

Why, Where, and When

Why did people begin to settle into permanent societies?

The word *revolution* might bring to mind images of soldiers fighting a war. From a world history perspective, a revolution is a widespread change of life. Such a change occurred in the Neolithic Age, when humans largely shifted away from living as roaming hunter-gatherers and began farming in settled agrarian communities. The **Neolithic Revolution**, or **agricultural revolution**, did not happen quickly. It occurred gradually, over several thousand years.

After the cold temperatures of the Ice Age, about 11,700 years ago, climates around the globe began to warm. People during this time were **nomadic**. They moved from place to place following the **migration** of the animals they hunted for food. They also ate plant-based foods that they gathered, such as fruits, seeds, roots, and nuts.

As these nomadic peoples moved from region to region, they found areas with plentiful natural resources. For instance, the area that is today known as the **Fertile Crescent**, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, used to have lush vegetation and abundant animal species. People settled in these areas and eventually learned how to help the plant life in

the area grow. However, many people continued to hunt and gather food. The shift to **agriculture** was a gradual transition, not a sudden event.

The First Farmers

Researchers have found that people established settlements about 31,000 years ago. However, the earliest buildings were made of brush and were not permanent structures, so people may not have lived in them year-round. The oldest permanent settlements have been found in the **Middle East**—in modern-day **Syria, Iraq, Israel, Turkey, and Jordan**—dating back 14,000 to 11,000 years ago. Ancient civilizations have also been found in modern-day China, India, Egypt, Peru, and Mexico.

The Neolithic Revolution began at different times, in different places, and for different reasons. Therefore, it is difficult to identify a single point in time when this revolution began. However, because the spread of farming equates to the spread of civilization, researchers will continue to investigate answers to the questions of *who, why, when, how, and what*.