

# Chronology of Relevant Events

## Middle Eastern Literatures and Their Times



### MESOPOTAMIAN SOCIETY: EARLY MIDDLE EASTERN CIVILIZATIONS

**Note:** Ancient dates in the Mesopotamian and subsequent timelines represent a degree of consensus among scholars but are subject to ongoing debate and are necessarily approximations.

Often called the “cradle of civilization,” the Mesopotamian crescent—which corresponds roughly to modern-day Iraq—was settled around 5000 B.C.E. by migrating farmers from the north. More than a thousand years later, with the advent of the Sumerians, Mesopotamia witnessed the rise of one of the world’s earliest civilizations. The Sumerians established the first cities in the region, founded the first ruling dynasties, and introduced a system of writing that transformed countless aspects of economic, social, and intellectual life. One of the Sumerian kings, Gilgamesh, inspired multiple legends, which led to the composition of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, thought to be the oldest surviving epic poem in world history. Although the Sumerians were eventually supplanted by later Mesopotamian peoples, such as the Akkadians, Assyrians, and Babylonians, many Sumerian ideas, inventions, and practices left a lasting impression on the civilizations that followed. During the sixth century B.C.E., Mesopotamia fell to the forces of Cyrus the Great of Persia and was thereafter ruled as a Persian province, after which it would fall to the Greeks, later to the Persians again, and then, most lastingly, to the Arabs.

Historical Events	Related Literary Works in <i>WLAIT 6</i>
5000 B.C.E. Agricultural settlements are founded in region that extends from Babylon to the Persian gulf	
4000–3500 B.C.E. Obeid period in Mesopotamia—Semitic nomads from Syria and the Arabian peninsula invade Mesopotamia and intermingle with Obeidian population	

Historical Events		Related Literary Works in WLAIT 6
3500–3200 B.C.E.	Uruk period—Sumerians migrate to the region, possibly from Central Asia through Iran, settling on the banks of the Euphrates River; their arrival leads to the founding of urban communities	
3000–2750 B.C.E.	Democratic assemblies develop into kingships of limited authority, which, in turn, evolve into hereditary monarchies; Kish becomes leading Sumerian city; Meskiagger founds Sumerian dynasty of Erech	
2800–2360 B.C.E.	Sumerian city-states vie for dominance over a period of several centuries; during the reign of King Eannatum, the city of Lagash gains power through military conquests	
2700 B.C.E.	Supposed reign of Gilgamesh, king of Erech, who becomes a source of Sumerian legends	<i>The Epic of Gilgamesh.</i>
2300s B.C.E.	Sargon the Great of Akkad rises to power, conquering Kish and eventually the rest of Sumer	
2100–2000 B.C.E.	Resurgence of the Sumerians in the neo-Sumerian Period; composition and editing of major works of Sumerian literature, including the earliest known written versions of <i>Gilgamesh</i> .	
1800 B.C.E.	Babylonian ruler of West Semitic (Amorite) descent, named Hammurabi, creates empire encompassing all of Mesopotamia with its capital in Babylon; empire crumbles not long after his death	
1200 B.C.E.	Nebuchadnezzar expels Elamites from Babylon	
1100–1078 B.C.E.	Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria captures Babylon, extends his influence over Asia Minor, and exacts tribute from Mediterranean coastal cities; after his death, Aramean tribes and Zagros mountain dwellers break up the Assyrian empire	
721–725 B.C.E.	Sargon II of Assyria subdues an empire in revolt, destroys Samaria and conquers (northern) kingdom of Israel	
704–681 B.C.E.	Reign of Sargon’s son, Sennacherib, who destroys Babylon	
668–27 B.C.E.	Flourishing of culture during the reign of Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, who collects literature and texts, especially from Babylon, creating perhaps the finest library of Mesopotamian civilization; located in his capital, Nineveh, and later discovered by archaeologists, the library will become the greatest source for knowledge of Sumerian and Akkadian literature	
604–562 B.C.E.	Reign of Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon; he razes Jerusalem and takes Jews into captivity in Babylon	
539–330 B.C.E.	Cyrus the Great of Persia conquers Babylon; the Mesopotamian region becomes a Persian province	

### ARAB SOCIETY: THE PRE-ISLAMIC AND CLASSICAL PERIODS

For centuries the Arabian Peninsula was home to nomadic peoples known collectively as Arabs. The Arab peoples, a Semitic group whose origins are unclear, lived in tribes and concerned themselves almost exclusively with supporting the immediate family or the small clan in their harsh desert environment. Despite being divided into small, self-contained groups, Arab society of the pre-Islamic period gave rise to a rich culture, which relied on a shared language and on oral transmission of poems and legends. Some of the tribesmen traded extensively with ancient empires, including those of the Persians, Greeks, Romans, and Byzantines. The rise of Islam in the seventh century transformed the Arab world, moving it from the pre-