Chapter 18

The Cultural Geography of North Africa, Southwest and Central Asia
The Cultural Geography of North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia
Chapter Objectives

• Explain population patterns found in North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia.
• Discuss the history and governments of North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia.
• Describe the cultures and lifestyles of the people in the region.
Population Patterns

Section 1
Section Objectives

• Examine how movement and interaction in North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia led to ethnic diversity.

• Explain how the region’s seas, rivers, and oases influence where people live.

• Discuss how growing migration into cities has affected the region.
Terms to Know

- Ethnic diversity
- Infrastructure
A Geographic View

Family in the Caucasus
Geographic Literacy

- Armenia today is recovering from disasters that beset it during the 1980s and 1990s. An earthquake in 1988 devastated the country, killing 55,000 people and leveling cities and towns. War later erupted with neighboring Azerbaijan over disputed territory. Fuel shortages, caused by wartime trade blockades and two harsh winters, created near-famine conditions.
Many Peoples

• Because the region is a crossroads for Asia, Africa, and Europe, its population is ethnically diverse.

• **Arabs** Most people in the region are Arabs, and most Arabs are Muslims.

• Both Islamic culture and Arabic, the language of the Arabs, have had a significant impact on the region.
Many Peoples
Many Peoples

- **Israelis**  About 6.1 million people in the region are Israelis living in Israel.
- Of these, 82 percent are Jews; the remaining 18 percent are mostly Arabs.
- In 1948, Israel was founded as a Jewish state.
- Tensions between Arabs and Jews resulted in four wars that have brought severe hardship to the area’s peoples.
Many Peoples

- **Turks** The Turks are descended from ancient Turkic peoples who migrated to Anatolia from Central Asia. Most Turks practice Islam and speak the Turkish language.

- **Iranians and Afghans** Iran is home to about 66 million people, most of whom speak Farsi and are Shiite Muslims. Neighboring Afghanistan is made up of many ethnic and language groups, most of whom practice Islam.

- **Caucasian Peoples** The Caucasus region is home to many ethnic groups, but most of the population is Armenian or Georgian. Armenia and Georgia both have distinct languages and Christian cultures.
Many Peoples

- **Turkic Peoples** The republics of Central Asia are populated by various Turkic peoples, including the Uzbeks, Kazaks, and Tajiks.
- Most are Muslims, and they speak Turkic languages.
- **Kurds** The Kurds have a common language and culture, but they have no country of their own.
Population and Resources

- **Control of a Vital Resource**  Water has been a major issue in border disputes between Israel and Syria.
- Syria wants Israel to return the Golan Heights. Israel refuses, partly because 30 percent of its water comes from the Sea of Galilee, which is partly fed by streams beginning in the Golan Heights.
Population and Resources
Population and Resources

• **Population Growth**  Overall, the region’s population is growing rapidly, and the resulting unemployment causes a steady flood of migration to other countries.

• **Urbanization**  Population density is greatest in urban areas like Istanbul, Cairo, Tehran, and Baghdad.

• Living standards are low because the population has grown too fast for housing and facilities to keep pace with needs.
Section Objectives

- Name the great civilizations that arose in North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia.
- Discuss the three major world religions that originated in the region.
- Explain how countries of the region gained independence in modern times.
Terms to Know

- Domesticate
- culture hearth
- cuneiform
- hieroglyphics
- qanat
- monotheism
- prophet
- mosque

- nationalism
- nationalize
- embargo
A Geographic View

Yemeni woman in traditional clothing
Geographic Literacy

Bedouins make up only about 15 percent of the total population of Southwest Asia, and their numbers are decreasing as many Bedouins move to towns to work in the oil industry. Traditionally, Bedouins lived in tents made of woven goat hair. Men and women resided in separate tents in different areas.
Prehistoric Peoples

- People have been living in North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia for at least ten thousand years.

- Hunters and gatherers first settled in the area, and later the region’s farmers were among the first in the world to domesticate livestock.
Early Civilizations

- **Mesopotamia** Mesopotamia, the fertile area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, was one of the world’s first culture hearths.

- The Sumerians used irrigation for farming and made advances in mathematics and engineering. They also kept records by using a writing system.

- The Egyptian civilization flourished along the Nile River and used irrigation for farming the fertile soil.

- The Egyptians developed a calendar with a 365-day year, built impressive pyramids as tombs for their rulers, and invented **hieroglyphics** for writing.
Empires and Trades

- The Phoenicians of the eastern Mediterranean developed the basis for alphabets used by most Western countries.
- The Persian Empire of the 500s B.C. stretched from Egypt to Central Asia.
- The Silk Road was an overland trade route connecting China with the Mediterranean Sea.
- Many present-day cities in the region, such as Samarqand, were originally trading posts along the Silk Road.
Empires and Trades

- In the 1200s, nomadic Mongols led by Genghis Khan invaded Central Asia, establishing a vast inland empire.
- The Mongols at first caused widespread destruction but later introduced such benefits as paper money and safer trade routes.
Three Major Religions

- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam began in Southwest Asia. All three share many beliefs, especially **monotheism**.
- **Judaism**  Judaism is the oldest monotheistic faith.
- The Jews trace their origin to the ancient Israelites, who made Jerusalem their religious center.
- Jews eventually settled other areas, taking their beliefs with them.
Three Major Religions

- **Christianity** Christianity, which developed from Judaism, is based on the life and teachings of Jesus.

