

# Marriage in ancient mesopotamia essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Several scholars have studied the different cultures and traditions that existed in the ancient times before civilization as it is considered to have been developed. In these studies, some of the scholars have included the ways of life apparent in the societies of that period and the factors that affected the main developments that happened in those days. Some of the aspects of livelihood often studied include the rites of passage that one went through, the different roles of the different people in the society, their feeding habits, their marriages and family structures among many other factors. These studies have led to the understanding of the roots of the society we see today and have helped people learn from the wisdom practiced so long ago as well as the mistakes that these societies made. This paper discuss the various factors that were considered in the marriage of two people in the ancient Mesopotamia, the factors that led to the union and also the reasons that were considered valid for a divorce. It will also outline the different roles that the bride and the groom had and how they lived peacefully as a family. It will also discuss some of the social activities that influenced the marriages at the time.

In ancient Mesopotamia family and marriage was a very valid structure that was respected by all. There are many ceramic articles and paintings that show the view of family was valued and marriage was considered an institution in the society. Just as cultures are different, there are different perceptions as to how marriage should be arrived at. There are cultures that allow children to be of age and choose their life partners on their own while others choose for them. In this case, children's families chose partners for them while they were still very young and in most cases it was because of

economic or political reasons. The young girls were married off as soon as they were teenagers while the boys could wait even ten more years to marry. The girls could either go and live with the groom's family before the wedding or wait until after the wedding when they were ready to start a life together.

Marriages were arranged by fathers of the two parties who as stated earlier were mainly concerned about either economic or political factors. If the father of the family was deceased, then either the mother or the brothers would take up the responsibility of planning the marriage. The groom's family paid bride wealth which in many cases was silver. This bride wealth could either be paid in full or in installments. On the other hand, the girl's family also paid dowry. This mainly consisted of household goods that would help the new couple start new life together. It included cooking equipment, furniture and textiles. Though the marriages were arranged, this did not necessarily rule out the need for love between the two marrying parties. There has been implication of happy loving families in those days. Love was considered a necessary ingredient for marriage. However this was not always the case but the spouses were forced to create an adjustment which more often than not led the couple to learn to love each other.

There was a feast held to finalize the marriage and the newlyweds moved into their own house to start a new life together. In case before the wedding took place the engagement was broken off, then the groom's family would have forfeit the bride wealth that they had paid, whether it was in installments or in full. According to Jane McIntosh, at that time there was no condemnation for prostitution. A man was allowed to engage with

prostitution provided that it would not affect his marital affairs. This I find as a clear indication that the society had double standards since male adultery was not acceptable. Infidelity was considered a valid reason for divorce. However, the law did not allow a woman to ask for a divorce. If this happened though it was on rare occasions, the woman was thoroughly investigated to ensure that the reason was not because she was adulterous or that she intended to be with another man. After the wife was divorced she would retain her dowry and remarry if she wanted to.

In the marriage institution both the bride and the groom had their roles to play. These roles were common in all the families in the community and were considered as the acceptable way to lead marriage life. The man like in many communities today was considered as the head of the household. Men were responsible for making the major decisions in the household such as arranging marriages for their sons and daughters. They were also in charge of the financial status of the family and therefore made decisions on investment and trade. Sometimes in the family fell into debt, the man of the house would give his wife and children to work off the debt. In the worst case scenario he would sell them off as slaves.

The men were involved in planning business ventures and tending to religious rites. Though some of these rites were also performed by the women, it was clear that the man was the main representative of the family in the society. This was so important that a woman was referred to in the society with the name of the husband. She was considered to belong to the husband and was therefore to uphold his name everywhere she went. The sons born in the marriage remained subordinate to their father even after

marriage. It was often the case that they would only get control of the family assets through inheritance. The sons were therefore in the supervision of their fathers until the fathers died. After inheritance the sons would then take charge and make decisions for the family accordingly.

Men also performed the duty of entertaining guests and visitors from other cities. This created means and a forum to make political alliances and look for suitors for their children. The treatment that one was given while visiting was an important impression of both the financial and the social standing of a particular family. This duty was therefore entrusted to the husbands to create alliances and a good social standing for the family. The men also had a duty of enrolling in the military in times of war. Men were considered as the strength and protectors of the community. They were therefore expected to participate in warfare and protect the welfare of their families. Men also had the duty of providing the city state with produce and manpower from the farming fields he may own. This of course depended on the amount of wealth that one may own. This can be considered as a form of tax system where people gave back to the government.

In ancient Mesopotamia the women worked in a capacity that mainly displayed that they were subordinate to their husbands. The women from higher classes however had a substantial amount of freedom. By this I mean that they had various rights that made them seem in some ways independent. Some of these rights include owning properties in their own right and inheritance. It was also the task for women to go to the market and buy household slaves. The wives would know of the upkeep of the slaves and their health and welfare as well. She was the one who allocated the duties

and divided the jurisdiction of each slave.

The main role of women in the ancient Mesopotamia society was to bear and bring up children. This was the most important aspect of a wife's duty since a man had to provide himself with children to inherit his properties and care for him in his old age. Men were identified through their father's name and this created an urgent importance for a male heir. This heir in addition to the different duties mentioned above, they were responsible for the performance of the appropriate rites that had to be performed after the death of their fathers.

Childlessness was considered a valid reason for a man to divorce his wife or take another wife. In some cases, the wife could appoint one of the maid servants to act as a surrogate if she could not bear children. However, a husband was not allowed to discard his sick or injured wife. This proves that though people who lived around that period are now viewed as savages by some societies, some of the practices that they practiced portrayed a great sense of compassion and humanity.

