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通识读本

走出黑暗 ——人类史前史探秘

Prehistory

A Very Short Introduction

Chris Gosden 著
陈炳辉 陈星灿 译

外语教学与研究出版社
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A very, very short introduction to chronology

The hard thing about writing a very short introduction to prehistory is that prehistory is so long. Human origins currently go back 6 million years, a time period which encompasses a number of different prehistoric and geological periods. Prehistory is about sets of sites, artefacts and landscapes from the past which we try to understand in the present, putting the evidence we have in the context of their contemporary environments, both physical and social. I will refer to commonly-used terms for periods of the past, and rather than pause to explain each of them in the text, provide some overview here. For each region of the world I have also constructed a series of very brief timelines at the back of the book.

Beneath me as I sit here in the centre of southern Britain lies the following general sequence of sediments and archaeological evidence. In the upper metre of soil and sub-soil is evidence from the last 10,000 years – what are locally known as the Mesolithic (*c.*8000–4000 BC – i.e. Before Christ) – a world of hunter-gatherers living in modern climatic conditions; the Neolithic period (*c.*4000–1800 BC) – the first farmers; the Bronze Age (1800–800 BC) – the first widespread use of metals; the Iron Age (800 BC–AD [Anno Domini] 43) – the end of prehistory. The period older than 10,000 years ago is known as the Palaeolithic and extends back to the start of direct human ancestry. The last 2 million years has been a period of fluctuating cold and warm periods known generally as the Ice Ages. Evidence from this period

is found in river gravels, cave deposits and relatively rare occurrences of old sediments, as we shall see in the next chapter. The Palaeolithic currently starts 6 million years ago in Africa, where our earliest direct ancestors originated to spread out to Eurasia and southeast Asia between 1.8 and 1 million years ago (see Fig. 6 for a depiction of early hominid evolution). The oldest evidence in Britain is no older than this. At this stage of human evolution we are looking at *Homo erectus* – a stocky creature with a small brain, a limited social life and restricted material culture (although life may not have been as dull as this makes it sound). The so-called Ice Ages of the last 2 million years were really fluctuating climates and so in the Thames gravels beneath me are evidences of cold-adapted faunas (mammoths, woolly rhinos etc.) and warm-loving creatures, including hominids who may have lived in Europe only during warm periods. This was not true of the last glaciation, which started around 40,000 years ago and reached its height around 18,000 years ago. Now there were two sets of hominid species permanently in Europe – ourselves (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) and Neanderthals (*Homo neanderthalensis*) – the latter a cold-adapted species found from Britain to central Asia, whose extinction has led to one of the great whodunits – did we wipe them out directly, out-compete them more indirectly, or did they die out due to an inability to cope with changing conditions? At the height of the last glacial, the northern polar ice caps extended down to the Thames, with tundra south of that and open savannah conditions down to the Mediterranean. Much of Canada was covered by ice, and the expansion of the southern ice sheets caused glaciers in Tasmania, the Australian mainland and Argentina. Because so much of the earth's water had frozen, global sea levels dropped, joining Britain to Europe, Papua New Guinea to Australia, and Borneo to peninsular Malaysia. There was drought in the tropical zones, extending the deserts and savannahs and creating holes in the equatorial rainforest. As the earth's climate warmed after 14,000 BC the ice retreated, and plants, animals, insects and birds moved into higher latitudes in both hemispheres and recolonized former deserts. Land was lost to the

rising sea, especially in southeast Asia, and more continuous rainforest may have posed some barriers in the tropics. This cycle of warm and cold has been repeated a number of times over the last 2 million years.

Although a small part of the story in terms of overall time, we are most interested in people like us – *Homo sapiens sapiens*. We arose in Africa about 120,000 years ago, moving out to the Middle East by 90,000 years ago and the Indian sub-continent and beyond by 70,000. Europe and Australia were both colonized about 50,000 years ago, the latter for the first time, and the last large landmass to receive people was the Americas 20–15,000 years ago. After that the last big movements were to islands – the Caribbean and Mediterranean islands were permanently settled around 6000 BC, the remote Pacific islands after 1500 BC, with places like Iceland in the northern hemisphere and New Zealand in the southern being the last sizeable pieces of land people reached, about 1000 years ago.

