

A

A few hunter-gatherer groups still exist today. They do not represent the great diversity of ancient hunting-and-gathering societies, but their way of life offers clues about early modern humans of the distant past. Those clues, along with evidence gathered by archaeologists, suggest that in a hunting-and-gathering economy the people were largely self-sufficient. They secured their own food supply and moved from place to place as needed to maintain it. They clothed themselves in the furs of animals that they had killed for food. They also lived in caves or built shelters out of available materials, such as trees, brush, and animal hides. They crafted tools out of wood, bone, antlers, and stone.

Most of the materials used by ancient hunter-gatherers have disintegrated with the passage of time. The one material that has survived the best is stone. When archaeologists dig at sites once inhabited by hunter-gatherers, nearly all of the tools and other artifacts that they find are made of stone. Because of the widespread use of stone tools, the period in human history that began 2.5 million years ago and ended around 3000 B.C.E. is known as the Stone Age.

B

When archaeologists find stone tools, they use them to gain insight into the group that produced them. By studying ancient people's tools, they can judge how advanced the community was. The earliest hunter-gatherers' "toolkit" included stone flakes—sharp pieces of stone that could be used like knives to butcher animals. To produce them, people hit a large stone with a fist-sized stone in order to flake off pieces.

After a number of flakes had been removed, what was left of the original stone had a jagged edge. This stone tool might have served as a chopper, useful in cutting wood, cracking nuts, or breaking open bones for their marrow. It might have been used as a digger, useful for gathering edible roots. These stone tools could also be used as weapons for hunting or for fighting. Knowledge of how to make tools was culturally transmitted. That is, it was passed from one generation to the next. Through much of the Stone Age, tool-making techniques developed slowly.

Archaeologists identify few differences in the design of tools made during that time. Near the end of the Paleolithic period, however, some dramatic changes took place. One advance was the development of composite tools, like the spear. It combined a sharp point with a wooden shaft, for thrusting or throwing.

Other tools with a variety of specific uses began to appear. For the first time, hunter-gatherers began to use needles, often made of bone, to sew their clothing. Crude flakes were now worked into thinner blade arrowheads.

C

Hunter-gatherers relied on the natural plant and animal resources found in their surroundings for survival. They used their tools to gather, hunt, fish, and trap those resources. In the forested areas of Europe, for example, early modern humans gathered wild fruits, nuts, roots, and seeds. In meadows and on open plains, hunter-gatherers could collect wild cereals along with wild peas, beans, and other plants. They could also hunt game animals including rabbits, deer, and wild pigs. To maintain a successful hunting-and-gathering economy, these early modern humans had to be mobile. That is, they had to be able to relocate often and quickly. Hunter-gatherers moved from one place to the next in an ongoing quest for food. Much of their movement related to the seasonal migrations of the game animals that they hunted. They followed herds of deer and other animals as they moved from one grazing land to another. The early humans trekked to coastal locations and rivers during the season when fish gathered to

produce and deposit eggs. They also traveled to local lakes and marshes when it was time for migrating birds to stop there to feed. Gathering fruits, nuts, and other vegetative sources of food was also a seasonal activity. It, too, called for mobility.

D

The following scenario suggests how hunter-gatherers might have begun domesticating wheat. Of two varieties of wild wheat, one dropped its ripened seeds when touched. That made it hard to harvest.

Hunter-gatherers learned to collect only the variety that kept its seeds. That way, they could harvest the wheat by cutting the stalks and carrying them back to their village for processing. They saved and later sowed some of that same seed, intending to expand the resource in the wild. As a result, that one variety of seed began to dominate the local stands of wild wheat. Through this process, hunter-gatherers unintentionally changed the overall traits of the wheat in their territory. In time, hunter-gatherers in the Fertile Crescent began to make these kinds of choices intentionally. They selected plants, as well as animals, that had favorable characteristics. By around 9,000 years ago, they were cultivating wheat—preparing the ground and then sowing and harvesting the seeds. They also grew barley, lentils, chickpeas, peas, and beans. They built structures for storing their food.

Near their fields, they built houses, which together formed a farm village. They may have continued to hunt or to gather, but eventually, most came to rely on their domesticated plants and animals to provide for their basic needs. They were sedentary—they stayed in one place, in permanent, year-round settlements. They had become farmers.

