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Geography of the Fertile Crescent makes it a natural crossroads for people to meet and exchange ideas, trade goods, etc.

1st civilization in this area: Mesopotamia – or the land between the rivers.

 A river valley encompassing the Tigris and Euphrates river basin – a perfect place to settle and grow food.

 Flooding is a problem, in the Epic of Gilgamesh there is a flood story of an event that ends up washing away the world – arch evidence of big flood 4900 ya. To survive neighboring communities had to work together to manage the flood waters and irrigation in times of drought. Nobles and/or priests may have been the ultimate managers of these processes.

Around 3200 BC (5200 ya) cities began to emerge in southern Mesopotamia – mud brick, some timber and very little stone used to build their communities. Sumerians are the first known people to use wheeled carts and they made the most them using them for trade as far away as Egypt and India across the deserts – some traders went by water and Sumerian goods spread throughout the region.

Sumerian city-states were always battling for control land and water. After a time the Sumerians (according to their own records) abandoned a more cooperative form of governance for an individual leader brave and smart enough to preserve their community. Over time many of these positions became hereditary.

These leaders were responsible for maintaining the city walls and irrigation systems. The leader would command armies in times of war, and enforced the laws and traditions of the community – after awhile the scribes were the keepers of the records and collected taxes for the ruler. The ruler was technically the chief servant of the gods, and in charge of making sure that rituals were properly observed to please them.

Each Sumerian city had a social hierarchy – or ranking system. At the top the ruler and family, then leading officials and high priests, lesser priests and scribes, merchants and artisans (who lived together in specific areas of the city if they practiced the same trade).

AT the bottom of society were the peasant farmers – the largest part of the population. Most worked the land of others, a few had their own small plots. Sumerians had slaves, either captured in war or who’d sold themselves into slavery to pay off debts.

Women in Sumerian society held positions of respect originally – mother-goddess was fairly common. AS the city-states emerged and military might became more important the position of the female god is supplanted by male deities. In early city-states wives of rulers had special powers and duties, and might even step in for the ruler if he were absent. Women continued to have specific legal rights and engaged in trade and owned property.

The Sumerian religion is not exactly a hopeful one. Their afterlife was pretty grim, described as a dark and dusty, where the people ate dirt and mud.

Sumerian gods reflected the lives of the people on earth, they married, had kids and ate, drank, and had disagreements and triumphs like regular humans. Priests made sacrifices to earn their favor at the top of ziggurats in temples dedicated to the local god/dess.

The Epic of Gilgamesh – was a traditional story of the hero and his adventures. Many of the tales in this work were the basis for stories in other cultures, since the crossroads of the Fertile Crescent became a place where people came to settle and adopt the Sumerian culture and ideas, and in some cases return home with a command of cuneiform, and the “advanced” Sumerian ways – understanding of the constellations and planets, their system of writing and their mathematical system.

Chapter 2 section 4 Invaders, Traders and Empire Builders

 Section 5 roots of Judaism

EQ: How did early empires arise in Mesopotamia?

 How did ideas and technology spread?

 What are the contributions of the Persians and Phoenicians?

Fortified cities tell us that there was a lot of invasion and conflict going on in the Fertile Crescent from about 5000 ya

Invaders wanted land, or loot. Some destroyed cities and moved on, some stayed to take over the communities they attacked. Powerful rulers emerge during this period to conquer and create empires that they bring peace and prosperity.

1. Sargon of Akkad invaded and conquered Sumer about 4300 ya

 First known “empire” of history

 Combines Akkad and Sumer into one political unit

 Does not last after his death. Sumer separates and returns to independence

Hammurabi of Babylon conquers much of Mesopotamia and unites it under his rule.

 Publishes the Code of Hammurabi – he didn’t write it, it was a collection and codification of existing laws and customs in the region from earliest times.

 He had 300 laws carved on a stone pillar for everyone to see – so everyone could know what to expect from his rule.

 His stated goals were:

 To cause justice to prevail in the land / to destroy the wicked and the evil/ that the strong want not oppress the weak.

Hammurabi’s code is divided into the criminal law and the civil law—

 Robbery assault and murder – specific punishments for these crimes. In the past the families of the victims were allowed to punish the wrongdoer, Hammurabi stepped in with known consequences – this allowed for orderly administration of laws, and more social order that the previous system.

