

C. WARREN HOLLISTER

ROOTS OF THE WESTERN TRADITION

A Short History of the Ancient World



4th Edition

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**A Short History of the Ancient World
Fourth Edition**

C. WARREN HOLLISTER

University of California, Santa Barbara

Alfred A. Knopf



New York

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data:

Hollister, C. Warren (Charles Warren), 1930-
Roots of the Warren tradition.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. History, Ancient. I. Title.

D59.H64 1982 930 81-23141

ISBN 0-394-34190-2

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7

Roots of the Western Tradition

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C. Warren Hollister, Professor of History at the University of California, Santa Barbara, received his BA from Harvard and his MA and Ph.D. from UCLA. He is a Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America and the Royal Historical Society (London) and has served as Vice-President for Teaching of the American Historical Association, President of the Pacific Coast Conference on British Studies, Visiting Research Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, and Visiting Fellow of the Australian National University. The author of many scholarly books and articles, and co-author of a children's fantasy, he has been honored with Guggenheim, NEH, Fulbright, ACLS, and American Philosophical Society Fellowships. He has lectured at numerous colleges and universities across America and at such overseas universities as Cambridge, Oxford, Ghent, Leyden, Utrecht, London, Sydney, Auckland, Tasmania, Bologna, and Moscow. He is currently on the editorial boards of the *American Historical Review*, *Albion*, the *Journal of Medieval History*, and the University of California Press. He serves on the National Advisory Board of the Society for History Education and chairs the National Development Committee for the College Board Advanced Placement Test in European History. Among his other honors are the Triennial Book Prize of the Conference on British Studies, the E. Harris Harbison National Award for Distinguished Teaching, and the Walter D. Love Memorial Prize of 1981 for the best scholarly article in any area of British history or culture.

Preface

This fourth edition of *Roots of the Western Tradition* has undergone a page-by-page, word-by-word revision to achieve greater clarity and accuracy and to incorporate the results of recent research. The Introduction and Chapter 1 are rewritten completely, and Chapters 2, 4, 11, and 15 are heavily revised. Ancient history is more vulnerable to scholarly revision than most other historical fields because of the relative scarcity of documents and the growing momentum of archeological investigations. Entire civilizations have turned up since I prepared the third edition of *Roots*, and it is unsettling to realize that one or two new ones could be unearthed between the writing of this present edition and its publication. As a result of constant discoveries and reinterpretations by historians and archeologists throughout the world, not a page of this edition remains unchanged from the last.

Specifically, I have incorporated major revisions into my treatments of the Paleolithic and Neolithic eras, the emergence of cities and civilizations, Mesopotamia and its urban neighbors to the east (Iran) and west (Ebla), the Hittites and other Indo-Europeans, the Minoans, the Mycenaean and Dorian Greeks, Greek religion, the Greek economy and society, the reforms of Cleisthenes, the battle of Salamis, the Macedonians, Ptolemaic Egypt, Hellenistic society and culture, class relationships in republican Rome, the culture of the Roman silver age, the rise of Christianity, and the barbarian invasions. On the disintegration of Roman authority in the West, I have adopted the current gradualist approach but have drawn back from the recent suggestion that “what we call the Fall of the Western Empire was an imaginative experiment that got a little out of hand.” The place of women in ancient societies has received added emphasis throughout.

In this edition, as in previous ones, it has been my goal to strike a proper balance between factual narrative and interpretation, to maintain the highest possible level of accuracy, to present sound, current interpretations, and to write clearly and, if possible, vividly. Above all, I have tried to be brief, believing that beginning college students need a genial and agile guide through ancient history rather than an encyclopedic catalogue of facts. With the conviction that the great textbook has yet to be written, I have tried at least to write a succinct one that will leave adequate time for the student to pursue extensive collateral reading. Annotated guides to such reading, both in modern works and in the original sources, are provided at the ends of the three parts into which this book is divided.

I am particularly fortunate in having as my friends and colleagues at Santa Barbara such distinguished specialists as Brian M. Fagan (prehistoric and ancient archeology), Frank J. Frost (ancient Greece), and Harold Drake (ancient Rome), all of whom helped keep me current with the most recent scholarship by answering my frequent inquiries with authority and good cheer. Frank Frost put the third edition of *Roots* under his critical microscope, and his detailed comments were immensely helpful to me in preparing this present book. I am also much indebted to other scholars for their thorough and valuable comments on earlier editions: Harold Drake (again), Mortimer Chambers, Judy Turner, and William G. Sinnigen. All remaining blunders are mine, not theirs. I also thank my research assistants, past and present: Alberto Ferreiro, Professor Sally N. Vaughn, and Professor Thomas K. Keefe.

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Introduction: The Western Tradition

Some people are rather like ants. They work together at tasks that ensure the survival and prosperity of the anthill, never wondering why. Ants have several good excuses. They are governed primarily by instinct, not by an evolving culture that must be absorbed over a period of years. Were some super-ant to develop an interest in anthill history, or in the study of comparative anthills, the result would be most discouraging. Individual anthills come and go, but anthill society does not change through time. One anthill has been much like another since the days of the first ants.

