

Mesopotamia: Early Bronze Age

Sarker Fahim Faysal Nirjhar, CSE
Sadia Haque Monisha, School Of Law
MD. Ahmedul Karim, BBS

1) What is Fertile Crescent?

Ans: The Fertile Crescent is a large arc of rich, fertile farmland. It is *Fertile* because the soil has silt (a mixture of fertile soil and tiny rocks that makes land ideal for farming) in it. It is known as the Fertile *Crescent* because it is shaped like a crescent. It is located in Southwest Asia. It is between The Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf. Two rivers that flow through the Fertile Crescent are the Tigris and Euphrates. (Modern day Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, Syria, Iraq)

2) Why did the first civilization emerge in Mesopotamia?

Ans: Fertile Crescent: The Fertile Crescent is a large arc of rich, fertile farmland. It is *Fertile* because the soil has silt (a mixture of fertile soil and tiny rocks that makes land ideal for farming) in it. It is known as the Fertile *Crescent* because it is shaped like a crescent. It is located in Southwest Asia. It is between the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf. Two rivers that flow through the Fertile Crescent are the Tigris and Euphrates. (Modern day Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, Syria, Iraq)

Mesopotamia: Mesopotamia lies within the Fertile Crescent. It is also known as the: Fertile Crescent & the Cradle of Civilization. It is between the Asia Minor and the Persian Gulf. Eastern part of the Fertile Crescent is present day Iraq. Mesopotamia actually means “between the rivers” in Greek. It is located in between the two rivers The Tigris and Euphrates! It lasted for approximately 3000 years. The first civilization emerged in Mesopotamia C. 3500 BCE. Major civilizations in Mesopotamia included:

- Sumerian
- Babylonian
- Assyrian

The land of Mesopotamia was *Fertile* because the soil had silt (a mixture of fertile soil and tiny rocks that makes land ideal for farming) in it. But during the rainy season flood used to occur and destroyed the crops on the way. In order to save the crops the people of Mesopotamia dug dam & canals and later when there was need of water they used the waters stored in the dam and canals.

3) What were the main features of Sumerian city states?

Ans: City state is a city with estates or farmlands and has its own government. Sumer is located in the southern part of Mesopotamia. Over 30 Sumerian cities came up and gradually became independent states with surrounding agricultural land. Renowned city states are: Ur, Uruk, Kish and Lagash. Period

of city states became known as the Uruk period. The city named Uruk was among the first and most developed.

Main features: (ISSTT)

- a. City state is a city with estates or farmlands and has its own government.
- b. These city states were independent from one another.
- c. The Sumerian city states were surrounded by walls with vast space within.
- d. It is served as spiritual, economic and cultural centers for the people.
- e. Temple, which was known as Ziggurat, was located in the center of the city.
- f. Temple, palace and other official and residential buildings were

4) What was a “Ziggurat”?

Ans: Sumerian temples came to known as, “Ziggurat”. The temple was located in the center of the city. Sumerians practiced polytheistic and their gods were thought to control every aspect of life. Temples evolved to ziggurats- a stepped tower topped by a shrine, which was a *stack of 1-7 platforms decreasing in size from bottom to top*. Ziggurats were made of layer upon layer of mud bricks in the shape of a pyramid in many tiers. The shrine on top was served as the god’s home and was beautifully decorated. It was the god’s home and also the god’s estate. Inside was a room for offerings of food and goods. It was a school, storage area, observatory, temple and government building in one.

Around the Ziggurat there were courts. The courts and the temple were the center of Sumerian life. Craftspeople worked there. Children went to school there. Farmers, craftspeople and traders stored their goods there. The poor were fed there. All the great events were celebrated there. People used to keep animals like sheep, goats, cows and donkeys within the Ziggurats, because they believed since it's a holy place no one will stole from here. The first Ziggurat of Mesopotamia was dedicated to the, "moon god Nanna". It became the most important sacred structure in Mesopotamia.

