"Shaping the Ancient World: How Clay Built Mesopotamian Civilization"

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of clay in building the civilization of Mesopotamia, which is often referred to as the "cradle of civilization", which was a region in the Middle East that corresponded to modern-day Iraq. Clay is one of the key factors that contributed to the growth and development of Mesopotamian civilization. The abundance of clay, a type of fine-grained earth material, and how clay played a pivotal role in the daily lives of Mesopotamians, influencing their architecture, art, literature, and economy, affected the developments of the region in the early times after it emerged. Clay played a crucial role in the development of writing in Mesopotamia. The use of clay in building allowed for the creation of complex cities like Ur and Babylon, which became centers of trade, commerce, and culture. In addition, clay was the primary building material in Mesopotamia, used for constructing homes, temples, and city walls, when the Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians, who inhabited Mesopotamia, developed sophisticated techniques for using clay in building. In this paper, I will focus on the most intriguing period, in my opinion, when mud and clay were used in various ways in Mesopotamian civilization.

Keywords: Mesopotamia, Clay, Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians.

تشكيل العالم القديم: كيف ساهم الطين في بناء حضارة بلاد ما بين النهرين؟

المستخلص

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية دور الطين في بناء حضارة بلاد ما بين النهرين، التي تُعرف غالبًا بـ "مهد الحضارة"، وهي منطقة في الشرق الأوسط تُعرف حاليًا بالعراق. يُعدّ الطين أحد العوامل الرئيسية التي ساهمت في نمو وتطور حضارة بلاد ما بين النهرين. لقد أثّرت وفرة الطين- وهو نوع من المواد الترابية الدقيقة الحبيبات- في ان يكون له دور رئيسي في الحياة اليومية لسكان بلاد ما بين النهرين، وكان تأثيره على عمارتهم وفنونهم وأدبهم واقتصادهم عاملا على تطور المنطقة في العصور الأولى بعد ظهورها. لعب الطين دورًا حاسمًا في تطوير الكتابة في بلاد ما بين النهرين. وقد سمح استخدام الطين في البناء بإنشاء مدن متطورة مثل أور وبابل، اللتين أصبحتا مركزين للتجارة والتبادل الثقافي. علاوة على ذلك، كان الطين مادة البناء الأساسية في بلاد ما بين النهرين، حيث استُخدم لبناء المنازل والمعابد وأسوار المدن عندما طوّر السومريون والبابليون والآشوريون، الذين سكنوا بلاد ما بين النهرين، تقنيات متطورة لاستخدام الطين في البناء. في هذه الورقة، سأركز على الفترة الأكثر إثارة للاهتمام، برأيي، والتي استُخدم فيها الطين والصلصال بطرق مختلفة في حضارة بلاد ما بين النهرين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: *بلاد ما بين النهرين، الطين، السومريون، البابليون، والآشوريون.*

1.Introduction

Clay is a fine-grained natural soil material commonly used in pottery, ceramics, and architecture. It is made up of minerals, water, and other materials and is noted for its flexibility when wet, which allows it to be sculpted and molded. Clay comes in various hues and kinds, each having its own distinct qualities and applications.

Allah created the first human being by shaping clay into human form and infusing a soul into it, as your Lord declared to the angels. The Qur'anic idea that "He created the human being from hard clay, like pottery" is referenced in Surah Ar-Rahman (55:14), which states, "He created man from sounding clay like [that of] pottery."

﴿خَلَقَ الْإِنسَانَ مِن صَلْصَالٍ كَالْفَخَّارِ﴾ [الرحمن: ١٤]

To clarify the significance and ramifications, we find that "He created the human being." This passage affirms divine authorship, which holds that God (Allah) is the source of humanity. It highlights how intentional and purposeful creation is.

