

Timeline of Mesopotamian Civilizations:

Sumerians: 3500-1800 B.C.

*Due to the intense curiosity my classes have shown in ancient Mesopotamia, here is a handout I have compiled to help quench your historical thirst.

Among the earliest civilizations were the diverse peoples living in the fertile valleys lying between the Tigris and Euphrates valley, or **Mesopotamia**, which in Greek means, "between the rivers." In the south of this region, in an area now in Kuwait and northern Saudi Arabia, a mysterious group of people, speaking a language unrelated to any other human language we know of, began to live in cities, which were ruled by some sort of monarch, and began to write. These were the Sumerians, and around 3000 BC they began to form large city-states in southern Mesopotamia that controlled areas of several hundred square miles. The names of these cities speak from a distant and foggy past: Ur, Lagash, Eridu. These Sumerians were constantly at war with one another and other peoples, for water was a scarce and valuable resource. The result over time of these wars was the growth of larger city-states as the more powerful swallowed up the smaller city-states. Eventually, the Sumerians would have to battle another peoples, the Akkadians, who migrated up from the Arabian peninsula. The Akkadians were a Semitic people, that is, they spoke a Semitic language related to languages such as Hebrew and Arabic. When the two peoples clashed, the Sumerians gradually lost control over the city-states they had so brilliantly created and fell under the hegemony of the Akkadian kingdom which was based in Akkad, the city that was later to become Babylon.

But that was not the end of the Sumerians. The Akkadians abandoned much of their culture and absorbed vast amounts of Sumerian culture, including their religion, writing, government structure, literature, and law. But the Sumerians retained nominal control over many of their defeated city-states, and in 2125, the Sumerian city of Ur rose up against the Akkadians and gained for their daring control over the city states of southern Mesopotamia. But the revival of Sumerian fortune was to be short-lived, for after a short century, another wave of Semitic migrations signed the end of the original creators of Mesopotamian culture.

But history sometimes plays paradoxical games and human cultures sometimes persist in strange ways. For the great experiment of the Sumerians was civilization, a culture transformed by the practical effects of urbanization, writing, and monarchy. While the Sumerians disappear from the human story around 2000 BC, the invaders that overthrew them adopted their culture and became, more or less, Sumerian. They adopted the government, economy, city-living, writing, law, religion, and stories of the original peoples. Why? What would inspire a people to deliberately adopt foreign ways? For whatever reason, the culture the later Semites inherited from the Sumerians consisted of the following:

The Sumerians seem to have developed one of the world's first systems of monarchy; the early states they formed needed a new form of government in order to govern larger areas and diverse peoples. The very first states in human history, the states of Sumer, seemed to have been ruled by a type of priest-king, called in Sumerian, a ; among their duties were leading the military, administering trade, judging disputes, and engaging in the most important religious ceremonies. The priest-king ruled through a series of bureaucrats, many of them priests, that carefully surveyed land, assigned fields, and distributed crops after harvest. This new institution of monarchy required the invention of a new legitimation of authority beyond the

tribal justification of chieftainship based on concepts of kinship and responsibility. So the Sumerians seemed to have at first justified the monarch's authority based on some sort of divine selection, but later began to assert that the monarch himself was divine and worthy of worship. This legitimation of monarchical authority would serve all the later peoples who settled or imitated Mesopotamian city-states; the only exception were the Hebrews who imitated Mesopotamian kingship but construed the monarchy not as a divine election but as disobedience to Yahweh, the Hebrew god.

The principal character of Sumerian government was bureaucracy; the monarchy effectively held power over great areas of land and diverse peoples by having a large and efficient "middle management." This middle management, which consisted largely of priests, bore all the responsibility of surveying and distributing land as well as distributing crops. For city living greatly changes the human relation to food production: when people begin to live in cities, that means a large part of the human population ceases to grow or raise its own food, which means that all those people who do grow and raise food need to feed all those who don't. This requires some sort of distribution mechanism, which requires the greatest of all inventions of civilizations, the bureaucrat. And to make sure that the entire mechanism works, the newly urbanized needs to invent a tool to make the bureaucrat's life easier: record-keeping. And record-keeping means writing in some form or another.

