

The Assyrians

Assyria was a civilization in Mesopotamia on the upper Tigris River. The civilization lasted many centuries, but was most prominent between 1800 B.C. and 612 B.C. Assyria had several advantages over Babylonia. Assyrians could farm without the elaborate irrigation that was needed in Babylonia. The land not only received water from the Tigris River and its tributaries, but it also received a moderate amount of rainfall annually. Also, Assyria had rocks and stones that could be used for building. Assyria had two disadvantages, however, compared to Babylonia. The Assyrian land was harder to cultivate, and they were often attacked by barbarians who raided their villages.

Assyrians were a Semitic-speaking people who arrived in Mesopotamia about 2000 B.C. Assyria was named after its original capital, Ashur. Ashur became part of the Mesopotamian empire but eventually gained its independence in about 1365 B.C. Assyrians developed a thriving trade in Anatolia (Asia Minor). Eventually, the Hittites drove the Assyrians out of Anatolia, and when the Babylonian Kingdom became stronger under the leadership of King Hammurabi, Assyrian power in Mesopotamia grew weaker. By 1550 B.C. Assyria became part of the of Mitanni Kingdom. The notable achievement of the Mitanni Kingdom was that it introduced trained horses and chariots into this part of the world.

Gradually, Assyrian power grew and by 1100 B.C. it was strong enough to begin expanding. Assyria's method of expansion was very different from those of other civilizations. The Assyrians developed a **standing army**, which is composed of soldiers who choose the army as their career. When the soldiers are not fighting, they are still in the army training to fight. This was a revolutionary idea in this period. Other countries fought their wars with citizen-soldiers. A **citizen-soldier** fights a war, and after it is over, he returns home and resumes his life working at his former craft or career. The Assyrian soldiers were fierce and cruel warriors. They had weapons made of iron rather than copper or bronze. They also had battering rams. They not only had foot soldiers, they had archers, chariots, and a cavalry. Whenever they captured enemies, they would either murder them or make them slaves.

Captured cities were plundered and looted. Once a city was conquered by the Assyrians, the citizens of the city were required to pay taxes and tribute to the Assyrians. The Assyrians built forts close to these cities, and a governor was appointed to administer each of these forts. The governor reported directly to the king by sending reports by messengers on horseback—the first mail delivery service.

However, the success of the Assyrians was also their undoing. Because their kingdom was so large, it was impossible to maintain. There were too few soldiers, so mercenaries were hired to serve in the army. A **mercenary** is a foreign soldier hired by another country to fight in its army. Eventually, the Assyrians were vanquished by the Medes, Chaldeans, and the Babylonians. The capital city of Nineveh was razed.

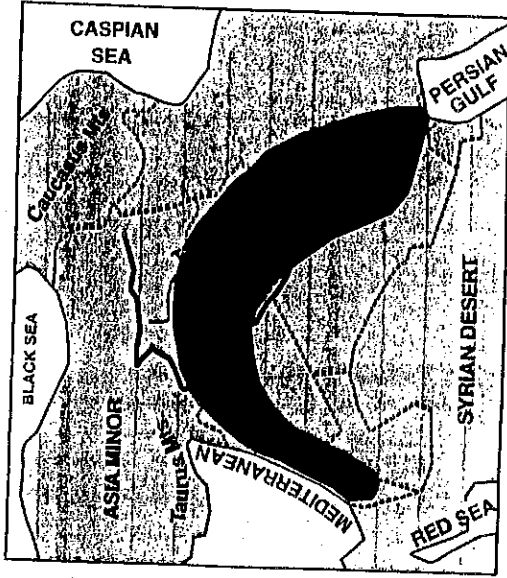
The Fertile Crescent

The term "Fertile Crescent" refers to an area in the Middle East where the earliest known civilizations of the world began. The area got its name because the soil is fertile and the region is shaped like a crescent. Like a huge arch, the Fertile Crescent covers an area from the Persian Gulf through the Tigris and Euphrates River valleys and along the Mediterranean Sea. Some people refer to the eastern part of the Fertile Crescent as Mesopotamia. The western part of the Fertile Crescent is sometimes referred to as the Mediterranean section.

