

Mesopotamia

The Worlds First Civilization



What is a civilization?

- Civilizations (SIH•vuh•luh•ZAY•shuhns) **are complex societies. They have cities, organized governments, art, religion, class divisions, and a writing system.**

Why were river valleys important?

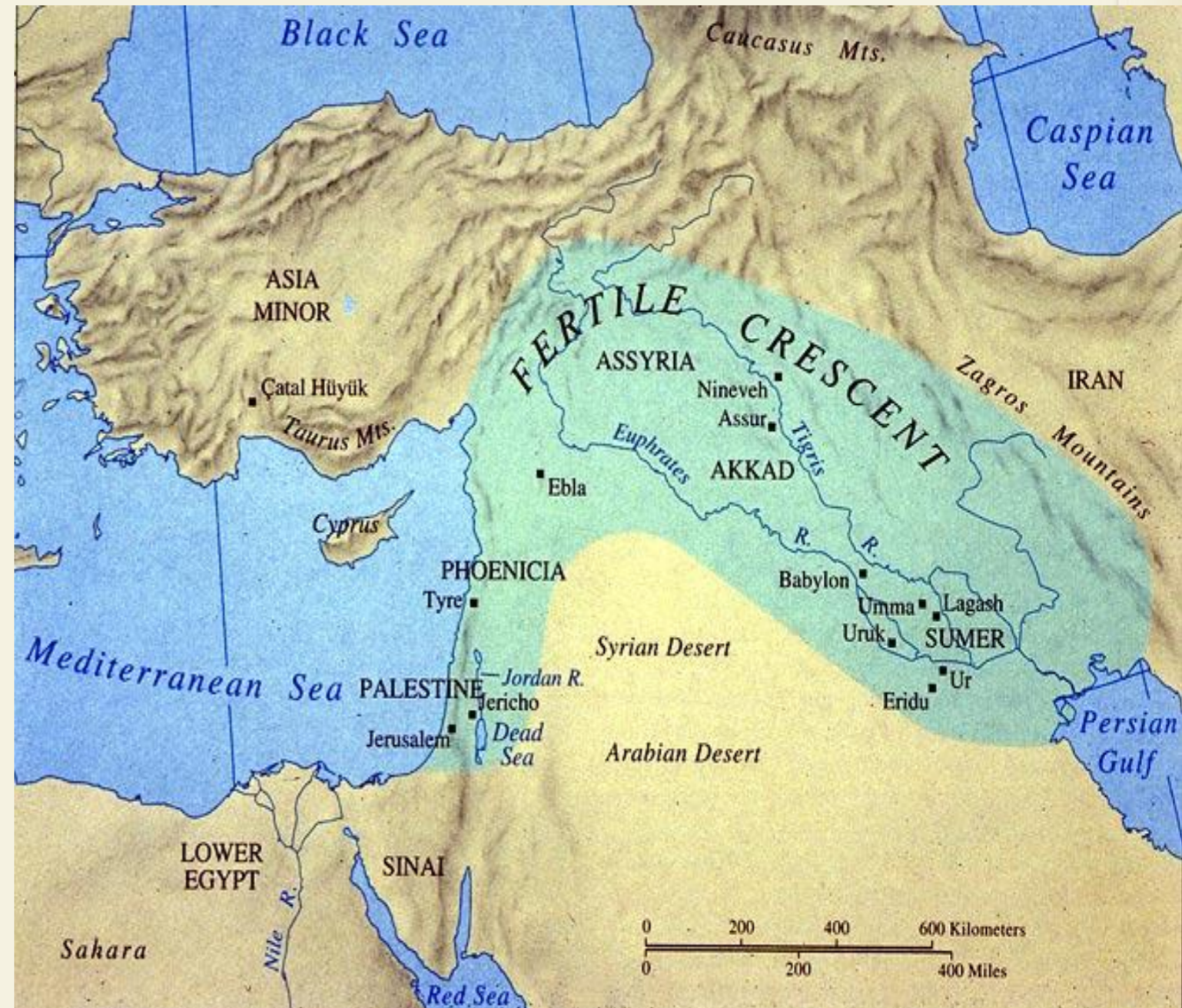
- **Farming** - large amounts of people could be fed due to the resources in the river valleys
- **Trade** - goods and ideas could be moved easily from place to place because of the rivers and location.
- **Cities** - are able to grow in these valleys and become the centers of civilizations.

