



# City-States in Mesopotamia

## MAIN IDEA

**INTERACTION WITH ENVIRONMENT** The earliest civilization in Asia arose in Mesopotamia and organized into city-states.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The development of this civilization reflects a settlement pattern that has occurred repeatedly throughout history.

## TERMS & NAMES

- Fertile Crescent
- Mesopotamia
- city-state
- dynasty
- cultural diffusion
- polytheism
- empire
- Hammurabi

**SETTING THE STAGE** Two rivers flow from the mountains of what is now Turkey, down through Syria and Iraq, and finally to the Persian Gulf. Over six thousand years ago, the waters of these rivers provided the lifeblood that allowed the formation of farming settlements. These grew into villages and then cities.

## Geography of the Fertile Crescent

A desert climate dominates the landscape between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea in Southwest Asia. Yet within this dry region lies an arc of land that provided some of the best farming in Southwest Asia. The region's curved shape and the richness of its land led scholars to call it the **Fertile Crescent**. It includes the lands facing the Mediterranean Sea and a plain that became known as **Mesopotamia** (MEHS•uh•puh•TAY•mee•uh). The word in Greek means "land between the rivers."

The rivers framing Mesopotamia are the Tigris (TY•grihs) and Euphrates (yoo•FRAY•teez). They flow southeastward to the Persian Gulf. (See the map on page 30.) The Tigris and Euphrates rivers flooded Mesopotamia at least once a year. As the floodwater receded, it left a thick bed of mud called silt. Farmers planted grain in this rich, new soil and irrigated the fields with river water. The results were large quantities of wheat and barley at harvest time. The surpluses from their harvests allowed villages to grow.

**Environmental Challenges** People first began to settle and farm the flat, swampy lands in southern Mesopotamia before 4500 B.C. Around 3300 B.C., the people called the Sumerians, whom you read about in Chapter 1, arrived on the scene. Good soil was the advantage that attracted these settlers. However, there were three disadvantages to their new environment.

- Unpredictable flooding combined with a period of little or no rain. The land sometimes became almost a desert.
- With no natural barriers for protection, a Sumerian village was nearly defenseless.
- The natural resources of Sumer were limited. Building materials and other necessary items were scarce.

## TAKING NOTES

**Identifying Problems and Solutions** Use a chart to identify Sumer's environmental problems and their solutions.

Problems	Solutions
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

## The Fertile Crescent, 2500 B.C.



### GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

- 1. Location** Where are the Tigris and Euphrates River valleys found?
- 2. Place** What is the most likely cause of the change in the Persian Gulf coastline?

**Solving Problems Through Organization** Over a long period of time, the people of Sumer created solutions to deal with these problems.

- To provide water, they dug irrigation ditches that carried river water to their fields and allowed them to produce a surplus of crops.
- For defense, they built city walls with mud bricks.
- Sumerians traded their grain, cloth, and crafted tools with the peoples of the mountains and the desert. In exchange, they received raw materials such as stone, wood, and metal.

These activities required organization, cooperation, and leadership. It took many people working together, for example, for the Sumerians to construct their large irrigation systems. Leaders were needed to plan the projects and supervise the digging. These projects also created a need for laws to settle disputes over how land and water would be distributed. These leaders and laws were the beginning of organized government—and eventually of civilization. **A**

### MAIN IDEA

#### Summarizing

**A** What are three solutions to the environmental challenges of Mesopotamia?

## Sumerians Create City-States

The Sumerians stand out in history as one of the first groups of people to form a civilization. As you learned in Chapter 1, five key characteristics set Sumer apart from earlier human societies: (1) advanced cities, (2) specialized workers, (3) complex institutions, (4) record keeping, and (5) improved technology. All the later peoples who lived in this region of the world built upon the innovations of Sumerian civilization.



By 3000 B.C., the Sumerians had built a number of cities, each surrounded by fields of barley and wheat. Although these cities shared the same culture, they developed their own governments, each with its own rulers. Each city and the surrounding land it controlled formed a **city-state**. A city-state functioned much as an independent country does today. Sumerian city-states included Uruk, Kish, Lagash, Umma, and Ur. As in Ur, the center of all Sumerian cities was the walled temple with a ziggurat in the middle. There the priests and rulers appealed to the gods for the well-being of the city-state.

**Priests and Rulers Share Control** Sumer's earliest governments were controlled by the temple priests. The farmers believed that the success of their crops depended upon the blessings of the gods, and the priests acted as go-betweens with the gods. In addition to being a place of worship, the ziggurat was like a city hall. (See page 22 for a ziggurat.) From the ziggurat the priests managed the irrigation system. Priests demanded a portion of every farmer's crop as taxes.

In time of war, however, the priests did not lead the city. Instead, the men of the city chose a tough fighter who could command the city's soldiers. At first, a commander's power ended as soon as the war was over. After 3000 B.C., wars between cities became more and more frequent. Gradually, Sumerian priests and people gave commanders permanent control of standing armies. **B**

In time, some military leaders became full-time rulers. These rulers usually passed their power on to their sons, who eventually passed it on to their own heirs. Such a series of rulers from a single family is called a **dynasty**. After 2500 B.C., many Sumerian city-states came under the rule of dynasties.

