When examining the interactions between civilizations and their varying environments, I believe that Frankforter states it best, in his book The West, when he says, “Thanks to human ingenuity in finding multiple ways to adapt to environments (and to the new environments adaptation continually creates), human communities and cultural identities are of nearly infinite variety.” This may seem an oversimplification of the interactions that happen between civilizations and the environments in which they exist; however, it is the core of the interactions that take place. The Egyptians and the Sumerians prove Frankforter’s statement through the distinctly different interactions that these two civilizations have with their distinctly different environments.

The Sumerians existed in a land between two raging rivers that had a way of making life very difficult and unpredictable for the Sumerians living there. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers produced nutrient rich soil for the inhabitants in Mesopotamia; however these same rivers could take away what they had given. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers were notorious for flooding their banks at a pivotal time for the Sumerians, a time at which their harvest was ripening in the deep rich soil that the flooding provided. This flooding at such a pivotal time could wipe out an entire harvest; however, it could also deposit such rich soil that it could double the size and amount of the ripening food in the fertile land. The dichotomous relationship between the Sumerians and the land in which they lived is very evident, according to Frankforter, “Sumer was wealthy but insecure. The flooding rivers on which it depended periodically threatened to rout its people and destroy the monuments of its civilization. Violent storms swept the countryside. Epidemics and plagues decimated cities.” I guess that the Sumerians understood the concept that in order to win big, you have to play big, because they knew the issues that came with living between the raging Tigris and Euphrates rivers could either destroy them or make them extremely wealthy.

The Egyptians on the other hand, existed in a fertile landscape surrounded by desert, with a lazy Nile River providing a solid method for maintaining the growth of their civilization. The Nile River was crucial to the development and sustenance of the Egyptian people, through the annual flooding (occurring after the first harvest was finished) which afforded a second growing season for the Egyptian crops, through the ability to use the Nile as a transportation method, as well as providing plants and wildlife along its banks. “Egypt’s generous environment may partially explain why many of its myths and legends seem to express more contentment with the human conditions and more hope for life beyond death than some of Sumer’s religious texts.” Though the Nile was more giving in its riches, Egypt was still very similar to Mesopotamia in the fact that neither civilization received much, if any, rain; temperatures would hover around the 100°F mark; and life would not have been possible in either area without the flooding that happened from its river(s).

Mesopotamia and Egypt share similar environments in which they lived, such as having a river(s) to help maintain the growth and development of their civilization, to living through annual flooding which threatened their very security, to extremely hot temperatures in the surrounding desert areas within which they existed. Though these environments are similar in many respects, they provided ample differences in the success and failures of these peoples. The Egyptians, through artifact texts, seemed quite content with their life and had an overall decent outlook on their life and afterlife. The Sumerians, on the other hand, seemed to be engaged in a gloomy outlook on life where they could toil in their fields and begin to see the ripening of their plants just to see those plants wiped away the next day from the flooding of the rivers that gave them life. Similarities aside, the Egyptians and Sumerians had distinctly different experiences in the environments in which they lived.