Mesopotamia is the Greek word that means,
“the land between two rivers.”



Mesopotamia

- Mesopotamia was the world's first civilization.
- The **two rivers** that allowed Mesopotamia to succeed were the **Euphrates & Tigris.**

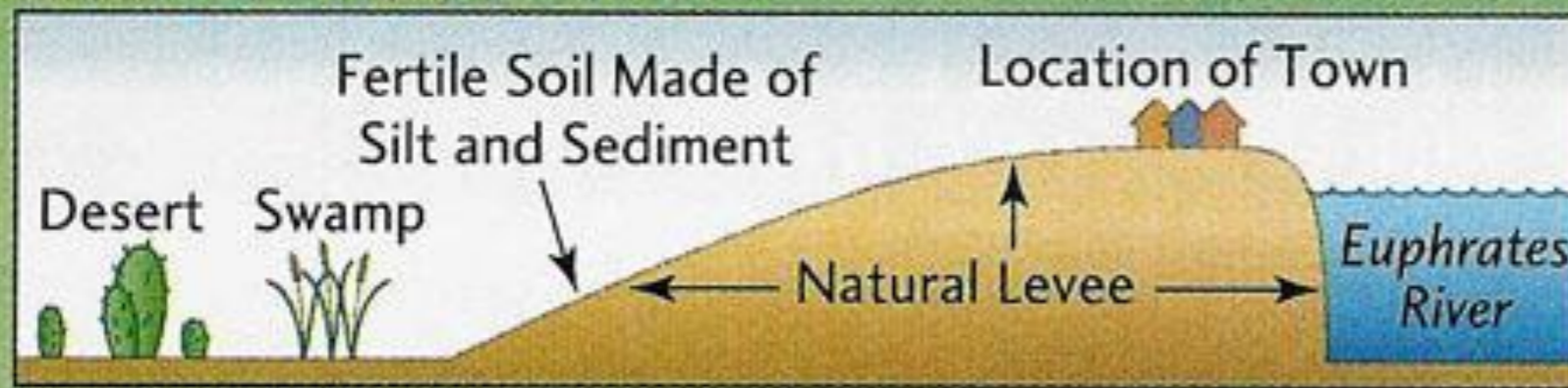


Geographic/Climate Conditions of the area around Mesopotamia

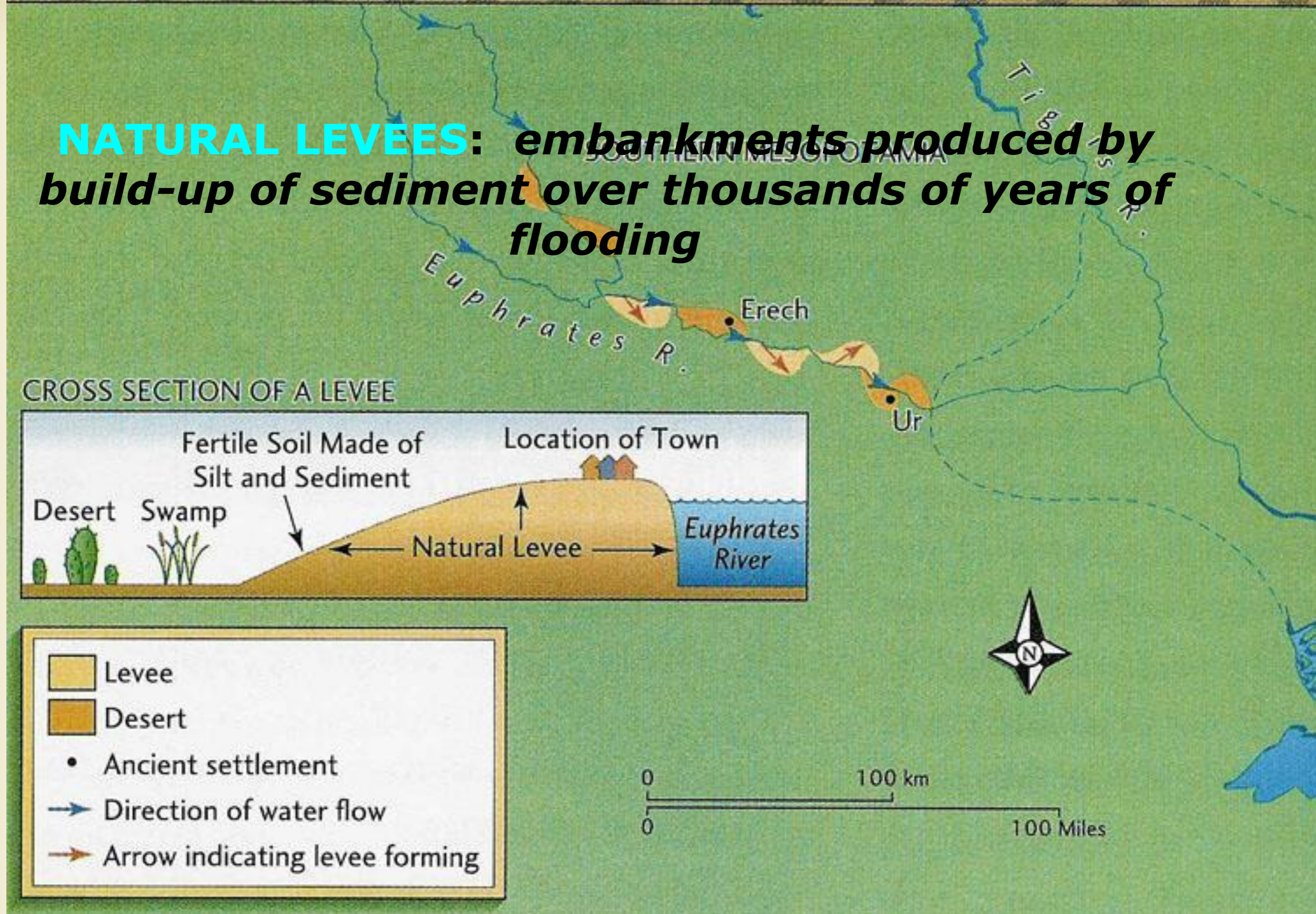
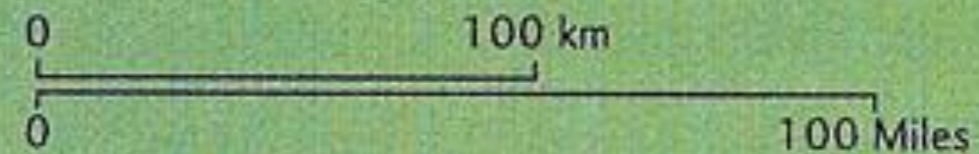
- Little rainfall
- Hot and dry climate
- windstorms leaving muddy river valleys in winter
- catastrophic flooding of the rivers in spring
- Arid soil containing little minerals
- No stone or timber resources to build with

NATURAL LEVEES: embankments produced by build-up of sediment over thousands of years of flooding

CROSS SECTION OF A LEVEE



- Levee
- Desert
- Ancient settlement
- Direction of water flow
- Arrow indicating levee forming



