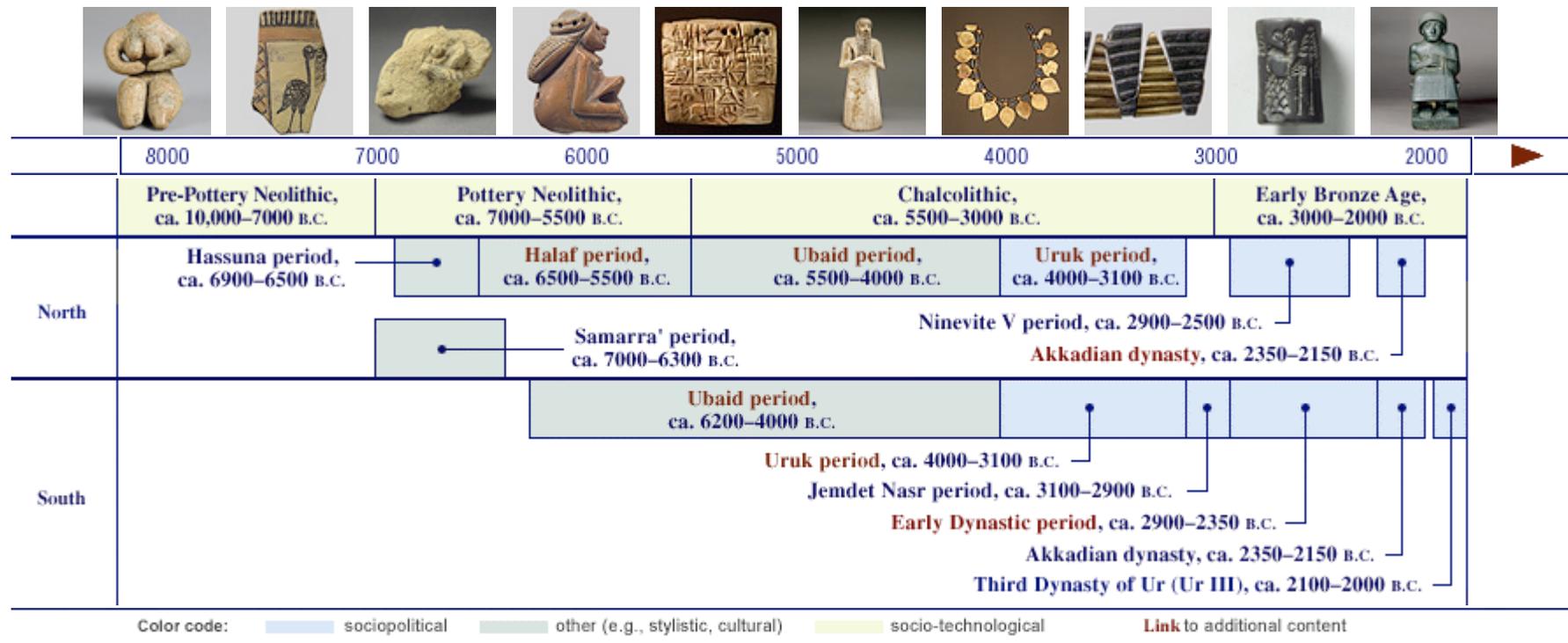
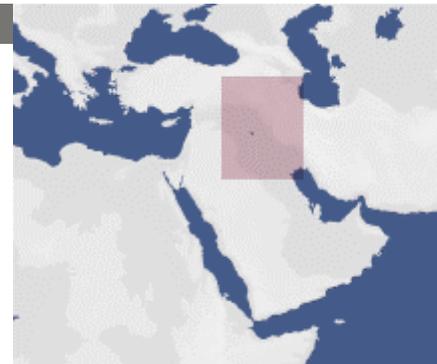


Mesopotamia, 8000–2000 B.C.

Encompasses present-day Iraq and northeastern Syria



Chronology



[Enlarge image for more detail](#)

See an [abridged list of rulers](#) in Mesopotamia.

See also [Anatolia and the Caucasus](#), [Arabian Peninsula](#), [Central and North Asia](#), [Eastern Mediterranean](#), and [Iran](#).

A universally accepted chronology for the entire ancient Near East remains to be established. On the basis of the *Royal Canon* of Ptolemy, a second century A.D. astronomer, regnal dates can be determined with certainty in Babylonia only as far back as 747 B.C.

(the accession of King Nabonassar). Through the use of excavated royal annals and chronicles, together with lists of annually appointed *limmu*-officials, the chronology of Assyria can be confidently extended back to 911 B.C. (the accession of King Adad-nirari II). The earliest certain link with Egypt is 664 B.C., the date of the Assyrian sack of the Egyptian capital at Thebes. Although it is often possible to locate earlier events quite precisely relative to each other, neither surviving contemporary documents nor scientific dating methods such as carbon 14, dendrochronology, thermoluminescence, and archaeoastronomy are able to provide the required accuracy to fix these events absolutely in time. The West Asian portion of the Timeline therefore employs the common practice of using, without prejudice, the so-called Middle Chronology, where events are dated relative to the reign of King Hammurabi of Babylon, which is defined as being ca. 1792–1750 B.C.

