
UNIT 9 THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE RECONSTRUCTED

Structure

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9.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we will first discuss about the form of social structure that existed in the Bronze Age societies. With the emergence of state the institution of kingship becomes important. You will learn about the sacral king and nature of kingship in the bronze age societies. The Unit ends with a discussion on the developments in the four regions after the Bronze Age.

9.2 THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF BRONZE-AGE SOCIETIES

It is time we attempted a definition of the kind of social structure peculiar to the Bronze Age. This reconstruction shall depend mainly on the Mesopotamian evidence. It is for this region that thousands of written tablets of the third millennium BC are available to the historian, which give enormously detailed information. A large segment of an archive (dozens of clay tablets) for instance, document the month-by-month work of an official in charge of grain disbursements in one small centre. Moreover, there is a wealth of archaeological and settlement pattern data, because the Euphrates and its branches have shifted to the west since the third millennium, so that the area under intense cultivation today has not damaged Bronze-Age sites.

In Unit 7 we had seen that the situation in Egypt was totally different. The Indus and the Huang Ho are in their turn huge rivers with speedy currents, that regularly flood their banks, so that the probability of ancient sites being preserved in their valleys is very low. However, the Hakra tributary of the Indus (perhaps the lowest stretch of the Sarasvati of the Rgveda) became dry soon after the Harappan period, so that many mounds have survived until today along its lower stretch in Pakistan

Concerning Mesopotamia, as far back as 1972 the Russian cuneiform scholar, I. Diakonoff, had concluded that its economy after 3000 BC had two separate “sectors”, the “communal-and-private” sector, and the sector managed by the state. The first was peopled by rural communities, still structured on descent, and tribal in the sense that private property in agricultural land had not come

into existence. As far as the written evidence goes, only a few members of the elite actually purchased land and became private owners. A few third-millennium legal texts attest to the sale of large tracts of land by multiple sellers, (As the names of the sellers' fathers, grandfathers, and other ancestors are often given, we can make out that they were all related in the male line) to individuals who were either the rulers themselves, or high functionaries (Food grains, cloth, fish, oil, and occasionally copper were some of the items given in exchange). These were the only "contracts" that were inscribed on stone (not on ordinary clay tablets), and they make references to certain rituals being performed after the transfer, like the pouring of oil and the driving of nails into walls and feasting the entire group of sellers. All this indicates that the transfer of communally owned lands into private hands was a highly unusual deed. References in royal inscriptions indicate that people could be summoned by clan or lineage to labour in the city or on temples or their estates. Nowhere in the Bronze Age are there references to land registration, or to the state keeping records of land holdings.

The state sector comprised the economies of the temple and palace, the property of gods/kings/sacral rulers. The Mesopotamian temple owned large tracts of land (originally the land of the tribal community) and herds of livestock. The palace of the king also owned land, occasionally that bought from rural communities. Agriculture on such land was performed by the populace under one or other form of allocation, for a few months in the year, or, in the case of prisoners of war and clients and warriors of the king, through the year. The produce of the land and animal herding was also processed. Temples and palaces organized the grinding of flour, the baking of bread, and the production of woolen cloth from sheep's wool, together with a number of crafts utilizing metal, stone, and shell from afar. (see Unit 7, sections on technology and trade).

There is absolutely no evidence that the rural people had to pay a tax in grain on their harvests. It was periodic labour that they owed to their king and gods. Sometimes temple offerings would have been obligatory, and in this period of very early state formation, when there would have been no standing armies, young men would have been called up for war as and when the need arose. (It is at that stage that metal weapons would be cast on a mass scale.)

The state sector was of large proportions. An entire palace archive available from excavations at the city-state of Mari (1800 – 1750 BC) has been studied, and it appears that the palace itself occupied 3 hectares, with 260 rooms and multiple courtyards. The king allotted parcels of land around the town or further afield, to his men. Allotments of 50 to 80 hectares were worked by 10 to 15 men. People were recruited from the respective localities when labour needs were high, e.g. at harvest time. Texts indicate that palace workshops organized the crafting of textiles, weaponry, leather, bronze tools, etc. The palace provided the raw materials and supplied food and clothes as rations to as many as 400 individuals at any one time. The produce was stored in palace magazines. (Palace and temple workshops were also located outside the enclosed precincts of these institutions.) Merchants went abroad on behalf of the king, and his personal seal was often rolled on packages.

