



Chapter 14 Notes

Scribes, School, and Schoolboys (Education in Ancient Mesopotamia)

School



Mesopotamian discipline: “caning” = student was whacked with a stick

“Caning student” story: student caned 9 times (mistake in writing, messy handwriting, talking during class, speaking in native Akkadian instead of Sumerian, stood up when he shouldn't have, left building without permission)

Story became a school exercise for students to copy

Only wealthy could afford to send their children to scribal schools in Mesopotamia

scribe: means “one who writes”

prepared students for professions as scribes, doctors, judges, priests, astronomers

Almost all students were boys (few women ever became scribes), the women who did generally worked with other women

School life



Clay tablets = student workbooks, tell us much about the lives of male students

Schools were called “edubba” or “tablet house”. They used tablets all day, spent time on vocabulary, learning cuneiform signs. Most spoke Akkadian language in their everyday lives but learned Sumerian in school because it was the “official” language for contracts, letters, temple documents (used by priests to speak to gods)

Students copied simple lines of cuneiform from teacher, myths and legends

Students memorized lists of Sumerian words and Akkadian words that meant same thing. Students recited and wrote words

Teachers ordered harsh punishments for misbehavior (“caning”) but rewards were great

Not all wealthy parents sent their sons to school; most saw no need for them to learn to read and write

Only a tiny percentage actually went to school

Afterwards



Boys started school when they were young and finished in late teens

Boring studies by modern standards: language, literature, math, music through memorization

Punishments harsh but rewards great: could become important, well-respected man

Pagirus: well-known scribe who lived around 1650 BCE.

Self-employed, earned living by writing letters or contracts for people

knew proper legal language, could take diction (quickly writing down words as they were spoken)

Understand math and could survey houses and fields to calculate sizes

Rewarded by king (gives 51 acre fields to him)