The Fertile Crescent was an ideal place for nomadic people to settle, build cities, and eventually develop civilizations. Sheep, goats, and various kinds of grains were found in abundance in the wild. With a permanent food source, there was no need to move around to find food. It was easier to grow crops in the rich soil and to raise animals for food. People living in the Fertile Crescent were able to grow more crops than they could eat and raise more animals than they needed, so they could trade the excess crops and animals with others. As trading increased, the population grew, and the people needed to develop laws, keep records, and invent ways to deal with their new way of life. There was a need for a written language, mathematics, laws, medicine, agriculture, and other developments because of the many people living close to one another.

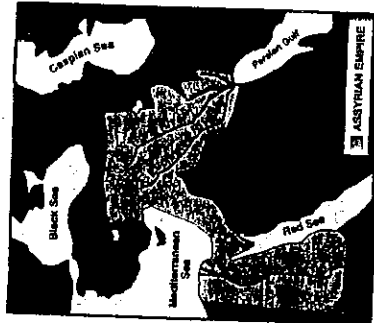
When humans changed their lifestyle from hunters and fishers to farmers about 5,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent, the developments and inventions that came from this change helped to develop the world's first civilizations. These civilizations have affected world history tremendously, not only in social and business areas, but in religion as well. Many of the great religions that exist in the world today had their beginnings in the area known as the Fertile Crescent.

The Fertile Crescent was not only the home of the first civilizations, but also the area where many later civilizations were developed. Some of the civilizations that developed in the Fertile Crescent were the Assyrians, Sumerians, Canaanites, Philistines, Phoenicians/Carthaginians, Akkadians, Hittites, Palestinians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Israelites, and others.



Identifying Modern Countries in the Fertile Crescent

Using an atlas, identify the middle-eastern countries that exist in the areas in and around the Fertile Crescent on the map at right. The outlines of the countries are shown as dashed lines.



ASSYRIAN CIVILIZATION AT A GLANCE

WHERE: Northern Mesopotamia
WHEN: 1800 B.C.–612 B.C.

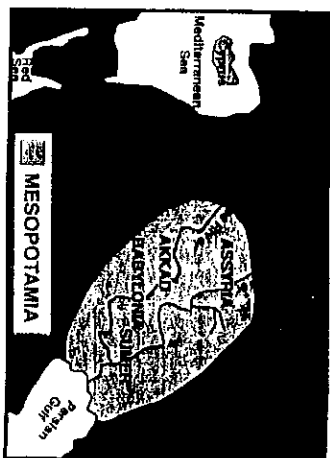
ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Created the first library
- Built a system of roads
- Ruled their extended kingdom with appointed governors
- First to develop a standing army
- Developed a mail service

Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia is a Greek word that means "between two rivers." The two rivers referred to are the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers begin in what is now Turkey, flow south-east, converge in the southeast in what is now Iraq, and empty into the Persian Gulf. The hot, dry climate of Mesopotamia was mixed with seasonal flooding, which made farming a challenge. Farmers in ancient Mesopotamia learned to deal with these problems by building levees to control the floods and developing irrigation systems in order to produce wheat, barley, sesame, and flax. They were also able to produce many different kinds of fruits and vegetables.

People talk about Mesopotamia as if it were a single civilization or culture. Actually, Mesopotamia was an area, not a civilization. It was composed of several independent city-states, each with its own religion, laws, language, and government. Many civilizations have existed in Mesopotamia, some of them at the same time. While one culture may have dominated a certain period, other cultures may have existed and were seeking to become independent. Some of the cultures that have existed in this area are Sumeria, Assyria, Babylonia, and Iraq.



The Sumerians and The Akkadians

The first group of people to inhabit Mesopotamia were the Sumerians. They originally lived in the mountains, but moved to the Plain of Shinar near the Persian Gulf to take advantage of the fertile soil. First, they drained the marshes and then controlled the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers by building levees and irrigation canals. As a result, the Sumerians had a stable food supply, and not everyone was needed to farm, hunt, or fish. Some Sumerians became tradesmen, merchants, soldiers, priests, government officials, and artisans. Their country was called Sumer.

The Sumerians are given credit for many inventions. One of the most important was the invention of a written language. Writing was invented so the Sumerians could keep records. Their writing was, of course, very simple. It was composed of pictures called **pictographs**. **Scribes**, who were professional writers, drew the pictures on clay tablets using a wedge-shaped instrument, or **stylus**. Over a period of time, the writing became more sophisticated. The pictures were replaced with shapes and lines. This type of writing

SUMERIAN CIVILIZATION AT A GLANCE

Where: In the Middle East, between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers
When: 3500 B.C. - 2000 B.C.

