

PART I

FROM HUNTING AND GATHERING TO CIVILIZATIONS, 2.5 MILLION – 1000 B.C.E.: ORIGINS

Summary. The earliest known humans lived in east Africa about 2.5 million years ago. These humans lived by hunting and gathering. Gradually, the most advanced human species, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, migrated from Africa to the Middle East, then into Europe, Asia, Australia, and the Americas. They developed tools out of stones, sticks, and other natural objects. Agriculture began from about 10,000 years ago onward. This in turn encouraged the development of civilization. Early civilizations arose in five different sites, four along the fertile shores of great rivers. The key element in this long phase of human history focuses on adaptation to environments and the search for food supplies. The development of agriculture offered different opportunities for humans, including altered family forms, formal political structures and cities, and monumental buildings. But change took place during this time period slowly. The impact of this change in human civilization can be seen with children who were more supported, nurtured, and disciplined because they were a vital part of the family labor force in agricultural societies.

CHAPTER 1

From Human Prehistory to the Early Civilizations

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Archeological studies and other scientific methods have provided us with a view of human development that begins millions of years ago. Most of the 2 million-plus years of our existence as a species has been described as the Paleolithic, or Old Stone, Age. This lengthy phase, during which both *Homo erectus* and then *Homo sapiens sapiens* made their appearances, ran until about 14,000 years ago. *Homo erectus* appeared as early as 500,000-750,000 years ago. They stood upright and learned simple tool use, mainly through employing suitably shaped rocks and sticks for hunting and gathering. Several species of *Homo erectus* developed and spread in Africa and to Asia and Europe, reaching a population of perhaps 1.5 million 100,000 years ago. *Homo erectus* disappeared about 40,000 years ago. Our immediate ancestors were *Homo sapiens sapiens*. All current races are descended from this subspecies. Early varieties of *Homo sapiens sapiens* lived as small bands of hunter-gatherers. These groups developed language, rituals, and more sophisticated tools.

Human Life in the Era of Hunters and Gatherers. Hunting-and-gathering economies dominated human history until 9000 B.C.E. These economies helped propel migration over most of the lands of the Earth.

Human Life Before Agriculture. As human societies spread geographically over the Earth, the hunter-gatherer economy benefited with improved tool use.

Late Paleolithic Developments. A variety of human types developed in the Paleolithic time period but these were killed off or displaced by competitors over time. *Homo sapiens sapiens* originated about 240,000 years ago. Humans today are descendants of this group. Life became easier for these early human ancestors as stone tool use improved. Speech developed with *Homo erectus* 100,000 years ago. By the late Paleolithic period, people had developed rituals and religion to lessen fear about death and nature. All during this time humans spread from east Africa into Asia and Europe and finally North America. Human development accelerated after the last ice age. In a span of several thousand years from 12,000 to 8,000 B.C.E., humans dramatically improved the ability to fashion stone tools and other implements, including weapons. These Mesolithic people domesticated animals for an improved food supply. With the increased food supply was an increased population, and with that, conflict.

The Neolithic Revolution. The Neolithic revolution is the term given to the development of agricultural societies. This revolution in economic, political, and social organization began in the Middle East as early as 10,000 B.C.E. and gradually spread to other centers, including parts of India, north Africa, and Europe. With the rise of agricultural forms of economic production, humans were able to remain settled more permanently in one spot and increase their levels of specialization regarding particular economic, political, and religious functions. Additionally, the emergence of agriculturally based societies caused a massive increase in the sheer number of people in the world. However, most evidence suggests that hunting-and-gathering peoples resisted agriculture as long as they could. By about 3000 B.C.E., metalworking had become common in the Middle East. Like agriculture, knowledge of metals gradually fanned out to other parts of Asia and to Africa and Europe. Metalworking was extremely useful to agricultural and herding societies. Agricultural peoples had the resources to free up a small number of metal tool makers who specialized in this activity and exchanged their product with farmers for food.

