

# Ap history compare and contrast essay: egypt and mesopotamia

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Ethan Sua 10/16/10 Mr. McGrath AP World History A Compare and Contrast Essay of Egypt and Mesopotamia Egypt and Mesopotamia developed different and similar political and religious civilizations. Mesopotamian civilizations such as the Sumerians, the Akkadian kingdom, the Assyrian empire and the Babylonian city-state, were all too dependent on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Egypt's natural isolation and material self-sufficiency fostered a unique culture that for long periods had relatively little to do with other civilizations.

Ancient Egypt was an ancient civilization of eastern North Africa, concentrated along the lower reaches of the Nile River in what is now the modern country of Egypt. In politics, Mesopotamia culture created compact self-governing political units- the city-states. It was due to the geographical barriers of the rivers and rough terrains that made it impossible to unite the many different settled communities under one rule. The Nile River was the total opposite of the rivers of Mesopotamia. These kings emerged mainly by their military status and role.

Through their powers they created mechanisms such as military forces, laws, and taxations. Similarly, in Egypt, the control of writing meant control of knowledge and thus power. It is easy to see where they come to these conclusions. The Pharaoh controlled all political instruments of power and is also the authority in terms of religious beliefs. By the third millennium B. C. E. the concept of king (lugal) developed, quite possibly because of arguments about natural resources. Religious leaders decreased in power, as the power of kings increased. Although the kings subdued the temples, Mesopotamian kings did not have divine power.

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Political changes occurred in Mesopotamia because of the succession of people that followed the politically dominant Sumerian civilization. By 1750 B. C. E. , the written law code of King Hammurabi (the first ruler of the Old Babylonian state) , was used to maintain political authority and continuity. In contrast to Mesopotamia, Egypt spent most of its history as a unified monarchy, whereas Mesopotamia seems to have begun as a collection of city-states (under the politically dominate rule of Sumer) and progressed to being dominated by a pair of mutually hostile powers: Assyria and Babylonia.

In ancient Egypt, legendary King Menes united Upper and Lower Egypt into one nation that lasted with continuity of culture from 3, 100-1070 B. C. E. with thirty dynasties. Unlike Mesopotamian kings, the Egyptian king was represented as Horus and as the son of Re, and fit into the pattern of the dead returning to life and the climatic renewing life of the sun-god. No written law code was developed in Egypt. Egypt was substantially more self-sufficient than Mesopotamia with copper and turquoise. The pharaoh governed the country through a large efficient bureaucracy.

In highly urbanized Mesopotamia, central powers, and the use of written records allowed certain groups to obtain mass amounts of wealth. Male domination of the position of a scribe- an administrator or scholar charged by the temple or palace with reading and writing tasks- further complicates efforts to reconstruct the lives of women. Women were able to: own property, maintain control of their dowry, and even engage in trade but men monopolized political life. The females also worked outside the home in textile factories, breweries or as prostitutes, tavern keepers, bakers, or fortune tellers.

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Inside the home women wove baskets, cooked, cleaned, and collected water. For the most part, their writings reflect elite male activities. Temple leaders and the kings controlled large agricultural estates, and the palace administration collected taxes from subjects. How elite individuals acquired large private holdings is not known, since land was rarely put up for sale. In some cases debtors lost their land to creditors, or soldiers and priests received land in return for their service.

The lowest class, the slaves and peasants, of Mesopotamian society worked on the fields and used their strength, when harvest season ended, to build large public works like ziggurats- a multistory, mud-brick, pyramid-shaped tower with ramps or stairs. Women were subordination to men and had no property rights. In Mesopotamia by the second millennium B. C. E. merchants had gained in status and in power through guilds. In the Old Babylonian period, the class of people who were not dependent on the temple or palace grew, the amount of land and other property in private hands increased, and free laborers became more common.

Hammurabi's Code written in the eighteenth century B. C. E. identifies three classes: 1. Free landowning class- royalty, high-ranking officials, warriors, priests, merchants, and some artisans and shopkeepers; 2. The class of dependent farmers and artisans, whose legal attachment to royal or temple, or private estates made them the primary rural work force; and 3. The class of slaves; primarily used in domestic service. Penalties prescribed in the Law Code depended on the class of the offender. The lower orders received the most severe punishments. Slaves were mainly prisoners of war from the mountains.

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Egyptian class structure was less defined and more pyramid in shape. Compared to Mesopotamia, a far larger percentage of the Egyptian population lived in farming villages and Egypt's wealth derived from a higher degree from cultivating the land. When not need for agriculture the peasants labored to build the tombs of the pharaoh. Slavery existed on a limited scale and was of limited economic significance. In contrast to Mesopotamia, Egyptian merchants had a low social status. For women subordination to men is evident but they are represented with dignity and affection in tomb paintings.

Legal documents show that Egyptian women could own property, inherit from their parents, and will their property to whomever they wished. Marriage, usually monogamous, arose from a couple's decision to establish a household together rather than for legal or religious ceremony. Both parties could dissolve the relationship, and women retained rights over her dowry in case of divorce. At certain times, queens and queen-mothers played significant behind-the-scenes roles in the politics of the royal court, and priestesses sometimes supervised the cults of female deities.

In general, the limited evidence suggests that women in ancient Egypt enjoyed greater respect and more legal rights and social freedom than women in Mesopotamia and other ancient societies. State-organized religion stands out in Mesopotamia. City-states built temples and showed devotion to the divinity or divinities that protected the community. Priests attended this divine image with rituals that reflected the message of the Babylonian Creation Myth that humankind existed only to serve the gods and a priest would actually read from that text to the god's image.

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Many subsequent activities in the temple reenacted the events of the myth. The Sumerian gods embodied the forces of nature: Anu the sky, Enlil the air, Enki the water, Utu the sun, Nanna the moon. Egyptians also believed in amulets and in magic. Religion was state organized there also. A primary difference in Egyptian belief is that the Egyptians believed in the afterlife. They prepared for a safe passage and a comfortable existence once they arrived. The Egyptian Book of the Dead, present in many excavated tombs, contains rituals and spells to protect them.

In Mesopotamia, they felt that their deities were not loving, care-taking beings. They felt that their gods were vengeful, jealous, and malicious. This view developed from the many natural obstacles they were burdened with. Geography and climate did influence different and similar development in the political, and religious systems of both Egypt and Mesopotamia. Quite possibly Egyptian civilization enjoyed greater longevity than that of Mesopotamian because the Mesopotamia culture was started from scratch by the early Sumerians where as Egyptians were able to borrow from Mesopotamia.