



## Ancient Mesopotamia

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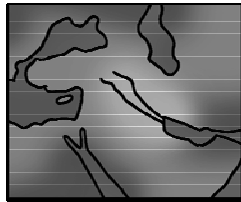
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## Geography

Ancient Mesopotamia covered an area about 300 miles long and 150 miles wide. It was located in what today is southern Iraq.

The ancient Mesopotamians built their cities between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. These rivers flow into the Persian Gulf. The word "Mesopotamia" actually means (in Greek) "the land between the rivers."



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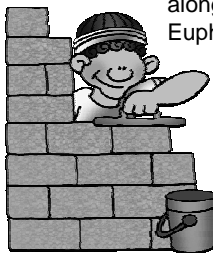
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## The Bronze Age



Many thousands of years ago, early settlers began to build cities along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The vegetation and wildlife there kept these early people fed while they began to build their new world.

It was the end of the Stone Age and the beginning of the Bronze Age—the Age of Metallurgy and Writing.

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## People Settled Down

It did not rain much, but the early settlers soon learned that if you irrigated the land, crops grew quickly.

They built canals to bring water to the land from the rivers.

They planted wheat, barley, dates, and vegetables, including cucumbers and onions. They also grew apples.



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## People Settled Down



They raised sheep, goats, and cows. They hunted wild birds.

They ate fish, cheese, eggs, roasted duck, pork, and deer.

They wove sturdy baskets from the weeds that grew along the riverbanks.

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## Permanent Homes



They made such beautiful pottery out of the moist soil that it became a form of wealth. They traded pottery for food, clothing, and jewelry.

These early people were real pioneers. They built permanent homes from sun-dried bricks made of mud and straw, and started a new life in the southern region of ancient Mesopotamia.

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## Cradle of Civilization

Ancient Mesopotamia is called the **cradle of civilization** because it was the first known area in which humans settled in villages, built permanent homes, and farmed the land.

Ancient Mesopotamia is also nicknamed the **Fertile Crescent** because agriculture flourished in the land between two rivers.



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## Early Groups of People



The earliest people to settle ancient Mesopotamia and begin to develop a civilization are called the Sumerians.

About a thousand years later, two other groups came into power. The Babylonians took over in the south, while the Assyrians ruled the north. However, the Sumerian culture lived on.

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## Questions

1. Mesopotamia is called "the land between two rivers." What are the names of these rivers?
2. Why was pottery a form of wealth?
3. Why did archaeologists nickname ancient Mesopotamia "the Fertile Crescent"?
4. Why do we call ancient Mesopotamia "the Cradle of Civilization"?



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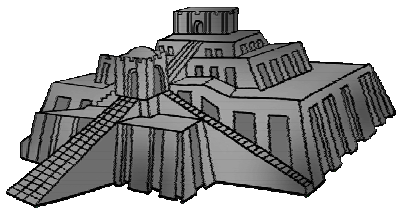
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## Ancient Sumer

The Sumerian civilization likely began around 5000 BCE.

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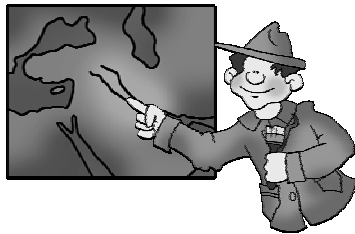
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## Cities: Ur

The ancient Sumerians were very clever people. They built many cities along the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers.

Archaeologists believe that their largest city, the capital city of Ur, had a population of around 24,000.



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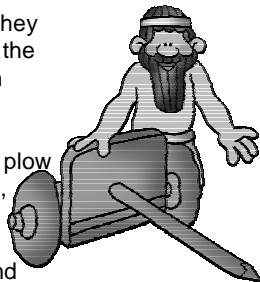
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## Inventions

As time went by, the clever Sumerians invented things they needed, such as the wheel, the sailboat, and the first written language.

They invented the plow, the plow seeder, the shepherd's pipe, cosmetic sets, frying pans, razors, the harp, kilns for baking bricks and pottery, and bronze hand tools.



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## Inventions



They invented a system of mathematics based on the number 60. Today, we divide an hour into 60 minutes, and a minute into 60 seconds. This system began with the ancient Mesopotamians.