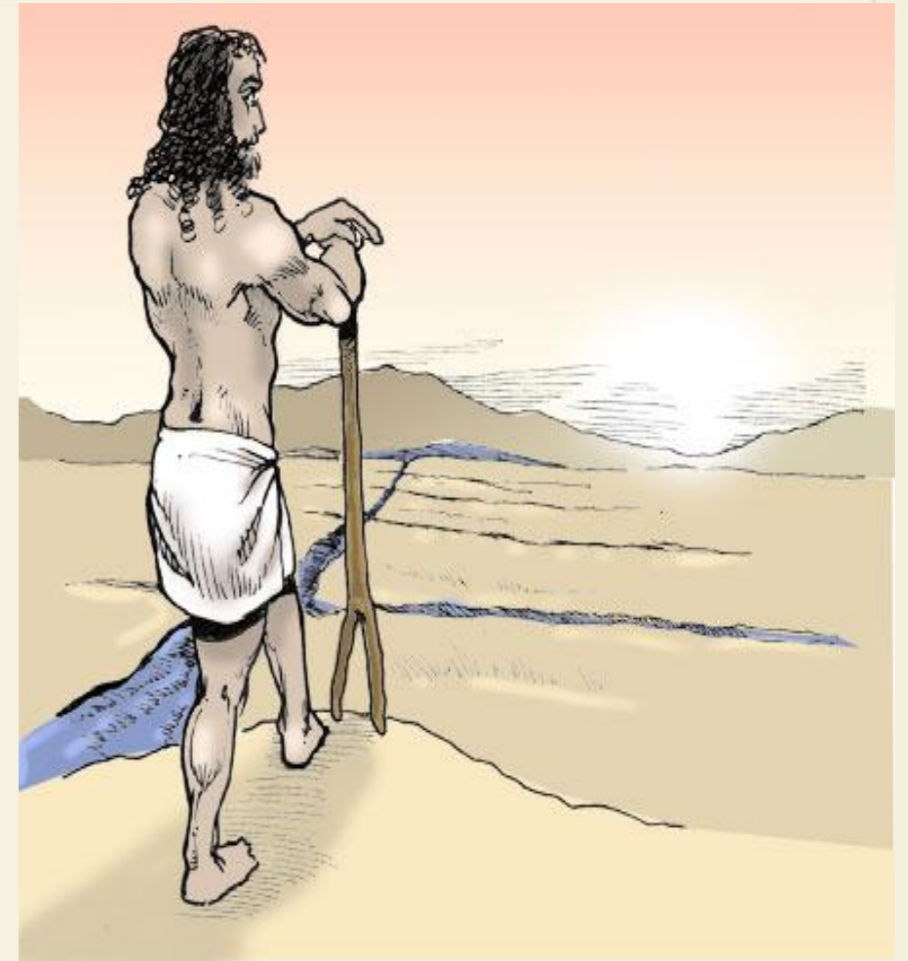
The Fertile Crescent

- In the spring, the snow in the Zagros and Taurus Mountains would melt and run off into the rivers.
- The **rivers** often **flooded**, leaving behind **rich soil for farming(silt)**.
- The problem was that the **flooding was very unpredictable**. It might flood one year, but not the next. Every year, farmers worried about their crops.



