

DEEP ROOTS: MYTHOLOGY AND US

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Welcome!



Friday September 23 is the Autumnal Equinox. The Druid Albion Elfed (The Light of Water celebration.

Alban Elfed

**the air is different today
the wind sings with a new tone
sighing of changes
coming
the harvest gathered
a flower, a nut
some mead, and bread
a candle and a prayer
returning the fruits
in thanksgiving
to the grove
and receiving
it's blessing
again**

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Equality between the god and goddess, the god represented by the sun, the goddess by the moon, each half of one whole fulfilled by their joining. It is a time of the **second harvest** usually of the fruit which has stayed on the trees and plants to ripen.

It is the time of the Druid celebration honoring the Green Man, The God of the Forest, by offering libations to trees: ciders, wines and herbs.

Neo-paganism: In Wicca, the **Green Man** has often been used as a representation of the Horned God, a syncretic deity inclusive of ancient pagan gods such as the Celtic Cernunnos and the Greek Pan.

It is a time for projects, but we pause. There is the sound of a pack of **supernatural hounds** baying in the sky. “The **Hounds of Annwn**” (Welsh Otherworld) are escorting **Welsh souls to the underground**. According to Welsh folklore, their growling is loudest when they are at a distance, and as they draw nearer, it grows softer and softer. Their coming is generally seen as a death portent.

Mabon, one of eight Wiccan Sabbats, represents themes of closing, letting go, remembering the year, the harvest and those that were lost during the year. In Pagan lore it is a day of symbolic sacrifice; **the last sheaf of grain** is commonly tied to the sacrificed god of light. In ancient times the last sheaf was more commonly referred to as **female** or “**shorn maiden**,” “**ivy bride**” or “**wheat girl**.”

This association may have originated with ancient **Greeks’ Eleusynian** rites, which honored the goddess **Persephone**’s return to the underground to live with her husband, Hades, at the waning of the year. She would return to the surface in the spring.

Germans and North African Berbers have other rituals, with the **last sheaf decorated as a female** to preside over the threshing or to be carried off by warriors in a mock marriage by abduction.

In Ireland it is the time of the **goose harvest** and is associated with the ancient custom of giving gifts of newly-butchered goose and mutton to the poor.

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For modern **day Wiccans, the Horned God, is the spirit of the Sacrificial Victim, the beast, the bull, the goat or the stag** who is slain in the fall so the tribe might live. But the Horned God is also the **god of fertility** who dies with the harvest and is rent asunder, as the grain is gathered in the fields; who is **buried as seed**; who then **springs forth anew, fresh and green and young** in the spring, from the **Womb of the Great Mother**.

Higan (other shore) is observed with a week of **Buddhist services in Japan**. **In China mooncake filled with lotus, sesame seeds, a duck egg or dried fruit is prepared** and offered to the moon, streets are decorated with lanterns, incense is burned and fire dragon dances take place.

So September 23 is a very busy and important day in our lives steeped in the mythology of times past but portending the future.



Green Man
Chartres
greennosticemplars.org
Gothic Cathedral France
Medieval Times

The Green Man [motif](#) has many variations. Found in many cultures around the world, the Green Man is often related to natural vegetative deities springing up in different cultures throughout the ages. Primarily it is interpreted as a [symbol](#) of rebirth, or "renaissance," representing the cycle of growth each spring. Some [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) speculate that the [mythology](#) of the Green Man developed independently in the traditions of separate ancient cultures and evolved into the wide variety of examples found throughout history.

Contents

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Your Instructor

- Bob Bohall
- Bob.Boh@verizon.net 703 273-1146
- 76 years young
- Economist:
 - Human nature is predictable
 - Self interest, profit, control as human motivators
 - Sociology, human psychology, behavior

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Farm and agricultural background

Interest in history, politics, public policy

A bit hard of hearing

Not an expert on mythology but know more about it than when I started

References

- Armstrong, Karen. *A Short History of Myth* (2005), *A History of God* (1993). Cannongate.
- Rosenberg, Donna. *World Mythology: An Anthology of the Great Myths and Epics* (1994). McGraw-Hill.
- Willis, Roy. *World Mythology: The Illustrated Guide* (2006). Oxford University Press.

GILGAMESH: A New English Version by Stephen Mitchell

- ISBN-13: 978-0-7432-6169-2 Paperback, Free Press US. \$15.00. Very readable, superb translation.
- Other material from the Internet, primarily Wikipedia.
- Various other references that I will mention via slides.

