Documents

Considering the Evidence: Agricultural Village Societies

The Agricultural Revolution was arguably the most significant turning point in the larger story of humankind, at least before the Industrial Revolution. And the most celebrated outcome of the agricultural breakthrough was "civilization"—the early city- and state-based societies of Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, China, Peru, and elsewhere (see Chapter 3). Yet the domestication of plants and animals did not everywhere and always lead to civilizations, and certainly not immediately. In the Middle East and Northeastern Africa, for example, thousands of years passed before the transition to agriculture generated a recognizable civilization. Elsewhere, fully agricultural societies without the characteristic features of civilization—cities, empires, written languages, and pronounced social inequalities—persisted well into modern times.

The earliest agricultural village societies, which emerged well before writing had been developed anywhere, have passed into history leaving no documentary record. Therefore, we focus here on three much later examples of such societies—the Germanic neighbors of the Roman Empire during the first century C.E., the Gikuyu people of East Africa in the early twentieth century, and the Taino of the Caribbean islands during the sixteenth century. Since these peoples lacked writing, our documentary evidence about them derives from the descriptions of literate outsiders or from more recent accounts by educated insiders. While varying greatly in their historical and cultural settings, the documents that follow and the peoples they describe nonetheless provide us with some exposure to those agricultural village societies and chiefdoms that were among the major outcomes of the Agricultural Revolution.

Document 2.1

Germanic Peoples of Central Europe

Ancient Germanic-speaking peoples, occupying much of Central Europe north of the Roman Empire, were never a single "nation" but rather a collection of tribes, clans, and chiefdoms, regarded by the Romans as barbarians though admired and feared for their military skills (see Map 4.4, p. 156). They were

famously described by Tacitus (56–117 C.E.), a Roman official and well-known historian. Tacitus himself had never visited the lands of the people he describes; rather, he relied on earlier written documents and interviews with merchants and soldiers who had traveled and lived in the region.

- What can we learn from Tacitus's account about the economy, politics, society, and culture of the Germanic peoples of the first century C.E.?
- Which statements of Tacitus might you regard as reliable and which are more suspect? Why?
- Why did Tacitus regard Germanic peoples as distinctly inferior to Romans? How might he have responded to the idea that these people would play a major role in the collapse of the Roman Empire several centuries later?
- Modern scholars have argued that Tacitus used the Germanic peoples to criticize aspects of his own Roman culture. What evidence might support this point of view?

TACITUS

Germania

First Century C.E.

The Germans themselves I should regard as aboriginal, and not mixed at all with other races through immigration or intercourse.... [W]ho would leave Asia, or Africa, or Italy for Germany, with its wild country, its inclement skies, its sullen manners and aspect, unless indeed it were his home? In their ancient songs, their only way of remembering or recording the past, they celebrate an earth-born god, Tuisco, and his son Mannus, as the origin of their race, as their founders....

The tribes of Germany are free from all taint of intermarriages with foreign nations, and they appear as a distinct, unmixed race, like none but themselves. Hence, too, the same physical peculiarities throughout so vast a population. All have fierce blue eyes, red hair, huge frames, fit only for a sudden exertion. They are less able to bear laborious work. Heat and thirst they cannot in the least endure; to cold and hunger their climate and their soil inure them....

They choose their kings by birth, their generals by merit. These kings have not unlimited or arbitrary power, and the generals do more by example than by authority.... But to reprimand, to imprison, even to flog, is permitted to the priests alone, and that not as a punishment, or at the general's bidding, but, as it were, by the mandate of the god whom they believe to inspire the warrior.... And what most stimulates their courage is that their squadrons or battalions, instead of being formed by chance or by a fortuitous gathering, are composed of families and clans. Close by them, too, are those dearest to them, so that they hear the shrieks of women, the cries of infants....

Tradition says that armies already wavering and giving way have been rallied by women who, with earnest entreaties and bosoms laid bare, have vividly represented the horrors of captivity, which the Germans fear with such extreme dread on behalf of their women.... They even believe that the sex

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Source: Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb, *The Agricola and Germania of Tacitus* (London: Macmillan, 1877), pp. 87ff.

has a certain sanctity and prescience, and they do not despise their counsels, or make light of their answers....

