

# BETWEEN THE RIVERS

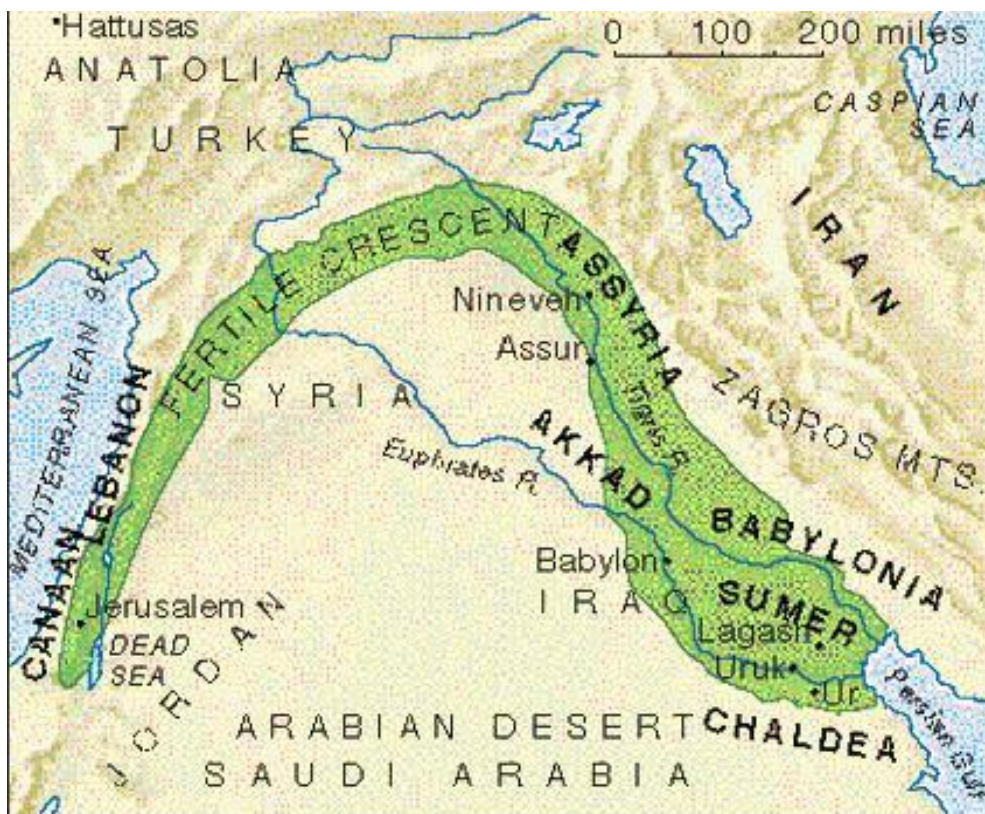
In this unit you will learn about:

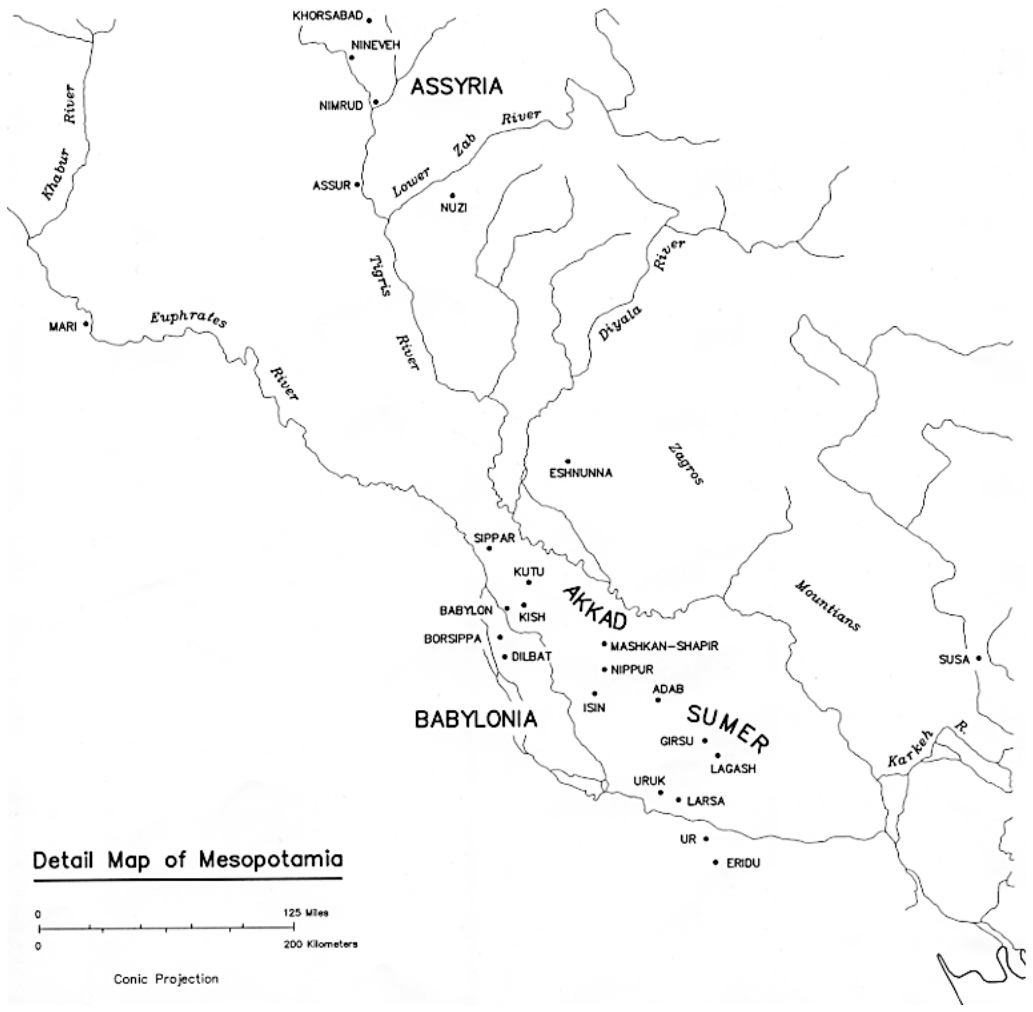
- ∅ the geography of the Fertile Crescent
- ∅ the Sumerians
- ∅ the Babylonians, the Assyrians and the Persians

