

HUM 101

IN CLASS ACTIVITY

SESSION 03; EARLY CITIES AND STATES IN MESOPOTAMIA

Questions for Exploration

Each group will work separately on their assigned questions:

Group 1

Book Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/11Q0IPBIrCKqvjYzLNtc6zLG0y6BKINH/view?usp=sharing>

Describe the city-states of Sumer. Comment on some distinct features of Sumerian City-states based on your readings (Page 31 and 32). In the text, on page 33, it is written that there was a **contrast** between periods of civic political culture and those in which tribal warrior aristocracies predominated. Give examples of civic political culture and tribal warrior aristocracies, and what, according to your reading, are the contrasts between these two forms of polity? (Page 33)- particularly focus on how these two types of political systems had two different perceptions of the notion of kingship.

Comment on the influence of religion over the notion of kingship, social order (providing justifications of the existence of social hierarchies), and an ideal life of the gods reflecting actual civic procedure. In this context, how far religion was important in the civilizations of Mesopotamia? Why is it that the author writes while describing the Mesopotamian political culture, "...legitimate human authority was conceived as inherently universal-like that of the gods" (Black 35). (Read Page 33 to 35 to discuss the points). The text claims, on page 36, that the gods of Mesopotamian culture had established "**not just individual rulers but an *institution***". How did Mesopotamian monarchs create "institutions", and what do you think were the impacts along with explaining some functions of the monarchy (Page 36 - 37).

Group 2

Book Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CZ16TtAultwYVOMCgU06tAdYOUXdACpW/view?usp=sharing>

Explain the quote on page xxxiii, "...Above all [the epic] retains, in spite of its long and literate history, an unmistakable aura of the mythical-of that kind of emotional exploration of the permanent meaning of life, by the release of fantasy about the distant past...". Why do you think the creators of the epic of Gilgamesh released the fantasy about the distant past? What do you think is the necessity of the past?

Read pages xxxiv to xxxvii and discuss in class what possible functions did the Epic of Gilgamesh fulfil? Also explain the quote, "The message of the Gilgamesh epic is the vanity of the hero's quest: pursuit of immortality is folly, the proper duty of man is to accept the mortal life that is his lot and enjoy it to the full. 'Do your duty in the embrace of your woman!'..." (*Epic of Gilgamesh* xxxvi). From this quote what type of functions did the religion of ancient Mesopotamia fulfilled?

What was the epistemic foundation of the city states according to the ancient Mesopotamian myths? Why do you think the ancient gods would build cities and rivers for humans? - particularly refer to page xxxvii. What does this attitude reveal about the communities of ancient Mesopotamia perceiving themselves as a civilization?

Group 3

Book Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CZ16TtAultwYVOMCgU06tAdYOUXdACpW/view?usp=sharing>

Read pages xli to xlvi and contemplate on how *The Epic of Gilgamesh* provided the foundation of kingship and the role of kings? Do you think the epic provides a significant understanding of the importance of laws and governance?

According to ancient Mesopotamian myths, what is the source of human mortality? What connection does this have with the myth of the ark of Utanapishti? Discuss the flood myth and also the social order of the post

diluvian civilization within the context of the quote,

“The implication is that, when kings began to reign again, the antediluvian civilization was restored, that is, the order ordained by the gods came back into operation. This was important, for the traditional belief was that the gods had supplied all that was needed for human beings to flourish-cities, agriculture, the arts of civilization- at the outset of human history, in the antediluvian age. Nothing more was to be discovered; the antediluvian model was how human society should be run” (*The Epic of Gilgamesh* xlix). What can this quote tell us about the attitude that ancient Mesopotamian had regarding their world views and the foundations of their social order?

Group 4

Book Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/11Q0IPBIrCKqvjYzLNtc6zLG0y6BKINH/view?usp=sharing>

Read pages 39 to 42 from the book *World History of Ancient Political Thought* thoroughly and comment on the possible purpose which civic assembly (created by elders and professionals) and merchant assemblies played within the city-states of Sumer and later on in the Akkadian and Babylonian kingdoms. (39 to 42). On page 40 the text claims that in ancient Mesopotamia there might have been a presence of ‘primitive democracy’ which is disputed by some historians. Read pages 40 and 41 selectively and comment on the reasons behind why some historians believe that in ancient Mesopotamian cities and kingdoms, absolute sovereignty prevailed over ‘primitive democracy’ (Book Link:

Read Tablet III (Page 22 to 29) from the book *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and analyze the role of the elders, and the instructions for the governing of Uruk in his absence. How far did the assembly of the elders have a social authority, and to what extent was Gilgamesh powerful. (Book Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CZ16TtAultwYVOMCgU06tAdYOUXdACpW/view?usp=sharing>)