Civilization. The word “civilization” comes from the Latin term for “city.” Formal states, writing, cities, and monuments all characterize civilizations. Civilizations also exhibit elaborate trading patterns and extensive political territories. While many of the ingredients of civilization had existed by 6000 B.C.E., the origins of civilization, strictly speaking, date to only about 3500 B.C.E. The first civilizations were the river valley civilizations, so-called because they all developed alongside major rivers to secure an adequate water supply for agricultural production. The earliest river valley civilizations began in the Middle East and flourished for many centuries. They created a basic set of tools, intellectual concepts such as writing and mathematics, and political forms that would persist and spread to other parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Most of the river valley civilizations were in decline by 1000 B.C.E.

Tigris-Euphrates Civilization. This civilization originated in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in a part of the Middle East called Mesopotamia. It was one of the few cases of a civilization that started from scratch—with no examples from any place available for imitation. This civilization progressed mostly due to the accomplishments of the Sumerians, the most influential people in the Tigris-Euphrates region. By about 3500 B.C.E, the Sumerians had developed the first known human writing, cuneiform. They also were characterized by the development of astronomical sciences, intense religious beliefs, and tightly organized city-states. The Sumerians improved the region’s agricultural prosperity by learning about fertilizers and using silver to conduct commercial exchange. Their ideas about divine forces in natural objects were common among early agricultural peoples; a religion of this sort, which sees many gods in aspects of nature, is known as polytheism. Sumerian political structures stressed tightly organized city-states, ruled by a king who claimed divine authority. Here was a key early example of how a civilization and political structures combined. The government helped regulate religion and enforce its duties; it also provided a system of courts for justice. Kings were originally war leaders, and the function of defense and war, including leadership of a trained army, remained vital. The Sumerians eventually succumbed to the Akkadians, who continued much of the Sumerian culture in the Tigris-Euphrates region, and the Babylonians, who developed Hammurabi’s code. It laid down the procedure for law courts and regulated property rights and duties of family members, setting harsh punishments for crimes. This focus on standardizing a legal system was one of the features of early river valley civilizations.

Egyptian Civilization. Egyptian civilization emerged in northern Africa along the Nile River by about 3000 B.C.E. It benefited from trade and influences from Mesopotamia, but it also produced its own distinct social structures and cultural expressions. Unlike Mesopotamian civilization, Egyptian civilization featured very durable and centralized institutions. Mathematical achievements and impressive architectural structures also characterized Egyptian civilization. From 2700 B.C.E. onward, the Egyptian pharaohs directed the building of the pyramids, which were to function as their tombs. However, the building of these massive architectural monuments could only be accomplished with the use of an abundance of slave labor.

Indian and Chinese River Valley Civilizations. A prosperous urban civilization emerged along the Indus River by 2500 B.C.E., supporting several large cities, such as Harappa. Indus River peoples had trading contacts with Mesopotamia, but they developed a distinctive alphabet and artistic forms. Invasions by Indo-Europeans resulted in such complete destruction of this culture that little is known today about its subsequent influence on India. Civilization along the Huanghe (Yellow) River in China developed in considerable isolation, though some overland trading contact developed with India and the Middle East. In addition to the existence of an organized state that carefully regulated irrigation in the flood-prone river valley, the Chinese had produced advanced technology and elaborate intellectual life by about 2000 B.C.E. There was also less of a break between Chinese river valley society and the later civilizations in China than in any other region. The Shang ruled over the Huanghe River valley by about 1500 B.C.E. These rulers are noted for managing the construction of impressive tombs and palaces.

The Heritage of the River Valley Civilizations. Basic achievements like the wheel, alphabets, mathematics, and divisions of time are vital legacies of the early civilizations. Mesopotamian art and Egyptian architecture influenced the Greeks, and subsequently the Romans, who both passed on much of their heritage to Muslim and European civilization. The Phoenicians devised a simplified alphabet that greatly influenced the Greek and Latin writing systems. The most influential of the smaller Middle Eastern groups were the Jews, who gave the world the first clearly developed monotheistic religion.

