

The Paths of History

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Contents

Foreword by Geoffrey Hosking	vii
<i>Preface</i>	xi
Introduction	1
1 First Phase (Primitive)	10
2 Second Phase (Primitive Communal)	13
3 Third Phase (Early Antiquity)	21
4 Fourth Phase (Imperial Antiquity)	37
5 Fifth Phase (the Middle Ages)	56
6 Sixth Phase (the Stable Absolutist Post-Medieval Phase)	144
7 Seventh Phase (Capitalist)	193
8 Eighth Phase (Post-Capitalist)	324

1 First Phase (Primitive)

For the earliest periods in the history of *Homo sapiens* only a technological periodisation is possible: the Palaeolithic period, the Mesolithic period (chiefly attested in the western part of the Eurasian continent), the Neolithic period. The actual life of the Late Palaeolithic man might have been observed in the instance of the aboriginal population of Australia; however, the very imperfect observations date mainly from the time when the societies of the Aborigines had already been radically disrupted by the mass immigration to Australia from Europe from the second half of the nineteenth century. One of the most interesting pieces of evidence comes from a nearly illiterate Englishman, who was sentenced to transportation to Australia, fled from the colony and lived among the Aborigines for decades, spending the end of his life in one of the towns of Eastern Australia. He told his story to a chance journalist. Scientific research, however, began only at the very end of the nineteenth century. It might seem that the Palaeolithic state of the Australian Aborigines, at an epoch when Europe and America had reached the high level of capitalist development, might attest not only to social but even to biological backwardness. This is not the case. The epoch of the class development of mankind occupies no more than 1 or 2 per cent of the existence duration of the species *Homo sapiens sapiens*.¹ Thus a technological lag of only 2 per cent – let us say a

1. The problem of the development of modern man (genus *Homo*, species *sapiens*, subspecies *sapiens*) from certain preceding forms is still being discussed. If the hallmark of ‘wise man’ is the ability to create at least primitive tools, and to use fire for his own benefit, then already the so-called *Sinanthropus* of China must be regarded as belonging to the genus *Homo sapiens*; however, at present it is assumed that the *Sinanthropus* belonged to the same species (perhaps even to the same subspecies) as the Pithecanthropus in Indonesia, the Olduvia Man in Africa and the Heidelberg Man in Europe, who at present are usually subsumed under the denomination of *Homo erectus*, or *Homo sapiens erectus*, also called *Archanthropus*. The time of the latter’s existence was the Middle Pleistocene (about 500,000–200,000 years ago); but at that period another hominid also existed (or still did exist), namely the *Australopithecus*; a late subspecies of the latter was also able to produce very primitive artefacts. Some scientists are of the opinion that the *Archanthropus* is the direct ancestor (through mutation) of modern Man, while others think that modern man is a mutant of the *Homo sapiens neanderthalensis* (the Palaeoanthropus). But the Neanderthal man is attested only from the period of the last (fourth) Glaciation, while the earliest Palaeolithic artefacts (Chellean and Acheulian) are by many students ascribed to the *Archanthropus*. If so, the *Archanthropus* should be regarded as the ancestor both of the Neanderthal and the Modern man. Then the intermediary type discovered in Palestine (Carmel, Qafzeh) should be regarded as hybrid. The problem is still debated.

speed of 10.2 seconds instead of 10.0 in a 100 metre run – is sufficient to account for a technological retardation of this scale.

The reason for it is not so much a minor diminishment in the speed of technological development, but rather a difference in whether the ecological environment had been more or less favourable. The Aborigines arrived in Australia during the last glacial period which induced a low level of the World Ocean.² All of Indonesia was at that time a single peninsula joined to Indo-China, while New Guinea and the Halmahera island were a peninsula of the Australian continent. The narrow straits between Halmahera and Sulawesi, and between Sulawesi and Borneo (Kalimantan), then belonging to the Eurasian continent, were such as could be overcome on rafts which, seemingly, even Palaeolithic men were able to construct. (In the same way, over now-submerged land, man also reached Tasmania.³) On the continent of Australia there did not exist the necessary ecological (zoobotanical) requisites for the acculturation of cereals and fruit plants, and for domestication of animals.

