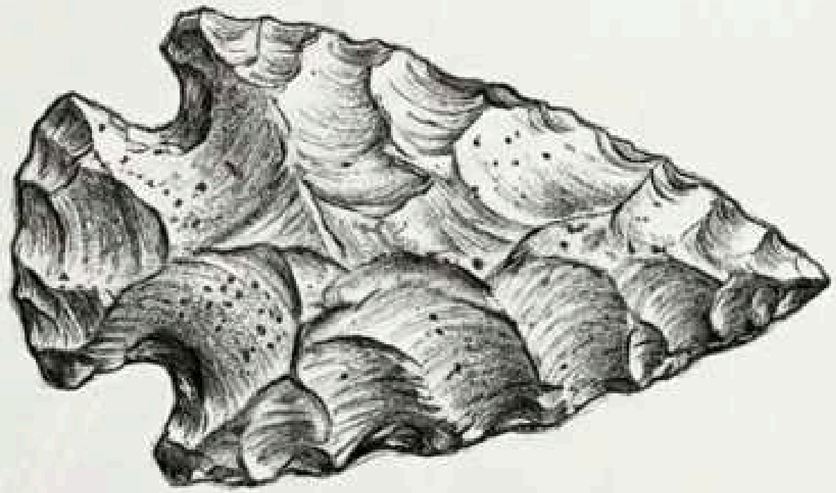
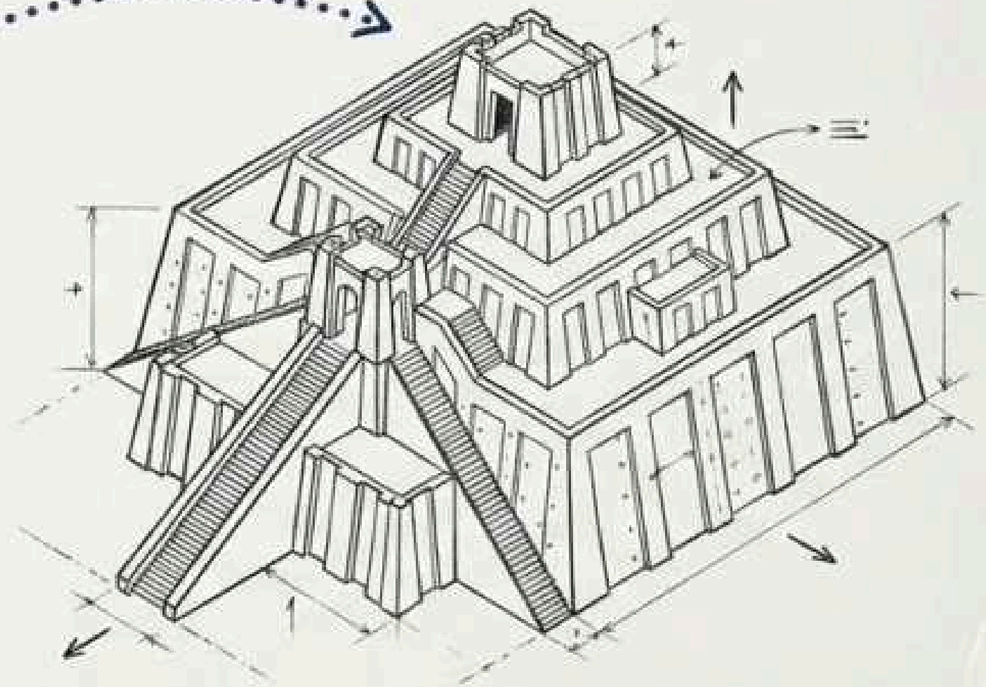
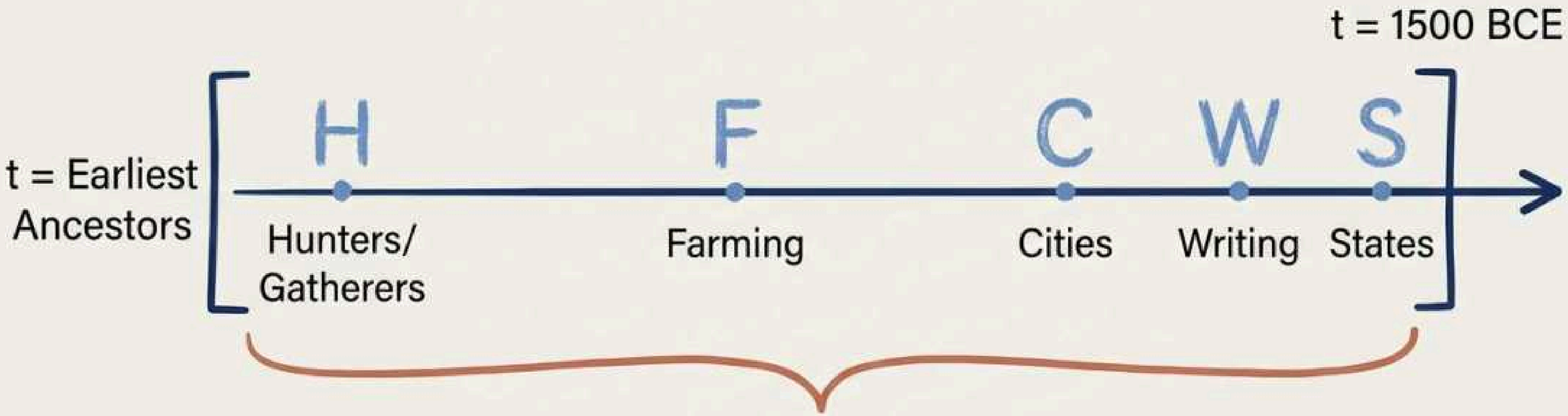
¶ 1.1

HIST 101 B: From Hunters to the First Cities





The Longest Stretch of Human History



These variables form the foundation for all subsequent empires, economies, and religions.

subsequent empires, economies, and religions.