**The Spread of Cities** Sumer's city-states grew prosperous from the surplus food produced on their farms. These surpluses allowed Sumerians to increase long-distance trade, exchanging the extra food and other goods for items they needed.

By 2500 B.C., new cities were arising all over the Fertile Crescent, in what is now Syria, northern Iraq, and Turkey. Sumerians exchanged products and ideas, such as living in cities, with neighboring cultures. This process in which a new idea or a product spreads from one culture to another is called **cultural diffusion**.

## Sumerian Culture

The belief systems, social structure, technology, and arts of the Sumerians reflected their civilization's triumph over its dry and harsh environment.

**A Religion of Many Gods** Like many peoples in the Fertile Crescent, the Sumerians believed that many different gods controlled the various forces in nature. The belief in more than one god is called **polytheism** (PAHL•ee•thee•IHZ•uhm). Enlil, the god of storms and air, was among the most powerful gods. Sumerians feared him as "the raging flood that has no rival." Demons known as Ugallu protected humans from the evil demons who caused disease, misfortune, and misery.

Sumerians described their gods as doing many of the same things humans do—falling in love, having children, quarreling, and so on. Yet the Sumerians also believed that their gods were both immortal and all-powerful. Humans were nothing but their servants. At any moment, the mighty anger of the gods might strike, sending a fire, a flood, or an enemy to destroy a city. To keep the gods happy, the

▼ Iku-Shamagen, King of Mari, a city-state in Sumer, offers prayers to the gods.



### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Causes

**B** How did military leaders gain power in the city-states?



▲ This gold and lapis ram with a shell fleece was found in a royal burial tomb.

Sumerians built impressive ziggurats for them and offered rich sacrifices of animals, food, and wine.

Sumerians worked hard to earn the gods' protection in this life. Yet they expected little help from the gods after death. The Sumerians believed that the souls of the dead went to the "land of no return," a dismal, gloomy place between the earth's crust and the ancient sea. No joy awaited souls there. A passage in a Sumerian poem describes the fate of dead souls: "Dust is their fare and clay their food."

Some of the richest accounts of Mesopotamian myths and legends appear in a long poem called the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. (See a selection from the Gilgamesh epic on page 83.)

**Life in Sumerian Society** With civilization came the beginning of what we call social classes. Kings, landholders, and some priests made up the highest level in Sumerian society. Wealthy merchants ranked next. The vast majority of ordinary Sumerian people worked with their hands in fields and workshops. At the lowest level of Sumerian society were the slaves. Some slaves were foreigners who had been captured in war. Others were Sumerians who had been sold into slavery as children to pay the debts of their poor parents. Debt slaves could hope to eventually buy their freedom.

Social class affected the lives of both men and women.

Sumerian women could work as merchants, farmers, or artisans. They could hold property in their own names. Women could also join the priesthood. Some upper-class women did learn to read and write, though Sumer's written records mention few female scribes. However, Sumerian women had more rights than women in many later civilizations.

**Sumerian Science and Technology** Historians believe that Sumerians invented the wheel, the sail, and the plow and that they were among the first to use bronze. Many new ideas and inventions arose from the Sumerians' practical needs.

- **Arithmetic and geometry** In order to erect city walls and buildings, plan irrigation systems, and survey flooded fields, Sumerians needed arithmetic and geometry. They developed a number system in base 60, from which stem the modern units for measuring time (60 seconds = 1 minute) and the 360 degrees of a circle.
- **Architectural innovations** Arches, columns, ramps, and the pyramid shaped the design of the ziggurat and permanently influenced Mesopotamian civilization.
- **Cuneiform** Sumerians created a system of writing. One of the first known maps was made on a clay tablet in about 2300 B.C. Other tablets contain some of the oldest written records of scientific investigations in the areas of astronomy, chemistry, and medicine.

## The First Empire Builders

From 3000 to 2000 B.C., the city-states of Sumer were almost constantly at war with one another. The weakened city-states could no longer ward off attacks from the peoples of the surrounding deserts and hills. Although the Sumerians never recovered from the attacks on their cities, their civilization did not die. Succeeding sets of rulers adapted the basic ideas of Sumerian culture to meet their own needs.

### Vocabulary

*epic*: a long heroic poem that tells the story of a historical or legendary figure



**Sargon of Akkad** About 2350 B.C., a conqueror named Sargon defeated the city-states of Sumer. Sargon led his army from Akkad (AK•ad), a city-state north of Sumer. The Akkadians had long before adopted most aspects of Sumerian culture. Sargon's conquests helped to spread that culture even farther, beyond the Tigris-Euphrates Valley.

By taking control of both northern and southern Mesopotamia, Sargon created the world's first **empire**. An empire brings together several peoples, nations, or previously independent states under the control of one ruler. At its height, the Akkadian Empire loosely controlled land from the Mediterranean Coast in the west to present-day Iran in the east. Sargon's dynasty lasted only about 200 years, after which it declined due to internal fighting, invasions, and a famine. 🕒

**MAIN IDEA**

**Contrasting**

🕒 How does an empire differ from a city-state?

