

THE MESOPOTAMIAN CIVILIZATION

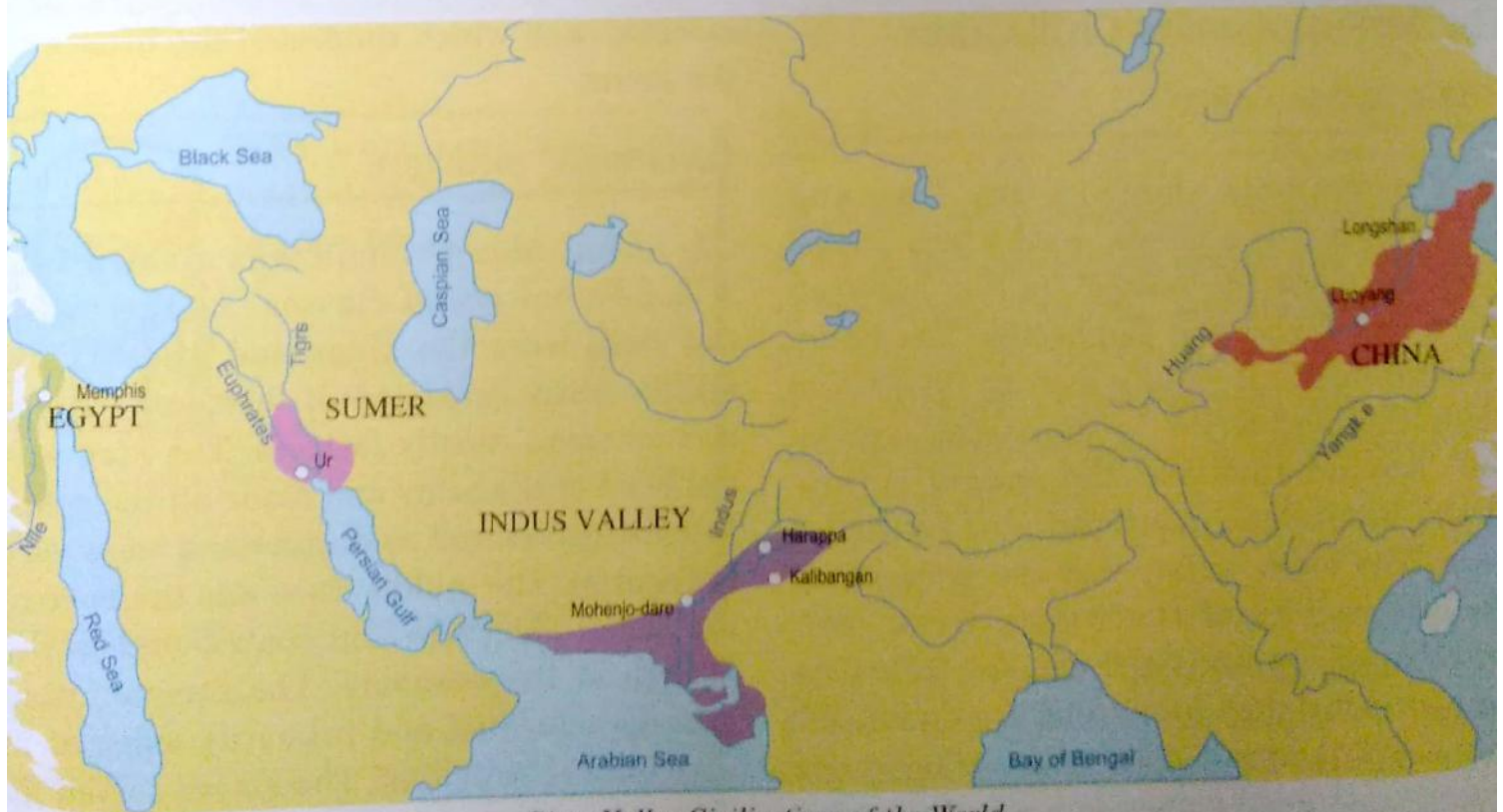


Introduction

We all know that History is the study of our past. It tells us how our today has been shaped through past events. We live in a civilized world, but how did it become so? What does it mean? Civilization is a

process where groups of people live together and evolve culturally. They gain knowledge of utilising the resources around them.

Humans before civilization were nomadic hunter-gatherers. Over thousands of years they formed communities and developed



River Valley Civilizations of the World



civilizations. These civilizations developed their own culture and way of life. Therefore, civilizations around the world are different in different geographical locations. It is these ancient civilizations that have laid the foundation for the world that we know today. The oldest known civilizations of the world are the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Indus Valley and Chinese. These civilizations are also called River Valley Civilizations. Can you guess why?

Reasons for Settlement Near Rivers

1. The first reason is food. The rivers provided water for irrigation, drinking etc. Besides this, it was also a source of fish and meat.
2. Man learnt to grow crops as the rivers made the land fertile. This gave them time to enjoy other cultural pursuits and engage in leisure activities.
3. Rivers created an ideal transport network to carry people and goods which in turn gave rise to trade.

The Mesopotamian Civilization

Origin and Location

Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq and Kuwait) is a Greek word which means '*land between the rivers*'. It lies between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. The rivers overflowed their banks during floods and made the land fertile by depositing alluvial soil. Around 4500 BCE, the ancient culture of the Sumerians developed and flourished here. The lower valley was the area where the oldest city of the world, Uruk, was established. Around 2400 BCE, the Akkadian empire flourished and ruled for about 200 years. The Assyrian civilization followed and it was a dominant empire for a very long time.

