

Lecture 9
Ancient Near East Cultures:
Sumeria, Babylonia, Judea



The Fertile Crescent, where agriculture began in 8000 BCE

Female figurines: Terra cotta 5000 BCE



Sites yield an abundance of terra cotta figures of woman with exaggerated hips and breasts, indicating concerns of fertility as a fundamental principle of survival for agro-pastoral communities.

This type of fertility symbol (mother goddess) appeared in the Near East at the end of the 9th millennium and continued for several more millennia.

Gaston Lachaise
Standing Woman
(Heroic Woman)
1932 (cast 1981)



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Chronology of Mesopotamian civilization

3000 BCE to the current era (birth of Christ) in comparison to Palestine, Egypt, and Greece.

Year	Historical Event / Discovery	Region / Civilization	Approx. Date	Archaeological Evidence	Significance
3000	Earliest known writing	Sumer (Mesopotamia)	~3000	Uruk Tablets	Start of recorded history
2800-2600	Uruk Period	Sumer	2800-2600	Uruk IV, Uruk III	Expansion of Sumerian culture
2500-2300	Early Dynastic Period I	Sumer, Akkad	2500-2300	Early Dynastic I Tablets	First Sumerian dynasties
2300-2100	Early Dynastic Period II & III	Sumer, Akkad	2300-2100	Early Dynastic II/III Tablets	Continuation and growth
2100-1900	Accadian Period	Akkad	2100-1900	Accadian Tablets	First Semitic empire
1900-1800	Old Babylonian Period	Babylon (Sumer)	1900-1800	Old Babylonian Tablets	Second Semitic empire
1800-1600	Isin-Larsa Period	Sumer	1800-1600	Isin-Larsa Tablets	Third Sumerian dynasties
1600-1500	Isin-Larsa Period	Sumer	1600-1500	Isin-Larsa Tablets	Continuation of Sumerian culture
1500-1200	Old Assyrian Period	Assyria (Mesopotamia)	1500-1200	Old Assyrian Tablets	First Assyrian empire
1200-1000	Old Babylonian Period	Babylon	1200-1000	Old Babylonian Tablets	Second Babylonian empire
1000-500	New Babylonian Period	Babylon	1000-500	New Babylonian Tablets	Third Babylonian empire
500	Seleucid Period	Syria (Mesopotamia)	500	Seleucid Tablets	Part of Hellenistic world

Chronological chart

2100 BCE	Ur III		
2350 BCE	Akkadian		
	Early Dynastic	III II I	
2900 BCE	Jemdet Nasr		
3100 BCE	Uruk	Late Middle Early	
4000 BCE	Ubaid		
5000 BCE			

Note: Dates, based principally on radiocarbon determinations, are approximate.

Sumeria 3500–2000 BCE


Lost Culture—Unknown to Herodotus (484–425 BCE)

City of Ur

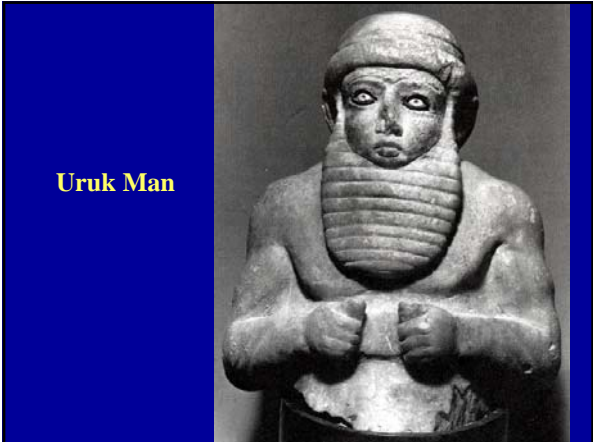
Writing Developed 3000 BCE (cuneiform)

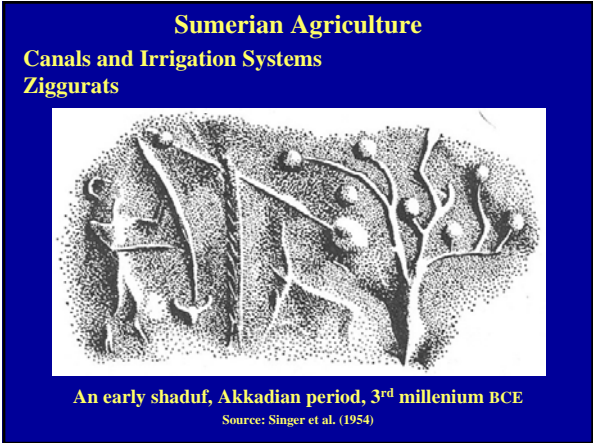
Sumer and Akkad, 3500–2000 BCE

Source: Harper Atlas of World History (1992)