¶ 1.3

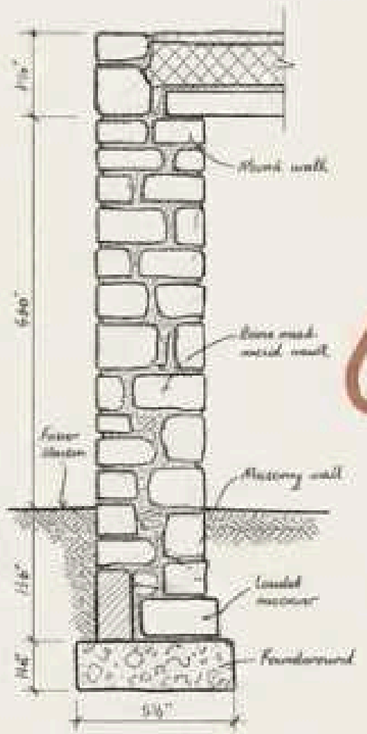
History vs. Prehistory

Study of the Past = Evidence + Interpretation

Prehistory (< 3200 BCE)

Driven by Archaeology





History (>= 3200 BCE, Mesopotamia)

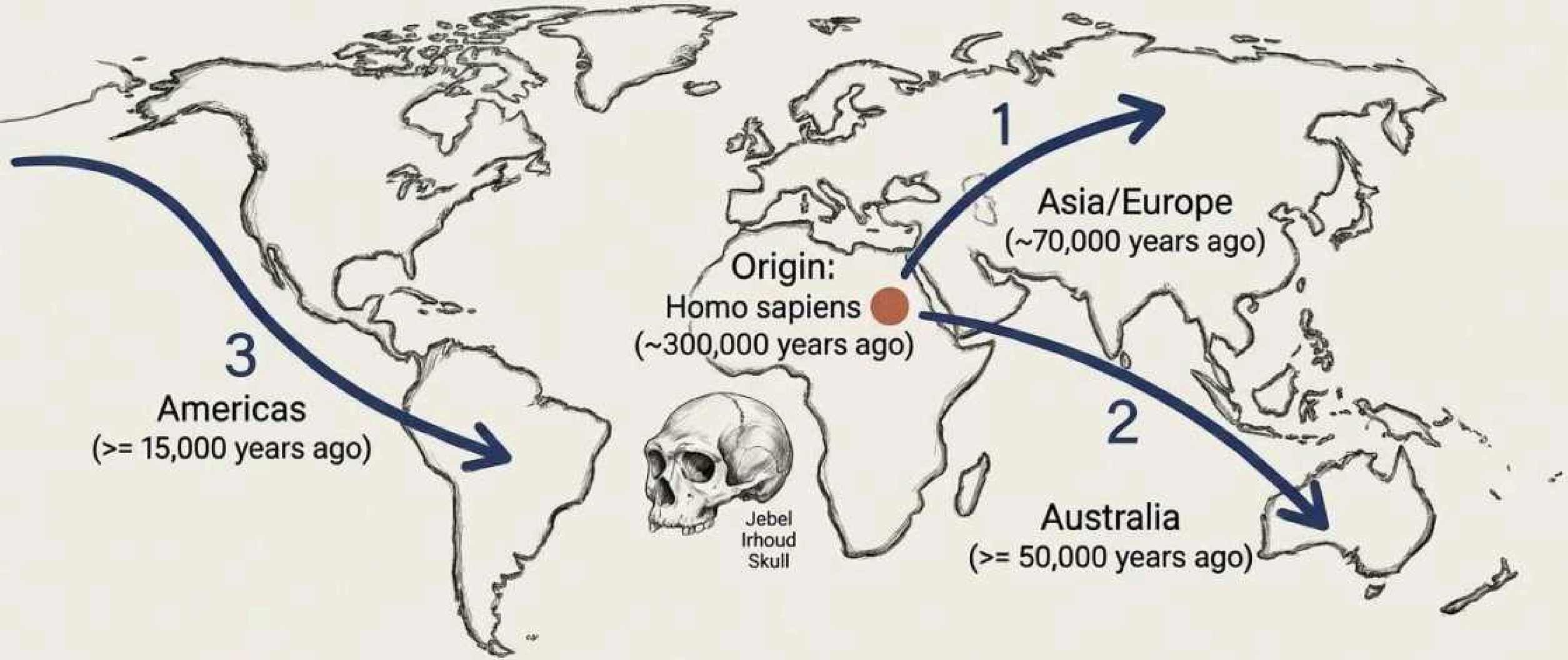
Driven by Written Sources



Careful Interpretation Required

¶ 1.4

Global Settlement Before Farming



Our ancestors settled the whole world long before farming.

The Dynamics of Foraging Bands

High Mobility + Small Group Size = Egalitarian Society

Key Variables:

