

Week VII

The Early Civilizations (4000 to 800 BCE)

- The growth of agriculture
- The start of cities
- The refinement of primitive mythologies
- The advent of writing, enduring literary expression. The historical age. Gilgamesh.

AXIAL AGE (800 to 200 BCE) and The Common Era

- Evolution of mythology and philosophy
- Beginning of religion as we know it.
- New religions and philosophical systems.
- Monotheism

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Axial Age (800 to 200) BCE and the Common Era

Array of sages, prophets and mystics began to develop traditions that proved pivotal to the spiritual development of humanity. Cities more organized. Old mythical visions replaced.

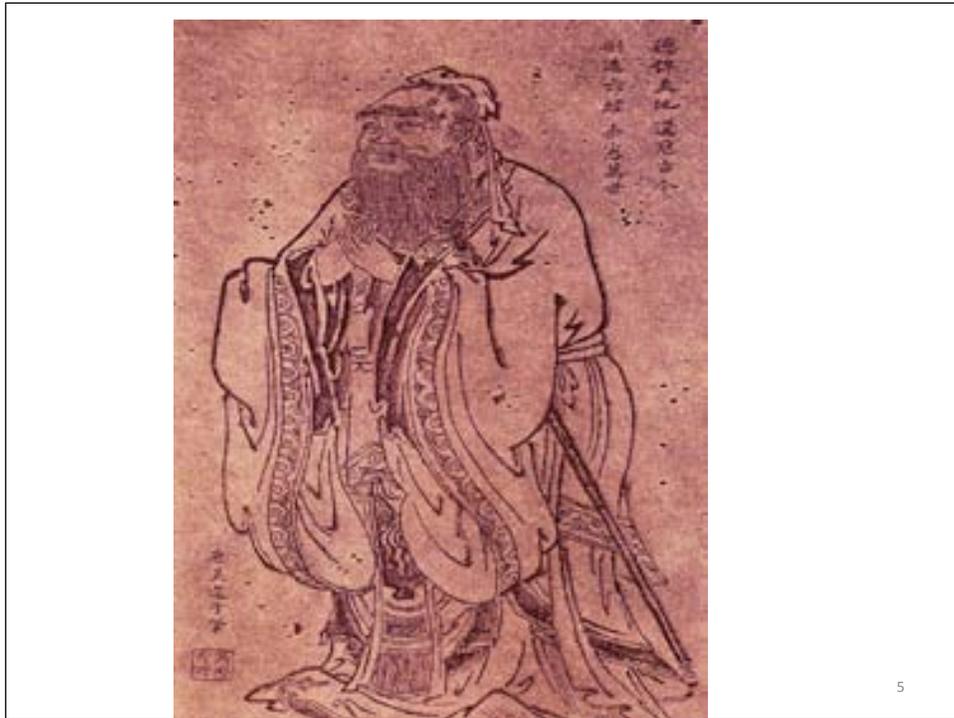
Monotheism develops in the Middle East

From 12 Steps For a Compassionate Life - Armstrong

- Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism on the Indian subcontinent; Confucianism and Daoism in China; monotheism in the Middle East; and philosophical rationalism in Greece.
- This was the period of Upanishads, the Buddha, Confucius, Laozi, Isaiah, Ezra, Socrates, and Aeschylus.
- We have never surpassed the insights of the Axial Age.

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Rabbinic Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were all latter-day followings of this original vision, which they translated marvelously into an idiom that spoke directly to the troubled circumstances of a later period. Compassion would be a key element in each of these movements.



A [portrait](#) of Confucius, by [Tang Dynasty](#) artist [Wu Daozi](#) (680–740).

Confucius (traditionally 28 September [551 BC](#) – 479 BC)^[2] was a [Chinese](#) thinker and social [philosopher](#) of the [Spring and Autumn Period](#).

The philosophy of Confucius emphasized personal and [governmental morality](#), correctness of [social relationships](#), [justice](#) and [sincerity](#).

Daoism or **Taoism** refers to a [philosophical](#) or [religious](#) tradition of which the basic concept is to establish harmony with the [Tao](#) (道), which is everything that exists, the origin of everything and because of the latter it is also nothing. The word "Dao" (or "Tao", depending on the [romanization](#) scheme) is usually translated as "way", "path" or "principle". Daoism had not only a profound influence on the culture of China, but also on neighboring countries. Daoist propriety and ethics emphasize the [Three Jewels of the Dao](#): [compassion](#), [moderation](#), and [humility](#), while daoist thought generally focuses on [nature](#), the relationship between humanity and the cosmos (天人相应); [health](#) and [longevity](#);

A focus on the individual.



Rama (right) seated on the shoulders of Hanuman, battles the demon-king [Ravana](#), scene from Ramayana.

