

Exploring the NATIONAL MUSEUM of KOREA

by Oh Myung-sook



About the Author

Oh Myung-sook has been meeting readers for over ten years with a hope that museums can be a place for everyone to enjoy and learn. She has worked as a consultant for the National Museum of Korea, the National Folk Museum of Korea, and the Children's Museum. She also has taken part in developing educational programs at the National Folk Museum of Korea and the Seoul Museum of History. She is currently the head of Museum School with New Perspectives and always pursues interesting and instructive ways for people to experience museums.

Cover image:

Gold Crown, Silla, 5th century, National Treasure No. 191 (p. 45)



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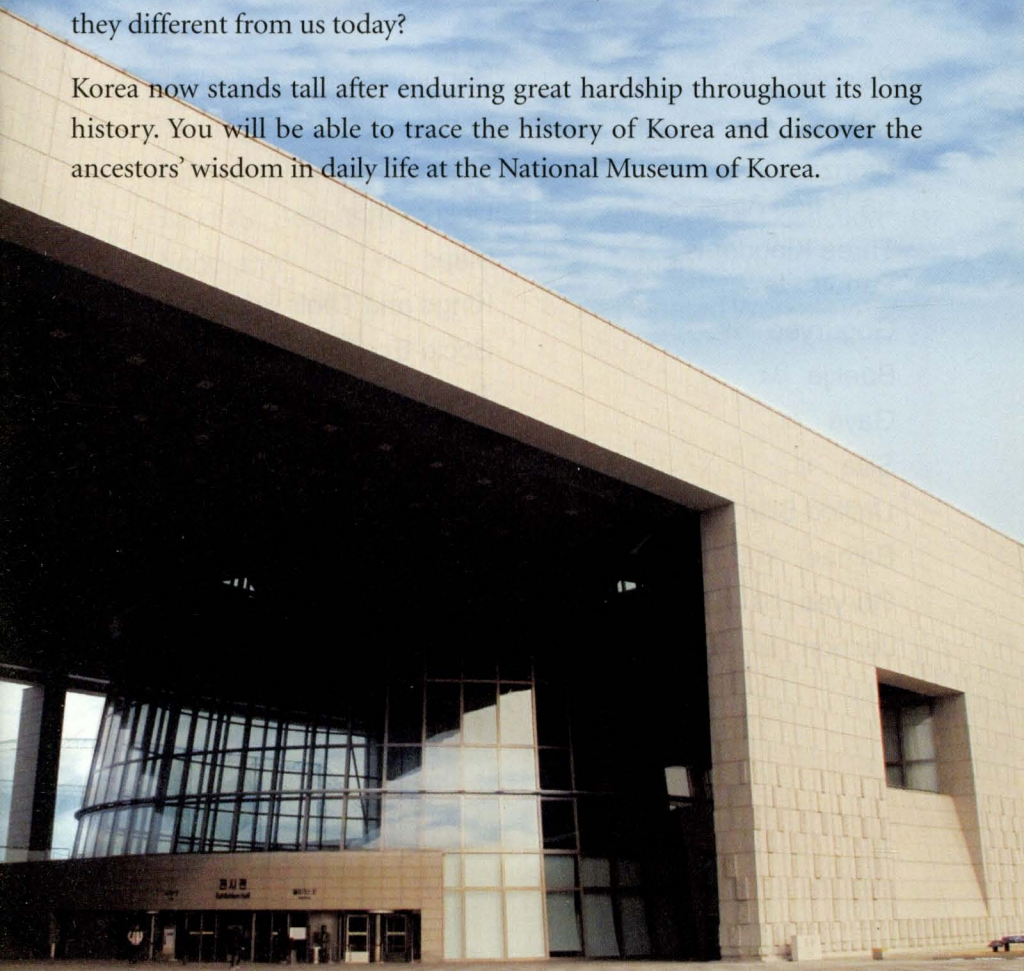
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Situated in the heart of Seoul and with a view of Mt. Namsan, Yongsan was the location of another country's army base for a long time. Now, the museum with the Korean spirit stands tall on that land.

The National Museum of Korea is the sixth largest museum in the world. This book follows each gallery of the Museum and looks at important relics and artifacts that show the flow of the nation's history and culture.

Some of the relics and artifacts, which demonstrate the characteristics of each era, are well known while many others are less so. What did the Korean ancestors think? What tools did they make and use? How were they different from us today?

Korea now stands tall after enduring great hardship throughout its long history. You will be able to trace the history of Korea and discover the ancestors' wisdom in daily life at the National Museum of Korea.