## I. Geography

1. Read the text, then look at the maps carefully. Use the maps to write out the basic geographical information about Mesopotamia.

One of the world's earliest civilizations grew up on the fertile plains between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates which rise in the Armenian mountains. The land between the two rivers became known as Mesopotamia. The name comes from two Greek words, 'meso' meaning 'middle' and 'potamos' meaning 'river'. Nowadays this part is called Iraq.





## Geography of Mesopotamia - My notes

2. Think of what the river could provide to the earliest civilizations.

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## II. The Sumerians

1. Read the following article and answer the questions.

### **The way to the city-state.**

Some time between 5000 and 3500 BC, mountain folk from the north speaking a language called Sumerian moved into this plain. The Sumerians gave up hunting and began to farm. They learnt how to control the river floods, building earth banks, channels and ditches to direct water where they wanted it to go. They became very skilled farmers growing wheat, barley, vegetables and dates, craftsmen and builders of houses of dried mud. This was not able for one inhabitant even for one family. The families joined together to create a **village** that controlled the surrounding area. Some villages became political and commercial centres of a neighbouring territory and they also controlled smaller villages there. Gradually these centres changed into **cities** surrounded by walls made of clay. The cities were ruled by **the Council of Elders**. There was a large **temple** in the centre of each city. The temple was mainly religious centre, even the commercial and cultural centre and the place where the production was put down. The temple had its own fields farmed by slaves or servants. Priests and writers could write and so they could record commercial agenda, political events and observe the celestial bodies to foresee the floods. They also organised the work in the city, take care of

religious ceremonies and divided the production of the city among its inhabitants moneyless. Later this became the role of a king. The king lived in a **palace** that now became the centre of the city. The king and his officials / priests, writers and warriors / directed the city, organised work, supervised the irrigation work, divided the production, decided who should farm which land and defended the city against the enemies. The first cities called **city-states** were established **by the Sumerians around 3500 BC**. The cities of Sumer fought between each other constantly, mainly because of water supplies and land. Sometimes one city was the most important, sometimes another. For a time Kish was the strongest city, then Erech, whose mysterious **King Gilgamesh** became the hero of many later stories, then Ur and finally Lagash.

- 1. Explain how the city-states were created.**
  - 2. Write out the well known Sumerian city-states.**
  - 3. Write out the centres of a city and the role they played.**
  - 4. Why were the cities surrounded by walls?**
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- 2. Draw a pyramid showing the structure of the Sumerian society. Then write what role each group of the Sumerian society had.**

