

Ch. 2 Agrarian-Urban Centers of the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean

1) Who were the Natufians, and why are they important to prehistory?

The Natufians were the first settled forager culture and were located in the Middle East. The Natufian culture found themselves in a very fortuitous time and place after the Ice Age in the Fertile Crescent when nature was able to replenish a large enough amount of resources every year for a nomadic lifestyle to be unnecessary. Instead of constantly moving about following food, the Natufians created settlements of approximately 60 people each in which they created permanent homes. These houses show evidence of repair, proving that instead of just leaving when things got difficult, they rebuilt and intended to stay where they had begun. The Natufians also showed some of the first evidence of a placed importance on ancestry. Relatives were buried either beneath the floor or in close proximity to the homes within settlements, and eventually the Natufians began the practice of removing the skulls of their dead, adorning them, and placing them within their homes. However, the downfall of the Natufians came relatively quickly with the arrival of the Younger Dryas period (also known as the “big freeze”) which brought weather too cold for agriculture, forcing the Natufians to return to a nomadic lifestyle.

2) How did rivers aid the development of the first cities in Mesopotamia and Egypt?

Rivers (specifically the Euphrates and the Nile) allowed for more fertile areas to begin development of agriculture and, therefore, permanent settlements which would grow to become the first cities. Along the Nile, there are yearly floods beginning in July and ending in October. Fortuitously, this flooding coincided with the growing season of winter barley and wheat. The flooding fertilized the fields every year just before planting. The first settlements in this area occurred in a swampy depression called Fayyum, stemming from the fact that agriculture was so easy to cultivate. Along the Euphrates, agriculture was a bit more difficult than along the Nile. However, with the use of irrigation, they were able to use the water to their advantage. If unaltered, the flooding of the river would completely wipe out crops, rendering the land unusable, but with irrigation, the water could soften hard soils, remove salt deposits, and prepare the land for smaller crops, making the areas much more abundant and reliable. With readily usable land for agriculture, settlements could be easily formed that could rise to become cities.

3) Explain how social distinctions emerged in the first cities.

As more and more cities emerged, it became necessary for true borders to be drawn between them. This led to war, and therefore the need for militaries and commanders of those militaries. The commanders used their position to acquire wealth and image of leadership. Many cities appointed priestly leaders to be kings. Because of these war times, there were a large number of prisoners of war that could provide cheap labor as slaves in wealthy households. A ruling class emerged of dynastic families who collaborated with other landowning or priestly families. Below that social class was the

class consisting of craftspeople and merchants, which contained a social hierarchy within itself based on who's trade was cleaner. The bottom rank in society consisted of slaves, prostitutes, and other marginalized people. A patriarchal structure emerged in society. Men had legal power over women. Women were able to hold high positions as priestesses and even queens but only as an extension of male rule.

- 4) Choose two empires from the chapter and make as many comparisons/contrasts as you can.

No thanks.

- 5) In your opinion (from what you read in the chapter), how did polytheism develop?

Polytheism developed in a time when agriculture had replaced foraging and cities had developed with social structures led by kings. With humans no longer in awe of the wild, but still in awe and veneration of the natural forces that allowed for them to build agriculture, it makes sense for there to be a switch from animism to polytheism. Personified deities mimic an all-powerful force such as how kings would be seen, and these forces were what were viewed as the forces that allowed for the perfect levels of rain and flooding and sun for their crops to grow. Politically, the development of polytheism gave kings a new level of power. Since kings were seen as possessing a control over society, these polytheistic deities were the forces that endowed that power and authority upon them.