



Archaeology and Humanity's Story

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO WORLD PREHISTORY

SECOND EDITION

Deborah I. Olszewski

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In memory of my good friend, Harold L. Dibble
(July 26, 1951–June 10, 2018) and all the years of “Forward into the Past”

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Preface

Archaeology provides the evidence for the story of all humanity. The long time depth of this record and its worldwide coverage offer us a view of change and diversity over the tens, hundreds, and thousands of millennia that mark the human presence on planet Earth. The goal of this book is to convey a sense of the processes that occurred, why these changes may have taken place, and how human groups created relationships that allowed them to navigate both their social and their natural worlds.

Some of our earliest ancestors likely would not be recognized by us as human, but many of the challenges they faced were ones that continued to be significant to later modern human groups. A number of the important watershed events were linked in part to dietary shifts. For our earliest ancestors, these included eating more C_4 plants compared to the C_3 plants that our closest living relatives, the common chimpanzees and bonobos, eat. By doing so, these earliest ancestors expanded into a new econiche. Some of these early ancestors also began to incorporate more meat in their diet (another new econiche), which provided a rich food source to supply energy to the very energy-expensive brain. Along the way, the innovation of using sharp-edge stone artifacts gave our ancestors advantages in procuring meat and marrow from animal bones and eventually weapons with which to hunt. Of course, there were many other later technological innovations, such as hafting stone artifacts, the invention of spear throwers and the bow and arrow, and the knowledge of how to manufacture basketry and, later, how to fire clay to make pottery vessels, among many others.

One of the major economic transitions/dietary shifts, however, was the advent of food-production economies. Some human groups in the late Pleistocene and early Holocene epochs in both the Old and the New Worlds began to manipulate certain plants and animals in ways that led to their domestication. Whereas early farmers and pastoralists faced their own sets of challenges such as droughts, floods, and insects, generally speaking, food-production economies had the potential to create surpluses, which are a type of “wealth.” How these surpluses were used by communities could vary significantly. In some groups, surpluses were shared, whereas in other groups, particular individuals and their families eventually gained increased access to surpluses. When this happened, there was potential for the development of “elites” who not only accumulated more surpluses but also became more powerful in terms of authority and decision-making for others. In a number of cases, through a variety of social processes, these elites became established as rulers, and the societies they led became increasingly politically complex. This type of transition often was marked by the development of features such as social classes and bureaucracies, and the polities are those we call kingdoms, states, and empires. Several of this book’s chapters focus on these politically complex societies.

Organization and Themes

The intent of this book is to provide undergraduate students and the public with an overview of human prehistory and early history, as well as case studies for several societies that are examples of social complexity and of political complexity. By taking a case study approach, attention is paid in some detail to particular places and points in time at the expense of coverage of all past societies, processes, and events. This approach has the benefit of not overwhelming the reader with everything that is represented in the archaeological record, particularly because such coverage within one book either would require a rather lengthy presentation or would result in just the briefest of mentions for each site and event.

The book is organized into several parts as follows. Part 1 (“The Basics of Archaeology”) contains one chapter. This part presents information on archaeological method and theory, dating, and issues such as “Who Owns the Past.” In Part 2 (“Prehistory Before Political Complexity”), there are four chapters. Chapter 2 (“Humanity’s Roots”) discusses the earliest human ancestors in the interval from 7 to 1 million years ago and the origins of stone tool technology. Chapter 3 (“Becoming Human”) provides information on later ancestors who began the series of out of Africa movements that led to populating the Middle East, Europe, and Asia. It also includes discussion of the origins of modern humans and of modern human behaviors. Chapter 4 (“A World of Modern Humans”) examines the hunting–gathering–foraging groups of Later Stone Age Africa and Upper Paleolithic Europe. It provides information about modern human expansion into Australia/New Guinea and into the Americas, as well as materials on Paleoamericans. Chapter 5 (“Hunting, Gathering, Foraging, Farming, and Complexity”) deals with events at the end of the Pleistocene and in the Early Holocene in the Old and New Worlds. These include discussion of the origins of food-production economies and some of the social consequences of these new lifeways. The concepts of social and political complexity are discussed in the context of the example of Hawai‘i, as are examples of interpretive frameworks and themes in politically complex societies.