Some Mesopotamian words are still in use today. Words like "crocus" (a type of flower) and "saffron" (a spice) are words borrowed from the ancient Mesopotamians.

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## Craftsmen/Artisans

The Sumerians were wonderful craftsmen. They invented the kiln for baking bricks to make their homes and walls sturdier.

They made beautiful things with the materials on hand: jewelry of precious gold and lapis, fancy chairs, and unglazed vases that kept water cool. They made musical instruments like the harp and the shepherd's pipe.



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## Sumerian Mosaics

Their artists created colorful mosaics in intricate and beautiful patterns using little pieces of painted clay.

Archaeologists have found remains of their mosaics, helmets, harps, jewelry, pottery, and decorated tablets.



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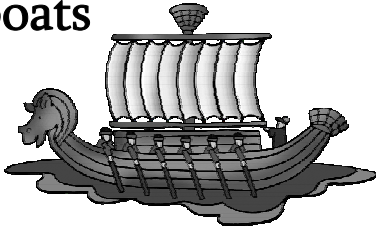
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## Sailboats



In the cities of Sumer, long docks were built along the riverbanks so that trading ships could easily stop and unload their goods. Ships brought food, drinks, clothes, jewelry, and other goods up and down the rivers.

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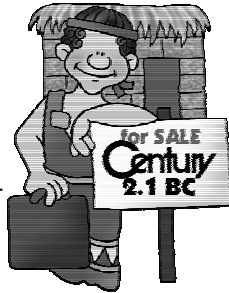
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## Sumer Grew Rapidly

Soon, there were hundreds of villages and towns, some with populations of only 100, and some with populations of 30,000 or more.

By 2500 BCE, the population in ancient Sumer was more than half a million people. About four out of five people lived in cities, making Sumer the world's first urban culture.



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## City-States

To protect themselves, small towns attached themselves to big cities. This created a system of city-states.



People in different Sumerian city-states:

- Worshipped the same gods
- Spoke the same language
- Traded goods
- Hired one another
- Made agreements

But each city had its own royal family and its own military.

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## Walled Cities

City-states were protected by brick walls that wrapped around the entire main city.



Each main city controlled many villages. The huge city-state of Uruk, for example, controlled 76 nearby villages.

When trouble came, villagers fled to the nearest walled city for protection.

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## Law & Order

Although not written down, Sumerian law clearly defined how to behave and the punishment for not behaving correctly.

Government was a combination of monarchy and democracy. Kings in each main city ruled the people of their city-state. Elected officials who served in the Assembly also ruled the people.



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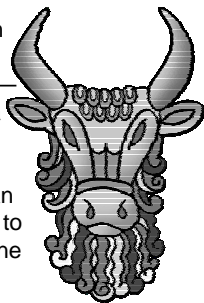
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## Sumerian Religion

The ancient Sumerians believed in many gods. They believed that everything that happened to them—good and bad—was the result of a god's favor or displeasure.

Much of daily life in every Sumerian city-state was spent seeking ways to please and appease their gods. One of their most important deities was the god Marduk.



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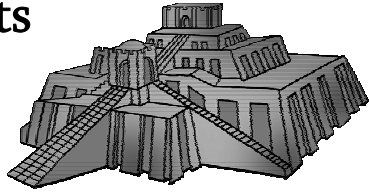
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## Ziggurats



The Sumerians believed that the most powerful gods lived in the sky. They built huge temples called "ziggurats" that had steps climbing up to the top. Religious ceremonies were held at the very top, where people left offerings of food and wine. The priests enjoyed these offerings, since the gods themselves could not eat.

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## Sumerian Daily Life



The ziggurat was built in the center of town. It was the center of daily life.

From the top of the ziggurat, it was possible to see workers building and repairing the protective wall that surrounded the entire town. Also you could see over the wall to the outside farmlands.

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## Sumerian Daily Life



Except for festivals, which were gloomy things, the ziggurat courtyard was bright and lively.

You might see an artist painting, a boy racing by on his way to school, someone milking a cow, or someone weaving a basket.