Another important civilization of this region was the Babylonian. Mesopotamia is known as 'The Cradle of Civilization' as it gave rise to a number of civilizations.

Features of Mesopotamian Civilization

Town Planning

The city of Ur and other prominent cities of Mesopotamia were built with a protective wall around them.

The walls were cut at right angles and towers were built there. They were also surrounded by small villages. The main temple, in the sacred area of the town, was built on a multilayered platform or Ziggurat dedicated to the patron god of the city. The central part was inhabited by the rich and powerful people of the society. The rest of the city was made up of narrow lanes and houses were built along them. The houses did not face the streets but had open courtyards and all the rooms opened into it. They had a door like opening in the external wall which connected the houses to the street.

Community Structure

Ancient Mesopotamia was divided into different social classes. At the top of the class were the kings and priests. The middle class consisted of farmers, traders and artisans, mostly farmers. The king was the head of the army and made all the rules. Priests also served as doctors and were very influential. The middle class was the **core** of the social structure and contributed to the growth of the economy. The common man was not educated and primarily engaged in agricultural activities. The slaves served all other classes.



City of Ur



Ruins of the historic city of Babylon

LET'S
DISCUSS

Why were boys and girls treated differently? Does it happen today?



Family

Males were considered more important in the society and father was the head of the family. His wife and children had to follow the rules laid down by him. The boys were taught skills to help them earn a living and the girls were trained to take care of the house and children.

Occupation

Agriculture was their main occupation because of abundant supply of water throughout the year. They invented ox-drawn ploughs and used transport with wheels for

goods. They were the first who are believed to have cultivated wheat and barley, pulses and fruits as well.

Mesopotamians built a highly developed irrigation system because of irregular flooding in the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. They built dykes to control floods.

Jewellery making, carpentry, shoemaking and weaving were other occupations of the people of this civilization.

Animals such as cow, ox, sheep, donkey were domesticated.

Trade

Mesopotamians had a **flourishing** trade and they traded in wool, cloth, grains, oil and jewellery. They used **barter** system and exchanged these items along with silver, gold, tin, copper and barley to buy things such as stone, timber and metal

ores. Trade was carried out with Egypt, Mediterranean countries and even Indus Valley. The record of trade was inscribed on clay tablets.

Art and Architecture

They used clay and mud for their pottery. Mainly war and religion were depicted in their art and architecture. The designs were geometrical. Many cylindrical seals have also been found which have detailed designs of deities and animals and daily life. Ziggurats were the beautiful temple towers built by the Mesopotamians. They used sun-baked mud bricks and adobe – a mixture of sand, straw and glass – for the construction of these tall structures. These temple towers served as temples of learning and business. Mesopotamian houses and other buildings had domes, arches and vaults. Sumerians were the first to build a city of gardens, temple, streets and markets.