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Will use Gilgamesh in week 5 or 6. I can recommend **the Stephen Mitchell version of *Gilgamesh: A New English Version***, which has an extensive and helpful introduction, detailed explanatory notes and very readable verse that keeps fairly close to the literal meaning but adapts when necessary to help the modern reader.

WEEK ONE

- ANCIENT ROOTS

THE ORIGINS OF MYTHOLOGY

- DEFINITIONS AND DIFFERENCES:
MYTHOLOGY, RELIGION, FABLES AND
LEGENDS

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Mythology and paganism form the roots of most of our spiritual and philosophical thought through the ages.

Understanding deep roots might just make us a bit more tolerant and understanding in today's world.

I am not trying to force alternative views on anyone or to interfere with beliefs or values.

If we can learn together, it is great, and that is enough.

Examples of myths will be utilized from all parts of the world, from the Middle East to the Americas, from the Maori to the Mongol and from literature and epics, including Gilgamesh and Sedna (She Down There-Inuit).

WEEK TWO

- CREATION – THE ORGINS OF THE WORLD
- COSMIC ARITECTURE – STRUCTURE OF THE UNIVERSE

Week Three

- HUMANITY – CAUSES OF LIFE AND DEATH
- SUPERNATURAL BEINGS – GODS, SPIRITS AND DEMONS

Week Four

- Dibs and Dabs
 - Cosmic Disasters and the End of the World
 - Heroes and Tricksters
 -

WEEK FIVE

- GILGAMESH –
 - The oldest story in the world, a thousand years older than the Iliad of Homer or the Bible.
 - As relevant today as it was 4000 years ago.
 - Gives voice to grief, death, love, vulnerability the quest for wisdom, fundamentalism and jihad against what is perceived as an evil enemy.

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The oldest story in the world, a thousand years older than the Iliad or the Bible. As relevant today as it was 4000 years ago. Gives voice to grief, death, love, vulnerability, the quest for wisdom, fundamentalism and jihad against what is perceived as an evil enemy.

BODY AND SOUL

WEEK SIX

WEEK SEVEN

- MYTHOLOGY DEVELOPS
- PAGANISM
- POLYTHESIM, MONOTHEISM
- MEDIEVAL TIMES

WEEK EIGHT

- MYTHOLOGY AND US
- WICCANS
- CULTS
- HOLIDAYS AND CELEBRATIONS AROUND THE WORLD

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Rituals and Practices



NGC 4414, a typical spiral galaxy in the Constellation Coma Berenices is about 17,000 parsecs in diameter and approximately 20 million parsecs or 65 million light years away.

Imaged by Hubble Space Telescope 1995

Galaxy massive gravitationally bound system stars and stellar remnants.

Sun one of 200 billion stars Milky Way Galaxy

Probably more than 170 billion galaxies in the observable universe.

Parsec is about 3.26 light years, or just under 19 trillion miles

Astronomy – Study of the stars and planets.

Universe is 13.73 +/- .17 years old.

Solar System approximately 4.54 billion years old.

Paleontology – Study of Prehistoric Life

Astrobiology – Study Life on other Planets. Extraterrestrial creatures, what is life and what are the building blocks. Most likely life exists beyond earth and in some instances has become complex and includes what would be considered intelligence.

Kepler Mission suggests likely 100 million inhabitable planets in the Milky Way and up to 140 earth like planets.

600 million years ago simple animals appear on earth.



Homo, the genus that includes modern humans, is 2.3 to 2.4 million years old and coincides with the first evidence of the use of stone tools.

Homo Erectus: Originated in Africa 1.8 to 1.3 million years ago (spread as far as China and Java).

Brain of *Homo Erectus* weighed about 900 grams compared with that of our closest living relatives, chimpanzees, with one-third as much brain—just 384 grams.

Males were about 25% larger than females.

Likely were the first humans to live in hunter-gather societies.

Thought to hunt in coordinated groups, use primitive tools beyond stones, and in later development, to control fire and care for infirm or weak companions.

Germanic Reconstruction of *homo heidelbergensis*. ***Homo heidelbergensis***

("Heidelberg Man", named after the [University of Heidelberg](#)) is an [extinct species](#) of the [genus *Homo*](#) which may be the direct ancestor of both [Homo neanderthalensis](#) in [Europe](#) and [Homo sapiens](#). Lived 600,000 to 400,000 years ago, were giants up to 7' tall. May have been the first species of the *Homo* genus to [bury their dead](#), even offering gifts.

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Two major developments among many others in what evolved as Homo Sapiens.

Richard Leahy: *Origins Reconsidered* (1992). Doubleday. Leahy argues:

Cognition and language make us feel human. Our language skills are firmly rooted in the cognitive abilities of ape brains.