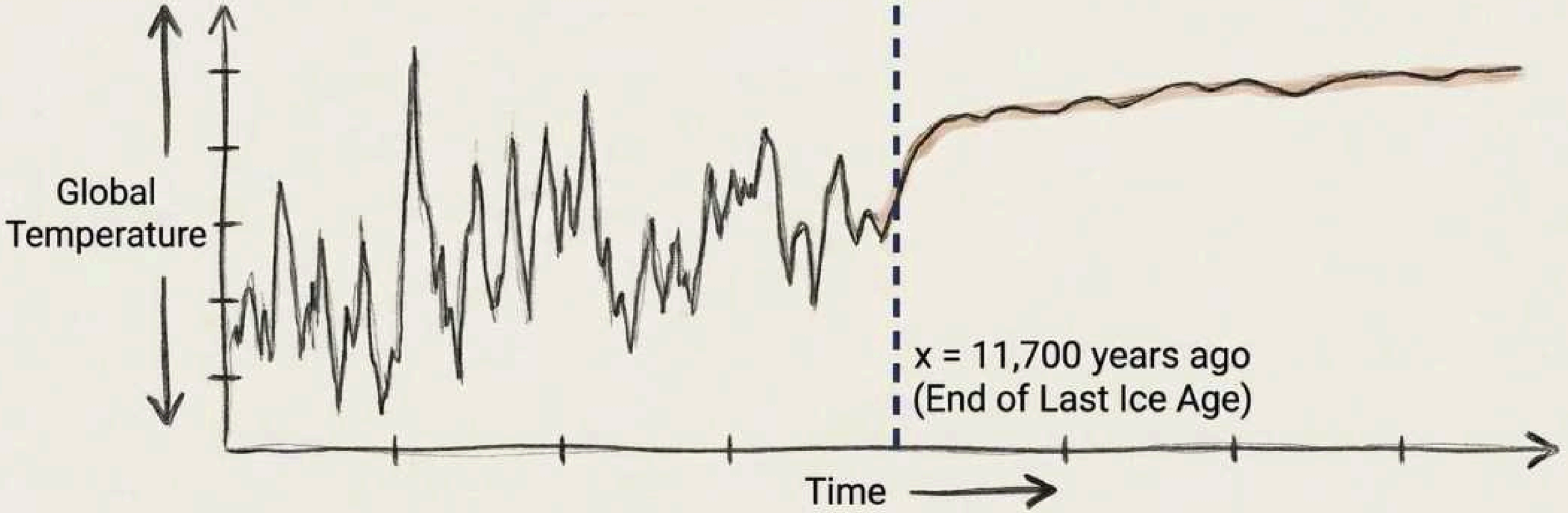
- Controlled fire
- Stone, bone, & wood tools
- Language transfer



Chauvet Cave, France
(~36kya)

The Climate Opening & The Neolithic Revolution

¶ 1.6



Δ Climate Stability → Emergence of Cultivation

Not a single event (E ≠ 1) -- happened slowly and independently across the globe.

¶ 1.7

Independent Sites of Domestication

Region	Domesticates
Fertile Crescent (~10kya)	Wheat, barley, sheep, goats
China	Rice, millet
Mesoamerica	Maize
Andes	Potatoes
New Guinea	Bananas, taro



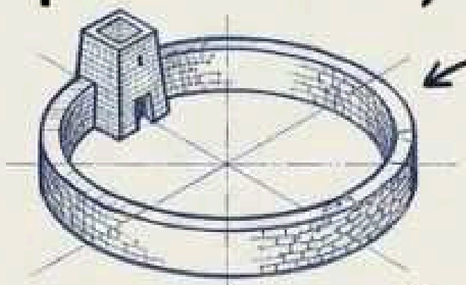
Domestication = Biological modification over generations (t^n) to suit human needs.

¶ 1.8

Farming Changed Everything

Gains (Surplus Food)

- Villages

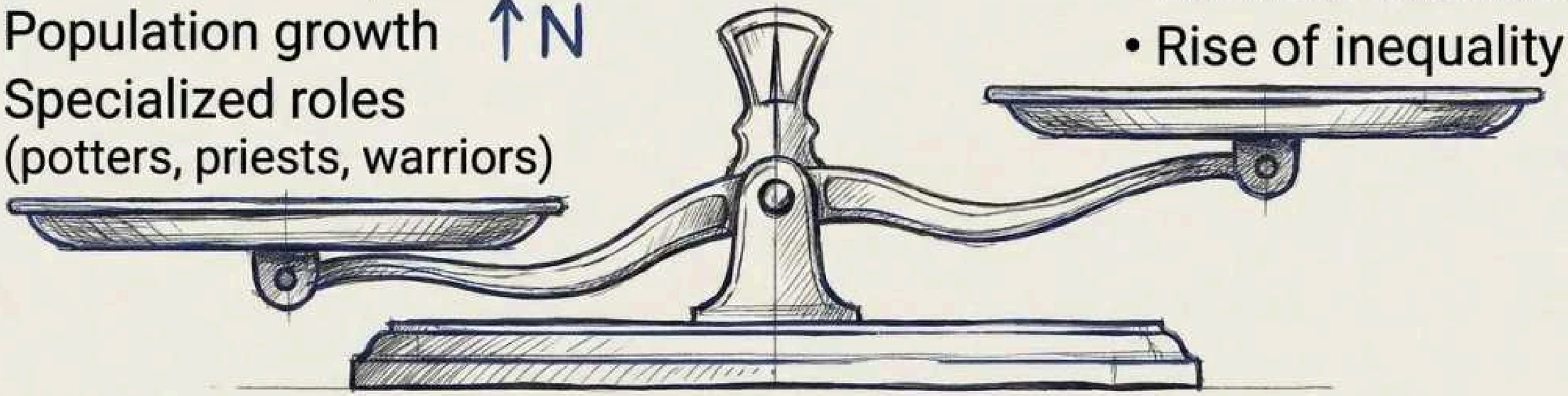


Jericho wall
~8000 BCE

- Population growth ↑N
- Specialized roles
  (potters, priests, warriors)

Costs (Friction)

