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# FOREWORD

On 10 December 1972, Premier Zhou Enlai, in replying to my advice to him that I intended that Australia should normalise relations with the People's Republic of China as soon as possible, expressed his conviction that this would be in the interests of the Australian and Chinese peoples. He looked forward to increasing cooperation and personnel exchanges 'in the trade, cultural, scientific, technological and other fields'.

In the two succeeding decades Premier Zhou's vision and our mutual hopes have been realised. In all the fields which he singled out for mention there has been a vast widening and deepening of relations since the first Australian ambassador, Dr Stephen Fitzgerald, arrived in Beijing in April 1973, followed in May and June by a ministerial-led trade mission and a parliamentary mission. In the five years of my chairmanship of the Australia-China Council I was closely interested in the further development of cultural, scientific and technological exchanges, many of them linked with trade and economic cooperation between our two countries.

In Victoria, which has a state-to-province sister relationship with Jiangsu, Deakin University decided in 1991 to collaborate with Nanjing University to develop material on Australian Studies specifically for a Chinese audience. This book, *Contemporary Australian Society*, is the result.

The project is a happy example of a close and friendly cooperation between an Australian university, Deakin, and a Chinese university, Nanjing. It is published jointly by Deakin University Press and Nanjing University Press in the English and Chinese languages. It is aimed at a wide audience: Chinese students interested in Australian Studies, Chinese intending to study in Australia, and businessmen and others interested in trade with and investment in Australia. I know that it will be particularly welcomed by students at Centres for Australian Studies in Chinese universities. It establishes a secure foundation for the further development of close cooperation between Deakin University and Nanjing University.

I congratulate the universities, the presses and the Australia-China Council which have collaborated in producing this book, and I wish every success to the students and businessmen who use it.



The Honourable Gough Whitlam, AC, QC  
Prime Minister of Australia, 1972-75  
Chairman of Australia-China Council, 1986-91

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## PREFACE

I wish to acknowledge the support provided for this project by the Australia–China Council, Unilink Pty Ltd, and the International Office of Deakin University. I also wish to recognise the valuable work of Mrs Fay Warby, Manager of Deakin University Press, and Mr Shi Huirong, Manager of Nanjing University Press, whose initial negotiation in 1992 led to the undertaking of this co-publication.

As well as sincerely thanking the contributors for the professional way in which they produced and revised their chapters, I would like to acknowledge the valued contributions of Ms Linda Creek who assisted in the preparation of the manuscript, and Mr Frank Bosch and Mr Ray Williams who proofread the chapters.

Finally, I wish to thank Mrs Frances Hay, Chief Editor, Mr Roy Walshe, Chief Designer and Miss Janine Doherty, Graphic Design Assistant, of Multi-media Production Services, Deakin University, and Dr Shuming Zhao, Chief Translator of the manuscript into Standard Chinese, and his colleagues at Nanjing University Press for the highly efficient and professional way in which they undertook their tasks.

It is to be hoped that the expertise and goodwill developed during the course of this project will lead to future joint ventures between Deakin and Nanjing universities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Forth', with a long horizontal line extending to the left and a shorter horizontal line below it.

Gordon Forth

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# INTRODUCTION

GORDON FORTH

IN 1991 MY DEAKIN UNIVERSITY colleague Jan Critchett and I visited several Australian Studies Centres in China and conducted short certificate courses in Australian Studies at Xuzhou and Yangzhou in Jiangsu Province. As a result of the visit, we became aware of the need for a suitable text specifically designed for Chinese readers which would provide a general introduction to contemporary Australian society. In particular, we saw the need to produce a book which would clearly explain recent changes in Australian society and Australia's changing position in the world. In planning this project, we initially intended that *Contemporary Australian Society* would serve as a basic text for students undertaking Australian Studies elective units at Chinese tertiary institutions, or as a guide for Chinese students enrolled at Australian universities. We later broadened the scope of the book to provide Chinese managers with useful, current information concerning Australian investment in China and Chinese investment in Australia. It was always our intention to produce a useful guide for students and managers, as well as to provide the general Chinese reader with a clear and informative account of some of the more distinctive features of Australian society in the late twentieth century.

