

Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Mesopotamia

Mesopotamians looked to religion to answer their questions about life and death, good and evil, and the forces of nature. They believed that each city and larger city-states belonged to a patron god or goddess who owned everything and everyone in the city. The people trusted the priests and priestesses in the temples to tell them what the gods wanted, and they followed the holy leaders' commands without question. In this way, the leaders in the temples had almost as much power over the people as the kings, who were also the high priests.

Mesopotamians believed that the gods, called dingir in Sumerian, looked and acted much like humans. They had feasts, marriages, children, and wars. They could be jealous, angry, joyful, and kind.

The dingir controlled four realms in the universe: An was the god of heaven, Enlil was the air-god, Enki was the water-god, and Ninhursag was the mother earth-goddess. Enlil was also called the "father of the gods". He set up the me, or laws of the universe, but he broke the laws and was banished to the underworld. Enki, the water-god, was then put in charge of the me, and organized the universe.

There were other important deities in Mesopotamia. Utu, the sun-god, lit the world with rays shooting from his shoulders. He moved across the sky in a chariot. Ur's patron god, Nanna, was the moon-god, who used a boat to travel by night.

Name _____

Date _____

Period _____

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1.) What questions did religion answer for Mesopotamians? _____

2.) What did the patron god/goddess of the city own? _____

3.) Why were the priests of the temple important? _____

4.) What does “dingir” mean? _____

5.) How were the gods/goddesses of Mesopotamia human-like? _____

6.) What were the 4 realms of the universe, and who controlled them?

a.) _____

b.) _____

c.) _____

d.) _____

7.) Who was the “father of the gods”? _____

8.) What were the “me”, and who is in charge of them? _____

9.) Who were two other important gods/goddesses?

a.) _____

b.) _____