Chapter 3 – Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent

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Geography of the Fertile Crescent

The Big Idea
The valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers were the site of the world’s first civilizations.

Main Ideas
• The rivers of Southwest Asia supported the growth of civilizations.
• New farming techniques led to the growth of cities.
Main Idea 1: The rivers of Southwest Asia supported the growth of civilizations.

- The Tigris and Euphrates rivers are the most important physical features of the region known as Mesopotamia.
- Farm settlements in Mesopotamia eventually developed into civilizations.
Mesopotamia means “between the rivers” in Greek.

Mesopotamia is part of a larger area of rich farmland called the **Fertile Crescent**.

Mesopotamia was divided into two regions in ancient times: northern and southern Mesopotamia.
Rise of Civilizations

- Annual floods on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers brought **silt** that made the land ideal for farming.
  - Silt is a mixture of rich soil and tiny rocks.
- Plentiful food led to population growth and the formation of villages.
- Villages later developed into the world’s first civilizations.
Main Idea 2: New farming techniques led to the growth of cities.

- Farmers used **irrigation** and **canals** as a way to control river flow.
- Increased amounts of food led to **surpluses**, which meant that fewer people needed to farm.
- As a result, new occupations developed.
Controlling Water

The water levels of the Tigris and Euphrates would rise or fall, depending on the amount of rainfall. Irrigation and canals helped solve flooding and drought problems.

**Irrigation**
A way of supplying water to an area of land

**Canals**
Human-made waterways

Farmers also built up the banks of the rivers to hold back the floodwaters.
Food Surpluses and Effects

• Irrigation increased the amount of food farmers produced.
• This created a food surplus, or more food than they needed.
• Fewer people needed to farm, so they took on other roles and jobs.
• When workers specialize in a particular task, a division of labor is created.
• Large projects were undertaken, which led to the need for structure and rules.
• Settlements grew in size, creating cities between 4000 and 3000 B.C.
The Rise of Sumer

The Big Idea

The Sumerians developed the first civilization in Mesopotamia.

Main Ideas

- The Sumerians created the world’s first advanced society.
- Religion played a major role in Sumerian society.
Main Idea 1:
The Sumerians created the world’s first advanced society.

- Created basic political units called city-states
- Had strong armies
- Built walled cities for protection
City-States

- Consisted of a city and all the countryside surrounding it
- The amount of countryside in each city-state depended on its military strength.
- Fought each other to gain more farmland
- Gained and lost power over time
Sargon

Akkadian ruler who had the first permanent army

Defeated all the city-states of Sumer

When his army conquered northern Mesopotamia, he established the world’s first **empire**.

**Empire:** land with different territories and peoples under a single rule

Sargon ruled for 50 years. After his death, his empire lasted only a century longer.
Main Idea 2:
Religion played a major role in Sumerian society.

- Sumerian **polytheism** was the basis for all Sumerian society.
  - Polytheism is the worship of many gods.
- Gods had enormous powers.
- Priests had great statues built in Sumer.
  - Priests were people who performed religious ceremonies.
Sumerian Social Order

- Social hierarchy: the division of society by rank or class
- Kings were at the top of the order because they claimed to be chosen to rule by the gods.
- Social order
  - Kings
  - Priests
  - Skilled craftspeople, merchants, and traders
  - Large working class of farmers and laborers
  - Slaves
Men and Women in Sumer

- Men generally held the political power and made laws.
- Women generally took care of the home and children.
- Education was generally reserved for men, but some upper class women were educated.
- Some women were priestesses in Sumerian temples.
  - Enheduanna, a priestess who wrote hymns, is the first known female writer in history.
Sumerian Achievements

The Big Idea
The Sumerians made many advances that helped their society develop.

Main Ideas
- The Sumerians invented the world’s first writing system.
- Advances and inventions changed Sumerian lives.
- Many types of art developed in Sumer.
Main Idea 1:
The Sumerians invented the world’s first writing system.

- The **cuneiform** system involved the use of sharp tools called styluses.
- The Sumerians first used cuneiform to keep business records.
- The Sumerians also used their writing skills to write books about history, poems, and math.
# Invention of Writing

## Cuneiform
- World’s first system of writing
- Cuneiform symbols could represent syllables. Earlier pictographs had represented only objects.
- The Sumerians wrote on clay tablets with a stylus.