Payments made for labour in the state sector were rations rather than wages. They took the form of flour, bread, wool, fish, etc. They were paid monthly. Detailed lists of payments were drawn up, naming each recipient. Because they

were made to the aged and to infants, and because the amounts were standardized according to age and gender, (In Sumer in the later third millennium, adult men usually got 48 litres of flour a month and adult women, 24) these payments cannot be termed wages. They were rations. The major workforce in the state sector comprised the ration workers.

The king and his extended family and military officials not only laid claim to the palace lands, they were also de facto owners of the temple's estates, herds, fisheries and workshops. They are not mentioned ever as performing any kind of labour, but instead often had huge amounts of wealth expended on their burial, as we shall see below. So we conclude that class formation was present but inchoate—it was not yet based on the ownership of basic resources such as land. We could suggest that in any Bronze Age situation it was one kin group that had acquired the permanent power to impose its will on society. This meant that the various tribes and descent groups in the land lost the right to declare war on each other, or resort to blood vengeance. As an elite came to assert its authority with the backing of force, it was the king and his officers who alone could decide who was right or wrong, and the punishments for misdeeds, according to declared laws of the land.

There is evidence that in broad outline society in Bronze-Age Egypt was similarly structured. You may recall that on the Narmer Palette, ahead of the Pharaoh in the red crown of Lower Egypt, walk four standard bearers, with bird or animal emblems, of which each probably represented a tribe or a clan. So here too, as in Mesopotamia, recruitment to warfare may have been by descent group or clan. We have referred in Unit 8 to the wooden tokens given out to soldiers and workmen for their food rations. Expeditions consisting of over a thousand men were on occasion equipped to settle for several months in the eastern desert, to quarry stones or mine metal. Elsewhere, the remains of barrack-like housing testify to an expedition force that built a new city. Records were maintained of tools handed out or given for repair, of attendance, and of ration payments. Attached smiths repaired the tools, scribes kept the records. Once the required quantities of stone or metal were ready, or the new city built, the expedition would close.



Illustration 13 : Ushabti figurine from Egyptian Tomb

Hundreds of wooden or faience statuettes of hoe carriers have been found in ordinary Egyptian tombs. They depict the *ushabti* or “answerer” who would respond to any calls made on the dead person. When a person died and went to the afterlife, he wanted to cease to join up, with his hoe, for labour on the fields. So an inscription could read, “*O Answerer, if I am called up, if I am appointed any work in the Hereafter—even as man is required to cultivate fields, to flood banks, or to carry sand of the East to the West—then speak you: “Here I am!”*” Quite literally, the statue was expected to take the place of the tomb owner in labour service in heaven.

The Egyptian system of creating estates, however, has no parallel in Mesopotamia. Where the pyramids or mortuary temples of Pharaohs were built, land was endowed for the future cult of these dead kings. These had to provide a range of staple food and luxuries for the continuance of the cult and the well-being of the appointed high priests. Thus the elite did live on the income of such endowments and it appears that the cultivators were not allowed to move away from such estates.

Where the pyramids of the Old Kingdom are concerned, many scholars have tried to work out the labour force that was employed. Probably the Great Pyramid was built over twenty years. One estimate is that a gang of 8 men was required to put in place each of its 2,300,000 huge blocks of stone. Perhaps 100,000 men were employed at this building site over three-month stretches (in the non-agricultural season) each year and for many years.

Similarly, it has been calculated that the city wall, made of hundreds of layers of beaten down mud, that protected Chengchow in northern China, took 10,000 men eighteen years to build. Shang oracle inscriptions indicate that up to 13,000 men could be taken prisoner in one military campaign. Hundreds of prisoners-of-war were sometimes sacrificed to a royal ancestor. Probably it was these prisoners who built the city walls and dug the royal tombs at Anyang.

