



# The Lost Civilizations of the Stone Age

*Richard Rudgley*

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**The Lost Civilizations of the Stone Age** Richard Rudgley

**An authoritative, eye-opening look at Stone Age civilizations that explodes traditional portrayals of prehistory**

The rise of historical civilization 5,000 years ago is often depicted as if those societies were somehow created out of nothing. However, recent discoveries of astonishing accomplishments from the Neolithic Age - in art, technology, writing, math, science, religion, medicine and exploration - demand a fundamental rethinking of humanity before the dawn of written history.

In this fascinating book, Richard Rudgley describes how:

- \* The intrepid explorers of the Stone Age discovered all of the world's major land masses long before the so-called Age of Discovery
- \* Stone Age man performed medical operations, including amputations and delicate cranial surgeries
- \* Paleolithic cave artists of Western Europe used techniques that were forgotten until the Renaissance
- \* Prehistoric life expectancy was better than it is for contemporary third-world populations

Rudgley reminds us just how savage so-called civilized people can be, and demonstrates how the cultures that have been reviled as savage were truly civilized. *The Lost Civilizations of the Stone Age* shows the great debt that contemporary society owes to its prehistoric predecessors. It is a rich introduction to a lost world that will redefine the meaning of civilization itself.

## The Lost Civilizations of the Stone Age Details

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Author : Richard Rudgley

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## From Reader Review The Lost Civilizations of the Stone Age for online ebook

### Michael Brady says

The Lost Civilizations of the Stone Age is a fascinating examination of the period between the Upper Paleolithic Revolution and our earliest historical knowledge. Civilization did not arise fully formed like a Venus on the half shell. This wide-ranging but effectively concise book explains that our climb to modernity began many centuries before the Sumerians, Egyptians, and the Minoans began to create history. Written by Richard Rudgley in 1999, Lost Civilizations foreshadowed wonders yet to be unearthed at Wonderwerk, Blombos Cave and other excavations where we moderns strive to discern the nature of our paleolithic origins.

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### Albert Barlow says

This book demonstrates that cultures have been advanced for a very long time. Lends credence to the argument that we are not the first technological society.

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### Ulrika Eriksson says

Just as we during the Renaissance learnt from the Greeks and Romans, Rudgley thinks we could look back, be inspired and learn from early more peaceful civilizations how to live in harmony with nature and each other. People before us were much more clever and industrious than we have given them credit for, it seems. The trend that this book shows - how we CONSTANTLY must put back in time the dates for our past history and our achievements - haven't made the representatives for today's truths a least bit humbler. Many artifacts that are older than they are supposed to be able to be are often ignored or ridiculed. How much more WOULD we have known if they had been more open-minded?

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### Elizabeth Biehl says

This is a fascinating, important, intriguingly flawed book.

The central thesis is a critique of the "sharp" Neolithic boundary or Neolithic Revolution theory: at around 12,000 BPE, a radical, abrupt, and monumental change took place in the fundamental structure of human societies, with relatively little in the way of precursors. It's a pretty arrogant idea - that we modern humans are somehow qualitatively different from (=superior to) even relatively near ancestors, that we have a clear understanding of what was happening at the Neolithic boundary from a well-rounded archaeological record, that the evolution of culture is concretized in the history of technology. Combined with the common mythological theme of the Culture-Bringing Diety, it's not all that surprising that a lot of pretty quirky explanations are offered for the "revolution" - from abrupt evolutionary changes in the brain to technology-purveying aliens. It's an idea that needed a good smack upside the head, and Rudgely is happy to deliver.

Unfortunately, his approach reads a little bit like "There is a horrible, worldwide, pervasive, monolithic conspiracy to maintain a scientific status quo that is wrong! The MOUNTAIN of data from many many researchers all around the world demolishing the status quo: let me show you it!" Wait, what?

But the DATA. All the pretty data! It's comprehensive, rich, and fascinating. Rüdger is meticulously careful to use research not only from Europe and the Middle East, but from throughout Asia, Africa, Australia, and (to a lesser extent) the Americas, and from technologically analogous modern and recent-historic cultures. The argument for a "soft" Neolithic boundary, a 10,000-year+ period of slow, accumulating, incremental (and - this is critical for a credible theory of evolution, cultural or biological - *useful at every stage*) emergence of writing, ceramics, food production, textiles, and other technologies, built on a foundation of symbolic and critical thinking abilities and complex social organization reaching into deep time, is compelling.

In short, I wanted this book to be for the Mesolithic what *1491* was for the pre-Columbian Americas... and at times, it approached that masterwork quality, but it always fell short, dragged down by its own ideological axe to grind. SO disappointing.

As a much more ideologically neutral companion, I recommend Nicholas Wade's superb *Before the Dawn*, which is more recent (2007) and reaches further back into time than *Lost Civilizations*, but deals primarily with biological and genetic history to Rüdger's cultural and archaeological history.

