

land. The mountains to the east and north were filled with many tribes, looking down with envy and desire upon the prosperous valley country. Enemies could follow the Euphrates from the west. Invaders could land in the south in boats, and this was probably the source of a great prehistoric conquest. Mesopotamian history constitutes a patchwork of many different forces, and seems far more complicated than Egyptian history.

A primary difference between the life of Mesopotamia and that of Egypt is the result of a physical situation. Egypt had great numbers of papyrus plants growing along the Nile, and from them a sort of paper called papyrus was made, which made writing easy and was a tremendous help in the development of Egyptian economic and cultural life. However, these Egyptian papyri have almost entirely disappeared, except for those few that were buried in tombs. Since Mesopotamia had no such easy source of writing material as papyrus, a rather poor substitute was invented, that of making clay tablets, the size of a cake of ivory soap or larger, and writing on these by pressing on them with a stylus, so as to make a line that was a little wider at one end than at the other. These clay tablets were much more cumbersome and awkward than the papyrus so readily available in Egypt. However, from our viewpoint they had one great advantage, that of being far more durable. If the clay tablets were baked, as was sometimes done, they became almost imperishable. Mesopotamian remains include not only the monuments and other records that the leaders wished preserved--and of these we have a great many--but also a tremendous amount of the ephemeral writing of the people. Almost everything written in ancient Mesopotamia eventually came to be buried under the accumulating debris of ongoing civilization. Excavation brings to light not only inscriptions of kings, but also incidental contracts of common people. The