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Indo-European Migrations

TERMS & NAMES

- Indo-Europeans
- steppes
- migration
- Hittites
- Anatolia
- Aryans
- Vedas
- Brahmin
- caste
- Mahabharata

MAIN IDEA

Indo-European peoples migrated into Europe, India, and Southwest Asia and interacted with peoples living there.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Half the people living today speak languages that stem from the original Indo-European languages.

SETTING THE STAGE In India and in Mesopotamia, civilizations first developed along lush river valleys. Even as large cities such as Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa declined, agriculture and small urban communities flourished. These wealthy river valleys attracted seminomadic tribes. These peoples may have left their own homelands because of politics or changes in the environment.

Indo-Europeans Migrate

The **Indo-Europeans** were a group of seminomadic peoples who came from the **steppes**—dry grasslands that stretched north of the Caucasus (KAW-kuh-suhs). The Caucasus are the mountains between the Black and Caspian seas. (See the map on pages 54–55.) These primarily pastoral people herded cattle, sheep, and goats. The Indo-Europeans also tamed horses and rode into battle in light, two-wheeled chariots. They lived in tribes that spoke forms of a language that we call Indo-European.

The Indo-European Language Family The languages of the Indo-Europeans were the ancestors of many of the modern languages of Europe, Southwest Asia, and South Asia. English, Spanish, Persian, and Hindi all trace their origins back to different forms of the original Indo-European language.

Historians can actually tell where different Indo-European tribes settled by the languages they spoke. Some Slavic-speakers moved north and west. Others, who spoke early Celtic, Germanic, and Italic languages, moved west through Europe. Still others, Greek- and Persian-speakers, went south. The Aryans (AIR-ee-uhnz), who spoke an early form of Sanskrit, penetrated the mountain passes of the Hindu Kush and entered India.

Notice the similarities of words within the Indo-European family of languages.

Language Family Resemblances

English	mother	father	daughter	new	six
Sanskrit	mātár	pitár	duhitá	návas	sát
Persian	muhdáhr	puhdáhr	dukhtáhr	now	shahsh
Spanish	madre	padre	hija	nuevo	seis
German	Mutter	Vater	Tochter	neu	sechs

An Unexplained Migration No one is quite sure why these people left their homelands in the steppes. The lands where their animals grazed may have dried up. Their human or animal population may have grown too large to feed. They may also have tried to escape from invaders, or from an outbreak of disease.

Whatever the reason, Indo-European nomads began to migrate outward in all directions between 1700 and 1200 B.C. These **migrations**, movements of a people from one region to another, did not happen all at once, but in waves over a long period of time.

Background

This steppe area included parts of present-day Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, southern Russia, and Kazakhstan.



