

Sumer

First Early Civilization





Mesopotamia is a vast landscape including the two most important streams Euphrates and Tigris. It is divided into Lower Mesopotamia in the south and Upper Mesopotamia in the north. Six major empires evolved in this historically prominent region. Sumer is the first important culture evolving in the south. Upper Mesopotamia became independent from the south to form the Akkad Kingdom. Assyria in turn quickly developed in the north to a powerful empire to take over the dominant position and replaced Akkad. Hurritic immigrants from the east settled between the south and north and created later the Mitanni Empire. Another force was Elam in Parthia, which controlled the east. Later the Hittite in Anatolia invented iron and controlled the west. The Levant area on the Mediterranean coast consisted of a string of trading focused port cities and was in competition with the Egyptian Pharaohs.

Cradle of Civilization

Mesopotamia was the cradle of civilizations. It started with the Neolithic Revolution bringing about the domestication of animals and grains around 20,000 years ago. This led to nomadic hunter and gatherer clans becoming over time sedentary as farmers and breeders. An overproduction of foodstuffs allowed the growing

urban population to focus on different topics of interest such as astronomy, herbs and healing, introducing writing, mathematics including arithmetics, algebra and geometry, developing new techniques for building first mega structures, drafting the first complex legal code and finally introducing a fully organized social and state structure.

Sumer Culture

Sumer was the first highly advanced civilization in history. The Sumer Empire lasted for over 2,500 years from 4500 to 1900 BC. Just imagine, that this is longer than from Christ birth to now. The Sumer called themselves kengir, which means land of noble lords. But they also described themselves as black headed. We hope modern DNA sequencing one day will solve this puzzle and their still unknown origin. Experts still discuss two possible immigration theories. They either moved into Mesopotamia from the Persian highlands and Caucasus area, or they came by sea from the Indus Valley via Dilmun modern day Bahrain. The latter could be supported by the Sumer creation myth and some sources identify Dilmun as being the biblical paradise. So far we still follow the theory, that the Sumer developed out of the local Ubaid Culture. But Ubaid



might as well be an immigrant. The name Sumer originates from Akkad records calling their language sumeru.

Sumer Details & Insight

Its history starts 6,500 years ago as documented by the hundreds of thousands discovered cuneiform writing tablets. This is a unique treasure of information for archeologists. The empire established itself in the southern low lands from Baghdad to the Gulf along the Euphrates and Tigris including the city of Kish as the most northern. Uruk and later Ur developed as first true urban civilizations. The Sumerian trade colonies were vital catalysts to establish long distance trade and transform regional trade economies and city states. Ebla and Mari were well connected with Sumer, but did not adopt their temple regulated economic system.

Sumer City States

It started with a theocratic priest-king ruler called ensi, who was supported by a group of Elders consisting of both men and women. The first five Sumer cities included Eridu or Tell Abu Shahrain, Bad-tibira or Tellal Madain, Larak a site not yet identified, Sippar or Tell Abu Habbab and Shuruppak or Tell Fara. Further key city states were Uruk or Warka, Ur or Tell al-Muqayyar, Eshnunna or Tell Asmar, Kish or Tell Uheimir and Ingharra, Lagash or Tell al-Hiba, Umma or Tell Jokha, Larsa or Tell es-Senkereh, Isin or Ishan al-Bahriyat, Shaduppum or Tell Harmal, Nippur or Afak, Girsu or Telloh, Isin, Larsa, Adab or Tell Bismaya, Mari or Tell Hariri, and Hammazi, Akshak, Akkad. The latter three sites are not yet geographically identified and might lie unknown under modern settlements. And there was about another dozen lesser important cities belonging to the Sumer Culture. The most important city states we will describe in more detail below. Please also refer to the Excel spreadsheet on this website. It puts all kingdoms and empires plus their rulers into perfective on a timeline including a synopsis of their reign with gaining control over various city states and being defeated again and becoming vassals of other powers.

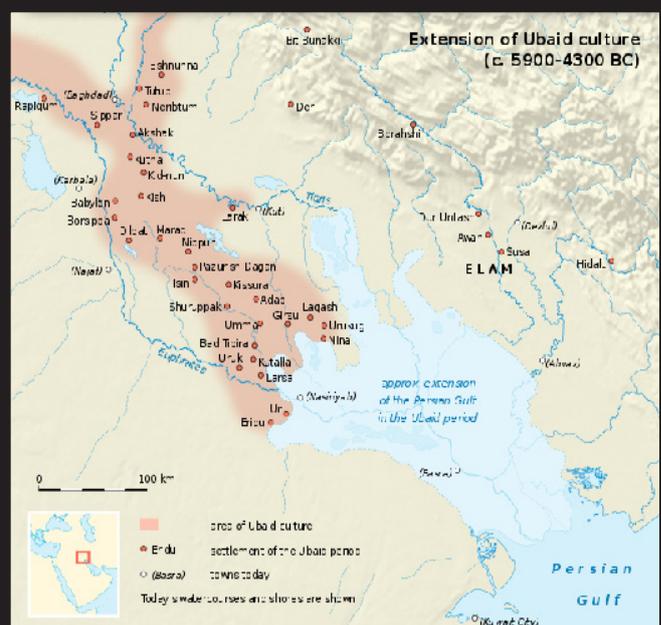
City State System

Sumer city states were famous for their temple architecture, refined art, first cuneiform script, interesting poetry and prose. They be-

lieved that God was giving the ruling power to a city and not to a person such as a king. So, each city had a specific city god called lu-gal and meaning big man. This was the basis for the early concept of city states. Sumer at first were not empire builders. Nevertheless, later kings established themselves as rulers. Kish was regarded as Sumer mother city, which each local ruler wanted to be accepted by or even to control it. Therefore, Sumer city states shared the same culture, but each city and ruler did not see themselves as unified Sumer Empire. Consequently, the city state system was prone to rivalries about resources and agricultural land, as most cities lay too close to each other. This also led to competition in building grandness of temples, palaces and art works. From 2500 BC a constant war fare led to the demise of Sumer city states.