Achievements:

- The world's first civilization where people lived together in a city-state
- Invented a written language
- Developed science and mathematics to a high degree; were able to divide the year and the circle into 360 parts
- Developed a twelve-month calendar based on lunar cycles
- Used the wheel and made vehicles
- Invented the plow and the sailboat

Name: _____

Date: _____

Babylonian Civilization Quiz

Fill in the following sentences with the appropriate word or words.

1. The priests used their knowledge of planets and the stars as part of their _____.
2. King Hammurabi had a code of laws that are known as the _____.
3. _____ is the study of the universe.
4. _____ is the belief that the positions and movement of the planets and stars can affect or predict life on Earth.
5. About 1,000 years after the death of Hammurabi, _____ came to power.
6. The most impressive gate in the Wall of Babylon was the _____.
7. Ishtar was a _____.
8. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon were built to please Nebuchadnezzar's wife _____.
9. The Hanging Gardens is considered one of the _____.
10. Babylon was invaded by the _____, and Babylon became part of their empire.
11. Babylon was located by the _____ River.
12. Nebuchadnezzar ruled Babylon from _____ to _____.
13. _____ was king of Babylonia from 1792 B.C. to 1750 B.C.
14. The _____ Empire came to power after the Assyrian Empire was destroyed.
15. The *Code of Hammurabi* did not impose a fine on criminals but substituted the ancient punishment of "an eye for an _____" and a tooth for a _____.
16. Babylonians were able to measure time by studying the movements of _____.
17. The _____ were a Semitic tribe from Syria who conquered the Sumerians and the Akkadians.
18. Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his _____ in 562 B.C.
19. The *Code of Hammurabi* was a little different from those adopted from Sumeria. It added the element of _____ to the code.
20. Many people refer to the Babylonians as a later development of the _____ culture.

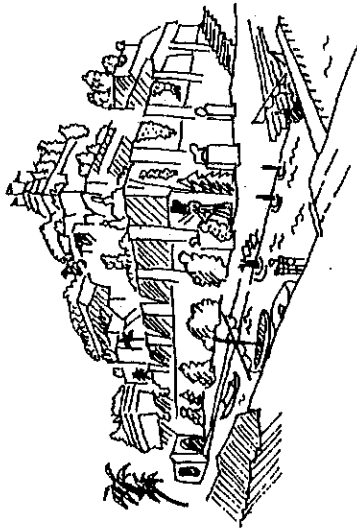
if he put out the eye of a man's slave, he would then have to pay one-half of the slave's value. Law was not the only interest of the Babylonians. They studied astronomy and also believed in astrology. **Astronomy** is the study of the universe, including the movement of the stars and planets. **Astronomy** is the belief that the positions and movements of the planets and stars can affect or predict life on Earth. While we separate these two areas today, the Babylonians did not.

The study of astronomy by the Babylonians was very advanced for its time. They not only watched the stars and heavens, they kept records of events, such as when an eclipse occurred. They were able to measure time by studying the movements of the celestial bodies. The priests used their knowledge of planets and the stars as part of their religion. The priests claimed that by studying the celestial bodies, they could tell the future. They were constantly looking at the skies, making horoscopes and predictions based on what they saw. A **horoscope** is a prediction of a person's future based on a diagram of the planets and stars at a given moment, such as birth.

About 1,000 years after the death of Hammurabi, another king came to power. His name was Nebuchadnezzar II. By this time, Babylon was part of the Chaldean Empire, which came to power after the Assyrian Empire was destroyed. Nebuchadnezzar ruled Babylon from 605 B.C. to 562 B.C., and under his leadership, Babylon grew. At this time, Babylon had two structures that were so impressive they were known throughout the civilized world. The first was the beautifully decorated wall surrounding Babylon. On top of the wall were towers for guards who could watch for approaching enemies. This wall was wide enough for a four-horse chariot to be driven on it. While the wall had several gates through which travelers could enter and leave the city, the most impressive was the Gate of Ishtar. Ishtar was a goddess, and the gate named in her honor was made of colorful glazed enamel bricks with pictures of animals. The gate was so beautiful that one time it was considered as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It was later replaced on the list by the Lighthouse at Alexandria.