The first writings, in fact, were records—tons of records: stone tablets filled with numbers recording distributed goods. These early writings (besides the numerals) were actually pictures, or rough sketches, you might say, of the words they represented; this early Sumerian writing was **pictographic** writing. The Sumerians would scrawl their picture words using reeds as a writing instrument on wet clay which would then dry into stone-hard tablets, which is very good because it's hard to lose your records if they are big old heavy tablets. (And more permanent: when all the paper in all the books you see around you has gone to dust and ashes, the Sumerian tablets will still bear mute witness to the hot days when farmers brought grain to city storehouses and bureaucrat-priests parcelled out food to their citizens while scratching on wet clay with their reeds) Eventually, the Sumerians made their writing more efficient, and slowly converted their picture words to a short-hand consisting of wedged lines created by bending the reed against the wet clay and moving the end closest to the hand back and forth once. And thus was born a form of writing that persisted longer than any other form of writing besides Chinese: cuneiform, or "wedge-shaped" (which is what cuneiform means in Latin) writing.

All this administration of agriculture required much more careful planning, since each farmer had to produce a far greater excess of produce than he would actually consume. And all the bureaucratic record keeping demanded some kind of efficient system of measuring long periods of time. So the Sumerians invented calendars, which they divided into twelve months based on the cycle of the moon. Since a year consisting of twelve lunar months is considerably shorter than a solar year, the Sumerians added a "leap month" every three years in order to catch up with the sun. This interest in measuring long periods of time led the Sumerians to develop a complicated knowledge of astronomy and the first human invention of the zodiac in order to measure yearly time.

Record-keeping pushes the human mind in other directions as well. In particular, record-keeping demands that humans start doing something all humans love to do: calculating. Numbers have to be added up, subtracted, multiplied, divided, and sundry other fun things. So the Sumerians developed a sophistication with mathematics that had never been seen before on the human landscape. And all that number crunching led the Sumerians to begin crude speculations about the nature of numbers and processes involving numbers—abstract mathematics.

We know very little about the early Semitic religions, but the Semites that invaded Mesopotamia seem to have completely abandoned their religion in favor of Sumerian religion. Sumerian religion was polytheistic, that is, the Sumerians believed in and worshipped many gods. These gods were incredibly powerful and **anthropomorphic**, that is, they resembled humans. Many of these gods controlled natural forces and were associated with astronomical bodies, such as the sun. The gods were creator gods; as a group, they had created the world and the people in it. Like humans, they suffered all the ravages of human emotional and spiritual frailties: love, lust, hatred, anger, regret. Among the gods' biggest regrets was the creation of human life; the Sumerians believed that these gods regretted the creation of human life and sent a flood to destroy their faulty creation, but one man survived by building a boat. While the destruction of the earth in a great flood is nearly universal in all human mythology and religion, we can't be sure if the Semites had a similar story or took it over from the Sumerians. This is, of course, a question of contemporary significance: according to Genesis, the originator of the Hebrew race, the patriarch Abraham, originally came from the city of Ur.

Although the gods were unpredictable, the Sumerians sought out ways to discover what the gods held in store for them. Like all human cultures, the Sumerians were struck by the wondrous regularity of the movement of the heavens and speculated that this movement might contain some secret to the intentions of the gods. So the Sumerians invented astrology, and astrology produced the most sophisticated astronomical knowledge ever seen to that date, and astrology produced even more sophisticated mathematics. They also examined the inner organs of sacrificed animals for secrets to the gods' intentions or to the future. These activities produced a steady increase in the number of priests and scribes, which further accelerated learning and writing.

Sumerian religion was oriented squarely in this world. The gods did not occupy some world existentially different from this one, and no rewards or punishments accrued to human beings after death. Human beings simply became wisps within a house of dust; these sad ghosts would fade into nothing within a century or so.

Among the inventions of the Sumerians, the most persistent and far-reaching was their invention of [law](#). While all cultures have some system of social regulation and conflict resolution, *law* is a distinct phenomenon. Law is written and administered retribution and conflict resolution. It is distinct from other forms of retribution and conflict resolution by the following characteristics:

Administration Law is retribution that is administered by a centralized authority. This way retribution for wrongs does not threaten to escalate into a cycle of mutual revenge. Sumerian law sits half way between individual revenge and state-administered revenge: it is up to the

individual to drag (quite literally) the accused party into the court, but the court actually determines the nature of the retribution to be exacted.