**Babylonian Empire** In about 2000 B.C., nomadic warriors known as Amorites invaded Mesopotamia. Gradually, the Amorites overwhelmed the Sumerians and established their capital at Babylon, on the Euphrates River. The Babylonian Empire reached its peak during the reign of **Hammurabi**, from 1792 B.C. to 1750 B.C. Hammurabi's most enduring legacy is the code of laws he put together.

**Hammurabi's Code** Hammurabi recognized that a single, uniform code of laws would help to unify the diverse groups within his empire. He collected existing rules, judgments, and laws into the Code of Hammurabi. Hammurabi had the code engraved in stone, and copies were placed all over his empire.

**> Analyzing Primary Sources**

**Hammurabi's Code of Laws**

The image at the right shows the top of a pillar that had Hammurabi's Code engraved on it. Hammurabi's law code prescribed punishments ranging from fines to death. Often the punishments were based on the social class of the victim. Here are some examples of the laws:

**PRIMARY SOURCE**

- 8. If a man has stolen an ox, a sheep, a pig, or a boat that belonged to a temple or palace, he shall repay thirty times its cost. If it belonged to a private citizen, he shall repay ten times. If the thief cannot pay, he shall be put to death.
- 142. If a woman hates her husband and says to him "You cannot be with me," the authorities in her district will investigate the case. If she has been chaste and without fault, even though her husband has neglected or belittled her, she will be held innocent and may return to her father's house.
- 143. If the woman is at fault, she shall be thrown into the river.
- 196. If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out.
- 198. If he puts out the eye of freed man or break the bone of a free man, he shall pay one gold mina.
- 199. If he put out the eye of a man's slave, or break the bone of a man's slave, he shall pay one-half of its value.

**CODE OF HAMMURABI**, adapted from a translation by L. W. King



**DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS**

- 1. **Making Inferences** Why might the punishments for the crimes be based on social class?
- 2. **Forming Opinions** What do you think the value was in making the punishments for the crimes known to all?

## History Makers



**Hammurabi**  
? –1750 B.C.

The noted lawgiver Hammurabi was also an able military leader, diplomat, and administrator of a vast empire. Hammurabi himself described some of his accomplishments:

*As for the land of Sumer and Akkad, I collected the scattered peoples thereof, and I procured food and drink for them. In abundance and plenty I pastured them, and I caused them to dwell in peaceful habitation.*

### INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

**RESEARCH LINKS** For more on Hammurabi, go to [classzone.com](http://classzone.com)

The code lists 282 specific laws dealing with everything that affected the community, including family relations, business conduct, and crime. Since many people were merchants, traders, or farmers, for example, many of the laws related to property issues. Additionally, the laws sought to protect women and children from unfair treatment. The laws tell us a great deal about the Mesopotamians' beliefs and what they valued.

Although the code applied to everyone, it set different punishments for rich and poor and for men and women. It frequently applied the principle of retaliation (an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth) to punish crimes.

The prologue of the code set out the goals for this body of law. It said, "To bring about the rule of righteousness in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil-doers; so that the strong should not harm the weak." Thus, Hammurabi's Code reinforced the principle that government had a responsibility for what occurred in society. For example, if a man was robbed and the thief was not caught, the government was required to compensate the victim. **D**

Nearly two centuries after Hammurabi's reign, the Babylonian Empire, which had become much smaller, fell to the neighboring Kassites. Over the years, new groups dominated the Fertile Crescent. Yet the later peoples, including the Assyrians, Phoenicians, and Hebrews, would adopt many ideas of the early Sumerians. Meanwhile, a similar pattern of development, rise, and fall was taking place to the west, along the Nile River in Egypt. Egyptian civilization is described in Section 2.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Recognizing Effects

**D** How did Hammurabi's law code advance civilization?

## SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Fertile Crescent
- Mesopotamia
- city-state
- dynasty
- cultural diffusion
- polytheism
- empire
- Hammurabi

### USING YOUR NOTES

2. Which of the problems you listed required the most complex solution? Explain.

Problems	Solutions
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

### MAIN IDEAS

3. What were the three environmental challenges to Sumerians?
4. How did the Sumerians view the gods?
5. What areas of life did Hammurabi's Code cover?

### CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. **DETERMINING MAIN IDEAS** How was Sumerian culture spread throughout Mesopotamia?
7. **RECOGNIZING EFFECTS** Why is the development of a written code of laws important to a society?
8. **ANALYZING CAUSES** How did the need to interact with the environment lead to advances in civilization?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **POWER AND AUTHORITY** What advantages did living in cities offer the people of ancient Mesopotamia? Do modern cities offer any of the same advantages? Write a **compare-and-contrast essay** supporting your answer with references to the text.

### CONNECT TO TODAY WRITING A STATUS REPORT

Research the South East Anatolian Water Project in Turkey. The project will place dams on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Create a **map** and write a **status report** that summarizes the current status of the project.