Early Humans and the Prehistoric Record:
Human–Plant Interaction
Dating the Past

Hominid fossils and tools date to 1.8 million years ago.
There is some evidence of tools in Europe as early as 1.2 million years ago.
An explosion of hominid remains appears in Europe about 500,000 years ago.

Source: A. Gibbons, Science 291:1722 (March 2, 2001)

Africa: The Source of Human Evolution

The dates above are the generally accepted dates but recent evidence indicates initiation considerably earlier.

**Paleolithic Humans**

Old Stone Age 750,000–15,000 years ago  
Archaic *Homo sapiens* (*Homo heidelbergensis*) 500,000 years ago  
Neandertals 250,000 years ago  
  Developed in Europe  
  Brawny, short arms, broad trunk  
  Hunting skills, weapons  
Cro-Magnon 200,000 years ago  
  Up to 6 ft. tall, large cranial capacity  
  Developed in Asia  
  Dominated Ice Age Europe 40,000 years ago  
  Contact in Europe—200,000 years ago  
  Neandertals disappear 25–30,000 years ago

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**Dispersal of Human Species over Space and Time**

![Dispersal of Human Species over Space and Time](source)

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**Cultural Diversity Changes**

Cultural diversity changes as Cro-Magnons and their sophisticated tools arise from Asia (red).  
Tools of Neandertals (black) persist in Europe & Asia.  
Transitional tools made by both groups in blue.

![Cultural Diversity Changes](source)
History of Horticulture: Lecture 2

Early Humans as Hunters

Portion of the “Hall of Bulls” in the Lascaux caves, France, showing drawings of bulls, horses, and stags.

Bison and Horses

Speared bison with extruded entrails
Note the male figure with bird-like head
History of Horticulture: Lecture 2

Hunting of stags with bow and arrow

Source: Singer, 1954
Cueva de los Caballos, Albacete, Castellon, Spain

Paleolithic and Neolithic Representations of Plants

Lascaux
Paleolithic scratched image on reindeer horn
Pottery from Tejpe Sialk, Iran, 7,000 years ago
Arcy-sur – Cure, Dep. Yonne, France (Singer 1958, Fig. 66) Source: New York Times

Plants as Clothing “Venuses”

The Venus of Willendorf, Austria, dated 30,000 years ago showing a snood-like cap
Plants as Clothing

“A Venuses”

A woven halter

Plants as Clothing

“A Venuses”

A grass skirt from a stunning figure found in Lespugue, France (facsimile sold in the Lourve)

Bronze Age—Ice Man

Reconstructed figure of the Iceman

Remains of grass cloak

Plant derived artifacts of the Ice Man, dated about 5000 years ago, found in the Southern Alps, 1991 dated 5300 years ago showing uses of plant products.
Details of woven grass cloak

Woven grass net (left) found inside leather shoe (right)

Leather quiver and wooden arrows

Wooden handle of dagger (top) and tool "retoucher" (bottom) used to sharpen flints

Birch bark container used to carry embers

Birch fungus attached to a leather thong used as a medicinal

Sloe berry
Gatherers and Herders

- Paleolithic representation of honey gathering
- Domesticated cattle Tassili n’Ajjer
- Cave painting of women gathering grain, 5000–6000 years ago. Tassili n’Ajjer, Algeria

(Source: Bruce 1995).

Early Representation of Identifiable Plants

- Predynastic drawing of palm tree and gazelle, 5000–6000 years ago
- Cereal carvings, first dynasty, 5000 years ago

Conclusions

Increasing Importance of Plants
- Food
- Fuel
- Weapons
- Ritual
- Clothing
- Medicine

Shift from gathering to cultivation
- 10–12,000 years ago

Neolithic Revolution

Various Locations
- Fertile Crescent
- Indus Valley
- China
- Americas
Lecture 2 Readings

2-1. Furs for Evening, but Cloth Was the Stone Age Standby

2-2. Use Of Plants in the European Palaeolithic: A Review of the Evidence