

FOURTH EDITION

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# The Humanities

Culture, Continuity & Change



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Henry M. Sayre

FOURTH EDITION

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# The Humanities

## Culture, Continuity & Change



PREHISTORY TO 1600 | VOLUME I

 Pearson

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HENRY M. SAYRE

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**Cover Printer:** Lehigh Phoenix Color

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**Cover and title page image :** Cai Guo-Qiang, *Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters: Project for Extraterrestrials, No. 10*, 1993. Commissioned by P3 art and environment, Tokyo.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Sayre, Henry M., 1948- author.

Title: Humanities : culture, continuity & change / Henry M. Sayre.

Description: Fourth edition. | Boston : Pearson, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017029582 | ISBN 9780134739816 (volume 1 : student edition)

| ISBN 0134739817 (volume 1 : student edition) | ISBN 9780134739823 (volume 2 : student edition) | ISBN 0134739825 (volume 2 : student edition)

Subjects: LCSH: Civilization--History. | Humanities--History. | Social change--History.

Classification: LCC CB69 .S29 2019 | DDC 001.3--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017029582>

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Volume I

Rental Edition ISBN 10: 0-13-473981-7

Rental Edition ISBN 13: 978-0-13-473981-6

A la Carte ISBN 10: 0-13-474139-0

A la Carte ISBN 13: 978-0-13-474139-0



[www.pearsonhighered.com](http://www.pearsonhighered.com)

Instructor's Review Copy ISBN 10: 0-13-478951-2

Instructor's Review Copy ISBN 13: 978-0-13-478951-4

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## DEAR READER,

It has been nearly 20 years since I first sat down to write this book, and now, with the publication of this fourth edition, I'd like to take the opportunity to reflect a moment on the humanistic enterprise as, in its new Revel edition, this book fully enters the digital age.

But first, you might well ask, what is the humanistic enterprise exactly? At the most superficial level, a Humanities course is designed to help you identify the significant works of art, architecture, music, theater, philosophy, and literature of distinct cultures and times, and to recognize how these different expressions of the human spirit respond to and reflect their historical contexts. More broadly, you should arrive at some understanding of the creative process and how what we—and others—have made and continue to value reflects what we all think it means to be human. But in studying other cultures—entering into what the British-born, Ghanaian-American philosopher and novelist Kwame Anthony Appiah has described as a “conversation between people from different ways of life”—we learn even more. We turn to other cultures because to empathize with others, to willingly engage in discourse with ideas strange to ourselves, is perhaps the fundamental goal of the humanities. The humanities are, above all, disciplines of openness, inclusion, and respectful interaction. What we see reflected in other cultures is usually something of ourselves, the objects of beauty that delight us, the weapons and the wars that threaten us, the melodies and harmonies that soothe us, the sometimes troubling but often penetrating thoughts that we encounter in the ether of our increasingly digital globe. Through the humanities we learn to seek common ground.

Today, digital media—epitomized by Revel—give us the means to open this world to you in ever-increasingly interactive ways. Architectural panoramas of major monuments such as Chartres Cathedral, or Angkor Wat in Cambodia, or Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater allow you to stand at multiple points in the spaces and turn around a full 360 degrees, as if you were actually there. And in these spaces, you can zoom in to see details, as in fact you can with nearly every image in the book. Videos take you on detailed tours of great works of art. Recordings of the music discussed in the book are embedded in the text, usually with listening guides for those of you less than musically literate. If you'd like, you can listen to an audio of the entire text (a helpful guide to pronunciation of foreign-language names), even as you study the images. And there are untold study resources, including everything from

highlighting and note-taking tools, to self tests and shared writing prompts. The digital book is designed, in other words, to immerse you in the humanistic enterprise. I hope you enjoy it.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Henry M. Sayre is Distinguished Professor of Art History Emeritus at Oregon State University. He earned his Ph.D. in American Literature from the University of Washington. He is producer and creator of the ten-part television series, *A World of Art: Works in Progress*, aired on PBS in the Fall of 1997; and author of seven books, including *A World of Art*, *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams*, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970*; and an art history book for children, *Cave Paintings to Picasso*.





# What's New

## THIS NEW EDITION ENHANCES THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR STUDENTS:

To facilitate student learning and understanding of the humanities, this fourth edition is centered on **Learning Objectives** that introduce each chapter. These learning objectives are tailored to the subject matter of the key chapter topics so that the student will be continually reminded of the goals and objectives of study as they progress through each chapter.

The chapter learning objectives are repeated in a **Chapter Review** that poses critical-thinking questions as well as reviewing the material covered in the chapter.

