

# The Transition from Foraging to Agriculture

The transition from **foraging** (hunting and gathering) arose as nomadic groups returned to favorite grazing areas year after year. Perhaps some nomadic peoples made an effort to cultivate those crops that they found most appealing; later they may have transplanted seeds from these same favored crops in other areas through which they traveled. Because hunting required greater physical strength, the early cultivation of plants was probably a task left to women, granting them increased importance among agricultural peoples. Women farmers studied the growth patterns of plants as well as the effect of climate and soil on them. Agricultural development included the domestication of animals as well as the cultivation of crops.

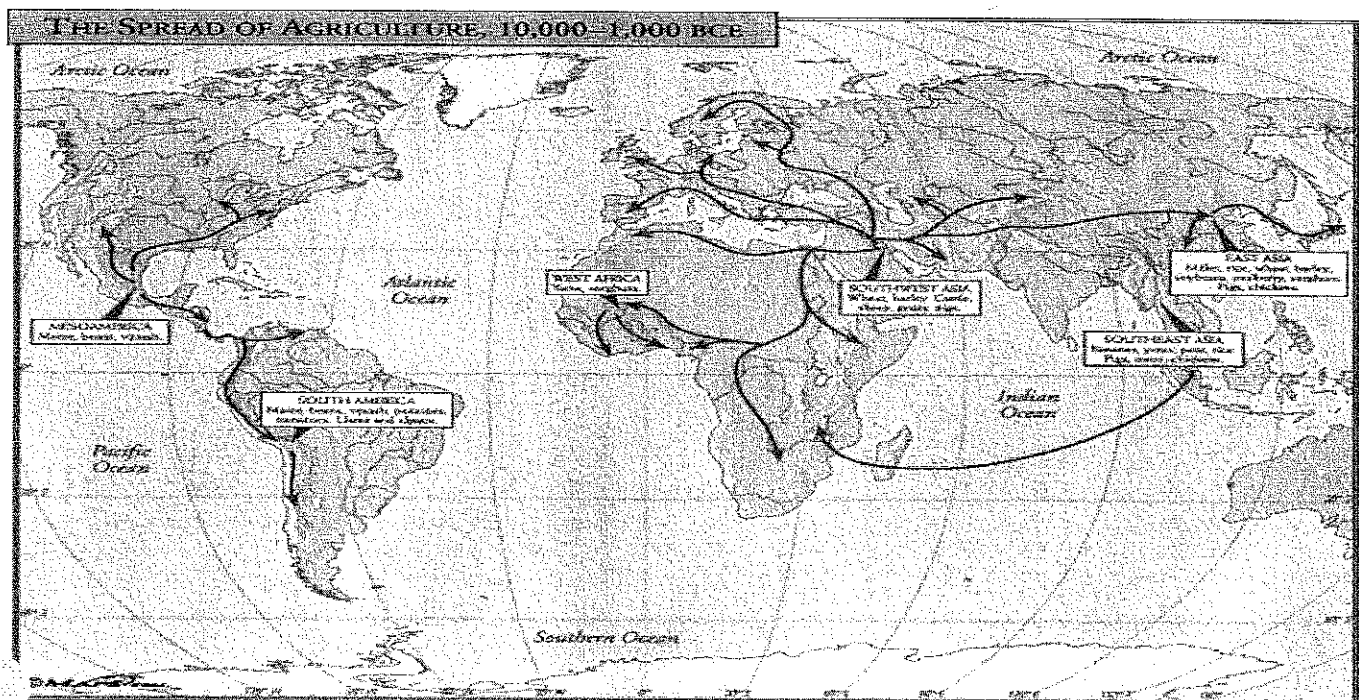
## Independent Origins of Agriculture: A Timeline

Key developments in the history of agriculture show the following events in the process:

- Agriculture began sometime after 9000 B.C.E. with the cultivation of grain crops such as wheat and barley in Southwest Asia. Animals such as pigs, cattle, sheep, and goats also were domesticated.
- By 7000 B.C.E. Sudanese Africa and West Africa cultivated root crops such as sorghum and yams.
- In present-day China, inhabitants of the Yangtze River valley cultivated rice about 6500 B.C.E.
- About 5500 B.C.E., people of the Huang He valley began the cultivation of soybeans and millet. They also domesticated chickens and pigs and, later, water buffalo.
- In Southeast Asia, perhaps around 3500 B.C.E., inhabitants grew root crops such as yams and taro as well as a variety of citrus and other fruits.
- Around 4000 B.C.E., the peoples of central Mexico cultivated maize, or corn, later adding beans, squash, tomatoes, and peppers.
- The principal crop of the Andean region of South America was potatoes, first cultivated around 3000 B.C.E. Maize and beans were added later. The only domesticated animals in the Americas were the llama, alpaca, and guinea pig.