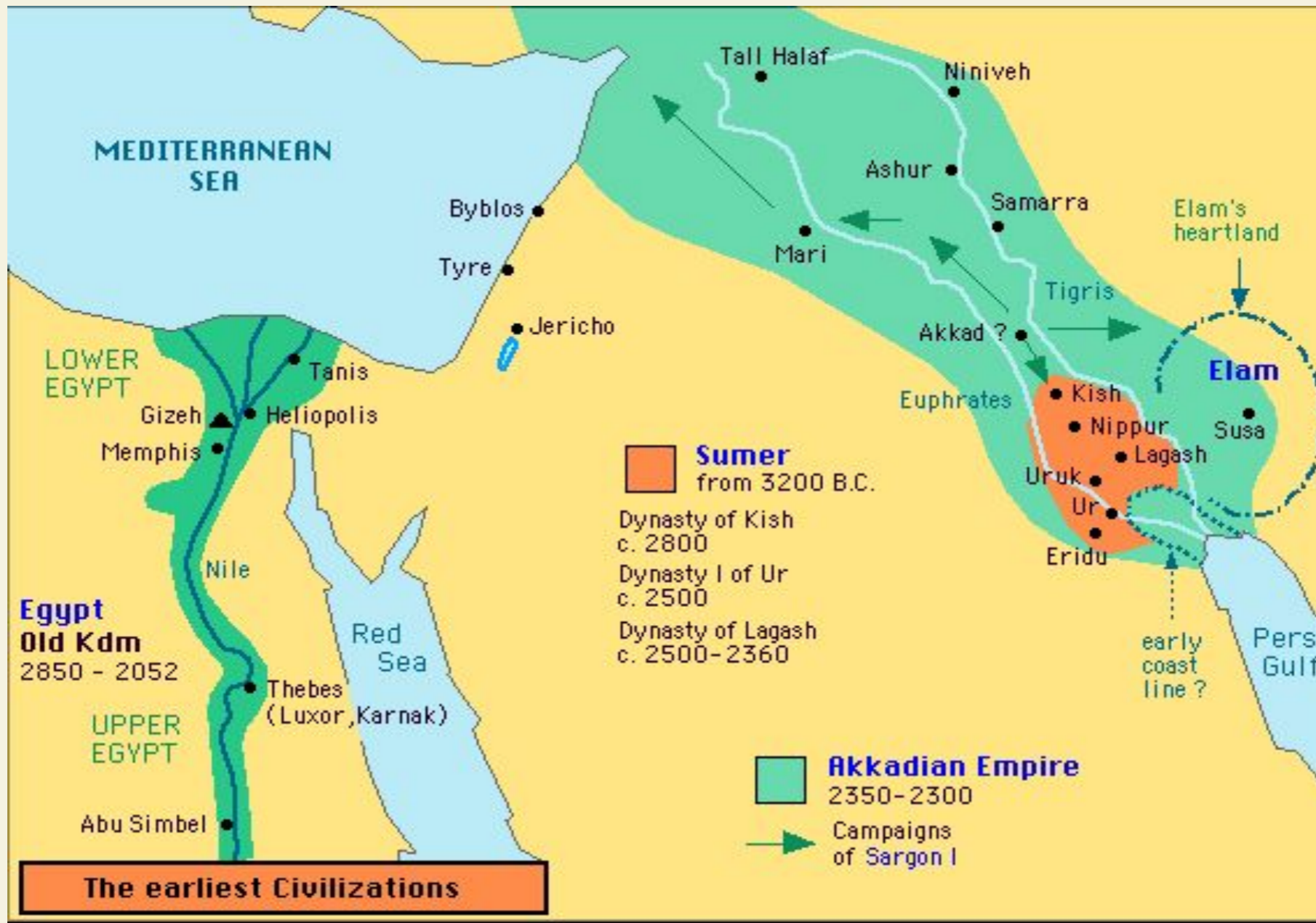
Irrigation

- Over time, the farmers learned to build **dams** and **channels** to **control** the seasonal **floods**.
- They also built **walls**, **waterways**, and **ditches** to bring water to their fields.
- **This way of watering crops is called *irrigation***.
- Irrigation allowed the farmers to grow plenty of food and support a large population.



Sumer

The first major civilization in Mesopotamia was in a region called Sumer.



Food in Sumer

- The Sumerians grew several kinds of crops.
- The most valuable one was **barley**, which was used to make flour and bread.
- **Dates** were also very valuable to the Sumerians. They were eaten once ripe or else they were dried for future consumption. Dates also made an excellent wine.

Barley and dates



Barley



City-states

- Each Sumerian city and the land around it became a separate *city-state*.
- **Each city-state had its own government** and was not part of any larger unit.
- City states often fought over resources such as land.