Secondly, God created human beings. "From hard clay"—a common translation of the Arabic word ṣalṣāl is "dry clay" or "sounding clay." This suggests a substance is hard and rigid when dry but moldable when wet. When tapped, it produces a sound that suggests a hollow or resonating quality, which could be interpreted symbolically as a reference to the emptiness or fragility of human nature in the absence of spiritual guidance. A process of design, transformation, and solidification is implied by the hand-shaping, firing, and hardening of pottery.

However, the transformation of clay into something valuable and useful also reveals a noble goal. The text strikes a balance between spiritual significance—our souls being breathed by God, as stated elsewhere in the Qur'an—and material reality—our bodies made of clay. This duality highlights the interconnectedness of the spiritual and physical realms, suggesting that while our earthly existence may be fragile, it is also imbued with divine purpose. Ultimately, the journey of creation serves as a metaphor for the human experience, reminding us to seek harmony between our spiritual aspirations and our tangible lives.

Conversely, the Epic of Gilgamesh states that the goddess Aruru created humans from clay. The narrative continues to detail the process by which Aruru creates Enkidu from clay, establishing him as a formidable counterpart to Gilgamesh. The Babylonian Epic of Atrahasis describes how Nintu (Ninhursag) fashioned humanity through the combination of clay and the blood of a sacrificial deity.

Approximately 5,500 years ago, when humans settled in Mesopotamia, an ancient civilization emerged, recognized as one of the oldest in the world. The scarcity of stone for constructing shelters presented a challenge for the Sumerians; however, this limitation prompted them to develop an effective solution for their building needs. Shelters, homes, and other structures were constructed using locally sourced materials, including clay, cane, and soil, while the Sumerians refined the design and functionality of municipal buildings. The construction of brick structures, such as ziggurats, temples, and palaces, featured intricate sculptures and mosaics, showcasing a high level of craftsmanship and architectural planning. Mesopotamian societies employed clay not merely as a construction material but also as a means for documentation, artistic representation, and religious activities.

2.Clay and writing

In ancient Sumer, clay was fundamental to the construction of mudbrick edifices that were the foundation of urban development, while clay tablets engraved with cuneiform served as the principal medium of written communication. The Babylonians similarly inherited and enhanced these ideas, utilizing clay for purposes ranging from administrative papers to the crafting of elaborate ceramics and sculptures. Clay is among the most prevalent and adaptable natural substances. The Sumerians developed cuneiform, one of the first writing systems, by pressing wedge-shaped symbols into moist clay tablets. The clay tablets were then sun-dried or kiln-fired to provide enduring records of commercial transactions, legal statutes, and literary compositions. The Epic of Gilgamesh, among the first extant literary works, was inscribed in cuneiform on clay tablets. The utilization of clay for inscribing enabled the development of a profound literary heritage and supported the governance of intricate civilizations.

Enheduanna is regarded as the earliest writer in history and the progenitor of written poetry. To contextualize the Sumerian poet Enheduanna within a timeframe, it is essential to note that she lived around 1,700 years prior to Sappho, 1,100 years before Homer, and around

500 years before Abraham, assuming his birth occurred circa 1700 B.C. E. Enheduanna composed her poem at an early stage in the development of writing, perhaps three hundred years after cuneiform language had advanced enough to articulate linguistic concepts. Having four thousand five hundred lines from an early author is like replenishing the well from which all authors get inspiration.

Tikva Frymer-Kensky[1] refers to Enheduanna as “the Shakespeare of ancient Sumerian literature, as her exquisite compositions were examined, replicated, and recited for over five centuries following her demise.” Literature from the Sargonic era represents the first texts that may be comprehended with ease. Enheduanna's composition is one of the earliest creations, rendering her poetry and hymns integral to the first known literary pieces in history.

