

# CHAPTER 1 BEFORE HISTORY

## INTRODUCTION

The first chapter of *Traditions and Encounters* sets the stage for the drama of world history by presenting the major milestones in the development of humans from their earliest appearance on earth to the dawn of civilization. This chapter addresses the physical evolution of the species and their migrations throughout the globe as well as the revolutionary transformation from all humans surviving by hunting and gathering to the majority living in agricultural societies. The results of this remarkable transformation include

- An unprecedented population explosion due to the increase in the food supply
- Permanent settlement in villages and, later, in cities
- The specialization of labor, which led to the development of craft industries and other professions
- The opportunity to accumulate wealth and the resulting emergence of social class differences
- The development of fertility-based religions and the increasing elaboration of religious institutions

## OUTLINE

### **I. The evolution of *Homo sapiens***

- A. The hominids
  - 1. *Australopithecus*
    - a) Appeared in east Africa about four million to one million years ago
    - b) Walked upright on two legs; well-developed hands
    - c) Stone tools; fire later
  - 2. *Homo erectus*
    - a) 2.5 million to two hundred thousand years ago, east Africa
    - b) Large brain; sophisticated tools; definitely knew how to control fire
    - c) Developed language skills in well-coordinated hunts of large animals
    - d) Migrated to Asia and Europe; established throughout by two hundred thousand years ago
- B. *Homo sapiens*; evolved as early as two hundred thousand years ago
  - 1. Brain with large frontal regions for conscious and reflective thought

2. Spread throughout Eurasia beginning more than one hundred thousand years ago
3. Ice age land bridges enabled them to populate other continents
4. The natural environment
  - a) *Homo sapiens* used knives, spears, bows, and arrows
  - b) Brought tremendous pressure on other species

## II. Paleolithic society

- A. Economy and society of hunting and gathering peoples
  1. Economic life
    - a) Prevented individuals from accumulating private property
    - b) Lived an egalitarian existence
    - c) Lived in small bands, about thirty to fifty members in each group
  2. Big game hunting with special tools and tactics
  3. Some permanent paleolithic settlements, if area rich in resources
    - a) Natufians in eastern Mediterranean
    - b) Jomon in central Japan
    - c) Chinook in Pacific northwest area of North America
- B. Paleolithic culture
  1. Neandertal peoples
    - a) Europe and southwest Asia between one hundred thousand and thirty-five thousand years ago
    - b) Careful, deliberate burials were evidence of a capacity for emotion and feelings
  2. Cro-Magnon peoples (*Homo sapiens sapiens*)
    - a) The first human beings of fully modern type; appeared forty thousand years ago
    - b) Venus figurines—fertility
    - c) Cave paintings of animals—sympathetic magic

## III. The neolithic era and the transition to agriculture

- A. The origins of agriculture
  1. Neolithic era; new stone age; refined tools and agriculture
    - a) From about twelve thousand to six thousand years ago
    - b) Neolithic women began systematic cultivation of plants
    - c) Neolithic men began to domesticate animals
  2. Early agriculture around 9000 B.C.E.
    - a) Agriculture emerged independently in several parts of the world
    - b) Merchants, migrants, and travelers spread food knowledge

- c) Slash-and-burn cultivation involved frequent movement of farmers
  - d) Agriculture more work than hunting/gathering but steady, large supply of food
- B. Early agricultural society; population explosion caused by surplus
- 1. Emergence of villages and towns
    - a) Jericho, earliest known neolithic village
    - b) Mud huts and defensive walls
  - 2. Specialization of labor
    - a) Neolithic site of Çatal Hüyük, eight thousand people
    - b) Prehistoric craft industries: pottery, metallurgy, and textile production
  - 3. Social distinctions, due to private land ownership
- C. Neolithic culture; calendars and life cycle deities
- D. The origins of urban life
- 1. Emergence of cities, larger and more complex than villages
  - 2. Earliest cities in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, 4000 to 3500 B.C.E.