

History 1010: Western Civilization to the Seventeenth Century

Professor Lester

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) = idea of cooperative social organization.

- Presence of **organized states**, with definite boundaries and political and religious leaders
- 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**
- **Urban centers** – density of population

The Fertile Crescent in the Ancient Near East



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)
 - Hammurapi (r. 1792-1750).

C. Sumerian Culture

- Law (code of Hammurabi, ca. 1792 BCE)
- Religion – **Polytheistic** and **Syncretistic**
- Written Word – cuneiform (ca. 3100 BCE)
- Literature – Epic of Gilgamesh (ca. 2500 BCE)
- Monumental Building -- *ziggurats*

The Fertile Crescent in the Ancient Near East



Head of an Akkadian Ruler, c. 2250-2200 B.C., bronze (possibly Sargon I)



Head of an Akkadian Ruler

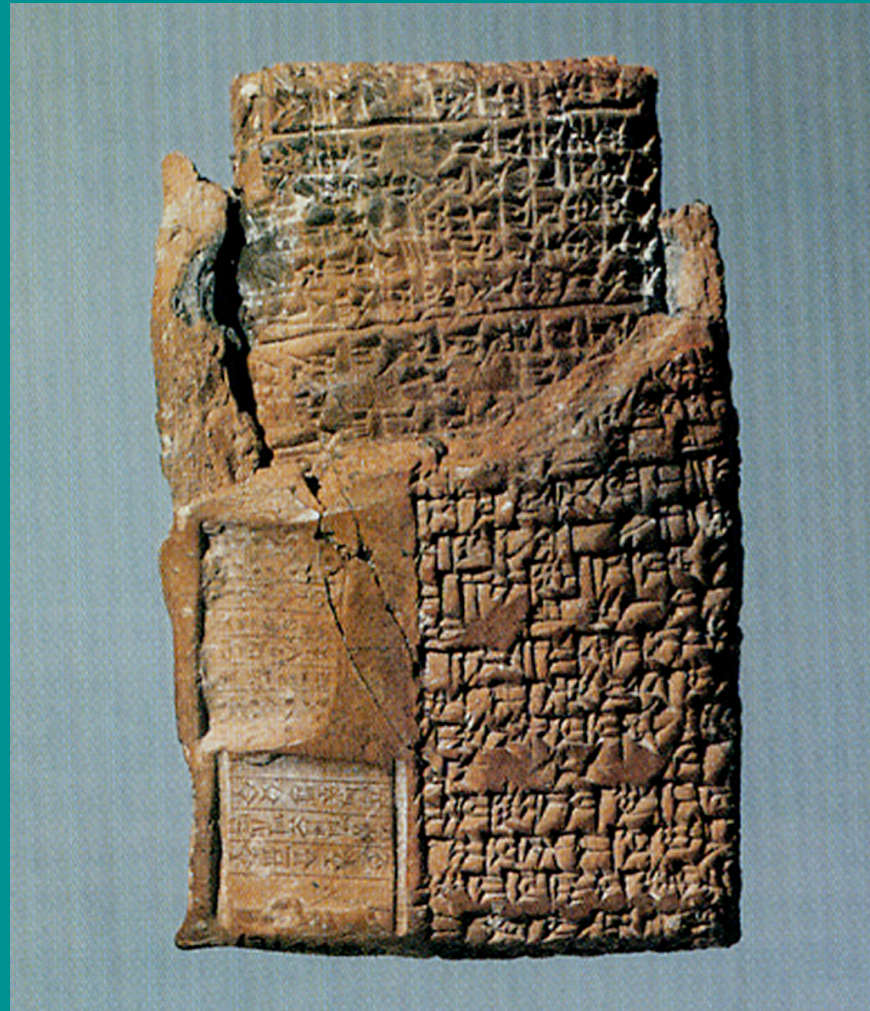
Stele of Hammurabi *c. 1780 BC* – on basalt stone – This stele depicts the king receiving the inspiration for his code of law from the sun god Shamash.



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Letter Written in Cuneiform (c. 1900 B.C.) (Latin: *cuneus* = stylus, pen)



CYLINDER SEAL

Iraq Akkadian Period Reign of Naramsin or Sharkalishari, ca. 2254-2193 B.C.

Black stone 4.2 cm H, 2.5 cm

(Collection of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago).



Mesopotamian Ziggurat at Ur, c. 2100 B.C.