## NEW TO THE PRINT EDITION OF THE HUMANITIES

- **Continuing Presence of the Past**, a feature designed to underscore the book's emphasis on continuity and change by connecting an artwork in each chapter to a contemporary artwork, helps students understand how the art of the past remains relevant today. Included only in the digital version of the last edition, the **Continuing Presence of the Past** is now featured in each chapter on its own page in close proximity to the artwork to which it refers. New additions to the feature include works by Paul Kos, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Carrie Mae Weems, Daniel Buren, Arthur Amiotte, and Roy Lichtenstein.
- More than 300 **images have been updated** whenever new and improved images were available or works of art have been cleaned or restored.
- Whenever **new scholarship** has provided us with new insights and understandings, that scholarship has been included in the text. Examples include discussion of the earliest musical instruments—from prehistoric flutes to the development of the organ in Greece and Rome—continuing research at Stonehenge, medical scans of Akhenaten's mummy, new archaeological findings at Teotihuacán, and the workings of the Dutch East India Company in Indonesia.
- In Chapter 10, the discussion of **feudalism** has been refined, and the *Closer Look* on **Krak des Chevaliers** has been restored.
- In Chapter 26, the discussion of **Alexander Hamilton** and the *Federalist* papers has been greatly expanded in order to provide perspective on the current popularity of Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton: An American Musical*.
- In response to readers' requests, **many new works of art have been added**, including the Göbekli Tepe archaeological site, a Tang tomb figure of a horse, the Inca Twelve-Angle Stone in Cuzco, the *Pitcairn Flight into Egypt* from Saint-Denis, Michelangelo's design for the facade of St. Peter's, Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*, Bronzino's *Saint Sebastian*, Degas's *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*, Picasso's *Guitar Player* of summer 1910, and Balla's *Speeding Automobile*.
- The last half of **Chapter 40 on contemporary art** has been thoroughly reconceived, with many new images, to address issues of postcolonialism, the global marketplace and the commodification of culture, and the plural self in the Americas—Latino, African American, and Native American—as well as the impact of new media.

# New to the Revel edition of *The Humanities*

All of the new material cited in “What’s New” on page xii is included in the Revel edition as well, but Revel’s cross-platform digital environment allows us to offer many more aids to student learning in an interactive, engaging way.

**Revel™** Education technology designed for the way today’s students read, think, and learn

When students are engaged deeply, they learn more effectively and perform better in their courses. This simple fact inspired the creation of Revel: an interactive learning experience designed for the way today’s students read, think, and learn. Built in collaboration with educators and students nationwide, Revel is a fully digital and highly engaging way to deliver respected Pearson content.

Revel enlivens course content with media interactives and assessments—integrated directly within the authors’ narrative that provide opportunities for students to read, practice, and study in one continuous experience. This interactive educational technology boosts student engagement, which leads to better understanding of concepts and improved performance throughout the course.

- **Pan/zooms** appear with a simple click for almost all of the figures, allowing students to zoom in and examine details with stunning clarity and resolution, and then return to the overall view of the work of art, so they can relate these details to the whole.
- The pan/zooms’ **scale feature** opens a window where works of art appear next to a scaled human figure (or for small works, a scaled human hand), giving students an instant sense of the size of what they are studying.
- **3D animations of architectural and art-historical techniques** depict and explain processes and methods that are difficult for students to grasp simply through narrative text.
- **Panoramas from global sites** have been integrated into the design, bringing students into the setting, both inside and out, of major buildings and monuments such as the Taj Mahal, Great Zimbabwe, the Paris Opera House, and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Fallingwater.

- **Each and every Closer Look and Continuing Presence of the Past** has been transformed into a Revel video presentation, where students are guided through a detailed examination of the work.
- **Listening Guides with Streaming Audio** for most of the music selections in the book are embedded in the platform, which allow students to follow along as they listen to the selection.
- The entire text is available on **streaming audio**, much of it read by the author himself.

In addition, a variety of self-tests, review features, and writing opportunities have been built into the platform. These are all designed to ensure the student’s mastery of the material.

- **Multiple-choice self-tests**, at the conclusion of each major section of a chapter, allow the student to assess quickly how well they have absorbed the material at hand.
- **Interactive learning tools**, in a variety of formats, review key terms and ideas, help the student in analyzing literary works, and make use of flashcards to test student retention.
- Each chapter contains three kinds of **writing prompts**. All are keyed to specific works of visual art, literature, or music and appear in conjunction with figures that illustrate the works. **Journaling** prompts focus on building skills of visual analysis; **Shared Writing** responses relate the material in the chapter to today’s world; and **Writing Space** prompts encourage students to engage in cross-cultural thinking, often across chapters.