## Scribes
- Writers
- Kept track of items people traded and wrote down government records
- Scribes could move up in social class.

## Other Uses
- Wrote works of literature, stories, proverbs, and songs
- Wrote poems about the gods and military victories.
- Created **epics**, long poems that tell the stories of heroes.
Main Idea 2: Advances and inventions changed Sumerian lives.

- Development of the wheel
  - Used for carts and wagons
  - Potter’s wheel
- The plow increased farm production.
- Sewers under city streets
- Math and science
  - Number system based on 60
  - Names of animals, plants, and minerals
- Used medicines for healing and catalogued medical knowledge
Main Idea 3: Many types of art developed in Sumer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architecture</th>
<th>The Arts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Rulers lived in large palaces.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Most Sumerians lived in houses with many rooms around a small courtyard.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mud bricks were the houses’ main building blocks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A ziggurat, or pyramid-shaped temple tower, rose above each city.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sculptors produced many statues of the gods for their temples.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Jewelry was a popular item made from imported gold, silver, and gems.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engraved cylinder seals are one of Sumer’s most famous types of art.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Battle scenes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Show ownership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Highly decorative</td>
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</table>
Later Peoples of the Fertile Crescent

The Big Idea

After the Sumerians, many cultures ruled parts of the Fertile Crescent.

Main Ideas

• The Babylonians conquered Mesopotamia and created a code of law.
• Invasions of Mesopotamia changed the region’s culture.
• The Phoenicians built a trading society in the eastern Mediterranean region.
Main Idea 1:
The Babylonians conquered Mesopotamia and created a code of law.

- Hammurabi was Babylon’s king.
- During his rule, Babylon became the most important city in Mesopotamia.
- Hammurabi’s Code was a set of 282 laws he created that dealt with almost every part of daily life.
Hammurabi

Babylon’s king and the city’s greatest monarch, or ruler of a kingdom or empire.

Brilliant war leader who brought all of Mesopotamia into his Babylonian Empire.

- Oversaw building and irrigation projects and improved the tax system.
- Developed a set of laws that was written down for all to see.
Hammurabi's Code

- Hammurabi wrote down 282 laws which contained some ideas still found in laws today.
- Specific crimes brought specific penalties.
- Social class was taken into account. It was a greater crime to injure a rich man than a poor one.
- It was unique not only because of how thorough it was, but also because he wrote it down for all to see.
Main Idea 2: Invasions of Mesopotamia changed the region’s culture.

- Armies battled for control of fertile land.
- Different peoples ruled Mesopotamia.
  - Hittites
  - Kassites
  - Assyrians
  - Chaldeans
- Each group affected the culture of the region.
The Hittites & Kassites

The Hittites were the first to master ironworking, so they made the strongest weapons of the time.

They used the **chariot**, a wheeled, horse-drawn cart, which allowed them to move quickly around the battlefield.

They were taken over by the Kassites after their king was assassinated.

The Kassites ruled for almost 400 years.
The Assyrians

- The Assyrians had a strong army that used chariots and iron weapons.
- They spread terror before battles by looting villages and burning crops.
- Assyrian kings ruled their empire through local leaders who each governed a small area.
- The local leaders demanded heavy taxes.
The Chaldeans

- The Chaldeans attacked the Assyrians when they were weak and destroyed their empire.
- **Nebuchadnezzar** rebuilt Babylon into a beautiful city that had the famous Hanging Gardens.
- They admired the Sumerian culture, studied their language, and built temples to Sumerian gods.
- Babylon became a center for astronomy.
Main Idea 3:
The Phoenicians built a trading society in the eastern Mediterranean region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Expansion of Trade</th>
<th>Alphabet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prized Cedar trees for timber</td>
<td>Sailed ships around the Mediterranean Sea</td>
<td>Recorded their activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessed the sea for trade</td>
<td>Founded several new colonies along the trade routes</td>
<td>Made writing much easier for everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built great harbors</td>
<td>Became wealthy</td>
<td>Is the basis for the English language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
History Close-up