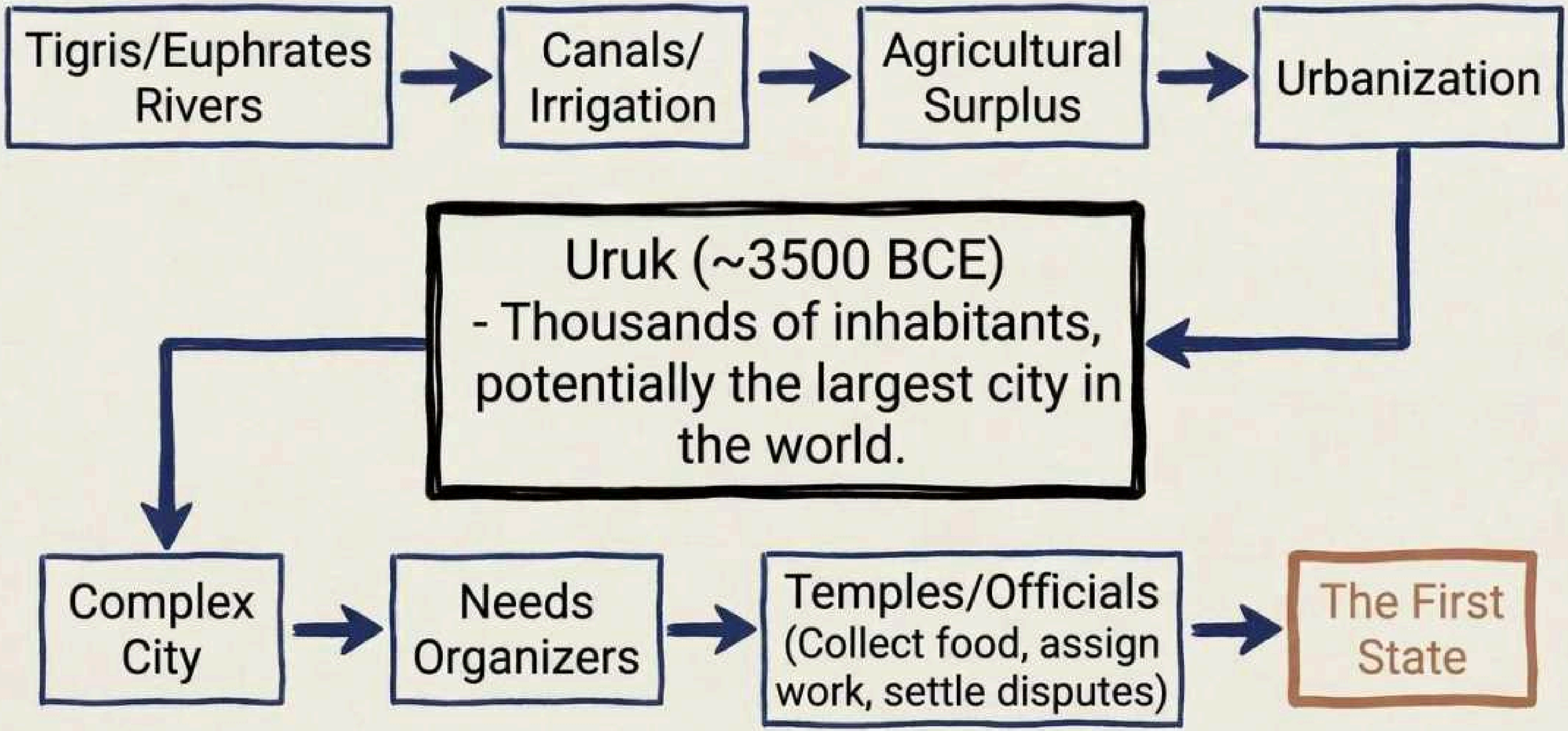
- Hard labor
- Crowding
- Zoonotic disease
- Rise of inequality



Did early farmers live better than foragers?

¶ 1.9

Mesopotamia & The Rise of the State



From Bookkeeping to Poetry

Step 1: Bureaucracy

Wet clay + Wedge mark = Cuneiform



Recording grain, beer, & sheep

Step 2: Administration

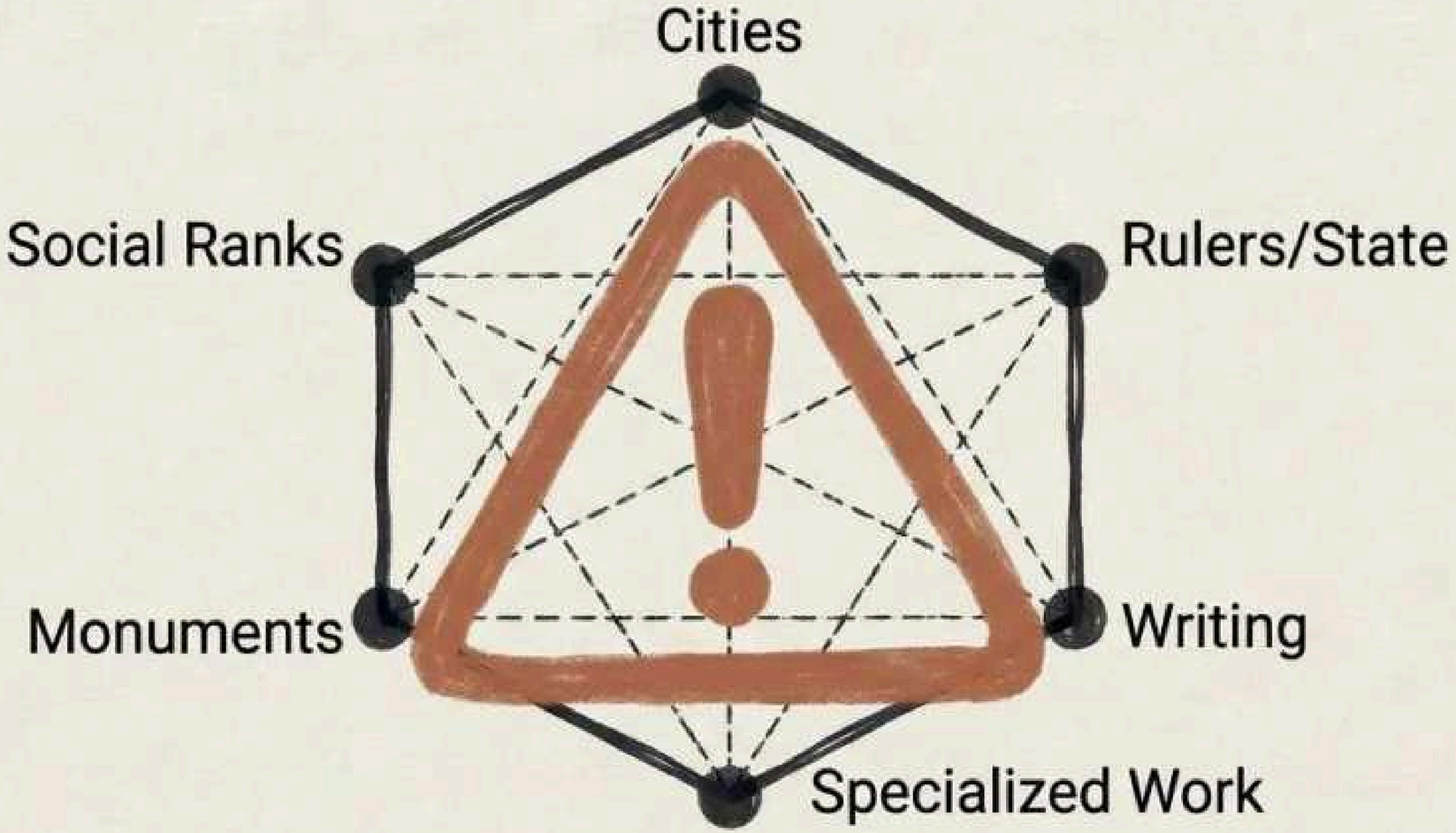
The script expands to record Letters and Laws

