

# MESOPOTAMIA MAP

LOCATE THE FOLLOWING ITEMS ON  
YOUR MAP AND USE THE COLOR  
INDICATED TO COLOR YOUR MAP.

TIGRIS RIVER (BLUE)

EUPHRATES RIVER (BLUE)

CASPIAN SEA (BLUE)

MEDITERRANEAN SEA (BLUE)

PERSIAN GULF (BLUE)

BABYLON (RED)

NILE RIVER (BLUE)

RED SEA (BLUE)

ARABIAN DESERT (YELLOW)

BLACK SEA (BLUE)

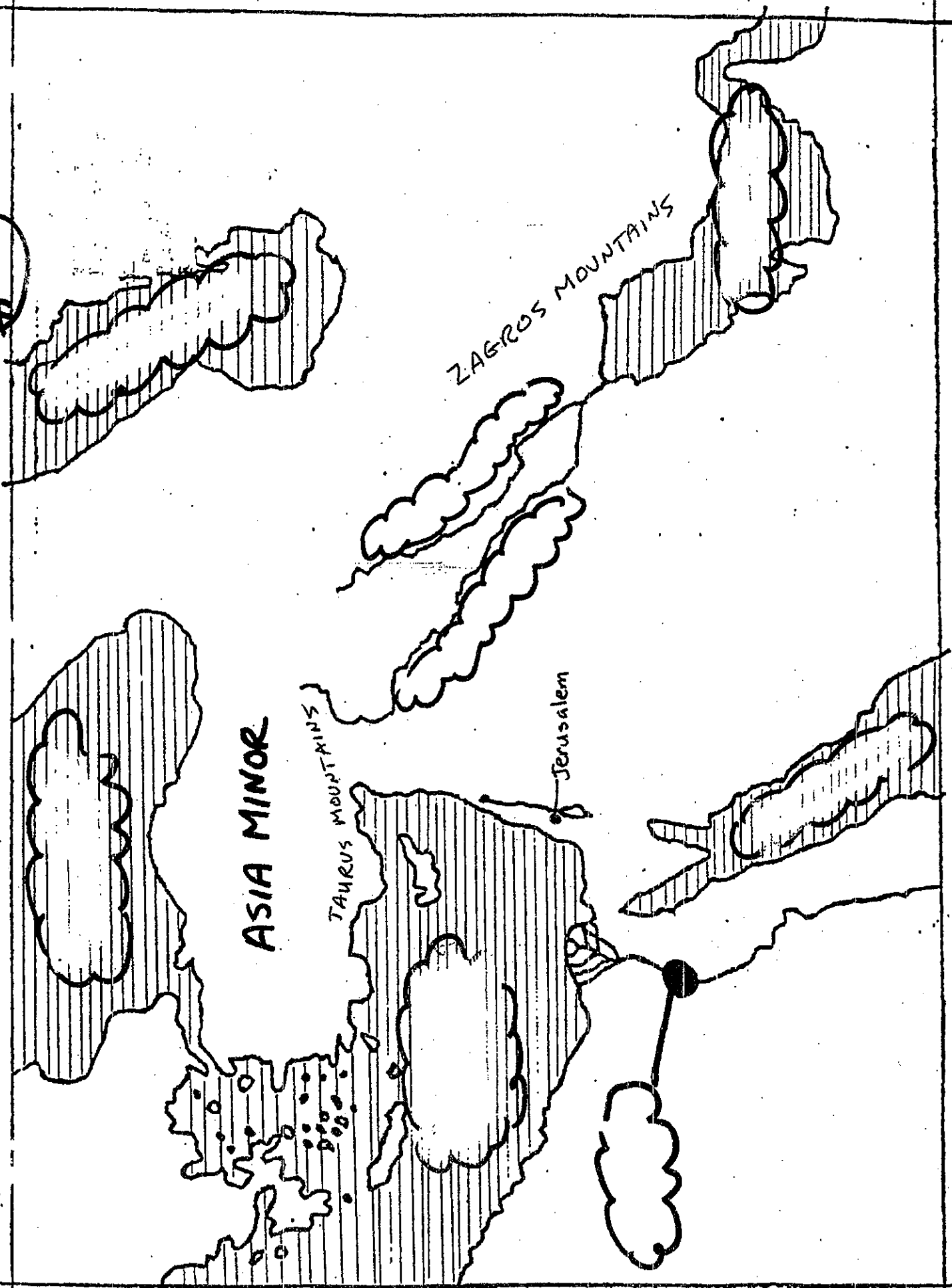
MESOPOTAMIA (GREEN)



BODY OF WATER

NAME

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## 2

# Daily Life in Sumer

Look now at everything on earth,"  
Rejoiced Ninurta, king of the land. "The  
fields produce abundant grain. They  
make happy the spirit of the gods."

This poem is part of a Sumerian "farmers' almanac" which served as a guide to successful farming. The land was very important to the people of Sumer. It was the source of most of the nation's wealth. In a bad year, a drought or a flood could bring famine.

