

The Study of Changing Agriculture in Middle East

Thu Zar Ko*

Abstract

None of the things that we take today as marks of our civilization, our great cities, art, music and literature, commerce, industry, scientific and technological achievements would be possible without agriculture.

Keywords: agriculture, writing, civilization

Introduction

Prior to this the vast majority of people lived in the countryside working the land: But cities have existed since the very beginning of recorded human history, over five millennia ago and were from the start important centres of power, as well as engines of cultural and technological change.

Research Questions

What agriculture has done for us?

Data and Method

The materials required for this paper has been collected from the books. Descriptive method and analytical method are used.

Background of Human Civilization

It was only after human beings learned how to farm that we could produce sufficient food surpluses to allow some of us to follow pursuits other than hunting and gathering. With some people specializing in food production, others could become full-time priests, soldiers, artisans, scribes, or scholars. Thus, more complex and less egalitarian societies began to emerge. Nevertheless, these developments only came very late in the story of humankind.¹ The earliest of our ancestors that we might recognize as human emerged some 4 million years ago. Over the ages, a variety of human species evolved *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus*, the Neanderthals, but it was not until around 100,000 years ago that modern humans began to spread out of Africa and started to colonize the rest of the world.²

Human had started to use stone tools around 2 million years previously, but the rate of technological progress was extremely slow, gradually tools and weapons of wood, stone, bone and antler became more refined and humans learned how to use fire. People sustained themselves by fishing, hunting and gathering fruits, seeds, nuts and berries a way of life that can support small groups, but which requires that the hunter, gatherers must move on once the resources of one area are temporarily exhausted.³

Then around 800 B.C. something extraordinary happened in the fertile crescent, an area of the Middle East that extends from the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers westward through Syria and the south through the Levants. It was that people first began to cultivate crops, kick starting global revolution in the way that humans live. The Fertile Crescent was the first but not the only area to experience an agricultural revolution: farming independently began in various other parts of the

* Associate Professor, Department of History, Maubin University, Myanmar

¹ (Criag, Grahm, Kagan, Ozment & Turner, 1999) p.20

² Ibid, p.20-21

³ (Stephen F. Mason 1962) p.3

world, including Mesoamerica, the Andean region of South America, China, Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.⁴

Beginning of Agriculture

It is probably that the beginnings of agriculture 10,000 years ago coincided with the end of the last Ice Age. As the earth warmed, the ice sheets covering much of northern Eurasia and North America melted, releasing vast amounts of fresh water. In these conditions, the sparse tundra gave way to lush vegetation grasslands and forests, which provided hunter-gatherers with much richer pickings. In some places, the environment was so productive that groups that knew how to exploit it could stay rather than having to move on constantly with greater quantities of food available, population grew, and this in turn meant that people had to devise ways of surviving through leaner periods, by learning how to store food. One of the earliest foods to store, because they do not decay when kept dry, is cereals the seeds of various grasses.⁵ It was no doubt a gradual process by which certain groups learned to look after the wild plants that they found most useful as food sources keeping off pests, clearing away weeds was a start and at some point people made the connection between sowing seed and harvesting the resulting crop. In the Fertile Crescent, wheat and barley were the key cereals in the Americas it was maize in Sub-Saharan Africa sorghum, in northern China Millet, while southern China and Southeast Asia it was rice. Other crops were also important in various parts of the world, for example beans, yams, potatoes, peppers.⁶

Domesticating Wild Animals

The first animal to be domesticated was the dog, which is a direct descendant of the wolf. Dogs were used in hunting and as guards long before people became settled farmers, for example, is a descendant of the dogs that the first humans brought to the continent some 50,000 years ago. Nevertheless, it was not until after arable farming began in the Middle East that livestock farming the rearing of animals for food and other product such as leather began. This in their domesticated form spread from the Middle East across Asia. Cattle and donkeys began to be used to pull ploughs, sleds and eventually wheeled wagons. In South America bred as a pack animal, while guinea pigs reared for food.⁷

Agriculture has done for us

Food production based on agriculture continues to provide the bedrock of modern civilization. But the coming of agriculture was not an unlimited blessing. Comparison of the skeletons of earlier hunter, gatherers with those of later farming people shows that on the whole the farmers were better built and healthier, reflecting their more varied diet. The first farmers and this is still the case with hundreds of millions of subsistence farmers around the world had a very plain diet, largely consisting of a staple carbohydrate crop. Protein in the form of meat or dairy products was very much a rarity.⁸

Therefore, the coming of farming there was some division of labour. In hunter-gatherer societies the women usually did most of the gathering and men most

⁴ (Ian Crofton 2010) p.5

⁵ (Krieger, Neill, Reynolds, 5 edit 1997) p.6

⁶ (Ian Crofton 2010) p.6

⁷ (Kish Lansky, Brien and Geary 1998) p.50

⁸ (Cole, Symes 19 edit, 2017) p.28

of the hunting, while certain individuals sometimes with some form of disability, became shamans. However, generally speaking, the development of occupational specializations and social hierarchies, with kings and priests at the top and lowest at bottom came only after the establishment of sedentary farming communities. Settled communities, food surpluses and the manufacture of artifacts such as pottery or ceremonial stone axes also gave rise to trade over considerable distances amber from the Baltic, for example, has been found in Neolithic sites across Europe.⁹

Conclusion

The beginnings of agriculture in the Middle East, 10,000 years ago although some settlements may have begun not as farming communities, but as markets at the intersection of trade route. Trade certainly plays an important role in the development of larger towns and cities, but growing urban populations could not have been sustained without an intensification of agriculture, which in many places was only made possible by large and complex irrigations schemes.

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⁹ (Brinton, Christopher, Wolff, 1961) p.18