

Who were the Ancient Sumerians and where did they live?

- The Ancient Sumerians lived in Sumer from 4000BC.
- Today Sumer no longer exists, the land is part of Iraq.
- The Sumerians built large cities and invented a written script.
- They had a significant effect on the world as it is today.



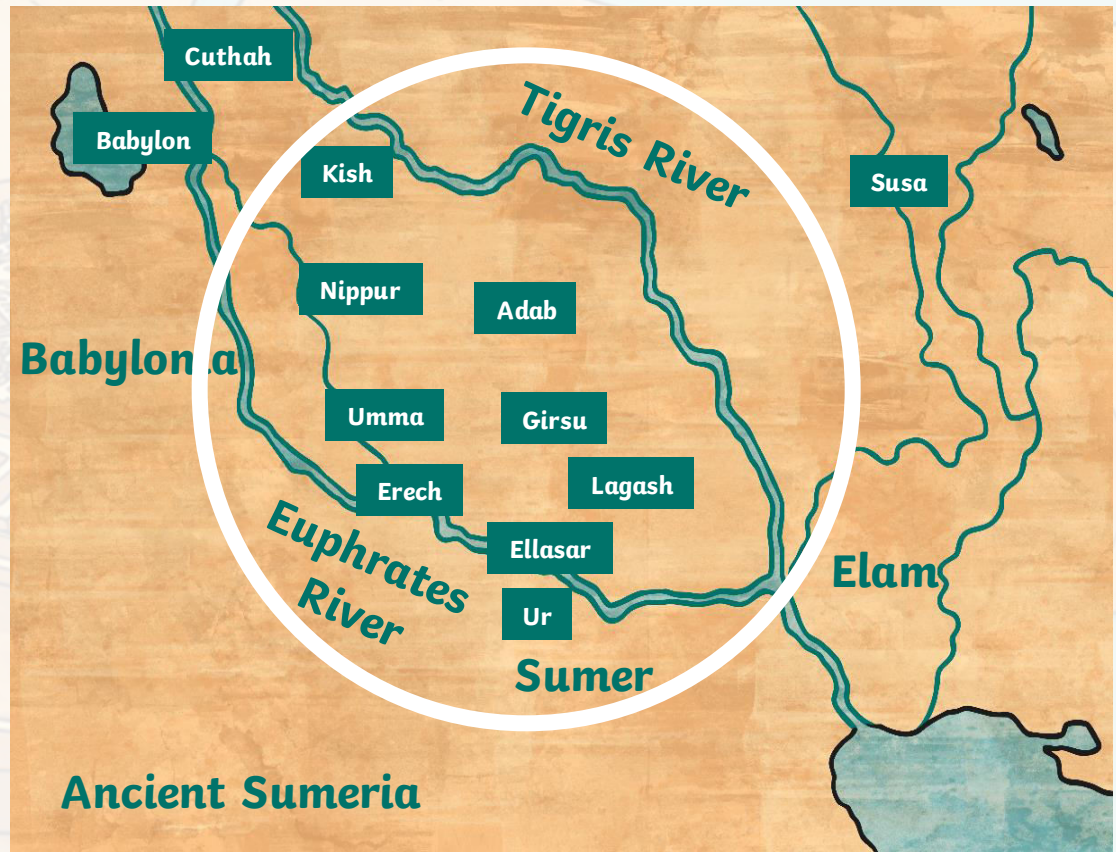
Ancient Sumer



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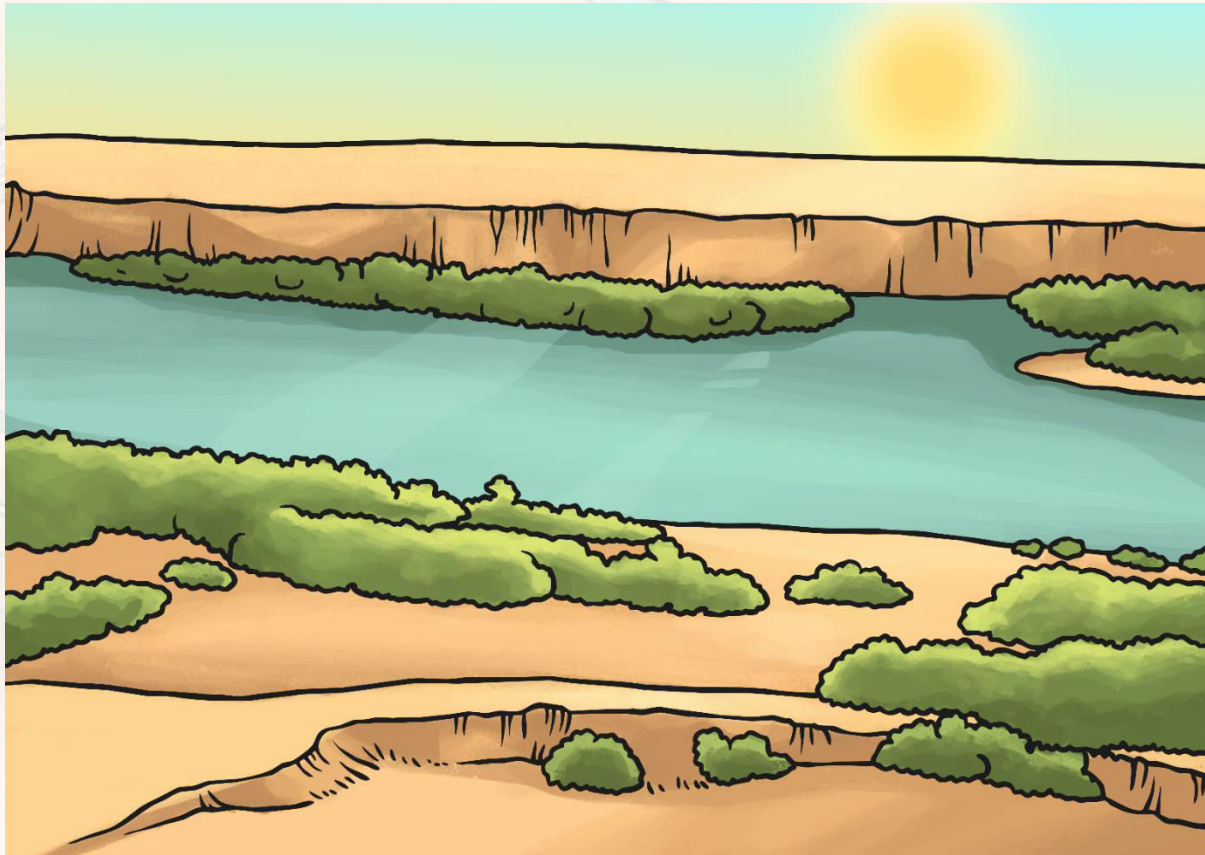
Ancient Sumer and Mesopotamia

The first Sumerian cities were built along the banks of the rivers. Can you work out which rivers these were? The Greeks later named the whole area 'Mesopotamia' meaning 'The land between two rivers'.



Location, Location, Location

Why do you think the Sumerian civilisation chose to build their cities by the Euphrates and Tigris rivers? What were the advantages?



