

## Questions & Answers about Theme 1: Writing and City Life

1. Explain the 'far-reaching changes' associated with the shift from nomadic life to settled agriculture around 10,000 years ago.

- The change was the gradual shift from nomadic life to settled agriculture.
- People gathered **plant produce** and adopted agriculture as a **source of food**.
- They learned how to **domesticate animals** such as **sheep, goat, cattle, pig and donkey**.
- These developments led to **more permanent structures** in which to live, causing **settled life** to become **more common**.

2. Describe the distinct geographical features of Iraq and explain why Southern Mesopotamia became the centre of the earliest cities and writing.

- Iraq is a **land of diverse environments**, including the green undulating north-east plain and the **upland called a steppe** in the north.
- The South is mostly a **desert region**. However, the **Euphrates and Tigris rivers carry huge loads of silt (fine mud)** when they flood.
- When this water is let out onto the fields, the **fertile silt is deposited**.
- This phenomenon made the agriculture of southern Mesopotamia the **most productive**, even though the region did not have **sufficient rainfall to grow crops**.

3. Assess the challenges faced by Mesopotamian cities regarding resource availability and how they addressed the problem of long-distance transport.

- Mesopotamia faced a scarcity of **mineral resources**.
- They lacked **stone for tools and seals, wood for carts, boats, or wagons, and metal**.
- They traded their **abundant textiles and agricultural produce** to import copper, tin, silver, gold, and various stones from places like **Turkey and Iran**.
- The **cheapest mode of transportation is everywhere over water**, and in Mesopotamia, **river boats or barges** were propelled by the **current of the river and/or wind**.

4. Explain the main reasons why city life in Mesopotamia necessitated the development of a written system of communication.

- Writing converts **spoken sounds** (verbal communication) into **visible signs**.
- City life required the **keeping of records of transactions** because it was difficult to account for everything orally.
- Transactions often **occurred at different times**, involving **many people and a variety of goods**.
- The earliest tablets contained **picture-like signs and numbers** listing things like **oxen, fish, and bread loaves** brought into or distributed from the temples.

**5. Describe the key characteristics and early uses of the Cuneiform script in Mesopotamia, noting the shift in language over time.**

- Cuneiform refers to the **wedge-shaped signs** pressed into the soft clay by the **sharp end of a reed**.
- The earliest known language of Mesopotamia was **Sumerian**, which was gradually replaced after **2400 BCE** by the **Akkadian language**.
- By **2600 BCE**, writing was used for things other than just **log keeping records**, such as **making dictionaries**.
- Cuneiform was also used for **giving legal validity to land transfers** and announcing **changes a king had made in the customary laws of the land**.

**6. Examine the reasons why literacy rates were likely very low in Mesopotamian society.**

- **Very few Mesopotamians could read and write.**
- This was because the script had **hundreds of signs** and was **complex**.
- A scribe required **intellectual achievement** and skill to **handle the craft tablet** and learn the signs.
- If a king himself could read, he made sure that this was recorded in **boastful inscriptions**.

**7. How did the temples evolve to become the nucleus of urban settlements in Southern Mesopotamia starting around 5000 BCE?**

- The earliest cities in Southern Mesopotamia began to **develop around temples**.
- Temples were considered the **residences of various gods** (like the **Moon God of Ur** or the **Goddess Inanna of Uruk**).
- The temple god was the **theoretical owner of the agricultural fields, the fisheries, and the herds** of the local community.
- The temple organized the **processing of produce** (such as oil pressing, grain grinding, and weaving of woolen cloth) and employed **merchants and keepers of written records**.

**8. Analyse the role of continuous warfare and military success in the emergence of powerful kingship in early Mesopotamian city-states.**

- The early Mesopotamian countryside saw **repeated conflict over land and water rights**.
- **Chiefs who had been successful in war** would **distribute the loot** and take **prisoners** to use as **guards or servants**.
- Over time, **victorious chiefs began to offer precious booty to the gods** and **beautify the community's temples**.
- The leadership of the king was viewed as an **efficient way** for things to be organized and a system that **secured the community**.

**9. Uruk was a major example of early urbanization. State the key features of Uruk around 3000 BCE.**

- Uruk was one of the **earliest rulers of Uruk**.

- Uruk was often simply known as The City in Mesopotamian epic literature.
- Around 3000 BCE, Uruk grew to an enormous extent of 250 hectares.
- Uruk's growth was so significant that it was twice as large as Mohenjo-daro in later centuries.

**10. Write four points explaining the social structure observed in Mesopotamian cities like Ur, focusing on the elite and family organization.**

- A small ruling elite emerged who commanded enormous riches.
- This elite possessed expensive items like jewellery, gold vessels, musical instruments.
- Mesopotamian society revolved around the nuclear family (a man, his wife, and children).
- The father was the head of the family; for marriage, the bride's parents giving their consent was required.

