

Sumer Class Notes

- By 10,000 BC man had learned to work with the physical environment.
- The Ice Age had ended and the climate changed.

Geography

- Between the forest region of northern Europe and Asia and the desert region south of the Mediterranean Sea, laid a new land called Mesopotamia.
- Mesopotamia- the land between two rivers
- The two rivers were: the Tigris and Euphrates.
- This land is now called the Middle East.

Climate

- Summers were long, hot, and dry.
- Winters were mild and rainy.
- The weather let man make many decisions:
- Trees/grass grew along the river banks.
- Humans began to migrate from desert area to northern Mesopotamia.
- They moved toward land, animals and water. (favorable conditions)
- Here, man took giant steps to controlling the environment.
- In Mesopotamia the first farmers accidentally learned to grow crops from seeds.
- It is believed that women made this discovery.
- This was the beginning of what we know as agriculture. (farming for food)
- The slash and burn technique was used for controlling forests.

To do this:

- The farmer slashed the bark off trees, then the trees would die.
- Burn the trunks and branches of the dead trees.
- Scatter ashes for fertilizer

Classes

- The Sumerian society was made up of different classes.

Nobles- kings, priests, rich land owners

Commoners- merchants, scribes, farmers, skilled workers (potters, etc.)

Slaves- prisoners of war, sold wives/children, others who were punished

The Priest King Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC)

- United all of Mesopotamia under his 43 year reign of Babylon
- Hammurabi's Code is the best preserved legal document reflecting the social structure.
- Law maintained order and peace in the cities.

Families

- Most people lived in families
- In family: husband, wife, children
- Only one wife allowed

Family roles

- Husband was head of household
- Could sell wife/ children as slaves for up to three years
- Some women had high positions in the temple (priestess)

- Were able to own/sell slaves
- Could be a witness in court
- Could run business if husband was away
- Upon marriage, a women's father might give a dowry
- Children had to obey all older family members (siblings too)
- Could be sold as slaves
- Could be sent to another city if the made an older family member angry
- had arranged marriages

Sumer Education

Writing

- The Sumerians developed the earliest known form of writing in civilization
- Cuneiform- writing method used by Sumerians
- Used a stylus (a reed) to make wedge shaped symbols
- Wrote on clay tablet

Students

- Didn't have an easy life
- Attended school sunrise to sunset
- Learned by copying lines over and over on tablets
- No special activities
- No class discussions
- School never changed

Schools

- Located in temples
- Only sons of the rich attended
- NO girls allowed
- Rich girls were sometimes taught at home
- Sumerians schools were called edubbas
- Students learned: grammar, the names of plants /animals math and stories.

Administration

- The principal was called the Ummia
- the disciplinary was called "Man in charge of whip"

Benefits of Schooling

- Business contracts were written on tablets [disputes were settled easily]
- Accounting was easy because math was new
- Most people couldn't read/write thus, cylinder seals [round seals signifying a signature]

Scribes

- Knew the meaning of all symbols developed
- Read/wrote for those who could not.
- Was always in need for the marketplace and temple
- Knew everyone's cylinder seal

Educational Contributions

- System of math
- Based on the number 10
- Based on units of 60
- We use this to tell time
- Measuring circles- [60x6=360]
- Measured land in Sumer
- This setup the future foundations for measuring land
- Fields were divided into equal squares and counted

Artisans

- Learned how to carve wood, work with copper/stone and make weapons
- They invented bronze [melting metals together]
- This gave artisans many jobs.
- This would help the economy
- Capitol goods- surplus [grain]-grow
- Consumer goods- food, clothing, shelter
- Services- transport, education, and other personal service

Sumer Government, Law and Economy

- Since the Sumerians could control their environment they were able to develop skills in their free time.
- As individuals become more skilled they created a division of labor (people completing different jobs)
- Sumerians worked to produce goods (make/grow) so they could trade. (Barter system).
- Due to the surplus of food, Sumerians had jobs like:
- Artisans- carpenter/ metal worker
- Tailors- made cloth/clothing
- Priests, soldiers, and doctors
- At first Sumerians used barley as a Medium of exchange this did not work, instead, they used silver this was the first metal money
- Sumer, like all cultures, had rich, poor and slaves. (Not all)

4 things are needed to have a culture function well

- land
 - capital
 - workers
 - managers
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- All these people traded their products or service for food
 - Even though grain was abundant there was no timber, stone, or metals. People had to trade for them
 - Sumerians trade their goods/service for someone's goods/service.

Sumer: Religion

Although Sumerians controlled their environment there were still some unanswered questions. The forces of nature (wind, rain, sun) filled them with wonder/fear.

- Since there was no scientific knowledge they decided that everything had a life (the thunder was alive, the sun was alive) These forces were worshipped as Gods
- Sumerians entire world was make up of Gods. They believed that the Gods controlled everything. If the Gods wee pleased the people would prosper. If they were angry suffer
- Sumerians believed tat they were slaves to the Gods. By obeying a priest they were obeying the Gods.
- Each Sumerian city had a God. The priests owned the city. To honor the Gods, they built a temple.
- A temple was a place for worshipping the Gods (They ere always the largest buildings)
- The temples of Sumer were called ziggurats. The Sumerians believed that the God lived at the top of the ziggurat.

Ziggurats

- Rectangular buildings on low platforms
- Built of sun baked clay
- As the states became more prosperous, the temple became more detailed

Gods

- Had male/female names
- Enki- God of Crafts
- Ninhusaq- Great mother goddess
- Nanna- moon god
- Enlil- mother nanna
- Uu- sun god, son of nanna
- Inanna-goddess of love/war

Jobs at Ziggurat

- Priest/priestess-ran temple, conducted rituals (ceremonies)
- Officials
- Scribes- wrote documents
- Artisans- potters
- Cooks
- Cleaners
- Religion was at the core (center) of the Sumeran life
- As Sumer invaded and taken over, so was their religion