Mercury is the deity whom they chiefly worship, and on certain days they deem it right to sacrifice to him even with human victims....

Augury and divination by lot no people practice more diligently. The use of lots is simple. A little bough is lopped off a fruit-bearing tree, and cut into small pieces; these are distinguished by certain marks, and thrown carelessly and at random over a white garment. In public questions the priest of the particular state, in private the father of the family invokes the gods, and, with his eyes toward heaven, takes up each piece three times, and finds in them a meaning according to the mark previously impression on them....

When they go into battle, it is a disgrace for the chief to be surpassed in valor, a disgrace for his followers not to equal the valor of the chief. And it is an infamy and a reproach for life to have survived the chief, and return from the field. To defend, to protect him, to ascribe one's own brave deeds to his renown, is the height of loyalty. The chief fights for victory; his vassals fight for their chief.... Feasts and entertainments, which though inelegant, are plentifully furnished, are their only pay. The means of this bounty come from war or rapine.° Nor are they as easily persuaded to plough the earth and to wait for the year's produce as to challenge an enemy and earn the honor of wounds. Nay, they actually think it tame and stupid to acquire by the sweat of toil what they might win by their blood.

Whenever they are not fighting, they pass much of their time in the chase, and still more in idleness giving themselves up to sleep and to feasting, the bravest and the most warlike doing nothing, and surrendering the management of the household of the home, and of the land, to the women, the old men, and all the weakest members of the family.... It is the custom of the states to bestow by voluntary and individual contribution on the chief a present of cattle or of grain, which, while accepted as a compliment, supplies their wants. They are particularly delighted by gifts from neighboring tribes... such as choice steeds, heavy armor, trappings, and neckchains. We have now taught them to accept money also.

It is well known that the nations of Germany have no cities, and that they do not even tolerate closely contiguous dwellings. They live scattered and apart, just as a spring, a meadow, or a wood has attracted them. Their villages they do not arrange in our fashion,... but every person surrounds his dwelling with an open space, either as a precaution against the disasters of fire, or because they do not know how to build. No use is made by them of stone or tile; they employ timber for all purposes, rude masses without ornament or attractiveness....

They all wrap themselves in a cloak which is fastened with a clasp, or, if this is not forthcoming, with a thorn, leaving the rest of their persons bare.... They also wear the skins of wild beasts....

Their marriage code, however, is strict, and indeed no part of their manners is more praiseworthy. Almost alone among barbarians they are content with one wife, except a very few among them.... Lest the woman should think herself to stand apart from aspirations after noble deeds and from the perils of war, she is reminded by the ceremony which inaugurates marriage that she is her husband's partner in toil and danger, destined to suffer and to dare with him alike both in peace and in war....

Very rare for so numerous a population is adultery, the punishment of which is prompt, and in the husband's power. Having cut off the hair of the adulteress and stripped her naked, he expels her from the house in the presence of her kinfolk, and then flogs her through the whole village. The loss of chastity meets with no indulgence; neither beauty, youth, nor wealth will procure the culprit a husband. No one in Germany laughs at vice, nor do they call it the fashion to corrupt and to be corrupted.... To limit the number of their children or to destroy any of their subsequent offspring is accounted infamous, and good habits are here more effectual than good laws elsewhere....

It is the duty among them to adopt the feuds as well as the friendships of a father or a kinsman. These feuds are not implacable; even homicide is expiated by the payment of a certain number of cattle and of sheep, and the satisfaction is accepted by the entire family, greatly to the advantage of the state, since

°**rapine:** a seizure or robbery.

feuds are dangerous in proportion to a people's freedom....

[S]laves are not employed after our manner with distinct domestic duties assigned to them, but each one has the management of a house and home of his own. The master requires from the slave a certain quantity of grain, of cattle, and of clothing, as he would from a tenant, and this is the limit of subjection. All other household functions are discharged by the wife and children....

Of lending money on interest and increasing it by compound interest they know nothing—a more effectual safeguard than if it were prohibited.