The punishments seem harsh to us today – an eye for an eye, a life for a life. For example if a building were poorly built and collapsed killing someone the builder could be put to death.

Justice varied according to social class as well – a slave was more harshly punished for an attack on a non-slave than the other way around. If someone harmed a slave often the punishment may be a fine paid to that person’s master.

Civil law dealt with private rights such as business contracts, marriage, divorce, property, inheritance, taxes, marriage, and divorce.

The radical thing about hammurabi’s code is that it protected the rights of the less powerful, making sure that slaves, women and children, and the common man had standing and rights in the courts.

If a woman owned property, she could pass it on to her children, not her husband, at her choosing.

Women could leave abusive relationships, if they were “blameless” but if they were not they could be thrown in the river.

Babylonian civil laws gave husband both legal authority over wife, but also the legal duty to support her – and nearly unlimited authority over his children – believing this was the basis for a stable society.

* *If anyone ensnares another, putting a ban upon him, but he cannot prove it, then he that ensnared him shall be put to* [*death*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capital_punishment)*.*
* *If anyone brings an accusation against a man, and the accused goes to the river and leaps into the river, if he sinks in the river his accuser shall take possession of his house. But if the river proves that the accused is not guilty, and he escapes unhurt, then he who had brought the accusation shall be put to death, while he who leaped into the river shall take possession of the house that had belonged to his accuser.*
* *If anyone finds runaway male or female slaves in the open country and brings them to their masters, the master of the slaves shall pay him two shekels of silver.*
* *If anyone brings an accusation of any crime before the elders, and does not prove what he has charged, he shall, if a capital offense is charged, be put to death.*
* *If a builder builds a house for someone, and does not construct it properly, and the house which he built falls in and kills its owner, then the builder shall be put to death. (Another variant of this is: If the owner's son dies, then the builder's son shall be put to death.)*
* *If a son strikes his father, his hands shall be hewn off.*
* *If a man gives his child to a nurse and the child dies in her hands, but the nurse, unbeknown to the father and mother, nurses another child, then they shall convict her of having nursed another child without the knowledge of the father and mother and her breasts shall be cut off.*
* *If anyone steals the minor son of another, he will be put to death.*
* *If a man takes a woman as a wife, but has no intercourse with her, this woman is no wife to him.*
* *If a man strikes a free-born woman so that she loses her unborn child, he shall pay ten shekels for her loss.*
* *If a man puts out the eye of a patrician, his eye shall be put out.*
* *If a man knocks the teeth out of another man, his own teeth will be knocked out.*
* *If anyone strikes the body of a man higher in rank than he, he shall receive sixty blows with an ox-whip in public.*
* *If a freeborn man strikes the body of another freeborn man of equal rank, he shall pay one gold* [*mina*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mina_%28unit%29)*.*
* *If the slave of a freed man strikes the body of a freed man, his ear shall be cut off.*
* *If anyone commits a robbery and is caught, he shall be put to death.*
* *If anyone opens his ditches to water his crop, but is careless, and the water floods his neighbor's field, he shall pay his neighbor grain for his loss.*

*If a judge tries a case, reaches a decision, and presents his judgment in writing; and later it is discovered that his decision was in error, and it was his own fault, he shall pay twelve times the fine set by him in the case and be removed from the judge's bench...*

The code is not Ham’s only accomplishment – he rebuilt temples, organized a well-trained army, and worked to improve the irrigation systems of his country. He also attempted to promote the Babylonian god Marduk over the older Sumerian gods in a bid to bring the empire together in one religious faith.

War and the Spread of Ideas –

**Hittites** – come out of Asia Minor about 3400 ya – with one big advantage – they knew how to extract iron from ore and make tools and weapons. Their culture was not nearly as advance as the Mesopotamians, but this technology gave them an advantage until their empire began to fall apart (around 3200 ya) and their artisans moved into other societies, taking their knowledge with them across Africa, Asia and Europe.

**Assyrians** – from the Upper Tigris also knew how to forge iron – by 3100 ya they are on the move across Meso, and for 500 years they are the most feared warriors anywhere. Their’s was a culture based on warfare, and everything about warfare, and fierceness was their pride and character. Despite this they ran a well-ordered society with extensive laws, especially about the conduct of women in the palace (secluded and veiled in public) looting of other societies assured their wealth and paid for their extravagant lives.

