

Neolithic bronze and iron age history essay



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Europe is one region in the world that has its history deeply ingrained in the era of Stone Age when there were great and marked changes that took place in the lives of people alive around that period of time, who were at this time at the stage of evolution known as Homo sapiens. Among the most marked eras that gave transition in the lives of the people of Europe around that time were the Neolithic, bronze and iron ages. However, from the late Neolithic era to the start of the Roman age, prehistoric Europe underwent some major significant transformation as will be outlined in this paper. Evidence is based on archeological facts and not necessarily on historical records as there are none that were left behind by these people (Barry, 2001).

The Neolithic eras was also known as the new Stone Age and among the transformations experienced were in aspects to do with the social relations and economic practices. Economic activities affected by the transformation included a change of farming from use of wild cereals as a source of food to true farming, which was characterized by domestication of cattle, sheep, dogs and goats. They farmed in domesticated cereals like millet, spelt and einkorn wheat. This was in the area around Asia Minor, North Africa and North Mesopotamia. Land was normally opened up for planting either by burning or chopping. As such, there was a shift from nomadic lifestyles to a more settled lifestyle fixed at one point. This marked a great change both in the cultural shift and the social aspects of life (Barry, 2001).

Farming also experienced some changes from the use of stone-made tools to bronze made tools and eventually to iron in latter eras. At around 3, 500 BC, the people discovered that metallic tools were much more reliable than

stone-made tools, which were nothing more than sharp flints. They discovered that copper can be made harder and much stronger by melting it in combination with tin, hence forming bronze, which marked the beginning of the Bronze Age. These tools formed the basis of trade with other groups that needed them for farming as well (Barry, 2001).

Socially, there were many marked changes that were associated with the Neolithic period. Among the changes were the social obligations that were becoming expanded beyond the immediate family boundaries, requiring that people operate as groups or members of the same tribe. However, enough evidence still lacks on how these social ties affected the general social life of the communities (Barry, 2001).

Neolithic cultures in South Asia and Middle East started becoming evident soon after the tenth millennium. Some of the characteristics that marked the cultural aspects of the lives of the people around this time included an inclination towards pottery and sculpting. At around 3, 500 BC, tribal leaders encouraged their fellow tribesmen to erect stone monuments which served the purpose of ritual structures and one of the best known stone monuments that were carved as a result of this cultural practice is the Stone Henge. Other sculpted works that were evident in the Neolithic age were burial chambers and communal houses (Barry, 2001).

Mortuary practices

Around 4000-2000 BC, the Neolithic period showed a marked evidence of tombs that had been excavated during the megalithic era. The tombs were nothing more than caves and pits that had been dug and preserved

purposely with an aim of preserving the remains of their dead kinsmen. The tombs were mainly excavated with the aim of housing the dead, which were mainly nothing more than cremated remains. The remains were accompanied by 'grave goods.' The tombs came in four distinct categories of court tombs, passage tombs, portal tombs and wedge tombs. Passage tombs were carved from a very spectacular stone that are very visible in Ireland. An example of a passage tomb is The Mound of the Hostages at Tara. These burial evidences present the possibility that the people who existed around this time had some form of knowledge and laid importance preservation of human remains (Barry, 2001).

Technological innovations

The Neolithic age was marked by some improvements in the farming tools that were previously used in farming. From simple farming sticks to polished stone axes, people developed an idea or two on how to implement new farming tools that would make it easier to farm and skin their animals. The Neolithic Stone Age is the period that marked the end of the Stone Age as the succeeding era was characterized by bronze far implements which later gave way to forging of iron farm implements. Among the tools that were made by the people and which marked a development as far as technology was concerned include sickle blades, stone axe, and grinding stones. In the area of decoration, they were able to make ornaments from beads, statuettes and projectile points.

Wood also became a widely used material, which saw the clearance of a wide scale of forests (Barry, 2001).

Wood was mainly used for upgrading houses from mud structures to wooden shelters. They also made canoes that would help them cross over rivers and other water bodies in order to explore and exploit newly-won farmlands. In Anatolia, Syria and Northern Mesopotamia, Neolithic peoples developed a culture of painting and plastering houses with both human and waste materials. House construction also moved from use of simple materials alone like mud and cow dung, to wattle and daub. These enabled them to build very long houses unlike those that existed before which were rather short. In matters to do with food, there was a transition in the manner in which food was preserved. They came up with airtight containers and realized that adding preservatives like salt would do the trick and preserve the food for days on end (Barry, 2001).

In matters to do with clothing, the earliest form of clothing found to have existed during the Neolithic age were made from animal skin and to support this evidence are bone and antler pins, which could only have been fasteners for leather but not cloth material. However, as time progressed towards the new Roman age, wool and linen clothing might have become available to the people, as is indicated by some perforated stones, which are believed to be the tools with which they spindled the fibers together. The clothing worn was very similar to that worn during the Roman Stone Age (Barry, 2001).

