**Ancient Mesopotamian Religion**

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(Redirected from [Mesopotamian mythology](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Mesopotamian_mythology&redirect=no))

The god [Marduk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marduk) and his dragon Mušḫuššu

**Mesopotamian religion** refers to the [religious beliefs and practices](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion) followed by the [Sumerian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer) and [East Semitic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Semitic_languages) [Akkadian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akkadian_Empire), [Assyrian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyria), [Babylonian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonia) and later migrant [Arameans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arameans) and [Chaldeans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaldea), living in [Mesopotamia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamia) (a region encompassing modern [Iraq](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq), [Kuwait](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuwait), southeast [Turkey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkey) and northeast [Syria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria)) that dominated the region for a period of 4200 years from the fourth millennium BCE throughout Mesopotamia to approximately the 10th century CE in Assyria.

Mesopotamian [polytheism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polytheism) was the only religion in ancient Mesopotamia for thousands of years before entering a period of gradual decline beginning between the 1st and 3rd centuries CE. This decline happened in the face of the introduction of a distinctive native [Eastern Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Christianity) ([Syriac Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syriac_Christianity) such as the [Assyrian Church of the East](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyrian_Church_of_the_East) and [Syriac Orthodox Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syriac_Orthodox_Church)) as well as [Judaism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism), [Manichaeism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manichaeism) and [Gnosticism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gnosticism), and continued for approximately three to four centuries, until most of the original religious traditions of the area died out, with the final traces existing among some remote [Assyrian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyria) communities until the 10th century CE.

**Reconstruction**

As with most dead religions, many aspects of the common practices and intricacies of the doctrine have been lost and forgotten over time. Fortunately, much of the information and knowledge has survived, and great work has been done by historians and scientists, with the help of religious scholars and translators, to re-construct a working knowledge of the religious history, customs, and the role these beliefs played in everyday life in Sumer, Akkad, Assyria and Babylonia during this time. Mesopotamian religion is thought to have been a major influence on subsequent religions throughout the world, including [Canaanite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canaanite_religion), [Aramean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arameans#Religion_and_art), [ancient Greek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_religion), and [Phoenician](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenicia) religions, and also [monotheistic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monotheism) religions such as [Judaism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism), [Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity), [Mandaeism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandaeism) and [Islam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam).

It is known that the god [Ashur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashur_%28god%29), among others, was still worshipped in [Assyria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyria) as late as the 4th century CE. Mesopotamian religion was [polytheistic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polytheism), worshipping over 2,100 different deities, many of which were associated with a specific city or state within Mesopotamia such as Sumer, Akkad, Assyria, [Assur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assur), [Nineveh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineveh), [Ur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ur), [Uruk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uruk), [Mari](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mari%2C_Syria) and [Babylon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylon). Some of the most significant of these deities were [Anu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anu), [Enki](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enki), [Enlil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlil), [Ishtar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ishtar) ([Astarte](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astarte)), [Ashur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashur_%28god%29), [Shamash](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shamash), [Shulmanu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shulmanu), [Tammuz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tammuz_%28deity%29), [Adad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adad)/[Hadad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadad), [Sin (Nanna)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sin_%28mythology%29), [Kur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kur), [Dagan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dagon), [Ninurta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ninurta), [Nisroch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nisroch), [Nergal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nergal), [Tiamat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiamat), [Bel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bel_%28mythology%29) and [Marduk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marduk).

Historians, such as [Jean Bottéro](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Bott%C3%A9ro), have made the claim that Mesopotamian religion is the world's oldest religion, although there are several other claims to that title. However, as writing was invented in Mesopotamia it is certainly the oldest in written history. What is known about Mesopotamian religion comes from [archaeological evidence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeology) uncovered in the region, particularly literary sources, which are usually written in [cuneiform](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuneiform) on clay tablets and which describe both mythology and [cultic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cult_%28religion%29) practices. Other artifacts can also be useful when reconstructing Mesopotamian religion. As is common with most ancient civilizations, the objects made of the most durable and precious materials, and thus more likely to survive, were associated with religious beliefs and practices. This has prompted one scholar to make the claim that the Mesopotamians' "entire existence was infused by their religiosity, just about everything they have passed on to us can be used as a source of knowledge about their religion."

Although, a few isolated pockets in [Assyria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyria)/[Upper Mesopotamia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_Mesopotamia) aside, it largely died out by approximately 400 CE, Mesopotamian religion has still had an influence on the modern world, predominantly because many biblical stories that are today found in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Mandaeism were possibly originally based upon earlier Mesopotamian myths, in particular that of the [creation myth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creation_myth), the [Garden of Eden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garden_of_Eden), the [flood myth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flood_myth), the [Tower of Babel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower_of_Babel) and figures such as [Nimrod](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nimrod) and [Lilith](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilith). In addition, the story of [Moses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses)' origins shares a similarity with that of [Sargon of Akkad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sargon_of_Akkad), and the [Ten Commandments](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten_Commandments) mirror Assyrian-Babylonian legal codes to some degree. It has also inspired various contemporary [neopagan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_paganism) groups to begin worshipping the Mesopotamian deities once more, albeit in a way often different from that of the Mesopotamian people themselves.