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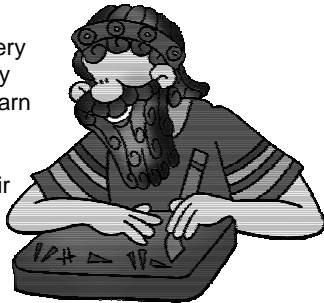
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## Cuneiform

The ancient Sumerians believed in education. Record keeping was very important to them. They wanted their sons to learn how to read and write.

Archaeologists call their written language "cuneiform."



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## Schools



Schools were attached to temples. Only boys went to school. Teachers were very strict. Students had to do a perfect job, or they were punished.

If your work was sloppy, you might hear—or even feel—the snap of a whip!

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## Schools

In spite of the punishment they often received, most students wanted to go to school.

People who could read and write could always find a good job.



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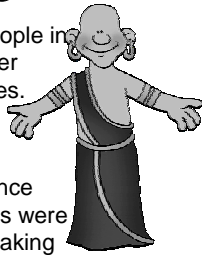
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## Classes of People

There were four main classes of people in ancient Sumer: the priests, the upper class, the lower class, and the slaves.

### **Priests:**

It was easy to identify the priests since they shaved their heads. The priests were powerful. They were in charge of making sure everyone behaved in a way that would make the gods happy. They were also the doctors of the time. If you were sick, you called a priest.



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## The Upper Class

Both men and women wore jewelry, especially rings. Everyone wore cloaks made from sheep's wool to keep warm in winter.

### **Upper-class men:**

Men wore skirts and had long hair, curly moustaches, and long beards.



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## The Upper Class



### **Upper-class women:**

Women wore dresses that left one shoulder bare.

They had long hair, which they braided or wore up in very fancy arrangements.

They also wore lots of jewelry.

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## The Lower Class

In Sumer, people were paid for their work. Whether they worked in the fields or ran a shop, they were paid for their labor or goods. Everybody paid, even the king.

The lower class did not have the luxury lifestyle of the rich, but because they were paid for their work, usually in food or other goods, they were comfortable. They worked very hard, but they had good food to eat and homes of their own.



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## The Lower Class

There was no law that said they had to live in a certain place or have a certain job.

The lower class was free to move from one city to another.

They could move up the social ladder by becoming a scribe or a priest or priestess.



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## Sumerian Women

Women were not considered equal to men, but they did have rights. They could freely go to the marketplace, buy and sell goods, handle legal issues, own property, and start their own business. Upper-class women were free to learn how to read and write. Some women even held jobs in city government.



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## Sumerian Slaves

When the Sumerians conquered another town, they brought prisoners back with them to work as slaves. Slaves worked for the king, at the temples, and for the wealthy.



Slaves were bought and sold. Records have been found indicating the amount paid for a slave. Typically, a slave bought at auction cost less than a donkey but more than a cow.

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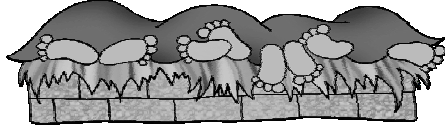
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## Sumerian Homes

The rich lived in large homes, and the poor lived in small homes. But everyone had a home of their own.

Homes were clustered around the ziggurat. Most houses shared walls, like townhouses do today. People built their homes out of sun-dried brick, with flat roofs. People cooked and slept on their roofs, weather permitting.



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## Gilgamesh



The Sumerians were great storytellers. Thousands of years ago, they created the story of Gilgamesh.

Gilgamesh is one of the world's oldest recorded stories. It's about an ancient king of Uruk who may have actually existed. The name Gilgamesh appears on the list of Sumerian kings.

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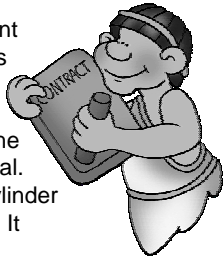
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## Cylinder Seals

The Sumerians kept very good records. They also wrote contracts.

When people made an agreement with one another, a contract was drawn up. Sumerians signed contracts and other documents with cylinder seals. Everyone had their own unique cylinder seal. Stamping a contract with your cylinder seal was like signing your name. It was legally binding.