Vocabulary

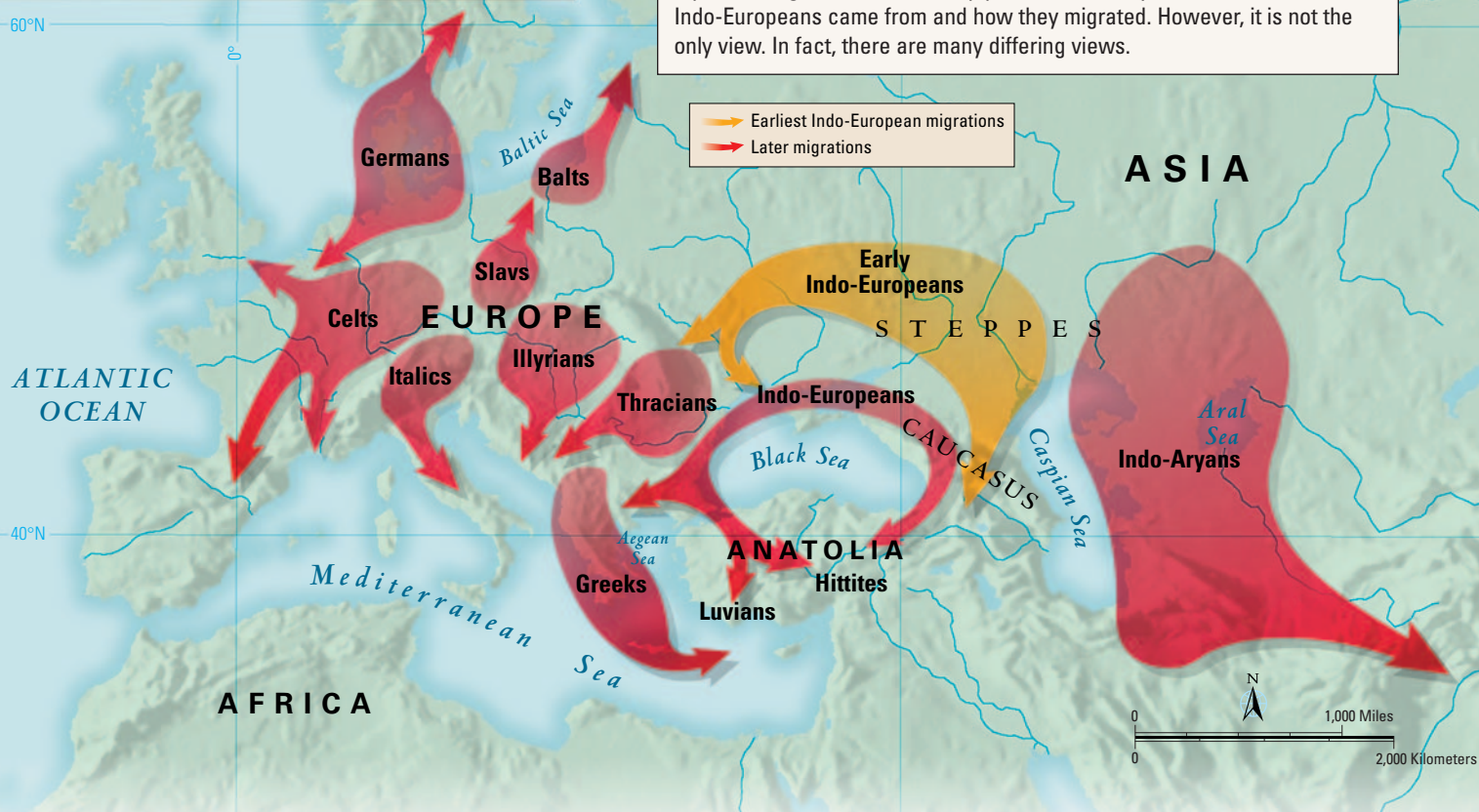
Slavic-speakers: speakers of a language that developed into most of today's eastern European languages.



Indo-European Migrations, Starting about 1700 B.C.

The origins and migrations of the Indo-European peoples are controversial topics among scholars. This map presents a widely held view of where the Indo-Europeans came from and how they migrated. However, it is not the only view. In fact, there are many differing views.

 Earliest Indo-European migrations
 Later migrations



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

- Location** Which Indo-European people reached the farthest west?
- Movement** Describe the movement of the Indo-Europeans in their earliest migrations.

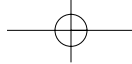
Hittites Blend Empire and Technology

By about 2000 B.C., one group of Indo-European speakers, the **Hittites**, occupied **Anatolia** (AN-uh-TOH-lee-ah), also called Asia Minor. Anatolia is a huge peninsula in modern-day Turkey that juts out into the Black and Mediterranean seas. Anatolia was a high, rocky plateau, rich in timber and agriculture. Nearby mountains held important mineral deposits. Separate Hittite city-states came together to form an empire there in about 1650 B.C. The city of Hattusas (hah-TOO-sahs) was its capital.

The Hittite empire went on to dominate Southwest Asia for 450 years. Hittites occupied Babylon, the chief city in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, and struggled with Egypt for control of northern Syria. Neither the Hittites nor the Egyptians were able to get the upper hand. So, the two peoples ended their conflicts by signing an unusual peace treaty. In it, they each pledged to help the other fight off future invaders.

Hittites Adopt and Adapt The Hittites used their own Indo-European language with one another. However, for international use, they adopted Akkadian, the language of the Babylonians they had conquered. Akkadian was already widely spoken in Mesopotamia, and Babylonian culture was more advanced. The Hittites thus blended their own traditions with those of other, more advanced peoples. In the process, they spread many innovative ideas throughout Southwest Asia.

The Hittites borrowed ideas about literature, art, politics, and law from the Mesopotamian peoples they encountered. However, they always managed to give these ideas a distinctive twist. Their own legal code, for example, was similar to Hammurabi's Code but was more forgiving. Murderers were not automatically pun-



ished by death. A convicted murderer could make up for the crime by giving the victim's family a slave or a child from his own family.

