INTRODUCTION: BEGINNING WORLD HISTORY

A clear tension exists in dealing with the long early history of human-kind. On the one hand, it's tempting to go into increasing detail, for new discoveries open additional information about human evolution and indeed about the vital connections between human history and the far longer history of earth before the first species emerged. On the other hand, in dealing with conditions so long ago and so different from patterns today, it is imperative to focus on developments obviously important in setting the stage for ongoing human activity. Here, besides evolution, tool use and migration/dispersion draw primary attention, all emphasizing accelerating changes once humans enter the historical stream.

Scientific work has steadily expanded what we know about early humans, from their starting point in East Africa to their migrations to almost every habitable part of the world by 25,000 B.C.E.* Discoveries multiply about previously unknown species that served as intermediaries between apes and early semi-humans, or about the startling

* In Christian societies, historical dating divides between years "before the birth of Christ" (B.C.) and after (A.D., anno Domini, or "year of our Lord"). This system came into wide acceptance in Europe in the 18th century as formal historical consciousness increased (although ironically, 1 A.D. is a few years late for Jesus' actual birth). China, Islam, Judaism, and many other societies use different dating systems, referring to their own history. This text, like many recent world history materials, uses the Christian chronology (one has to choose some system) but changes the terms to B.C.E. ("before the common era") and C.E. ("of the common era") as a gesture to less Christian-centric labeling.
amount of genetic material humans share with species such as chimpanzees. There’s every reason to explore these diverse and complex beginnings.

At the same time, however, it’s important to keep sight of main points. Without slighting far more detailed inquiry, or the possibilities of lifetimes of fruitful new research, the long early stages of the human journey highlight three points, which are covered in Chapter 1. First, evolution gradually improved human capacities—adding, for example, unprecedented facility in speech—yet soon after the arrival of the current species the evolutionary process halted at least for a time. There have been no fundamental changes in the species for about 80,000 years. Second, humans were tool-using animals and gradually improved their abilities, moving from picking up potential tools to shaping them deliberately. And third, humans were often on the move. Their hunting-and-gathering economy dictated recurrent migration in search of additional space. The wide dispersion of people was a fundamental feature of early history and a precondition of much that would follow.

After early history comes the first great transformation of the human economy, from hunting and gathering to agriculture or herding. This transformation, one of the great systems changes in the human experience, essentially redefined the framework for world history beyond the implications of previous tool use. This change is also covered in Chapter 1.

Fundamental transformation is easy to claim, but it is also abstract. Childhood provides a concrete example. In hunting-and-gathering societies, children were important but they could not be handled in large numbers. Families could not support many children, who were not very useful; and trying to travel with many young children during migrations to new hunting spots was impractical. But with agriculture, children gained new utility—they could do useful work and indeed provided families with a vital labor force. So their number increased greatly, and human groups began approaching childhood in terms of labor expectations. This was one reason agricultural people normally placed such emphasis on obedience, to try to shape children into useful workers—another huge transformation for all concerned.

Many agricultural societies ultimately created new organizational forms that we call civilizations. This subsequent change and the four specific centers of the earliest civilizations are discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 turns to peoples who made a different transition, to nomadic herding, avoiding both agriculture and civilization. These peoples too played a vital role in world history for many centuries.

Chapters in this part thus deal with crucial building blocks of the human experience: evolution and migration; tool use that ultimately helped lead to agriculture and the domestication of animals; and new organizational forms for many human societies. The stretch of time involved is massive, but the chapters primarily emphasize changes that took shape between 10,000 and 4000 years ago. The result was a set of practices and institutions that have not required reinvention in human history since that point.
Global Connections

One of the key features of the early human experience involves the separateness that resulted from dispersion. As people fanned out in search of space—each hunter-gatherer required an average of 2.5 square miles to operate, so even small population bumps could create big pressures—they normally lost contact with their points of origin.