**History**

*See also:* [*Sumerian religion*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_religion) *and* [*Babylonian religion*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonian_religion)

Overview map of ancient Mesopotamia.

The people of Mesopotamia originally consisted of two groups, the [East Semitic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Semitic) [Akkadians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akkadian_Empire) (later to be known as the [Assyrians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyrian_people) and [Babylonians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonia)) and the [Sumerians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer) who spoke a [language isolate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_isolate). These people were not originally one united nation, but members of various city-states and small [kingdoms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy). In the fourth millennium BCE, when the first evidence for what is recognizably Mesopotamian religion can be seen with the invention in Mesopotamia of [writing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Writing) circa 3500 BCE, the Sumerians appeared, although it is not known if they migrated into the area in [prehistoric times](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prehistoric_times) or whether they were some of the original inhabitants. They settled in southern Mesopotamia, which became known as Sumer, and had a huge influence over the [Semitic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semitic) Akkadian peoples and their culture.

The Sumerians were incredibly advanced: as well as inventing [writing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Writing), they also invented early forms of [mathematics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mathematics), early [wheeled vehicles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wheeled_vehicle), [astronomy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astronomy), [astrology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrology), [written law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Written_law), organized [medicine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicine), advanced [agriculture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agriculture) and [architecture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Architecture), and the [calendar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calendar). They created the first [city-states](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City-states)/[nations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nations) such as [Uruk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uruk), [Ur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ur), [Lagash](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lagash), [Isin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isin), [Kish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kish_%28Sumer%29), [Umma](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umma), [Eridu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eridu), [Adab](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adab_%28city%29), [Akshak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akshak), [Sippar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sippar), [Nippur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nippur) and [Larsa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larsa).

[Akkadian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akkadian_language) names first appear in king lists of these states circa 2800 BCE. The Sumerians remained largely dominant in this synthesized [Sumero-Akkadian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumero-Akkadian) culture however, until the rise of the [Akkadian Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akkadian_Empire) under [Sargon of Akkad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sargon_of_Akkad) circa 2335 BCE which united all of Mesopotamia under one ruler.

Gradually there was increasing [syncretism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syncreticism) between the Sumerian and Akkadian cultures and deities, with the Akkadians typically preferring to worship fewer [deities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deities) but elevating them to greater positions of power. Circa 2335 BCE Sargon of Akkad conquered all of Mesopotamia, uniting the Akkadian and Sumerians in the world's first empire, and spreading its domination into [Ancient Iran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Iran), the [Levant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Levant), [Asia Minor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia_Minor), [Canaan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canaan) and the [Arabian Peninsula](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabian_Peninsula). The Akkadian Empire endured for two centuries before collapsing due to economic decline, internal strife and attacks from the north east by the [Gutians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gutians).

Following a brief Sumerian revival with the [Neo-Sumerian Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-Sumerian_Empire), Mesopotamia broke up into a number of Akkadian states, [Assyria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyria) reasserted itself in the north circa 2100 BCE, and southern Mesopotamia fragmented into a number of kingdoms, the largest being [Isin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isin), [Larsa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larsa) and [Eshnunna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eshnunna). In 1894 BCE the initially minor city-state of [Babylon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylon) was founded in the south (Babylon was founded by invading [West Semitic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Semitic_languages) [Amorites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amorites), and was rarely ruled by native dynasties throughout its history).

Sometime after this the Sumerians disappeared, becoming wholly absorbed into the Assyro-Babylonian population. Assyrian kings are attested from the late 25th century BCE, and dominated northern Mesopotamia and parts of [Asia Minor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia_Minor) and north east [Syria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria). Circa 1750 BCE, the [Amorite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amorite) ruler of Babylon, King [Hammurabi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hammurabi), conquered much of Mesopotamia, but this Babylonian Empire collapsed after his death due to attacks from mountain-dwelling people known as the [Kassites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kassites) from [Asia Minor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia_Minor), who went on to rule Babylon for over 500 years.

Assyria, having been the dominant power in the region with the [Old Assyrian Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Assyrian_Empire) between the 20th and 18th centuries BCE before the rise of Hammurabi, once more became a major power with the [Middle Assyrian Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Assyrian_Empire) (1391–1050 BCE). Assyria defeated the [Hittite Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hittite_Empire) and [Mitanni](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitanni), and its growing power forced the [Egyptian Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_Empire) to withdraw from the [Near East](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Near_East). The Middle Assyrian Empire at its height stretched from the [Caucasus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caucasus) to modern [Bahrain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahrain), and from [Cyprus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyprus) to western [Iran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran).