The Cradle of Civilisation

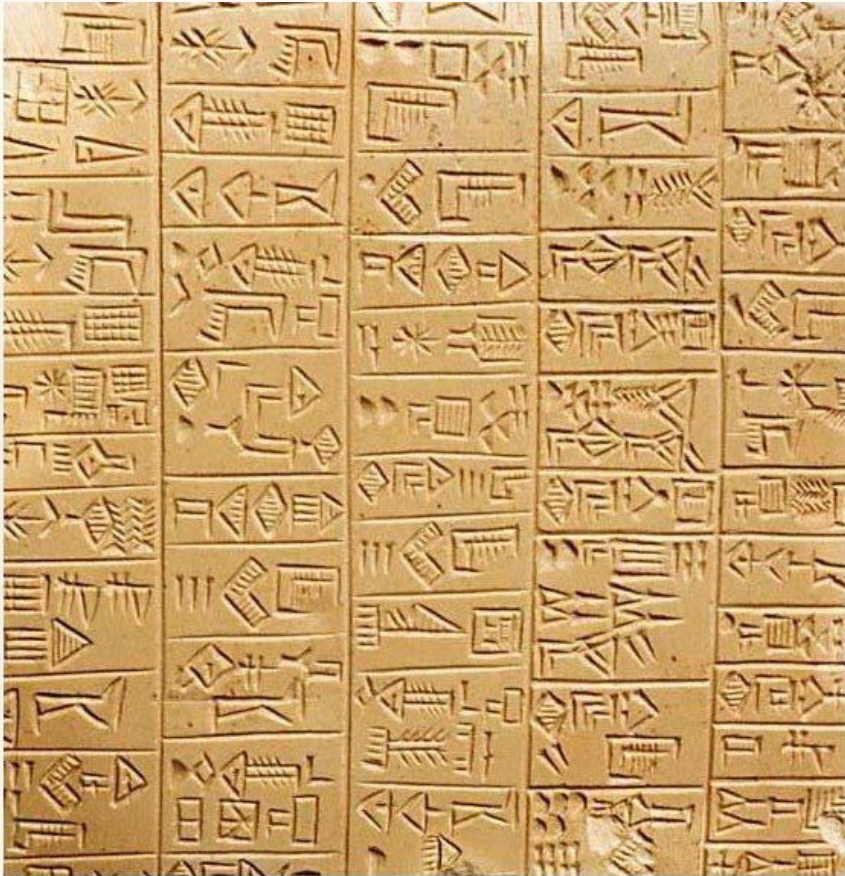


Ancient Sumer was one of the earliest civilisations. Mesopotamia is referred to as the 'cradle of civilisation' because the Ancient Sumerians were the first civilisation to write, in 3500 BC. This was early writing, and it took a few hundred years to develop into a full script.

Why do you think the word 'cradle' is used to describe a place?

