The Origins of Plant and Animal Domestication

Paragraph 1

The emergence of plant and animal domestication represented a monumental change in the ways that humans interacted with Earth’s resources: the rate at which Earth’s surface was modified and the rates of human population growth. The development of agriculture was accompanied by fundamental changes in the organization on human society: disparities in wealth, hierarchies of power, and urbanization.

1. The word “monumental” in the passage is closet in meaning to

A. innovative

B. surprising

C. complex

D. enormous

Paragraph 2

Phrases like “plant and animal domestication” and “the invention of agriculture” create the impression that humans made the transition to cultivating plants and tending animals rather abruptly, maybe with a flash of insight. Most scholars don’t think so. It seems more likely that humans used and manipulated wild plants and animals for many hundreds of thousands of years. The transition to gardens, fields, and pastures was probably gradual, the natural outgrowth of a long familiarity with the environmental requirements, growth cycles, and reproductive mechanisms of whatever plants and animals humans liked to eat, ride, or wear.

2. According to paragraph 2, phrases such as “plant and animal domestication” and “the invention of agriculture” encourage which of the following wrong ideas?

A. Early farmers were fairly advanced in their knowledge of plants and animals.

B. Agriculture and animal domestication arose as a result of systematic study and experimentation.

C. The change from hunting and gathering to farming and raising animals occurred quickly.

D. Early efforts to raise plants and animals were generally successful.

3. The word “manipulated” in the passage is closet in meaning to

A. observed

B. consumed

C. skillfully used

D. protected

4. Which of the sentences below best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence in the passage? Incorrect choices change the meaning in important ways or leave out essential information.

A. The change to land cultivation was a slow process because humans were familiar with the needs of relatively few plants and animals.

B. The cultivation of land occurred gradually as it was the product of extensive human experience observing plants and animals of value to humans.

C. Gardens, fields, and pastures were outgrowths of the desire for plants and animals that humans knew from long familiarity were good to eat, wear, or ride.

D. People learned about environmental requirements, growth cycles, and reproductive mechanisms through their long familiarity with plants and animals that they liked to eat, ride, and wear.

Paragraph 3

For years, scholars argued that the practices of cultivation and animal domestication were invented in one or two locations on Earth and then diffused from those centers of innovation. Genetic studies are now showing that many different groups of people in many different places around the globe learned independently to create especially useful plants and animals through selective breeding. Probably both independent invention and diffusion played a role in agricultural innovation. Sometimes the ideas of domestication and cultivation were relayed to new places. In other cases the farmers or herders themselves moved into new zones, taking agriculture or improvements such as new tools or new methods or new plants and animals with them.

5. What do genetic studies suggest about the theory that “cultivation and animal domestication were invented in one or two locations on Earth and then diffused from those centers of innovation”?

A. The theory underestimates the speed at which cultivation and animal domestication were diffused.

B. The theory underestimates the number of locations in which cultivation and animal domestication arose independently.

C. The theory overemphasizes the importance of selective breeding in cultivation and animal domestication.

D. The theory overemphasizes the importance of cultivation and animal domestication to some groups of people.

Paragraph 4

Scholars used to assume that people turned to cultivating instead of gathering their food either because they had to in order to feed burgeoning populations, or because agriculture provided such obviously better nutrition. It now seems that neither of these explanations is valid. First of all, the risk attached to exploring new food sources when there were already too many mouths to feed would be too great. Second, agriculture did not necessarily improve nutrition or supplies of food. A varied diet based on gathered (and occasionally hunted) food probably provided a wider, more secure range of nutrients than an early agriculturally based diet of only one or two cultivated crops. More likely, populations expanded after agricultural successes, and not before.

6. According to paragraph 4, what advantages did the diet of hunter-gatherers probably have over an early agricultural diet?

A. It required less effort for them to acquire food that was nutritious.

B. It allowed their populations to expand across wider areas.

C. It provided a greater variety of foods needed for them to stay healthy.

D. It allowed them to have more children.

7. According to paragraph 4, what was the most likely relationship between population growth and food cultivation?

A. Population growth encouraged the development of food cultivation.

B. Population growth was dependent on the development of a varied diet of cultivated foods.

C. Successful methods of food cultivation were developed before population growth occurred.

D. Food cultivation was more successful in situations where population growth was limited.

Paragraph 5

Richard MacNeish, an archaeologist who studied plant domestication in Mexico and Central America, suggested that the chance to trade was at the heart of agricultural origins worldwide. Many of the known locations of agricultural innovation lie near early trade centers. People in such places would have had at least two reasons to pursue cultivation and animal raising; they would have had access to new information, plants, and animals brought in by traders, and they would have had a need for something to trade with the people passing through. Perhaps, then, agriculture was at first just a profitable hobby for hunters and gatherers that eventually, because of market demand, grew into the primary source of sustenance. Trade in agricultural products may also have been a hobby that led to trouble.