Given such evidence, it is reasonable to ascribe the planned Harappan cities to state initiative. Where evidence exists on the origins of planned settlements in the ancient world, it is known that street plans did not gradually evolve, but were created at a certain historical juncture, in many cases because a settlement had to be relocated. If this is accepted, you will also find reasonable the argument that in Harappan towns the sizes of bricks were uniform not because of “tight administrative controls”, whatever that may mean, but because the populace was ordered or recruited to making bricks on a mass scale. It is in this context, too, that we can begin to appreciate why the copper/bronze tools and pottery found at Harappan sites are so uniform. The state sector, again, is the context of street plans and drains at Harappan sites.

However, it needs to be said that the state did not yet have the means to organize irrigation on a large scale. In Egypt it was at the level of the nomes that irrigation basins were controlled. In ancient Iraq, as in the medieval and early modern periods, it would have been tribes with their traditions of showing up periodically at the call of their chief to desilt or dig canals, who coordinated the flow of Euphrates water for irrigation.

Within the umbrella of these fledgling states, we expect, flourished enclaves of autonomous tribes, and hunters and gatherers. The archives of the Mesopotamian city-state of Mari, located on the northern edge of the cultivated zone and the

southern frontier of the nomadic pastoralists' domain, show that sheep herders' movements into the irrigated alluvium had to be watched, sometimes controlled. Pastoralists could be of use but also destructive. Pastoral tribes like the Yaminites grazed their flocks in the steppe and desert to the west, north, and east of the Euphrates lowlands in the autumn and winter, moving into the valley for a long sojourn between April and October. If their relations with agrarian communities were amicable, or the state controls were in place, agriculture would benefit from sheep manure on their fallow or newly-harvested fields, and from the extra labour that pastoralists could provide for the harvest. However, flocks could do damage to the standing crop if they entered the arable zone at the wrong time, or disrupt important routes of communication. Urban literary texts sometimes disparaged the nomads as people who knew no cults and did not bury their dead. Perhaps it is the Mesopotamian data alone that also afford us a glimpse of people like the Habiru, who lived on the margins of society, taking to brigandage on the steppe or on the roads, and dwelling in camps. They were not pastoralists in the strict sense, and not integrated into state society. They appear to have always been on the move. "Habiru" was thus not the identity of a people/tribe—there are no references, for instance, to their elders or chiefs—so much as of marginalized vagrants.

The fledgling state, the state sector, and writing and records/archives do not, it needs to be said, amount to the formation of a bureaucracy in any of these societies. Bureaucracies involve specialization of duties and a chain of command. They involve salaried officials, who function in an impersonal manner and not as the son of X or the father-in-law of Y. In the tomb inscriptions of Egyptian state officials we read that one high functionary could enjoy as many as eighty titles, such as "Seal bearer", "Overseer of the Two Bathrooms", or "Sole Friend". These were honorifics or titles rather than the designations of particular administrative functions. An administrator could recruit soldiers, organize the quarrying of turquoise and the building of monuments, and also hear disputes. The Bronze-Age state had, we said, emerged from a society in which kinship was the relations of production. There was no money economy, and few institutions for the codification of law or for executive action. As we shall now see, rulers, therefore, depended more on building relationships with their subjects, and on their sacral and ceremonial trappings, than on substantial economic privileges.

9.3 THE INSTITUTION OF SACRAL KINGSHIP

People perform rituals in order to purify either themselves or a particular place; to predict what will happen; to propitiate a divine being; or to create abundance. When a person moves from one stage of his/her social life to another, from, say, the daughter of a house to the wife of someone in another village, a ritual usually marks the transition. In most simple cultures, where an individual has multiple roles (as son, nephew, elder brother, client, etc.), the appropriate etiquette is important. Because a tribal chief eats the same food and uses the same tools as his followers, symbols and social etiquette are, again, necessary to assert that he is the leader, spokesman, and performer of ancestral rituals.

Early kings, too, had little coercive force at their command, and little privilege as regards ownership of land or irrigation water. The more the potential for conflict in their societies, the more they vested their office in mystical values

that placed them above criticism. As an Egyptian text of the Middle Kingdom says, *“What is the King of Upper and Lower Egypt? He is a god by whose dealings one lives, the father and mother of all men, alone by himself, without equal.”* We recall that the “Uruk expansion” involved not just the implanting of Mesopotamian methods of sealing and recording in settlements at a distance, but also architecture typical of Mesopotamian religious buildings.