Step 3: Culture (Literature)

Epic of Gilgamesh (seeking to escape death)

Enheduanna (~2300 BCE) - Priestess, poet, and earliest author known by name.

Analyzing "Civilization"



Civilization =/= Superiority

*Tool for COMPARING, not for RANKING. Many peoples without cities built rich, complex cultures.

Consolidation of Power: Empires and Law

2334 BCE

Sargon of Akkad

Conquers Sumerian cities

Creates the First Empire.

1754 BCE

King Hammurabi of Babylon

Code of 282 Laws

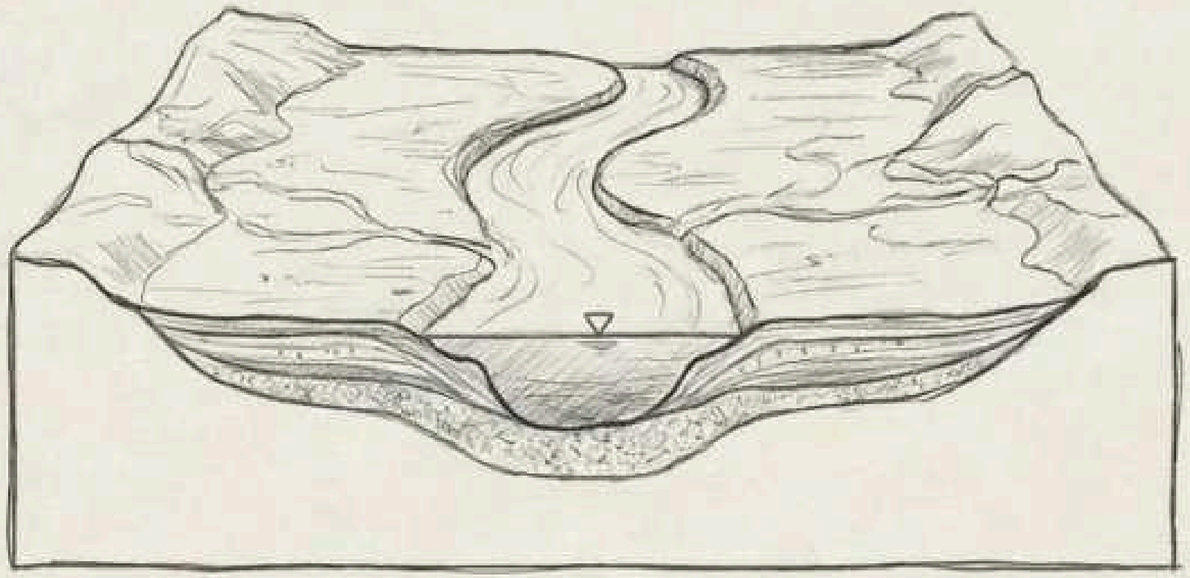


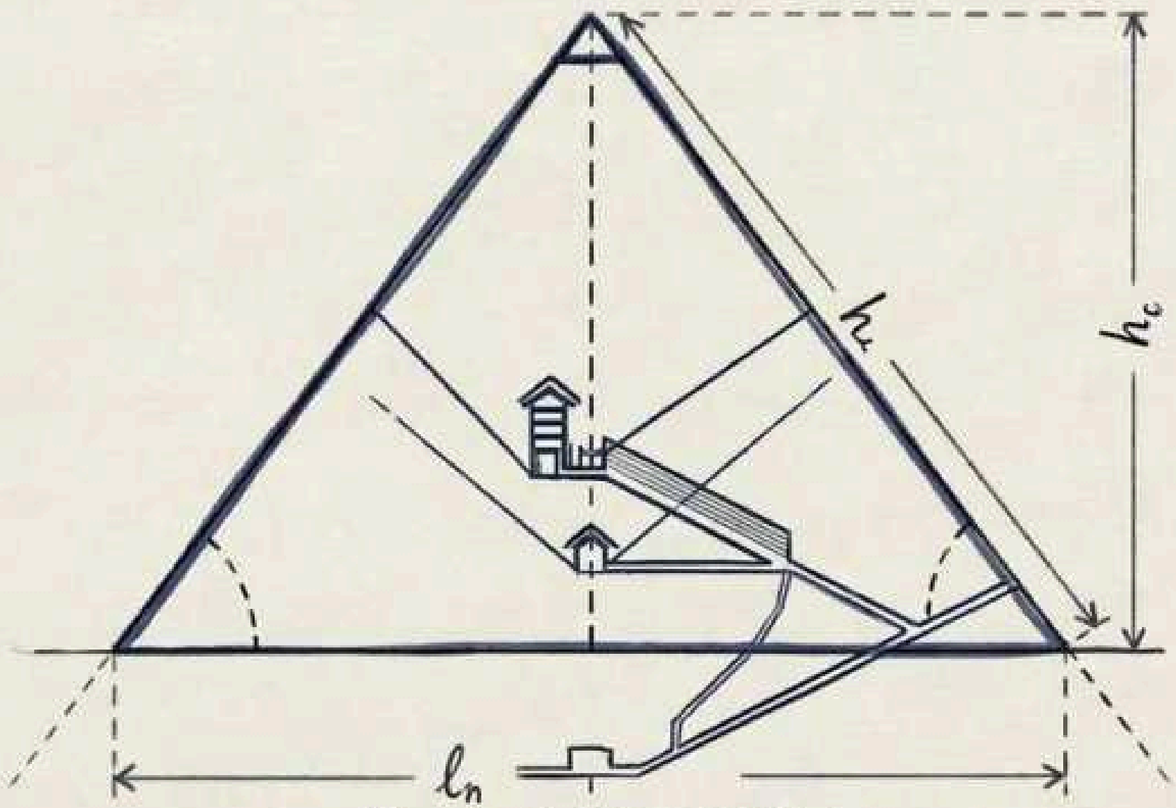
Penalties = f(Social Rank)

Penalties were harsh and explicitly tied to a person's social standing.

