The Developement Of Civilization Essay, Research Paper

According to Webster?s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, civilization is ?a relatively high level of cultural and technological development, specifically the stage of cultural development at which writing and the keeping of written records is attained?. Other sources trace the meaning of civilization to political, economic, military and social structures as well as the heightened intellectual and artistic aspects of life (Spielvogel,xxxi). Civilization developed as the crises of everyday life necessitated change. As history progresses, we study our past in search of guidance and other crucial information to help us along the way. The study of civilization also plays as an agent to defer us from duplicating past blunders.

Before recent finds in East Africa, paleoanthropologists thought civilization began in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, often referred to as the fertile crescent. In the year 1959, Mary Leaky, coming from a prestigious paleoanthropological family, found a nearly complete human like skull which dated back to before the fossils of any Southeast Asian finds. In 1972, a team led by her son Richard found the remains of a skeleton over 200,000 years older (Lerner,4-5). These ancient people are known as Australopithecines and wandered through East and South Africa (Spielvogel,3) The tools of these people were very crude. They seem to have been made for agricultural purposes. From this human like species, also referred to as Homo habilis, another group sprouted. They represent the second stage of human life and are called Homo erectus (Lerner,6-7).

The finds in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley date at about 1.5 million years old. Migrants from Africa, also part of the Homo erectus group, they began to apply the use of larger and more sophisticated tools (Spielvogel,3). They were not only physically advancing in their height, compared to the pygmy sized Homo habilis, but had an increased brain capacity as well. It is taken from the fossils of these people that language may well have began in this form of human (Lerner,8). They had enlarged cavities in the front of the neck. Soon different dialects would run rampant. These people, the Neanderthals, were also nomadic. They followed the herds along their migratory patterns and gathered other sustenance consisting mostly of plants and their roots along the way. It is believed that approximately 400,000 years ago, Homo erectus learned to use fire (Lerner,9). They also began to travel farther distances, for the earliest evidence of the wheel used in travel was found to be in 35,000 BCE (Calder,54).

There is conflicting information as to when the Homo erectus began evolving into the Homo sapien. Some say it was in 28,000 BCE (Lerner,9), others say it was between 18,000 and 13,000 BCE (Spielvogel,3). Facts would point to the earlier years, where the Sumerian city-states, Egyptian Civilization (especially the Old Kingdom), and cuneiform began to emerge. ?Groups of people advanced beyond their old hunting grounds at a rate of only two or three miles per generation (Spielvogel,3).? They began making waterproof shelters of their own. With this new advance in addition to the discovery and use of fire, man was able to move to climates other than the reasonably comfortable settlements of Africa and Southeast Asia (Calder,49).

Thousands of years later, in between 9,000 and 8,000 BCE, man began to take its first steps toward domesticating animals. In the area of early Iran, men began herding sheep and goats (Lerner,16). They also learned how to preserve meat by using methods of smoking, salting and drying, and in the colder climates, refrigeration (Calder,56). This would provide an emergency food stock in case their primary food source was somehow cut off.

The major employment of agriculture as a mainstay of life occurred in about 10,000 BCE. This major transition from hunting, gathering and basic herding to agriculture is called the Neolithic Revolution (Spielvogel,5). The cause of this transition was the slow but sure disappearance of the herds (Lerner,14). Man could no longer depend on the food source of the migratory throng of wild animals, nor on the meager herds they kept for themselves. The earliest testimony of permanent settlement appears in the area of the fertile crescent and its surrounding countries (Lerner,17). Historians, however, are not sure where the use of agriculture first became a strict way of life. There are four basic regions where the proof of this sedentary way of life took hold, their being the Near East, southern Asia, western Africa, and the middle Americas. There is no doubt, though, that the transition to agriculture made man settle down, thus creating the roots for what we call civilization. It was this change that made way for the growth and development of cities and their own separate cultures (Calder,59).

