Government in the Ancient World

1. Picking up where we left off yesterday, irrigation is a necessary way to expand agricultural production (and in some cases, the only way).
   1. The question then becomes, how did these societies manage to employ or coerce thousands of people to do this backbreaking labor.
      1. The answer comes in government - or the application of political power.
2. Forms of political power
   1. There are two ways of getting to do something he/she would not otherwise do - **legitimately** or **illegitimately.**
   2. **Legitimate** power is wielded when you believe that the person in charge should be in charge and should tell you what to do (your parents, your teachers, the police, etc.). **(slide 2)**
   3. **Illegitimate power** is wielded when you don’t believe that the person in charge should be charge and you do not believe that person should tell you what to do, but you are compelled to go along anyway (criminals, malevolent dictators, bullies) **(slide 12)**
3. The ancient societies we’re discussing this week used both forms of political power in order to get things done and maintain order.
   1. All of the societies also looked the same while doing it, with a few minor differences, with the exception of India, which was (and remained) very different in this regard.
4. Forms of legitimate power
   1. Today, we view legitimate power as coming through elections, but this was not always the case - hereditary monarchy was the form of legitimate power just a few hundred years ago.
   2. In the ancient world, the primary form of legitimate power was religious authority.
      1. Basically, this states that the ruler is in charge he is a god, or because God, or Gods put him there. **(introduce the geo of each place on 1st slide, then the ruler on the 2nd)**
      2. This is the case in Mesopotamia, where legends claim that King Gilgamesh of Ur was ⅔ God, ⅓ man. **(slides 3 & 4)**
      3. This is the case in Egypt, which viewed the Pharaoh as a god **(slides 5 & 6)**
      4. This is the case in China, where the rulers were able to rule because they received the Mandate of Heaven **(slides 7 & 8)**
      5. This was also the case in Central America, where the rulers were seen as descendants of gods **(slides 9 & 10)**
5. Examples of legitimate power at work
   1. The best examples of legitimate power at work are the massive public works projects that arose in four of the societies just described. **(slide 11)**
      1. The ziggurats in Sumeria, like this one in Uruk
      2. The series of Great Walls in China
      3. The massive ceremonial centers and pyramids in Central America like, “The Temple of the GIant Jaguar” in Tikal.
      4. The Pyramids in Egypt serve, perhaps, the best reflection that legitimate political power can achieve.
         1. Each of these were built without slave labor, just those that believed that the government should ask the people to do these projects.
      5. These public works projects also served as a means to focus the society on a big project and not bother the ruler with any pesky rebellions
6. Examples of illegitimate power **(slide 12)**
   1. The best examples of illegitimate power comes from Mesopotamia, where the concept of Empire first arose.
      1. An empire is a political order in which many different nations are united under one leader. Usually, these other nations are not happy about the situation.
      2. The first empire was built by Sargon of Akkad, who had to continuously move his army around the empire in order to squash any rebellions. **(slide 13)**
      3. Hammurabi sits in a gray area **(slide 14)**
         1. He had an empire, but attempted to rule the empire legitimately, through a common set of laws applicable to every person within the empire. (You can do one of your SPICE analyses on Hammurabi’s code)
7. Social Hierarchies **(slide 15)**
   1. In each of these societies discussed so far, the social hierarchy was essentially the same.
   2. At the top was the ruler and his family, maybe a group of trusted advisors
      1. Below them were typically priests and military leaders
         1. Below them were merchants and more wealthy non-nobles
            1. Below them were farmers,soldiers and other poor people

Below them were slaves

1. The Exception - India **(slide 16)**
   1. India’s social and political order are very different from the societies we’ve discussed so far and we’re not going to go into much detail right now (we will later), suffice it to say, though, that India, for much of its history, did not have a centralized authority - no government.
2. How did India maintain order? **(slide 18)**
   1. India maintained order through the caste system - a religious based social hierarchy that compelled people to stay in their place and do their specified tasks without complain in the hopes that they would be reincarnated into a better situation in their next life.
      1. If you rock the boat, you’ll be reincarnated as something worse or even something non-human.
   2. India’s social hierarchy looked different than the other places we’ve discussed
      1. Priests on top (obviously)
         1. Then soldiers
            1. Then merchants and farmers

Then peasants and servants

* 1. This is meant to resemble a person
     1. The priests are the mouth
        1. The soldiers, the arms
           1. The merchants and farmers, the thighs

The peasants and servants, the feet.

1. While India had small, regional kingdoms, there were no large scale governments in India until the British arrived in the 18th century. The caste system maintained order across India for centuries without centralized government. We will go into much more depth in India as we move forward, so don’t worry if this seems vague at the moment.