Land proportioned to the number of inhabitants is occupied by the whole community in turn, and afterward divided among them according to rank. A wide expanse of plains makes the partition easy. They till fresh fields every year, and they have still more land than enough;... corn [wheat] is the only produce required from the earth.

Document 2.2

Social Organization among the Gikuyu

Occupying the fertile highlands of central Kenya in East Africa, the Gikuyu were an agricultural, iron-working, and Bantu-speaking people who were incorporated into the British Empire during the late nineteenth century (see the map on p. 60). They were among the many "stateless societies" of world history, for they did not organize themselves in a large-scale centralized political authority. Over many centuries, however, they had developed or adapted from their neighbors a mechanism known as age-sets to facilitate social integration and political decision-making. Age-sets were groups of men who were initiated at the same time and then rose collectively through a series of age-grades, or ranks, over the course of their lives. Here, the Gikuyu age-set system, as well as its gendered division of labor, is described by Jomo Kenyatta, a well-known nationalist leader in colonial Kenya and the country's first African president. In his book *Facing Mount Kenya*, published in 1938, Kenyatta described Gikuyu life in a positive (perhaps idealized) fashion, intended to counteract negative British images of African life as primitive, backward, or savage.

- How does Kenyatta describe the division of labor and marriage practices in Gikuyu families? Does his description suggest gender equality or patriarchy?
- What were the major stages through which Gikuyu men passed during their lives? What duties were associated with each of the age-grades?
- How did the age-set system perform some of the functions of states, while avoiding their often oppressive features? How might you define the advantages and disadvantages of a stateless society in comparison to human communities organized around a formal government or state?
- In light of the colonial setting in which Kenyatta was living, what message was he trying to convey?

Jomo Kenyatta

Facing Mount Kenya

1938

The chief occupations among the Gikuyu are agriculture and the rearing of livestock, such as cattle, sheep, and goats. Each family, i.e., a man, his wife or wives, and their children, constitute an economic unit. This is controlled and strengthened by the system of division of labor according to sex....

In house-building, the heavy work of cutting timbers and putting up the framework falls on men. Carrying and cutting of the grass for thatching and plastering the wall with clay or cow-dung is the work of women.... The entire housework naturally falls within the sphere of women's activities. They cook, bring water from the rivers, wash utensils, and fetch firewood from the forests and bush. They also perform the task of carrying the loads on their backs....

In cultivating the fields, men clear the brush and cut big trees, and also break the virgin soil with digging sticks and hoes. Women come behind them and prepare the ground for sowing seeds. Planting is shared by both sexes.... Weeding is done collectively.... Harvesting is done chiefly by women.... Tending of cattle, sheep, and goats and also slaughtering and distributing the meat and preparing the skins is entirely men's duty. Dressmaking, pottery, and weaving of baskets is exclusively women's profession.... The brewing of beer is done jointly by both men and women.... Trading is done by both sexes....

The Gikuyu customary law of marriage provides that a man may have as many wives as he can support, and that the larger one's family, the better it is for him and the tribe.... The custom also provides that all women must be under the protection of men... and that all women must be married in their teens, i.e., fifteen to twenty. Thus there is no term in the Gikuyu language for "unmarried" or "old maids."...

The teaching of social obligations is... emphasized by the classification of age-groups.... This binds together those of the same status in ties of closest loyalty and devotion. Men circumcised at the same time stand in the very closest relationship to each other....

The fellowship and unity of these age-groups is rather a remarkable thing. It binds men from all parts of the country, and though they may have been circumcised in places hundreds of miles apart, it is of no consequence. They are like old boys of the same school, though I question whether the Europeans have any association with the same high standards of mutual obligation.... Age-groups further emphasize the social grades of junior and senior, inferior and superior.... The older group takes precedence over the younger and has rights to service and courtesy which the younger must acknowledge.

...The circumcision ceremony was the only qualification which gave a man the recognition of manhood and the full rights of citizenship.... As soon as his circumcision wounds heal, he joins the national council of junior warriors. At this stage his father provides him with necessary weapons, namely spear, shield, and sword; then a sheep or a male goat is given to the senior warriors of the district.... The animal is killed for a ceremony of introducing the young warrior into the general activities and etiquette of the warrior class.