Religion



- Polytheistic religion consisting of over 3600 gods and demigods
- Each god had control of certain things and each city was ruled by a different god

Prominent Mesopotamian gods

- Enlil (supreme god & god of air)
- Ishtar (goddess of fertility & life)
- An (god of heaven)
- Enki (god of water & underworld)
- Shamash (god of sun and giver of law)

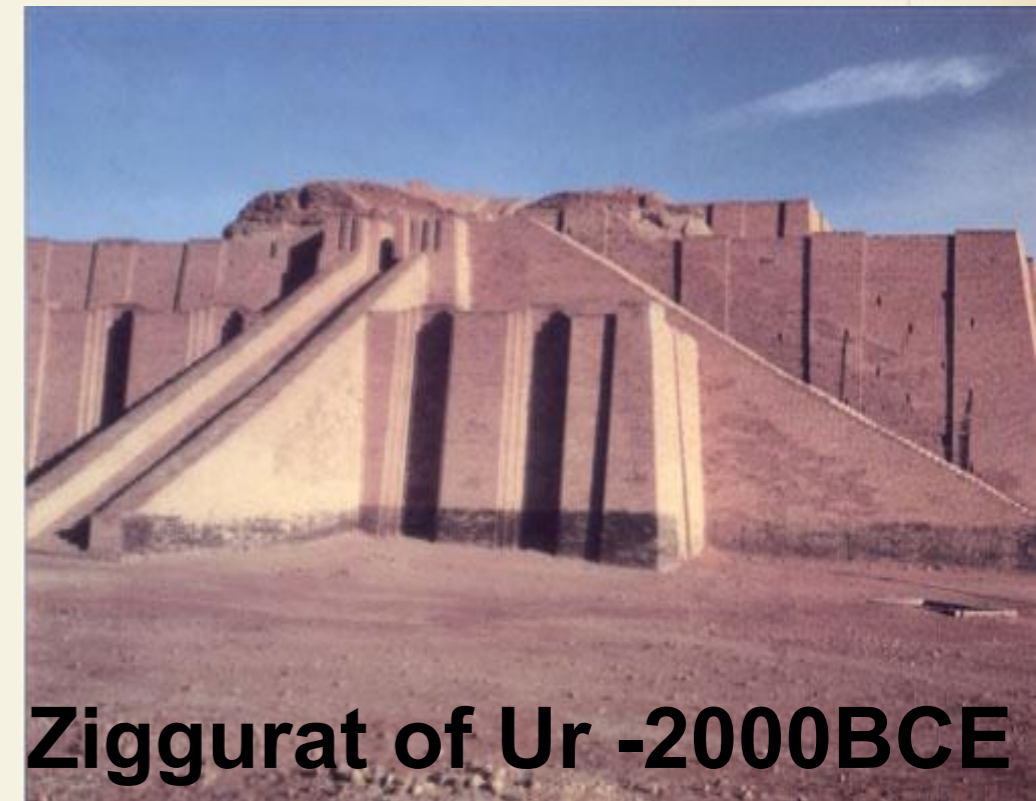


Kingship believed to be created by gods and the king's power was divinely ordained

- Belief that gods lived on the distant mountaintops
- Kings and priests acted as interpreters as they told the people what the god wanted them to do

Ziggurats

- ❖ Large **temples** dedicated to the god or goddess of the city
- ❖ Made of layer upon layer of mud bricks in the shape of a pyramid in many tiers (due to constant flooding and from belief that gods resided on mountaintops)
- ❖ Temple on top served as the god's home and was beautifully decorated
- ❖ Inside was a room for offerings of food and goods
- ❖ Temples evolved to **ziggurats**- *a stack of 1-7 platforms decreasing in size from bottom to top*
- ❖ Famous ziggurat was **Tower of Babel** (over 100m above ground and 91m base)