Two obvious examples of this, late in the dispersion process, involve Australia and the Americas. People reached Australia about 60,000 years ago. At this point, because of the ice age, the Indian Ocean was smaller than it now is, so land extended south from Asia; the distance across the water was not too great. But then the waters expanded, and the people who had reached Australia were cut off from further contacts. There's a bit of a mystery here, because several peoples did actually reach Australia by ship—the Chinese did, then the Dutch and the French—but decided against regular interaction, because the land seemed inhospitable. Only 300 years ago were new forms of regular contact developed, to the great disadvantage of the native Australians who simply lacked the experience, including disease immunities, to handle the new interactions without huge damage.

On another side of the planet, people reached the Americas about 25,000 years ago, crossing what was then a land bridge from northeast Asia to Alaska. Several surges of migration may have occurred before the land bridge was flooded and the process halted. It would be many millennia before peoples in the Americas had any contact, or at least meaningful contact, with other humans in other regions. Here too there's a bit of mystery. Some peoples undoubtedly reached the Americas at a later point, but before the famous travels of Columbus: Polynesian chicken bones, for example, have recently been discovered in Chile from over a hundred years before 1492. But none of the travels had significant impact on the Americas or established a larger place for these continents in world history—effectively, then, dispersion and then isolation set the framework for literally thousands of years.

These are two dramatic examples, but even migrants to Asia or Europe or other parts of Africa might easily lose connection with their relatives and ancestors. The emergence of different physical characteristics was a sign of this process. So was the welter of separate languages that emerged—more than 6000 at a high point (the number is smaller today). To be sure, basic language groups were far less numerous—many separate tongues sprang from common cores such as the Semitic or Indo-European or Bantu stems. Still, the process of diffusion and separation was both illustrated and encouraged when groups of people, even in the same linguistic family, lost the capacity to talk with each other in case of encounter.
Yet too much emphasis on separation misses the mark, even in these very early parts of the human experience, because connections of several sorts developed as well.

Migration and invasion, for example, proved to be recurrent processes in Asia, Africa, and Europe. The Middle East, the cradle of civilization, was frequently overrun by new peoples, often coming in from central Asia. Egypt, though invaded less often, saw attacks from the Middle East and from farther south in Africa. These processes mixed peoples. Stone tablets have been found in the Middle East with inscriptions both in the local language and in ancient Egyptian, showing the need and ability to translate. Egyptian pictures present people from Africa along with Semitic peoples from the Middle East—as well as local Egyptians.

Mixing of this sort also brought knowledge of new technologies. Several of the technological changes vital to extend agriculture, such as knowledge of the wheel, came into the Middle East from peoples migrating or attacking from central Asia.

Beyond invasion and migration, contacts also developed by a vaguer process often called diffusion, in which people in one region learned from their neighbors. Occasional travelers or traders might also bring new ideas. Thus we will see that agriculture, though separately invented in several places, gradually spread through diffusion. It took centuries for knowledge of this new system to reach southern Europe from the Middle East, for contacts were doubtless limited and there was outright resistance to change. But the same diffusion process ultimately occurred, bringing knowledge of how to work metals and introducing foodstuffs from one region to another, where they might be adopted as basic crops.

And, of course, there was trade. We know that early agricultural communities often traded with nearby hunting-and-gathering groups, if only to provide symbolic exchanges that helped keep the peace. By the time of the early civilizations there was a certain amount of interregional trade—linking, for example, parts of the Middle East to northwestern India.

Separateness, in sum, was not an absolute. A few peoples truly became isolated, at least from population centers in other parts of the world. Contacts were sporadic for many groups. But the advantages of exchanges, in terms of trade and new knowledge, made contact an important part of the early human experience. And advantage or not, the force of migration and invasion made interaction inescapable for many of the world’s peoples, at least recurrently.

**SUGGESTED READINGS**

Getting Started Is Always Hard

The human species has accomplished a great deal in a relatively short period of time. There are significant disagreements over how long an essentially human species, as distinct from other primates, has existed. However, a figure of about 2.5 million years seems acceptable. This is approximately 1/4000 of the time the earth has existed. If one thinks of the whole history of the earth to date as a 24-hour day, the human species began at about five minutes until midnight. Human beings have existed for less than 5 percent of the time mammals of any sort have lived. Yet in this brief span of time—by earth-history standards—humankind has spread to every landmass (with the exception of the polar regions) and, for better or worse, has taken control of the destinies of countless other species.