3.Cuneiform writing and Record Keeping

Uruk, a city in southern Mesopotamia, was the site of the earliest known written texts, which date back to around 3200-3000 B.C. There, archaeologists uncovered about 5,000 tablets and other artifacts with proto-cuneiform inscriptions. Archaeologists discovered the majority of these tablets in seal and waste sites, which are considered secondary contexts. Although the exact order of events and where the tablets originally originated from remain a mystery, it is certain that they originated from powerful institutions often referred to as "palaces" or "temples." Typological considerations have led to their division into two periods: Uruk III and IV. This division is based on the stratigraphy of the traditional region of Uruk, which was formerly known as Eana. Since archaeological strata are numbered according to their order of discovery, Uruk IV is older than Uruk III. A more exact dating of tablets into smaller subdivisions has been offered by Hans Nissen, who heads the Berlin team that is publishing these materials (Green and Nissen 1987). The ongoing revisions to the stratigraphy of the ancient Uruk findings may require adjustments to many of the texts' dates. [2]

In the broad context of the Uruk phenomenon, seals and clay accounting technologies were important cultural symbols; these shared symbols helped connect local and regional elites [3]. Studies of trace elements and isotopes show that clay vessels and seals were made locally, but they were also widely transported.
Stamp seals were employed on clay for administrative functions beginning in the late seventh millennium BC in northern Mesopotamia and were extensively adopted and modified in subsequent millennia. By the mid-fourth millennium, cylinder seals were utilized in Iran, Iraq, and Syria [4]. Besides sealing lumps of clay to fasten containers and doors, seals also adorned the surfaces of clay balls—which might bore numerical impressions and enclose tokens—and were ultimately employed on blank or numerical tablets. Iraq, contains cylinder seals and impressed artifacts featuring Uruk-related iconography.

The first writers we know of drew marks on shaped lumps of clay, which explains how we know about them: the marks were durable. They used the square corner of a reed tool to make wedge-shaped marks. They wrote in Sumerian, which is not linked to any other language that we know of. For more than one hundred years, scholars have argued about why and how writers of the Semitic language Akkadian (which comes in two main forms, Assyrian and Babylonian) gradually replaced them. This society had a big impact on nearby lands, and its script was used (and simplified) for a number of languages. Other than the Indo-European Hittite, these languages are still hard to understand because there isn't a lot of information about them and they aren't connected to better-known languages. [5]

Cuneiform characters, referred to as signs, are formed by impressions created with a reed stylus on moist clay. The earliest signs, dating to 3100 B.C.E., were linear, created with a pointed stylus. However, it was soon recognized that using short, quick strokes with the stylus was more efficient and aesthetically pleasing. The strokes comprising a single sign exhibit variability in length and are applied at different angles. Each stroke features a wedge-shaped

head, created by the angular design of the stylus, and a linear tail. By the end of the third millennium, short angular strokes had lost their tails, and scribes had ceased using a separate stylus with a round cross-section.

A Sumerian epic text featuring an etiology of writing [6] presents the first recipient of a cuneiform message exclaiming, "It's wedge-like!" Clay cuneiform tablets exhibit a range of sizes from 2 x 2 cm to 30 x 30 cm. Their shapes, which include round, rounded corners, sharp corners, and variations in thickness, as well as their orientation—either "portrait" or "landscape"—have shown variation both diachronically and synchronically, influenced by text type and function. The influence of gravity on wet clay results in a flat obverse of an inscribed tablet, as it rests on a flat surface during the writing and drying processes, while the reverse exhibits a slight convexity. Tablets may be subjected to kiln firing to improve durability; however, this process was typically reserved for exceptional cases, such as the finely crafted examples found in the library of Ashurbanipal (king of Assyria, 668-627). Many additional tablets were inadvertently baked due to fires that ravaged their storage locations in ancient times. Clay cones, prisms, cylinders, pots, and bricks were inscribed for commemorative purposes. The latter were stamped in large quantities using ceramic or wooden stamps, which featured the complete text of a brief inscription carved in reverse.

