**Ancient Mesopotamia The Sumer History >>**

**Ancient Mesopotamia**

**SOURCE:** [**http://www.ducksters.com/history/mesopotamia/ancient\_sumer.php**](http://www.ducksters.com/history/mesopotamia/ancient_sumer.php)

**----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------**

The Sumerians are thought to have formed the first human civilization in world history. They lived in southern Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in the Middle East.

The cities of Sumer - The Sumer Dynasty by Crates - Cradle of Civilization

Many historians think that cities and towns were first formed in Sumer around 5000 BC. Nomads moved into the fertile land and began to form small villages, which slowly grew into large towns. Eventually these cities developed into the civilization of the Sumer. This land is often called the "Cradle of Civilization". Sumer City-States As the Sumerian villages grew into large cities, they formed city-states. This is where a city government would rule the city as well as the land around it. These city-states often fought each other. They built walls around their cities for protection. Farmland was outside the walls, but people would retreat to the city when invaders came. There were many city-states throughout Sumer. Some of the most powerful city-states included Eridu, Bad-tibura, Shuruppak, Uruk, Sippar, and Ur. Eridu is thought to be the first of the major cities formed and one of the oldest cities in the world. Sumerian Rulers and Government Each city-state had its own ruler. They went by various titles such as lugal, en, or ensi. The ruler was like a king or governor. The ruler of the city was often the high priest of their religion as well. This gave him even more power. The most famous king was Gilgamesh of Uruk who was the subject of the Epic of Gilgamesh, one of the world's oldest surviving works of literature. In addition to the king or governor, there was a fairly complex government with officials who helped to organize city building projects and keep the city running. There were also laws that the citizens must follow or face punishment. The invention of government is often credited to the Sumerians. Religion Each city-state also had its own god. In the center of each city was a large temple to the city god called a ziggurat. The ziggurat looked like a step pyramid with a flat top. Here the priests would perform rituals and sacrifices. Important Inventions and Technology One of the great contributions the Sumerians made to civilization was their many inventions. They invented the first form of writing, a number system, the first wheeled vehicles, sun-dried bricks, and irrigation for farming. All of these things were important for the development of human civilization. They also had an interest in science including astronomy and the movement of the moon and the stars. They used this information to make a more accurate calendar. Fun Facts About the Sumerians Their number system was based on the number 60, like ours is based on the number 10. They used this when they came up with 60 minutes in an hour and 360 degrees in a circle. We still use these divisions today. Some historians think that the ziggurat at the city of Eridu was the Tower of Babel from the Bible. Some of the city-states were quite large. Ur is thought to have been the largest and may have had a population of 65,000 people at its peak. Their buildings and homes were made from sun-dried bricks. The Sumerian language was eventually replaced by the Akkadian language around 2500 BC.

**Activities:**

Take a ten-question quiz about this page. Listen to a recorded reading of this page: Your browser does not support the audio element.

Learn More about Ancient Mesopotamia:

Overview Timeline of Mesopotamia Great Cities of Mesopotamia The Ziggurat Science, Inventions, and Technology Assyrian Army Persian Wars Glossary and Terms Civilizations Sumerians Akkadian Empire Babylonian Empire Assyrian Empire Persian Empire Culture Daily Life of Mesopotamia Art and Artisans Religion and Gods Code of Hammurabi Sumerian Writing and Cuneiform Epic of Gilgamesh People Famous Kings of Mesopotamia Cyrus the Great Darius I Hammurabi Nebuchadnezzar II Works Cited History >> Ancient Mesopotamia

Read more at: <http://www.ducksters.com/history/mesopotamia/ancient_sumer.php>  
This text is Copyright © Ducksters. Do not use without permission.