Fertile Crescent/Mesopotamia Study Guide

I. Geography of Fertile/Crescent Mesopotamia
   1. Fertile Crescent-An area in the Middle East shaped like a crescent known for its good soil.
   3. Sumer- located in southern Mesopotamia, site of first cities.

II. Rise of City States
    Problems and Solutions with the geography of Sumer
    1. Food Shortages in the Hills A shortage of food forced people to move from the foothills of the Zagros Mountains to the plains between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. This plains area became Sumer.
    2. Controlling the Water Supply on the Plains Farmers in Sumer faced times of flooding and drought. They built irrigation systems to create a steady water supply. Maintaining these complex systems required cooperation among villages.
    3. From Farming Villages to City-States As villages grew into towns and cities, some became large city-states (independent countries) with protective walls and moats around them.

III. Sumer
    Characteristics of a civilization:
    A. Stable food supply (THIS HAD TO COME FIRST):
       1. People have all the food they need to survive.
       2. The Sumerians invented irrigation canals and the plow to help produce more food.
    B. Social Structure:
       1. Different social levels and jobs.
       2. A way to organize a civilization.
          Top: Kings, Priests, Government workers
          Middle: Merchants, Artisans, Metal workers, Farmers and Fishers
          Bottom: Slaves (had no rights, lived with master and were enemies captured in war).
    C. Government:
       2. Kings were believed to be chosen by gods so they had a great deal of power.
          Responsibilities of King and government:
          1) Enforce and record laws (scribes were hired to write down laws)
          2) Collect taxes
          3) Lead the city-state’s army
          4) Patrol and maintain the irrigation systems
          5) Build temples
D. Religion:  
1. A religious system includes a set of beliefs (god or goddess) and various forms of worship.  
2. In Sumer, religious beliefs influenced all parts of daily life.  
3. Sumerians constructed ziggurats (religious towers) as a home to the city-state’s god or goddess. Most had a shrine at the top. They were an example of the great technology in Sumer.  
4. Sumerians had statues to their god and goddess and performed religious ceremonies.

E. The Arts:  
1. The Sumerians had a highly developed culture that included the creative arts of painting, art, architecture and music.  
2. Metal workers made objects such as weapons and cups and decorative items like jewelry and mirrors.  
3. Architects designed temples and ziggurats.  
4. Musicians played the lyre (small harp), drums and wind pipes for entertainment.

F. Technology:  
1. The most important technological invention was the wheel (potter’s wheel turned into wheeled carts and then to chariots).  
2. Sumerians also invented the arch to help build stronger walls.

G. Writing (MAJOR TURNING POINT):  
1. The Sumerians created a written language called cuneiform (wedge shaped writing).  
2. Their first language was based on pictographs (symbols that stand for an object).  
3. Scribes wrote on clay tablets with a sharpened reed called a stylus. When the clay dried it made a permanent record.  
4. Created cylinder seals.

IV. Babylonians  
1. King Hammurabi (Babylon) created the first written laws called the Code of Hammurabi.  
2. There were 282 laws for all aspects of life to maintain order in society.  
3. People were not treated equally under these laws.

V. Assyrians  
1. First people to create a large empire.  
2. Created a library at Nineveh (Epic of Gilgamesh).  
3. Great warriors-skilled at warfare (battering ram).