CHAPTER 2
EARLY SOCIETIES IN SOUTHWEST ASIA AND
THE INDO-EUROPEAN MIGRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

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. Some of the characteristics of Mesopotamian societies were

- The establishment of governmental institutions 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.

- The emergence of social classes 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 that developed including a system of writing that would endure for thousands of years and more elaborate religious institutions than had previously existed.

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 show 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 farther
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 become 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
         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")

IDENTIFICATION: PEOPLE

What is the contribution of each of the following individuals to world history? Identification should include answers to the questions who, what, where, when, how, and why is this person important? (Figures with an asterisk are found in the glossary.)

Gilgamesh*
Sargon of Akkad
Hammurabi
Nebuchadnezzar
King David
King Solomon
Moses
IDENTIFICATION: TERMS/CONCEPTS

State in your own words what each of the following terms means and why it is significant to a study of world history. (Terms with an asterisk are defined in the glossary.)

_Epic of Gilgamesh_

Mesopotamia*

Sumer/Sumerians*

Tigris

Euphrates

Ziggurat*

Akkad/Akkadian

Hammurabi’s Code*

_Lex talionis_*

Assyrians*

New Babylonia

Hanging gardens

Bronze metallurgy

Iron

Patriarchy

Cuneiform*

Hebrews/Israelites/Jews

Palestine

Israel

Judea

Ten Commandments

Torah

Phoenicians
Astarte

Indo-Europeans*

Hittites

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. What does the *Epic of Gilgamesh* tell us about the culture in which it emerged?

2. What was the significance of the need for irrigation to the political development of Mesopotamia?

3. What were the underlying principles of Hammurabi’s code of laws, and what does the law code tell us about the kind of society that existed in Mesopotamia at the time?

4. Why were the Assyrians such formidable conquerors?

5. What were the technological innovations of the early Mesopotamians, and how did they contribute to the development of the culture and to its overall economic prosperity?

6. What were the social strata in ancient Mesopotamia and, in general, what roles did women play?

7. What is the significance of the development of cuneiform writing to the Mesopotamian culture and the surrounding areas?

8. Compare and contrast the history of the early Jewish community and the Phoenician culture. How did the Mesopotamians influence each?

9. What were the origins and early development of the Indo-Europeans?

10. Discuss where and how the Indo-European cultures spread through Eurasia.

**INQUIRY QUESTIONS**

1. Some historians refer to Mesopotamia as the “cradle of civilization.” Why is this? Do you agree that “civilization” originated there? Why or why not?

2. Compare and contrast the *lasting* contributions of the Sumerians, Jews, Phoenicians, and Indo-Europeans. Which culture do you believe made the most significant contributions? Why?

3. Warfare was a significant factor in the development of all the cultures discussed in this chapter. Analyze how political institutions, economic factors, social factors, and technology interplayed to create conflict and war throughout this region.
MATCHING
Match these peoples with the statements that follow.

A. Hittites  F. Aryans
B. Chaldeans  G. Phoenicians
C. Jews  H. Sumerians
D. Hebrews  I. Assyrians
E. Akkadians

1. ___ Indo-Europeans who built an empire with the technologies of chariots and iron weapons.
2. ___ Independent city-states that influenced other societies through their trade and industry.
3. ___ The earliest urban-based society in Mesopotamia; they developed cuneiform writing.
4. ___ Northern Mesopotamians who built an empire by first conquering Sumer.
5. ___ Semitic pastoral polytheists who settled the region of Palestine about 1850 B.C.E.
6. ___ Empire under King Nebuchadnezzar who lavished wealth and resources on his capital.
7. ___ Wave of Indo-Europeans who migrated into India and built powerful states.
8. ___ Group, exiled by New Babylonian conquerors, who eventually returned to Judea.
9. ___ Powerful and intimidating army that built far-flung empire including Mesopotamia, Palestine, and much of Egypt.

SEQUENCING
Place the following clusters of events in chronological order. Consider carefully how one event leads to another, and try to determine the internal logic of each sequence.

A.

___ King Hammurabi has laws codified.
___ Sargon overthrows king of Kish, then wages war on other city-states.
___ King Nebuchadnezzar commissions the hanging gardens of Babylon.
___ Legendary reign of King Gilgamesh.
___ Assyrians conquer entire region of Mesopotamia.
B.

____ Moses leads the Hebrews out of Egypt.

____ Federation of twelve tribes carves out territory for themselves in region of Palestine.

____ Some Hebrews make their way into Egypt.

____ Israelites divide into two kingdoms: Israel and Judea.

____ Hebrews migrate from Sumer into Palestine.

____ Moses announces the Ten Commandments to the Israelites.

____ Exiles return to Judea, organize several small states, and build religious community.

____ City of Jerusalem destroyed by the New Babylonian empire.

QUOTATIONS

For each of the following quotes, identify the speaker, if known, or the point of view. What is the significance of each passage?

1. “And behold, I plan to build a house in the name of the Lord, my God. . . . Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon, and my servants shall be with thy servants.”

2. “So the gods in their hearts were moved to let loose the deluge; but my lord Ea warned me in a dream . . . ‘tear down your house and build a boat.’ For six days and six night the winds blew, torrent and tempest and flood overwhelmed the world.”

3. “If a seignior wishes to divorce his wife who did not bear him children, he shall give her money to the full amount of her marriage price and . . . the dowry . . . and then he may divorce her.”

4. “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make yourself a graven image. . . . Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . Honor your father and your mother.”

MAP EXERCISES

1. Study the map on page 53 in the textbook (Map 2.4) and then go to the Internet and find a map that shows the distribution of modern Indo-European languages. What modern languages are Indo-European? According to the map in the textbook, when is it likely that each language began developing independently? How does studying the relationships among modern languages shed light on historical migration?
2. On the outline map of Europe, north Africa, and southwest Asia below, combine the information contained in Maps 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 in the textbook. Include the following, using different colors for different millennia: Sumer, Akkad, Assur, Uruk, Ur, Anatolia, Ninevah, Babylon, Tigris, Euphrates, Persian Gulf, Egypt, Israel, Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre, Carthage, Panermo, Gadir. Identify which location goes with which culture or cultures.

CONNECTIONS

In fifty words or less, explain the relationship between each of the following pairs. How does one lead to or foster the other? Be specific in your response. (May be done individually or in small groups.)

- Cuneiform and Gilgamesh
- Hammurabi and Hebrews
- Phoenicians and bronze
- Chariots and empire
- Indo-Europeans and iron

FILMS


*Archenemy: The Philistines.* The History Channel.

*Mesopotamia – Return to Eden.* Time/Life Films, Lost Civilizations Series.