In Part 3 (“On the Threshold of Political Complexity”), there are three chapters. Chapter 6 (“Prehistoric Europe North of the Mediterranean”) examines the archaeological background to changes in Europe, especially in the period following the expansion of food-producing economies from the Middle East. It concentrates mainly on the Bronze Age. Chapter 7 (“The North American Southwest”) treats developments in the North American Southwest after the introduction of domesticated plants from Mesoamerica. It focuses specifically on the Ancestral Pueblo, particularly Chaco Canyon, but also includes some information on the Hohokam and Mogollon. Chapter 8 (“Eastern North America”) examines the North American East where indigenous plants were brought into cultivation but some domesticates were later introduced from Mesoamerica. It highlights Cahokia during the Early Mississippian period.

Part 4 (“Politically Complex Societies”) contains seven chapters. Chapter 9 (“Early Dynastic Mesopotamia”) discusses developments in the Middle East and

uses the Early Dynastic period of Mesopotamia as a case study of political complexity. Chapter 10 (“Pharaonic State and Old Kingdom Egypt”) does the same for Egypt, focusing especially on the Old Kingdom period there. Chapter 11 (“Shang China”) examines political complexity in East Asia using the Shang period as its case study. Chapter 12 (“The Indus Valley”) looks at the Harappan and the processes that led to the Mature Harappan period, especially the context of urbanism. Chapter 13 (“Mesoamerica, the Classic Maya, and the Aztec Empire”) provides a case study of early political complexity from the New World using the Classic period Maya. It also includes information on the later Aztec Empire. Chapter 14 (“Andean South America and the Inka Empire”) examines the contexts for the appearance of the Inka Empire and provides materials using the Inka as its case study. Chapter 15 (“Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe in Africa”) does the same for late politically complex societies in southeastern Africa.

In Part 5 (“Epilogue”), there is one chapter. This epilogue recaps the “disappearance” of politically complex entities and some lessons from past societies which are perhaps useful for today’s world.

New to the Second Edition

Global Changes

- New chapter (Chapter 6) on Europe.
- New section on the Aztecs in the Mesoamerican chapter (Chapter 13).
- All chapters have been updated to include current research and interpretations, as well as many revisions suggested by reviewers.
- New box feature, “Further Reflections,” now appears in all chapters except Chapter 1 and the Epilogue. This feature addresses a key topic or concept that is covered in each chapter.
- Detailed sections on early food production were moved from Chapter 5 to the relevant chapters on Europe, North American Southwest, Eastern North America, China, Mesoamerica, and Andean South America.
- Sections on political complexity, including Hawai’i, were moved from first edition Chapter 15 to second edition Chapter 5.
- Topography was added to map figures throughout.

Chapter by Chapter Changes

- **Chapter 1** (“Acquiring and Interpreting Data in Archaeology”):
 - Reworked section on theory in archaeology

