

EPILOGUE

A WORLD NOT TRULY LOST

The ancient Near East was home to one of the longest lasting, most successful civilizations the world has ever seen. Imagine a timeline stretching from the time of the first cities to the present—about 5,500 years. Mesopotamian civilization flourished for more than half of those years: from around 3500 to 330 BCE . . . more than three thousand years. In contrast, the first towns in what later became the United States were founded in the early 1600s, less than four hundred years ago.

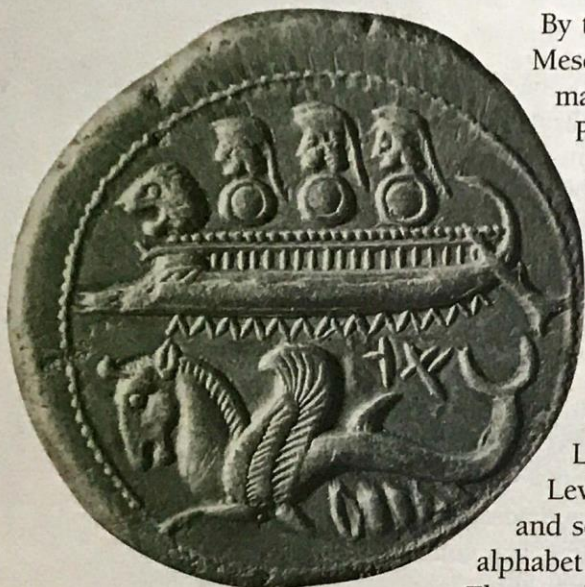
During those three millennia of Mesopotamia's existence, the people made countless inventions that changed the world. They rightly saw themselves at the cutting edge of science and technology. They devised one of the world's first writing systems and the first law collection. The first cities and the first empires grew in these lands. These imaginative people invented the wheel, plow, boat, and irrigation canal—to name just a few more of Mesopotamia's "firsts."

Babylonian architects built vast, stable, brick structures, such as ziggurats and city walls. Mesopotamia's astronomers could predict eclipses of the sun and the moon, and its mathematicians figured out what we call the Pythagorean Theorem (the formula used to calculate the length of one side of a right triangle) more than a thousand years before the Greek mathematician Pythagorus rediscovered it.

A Mesopotamian scribe wrote about right triangles on this tablet. He used the Pythagorean Theorem, which says that in a right-angle triangle where a and b are the two shorter sides and c is the long side, $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$.



On one side of a coin, seafaring Phoenicians sail above a fantastic sea creature with a horse's head and a fish's tail. Coins, invented by the Lydians, became popular among ancient peoples all across the Near East and the Mediterranean.



By the time King Cyrus conquered Mesopotamia, irrigation agriculture made it the wealthiest land in the Persian Empire. Its complicated system of canals, levees, and reservoirs kept the rivers under control and prevented serious floods for hundreds of years. Mesopotamia's neighbors also left important legacies, such as the alphabet from Canaan and money from Lydia. The Phoenicians, in the Levant, mastered boat building and sea navigation and spread their alphabet to other lands.

The people of the ancient Near East are important not only for these world-changing inventions, but also for their ideas and values. Some of the very first royal inscriptions were designed to keep strong or rich people from taking advantage of the poor. The Mesopotamian legal system aimed to prevent corruption, promote fairness, and foster justice. These ancient peoples seem to have lived without much fear of crime and without much fear of the law itself. We know of very few instances where death penalties were actually carried out. Most criminals just paid fines for their offenses.

The people of the ancient Near East expected good behavior of themselves and each another. Someone who cared for his family, dealt fairly with others, and obeyed the laws could hope that the gods would reward him or her with a long life and good luck. One Mesopotamian proverb summed up these expectations, "Commit no crime, and fear of your god will not consume you. Speak no wrong and then grief will not reach your heart. Do no evil and then you

will not experience lasting misfortune." The Mesopotamians had a lot of proverbs to help them live a good life. Another proverb, a version of the Golden Rule, tells a newly married woman "Bride, as you treat your mother-in-law, so will women later treat you."

One of the most influential ideas to develop in the ancient Near East was monotheism, an idea that spread gradually at first but came to be adopted by many of the world's peoples.

In the centuries after Alexander the Great of Greece conquered his empire, people forgot that the Mesopotamians and other peoples of the Near East had developed all these ideas. Some mentions of the Assyrians in the Hebrew Bible and in the writings of Herodotus described the great civilizations that had once existed in the Near East. But by the beginning of modern times, few people realized how ancient or how brilliant these cultures had been. Historians gave credit to the Greeks for many ideas and inventions that had actually come from the peoples of the ancient Near East.