Learn more about Revel [www.pearsonhighered.com/revel](http://www.pearsonhighered.com/revel)

# Developing *The Humanities*

*The Humanities: Culture, Continuity & Change* is the result of an extensive development process involving the contributions of over 100 instructors and their students. We are grateful to all who participated in shaping the content, clarity, and design of this text. Manuscript reviewers and focus group participants include:

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# Acknowledgments

No project of this scope could ever come into being without the hard work and perseverance of many more people than its author. In fact, this author has been humbled by the teams at Pearson and Laurence King Publishing, who never wavered in their confidence in my ability to finish this fourth edition of what remains an enormous undertaking. At Laurence King, I am especially grateful to Senior Editor and project editor Chelsea Edwards for the exceptional care she has taken in moving the project forward, a task made doubly difficult by our working simultaneously in print and digital formats. I also want to thank Julia Ruxton, Picture Manager, and Peter Kent, who researched picture permissions, for their sometimes miraculous work at finding images, often providing me with a wealth of choices. Rachel Thorne has handled the always difficult task of securing literature permissions with aplomb and good humor. Emily Asquith and Rosie Lewis made this a far better book by their scrupulous copy editing, and Simon Walsh oversaw matters of production with his usual mastery. The overwhelming task of indexing the book has been borne by Vicki Robinson. Allan Sommerville has patiently worked with me to get the page design as close to perfect as we could manage, and I have come to very much appreciate his eye and sense of style. Finally, all of these great people at Laurence King are overseen by the inestimable Kara Hattersley-Smith.

At Pearson, Rich Barnes has helped coordinate Revel production with the good people at Ohlinger Publishing Services and, particularly, their program

manager, Laura Bidwa. For her help with the Closer Look and Continuing Presence of the Past videos, I'd like to thank Cynthia Ward. It is always a pleasure to work with her. And I have been especially pleased with Kelly Donahue-Wallace's work on the learning modules for each chapter in Revel. On the marketing side at Pearson, Wendy Albert and Nick Bolt have helped us all to understand just what students want and need. Much of what is good about this book I owe to Sarah Touborg's great editorial advice while she was at Pearson, and to the late Bud Therien, who envisioned this project and saw it through to the first edition. I am forever grateful for the support, encouragement, and, above all, friendship of both.

No one has been more important in seeing this fourth edition through to production than Helen Ronan. She has no official title, but without her negotiating the intricacies of development between Ohlinger Publishing's work on the Revel edition, Laurence King's work on the print edition, and Pearson as a whole, this edition would today be mired somewhere—I hesitate to think where. With all my thanks, I hereby appoint her Liaison-in-Chief.

Finally, I want to thank, with all my love, my beautiful wife, Sandy Brooke, who has always supported this project in every way. I have said this before, but it continues to be true: She has continued to teach, paint, and write, while urging me on, listening to my struggles, humoring me when I didn't deserve it, and being a far better wife than I was a husband. She was, is, and will continue to be, I trust, the source of my strength.



## PART ONE

# The Ancient World and the Classical Past

PREHISTORY TO 200 CE



*Nebamun Hunting Birds, from the tomb of Nebamun, Thebes, Egypt (detail). ca. 1400 BCE (see Fig 3.2).*

The history of human beings on this planet is, geologically speaking, very short. The history of their coming together in groups for their common good is even shorter, covering a span of perhaps 25,000 to 50,000 years on a planet that scientists estimate to be between 4 and 5 billion years old. We call these groups, as they become more and more sophisticated, civilizations. A **civilization** is a social, economic, and political entity distinguished

by the ability to express itself through images and written language. Civilizations develop when the environment of a region can support a large and productive population. It is no accident that the first civilizations arose in fertile river valleys, where agriculture could take hold: the Tigris and the Euphrates in Mesopotamia, the Nile in Egypt, the Indus on the Indian subcontinent, and the Yellow in China. Civilizations require technologies capable of supporting the

principal economy. In the ancient world, agriculture was supported by the technologies related to irrigation.

With the rise of agriculture, and with irrigation, human nature began to assert itself over and against nature as a whole. People increasingly thought of themselves as masters of their own destiny. At the same time, different and dispersed populations began to come into contact with one another as trade developed from the need for raw materials not native to a particular region. Organizing this level of trade and production also required an administrative elite to form and establish cultural priorities. The existence of such an elite is another characteristic of civilization. Finally, as the history of cultures around the world makes abundantly clear, one of the major ways in which societies have acquired the goods they want and simultaneously organized themselves is by means of war.

If a civilization is a system of organization, a **culture** is the set of common values—religious, social, and/or political—that govern that system. Out of such cultures arise scientific and artistic achievements by which we characterize different cultures. Before the invention of writing sometime around the fourth millennium BCE, these cultures created myths and legends that explained their origins and relation to the world. As we do today, ancient peoples experienced the great uncontrollable, and sometimes violent, forces of nature—floods, droughts, earthquakes, and hurricanes. Prehistoric cultures understood these forces as the work of the invisible gods, who could not be approached directly but only through the mediating agency of shamans and priests, or kings and heroes. As cultures became increasingly self-assertive, in the islands between mainland Greece and Asia Minor, in Egypt, in China, on the Indian subcontinent, and on the Greek mainland, these gods seemed increasingly knowable. The gods could still intervene in human affairs, but now they did so in ways that were recognizable. It was suddenly possible to believe that if people could come to understand themselves, they might also understand the gods. The study of the natural world might well shed light on the unknown, on the truth of things.

