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On the Origins of Oriental Civilization

Between the tenth and the third millennium B.C.E., South-West Asia was the theater of events that foreshadowed a decisive shift in human destiny. These events signaled a radical change in man's relationship to the natural surroundings. Taking advantage of an overall improvement in climatic conditions, bands who were living from hunting, fishing and gathering in the most propitious regions of the Near and Middle East then settled. They increased in terms of numbers of individuals, they structured themselves: they made contacts and developed bartering. In a more or less fortuitous manner, the peoples of this part of the world overcame their environmental constraints; they became aware of new abilities to change the course of events. As of the seventh millennium, deploying their own means, they were able to challenge nature; several more millennia later they would reach this higher state of techno-economic and socio-cultural development known as civilization.

On Prehistoric Archaeology

Archaeology attempts to reconstruct this evolution. However, in the absence of texts, its means are restricted: these are limited to the search, the observation, and the description of the rare concrete pieces of evidence of human activity, and to the analysis of the relationships which apparently link them, to form a synthesis establishing the *facts* and *events* whose sequencing should enable the historian – in this case the pre-historian – to say "what happened". This he will do by grounding his hypotheses on a theory of evolution. In fact, our reconstructions are for the most part based on interpretations, presumptions and intuitions. They can only be provisional. Archaeology is not a science; at best it can hope for a status akin to the social sciences. It is, in the field, a craft, a know-how, a set of methods and well-defined procedures aimed at uncovering phenomena with human origins, what archaeology calls "*artifacts*" (the word itself is an admission). The excavation of a site is an irreversible operation, a unique experience. Even when its methods draw on those of the natural sciences, even "cutting-edge high-tech" ones, archaeology cannot give rise to laws. Archaeological documentation, "archaeological *reality*" remains open to permanent query.

For the region and the period we are interested in here, the documentation today is relatively abundant, as are the gaps. For the entire Near and Middle

East, and for a period of time covering six to seven millennia, we have only about fifty significant sites. Many excavations and probes have little scientific value because of insufficiencies in recording or in publishing. Another problem is one that pervades all interdisciplinary research. Different disciplines work alongside one other to a greater extent than they communicate; each field has its concepts, methods and vocabulary, but also its limitations. The archaeologist is often poorly informed of the limitations of the fields to which he refers as support for his claims concerning the environment, chronology or the nature of events in general. It does not always occur to him to attract the attention of zoologists, botanists, palynologists, physicists or chemists to the tenuous nature of the "reality" he has submitted to their analysis. Cooperation is steeped in the equivocal nature of interdisciplinarity. For instance, the archaeologist is extremely tempted by ethnographic comparisons. He forgets that the ethnologist's prism is not that of the pre-historian; the former observes the living, the latter, the remains of man's activity. A similarity in form does not necessarily lead to a similarity of function. The customs of the American Indians or the modern-day tribes of Melanesia are of little help in understanding those of the Negev 6,000 years ago! The reconstruction of the past remains a risky enterprise. After decades of research, archaeologists, zoologists and botanists have yet to concur on the origins of farming or animal rearing, which are key moments in techno-economic and socio-cultural development.

This is further aggravated by problems of terminology and vocabulary. Many archaeologists have a great deal of difficulty shedding outdated terminology which, in the past, may have facilitated an initial classification of material discoveries under such labels as "Neolithic", "Chalcolithic" and their chronological subdivisions. These terms have been overused and today are for all extents and purposes meaningless. We need to find other, more appropriate terms to designate the stages of development, namely by relying on the chronological timeline available to us today. We should also be careful not to describe the beginnings of processes of change that lasted for centuries, if not millennia, with the same terms used to designate the final state of these processes; these words are unsuitable for the description of their underlying mechanisms. Thus, we should avoid using the terms farming, animal rearing, writing, religion, etc. when these words, laden with meaning as they are, do not correspond to a defined reality. Words such as "domestication", "civilization" etc. have two meanings: they refer to both a state and to the process leading to this state. The word "civilization" does not correspond to a clear-cut concept, it cannot be defined without the word "culture" which is not more precise. The "archaeological reality" is evanescent as regards objects; it is not less so in its concepts and words.