E

Increased knowledge of how to domesticate plants and animals is just one reason scholars give for why agriculture began when it did. They also note the development of new technology for gathering, processing, and storing foods. Another important factor is climate. The last Ice Age ended around 11,500 years ago. After that time, Earth's climate remained generally stable. In the Fertile Crescent and other places in which farming began, the climate turned favorably warm and rainy.

Neolithic peoples developed new technologies to feed the ever-growing population. They crafted better stone tools, such as the stone-bladed plow for tilling the soil. They created pottery for storing food and decorated it

with distinctive styles. In time, they invented the wheel, which served as a turntable for pottery-making. The wheel was also a landmark improvement in transportation. The rise of agriculture also had an important social impact. The population density—the number of people in a unit of area—rose as kin groups came together in farm villages. Humans, now sedentary, began to accumulate goods, sometimes in exchange for surplus crops.

F

Agriculture was widespread in the Fertile Crescent around 9,000 years ago. Through cultural diffusion, it spread from there to Egypt, Europe, and India.

Knowledge of agriculture might have been carried to those places by pastoral nomads, some of whom were also skilled farmers. These mobile peoples were free to travel far from their home territory, wherever there was grass to feed their herds. Another way that agriculture spread was through the migration of farming peoples.

By 8,000 years ago, rice and millet were being domesticated in China. By 5,500 years ago, maize (corn) was being domesticated in the Americas, followed about a thousand years later by llamas.

Agriculture appears to have arisen independently in these two places, as well as in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere.

G

A civilization is a highly organized and complex society. This definition, however, is a bit too tame for historian Michael Cook. He declares that “the term civilization suggests that there is in fact some kind of quantum leap in complexity.” Ancient civilizations commonly shared several other characteristics besides writing. One was geography. Ancient civilizations arose in river valleys, where access to water and fertile soil made farming much more productive, making it a popular place for early civilizations to settle. Another characteristic of ancient civilizations was large cities. Unlike agricultural villages, populated by related families, cities drew a wide mix of peoples from the surrounding region. Usually, the urban social system evolved into a hierarchy—a ranking of groups of people according to their importance, status, or power. One person, the king (or priestking), held the top rank. Most cities contained large public structures—palaces for kings and temples for priests—as well as markets for the exchange of goods. Rulers typically managed the economy, supporting state activities by taxing

farmers, merchants, and artisans. Rulers also supported state activities by forcing people to labor for the state.

H

Complex states formed, in part, as a result of the success of agriculture. Irrigation played a key role in that success. The first civilizations developed in fertile river valleys, where farmers built canals and other structures to carry river water to their fields or to store floodwater. Ready access to water greatly improved crop yields—the amount of food that could be grown per acre. Plentiful food led to expanding populations. Settlements eventually became cities. As a settlement's population increased, its society changed in a number of ways. One way related to government. Some societies replaced rule by elders with rule by a central authority, the state. The state, run by the king and a multitude of trained officials, was better able to organize and coordinate the activities of the increasingly more complex society.

I

With advances in agriculture, farmers were able to grow more than the society could consume, which meant that everyone did not have to be a farmer. Food

surpluses supported those who chose to specialize, full-time, in other areas. They became artisans and warriors as well as priests and government officials. Some people became merchants, or traders. Growing settlements found that they could not produce all the resources that people needed or wanted. They engaged in long-distance trade both for necessities, such as raw materials, and for luxury goods. Having a steady supply of goods helped settlements grow, and thus trade was yet another factor in the rise of civilizations.

J

Around 3500 B.C.E The world's first civilization arose in Mesopotamia. This region was located in the eastern part of the Fertile Crescent. Through this region flow two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. This civilization had a fitting name for its location: Mesopotamia means "the land between the rivers." Sumer's cities had formed around temples. The temple became the central agency that ran the city's affairs. Priest-kings and their officials managed the economy. The grain that farmers produced went into temple storehouses, from which it was redistributed to the people. The temple kept a portion of the crops to finance the building and maintenance of canals, temples, and city walls. Surplus crops also paid for

weapons. The city-states of Sumer regularly fought one another over land and water.