It is to this moment—it was a long “moment,” extending for centuries—that the beginnings of scientific inquiry can be traced. **Humanism**, the study of the human mind and its moral and ethical dimensions, was born. In India, the emperor Ashoka established Buddhism as the official state religion and built great monuments to celebrate the Buddha’s teaching. In Mesopotamia and Greece, the presentation of a human character working things out (or not) in the face of adversity was the subject of epic and dramatic literature. In Greece, it was also the subject of philosophy—literally, “love of wisdom”—the practice of reasoning that followed from the Greek philosopher Socrates’ famous dictum, “Know thyself.” Visual artists strove to discover the perfections of human form and thought. By the time of the rise of the Roman Empire, at the end of the first millennium BCE, these traditions were carried on in more practical ways, as the Romans attempted to engineer a society embodying the values they had inherited from the Greeks.

## PART ONE TIMELINE



**30,000 BCE**  
Art created in the Chauvet Cave

**10,000–8000 BCE**  
Emergence of agricultural civilizations in Mesopotamia, India, Egypt, China

**3200–2000 BCE**  
Development of pictographic writing systems in Mesopotamia, India, Egypt, China



**2500 BCE**  
Pyramids in Egypt

**1792–1750 BCE**  
Hammurabi’s Law Code

**1500–322 BCE**  
Vedic period in India; origins of Hinduism



**1300 BCE**  
Emergence of Olmec culture in Mesoamerica

**1200 BCE**  
Mesopotamia: *Epic of Gilgamesh*

**1200 BCE**  
Earliest use of Phoenician phonetic alphabet



**1000 BCE**  
King David reigns in Israel

**800 BCE**  
Akropolis (citadel) and agora (market)  
Homeric epics: *Iliad* and *Odyssey*



**800–600 BCE**  
Etruria: Origins of Roman culture

**563–483 BCE**  
Lifetime of Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) in India

**551–479 BCE**  
Lifetime of Confucius in Zhou dynasty China



**461–429 BCE**  
Perikles, Socrates, Sophocles  
Parthenon on Athens’s Akropolis

**469–399 BCE**  
Lifetime of Socrates, Greek philosopher



**27 BCE**  
Octavian becomes Emperor Augustus

**20 BCE**  
*Augustus of Prima Porta*







# 1

## The Rise of Culture

### From Forest to Farm



### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 Discuss the ways in which cave art and small sculptural figurines in the Paleolithic era have been interpreted.
- 1.2 Explain how the art and architecture of the Neolithic era reflect changing cultural concerns.
- 1.3 Understand the function of myth in prehistoric culture.
- 1.4 Describe the role of sacred sites in prehistoric culture.

On a cold December afternoon in 1994, Jean-Marie Chauvet and two friends were exploring the caves in the steep cliffs along the Ardèche River gorge in southern France. After descending into a series of narrow passages, they entered a large chamber. There, beams from their headlamps lit up a group of drawings that would astonish the three explorers—and the world (Fig. 1.1).

Since the late nineteenth century, we have known that prehistoric peoples, peoples who lived before the time of writing and so of recorded history, drew on the walls of caves. Twenty-seven such caves had already been discovered in the cliffs along the 17 miles of the Ardèche gorge (Map 1.1). But the cave found by Chauvet and his friends transformed our thinking about prehistoric peoples. Where previously discovered cave paintings had appeared to modern eyes as childlike, this cave contained drawings comparable to those a contemporary artist might have done. We can only speculate that other comparable artworks were produced in prehistoric times but have not survived, perhaps because they were made of wood or other perishable materials. It is even possible that art may have been made earlier than 30,000 years ago, perhaps as people began to inhabit the Near East, between 90,000 and 100,000 years ago.

From almost the moment of Chauvet's discovery, scientists realized that their own presence in the cave—let alone the prospect of an enthralled public visiting the

site—threatened its survival. The lesson had been learned at Lascaux Cave in the Dordogne region of southern France to the west of the Ardèche. After its discovery in 1940, as many as 1,200 visitors a week were admitted to the site, until authorities realized that the carbon dioxide from their breath was contributing to the growth of bacteria and mold that was destroying its wall paintings. The cave was closed in 1963, and a replica of the site opened in 1983,



Map 1.1 Major Paleolithic caves in France and Spain.

◀ **Fig. 1.1 Wall painting with horses, Chauvet Cave, Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, Ardèche gorge, France, ca. 30,000 BCE.** Paint on limestone, height approx. 6'. Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication. Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles de Rhône-Alpes. Service Régional de l'Archéologie. In the center of this wall are four horses, each behind the other in a startlingly realistic space.





