Mesopotamian Agriculture


Agriculture was very important in ancient Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Because the climate of Mesopotamia was dry with little rainfall, farmers depended on the flooding of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers for water for their crops. The silt left behind from the flooding water made the soil fertile.

Crops

The most important crops in Mesopotamia were wheat and barley. Farmers also grew dates, grapes, figs, melons, and apples. Favorite vegetables included eggplants, onions, radishes, beans, lettuce, and sesame seeds. Mesopotamians also raised sheep, goats, and cows.

Hoping for a plentiful crop, farmers worshipped Baal. Baal was a major Mesopotamian god of the sun and good crops. They also worshipped Ashnan, the Sumerian goddess of grain.

Farming Tools

The farmers of Mesopotamia were inventive. They made bronze hand tools, like hammers, sickles, axes, and hoes. Mesopotamians were probably the first to use the wheel. By 3000 BCE, they had invented the plow and plow seeder.

Mesopotamians even wrote handbooks that told how and when to plant crops. They had a calendar based on the moon to aid farmers, too.

Irrigation Techniques

Mesopotamians traded their extra grain for stone, wood, metal products, and other goods. They produced this extra grain by irrigation. They built canals, ditches and dikes to bring water to the land from the rivers.

Because the rivers were higher than the surrounding plain, the water for irrigation flowed down into the fields. However, once the water was in the fields, it did not easily drain away. As the water evaporated, it left dissolved mineral salts behind. Evaporation also drew salts up from the lower levels of the soil.

Over time the soil could no longer produce crops. By 2300 BCE, agricultural production in Mesopotamia had significantly decreased. Many fields were abandoned. Mesopotamian cuneiform tablets tell of crop damage due to mineral salts.

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