

# MESOPOTAMIA AND THE FERTILE CRESCENT

TOPIC 2 PRESENTATION



# CIVILIZATION IN MESOPOTAMIA

- Mesopotamia
  - Greek word – “land between the rivers”
    - Tigris and Euphrates Rivers
  - Very little rainfall
    - Soil enlarged and enriched by layers of silt deposited when the two rivers flood
    - Flooding depends on melting snow in the upland mountains
    - Irregular, catastrophic
  - Farming accomplished only with human intervention in the form of irrigation and drainage ditches
    - Complex system was required to control the flow of the rivers and produce the crops
    - Large-scale irrigation made possible the expansion of agriculture and this abundant food provided the material base for the emergence of civilization in Mesopotamia

# CITY-STATES OF MESOPOTAMIA

- By 3,000 B.C.E, Sumerians had established a number of independent cities in southern Mesopotamia
- Eridu, Ur, Uruk, Umma, Lagash
- Nippur as a Trading Center - Video
- Social Hierarchy within Nippur - Video
- Exercised political and economic control over the surrounding countryside --- **city-states** --- basic units of Sumerian civilization
- Development of the Sumerian City State - Video

# SUMERIAN CITIES

- Surrounded by walls
  - Uruk
    - 6 miles long
    - Defensive towers every 30 to 35 feet
- City dwellings
  - Small flats for peasants
  - Larger dwellings for civic and priestly officials
- Sun-dried, mud bricks
  - Very little stone or wood
  - Plenty of mud
  - Shaped by hand
  - Left to dry in the sun until hard enough to use for building
- Invented the arch and dome for constructing some of the largest buildings in the world
- Mudbrick still used in rural parts of the Middle East today

# SUMERIAN CITIES

- Temple
  - Most prominent building in the city
  - Dedicated to chief god or goddess
  - Built atop massive, stepped tower --- ziggurat
- Believed gods and goddesses owned the cities
- Much wealth spent to build temples and elaborate houses for the priests and priestesses
  - Serve the deities
  - Supervise the temples and their property
  - Great power
  - Played important role in governance in the formative stages of certain city-states
- Theocracy - government by divine authority
  - Gods ruled the cities
- Actual ruling power was in the hands of worldly figures known as kings
- [Religion-and-the-Ruling-Class-of-the-Ancient-Sumerians - Video](#)

# KINGSHIP

- Sumerians viewed kingship as divine in origin
  - Derived their power from the gods and were agents of the gods

***“You in your judgement, you are the son of Anu [god of the sky]; Your commands, like the word of a god, cannot be reversed; your words, like rain pouring down from heaven, are without number” --- Sumerian petitioning the king***

- Kings had power
  - Led armies
  - Organized workers for irrigation projects
  - Army, government bureaucracy, priests and priestesses all aided the kings in their rule
  - Lived in large palaces with their wives and children
- Power Authority and Governance in the Sumerian City State Video

# ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

- Primarily agricultural, but commerce and industry became important
- Woolen textiles, pottery, metal work
- Imported copper, tin, and timber
- Exported dried fish, wool, barley, wheat, and metal goods
- Traders traveled to eastern Mediterranean
- [Development-of-Trade-in-Mesopotamia – Video](#)
- [The Function of Trading – Video](#)
- [Trade-Routes-over-Water – Video](#)
- [Trade-and-the-Ruling-Class – Video](#)
- [Trade-between-Cultures-in-the-Ancient-World – Video](#)

# EMPIRES IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

- City-states fought for control of land and water as the number and size of city-states grew
- This constant warfare left many Sumerian city-states in deep despair

***Ur is destroyed, bitter is its lament.***

***The country's blood now fills its holes like hot bronze in a mold.***

***Bodies dissolve like fat in the sun.***

***Our temple is destroyed, the gods have abandoned us, like migrating birds.***

***Smoke lies on our city like a shroud.***

***---Sumerian poem from Ur***

# SARGON'S EMPIRE

- Sumerian city-states were open to attack due to a lack of natural defense
- Akkadians, led by king Sargon, overran the Sumerian city-states and established an empire that included most of Mesopotamia as well as lands westward to the Mediterranean (2340 B.C.E.)
- Attacks from neighboring hill peoples eventually led to the fall of the Akkadian Empire (2100 B.C.E.)
- Fighting amongst Mesopotamian city-states resumed
- Hammurabi, who led the Amorites or Old Babylonians, created an empire that controlled much of Mesopotamia (1792 B.C.E.)

