Prehistoric culture - culture in the stone age

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION:

Prehistory is a term used to denote the long period of time before people began making written records. Some people believe that prehistoric people had lived on earth for millions of years before writing was invented more than 5, 000 years ago. Recent finds of prehistoric fossils have led some scientists to believe that the first hominids, or human like creatures may have appeared in Africa seven million years ago. They think that a large range of different hominid species developed over the next millions of years. Some scientists think that the first species of Homo, the genus to which humans belong, emerged about 2. 5 million years ago and that their successors eventually began making stone tools, mastering the use of fire, living in cave entrances and simple shelters. Scientists hold that modern humans first appeared in Africa more than 160, 000 years ago, eventually leaving that continent to spread across the whole world. In Europe, they are thought to have lived at the same time as another species, the Neanderthals. When the Neanderthals died out, modern humans became the only hominids left on earth. Some of our hunter gatherer ancestors eventually took up farming, and their early settlements gradually grew into cities and formed the basis for the first civilizations on earth. After people found time to devote to art, religion and trade, the invention of writing finally marked the end of the prehistoric period.

Prehistory is about sets of sites, artifacts and landscapes from the past which we try to understand in the present, putting the evidence we have in the context of their contemporary environments, both physical and social. The chronological scheme for understanding prehistory, the so called Three Age

System, was mainly developed in Europe. The three-age system is the periodization of human prehistory into three consecutive time periods, named for their respective predominant tool-making technologies; the Stone Age, Bronze Age, and Iron Age. The Stone Age was divided into two by the start of farming, with the Old Stone Age(Paleolithic, with its own three divisions-lower, middle and upper) succeeded by the New Stone Age(Neolithic). The metal age of bronze and iron(the Mesolithic Age), it was thought saw the development of tribal societies with sophisticated farming and the ability to build monuments like hill forts or create metal objects. Some of humans' greatest achievements were made by prehistoric people. They created the world's first languages, and learned to make tools and clothes and to control fire. They invented art, religion, farming, boats, and the wheel. Prehistoric people also settled the world, from the Arctic to the deserts of Australia. All the evidence that we have for our prehistoric past comes from material remains-objects and sites-that ancient people have left behind. It is the task of archaeologists to find and interpret this evidence. Many prehistoric sites have been discovered by accident, such as Seahenge in England, an ancient wooden monument revealed by the tide in 1998. Other prehistoric features, including standing stones and burial mounds, stand out in the landscape. The first question archaeologists ask about any prehistoric site is, " How old is it?".

1. 1 WHAT IS CULTURE ?

Term traditionally used in prehistoric archaeology to define a specific collection of portable material objects, most often stone and bone tools, that exhibit similarity in a number of variables and that are found within a

delimited region and time period. Culture also refers to a shared system of learned behaviors, passed on through several generations and thus characteristic of particular groups or communities. In this sense, there is considerable debate over whether humans are the only living primate species with culture, and, if so, when culture first appeared. At one extreme, only anatomically modern humans are considered to have possessed culture; at the other, chimpanzees and even certain species of cercepithecoid monkeys (macaques, baboons) are described as exhibiting culture in the form of long-term learned behavioral differences between populations.

1. 2 EVOLUTION:

The theory that living things evolve with time, giving rise to new species, was first proposed in the 1790s by English scientist Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802). But there was no convincing explanation as to exactly how a species might evolve. Then, in 1859, Erasmus's grandson Charles Darwin (1809-1882) published The Origin of Species, in which he explained that evolution was driven by a process he called " natural selection." Darwin's theory led to the conclusion that humans and apes had evolved from a common ancestor.

Hominization is the evolutionary process that results in the present human being. It was a very long process.

The first ancestors of the human beings appeared about five million years ago. We call them Australopithecus. They were quite similar to chimpanzees. Two million years ago a new human species called Homo Habilis appeared. They made tools of stone and lived on hunting and gathering. Homo Habilis and Australopithecus lived in Africa. Homo erectus appeared a million and a

half years ago. They were similar to Homo habilis but they made more perfect tools. They had a greater technological development. This species discovered and learned how to use fire. Home erectus remains have been found out of Africa, in Europe andAsia.

Homo antecessor is an extinct human species discovered in the Atapuerca site (Spain). He appeared about 800, 000 years ago. Most probably he is the oldest European. He is a common ancestor of Homo neanderthalensis and Homo sapiens.

