
Was Agriculture The Biggest Transformation In Human History?

The emergence of agriculture was the most significant transformation in human history because the capability to produce more food than a certain community needed by farming instead of hunting and gathering wild products meant that some members of these communities could focus on other jobs like specialist craft-workers. Humans had lived in hunter-gatherer communities for several thousands of years, they survived by gathering, fishing and hunting but they had not developed massively over such a long period of time, this was because everyone in the community had to focus on one thing, find enough food for everyone to survive. When agriculture became a reliant food supply, this was no longer something that the whole community had to focus on, this made possible for new social and economic complexities to develop over time (Barker G. 2006). It can also be said the opposite as many argue that agriculture was indeed not the biggest transformation in human history because even though the large majority of communities adapted into this style of living, hunting and gathering was still practiced recently and in some places it still is practised today as these regions have hostile conditions and therefore agriculture isn't able to develop there. (Scarre, C. 2018) This is actually not correct because the majority of communities that continued to live as hunters and gatherers had a very slow growth over the years and in some cases even to the point of extinction, whereas the communities that had adapted agriculture continued to grow very fast which was a key factor in the development of the first cities.

As mentioned before the domestication of animal and plants had a big impact on how the life of these communities changed and grew throughout time, this domestication was only possible because of the environmental change that happened around 9,600 BC. This change causing the warming of the global warming, caused the ice sheets to retreat and therefore making the sea level rise, this was crucial to the beginning of agriculture as these changes in the world allowed for a big expansion of animal and plant species, perhaps if this environmental change had never happened, communities would have never started to adapt this new way of living and perhaps we wouldn't be alive today as big and complex societies might have never started to develop and appear. (Scarre, C. 2018). Agriculture didn't develop in one single place and it was not created by one person, agriculture is the result of a process of interaction between plants and humans over a long period of time. Studies have shown that agriculture rose in at least seven different regions at different times, when speaking of agriculture people mistake what archaeologists mean when talking about agriculture during this time as they just assume that it is just the straightforward definition of the word. This is incorrect because by agriculture, archaeologists not only mean what the first sedentary communities practiced but also the commitment that the relationship between plants and animals requires. This is because farming is not achieved by just throwing some seeds onto the floor, agriculture ultimately requires a change in the way humans were communicating and organizing themselves at the time as agriculture involved more complex thinking and the necessity of doing many activities. Activities such as the clearance of great areas as farming takes large amounts of soil which must be protected as you don't want animals or other communities to destroy them or steal the things that you have planted or the animals that you have bred.(Scarre, C.2018). Many inventions also derived from this new practice as these communities had to find solutions for the problems they were encountering when farming, also over the time new technologies appeared such as

ploughing the soil and the understanding of how irrigation works, when crops were ready to be harvested, how to store them and most importantly how to cook them so that it can feed the never stopping growing communities, another thing that also derived from agriculture was their social values based around their sedentary lifestyle. (Whittle, A. 1994)

Farming settlements started to appear and these settlements were a lot larger than the ones that hunter-gatherers built; these large settlements also started having better protection from other communities but also wild animals. Agriculture made it possible for very large groups to start living together as they could easily get enough food for everyone from fields that were close from their settlements. These settlements could also provide as key places in the landscape, being easier to recognise if lost and it is argued that it started giving the people who lived in these settlements a sense of identity because it became the place where they lived, their home, ancestry because it was the place where your parents and family had lived and been buried before you and ethnicity as you belonged to a community. The change from nomadic to sedentary was one of the biggest changes that happened because of agriculture, this is because archaeological evidence shows that in the other hand, hunters and gatherers were nomadic, which meant that they travelled around after game as they needed to hunt to survive and if they killed all the animals in one area then they couldn't stay there as they wouldn't have a food source, although in some places where environments are rich and productive, hunter-gatherers too could have become partly sedentary for some periods of time.

As mentioned in the introduction, some argue that agriculture was not the biggest transformation in human history because there continued to exist hunter-gatherer communities that never evolved and seemed to survive all of these years, for example the Martu people in Australia are a traditionally nomadic community, they live in Western Australia in the Pilbara desert. These people have been living here, in this part of the world, have been able to live without agriculture for at least 40,000 years. This makes them one of the living cultures in the world today which has not been affected by agriculture, many have been taken into religious camps where they have been introduced to farming but there are still many out there with no such knowledge that keep on surviving and will keep on surviving for many more years. (Gill Gracie, 2011). There are other examples of hunter-gatherer societies that still exist in 2019, for example Kalahari bushmen live in the Kalahari Desert of Africa and they still hunt to survive, they not only hunt but they also use one of oldest methods of hunting in the world, they persist hunt which consists in following a prey until the prey gets tired and falls to the ground, after the prey collapses, they kill them. These hunters do this on a daily basis for multiple hours per day, showing how agriculture isn't necessary. Even more fascinating than the Kalahari or the Martu people is the Sentinelese because this tribe not only has managed to live for such a long time as hunter-gatherers, they have resisted complete contact with the outside world, this makes them unique, which not only shows that perhaps agriculture was not the biggest transformation in human history but also that agriculture isn't fundamental to the survival of communities around the world. (Alex Czaratoryski, 2011). Although the hunter-gatherer communities prove that you do not require agriculture to live or survive such long periods of time, unlike some people argue, it does not show that agriculture was not the biggest transformation in the human history. Even though it is possible to live without agriculture, it was agriculture that allowed societies to become more complex as the surplus of food, meant that they now had new resources for trading, there was a currency for the payment of taxes or tributes, you could start selling the surplus, this meant that societies were starting to get more complex as they had the resources to do things that hadn't done before. Most importantly agriculture was being able to be done but only a group of people, farmers and still feed the entire society which meant that

there was food for non-food producers and therefore these could focus in developing new skills such as a specialist craft-work and different jobs such as warriors and priests. This surplus of food and the lower rates of death which were a lot higher in nomadic hunter-gatherer societies, gave half of the society the time to invent new tools, develop mathematics, improve the language and many more things, this is known as the division of labour and agriculture made it very easy to happen. (Christopher Muscato). Farming and the division of labour therefore allowed for the development of the first big cities such as Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Another example of how agriculture was the biggest transformation in human history is the fact that as social theories argue, present-day notions that we have in our societies such as the notion of equality, property were shaped by the organization, the new technologies and the food surplus that is entailed in our dependence on agriculture. (Winterhalder B, Kennett D. 2006). The significance that this transformation had is comparable to previous transformations such as the change into becoming bipedal, the early stone tool manufacture and also the origins of language. These were some of the biggest transformations in human history before agriculture, even though these were some of the biggest transformations in human history, the biggest is agriculture, this is due to the fact that hunter-gatherer communities had adapted the transformations mentioned before but without agriculture they were not able to develop like the communities that had adapted to this new style of living. The reason for this is that without the surplus of food that archaeology provided communities with, many of the changes and transformations that happened after agriculture were would not been able to happen because they were consequences of this new practice which was farming.

In conclusion, after having analysed different arguments, farming is the biggest transformation in human history because without agriculture we would still be like the hunter-gatherer tribes that still survive today, hunting everyday trying to find just enough to feed everyone and many times struggling because of it. The surplus of food that farming was able to give to the communities made many things possible, it allowed for people to focus on other skills, it allowed for new jobs to develop and therefore bigger cities to develop and be built, it allowed for the army to develop which was crucial in a time where there was a constant battle about territory, the development of an army made it possible for these cities to be better protected than hunter-gatherer societies which depended on the same people to get food and to fight. Agriculture had a snowball effect in the way that everything that it caused, made something else happen which ultimately developed societies into the places we know. A civilization was only able to start forming governments, education systems, the armies previously mentioned, class systems and others because of the substantial surplus of food. A surplus of food was the key difference between hunter-gatherer communities and the communities that had adopted agriculture is that like previously mentioned the hunter-gatherer communities were not able to construct larger permanent settlements and have a more complex society than the simple hierarchy that these communities have whereas the farming communities could do such things. (Tauger, M. 2010). To conclude, these points that I have mentioned above were the key factors that made agriculture the biggest transformation in human history and without it we wouldn't have been able to reach the point where we are, this can be seen as we have evolved in such a small period of time whereas hunter-gatherer communities had lived on earth for many thousands of years before us without a significant amount of change throughout time, this therefore makes me to conclude that agriculture was the biggest transformation that has ever happened in human history.