Five Periods

Archeologists have divided the Sumer Empire into five major periods based on the controlling powers. After the neolithic Ubaid Culture in the





same area experts named the first Sumer Period the Uruk Period lasting for 1,200 years from 4100 to 2900 BC. It was falling into the Chalcolithic Age or the holocene climatic optimum. It was followed by the Early Dynastic Period from 2900 to 2334 BC, which falls into the Bronze Age. During this period the rule changed to a solidary ruler and was the time of territorial expansion with wars and erecting protective city walls. It was also the time of King Gilgamesh, who became famous through having written the unique Gilgamesh Epic. The third period was short from 2334 to 2218 BC when Akkad controlled Sumer with famous King Sargon. Thereafter followed the Gutian rule with King Gutea from 2218 to 2047 BC, when he moved the capital to Adab. The last period was named Ur III or the Neo Sumer Period lasting from 2047 to 1940 BC.

Ancient Dating Chronology

As we talk about a lot of dates it is important to understand the difference between the various quotes. Archeologists base their timeline on a frame work of dates for various events and recorded names of rulers. As events sun eclipses were taken. Another key dating source is the so-called venus tablet of Babylonian King Amisaduqa. It fixed three points for the rise of venus with the new moon in 1848 BC, 1792 BC and 1736 BC. These dates are the base for the so-called high, middle or low chronology often mentioned in literature. Ancient inscriptions typically mention year xxxx of king Y indicating for example the fourth year of his rule and with a new king it started from zero again. For the first millennium events can be tied to actual calendar years. For the second and third mil-

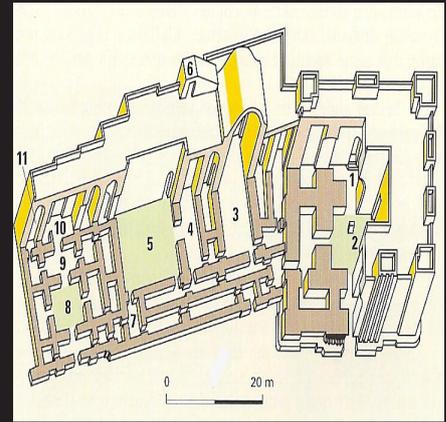
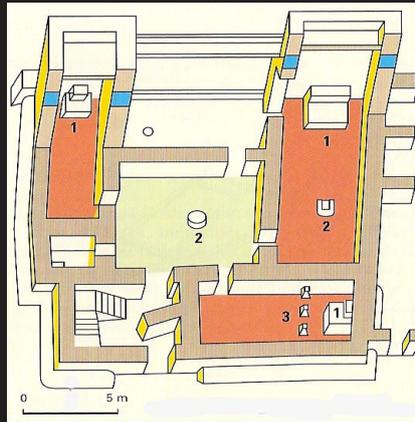
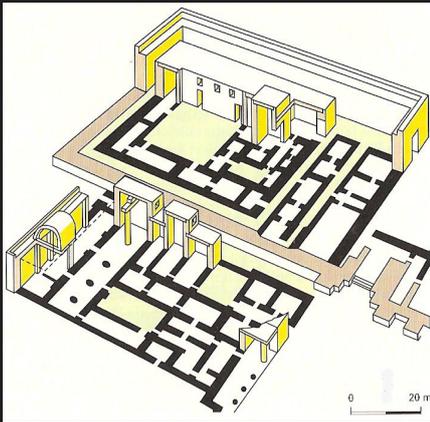
lennia they can not be fixed with certainty. So, the Sumer king list has no absolute dates and shows a variance of up to 100 years. It starts from the time before the flood to the fall of city state Isin, but omits Lagash kings. A Lagash chronicle with ruler names has been found. Why it was omitted is not known.

Forming Uruk Period

It started with a theocratic ensi system supported by a council of Elders. At that time no organized army neither city walls existed yet. Sumer cities grew already to 10,000 inhabitants. Later Sumer cities were as large to house a population of up to 80,000. Pottery items were now produced en mass. Long distance trade was flourishing and many items exported resulting in enormous wealth. Long distance means 500 km or over 1,000 km and even more when sea routes were involved going to Indus Valley or down the African coast. During this period also slave labor was first introduced.

Ur Important Dynasty

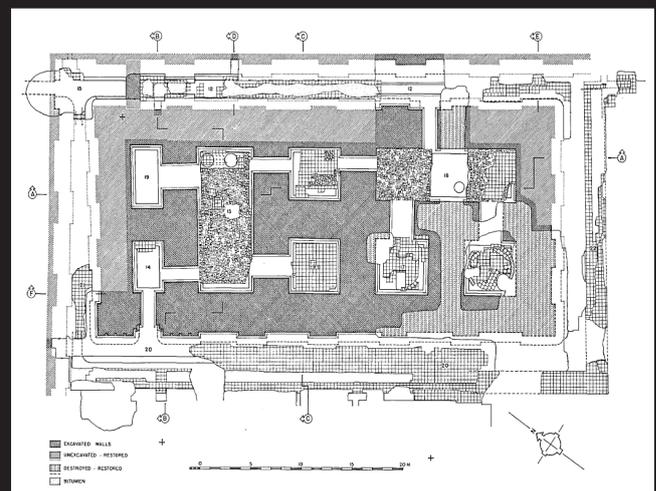
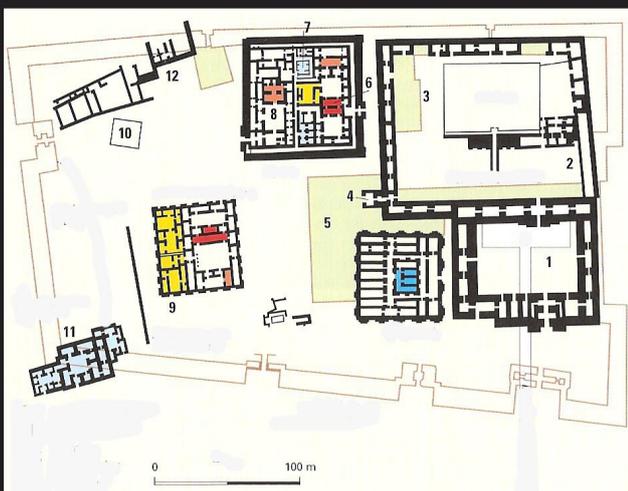
The 3rd Dynasty was started by famous King Ur-Nammu 2112 BC. Just imagine, at the time the Sumerian population grew to around 1,5 million when the world population just reached 27 million. This important period is also called the Sumer Renaissance with new law codes created by Ur-Nammu and establishing a divine ruler status and hereditary succession system. The question still stands between experts, if the 3rd Dynasty was just created as a hegemony between city states, or was it a genuine imperial administration? We know this dynasty had a central state organization including many Sumer cities and tributaries on the fringes of its