**Fig. 1.2 Chauvet Cave replica, Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, Ardèche gorge, France, 2015.** This full-size replica of the Chauvet Cave opened to the public in 2015, making the cave accessible to some 300,000–400,000 visitors a year.

but its paintings are largely beyond repair. To avoid just such a disaster, in 2007 authorities began recreating Chauvet some 3 miles from the actual cave at a cost of some 56 million euros (approximately \$60 million) (Fig. 1.2). Using hi-tech scans and 3D-modeling, the cave's limestone walls were reproduced in concrete and its stalagmites and stalactites in resin. Digital reproductions of the original art were then projected onto the surfaces and painted with pigments mimicking the earth tones of the original artists. The result is a stunningly realistic experience for the contemporary visitor. Even the temperature of the original cave—53.6° Fahrenheit (12° Celsius)—is maintained.

To visit the replica of the Chauvet Cave is to come as close as we can imagine to what it must have been like to live during the Paleolithic era, or “Old Stone Age,” from the Greek *palaios*, “old,” and *lithos*, “stone.” The cultures of the era sustained themselves on wild plants and game (the bones of which were scattered across Chauvet's floor and are reproduced in plastic for the replica). The cultures themselves were small, scattered, and nomadic, though evidence suggests some interaction among the various groups. We begin this book, then, with the cultures of prehistoric times, evidence of which survives in wall paintings in caves and in small sculptures dating back more than 25,000 years.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF CULTURE IN THE PALEOLITHIC ERA

*In what ways has the role of art in Paleolithic culture been interpreted?*

A **culture** encompasses the values and behaviors shared by a group of people, developed over time, and passed down from one generation to the next. Culture manifests itself

in the laws, customs, ritual behavior, and artistic production common to the group. The cave paintings at Chauvet suggest that, as early as 30,000 years ago, the Ardèche gorge was a *center of culture*, a focal point of group living in which the values of a community find expression. There were others like it. In northern Spain, the first decorated cave was discovered in 1879 at Altamira. We have already mentioned Lascaux, discovered by schoolchildren in 1940 when their dog disappeared down a hole. In 1991, along the French Mediterranean coast, a diver discovered the entrance to the beautifully decorated Cosquer Cave below the waterline near Marseille. And there are many other Paleolithic caves in the region, as shown on Map 1.1.

### Agency and Ritual: Cave Art

Ever since cave paintings were first discovered, scholars have marveled at the skill of the people who produced them, but we have been equally fascinated by their very existence. Why were these paintings made? Most scholars believe that they possessed some sort of **agency**—that is, they were created to exert some power or authority over the world of those who came into contact with them. Until recently, it was generally accepted that such works were associated with the hunt. Perhaps the hunter, seeking game in times of scarcity, hoped to conjure it up by depicting it on cave walls. Or perhaps such drawings were magic charms meant to ensure a successful hunt. But at Chauvet, fully 60 percent of the animals painted on its walls were never, or rarely, hunted—such animals as lions, rhinoceroses, bears, panthers, and woolly mammoths. One drawing depicts two rhinoceroses fighting horn-to-horn beneath four horses that appear to be looking on (see Fig. 1.1).

What role, then, did these drawings play in the daily lives of the people who created them? The caves may have served as some sort of **ritual** space. A ritual is a rite or ceremony habitually practiced by a group, often in religious or

quasi-religious contexts. The caves might be, for instance, understood as gateways to the underworld and death, as symbols of the womb and birth, or as pathways to the world of dreams experienced in the dark of night, and rites connected with such passage might have been conducted in them. The general arrangement of the animals in the paintings by species or gender, often in distinct chambers of the caves, suggests to some that the paintings may have served as lunar calendars for predicting the seasonal migration of the animals. Whatever the case, surviving human footprints indicate that these caves were ritual gathering places and in some way were intended to serve the common good.

At Chauvet, the use of color suggests that the paintings served some sacred or symbolic function. For instance, almost all of the paintings near the entrance to the cave are painted with natural red pigments derived from ores rich in iron oxide. Deeper in the cave, in areas more difficult to reach, the vast majority of the animals are painted in black pigments derived from ores rich in manganese dioxide. This shift in color appears to be intentional, but we can only guess at its meaning.

The skillfully drawn images at Chauvet raise even more important questions. The artists seem to have understood and practiced a kind of illusionism—that is, they were able to convey a sense of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. In the painting reproduced at the beginning of this chapter, several horses appear to stand one behind the other (see Fig. 1.1). The head of the top horse overlaps a black line, as if peering over a branch or the back of another animal. In no other cave art yet discovered do drawings show the use of shading, or **modeling**, so that the animal or person depicted seems to have volume and dimension. And yet these cave paintings, rendered over 30,000 years ago, predate other cave paintings by at least 10,000 years, and in some cases by as much as 20,000 years.

