THE URUK EXPANSION

Where writing began
The Uruk Expansion

- Uruk society during period
- What led to the rise of civilization
- Why writing was needed
- The nature of the expansion
- How we know this (archeologically)
Terminology

- **Mesopotamia** – “the land between two rivers” (Tigris and Euphrates)
- **Sumer** – the southern part of Mesopotamia
- **Sumerian** – the name of the culture in Southern Mesopotamia during the period in question
- **Uruk**
  - (a) the name of a city in Mesopotamia
  - (b) the time period from ~4000-3000 BCE (generally divided into Early, Middle, and Late)
  - (c) the Sumerian culture associated with the above time period
  - (d) “Uruk expansion” – the name of the apparently colonial enterprise established ca. 3200 BCE
Timeline

- **by 8000 BCE:**
  - practice of farming established & wild auroch (cattle) domesticated

- **5000-4000 BCE: Ubaid Period**
  - new technology leads to greater crop yields
  - formation of a state (stratified society) by end

- **4000-3200 BCE: Uruk Period**
  - proto-writing appears:
    - 3500-3400 BCE: clay envelopes
    - 3400-3300 BCE: numerical tablets
  - 3500 BCE: Uruk expands into colonial enterprise

- **3200-3000 BCE: Jemdet Nasr Period**
  - 3200 Uruk is largest city in Mesopotamia, if not world

- **3000 BCE**
  - Uruk expansion collapses, state looks inward

- **2700 BCE**
  - first royal inscriptions appear
Civilization Arises

- civilization – a stratified society

The Standard of Ur (2600-2400 BCE) recovered from Royal Cemetery at Ur
• ox-drawn plow that seeded during plowing
  ◦ seed buried in ground instead of scattered by hand
• threshing sled pulled by donkeys
• clay sickle
  ◦ replaced flint, cheaper to make, though irreparable
• long-field irrigation
Basin Irrigation
Channel Irrigation

(This is actually the Yellow River in China)
Civilization Arises

- temples acquire land
  - built long fields (channel irrigation)
  - grew barley
  - as much as five- to tenfold increase in yield
  - they got very, very rich

- corvée labor
  - men called from villages to work temple fields
    - paid in rations, enough for self (not family)
    - likely ideological motivation
Archeological Evidence

- texts
  - records of wages distributed
  - form of glyph for ‘farm’ is long field
  - size of temples

- disposable mass-produced pottery
  - made in moulds instead of on wheel
  - contained one day’s ration
Growth of Temples

- 1/3 production costs
- 2/3 profit

Diagram 3. Development of the sizes of temples (−) and of houses (-----) in Mesopotamia.

Why sheep?
Why sheep?

A modern Iranian horizontal loom; above, a later period Susiana woman spinning
Why cloth?
Manufacturing Textiles

- temples controlled textile production
  - sheep entrusted to herders for pasturing
    - required migration from steppe to valley by season
    - expected fixed return from herders
    - animals for sacrifice
    - wool
  - wool gathered by slave women
    - prisoners of war and “oblates”
  - textile mills
Trade

- **exports**
  - entrusted to private merchants
    - fixed rates for goods
  - maritime and overland routes
  - textiles, oils or aromatics, others?
    - leave no archeological traces

- **imports**
  - wood
  - metals
  - semi-precious stones
  - precious metals (silver, copper)
Why writing?

- agricultural records
  - estimated harvest
  - amount given in rations
  - yield recovered
- herding records
  - annual
- trade records
  - annual
  - commodity prices
A Colonial Enterprise
The Susiana Plain

- separated from Sumer by marshes
  - usable passage, however
- sufficient rainfall for dry agriculture
The Susiana Plains

- **Susa I Period (4200-3500 BCE)**
  - greater regional differences

- **Susa II Period**
  - Uruk expands into area during Early Uruk period
  - clear break before and after Uruk period
  - two main cities: Susa (25 ha) and Choga Mish (18)

- **Susa III Period**
  - Choga Mish abandoned, Susa gets smaller, less area occupied
The Susiana Plains

Susa I (4000 BCE)
Pottery from burial

3100-2900 BCE

Susa II pottery: Sumerian forms
The Susiana Plain: Uruk expansion

- Susa II Period (Early Uruk)
  - generally interpreted as a colonial takeover
    - pottery suddenly Sumerian
    - same male figure shown at top of hierarchy
    - identical temple offerings (Sumerian goddess)
  - writing differs in some ways but origin is clearly Sumerian
  - animal husbandry also under state control
    - records of fixed returns, as in Uruk
  - theories
Anatolia (The Northern Highlands)

- **Late Chalcolthic**
  - was a complex society
  - evidence of long-distance trade
    - exports varied by city
  - used a stamp-seal accounting system
    - did not employ tablets, marked different goods
  - public/state scale storage facilities
  - mass produced pottery

- **Uruk expands into area ca. 3700 B.C.E.**
  - established outposts and overtook cities
Anatolia: Hacinebi

- earliest attested Uruk settlement here
  - outpost in larger indigenous community
  - ca 3700 BCE – 3400 BCE (Middle Uruk)

- Hacinebi
  - had fortified walls
  - trade in copper
    - import of copper ore
    - export of processed ingots
  - even mix of sheep, goat, cattle, pig remains
  - stamp seals
Hacinebi (cont.)

- the Uruk quarter
  - artifacts
    - personal artifacts
    - clay sickles
    - sheep and goat remains only
    - accounting tablets and cylinder seals
    - southern-style pottery and kilns
    - but not Uruk spindles
  - architecture
    - “mittelsaal” house
    - wall cone mosaic murals
Anatolia

Uruk-style houses from Tell-Brak, Uruk Period

Late Chalcolthic architecture, ca 3500 BCE (Hamoukar)
Anatolia: Tell-Brak

- Uruk takeover
  - many strategic sites on trade routes apparently conquered
  - Uruk culture found in center
    - fourth temple constructed is purely Uruk
    - clear break between indigenous and Uruk
  - indigenous culture remains on outskirts
Conclusion: Writing

- arose with civilization
  - accumulation of wealth
  - administrative needs
- aids understanding of civilization
  - how economy worked
The Sumerian Influence

- first writing
- long-field irrigation
- capitalist society
- civilization
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