The second structure built by Nebuchadnezzar that gained worldwide fame was the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. The Hanging Gardens is still considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Built to please Nebuchadnezzar's wife, Amytis, the Hanging Gardens was a building consisting of several terraces, one above the other. Each terrace was planted with trees and flowers from around the country. Pools and fountains were also built into the structure. In order for all of the plant life to thrive in this desert environment, the Babylonians developed an irrigation system to raise water from the Euphrates River to the Gardens. Exactly how this irrigation system worked is unknown, but later writers referred to the system as "water engines."

Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son in 562 B.C. who was assassinated three years later. Within a few years, Babylon was invaded by the Persians, and Babylonia became part of the Persian Empire.



The Hanging Gardens of Babylon

is called **cuneiform**. Other inventions include the wheel, which was developed for making pottery, but was later used to make vehicles. They also invented the water clock, the twelve-month calendar, the plow, and the sailboat.

The Sumerians had a numbering system based on the number 60. We still use the Sumerian system today when measuring time. For example, sixty seconds make a minute and sixty minutes make an hour. Also, a circle has 360 degrees.

Between 3500 and 2000 B.C., the Sumerians were living in large villages. Eventually they became prosperous, and the villages developed into self-governing city-states. The buildings in these city-states were made of sun-dried mud bricks. The Sumerians used these mud bricks as building materials because there was no building stone and very little timber in Sumer, and the rivers were a great source for mud.

The buildings in Sumer were different from other civilizations, such as the Egyptians. Sumerians learned how to use a keystone to make arches. A keystone is a wedge-shaped stone in an arch that causes the arch to lock together. The doorways, gates, and other openings in buildings in the Sumerian cities had arches. Similar openings in Egyptian buildings were square.

Priests, wealthy citizens, and merchants had two-story houses. These houses had an open courtyard that all the rooms of the house opened into. There were smaller homes for others, also. Religion was important to the Sumerians. At the center of each city-state was a temple that was surrounded by courts and public buildings. These temples were called **ziggurats**. Ziggurats were originally built on platforms, but eventually became temple-towers brightly decorated with glazed bricks. They were like huge pyramids with terraced sides that were flat on the top.

The Sumerians had many gods. They believed the gods spoke to them through their priests. Since the priests were representatives of the gods, they had a great deal of power in Sumer. When a priest commanded that something be done, the people believed the command was actually coming from one of their gods, and they obeyed. The ability to make important decisions and have people obey them elevated the status of priests. They became priest-kings and ruled large areas.

While Mesopotamia offered many advantages for settlement, such as rich soil, water, and game, there was one great disadvantage. The land did not provide any natural protection from invaders. Enemies could easily march into Sumer from almost any direction. This made Sumerians vulnerable to attack, not only from foreign armies, but from other Sumerian cities as well. Wars between Sumerian cities were common.

The importance of natural protection cannot be overstated. Compare the location of Egypt with Sumer, for example. Egypt is protected by a desert on both sides of the Nile River, which is difficult to navigate in some spots. Nations wanting to conquer Egypt would have a difficult time overcoming these natural barriers to launch an attack. Consequently, Egypt's culture grew rapidly. Sumer, on the other hand, did not have natural barriers. Sumerians not only had to worry about invading armies, but also about other groups of people who wanted to share the fertile soil of Mesopotamia.

One of the groups that moved into Sumeria was the Akkadians, who had been living on the Arabian peninsula. The Akkadians were a Semitic people. This means they spoke a Semitic language related to languages similar to Arabic and Hebrew. The Akkadians formed their own country where the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers were close together. Their country was called Akkad. The Akkadians adopted much of the Sumerian culture. After many clashes between the Sumerians and the Akkadians, more Semites invaded Sumeria. The Sumerian culture was eventually absorbed by the invaders. This combined civilization lasted until about 1950 B.C. when the Amorites and the Elamites captured Ur, Mesopotamia's most important city.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Sumerian Civilization Quiz

Fill in the following sentences with the appropriate word or words.

