

# World History Studies Weekly



## Historic Times Begin

This week we're going to travel back in time to Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia was located in Iraq between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Because the people of Mesopotamia kept written records, they are the first known historic people of the world. The Mesopotamian people established laws and a government, had schools (for some) and spent their days working as brick makers, farmers and in other trades.

Mesopotamia, which means "land between two rivers," is called many different things, including the cradle of civilization.

It is here that archaeologists have found remains of the oldest historic people discovered to date. The first people to live in southern Mesopotamia were the Sumerians around 3000 B.C. The Sumerians developed complex city-states, used irrigation for farming and developed cuneiform, one of the earliest known forms of writing. Although much of the land was barren desert, the Tigris and Euphrates rivers often overflowed their banks and created a fertile crescent of land. (Mesopotamia is part of an area called the Fertile Crescent, which also includes ancient Egypt.)

This fertile land was so desirable that many different groups of people fought to control it over the years. The Sumerians, Babylonians, Chaldeans, Akkadians and Assyrians all called Mesopotamia home at different times in history. Fortunately, each group continued many of the

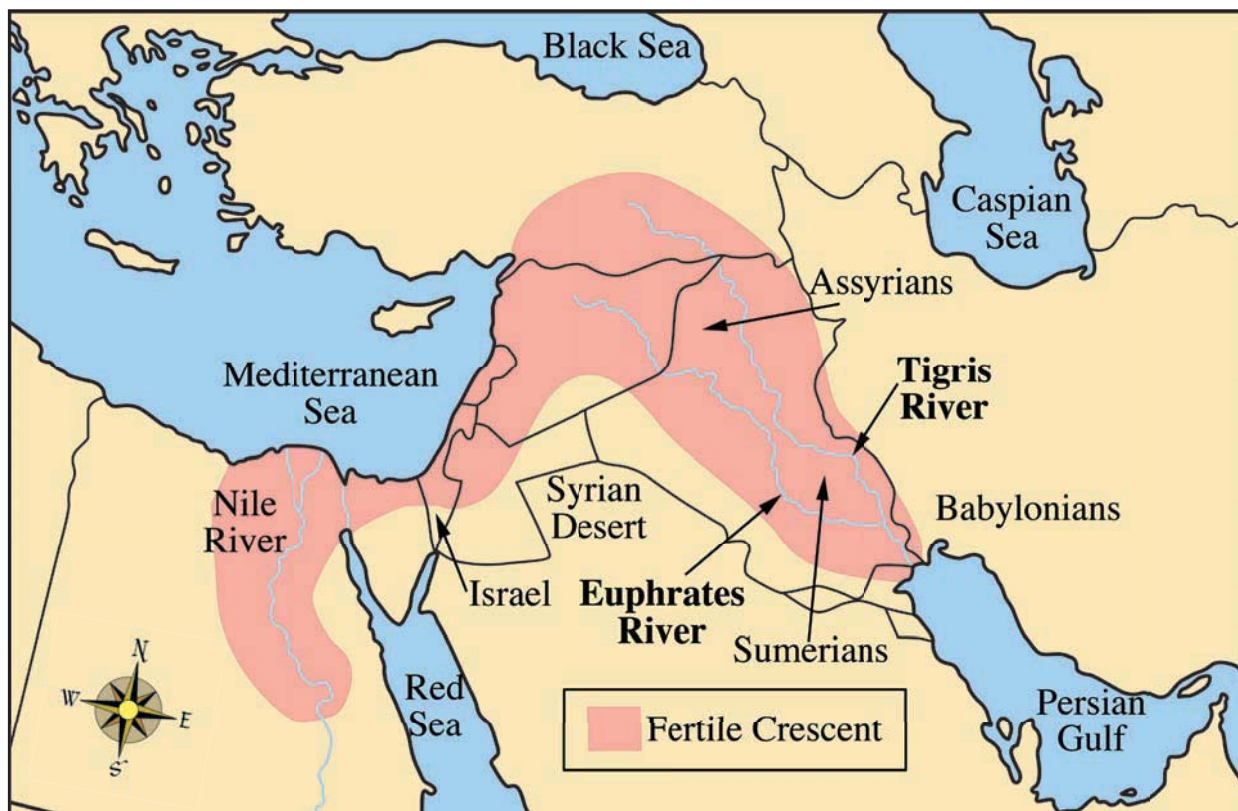
ideas of the people before them, such as cuneiform.

