Ancient Sumerians

Reviving a civilization from the past

Megan Frisella, Joy Lim, Sriya Pidatala, Tony Vuolo
Who were the Sumerians?

- A civilization that populated land in southern Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq and Kuwait)
- The Sumerians are known for the first cities and innovation in writing, governance, and technology.
- Sumer existed from around 4000 BCE to 2000 BCE.
Origin of the Sumerians

➔ 4500-4000 BCE (in Mesopotamia)
   ◆ Ubaid people - civilization built around farming communities

➔ 3000 BCE - Sumerians took over the region and controlled it until 2000 BCE
Sumerian City-States

→ Sumerian city-states were walled in communities surrounded by agricultural villages

→ Governed by a king/priest who serves as a political and religious leader
  ◆ Each city is dedicated to a Sumerian deity who is worshiped by the city's inhabitants

→ The first cities in the world were in the Sumerian civilization
  ◆ Uruk: The first city in the world and the capital of the Sumerian empire
Government

- Government could levy taxes; allowed them to have public works like large canals and monuments
- A record of kings was found inscribed on a tablet
- Lugalzagesi was the last ruler before Sumer came under the control of another nation
- Captured by the Akkadians
Language

- One of the first writing systems was cuneiform
  - Cuneiform uses pictographs, written with a reed stylus on a wet clay tile
- Employed scribes to keep records in government or religious settings
  - Stamps with symbols that indicate what is being traded
  - Detailed trade reports (for taxes, etc.)
Social Structure

1. King/Priest
2. Subordinate Priests (religious leaders and healers)
3. Upper Class (self-employed, high in the military, scribes)
4. Commoners (Fishermen, craftsmen, artisans, merchants, farmers, temple workers, dependents of nobility)
5. Slaves
Slavery in Sumer

- People became slaves in 3 main ways:
  - Prisoners of war that resulted from battles between city-states
  - Selling oneself into slavery to pay debts
  - Being sold into slavery by a family member to pay debts

- They were free to purchase their freedom and were not overly mistreated

- Labor from slavery allowed the Sumerians to expand their empire and create a successful civilization

- Enslaved individuals worked in agriculture, industry, as personal servants, and in any field that they had talent in
Primary energy sources were biomass, hydropower, solar energy, and wind. The main source of labor was muscular power provided by humans and domesticated animals.

Oil was a biomass used by the Sumerians. 3 BCE: evidence that they use lamps (powered by plant oils) for lighting.
Family & Gender Roles

→ The man was the head of the family and could have more than one wife
→ Both men and women worked
→ Men were craftsmen, merchants, fishermen, farmers
→ Women enjoyed almost equal rights, but were not given an education.
  ◆ They could hold high positions (such as priestesses) but were generally employed in lower occupations.
→ Children learned the roles of their corresponding parent
Temples

- Temples - religious, economic, and social life
- Fancy architectural features, extensive decoration
- Largest ones 300 ft tall
- Lots of religious sculptures
Religion & Tradition

- Religion was animism
- Had lots of myths, deities
  - Epic of Gilgamesh
- High class people were sometimes buried with goods and other corpses when they died
Agriculture

- Lived on Fertile Crescent = successful agricultural industry
  - Fertile land because of the two rivers which often flooded (both good and bad)
    - feeds people when there is no food and increases exports so that they can get more goods
    - If crop is destroyed then there is no food and less things to trade for food
- Complicated irrigation systems were overseen by managers
- Inventions include the wheel, which helped the creation of wheeled carts and the plow.
Trade

➔ Most of wealth came from trade
   ◆ Didn't have a lot of natural resources in region
   ◆ Precious Metals: One of the earliest users of metal and bronze
   ◆ Sumerian tablets record trade of copper, gold, and silver between Ur (modern day Iran) and Magan (~modern-day Oman)

➔ Transportation:
   ◆ Large quantities (grain) transported by boat
   ◆ Small quantities (precious stones) transported by foot or donkey

➔ Traded at, at least, 8 foreign trading outposts in Mesopotamia (neighboring and across seas/deserts)
Technology & Innovation

- City walls helped protect various city states from invaders and siege.
- Canals/locks were very useful in several ways.
- Numerous inventions.
Significant Events, Part 1

➔ Sumerian influence and general power
  ◆ Peaked in 2500 BCE

➔ Sumerian expansion
  ◆ King Shulgi captures parts of southwestern Iran
  ◆ Walls are built to keep out enemies

➔ Nippur Temple Complex constructed, 2100 BCE
  ◆ Nippur was settled in 5000 BCE, and remained until 800 CE
  ◆ Temple complex includes temples, priest quarters
  ◆ Assembly halls, courtyards, workshops and craft shops were included in complexes built from 4000-2100 BCE
Significant Events, Part 2

- Third Dynasty of Ur
  - Started with the Gutian relinquishing of power over Ur around 2120 BCE
  - Ur-Nammu created a small empire from the remains of the Gutian realm
  - Last native dynasty to control Sumer
  - Cities controlled by UR at some time: Uruk, Isin, Eridu, Larsa, Nippur, Adab, Kish, Eshnunna
End of Sumer

➔ Elamite invasion in 21\textsuperscript{st} century BCE
  ◆ King Shulgi (ca. 2094-2047 BCE) takes over most of Elam during his reign
  ◆ Hostile Amorites started settling the fields outside of Ur
  ◆ Elamites first take over Ur in 2004 BCE
    ● King is taken prisoner
    ● Townspeople are slaughtered
  ◆ Elamites destroyed Ur in the 1900s BCE

“Ancient Mesopotamian Warfare.” SiOWfa15 Science in Our World Certainty and Controversy, sites.psu.edu/ancientmesopotamianwarfare/slavery/.


IMAGES:
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