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Course

Date

Early Agriculture's Effect on Ancient Egypt's Development

Introduction

The significance of agriculture in ancient Egypt cannot be gainsaid. Agriculture acted as the mainstay of Egypt's economy and still continues to be the backbone of the modern Egyptian economy. It also from Egypt that civilization is believed to have started, later translating into innovations in science, education, communication, and technology. Though the agrarian revolutionary period, the country experienced developments both from an economic and social front. Using water from River Nile, the early Egyptians perfected in irrigation systems that ensured large scale food production that spurred not only the development of means of transport like rail and roads but also promoted industrialization, urbanization, and trade. As a matter of fact, it is from this early agriculture and subsequent civilizations that Egypt's rich cultural heritage came or developed. This paper examines the impacts that early agriculture had on the development of ancient Egypt. It makes the argument that early agriculture had the significant effect of facilitating Egypt's development by enhancing trade, urbanization, industrialization, scientific research innovations and building of empires or pyramids.

Early Humans and Agriculture in Egypt

The development of early civilization in Egypt spanned from the period when Menes was the Pharaoh to the Proto-dynastic era when Naqada III ruled Egypt. Some of the early humans who shaped early civilization in ancient Egypt through civilization include the Khormusan, the

Qadan, Sebilian, the Harifians, the Bardarians, and Amratians amongst others. It is these early humans who defined and shaped early civilization and later agriculture through their unique cultures and traditions. Some of them perfected in tool making culture, and these tools would then be used as farm implements for cultivating crops.

What made Egypt suitable for habitation was mainly the presence of fertile soils and constant supply of water from River Nile. However, it is Egypt's geography that made some parts inhabitable, including the desert and the harsh climatic conditions. The early humans however quickly adapted to this ancient way of life in Egypt, hence transforming it into a center for agricultural innovation and excellence.

The Centrality of the Nile Valley in Early Egyptian Agriculture

The River Nile played a significant role as far as habitation and even agriculture are concerned. For, whenever it flooded its banks, rich fertile loamy and clay soils would be left behind hence facilitating the growth of agricultural products. The water from the Nile also helped in irrigation of crops and watering of animals besides fishing. The Nile would flood its banks during the month of September. It is believed that without the River Nile and its fertile soils when it overflowed its banks, early agriculture would have developed as it did and civilization would have been delayed. This flooding of the Nile River affected early humans in that it influenced settlement patterns and also increased population due to plenty of subsistence food produced. The Nile River was a fundamental aspect of the lives of early humans as the floodwaters from the river also supported other aspects of ancient Egyptian culture such as pottery and tool making. The flooding of the Nile River also had effects on inundation in Egypt as it promoted the development of the Egyptian society as kingdoms would collapse without the crucial resources from the river. However, this flooding of the River Nile also negatively

affected the lives of early humans in Egypt in that it increased the likelihood of people suffering from waterborne diseases such as snail fever and malaria. Further, according to Hughes, the lack of predictability of the course of the river and when it flooded also affected agriculture adversely since it was wholly dependent on water from the Nile. The floods would also wash away villages, storage facilities, and irrigation works and failure of the Nile would sometimes also result in failure in the sustainability of agriculture (Hughes 13). Additionally, since the Egyptian agriculture and civilization depended in large part on the continuous flow of River Nile, the fluctuations in the levels of water in the River had a profound influence on both the area cultivated and the geomorphology of the floodplain (Hassan 51). This also promoted culture since the flooding of the river left archaeological remains and other cultural artifacts that early humans would collect and preserve. These fluctuations in the water levels and seasonal flooding of the River's banks also influenced the course of trade in the Egyptian kingdoms.

According to Woods and Woods, early agriculture in Egypt was discovered mainly through the domestication of wild animals and plants (18). This domestication enabled early humans to discover seeds of plants that could be planted and framed subsistent and animals who could be domesticated. Early humans in ancient Egypt would collect wild seeds and grains in the deserts and plains or along the river banks and these later became domestic crops.

