

The Mesopotamian World

How to make a city – with laws, wheels and swanky gardens

If you want to set up a city, it's a good idea to find a river – or two rivers, in this case: the mighty Tigris and Euphrates. (Mesopotamia means 'land between the rivers' in Greek.) Rivers provide water for drinking and for watering crops, so it's no surprise that some of the world's very first cities were built here.

Over some three thousand years, humans in Mesopotamia gradually worked out how to live in really big groups. It wasn't easy. When lots of people live together there are bound to be arguments, and that meant inventing laws. They also needed to keep count of all the things they farmed, made and traded, so they

came up with the world's first system of writing. That's right, writing was invented by accountants.

Some of the earliest people in Mesopotamia were the Sumerians. They were an inventive lot, who worked out how to make sailing boats, wheels, and maps. They were also seriously good at maths and astronomy.

They soon had competition, though, as the Akkadians, Assyrians and Babylonians set up rival city states. The Babylonians were particularly fearsome fighters. Surprisingly, they were also amazing gardeners, and their capital city, Babylon, was renowned for its beautiful gardens.

From around 3500 to 600 BC

THE MAP OF THE MESOPOTAMIAN WORLD

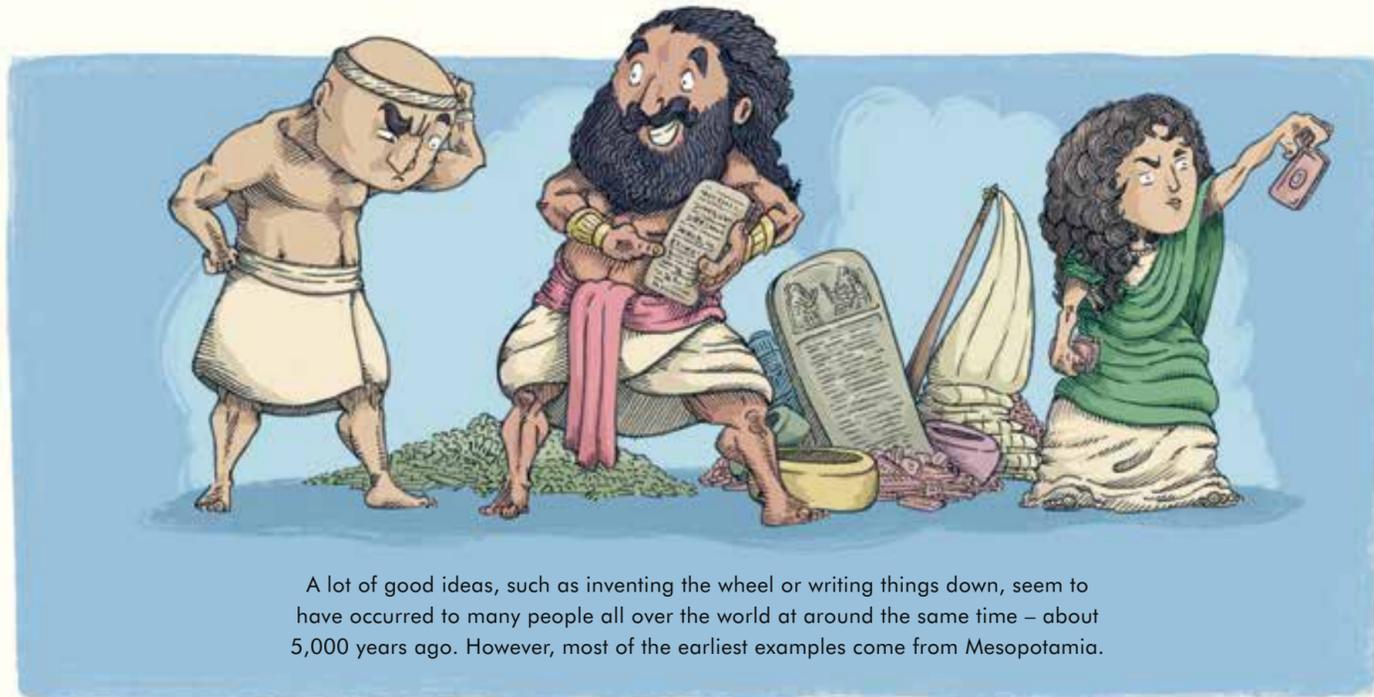
Several magnificent city states grew up in this area (now home to parts of many countries including Iraq, Syria and Turkey.) The Sumerians started it, creating towns like Ur and Eridu. The others copied them – then spent most of their time fighting and trying to outdo each other.