The City-State of Ur

Ur was one of the earliest and largest cities of ancient Mesopotamia. This great trading center and port was home to roughly 30,000 people. Located on the Euphrates River near the Persian Gulf, Ur carried on a rich trade with merchants from distant lands like India. This illustration shows what Ur may have looked like around 2000 BC.
Sumerian writing developed from early symbols called pictographs. Writers used clay tablets to record business deals, like this tablet that describes a number of sheep and goats.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>3300 BC</th>
<th>2800 BC</th>
<th>2400 BC</th>
<th>1800 BC</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heaven</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grain</td>
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<td>Fish</td>
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<td>Bird</td>
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<td>Water</td>
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**Sumerian Achievements**

The Sumerians’ artistic achievements included beautiful works of gold, wood, and stone.

This stringed musical instrument is called a lyre. It features a cow’s head and is made of silver decorated with shell and stone.

Cylinder seals like this one were carved into round stones and then rolled over clay to leave their mark.

The Sumerians were the first people in Mesopotamia to build large temples called ziggurats.

This gold dagger was found in a royal tomb. The bull’s head is made of gold and silver.

**Analyzing Visuals**

What animal is shown in two of these works?
Archaeologists think this statue from the 700s BC represents Gilgamesh.
The area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers is known as Mesopotamia.

**Movement** In what general direction do the Tigris and Euphrates rivers flow on their way to the Persian Gulf?
River Valley Civilizations

All of the world’s earliest civilizations had something in common—they all arose in river valleys that were perfect locations for farming. Three key factors made river valleys good for farming. First, the fields that bordered the rivers were flat, which made it easier for farmers to plant crops. Second, the soils were nourished by flood deposits and silt, which made them very fertile. Finally, the river provided the water farmers needed for irrigation.

Natural Highways River travel allowed early civilizations to trade goods and ideas. These people are traveling on the Euphrates River, one of the two main rivers of ancient Mesopotamia.

Gift of the River River water was key to farming in early civilizations. This farmer is using water from the Huang He (Yellow River) in China to water her crops.

From Village to City With the development of agriculture, people settled into farming villages. Over time, some of these villages grew into large cities. These ancient ruins are near Memphis, Egypt.

New Activities Food surpluses allowed people to pursue other activities, like crafts, art, and writing. This tile designer lives in the Indus Valley.

1. Human-Environment Interaction Why did the first civilizations all develop in river valleys?
2. Location Where were the four earliest river valley civilizations located?
According to legend, a gardener found a baby floating in a basket on a river and raised him as his own child. This baby later became the Akkadian emperor Sargon. As a young man, Sargon served Ur-Zababa, the king of Kish. Sargon later rebelled against the Sumerian ruler, took over his city, and built Akkad into a military power. He was among the first military leaders to use soldiers armed with bows and arrows. Sargon gained the loyalty of his soldiers by eating with them every day.
Babylonian and Assyrian Empires

**Place** What region in the southwest did the Assyrian Empire include?
Hammurabi’s Code

The Babylonian ruler Hammurabi is credited with putting together the earliest known written collection of laws. The code set down rules for both criminal and civil law, and informed citizens what was expected of them.

196. If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out.

197. If he break another man’s bone, his bone shall be broken.

198. If he put out the eye of a freed man, or break the bone of a freed man, he shall pay one gold mina.

199. If he put out the eye of a man’s slave, or break the bone of a man’s slave, he shall pay one-half of its value.

221. If a physician heal the broken bone or diseased soft part of a man, the patient shall pay the physician five shekels in money.

222. If he were a freed man he shall pay three shekels.

223. If he were a slave his owner shall pay the physician two shekels.

Hammurabi, from the Code of Hammurabi, translated by L. W. King

Analyzing Primary Sources

How do you think Hammurabi’s code of laws affected citizens of that time?
Visual Summary

The early Mesopotamians developed irrigation to grow food.

Food production in Mesopotamia led to the world's first civilization.

Sumerian advances included ziggurats, the wheel, and the first writing system.

Later peoples developed the first written laws and the first empires.
Click window above to start playing.