To be sure, human beings have some drawbacks as a species, compared to other existing models. They are unusually aggressive against their own kind: while some of the great apes, notably chimpanzees, engage in periodic wars, these conflicts can hardly rival human violence. Human babies are dependent for a long period, which requires some special family or child-care arrangements and often has limited the activities of many adult women. Certain ailments, such as back problems resulting from an upright stature, also burden the species. And, the distinctive human awareness of the inevitability of death imparts some unique fears and tensions.

Distinctive features of the human species account for considerable achievement as well. Like other primates, but unlike most other mammals, human beings can manipulate objects fairly readily because of the grip provided by an opposable thumb on each hand. Compared to other primates, human beings have a relatively high and regular sexual drive, which aids reproduction; being omnivores, they are not...
dependent exclusively on plants or on animals for food, which helps explain why they can live in so many different climates and settings; the unusual variety of their facial expressions aids communication and enhances social life. The distinctive human brain and a facility for elaborate speech are even more important: much of human history depends on the knowledge, inventions, and social contracts that resulted from these assets.

Although the rise of humankind has been impressively rapid, its early stages can also be viewed as painfully long and slow. Most of the 2 million plus years during which our species has existed are described by the term Paleolithic, or Old Stone Age. Throughout this long time span, which runs until about 14,000 years ago, human beings learned only simple tool use, mainly through employing suitably shaped rocks and sticks for hunting and warfare. Fire was tamed about 750,000 years ago. The nature of the species also gradually changed during the Paleolithic, with emphasis on more erect stature and growing brain capacity. Archeological evidence also indicates some increases in average size. A less apelike species, whose larger brain and erect stance allowed better tool use, emerged between 500,000 and 750,000 years ago; it is called, appropriately enough, *Homo erectus*. Several species of *Homo erectus* developed and spread in Africa, then to Asia and Europe, reaching a population size of perhaps 1.5 million 100,000 years ago.

Considerable evidence suggests that more advanced types of humans killed off or displaced many competitors over time. Intermarriage also occurred. And even *Homo sapiens sapiens* coexisted with other human species in several regions for considerable periods, as recent archeological and genetic evidence suggests. Ultimately, however, the single species predominated throughout the world, rather than a number of similar human species, as among monkeys and apes. The newest human breed, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, of which all humans in the world today are descendants, originated about 120,000 years ago, also in Africa. The success of this subspecies means that there have been no major changes in the basic human physique or brain size since its advent.

Part of human evolution in this decisive later phase involved a probably modest genetic modification in the brain that allowed much more elaborate patterns of speech. A number of animals and birds have some power of speech, in terms of varied sounds that communicate. But with the advent of this "language gene," people became capable of a much wider variety of sounds. From this, it was possible to invent languages. Scientists have wondered what the first people who had this gene must have thought, surrounded by other people who were still confined to a series of grunts plus elaborate facial expressions.

**Key Questions:** What were the most significant human achievements before the rise of agriculture? How did agriculture change human life?

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**Human Development and Change**

