



Week 2

Prehistoric Humanity: The Palaeolithic and The Neolithic

HIST-221
History of Civilization

Atılım University



Content of today's class

1) The origins: Prehistoric humanity

The genus *homo* in the Pleolithic Age

2) Out of Africa: Early human migrations

Why did we leave our homeland «Africa»?

3) The Neolithic Age and the Agricultural Revolution

The beginnings of the transformation into civilized societies

4) Q&A and discussion

It is your turn now! Please contribute..

01

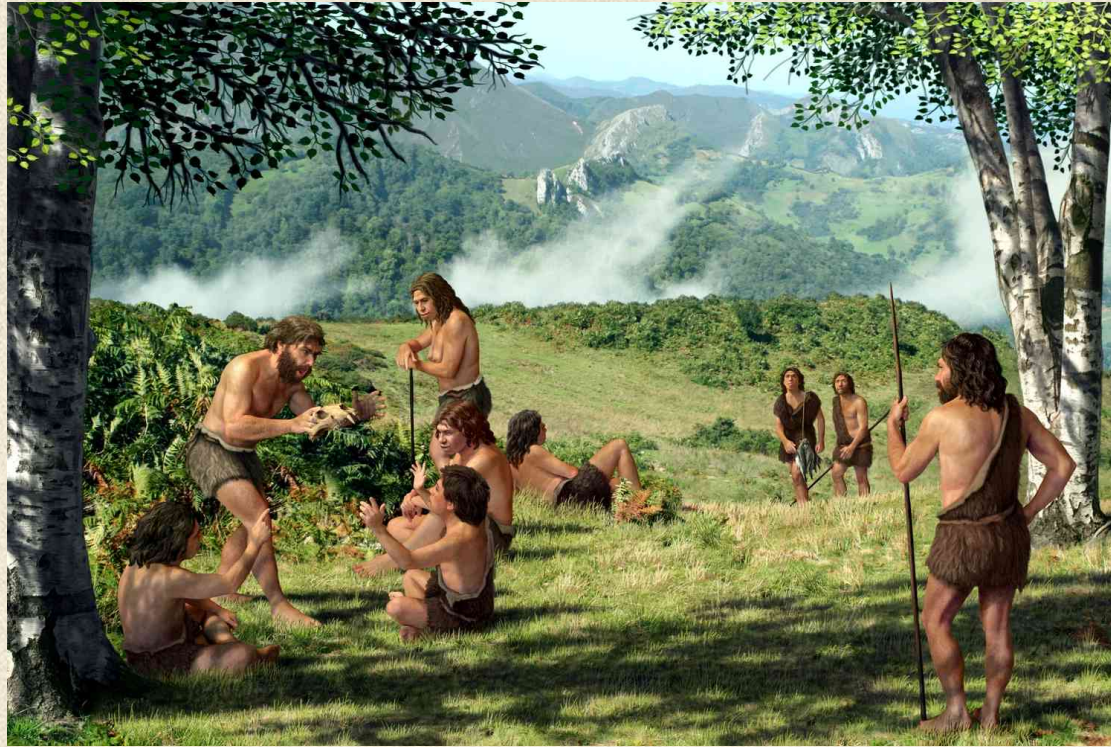
The origins: Prehistoric humanity



Humans in the Paleolithic Age

The first humans lived more than 2 million years ago, during a period we call today «prehistory» (a.k.a. before the invention of writing)





The Paleolithic Age (Old Stone Age) was the period when we, humans, were **hunter-gatherers**, moving around for food and security.

Characteristics of the Paleolithic Era – 1



Making and usage of tools

→ **Homo habilis and homo erectus made and used tools**, such as blades, axes, choppers, etc.

→ Homo sapiens made this tool making skill even more sophisticated towards the end of the Paleolithic Era.

→ **Control of fire!**

Characteristics of the Paleolithic Era - 2



Hunting-gathering

→ Hunting and gathering were the main components of the human diet.

→ **Specializations developed:** knowledge about the characteristics of different plants and herbs, when and how to consume certain plants, using plants for clothing, making medicine and bows, etc.

Characteristics of the Paleolithic Era – 3



Language and cooperation

We created a **symbolic world** through grammatical and comprehensible speech.

→ **Language allows cooperation**, discussion, conflict resolution, social network, etc.

Characteristics of the Paleolithic Era - 3



Lascaux Cave, France
c. 15,000 B.C.E.

Art and symbolism

→ Homo sapiens has (and had!) the ability to create **artistic expression**.

→ **Cave art:** Depiction of animals, scenes of hunting, and possibly spiritual and ritualistic themes in the caves.



Venus of Willendorf, Austria
c. 25,000 B.C.E.



Venus of Hohle Fels, Germany
c. 35,000-40,000 B.C.E

**Symbolic
representations related
to fertility and/or
spiritual beliefs**

Lascaux

EN ▾

MENU ≡



EXPLORE

The left wall - The Unicorn Panel





Map of Paleolithic art



02

Out of Africa: Early human migrations



Origins in Africa

- Homo sapiens emerged in Africa ca 200.000-300.000 years ago.
- Earliest evidence: East Africa (Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania)
- “Out of Africa” theory: Modern humans evolved in Africa and dispersed globally.
- Genetic studies confirm common African ancestry.



