

Chapter Summary



The Rise of Civilization

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What do archaeology and anthropology teach us about prehistoric humans?

What is a civilization, and how does one form?

Hominids emerged as early as 3.5 million years ago in Africa. *Homo sapiens sapiens*, or modern humans, who are only about 200,000 years old, migrated out of Africa and populated Europe and Asia. These early humans were mainly nomadic hunter-gatherers who developed the first tools, including spears and the bow and arrow, and made use of fire. Between 8000 and 4000 B.C., these peoples developed methods of systematic farming and domesticating animals. Because early humans no longer needed to follow migrating herds of animals, they settled down and eventually formed communities along fertile river valleys. These communities, such as those of the Sumerians in Mesopotamia, slowly grew into civilizations with their own cities, governments, religions, social structures, writing, and art.

Early Humans

- The tools and evidence used to learn about prehistory, such as archaeological and biological evidence from excavation sites, are different from those used to learn about the time after writing was developed.
- During the early stages of human history, hominids—humanlike creatures that walked upright—lived in Africa 3.5 million years ago.
- The period of human history in which humans used simple stone tools—hand axes, wooden poles with spear points, bows and arrows, and harpoons and fishhooks—is known as the Paleolithic Age, sometimes called the Old Stone Age.

The Neolithic Revolution

- The Neolithic Revolution was the shift from hunting and gathering to systematic agriculture in various parts of the world.
- Changes brought about by the Neolithic Revolution led to more permanent settlements and the emergence of civilization.

- The six most important basic characteristics that people share in a distinct culture, or civilization, are cities, government, religion, social structure, writing, and art.

Mesopotamia

- The impact of geography, specifically the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys, allowed people in this area of the world, known as the Fertile Crescent, to develop complex economic, political, and social structures.
- A polytheistic religion played an important role in the economic, political, and social structure of Sumer, and Sumerians devoted much wealth to building temples and elaborate houses for priests and priestesses who served the gods.
- The Sumerians invented cuneiform, a wedge-shaped system of writing used primarily for recordkeeping, as well as new technological innovations, such as the wagon wheel, sundial, and arch, that still affect life today.