Even after the appearance of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, human life faced important constraints. People who hunted food and gathered nuts and berries could not support large numbers or elaborate societies. Most hunting groups were small, and they had to roam widely for food. Two people required at least one square mile for survival. Population growth was slow, partly because women breast-fed infants for several years to limit their own fertility. On the other hand, people did not have to work very hard—hunting took about seven hours every three days on average. Women, who gathered fruits and vegetables, worked harder, but there was significant equality between the sexes based on common economic contributions.
Paleolithic people gradually improved their tool use, beginning with the crude shaping of stone and wooden implements. The development of speech allowed more group cooperation and the transmission of technical knowledge. By the later Paleolithic period, people had developed rituals to lessen the fear of death and created cave paintings to express a sense of nature’s beauty and power. Goddesses often played a prominent role in the religious pantheon. Thus, the human species came to develop systems of belief that helped explain the environment and set up rules for various kinds of social behavior. The development of speech provided rich language and symbols for the transmission of culture and its growing sophistication. At the same time, different groups of humans, in different locations, developed quite varied belief systems and languages.
The greatest achievement of Paleolithic people was the sheer spread of the human species over much of the earth’s surface. The species originated in eastern Africa; most of the earliest types of human remains come from this region, in the present-day countries of Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. But gradual migration, doubtless caused by the need to find scarce food, steadily pushed the human reach to other areas. Key discoveries, notably fire and the use of animal skins for clothing—both of which enabled people to live in colder climates—facilitated the spread of Paleolithic groups. The first people moved out of Africa about 750,000 years ago. Human remains (Peking man, Java man) have been found in China and southeast Asia dating from 600,000 and 350,000 years ago, respectively. Humans inhabited Britain 250,000 years ago. Later, migrations of Homo sapiens sapiens from Africa took people to Eurasia. Two strands developed once migrants had crossed into West Asia: one took people to Europe, central Asia, and south Asia and the other pushed on to east and southeast Asia. From this in turn, further migrations occurred: people first crossed to Australia 60,000 years ago, followed by another group 20,000 years later, combining to form the continent’s aboriginal population. Humans crossed what was then a land bridge from Siberia to Alaska about 25,000 years ago and quickly began to spread out, reaching the tip of the South American continent possibly within a mere thousand years. Settlers from China reached Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia 4500 to 3500 years ago.

In addition, soon after this time—roughly 14,000 years ago—the last great ice age ended, which did wonders for living conditions over much of the Northern Hemisphere. Human development began to accelerate. A new term, Mesolithic, or Middle Stone Age, designates a span of several thousand years, from about 12,000 to 8000 B.C.E., in which human ability to fashion stone tools and other implements improved greatly. From the Mesolithic also date the increased numbers of log rafts and dugouts, which improved fishing, and the manufacture of pots and baskets for food storage. Mesolithic people domesticated additional animals, such as cows (dogs had been tamed earlier), which again improved food supply. Population growth accelerated, which also resulted in more conflicts and wars. Skeletons from this period show frequent bone breaks and skull fractures caused by weapons.
In time, better tool use, somewhat more elaborate social organization, and still more population pressure led people in many parts of the world to the final Stone Age—the Neolithic, or New Stone Age. And from Neolithic people, in turn, came several more dramatic developments that changed the nature of human existence—the invention of agriculture, the creation of cities, and other foreshadowings of civilization, which ended the Stone Age altogether throughout much of the world.

**Solving Problems**

**Dealing with Death**

- Two related problems human societies faced concerning death involved devising appropriate rituals for those who died—so people could be assured that loved or powerful figures were taken care of properly and could have some confidence their own death would be handled well—and making sure that dead bodies did not cause disease. Members of various species have some awareness of death immediately around them, but presumably humans are the only species with knowledge of death as an inevitable experience. It is not surprising that death figures strongly in early human culture, including the world’s first known literary epic, the *Gilgamesh* from the Middle East in the 3rd millennium B.C.E. We cannot know when people figured out that death was an issue, or that dead bodies could be sources of contagion. It is possible that earlier versions of the human species, such as Peking man (500,000 B.C.E.), developed burial sites (there are stacks of bones, but this might be a result of cannibalism). Certainly by the time of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, and the possibility of speech, deliberate burial practices were becoming common.

- While efforts to solve problems posed by death are seemingly universal, and persist today, widely separated societies also forged very different specific approaches. North American hunting tribes often urged that death was a normal part of life, to be faced fearlessly, while many Australian aborigines viewed it as a disruption caused by forces of evil and magic. Reflecting mixed feelings about the dead, some African groups established a custom of creating a special hole in the wall of the home to remove a corpse, then sealing it up so that the spirit would have a harder time figuring out a way back.

