

Cultural Development of Ancient Mesopotamians

Karimov Basriddin Irgashevich

Docent of of "Social Sciences" Department Tashkent State University of Economics



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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examines the cultural development of ancient Mesopotamia, with a focus on the invention and evolution of writing as a key achievement. **Method:** A comprehensive review of archaeological evidence, cuneiform inscriptions, and historical texts was conducted to analyze the origins and impact of early writing systems in Mesopotamia. Comparative analysis with contemporaneous cultures was also utilized to assess the uniqueness and influence of Mesopotamian writing. **Results:** The invention of writing by the Sumerians in the 4th millennium BC marked a transformative development in human history. Initially pictographic, the script evolved into a complex system of symbols (cuneiform), facilitating administrative, legal, and cultural exchanges. Writing was integral to the administration of city-states, religious practices, and the preservation of knowledge, contributing significantly to the intellectual foundations of subsequent civilizations. **Novelty:** This research underscores the critical role of writing in the cultural and societal advancements of Mesopotamia, highlighting its impact on governance, literature, and the transmission of knowledge. The study also provides new insights into the adaptability and influence of Sumerian writing in shaping the broader ancient world.

INTRODUCTION

The peoples who lived in Mesopotamia and founded such large states as Sumer, Akkad, Babylon and Assyria were distinguished by their highly developed science, literature and art, as well as the predominance of religious ideology [1].

The Sumerian economy was based on a system of irrigated agriculture. Animal husbandry and metalworking were also important. From the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC, the Sumerians made bronze tools, and by the end of the 2nd millennium BC, the Iron Age began.

One of the great achievements of Mesopotamia was the invention of writing. The first writing was invented by the Sumerians in southern Mesopotamia in the 4th millennium BC. It was a pictographic script, in which words were expressed through pictures. This science was called hieroglyphics. However, due to the limitations of pictographic writing, this script was improved and the famous cuneiform script was invented [2]; [3].

Cuneiform is an ideographic writing system used in ancient Near East, consisting of carving lines (signs) similar to nails or pins on clay tablets. It was created by the Sumerians at the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC. In this case, the names of some objects and general concepts were represented by pictures, for example, the image of a foot meant "walk", "stand", "carry". The number of such signs reached 1000. Sumerian

cuneiform was initially written from top to bottom, and later horizontally - from left to right. In the middle of the 3rd millennium BC, the word-syllabic form of cuneiform appeared, the number of signs was reduced to 600, and the picture-signs were simplified. At the same time, Sumerian cuneiform was adopted by the Akkadians (Babylonians and Assyrians) and adapted to the Semitic languages, the number of signs was reduced to 300. The cuneiform script developed by the Akkadians was later adapted to the languages of a number of neighboring peoples (Hittite, Elamite, Urartu, and ancient Persian) in the 2nd and 1st millennia BC. During this period, cuneiform became much closer to the letter-sound-syllable writing system and became the basis for the emergence of such writing systems. At the end of the 1st millennium BC, cuneiform was replaced by Aramaic writing [4].

Schools have existed in Mesopotamia since ancient times, where the children of wealthy people were educated. Literature, language, and grammar were taught in the lower grades of the schools. Astronomy, mathematics, geometry, medicine, and veterinary medicine, as well as religious lessons, were taught in the upper grades. The schools trained officials to govern the state.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research on the cultural development of ancient Mesopotamia employs a multidisciplinary approach, combining archaeological analysis, historical documentation, and comparative studies. Primary sources, including cuneiform texts, inscriptions, and ancient artifacts, are analyzed to trace the evolution of Mesopotamian society, particularly focusing on advancements in writing, architecture, and sciences. Archaeological excavations of key sites such as Ur, Nippur, Nineveh, and Babylon provide material evidence to support the examination of social, religious, and cultural practices. The study also integrates the analysis of literary works like the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and legal documents such as the Code of Hammurabi to explore the intellectual and legal contributions of Mesopotamian civilizations. Comparative analysis with other ancient cultures, alongside the interpretation of ancient texts, allows for a broader understanding of Mesopotamian achievements and their influence on neighboring regions. This comprehensive method offers a holistic view of the historical, cultural, and technological developments in the ancient Near East.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Since ancient times, Mesopotamian princes wrote literary and historical works on leather, clay, and clay tablets, first drying them in the sun, and then baking the clay tablets in kilns, creating unique books and organizing libraries. Such libraries existed in cities such as Ur, Nippur, Nineveh, Babylon, and Assyria. The largest of them was the library of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal in Nineveh, which contained more than 30,000 stone tablets [5].