In Depth: The Idea of Civilization in World Historical Perspective. The belief that there are fundamental differences between the “civilized” and the “barbarians” is an old and widespread one, used by the Chinese, American Indians, ancient Greeks, and modern western Europeans, to name just a few. The latter attempted to define a series of stages in human development that ranged from utterly primitive to “advanced,” with the advanced culture belonging to the western Europeans. By the 19th century, racial qualities were quantified as qualifiers for position along the hierarchy of “civilization.” In the 20th century much of that intellectual baggage was eventually discarded. At present, the most accepted way to approach a definition of civilization is to see it as one of several ways humans identify social organization.

The First Civilizations. The first civilizations established a pattern of division among the world’s peoples. After *Homo sapiens sapiens* spread to almost every corner of the world and then had relatively little contact with each other, separate languages and cultures developed. But by 1000 B.C.E., the Phoenicians traded with Britain and Chinese silk was sold in Egypt. Overall, four distinct centers of civilization developed: the Middle East, India, China, and Egypt (five if the nascent Olmec civilization is included). Each had important commonalities, including trade, writing, and cities, yet each was in many ways different from the others. Thus,

the duality of common experience and diversity has been part of the human experience for a very long time.

Global Connections: The Early Civilizations and the World. The scope and legacy of the first civilizations are unique to geography and other factors. Mesopotamia was flat with few natural barriers to recurrent invasions. Thus the Middle East had an active role as an agent for wider connections with other cultures. Egypt, though not isolated, was more self-contained with the Libyan desert, Nile River, and Red Sea serving as barriers. Therefore, Egypt played less of a role as intermediary among different regions. China also had less far-reaching contacts than Mesopotamia. But it did make major connections with Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Harappan society did trade widely with Mesopotamia; but its rapid decline limited its impact on surrounding cultures.

KEY TERMS

Paleolithic, or Old Stone, Age: Most of the 2 million-plus years during which our species has existed. Throughout this long time span, which runs to about 14,000 years ago, human beings learned only simple tool use, mainly through employing suitably shaped rocks and sticks for hunting and warfare. During this time, the human species developed into *Homo erectus*, and later *Homo sapiens sapiens*. The greatest achievement of the Paleolithic people was the spread of the human species over much of the Earth's surface.

Mesolithic, or Middle Stone, Age: This term designates a span of several thousand years, from about 12,000 to 8000 B.C.E., during which human ability to fashion some tools and other implements improved greatly. The Mesolithic people's ability to domesticate more animals led to an increase in food supply and a subsequent increase in population growth.

Neolithic Revolution: The Neolithic revolution is the term for the invention of agriculture. This revolution in economic production began in the Middle East as early as 10,000 B.C.E. and gradually spread to other centers, including parts of India, north Africa, and Europe. With agriculture, human beings were able to settle more permanently in one spot and specialize in particular economic, political, and religious functions. Agriculture also created a great increase in the sheer number of people in the world.

Prehistoric: Prehistoric is a term used for human patterns before the invention of writing allowed for the creation of the kinds of records with which historians prefer to study the past. This huge span of time includes the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic periods.

Metalworking: By about 3000 B.C.E., metalworking had become common in the Middle East. Like agriculture, knowledge of metals gradually fanned out to other parts of Asia and to Africa and Europe. Metalworking was extremely useful to agricultural and herding societies. It allowed for the creation of more efficient farming tools and better weaponry.

Civilization: The word "civilization" comes from the Latin term for "city." Formal states, writing, cities, and monuments characterize civilizations. They also develop elaborate trading patterns and extensive political territories. While many of the ingredients of civilization had existed by 6000 or 5000 B.C.E., the origins of civilization, strictly speaking, date only to about 3500 B.C.E. The first civilization arose in the Middle East, along the banks of the Tigris and

Euphrates rivers. Many of the accomplishments of the river -valley civilizations had lasting impact and are still fundamental to world history today.

Çatal Hüyük: Çatal Hüyük was a Neolithic village located in southern Turkey. It has been elaborately studied by archeologists and has produced substantial historical data on the political, economic, and cultural dynamics of the Neolithic period.