The [Neo-Assyrian Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-Assyrian_Empire) (911–605 BCE) was the most dominant power on earth and the largest empire the world had yet seen between the 10th century BCE and the late 7th century BCE, with an empire stretching from [Cyprus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyprus) in the west to central [Iran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran) in the east, and from the [Caucasus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caucasus) mountains in the north to [Nubia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nubia), [Egypt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt) and [Arabia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabia) in the south, facilitating the spread of Mesopotamian culture and religion far and wide under emperors such as [Ashurbanipal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashurbanipal), [Tukulti-Ninurta II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tukulti-Ninurta_II), [Tiglath-Pileser III](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiglath-Pileser_III), [Shalmaneser IV](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shalmaneser_IV), [Sargon II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sargon_II), [Sennacherib](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sennacherib) and [Esarhaddon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esarhaddon). During the Neo-Assyrian Empire [Mesopotamian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamia) [Aramaic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aramaic) became the [lingua franca](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lingua_franca) of the empire, and also Mesopotamia proper. The last written records in Akkadian were [astrological](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrological) [texts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literature) dating from 78 CE discovered in Assyria.

The empire fell in 605 BCE with the death of [Ashur-uballit II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashur-uballit_II) after a period of internal strife followed by attacks by a coalition of [Babylonians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonians), [Chaldeans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaldea), [Medes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medes), [Scythians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scythians), [Persians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persia) and [Cimmerians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cimmerians). The attacks, which began in 625 BCE, were led by [Nabopolassar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nabopolassar), the Chaldean ruler of Babylon, who was joined by [Cyaxares](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyaxares) of Media in 616 BCE after the Medes allied with the Babylonians.

Babylon had a brief late flowering of power and influence under the migrant [Chaldean Dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaldean_Dynasty) which took over much of the empire formerly held by their northern kinsmen. However, the last king of Babylonia, [Nabonidus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nabonidus), paid little attention to politics, preferring to worship the [moon god](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moon_god) [Sin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sin_%28mythology%29), leaving day to day rule to his son [Belshazzar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belshazzar). This and the fact that the Persians and Medes to the east were growing in power now that the might of Assyria that had held them in [vassalage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vassalage) for centuries was gone, spelt the death knell for native Mesopotamian power. The [Achaemenid Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achaemenid_Empire) conquered the [Neo-Babylonian Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-Babylonian_Empire) in 539 BCE.

**Effect of Assyrian religious beliefs on its political structure**

Like many nations in Mesopotamian history, Assyria was originally, to a great extent, an [oligarchy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oligarchy) rather than a monarchy. Authority was considered to lie with "the city", and the [polity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polity) had three main centers of power—an assembly of elders, a hereditary ruler, and an [eponym](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eponym). The ruler presided over the assembly and carried out its decisions. He was not referred to with the usual Akkadian term for "king", *šarrum*; that was instead reserved for the city's patron deity [Ashur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashur_%28god%29), of whom the ruler was the [high priest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_priest). The ruler himself was only designated as "the steward of Assur" (*iššiak Assur*), where the term for steward is a borrowing from Sumerian [*ensi(k)*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ENSI). The third center of power was the eponym (*limmum*), who gave the year his name, similarly to the [archons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archons_of_Athens) and [consuls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_consul) of [classical antiquity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_antiquity). He was annually elected by [lot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sortition) and was responsible for the economic administration of the city, which included the power to detain people and confiscate property. The institution of the eponym as well as the formula *iššiak Assur* lingered on as ceremonial vestiges of this early system throughout the history of the Assyrian monarchy.

**Religion in the Neo-Assyrian Empire**

The religion of the [Neo-Assyrian Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-Assyrian_Empire) centered around the Assyrian king as the king of their lands as well. However, kingship at the time was linked very closely with the idea of divine mandate. The Assyrian king, while not being a god himself, was acknowledged as the chief servant of the chief god, [Ashur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashur_%28god%29). In this manner, the king's authority was seen as absolute so long as the high priest reassured the peoples that the gods, or in the case of the [henotheistic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henotheism) Assyrians, the God, was pleased with the current ruler. For the Assyrians who lived in [Assur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assur) and the surrounding lands, this system was the norm. For the conquered peoples, however, it was novel, particularly to the people of smaller city-states. In time, Assur was promoted from being the local deity of Assur to the overlord of the vast Assyrian domain, which spread from the [Caucasus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caucasus) and [Armenia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenia) in the north to [Egypt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt), [Nubia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nubia) and the [Arabian Peninsula](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabian_Peninsula) in the south, and from [Cyprus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyprus) and the eastern [Mediterranean Sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_Sea) in the west to central [Iran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran) in the east. Ashur, the patron deity of the city of Assur from the Late Bronze Age, was in constant rivalry with the patron deity of Babylon, Marduk. Worship was conducted in his name throughout the lands dominated by the Assyrians. With the worship of Ashur across much of the [Fertile Crescent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fertile_Crescent), the Assyrian king could command the loyalty of his fellow servants of Ashur.

**Later Mesopotamian history**

In 539 BCE, Mesopotamia was conquered by the [Achaemenid Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achaemenid_Empire), then ruled by [Cyrus the Great](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrus_the_Great). This brought to an end over 3,000 years of [Semitic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semitic_languages) Mesopotamian dominance of the Near East. The [Persians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persian_people) maintained and did not interfere in the native culture and religion and Assyria and Babylon continued to exist as entities (although Chaldea and the Chaldeans disappeared), and Assyria was strong enough to launch major rebellions against [Persia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persia) in 522 and 482 BCE.