Women also had a duty to stand in for their husbands when they were away in business or was. In those days business often took the men for very long journeys and the women had to find a way to manage the family estate on behalf of the husband. The women would therefore deputize for their absent husbands. Often during wars and great business ventures, the women would not be sure if their husbands were ever coming home or if they were already dead. In such cases, the women were allowed to have a second marriage. However, the marriage would only take place if there was a provision for the woman to go back to her first husband if he ever returned. Any children

belonging to the second marriage would be left with their father when the woman returned to her husband. If a woman was widowed in any of the above circumstances or by any other reason and did not consider a second marriage, she had the duty to manage the family property on behalf of their sons.

The role of the family was to be a central institution for the whole community. The most common reason for the promotion of marriage unions is for the purpose of procreation. This was to facilitate the continuity of lineages and clans. Families identified themselves with the names of their clans and therefore continuity of their lineages was very important.

The general roles of the couple included the passage of the traditions and values from one generation to the next. The first place where children experienced learning was in their own homes. Since the parents are the people who had the major impact on the children, they were responsible for positively influencing their children towards the acceptable norms of the community. These teachings were the backbone of the entire society.

Through marriage and families, the norms and values of the ancient Mesopotamia society were maintained.

The other main duty was to look for a suitable family into which the children will either marry or be married to. Then they search for a partner in that family or clan for their child to marry. This was not an easy task since the parents had to establish long and dependent relationships with the potential family they intended to marry into. This also called for impeccable reputation so that the family they approach will agree to the marriage proposal. If groom's family had a bad reputation, then no man would agree to pledge his

daughter to that family and therefore finding a bride would become difficult. On the other hand if the bride's family does not have a good reputation then there would be very few people coming to ask for her hand in marriage if any. The parents therefore had to protect the name and reputation of the family for the sake of their children's future marriages

The more specific roles of the couple were mainly dependent on the reason for the marriage in the first place. If it was for political reasons then the role of the couple was to maintain the political aspirations intended when the marriage was arranged. For instance if two clans intermarried for the purpose of peace and cohesion between the two clans, then the married couple has a duty to maintain a good picture to promote the peace and unity intended. If for any reason the marriage falls apart, it is more likely than not that the treaty or agreement offered before will not stand. It is therefore a duty for the couple to set an example by staying in a peaceful and fruitful home to promote the political ties supported by their marriage.

If the marriage was arranged for social purposes then this dictates a different obligation for the married couple altogether. For instance, there were clans that had quite a prestigious name either as a result of successful businesses or political affiliations. These families often became the targets for marriage unions. If the marriage plans to such a family succeeded, then the couple had the duty to uphold the prestigious name of the two families. They had to keep good relations with other families that were of the same class. In order to achieve this there were friendships to establish and extravagant parties to be held. There was also the act of giving prestigious presents to the people who fit the class that is desired. These social occasions included affiliations



with political characters and other rich families.

The couple besides having a new family, they had to take care of their respective families as well. The husband would continue giving gifts and economic support to the bride's family. Some women could even become priestesses but they were not allowed to marry. Married women were allowed to give support to their parents. One of the main reasons for having children was for the parents to be taken care of in old age.

In conclusion, the study has shown that there was great importance and value for marriages and what they stood for. There was a very great importance on the bearing of children and the roles they were required to play both when they were at home and when they got married. The ancient Mesopotamia society had high expectations of both the parents and the couples that eventually created new families and joined the clans together. These expectations are what held the society together and guaranteed the continuity of their traditions from one generation to the next. Marriage was the cornerstone of the entire community. These unions had economical, political and social benefits. However, love was encouraged to be a necessary factor in a marriage.

The structure of the matrimonial home was very constant and the duties and privileges of the people involved were effectively outlined. The father was the head of the household from the day of the wedding until the day he died. No matter how old the children got they had to answer to the father at all times. The mother on the other hand did not have such an outgoing leadership pattern but she also had key responsibilities that mainly involved the upbringing of the children and filling into the position of the father in

case of absence or death.

The culture of the ancient Mesopotamians has led to many of the behaviors and cultures that we have in the society today. The importance of marriage is still valued in many of the communities in the world today. The value for morals and fidelity is also a positive trait that the society of the present day should emulate from them. However, there are some activities that were practiced such as prostitution that we should learn from today. The study has also helped to compare the contrast between the way of life then and what is practiced now. For instance though there is wife inheritance in some communities in the third world countries, this practice has been wiped off and many people now marry at their own will and choose whether to remarry. In the current generation sons do not totally answer to their fathers like in the past. But rather there is a sense of independence for both the sons and the women who now have started fighting for the right to gender equality.

Having the study of history in schools provides great insight to the students on how much civilization has changed people's culture. It also provides a basis from them to know about the roots of some cultures and the factors that have affected these cultures and caused them to evolve to what we see today. There is so much for people to learn from both the positives and negatives in the cultures that were practiced in ancient times.

## **Works Cited**

Hunt, Norman Bancroft. *Living in Ancient Mesopotamia*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008. Web

Jones, Lee. *Brothers of the Academy: Up and Coming Black Scholars Earning*

<https://assignbuster.com/marriage-in-ancient-mesopotamia-essay-sample/>

Our Way in Higher Education. Virginia: Stylus Publishing, 2000. Web

McIntosh, Jane. Ancient Mesopotamia: New Perspectives. Santa Barbara:  
ABC-CLIO, 2005. Web

Nemet-Nejat, Karen Rhea. Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia. Connecticut:  
Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998. Web