### The First Civilizations

**首期文明**

Evidence suggests that an important stimulus behind the rise of early civilizations was the development of settled agriculture, which unleashed a series of changes in the organization of human communities that **culminated in** the rise of large ancient empires.

证据显示， 早期文明兴起的一个重要刺激因素就是定居农业的发展。 它导致了人类群落的组织结构出现一系列变更，在古代大型帝国的兴起时达到了顶峰。

The exact time and place that crops were first cultivated successfully is uncertain. Many prehistorians believe that farming may have merged independently in several different areas of the world when small communities, driven by increasing population and a decline in available food resources, began to plant seeds in the ground in an effort to guarantee their survival. The first farmers, who may have lived as long as 10,000 years ago, **undoubtedly** used simple techniques and still relied primarily on other forms of food production, such as hunting, foraging, or pastoralism. The real breakthrough took place when farmers began to cultivate crops along the flood plains of river systems. The advantage was that crops grown in such areas were not as dependent on rainfall and therefore produced a more reliable harvest. An additional benefit was that the sediment carried by the river waters deposited nutrients in the soil, thus enabling the farmer to cultivate a single plot of ground for many years without moving to a new location. Thus, the first truly sedentary (that is, nonmigratory) societies were born. As time went on, such communities gradually learned how to direct the flow of water to **enhance** the productive capacity of the land, while the introduction of the iron plow eventually led to the cultivation of heavy soils not previously susceptible to agriculture.

庄稼究竟是何时何地被首次成功开垦种植还不得而知。 很多史前学家认为农业可能是当小型群落迫于不断增长人口和日益减少的食物资源压力而开始在地里种植种子试图维持他们的生计时，进而在世界不同区域独自兴起的。出现在 10,000 年前的最早的农民，毫无疑问地使用着简单的技术，并且仍主要依赖着其他的食物生产方式，比如狩猎，觅食或放牧。当农民开始在河川系统的泛滥平原沿岸种植庄稼的时候，真正的突破发生了。它的优点是，在这些区域种植的庄稼不会过于依赖降水， 因此会带来更可靠地收成。 它另外一个好处就是由河流带来的沉淀物会把营养物质沉积在土壤里， 这就使得农民能够在常年耕作一块土地而不用去开垦新的耕地。这样，第一个真正的定居（即不用迁徙的）社会就形成了。随着时间的推移， 这些社群逐渐知道了如何引导水流来加强土地的生产能力， 铁犁的引入也终于使之前不受用于农业的重质土壤得以开垦种植。

The spread of this river valley agriculture in various parts of Asia and Africa was the decisive factor in the rise of the first civilizations. The increase in food production in these regions led to a significant growth in population, while efforts to control the flow of water to maximize the irrigation of cultivated areas and to protect the local inhabitants from hostile forces outside the community **provoked** the first steps toward cooperative activities on a large scale. The need to oversee the entire process brought about the emergence of an elite that was eventually transformed into a government.

这种河谷农业在亚洲和非洲不同地区的传播是首次文明兴起的决定性因素。 这些地区食物产量的增长导致了人口的激增。 与此同时， 为了努力控制水流来最大化灌溉耕种区域和保护当地居民免受部落外部敌对力量的侵袭， 第一步的大规模合作活动被引发了。 而出于对整个程序步骤监督的需求，一个上层精英团体出现了。它也逐渐转变成了政府部门。

The first clear steps in the rise of the first civilizations took place in the fourth and third millennia B.C. in Mesopotamia, northern Africa, India, and China. How the first governments took shape in these areas is not certain, but anthropologists studying the evolution of human communities in various parts of the world have discovered that one common stage in the process is the emergence of what are called “big men” within a single village or a collection of villages. By means of their military prowess, dominant personalities, or political talents, these people gradually emerge as the leaders of that community. In time, the “big men” become formal symbols of authority and pass on that authority to others within their own family. As the communities continue to grow in size and material wealth, the “big men” assume hereditary status, and their allies and family members are transformed into a hereditary monarchy.

首期文明兴起的第一个明显的阶段发生在公元前三千和四千年的美索不达米亚、 北非、 印度和中国。 究竟第一个政府在这些地区是如何形成的还无法确定， 但是人类学家在研究世界不同地区人类群体的进化时， 发现在这个过程中有一个共同阶段， 那就是在单个或多个村落中“big man”的出现。这些人凭借他们杰出的军事力量、超凡的品性和政治天赋，逐渐成为了那些群落的领导者。后来， “big man”成为了权力的正式象征，并且还会把权力传给他们家族的其他成员。当这些群落的面积和物质财富不断发展壮大时，这些“big man”就开始采取世袭制，他们的同盟和家族成员便转变成了世袭君主王室。

The appearance of these sedentary societies had a major impact on the social organizations, religious beliefs, and way of life of the peoples living within their boundaries.[A]■With the increase in population and the development of centralized authority came the emergence of the cities. [B]■While some of these urban centers were identified with a particular economic function, such as proximity to gold or iron deposits or a strategic location on a major trade route, others served primarily as administrative centers or the site of temples for the official cult or other ritual observances. [C]■ Within these cities, new forms of livelihood appeared to satisfy the growing need for social services and consumer goods. [D]■Some people became artisans or merchants, while others became warriors, scholars, or priests. In some cases, the physical division within the first cities reflected the strict hierarchical character of the society as a whole, with a royal palace surrounded by an imposing wall and separate from the remainder of the urban population. In other instances, such as the Indus River Valley, the cities lacked a royal precinct and the ostentatious palaces that marked their contemporaries elsewhere.

这些定居社会的出现对社会组织、 宗教信仰和住在界定范围内的人们的生活方式都造成了巨大的影响。随着人口的增长和中央集权的发展，城市开始出现。其中一些城市中心被赋上了一个特定的经济功能， 像那些靠近金矿或铁矿的， 或是在主要贸易路线上占据关键战略位置的；其他地区主要充当行政中心，或是作为用于官方祭礼和其他典礼仪式的寺庙神殿地址。在这些城市里，为满足不断增长的社会服务和消费商品的需求，新的生活形式出现了。一些人变成了工匠或商人，另一些人则成了武士、学者或牧师。在某些情况下，首批城市的物理分割整体上反映了社会严格的等级特征。 富丽堂皇的围墙环绕着皇家宫殿， 也隔离了城市剩下的人们。但另一方面，如印度河流域，城市就没有像同时期其他地方一样的皇家区域和豪华招摇的宫殿。