



The Neolithic Revolution ^[1]

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The Neolithic Revolution is an important event—particularly for archaeologists and biological anthropologists—that has produced a vast number of changes to human society and physiology, as well as to the environment itself. The Neolithic Revolution was the invention of agriculture.

The Neolithic Revolution occurred approximately 12,000 years ago. The transition from foraging methods of subsistence ^[3] to agriculture allowed groups to create permanent settlements, rather than travelling nomadically in search of food. This switch to sedentary societies had huge effects on human culture, and also produced physiological and environmental changes.

The Neolithic Revolution included both plant and animal domestication. This involved the intentional selection of plants and animals, with specific traits, to create more advantages for humans in the future. For example, this selection led to plants that had a higher amount of calories and nutrients, better taste, and were easier to grow.

History

Most anthropologists and other academics believe that there were several independent inventions of agriculture, which all occurred at approximately the same time. However, most academics disagree about the reasons why and how agriculture began and became so widespread. Some argue that domestication began as an accident, while others argue that it was purposeful.

While agriculture developed independently in several parts of the world, the Fertile Crescent was a particularly significant area. The Fertile Crescent—often also called the cradle of civilization—is a region in south-western Asia and one of the first areas in the world where agriculture began. This region is so-called because of presence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which made it an especially fertile area for plant growth.

Consequences

The invention of agriculture during the Neolithic Revolution had several consequences, both positive and negative.

Significantly, the widespread practice of agriculture led to vast *societal changes*. Agriculture led to the establishment of permanent settlements, since seasonal travel with animals and plants was no longer as necessary. Before, storage of food was difficult or impossible

because nomadic lifestyle meant that all stored food would have to be transported. Therefore, agriculture also led to the ability to have surpluses of food. Surplus food led to the possibility of the group supporting higher populations, as well as the creation of specialization—meaning more and more individuals were not needed to be involved in the agricultural process. Instead, more individuals were free to devote their time to other things, such as art, politics, religion, and others. Many anthropologists and historians believe that this led to class specialization.

Besides societal changes, the Neolithic Revolution also had *biological effects*. Greater numbers of people living in smaller spaces meant that infectious diseases were more easily transmitted. Furthermore, many animal-borne diseases were quickly spread to humans due to closer quarters than before. Many academics also argue that the Neolithic Revolution and the sudden dietary changes that accompanied it also led to nutritional and physiological changes in humans.

The Neolithic Revolution—and the ability to consume domesticated plants, as well as animal meat—led to further understanding of the usefulness of animals to human society. Soon, animals had a variety of other uses, including milk, eggs, transportation, manure, and much more.

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