



CHAPTER 2

EARLY SOCIETIES IN SOUTHWEST ASIA AND THE INDO-EUROPEAN MIGRATIONS

Before you get started: The AP guidelines stress that students should be able to compare two of the following early civilizations: Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Indus River Valley culture, the Yellow River culture, and the two American societies. It is unlikely that you will be asked to compare Egypt to Mesopotamia because they are in the same region. So, think about similarities and differences as you study. Consider starting a chart or other graphic organizer to help you see the comparisons.

Mesopotamia has some of the earliest archaeological traces of the neolithic period as well as the grand remains of mighty empires. Its location was conducive to agriculture but also subject to natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes. It is the sole early civilization dependent on two rivers rather than one, the Tigris and Euphrates in modern-day Iraq. In this chapter cultures demonstrate two key concepts in religion: **polytheism** meaning multiple gods and **monotheism** meaning a single god.

THE QUEST FOR ORDER

As the human population grew rapidly due to increased agricultural yield, the administration of cities and states became necessary to handle the political and social affairs of large urban areas.

Mesopotamia: “The Land between the Rivers” ***(Themes: #1 Human-Environment Interaction, and #3 Politics)***

Around 4000 B.C.E., **Mesopotamia** developed the earliest urban culture in the region between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Elaborate **irrigation systems** from the two river sources allowed the Mesopotamians to develop the arid area. Successful farming around the world’s earliest city, **Sumer**, fostered its population growth to approximately 100,000 by 3000 B.C.E. Other Semitic groups, such as the Hebrews and Phoenicians, migrated to and settled in the region. Eventually, a dozen Sumerian cities emerged that worked together but were politically separate. Ruled by absolute monarchs, each **city-state** was engaged in tax collection and governance of its population. Primary functions of the state included building palaces, **ziggurats** (temples), irrigation systems, and defensive walls. These projects were so elaborate that they required enormous numbers of laborers who had to be drafted by the state.

The Course of Empire ***(Themes: #2 Human Interactions, and #3 Politics)***

As Mesopotamian city-states came into conflict with each other, some extended their control over weaker cities and developed into larger states. The late period of Mesopotamian city-states was punctuated by frequent warfare. Later, other **Semitic peoples** conquered the Sumerian cities and formed regional empires. The primary early Semitic ruler was Sargon of Akkad in the twenty-third century B.C.E., but the more important later ruler was the **Babylonian King Hammurabi** who improved administration with an extensive legal code built on previous regional laws. The foundation of the code was **lex talionis**, or the law of retribution, with punishments tied closely to offenses. So, the loss of an eye between equals demanded the loss of the offender’s eye. But the loss of an eye between different classes required more punishment for the lower-class offender and less for the upper-class offender. In reality, judges had some latitude to make their own decisions, but it set a strong precedent for the rule of law.



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The Later Mesopotamian Empires

(Themes: #1 Human-Environment Interaction; #2 Human Interactions)

The **Assyrian Empire** used iron weapons, chariots, and professional soldiers promoted on the basis of merit to overpower neighboring cities. King **Assurbanipal** assembled a vast library, including the **Epic of Gilgamesh**. The Assyrian empire grew too large to effectively rule, and fell to a series of internal revolts and foreign assaults by 600 B.C.E. The **Chaldean** empire under **Nebuchadnezzar** earned fame for its hanging gardens, but foreign conquerors absorbed Mesopotamia into their own empires by the mid-sixth century B.C.E.

THE FORMATION OF A COMPLEX SOCIETY AND SOPHISTICATED CULTURAL TRADITIONS

The formation of social classes occurred as the population became very diverse and long-distance trade increased. Small groups of individuals began to accumulate wealth and power that distinguished them from other groups. Social, economic, and political power lay in the hands of males thus forming a patriarchal society. The Mesopotamians devised a system of writing that revolutionized administration and trade.

Economic Specialization and Trade

(Themes: #1 Human-Environment Interaction; #4 Economic Systems)

One early development in labor specialization occurred when the Mesopotamians learned how to combine tin and copper into **bronze**. By 4000 B.C.E., they had begun to fashion bronze into weapons. Later on, they developed bronze farm implements that replaced the wood and stone tools. But the expense of the relatively scarce tin and copper required to make bronze gave way to more easily mined and more durable **iron**. With iron technology, the Assyrians were able to conquer the entire region. Mesopotamians also devised extremely efficient transportation with their invention of the **wheel**. They improved sailing vessels so much that by 2300 B.C.E. Mesopotamians traded regularly with distant regions of the Indus Valley, Egypt, and Afghanistan.