Writing Law is written; in this way, law assumes an independent character beyond the centralized authority that administers it. This produces a sociological fiction that the law controls those who administer the law and that the "law" exacts retribution, not humans.

Retribution Law is at its heart revenge; the basic cultural mechanism for dealing with unacceptable behavior is to exact revenge. Unacceptable behavior outside the sphere of revenge initially did not come under the institution of law: it was only much later that disputes that didn't involve retribution would be included in law.

Although we don't know much about Sumerian law, scholars agree that the **Code of Hammurabi**, written by a Babylonian monarch, reproduces Sumerian law fairly exactly. Sumerian law, as represented in Hammurabi's code, was a law of exact revenge, which we call **lex talionis**. This is revenge in kind: "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life," and reveals to us that human law has as its fundamental basis revenge. Sumerian law was also only partly administered by the state; the victim had to bring the criminal to court. Once there, the court mediated the dispute, rendered a decision, and most of the time a court official would execute the sentence, but often it fell on the victim or the victim's family to enforce the sentence. Finally, Sumerian law recognized class distinctions; under Sumerian law, everyone was not equal under the law. Harming a priest or noble person was a far more serious crime than harming a slave or poor person; yet, the penalties assessed for a noble person who commits a crime were often far harsher than the penalties assessed for someone from the lower classes who committed the same crime.

This great invention, law, would serve as the basis for the institution of law among all the Semitic peoples to follow: Babylonians, Assyrians, and, eventually, the Hebrews.

Richard Hooker



The Akkadians: 2340-2125 B.C.

The Akkadians were a Semitic people living on the Arabic peninsula during the great flourishing period of the Sumerian city-states. Although we don't know much about early Akkadian history and culture, we do know that as the Akkadians migrated north, they came in increasing conflict with the Sumerian city-states, and in 2340 BC, the great Akkadian military leader, **Sargon**, conquered Sumer and built an Akkadian empire stretching over most of the Sumerian city-states and extending as far away as Lebanon. Sargon based his empire in the city

of Akkad, which became the basis of the name of his people. This great capital of the largest empire humans had ever seen up until that point later became the city of Babylon, which was the commercial and cultural center of the middle east for almost two thousand years.

But Sargon's ambitious empire lasted for only a blink of an eye in the long time spans with which we measure Mesopotamian history. In 2125, the Sumerian city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia rose up in revolt, and the Akkadian empire fell before a renewal of Sumerian city-states.

The Akkadians were **Semites**, that is, they spoke a language drawn from a family of languages called **Semitic languages** (the term "Semite" is a modern designation taken from the Hebrew Scriptures; Shem was a son of Noah and the nations descended from Shem are the Semites). These languages include Hebrew, Arabic, Assyrian, and Babylonian. After the final end of Sumerian power and civilization around 2000 BC, the area came under the exclusive control of Semitic peoples for centuries.



The Amorites: 1800-1530 B.C.

After the last Sumerian dynasty fell around 2000 BC, Mesopotamia drifted into conflict and chaos for almost a century. Around 1900 BC, a group of Semites called the **Amorites** had managed to gain control of most of the Mesopotamian region. Like the Akkadians, the Amorites centralized the government over the individual city-states and based their capital in the city of **Babylon**, which was originally called Akkad and served as the center of the Amorite empire. For this reason, the Amorites are called the **Old Babylonians** and the period of their ascendancy over the region, which lasted from 1900-1600 BC, is called the **Old Babylonian period**.

The Sumerian monarchy underwent significant changes; in order to justify the enormous power the monarch enjoyed, the Old Babylonians believed that the monarch was a god and had a divine origin. This powerful new monarchy invented new ways to administer the state and its resources: taxation and involuntary military service. Above all, the greatest innovation was **centralization**. While the Sumerian civilization consisted of independent and autonomous city-states, the Old Babylonian state was a behemoth of dozens of cities. In order to make this system work, power and autonomy was taken from the individual cities and invested in the monarch. As a result, an entirely new set of laws were invented by the Old Babylonians: laws which dealt with crimes against the state.

It is in the realm of law that the Sumerian state was most dramatically changed by the Amorites. While law among the Sumerians was administered jointly by individuals and the state, the Old Babylonians allowed the state to more actively pursue and punish criminals. The punishments became dramatically more draconian: the death penalty was applied to many more crimes, including "bad behavior in a bar."

