Chapter 1

The Evolution of Humans and the Dawn of Agriculture (Prehistory to 3500 BCE)
Marking Change over Time

- The study of history considers past peoples on their own terms and assesses change and continuity over time.
- Before hominids were fully human, they created and used tools to master their environment.
- The notation BP (Before Present) is used to indicate ancient times, BCE (Before Common Era) indicates dates earlier than about 2,000 years ago, and CE (Common Era) indicates dates since then.
The Beginning of Humankind
7 million BP – 200,000 BP

- Hominids were humanlike animals that inhabited the earth millions of years ago.
- *Australopithecus*, a short and slight creature with a brain capacity about one third the size of modern humans, was an early hominid species.
- The most famous example of *Australopithecus* is a skeleton called “Lucy” (see photo) that was discovered in East Africa and dates to about 3.5 million BP.
- The last hominid, *Homo erectus*, existed for over 1 million years until about 200,000 BP, and overlapped with *Homo sapiens*, the ancestor of modern humans.
Paleolithic Era
2 million BP – 12,000 BP

- The Paleolithic era, or Old Stone Age, straddles the divide between hominids and humans and was the first and longest era of human history.
- Both hominids and early humans made stone tools by chipping off pieces of rock and then shaping them.
- The earliest humans may have learned their technique from the last hominids.
- Like the hominids, prehistoric humans foraged for food and basic supplies, though in more efficient ways.
The last of the hominids, *Homo erectus* had a much larger brain than earlier species and were much bigger, about the same size as modern humans.

*Homo erectus* lived in seasonal camps where they gathered plants, hunted, and cooked their meat.

They probably possessed some level of formal language and the beginnings of society.

*Homo erectus* was probably the first to make and use the Acheulian hand axe, a tool that remained in use for over a million years.
The First Humans
250,000 BP – 50,000 BP

- *Homo sapiens* ("thinking man") first evolved in Eastern Africa by about 250,000 BP.
- They had a heightened intelligence that allowed them to control the physical environment, make choices, and develop their society and culture.
- Neanderthals flourished between 200,000 and 50,000 BP.
- Elaborate burial sites prove that early humans thought abstractly and reflected on the world around them and on the nature of human existence.
Cro-Magnon humans were a new species with an even larger brain and a smaller face, thinner skull, and straighter limbs.

By 40,000 BP, Cro-Magnon had largely replaced Neanderthals.

Cro Magnon humans began to represent thought visually in the form of cave paintings.

By 100,000 BP, Cro-Magnon and Neanderthal humans began to spread out of Africa.

By 13,000 BP, modern humans lived on all of the Earth’s continents except Antarctica.
Era of Foraging

- All paleolithic humans foraged, which kept them constantly on the move.
- Men hunted cooperatively, taking down large mammals with knives, spears, and, later, bows and arrows.
- Women gathered wild grains, fruits, nuts, melons, edible roots and tubers, and bugs like termites, caterpillars, and locusts.
Advantages and Disadvantages of Hunting and Gathering

• Hunting and gathering provided a nutritious and varied diet but a limited number of calories.
• Foragers had to keep their populations low.
• Average life expectancy was only about 30 years due to infant mortality, complications in childbirth, and endemic violence.
• By 10,000 BCE there were an estimated 6 million humans around the world, all of them foragers.
Cultural Development

- Culture refers to all aspects of how a group of people live that are not a physical expression of biology.
- All human species exhibited some form of culture.
- Cro-Magnon culture was based on small, egalitarian, kin-based groups.
- Cro-Magnon humans developed microliths (tiny, sharp tools) and later, the bow and arrow.

Gianni Dagli Orti / The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY
Language, Art, and Settlement

- The development of language allowed humans to adapt quickly to changing circumstances.
- Sculpted clay *Venus figurines*, engraved animal figures on bones, musical instruments, and cave paintings show a profound appreciation for the sacred in human existence.
- By about 15,000 BP some paleolithic peoples had begun to stay in semi-permanent settlements, and some late-paleolithic settlements had populations of 1,000 or more.
• The Neolithic era began around 12,000 BP when humans introduced a polished stone axe that could easily penetrate wood.
• Between 12,000 and 6,000 BP, humans throughout each inhabited continent gradually began to practice agriculture.
• The earliest agriculture developed among the most successful foragers, who may have innovated due to population pressures.
Domestication and Cultivation

• Choosing, cultivating, and breeding certain species of plants and animals changed the genetic makeup of those species.

• People in each region focused on a small set of domesticated plants and animals best suited to their local conditions.

• People relied on grains that are relatively easy to ferment into alcoholic beverages (such as beer) and into dough to make bread.
• Agriculture changed the environment by reducing biodiversity.
• Farming required more work than foraging but provided increased calories and reliability, and thus fostered population growth.
• Farming populations ate less varied diets than foraging people and were more vulnerable to drought, flood, pestilence, war and famine.
• Neolithic people made fire-baked ceramic pottery to hold both liquids and dry goods.
• Other major innovations included heavy plows and wheeled carts, canals and irrigation systems, and woven textiles.
• Toward the end of the Neolithic era, many peoples learned to melt copper and mix it with tin to make bronze.
Class Structure

- Social classes emerged and gender roles changed when people settled into permanent villages and specialized their tasks.
- Men accumulated goods, owned or controlled land, and organized workers and warriors.
- The powerful elite exploited other men and women, who in turn exploited the farmers, who in turn exploited the natural environment.
- Neolithic farmers observed the natural world closely to predict changes in weather and the seasons.
Towns and Cities

- Between 4000 and 3500 BCE, larger towns and other urbanized settlements appeared in the Fertile Crescent, Egypt, and other parts of the world.
- By 3000 BCE these complex centers connected villages and towns into single political, economic, and cultural regions.
- Cities and urban living allowed for the concentration of regional power by a ruling elite, organized labor for massive public projects, and led to systems of writing.
Emergence of Complex Society
3500 BCE – 500 BCE

• Between 3500 and 500 BCE, complex societies emerged in Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, China, east of the Mediterranean Sea, Mesoamerica, and South America.
• Most were located near water sources, and all established political organizations to collect and redistribute agricultural surpluses.
• These societies also traded extensively.
• Complex societies were hierarchical, created elaborate cultural traditions, and founded formal systems of education – all of which would form the basis of civilization.