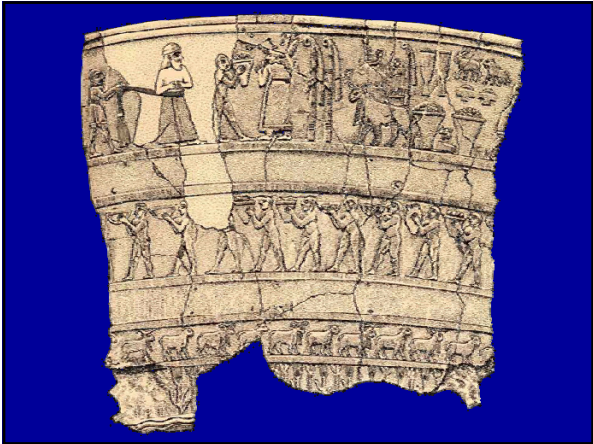
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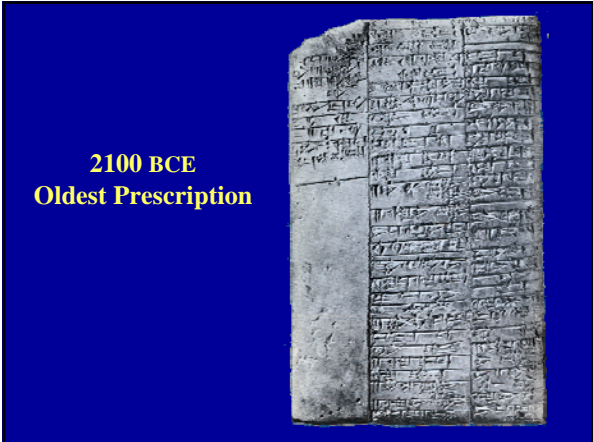
Cuneiform Inscriptions

Writing is inextricably associated with the evolution of agriculture.
These 5 Sumerian clay tablets dating to 3000 BCE appear to be associated with crops and livestock.

The image shows five fragments of clay tablets with cuneiform inscriptions. The fragments are arranged in two rows: three in the top row and two in the bottom row. The inscriptions include various symbols, some of which appear to be pictorial representations of agricultural items like a horse and a cow.

		head
		ration
		disbursement
		cow
		plow

The image shows a grid of cuneiform symbols. The symbols are arranged in two columns and five rows. To the right of each row, there is a label in English: 'head', 'ration', 'disbursement', 'cow', and 'plow'. The symbols are yellow on a blue background.



**The Disputation Between
the Hoe and the Plow**

Hoe picked a quarrel with the Plow.
Hoe and Plow—this is their dispute.

Hey! Hoe, Hoe, Hoe, tied up with string;
Hoe, made from poplar, with a tooth of ash;
Hoe, made from tamarisk, with a tooth of sea-thorn;
Hoe, double-toothed, four-toothed;
Hoe, child of the poor, bereft even of a loin-cloth;

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Hoe cried out to Plow

“O Plow, you draw furrows—what is your furrowing to me?
You make clods—what is your clod making to me?
You cannot dam up water when it escapes.
You cannot heap up earth in the basket.
You cannot press clay or make bricks.
You cannot lay foundations or build a house.
You cannot strengthen an old wall’s base.
You cannot put a roof on a man’s house.
O Plow, you cannot straighten a street.
O Plow, you draw furrows—what is your furrowing to me?
You make clods—what is your clod-making to me?”

The Plow cries out to the Hoe

“I, I am Plow, I was fashioned by the great powers, assembled
by noblest hands!
I am the mighty registrar of God Enlil!
I am the faithful farmer of Mankind!
At the celebration of my harvest-festival in the fields,
Even the King slaughters cattle for me, adding sheep!
He pours out libations for me, and offers the collected liquids!
Drums and tympanans sound!
The king himself takes hold of my handle-bars;
My oxen he harnesses to the yoke;
Great noblemen walk at my side;
The nations gaze at me in admiration,
The Land watches me in Joy!”

