

Mesopotamian Religion and Writing

The religion of Mesopotamia was a kind of polytheism. This means they had a belief in many Gods. Sumerians had 4 main gods and around 3,000 lower gods. They had human qualities and were seen to be harsh and unpredictable, much like the conditions in the environment.

Each city-state had their own god with whom only the priests could talk with. Priests were the rulers and thought to carry out the work of the gods. They controlled many important things in the city-state such as taxes, irrigation and stored surplus. The Sumerians offered food and animal sacrifices to the gods to insure they would have good crops and a good life. They believed their purpose on earth was to serve the gods.

Priests were also in charge of the schools, which were called edubbas or tablet houses. Only wealthy, young boys were taught to write (with a few exceptions). The schooling was very long and boring, but guaranteed the boys a good job as a scribe. Very few people could read or write, so scribes were in demand. Sumerian writing developed because of a need to keep track of business dealings. Early writing started out as pictographs, but over time changed into wedge shaped symbols known as cuneiform. Scribes used a reed called a stylus to

press into the soft Clay tablets. Now records, ideas, treaties
and even legends could be written down. The very first

Written epic comes from the Sumerians. It is a myth about an actual
King named Gilgamesh from the city-state of Uruk who
is on a quest to find immortality.

Later Mesopotamia

Since there were many battles between the city-states and with nomads, the priests would need to consult an assembly of people^{to} help. The assembly would elect one person to lead the battles and act as temporary King. Once the battles were over, and the king no longer needed, he would go back to being a regular man. However, the city-states found themselves in war so often that eventually the priest and the King shared the power. The priest would handle the religious aspects of the city-state, while the King would control the everyday duties of the city-states. Kings were seen by the people as having power given to them by the gods.

Each city-state remained independent until King Sargon I from AKKad started to invade all the neighboring city-states and take control of them. He would destroy the cities and then burn down the walls to show his power. He was a cruel leader and the people of Mesopotamia and Sumer resented being controlled by him. Since Sargon controlled all the city-states, Mesopotamia was now considered an empire. An empire is when several regions are ruled by one person. Sargon passed his power to his son, and eventually his grandson. Over a 100

raise
Akad from
not
Mesopotamian
gods

years later, the empire fell because of all the revolts within the city-states and the difficulty of protecting so much flat land.

After centuries of constant battles and returning to independence, the king of Babylon, Hammurabi, conquered all the land and controlled all 24 city-states of Mesopotamia. Hammurabi was a fair and just ruler, but he was also very strong. He had judges and governors keep track of the individual city-states and report back to him. He is most famous for the Code of Hammurabi. This was a set of 282 laws that all the people of Babylonia were expected to follow. His punishments were very harsh, ranging from fines to death.

Prison was not an option. He created the idea of eye for an eye justice. He believed if you committed a crime; the same should be done to you. He varied the punishment according to a person's social status. He had his laws written into a large stone that was placed in the center of the city for all to see. Babylonia was a great empire, but soon crumbled after Hammurabi's death.

Contributions

- 1st writing system
- wheel, sailboat, plow to help w/ farming
- # system based on 6 (60sec, 60min, 360°)
- 12 month calendar