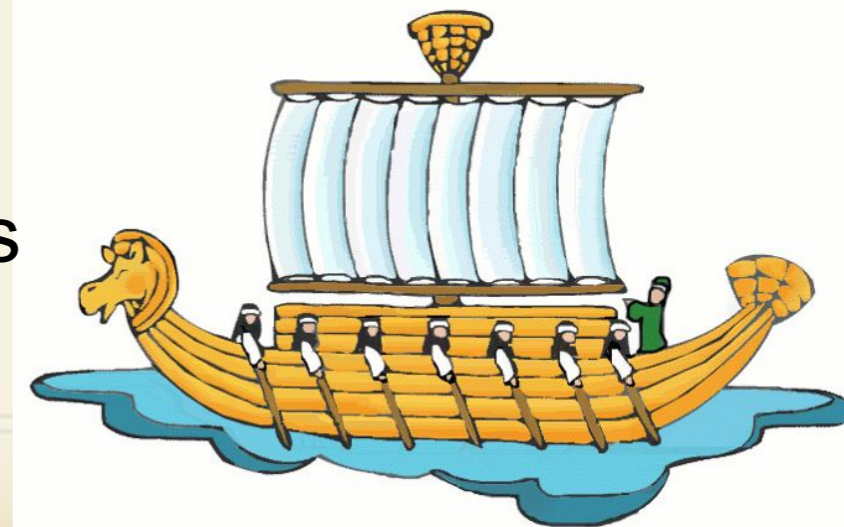
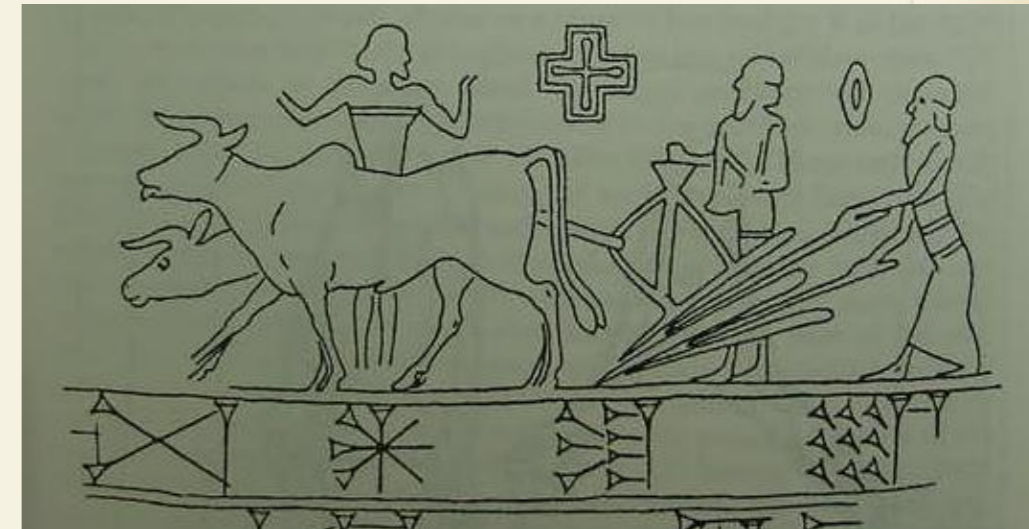
Ziggurat of Ur -2000BCE

Social Classes in Sumer

- Upper class –
 - kings, priests, warriors, and government officials.
- Middle class –
 - artisans, merchants, farmers, and fishers. These people made up the largest group.
- Lower class –
 - enslaved people who worked on farms or in the temples.

Sumerian Inventions

- Writing system
- wagon wheel and axle
- plow
- sailboat
- number system based on 60
- geometry
- 12 month calendar



Journals Through History-From Nomads to Farmers
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VroX-_thMLg

- The most important invention of the Sumerians was writing.

- The writing of the Sumerians was called *cuneiform*.



















- Cuneiform was made up of wedges and lines.

