

Paleolithic Era

The earliest people lived during the [Old Stone Age](#). The period is also called the [Paleolithic Era](#). The Paleolithic Period began more than 2,000,000 years ago. These people were [nomads](#). In order to find food, the Paleolithic people often had to move from place to place, hunting and gathering. Because of the lack of food and the constant moving, populations tended to be small. These people usually died at a very early age because of hunger, disease, or injury.

Early people were quite smart. They developed tools that made life easier for them. They were simple tools but they were able to use stones, sticks, bones and other things to make weapons for hunting and defense. Although these were [prehistoric](#) times, they left cave paintings behind. These paintings have helped us understand the lives and religious beliefs of these people. In order to communicate, Paleolithic Man developed a very simple language that usually consisted of simple grunts or babbles. Today we would say that their language was similar to the early language of a baby. At some point, early man discovered fire and that it could be used for cooking, light and warmth. Over time they even discovered ways to make fire.

When Paleolithic people had a successful hunt, they would use every part of the animal they killed. They would use the meat for food, the skins for clothing, and the bones for tools or weapons. If they were unable to find the shelter of a cave, they might also use the bones and skins to make simple huts.

Paleolithic People also developed religious beliefs. They believed in [animism](#), where all living things had spirits. They also believed in life after death and because of this they took special care in burying their dead. To ensure that their dead would have what they needed in the [afterlife](#) they would often bury their dead with food, tools, and weapons.

Because populations were small, both men and women were important in these early societies. It is believed that men were probably the leaders of these little tribes. The eldest man ruled until his death. At that point power would move to the next oldest male. Women, however, had the most important roles during this time period. They had the important role of carrying on life and for the most part they were more successful in finding food. They were the "gatherers." They found nuts and berries while the men hunted. Most times the men were unsuccessful in finding food while the women weren't.

Neolithic Era

About 12,000 years ago (10,000 B.C.) an important discovery was made. Humans learned to farm. This became known as the [Neolithic Period](#) or [New Stone Age](#). The [Neolithic Revolution](#) was a major turning point in history. In addition to learning to farm, man learned to domesticate (tame) animals. In doing so, life drastically changed for mankind.

Once man learned to farm, they began to settle. Permanent settlements began to develop in river valleys. The rivers provided fertile soil and water for irrigation. In order to farm more effectively, man developed new skills and tools. They made tools that were more complex and made farming easier. They quickly learned that animals could be used to do work. In addition, they developed ways to measure their seed for planting, keep track of time, build stronger homes and boats that could be used for trade and travel.

These changes made work more specialized. Unlike the [Paleolithic Era](#) where you either hunted or gathered, now there were many jobs that needed to be completed. Some families may have strictly farmed, while others took care of the animals, another family may have been responsible for gathering wood or other building materials. In order for communities to function efficiently, it was important that each person perform his or her role in the community responsibly. The status of women soon changed. Men became more powerful and some men took on more distinct roles as community leaders.

Since more food was available, populations began to grow. Soon small societies developed into villages and eventually they became large advanced societies called [civilizations](#). As these civilizations grew, they began to accumulate more personal property and distinct cultures began to develop. Language became more sophisticated and people soon learned to write. Animal skin clothing was replaced by cloth, caves and simple shelters became wood or clay homes. As more communities emerged, there was greater interaction among the people and, in time, humans began to trade with one another. [Cultural diffusion](#) increased. Life was changed rapidly during this time.

One aspect of life that seemed to stay the same was religion. Like their earlier ancestors, Neolithic man believed in [animism](#). To help them in this world, they would call on spirits to help them. As the societies became more developed, people began to develop more elaborate structures for worshipping. But like their earlier ancestors, Neolithic man believed in the importance of burying their dead and preparing them for the [afterlife](#).