empire. To those tributaries belonged Ebla, Byblos, Mari and Carchemish. The Sumer Renaissance also included a reformed more modern state, centralization of control, standardization of procedures, creation of state archives, establishment of a state army and a single national calendar. The sophisticated form of governance split city state land into provinces with appointed governors without military power. Instead, Ur installed military garrisons in those provinces. But times were not peaceful and therefore a defensive wall with a length of 250 km was built against Amorite nomadic tribes falling into Mesopotamia from Syria. In various military actions Ur defeated Hurrians, Subartians, Assyria and pacified Elam by arranging marriages of their princesses with kings in Warshe and Ansham. Ur also invaded Susa in Elam and installed a governor and controlled Elam with the help of an army of mercenaries. State wealth was created by an all embracing tax system with taxes on everything such as labor, livestock, crops and land. Imagine there is really no difference to our tax levied today. Interesting is that food surpluses were distributed to the poor, non-agricultural workers and the rest was given to the temples.

Different group of workers had a different level of independence. Ur even employed a system of mobile workers and workers could even become land owners. But slaves were not hereditary, most were prisoners, debtors, or sold by their families to raise money. Nevertheless, slaves were allowed to own assets. Agricultural production was fully controlled and had a huge organized workforce to feed all inhabitants. It was Ur, which created the world's first true bureaucracy with an official messenger system. The legal system was well developed with public trials in various cities presided by a governor or his delegates. The Ur upper class residents had to study old Sumerian script as the Sumer language was not spoken any longer. The common language now was Akkad and they had to be able to read old Sumerian literature texts.

Let's look at the important King Ur-Nammu again. He rebuilt the Ekur temple on a 12 m high terrace made of mud bricks covering 32,000 m² at its base. The terrace was the base of the ziggurat with three levels and a shrine on top. The lower level contained the house of Bel and other shrines including various treasure chambers. At this temple kings



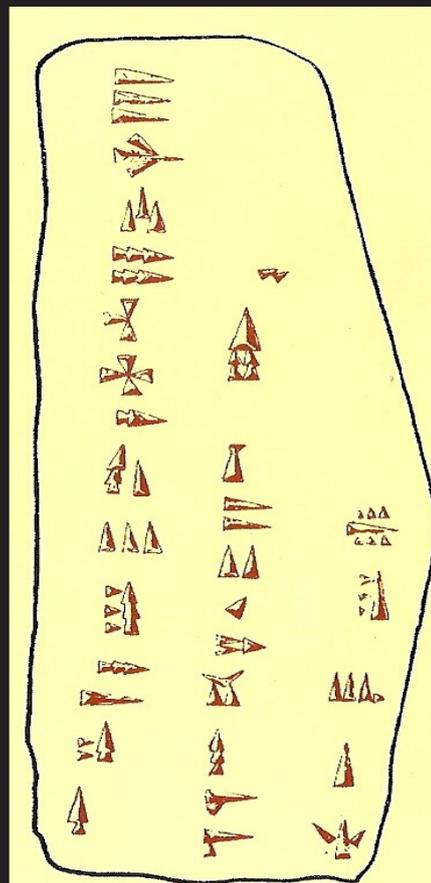
of Ur and Uruk left their inscriptions. Some rulers designated themselves in their votive texts as governors of Nippur. During the later Seleucid Period the temple was converted into a fortress with huge walls. For that the ziggurat was built over to create a cruciform acropolis and opposite the temple a large Seleucid palace was erected.

Cuneiform Writing

Now we will look at one of the most important Sumer inventions for humanity. The first writing was imprinted in cuneiform on small wet clay tablets. It was invented by Sumer about 5,000 years ago, as well as most probably parallel in Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast. The Sumer people possibly brought it with them from their place of origin. Over 80% of all Sumer texts were found at Nippur. This includes the first version of the biblical flood story, which is part of the famed Gilgamesh Epic. Cuneiform script began as a series of symbols and pictograms developed to be used by traders as logosyllabic, syllabic and later alphabetic form. Later cuneiform numbers were developed, using both a decimal and sexagecinal system. The numeric signs forming five systems to count and measure were used for administrative or trading purposes, such as counting animals, grain volumes, field sizes and content of storage bags. The use of these systems was stopped about 2000 BC and thereafter only one cuneiform numeric system was in use. The Sumer people used approximately 600 pictograms, in comparison the Hittite about 500 and the Maya up to 800.

First texts were only of economic content

ca. 3200	ca. 3000	ca. 2500	ca. 1800	ca. 700	meaning
					sky god
					mountain
					head
					mouth
					water
					bird
					cattle
					cattle



FIRST ALPHABET OF THE WORLD
(UGARIT 14th B.C SYRIA)

with no religious, epic, literature or hymns. Legal texts were drawn in archaic script on Sumer clay tablets. The first clay tablets contained few words and numbers, later they were fully covered with detailed texts in columns. Later they changed from vertical column writing in fields to horizontal lines. Words became multi-functional, which led to a reduction of signs from 1,200 to 600. For example, a head and water sign represented drinking and a head and

	ox **		god heaven ***		gazelle *****
	stream water *		earth ***		sheep *****
	fish *		woman ***		pen *****
	ear of barley *		to go ***		rising sun *****
	bowl/ food *		ox ****		one, ***
	grain **		heart ****		three, 3 ***
	'mountain **		net ****		two, 2 ***

bread sign stood for eating. Only after 2500 BC the script became phonetic.