## The Spread of Agriculture

After agriculture was established independently in various locations across the globe, the knowledge of crop cultivation spread rapidly. In fact, it was the nature of early agricultural methods that aided the extension of agricultural knowledge. An often-used agricultural method called **slash-and-burn cultivation** involved slashing the bark on trees and later burning the dead ones. The resulting ashes enriched the soil for a number of years. When the soil eventually lost its fertility, however, farmers were forced to move to new territory. By 6000 B.C.E., agriculture had spread to the eastern Mediterranean basin and the Balkans, reaching northern Europe about 4000 B.C.E. These frequent migrations exposed early farmers to new peoples, diffusing both agricultural knowledge and cultural values.





## Characteristics of Early Agricultural Societies

Although agriculture required more work than foraging, it had the advantage of producing a more constant and substantial food supply. Consequently, the spread of agriculture not only increased cultural contacts but also produced significant population growth. As populations multiplied, neolithic peoples began to settle in villages. As villages grew and agriculture continued to supply an abundance of food, not all villagers were needed as farmers. Some inhabitants began to develop other talents and skills such as the manufacture of pottery, metal tools, textiles, wood products, and jewelry. Two early noteworthy agricultural settlements were:

- Jericho (established around 8000 B.C.E.) in present-day Israel. Here farmers produced wheat and barley, while also trading with neighboring peoples in obsidian and salt. Characteristic of Jericho was a thick wall designed to protect the wealthy settlement against raiders.
- Çatal Hüyük (established around 7000 B.C.E.) in Anatolia (present-day Turkey). Residents of this village left **artifacts** representing a variety of craft products indicating an extensive **specialization of labor**. They also traded obsidian with neighboring peoples.

