

Climate Change Rocked Cradles Of Civilization

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Severe climate change was the primary driver in the development of civilisation, according to new research by the University of East Anglia. The early civilisations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, South Asia, China and northern South America were founded between 6000 and 4000 years ago when global climate changes, driven by natural fluctuations in the Earth's orbit, caused a weakening of monsoon systems resulting in increasingly arid conditions.

These first large urban, state-level societies emerged because diminishing resources forced previously transient people into close proximity in areas where water, pasture and productive land was still available.

In a presentation to the BA Festival of Science on September 7, Dr. Nick Brooks will challenge existing views of how and why civilisation arose. He will argue that the earliest civilisations developed largely as a by-product of adaptation to climate change and were the products of hostile environments.

"Civilisation did not arise as the result of a benign environment which allowed humanity to indulge a preference for living in complex, urban, 'civilized' societies," said Dr. Brooks.

"On the contrary, what we tend to think of today as 'civilisation' was in large part an accidental by-product of unplanned adaptation to catastrophic climate change. Civilisation was a last resort - a means of

organising society and food production and distribution, in the face of deteriorating environmental conditions."

He added that for many, if not most people, the development of civilisation meant a harder life, less freedom, and more inequality. The transition to urban living meant that most people had to work harder in order to survive, and suffered increased exposure to communicable diseases. Health and nutrition are likely to have deteriorated rather than improved for many.

The new research challenges the widely held belief that the development of civilization was simply the result of a transition from harsh, unpredictable climatic conditions during the last ice age, to more benign and stable conditions at the beginning of the Holocene period some 10,000 years ago.

The research also has profound philosophical implications because it challenges deeply held beliefs about human progress, the nature of civilisation and the origins of political and religious systems that have persisted to this day. It suggests that civilisation is not our natural state, but the unintended consequence of adaptation to climatic deterioration - a condition of humanity "in extremis".

Dr. Brooks said: "Having been forced into civilized communities as a last resort, people found themselves faced with increased social inequality, greater violence in the form of organised conflict, and at the mercy of self-appointed elites who used religious authority and political ideology to bolster their position. These models of government are still with us today, and we may understand them better by understanding how civilisation arose by accident as a result of the last great global climatic upheaval."

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