

Religion in paleolithic culture

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Religion has always been a significant part of humans' life. Despite the great variety of religious views, often contradictory, all believers are united under one motto "To Believe". It does not really matter who or what people believe, but this process of relying on someone or something is vital in helping people to cope with difficulties. Even atheists are strong believers. They believe in themselves.

Many researchers have come up to a single conclusion that the understanding of religion appeared about 30,000 years ago during the Upper Paleolithic period. However, those who consider burial rites or similar rituals to be religious state that the religion takes back to the Middle Paleolithic which is as long as 300,000 years ago. This latter point of view coincides with the appearance of the Homo Sapiens which marked a new era in the evolution (The Beginning of Religion at the Beginning of the Neolithic, 2001). A comparatively small group of scientists also claims that we can trace religious behavior in the Lower Paleolithic, however, this opinion remains very limited in support by others (Rossano, n. d.).

During the Middle Pleolithic we can observe the first notable rituals of burials with a distinct feature of grave goods as the most ancient religious behavior. At the same time it is supported that Neanderthals, who lived during that period, could have practiced excarnation (the removal of organs and flesh of the dead without touching bones) - a widespread religious ritual of ancient people. Likewise, animal worship, or totemism took place leading to the thoughts of the high religious understanding of the first people who were strongly inclined to praise everything that seemed unusual to them, and, therefore, showing their high level of spirituality. (The Beginning of Religion <https://assignbuster.com/religion-in-paleolithic-culture/>

at the Beginning of the Neolithic, 2001). The importance of the religion for people at that time is undeniable.

Tension-reducing and trust-building rituals, also a very special way of welcoming guests provoked people to social interaction, developing their communicative skills. Believing in supernatural powers made people more respectful and intelligent. An interesting fact is how the nature influenced religious beliefs and how it helped the first people to overcome difficulties. Neanderthals envisioned thunder, lightning, the sun and the moon, stars, the wind, etc. to be alive.

They believed that these heavenly bodies and natural changes have souls and decide who will live and who will die during the hunting or river-crossing. Such way of thinking helped people to survive as they run away from the ‘angry god’ when the storm came or volcano erupted (The Beginning of Religion at the Beginning of the Neolithic, n. d.). These weather changes made Neanderthals recognize all the unfathomable power of nature and worship it shaping the first religious beliefs for them. During the Upper Paleolithic period we can already find drawings of half-humans-half-animals.

People had always compared themselves to the animals that were often their main food. This was how totemism evolved, marking another stage of religion progress. The appearance of little figurines of animals and Venus also ensures the need of religion which can help them to succeed at hunting, increase the fertility of women and land (Rossano, n. d.). To conclude I would like to say that religion played one of the key roles in the development of human’s mind.

Religious fears taught people to be cautious and reasonable, increasing their potential for survival.