- Early civilizations elaborated the rituals associated with death, but again with many distinctive cultural variants. Mesopotamians tended to emphasize gloomy aspects of death; the *Gilgamesh* epic stressed that the dead lived on in darkness, with dust for good. Egyptians, on the other hand, emphasized the need to organize for an afterlife, with expensive funeral rituals even for relatively ordinary people, and with large numbers of professionals associated with preparing bodies and creating art for monuments. Egypt’s *Book of Death* is the earliest surviving sacred
From Human Prehistory to the Rise of Agriculture

The initial development of agriculture—that is, the deliberate planting of grains for later harvest—was probably triggered by two results of the ice age’s end. First, population increases, stemming from improved climate, prompted people to search for new and more reliable sources of food. Second, the end of the ice age saw the retreat of certain big game animals, such as mastodons. Human hunters had to turn to smaller game, such as deer and wild boar, in many forested areas. Hunting’s overall yield declined. Here was the basis for new interest in other sources of food. There is evidence that by 9000 B.C.E., in certain parts of the world, people were becoming increasingly dependent on regular harvests of wild grains, berries, and nuts. This undoubtedly set the stage for the deliberate planting of seeds (probably accidental to begin with) and the improvement of key grains through the selection of seeds from the best plants.

As farming evolved, new animals were also domesticated. Particularly in the Middle East and parts of Asia, by 9000 B.C.E., pigs, sheep, goats, and cattle were being raised. Farmers used these animals for meat and skins and soon discovered dairying as well. These results not only...
The Neolithic Revolution contributed to the development of agriculture, but they also served as the basis for nomadic herding societies.

Farming was initially developed in the Middle East and Black Sea regions, in an arc of territory running from present-day Turkey to Iraq and Israel. This was a very fertile area, more fertile in those days than at present. Grains such as barley and wild wheat were abundant. At the same time, this area was not heavily forested, and animals were in short supply, presenting a challenge to hunters. In the Middle East, the development of agriculture may have begun as early as 10,000 B.C.E., and it gained ground rapidly after 8000 B.C.E. Gradually during the Neolithic centuries, knowledge of agriculture spread to other centers, including parts of India, North Africa, and Europe. Agriculture, including rice cultivation, soon developed independently in China (the second of at least three separate inventions of the new economic systems). We will see that agriculture spread later to much of Africa south of the Mediterranean coast, reaching West Africa by 2000 B.C.E., although here too there were additional developments with an emphasis on local grains and also root crops such as yams. Agriculture had to be invented separately in the Americas, based on corn cultivation, where it was also a slightly later development (about 5000 B.C.E.).

Many scholars have termed the development of agriculture a Neolithic revolution. The term is obviously misleading in one sense: agriculture was no sudden transformation, even in the Middle East, where the new system had its roots. Learning the new agricultural methods was difficult, and many peoples long combined a bit of agriculture with considerable reliance on the older systems of hunting and gathering. A “revolution” that took
more than a thousand years, and then several thousands more, to spread to key population centers in Asia, Europe, and Africa, is hardly dramatic by modern standards.

The concept of revolution is, however, appropriate in demonstrating the magnitude of change involved. Early agriculture could support far more people per square mile than hunting ever could; it also allowed people to settle more permanently in one area. The system was nonetheless not easy. Agriculture required more regular work, at least of men, than hunting did. Hunting-and-gathering groups today, such as the Kung or Khoisan people of the Kalahari Desert in southwest Africa, work an average of 2.5 hours a day, alternating long, intense hunts with periods devoted to such pursuits as music, dance, and decorative art. Settled agriculture concentrated populations and encouraged the spread of disease. As much as agriculture was demanding, it was also rewarding: agriculture supported larger populations, and with better food supplies and a more settled existence, agricultural peoples could afford to build houses and villages. Animals provided not only hides but also wool for more varied clothing.