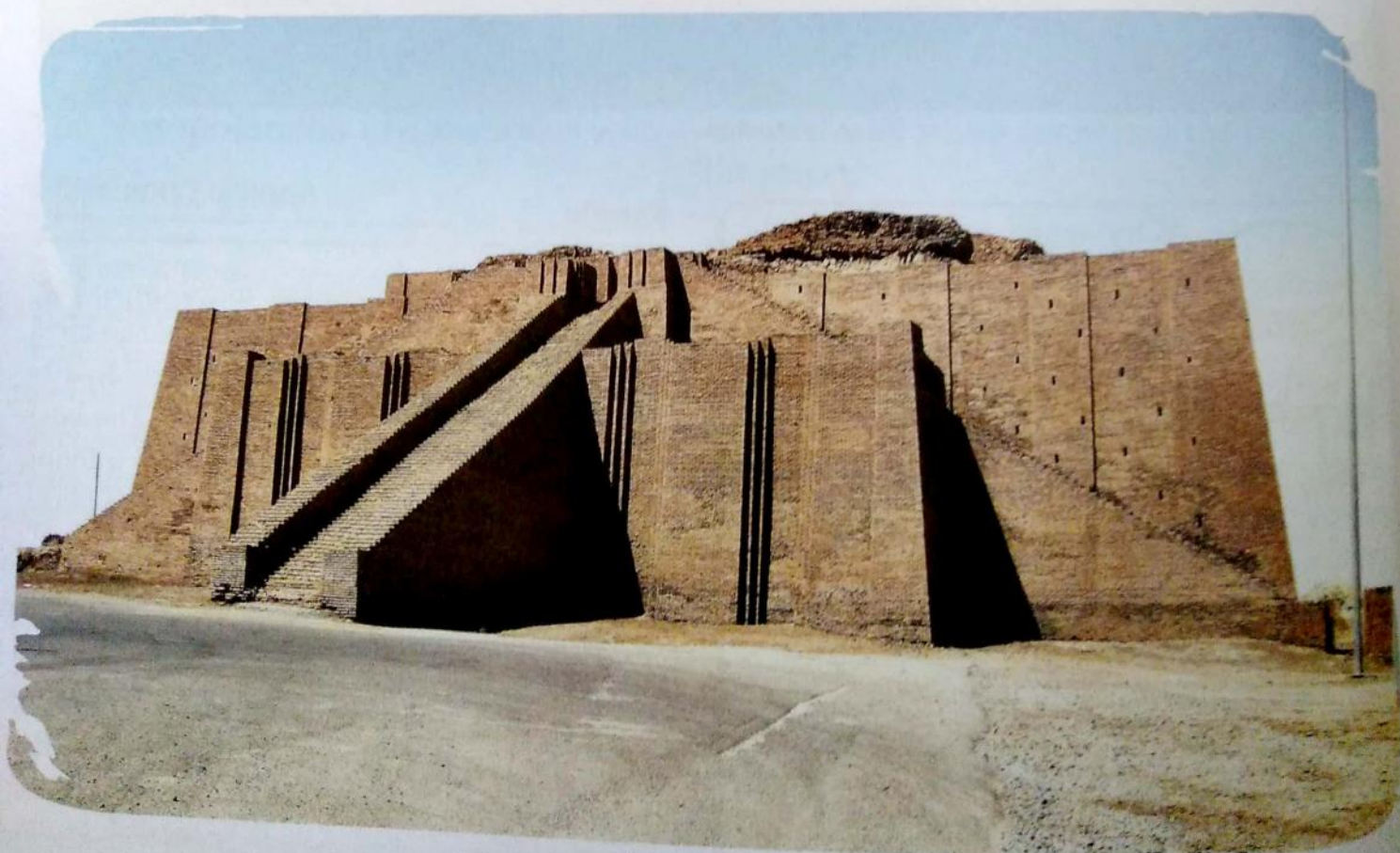
Religion

The people believed in many gods. Each deity had a temple where they worshipped. The deity was placed in a statue or figure. The gods were called Enki, Enlil, Inanna, etc.

Shamash was the sun god. Enki was the god of water. Inanna was the goddess of love and war.

Decorative

The Mesopotamians used a lot of decorative elements in their art and architecture.



A Ziggurat



Harvest time. God of fresh water Enki can be seen second from right.

Religious Beliefs

They believed in many Gods and offered prayers to various deities. They also believed in demons created by their gods. Each city had its own patron God and they made special multilayered platforms or ziggurats which served as temples where people made offerings to their deity. Inside the worshiping area, people placed a wide eyed and clasped hands stone figure to pray on their behalf. Their main Gods were:

Shamash – Sun God and king of all Gods.

Enki – The wise God of fresh water. According to the Sumerians, Enki was the son of the god of Sky, Anu. Enki was the patron deity of the city of Eridu.

Innana – The most important Goddess. She was the deity of war, love and fertility.

Decline of Mesopotamian Civilization

The main reason for the decline of this civilization was the war between city

GOOD TO KNOW

The origins of the sixty-second minute and sixty-minute hour can be traced all the way back to ancient Mesopotamia. Like the decimal system based on 10, Sumerians used a sexagesimal structure that was based around groupings of 60. This easily divisible number system was later adopted by the ancient Babylonians, who used it for astronomical calculations on the lengths of the months and the year.

states which destroyed most of the life. Another important reason was water. The rivers made the soil fertile but the farming land was below the level of the rivers. Standing water in the fields left minerals and salts in the soil which **eroded** it of its nutrients over time.

VALUE LEARNING

Is it important to keep written records? How did it help the early Mesopotamians?



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VOCABULARY

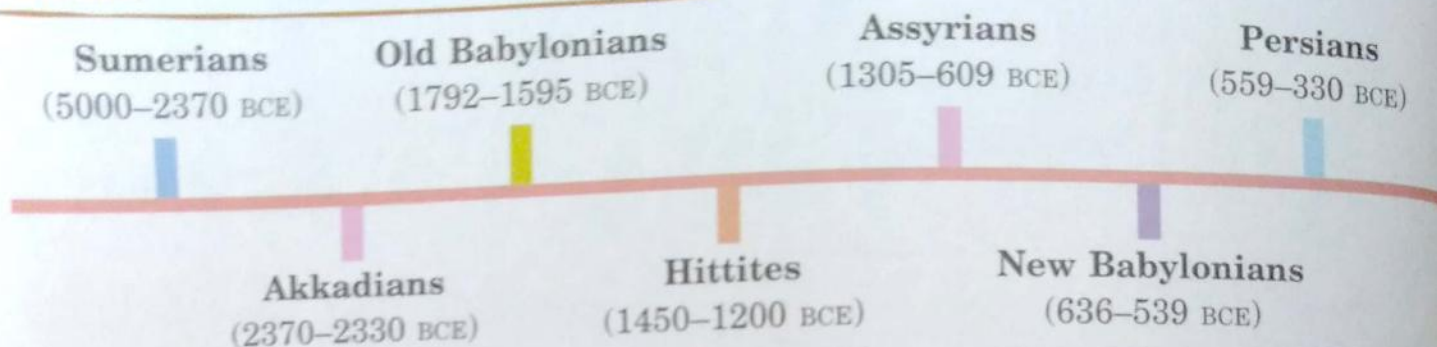
Core: the part of something that is central to its existence or character

Flourishing: developing rapidly

Barter: exchange of goods and services for other services without using money

Eroded: gradual destruction

Timeline



LET'S RECALL

- The oldest known civilizations of the world are the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Indus Valley and Chinese. These civilizations are also called River Valley Civilizations.
- Mesopotamia lies between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. Around 4500 BCE, the ancient culture of the Sumerians developed and flourished here. The lower valley was the area where the oldest city of the world, Uruk, was established.
- Mesopotamians were engaged in agricultural activities. Other important jobs were that of a boat maker, jeweller, artisan, carpenter, shoemaker and weaver.
- They used a barter system to exchange silver, gold, tin, copper and barley to buy things they needed. They traded extensively with Egypt, Mediterranean countries and even Indus Valley.
- They used clay and mud for their pottery and sculptures. Mainly war and religion were depicted in their art and architecture.
- Ziggurats or temple towers were built by them to pray to their deities. These temple towers were built on a raised platform and the highest level was the prayer room. Ziggurats also served as learning centres.
- They believed in many gods and offered prayers to various deities. They also believed in demons created by their gods.

