**Babylonia**

Babylon is the most famous city from ancient Mesopotamia whose ruins lie in modern-day Iraq 59 miles southwest of Baghdad. The name is thought to mean ‘Gate of God’ or `Gate of the Gods’. The city owes its fame (or infamy) to the many references the Bible makes to it; all of which are unfavorable. It was these biblical references which sparked interest in Mesopotamian archaeology. Outside of the sinful reputation given it by the Bible, the city is known for its impressive walls and buildings, its reputation as a great seat of learning and culture, the formation of a code of law, and for the Hanging Gardens of Babylon: man-made terraces of plants and animals, watered by machinery, which were cited as one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

Babylon was founded at some point prior to the reign of Sargon of Akkad (also known as Sargon the Great) who ruled from 2334-2279 BCE and claimed to have built temples at Babylon (other ancient sources seem to indicate that Sargon himself founded the city). Whatever early role the city played is lost to modern-day scholars because the ruins of Old Babylon have become inaccessible.

The known history of Babylon, then, begins with its most famous king: Hammurabi (1792-1750 BCE). This obscure prince ascended to the throne upon the abdication of his father, and fairly quickly transformed the city into one of the most powerful and influential in all of Mesopotamia. Hammurabi’s law codes are well known but are only one example of the policies he implemented to maintain peace and encourage prosperity. He enlarged and heightened the walls of the city, engaged in great public works which included opulent temples and canals, and made diplomacy an integral part of his administration. So successful was he in both diplomacy and war that, by 1755 BCE, he had united all of Mesopotamia under the rule of Babylon which, at this time, was the largest city in the world, and named his realm Babylonia.

Following Hammurabi’s death, his empire fell apart and Babylonia dwindled in size and scope until Babylon was easily sacked by the Hittites in 1595 BCE.

**Assyria**

The Assyrians were one of the major peoples to live in Mesopotamia during ancient times. They lived in northern Mesopotamia near the start of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The Assyrian Empire rose and fell several times throughout history.

The Assyrians first rose to power when the Akkadian Empire fell. The Babylonians had control of southern Mesopotamia and the Assyrians had the north. Under king Shamshi-Adad the empire expanded to control much of the north and the Assyrians grew wealthy. However, after his death in 1781 BC, the Assyrians grew weak and soon fell under control of the Babylonian Empire.

The Assyrians once again rose to power from 1360 BC to 1074 BC. This time they conquered all of Mesopotamia and expanded the empire to include much of the Middle East including Egypt, Babylonia, Israel, and Cypress.

The last of the Assyrian Empires ruled from 744 BC to 612 BC. During this time Assyria had a string of powerful and capable rulers. These leaders built the empire into one of the most powerful empires in the world. They conquered much of the Middle East and Egypt. Once again, it was the Babylonians who brought down the Assyrian Empire in 612 BC.

The Assyrians were perhaps most famous for their fearsome army. They were a warrior society where fighting was a part of life. It was how they survived. They were known throughout the land as cruel and ruthless warriors. Two things that made the Assyrians great warriors were their deadly chariots and their iron weapons. They made iron weapons that were stronger than the copper or tin weapons of some of their enemies.

The last great Assyrian king constructed a great library at the city of Nineveh. He collected clay tablets from all over Mesopotamia. These included the stories of Gilgamesh, the Code of Hammurabi, and more. Much of our knowledge of the Ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia comes from the remains of this library. According to the British Museum in London, just over 30,000 tablets have been recovered. These tablets make up around 10,000 different texts.