

Chapter 1 Notes – *From the Origins of Agriculture to the First River-Valley Civilizations*

Chapter Thesis: The first civilizations, loosely defined by multifarious political or socioeconomic characteristics, began following the last Ice Age in Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq), Egypt, and the Indus River-Valley.

- I. *Before Civilization:* We are able to identify the signs of the first developing societies through archaeological discoveries of artwork, tools, and cave paintings that reveal their cultural and historical beginnings from the Stone Age to the Agricultural Revolutions.
 - **Culture** included clothing, tools, or crafts that represented patterns of expression
 - **History** includes the study of the ways that cultural activities were formed, passed on, and changed over time
- A. Food Gathering and Stone Tools: During the Stone Age (Paleolithic era), hunter-gatherers that traveled in small bands with their changing and moving resources were, despite being very mobile and took shelter in natural areas, evidently had time to make the earliest clothing garments, building materials, and artwork possibly expressing early religious beliefs.
 - Hunter-gatherers were known as **foragers** and their band population was limited by the food available in their surroundings
 - Stone Age peoples most likely relied more heavily on gathered vegetable foods rather than hunted game
 - “Iceman” preserved in ice from 5,300 years ago shows us Stone Age clothing made of animal hides
 - Studies suggest that the daily life of a person living in the Stone Age acquiring necessary food and shelter only took about 3-5 hours, allowing for creative exploration and tool-making
- B. The Agricultural Revolutions: Occurring in many parts of the world at different times, the Agricultural Revolution (or Neolithic Age) began the transition from nomadic hunter-gatherer bands to settled villages domesticating plants and animals.
 - About 10,000 years ago, changes in the world climate catalyzed societies to domesticate plants and animals, beginning the transition from foraging to farming
 - May have begun by forager bands first purposefully planting seeds in specific locations at seasonal campsites, aiding food gathering but eventually became focus
 - New, specialized tools found by archaeologists indicated a revolution in food supply

- **8000 B.C.** – Transition to agriculture begins in the Middle East, humans selectively planting crops and unconsciously accelerating evolution; separate but similar Agricultural Revolution begins in Saharan Africa
- **6000 B.C.** – Domestication spreads to Greece
- **5000 B.C.** – Dry weather conditions spurs Saharan farmers' move to naturally irrigated and soil-rich Nile Valley; American continents begin domesticating crops
- **4000 B.C.** – Agriculture spreads to plains along Danube River and other parts of central Europe
- **2600 B.C.** – Central Europe using animals to till fields
- Domestication of animals also prevalent during this time period, thought to have begun with the dog as a hunting aide and progressed to include sheep, goats, cattle, and pigs for food, milk, or work
- **Pastoralism** emerged in Africa and Central Asia as a life of herding domesticated livestock and sometimes farming or trading meat and skins for crops
- World population increased significantly because of the Agricultural Revolutions and its social and environmental effects make it one of the greatest changes in human history

C. Life in Neolithic Communities: As farming spread throughout the world and increased the population, the health, social and cultural customs, and outlook of its people changed while they began living in villages and towns with specialized labor and religious identities.

- Although early farmers were less likely to starve since they could preserve food supply, studies show that they were less healthy than foragers
- Farmers' surpluses allowed their kind to survive during a drought or natural crisis more than foragers, key to population growth
- Farming communities' social structure was based on kinship and marriage, lineages or clans worked together for common land and interests
- **Megaliths** constructed often reflected religious beliefs or honoring ancestral rituals
- In parts of the world, villages became towns that acted as center for trade and specialized professions; Jericho and Catal Huyuk were examples of such towns in the Middle East
- Metalworking developed in the later years of the Neolithic Age for decorations or ceremonial objects

II. *Mesopotamia:* "The land between two rivers," Mesopotamia, is along the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers and the site of one of the first developed civilizations in which advances were made societally, technologically, and religiously.

- Mesopotamia is an alluvial plain, a fertile part of land with the river silt deposited over thousands of years
- Zagros Mountains to the north and the east, Syrian and Arabian deserts to the west and southwest