4. Clay usage in Schools and Education

Kramer, 1963 [7], describes the way that the kids students attend the schools as the following: "Why do you idle about? Go to school, and stand before your school father. (teacher) recite your assignment, open your school bag, write on your tablet, and let your big brother (school leader), write on your new tablet for you. After you have finished your assignment and reported to your monitor, come to me, and do not wander about in the street. Come now, do you know what I said?" (p.244) These words are familiar, with other phrases that almost every child in Sumerian Kingdom, who attends school, hears from their parents about their education. What makes something so unique and notable? In order for his kid to be able to remember these instructions, a father who had been a scribe in the past wrote them down for him and then made his son write them down on a clay tablet. This took place over four thousand years ago. There are hundreds of documents that have been discovered in the Sumerian state, which is now known as Iraq. This clay tablet is one of the records that demonstrates the significance of the art of writing and the role that a scribe had in the Sumerian civilization.

With regard to a variety of domains, the Sumerians produced some very amazing contributions to the development of human civilizations. The Sumerians, much like the ancient Egyptians, were the first people to develop a system of writing. When they first started out, they employed the image writing method, but later on, they switched to the phonetic method. The oldest evidence of their ability to write may be found in an inscription on a stone that dates back to 3600 BCE. Cuneiform was a writing system that was initially developed around the end of the fourth millennium BCE, most likely in the city of Uruk, which is located in southern Mesopotamia. The name of this writing system comes from the Latin term that means "wedge-shaped." Cuneiform writing was the most frequently used method of writing previous to the alphabet, which finally superseded it. It reached its peak of popularity about the year 100 CE and continued to be used until that time.

Considering the historical context of civilization, the most significant achievements of Sumer include the creation of the cuneiform writing system and the creation of a formal educational framework that emerged as an immediate result. The inventiveness and perseverance of the anonymous, practically oriented Sumerian scholars and educators in the early third millennium B.C. played a crucial role in shaping the foundations of modern intellectual and

scientific achievements. It is from Sumer that the concepts of writing and learning disseminated globally. The inventors of the earliest Sumerian signs, the pictographs, likely did not foresee the evolution of the educational system that emerged in subsequent periods. Even within the oldest known written documents found in Erech, which comprise over a thousand small pictographic clay tablets inscribed mainly with economic and administrative notes, there are several that feature word lists designed for study and practice. This indicates that as early as 3000 B.C., some scribes were already conceptualizing the processes of teaching and learning. Progress experienced a gradual pace in the centuries that ensued; however, by the midpoint of the third millennium B.C., it is likely that several schools existed across Sumer, where writing was formally instructed. In ancient Shuruppak, the home city of the Sumerian Noah, a significant number of school “textbooks” dating from around 2500 B.C. were excavated approximately fifty years ago. These texts comprise lists of gods, animals, artifacts, and a diverse collection of words and phrases.[7]

Julius Jordan, a German archeologist, discovered a vast library of clay tablets dating to the Sumerian culture in 1929. These tablets were recovered from the ground. According to these examples, the Chinese, Egyptian, and Mesoamerican writing systems were all older than these samples. In the past, Uruk was a massive urban collection and one of the wealthiest early cities in the world. However, when compared to the standards of today, Uruk is considered to be a very tiny city with just a few citizens. A reference to the city of Uruk may be found in the Epic of Gilgamesh, which states that "he built the town wall of Uruk, city of sheepfolds." The magnificent metropolis is well-known in modern times due to the fact that it generated a large number of clay tablets that are unreadable by contemporary researchers. Jordan asserts,[7] that the Sumerians employed items that were conical, spherical, and cylindrical for the purpose of writing themselves. The clay tablets were used by the Sumerians to count the commodities of their everyday life, such as jars and animals, in a manner that was stylized and standardized, according to what he recorded in one of his notebooks. [7]