Then, two centuries later in 330 BCE the [Macedonian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macedon) [Greek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greece) emperor [Alexander the Great](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great) overthrew the Persians and took control of Mesopotamia itself. After Alexander's death increased [Hellenistic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_civilization) influence was brought to the region by the [Seleucid Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seleucid_Empire). Assyria and Babylonia later became provinces under the [Parthian Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parthian_Empire) (province of [Babylonia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persian_Babylonia)), [Rome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Rome) (province of [Assyria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyria_%28Roman_province%29)) and [Sassanid Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sassanid_Empire) (province of [Asuristan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asuristan)). Babylonia was dissolved as an entity during the Parthian Empire, though Assyria was to endure.

Christianity began to take hold in the 1st century CE, and the independent states of [Adiabene](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adiabene), [Osroene](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osroene), [Assur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assur), [Hatra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hatra) and [Palmyra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palmyra) were largely ruled by converts to [Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity) and [Judaism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism). [Gnostic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gnostic) sects such as [Sabianism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabianism) and the still extant [Mandeanism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandeanism) also became popular, though native religions still existed among the populace, gods such as Ashur and Sin were still worshipped at least until the 4th century CE. In the 3rd century CE another native Mesopotamian religion flourished, [Manicheanism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manicheanism), which incorporated elements of Christianity, Judaism, [Buddhism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism), and [Zoroastrianism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoroastrianism), as well as local Mesopotamian elements.

The city of [Assur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assur) was still populated until the 14th century CE massacre of [Assyrian Christians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyrian_Christianity) by [Tamurlane](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamurlane). There is some evidence to suggest Ashurism was still practiced around [Harran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harran) as late as the 17th century by tiny minorities of Assyrians.

Assyria became a center of a distinctly [Mesopotamian Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_East), the [Eastern Syrian Rite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Syrian_Rite) Christianity which was spread all over the Near East and as far away as Central Asia, India, Mongolia and China by travelling monks and still exists as the religion of the [Assyrians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyrian_people) to this day in the form of the [Assyrian Church of the East](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyrian_Church_of_the_East), [Chaldean Catholic Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaldean_Catholic_Church) and [Ancient Church of the East](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Church_of_the_East). Various [Gnostic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gnostic) sects also sprang up such as [Sabianism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabianism) and [Mandeanism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandeanism) the latter of which also still exists.

After the [Arab Islamic conquest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Islamic_conquest) in the 7th century CE, Assyria was dissolved. Over the next few centuries Mesopotamia saw an influx of foreign, non-indigenous and largely [Muslim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim) peoples, in particular [Arabs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabs), [Kurds](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurds) and [Turkic peoples](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkic_peoples), and indigenous Assyrian-Mesopotamian people retaining native ethnicity, culture, customs, religion and language gradually became a minority over the next seven centuries. This process of marginalization was completed by the massacres of native Assyrians by [Tamurlane](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamurlane) in the 14th century, after which the city of [Assur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assur) was finally abandoned.

However the [Neo-Aramaic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-Aramaic) dialects still survive to this day among the 5% of Mesopotamians that survived the various massacres and resisted "Arabization" and "Islamification". These people exist today as the modern [Assyrians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyrian_people) (aka [Chaldo-Assyrians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaldo-Assyrians)) who are wholly [Eastern Rite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Syrian_Rite) Christian but retain a distinct Mesopotamian language, [Neo-Aramaic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-Aramaic) (which descends from the Aramaic first spoken in Mesopotamia in 1200 BCE and still retains hundreds of [Akkadian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akkadian_language) loan words and an Akkadian grammatical structure) and identity and the naming of children with ancient names such as Ashur, [Shamash](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shamash), [Semiramis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semiramis), [Lamassu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamassu), [Ninus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ninus), [Lilitu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilitu)/[Lilith](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilith), [Sargon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sargon_%28disambiguation%29), [Sharrukin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharrukin), [Sennacherib](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sennacherib), [Hadad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadad) etc. is still common. Likewise months may be named after ancient deities in the [Assyrian Calendar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyrian_calendar), i.e. [Tammuz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tammuz_%28Babylonian_calendar%29). The modern [Assyrian calendar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyrian_calendar) is dated back to the traditional founding and dedicating of the city of Ashur to the god of the same name.

**Mythology**

There are no specific written records explaining Mesopotamian religious [cosmology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmology) that survive to us today. Nonetheless, modern scholars have examined various accounts, and created what is believed to be an at least partially accurate depiction of Mesopotamian cosmology. In the *Epic of Creation*, dated to 1200 BCE, it explains that the god Marduk killed the mother goddess [Tiamat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiamat) and used half her body to create the earth, and the other half to create both the [paradise](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradise) of *šamû* and the [netherworld](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Underworld) of *irṣitu*. A document from a similar period stated that the universe was a spheroid, with three levels of *šamû*, where the gods dwelt, and where the stars existed, above the three levels of earth below it.

