

origin of society~reading

Hunting & Gathering Bands

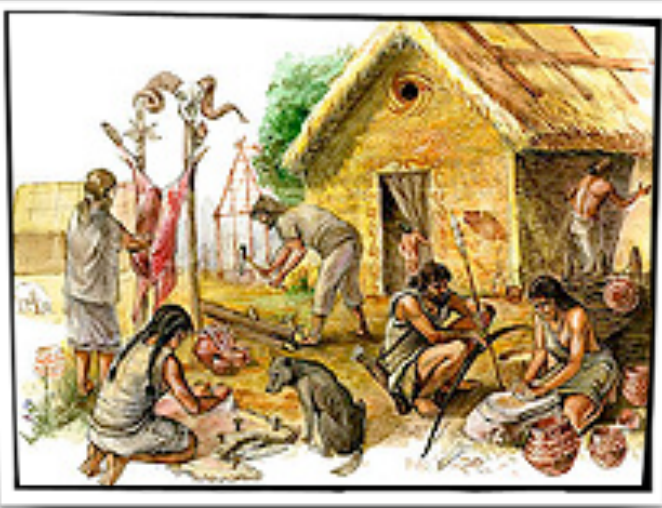
Until 8500 BC, all humans were hunters and gatherers. They lived in groupings called Bands. Bands consist of three to fifty people that are all of the same family. Food availability determined the size of the band. These bands were always egalitarian, which means everyone was equal. Everyone had to do their share of work, everyone had some say in decisions, everyone got to eat from what is killed and gathered. There may have been a “leader” who gave some guidance to the group, but his power was very limited. He is typically someone who was a successful hunter and a strong warrior.



Bands that did not or could not develop agriculture always remained as a band and never progressed to the other levels; some even to this day.

Tribes

If a band lived in an area that supported agriculture (as in they can get more food from farming than from hunting and gathering), they settled down and began farming. This led to the band growing in size and becoming a tribe. A tribe consisted of a couple hundred members living in one village. They all lived in the same village and were typically related to each other. Life in a tribe was very tough as the farming life was very tough. This was especially true as new diseases would break out from the people living in close quarters with farm animals or if bad weather conditions ruined the harvest. The difficulty of growing food and raising animals required everyone to work.



Agriculture life cultivated the idea of “mine”: This is MY land, MY crops, MY home, MY animals, MY harvest. For the first time people started to claim the land and its resources as personal property. There started to be the “haves” and the “have nots.” There were those who claimed more land for themselves or harvested more food or successfully raised more animals. In turn, there were those who had less land or had smaller harvests. There would be frequent fights between tribes over who owned the land or to steal each others resources.

A tribe was typically egalitarian, however they would select someone to be the “Big Man.” The Big Man was first among equals. Everyone in the tribe had a say in decisions, but the Big Man provided leadership and helped to settle disputes. When choosing a Big Man, the tribe would select a man who had strong fighting skills and/or was a very successful farmer. They would also choose someone whom they felt was more connected with the gods, as they started to care more about keeping the gods happy in order to keep the weather good for their harvest.

City-States & Kingdoms

If a tribe lived in a fertile area, their population would increase. As their population increased, they would need more land. This would require the tribe to conquer and claim the surrounding land, fighting those who stood in their way. A tribe with thousands of members becomes a City-State. When they expand to being multiple cities, they would be considered a Kingdom. With so many members and so much territory, there would be little or no family connection between the members. They needed a group to create laws and to establish order among the people. Thus, a central government would be created to keep the peace and establish order. The government would be led by a King. The King would come from a successful family. Power being passed through a family is called a dynasty. A King would also claim to have special information from the gods and that they had given him the right to rule. He required that a tribute of gold, food, or service be paid to him.



Kingdoms had become so big and complex that it would require a bureaucracy, or a group of officials to help run the government. Bureaucrats were the officials who helped organize the different parts of the Kingdom. One Bureaucrat would be responsible for water and irrigation. A second Bureaucrat would be in charge of labor and large projects. A third would oversee the collection and storage of tribute. The Bureaucrats were selected from the family of the King. The King and the Bureaucrats lived comfortably off of the tribute paid by the common people.

With the surplus, or excess amount of food being produced from the farms, members were no longer forced to work on the farms. Much of the dirty work was done by the slaves, who were captured during the fighting. People had time and energy to learn a skill and earn money by doing different jobs. They could become artists, musicians, metal workers, priests, carpenters, or any of a number of skilled based professions. These workers would get paid and then they could buy food from the farmers at the market. Kingdoms also had the capability of having professional soldiers and police forces who could focus on fighting and training.

States

As a successful Kingdom continues to expand and conquer surrounding territory, it becomes a State. A state has anywhere from 50,000 to over 1 Billion members with numerous cities, a powerful military, extensive taxes/tributes to fund the government, and a complex bureaucracy. The government could take the form of a Democracy/Republic, where the people vote and have power, or a King/Dictator, where one man or family is in charge. Most of the citizens of the state were literate (able to read) and from multiple ethnic groups. The economy was based on slavery or really cheap labor to work the farms, which would allow its citizens to hold other jobs. A State is only as strong as its ability to keep its citizens loyal. States use religion and patriotism to create a feeling of loyalty and unity. If unhappy citizens become disruptive enough, the whole system falls apart.



Concluding Thoughts

We have traced the growth of society from small Bands of five people to States with millions of people. It is important to remember that the growth of society is based around one thing: Food. The level of food determines the level of society. The geography determines the level of food production.