LANGUAGE
Sumerian, Akkadian
(and many others)



Mesopotamian Life



A lot of good ideas, such as inventing the wheel or writing things down, seem to have occurred to many people all over the world at around the same time – about 5,000 years ago. However, most of the earliest examples come from Mesopotamia.



LAYING DOWN THE LAW

One of the world's oldest sets of laws, the Code of Hammurabi, comes from Mesopotamia. It contains a lot of stuff about cutting people's fingers off, or even executing them for breaking the law, but it also introduced some really sound ideas, like a minimum wage for workers.



MUDDY THINKING

The Sumerians came up with one of the earliest forms of writing, called cuneiform. It involved scratching marks on clay tablets, and was used for over 3,000 years. Writing meant people could keep records and send each other letters (which they put in mud envelopes – postmen must have been seriously strong in those days.) The Sumerians were also the first people to write down a story: *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, about the many adventures of super-strong King Gilgamesh of Uruk.



ROUND THINGS WITH A HOLE

Mesopotamians developed two handy round things with a hole in the middle: the wheel, and the number 0. The first wheels were actually potters' wheels. It was ages before people thought, 'Hey, we could roll that wheel over the ground and use it to carry stuff!'

The Babylonians, meanwhile, were incredibly whizzy at maths. Their best invention was the number 0. That might seem like nothing, but try doing sums without it. Not easy.



The Egyptian World

Bossy kings, bolshy peasants and crazy tombs

Ancient Egyptian society was built on very strict rules, and everyone was expected to know their place. At the top of the tree were Egypt's kings, called pharaohs. They represented the power of the gods on earth and were incredibly bossy.

Most people, of course, were peasants, and they had pretty horrible lives. But ancient Egypt is full of surprises. For instance, when the pharaoh didn't pay his peasants' wages, they went on the world's first-ever strike – and won. Egypt's women also had almost equal rights with men, which shocked the ancient Greeks when they invaded.

The Egyptians had many skills, from writing and glass-making to boat-building and some quite effective medicine. They were even the first to bake bread. Their love of order also meant they were great at constructing enormous, complicated buildings, like the extraordinary pyramids which they built as tombs for their pharaohs. To this day we're not quite sure how they managed it.

Ancient Egyptian society remained surprisingly unchanged for all of its 3,000 years – until they were conquered not once, but three times. First came the Persians; then Alexander the Great, and finally the Romans. With the death of Cleopatra (who you'll find in the Roman World), the reign of the pharaohs finally came to an end.

From 3000 to 30 BC

THE MAP OF THE EGYPTIAN WORLD

Ancient Egypt was in northeast Africa, where modern-day Egypt (and a bit of Sudan) still stands. As in Mesopotamia, life revolved around a great river: the Nile. Its annual flooding made the land incredibly fertile, and Egypt's main towns were dotted along its banks.

LANGUAGE
Egyptian

1 KHUFU

A pharaoh who wanted to make really, really sure people would remember him after he died. He had the Great Pyramid at Giza built to use as his tomb.

2 HEMIUNU

The architect who designed Khufu's Great Pyramid. He did a great job on the outside. The inside's a bit boring, though – just some small, plain burial chambers and a few corridors.