- A. Settled Agriculture in an Unstable Landscape: Upon the arrival of farming from the Fertile Crescent, Mesopotamians used the dry area between the rivers through inventions such as a canal irrigation system and ox-drawn plows.
- Agriculture did not come to Mesopotamia from the Fertile Crescent of the northwest until 3000 years later in 5000 B.C.
 - Region lacks rainfall required for farming, so artificial irrigation is needed to support crops; spring floods were sudden and destructive and could not be reliable for irrigation during ripening season
 - **4000 B.C.** – Mesopotamians used animals to plow their fields and fields were allowed to replenish annually
 - **3000 B.C.** – Mesopotamians constructed canals for an irrigation system
 - River resources such as fish and land resources such as fields allowed for food supply surplus and animal domestication
- B. Sumerians and Semites: The Sumerians and the Semites both shared a part of history dominating Mesopotamia and their traditions and culture shaped the history of Mesopotamia from 5000 B.C. to 2000 B.C.
- **Sumerians** were the people group living in the historical time (meaning that there is written evidence for their existence) in Mesopotamia who laid the groundwork for civilization there
 - **Semites**, who were those who spoke ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, Phoenician or Arabic, lived in peace with the Sumerians and are found recorded in Sumerian inscriptions
 - Semites lived in peace with Sumerians, but by 2000 B.C. they became dominant over Mesopotamia and “Akkadian” became the standard language
- C. Cities, Kings, and Trade: Once permanent settlement became city-states that had organization and a central leader, the social classes began forming with priests, kings, and citizens; and across Mesopotamia, rival city-states competing for resources either took to conquest or to trade.
- Urban centers called **city-states** developed, which were self-governing and controlled smaller villages and agricultural land outside of it
 - Complex irrigation networks required organization between leaders, citizens, and workers; leading to the “lugal” or king-like leader figure
 - Cities had religious affiliation with central temples for their cult, or set of religious practices
 - City-states began conquering others once they had become powerful enough, for obtaining resources possessed by other city-states; trade was also used and evidence points to long-distance trade in the region
 - Akkadian Mesopotamia gave way to Sumerians’ “Third Dynasty of Ur” again in 2230 B.C., which fell as a result of nomadic attacks; ancient city of Babylon created by Semitic Amorites who had toppled the Sumerians
- D. Mesopotamian Society: As seen in Mesopotamian history, the advent of agriculture not only meant a new way of life for people, but also a new societal

structure, with historical documents like the Code of Hammurabi explicitly listing three groups of people by their status and profession; kings and priests held the highest positions while women and slaves became the lowest regarded in society.

- Social classes were created with new, specialized jobs and power centralization, allowed people such as priests and kings to be very wealthy without directly being involved in agriculture
 - Law Code of Hammurabi from Babylon in 1800 B.C. classifies people into three social strata: land-owning class, farmers and artisans, and slaves
 - It is thought that women became less prevalent socially during the Agricultural Revolution, when their work transitioned from gathering plant foods to primarily raising children (as they could support more with their surplus), laws favored men and began the inequality
- E. Gods, Priests, and Temples: The Sumerians believed in gods in nature that affected their day-to-day lives by determining natural events and causing natural disasters, and they worked to appease them through priests that worked in cult temples.
- Sumerian and Semitic gods represented concepts in nature and were believed to be anthropomorphic, or human-like and controlling natural disasters and events
 - Religious dedication found in temples of all cities of the time, included a shrine with a cult statue inside and a ziggurat, for an unknown purpose
 - Priests passed on their positions to their sons; included the high priest, music priests, priests for exorcism, dream interpreters
 - **Amulets**, or small charms, were found and suggest a belief in magic and superstition
- F. Technology and Science: Advances were made by the Mesopotamians to not only alleviate the challenges of the environment with wheeled carts and metal tools, but also for the purposes of recording and documenting with the invention of cuneiform as a written language and a number system.
- “Technology” constituted any knowledge used by early peoples to change their surrounding environment or society
 - 3300 B.C. – Writing appears in Mesopotamia; tablets found in a temple (which at the time was the principal economic institution of the city-states)
 - Written language thought to have begun from a system developed to record and track farm property
 - **Cuneiform**, a writing system that used wedge-shaped symbols for words or sounds developed from picture symbols drawn by a sharpened reed
 - Carts with wheels and platforms carried by cattle were inventions used to help the people carry goods; boats were made and used for transportation along the canal system; craftsmen began making **bronze** alloys from copper and tin for tools and weapons; a base-60 number system was developed

III. *Egypt*: Positioned uniquely between Asia and Africa with natural barriers of the desert and coast, Egypt is an example of the natural environment affecting the society and of resource independence creating a different, isolated culture.