One of the few cave paintings that depicts a human figure is found at Lascaux. What appears to be a male

wearing a bird's-head mask lies in front of a disemboweled bison (Fig. 1.3). Below him is a bird-headed spear thrower, a device that enabled hunters to throw a spear farther and with greater force. (Several examples of spear throwers have survived.) In the Lascaux painting, the hunter's spear has pierced the bison's hindquarters, and a rhinoceros charges off to the left. We have no way of knowing whether this was an actual event or an imagined scene. One of the painting's most interesting and inexplicable features is the discrepancy between the relatively naturalistic representation of the animals and the highly stylized, almost abstract realization of the human figure. Was the sticklike man added later by a different, less talented artist? Or does this image suggest that man and beast are different orders of being?

Before the discovery of Chauvet, historians divided the history of cave painting into a series of successive styles, each progressively more realistic. But Chauvet's paintings, by far the oldest known, are also the most advanced in their realism, suggesting the artists' conscious quest for visual **naturalism**, that is, for representations that imitate the actual appearance of the animals. Not only were both red and black animals outlined, their shapes were also modeled by spreading paint, either with the hand or a tool, in gradual gradations of color. Such modeling is extremely rare or unknown elsewhere. In addition, the artists further defined many of the animals' contours by scraping the wall behind so that the beasts seem to stand out against a deeper white ground. Three handprints in the cave were evidently made by spitting paint at a hand placed on the cave wall, resulting in a stenciled image.

Art, the Chauvet drawings suggest, does not necessarily evolve in a linear progression from awkward beginnings to more sophisticated representations. On the contrary, already in the earliest artworks, people obtained a very high degree of sophistication. Apparently, even from the earliest times, human beings could choose to represent the world naturalistically or not, and the choice not to represent the



**Fig. 1.3** Wall painting with bird-headed man and bison, Lascaux Cave, Dordogne, France, ca. 15,000–13,000 BCE. Paint on limestone, length approx. 9'. In 1963, Lascaux was closed to the public so that conservators could fight a fungus attacking the paintings. Most likely, the fungus was caused by carbon dioxide exhaled by visitors. An exact replica called Lascaux II was built and can be visited.





**Fig. 1.4 Bone flute from Hohle Fels Cave, Germany, ca. 40,000 BCE.** The flute is nearly 1 foot long, and its mere existence points to a culture of reasonable musical sophistication.

world in naturalistic terms should not necessarily be attributed to lack of skill or sophistication but to other, culturally driven factors.

### Paleolithic Culture and Its Artifacts

Footprints discovered in South Africa in 2000 and fossilized remains uncovered in the forest of Ethiopia in 2001 suggest that, about 5.7 million years ago, the earliest upright humans, or hominins (as distinct from the larger classification of **hominids**, which includes great apes and chimpanzees as well as humans), roamed the continent of Africa. Ethiopian excavations further indicate that sometime around 2.5 or 2.6 million years ago, hominid populations began to make rudimentary stone tools, though long before, between 14 million and 19 million years ago, the *Kenyapithecus* (“Kenyan ape”), a hominin, made stone tools in east central Africa. Nevertheless, the earliest evidence of a culture coming into being are the stone artifacts of *Homo sapiens* (Latin for “one who knows”). *Homo sapiens* evolved about 100,000–120,000 years ago and can be distinguished from earlier hominids by the lighter build of their skeletal structure and larger brain. A 2009 study of genetic diversity among Africans found the San people of Zimbabwe to be the most diverse, suggesting that they are the most likely origin of modern humans from which others gradually spread out of Africa, across Asia, into Europe, and finally to Australia and the Americas.

*Homo sapiens* were **hunter-gatherers**, whose survival depended on the animals they could kill and the foods they could gather, primarily nuts, berries, roots, and other edible plants. The tools they developed were far more sophisticated than those of their ancestors. They included cleavers, chisels, grinders, hand axes, and arrow- and spearheads made of flint, a material that also provided the spark to create an equally important tool—fire. In 2004, Israeli

archaeologists working at a site on the banks of the Jordan River reported the earliest evidence yet found of controlled fire created by hominids—cracked and blackened flint chips, presumably used to light a fire, and bits of charcoal dating from 790,000 years ago. Also at the campsite were the bones of elephants, rhinoceroses, hippopotamuses, and small species, demonstrating that these early hominids cut their meat with flint tools and ate steaks and marrow. *Homo sapiens* cooked with fire, wore animal skins as clothing, and used tools as a matter of course. They buried their dead in ritual ceremonies, often laying them to rest accompanied by stone tools and weapons.

The Paleolithic era is the period of *Homo sapiens*’ ascendancy. These people carved stone tools and weapons that helped them survive in an inhospitable climate. They also made music. The five-holed flute illustrated here (Fig. 1.4) was found in the summer of 2008 in Hohle Fels Cave in the Ach Valley of the Swabian Alps near the city of Ulm, Germany. Made from the naturally hollow wing-bone of a griffon vulture, its five holes produce a pentatonic scale (five notes per octave, and still the most common scale used in blues, pop, and rock music today). In 2012, a team of scientists from Oxford and Tübingen universities unearthed flutes made from mammoths’ ivory and bird bones, carbon-dated to between 43,000 and 42,000 BCE at nearby Geißenklösterle Cave. Of course, we do not know what sort of music these very ancient peoples played (just as we cannot know what any music sounded like until musical notation systems were first introduced in about 1450 CE, long after written language). However, University of Paris researchers discovered in 2008 that Chauvet’s paintings are concentrated at the points of greatest resonance within the cave. Did these instruments play an important role in prehistoric ritual? We can only guess, but we can be sure that, as today, people gathered to hear them be played.