The Emergence of a Stratified Patriarchal Society

(Theme: #5 Social Structures)

Continued accumulation of wealth led to more pronounced **class distinctions** in Mesopotamian cities. **Royal** family members had hereditary status and early monarchs were even considered the children of gods. The **nobility** formed around the monarch with **priests and priestesses** closely connected to them. The role of priests was to intercede with the gods on behalf of the people. But the large temple complexes also brought in revenue and benefited both farmers and craftsmen attached to the religious lands. The lower classes consisted of **free commoners and slaves** with an intermediary class known as **dependent clients** who owned no property but were not slaves. All three lower classes were drafted into building the large construction projects but also engaged in agriculture. The commoners and dependent clients were taxed heavily to support the state and religion. Slaves were prisoners of war, indebted individuals, and convicted criminals who generally worked as domestic servants in wealthy households.

Mesopotamia was a **patriarchal society**. Men dominated public and home life and, legally, had the ability to sell their wives and children into slavery. Other laws also favored men over women. Nevertheless, individual women advised kings, managed large estates, and obtained a formal education that enabled them to become scribes. Women were also shopkeepers, bakers, and weavers. Eventually, men tightened control over women and decreased interactions between women and men outside their families to protect the family fortunes. By 1500 B.C.E., married women began to wear veils outside the home. Much later, this custom was adopted by Muslims in the region. (see chapter 14, p. 364)





Part I: The Early Complex Societies, 3500 to 500 B.C.E.

The Development of Written Cultural Traditions
(Theme: #2 Development and Interaction of Cultures)

Around 4500 B.C.E., the Mesopotamians began to develop the world's earliest written language for their commercial transactions and tax collection. The writing tool of **cuneiform** was a wedged-shaped stick used to make marks on tablets of wet clay. Early symbols were pictographs but later phonetic symbols were added. Since cuneiform writing required years of study and education, most educated people became scribes or government officials. The development of writing enabled the Mesopotamians to devise more sophisticated mathematics and sciences as well as to transcribe their oral legends like the *Epic of Gilgamesh* into writing. With the advent of advanced math and astronomy, a calendar was devised that broke the year into twelve months and hours into sixty minutes each consisting of sixty seconds. These conventions remain with us today. The Mesopotamians also used complex math to survey their vast agricultural lands.

THE BROADER INFLUENCE OF MESOPOTAMIAN SOCIETY

The Mesopotamians influenced many cultures outside their boundaries by the unique quality of their ideas and occasionally by force. Other societies adopted components of the Mesopotamian culture but maintained their own traditions as well.

Hebrews, Israelites, and Jews
(Theme: #2 Development and Interaction of Cultures)

The **Hebrews** were **nomadic pastoralists** who lived between Mesopotamia and Egypt but took on more of the cultural attributes of Mesopotamia than Egypt. For instance, early Hebrew law was derived from the principles of Hammurabi's code and tribal governance was abandoned for monarchies. Among the accomplishments of the Hebrews, the world's first permanent adoption of **monotheism** in place of polytheism is most notable. Early Hebrews had recognized the same gods as the Mesopotamians, but after 900 B.C.E., **Moses** embraced a single god, Yahweh. The development of a **written Hebrew script** allowed the history of the people, its belief system, and its legal code to be recorded in the **Torah**. Conquered by the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians, the Israelites eventually settled in Judea, maintained their monotheistic religion, and became known as **Jews**. Their religion later influenced both Christianity and Islam.

The Phoenicians
(Themes: #1 Human-Environment Interaction, #4 Economic Systems)

Settled in coastal cities along the Mediterranean, the **Phoenicians** developed a thriving trade network. Overland and maritime trade of timber and high-quality manufactured goods resulted in enormous prosperity for this small group. They were particularly well known for a desirable purple dye derived from a shellfish. Eventually, their **advanced ship technology** allowed them to trade as far away as the British Isles and down to the Gulf of Guinea. Like the Hebrews, they adopted Mesopotamian culture, although they remained polytheistic. Their primary contribution to world culture was the development of a twenty-two-symbol writing system based on phonemes where each symbol represented a sound in the Phoenician language. Eventually, the Greeks and Romans would adopt and enlarge upon the world's first completely **phonetic language**.





THE INDO-EUROPEAN MIGRATIONS

The Mesopotamians developed relationships with diverse groups beyond the Middle East. The most significant of these were Indo-Europeans whose migrations across Eurasia profoundly affected world history.