We know next to nothing of the debates that must have raged when people were first confronted with agriculture, but it is not hard to imagine that many would have found the new life too complicated, too difficult, or too unexciting. Most evidence suggests that many gathering and hunting peoples resisted agriculture as long as they could. Gradually, of course, agriculture did gain ground. Its success was hard to deny. And as farmers cleared new land from forests, they automatically drove out or converted many hunters. Disease played a role: settled agricultural societies suffered from more contagious diseases because of denser population concentrations. Hunting-and-gathering peoples lacked resistance and often died when agriculturists who had developed immunities carried the diseases into new areas.

Not all the peoples of the world came to embrace the slowly spreading wave of agriculture, at least not until very recently. Important small societies in southern Africa, Australia, the islands of southeast Asia, and even northern Japan were isolated for so long that news of this economic system simply did not reach them. The white-skinned hunting tribes of northern Japan disappeared only about a hundred years ago. Northern Europeans and southern Africans converted to agriculture earlier, about 2000 years ago, but well after the Neolithic revolution had transformed other parts of their continents. Agriculture was initiated in the Americas as early as 5000 B.C.E. and developed vigorously in Central America and the northern part of South America. However, most Indian tribes in North America continued a hunting-and-gathering existence, though it was often combined with seasonal agriculture, until recent centuries. Finally, the peoples of the vast plains of central Asia long resisted a complete conversion to agriculture, in part because of a harsh climate; herding, rather than grain growing, became the basic socioeconomic system of this part of the world. From this area came waves of tough, nomadic invaders and migrants whose role in linking major civilizations was a vital force in world history until a few centuries ago.
The Nature of Agricultural Societies

Much of what we think of as human history involves the doings of agricultural societies—societies, that is, in which most people are farmers and in which the production of food is the central economic activity. Nonagricultural groups, such as the nomadic herders in central Asia, made their own mark, but their greatest influence usually

Development possibilities among people who became agriculturists were more obvious than those among smaller populations who resisted or simply did not know of the system: agriculture set the basis for more rapid change in human societies. Greater wealth and larger populations freed some people for other specializations, from which new ideas or techniques might spring. Agriculture itself depended on control over nature that could be facilitated by newly developed techniques and objects. For example, during the Neolithic period itself, the needs of farming people for storage facilities, for grains and seeds, promoted the development of basket-making and pottery. The first potter’s wheel came into existence around 6000 B.C.E., and this, in turn, encouraged faster and higher-quality pottery production. Agricultural needs also encouraged certain kinds of science, supporting the human inclination to learn more about weather or flooding.

HISTORY DEBATE

People in the Americas

As early as the 17th century, a Catholic scholar suggested that American Indians had come from Asia. But it was only in the late 19th century that speculation about where the Indians had come from turned into scientific inquiry. For some time, using carbon dating techniques from Indian cities and artifacts, it was generally agreed that immigrants from Siberia poured across the land bridge that then connected to Alaska around 12,000–15,000 years ago. They moved relatively rapidly, reaching South America within a few hundred years. Archaeological finds seemed to support this view. So did the belief that people would not have moved in this fashion, in the far north, before the end of the ice age.

More recently, new techniques—including better carbon dating but, above all, genetic analysis—have called this long-established view into question. Among other things, we realize that it would be very unlikely for migrants to develop sophisticated settlements in South America so quickly. Now it is widely agreed that migrations began about 25,000 years ago. The migrants knew how to make boats, which allowed them to move down the Pacific coast, bypassing ice-age glaciers. (Boats, after all, had allowed humans to reach Australia even before this.) There is still debate over the best scientific techniques to use, and over whether there was one migration or several. Some authors, though now a declining number, also long defended the previous migration model. Is a debate of this sort significant? How does it affect judgments about human experience and capacity before the rise of agriculture?
In agricultural societies, not surprisingly, most people farmed, at least part of the time. Agricultural societies often produced some surplus, but never enough to allow more than 20–25 percent of the population to specialize in something other than agriculture, or to live away from the land (in cities). Often, the agricultural percentage of the population was even higher. Agricultural societies also always developed certain rituals around planting and harvesting, often including special festivals. Here too, religion usually picked up some of the tasks of seeking a good season or giving thanks when the harvest was in, though there was great variety among the religions that arose among agricultural peoples. Agricultural societies always emphasized certain kinds of science and mathematics, in order to, for example, calculate seasons and permit the development of calendars. Sometimes, science became far more elaborate than this, but agricultural needs always figured in intellectual life.