### 3. Read the article about the Sumerian architecture and religion.

#### Architecture

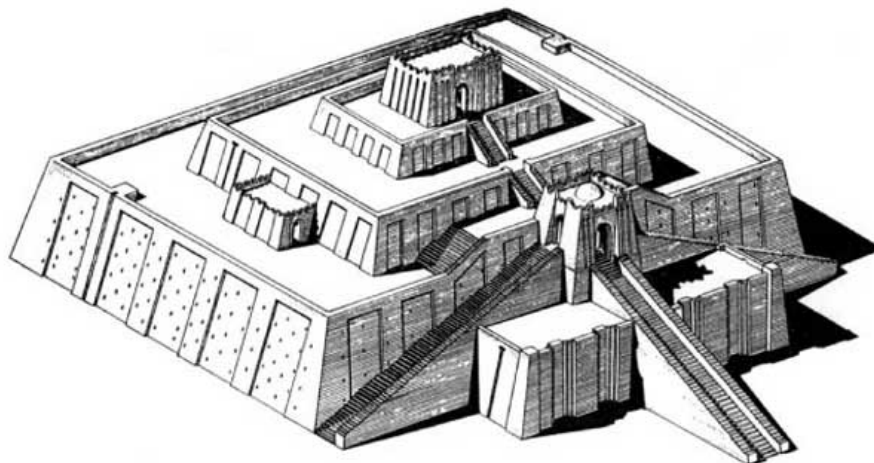
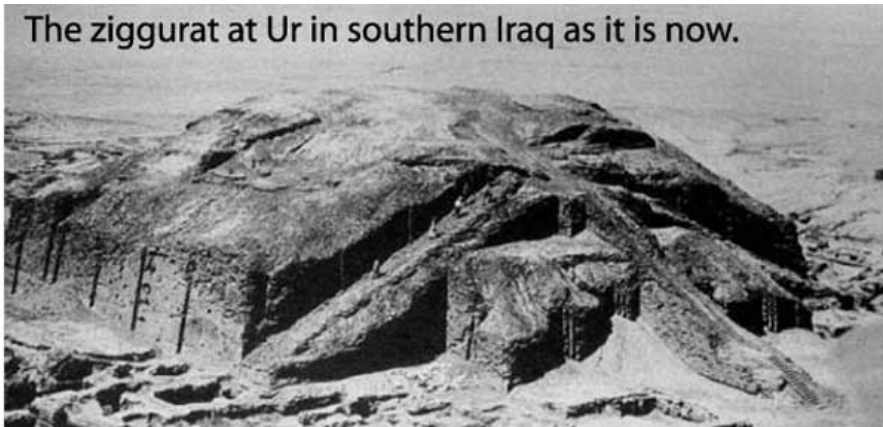
The greatest example of the Sumerian architecture was **the temple**, the centre of the city. The Sumerians built stepped temples called **the ziggurat**. One of the best known is the ziggurat at Ur built around 2100 BC and worshipped as the home of **the Moon God, Nanna**. The Ziggurats were built of clay bricks or wood brought from Libanon.

#### Religion

The Sumerians created polytheistic religion which later adapted Babylonians and Assyrians. They believed that the Gods created the world and a man, that they were responsible for fertility, famine, storms and wind. The kings were considered to be the descendants of the God and was worshipped as the God.

### 4. Look at the picture below and write out the main parts of the ziggurat.

The ziggurat at Ur in southern Iraq as it is now.



The ziggurat at Ur as it appeared c. 2100 BCE.

**5. Return back to the Stone Age. Which buildings were used as shrines in the Paleolithic and then in the Neolithic Age?**

**6. Try to write in your own words what a polytheistic religion is?**

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**7. Before you start reading the following story, find the meaning of these words.**

**quayside, a paved courtyard, cemetery, royal court, a harpist, a harp, to clutch, to harness oxen, scattered cups, the tomb, a port, sacrifice, shrine**

### **The mystery of Ur**

The Sumerian city we know most about is **Ur**. It was found by an English team, led by **Leonard Wooley** between 1924 and 1934.

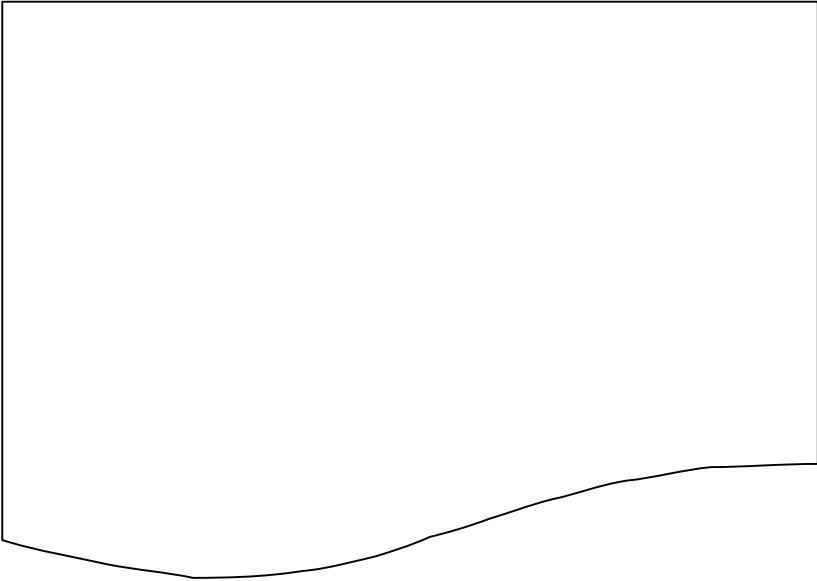
Ur, between 3200 BC and 2500 BC, was a rich and powerful **port**. The remains of lengthy quaysides have been found and inside fortified walls many of the houses were two storeys high with a large room facing on to a paved central courtyard. At the city's centre lay **the Sacred Area** where a palace, public buildings and temples stood. Towering over all else was the pyramid – **shaped ziggurat**. At the top of the ziggurat was **the shrine** of Nanna, the Moon God. On New Year's Day a procession of priests mounted to the top of the ziggurat and there made sacrifices to Nanna so that he would protect the city and its lands throughout the coming year.