Self consciousness. Not only alert, but aware that they are aware, thus treating creature consciousness as a form of self-consciousness. Conceptual self-awareness.

What it is like. Recognition of what it is to be another creature. Information processing, the process of thought.

In the animal world only a few animals can pass the mirror or **self awareness** test: great apes (chimpanzee and the orangutan), bottlenose dolphins, pigeons, elephants and magpies.

Chimpanzees have the ability to use **deception** to gain their own needs. They need to have a self sufficiency or awareness of what response their action will provoke in the target. An ability for intricate political maneuverings. Of working in one's own self interest.

A half-million years ago, the brains of our ancestors started to grow again; 200,000 years ago they finally reached about the same size weight of *Homo sapiens sapiens* brains today at about three pounds or 1,350 grams.

Glottogony: The Origin of Spoken Language

Evolution of fully modern human language required development of the vocal track used for speech production and the cognitive abilities required to produce linguistic utterances, especially vowel sounds.

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Anatomical changes in the skull allowing for a **more L-shaped vocal track** and a larynx positioned relatively **low in the neck** are necessary prerequisites for many of the sounds humans make, particularly vowels. It is likely that *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus* had some form of communication intermediate between that of “modern” humans and that of other primates.

The **hyoid bone** is horseshoe-shaped, situated in the anterior midline of the neck between the chin and the thyroid cartilage. It is held in place by thyroid ligaments. The hyoid bone provides attachment to the muscles of the floor of the mouth and the tongue above, the larynx below and the epiglottis and pharynx behind. In 2007 a hyoid bone was found in a Neanderthal fossil.

A significant step in language evolution would have been the progression from primitive pidgin-like communication to a Creole-like language with all the grammar and syntax of modern language. Some scholars argue this could only have occurred with brain changes that took place in East Africa 100,000 to 50,000 years ago.

Armstrong discusses the ability of the human mind to have ideas and experiences that cannot be explained rationally. We have imagination, a faculty that produces religion, mythology, and new inventions and scientific discovery. Mythology and science extend the scope of human beings.

DEFINITIONS AND DIFFERENCES: MYTHOLOGY, RELIGION, FABLES AND LEGENDS

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Note: Break for lecture period, discussion of differences each type of oral and written vehicle.