Tasks

1. Fill in the blanks.

- Civilizations in different geographic locations lay the for the world as we know today.
- Prominent cities of Mesopotamia were built with a wall around them.

- (c) The main temple was built on multilayered platforms or
- (d) was the Sun God.
- (e) They had a trade and traded in wool, cloth, grains, oil and jewellery.

2. Match the following.

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| (a) Mixture of sand, straw and glass | (i) Babylonian |
| (b) A learning centre | (ii) Uruk |
| (c) An important civilization of this time | (iii) Barter |
| (d) Oldest city of the world | (iv) Adobe |
| (e) Exchange of goods and services | (v) Ziggurat |

3. Write true or false.

- (a) Ziggurats were single-layered platforms.
- (b) Mesopotamia lies between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates.
- (c) Ancient Mesopotamians believed in many gods.
- (d) Father was the head of the family.
- (e) Traders kept written records.

4. Define the following.

- (a) Barter system
- (b) River Valley Civilization
- (c) Mesopotamia

5. Answer the following question in brief (40–50 words).

- (a) What do you mean by civilization? Name any two.
- (b) Give two main features of cities in Mesopotamia.
- (c) What was the occupation of the Mesopotamians?
- (d) Give reasons for the decline of the Mesopotamian Civilization.
- (e) What is a Ziggurat?
- (f) What is the contribution of Mesopotamian civilization in the field of architecture?

6. Write in detail.

- (a) Write a note on the origin of the Mesopotamian civilization.
- (b) What were the religious beliefs of the people of Mesopotamia?
- (c) 'The family hierarchy favoured the men.' Is this statement true? Explain.

Picture based questions

1. Look at the picture given below and answer the following questions.



- Name the structure.
- Name one important feature of this structure.
- Why was it important to people?

2. Identify the image and answer the following questions.



- Name the deity in this image.
- Who was his father?
- Of which city was this the patron deity?

Project work

- Read more about the Mesopotamian civilization and make an interesting collage.
- Which three aspects did you find most unusual about this civilization?
- The Hanging Gardens of Babylon are an architectural wonder. They were also one of the ancient Seven Wonders of the world. Find out more about it.

For more information, please log on to...

- mesopotamia.mrdonn.org > ziggurats
- <https://www.timemaps.com/civilizations/ancient-mesopotamia>

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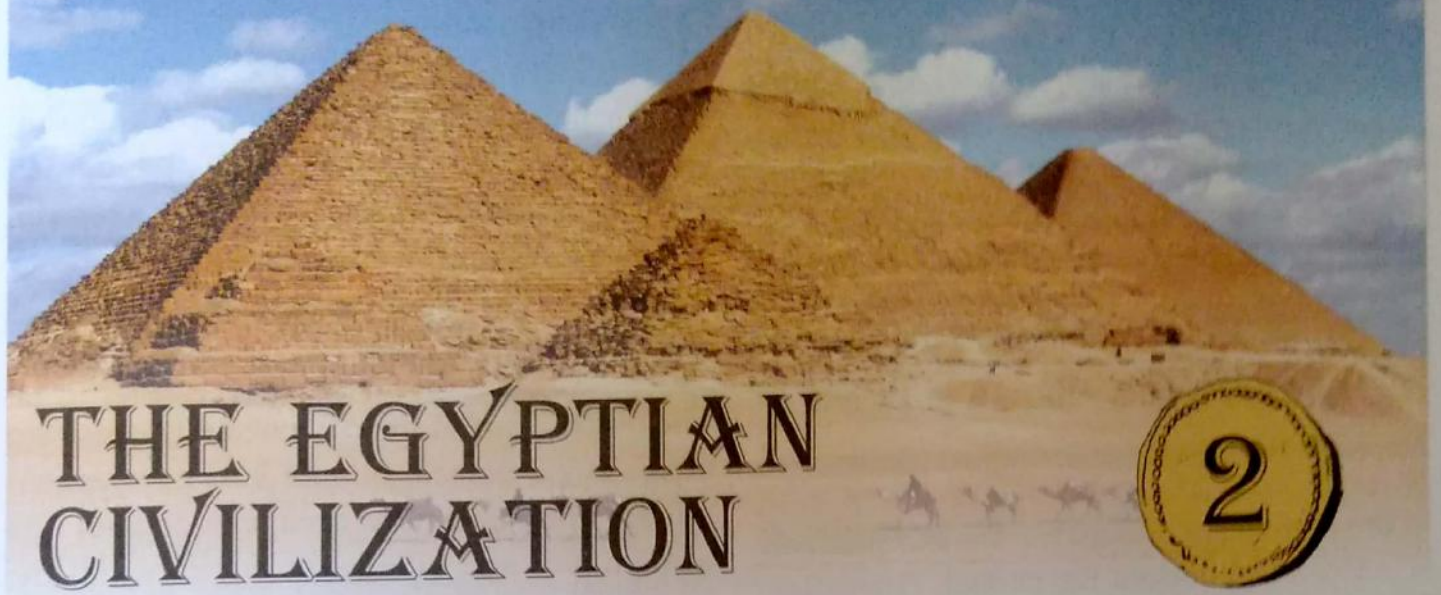
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THE EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION



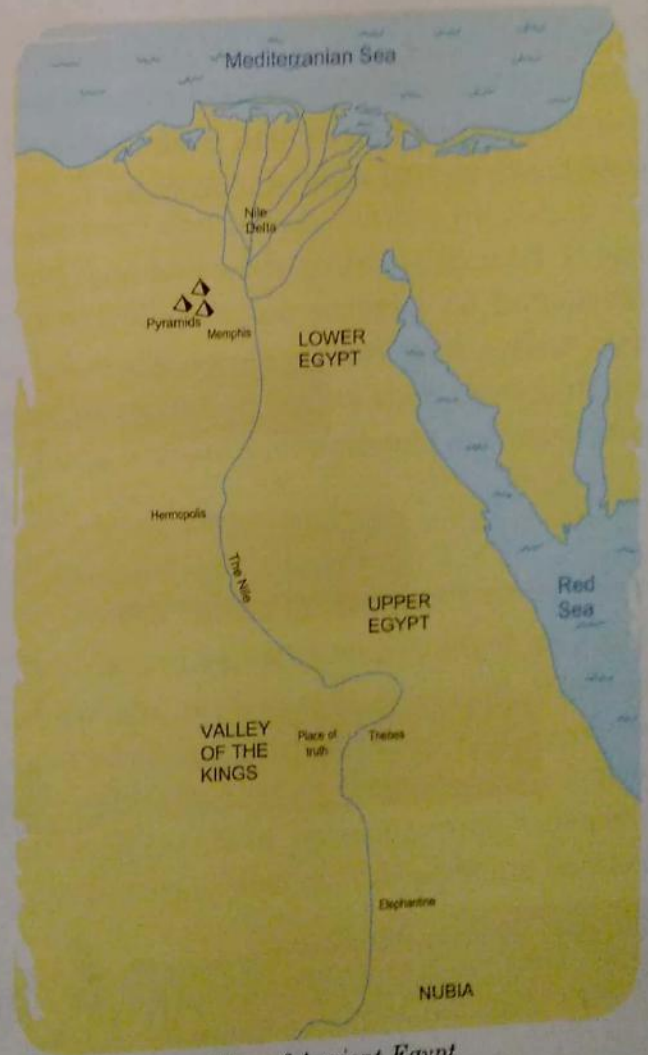
Introduction

The second great river valley civilization is the Egyptian. It is one of the earliest civilizations in the world. Egypt is a land of rich cultural heritage, temples, tombs, pyramids and the Great Sphinx. Let us now find out about how this civilization developed.

The Egyptian Civilization

Origin and Location

Egypt is the country that connects Africa with the Middle East. Like other river valley civilizations, it also developed along a river called Nile which was the lifeline of the people of Egypt. The Greek historian Herodotus aptly called Egypt the 'Gift of Nile'. The flooding of river Nile led the people to farming in the fertile soil left behind by the river. The advantage of the flooding of river beds helped them to produce surplus crops. There was no shortage of food.



Map of Ancient Egypt

The river Nile was also a means of transportation for the people of this civilization. Trade flourished during this time.

Around 5500 BCE, two major kingdoms developed here. They were Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt. Around 3200 BCE, they were united under the rule of Menes, the pharaoh. Under the pharaohs, Egypt prospered. The History of Egypt is divided into three parts:

The Old Kingdom: 3000 BCE to 2100 BCE

The Middle Kingdom: 2100 BCE to 1700 BCE

The New Kingdom: 1600 BCE to 1100 BCE

In the year 30 BCE, Cleopatra, the last pharaoh of independent ancient Egypt died. Thereafter, the Romans captured Egypt.

GOOD TO KNOW

Nile is the longest river (6650 kilometres) in the world and flows north from the heart of Africa to the Mediterranean Sea.

Features of Egyptian Civilization

Town Planning

The towns were built at a height to save them from flooding by the river Nile. Only a few cities like Memphis, Akhetaten and Thebes were planned. As the population grew, houses were constructed haphazardly. Cities grew around important religious or trading centres. They were surrounded by an outer wall.

The central part of the city normally consisted of the royal palace, temple and government offices. The residential area was divided into a main city and village for workers. All the houses were built parallel to the river. Large houses had spaces between them. The spaces were gradually filled by smaller dwellings that shared walls with neighbouring houses. Wealthy people had large villas made of stone with many rooms and a garden. They even had bathrooms. The common man, however,

Pharaoh

The pharaoh ruled Egypt as a god.



Nobles

Officials and priests helped run the government and temples.



Scribes and Craftspeople

Scribes wrote and craftspeople produced goods.



Farmers, Servants, and Slaves

Most Egyptians were farmers. Below them were servants and slaves.