Indo-European Origins (Theme: #1 Human-Environment Interaction)

Indo-Europeans were originally herders from the Russian steppes. They domesticated horses about 4000 B.C.E. and once they obtained metallurgy and wheels from the Mesopotamians, they devised carts and chariots. With horse power and speed, the Indo-Europeans spread widely across Eurasia. They considered themselves superior and called themselves “nobility” or **Aryans**.

Indo-European Expansion and Its Effects (Theme: #1 Human-Environment Interaction)

As the Indo-European population increased, they spread further away from their homelands. Intermittent migrations occurred over two thousand years of early history. An Indo-European group, the Hittites, spread into the Middle East and conquered regions as far away as Egypt. They adopted the cuneiform writing and the polytheistic gods of Mesopotamia. They greatly refined iron metallurgy and introduced the war chariot. Some also went as far as western China. And many went to Europe, invading the British Isles and the Baltic region as well as the more central areas of Europe. They depended upon agriculture or herding but did not build large states. However, Celts dominated the areas north of the Mediterranean in trade, religion, and agriculture. They also spread into India. The primary legacy of the Indo-Europeans was their language, the ancestor of most European languages and Sanskrit.

Finished reading the chapter? Be sure you can . . .

- Explain the effect of the Tigris and Euphrates geography on Mesopotamian culture.
- Describe the political and class structure of Mesopotamia.
- Discuss the origin and development of monotheism.
- Discuss the origin and development of written language.
- Describe gender relations in Mesopotamia.
- Explain Mesopotamian adoption of metallurgy.
- Identify Mesopotamian art style and subject matter.

Chapter Multiple Choice Questions

1. The most favorable environmental condition that prompted the growth of cities was
 - a. a dry climate.
 - b. high mountains.
 - c. access to fresh water.
 - d. rivers.
 - e. seasonal climate change.
2. As populations increased, Mesopotamian cities were obligated to protect the welfare of their citizens by
 - a. expanding control to the neighboring agricultural areas.
 - b. building defensive walls to hold off Indo-European armies.
 - c. developing religions so that gods protected the inhabitants of the cities.
 - d. refusing to allow canals in urban areas.
 - e. organizing smaller political units within the city.





Part I: The Early Complex Societies, 3500 to 500 B.C.E.

3. While sharing the same language and customs, relations between the late Mesopotamian city-states were
 - a. cooperative and neighborly.
 - b. kept at a minimum due to distance.
 - c. subject to overwhelming authority of Sumer.
 - d. degenerated into constant conflict.
 - e. easily sustained by trade.
4. In order to maintain an orderly state, Babylonian King Hammurabi developed laws from
 - a. earlier Babylonian traditions.
 - b. unwritten regional precedents.
 - c. his personal ideas of legality.
 - d. Mesopotamian legal traditions.
 - e. Hebrew legal traditions.
5. Conquering armies were dependent upon new metal technology to best their opponents. Bronze metallurgy took the place of copper because
 - a. tin deposits were more common than copper.
 - b. bronze is stronger than copper.
 - c. most warriors could better afford bronze.
 - d. copper could not be used for tools.
 - e. bronze was more prized in art.
6. Later the Hittites gained an advantage over Egypt when they used iron technology. Iron metallurgy replaced bronze because
 - a. only iron could be made into weapons.
 - b. mining for iron is done on the surface of the earth.
 - c. bronze is a relatively rare metal.
 - d. iron was less expensive.
 - e. iron could be used as ballast for Phoenician ships.
7. Mesopotamian long-distance trade expanded to include most areas of the Mediterranean and parts of the Indian Ocean due to
 - a. its geographic location.
 - b. its alliance with Egypt and India.
 - c. the development of improved sailing ships.
 - d. reliance on camels for desert travel.
 - e. easy access to river travel.
8. Regarding social stratification, Mesopotamians were
 - a. egalitarian with just three classes.
 - b. dependent on bureaucracy for status.
 - c. more fair to their slaves than the dependent clients.
 - d. disinterested in an inherited class of nobles.
 - e. divided into several distinct classes.
9. Monotheism is the cornerstone of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It developed in Mesopotamia due to
 - a. the recognition of a single god by Hammurabi.
 - b. the beliefs of a separate ethnic group in Mesopotamia.
 - c. cultural diffusion from the Egyptian pharaoh, Akhenaton.
 - d. the acceptance of a single god by the priests.
 - e. the development of Christianity.





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10. The place of women in Mesopotamian society was
- the legal equivalent of slaves.
 - approximately equal to men.
 - legally subservient but allowed to participate in public life.
 - economically subservient to men but legally equal.
 - a solely domestic role of wife and mother.

