



## Ancient Sumer

In ancient Mesopotamia, the people who first settled down in the land between two rivers are known as the Sumerians. The civilization that grew along the riverbanks was named after one of its more famous cities, Sumer. This civilization started out arranged in small villages and towns that were agricultural in nature, with of course some hunting and fishing.

The villages and towns gradually grew into great walled cities that traded amongst themselves as well as with other people. Each city has its own military and its own government. But the people in all the Sumerian city-states (cities) spoke the same language, believed in the same gods, and moved freely from one city-state to another, to trade and also to live.

They also went to war with each other. The laws of all the

city-states were pretty much universal. Everyone knew them and was expected to obey them. This was understood.

The Sumerians believed in many gods. To the ancient Sumerians, all gods were important.

The ancient Sumerians were very clever. They invented many things to make their life more comfortable and to help their civilization grow. They put wheels on carts and probably invented the sail for sailboats.

They invented cylinder seals, which they used to sign legal documents like contracts. They invented the first super hero, Gilgamesh.

They may have invented kilns for bricks and plows for their fields. They are credited with inventing many other tools and implements to help with building and farming.

## **Cuneiform**

The ancient Sumerians were the first people to develop an actual written language. We call that writing cuneiform. The ancient Sumerians kept records of everything. Written records were very important to them. They needed young men to learn to read and write.

Their language began as pictographs just like the Egyptians and Chinese. But pictographs are not easy to form into sentences, so they started to use triangle shapes to represent sounds, which they could then use to spell words.



They did not have paper or ink, so they used tools made of wood or stiff reeds to press the symbols into clay tablets. Many thousands of these have survived the ages and we can see them today. Some are worn, some are broken, but many thousands have been found complete.

The Sumerians invented Cuneiform, but the Babylonians and Assyrians continued to use it long after the Sumerians had been destroyed.

Cuneiform is not easy to read today since through time the meaning of some of the symbols changed as language changed. With patience and effort, it can be deciphered. There are many cuneiform tablets that are still waiting to be translated and ancient tablets are still being found today.