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## Sumer Quiz

1. What city was the capital of the Sumerian civilization?
2. What is a city-state?
3. Why did towns band together under the leadership of a king?



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## The Ancient City of Babylon



The Sumerians ruled themselves with a system of city-states. One of those city-states was Babylon.

As the civilization of Sumer declined, the Babylonians took over in the south.

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## The God Marduk

The Babylonians had a different language than the Sumerians. Still, they believed in many of the same gods.

To the Sumerians, Marduk was an important god. To the Babylonians, Marduk was the most important god of all. King Hammurabi declared Babylon the capital of Babylonia. He built the city of Babylon in Marduk's honor.



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## Hammurabi's Code

Hammurabi was a fabulous Babylonian king who did something that no one had done before. The Sumerians had developed the first written language, cuneiform. Using this written language, Hammurabi created the first written set of laws.



It did not matter if you were rich or poor. If you broke the law and were found guilty, you would be punished. Since the laws were clearly written down, everyone was expected to obey them.

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## 3500 Years Ago

Babylon was an impressive place. It was a massive walled city with a network of canals and vivid green crops. Visitors could see the top of the 300-foot-tall ziggurat long before they reached the huge city gates.

There was much to buy, like fresh fruits and vegetables, breads, cheese, warm coats, gold jewelry, and date wine. Life teemed inside the walls.



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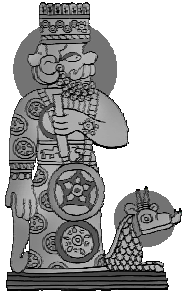
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## Procession Avenue & the Ishtar Gates



One of the most impressive sites was Procession Avenue, the street that led into the city. Huge brick animals were positioned along both sides of the avenue as decoration.

The avenue passed under the Ishtar Gates, the elaborate portal to the walled city. The gates were decorated with dragons and bulls in honor of the god Marduk.

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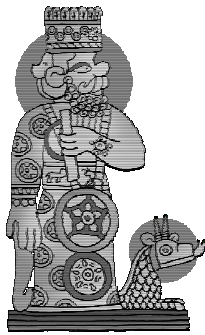
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## Marduk's Dragon

Most mythical dragons have wings.

However, Marduk's dragon was wingless. It looked somewhat like a huge dragon dog.



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## Homes

Many of the houses were designed with three stories of living space. All had flat roofs. Even the very poor, who lived in tiny townhouses, typically had three levels of living space.

The courtyard (or first floor) in each house had a front door. Behind the door, a visitor might find a garden and domesticated animals such as chickens.



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## Streets & Trash

The streets were narrow and unpaved. Streets or alleyways provided access to everyone's front door. People simply threw their trash out their front door.



Now and then, the city covered the streets with a new layer of clay. While this buried the trash, it made the level of the street higher. People then had to build steps down to their front door or fill in the space up to the new street and punch out a new door.

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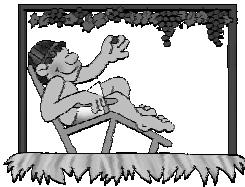
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## Rooftops

People had easy access to their roofs from inside their homes. Roofs were flat for a reason: flat roofs provided a fourth level of living space. People spent much of their lives on the roof. They cooked and slept on their roofs.



Some of the fancier roofs were designed with four walls for privacy. Some had grape arbors that provided food, privacy, and shelter from the sun.

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## Hanging Gardens

One of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the Hanging Gardens were built on the flat roof of the palace. The tops of their trees could be glimpsed from a great distance.



This gave the appearance of a garden hanging in thin air, which is how the gardens received its name.

The terraced gardens rose about 75 feet high. They had flowers and fruit trees and waterfalls.

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## Hanging Gardens

Legend says that the Hanging Gardens were built as a gift of love from a king to his queen. But not everyone agrees that the gardens actually existed.

Whether a real or an imaginary place, the Hanging Gardens are counted as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.



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## Babylon Questions

1. Why were rooftops important to the ancient Babylonians?
2. Who was the patron god of Babylon?
3. Why was it important to write down the laws?



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Meet  
the  
Assyrians



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## The Assyrians

About a thousand years after the Sumerians first settled in the Fertile Crescent, two other groups came to power. The Babylonians took over in the south, and the Assyrians took over in the north.

