



# Y6 History – Ancient Sumer

## Overview

The Ancient Sumer civilization grew up around the Euphrates and Tigris rivers in Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq), because of its natural fertility. It is often called the 'cradle of civilization'. By 3000BCE the area was inhabited by 12 main city states, with most developing a monarchical system. The fertility of the soil in the area allowed the societies to devote their attention to other things, and so the Sumer is renowned for its innovation. The clock system we use today of 60-minute hours was devised by Ancient Sumerians, as was writing and the recording of a number system. The civilization began to decline after the invasion of the city states by Sargon I in around 2330BCE, bringing them into the Akkadian Empire.

## Key Individuals



Eannatum of Ur - one of the first individuals in the world to create an empire



Gilgamesh - King of Uruk, featured in an epic tale often considered to be the oldest written story.



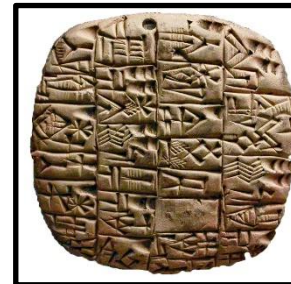
Ur-Nammu - leader of the last great Sumerian renaissance before the empire was overtaken.



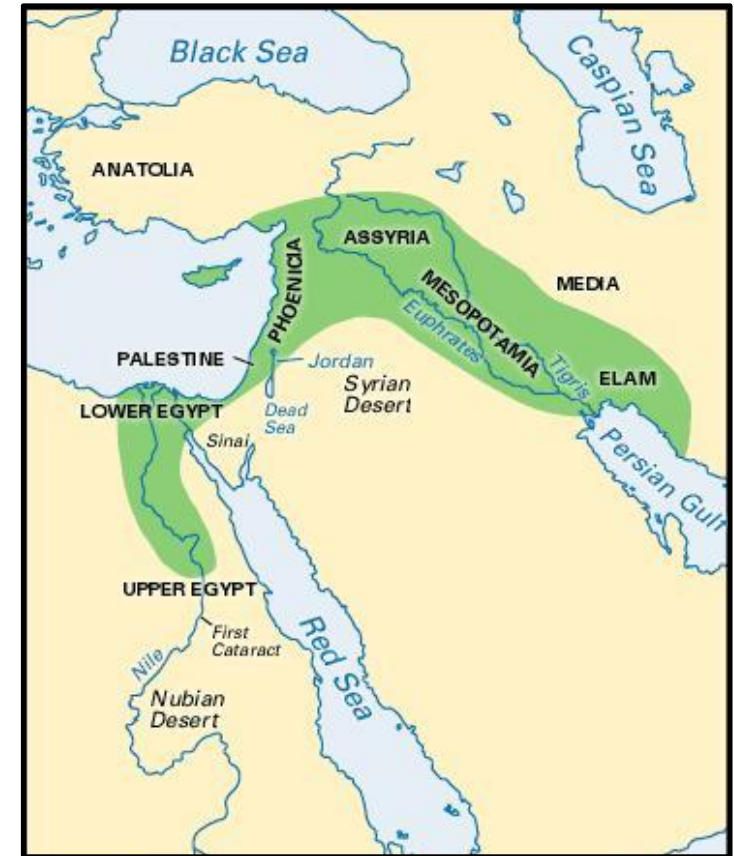
Sargon the Great - first king to unite all of the Mesopotamian cities into a single empire.



Ziggurat



Cuneiform Writing



## Power and Privilege



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## Changing Times

- During the 5th Millennium BC, Sumerians began to develop large towns which became city-states.
- This was made possible by their systems of cultivation of crops, including some of the world's earliest irrigation systems.
- These developing communities then were able to devote time to pursuits other than gathering food. This freedom may explain why the area was home to the first known form of writing.
- During the late 4th Millennium, inventions were created which seem second-nature to use today, including the use of the wheel, writing and even a base-60 number system (like we still use for time).
- During this period, Uruk in Sumer became the busiest city in the world, with something around 50,000 residents. Later, increased violent clashes between the groups led to the development of walled cities.
- During the late 3rd Millennium, the Akkadian empire of northern Mesopotamia began to attack Sumerian city states, led by the king of the empire Sargon. His dynasty later came to control much of the area for 150 years.
- During this period the population rapidly declined & the area was invaded by the Elamites.

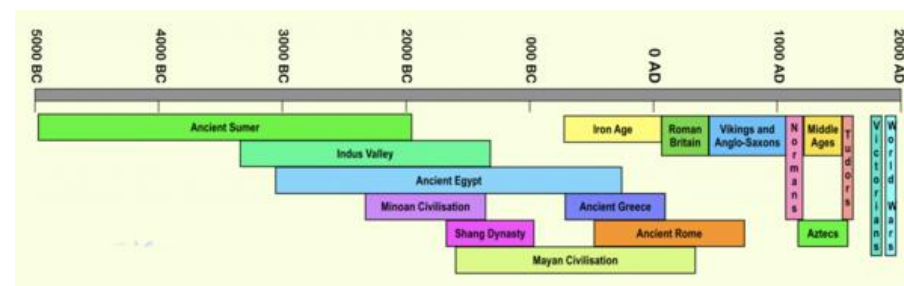
## Life in Ancient Sumer

Although starting out as small villages and groups of hunter-gatherers, Sumer is notable because of its development into a chain of cities. Within the cities the advantages of communal living soon allowed individuals to take on other roles than farming, and a society of classes developed. At the top of the class system were the king and his family, and the priests. Administrators, scribes, craftsmen and traders made up an upper class strand, with labourers and farmers of the lower classes earning a lesser wage. Slaves were also common, particularly after conquests of neighbouring areas. Families lived in houses, quite possibly built from the earliest design of bricks, in communities which often centred around the temple or Ziggurat. These places of worship were busy places, and were used for worshipping a number of gods who were thought to live in the sky. Offerings of food and drink would be left at the top of the buildings for the gods. Education was important to Sumerians, with writing becoming widely used. Only boys could attend schools, although many women learned to read and write

## Vocabulary

<b>Empire</b>	A group of countries or states ruled over by a single leader.
<b>Fertile</b>	Land capable of producing lots of vegetation or crops.
<b>Mesopotamia</b>	Ancient region of south-western Asia in present day Iraq.
<b>Cuneiform</b>	Wedge-shaped symbols used in the ancient writing systems of Mesopotamia.
<b>Unification</b>	The process of being made into a whole.
<b>Millennium</b>	A period of a thousand years.
<b>Dynasty</b>	A line of hereditary rulers of a country or empire.

## Ancient Sumer in context of History



# Power and Privilege