

Agriculture in mesopotamia

Sociology



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Agriculture in Mesopotamia As Mesopotamia literally means the "land between rivers," its history and culture are substantially related to the ebb and flow of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. In this regard, by 5000 B. C., communities in Mesopotamia had spread and settled to the rich alluvial plain of the region. ("Mesopotamian Civilization")

Due to the favorable topographic and geographic characteristics of Mesopotamia, people were able to shift their means of subsistence from hunting-gathering to agriculture during the Holocene epoch, i. e. 10,000 radiocarbon years ago (Rietvelt). Since the soil was conducive for farming, people opted to build new settlements within this region and planted various crops as a means of living. However, as Professor Gunter Garbecht of the Technical University of Braun Schweiz in West Germany notes:

"First the floods of the Tigris and Euphrates were very erratic and occurred at the wrong time, the period April-June being too late for the summer crops and too early for the winter crops" (Goldsmith and Hildyard)

This means that the riverbeds of Tigris and Euphrates rise and fall with the seasons and often changed their course unpredictably ("Mesopotamian Civilization"). To address this problem, the farmers of Mesopotamia were prompted to develop irrigation agriculture to efficiently utilize the waters of Tigris and Euphrates, which were their primary water source. ("Wikipedia") For instance, small communities made use of shaduf, a long pole on a pivot with a bucket suspended from one end of the pole and a counterweight at the other end, which made lifting a heavy water bucket of water from the rivers less taxing. Moreover, they built structures such as canals, channels, dikes and reservoirs as form of irrigation to harness the waters of these major rivers ("Wikipedia"). The irrigation systems these farmers learned to

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build turned dry valleys into thriving agricultural centers that provided for the needs of the people. This exemplified how humans had changed the natural environment in the early times (Rietvelt).

Farmers in Mesopotamia initially cultivated wheat, however, this crop is salt-sensitive. Given that the waters of Tigris and Euphrates have high levels of salinity, they shifted to planting barley which is more tolerant of salt.

According to Goldsmith and Hildyard, "... there was a gradual but marked reduction in the cultivation of salt-sensitive wheat, which was replaced by salt-tolerant barley." Aside from these, they also cultivated other crops like chickpeas, lentils, millet turnips and dates among others (Oppenheim).

Based on studies by historians like Oppenheim, farmers in Mesopotamia made use of farming tools to further increase efficiency of their economic undertaking. Examples of these tools are plows, pickaxes, harrows, rakes and mattocks. As to how these they used these tools in actual farming, according to an article in the primary internet encyclopedia Wikipedia:

" Using canals for irrigation - farmers would flood their fields and then drain the water. Next, they let oxen stomp the ground and kill weeds. Then, they dragged fields with pickaxes. After drying, they plowed, harrowed, raked thrice and pulverized (the soil) with a mattock."

Given the above discussion, it is evident that agriculture has significantly contributed to the emergence of civilization in Mesopotamia. Through agriculture, people in Mesopotamia were able to build more permanent structures and settlements, as well as accumulate food surplus from which social, cultural and economic developments ramified. With this, Mesopotamia is dubbed as the " cradle of civilization."

In the same way, Mesopotamians have substantially contributed to

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agricultural advancements. They have laid the foundation for the system of irrigation farming, which is still utilized in modern farming hitherto.

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