With few resources like stone and wood, these people had to build their cities with mud bricks. Sadly, these bricks did not stand up to decades of erosion, and as centuries passed, blowing sands covered many of the buildings.

Because the buildings didn't stand the test of time, no one saw any tangible evidence of Mesopotamia until the 1800s. Huge mounds of sand interested a number of people working in an area of what is present-day Iraq. As explorers dug deeper and deeper into the mounds, they saw a forgotten world begin to emerge from the sand.

The people of Mesopotamia gave us several gifts. They were the first to have musical notation. Shepherds tending sheep at night often looked to the

heavens to pass the time and made some of the world's first astronomical discoveries. They were the first to develop the belief that the stars can predict the future. Today we call that belief astrology, and many people enjoy reading what their horoscopes predict. Have you ever wondered why our system of telling time includes 60 seconds per minute and 60 minutes per hour? Thank the Mesopotamians. It seems they came up with the system by counting the joints on their fingers and toes—three on each finger and three on each toe. We also owe the Mesopotamians a thank-you for the potter's wheel, sailboat, the wheel, soap and the arch.



### Connections

## Thousands of Artifacts Missing

When the United States and its allies went into the country of Iraq in 2003, some very valuable things disappeared. Artifacts from the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad—at least 15,000 items—went missing. Seeing that the museum wasn't being protected, looters went inside, carting the valuable treasures away. Losing so many important items of Iraq's long history was very upsetting to people in Iraq.

Recently, some of the artifacts have been found and returned. The country of Jordan located 2,466 artifacts and has sent them back to Iraq. Syria has returned 700 items, including an ancient marble block. The block, about 4 feet tall and 1 1/2 feet

wide, shows a carving of a man with a beard kneeling in prayer. There is also a cuneiform inscription on the marble block. A number of artifacts found in the United States have also been returned. These included ancient coins and cuneiform tablets. The United States also donated \$14 million to help rebuild the 80-year-old National Museum of Iraq that was badly damaged during the looting.

Although they are happy to see their prized objects returning, Iraqi archaeologists are still wondering where more than 7,000 other historical artifacts might be. They also hope that one day all of the missing artifacts will be returned.

photo courtesy ICE







# Mesopotamia

## City States

The people of Mesopotamia lived in what were called city-states. With a strong wall for protection, each enclosed town was like a country of its own. Every city-state had its own god, its own ruler called a lugal (“great man” or “king” in Sumerian) and its own laws. The class structure included wealthy people, a middle class and slaves.

## 1. Religious Beliefs

The ancient people of Mesopotamia were polytheistic, which means they believed in many gods and goddesses. It was very important to keep the gods and goddesses happy to prevent wars, disease, crop failure and famine. The Sumerians, Babylonians, Elamites and Assyrians built beautiful temples called ziggurats that had several tiers. A large

stairway led down from the top section where the shrine for the gods was located. The people believed the ziggurats were dwelling places for the gods, and the gods used the stairway to go back and forth to heaven.

The first ziggurat was built in about 3000 B.C. The early people of the area needed to move from the northern mountains to the fertile land by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. However, many people believed their gods only lived on mountaintops and wouldn’t follow them to the flat land of Mesopotamia. The leaders decided to build mountains for their gods to live on. The word ziggurat is sometimes translated as “man-made mountain.”

These early people also believed in life after death and thought they could take their possessions with them into the afterworld. Archaeologists have found tombs that help us learn a lot about the lives of the Mesopotamians.

