

Civilization of the Middle East

It is the opinion of most archaeologists that civilization first developed in the Middle East, where, of all regions of the world, natural conditions offered the greatest assistance to man in his changeover from a life of nomadic wandering as a hunter to settled occupation of the soil. The regular rise of the three large rivers Nile, Euphrates, and Tigris; annual renewal of soil fertility by the disposition of a layer of silt; and the generally warm climate, favorable both to the growth of a rich plant life, and to the activities of man himself, were all special inducement to the adoption of a way of life based on agriculture.

Until recently many archaeologists took the view that civilized community first arose in Egypt, though only a very short time before a similar development in Mesopotamia; a more recent opinion is now that the earliest advances may have taken place in Mesopotamia. Whichever view is followed, it is necessary to bear in mind that geographical conditions in both regions were not identical, and it can in fact be stated that in Mesopotamia environmental factors were not as wholly favorable as in the valley of Nile. The Nile is a single stream, without tributaries in its lower course; but Tigris and Euphrates are both braided streams, and the former receives important effluents which bring down immense masses of silt that block the lower courses of both rivers, giving rise to swamps, lagoons, shifting banks and coastlines.