

## 2.1 Mesopotamia



**Main Idea** Mesopotamia's early civilization contributed much to other cultures.

Mesopotamia is known as an early **cultural hearth**, or center of civilization from which ideas and technology spread to other cultures. The emergence of farming there more than 10,000 years ago allowed for advanced societies to grow.

### Agriculture Develops

As you have learned, the Fertile Crescent extends from the Persian Gulf to the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. About 9500 B.C., people in this fertile land began to shift from gathering food to growing food. This shift is called the **agricultural revolution**. This revolution enabled groups of people to settle in one place and eventually develop advanced civilizations.

In addition to farming, Mesopotamians began to **domesticate** animals, or keep them as a source of animal labor and food. Farming villages grew into bigger settlements and then cities. Eventually, these cities unified into the world's first **city-states**, or independent political units.



### Sumer

The first Sumerian city-states formed around 3500 B.C. Sumer was an ancient Mesopotamian region in what is now southeastern Iraq. Located in the lower valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, Ur was one of the most important Sumerian city-states. Between 2800 and 1850 B.C., Ur was a center of trade.



Its location on the Euphrates River helped it become a major port. Sea-traders from Ur connected Mesopotamia with people as far away as the Indus Valley in South Asia.

Sumerians made many significant cultural contributions. They used advanced mathematics and invented the first wheeled vehicles and the first codes of law. Sumerians also used written language to record their knowledge. Sumerian writing, called **cuneiform** (kyoo NEE uh form), is the earliest known form of writing. Clay tablets carved with cuneiform provide scientists with many details about daily life and culture in Sumer.

### Babylonia

Around 1900 B.C., the Amorites, a nomadic group from Arabia, conquered Mesopotamia. The Amorites adopted much of Sumerian culture and continued using cuneiform. Eventually, the conquered lands became known as Babylonia. The Babylonian Empire included all of southern Mesopotamia. During the 1700s B.C., King **Hammurabi** developed a code of law known as Hammurabi's Code.

After Hammurabi's death, outside invaders weakened the Babylonian Empire. Nearly 1,000 years after

Hammurabi's rule, another strong ruler emerged. **Nebuchadnezzar** (nehb buh kuhd NEHZ uhr) was Babylonia's king from 605 to 562 B.C. His ambitious projects included rebuilding the port at Ur on the Persian Gulf and the creation of the Ishtar Gate in Babylon, the empire's capital. The Persians captured Babylonia in 539 B.C. Then, in 331 B.C., Alexander the Great from Macedonia conquered the Persians and Babylonia was never independent again.

### Before You Move On

**Summarize** In what ways did Mesopotamia's early civilizations contribute to other cultures?

### FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

## SPEAKING LAB

- Express Ideas Through Speech** What was the impact of the agricultural revolution? Work with a partner to develop an oral presentation that describes the agricultural revolution and how it impacted human development.
- Conduct Internet Research** Go online to research the cultural contributions of Mesopotamian civilizations. Discuss your findings with a partner.



9500 B.C.  
Agricultural revolution begins in Fertile Crescent.

Ancient Mesopotamian map with cuneiform text

1900 B.C.  
Amorites conquer Mesopotamia.

1750 B.C.  
Babylonian Empire begins decline.

Detail from Ishtar Gate of ancient Babylonia

331 B.C.  
Alexander the Great takes over Babylonia.

9500 B.C. 3500 B.C.

3500 B.C.  
City-states begin to develop in Sumer.



2500 B.C.

Golden helmet from Ur, a Mesopotamian city-state

1792 B.C.  
Hammurabi becomes king of Babylonia.



1500 B.C.

Sculpture of Hammurabi

500 B.C.

539 B.C.  
Persians conquer Babylonia.