Social Hierarchy

lived in smaller one- or two-room houses. Therefore, the size of the house depicted the social standing of its owner. Temples had a symmetrical design with wide roads around it. The royal palace was built with high walls. It was located at a distance from the rest of the living quarters.

Community Structure

The society was structured in **tiers**. The Pharaohs were at the top of the pyramid. They were believed to be gods on earth. Vizier, the most important government official was his chief adviser. He was followed by other officials like the head of treasury and the chief of army. Other important people in this top order were the priests and nobles who ruled different regions called nomes. Scribes, soldiers, craftsmen and merchants formed the middle segment of the societal hierarchy. At the bottom were the farmers. Slaves were the lowest of the pyramid.

Family

Nuclear family was a basic unit in the Egyptian society. The father was the head of the family and responsible for their well being. The mother took care of the household and her children. Each family had many children. Daughters were kept at home and taught skills to look after the house. The sons were sent to schools to get an education. One's **lineage** was traced through both father's and mother's side. Children were supposed to take care of old parents. It was the duty of the eldest son to ensure that his parents received a proper burial. The position of women was better than that of their Mesopotamian **counterparts**. They enjoyed greater freedom and respect. In the eyes of the law, they were treated almost equal to men.



Why was a proper burial considered important in Egyptian civilization?

Occupation

Most of the jobs were **hereditary**. People worked as farmers, fishermen, weavers, carpenters or potters. They also domesticated donkeys, goats, camels and horses. Some of the main crops that were wheat, barley and corn. They used surplus barley and corn to make beer and bread. Scribes or people who could read and write were highly paid. Priests and astrologers too enjoyed an honourable social standing. Sculptors and artists were considered important as they contributed to building beautiful monuments and decorating them.

Trade

Goods and services were valued on a unit known as deben (approx. 90 grams of copper or silver). Besides agricultural produce, the Egyptians traded in gold, linen, spices and lapis lazuli (a precious stone). Ancient Egyptians were also master perfume makers.

VALUE LEARNING

Does learning and mastering a skill help a person to lead a better life?

Egypt was a centre of trade for perfumes. They also exported cosmetics, balms, lotions, oils and medicines. Another important trading item was papyrus. It was used to make sheets for writing or painting and also for making articles such as rope and furniture. Ancient Egyptians traded with their neighbouring countries and far-off lands.

Art and Architecture

The ancient Egyptians used the predictable flooding of Nile to their advantage and established a stable agricultural system. This gave them time to pursue various arts. They were also master craftsmen. Their pottery was made of clay and was left in the hot sun to dry. They decorated their pots with symbols and colourful dyes. The lids were given a distinct dark colour.

Architecture flourished in this region as this fertile valley was surrounded by a desert. There were thus no foreign invasions for many years.

The main building materials used in ancient Egypt were stone and unbaked mud bricks.

While stone was used to build tombs and temples, mud bricks were used for all other constructions including fortresses, the great walls of towns and for subsidiary buildings in temple complexes.

Tomb architecture

Tomb architecture in Egypt was grand and highly developed. It was a place where their dead were protected and provided with all material objects to ensure their comfortable journey after death. Most tombs had two parts—one for the actual burial and one where offerings to the dead could be made. The kings were placed in larger tombs with many chambers. The most common shape of a tomb was a pyramid. The finest example of which is the Great Pyramid of King Khufu or Cheops at Giza. It is the oldest of the seven wonders of the ancient world and the only one that is still, mostly, intact. It has three chambers. The lower chamber upon which the pyramid is built and two more upper chambers for the king and the queen. In the same complex stands another architectural wonder, the Sphinx. It is a **mythical** figure with a human head and the body of a lion.



An Egyptian vase



Palette of Narmer (Menes)



Pyramid of Giza and Great Sphinx



Statues of Ramases II

Religious Beliefs

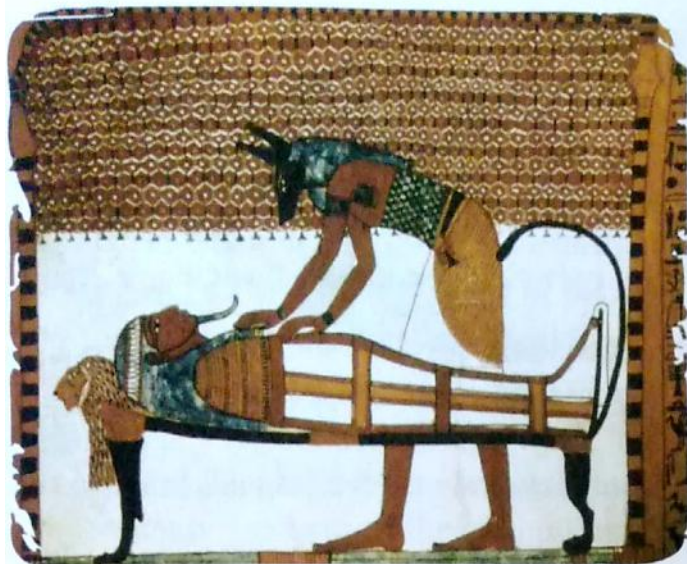
Ancient Egyptians believed in many Gods. Religion was an integral part of the society at every level. Each city had its own god and each god had his or her own temple and priest. The Gods had human body but the head of an animal. Their main god, Ra, had the head of a falcon. River Nile and some animals like the crocodile and hawk were also considered sacred. Egyptians also believed in life after death. The bodies of pharaohs were embalmed and buried in pyramids along with

food, clothes, jewellery and weapons. Anubis was the god of funeral and he was believed to take the dead people to meet Osiris, God of the underworld. Anubis had the head of a jackal and Osiris was represented as a king with blue skin and white robes.