King Addurbanipal created the first library at Nineveh – he ordered the collection of cuneiform clay tablets from all over the Fertile Crescent – still studied today.

Babylon is back! 2600 ya the subjected people rose up and overthrew their Assyrian overlords. King Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt the palaces of Babylon and expanded their territory from the Persian gulf to the Med – built the hanging gardens of Babylon, one of the wonders of the ancient world. – and the canals, temples, walls, palaces of the past restores B. Expands science and other scholarly pursuits. –esp astronomy.

PERSIAN EMPIRE –

2500 ya Cyrus the Great leads the charge and the Persians come out of Asia Minor and take over most of turkey, india, iran Egypt Afghanistan and Pakistan, Greece, Egypt and the Eastern Med

Tolerance and respect of local customs cut back on what had to be enforced. Darius 522 BC to 486 BC is the expander of the empire. Divides the empire into Satraps, with “the Eyes and Ears of the King” who traveled among these to be sure everything was going well.

Another codification of laws

Built roads

Observed local festivals – made himself seen by the people

Established a common set of weights ad measures, use of coins (with himself prominently featured on each)

Move away from barter economy to money economy

Zoroaster – 600BC One god Ahura Mazda with an evil enemy Arihman – people had to choose who to follow. At the end of the world there would be a judgment and the followers of Ahura Mazda would enter paradise and evildoers would have eternal suffering….. later Christianity and Islam have similar concepts.

PHOENICIANS

Living along the N African coast these sailors and traders were known for the manufacture of glass and papyrus, and a purple dye from a tiny snail shell. To promote trade they established colonies in Spain and Sicily and all over N Africa – they made it all the way to England where they traded for tin.

Their system of 22 sound based symbols used for recordkeeping became the basis for the Greek and later our 26 character alphabet.

The Middle East remained a crossroads for the world where people exchanged ideas and technologies filtering the cultures of east and west – many of which became the basis for our modern world.

SECTION 5 ROOTS OF JUDAISM

According to the Torah – a man named Abraham lived near UR about 4000 ya. He migrated with his family to Canaan taking their sheep and goats (nomadic, hearding people….) and is considered the founder of Israel. A famine later caused a migration from this region into Egypt – people from Israel ended up being enslaved by the Egyptians for a time, then a leader called Moses took them back home and they eventually returned to Canaan where they settled again.

By 3000 ya they had formed the state of Israel – a leader named David united warring tribes into a single government. His son Solomon built an impressive capital called Jerusalem, with a large central temple dedicated to their God. Solomon was noted for his judicious nature and his attempts to secure Israel by negotiating with the neighboring empires of Egypt and the rulers of Mesopotamia.

Solomon, though wise about many things was not good with money. His building projects caused high taxes and after his death people rebelled and the country became divided into Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Divided, and weak these countries became vulnerable to invaders --- Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC, in 586 BC Babylonia captured Judah. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the central temple and much of Jerusalem and took many of the people home as slaves – it was during this “Babylonian Captivity” that Israelites became known as Jews.

When Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon he allowed those who wished to to return to Israel, and many did, rebuilding their temple and resettling in their homeland – under Persian rule.

What the Israelites believe –

Monotheists – Hammurabi and Ahkenaton also, but did not stick, these guys are monotheists from the start and stick to it for the most part.

Covenant with their god, originally with Abraham, renewed with Moses – they follow the rules, and will be taken care of, given a land of their own. They believed that Canaan was this land.

Following the rules is big with the Israelites – laws for nearly everything, reflects a dedication to their god – cleanliness, food handling, observance of holy days (Sabbath), conflict resolution in the community – all covered in the religious teachings.

Ten Commandments is central here – four about relationship with God, 6 about conduct with others. The prophets concentrate on ethics, or moral standards for the people – the strong and powerful are directed to protect the weak and powerless in the community. Here we see the idea that all are equal before the deity, and all are equally bound by the obligations and laws, including their leaders who are not gods but men and must follow the same rules as everyone else.

Diaspora – when the Jews left their homeland they scattered throughout the world. Many retained their religious identity, and in some places suffered persecution because of their faith.

Judaism is one of the three religions of the book, meaning the Torah or old testament. Christian and Muslims also trace their roots to Abraham, and his covenant with his god.