

Lecture 2: Prehistoric Architecture as a Second Nature . . . Caves and Huts



Prehistoric architecture: ca. 10,000-1,500 B.C.E.

Pre-history: before written accounts

(different bracket dates in different parts of the world!)

Proto-writing: Jiahu, China; Vinča, Southeast Europe ca. 6000 BCE (Neolithic)

Writing systems: Sumerian / Egyptian, ca. 3500 BCE (Neolithic→Bronze age)

Evidence of human-made tools 2,5M BP (before present)

Evidence of the control of fire 500,000-400,000 BP / oldest huts (Terra Amata, France)

Evidence of the permanent human settlement 25,000 BP (last glacial maximum)

(Dolni Vestonice, Czech Republic, the oldest archaeologically confirmed)

Prehistoric architecture periods (defined by the type of tools used)

– dates vary by region (here given chronology mostly stands for Europe)

1. Stone Age

1a. Palaeolithic Age (Architecture of the Old Stone Age) ca. 2,5 M BP – 10,000 BP / ca. 30,000-8,000 B.C.E.

palaios=old; *“lithos”*=stone; lit. *old age of the stone*=OLD STONE AGE

*hunting and gathering – nomadic cultures – temporary architecture (tents, huts, shelters – mouths of caves, igloos)

Mesolithic Age

(from *“meso”* =in the middle; *“lithos”* =stone; Palaeolithic-Neolithic overlap, ca. 9,000-4,000 B.C.E. / today Mesolithic architecture often grouped under the Neolithic architecture)

1b. Neolithic Age (Architecture of the New Stone Age), from ca. 8,000 B.C.E.

neos=new; *“lithos”*=stone – NEW STONE AGE

*agriculture – sedentary cultures – permanent settlements

2. Bronze Age, ca. 3,000-800 B.C.E.

*writing / recorded history

3. Iron Age, ca. 1,200-1 B.C.E.

1. Palaeolithic Architecture, ca. 30,000-8,000 B.C.E.

Evidence of built architecture – rare!

Vernacular architecture – local needs, local construction materials, local traditions

Temporary structures: huts, igloos, tipis, tents

-we often reconstruct these lost structures based on more recent examples:

cf. Hakka people's *toulus* (earth construction) in Fujian Province (China), ca. 1200 CE

cf. Mud-brick (adobe) tower houses of Yemen, ca. 1500 CE

Building materials (timber, branches, stone, animal skin, animal bones, earth and adobe...)

*Prehistoric hut, Terra Amata, France: *hypothetical* reconstruction drawing of the earliest known huts, ca. 400,000 BCE

cf. Baka Pygmy hut – *mongulu*, contemporary temporary structure of hunter-gatherers - made of woven branches, covered in leaves

Cave mouths could have been used as shelters and dwellings

cf. *Cave, Mas d'Azil*, Ariège, France

cf. Montezuma Castle, Sedona, AZ, 1100-1400 C.E.

However, cave art reveals the use of caves as “sanctuaries” or ritual places, pushing the role of shelter beyond mere housing

Cave paintings (animals predominantly, human figures rare; no plants) and sculpture (animal and human figures) reveal the use of caves:

*Chauvet Cave, France, *Wall Painting with Horses, Rhinoceroses, and Aurochs*, ca. 30,000 BCE

*Lascaux, France, c. 15,000 BCE (*Hall of Bulls, Bird-Headed Man with a Bison*)

Paleolithic site:

*Mammoth-bone houses in Mezhirich, Ukraine, ca. 16,000-10,000 BCE

Terms:

Prehistoric architecture

Paleolithic architecture

Vernacular architecture

Temporary structure

Wood-post-framing

Hut (*mongulu*)

Tent (*tipi*)

Igloo

Adobe

Building material

Thermal insulation

Cave / Cave art – painting and sculpture

Sanctuary