

# **MESOPOTAMIAN CIVILIZATION-I AN INTRODUCTION**

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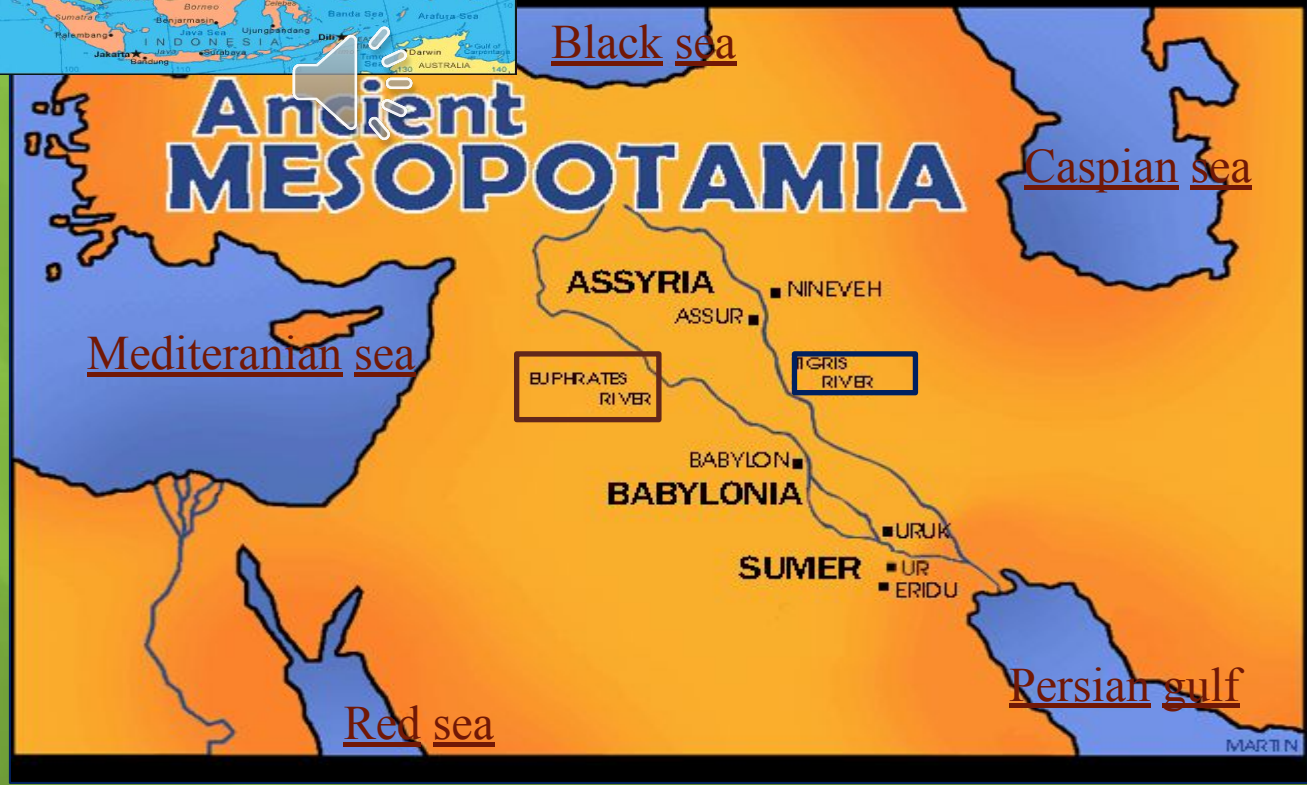
By the fourth millennium BCE, Sumerians had established roughly a dozen city-states throughout ancient Mesopotamia, including Eridu, Ur, Uruk, Umma and Nippur.

Sumerians called themselves the *Saga-giga*, the “black-headed ones.”

They were among the first to use bronze.

- ▣ They also pioneered the use of levees and canals for irrigation.
- ▣ Sumerians invented **cuneiform script**, one of the earliest forms of writing,
- ▣ They built large stepped pyramid temples called **Ziggurats**.
- ▣ Sumerians celebrated art and literature. The 3,000-line poem “Epic of **Gilgamesh**” follows the adventures of a Sumerian king as he battles a forest monster and quests after the secrets of eternal life.





