



Reading 63

Neolithic Agriculture Development

In the Neolithic period, starting around 10,000 years ago, perhaps the most important economic revolution in human history occurred - the commencement of agriculture and the domestication of animals for human consumption. From this point in time, people could start to rely on a more consistent and much increased food supply. As a **corollary** of this, considerably larger populations could be supported and people could settle in one place without the need to migrate in search of food supplies. Equally important, the surpluses of crops and animals meant that not all the population needed to dedicate their time and energy to farming; some could now learn specialized skills such as crafts or trade. **The building of permanent settlements where skills could be developed brought about the conditions necessary for the first growth of towns.** But several thousand years elapsed between the beginnings of agriculture and the rise of what we call civilization about 6,000 years ago.

Recent evidence seems to indicate that while the Neolithic revolution first took place in the Middle East - in the valleys of the Tigris-Euphrates and of the Nile - it occurred **independently** in other areas of the world. The origins of the revolution are not known in great detail, but it is known that the wild grasses that were the ancestors of wheat and barley grew natively in the Eastern Mediterranean area. It may be that Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) foragers* simply supplemented their diet by reaping these wild grasses, and later came to understand the advantage of returning some of the grain to the soil as seed. Whatever the case, we know that at an early date people living in the Eastern Mediterranean region, who lived by hunting, fishing, and gathering, began to make sickles, with stone teeth set in bone handles. Such tools were certainly used for reaping some grass crop, whether cultivated or wild.

Around this time, other communities in the Middle East cultivated plants from which they learned how to obtain flour. Evidence shows that they ground down the grain with a simple type of mill, consisting of a large saddle-shaped stone on which a smaller stone was rubbed up and down. The livestock they bred - cattle, sheep, pigs, and goats - was exploited for their meat, skins, and milk.

[A] Both in Egypt and Mesopotamia, the periodic floods of great rivers such as the Nile and the Tigris-Euphrates not only supplied water to the fields but also brought down fresh soil in the form of **fertile** muddy sediments. [B] This sediment was deposited on flood plains around such rivers, thus annually restoring the fruitfulness of the land. [C] This regular flooding and sediment deposit allowed these early farmers to continue cultivating the same fields repeatedly for generations without exhausting the fertility of the soil, and crop surpluses were, therefore, available to allow an increase in population and a growth in trade and skills development. [D] The area available for cultivation was expanded when people learned to draw off the river water into man-made irrigation canals and ditches, watering and fertilizing larger and larger areas of land.

The practice of artificial irrigation affected the soil in various ways, but not always for the good. Since the channels were often shallow, there was frequently a great loss of water through evaporation in a hot climate. **This** could lead to a marked increase in soil salinity, since the salts held in solution or suspension were deposited as the water evaporated, and too much salinity could eventually damage the soil. But overall the effect of the irrigation system was to create an artificial environment - and to some extent an artificial climate - with a range of conditions that favored both human experiment and agricultural development. Beyond this, settled agriculture led to the development of property rights and hence to a legal framework and mechanisms to enforce laws. This in turn led to a more extensive and hierarchical government organization and hence to the development of large, stable communities.

*foragers; people who go searching for food

26 The word "corollary" in the passage is closest in meaning to

- A basis
- B result
- C source
- D purpose

27 According to paragraph 1, what condition allowed people to learn specialized skills?

- A The ability to migrate
- B The growth of population
- C The surplus of farm products
- D The spread of settlements

28 According to paragraph 1, why did people migrate before the Neolithic revolution?

- A To search for better climates
- B To improve trading skills
- C To avoid enemies
- D To find food

29 Which of the sentences below best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence in the passage? Incorrect choices change the meaning in important ways or leave out essential information.

- A The conditions for the growth of the first towns were established in permanent settlements where skills developed.
- B The first towns and the skills that were developed were also found in the earliest permanent settlements.
- C Skills were developed and early permanent settlements were established before towns could be built.
- D The conditions necessary for permanent settlements and the practice of skills were found in the first towns.

30 The word "independently" in the passage is closest in meaning to

- A separately
- B collectively
- C individually
- D originally

31 According to paragraph 2, sickles found in the eastern Mediterranean are evidence that

- A the makers of these sickles were skilled craftsmen
- B wild grasses were eaten before domesticated grasses
- C the sickles were useful for fishing and hunting
- D grasses were cut down for food consumption

32 The word "fertile" in the passage is closest in meaning to

- A forceful
- B productive
- C creative
- D shallow

33 According to paragraph 4, why was it easy for people to grow food near large rivers?

- A Flooding eroded the soil.
- B The soil was continuously enriched.
- C Surplus crops were regular.
- D The population was large enough.

34 According to paragraph 4, why did early Neolithic people build irrigation ditches?

- A To increase the growing areas
- B To enlarge the fertilized areas
- C To produce crop surpluses
- D To water the early canals

35 The word "This" in the passage refers to

- A irrigation
- B hot climate
- C evaporation
- D loss of water

36 According to paragraph 5, what negative effect did the building of irrigation ditches create?

- A Too much salt in the soil
- B worsening climate
- C Destruction of settlements
- D Too much experimentation

37 What can be inferred from paragraph 5 about the development of an organized government?

- A Stable communities function best with a hierarchical government.
- B Human experiment is most often practiced if government enforces laws.
- C An organized government is necessary to extend artificial irrigation.
- D The need to enforce property laws required government organization.

38 Look at the four squares [] that indicate where the following sentence could be added to the passage.

In much of the Middle East region, the earth was mainly watered not by rain but by natural irrigation.

Where would the sentence best fit? Choose the letter of the square that shows where the sentence should be added.

39 An introductory sentence of a brief summary of the passage is provided below. Complete the summary by selecting the THREE answer choices that express the most important ideas in the passage. Some sentences do not belong in the summary because they express ideas that are not presented in the passage or are minor ideas in the passage. Write the letters of the answer choices in the spaces where they belong.

During the Neolithic period, people started to domesticate animals, grow crops, and build permanent settlements, leading eventually to the beginnings of civilization.

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Answer Choices

A It is likely that early hunters ate wild grasses and later understood how to cultivate, reap, and grind grain.

B The floodwaters of rivers in the Middle East enriched the soil, which led to food surpluses and an enlarged population.

C At one time, people in the Eastern Mediterranean region lived by hunting animals, catching fish, and gathering edible plants.

D We know that early people learned how to cultivate grasses since they developed a simple type of grinding mill.

E The large increase in the number of irrigation canals led to the worsening of the soil condition due to deposits of salt.

F Artificial irrigation increased the arable area, and despite some negative effects, overall this development led to improvement in life and eventually to an organized government system.

Источник задания: Cambridge Preparation to the TOEFL

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26 B

The word "corollary" is a natural consequence or "result."

27 C

The passage explains that surpluses allow people to use their time in other ways.

28 D

The passage states there was no longer "the need to migrate in search of food supplies."

29 A

Settlements first needed to be established before people could develop their skills.

30 A

When something occurs "independently," it is unrelated or occurs "separately."

31 D

The passage states that "Such tools were certainly used for reaping some grass crop."

32 B

Something that is "fertile" is "productive" in that it provides the environment for productivity.

33 B

The passage states that the sediment was deposited on flood plains and that the fruitfulness of the land was restored annually.

34 A

The passage states that the area was expanded when people learned to draw off the river water into canals and ditches.

35 C

The evaporation of water could lead to an increase in soil salinity.

36 A

The evaporation of water from the irrigation ditches caused an increase of the salt in the soil, and this damaged the land.

37 D

The passage states that "settled agriculture led to the development of property rights and hence to a legal framework... to enforce laws." This suggests that an organized government was needed to protect property rights.

38 A

This sentence introduces the topic that the other sentences in the paragraph support.

39 A B F

The people who ate the grass began to understand how to cultivate it. With the enriched soil to grow crops, the land sustained more people. Irrigation increased crop-growing areas, but property rights led to the need for a government to enforce laws.