The second stage in warriorhood was celebrated about eighty-two moons or twelve rain seasons following the circumcision ceremony. At this juncture the junior warrior was promoted to the council of the senior warriors.... The initiation fee to this rank was two sheep or goats....

The third stage in manhood is marriage. When a man is married and has established his own homestead, he is required to join the council of elders

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Source: Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1938), 53–55, 174, 115–16, 198–205.

(*kiama*); he pays one male goat or sheep and then he is initiated into a first grade of eldership.... [They] act as messengers to the *kiama*, and help to skin animals, to light fires, to bring firewood, to roast meat for the senior elders, and to carry ceremonial articles to and from the *kiama* assemblies. They must not eat kidneys, spleen, or loin, for these are reserved for the senior elders.

Next... comes the council of peace. This stage is reached when a man has a son or daughter older enough to be circumcised.... After this [an elaborate ceremony of induction into this new age-grade], the candidate is invested with his staff of office and a bunch of sacred leaves. This signifies that he is now a peaceful man, that he is no longer a carrier of spear and shield, or a pursuer of the vanity of war and plunder. That he has now attained a stage where he has to take the responsibility of carrying the symbols of peace and to assume the duties of peace-maker in the community....

The last and most honored status in the man's life history is the religious and sacrificial council. This stage is reached when a man has had practically all his children circumcised, and his wife (or wives) has passed the child-bearing age.... The elders of this grade assume a role of "holy men." They are the high priests. All religious and ethical ceremonies are in their hands.

Document 2.3

Religion in a Caribbean Chiefdom

When Christopher Columbus arrived in the Caribbean region in the late fifteenth century, he found a densely settled agricultural people known as the Taino inhabiting the islands now called Hispaniola (modern Haiti and Dominican Republic), Cuba, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico. Organized into substantial village communities governed by a hierarchy of chiefs (*cacique*), Taino society featured modest class distinctions. An elite group of chiefs, warriors, artists, and religious specialists enjoyed a higher status than commoners, who worked the fields, fished, and hunted. Within a half century of Columbus's arrival, almost all of the Taino had perished, victims of Spanish brutality and Old World diseases. Among the witnesses to this catastrophe was the Spanish missionary and Dominican priest Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474–1566). His extensive writings contained a vehement denunciation of Spanish actions in the Americas as well as an informed description of Taino life and culture. Here, Las Casas describes his understanding of Taino religion.

- Based on this account, how might you describe Taino religious practice?
- To what extent does Las Casas's Christian perspective color his account of Taino religion?
- What was the function of the *zemis* in Taino culture?
- What was the relationship between Taino political authorities and the "priests," or *behiques*?
- Which features of Taino religious life did Las Casas appreciate and which did he find offensive or erroneous?

Bartolomé de Las Casas

Apologetic History of the Indies

1566

The people of this island Hispaniola had a certain faith in and knowledge of a one and true God, who was immortal and invisible, for none can see him, who had no beginning, whose dwelling place and residence is heaven, and they called him Yócahu Vagua Maórocoti....

Into this true and catholic knowledge of the true God these errors intruded, to wit: that God had a mother, whose name was Atabex, and a brother Guaca, and other relatives in like fashion. They must have been like people without a guide on the road of the truth; rather there was one who would lead them astray, clouding the light of their natural reason that could have guided them....

[T]hey had some idols or good-luck statues, and these were generally called *zemis*.... They believed these zemis gave them water and wind and sun when they had need of them, and likewise children and other things they wanted to have. Some of these were made of wood and others of stone....

[P]riests, who are called *behiques* in the language of these islands and who were their theologians, prophets, and soothsayers, practiced some deceptions upon these people, primarily when they acted as physicians, in accordance with what the devil, from the domain allowed to him, dictated to them what they were to say or do. They led the people to believe they spoke with those statues and that the statues revealed their secrets to them, and they find out from those secrets everything they want to know. And it must have been so, because the devil surely spoke in those statues....