These prehistoric peoples carved small sculptural objects as well, which, along with the cave paintings we have already seen, appear to be the first instances of what we have come to call “art” (see *Materials & Techniques*, page 8). Among the most remarkable of these sculptural artifacts are a large number of female figures, found at various archaeological sites across Europe. The most famous of these is *Woman*, the limestone statuette of a woman found at Willendorf, in present-day Austria (Fig. 1.5), dating from between 25,000 and 20,000 BCE and sometimes called the *Venus of Willendorf*. Markings on *Woman* and other similar figures indicate that they were originally colored, but what these small sculptures meant and what they were used for remains unclear. Most are 4 to 5 inches high and fit neatly into a person’s hand. This suggests that they may have had a ritual purpose. Their exaggerated breasts and bellies and their clearly delineated genitals support a connection to fertility and childbearing. These figures suggest that what was most valued about the body in prehistoric times was its ability to sustain itself for some period of time without food, and its ability to nourish a child at the same time. We know, too, that the Willendorf *Woman* was originally painted in red ocher, suggestive of menses. And, her navel is not carved; rather, it is a natural indentation in the stone. Whoever carved her seems to have recognized, in the raw stone, a connection to the origins of life. But such figures may have served other purposes as well. Archaeologist Clive Gamble has recently argued that such sculptures served as a form of nonverbal communication among groups of ancient peoples scattered widely across what is today the European continent. He suggests that, whenever groups of these hunter-gatherers met—as they must occasionally have done when tracking game, these easily portable female statues served as signs suggesting the amicability of the hunters bearing them (it is doubtful that many, if any, of these groups shared a common language). These figurines, in other words, might have been used to communicate commonly held ideas of “femaleness” across widespread groups. They therefore may have encoded a system of shared values and ideals.

Indeed, female figurines vastly outnumber representations of males in the Paleolithic era, which suggests that women played a central role in Paleolithic culture. Most likely, they had considerable religious and spiritual influence, and their preponderance in the imagery of the era suggests that Paleolithic culture may have been *matrilineal* (in which descent is determined through the female line) and *matrilocal* (in which residence is in the female’s tribe or household). Such traditions exist in many primal societies today.

The peoples of the Upper Paleolithic period followed herds northward in summer, though temperatures during the Ice Age rarely exceeded 60 degrees Fahrenheit (16 degrees Celsius). Then, as winter approached, they retreated southward into the cave regions of northern Spain and southern France.



**Fig. 1.5** *Woman (Venus of Willendorf)*, found at Willendorf, Austria, ca. 25,000–20,000 BCE. Limestone, height 4". Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna. For many years, modern scholars called this small statue the *Venus of Willendorf*. They assumed that its carvers attributed to it an ideal of female beauty comparable to the Roman ideal of beauty implied by the name Venus.

## THE RISE OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMUNITY IN THE NEOLITHIC ERA

*How do Neolithic art and architecture reflect the era’s changing cultural concerns?*

As the ice covering the Northern Hemisphere began to recede around 10,000 BCE, the seas rose, covering, for instance, the cave entrance at Cosquer in southern France (see Map 1.1), filling what is now the North Sea and English Channel with water, and inundating the land bridge that had connected Asia and North America. Agriculture began to replace hunting and gathering, and with it, a nomadic lifestyle gave way to a more sedentary way of life. The consequences of this shift were enormous, and ushered in the Neolithic era, or “New Stone Age.”

For 2,000 years, from 10,000 to 8000 BCE, the ice covering the Northern Hemisphere receded farther and farther northward. As temperatures warmed, life gradually changed. During this period of transition, areas once covered by vast regions of ice and snow developed into grassy

# Materials & Techniques

## Methods of Carving

**Carving** is the act of cutting or incising stone, bone, wood, or another material into a desired form. Surviving artifacts of the Paleolithic era were carved from stone or bone. The artist probably held a sharp instrument, such as a stone knife or a chisel, in one hand and drove it into the stone or bone with another stone held in the other hand to remove excess material and realize the figure. Finer details could be scratched into the material with a pointed stone instrument. Artists can carve into any material softer than the instrument they are using. Harder varieties of stone can cut into softer stone as well as bone. The work was probably painstakingly slow.