Perhaps the most important legal text in history is an Old Babylonian code of laws written by Hammurabi (around 1792-1750 BC), the most famous of the Old Babylonian monarchs. This code, called the **Code of Hammurabi** (I wonder why?) is generally regarded as Sumerian in spirit, but with all the harshness of the Old Babylonian penalties.

Although we know nothing of Old Babylonian religion, they seem to have adopted whole-cloth the religion of the Sumerians. We do know that the Amorites lived in close contact with the Sumerians for a long time preceding their ascendancy over the region, so it's possible that they gradually adopted Sumerian religion over several centuries. The Amorites did, however, import a new god into Sumerian religion, **Marduk**, which they elevated to the supreme position over the other gods. Like the Sumerians, the Amorites did not believe that life after death held any promise or threat, so like the Sumerians, Amorite religion ruthlessly focussed on this world.



The Hitites:1600-717 B.C.

Roaring into history from mysterious origins, the Hittites would rule a great empire that stretched from Mesopotamia to Syria and Palestine. The Hittites are shrouded in fog and mystery; we don't where they came from, and for a long time the language they spoke was undecipherable. In the end, it turns out they were **Indo-European**, that is, they spoke a language from the Indo-European language family, which includes English, German, Greek, Latin, Persian, and the languages of India. Their invasion spelled the end of the Old Babylonian empire in Mesopotamia (1900-1600 BC), and like so many others before them, the invaders adopted the ways of the conquered; after the conquest of Mesopotamia, the Hittites adopted the laws, religion, and the literature of the Old Babylonians thus continuing the long heritage of Sumerian culture.

Their empire was at its greatest from 1600-1200 BC, and even after the Assyrians gained control of Mesopotamia after 1300 BC, the Hittite cities and territories thrived independently until 717 BC, when the territories were finally conquered by Assyrians and others.

The Hebrew scriptures have little to say about the Hittites, and the Egyptians regarded them as barbarians. In fact, from 1300-1200 BC, the Hittites waged a war against Egypt that drained both empires tragically. The Hittites themselves seem to have left few accounts of their history, so until this century no-one really knew their culture or the greatness of their political ascendancy

But the Hittites are perhaps one of the most significant peoples in Mesopotamian history. Because their empire was so large and because their primary activity was commerce, trading with all the civilizations and peoples of the Mediterranean, the Hittites were the people primarily responsible for transmitting Mesopotamian thought, law, political structure, economic structure, and ideas around the Mediterranean, from Egypt to Greece. So the Hittites

are the great traders in the culture built by the Sumerians and adopted and modified by later peoples. Because of the Hittites, when the Hebrews migrated to Canaan under Moses they found a people, the Canaanites, who were, culturally speaking, Mesopotamian.

The Hittites greatly modified the system of law they inherited from the Old Babylonians. The most extensive literature that the Hittites have left us is, in fact, decrees and laws. These laws were far more merciful than the laws of the Old Babylonians, perhaps because the Hittites were less concerned about maintaining a rigid, despotic central authority. While you could lose your life for just about everything under the Old Babylonian system of laws, including getting rowdy in a tavern, under the Hittites only a small handful of crimes were capital crimes. Even premeditated murder only resulted in a fine—a large fine, to be sure, but far preferable than losing your head. They modified the role of the monarch in that they gave the king ownership of all the land under his control; previously, under the Sumerians and Amorites, private property was allowed and the monarch only owned his own private property. Individuals were allowed control over land, which belong to the king, only by serving in the king's army. So the bulk of the population became tenant farmers.

The Hittites adopted many of the gods of the Sumerians and Old Babylonians. The odd thing about the Hittites, though, is that they seemed to have recognized that all gods were legitimate gods. Whenever they conquered a people, they adopted that people's gods into their religious system, in much the same way the *uji*, or clans, in early Japan would adopt the gods of rival *uji* when they had conquered them. As far as history is concerned, this has tremendous consequences for the history of the Hebrews. The Assyrians seem to have adopted the same tolerance towards other religions, which allowed the Jewish faith to persist after the Jewish state was decimated by the Assyrians. And the Assyrians seem to have adopted the same tendency to adopt the gods of conquered people, so the Assyrian conquerors of Palestine adopted the Hebrew god, Yahweh, into their religion. This eventually led to the only major religious schism in Hebrew history, the schism between Jews and Samaritans (there are still Samaritans alive today).