- Recorded on clay tablets using a stylus

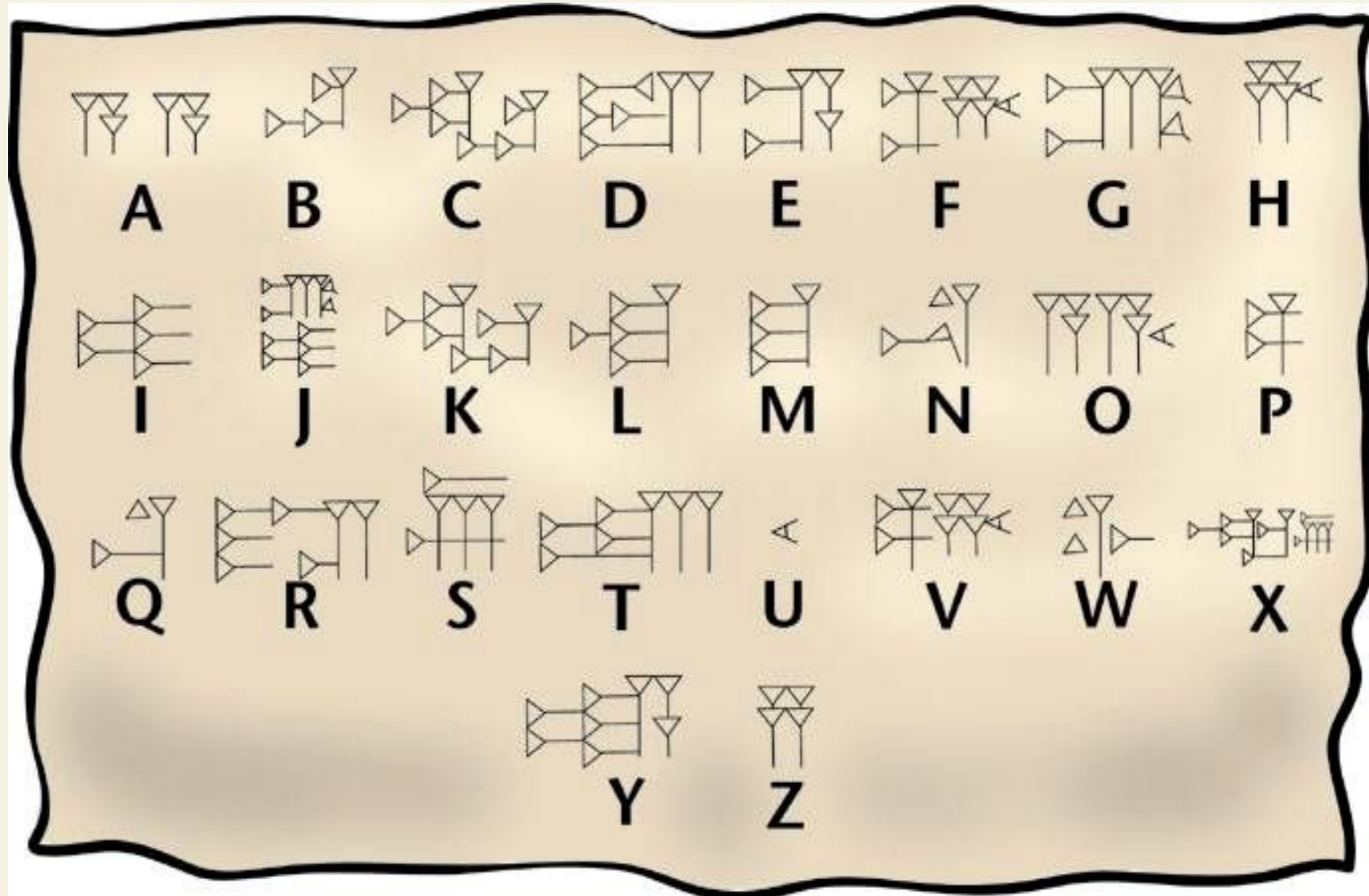
Writing



Development of Cuneiform, 3000 B.C.–600 B.C.

Meaning of Pictograph						
	Ear of Barley	Head and Body of Man	Fish	Bird	Bowl of Food	Stream of Water
Pictographs c. 3000 B.C.						
Rotated Position Pictographs c. 2800 B.C.						
Cuneiform Signs c. 600 B.C.						

Cuneiform alphabet



The Epic of Gilgamesh



. The most famous piece of literature from Sumer is the Epic of Gilgamesh.

. It is the first recorded story, written over 4000 years ago

. An epic is a long poem that tells the story of a hero.

. The hero Gilgamesh is a king who travels around the world with a friend and performs great deeds. When his friend dies, Gilgamesh searches for a way to live forever.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pGhEu9eInA>