Drivers of migration

- Climate change (Ice Ages, desertification)
- Search for food and resources
- Population pressure



Dispersal around the world

- Early groups left Africa via the Sinai Peninsula and Bab-el-Mandeb Strait.
- They reached West Asia, then spread to other parts of Asia and Europe. (70,000-60,000 years ago)
- Southeast Asia and Australia reached around 50,000 years ago. (maritime migrations)
- Europe was populated by 45,00-40,000 years ago.
- Peopling of North and South America by 15,000 years ago (Increased mobility due to low sea levels, the crossing of the Bering Strait, and the migration into the American continents)

Early Migration Routes



Key outcomes of early human migrations

Dispersal around the globe

Migrations of *Homo sapiens* and the increase in human population on almost all continents

Genetic and cultural diversity

Homo sapiens interacted with other human genus such as Neanderthals and Denisovan people. → interbreeding evidence

Early human innovations

Spread of tools, fire use, and language

Environmental adaptations

Adaptation to various climate conditions, from tropical rainforests to polar cold

03

Neolithic Era and the Agricultural Revolution





Agricultural Revolution

Shift from hunting-gathering to cultivation of plants and domestication of animals began around 10,000 BCE (the earliest evident is from the Fertile Crescent)

→ Agricultural evidence in **seven different locations** on Earth that had no interaction/communication.

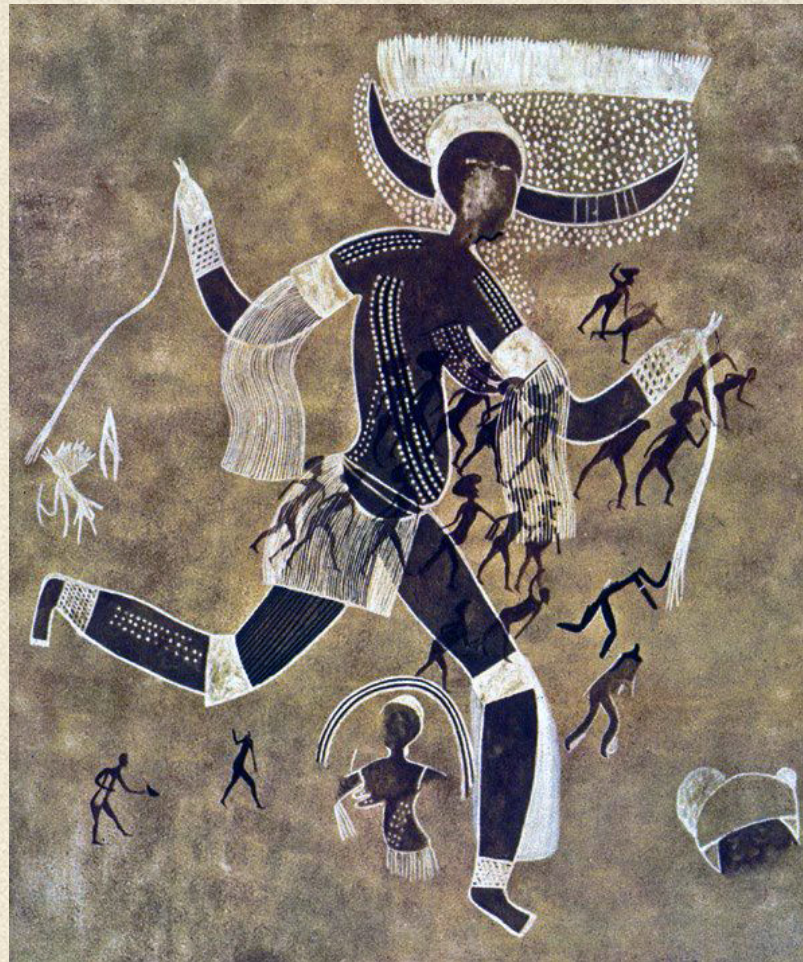
→ **Domestication of plants and animals:**

- Wheat, barley, lentils in Near East
- Rice in East Asia
- Maize and beans in the Americas
- Goats, sheep, pigs domesticated.