Even so, in Bronze-Age Egypt and Mesopotamia, there were many rebellions, wars of succession, and assassinations of rulers. This paradox puts the issue of sacral kingship in perspective. The anthropologist Webster pointed out that theocracy never meant that the early king was exclusively a cult figure, or that the polity was wholly religious, or that sacral kingship made physical domination and warfare redundant. He insisted that we do not allow the ceremonial façade to mask the true content of kingship or, worse, think that religion was the source of royal power. Power came from command over the labour of others, from military might, and the ability to enforce (in a limited way) the obedience of others.

The word “Pharaoh” comes from an Egyptian root word meaning “Great House”. Wearing both crowns in turn, the Pharaoh united the land of Egypt. He was an incarnation of Horus the falcon, and when a ruler died, it was said, *“The falcon has flown to the horizon”*. The rulers of Egypt had, by the time of the Old Kingdom, acquired a series of titles associating them with various deities, and engaged in rituals to guard the cosmic order. Yet they were not gods as such, and we expect that their subjects understood the distinction.

We see that in the period of state emergence the Narmer Palette portrayed the Pharaoh as largely a conqueror. Around 1850 BC, a Pharaoh recorded that *“...aggression is bravery, retreat is vile... One is aggressive to the Nubian [further upstream of the Nile, in the Sudan], and he shows his back. But retreat, and he becomes aggressive.... I have plundered their women, and carried off their underlings, gone to their wells, driven off their bulls, torn up their grain and set fire to it....”* One can detect a great deal of swagger in this inscription. Let us, also consider the pyramids of the Old Kingdom.

Many of these were built on the edge of the valley and the western desert, near the capital, Memphis, in the direction of the setting sun. The Great Pyramid of Khufu (or Cheops), of the Fourth Dynasty, at Giza, represents the apogee of pyramid building. The base is square, covering 5.1 hectares, (In comparison the plinth on which the Taj Mahal stands is 186 feet on each side, whereas the base of the Great Pyramid was 755 feet on each side) and the height when complete, 481 feet or 144 m (The Qutb Minar is, in comparison, 238 feet). It is a marvel that this base is absolutely horizontal, deviating by only half an inch between corners. The Great Pyramid was built of 2,300,000 blocks of limestone, each weighing about 2.5 tons. Inside this truly gigantic structure (Built without iron tools!) were built, about 16 m above ground level, a series of chambers and corridors, with the King’s chamber and sarcophagus robbed, by ancient looters, of the royal corpse and the offerings. Other pyramids in Giza have revealed that funerary offerings comprised copper vessels, gold vessels, razors and knives, stone statues, alabaster vases and miniature perfume bottles, silver jewellery inlaid with malachite and carnelian, and so on.

Clearly, such phenomenal structures were intended to protect the body of the

Pharaoh and to keep him happy in the afterlife. But beyond this, there is a far more complex and rich meaning. We had said that during life-cycle transitions rituals are important. When a Pharaoh died and the process of installing his successor was on, and dangers of dissatisfaction or rebellion became real. At such a time, the death ritual (washing the corpse, laying in the offerings, burial processions, animal sacrifices, and the final sealing of the pyramid) would have expressed the continuity and cosmic character of kingship. It would have offered the public a grand spectacle. And from now on, the cult of a dead king was initiated, with regular offerings and ritual personnel associated with it. As for the symbolism of the huge pyramid, there is space here only to say that it was the loftiest structure to capture the first sun's rays of the day, but it also represented the celestial rays on which the Pharaoh could climb to the heavens and become a star.

According to a Chinese belief, certain wise and understanding people can understand what lies above and below, and have the insight to perceive the distant. It is they who supervise the positions of the spirits during rituals. They alone had access to the heavens. The Shang rulers were such persons. They visited the heavens and brought down prayers and songs of various rituals to the earth. The ruling dynasty belonged to the Tzu clan, whose ancestors were periodically consulted for guidance. Cattle bones and turtle shells were heated and the cracks that appeared on them were studied by the kings to answer questions about the future. The answers were then spelt out on the bones/shells. *"It is asked, shall an army of 5000 men be raised?"* Or, *"will there be rain for the millet crop?"* The ancestors were consulted about journeys, war, illness, the hunt, and the prospects of a good harvest. It was the king who had the gift of prediction. Only he had the status and ability to make contact with the ancestral spirits.

