

NOTES ON QUIZ 1

1. How did the Sumerians think about the world? How did geography contribute to the Sumerian mindset?

The environment of Sumer was indifferent and sometimes hostile; hard work was required simply to survive, since both cultivation and irrigation were difficult and nature was occasionally destructive. Consequently, they conceived of their gods in the same way as the chaos of the natural world around them: capricious, indifferent, sometimes beneficial, sometimes hostile.

The Sumerians valued hard work that could result in stability and protection against nature, the gods, and other humans. One must accomplish all one can during life; after death, there was no more that could be done, and the dead existed as pitiful, impotent specters in the House of Dust.

2. Who was Sargon? What did he create? What were the benefits of this creation?

Sargon was a king of Akkad, one of the Semitic cities that rose in Mesopotamia after the Sumerians, during the Bronze Age. He's credited with creating the first multinational empire, after conquering or absorbing many of the lands and peoples of the Fertile Crescent.

For Akkad, empire had the benefit of direct control of distance resources that would otherwise been gotten through traders. This meant a stronger and more stable economy, allowing Akkad to become wealthier—though that wealth would have been offset by the expenses of ruling over a vast empire, suppressing its subjects, and crushing rebellions.

For the subjects of Akkadian rule, empire would have meant broader distribution of previously hard-to-get goods, as the empire developed a larger overall economy; over time this can raise the standard of living throughout the empire. Migration within the empire meant greater contact with unknown peoples and ideas; in general, a potential for broadening beyond the local. Improvements in the empires that benefitted the Akkadian overlords would have helped locals as well, such as bridges and roads.

However, subjects of empire were liable to the tribute and taxes, to misrule by alien governors, and to military service in the emperor's wars.

3. In your first reading in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, tablets 1 and 2, we encounter Enkidu. How would you describe Enkidu? What angers Enkidu in this reading? What action does he take as a result?

Enkidu comes from among the animals, but undergoes a process of civilization through his bonding with Shamhat, after which the animals no longer know him; he is civilized. This mirrors the process of civilization the Sumerians themselves underwent, from primitive to civilized. Enkidu's socialization and complete once he bonds with Gilgamesh, underlining that society consists of both male and female bonds.

Enkidu hears that Gilgamesh is abusing the people of Uruk, and goes to fight him, defending the bonds of civilization he has just acquired.

EC1 All of the following are true of Gilgamesh's encounter with the goddess Ishtar EXCEPT:

(d) At her insistence, Anu sends the Bear of Heaven to punish Gilgamesh and Enkidu [it was a bull, not a bear]

EC2 What was the Code of Hammurabi? What kinds of things did it deal with? Why was it important?

It was a law code, one of the earliest known in history, issued by Hammurabi, a king of the Old Babylonian empire during the 18th century BCE. For the most part it dealt with applying justice to conflicts between individuals, often having to do with property or commercial transactions, with different provisions depending on class.

In an empire consisting of many different peoples and traditions, the Code imposed a unified law that overrode varying and conflicting local customs. Its publication meant that law and justice were fixed, rather than being subject to the whims and avarice of officials. A unified law code was one way to help bring about trust in an empire controlled by alien rulers from far away, because locals could now be sure what to expect from their rulers.