Then, about 100, 000 years ago Homo sapiens appeared. This species is divided into two subtypes: Homo Sapiens Neanderthalensis or Neanderthal man and Homo sapiens sapiens.

Neanderthal man looked like us but he was more robust and sturdy. This species became extinct.

Homo sapiens sapiens is the species we belong to. Archaeologists have found remains of Homo sapiens in America and Australia.

The continent where human beings first appeared is Africa. Homo erectus were the first human beings to leave Africa. Their remains have been found in Asia, Europe and Africa. In America and Australia, there are no remains of Homo erectus. The only vestiges that archaeologists have found there belong to Homo sapiens.

There are several characteristics that make human beings different from other similar species: they invent tools thanks to the evolution of their intellect; they can walk on two legs (biped walk) so they can work with their

hands; they have an opposable thumb, which, for example, allows them to make tools or write; and., finally, the fact that learning is possible because human beings develop a symbolic language and have a long childhood.

Homo Neanderthalensis

Homo Erectus

Homo Sapiens

Austrelopithecus

The basic timeline of Prehistory is dominated by the so-called Old Stone Age or Paleolithic era, which lasted (roughly) from 1, 600, 000 until 10, 000 BCE. It spans three periods:

(1) Lower Paleolithic (2, 500, 000-200, 000 BCE)

(2) Middle Paleolithic (200, 000-30, 000 BCE)

(3) Upper Paleolithic (40, 000-10, 000 BCE).

After this comes a transitional phase called the Mesolithic period (sometimes known as epipaleolithic), ending with the spread of agriculture, followed by the Neolithic period (the New Stone Age) which witnessed the establishment of permanent settlements.

The Stone Age ends as stone tools become superseded by the new products of bronze and iron metallurgy, and is followed by the Bronze and Iron ages.

CHAPTER 2: PALEOLITHIC AGE:

The period, also known as the stone age, encompasses the first widespread use of technology-as humans progressed from simpler to more complex

developmental stages-and the spread of humanity from the savannas of East Africa to the rest of the world. It is generally said to have begun approximately 500, 000 years ago and to have ended about 6, 000 B. C. E. It ends with the development of agriculture, the domestication of certain animals, and the smelting of copper ore to produce metal. It is termed pre-historical, since humanity had not yet started writing-which is seen as the traditional start of (recorded) history. Knowledge of human life at this time is confined to generalities. Scientists do not have records of individual lives or of the achievements of individual contributors to human development. As technology enabled humans to settle in larger numbers, however, more rules were needed to regulate life, which gave rise to ethical codes. Religious belief, reflected in cave art, also became more sophisticated. Death and burial rites evolved. As hunting and gathering gave way to agriculture and as some people became artisans, trading implements they produced, even larger settlements, such as Jericho, appear. Art and music also developed as some people had more time for leisure. Human society emerged as more self-consciously collective. People became aware that they faced the same challenges, so co-operation was better than competition. In the early Paleolithic period, each clan or family group regarded themselves as “ the people” to the exclusion of others. Strangers may not even have been thought of as human. With settlement, this changed and community identity became more important than individual identity.

2. 1 MATERIAL CULTURE DURING THE PALEOLITHIC ERA:

IMPLEMENTS AND TOOLS:

Implements are essentially an extension of human limbs-the extension of the fist and tooth with the stone ; the arm with the stick; the hand or mouth with a bag or basket. If an implement such as a stone, picked up and thrown, is the beginning of human technical process, that progress becomes unlimited once the tool is developed. The tool-the implement to make implements-creates the possibility of producing far more different types of implements than could by simply selected from nature. The process of making tools, first by chipping from stone, then by grinding, and finally from metal by hammering and casting, underlies all our modern techniques of dealing physically with material objects. Through the practice of tool making, men learned the mechanical properties of many natural products and thus laid the basis for physical science. Paleolithic means Old Stone. In the Paleeolithic objects were made of stone, wood and animal bones. Most objects were made of stone and that is why this period was also called Stone Age.

The technique to make tools and objects out of stone was very simple. They knocked two stones together until they got small pieces from one of them. These pieces became cutting objects. They used them to hunt and cut animal skins and meat. Examples of objects made of wood and animal bones are: harpoons, needles and lances

CLOTHING:

Partly from the need to carry things about, at first only food and implements, came the custom of attaching objects more or less permanently to the body,

wherever a convenient hold could be made, in the hair, round the neck, waist, wrists and ankles. These attachments tended to become distinctive and ornamental. Feathers, bones and skins were added. Then came the crucial discovery that furry skin helped to keep people warm on cold nights and in winters. From this came clothes, first in isolated skin, cloaks and skirts then sew and tailored garments.