- Christianity spread throughout the Mediterranean world into Asia, Africa, Europe, and eventually to the Americas and the South Pacific region.

- **Islam** Islam is the major religion of the region.

- Its followers, called Muslims, believe in one God and acknowledge Muhammad as the last of a series of prophets.

- By the 800s Islam had spread from the Arabian Peninsula to other parts of Asia, North Africa, and Europe.
The Modern Era

- By the late 1800s, European powers controlled much of North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia. European influence led to the development of an educated middle class that demanded self-rule.

- **Independence**  By the 1960s most territories in North Africa and Southwest Asia had gained independence.

- Countries controlled first by Russia and then by the Soviet Union did not become independent until 1991.
The Modern Era

- **Arab-Israeli Conflict**  Most of the region’s countries are Arab or Muslim.
- An exception is Israel, founded in 1948 as a Jewish state in what was once British-ruled Palestine.
- During the next 25 years, Arab opposition to Israel and Israel’s concern for its security led to conflict in the region.
The Modern Era
The Modern Era

- **Israelis and Palestinians** Arab-Israeli conflicts forced many Palestinian Arabs to live as refugees or settlers abroad.
- Palestinians today want to set up their own state in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, a goal complicated by the many Jewish settlements built in the West Bank.
- Neither side has stopped fighting.
The Modern Era

- **War in Afghanistan**  In 2001, American and British warplanes bombed targets in Afghanistan to uproot Saudi exile Osama bin Laden’s terrorist network and the Taliban government that supported it. Anti-Taliban forces won control of most of the country.

- **Border Conflicts**  Disputes over borders and scarce water resources fuel conflict in the region.

- In 1980 a border dispute led to years of war between Iran and Iraq.

- In 1991 Iraq invaded oil-rich Kuwait, but a joint military effort of the United States and other countries during the Persian Gulf War forced Iraq to withdraw.
The Modern Era

• **Today’s Governments**  Eight countries in the region are monarchies, including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Morocco.

• The rest call themselves republics, but their governments range from parliamentary democracies to military dictatorships.
Section Objectives

- Explain how religion and language have both unified and divided the peoples of North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia.
- Describe arts that are popular in the region.
- Discuss the characteristics of everyday life in the region.
Terms to Know

- Ziggurat
- bedouin
- bazaar
A Geographic View

Alexandria, Egypt
Religion

- The great majority of people in the region are Muslims.
- Most belong to the Sunni branch of Islam, which believes that leadership should reside in the Islamic community at large.
- The Shia branch holds that only Muhammad’s descendants should lead the community.
- Most of the region’s Jews live in Israel.
- Christians predominate in Georgia and Armenia; large groups of Christians also live in Lebanon, Egypt, and Syria.
Languages

- Arabic is the region’s main language.
- Other languages include Hebrew in Israel, Berber in southern Morocco and Algeria, Turkish in Turkey, and Farsi in Iran.
- The people of Central Asia speak various Turkic languages.
The Arts

- **Art and Architecture** The region’s early civilizations built impressive palaces and temples.

- Later, Muslims built mosques, and their artists produced geometric and floral designs.

- **Literature** Literary masterpieces from the region include poems and epics like the *Rubaiyat* by the Persian poet Omar Khayyam and the collection of Arab, Indian, and Persian stories known as *The Thousand and One Nights*. 
Everyday Life

- **Home and Community**  Everyday life in the region has changed greatly in the last century, with improved health care, rapid population growth, and the introduction of technology. People’s activities, however, still center on home, family, and religion.

- **Standards of Living**  Countries whose economies are based on oil production or manufacturing and trade are prosperous.

- People in less developed countries that lack these advantages often do not have access to basic necessities.
Education and Health Care

• Most of the region’s youth—male and female—attend high school.

• Some attend universities. Literacy rates in the region vary but have improved greatly in the past 20 years.

• Health care has improved and expanded, but there is a shortage of hospital beds and doctors, particularly in rural areas.

• Average life expectancy is low in much of the region.
Celebrations and Leisure Time

- In all countries with large Muslim populations, a muezzin calls the faithful to prayer five times a day.
- Muslims, Christians, and Jews observe their own holy days throughout the year.
- People visit with friends and family during their leisure time.
- Soccer, board games, and chess are popular in many areas.
Celebrations and Leisure Time
Gender and Religion

- Muslim women have been restricted in some public activities because of interpretations of Islamic law.
- Some, however, have begun to resist the restrictions. They are winning greater freedom, both in dress and in activities.
Section 1 - Summary

- Movement and interaction of people have created the region’s ethnic diversity.
- The largest concentrations of population are in coastal and river valley areas where water is readily available.
- Urbanization has caused increased pollution and overcrowding, challenges that cities and regional governments are addressing in many ways.
Section 2 - Summary

• Early peoples in the region were among the first to domesticate plants and animals.

• Two of the world’s earliest civilizations arose in Mesopotamia and the Nile River valley.

• Three of the world’s major religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—trace their origins to Southwest Asia.

• After centuries of foreign rule, independent states arose in North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia during the 1900s.
Islam and the Arabic language have been unifying forces in much of North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia.

Many people in the region speak Arabic. Other major languages in the region include Hebrew, Berber, Greek, Farsi, Pashto, Kurdish, and various Turkic languages.

The peoples of North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia have expressed themselves from the earliest times through the arts and architecture.