With the exception of Dr Shuming Zhao of Nanjing University, all of the contributors to this book are Australian scholars who have a particular interest in the development of Australian Studies in China. This book is a co-publication of Nanjing University Press and Deakin University Press, and its production has involved close collaboration between staff of Nanjing and Deakin universities. The trust and the close cooperation developed as a result of Australian and Chinese scholars' involvement in this project will provide a sound basis for future joint ventures involving these two institutions.

The excellent working relationship between Deakin and Nanjing universities which developed during the course of this project reflects the strengthening ties of friendship between Australia and China over the past two decades. As pointed out in Professor Beaumont and Mr Woodard's chapter on Australian foreign policy, there was a time in the not too distant past when many Australians regarded the



People's Republic of China as the major threat to Australia's national security. Yet, as is made clear in Professor Walker's and Dr Shuming's chapters, this situation has changed quite dramatically since Mr Whitlam accepted Premier Zhou Enlai's invitation to visit China in 1972. Australia now has established close economic, diplomatic and cultural links with China. For its part, China regards Australia as a friendly nation which has assisted, and will continue to assist, China's modernisation program.

In writing chapters for this book, we were aware that very few of our potential Chinese readers would possess more than the most basic understanding of Australia and Australian society. This is hardly surprising given Australia's remoteness from China and its relative lack of importance as a major economic or military power. Yet over the past fifteen years or so there has been a growing awareness and general interest in Australia amongst educated young Chinese. Australians, too, have become much better informed about China and its central importance to Australia's future role in world trade and international relations. Australians are keen travellers, and it is now fairly common for Australians to visit China as tourists, foreign experts, students or academics on exchange programs. Chinese language and cultural studies are now well established in a number of Australian universities, including Deakin University, and there is growing interest in Chinese literature, art and films among Australian intellectuals. While the great majority of Chinese students undertaking studies abroad continue to enrol at US and European universities, a small but significant number from the People's Republic of China undertake tertiary studies, mainly at the postgraduate level, in Australia. Dr Shuming's chapter describes the strong economic links that have developed between Australian and Chinese companies since 1978. Many Australian universities and government departments have hosted visiting delegations from China and have some kind of formal links or agreements with counterpart organisations in China. It is obvious that China and Australia will be even more closely linked in the future, and there is a real need for Australians and Chinese to learn much more about each other's society and culture.

Available evidence, which includes a minor research project I conducted in China in 1991, suggests that educated young Chinese tend to hold rather romanticised views about Australia and Australian society. Australia, like the United States, is perceived by most Chinese students as an extremely affluent country where most citizens are virtually guaranteed a comfortable and secure life. In brief essays they wrote about Australia, most of the Chinese students described Australia as an underpopulated, rural society, where the majority of the population were involved in some type of farming, and where exotic wildlife such as kangaroos and koalas were found in abundance. This tourist brochure image of Australia as one gigantic sheep ranch and wildlife park is common throughout the world. It has a great deal to do with the way in which Australians have preferred to portray their country and themselves. The reality is, of course, that Australia is one of the world's most highly urbanised and industrialised societies with only around four per cent of its population engaged in agriculture.

As well as emphasising the importance of manufacturing in Australia, my chapter on the Australian economy is intended to provide Chinese readers with an introduction to the problems facing Australia as we seek to internationalise our economy and find new markets for our exports. While most of the Chinese students who took part in my project knew about and were extremely interested in Australia's Aboriginal people, few had any idea of the complex issues involved in government policy on Aboriginal concerns. As well as providing a general introduction to Aboriginal culture, Associate Professor Critchett's chapter, 'The first Australians — the Australian Aborigines', discusses how governments in Australia are attempting to come to some form of reconciliation with our Aboriginal people. Many of the young Chinese who were surveyed were aware that Australia is a former British colony, and they still see Australia as being closely linked politically with Great Britain. As is pointed out in Mr Craig's chapter on government in Australia, however, most of these links have been broken, and it seems likely that Australia will become a republic in the near future.

