

Approaching the Ancient World: The Historians May Be Wrong Really

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Abstract

This article provides some neglected but still crucial environmental and biological clues about the ancient civilizations throughout the world. The narratives and findings presented are unexpected but reasonable – all of which are what every student of anthropology or history needs to know and doesn't get in the usual text.

Keywords: Ancient civilization; Cultural evolution; Environmental impact; Ancestral language

Introduction

It is generally believed that civilizations arose independently at several locations in both hemispheres. Existing textbooks and relevant monographs in the subjects of anthropology and history have presented incomplete and sometimes misleading descriptions of how mankind has advanced from the hunter-gatherer society to more complicated cultures. For example, historians have suggested that fertile land and other favorable environmental (geographic) factors have helped Sumerians/Egyptians make a creative leap to the early civilizations along river valleys. However, this is not the real story about civilizations, and more critical geographic factors (or conditions) incentivizing humans to develop various civilizations have not been presented. Still, anthropologists and historians have highly simplified, if not dismissed, some key biological factors that may have decisively influenced the dynamic behaviors of mankind.

In this article a few of common ancestral terms are resurrected to help understand the complicated process of human and cultural evolutions throughout the world. What is quite interesting is that all of them are derived from the multilingual word were selected as the common ancestral word with the meanings of “house, home, homeland, motherland, and so on” by – early humans living in different parts of the world.

In the remaining part of this article, I will delve into factors and mechanisms that may have influenced the dynamic behaviors of six earliest civilizations – Sumerian, ancient Egyptian, Harappan (Indus), Chinese, Mesoamerican, and Andean South American. My narratives and theoretical and statistical analyses are focused on both environmental (geographic) factors on which traditional historic analyses are based and human (behavioral) factors on which anthropological analyses are usually based.

The Environment Matters, But Not the Way You Think

The concept “cradle of civilization” is referred to as a place that can incentivize inhabitants to build cities, to create writing systems, to experiment in techniques for making pottery and using metals, to domesticate animals, and to develop complex social structures involving class systems. The term “Fertile Crescent” was popularized by the University of Chicago archaeologist James Henry Breasted in the 1920s. Since its popularization in the 1910s, the term has been widely adopted by historians and anthropologists. Moreover, the fertility of crescent-shaped land and the favorable environment there, which are believed to have advantages over those of the surrounding areas, have been assumed to be the major, if not the only, factors contributing to the first civilization in the Eastern Hemisphere. This has been well

summarized by Marvin Perry and his colleagues [1].

Unfortunately, that the favorable environment of the Fertile Crescent played a sweeping role in the birth of a civilization is a pseudo-proposition. It is true that the first human civilization was born in Mesopotamia or the Fertile Crescent as called by historians. However, the crucial factors contributing to the birth of civilization are not those that have been claimed by many historians and anthropologists. As a matter of fact, historians' views about the natural and environmental influences on ancient civilizations have varied [2]. However it seems that historians have presented an incomplete picture about the initial factors (or conditions) promoting humans to give birth to various civilizations.

While various natural and geographical challenges have largely determined the developments of ancient civilizations exist, not all natural disasters (threats) have contributed to the birth of civilizations. Although the unfriendly environment – as long as it could sustain humans – has incentivized humans to create the first and powerful civilizations, not all places of such kind of environment have become cradles of civilizations. To be sure, in the explanation of the rise and fall of civilizations, natural and geographical factors are the exogenous variable, and human behaviors should always be treated as an endogenous variable.

As a matter of fact, it is the cyclical disasters and threats (especially annual or seasonable river floods) that have enabled humans to be more prepared and intelligent and thus to possess brilliant civilizations of today [3,4]. Other geographical and environmental factors, including irregular disasters and threats have also played a role in the evolution and development of ancient cultures and civilizations. However, they do not provide cyclical incentives for humans to change their lifestyles and to advance the social complexities of their own.

What Everyone Needs to Know and Doesn't Get in the Usual Text

Another possible mistake historians could have made relates

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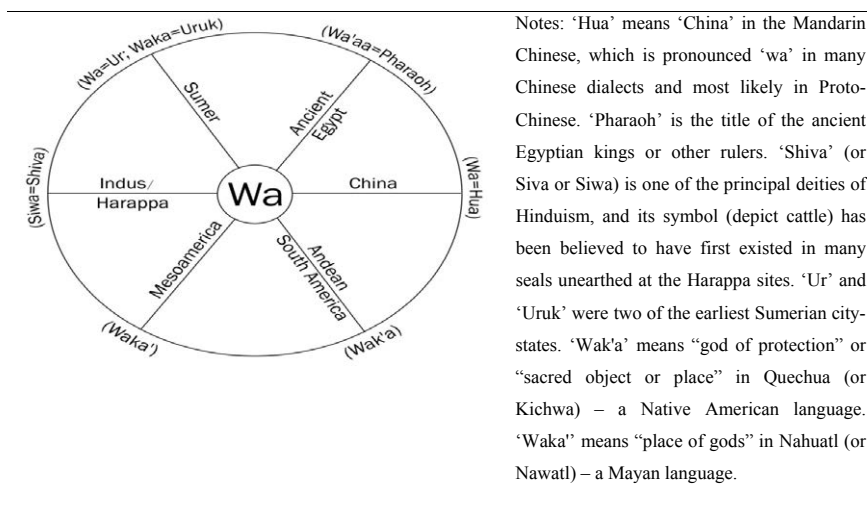



Figure 1: Connecting the ancient world: linguistic evidence (Guo, 2017b, p. 65).

to the initial scenarios of the earliest civilizations. For example, the earliest Sumerian city-states of Ur and Uruk have been identified as 'Urim' and 'Unug,' respectively, as stated in the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature – a project of Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford [5] and in the usual text, which have followed the findings of Samuel Noah Kramer [6], a world-renowned expert in Sumerian history and Sumerian language [6]. However, it is very likely that these two ancient Sumerian city-states were originally called 'Wa' and 'Waka,' respectively (Figure 1).

- Let us first look at the Sumerian cuneiform script for the city-state 'Ur,' which is composed of the following signs:
- Possibly denoting a house or shelter above the horizon and with a natural barrier on the right side or;
- Possibly denoting two rivers (or canals) and a piece of land between them; and, in a few of cases,
- Possibly denoting a piece of land with four walled boundaries.

There is a possibility that the main portion of the first sign () for the cuneiform script 'Ur' was originally referred to as the Ziggurat of Ur or any other building [4]. There is another possibility that the Sumerians of the ancient city-state of Uruk might originally use the easy-to-read 'Waka' or any other variant of it – not the twisted 'Unug' – as the name of their motherland. And the original meaning of 'Waka' has the meaning of "place of gods" or "god of protection," similar to those of 'Waka' in Mesoamerica and of 'Wak'a' in Andean South America [7]. Like in many other ancient civilizations, 'wa' and 'waka' were common ancestral words in Mesopotamia.

To be certain, 'wa' is the common ancestral language of all humans, and other, more twisted words did not come into being until later stages when cultures became more complicated. The word 'wa' has the meanings of, for example, 'house,' 'land,' 'homeland,' and 'motherland,' and its extended meanings include physical and moral protections. In addition, 'wa' also frequently serves as the prefixes and suffixes of vocabularies in almost all human languages, especially in indigenous languages. Particularly noteworthy is that many key terms created by the six earliest ancient civilizations of the world include the syllable 'wa' (Figure 1).

Over the course of the past thousands of years, and thanks to humans' efforts on the invention of new syllables and new vocabularies, the frequency of the syllable 'wa' in human languages has been declining over time. For example, in the "Declaration of Independence" of the United States of America, which was drafted in AD 1776, only 0.75% of the English words include the syllable 'wa.' However, in the "Hymn to the Nile" written in the Egyptian hieroglyphs in the New Kingdom (c. 1550 – 1069 BC), about 1.11% of the words include the syllable 'wa,' and that, in "The Epic of Gilgamesh" – an epic poem written in the Sumerian cuneiform in about 2600 BC that is often regarded as the oldest written story on earth – the frequency of the words including the syllable 'wa' is as high as 1.75%. Obviously, the older the written document, the higher is the frequency of the syllable 'wa' in it [7].

Conclusion

This article suggests that it is the cyclical disasters and threats (especially annual or seasonable river floods) that have enabled humans to create various ancient civilizations. In addition, a few of common ancestral terms are resurrected to help understand the complicated process of human and cultural evolutions throughout the world. What is quite interesting is that all of them are derived from the multilingual word or syllable 'wa,' while the latter is originally associated with the crying of – and certainly was selected as the common ancestral word with the meanings of "house, home, homeland, motherland, and so on" by – early humans living in different parts of the world. To be certain, at the earliest stage when humans were evolving bipedalism, they were still not able to speak 'ma' and 'ba' ('pa'); however, like many other similar animals, they could scream with the sound 'wa.'

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