

UNIT ONE

TECHNOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSFORMATIONS TO 600 B.C.E.

Of all the time periods covered in the AP World History curriculum, this first one spans the largest number of years. It includes an important Marker Event – the **Neolithic Revolution** – and ends after the fall of the earliest urban societies in the Middle East, South Asia, China, and the Americas.

Key concepts within this time period include:

- Geographical settings and human adaptations and migrations
- Early development in agriculture and technology
- The development of urban societies and their interactions with pastoral and subsistence agricultural societies.

The time period is so vast that there are many ways to divide it into periods or eras. However, some major breaks within the time period are these:

Early agricultural and technological development (about 8000 B.C.E. to 3500 B.C.E.) – Small groups of settlers grew into kinship-based villages that practiced both crop cultivation and domestication of animals. Tools and inventions helped villages to stabilize and eventually grow.

Development of the earliest civilizations (about 3500 to 1000 B.C.E.) – Villages grew into cities that came to dominate the land around them. Collectively they are known as the “river valley” civilizations in Eurasia with **Mesopotamia** (developed by about 3500 B.C.E.) between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in the Middle East, **Egypt** (developed by about 3500 B.C.E.) along the Nile River in northeastern Africa, the **Indus Valley** people (developed by about 2500 B.C.E.) along the Indus River in south central Asia and **Shang China** (developed by about 1700 B.C.E.) along several rivers in the north China plains. Early civilizations also developed in MesoAmerica, with the **Olmecs** who appeared by about 1200 B.C.E. in what is now Mexico and in Andean South America, and with the **Chavin**, which developed between 1800 and 1200 B.C.E.

A NOTE ABOUT PREHISTORY (BEFORE 3500 B.C.E.)

A basic type of periodization is to divide all of time into “prehistory” and “history.” Usually the distinction is based on whether or not the people left written records, but the presence of written records is very closely tied to the beginnings of agriculture. Scholars are not entirely sure about when human beings first appeared on earth, but new discoveries continue to push the date further back in time. So “prehistory” lasted for millions of years.

The first humans probably emerged in eastern Africa, due to a happy confluence of availability of food and domesticable animals and favorable climate. For thousands of years humans sustained themselves as hunters and gatherers, and as a result were quite dependent on the abundance of food. Hunters gained skills in capturing and killing animals, and gatherers learned which plants and fruits were edible and nutritious. Technological inventions generally supported the fulfillment of these basic activities. Stones (and eventually metals) were shaped as tools and weapons, and techniques were developed for efficient gathering and storage of food.

By 8000 B.C.E., humans had migrated to many other areas, probably following the herds and other available food sources. Major migrations include:

- **Early Africans to Australia, the Middle East, Europe, and Asia**
- **Asians across the land bridge to the Americas**

Our knowledge of prehistoric people is limited, partly because they lived so long ago, and partly because they left no written records. However, archaeologists have found evidence of these generally shared characteristics of prehistoric people:

- 1) **Social structure** – Most people traveled in small bands, and authority was based on family relationships. Men took leadership roles, but women were highly valued for their gathering skills. Labor was generally divided based on gender, with men as hunters and women as gatherers. However, status differences between men and women were generally not wide, with relative gender equality apparently characterizing their group life.
- 2) **Beliefs** – Archaeological evidence suggests that prehistoric people were guided by their beliefs in spirits and sacred places. Their cave drawings and traces of their cultural objects indicate that they believed in an afterlife, although they probably did not practice **polytheism**, or a belief in many gods. Instead, **polydaemonism**, or the belief in many spirits (not specific gods), probably describes their religion more accurately. Bushes, rocks, trees, plants, or streams could be inhabited by these spirits, who often appeared to communicate with humans.

The prehistoric era includes the early stages of agriculture from about 10,000 to 4,000 B.C.E., but once settlement began, the stage was set for the development of reading and writing and the period known as “history.”

EARLY AGRICULTURAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

When, how, and why did people give up their wandering and settle to live in one place? First of all, it happened in different parts of the world at different times, but settled communities had developed in many places by 8000 B.C.E. The ability to settle was based almost entirely on successful cultivation of crops and domestication of animals. These drastic changes in human life are known collectively as the **Neolithic Revolution**

that almost certainly happened independently in different places over a large span of time. For example, the people settling along the major rivers in China did not learn to farm because they were in contact with the people in the Indus River area. Instead, people in both areas probably figured out the advantages of settled life on their own. Although the Neolithic Revolution was one of the most significant Marker Events in world history, it occurred gradually and probably by trial and error.

Villages emerged as populations increased and communities began to settle near their fields. One of these Neolithic villages, Catal Huyuk in southern Turkey, has been studied extensively. Founded around 7000 B.C.E., it covered 32 acres. Obviously the nature of village life in these permanent communities of large size was very different than life for pastoral (peoples that follow herds) and nomadic societies.

The social and economic changes that resulted from the Neolithic Revolution include:

- **Increase in reliable food supplies** – Agricultural skills, which allowed people to control food production, and the domestication of animals, both helped to make agricultural production more efficient and increased the availability of food.
- **Rapid increase in total human population** – Reliable food supplies meant that people were less likely to starve to death. With increasing life spans came increasing reproduction, and more children meant that there were more people to tend the land and animals.
- **Job specialization** – Other occupations than farming developed, since fewer people were needed to produce food. Some early specialized jobs include priests, traders, and builders.
- **Widening of gender differences** – Status distinctions between men and women increased, as men took over most agricultural cultivation and domestication of animals. Women were responsible for raising children, cooking food, and keeping the house, but in virtually all of the early civilizations men became more and more dominant. A **patriarchal system** commonly developed, with men holding power in the family, the economy, and the government.
- **Development of distinction between settled people and “nomads”** – All people did not settle into communities but remained as hunters and gatherers. As more settled communities developed, the distinction between agriculturalists and hunters and gatherers grew.
- **Impact of agriculture on the environment** – The spread of agriculture significantly altered the natural environment. Humans cleared land, diverted water, introduced crops to new areas, domesticated animals, built permanent structures, worked hard to predict natural events such as floods, and attempted to protect themselves from catastrophes such as droughts. Of course, even today humans still are victims of environmental catastrophes, but the development of agriculture was a major turning point in terms of human attempts to control the environment.