The ritual bronze vessels that we have mentioned were used for sacrificial feasts. The decorations on them depicted all manner of real and mythical beasts in a highly schematic way. It is these creatures who helped the kings to cross over into the heavens and make connection with ancestors. Actual animal and human sacrifices were also made. You may remember that such vessels were buried with the dead kings.

In the case of Mesopotamia, the royal burials of Ur involved the deposition of all kinds of costly and skillfully crafted items with the dead. Great amounts of silver and gold, and precious stones and shell, much art work too, went into royal burials. More intriguing, guards armed with weapons, musicians and domestic staff were also buried with the dead. As elsewhere, there were rituals of royal rejuvenation. The Sumerian king took part in the New Year's ritual each year. At this time, the Sacred Marriage was ritually re-enacted between the deities Dumuzi (the king) and Inanna (personified by a high priestess). We have numerous erotic love songs recorded on clay tablets, which had accompanied this ritual. At one stage a priest chants,

"Give him a reign favourable and glorious...

Give him the people-directing spectre, the staff, the crook, the enduring crown which ennobles the head...

May he exercise the shepherdship of the blackheaded people wherever they dwell.

*May he multiply the sheepfolds,
... in the marshes let the birds and fish make much chatter ...
May the grain heaps pile high.”*

Obviously, this was a fertility ritual emphasizing the role of the sacral king as one who commanded the necessary rituals to ensure the prosperity of the land.

9.4 THE FATE OF THE BRONZE-AGE STATES

It is necessary to have a brief idea of what transpired in the four regions after the Bronze Age.

In northern and central China, the Western Chou, who had been powerful in the Shaanxi province (along the upper Wei river) as the western neighbours of the Shang, defeated the Shang and dominated the region from 1122 to 771 BC. There was continuity in the ancestor rituals and casting of bronze vessels, in iconography and in the practice of royal lineage fissioning. But the Chou did not themselves inscribe oracle bones. Their inscriptions on bronze ritual vessels are much longer than Shang inscriptions, and this was a time when literary output increased. A collection of historical narratives and some poetry of this period, known to us in later compilations/editions, are a valuable source of history. The Iron Age came to China in around 500 BC. The political unification of all China was achieved in 221 BC.

As regards the vast region between the Nile and the Indus, we need to consider not just the great river valleys, but also their hinterlands. We have made passing references to the world in which the Bronze-Age societies of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and South Asia functioned. We sometimes mentioned hinterland areas such as the desert east of the Nile, or northern Rajasthan, or Oman, from which copper and other products were extracted. There were, however, also secondary centres like Byblos, where ruling houses appear to have emerged. It is possible that the island of Crete saw the emergence of a palace-centred state system and writing as an outcome of engagement in interactions with Egypt and Mediterranean Europe. The island of Bahrain, which in the third millennium BC appears to have handled some of the onward trade between Sumer and South Asia—and also to have been in independent cultural interaction with Sumer—lacked writing, but appears to have seen some degree of urbanization. By 1200 – 1100 BC, however, the Bronze Age as we know it was over everywhere in western Asia and Egypt.

In Indian English we use the word ‘alphabet’ quite incorrectly. At school our children learn, not “the alphabets” but the letters of one alphabet, English, or Marathi, etc. An alphabet is a system of writing in which one sign denotes a single consonant or vowel

The end came much sooner in South Asia. Although numerous folk traditions undoubtedly survived, we know that the Harappan great tradition came to an almost abrupt end. The greater Indus valley did not play a central role in any later Indian empire. The continuing stream of what we call Indian civilization derived its writing system from the Brahmi alphabet, not the Harappan logographic script. Systems of drainage and sewage in the ancient and medieval cities were vertically laid, involving water-tight ceramic encasement. Developed in the first millennium BC on the Gangetic plain, it is these rather than the small open drains of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa that are believed to be the more efficient and hygienic systems of waste disposal. Technologies of crafting jewellery of shiny red carnelian beads, and the aesthetic associated with them, did not survive the Indus civilization. The sea trade with Oman, Bahrain, and

Mesopotamia came to an end, and the largest urban centres were deserted at the end of the Harappan period. It appears that much of the population reverted to life in small villages.