This multifaceted "reality" should be examined by an overall approach that is not restricted to perspectives of technology, economy or sociology. Publications over the last several decades give the impression that there has been more interest in features concerning the environment and chronology than those related to man himself; more interest in the "when" and "how" of things rather than the "why"; more interest in natural causes than those produced by man. An objective study of changes in the relationship of man to his natural surroundings requires equal time for both protagonists in what was, first of all, from the tenth to the sixth millennium, man's gradual adaptation to a favorable but changing ecosystem, up to the emergence of socio-economic forces which enabled him to overcome the most powerful constraints of nature, free himself from the fear of want, and emerge from the cocoon of the original ecosystem.

The transition from prehistory to history was not only technical and economic: the transition from hunting, fishing and gathering to animal husbandry and crop growing; the transition from a mode of acquiring subsistence to another. From a social point of view it was not only the transition from the single cell (family, kin, clan) to a larger unit, to the social level of complexity of urban communities of the earliest historical times. Changes also took place between the mythical awareness of the Paleolithic hunters, as we imagine them from the drawings and paintings in the decorated caves of the European Upper Paleolithic, and the historical awareness of men of the Orient in the third millennium. Today we possess a number of milestones in this evolution. Indeed, if it is considered legitimate to put forward reconstructions of the social order and to discuss inter-group conflicts on the basis of a few pieces of wall at the bottom of a trench, it is no less so to attempt to trace the changes in human thought through the evolution of behaviors, burial practices, figurative art and various features of symbolic activity. This evolution took place in an uninterrupted way. There was no *mutation* from a pre-categorical "primitive mentality" to a logical and rational one

The Chronological and Environmental Framework

The reconstruction of the past requires an environmental and chronological framework. The prehistorians of the Near and Middle East have attempted, as elsewhere, to delineate this framework. Since 1950, the timeline has expanded as Carbon 14 dating techniques have improved. This has led to growing confusion in the reports of excavation findings. To read them, pocket calculators have been replaced by computer software, without however solving the problem. The prime difficulty does not stem as much from the dating methods as from the often doubtful representivity of the samples taken from the archaeological sites. The same is true for the reconstruction of the environment from soils or organic

debris from excavations. The environment, like chronology, can only be determined from samples coming from milieus untouched by man.

This is exactly what paleo-climatologists have succeeded in doing recently, and very luckily for Oriental prehistory, on the basis of coring of the sea floor and lakes of South West Asia and elsewhere on the planet. Paleo-climatology today provides the prehistory archaeologist with a reliable framework, applicable to the entire northern hemisphere, a timeline of changes in climate, and by extension of the natural environment based on multiple radiometric measures independent of archaeology. This timeline has been confirmed by dendro-chronology for the last 20,000 years. Even if the proposed datings were only accurate by give or take a few centuries, they would still have a high enough precision to be envied by many historians. In any case, paleo-climatology provides us with a supplementary grid to archaeological dating. As regards the environment, it confirms the homogeneity of the climatic conditions for South West Asia; it opens up the possibility for a reconstruction of the paleo-environment, ecological niche by ecological niche, using the relationship that exists today between the various ecosystems and the contemporary overall climate.

On Sedentism

Archaeological evidence from the Land of Israel was long the sole source of information on the late prehistory of South West Asia. In 1950, this evidence was still presented in the way it had been developed on the eve of World War II during the first systematic excavations, those conducted by René Neuville, Dorothy Garrod, John Garstang, Moshe Stekelis and a few others. The cultural sequence drawn up at that time (Kebarian, Natufian, Khiamian, Sultanian, etc.) would long remain the frame of reference for the entire Near and Middle East, imposing a schema (and a jargon) which would be an additional source of confusion. Starting in the 1950s, as research resumed in the Southern Levant and in particular in Israel where there was close cooperation between Israeli and French researchers, and more recently in Jordan; with its extension to Lebanon, Northern Syria and Upper Mesopotamia, the whole Anatolian plateau and up to the foothills of the Zagros range, new centers of interest emerged, revealing the complexity of evolution, its nature and its pace. The role and relative importance of the Southern Levant was highlighted at the same time as the set of processes that formed the bases of Oriental civilization were being defined.