Beside the Sacred Area, Wooley found **the royal cemetery**. As well as many beautiful and precious objects, he found the remains of an astonishing and terrible event.

In the tomb of the Queen Shub – Ad were more than **sixty female skeletons**. The fragments of their clothes and jewellery revealed that they were noblewomen from the royal court. Nearby were soldiers with their spears beside them, a harpist clutching his harp and oxen still harnessed to their wagons. The hands of most of the skeletons were raised as if to their mouths and little clay cups were scattered on the floor of the tomb. It seems that the servants of the dead king or queen followed the body to the tomb. There they took poison because their master or mistress could not continue **after – life** alone. Leonard Wooley called this area **the Death Pit**.

Woolley's sketch of the Death Pit of Ur as he found it.

**8. What mysteries did the Death Pit reveal to Leonard Wooley? Talk about that mystery in the class.**



**9. Draw a sketch how Leonard Wooley described the City of Ur.**

**Your sketch of Ur**

**10. Now read the article about the Sumerian inventions and write the basic ones out.**

#### **The Sumerian inventions**

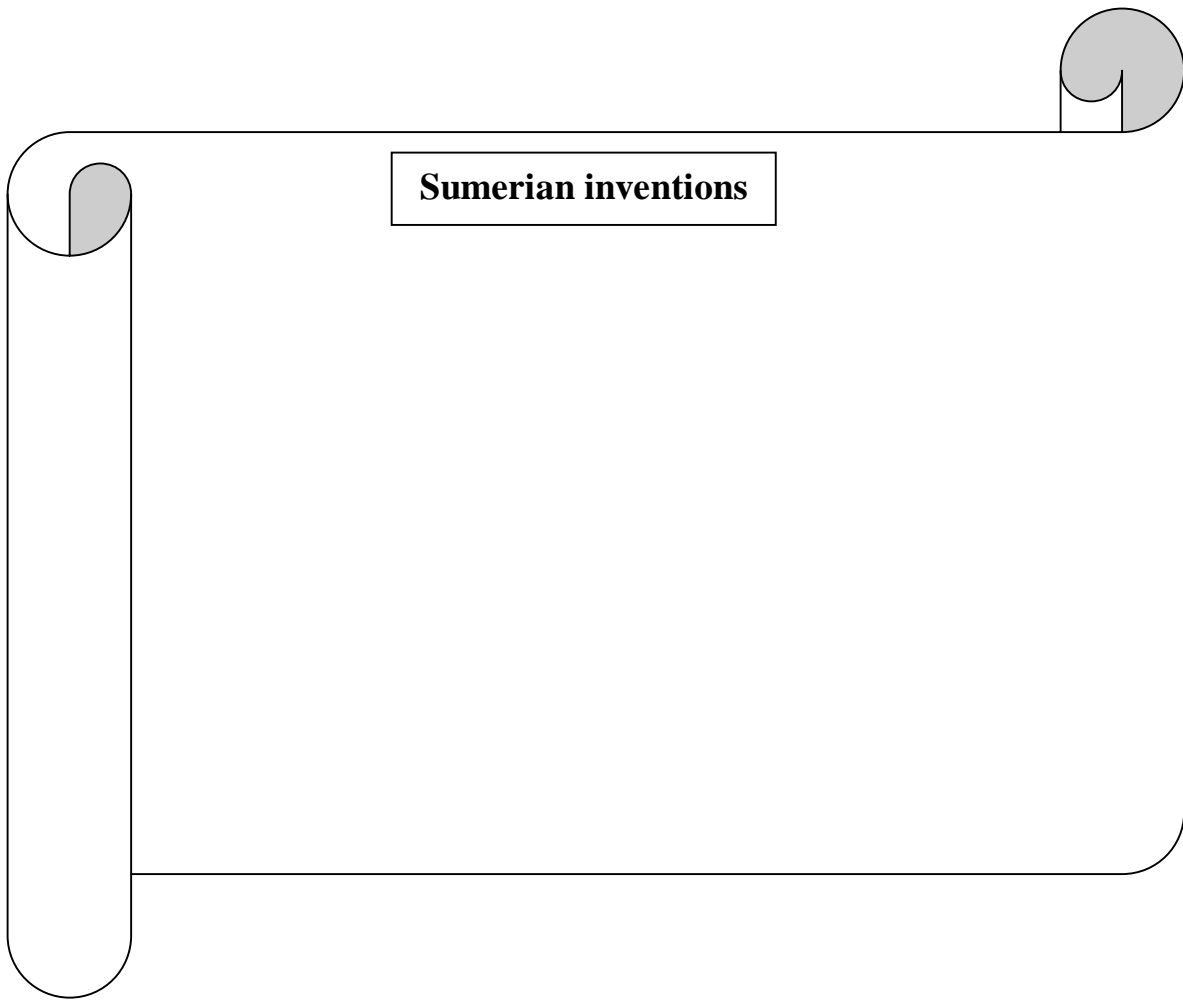
Sumerian craftsmen were very skillful. Firstly they began to use **the wheel** but it is not completely clear how it was invented. By 3250 BC the Sumerians had **wheeled carts** and, soon after, **pulleys** for raising water from their wells. Secondly they discovered how to make **bronze** by mixing copper and tin.

