

Ancient Civilizations

Question Group 1

1. *What does civilization mean?*

The definition of a civilization has been difficult hold down to a specific set of rules, but it does follow a number of generalized guidelines. One of the primary factors being urbanization, a city or group of cities, or a territory of a number of farming communities (as with China) but essentially something with a large population base of approx. 50,000, and the organization of a centralized political unit, a state. The next factor considered necessary is a stratified society with a strong form of government. This would have also developed in an area with a considerable ability to farm, thus creating the food resources and energy to sustain them.

This then follows with laws, a police force and a taxation system. A large population provides the elite with the manpower needed for the construction of the monumental structures that provided them with the sense power, wealth and grandeur. A large population also contained specialists in crafts and those that performed religious ceremonies, like shamans and priests. These in particular often assisted to confirmed the king's right to declare him divine a god among man.

Trade of excess resources with other cultures brought in new wealth and possessions. It also provided a network to aid in communication between towns, villages and other cities. These trade networks would follow along manmade concourses, canals, rivers or along the coastal regions. With trade came forms of accounting systems that is believed to be the precursor to writing as with the Sumerian cuneiform. This follows along with the inclusion of the arts and sciences. There is the creation of calendars, thru the study of astronomy and the beginnings of arithmetic and geometry. Generally speaking though it is a set of important factors, structures and complex ideas all organized in a way to maintain its continued existence.

2. *How can you explain the emergence of civilization?*

There are a number of reasons why the formation of a civilization would occur. Not one is fixed but there is a set of basic variables that have to be present. First is an environment where resources that are perceived as being unlimited. Where a sedentary lifestyle is initiated and where farming can begin. Next where there is an abundance of resources (that provide a source of energy) and food surpluses and storage areas are created populations quickly increase.

The next is a growing population that over time begins to diversify, skills sets develop, and specialists become an important part of the state. Out of this diversity and within population base; a form of social inequality begins to emerge. Larger communities that develop a system to hold surplus food can then begin to feed those whose primary task is not directly involved with food production. Like shaman's, priests and crafts people that will provide goods considered exotic to the elite.

This in time creates a stratified society and a level of hierarchy - haves and have nots. At least three levels of administrative control are needed, to run a state. One of these levels has the important task of keeping tract of surpluses and trade, this is where the beginnings of writing occurs, necessity for keeping some form of records. Goods sold, traded or in transit, labour used or needed. Labour needed was for the creation of monumental structures, walls for defense, palaces and tombs. As states grew so did competition for resources, what could not be acquired through trade might be taken by force.

In conclusion the main factors for the development of a state requires an environment that can sustain and provide enough energy to encourage an abundance of growth in population and hierarchical social structure are the primary factors for the emergence of a civilization. It has been

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suggested that civilizations grew because an opportunity and a need arose for them to do so.

There are a number of primary and secondary factors - a check list so to speak but not all civilizations have formed using all of them, or the influences may vary. The majority of Ancient Civilizations that grew on nearly every continent around the world, did so independently, without the influence of other civilizations.

Question Group 2

1. Discuss the concept of cultural complexity and the rise of civilization.

With the rise of an abundant and consistent food supply in areas of ecological diversity a sedentary life style was developed. With that populations grew, there were those with the culture that began to specialize in areas that was not related specifically to hunting and gathering, but were useful within the community and became valuable.

Feasting was a cultural activity that grew out of maintaining a competitive edge between family clans, this activity eventually developed into cultural pursuit between more complex societies. Out of this activity organizational skills developed and were acquired by those that proved themselves capable of organizing these feasts. These became known as 'big men' or 'head man', and as long as they could prove themselves they maintained the title through acquired status.

These 'head men' were also those that acquired more in material goods, or the ability to hunt more and gain a greater level of self - sufficiency.

When acquired status was held for long periods of time, and the culture became more and more complex, clans became tribes, tribes became villages. Descendents would gain the titles handed down from ancestral spirits, some that were headman of acquired status became chief through ascribed status.

Chiefdoms developed then a 'elite status' through a hierarchy of ancestral rights was born. Nobles were relatives of chiefs and vying for status and power grew. The elite then no longer were required to look after their daily needs their status elevated them to a position where others would be required to see to their wants. Within the structure of chiefdoms religious specialists would become advisors to the chief and function as a conduit to the spirits or gods, these were known as priests or shamans.

Specialized crafts people began to appear and were found needed to create an expanded image of the elites material wealth. This was done through specializations in things like metallurgy and precious stones, creating jewelry and items that were used for display and ceremonial used. Potters and leatherworkers that made containers allowed for more storage of grains and food supplies. The creation of storage of food created a culture that required people to process larger and larger amounts of food. Which in turn created a larger population and a greater demand for organization and distribution of the food resources. More and more need for specializations grew out of a demand to take care of the needs of a growing population and a growing elite.

