

The Assyrians: Iron Men

Directions: Read and annotate the article and write a half page in answer to the question below.

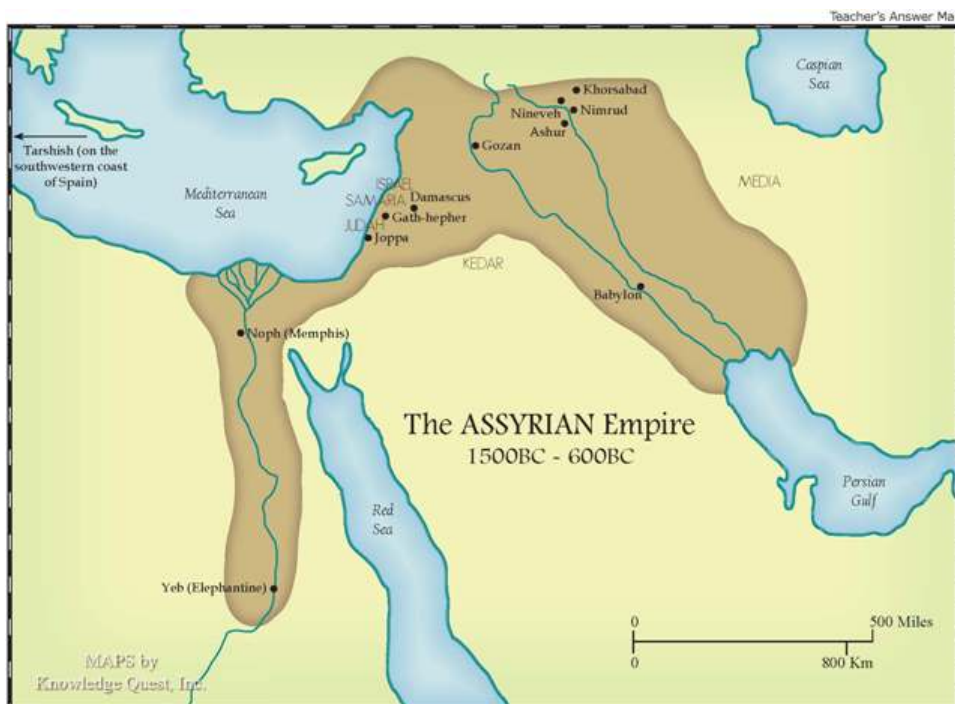
The Assyrians built the largest empire that the world had seen up to their time. The Hittites, Egyptians, and other Mesopotamian empires had barely expanded beyond their own boundaries, but the Assyrians united the lands from modern-day Iran to Egypt. Iron gave the Assyrians an advantage over their enemies, but should not be overestimated. Their understanding of logistics and innovations to their military organization contributed at least as much to their hegemony as did their iron weapons.



The Hittites of Anatolia had first used iron weapons to build their empire well before the rise of the Assyrians. They had battled Egypt to a tie in Syria and Palestine during their peak years between 1400 and 1200 BC. The Hittites had a much smaller population than the Egyptians, yet their ability to transform iron into weapons allowed them to stalemate much larger Egyptian armies. Nevertheless, the Hittites could never expand their borders farther than the territories that immediately bordered their own. The Assyrians would have to take up their iron weapons, and combine them with new military sciences to create the first major empire.

From just before 1,000 BC until 665 BC, the Assyrians dominated the Near East. Like the Hittites, they used iron in their weapons. When used in arrowheads, spear points, and swords, no bronze shields could offer effective resistance. Using these weapons made the weapons of virtually every neighboring army obsolete. Shields and armor of the Assyrians also far exceeded the capabilities of their opponents' arms. With iron shields and armor, no bronze weapons could penetrate the Assyrian warriors, and only a well-placed blow to a weak point in the armor could inflict a casualty.

While the iron weapons guaranteed victory over foreign armies, other innovations of the Assyrians allowed them to keep control over the territories they conquered and expand over farther distances than even other empires (like the Hittites) who also had iron weapons. Iron weapons could not win victories if the soldiers faced starvation. The first great innovation of the Assyrians was an unparalleled logistics system. Assyrians stored food along the roads of their empire at intervals that would allow the armies to access them after every few days march. By allowing the army to remain fed over hundreds of miles, the Assyrian logistics system allowed the soldier to make use of his weapons after reaching his destination.



If weapons, armor, or chariots were destroyed or lost in campaigns, the Assyrian army also had the equivalent of a small town that traveled with it. This camp following included skilled workers, such as blacksmiths, who could repair or replace any equipment, again, ensuring that the advantage given by iron weapons remained constant wherever the Assyrian army marched.

While the Hittites had used iron to counter greater Egyptian numbers, the Assyrians found a way to ensure that they had the dual advantages of numbers and iron weapons. Around