FOOD:

Food sources of the early hunter-gatherer humans of the Paleolithic Age included both animals and plants that were part of the natural environment in which these humans lived, often animal organ meats, including the liver, kidneys, and brains. They consumed little dairy food or carbohydrate-rich plant foods like legumes or cereal grains. Current research indicates that two-thirds of the energy was derived from animal foods.

FIRE AND COOKERY:

Fire was discovered about half a million years ago. For human beings in the Paleolithic Age it was one of the most important discoveries. The climate was extremely cold and with fire they could heat and light their caves, cook their food and frighten wild animals away. How man came across fire and why he dared to tame and feed it is yet to be discovered. The preservation and propagation of fire must at first have been frightening, hazardous and difficult. At first it must have been used to warm the body on cold nights. Cooking could only have come once the camp fire had become an established custom.

Just as the tool is the basis of physical and mechanical science, so is fire the basis of chemical science. First of all came the very simple and essentially chemical practice of cooking. It is from the accidental use of fire that the more specifically controllable and scientific uses of fire in pottery and later in metal-making first arose. It was not very difficult to roast meat on sticks, but boiling represents a real problem, the solution of which was to lead to further great advances. The crucial discovery, was that by coating a basket with thick clay it could be put on the fire and actually improved in the process. In time it was discovered, probably towards the end of the Old Stone Age, that the basket could be dispensed with and clay pottery made that would hold water and stand fire.

PRIMITIVE ART:

For this, we have the evidence of the most detailed knowledge of nature possessed today by all tribes still in the hunting phase and by the large part that animal dances play in their ceremonies. All this is shown by widely dispersed cave paintings, drawings and sculptures, which are almost exclusively of animals. These representations don not stop at the outside of the animal, often

bones, heart and entrails are also shown giving evidence of the origin of anatomy arising from the cutting up of game.

A rock painting at Bhimbetka, India, a World heritage site.

2. 2 SOCIAL BASIS OF PRIMITIVE LIFE:

LANGUAGE:

The cooperation of several individuals in the pursuit of food with their bare hands or with unshaped sticks and stones is possible only by the use of gesture or words. Early language must have mainly dealt with the getting of food, including the movements of people and the making and using of implements. Language must have been, from the very beginning, almost entirely arbitrary and conventional. In each community the meaning of sounds had to win acceptance and be fixed by tradition into a complete language capable of dealing with the totality of material and social life.

FOOD GATHERING AND HUNTING: DIVISION OF LABOUR

The general ecological character of the human groups was determined at first almost exclusively, later very largely by how they got their food. To begin with they must have collected anything they could eat-seeds, nuts, fruit, roots, insects etc. All primitive people still surviving have passed into the next stage where food gathering is supplemented by hunting large animals.

The necessarily small social groups of the early Stone Age maintained their continuity through the women, while the young men for the most part must have gone off and mated with girls of other groups to which they then attached themselves. This corresponded to an economic division in which the women collected fruits, nuts, grains while men caught game and fish.

The further development of big game hunting a man’s business increased man’s importance as a prime food-getter. It may be that this, combined with the extra strength, aggressiveness and skill that went with it, led towards the end of the Stone Age to the dominance of men over women.

RELIGIOUS/BURIAL CUSTOMS:

A number of archeologists propose that Middle Paleolithic societies such as Neanderthal societies may also have practiced the earliest form of totemism or animal worship. Animal cults in the following Upper Paleolithic period, such as the bear cult, may have had their origins in these hypothetical Middle Paleolithic animal cults.

The oldest known burials can be attributed to the Middle Paleolithic Period. The corpses, accompanied by stone tools and parts of animals, were laid in holes in the ground and sometimes the corpses were especially protected. In some cases, the findings give the impression that the dead were to be “ held onto.” Whether or not that meant that the dead were to be cared for lovingly or that their return was to be feared, it implies, in any case, a belief in life after death in some form. But it is not necessary to infer a belief in separate souls; rather, it could also indicate the concept of a “ living corpse.”