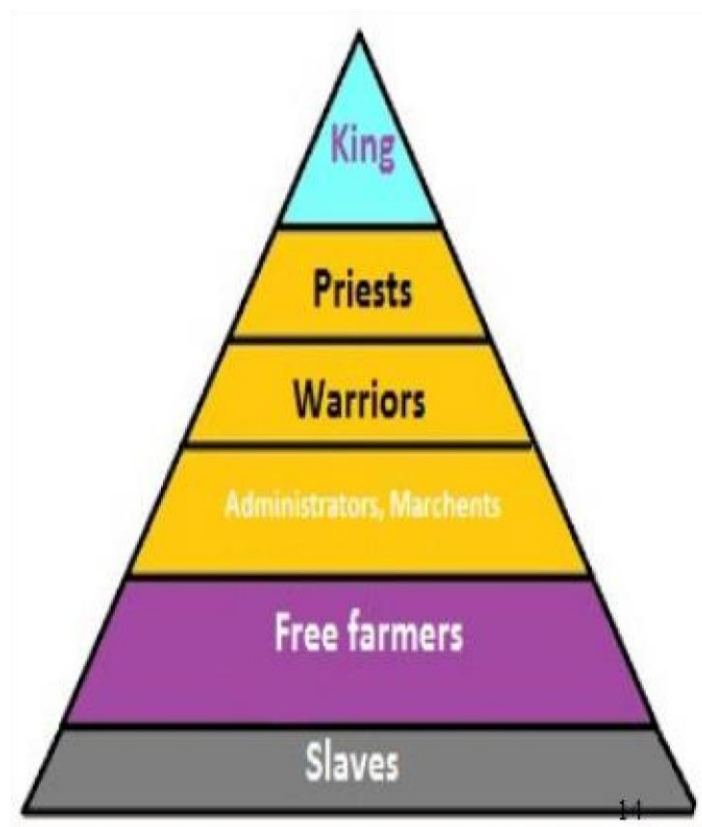
5) What were the main characteristics of Sumerian religion?

Ans: The Sumerians practiced polytheism. A long time ago the Sumerians didn't know how to explain things scientifically. They did not know why it rained or snowed. They did not know why lightning struck, or how the plants grew. They explained things by saying the gods had enormous powers. They believed the gods could bring good health and wealth. The Sumerians believed that success in areas of life depended on pleasing the gods, so they were very religious! Each state had its very own guardian deity (god). The priests knew the will of the gods. This made Sumerian priests very powerful. For example: all the land was owned by the city's god. But the priests controlled and administrated the land in the god's name. The priests also ran the schools. The Sumerian priests were also kings of city states.

6) What was the social structure of Mesopotamian city states?

Ans: Priests, Kings and prominent warriors were at the top. Next were the administrators, merchants and free farmers and finally the Slaves.

Here is the social structure of Mesopotamia city state:



Since the priests were the ones who knew the will of the gods, this made the Sumerian priests very powerful. That is why at first the priests were also king of city states. It was believed that the kings were actually declared by the gods. The warriors protected the city from out coming attacks. They were basically saviors of the cities, which is why after kings and priests was the position of the

warriors. Next were the administrators, merchants and free farmers. The administrators used to manage everything in the behalf of the kings and priests. The merchants used to trade goods with other city states and the farmers grew food for the city state. At last were the slaves! In those days the city states used to run into war with each other. The defeated party was bought in as prisoners in the city of the winning party and was treated as slaves. Slaves had no rights. They were treated in ill manner.

7) What was the Sumerian family?

Ans: The Sumerian families were dominated by the eldest male member. Sons could inherit property in equal shares. The schools in Sumer were only for the sons of the rich. Poorer boys worked in the fields or learned to trade. Only the Sumerian males went to school but the females had rights too. They could buy and sell property. They could run business, including taverns. They were allowed to own and sell slaves. Although woman could handle her husband's affairs when he was away, the husband was the head of the household. Monogamy prevailed and marriages were bound by contract. The husband could divorce his wife by saying, "You're not my wife." If he needed money he had the right to sell or rent his wife and children for up to 3 years. He also arranged the marriage of his children. Children were expected to support their parents when their parents became too old to support themselves. All family members were expected to obey the gods and the priests.

8) List the main Sumerian inventions (writing, wheel, lunar calendar).

Ans: The main Sumerian inventions are discussed below:

Writing: The birth place of writing is Mesopotamia. Sumerians invented the earliest known form of writing called **cuneiform** using a reed pen to make wedge-shaped marks on clay tablets. After writing on the wet clay tablets, they were kept on the hot sun to dry and once they were dried the writing procedure was completed. It was started as pictogram. They were basically drawn over cylinder seal or stone seal. It was first used to keep records of trade, taxes, marriage, death etc. Sumerian scribes went through years of difficult schooling to acquire their skills. When a student graduated from school he became a scribe or writer. He worked for the temple, the palace, the government or the army. Some scribes went to work for a merchant or set up their own business as public writers.

Wheel: Wheel or wheeled transport was invented c. 3200 BCE. Ox or horse drawn two wheeled chariots and four wheeled carts were used in those days. The wheels were solid, not spoked- made of wooden slabs.

Lunar Calendar: By mapping the night sky the people of Mesopotamia developed a 12 month calendar based on the cycles of the moon. The calendar marked the times for religious festivals. It also told farmers when to plant their crops. The Lunar year was 11 days shorter than the solar year but it was corrected by adding 1 month every few years. Later it was followed by the Israelites and Arabs.