Most of the Chinese students who took part in my survey were aware that Australia is a predominantly arid, infertile country, yet many had the impression that Australia is still very much underpopulated and needs many more people. Similarly, very few were aware of the highly restrictive nature of Australia's current immigration policy or of the difficulties which even hardworking and well-qualified young Chinese are likely to experience in obtaining suitable employment in Australia. As one would expect, many young Chinese are interested in undertaking further studies or finding paid work in Australia. However, very few have much idea of the difficulties, including the high cost of living, they are likely to experience while studying at an Australian college or university. It is to be hoped that the chapter on Australia's immigration policy, together with Associate Professor Jean's chapter on higher education in Australia, will provide young Chinese with a realistic view of some of the problems they are likely to experience when living and studying in Australia.

From their essays on Australia, it is apparent that most young Chinese still see Australia as a mainly British society with no distinctive culture of its own. The chapter on Australia's immigration policy and Dr Rule's chapter on religion in Australia provide a clear indication of the multicultural, multi-racial nature of contemporary Australian society. Similarly, Associate Professor Critchett's general description of the Australian way of life, in combination with Dr Alomes and Ms Jones's chapter on Australian popular culture and Mr Franklin's account of the performing arts in Australia, should provide readers with a basic understanding of modern Australian culture.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that producing this book has been very much an experimental project. It is our intention to produce a revised and improved edition after we have had an opportunity to evaluate its worth, both as a basic text and as a general guide for Chinese interested in Australia.

## CHAPTER ONE

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# THE FIRST AUSTRALIANS — THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES

JAN CRITCHETT

THE ABORIGINES ARE THE INDIGENOUS people of Australia. In many countries—for example, in India and Japan—there are people referred to as aboriginal people. But in Australia, from the beginning of European settlement in 1788, the aboriginal race has been referred to as the Aborigines with a capital A—as a special race. The Aborigines believe they have been in Australia since the Dreamtime, a term used to describe a time when the great Ancestral Beings created the features of the Australian landscape, and then the birds, plants, animals and people. Archaeologists, constrained by the evidence found in excavations (and archaeology is a relatively new discipline in Australia), argue that the Aborigines have been in Australia for more than 40000 years and may have been here for as long as 80000 years.

The Aborigines form 1.46 per cent of the Australian population, according to the 1986 census. In the 1986 census, 227645 people stated that they were Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders. To put this in some sort of perspective, in June 1989 the estimated number of people born in Asia and living in Australia was 570000—just over 3.4 per cent of the total population. So, we have more people born in Asia living in Australia than Aborigines. But numbers or percentage of the population are not what matters in the case of the Aborigines. They are of importance because they are the descendants of the original inhabitants of the land we call Australia. More than this, their numbers are growing, and they are becoming more vocal about the unjust treatment they have received. Their national and state organisations are demanding, for example, freehold title to land in recognition of their prior occupation of the country and a statement of understanding, treaty or declaration recognising their prior ownership and offering some form of compensation.

Many Aborigines look distinctively different from other Australians. In the north their skin is black, in some places it is dark brown, and in the south, where there has been cohabiting and marriage with 'white' Australians, many Aborigines look little darker than the general population.

Aborigines are not evenly distributed throughout Australia. More than half of the people counted as Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders in the 1986 census were in New South Wales and Queensland. The part of Australia where they make up the largest proportion of the population, however, is the Northern Territory, which has a relatively small total population. There, Aborigines make up 22 per cent of the population.

Today, Aborigines live many different lifestyles. Some live in cities, others in country towns, while still others live on outstations in areas of northern Australia remote from European settlement. While the way of life varies in different parts of Australia, it is in the north that it remains closest to that of the past. Nowhere has it remained totally unaffected by the effects of European settlement. For example, even remote communities in the north are likely to have radios, cigarettes, alcohol and tinned food.

In Victoria, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, 90 per cent of Aborigines live in urban centres. But this is not true of the general Aboriginal population. Less than 25 per cent of Aborigines live in urban centres. Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia have the least urbanised Aboriginal populations.