Buddhism and Hinduism in India.

Hindu religious literature is the large body of traditional narratives related to [Hinduism](#), notably as contained in [Sanskrit literature](#), such as the [Sanskrit epics](#) and the [Puranas](#). As such, it is a subset of [Indian culture](#). Rather than one consistent, monolithic structure, it is a range of diverse traditions, developed by different sects, people and philosophical schools, in different regions and at different times, which are not necessarily held by all Hindus to be literal accounts of historical events, but are taken to have deeper, often symbolic, meaning, and which have been given a complex range of interpretations.^[1]

Buddhism ([Pali/Sanskrit](#): बौद्ध धर्म *Bauddha Dharma*) is a [religion](#) and [philosophy](#) encompassing a variety of traditions, beliefs and practices, largely based on teachings attributed to [Siddhartha Gautama](#), commonly known as the [Buddha](#) ([Pāli/Sanskrit](#) "the awakened one"). The Buddha lived and taught in the northeastern [Indian subcontinent](#) some time between the 6th and 4th centuries BCE.

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Myth in Buddhism is used at various intellectual levels in order to give symbolic and sometimes quasi-historical expression to religious teachings. Accepted on its own terms, Buddhism is a supernatural religion in the sense that, without a Buddha to reveal them, the truths remain unknown. Only after human beings have received the Buddha's revelation can they proceed apparently by their own efforts. This teaching was explicit in the early schools, in which the revelation was still thought of as historically related to Shakyamuni's mission in the world.

Buddhist mythology operates within the Buddhist belief system. It is a relatively broad mythology, as it was adopted and influenced by several diverse cultures.^[1] As such, it includes many aspects taken from other mythologies of those cultures (for instance, Japanese *kami*^[1] are considered to be local bodhisattvas by many Japanese Buddhists).

One notable feature of Tibetan Buddhism and other Vajrayana traditions in particular is the use of Wrathful deities.^[2] While the deities have a hideous and ferocious appearance,^[3] they are not personifications of evil or demonic forces.^[2] The ferocious appearance of these deities is used to instill fear in evil spirits which threaten the Dharma.^[3]

The Yaksha are a broad class of nature-spirits, usually benevolent, who are caretakers of the natural treasures hidden in the earth and tree roots.^[4] Having been worshiped in India since before the Vedic period,^[5] their worship was adopted by both Buddhism and Jainism.^[5]

In Buddhism, it is believed that they reside deep within the Earth under the Himalayas^[5] where they guard the wealth of the Earth.^[5] The Yaksha are ruled over by Kubera, the Lord of wealth.^[5]



Bust of [Zeus, Otricoli](#) (Sala Rotonda, [Museo Pio-Clementino](#), [Vatican](#))

Greek mythology is the body of [myths](#) and [legends](#) belonging to the [ancient Greeks](#) concerning their [gods](#) and [heroes](#), [the nature of the world](#), and the origins and significance of their own [cult](#) and [ritual](#) practices. They were a part of [religion in ancient Greece](#). Modern scholars refer to and study the myths in an attempt to throw light on the religious and political institutions of Ancient Greece, its civilization, and to gain understanding of the nature of myth-making itself.^[1]

Greek mythology is embodied explicitly in a large collection of narratives and implicitly in Greek representational arts, such as [vase-paintings](#) and [votive gifts](#). Greek myth attempts to explain the origins of the world and details the lives and adventures of a wide variety of [gods, goddesses, heroes, heroines](#), and [mythological creatures](#). These accounts initially were disseminated in an [oral-poetic tradition](#); today the Greek myths are known primarily from [Greek literature](#).

The oldest known Greek literary sources, the [epic poems *Iliad*](#) and [Odyssey](#), focus on events surrounding the [Trojan War](#). Two poems by [Homer](#)'s near contemporary [Hesiod](#), the [Theogony](#) and the [Works and Days](#), contain accounts of the genesis of the world, the succession of divine rulers, the succession of human ages, the origin of human woes, and the origin of sacrificial practices.

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Myths also are preserved in the Homeric Hymns, in fragments of epic poems of the Epic Cycle, in lyric poems, in the works of the tragedians of the fifth century BC, in writings of scholars and poets of the Hellenistic Age and in texts from the time of the Roman Empire by writers such as Plutarch and Pausanias.

Archaeological findings provide a principal source of detail about Greek mythology, with gods and heroes featured prominently in the decoration of many artifacts.