During the 19th century, language experts deciphered cuneiform and archaeologists began to dig in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey—and they began to uncover ancient secrets. Like multiple Alices tumbling down the rabbit hole, archaeologists rediscovered a hidden world that once had been peopled with kings and queens, heroes and common folk. The dreams, ambitions, hopes, fears, and feelings of these people came alive through the texts that they wrote and the remnants that they left of their lives.

MANY SHADES OF GOLD

Some version of the Golden Rule appears in the writings of nearly every religion. The Christian New Testament's Book of Matthew says: "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them." The Hadith of the Muslims warns: "No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself." The Mahabharata of the Hindus advises: "Do nothing to others which, if done to you, would cause you pain." The Jewish Talmud says: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow men." And the Udana-Varga of the Buddhists puts it this way: "Hurt not others with that which pains yourself." The message is the same.

TIMELINE

The centuries BCE and CE are mirror images of each other. The years go backwards before the Year 1 CE. So someone born in 2000 BCE who died in 1935 BCE would have lived to be 65 years old. On both sides of the "mirror," the 200s can also be called the 3rd century, the 900s are called the 10th century and so on—BCE as well as CE.

8000–3800 BCE
Neolithic Age

8000 BCE
First farming communities in the Near East; tokens first used as accounting system

5000 BCE
Southern Mesopotamia first settled; first shrine built at Eridu

4000 BCE
First towns established in Mesopotamia and Syria

3800–1200 BCE
Bronze Age

3800–3100 BCE
Uruk period

3500 BCE
Cities develop in Mesopotamia; pottery wheel first used; plow invented

3350 BCE
Accounting tokens enclosed in clay balls

3200 BCE
Pictographic writing invented



3100 BCE
Wheel and first wagon invented

3000 BCE
Use of cuneiform writing begins

2900 BCE
Kingship and city-states begin

2600–2450 BCE
Royal tombs of Ur built

2600 BCE
Mebaragesi writes first-known royal inscription; Gilgamesh of Uruk possibly reigns

around 2500 BCE
Indo-Europeans begin to migrate

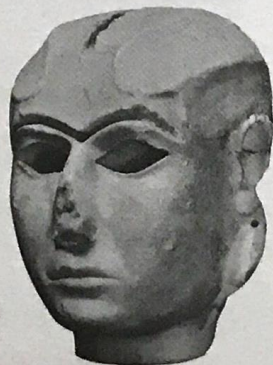
2400 BCE
Eannatum of Lagash reigns; city of Ebla flourishes in Syria; first personal letters written

2340–2284 BCE
Sargon of Akkad reigns and creates first empire, installs daughter Enheduanna as high priestess

