

## MESOPOTAMIA STUDY GUIDE

### I. VOCABULARY

TERMS	PEOPLE
Rural	Sargon
Urban	Gilgamesh
Empire	Enkidu
Social Hierarchy	Shamhat
Ziggurat	Hammurabi
Cuneiform	
Mesopotamia	
City State	
Polytheistic	
Epic	
Scribe	
Silt	
Surplus	
Irrigation	
Priests	

### II. **Section 1: Physical Geography of the Fertile Crescent.** *As far back as 10,500 BCE, people were farming and harvesting near the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in what is now called Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Lebanon.*

#### a. Rivers, Farming Techniques, and Agriculture

##### i. Tigris and Euphrates Rivers

1. Provided water source for people and livestock, sanitation, transportation and trade, religious inspiration, canal irrigation for crops, and food surpluses.
2. Food surpluses (due to specialization) made possible the rise of civilization: village → city state → empire

#### b. Other Important Bodies of Water

- i. **Persian Gulf** was closest to ancient Sumer and Babylon
- ii. **Mediterranean Sea** also provided opportunities for travel and trade from ports in modern day Turkey, Lebanon and Israel

### III. **Section 2: Sumerian Society.** *Sumerians developed the first civilization in Mesopotamia. Guarded by a wall, the society was organized into a complex social hierarchy where religion played a major role.*

#### a. Sargon and the Akkadian Empire

- i. **Population boom (10k - 100k)** led to growth of city-states that required protection in the form of walls and armies.
- ii. **Sargon** established a permanent standing army and used it to build the first empire. It fell shortly after he died.

## b. Religion Shaped Society.

- i. Polytheistic **priests** gained high status and became powerful because they performed ceremonies.
- ii. Sumerian **social hierarchy**: 1. King → 2. Priests → 3. Skilled people → 4. Farmers and laborers → Slaves
- iii. **Men** had access to education, law, and politics whereas few **women** had access to education and cared for the home and children. Those who were educated were wealthy.

## IV. **Section 3: Sumerian Achievements.** *Advancements in mechanics, mathematics, writing, arts, and law greatly enriched Sumerian culture and society. Modern humans continue to benefit from these achievements.*

### a. Invention of Writing

- i. Sumerians invented the first system of writing to track crop amounts and trade using **pictographs** and **cuneiform** etched into clay tablets by **scribes**.
- ii. Sumerians recorded **epics** to tell stories of powerful kings or important events. This act signaled the beginning of recorded time (also known as history).

### b. Advances and Inventions

- i. **Technical advancements included**: potter's wheel → wheel and wheeled vehicles, plow, water clock, sewer systems, bronze crafts, and sailboats
- ii. **Mathematical and Scientific advancements included**: 60-base (sexagesimal) number system, area of a rectangle and triangle, calendar, and medicines from plants and minerals.

### c. Arts of Sumer

- i. Architectural achievements: palaces and **ziggurats** (temples)
- ii. Sculptures of gods and temples made from ivory, wood, and clay
- iii. Jewelry made from bronze, gold, silver, and gemstones
- iv. Cylinder Seals: engraved with symbols and used as a signature
- v. Song and Dance: reed pipes, drums, tambourines, and lyres (small harps) accompanied people who sang hymns and danced

### d. Law

- i. **King Hammurabi** of **Babylonia** developed the **Stele of Hammurabi** (today it is referred to as **Hammurabi's Code**): one of the first written law codes in the world.
- ii. Babylonians were provided with rules for settling problems that arose in their everyday lives. Many laws focused on **commerce, trade, and agriculture** (farming and herding)
- iii. **Punishments** ranged from mild (fines) to severe (loss of hand, eye, or life). Punishments became more severe as the crime involved religion.
- iv. Led to a boom in **literacy** since people had to read the laws in order to understand and follow them. Many laws also required **contracts** to great proof or evidence of transactions.