They had other idols or images of stone which those priests and physicians made the people believe they took out of the bodies of those who were sick, and these stones were of three kinds. I never saw their form, but they held each one to have its own power: one had the power to favor their sown lands; the second, so that women would have good fortune in childbirth; the power of the third was that they would have water and good rains when they had need of them. Thus they must have been like the gods of the ancients, each one of whom had the responsibility of presiding in his domain, although these peoples sensed this more crudely and simply than the ancients. The kings and lords boasted, and in this the other people must have followed them, about their zemis or gods and considered them more glorious, saying that they had better zemis than the other peoples and lords, and they endeavored to steal them from each other; and although they took great care in guarding these statues or idols or whatever they may have been from other Indians from other kingdoms and dominions, they took incomparably greater care in guarding and concealing them from the Spaniards, and when they suspected their approach, they would take them and hide them in the mountains....

We found that in the season when they gathered the harvest of the fields they had sown and cultivated, which consisted of the bread made from roots, yams, sweet potatoes, and corn, they donated a certain portion as first fruits, almost as if they were giving thanks for benefits received. Since they had no designated temples or houses of religion, as has been said above, they put this portion of first fruits of the crops in the great house of the lords and caciques, which they called *caney*, and they offered and dedicated it to the zemi. They said the zemi sent the water and brought the sun and nurtured all those fruits and gave them children and the other benefits which were there in abundance. All the things offered in this way were left there either until they rotted or the children took them or played with them or until they were spoiled, and thus they were consumed....

Source: Bartolomé de Las Casas, "Apologetic History of the Indies, 1566," in *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, edited by Fatima Bercht et al., translated by Susan C. Griswold (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997), 175–79.

When I would ask the Indians at times: "Who is this zemi you name?" they answered me: "He who makes it rain and makes the sun shine and gives us children and the other benefits we desire."...

I saw them celebrate their cohoba° a few times, and it was something to see how they took it and what they said. The first to begin was the lord, and while he took it everyone kept silent; when he had taken his cohoba (which is to inhale those powders through the nostrils...), and they took it seated on some low but very well carved benches which they called *duhos*..., he would stay a while with his head turned to one side and his arms placed on his knees, and afterward he would lift his face toward heaven and speak his certain words, which must have been his prayer to the true God, or to the one whom he held to be a god; then everyone would respond almost like when we respond amen, and they would do this with a great clamor of voices or sounds, and then they would give thanks to him, and they must have flattered him with praises, winning his benevolence and begging him to tell what he had seen. He would give them an account of his vision, saying that the zemi had spoken and assured him of good or adverse times, or that there were to be children, or that there was to be a death among them, or that they were to have some contention or war with their neighbors, and other foolishness that came to their imagination, stirred up by that intoxication, or that the devil, perhaps and haplessly, had insinuated to them so as to deceive them and inculcate in them a devotion to him....

[One particular] zemi brought diseases to men, according to their belief, for which they sought the help of the priests or behiques, who were their prophets and theologians as has been said; these priests would respond that the disease had befallen them because they had been negligent or forgetful in bringing cassava bread and yams and other things to eat to the ministers who swept and cleaned the house or hermitage of Vaybrama, good zemi, and that he had told him so.

°**cohoba:** a hallucinogenic drug used in religious ceremonies.

Using the Evidence: Agricultural Village Societies

1. **Comparing agricultural societies:** How would you compare the social organization of the three societies described in Documents 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3?
2. **Comparing agricultural and Paleolithic societies:** What features of gathering and hunting societies persisted among agricultural peoples? In what ways did they differ from their Paleolithic ancestors?
3. **Evaluating documents:** Documents 2.1 and 2.3 derive from outsiders to the societies they portray. In what ways did their outsider status influence the authors' understanding of these societies? And how did Kenyatta's position as a modern and Western-educated Gikuyu living in a colonial setting shape his description of his own people in Document 2.2? What assumptions and purposes did each of these writers bring to his task?
4. **Assessing the credibility of sources:** Consider these documents as sources of historical information about the societies they describe. What statements might historians reliably use as evidence and what might they discard or view with skepticism?