The Sumerians also used **sailing boats** on Tigris and Euphrates. They were also excellent **mathematicians and astronomers**. Though they could count in tens and hundreds, they preferred to use **60** as their basic **arithmetical unit**. From them came our **360 degree circle, 60 minute hour and 60 second minute**.

They also developed a complex **legal system**, a set of laws dealing harshly with wrongdoers. For example, if a house fell down because it had been badly built, and the owner was killed, then the builder was likely to be put to death. If a doctor through carelessness was responsible for his patient losing his eye, then he could expect to lose his hand.

Around 3000 BC the Sumerian traders started to make **picture signs** on **clay tablets** so that they had some record of their sales and purchases. This was the beginning of **writing**. The Sumerian writing is called **cuneiform**. The word also came from latin word 'cuneus' meaning 'wedge'. For writing they used **soft clay tablets** on which they wrote with **reed pens**. If they wished to keep what they had written, they baked the clay tablets. **The cuneiform was a picture writing**, but as time passed their writing included fewer pictures and **more symbols**. The letter could be drawn quickly and clearly in wedges. Later signs were used for syllables which when combined together made another word. Eventually there were more than **six hundred cuneiform signs**. The cuneiform was first used by traders and by tax collectors to keep accounts. Then it came to be used by priests and kings. The Sumerians had **schools** and a special training course for those who wished to master the skill of writing. The deciphering of cuneiform came in the 19th century. It was not deciphered by one man as in the case of hieroglyphics. Mostly it was due to a German schoolteacher **George Fridrich Grotefend** and later to **Henry Rawlinson**.





**11. Complete the following sentences about the Sumerian writing.**

The Sumerian writing is called.....

It was ..... writing including about..... symbols.

The Sumerians used for writing ..... and they wrote on.....

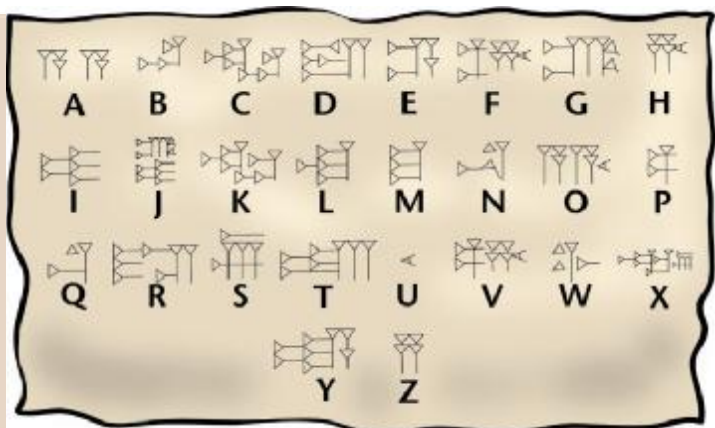
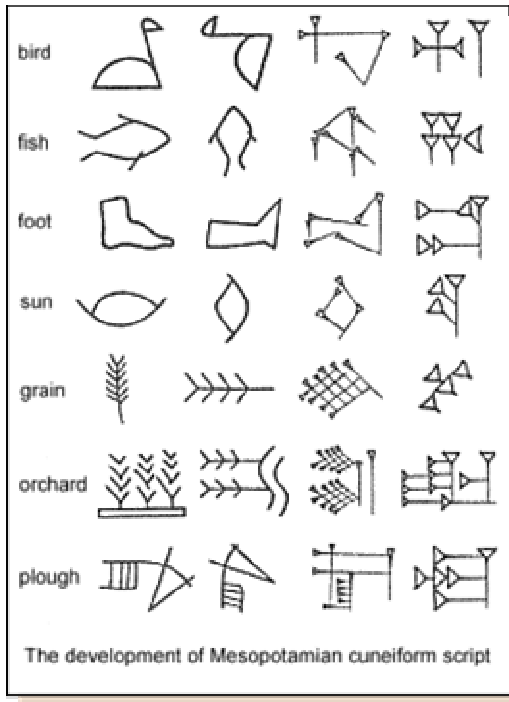
Later on the cuneiform sign stand for a..... instead of word.