## 2. Code of Hammurabi

Although the Code of Hammurabi is not the oldest written set of laws, it is probably the best preserved. King Hammurabi,

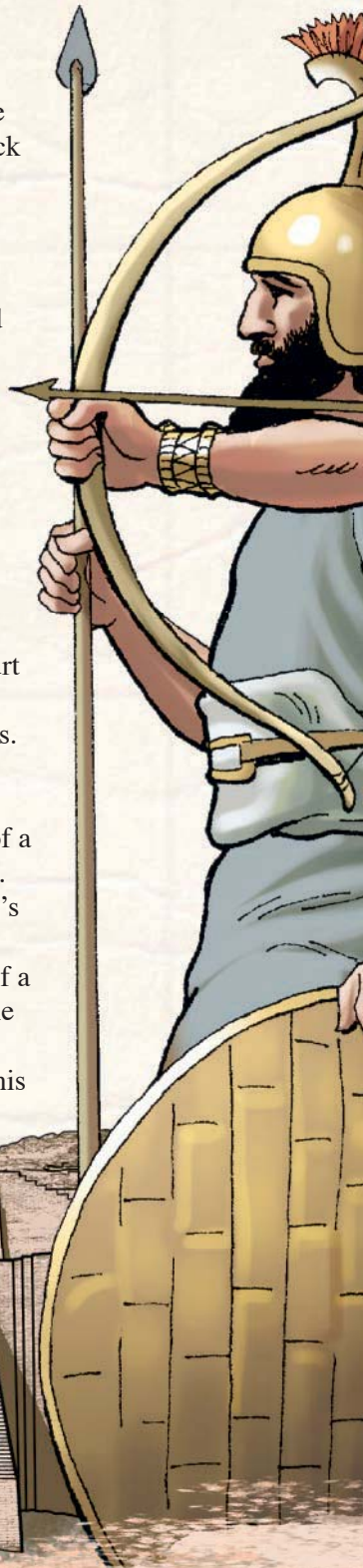
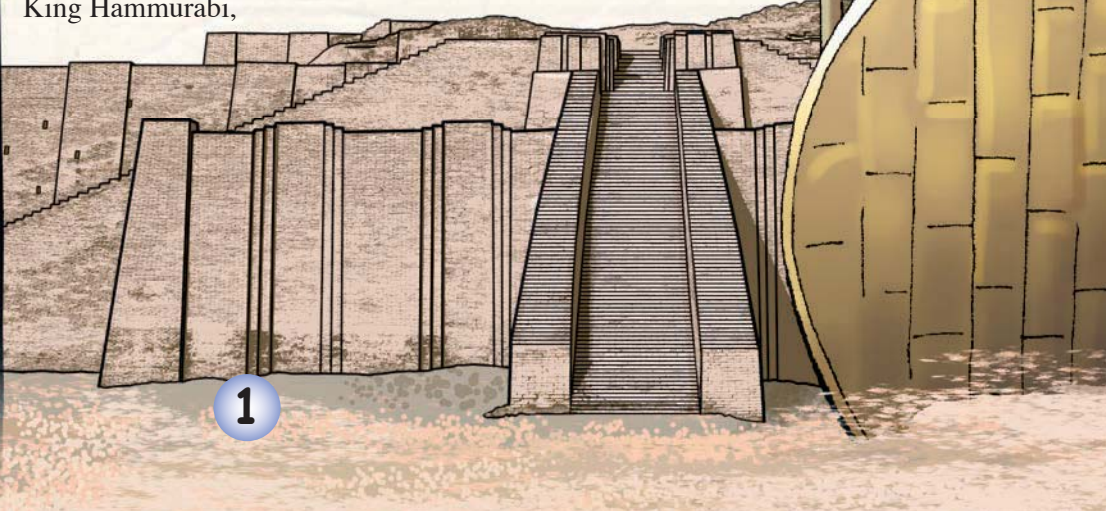
the ruler of the Babylonians around 1700 B.C., ordered the laws be written on a huge black stone. The stone, which was more than 6 feet tall, is called a stela. It was placed where everyone could see the laws, even though few people could read. The stone was covered with 282 paragraphs of laws written in cuneiform. The laws showed that there were different classes of people and different punishments depending on your class. The code was used as a basis for some modern laws. In fact, a wall of the U.S. Supreme Court Building shows an image of Hammurabi receiving the laws. Some say the laws were very harsh. What do you think?

If a man puts out the eye of a noble, his eye shall be put out.

If a boatman loses another’s goods, he must pay for them.

If a man breaks the bone of a common man, he shall pay one large piece of silver.

If a son strikes his father, his hands will be cut off.



