



Bull-Headed Lyre  
2550-2450 BCE

## Iraq's Ancient Past

Ancient Mesopotamia was located between two great rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. In fact, the name *Mesopotamia* means the land between two rivers. Today, we call this area Iraq. About 24000 BCE, the Akkadians settled the northern part of this region. The Sumerians had been living in the area since about 4500 BCE.

Ancient Mesopotamia is called the *cradle of civilization* for good reason. They created the concept of the city, the first code of laws, and the first written language. The words abyss, cane, and Eden, all come from ancient Mesopotamia.

In the 1920s, the Penn Museum and the British Museum excavated the site of the Sumerian city of Ur, home of the Bible's patriarch, Abraham. In the Royal Cemetery, archaeologist Sir Leonard Woolley discovered the greatest treasure of the Early Dynastic period of Mesopotamian civilization, from about 2500 BCE. Some of the unearthed artifacts include personal ornaments, headdresses, musical instruments, and all the paraphernalia of court and everyday life.

In the tomb of Lady Puabi, archaeologists found the remains of soldiers, ladies-in-waiting, and a sledge drawn by four oxen. At first, Sir Leonard Woolley and his team thought that the large number of bodies within the royal tombs suggested that the servants were peacefully marched to their final resting place and ceremonially poisoned. Now, however, high-tech reanalysis of several of the skulls presents a different and harsher picture of what might have really occurred.

There were not too many trees for papermaking in Mesopotamia. There was, however, plenty of clay so the ancients scratched or incised their writing onto clay tablets.



Lady Puabi's Headdress  
2600-2450 BCE

IRAQ'S ANCIENT PAST GALLERY AT THE PENN MUSEUM



Sealing (Clay) 2900-2600 BCE

The exhibition has two important kinds of artifacts: clay tokens which demonstrate the earliest known counting mechanism and Sumerian clay tablets, the earliest preserved writing. Some of these artifacts are over 7,000 years old.

The Mesopotamians initially used writing to keep track of business transactions, but soon they recorded events (the beginning of *history*) and wrote down stories and poems.



Human Skull & Jewelry 2550-2450 BCE

Along with the ability to write came the desire to send letters to other people. The Mesopotamians invented the earliest example of an envelope. They would write a letter on a small clay tablet, enclose it in a clay envelope, record the name and address of the recipient, and off it would go!

Many of the tokens, cylinder seals, and cuneiform tablets in the Museum's collection are famous examples of their period and genre. They have appeared in academic and popular publications, and have been shown throughout the world.



Ram Caught in Thicket 2600-2450 BCE

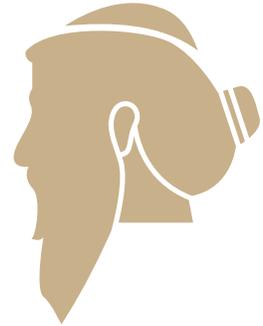
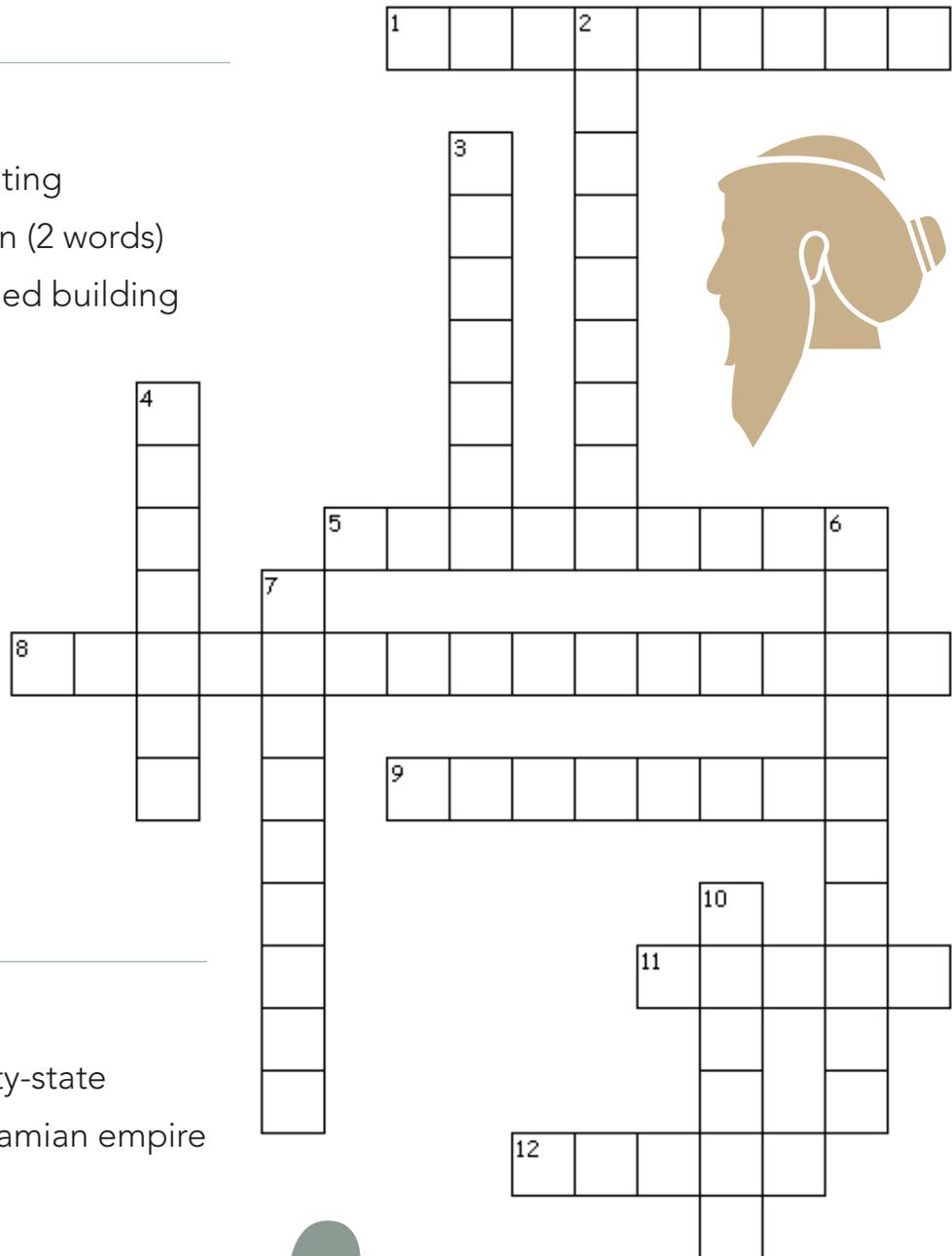
Along with ancient ceramic vessels, stone and bone tools, luxury items and ritual objects, these examples of early writing are tangible evidence of the world of civilized peoples living as early as 6,000 years ago.

Penn Museum's Babylonian section does a range of research on its extensive collection of cuneiform tablets. Check out the Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary Project at <http://psd.museum.upenn.edu/epsd/> and the related links for more information on cuneiform writing and Sumerian literature.

## Mesopotamia Crossword

## Across

1. river in Iraq
5. ancient form of writing
8. cradle of civilization (2 words)
9. step pyramid-shaped building
11. King of Israel
12. first empire



## Down

2. code writer
3. Fertile Crescent city-state
4. northern Mesopotamian empire
6. one god only
7. ancient epic poem
10. Hebrew land



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