

Lesson 2: Mesopotamia



DIRECTIONS: Review the vocabulary terms in the box. Read the summary to reveal how the Mesopotamian civilizations of Sumer and Akkad flourished in the Fertile Crescent. As you read, underline important details in each section that relate to that section's title. Think about what you already know, what you want to know, and what you have learned after reading the summary.

Vocabulary

ziggurat: a temple made up of a series of stacked rectangular platforms that form a pyramid-shaped structure

society: an organized community with established rules and traditions

polytheism: the worship of many gods

scribe: a professional writer

cuneiform: a form of wedge-shaped writing developed by the Sumerians

conquer: to defeat and take over

empire: a large territory that is controlled by one ruler

dynasty: a ruling family

Sumer and Akkad (p. 41)

Early Mesopotamia was made up of the city-states of Sumer and Akkad. Sumer was in the south. Akkad was in the north. The Sumerians and Akkadians had similar customs, businesses, and religions. However, they spoke different languages. People living in Sumer spoke Sumerian. In Akkad people spoke Akkadian, a language similar to Hebrew. In about 3500 B.C., Sumer became more powerful than Akkad. Sumerian city-states built temple structures called **ziggurats**. A ziggurat was made up of a series of stacked rectangular platforms that formed a huge pyramid-shaped structure. Mesopotamians believed that ziggurats linked the heavens and Earth. Outside the Sumerian cities were vast, irrigated farm fields that supplied the city with food. A mudbrick wall surrounded most city-states, protecting them from unfriendly nomads and the armies of enemy city-states.

Religion and Government (p. 42)

Religion was an important part of Mesopotamian society which is why they built ziggurats. People in both Sumer and Akkad practiced **polytheism**. They worshipped many gods. The Sumerians believed that kings were chosen by the gods to carry out the gods' wishes. These ideas about "divine kingship" would have an effect on later civilizations. They also believed that kings passed the right to rule to their sons. Sumerian society was divided into classes. Wealthy people were at the top of the class system. Slaves were at the bottom. This kind of class system also affected later civilizations.

Writing (p. 43)

In about 3200 B.C., the Sumerians invented a system of writing. First they drew simple pictures that stood for objects or actions. Later this picture writing was made even simpler. A professional writer, or **scribe**, pressed a reed into wet clay to form wedge-shaped markings. These marks stood for objects, activities, or sounds. This new form of writing was called **cuneiform**. People used writing to keep records, tell stories, write letters, and set down laws.

The Rise and Fall of the Akkadian Empire (p. 45)

Sargon was an Akkadian ruler. He and his army **conquered**, or defeated, Sumer's city-states in about 2334 B.C. All of Mesopotamia came under Sargon's rule. This formed the world's first **empire** which was said to stretch from the "sunrise to the sunset," meaning they ruled the whole world. An empire is a large territory of many different places controlled by one ruler. The Akkadian **dynasty**, or ruling family, was in power for about 150 years.

Sumer's Final Days (p. 46)

Between 2100 B.C. and 2000 B.C., the city-state of Ur in Sumer controlled Mesopotamia. Farming, business, and culture thrived. The oldest known written law code was created at this time. Many important structures, such as the Ziggurat of Ur, were built during this period. The Ziggurat of Ur is thought to be one of the largest ziggurats ever built. In about 2000 B.C., Sumer lost power to invaders from the northeast. The contributions of the Sumerians helped other civilizations to rise. These contributions include cuneiform, ziggurats, and the wheel.

