

Mesopotamia

Economy & Social Class



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Agriculture

- Land between two rivers - Tigris and Euphrates
- Nickname Fertile Crescent
- Rivers provide drinking water, irrigation for fields, and transportation routes for trade 
- Flooding left rich silt (soil)
- Dates and sesame, could be eaten or used to make products such as oil.
- Other crops, such as barley and wheat, could also be traded as raw materials.



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Trade

- Used bartered system - traded with neighboring states
- Building materials such as timber and stones were needed, they had to be brought in from the mountain areas.
- Metal ores and precious stones were used to make tools, jewelry, and weapons. 
- Traders led caravans, used the Euphrates and Tigris rivers to ship, or used donkey carts to carry their goods.



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Money

- Did not use regular money like we do today
- Bars of valuable metals, such as copper, silver, and gold were exchanged for other goods.
- Merchants measured these metals out in each transaction.
- 1st people to use a number system for weights and measurements – kept business fair
- Traders employed scribes to record transactions in pictographs. 
- Eventually turned into a written language called cuneiform, one of the world's oldest known writing systems.



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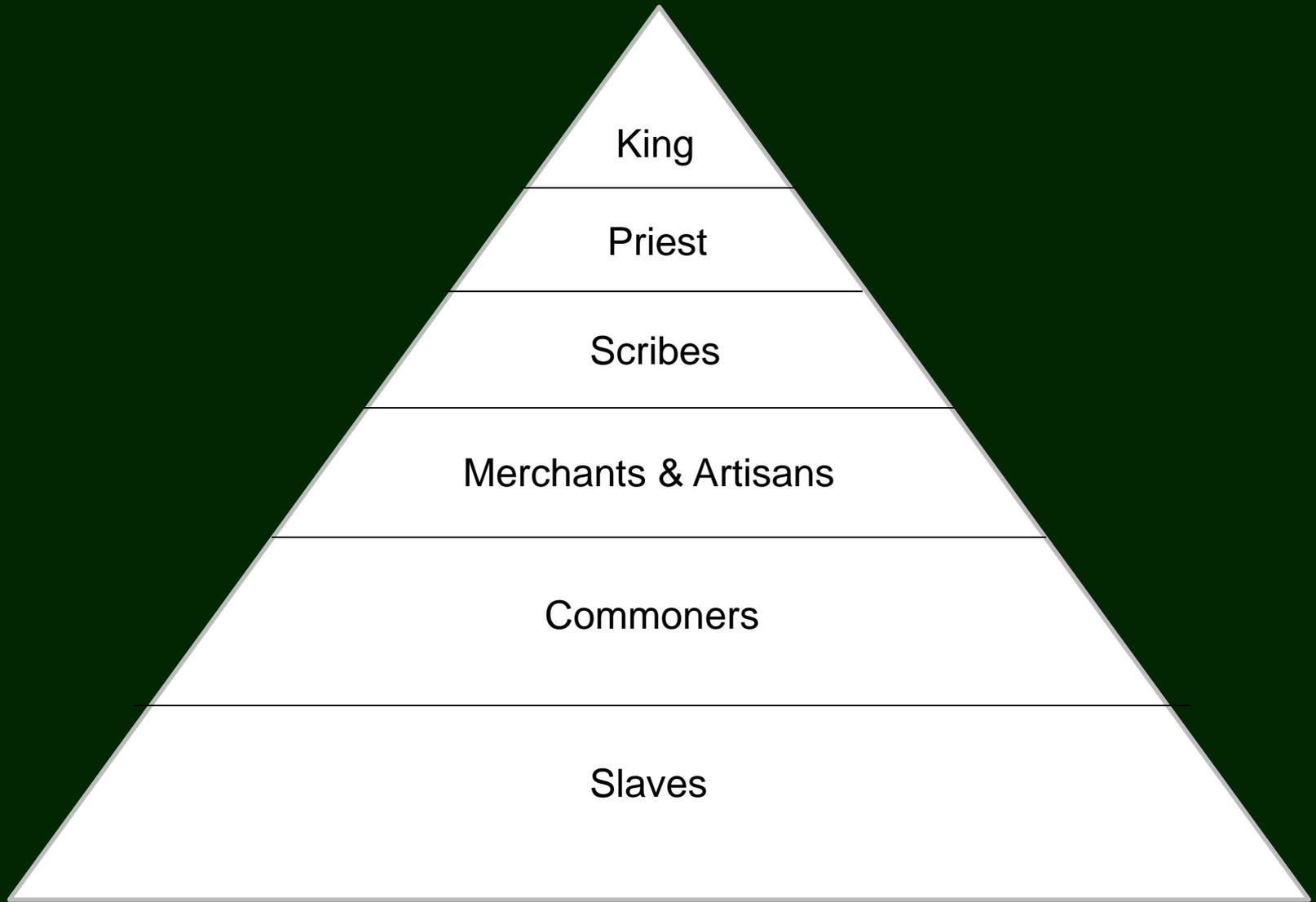
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Ruler

- Highest authority
- Were 'divinely ordained humans'
- The word of a king was law
- Generally head of the army
- Were sometimes also priests



Priests

- 2nd in command
- With the king they were the upper-class of society
- Settled arguments
- Pray & make sacrifices to the gods
- Controlled the distribution of land to farmers and crops to workers
- Ran the school
- Considered 'doctors' of the time



Scribes

- They were the educated class, sons of the wealthy
- Were able to read and write
- Worked for the palace, the government, the army, merchants, or set up their own business as public writers
- Were nearly always men 
- Had to undergo training and complete a specific program to be called a scribe



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Merchants and Artisans

- Invented Cuneiform to document trade deals
- Traded ideas and products throughout the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, taking caravans as far as Egypt, Cyprus, and Lebanon
- Produced the wealth that made civilization possible
- Merchants would lead groups with barley and textiles to Asia minor, returning with timber, stone and metal
- Worked raw materials into tools, weapons, and jewellery
- To keep track of trade, they invented calendars, that were based on the cycle of the moon (included 12 months, leaps years, and a zodiac)



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Commoners

- The laboring lower-class of the kingdom
- 85% were in farming
- The specialized tradesmen (non-farmers) were paid uniform wages from the surplus collected from the farmers as taxes
- Women enjoyed more rights than in other social orders 
- Had close family ties
- Weren't educated, boys were taught their father's trade, girls were taught to care the home and children by their mother



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Slaves

- Slaves were at the bottom but were generally treated well
- Identified by their specific haircut.
- Had no rights, were owned by the wealthy, merchants, some even worked for commoners and worked in the temples, the palace, or on farms. 
- Slaves were obtained as prisoners of war, or people who couldn't pay debts. Sometimes they were offered as payment for a relatives debt.



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