The Kassites: 1530-1170 B.C.

History has been unkind to the Kassites, a people who come onto the stage of history in the one of the most chaotic periods in the Middle East. In the middle of the second millenium BC, Indo-European peoples began vast and chaotic migrations out of Europe towards Persia and India; this migration was powered by a stunning new technology: the military use of horses and chariots. These invasions displaced many peoples who began to migrate in many directions, and some

headed towards Mesopotamia and Palestine. These were Asian people who had adopted Indo-European authority and military structures, and many of them were invaders who set up miniature kingdoms dotting the landscape of the Middle East and Asia Minor. The Hittites were the most successful of these new invaders. But they didn't control the center of Mesopotamia, the city of Babylon, for very long before another Indo-European people, the Kassites, roared in and dominated a large part of Mesopotamia. The Hittite empire continued for several hundred years, but the Kassites would dominate the center of Mesopotamia both militarily and commercially.

After storming into Babylon, they renamed the city, Karanduniash, and made their capital in a new city that they built from scratch, Durkurigalzu. In this respect, we can see in the dim dust of history an attempt to do something new culturally in Mesopotamia. But the Kassites are gone within a blink of an eye, as wave after wave of migrations put pressure on their fragile hold on power. By 1200, all the great Indo-European kingdoms, that great human experiment in transforming Mesopotamia into an Indo-European culture, have been weakened by the incessant troubles of war and invasion, and the Assyrians, a Semitic people angered by Indo-European domination, would return the area to Semitic control. Under the Assyrian king, Ashur-Dan, the last Kassite king was driven from the Babylonian throne in the twelfth century BC.

History, of course, is written by the winners. We know very little about the Kassites except that their conquerors felt that they were barbarians and savages. What they intended culturally we will never know, whether they would adopt the genealogy of Sumerian culture as so many peoples had done before them or whether they would have forged something new. But their story was swallowed up in the soil they thought they owned, and with dust their paper they left us only their names.



The Assyrians: 1170-612 B.C.

The Assyrians were Semitic people living in the northern reaches of Mesopotamia; they have a long history in the area, but for most of that history they are subjugated to the more powerful kingdoms and peoples to the south. Under the monarch, Shamshi-Adad, the Assyrians attempted to build their own empire, but Hammurabi soon crushed the attempt and the Assyrians disappear from the historical stage. Eventually the Semitic peoples living in northern Mesopotamia were invaded by another Asiatic people, the Hurrians, who migrated into the area and began to build an empire of their own. But the Hurrian dream of empire was soon swallowed up in the dramatic growth of the Hittite empire, and the young Hurrian nation was swamped. After centuries of attempts at independence, the Assyrians finally had an independent state of their own since the Hittites did not annex Assyrian cities. For the next several hundred years, the balance of power would shift from the north to the south

Beginning with the monarch, Tukulti-Ninurta (1235-1198 BC), Assyria began its first conquests, in this case the conquest of Babylon. The Assyrian dream of empire began with the monarch,

Tiglat-Pileser (1116-1090), who extended Assyrian dominance to Syria and Armenia. But the greatest period of conquest occurred between 883 and 824, under the monarchies of Ashurnazirpal II (883-859 BC) and Shalmeneser III (858-824 BC), who conquered all of Syria and Palestine, all of Armenia, and, the prize of prizes, Babylon and southern Mesopotamia. The Assyrian conquerors invented a new policy towards the conquered: in order to prevent nationalist revolts by the conquered people, the Assyrians would force the people they conquered to migrate in large numbers to other areas of the empire. Besides guaranteeing the security of an empire built off of conquered people of different cultures and languages, these mass deportations of the populations in the Middle East, Mesopotamia, and Armenia, turned the region into a melting pot of diverse cultures, religions, and languages. Whereas there would be little cultural contact between the conquered and the conquerors in early Mesopotamian history, under the Assyrians the entire area became a vast experiment in cultural mixing. It was the Assyrian monarch, Sargon II (721-705 BC), who first forcefully relocated Hebrews after the conquest of Israel, the northern kingdom of the Hebrews. Although this was a comparatively mild deportation and perfectly in line with Assyrian practice, it marks the historical beginning of the Jewish diaspora. This chapter in the Jewish diaspora, however, never has been really written, for the Hebrews deported from Israel seem to have blended in with Assyrian society and, by the time Nebuchadnezzar II conquers Judah (587 BC), the southern kingdom of the Hebrews, the Israelites deported by Sargon II have disappeared nameless and faceless into the sands of northern Mesopotamia.