**11. What were the peculiar features of town planning and hygiene observed in the residential areas of Ur, based on archaeological excavations?**

- The streets were narrow, winding streets, which meant wheeled carts could not have reached many parts of the town.
- There were no street drains of the kind found in Mohenjo-daro.
- Drains and clay pipes were found in the inner courtyards of the houses.
- Rainwater was channelled via drainpipes into a covered basin or 'sump' in the inner courtyards.

**12. List four superstitious beliefs related to house building and customs recorded in the city of Ur.**

- Houses often had doors opening away from the street to give privacy to the families inside the courtyard.
- A raised threshold was believed to bring prosperity.
- A main wooden door opening inwards was believed to mean the wife would constantly argue with her husband.
- The town cemetery housed the graves of royalty and commoners, but some individuals were found buried under the floors of ordinary houses.

**13. Describe the function and authentication process involving the Cylinder Seal in the context of Mesopotamian urban life.**

- Cylinder stone seals were pierced down the centre and fitted with a stick, then rolled over wet clay.
- This process created a continuous picture.
- A seal could be rolled on clay covering the string knot of a cloth package or the mouth of a pot, serving to keep the contents safe.
- When rolled on a written letter, it became a mark of a city dweller's role in public life and a mark of authenticity.

**14. Mari, though an agricultural centre, stood out due to its reliance on pastoralism. Discuss the interaction between pastoralists and farmers in the Mari region.**

- Mari's surrounding territory was used by shepherds for **grazing sheep and goats** (pastoralism).
- Mobile pastoralists traded **young animals, cheese, leather, and meat** for grain, metal tools and other products with the farmers.
- Herdsmen, being **mobile**, would bring their flocks into the **sown area** in the summer after the harvest.
- Clashes sometimes occurred when herdsmen moving their flocks would **graze in sown fields** or **block irrigation canals**.

**15. Explain how the city of Mari functioned as a strategic urban centre for trade, highlighting the taxation system applied there.**

- Mari was located on the Euphrates in a **prime position for trade**.
- Trade routes carried goods like **wood, copper, tin, wine, and oil** between the southern plains and the **mineral-rich uplands of Turkey, Syria and Lebanon**.
- Mari is an example of an **urban centre prospering on trade**.
- Officials at Mari would **inspect the cargo and levy a charge of about one-tenth the value of the goods** before allowing them to continue downstream.

**16. Describe the key mathematical and astronomical achievements of the Mesopotamians that influenced later civilizations.**

- Mesopotamia is globally renowned for its contribution to **time reckoning and mathematics**.
- Tablets from around **1800 BCE** show detailed knowledge of **multiplication and division tables, square- and square-root tables, and compound interest**.
- They divided the year into **12 months** (according to the moon) and the day into **24 hours**, and the hour into **60 minutes**.
- They **observed and recorded the observed positions of stars and constellations** in the night sky.

**17. The use of bronze was highly important in Mesopotamia. What evidence from the source supports the view that securing metal resources was vital to the kingdom of Mari?**

- Bronze was the **main industrial material for tools and weapons**.
- Mari was located for trade between the southern plains and the **mineral-rich uplands** that supplied **copper and tin**.
- Barley and copper, known as '**Alashiya**' (the island of Cyprus), came in **special grain boats**.
- This necessary trade was important and ensured that the kingdom of Mari was **exceptionally prosperous**.

**18. Provide four pieces of information about the scale and content of the library collected by the Assyrian King Assurbanipal at Nineveh.**

- The library was established by the great Assyrian king **Assurbanipal (668–627 BCE)**.

- The library was located at his capital, **Nineveh in the north**.
- Assurbanipal collected tablets covering subjects like **history, epics, omen literature, astronomy, hymns, and poems**.
- His library contained a total of some **30,000 tablets**, which were **grouped according to subject**.

**19. Explain the historical significance of the Gilgamesh Epic and how it reflects Mesopotamian cultural values regarding cities.**

- The Epic of Gilgamesh is the **most poignant reminder of the pride Mesopotamians took in their cities**.
- Gilgamesh, the ruler of Uruk, went on a **heroic search for immortality** after the death of his friend.
- Gilgamesh **failed** in his attempt to find immortality and returned to Uruk **consoling himself**.
- He consoled himself by walking along the **city wall of Uruk** and reflecting on the great **tale of heroism and endeavour** that his city represented.

**20. Why was Mesopotamia considered an "ancestral land" by early European explorers and scholars, as mentioned in the sources?**

- Mesopotamia was important to Europeans because of **references to it in the Old Testament**.
- The **Book of Genesis** refers to Shin'ar (Sumer) as a **land of brick-built cities**.
- **Travellers and scholars of Europe** regarded Mesopotamia as a **kind of ancestral land**.
- When archaeological work began in the area in the 1840s, it was often an attempt to **prove the literal truth of the Old Testament**.