

Religion and art of foragers

[Religion](#)



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Religion is a very important for foraging societies. From a psychological perspective, religion helps people understand and accept sickness and death. Australian Aborigines believe that past spirits live on in the physical matter of the natural world. These 'ghosts' exist as a state of 'dreamtime' and manipulate the weather, plant life, animal life, and the birth and death of people (Scupin 2008). Unlike the Aborigines, the Inuit people believed in reincarnation.

When one was sick or dying, the Inuit people believed this to be 'soul lost', where the soul has been stolen from a spirit. They had healers called Shaman to help battle these supernatural forces (Scupin 2008). Socially, religion teaches how people should live their life and behave under certain social situations. Through certain social activities and rituals, like circumcision among males, the Australian Aborigines believed they were connecting with the spirits of 'dreamtime' (Scupin 2008).

The social importance of religion also enforces social codes that tell people what is right and wrong. It was very important for the Aborigines to appease the spirits that controlled their resources, so they followed the moral codes that descended from their ancestors (Scupin 2008). In the Inuit society, Shamans were generally the highest of all ranks and encouraged social order amongst tribes. Since Shamans were the healers, curing everything from illnesses to performing exorcisms, they were looked up to for their wisdom and contributions.

Without religion, societies would have no way of controlling behavior and social norms. Foraging societies generally practice forms of 'cosmic religions', meaning their religious practices are directly associated with the

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land they live off of. The Australian Aborigines believe that their ancestors lived on in the physical world as organic matter and controlled aspects such as plant growth, weather, animals, and human life is a form of cosmic religion called animism. Religion and art are very much intertwined among foraging societies.

The differences of art in various societies are directly influenced by the religious practices of the people. In most foraging societies, there are places that are sacred amongst the tribe. These places are surrounded by petroglyphs, rock paintings used to help mark territory and symbolize the importance between the people and contact with the supernatural world (Scupin 2008). Art correlates with plants, animals, humans, and many other elements of nature called naturalistic art.

Art has also been worn as jewelry for many foraging tribes. For example, the Inuit tribe made many items out of ivory. Human and animal figurines were worn around the neck as amulets to enhance power and spiritual beliefs (Scupin 2008). Music is also a very important form of art amongst tribes. During a rite of passage ceremony, young men and women of the Mbuti tribe sing harmonious chants to liken the spirits of the rainforest (Scupin 2008). Among the Inuit tribes, religion and music depend upon each other.

Shamans chant and play drums to make contact with spirits (Scupin 2008). Religion is very important amongst foraging societies and is deeply impacted by the subsistence patterns and area of the people. Art is also inspired by religion and used to correlate with many spiritual practices and customs. By appreciating the art from these foraging societies we can also learn to

understand their beliefs and practices, and see their world through their eyes and spirits.