

## Summary 7: The Wise Men from the East

Several thousand years after *Mungo Man* lived and died in Australia, the first of our species, *Homo sapiens* (or “Wise Man”) edged their way into the lands which, until then had been the province of the cave bears and Neanderthals. These people are classified according to their stone tool technology as “Aurignacian”. The oldest evidence of their arrival in Europe has been found

at Kostenki, on the river Don, and dates from about 45 KYA. The 20 or so Kostenki excavations have been going on for many years and show occupation from 40 to 30 KYA. As well as hunting mammoths, bison and other large game, the Kostenki people included smaller mammals and fish from the river in their diet. Their tools included blades, scrapers, drills and awls, as well as sturdy antler digging tools resembling crude pick-axes. They built huts with mammoth bones as framework, and dug sleeping pits where embers kept them warm at night.



Most notable among the Kostenki finds were so-called "Venus" figurines made from loess which are possibly the oldest mobiliary art in Europe and also the first use of "ceramics". As with the Jomon, they appear to have served a shamanistic healing function.

**Europe's Climate during the Late Pleistocene:** *Stadials* are those periods in the Earth's climate during which full glacial conditions occur. *Inter-stadials* are those periods in between the stadials in which the climate is warmer and moister. A *Heinrich event* is a surge in the amount of ice in the North Atlantic which scientists suggest also relates to a decrease in temperatures on land.

43,000 – 41,000 years ago: this was a brief interstadial during which the climate in the north-west was about as warm as it is at present.

41,000 – 39,000 years ago: This phase seems to have coincided with Heinrich event “H4”. A large ice sheet covered modern Norway and Sweden south of which was a zone of sparse vegetation, Aeolian sand and loess. The mean annual temperature was about the same as in the high Arctic today. 39,000-36,000 years ago: Although milder than during the previous stadial, it was still colder and dryer than today with steppe-tundra south of the ice-sheet. Sea levels were about 70m below present.

**The Occupation of Britain:** From about 750,000 years ago, a huge plain the size of modern Britain stretched from Scotland to Denmark. Archaeologists now call this lost Atlantis “Doggerland”. Up to ~ 8,000 years ago the Irish Sea and the English Channel were also dry land. Although there were times the climate was too cold and humans would have been driven out, it seems Britain has been occupied by humans, on and off, for a very long time. Piltdown aside, it is generally believed that early Neanderthal Man entered the region somewhere between 750 KYA and 500 KYA. Around 470 KYA, a very cold phase forced them out of Britain for the next 50,000 years, returning during the Hoxnian Interglacial. Again, around 125 KYA the cold became too intense and Neanderthal Man was driven from Britain and did not return until about 60–50 KYA so that Neanderthal had been in residence for less than about 20,000 years before our ancestors, *Homo sapiens*, joined him.

The occupation by modern humans was initially spasmodic from 40-35 KYA, when the climate was less severe. More clearly, there is evidence at about 30KYA of Aurignacian industries at a site known as Paviland Cave on the Gower Peninsula in South Wales( the *Red Lady* was found in 1823). Other significant finds come from Gough's Cave in Somerset ("Cheddar Man") and also at Creswell Crags where artefacts dating from Neanderthal occupation down to the LGM have been found. At Creswell also were depictions of animals including bison and a number of different species of birds. These are the only known Palaeolithic cave art yet found in Britain and are the most northerly ever found in Europe.

**The long journey to Europe:** The Out-of-Africa hypothesis suggests not everyone went beachcombing to Australia, Eastern Asia and the Americas. Some modern humans migrated more to the north from whence their descendants eventually entered the steppes of Central Asia. Later generations gradually moved east, entering western China, Tibet, and as we saw, Japan. Some also ended up in the Levant or Middle East. There are two opposed theories as to what happened next: *did the original inhabitants of Europe come west from the steppes of Central Asia or were they the Levantine settlers who, expanding north and north-west, came to Europe by way of what would later be known as the Fertile Crescent and Anatolia?*

The older, northern alternative says that after an earlier existence in Asian Khazakstan, all European variants of R1b shared an existence in Russia (in the region of Kazan, on the Volga river at about 55° North and 50° East). Recent studies indicate that between 65 and 55 KYA this north-west region had been unsuitable for human habitation. However, in the Zagros Mountains in western Iran between the Persian Gulf and the Dead Sea, there was a rapidly expanding population who had developed the stone-working technique which for archaeologists is the signature of the Upper Palaeolithic or Aurignacian culture. From about 50 KYA, these people began a diaspora which took them, some into the Indus valley, some north-west up the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers into Kurdistan whence they eventually found their way into Anatolia; some went north into the Caucasus Mountains while others went south along the Mediterranean coast and crossed back into Africa becoming the progenitors of the Berbers. By 40 KYA, modern humans were living on the shores of Lake Baikal in eastern Siberia and as far west as Kostenki on the River Don. While they were in Central Asia, our ancestors domesticated the dog.

**Gravettian culture:** At about 33 KYA, *Homo sapiens* in Europe made a big technological leap forward and developed new, much more sophisticated stone working techniques now called the Gravettian culture. Had they not made this advance, they might not have survived the LGM when it arrived on their doorstep. By 30 KYA, people were living a hunting and foraging lifestyle but on a more sedentary basis; populations expanded and communities evolved into patrilocal bands probably with some kind of leadership such as a "first among equals".

The big question is how did the Gravettian culture replace the Aurignacian? Was it by a migrating horde overpowering and replacing the original inhabitants? Or was it by some more peaceful form of cultural diffusion? The overwhelming impression is that the Gravettian culture spread more by diffusion than by replacement. That it spread so rapidly and so extensively perhaps supports the idea that as the climate grew colder, even the Aurignacians with all their previous experience of living in Arctic conditions, took on the Gravettian techniques which allowed them to survive better and for longer when the climate grew colder than *Homo sapiens* had ever known before.