

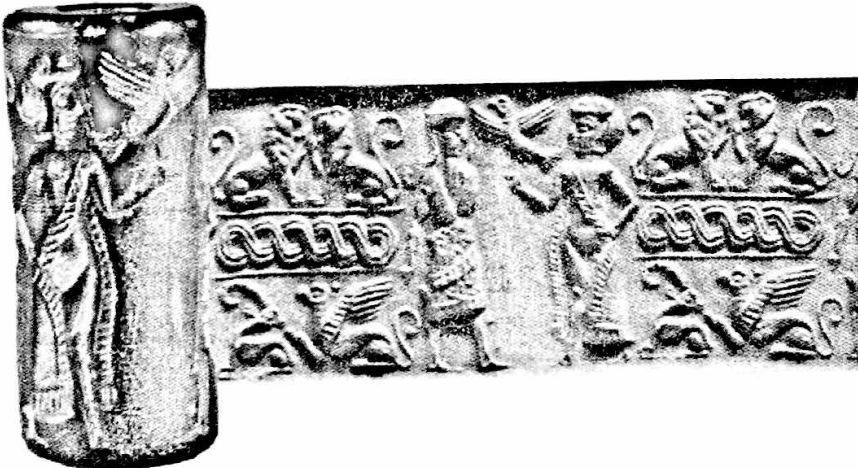
Student Handout I: Mesopotamia and Egypt

Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia, or the area in the floodplain between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, was home to many small Neolithic farming villages that grew steadily between 4000 and 3500 BC/BCE. By 3000 BC/BCE the villages became cities and grew in population and began building walls and monuments. Sumer was a particular civilization that developed in the region of Mesopotamia.

Cities were home to a privileged class of elites who headed households supported by nearby irrigated land. The households were made up of staff, slaves, and workers. Outside the walls of the city, merchants traded products like wool and food for timber and metals from as far away as Egypt or the Indus River. Evidence of Sumerian seals has been found in both places.

Sumerian Seal (http://z.about.com/d/arthistory/1/0/1/8/MorganExpansion_12.jpg 6/3/10)



Each city had a large monument that was believed to be home to a god. The monument was surrounded by a temple managed by priests. The temples were the wealthiest of households, each supported by agriculture, artisans who crafted metals and stones into goods, and large storehouses of surplus grain.

Sumerian religion was polytheistic – meaning there was more than one god. The religion revolved around monuments and the houses the gods. People believed that if the gods were not pleased by the splendor of the temple, floods or attacks might occur. It is believed there were two types of deities (gods) in Sumer; each city-state had local gods they worshipped, and there were also several gods that were worshipped across the larger region.