
4 AN EARLY AGRICULTURAL VILLAGE

The agricultural revolution allowed people of Neolithic times to build homes and settle permanently in one area. In time small agricultural villages grew up around these settlement sites. One of the earliest of these villages, dating from about 6750 B.C., was Jarmo, located in what today is northern Iraq. In the excerpt below from Prehistoric Men, Robert Braidwood, the archaeologist who unearthed Jarmo, describes what he found there. As you read the excerpt, ask yourself what artifacts discovered at Jarmo suggest that the village had connections with the outside world.

The site of Jarmo has a depth of deposit of about twenty-seven feet, and approximately a dozen layers of architectural renovation and change. Nevertheless it is a "one period" site; its assemblage remains essentially the same throughout, although there are developments in some categories of artifacts and one or two new items are added in later levels. The site covers about four acres of the top of a bluff, below which runs a small stream. It lies in the hill country east of the modern oil town of Kirkuk. . . .

The people of Jarmo grew the barley plant and two different kinds of wheat. They made flint sickles with which to reap their grain, mortars . . . on which to crack it, ovens in which it may have been parched, and stone bowls out of which they might eat their porridge. We know that they had domesticated goats, sheep, dogs, and, in the latest levels, pigs. . . . As well as their grain and the meat from their animals, the people of Jarmo consumed great quantities of land snails. . . .

The houses of Jarmo were only the size of a small cottage by our standards, but each was provided with several rectangular rooms. The walls of the houses were made of puddled mud, often set on crude foundations of stone. . . . The village probably looked much like the simple Kurdish farming village of today, with its mud-walled houses and low mud-on-brush roofs. I doubt that the Jarmo village had more than twenty houses at any one moment of its existence. Today, an average of about seven people live in a comparable Kurdish house; possibly the population of Jarmo was about 150 people.

It is interesting that portable pottery does not appear until the . . . last third of the life of the Jarmo deposit, and even then not over the whole site. Throughout the duration of the village, however, its people had experimented with the plastic qualities of clay. As well as building puddled-mud houses, they modeled little figurines of animals and human beings in clay. One type of human figurine they favored was that of a markedly pregnant woman, probably the expression of some sort of fertility spirit. They provided their house floors with baked-in-place depressions; either as basins or as hearths, and later with domed ovens of clay. . . . The houses themselves were of clay or mud; one could almost

say they were built up like a house-sized pot. Then, finally, the idea of making portable pottery itself appeared. . . .

On the other hand, the old tradition of making flint blades and micro-lithic tools was still very strong at Jarmo. The sickle blade was made in quantities, but so also were many of the much older tool types. Strangely enough, it is within this age-old category of chipped stone tools that we see one of the clearest pointers to a newer age. Many of the Jarmo chipped stone tools . . . were made of obsidian, a black volcanic natural glass. The obsidian beds nearest to Jarmo are over three hundred miles to the north. Already a bulk carrying trade had been established, the forerunner of commerce, and the routes were set by which, in later times, the metal trade was to move.

READING REVIEW

1. What was the diet of the people of Jarmo?
2. Why does Braidwood find it interesting that portable pottery did not appear until late in the life of Jarmo?
3. (a) Why does the existence of obsidian tools indicate that the people of Jarmo were involved in trade? (b) Why did these obsidian tools "point to a newer age"?