SACRIFICES:

Sacrifices (i. e., the presentation of offerings to higher beings or to the dead) appear as early as the Middle Paleolithic Period. Pits with some animal bones have been found in the vicinity of burial sites; thus, it is a likely possibility that they represent offerings to the dead. There is a dispute over the interpretation of the arrangement of the skulls and long bones of bears,

since they are deposited in such a manner that it is hardly possible to discern a profane explanation. It is assumed that they had a cultic or magical significance. Most likely, certain parts of the prey, such as the head and the meaty shanks, or at least the bones with brain and marrow, were sacrificed. Even if it cannot be definitely stated who the recipient of these sacrifices was, analogies with present-day “ primitive” phenomena make it likely that a part of the prey was offered to a higher being who was believed to dispense nourishment.

CHAPTER 3: MESOLITHIC ERA:

The Mesolithic period is a transitional era between the ice-affected hunter-gatherer culture of the Upper Paleolithic, and the farming culture of the Neolithic. The greater the effect of the retreating ice on the environment of a region, the longer the Mesolithic era lasted. So, in areas with no ice (eg. the Middle East), people transitioned quite rapidly from hunting/gathering to agriculture. Their Mesolithic period was therefore short, and often referred to as the Epi-Paleolithic or Epipaleolithic. By comparison, in areas undergoing the change from ice to no-ice, the Mesolithic era and its culture lasted much longer. The Mesolithic is characterized in most areas by small composite flint tools – microliths and microburins. Fishing tackle, stone adzes and wooden objects, e. g. canoes and bows, have been found at some sites

MESOLITHIC CULTURES:

As the ice disappeared, to be replaced by grasslands and forests, mobility and flexibility became more important in the hunting and acquisition of food. As a result, Mesolithic cultures are characterized by small, lighter flint tools, quantities of fishing tackle, stone adzes, bows and arrows. Very gradually, at

least in Europe, hunting and fishing was superceded by farming and the domestication of animals. The three main European Mesolithic cultures are: Azilian, Tardenoisian and Maglemosian. Azilian was a stone industry, largely microlithic, associated with Ofnet Man. Tardenoisian, associated with Tardenoisian Man, produced small flint blades and small flint implements with geometrical shapes, together with bone harpoons using flint flakes as barbs. Maglemosian (northern Europe) was a bone and horn culture, producing flint scrapers, borers and core-axes.

MESOLITHIC ROCK ART:

Artworks created during the Mesolithic period reflect the arrival of new living conditions and hunting practices caused by the disappearance of the great herds of animals from Spain and France, at the end of the Ice Age. Forests now cloaked the landscape, necessitating more careful and cooperative hunting arrangements. European Mesolithic rock art gives more space to human figures, and is characterized by keener observation, and greater narrative in the paintings. Also, because of the warmer weather, it moves from caves to outdoor sites in numerous locations across Europe, Asia, Africa, Australasia and the Americas. For example, in Africa, a number of bushman rock paintings were found in the Waterberg area which date from about 8, 000 BCE. In India, the paintings in the Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka, derive from Mesolithic artists. A good deal of Australian Aboriginal art (eg. from Arnhem Land) dates from Mesolithic as well as Paleolithic periods. Most of the Aborigines' ancient artwork is stylized rock painting, often executed in a symbolic or abstract manner as many were created from a ' bird's eye view'.

MESOLITHIC SCULPTURE:

As well as these stylized cave paintings, the Mesolithic era also featured more 3-D art, including bas-reliefs and free standing sculpture. Early examples of the latter include the anthropomorphic figurines, typically embellished by animals, uncovered in Nevali Cori and Göbekli Tepe near Urfa in eastern Asia Minor (now Turkey), dating to 9, 000 BCE. The mesolithic statues of Lepenski Vir (eg. The Fish God) in Serbia date from about 5, 000 BCE and depict either humans or hybrid figures, part-human, part-fish.

MESOLITHIC DECORATIVE CRAFTS:

Other examples of this type of new portable art include adornments, like bracelets and painted pebbles, together with decorative drawings on functional objects like paddles and weapons. Ceramic art was also developed, notably by the Jomon culture – an early highpoint of Japanese Art – whose sophisticated pots have been dated to the 11th millennium BCE. Their clay figures and vessels were typically decorated with patterns created by impressing the wet clay body with cord and sticks. Chinese pottery begins during the Mesolithic period.