River Valley Civilizations: The first civilizations all sprang up alongside the banks of major rivers in order to irrigate their agricultural fields. The first river valley civilizations began in the Middle East and flourished for many centuries. They created a basic set of tools, intellectual concepts such as writing and mathematics, and political forms that would persist and spread to other parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Additionally, most of the river valley civilizations were in decline by 1000 B.C.E.

Tigris-Euphrates Civilization: This civilization was founded in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in a part of the Middle East long called Mesopotamia. It was one of the few cases of a civilization that started absolutely from scratch, with no examples to imitate. This civilization progressed mostly because of the accomplishments of the Sumerians.

Sumerians: The Sumerians were the most influential people of the Tigris-Euphrates region. By about 3500 B.C.E., the Sumerians had developed a cuneiform alphabet, the first known human writing. The Sumerians were also characterized by their development of astronomical sciences, intense religious beliefs, and tightly organized city-states. The Sumerians also improved the region's agricultural prosperity by learning about fertilizers and adopting silver to conduct an early form of commercial exchange. The Sumerians eventually fell to a people called the Akkadians, who continued much of the Sumerian culture in the Tigris-Euphrates region.

Egyptian Civilization: Egyptian civilization emerged in northern Africa, along the Nile River, by about 3000 B.C.E. It benefited from trade and technological influence from Mesopotamia, but it produced different social structures and cultural expressions. Unlike Mesopotamian civilization, Egyptian civilization featured very durable and centralized state institutions. Mathematical achievements and impressive architectural forms, including the pyramids, also characterized Egyptian civilization.

Indian River Valley Civilization: A prosperous urban civilization emerged along the Indus River by 2500 B.C.E., supporting several large cities, including Harappa, whose houses had running water. Indus River peoples had trading contacts with Mesopotamia, but they developed a distinctive alphabet and artistic forms. Invasions by Indo-Europeans, however, resulted in such complete destruction of this culture that little is known about its subsequent influence on India.

Chinese River Valley Civilization: Civilization along the Huanghe River in China developed in considerable isolation, though some overland trading contact developed with India and the Middle East. In addition to the existence of an organized state that carefully regulated irrigation in the flood-prone river valley, the Chinese had produced advanced technology and elaborate intellectual life by about 2000 B.C.E. There was also less of a break between Chinese river valley society and the later emergence of civilization in China than in any other case.

The Shang Dynasty: The Shang ruled over the Huanghe River valley by about 1500 B.C.E. These rulers are noted for constructing substantial tombs and palaces. The Zhou took over the river valley from the Shang around 1000 B.C.E., ruling a loose coalition of regional lords.

Jews: They were the most influential of the smaller Middle Eastern groups that gave the world the first clearly developed monotheistic religion. They settled near the Mediterranean around 1200 B.C.E. but were never able to form a strong political or military tradition. However, Jewish monotheism has sustained a distinctive Jewish culture to our own day; it would also serve as a key basis for the development of both Christianity and Islam as major world religions.

Neolithic Age: (8000 - 5000 B.C.E) Time period when people used polished stone artifacts and were farmers.

Bands: Social organization used by hunter-gatherer societies with associations of families not exceeding 25 to 60 people.

Bronze Age: (4000 - 1500 B.C.E.) Subdivision of prehistory based on technological advancement in which bronze metalwork was developed in the Middle East.

Hunting and gathering: Preindustrial state in which members use a combination of hunting and gathering to acquire food.

Slash and burn agriculture: System of agriculture that allows farmers to grow grain in places it does not naturally grow. It involves cutting the forestation of an area which is burned for the purposes of using the ashes as fertilizer for the deforested area.

Nomads: People with no permanent home but who roam from place to place searching for pasture lands.

Babylonians: (1800 – 1600 B.C.E) One of the Amorite kingdoms in Mesopotamia which developed an empire centralized at the city-state of Babylon; collapsed due to foreign invasion.

Ideographic: Type of written communication in which symbols are used to represent concepts; typical of Chinese writing.

LESSON SUGGESTIONS

Change Analysis Neolithic revolution

Societal Comparison Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, China

Document Analysis Hammurabi's Law Code

Inner/Outer Circle In Depth: The Idea of Civilization in World Historical Perspective