The cuneiform was used firstly by..... for.....

The Sumerians had special..... to master the skill of writing.

The cuneiform was deciphered by.....

**12. Look at the below cuneiform symbols.**



Cuneiform tablet

13. Explain what the meaning of writing was.

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14. Write out the basic principalities of the Sumerian legal system.

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**15. Think of why the people needed a set of laws. Talk about it in the class.**

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**16. Read about the oldest literary work.**

**The story of Gilgamesh**

**The story of Gilgamesh**, based upon older stories that had been passed from generation to generation, was first written around 1700 BC on clay tablets. The story tells about all sorts of adventures Gilgamesh experienced while looking for his ancestor **Utanapishtim**. When at last he found him, Utanapishtim told him the story of the catastrophe which he only survived. The story was remembered by later generations in **the Epic of Gilgamesh**.

*For one day the South Wind blew, gathering speed, submerging the mountains, overtaking the people like a battle. Adad's rage reached the heaven, turning all light to darkness. Six days and six nights raged the wind and the flood and the cyclone devastated the land. When the seventh day came, the cyclone, the flood, the battle was over. All mankind was turned to clay. The ground was flat like a roof.*

**17. Do you know any similar stories about the Great Flood?**

### III. Akkad

1. Read the following article. Look at the below title of the article. What difference do you think is between these types of states.

#### From city-state to territorial state

To the north of Sumer lay the land of **Akkad**. **The people of Akkad** came to Mesopotamia at about the same time as the Sumerians, but they were quite different. They were a **fierce, desert** people who spoke a different language / Akkadian / and wore long hair and beards. From time to time the Sumerians had to make a war on these nomads to drive them away.

In about **2300 BC** a strong king arose in Akkad called **Sargon**. He made the people of Akkad a well-drilled army and with them he conquered the Sumerians around this year.

He united all the cities and created **the territorial state** for the first time in Mesopotamia. Since that time **the Akkadian Empire** had existed with the capital **Akkad**. By about 2200 BC the Sumerian cities were free again.

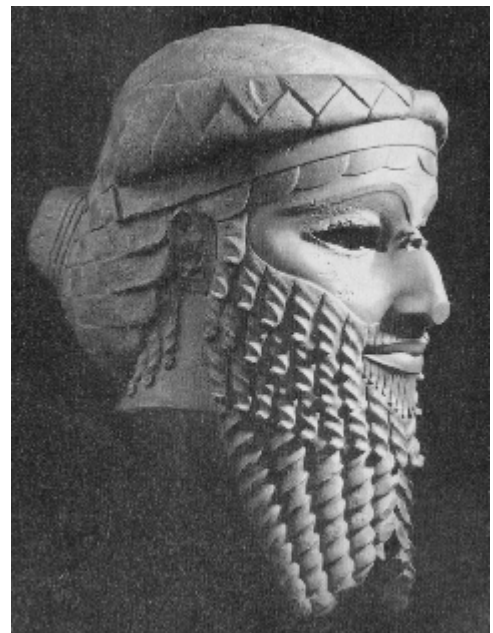
Sargon became a national hero and many stories were made up about him.

*Sargon the mighty king, the King of Agade,  
am I*

*My mother was of humble birth, I knew not  
my father.*

*My humble mother conceived me,  
She brought me forth in secret,  
She laid me in a basket made of reeds,  
She smeared it with bitumen,  
She put me in the river and I did not sink.*

*The river carried me to Akki,  
A man who watered the fields,  
He lifted me out of the basket.  
Akki brought me up as his son,  
he made me his gardener,  
Whilst I was a gardener the goddess Istar  
fell in love with me and for..... four years  
I ruled the kingdom.*



**2. Complete the following sentences about Sargon.**

The mother of Sargon was of..... birth.

The nursing father of Sargon was.....

Sargon worked as a .....

The goddess ..... fell in love with Sargon.

**3. Why was Sargon celebrated as a national hero?**

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**5. In what ways were the Akkadians and the Sumerians different?**

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**6. How was the Akkadian Empire established?**

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## IV. Babylon

### 1. Read the following article

#### **The Rise of Babylon**

The lands of Sumer and Akkad were often invaded by peoples from the mountains and deserts in the north and west.