# Iraq

Iraq is found on the continent of Asia and bordered by Syria, Jordan, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. It is about twice the size of the state of Idaho and has mountains to the north and desert to the west. Iraq has two major rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, which flow into the Persian Gulf. People have lived on the fertile land by these rivers for thousands of years. Iraq also has the fifth-largest supply of oil in the world.

Iraq’s capital and largest city is Baghdad. Other large cities are Kirkuk, Basra and Mosul. About 31 million people live in Iraq. These people mainly speak Arabic, but some also speak Kurdish, Assyrian,

Armenian and English. Most people of Iraq follow the Islamic religion. You will see lots of western-style clothing, but many Islamic women wear a long black cloak called an abaya in public. Men often wear a headscarf kept in place by two black ropes.

In 1980, Iraq and its neighbor Iran began what would be an eight-year war over water rights. In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, which led the United States to come to Kuwait’s aid in the Persian Gulf War. In 2003, the United States and its allies went to war with Iraq. One of the results of the Iraq War was forming a democratic government in the country.

## World Regions





### 3. A King's Gift

One of the seven wonders of the ancient world was the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful king who lived around 600 B.C. The story goes that his wife, Amyitis, was very unhappy living on the flat lands of Mesopotamia. She cried for her beautiful



mountains and pretty flowers. To make his queen happy, King Nebuchadnezzar built a beautiful palace that looked like a mountain. Standing about 75 feet tall, the structure had rooftop gardens and waterfalls. The king brought animals and plants from many places to the palace. Slaves pumped water from the Euphrates River to help the flowers flourish.

### 4. Assyrians

The Assyrians were one of the first real warrior people of the ancient world. They lived in the city-state of Assur and wanted to build an empire. They fought other city-states for control of land. They used horses and iron weapons. Most people at this time only had weapons made of bronze, a weaker metal. The Assyrians used battering rams to break through the walls of the city-states they wanted to conquer. They also built towers on wheels (like early tanks without an engine) to use against their enemies. Once they conquered a city-state, the Assyrians proved to be cruel rulers.

They neglected farming and trade while they focused on war and conquest. Eventually, their enemies banded together and destroyed the Assyrian city of Nineveh.

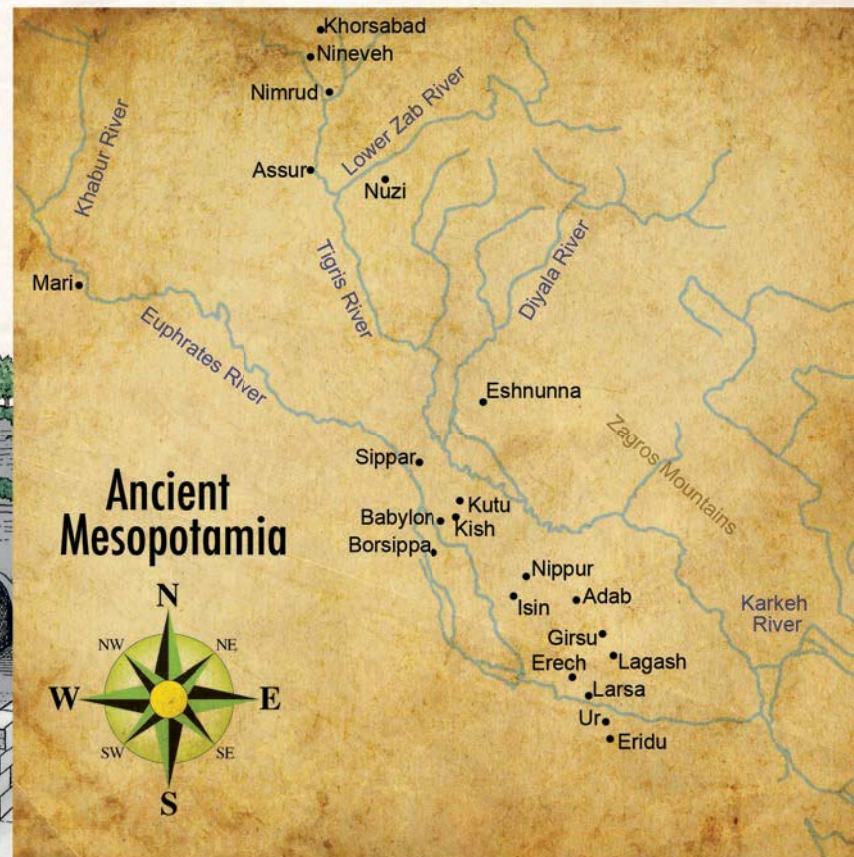
The Assyrians may have been fierce warriors, but they also valued knowledge and progress. The Assyrians paved roads and had one of the first postal services where messages could be sent to their soldiers. Ashurbanipal, the Assyrian king during 668-627 B.C., built one of the first libraries in the world. In the 1850s, nearly 25,000 clay tablet fragments were unearthed near the city of Nineveh. The tablets told about math, science,