Mummification

The bodies of the dead were embalmed to be preserved before they were placed in tombs. They used a mixture of oils and spices on the body to keep it intact. The body





Depiction of Anubis Preparing a Dead Body to Meet Osiris

was finally covered in a fine linen cloth and then put in a **coffin**. This process was called

mummification. As it was expensive, it was used only for kings, the royal family and other rich people.

Decline of Egyptian Civilization

Pharaoh Ramses II was one of the greatest pharaohs of ancient Egypt. He was succeeded by his son Ramses III. During his reign, Egypt faced attacks from outsiders which eventually led to its decline. After his death, it was split into two kingdoms. In 525 BCE, Egypt was conquered by the Persians. Alexander the great took over the reign of Egypt in 332 BCE and finally it became a part of the Roman empire in 30 BCE after the defeat of Queen Cleopatra.

VOCABULARY

Aptly: suitable

Haphazardly: lacking planning or order

Tiers: levels

Lineage: members of family of a person who lived a long time ago

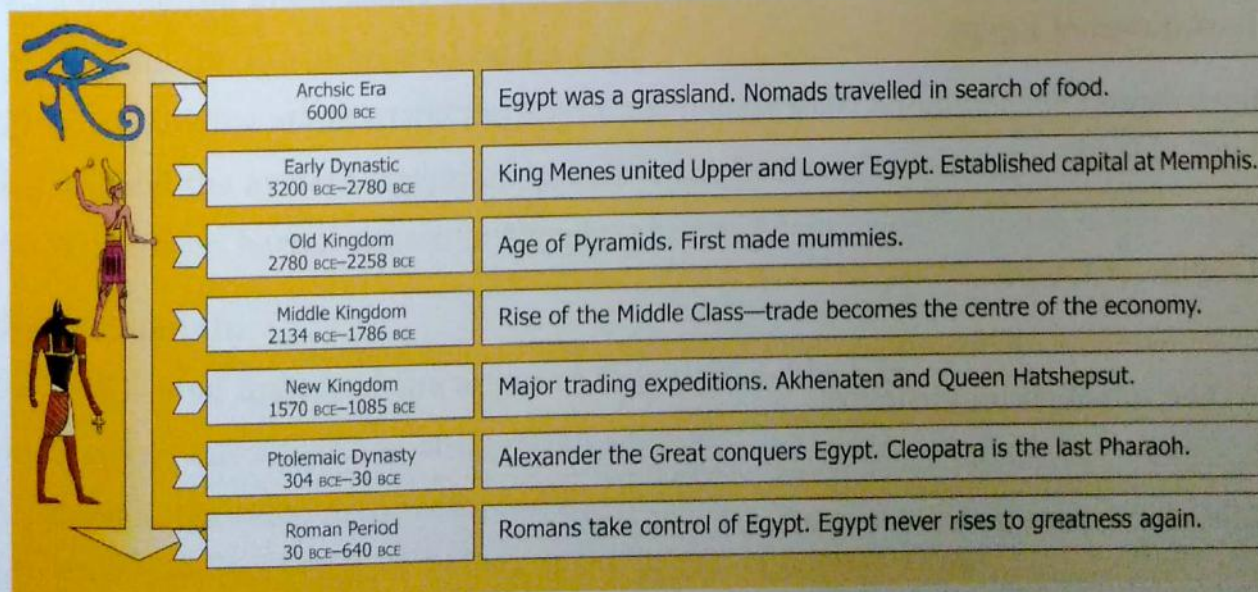
Counterparts: a person who corresponds to another person in a different place or situation

Hereditary: passed from parents to offsprings

Mythical: imaginary

Coffin: box for keeping a dead body

Timeline



LET'S RECALL

- Egypt is the country that connects Africa with the Middle East. Like other river valley civilizations, it also developed along the river Nile which was the lifeline of people of Egypt.
- The towns were built at a height where the flooding of Nile would not affect them. Only a few cities like Memphis, Akhetaten and Thebes were planned.
- The central part of the city normally consisted of the royal palace, temple and the government offices. The residential area was divided into main city and workers' village. All the houses were built parallel to the river.
- The society was structured in tiers. The top was for the Pharaoh, who was believed to be god on earth. Vizier, the most important government official, was his chief adviser.
- Nuclear family was a basic unit in the society. The father was responsible for the well being of his family and mother took care of the household and her children. One's lineage was traced through both father's and mother's side and people took pride in their family.
- Goods and services were valued on a unit known as deben (approximately 90 grams of copper or silver). Besides agricultural produce, they traded in gold, linen, spices and lapis lazuli (a precious stone).
- Tomb architecture in Egypt was grand and highly developed. It was a place where their dead were protected and provided with all material objects to ensure their comfort and existence after death.
- The most common shape of a tomb was a pyramid, the finest example of which is the Great Pyramid of King Khufu or Cheops at Giza. It is the oldest of the seven wonders of the ancient world and the only one which is still, mostly, intact.

Tasks

1. Give one word answers.

- (a) Last queen of Egypt
.....
- (b) Unit of trade
.....
- (c) Lifeline of Egypt
.....
- (d) At the top of social structure
.....
- (e) Most important government official
.....