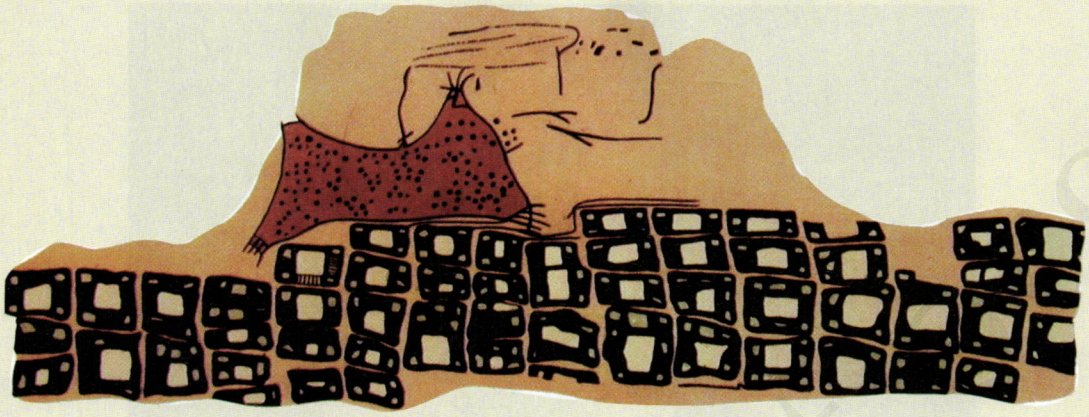
Visual Sources

Considering the Evidence: Art and Life in the Early Agrarian Era

The long period of world history between the beginnings of settled agriculture and the rise of civilizations is known as the early agrarian era or sometimes the Neolithic age. It was a time when the revolutionary implications of the breakthrough to agriculture began to be felt. Since these transformations took place before the advent of writing, historians depend heavily on material remains—art, artifacts, and architecture—for understanding the life of these people. In the absence of written records, scholars are sometimes hard-pressed to know precisely what motivated the creation of these works or what they signified to those who made them. Inference, imagination, and sometimes speculation play an important role in the analysis of this evidence.

Given human creativity and the global scope of the early agrarian era, generalizations about Neolithic art as a whole are difficult to make. But in comparison with the Paleolithic era, the new economy generated by agriculture gave rise to many artistic innovations. Weaving and pottery making became major industries, offering new opportunities for creative expression. Larger-scale stone structures, known as megaliths, appeared in various places, and settled farming communities required more elaborate dwellings, including some substantial stone fortifications. Agrarian societies also produced much larger sculptures than did gathering and hunting societies. Finally, while animals continued to be a focus of Neolithic art, human figures became more prominent and were more realistically depicted than in the cave paintings and Venus figurines of the Paleolithic era.

The art of the early agrarian era sometimes included representations of the distinctive social and economic patterns of this new phase of human history. One example is a remarkable wall painting from Çatalhüyük, an early farming community located in south-central Turkey (see pp. 64–65 and Map 2.1, p. 54). Dated to about 6200 B.C.E., the painting is apparently a stylized portrayal of the village itself, showing some eighty buildings arranged on rising terraces. Behind the town rises an erupting twin-peaked volcano, resembling the nearby actual volcano of Hasan Dag, which was active during the time that Çatalhüyük flourished. In this painting, we have a record of one of the most distinctive outcomes of the Agricultural Revolution—the establishment of settled agricultural villages. It is also perhaps the earliest map and landscape painting



Visual Source 2.1 Çatalhüyük: An Early Map and Landscape Painting (James Mellaart/Çatalhöyuk Research Project)

uncovered to date. Visual Source 2.1 is a reconstruction of that image, which was about ten feet long in its original form.

- What particular features of the mountain/volcano can you identify? What do you think the dots on the mountain represent? Notice that the volcano is venting from both the top and the base of the mountain, as volcanoes often do.
- Compare the map with the photograph on page 64 of the uncovered remains of Çatalhüyük. What similar features do you see?
- Notice that this image contains neither human nor animal figures. What might be the significance of this absence?
- What do you think the purpose of such an image might have been? Keep in mind that obsidian (black volcanic glass) found at the base of the mountain was a very valuable, and perhaps sacred, item in Çatalhüyük and an important product in regional trading patterns.

