

Achievements of Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia, located in the Middle East, is often called the “cradle of civilization.” This region is where some of humanity’s earliest achievements occurred. For example, the first writing system was developed in Mesopotamia, and the first cities were also established there. The people of this region have made many invaluable contributions to society as a whole. We should all be proud of their accomplishments!

Irrigation Systems

The ancient people of Mesopotamia created their civilization with many new ideas and inventions. One of the first was the creation of irrigation systems.

Mesopotamia is known as the Fertile Crescent because it is built around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers which together create a crescent-shaped area. The rivers flooded and left behind fertile soil for farming.

However, the semiarid (partially dry) climate gave the people little rainfall to water their crops. Irrigation, the act of moving water to where it’s needed, helped these ancient people successfully grow crops. They dug many canals, tunnels in the earth, from the river to the farms.

Irrigation led to a surplus (extra) of food. Sumerians, the earliest civilization of Mesopotamia, was able to increase its population and grow into cities, all thanks to their early irrigation discoveries.

Farming Inventions

As far back as 2500 B.C.E. metalworkers started mixing copper with tin to produce bronze, which creates a much stronger metal. Farmers used this material for tools. This allowed them to turn more soil because the tools were stronger and able to withstand more weight.

This resulted in larger crops and the ability to feed more people.

Another invention was an early form of seeding machine. Farmers attached a container filled with seeds to their plows. The container had a small hole

on the bottom that allowed seeds to slowly fall out onto the newly tilled soil. The technique made it possible for less farmers to plant more seeds.

Weights and Measures

Sumerians developed standard units of measurements for weight. They were able to accurately calculate the length, area and volume. This is how they measured crop harvests. It also allowed them to conduct trade. They could be precise in measuring how much wheat they were exchanging for another product or service.

The mina was a standard weight at that time. One mina was equal to 60 shekels, approximately one pound. In order to create measurement systems Sumerians need a number system. Their number system was based on the number 60. We adopted this method in calculating our time – 60 minutes in an hours, 60 seconds in a minute.

The Wheel

Archeologists uncovered the world's earliest wheel in Mesopotamia. They dated it back to 3500 B.C.E. Sumerians were the first to attach wheels to a cart. Chariots were made that were pulled by oxen or donkeys. They carried the wealthy nobles in these carts. The Sumerians also used the wheel for pottery making and milling (cutting metal). Merchants used these early vehicles for long-distance trading.

Math

If you love math you can thank the Mesopotamians! The people of Mesopotamia developed mathematics about 5,000 years ago. It was originally used to count when trading, things like sheep and crops. Archeologists have found many cuneiform (Mesopotamia's writing system) tablets with advanced mathematical calculations on them. They include operations such as fractions, geometry, algebra and quadratic equations.

Art and Architecture

One of the most distinctive features of Mesopotamian architecture is the ziggurat. These massive structures were built as temples for the gods and served as a link between the heavens and the earth. The ziggurat at Ur, for example, was constructed of mud bricks and stood nearly 200 feet tall. It was composed of a series of terraces, each one smaller than the one below it, with a stairway leading up to the top. The ziggurat was usually topped by a temple, which served as the home of the god or goddess who was worshipped there.

In addition to the ziggurat, Mesopotamians also invented winged bulls and lions, which were placed at entrances to palaces and temples as guardian figures. These statues were often made of glazed brick or stone, and their size and striking appearance helped to reinforce the power of the ruler.