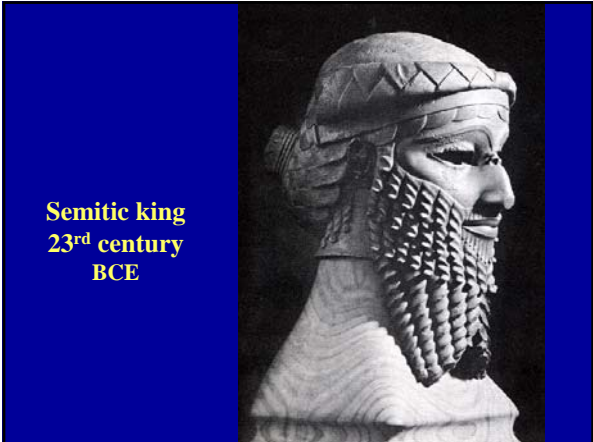
Terra Cotta Wagons 2500 BCE



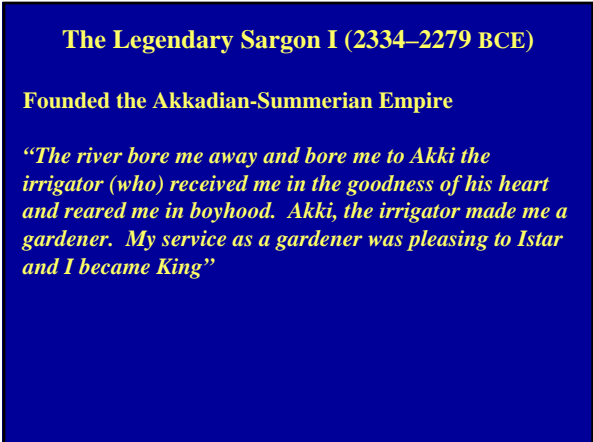
Two-wheeled carts drawn by asses or oxen were developed at the end of the 4th millennium for use on flat land.

Over uneven terrain goods were transported on the backs of asses which could cover 20 km per day.

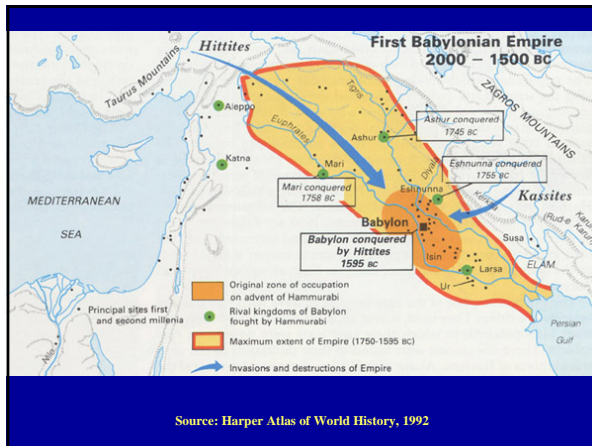
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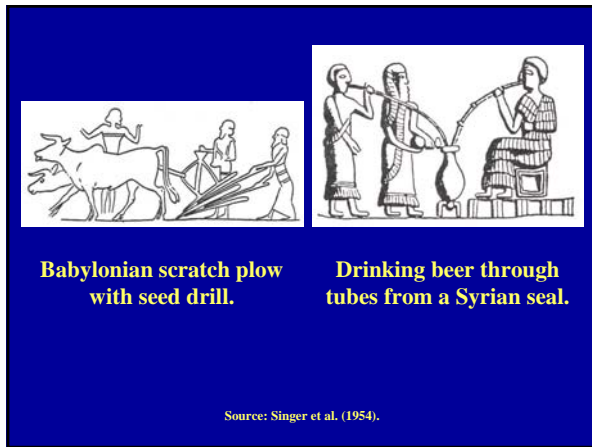






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Hammurabi (1795–1750 BCE)
King of Babylon
Code of Hammurabi
Nebuchadnezzar
(villain in the Book of Daniel)



