

Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia is located in present day Iraq between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Its name is Greek, meaning "the land between two rivers." This is not a country or a state, but rather a region that makes up a large part of The Fertile Crescent in the Middle East. It is about the size of Maryland. In southern Mesopotamia, Sumer developed around 3,500 BC and it is the first known civilization on earth. Although man had been around for thousands of years, civilizations did not form until Sumer.

Civilizations are considered to be groups of people living together that have a stable food supply, different jobs with different classes of people, a government and a developed culture.

The climate of Mesopotamia is very hot and dry with very few natural resources. The rivers were also unpredictable and often devastating floods would occur. These floods would often ruin harvests, but the minerals they left behind created very fertile soil. Despite the disadvantages, people prospered by using the idea of irrigation. The Sumerians learned to control the rivers and make use of the water when they needed it by creating dams, gates and canals. Irrigation led to surplus in food which in turn led to the

growth of the community because people could have different jobs. Trade became important to the Sumerians and they used the barter system to exchange goods. Due to the lack of natural resources, Mesopotamians needed to get goods from other lands. Soon many cities began to form in Mesopotamia.

Early Mesopotamian cities are much different than cities today. They were called city-states. They were independent of one another and consisted of the city and the farmland and villages surrounding it. They were self-governing and each city-state had their own god and own government. The earliest city-states were ruled by priests. The priests were in charge of irrigation and settling arguments. They stored the surplus grain and would distribute it during times of drought. Priests also collected taxes, would play and make sacrifices to please the Sumerian gods.

Mesopotamian city-states were set up like a bull's eye. In the center of each city-state was a huge temple called a ziggurat which was considered the home of the city's god. It had tiers and a set of stairs that led to the top. Only the priests were allowed in the ziggurat. Surrounding the ziggurat was the courts where the merchants would trade goods. Next were the homes of the people. Most homes were windowless and

made of sun dried mud bricks. They were closely packed together. Some of the wealthier homes would have two stories and an open courtyard. The location of one's home depended on their wealth. The ~~more~~ more wealthy you were, the closer to the ziggurat you lived. Small, narrow roads would wind through the city-state. Finally, there was a large gate surrounding the city-state for protection. This wall was locked at night to keep animals and thieves out of the city-state. The farms were located outside of the gate near the rivers.

Diagram of city-state: