

Discuss what makes civilisation.

The foundations of what makes a civilisation is based around the ten characteristics laid out by Vere Gordon Childe. The characteristics which Childe laid out include: the presence of a State; the use of writing within the civilisation; long-distance trade; and the production of agriculture which can support the State and specialist craft workers. Elements of the ten characteristics can be seen in some capacity within all ancient civilisations, for example, the use of long-distance trade routes can be seen heavily in the Roman civilisation, with the reach of their trade routes expanding as far as China. The characteristic which is seen in the majority of ancient civilisations is 'monumental architecture'; there are clear shows of monumental architecture within ancient civilisations, such as the Parthenon from the Greeks, the Colosseum from the Romans and Teotihuacan from the Aztecs.

Childe wrote down the ten characteristics of what makes a civilisation but there is argument against Childe's ideas. Childe believed that each civilisation needed all of the ten characteristics to be counted as a true civilisation. However, there are many civilisations that did not have all of the ten and are still regarded as complex civilisations. The use of writing is one of Childe's characteristics, but there are civilisations that had no documented language that are considered to be complex and advanced, such as the Mayans.

Egypt can be regarded as one of the prime examples of monumental architecture from the ancient world. There are many examples of such architecture in Egypt, including the city of Petra, Abu Simbel and the Karnak temples. Architecture in Egypt was added to and changed throughout its whole period, with Pharaohs using the architecture as a show of power. Architecture was used as a show of power because it demonstrated a Pharaoh's wealth, it showed all those who saw it that there was strength and money because of the materials needed to create the monuments, as many needed to be imported into Egypt, and the size of them required a lot of materials. The size of the monument also was a show of power and also a competition between Pharaohs; the Pharaoh with the largest monument was seen as the more powerful and strong. For example, the temples at Karnak were added to by many different Pharaohs, with each wanting to create the larger monuments in their own name. Rameses II used architecture as a show of his own power and a form of propaganda; following the Battle of Kadesh (neither a loss or a win for Egypt), against the Hittites, Rameses erected monuments which were intended to signify and boast about the victory over Egypt's opponents.

The Egyptians linked their architecture to their writing and their own interpretation of what was art. The use of hieroglyphics was the Egyptian form of writing and can also be considered to be art because of the use of the symbols that translated into words. Art was more complex in Egypt, as they tended to create long comic-strip style art works which told whole stories. These writing and art forms were often carved into the architecture created, such as the pillars at the temples of Karnak, which had inscriptions and carvings all the way to the top of the pillar, some of which are 30 metres high. Religion was also linked into their architecture, as there were many temples and statues which represented or were in homage of their many different Gods (these can also be considered as art works because of

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the craftsmanship and the detailing in them). The Egyptian architectural monuments can be linked to different aspects of Childe's list of civilisations making characteristics.

The use of Childe's list of characteristics regarding what makes a civilisation is difficult, as some civilisations which are highly complex and advanced for their period do not include all of the characteristics laid out. However, the characteristic of "monumental architecture" can be greatly seen throughout the majority, if not all, of the ancient civilisations, particularly so in ancient Egyptian civilisation, with many still remaining today and them having links and attributes to other characteristics laid out by Childe, such as the use of writing, "monumental art" and the State (because of the Pharaohs use of architecture as a power move).

Bibliography

"Understanding Early Civilisation", Trigger, 2007