

Revision Notes

Chapter-2: Writing and City Life

SNIPPETS FROM THE CHAPTER

I. Ancient Mesopotamia

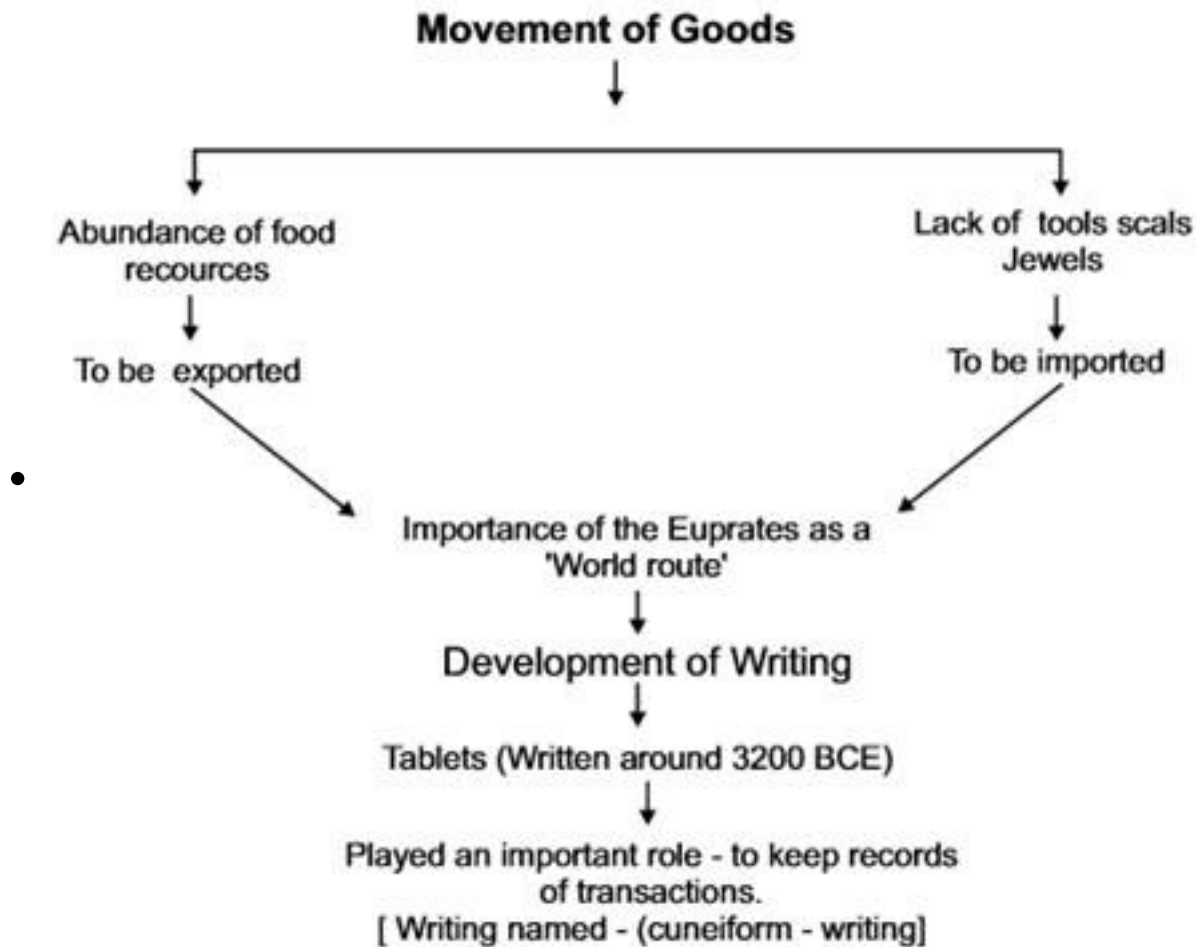
Geography:

- City life began in Mesopotamia (Mesopotamia is derived from the Greek words 'mesos', meaning middle, and 'potamos', meaning river.)
- It is a flat land between the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers that is now part of the Republic of Iraq.
- In the north, there is a stretch of upland called a steppe, where animal herding offers people a better livelihood than agriculture
- Agriculture began between 7000 and 6000 BCE.
- Soil was very fertile here but agriculture was threatened because of natural causes.
- Ur, Lagash, Kish, Uruk and Mari were some of its important cities.
- The excavation work started 150 years ago.

Urbanisation

- Mesopotamian civilization was based on definite plan.
- Cities and towns are develop when an economy develops in spheres other than food production that it becomes an advantage for people to cluster in towns.
- Urban economies comprise besides food production, trade, manufactures and services.
- There is social organisation in place
- Helpful for the city manufacturers.
- The division of labour is a mark of urban life.

Movement of Goods into cities



II. Mesopotamian & Writing Modern Writing

1. Mesopotamian Writing:

- The first Mesopotamian tablets, written around 3200 BCE, contained picture-like signs and numbers.
- Writing began when society needed to keep records of transactions – because in city life transactions occurred at different times, and involved many people and a variety of goods
- Mesopotamians wrote on tablets of clay.

2. Modern Writing: The greatest legacy of Mesopotamia to the world is its scholarly tradition of time reckoning and mathematics, calender.