The Assyrians had their own language and their own lifestyle. They were well known as traders. Their donkeys and caravans were known throughout Mesopotamia.



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## Quick History



The Assyrians did try to take over the south, but they were unsuccessful. They were much more successful conquering the tribes to the east and west.

The Assyrians were always at war with somebody. This was expensive, and taxes were terrible. However, the Assyrians expanded quickly and grew into an empire.

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## Warriors

Much of Assyrian daily life was spent in military camps preparing for war.

We know a great deal about daily life in the military camps because their artists painted scenes on ceramics and carved pictures on stone reliefs, pictures that reveal what life was like in the camps.



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## Military Camp Life

Archaeologists have found pieces of art that show the king in his royal chariot in the center of a military camp. You can see his face and the six wheels on the chariot.

Other drawings show:

- The camp bakery
- Soldiers at mealtime
- A servant holding a scoop from which a soldier is taking a drink
- Horses and grooms
- Men guarding the entrance to the camp, wearing sandals and carrying shields



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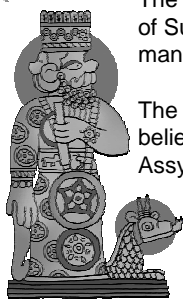
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## Religion/Afterlife



The Assyrian religion was similar to that of Sumer and Babylon. They worshipped many of the same gods.

The ancient Mesopotamians did not believe in a happy, busy afterlife. But the Assyrians did believe in an afterlife.

During a funeral ceremony, they would place the deceased's hand on a plate of food so that he or she would have something for the trip.

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## Burial Ceremonies

The Assyrians buried the dead with a few of their favorite possessions: weapons, favorite drinking cups, and other small personal items.

The poor might dig a hole somewhere in the house and bury their dead at home. The rich might build a room just for the burial. Some bodies were put to rest in cemeteries, in jars with tight lids. Others were buried in the desert.



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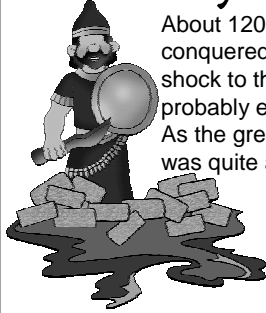
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## The Assyrians Sack Babylon!



About 1200 BCE, the Assyrians finally conquered Babylon. This was a total shock to the people of the time—probably even a shock to the Assyrians. As the greatest city of the age, Babylon was quite a prize.

The Assyrians hated the Babylonians. They leveled the city, turning it into rubble.

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## Relocation

As was their habit, they made all the people in Babylonia move to other parts of the Assyrian Empire.

That way, conquered people had to learn new ways in a new place and were much less likely to revolt.



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## Rising From the Rubble

After they destroyed Babylon, the Assyrians began to worry. They were afraid Marduk might punish them for destroying a city built in his honor.



The Assyrians decided to rebuild the city and return the statue of Marduk to his temple.

They rebuilt Babylon, but left it an empty city. They had no use for it. Eventually, people returned to the city, and Babylon rose again.

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## Library of Nineveh

Around 600 BCE, before the people of ancient Mesopotamia were conquered by the great Persian Empire, the last Assyrian king started a project.

He began collecting a library of clay tablets of all the literature of Sumer, Babylonia, and Assyria.



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## 30,000 Tablets

No one knows how many tablets he actually collected, but when discovered in modern times, over 30,000 tablets still remained in the great library in his capital city of Nineveh. These tablets are our most important source of knowledge about ancient Mesopotamia.



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## Assyrian Questions

1. How do we know so much about Babylon and Assyria?
2. Who was Marduk?



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## Conclusion

These early people were true pioneers.

- They settled down and farmed the land.
- They built cities.
- They wrote down laws.
- They created wonderful works of art.
- They invented many useful things, like the wheel, the sailboat, the first written language, and the first superhero, Gilgamesh.
- They built a library, and filled it with 30,000 tablets about life in ancient Mesopotamia.



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## Cradle of Civilization

Now that you know more about these clever, creative people, it is easy to understand why scholars have nicknamed Mesopotamia the **Cradle of Civilization**.



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