**Deities**

*Further information:* [*List of Mesopotamian deities*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Mesopotamian_deities)

Representation of the Goddess [Ishtar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ishtar), winged and wearing a version of the horned cap of divinity. Detail of the so-called "Ishtar vase", early 2nd millennium BCE ([Louvre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louvre) AO 17000)

Mesopotamian religion was [polytheistic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polytheism), thereby accepting the existence of many different deities, both male and female, though it was also [henotheistic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henotheism), with certain Gods being viewed as superior to others by their specific devotees. These devotees were often from a particular city or city-state that held that deity as its [patron deity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patron), for instance the God [Enki](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enki) was often associated with the city of [Eridu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eridu), the God [Ashur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashur_%28god%29) with [Assur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assur) and [Assyria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyria), [Enlil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlil) with [Nippur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nippur), [Ishtar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ishtar) with [Arbela](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arbil), and the God [Marduk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marduk) was associated with [Babylon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylon). Though the full number of gods and goddesses found in Mesopotamia is not known, K. Tallqvist, in his *Akkadische Götterepitheta* (1938) counted around two thousand four hundred that we now know about, most of which had Sumerian names. In the [Sumerian language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_language), the gods were referred to as *dingir*, while in the Akkadian language they were known as *ilu* and it seems that there was syncretism between the gods worshipped by the two groups, adopting one another's deities.

The Mesopotamian Gods bore many similarities with humans, and were [anthropomorphic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropomorphic), thereby having humanoid form. Similarly, they often acted like humans, requiring food and drink, as well as drinking alcohol and subsequently suffering the effects of [drunkenness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drunkenness), but were thought to have a higher degree of perfection than common men. They were thought to be more powerful, all-seeing and all-knowing, unfathomable, and, above all, immortal. One of their prominent features was a terrifying brightness (*melammu*) which surrounded them, producing an immediate reaction of awe and reverence among men. In many cases, the various deities were family relations of one another, a trait found in many other polytheistic religions. The historian J. Bottéro was of the opinion that the gods were not viewed [mystically](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysticism), but were instead seen as high-up masters who had to be obeyed and feared, as opposed to loved and adored. Nonetheless, many Mesopotamian, of all classes, had names that were devoted to a certain deity; this practice appeared to have begun in the third millennium BCE among the Sumerians, but also was later adopted by the Akkadians as well.

Initially, the [pantheon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pantheon_%28gods%29) was not ordered, but later Mesopotamian theologians came up with the concept of ranking the deities in order of importance. A Sumerian list of around 560 deities that did this was uncovered at [Fâra](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=F%C3%A2ra&action=edit&redlink=1) and [Tell Abû Ṣalābīkh](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tell_Ab%C3%BB_%E1%B9%A2al%C4%81b%C4%ABkh&action=edit&redlink=1) and dated to circa 2600 BCE, ranking five primary deities as being of particular importance.

One of the most important of these early Mesopotamian deities was the God [Enlil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlil), who was originally a Sumerian divinity viewed as a king of the Gods and a controller of the world, who was later adopted by the Akkadians. Another was the Sumerian God An, who served a similar role to Enlil and became known as [Anu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anu) among the Akkadians. The Sumerian God [Enki](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enki) was later also adopted by the Akkadians, initially under his original name, and later as [Éa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89a_%28Babylonian_god%29). Similarly the Sumerian moon God [Nanna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sin_%28mythology%29) became the Akkadian Sîn while the Sumerian sun God [Utu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utu) became the Akkadian [Shamash](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shamash). One of the most notable Goddesses was the Sumerian sex and war deity [Inanna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inanna). With the later rise to power of the Babylonians in the 18th century BCE, the king, [Hammurabi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hammurabi), declared Marduk, a deity who before then had not been of significant importance, to a position of supremacy alongside Anu and Enlil in southern Mesopotamia.

Perhaps the most significant legend to survive from Mesopotamian religion is the [Epic of Gilgamesh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_of_Gilgamesh), which tells the story of the heroic king Gilgamesh and his wild friend Enkidu, and the former's search for immortality which is entwined with all the Gods and their approval.

**Cultic practice**

"[Enlil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlil)! his authority is far-reaching; his word is sublime and holy. His decisions are unalterable; he decides fate forever! His eyes scrutinize the entire world!"

A prayer to the god Enlil.

**Public devotions**

Each Mesopotamian city was home to a deity, and each of the prominent deities was the patron of a city, and all known temples were located in cities, though there may have been shrines in the suburbs. The temple itself was constructed of mud brick in the form of a [ziggurat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziggurat), which rose to the sky in a series of stairstep stages. Its significance and symbolism have been the subject of much discussion, but most regard the tower as a kind of staircase or ladder for the god to descend from and ascend to the heavens, though there are signs which point towards an actual cult having been practiced in the upper temple, so the entire temple may have been regarded as a giant altar. Other theories treat the tower as an image of the cosmic mountain where a dying and rising god "lay buried." Some temples, such as the temple of Enki in Eridu contained a holy tree (*kiskanu*) in a holy grove, which was the central point of various rites performed by the king, who functioned as a "master gardener."