Aborigines have not been satisfied with simply protesting in Australia's cities about their situation. They have sought as much international publicity as possible. You may have seen them on the television news in China in 1988 when Australia celebrated 200 years of European settlement. Aborigines boycotted all Bicentennial celebrations. Instead of celebrating, they declared a year of mourning and made much of the slogan 'We have survived'. The focus of celebration was 26 January 1988, the day which commemorated the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788.<sup>1</sup> Great celebrations were planned in Sydney for that day, but the Aboriginal response was a march of mourners. Aborigines assembled from all over Australia and marched through the streets of Sydney. Holding up their distinctive Aboriginal flags, they reminded Australians that Aborigines had little to celebrate. Why do they feel they have little to celebrate? As a people, their day-to-day circumstances and standard of living are far below the average enjoyed by other Australians:

- Aborigines have a life expectancy 20 years lower than that of other Australians.
- Their health is poor compared with that of other Australians. Many suffer from Third World diseases such as leprosy and trachoma (eye disease), which are not experienced by other Australians.
- Most are unemployed or have poorly paid, low-skilled and insecure jobs.
- Many more Aborigines live in one house than non-Aboriginal Australians do: hence, the space they have is less than that of other Australians.
- They leave school much earlier than other Australian school children. Most do not complete secondary school.

- The child mortality rate is much higher than for the non-Aboriginal population.
- They are imprisoned in a much greater proportion than other Australians. Aborigines form just over 1 per cent of the total Australian population, but they make up 11 per cent of the prison population. This is the result of Aborigines being imprisoned for less serious crimes than other Australians — often for being drunk and disorderly. Their despair is evident in the alarming number of Aborigines who hang themselves while being held in police custody. Between 1 January 1980 and 31 May 1989 ninety-nine Aborigines died in police custody. A Royal Commission was set up to enquire into the causes of these deaths. It has now made its recommendations, but the number of Aboriginal deaths while in police custody has not decreased.

There have been some advances. For example, more Aboriginal people are staying on at school to complete a secondary education. About 2000 Aborigines are enrolled in degree courses at universities throughout Australia. Second, there has been progress in the area of land rights (the demands of Aborigines to be given legal title to land). The following table, taken from the *Weekend Australian* (our national newspaper), 2–3 February 1991, provides a useful summary of the situation state by state and for the nation as a whole.

Table 1

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land tenure, as at 30 June 1989

	ATSI pop. (a)	As % total pop.	Total land area (sq km)	ATSI F'hold (sq km)	As % total land	ATSI F'hold (b) (sq km)	As % total land	Reserve- mission (sq km)	As % total land
NSW and ACT (c)	60 229	1.07	804 000	507	0.06	842	0.10		
Vic.	12 610	0.31	227 600	32	0.01				
Qld	61 267	2.37	1 727 200	5	0.00	31 990	1.85	95	0.01
SA	14 292	1.06	984 000	183 649	18.66	508	0.05		
WA	37 788	2.69	2 525 000	35	0.00	103 227	4.09	202 223	8.01
NT	34 740	22.43	1 346 200	453 123	33.66	26 009	4.93	45	0.00
Tas.	6 712	1.54	67 800	2	0.00				
Aust.	227 638	1.46	7 681 800	637 353	8.30	162 576	2.12	202 363	2.63

(a) As at June 1986, from 1986 census.

(b) Includes pastoral, special purposes, and local shire council leases.

(c) Includes Jervis Bay Territory land.

Note: Since 30 June 1989, a further 10 686 sq. km freehold has been successfully claimed in the Northern Territory, while the Commonwealth through ATSIC has purchased and handed over an 1865 sq. km pastoral lease on Cape York in Queensland.

Source: Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

The area given back (8 per cent), when Aborigines form only 1.46 per cent of the total population, looks impressive. However, it should be noted that most of the land has been given back in the Northern Territory and South Australia. Elsewhere, little has been achieved.

The federal government in the early 1980s was committed to national land rights legislation but was forced by strong opposition, mainly from leaders in the mining industry, and farmers and graziers organisations, to abandon this by the mid-1980s. Meanwhile, the land rights struggle continues. The Aborigines argue that they want land back not only for cultural reasons but to gain profit from the use of the land—so that, for example, if a large mining company is interested in mining on their land, they can ask for royalties and so improve their economic position. Without ownership of land, they have no basis from which to make money.

