

PREFACE

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Within the last 50 years archaeology has grown dramatically to become our major source of information for the past 3 million years of the human story. It is only by appreciating that past that we can hope to understand the world we inhabit today. The aim of this volume is to provide an authoritative guide to those 3 million years, in a way that is accessible both to beginning students in archaeology and anthropology and to any interested reader; the book assumes no prior knowledge of the field of prehistory. At the dawn of the 21st century, new technologies and discoveries, as well as the increasing scale of archaeological research, are allowing us to see the patterns of the human past in fuller outline and in greater detail than ever before. What archaeologists have long sought to achieve – to construct a truly worldwide picture of the development of human societies, in all their diversity and across enormous spans of time – we are now able to do with new confidence.

The growing pace of archaeological research is reflected in the development of university courses, and that, in turn, has triggered the production of several textbooks on world prehistory. Many seek to cover the entire field of the human past under the pen of a single author. These are valiant undertakings, increasingly so in an age when the rate of archaeological publication has reached levels that make it difficult even for regional specialists to keep up with new work in their own area. Thus, *The Human Past* is a multi-authored text, with each chapter the work of an acknowledged expert in his or her field.

Our 24 authors are drawn from North America, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. Specializations range from the first stone tools made by early hominins in Africa, to the complex societies of such disparate cultures as those of the Romans, Polynesians, and Aztecs. Together these scholars cover the vast panorama of the human past with a level of detailed understanding and expertise that is unrivaled in any other textbook of world prehistory. *The Human Past* thus has an authority that is beyond the reach of any single-authored work: the texts are based on first-hand knowledge of the areas and issues under discussion, and represent an accessible, up-to-date, and uniquely reliable account of what we know today about the origins and development of human society.

The study of world prehistory is a rapidly moving field with new discoveries reported weekly in newsprint and on television. Some of these are spectacular, others profound in their consequences for the understanding of how human societies have developed – that is to say, how we come to be who we are today.

This new edition of *The Human Past* incorporates these advances in knowledge, building on the first edition. We have amended the text to include the most up-to-date information, as well as revising the illustration program and adding a series of new boxes, in some cases replacing older material, and updating the bib-

liography. This represents a comprehensive revision in which each member of our international team of authors has played a central and active part in reviewing and rewriting their own chapters and sections. Their input ensures that *The Human Past* continues to be the leading textbook of world prehistory, and the most authoritative and up-to-date account available of the development of human societies from early hominins to states and empires.

New discoveries are given prominent coverage in this new edition. Thus a box feature is devoted to remarkable evidence that large areas of the Amazon basin are not “pristine” but were indeed farmed and engineered by the time of first European contact (Chapter 17). It was the impact of disease and disruption consequent upon that contact that led to their abandonment. Such discoveries demonstrate how profound and geographically extensive human impacts on the global ecosystem have been in the prehistoric past, which also has implications for the future.

Other highlights of the new edition are features on *Australopithecus garhi*, the fossil hominin from East Africa that may have been responsible for the earliest stone tools (Chapter 2), on the ceremonial center of Göbekli Tepe in southeast Turkey (Chapter 6), representing some of the world’s earliest monumental architecture – over twice as old as the first famous structures of Egypt or Mesopotamia – and on the Neolithic settlers at Ban Non Wat in eastern Thailand (Chapter 7). A box is also devoted to the Jamestown fort that marked the beginnings of permanent English settlement in North America (Chapter 18). Other boxes have been expanded to include new information, such as the intestinal analysis that enables us to chart in amazing detail the final hours of the Alpine “Iceman” and the latest findings at Stonehenge.

Significant contributions to the study of the human past continue to be made by advances in molecular analysis, notably DNA. These include the use of DNA to trace the origins of domestic pigs, one of the most widespread of Old World domesticates, and one which this research indicates has had multiple geographic origins (Chapter 5). This important species was domesticated not only once, but on several separate occasions. DNA research also continues to throw new light on the evolution of modern humans, providing new evidence (Chapter 4) that Neanderthals were not our close relatives, while at the same time suggesting that they may have possessed the FOXP2 gene which has been linked to language ability. Thus Neanderthals may have been only distantly related to us, but they may have had key “human” abilities.

These new discoveries and insights should not blind us to the fact that archaeology draws upon the emotive material of cultural heritage. Growing pressure on world resources constitutes a major threat to the archaeological heritage. Conflict and poverty exacerbate the problem, as in Iraq where recent instability has led to widespread looting of archaeological sites (Chapter 12). Involving local communities in their own archaeology is a crucial step in reconnecting people to their own heritage. The picture of the human past that we present in this revised edition is the fruit of new research in the laboratory and in the field, but is inspired by the

firm belief that by understanding world prehistory, we gain a fuller and richer understanding of ourselves, and of the diversity of human experience past and present.

Organization of the Book

As before, the volume is divided into two main sections. Part I (chapters 2–4) focuses on human origins and developments up to the end of the last Ice Age – the period conventionally known as the Paleolithic. The second, longer, section (Part II, chapters 5–18) covers the postglacial period, the Holocene, from 11,500 years ago to recent times.

The book begins with an introduction (**Chapter 1**) that presents and explains a number of key concepts: what the disciplines of archaeology and prehistory comprise and how they originated; the ways in which archaeologists seek to learn about the human past (methods and techniques); and how they attempt to interpret archaeological remains in order to understand how societies have developed and changed (archaeological theory). The following three chapters cover the Paleolithic period, beginning in **Chapter 2** with hominin origins in Africa. **Chapter 3** describes the dispersal of early humans across much of the Old World and the development of new species of the human lineage, new lifestyles, and new technologies. **Chapter 4** covers the emergence and spread of fully modern humans, including their first colonization of the Americas and Australia.

