

Chapter 2: Mesopotamia Chapter Introduction

Book Title: World Civilizations

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Chapter Introduction

They see the cedar-mountain, the abode of the gods, ...

On the mountain the cedars uplift their abundance.

Their shadow is beautiful, is all delight.

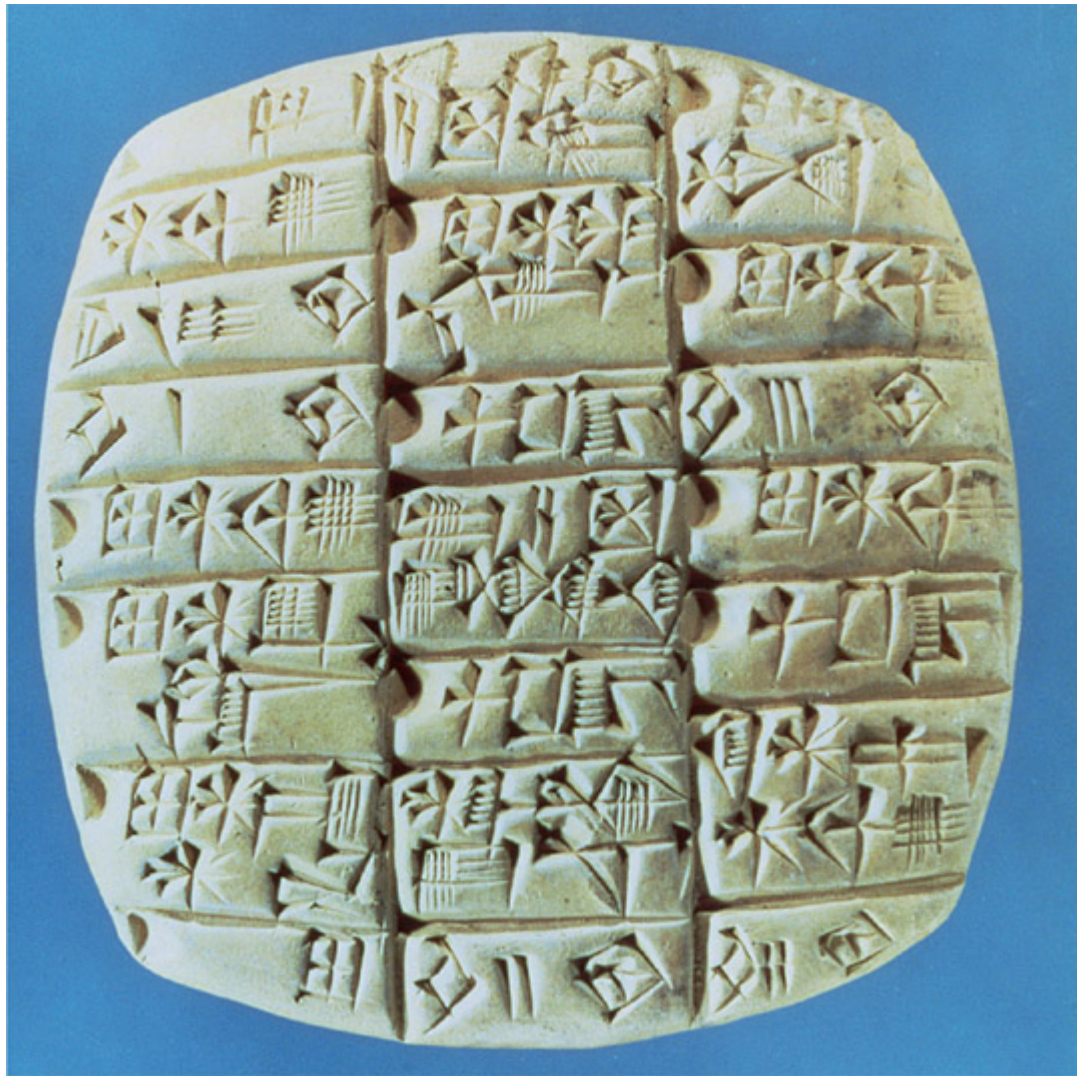
Thistles hide thereunder, and the dark prick-thorn,

Sweet-smelling flowers hide under the cedars.

—*Epic of Gilgamesh*

Cuneiform Writing.

This example of cuneiform writing is an astrological tablet from Uruk in Sumer. Probably recorded by a priest, it serves as a reminder of the linkage that existed between religious ritual and timekeeping in ancient agrarian societies.



© Accounts Table with cuneiform script, c.2400 BC (terracotta), Mesopotamian / Louvre, Paris, France / Bridgeman Images

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Chronology

c. 15,000–10,000 B.C.E.	End of the last Ice Age
c. 10,000 B.C.E.	First evidence of agriculture in the Levantine Corridor
c. 5000 B.C.E.	Sumerians arrive in Mesopotamia
c. 3500 B.C.E.	Cuneiform writing
c. 3000 B.C.E.	Sumerian city-states develop
c. 2300 B.C.E.	Sargon of Akkad
1700s B.C.E.	Hammurabi/oldest surviving law code

c. 1500 B.C.E.	Hittites conquer Mesopotamia
c. 900 B.C.E.	Rise of Assyria
539 B.C.E.	Conquest by Persia

The population increase resulting from the Neolithic Revolution led to the creation of farming villages, often in the same locations where nomadic hunter-gatherers had previously settled temporarily to plant their crops and graze their livestock. Grains were the usual basis of early agriculture, and the residents of those areas with fertile soil, sufficient rain, and a temperate climate to support wild grains were the pioneers of village development. From the farming village slowly evolved the much more socially differentiated town, with its various economic divisions and occupational specialties. From some small settlements grew larger centers (called *cities*) of governmental power, religious ritual, manufacturing, trade, and cultural sophistication. A combination of agrarianism, city life, social complexity, government, trade networks, and writing produced the earliest known civilizations in world history. One of these was [Sumeria \(The earliest known civilization, based on city-states located in southern Iraq along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.\)](#), in southern Mesopotamia.

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