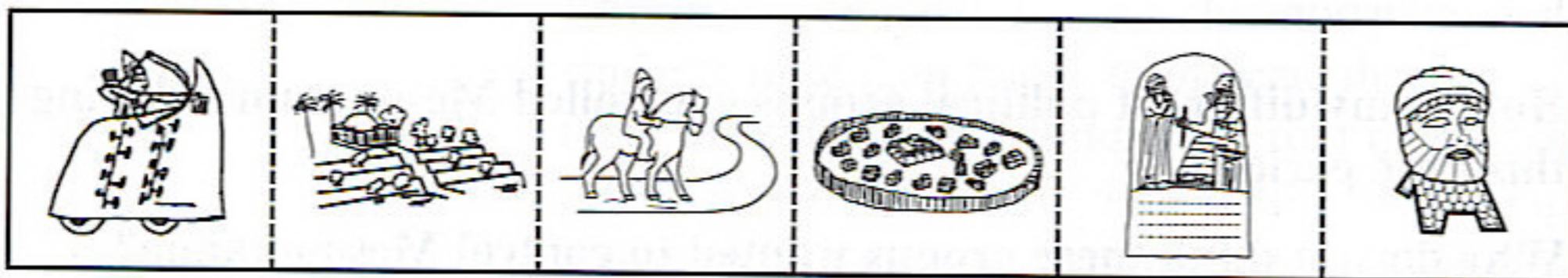


Key Civilizations in Mesopotamia



Sumerian City-States (4000–2300 B.C.E.) Sumer was located on the Mesopotamian plain, close to the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. It was made up of several *city-states*, which were small, independent cities with surrounding villages and farms. The city-states were enclosed by walls for protection. The Sumerians were the first people to develop an advanced civilization in Mesopotamia. Major contributions of the Sumerians include the wheel, the plow, the sailboat, and *cuneiform*, the earliest written language. Although these city-states had a common language, culture, and religion, each had a different king or warlord governing it. Since the city-states of Sumer were not unified under one political leader, they were constantly at war with one another over resources such as water rights and raw materials for building.

Akkadian Empire (2330–2100 B.C.E.) Akkad was a city located on the banks of the Euphrates River, on the Mesopotamian plain. It was founded by Sargon, who rose to power after defeating one of Sumer's kings. Sargon then expanded his powerful army and began to conquer the other city-states of Sumer one by one. He united these conquered city-states with Akkad to create the world's first *empire*, or large group of cities or regions governed by one supreme leader. The Akkadian Empire stretched beyond the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, and from the Persian Gulf to the east side of the Mediterranean Sea. Under Sargon's rule, Akkadian became the common language of Mesopotamia, and Sumerian was used only for religious purposes. After Sargon's death, the Akkadian Empire fell from power, and various city-states battled for control of Mesopotamia.

Babylonian Empire (1800–1500 B.C.E.) Babylon was a city located along the banks of the Euphrates River. Hammurabi was the city's sixth king. He won control over all of Mesopotamia after a series of swift battles, and turned Babylon into an important trade center. Hammurabi's Babylonian Empire followed the courses of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers closely, and stretched to the Persian Gulf. Hammurabi carried out a series of advanced political reforms, the most famous of which was the Code of Hammurabi, a set of 282 laws. These laws formed the basis of the Babylonian legal system. They were carved into a *stela*, or stone pillar, which was kept in a special temple in the city. Shortly after Hammurabi's death, the empire began a steady decline and was conquered repeatedly until Babylon was left in ruins.

Assyrian Empire (1100–612 B.C.E.) Assur was a city on the banks of the Tigris River. Originally under Babylonian rule, the Assyrians battled their way to independence and formed a state. Over the course of two centuries, the Assyrians expanded their control and created an empire, ruling over lower Mesopotamia, Persia, Syria, the Sinai Peninsula, and along the southeast coast of the Mediterranean Sea into Egypt. The Assyrians ruled with a combination of organized government and terror. They often completely destroyed the cities they captured, and either killed or enslaved the residents. They developed advanced weapons and military equipment, including the *siege engine*, a cartlike structure that protected soldiers from harm as they shot arrows from their bows. The Assyrians also built a fine library north of Assur in the city of Ninevah, with thousands of clay tablets on the subjects of literature, mathematics, and science. Their empire was overthrown by their rivals, the Chaldeans.

Chaldean Empire (612–539 B.C.E.) Chaldea was another name for Babylonia, the region in the lower valley of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The Chaldeans came to power after gaining control of the city of Babylon through a series of bloody battles. The famous Chaldean king Nebuchadnezzar expanded his empire to include Mesopotamia, Syria, and a portion of the southeast coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Like the Assyrians, the Chaldeans were known for the cruelty of their rule over people they defeated in battle. The Chaldeans conquered Canaan and imprisoned many Israelites, whom they marched to Babylon to work as slaves. Using this slave labor, Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt the city of Babylon in grand style, including construction of the impressive *Hanging Gardens* within the walls of his palace. These beautiful gardens were built upon a series of terraces rising to the palace roof, and were irrigated by pumps in the nearby Euphrates River. In spite of the great wealth and power of the Chaldeans, the Chaldean Empire fell when Babylon was captured by the Persians.

Persian Empire (550–333 B.C.E.) Persia was the name of the kingdom that originated on the *plateau*, or raised level land, east of the Zagros Mountains. The Persian people, originally cattle herders, lived peacefully until they were conquered by warriors from the region west of the Mesopotamian plain. This attack enraged Cyrus, a Persian general. In 550 B.C.E., he organized armies and began a long series of conquests in Mesopotamia and surrounding lands. Persia then expanded to include all of Mesopotamia, Anatolia (modern-day Turkey), Canaan, Egypt, India, and parts of southeastern Europe. Unlike the Assyrians and Chaldeans, the Persians were tolerant rulers who respected the different religions, languages, and customs of the people under their rule. The Persians divided their empire into provinces, and built a series of well-constructed roads to make rapid communication between the provinces possible. The Greek leader Alexander the Great led his armies along one of these royal roads and conquered the Persian Empire in the fourth century B.C.E.
