

Prehistoric Culture

The longest phase of Stone Age culture - known as the Paleolithic period - is a hunter-gatherer culture which is usually divided into three parts:

- (1) Lower Paleolithic (2,500,000-200,000 BCE)
- (2) Middle Paleolithic (200,000-40,000 BCE)
- (3) Upper Paleolithic (40,000-10,000 BCE).

After this comes a transitional phase called the Mesolithic period (sometimes known as epipaleolithic), ending with the spread of agriculture, followed by the Neolithic period (the New Stone Age) which witnessed the establishment of permanent settlements. The Stone Age ends as stone tools become superseded by the new products of bronze and iron metallurgy, and is followed by the Bronze Age and Iron Age.

WARNING: All periods are approximate. Dates for specific cultures are given as a rough guide only, as disagreement persists as to classification, terminology and chronology.

Paleolithic Era (c.2,500,000 - 10,000 BCE)

Characterized by a Stone Age subsistence culture and the evolution of the human species from primitive austral piths via *Homo erectus* and *Homo sapiens* to anatomically modern humans. See litchi Art and Culture

Lower Paleolithic (2,500,000 - 200,000 BCE)

- Old wan culture (2,500,000 - 1,500,000 BCE)
- Ache lean culture (1,650,000 - 100,000 BCE)
- Claytonia culture (c.400,000 – 300,000 BCE)

Middle Paleolithic (200,000 - 40,000 BCE)

- Mousterian culture (300,000 - 30,000 BCE)
- Levalloisian Flake Tool culture (dominant c.100,000 - 30,000 BCE)

Upper Paleolithic (40,000-8,000 BCE)

- Aurignac an culture (40,000 - 26,000 BCE)
- Perigordian (Chatelperronian) culture (35,000-27,000 BCE)
- Gravettian culture (26,000 - 20,000 BCE)

PINNACLE
Learning Destination

- Solitarian culture (19,000 – 15,000 BCE)

- Magdalenian culture (16,000 - 8,000 BCE)

Note: Neither Perigordian (aka Chatelperronian) nor Solutrean cultures are strongly associated with artistic achievements. Artworks created during their eras are believed to have been influenced by other cultures.

Mesolithic Era

(From 10,000 BCE)

This era joins the Ice Age culture of the Upper Paleolithic with the ice-free, farming culture of the Neolithic. It is characterized by more advanced hunter-gathering, fishing and rudimentary forms of cultivation.

Neolithic Era

(From 8,000-4,000 BCE to 2000 BCE)

This era is characterized by farming, domestication of animals, settled communities and the emergence of important ancient civilizations (eg. Sumerian, Egyptian). Portable art and monumental architecture dominate.

Human Evolution: From Axes to Art

How did prehistoric man manage to leave behind such a rich cultural heritage of rock art? Answer: by developing a bigger and more sophisticated brain. Brain performance is directly associated with a number of "higher" functions such as language and creative expression.

The consensus among most paleontologists and paleoanthropologists, is that the human species (Homo) split away from gorillas in Africa about 8 million BCE, and from chimpanzees no later than 5 million BCE. (The discovery of a hominid skull [Sahelanthro pustchadensis] dated about 7 million years ago, may indicate an earlier divergence). The very early hominids included species like Australopithecus aphaerensis and Paranthro pusrobustus (brain capacity 350-500 cc).

About 2.5 million years BCE, some humans began to make stone tools (like very crude choppers and hand-axes), and newer species like Homo hails and Homorudolfensis emerged (brain capacity 590-690 cc). By 2 million years BCE more species of humans appeared, such as Homo erectus (brain capacity 800-1250 cc). During the following 500,000 years, Homo erectus spread from Africa to the Middle East, Asia and Europe.

Between 1.5 million BCE and 500,000 BCE, Homo erectus and other variants of humans engendered more highly developed types of Homo, known as Archaic Homo sapiens. It was a group of artists from one of these Archaic Homo sapiens species that created the Bhimbetka petroglyphs and cupules in the Auditorium cave situated at Bhimbetka in India, and at Daraki-Chattan. These cupules are the oldest art on earth.

From 500,000 BCE onwards, these new types morphed into Homo sapiens, as exemplified by Neanderthal Man (from 200,000 BCE or earlier). Neanderthals had a brain size of about 1500 cc, which is actually

greater than today's modern man, so clearly cranial capacity is not the only guide to intellect: internal brain architecture is important too. In all probability Neanderthal sculptors (or their contemporaries) created the famous figurines known as the Venus of Brecht Ram and the Venus of Tan-Tan, as well as the ochre stone engravings at the Blombos cave in South Africa, and the cupules at the Dordogne rock shelter at La Ferrassie.

Finally, about 100,000 BCE, "anatomically modern man" emerged from somewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, and, like his predecessors, headed north: reaching North Africa by about 70,000 BCE and becoming established in Europe no later than the beginning of the Upper Paleolithic (40,000 BCE). Painters and sculptors belonging to modern man (eg. Cro-Magnon Man, Grimalkin Man) were responsible for the glorious cave painting in France and the Iberian peninsula, as well as the miniature "Venus" sculptures and the ivory carvings of the Swabian Jura, found in the caves of Vogel herd, HohleFels, and Hohlenstein-Stadel.

Note: Traditionally, prehistoric painting and sculpture is not classified as primitivism/primitive art - a category which is usually reserved for later tribal art.