8. The word “pursue” in the passage is closet in meaning to

A. practice

B. encourage

C. prefer

D. combine

9. Which of the following most accurately reflects the statement discussed in paragraph 5, on efforts to cultivate plants and animals?

A. The efforts often failed because hunter-gatherers had limited access to new information about plants and animals.

B. The efforts were begun out of a desire to produce goods for trade rather than to increase their growers’ food supplies.

C. The efforts were sometimes abandoned so hunter-gatherers could become involved in the more profitable activity of trading.

D. The efforts were not profitable until people began trading food that they had raised for other goods.

Paragraph 6

E. N. Anderson, writing about the beginnings of agriculture in China, suggests that agricultural production for trade may have been the impetus for several global situations now regarded as problems: rapid population growth, social inequalities, environmental degradation, and famine. Briefly explained, his theory suggests that groups turned to raising animals and plants in order to reap the profits of trading them. As more labor was needed to supply the trade, humans produced more children. As populations expanded, more resources were put into producing food for subsistence and for trade. Gradually, hunting and gathering technology was abandoned as populations, with their demands for space, destroyed natural habitats. Meanwhile, a minority elite emerged when the wealth provided by trade did not accrue equally to everyone. Yet another problem was that a drought or other natural disaster could wipe out an entire harvest, thus, as ever larger populations depended solely on agriculture, famine became more common.

10. Which of the following most accurately reflect the relationship between

paragraph 6 and a topic discussed in paragraph 5?

A. Paragraph 6 discusses a series of events that calls into question the theory that plants and animals were raised for purposes of trade.

B. Paragraph 6 presents evidence supporting the claim that many sites of agricultural innovation were located near trade centers.

C. Paragraph 6 identifies problems that led to the raising of plants and animals as the primary source of sustenance.

D. Paragraph 6 traces negative developments that arose possibly as a result of raising plants and animals for trade.

11. The word “subsistence” in the passage is closet in meaning to

A. profit

B. surplus

C. enjoyment

D. survival

12. Look at the four squares [] that indicate where the following sentence can be added to the passage.

Among the many places that are now known to be centers of independent domestication are Mesopotamia, Central China, and Mesoamerica.

Where would the sentence best fit? Click on a square [ ] to add the sentence to the passage.

Paragraph 3

For years, scholars argued that the practices of cultivation and animal domestication were invented in one or two locations on Earth and then diffused from those centers of innovation. [A] Genetic studies are now showing that many different groups of people in many different places around the globe learned independently to create especially useful plants and animals through selective breeding. [B] Probably both independent invention and diffusion played a role in agricultural innovation. [C] Sometimes the ideas of domestication and cultivation were relayed to new places. In other cases the farmers or herders themselves moved into new zones, taking agriculture or improvements such as new tools or new methods or new plants and animals with them. [D]

13. Directions: An introductory sentence for a brief summary of the passage is provided below. Complete the summary by selecting the THREE answer choices that express the most important ideas in the passage. Some answer choices do not belong in the summary because they express ideas that are not presented in the passage or are minor ideas in the passage. This question is worth 2 points.

Drag your choices to the spaces where they belong. To review the passage, click on View Text.

Agriculture invention and animal domestication caused lasting changes to how humans live and to the physical surface of Earth.

Answer Choices

1. The transition from hunting and gathering to raising plants and animals was gradual and led to significant changes in the organization of human societies.

B. Scholars now believe that agriculture and animal domestication began independently in many separate locations and then spread to new areas.

C. As trade in agricultural products grew and social inequalities arose, new crops were developed specifically to feed the labor needed to support societies.

D. Although it is now clear that agriculture developed independently in many places, often the most efficient techniques arose by combing practices of different cultures.

E. Agriculture became more widespread when human populations realized that an agricultural diet supplemented through trade could provide as much nutrition as the hunter-gatherer diet.

F. The earliest reason for raising plants and animals may have been to provide goods for trade, and such trade may account for the rise in social problems such as environmental destruction.