medicine, religion and government. Some even contained instructions for making things like perfume and glass. Other tablets included dictionaries, lists of area rulers and collections of proverbs. Among the tablets came "The Epic of Gilgamesh," one of the oldest recorded stories.

### The Epic of Gilgamesh

"The Epic of Gilgamesh" was written in about 2500 B.C. Here's the story: Once, a great Sumerian king named Gilgamesh traveled the world with his friend Enkidu. Together they killed Humbaba, the monster that guarded the cedar forest, and cut down the trees to build a gate for the city of Uruk. When the Bull of Heaven attacked Uruk, they killed the bull, as well.

The gods were angry at so much killing. They punished Enkidu by making him suffer greatly for 12 days, before allowing him to die. Seeing his friend suffer and die sent Gilgamesh on a search for a way to live forever. He met a man who claimed to be immortal and said that a flower at the bottom of certain lake would make Gilgamesh immortal too. Gilgamesh found the flower only to watch a snake devour it when he set it down next to the lake. Gilgamesh realized humans can never have eternal life, and he returned to his city as a wiser man and king.



### This Week's Question

## Should museums return artifacts?

Many treasures of the ancient people of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome are housed in museums of other countries. For example, when a French archaeologist found Hammurabi's stela of laws, he took it back to France. That's why it is now found in the Louvre Museum in Paris, France. Today, many countries want the artifacts of their past cultures back. They believe the artifacts are part of their heritage and that such historical treasures were taken from them illegally. What do you think? Should museums return some or all artifacts to the original country they came from? Why or why not?

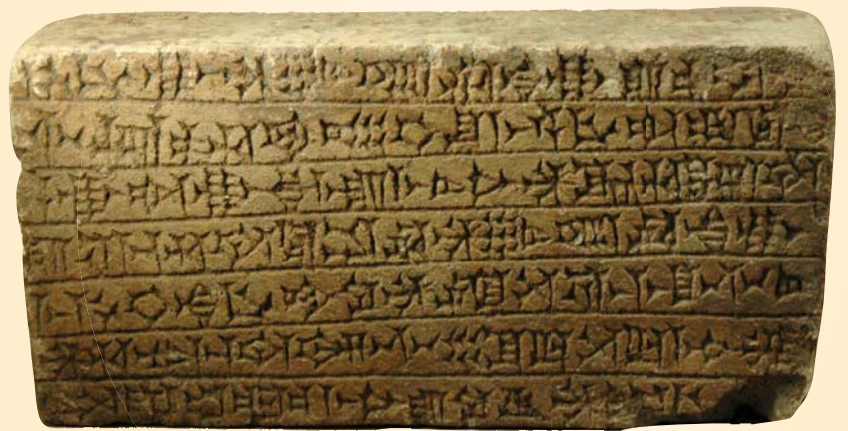
## Trades & Technology

### Cuneiform

Dating back to 3000 B.C., cuneiform is one of the earliest written languages. The Sumerians of southern Mesopotamia developed cuneiform. Researchers believe this type of picture writing was first used for records, such as proof of paying a bill.

