



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.

- (a) 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.
- (b) The **middle class** comprised farmers, artisans and traders.
- (c) 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.

The four main deities of the Mesopotamian people were—**An**, the God of sky; **Enlil**, the God of air; **Enki**, the God of water; and **Ninhursaga**, the Mother Goddess of Earth. There were also lesser Gods like the Sun-God, **Utu** and the Moon-God, **Nanna**.



The Great Ziggurat of Ur

Know This

The ziggurat at Babylon was known as Etemenankia or 'House of the Platform between Heaven and Earth'. Ziggurat Etemenankia housed the temple of Marduk, the patron deity of the city of Babylon.

A massive temple complex was built at the centre of each Mesopotamian city. The temple complex included a **ziggurat**, a courtyard, storage rooms and living quarters for the priests. The ziggurat was a pyramid-shaped tower. It was considered a dwelling place for the gods. At the top of the ziggurat was a shrine or temple, dedicated to the god or goddess who owned the city. Only priests were permitted on the ziggurat or in the rooms at its base. A famous ziggurat is the Great ziggurat of Ur.

The Mesopotamians believed in life after death. They would bury articles of daily

use and eatables with the dead. Their belief was that the dead would need these things after rebirth.

Hammurabi's Code of Laws

In Mesopotamia, law codes regulated every aspect of life. The most famous of these codes is the **Code of Hammurabi**. This code was formulated by Hammurabi, the ruler of Babylonia, in c.1780 BCE. Starting as a ruler of the small city of Babylon, Hammurabi built the empire of Babylonia. Babylonia means 'the Gateway of the Gods'.

The Code of Hammurabi dealt with various facets of life, such as wages, interest rates, theft, marriage, divorce, adoption, and military duty. The Code contained 282 laws. The Code brought about a culture of strict justice in Mesopotamia. Severe penalties were awarded to criminals and negligent public officials. The penalties varied according to the social class of the



Top portion of the stele of Hammurabi's Code of Laws. Hammurabi is receiving the law code from the Sun God Shamash

convict. The stele, on which the Code of Hammurabi is written, is kept in the Louvre Museum in Paris.

Recap

1. Present-day Iraq and parts of Iran, Syria and Turkey constituted ancient Mesopotamia.
2. The Mesopotamian civilization represents four cultures—Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian and Assyrian.
3. Important Mesopotamian rulers included Ur-Nammu, Sargon and Hammurabi.
4. The Mesopotamian society was divided into three main classes—upper class, middle class and lower class.
5. Each Mesopotamian city had its own god or goddess. The temples were also the centres of economic activities. They had a pyramid-shaped tower called ziggurat.
6. The Code of Hammurabi enforced a culture of strict justice in Mesopotamia.

ECONOMIC LIFE

Agriculture

Agriculture was the prime occupation of the people of Mesopotamia. They built dams, canals and dykes to control the flooding by rivers and to irrigate crops. With the introduction of the plough, they simplified agriculture. They grew crops like wheat, barley, sesame, flax and various fruits and vegetables. People also raised livestock.

Trade

As stated earlier, temples were the centre of economic activities in Mesopotamia. Every economic activity including trade was controlled by temple priests. Farmers

also used to bring their produce to the temple.

Mesopotamia had extensive trade links with the rest of ancient Western Asia. Ur, a city-state in Sumer, was a major centre for commerce and trade. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers made it easy to transport goods by boats for trade. The invention of the wheel by the Sumerians also revolutionized transport over land. The Mesopotamians imported timber, stone, and metals. They exported food grains and cereals. The Mesopotamians used the barter system of trade.

ART AND CRAFT

Development of Writing

The Sumerians developed writing primarily for keeping the record of their trade. The excavated tablets of their writings have transactions of daily life like the count of cattle kept by herdsman, production figures, lists of taxes, accounts, contracts, etc.

In Mesopotamia, not everyone learned to read and write. Only boys chosen by the priests became scribes (professional writers). These boys began to study at the age of 8 and finished their study when they turned 20.

Initially, the Sumerian language was in the form of word-pictures that were drawn on wet clay tablets using a reed stylus. These tablets were then dried in the sun. Gradually, the word-picture symbols of the Sumerian language developed into wedge-shaped signs. This type of script was called

stele: an upright stone slab or pillar bearing an inscription

stylus: a pen-like instrument of metal, bone, etc. used by the Mesopotamians for writing

KRISHNAGAR ACADEMY.
CLASS - VI, SUBJECT - HISTORY
CHAPTER - 4. THE MESOPOTAMIAN
CIVILIZATION.

TOPIC - Religion, Hammurabi's
Code of Laws.

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS:

- Q1. Each Mesopotamian city had its own god or goddess called _____ in Sumerian language.
2. Name four main deities of the Mesopotamian people.
3. Write a short note on Ziggurat.
4. A famous Ziggurat is _____.
5. Who was Hammurabi?
6. What was the Code of Hammurabi?
7. The Stele on which the code of Hammurabi is written is kept in _____.

Now we shall follow the answers of the Questions published on 23.06.2020 (TUESDAY).

A1. Mesopotamia is a Greek name made of two words - mesos meaning 'middle' and potamos meaning 'river'. Literally it means the land between rivers.

2. Tigris and Euphrates.

3. present-day Iraq and parts of Iran, Syria and Turkey constituted ancient Mesopotamia.

4. 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.
5. Mesopotamia consisted of four main regions - Sumer, Akkad, Babylonia and Assyria.
6. The first civilization that flourished in Mesopotamia was the Sumerian culture. It dominated Mesopotamian law, religion, art, literature and science for nearly seven centuries.
7. Some of the early Mesopotamian cities were Eridu, Uruk, Ur, Lagash, Kish, Nippur, Nineveh and Babylon.
8. 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).
9. 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 highest priest.

10. patriarchal society.

Next class we shall continue with the same chapter following the Question Answers published today.