## ZIGGURAT

**CUNEIFORM SCRIPT**  
(Wedge shaped)



- Perhaps it was the growing attractiveness of agriculture that drew the dark-haired and light-skinned people into Mesopotamia.



- They probably originated in a region to the east or north-east of Mesopotamia; their language was related to one spoken near the Caspian Sea.
- It is likely that they arrived in the valley about 8500 BC, at a time at which the first primitive agricultural villages were being established there, two thousand years prior to the start of the Hassuna culture. (The **Hassuna culture** is a Neolithic archaeological **culture** in northern Mesopotamia dating to the early sixth millennium BC). It is named after the type site of **Tell Hassuna** in Iraq.

The Ubaid culture spread north across Mesopotamia, gradually replacing the **Halaf** culture.

The **Ubaid period** (c. 6500-3800BC) is a prehistoric period of **Mesopotamia**.

- ▣ The name derives from **Tell al-'Ubaid** where the earliest large excavation of **Ubaid period** material was conducted initially by **Henry Hall** and later by **Leonard Woolley**.
- ▣ In North **Mesopotamia** the **period** runs only between about 5300 and 4300 BC

(Uruk was known in the Aramaic language as Erech which, it is believed, gave rise to the modern name for the country of **Iraq** (though another likely derivation is **Al-Iraq**, the Arabic name for the region of Babylonia)



In the period 5500–4000 B.C., much of Mesopotamia shared a common culture, called **Ubaid** after the site where evidence for it was first found.

- ▣ Characterized by a distinctive type of **pottery**, this culture originated on the flat alluvial plains of southern Mesopotamia (ancient Iraq) around 6200 B.C. Indeed, it was during this period that the first identifiable **villages** developed in the region, where people did agriculture on the land using irrigation and did fishing in the rivers and sea. (Persian Gulf).
- ▣ Thick layers of alluvial silt deposited every spring by the flooding rivers cover many of these sites. Some villages began to develop into **towns** and became focused on **monumental buildings**, such as at Eridu and Uruk.