Agricultural societies always emphasized the superiority of men over women, in what is called the patriarchal system. The exact form and extent of male and fatherly power varied, but it was always there. Some historians have argued that, because agriculture encouraged the emergence of ideas of property, men tended to think of women as part of the property package. Trying to control women’s sexual activity, so a father could be sure that his children were his, and so feel comfortable in passing on his land to them, may have been part of the arrangement as well. Certainly, patriarchal societies place a high premium on women’s sexual faithfulness. Agricultural societies also encouraged higher birth rates than hunting-and-gathering societies had done, because a number of children were useful as labor on the land. This meant that more of women’s time was taken up with bearing and caring for young children, which reduced their ability to match men’s economic activities.
Agriculture usually generated communities and not a series of isolated farms. Small groups simply could not regulate a river’s flow or build and maintain irrigation ditches and sluices. Irrigation and defense encouraged villages—groupings of several hundred people—as the characteristic pattern of residence in almost all agricultural societies from Neolithic days until our own century.

One Neolithic town, Çatal Hüyük in southern Turkey, has been elaborately studied by archaeologists. It was founded about 7000 B.C.E. and was unusually large, covering about 32 acres. Houses were made of mud bricks set in timber frameworks, crowded together, with few windows. People seem to have spent a good bit of time on their rooftops in order to experience daylight and make social contacts—many broken bones attest to frequent falls. Some houses were lavishly decorated, mainly with hunting scenes. Religious images, both of powerful male hunters and “mother goddesses” devoted to agricultural fertility, were common, and some people seem to have had special religious responsibilities. The town produced almost all the goods it consumed. Some trade was conducted with hunting peoples who lived in the hills surrounding the village, but apparently it was initiated more to keep the peace than to produce economic gain. By 5500 B.C.E., important production activities developed in the village, including those of skilled toolmakers and jewelers. With time also came links with other communities. Towns such as Çatal Hüyük ruled over smaller communities. This meant that some families began to specialize in politics, and military forces were organized. Some towns became small cities, ruled by kings who were typically given divine status. Here were developments that led to bigger changes in the organization of some agricultural societies.

Growing the staple grain crop was almost always seen as a male activity, which meant that men were more important economically.

Agriculture brought many disadvantages to many people involved, including greater liability to disease and an increase in human inequality. But it did allow societies to support a larger number of people than hunting and gathering had done, because the food supply became more reliable despite frequent bad harvests and famines. Before agriculture, and for many thousands of years, the global human population had fluctuated between 5 and 8 million. By 4000 B.C.E. the global population stood at 60 to 70 million. And this proved to be only the beginning.
A headless reconstruction of an enthroned stone fertility goddess, from Çatal Hüyük.

The discovery of metal tools dates back to about 4000 B.C.E. Copper was the first metal with which people learned how to work, although the more resilient metal, bronze, soon entered the picture. In fact, the next basic age of human existence was the Bronze Age. By about 3000 B.C.E., metalworking had become so commonplace in the Middle East that the use of stone tools dissipated, and the long stone ages were over at last—although, of course, an essentially Neolithic technology persisted in many parts of the world, even among some agricultural peoples.

Metalworking was extremely useful to agricultural or herding societies. Metal hoes and other tools allowed farmers to work the ground more efficiently. Metal weapons were obviously superior to those made from stone and wood. Agricultural peoples now supported the small number of individuals such as toolmakers, who specialized in this activity and exchanged their products with farmers for food. Specialization of this sort did not, however, guarantee rapid rates of invention; indeed, many specialized artisans seemed very conservative, eager to preserve methods that had been inherited. But specialization did improve the conditions or climate for discovery, and the invention of metalworking was a key result. Like agriculture, knowledge of metals gradually fanned out to other parts of Asia and to Africa and Europe.