Archeological investigation at Çatalhüyük has generated a major debate about the role of women in the religious and social life of this early agricultural village. The first major dig at the site, undertaken by James Mellaart in the 1960s, uncovered a number of small female figurines, the most famous of which is shown here as Visual Source 2.2. It dates to about 5000 B.C.E. and is some eight inches in height. The baked-clay figure depicts a seated female whose arms are resting on two lionesses or leopards. For Mellaart, this was evidence for an ancient and powerful cult of the "mother Goddess," an idea that proved compelling to a number of feminist scholars and goddess worshippers. This understanding also gained support from the absence of similar male figurines. Some goddess devotees have come to view Çatalhüyük as a pilgrimage site.

Visual Source 2.2 Women, Men, and Religion in Çatalhüyük (Museum of Anatolian Civilization, Ankara/Gianni Dagli Orti/The Art Archive)

- What features of this statue might support such a view?
- How might the fact that this figurine was discovered in an abandoned grain bin affect your thinking about its significance?
- Why might feminist scholars have been attracted to Mellaart's interpretation of this figure?
- What alternative understandings of this figure can you imagine?

Later archeological research, ongoing since 1993 under the leadership of Ian Hodder, has called some aspects of this "mother Goddess" interpretation into question. Hodder, for example, doubts the existence of an organized cult with an attached priesthood, as Mellaart theorized. Rather, Hodder noted

that the image suggests "a close connection between ritual and daily functions." He added:

> I do not think that there was a separate religious elite. I think the religion was an integral part of daily life. It may be wrong to think of the Çatal art as religious or symbolic at all. It may be more that people thought that they had to paint, or make relief sculptures, in order to achieve certain practical ends (such as make the crops grow, or prevent children from dying).[20]

Furthermore, Hodder suggested that while women were certainly prominent in the symbolism of the village, there is little evidence for a "matriarchal society" in which women dominated. Rather, he wrote that "men and women had the same social status. There was a balance of power."[21]

- Why do you think the life of this small Neolithic village some 7,000 or more years ago continues to provoke such passionate debate? (You might want to do a little research about the controversies surrounding Çatalhüyük.)

The Neolithic or Agricultural Revolution gave rise not only to settled farming communities but also to pastoral nomadic societies, dependent on their herds of domesticated animals (see p. 63). Nowhere has this transformation been more thoroughly documented than in the rock art of the central Sahara region of Africa. There the domestication of cattle actually preceded the development of farming and from perhaps 4500 B.C.E. or earlier, pastoral societies flourished in the area. Later, horses and camels were introduced into the region as well. Visual Source 2.3, a rock-art painting from Tassili-n-Ajjer, in southeastern Algeria, illustrates the early development of such pastoral societies. The multiple colors of the cattle indicate that they were a long-domesticated species.

- On the left, women and children are attending a line of calves roped together. What might this suggest to historians seeking to understand this society?
- How would you describe the activities of the other human figures, presumably men? Does this suggest anything about the division of labor in such societies?
- Notice that the herd of cattle is portrayed in front of some huts, indicated by stylized circles. What might this indicate about the nature of this community?
- How might you compare the society depicted in this image with that of Çatalhüyük in Visual Source 2.1?

Among the most famous sites of the early agrarian era is Stonehenge, a series of earthworks accompanied by circles of standing stones located in

Visual Source 2.3 An African Pastoral Community (Document Henri Lhote's Expedition/ Visual Connection Archive)

southern England, where the Agricultural Revolution emerged around 4000 B.C.E. Construction of the Stonehenge site began around 3100 B.C.E. and continued intermittently for another 1,500 years.

- Have a close look at the aerial photograph of Stonehenge in Visual Source 2.4. How would you describe its major features to someone who had never seen it? What questions about the site come to mind?