2. Tick (✓) the correct option.

- (a) Herodotus called Egypt Curse/Gift of Nile.
- (b) Generally, houses bathrooms/drawing rooms.
- (c) Joint/Nuclear family was the basic unit of society.
- (d) People used their surplus barley and corn to make beer/wine.
- (e) Sphinx is a mythical/mystical figure with a human head and body of a lion.

3. Write true or false.

- (a) Vizier was believed to be a god on earth.
- (b) Anubis was the god of funeral.
- (c) The most common shape of a tomb was round.
- (d) Ra, had a head of a hawk.
- (e) Osiris had the head of a jackal.

4. Define the following.

- | | |
|-------------|------------|
| (a) Pharaoh | (b) Scribe |
| (c) Deben | (d) Sphinx |

5. Answer in brief (40-50 words).

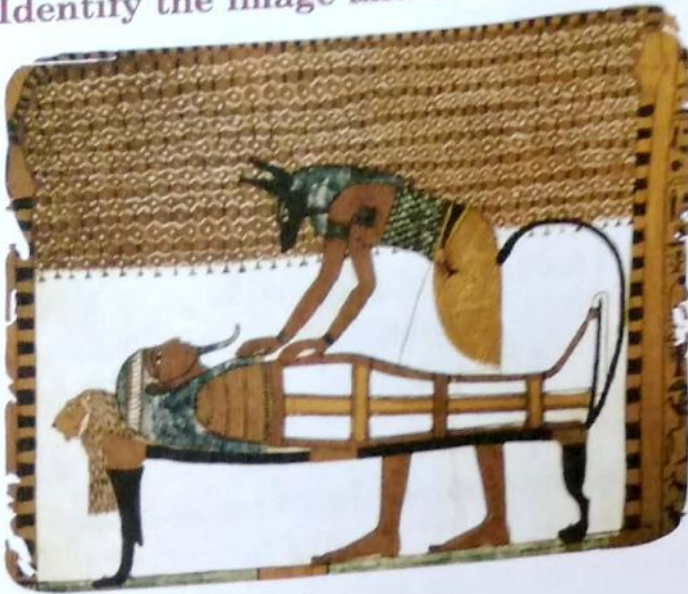
- (a) Egypt is called the 'Gift of the Nile'. Give reasons.
- (b) What was the community structure in ancient Egypt?
- (c) Give a short note on trade in Egypt.
- (d) Give two reasons for the flourishing art and architecture in Egypt.
- (e) What do you know about mummification?
- (f) How did the Egyptian civilization end?
- (g) What building material did the Egyptians use for their buildings and temple complexes?
- (h) Why did the ancient Egyptians preserve the bodies of the dead?
- (i) Write about barter system in Egypt.

6. Write in detail.

- (a) Give a brief history of the origin of Egyptian civilization.
- (b) Give two main features of Egyptian society.
- (c) Explain the tomb architecture of Egypt.
- (d) What were the religious beliefs of the people of ancient Egypt?

Picture based questions

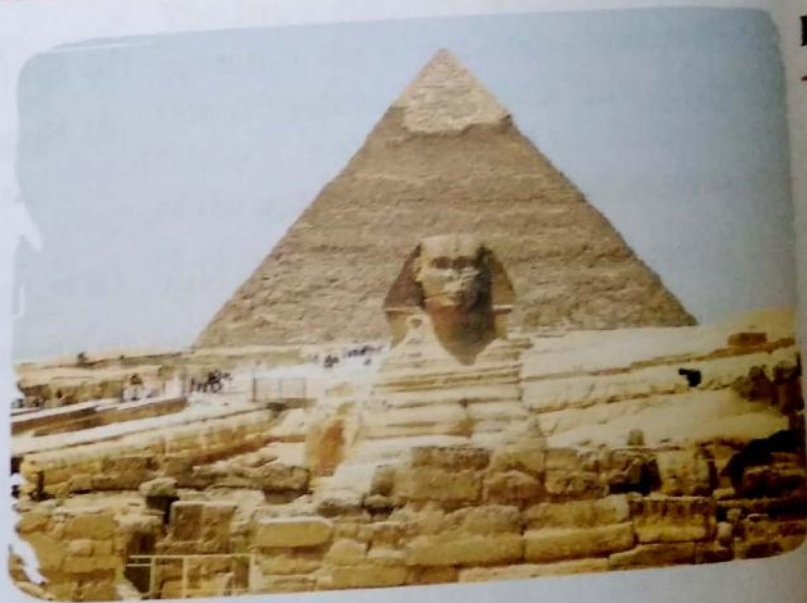
1. Identify the image and answer the following questions.



- Who is the deity in the picture?
- What did this deity do?
- Who is represented as a king with black skin and white robes?

2. Identify the image and answer the following questions.

- Where is the pyramid located?
- The pyramid is believed to be the tomb of which king?
- Describe the architectural wonder that stands in the same complex.



Project work

- Find out about Ramses II from the Internet and write why is he called the greatest Pharaoh of ancient Egypt.
- You are an Egyptian artist and you are given a vase. How would you decorate it? What symbols would you draw and what would be the colour of the vase?

For more information, please log on to...

- <https://www.timemaps.com/civilizations/ancient-egypt/>
- <https://www.britannica.com/place/ancient-Egypt>