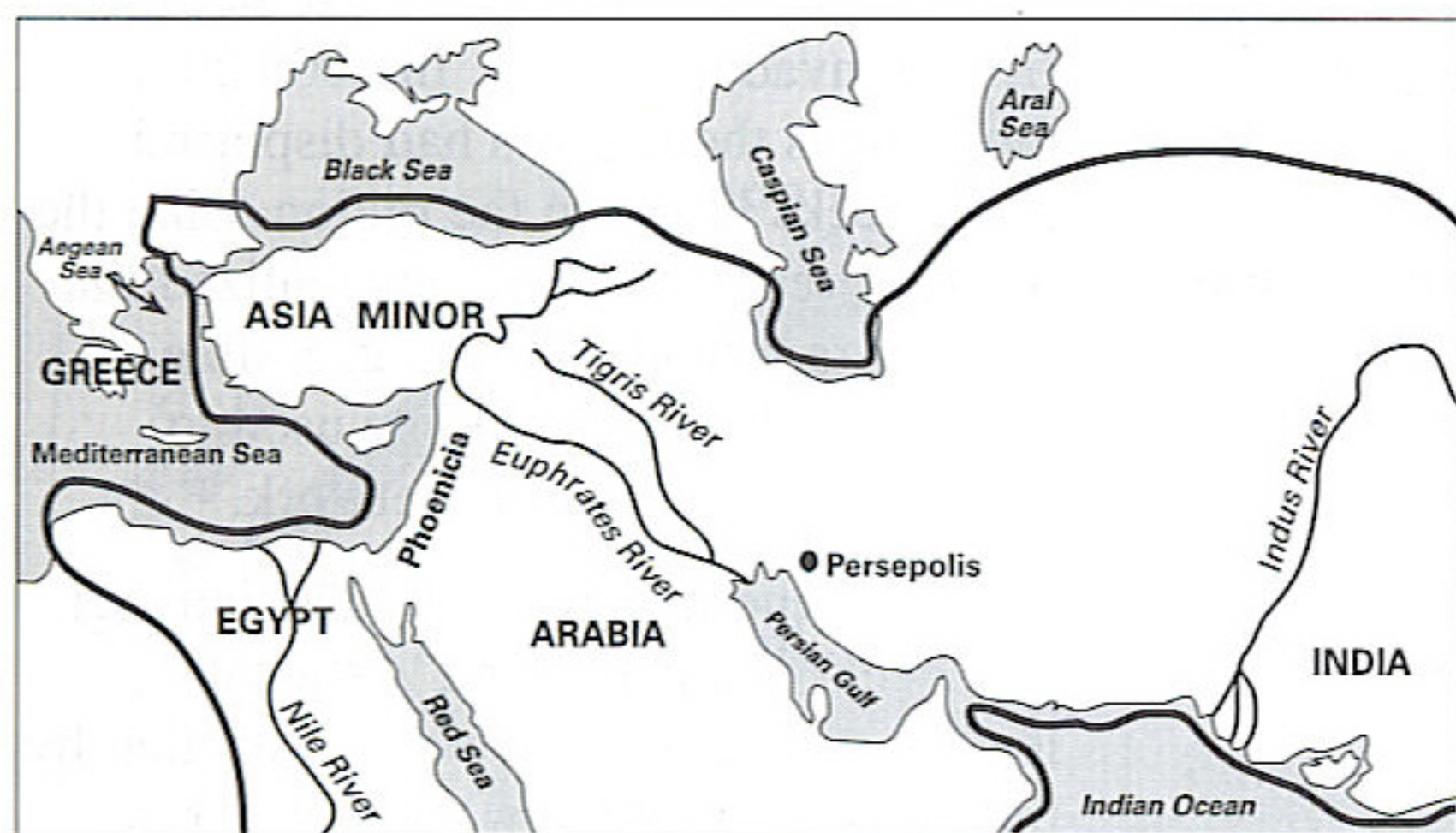


Background Information About the Persian Wars

Event A: The Expansion of the Persian Empire



At the beginning of the fifth century B.C.E., the Persian Empire was the largest in the world, stretching from Asia Minor to India, and from the Caspian Sea to Egypt and Arabia. The Persians overwhelmed their opponents with their large, highly-trained army, and expanded their empire by conquering new peoples. Persian warriors became known as the *Ten Thousand Immortals*, because if

one of them died in combat, he was immediately replaced by another. Their mighty cavalry was composed of nobles who were trained from boyhood to ride horses and shoot arrows.

Despite their powerful army, Persian kings avoided ruling their subjects by force and through fear. One of the greatest Persian kings was Darius (pronounced DAHR-ee-yuss) the Great, who ruled from 522 to 486 B.C.E. Darius was a brilliant politician and administrator, and a capable military man. In order to rule his diverse empire more efficiently, he divided it into 20 large provinces, or *satrapies* (pronounced SAH-treh-pee-z), each run by an appointed official. Persian kings believed that they could more easily win the loyalty of their subjects if they ruled fairly rather than through force. So, while the people had to pay taxes, they were also allowed to keep their own language, religion, and laws.

Darius decided to build a new capital at Persepolis (pronounced pur-SEP-oh-liss) with the incredible amount of wealth produced by the Persian Empire. This city became known for its beauty and splendor throughout the ancient world. According to legend, it would take 10,000 horses and 5,000 camels to carry the royal treasures that were kept in the city. Darius's desire to acquire more land and economic power drove him to conquer nearby lands throughout his reign. In 513 B.C.E., he launched the first Asian invasion of Greek city-states in Asia Minor. He knew that conquering these city-states would give him control of many Greek trade routes, allowing him to obtain more resources to run his enormous empire.

Greece presented a dramatic contrast to the powerful and orderly Persian Empire during the early sixth century B.C.E. Greece was divided into hundreds of tiny, independent political units, known as city-states. Because of Greece's geography, the people developed their cultures in isolated regions and had very little contact with one another. The ancient Greeks based their identities on their ethnicity and the region of their origin, referring to themselves as Athenians, Spartans, or Ionians, rather than as Greeks. Unlike the orderly Persian Empire, life in the Greek city-states was characterized by frequent outbreaks of warfare over land disputes. Furthermore, city-states had limited resources, and some were relatively poor.