The origins of Oriental civilization have always held special fascination: the imagination was fueled by Bible stories. At the beginning of the last century, Gordon Childe argued that civilization emerged as a result of post-glacial warming which would have caused increased aridity in the Orient. Men and animals would then have gathered on the banks of the great rivers – the Tigris,

the Euphrates – men controlling the animals and developing farming. This model, which became paradigmatic, was vigorously attacked as of the 1950s by Robert Braidwood and the Chicago school of anthropology. They stressed the unlikelihood of a spontaneous movement of plants and animals beyond the boundaries of their natural habitat. Rather, in those places where wheat and barley grew wild – between 500 and 1000 meters in altitude in the foothills of the Taurus and Zagros ranges and in the hills of the Mediterranean shelf – scientists should look for traces of the first attempts at farming and domestication of sheep, goats, pigs and cattle. It was only in the 1960s, with the French-Israeli excavation of Mallaha (Eynan) in the Upper Jordan valley, that evidence emerged supporting the hypothesis that hunter-gatherers could, under favorable conditions, have settled quasi- permanently before any attempt at domestication. This new paradigm, which today seems unremarkable, took more than ten years to be widely accepted.

At all epochs, men made halts as soon as the natural resources in one spot appeared to be sufficient to respond to their basic needs. They adapted to the environment, driven by the survival instinct and doubtless by a strong penchant for lesser effort. 25,000 years ago the mammoth hunters of the Gravettian of Central and Eastern Europe settled, building habitations and digging cemeteries until a change in climatic conditions pushed the mammoths northwards. In the second half of the twelfth millennium B.C.E., in the Southern Levant this time, living conditions were nearly what they are today. Bands of hunter-gatherers also settled, in particular in the upper valley of the Jordan on the banks of the Houleh lake near the Ain Mallaha spring. Significant progress was then achieved in tool-making, the building of habitations, and in the preservation and preparing of food. Nevertheless, the process of sedentism was interrupted at the beginning of the eleventh millennium B.C.E. by a severe dry and cold climatic episode, connected to what is called the Younger Dryas. This episode marks for geologists the end of the Pleistocene, for prehistorians the end of the Upper Paleolithic. The hunter-gatherers of Mallaha and their contemporaries, who are hinted at on several other sites in the Levant, were forced to return to wandering, and for archaeology, to obscurity. These events suggest that the abundance of natural resources, even if it is a necessary condition for the permanence of settlements, is not sufficient in itself. The time factor, the length of time, also has its importance. Almost a millennium was to pass before the rains returned, and a new warming of the climate that was to start 10,000 years ago, before sedentism was triggered once again, this time, in numerous points in Southwest Asia. European-like forest vegetation extended at this time gradually to all the mountainous areas. Permanent settlements appeared in the upper valleys of the Western Taurus and on the Anatolian plateau. The movement extended to the East along the continental gradient, and towards the South along the aridity

gradient. In the Southern Levant the most impressive site was Jericho, in the large oasis in the lower Jordan valley. Sedentism benefited this time from duration, as of 8,000 B.C.E. there were exceptionally favorable conditions and South West Asia entered into a climatic optimum that would last 3,000 years with summer rains and mild winters. As of the start of the ninth millennium, progress was considerable. In habitation, collective works emerged: terracing and supporting walls, perhaps for defense. In Jericho, a round eight-meter high "watch tower" was built of stone, with a central staircase. No less spectacular were the "exceptional" buildings for ritual use found in Upper Mesopotamia, in South East Anatolia. Some, located in the center of the settlements, appear to respond to the need of community ritual, others, away from the habitations, appear to have been reserved for initiation rites. That the "ritual spaces" of each social group – which have always existed – were endowed at that time with a specific architectural expression can be seen as a significant outcome of the sedentism process.

The unfolding of the sedentism process as of the tenth millennium is characterized by the interplay of actions and interactions between peoples and their environment. At first, the constraints of the natural surroundings were determinant. Favorable climatic conditions led to changes in the landscape; the forest spread, the steppe advanced into the desert. The zones of natural habitat of certain animal species or plants probably shifted. Man adapted to these positive changes in the environment; he has always attempted, for safety reasons, to integrate himself as closely as possible with the natural surroundings. Hunting techniques improved. Habitations changed. From its beginnings as a simple circular pit with stones piled as walls and a cover resting on poles – as was seen at Mallaha - habitation surfaced, so to speak, with the construction of real walls requiring wood clamping, walls whose building techniques spearheaded the transition from the traditional circular layout to the rectangular. Through its external features the rectangular house contributed to humanizing the landscape; its shape, more or less consciously marked mentalities. It would be too much to speak of a mental revolution, but the rectangular house testifies to a "different mental attitude". The wall supports, protected (it became a rampart) but also separated: it divided. It introduced or reinforced a cleavage in human relationships.