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Writing



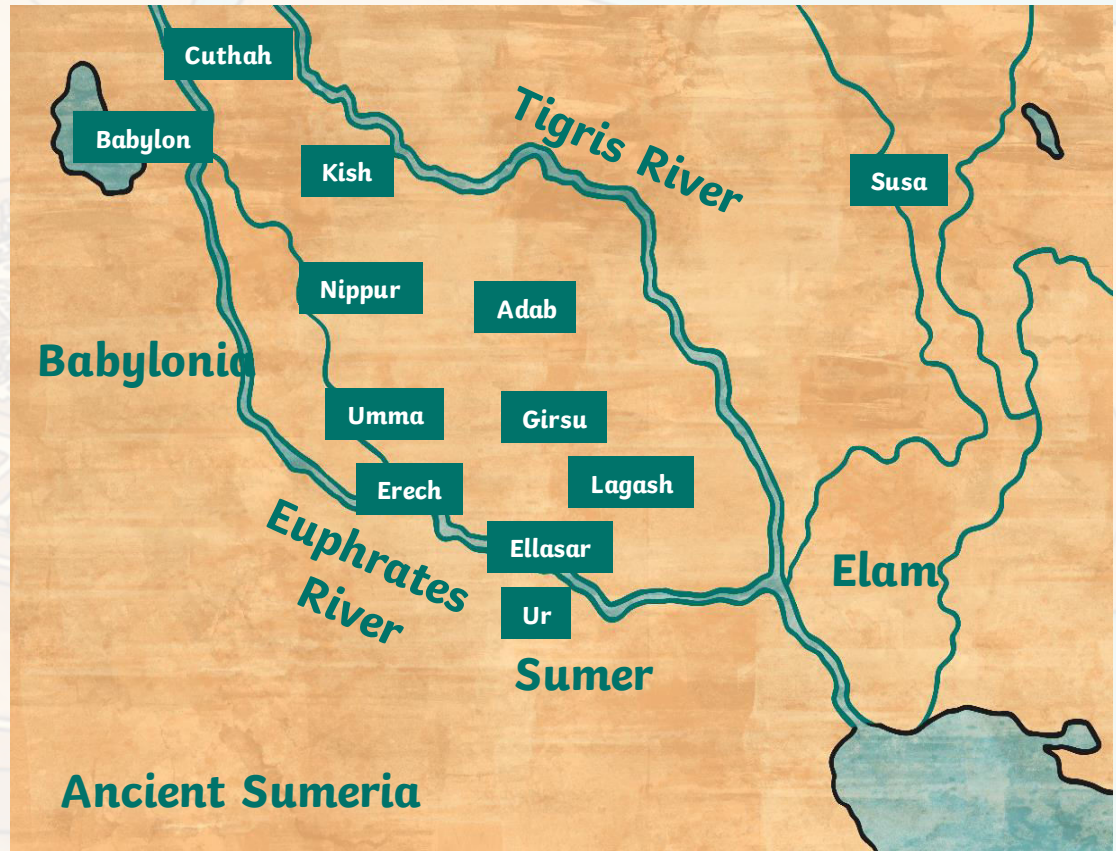
This script was called cuneiform, which means 'wedge-shaped'. A blunt reed was used to make marks on clay tablets, which left a wedge shape. This type of early writing tool, something used to make marks in clay or wax, was called a **stylus**.

You might already be familiar with the word stylus, what is a modern stylus used for?

City States

Many city states were built between the two rivers. The city of Uruk was the biggest city in the world at the time, home to well over 50,000 people.

How does this compare to the sizes of cities today?
Can you find out the population of your city or town?



Ziggurats



What do you think they built with?

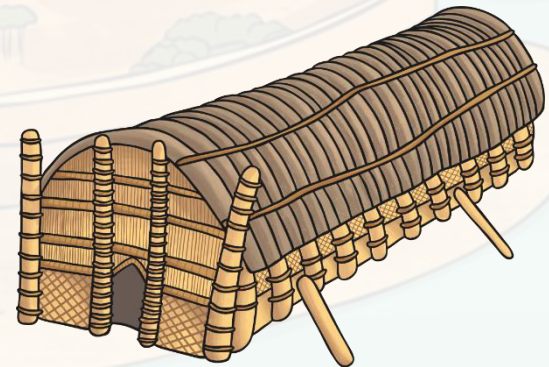
Each city had a temple which was dedicated to that city's god. The cities were ruled by a king (lugal) or governor/priest (ensi).

By 2100BC the temples had become massive buildings known as ziggurats, with three platforms, steep steps up the front and a temple at the top.

Building

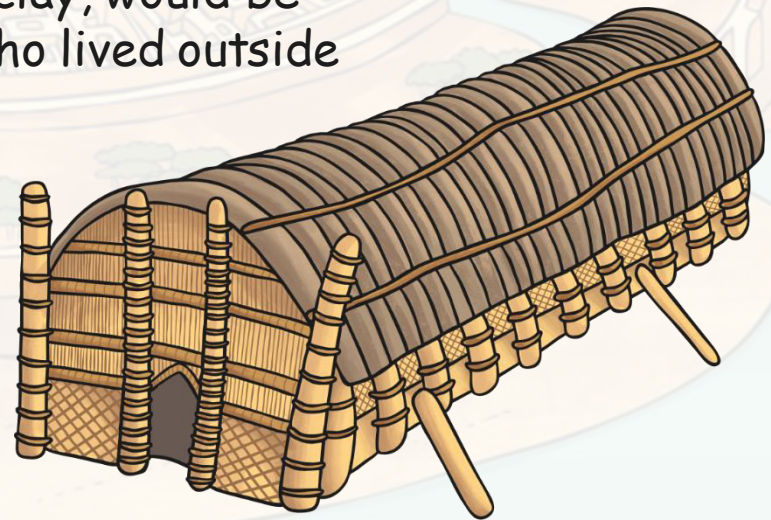
- Stone was scarce. Early buildings were made from sun-baked mud bricks.
- They started using wooden moulds to make bricks that were all the same size.
- Later on they used kilns to fire the bricks which made them harder so they lasted longer.
- They used bitumen to give the bricks a waterproof coating and fill the gaps, it was a black, petrol based material.