Comprehensive Multiple Choice Questions

- What area of Mesopotamian life deeply influenced both Phoenicians and Hebrews?
 - weaponry and the art of war
 - manufacture and distribution of trade items
 - a society deeply influenced by urban living
 - a tradition of writing that enabled both worship and trade
 - adoption and retention of essential religious practices
- Increased patriarchal forms of gender status appear to evolve in accordance with the sophistication of society. Compared with earlier communities, the high status of males may be the result of
 - the relative importance of wealth in a society.
 - men's physical ability to act as farmers.
 - an innate resentment of women as nurturers.
 - a failure to recognize women as manufacturers.
 - the lack of equal education.
- The relationship between settled peoples such as the Sumerians and nomadic groups such as the Indo-Europeans was a state of interdependency that was chiefly reliant on
 - tolerance and acceptance of differences in customs, such as legal codes and women's status.
 - acceptance and adaptation of aspects of technology, religion, and social order by the nomads.
 - a willingness on the part of the nomads to settle down into separate communities.
 - a strict separation of the societies outside of trade and commerce.
 - the adoption of the settled society's belief system with a rejection of the nomad's religion.

Primary Source Questions

- Refer to the painting, the Royal Standard of Ur, 2700 B.C.E., on page 30 of your textbook.**
 - What type of professions are represented?
 - Who might have drawn this?
 - Does dress indicate different social status? Does anything else?
 - Does the painting demonstrate any other cultural values?
- Examine the basalt stele of Hammurabi, c. 1750 B.C.E., on page 37 of your textbook.**
 - What does the stele have in common with the Royal Standard of Ur?
 - How has the style of dress changed from the Royal Standard?
 - What impression does Hammurabi make? Why would this impression be important?

Chapter Multiple Choice Answers

- c:** The early Mesopotamians developed methods to irrigate their agricultural fields with water from the Tigris and the Euphrates. (p. 32)
- a:** Since the citizens were dependent on crops from outside the city walls, Mesopotamian governments expanded to include farming areas surrounding the cities. (p. 33)





Part I: The Early Complex Societies, 3500 to 500 B.C.E.

3. **d:** Cities competed constantly with each other for political power. (p. 36)
4. **d:** Hammurabi borrowed liberally from Mesopotamian predecessors. (p. 37)
5. **b:** Bronze implements are stronger than copper or tin. (p. 40)
6. **d:** Iron deposits are more common than tin or copper deposits. (p. 40)
7. **c:** Invention of the wheel and improved sailing vessels facilitated long-distance trade. (p. 40)
8. **e:** Mesopotamian society was divided into a nobility, a priestly class, free commoners, dependent clients, and slaves. (p. 41)
9. **b:** The Hebrews under Moses embraced the concept of one god, Yahweh. (p. 47)
10. **c:** Regardless of legal status, women served as advisers to rulers, scribes, shopkeepers, midwives, and textile producers. (p. 42)

Comprehensive Multiple Choice Answers

1. **d:** Evidence that the Hebrews adopted writing can be found in the compiled teachings of the Torah; the Phoenicians adapted cuneiform into a simplified set of phonetic symbols. (pp. 47, 49)
2. **a:** As societies became more complex and accumulation of wealth determined family status, women became increasingly restricted in society. (p. 42)
3. **b:** The most important nomadic groups associated with the Mesopotamians were the Hittites and the Hebrews. They adopted components of Mesopotamian innovations such as iron metallurgy and legal codes but later revised them into more appropriate societal needs such as war chariots and Hebrew law. (pp. 45, 53)

Primary Source Answers

1. It is evident that there are servants, porters, wealthy men, cattlemen, fishermen, a horse trader, and one foreigner (with the beard and the hat). It is likely that this was painted by a court artist specifically for the king. All are dressed similarly in short skirts except the foreigner. The only indication of status is that two men are sitting in chairs. Apparently, the fashion is for all men to be shaved on their faces and their heads. The foreigner indicates long-distance trade. The artistic style of the Mesopotamians is linear with all people and animals in profile. Finally, large eyes seem to have importance. (p. 30)
2. In both art pieces, the figures are in profile and the higher-status person is sitting. It is apparent that the Babylonians wore full body covering and had facial hair and hats, like the foreigner in the Royal Standard. Hammurabi's figure is wider, more open, and emanates power. Since the stele was a memorial to Hammurabi's laws, he needed to appear authoritative. (pp. 30 and 37)