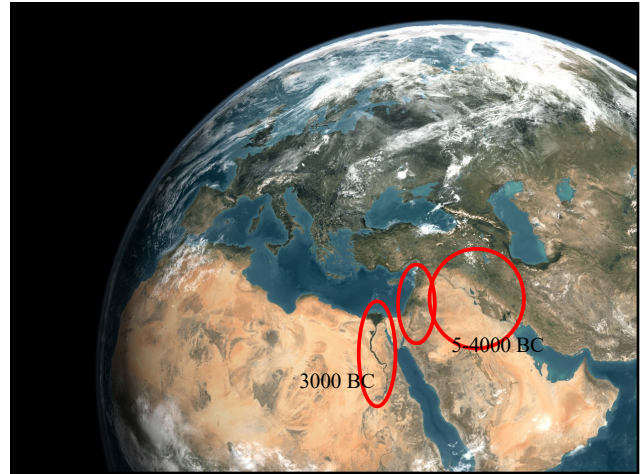


The Fertile Crescent after 4000 BC

Ec 365
September 10, 2026

1



2

Plan : from geography to institutions

- Mesopotamia
 - North (high)
 - South (low and wide)
- Egypt
 - Small band
- Issues
 - Type of river, water and irrigation
 - Taxability
 - Cities and state

3

3

Mesopotamia

- Between two rivers
 - Euphrates and Tigris
- Two parts
 - North
 - Higher, rain
 - South
 - Very low, no rain
 - Bagdad elevation 150 feet



4

4

The two rivers

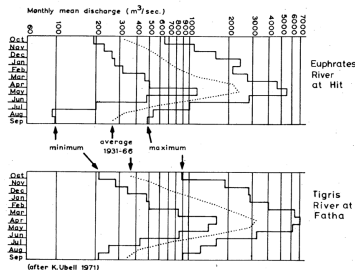


Fig. 1. Variations in Euphrates and Tigris River discharge.

5

North / South

- North
 - Rain fed agriculture
- South
 - Bagdad elevation 50m from the sea
 - Necessity of irrigation (both for capture and defense)



Mardin (Turkey)



6

The south

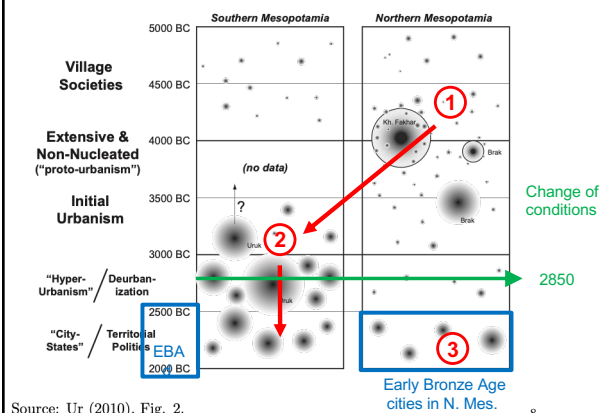
Then (and now)



7

7

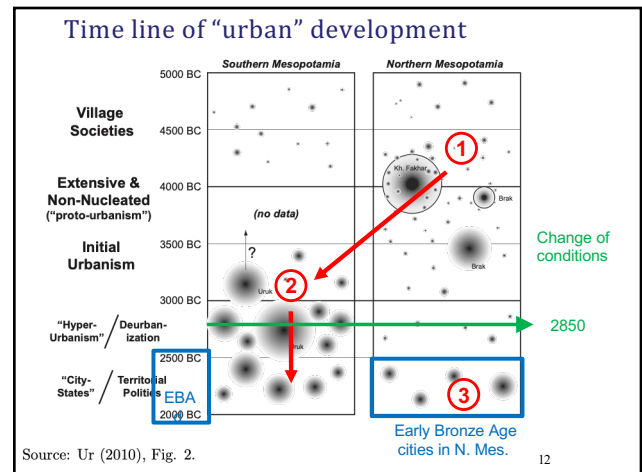
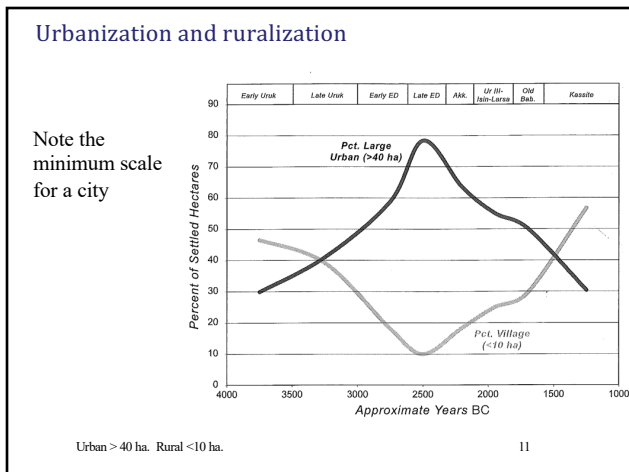
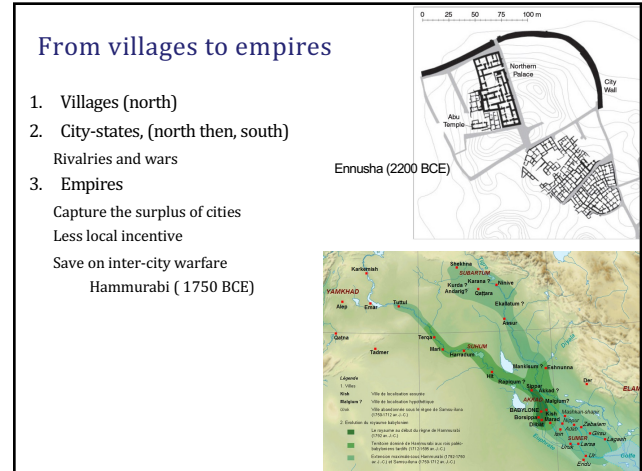
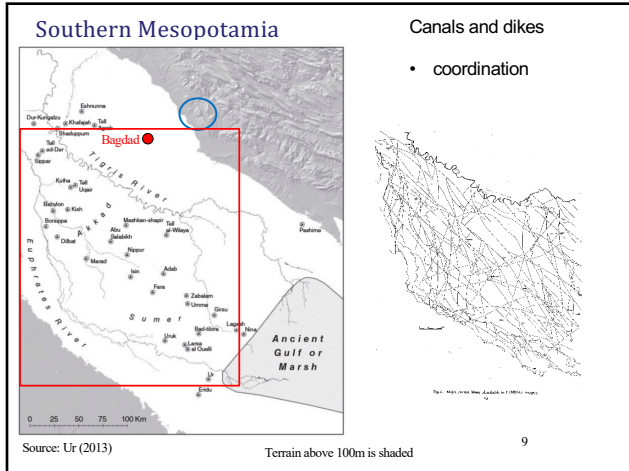
Time line of "urban" development



