

The Rise of Sumerian City-States

I. Introduction

- A. Small Neolithic villages grew into large, complex cities
- B. Villages were located in an area called Mesopotamia
- C. Greek word that means the “land between the rivers.”
- D. Two main rivers of the Fertile Crescent are the Tigris River and the Euphrates River
- E. Cities first appeared in the southern part of this land.
- F. Ruins in the Syrian Desert reveal an ancient Sumerian walled city
- G. Earliest cities in this area date back to about 3500 B.C.; were like small, independent countries

II. Mesopotamia: A Difficult Environment

- A. Not easy to live in the part of the Fertile Crescent called Mesopotamia
- B. Mesopotamia: in ancient times, the geographic area located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers
- C. Tigris & Euphrates Rivers: the two largest rivers in Southwest Asia that flow from the mountains in Turkey to the Persian Gulf
- D. Mesopotamians were farmers; farms needed water
- E. Building materials were difficult to find
- F. Faced 4 major problems as they tried to survive in this environment:
 - 1. Food shortages in the hills
 - 2. An uncontrolled water supply on the plains
 - 3. Difficulties in building and maintaining systems that provided water across village boundaries
 - 4. Attacks by neighboring communities

III. Food Shortages in the Hills

- A. Mild weather & plentiful rains made the foothills a good place to farm
- B. Some historians believe that by 5000 B.C., farmers in the Zagros foothills didn't have enough land to grow food for the increasing population
- C. Below the foothills & to the south, the Euphrates and Tigris rivers ran through flat plains
- D. In spring, both rivers flooded, bringing water to the land
- E. Driven by the need to grow food, people moved out of the foothills & onto the plains
- F. This region became known as Sumer; its people, the Sumerians

IV. Uncontrolled Water Supplies in the River Valley

- A. During the spring, rain & melted snow flowed into the Tigris & Euphrates rivers, causing them to flood across the plains
- B. For much of the rest of the year, the soil was dry and hard as stone

- C. Farmers constantly struggled to raise crops
- D. Needed a way to control the water so they would have a reliable water supply year round
- E. Sumerian farmers began to create irrigation systems for fields; built levees along the sides of the river to prevent flooding
- F. Levee: a wall of earth built to prevent a river from flooding its banks
- G. Over time, Sumerians learned other ways to control the supply of water

V. Building and Maintaining a Complex Irrigation System

- A. Irrigation systems provided enough water for farmers to grow plenty of food
- B. A new problem arose: how to maintain the irrigation system across village boundaries
- C. The irrigation system needed constant care and repair
- D. Silt: fine particles of rock
- E. Villages were connected for miles around by canals, farmers had to work together for the common good
- F. Villages came to depend on one another to build and maintain the complex irrigation system
- G. As Sumerians worked together, they created larger communities

VI. Attacks by Neighboring Communities

- A. As cities grew, Sumerians fought over the right to use more water
- B. Disputes over water became so intense they often led to bloodshed
- C. Sumerians looked for ways to protect cities from neighboring communities
- D. Sumerians began to build strong walls around their cities
- E. Walled cities of Sumer were like independent countries
- F. City-states: an early city that was like a small, independent country with its own laws and government

VII. From Small Farming Villages to Large City-States

- A. Beginning around 3500 B.C., Sumerians progressed from living in small farming villages to building large, walled cities
- B. To control the water supply, Sumerians built a complex irrigation system; it crossed village boundaries, Sumerians had to cooperate with one another
- C. This led them to live in larger communities: the first cities
- D. To defend themselves, Sumerians built walls and dug moats around their cities