Egypt: The Gift of the Nile

Predictable Flood = ↑ Increased Crop Yield

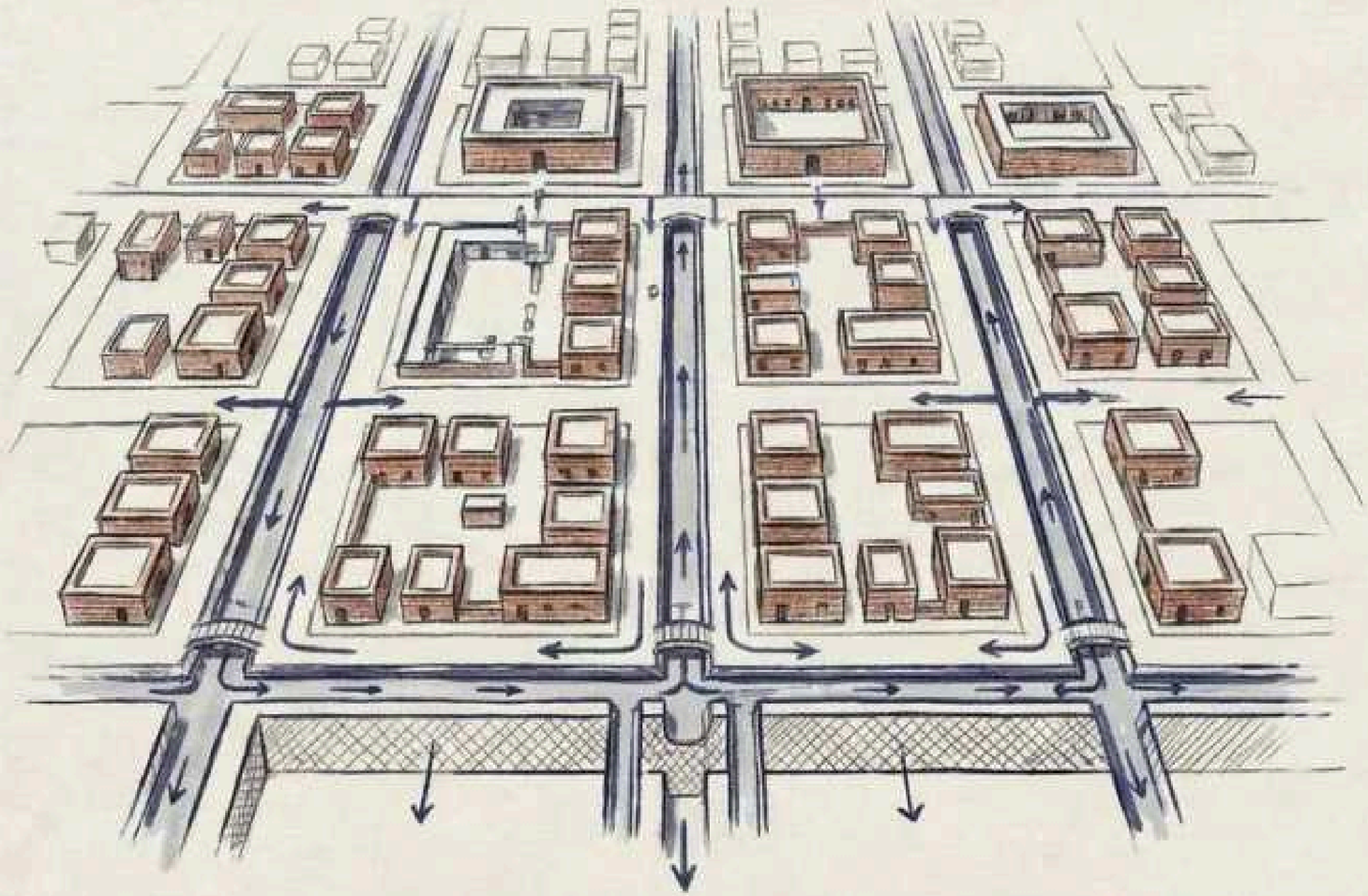


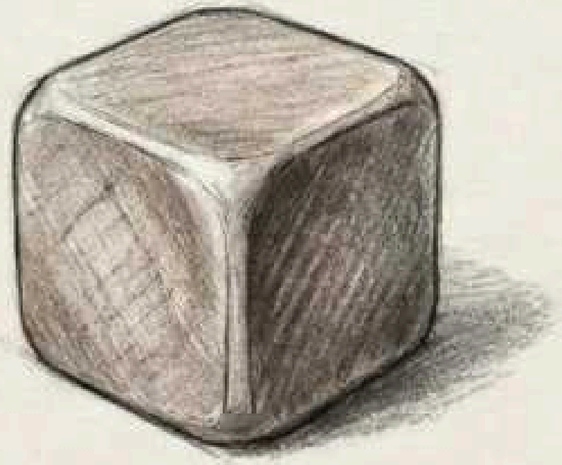


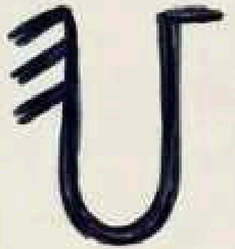
Khufu (~2560 BCE)

- Unification of Upper/Lower Egypt (~3100 BCE)
- Pharaohs viewed as living gods
- Scribes utilizing hieroglyphs