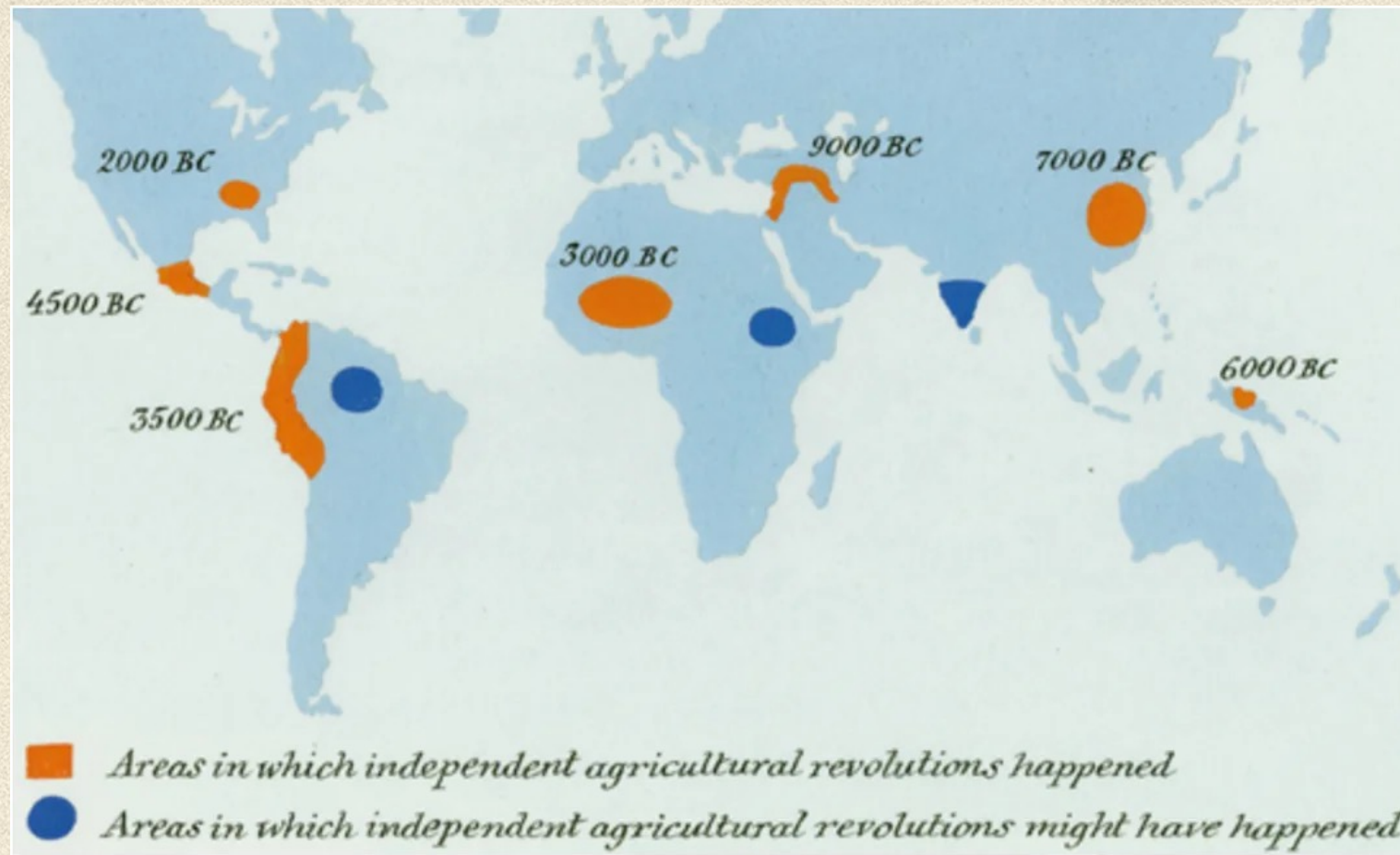
→ **Technological developments** (pottery for storage and cooking, looms and textile, advanced stone tools)

→ **Belief systems and rituals** (early communal rituals, fertility was linked to religious practices)





The Lady of Aouanrhet in the Tassili, mid-Sahara, c.3000 BCE



Characteristics of the Neolithic Era - 1



Communalism

→ Village communities shared common property of lands - **no private ownership!**

→ Food sharing was common to ensure that the **village as a whole survived and nobody suffered from hunger,** livelihood problems, etc.

Characteristics of the Neolithic Era - 2



Increase in birth rate

→ The **changes in production management** had a positive impact on the population rise.

→ In agriculture based settled village life, number of children did not pose a difficulty. On the contrary, **communities needed more people!**

→ **Solidarity in child care.**

Characteristics of the Neolithic Era – 3



Cooperation and ruling mechanisms

→ Larger and more complex communities emerged in the Neolithic.

→ Organized cooperation was necessary to respond to external threats. Over time, decision-making mechanisms needed to be established.



Çatalhöyük neolithic settlement, Konya – c.7000 B.C.E.



Jericho neolithic settlement, Palestine, c. 9000 B.C.E



Göbeklitepe, Şanlıurfa, Turkey

- Ritual and ceremony centre from the Early Neolithic (ca 9600-8000 BCE)
- **Challenges the traditional Neolithic narrative** (agriculture → settlements → religion)
- **Collective labor & social organization** before farming

Outcomes of the Agricultural Revolution

**Turning
point in
human
history**

Transition from hunter-gatherer to agrarian society, increasing emergence of settled lifestyle

Production of more food than consumed, food, storage, population growth, establishment of permanent settlements

**Increasing
surplus
value**



Outcomes of the Agricultural Revolution

Transformations in social organization

Increasing diversification of labor and specialization, gradual emergence of differences in wealth and status in some communities

Spread of circulation of raw materials, good, technologies, and cultural exchanges among different communities, intensification of the cultural network

Increase in
communication
and interaction