In early 1993 the land rights aspirations of Aborigines were bolstered by the verdict in a very important law case, *Mabo v. Queensland*. In 1982 Mabo and four other Murray Islanders (in Torres Strait, which stretches from the north-east tip of Australia north to New Guinea) began action in the High Court of Australia seeking a declaration of their traditional land rights:

They claimed that the islands had been continuously inhabited and exclusively possessed by their people who lived in permanent settled communities with their own social and political organisation. They conceded that the British Crown became sovereign of the islands upon annexation [1879] but claimed continued enjoyment of their land rights until those rights had been extinguished by the sovereign. Further they claim that their rights had not been validly extinguished and that their continued rights were recognised by the Australian legal system.<sup>2</sup>

The High Court upheld the Islanders' claim, ruling by 6 to 1 that 'the lands of this continent were not *terra nullius* or "practically unoccupied" in 1788' when the European settlers arrived:

Though the Crown acquired a radical title to land within its territory, native title to land continued unaffected until it was extinguished by a valid exercise of sovereign power inconsistent with the continued right to enjoy native title.<sup>3</sup>

Where the Crown (meaning the British Government acting on behalf of the monarch as head of the government) has granted freehold or leased land to others, native title is extinguished, but where land has remained Aboriginal reserve, vacant Crown land, stock route or national park, native title continues if the local system of traditional law recognises present owners or managers. The verdict is of profound significance for Australians. As Frank Brennan states, it 'has changed the law of the land'.

The Aborigines are becoming stronger as a group and drawing closer as a people right across the nation. In fact, there seems to be a growing sense of

nationalism. There is also a strong sense of culture and a desire to re-establish culture or reclaim aspects of traditional culture even where it has almost disappeared.

In the last few years the Australian Government has made a commitment to work with the Aboriginal people to negotiate some form of treaty or compact. The general terms of this would be recognition of the prior ownership of Australia by the Aborigines and of the fact that the British settlers took the land without negotiation or compensation. It is an issue that causes great division and strong feeling in Australian society. The previous Prime Minister, Mr Bob Hawke, and the present one, Mr Paul Keating, argue that morally we should do something. We owe it to the Aborigines. Mr Hawke chose to be in the company of Aborigines for his last few minutes as Prime Minister as a symbol of the importance he places on our need to negotiate with the first Australians. However, many non-Aboriginal Australians feel that signing a treaty would undo the whole legal basis to their ownership of Australia. It is a very difficult problem for the Australian Government to resolve. The government had hoped to negotiate a treaty during 1988 so that all Australians could celebrate. But progress has been slow. Now the target date appears to be 2001.

The present difficulties faced by Aborigines are the result of the arrival of European settlers in 1788 and the impact of European settlement on a people who lived a very different lifestyle from that of Europeans. I will sketch first the way of life of Aborigines at the time of European settlement and then examine how settlement disrupted and destroyed Aboriginal societies.

Until recently it was widely believed that there were approximately 300000 Aborigines in Australia at the time of European settlement. This figure has been recently revised upwards to about 750000 at European settlement. This may seem to be a very small number for the sixth largest country in the world. But everywhere in the world hunter-gatherer people, because of their need to live entirely from the local and natural resources, have been distinguished by their small numbers. One must also remember that large areas of Australia have low rainfall and could not have supported a large population.

Archaeologists believe that the Aborigines came to Australia during the concluding phase of the long glacial or Pleistocene epoch. This was the time when humans migrated to the continents of Australia and America. During the last glacial phase, the ice of the Arctic and Antarctic was much thicker than today and the area of the Earth covered by ice was much larger than today. During the latest ice age, at its greatest extent ice covered one quarter of the land surface of the globe, whereas only one tenth of the land is covered with ice today.

The last ice age was not only a period when this part of the world was colder but also a period when, as a result, the sea was probably 122–183 metres lower than today. This made a tremendous difference to the shape of the land masses. Java, Sumatra and Kalimantan were part of the Asian mainland; so, too, was

America. It was possible to wade from Siberia to Alaska and continue into the Americas through an ice-free inland corridor. The surface shape of Australia was also different. It was possible to walk from New Guinea into Australia and from mainland Australia to the present-day island of Tasmania to the south. It was during this time when the sea was at its lowest level that the archaeologists believe the Aborigines entered Australia (perhaps 55 000–70 000 years ago).