around 2300 BCE
Ebla destroyed

2300 BCE
Burials at Umm el-Marra

2260–2223 BCE
Naram-Sin of Akkad reigns



2113–2096 BCE
Ur-Nammu of Ur reigns

2094–2047 BCE
Reign of Shulgi of Ur, creator of first law collection

around 2000 BCE
Amorites invade Mesopotamia

2000–1500 BCE
Old Babylonian Period

1792–1750 BCE
Hammurabi of Babylon reigns

1775–1761 BCE
Zimri-Lim of Mari reigns

1755 BCE
Hammurabi's laws established

1749–1712 BCE
Samsu-iluna of Babylon reigns

1650 BCE
Sippar destroyed

1625–1595 BCE
Samsu-ditana of Babylon reigns

1595 BCE
Mursili I of Hatti attacks Babylon; Old Babylonian Empire ends

1595–1500 BCE
Period of turmoil in the Near East



1500–1176 BCE
International Age

before 1500 BCE
Abraham leads Hebrews to Levant

1500 BCE
Kassites in power in Babylon; Kingdom of Mittani begins; Hittite Empire expands

1387–1350 BCE
Amenhotep III reigns in Egypt; height of the International Age

around 1200 BCE
Sin-leqe-unnini writes *Epic of Gilgamesh*

around 1200 BCE
Moses leads Israelites from Egypt to Levant

1185 BCE
Ugarit, Syria, and Hattusa, Hittite capital, destroyed

1176 BCE
Sea Peoples attack Egypt

1200 BCE
Iron Age begins

1176–911 BCE
Dark Age

around 1020 BCE
Saul of Israel reigns

around 1000 BCE
David of Israel reigns



around 960 BCE

Solomon of Israel reigns, builds the temple

922 BCE

Israel divides into two kingdoms

911–612

Assyrian Empire

885–874 BCE

Omri of Israel reigns

883–859 BCE

Ashurnasirpal II of Assyria reigns

722 BCE

Assyria conquers Israel

704–681 BCE

Sennacherib of Assyria reigns

649–547 BCE

Adad-guppi, mother of Nabonidus, lives

612 BCE

Nineveh destroyed; Assyrian Empire ends

612 BCE

Neo-Babylonian Empire begins

605–562 BCE

Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon reigns

598–597 BCE

Jehoiachin of Judah reigns

**587 BCE**

Babylon conquers Judah, destroys temple at Jerusalem

560–547 BCE

Croesus of Lydia reigns

559–530 BCE

King Cyrus of Persia reigns

555–539 BCE

Nabonidus of the Neo-Babylonian Empire reigns

550 BCE

Cyrus defeats the Medes; founds Persian Empire

547 BCE

Cyrus defeats Lydia

539 BCE

Cyrus conquers Neo-Babylonian Empire

522–486 BCE

Darius I of Persia reigns

490 BCE

Persia attacks Greece

486–465 BCE

Xerxes of Persia reigns

330 BCE

Alexander the Great defeats the Persian Empire



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Ancient Art: Mesopotamia

<http://www.dia.org/collections/ancient/mesopotamia/mesopotamia.html>

A brief introduction from the Detroit Institute of Arts to the history and culture of ancient Mesopotamia, illustrated by objects from the museum's collection.

The Beginning of Writing and the First Alphabets

<http://www.nb.no/baser/schoyen/4/4.4/441.html>

Pictures of early Canaanite writing from Norway's Schoyen Collection.

Egypt's Golden Empire: Amenhotep III

<http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/amenhotep.html>

PBS website about Amenhotep III, with images of the king and some of the Amarna letters.

The Flood Narrative from the Gilgamesh Epic

<http://pseudepigrapha.com/pseudepigrapha/gilgamesh.html>

A translation by E. A. Speiser of the flood story in the Epic of Gilgamesh.

Hammurabi's Code of Laws

<http://eawc.evansville.edu/anthology/hammurabi.htm>

Hammurabi's code, translated by L. W. King. Part of a University of Evansville website called Exploring Ancient World Cultures.

Hattusha

<http://www.hattuscha.de/eng/eng.html>

A project of the German Institute of Archaeology, this website includes a history and photographic tour of the city of Hattusa, along with a timeline of excavations.

Internet Ancient History Sourcebook

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/asbook.html>

A website run by Fordham University of primary sources from the ancient world, including Mesopotamia, Egypt, Persia, and Israel. Includes such sources as the Legend of Sargon, Book of Exodus, and Sumerian proverbs.

The Johns Hopkins/University of Amsterdam Joint Expedition to Tell Umm el-Marra, Syria

<http://www.jhu.edu/neareast/uem/index.html>

Photos and findings from the Johns Hopkins/University of Amsterdam excavations at Umm el-Marra.

Mesopotamia

<http://www.mesopotamia.co.uk/>

A wealth of information about the ancient Near East, illustrated with objects from the collections of the British Museum. Topics include: Assyrian palaces and warfare; Babylonian astronomers; Mesopotamian geography, writing, and religion; royal tombs of Ur; trade and transport; and ziggurats.

Museum of the Ancient Near East in the Pergamon Museum

<http://www.smb.spk-berlin.de/vam/e/s.html>

Images of the Ishtar Gate in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.

The Northwest Palace of Ashur-nasir-pal II at Nimrud

<http://www.learningsites.com/NWPalace/NWPalhome.html>

A virtual tour of the palace at Calhu (Nimrud).

The Oriental Institute

<http://orientalinstitute.uchicago.edu/OI/default.html>

Official website of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute, dedicated to documenting and studying the languages, history and cultures of the ancient Near East. Site includes: expedition photographs from Persepolis; highlights of the Institute's Canaan/Palestine and Mesopotamian collections; objects stolen from the National Museum in Baghdad in 2003; pictures of tells at Babylon, Eridu, Calhu, Nineveh, Ur, and Uruk; and virtual tours of the Institute's Mesopotamian and Persian galleries.

Sumerian Inscription: Umma and Lagash

<http://www.northpark.edu/history/Classes/Sources/UmmaLagash.html>

Documents found on clay cylinders that date from about 2500 BCE. With explanatory notes from the history department at North Park University—Chicago.

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