



Fourth Edition

THE HUMAN PAST

World
Prehistory
& the
Development
of Human
Societies

Edited by Chris Scarre

Thames & Hudson

the human past





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World Prehistory and
the Development of
Human Societies

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 **Thames & Hudson**



On the cover Upper part of a Nok terracotta of a male figure from Pangwari E., Nigeria, excavated in 2013. Courtesy Institute for Archaeological Sciences, Goethe University Frankfurt.

Half-title Hopi Manawgya Kachina doll. Museum of Northern Arizona, Flagstaff.

Title page Frieze from the Palace of Darius I at Susa, Iran. Fifth century BCE. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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BRIEF CONTENTS

CONTRIBUTORS 19

PREFACE 21

1 Introduction: The Study of the Human Past 24

PART I • THE EVOLUTION OF HUMANITY

6 million to 11,600 years ago 44

2 African Origins 46

3 Hominin Dispersals in the Old World 71

4 The Rise of Modern Humans 108

5 The Origins, Antiquity, and Dispersal of the First Americans 149

PART II • AFTER THE ICE AGE

11,600 years ago to the Early Civilizations 172

6 The World Transformed: From Foragers and Farmers to States and Empires 174

7 From Mobile Foragers to Complex Societies in Southwest Asia 198

8 East Asian Agriculture and Its Impact 230

9 Australia and the Indo-Pacific Islands during the Holocene 261

10 Origins of Food-Producing Economies in the Americas 303

11 Holocene Africa 344

12 Holocene Europe 388

13 Peoples and Complex Societies of Ancient Southwest Asia 429

14 The Mediterranean World 469

15 South Asia: From Early Villages to Buddhism 515

16 Complex Societies of East and Southeast Asia 547

17 Mesoamerican Civilization 590

18 From Village to Empire in South America 636

19 Complex Societies of North America 670

20 The Human Past: Retrospect and Prospect 703

GLOSSARY 710

REFERENCES 715

SOURCES OF ILLUSTRATIONS 746

INDEX 749

CONTENTS

CONTRIBUTORS 19

PREFACE 21

1 INTRODUCTION: THE STUDY OF THE HUMAN PAST 24

Chris Scarre, Durham University

What Is Archaeology? 25

Prehistory vs. History 26

The Relevance of World Archaeology 27

A Brief History of Archaeology 28

Renaissance Beginnings 28

Advances in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth

Centuries: The First Excavations 29

Developments in the Nineteenth Century:

Understanding Chronology and Evolution 29

Methods and Techniques 31

Dating 31

Radiocarbon Dating 31

Potassium-Argon Dating 31

Uranium-Series 32

Electron Spin Resistance 32

Luminescence Dating 32

Paleomagnetism 32

Tree-Ring Dating 32

Other Field and Laboratory Methods 33

Reconstructing Ancient Environments 34

Genetics in Archaeology 34

Archaeological Fieldwork 34

Archaeological Theory 35

Processual and Postprocessual Archaeology 35

Cultural Ecology and Agency Theory 37

Common Models in Archaeology 37

Innovation, Diffusion, Emulation, and Migration 37

KEY THEMES Humans in Long-Term Perspective 38

Linear and Cyclical Patterns 40

The Responsibilities of Archaeology 41

Summary and Conclusions 42

Further Reading and Suggested Websites 43

PART I • THE EVOLUTION OF HUMANITY

6 million to 11,600 years ago 44

2 AFRICAN ORIGINS 46

Nicholas Toth and Kathy Schick, Indiana University

Evolution and Human Origins 47

The Human Evolutionary Record 48

The Primate Ancestors of Apes and Humans 49

What Is a Primate? 49

Our Ape Ancestry: The Comparative Anatomical and Genetic Evidence 50

Anatomical Evidence 50

Genetic Evidence 50

The Environmental Background 51

KEY DISCOVERY *Ardipithecus ramidus* and

Other Early Fossils 52

Climate Change and Early Hominin Evolution 53

The Rise of the Earliest Hominins 53

KEY THEME: CLIMATE CHANGE Evolutionary Change 54

The Australopithecines 54

The Emergence of *Homo: Homo habilis, Homo ergaster, and Homo rudolfensis* 55

KEY SITES Hadar and Laetoli: “Lucy,” the “First Family,” and Fossil Footsteps 56

The First Stone Tools and the Oldowan 58

Technology 59

Who Made the Oldowan Tools? 59

KEY SITE Olduvai Gorge: The Grand Canyon of Prehistory 60

The Nature of Oldowan Sites 61

KEY CONTROVERSY Modern Apes as Oldowan Toolmakers? 62

KEY DISCOVERY *Australopithecus garhi*: The First Stone Toolmaker? 63

Food Procurement and Diet 64

Hunters or Scavengers? 64

Food for Thought: Diet and Encephalization 65

- The Behavior of Oldowan Hominins** 65
 - Social Organization 65
 - Diet 65
 - Fire 66
 - Art, Ritual, and Language 66
- Recent Trends in Approaches to the Oldowan** 67
 - Isotopic Studies 67
- KEY CONTROVERSY** What Were Oldowan Tools Used For? 68
- Summary and Conclusions** 69
- Further Reading** 70

3 HOMININ DISPERSALS IN THE OLD WORLD 71

Richard Klein, Stanford University

- Homo ergaster*** 74
 - Anatomy 74
 - The Turkana Boy 74
 - Human Evolution and Inferences from the Turkana Boy 75
- KEY CONTROVERSY** Distinguishing *Homo ergaster* and *Homo erectus* 76
- The Acheulean** 77
 - The Acheulean Hand Axe Tradition 77
- KEY DISCOVERY** The Acheulean Hand Axe Tradition 78
 - Hand Axe Function 79
 - Variation within the Acheulean Tradition 80
- The Dispersal of *Homo ergaster*** 80
 - The Initial Expansion of *Homo ergaster* from Africa 81
 - The Expansion of *Homo ergaster* to Eurasia: The Dmanisi Discoveries 81
- KEY CONTROVERSY** The “Hobbit”: *Homo floresiensis*, a Unique Species? 82
 - Dating the Dmanisi Fossils 84
- Homo erectus*** 86
 - The Discovery and Dating of *Homo erectus* in Java and China 86
 - China and the Peking Man 87
 - The Movius Line 88
- KEY THEME: CLIMATE CHANGE** Human Evolution and Adaptability 89
 - The Persistence and Fate of *Homo erectus* 89

- Homo heidelbergensis* and the Initial Occupation of Europe** 90
 - KEY CONTROVERSY** When Did Humans First Colonize Europe? 91
 - KEY SITE** The Gran Dolina TD6 and the History of Cannibalism 94
 - Brain Expansion and Change within the Hand Axe Tradition 94
 - KEY THEME: MIGRATION** *Homo ergaster* as the First Afro-Eurasian Hominin 95
 - The European Origin of the Neanderthals 95
- Evidence for Early Human Behavior apart from Stone Artifacts** 97
 - Other Raw Materials 97
 - Site Modification and Housing 98
 - Fire 99
 - Art 100
 - Diet and Food Procurement 101
 - Plant Foods: Foraging 101
- KEY CONTROVERSY** Is *Homo erectus* Represented by DNA from Denisova Cave? 102
 - Animal Foods: Hunting and Scavenging 103
- KEY SITE** The Mystery of Dinaledi Cave and *Homo naledi* 104
- Summary and Conclusions** 106
- Further Reading and Suggested Websites** 107

4 THE RISE OF MODERN HUMANS 108

Paul Pettitt, Durham University

- The Climatic Background** 109
- Competing Hypotheses for the Origin of *Homo sapiens*** 109
 - The Multi-Regional Evolution Hypothesis 111
 - The Out of Africa Hypothesis 111
 - Other Hypotheses and Attempts at Consensus 111
- KEY THEME: CLIMATE CHANGE** Oscillations and Human Dispersal 112
- Evidence for the Rise of Modern Humans in Africa** 113
 - Earliest *Homo sapiens* 113
 - Transitional *Homo sapiens* 114
 - Anatomically Modern Humans 117

Genetic Keys to the Origins of Modern Humans	118
Mitochondrial DNA and the Theory of an Early African “Coalescence”	118
Other Theories and Potential Consensus	119
Mitochondrial DNA and the Evolution of <i>Homo neanderthalensis</i>	119
Archaeology and the Emergence of “Modern” Behavior in Middle Stone Age Africa	120
Hunting and Dietary Evidence	121
KEY SITE Klasies River Mouth: Middle Stone Age Hunters?	122
Evidence of Site Modification and Art	123
KEY CONTROVERSY The Evolution of Language	124
The Neanderthals	124
KEY SITE Blombos Cave and the Origins of Symbolism	125
The Anatomy of <i>Homo neanderthalensis</i>	126
Exploitation of Resources: Hunting, Gathering, and Scavenging	127
The Mousterian Lithic Industry	130
Neanderthal Behavior	130
KEY DISCOVERY The Neanderthal Genome	131
Early Dispersals of <i>Homo sapiens</i> into the Levantine Corridor	133
KEY THEME: MIGRATION Changing Pleistocene Environments Drove Human Dispersals	134
The Colonization of East Asia and Australia	135
The Colonization of Europe, and the Middle to Upper Paleolithic Transition	137
The Aurignacian	137
KEY CONTROVERSY The Initial Upper Paleolithic and the Emergence of Modern Behavior	138
The End of the Neanderthals and their Relationship to Incoming <i>Homo sapiens</i>	139
Developments in Human Behavior: The European Mid- and Later Upper Paleolithic	141
The Gravettian	141
Gravettian Behavior	141
KEY SITES Four Sites with Upper Paleolithic Art	142
The Magdalenian and Mezinian	143
KEY CONTROVERSY The Meaning of “Venus” Figurines	144
Summary and Conclusions	147
Further Reading and Suggested Websites	148

5 THE ORIGINS, ANTIQUITY, AND DISPERSAL OF THE FIRST AMERICANS 149

David J. Meltzer, Southern Methodist University

Pleistocene Bridges and Barriers to America (35,000–11,600 Years Ago) 150

The Archaeology of Beringia 151

Colonization Complexities 152

KEY DISCOVERY Genetics and the First Americans 153

When and How 155

KEY SITES Pushing the Antiquity Envelope: Folsom, Clovis, and Monte Verde 156

KEY THEME: MIGRATION Motives and Methods 158
Learning New Landscapes 158

The Clovis Occupation of North America (13,400–12,600 Years Ago) 161

KEY THEME: CLIMATE CHANGE The Effects of Climate Change on the First Americans 162

North America after Clovis 162

KEY CONTROVERSY Pleistocene Extinctions 164

The Earliest South Americans 167

Adapting to Diversity 168

Summary and Conclusions 170

Changes on the Horizon 171

Further Reading 171

PART II • AFTER THE ICE AGE

11,600 years ago to the Early Civilizations 172

6 THE WORLD TRANSFORMED: FROM FORAGERS AND FARMERS TO STATES AND EMPIRES 174

Chris Scarre, Durham University

From Glacial to Postglacial 175

Climate Change and Faunal Extinction at the End of the Pleistocene 175

The Early Holocene Environment 177

Hunter-Gatherer Adaptations to the Holocene 179

The Adoption of Agriculture 180

What Is Agriculture? 180

The Development of Domesticates	181
The Geography of Domestication	181
KEY THEME: DOMESTICATION The Domestication of the Dog	182
Why Agriculture?	183
KEY CONTROVERSY Explaining Agriculture	184
The Spread of Agriculture	186
The Consequences of Agriculture	187
Settlement	187
Social Complexity	187
Material Culture	188
Warfare	188
Agricultural Intensification	189
Cities, States, and Empires	189
KEY CONTROVERSY Cities, States, and Civilizations Defined and Explained	190
The Development of States	192
The Geography of State Formation	193
Archaeological Features of States	194
Toward History: The Adoption of Writing	194
States and Empires	195
Summary and Conclusions	197
Further Reading and Suggested Website	197

7 FROM MOBILE FORAGERS TO COMPLEX SOCIETIES IN SOUTHWEST ASIA 198

Trevor Watkins, University of Edinburgh

Terminologies in Southwest Asia	199
Landscapes and Environments of Southwest Asia: Defining the “Core Area”	199
Changing Climate and Environments	201
A Crescendo of Change (20,000–8800 BCE)	201
The Epipaleolithic in the Levant (c. 20,000–9600 BCE)	201
KEY CONTROVERSY Explaining the Neolithic Revolution	203
KEY THEME: CLIMATE CHANGE Environmental Shocks in Southwest Asia	204
The Natufians in the Late Epipaleolithic Levant	204
KEY SITE Ohalo II: Epipaleolithic Lifeways in the Levant	205
The Epipaleolithic beyond the South Levant	207

KEY SITE Abu Hureyra: The Transition from Foraging to Farming	208
The Early Aceramic Neolithic: A Burst of New, Permanent Settlements	209
KEY SITE Jerf el Ahmar: A Neolithic Village	212
Pre-Domestic Cultivation	214
A Cascade of Rapid Change: The Later Aceramic Neolithic (8800–6500 BCE)	214
Settlements and Communities	215
KEY SITE Göbekli Tepe: Religious Structures at a “Central Place”	216
Special Buildings for Special Purposes	218
Ritual Cycles of Burial, Skull Retrieval, and Curation	219
KEY SITE Çatalhöyük	220
Regional and Supra-Regional Networks of Sharing and Exchange	223
KEY THEME: DOMESTICATION A Story of Unintended Consequences	224
Transformation, Dispersal, and Expansion (6500–6000 BCE)	225
The Levant	225
Central and West Anatolia	225
KEY SITE Tell Sabi Abyad I	226
What Was the Cause of Dispersal and Expansion?	228
Summary and Conclusions	228
Further Reading and Suggested Websites	229

8 EAST ASIAN AGRICULTURE AND ITS IMPACT 230

Charles Higham, University of Otago

Northern China	233
The Origins of Millet Cultivation: The Yellow River Valley to 7000 BCE	233
The Development of Permanent Villages in the Yellow River Valley (c. 7000–5000 BCE)	234
KEY SITE Jiahu: The Transition to Agriculture in the Huai River Valley	235
KEY THEME: DOMESTICATION The Consequences and Significance of Agriculture	237
The Growth of Agricultural Communities (c. 5000–2600 BCE): Neolithic Cultures in the Yellow River Valley	237
Central Plains and the Loess Plateau: The Yangshao Culture (c. 5000–3000 BCE)	237

The Middle Yangshao (c. 4000–3500 BCE)	239
Eastern China: The Dawenkou Culture (c. 4150–2600 BCE)	239
The Yangzi Valley	240
The Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Yangzi River Valley	240
Gathering Wild Rice: Yuchanyang	240
The Transition from Wild to Cultivated Rice: Diaotonghuan and Xianrendong	241
KEY CONTROVERSY The Origins of Rice Cultivation	242
The Development of Permanent Villages in the Yangzi Valley	243
The Middle Yangzi Valley	243
The Lower Yangzi Valley	243
Summary: The Origins of Rice Domestication	244
KEY SITE Tianluoshan	245
The Expansion of Neolithic Settlement in the Yangzi River Valley	246
The Daxi Culture (c. 4500–3300 BCE)	246
The Qujialing Culture (c. 3300–2500 BCE)	246
The Lower Yangzi Region: The Majiabang and Songze Cultures (c. 5000–3300 BCE)	247
The Expansion of Rice and Millet Farmers	248
The Expansion of Farmers into Southeast Asia	248
Initial Dispersal into Southern China	248
From Southern China into Vietnam	249
Early Rice Farmers in Northeast Thailand	249
KEY SITE Man Bac	250
Cambodia and the Dong Nai River	251
The Bangkok Plain	252
Khok Phanom Di	252
KEY SITE Ban Non Wat: Hunter-Gatherers and Early Rice Farmers	253
The Expansion of Farmers into Korea and Japan	254
Korea	254
KEY THEME: SOCIAL INEQUALITY The Role of Agriculture and Metallurgy	255
Japan	257
Yayoi Rice Farmers	257
KEY DISCOVERY Sedentism without Agriculture	258
Summary and Conclusions	259
Further Reading and Suggested Websites	260

9 AUSTRALIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC ISLANDS DURING THE HOLOCENE 261

Peter Bellwood, Australian National University, and Peter Hiscock, Sydney University

Australia	265
Early Foragers in a Changing Landscape	265
KEY SITE South Molle Quarry: Aboriginal Foragers at the End of the Ice Age	266
Technology in Uncertain Times	266
Changing Life in Tasmania	267
KEY CONTROVERSY Explaining Technological Change in Australia	268
Changes in Aboriginal Perceptions of the Landscape: The Rainbow Serpent	268
KEY CONTROVERSY Why Did the Tasmanians Stop Eating Fish?	269
The Growth of Trade Networks	270
Population and Settlement Change	270
The Effects of Historic Foreign Contacts	271
KEY SITE Barlambidj: Aboriginal Contact with Southeast Asia	272
The Indo-Pacific Islands of Southeast Asia and Oceania	272
The First <i>Homo sapiens</i> in Island Southeast Asia	273
Early Agriculturalists in New Guinea	273
The Austronesian Dispersal	274
KEY DISCOVERY Early Farming in the New Guinea Highlands	275
A Basic History of the Austronesian Languages	276
The Archaeology of Early Austronesian Dispersal	279
Taiwan	279
Further Dispersals into Island Southeast Asia and to Madagascar	279
Recent Debate over Movement through Taiwan	281
The Colonization of Oceania: Lapita	281
KEY SITE Beinan and the Jade Trade	282
Lapita Economy	284
The Settlement of Polynesia	284
KEY CONTROVERSY The Origins of Lapita	285
Eastern Polynesia	287
KEY SITES Talepakemalai and Teouma	288
KEY CONTROVERSY Expert Navigation or Sheer Good Luck?	290
Why Migrate?	291

KEY CONTROVERSY Easter Island and South America 292

The Austronesian World after Colonization 293

Polynesian Complex Societies: Easter Island and Elsewhere 293

Hawai'i and New Zealand: Varying Social Responses to Environmental Constraints 294

KEY THEME: CLIMATE CHANGE Human Impact, Environmental Change, and Migration 295

The Chiefdoms of Polynesia: Comparative Ethnographic Perspectives 297

Theories of Social Evolution 297

Seaborne Trade and the Transformation of Tribal Society in Southeast Asia 298

Summary and Conclusions 301

Further Reading 302

10 ORIGINS OF FOOD-PRODUCING ECONOMIES IN THE AMERICAS 303

David L. Browman and Gayle J. Fritz, Washington University in St. Louis, and BrieAnna S. Langlie, Binghamton University, New York

The Mexican Archaic and the Origins of Mesoamerican Agriculture, c. 9500–2500 BCE 305

The Earliest Cultigens 306

Eastern North America 308

Early to Middle Archaic, c. 9500–4000 BCE 309

KEY THEME: CLIMATE CHANGE Changing Climates and Early Agricultural Developments in the Americas 310

KEY SITE Koster: An Archaic Camp in Illinois 312

The Beginnings of Agriculture in the Middle and Late Archaic 313

KEY SITES Watson Brake and Poverty Point, Louisiana 314

Late Archaic Lifeways and Social Elaborations (c. 4000–1000 BCE) 315

The Carlston Annis Shell Mound in West Central Kentucky 316

Horr's Island, Florida 316

The Earliest Pottery 316

KEY DISCOVERY The Archaic Dog 317

Early Woodland Period, c. 1000–200 BCE 317

Later Agricultural Developments 318

Tobacco 319

Southwest North America 319

The Archaic Period (c. 7500 BCE–1 CE) 319

Agricultural Beginnings 319

The Economic Impact of Maize and Other Crops 319

KEY CONTROVERSY The Domestication of Maize 320

Models of Agricultural Adoption and Dispersal 322

Later Agricultural Developments and Systems 322

Western North America: Alternatives to Agriculture 323

Great Plains Bison Hunting 324

The Pacific Northwest Maritime Cultures 325

The Great Basin Desert Archaic 325

The Archaic Period in California 326

The South American Pacific Lowlands 326

The North Pacific Coast 327

The Peruvian Coast 328

North Coast 328

South Coast 328

KEY THEME: MIGRATION Early Agricultural Developments in the Americas 329

The Chilean Coast 330

KEY SITES La Paloma and Chilca: Archaic Villages of the Peruvian Coast 331

KEY DISCOVERY The Chinchorro Mummies 332

Southern Chile and Southern Argentina 334

The Andean Highlands 334

The Northern Andes 334

The Central Andes 334

Northern Peru 334

Central Peru 335

Southern Peru 336

The Southern Andes 336

Andean Animal and Plant Domestication 336

KEY SITE Caral and Norte Chico 339

The Amazonian Lowlands 340

The Atlantic Lowlands 341

Summary and Conclusions 342

Further Reading 343

11 HOLOCENE AFRICA 344

Graham Connah, Australian National University

Intensified Hunting, Gathering, and Fishing, c. 9000–5000 BCE 348

Southern and Central Africa 349

Southern African Rock Art 349

KEY CONTROVERSY Symbolism in Southern African Rock Art 350

Northern, Eastern, and Western Africa 351

North Africa and the Sahara 351

KEY CONTROVERSY Climate and Adaptation in the Sahara 352

East Africa 354

West Africa 354

KEY THEME: DOMESTICATION Agriculture for a Broad Range of Environments 355

The Beginnings of Farming 355

The Sahara 355

The Nile Valley 356

West Africa 357

Northeast and East Africa 358

Ironworking and Early Farming in Central and Southern Africa 359

Movements of Bantu-Speaking Peoples 359

Ironworking Farmers 360

KEY CONTROVERSY The Origins of African Ironworking 361

KEY DISCOVERY Nok: Unique Sculptures by Forgotten People 362

Domesticated Plants and Animals 363

Interaction between Hunter-Gatherers and Farmers 364

Urbanization and Social Complexity in Ancient Egypt 365

The Predynastic Period 366

The Early Dynastic Period 368

The Old Kingdom 369

The First and Second Intermediate Periods and the Middle Kingdom 369

KEY DISCOVERY Insights from the Pyramids 370
The New Kingdom and After 371

KEY THEME: URBANIZATION The Concept of Urbanization in Africa 373

Urbanization and State Formation in the Rest of Africa 373

Nubia and Ethiopia 374

Kerma 374

Napata and Meroë 374

Aksum 375

North and West Africa 376

KEY SITES Ethiopia's Rock-Cut Churches 377

KEY SITE Old Jarma: Urbanism in the Middle of Nowhere 378

Eastern, Southern, and Central Africa 379

The Swahili Coast 379

KEY SITE Great Zimbabwe 380

The Zimbabwe Plateau 381

Remoter Parts of Central Africa 382

Africa and the World 382

The Mediterranean, Southwest Asia, and the Red Sea 382

The Indian Ocean 383

KEY SITE Igbo-Ukwu 384

KEY SITE Quseir al-Qadim and the Indian Ocean Trade 385

The Atlantic Coast 386

Summary and Conclusions 386

Further Reading and Suggested Websites 387

12 HOLOCENE EUROPE 388

Chris Scarre, Durham University

From Foraging to Farming 389

After the Ice: Europe Transformed 391

KEY SITE Star Carr: A Mesolithic Campsite in Northeast England 392

Farming Comes to Europe 393

KEY THEME: MIGRATION The Spread of Farming to Europe 394

Southeastern Europe 395

The First Neolithic Settlements, c. 6600–6000 BCE 395

Developing Societies, c. 6000–3200 BCE 396

KEY THEME: MIGRATION Incursions from the Steppes 397

Copper, Gold, and Secondary Products 397

KEY SITE The Varna Cemetery 398

The Mediterranean Zone 399

Social Distinctions in Mediterranean Europe, c. 3500–2500 BCE 400

Central Europe 401

KEY DISCOVERY The “Iceman” 402

The Bandkeramik Culture, *c.* 5600–5000 BCE 404

Regional Diversification, *c.* 5000–3000 BCE 405

KEY DISCOVERY The Talheim Death Pit 406

Atlantic Europe 407

Monuments and Society 408

Polished Stone Axes 409

KEY CONTROVERSY Stonehenge: Symbolism and Ceremony 410

Northern Europe 412

Monuments and Ritual 412

Toward Complexity: Europe from *c.* 2500 BCE to the Roman Empire 414

Later Prehistoric Societies in Central and Western Europe 414

Beaker Pottery and Metalwork 415

Chiefly Elites and Long-Distance Contact 417

KEY CONTROVERSY Rock Art—Representation of Myth or Reality? 418

KEY THEME: SOCIAL INEQUALITY Centers of Power in Late Hallstatt Europe 420

“Princely Centers” 421

Later Prehistoric Societies in Eastern Europe 422

The Earlier Bronze Age in Eastern Europe, *c.* 2300–1300 BCE 422

Urnfields, *c.* 1300–700 BCE 423

European Society at the Dawn of History 424

European Societies beyond the Mediterranean 424

The So-Called “Celtic” Societies 425

Bog Bodies 425

KEY CONTROVERSY Who Were the Celts? 426

The Expansion of Roman Control 427

Summary and Conclusions 428

Further Reading 428

13 PEOPLES AND COMPLEX SOCIETIES OF ANCIENT SOUTHWEST ASIA 429

Roger Matthews, University of Reading

Farmers of the Early Chalcolithic: The Halaf and Ubaid Periods, *c.* 6000–4200 BCE 432

The Halaf Period, *c.* 6000–5400 BCE 432

The Ubaid Period, *c.* 5900–4200 BCE 433

Eridu 433

Ubaid Sites beyond Lower Mesopotamia 434

KEY DISCOVERY Early Steps toward Social Complexity on the Iranian Plateau 435

Urban Communities of the Late Chalcolithic:

The Uruk Period, *c.* 4200–3000 BCE 436

The Lower Mesopotamian Site of Uruk:

The “First City” 437

KEY THEME: URBANIZATION The World’s First True Cities 438

The Invention of Writing 438

Cylinder Seals 439

Uruk Expansion and Trade 440

City States, Kingdoms, and Empires of the Early Bronze Age, *c.* 3000–2000 BCE 441

Sumerian City States 441

Upper Mesopotamian, Iranian, and Anatolian Communities 443

Kingdoms and Empires of the Later Third Millennium BCE 444

KEY SITE Ebla 446

Commerce and Conflict in the Middle Bronze Age, *c.* 2000–1650 BCE 447

Lower Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf 448

Upper Mesopotamia and the Levant 449

Upper Mesopotamia and Anatolia,

c. 2000–1650 BCE 450

Empires and States at War and Peace:

The Late Bronze Age, *c.* 1650–1185 BCE 450

Anatolia and the Hittites 451

KEY SITE Hattusa, Capital of the Hittites 452

The Levant in the Late Bronze Age 453

Ugarit 454

Upper Mesopotamia and Syria: Hurrian Mittani 455

KEY DISCOVERY The Uluburun Shipwreck 456

The Rise of Assyria 457

Lower Mesopotamia: Kassite Babylonia 458

Elam 459
The End of the Late Bronze Age 460
New and Resurgent Powers of the Iron Age, c. 1185–330 BCE 460
The Levant: Philistines, Phoenicians, Neo-Hittites 460
 The Philistines 460
 The Phoenicians 461
 The Neo-Hittites 461
The Assyrian Empire 462
The Levant: Israel and Judah 463
Anatolian States 463
Babylonia 464
The Achaemenid Empire and the Conquest of Southwest Asia 465
KEY THEME: MIGRATION Small and Large Movements across Southwest Asia 466
Summary and Conclusions 467
Further Reading and Suggested Websites 468

14 THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD 469

Susan E. Alcock and John F. Cherry, Brown University

Defining the Mediterranean, Redefining Its Study 472
The Bronze Age, c. 3500–1000 BCE 473
 The Aegean Early Bronze Age 474
 Crete 474
KEY THEME: SOCIAL INEQUALITY The Emergence of Social Inequality in the Mediterranean 475
 The Cyclades 475
KEY CONTROVERSY Early Cycladic Marble Figures 476
 The Greek Mainland and Troy 477
Minoan Crete: The Palace Period 477
 The Palace at Knossos 477
 Peak Sanctuaries 478
 Life outside the Palaces 479
KEY SITE Troy 480
 The End of the Minoan Palaces 481
Mycenaean Greece: Mycenae and the Mycenaean Kingdoms 481

KEY DISCOVERY Linear B 482
 Other Mycenaean Palaces 484
 Overseas Influence 485
 The End of the Aegean Bronze Age 485
Cultural Variety in the First Millennium BCE 486
Greece and the Aegean 486
 The Early Iron Age 486
 The Orientalizing and Archaic Periods 486
KEY THEME: MIGRATION Human Trafficking in the Mediterranean World 487
 The Classical Period 487
KEY SITES Olympia and Other Panhellenic Sanctuaries 489
 Features of the Classical City 490
KEY CONTROVERSY What Did Greek Sculptures Really Look Like? 492
 Greek Colonization 493
KEY SITE The Necropolis at Metapontum 494
 The Phoenicians and Phoenician Expansion 495
 The Etruscans and the Italian Peninsula 496
Growing Powers, Growing Territories 498
 Alexander and the East 498
 The Conquests of Alexander 498
 The Hellenistic World 500
 Carthage and the Carthaginian Empire 500
KEY SITE Alexandria-by-Egypt 501
 The Rise of Rome 502
 Growth and Crisis 503
A Mediterranean Empire 503
 Rome, Center of the World 504
 The Provinces and Frontiers 506
 Reactions to Roman Annexation 507
KEY CONTROVERSY Pompeii—All Problems Solved? 508
KEY DISCOVERY The Mahdia Shipwreck 510
 The Roman Army 511
 The Later Empire 512
Summary and Conclusions 513
Further Reading and Suggested Websites 514

15 SOUTH ASIA: FROM EARLY VILLAGES TO BUDDHISM 515

Robin Coningham, Durham University

Land and Language 518

The Foundations, c. 26,000–6500 BCE 518

Western India 519

The Ganga Plain 519

Central India 519

Sri Lanka 519

Seasonality and Mobility 520

Early Neolithic Villages: The First Food Producers 520

Western Pakistan 520

Kashmir and the Swat Valley 521

KEY SITE Mehrgarh: An Early Farming Community 522

The Ganga Basin 523

Peninsular India 524

An Era of Regionalization: Early Harappan Proto-Urban Forms 524

Kot Diji and Early Pointers toward the Indus Civilization 525

KEY CONTROVERSY Foreign Contact and State Formation 1: The Indus Cities 526

An Era of Integration: The Indus Civilization, c. 2600–1900 BCE 528

A Hierarchy of Settlement Forms 528

KEY CONTROVERSY The Decipherment of the Indus Script 529

KEY THEME: SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Uniformity within the Indus Civilization 530

KEY SITES Mohenjo-daro and Harappa 532

Character of the Indus Civilization 532

Subsistence and Trade 533

The Western Borderlands 534

An Era of Localization: The Eclipse of the Indus Civilization, c. 1900 BCE 534

The Core Cities 534

KEY THEME: MIGRATION The Aryan Migration and the End of the Indus Cities 535

Peripheral Areas 535

Gandharan Grave Culture 536

The Ganga–Yamuna Doab 536

The Western Deccan 536

The Re-Emergence of Regionalized Complexity, c. 1200–500 BCE 537

Developments in the Northwest and East 537

Painted Gray Ware 537

KEY CONTROVERSY Foreign Contact and State Formation 2: The Early Historic Cities 538

“Great Territories” 539

Southern India and Sri Lanka 539

Reintegration: The Early Historic Empires, c. 500 BCE–320 CE 540

The Mauryan Empire 541

KEY CONTROVERSY Early Historic Hierarchy and Heterarchies 543

Post-Mauryan Dynasties 544

The Kushan, Satavahana, and Later Dynasties 544

KEY CONTROVERSY Roman Contact and the Origins of Indian Ocean Trade 545

Summary and Conclusions 546

Further Reading and Suggested Websites 546

16 COMPLEX SOCIETIES OF EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA 547

Charles Higham, University of Otago

Early States of China 549

The Longshan Culture, c. 3000–1900 BCE 549

The Xia Dynasty, c. 2070–1500 BCE 551

The Shang Dynasty, c. 1500–1045 BCE 551

KEY SITE Zhengzhou: A Shang Capital 552

KEY DISCOVERY The Origins of Chinese Writing 554

Southern Rivals to Shang Culture 556

The Western Zhou Dynasty, 1045–771 BCE 557

KEY SITE Sanxingdui 558

Western Zhou Bronzeworking 559

The Eastern Zhou Dynasty, 770–221 BCE 560

Technological and Social Changes 560

KEY CONTROVERSY Confucianism and Buddhism 561

KEY SITE Tonglushan: A Copper Mining Site 562

Imperial China 563

The Qin Dynasty, 221–207 BCE 563

KEY CONTROVERSY The Origins of Chinese Metallurgy 565

The Han Dynasty, 206 BCE–220 CE 565

Administration 565

KEY THEME: URBANISM Feeding a State 566

Agriculture 567

Religious Beliefs 567

KEY SITE Mawangdui 568

Korea 570

Koguryo, 37 BCE–668 CE 570

Paekche, 18 BCE–680 CE 571

Silla, 37 BCE–668 CE 571

Great Silla, 668–918 CE 573

Japan 574

Early Yamato 574

The Growth of Yamato Power 574

Decline and Civil War 576

The Asuka Enlightenment 576

The Transition from Yamato to Nara 577

Silk Roads 578

The Central Asian Silk Road 578

Khotan 579

A Maritime Silk Road 579

Funan, the Mekong Delta 579

Angkor, Cambodia 580

The Pyu of Burma 583

KEY CONTROVERSY Khao Sam Kaeo and the
Origins of Southeast Asian Indianized States 584

The Dvaravati of Thailand 586

The Cham of Vietnam 587

Summary and Conclusions 587

KEY THEME: SOCIAL INEQUALITY Social Status
and the Built Environment 588

Further Reading 589

17 MESOAMERICAN CIVILIZATION 590

David Webster and Susan Toby Evans,
The Pennsylvania State University

The Landscape and Its Peoples 591

KEY DISCOVERY The Mesoamerican Ball Game 594

**The Spread of Agriculture and the Rise of Complex
Societies in Preclassic Mesoamerica** 595

Early Sedentism 595

KEY THEME: DOMESTICATION Social
Consequences of Agriculture 596

KEY SITE Paso de la Amada and the Emergence
of Social Complexity 597

**The Olmecs, c. 1200–400 BCE (Early to Middle
Preclassic)** 598

San Lorenzo and La Venta 598

KEY CONTROVERSY The Olmecs: Mesoamerica's
“Mother Culture”? 600

West Mexican Polities, c. 1500 BCE–400 CE 601

Late Preclassic Mesoamerica, c. 400 BCE–250 CE 601

KEY CONTROVERSY Metallurgy in Mesoamerica 602
Calendars and Writing 602

Kings, Courts, and Cities 603

KEY DISCOVERY The Mesoamerican Calendar 604

KEY CONTROVERSY Who Invented Mesoamerican
Writing? 606

Monte Albán 608

Teotihuacán 609

KEY SITE Teotihuacán 610

**The Classic Period: Teotihuacán and
Its Neighbors** 612

KEY CONTROVERSY The Teotihuacán Writing
System 613

Teotihuacán's Wider Influence: The Middle
Horizon 614

KEY SITE Classic Monte Albán 615

Cholula, Cantona, and the Teuchitlan Cultural
Tradition—Independent Polities? 616

The Demise of Teotihuacán 616

Epiclassic Mesoamerica, c. 600–900 CE 617

The Classic Maya 618

Kingdoms and Capitals 619

KEY THEME: URBANISM Defining a City
in Mesoamerica 621

Maya Society 621

Royalty 621

KEY SITE Tikal 622
Lords and Officials 622
Commoners 623

KEY CONTROVERSY How Sudden Was the
“Collapse” of Maya Civilization? 624
Warfare 624

Postclassic Mesoamerica 624

The Rise of the Toltecs 625

The Postclassic Maya 627

The Puuc Florescence 627

Chichén Itzá 627

Mayapan 627

**Mesoamerica Contacted: What the Spaniards
Found** 628

The Maya of the Early Sixteenth Century 628

The Aztecs and the Late Horizon: History
and Myth 629

The Aztec Empire in 1519 629

KEY SITE Tenochtitlán: The Aztec Capital 630
Aztec Society 633

The Spanish Conquest 634

Summary and Conclusions 634

Further Reading and Suggested Websites 635

18 FROM VILLAGE TO EMPIRE IN SOUTH AMERICA 636

Michael E. Moseley and Michael J. Heckenberger,
University of Florida

A Continent of Extremes 637

The Andes 637

Amazonia 637

Coasts 637

Floodplains 640

Uplands 640

**Preceramic (Prepottery) Civilization in the Andes,
c. 3000–1800 BCE** 640

Temple Mounds and Sunken Courts 640

KEY CONTROVERSY The Maritime Hypothesis 641

**The Initial Period and the Early Horizon,
c. 1800–400 BCE: Civilization Reconfigured** 643

The Initial Period, c. 1800–400 BCE 643

KEY SITE Sechín Alto 644

The Early Horizon, c. 400–200 BCE 645

Paracas 646

Pukara 647

**The Early Intermediate Period, c. 200 BCE–650 CE:
Andean Confederacies and States** 647

KEY SITE Sipán and the Presentation Theme 648

The Moche 649

The Temples of the Sun and the Moon 649

Nazca and the South Coast 651

Nazca Lines 651

The Rise and Fall of the Andean Empires 652

The Middle Horizon, c. 650–1000 CE: Tiwanaku
and Wari 652

KEY THEME: SOCIAL INEQUALITY Descent and
the *Kurakas* 653

The Late Intermediate Period, c. 1000–1476 CE:

Lambayeque and Chimor 654

Chimor and Chan Chan 654

Lambayeque and Batán Grande 656

The Late Horizon, 1476–1533: Cuzco and the Incas 656

Origins and Expansion 657

Cuzco and the Trappings of Empire 657

KEY SITE The Sacred Valley of the Incas and
Machu Picchu 658

Amazonia 659

**The Amazonian Formative Period,
c. 1000 BCE–500 CE** 660

The Linguistic Evidence 660

The Archaeological Evidence 660

KEY CONTROVERSY The Rank Revolution 661

**Regionalism and Complexity in Amazonia,
c. 1–1500 CE** 662

The Lower Amazon 662

KEY CONTROVERSY Amazonian Mound Builders 663

KEY CONTROVERSY “Amazonian Dark Earths” and
Anthropogenic Landscapes 664

KEY THEME: URBANISM Amazonian Urbanism? 665

The Central Amazon 666

The Upper Amazon 667

The Orinoco and the Caribbean 667

The Southern Amazon 667

Summary and Conclusions 669

Further Reading 669

19 COMPLEX SOCIETIES OF NORTH AMERICA 670

George R. Milner, The Pennsylvania State University, and W. H. Wills, University of New Mexico

Eastern Woodlands 673

Adena and Hopewell: The Early and Middle Woodland Period, c. 800 BCE–400 CE 673

Pervasive Intergroup Connections 675

KEY SITE Hopewell 676

Establishing Food-Producing Economies 677

Late Woodland Period, c. 400–1000 CE 677

Changes in Social Relationships and Diets 678

Mississippian Period, c. 1000–1650 CE 678

Integral Roles of Mounds and Burials 678

KEY CONTROVERSY The Size and Influence of Cahokia 680

How People Lived 681

Northern and Eastern Periphery, c. 1000–1650 CE 682

Southwest 683

Preclassic and Classic Hohokam, c. 700–1450 CE 683

KEY DISCOVERY Hohokam Ball Courts 685

KEY THEME: SOCIAL INEQUALITY Identifying Social Distinctions in North America 686

Pueblo Villages on the Colorado Plateau 686

Agricultural Foundations 686

KEY THEME: MIGRATION Movement and Abandonment in North America 687

Pueblo I, c. 750–900 CE 687

The Great Kiva 688

Pueblo II, c. 900–1150 CE 688

The Chaco Phenomenon 688

KEY DISCOVERY Chocolate at Pueblo Bonito 690

Pueblo III, c. 1150–1300 CE 690

Pueblo IV, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries CE: Abandonment of the Colorado Plateau 691

Pottery Innovations and Group Expression 692

Population Decline 692

Plains 693

Village Life 693

Widespread Exchange 694

Pacific Coast 695

Southern California 695

Pacific Northwest 695

Life in Villages 695

KEY SITE Ozette 697

Warfare and Population Loss 697

Arctic and Subarctic 698

Dorset and Thule Cultures 698

KEY SITE L'Anse aux Meadows 699

Two Worlds Collide 700

Summary and Conclusions 701

Further Reading and Suggested Websites 702

20 THE HUMAN PAST: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT 703

Chris Scarre, Durham University

Demographic Increase 704

Intensification and Degradation 705

Biological Exchange 706

Climate Change and Human Society 707

The Wider Relevance of Archaeology 708

Climate Change 708

Domestication 708

Urbanization 708

Social Inequality 709

Migration 709

GLOSSARY 710

REFERENCES 715

SOURCES OF ILLUSTRATIONS 746

INDEX 749

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PREFACE

Chris Scarre

When we apply for a driving license or a passport, we interact as citizens with a complex structure of government and administration through which nation states function. When we buy food at the supermarket, we are the last link in a complicated organization that grows and ships food around the world to meet our needs. But our ancestors 20,000 years ago did not have access to government agencies nor to organized systems of food production and the many other things we take for granted in modern society. They lived in small groups, made their own clothing and tools, and found their own food. It is only by understanding our past that we can hope to grasp how the world—and human society—has come to be as it is today: a network of states and cities, societies and individuals, underpinned by beliefs, knowledge, and traditions. Historical records take us back only so far—indeed in many parts of the world, little more than a few centuries. The human past is much longer, richer, and more diverse, stretching back 3 million years or so to our early tool-making ancestors on the African savanna. How humans colonized the rest of the world, how farming came to support larger and more complex societies, how the first cities and states arose, and how a diverse mosaic of cultures came to populate the habitable world, is the story told by archaeology.

The aim of this volume is to provide an authoritative guide to those 3 million years, in a way that is accessible both to beginning students in archaeology and anthropology and to any interested reader; the book assumes no prior knowledge of the field of prehistory. Today, in the twenty-first century, new technologies and discoveries, as well as the increasing scale of archaeological research, are allowing us to see the patterns of the human past in fuller outline and in greater detail than ever before. What archaeologists have long sought to achieve—to construct a truly worldwide picture of the development of human societies, in all their diversity and across enormous spans of time—we are now able to do with new confidence.

The growing pace of archaeological research is reflected in the development of university and college courses, and that, in turn, has triggered the production of several textbooks on world prehistory. Many seek to cover the entire field of the human past under the pen of a single author. These are valiant undertakings, increasingly so in an age when the rate of archaeological publication has reached levels that make it difficult even for regional specialists to keep up with new work in their own area. *The Human Past*, diversely, is a multi-authored text, with each chapter the work of an acknowledged expert in his or her field.

Our twenty-four authors are drawn from North America, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. Specializations range from the first stone tools made by early hominins in Africa, to the complex societies of such disparate cultures as those of the Romans, Polynesians, and Aztecs. Together these scholars cover the vast panorama of the

human past with a level of detailed understanding and expertise that is unrivaled in any other textbook of world prehistory. *The Human Past* thus has an authority that is beyond the reach of any single-authored work: the texts are based on first-hand knowledge of the areas and issues under discussion, and represent an accessible, up-to-date, and uniquely reliable account of what we know today about the origins and development of human society.

New in this Edition

The study of world prehistory is a rapidly moving field with new discoveries reported weekly in the news and on television. Some of these are spectacular, others profound in their consequences for the understanding of how human societies have developed—that is to say, how we come to be who we are today.

This new fourth edition of *The Human Past* incorporates these advances in knowledge, building on the three previous editions. Major revisions for this edition include:

- Streamlined and updated chapter text;
- Thoroughly revised design, illustration program, and timelines;
- A brand-new chapter, Chapter 5 “The Origins, Antiquity, and Dispersal of the First Americans,” written by David J. Meltzer;
- Archaeological methods assembled together in Chapter 1;
- New Key Themes boxes throughout the book, which focus attention on five common issues in human history: **climate change, domestication, migration, social inequality, and urbanism.**

This represents the third comprehensive revision of our original book, and each member of our international team of authors has played a central and active part in reviewing and rewriting their own chapters and sections. Their input ensures that *The Human Past* continues to be a leading textbook of world prehistory, and the most authoritative and up-to-date account available of the development of human societies from early hominins to states and empires.

New discoveries continue to open fascinating windows on the past, and to alter and improve our understanding of early human societies. The most important of them are given box feature treatment in this new edition. They include the hominin fossils found in Dinaledi Cave in South Africa (Chapter 3) suggesting a new species, *Homo naledi*; signs of administration and the impact of agriculture in the Neolithic farming villages of Tell Sabi Abyad I in Northern Syria (Chapter 7) and Jiahu in China (Chapter 8); evidence for the movement of southern Chinese rice farmers into Vietnam at the important site of Man Bac (Chapter 8); and the surprising location for an urban settlement at

Old Jarma, in the Libyan Sahara (Chapter 11). These discoveries are not only important in themselves, but also have significance for our broader understanding of social and cultural change and interaction.

Some of the most important recent advances have come from the application of scientific techniques to archaeological questions, and in particular the analysis of ancient DNA extracted from human and animal remains. Chapter 5, the new chapter on the peopling of the Americas, explains how only in the last decade has technology enabled us to map modern and ancient genomes, and how this has been used to reveal details about the ancestry of the first Native Americans; we also report on new genetic evidence for the migration of the Yamnaya people from the Eurasian steppes into Eastern and Central Europe (Chapter 12); and we learn how new mitochondrial DNA analysis is impacting hypotheses about Austronesian dispersal (Chapter 9).

These new discoveries and insights should not blind us to the fact that archaeology draws upon the emotive material of cultural heritage. Growing pressure on world resources constitutes a major threat to the archaeological heritage. Conflict and poverty exacerbate the problem, as in Iraq where instability following the Iraq War in 2003 led to widespread looting of archaeological sites. Involving local communities in their own archaeology is a crucial step in reconnecting people to their own heritage. Indigenous archaeologists are increasingly playing a prominent part in exploring and developing archaeological programmes and perspectives. The picture of the human past that we present in this fourth edition is the fruit of new research in the laboratory and in the field, but is inspired by the firm belief that by understanding world prehistory, we gain a fuller and richer understanding of ourselves, and of the diversity of human experience past and present.

Organization of the Book

The volume is divided into two main sections. Part I (Chapters 2–5) focuses on human origins and developments up to the end of the last Ice Age—the period conventionally known as the Paleolithic. The second, longer, section (Part II, Chapters 6–19) covers the postglacial period, the Holocene, from 11,600 years ago to recent times.

The book begins with an introduction (Chapter 1) that presents and explains a number of key concepts: what the disciplines of archaeology and prehistory comprise and how they originated; the ways in which archaeologists seek to learn about the human past (methods and techniques); and how they attempt to interpret archaeological remains in order to understand how societies have developed and changed (archaeological theory). The next four chapters cover the Paleolithic period, beginning in Chapter 2 with hominin origins in Africa. Chapter 3 describes the dispersal of early humans across much of the Old World and the development of new species of the human lineage, new lifestyles, and new technologies. Chapter 4 covers the emergence and spread of fully modern humans; and Chapter 5 is a new chapter, exploring the first peopling and early prehistory of the Americas. Chapter 6 prefaces the second section of the book, setting

out the main themes of the postglacial period around the world: climate change; the origins of farming; the inexorable rise in human population density; and the development of the social complexity that underpinned the emergence of cities and states. These themes are highlighted in the region-by-region chapters that follow.

The arrangement of material both within and between chapters is broadly chronological. Chapters 7–15 take the reader on a world tour of Holocene developments, beginning in Southwest Asia and proceeding via East Asia, Australasia, and the Americas to Africa, Europe, and South Asia. The adjustment of human societies to postglacial environments, and the development of the new food-producing economies, provides a unifying theme across these chapters. The development of complex societies is also described: in Africa (Chapter 11), Southwest Asia (Chapter 13), the Mediterranean lands (Chapter 14), and South Asia (Chapter 15). More recent centuries are covered in Chapters 16–19, which describe regional developments in East Asia and particularly in the New World.

This book provides a comprehensive introduction to world prehistory, and could form the basis of a complete undergraduate program. It could also be used more selectively, by taking a series of chapters to explore a particular theme or region. Thus Chapters 5, 10, and 17–19 provide an account of American prehistory from the Paleoindians to European colonization; alternatively, a comparative study of state societies might draw on Chapters 13, 15, 17, and 18 for a selection of Old and New World examples (Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, Mesoamerica, and Andean South America).

Within a multi-authored work of this kind there is necessarily less scope for a personal perspective, but the book is given coherence by its focus on key themes of climate change, domestication, migration, social inequality, and urbanism. The final chapter brings these themes together in a brief retrospective that also looks to the lessons of the human past for the human future, in particular in terms of climate change and demographic growth. These form, arguably, the most important message that archaeology offers to the present world, though their implications are all too rarely taken seriously by planners and politicians. For the story of human evolution is not just about our past; it is intensely relevant to the most burning issues of contemporary humankind.

Our final image, the calving of an enormous iceberg from the end of the Petermann glacier in Greenland in 2010 [20.4], graphically illustrates the constantly changing environment in which we live. It is particularly timely since a similarly huge iceberg has recently broken away from the Larsen ice shelf in Antarctica, fuelling concerns about global warming. As archaeology reveals, climatic and environmental change have been the backdrop to the development of humans and human society over the past 3 million years, providing both challenges and opportunities. Yet archaeology is also about the small scale, about the lives and circumstances of ordinary individuals across a huge kaleidoscope of times and places.

Special Features

The specialist scholarship of *The Human Past* is supported by a series of features that make the book accessible to the widest variety of readers:

Methods and Techniques. New for this edition, Chapter 1 introduces some of today's most important scientific techniques used to date archaeological remains and to reconstruct ancient environments, including such current technologies as GIS and LiDAR survey, and the study of ancient DNA.

Timelines. Located at the beginning of each chapter and newly designed in full color for this edition, timelines allow students easily to identify the periods, peoples, events, sites, and artifacts for the area under discussion, and the chronological terminology commonly employed in each region ("Formative," "Neolithic," etc.).

Maps and Diagrams. Each chapter is accompanied by a map showing the location of major sites and regional or cultural groupings. Additional maps and a wealth of plans, diagrams, and photographs illustrate specific themes or processes. Archaeology is an extremely visual subject, a fact that the high level of illustration in this volume serves to underscore.

Box Features. Highlighted in each chapter, these fall into four categories: "Key Sites," "Key Controversies," "Key Discoveries," and, new for this edition, "Key Themes." "Key Sites" describe important individual sites or finds in greater detail than is possible within the main text. "Key Controversies" supplement the chapter texts by focusing on such important areas of debate as the evolution of language, the domestication of maize, or the origins of African ironworking. "Key Discoveries" include discussions of breakthroughs in long-standing archaeological enquiries, for example the origins of Chinese writing or the Mesoamerican ball game, as well as descriptions of such world-famous discoveries as the Chinchorro mummies of Chile, representing the world's earliest deliberate mummification, and of the Alpine "Iceman" popularly known as "Ötzi." "Key Theme" boxes are introduced in Chapter 1, and appear in every chapter. Written by the authors, the themes link global regions and highlight issues still of critical relevance at the present day, the subject of each box belonging to one of five topics: Climate Change, Domestication, Migration, Social Inequality, and Urbanism.

Summaries. Provided at the end of each chapter, these give an overview of the chapter contents and reiterate the main conclusions. Links between chapters are indicated, making it easy to follow the developments of a particular region from their earliest appearance to later complexity.

Further Reading and References. Each chapter closes with suggestions for further reading: carefully selected titles that will enable students to amplify and deepen their understanding of the key themes of that chapter. Full information for publications cited in each chapter is provided in the chapter-by-chapter References at the end of the volume.

Suggested Websites. A list of recommended websites, chosen for particular usefulness, clarity, and scholarly reliability, is provided at the end of chapters where appropriate.

Glossary. As far as possible, specialist terms are explained where they first appear in the book; in addition, a glossary is provided at the end of the volume for easy reference. Glossary terms are emboldened at first mention in the book; bold text is also used to draw attention to key sites within each chapter.

Student and Instructor Resources

A website has been designed to accompany *The Human Past*, Fourth Edition, offering students a range of materials to reinforce what they have learned from *The Human Past* and to help them prepare for tests: <http://college.thamesandhudsonusa.com/college/humanpast4>

The following are provided for each chapter: chapter summaries and key concepts; practice quizzes; glossary; web links; and flash cards to revise key terms. For this edition we have also prepared a test bank of questions that instructors can customize for tests and exams, and images and diagrams (as JPEGs and as captioned PowerPoint slides) for use in class; we have also provided a selection of videos: <http://college.thamesandhudsonusa.com/college/humanpast4>

Readers outside North America should email education@thameshudson.co.uk for further information.

The Human Past, Fourth Edition is also available as an e-book. Visit nortonebooks.com for more information.

A Note on Dating

For the Paleolithic period (Chapters 2–5) dates are given as "years ago" (years before the present). The other dates used in this volume have wherever possible been converted to calendar years (BCE/CE). For an explanation of calibration and radiocarbon dating, see p. 31.

Reviewers

In preparing this fourth edition of the book, we benefited from feedback from Marcia-Anne Dobres, University of Maine; Tina Greenfield and Haskel Greenfield at The University of Winnipeg; and Marissa Wojcinski, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Thanks should also go to reviewers of previous editions of *The Human Past*.

1 INTRODUCTION: THE STUDY OF THE HUMAN PAST

Chris Scarre, Durham University

What Is Archaeology? 25

The Relevance of World Archaeology 27

A Brief History of Archaeology 28

Methods and Techniques 31

With contributions from Nicholas Toth and Kathy Schick;
Richard Klein; Paul Pettitt; and George R. Milner and
W. H. Wills

Archaeological Theory 35

KEY THEMES

Humans in Long-Term Perspective 38

The Responsibilities of Archaeology 41

Summary and Conclusions 42

Further Reading and Suggested Websites 43



Colossal statue of an Egyptian pharaoh discovered at Heliopolis in eastern Cairo in March 2017. It was originally thought to represent Ramses II, a famous ruler of the thirteenth century BCE, but a **hieroglyphic** inscription on the back bears the name of Psamtik I, an important pharaoh of the seventh century BCE.

Modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) have been living on the Earth for 200,000 years or more, an immense span of time when compared with the normal compass of human experience. Human ancestors go back even further, to the earliest so-called hominins of Africa 6 million years ago, or to the first of those who made stone tools, c. 2.5 million years ago. Archaeology, by contrast, is a young subject.

Far from being secondary to history, archaeology is our main source of knowledge for the human past, covering literate and non-literate peoples alike. It is the only field of enquiry that allows the broad canvas of the human story to be viewed as a whole. It illustrates the full diversity of human culture and society and shows how humans have changed and adapted, both to such external factors as climate and environment, and to new social circumstances and technologies. It reveals the degree to which humans have created themselves, in the form of culture and innovation, and it studies how they coped with the demands of subsistence and technology. These factors remain pertinent today, and a study of prehistory gives us a unique opportunity to examine such processes using a long-term perspective. Before exploring the range of prehistoric societies that make up our shared history, this first chapter introduces how we have been able to reconstruct world prehistory through the various methods and theories of archaeology.

What Is Archaeology?

Archaeology can be defined as the study of the human past from material remains. It is often considered (especially in North America) as a sub-field within the discipline of **anthropology**. Anthropology—the study of humans—includes a number of other sub-fields:

- **Cultural anthropology** (or social anthropology), the study of the diversity of living societies, often based on the work of ethnographers who live for a time within those societies and observe their behavior at first hand. For example, a cultural anthropologist may study the lives of the !Kung in Namibia

or the Dogon in Mali. Cultural anthropology has enriched our understanding of the diversity of human communities. Traditionally, ethnographers have focused on non-Western societies, but increasingly today they are turning their attention to specific groups within Western societies, for example immigrant communities or inner-city groups.

- **Biological anthropology**, the study of human evolution and physiology. Biological anthropology includes the study of fossil and skeletal remains of early humans, which feature predominantly in Chapters 2–4. It also includes human adaptation to environment and disease, including patterns of nutrition, fertility, and genetics.
- **Linguistic anthropology**, the study of world languages, their development, and interrelationships. Studying the relationships between languages can offer valuable insights into how peoples have traveled across the globe, or interacted with each other. We will find excellent examples of this in the case of the Polynesians in Chapter 9.

Archaeology is the fourth of these sub-fields of anthropology. It is famous for such exceptional discoveries as the “royal” tombs of Sipán in Peru (Chapter 18) or Qin Shi Huangdi’s pottery army in China (Chapter 16) [1.1]; these catch the headlines but are only one small element of the story that archaeology tells us about the human past. What we can learn about the details of daily life is often equally intriguing and arguably more significant. One of the greatest advantages of archaeology is that it deals with the rich and poor, literate and illiterate, the ordinary and the exceptional, dependent simply on the survival of evidence and the attentions of archaeologists themselves. The result is a rich and insightful account of human history.

1.1 Terracotta army. Discovered by accident in 1974, the army of life-size terracotta warriors at Xian in China was intended to protect the tomb of the first emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi. Pit 1, shown here, contained 3,210 armored infantrymen, while a second pit held 1,400 cavalry, chariots, and crossbowmen.





In terms of **chronology**, many consider that archaeology begins when early **hominins** first began to create material culture (stone tools) some 2.5 million years ago (Chapter 2). Material culture is often presented as one of the hallmarks of humanness; several other **species** use found objects (e.g., twigs or stones) to probe for food or to break open nuts, but none manufactures tools on a regular basis. The reliance on material culture, on tools, is hence distinctively human, and has given humans a substantial advantage in coping with a wide range of environments. Without key items of material culture (e.g., clothing and shelter) humans would still be restricted in distribution to the tropical regions, where our closest primate relations, the gorillas and chimpanzees, live today. It is material culture that has allowed humans to populate the globe, and to develop large and complex settlements and societies. Material culture also makes humans what we are today: we are in many respects the product of the material world we have created. Thus, in a real sense, the rudimentary stone tools made in Africa 2.5 million years ago were a vital step in enabling the development of human potential, the results of which we see around us in the twenty-first century.

But archaeology is not just about technology. The material remains form part of the broader category of human culture that also includes such non-material traces as oral literature, dance, song, belief, myth, and ritual practices. And the remains of material culture are also rich in evidence about the social, economic, symbolic, and religious life of past human societies: what we might call the human experience. Recent decades have seen a growth of interest in **cognitive archaeology**—the study of religious and symbolic behavior and of the development of the human mind. Powerful structures of belief and understanding underpin the ways in which humans comprehend the world, and these are frequently manifest in imagery or traces of ritual

1.2 The Churning of the Sea of Milk, from the eastern gallery of the twelfth-century temple-mausoleum of Angkor Wat in Cambodia. The scene is taken from the Hindu creation myth and depicts gods and demons pulling on the body of a giant snake in order to churn the cosmic sea and release the elixir of immortality.

practice. Carvings and figurines may provide direct representations of mythical beings and religious ceremonies [1.2]. Scenes in Egyptian temples and tombs, for example, show deities weighing the souls of the dead, while Angkor temples (Chapter 16) depict elements of the Khmer pantheon.

Burials, the ways in which people have disposed of their dead, indicate a growing concern with identity and the afterlife across the millennia. The occasional burials of the Middle and Upper Paleolithic testify to the origins of human feelings of respect in the treatment of the dead. In more recent periods, the deceased may be inhumed (buried) or cremated, and equipped (sometimes lavishly) with objects and furnishings to assist life in the afterworld, or the journey there. The living, too, may be represented in statuary and art, throwing light on social practices and political power. Popular beliefs and household rituals are as much a part of archaeology's domain as the lavish stage-managed cults of **state**-sponsored temples and priesthoods.

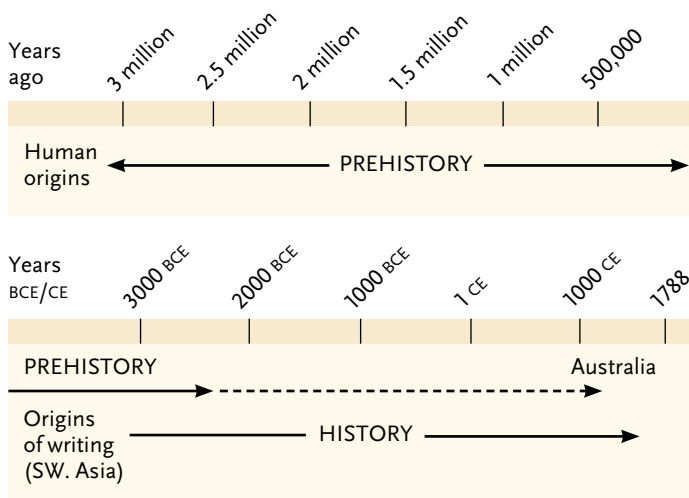
Prehistory vs. History

Archaeology has, in chronological terms, no upper limit. It does not end with Columbus's expedition to the Americas in 1492, nor with the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is not a method exclusively for the study of the *early* human story, but of the *whole* of the human past. It can as well be applied to contemporary societies as to those of distant

millennia, and to industrialized societies as much as to developing, non-Western ones. Indeed, one particularly flourishing sub-field of the subject is devoted to industrial archaeology—the archaeology of the Industrial Revolution and later, focusing not only on factories and machines, but also on the housing and living conditions of ordinary families of the time. There have also been a number of projects on the archaeology of modern Western society, one example being the Arizona garbage project, which studied the contents of domestic trash cans from Tucson, Arizona (Rathje and Murphy 1992). More recent still is the archaeological analysis of the twentieth-century Jodrell Bank radio telescope in the UK (Edmonds 2010).

If archaeology is essentially an approach to human societies based on the study of material culture, there is nonetheless an important distinction to be drawn between historic and prehistoric archaeology. History is the study of the human past from written records (or from recorded oral traditions). Since writing was first invented less than 5,500 years ago in Southwest Asia, the whole of the human story before that time falls within the period of **prehistory** [1.3]. As writing, however, was adopted at different times in different places, so the transition from prehistoric to historic (text-based) archaeology (Little 1992) occurs at diverse stages. In western Europe, for example, history proper begins with the Greeks and Romans in the south, and with the Middle Ages in the north. This transition is sometimes further complicated by a shadowy protohistoric period; here, archaeology continues to provide the primary source of information for those early societies where writing was known, but used only for limited purposes.

1.3 Prehistoric and historical archaeology. Writing was invented in Southwest Asia around 5,500 years ago; prehistory, the period before written records, covers a vast time span, for which material remains form our only evidence. Because writing was adopted at different times around the world, the transition from prehistory to history also varies.



The Relevance of World Archaeology

We live today in a global age, when all cities and regions of the world are bound together, and where cultures and ideologies meet in diverse, multi-ethnic societies. Yet there is still a profound ignorance about the more remote segments of the human story, those lying furthest back in time or in regions that have been relatively little explored. This is all the more surprising given the public interest in ancient sites and remains; many Europeans and North Americans, for example, now combine a few weeks on a beach with a visit to Maya ruins or Mycenaean citadels.

Archaeology, too, is global in scope, telling us about both literate and non-literate societies, redressing the imbalance of a document-based history. Striking examples of this can be found in Australia and southern Africa, both areas without any written historical record prior to the arrival of the Europeans, and where archaeology now demonstrates a rich prehistoric past.

The study of world prehistory also encourages us to view human development in long-term perspective. This can be seen most obviously in the early stages of human evolution, where the gradual expansion in human settlement and the ability to cope with varied and changing environments are major themes. The broad perspective of prehistory presents a similarly long-term view of human interaction with the environment, and allows us to pose key questions about the origins of agriculture, the development of cities, and various other phenomena that emerged, apparently independently, in different parts of the world. This perspective is all the more important since it was agriculture that laid the foundation of the complex societies, the urbanization, and states that have been a prominent feature of recent centuries.

Thus, world prehistory is both enlightening and empowering. It is enlightening in that it offers a broad perspective, enabling local and regional developments to be better understood. It also allows events and circumstances in the recent past or at the present day to be set within the context of human developments stretching back over hundreds or thousands of years. It is empowering in that it documents the whole human past and is not restricted to dominant political players, such as literate states and empires, with their rich **iconography**, military strength, and historical records. It tells us how the Bantu spread into southern Africa while the Roman empire rose and fell, 2,500 km (1,500 miles) to the north, entirely oblivious to the major population movements further south. It also documents the lives of ordinary people—how they farmed or herded, what they ate and made, how they buried their dead—subjects on which conventional historical sources have relatively little to say. It is also increasingly enabling us to rectify the serious imbalance that has generally emphasized male histories and roles and disregarded those of females; the recent growth of **gender archaeology** is throwing remarkable new light on the lives of women in prehistoric and early historic societies.