Geometric designs on pottery of the eighth century BC depict scenes from the Trojan cycle as well as the adventures of Heracles. In the succeeding Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods, Homeric and various other mythological scenes appear, supplementing the existing literary evidence.^[2]

Greek mythology has exerted an extensive influence on the culture, the arts, and the literature of Western civilization and remains part of Western heritage and language. Poets and artists from ancient times to the present have derived inspiration from Greek mythology and have discovered contemporary significance and relevance in these mythological themes.^[3]



Monotheism (from [Greek \$\mu\acute{o}\nu\omicron\varsigma\$](#) , *monos*, "single", and [\$\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma\$](#) , *theos*, "god") is the belief in the existence of one [god](#),^[1] as distinguished from [polytheism](#), the belief in more than one god, and [atheism](#), the absence of belief in any god. Monotheism is characteristic of the [Baha'i Faith](#), [Christianity](#), [Druzism](#), [Judaism](#), [Islam](#), [Samaritanism](#), [Sikhism](#)^[2] and [Zoroastrianism](#). It is difficult to delineate monotheism from beliefs such as [pantheism](#) and [monism](#) as in the [Advaita](#) traditions of [Hinduism](#).

The word [monotheism](#) is derived from the [Greek \$\mu\acute{o}\nu\omicron\varsigma\$](#) (*monos*)^[6] meaning "single" and [\$\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma\$](#) (*theos*)^[7] meaning "[god](#)".^[8] The English term was first used by [Henry More](#) (1614–1687).

Some writers such as [Karen Armstrong](#) believe that the concept of monotheism sees a gradual development out of notions of [henotheism](#) (worshiping a single god while accepting the existence or possible existence of other deities) and [monolatrism](#) (the recognition of the existence of many gods, but with the consistent worship of only one deity). However, the historical incidences of monotheism are so rare, that it's difficult to support any theory of the natural progression of religions from polytheism to henotheism to monotheism.

Two examples of monolatrism developing from polytheism are the [Aten](#) cult in the reign of the [Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten](#), as well as the rise of [Marduk](#) from the tutelary of Babylon to the claim of universal supremacy.

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The Zoroastrian Achaemenid Empire at its greatest extent was the largest ancient empire in recorded history at 8.0 million km² (480 BCE)

In Iran, Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda appears as a supreme and transcendental deity. Depending on the date of Zoroaster (usually placed in the early Iron Age), this may be one of the earliest documented instances of the emergence of monism in an Indo-European religion.

In the ancient Near East, each city had a local patron deity, such as Shamash at Larsa or Sin at Ur. The first claims of global supremacy of a specific god date to the Late Bronze Age, with Akhenaten's *Great Hymn to the Aten* (speculatively connected to Judaism by Sigmund Freud in his *Moses and Monotheism*). However the date of the Exodus is disputed, and it is not definitive whether the setting of the biblical Exodus event is prior to or following Akhenaten's reign. Furthermore it is not clear to what extent Akhenaten's Atenism was monotheistic rather than henotheistic with Akhenaten himself identified with the god Aten.

Currents of monism or monotheism emerge in Vedic India earlier, with e.g. the Nasadiya Sukta. In the Indo-Iranian tradition, the Rigveda exhibits notions of monism, in particular in the comparatively late tenth book, also dated to the early Iron Age, e.g. in the Nasadiya sukta.

Philosophical monotheism and the associated concept of absolute good and evil emerge in Zoroastrianism and Judaism, later culminating in the doctrines of Christology in early Christianity and later (by the 7th century) in the *tawhid* in Islam. In Islamic theology, a person who spontaneously "discovers" monotheism is called a *ḥanīf*, the original *ḥanīf* being Abraham.

Austrian anthropologist Wilhelm Schmidt in the 1910s postulated an *Urmonotheismus*, "original" or "primitive monotheism."



Frieze and inscription of Persian ruler Darius the Great, with Zoroastrian symbol.
Photo: [GFDL](#).

Zoroastrianism ([/zɔˈrɒʊˈæstri.ənɪzəm/](#)) (or Mazdaism) is a religion and philosophy based on the teachings of prophet [Zoroaster](#) (also known as Zarathustra, in [Avestan](#)) and was formerly among the world's largest religions.^[1] It was probably founded some time before the [6th century BCE](#) in [Persia \(Iran\)](#).

In some form, it served as the [national](#) or [state religion](#) of a significant portion of the [Iranian people](#) for many centuries. The religion first dwindled when the [Achaemenid Empire was invaded](#) by [Alexander III of Macedon](#), after which it collapsed and disintegrated^[2] and it was further [gradually marginalized](#) by [Islam](#) from the 7th century onwards with the decline of the [Sassanid Empire](#).^[3] The political power of the pre-Islamic Iranian dynasties lent Zoroastrianism immense prestige in ancient times, and some of its leading doctrines were adopted by other religious systems.