K

Egypt, a desert country, has been called “the gift of the Nile.” The Nile River flows south to north, rising in the highlands of eastern Africa and emptying into the Mediterranean Sea. In Neolithic times and beyond, the Nile overflowed its banks each summer. The floodwaters deposited fertile silt onto the adjoining lands. In the rest of this ancient land, known as Upper Egypt, several large bands of people competed for power. Around 3100 B.C.E., a leader named Menes took control of Upper Egypt and then conquered Lower Egypt, uniting the country for the first time. King Menes thus launched Egypt’s first dynasty. A dynasty is a series of rulers who come from the same family.

L

The studies reveal that the Indus Valley civilization was home to around 100 villages and several walled cities. Two large cities, Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, dominated the region. Harappa and Mohenjo-daro reflected the organization and complexity that is a key sign of a civilization. Each consisted of two

sections—an elevated citadel, or fortress, and a lower residential area. Both were surrounded by walls. In the citadel, members of the ruling class likely conducted their political business and carried out religious rituals. In the residential city below, the people lived in brick houses linked by an orderly arrangement of streets. The finer homes had wells for water and bathrooms that drained into the city's main sewer system. Within the lower city lived shopkeepers, merchants, scribes, and artisans. The artisans manufactured a variety of goods, including metal ornaments and weapons, fine ceramics, and cotton cloth. Woven cotton textiles and beads of semi-precious stone both served as popular goods for export. Indus Valley trade goods flowed northwest over the mountains to Iran and later also by boat across the Arabian Sea and through the Persian Gulf to Mesopotamia.

M

The Greeks called themselves Hellenes. They had the same ethnic background, shared the same customs, and spoke the same basic language. However, their city-states preferred to remain independent. Nevertheless, they came together politically when threatened by an outside power—or when forced to by a dominant city-state. One such city-state was

Athens. There, in 508 B.C.E, the world's first democracy appeared. The Athenians cherished their liberty, both personal and political, and they designed a government that would protect it. There was a direct democracy—citizens participated directly in the rule of their state. Women, foreigners, and slaves were excluded from citizenship. Everyone else over age 20 had a right to vote in the people's assembly and to make speeches there concerning public policy. They could also elect magistrates, officials who carried out the assembly's decisions.

N

Greek city-states continued to function until, in the 100s B.C.E., they were crushed by a new Mediterranean powerhouse. The Roman Empire began as a city-state in the middle of the Italian peninsula. It grew steadily through military aggression, and it would keep expanding for about 400 years. Rome's conquest of the Mediterranean region made it an empire, although the Romans still thought of their country as a republic. A republic is a system of government in which the people rule through representatives they select to make decisions for them. In 27 B.C.E., Octavian became the first official emperor. He assumed the title Augustus, which means

“majestic.” Under Augustus and the next 15 or so emperors, the Mediterranean region enjoyed a time of relative calm known as the “Pax Romana,” or “Roman Peace.” The Romans, great road builders, extended their network of roads into conquered territories. This made the movement of troops to Roman colonies easier. It also encouraged trade and the diffusion of Roman culture and ideas throughout the empire. Rome also extended citizenship rights to conquered peoples, which helped integrate them into Roman society and government.

O

Another goal of the Han was to enlarge the empire. The Han army, equipped with the newly invented crossbow, gained new territory in several directions. To the north they pushed the fearsome Xiongnu people, also known as the Huns, away from the Great Wall that hugged China’s border. To the northeast the Han colonized part of the Korean peninsula. To the south they took possession of coastal lands well into Vietnam. To the west they gained control of caravan routes that passed through Central Asia.

As a result of the westward expansion, the Han opened up interregional trade starting around 100 B.C.E. They exported mainly silk, some of which reached as far

west as Rome. The trade routes across Asia became known as the Silk Road. The Silk Road also carried goods and ideas eastward into China, including Buddhism, a religion that arrived from India during the time of the Eastern Han dynasty.

The most admired leader of the Mauryan Empire was its third king, Ashoka. Ashoka set out to expand the empire, but a massacre stopped him. The slaughter, by his troops, of many thousands of people from the east coast kingdom of Kalinga had a profound effect on Ashoka. He converted to Buddhism, a religion of peace, and vowed to conquer not through military force but through moral teachings.

Ashoka sent Buddhist missionaries throughout the empire and also into Southeast Asia and Central Asia. He instituted religious tolerance in India, supporting Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist groups. Ashoka also issued edicts expressing his philosophy. These decrees were carved into stone pillars. Ashoka's religious tolerance helped his people live peacefully. Through these actions and policies, Ashoka worked to unify the many different peoples of his empire.