Mesopotamian temples were originally built to serve as dwelling places for the god, who was thought to reside and hold court on earth for the good of the city and kingdom. His presence was symbolized by an image of the god in a separate room. The god's presence within the image seems to have been thought of in a very concrete way, as instruments for the presence of the deity." This is evident from the poem *How Erra Wrecked the World*, in which [Erra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erra_%28god%29) deceived the god Marduk into leaving his [cult statue](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cult_image). Once constructed, idols were consecrated through special nocturnal rituals where they were given "life", and their mouth "was opened" (*pet pî*) and washed (*mes pî*) so they could see and eat. If the deity approved, it would accept the image and agree to "inhabit" it. These images were also entertained, and sometime escorted on hunting expeditions. In order to service the gods, the temple was equipped with a household with kitchens and kitchenware, sleeping rooms with beds and side rooms for the deity's family, as well as a courtyard with a basin and water for cleansing visitors, as well as a stable for the god's chariot and draft animals.

Generally, the god's well-being was maintained through service, or work (*dullu*). The image was dressed and served banquets twice a day. It is not known how the god was thought to consume the food, but a curtain was drawn before the table while he or she "ate", just as the king himself was not allowed to be seen by the masses while he ate. Occasionally, the king shared in these meals, and the priests may have had some share in the offerings as well. Incense was also burned before the image, because it was thought that the gods enjoyed the smell. Sacrificial meals were also set out regularly, with a sacrificial animal seen as a replacement (*pūhu*) or substitute (*dinānu*) for a man, and it was considered that the anger of the gods or demons was then directed towards the sacrificial animal. Additionally, certain days required extra sacrifices and ceremonies for certain gods, and every day was sacred to a particular god.

The king was thought, in theory, to be the religious leader (*enu* or *šangū*) of the cult and exercised a large number of duties within the temple, with a large number of specialists whose task was to mediate between men and gods: a supervising or "watchman" priest (*šešgallu*), priests for individual purification against demons and magicians (*āšipu*), priests for the purification of the temple (*mašmašu*), priests to appease the wrath of the gods with song and music (*kalū*), as well as female singers (*nāru*), male singers (*zammeru*), craftsmen (*mārē ummāni*), sword bearers (*nāš paṭri*), masters of divination ([*bārû*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B%C4%81r%C3%BB)), penitents (*šā'ilu*), and others.

**Private devotions**

Besides the worship of the gods at public rituals, individuals also paid homage to a personal deity. As with other deities, the personal gods changed over time and little is known about early practice as they are rarely named or described. In the mid-third millennium BCE, some rulers regarded a particular god or gods as being their personal protector. In the second millennium BCE, personal gods began to function more on behalf of the common man, with whom he had a close, personal relationship, maintained through prayer and maintenance of his god's statue. A number of written [prayers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prayers) have survived from ancient Mesopotamia, each of which typically exalt the god that they are describing above all others. The historian J. Bottéro stated that these poems display "extreme reverence, profound devotion, [and] the unarguable emotion that the [supernatural](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supernatural) evoked in the hearts of those ancient believers" but that they showed a people who were scared of their gods rather than openly celebrating them. They were thought to offer good luck, success, and protection from disease and demons, and one's place and success in society was thought to depend on his personal deity, including the development of his certain talents and even his personality. This was even taken to the point that everything he experienced was considered a reflection of what was happening to his personal god. When a man neglected his god, it was assumed that the demons were free to inflict him, and when he revered his god, that god was like a shepherd who seeks food for him.

There was a strong belief in [demons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demons) in Mesopotamia, and private individuals, like the temple priests, also participated in incantations (šiptu) to ward them off. Although there was no collective term for these beings either in Sumerian or Akkadian, they were merely described as harmful or dangerous beings or forces, and they were used as a logical way to explain the existence of evil in the world. They were thought to be countless in number, and were thought to even attack the gods as well. Besides demons, there were also spirits of the dead, (etimmu) who could also cause mischief. Amulets were occasionally used, and sometimes a special priest or exorcist ([āšipu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C4%80%C5%A1ipu) or mašmašu) was required. Incantations and ceremonies were also used to cure diseases which were also thought to be associated with demonic activity, sometimes making use of [sympathetic magic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sympathetic_magic). Sometimes an attempt was made to capture a demon by making an image of it, placing it above the head of a sick person, then destroying the image, which the demon was somehow likely to inhabit. Images of protecting spirits were also made and placed at gates to ward off disaster.

[Divination](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divination) was also employed by private individuals, with the assumption that the gods have already determined the destinies of men and these destinies could be ascertained through observing omens and through rituals (e.g., casting lots). It was believed that the gods expressed their will through "words" (amatu) and "commandments" (qibitu) which were not necessarily spoken, but were thought to manifest in the unfolding routine of events and things. There were countless ways to divine the future, such as observing oil dropped into a cup of water ([lecanomancy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lecanomancy)), observing the entrails of sacrificial animals ([extispicy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extispicy)), observation of the behavior of birds ([augury](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augury)) and observing celestial and meteorological phenomena ([astrology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrology)), as well as through interpretation of dreams. Often interpretation of these phenomena required the need for two classes of priests: askers (sa'ilu) and observer ([baru](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B%C4%81r%C3%BB)), and also sometimes a lower class of ecstatic seer (mahhu) that was also associated with [witchcraft](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witchcraft).

