

WRITING AND CITY LIFE

CHAPTER-2

Meaning of Mesopotamia - The name Mesopotamia is derived from the Greek word mesos, meaning 'middle', and potamos meaning river.

Greek Mesopotamia → Middle Mesos + River → [Euphrates, Tigris] Potamos

* CITY LIFE BEGAN IN MESOPOTAMIA

Mesopotamia civilisation is known for its prosperity, city life, its voluminous and rich literature and its mathematics and astronomy.

Urbanised South → Sumer & Akkad.

After 2000 BCE → Babylon become an important city, the term Babylonia was used for the southern region.

About 1100 BCE - Assyrian Kingdom (North)

↓
Assyria

↓ Known language
Sumerian

Around 2400 BCE (Alexander's time) ↓ Replaced by
AKKadian

↓
Aramaic (similar to Hebrew)

Mesopotamia was important to Europeans



first part of Bible 'Old Testament



Book of Genesis



Shimare

Meaning Sumar, as a land of brick
built cities

Mesopotamia and its Geography.

- * Diverse environment - Iraq is a land of diverse environment. In the north-east lie - green, undulating plains, gradually rising to tree-covered mountain ranges.
- clear streams and wild flowers, with enough rainfall to grow crops.
- * Begin of Agriculture - Agriculture began here between 7000 and 6000 BCE.
- In the north, there is a stretch of upland called a steppe, where animal herding offers people a better livelihood than agriculture.
- Also winter rains, sheep and goats feed on the grasses and low shrubs that grow on steppe.

* Rivers - To the east, tributaries of the Tigris provide routes of communication into the mountains of Iran.

* Desert - The south is a desert - and this is where the first cities and writing emerged.

- This desert could support cities because the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, which rise in the northern mountains carry loads of silt (fine mud). When they flood, or when their water is let out on the field, fertile silt is deposited.

* Southern Mesopotamia - of all ancient systems, that of the Roman Empire included it, it was the agriculture of Southern Mesopotamia that was the most productive,

→ Euphrates → desert →
small
channel Irrigation
Canals (in past)

When necessary field of wheat, barley, peas or lentils let into these fields.

* Animal herding - Mesopotamian sheep and goats that grazed on the steppe, the north - eastern plains and the mountain slopes produced meat, milk & wool in abundance.

→ fish was available in rivers and date-palms gave fruit in summer.

The Significance of Urbanism

- food production
- Trade storage.
- Manufactures
- Services
- Division of labour.
- Organised Trade.

Movement of Goods into cities

1. few mineral resources - Most parts of the South lacked stones for tools, seals and jewels
4. The wood of the Iraqi date-palm and poplar was not good enough for carts, cart wheels or boats and there was no metal for tools, vessels or ornaments.
2. Import - export - We can surmise that the ancient Mesopotamians could have traded their abundant textiles and agriculture produce for wood, copper, tin, silver, gold, shell and various stones from Turkey and Iran, or across the Gulf.
3. Social organisation - Regular exchanges - possible only when there was a social organisation to equip foreign expeditions and direct the exchanges were initiated by the people of Southern Mesopotamia.
4. Transport - Efficient transport is also important for urban development.
4. If it takes too much time, or too much animal feed, to carry grain or charcoal into cities on pack animals or bullock carts, the city economy will not be viable.

4. Water Transport - The cheapest mode of transportation is, everywhere, over water. River boats or barges loaded with sacks of grain are propelled by the current of the river and/or wind.

But when animal transport goods, they need to be fed.

5. Ancient Mesopotamia - The canals and natural channels of ancient Mesopotamia were in fact routes of good transport between large and small settlements.

The Development of Writing :-

- Verbal Communication :- All societies have languages in which certain letters spoken sounds convey certain meanings.
- Script :- Writing or a script, means that spoken sounds are represented in visible signs.

Mesopotamian Tablets

↓
3200 BCE

↓
Picture (signs & numbers)

↓
5,000 lists (oxen, fish

∴ List of goods related

bread, loaves etc.

classmate

With week's temple.