It is difficult to reconstruct what could have been the social structure of the first sedentary groups. Their economy remained predatory (hunting, fishing, gathering). However these groups increased in size; the settlements expanded to one or two hectares with probably one to two hundred inhabitants. The social structure was familial, probably clan-like; the clan is exogamous. The intensification of the use of natural resources in the immediate surroundings of the settlements, the development of activities of preserving and eating food

probably led to a more clear-cut division of labor. Terracing, defense, exceptional buildings called for a collective effort; this implied a degree of joint endeavor, and the planning of projects that could require a pooling of means. In South Eastern Anatolia, in the Urfa region, and in particular at the Göbekli Tepe site, the positioning of megalithic pillars in buildings had to involve the combined efforts of groups of hunter-gatherers from the entire region. Blocks of stone weighing more than ten tons were moved 3 km towards the top of a hill, from the quarries where they were dug.

The Göbekli site, currently being excavated by a German team, and with it several sites in the region of Urfa (Nevalı Çori, Çayonu, etc.) are interesting for another reason: they provide a glimpse into the inner world, the imagination and the mentality of the populations of this region at the turn of the tenth and ninth millennium B.C.E. At Göbekli, far away from the dwellings area there is a set of buried structures, the oldest of which are circular and the more recent ones rectangular; their covering, on the level of the surrounding ground, was held up by enormous pillars. These monolithic blocs were in the shape of a capital T; they are set into walls and also found in pairs in the center of each building. They have a human, masculine, highly stylized shape; the arms and the hands are engraved or in low relief; on their sides are highly realistic animal drawings of snakes, foxes, boars, bulls, lions, and birds of prey, with one of these species dominating each structure. Both from the point of view of the stylistics of the figures as from the function of these buildings, probably related to initiation rites, the Göbekli ensemble appears to be situated in the tradition of the European decorated caves of the Upper Paleolithic. The same antinomy can be found in the stylized treatment of the human figure as compared to the realistic animal figures as in the stylistic forms of the Upper Paleolithic; the distribution of representations is suggestive of the traces of totemism already observed in the Paleolithic. The Göbekli site suggests that we are not very far from the practices and mentalities of peoples of the Upper Paleolithic, several millennia earlier.

The explanation which peoples at that time had of the world around them and of their place in it falls into the realm of myth. This word is not used to refer to a tale of wonder but rather a tale of experience. The function of myth is to integrate man into the surrounding nature in order to give him a needed sense of security. Myth is the memory of the group, the totality of its knowledge, its know-how, its wisdom. It forms a heritage that is perpetuated by repetition, through rite. It is important to transmit it to all the members of the group and to impart it to the younger generations in order to guarantee group cohesion in action and for the future. A rite is both gesture and speech; accomplishing it may require the support of a sign, of a memory-jostling image; this was probably the role of the engraved stones of animal figures or diverse motifs found on numerous sites of this period (in Göbekli as in Djerf el Ahmar on the Middle

Euphrates.) Rites give scansion to the daily life of the group; on the one hand community rites, rites of passage at all ages of life, from birth to death, on the other hand initiation rites which took place away from the group, in secluded or secret places. The mentality of the hunter-gatherers of South West Asia does not appear to differ fundamentally from that of their European predecessors. In the absence of natural caves, as the process of sedentism grew, they built the appropriate structures.

These ritual spaces were neither "sanctuaries" nor "temples". We tend, in this perspective, to consider as "religious" anything that is not connected to the utilitarian or necessities of life. We touch here on one of the prime causes of the confusion that exists today in our studies: the lack of accuracy in concepts and in the use of words, in particular in areas related to the "religious" or the "divine". Too often we give these terms an orientation characteristic of our mental attitude, which itself is conditioned by models of institutional beliefs. On the horizon of the tenth and ninth millennia, everything which escaped man's understanding of nature, everything that could be translated in his imagination into the notion of forces, either beneficial or threatening to his safety, is not a clear-cut *concept* and is divorced from any reference to "gods" or "spirits." We should orient ourselves towards a more appropriate notion than that of the "divine" to characterize the relationship between man and his environment. This does not mean that we should sink into the conceptual morass of shamanism.

The mentality of the first sedentary peoples can also be seen through the relationship of the living to the dead. The dead are a special category of people who need to be taken into account and appeased in order to maintain good neighborly relationships. Appropriate rites are used to disperse their malicious intents, through familial rites such as the respectful display of skulls within houses, or by community rites such as were apparently the deposits of bones in the large buildings, for example the "skull building" of Çayonu.