Zoroastrians believe that there is one universal and [transcendent](#) God, [Ahura Mazda](#). He is said to be the one uncreated Creator to whom all worship is ultimately directed.^[6] Ahura Mazda's creation—evident as [asha](#), truth and order—is the [antithesis](#) of chaos, which is evident as [druj](#), falsehood and disorder. The resulting conflict involves the entire universe, including humanity, which has an active role to play in the conflict.

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The religion states that active participation in life through good thoughts, good words, and good deeds is necessary to ensure happiness and to keep chaos at bay. This active participation is a central element in Zoroaster's concept of free will, and Zoroastrianism rejects all forms of monasticism. Ahura Mazda will ultimately prevail over the evil Angra Mainyu or Ahriman, at which point the universe will undergo a cosmic renovation and time will end. In the final renovation, all of creation—even the souls of the dead that were initially banished to "darkness"—will be reunited in Ahura Mazda, returning to life in the undead form. At the end of time, a savior-figure (a Saoshyant) will bring about a final renovation of the world (*frasho.kereti*), in which the dead will be revived.^[6]

Karen Armstrong, "*The Battle for God*" 2000, notes in there was a similar transitional period in the ancient world, lasting roughly from 700 to 200 BCE, which historians have called the Axial Age because it was pivotal to the spiritual development of humanity. This age was itself the product and fruition of thousands of years of economic, and therefore social and cultural, evolution, beginning in Sumer in what is now Iraq, and in ancient Egypt. People in the fourth and third millennia BCE, instead of simply growing enough crops to satisfy their immediate needs, became capable of producing an agricultural surplus with which they could trade and thereby acquire additional income. This enabled them to build the first civilizations, develop the arts, and create increasingly powerful polities: cities, city-states, and, eventually, empires. In agrarian society, power no longer lay exclusively with the local king or priest; its locus shifted at least partly to the marketplace, the source of each culture's wealth. In these altered circumstances, people ultimately began to find that the old paganism, which had served their ancestors well, no longer spoke fully to their condition.

In the cities and empires of the Axial Age, citizens were acquiring a wider perspective and broader horizons, which made the old local cults seem limited and parochial. Instead of seeing the divine as embodied in a number of different deities, people increasingly began to worship a single, universal transcendence and source of sacredness. They had more leisure and were thus able to develop a richer interior life; accordingly, they came to desire a spirituality which did not depend entirely upon external forms. The most sensitive were troubled by the social injustice that seemed built into this agrarian society, depending as it did on the labor of peasants who never had the chance to benefit from the high culture. Consequently, prophets and reformers arose who insisted that the virtue of compassion was crucial to the spiritual life: an ability to see sacredness in every single human being, and a willingness to take practical care of the more vulnerable members of society, became the test of authentic piety. In this way, during the Axial Age, the great confessional faiths that have continued to guide human beings sprang up in the civilized world: Buddhism and Hinduism in India, Confucianism and Taoism in the Far East; monotheism in the Middle East; and rationalism in Europe. Despite their major differences, these Axial Age religions had much in common: they all built on the old traditions to evolve the idea of a single, universal transcendence; they cultivated an internalized spirituality, and stressed the importance of practical compassion.

Paganism

- What are Pagans?
- We all are pagans depending on definitions.
Welcome to the club.
- Eligibility requirements and
ways to join follows.

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Pagans: Definitions:

Websters: From the Latin *paganush* country dweller or *pagus* country district. Akin to *pangere* to fix.

1: Heathen, esp. a follower of a polytheistic religion (as in ancient Rome).
My note: Not a follower of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

2: One who has little or no religion and who delights in sensual pleasures
and material goods: an irreligious or hedonistic person.

Most modern persons who consider themselves neo-pagans or pagans interpret the
word to mean “rustic,” “hick” or “*country bumpkin*” – a pejorative term.

The implication was that those in the country were much slower in adopting the new
religion of Christianity than were urban dwellers.

Many rural dwellers still followed Greek state religion, Roman state religion,
Mithraism, various mystery religions, etc., long after urban areas had
converted.

Source: Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance.

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Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance indicates several meanings:

1. Pagans consist of Wiccans and other neopagans.
2. Pagans are people to hate.
3. Pagans are ancient polytheists.
4. Pagans follow aboriginal religions.
5. Pagans are non-Abrahamic.
6. Pagans don't belong to any of the main religions of the world.
7. Pagans are atheists, agnostics or humanists.

Badness, greed and evil.

Filled with spite, murder, fighting, trickery and pessimism.

Gossips, backbiters, God-haters, jerks, showoffs and con artists.

Inventors of evil, disobedient to parents.

Impudent, contrary, unsympathetic and unmerciful.

Source: Cited as Paul's list, Biblical.

"Polytheism and immorality are the pagan way."

Source: Grace Communion International.

By the 3rd century BCE, along with all non-Christians, it eventually became an evil term that implied Satan worship. The terms are still in wide use today.