MESOLITHIC MASTERPIECE: The Thinker From Cernavoda (5000 BCE)

One extraordinary example of Neolithic art is the sculpture known as the Thinker From Cernavoda (c. 5, 000 BCE), discovered in the lower Danube in Romania. It belongs to the Hamangia culture, usually classified as a Neolithic culture practised in Dobruja (Romania and Bulgaria) on the right bank of the Danube in Muntenia, and in the south, but may be connected with mesolithic hunter-gatherers. The uniqueness of the sculpture stems from the fact that

the figure is neither a hunting or fertility idol, but simply sits in deep thought. A near-perfect illustration of a ‘ thinking’ Neolithic man.

CHAPTER 4: NEOLITHIC OR NEW STONE AGE:

“ Neolithic” means “ New Stone Age.” This was a period of primitive technological and social development, toward the end of the “ Stone Age.” Beginning in the 10th millennium BCE (12, 000 BP), the Neolithic period saw the development of early villages, agriculture, animal domestication, tools and the onset of the earliest recorded incidents of warfare It is characterized by the discovery of stone implements that were polished, and, in particular, the stone axe that was bound to a wooden handle. There were also numerous arrow-heads that were found. Also found was the beginning of a sort of agriculture, as well as the use of plants and seeds. Evidences of hunting revealed that there were hunters among Neolithic humans. There is also evidence revealing the domestication of animals, such as dogs, cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs. Hunters began tending the herds that they hunted. Also discovered are evidences of pottery, plaiting and weaving.

In the Mesolithic period, people built up knowledge about harvesting wild foods. In the Middle East, they specialized in gathering the seeds of wild grasses. Between 10, 000 and 9000 bce, people learned how to store and sow seeds of plants, which then changed as a result of human selection. Wild wheat has brittle stalks that shatter when ripe, releasing grains to be spread by the wind. People harvested wheat with larger, intact ears, which stayed longer on the plant and eventually created a new wheat with heads that no longer shattered. People also began to control the breeding of animals, such

as sheep. They had become farmers. This new period of prehistory is called the Neolithic (New Stone) Age.

4. 1 VILLAGE AND RIVER CULTURE:

The characteristic economic and cultural unit of the Neolithic age is the village. Village economy is strictly limited in scope and possibility of change. Even where it involves thousands of people, as in some African villages today, it remains an economy in which nearly all the people are occupied most of the time in agricultural pursuits or in the production of locally made and locally used goods.

The first step towards larger scale of operations occurred when people tried to practice agriculture in the wide alluvial valleys of rivers which flowed in their lower courses through aris lands. They may have started from the low river banks where seeds could be sown in the wet mud and then gradually cut back the marshes and cleared the river channels. Alternatively, the practice of agriculture in small upland valleys may simply have been pushed downstream step by step into the great valleys. In some such way, a new kind of agriculture based first on natural then on artificial irrigation came into being.

4. 2 SOCIAL ORGANIZATION:

During most of the Neolithic age, people lived in small tribes of 150-2000 members that were composed of multiple bands or lineages. There is little scientific evidence of developed social stratification in most Neolithic societies; social stratification is more associated with the later Bronze Age. Although some late Neolithic societies formed complex stratified chiefdoms

similar to Polynesian societies such as the Ancient Hawaiians, most Neolithic societies were relatively simple and egalitarian. However, Neolithic societies were noticeably more hierarchical than the Paleolithic cultures that preceded them and Hunter-gatherer cultures in general. The domestication of animals (c. 8000 BC) resulted in a dramatic increase in social inequality. Possession of livestock allowed competition between households and resulted in inherited inequalities of wealth. Neolithic pastoralists who controlled large herds gradually acquired more livestock, and this made economic inequalities more pronounced.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION:

We can conclude by saying that Prehistoric culture refers to human evolution and development that occurred before the discovery of writing. For a short cut, this period is sometimes called the Stone Age. As the sciences of Geology, Paleontology, Anthropology and Archeology have developed, they have, by our time produced a vast, complex body of knowledge about the dawn of the human mind. If we correctly evaluate modern discoveries and proposed hypotheses, it can help us understand human nature and shed light on modern human problems. What is the role of reason in the life of mankind. Question One. What does our current knowledge about prehistoric times tell us about the use of reason in the prehistoric culture? Question Two: How do we use our personal, modern day reason in order to answer Question One. In order to examine the role of reason in prehistoric times, it first behooves us to understand the role of reason in our own lives here and now.