- Table added to show examples of theories and the chapters in which the examples are to be found
- **Chapter 2** (“Humanity’s Roots”):
 - New opening image
 - Added nonhoning chewing
 - Reduced discussion of *Ardipithecus ramidus* in main text; see “Further Reflections”
 - Added Lomekwian stone tool industry
 - New box: “Further Reflections: The Place of *Ardipithecus ramidus* in Human Evolution”
- **Chapter 3** (“Becoming Human”):
 - Deleted text and image for Movius Line (a concept now widely disputed re its usefulness)
 - Reorganized and rewrote sections on models for the origins of modern humans
 - Added image on Broca’s and Wernicke’s areas in the brain
 - Added box: “Further Reflections: Was There an Out of Africa Before 1.9 Million Years Ago?”
- **Chapter 4** (“A World of Modern Humans”):
 - New opening image
 - New images for engravings/painting in Upper Paleolithic caves added for Chauvet and for Altamira
 - New image showing Sahul and Sunda added
 - Moved some mentions of sites to endnotes (e.g., el Castillo) and deleted others (Kostenki12, 17, Kents Cavern, Grotta del Cavallo, Pech Merle, Devil’s Lair, Allen’s Cave, Huon Peninsula, Kara-Bom, Cactus Hill, Dent, Deborah L. Friedkin site, Lindenmeier)
 - Added sites of Madjebebe, Vilakuav, Carpenters Gap, Bluefish Caves, Wally’s Beach
 - New box: “Further Reflections: Megafauna in Australia”
- **Chapter 5** (“Hunting, Gathering, Foraging, Farming, and Complexity”):
 - New opening image
 - Added a second example of a Gobekli Tepe carved T-shape pillar

- Added Shubayqa I and its evidence for early flat bread
- As noted above, detailed sections of food production moved to other chapters, except for the discussion of food production and its background in the Levantine part of the Middle East
- Reorganized/rewrote section “Why Food Production?”
- As noted above, sections on complexity including themes and frameworks, as well as the example from Hawai’i) moved from first edition Chapter 15 to this chapter
- New box: “Further Reflections: Thinking About Food Production”
- **Chapter 6** (“Prehistoric Europe North of the Mediterranean”):
 - New chapter to this edition
 - Boxes include:
 - “Timeline: Prehistoric Europe”
 - “Peopling the Past: Building Stonehenge”
 - “Peopling the Past: Bronze Age Elites”
 - “Peopling the Past: Violence, Ritual or Both in the Bronze Age?”
 - “Further Reflections: Characterizing Social and Political” Organization”
 - Topics covered include:
 - Early Holocene Hunter-Gatherer-Foragers (including Ertebølle)
 - Early Food Production (including Cardial Ware, Linear Pottery, Funnel Beaker)
 - Neolithic Megaliths and Other Monument Building
 - Interpretations of Neolithic Megaliths and Other Monuments in Great Britain
 - Bronze Age Europe
 - Iron Age Europe (Halstatt and La Tène)
- **Chapter 7** (“The North American Southwest”):
 - Added some material from first edition Chapter 5 on precursors to food production
 - Deleted sites (Atl Atl Cave)
 - New box: “Further Reflections: Elite Lineage at Pueblo Bonito”

- **Chapter 8** (“Eastern North America”):
 - New opening image
 - Added some material from first edition Chapter 5 on precursors to food production
 - Deleted sites (Turner)
 - New box: “Further Reflections: Cahokia: Paramount Chiefdom or State?”
- **Chapter 9** (“Early Dynastic Mesopotamia”):
 - New opening image
 - Two new images added: aerial view of Ur and a ziggurat
 - New box: “Further Reflections: Archaeology and Politics”
- **Chapter 10** (“Pharaonic State and Old Kingdom Egypt”):
 - New image added: mastaba
 - New box: “Further Reflections: Egypt’s Multiple Rises and Falls”
- **Chapter 11** (“Shang China”):
 - Added some material from first edition Chapter 5 on precursors to food production
 - New images: map showing Neolithic culture areas and oracle bone with writing on it
 - Deleted sites (Haojiatai)
 - New box: “Further Reflections: Consolidating the Western Zhou State Identity”
- **Chapter 12** (“The Indus Valley”):
 - New box: “Further Reflections: Importance of Trade and Exchange Networks”
- **Chapter 13** (“Mesoamerica, the Classic Maya, and the Aztec Empire”):
 - Added some material from first edition Chapter 5 on precursors to food production
 - New images added: Monte Albán plaza area, aerial view of Pyramid of the Moon area at Teotihuacan, a *Spondylus* shell, map of the Aztec Empire, part of the Tlateloco market, stylized portrayal of the Aztec god Huitzilopochtli, altar with skull carvings at Templo Mayor
 - As noted above, a section on the Aztec Empire was added to this chapter, including:
 - The Triple Alliance