Most academics would not use good or evil in classifying pagans.

However, pagans is also a "skunk" word that has varied meanings to various people.

There is not a generally accepted, single current definition of the word "pagan."

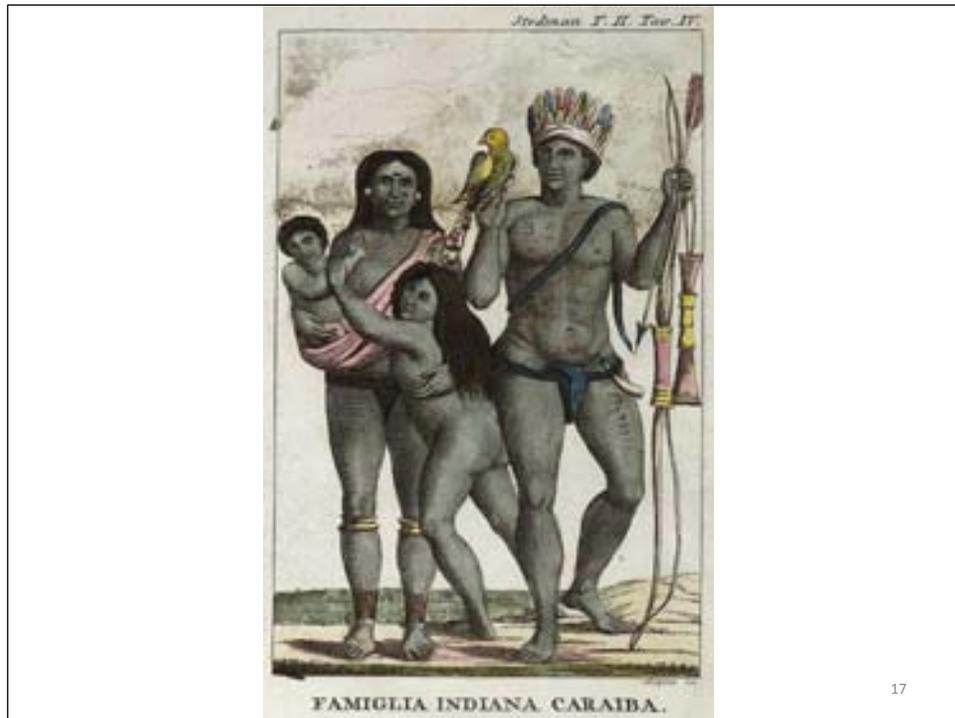
Of interest to us are pagan practices, the reasons for their occurrence, whether they are in a sense mythologies, and the impact of paganism and mythology on our lives today.

Joseph Campbell suggest paganism might be considered "other peoples religion".

Pagans

- Pagans may also be considered a positive attribute.
- Questions to consider:
 - What were or are the reasons for paganism?
 - Are pagans any less (or more) moral than other people?

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Cannibalism and Human sacrifice: Carib family (by [John Gabriel Stedman](#)), Natives of the Lessor Antilles Islands, origins lie in the southern West Indies and the northern coast of South America, Orinoco River area. Carribean Sea named by Spanish after peoples, also term cannibal stems from the name. People did not practice cannibalism per se but did engage in as part of war trophies not to satisfy hunger.

Head Hunting and Cannibalism

Intimately associated with notions of warfare, death and regeneration, cannibalism had less to do with eating people for food than with concepts of **social identity, kinship, and the transference of soul** essence from one person to another.

“Exo-cannibalism” involved the actual or symbolic eating of an enemy’s flesh as an expression of **martial ferocity and as ultimate humiliation and revenge.**

Cannibal tribes were greatly feared as their warriors were believed to be possessed by fierce jaguar-spirit, which encouraged them to savage and then devour their prey.

“Endo-cannibalism” had a more respectful motivation. It involved grinding to powder a dead person’s bones, which were then added to manioc beer and drunk by family members and friends.

The deceased’s bones were thought to **retain vital elements of the persons spirit,** which could be perpetuated in the lives of those who took part in the ritual consumption of the dead.

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The Tupinamba, better known as the Tupi, of Brazil were important first contacts for 16th century Europeans who were horrified at cannibalism.

A Tupi prisoner of war would be pampered and treated well, but on the appointed day killed and prepared for a feast.

Smearing blood from the victim and the heart symbolized absorbing the courage of the enemy. The body was roasted and eaten by the entire village.

Only the executioner was forbidden to feast; he had to go into seclusion to protect himself and the village from the prisoner's ghost.



Amerindian children enjoying their history. Bolivia, Peru, Paraguay, Mexico, Guatemala, Columbia and Ecuador have relatively high percentages of indigenous people.