Types of Crops Grown, Development and use of Tools

Early Egyptians according to Gorkinski mainly grew barley, wheat, melons, vegetables, flax, grains, vines and pomegranates (24). The grains such as wheat and barley would be used for making porridge, bread, and beer. They also kept pigs, geese, cows and goats as part of the agriculture. The animals such as the oxen would be used to plow the agricultural fields and prepare farms for planting (Mieroop 55). The health effect of these crops, particularly grains is

that sometimes they would cause headaches and stomach upsets. The Egyptians also made advancements in early agriculture regarding the methods of farming and tools used. One of the most significant development was the development of various irrigation methods such as canal irrigation and drip irrigation. Regarding agricultural tools and implements, there were developments of the ox-drawn plow and the invention of the wheel. The Egyptians also developed scoops, flint-bladed sickles, forks, plows and mattocks which they would use in farming their lands in preparation for the planting season. These also included wooden tools like hoes, plows, rakes, mallets, scoops, and stone tools such as flints some of which were made or carved out of bronze. They also had copper and iron tools. Further, there were also developments and use of weapons for the protection of farmlands and defense of kingdoms. According to Trigger, these included weapons like knife blades, arrowheads, sickle blades, and gouges (112). The Egyptian warriors charged with the protection of agricultural produce against theft and invasion used weapons such as bows, spears, throwing sticks, axes, swords, and horse-drawn chariots. These were also used to protect possessions and take other people's possessions. The land expansion would sometimes cause war and conflicts both within and outside the kingdom hence the necessity of such weapons for protection.

Development of Trade, and Urbanization

Early agriculture played a significant role in promoting both local and international trade in the ancient Egypt. As the volume of agricultural production and increased due to fertile soils and availability of water, barter trade in the agricultural products among Egyptians and foreigners began to thrive. Crops such as flax were used for making clothes that would then be sold or exchanged for expensive items such as jewelry and gold from the Arabic nations in the North. This made Egypt a center for both domestic and external trade. They also exchanged

agricultural products for precious items and resources like Lebanese cedar wood, West African ivory, and ebony, Punta incense, oils and myrrh, Afghan lapis lazuli, Nubian gold, iron, and copper. They mostly trade linen, papyrus, artifacts, and grains and gold. Since the Egyptian rulers only allowed trade in set marketplaces, trade in agricultural products subsequently led to the growth of urban centers such as Ur, Uruk, Babylon, Erindu, Aswan, Thebes, and Memphis. Soon, the development of these centers helped in absorbing the increasing population caused by improved agricultural activities.

Impact of Early Agriculture on Transportation and Industrialization

To begin with, the River Nile in itself provided an important transportation means in early Egypt. The Egyptian farmers would transport their goods and people across the Nile using rafts and boats, making it a cheaper, easy and quick means of carriage of the otherwise perishable agricultural products. In fact, it is the development of transportation that also promoted trade in ancient Egypt since it made it possible for traders from different parts of the kingdoms and other areas of the Arab world to meet and sell or exchange their merchandise (Mieroop 146). Transportation in ancient Egypt involved the use of camels, carriage, barges, and boats. The development of transportation networks and routes such as rails and roads enhanced trade by promoting access to the marketplaces. Moreover, as scientific research and innovation developed and improved agricultural methods led to increased food production, there developed the need for surplus food products to be processed. This resulted in the growth of industries that made machinery used in farming and also relied on raw materials from farming.

Besides these developments, there were also other discoveries and innovations including language, water clocks, papers and books, calendars, written words, the Oxen-drawn plows, and compass.

Conclusion

As has been demonstrated in the above discussion, early agriculture in ancient Egypt had the primary impact of promoting trade, transport system, industrialization, scientific inventions and urbanization. At the center of these developments and civilizations was the River Nile which acted as the heartbeat of the ancient Egyptian civilization, culture, and agriculture through its seasonal flooding patterns. It provided a means of agricultural irrigation and aided transportation using boats and barges. Agriculture promoted trade in ancient Egypt through the exchange of agricultural products and surplus with precious resources such as gold, copper, wood and myrrh from neighboring kingdoms. It promoted transportation and industrialization by creating the need to access markets and demand for processing of agricultural products and manufacture of farm tools and machines. Agriculture is also enhanced urbanization by sustaining high populations and creating trading centers. Therefore, it may be restated that had it not been for early agriculture facilitated by fertile soils and water from the Nile, ancient and present Egyptian civilizations would not have been realized or made possible.

Works Cited

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