PAGE

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beginning of writing

When Society needed to keep records of transactions - because in city life transactions occurred at different times, and involved many people and a variety of goods.

Clay Tablets

Mesopotamians wrote on tablets of clay. A scribe would wet clay and pat it into a size he could hold comfortably in one hand. He would carefully smoothen its surfaces. With the sharp end of a reed cut obliquely, he would press wedge-shaped (cuneiform) signs on to the smoothened surface while it was still moist. Once dried in sun, the clay would harden and tablets would be almost as indestructible as pottery.

Tablets of clay



Wet clay



Pat it, (hold comfortably)



Smoothen surface



Wedge-shaped (cuneiform)

When a written record of, say, the delivery of pieces of metal had ceased to be relevant, the tablet was thrown away.

* By 2600 BCE or so, the letters became cuneiform and the language was Sumerian

literacy

Very few Mesopotamians could read and write.

The Uses of Writing

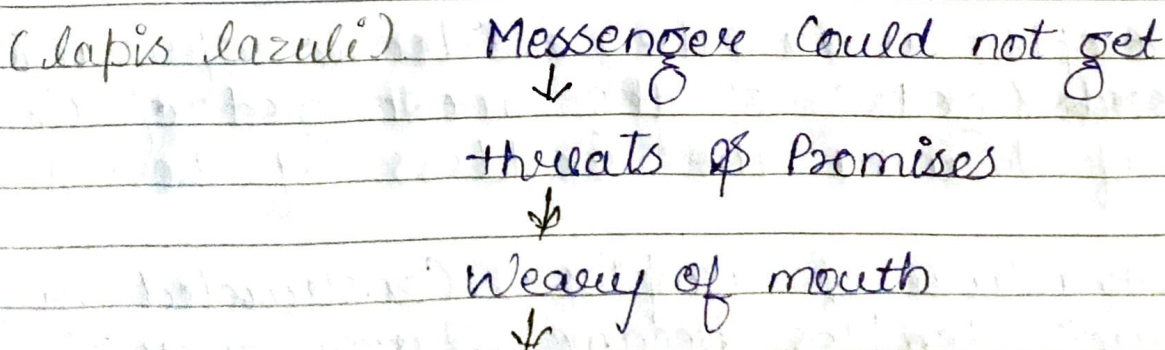
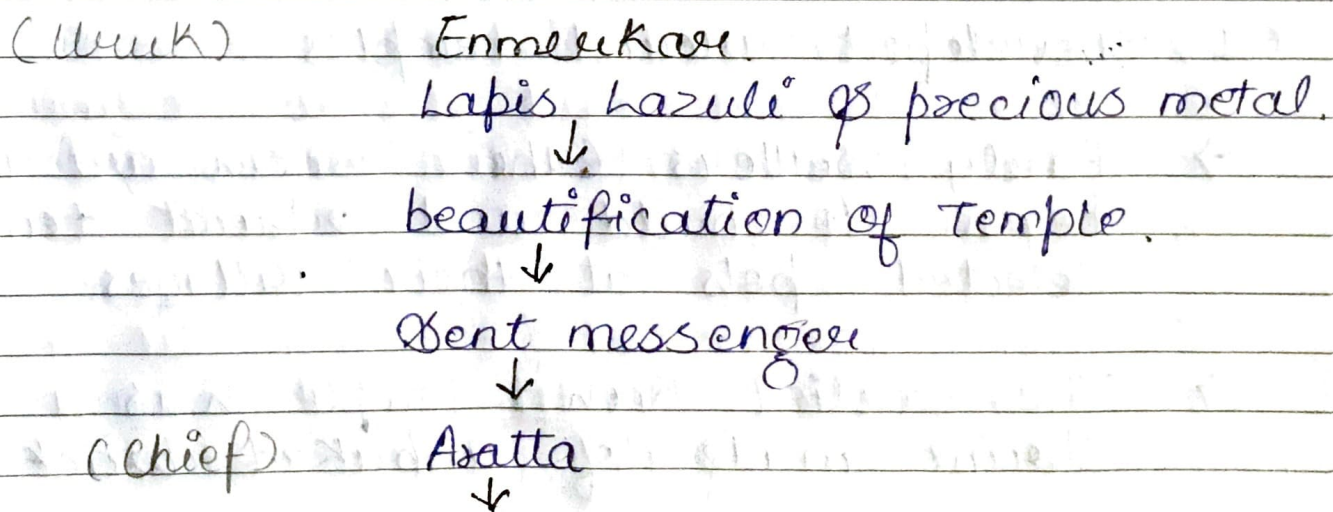
The connection between city life, trade & writing is brought out in a long Sumerian epic poem about Enmerkar, one of the earliest rulers of Uruk.

* Enmerkar is associated with the organisation of the first trade of Sumer: in the early days.

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↳ Enmerkar wanted lapis lazuli and precious metal for the beautification of a city temple and sent his messenger out to get them from the chief of a very distant land called Azatta.

- ↳ The messenger could not get the chief of Aratta to part with lapis lazuli or silver.
- ↳ He had to make the long journey back and forth, again and again, carrying threats and promises from the king of Uruk.
- ↳ Ultimately, the messenger "grew weary of mouth". He got all the messages mixed up.
- ↳ Then, Enmerkar found a clay tablet in his hand, and he wrote the word down. In those days, there had been no writing down of words on clay.



(Enmerkar) Wrote the word on clay tablet
 classmate Spoken words were nails

Urbanisation in Southern Mesopotamia: Temple and Kings

From 5000 BCE, settlements had begun to develop in Southern Mesopotamia.

The earliest cities emerged from some settlements



1. Those that gradually developed around temples:
2. Those that developed as centres of trade;
3. Imperial cities

* 1. Developed around temples

→ Early settlers (their origin are unknown) began to build and rebuild temples at selected spots at their villages.

→ The earliest known temple was a small shrine made of unbaked bricks.

→ Temples were the residences of various ~~beings~~ / gods: of the moon god of Ur, or of Inanna the Goddess of Love & War.

* Structure of Temples - Constructed in brick, temples became large over time with several rooms around open courtyard.

↳ Some of the early ones were possibly not unlike the ordinary house - for the temple was the house of god.

↳ But temples different from ordinary building / house - Temples always had their outer walls going in and out at regular intervals; which no ordinary building ever had.

* focus of worship - The god was the focus of worship to him or her people brought grain, cured & fish (the floor of some early temples had thick layers of fish bones).

↳ The god was also the theoretical owner of the agricultural fields, the fisheries, and the herds of the local community.

↳ In time, the processing of ~~to~~ produce (for example, oil pressing, grain grinding, spinning and the weaving of food clothes) was also done in the temple.

* Written records - Organiser of production at a level above the household, employer of merchants and keeper of written records of distributions and allotments of grain, plough animals, bread, beer, fish etc., the temple gradually developed its activities and became the

main urban institution

* Problems related with agriculture → In spite of natural fertility, agriculture was subject to hazards.

(Natural problems)

↳ The natural outlet channels of the Euphrates would have too much water one year and flood the crops, and sometimes they would change course altogether.

↑* As the archaeological record shows, villages were periodically relocated in Mesopotamian history.

(Man-made problems)

↳ Those who lived on the upstream stretches of a channel could divert so much water into their fields that villages downstream were left without water.

↳ They could neglect to clean out the silt from their stretch of the channel, blocking the flow of water further down.

* Mesopotamian countryside saw repeated conflict over land and water.

Welfare chief - When there was continuous warfare in a region, those chiefs who had been successful in war could oblige their followers by distributing the loot.

↳ Take prisoners from the defeated groups to employ as their guards or servants

↑ * So, they could increase their influence and clout.

* Stable leaders - War leaders, however, would be here today and gone tomorrow until a time came when such leadership came to increase the well-being of the community with the creation of new institutions or practices.

↳ temple wealth - In time, victorious chiefs began to offer precious booty to the gods and thus beautify the community's temples.

↳ They would send men out to fetch fine stones and metal for the benefit of the god and community, and organise the distribution of temple wealth in an efficient way by accounting for things that came in & went out.

Work for the temple :- War captives and local people were put to work for the temple, or directly for the ruler. This, rather than agricultural tax, was compulsory. Those who were put to work were paid rations.

Ration lists ↓

People's names ↓
Quantities of grain ←

+ Cloth

+ Oil.

Ruler's instructions - rulers commanding people to →

1. fetch stones or metal ores

2. Make bricks.

3. Lay the bricks for

a temple.

4. Go to a distant country to fetch suitable material.

Architectural improvement -

1. Architects learnt to construct brick columns, there being no suitable wood to bear the weight of the roof of large halls.

2. Bronze tools came into use for various crafts.

3. People were put to work at making and baking clay cones.
4. Clay cones could be pushed into temple walls painted in different colours, creating a colourful mosaic.
5. In sculpture, there were superb achievements, not in easily available clay but in imported stone.
6. A technological landmark that is appropriate to an urban economy: The potter's wheel. In the long run, the wheel enables a potter's workshop to 'mass produce' dozens of similar pots at a time.

Life in the city

Ruling elite had emerged :-

- ↳ A small section of society had a major share of the wealth
- ↳ Evidence - enormous riches (jewellery, gold vessels, wooden musical instruments inlaid with white shell and lapis lazuli ceremonial daggers of gold etc.) buried with some kings and queens at Ur.

↳ Lifestyle - (Nuclear family)

→ In Mesopotamian Society the nuclear family was the norm, although a married man and his family often resided with his parents.

→ father was the head of the family.

↳ Procedure of marriage -

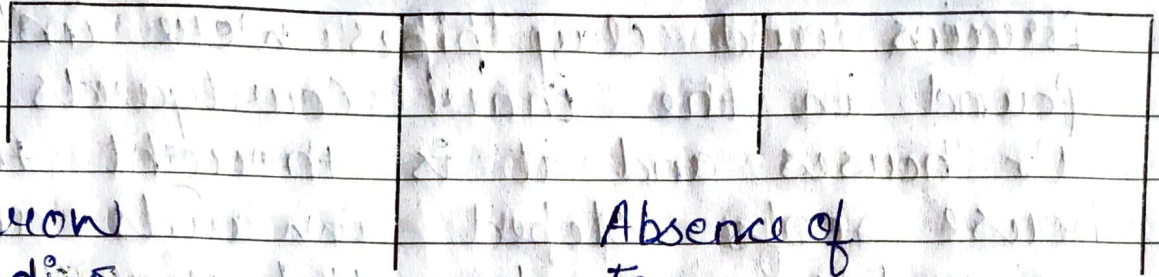
1. A declaration was made about the willingness to marry, the bride's parent giving their consent to the marriage.

2. Then a gift was given by the groom's people to the bride's people.

3. When the wedding took place, gifts were exchanged by both parties, who ate together and made offsprings in a temple.

4. When her mother-in-law came to fetch her, the bride was given her share of the inheritance by her father. The father's house, herds, fields etc., were inherited by the sons.

↳ Lack of Town planning - Ur. was a town whose ordinary houses were systematically excavated in 1930's (one of the earliest excavated city).



Narrow
Winding
Streets

Absence of
Town

Sack of
Grains &
firewood

Planning

Imper-
Court yard

1. Narrow Winding Streets

Narrow winding streets indicate that wheeled carts could not have reached many of the houses.

2. Sack of Grains & firewood.

Sack of Grains & firewood would have arrived on donkey-back. This shows that there was a city where planning of absence of town planning is occurred.

3. Absence of town planning

Narrow winding streets and the irregular shapes of house plots also indicate an absence of town planning. There were

no street drains of the kind we find in contemporary Mohenjo-daro.

4. Inner Courtyards

Drains and clay pipes were instead found in the inner courtyards of the Ur houses and it is thought that house roofs sloped inwards and rainwater was channelled via the drain-pipes into sumps in the inner courtyards.

↳ This would have been a way of preventing the unpaved streets from becoming excessively slushy after a downpour.

5. household trash

People seem to have swept all their household trash into the streets, to be trodden underfoot.

↳ Rise of street level.

household trash made street levels rise, and over time the thresholds of houses had also to be raised after the rains.

6. families's privacy

light came into the rooms not from windows but from doorways opening into the courtyards. ~~not from windows~~ this would also have given families their privacy.

* Superstitions about houses -

There were Superstitions about houses, recorded in Amen tablets at Uruk:

- - a raised threshold brought wealth,
- a front door that did not open towards another house was lucky,
- - If the main wooden door of a house opened towards (instead of inwards), the wife would be a torment to her husband!

* Town Cemetery - A town cemetery at Uruk in which the graves of royalty and commoners have been found, but a few individuals were found buried under the floors of ordinary houses.

A Trading town in a Pastoral zone.

After 2000 BCE the royal Capital of Mari flourished.

(Kingdom of Mari)

→ Mari stands on upstream on the Euphrates

↓
Agriculture & animal rearing were carried out close to each other.

↓
farmers and pastoralists

↓
Most of its territory was used for pasturing sheep & goats

↓

Herders

↓

Farmers

1. Herders need to exchange young animals, cheese, leather and meat in return for grain, metal tools, etc.

2. The manure of a penned flock is also of great use to a farmer.

* Reasons of Conflict between Herders & Farmers

1. A shepherd may take his flock to water across a sown field, to the ruin of the crop.

2. Herdsmen being mobile can raid agricultural villages and seize their stored goods.

3. Settled groups may deny pastoralists access to river and canal water along a certain set of paths.

* Nomadic communities of the western desert filtered into the prosperous agricultural heartland.

↳ Shepherds would bring their flocks into the sown area in the summer.

↳ Such groups would come in as herders,

harvest labourers or hired soldiers, occasionally become prosperous, and settle down.

↳ A few gained the power to establish their own rule →

Akkadians

Amorites

Assyrians

Accadians

↳ The kings of Mari were Amorites whose dress different from that of the original inhabitants.

↳ King of Mari respected not only the gods of Mesopotamia but also raised a temple at Mari for Dagan, god of the steppe.

Mesopotamian society and culture were thus open to different people and cultures, and the vitality of the civilisation was perhaps due to this intermixture.

↳ The kings of Mari, had to be vigilant.

↳ herders of various tribes were allowed to move in the kingdom, but they were watched.

(champs of herders)

letters between kings → officials

Seeing frequent fire signals at night - sent by one camp to another → he suspects that a raid or an attack is being planned.

Mari an Urban Centre prospering on Trade :-

→

in wood, copper, tin, oil, wine and various other goods that were carried in boats along the Euphrates - between the south and the mineral-rich upland of Turkey, Syria & Lebanon.

Trade



[wood copper tin
oil wine]

boats ↪ Euphrates

bnw South & mineral rich upland
Turkey, Syria & Lebanon.

* Mari is a good example of an Urban Centre prospering on Trade.

→ Boats carrying grinding stones, wood, wine, & oil jars ↓

would stop at Mari on their way to the Southern cities.

officers of this town would go aboard, inspect the cargo (a single river boat could hold 300 wine jars) a levy a charge of about one-tenth (1/10) the

Value of the goods before allowing the boat to continue downstream.

barley came in special grain boats.

Tablets refers to copper from 'Alashiya' the island of Cyprus, known for its copper, and tin was also an item of trade.

A bronze was the main industrial material for tools and weapons, this trade was of great importance.

* Although the Kingdom of Mari was not militarily strong, it was exceptionally prosperous.

Cities in Mesopotamian Culture.

* Gilgamesh a great hero.

Mesopotamians valued city life in which people of many communities and cultures lived side by side.

Gilgamesh epic → 12 tablets

The most poignant reminder to us of the pride Mesopotamians took in their cities comes at the end of the Gilgamesh Epic, written on Gilgamesh Epic.

- Ruler of Uruk city → Enmerkar → Gilgamesh
- Gilgamesh a great hero who subdued people far and wide, he got a shock when his heroic friend died.
- ↳ He then set out to find the secret of immortality, crossing the world that surround the world.
- ↳ After a heroic attempt; Gilgamesh failed and returned to Uruk.
- ↳ Consolated himself by walking along the city wall, back and forth.
- ↳ He admired the foundations made of fired bricks that he had put into place. It is on the city wall of Uruk that the long tale of heroism and endeavour fizzles out.
- He takes consolation in the city that his people had built.

Gilgamesh → heroic friend died

Gilgamesh failed → secret of immortality

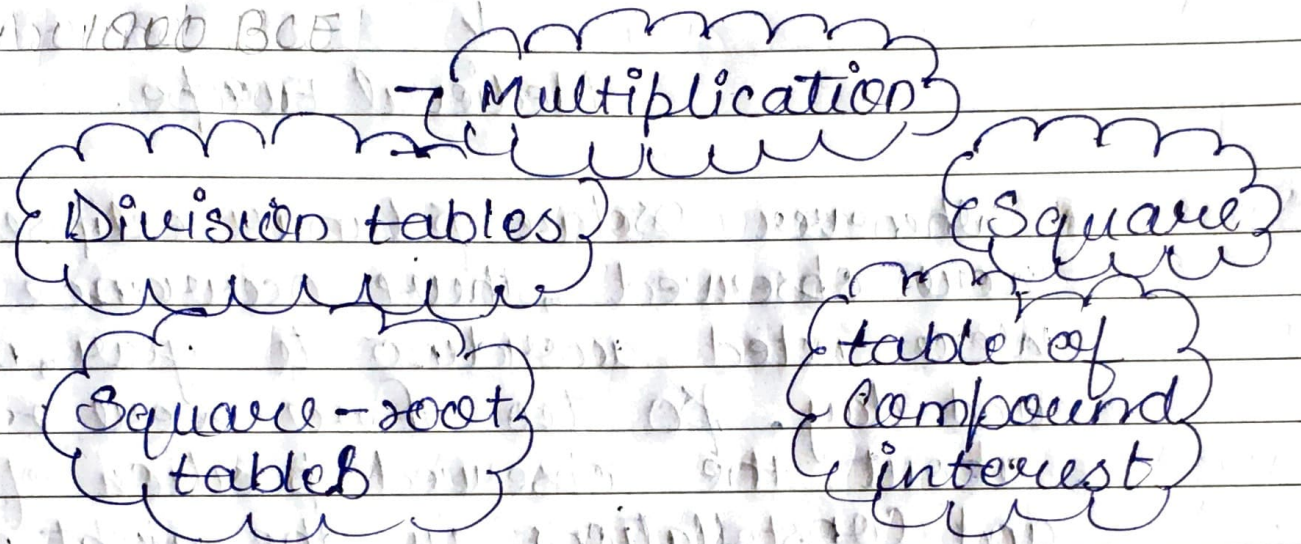
Returned Uruk → city walk for consolation

Sons will outlive him

The Legacy of Writing

The greatest legacy of Mesopotamia to the world is its scholarly tradition of time reckoning and mathematics.

Around 1800 BCE Tablets



Students had to solve problems such as the following:-

- A field of area such and such is covered one finger deep in water; find out the volume of water.

The division of the year into 12 months according to the revolution of the moon around the earth.

The division of the month into four weeks, the day into 24 hours, and the hour into 60 minutes.

* Comes from Mesopotamia.

Time divisions were adopted by the



Successors of Alexander



Roman world



Islam



Medieval Europe.

* Whenever solar & lunar eclipses were observed, their occurrence were noted according to year, month and day. So too there were records about the observed position of stars and constellations in the night sky.

* Conclusion →

All these momentous Mesopotamian achievements would have been possible with writing and urban institution of schools.

- Urban institution of schools where students read and copied earlier written tablets
- Some boys were trained to become intellectuals who could build on the work of their predecessors.