On Domestication

The settling of hunter-gatherers in a territory put them in a state of increased dependence on the surrounding natural environment. They were obliged to intensify their use of the plant and animal resources that had attracted them initially; their eating behavior became specialized and diversified as a function of the constraints of ecology. To each archaeological niche corresponds an archaeological facies. Sedentary life led to an increase in the population. Settlements increased to an area of one or two hectares. Population density however remained low. It was highly unlikely that demographic pressure played a decisive role in triggering the process of domestication. Nature is generous; it was even more so starting from the eighth millennium when the region entered into a climatic optimum. Then, all the conditions were united to trigger the

process of domestication of plants and animals. This favorable situation was like a combination lock that opens as soon as the right numbers are aligned. Here the push came from man and his permanent desire for domination as well as his need for food. Before its beginnings, the domestication process involved, as for any discovery, a proliferation of minor events that could have led, here and there, individually or collectively, to the awareness of a possibility, the formulation of a plan. As soon as men became sedentary, the wolf approached their dwellings, the cat entered their houses and the rodents found their storerooms. These are examples of *self-domestication*. A distinction must be made between the act of domesticating a wild animal by controlling its reproduction and the fact of reducing it to a state of submission in captivity by simply guaranteeing its subsistence. Men did not domesticate animals by striking them. One can imagine hunters returning from their expeditions with very young animals for purposes of play rather than food. These animals could have grown up in captivity and reproduced. In this context the idea could have arisen that controlling their reproduction could be more profitable than hunting and luck. The invention of techniques to achieve such an enterprise followed soon afterwards. In the case of the wild sheep that lived on the grassy steppe in herds that were relatively easy to approach, the process of domestication must have been quick. As the number of animals under man's control increased, the need to feed them created a problem in the narrow confines of the first permanent settlements, located in the forested areas. It may have appeared easier for several men to lead the sheep, who were gradually adapting to domestic life, towards the grassy steppes and the wide expanses that formed the natural habitat of this animal. Here we are on the brink of pastoralism.

The problem presented itself differently for wild goats whose natural habitat is the mountains. In contrast to sheep that eat grass, goats eat leaves. Goats are also more independent. Men did not head out to conquer the steppe with herds of goats. The domestication of this animal only really took place in the technological context of the domestication of sheep. This was also true for pigs and cattle. Whereas small numbers of wild goats were found on all the ancient sites of the Near and Middle East, sheep only existed in the wild on the Iranian and Anatolian plateau and in the foothills of the eastern Taurus range. Sheep made a massive appearance on the sites of the Middle Euphrates, coming from the East, at about 7500 B.C.E., which suggests that they were already under man's control; their domestication could go as far back, on the Anatolian plateau and in eastern Djezireh, to the ninth millennium. To the west of the Euphrates, in the countries of the Levant, sheep only appear in a domesticated form; to the west of Jordan, at only about 6,000 BCE.

As regards grains, the initial phase of their domestication is masked by a phenomenon of spontaneous mutation that is thought to have affected wheat and

barley at about the eleventh millennium; it was perhaps related to the dry and cold episode of the Younger Dryas. This mutation, which changed the morphology of graminaceous plants by making the ear less breakable on its stalk was first believed by botanists and archaeologists to be an outcome of domestication. The fact that the ear stays longer on its stalk simply increases its chances of being picked. A mutation that normally would have had no impact was prolonged in a fortuitous manner by man's initially haphazard intervention until he realized the advantages of selecting for planting those seeds that stayed the longest on the stalk. The advantage was that people could wait to harvest until all the ears in the same field were ripe. Here again, domestication was the outcome of a discovery, of a realization and the formulation of a plan.

The process of domestication of wheat occurred independently of that of the domestication of sheep. Both took place in different locations, within the limitations of the natural habitat of each species, limitations that we cannot accurately define and which could have varied with climatic conditions. In current conditions, wild wheat prefers dry soils between 500 and 1000 meters in altitude. Geneticists such as Daniel Zohary suggest that the strain of wheat that was domesticated derived from a variety of wild wheat of the Levant. As to the question of which of the two processes, farming or rearing took place first, archaeologists working in the Levant countries long believed they could answer farming, and cite their region. However, this is clearly a provincial point of view. Current data tend towards animal rearing, which could have arisen on the Anatolian plateau as early as the ninth millennium. The data on the emergence of farming remain circumstantial. What can be said is that herders who reached the Middle Euphrates at about 7500 could not have gotten this far nor continued their march southward towards the region of Damascus and the Jordanian steppe without the help of cereals that they may have obtained through bartering with the first farmers of the Mediterranean area.