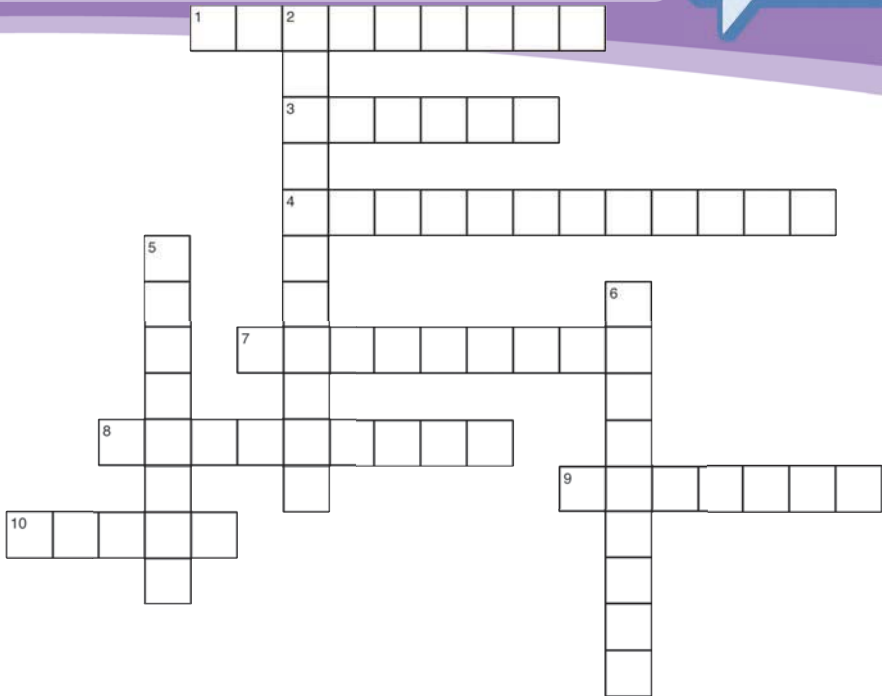
The word "cuneiform" comes from two Latin words: "cuneus," which means wedge, and "forma," which means shape. Thus, cuneiform is wedge-shaped writing. Since there were few trees in Mesopotamia, people did not make paper. Instead they wrote on clay tablets. A long reed, called a stylus, was used to carve the cuneiforms into wet clay. When the clay hardened, the tablets became permanent records—as long as no one dropped them.

People who could read or write were called scribes in ancient Mesopotamia (and in other cultures). They were very valuable to the Mesopotamian people because so few people had those skills. To see your initials in cuneiform, go to: <http://www.penn.museum/cgi/cuneiform.cgi>





Name \_\_\_\_\_



**Across**

1. the first people to live in southern Mesopotamia
3. a person who could read and write
4. believing in many gods and goddesses
7. wrote a famous code of laws
8. wedge-shaped writing
9. city of the Hanging Gardens
10. the ruler of a city-state

**Down**

2. located in Iraq between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers; "land between two rivers"
5. a tall, tiered temple
6. one of the oldest written stories; The Epic of \_\_\_\_\_



As you read this week's lesson, circle or highlight all proper nouns with any color pen or highlighter. This will help you find some of the crossword answers and get ready for this week's test.

*Mapping & Charting*

1. What mountain range is east of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Name two rivers that flow into the Tigris.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Which Mesopotamian city is furthest south on this map?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. In what direction would an ancient Mesopotamian travel to get to Nineveh from Nuzi?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. In what direction would an ancient Mesopotamian travel to get to Adab from Isin?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What direction would an ancient Mesopotamian travel to get to Eshunna from Sippar?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. How many rivers would an ancient Mesopotamian have to cross to get from Borsippa to Eshunna, traveling the most direct route?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Mesopotamia**



*Let's Write*

Beginning in 1922, an archaeologist named Sir Charles Leonard Woolley excavated the ancient city of Ur. Woolley spent about 12 years excavating the site. He found 16 royal tombs and the bodies of 74 soldiers and 13 women. He also found helmets, harps, crowns and gold and silver jewelry. He even discovered the tomb of Queen Puabi and her golden headdress. Pretend you are Woolley and write a diary entry for the day you first found the tombs. How did you feel? What amazed you the most? Remember to check for correct grammar, spelling and punctuation. After you've written your diary, ask your teacher to go to this website ([http://www.mesopotamia.co.uk/tombs/home\\_set.html](http://www.mesopotamia.co.uk/tombs/home_set.html)) to read about Woolley's story and look at photos from the excavation.



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