Chapter 1: The Earliest Human Societies: 1-3a Human Development During the Paleolithic
Book Title: World Civilizations
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1-3a Human Development During the Paleolithic

During the Paleolithic, both the physical appearance of humans and their vital capacity to reason, plan, organize, make tools, and even—as we shall see—create art changed considerably. Because of the extensive work of anthropologists since World War II, we know that at least seventeen varieties of hominid evolved during this time. Much evidence uncovered in East Africa and the Near East, as well as in Europe, indicates that all of these species of *Homo* came to an evolutionary dead end, except for *Homo sapiens*. Sometime between 30,000 and 10,000 B.C.E., *Homo sapiens* seems to have become the sole species of *Homo* to survive anywhere.

Footprints from 3.5 Million B.C.E.

The Leakeys found these fossilized prints at the Laetoli site in present-day Tanzania in East Africa. The stride and distribution of weight on the foot indicate that these creatures were walking upright and were thus some of the earliest hominids.

Kenneth Garrett/National Geographic Creative

Why this occurred is problematic. Some believe that bloody warfare erupted between competing species of hominids; others posit a peaceable, gradual absorption by the more advanced species. A good example of these failed species is the famous **Neanderthal Man**

(A species of *Homo sapiens* flourishing between 100,000 and 300,000 years ago that mysteriously died out; the name comes from the German valley where the first remains were found.) , who flourished in many parts of Europe until about 30,000 B.C.E. and then disappeared soon after *Homo sapiens* appeared in Europe.

During the Paleolithic, hominids became more upright, and their skulls enlarged and became more rounded to encompass a gradually enlarging brain. Hip structure changed to allow a more erect gait and became enlarged among females to permit delivery of infants with larger heads (as well as brains). Eyesight grew sharper and the sense of smell less so. Gradually, too, the shape of the lower jaw altered, and the larynx shifted into its present location to allow for speech. All of these modifications and many others were adaptations that reflected humans' changed physical environment, their increasing manipulation of that environment, and—perhaps most human of all—sophisticated forms of communication and social organization.

Changes in the global climate effected the substitution of semipermanent shelter for the nomadism of an earlier day. By the late Paleolithic (c. 100,000–10,000 B.C.E.), groups were living in caves, lean-tos, and other shelters for long periods of time—perhaps several months. Whereas earlier a group rarely remained more than a few weeks at a given locale, now it could stay in one place several months to await the ripening of edible grasses and roots or the migration of animals. Even more important, humans' ability to master their physical environment changed dramatically as they learned to make clothing for cold seasons, kindle fire where and when it was needed, and devise new tools fashioned specifically for new tasks (for example, missile heads, hammers, axes, chisels, awls, scrapers, and drills). The earliest human artwork came in the late Paleolithic. Rock paintings in Africa and certain caves of southern France (Lascaux) and Spain (Altamira) are world famous for their lifelike portraits of deer and other animals, as shown in the Evidence of the Past feature. Throughout this book, in Evidence of the Past features, we broaden the usual definition of *primary sources* (original documents of the time) to include objects, artifacts, and nonwritten sources such as the spoken word, human genetic history, and the study of past languages (called *linguistic history*). Other human explorations of the aesthetic, whether in art, architecture, sculpture, music, or literature, are the subjects of Framing History: Arts & Culture features throughout the text.

Evidence of the Past

Çatal Hüyük

At a location named Çatal Hüyük (chat-ahl hoo-yook) in central Turkey, archaeologists discovered one of the world's earliest Neolithic communities. From about 7200 to 6300 B.C.E., the earliest occupants subsisted by hunting and gathering. Gradually, however, they domesticated food crops that were native to the region, and as time passed they adopted these as their main food source. Once this happened, they began constructing a densely occupied town of rectangular, flat-roofed houses. These mud-brick structures were joined together in a rabbit

warrenlike community that lacked streets. Walls also were without doors and windows, and entry was through rooftop openings.

The dimensions of a typical dwelling measured about twenty feet by thirteen feet. The inhabitants coated earthen floors and brick walls with a white lime plaster, and built benches, platforms, small niches, and baking ovens into the walls. Virtually every dwelling had bins, and occasionally an added room, for food storage. Homes seemed to have served religious purposes; most came equipped with shrines made from auroch (OH-rock, a wild ox) skulls. Wall murals were painted in red, usually in geometric shapes, but also depicting various animals. Shrines and wall niches ordinarily contained figurines of humans and animals.

Çatal Hüyük's occupants lived mainly by mixed farming, but hunting for wild game never entirely disappeared. Being a dry region, the main food sources included the usual cereals—emmer wheat and barley—and lentils. Other crops that supplemented this basic diet were hackberries, chickpeas, acorns, and almonds. Sheep and goats were the most commonly bred livestock, with some chickens, and later cattle and donkeys were added.

Artifacts excavated at Çatal Hüyük include technology that one typically encounters at Neolithic sites. These early farmers fashioned tools and craft items from stone, obsidian, bone, clay, and natural fibers and dyes. Archaeologists have found arrowheads and spearheads, as well as an assortment of flint daggers and obsidian blades. Bone was used to make awls, needles, and pins of various kinds. Common household items included woven baskets and mats, as well as pottery made from fired clay. Red clay and dyes were used to paint wall murals and to add color to figurines.

One discovery that has created a lot of speculation is a splendid seated "Mother Goddess." James Mellaart, who excavated Çatal Hüyük nearly forty-five years ago, interpreted this image and others like it as proof that Neolithic communities like Çatal Hüyük were matriarchies whose principal object of worship was a great Earth Mother. Ian Hodder, who has been working at Çatal Hüyük since 2005, believes that the overall picture is more ambiguous. Clearly, females figured prominently in the fertility cults of early agrarian societies and played important roles in daily life. He points out, however, that figurines of males with erect penises suggest that males also had parts in fertility cults. Other kinds of evidence, such as mortuary studies and DNA-based examinations of diets, suggest that both sexes enjoyed equal status in these early farming communities.

Bull Worship at Çatal Hüyük.

Numerous wall paintings, statues, and the heads of oxen and bulls on the walls in many rooms at Çatal Hüyük attest to the importance of religion. Bull veneration was common in western Asia during Neolithic times. In addition to the art at Çatal Hüyük, evidence of bull worship has been found in ancient

Egypt and Crete. Even today, bull veneration exists in India and as a sport in Spain.

Gianni Dagli Orti/The Art Archive/Alamy Stock Photo

Analyze and Interpret

What explanations can you give for the unusual architecture of Çatal Hüyük? What do you think family life was like? How might equal status between the sexes have been manifested in religious imagery like that at Çatal Hüyük?

In such ways, humans began to bend the physical world to their will. As they developed speech around 80,000 years ago, humans acquired the ability to plan and remember what had been successful in the past so that they could repeat it. Humans in the late Paleolithic were making rapid strides toward the remembered past, or “history.” Soon after, they would reach the state of advanced mastery of toolmaking and innovative problem solving that we call the Neolithic Age.

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