On Neolithization

The encounter between the first herders and the first farmers, the combination of behaviors and food strategies, techniques and means of production took place at the interface of the steppes and woodland zones. This encounter, assisted by some demographic pressure, led to the formation of new types of mixed agro-pastoral socio-economic systems. Great adaptational flexibility to various natural settings then became possible through modulation of elementary activities of food production. Hunting, fishing and foraging were now associated with grain growing and animal rearing. These new forms of economy and society were not due to man's choices alone; they did not completely escape the constraints of ecology: they resulted from the chance interaction of single causes eventually converging at a given point in time.

"Neolithization" as discussed below refers to these phenomena as a whole. The potential of the agro-pastoral system was considerable. It gave the impetus for the geographic spread of the process of "Neolithization" beyond the natural habitat of domesticated species. The agro-pastoral system provided peoples with the possibility to settle permanently in semi-arid regions, near sources of water. Neolithization reached the coastal plain of the northern Levant (Ras Shamra), Cilicia (Mersin), Western Anatolia and, beyond, to Danubian Europe; to the East and Southeast it extended to the foothills of the southern ranges of the Zagros (the Deh Loran and Susiana plains). Southwest Asia, it should be recalled, was then experiencing exceptionally favorable climatic conditions: the summer rains made possible a European type of vegetation. The level of the oceans continued to rise. At about 7000 it was still 33m below its current level. The Black Sea and the Mediterranean were connected again, but the Persian Gulf was still dry; the Tigris, the Euphrates and the Karun flowed into the Sea of Oman.

With the acquisition of new modes of production, people came to realize that they could change the course of events in their favor. Their new self confidence is obvious as of the beginning of the seventh millennium, in the breakdown of the old social and mythical structures which is apparent in terms of habitat, the organization of living spaces, burial practices and in general, in symbolic activities. The issues for the scholar become more complex with the diversification of lifestyles as a function of each ecological niche. A whole range of possibilities was now open: from an agricultural economy to a pastoral one, from sedentary to nomadic life. Pottery, whose use became widespread during the seventh millennium, confirms this diversity by the variety of shapes and ornamentation; its appearance nevertheless does not constitute an event that can be used as a chronological or cultural landmark. This would also be the case a little later for the beginnings of metallurgy.

The case of the southern Levant

It would be impossible here to trace all the features of the development of the various regions of the Near and Middle East. I will only deal briefly with what happened in the Southern Levant on either side of the Jordan valley (Israel, the territories, Jordan). I will restrict myself to a few comparisons with the neighboring regions, while emphasizing the contribution of the Southern Levant to general development.

During the entire duration of the seventh millennium (from 7000 to 6000 B.C.E.), our documentation for this region comes primarily from the Jordanian plateau. To the west of the Jordan, and up to the Mediterranean coast, sedentary settlements seem to have disappeared. We cannot attribute this to a lack of research or a change in climate, which had never been as favorable. One could theorize that west of the Jordan, a densification of the forest cover would have

created an environment unfavorable to sheep rearing, while at the same time, a lifestyle based on livestock was spreading on the Jordanian plateau. Towards the east, beyond Amman was a grassy steppe; the plateau tilts down to the desert and the Euphrates. Rollefson and Kafafi, who excavated Ain Ghazal near Amman, hypothesized that the inhabitants of Jericho moved towards Ain Ghazal; the size of this village increased rapidly towards 7000 to cover more than ten hectares.

The arrival of shepherds on the Jordanian plateau and their presence on the steppe at the end of the eighth millennium rapidly had an impact on the local sedentary population. Contacts were made; ties formed and exchanges took place (meat and skins for grain). As of 7000 B.C.E., the fabric of the Ain Ghazal settlement began to broaden; courtyards and pens appeared, which were destined probably for animals. From 7000 to 6000, there was a genuine deconstruction of the village, which finally disappeared. Its population probably turned to herding and a semi-nomadic life. This life style, characterized by a dominant pastoral economy, was now found throughout the Southern Levant until the fourth millennium, whereas at the same time, Northern Syria, Upper Mesopotamia, and Susiana were experiencing an agriculturally dominant economy and a sedentary life style.