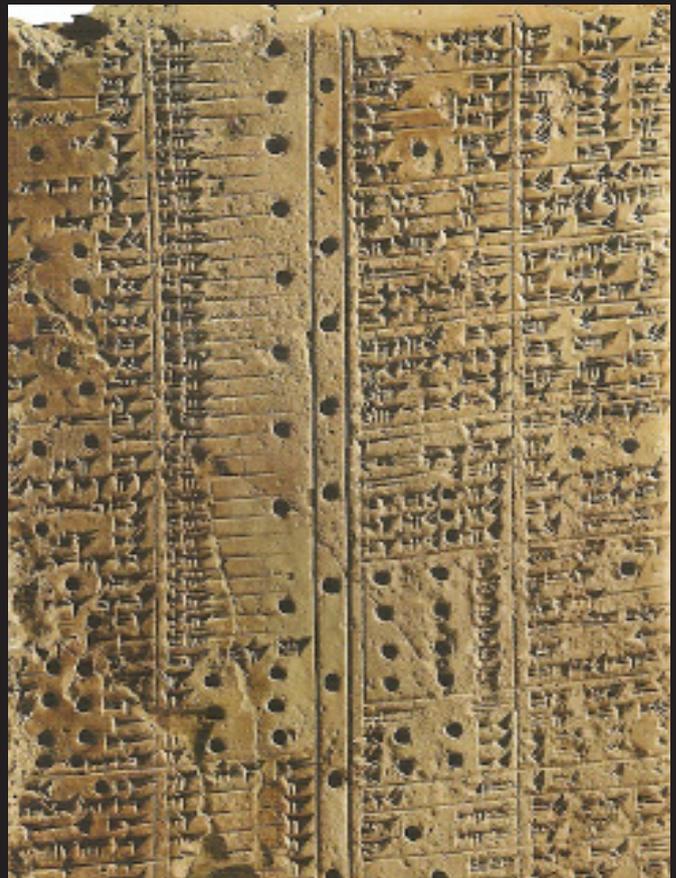
Sumer also developed the first envelop in history for confidential messages made of clay for tablets to fit in. They also started an early organized education in writing and arithmetic's attested by schooling tablets found. The thousands of symbols took long years of training including mathematics for multiplying, dividing, square and cubic root calculations. Interesting discoveries are various tablets found containing medical texts concerning gynecological problems. Next to astronomical knowledge early Sumer scientists gathered detailed medical knowhow.

The Levant area was dominated by private merchant families, not state or temple based economies. Here a simplified alphabet with 20 to 30 signs was developed for merchants to be able to be written by themselves without the help from trained scribes. This was the first fully phonetic script, but using only consonants and no vowels. The phonetic script had the perfect ability to communicate in all languages in the multi-cultural port cities. The famous Ugarit cuneiform script had 27 consonants and three signs. Archeologists unearthed over 1,000 of these clay tablets, as well as the first alphabet table. The Phoenician script was widely used and had only 22 consonants, which were written right to left. It dominated the Levant area due to the Phoenicians being a strong trading nation and excellent seafarers.

Cuneiform script was used also in Akkad, Elam, Hittite, Luwian, Hurrian and Parthia. Sumer went even so far to fully adopt their script for Akkad language. Both Sumerian and Akkadian language was used throughout Mesopotamia until it was replaced by Aramaic around 1200 BC. Please note that Sumer used a different agglutinant language with no relationship to any other language. This Sumer language was spoken between 3000 to 2000 BC and vanished thereafter and was only used as religious language until 1000 BC. But the Sumer cuneiform script survived another 2,000 years.

Important Cuneiform Archive

An important archive discovered at Nippur belonged to an influential trading family. Over



800 Late Babylonian cuneiform texts were excavated. Some even had Aramaic comments. Most texts were written by Murasu family members. The texts include lease contracts, receipts of lease payments and taxes plus debt acknowledgements. They give an interesting insight into the Nippur economy. The Murasu family managed farms and domains belonging to royal family members and highlevel civil servants, as well as temple land. Royal land was leased to commoners for which they paid rent or served in the military. The Murasu family acted as middlemen and leased these lands to small farmers. All these informations made it the most important Mesopotamian archive for that period.

Sumer Family Life

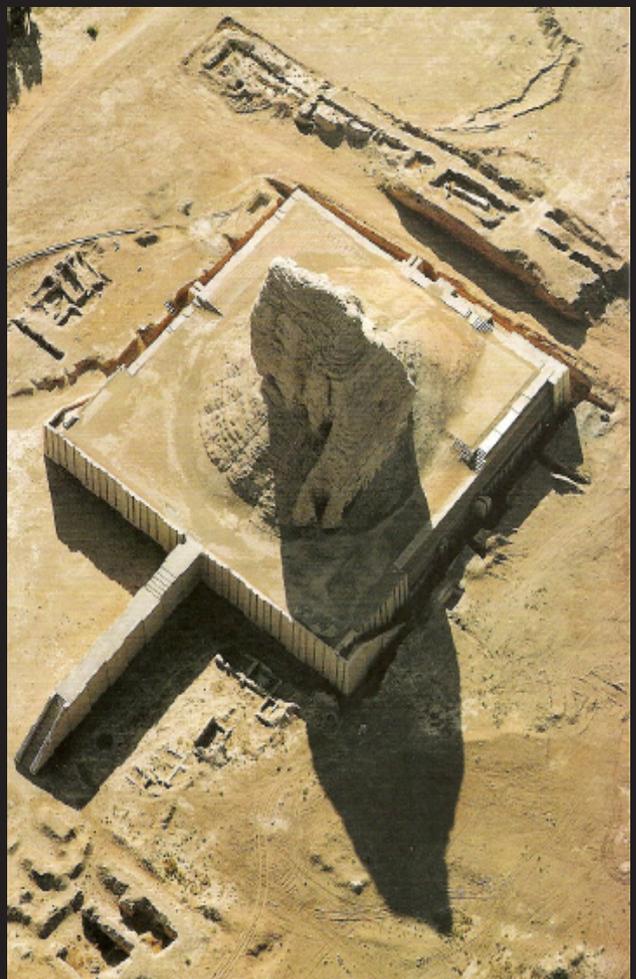
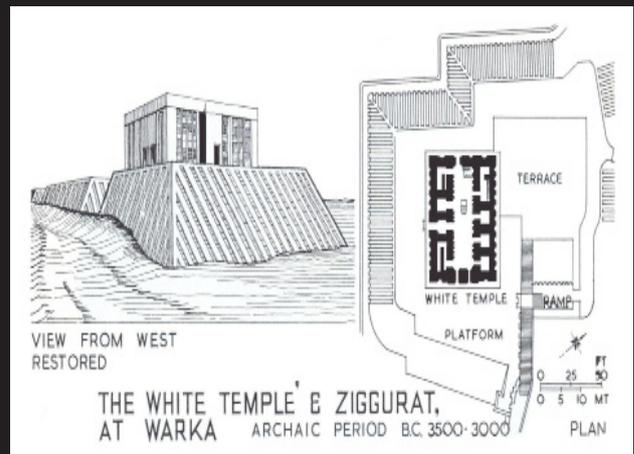
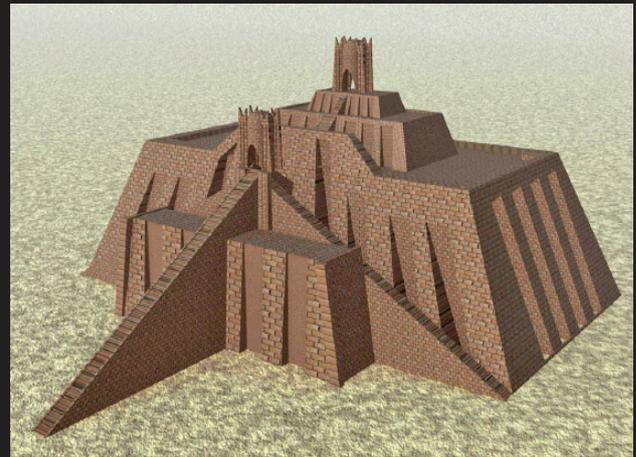
The vast amount of records discovered also gave a deeper insight into daily life at the time. These documents show, that marriages were arranged between both parents and concluded with a contract. The marriage was valid, when the groom family paid the bridal gift. We also learned, that Sumer people had a relaxed attitude towards sexuality with various diverse practices as being used today. Even prostitution existed. Further, they had no word for virginity, which did not seem to have played any role for getting married. A re-marriage was possible too, when the husband had died.