“Once Upon a Time” Joseph Campbell

Mythology, myth

Religion

Folktales, legends, fables, fairy tales

Wikipedia

Webster's

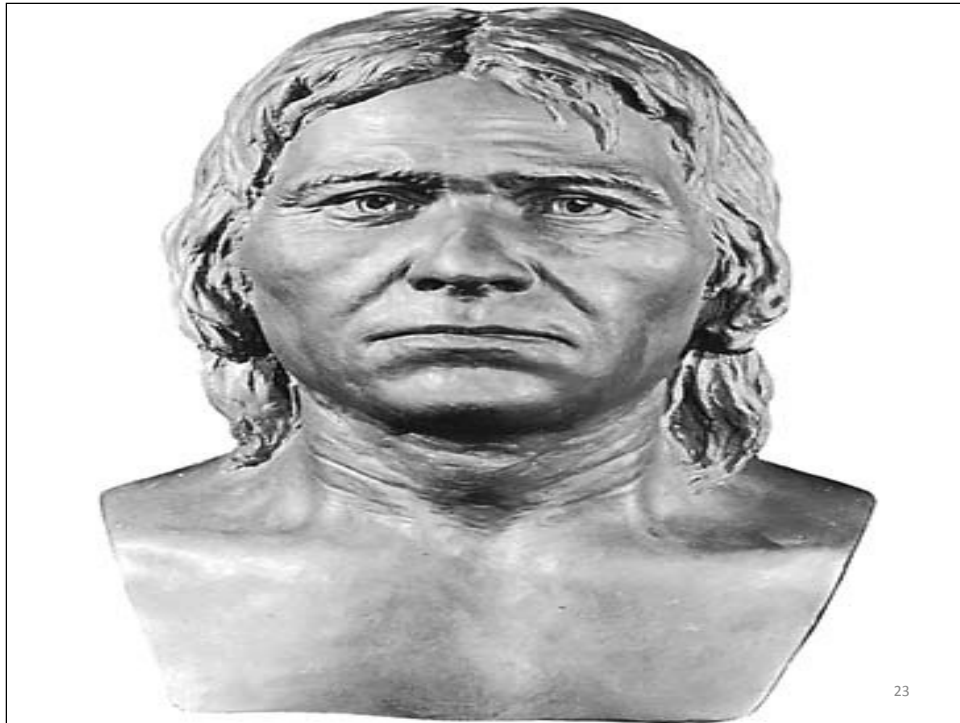
Joseph Campbell

Folklore

Mythology and Religion

Karen Armstrong

THE ORIGINS OF MYTHOLOGY

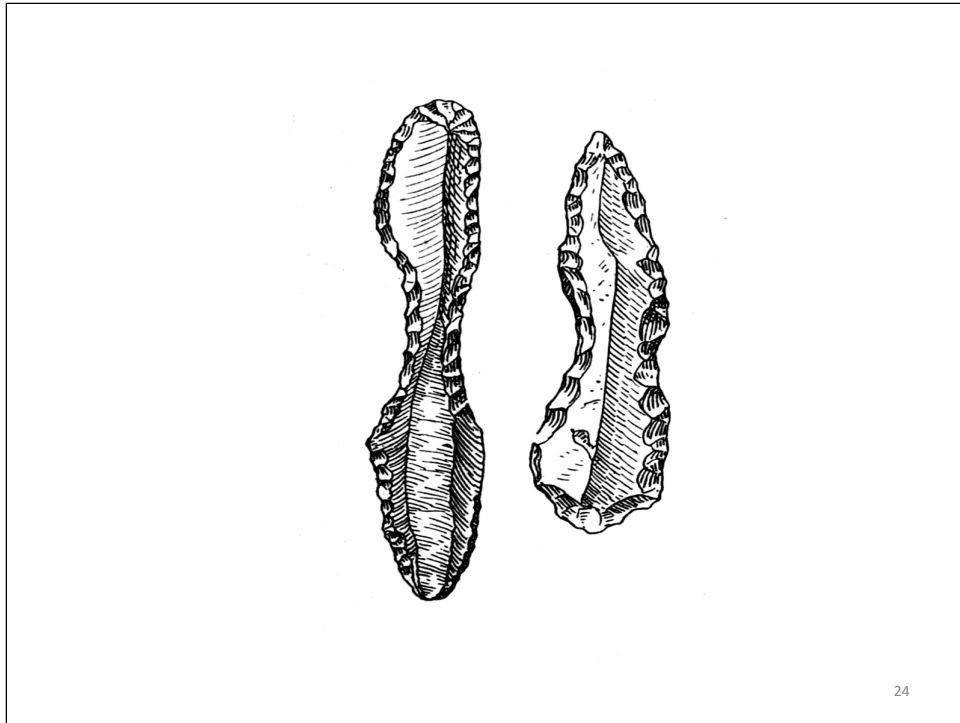


Cro-Magnon Man artists reconstruction

Anatomically modern, straight limbed and tall compared to the contemporary Neanderthals. On average taller, with a more robust physique and slightly larger cranial capacity than modern day man.

Primarily big-game hunters, killing mammoth, cave bears, horses and reindeer. Knew how to make woolen clothing, made huts out of mammoth bones, rocks, clay, branches and animal hide and fur.

These early humans used manganese and iron oxides to paint pictures and may have created the first calendar around 15,000 BP.



Aurignacian Culture likely first humans: Aurignacian blades from prepared cores. Worked bone points with grooves cut in the bottom. Some of earliest known cave art.

Began 36,000 BP and lasted until 28,000 to 26,000 BP ago.

Europe and southwest Asia.

Produced bone points with grooves cut in the bottom, cave art, animal engravings in France; made pendants, bracelets, ivory beads and three dimensional figurines to ornament themselves.

Anthropomorphized depictions that could be inferred as some of the earliest evidence of religion or mythology



The Lion Man Hohlenstein-Stadel cave of Germany Swabian Alb date 32,000 years old, Aurignacian culture, oldest known antromorphic animal figurine in the world (11.7 inches tall, 2 ¼ wide, and 2.4 inches thick., made of mammoth ivory.

Began 36,000 BP and lasted until 28,000 to 26,000 BP ago.

