

Handout 1: Characteristics of a Civilization

Intensification: Neolithic villages became larger and denser as populations grew, architecture expanded, and a food surplus was available. After 4000 BC/BCE, great changes occurred in cultural institutions. These changes occurred very quickly considering humans had lived at foragers and in small farming villages for over 200,000 years before this. This process of change and growth in Era 2 is called intensification. A society did not have to have every characteristic to be a civilization, but below represent some general trends.

Characteristic	Description
Cities	Cities supported large populations of over 30,000 people
Specialization	Some people living in cities took full-time specialized jobs (artisan, merchant, soldier, priest) because they were supported by farmers from the surrounding community.
Hierarchy	A class system emerged where certain men (and sometimes women) held all the power. They were called elites. Men began to dominate in politics and women became more responsible for the life at home. This system is called patriarchy.
The State	One city usually ruled over all others in a civilization. A king or pharaoh with a small group of officials controlled the rest of society.
Networks of Trade	Many civilizations traded within and outside of their borders. Technology, food, and language spread from Mesopotamia outward to Egypt, India, and China.
Technology	Technology changed much more rapidly than in Era I. People developed metals like bronze and use those build things like wheeled carriages.
Monuments	Large buildings were constructed like city walls, temples, palaces, and tombs for powerful rulers.
Spiritual Beliefs and Laws	Spiritual beliefs and laws became richer and more complex.
Creativity	Individuals worked with the ruling class to study astronomy, mathematics, sciences, and engineering.