Eridu Developments

Enki was the first Sumer temple erected around 5500 BC. It was 18 times rebuilt always with mud brick. The first structure was a simple rectangular raised platform with a small shrine, niche and sacrifice platform in a single room erected during the earlier Ubaid Period. In a second step a T shape temple layout with perimeter wall and columned courtyard was added. Later it was changed to a double T shape layout with a three ship structure on a higher platform. This new layout was first used at Eridu and Uruk. In the Sumer creation story god Enki raised Eridu from sea. And father of all gods Anu deposited at Eridu the universal decrees of divine authority for Enki to create and guard the world.

What is a Ziqqurat?

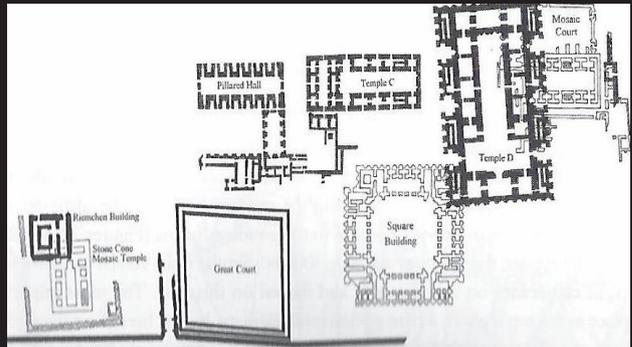
Let's look at the religious Ziqqurat structures. They were significant stepped plat-



form and tower like buildings erected for ritual reasons from 4000 BC onwards. The oldest ziqqurat was erected in Tepe Sialk during the Proto-Elam Period. The typical ziqqurat layout was already perfected in the Sumer Early Dynastic Period. In comparison the first Egyptian stepped pyramid for Pharaoh Djoser was built much later around 2700 BC. The Cheops Pyramid reached a height of 146 m and the tower of Babylon in comparison 90 m. The ziqqurat layout was standardised during the 3rd Ur Dynasty with square or rectangular stepped platforms, central ramp style stairs with two side stairs left and right of ramp. Still mud bricks were used and stabilized with reed mats soaked with bitumen and wooden anchors. This was no wonder in a marshland area, where stones as building material were rare. Therefore, the structure was covered by a layer of burnt clay bricks and a rain water drainage system was installed. Important ziqqurats for example were built at Ur, Eridu, Larsa, Uruk, Borsippa, Sippar, Kish and Nippur.

Uruk Developments

First Neolithic settlements with ten different sites dated around 6000 BC were discovered around Uruk. The first Ubaid Culture settlement on site was dated 5000 BC. Please see our article about Ubaid and other Pre-Sumer cultures such as Hassana, Samarra and Halaf on this website. By 4500 BC Uruk became a powerful trading center. The first high platform with single floor temples was erected 500 years later. Another 700 years later two temples for sky god Anu and mother goddess Inanna were built. By that time the number of villages around Uruk rapidly



grew to over 100. That indicates the importance of Uruk and its inhabitants needed to be fed by the surrounding agricultural settlements. Uruk was ruled by a priesthood with all land owned by God and finally the temple. The temple precinct also was a political and important administration center with lots of storerooms for all goods. The great city of Uruk with its new layout was founded by King Gilgamesh ruling from 2652 to 2602 BC. He was the first real Sumer king. Just imagine Uruk was inhabited for 4,500 years, which is longer than Rome and Athens.

Uruk Details

The early Uruk was an urban center spanning over 600 ha and therefore can be regarded as the first ancient metropol. In 3300 BC it had a population of 25,000 and an extension of 3 km², which was huge for the time. 300 years later the city extension had grown to 5 km² with 40.000 inhabitants. The length of the city wall was 10 km. And it was supported by many towers also along the banks of Euphrates. Experts established that Uruk had an increased social stratification with true social hierarchy and an advanced system of regulated agricultural production with intensive cultivation of monocrop, ploughing plus a highly organized and well managed irrigation systems. Most importantly a redistribution of agricultural surpluses took place after harvest. Imagine Sumer people were the first beer drinkers in history with various brews being produced from wheat,



barley and mixed grains. And its religious festival calendar was organized around the agricultural seasons. At a later stage more elite households built their own compounds in the city.

Uruk Temples

The city was divided into various districts. One such district was Eanna a holy area with over a dozen temples erected during different periods. It included a ziqqurat, various halls, mosaic courtyards, bath and many storerooms for goods and cult objects. Some temples could be identified by archeologists to divinities such as Innin, Ningizzida, Eanna, Ningal and others were just called Temples A to F or Uruk, Low, Red and Stone Temple. In other city areas archeologists could identify further temples such as Bit Resh, Irigal, Gareus, Sasanid or simply called them the White Temple. These numerous temples indicate, that the priesthood of Uruk was well organized and had the working populations fully occupied with construction, agriculture, wealth creation and religious rituals and festivals.

Uruk Architecture

Most significant religious building was the so-called White Temple of Inanna with a double staircase leading to the roof area 12 m above ground, where important rituals took place. This was a common practice at the time and the roofs were only open to priests and rulers. This temple was rebuilt many times over 500 years and finally reached five floors. The temple featured a unique multicolor mosaic done with horizontally laid small clay cones around its columns and was the first complex Sumer mosaic. An enormous and detailed organization was needed to erect this major temple structure. Like in Egypt specialized artisans for different type of works were employed and here the first division of labor took place. In addition, a huge farming operation was needed to feed all the workers during the long construction period. The building also showed first sophisticated artwork with no parallel at the time. The art was largely religious in theme and showed scenes of worshipping and priests as well as sacrifice of animals.