A Brief History of Archaeology

Renaissance Beginnings

The origins of archaeology lie some 500 years ago in Europe, during the Renaissance [1.4] (Trigger 2006). Medieval scholarship had been constrained by the authority accorded to certain key texts that had been handed down from the ancient world. Chief among these were the Bible and the writings of Classical authors, especially the fourth-century BCE Greek philosopher Aristotle.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth century a series of key developments came together to create the underpinnings of modern Western science. One of those was the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the mid-fifteenth century. Books became cheaper and more readily available, and accompanied a gradual spread of literacy. Reliance on ancient texts also was steadily supplanted by new knowledge derived from direct observation and experimentation. At the same time, European economic expansion led to overseas voyages, which brought knowledge of distant and diverse societies. The Portuguese explored the coast of Africa, and Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope to discover the monsoon route to India in 1498. Six years earlier, Christopher Columbus had successfully crossed the central Atlantic and reached the Caribbean islands. Columbus's achievement was soon followed by European landfalls on the Central American mainland, which set in train the tragic effects of conquest and disease that devastated the indigenous societies of native America.



The voyages of discovery brought back to Europe new information and a new curiosity about human societies and technology that fed directly into the understanding of the European past. Comparisons were drawn between the peoples met with in the newly encountered lands, and the prehistoric occupants of Europe; John White, for example, produced images of so-called “ancient Britons” with body painting based directly on his watercolors of the Native North Americans [1.5, 1.6] he had seen in Virginia in 1585 (Moser 1998).



1.4 (Above) Renaissance rediscovery of Classical antiquity. Maerten van Heemskerck (1498–1574) was a north European artist who in the 1530s spent several years in Italy, where he was inspired by the ruins of Roman buildings. These appear as the background of many of his paintings and engravings, as in this self-portrait in front of the Colosseum in Rome.

1.5, 1.6 Early ethnography. Artist John White accompanied Sir Walter Raleigh on his voyage to establish the colony at Roanoke in Virginia in 1585. He recorded indigenous people along with local fauna and flora in a series of watercolors. After returning to England thirteen months later, these watercolors—for example the North American chief (left)—inspired his imaginary depictions of the pre-Roman inhabitants of Britain, such as the Pictish warrior (far left).

Advances in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: The First Excavations

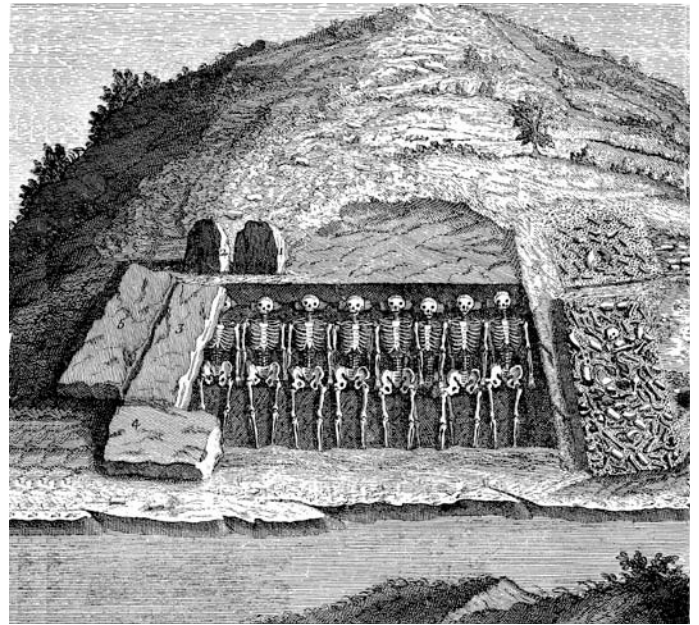
It was Europeans who undertook these world voyages, and so Europeans who were first faced with the full perspective of global human diversity. Archaeology, however, was initially focused on their own lands of northern and western Europe, and only later became a means of exploring the pasts of other peoples [1.7]. The first serious investigations of British prehistoric monuments began in the seventeenth century, with John Aubrey's descriptions and plans of Stonehenge and Avebury in southern England. Systematic excavation began only in the late eighteenth century. A pioneering example was the excavation of Native American burial mounds undertaken by Thomas Jefferson in 1784 (Willey and Sabloff 1993).

These early archaeological enquiries were innovative for their time, but were unable to overcome the most fundamental problem of prehistory: that of **chronology**. In much of western Europe, scholars could chart a historical sequence back to the Roman conquests of the first century BCE or CE. Roman authors including Caesar told of the native peoples who were conquered, and sometimes of those who lay just beyond the edges of the empire. Archaeologists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were increasingly able to recognize that many of the remains they were studying were pre-Roman in date, but had no way of establishing their true age. The problem was compounded by biblical scholars, who set the age of the earth at around only 6,000 years old.

Developments in the Nineteenth Century: Understanding Chronology and Evolution

It was during the nineteenth century that the problem of chronology began to be resolved and the study of prehistoric archaeology was finally born (Daniel 1975; Trigger 2006; Diaz Andreu 2007). Early in the century, archaeological materials began to be sorted into sequences by means of their technology: stone tools had preceded metal ones, and among the latter, bronze had preceded iron. The **Three Age System** of Stone, Bronze, and Iron was established. It was widely used within Europe by the middle years of the nineteenth century, though it is important to observe that it was not applied to other continents—Africa, Australia, or the Americas—where different chronological terms were developed.

Closer study of the **artifacts** led to increasing subdivision of the European “three ages” on the basis both of technology and style. The Stone Age was subdivided into an Old Stone Age or Paleolithic (with tools exclusively of chipped or flaked stone) and a New Stone Age or Neolithic (with tools of polished stone). The Bronze Age and Iron Age, too, were each subdivided into Early, Middle, and Late. These typological methods made it possible to sort objects into sequences that could be checked by excavation and thus provide a **relative chronology**. For example, did the different types follow each other in correct order in successive



1.7 The growth of antiquarian interest. Accurate surveys of European prehistoric monuments were first undertaken in the seventeenth century, as it came to be appreciated that careful observation and recording could yield much additional information about the character and purpose of these structures. Toward the end of the century excavations began to be undertaken, as here in 1685 at the tomb of Cocherel in northern France.

layers? These approaches did not, however, reveal exact ages, nor the length of the different phases or stages.

A crucial change in understanding of the human past came in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, with three interlinked developments (Daniel 1975; Grayson 1983). First, was the demonstration in the 1830s that early human chipped stone tools could be found in the gravels of European rivers associated with remains of such extinct species as mammoth and woolly rhinoceros. This indicated the great age of the human tools. Second, was the chance discovery of a premodern skeleton in a limestone cave in the Neander Valley in western Germany in 1856. This was the first fossil hominin—a Neanderthal [1.8, see p. 30]—to be generally recognized as such, and gave evidence of the development of modern humans from earlier, archaic human forms.

The third key event was the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, followed by his *Descent of Man* in 1871 (Bowler 1990). In 1831, the young Charles Darwin (1809–1882) had embarked on a voyage of survey and exploration in the *Beagle*, which was mapping the coast of South America. His observations of the diversity and interrelationships of the species of plants and animals he encountered and recorded led him, in the following decades, to recognize the key role of natural selection in shaping the development of individual species over time (Chapter 2). Successful individuals within a species would



1.8 The first fossil evidence for human ancestry. The skull cap and associated bones discovered in 1856 at the Feldhofer Cave in the Neander Valley of western Germany were the first direct fossil evidence for human ancestry to be recognized as such, though it was dismissed by skeptics for many years. Further discoveries in the 1880s and early 1900s finally laid these objections to rest.

be more likely to reproduce and pass on their characteristics to their offspring, and thus features that conferred an advantage—a longer beak, a different coloring—would spread through a population. Ultimately, a single species might be divided into sub-groups, each of which was increasingly specialized and successful within its particular environmental niche. This could lead eventually to the division of one species into two or more separate species, each of which would become increasingly different from the others as they respectively underwent further adaptations to their environment. Darwin’s theory was revolutionary in suggesting that the diversity of life was not the result of divine creation, but of natural processes that could still be observed in the present day. Furthermore, what was true for animals could also be applied to humans.

Darwin’s views brought him into fierce conflict with others, who continued to maintain that the account of divine creation contained within the Bible was correct. Gradually, however, his theory succeeded in winning general acceptance as the most persuasive explanation for the development of the diversity of life [1.9]. It came to be appreciated that humans, along with other species, are not fixed in their form or behavior, but are constantly changing in response to the pressures and circumstances around them. The model of evolution through natural selection was

1.9 The theory of evolution. Charles Darwin’s theory of the origin of species through natural selection presented a powerful challenge to the Christian religious belief in a divine creation, but provided the context in which human evolution and the development of early societies could be understood. Darwin’s earliest drawing of the Tree of Life dates to 1837, but his book *On the Origin of Species* was not published until 1859.

given further support by advances in genetics, beginning with Austrian botanist Gregor Mendel’s plant-breeding experiments in the 1860s, which showed how particular characteristics are passed from parent to offspring. With the rapidly developing knowledge of DNA in the past fifty years, geneticists are now able to explain in detail how Darwinian natural selection operates at the level of the genetic code.

For some, however, these new understandings are unwelcome, and a number of people continue to believe in a creationist view: that the world, and all the species within it, were created in the form we see them today by divine action. Archaeology allows us to demonstrate that creationist views, though deeply held, are incompatible with the evidence of the past that is available to us. The fossil record of human evolution, with its numerous and increasingly well-dated remains of earlier hominin species, indicates clearly the steady **morphological** and behavioral change that preceded the development of the first modern humans between 350,000 and 200,000 years ago. Nor did natural selection stop at that point: to this day we are still continuously (if almost imperceptibly) changing in response to selective pressures.

Darwin’s thesis of human origins, coupled with the discovery of the Neanderthal fossils and the early stone tools, suggested that the human story went back much further than had previously been supposed, and could certainly not be accommodated within the 6,000 years offered by the biblical time frame. This new knowledge allowed for the study of human prehistory to begin in earnest.

