

# Lesson 2 The First Civilization

## MAIN IDEAS

**Culture** Food surpluses, new technology, and advanced social organization led to a complex way of life. It is called civilization.

**Government** A new type of government developed in Sumer that included a city and its surrounding lands.

**Government** Religion dominated life in Sumer, but in time, powerful men who were not priests became the political rulers.

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## The Rise of Civilization

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION** How did civilization develop in the region of Sumer?

### Culture Grows More Complex

- Rise of agriculture allowed people to settle in villages
- As villages grew into cities, society and culture grew more complex
  - changes led to **civilization**—advanced form of culture
- Most historians think civilization first began in Sumer, 3300 B.C.
  - **Sumer**—a region in southern Mesopotamia

### Traits of Civilization

- **Advanced Cities**—offered many advantages
  - place to store, trade surplus grain; later, many jobs, large temples
- **Specialized Workers**—people do jobs requiring special skills
  - specialization and developing skills improves quality of work
  - city people must cooperate on projects and organize their society
  - in early Sumerian cities, priests organized society, acted as judges
- **Complex Institutions**—religion, government became institutions
  - groups of people who share a purpose, help society meet its needs
  - institutions also include schools, armies
- **Record Keeping**—societies must keep records of things such as food
  - usually written, but early Mesopotamians used counting sticks
  - later Mesopotamians invented world's first system of writing

## Traits of Civilization

- **Advanced Technology**—people learn better ways of doing things
  - Sumerians used canals to irrigate crops
  - created new tools, used new materials
  - made tools from bronze—a mixture of copper and tin
  - replaced softer copper metal

### REVIEW QUESTION

Why was Sumer a good example of civilization?

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# Sumerian City-States

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION** What new type of community developed in Sumer?

## The City-States of Sumer

- Cities were centers of society, but most people lived in country
  - cities began to rule surrounding lands, villages
- **City-state**—self-ruled community including city and nearby farmlands
- By 3000 B.C., Sumer had at least 12 city-states
  - most, like Ur, were on fertile land by mouths of Tigris, Euphrates

## Life in the City

- Slow-growing Sumerian cities had narrow, winding streets
- Walls surrounded cities; gates let people come and go
- Homes had thick mud walls to keep out heat, tunnels to get fresh air
  - rooms surrounded covered courtyard that was cooking area

## The Ziggurat: City Center

- In Sumerian city, largest, most important building was the temple
  - **ziggurats**—Sumerian temples first built around 2200 B.C.
- Priests ran irrigation, so ziggurat was center of city life
  - priests were paid with grain, so they controlled, stored surplus
  - priests ended up controlling much of city-states' wealth

## REVIEW QUESTION

What was life like in Sumerian cities?

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# Changes in Leadership

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION** How did the leadership of Sumer change?

## Sumerian Religion

- Sumerian religion based on **polytheism**—belief in many gods, goddesses
  - gods of sky, wind, foothills, fresh water created and ruled world
- Each city-state worshiped own god
  - Sumerians had thousands of lesser gods
- Believed gods looked and acted like people

## Priests Become Leaders

- Sumerians thought gods protected against flood, drought, invasion
- Priests worked to please gods in order to protect cities
  - priests claimed that they had influence with gods
  - people believed claim and accepted priest as the cities' leaders

## Service to the Gods

- Saw gods as rich landowners who created humans to work for them
- People followed religious rules, prayed, made offerings to gods
  - all participated in rituals, many of which were held at ziggurat
- Believed souls of dead went to land of no return—gloomy underworld
  - Scholars think hard life made Sumerians expect unhappy afterlife

## New Leaders in Sumer

- By 3000 B.C., rich city-states were attacked by other regions, cities
- In times of war, people asked powerful men to rule, protect cities
  - later they ran city-states full-time, took some of priests' jobs
- This type of ruler became a **king**—the highest-ranked leader of group
- By 2375 B.C., Sumer was a kingdom ruled by a single king
- Priests still tried to please gods—people thought gods let kings rule

## REVIEW QUESTION

How did kings take over as rulers of Sumer?

## Lesson Summary

- Sumer had a complex society and culture. Historians consider it the first civilization.
- Sumerian city-states were a form of government that included cities and the land around them.
- Priests were the first leaders in Sumer, but kings became leaders when the need for defense grew.

## Why It Matters Now...

Cities first became important in Sumer. People today still move to cities to find jobs, education, and culture.