

World Prehistory

The Cuneiform Lab

Introduction: Mesopotamian cuneiform writing originated in the Middle East by the end of the 4th millennium BCE. The Sumerians originally developed cuneiform so as to keep track of commercial transactions and the like. As a result, cuneiform evolved in tandem with a mathematical system that was elaborated upon by the later Babylonian peoples of Mesopotamia. Today, your task will be to learn the essentials of cuneiform writing and Mesopotamian mathematics.

Directions: Please use the attached Cuneiform Links page to explore and facilitate the lab exercise as described below. By the end of the lab, you will have had the opportunity to (a) render your full name in cuneiform, (b) render your age or year of birth in Mesopotamian mathematics, (c) your place of birth in cuneiform, and then (d) prepare a brief text in Babylonian cuneiform that includes each of the aforementioned elements.

1. Please break into your pre-assigned lab groups. Once you have done so, each member of the team should take a few minutes to review the following two links:
 - <http://www.u.arizona.edu/~vancet/Lecture8.pdf>
 - http://www-groups.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history/HistTopics/Babylonian_numerals.html
2. Having reviewed that information provided on cuneiform and Mesopotamian mathematics, each member of your team should now prepare to create a cuneiform (stylus-based) rendering of his or her full name on an index card or individual slip of paper.
3. Having completed the cuneiform rendering of your name, you should proceed to prepare a cuneiform version of your place of birth, and then, use those Internet links labeled Mesopotamian Mathematics to render your year of birth. Again, you should make use of an index card or slip of paper to do so. See http://www.mathematicsmagazine.com/7-2003/Cueniform_No_7_2003.htm for an explanation on how to tabulate your date of birth in Mesopotamian format.
 - a. Tabulate your year of birth in cuneiform (stylus) format on an index card.
 - b. Use the link at <http://library.thinkquest.org/25672/thebase,.htm> for an explanation of Mesopotamian mathematics, and the Cuneiform Numbers Worksheet to complete a cuneiform rendering of those numbers listed in the upper table.
4. Finally, please make use of those cuneiform versions of your Name, Birthplace, and Year of Birth completed in the aforementioned portion of the exercise so as to create a brief one to two sentence cuneiform (stylus-based) narrative in which you place yourself into Mesopotamian written history. Please bear in mind that the entire text, lab time permitting, should be rendered entirely in cuneiform with Mesopotamian or Sumerian numerals.
 - a. You may make use of the Babylonian Kings list at <http://www.livius.org/k/kinglist/uruk.html> to render in the names of Kings of that era.
 - b. See <http://it.stlawu.edu/~dmelvill/mesomath/calculator/scalc.html> for a Cuneiform Numbers Calculator that may assist you with calculating distance dates or numerals you may wish to include in your narrative. Finally, please post a brief summary of your results (less Cuneiform) in the Discussion Forum posted for this day.