The Babylonians advanced in education; Babylon had institutions to provide education to pupils. The schools, typically located within or adjacent to temples, instructed boys in reading, writing, mathematics, and clerical skills. Clay tablets were used as writing surfaces. In 1844, researchers uncovered a schoolhouse of 55 square feet. The objective of the schools was to instruct pupils in the craft of writing. The kids were obligated to remember 350 signs, which was a formidable assignment. A proverb from the era, inscribed on the wall of an ancient schoolhouse, states, "He who excels in tablet writing shall shine like the sun." This is how educated individuals were held in high regard throughout society. The pupils inscribed on pliable clay that could be effortlessly erased at any moment. Several clay tablets in the Yale Babylonian collection exhibit mathematical discoveries. They encompass the scribe's exercises documenting the area of a certain trapezoid and circles.**[7]**

5. Literature

The story of Gilgamesh is inscribed on clay tablets, which have been discovered in fragments throughout various locations in the Sumerian states. In the 19th century, the discovery of the flood story in the Gilgamesh epic was regarded as a pivotal moment, marking a significant revival of the entire narrative.
In a similar vein, another newly discovered tablet, rescued from illicit trafficking in Iraq, has been incorporated into the narrative of the Gilgamesh epic. Research indicates that twelve distinct tablets of the Gilgamesh Epic have been uncovered by Sumerian historians to date.[8]

The Assyrians were also quite curious and open to new ideas. The Sumerian cuneiform script was utilized. Arameans taught them Aramaic writing at a later period. Clay tablets were used for writing. Their well-known ability to Ashurbanipal greatly supported education. At Nineveh, he oversaw a collection of 22,000 clay tablets. Hymn books, prayer books, medical

texts, letters, grammatical rules, and even people's superstitions were all covered on these tablets. Modern historians have deciphered the ancient Assyrians' thoughts using these tablets.

The excavators uncovered the picture of Enheduanna, high priestess of the moon deity and the earliest recorded poet. Her compositions are the first oeuvre of an author recognized as a historical character, explicitly named in the songs and hymns she composed. On the disk, Enheduanna designated her father, Sargon, as "King of All." Prior to the finding of the disk, the excavators were uncertain if the legendary Sargon was a genuine figure or a mythological construct. Enheduanna was previously unknown to anyone. In the seventy-five years after the excavation, scientists have unearthed and interpreted thousands of baked clay tablets and artifacts, significantly enhancing our understanding of Mesopotamia. Among the over five thousand Mesopotamian literary tablets, Enheduanna authored three lengthy poems dedicated to Inanna, three poems to Nanna, and forty-two temple hymns. [5]

The poems were initially inscribed in cuneiform on moist clay tablets and preserved for millennia beneath the desert sand of contemporary Iraq. Enheduanna's poetry was replicated at scribal schools posthumously, resulting in several exemplars of each poem. Nonetheless, several tablets are fragmented, presenting investigators with a complex jigsaw to reconstruct. The pinpoint locations in the poems where lines are absent, signifying that the quantity of missing lines from the current exemplars may be quantified, although these lines are not present on the tablets unearthed thus far.

The use of soft clay to write with a straight stylus helped the Babylonian writing system stay constant throughout history. Curves were removed, leaving behind an arbitrary complex of straight wedges whose shapes differed according to the scribe. But in the seventh century B.C., a standard Ninevite cuneiform hand was created in Assyria under royal control.[9]

Not only did the Sumerians create writing, but they also improved mathematics, astronomy, astrology, a codified system of law, organized medicine, sophisticated farming and building techniques, a calendar, and early wheeled vehicles/chariots. Various city-states were established by them, with ensí ruling over each. These were Uruk, Ur, Lagash, Isin, Kish, Umma, Eridu, Adab, Akshak, Sippar, Nippur, and Larsa. Nonetheless, up until Sargon of Akkad's ascent to power in around 2335 BC, when he unified all of Mesopotamia under one king, the Sumerians maintained a strong presence in this merged society.

6. Sumerian's Religion and the use of clay

Among the most respected gods in the Sumerian pantheon was Enki, subsequently known as Ea in the Akkadian mythology. The lord of the **ab— "ab"** (also written **"abzu"** or **"apsu"**) in Sumerian refers to the **subterranean freshwater ocean** believed to lie beneath the earth. —is thought to be the genesis of all life. Enki, a god of magic and knowledge, defended mankind and deftly mediated among the gods.