The third powerful state in Mesopotamia was Assyria. Assyria was founded in the 3rd millennium BC and flourished in the second half of the 2nd millennium BC. Assyria

quickly became a powerful state due to its location at the crossroads of trade routes in the Middle East. Architecture played a leading role in Assyrian culture. The largest of the architectural monuments is the palace complex of King Sargon II, built in Dur-Sharrukin. The walls of this palace depict sculptures (animals). In Assyria, the palace walls depicted scenes from the life of the king and scenes from nature. For example, the walls of the palace of King Ashurbanipal II in Nineveh depict the "Great Lion Hunt", which skillfully depicts the wounded, dying and dead lions. The religion of the ancient peoples living between the two rivers consisted of worshiping certain local deities. However, this did not exclude the worship of other gods. In the 3rd millennium BC, the worship of gods and goddesses who were the patrons of certain communities increased in the Sumerian religion, especially those of the plant world and irrigated agriculture. The sun god - Utu, the moon god - Zuen (Nanna), the sky god - An, the love goddess - Innin (Inanna), the god of underground waters, the patron of wisdom and cultural inventions - Enki, etc. were worshiped everywhere, but also in their own community centers. Among the Sumerians, the god Enlil was considered the highest god, Enlil, An and Enki formed a triad of great gods. The worship of the plant world, as well as the dying and reviving gods of the livestock sector - Dumuzi-abzu (Tammuz) and others - was also considered a form of worship of great importance in the life of the Sumerians. The Sumerians imagined the world after death as a dark underground city. The god Ereshki (or the god Nergal) ruled in this dark city. Belief in the spirits of good and evil was also widespread. In the field of material culture, the field of architectural construction played an important role in Sumer. Here, mud brick was discovered, from which temples were built - six- and seven-story ziggurats. In the field of architecture, temples and minarets acquire a high and luxurious appearance. A new form of temple construction appears, called the ziggurat ("sacred mountain"). This is a hill that can be climbed by steps, on top of which a smaller temple is built. The lower part of the staircase was painted black, the middle part was red, and the upper part was white. It was called the "Path to Heaven" and had a rather simple symbolic meaning. The most famous of them was the "Temple Mountain" in the city of Ur (22nd-21st centuries BC). Ziggurats were not only places for religious ceremonies, but also served as observatories. Astronomer priests were engaged in observing the movement of celestial bodies. Ancient Mesopotamian astronomers predicted solar and lunar eclipses. They determined that the solar year was 365 days long and the lunar year was 354 days long, and based on this, they created an astronomical calendar. The field of sculpture developed, and small-sized figurines were made for temples. For example, the female figurine from Lagash (26 cm tall) also shows signs of ethnic appearance. The bronze statuette of Sargon's head from this period shows the king's bravery, strong will and fierce character [6].

By the end of the 3rd millennium BC, Sumer was in crisis and was conquered by Babylon. The history of Babylon is divided into two periods, the ancient period, which includes the first half of the 2nd millennium BC, and the modern period, which includes the middle of the 1st millennium BC.

The most developed period of the ancient period was the reign of King Hammurabi from 1792 to 1750 BC. Hammurabi created a large state and governed it based on the laws he created. The Code of Hammurabi is written in cuneiform on a basalt stone pillar. The Code of Laws consists of 282 articles, which consist of an introduction, laws, and a conclusion. The introduction states that the purpose of enacting laws is to establish justice in the country. It glorifies the king, but also protects private property. For example, anyone who steals the property of a temple or the king must be killed; the one who buys stolen goods must also be killed...

The Code of Hammurabi is an important legal document of its time. A two-meter-high basalt column depicts Hammurabi standing and taking the symbol of power - the scepter - from the hands of Shamash, the god of the Sun and justice, who is sitting on a chair. In this sense, it is also a figurative monumental work.

The heyday of Neo-Babylon falls on the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BC). During his reign, one of the Seven Wonders of the World - the "Hanging Gardens of Semiramis" was built, which is also called a symbol of love. The Babylonian king ordered this most beautiful garden in the world to be built in honor of his beloved wife. The reason is that the princess was from the mountainous country of Media, covered in gardens and mountains. Since she was homesick and always wanted to please her homeland, the king built a garden and made a place for construction near the palace. This four-story garden, built on a hill, is a model of the knowledge and thinking of ancient engineers. The ruler loved his wife, who was unique in stature, beauty, and intelligence, and longed for the fresh air and rustling of tree leaves in Babylon, which was covered with greenery. The king of Babylon did not move the capital to the green hills of Media, but he did what not everyone could do. He built a green hill in the center of a hot oasis. He used all the strength of the ancient kingdom, all the experienced builders and mathematicians, to build this garden, which was a refuge for the queen.

Imagine: over the porches resting on carved pillars, bricks, a complex binding material, filled with mud similar to modern cement, were laid, more bricks were laid, and finally lead was poured to prevent water from seeping through; after the "ground" was built in this way on each floor, a layer of fertile soil was laid on top, thick enough to support huge trees. From one floor of the garden to the other, it was possible to climb wide stairs or ride in a carriage along a circular stone path. The rarest and most beautiful tree seedlings and various flowers were brought and planted for the garden from the Maghreb and the East. They were cared for by thousands of slaves, irrigated with water drawn from the Euphrates River using a pump. The trees in the garden are green and, when viewed from a distance, appear to be growing in the air, hence the name "The Hanging Gardens of Semiramis." The fame of the Babylonian gardens reached neighboring countries, even Alexander the Great. The conqueror who conquered Babylon was amazed by its beauty, was amazed by the city's palace, especially the hanging gardens, and declared it his capital.