In matters to do with transport and energy, it was during this time that people discovered that energy could be harnessed from other sources. The earliest known use of wind energy for example was the sailboat, which was in the land of Mesopotamia which is the modern day Iraq. This influenced interactions with the Neolithic people as they needed to borrow this

technology and wisdom from the people of Mesopotamia. The people of Mesopotamia later invented the wheel around the year 5500 BC, which proved to be a very effective tool in the production of pottery and other artifacts. With time they discovered that wheeled wagons could be used as a means of transport for ferrying heavy items and people as well, but it was the use of the wheel as a source of energy that transformed technological innovations when it started being used as machinery for driving windmills and waterwheels as well as treadmills (Barry, 2001).

Trade and exchange

As mentioned earlier, the development of tool implements from metallic materials facilitated trade with other communities that needed the implements but which had no means of producing them. They also traded with the people of Mesopotamia and the larger world so that they could benefit from items like the wheel, which had proven to be a much needed utility in the advancement of technology. With the discovery of valuable elements like copper and gold though in traces, there was a much more marked improvement in exchange of such items for food materials, marking the beginning of what is now commonly known as barter trade (Barry, 2001).

Relationships with larger scale societies

All the improvements in the lifestyle of the Neolithic people to a very great extent influenced how this community interacted with people from the larger society, especially with the invention of the wheel, which influenced transport patterns and increased the scale at which production of items like pots could take place. This meant that as Europe transformed, it had to

incorporate culture, lifestyles, beliefs and systems from the larger world. It was through such interactions that cultural aspects of the Neolithic people continued to gain new shape and meaning. For example, while their diet was mainly comprised plant and animal products in their natural occurrence, with time they learnt how to ferment and taste wine. Fermentation was done in animal skins and crude wooden bowl, a culture they inherited from South Asia and parts of Australia. This habit replaced the previous eating habits that were characterized by eating of animal meat like liver and kidneys and drinking dairy products like milk and blood (Barry, 2001).

It was also through such interactions that the forms of shelter and habitat continued to take new shape and forms. For example, a tent-like shelter, believed to be 5000 years old was discovered in the caves of Grotte du Lazaret, Nice, France. Another structure with a timber-supported roof was discovered in Dolni Vestonice, while the walls were made of clay blocks and stones. In Eastern Europe, there were many huts found, which were made using mammoth bones, and this was a likely indication that the people behind the construction of the huts were mostly mammoth hunters. In Europe and Asia, several tombs were constructed in different designs; different from those designs mentioned earlier on (Barry, 2001).

These included multi chambered, single chambered and dolmens, and which had a more grave-like structure as graves are known like today. In matters to do with art, there is a lot of evidence in how art and culture progressed from the Neolithic to the Roman age. Rock paintings were common in this era and much of the representations were of animal forms while human forms were quite rare then. Animals that were commonly painted were not only those

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that were a source of foods to the people, but also of those animals that were regarded in high esteem due to characteristics like strength for example the rhinoceros and the large cats. The meaning attached to these painting is however yet to be clarified (Barry, 2001).

While many aspects of life in the prehistoric Europe underwent significant and quantifiable changes, there are some other aspects that did not experience and profound changes which deserve so much attention. For example, language does not seem to have any marked improvements during the transition from Neolithic to Roman age. There is still no clear evidence of the languages that were spoken then, but there are some scholars who have attempted to extend historical linguistics methods into the Stone Age but still, there is no much scholarly materials supporting the proposals. However, it is believed that the predominant languages then were Indo-European and Pre-Indo-European, associated with the mixture of Europeans and Asians (Barry, 2001).

From these languages came the Basque languages, but these are rather isolated languages that are not very easy to dissect and study in greater detail. As such, not much development can be reported to have occurred as far as language and linguistics of the Neolithic people is concerned (Barry, 2001).

Material culture as a mark of identity and status

Much of the materials that have been identified in the history of the Neolithic people act as a strong evidence of the identity and status of the people, giving insights as to what belonged to who, and at what stage of

development and evolution. The Stone Age is known for material culture like stone made tools, caves as their shelters as well as co-existence with some animals that are no longer in existence today, for example the dinosaur. This is not supported by any scientific evidence, but depiction of the same through cartoons like the Flintstones, films like One Million Years B. C. and computer games like Chuck Rock is almost full evidence that such material items can only be associated to the prehistoric times around the Stone Age (Barry, 2001).

Conclusion

From the evidence gathered, it goes without saying that the transformations that occurred in Europe were so significant to go unnoticed. There is still much more that concerns the transformations, which not only affected Europe, but the impacts are being felt the world over in this present day and age. Transformation of Stone Age cultures, rituals and beliefs go beyond acquisition of food, body covering and shelters to rituals that relate to death and burial, though they differ in style from culture and from place to place.