

when land gets too much salt caused by the evaporation of water. Since even fresh water has small amounts of salt in it, the same problem could have caused the decline of ancient Sumer as well.

Egypt

Fortunately, scholars have been able to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphics, a form of writing that Egyptians developed around 3300 BCE. Scribes or record keepers who could read and write well, kept information on an early form of paper called *papyrus*. Documents reveal that Egyptian settlements were united in about 3100 BCE and ruled from a city called Memphis on the Nile River Delta.

The Nile River, the longest river in the world at 4,160 miles, gave Egyptians many advantages. It provided transportation by boat that allowed their ruler, called a *pharaoh*, to control the distribution of resources through the kingdom. Since the river flooded annually, Egyptians farmers were able to trap water in deposits of soil to water their crops. *Salinization* occurs when water evaporates leaving too much salt. Because there was less evaporation here, agriculture lasted much longer than in the Indus Valley or in Sumer.

In 1687 BCE, Egypt was invaded by a people called the Hyksos who rode horse drawn chariots. This drew Egypt into warfare and Egypt ruled the Nile far to the south and as far as the Euphrates River in the north.

Yellow River

In China, in the far eastern part of Eurasia, a fourth civilization developed. Early Chinese cities developed on the agricultural surplus produced near the Yellow River. Urban areas evolved from villages on terraced land near the Yellow River. By 3000 BCE there were walled villages in northern China with richly appointed tombs containing pottery with mark that appeared to be ancient Chinese script.

By 1523 BCE, the Shang family had established military and political power by importing weapons from the Middle East. The Shangs ruled for 500 years. Their capital was in Anyang, now in the Honan province of modern China.

During the Shang dynasty, elites, or people at the top of the social hierarchy used bronze to make cooking pots and other artifacts. Bronze was also used for wheeled vehicles. They made books out of bamboo and used brushes for writing. There is also evidence they practiced human sacrifice.