Original [1557 Hans Staden woodcut](#) of the Tupinambá portrayed in a [cannibalistic](#) feast. The usages and habits of the Tupinambas were abundantly described in the *Cosmographie universelle* (1572) of [André Thevet](#), and in *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* (1578), by [Jean de Léry](#). Their story inspired the work of [Montaigne](#) *Des Cannibales* (*Essais*, Book 1, Chap.31), and they influenced the creation of the myth of the "[Bon sauvage](#)" during the [Enlightenment](#).

Cannibalism for food

There are isolated instances of homicidal cannibalism for food.

Famine

In cases of extreme mental health or criminal behavior.

Rumored through libelous accusations.

It does not appear to be a widespread practice based on archeological or written evidence.

War starvations, shipwrecks, famines from the Neanderthals to the present, Colonial Jamestown, Donner party of settlers, North Korea between 1995-1997 are examples.



View of Raiatea Mountain. The mummies of Tahitian rulers were formerly deposited on this mountain, traditionally considered sacred (tapu).

Cannibalistic Women

In **Polynesia**, tales of cannibalistic women are known from Tahiti and the Chatham Islands just east of New Zealand.

One Tahitian myth recounts the story of a female ancestress, “Rona long-teeth” whose daughter Hina grew into a lovely young woman and fell in love with a man called Monri.

Rona, however, trapped Monri and ate him. Hina then enlisted the aid of the “hairy chief,” No’ahuruhuru, to put an end to the rapacious cannibal.

The competitive **abutu** exchanges, in which modern Goodenough Islanders (Solomons) challenge each other to present the largest gifts of garden produce, began as a ritual to satisfy the appetite of Malaveyoyo, a voracious cannibal who is said to have roamed the interior of the island.

The islanders believed that if they gave Malaveyovo enough vegetables to eat, he would not need to eat humans. Cannibalism occurs in mythology throughout Oceania and is characterized by a **strong theme of inter-sexual hostility**.



Marae Arahurahu Open-air Temples where the ancient Polynesians worshipped their gods



A [tzompantli](#), or skull rack, as shown in the post-Conquest [Ramirez Codex](#). 15 Century Aztec

Human Sacrifice

Human sacrifice was more common than cannibalism. Human sacrifice is the act of killing one or more human beings as part of a **mythological or religious ritual**. It has been practiced in various cultures throughout history.

Offerings were to the deities as **payments for favorable interventions and to forestall unfavorable events**. Victims were typically ritually killed in a manner that was supposed to please or appease the gods, spirits or the deceased, for example, as a **propitiatory offering**.

To placate the god(s), expiate the sins of the people.

Divination: A priest would try to predict the future from the body parts of a slain prisoner or slave. Attempts to determine disclosures about the physical world and the future. Celts interpreting body spasms is an example.

Sacrifice to the gods. **Aztecs/Mayans most often cited**. Thanking or appeasing the gods. Estimates of thousands of sacrifices in ceremonies over centuries.

Ward off droughts, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions with a gift to the gods. Warfare was helpful in capturing prisoners for sacrifice.

Sacrifice to accompany the dedication of a new building or temple. Chinese legends regarding thousands of people entombed in the "Great Wall."

Burial of children alive in foundations of new courts – Jericho



A jaguar-shaped [cuauhxicalli](#) in the [National Museum of Anthropology](#). This altar-like stone vessel was used to hold the hearts of sacrificial victims. See also [chacmool](#) (Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican stone art).

Human Sacrifice in Aztec Culture

Practiced in the Aztec Empire and throughout pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.

Millennia-long tradition of human sacrifice.

Sacrifice victims on each of 18 festivals, one for each 20-day month.

Belief that a great on-going sacrifice sustains the Universe.

Everything — earth, crops, moon, stars, people — springs from the severed or buried bodies, fingers, blood or the heads of sacrificed gods.

Sacrifice of animals common — dogs, eagles, jaguars and deer. Cult of Quetzalcoatl also sacrifices butterflies and hummingbirds.

Most common form is heart-extraction.

Ritual includes the priest grabbing the heart and tearing it out, still beating.

It would be placed in a bowl held by a statue of the honored god, and the body thrown down the temple stairs.

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High profile nature of sacrificial ceremonies.

Used sophisticated psychological weaponry to maintain their empire aimed at instilling a sense of fear in their neighbors.

The Aztecs controlled a large empire of tribute- paying vassal tribes.

The population of native Aztecs was very small, compared to the population of the area they controlled.

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Altar for human sacrifice at [Monte Alban](#) southern Mexican state of Oaxaca

Rituals upon the death of a king, high priest, or great leader.

Servants, slaves, concubines and other persons to accompany the deceased into the afterlife.

Practiced by Mongols, Scythians, Egyptians, Mesoamericans, but many others.

