

What were the three transitional cultures of Southern Mesopotamia that prepared the ground for the growth of Sumerian civilization?

The growth of Sumerian civilization was a gradual process that can be seen in the transitional cultures of North Mesopotamia (Hassuna, Samarra and Halaf) and South Mesopotamia (al-Ubaid, Uruk and Jamdat Nasr). Civilisational features developed first in Southern Mesopotamia which was a low rainfall area, but the land was extremely fertile. The earliest settlements were along the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates. Subsequently, canals were dug to carry the water to the fields located at a distance from the rivers. A network of canals and barrages came up in Southern Mesopotamia which the full potential of the region to be realized, making it the centre of the earliest bronze age civilisation.

With the settlements of Southern Mesopotamia three ^{transitional} Neolithic cultures developed in the region. The earliest was the al-Ubaid culture (5000-4000 BC). This was followed by one of the most prominent cultures of West Asia - the Uruk culture (4000 to 3200 BC). Finally, the Jamdat Nasr culture (3200 to 3000 BC) culminated in the emergence of Sumerian civilization.

Ubaid was a ~~start~~ cluster of small rural communities situated along the river silt of the Euphrates valley. Indeed the al-Ubaid culture marked the first major attempt to adapt to the environment of Southern Mesopotamia. Initially advantage was taken of natural channels to irrigate crops. Wheat and barley were grown. Goats and sheep were also reared. Fish, procured from the Euphrates and Tigris, as well as from marshes in Lower Mesopotamia, was an important source of food. The nutritious date palm which grows in abundance in the area would have supplemented the diet.

Ubaid sites have suggested that people of this culture lived in multi-roomed rectangular houses with various sizes. The variations in the size of the houses and construction materials indicate social and economic differentiation. During this

Various settlements in this region have been collectively termed as Ubaid culture after a small site Al-Ubaid in Iraq. The other prominent sites of the Ubaid culture are - Tell abada, Kheit Gasim, Tel el Qeili and Eridu.

⑧ The digging and upkeep of canals which was done under the supervision of temples.

period temples played a key role in the ^{development of} formative political institutions and helped to shape economic activities. A major function of the temples was to organize irrigation. From small shrines at the beginning of the al-Ubaid culture, temple grew into massive structures.

Uruk (4000-3200 BC), ~~was~~ a large settlement situated near Euphrates and corresponds to Modern Warka, is considered as a phase of qualitative advancement over al-Ubaid culture. Indeed the contribution of the Uruk culture to human civilization is remarkable. This culture has yielded the earliest evidence of the use of the wheel and the plough as well as of writing. With the Uruk culture we move from pre-history to protohistory. The Uruk culture saw the beginnings of wheel-turned pottery. Beautiful wheel-turned vases have been found at various Uruk sites. Wheel making was a momentous step from technological point of view. Wheels could be made efficiently only with metal tools like axes and saws to give it a round shape. Next stage in the technological development was the ^{the} manufacturing of wheels for carts that were used for purpose of transportation. The workmanship involved in making wheels and carts indicates that there were specialist carpenters in Uruk. In agriculture the introduction of the plough was the main breakthrough. This new tool rendered the breaking of soil much easier. The most outstanding achievement of Uruk was the ~~also~~ development of writing.

Towards the end of the Uruk period several settlements in Sumeria had grown into cities. The process of transition from villages to cities continued in the Jamdat Nasr period. Jamdat Nasr is known for its painted polychrome and monochrome potteries displaying geometrical patterns and depiction of few animals. People were familiar with kiln firing of pottery that consisted of large jars, bowls and cups. A number of cylinder seals and stamp seals made of clay have also been found from archaeological excavations. Most of these seals are carved depiction of humans and animals. An improved irrigation system, increasing trade and more specialisation of crafts are other features associated with this culture. A number of urban centres had come up in Southern Mesopotamia.

→ by c. 3200-3100 B.C. Gordon and Childs call this phenomenon 'the Urban Revolution'.