**Morality, virtue and sin**

"Do not return evil to the man who disputes with you, requite with kindness your evil-doer, maintain justice to your enemy... Let not your heart be induced to do evil... Give food to eat, beer to drink, the one begging for alms honor, clothe; in this a man's god takes pleasure, it is pleasing to Shamash, who will repay him with favor. Be helpful, do good"

Incantation from the [*Šurpu*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%A0urpu) series.

Although ancient [paganism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paganism) tended to focus more on duty and ritual than morality, a number of general moral virtues can be gleaned from surviving prayers and myths. It was believed that man originated as a divine act of creation, and the gods were believed to be the source of life, and held power over sickness and health, as well as the destinies of men. Personal names show that each child was considered a gift from divinity. Man was believed to have been created to serve the gods, or perhaps wait on them: the god is lord (*belu*) and man is servant or slave (*ardu*), and was to fear (*puluhtu*) the gods and have the appropriate attitude towards them. Duties seem to have been primarily of a cultic and ritual nature, > although some prayers express a positive psychological relationship, or a sort of conversion experience in regard to a god. Generally the reward to mankind is described as success and long life.

Every man also had duties to his fellow man which had some religious character, particularly the king's duties to his subjects. It was thought that one of the reasons the gods gave power to the king was to exercise justice and righteousness, described as *mēšaru* and *kettu*, literally "straightness, rightness, firmness, truth" Examples of this include not alienating and causing dissension between friends and relatives, setting innocent prisoners free, being truthful, being honest in trade, respecting boundary lines and property rights, and not putting on airs with subordinates. Some of these guidelines are found in the second tablet of the [*Šurpu*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%A0urpu) incantation series.

Sin, on the other hand, was expressed by the words *hitu* (mistake, false step), *annu* or *arnu* (rebellion), and *qillatu* (sin or curse), with strong emphasis on the idea of rebellion, sometimes with the idea that sin is man's wishing to "live on his own terms" (ina ramanisu). Sin also was described as anything which incited the wrath of the gods. Punishment came through sickness or misfortune, which inevitably lead to the common reference to unknown sins, or the idea that one can transgress a divine prohibition without knowing it—psalms of lamentation rarely mention concrete sins. This idea of retribution was also applied to the nation and history as a whole. A number of examples of Mesopotamian literature show how war and natural disasters were treated as punishment from the gods, and how kings were used as a tool for deliverance.

In spite of some similarities in virtue and sin, when compared with traditional Islamic and Judeo-Christian morality, Mesopotamian religion and culture were highly sexualized, particularly in Babylon, where free sexual expression was viewed as one of the natural benefits of civilized life—homosexuality, transvestitism, and male and female prostitution were tolerated. The worship of Inanna/Ishtar, which was prevalent in Mesopotamia could involve wild, frenzied dancing and bloody ritual celebrations of social and physical abnormality. It was believed that "nothing is prohibited to Inanna", and that by depicting violations of normal human social and physical limitations, including gender definition, one could cross over from the "conscious everyday world into the trance world of spiritual ecstasy."

**Afterlife**

The ancient Mesopotamians believed in an [afterlife](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afterlife) that was a land below our world. It was this land, known alternately as *Arallû*, *Ganzer* or *Irkallu*, the latter of which meant "Great Below", that it was believed everyone went to after death, irrespective of social status or the actions performed during life. Unlike Christian Hell, the Mesopotamians considered the underworld neither a punishment nor a reward. Nevertheless, the condition of the dead was hardly considered the same as the life previously enjoyed on earth: they were considered merely weak and powerless ghosts. The myth of Ishtar's descent into the underworld relates that "dust is their food and clay their nourishment, they see no light, where they dwell in darkness." Stories such as the Adapa myth resignedly relate that, due to a blunder, all men must die and that true everlasting life is the sole property of the gods.

**Eschatology**

There are no known Mesopotamian tales about the [end of the world](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/End_Time), although it has been speculated that they believed that this would eventually occur. This is largely because [Berossus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berossus) wrote that the Mesopotamians believed the world to last "twelve times twelve *sars*"; with a *sar* being 3,600 years, this would indicate that at least some of the Mesopotamians believed that the Earth would only last 518,400 years. Berossus does not report what was thought to follow this event, however.

**Historical study**

**Challenges**

The modern study of Mesopotamia ([Assyriology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyriology)) is still a fairly young science, beginning only in the middle of the Nineteenth century, and the study of Mesopotamian religion can be a complex and difficult subject because, by nature, their religion was governed only by usage, not by any official decision, and by nature it was neither dogmatic nor systematic. Gods, characters, and their actions within myths changed in character and importance over time, and occasionally depicted different, sometimes even contrasting images or concepts. This is further complicated by the fact that scholars are not entirely certain what role religious texts played in the Mesopotamian world.