The story of Enki-Ninhursag describes how humans were formed from "clay that is over the abyss." The plot story starts out by explaining how the gods had a hard time getting food, particularly when the female deities were created. It would have been reasonable to expect Enki, the Sumerian deity of knowledge, might sodomize them to intervene when the gods squawk, but he is in sound slumber in the depths and doesn't seem to hear them. His mother, the primordial sea, who is described as "the mother who gave birth to all the gods," then delivers the gods' tears to Enki and says, "O my son, rise from your bed, from your... work what is wise. Fashion servants of the gods; may they produce their doubles."[9].

After considering the situation, Enki calls forth the group of "good and princely fashioners" and addresses his mother, Nammu, the primordial sea, saying, O my mother, the creature whose name you pronounced, it exists."

Affix the gods' image on it. The good and princely fashioners will thicken the clay by mixing the heart of the clay that is over the abyss. You are the one who creates the limbs; Ninmah, another name for Ninhursag, will work above you; the goddesses of birth will support you while you are being fashioned; O my mother, decide the fate of the newborn; Ninmah will bind the mold of the gods, which is man.

The poem then shifts from the creation of man as a whole to the creation of certain defective human kinds, a clear attempt to explain the presence of these aberrant individuals. It talks of an Enki-arranged feast for the gods, most likely to mark the genesis of mankind. At this feast, Enki and Ninmah consume copious amounts of wine and get quite boisterous. Ninmah takes part of the clay from the abyss and creates six distinct types of weird people, while Enki decides their destiny and feeds them bread. After Ninmah has created the six forms of man, Enki chooses to make his own. The method by which he does this is unknown, but whatever it is, the end result is a failure; it is weak and frail both physically and mentally.

To investigate how materiality was tangled with divine communication, the cultural and theological relevance of clay in Sumerian religion, and the part the god Enki performed, it is better to say that among the first societies in human history, the ancient Sumerians built a diverse pantheon of gods and sophisticated religious rituals. Their cosmology revolved mostly around **Enki,** the god of water, knowledge, creation, and magic. His impact was felt in ritual, social structure, material culture, and theology as well. Sumerian religious life was fascinating in many respects, including their ceremonial usage of **clay**, a lowly yet highly symbolic substance. The function of Enki in Sumerian religion is investigated in this article together with how clay evolved into a necessary tool for religious and symbolic uses.

Enki made the most important contributions to mythology **creation**—not just of life but also of social order, handicaps, and divine decrees. The **Sumerian myth, "Enki and the World Order,"** says he created the natural surroundings, assigned roles to the gods and people, and arranged the laws controlling the universe. In another myth, "Enki and Ninmah," Enki makes people out of **clay** to appease the gods of labor, again stressing the metaphorical link between divinity and material.

Clay was endowed with **religious significance** rather than as a building and writing tool. Clay was the **primordial substance** the Sumerians saw from which mankind was shaped. While Egyptian and Biblical tales abound with similar ideas, Mesopotamia was not the only place where this concept found literary expression. Sumerians were among the first.

The way clay was shaped mirrored the creative deeds of the gods. Not only practical but also symbolic was forming a clay tablet, sculpting a figure, or building a ziggurat wall. It portrayed divine creation in reenactment. **Temples and ceremonial settings used clay to anchor the holy to the material world.** Often constructed from mudbrick and clay plaster, the Sumerian temple (or *Ekur* and *ziggurat*) was These buildings were **microcosms of the universe,** not only architectural ones. As God of foundations and deep seas, Enki was called in for their building; ceremonies included depositing **foundation deposits**—clay figurines, engraved bricks, or small tools—at crucial spots to elicit divine favor. Priests and priestesses consecrated these clay objects by libations and incantations. By this process, they turned unprocessed clay into **sacred intermediaries**—bridges between gods and humans. Clay thus started taking part actively in divine contact.

