**The Mesolithic Age:**

* The *Mesolithic Age* (Middle Stone Age) went from 12,000-8,000 BCE.
* Major changes included the ability to shape and sharpen stone tools, make needles out of bone, etc.
* More animals were domesticated, like cows.
* Pottery and basket-making begin to be developed for use as food storage.

**The Neolithic Revolution:**

* The advent of the introduction of agriculture and animal husbandry (known as the Neolithic revolution) is considered by many historians to be one of the two key changes in the human experience—since our species emerged.
* The other key change?
* Archeologists and historians believe agriculture was “invented” in at least three separate places sometime between 9,000 BCE and 5,000 BCE.
* The first occurrence was in the northern Middle East/Black Sea region with the domestication of wheat and barley.
* It probably occurred because of changes in the animal supply.
* The earliest traces of wheat and barley were found in Iraq.
* Women most likely started the Neolithic revolution because as gatherers, they were probably the ones who noticed if you drop some seeds in the ground, a little later something else happened.
* We’ll never know if this happened by accident or by design.
* The second “invention” occurred in southern China and continental Southeast Asia around 7,000 BCE with the introduction of rice.
* The third clear separate “invention” was the domestication of corn (maize) in Central America around 5,000 BCE.
* Traces of the oldest known corn (Teosinte) was found under this boulder in Mexico.
* Agriculture may have been invented in other places too, like sub-Saharan Africa and northern China. We simply don’t know.
* But by 5,000 BCE agriculture had gradually spread and was becoming the most common economic system for the largest number of people in the world.
* Despite the advantages of agriculture over hunting and gathering, its widespread adoption was slow.
* One reason for this slow spread was that the contacts among relatively far-flung populations was minimal (it took several thousand years for agriculture to disseminate from the Middle East to Europe).
* **The Neolithic Revolution: (Continued)**
* Not all regions were suitable for agriculture; some were arid (dry) or heavily forested.
* An alternative economic system based on nomadic herding of animals (known as pastoral societies) prevailed for a long time over agriculture in parts of the Middle East, Africa, the Americas, and especially Central Asia (some still exist today).
* These nomadic pastoral groups found they could tame and breed some of the animals they hunted—goats, sheep, pigs, cattle, and camels.
* These pastoral societies developed in regions where low rainfall made it impractical to build life around growing crops.
* Agriculture involves settling down, which might not have appealed to some hunting-gathering societies that valued their capacity (freedom) to move around.
* Agriculture might have been repellant to societies where males were accustomed to boasting about their hunting exploits.
* When agriculture was introduced, it brought massive changes to the human experience.
* First, it changed the nature of work. Agriculture involves more work, particularly for men, than hunting and gathering.
* It is estimated that hunting/gathering, on average, involves about 3 hours of work a day.
* Agriculture, especially “in season,” requires much, much more.
* Agriculture redefined and increased the work expectations of human society.
* Agriculture also redefined gender relations. In most hunter/gatherer societies, men did the hunting and women the gathering. Since both groups contributed to the food supply, women had some influence in society.
* In agricultural societies, patriarchal systems predominated.
* Since men increasingly assumed the role as the principle cultivator of crops, they increased their dominance over women.
* In all agricultural societies, not only does male dominance over women occur, but older males dominate younger ones.
* This characteristic of agricultural societies still exists in our world today.
* The most obvious reason for the increase in male dominance was that agriculture both permitted and required an expansion of the birthrate.
* Domestication also benefited the domesticated species (plant and animal) as farmers protected them from predators and helped them reproduce, ensuring their survival (which is why there are so many dogs, sheep, and cows and so much wheat, rice, and corn).
* More secure food supplies—that’s the principle advantage of agriculture over hunting/gathering.

**The Neolithic Revolution: (Continued)**

* Producing more abundant and more predictable food supplies permitted larger numbers of children to be born.
* Agricultural societies needed more children to work the land.
* Greater food supplies created new patterns of child rearing and an increase in the per capita birth rate (usually between 5-7 births per family).
* In a hunting-gathering society, children have relatively few functions until they reach their early teen years.
* In agricultural societies, childhood and work became closely associated.
* Virtues, such as hard work and obedience, became part of the lessons children learned in an agricultural society.
* Early farmers faced limitations on the amount of food they could produce since there was a shortage of laborers (why so many children were needed), water, and nutrients (it would take thousands of years for people to understand the benefits of animal fertilizer).
* So there were three main farming technologies early farmers adopted that reflected these limitations.
* 1. Horticulture: traditional gardening techniques (clearing land, tilling then planting then harvesting).
* Since human labor provides all the energy, the effectiveness of early tools was critical.
* 2. Swidden (slash and burn): weeding out excessive trees to allow more sunlight and nutrients to reach the ground.
* Trees/vegetation cut, then area burned, then plots cultivated.
* 3. Chinampas: created by Mesoamerican farmers, growing crops on man-made floating fields of timber and soil, anchored in the middle of lakes.
* The advent of agriculture raises some interesting questions about human progress.
* First, a major drawback was the introduction of new inequalities between men and women.
* A second drawback was that agriculture allowed people to settle in clustered communities, which exposed inhabitants to periodic epidemic diseases.
* A third drawback was that agricultural societies altered the local environment in a way that hunter/gatherer societies did not.
* Some regional environments were damaged, even destroyed, by agricultural communities (which we will see later).
* But agriculture clearly had advantages, which was why it spread (albeit very slowly).
* One of its advantages was that it produced products that could be fermented and turned into alcohol.

**The Neolithic Revolution: (Continued)**

* Some historians believe this is one of the reasons why men gave up hunting to adopt agriculture.
* Clay, southern Iraq, 3100 BCE.
* One of the first things agricultural societies did when they developed writing was to write down recipes for the fermentation of wheat, barley, grapes, etc.
* More systematically, agriculture significantly increased food supplies.
* This in turn allowed families to have more children and resulted in population expansion.
* These conditions prevailed in much of the world from about 9,000 BCE until about 300 years ago.
* But agricultural economies were constrained by limitations in the amount of food that a worker could generate.
* Even the most advanced agricultural economies required about 80% of the population to be involved in agriculture.
* This limited the size of cities to be no more than 20% of the population (most were less) and limited the amount of taxation that could be levied.
* More taxes = ?
* Only within the last century did Russia’s agricultural society have an urban level that was more than 10% of the population.
* Agricultural societies also generated cultural emphases, especially by encouraging attention to the spring season (and the divine forces responsible for creation and renewal).
* The crucial features of agriculture were its role in population increase and its capacity to generate food surpluses.
* This freed some people to do other things, like manufacture containers (pottery) that could hold food or seed from one season to the next.
* One of the first areas where agricultural societies generated technological advancement was in the area of pottery making (needed to maintain an agricultural economy) and metal working.
* The world’s oldest known city is Jericho, located in today’s West Bank (Palestine) and dated to about 9,000 BCE.
* The city was surrounded by springs near the Dead Sea.