Sacrifice of the deceased's or family possessions and valuables, i.e. slaves.

Modern times: honor killings in some societies, Italian opera, some primitive ethnic and religious groups. An extreme example is the occasional stoning or killing of females in Islamic families by immediate family members.



An 18th century German illustration of Moloch ("Der Götze Moloch" i.e Moloch, the false god). Can refer derogatorily to any person or thing which demands or requires costly sacrifices. Burning children alive sacrifices.

Child Sacrifice

Not one's favorite topic but throughout history infanticide has been common.

Child sacrifice to supernatural figures or forces, such as practiced in ancient Carthage, may be only the most notorious example.

You could appease the gods or show one's love and respect while conveniently reducing the number of family members.

Laila Williamson notes that "Infanticide has been practiced on every continent and by people on every level of cultural complexity, from hunter gathers to high civilizations, including our own ancestors.

Many Neolithic groups routinely resorted to infanticide in order to control their numbers so lands could support them (15% to 20% or more).

In more advanced societies and in some situations it was a way to reduce the number of potential heirs for the rich.

Abandonment, leaving the infant to die by exposure (hypothermia, hunger, thirst or animal attack) occurred. as well as suffocation, drowning, cannibalism and sacrifice.

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Fortunately the practices slowed by the High Middle Ages as churches and the first orphanages took over responsibility for unwanted infants.

Slavery

Slavery is a system in which people are the property of others. Slaves can be held against their will from the time of their capture, purchase or birth, and deprived of the right to leave, to refuse to work or to demand compensation.

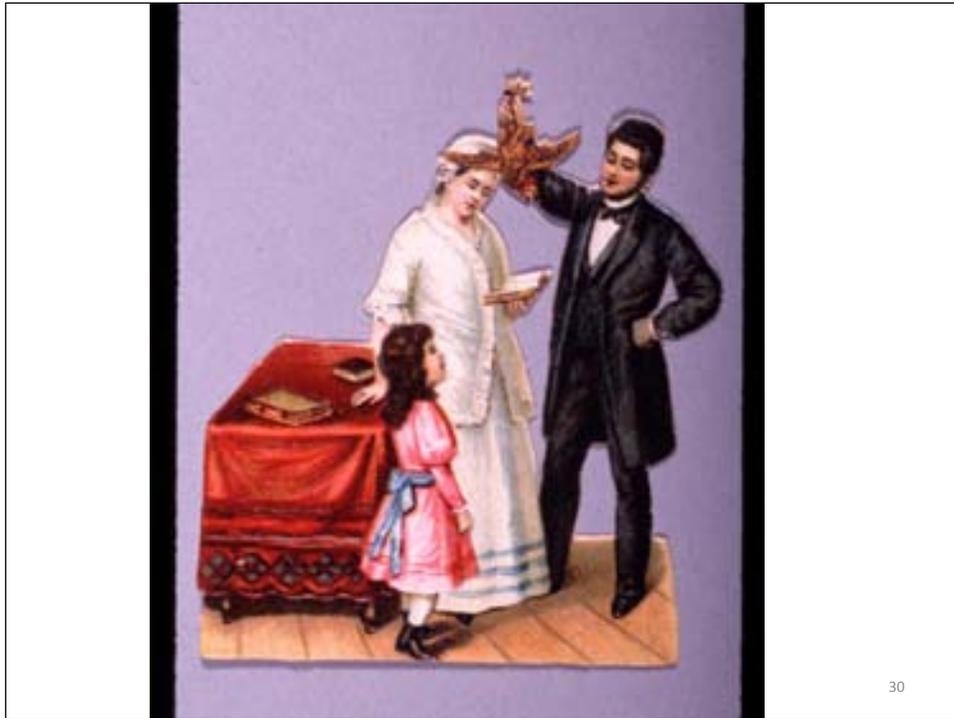
The number currently remains as high as 12 million to 27 million, though this is probably the smallest proportion of the world's population in history. Debt bondage of males and females and human trafficking of females and children are typical circumstances.

Evidence of slavery predates written records and has existed in many cultures. It is rare among hunter-gather populations requiring economic surpluses and a high population to be viable. Hence it has emerged during Neolithic agricultural societies.

Pagan slaves were good value since they had no holy day off.

Rituals

- Rituals both for religious and other purposes have existed since ancient times and in all cultures.
- They can help satisfy the emotional needs of practitioners, strengthen social bonds, provide social and moral education, demonstrate respect or submission, convey one's affiliation, help obtain social acceptance, indicate approval of some event—or, sometimes, just provide the pleasure of the ritual itself.