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The chronological scheme for understanding prehistory, the so-called Three Age system, was mainly developed in Europe. The Stone Age was divided into two by the start of farming, with the Old Stone Age (Palaeolithic, with its own three divisions – lower, middle and upper) succeeded by the New Stone Age (Neolithic). The metal ages of Bronze and Iron, it was thought, saw the development of tribal societies with sophisticated farming and the ability to build monuments like hillforts or create metal objects both for use and for long-distance exchanges. The Three Age system works fine for much of Eurasia (although not Japan) and with some reservations for southeast Asia. Australia and the Pacific had only stone ages; the first metals were introduced by Europeans. Africa's bronze age probably came after its iron age and the Americas developed only copper, eschewing bronze or iron. Reflecting their different histories the Americas have developed their own terminologies, sometimes aimed at understanding the growth of states and civilizations in central and southern America (Archaic, Formative,

Classic etc.) or local sequences in north America (Woodland, Anasazi etc.). Since the 1960s absolute dates, especially radiocarbon determinations, have come through in numbers providing the basis for a comparative world prehistory, so that we can now ask what was happening in the world 18,000 or 5000 BC. Absolute dates have not solved all our chronological problems, but have shifted attention from when things happened to why they happened.

Absolute dates have changed our views of processes. In many areas of the world we can now see that the adoption of farming, which used to be seen as a sudden and dramatic change, often happened over a long period of time. The acceptance of sheep, cattle, pigs, wheat, barley and oats over much of western Eurasia occurred slowly and through complicated means between 10,000 and 3000 BC in differing areas; the movement of rice, probably first domesticated in China around 6000 BC, to Japan, India and southeast Asia took many millennia, as did the movement of millet and sorghum in Africa or maize and beans in the Americas. Indeed, many now think that the origins of farming is not really the issue. More significant is the total, but changing, pattern of production and consumption, which includes not only plants and animals, but also stone tools, pots, baskets, textiles and metals. Over the last ten thousand years people have created a complex series of worlds for themselves drawing on even older skills and resources – but such issues take us beyond an introduction to chronology and I will leave them for later chapters.

年代学简介

史前史如此漫长，要为其撰写一个简短的绪论确非易事。人类的起源目前可追溯到 600 万年前，这段时间涵括了许多不同的史前时代和地质时代。史前史是现在的我们试图去理解过去的诸多遗迹遗址、人工制品和地形地貌，并将我们已掌握的证据置于其同时代的自然和社会双重背景之中加以考察。在讨论到过去的各个时代时，难免涉及一些常用术语，为了避免在文中一一解释，我先在这里进行一下概述。

现在我所坐的位置处于英国南部的中心地域，脚下的地层中包含许多沉积物和考古学证据，大致按照下列顺序排列。在最上面 1 米厚的表土层和心土中的考古证据来自过去 1 万年间的各个时代。首先是被当地称为“中石器时代”的时期（约公元前 8000—前 4000 年，“公元前”意为“基督前”，指传说中耶稣基督诞生以前），当时人们生活在现代气候条件下，以采集和狩猎为生；接下来是新石器时代（约公元前 4000—前 1800 年），这时出现了最早的农民；再后来是青铜时代（公元前 1800—前 800 年），是人类开始广泛使用金属的第一个时代；最后是铁器时代（公元前 800 年—公元 43 年），史前史于此结束。比 1 万年以前更早的时期，我们称之为“旧石器时代”，向前可一直追溯到人类直系祖先的出现。在过去的 200 万年间，地

球经历了多次气候冷暖波动的时期，一般称为“冰期”。在下一章中我们会谈到，这一时期的证据主要见于河流的砾石层、洞穴堆积和其他相对罕见的古老沉积物中。目前来说，我们认为旧石器时代开始于 600 万年前的非洲。180 万至 100 万年前，人类最早的直系祖先从那里扩散到欧亚大陆和东南亚地区（请参阅图 6 中早期人类进化的系谱图）。在英国，年代最久远的考古证据也没有早于这个时代。人类演化到这个阶段时被称为“直立人”——一种拥有有限的社会生活和物质文化、身躯粗壮、脑容量小的早期人类（不过他们的生活可能并不像我们描述的那么乏味）。由于过去 200 万年间所谓的“冰期”的气候波动幅度大，我脚下泰晤士河的砾石层中的遗迹既包含适应寒冷气候的动物群（如猛犸象、长毛犀等），也有喜欢温暖气候的生物，包括可能只在温暖时期才在欧洲居住的早期人类。但这种情况并不适用于约肇始于 4 万年前，在 1.8 万年前达到顶峰的末次冰期。我们知道这个时期的欧洲永久性生活着两种人类——即我们这种现代智人和尼安德特人，后者是一种可适应严寒气候的人类，从英国到中亚地区都曾发现过，其灭绝的原因已经成为人类演化史上的大悬案之一：到底是他们直接消灭了他们？还是与他们的竞争间接导致了他们的灭绝？抑或是他们没有足够的能力来应对环境变化而最终灭绝？在末次冰期的冰盛期，北极的冰盖一直往南扩张到了泰晤士河流域，其南部变成了冻原，而开阔的热带稀树草原则接着向南延伸到地中海沿岸地区。加拿大的大部分地区被冰层覆盖，南极冰盖的扩大则导致塔斯马尼亚、澳大利亚大陆和阿根廷形成了冰川。由于地球上这么多水都结成了冰，全球海平面下降，使得英国和欧洲大陆、巴布亚新几内亚和澳大利亚、婆罗洲和马来半岛等地连接了起来。此时热带地区的干旱使得沙漠、热带稀树草原面积扩张，并在赤道雨林地区造成植被缺失。随着地球气候在公元前 1.4 万年后开始回暖，冰层消退，南北半球的植物、动物、昆虫和鸟类