Larger populations provided a means of manpower to create monumental structures and to go to war. Competition for resources and more land began out of both need to feed a growing population but out of greed for more items of wealth as well.

2. What, if any, is the relationship between environment and the rise of civilization.

The environment and the abundance of resources obtained from the region is one of the primary reasons considered for the development and creation of the concept of civilization.

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It is believed that it is only due to the availability of what appears as an unlimited amount of food resources and thus energy, was what encouraged man to become sedentary. With man settling to a specific area the concept of families grew as children and the elderly lived longer, and clans developed. But primarily the environment and the creation of agriculture was the defining element that allowed for the expansion of human settlements, and thus ultimately laying the foundations for towns, villages, cities, states and then civilizations.

It is also evident from archeological sites throughout the world that civilizations collapsed or were forced to move due to changes in the environment. Changes brought on by earthquakes, draught, or long periods of cold weather (Younger Dryus) that reduced the availability to farm or acquire food. These environmental influences are also believed to have been the impetus to the development of horticulture and then agriculture. Requiring people to move to other areas, take plants and seeds with them to plant. With this also came the invention of new technologies that help process larger and larger amounts.

The cultivation of plants and the domestication of animals that both assisted in providing a secure foundation for the subsequent growth of populations.

Question Group 3

1. Discuss the similarities and differences between the early civilizations found in the western hemisphere with those found in the eastern hemisphere. How can these similarities and/or differences be explained?

Old and new world cultures shared, and unusually so, many striking similarities, primarily agriculture, metallurgy, urbanism, socially stratified and hierarchal structure, an elite, state-level organization, arts and sciences, astronomy was important to both old and new worlds.

But civilizations both east and west developed forms of ritual and worship of the gods that were unique to their culture, held their own traditions and created their own economies and technologies.

The old world cultures all began around the use of rivers in dry desert like regions, thus their farming was accomplished through irrigation systems. They relied on domesticated plants and animals. They developed trade networks and many technological successes, the creation of the plow, wheel, bronze and iron.

The new world though did not have a reliance on rivers as the old world did, more on what was just present in the fertile soils, rains and springs. They did not have the same level of writing, the plow, nor iron, draught animals or use the wheel. But they were as culturally advanced as the old world societies, they had the same elite, and religious, and craft specialists structures.

It has been suggested that to account for the similarities “*that humans under certain conditions are preprogrammed to develop along similar paths.*” (Scarre/Fagen p. 11)

2. Rivers form an integral component of the early civilizations of the Middle East, North Africa and India. Discuss the similarities and/or differences these early civilizations experienced regarding the catalyst provided by these rivers.

Rivers were the catalysts of early civilizations as they provided first and foremost what was to be an unlimited supply of water. One can live without food for a month but only 3 days without water before the human body becomes compromised. Rivers were also the source of cereal grains and tubers in the rich soil at their banks. They were a source of fresh fish and wild game that came to drink, which were a source of protein, essential for both brain growth and

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fertility.

Rivers provide a source of water for the irrigation of cultivated crops in areas where rain was not dependable. Rivers allowed for the growth of farming and thus the growth of civilizations. For some rivers were also a source of transportation for trade, exploration for new resources and conquest. Primarily though rivers being a source of water are also the source of life.

In the Middle East what was known, as 'the fertile crescent' became the area where the world's first cities grew. This was the land of Mesopotamia, or the land between two rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris and alluvial plains. This area is known for being arid, having low levels of rainfall and relied heavily on irrigation for farming.

Their main crops grown consisted of types of wheat, barley and pulses that could have only grown under irrigation. One of the primary issues relating to this region was irrigation in an area that was hot enough to cause high rates of evaporation. This became the cause of an increased salt content of either the ground water, or the formation of a salt crust on the surface of the fields known as salination. Farmers learnt to take steps to rectify these problems.

The Egyptian civilization depended on the annual flooding of the Nile river. During the rains of summer the Nile's banks would flood supplying a layer of silt and water to the dry lands. The wet soil would then be seeded, crops would grow be harvested and then the soil would again dry and crack. This process allowed the earth to be aerated preventing the accumulation of harmful salts. This was known as the season of draught, the Shemu.

The rich marshland at its banks of the Nile teemed with an abundance of birds and fish during good flood years.

One of the differences between the rivers is that, where as the Nile is relatively predictable, with few extremes in highs and lows, and its draught season that allows for the aeration of the soil preventing a saline build up that would eventually prevent the growth of new crops as with what happened in areas of the fertile crescent. The Tigris and Indus rivers could be tumultuous, with wild fluctuations and violent floods. What they all have in common was that these three rivers ran through deserts, the water and the silts these rivers carried was what enabled settlements to occur. (Scarre/Fagen p. 152) One of the differences between the Indus and the Nile was the extent of the Indus's numerous tributaries and channels and like the region of Mesopotamia it was once a land of two rivers. The Sarawati has since become extinct possibly due to earthquakes.