

Lecture 2: *The Earliest Civilizations: Sumer and Egypt*

1. Characteristics of “Civilization”
2. The Space Between Two Rivers – the case of Mesopotamia
3. On the Banks of the Nile – Egypt

Characteristics of “Civilization”

root meaning *civis* = citizen; or *civitas* = city; *civilis* = one who subscribes to specific agreed upon norms of behavior (laws); and idea of cooperative social organization.

- Presence of **organized states**, with definite boundaries and political and religious leaders
- **Urban centers**
- Distinction of **social classes**
- Economic specialization** – economic networks and systems
- Conscious development of the arts and intellectual attitudes: **writing**; elaboration of **religious views**; **monumental architecture**

The Space Between Two Rivers – The Case of Mesopotamia

- A. Geography and Ecology
 - Tigris and Euphrates Rivers
- B. Social Organization
 - Sumerian Society (ca. 3800-2350 BCE) – City-States = Ur, Uruk, Eridu
 - Ruling Dynasties: Akkadian Empire (2371-1792 BCE)
 - Babylonian Dynasty (begins 1792 BCE)
 - Hammurabi (r. 1792-1750).
- C. Sumerian Culture
 - Law (code of Hammurabi, ca. 1792 BCE)
 - Religion – **Polytheistic** and **Syncretistic: worshiped many gods at the same time**
 - Written Word – cuneiform (ca. 3100 BCE)
 - Literature – Epic of Gilgamesh (ca. 2500 BCE)
 - Monumental Building -- *ziggurats*

On the Banks of the Nile – The Case of Egypt

- A. Geography & Ecology

- The Nile River – Upper and Lower Egypt

•B. Social Organization

-United Egypt: Old Kingdom (ca. 2686-2181 BC)

Middle Kingdom (ca. 2025-1786 BC)

New Kingdom (ca. 1567-1085 BC)

(King Tut or Tutankhamun (r. 1361-1352))

•C. Culture of Egypt

-Political culture of the Pharaohs – and everyone else

-Religion – polytheistic; emphasis on the afterlife – as a continuation of this world

-The Written Word – hieroglyphics & papyrus

-Monumental architecture – the Pyramids

The Written Word: Languages

• Cuneiform – ca. 3100 B.C., Sumerian, first written language, on clay tablets

• Hieroglyphics – ca. 3100 B.C., system of writing developed in Egypt, “sacred letters,” employed around 700 pictorial forms

• Demotic script, (*demos* = of the people) a cursive script also employed in Egypt for everyday documents.

• Greek Alphabet – ca. 700 B.C.