Agriculture in the Ancient World

1. Agriculture requires a steady water source, so most (but not all) ancient societies formed around major river valleys
   1. The Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia (in modern day Iraq)
   2. The Nile in Egypt and Nubia
   3. The Indus River in India
   4. The Yellow River in China
   5. The exception is South America - most of the societies here arose in the mountains away from major rivers (more on that later)
2. Why rivers?
   1. Rivers are important for agriculture for two reasons: flooding and irrigation
   2. Flooding
      1. Many major rivers flood, leaving behind extremely rich soil for planting
         1. These include the Yellow River (called that for the color of the soil left behind from the floods) and the Indus, however the most famous example of river flooding is the Nile
      2. As northern Africa’s climate began to get more hot and dry (about 7,000 years ago), the Nile valley began to attract cultivators from all over Africa
         1. Goards and watermelons were introduced from central Africa, as well as cattle and donkeys
         2. Cattle and donkeys were brought in, too
         3. From Mesopotamia, wheat and barley were introduced
      3. Two consequences of this fertile soil
         1. First, there was a population boom. Everywhere that developed agriculture also experienced an increase in population.
            1. “it is crudely true that if man's caloric intake is sufficient, he will somehow stagger to maturity, and he will reproduce.” - Alfred Crosby
            2. This also led to increases in wealth for Egypt, which necessitated the growth of a military - more on that later this week
         2. Second, the growth in population required more extensive and complicated modes of watering crops - irrigation.
            1. This was the more common mode of agriculture in the territory south of Egypt, Nubia, which did not receive the benefit of the extensive Nile flooding.
   3. Irrigation
      1. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in Mesopotamia do not flood, or if they do, they don’t bring along fertile soil.
      2. The Sumerians, located in Southern Mesopotamia were among the first to utilize irrigation to bring in huge harvests and support huge populations, up to 100,000 people
      3. Making irrigation ditches is extremely labor intensive, so the governments of Sumer had to be able to get people to do this work - more on this when we talk about governments.
3. Exception - Meso and South America
   1. The complex societies of the Western Hemisphere did not arise out of river valleys.
      1. Those in Central America probably received enough water for their crops through rainfall, as these are in tropical climates.
      2. Those in South America, along the Andes Mountains, ate crops that did not require much water, like beans and peanuts, and supplemented their diet with seafood from the Pacific Ocean
   2. They build canals and irrigation systems, probably connected to lakes or smaller streams.
   3. Another important difference is the lack of draft animals
      1. In Eastern Hemispheric societies, animals like cattle, horses, oxen, etc, could be domesticated and used to help in agricultural endeavors.
      2. No such animals existed in the Western Hemisphere - the largest domesticated animal was the llama, which is not suited to this kind of work.
         1. This meant that people did most of the heavy work.
         2. It also meant that the wheel was not yet invented yet because there’s no need for it. People carried stuff.

Show map of food crop origins

<http://cms.kohoia.org/pluginfile.php/257/course/section/70/food-crops.png>