The Fertile Crescent in the Ancient Near East



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

RELIEF FROM THE TOMB OF MENTUEMHAT

Egypt: Thebes, Tomb 34 Late Period Dynasty 25, ca. 690-660 B.C. Limestone, painted
In the relief below, oarsmen paddle small boats made of papyrus bundles through waters teeming with fish; wicker baskets piled high with fruit. (Oriental Institute, University of Chicago)



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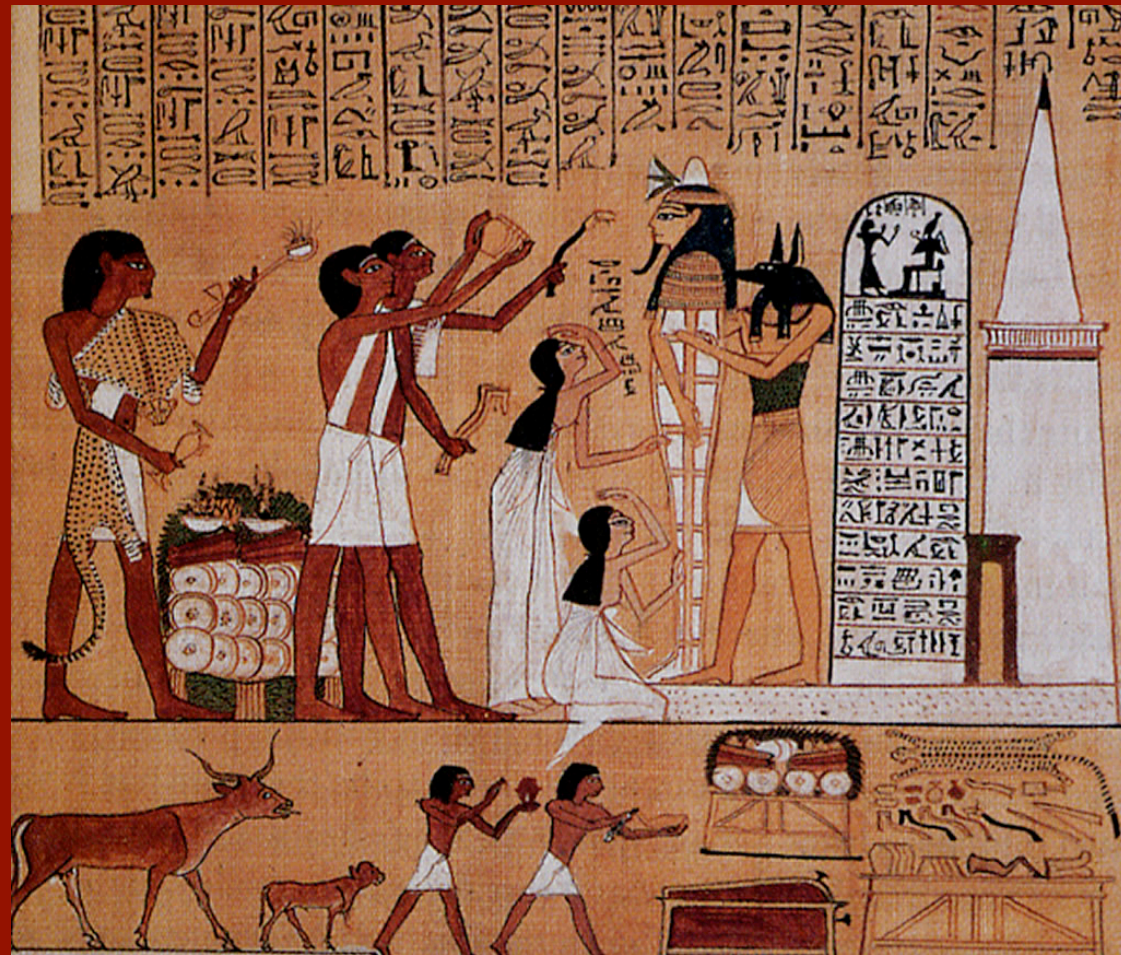
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Seti I, Egyptian Pharaoh, ruling from 1314-1304 BC shows the great ruler who restored order to the kingdom and returned Egyptian art and architecture to the powerful style of past dynasties



“Opening of the Mouth” Ceremony with Hieroglyphs
(Papyrus Scroll of the Book of the Dead).



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.

The Great Pyramid of Giza
(Tomb of the Pharaoh Khufu, c. 2560 B.C.)