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HISTORY

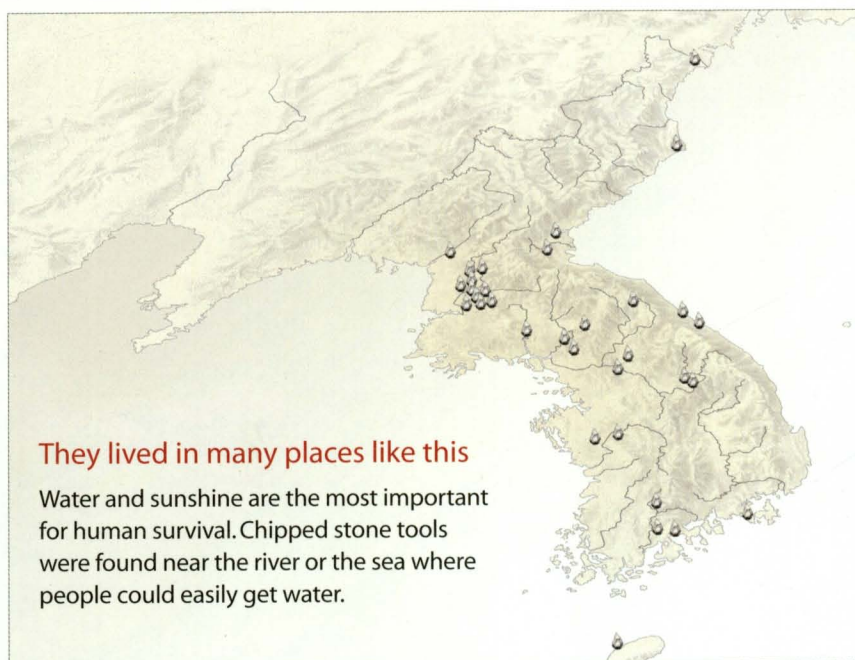
Korean History by Period

Exhibition galleries are arranged by time period—Paleolithic, Neolithic, Bronze and Early Iron Ages, Goguryeo, Baekje, Gaya, Silla, Unified Silla, Goryeo, and Joseon—so that we can look over Korea's history at a glance. Now, shall we take a look at the artifacts that represent each period and examine how they changed with the different lifestyles of each period and kingdom?

PALEOLITHIC AGE

Everything Began by Hand

Human hands are amazing. The tools that established civilization were all made by hand. The very first tools that were made by chipping away bits of stone are called chipped stone tools or old stone tools. Paleolithic people sharpened only one side of stones at first. As the technique developed, they made stone tools with many edges. They made choppers, handaxes, borers to make holes, and tangs to fasten the edge to a long rod. The Paleolithic Age continued on to the Neolithic Age, which then developed into the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, all of them producing civilization for humankind.





▲ Remains of a (presumed) Dwelling Site,
Nobong, Donghae, Gangwon-do

Making holes and raising pillars

Paleolithic people moved according to the seasons and either lived in caves or built huts along the river. The places for pillars were found at the remains of the dwelling site. They must have fixed the pillars in the holes, raised them, and used animal hide for the roof of the hut.

How did people make tools from a stone?

At first, people threw a stone and used the pieces that broke off just as they were. But as they gradually developed their stone striking techniques, they were able to make more elaborate tools. When you look at the collection of chipped stone tools, you can see that they all come from one stone.

► Collection of Chipped Stone Tools,
Paleolithic Age, Length: 7.1 cm



According to the use of the stone

The top of the hand axe was formed into a point by trimming the sides and the two faces were also sharpened into edges. It was used for various purposes because it had edges for both stabbing and cutting.

► Handaxe,
Paleolithic Age,
Approximately 18 cm



▲ Chopper, Paleolithic Age, Approximately 9.5 cm

Choppers were used throughout the Paleolithic Age because they were easy to make. They were used for cutting trees or hunting.



▲ Awl, Paleolithic Age, Approximately 6 cm

An awl was an instrument that was used to bore holes.