The "Tower of Babel" (90 meters high) – a ziggurat belonging to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II – was the largest architectural structure of its time. The tower is also mentioned in the Bible.

The Greek scholar Herodotus (490-425 BC), who was in Babylon in 460 BC, tells the following story: "In the middle of the palace there is a huge tower, built in steps both in width and in height. One step is built on top of another, and the next on top of that, and so on, until the eighth step is built at the top. To reach the steps, a circular path is built around the entire minaret from the outside. If you climb the middle step of the minaret, you will see benches. People who climb the minaret sit there and rest. The last step is a large chapel, inside which there is a large, beautifully decorated bed, and next to it is a golden table, but there are no images or idols. No one is allowed to spend the night here. Only the one local woman whom God has chosen for himself among all the women has this right. According to the stories of the priests of that time, God himself descended into that chapel and spent the night on the bed. But I do not believe this story ... "It is obvious that this minaret is reminiscent of another miracle of ancient engineering - the Egyptian pyramids. However, the pyramids were simple tombs built by rulers for themselves in order to find peace and comfort in the afterlife. The ziggurats were religious buildings, temples, which were gradually improved, restored and decorated over time. Babylonian mathematicians widely used the sexagesimal positional system of calculation created by the Sumerians; based on this system, they created various calculation tables: division and multiplication of numbers, squares, cubes and square and cube roots of numbers, and other tables. The division of an hour into 60 minutes, and a minute into 60 seconds was invented in Babylon.

Interest in mathematics, geometry, astronomy, medicine, history and other sciences began early in ancient Babylon. Mathematics and geometry were needed to measure land, determine distances, calculate crops, and conduct trade. The Babylonians expressed the numbers 100 and 1000 with a separate symbol, and even determined that a circle is 360 degrees. The Babylonians solved quadratic equations, knew the "Pythagorean theorem" and methods of finding various "Pythagorean numbers" (more than a thousand years before Pythagoras); they drew outlines of land areas, places, some buildings (but did not follow the scale), were able to determine the size of spatial bodies.

Medicine also developed rapidly during that period. Surgery was performed to amputate limbs that could not be healed, repair broken areas, remove prominent whites, and other procedures. Mil. av. From the second half of the II millennium, it became known that the parts of the human body were put into an anatomical system in the medical texts that have come down to the present. Certain diseases and related medicines are also included in a specific system.

Unlike the Egyptians, the inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia paid more attention to life on earth. Although they thought that death ends a person's life in this world, they believed in the next world. Unlike the Egyptians, they imagined the afterlife to be a terrible world where the human soul lives without food and water. In Shuruppak's admonition to the Mesopotamians, it is said that "nothing is precious except the sweet

life." The Mesopotamian view of a happy life is also described in the Epic of Gilgamesh. The Epic of Gilgamesh is about earth, water, air, sun, human life and the eternal source of life, and the Babylonians were more interested in the problems of personal life in this work.

The ancient culture, religious beliefs, philosophical views, literary works, knowledge, units of measurement, legends and narratives of the Babylonians passed from generation to generation, developed and enriched, and had a positive effect on the cultural and spiritual development of many peoples in the East, and the development of socio-philosophical thoughts. Babylon Mile. av. It was conquered by Iranian troops in 539. This is the end of the history of the ancient culture and art of the peoples of Mesopotamia [7].

In short, the comfort of the natural climate, the presence of underground resources, the suitability of the geostrategic location in this country - these caused the emergence and development of agriculture, crafts and trade based on artificial irrigation earlier than in other countries. The development of material culture led to spiritual and cultural development. With the emergence of the first states, the level of cultural development accelerated. As a result, Mesopotamia became one of the cradles of the first civilizations [8].

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : The study of ancient Mesopotamian culture reveals that its profound contributions in areas such as writing, architecture, astronomy, and law laid the foundational principles for subsequent civilizations. The invention and evolution of cuneiform writing, the architectural innovation of ziggurats, and the legal system codified by Hammurabi exemplify the advanced societal structures of the Mesopotamians. **Implication :** These findings underscore the critical role of Mesopotamian societies in shaping the intellectual and cultural frameworks of the ancient world, with their advancements influencing subsequent cultures in the Near East and beyond. **Limitation :** However, the reliance on fragmented archaeological evidence and the incomplete preservation of ancient texts limits a full understanding of the extent and diversity of Mesopotamian culture, especially with regard to less-documented social classes and practices. **Future Research :** Future studies could benefit from a more detailed examination of lesser-known sites and the use of emerging technologies such as digital imaging and data modeling to reconstruct ancient Mesopotamian landscapes and social dynamics. Additionally, cross-disciplinary research that integrates more comparative studies with contemporaneous civilizations will enhance our understanding of the interconnectedness of early cultures.

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*** Karimov Basriddin Irgashevich (Corresponding Author)**

Docent of "Social Sciences" Department, Tashkent State University of Economics
