

Ch. 1 African Origins of Humanity

1) What are hominins? Give examples

Hominins are the early forerunners of modern humans that mark the split of the human genetic line from chimpanzees. Hominins date back to 7 million years ago, and there are 28 different species of hominins discovered to date. The Toumai skull seems to be the earliest example of the ape-human split, but without any other bones, it is difficult to draw conclusions. *Orrorin tugenensis* and *Australopiths* were two of the earliest species of hominins. The most famous *Australopith* is Lucy, discovered in Ethiopia in 1974. *Homo habilis* (“the handyman”) was an early human ancestor, the first to develop a taste for meat, and consequently, the first to develop tools (though simple) to scrape the meat from the bones of animals they had scavenged. Later, came *Homo erectus* (upright man), a pre-human species with better adaptability through their larger brain size, improved use of tools, and their living within settlements. Then came the Neanderthals and the *Homo Sapiens* (“wise human”), both with larger brains (*Homo sapiens* having the slightly larger of the two), better tools, and better communication. Eventually, Neanderthals, too, went extinct, and *Homo sapiens*, the “modern human,” were all that remained.

2) What differentiates *homo sapiens* from previous species?

Homo sapiens are differentiated from previous species by two very distinct things: technical skills and cultural creativity. Technically, *Homo sapiens* were able to create tools that far surpassed anything that previous ancestors had ever created. With the use of the Levallois technique, they could create spear heads, allowing for *Homo sapiens* to rise above their ancestors and be truly successful hunters. They created tools for fishing, plaster-lined storage pits, and grindstones to break down hard seeds. They expanded trade networks, and even, eventually, created boats to move from place to place and to allow for farther trade routes. Culturally, *Homo sapiens* were the first to create objects without an objective purpose - objects with abstract, symbolic meaning. This began with jewelry made from shells and eggshell fragments, continuing on to create statues, paintings, and musical instruments. These creations allowed them to express abstract things, such as emotions. *Homo sapiens* had reached a point where they were so well adapted to surviving, that they could begin to actually find ways to express themselves and add a meaning to life.

3) What is symbolic thinking? Give examples.

Symbolic thinking is first seen in the cultural creativity of *Homo sapiens*. *Homo sapiens* began to use art forms to express things symbolically, that is to say, they began to express concepts using their art (jewelry, painting, sculpture) that we, to this day, find easier to express through art than through words. By using these symbols, they could express emotions and feelings. This is seen by historians as the transformation marking

the beginning of the human capacity to conceptualize, creating the foundation for all the various kinds of art, religion, philosophy, science, and other intellectual pursuits to come in later years.

4) Describe gender relations in prehistory.

There is nothing decisive discovered about the relationship between men and women in prehistoric times. Women and men had separate jobs, generally the women gathering and doing things at the camps with the men hunting and doing the previously mentioned tasks secondarily. However, none of this really is conclusive on whether or not prehistoric societies were patriarchal or matriarchal. Men and women generally spent most time together working in camps, and seemed to be, for the most part, equals.

5) What impact did the ice age(s) have on human history?

The ice age created a world in which only the most adaptable could survive. At this time, both the Neanderthals and Homo sapiens coexisted, but with the harsh climate, survival became more and more difficult, and only the Homo sapiens were able to survive, making the “modern human” the last human species left on the planet. This survival can be largely accredited to their technological prowess, allowing them to create warmer clothes, hunting tools appropriate for winter, and ways to store food. The ice age, though a formidable challenge for Homo sapiens, also provided a new means to migrate into further points of the earth. The buildup of ice created land bridges between Malaysia and Indonesia, Korea and Japan, and most famously, between Siberia and North America. Homo sapiens were able to move about and populate the earth in ways that had not yet been possible.