What did the Mesopotamians give us?

**Irrigation**

The majority of Mesopotamia is a desert – hot, dry and not suitable for growing crops. However, two rivers flowed through the centre of Mesopotamia that provided suitable land for farming. Despite this, only during the wet season was there enough water for farmers to grow food and if something went wrong, for example if the dry season lasted much longer than expected, families could face starvation. To prevent this from happening, over time the Mesopotamians learned how to control the flow of water from the river and used it to water the crops all year round. They would dig ditches to store the water and tunnels of water that could flow to the crops. This use of water to help farming is known as irrigation and even today is used around the world.

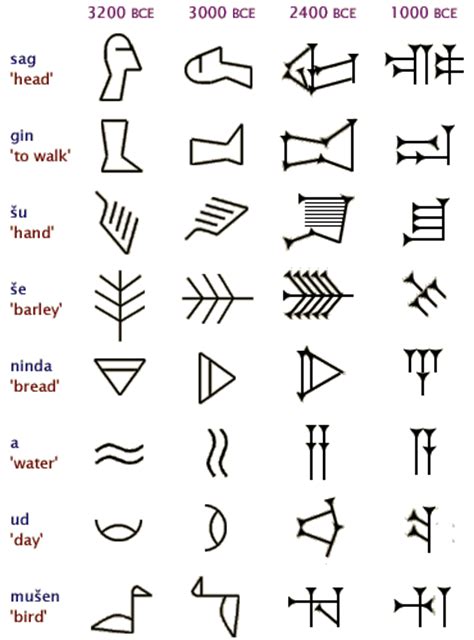
In creating irrigation, farmers were able to grow food throughout the year. This meant more food, and more food meant that more people could live in one place and have bigger families, as they no longer feared starvation. Farmers could also sell surplus (extra) food to become wealthy. With more wealth and more people, farmers could afford to buy better farming tools and therefore could grow even more food. Irrigation created a never-ending cycle of more food, more wealth and more people!

**The City**

Humans have not always lived in towns and cities. Thousands of years ago most people were hunters and gatherers, so would constantly have to be moving about to search for food. However, in Mesopotamia, for the first time in a history, humans started to settle in a specific place. The invention of irrigation made it possible to feed more people and therefore have both people and animals living in a single location. As more people began to settle, not everyone could be farmers, so they began to learn new skills. Therefore, there were skilled craftsmen and builders who could create huge temples and buildings and scholars who would write down the history of the people and laws that everyone had to follow. With such a big group of people with various skills living in the same place, the city was formed.

Mesopotamia created one of the first cities in the world at around 3,200 BC. This was at a place called Uruk. At Uruk humans built some of the first temples in the world (similar to the Egyptian pyramids) and writing also developed.

**The First Form of Writing: Cuneiform**

The Sumerians developed the first form of writing, called “cuneiform”. It was mostly used in trade, so merchants could record information of what was bought and sold. The Mesopotamians also used writing to record daily events like the position of the stars, which they believed would help predict the future, and orders from the king. Later, the people would write poems, stories of gods and heroes and, most importantly, the laws of their city everyone had to follow.

Cuneiform evolved as a simple pictograph. For instance, a pictograph for a horse would just be small image of a horse. However, this meant that writing took a long time, so they used simpler shapes to represent the pictures. Most of the writing was done on clay collected by the Mesopotamian rivers. It was hard to remember every symbol and it would take [12 years](https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Cuneiform.pdf) for a person to learn to write in cuneiform!

Cuneiform script was used for about 3,000 years and millions of written records from Mesopotamia have been discovered.

## Time and Numbers

## Babylonian NumeralsInvention of timeThe Mesopotamians developed the concept of time, dividing time units into 60 parts, which eventually led to 60-second minutes and 60-minute hours. They also created the very first calendar – dividing the hours into days and months. Each month had their own name and would have their own festival. To help keep track of time the Mesopotamians created the first sundial, which was used a disc and the shadow of the sun to help tell the time. As well as creating the idea of time, the Mesopotamians were also very talented mathematicians and developed many different mathematical ideas. Maths first developed for the same reason writing developed – to help them keep track of trade, for example to calculate how many animals were bought and sold. The Mesopotamians used a simple counting system that was easy to understand, and therefore they could improve their mathematical knowledge.

**The Map**

The oldest map was discovered in a city called Babylon in Mesopotamia, which was created around 2300 BC. Ancient cartography (the science of drawing maps) used in Babylonia were simple sketches on clay tablets, similar to the ones pictured. They usually covered just a small area, such as a city, which could then be used for people to find their way around the city and learn the best ways to defend it in times of war. The map pictured shows Mesopotamia surrounded by the sea (circle), their two rivers are shown flowing through the country and there are notes showing the distance between each area. The writing above the map describes the different areas pictured, as well as telling stories of heroes and beasts who lived in the country. Maps made in Medieval Europe would also include images and stories of mythical people and places.

Even though the map was first invented in Mesopotamia, Greek and Roman cartography became much more advanced and the concept of a spherical (round) earth was developed by the [Greek](https://www.ancienthistorylists.com/greek-history/top-10-ancient-greek-philosophers/)s in 350 BC. This allowed geographers to develop the map further. It would take more than a thousand years, however, before we are able to create accurate maps of the world that we still use today.