Sumerian religion was rich in **ritual magic**, sometimes carried out alongside official temple worship. These ceremonies were much enhanced by clay figures. Miniature human or zoomorphic clay sculptures abound in archeological finds from sites like Nippur and Ur. These fulfilled a ritual rather than being toys or just décor.

One might use such figures for **protection, healing**, or **banishing** evil spirits. Sometimes etched on clay tablets, ritual texts offered directions: depending on the intended magical effect, the figure may be buried, burned, or submerged in water. These acts represented the divine

application of clay in stories of creation. As Enki created life from clay, so too might humans shape their destiny via it—albeit figuratively.

One of humanity's first scripts, **cuneiform writing,** made the most use of clay tablets. Writing was religious, not a secular hobby. Considered the deity of knowledge, Enki was thought to be the ultimate source of crafts, mathematics, and writing.

Many of the clay tablets recorded **omens, prayers, hymns, and ceremonial directions**—many of which called for Enki. Writing on clay was to **inscribe the divine in the material world.** Scribes were often priests at temples; their work was a part of their sacred obligation. Some tablets were dedicated to shrines, sealed in jars, or placed in walls, connecting the written word to ritual permanence.

The Enki movement centered on the city of Eridu, revered as the first city in Sumer and considered a holy site of origin. Priests performed ceremonies honoring Enki and the abzu here, usually including the use of water, clay, and incantations. Clay vessels carried liquidations, purification rites, storage of holy water, and other offerings.

Many stories claim that the clay itself was revered prior to usage; it was washed with holy water and perfumed with incense. This made its movement from the earthly world to the divine medium under more attention. The Enki priests might don amulets fashioned from clay and carved into symbols or holy texts.

To the Sumerians, clay was alive, with the possibility of being heavenly rather than a dry material. Under human control, it developed into a means of contact with the gods, respect for them, and imitation tool. The mythology of Enki stresses that materiality, knowledge, and creativity play a part in the sacred. By means of clay's manipulation, the Sumerians were able to both physically and spiritually mold their environment.

One of the first civilizations humanity has ever known continues to be remarkably creative in blending deity with earth, knowledge and muck, wisdom and dirt. Mesopotamian knowledge as well as its echoes in later civilizations and faiths still reflect the heritage of Enki and the use of clay in religious activities.

Enki The Sumerians makes actual or symbolic sacrifices and offerings. It serves as the focal point of ceremonial devotion. Prehistoric open-air rites in Mesopotamia likely used natural rocks, pebbles, or soil. However, when temples and shrines developed, more visible altars were built of clay, stone, or brick. A modest shrine from the late fifth millennium BCE in Eridu already had an altar built into a position opposite the entryway, as well as an offering table. This axial location of the altar remained a consistent characteristic except when its shift to one side was necessary by the 'portal' layout of 'high temples.' (See **temples and temple architecture).**

The altar would often be set up in front of the god's image (refer to cult statues) so that sacrifices could be made there. When the altar is placed in front of the statue of the Assyrian monarch in a temple, it is more accurate to view the non-divine king as a worshipper before the altar than as the object of worship.[10].

Second, the image of hand-sculpting a clay figurine was exploited, notably in the creation of humans. A mother goddess, such as Nammu or Aruru, or Enki, creates the creature, with another goddess acting as a midwife. In the Epic of Atra-hasis, clay is mingled with a murdered god's blood. According to the Epic of Creation, man was created from the blood of the slain deity Qingu**. [10]**

The Neo-Sumerian metal figures of 'basket bearers' are thought to represent the ruler engaged in ritual labor in connection with a new building. In a different type of building ritual of the Neo-Assyrian Period, magically. Protective figurines of clay and wood represented various minor gods and beneficent demons and monsters. These were buried or placed in the rooms. In many of these cases, the efficacy of the figurines depended upon the supposed localization of the

power of a supernatural being within the figurine itself (a parallel to the procedure concerning the preparation of cult statues).[10]

The process of crafting a clay figurine that is subsequently animated serves as an analogy for creation. Typically, a goddess, referred to by one of the aforementioned names, is the one who shapes and forms the clay, particularly in relation to the creation of humanity, although there are instances where Enki takes on this role. This action further establishes her as a mother goddess in an additional context. A supplementary goddess often serves as a 'midwife' in both forms of creation, and these divine midwives can effectively be classified as birth goddesses.