European scholars believe that the first Australians came from South-East Asia but find it difficult to be more specific than this because the evidence that could provide vital clues is so sparse. But it is clear that whenever and by whatever route the first Australians arrived in Australia they would have had to cross the sea. It would have been impossible for them to have walked into northern Australia as Australia and Asia have been separated by sea for millions of years. The sea crossing may have been only a hundred kilometres, but to travel even this small distance in the small craft of the time would have been a dangerous activity.

Everywhere else early people spread, they walked: into Australia alone a long sea crossing was necessary. The crossing by man from Asia into Australia was one of the great moments of world history. Of this Professor Geoffrey Blainey has written:

The journey to what was then the single continent of Australia-New Guinea was one of the momentous events of world history. That series of crossings must have surpassed any previous achievement in seacraft ... It also marked the expansion of man beyond that single mass of land to which he had previously been confined: a continent embracing Africa, Asia, Europe, much of Indonesia, and of course the Americas ... <sup>4</sup>

We do not know how the Aborigines peopled Australia, whether they migrated directly south or followed the coastline, but we know they came to inhabit the whole continent, including Tasmania. But then the sea began rising, and by 7000 BC the coastline of Australia was as it is now. The Aborigines were cut off from the rest of the world. Very large seacraft became necessary for the much longer sea journey, and the Aborigines did not show any interest in looking outwards. Instead, they developed a way of life which was based on an intimate knowledge of their particular environment.

Before the arrival of Europeans in 1788, the Aborigines were not a nation. They were divided into many tribes, each with its own distinct territory, history, language or dialect, and culture. There were at least 300 languages spoken by Aborigines throughout Australia. It seems to me that it must have been like China, in the sense that if people from Fujian and Guangdong speak their regional dialects, they find it difficult to make themselves understood in Nanjing or Beijing. But the difference is that if people speak Beijing dialect they can be understood everywhere. This was not true of the Australian situation. And the Aborigines, unlike the Chinese, lacked a written language.



The Aborigines are usually thought of as nomadic people, wanderers, not settled: however, the correct word to use is semi-nomadic. Each tribe consisted of a number of clans, and the members of a clan moved within their own part of the tribal territory, taking advantage of changes in the availability of food at different times of the year.

When asked how long they have been in Australia, Aborigines always answer: from the beginning. Christians believe that in the beginning God made the world. Aborigines believe that the world was created in what they call the Dreamtime. In the Dreamtime the plants and animals were made and the continent peopled. They believe their way of life was given to them in the Dreamtime, and since then each new generation of children has been taught the laws and customs as handed down from the past. As a people, Aborigines looked to the past for guidance on how to live and gave great respect to the elders of the community, who had become wise as they learnt more and more of the knowledge that had been handed down from the Dreamtime.

In Chinese history and European history, in fact in the history of most of the countries of the world, there has been fighting over land, over territory. The Aborigines did not fight over land. Each clan gained its land in the Dreamtime, and each member of the tribe grew up knowing that the land he or she lived on was given in the Dreamtime. He or she also knew from these stories that other tribes had been given the other land. This was something fixed in the beginning and never questioned. Land was and is central to the Aboriginal way of life. Often Aborigines referred to land as 'my mother'. The land was not only a place on which to live and from which to gain food, but it was also something with which they had a spiritual relationship. The Aborigines knew their land intimately. They lived in such closeness to it. They believed the spirit of a baby came from the land about them—from a rock that was special or from a spot by the river. At some special site the spirit of new life entered a woman. A woman would tell her husband that she felt the new life, and the child would often be given a name that reminded everyone of the site from which his or her spirit came. When Aborigines grew old, they liked to go back to the part of the tribal territory they were closest to and die there.

The Aborigines lived a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. You may have heard of other people who live like this. One such people who still live this way are the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert. There was no industry, no factories. Life revolved around getting food, learning about one's culture and enjoying oneself. The word 'hunter-gatherer' refers to the method of gaining food. Very early in human history, people decided to settle down and live in one place, plant crops and keep animals nearby. Thus people began living in villages and began what we call agriculture. Before this, early people were ~~hunter~~-gatherers. They followed the animals. They did not plant crops. They simply collected berries, nuts, seeds and the roots of various plants. The time when people settled down in villages and began sowing crops in