The ability to produce at least part of their food gave men a new feeling of security. A lesser fear of lack impacted on the relationship between the living and the dead. This relationship could also have been affected by the mobility imposed by herding. As of the end of the seventh millennium there was a change in the Southern Levant as regards the treatment of the dead. This treatment had taken on a specific form in the eighth millennium in the sites of the Jordan basin: the skulls were removed from the graves and displayed in the dwellings; this was a generalized practice at that time throughout the Near and Middle East. However in the Jordan basin the skulls were covered over with lime to outline the features of the deceased; the eyes were incrustated and the hair was painted. In addition, real statues, half human size, installed on a rush frame were probably also images of the deceased. When the memory of the deceased faded, these statues were ceremonially buried. These practices disappeared before the end of the eighth millennium at the same time as the frightening stone masks, which could have also played a role in burial rituals. With nomadic life, the practice of secondary burials increased in the seventh millennium. The first burial took place immediately when death occurred during travel. Later the bones were exhumed, collected and brought to a collective tomb. As time passed, the feeling of any malicious intent of the dead tended to dissipate, and gave rise to a more tranquil memory, that of the ancestor, who became the guardian of the family and the line.

In the seventh millennium, social concerns dominated symbolic activities and figural representations. This is seen clearly in Anatolia, in the sedentary world of Çatal Hoyuk, where the imagery reflects the desire to structure group identity by giving it a collective memory as a link in the chain of generations. This tendency is perhaps less clear-cut on the Jordanian plateau where an agro-pastoral semi-nomadic lifestyle developed in the Yarmuk basin (well represented by the site at Sha'ar Ha'Golan on the eastern banks of the Jordan) where the most typical figure of this period is that of a seated woman, clothed, bedecked and bejeweled; with it, the woman appears to take on a new importance in the social structure.

At about 6000 B.C.E. small groups of herders, separate but related as their pottery suggest, came down from the Jordanian plateau. They crossed the Jordan to the west, taking the natural routes: the mouth of the Yarmuk (south of the Sea of Galilee), the Jericho ford, and perhaps a road to the south of the Dead Sea. These groups left traces of their presence on the right bank of the Jordan (Munhata, Jericho), in the Jezreel, and the coastal plain. Heading south, a group passed through the Sinai as far as Egypt. There they most likely introduced sheep and wheat to the Fayum basin towards 5800 B.C.E. We know hardly anything about these semi-nomadic shepherds except for the remains of habitats in pits and rough but not primitive pottery, with its incised, painted decorations. Overall, the Southern Levant presents a level of life that contrasts with that of the agricultural populations of Northern Syria, Upper Mesopotamia and the foothills of Zagros. In these regions a predominantly agricultural economy developed; the habitations were vast and multi-cellular; the appearance of stamps and seals suggests the development of personal property.

In the second half of the fifth millennium B.C.E., the influence of Northern Syria (the Halaf culture) was felt as far as the Southern Levant via the channel of the Lebanese Beqa'a (objects in obsidian, green stone, sling balls, glossy pottery in carinated shapes). A sign of a tendency towards sedentary life, rectangular buildings on stone foundations were built on several sites, to the north of a Tel Aviv-Jericho line.

Towards 5000 B.C.E., the climatic optimum came to an end. The winters became harsher, rains decreased; towards 4000 the living conditions in Southwest Asia became more similar to what they are today. The oceans rose to their current levels. Freed from the most severe constraints of nature, men acquired a relative mastery over plants and animals. Their own social and economic forces enabled them to cope with the changes in their natural milieu. In the Southern Levant, from 4500 to 4000 B.C.E., the pastoral lifestyle manifested itself with striking singularity. In the northern Negev, small groups of sheep and goat herders settled in the region of Beersheva, which up to then had been uninhabited. In the compact silt of the alluvium of the Wadi, they dug cave dwellings. Their society was egalitarian, but we can already observe a

beginning of craft specialization (work on ivory, a few copper objects). Each group, family or clan, doubtless had a chief and a council of elders; in each settlement a space was reserved for non-domestic activities. Nevertheless the structure of these groups, overall, was still at an archaic tribal stage and it would be excessive to speak of "chieftdom". Indications of burial practices are abundant. Semi-nomadic life apparently had to provide some compensation to the deceased for the wrongs committed by abandoning the first grave dug during travel; greater attention was paid to the permanent tomb. The dried bones were gathered up (skull and long bones) and brought back to the group's base camp and deposited in a collective subterranean tomb, dug into soft rock. The bones were placed in individual containers, built on the site, and decorated with much imagination. Some have the shape of an animal, often a sheep, others suggest a house, a silo, a vase. The ornamentation of these containers, painted or in relief, deals with identity themes. A comparative analysis could eventually help specify kinship ties. The human figure appears. It is found more clearly in some ritual objects in the dwellings of Beersheva, where there is a group of very realistic masculine and feminine ivory statuettes. They are naked, in a hieratic posture, with their arms alongside their sides. The men are bearded and have long hair. They are wearing a phallic sheath (which introduces an African connotation). The women have a highly sophisticated hairdo with a high bun on their heads. These realistic, sometimes sensuous figures appear to translate the need among the living to project an image of themselves into the outside world; as a desire to affirm their identity and to stave off death.