Uruk Economy

It was a fully organized economy with division of labor, mass production, detailed administration, introduction of written recordings, including hieratic organization, central supply, wealth



of knowledge and active interconnection of various levels. Surprising was the early industry specialization with refined metal working, most varied pottery and fine textile production. This increased artisan and trade volumes including flourishing exports and imports of many goods. Uruk even had first trade posts in Tell Brak in northeastern Syria, in Tepecik in Anatolia, in Habuba Kabira in the mid Euphrates area in western Syria.

For transport ships and donkeys were used. When going upstream ships were pulled by donkeys and slaves. In Uruk many industrial innovations took place such as the fastturning potter's wheel and improvements thereof including improvements of pottery kilns leading to pottery mass production. The use of various wheeled vehicles was common and the plough was invented for intensive agriculture. The increasing demand for ever rising labor needs introduced slave labor via forced migration from conquered territories.

Uruk Rulers

The 1st Dynasty lists 12 rulers of which Gilgamesh was in power for 50 years and was the most noteworthy ruler. He was the first hobby archeologists collecting written documents left in the foundations of ancient buildings and is known to have searched for immortality. He is famous for his Gilgamesh Epic imprinted on

many cuneiform clay tablets. The last king of this dynasty also was king of neighbour city state Ur. Lugal-zage-si must have been a strong ruler, as he was also king of city states of Umma, Lagash and Ur. Finally, he was defeated by King Sargon of Akkad and all Sumer city states he controlled became part of Akkad. Another three dynasties followed with 13 kings lasting for 350 years until the cities finally came under Babylonian control.

Important City Gods

As was common at the time the Sumer pantheon too consisted of many gods with various attributes. An was the god of heaven, sky, stars and father of all gods. His consort was Ki the goddess of earth. Enlil was the god of storm, wind, rain and chief god with his consort goddess Ninlil. Enki was the god of beneficence, wisdom, healing, freshwater, arts, science and law. Inanna was the goddess of love, sexuality and war. Utu was the sun and Sin the moon god. In addition, each city had its own all important city god, who protected them and was cherished by the local priesthood. Uruk had two city gods Anu plus Inanna. In Eridu it was Enki and in Nippur Enlil. In Lagash people prayed to Ninurta or Ningirsu the god of war. Ur was the home of Sin and in Larsa and Sippar it was Utu. In Borsippa Nabu the god of wisdom was adorned and in Umma it was Shara the god of war. When some prayed for good harvests, others wished for success of their military campaigns with rich loots.

Ur Developments

The first settlement was erected here around 4000 BC. Ur was a port city lying on the Gulf coast. Over time the Gulf coast line was pushed further south through large annual Euphrates and Tigris silt deposits. Important changes introduced in Ur were the use of one calendar system, various tax and administrative reforms, training of civil servants for different tasks, spread of literacy, division of labor, use of standard forms, expanding infrastructure, one law for all and well defined private land ownership with recorded sales transactions. This included the introduction of private economy with most long distance trade now being in private hands. So, traders established trading posts in foreign cities and huge quantities of stones, timber and metal was imported, due to lack of these

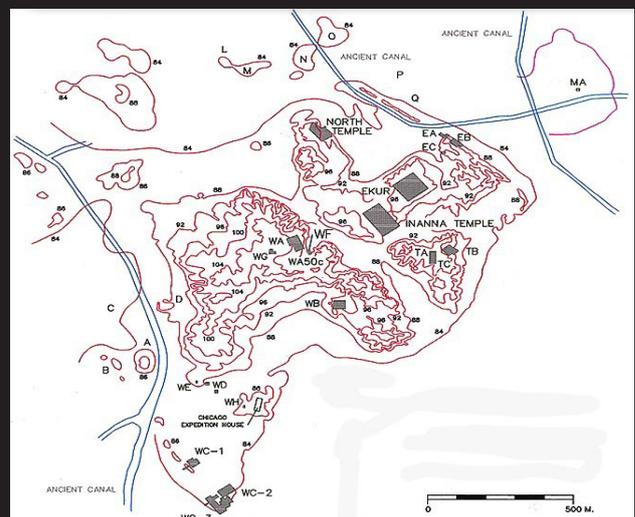
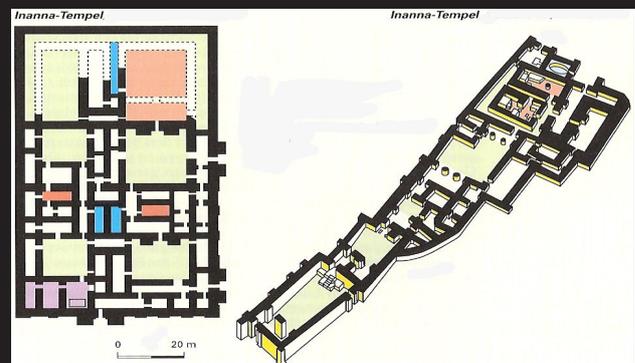
materials in the Mesopotamian marshlands.

Ur Artisans

Ur artisans took the artistic sophistication to new levels with mosaics, sculptures, stelea, portrait heads, friezes and liturgical poetry. Metal workers produced at first small items, but later used closed mold and lost wax techniques to produce large complex items such as royal helmets. Goldsmith handcrafted gold and silver jewelry with imported obsidian, lapis lazuli, agate, carnelian, jasper and chalcedony semi-precious stones. They also introduced new techniques such as acid etching, cloisonné, engraving, granulation and filigree to manufacture necklaces, bracelets, anklets, pectorals, pendants, pins, earrings, rings, headdresses, helmets and crowns.

Ur State Organization

This was a rather advanced state structure with a separation of military and civil administration. Nevertheless, the social system was rigid, one was born into a class and jobs were inherited from father to sons. Ur left other city states under their control with quite a lot of independence. These rulers used the title ensi or governor, but they had to pay tribute called bala. Foreign relations



were handled by Ur alone. This involved a high level of control and detailed record keeping. These records also show that loans with fixed interest were given. The interest rates were different depending on purpose. Commercial loans to traders were repaid in silver and the interest rather high. Individual loans to farmers were settled in grain. Interesting is that at certain times for example with a new king coming into power all loans were forgiven and cancelled. This helped to give the economy a new push.