Chapter 5 prefaces the second section of the book, setting out the main themes of the postglacial period around the world: climate change, the origins of farming, the inexorable rise in human population density, and the development of the social complexity that underpinned the emergence of cities and states. These themes are highlighted in the region-by-region chapters that follow.

The arrangement of material both within and between chapters is broadly chronological. **Chapters 6–14** take the reader on a world tour of Holocene developments, beginning in Southwest Asia and proceeding via East Asia, Australasia, and the Americas to Africa, Europe, and South Asia. The adjustment of human societies to postglacial environments, and the development of the new food-producing economies, provides a unifying theme across these chapters. The development of more complex societies is also covered – in Africa (**Chapter 10**), Southwest Asia (**Chapter 12**), the Mediterranean lands (**Chapter 13**), and South Asia (**Chapter 14**). More recent centuries are covered in **chapters 15–18**, which describe regional developments in East Asia and particularly in the New World.

This book provides a comprehensive introduction to world prehistory, and could form the basis of a complete undergraduate program. It could also be used more selectively, by taking a series of chapters to explore a particular theme or region. Thus chapters 9 and 16–18 provide an account of American prehistory from the Paleoindians to European colonization; alternatively, a comparative study of state societies might draw on chapters 12, 14, 16, and 17 for

a selection of Old and New World examples (Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, Mesoamerica, and Andean South America).

Within a multi-authored work of this kind there is necessarily less scope for a personal perspective, but the book is given coherence by its focus on key themes of adaptation, social change, and the development of social complexity. The final chapter brings these themes together in a brief retrospective that also looks to the lessons of the human past for the human future, in particular in terms of climate change and demographic growth. These form, arguably, the most important message that archaeology offers to the present world, though their implications are all too rarely taken seriously by planners and politicians. For the story of human evolution is not just about our past – it is intensely relevant to the most burning issues of contemporary humankind.

Special Features

The specialist scholarship of *The Human Past* is supported by a series of features that make the book accessible to the widest variety of readers:

Timelines Located at the beginning of each chapter, these give a simple, clear overview of the events covered in that chapter. Timelines also highlight the standard period divisions (with dates) for the area under discussion, and the chronological terminology commonly employed in each region (“Formative,” “Neolithic,” etc.).

Maps and Diagrams Each chapter is accompanied by a map showing the location of major sites and regional or cultural groupings. Additional maps and a wealth of plans, diagrams, and photographs illustrate specific themes or processes. Archaeology is an extremely visual subject, a fact that the high level of illustration in this volume serves to underscore.

Box Features Highlighted in each chapter, these fall into four categories: “Key Sites,” “Key Controversies,” “Key Methods,” and “Key Discoveries.” “Key Sites” describe important individual sites or finds in greater detail than is possible within the main text. “Key Controversies” supplement the chapter text by focusing on important areas of debate such as the evolution of language or how “African” was ancient Egypt. “Key Methods” describe some of the most important scientific techniques used today to date archaeological remains and to reconstruct ancient environments. “Key Discoveries” include discussions of breakthroughs in long-standing archaeological enquiries such as the exact significance of the Parthenon in Athens or the Mesoamerican ball game, as well as descriptions of such world-famous discoveries as the Chinchorro mummies of Chile, the world’s earliest deliberate practice of mummification, and of the major hominin fossils in the human story.

Summaries Provided at the end of each chapter, these give an overview of the chapter contents and a reiteration of the authors’

conclusions. Links between chapters are indicated, making it easy to follow the developments of a particular region from their earliest appearance to later complexity.

Further Reading and Bibliography Each chapter closes with suggestions for further reading – carefully selected titles that will enable students to amplify and deepen their understanding of the key themes of that chapter. More detailed references are provided in the chapter-by-chapter bibliography at the end of the volume.

Suggested Websites A list of recommended websites is provided at the end of chapters where appropriate, chosen by the authors for particular usefulness, clarity, and scholarly reliability.

Glossary As far as possible, specialist terms are explained where they first appear in the book; in addition, a glossary is provided at the end of the volume for easy reference.

Website

A student web site has been designed to accompany *The Human Past*, which can be found at:

www.thamesandhudsonusa.com/web/humanpast

This offers students a range of materials specifically developed by Professor Tina Thurston of the University of Buffalo and updated by Donna Yates of the University of Cambridge, to reinforce what they have learned from reading *The Human Past* and to help them prepare for tests. The following are provided for every chapter in the book: learning objectives; chapter summaries; key terms; practice quizzes; flash cards to revise key terms; and useful internet links.

A Note on Dating

For the Paleolithic period (chapters 2–4) dates are given as “years ago” (years before the present). The other dates used in this volume have wherever possible been converted to calendar years (BC/AD). For an explanation of calibration and radiocarbon dating, see the box on p. 157.

Acknowledgments

I should like, first and foremost, to acknowledge the individual contributors to this volume, who have provided an excellent series of texts and have patiently responded to a seemingly endless sequence of questions and comments. The success of the book is a testimony to this teamwork. My thanks go to them also for their ongoing commitment to the project, and for their co-operation, inspiration, and hard work. In preparing this new edition it is my pleasant duty to record once again my gratitude to all the team at Thames & Hudson for their support and hard work. I also owe a large vote of thanks to my colleagues at Durham for their knowledge and advice, and for providing a lively academic environment.

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Terracotta figurines of women preparing maize for tortillas, from Nayarit, west Mexico, dating between c. 200 BC and AD 600.