Almost everything about Stonehenge has been a matter of controversy and speculation among those scholars who have studied it. Prominent among those debates have been the questions of motivation and function. Why was it constructed? What purposes did it serve for those early farming peoples who used it? The discovery of the cremated remains of some 240 individuals, dat-

ing to the first five centuries of its existence, has convinced some scholars that it was a burial site, perhaps for members of a single high-ranking family. It was the "domain of the dead" or an abode of the ancestors, remarked one archeologist, linked ritually perhaps to a nearby village of Durrington Walls, a "land of the living" consisting of 300 to 1,000 homes.[22] Others have cast Stonehenge as an astronomical observatory, aligned with the solstices and able to predict eclipses and the movement of heavenly bodies, or perhaps a center of sun worship. Most recently, it has been depicted as "a place of pilgrimage for the sick and injured of the Neolithic world," based on the number of burials in the area that show signs of serious illness, trauma, or deformity as well as the presence of many bluestone rock chips thought to have magical healing properties.[23]

Whatever its purposes, still other controversies surround the manner of its construction. How were those huge slabs of rock, some as heavy as fifty tons and others coming from a location 240 miles away, transported to Stonehenge and put into place? Were they dragged overland or transported partway by boat along the Avon River? Or did the movement of earlier glaciers deposit them in the region?

Visual Source 2.4 The Mystery of Stonehenge (© Skyscan/Corbis)

- What does a structure of the magnitude of Stonehenge suggest about the Neolithic societies that created it?
- What kinds of additional evidence would be most useful to scholars seeking to puzzle out the mysteries of Stonehenge?

The first millennium B.C.E. witnessed the flourishing of an impressive artistic tradition, arising out of the Nok culture, among the agricultural peoples of what is now northern Nigeria. Unlike the earlier Neolithic peoples highlighted in this section, they had learned to make and use iron. Amid the stone axes, iron implements, and pottery found in the region, the material remains of this ancient African culture also yielded a treasure of terra-cotta (fired clay) figures, often life-size, depicting animals and especially people. The highly stylized human figures shared several features: elongated heads often disproportionately large in comparison to their bodies; triangular eyes; pierced noses,

Visual Source 2.5 A Sculpture from the Nok Culture (Musée du Quai Branly/Scala/Art Resource, NY)

pupils, ears, and lips (perhaps to vent the air during the firing process); and elaborate attention to hairstyles, ornamentation, and dress. The artistic sophistication of these pieces has suggested to some scholars that their creators drew on an even earlier, as yet undiscovered, tradition. Some similarities with much later sculptures from Ife and Benin in southern Nigeria suggest the possibility of a long-lasting and widespread artistic tradition in West Africa. Visual Source 2.5 presents one of these Nok sculptures, dating to somewhere between 600 B.C.E. and 600 C.E.

- What features of Nok sculpture, described above, can you identify in this figure?
- How might you describe the mood that this figure evokes? Some scholars have dubbed this and many similar Nok sculptures "thinkers." Does it seem more likely that this notion reflects a present-day sensibility or that it might be an insight into the mentality of the ancient artist who created the image? Why?
- What might you infer about the status of the person represented in this sculpture?
- No one actually knows the purpose of these works. What possibilities come to mind as you consider Visual Source 2.5?

Using the Evidence: Art and Life in the Early Agrarian Era

1. **Assessing personal reactions:** How do you respond personally to Visual Sources 2.1–2.5? What do you find surprising or impressive about them? Which of them are most accessible to a person of the early twenty-first century? Which are least accessible? Do you find these images easier to understand than the Paleolithic rock art featured in Chapter 1? Why or why not?
2. **Considering art as evidence:** What insights about early agrarian life might we derive from these images? In what ways do they reflect the technological or economic changes of the Agricultural Revolution?
3. **Reflecting on speculation:** You will notice that our understanding of all of these works is highly uncertain, inviting a considerable amount of speculation, guesswork, or imagination. Why are historians willing to articulate uncertain interpretations of ancient art? Is this an appropriate undertaking for historians, or should scholars remain silent when the evidence does not allow them to speak with certainty and authority?