Indus Cities: Master Planners







Script undeciphered
= Rulers/Beliefs
remain a mystery.

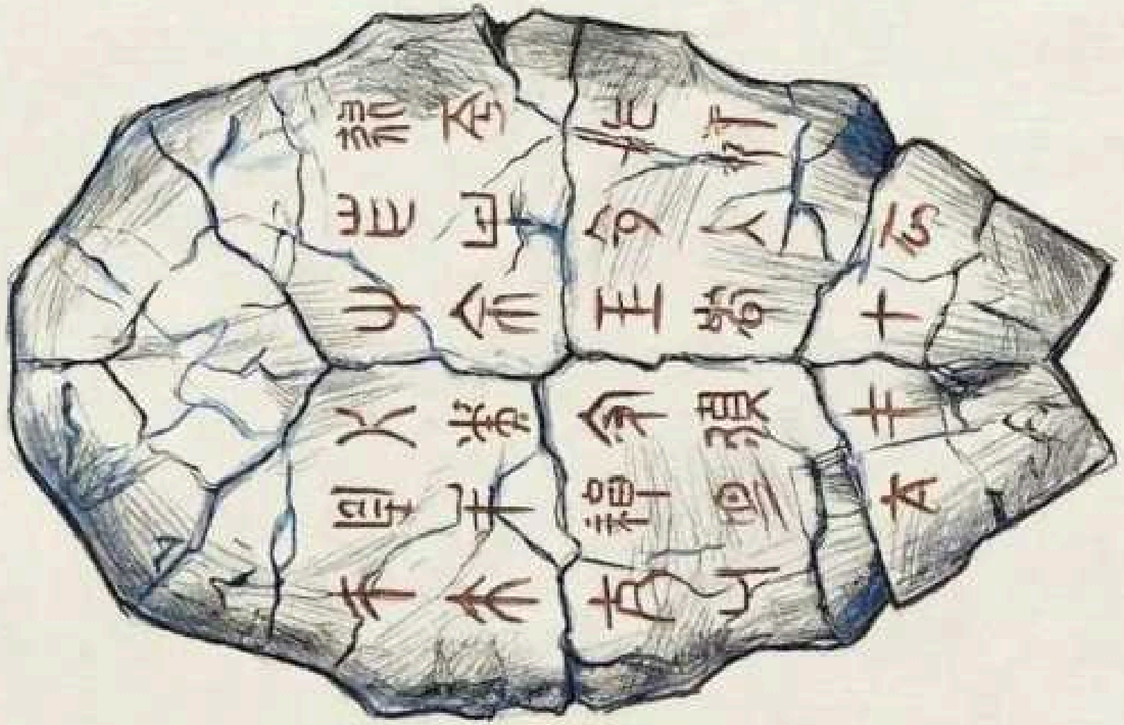
Decline around ~1900 BCE, likely due to [Δ] Climate.



The Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 BCE)



(Signifying chariots and armies)



(Oracle Bone)