# THE CULTURE OF MESOPOTAMIA

- The Importance of Religion
  - Physical environment impacted Mesopotamian's view of the universe
    - Ferocious floods
    - Heavy downpours
    - Scorching winds
    - Oppressive humidity
  - Convinced the Mesopotamians that this world was controlled by supernatural forces
  - Days of human beings “are numbered; whatever he may do, he is but wind” --- *The Epic of Gilgamesh*
  - [The-Epic-of-Gilgamesh - Video](#)

# THE CULTURE OF MESOPOTAMIA

- The Importance of Religion
  - Mesopotamians felt helpless as this poem relates:

The rampant flood which no man can oppose,  
Which shakes the heavens and causes earth to tremble,  
In an appalling blanket folds mother and child,  
Beats down the canebrake's full luxuriant greenery,  
And drowns the harvest in its time of ripeness.

# THE CULTURE OF MESOPOTAMIA

- The Importance of Religion
  - Polytheistic
    - An – god of the sky; most important force in the universe
    - Enlil – god of wind
    - Enki – god of the earth, rivers, wells, canals, inventions, and crafts
    - Ninhursaga – goddess associated with soil, mountains, and vegetation; worshipped as a mother goddess, “mother of all children”, manifested her power by giving birth to kings and conferring the royal insignia on them

# THE CULTURE OF MESOPOTAMIA

- The Importance of Religion
  - Human beings were created to do the manual labor the gods were unwilling to do themselves – **subservience**
  - Human beings were anxious because they could never predict the gods' actions, but attempted to through **divination**
    - Killing animals and examining their organs (i.e. if organ shape is **x**, then the outcome of the war will be **y**)
    - Desired to discover the purposes of the gods and could act wisely if events could be predicted

# THE CULTURE OF MESOPOTAMIA

- The Cultivation of Writing and Sciences
  - Identifying-the-Need-for-a-Written-Language - Video
  - Cuneiform ("wedge-shaped") – oldest Mesopotamian text which dates to 3,000 B.C.E.
  - Wrote on clay tablets using a reed stylus and then dried them in the sun – virtually indestructible and several hundred thousand have been found
  - Valuable source of information for modern scholars
  - Evolved from pictures of concrete objects to simplified and stylized signs which eventually led to phonetic system which made possible the written expression of abstract ideas
  - Development-of-Writing-in-Mesopotamia - Video

# THE CULTURE OF MESOPOTAMIA

- The Cultivation of Writing and Sciences
  - Primarily for record keeping
  - Schools taught cuneiform writing
  - [Education of Scribes – Video](#)
  - Primary goal of scribal education was to produce professionally trained scribes for careers in temples and palaces, the military, and government services
  - [The Role of Scribes in Ancient Sumerian Society – Video](#)
  - Males from wealthy families went to school
  - [Relationship Between Scribes and the Ruling Class – Video](#)

# THE CULTURE OF MESOPOTAMIA

- The Cultivation of Writing and Sciences
  - Writing was important for record keeping and maintaining previous knowledge
  - Also important for communicating new ideas in new ways
    - Epic of Gilgamesh – most famous poem from Mesopotamia

# THE CULTURE OF MESOPOTAMIA

- The Cultivation of Writing and Sciences
- [Inventions-and-Innovations-in-Ancient-Mesopotamia - Video](#)
  - Math
    - Sumerians devised a number system based on 60 using combinations of 6 and 10 for practical solutions
    - Geometry was used to measure fields and erect buildings
  - Astronomy
    - Used units of 60 to chart heavenly constellations
    - Calendar based on twelve lunar months
      - Brought into harmony with solar year by adding an extra month from time to time

# WORKS CITED

- Duiker, William J., and Jackson J. Spielvogel. *World History: to 1500*. 6th ed. Australia: Wadsworth Cengage, 2009. Print.