Towards 4000 B.C.E., the Negev was abandoned. The occupation of the region of Beersheva only lasted a few centuries. The environment approximated what we know today. The population moved away from zones that had become semi-arid. They relocated on the borders of the Judean range, near sources of water; there where the system of production could readjust itself towards an agro-pastoral form which in the Southern Levant would become that of the Canaanite era. The pastoral economy had revealed its limitations. Throughout the fourth millennium, the Southern Levant would only play a minor role.

Towards Civilization

A long road remained to be trod in the Orient before reaching that level of development we call civilization. This would mainly take place on a new land, which yesterday had been desert-like, but which the rising of the ocean waters, rivers and the underground water levels transformed in the fifth millennium into a fertile and hospitable region: Lower Mesopotamia. Here peoples with different backgrounds would gather and concentrate, like a true "melting pot". The first were the former inhabitants of the banks of the Euphrates, Tigris and Karun when these rivers still flowed into the Sea of Oman. Pushed back by the rising

waters, these men doubtless still lived from fishing and hunting; they are most likely the direct ancestors of the Sumerians. We are less astonished today that they had preserved in their mythology the memory of having escaped from rising waters. They stopped and settled on lands whose new fertility would become proverbial. They benefited from the technology of their neighbors, groups that came down from the North, from Upper Mesopotamia, where the impact of the diminishing rains were also beginning to be felt. About 4200B.C.E., when the Beersheva herders were settling in the Negev, Lower Mesopotamia was developing a flourishing economy based on farming and its population was rapidly expanding. People lived, as they did in nearby Susiana, from fishing, hunting, animal rearing and growing barley. Settlements could have as many as a thousand people. One indication of the level of technological development of this time is the use of metal. The major production centers have been found, with their mineral deposits, on the Anatolian and Iranian plateaus. Their products reached far and wide, apparently following the routes that headed down towards the south, and to the east as far as Susiana (the Susa necropolis testifies to this, towards 4000B.C.E., with axes and mirrors) and to the southwest through the Levant as far as Upper Egypt where in return were brought back gold and ivory. The "treasure" (abandoned in a cave in the Judean desert) could have been left on this route by wandering metal merchants. The existence of these trade routes shows that from the Caspian to the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf there was now a real community, a certain feeling of unity, a sense of the universal which was far removed from that of small groups of men attached to a narrow piece of land. Universality leads to rationality; a new ability to differentiate, separate, categorize and conceptualize more clearly. The concept of a superior, transcendent principle appears to have emerged in Lower Mesopotamia and in Susiana over the course of the fourth millennium. The first anthropomorphic representations of a divinity did not appear before 3000 B.C.E.

At the same time as lifestyle, mythical awareness changed over the preceding millennia. The old mythical and social structures collapsed, others now replaced them where logic took on the role of stabilizer instead of myth. The tensions that threatened the cohesion of a society in the process of stratification and hierarchization led to the development of social morals; combined with beliefs and ideology, ethics became systematized in the form of law and religion. At this stage of development of rational thought, the word "religion" becomes appropriate. Confirmation that this level had been attained is found in the invention of writing (the process extended from 3500 to 2500 B.C.E.). Writing, the recording of speech, means both the control of memory and communication. In the seventh millennium man had taken control of plants and animals; in the fourth millennium he was determined to master time and space. One can envisage the structure of the emerging civilization as a harmonious set of

systems, of complementary phenomena as religion and law -- each depending on the others and unable to be what it is except through its relationships with the others.

Each civilization bears the mark of the land, the landscapes where it was born: it draws its identity from them, its originality. The first civilization to take shape was that of the Near and Middle East; it was the heir of a long, a very long past, during which time each man and every bit of this vast territory made a unique contribution. We know what our Western civilization owes to the ancient Orient. To our eternal questions of "what", "when" and "how" and perhaps "why", Oriental prehistory, even though it is not a science, can perhaps today be in a position to provide part of the answer.

Jean Perrot