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### **Sean Murray says**

Disappointing. Far too speculative for what the cover claims it is

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### **Simon Mcleish says**

Originally published on my blog here in October 2000.

The standard picture of prehistory is of a series of revolutionary developments, separated by great stretches of time, culminating in the "Neolithic Revolution" and the appearance of agriculture, towns, writing, and civilisation. The purpose of this book is to argue that the process of development was far more gradual and evolutionary, with each of the new developments (other examples being art and medicine) being foreshadowed, in many cases for a very long time.

Rüdger's argument seems to prove an obvious point, yet the idea that the human race moved towards civilisation in a series of leaps is not just the fundamental theory on which most popular books on prehistory are based, it remains the basis of much of the academic study of ancient peoples. It is an inherently unlikely theory, particularly the "Neolithic Revolution" when so many new inventions are supposed to appear simultaneously, and Rüdger points out that this is one of the reasons that people have come up with such pseudo-historical theories as the idea that civilised ideas came from aliens or from mythological advanced cultures which have left no trace, such as Atlantis or Lemuria.

*Lost civilisations of the Stone Age* contains a great deal of material gathered to counteract assertions which amount to "before such an such a date, humans did not have a certain ability", where the abilities range from writing to the ability to think symbolically. Much of this is fascinating, but it does not answer two questions which particularly interest me: how did the standard theory arise, and why do people still believe in it? The

answers to these questions lie both in the nature of prehistoric archaeology and in human nature.

In formulating the theory, which is mainly a product of the first half of the twentieth century, the main reasons it came about seem to be to do with the fragmentary nature of the evidence and the difficulties in dating it, which leads to assumptions that material containing art, say, must be later than the accepted first date for the production of art. There are also racist assumptions involved about the capabilities of those Stone Age cultures which have survived until modern times, which are projected back into the past. Archaeologists have also tended, particularly in the Middle East, to be more interested in the relatively simple later remains after the written record begins, such as pharaonic tombs and Sumerian towns, and to have been half-hearted about going farther back; I suspect that rivalry between the French and German excavators principally responsible for discoveries in Egypt and Iraq respectively to produce impressive finds also had something to do with this. The desire to put a definite date on events probably also played a part, by encouraging oversimplification.

The idea has obviously continued partly because of inertia, but there are other reasons. Prehistoric remains are difficult to interpret, and those who attacked the theory often made overblown and seemingly ridiculous claims, such as Marija Gimbutas' idea of the earth goddess. This obviously tended to make all of what they said vulnerable and easy to dismiss. Even in this book, which is relatively careful, there is some debatable evidence, particularly in the chapter on music making.

The good thing about the standard theory is that it makes life easy, as long as you don't express it too explicitly. Writers can talk about the Neolithic Revolution, and readers will not only understand what they mean, but they will latch onto something dramatic which has facile parallels with the relatively familiar industrial revolution. It can even be given a date. It is only when someone starts to wonder why all these changes happened at once that cracks begin to appear.

I suspect that few academics really believe the standard model, at least in the rather naive form in which it is portrayed here. It is far more prevalent in popular histories, particularly in the most wide ranging books where prehistory is just a prelude to the main material. Lost civilisations of the Stone Age is clearly intended to counter this attitude, and is definitely worth reading by anyone with an interest in the origins of civilisation.

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### **Corprew says**

This is a generally good and useful book about prehistory, but should have concentrated more on actually purveying information and not academic one-upmanship. It divided its attention between being a historiographical study and being a text about the subject, most readers would have been better served by a clearer separation between these two parts. This division of style made it read more like a repurposed dissertation than a general study in some parts.

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### **Johnna says**

am learning a great deal.

enjoying the ride.

## **Tim says**

An uneven presentation. The introductory diatribe is off-putting but the main discourse is usually reasonable. A useful collection of facts concerning how some artifacts might describe possible pre-historical accomplishments. The author presents some of his ideas as controversial that do not seem to be; he is sometimes balanced and identifies evidence that is in dispute. There are some good parts but near the end I just wanted to be done with this book.

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## **Don says**

This book brings forth notions that suggest that Sumer and Egypt were NOT unique in their bringing forth of cultural elements that represent civilization, but that Europe had more going on that we typically think.

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## **Stephen Palmer says**

Prehistory is a difficult and potentially dangerous area to enter, even for an experienced archaeologist or palaeohistorian. Richard Rudgley has made a good career from debunking myths both historical and prehistorical, including in a couple of excellent television series, and in 'The Lost Civilizations of the Stone Age' he describes various aspects of Neolithic and Mesolithic life that he thinks need clarification. It's all fascinating stuff, covering a wide range of subjects, from tallies and early astronomy, through art, sculpture, hunting equipment, understanding of environment and much more. The book takes a backwards journey through prehistory, a template which perfectly allows Rudgley to point out how much of what appears suddenly in the prehistorical record is in fact based on earlier, simpler beginnings.

