Civilization Begins

A long time ago, people began farming. This change is called the Neolithic Revolution. Farming helped villages grow bigger.

A civilization is a very organized group of people. It has leaders who make rules. People in a civilization make art, learn new things, and build tools and buildings.

When farms grew more food than people needed, villages could become cities. Cities are big places where many people live and work together.

The First Cities and Civilizations

River Valley Civilizations

The first people who made cities lived by big rivers. One group lived by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. This place is in the Middle East.

Another group lived by the Nile River in Egypt. They built homes and grew food near the water.

A group called the Indus lived by rivers in what is now Pakistan and India. They used the river water for farming.

A fourth group lived by the Huang River, also called the Yellow River, in China. They also grew food and made towns near the river.

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These river valleys helped early farmers. The soil was rich and good for growing plants. The rivers gave water for crops and a way to move boats.

Animals came to drink at the rivers. People could hunt some animals for food. Because of these good things, farmers grew more food than they needed. Extra food helped people live in bigger towns and cities.

Rivers also changed the land. When rivers flooded, they left silt. Silt is very fine sand and soil. The silt made the ground good for planting again. But floods could also cause trouble for farmers, just like floods can today.

Floods can wash away fields and homes. People had to learn how to stop or control the water. Sometimes the water moved the lines that showed where land ends. People also needed to bring river water to help plants grow.

They built walls called dikes and small paths for water called irrigation ditches. Many people had to work together to build and maintain these. Because of this big work, groups of leaders and helpers formed to organize the work. These leaders helped strengthen towns and communities.

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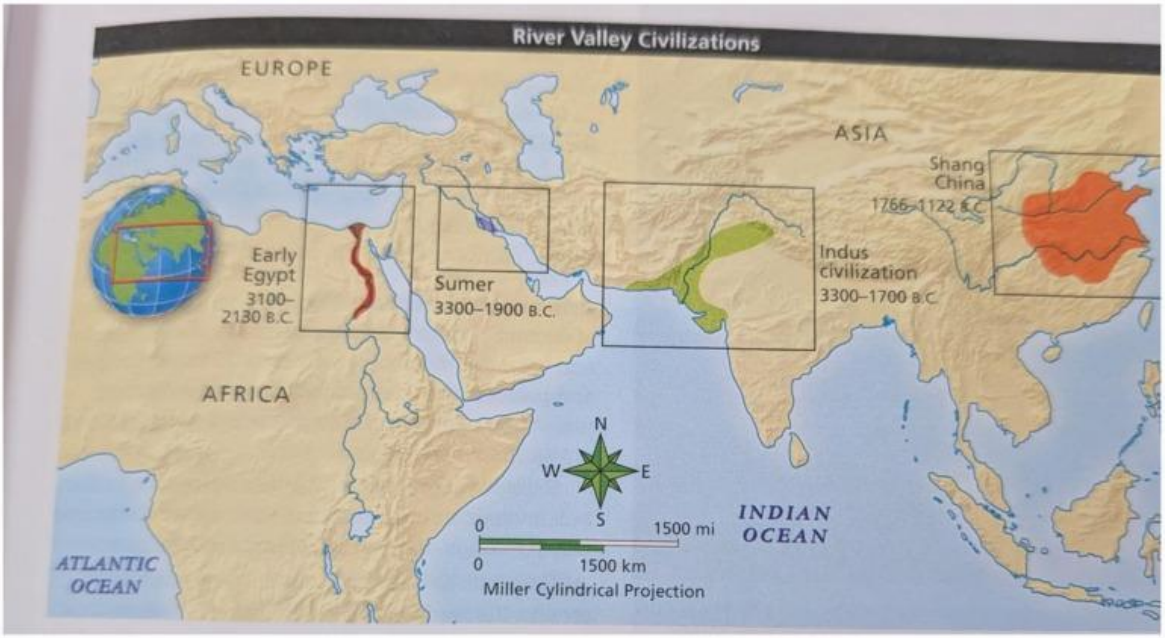

Civilizations in the Americas

Long ago, people lived in different places. In Asia and Africa, some early towns grew near rivers. But in the Americas, early towns did not grow only by rivers.

Two main places in the Americas had early civilizations. One place is called Mesoamerica. Mesoamerica is part of Mexico and Central America. Long ago, the Olmec, Maya, and Aztec people lived there. The other place is in Peru. In Peru, several early groups lived there and later the Inca people became powerful.

People in the Americas grew food on farms. They planted corn, beans, squash, and potatoes. They farmed in lowlands and in mountain valleys. In Mesoamerica, farmers drained swamps to make land so they could plant more crops. In Peru, farmers built flat steps on steep mountains. These steps are called terraces and give them more space to grow food.

Life Away From Cities

Some people did not live in big cities. They still hunted or gathered food. Some lived in small farming villages.

On dry, grassy lands called steppes, some people cared for animals. They looked after cows, sheep, and goats. The land did not have much water or grass. These people had to move from place to place to find new grass and water for their animals.

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Features That Define Civilization

Early Civilizations —

What did the first groups of people who lived in cities have in common? Cities were very important. Historians also found seven other things many early civilizations had:

1. Governments that helped make rules and keep order.
2. Religions with beliefs and places to pray.
3. Different jobs for different people.
4. Social groups where some people had more power or money than others.
5. Art and buildings that people made and enjoyed.
6. Public works like roads, walls, or places to bring water.
7. Sometimes writing to keep records and tell stories.

Organized Governments

How Cities Needed Leaders —

As towns grew, people needed more food. To grow lots of food and care for water for fields, new kinds of leaders started. City leaders were stronger than the small village groups of elders and chiefs.

At first, priests had much power. Later, warrior kings became the main leaders. They took the place of the old elders and made their children the next leaders.

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