Ur Burials

Part of a necropolis with over 2,000 tombs including royal tombs were excavated. For the first time they established true state burials with rich funeral gifts of gold, silver, semi precious stones and alabaster items. Noteworthy is the richly decorated tomb for King Puabi, which was found intact. He was buried with 23 of his soldiers, servants and slaves. Does this indicate the practice of human sacrifice?

Eshnunna Developments

It is the most northern Sumer city. The first settlement was erected already during the Jemdet Nasr Period. It was a major Sumer city during the Early Dynastic Period. In its long history of



about 1,200 years at least 30 kings are known by name from ancient records. At a certain stage it was controlled by Ur, Isin, Elam and later Babylon. Because of its position it was a gateway for the important trade between Mesopotamia and Elam. Eshnunna had a changing history of military success and lost control. It gained again independence from Ur, conquered Arrapha, Rapiqum, Assur and finally Elam with the help of Mari and Babylon under Hammurabi. About 20 Amorite kings ruled in Eshnunna after the Old Babylonian Empire disappeared.

First Eshnunna Law Code

Two tablets with a law code were discovered at Shaduppum and further fragments found at Haddad. Possibly they were written during the reign of King Dadusha. This legal code covered loans, deposits, slavery, agricultural transactions, goring oxen, marital rights and sexual offences. It consists of 60 sections with instructions: if that happens, then this has to be done. The code is concerning three social groups the so-called awilum or upper class, the mushkenum or common class and the wardum or slaves. The punishments were different for each class. So, this code is possibly slightly earlier than the famous Hammurabi code with 294 paragraphs dated 1770 BC.

Kish Developments

It is an archeological area of 25 km² with over 40 mounds with Euphrates running through them. It includes such ancient settlement hills as Tell Uhaimir with many red bricks from an ancient ziqqurat, Tell Ingharra or Hursagkamma with an Inanna temple, Tell Khazneh, Tell el-Bender with Parthian items found and mound W called so by archeologists with



finds of Neo-Assyrian clay tablets. This area lies 12 km east of Babylon and 80 km south of Baghdad. The site was first occupied during the Jemdet Nasr Period. Kish was a dominant power during Early Dynastic Period together with Nippur the most important religious center at the time. These first city states were ruled by a king. Kish had a symbolic importance for other city states and their rulers. Therefore, they liked to either control Kish and add the title King of Kish to their own. Even kings from Akkad and Babylon wanted to do this. But the main reason was the importance and regional influence of the Kish main temple. And the first king to do this was King Mesannepada from Ur.

Kish Rulers

The 15 known early rulers before 2800 BC are historically not proven. Eleven rulers were in power during the 1st Dynasty. Mebaragesi is known to have conquered Elam. Nine kings ruled during the 2nd Dynasty. Mesalim is noted to have been also king of Lagash and Adab, where he erected temples to enforce his reign. The 3rd Dynasty is note worthy as it had only one ruling queen named Kubaba previously an inn keeper, who later was deified as goddess Kheba. This happened about 2400 BC. One king is known for the 4th



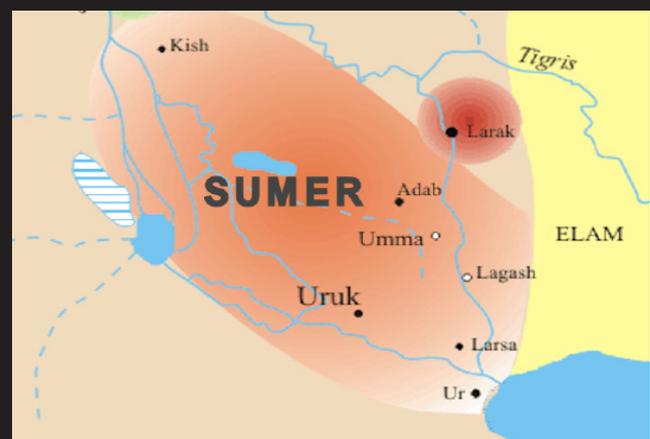
Dynasty and six rulers for the 5th, which were all vassals of the Akkad Empire.

Lagash and Girsu

Lagash is one of the oldest Sumer cities going back to 3000 BC. Its remains form the largest mounds in the region measuring up to 600 ha. The two mounds are divided by a diagonal canal. Lagash and Girsu both were political and religious centers. People of Lagash were the first to revolt against one of their own kings, because of high taxes and limited freedom. Therefore, a new king took over to combat corruption and he also introduced a new law code to appease the population. Even after Akkad took over control, Lagash was able to maintain it's Sumer Culture. During this time Gutian people from the Zargos mountains moved in and started the 2nd Dynasty and a new golden age in Lagash evolved. Supsequently the capital was moved to Girsu. Under this reign the Lagash state area expanded to 1,600 km² including 8 districts and 17 large cities and over 40 villages. Reforms were introduced to reduce farmers debt, who now became rich landlords. Please note that the Lagash dynasties with 18 known rulers over a period of 400 years are not part of Sumer king lists.

Lagash Temples

As all ancient Mesopotamian city states, also Lagash featured various temples. The E-Nin-nu Temple was dedicated to Ningirsu, the Ibgal Temple to goddess Inanna and the Bagara Temple again to Ningirsu. Interesting are the unearthed artefacts, such as the famous Eanatum stele with vultures, which is housed today in Paris at the Louvre Museum. The depictions are proof of the ongoing fight for land and resources with neighbor city state Umma. A good example of ancient craftsmanship is



the Entemena silver vase with Ningirsu and the sacred animal called Anzu as lion headed eagle.

Umma Developments

Situated about 10 km southeast of Umma al Aqarib a second city belonging to Umma. During its heydays it controlled Ur and Uruk. Umma and Lagash were permanently in fight over fertile land lying between both cities. Therefore, Kish intervened and defined the borders to end the ongoing conflicts. Unfortunately, this agreement only lasted a short while. Interestingly, the Umma calendar is the predecessor of the later universally used Babylon calendar. The settlement site was finally abandoned during the Middle Bronze Age.