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Aurochs (ancient cattle) on a cave painting in Lascaux France



30,000 or is it 20,000 year old cave painting of a hyena found in the Chauvet cave near Vallon-Pont-d'Arc France



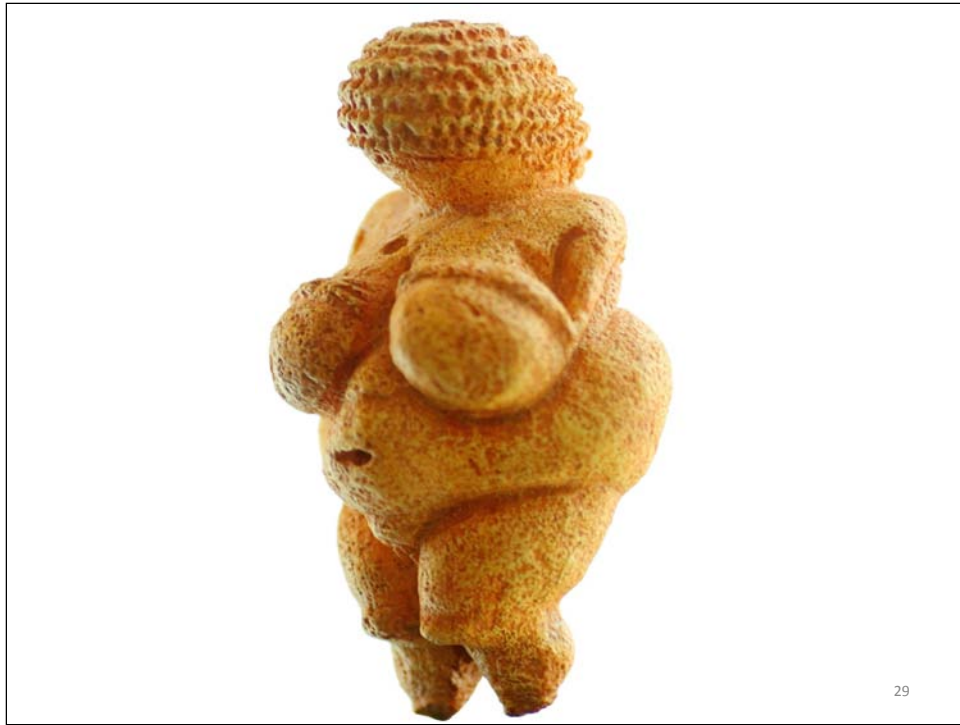
The Venus of Hohlne Fels Photo: H. Jensen. © Universität Tübingen. Schelkingen-Venus, Germany 35,000 to 40,000 years ago.

Upper Paleolithic Venus figurine of a voluptuous woman was found near Schelkingen, Germany. Height 2.4 inches.

Belongs to the early Aurignacian culture, with the assumed earliest presence of *Homo sapiens* (Cro-Magnon) in Europe. It is the oldest undisputed example of Upper Paleolithic art and figurative prehistoric art in general.

Presumed to be an amulet related to fertility, it is made from a woolly mammoth tusk. Archaeologist John J. Shea suggests it would have taken “tens if not hundreds of hours” to carve the figurine.

Discovered in 2008, experts are excited about the Venus because of what it tells us about early humans—and about ourselves. “It suggests the same values and ways of seeing the world existed among the earliest humans that migrated to Europe as among humans today.”



Upper Paleolithic, Venus von Willendorf, estimated to have been carved 24,000-22,000 BCE, one of the most famous of Venus figurines. 11 cm high statuette, Krems, Germany



Gaia, The Mother Earth. End of the Upper Paleolithic Epoch: The existence of anthropomorphic images and half-human, half-animal images may indicate “shamans” and “shamanic” practices similar to those of contemporary societies. The earliest known undisputed burial of a “shaman” dates back to 30,000 BP.

One historian notes that **ancestor cults** first emerged in these societies. He argues that **the elites may have used special rituals and ancestor worship to solidify control by convincing their subjects that they possess a link to the spirit world.**

Paleolithic **sympathetic magic** may also have been used for ensuring success in **hunting and to bring fertility to the land and women.** The **Greek Grandmother goddess Gaia or earth goddess**, ruler of earth and animals, has sometimes been explained through the Upper Paleolithic Venus figurines. The root word Ki means earth in Sumerian. Ge is a root word for earth in many tongues, including “geography”, “geology”, and “geometry” in English.

Leahy indicates death awareness in humans has played a large part in the construction of mythology and religion, but that the vicarious experience of emotions is not well developed in chimpanzees and is even less so in lower primates.

Death awareness was evident with Neanderthals and presumably other archaic *sapiens*, but modern *Homo sapiens* appear to have had a keener subjective consciousness of death.

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Leahy supports Dostoevsky's view that "Man needs the unfathomable and the infinite just as much as he does the small planet on which he inhabits."

End of the Upper Paleolithic Epoch: Society consisted of bands of nomads that ranged from 25 to 100 members from several families. Bands sometimes joined together for larger group activities such as acquiring mates and celebrations. Inter-band trading began to emerge for rare commodities.

Evidence is sketchy on mythological, religious and spiritual beliefs. During the Middle and Upper Paleolithic periods burial sites began to appear, leading to speculation about belief in an afterlife and a "concern for the dead that transcends daily life."

