

## Handout 2: Early Cities

Adapted from *Big History* by Cynthia Stokes Brown (2007)

***“Were these four societies civilization?” As you read, identify evidence that will help you answer this question and determine if they meet the criteria for civilization.***

The first cities developed in about 3500 BCE in four river valleys across Afroeurasia. The earliest cities appeared in the Tigris and Euphrates valleys in what is now southern Iraq. Cities also appeared in the Nile valley in Egypt, the Indus valley in Pakistan/India, and in the Yellow River valley in China. All of these cities were supported by farming in the river valley areas, although the specific crops varied by place. They all also had domesticated animals which provided food as well.

### **Mesopotamia-Sumer**

The name *Mesopotamia* actually means “land between rivers” in ancient Greek. This society, also known as Sumer, is an ancient civilization of cities that developed on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers over five thousand years ago.

The first of eight Sumerian cities to develop was Uruk. Uruk had two major temples. One was to An, the sky god and another to Inanna the goddess of love and protection. Each major city in Sumer was devoted to one or more gods. The Sumerians believed that the gods resided in the temples they built for them.

Sumerians believed in seven major gods and goddesses, who formed a council that decided what would happen to people. The four gods were An (sky), Enlil (air), Enki (water and wisdom), and Utu (sun). The three goddesses were Ki (Earth), Nannar (moon), and Inanna (love and protection). People in Sumer ranked gods just like they were ranked when hierarchies appeared. The major gods lived in temples that formed large towers called *ziggurats*.

Over time, the cities of Sumer were united. King Sargon of the city Akkad conquered the other cities, demolished their walls, and appointed his sons as governors. Sumer was now ruled by one city and its ruler controlled others, supported by scribes and priests. Sargon’s grandson, Naram Suen, declared himself a god.

### **Indus River Civilization**

People began living in the Indus Valley in about 7000 BCE and on the Indus River by 3000 BCE. Archeologists have excavated two Indus Valley cities, Mohenjo Daro and Harappa. Scholars have not been able to decipher Indus script, so not much is known about their culture.

Scholars do know that the people of Mahenjo Daro and Harappa were able to separate drinking water from waste-water in the first known sewage system. Some carvings on artifacts found in these cities may depict some early forms of Hindu gods. By 1500 BCE life on the Indus River had disappeared. Scholars think there may have been an earthquake or a flood that made life difficult. Another possibility is that farming became difficult because of *salinization*. *Salinization* occurs