Up to modern times, apart from Australian Aborigines, the population of the subpolar and taiga region of Eurasia and America also belonged to the First Phase of primitive society. The reason was purely ecological: because in the zones in question there are no plants or animals which can be domesticated (even the reindeer is only semi-domesticated).

Note that in the first stage of the historical process (the Phase of early primitive society) there already existed a rudimentary exchange between the different groups of population, sometimes through many intermediaries over considerable distances. Obsidian and even flint for making Neolithic implements and arms could be acquired by exchange from afar.

In the Soviet school literature, what we here define as the First Phase, is lumped together with the Second Phase under the common name of ‘primitive communal formation’. In this the Soviet authors follow rather Stalin than Engels, although the latter’s book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* is a classic for the

2. The same is true of the peopling of the American continent. This event seems to have occurred in the beginning of the last Glacial period through a then-existing isthmus between the Chukotka peninsula and Alaska (the level of the ocean being at that time lowered, and land appearing across the Bering straits). This isthmus cut off the cold Kamchatka-Kuril current flowing from the Polar Ocean; while from the South it was reached by the warm North Pacific current. The result was, that here sufficient verdure did appear, and the climatic conditions were generally quite favourable. Once having reached the American continent, the new settlers found more favourable conditions for development than those they had left in Asia.
3. Tasmania was a peninsula of Australia at the end of the last Glaciation, a period of low sea level. However, anthropologically, the extinct Tasmanians differed considerably from the Australian Aborigines. It seems, their appearance here was due to an earlier migration across the Australian continent. An alternative hypothesis, supposing that the Tasmanians arrived from the New Hebrides, is untenable: the New Hebrides are surrounded by deep ocean waters, so that men could reach them not earlier than during the Neolithic Period, when the necessary boats (not just rafts) could be produced; but Neolithic man could not bring a Palaeolithic culture to Tasmania.

Marxists. However, Engels subdivided this 'formation' (a term not used by him) into two stages, which (following L. H. Morgan) he defined as 'Savagery' and 'Barbarism'. Engels' book is a brilliant but amateurish exposition of this outstanding American anthropologist's ideas. However, the works of L. H. Morgan are not the conclusion but the starting point for the exploration of primitive societies, and, in particular, of the very important factor in their social life, namely their systems of kinship reckoning.

The canonisation of the book of Engels led to Soviet social anthropology (ethnography) repeating elements of what was already a past stage in the development of the studies in primitive society. What Engels thought of the period of 'Savagery' – when men supposedly went through a stage of sexual promiscuity and a stage of group marriage towards the stage of pairing marriage – is not tenable. Promiscuity is attested neither in human societies nor even among the higher apes; as to group marriage, this phenomenon can be identified only with certain serious reservations (some primitive tribes have certain degrees of kinship which preclude sexual relations between men and women belonging to them, and other degrees of kinship where there is no such prohibition). But even in the most 'retarded' of populations known to us – the Australian Aboriginals – the prevalent type of marriage is not group marriage but cross-cousin marriage (a man takes as his wife the daughter of his father's brother or of his mother's sister). Although extramarital sexual relations (not inside the forbidden kinship groups) are not punished, a nuclear family actually does exist, which is in fact held together by the woman as the keeper of the hearth and the children. Note that the nuclear family is usually but not invariably monogamous.

We can affirm with a great degree of certainty that other, later, familial social structures (extended families, lineages, gentes, clans, etc.) are also developments of the nuclear family, and after reaching a certain critical dimension they dissolve into new nuclear families, which again create extended families, lineages, clans, etc. The external activities of the men of the clan depend to a considerable degree on the role of the women as the stimulus for men's activities, and even their aggression.

This is something we ought to keep in mind throughout history. Only by taking into account the nuclear role of the woman's function as the original mother and the stimulus of activity can we understand history as more than a series of male fights with mostly fatal results.