

# The Mesopotamian Civilization

4

## Lesson Focus

- Origin
- Social life-family, community
- Town Planning
- Occupations
- Trade
- Art and Architecture
- Religious Beliefs
- Decline

Mesopotamia is a Greek name made of two words—*mesos* meaning ‘middle’ and *potamos* meaning ‘river’. Literally, it means the land between rivers. In ancient times, the name **Mesopotamia** was given to the region that was watered by the **Tigris** and **Euphrates** rivers. The Mesopotamian civilization flourished about 7000 years ago. Present-day Iraq and parts of Iran, Syria and Turkey constituted

ancient Mesopotamia. We can also say Mesopotamia was located in present-day West Asia.

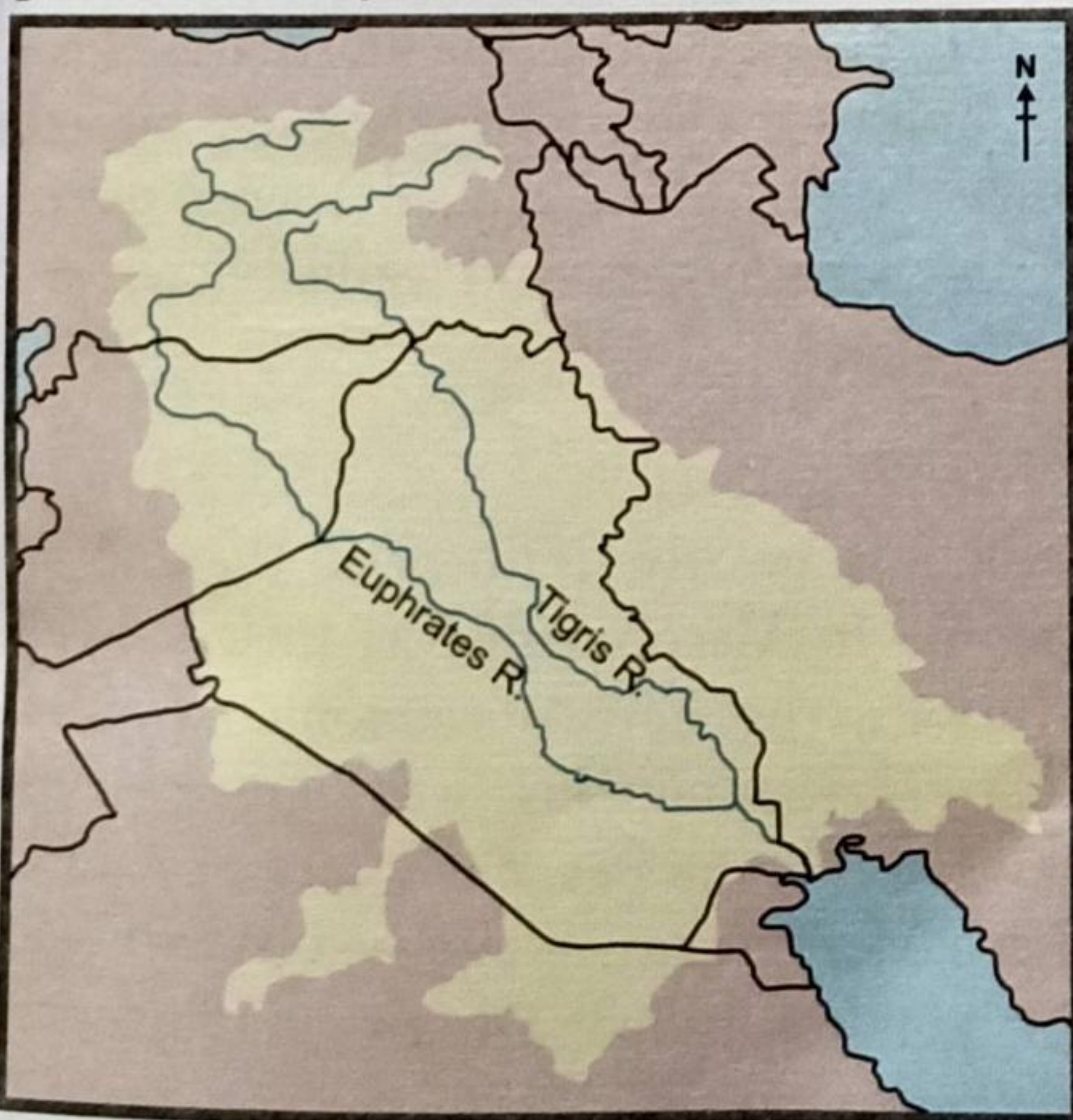
Mesopotamia is called the **cradle of civilizations** because it was here that the first cities of the world came up and writing was developed. The Mesopotamian people also did some path-breaking work in the fields of science, mathematics, law, etc.