There are basically two types of sculpture: sculpture-in-the-round and relief sculpture. **Sculpture-in-the-round** is fully three-dimensional; it occupies 360 degrees of space. The Willendorf statuette (see



**Woman Holding an Animal Horn, Laussel, Dordogne, France, ca. 30,000–15,000 BCE.** Limestone, height 17¾". Musée des Antiquités Nationales, Saint Germain-en-Laye, France.

Fig. 1.5) was carved from stone and is an example of sculpture-in-the-round. **Relief sculpture** is carved out of a flat background surface; it has a distinct front and no back. Not all relief sculptures are alike. In *high-relief* sculpture, the figure extends more than 180 degrees from the background surface. *Woman Holding an Animal Horn*, found at Laussel, in the Dordogne region of France, is carved in high relief and is one of the earliest relief sculptures known. This sculpture was originally part of a great stone block that stood in front of a Paleolithic rock shelter. In *low* or *bas relief*, the figure extends less than 180 degrees from the surface. In *sunken relief*, the image is carved, or incised, into the surface, so that the image recedes below it. When light falls on relief sculptures at an angle, the relief casts a shadow. The higher the relief, the larger the shadows and the greater the sense of the figure's three-dimensionality.



**Map 1.2 The great river valley civilizations, ca. 2000 BCE.** Agriculture thrived in the great river valleys throughout the Neolithic era, but by the end of the period, urban life had developed there as well, and civilization as we know it had emerged.



plains and abundant forests. Hunters developed the bow and arrow, which were easier to use at longer range on the open plains. They fashioned dugout boats out of logs to facilitate fishing, which became a major food source. They domesticated dogs to help with the hunt as early as 11,000 BCE, and soon other animals as well—goats and cattle particularly. Perhaps most important, people began to cultivate the more edible grasses. Along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, they harvested wheat; in Asia, they cultivated millet and rice; and in the Americas, they grew squash, beans, and corn. Gradually, farming replaced hunting as the primary means of sustaining life. A culture of the fields developed—an agriculture, from the Latin *ager*, “farm,” “field,” or “productive land.”

Agricultural production seems to have originated about 10,000 BCE in the Fertile Crescent, an area arching from southwest Iran, across the foothills of the Taurus Mountains in southeastern Turkey, then southward into Lebanon. By about 8000 BCE, Neolithic agricultural societies began to concentrate in the great river valleys of the Middle East and Asia (Map 1.2). Here, distinct centers of people involved in a common pursuit began to form. A **civilization** is a social, economic, and political entity distinguished by the ability to express itself through images and written language. Civilizations develop when the environment of a region can support a large and productive population. An increasing population, in turn, requires increased production of food and other goods, not only to support itself, but to trade for other commodities.

Gradually, as the climate warmed, Neolithic culture spread across Europe. By about 5000 BCE, the valleys of Spain and southern France supported agriculture, but there is no evidence of farming in the northern reaches of the European continent and England dating back any earlier than about 4000 BCE. The Neolithic era did not end in these colder climates until about 2000 BCE, and continued in more remote regions, such as Africa and the Americas, well into the second millennia.

### Neolithic Communities

The great rivers of the Middle East and Asia provided a consistent and predictable source of water, and people soon developed irrigation techniques that fostered organized agriculture and animal husbandry. As production outgrew necessity, members of the community were freed to occupy themselves in other endeavors—complex food preparation (bread, cheese, and so on), construction, military affairs, and religion. What is believed to be one of the earliest of all religious sites is Göbekli Tepe, which sits atop a mountain ridge in southeastern Turkey (Fig. 1.6). In 1995, a research team headed by German archaeologist Klaus Schmidt uncovered a ring of standing pillars, then a second, then a third—today at least 20 such rings have been discovered. Some of the tallest of the pillars in these rings stand 18 feet high and weigh 16 tons. The surfaces of many are covered in a myriad of *bas-relief* carvings of animals—including lions, bulls, boars, foxes, gazelles,

and donkeys—as well as snakes and other reptiles, insects and spiders, and also birds, vultures in particular. The pillar illustrated here is decorated with a predatory animal, perhaps a leopard, realized in the round. The pillars are all made of limestone, shaped like giant spikes or capital Ts, and are connected by low stone walls. Perhaps the most surprising thing about Göbekli Tepe is that evidently the people who built it did not live there—yet it must have required hundreds of people to build each of the rings. Archaeologists estimate that it would have taken at least 500 people to move the pillars from local quarries. From Schmidt’s point of view, Göbekli Tepe was comparable to what, in later ages, would come to be known as a pilgrimage site—visited periodically by people coming from every direction. In many ways, it may have served the same purpose as a Paleolithic cave—a place reserved for the ritual practices of the surrounding peoples. It also suggests that the development of Neolithic culture was religiously motivated. In Schmidt’s words: “First came the temple, then the city.”

**Fig. 1.6 A predatory animal on a pillar at Göbekli Tepe, Turkey, ca. 9130–8800 BCE.** To date, only about one-tenth of the site has been excavated.