Chariots and Iron Bring Victory The Hittites excelled in the technology of war. They conquered an empire even against Egyptian opposition—largely through their superior chariots and their iron weapons. The Hittite war chariot was light and easy to maneuver even at high speeds. The chariot had two wheels and a wooden frame covered with leather and was pulled by two or sometimes four horses. On the battlefield, the Hittite chariot proved itself a superb fighting machine. It helped make the Hittites conquerors.

The Hittites used iron in their chariots, and they owed many of their military victories to the skill of their ironworkers. Ancient peoples had long known that iron was stronger than bronze. They also knew that it could hold a sharper edge. However, the process of purifying iron ore and working it into weapons and tools is complex. For centuries, prehistoric people used only the purified iron they obtained from meteorites. Around 1500 B.C., the Hittites were the first in Southwest Asia to smelt iron and harden it into weapons of war. The raw materials they needed—iron ore and wood to make charcoal—were easily available to them in the mountains of Anatolia. Knowledge of iron technology traveled widely with the Hittites—in both their trade and conquests.

Despite its military might, the powerful Hittite empire fell quite suddenly around the year 1190 B.C. As part of a great wave of invasions, tribes attacked from the north and burned the Hittite capital city. Hittite supremacy in Southwest Asia had ended.



Hittites sometimes owned small gold statues of their gods—probably intended to protect them from danger or bad fortune.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY
A. Analyzing Effects
 How did environmental features in Anatolia help the Hittites advance technologically?

Aryan Invaders Transform India

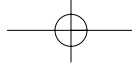
In about 1500 B.C., the Hittites were establishing themselves in Anatolia. At the same time, another Indo-European people, the **Aryans**, crossed over the northwest mountain passes into the Indus River Valley of India. Though they left almost no archaeological record, their sacred literature, the **Vedas** (VAY-duhz), left a fairly reliable picture of Aryan life. The *Vedas* are four collections of prayers, magical spells, and instructions for performing rituals. The most important of the collections is the *Rig Veda*. The *Rig Veda* contains 1028 hymns, all devoted to Aryan gods.

For many years, no written form of the *Vedas* existed. Instead, elders of one generation passed on this tradition orally to men of the next generation. If a prayer was uttered incorrectly, they believed terrible consequences might result. So accuracy was crucial.

A Caste System Develops The Aryans (“the nobles” in their language) called the people they found in India *dasas* (“dark”), referring to the color of their skin. (*Dasa* eventually became the Aryan word for slave.) The Aryans differed from the *dasas* in many ways. Aryans were taller, lighter in skin color, and spoke a different language. Unlike the earlier inhabitants of the Indus Valley, the Aryans had not developed a writing system. They were also a pastoral people and counted their wealth in cows. The *dasas*, on the other hand, were town dwellers who lived in communities protected by walls. The Aryans offered sacrifices to heroic nature gods, such as Indra, the thunder god, and Agni, the fire god. Archaeological evidence seems to show that the *dasas* worshiped life-giving principles, such as the “Great God” Shiva and various mother goddesses.

When they first arrived in India, Aryans were divided into three social classes: **Brahmins** (priests), warriors, and peasants or traders. The class that an Aryan belonged to determined his or her role in society. At first, the three classes mixed freely. Eventually, non-Aryan laborers or craftsmen (*shudras*) formed a fourth group.

Background
 Indra was the most popular god in the *Rig Veda*. Indra hurled thunderbolts, ate bulls, and raced his chariot across the sky.



The Aryan Caste System

According to Indian tradition, the four major castes emerged from the mouth, arms, legs, and feet of Perusha (the first human being). Perusha is identified with the creator god Brahma. The body part indicated the dignity and role of the caste that emerged from it.

LEGS
Vaishyas
(peasants and traders)



MOUTH
Brahmins
(priests)

ARMS
Kshatriyas
(rulers and warriors)

FEET
Shudras
(laborers)

As the Aryans settled in India, they developed closer contacts with non-Aryans. To regulate those contacts, the Aryans made class restrictions more rigid. *Shudras* did

work that Aryans did not want to do. *Varna*, or skin color, was a distinguishing feature of this system. So the four major groups came to be known as the *varnas*. Much later—in the fifteenth century A.D.—explorers from Portugal encountered this social system and called these groups **castes** (kasts).

