

Chapter 2: Early Societies in Southwest Asia and the Indo-European Migrations

Overview

Because of the agricultural transition, societies could sustain larger populations and could become increasingly complex. Thus urban societies emerged in the fourth millennium B.C.E., particularly in the region known as Mesopotamia ("the land between the rivers") along the fertile river valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates. Some of the world's earliest cities developed and prospered in that region. Mesopotamian prosperity and sophisticated culture attracted many migrants and influenced many neighbors, including the Hebrews, the Phoenicians, and the Indo-Europeans. Characteristics of Mesopotamian societies included the following:

- Governmental institutions were established to provide order and stability and to resolve disputes. These institutions evolved into hereditary kingships and, at times, into empires when states sought to expand their dominion to neighboring lands.
- Social classes emerged as the result of specialization of labor and accumulation of wealth. The agricultural surplus and the accompanying specialization allowed individuals and groups to produce goods of high quality. The desire for these goods, in turn, helped to stimulate trade with other societies, greatly expanding intercultural contact.
- Distinctive cultural traditions developed, including a system of writing that would endure for thousands of years, and more elaborate religious institutions than had previously existed.

Chapter Outline

I. The quest for order

- A. Mesopotamia: "the land between the rivers"
 1. Valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates
 2. Little rain, so area needs irrigation (small scale by 6000 B.C.E.)
 3. Food supplies increase
 - a. Human population increases
 - b. Migrants to the area increase--especially Semites
 - c. Sumer (in south) becomes population center
 4. First cities emerge, 4000 B.C.E.
 - a. Between 3200 and 2350 B.C.E., they evolve into city-states (control of surrounding region)
 - b. Governments sponsor building projects and irrigation
 - c. Attacks by others led to wall building and military development
 - d. Kingships evolve with cooperation of noble families
- B. The course of empire
 1. Sargon of Akkad (2370-2315 B.C.E.)
 - a. Coup against king of Kish
 - b. Seizes trade routes and natural resources
 - c. Gradually empire weakens and collapses about 2000 B.C.E.
 2. Hammurabi (1792-1750 B.C.E.)
 - a. Centralizes the bureaucracy and regulates taxation
 - b. Capital is Babylon
 - c. Law Code: law of retribution and importance of social status
 - d. Hittite assault and empire crumbles in 1595 B.C.E.
- C. The later Mesopotamian empires
 1. Assyrians (northern Mesopotamia), about 1300-612 B.C.E.
 - a. Cities: Assur and Ninevah
 - b. Powerful army: professional officers (merit), chariots, archers, iron weapons
 - c. Unpopular rule leads to rebellions; ends 612 B.C.E.
 2. New Babylonian empire, 600-550 B.C.E.
 - a. Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 B.C.E.)
 - b. Hanging gardens of palace shows wealth and luxury

II. The formation of a complex society and sophisticated cultural traditions

- A. Economic specialization and trade
 1. Bronze (made from copper and tin); used in weapons and later agricultural tools
 2. Iron (about 1000 B.C.E.), cheaper and more widely available; used in weapons and tools
 3. Wheel (about 3500 B.C.E.) helps trade; carts can carry more goods further
 4. Shipbuilding: maritime trade increases in all directions; network develops
- B. The emergence of a stratified patriarchal society
 1. Social classes
 - a. Cities: more opportunities to accumulate wealth
 - b. Kings (hereditary) and nobles (royal family and supporters) are highest class
 - c. Priests and priestesses rule temple communities with large incomes and staff
 - d. Free commoners (peasants), dependent clients (no property); pay taxes and labor on building projects
 - e. Slaves (POWs, criminals, debt servitude): mostly domestic servants
 2. Patriarchy
 - a. Hammurabi's code: men are head of the household
 - b. Women get fewer rights after 2000 B.C.E.; by 1500 B.C.E. are wearing veils
- C. The development of written cultural traditions
 1. Cuneiform, Mesopotamian writing style, becomes standard
 - a. Reed stylus (wedge-shaped) pressed in clay then baked
 - b. Mostly commercial and tax documents
 2. Education: vocational to be scribe or government official
 3. Literature: astronomy, mathematics, abstract (religious and literary like Gilgamesh)

III. The broader influence of Mesopotamian society

- A. Hebrews, Israelites, and Jews
 1. Early Hebrews are pastoral nomads between Mesopotamia and Egypt (second millennium B.C.E.)
 - a. Settle in some cities
 - b. Abraham leads group to Palestine 1850 B.C.E.
 - c. Descendants borrow law of retribution and flood story from Mesopotamia
 2. Some migrate to Egypt in eighteenth century B.C.E. then back to Palestine with Moses
 - a. Twelve tribes become Israelites
 - b. Mesopotamian-style monarchs with Jerusalem as capital
 - c. David (1000-970 B.C.E.) then Solomon (970-930 B.C.E.)
 3. Moses and monotheism
 - a. Ten Commandments: moral and ethical standards for followers
 - b. Compilation of teachings into Torah (1000-400 B.C.E.)
 4. Assyrians conquer
 - a. Conquer Israel in north and Judah in south and destroy Jerusalem
 - b. Deportees return to Judea; become known as Jews (586 B.C.E.)
 - c. Prophets in this period increase devotion of people
 - d. Build distinct Jewish community in Judea with strong group identity
- B. The Phoenicians
 1. First settlers about 3000 B.C.E.; develop into kingdoms of independent city-states
 2. Little agriculture; live on trade and communications networks
 - a. Overland trade to Mesopotamia; influence on culture
 - b. Sea trade most important; get raw materials, trade for manufactured goods
 3. Have early alphabetical script (1500 B.C.E.)

IV. The Indo-European migrations

- A. Indo-European origins
 1. Linguists discover similarities between many languages; they must be related
 2. Originate in steppes of central Asia; pastoral people; 4500-2500 B.C.E.
 3. Domesticate horses; learn to ride; use horses with carts, then chariots
- B. Indo-European expansion and its effects

1. Indo-European society breaks up about 3000 B.C.E.; peoples gradually migrate
2. Hittites settle in central Anatolia about 2000 B.C.E.
 - a. Build powerful kingdoms
 - b. Conquer Babylonian empire 1595 B.C.E.
 - c. Dissolve by about 1200 B.C.E.
 - d. Technology: light horse-drawn chariots (spokes) and iron metallurgy
3. Some migrate into central Asia by 2000 B.C.E.
4. Other migrations: Greece, Italy, central Europe, western Europe, Britain
 - a. All pastoral agriculturalists
 - b. All speak related languages and worship similar deities
5. Later wave of migrations to Iran and India ("Aryan")