III. Political Factors

- From about 1100 BCE, when the Assyrians established their kingdom in the north, the region became known as Assyria. The first known language of the land was Sumerian.
- Writing was used not only for keeping records, but also for making dictionaries,

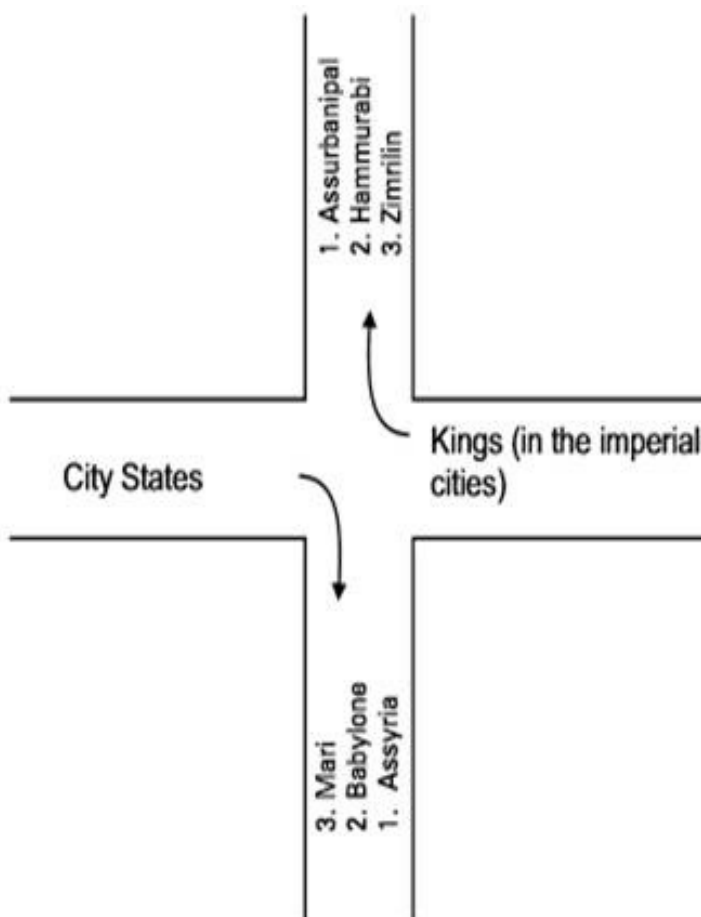
giving legal validity to land transfers, narrating the deeds of kings, and announcing the changes a king had made in the customary laws of the land.

- It can be inferred that in Mesopotamian understanding it was kingship that organised trade and writing.

Religious Factors

- Early settlers (their origins are unknown) began to build and rebuild temples at selected spots in their villages. The earliest known temple was a small shrine made of unbaked bricks. Temples were the residences of various gods.
- Temples were centres of religious activities. They were dedicated to different gods and goddess.

(5000 BCE – Settlements began to develop in southern Mesopotamia)



IV. Social Factors

1. Life in the City – Mesopotamian society the nuclear family was the norm, although a married son and his family often resided with his parents. The father was the head of the

family.

- A ruling elite had emerged
- Had a major share of wealth
- Followed nuclear family system and patriarchal system
- Condition of women
- System of marriages

2. Ur – was a town, one of the earliest cities. It is often compared with Mohenjodaro

3. In Mesopotamian tradition, Uruk was the city par excellence, often known simply as The City.

V. Economic Factors

1. Urbanism
2. Trade
3. Record of transaction
 - Writing began in Mesopotamia in 3200 BCE.
 - Writing became as a records of transactions
 - 2600 BCE the letters became cuneiform and language was Sumerian

VI. Cultural Factors

1. System of Writing:
 - Writing was skilled craft
 - It conveyed in visual form of system of sounds of a particular language
2. Literacy:
 - Writing reflected the mode of speaking
 - King and very few could read
 - Official letter from a king could be read
3. Uses of Writing:
 - Connections between city life trade and writing is brought out.

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- It has brought out in a long Sumerian epic poem about Enmerkar (king)
 - Kingship was able to organise trade and writing

4. Inter Mixture culture:

- Mesopotamian society and culture were open to different people and cultures.
- Thus the vitality of the civilisation was of course - an intermixture culture

Cuneiform Script

1. Meaning: It is a script of Mesopotamia. The word 'Cuneiform' is derived from the Latin words *cuneus*, meaning 'wedge' and *forma*, meaning 'shape'. Cuneiform letters were wedge shaped, hence, like nails.

2. Uses: By 2600 BCE or so, the letters became cuneiform, and the language was Sumerian. Cuneiform writing in the Akkadian language continued in use until the first century CE, that is, for more than 2,000 years.

VII. Sources

- i. Tables (Written around 32000 BCE)
- ii. Bible (Old Testament)
- iii. British Museum
- iv. Texts

VIII. Greatest Legacy of Writing

1. Scholarly tradition of time reckoning

A. Calendar

- Division of years
- Division of Months
- Division of Weeks
- Division of Days
- Division of Hours
- Division of Minutes
- Division of Seconds

B. Recorder of Modern world Phenomenon past

C. Literature: Gilgamesh, which was written on twelve tablets, was the famous epic of Mesopotamia. It was the work of Uruk who was the ruler of Mesopotamia in 2700 BCE.

2. Mathematical contribution

- Tables with multiplication and division
- Square
- Square root tables
- Tables of compound interest
- Problem regarding
- A field of area
- Volume of water

IX. Timeline – refer to the text book Page No.48

X. Key Words : Mesopotamia, Cuneiform, Syllable, Steles, Nuclear Family.