As time went on, the four basic castes gradually grew more complex—with hundreds of subdivisions. People were born into their caste for life. Their caste membership determined the work they did, the man or woman they could marry, and the people with whom they could eat. Ritual purity—for example, habits of eating and washing that made a person physically and spiritually clean—became all-important. Those who were the most impure because of their work (butchers, gravediggers, collectors of trash) lived outside the caste structure. They were known as “untouchables,” since even their touch endangered the ritual purity of others.

Aryan Kingdoms Arise Over the next few centuries, Aryans extended their settlements east, along the Ganges and Yamuna river valleys. (See map on page 61.) Progress was slow because of difficulties clearing the jungle for farming. This task grew easier when iron came into use in India about 1000 B.C.

When the Aryans first arrived in India, chiefs were elected by the entire tribe. Around 1000 B.C., however, minor kings who wanted to set up territorial kingdoms arose among the Aryans. They struggled with one another for land and power. And each claimed his authority as a right from the gods. Out of this strife emerged a major kingdom: Magadha. Under a series of ambitious kings, Magadha began expanding in the sixth century B.C. by taking over surrounding kingdoms. By the second century B.C., Magadha had expanded south to occupy almost all of the Indian subcontinent.

One of the great epics of India, the *Mahabharata* (muh-HAH-BAHR-ah-tuh), reflects the struggles that took place in India as the Aryans moved relentlessly south. The poem is the story of a great war between two sets of cousins, the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The *Mahabharata*'s 106,000 verses make it the longest single poem in the world. For several hundred years, it survived as an oral tradition.

CONNECT to TODAY

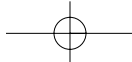
Untouchables Then and Now

In the sixth century B.C., ritual purity was so important to upper-caste Indians that untouchables had to ring a bell to warn that they were coming near. Even the shadow of an untouchable falling on upper-caste Hindus would contaminate them. They would have to bathe before worshipping or eating.

In the 20th century, the great Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi called the untouchables *harijans*, or “children of God.” Through his efforts, caste distinctions were outlawed by the Indian constitution. Later, the 1955 Untouchability Act provided penalties for discrimination. However, 3,000-year-old traditions do not die easily. Most former untouchables in India today still suffer from extreme poverty and caste discrimination.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Making Inferences How were the more physical forms of work viewed by Aryans?



Elements of the *Mahabharata* indicate that a blending of cultures was taking place between Aryan and non-Aryan peoples. For example, Krishna, a semi-divine hero of the *Mahabharata*, is described as dark-faced. This suggests that he is non-Aryan.

One of the most famous incidents in all of Indian literature occurs when Krishna instructs one of the Pandavas, Arjuna (ahr-JUH-nuh), on the proper way to live one's life. Arjuna loses the will to fight when he sees his cousins lined up among the enemies he faces. He asks Krishna how we can find joy in killing our own kinsmen. Krishna answers that the eternal spirit (or Self) of every human being cannot kill or be killed. However, Arjuna must still do his duty and wage war:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

He who thinks this Self [eternal spirit] to be a slayer, and he who thinks this Self to be slain, are both without discernment; the Soul slays not, neither is it slain. . . . But if you will not wage this lawful battle, then will you fail your own (caste) law and incur sin. . . . The people will name you with dishonor; and to a man of fame dishonor is worse than death.

KRISHNA, speaking in the *Mahabharata*

The violence and confusion of the time led many, like Krishna himself, to speculate about the place of the gods and human beings in the world. As a result of these speculations, religion in India gradually changed. New religions were born, which you will read about in Section 2.



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

- 1. Location** What waterway served as the focal point for the Aryan kingdom of Magadha?
- 2. Human-Environment Interaction** Why do you think the Aryans migrated to the east of the Western Ghats?

Section 1 Assessment

1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- Indo-Europeans
- steppes
- migration
- Hittites
- Anatolia
- Aryans
- Vedas
- Brahmin
- caste
- Mahabharata

2. TAKING NOTES

Re-create the web below on your own paper, and fill in the names of some modern languages that stem from Indo-European roots.



Why did so many languages originate from Indo-European roots?

3. FORMING OPINIONS

What important contributions did the Aryan invaders make to the culture and way of life in India?

THINK ABOUT

- roles in society
- religion
- literature

4. ANALYZING THEMES

Interaction with Environment

For what environmental reasons might the Indo-Europeans have migrated?

THINK ABOUT

- weather
- occupational needs
- health