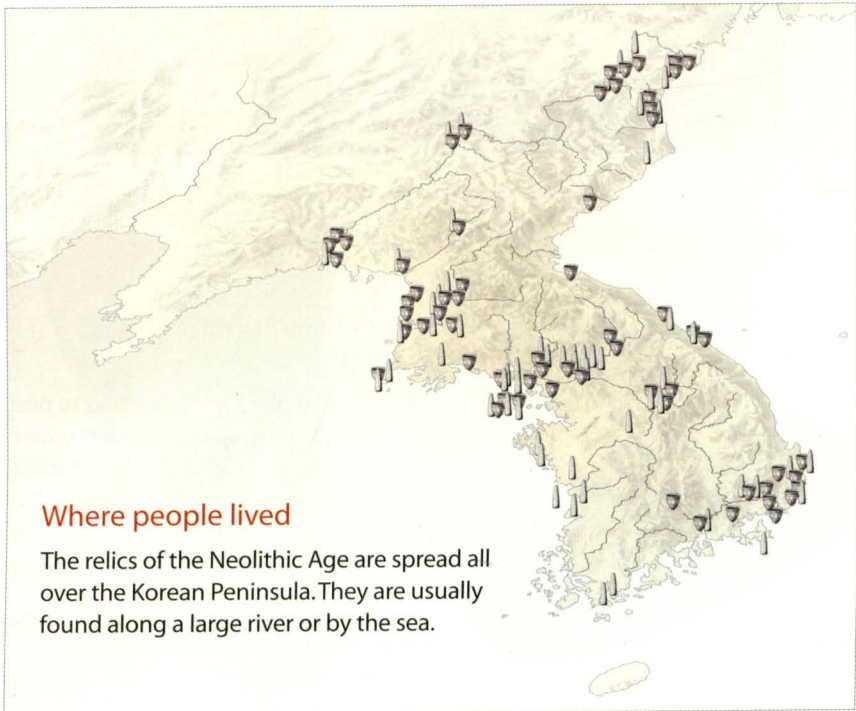
▲ Tanged Point, Paleolithic Age, 7.8 cm

A useful tool for hunting was the tanged point. The tang was attached to a long rod to attack animals from faraway.

NEOLITHIC AGE

The Grinding of Stones Brought Changes to Life

A grinding stone was a useful instrument for trimming and sharpening the chipped stone tools. The stone tools ground with a grinding stone are called ground stone tools or new stone tools. During the Neolithic Age, stones as well as bones were ground with a grinding stone to make needles, and animal teeth were ground to make beautiful anklets. Using these tools, Neolithic people dug into the earth and built pit houses to begin a settlement life.



Where people lived

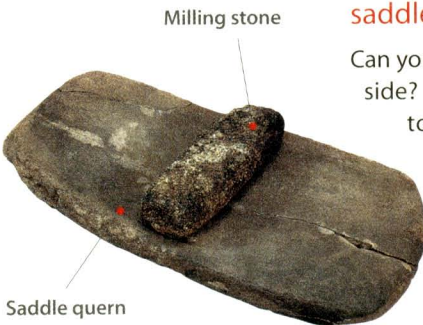
The relics of the Neolithic Age are spread all over the Korean Peninsula. They are usually found along a large river or by the sea.

Building pit houses in groups

What has changed from the housing site of the Paleolithic Age? In the Neolithic Age, people dug deep into the ground and built pit houses covered with a roof. They placed a hearth in the middle of the pit house to make a fire. The hearth was used for cooking and heating.



▲ Dwelling Site, Amsa-dong, Seoul



The science of milling stone and saddle quern

Can you see how the milling stone is tilting to one side? It takes less energy and it is much easier to grind the grain if the stone is tilted to one side. The thickness and length of the saddle quern is also just the right size for holding it with both hands to press.

◀ Saddle Quern and Milling Stone,
Neolithic Age, Length of the Grinding Stone:
Approximately 45 cm

Clay and fire meet to become earthenware

People in the Neolithic Age understood that clay hardened when it was baked with fire and made earthenware using this principle. The patterns on the earthenware spread the heat evenly and prevented it from breaking while being baked. The invention of earthenware enriched people's lives. Earthenware helped them to store fruit, grain, and leftover food as well as to boil or cook food.

► Comb-Pattern Pottery,
Neolithic Age, Height: 38.1 cm

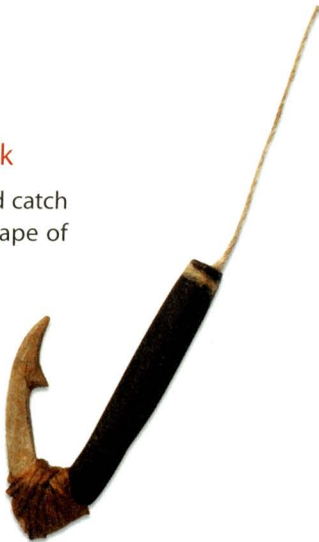


▲ Earthenware with Appliqué Decoration, Neolithic Age, Height: 45 cm (left)

Stone and bone meet to become a fish hook

People who used to catch fish with their hands could catch much more fish by making spears and nets. The shape of today's hook was first invented in the Neolithic Age.

► Composite Fish Hook,
Neolithic Age, Height: 7.1 cm



▲ Stone Plowshare,
Neolithic Age, 39.2 cm



▲ Stone Hoe,
Neolithic Age, 28.5 cm

Sowing seeds and harvesting

The stone plowshare and stone hoe are important evidence that farming began in the Neolithic Age. People plowed the land with plowshares and hoes to sow seeds and to harvest the grain. But gathering, hunting, and fishing were much more common than farming in the Neolithic Age.

Eating shellfish and making masks with shells

Neolithic people made bracelets and masks with shells. The mask with two eyes and one mouth was regarded as a guardian spirit.

► Shell Mask, Neolithic Age, Length: 10.7 cm