## FOUR MAIN CULTURES

Mesopotamia consisted of four main regions—**Sumer**, **Akkad**, **Babylonia** and **Assyria**. The first civilization that flourished in Mesopotamia was the Sumerian culture. It dominated Mesopotamian law, religion, art, literature and science for nearly seven centuries. The Sumerian culture was followed by the Akkadian, Babylonian and Assyrian cultures. So, the Mesopotamian civilization represents four cultures that evolved between 4000 BCE and 600 BCE.

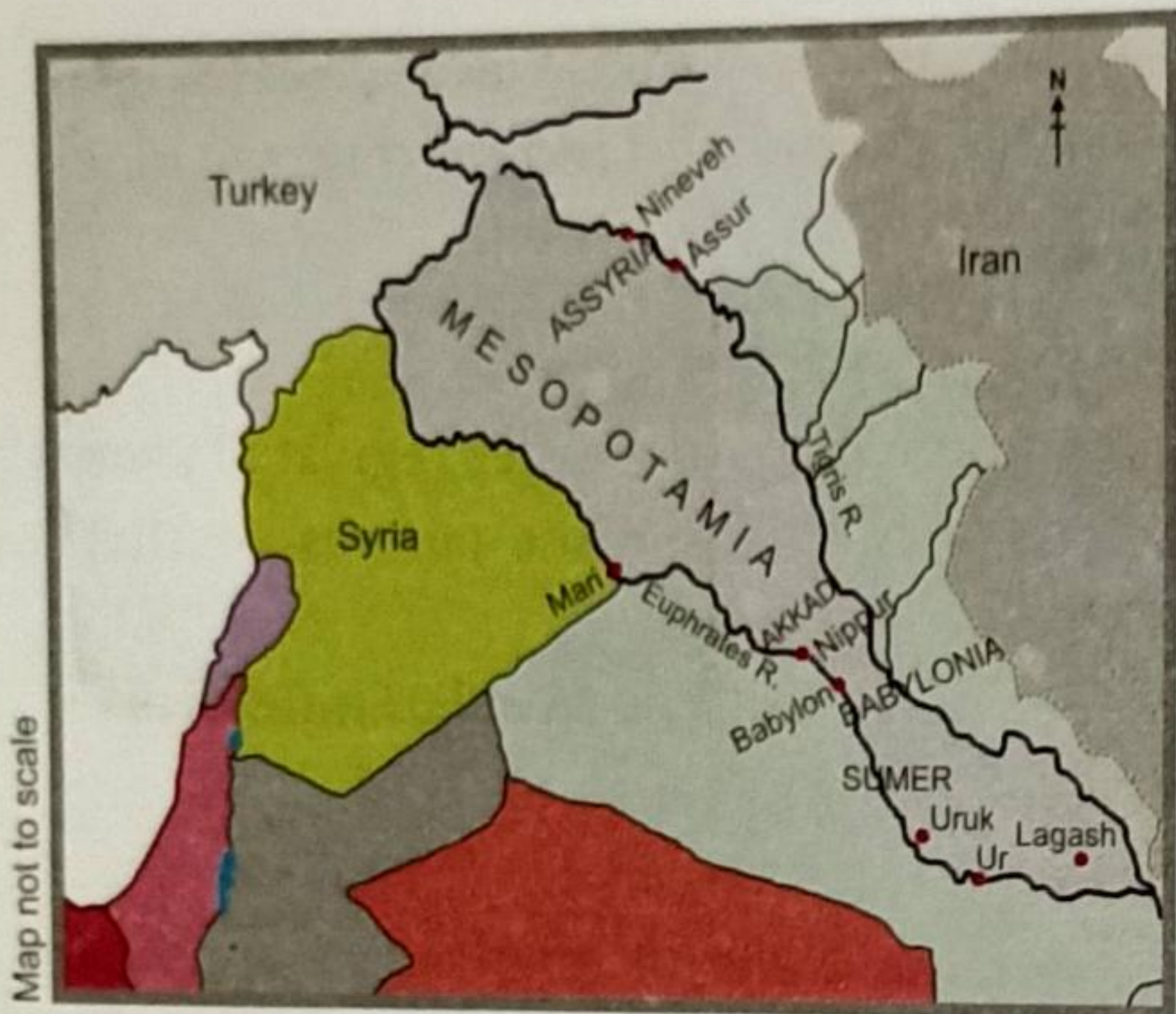
## Important City-States and Rulers

Around 3500 BCE, people started migrating from neighbouring regions to



The region of Mesopotamia watered by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers





The present-day countries covered by ancient Mesopotamia

villages in Mesopotamia. Gradually, small Mesopotamian villages grew into big cities. The people who settled in the Valley of Sumer were the earliest settlers of Mesopotamia. They are known as **Sumerians**.

Later, the early Mesopotamian cities became independent states. Each city-state consisted of an urban centre and its surrounding farmland. The city-states fought wars with each other. Many rulers also succeeded in building empires by conquering and uniting these city-states. So, in Mesopotamia, many empires rose and fell.

Some of the early Mesopotamian cities were Eridu, Uruk, Ur, Lagash, Kish, Nippur, Nineveh and Babylon. Important Mesopotamian rulers who built empires included Ur-Nammu (King of Ur), Sargon (who established the Akkadian Kingdom), Hammurabi (who established the Old Babylonian state) and Tiglath-Pileser I (who established the Assyrian Empire).

## SOCIAL LIFE

### Division of Society

The Mesopotamian society was a patriarchal society. Women had less rights and privileges than men. The society was divided into three main classes—upper class, middle class and lower class.