Larsa Developments

This city state is situated about 20 km south of Uruk. It was one of five cities ruled by a king. In total the city state had 17 known rulers over a period of about 300 hundred years. Its ruins cover an area of 3 km² and the settlement hill is the highest with 12 m. The temple of sun god Utu and Shamash was rebuilt by famous King Nebuchadnezzar II. Further inscriptions of Babylonian kings were found at Larsa. During its history the city state was under Lagash and Isin influence. Larsa became the main trading center with other Gulf area powers taking the old position of Isin. Later it came under Babylon control and finally it was fully integrated into the Babylon Empire.

Isin Developments

It is situated 30 km south of Nippur. The first settlement on site is from the Ubaid Period dated 2500 BC. The first written reference



of Isin is made during the 3rd dynasty of Ur. When the 3rd dynasty of Ur was taken over by Elam, the then Ur government official Ishbi-Era fled to Isin and established himself as ruler. Therefore, the traditions of the 3rd dynasty of Ur were copied including a similar hym. Later Ishbi-Era was able to expell Elam from Ur, Uruk and Nippur. Isin experienced 100 years of strong growth. But its demise was connected to water problems, because Larsa rerouted the Isinnitum water canal to Larsa. Finally, Larsa took over control. During Babylon and Kassite times some building at Isin took place. The city goddess was Nintinuga and other gods cherished were Sud, Ninisina and Ninbgal. Noteworthy is an annual sacred marriage ritual, whereby the king representing mortal Dumuzi and a priestess representing goddess of love and war Inanna had sex to demonstrate the king's connection to gods.

Military Campaigns

As you can see from our numerous comments, the Sumer city states were in constant battle for control with their neighbors. It started all peacefully at first, but the first recorded war happened 2450 BC between Lagash and Umma. This made rulers to install professional armies equipped with lances, throwing spears, bow and arrows, battle axes, swords, daggers, body armor, shields and helmets. The first war chariots were introduced with two and four wheels and the army was divided in infantry, cavalry and archers.

Nippur Developments

It was another of the most ancient Sumer cities and a sacred city as well, due to the key Enlil Temple. Therefore, it was together with Kish the most important religious center. At first an Ubaid settlement was started here around 5000 BC. Nippur reached its biggest extension with over 135 ha during the 3rd Ur Dynasty. But during the Old Babylonian Period Nippur shrank again. Archeologists established two periods of abandonment during the Old Babylon and Post Kassite Period, when the Euphrates flow changed. Kassite Babylon rebuilt Nippur after the first abandonment and King Assurbanipal after the second. Land was owned by both king and temple, but the temple tax was set by the king. He also controlled irrigation systems.

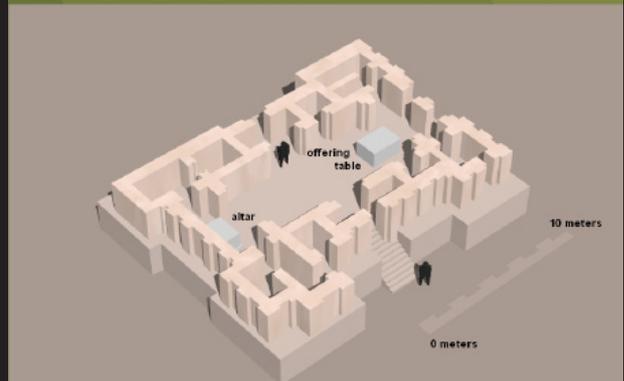
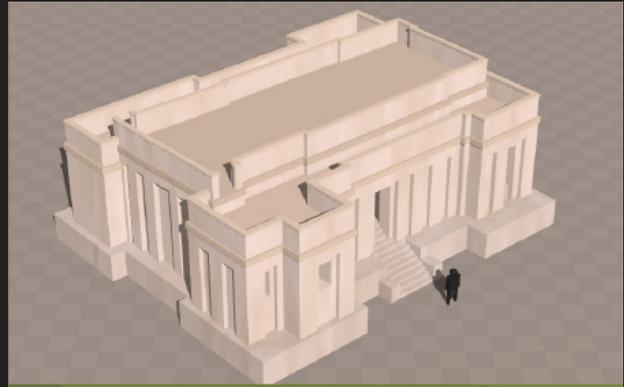
Nippur had a flourishing long distance trade with Babylon, Egypt, Persia, Greece and even with the Harappa Culture in the Indus Valley.

Nippur Religious Center

Nippur was an important religious center in the whole Mesopotamian region for over 1,000 years. Therefore, it was never destroyed because temples were holy precincts and important institutions and more stable than governments. Nippur administration and its temples were based on a long lasting and stable clan system forming its priesthood. The Ur-me-me family administered the Inanna Temple, another family branch managed governate and a third branch administered the Enlil Temple over hundreds of years during ruling Sumer, Akkad, Ur and Isin dynasties. Even under Akkad rule or Lagash 2nd Dynasty and Ur 3rd Dynasty royal pilgrimages to Nippur took place. And kings of Kish, Ur, Isin sought divine recognition of their reign. Even when Babylon made Marduk its principal deity, Enlil in Nippur was still worshipped and visited by kings and the temple nonetheless received many land donations and precious gifts.

Nippur Temples

The Ekur Temple for key deity Enlil the god of creation and heaven was rather large measuring at that early time already 60 x 40 m and had three entrances. The first Inanna Temple in Nippur was built during the early Jemdet Nasr Period 5,200 years ago and was still used by Parthians around 100 AD. During its existence it was 17 times rebuilt in total. Another temple was erected for the second most important deity Ninurta. The Gula Temple was built next to Ninurta as he was the divine husband of Gula the goddess of healing and medicine.



Nippur Layout & Buildings

Today only various ruined mounds are left including a conical hill with a heights of 30 m. A triangular mound has an extension of over 32,000 m². Archeologists unearthed in the western mound a large Kassite administrative building, huge Neo-Babylonian building, huge palace, various temples, many residences and a bakery. The city was divided by the Shatt-en-Nil canal. And the protective city wall was 14 m thick. A special walled suburb lay within the city further protected by with a water filled moat on all sides. This suburb featured a large temple with inner and outer courtyard plus two large storage buildings surrounded by double wall.

Conclusion

There is much more to the important Sumer Civilization as we were able to cover in this short article. Nevertheless we hope to have enlightened you and raised the interest to read more about it. And we hope to have given you a first insight into this amazing culture, which brought about many significant changes for humanity still valuable to us today. Stay tuned for the following articles we plan to publish on Akkad and Babylon.

Picture Credits

We thank the various museums, institutions and photographers for making available some of their pictures and graphs.