Herding was as important as growing grain. Shepherds were responsible for the wool, milk, and cheese that almost everyone used. They too were affected by drought or flood.

The Sumerians prayed to many gods and goddesses, or *deities* (DEE-ih-teez), to ensure a good harvest and healthy an-

imals. As shown in the poem, they believed that the gods and goddesses took a personal interest in the food supply. According to a myth, Inanna, goddess of love, could not decide whether to marry a farmer or a shepherd. She finally decided on the shepherd, perhaps because she liked cream. The farmer was luckier, though, because Inanna had a sharp tongue and a temper to match.

Some people in Sumer had little to do with the land. They lived in cities and worked at other jobs, such as making pottery. Because people lived close together, they needed laws and government.

How did the Sumerians govern themselves? They divided the land into different city-states. Unfortunately, this kind of organization did not, in the end, create

a unified nation. The city-states of Sumer were seldom at peace. They fought each other almost constantly. They fought over property rights, water rights, or to gain control over another city-state.

**God-Kings.** In times of war, a Sumerian city chose a king to lead it. When the war was over, the king was supposed to give back his power. After a while, though, the kings kept their power and handed it down to their sons. They called themselves gods, and eventually the Sumerians believed that they were gods.

Once in a while, a great king would defeat the other city-states and set up a small empire. But these empires did not last long. One or more city-states would overthrow them. Then the city-states would start fighting again.

The people of Sumer were divided into three classes, or groups of people. The kings, nobles, priests, and rich landowners made up the highest class. The next class included farmers, tradespeople, soldiers, and artisans. Slaves made up the lowest class.

Slaves were sometimes bought and sold for their entire lifetimes, or they could be hired for a certain period of time. Although masters owned their slaves, no one considered slaves less than human. Anyone could become a slave by having bad luck or by being captured in a war. Slaves had some rights. They could own property and trade goods. They could even save money to buy their freedom.

In a Sumerian family, men were the

heads of the households. They could own property and trade goods. They arranged their daughters' marriages and their sons' educations. If a man had debts, he was allowed to hire or sell his wife and children as slaves.

However, women had some power, too. When a woman married, her father usually gave a dowry, which was a gift of money or goods. A wife was permitted to use her dowry as she pleased. Sometimes she would use it to start her own business. Women in Sumer could be merchants, tavern owners, and landowners.

From what has been found in the ruins of Sumer, we can piece together some facts about life there. The rest can only be imagined. Suppose, for instance, that we are in a busy market street in the city of Lagash. Booths with all kinds of goods for sale line the mud-brick buildings. Cloth awnings cover the booths to shade them from the hot sun.

Two Sumerian women, Ninti and Shubad, are walking down the street. Ninti is a weaver who weaves linen from flax. Shubad and her husband are farmers who grow flax and millet, a kind of grain. Both women wear simple, linen tunics that reach to their knees. Because they are not slaves, each wears a thin veil draped about her face. Ninti is wealthy, so she also wears rings and bracelets.

SHUBAD: How is business lately, Ninti?

That cloth that you have been making looks very fine.

NINTI: Oh, business couldn't be better.



The soldiers who have been fighting in the war against Umma tear their clothes to shreds all the time. They buy a lot of cloth from me. The only problem is that the flax I use to weave linen costs too much.

SHUBAD: Yes, our crops were short this year because of the floods. That's why the price is so high. But the new crop will be ready in two weeks.

NINTI: Business aside, how are your children, Shubad?



*This figure was probably a Sumerian offering to the deities.*

SHUBAD: Oh, they're fine. But I'm worried about my oldest son, Dumuzi. His father says that we have so many debts to pay that he might have to hire Dumuzi out as a slave for a few years.

NINTI: Dumuzi is too young to leave home, Shubad. Maybe I could help you out.

SHUBAD: How?

NINTI: Well, you know my cousin, Shara?

She's a very good weaver and has decided to go into business for herself. She will be needing a lot of flax to work with, and she wants to be assured of a good supply. I think she would buy all the flax that you and your husband grow.

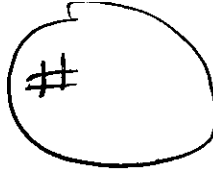
SHUBAD: This is just what we need, the assurance that we can sell everything we grow. My entire dowry was used to buy the flax field, and I sometimes wonder if I made the right decision. We have nothing to spare. Is it possible that your cousin would pay in advance?

NINTI: Flax has been in short supply lately, and I know she's anxious to secure enough to get her company started. I'll ask her right away.

### Quick Check

1. What were some of the ways that Sumerians made a living?
2. Would you describe Sumer as a unified nation? Why, or why not? How did the need for a ruler or king arise? How did these rulers keep their power and pass it on?
3. What kind of religion did Sumer have? What did most of their prayers concern?
4. How many classes were there in Sumerian society? In what class were soldiers? Priests? Farmers? Rich landowners? Kings?
5. How might a person become a slave? What rights did slaves have? How was it possible to get out of slavery?
6. What was the role of the husband in the Sumerian family? What powers did women have?





Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Disappearance of the Sumerian Culture**

Since the Sumerians lived in the open flat lands of Mesopotamia, they were an easy target for invaders. Sumer was invaded many times. Each time the invaders brought their own language, culture, and ideas, from which the Sumerians borrowed. In this way, the Sumerians were able to build upon their own knowledge by adopting from other cultures.

While a civilization can benefit from an invasion, it can also suffer from it. Around 2300 B.C., Sumerians were conquered by the Akkadians, a people from the northern part of Mesopotamia. The Akkadians took over the cuneiform writing of the Sumerians, but soon the Sumerian language disappeared altogether. Several centuries later, Babylonians attacked and conquered Mesopotamia. Babylonians took over the combined culture of the Sumerians and Akkadians. Old gods were given Babylonian names and their king, Hammurabi, drew up new laws to replace the old ones. By this time the original culture began to disappear. It was completely forgotten until 100 years ago when archaeologists uncovered artifacts of the Sumerian civilization.

1. Why were there so many invasions of Mesopotamia?

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2. How did the Sumerians benefit from the invasions?

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3. Who were the conquerors of Mesopotamia?

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4. Why did the Sumerian culture disappear?

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5. How was the Sumerian culture discovered?

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## A Sumerian Riddle:

What is it?

A house which like heaven has a plow,  
Which like a copper kettle is cloth - covered,  
Which like a goose stands on a base,  
He whose eyese are not open enters it,  
He whose eyes are wide open comes out of it?

Solution : It's the

### The Code of the Empire

Let's take a little closer look at the Code of Hammurabi. The Code begins with a statement from King Hammurabi himself. Unlike earlier codes, Hammurabi's applied to a mighty empire. His preamble makes this very clear! For 250 lines of text, he boasts of his conquests. He also names the city-states he conquered. Supposedly, even the great god Marduk was extremely pleased with him. But finally, he gets to the point.

"Marduk commanded me to give justice to the people of the land. I let them have good government. I set forth truth and justice throughout the land and made the people prosper. At that time, I issued the following decrees."

What follows are 282 laws. Most are very similar in form: "If such and such happens, in a particular way, then this shall be done." For example, "If a man has stolen a child, he shall be put to death...". The laws are arranged in groups.

The first group deals with procedures for trying witches. The Babylonians were great believers in demons and the supernatural. It is not surprising that Hammurabi dealt with these issues first.

The next sections deal with different kinds of crime. Included are lying in court, kidnapping, and burglary. Special attention is given to crimes against private property. The penalty for almost any kind of stealing was death. People who knowingly bought stolen property were also killed.

Methods of execution were not pleasant. They included drowning, burning, being run through with a sharp wooden stake, and cutting off the head. These severe penalties probably show how important private property had become to the Babylonians.

Many of the laws in Hammurabi's Code deal with economic issues. This should come as no great surprise. Remember, Babylon had a very prosperous economy. It was based largely on the private ownership of land and the bartering of farm products. Here are some examples of economic laws..

- 1.) "If a slave has said to his master, you are not my master... his master shall cut off his ear."

Slaves were used for farm work and considered private property.

- 2.) "If a man has hired an ox and caused its death, by carelessness or blows, he shall give the owner an ox."

Oxen were necessary for bringing in the crops. They were considered a most important piece of private property.

- 3.) "If a man has opened his channel for watering... and the water has flooded his neighbor's field, he shall pay him an average crop in grain."

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In a dry land, irrigation was needed to farm the land. Each farmer was responsible for keeping the water system in good order. Also, grain was the most important thing used in barter.

- 4.) "If a man borrows silver he must pay 20% interest in return. If a man borrows grain, he must pay 33 1/3% in interest."

Though both were important to trade, and both could be borrowed, note that borrowing grain was more expensive than borrowing silver.

- 5.) "If a salesman fails to make a profit on the goods given to him by a merchant, he must repay twice the amount."

Yes, there were even travelling salesmen in Babylon!

All of these laws, and dozens more, are about economic issues. Why do you think Hammurabi spent so much time on them?

Other sections of the Code dealt with just about every part of Babylonian life. There were laws about marriage and families. Standards of conduct were spelled out for various professions, including barbers. Builders in Babylon had to be especially careful. If a house collapsed and killed the owner's son, the builder's own son was put to death. Hammurabi went so far as to set wages for various kinds of work and workers. The wages of a shepherd were to be 33 bushels of grain a year -- no more, no less.

The code ends with a stern warning to anyone who did not respect the laws of the mighty King Hammurabi. It comes in the form of a long curse. Part of it reads: "May the mighty gods of heaven and earth curse him, his children, his land, his people, his nation..."

The laws of the empire were not to be taken lightly.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why did Hammurabi's Code start with such a long opening statement?

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2. How many laws are in the Code?

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3. Why did many of the laws deal with economic issues? What are some examples?

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4. What did other sections cover?

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5. Can you think of any laws we have that weren't included in Hammurabi's Code? Why do you think these were left out?

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