

Study Sheet on Mesopotamia

The Fertile Crescent
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Some of the best farmland of the Fertile Crescent is on a narrow strip of land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The Greeks later called this area Mesopotamia, which means "between the rivers". Many different civilizations developed in this small region. First came the Sumerians, who were replaced in turn by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Today this land is known as Iraq.

The Sumerians
The Sumerians moved to the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers about 5000BC, but we do not know where they came from. They were probably nomads who discovered the fertile land between the rivers. Nomads lived in small groups until they learned to grow crops. The Sumerians learned to grow more food. The Sumerians also made a very important invention—the wheel. The invention of the wheel made it possible to pull heavy loads.

Sumeria was composed of several city-states, or nations of the size of cities. Walls around each city-state protected the citizens from outside invaders. Farmland was usually outside the city walls, and people would seek protection from the walls of the city when under attack.

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There are many ways to define a civilization, but most scholars agree that when a society begins to farm cities, it becomes a civilization. Most civilizations have the following elements:

- A surplus of food.** When people have enough food, they begin to develop other needs.
- Division of Labor.** When people have one job, they tend to do that job very well. They are also more likely to choose a job in a field they enjoy.
- Organized government and religion.** When people have the same laws, it is easier to trade. People living under the same government are likely to have similar religious beliefs as well.
- Writing.** This allowed societies to keep records and communicate.

Waterfront Living
Most people live near water. If you look at any large city, you'll probably find water nearby. People need the water for drink, cooking, cleaning and transportation.

Mesopotamia, the "land between the rivers" is an obvious place for a civilization. Ancient Egypt developed along the Nile River in America, New York City has a harbor, Chicago grew alongside Lake Michigan and Los Angeles is on the Pacific Coast.

Numbering Years
In ancient calendars, years were generally numbered according to the year of a ruler's reign. For example, the third year of Hammurabi's rule. About 2052, a monk named Dionysius suggested that years be counted from the birth of Christ. Today we live in 2006, which is sometimes written as 2006, or 2006 AD, or 2006 after the year of the Lord. The years before the birth of Christ are numbered backward from his birth. The year before AD was 1.

Civilization
Ziggurat

Annotations:
Polytheistic belief in many gods (many gods = many gods)
Did my pen work? (the box)
Created the first wheel as well as many other things
Surprise Flood!
On the Mesopotamian amount of water in
Irrigation systems
A ziggurat to honor gods & ancestors
Created some first laws for cities & results today

Key:
New Info
Prior Knowledge
Questions

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Key!
New Info
Things I know
They had written laws and many inventions we use today!

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The Fertile Crescent
Is becoming a shape
Is the land still fertile today?
Even though the soil was fertile, I think it might have still been hard to live there because of the many swamps. It probably was difficult to migrate through swamps. I don't think that the Fertile Crescent would be the best place to live, but it still must have been a desert.

The Sumerians
They invented the first wheels.
I was surprised to find that some modern-day people still live as nomads.
How did they discover how to make wheels?
The invention must have been very smart and they knew the importance of controlling the rivers to protect them from floods.
How did the Sumerian civilization end?

Civilization
A civilization had many buildings.
Civilizations most likely give the citizens good protection from enemies and attacks.
How did leaders of civilizations decide where competitions held to decide the best leaders?

Numbering Years
How we use/see calendars today.
I learned that a monk named Dionysius suggested the year 1 should be Christ's birth.

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Division of Labor
Organized government and religion
Writing/language