- Aztec Trade and Exchange Networks
- Aztec Social Life
- Aztec Religion and Ritual
- Aztec Warfare and Violence
- New box: “Further Reflections: Historical Documents, the Maya, and the Aztecs”
- **Chapter 14** (“Andean South America and the Inka Empire”):
 - Added some material from first edition Chapter 5 on early food production
 - New images added: *Strombus* shell, aerial view of one of the Nazca lines, different example of a khipu
 - New box: “Further Reflections: Challenges to the State/Empire”
- **Chapter 15** (“Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe in Africa”):
 - New opening image
 - New box: “Further Reflections: The Bantu Expansion”
- **Epilogue:**
 - Previously appeared as Chapter 15
 - As noted above, sections on political complexity and on Hawai’i were moved to Chapter 5
 - Retained in this epilogue are the sections: “All Good Things Come to an End” and “Lessons from the Past?”

Features and Benefits

In all of the chapters, several sidebar boxes are provided. Every chapter has a timeline box showing the chronology relevant to that chapter. Each, except the last chapter, also has boxes that feature topics related to “The Big Picture” and to “Peopling the Past.” These highlight themes such as methods and frameworks, behavioral strategies, stone and other tool traditions, art and ideology, and social life. Given the scope of the topics covered, the themes and boxes of the early chapters (Chapters 1 through 5) are necessarily different from chapter to chapter, as well as different from those in Chapters 6 on. Finally, all chapters except Chapter 1 and the Epilogue have boxes on “Further Reflections.” These treat a variety of topics such as chiefdoms, the importance of “international” trade and exchange to early

societies, the family structure of elites, and how elites consolidated their power or legitimacy.

To the extent possible, for all chapters beginning with Chapter 6 in Part 3, each case study has the same set of themes. These include Resource Networks, Trade, and Exchange; Social Life; Ritual and Religion; and Warfare and Violence. Many also have The Written Word. Of course, in some cases, evidence is either not available or these societies did not have certain features. For example, we have not yet deciphered the Indus script, and thus there is not a box on the written word in Chapter 11, whereas for the Inka, theirs was a nonwritten word in the form of the khipu. In some instances, other types of themes are then provided, such as Urbanization for the Indus Valley and Oral Traditions for Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe.

The main goal in providing similar themes for all the chapters dealing with social complexity and with political complexity is to have a framework making comparisons between the various case studies easier for the reader. In many cases, there also are analogies given to features in the modern world that are similar in some respects to those of these past societies. These provide a direct connection between us and past groups that help show the relevance of archaeology and its evidence.

A Word About Dates

How dates are shown in the archaeological literature can be quite confusing to the nonspecialist. This is because there are differences in the levels of accuracy; for example, some dates are calendar years, whereas others can be expressed in calibrated calendar years, and still others are absolute dates but not at the level of correlation to calendar years. On top of all this is an additional complexity because of the terms that are used. These can include bp or BP (before the present, which is based on AD 1950 as a baseline), bc or BC (before Christ) or BCE (before the Common Era), and AD or CE. As explained in Chapter 1, to the extent possible, dates in this book are shown/used in the following ways. Prehistory prior to 50,000 years ago is referred to using uncalibrated dates, shown as bp (the small letters indicating that they are not calibrated). For the period between 50,000 and 5000, dates are cal BC (calibrated BC) when appropriate (not all types of dates can be calibrated). From about 5000 to the BC/AD boundary, dates are shown as BC. This is because many of them are from early written records and calendars that can be correlated with the calendric system we use today. Rather than using both the cal BC and the BC standards for the same periods of time, I chose to reduce some of the confusion by using BC for this range of time. Finally, dates after the BC/AD boundary are shown as AD. I have chosen not to use the BCE/CE terminology primarily because this is not as familiar to most readers, and it presents some difficulties for earlier prehistory because this terminology is not used by paleoanthropologists.

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