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Ways of the World: A Brief Global History with Sources
Second Edition

Chapter 1
First Peoples, First Farmers: Most of History in a Single Chapter, to 4000 B.C.E.
I. Out of Africa to the Ends of the Earth: First Migrations

A. Into Eurasia
   1. Migrations: 45,000–20,000 years ago: Starting 45,000 years ago, a series of migrations out of Africa and the Middle East populated Asia and Europe. Around 20,000 years ago, colder Ice Age temperatures moved humans from northern Europe towards the south and brought new hunting tools.
   2. New hunting tools: Moving southwards, humans developed spears, bows, arrows, and stone tools to hunt reindeer and horses.
   3. Cave paintings: Earliest existing records of representative human communication, mostly animals and human forms but also some abstract symbols.
   4. Venus figurines: Female figures with exaggerated breasts and hips across Eurasia raise the possibility of widespread networks of human communication.

B. Into Australia
   1. Migrations by boats as early as 60,000 years ago: From Indonesia into Australia by boats, a human first.
   2. Dreamtime: Contemporary Australian Aboriginal concept that expresses a world outlook that places human activity and knowledge in the continent’s natural environment of rocks, rivers, and waterholes.
I. Out of Africa to the Ends of the Earth: First Migrations

C. Into the Americas
   1. Bering Strait migrations: 30,000–15,000 years ago: Humans used land bridges created by colder temperatures and lower sea levels.
   2. Clovis culture: Common type of projectile point called “Clovis point” found all over North America. Used by Clovis people to hunt large animals.
   3. Large animal extinctions: Unclear why extinctions happened (perhaps over hunting or weather changes?) but suddenly Clovis culture disappeared.
   4. Diversification of lifestyles: After the extinction of the mega-fauna, humans adapted to various ecological niches with some remaining mobile foragers and hunters and others developing agriculture and urbanization.

D. Into the Pacific
   1. Waterborne migrations 3,500–1,000 years ago: Migrations came from Solomon and Bismarck Islands near New Guinea and from the Philippines to all corners of the Pacific (and from Indonesia to Madagascar in the Indian Ocean) and showed exceptional seamanship and navigation skills.
   2. Intentional colonization of new lands: Unlike other migrations, these were done by agricultural people with the intentional of finding new lands and creating new communities. Common pattern of highly stratified societies.
   3. Human environmental impacts: Species such as the moa in New Zealand and many large trees of Rapa Nui were overused by these settlers, resulting in waves of manmade extinctions of flora and fauna.
II. The Ways We Were

A. The First Human Societies
   1. Small populations with low density
   2. Egalitarian societies
   3. Widespread violence

B. Economy and the Environment
   1. The “original affluent society?”
   2. Altering the environment

C. The realm of the Spirit
   1. Ceremonial space
   2. Cyclical view of time

II. The Ways We Were

A. The First Human Societies
   1. Small populations with low density: Bands of twenty-five to fifty people organized by kinship. Sumatran mega-volcanic eruption 70,000 years ago lowered global temperatures and decreased human population to 10,000—a number that flirted with extinction.
   2. Egalitarian societies: Small numbers and relatively little accumulated wealth made these Paleolithic communities very egalitarian with little social stratification and relative equality between the sexes.
   3. Widespread violence: Without formal state systems, inter-personal violence was common and the community as a whole might punish a wrongdoer with death.

B. Economy and the Environment
   1. The “original affluent society?”: Gathering and hunting required fewer work hours than agriculture, allowing more leisure time. That said, these societies had limited needs to be met.
   2. Altering the environment: Setting fires and hunting had clear impacts on the environment, showing early human alteration of the landscape and species, including extinctions.

C. The realm of the Spirit
   1. Ceremonial space: While it is very difficult to research spiritual beliefs of prehistoric people, there is clear evidence of specific sites such as caves associated with various forms of spiritual and ceremonial activity.
   2. Cyclical view of time: While there were varieties of mono and polytheism in these cultures, there was a strong feminine dimension that concerned the regeneration and renewal of life. Thus the natural cycles of human life influenced early religious thought.
II. The Ways We Were

D. Settling Down: The Great Transition

1. New tools and collecting wild grains: Micro-blades allowed more precision and dexterity for human work. Better spear points were developed, as were better knives, scrappers, and arrowheads.

2. Climate change and permanent communities: A warming trend in the long-term natural climate cycles altered the habitats of plants and animals, allowing many to flourish. This allowed some humans to settle down and create permanent dwellings such as the Jomon societies in Japan and the longhouses of Labrador.

3. Göbekli Tepe: “The First Temple”: In southwestern Turkey, this 11,600-year-old site is built out of massive limestone pillars (some 16 tons) placed in a set of circles and decorated with carvings of animals. It is the product of gathering and hunting people who spent part of the year in a settled site.

4. Settlements make greater demands on environment: Settlement allowed for population growth, but these larger communities needed more food, thus placing greater demand on the environment and creating a need to increase the food supply.
III. Breakthroughs to Agriculture

A. Common Patterns

1. Separate, independent, and almost simultaneous: Between 12,000–4,000 years ago, agriculture developed in Fertile Crescent of Southwest Asia, several places in sub-Saharan Africa, China, New Guinea, Mesoamerica, the Andes, and eastern North America. As this happened within the context of 250,000 years of human history, it was surprisingly simultaneous.