Overview

By 8000 B.C., agricultural communities are already established in northern Mesopotamia, the eastern end of the Fertile Crescent. Early in the sixth millennium B.C., farming communities, relying on irrigation rather than rainfall, settle ever further south along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. As these new communities grow, monumental architecture and more elaborate forms of artistic representation reflect an increasingly differentiated social hierarchy. Forms of administration and recording are developed as cities emerge across the region, especially in the south. By 2500 B.C., cuneiform inscriptions describe rivalry between city-states, with rulers building temples and palaces decorated with royal imagery proclaiming their power. Within two centuries, the city-states of Mesopotamia are unified by Sargon of Akkad, who creates the first empire.

Learn more about the geography of [Mesopotamia](#).

Key Events

- **ca. 8000–7000 B.C.** The first evidence of domesticated grains (wheat and barley) and animals (sheep, goat, pig, and cattle) are found at Jarmo. Baked clay female figures occur at Mureybit.
- **ca. 7000–6000 B.C.** The earliest pottery is made and used for preparing, serving, and storing food. A particular style of pottery found in northern Mesopotamia is named after the site of Hassuna where it was first identified. It is decorated with incised lines and is lightly fired.
- **ca. 6000–5000 B.C.** Some early types of handmade pottery, particularly the styles named after the sites of Samarra' and [Halaf](#), are painted with elaborate polychrome geometric designs. Clay impressions of carved stamp seals are found at Sabi Abyad in northeastern Syria. These sealings, originally applied to a variety of containers, are thought to indicate some measure of administrative control.
- **ca. 5000–4000 B.C.** [Ubaid culture](#), characterized by its distinctive painted pottery made on a slow wheel, arises in the south. As the culture spreads, local pottery styles are replaced throughout Mesopotamia extending into the eastern Mediterranean, Iran, and the Arabian Peninsula. Throughout the period, a sequence of ever more massive mud-brick temples is constructed at the site of Eridu.
- **ca. 4000–3500 B.C.** Smaller Ubaid villages gradually give way to fewer but larger settlements in the south. From this emerges the [Uruk](#)

culture, marked by mass-produced pottery made on a fast wheel or in a mold.

• **ca. 3500–3000 B.C.** Cities emerge throughout the region, with the largest concentration in the south. These cities are centered around monumental mud-brick temples set on high platforms. At the largest city, Uruk, walls and massive columns of some buildings are decorated with mosaics of colored stone or clay cones embedded in plaster. Stone carving reaches new heights of artistry, with representations of humans, animals, and possibly deities. They are shown both in the round and in relief and range from tiny amulets to nearly lifesize sculpture. An increasingly centralized economy and stratified society generates new administrative practices. Various shaped clay tokens used for record keeping slowly disappear with the development of cuneiform writing, which uses a reed stylus to incise and later impress signs on clay tablets. Accompanying these changes, stamp seals are largely replaced by cylinder seals, which allow for a wider repertoire of designs and motifs. Representational images such as the "priest king," found at Uruk, are also attested on seals and carvings in Egypt and Iran.

• **ca. 3000–2350 B.C.** The first palaces are built throughout Mesopotamia during the Early Dynastic period, indicating a new emphasis on royal authority. Politically, the landscape is controlled by a series of rivalrous city-states ruled by Sumerian speakers. Excavated objects and texts demonstrate the existence of long-distance trade between Sumer and the Persian Gulf region, Iran, Afghanistan, and the cities of the Indus Valley. At the city of Ur, this trade is revealed in spectacular fashion in graves containing objects made of imported gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and carnelian.

• **ca. 2350–2150 B.C.** From Akkad, a site yet to be identified, King Sargon unifies much of Mesopotamia and northern Syria through conquest. Akkadian, a Semitic language related to modern Arabic and Hebrew, becomes the *lingua franca* of the new administrative apparatus that maintains the world's first empire. The arts of this period acquire a new naturalistic dynamism. Seals and relief carvings include novel mythological and narrative scenes. On the stele of Naram-Sin, Sargon's grandson, the king, wearing a horned helmet—a symbol usually reserved for divinity—is shown defeating his enemies in a landscape setting.

• **ca. 2100–2000 B.C.** After nearly two centuries of rule, the Akkadian empire disintegrates and local kings in southern Mesopotamia reassert their independence. In the city-state of Lagash, Gudea rebuilds many temples and installs finely carved diorite statues of himself to demonstrate his piety before the gods. When southern Mesopotamia is reunited under the kings of Ur, Sumerian is reintroduced as the administrative and literary language. Ziggurats, large mud-brick stepped towers surmounted by a shrine, are built at Ur and other cities. Metal foundation figures show the ruler carrying baskets of earth in a pious act of temple building. Later poetic accounts describe the sacking of Ur at the end of this period by the Elamites from the east.