- Two famous rivers located in Mesopotamia are the _____ and _____ Rivers.
- Farmers in ancient Mesopotamia learned to deal with flooding by developing _____.
- Ziggurats were originally built on platforms, but eventually became _____.
- Some of the cultures that have existed in _____ were Sumeria, Assyria, Babylon, and Iraq.
- The first group of people to inhabit Mesopotamia was called _____.
- The name of the country of the first inhabitants of Mesopotamia was _____.
- Perhaps the most important Sumerian invention was a _____.
- Mesopotamia is a Greek word that means _____.
- Sumerian writing was originally composed of pictures, called _____.
- _____ were professional writers.
- Scribes drew the pictures on clay tablets using a wedge-shaped instrument, or _____.
- Later Sumerian writing consisting of shapes and lines was called _____.
- The Sumerians invented writing so that they could keep _____.
- At the center of each Sumerian city-state was a temple called a _____.
- Mesopotamia was composed of several independent _____.
- Ziggurats were like huge _____ with terraced sides that were flat on the top.
- A _____ is a wedge-shaped stone in an arch that causes the arch to lock together.
- The Sumerians believed that the gods spoke to them through their _____.
- Sumerians learned how to use a keystone to make _____.
- Egypt is protected by a _____ on both sides of the Nile.
- The priests were actually _____, and they ruled large areas.
- Mesopotamia did not provide any natural _____ from invaders.
- One of the groups that moved into Sumeria was the _____.
- The Akkadians formed a country called _____.
- The Akkadians were a _____ people.

Babylonia

The Sumerians and Akkadians living in Mesopotamia became weaker and were conquered by the Amorites, a Semitic tribe from Syria. One Akkadian town that developed in approximately 1900 B.C. was the small town of Babylon, located by the Euphrates River. Babylon grew in size and importance, and eventually its ruler, King Hammurabi, conquered all of Mesopotamia. This kingdom came to be known as Babylonia.

The Babylonian culture was similar to the Sumerian culture, which had existed in Mesopotamia before the Babylonians arrived. In fact, many people refer to the Babylonians as just a late development of the Sumerian culture. This is why some historians credit Sumeria with some inventions and developments while other historians credit the same advances to Babylonia. This confusion is easy to understand. While the two civilizations existed at different times, they had many things in common. The Babylonians adopted the religion, literature, inventions, and practices of the Sumerians. Scholars and priests spoke the Sumerian language, although most Babylonians did not. While Babylonia borrowed heavily from the Sumerian culture, they did make one important contribution to the world. This contribution was a code of laws known as the *Code of Hammurabi*. Hammurabi was king of Babylonia from 1792 B.C. to 1750 B.C. He was a powerful leader with strong armies. Under his leadership, Babylon expanded by conquering other kingdoms. Hammurabi was not only an excellent military leader, he was an efficient administrator. While most ancient leaders considered only the comfort and pleasures of themselves and other noblemen, Hammurabi was also concerned with the lives of all of the people in his kingdom. He wanted everyone in his kingdom to have enough food, adequate housing, and to be treated fairly. In order to make sure that everyone was treated fairly, he had his scribes draw up a code of laws that are known as the *Code of Hammurabi*. The laws in the code were not completely original. They were taken, for the most part, from the written laws developed by the Sumerians, however, Hammurabi's code added the element of revenge. In Sumeria, most who committed a crime were fined. The *Code of Hammurabi* did not impose a fine on criminals, but substituted the ancient punishment of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." In other words, if someone did something bad to a person, in many cases, the court would do the same thing to the wrongdoer.

Some laws in the code seem very extreme and cruel. For example, if a son slapped his father the son's hands would be cut off. If a man killed another man's son, then his son would be killed. While this may seem harsh by today's standards, it should be remembered that before the code was written and followed, punishment was often decided by priests and judges who imposed punishments even more harsh. Death was a common punishment for even the most minor offenses. So the philosophy of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," was not meant to be cruel, but to be fair.

The Code did distinguish between classes of people. A person's punishment depended on who was wronged. For example, if a man put out the eye of another man, his eye would then be put out. But if he put out the eye of a freed man (a former slave), he would pay one gold mina.

BABYLONIAN CIVILIZATION

AT A GLANCE

Where: On the Euphrates River

When: 2000-1155 B.C.

ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Devised a code of laws, known as the *Code of Hammurabi*, designed to protect the weak
- Studied astronomy
- Built beautiful buildings as well as the Gate of Ishtar and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon