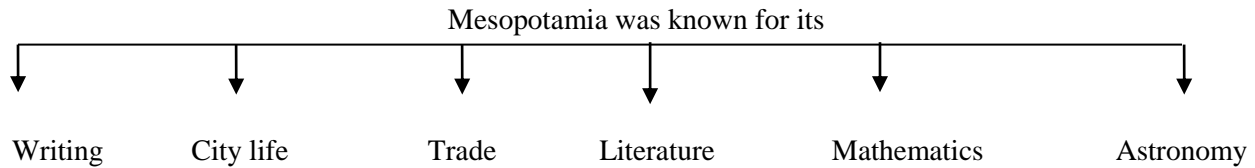
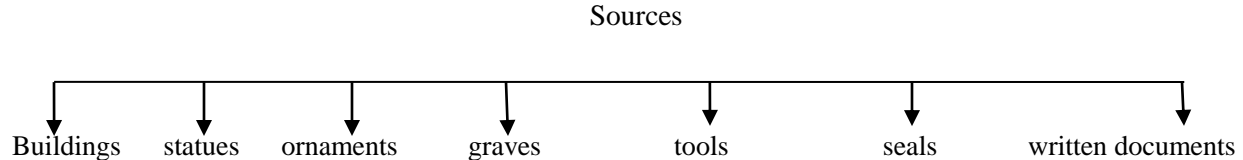
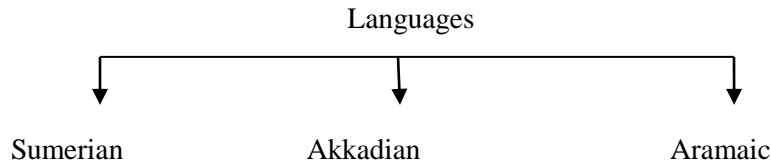


THEME 2.WRITING AND CITY LIFE (ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA)

Mesopotamia is derived from two Greek words *mesos* meaning middle and *Potamas* meaning river. Mesopotamia means land between two rivers-Euphrates and Tigris. Today it is part of Iraq.



- In the beginning the land was called Sumer and Akkad-language Sumerian
- Babylonia was the southern region and became important after 2000 BCE
- Assyria was the region where Assyrians established their kingdom in the north by about 1100 BCE



Mesopotamia and Its Geography

Iraq is a land of diverse environments

- North east lie green undulating plains, gradually rising to tree-covered mountain ranges with clean streams and wild flowers, with enough rainfall to grow crops. Here, Agriculture began between 7000 and 6000 BCE.
- In North-There is a stretch of upland called a steppe, where animals herding offers people a better livelihood than agriculture. Sheep and goats produced meat, milk and wool in abundance
- In the East-tributaries of the Tigris provide routes of communication in to mountains of Iran
- The South is a desert-the place with the first cities and writing emerged. Euphrates and Tigris carry loads of silt and deposited on the flood fields.
- The small channels of Euphrates and Tigris functioned as irrigation canals. Fish was available in rivers and date-palms gave fruit in summer.

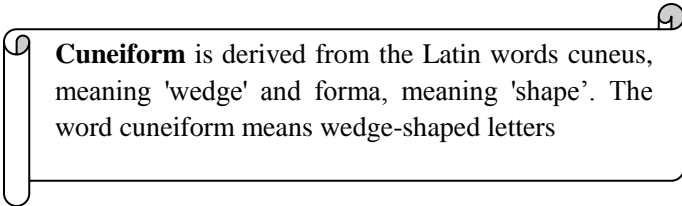
The Significance of Urbanisation

- Urban centres involve in various economic activities such as food production trade, manufactures and services.
- City people were not self sufficient. The carver of stone seal requires bronze tools, coloured stones.
- The bronze tool maker needs metals, charcoal. So they depend on the products or services of other people.
- The division of labour is a mark of urban life.
- There must be a social organisation in cities
- Fuel,metal,various stones, wood etc.,come from many places for city manufacturers
- There are deliveries of grain and other food items from the village to the city
- Thus organized trade and storage is needed.
- In such a system some people commands and those others obey.
- Urban economies often require the keeping of written records .

Movement of Goods into cities

- Food resources were abundant in Mesopotamia but lacked stones, wood, metal.
- So they imported wood, copper, tin, silver, gold, shell, stones from Turkey and Iran.
- They exported their textiles and food resources
- Transport is also important for urban development
- The canals and natural channels were routes for goods transport
- Euphrates became a world route

The Development of Writing



Cuneiform is derived from the Latin words *cuneus*, meaning 'wedge' and *forma*, meaning 'shape'. The word cuneiform means wedge-shaped letters

- The Mesopotamian tablets contained picture like signs and numbers.
- Writing began in Mesopotamia in 3200 BCE.
- Writing began when society needed to keep record of transactions.
- Mesopotamians wrote on tablets of clay.
- Scribe would impress wedge shaped signs on wet clay with the sharp end of a reed.
- Once written, tablets were dried hard in the sun and it would be almost indestructible.
- Once it dried, signs could not be pressed on to a tablet.
- So each transaction required a separate written tablet.
- This is why tablets occur by the hundreds at Mesopotamian sites.
- By 2600 BCE the letters became cuneiform and language was Sumerian.

Writing was used for,

- ✓ 1.keeping records
- ✓ 2.making dictionaries
- ✓ 3.giving legal validity to land transfers
- ✓ 4.narrating the deeds of kings
- ✓ 5.announcing the changes a king had made in the customary laws of the land
- ✓ 6. Storing information and of sending messages

The System of Writing

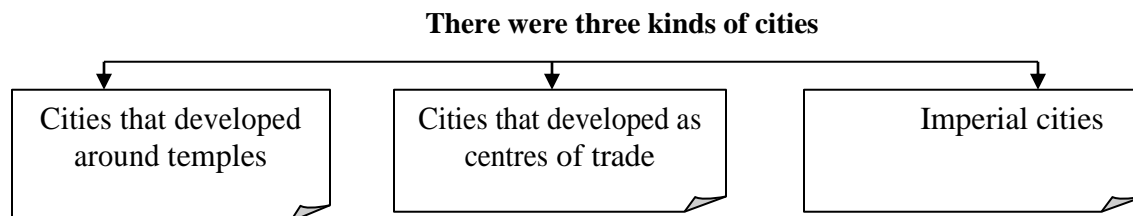
- The sound that a cuneiform sign represented was not a single consonant or vowel but syllables
- Thus the scribe had to learn hundreds of signs.
- He had to handle a wet tablet and get it written before it dried.
- So writing was a skilled craft
- It conveys visual form of system of sounds of a particular language.

Literacy

- King and Very few could read and write.
- There were hundreds of signs to learn and many of these were complex.
- If a king could read, that was recorded in his boastful inscriptions.
- Writing reflected the mode of speaking.
- It was kingship that organised trade and writing

Urbanisation in Southern Mesopotamia: Temples and Kings

By 5000 BCE, Settlements began in Mesopotamia. The earliest cities emerged from some of these settlements.



Construction and Maintenance of Temples in Mesopotamia

- The earliest known temple was a small shrine made of unbaked bricks.
- Temples were the residence of various gods: Moon God of Ur and for Inanna the Goddess of Love and War.
- Temples became larger over time with several rooms around open courtyards.

- Temples always had their outer walls going in and out at regular intervals.
- The god was the focus of worship.
- People brought grain, curd and fish to god
- The god was the theoretical owner of the agricultural fields, the fisheries, and the herds of the local community
- Production process such as oil pressing, grain grinding, spinning and weaving of woollen cloth done in the temple.
- Thus temple became the main urban institution by organizing production, employing merchants and keeping records of distribution and allotments of grain, plough animals, bread, beer, fish etc.

Role of Kings in Construction and Maintenance of Temples in Mesopotamia

- Archaeological records show that villages were periodically relocated in Mesopotamian history because of flood in the river and change in the course of the rivers.
- There were man made problems as well. Those who lived on the upstream stretches of a channel could divert so much water in to their fields that villages of downstream were left without water.
- There was continuous war fare in Mesopotamian villages for land and water.
- The victorious chiefs distributed the loot among their followers and took prisoners from the defeated groups
- They were employed as their guards or servants
- The chiefs also offer precious booty to the gods to beautify temples
- He organise the distribution of temple wealth by keeping records
- This gave the king high status and authority
- War captives and local people had to work for the temple, or for the ruler.
- Those who were put to work were paid rations
- Hundreds of people were put to work at making and baking of clay cones for temples

Life in the City of Ur.

- In Mesopotamian society the nuclear family system was the norm.
- The father was the head of the family

Marriage

- We know little about the **procedures of marriage**
 - A declaration was made about the willingness to marry by the bride's parents.
 - when the wedding took place gifts were exchanged by both parties who ate together and made offerings in a temple
 - The bride was given her share of inheritance by her father
 - The father's house, herds, fields etc. were inherited by the sons.
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- **Ur was a town and one of the earliest cities excavated in the 1930s**
 - Narrow winding streets indicate the wheeled carts could not have reached many of the houses.

- Sacks of grain and firewood would have reached on donkey back
- Town planning and street drains were absent at Ur.
- Instead of drains clay pipes were found in the inner courtyards of houses.
- House roofs sloped inwards and rainwater was channelled via the drain pipes in to sumps in the inner courtyards.
- People had swept their house hold refuse in to the streets. This made street level rise, and overtime the thresholds of houses had to be raised. So that no mud would flow inside after rains.
- Light came into the rooms not from windows but from doorways opening in to courtyards.
- **Superstitions about houses.** As recorded in omen tablets at Ur:
 - . A raised threshold brought wealth;
 - . A front door that did not open towards another house was lucky;
 - . If the main door of a house open outwards, the wife would be a torment to her husband

Town cemetery at Ur

- The graves of royalty and commoners have been found there. Very few individuals were found buried under the floors of ordinary houses.

A Trading Town in a Pastoral Zone (Life in the city of Mari)

After 2000 BCE the royal city of Mari flourished.

- Mari was located on the upstream of Euphrates.
- Agriculture and animal rearing were carried out in this region.
- Most of the region was used for pasturing sheep and goats.
- Herders exchanged animals, cheese, leather and meat in return for, metal tools etc. with the farmers.
- Nomadic groups of the western desert filtered into the prosperous agricultural land.
- Such groups would come as herders, harvest labourers or hired soldiers and settled down
- These included the Akkadians, Amorites, Assyrians and Armanians.
- The kings of Mari were Amorites and raised a temple at Mari for Dagan, god of steppe.
- Mesopotamian society and culture were open to different cultures
- Thus the vitality of the civilization was of course an inter mixture culture
- Mari is a good example of an urban centre prospering on trade.
- Wood, copper, wine, tin,oil,etc. were carried in boats along the Euphrates between the south and Turkey, Syria and Lebanon.
- Boats carrying grinding stones, wood, and wine and oil jars, would stop at Mari on their way to southern cities.
- Officers of this town would go abroad, inspect the cargo and levy a charge of about one-tenth the value of the goods.

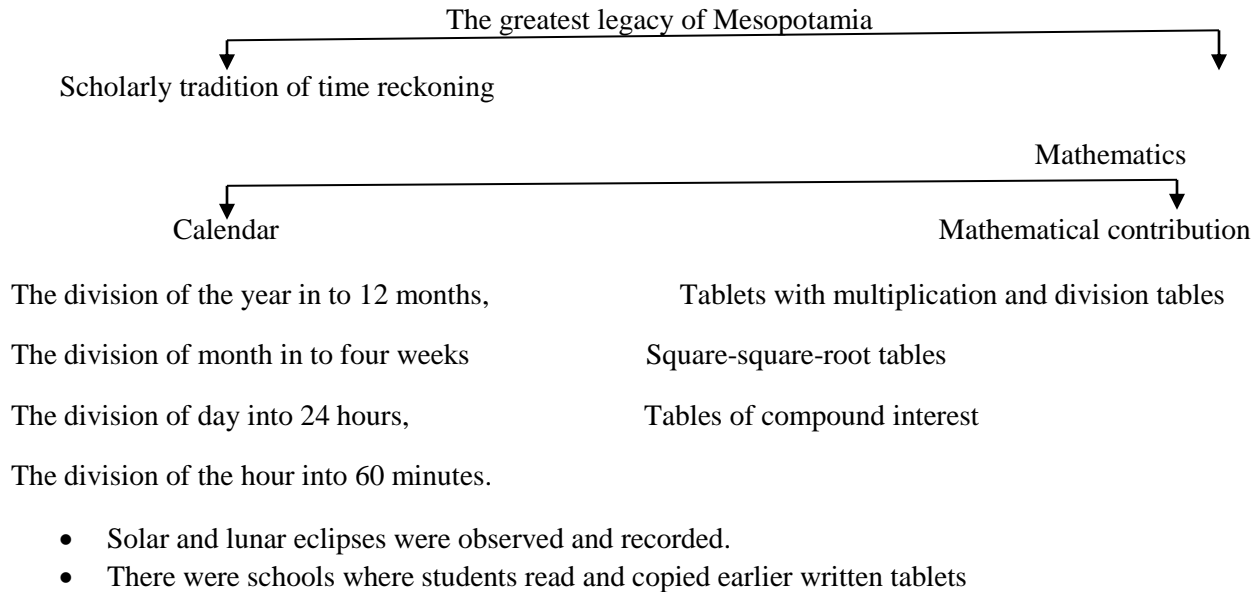
Thus, although the kingdom of Mari was not militarily strong but it was exceptionally prosperous.

Cities in Mesopotamian culture

Mesopotamians valued city life .Many communities and cultures lived side by side. After cities were destroyed in war, they recalled them in poetry.

- **The Epic of Gilgamesh** remind us the pride of the Mesopotamians who took in their cities
- Gilgamesh was the ruler of Uruk and 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.
- After a heroic attempt, Gilgamesh failed, and returned to Uruk. There he consoled himself walking along the city wall, back and forth.

The Legacy of Writing



Passage Based references

- The Book of Genesis of the Old Testament refers to '**Shimar**' as a land of brick built city was Sumer
- The Mesopotamian tablets refer to copper from '**Alashiya**', the island of Cyprus, as a major item of trade contributing to Mari's urban prosperity.
- **The warka Head** (Lady of Uruk) is a world famous piece of sculpture, made of white marble at Uruk before 3000BCE. It is the earliest representation of the woman's mouth, chin and cheeks.
- **The Palace at Mari of King Zimrilim** was the residence of the royal family, the hub of administration, and a place of production. The palace had only one entrance, open courtyards beautifully paved and 260 rooms.
- The great Assyrian king **Assurbanipal** collected a library at his capital **Nineveh**, possessing tablets on history, epics, omen literature, astrology, hymns and poems.
- **Nabonidus** was the last Babylonian king who was the world's first archaeologist.
- Connection between city life and trade and writing is brought out in a Sumerian epic poem about **Enmerkar**, the first king of Uruk.