To the west of Mesopotamia was a land called **Syria**. The nomadic people who lived there were called **the Amorites**. By 1894 BC the Amorites, under their great king **Hammurabi**, reached the banks of the Euphrates and built the city of Babylon. They conquered both Akkad and Sumer and created the second united empire called **the Babylonian Empire**. Hammurabi's capital, Babylon, now became the most important city in Mesopotamia. From that time, Sumer became unimportant, although the way the Sumerians had lived was copied by their conquerors and their neighbours.

### 2. Complete the following sentences about Babylon.

The nomadic people lived in..... and were called .....

Their great king was.....

By ..... they defeated Akkad and Sumer and created..... with the capital.....

They copied..... way of living.

### 3. Before you read the following article try to revise the greatest Sumerian inventions.

#### **The Babylonian's inventions**

The Babylonians were a clever people whose ideas have influenced present-day life. They were among **the first to use money to buy goods**. They thought **the number seven was lucky**, perhaps because they worshipped the seven planets. This began the custom of having **a week of seven days**.

Babylonian astronomers watched the heaven over a period of thousands of years. Their own year contained **360 days**, divided into **twelve 30-day months**. This did not keep pace with the movement of earth, so every now and again they added an extra month. They divided **the day into six parts**, beginning either at sunset or midnight. They measured the periods with **a sun-clock by day and a water-clock by night**.

The Babylonians were very interested in the heaven because they **thought the stars were Gods**. It seems likely that they watched what they believed to be the pathway of the sun and planets through the sky, the so-called **Zodiac**, and divided it into 12 parts. They called each part a constellation and the names they gave them have lived on in **the names of the birth signs** today.

### 4. Write down twelve birth signs of Zodiac.

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**5. Which of the Babylonian's inventions do we use in the 21st century?**

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**6. Read the following article and answer the questions.**

**Hammurabi's laws**

Between 1792 and 1750 BC the Babylonians had a king called **Hammurabi**. Although Hammurabi was a great warrior he is best known for his laws. He realised that to keep his great empire together he had to work out a set of laws based on justice.

Hammurabi copied some of the laws of Sumer and Akkad and to those he added new laws of his own. Then he ordered the whole empire to follow that set of laws he gave them. The rulers of cities were no longer allowed to make their own laws, nor they were allowed to be judges. Hammurabi sent reliable judges of his own to the cities in his empire.

There were 282 laws in **Hammurabi's Code**, and they covered everything that seemed likely to be important. There were laws on witchcraft, robbery, buying and selling, hiring, debt, inheritance, divorce, adoption, rates of wages, compensation for loss of injury. According to this Code the man who had done wrong should pay for it and the man who had suffered should be paid. The brief motto of the Code was **Eye for Eye, Tooth for Tooth**.

**Why did Hammurabi decide to work out the set of laws?**

**What types of laws are included in the Code?**

**What changed in the Empire after issuing the Code?**

**What is the main motto of the Hammurabi's laws?**



## **7. Read the extracts from the Hammurabi's laws and answer the questions.**

### **Document 1.**

*He who steal from the temple or place shall be kille, and the receiver of the stolen goods shall be put to death.*

*If a man steals an ox, or a sheep or an ass, or a pig, or a boat from the temple or palace, he shall pay thirty-fold. The poor man shall pay ten/fold. If the thief has no Money, he shall be killed.*

*The house-breaker shall be killed and buried in the hole he dug.*

*The highway robber shall be caught and killed.*

*The man who is caught stealing during a fire shall be thrown into the fire.*

*If a man has stolen the son of a free man, he shall be killed.*

*If a man has raped the maid of the temple, or the slave or maid of a poor man outside the gate, he shall be killed.*

### **Document 2.**

*/ Women were quite well protected by these laws. Some even owned property, a rare thing in the ancient world./*

*If a wife spends her time out of the house, behaves foolishly, wastes her husband's goods and holds him in contempt, he can say 'I divorce you' and send her away without paying her dowry, if he does not say 'I divorce you', he sahll marry another woman, and the wasteful wife shall live in his house as a servant.*

*If a blameless wife has been reated badly by her husband, she shall take her dowry and return to her father's house.*

*A man and and woman caught in adultery shall be cast into the water, but the husband of the woman may save her, and the king may save the man.*

*If a man divorces a wife because she is childless, he shall give back double her dowry.*

### **Document 3.**

*If a man strikes his father, his hands shall be cut off.*

*If a man destroys the eye of another, his own eye shall be destroyed.*

*If a man has made the teeth of another fall out, one of his own teeth shall be knocked out.*



**Ø How did the Hammurabi's laws treat:**

**a) wrongdoers**

**b) wives**

**c) slaves.**

**Ø Write a few sentences explaining what a husband expected of his wife in those days.**

**Ø Which of the laws seem to be the most unfair? Explain why you think so.**

**Ø What were the most common types of punishment in those days.**

## **8. Role play:**

Do the following:

1. Form groups of three.
2. Choose one law.
3. Imagine that you are a family in Babylon.
4. Your family has to take someone to the court over our chosen law.
5. You must decide: what happened, who did the crime and how should he be punished.
6. When ready perform the court. Accuse someone of the crime. The person defends himself and a judge decides the case.

