

**ISLAM**  
**KNOWLEDGE AND CIVILIZATION**

**Munawar Haque**  
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IIUM Press

Published by:  
IIUM Press  
International Islamic University Malaysia

First Edition, 2009  
©IIUM Press, IIUM

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Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Islam : knowledge and civilization / Munawar Haque ... [et al.].

ISBN 978-983-3855-66-7

1. Knowledge, Theory of (Islam). 2. Knowledge, Theory of.  
3. Civilization, Islamic. 4. Civilization. I. Munawar Haque.  
121.0882971

ISBN: 978-983-3855-67-7

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## CHAPTER SIX

# ANCIENT CULTURE AND CIVILISATIONS OF MESOPOTAMIA, EGYPT, INDIA AND CHINA

*Syamsuddin Arif*

Ancient, pre-Islamic civilisations flourished in North Africa and West as well as East Asia. Some of these early civilisations are still real foundations of contemporary civilisations, while some others now have little or no influence except on our imaginations and emotions when they are mentioned. The earliest known civilisations in history are believed to take place between 3500 and 500 BCE, that is, about 5500 years ago. Before we discuss them in detail, it is worthwhile to explain the meaning and definition of culture and civilisation.

### **The Concept of Culture and Civilisation**

The word "culture," from Latin *cultura*, originally means the cultivation of the soil or land, whereas the word "civilisation," also from Latin *civis*, refers to the status of (Roman) citizenship and its supposed superiority over the primitive condition of the foreigner or barbarian. Later on, however, the word 'culture' came to denote philosophy or learning in general, such as in the expression *cultura animi* ("culture of the soul"). Although 'culture' and 'civilisation' are often distinguished, the former being identified as man's spiritual development, and the latter signifying man's control over nature and the improvement of his material conditions or refinements of social manners, some scholars have regarded culture as a particular component or stage of civilisation, a sort of subculture within a