In fact, after the Harappan Bronze Age, we find several rural and chalcolithic cultures in Gujarat, Sind, and the Ghaggar-Sarasvati-Hakra plains. Metal was used on a restricted level, and these cultures were marked by an absence of full-fledged metallurgy, literacy and city life; crafts were few and technically modest. The concept of the rotating device and the potter's wheel were known, but wheeled transport was rare.

We shall not repeat details that you are expected to know, but it would be useful to bear in mind a few points. There is no hard evidence for massive floods of the Indus. Archaeologists have been prompted to suggest this as a cause of the Harappan decline largely on a reading of the account of Alexander Burnes in 1830. Burnes recorded that a massive earthquake had disrupted the flow of the Indus in 1819, so that a huge lake was formed. In 1826, this lake burst its banks and there was a devastating flood. Yet, archaeologists have not given attention to the fact that Burnes does not report that agriculture or town life were in abeyance in 1830. Thus, however "gigantic" a flood, we cannot expect one such event, or even a series of floods, to have brought an entire civilization to an end. The Nile and Euphrates valleys, after all, were also vulnerable to floods.

On the other hand, we may find clay models of wheeled carts in 2000 BC, and similar ones in, say, 500 BC. The material from both periods may be similar to bullock carts in use in recent times in Sind. I leave you to think out for yourself whether this is adequate justification for the claim that "the bullock cart has survived from Harappan times until today". Perhaps you can put this problem in perspective by reading about the end of the western Asiatic Bronze Age.

The end of the temple- and palace-centred polities of the western Asiatic Bronze Age have, in the past, been attributed variously to climatic change, earthquakes/volcanos, famines, or floods. Such arguments enjoy little credibility today, because it is acknowledged that natural disasters have been frequent in history, and cultures/civilizations have survived them.

Connected with the end of the polities is the coming of the age of iron. Between 1200 and 1000 BC, from the Mediterranean to the Iranian plateau, a transition was made to iron as the chief material for tools and weapons. The reasons may have been several. It was suggested that, with the disruption of certain trade routes, and the mass migrations of the Sea Peoples in the eastern Mediterranean and inland as well, some regions were deprived of supplies of tin and were forced to replace bronze with iron. It was also found that bronze metallurgy utilizes several times more fuel (wood charcoal) than does iron metallurgy.

Iron came relatively late to the world not because the smelting temperatures had to be much higher (except in China, nowhere was iron heated to its molten state) but because metallurgists had to learn to control the supply of oxygen in the smelting kiln. In the course of smelting copper sulphide ores, a small amount of carbon monoxide is produced, but for smelting iron ores the proportion of carbon monoxide has to be many times higher. Once the reduction process (involving the use of a flux) was learnt, iron, which is freely available all over the crust of the earth, (Whereas iron is the most abundant metal on the

crust of the earth, tin is one of the most scarce) became the obvious metal of everyday use. It did not require palace economies to organize the procurement of ores from afar. Instead, small-scale rural production of iron became the rule. This, in general, is how the change from bronze to iron is linked with the end of the Bronze-Age palace-centred economies of western Asia.

Many cities on the coasts of Anatolia, Syria and Palestine, and inland cities such as Hattusha, the capital of the Hittite empire, were destroyed by marauding migrants known as the Sea Peoples, who arrived suddenly in the Mediterranean. The destruction of a Bronze-Age city meant the destruction of the economic nerve-centre of the concerned polity. The marauders did not have the ability to rule those cities themselves. In urban economies, we have seen, various specializations were symbiotic. Once the cities were destroyed, people abandoned them and resettled in the countryside, so that they reverted to agricultural life. In Syria and Palestine, in course of time new tribal polities arose.