What do you think their houses were like?



Houses

- Ordinary people lived in mud brick houses in the cities, crowded tightly together.
- Wealthier people would have more rooms in their house, and it might be built in a U shape, with a garden in the centre.
- Reed huts, sometimes covered in clay, would be built by farmers and fishermen who lived outside the city.



Pottery

- Like in many other ancient civilisations, pottery was common.
- Vases, bowls, dishes and jars were made for storing food and drink, as well as to grow plants.
- One type of vase had a spout coming out of the side.



What do you think this type of vase was used for?

Gods

- Sumerians believed in many gods that took human form.
- Different cities had their own gods, although the same god might be acknowledged in other cities.
- In Eridu, Enki was the god of water, thought to have brought humans the arts and sciences.
- In Nippur, Enlil was the god of air or lord of the ghost land who gave humans spells to use on spirits.
- In Larsa and Sippar, Utu was the sun god.
- In Ur, Sin was the moon god.



Gods

- The Anunnaki were mortal gods who created humans out of clay and later became judges in the underworld.
- Humans were made in order to serve the Anunnaki.



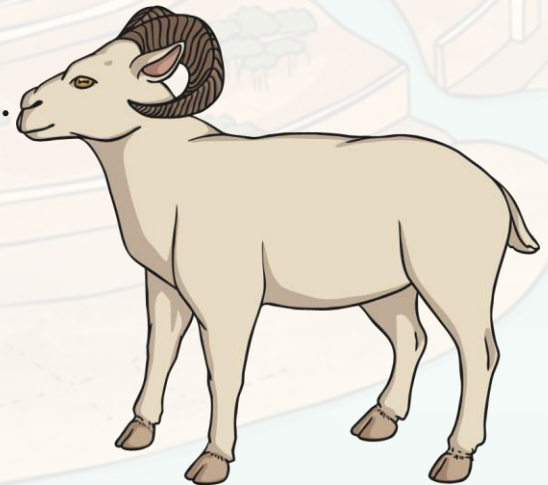
The Underworld

- Irkalla was the underworld, or land of the dead.
- Ereshkigal (great lady under the earth) was the goddess of the underworld and it was she who decided who could go in or come out.
- There were gateways and various monsters to guard the underworld.
- The dead were buried outside the city walls, left with food and offerings for the monsters.
- Which other civilisations believed in an underworld?



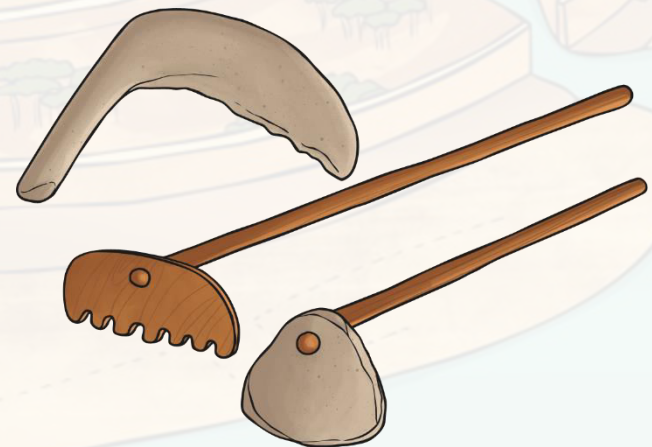
Animals

- Early writing appears to show sheep, goats, cows and pigs were kept as a supply of food.
- Oxen were used to work in the fields.
- Donkeys or onegars were used for transport.
- Animals were also used for their wool or hair to make clothes and rugs.
- Fish, birds and gazelle were hunted for food.
- What could they get from goats and cows other than meat?