- Egypt, for long periods, had little to do with other civilizations because of natural boundaries
- A. The Land of Egypt: “Gift of the Nile”: The Nile River, flowing through Egypt, became its greatest natural resource because of its annual flooding that irrigated crops, its potential for transportation, and its indigenous fish.
 - Nile is the world’s largest river and it cuts a narrow valley with hills on each side through to the Mediterranean Sea, but most the population lived on the fertile, triangular delta
 - River became main means of travel and communication and most significant cities were located away from the Mediterranean Sea
 - Agriculture dependent on river water, which overflowed every September in good timing with the grain crops and spreading through irrigation channels farther than the vicinity of the river
 - Egypt had many more natural resources than Mesopotamia, allowing them to be more self-sufficient and not relying on imported materials and goods
- B. Divine Kingship: As ancient Egypt grew larger than local communities could support, a political organization began to take form and ultimately resulted in the rule of pharaohs and dynasties of those in their lineage.
 - Population growth led to political organization formation beginning with a local king or ruler, which was later to be conquered and united under one Egyptian ruler starting with Menes
 - Old, Middle, and New Kingdom time periods created for different parts of cultural achievement by the Egyptians and their dynasties of **pharaohs**, or their word for king, to maintain **ma’at**, or a divine order as part of their religious beliefs
 - Lavish resources (human and otherwise) were spent to uphold traditions, especially upon the death of a pharaoh, which was traditionally celebrated by ceremoniously placing them in a stepped monument called a **pyramid**
- C. Administration and Communication: While Egypt developed as a state, hieroglyphics developed as the standard form of written record and the government became controlling of the economy and its people.
 - Old Kingdom capital was **Memphis**, replaced by **Thebes** to the south during the Middle and New Kingdoms
 - Central government held and controlled key parts of the economy and trade, taking taxes of 50% of revenue at times
 - **Hieroglyphics** were developed as a writing system for the government administration use, but folk literature was also written on **papyrus**, which was a reed that produced a material similar to paper

- The Old Kingdom had issues with officials trying to decentralize power, which was gone in the Middle Kingdom when their power was reduced and they were replaced with loyal administrators
- Many more Egyptians lived rurally and agriculturally than in Mesopotamia, which contributed to the reason why Egypt lacked real cities
- Egypt was isolationist with any foreigners but did trade for valuable resources of cedar wood from the Levant and gold from the south

D. The People of Egypt: A society very different to Mesopotamia's, Egyptian people did not have a strict social classes system (although they did have a sense of hierarchy from their professions) and women were thought to have been treated more equally.

- A range of people settled in Egypt with varying physical appearances and skin tones, coming from Northern Africa and sub-Saharan Africa
- No rigid social structure developed, but a hierarchy placed kings and officials at the top, with local leaders, priests, and artisans following, and peasants making up the majority at the bottom
- Peasants maintained agriculture and its irrigation system, occasionally contributing to state-mandated projects
- Unlike Mesopotamia, archaeological documents suggest that women were treated with more dignity and affection and given more legal rights and freedoms

E. Belief and Knowledge: The Egyptian religious beliefs in the gods representing parts of nature were dedicatedly practiced, whether in cult ritual or in burying their dead.

- Egyptian religion was centered around their environment; constancy of their surroundings led them to perceive that all of nature took place in cycles and renewal, natural elements led to diverse and numerous gods to represent each one
- The pharaoh was seen as the son of the sun-god Re (Ra)
- Private cult activities took place within the temples among priests but were also practiced publicly during festivals and events
- Strong emphasis on the afterlife, buried their dead with many rituals, spells, and preservations as a **mummy** wrapped in linen, placed in a tomb reflecting their social status (kings had pyramids)
- Egyptians developed mathematics to calculate amount of produce owed to the state and to measure fields, engineering and architecture were required in great skill to build the pyramids and temples

IV. *The Indus Valley Civilization*: The floodplain of the Indus River allowed for a civilization to grow and thrive in South Asia, with farming as the essential part of this growth.

A. Natural Environment: The land near the Indus River supported agriculture well, with a riverbed rich in deposited silt and biannual floods that made up for the lack of consistent rainfall.

- Indus-River area is silt-rich and has a naturally elevated riverbed because of erosion moving downstream and collecting
 - The river floods twice a year and covers the land in water with a ten mile radius, biannual floods allow for two crops to be harvest per year
 - Melting snow in March and April feeds floodwaters, the great monsoon in August causes rain to make a second flood
 - Punjab, point of five-river converging to form the course of the Indus is to the northeast
 - Indus Valley Civilization covers much more land than Mesopotamia
- B. Material Culture: Found in the Indus Valley are the remains of an ancient civilization that required an incredible amount of organization, seen in its buildings and cities, but many cultural institutions of this civilization are unknown.
- Indus Valley Civilization thrived from 2600 – 1900 B.C., Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro are modern names for their greatest cities
 - Relations between new civilization and existing peoples in the Indus Valley are unknown, as is the driving force behind urbanization in the region
 - Cities had major urban planning with consistent street width and walls around cities, large buildings for different purposes
 - Metal objects have been found in large amounts in the Indus Valley, mostly being tools and common household items
 - Indus Valley traded often with its neighbors with metals and precious stones of the region
 - Many religious, political, and economic aspects of the Indus Valley Civilization are unknown or unclear from currently excavated artifacts
- C. Transformation of the Indus Valley Civilization: For reasons still unclear, the Indus River Valley, after 700 years of thriving agriculture and trade was abandoned and replaced by farming and herding on a village level.
- Indus Valley Civilization was abandoned in 1900 B.C., perhaps because of invaders, breakdown of infrastructure, or environmental changes that made towns no longer sustainable
 - Village-based farming and herding took the place of the urban centers, and members of higher social classes had to merge into the general population