Egypt was perhaps the only state that withstood the attack. And of course Mesopotamia was at a safe distance away. The Egyptian and Mesopotamian pantheons, systems of writing, literary traditions, architecture, and iconography continued well into the late first millennium BC (Mesopotamia and Egypt experienced cultural/civilizational continuities in spite of invasions and conquests, and, as far as Egypt is concerned, centuries of foreign rule and political uncertainty). Yet these river valleys too saw certain structural changes towards the end of the Bronze Age. The states of the iron age were extensive, verging on empires. Together with Egypt and Assyria and Babylonia in Mesopotamia, there were Elam in Iran, and Urartu in north-eastern Anatolia. These were all militarily expansionist states. (The apogee was the Achaemenid empire, centred on western Iran, that stretched between the Mediterranean and the Gandhara province of South Asia from the sixth century BC onwards.)

True, Bronze-Age Mesopotamia also had seen episodes of imperialist expansion, but in the iron age a new factor seems to have prevailed. The power and wealth of the ruling elites of the iron age depended less on the organization of agricultural and craft production and trade missions, than filling their coffers by using their armies. They lived off their subject populations, acquiring booty, enslaved labour, captive artisans, and regular flows of tribute. In other words, those polities of the iron age flourished whose subject populations were large.

Everywhere, it appears, economies utilizing bronze tools of production were doomed to be dependent on elite organization of external trade and local production. In the ultimate analysis, they were structurally weak, and doomed to disintegrate, sooner or later. In some areas of the world they left lasting legacies in the realms of art, iconography, literature, and religious thought. In other places, such systems do not appear to have had a role in the civilizational processes that would later unfold. It will remain a challenge to historians for decades to come, to explain this difference.

9.5 SUMMARY

You have learnt in this Unit about the social structure that prevailed in the Bronze Age. Class formation was in a very nascent stage and it was not based on the ownership of land. The king and his officers formed the elite group in

society. Rulers in the Bronze Age depended on building relationships with their subjects and on their sacral and ceremonial trappings. After the Bronze Age changes did not come simultaneously in all four regions. We have discussed in brief this transition in different regions after the Bronze Age.

9.6 EXERCISES

1. Give brief account of social structure in Mesopotamia and Egypt.
2. Write a note on the pyramids and discuss whether you accept the statement that bronze age rulers exercised power over people rather than resources.
3. Write a note on burial practices followed in different early civilizations.

GLOSSARY

Adzes	: A tool for cutting away the surface of wood, like an axe with an arched blade at right angle to the handle
Apogee	: The top point of an arch.
Bevelled-edge Chisels	: A sloping surface chisels
Bone Awls	: A small pointed tool made of bone used for piercing holes especially in leather.
Lost Wax Technique	: This is a technique of making cast models. In this technique a clay core is made and then a wax model built around it. The model is encased in clay mould which is subsequently baked, allowing the melted wax to be poured off. Molten metal is poured into the new hollow mould and finally the clay is broken away to reveal the metal casting.
Cuneiform Literature	: Wedge shaped writing usually on clay tablets practised in Ancient Babylonian inscriptions
Faience Carvings	: Glazed ceramic ware carving originally made at Faenza in Italy.
Hieroglyphic Script	: A picture of an object representing a word, syllable or sound, used in ancient Egyptian writing
Humdrum	: Monotonous or dull or common place
Incholate	: Undeveloped or rudimentary
Loess	: A yellowish dust of silt-sized particles blown in by the wind and redeposited on land newly deglaciated or on sheltered areas. Loess has been found on about 10

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percent of the world's land surface, in Alaska, the Mississippi and Ohio valleys, in northwest and central Europe, and particularly in China where it covers over 4,40,000 sq. km(1,70,000 sq. miles) or about 40 percent of arable land there.

Sarcophagus

: Stone coffin to keep the mummified bodies

Stelae

: An upright stone slab or column typically bearing a commemorative inscription or relief design.

Trough

: A long narrow open receptacle for water or animal feed.

SUGGESTED READINGS FOR THIS BLOCK

Where your own reading is concerned, the following list lays emphasis on pharaonic Egypt and third-millennium Mesopotamia. Much published work on Bronze-Age China incorporates detailed stylistic analyses of the bronzes, and few publications are available in India, in any case.

- V. Gordon Childe, *What Happened in History*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1942 (numerous reprints thereafter)
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