2. Climate change: Warming started 16,000 years ago; by about 11,000 years ago, the Ice Age was over, creating warmer, wetter, and more stable conditions for human settlement and allowing for the flourishing of plants that were soon domesticated.

3. Gender patterns: As traditional plant gatherers, women likely led the way towards developing agriculture. As hunters, men likely led the way towards animal domestication. Many communities had long experience collecting plants such as grains in the Middle East and trapping animals such as eels in Australia.

4. A response to population growth: The warmer climate at the end of the Ice Age may have allowed a dramatic population growth of gatherer-hunter communities, thus necessitating a more abundant and stable food supply. Farming may have come after developing a sedentary way of life.
Map 1.3 The Global Spread of Agriculture and Pastoralism
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III. Breakthroughs to Agriculture

B. Variations

1. Local plants and animals determine path to agriculture: Geographical dispersion of various plants and animals suitable for domestication was quite varied and determined the path to agriculture.

2. Fertile Crescent first with a quick, 500-year transition: Due to climate changes and human migrations as well as grains suitable for cultivation, the Middle East saw a rapid transition to settled farming.

3. Multiple sites in Africa: With a dramatically different climate than contemporary Africa (the Sahara was wetter and fit for human habitation), multiple sites of agriculture developed south of the Sahara, each exploiting a plant adapted to that specific region.

4. Potatoes and Maize but few animals in the Americas: Lacking the cereal grains of the Fertile Crescent, the Americas saw the development of maize (corn) in Mesoamerica and potatoes in the Andes over a period of several thousand years. With the exception of the llama, the Americas lacked suitable animals for domestication. This was in sharp contrast to Eurasia.
Spot Map: Bantu Migrations
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IV. The Globalization of Agriculture

A. Triumph and Resistance

1. Diffusion and migration: Agriculture spread by diffusion, which involved exposure and adoption. The spread from China into Southeast Asia is an example of this process. Agriculture also spread by migration, which involved agricultural ways of life being forced on conquered people or the displacement of existing communities. The sub-Saharan African Bantu migrations illustrate this phenomenon.

2. Resistance: Some resisted agriculture for environmental reasons. For some, their land was not well suited but for others, the land was so abundant that they did not need farming.

3. End of old ways of life: Settled agricultural communities were often incompatible with gathering and hunting groups, leading to violent displacement. Some pre-agricultural societies were changed by exposure to technology and epidemic diseases and others inter-married with members of the new settled societies.
IV. The Globalization of Agriculture

B. The Culture of Agriculture

1. Dramatic population increase: 6,000,000 people in the world 10,000 years ago, 50,000,000 people 5,000 years ago, and 250,000,000 people 2,000 years ago.

2. Increased human impact on the environment: More humans meant a greater impact on the planet, specifically human selection of favorable plants and animals. Early examples of overuse of land were soil erosion and deforestation.

3. Negative health impacts: Agricultural life led to shorter life expectancy; people had a shorter physical stature and were plagued by tooth decay, anemia, and malnutrition. Relying on small numbers of crops and animals meant these communities were vulnerable to famine brought on by crop failure or drought.

4. Technological innovations: As seen in Banpo (near present day Xian, China), there was an explosion of technological development such as pottery, jewelry, weaponry, and tool making. Animals were used for secondary purposes, such as hides, wool, milking, and transport.

5. Alcohol: Wine and beer became common between 5400 and 4000 B.C.E., as did rowdy behavior. Drunken debauchery and carousing among the aristocracy prompted an unsuccessful effort by one Chinese ruler around 1046 B.C.E. to outlaw wine. Mesopotamians regarded beer as a symbol of civilization.
V. Social Variation in the Age of Agriculture

A. Pastoral Societies
   1. Environmental factors: Arctic tundra, deserts, and grasslands were generally not favorable to settled agriculture, but they were good for animal husbandry.
   2. Milk, meat, and blood: These became central to the diet of these communities.
   3. Mobility: Communities moved about with their animals looking for seasonally appropriate and unexploited grazing lands.
   4. Conflict with settled communities: Age-old conflict existed between the wealthier, settled communities and the nomadic herders, with the mobile, yet poorer communities desirous of the wealth and diverse products of the villages, towns, and cities.

B. Agriculture Village Societies
   1. Social equality: Ties to social patterns of gathering and hunting communities continued in communities that did without formal state systems of kings, chiefs, and bureaucrats.
   2. Gender equity: Importance of female work in farming and textile work gave women social importance.
   3. Kinship ties and role of elders: Without a formal state system, extended family ties
linked people together with elders exercising authority (this created the opportunity for the abuse of power).
V. Social Variation in the Age of Agriculture

C. Chiefdoms

1. Not force but gifts, rituals, and charisma
2. Religious and secular authority
3. Collection and redistribution of tribute
VI. Reflections

A. “Progress?”: Some might point to these various changes as a sign of life getting better.

B. Paleolithic values: Other might find aspects of early human life as a model or lesson for contemporary society.

C. Objectivity: Condemning or romanticizing a historical era violates the historian’s need to be objective.