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# DIET IN MESOPOTAMIA

A. Shurter, E. Teare, E. Sadler

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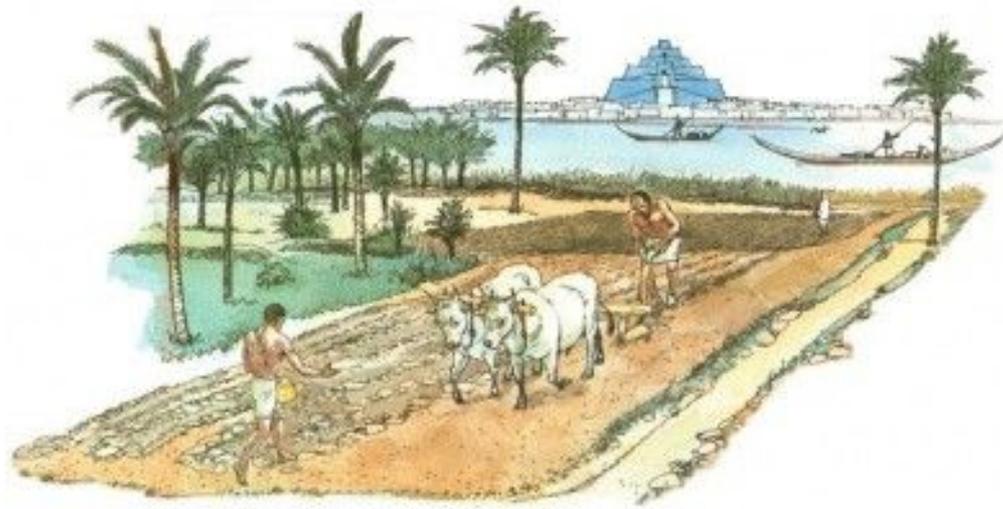
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# WHAT WAS SOME OF THE FOODS AVAILABLE IN MESOPOTAMIA, AND WHAT MEALS WERE MADE FROM THEM?

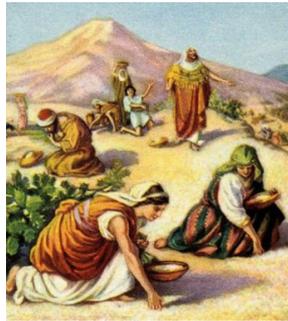
Chefs and farmers were very important in Mesopotamia. There were many important crops, including:

- barley
- beans
- wheat
- pomegranates
- grapes
- lentils
- olives
- dates
- peas
- pistachio nuts

From barley, for example, Mesopotamians created beer and bread. Both were staples of Mesopotamian diets, since water was often unsanitary and made people sick, and bread was relatively easy and cheap to make and eaten by poor and wealthy alike.

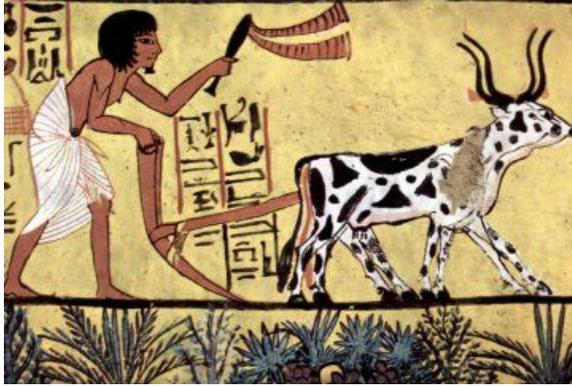


Mesopotamian farmers work to tend crops.



# WHAT MADE IT POSSIBLE TO HAVE SO MANY DIFFERENT CROPS?

Ancient Mesopotamia, (modern day Iraq) was similar to a desert. However, it was still possible for Mesopotamian farmers to plant many different crops. Rarely did Mesopotamia get rain and to grow the raw materials needed for food, farmers relied on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers as a water source. After settling in the area between the rivers, the settlers found yet another reason to stay on that part of the land- they could use the river water as irrigation. Living along the rivers not only supplied water for the crops, but also supplied fish to those who lived nearby, as well as a watering hole for other animals that needed a drink. So, the city was able to plant many different crops, thanks to the irrigation system created by the two rivers. Since a wide variety of food then became available for consumption, the diets of Mesopotamians were more diverse.



