LOCATION:
The Neolithic Age or New Stone Age cannot be “located” as accurately as was the Paleolithic in the region of the Great Rift Valley of Africa. The 5000 years of the Neolithic was characterized by the fastest population growth up to that time, migration to almost all continents, and advancements in all aspects of the economy, governance, religion, transportation, etc.

MIGRATION:
Movement of man from the hearth in eastern Africa over thousands of years was accompanied by an ever increasing population in all of the river valley and coastal regions once settled. Population growth in Mesopotamia, the Nile Valley, etc. was the basis for additional migration. After settling and prospering in these early hearths, migration took place along trade routes to the east, west, and north.

PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY:
Diyarbakir, Turkey-Physical landscapes of the early Neolithic Era (New Stone Age) inhabited by man were primarily river valleys where climate, water for agriculture, and transportation opportunities contributed to development of civilization. Agriculture evolved/changed over time in all the early river valley hearths of Indus, Tigris-Euphrates, Nile, and Yellow. New crops and practices, the availability of water and soil renewal continue in locations such as that shown near Diyarbakir, Turkey. The modern landscape retains the original profile of broad river floodplain, surrounding hills, and the obvious semi-arid (here about 18” of precipitation) climate. Row crops, tree crops, and forage on the distant hill slopes characterize most of the riverine environments.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SHELTER:
Humans used and adapted to their environment over thousands of years and in many different environments. Likewise, what was used for shelter early in the Paleolithic may have been dictated by availability (e.g. rock overhang, cave, etc.).

With the passage of human generations, knowledge of different materials used for shelter, and gradual movement to the middle and high latitudes, the variety/complexity of shelters multiplied. No small set of images can capture the variety. What can be understood from many images is climate (wet-dry, hot-cold, etc.).

Shelter during the early years of the Neolithic Era was made of locally available materials shaped to provide basic shelter. As knowledge, tools, and other materials became available, the once temporary shelters and settlements evolved into more permanent shelter/settlements.

The artist’s depiction is of an early Neolithic camp, wood shelter, use of fire, and stone tool for chipping.
EXAMPLES OF SETTLEMENTS:

Çatalhöyük is located southeast of the present-day city of Konya, Turkey. Archeologists estimate that the site was a settlement location for almost 2000 years (i.e. 7500 B.C.E.-6700 B.C.E.).

The former settlement site is today an eroded mound which would have risen about 66 feet above the plain at the time of the latest Neolithic occupation. Archeological research continues at the site with as many as eighteen “layers” of settlement already documented. The prehistoric mound settlements were abandoned before the Bronze Age. Çatalhöyük was composed entirely of domestic buildings with no obvious public buildings or ceremonial spaces. The population has been estimated at between 5,000 to 10,000 people at its peak. The inhabitants lived in mud-brick houses that were cramped together with no footpaths or streets. The maze of connected buildings with common walls was entered by holes in the roofs and ladders from ground level. Those same roof access holes provided ventilation from summer heat and chimneys for simple cooking hearths.

Aleppo: The Citadel is a large medieval fortified palace in the center of the old city of Aleppo, northern Syria. It is considered to be one of the oldest and largest castles in the world. Usage of the Citadel hill dates back at least to the middle of the 3,000 B.C.E.. Subsequently occupied by many civilizations, the majority of the construction as it stands today is thought to originate from the Ayyubid period. Dominating the city, the Citadel is part of the Ancient City of Aleppo, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1986.

TECHNOLOGY:

Weaving and basketry are crafts that cannot be directly recorded through archaeology because their end products are organic and therefore perishable. The practice of these crafts is indirectly confirmed from our knowledge of flora (reeds, flax) and fauna (sheep and goats) of this period and from imprints left on the base of clay vases and recovered bone needles.

The main weaving fibers were flax and wool. The use of flax came earlier than that of wool and dominated during the Neolithic Period. Coarse textiles were used in the manufacture of coarse vases and on the base and sides of their imprints survived the ravages of time.

Basketry was a craft related to but less time-consuming than weaving. An earlier form of weaving was that associated with construction of roofs for shelter, baskets for storing goods, straw mats for resting, and thick mats used as partitions in
houses. Imprints from straw mats have survived on the bases of coarse ware, which it is assumed were placed on straw mats or coarse textiles to dry.

The development of the plow can be traced back to Neolithic times and the domestication of plants and use of draft animals. Then it was a very simple tool, little more than a suitably forked branch with a sharp point. Application of metal to the plow and use of draft animals allowed deeper plowing and over larger fields.

SOCIAL ADVANCES:
Historians usually place the end of thePaleolithic Age about 8000 B.C.E., followed by significant developments and a transition into Neolithic Age that ends 3000 B.C.E. (i.e., 5,000 years later). The Neolithic Revolution, sometimes called the Agricultural Revolution, not only gave man the security of regular food production but also the freedom to settle in villages. This changeover from a migratory life of hunting, gathering and herding took place not once, but many times over time and at different locations.

The security and confidence of dependable food production allowed humanity to advance all aspects of their respective cultures. The release of people from food production to other endeavors ultimately led to artisans better prepared for building trades, tool making, commerce, etc. and those organizing village dwellers in local governance, defense, and religion.

Most evidence of social developments comes from archeological artifacts, study of permanent villages/cities and the speculation based on artifacts uncovered. One such city is Çatalhöyük (Catal Hoyuk), located on the Anatolian Plateau of modern day Turkey. One school of thought maintains that this city (estimates of 6,000 to 10,000 people) was little more than a collection of domestic buildings without streets/paths to separate buildings. Archeological digs have yet to discover public buildings, temples, streets, central source of water, or indicators of a defense (i.e. walls, defensive towers, etc.). The opposing opinion is that Çatalhöyük was indeed planned and “shows” many indicators of an advanced society.

Another city of the Neolithic Age that has been saved/reconstructed with numerous artifacts is Aleppo, Syria. Planning is evident with the outer walls, defensive towers, limited entry gates, and construction of the Citadel higher than the surrounding city. The central location of this Citadel within Aleppo is also characteristic of planning during the Medieval period.

FOOD SOURCES:
Knowledge of food consumption during the Neolithic Age come from archeological discovery of animal bones, pottery art, cave art, village garbage (i.e., middens) disposal sites and written records. Because of the Neolithic era’s time span of over 5,000 years and the immense area occupied, a complete list of foods consumed would be impossible. In addition, the warming climate after the last ice age, further development of domesticated plants and animals, as well as the evolving adaptability of the human system, all contribute to the complexity.