

MESOPOTAMIAN CIVILIZATION

Mesopotamia is a region of southwest Asia in the Tigris and Euphrates river system that benefitted from the area's climate and geography to host the beginnings of human civilization. Its history is marked by many important inventions that changed the world, including the concept of time, math, the wheel, sailboats, maps and writing. Mesopotamia is also defined by a changing succession of ruling bodies from different areas and cities that seized control over a period of thousands of years.

Mesopotamia is located in the region now known as the Middle East, which includes parts of southwest Asia and lands around the eastern Mediterranean Sea. It is part of the Fertile Crescent, an area also known as "Cradle of Civilization" for the number of innovations that arose from the early societies in this region, which are among some of the earliest known human civilizations on earth.

The word "mesopotamia" is formed from the ancient words "meso," meaning between or in the middle of, and "potamos," meaning river. Situated in the fertile valleys between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the region is now home to modern-day Iraq, Kuwait, Turkey and Syria.

Mesopotamian Civilization

Humans first settled in Mesopotamia in the Paleolithic era. By 14,000 B.C., people in the region lived in small settlements with circular houses.

Five thousand years later, these houses formed farming communities following the domestication of animals and the development of agriculture, most notably irrigation techniques that took advantage of the proximity of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Agricultural progress was the work of the dominant Ubaid culture, which had absorbed the Halaf culture before it.

Ancient Mesopotamia

These scattered agrarian communities started in the northern part of the ancient Mesopotamian region and spread south, continuing to grow for several thousand years until forming what modern humans would recognize as cities, which were considered the work of the Sumer people.

Uruk was the first of these cities, dating back to around 3200 B.C. It was a mud brick metropolis built on the riches brought from trade and conquest and featured public art, gigantic columns and temples. At its peak, it had a population of some 50,000 citizens.

SUMERIANS

Sumerians are also responsible for the earliest form of written language, cuneiform, with which they kept detailed clerical records. By 3000 B.C., Mesopotamia was firmly under the control of the Sumerian people. Sumer contained several decentralized city-states—Eridu, Nippur, Lagash, Uruk, Kish .

The first king of a united Sumer is recorded as Etana of Kish. It's unknown whether Etana really existed, as he and many of the rulers listed in the Sumerian King List that was developed around 2100 B.C. are all featured in Sumerian mythology as well.

Etana was followed by Meskiaggasher, the king of the city-state Uruk. A warrior named Lugalbanda took control

Sargon And The Akkadians

The Akkadian Empire existed from 2234-2154 B.C. under the leadership of the now-titled Sargon the Great. It was considered the world's first multicultural empire with a central government.

Little is known of Sargon's background, but legends give him a similar origin to the Biblical story of Moses. He was at one point an officer who worked for the king of Kish, and Akkadia was a city that Sargon himself established. When the city of Uruk invaded Kish, Sargon took Kish from Uruk and was encouraged to continue with conquest.

Sargon expanded his empire through military means, conquering all of Sumer and moving into what is now Syria. Under Sargon, trade beyond Mesopotamian borders grew, and architecture became more sophisticated, notably the appearance of ziggurats, flat-topped buildings with a pyramid shape and steps. control around 2750 B.C.

The Babylonians

Choosing Babylon as the capital, the Amorites took control and established Babylonia.

Kings were considered deities and the most famous of these was Hammurabi, who ruled 1792–1750 B.C. Hammurabi worked to expand the empire, and the Babylonians were almost continually at war.

Hammurabi's most famous contribution is his list of laws, better known as the Code of Hammurabi, devised around 1772 B.C.

Hammurabi's innovation was not just writing down the laws for everyone to see, but making sure that everyone throughout the empire followed the same legal codes, and that governors in different areas did not enact their own. The list of laws also featured recommended punishments to ensure that every citizen had the right to the same justice.

In 1750 B.C. the Elamites conquered the city of Ur. Together with the control of the Amorites, this conquest marked the end of Sumerian culture.

THE ASSYRIAN

The Assyrian Empire under the leadership of Ashur-uballit I rose around 1365 B.C. in the areas between the lands controlled by the Hittites and the Kassites.

Around 1220 B.C., King Tukulti-Ninurta I aspired to rule all of Mesopotamia and seized Babylon. The Assyrian Empire continued to expand over the next two centuries, moving into modern-day Palestine and Syria.

Under the rule of Ashurnasirpal II in 884 B.C., the empire created a new capitol, Nimrud, built from the spoils of conquest and brutality that made Ashurnasirpal II a hated figure.

His son Shalmaneser spent the majority of his reign fighting off an alliance between Syria, Babylon and Egypt, and conquering Israel. One of his sons rebelled against him, and Shalmaneser sent another son, Shamshi-Adad, to fight for him. Three years later, Shamshi-Adad ruled.