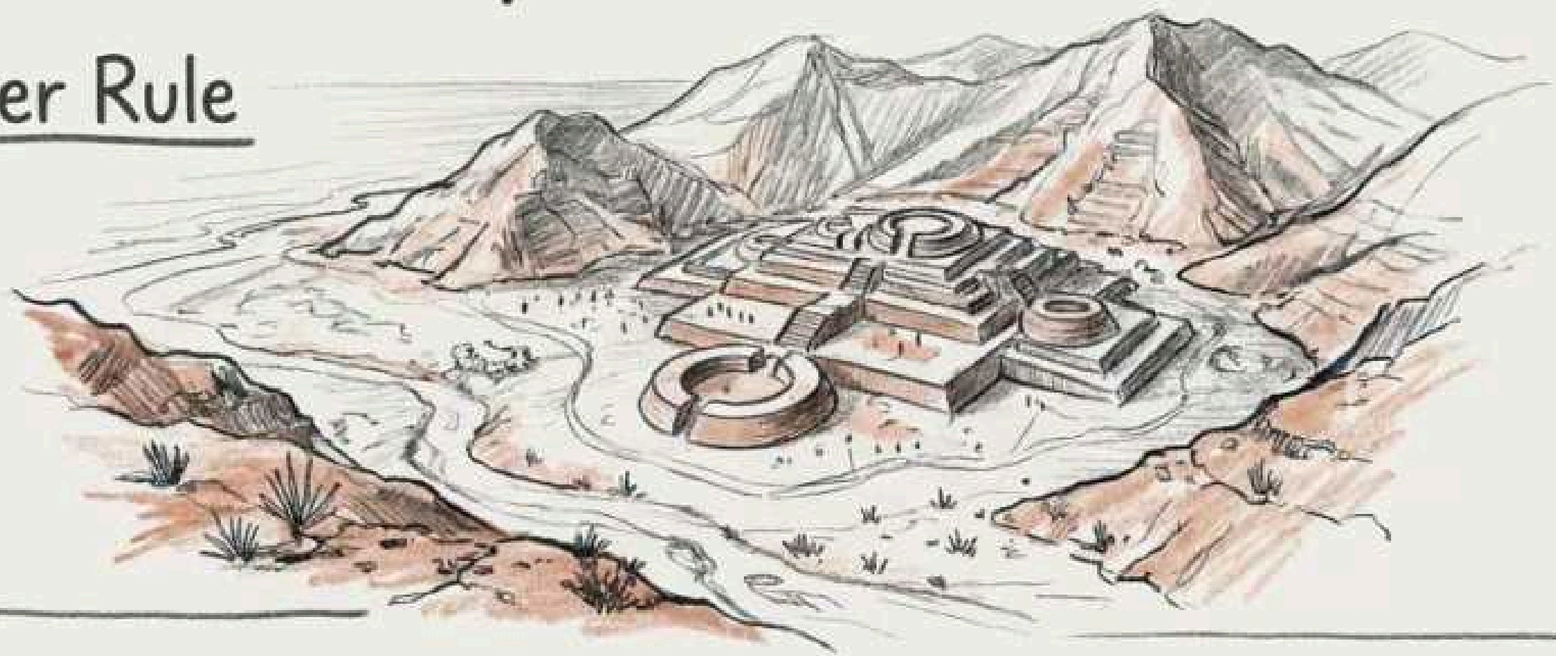
Questions for Gods → Heat Cracks → Carved Responses = Oldest surviving Chinese writing → Ancestors of characters used today

No Single Path to the City

¶ 1.16

Exception to the River Rule

Caral in Peru
(~3000 BCE)



Bronze Age Networking



Even in the Bronze Age, distant peoples were linked long before modern globalization.

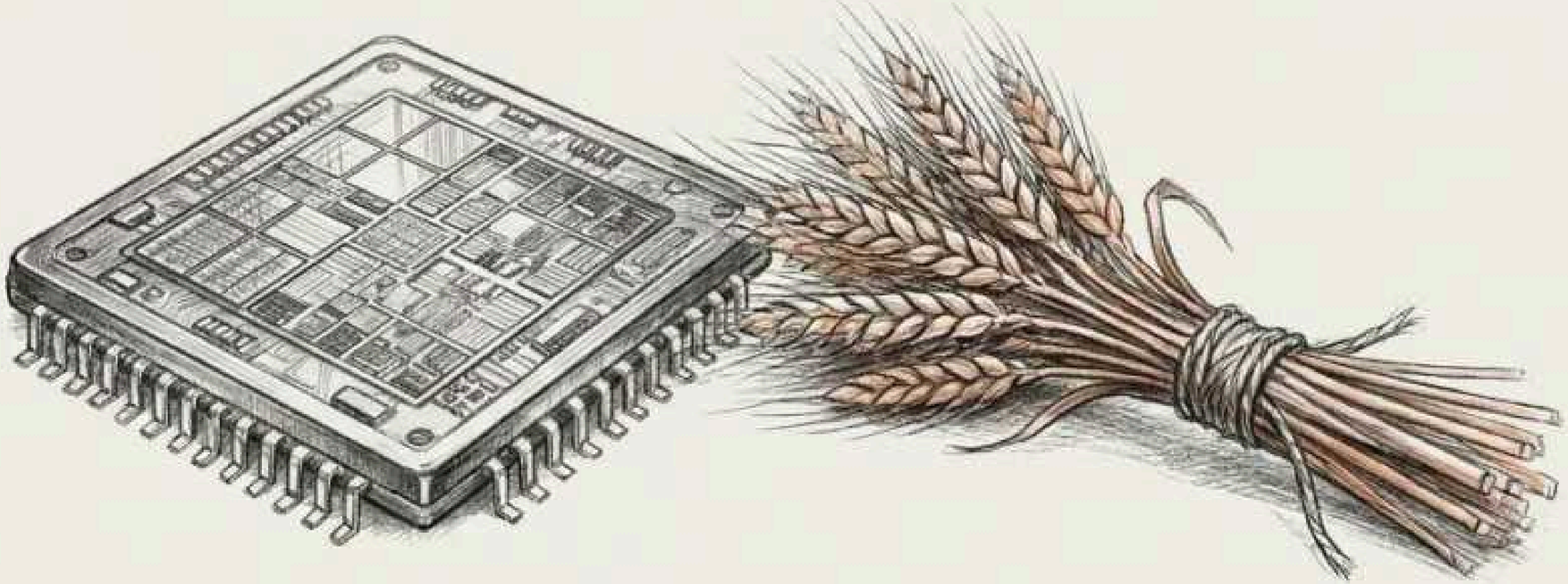
Taking Stock: Gains and Costs

Foragers → Farming → Cities/States

The Tradeoff Lens	
[+] Gains	[−] Costs
• Massive food surplus • Specialized professions • Writing systems • Monumental architecture	• Deep social inequality • Warfare • Zoonotic disease • Strict hierarchical ranks

✳These tradeoffs are a good lens for everything that follows in human history.

The Essential Question



Farming made food plentiful but
introduced new, systemic hardships.

Which of our modern inventions brings the same kind of tradeoff? How will a historian view it in 5,000 years?

Lecture 2 Preview: The Age of Empires