3 PYRAMIDS

When pharaohs died, their bodies were turned into mummies and placed in these huge tombs, together with all they needed for the afterlife: treasure, ships, and even pets and servants. Over a hundred still stand in Egypt today.

4 MEMPHIS

Egypt's capital for many years. Thousands of workers were kept busy here, building temples and tombs for the pharaohs. It's said the city's white-painted walls gleamed in the sun.

5 PRIESTS

As well as looking after their gods in temples, Egyptian priests were thought to have magical powers – looking into the future, healing people, and sometimes cursing them, too.

6 SOBKNEFERU

Most rulers in ancient times were men. Egypt was unusual in having a few female pharaohs, and Sobekneferu is the first one we know of.

7 RAMSES THE GREAT

Ramses ordered many of Egypt's greatest tombs and temples to be built. He also lived to be over 90 years old. In an era when most people died at 30, that feels like a bigger achievement.

8 DOCTORS

As well as using magic to try and cure people, Egyptians also had pretty good doctors (by the standards of the time). They developed medicines, set bones and even performed surgery (but without anaesthetic – ouch!)

9 VALLEY OF THE KINGS

Some of Egypt's best-known rulers were buried here, including Ramses the Great and Tutankhamun. Their tombs were cut directly into the rock in an attempt to foil grave-robbers.

10 AHMES

A scribe who wrote a papyrus full of very clever mathematical puzzles. It was written in 1550 BC. See if you can work out how long ago that was.

11 AKHENATEN

A revolutionary pharaoh who forced Egyptians to worship his brand-new sun-god, Aten, instead of the 1,000 or so fun gods they had before. Most Egyptians thought he was mad, and changed everything back after he died.

14 SCRIBES

Scrives were the only non-noble people who knew how to write. It took years to train, and they were highly valued. Scrives recorded everything, from laws and medical procedures to food stocks and magic spells.

15 THEBES

Another capital, and a very important centre of Egyptian religion. Thebes was had to put up with having statues made of her wearing a little fake beard (something all pharaoh statues had to have).

16 HATSHEPSUT

The longest-ruling woman in Egyptian history. She was an excellent pharaoh but had to put up with having statues made of her wearing a little fake beard (something all pharaoh statues had to have).

17 FARMERS

Most Egyptians worked as farmers, but only for two-thirds of the year. When the Nile flooded, they had a good rest. Just joking; that's when they were forced to build stuff for the pharaohs.

18 AMENHOTEP

An architect who designed and built a number of great temples. The pharaoh was so impressed, he proclaimed the architect a god, and gave him his own temple (which Amenhotep probably had to build himself).

19 MENES

Egypt used to be two countries. Lower Egypt's king wore a flat, red crown; Upper Egypt's wore a white, conical one. Menes unified the two Egypt's – which meant he could wear a groovy new united red-and-white crown.

20 HELIOPOLIS

Egyptians believed this city was built on the site where the world was created by the god Atum. Heliopolis means 'city of the sun' in Greek, and one of Egypt's most popular gods, the sun-god Ra, was worshipped here.

21 ARMIES

The Egyptian army started out as a temporary force of untrained farmers and peasants. The pharaohs eventually created an army of professional soldiers – probably much to the relief of the farmers and peasants.

22 THUTMOSE III

One of Egypt's greatest pharaohs. Thutmose was a just ruler and a brilliant warrior. He conquered many other lands and was much loved by the Egyptians (but not so much by their neighbours).

23 REKHMIRE

Vizier to Thutmose III. Viziers were powerful, as they pretty much ran the country for the pharaoh. Luckily, an inscription on Rekhmire's tomb says he prided himself on being merciful to the poor.



12 TUTANKHAMUN

Akhenaten's son. He became pharaoh as a child and died at 19. He still found time to undo a lot of his dad's revolutionary changes, and bring back all the old gods that Egyptians liked.

13 NEFERTITI

Akhenaten's favourite wife. She ruled the country with him and was famous for her looks – her name means 'the beautiful one has come'.