Human beings, on the other hand, are products of sweeping cultural changes that stretch back countless thousands of years. In our own time, the pace has become so swift that some people see no point in studying history at all. Because the past is altogether different from the present, they argue, nothing that happened before 1960 (or 1945, 1914, or whenever) can possibly be relevant now. On this same flabby reasoning, one needn't bother with such impractical things as Shakespearian drama, nineteenth-century novels, archeology, or astronomy. Who cares where we are in time or space, or where we come from? The anthill beckons.

But with the exception of some first-generation immigrants, every American is the product of a Western cultural tradition so encompassing that we scarcely notice it—as a fish is unaware of the ocean in which it swims. Our culture shapes our assumptions, defines our options, and governs the very categories in which we judge and perceive. And there is no escaping it. A Communist revolutionary is expressing the Western tradition of social protest in terms of the doctrine of Karl Marx, a Western intellectual of the last century. An anthropologist investigating preliterate non-Western cultures is engaging in a typically Western enterprise; non-Western cultures have not produced anthropologists except under Western stimulus. Indeed, the

overwhelming majority of courses and majors offered by a modern university consist of various strands in the Western cultural fabric. The natural sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities are all deeply rooted in Western Europe—and in non-European lands such as our own that have felt its influence. The university is itself a Western invention.

This is certainly not to suggest that Western culture is superior to others, but simply to recognize that American society in the 1980s remains firmly under its spell. The study of non-Western cultures, valuable and liberating in itself, has the further advantage of placing the Western tradition in a much broader perspective. Our understanding of our own culture is enriched by viewing it in the context of other cultures, just as our understanding of ourselves as individuals depends on our knowledge of other people. But we must begin at home. Without some sense of what it means to be “Western,” the term “non-Western” is, quite obviously, drained of its meaning.

The Western cultural tradition stretches back some 1200 years or more into the European past. It rose from the debris of a still older civilization—the Greco-Roman—from which it derived much of its political, artistic, and philosophical tone. Western Civilization drew also from the Judeo-Christian tradition of the ancient Near East, which was inspired in part by the still earlier religious thought of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the lands between. Greco-Roman Civilization was itself a child of former cultures: Minoan, Etruscan, and, behind them, Egyptian and Mesopotamian. This connected sequence of civilizations extends, like an immense chain, backward some six thousand years to Mesopotamia’s emergence from the Stone Age and forward into an unmapped future.

This book will deal with Western Europe’s cultural antecedents—the civilizations of the ancient Near East, Greece, and Rome. These early cultures contributed decisively to the rise of the West. Without them we would not exist. They are the deep roots from which our civilization has grown.



PART
1

**THE ANCIENT
NEAR EAST**

Chapter 1

The Stone Age and the Birth of Civilizations

THE OLD STONE AGE

Relative to the total time span of the human race, civilization is a latecomer. In 1981 a team of archeologists reported the discovery, in an Ethiopian gully, of primitive stone tools dating back at least two and a half million years—half a million years earlier than any previous finds. The tools are very crude: 48 small, sharp-edged slivers of volcanic stone and three fist-sized cutters, probably designed to hack through the skins of animals and to butcher their carcasses. The concentration of these tools at a single site suggests a home base for a band of prowling hunters.

Humans alone of all creatures are capable of making tools and

using them purposefully. Anthropologists describe the earliest toolmakers (collectively) as *Homo habilis*, "the skillful man." The tool-making breakthrough of *Homo habilis* was made possible by a relatively large brain and agile hands, cunningly contrived for the grasping of objects. But the earliest humans differed markedly from people of today in height, brain size, and general physical makeup. Gradually, across thousands and millions of years, brains grew and tools improved. People learned how to make fire and control it; they manufactured stone axes; they invented coherent speech; they sought to tame the savage, perverse forces of nature by developing religions. *Homo habilis* developed slowly, through uneven stages, into *Homo sapiens*, "the man who knows"—the prototype of all people of all races living today.

Long after the emergence of *Homo sapiens* some 75,000 years ago, the human economy continued to be based, as always before, on hunting, fishing, and gathering wild foods. For well over ninety-nine percent of its existence on earth, humanity lived in what has been called the Paleolithic, or Old Stone Age. Progress was far too slow to be recognized as such, and life was desperately insecure. But progress there was. Toward the end of the Paleolithic era (about 30,000 to 10,000 years ago) a *Homo sapiens* race living on the continent of Europe, known as Cro-Magnon man, carried the art of hunting to new levels of efficiency. A Cro-Magnon site in Czechoslovakia contains the skeletons of a thousand hairy mammoths, and a site in France testifies to the killing of tens of thousands of horses.

One of the dazzling achievements of Cro-Magnon culture was its cave paintings. In caverns such as those at Lascaux in France and Altamira in Spain, walls are ablaze with boldly realistic portrayals of animals—the woolly rhinoceros, the reindeer, the hairy mammoth—painted with assurance and skill, and enlivened with bright earth colors. These drawings may well have had some magical intent, perhaps to aid in the hunt by depicting and thereby bewitching the hunted beasts. It would be attractive, though doubtless naive, to imagine Cro-Magnon painters producing art for its own sake. But whatever their purpose, the cave paintings occupy a unique place at the dawn of human art. The mastery of draftsmanship that they display would not be duplicated for thousands of years.