

7.2: Paleolithic - Ancient Governance



Social Studies 2201

SCO 7.2

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Evolution of Governance Systems

Paleolithic Government

- Stone age peoples organized themselves in a far less formal manner than we do today. That said, they based their societies around egalitarianism, shared decision making, and consensus building:
 - **Egalitarian:** A flat social structure in which people are generally equal, with similar tasks & responsibilities.
 - Most people had similar jobs, tasks, and status in the community (e.g., men would hunt and protect, women would gather and care for children, etc.)
 - Little to no specialization and small populations meant there were few relationships to manage.

Evolution of Governance Systems

Paleolithic Government

- **Shared decision making and consensus building:** being more or less equal meant that decisions likely affected most of society in similar ways. It was in the best interest of the group to do what was best for everyone to survive.
- Community membership was a matter of familial ties, making benefits enjoyed by the community more equitable.

Neolithic Societies

- For most of human history (i.e., prehistory), societies contained no form of identifiable government as we know it today.
- They were, in a sense, **stateless societies**:
 - **small cultural groups in which authority is shared by lineages of equal power** instead of being exercised by a central government.
- The **Neolithic Revolution** and the establishment of permanent settlements would lead to **city-states**:
 - **A city and its surrounding lands functioning as an independent political unit.**
 - People identified based on their city of origin (countries did not exist).

Neolithic Societies

- Remember! With the **first agricultural revolution**, society would go through considerable changes (food surplus, permanent settlements, and urbanization).
- Society would grow increasingly complex as **civilization** developed:
 - **Advanced cities** brought larger populations and the need for increased trade.
 - **Specialization** resulted in artisans producing specific goods for trade, but also provided noticeable differences among roles in the community (class systems developed).
 - **Advanced technology** and **record keeping** made trade, defense, and other tasks more effective and diverse.

Neolithic Societies

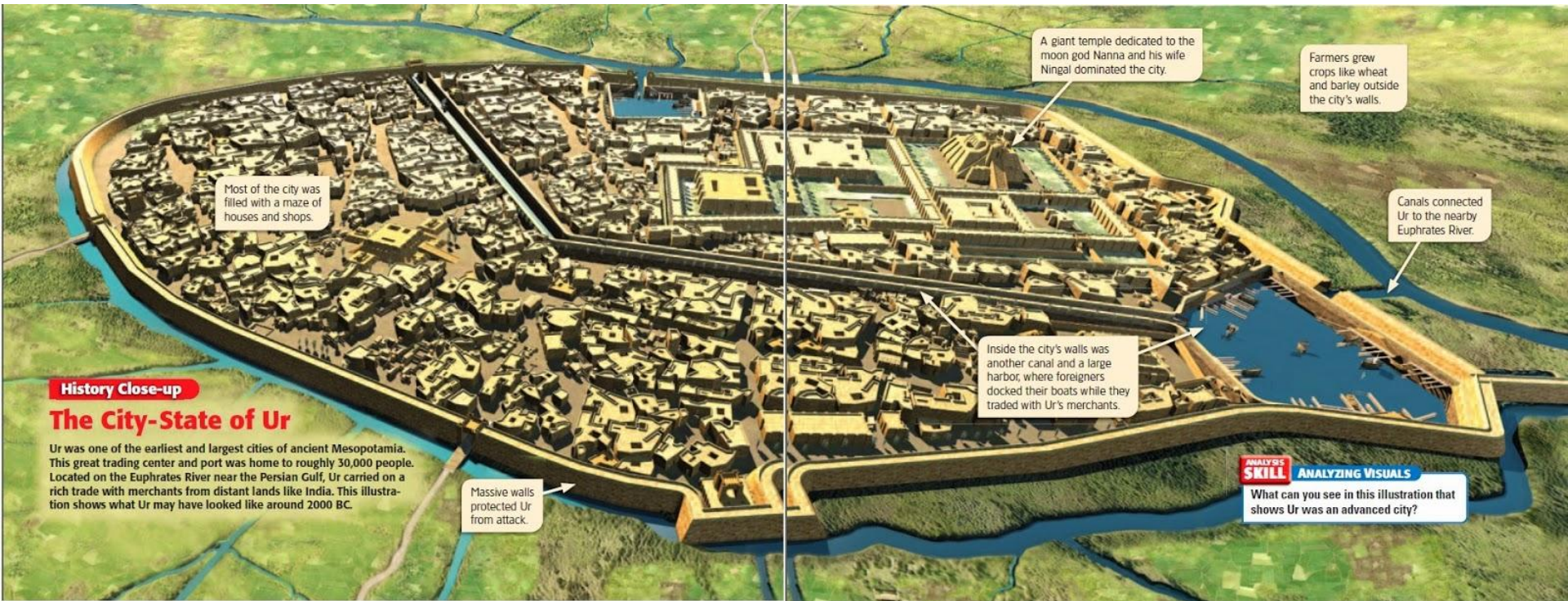
- **Institutions** would develop to make management of larger populations and fulfillment of community needs easier.
- **Government** would become formalized:
 - **Laws could now be written down** and become more authoritative and consistent.
 - Consensus building becomes more difficult in large groups, resulting in **fewer people making decisions for whole community.**

Mesopotamia and the First City-States

- In Ancient Mesopotamia (**Sumer**) governance took the form of **autocratic** rule, specifically a **theocracy** developed.
- **As the religious and governmental institutions developed, the head of a religion assumed position of power and authority.**
- These city-states were governed by rulers who were not only the heads of their communities, but the source of their power was separate from the community (divine).
- These leaders would conduct religious ceremonies to honour the gods, in addition to making decisions about trade, defense, and other aspects of daily life.



Third Dynasty of Ur, about 2100 BCE, from Babylon, southern Iraq.



Locate the ziggurat (massive temple) in this reconstruction of the Sumerian city-state of Ur.

How does the importance of the ziggurat change when we consider that Ur was a theocracy?

Complete Direct Democracy in Ancient Greece

- Refer to your handout *How Did Athenian Democracy Work?* & the video for a better understanding of government in Ancient Athens



Complete Representative Democracy in Ancient Rome

- Refer to your handout “*How Was The Roman Republic Governed?*” & the video for a better understanding of democracy in Ancient Rome