皆移居至纬度更高的地带，并重新占据了以前的沙漠地区。海平面上升，淹没陆地，这在东南亚地区尤其明显，而绵延的雨林则在热带地区形成一些屏障。这种气候冷热交替的循环在过去 200 万年间多次重复出现。

虽然现代智人的历史只占整个人类历史的一小部分，却是我们最感兴趣的焦点。我们的祖先大约于 12 万年前在非洲出现，约 9 万年前迁徙到中东，7 万年前又迁徙到南亚次大陆及以远地区。欧洲和澳大利亚在大约 5 万年前被现代人占据，这也是人类第一次移居澳大利亚。人类向大片陆地的最后一次迁徙发生在 2 万至 1.5 万年前的美洲。在此之后，人类最后一批大规模的迁徙的目的地是岛屿地区——加勒比海和地中海诸岛约在公元前 6000 年被人类永久占据；公元前 1500 年之后，人类到达遥远的太平洋诸岛；而在距今大约 1000 年前，北半球的冰岛和南半球的新西兰这样的地方成了人类到达的最后一批面积较大的陆地。

史前史的年代学框架，即所谓的“三期论”，主要是在欧洲发展起来的。石器时代由于农业的兴起被划分为两个阶段——旧石器时代（又分为早、中、晚三期）及紧随其后的新石器时代。一般认为，在青铜和铁器这两个金属时代里，部落社会得以发展，既拥有了复杂的农业生产模式，又具备了建造山堡之类遗迹的能力，还可以制造出既能使用又可远途交换的金属器物。三期论适用于欧亚大陆的大部分地区（日本除外），但东南亚地区却不尽然。澳大利亚和太平洋地区只经历过石器时代，其第一批金属物品是欧洲人引入的。非洲的青铜时代可能在铁器时代之后才出现，而美洲只生产了铜器，却略过了青铜器和铁器。美洲人为了说明自己与众不同的历史，发明了他们特有的专门术语，有时专门用于分析中南美洲国家与文明的发展（如远古时代、成形时代、古典时代等）或北美洲各地的

发展时序（如森林期、阿纳萨齐期）。自 20 世纪 60 年代起，人类在确定精确年份方面，尤其是通过放射性碳定年法取得巨大进步，为史前史比较研究提供了基础，使我们得以探究公元前 1.8 万年或公元前 5000 年时的世界到底发生了什么。虽然精确年代的测定并未解决我们所有的年代学问题，但已将我们的注意力从事件的发生时间转移到了发生原因上面。

精确年代的测定改变了我们对人类进化过程的看法。例如，在世界许多地区，农业的出现以往常被视为戏剧性的突发事件，但现在我们知道了农业的发明其实经历了漫长的岁月。在公元前 1 万至公元前 3000 年间，欧亚大陆西部的大部分地区逐渐完成了对绵羊、牛、猪、小麦、大麦和燕麦的成功驯化，其间过程缓慢，手段复杂；水稻可能是在公元前 6000 年前后由中国最先驯化，历数千年才传到了日本、印度和东南亚地区；非洲的小米和高粱、美洲的玉米和豆类作物的传播也无不如此。实际上，现在许多人认为农业的起源已不再是关键问题，了解人类整个生产和消费模式的历史及变迁过程才具有更重要的意义——这不仅包括动植物的驯化，也包括对石器、陶器、篮篓、纺织品和金属的生产和使用。在过去的 1 万年间，人类利用更古老的技术和资源为自己创造了一连串纷繁复杂的世界，但这些问题已超出了简介年代学的范畴，笔者将留在后面的章节中加以讨论。

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