The beginning of cities was initiated by the growth of the villages that came before them. In the early stages of village life, there were anywhere from 100 to 1,000 inhabitants. The largest villages held up to 5,000 citizens, rivaling the size of the smaller cities of the future (Lerner,18). For the time being, however, these establishments stood mainly as fortifications to protect the farmlands and the riches they held. Soon, those living within the village communities began having spare time on their hands. All of the old jobs had been occupied, and constant development of newer and better tools made them more efficient. New and different trades began to take ground. Among these were stronger frameworks for art, religion, and politics.

With the strong development of farming, there came the need for better agricultural tools, vessels for food storage, and sturdy housing for residents. Up popped the artisans. They created many different advantageous contraptions for the use of their people. Pottery and basket weaving became a large trade. The receptacles made by these craftsmen were important for transportation and storage of agricultural as well as other goods (Lerner,19). They allowed a better use of space, and were a comfort in everyday chores. Those who were clever and had experience in the field began developing better tools for planting and harvesting, making the job quicker and easier. This gave farmers more spare time to develop their mental capacity through various recreation. Carpenters began constructing more weatherproof housing. Shelters were no longer made of just skins and leaves, which the wandering tribes of yesteryear had needed. They were permanent shelters, some implementing basic forms of insulation. They became strongholds for the families they held. This advance started to bring a closer meaning to family life than there had been before. Those in the house would have common eating and living quarters, shared with a few select people as opposed to the whole tribe. It brought an innate meaning to close relationships, forcing man to make a distinction between home and work. This is another way in which the boundaries of mental capacity increased during the Neolithic Revolution.

Religion mixed with politics in these times. It seems that man has questioned his purpose on the earth since gaining comparatively large mental capacity. Man had been worshiping numerous gods for thousands of years, the establishment of village just gave them brotherhood and time enough to ponder together and create one, solid idea to share amongst themselves. This religion would undoubtedly be practiced throughout the village. Examples and declarations of a religious leader would dictate a way of life for the villagers. He would usually be the wisest in character and charisma and would act as a symbol of good living. It is my belief that the earliest religious/political leaders were those who created a written language. After that initial creation, the written text would change to fit the needs of the people, whatever they were. The political or religious leader would often be able to make the big decisions about who was right and who was not. He would be able to point a finger and expel a member of the community for their bad examples. In all likelihood, he would decide who was best for what job, and could assign the lots of those in his populace. With the gain of these structures, political and religious, man had taken another step toward civilization.

So, men had built for themselves a nice infrastructure upon which cities could develop. Trade between these rapidly growing towns. Barter was becoming a way of life. This would be no hard task. Man already had beasts of burden, wheeled carts and vessels in which to carry their merchandise with ease of travel. The need for food was greater than ever, and both obsolete knowledge and skills of numerous alternate communities and environmental factors were cause for raid and plunder. Some communities chose to steal food and other precious items from villages because they did not have the technology, land, number of workers to do so for themselves. Sometimes famine played a role in the robbery of these established villages, but those cases were few. As villages grew, and began to acquire more and more tradable valuables, the number of raids began to increase. It was usually a case of being able to get out of work for leisure, the old Grasshopper and the Ant fable. Men would steal what they didn?t want to work for. Unfortunately, these raiders were most often people with lesser intelligence and greater strength. Thus, the villagers began to take up arms. This was the beginning of warfare.

Civilization, in its bare simplistic function is the ability to yield a means of survival and protection for those included in its confines. It is a sense of belonging and working for one?s own group, whether it be large or small. This has nothing to do with the ability to write, hold political office, keep a god, keeping written history, or even to have a permanent home. Although mental capacity is advantageous, it has next to nothing to do with civilization in its base form. The only brainpower that matters in civilization is the ability to think rationally. The smaller mental capability of the Homo habilis still held those prehistoric people together. It supplied them with a sense of community and responsibility toward it. We still don?t always think rationally, and yet we are a civilization.

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