There may have been some societies that practiced the earliest form of totemism or animal worship. Middle Paleolithic caves have yielded evidence of bear worship in Europe and python worship in the Kalahari desert in Africa.



Cave Painting Vallon-Pont-d'Ard, France 15,000-18,000

End of the Upper Paleolithic Epoch: With the first introduction of agriculture around 12,000 BP the world had advanced. Fully behaviorally and anatomically modern humans with abundant artwork and fully developed language engaged in religious and spiritual behavior such as burial and ritual.

The Americas were populated via the Bering land bridge (exposed by lower sea levels), South America via the formation of the Isthmus of Panama and Australia was settled from India and the islands of Southeast Asia.

Human population was very low, only around one per square mile. This was most likely due to low body fat, infanticide, women engaging in intense endurance exercise, late weaning of infants and a nomadic lifestyle.

Ancient Roots: The Last Step

- We have gone from the formation of the Universe to mankind on the edge of agriculture.



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Neolithic family drying fish for food. Ability to utilize seafood, development of advanced spears all helped lead to the development of homo sapiens sapiens and eventually to Neolithic agricultural communities.

Ancient Roots: The Last Step The end of the Stone Age featured the lands of hunters and gatherers who supplemented their diets through fishing, catching and trapping game, and gathering wild plants, nuts, acorns, grains, berries and fruits. Food preservation included smoked, dried and salted products.

The last 9 millionth part of this history is now our focus.

Mythology and Religion

- A look at mythology, religion, logos and mythos from a secular perspective.



Karen Armstrong, Writer, Academic British, Author of *A History of God* (1993), *A Short History of Myth* (2005), Interesting views on Christianity and Islam, Muslim Brotherhood, The Pope, Israeli-Palestinian conflict., Winner of several top prestigious awards.

Neanderthal graves containing weapons, tools and the bones of a sacrificed animal suggest they had some kind of belief in a future world similar to their own.

Humans are meaning, sensing creatures. They have invented stories that enabled us to place our lives in a larger setting.

The human mind has the ability to have ideas and experiences that we cannot explain rationally.

Imagination produces mythology and religion, to invent new technology and to live more intensively in this world.

Neanderthal graves tell us important things about myth. Myths are nearly always rooted in the experience of death and the fear of extinction.

Burial was accompanied by sacrifice. Mythology is usually inseparable from ritual.

Myth is about the unknown. The most powerful myths force us to go beyond the limits of human experience.

Myth is not a story told for its own sake. It shows us how we should behave.

A belief in the invisible but more powerful reality, sometimes called the world of the gods, is a basic theme.



Joseph Campbell, 1904-1987 American mythologist, writer and lecturer best known for work in comparative mythology and comparative religion. "Follow your bliss".

"Once Upon a Time..." Nearly everybody loves a good story.

Our sense of self—our notion of who we are, from whence we came, and whither we are going—is defined by the tales we tell.

Here's the story: life is a dream.

It is all a story we're telling ourselves. Things are dreams, just dreams, when they are not in front of our eyes. What is in front of your eyes now, what you can reach out and touch, now, will become a dream.

Almost any good story will enchant and can teach us something, but only certain beguiling visions, stories with the power to shape and control our lives, can inspire and far too often destroy us.

Such potent timeless tales, he would insist, are the only ones that can be called "myths."

By extension, mythology is, for Campbell, the study of all stories imbued with this puissance.

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A traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon

A person or thing having only an imaginary or unverifiable existence

A metaphor for the spiritual potentiality in the human being.