Here, you can see ancient artwork depicting farmers tending to livestock & their crops.



# HOW WAS FOOD PREPARED?

Though sources say that only about three complete tablets with actual recipes have been found, we do know a bit about how meals were made. A variety of different tools were used to prepare food, including knives similar to modern ones, clay bowls, and other materials. Since electricity wasn't around in Mesopotamian times, stone ovens were used to cook food. Recipes were recorded in cuneiform, the written language of the time, and some of the old techniques are still used today.



Ovens used by Mesopotamians were made of stone, like the ones below.

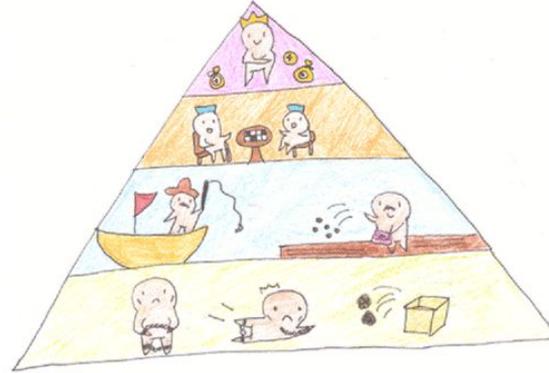
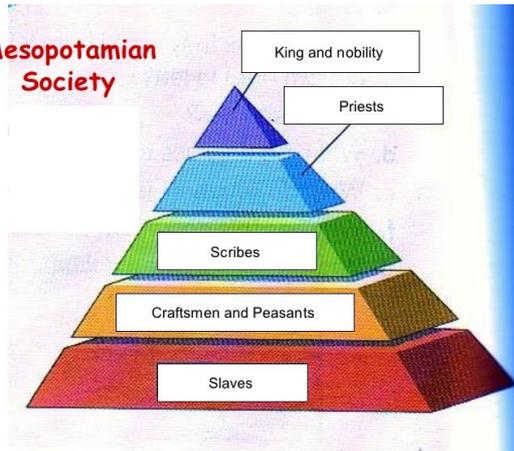


Stone tablets, like the ones pictured above, were used to inscribe recipes in cuneiform.

# HOW DID DIET VARY BETWEEN SOCIAL CLASSES?

In Ancient Mesopotamia, a person's place in the social classes determined how much and what they ate. Typically only the wealthy ate at least three meals a day while normal people tended to eat only two. Because of the great farmers, fruits and vegetables were very common and available to most. Meats were less common as they were much more expensive so most people couldn't afford them. For the regular folk, some common meals consisted of beer, milk, or water with bread, vegetables, fish, and some fruits. The poor usually had lower quality bread, fish, and vegetables with water. The upper class could usually afford a lot more meat, cheese, butter, more fruits, and wine.

## Mesopotamian Society



To the left we can see two examples of the mesopotamian social classes, with the most powerful people on the top of the pyramid.

To the right, men of probable high status are depicted consuming a traditional meal.



# DID MESOPOTAMIANS HAVE ANY DESSERTS?

A variety of desserts were available to the Mesopotamians that could afford them. Some of these included cakes and an assortment of breads. The Mersu was the construction of flour and oils, other items could then be added. Some of the other ingredients added to the cakes were dates, nuts, and other spice. In Mesopotamia, cakes could be decorated using a mould, which was a hollow container. The inside of the mould would have a design, and the pastry would be pressed into the mould. Then, filling was added, and the pastry would be taken out of the mould and get baked. The moulds used by Mesopotamians would be similar to the modern day klaicha-moulds, which are used to make traditional Iraqi cookies, like the ones pictured. Figs were a common ingredient found in most cakes.





These are all slightly different cakes that were made by Mesopotamians, all of which include figs.



A klaicha-mould similar to the moulds used.

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