Source: Ur (2010), Fig. 2.

8

8



Cities

- Definition?
- Buildings for common function
 - Burial
 - Palace
 - Temple



13

Uruk

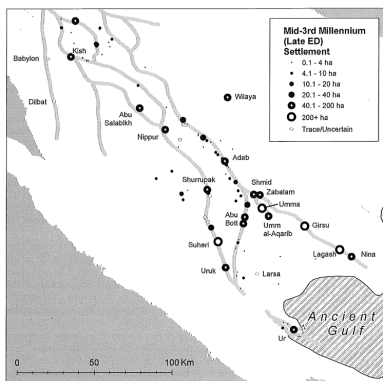
“Unfortunately, almost all objects found in the great structures at Uruk were in a secondary context and cannot be tied directly to them. These include the world’s first written documents, clay tablets (the so-called Archaic Texts) with a pictographic script (Englund 1998). The 5,400 tablets recovered are primarily concerned with economic matters and record great quantities of sheep, agricultural products, beer, and land. They are often assumed to be the economic records of temples, but this assumption is complicated by their secondary archaeological context”

Jason Ur (2012)

14

14

Competing cities 2600-2100 BC



15

15

Invention of writing

- around 7500 BCE, tokens for accounting
- ~ 3400, bullae (clay balls) for token
- ~ 3300, pictograms on boxes
- ~ 3200, tablets with numbers and logograms

~ 3000 BCE



16

Money

- Coins will appear around 7th century BCE (in Anatolia, current Turkey)
- Before that, weight in gold and silver
- Even with no exchange in gold and silver, a unit weight (shekel) can be used as a unit of account.
 - One shekel 8.4 grams of silver
 - Daily wage for Babylonian workers ~ ¼ shekel
- Other unit: sar (sar) 36 square meters (~ 400 square ft)

17

17

Contracts and private property

Sale of Real Estate, Sumer, around 2000 BCE

Sini-Ishtar, the son of Ilu-eribu, and Apil-Ili, his brother, have bought one third Shar of land with a house constructed, next the house of Sini-Ishtar, and next the house of Minani; one third Shar of arable land next the house of Sini-Ishtar, which fronts on the street; the property of Minani, the son of Migrat-Sin, from Minani, the son of Migrat-Sin. They have paid four and a half shekels of silver, the price agreed. Never shall further claim be made, on account of the house of Minani. By their king they swore. (The names of fourteen witnesses and a scribe then follow.) Month Tebet, year of the great wall of Karra-Shamash.

18

18

Contract: power of attorney

First year of Evil-Merodach, 561 B.C.

ITTI-NABU-BALATU, the son of Shula, the son of Egil acts in place of Bel-kishir, his brother, (who) has not gone into business. With reference to their securities and whatever property belonged to Shula, their father, (which) they have shared with one another, in so far as it belongs to Bel-kishir, it shall go into the business, and whatever profit arises from traffic (literally, the street), however much he may gain in this way, he shall bring all unto and to Bel-kishir deliver. His hand for this he raised.

