

## **THEME-2**

### **Early Cities: Iraq, 3000 B.C. (Writing and City Life)**

We will study in this Chapter :

1. Mesopotamia and its Geography
2. The significance of Urbanism
3. The development of Writing
4. Urbanization in Southern Mesopotamia
5. Life in the City
6. The Legacy of the Mesopotamian Civilization.

## **MODULE-I**

### Mesopotamia and its Geography

- A great civilization flourished in Mesopotamia around 3000 B.C.E.
- Mesopotamia is now part of the Republic of Iraq.
- Originally Mesopotamia is a Greek word which means the land between two rivers.
- Tigris and Euphrates were the two rivers between which the civilization of Mesopotamia flourished.
- The Civilization of Mesopotamia is known for its city life , prosperity, voluminous and rich literature, Astronomy and Mathematics. It left its influence on world civilizations in a number of ways.
- Mesopotamia is a flat plain. The excavation work started here about 150years ago.
- Mesopotamia can be broadly divided into two distinct different environments.
- Northern Mesopotamia was frequently referred to as Assyria during the ancient times.
- Southern Mesopotamia is the region lying roughly between the Middle Tigris and the Persian Gulf. In the west there is an unending stretch of desert merging with the Arabian Desert.

- Southern Mesopotamia was sub-divided into two parts i.e, Sumer and Akkad during the ancient times.
- From 2000 B.C. onwards Akkad and Sumeria together came to be referred to as Babylonia because Babylon (an important city) became the political centre of the major empire in southern Mesopotamia.
- From about 1100 B.C. when the Assyrians established their kingdom in the North, the region came to be known as Assyria.
- Sumerian was the first known language of the land.
- Later on , Sumerian was replaced by Akkadian and Aramaic languages respectively.
- Mesopotamia witnessed the growth of three civilizations –The Sumerian Civilization, The Babylonian Civilization and The Assyrian Civilization.
- It was in southern Mesopotamia (sumer) that the first cities came into emergence and the art of writing registered a growth.

### **The Significance of Urbanism**

- The earliest cities in Mesopotamia started growing in the Bronze Age in C. 3000B.C.
- Eridu, Ur, Uruk, Larsa, Laggash, Nippur, Nisin etc were important cities of ancient Sumer. Babylon, Ninveh, Nimrud, Assur, Mari etc, were other well known cities of Mesopotamia.
- Cities not only served as a living place for a large number of people but also as centres of various important economic activities.
- Initially , natural fertility and high standard of food production were the major factors leading to urbanization .
- Availability of water resources for transportation also played a significant role in the development of urbanization.
- Division of labour , the use of seals for trade and the military power of king etc. were also responsible factors for the growth of towns.
- As per excavations, there were three types of cities in Mesopotamia. They were religious, commercial and royal cities.

- Cities occupied a very significant place in the life of Mesopotamian people. They valued the city life highly.
- Cities were centres of various cultures. People of many communities and cultures lived side by side in cities.

**MODULE -II**  
**The Development of writing**

- Development of writing of writing is a great intellectual achievement of human society.
- Writing is a way of encoding information or a system of symboling.
- In every language certain spoken sounds convey certain meanings, which is known as verbal communication.
- The spoken sounds are represented in visible signs by writing or a script.
- The earliest discovered Mesopotamian tablets were written around 3200 B.C. Each tablet is 3.5 cm or less in height.
- The Mesopotamian tablets contained picture like signs and numbers.
- Around 5000 lists of Oxen, fish, bread, loaves etc. have been discovered from Mesopotamia .
- The script of the Sumerians was known as Cuneiform.
- The term Cuneiform is derived from the Latin words Cuneus meaning 'Wedge' and forma meaning 'shape'.
- Undoubtedly , these tablets contribute significantly in reconstructing the history of the Bronze Age Mesopotamia.
- The rate of literacy was very low in Mesopotamia.
- The main reason for low literacy was that there were hundreds of complex signs in Mesopotamian script and it was not easy to learn them.
- The famous epic of Sumerian literature was 'Gilgamesh'. It was composed during 2000 B.C.E. in 12 tablets.

