

The Varying Earth

Human civilisation appeared more or less simultaneously along the lower Nile River in Egypt, in the Tigris and Euphrates valleys in present Iraq, on the Indus delta of northwest India, and in northeastern China. The eastern Mediterranean Middle East region is today a harsh, arid country that seems an unlikely cradle for agricultural societies, yet when the great Ice Age glaciers covered northern Europe prior to 10,000 years ago, this region enjoyed climate that was comfortably warm and more humid than now. For example, former river valleys and dried lakes lie buried beneath the sands of the Sahara. Climatologists believe that an atmospheric high-pressure cell centered over the ice sheet pushed moist westerly winds south of the Mediterranean Sea. Knowing this, we can establish early humans spread across the area and developed their culture rapidly. After the great glaciers retreated, the Middle East climate harshened drastically. By 5000 to 3000 B.C., the major cultural centres had become restricted to the large, through flowing river systems, such as the Nile Tigris-Euphrates, and Indus, that were more or less independent of the increasing drought.

It is from such areas that our earliest written records have come. They tell of already highly developed agricultural systems with elaborate irrigated plantations and advanced urban centres, as in the Fertile Crescent of Mesopotamia. The earliest European civilisations, called Minoan, began on Crete only 125 km south of Thera, and a well-preserved Minoan settlement has been excavated on Thera itself. The Cretan civilisation collapsed suddenly about 1500 B.C. for reasons that eluded archaeologists for generations. A Greek archaeologist, Spyridon Marinatos, postulated in the 1930's that eruptions of Thera may have ended the Minoan culture. The search for how the Earth began, how humans appeared, how species evolved still continues, however, as much as we know today about our previous civilisations and ancestors we can undoubtedly conclude, the Earth has changed in many ways, and will continue to change. The Earth itself is only one of the influential factors responsible for the drastic changes that take place, the others vary from humans, culture, politics, and religion.

'The only thing certain is death and taxes. But change is the greatest certainty of all'. *Benjamin Franklin*

Q. Write the meanings of the following words in the spaces provided.

a. postulate

b. excavate

c. elude

d. simultaneous

e. elaborate

f. drastic

Q. Answer the following questions based on the text ‘The Varying Earth’.

a. Which areas are believed to be the first places for the birth of human civilisation?

b. What do we have written records of, and what do they infer?

c. What was the earliest European civilisation and what do we learn from their existence?

d. What does the continuous change tell us about the Earth and the existence of humans?

e. Explain what Benjamin Franklin meant in his quote, ‘The only thing certain is death and taxes. But change is the greatest certainty of all’.

f. How has change in civilizations, culture, politics, beliefs and history shaped the Earth we see today?
