

Chapter 2: Mesopotamia - Cradle of Civilization

Mesopotamia's Geography:

- present day Mesopotamia was located in present day Iraq, Northeast Syria and part of southeast Turkey
- it stretched from the Persian Gulf northwest through the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers
- the ancient Greeks were the first to call the region Mesopotamia
- the Greek word 'meso' means middle, and 'potamos' means river or the land between the rivers

Northern Mesopotamia

- this area of land was known as the Fertile Crescent and was the site of some of the world's first permanent farming villages
- rainfall was more reliable which helped to produce excellent farmland
- forests covered the area, which were full of animals (such as cattle, antelopes, elephants, wild boars, sheep and goats)
- the people here were also closer to the resources of the surrounding regions, such as tin from the east and gold/silver from the west

Southern Mesopotamia

- the land had a flat flood plain - the summers were very hot and dry which would cause droughts that would kill crops and cause famines
- waters from the mountains would cause flooding, but eventually people learned to control the flood waters and irrigate the soil to produce crops
- mineral and forests were also found here

Chapter 2: Mesopotamia - Cradle of Civilization

Government (Theocracy):

- in the early history of Sumer's city-states, free citizens elected an assembly to run the government
- this assembly consisted of two houses: an upper house (contained wealthiest citizens) and a lower house (contained soldiers)
- these elected members chose the judges, who were responsible for enforcing the laws, and selected the military leaders needed in time of war
- when war in Mesopotamia became more frequent, the assembly created the additional role of king - these kings were called 'lugals' - their major responsibility was the defense of the city-state
- because most of the kings see themselves as living representatives of a particular god - the system of government in Mesopotamia was considered a theocracy - at the beginning most kings were elected, eventually however, crowns would be passed from father to son (this created dynasties or hereditary monarchies)
- most kings kept a tight rein on their people - the king's word was considered law
- kings were still bound by religion - for 5 days each month the king was to fast and perform certain religious ceremonies for their people

The Code of Hammurabi is *one of* the earliest examples of basic law in society

The Code of Hammurabi displays rules, and punishments if those rules are broken

The 282 laws focuses on theft, farming (or shepherding), property damage, ^{women's} ~~wome's~~ rights, marriage rights, children's rights, slave rights, murder, death, and injury

The punishment is different for different classes of offenders and victims: Noble people were held to a higher standard because they should know better than commoners

The laws do not accept excuses or explanations for mistakes or fault - a breach of the law demanded punishment (ever heard a police officer say "Ignorance of the law is no defense"?)

The Code was displayed on an 8-foot tall pillar (called the Stela of Hammurabi) for all to see so no one could plead ignorance of the law

This gave rise to the term "Written in stone"

Chapter ³4: Mesopotamia - Society and Culture

Marriage:

- traditional parents arranged marriages for their sons and daughters when the children were in their teens
- during engagement ceremonies, the future groom poured perfume on the head of his future bride and brought presents
- after this, she was considered a full member of her future husband's family
- on the wedding day, the bride was delivered to her husband where he unveiled her and declared her to be his wife

Banquets and Feasts:

- these were a popular form of entertainment
- they would serve the wealthy citizens duck, beer and roasted wild pork along with fresh fruit, vegetables and bread
- the poorer citizen would eat dried or fresh fish with a mixture of onions, cucumbers, apples, spices, cheese and eggs

Schooling:

- at age 8-9 boys of the wealthiest families began to attend school
- children from lower class families were taught life skills at home
- the school was constructed of brick with small windows near the roof - there were rows of benches made of mud-bricks
- children wrote their work on clay tablets
- students were called sons, the teacher was called father (often because they were a priest or scribe)
- school ran from sunrise to sunset

- discipline was quite strict - students who did not do their work perfectly were punished - since the students were doing their work in clay, if the clay dried before they could make their corrections - the errors remained forever and they were in big trouble!

Art and Sculptures:

- these were quite important to life in Mesopotamia
- almost everyone owned a small statue of one of the gods
- nearly all of the statues depict a figure standing quietly with their hands clasped in prayer
- **Mosaics** (a picture or design created using chips of colored stones inlaid together) were often used to tell a story

Science and Math:

- the most important technological advance was the wheel
- they built wagons and chariots which improved both transportation of goods, but also their military
- they could count by tens, but they preferred to use 60 as their mathematical unit (60 was extremely important)
- they used math to build canals and keep accurate account of taxes
- they also developed the 360 degree circle, the 60 minute and the 60 second minute

Time:

- believed that the stars controlled the forces of heaven
- they named various groups of stars, gave them special meanings and used these groups and their movements to predict the future
- their astronomers worked out a lunar calendar of 12 months
- they divided the year into two seasons: emesh (summer) and enten (winter)

- due to time lapse from one new moon to another ($29 \frac{1}{2}$ days) the lunar year of 12 months only contained 354 days ($11 \frac{1}{4}$ days short of a solar year) - after three years the calendar was short almost an entire month - so, the king had to add an extra month every three years
 - people relied on the stars for determining directions, on land and sea
-

Chapter ³ A: Mesopotamia - Society and Culture

Marriage:

- traditional parents arranged marriages for their sons and daughters when the children were in their teens
- during engagement ceremonies, the future groom poured perfume on the head of his future bride and brought presents
- after this, she was considered a full member of her future husband's family
- on the wedding day, the bride was delivered to her husband where he unveiled her and declared her to be his wife

Banquets and Feasts:

- these were a popular form of entertainment
- they would serve the wealthy citizens duck, beer and roasted wild pork along with fresh fruit, vegetables and bread
- the poorer citizen would eat dried or fresh fish with a mixture of onions, cucumbers, apples, spices, cheese and eggs

Schooling:

- at age 8-9 boys of the wealthiest families began to attend school
- children from lower class families were taught life skills at home
- the school was constructed of brick with small windows near the roof - there were rows of benches made of mud-bricks
- children wrote their work on clay tablets
- students were called sons, the teacher was called father (often because they were a priest or scribe)
- school ran from sunrise to sunset

