

CHAPTER 1-BEFORE HISTORY

This first chapter deals with a number of large concepts that will help set the stage for the rest of world history. The rise of Homo sapiens (“thinking man”) and their migration from east Africa to the corners of the planet is the start of pre-history and subsequently history. The use of tools (knives, spears, bow and arrow, fire) by Homo sapiens marks the start of changes in the natural environment. Paleolithic (paleo=old, lithic=stone) societies were made up of hunter-gatherer peoples. Since they were constantly moving, they had few possessions, tended to live in small groups (30-50 people), and lived a fairly egalitarian (equal) existence. In the Paleolithic era we see the use of language increase dramatically, as well as the beginnings of art and animistic religions.

The Neolithic era (neo=new, lithic=stone) marks the transition from hunter-gatherers to agricultural societies. This first “agricultural revolution,” often referred to as the Neolithic Revolution, was the beginning of a time of major changes in human culture. The systemic cultivation of plants by women, and the domestication of animals by men meant not only more food, but also a shift away from egalitarianism between genders. The Neolithic Revolution was not a simple or singular event. Slash-and-burn agriculture led to the cultivation of new foods, but also contributed to the movement of peoples that had been part of the hunter-gatherer societies. What the Neolithic Revolution did was to provide not only more food but also a constant supply. This increased food supply allowed populations to grow, spurred on the development of villages, developed a group of specialized laborers (since not everyone now had to be a farmer), and in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, led to the rise of cities.

Key Concept 1.1. Big Geography and the Peopling of the Earth

- I. Archeological evidence indicates that during the Paleolithic era, hunting-foraging bands of humans gradually migrated from their origin in East Africa to Eurasia, Australia and the Americas, adapting their technology and cultures to new climate regions.

Key Concept 1.2. The Neolithic Revolution and Early Agricultural Societies

- II. Beginning about 10,000 years ago, the Neolithic Revolution led to the development of new and more complex economic and social systems.