Agriculture

- Growing food in the desert depended on irrigation, where water is diverted from a natural course and channelled into the area, for example using canals and channels.
- Keeping on top of the water they needed was a huge task as the River Tigris frequently flooded, damaging the canals. Men were forced to work on repairing the canals, only the rich could opt out.
- Do you think it was fair that men didn't have a choice whether to work or not? Why?



Agriculture

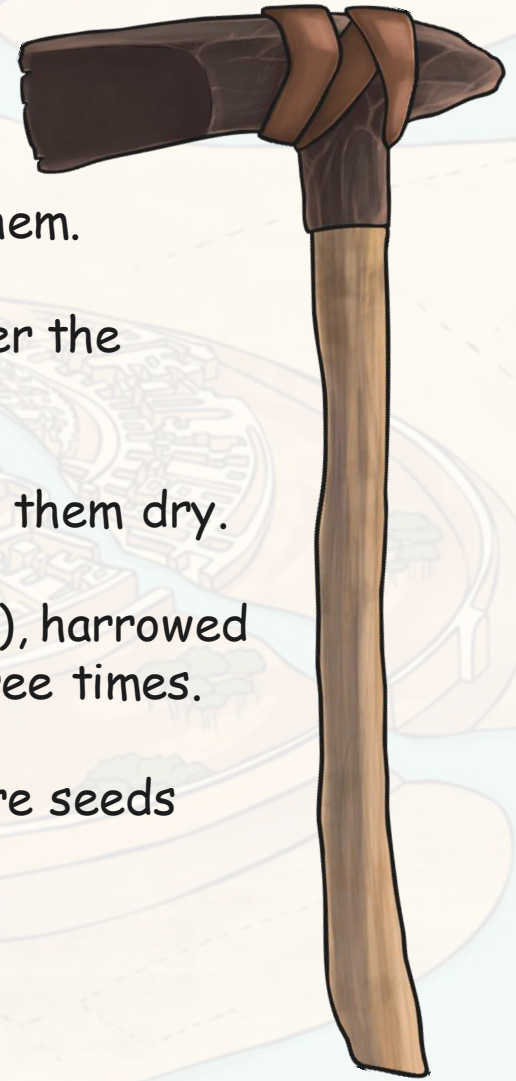
They grew barley, wheat, chickpeas, lentils, dates, onions, garlic, lettuce, leeks and mustard.

Do any of these foods surprise you?
Do you know what people were growing in Britain at a similar time (during the Bronze Age)?



Agriculture

- Farmers would flood their fields then drain them.
- The oxen would kill the weeds by stomping over the ground.
- Pickaxes were dragged over the fields to help them dry.
- When dry they ploughed (turned over the soil), harrowed (broke it up) and raked (smoothed it over) three times.
- The ground was pounded with a mattock before seeds were planted.
- Crops were harvested in Spring.



Sumerian Legacy

The Sumerians were the first, or among the first to:

- Invent and use the wheel
- Have a writing system (only Egyptian hieroglyphs were earlier)
- Map the stars into constellations
- Identify the five planets that you can see without a telescope
- Measure time in 60 second minutes and 60 minute hours
- Invent and develop mathematics
- Split the military into infantry (foot soldiers), cavalry (on horses) and archers (using bows and arrows).
- Create a government and legal system
- Domesticate animals