- The **upper class** consisted of the king, the royal family, priests and high officials. The people believed that the king had descended from the 'City of Gods'. Hence, the king held the highest position in the social hierarchy. He was also the head priest.
- The **middle class** comprised farmers, artisans and traders.
- The **lower class** consisted of slaves. There were two types of slaves—one, the prisoners of war, and the other, criminals who were forced to do slavery as punishment. Slaves kept house, managed large estates, tutored young children, tended houses, served as accountants and skilled jewellery makers.

### Religion

Religion greatly influenced the life of people in Mesopotamia as their temples were also the centre of economic activities. The Mesopotamians worshipped many gods and goddesses and forces of nature. Each Mesopotamian city had its own god or goddess called **Dingir** in Sumerian language.



KRISHNAGAR ACADEMY

CLASS - VI, SUBJECT - HISTORY

CHAPTER - 4. THE MESOPOTAMIAN

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CIVILIZATION.

TOPIC: Introduction, Four main cultures,  
Social Life, Division of Society.

### SHORT QUESTIONS.

1. Write the meaning of the word Mesopotamia.
2. In ancient times, the name Mesopotamia was given to the region that was watered by \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ rivers.
3. Name the places that constituted ancient Mesopotamia.
4. Why Mesopotamia is called the cradle of civilisations?
5. Name the four main regions that consisted Mesopotamia.
6. Write a note on Sumerian culture.
7. Name the early Mesopotamian cities.
8. Name any four important Mesopotamian rulers.
9. Write about the position of the king in the Mesopotamian society.
10. The Mesopotamian society was a \_\_\_\_\_.