Gradually, the knowledge of metal tools created further change, not only for farmers but also for manufacturing artisans, who benefited from better tools. Woodworking, for example, became steadily more elaborate as metal replaced stone, bone, and fire in the cutting and connecting of wood. We are, of course, still living in the metal ages today, although we rely primarily on iron—whose working was introduced around 1500 B.C.E. by herding peoples who moved into the Middle East from Central Asia—rather than copper and bronze.

By about 4000 B.C.E., other changes began to accumulate in several agricultural centers, particularly in the Middle East, beyond metalworking and the expansion of towns. These changes depended on the extent to which agricultural production could free up a few people to specialize in craft manufacturing, initially on products used in the agriculture process, such as the manufacture of pots. Gradually, certain other inventions cropped up that could benefit agricultural production, while also spilling over into other human activities such as warfare. Around 4000 B.C.E., for example, the wheel was introduced, probably by peoples who migrated into the Middle East. Here was a vital contribution to the movement of goods and, soon, to certain kinds of fighting.
Paths to the Present

By definition, the initial human experiences were in many ways remote from what we do and how we live today. They do, however, illustrate human capacities that we see around us—including adaptability to many different situations and geographies. Stone Age migrations and separations also established a basic framework for subsequent phases of world history. A basic feature of today’s world—that people exist in virtually every place that can support human life—occurred quite early. To be sure, the number of people was miniscule by contemporary standards, but humans had moved to all the inhabitable continents and most of the island groups where we find people today.

Agriculture’s arrival is more obviously relevant to how we live now. Just recently, in the early 21st century, the majority of humans began to live in cities, rather than the countryside, for the first time. But many agricultural societies still exist, societies in which characteristics that emerged several millennia ago still apply.

Even in societies no longer dominated by agriculture, such as the West or East Asia, questions derived from agriculture have not disappeared. We know, in industrial society, that the patriarchal gender relations generated by agriculture need to be rethought. But no society has yet fully resolved the question of what new gender model should replace patriarchy; traces of the older system, and groups committed to its values, still exist almost everywhere.

Early human activities and changes thus established key aspects of the framework in which global societies still function—including wide geographic distribution and the capacity to increase food supply through agriculture. They also set up issues that have survived a long time as well, because of the force and durability of agricultural forms. As world society debates gender rights or even appropriate roles for children, it must take this agricultural legacy into account.

KEY TERMS

Homo sapiens sapiens  p. 6  Neolithic revolution  p. 11
Hunting and gathering  p. 11  Patriarchy  p. 14

SUGGESTED READINGS

CHAPTER 1 From Human Prehistory to the Rise of Agriculture


MYHISTORYLAB MEDIA ASSIGNMENTS

Find these resources in the Media Assignments folder for this chapter on MyHistoryLab.

Questions for Analysis
1. What does a comparison between various hominid tools tell us about the Paleolithic culture?
   
   View the Image: Hominid Tools, p. 8
   
   Section: Human Development and Change

2. What do these excerpts tell us about Mesopotamian ideas about death?

   Read the Document: Excerpts from the Epic of Gilgamesh, p. 9
   
   Section: Human Development and Change

3. What does the discovery of the Iceman reveal about the Neolithic Age?

   Read the Document: A Visitor from the Neolithic Age, p. 12
   
   Section: The Neolithic Revolution

4. What kind of changes characterized the Neolithic Age compared to the previous era?

   Read the Document: Comparative Case Study: The Neolithic Village, p. 12
   
   Section: The Neolithic Revolution

5. What are some differences in the organization and function of the ancient house compared to modern homes?

   View the Closer Look: A House in Catalhoyuk, p. 15
   
   Section: Agriculture and Change

OTHER RESOURCES FROM THIS CHAPTER

Human Development and Change

View the Image: Chauvet Cave-Horses, p. 8

View the Image: Lascaux-Bull, p. 9

The Neolithic Revolution

View the Map The Spread of Human Populations, p. 13

Agriculture and Change

View the Map The International Bronze Age, ca. 1600–1100 B.C.E., p. 16