## V. Assyrians

### 1. Read the article and answer the questions.

#### **The Fall of Babylonia**

The Babylonians had dangerous enemies, particularly **the Hittites** from the north. They **discovered how to get fire hot enough to melt iron**. This gave them iron weapons. The Hittites captured Babylon in **1595 BC**, but they were driven out later.

In the Tigris Valley around a city **Assur** a warlike people **Assyrians** lived and they destroyed the first Babylonian state.

The Assyrians were the most cruel people of the ancient times. Their foot-soldiers and horsemen, often using **chariots**, captured town after town in Mesopotamia and showed no mercy to their captives. Rival kings were blinded and then burned alive. Men, women and children were beheaded or crucified, flayed alive or torn limb from limb. Even the land was sometimes poisoned so that it could not produce crops.

At first the rulers of Babylonia tried to be friendly with the Assyrians and help them in their wars. Then in **689 BC** the Assyrians turned against them. The Assyrian king, **Sennacherib**, besieged Babylon for nine months with a large army when finally he broke it.

Ø What did the Hittites become well-known for ?

Ø Describe how cruel the Assyrians were to their captives.

Ø Who and when destroyed the first Babylonian state?

### 3. Read the article and answer the questions.

#### The Glories of Nineve

There was a more pleasant side to Assyrians rulers. **Sennacherib**, for example, was very interested in farming and engineering. His capital and the greatest city of Assyria, Nineve, got its water from a 300-metre long aquaduct. He also introduced cotton-growing to Assyria.

Another Assyrian conqueror, **Assurbanipal** improved the army and under his rule the Assyrian Empire reached **its greatest extent around 650 BC**. He was also interested in **education**. He collected **a library of 22 000 clay tablets** written in cuneiform. Some of those clay tablets told the stories of the Creation of the World and the Great Flood. Others were about medicine, science and mathematics. Assurbanipal could hold this large empire together, but his successors could not. The cruelties of Assyrian rule provoked revolt after revolt. In **616 BC** the Babylonians joined forces with the Medes and together attacked the Assyrians. Nineve was captured and destroyed by fire in **612 BC**. The fire caused that the clay tablets in Assurbanipal's library were backed hard and so survived to be read in recent times. Three years later, all Assyria had been captured and never again appeared as an independent power.

Ø What achievements did the Assyrian kings reach?

Ø Thanks to what do we know more about the Assyrian Empire?

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## VI. The Second Bybylonian Empire

### 1. Read the following article and answer the questions.

#### **The Glory of Babylon**

After defeating the Assyrians, the Babylonians and Medes split the Assyrian Empire. The Medes took the north and east and the Babylonians the south and west. For nearly two thousand years Babylon had been an important city. and especially the reign of king **Nebuchadnezzar** was the most glorious in its history.

Babylon stood on the Euphrates where the main trade routes of the ancient world met. Babylonian ships traded down the river and along the coast of Arabia and India. Merchant caravans reached deep Persia and Asia Minor. Babylon was **a busy centre of trade and commerce.**

Babylon was also **a great centre of learning and religion.** The priests seemed to be interested in **astronomy.** Using their temple towers as observatories, they carefully noted the movements of the moon and of the planets.

King Nebuchadnezzar was famous for he invaded and conquered Judah, captured and destroyed Jerusalem and took many Jews back to Babylon as captives.

During his reign Babylon turned into one of the most beautiful cities in the world. The best description that we have of the city was written by the Greek, **Herodotus.** The most wonderful part of the city were the famous **Hanging Gardens** / one of the Wonders of the World /. An artificial hill of terrace upon terrace was planted with every sort of flower and tree. Water for them was raised by machinery from the river below. The story goes that Nebuchadnezzar had them made because his new young queen was homesick for the green hills of Persia.

The successors of Nebuchadnezzar were not able to protect the empire against the Persians. The Persian king, **Cyrus the Great,** moved against Babylon after he had conquered the Medes in 549 BC. The last Babylonian king, **Nabonidus,** was disliked by many of his people. So it came as no surprise that **Cyrus** was greeted by cheering crowds waving date palms when he **led his army into Babylon in 539 BC.** By 300 BC the main trade routes no longer passed through the city and it began to decay and the buildings turned to ruins. The glory of Babylon came again during the reign of **Alexander the Great.**

Ø How was the Assyrian Empire divided after its fall?

Ø What was Babylon famous for?

Ø Why is the name of the king Nebuchadnezzar mentioned in the Bible?

Ø What was Herodotus famous for?

Ø What is bizzare about the Hanging Gardens?

Ø Who was the last Babylonian Emperor?

Ø Who defeated Babylon, when and why?