The monarchs of Assyria, who hated Babylon with a passion since it constantly contemplated independence and sedition, destroyed that city and set up their capital in Nineveh. Later, however, feeling that the Babylonian god, Marduk, was angry at them, they rebuilt the city and returned the idol of Marduk to a temple in Babylon. The last great monarch of Assyria was Ashurbanipal (668-626 BC), who not only extended the empire, but also began a project of assembling a library of tablets of all the literature of Mesopotamia. Thirty thousand tablets still remain of Ashurbanipal's great library in the city of Nineveh; these tablets are our single greatest source of knowledge of Mesopotamian culture, myth, and literature.

After Ashurbanipal, the great Assyrian empire began to crumble; the greatest pressure on the empire came from their old and bitter enemies, the Babylonians. Aided by another Semitic people, the Medes, the Babylonians led by Nabopolassar eventually conquered the Assyrian capital of Nineveh and burned it to the ground, ending forever Assyrian dominance in the region.

Simply put, the Assyrian state was forged in the crucible of war, invasion, and conquest. The upper, land-holding classes consisted almost entirely of military commanders who grew wealthy from the spoils taken in war. The army was the largest standing army ever seen in the Middle East or Mediterranean. The exigencies of war excited technological innovation which made the Assyrians almost unbeatable: iron swords, lances, metal armor, and battering rams made them a fearsome foe in battle.

The odd paradox of Assyrian culture was the dramatic growth in science and mathematics; this can be in part explained by the Assyrian obsession with war and invasion. Among the great mathematical inventions of the Assyrians were the division of the circle into 360 degrees and were among the first to invent longitude and latitude in geographical navigation. They also developed a sophisticated medical science which greatly influenced medical science as far away

as Greece.



The Chaldeans: (Neo Babylon) 612-539

After the fall of Assyrian power in Mesopotamia, the last great group of Semitic peoples dominated the area. Suffering mightily under the Assyrians, the city of Babylon finally rose up against its hated enemy, the city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, and burned it to the ground. The chief of the Babylonians was Nabopolassar; the Semites living in the northern part of Mesopotamia would never gain their independence again.

Nabopolassar was succeeded by his son, Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BC). Nebuchadnezzar was the equal of all the great Mesopotamian conquerors, from Sargon onwards; he not only prevented major powers such as Egypt and Syria from making inroads on his territory, he also conquered the Phoenicians and the state of Judah (586 BC), the southern Jewish kingdom that remained after the subjugation of Israel, the northern kingdom, by the Assyrians. In order to secure the territory of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar brought Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, the two kings of Judah (in succession) and held them in Babylon. In keeping with Assyrian practice, the "**New Babylonians**," or **Chaldeans** forced a large part of the Jewish population to relocate. Numbering possibly up to 10,000, these Jewish deportees were largely upper class people and craftspeople; this deportation marks the beginning of the **Exile** in Jewish history.

Under Nebuchadnezzar, the city of Babylon was rebuilt with great splendor; it would eventually become one of the most magnificent human cities in the area of the Middle East and Mediterranean. But all was not perfect beneath the shining surface; there still existed a number of cities that were loyal to the Assyrians. The entire period dominated by the Babylonians, in fact, is a period of great unrest as Babylonian hegemony was continually tested by philo-Assyrians. This conflict slammed the door on the Babylonian empire after a dynasty of only five kings. Babylon in 555 BC came under the control of a king loyal to the Assyrians, Nabonidus (555-539 BC), who attacked Babylonian culture at its heart: he placed the Assyrian moon-god, Sin, above the Babylonian's principal god, Marduk, who symbolized not only the faith of Babylon but the very city and people itself. Angered and bitter, the priests and those faithful to Babylon would welcome Cyrus the Conqueror of Persia into their city and end forever Semitic domination of Mesopotamia. The center of the Middle Eastern world shifted to Cyrus's capital, Susa, and it would shift again after the Greeks and then the Romans. For almost two and a half centuries, Mesopotamia and Babylon at its center, dominated the landscape of early civilization in the Middle East to be finally eclipsed by the rising sun of the Indo-European cultures to the north and to the west

