

Prelude

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Writing history is not an easy or simple task. Even historians normally approach it with caution and care to put the events in the correct perspective in time and setting. Trying to read history of a particular historical event and drawing the right conclusions is, however, an even more difficult work. Different motives may lay behind writing the history of a particular event which necessitates looking into it from different angles and trying to reach an unbiased conclusion.

When I decided to write on the history of “Irrigation and Agriculture of the Land between the two Rivers” as an engineer, I thought that the problems involved are insurmountable, and maybe I should leave it to others. The challenge was very strong, and finally I decided to take it. The real problem was not in the absence of references, but on the contrary, there were so many of them that they needed to be scrutinized carefully. Archeologists who had dug in hundreds of sites in Iraq were so many, and their writings were so bulky for their work spanned well over hundred and fifty years. Many historians have also produced thousands of pages on the subject. In selecting resources, much weight had to be placed on primary older references whenever available. In all cases, I have listed the websites in which these resources are found; which is in conformity with the present-day intensive use of the internet to allow readers and researchers to refer back to these original sources for more details.

Following the advice of an old history teacher, I have attempted to analyze the theme of agriculture in Mesopotamia in its relation to irrigation, and their interactions with the social settings and environmental and political background. So in so many places of the book the reader finds descriptions of these social settings and political backgrounds which were thought to be necessary. Mellissa Rosenzweig states rightly “Standard treatments of ancient agriculture provide information on subsistence and economy, but archaeologies of agriculture can also engage with politics in the past. This approach requires theorizing the role that

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environmental practices play in constituting political associations, and appreciating the land-use as a ubiquitous and therefore, integral social locus for the negotiation of political relationships” [1].

Another important area to which my attention was drawn was following the correct chronology; the old history teacher had recommended taking a special care of the “When”. In many references, I was faced with conflicting dates for the same event. In such cases, it was inevitable to compare more than one source to reach the correct and trustworthy information. In dating historical events, I have selected the BC, AD system indicating, before and after birth of Christ. In addition, in so doing, I endeavored to change all the dates based on the CE (Current Era), BCE (Before the Current Era) back to the first one. This was done for the sake of uniformity, on the one hand, and also based on my firm belief that referring to the birth of Christ as bench mark in history gives a much clearer time frame. Otherwise, this leaves the unfamiliar reader in perplexity to the meaning of CE and BCE; for again you have to explain that the (Current Era) is nothing more than after Christ while BCE is before Christ.

Again, and for the same reason of consistency, I was faced with the cumbersome work in converting all the dates given in the Hijri calendar, in which all Muslim scholars of the Islamic era had used in their writings of the Islamic era, to the corresponding dates in the Gregorian calendar we use today.

Having taken care of the “When”, there still remained, however, the “Where, the Who and the why” to give a complete picture of any historical sequel, which I have tried to answer to. In the context of these four important articles, I have attempted to present to the reader a narrative of the development of irrigation and agriculture in the land between the Tigris and Euphrates to the best of my humble abilities.

Iraq or the Mesopotamia of the past has been described often as the cradle of civilization. Peoples that inhabited this land had developed skills and arts to a high degree of refinement that they may be considered as the early builders of human civilization. Societies and States here were developed based on a stable way of life, unlike many other communities of their predecessors who were shifting from one place to another looking for their means of living. In Iraq, people did not invent agriculture, but they may have been among the first peoples who developed irrigated agriculture in which they excelled. In this, they were supported by the rich water resources of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, which did not only provide them with a permanent supply of water, but added also fertility to the land every year by the rich mineral sediments they carried every flood season. Our knowledge of this past is enhanced by the archeological findings, and of the inscriptions on the clay tablets made by the Sumerian scribes who had recorded every day’s events and passed them to us. Indeed, they were the first inventors of writing; their cuneiform script was the first known form of writing in the world, and so they were indeed the first authors of written history.

One writer states, “civilization is a producing society that has writing and city life” [2]. For these reasons and not any other reasons, another historian states that “history begins at Sumer” [3]. If we take this statement as our basis, then all the tens

of thousands of years that preceded this baseline may be called prehistory. To put the history of water works in Iraq in the right perspective it is necessary; therefore, to look carefully into the development of agriculture, which is the most important user of water, and to make a start right at Prehistory.

This is done in this book in a chronological order, and so it is divided into eleven papers, in which each paper deals with a specific period characterized by the main actors on the scene. A special effort is made however, to keep the continuity of events between the papers to indicate the transitions taking place in the long timeline of Mesopotamia.

Paper 1; deals with prehistory and the long strides taken by mankind for hundred thousands of years to come at the end to the stage that we can call history, whereby man could communicate in writing, opening the door for the first Ancient Civilization in the World, which is the Sumerian Civilization. As for the other papers, I leave it to the reader to follow for themselves.

References

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