

Lecture: Mesopotamia: "land between two rivers"

Questions to Consider:

•Why Mesopotamia?

They developed things that help us keep stability today

•What were the significant contributions of Mesopotamian civilizations to the foundations of Western civilizations?

Irrigation systems

Wheel usage

Organized trade systems

Form of writing (pictographs --> cuneiform) to record trade

I. Sumeria: An Overview

A.The Sumerians

- first civilization

B.Environmental Challenges

1.Tigris and Euphrates Rivers

- loose soil/ organic material (good for agriculture)
- rivers occasionally flood banks (seasonally: spring)
- when flooded could completely ruin cities
- used for irrigation
- bugs
- swampland in between 2 rivers

2. Location of 'City-States: own diplomacy, laws, languages, etc...'

- Babylon
- Ur
- Haran
- Nineveh

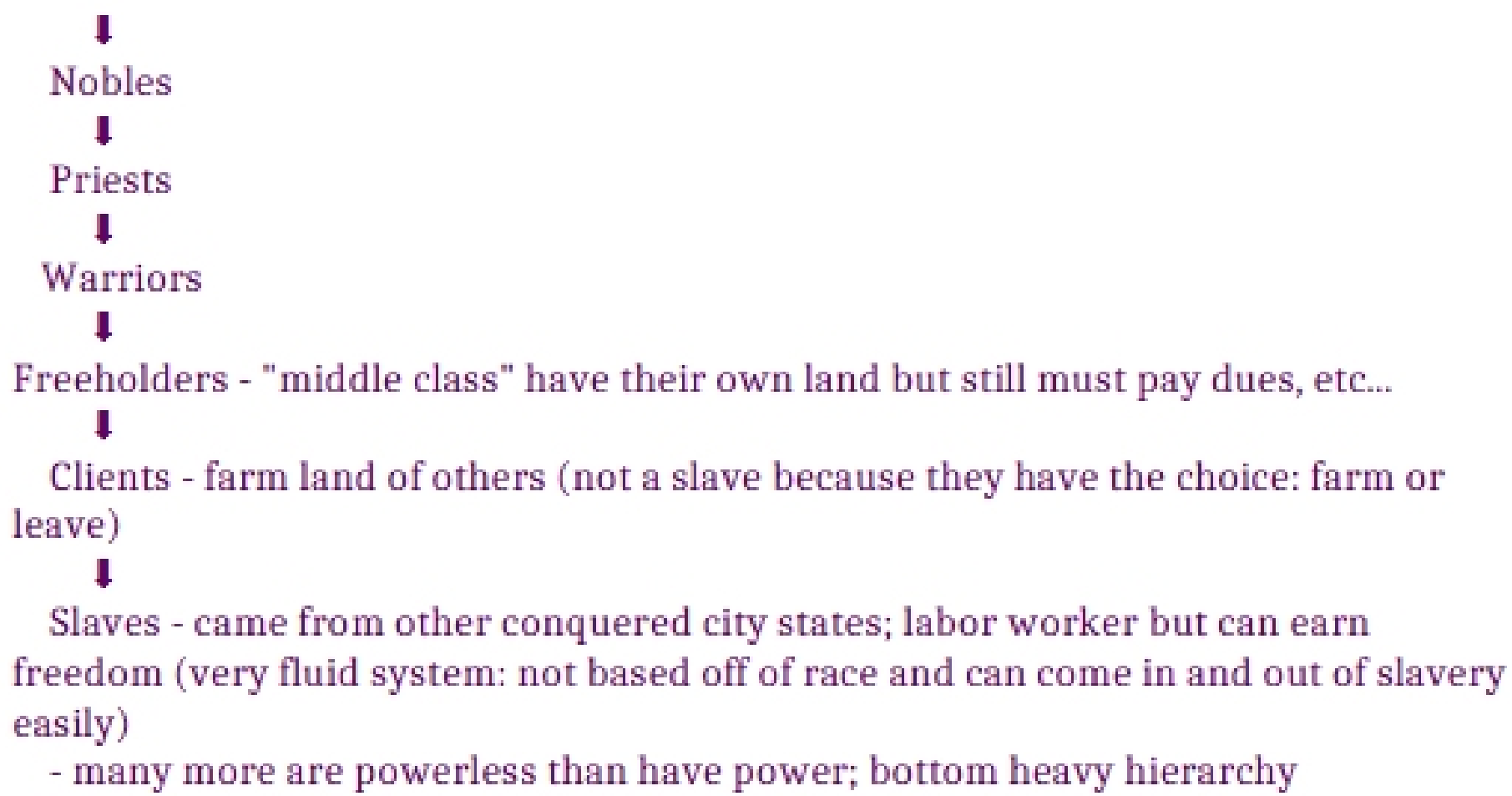
C.Sumerian Politics and Society

1. Royal status

- organized around a king
- accumulated power through wealth: that royal status become permanent and was passed down through offspring - blood right (oldest male child was in direct lineage of the king if her were to die)
- kings job is to commute with the gods (believed in divine right monarchy: you're the king because the god says you are)
- in their world kings had power over everything including people's life/death and it was even believed that they controlled the level of the rivers
- one is a good king if they have the Mandate of Heaven (if things go the way they're supposed to go you're golden)

2. Social Hierarchy

King



3. Gender distinctions

- men are somehow superior to women
- men are treated better than women
- although no man in a social class below a woman of higher class was superior to her (women are enhanced by their social class and that's how they earn their respect)

D.Sumerian Technological and Intellectual Advances

1. Mathematics

- comer
- invented fractions: fractionally kept track of taxes and money for trade
- measured angles and circles by degrees: advanced builders

2. Weights and Measures

- started balance weight measurement: compared how much they were giving for how much they were giving
- created lunar calendar: invented measurement of time by lunar cycle (told time in a linear form)

3. Cuneiform (ca. 3,200 BCE)

- pictograms to ideograms (lasted a total of about 2,000 years: 3100 BCE- 700 BCE)