**CLAY FIGURINES  
UBAID PERIOD**



**CLAY  
POTTERY  
UBAID PERIOD**





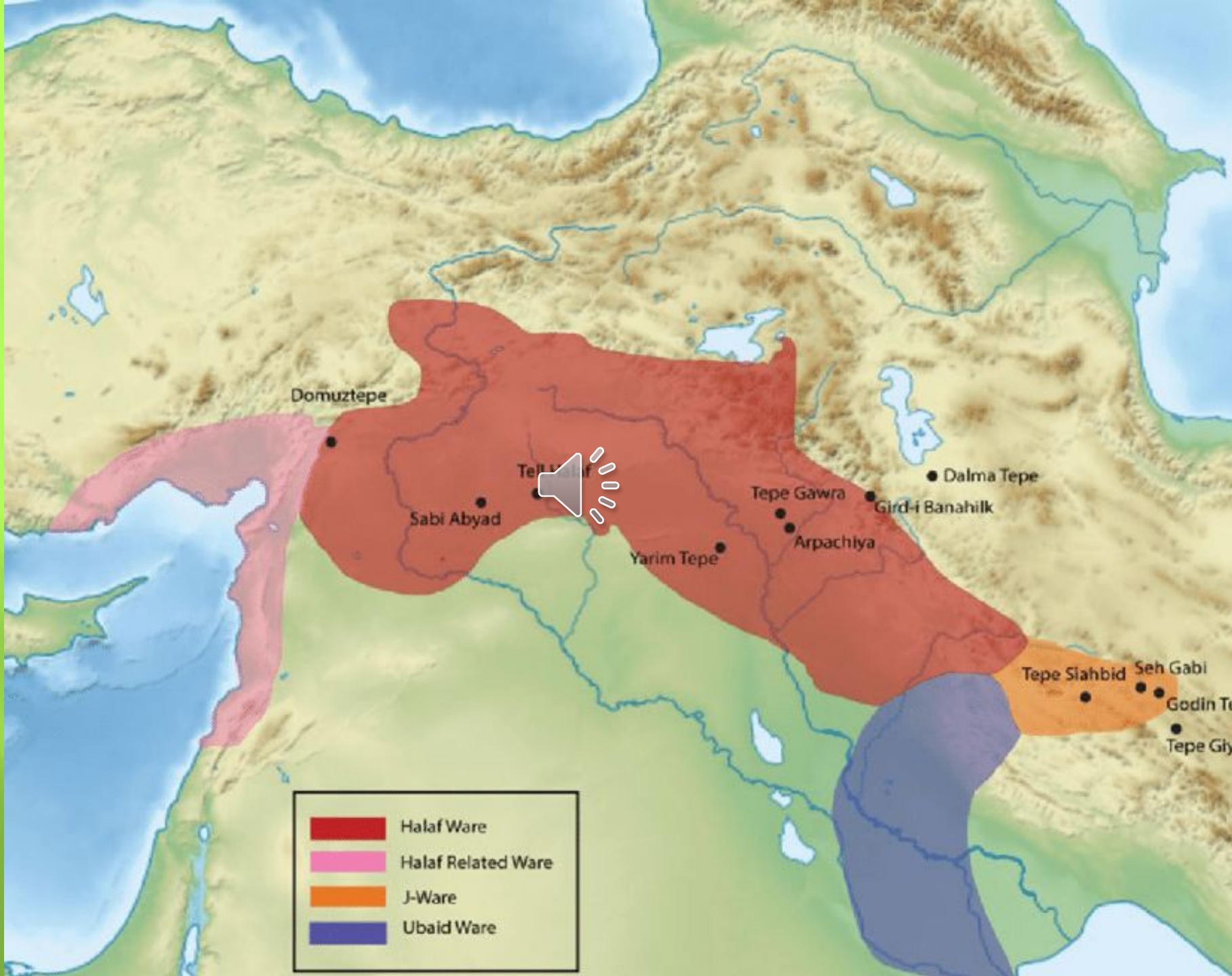
Ubaid pottery is also found to the south, along the west coast of the Persian Gulf, perhaps transported there by fishing expeditions.

Baked clay figurines, mainly female, decorated with painted or appliqué ornament and lizard like heads, have been found at a number of Ubaid sites.

Simple clay tokens may have been used for the symbolic representation of commodities, and pendants, stamp seals may have had a similar symbolism, if not function. During this period, the repertory of seal designs expanded to include snakes, birds, and animals with humans.

There was much continuity between the Ubaid culture and the succeeding Uruk period when many of the earlier traditions were elaborated, particularly in architecture.





- ▣ **Lugal** is the Sumerian term for "king, ruler". Literally, the term means "big man."
- ▣ In Sumerian, 'lu' is 'man' and 'gal' is 'great', or 'big'.
- ▣ It was one of several Sumerian titles that a ruler of a city-state could bear (alongside 'en' and 'ensi', the exact difference being a subject of debate).

## Ancient Mesopotamia and 'Primitive Democracy'

- ▣ Generally, it was called together when the Gods needed to make a decision regarding any number of issues, and they would listen and debate until the pros and cons of each issue were clarified and a virtual consensus emerged .



- The Mesopotamian Bronze Age began about 3500 BC and ended around 1500 BC.

(It was followed by the Kassite period c. 1500 BC – c. 1155 BC).

- These cities had quite a large population.
- Sumerians had established roughly a dozen city-states which includes Eridu, Ur, Uruk, Umma and Nippur in the early Bronze Age.

Ur, Kish, Isin, Larsa and Nippur in the Middle Bronze Age

and Babylon, Canah and Assur in the Late Bronze Age.



- Unlike the farming land either side of the Nile, that of Sumer was inundated with a large amount of silt which was a constant cause of trouble for the man-made irrigation systems. The timing of the floods also hindered the Sumerians. They came in late spring or early summer, generated by the melting snows of the Taurus Mountains. This was too late for a spring crop and too early for autumn crops.
- In addition, directly below the ground's surface was a large concentration of salt deposits. This high saline content in the soil made farming much more complex and difficult than was the case in Egypt. The area also suffered more from raiding and early warfare than did Egypt, and whenever the irrigation ditches were not properly maintained food shortages would emerge. However, at the start of the period, this was still a relatively far off concern

