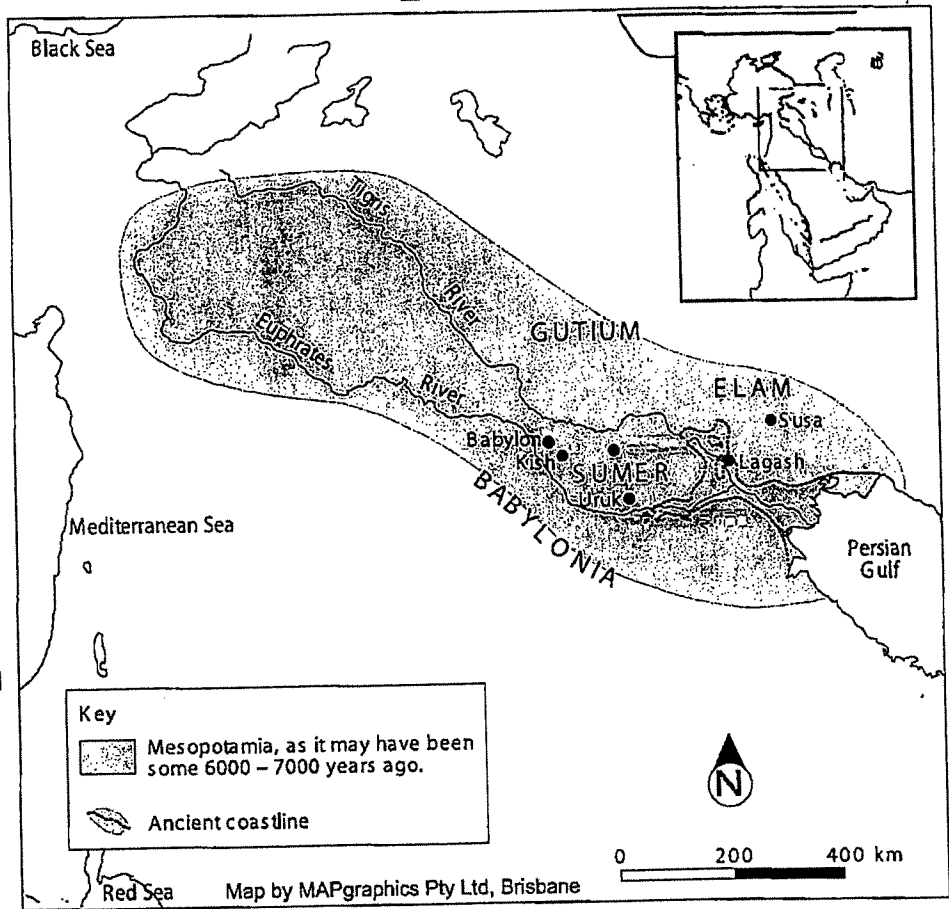


# Ancient Mesopotamia

The world's first true civilisation developed in an ancient land called Mesopotamia. The bustling heart of this region lay in the fertile floodplains between the mighty Euphrates and Tigris rivers. Traces of civilisations dating back to 7,000 BC have been found in the northern part of this region, while scattered remains of villages and ziggurats (stepped pyramids) have been found to the south. This southern region was once called Sumer.

The Sumerians built the first cities, invented the wheel and used the world's first known form of writing called cuneiform. Their words were made from wedge-shaped symbols pressed into clay and thousands of written clay tablets have been found. Once the language was deciphered and translated, these tablets revealed a lot of information to historians about the region's laws, religion and understanding of astronomy, medicine and other subjects.

Mesopotamia was annexed by the Persian empire in 539 BC. About 200 years later it became part of the Macedonian empire when it was conquered by Alexander the Great. By AD 1534, it was part of the Turkish Ottoman empire. Today, most of what was once Mesopotamia lies within the country of Iraq.



1. In what part of the country did the heart of ancient Mesopotamia lie? Suggest why this might have been the case.

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2. Compare the map above with a modern atlas of Iraq. Which modern Iraqi towns or cities would have been underwater (i.e. part of the Persian Gulf) during ancient times? (Hint: Look at the ancient coastline).

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3. Use the map scale above to measure the approximate length of the Mesopotamian region:

4. Suggest why the region of Sumer is sometimes referred to as the 'cradle of civilisation'.

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5. What three famous empires has the region that was once called Mesopotamia been a part of?

1. .... 2. .... 3. ....

# Mesopotamia 101

By Vickie Chao



atop	language	zodiac	culture
result	role	cultures	marking
between	banking	sledge	future
dated	news	pushcart	calculation

**Directions:** Fill in each blank with the word that best completes the reading comprehension.

Do you know where the world's oldest culture was?

It was at a place called "the land between the rivers."

Thousands of years ago, people came across an open field in Southwest Asia. They liked the area a lot. One reason was because its soil was very rich. It was great for farming.

Another reason was because it had two large rivers nearby.

At first, their settlements were small villages. But over time, they grew larger. Finally, they built the world's first cities. And they developed the world's first

(1) \_\_\_\_\_.

People in "the land between the rivers" were very smart. They invented and discovered many things. Here are three good examples.

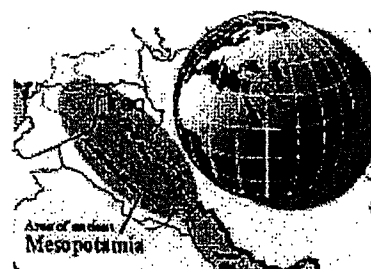
One, they knew that it would be easier to move a heavy object if they placed it over a log roller. As time went by, they made three big changes to the design. First, they put a (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_\_ the log roller to help them drag the object. Second, they cut deep grooves into the log roller to help them carry the object farther. Third, they used wooden pegs to fix the sledge to the log roller. The final (4) \_\_\_\_\_ was the world's first set of wheels and

(5) \_\_\_\_\_. The earliest of its kind

(6) \_\_\_\_\_ back about 5,500 years.

Two, they laid down the ground rules for (7) \_\_\_\_\_ time. Their methods are why there are 24 hours a day, 60 minutes an hour, and 60 seconds a minute.

Third, they created a set of wedge-shaped symbols called the cuneiform. It was the



oldest written (8) \_\_\_\_\_ on Earth. With it, people in "the land between the rivers" jotted down their thoughts. They looked at the sky and carefully recorded what they saw. Through their writing, we know that they divided the sky into twelve parts. They gave a name to each of the twelve parts. Later on, those names were translated into Greek and Latin. They became the (9) \_\_\_\_\_ we know today. Watching the sky was a very important task for people in "the land (10) \_\_\_\_\_ the rivers." That was because they believed that the gods lived in the heavens. By gazing at the stars, they searched for clues that might tell them the gods' will. They would use the zodiac to predict a baby's fortune. And since they were very good at (11) \_\_\_\_\_, they could even plot out the (12) \_\_\_\_\_ movement of the sun, moon, and stars for long periods. The only thing they got wrong at the time was the shape of the Earth. They thought it was a flat disk.

To sum up, the culture created by people in "the land between the rivers" had a great impact on our modern (13) \_\_\_\_\_. They set up the world's first (14) \_\_\_\_\_ system. They performed the world's first brain surgery. They created the world's first symbol for zero. They published the world's first laws. The list for their achievements is endless. It is simply impossible to describe them all!

So now that we know what a major (15) \_\_\_\_\_ "the land between the rivers" played in history, we must ask -- where exactly is "the land between the rivers"? Amazingly, most of it is at a place that we often hear on the (16) \_\_\_\_\_. It is Iraq!