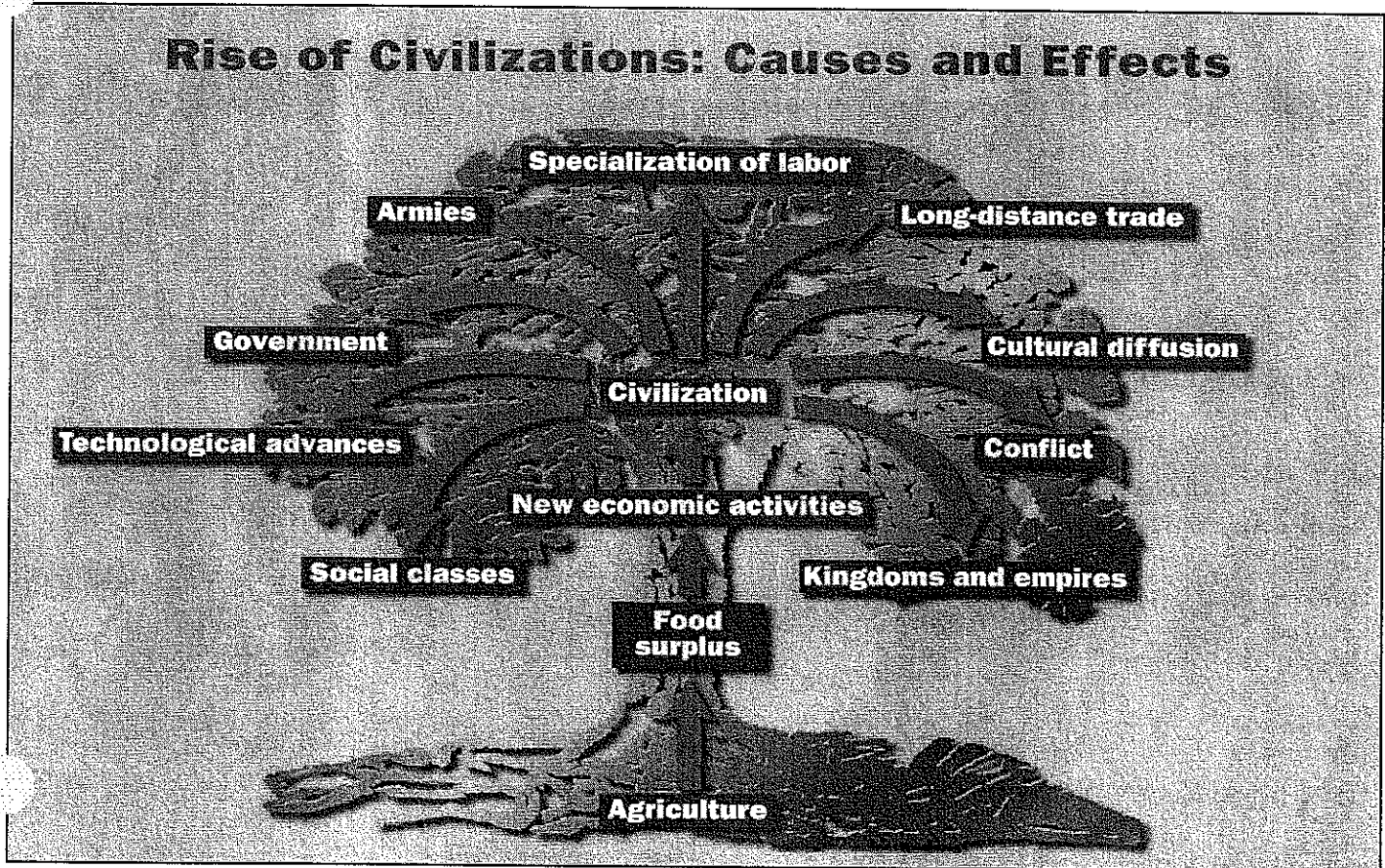
## Early Metallurgy

In addition to seeing the development and spread of agriculture, the Neolithic Age witnessed the origins of metallurgy. The first metal that humans learned to use was copper, with which they cast items such as jewelry, weapons, and tools. Later, neolithic humans learned the use of other metals such as gold and bronze (an alloy of copper and tin), giving rise to the term Bronze Age for the later neolithic period. Still later, the knowledge of ironworking was developed independently in Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

## The Culture of Neolithic Societies

As human populations concentrated in permanent settlements, the specialization of labor as well as trade activity resulted in differing degrees of accumulation of wealth. As time progressed, differences in family wealth manifested themselves in the emergence of social classes.

The inhabitants of early agricultural societies observed their environment in order to further their knowledge of the factors necessary to produce a bountiful harvest. Their knowledge of the seasons in relation to the positions of heavenly bodies led eventually to the development of calendars. Interest in the natural world led neolithic humans to celebrate fertility and the cycles of life. Archeologists have unearthed numerous figures representing pregnant goddesses in the ruins of neolithic villages.





## **The Beginnings of Cities**

As population growth resulted in larger settlements, the agricultural world experienced the rise of cities. Urban areas offered further specialization of labor and more sophisticated technology. New roles emerged as cities required administrators, collectors of taxes and tribute, and religious leaders. Cities also acquired influence over larger territories than villages did.

### **Rapid Review**

The Neolithic Age saw independent origins of agriculture worldwide. As the knowledge of agriculture spread, cultural diffusion marked the ancient world. When crop cultivation produced increasingly larger yields, some farmers specialized in other tasks or crafts. As population concentrations grew increasingly dense, settlements grew into villages and, later, cities. Cities developed a more complex social structure to administer wealth, provide order, and study the meaning of life itself.

### **Questions**

1. Define Paleolithic and Neolithic.
2. How did agriculture originally arise?
3. Where are the 7 places that developed agriculture?
4. What was slash and burn? Why was it used?
5. Why were people able to do other things than farming? Why did these people do?
6. What are two of the earliest agricultural settlements?
7. Besides agriculture, what other skill did early humans develop?
8. List basic cultural attributes of Neolithic societies.
9. What new roles emerged as bigger towns and then cities emerged?

