

The Neolithic Revolution

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The Neolithic Revolution

•The Neolithic Era was the “new stone age”. It ended with the smelting of copper, and the working of metals in general (ie. the end of the *stone* age).



•But before that happened, there was an economic revolution – or perhaps, an economic transition, since it was not sudden or violent. This transition occurred around 8,000 BCE, in the middle of the Neolithic Era, and is called the Neolithic Revolution.

Hunters and Gatherers

•Paleolithic people were hunters and gatherers, but so were early Neolithic people.

•The hunter-gatherer lifestyle has some advantages – namely that people lived and traveled light, and that they could move easily and quickly.

•However, there were significant disadvantages to this lifestyle.

First, sources of food were not consistently reliable. Groups would often go through periods of feast and periods of famine. **Second**, the focus of the group was on survival, and all energies were directed toward this. **Finally**, having to constantly move and hunt wild game yielded a more dangerous existence than a settled lifestyle.

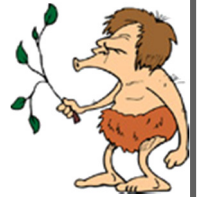
•Nomadic bands had to remain relatively small -- between 30-50 members. That was all the hunting-gathering lifestyle could support. If the group grew larger, starvation would naturally cut down the size. Sometimes groups would resort to infanticide (killing of infants) to keep the size small.



Agriculture

•The deliberate cultivation of vegetation is what we call agriculture. The idea of planting, raising and harvesting edible plants did not happen overnight.

•The role of women in hunter-gatherer groups was to forage for berries or edible plants. These foods were eaten, and the seeds were tossed outside the group’s campsite.



•Groups tended to return to the same campsites seasonally, and women began to notice that the seeds had grown into plants which yielded the same berries or fruit.

•Over time, groups began to deliberately sow seeds of desirable plants. Grains like wheat and barley were grown in the Middle East, rice was cultivated in Asia, and products like yams, okra and black-eyed peas were raised in West Africa.

•Neolithic peoples began to be familiar with the life cycles of plants, as well as the effects of weather on them. They also began to carefully observe the heavens in order to understand the change of seasons thereby maximizing the growing season.

The Revolution

•People wanted to create a situation where food production was more consistent and reliable. There were certain areas where conditions were right to attract wild animals on a regular basis. People formed settled communities there.



•However, to be able to form settlements wherever, two things needed to occur – deliberate cultivation of plants, and domestication of animals.