

Lecture Notes: Mesopotamia

SSWH1 Analyze the origins, structures, and interactions of societies in the ancient world from 3500 BCE/BC to 500 BCE/BC.

a. Compare and contrast Mesopotamian and Egyptian societies, include: religion, culture, economics, politics, and technology.

The Babylonian Empire

1. 1792-1750 BC: The 6th King of the Amorite Dynasty, Hammurabi (King of Babylon)
 - i. Called himself, “the Sun of Babylon, the king who has made the four quarters of the world subservient”
 - b. Controlled most of Mesopotamia
 - c. Known for law
 - i. Code of Hammurabi
 1. Not written by Hammurabi
 2. Mostly Sumerian Laws
 3. 282 Laws
 - a. 41 criminal laws
 - b. 241 civil laws
 - d. Wanted citizens to know the laws of the land
 - i. Had stone pillars carved with “282 Laws”
 - ii. Placed in the city centers for all to see
 1. Seven-foot-tall stone stele with 4000 lines of text
 2. Depicted Hammurabi receiving laws from Babylonian god Marduk (what does this sound like)
 - e. 1st attempt by a ruler to codify all the laws that would govern a state
 - f. 1st laws in history placed for all to see
 - i. Only a few could read: “Why would this be a problem?”
 - g. Criminal Laws
 - i. Murder
 - ii. Assault
 - iii. Theft
 - h. Civil Laws
 - i. Private rights
 - ii. Business contracts
 - iii. Property, taxes, marriage/divorce
 - i. Embodied the idea that the ruler had a responsibility to ensure justice and order
2. Civil Law and Women
 - a. Protected women and slaves
 - b. Allowed women to own property and pass on to heirs
 - c. Allowed blameless woman to leave marriage
3. Criminal Law
 - a. “an eye for an eye”
 - b. “life for a life”
4. Hammurabi’s other accomplishments
 - a. Improved irrigation systems
 - b. Organized a well-trained army

- c. Ordered repairs on temples
- d. Religious unit
 - i. Promoted “Marduk”
 - 1. Patron god of Babylon

New Empire, New Ideas

1. Hitties
 - a. From Asia Minor
 - b. Came to Mesopotamia ~~1400 BC
 - c. Learned to extract Iron from Ore
 - d. Iron
 - i. Weapons/tools
 1. Harder/sharper than those of bronze and copper
 - ii. Plentiful: cheaper to arm more people (army)
 - e. Tried to keep iron a secret
 - f. Empire collapsed ~~1200 BC
 - i. Iron work spread across the globe ushering in the “IRON AGE”
2. Assyrian “Warrior Empire”
 - a. Hardy nomads
 - b. Upper Tigris River 2000 BC
 - c. City-state named after chief god Assur
 - d. Gained iron technology ~~1100 BC
 - e. Began 500-year expansion of empire
 - i. Spread terror among conquered “most warlike in history”
 1. Boasted of Burning Babylon to the ground
 - ii. Collected payment or tribute from conquered people
 1. Became rich
 - f. King Sargon II (722-705 BC)
 - i. Ruled with absolute power
 - ii. Developed a system of riders on horses delivering messages to keep the king and government in contact
 - g. Nineveh: capital city
 - h. Society
 - i. Rulers encouraged well-ordered society
 - ii. Riches (collected tribute) paid for palaces
 - iii. Ruler developed extensive laws regulating life within Royal household
 1. Women confined to secluded quarters
 2. Women had to wear a vail in public
 - i. King Assurbanipal
 - i. Formed one of the first libraries at Nineveh
 - ii. Collected cuneiform tablets from all over the fertile crescent
 - j. Technology
 - i. Glass makers
 - ii. Made lock & key device

New Babylonian Empire 612 BC

--Assurbanipal dies, Assyrian army crushed by the Medes, the Persians, and the Scythians

1. King Nebuchadnezzar (Chaldean)—ruthless king
 - a. Revived Babylon Empire
 - i. Stretched from Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf
 - b. Oversaw rebuilding
 - i. Canals, temples, walls and palaces in Babylon
 - c. Near his palace
 - i. Built “Hanging Gardens”
 1. One of “The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World”
 - d. Babylon became a magnificent Capital City
 - e. Babylonian Astronomy
 - i. Priest—Astrologers, study stars & planets
 1. Masters of mathematics
 2. First to identify five other planets
 - a. Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn
 - f. 539 BC Babylon falls to the Persian Empire
 - i. Persian Army Led by Cyrus the Great

The Persian Empire

1. Emperor Darius I (522-486 BC)
 - i. Adopted laws of those he conquered
 - ii. Had hundreds of miles of road built to encourage unity
- b. Economy
 - i. Common set of weights/measures
 - ii. Encouraged the use of coins
 - iii. Barter economy largely popular
 - iv. Gold coins brought money economy
 1. Minted coins intended to increase trade
- c. New Religion
 - i. Zoroaster
 1. Named for Persian Thinker Zoroaster ~600 BC
 2. Rejected old Persian gods
 3. Taught one SINGLE “wise god” Ahura Mazda
 - a. Ahura was in constant battle with Ahriman
 - i. Ahriman: Prince of lies & evil
 4. Teachings written in a book: Zend-Avesta
 - a. Taught good would win over evil
 - b. Good go to Paradise
 - c. Evil to eternal suffering

Phoenicians (1500-300 BC)

1. Sailors and traders
2. Lived in cities along the eastern coast of Mediterranean Sea
 - a. Modern day Lebanon & Syria
3. Made glass from coastal sand
4. Purple dye from tiny sea snail
 - a. Tyria Purple (named after City of Tyre)
5. Set-up colonies to promote trade
 - a. N. Africa; Carthage
 - b. Sicily, Italy

- c. Spain
 - d. Britain
 - e. W. Africa
- 6. Used papyrus obtained from Egypt to make scrolls
- 7. Bible & bibliography named after the city of Byblos
- 8. Called “Carriers of Civilization”
- 9. Developed 22 symbols
 - a. 1st alphabet
 - b. Only consonants
 - c. Represented sounds