Sumerian, Egyptian, and Hebrew Literature

3000 B.C. - 100 B.C.
The Sumerians

Founders of Mesopotamian civilization

Relied on flooding for irrigation

Inventions:

- Cuneiform
- Numeration based on 60
- Cities
The Babylonians

King Hammurabi (1750 B.C.)

- Established Babylon as the capital of a great empire
- “An eye for an eye”

Appreciated Sumerian culture

The Epic of Gilgamesh
The Assyrians

Inhabited northern Mesopotamia

Defended their land from 1100 - 600 B.C. with iron weapons and an impressive cavalry

They understood that the Babylonian and Sumerian culture was superior, and paid homage in the first great library of the ancient world. They included more than 20,000 clay tablets in Sumerian and Babylonian cuneiform.
The Egyptians

Origins

- Egypt is known as “the gift of the Nile” because it owes its fertile land to the annual flooding of that river.

Society

- Pyramid: pharaohs - priests - nobles - middle class - peasants and slaves

Culture

- Worshipped gods associated with the forces of nature
- Created the calendar to predict flooding of the Nile
- Literature changed over time from sacred hymns to personal reflections
The Hebrews

People of the Covenant

- Believed in one god, recorded their history in the Bible

The Kingdom of Israel

- Battled for control of the promised land
- Enjoyed its greatest power under the rule of King David and his son Solomon

The Hebrew Legacy

- Hebrew monotheism created the basis for Christianity and Islam
- Deep concern for moral behavior and for spreading God’s message
Sumerian, Egyptian, and Hebrew Literature

Ancient Mesopotamia was a turbulent region ideal for trade but open to invasion. Mesopotamia was invaded repeatedly between 2500 and 500 B.C.

- The Epic of Gilgamesh gives testimony to this fact.
- Tale of a Sumerian ruler shaped by Babylonians and recorded in the library of a great Assyrian king.

Religious beliefs that the gods had absolute control over human destiny and that the underworld was dreary and inhospitable are evident in the literature.

Scribes regularly reshaped texts as they were recorded.