and the Persians. In these, the Greek city-states, under the leadership of Athens and Sparta, would successfully fight off the Persian attempt to conquer them.

3. Darius’ reforms
Darius organized this empire as a group of provinces (satrapies) under powerful governors (satraps) appointed directly by the Persian king (or “king of kings”, as he was called).

He also developed the road system the Persians had inherited from the Assyrians and Babylonians to cover the enlarged empire; and he organized the Persian forces into a centrally-controlled army (and navy - crewed largely by Phoenician sailors).
Darius took an interest in the prosperity of the empire, and took steps to foster trade. One of his projects would be the digging of a canal between the Red Sea and the River Nile - an early version of the Suez Canal. Sadly it would fall into disuse when Egypt revolted, about a hundred years after it was built.

4. The Jewish return from exile
The Persians ruled their vast domains with a lighter touch than the Assyrians and Babylonians had done. Cyrus the Great set the tone by respecting the traditions and cultures of the conquered peoples, and granting them a wide degree of local self-rule.

The most famous instance of his lenient policy towards his non-Persian subjects was in the case of the Jews. Cyrus ordered their homeland, and above all, Jerusalem, to be restored to them. Many returned there after 70 years of exile in Babylon.

This policy was continued by Cyrus' successors, especially Darius the Great. He allowed the former exiles to rebuild the walls (in ancient times, walls were the sign of a true city, and in any case were needed to guard against resentful neighbours) and the temple to Yahweh (the heart of the Jewish faith).

Suggested question:

First the Assyrian, then the Babylonian, and now the Persian - yet another empire. What indications are there that this one might be different?

The Persian generous treatment of the Jewish exiles in Babylon was unprecedented, and suggests that Cyrus and Darius realised the benefits of treating their conquered subjects with respect. (This idea is supported by the “Cyrus Cylinder”, a propaganda text which Cyrus had inscribed on a cylinder which went in a Babylonian temple. In it, he declares that he has set about improving the lives of the people of Babylon by repatriating exiles, and restoring temples and other public works which had fallen into disrepair. Other kings of Babylon had made similar declarations, but the fact that Cyrus, as a foreign conqueror, said these things, may be significant.)
Section 2: Student-based enquiry work

Some (though not all) of the questions in the Presentation notes will work just as well if used as a reinforcement exercise at the end of the Presentation, or as student-based tasks. The task below is more substantial.

The students can tackle the task either as individuals or in small groups. They will obviously need to have access to this Premium TimeMap unit.

They can present their answers in essay form or as presentations.

The questions are designed to stimulate enquiry, thought and discussion. We have offered suggested points that students might cover in their answers. These are given in italics just below the questions.

For teachers of AP World History, between them these questions address two of the five thinking skills and three of the four themes.

Activities:

**Question 1.**
Account for the rise and fall of the Assyrian empire.

Students will get all the information they need from the maps and texts. They answers should include:

**Rise of Assyria:**
- The Iron Age revolution in warfare: iron weaponry, mass armies, cavalry (horse-riding)
- A policy of spreading fear amongst potential enemies
- The relocation of conquered peoples - reducing potential centres of opposition
- The weakness of other powers - Babylonia in chaos, Egypt divided, the small states of Israel and Syria unable to compete

**Fall of Assyria:**
- The emergence of powerful external enemies, states such as Urartu, Media, Lydia, and “barbarian” raiders such as the Scythian and Cimmerian nomads
- Imperial policies that have left subject peoples at best apathetic, at worst rebellious (Babylonians, Egyptians).

**Question 2.**
Describe the impact of the Assyrian empire on Middle Eastern society and culture.

- Destruction of many smaller kingdoms and local cultures
- Mingling of peoples
- Spread of the Aramaic language and alphabet
- Extra points for students who suggest that the Assyrian empire paved the way for the empires which followed it. Taken together, the points made in the first three bullets resulted in the creation of a unified cultural zone, over which large unified states would be able to assert control. It is noteworthy that, following the Assyrians, the Middle East was ruled by successive empires up until .... well, more or less until modern times (Babylonian, Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, Parthian, Sasanian, Umayyad, Abbasid, Seljuq, Mongol, Timurid, Safavid and Ottoman empires)

Another way of tackling these issues would be with the following question:
Question 3.
To what extent were the changes which occurred in the Middle East in the first half of the first millennium BCE the result of the revolutionary changes which came about at the start of that millennium?

This covers
• the military revolution arising from iron weapons and horse-riding, and the more powerful states that this brought into being;
• the causes and consequences of the spread of alphabet;
• the mingling of peoples and the submergence of local cultures into one regional, Aramaic culture

These activities above cover the following thinking skills and themes in AP World History:

Thinking Skills

2. Chronological reasoning
Historical Causation
Patterns of Continuity and Change Over Time
Periodization - Deals with the characteristics of the Iron Age over the Bronze Age. This introduces an element of periodization not present in the AP periodization scheme, but the AP document encourages debate and disagreement on this issue.

3. Comparison and contextualization
Contextualization - connecting spread of iron (broad process) to political, social and cultural developments in a specific region

Themes:

Theme 3: State-Building, Expansion, and Conflict
• Political structures and forms of governance
• Empires
• Revolts and revolutions

Theme 4: Creation, Expansion, and Interaction of Economic Systems
• Trade and commerce

Theme 5: Development and Transformation of Social Structures
• Racial and ethnic constructions - destruction of local peoples and cultures

4. Write a history of the Israelites in the context of the broader developments taking place in the Middle East between 1200 and 500 BCE.
APPENDICES

Appendix 1: TimeMaps articles for further reading

A list of all TimeMaps articles for Period 1 can be found on the Encyclopedia home page. Here is a selected list of the key articles which students should find most helpful.

Ancient Egypt

History of Ancient Egypt

Ancient Israel

History of Ancient Palestine - covers not just the Israelites, but also neighbouring peoples such as the Moabites and Philistines.

The Assyrian empire

The Babylonian empire
Appendix 2: Using the Ancient Middle East II unit with AP World History

The teachers notes which accompany this TimeMap presentation offer challenges which cover two of the four Thinking Skills and three of the five Themes.

The Key Concepts covered in this unit are as follows:

Key Concept 1.3. The Development and Interactions of Early Agricultural, Pastoral, and Urban Societies

I. Core and foundational civilizations:
   • Mesopotamia in the Tigris and Euphrates River Valleys
   • Egypt in the Nile River Valley

II. The first states emerged within core civilizations.

C. Early regions of state expansion or empire building were Mesopotamia, Babylonia, and the Nile Valley.

D. Pastoralists were often the developers and disseminators of new weapons and modes of transportation that transformed warfare in agrarian civilizations.
   • Iron weapons
   • Horseback riding

C. Systems of record keeping arose independently in all early civilizations and subsequently were diffused.
   • Alphabets

E. New religious beliefs developed in this period continued to have strong influences in later periods.
   • Hebrew monotheism