On the whole, my feeling is that, although Rudgley has a few favoured authors whom he quotes and uses as support for his own ideas, he is fair-minded and reasonable in his outlook. Some reviewers (e.g. here on Goodreads) have attacked him for setting up straw men and for trying to promote the notion of a Stone Age utopia. Although such criticism could be aimed at the book's foreword and afterword, I think it's well off the mark as a whole. Rudgley is scrupulous with the speculation of his chosen influences, for example the work of the American-Lithuanian archaeologist Marija Gimbutas, which he often quotes.

Overall, an excellent, insightful and fair book, recommended to all fascinated by human origins.

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## **Iset says**

I'll keep this short and concise, in contrast to this book which, although slimline, made for a surprisingly laborious slog of a read. Why was the book laborious? Well, although Rudgley presents plenty of interesting raw data about Stone Age evidence for technologies and inventions usually accredited to the rise of urban settlement (writing, art, ceramics, medicine etc.), he also frequently deviates from the main topic on lengthy tangents in which he pits the aforementioned evidence against a perceived conservative majority view in denial of it. Except that such outmoded conservatism hasn't been prevalent or generally widespread in the academic community for some decades, so Rudgley's essentially knocking down a straw man. There were

occasions when on one page Rudgley would write about the many eminent established archaeologists uncovering new evidence and presenting new interpretations that support his arguments, and then on the very next page he would once again be talking about a stuck-in-the-mud majority again. I must confess that, by the time I hit the halfway mark in this book, I had taken to skimming over the parts where Rudgley went off on these tangents, and just intensively reading the actual information and data presented and making up my own mind, which actually tends to support Rudgley's hypotheses for early origins of "civilised" traits, but Rudgley's constant argument against an opposing view that really isn't there, or at least exists only on the fringe of the academic community, left a slightly sour taste in the mouth.

**5 out of 10.**

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### **Barnaby Thieme says**

I agree with nearly every review of this book that I've seen -- this admirable and much-needed overview of archaeological data pertaining to stone age culture is undermined on nearly every page by a thesis that is so misguided as to border on idiotic.

Rudgley's premise is that the academic world regards stone age hominids through a theoretical lens that holds them as "savage" and therefore incapable of generating culture in any meaningful sense. The development of civilization in Mesopotamia rescued us from the darkness of benighted ignorance and enabled man to create writing, math, civil society, art, and the other great lights of creative endeavor. This prejudice, Rudgely argues, prevents archaeologists and historians from grasping the significance of stone age artifacts that provide evidence of importance precursors to these tropes of civilized culture. He surveys a number of significant findings and examines the possibility that glyphs on walls could serve as early symbolic communication, that clay tokens were employed in primitive accounting systems, that ritual mutilation and trepanation were rudimentary forms of medicine, and so forth.

His survey and analysis of a wide range of evidence is so useful and balanced in tone that it is almost as if there are two Rudgleys: the one who did close analysis of available data, and the dunderhead who insisted on polemicizing throughout against the supposed deficits of our prejudiced views.

As many readers both amateur and professional have cogently called out, the putative target of Rudgley's critique is a straw man anachronistic caricature who would be regarded as a fringe lunatic within the academy. His scornful references to the alleged "common perspective" far outnumber his actual examples of such prejudice, leaving Rudgley looking like the zealot here.

This point has been covered so thoroughly by other reviewers that I will add only one point to this argument. Given that all the evidence and analysis that Rudgley presents in this book was conducted by other researchers, every single example he offers as criticism of the "prevailing view" is in fact counter-evidence to his own thesis. He demonstrates in painstaking detail that dozens of mainstream archaeologists have produced and considered evidence challenging what he takes to be dogma. Where does that leave his vitriol?

In the context of his other books I suppose that the real fuel for his ire is ideologically motivated by what I take to be his personal vision that a neo-archaic form of consciousness is emerging in modern times to counterbalance the excesses of a hierarchical forms of social control, inherited from the early Lavant, that subjugates the majority of its citizenry, alienates the spirit from the creative powers of the earth, and threatens the life of the planet.

Whatever the merits of such a theory on its own terms, the vehemence of his vision distorts this book. It

could easily have been a masterpiece of popular science writing. Even in its present state it is a valuable overview of the evidence of early culture in the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic periods, made tedious by vendetta.

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### **Elentarri says**

Vast quantities of information about prehistoric life and artifacts. Not overly technical, but not so simplified that it is useless.

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### **Tom says**

Parts of this book were very interesting, like the discussion of the evidence for Neolithic surgery. However, the author is annoyingly pedantic, and often times does not illustrate his arguments well. If someone is discussing a really interesting artifact that shows the ingenuity of early man, I would like to see sketches of the artifact, and nice references to the original papers.

While I generally agreed with Richard Rugley that people often underestimate the mental prowess of earlier humanity, this book could have been more engaging, or more academically rigorous. It fell into a limbo of trying to be approachable, and yet horrible dull and dry. This was not an easy read, despite the interesting subject matter.

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