



## HISTORY UNIT 2

### ANCIENT CIVILISATIONS

Dear students,

I hope all of you studied Egyptian Civilisation well. Now we are going to study about **Mesopotamian Civilisation**.

#### THE MESOPOTAMIAN CIVILISATION

- Mesopotamia refers to the region of Iraq and Kuwait in West Asia. Several kingdoms emerged around the city states of this region from the early third millennium BC (BCE).
- The Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian and Assyrian civilisations flourished in Mesopotamia.

#### Geography

- In the Greek language, meso means 'in between' and potamus means river.
- The Euphrates and Tigris flow here and drain into the Persian Gulf is since this area is in between two rivers it is known as Mesopotamia.

#### The Sumerians

- The oldest civilisation in Mesopotamia belonged to the Sumerians.
- The Sumerians settled in the Lower Tigris valley around 5,000 to 4,000 BC (BCE).
- They were believed to have originated from Central Asia.
- Their political domination came to an end by 2,450 BC (BCE).

#### The Akkadians

- The Akkadians dominated Sumeria briefly from 2450 to 2250 BC (BCE).
- The Sargon of Akkad was a famous ruler.
- The Sargon and his descendants (ca.2334–2218 BC (BCE)) ruled Mesopotamia for more than hundred years.

#### The Babylonians

- The Semitic people called Amorites from the Arabian desert moved into Mesopotamia.
- They were known as the Babylonians as they established a kingdom and made Babylon its capital.
- By the time of the king Hammurabi, they extended their domination to the western part of Mesopotamia.
- Hammurabi, the sixth king of Babylon belonging to the first Amorite dynasty (1792–1750 BC (BCE)), attained fame as a great law-maker.



### **The Assyrians**

- The Assyrian Empire was politically active in Mesopotamia around 1000 BC (BCE).
- The Assyrian kings were the priests of Ashur, the chief deity of Assyria.
- The Assyrian government was controlled by the emperor and provincial governors were appointed by the emperor to administer provinces.
- Assur was the capital city of Assyria.
- The Assyrians worshipped the deity of Lamassu for protection.

### **Society, State and Administration**

- The Sumerian civilisation had many city states.
- A typical Sumerian city was surrounded by cultivable lands.
- The fortified Sumerian cities had the temples called Ziggurats at its centre.
- The temple was controlled by the priests.
- The rulers and priests occupied the top of the social hierarchy.
- The ruler performed the role of the chief priest.
- The scribes, merchants and artisans were placed next in the hierarchy.
- The scribes maintained the account of the taxes and the priests collected the taxes.
- Assemblies were created for the administration of the state.
- Cultivable lands were owned by the kings and the higher classes of people in the hierarchy.
- Not all people were allowed to live in the cities.



### **Food and Agriculture**

- Agriculture was the main occupation of the Mesopotamians.



- They had developed irrigation systems for ensuring the availability of water for agriculture and cultivated wheat, barley, onions, turnips, grapes, apples and dates.
- They domesticated cattle, sheep and goats.
- Fish was part of their diet.

### **Trade and Exchange**

- Trade was an important economic activity of the Mesopotamian society.
- Traders assisted in the exchange of goods procured from the potters and artisans.
- They traded with Syria and Asia Minor in the West, and in Iran and the Indus Valley civilisation in the east.
- They travelled in ships across the seas for trade.

### **Cities and Town Planning**

- The Mesopotamian cities featured mud or baked brick walls with gates. Some people lived in reed huts outside the cities.
- The Ziggurats were at the city centre on a platform and appeared like steep pyramids, with staircases leading to the top.
- Around this temple were complexes of ceremonial courtyards, shrines, burial chambers for the priests and priestesses, ceremonial banquet halls, along with workshops, granaries, storehouses and administrative buildings.

### **Religion**

- The Sumerian religion was polytheistic.
- They worshipped several Gods and Goddesses.
- The Sumerians prayed to Enlil, the God of sky and wind.
- Ninlil was the Sumerian Goddess of grain.
- The Babylonians worshipped Marduk, and Ashur was the supreme God of the Assyrians.
- The kings were seen as representatives of the Gods on earth.

### **The Hammurabi's Law Code**

- The Hammurabi Code is an important legal document that specifies the laws related to various crimes.
- It has 282 provisions specifying cases related to family rights, trade, slavery, taxes and wages.
- It is carved on a stone, which portrays Hammurabi as receiving the code from the Sun God Shamash.
- It was a compilation of old laws based on retributive principles.
- 'An eye for an eye' and 'a tooth for a tooth' form of justice is used in the Hammurabi Code.



### Cuneiform: The Sumerian Writing System

- Cuneiform is the Sumerian writing system.
- The shape of the letter is in the form of wedge and hence it is called cuneiform.
- Evolving around 3000 BC (BCE), it is one of the earliest scripts of the world.
- They used this script for commercial transactions and writing letters and stories.

Cuneiform : From Pictograph to Assyrian				
Original Pictograph	Pictograph in later cuneiform	Early Babylonian	Assyrian	Derived meaning
				Bird
				Fish
				Donkey
				Ox
				Sun/ Day
				Grain
				Orchard
				to plow to til
				boomerang to throw
				to stand, to go

Development of cuneiform script

### Art

- The Mesopotamian art included sculptures in stone and clay.
- A few paintings and sculptures from the Mesopotamian times have survived today.
- Mesopotamian sculptures portray animals, such as goats, rams, bulls and lions.

### Science

- The Mesopotamians excelled in mathematics, astronomy and medicine.
- They developed the concepts of multiplication, division and cubic equation.
- They were the ones to formulate the 60-minute hour, the 24-hour day and the 360° circle.
- The Sumerian calendar had seven days in a week.
- They created the water clock and the lunar calendar based on the movement of the moon.
- They developed methods for measuring areas and solids.
- They had developed a medicinal system as well.



**Contributions of the Mesopotamian Civilisation**

- The invention of the potter's wheel is credited to the Sumerians.
- They developed the calendar system of 360 days and divided a circle into 360 units.
- The cuneiform system of writing was their contribution.
- The Hammurabi's law code was another legacy of the Mesopotamians.