The Laws of Hammurabi
A Sampling of Laws Relating to Agriculture

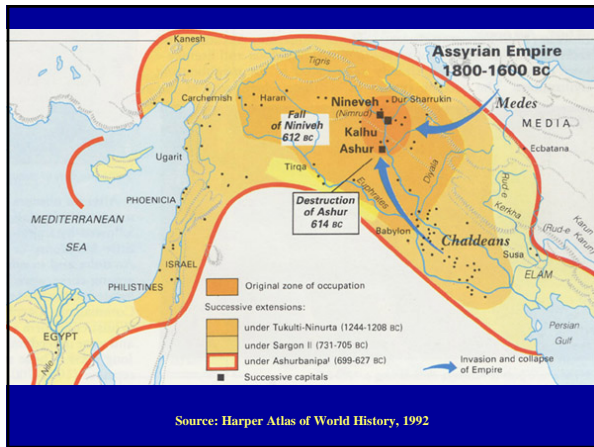
64 If a man gives his orchard to a gardener to pollinate (the date palms), as long as the gardener is in possession of the orchard, he shall give to the owner of the orchard two thirds of the yield of the orchard, and he himself shall take one third.

65 If the gardener does not pollinate the (date palms in the) orchard and thus diminishes the yield, the gardener [shall measure and deliver] a yield for the orchard to the owner of the orchard in accordance with his neighbor's yield.

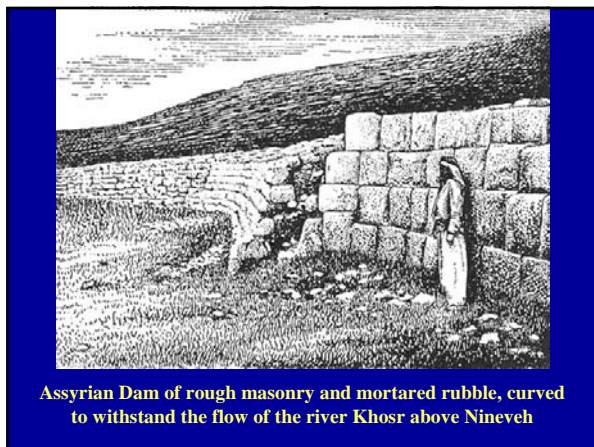
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God pollinating the date palm



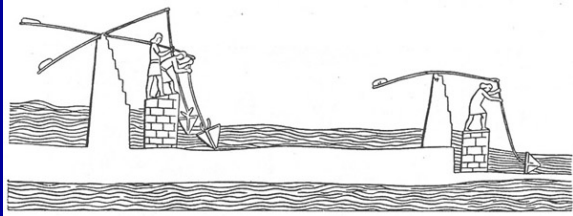
Source: Harper Atlas of World History, 1992




Assyrian Dam of rough masonry and mortared rubble, curved to withstand the flow of the river Khosr above Nineveh

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Assyrian Irrigation

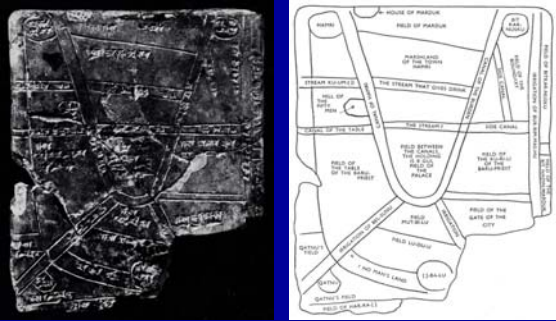


Raising river water with shaduf using a double lift.
The shadufs, on mud uprights, stand at two levels on the river bank utilizing a brick platform built out into the water.
From the palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh, Mesopotamia
7th Century BCE.

