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Harsh Mesopotamia versus calm and relaxed Egypt

Mesopotamia and Egypt are one of the first civilizations on the earth that we can study. Even though they were geographically located relatively close to each other, the development of these two civilizations were different. Religion was extremely important for early civilizations. Analyzing the nature of the gods and relationships between the gods and the people helps to understand the peoples' lifestyle in different regions. Social relationships were another big component of people's lives. To get a clear analysis of civilizations the primary source readings will be used because they are the most reliable sources. For Mesopotamia, primary sources that are being analyzed are *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and *Hammurabi Code*, and for Egypt, *Hymn to the Nile* and *Negative Confessions*.

Mesopotamians' religion was polytheistic; they believed in multiple gods. There was no recorded number of the gods, but *The Epic of Gilgamesh* gives the reader the idea that there were a lot of them, saying that "they gathered like flies over the sacrifice" (Gilgamesh, 541). *The Epic of Gilgamesh* tells the reader the story how the gods decided to exterminate mankind, so they sent a huge flood to them. The problem with the gods was that they had such power that "Even the gods were terrified at the flood, they fled to the highest heaven. . . they crouched against the walls, cowering like curs" (Gilgamesh, 540). Such a behavior shows that the gods were actually not that far from humankind; they were also afraid of the flood, even though they made the flood. They were more like humans with superpowers but not sure how to use them wisely. As the gods have way more power than regular humans, they separate themselves from humans. When there were too many people "the great god was

aroused by the clamour” (Gilgamesh, 538) which was why the gods decided to get rid of all the people. As the reader can see, the relationships between the gods and the people were not that good. Such an angst relationship indicates that the people of Mesopotamia were harsh to everything around them including other people and the gods. The development of the harsh Mesopotamian nature was determined because of their geographical location.

Mesopotamian’s rivers were not predictable and river floods affect the amount of food the people will get each year. Food is the most important product for everyone, so without food the people get angry, harsh, and anxious. Also their land was pretty open for invaders, so Mesopotamians had to be harsh to be ready to fight others.

Hammurabi’s code gives the reader the opportunity to see the social life of the Mesopotamian people. At the first glance it may seem that the laws were very straightforward, “If he break a man’s bone, they shall break his bone” (Code, 10). Actually there was a very clear separation between the classes – the slave, the man and the common man. So if the man knocks out the tooth of the man from the same class, he will get his tooth knocked out. However, “If he knock out a tooth of a common man, he shall pay one-third mana of silver” (Code, 10). Also there were many laws for wives, what wife shall not do, but nothing about a husband’s responsibilities. This means that women and men were not equally treated. Another interesting fact is that these laws were mostly about physical behavior, so Mesopotamians did not really care about the moral ideas. Same as their relationships with the gods were influenced by the living environment, these laws were too. They were harsh and their living habits were more about survival rather than enjoying their life. They did not have time for moral development, they had to protect and feed themselves first. The geographical position influenced the development of the harsh nature of the Mesopotamian’s civilization which reflected on their laws and on their representation of their gods.

Same as Mesopotamian's religion, Egypt's was polytheistic but they had an exact number of the main gods: "I know the exact number of the forty-two gods" (Confession, 15). This indicates that Egyptian religion was more organized. The gods themselves were organized as well. Each god had his or her own special attributes, what they were responsible for, so they could better control their power and did not have arguments among themselves. There was also a clear distinction between the people and the gods. Regular humans do not get to see the gods before death; they only meet them after death in "the Hall of Righteousness" (Confession, 15). So in real life they were kind of distant from the gods. Even though they pray and sacrifice for them, they never get any feedback, never actually talk to them. Whereas Mesopotamians' actually talk to their gods and have a more physical contact. Although Egyptian people were not that physically close to the gods, they were in very good relationships with them. Egyptians admired and respected their gods – "I am not a doer if that which the gods abhor" (Confession, 16). It is understandable why Egypt people love their gods that much because the gods do what the people were asking for. Nile is the main source of water for Egypt, so all agriculture depends on Nile's inundations. Nile is a very predictable river. The people keep praying for the Nile and "sacrifice is offered to every god as it is made to the Nile" (Hymn, 15). The people think Nile's inundation consistency is the gods' merit, so they actually love their gods. As the people have more positive relationships with the gods, they also have less harsh relationships among themselves.

Egypt does not actually have the compilations of the codes as Mesopotamians do but they have *Negative Confession* – compilations of statements that person should not do in order to get a good life after death. From this Confession the reader can get the idea of Egypt's social life and structure. Egypt same as Mesopotamia has different classes and gender differences but everyone respects each other. In Confession it says: "I hurt no servant with his master" (Confession, 16), which means that the people had an equal respect to the

different classes; they cared about their servants. Also there is a statement “I am not an adulterer” (Confession, 16). That statement means that both male and female must be loyal to the spouse, so they were equally treated, whereas in *Hammurabi’s Code* there are only loyalty rules for females and nothing for males. Another important observation of Egyptian civilization is that they care more about the moral principles assuming that physical damage was included in morality. Along with the statement “I am not a murderer,” there goes “I give no orders for murder” (Confession, 16). Such a phrasing is less selfish and with more respect to all the people around them. Another example of Egyptians’ morality is a statement: “I am not a doer of mischief” (Confession, 16). The reader can clearly see how Egyptian civilization was way less harsh and more relaxed. Their life was simpler than Mesopotamians’ because of their geographic location. Egypt had a predictable river, so they always had enough food. Also Egypt had natural borders that protected them from different invaders. Egyptian did not have to only focus on surviving, so they were more relaxed. Along with that they did not have to spend time for preparing for fighting against invaders or even among themselves for food, so they had time to develop morally.

Overall the analysis of the primary sources gives a good representation of two of the oldest civilizations in the world. Mesopotamians’ gods were not organized and could not even control themselves but in Egypt the gods were very organized. Along with that, Mesopotamians’ gods were more like humankind, but Egyptians’ were more dignified and they were distant from regular humans. However, Egyptians were in the better relationships with their gods than Mesopotamians’ were with theirs. In social life Mesopotamians had more physical laws, whereas Egyptians cared a lot about morality as well. The development of high moral standards in Egypt led to the more equal treatment of different classes and genders. The geographical location of both civilizations explains why they developed the way they did. The unpredictability of the Mesopotamian’s rivers made them think of their gods in

the worse manner, whereas a very predictable Nile made Egyptians to love their gods. Also Mesopotamia was more open for invaders so their life was more anxious compared to the relaxed Egypt with their natural borders. The hard life of Mesopotamians' made them live to survive so they developed as harsh civilization while Egypt had time to develop morally and they were developed as a calm civilization.