## **Urbanization in Southern Mesopotamia: Temples and Kings**

- Settlements had begun to develop in Southern Mesopotamia from 5000 B.C.E.
- Of these settlements some developed into the earliest cities.
- There were three types of cities in Mesopotamia. They were – religious, commercial and royal cities.
- Of these the religious cities and the cities functioning as centres of trade occupied very significant place in Mesopotamian culture.
- There was hardly any stone available in southern Mesopotamia.
- Therefore, bricks were used extensively for constructing dwelling places.
- Temples played a vital role in the formative phase of Sumerian civilization.
- The Sumerian people were polytheists i.e. they worshipped more than one deity.
- A big temple known as Ziggurat was built for the main deity of the city.
- Inana(Goddess of love and war) and Ur (the moon God) were the deities of Sumer.
- Enlil was the most eminent among the gods worshipped by the Sumerians. He was regarded as the master of humanity and king of king

## Significance Of Writing

- The development of writing made it possible to keep the documents secure.
- It helped make the maintenance of accounts of transactions easier and more convenient.
- As a result of it the state institutions could handle complex exchanges and multiple participants could participate in it.
- It also made possible calendars and time reckoning .
- It facilitated the record of outgoings and incoming goods, as well as stock in storage.
- As a result of the development of writing, literature of a high order came into growth in Mesopotamia.
- It enhanced the power of the ruling authority i.e., the king . His commands or orders could be sent in writing to various state officials.
- The development of writing rendered feasible a series of communications between persons at a geographic distance from each other.

## **MOUDLE -III**

### **LIFE IN THE CITY**

- Remains discovered from various Mesopotamian sites suggest that economic differentiation was present in society. Three types of graves have been discovered in Ur.
- Mesopotamian society consisted of three classes i.e.- Upper Class, Middle Class and Lower Class.
- Ruling class, the nobles, the royal people and high officials belonged to the Upper Class.
- Merchants , Traders, Landlords, Artisans, Craftsmen belonged to the second class.
- Slaves belonged to the lower class.
- Cows, Goats, Oxen and Sheep were the main animals of domestication.
- Ur., Lagash, Kish, Uruk and Mari were some of the most important cities of Mesopotamian civilization.
- Cities were of great significance in Mesopotamian culture . Many institutions such as the growth of industries, beginning of commercial activities, division of labour, establishment of a well-organised administrative system, establishment of military organization, construction of magnificent temples and palaces, beginning of the art of writing, progress in literature etc. came into being as a result of city life.

### **The Legacy of the Mesopotamian civilization**

- Mesopotamian civilization occupies a significant place among all the Bronze age civilizations.
- Mesopotamian civilization left its influence on other contemporary civilizations in a number of ways.
- The scholars suggest that the art of writing developed first in Mesopotamia.
- Mesopotamians had great interest in literature also. Gilgamesh was their famous epic.

- Mesopotamians were interested in Mathematics also. They made multiplication and division tables, square and square root tables and tables of compound interest .
- The Mesopotamian people had divided the year into twelve months according to the revolution of the Moon around the Earth, the month into four weeks, the day into twenty four hours and the hour into sixty minutes.
- Mesopotamians had knowledge about solar and lunar eclipses.
- The Mesopotamians also invented a water-clock and a Sun-dial to measure time.
- Another particular contribution of Mesopotamian civilization to the world were in the field of Astronomy and Astrology.
- The Mesopotamians were well acquainted with constellation.
- They had firm belief in the influence of stars and planets on human life.
- Education also registered a growth along with the growth of writing in Mesopotamia. Many schools came to be established and high quality literature was produced. They made admirable efforts to locate and preserve the text and traditions of the past by establishing libraries and by encouraging archaeological activities.
- These achievements of the Mesopotamians provide that civilization the pride of place among all the ancient world civilizations.