Mesopotamian religion encompasses the spiritual beliefs and practices of ancient Mesopotamian civilizations, notably Sumer, Akkad, Assyria, and Babylonia, spanning approximately from 6000 BC to 400 AD, focusing on deities, creation, the cosmos, and human origins. The religious evolution of Mesopotamia and its culture, particularly in the southern region, was not significantly affected by the migrations of many populations in and across the area. Mesopotamian religion constituted a cohesive and coherent tradition that evolved to meet the internal requirements of its practitioners throughout millennia.

Near the beginning of permanent settlement in the region in the 6th millennium BC, the earliest currents of religious thinking in Mesopotamia likely emerged. [1] Worship of natural forces as sources of nourishment is associated with the first evidence of Mesopotamian religion, which dates to the mid-4th millennium BC—coinciding with the birth of writing. (reference required) Objects of worship were given personalities and transformed into a wide array of deities with specific roles in the third millennium BC. In the latter phases of Mesopotamian polytheism, which emerged in the first and second millennia BC, a monarchical order was established among the gods, with the national god serving as the supreme deity. This system placed a stronger focus on individual religious practice and devotion. The ultimate nail in the coffin for Mesopotamian religion was the expansion of Iranian faiths under the Achaemenid Empire and the subsequent Christianization of the region.
It is assumed that the foundational religious ideas of Mesopotamia emerged in the first part of the sixth millennium BC, when the region's inhabitants initially started to permanently settle down as a result of better irrigation. Since they occurred before writing was invented, the early religious developments of the region remain a mystery. [1] The development of writing in Mesopotamia around 3500 BC provides the earliest evidence of religion that is distinctly Mesopotamian.

Historically, Mesopotamia was inhabited by two distinct people groups: the Akkadian-speaking East Semites and the Sumerian-speaking, isolated Sumerian-speaking people of Sumer. These folks belonged to a wide variety of city-states and minor kingdoms. Originating in Upper Mesopotamia during the Ubaid era (6500 BC to 3800 BC), the Sumerians are said to have been the earliest recorded inhabitants of the region. They had a major impact on the Akkadian speakers and their culture while they lived in southern Mesopotamia, a region called Sumer (and subsequently Babylonia). Names in Akkadian first showed up in the regnal lists of these nations around the 29th century BC, suggesting that Akkadian speakers arrived in the area between 3500 and 3000 BC.

The Akkadians tended to worship fewer deities but elevate them to larger positions of authority, since there was growing syncretism between their civilization and the Sumerian pantheon.

Conclusion

Clay in ancient Mesopotamia played a crucial role in the civilization's development in this region throughout the early time of the rising in the area and the following years. The invention of writing uses clay as a medium to write on clay tablets, and these tablets are

considered the modern copybooks in our times. Clay serves as the primary medium for documenting literature, religious scripts, and economic records.

The origins of writing in this area are frequently traced to the accounting systems that emerged during the fourth millennium BC, which recorded transactions through signs, tags, bullae (clay balls), numerical tablets, and seals. Proto-cuneiform, initially documented on clay tablets in the city of Uruk in southern Iraq between 3350–3000 BC, constitutes a sophisticated accounting system featuring hundreds of iconographic indications, many of which remain enigmatic. The development of signs, historically utilized across Mesopotamia, may have catalyzed the emergence of proto-cuneiform and influenced various sign representations, these signs can not be saved unless writing on clay.

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