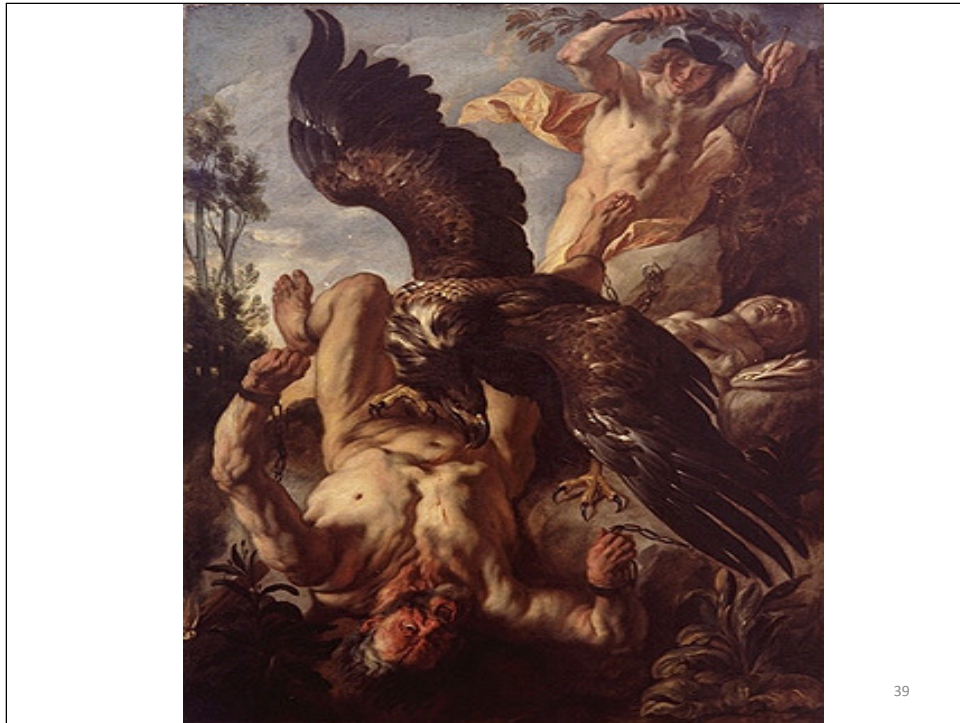
Quoting Campbell: "The elements of mythology, through space and time, confirm "the unity of the race of man, not only in biology but also in its spiritual history."

Perhaps the single most important behavioral adaptation of *Homo sapiens* is the passage from generation to generation of the elements of culture, the folk knowledge of the means of survival. Part of that cultural passage is the profoundly felt urge to understand the world.

It is interesting enough that every human society has felt the need to generate a body of myth, an explanation of how the society came to be and its place in the world.

"The comparative study of the mythologies of the world compels us to view cultural history of mankind as a unit."

"We find that such themes as the fire-theft, deluge, land of the dead, virgin birth and resurrected hero have a worldwide distribution—appearing everywhere in new combinations while remaining, like the elements of a kaleidoscope, only a few and always the same."



Prometheus having his liver eaten out by an eagle. Painting by [Jacob Jordaens](#), c. 1640, [Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne, Germany](#). He was a champion of human-kind known for his wily intelligence, who stole fire from Zeus and gave it to mortals. Zeus then punished him for his crime. His liver grows back each day to be eaten again.

Observations Regarding Myths: Today the word “myth” can mean something that simply is not true given our “logos” view of history. However, even history is often mainly a myth, dependent on who writes history and what facts have survived actual events.

Armstrong argues that in the ancient world a myth was an event which had happened once, but which also happened all the time.

Mythology should awaken us to rapture or inspiration, even in the face of death and despair. If a myth ceases to do that it has died and outlived its usefulness.

A myth is true because it is effective, not because it gives us factual information.

If it works...it is a valid myth.

There is never a single orthodox version of a myth. As our circumstances change we need to tell our stories differently.

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The myth of my tribe or clan may not be the same as that of your tribe.

Leakey in commenting on "Origins Reconsidered" notes: The way people arrived at answers about their world followed much the same path individuals take in coming to understanding one another.

In all mythologies that we know, and by extrapolation in mythologies long extinct, many of the elements, such as animals and physical forces, are endowed with humanlike emotions and motives.

The mind that evolved subjective consciousness as a tool with which to understand the complexities of social chess used the same formula to understand the complexities of the rest of the world.

Logos

- Reason: in ancient Greek philosophy.
- The controlling principle in the universe.
- The “word of truth,” logical, pragmatic and scientific.
- Essentially practical and rational. It allows us to invent new technology and define mathematics; one plus one equals two.

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First fish like fossil found in China in 1999 at Cheng-Jiang likely 500 million years old.

Neolithic Age was 10,000 to 3,500 BCE. Earliest evidence of agriculture 10,000 BCE was wheat in the Zagros mountains of Turkey and Iraq, and in Mexico, squash.

Writing emerged in 4th millennium BCE, and the spoked wheel chariot 2000 BCE in Russia and Kazakhstan.

Logos mentioned in Heraclitus 535-475 BCE. In Western philosophy, it is the source and fundamental order of the cosmos.

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, developed around 1990(?).

MYTHOS: FIVE MINUTE QUIZ

Please note your answers

- Where did we come from?
- Who am I?
- What must I do in order to survive?
- What must I do to be good?
- How do I live my life under any circumstances?
- Where are we going?
- What happens when I die?
- Is mythology an inferior mode of thought?

