

Hittites, Assyrians, Babylonians and Phoenicians
World History
Kienast

The Hittites

The Hittites, whose capital city was Hattusas in modern day Turkey, would rule in a flexible way, accepting the customs, traditions and deities of any land which became part of their growing empire. Hence, the Hittite kingdom is often called the "kingdom of thousands of gods." All the deities, those of the conquerors and those of the conquered, were to be worshiped in their own languages and according to their own customs. They were left as rulers of their lands—although their earthly representatives had to recognize Hittite authority.

The New Hittite Empire is usually dated to the period between 1450 and 1180 BCE, and is known for its aggressive spread, which succeeded mainly due to the Hittite use of a new technology, iron. As an empire, the Hittites were tolerant, but also required that conquered people pay tribute in the form of recognizing the authority of the Hittite king.

So, what is the legacy of the Hittites? They were one of the world's first empires, and as such provide a cultural bridge between the early Mesopotamian society and the later Greek and Roman societies. The Hittites also give us an example of how empires fail. The empire was based on conquest and taking resources from those they conquered. When the Hittites stopped conquest, they began to weaken due to the lack of resources.

The Assyrians

The Assyrian Empire began around 850 BCE and lasted to 650 BCE. They were descended from Hammurabi's people, the Akkadians, and originally dominated the Mesopotamian city-state. The form of rule used by the Assyrians was quite different than that of the Hittites, using terror and forced migration to deal with rebellious people within their empire. The brutality of the Assyrians is famously recorded in the Old Testament of the Bible. Despite the evidence, questions linger over the accuracy of information regarding the Assyrians. While the people they conquered described them as brutal, we also know that they valued education and culture. The capital city of Nineveh was known for the great library of King Ashurbanipal. This library, which housed 20,000 tablets (including Epic of Gilgamesh), allowed the transfer of knowledge between Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman cultures.

Babylonian Empire or Neo-Assyrian Empire

Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 605/604-562 BCE) was the greatest King of ancient Babylon during the period of the Babylonian Empire (626-539 BCE) or Neo-Assyrian Empire. Nebuchadnezzar married Amytis of Media and, according to some sources, had the Hanging Gardens of Babylon built for her to remind her of her homeland in Persia. The Hanging Gardens were so spectacular that they are now considered one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world.

The Phoenicians

Phoenicia was an ancient civilization composed of independent city-states located along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea stretching through what is now Syria, Lebanon and northern Israel. The Phoenicians were a great maritime people, known for contributions to the Mediterranean trade routes used by so many later civilizations. They also developed the world's first alphabet, which was used by the later Greeks.