

Section 5 – The Advent of Agriculture

From Horticulture to Agriculture

In a hunter-gatherer worldview, where one simply harvests Nature's bounty, time is effectively limitless. There is no pressure to do something today or tomorrow or even this or next year.¹ Agriculture required that things be done on time: the fields ploughed, the seed sown, the earth hoed, the harvest gathered and so on. Huge areas of land had to be cleared, tilled and irrigated, and this required an organised workforce of physically strong workers, a workforce of men.

People already knew how to mobilise workers; Göbekli Tepe is the proof. There, the large workforce had been motivated by religion. In the agricultural phase a new reward system was invented, which put material value on time and effort, in other words, on work.

The men would own the harvested produce that grew on the land they worked, and this could be shared and traded. Those who put in the time and effort most effectively, or who had been fortunate enough to begin working the best land, had the most successful crops. Some began to amass more wealth – in terms of produce surplus to their needs – than others. A new economic model was born, based on surplus produce and its accumulation as wealth. Gradually, the wealthiest were able to buy produce from the others and market it themselves. The market economy and the establishment of individual property rights soon followed.

Increased trading led to the invention of money, which appeared in Sumer in the fourth millennium BCE. Money could be saved, stored and transported more easily than produce, and, most importantly, it meant that commerce was no longer reliant on barter. Money could be traded for anything.

The inevitable result was that everything was given a monetary value. Even the land, rather than being held communally, was divided up so that it could be bought and sold. Instead of a 'workers collective' owning and cultivating the land, some men became owners and some labourers. Ultimately, this led to the development of a culture in which all material wealth and power was concentrated in the hands of a small number of men. To protect their 'rights' to money and land, these men invented systems of law that defined what property was, who owned it and what

¹ The phenomenon of a complete failure to understand the urgency that animates Western life has frequently been noted – usually pejoratively – by those meeting such cultures. A sympathetic, if puzzled observation of this was made by John Steinbeck and E. F. Ricketts. (Ricketts, E.F. and Steinbeck, J. *Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research*. Penguin Books. 2009.)

would happen to those who usurped these rules. The divisions between rich and poor were established here.

This model was so successful that large amounts of surplus were soon being created. This allowed the building of ever larger and more sophisticated settlements.