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Leaky in *Origins Reconsidered* notes to the earliest members of *Homo sapiens* and to societies through much of human history, life was played out in full interaction with other powers in the world.

The migratory herd had to be treated with respect; otherwise it would refuse to return next season.

Appropriate gifts had to be made to the sun; otherwise it would become angry and would not rise.

The spring had to be constantly blessed; otherwise it would choose to flow elsewhere.

Explanation, then, was what people sought, not as demonstrated fact but as authorized story, the basis of myth.



Religion

Hindu Statue of Rama in Kalaram Temple, India

Modern scholars, including Joseph Campbell, favor the derivation from *ligare* “bind, connect” with *re* or “to reconnect.”

Wikipedia, selected comments: ...Generally, mythology is considered one component or aspect of religion. Religion is the broader term: besides mythological aspects, it includes aspects of ritual, morality, theology and mystical experience....Disconnected from its religious system, a myth may lose its immediate relevance to the community and evolve—away from sacred importance—into a legend or a folktale.

Wikipedia: Religion is the belief in and worship of a god or gods, or any such system of belief and worship, usually involving devotional and ritual observances and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.

Wikipedia: Aspects of religion include narrative, symbolism, beliefs and practices that are supposed to give meaning to the practitioner’s experiences in life....

It may focus on specific supernatural, metaphysical and moral claims about reality (the cosmos and human nature) which may yield a set of religious laws and ethics and a particular lifestyle.

Religion also encompasses ancestral or cultural traditions, writings, history and mythology, as well as personal faith and religious experience.

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The term “religion” refers both to the personal practices related to communal faith and to group rituals and communication stemming from shared conviction.

Wikipedia: Religion is often described as a communal system for the coherence of belief focusing on a system of thought, unseen being, person or object, that is considered to be supernatural, sacred, divine or the highest truth.

Moral codes, practices, values, institutions, tradition, rituals and scriptures are often traditionally associated with the core belief; these may have some overlap with concepts in secular philosophy.

The myths of many religions, both ancient and modern, share common elements.

- Many religions involve an initial Paradise preceding ordinary historical time.
- Many religions involve the story of a god who undergoes death and resurrection.

- The mythical geography of many religions involves an *axis mundi*, or Cosmic Center.

- Many myths feature a global flood.

Scholars argue that myth was an essential foundation of religion, i.e., Mircea Eliade.

Most religions contain a body of traditional sacred stories that are believed to express profound truth. Some argue these are not only sacred and “true,” but also historically accurate and divinely revealed, so calling them a “myth” is disrespectful. Other religious organizations have no problem with categorizing their sacred stories as myths.

C. S. Lewis freely called the “Christ story” a true myth, historically and spiritually true. Catholic priest Father Andrew Greeley states with respect to the myth terminology, “The Christian would be well advised to get over his fear of the word and appreciate how important a tool it can be for understanding the content of his faith.” *Myths of Religion*.

Neo-pagans frequently refer to their sacred stories as “myths.”

...From Campbell’s unprejudiced perspective, no hagiology (sacred writings) is the divine revelation of inconvertible Truth, for all are, in actuality, fabulous human constructs, wondrous tales of “once upon a time,” marvelous myths.

From the point of view of any orthodoxy, myth might be defined simply as “other people’s religion.”

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Like dreams, myths are productions of human imagination. Their images, consequently, though derived from the material world and its supposed history, are like dreams, revelations of the deepest hopes, desires and fears, potentialities and conflicts of the human will.

...The task of the modern human being; to realize that all the gods and demons are within; to understand that heaven, hell and all other such realms are not places somewhere "out there" to which you go when you die, but psychological states within us all; to comprehend, in short, that all mythological images are all aspects of your own immediate experience

Leahy and others note that animals figure large in many societies' mythologies. They were anthropomorphized in terms of their "intentions" and often took on special roles in people's interaction with "spirit "worlds," sometimes representing sources of power. Frequently animal images are distorted, becoming part human and part beast, an expression of the ambiguity of life, an illusion of human, animal and spirit worlds.

The ultimate expression of this anthropomorphism is the creation of gods. Following psychologists Gordon Gallup and Jack Maser, "Because of our capacity to use personal experience as a means of understanding the experience of others and because of the well studied phenomenon of generalization, humans create god(s) in their own image and not vice versa. ...In another reversal of a familiar idea, we would say that it was awareness of self that should be construed as a high level abstraction; god(s) then follow as a rather concrete extension of self."

Leahy concludes the chapter on Consciousness: Mirror of the Mind by noting, "Great science, great art, and great compassion—each is the product of consciousness. And great arrogance."