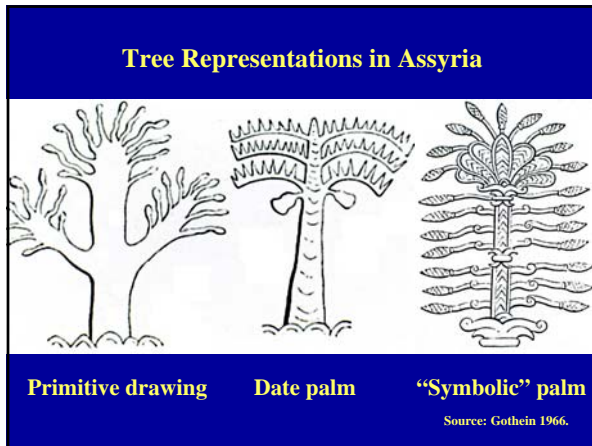


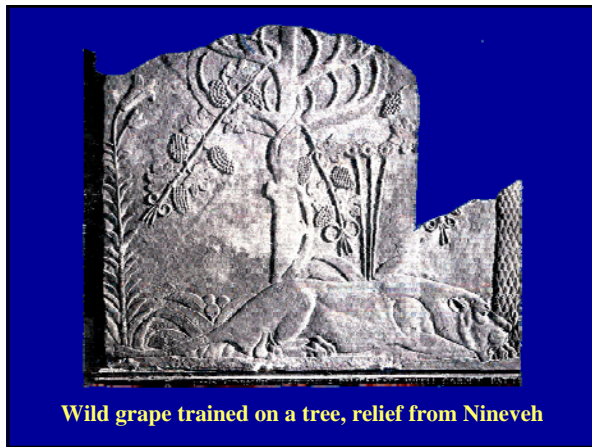
**Ziggurat of Aqra
Quaf, 1400 BCE**
Source Science 293:32 (2001).

**Hanging Gardens of Babylon.
A 19th century conception.**
Source: Berrall (1966).



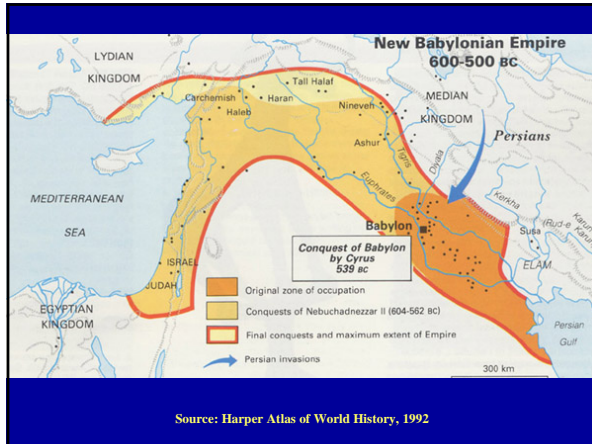
**Map of fields and irrigation canals near Nippur,
Mesopotamia from cuneiform tablet, ca 1300 BCE (left).
Translation (right).**

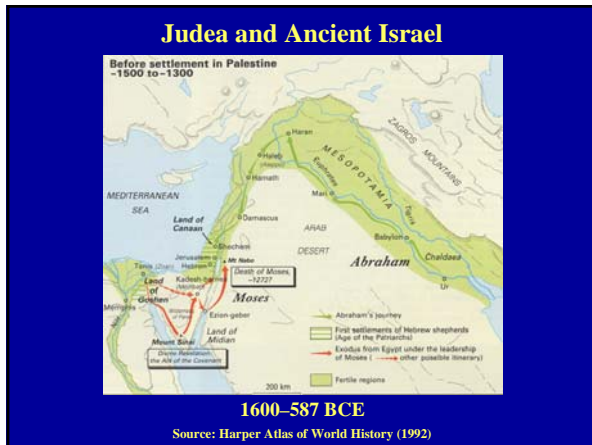


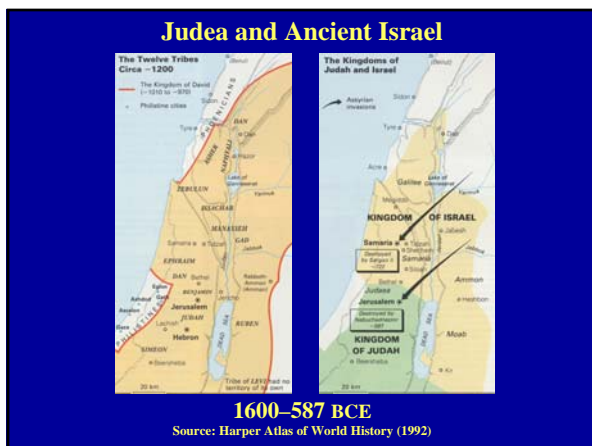




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Biblical Sourcebook of Agriculture

And Noah began to be a husbandman, and he planted a vineyard, and he drank of wine. (Genesis 9:20–21)

...and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nations shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more. (Isaiah 2:14)
