

Setting the Scene:

Antecedents to Urban, State-
based Societies

Antecedents to Civilization

- Holocene Transition and Climate Changes
- Sedentism
- Domestication
- Village Life

Holocene Transitions

- End of the “Ice Ages”
- Climatic changes: warmer, drier in the temperate, subtropic zones
- Loss of “Pleistocene megafauna”
- Global shift to more sedentary, intensive hunting and gathering
- Time frame: begins around 13,000 to 12,000 years ago

Sedentism and Domestication

- Sedentism PRECEDES agriculture in most places, usually by a long time
- “Pushing” wild resources: plants and animals
- Domestication a process archaeologically “seen” only when it’s complete
- Primary vs. secondary domestication
- In Middle East, transition begins 10-9,000 years ago

Plants and animals

Archaeology of Domestication

- With animals, changes in size, loss of aggressive features (like horns), retention of juvenile features: all can be visible in the skeleton
- With plants: seeds especially get larger, and their rachis become less brittle, keeping seed on plant until it can be harvested: visible in the seeds themselves, recovered from archaeological record

Early Village Life

- Small settlement size
- (Often) long occupation period
- Evidence for some trade
- Evidence for some ritual life, particularly surrounding burial
- Continued use of wild resources

On the threshold of urbanization:

- Trade
- Settled village life
- Early subsistence agriculture
- Craft production (but not necessarily specialization?)
- Elaborate ritual life (but not necessarily ritual specialists?)

A Word About Dating

Absolute

- Gives an exact, numerical date
- Often involves +/- factors
- bc, BC, BP, and BCE
- From mechanical/chemical testing, or from texts

Relative

- Dates objects “relative to” each other
- Often expressed as phases based on styles of artifacts
- CAN be tied to absolute dates, if the data are available

The Archaeology of Urbanization

Site-based approaches

- Defining features of a city
- Looking for population sectors within the city: class, occupation
- Establishing site history: origins, expansion, abandonment

Regional approaches

- Looking for patterns of interaction between city and hinterland
- Looking for relations between cities
- Looking for cultural, ethnic diversity at regional level
- Cycles of unification, fragmentation