For many decades, some scholars of the Ancient Near East argued that it was impossible to define there as being a singular Mesopotamian religion, with Leo Oppenheim (1964) stating that "a systematic presentation of Mesopotamian religion cannot and should not be written. " Others, like Jean Bottéro, the author of *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia*, disagreed, believing that it would be too complicated to divide the religion into many smaller groups, stating that:

Should we dwell on a certain social or cultural category: the "official religion, " the "private religion, " the religion of the "educated"... Should we emphasize a certain city or province: [Ebla](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebla), [Mari](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mari%2C_Syria), Assyria? Should we concentrate on a certain period in time: the [Seleucid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seleucid), the [Achaemenid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achaemenid), the [Chaldean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaldean_Dynasty), the [Neo-Assyrian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-Assyrian), the [Kassite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kassite), the Old Babylonian, the Neo-Sumerian, or the Old Akkadian period? Since, contrary to what some would imprudently lead us to believe, there were no distinct religions but only successive states of the same religious system... – such an approach would be excessive, even pointless.

**Panbabylonism**

According to a theory developed in the late Nineteenth century called [Panbabylonism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panbabylonism), many of the stories of the [Tanakh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanakh), the [Old Testament](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Testament) and the [Qur'an](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qur%27an) are believed to have been based on, influenced by, or inspired by the earlier legendary mythological past of Mesopotamia, which for centuries dominated the entire region. The [Enuma Elish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enuma_Elish) in particular has been compared to the later [Genesis creation narrative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative). The story of [Esther](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esther) in particular is traced to Assyro-Babylonian roots. Others include [The Great Flood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Flood) and [Noah's Ark](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noah%27s_Ark) which may well have been influenced by the earlier [Epic of Gilgamesh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_of_Gilgamesh) narratives. The story of the biblical hunter-king [Nimrod](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nimrod) (a ruler not attested in Mesopotamian annals) is believed to have been inspired by the real Assyrian king [Tukulti-Ninurta I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tukulti-Ninurta_I), or alternatively by the Assyrian war god [Ninurta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ninurta). Others include [Lilith](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilith), who seems to have been based on the Assyrian demoness [Lilitu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilitu), and the [Tower of Babel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower_of_Babel) inspired by the impressive Ziggurats of Assyria and Babylonia.

Jewish, Christian, and Islamic believers address the assertion that parts of the Bible may derive from pagan texts, [apologists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apologetics) point out that the differences between the Bible and Mesopotamian texts far outweigh the similarities, and that there is, at least, nothing about the ancient texts that indicates the biblical stories were directly copied from the older Mesopotamian ones. Instead, they may both draw from even older sources. For example, the Flood story appears in almost every culture around the world, including cultures that never had contact with Mesopotamia. Other apologists point out that the Mesopotamian texts appear highly embellished compared to the simpler Biblical texts, which bear closer resemblance to the creation account described in [tablets discovered at Ebla](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebla_tablets) in 1968. However, much of the initial media excitement about supposed Eblaite connections with the Bible, based on preliminary guesses and speculations by Pettinato and others, is now widely deplored as generated by "exceptional and unsubstantiated claims" and "great amounts of disinformation that leaked to the public". The present consensus is that Ebla's role in [biblical archaeology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_archaeology), strictly speaking, is minimal.

**Continuing influence**

**Popular culture**

Mesopotamian religion, culture, history and mythology has influenced some forms of music. As well as traditional [Assyrian music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyrian/Syriac_folk_music), many [heavy metal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heavy_metal_music) bands have named themselves after Mesopotamian gods and historical figures, including the partly ethnic Assyrian band [Melechesh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melechesh). Assyrians to this day still use the names of ancient Mesopotamian gods and rulers as both first and last names; Ashur, [Hadad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadad), [Shamash](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shamash), [Lilitu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilitu)/[Lilith](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilith), [Sennacherib](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sennacherib), [Sin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sin) (Shinu), Sargon, [Semiramis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semiramis), [Ishtar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ishtar) and [Lamassu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamassu) for example are still common names, and some months in the Assyrian calendar are named after ancient gods such as [Tammuz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tammuz_%28deity%29), and all periods are listed as being blessed by ancient gods.

**New religious movements**

Various [new religious movements](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_religious_movements) in the 20th and 21st centuries have been founded that venerate some of the deities found in ancient Mesopotamian religion, these include various strains of [neopaganism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neopaganism) that have adopted the worship of the historical Mesopotamian gods.

**Biblical eschatology**

In the New Testament book of [Revelation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revelation), Babylonian religion is associated with religious apostacy of the highest order, the archetype of a political/religious system heavily tied to global commerce, and it is depicted as a system which, according to the author, continued to hold sway in the first century CE, eventually to be utterly annihilated. According to some interpretations, this is believed to refer to the [Roman Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Empire), but according to other interpretations, this system remains extant in the world until the [Second Coming of Christ](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Coming_of_Christ).

* Revelation 17:5: "And upon her forehead was a name written, mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth,"
* Revelation 18:9: "The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.' And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more..."

**Fringe theories**

The unusual and apparently physical closeness of gods to men in these stories has prompted various extreme speculations including [Julian Jaynes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_Jaynes)'s theory of the [bicameral mind](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bicameral_mind) and [Zecharia Sitchin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zecharia_Sitchin)'s [ancient astronauts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_astronauts) theory. While receiving little attention from academics, such speculations have influenced many science fiction stories and movies.

**See also**

* [Sumerian religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_religion)
* [Babylonian religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonian_religion)
* [Mesopotamian prayer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamian_prayer)

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