19

19

Public good provided by the state: justice

- Code of King Ur-Nammu (2250 BC)
 - Probably, encoding of previous rules
- Code of Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC)
 - 282 cases
 - Very harsh punishments
 - “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”
- Demonstration of private property rights

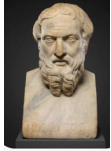
Louvre museum



20

Egypt

- Herodotes (c. 484-425 BC)



Herodotus Bust of Herodotus. Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

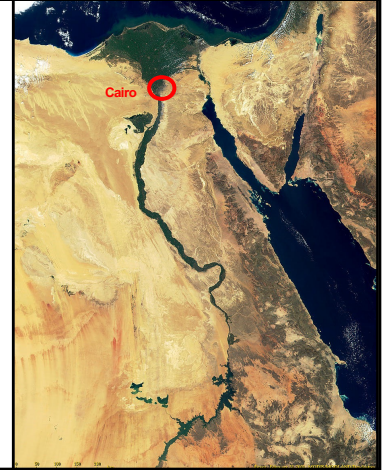
When you are still a day's sail from the land, if you let down a sounding-line you will bring up mud, and find yourself in eleven fathoms' water, which shows that the soil washed down by the stream extends to that distance. Egypt has a soil that is black and crumbly, as being alluvial and formed of the deposits brought down by the river from Ethiopia.

2
1

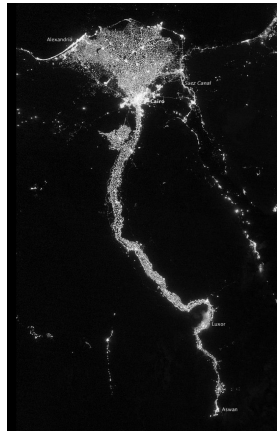
21

Now (and then)

- Same as 5000 years ago,
- except for the lake Nasser south of the Aswan dam.
- Valley encased in the desert
 - No escape
 - Restricted ports of entry for trade
- Any land is close to the Nile
 - Monitoring
 - Travel



22

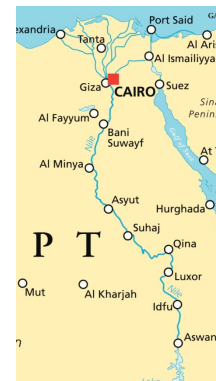


23

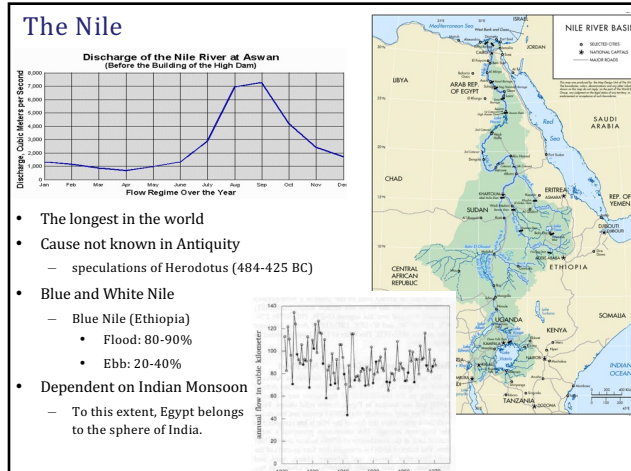
Cities today

- Greater Cairo : 23-25
- Alexandria: 6
- Port Said: 0.75
- Suez: 0.8
- Mansoura, Tanta :0.6
- Asyut, Al Minya: 0.6
- Ismailia: 0.4
- Fayum: 0.4

Egypt is not a civilization of cities



24



25

They obtain the fruits of the field with less trouble than any other people in the world, ..., since they have no need to break up the ground with the plough, nor to use the hoe, nor to do any of the work which the rest of mankind find necessary if they are to get a crop; but the husbandman waits till the river has of its own accord spread itself over the fields and withdrawn again to its bed, and then sows his plot of ground, and after sowing turns his swine into it- the swine tread in the corn- after which he has only to await the harvest. The swine serve him also to thrash the grain, which is then carried to the garner.

Concerning the nature of the river, I was not able to gain any information either from the priests or from others... The third explanation, which is very much more plausible than the others, is positively the furthest from the truth: that the Nile's inundation is caused by the melting of snows.

2
6

26

There is no country that possesses so many wonders, nor any that has such a number of works which defy description. Not only is the climate different from that of the rest of the world, and the rivers unlike any other rivers, but the people also, in most of their manners and customs, exactly reverse the common practice of mankind. The women attend the markets and trade, while the men sit at home at the loom; and here, while the rest of the world works the woof up the warp, the Egyptians work it down; the women likewise carry burthens upon their shoulders, while the men carry them upon their heads.

27

The river provided

- Water from the flood surge beginning each June overflowed the river banks and spread water and rich alluvial soils into basins in which grain crops were grown.
- Fish.
- A superb "communication corridor,"
- A rhythm to life, a unity of landscape and people, a sense of stability and fertility used to great effect by the rulers and their unique visual cultural expression of political ideology.

2
8

28

Irrigation

- Very powerful river
 - Water capture has no impact downstream
- No need for coordination of the state
 - **Local** coordination and advice
 - Prediction of the flood, suitable crops and taxation