II. Religion, Architecture, and Authority in Sumerian Life

A.Sumerian Religion

1. Cosmology

- how you explain your place in the universe (cosmo)

2. Life and Afterlife

- What happens after death? Where do we come from?
- men were originally crated by a god sacrifice: cleansing, using flesh and blood
- often afterlife is a better place of perfection

- Sumerians believed that they lived a terrible life and the horrors of life were visited on them by the gods, but knew it was their role to serve their gods and believed that after life they continued on serving to the gods, just more directly

3. Epic Poems: Epic of Gilgamesh

- wrote poems

B. Religion and Architecture

1. The Step Pyramid (ziggurat)

- forerunners of Egyptian pyramids

- ziggurat is built in middle of the city state and is continuously built upon used to bring offerings and prayers closer to gods

- many uses such as grainery, statues are housed, place of worship, sacred space, etc...

2. Appeasement of Divine Forces

- these step pyramids were built to appease the gods, along with many other of the sacrifices and architecture the Sumerians did

- the kings power is divine

C. Priests and State Authority

1. Taxation

- Sumerians didn't complain about taxes because it was considered an irreligious act

2. Centrality of Religion

- ever present and central to ones identity

- a clay figure is created to always be praying for one in case of absence

III. Formation of the Babylonian Empire

A. Sargon (Akkadian) and Hammurabi (Babylonian)

1. Conflict and Consolidation

- walls were built of clay to keep people in and keep people out (king did this to protect the sanctity of the city)

2. Conquest and Empire

- city-state of Akkad was first to have empire and did this by conquering other city-states and gaining control by the threat of violence, becoming a world empire; although, the ruler Sargon allowed cooperation within an empire

- city-state of Babylonian expanded Mesopotamia culture; the ruler, Hammurabi, imposed his own laws upon other city-states and spread his empire, becoming sort of a world empire

B. Spread of Mesopotamian Civilization

1. Importance of Trade

- allowed the spread of the Mesopotamian civilization

2. Spread of Mesopotamian Advances

- ideas and cultures, such as, their calendars, mathematics, and trade

3. Cultural Syncretism