Lithography of a man holding fowl for Kapparot, late 19th/early 20th century. In modern times, is performed with a live chicken (rooster for men, hen for women), mainly in Haredi (conservative Orthodox Jews) communities. In other communities money may be substituted for the chicken and then given to charity. Animal rights groups have concerns. The ritual consists of swinging the live bird three times around the head symbolically transferring one's sins to the chicken or the coins. The chicken is then slaughtered and donated to the poor for consumption at the pre-fast meal before Yom Kippur.

Sacrifice and Animal Sacrifice

As we have seen, sacrifice or the offering of food or objects (typically valuables) or the lives of animals or people to the gods as an act of propitiation to gain favor or goodwill or for worship was common in mythology and religion.

Animism is a philosophical or spiritual idea that souls or spirits exist not only in humans but also in animals, plants, rocks and natural phenomena such as thunder, geographic features such as mountains and rivers, and other entities of the natural environment.

So what of animal sacrifice versus just meeting food needs of humans?

Animal sacrifice has turned up in almost all cultures, from the Hebrews to the Greeks and Romans and from the Aztecs to the Hindus.

Remnants of ancient rituals are apparent in many cultures, for example sacrificial lambs, Spanish bullfights and kapparos in Judaism. Ritual slaughter procedures like shechita (Kosher) or dabiha (Halal) in Judaism and Islam have a long history.



Demeter: Goddess of the Earth, Agriculture, Harvest, and Forests. Sister of Zeus, Hades, Hera (goddess of women and marriage). Children include Persephone, goddess of the harvest, who presided over grains, the fertility of the earth, the seasons, sanctity of marriage, the sacred law and the cycle of life and death.

Sex

Ancient cultures generally had one or more deities associated with sexual love, lust or sexuality.

Love deities in mythology include Xochiquetzal (Aztec); Aizen Myo-o (Buddhism); Astarte (Canaanite); Aine (Irish); Bes, Hathor and Basstet (Egyptian); Aphrodite, The Erotes including Eros (Greek); Kamadeva and Rati (Hindu); Inanna or Ishtar (Mesopotamian), Freyja (Norse) and Mami Wata (Yorba).

Fertility rites are rituals that reenact, either actually or symbolically, sexual acts and/or reproductive processes.

Ancient peoples wanted to ensure good fortune (in harvests or hunting or warfare or other sympathetic magic in which the forces of nature are to be influenced by the example acted out in the ritual).

Hieros gamos

Also known as Hierogamy (holy marriage), refers to a sexual ritual that plays out **between a god and goddess**. It is a harmonization of the opposites.

The notion does not presuppose actual performance in ritual, but is also used in purely symbolic or mythological context.

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Sacred prostitution was common in the ancient Near East as a form of “sacred marriage” between the king of a Sumerian city-state and the High Priestess of Inanna.

There were many shrines and temples. In Uruk the temple of Eanna meaning “house of heaven” was the greatest of these.

Hieros gamos was celebrated during the annual Akitu (New Year) ceremony, at the spring equinox.

The **spring ceremonies served a practical purpose**: since commoners frequently took this opportunity to have sex with their own spouses, it coordinated the births of children so that they would be born in the winter, when there was more time to take care of them.

Other mythologies tell of an ancient union of Demeter with Iasion, son of Zeus, enacted in a thrice-plowed furrow. They had intercourse as Demeter lay on her back in a freshly plowed furrow. When they rejoined the celebration, Zeus guessed what had happened because of the mud on Demeter's back, and promptly killed Iasion with a thunderbolt.

In Tartaric Buddhism of India, Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet, yab-yum is a sexual ritual of the male deity in sexual union with his female consort. Yab-yum is generally understood to represent the primordial (or mystical) union of wisdom and compassion.

Sacred Prostitution

Herodotus, Greek historian, stated: “The **foulest Babylonian custom** is that which compels every woman of the land to sit in the temple of Aphrodite and have intercourse with some stranger once in her life.”

“Once a woman has taken her place there, she does not go away to her home before some stranger has cast money into her lap, and had intercourse with her outside the temple.”

Sumerian and Akkadian **Entu** were top-ranking priestesses who were distinguished with special ceremonial attire and held equal status to High Priests. They owned property, transacted business, and initiated the *hieros gamos* ceremony with priests and kings.

In the Hebrew Bible, **Qedesha** were temple prostitutes usually associated with the goddess Asherah. The male equivalent of a *qedesha* is a **qadesh**. Hierodules served as assistants to the priestess.

In Southern India, **devadasi** (meaning a woman who serves god) performed rituals that included hierodulic (child) prostitution. The practice was outlawed in 1988 but still exists today according to Human Rights Watch.

The Mayans maintained several phallic religious cults, possibly involving homosexual temple prostitution. Aztec religious leaders were heterosexually celibate and engaged in homosexuality. The Inca sometimes dedicated young boys as temple prostitutes.



Sheela na Gig at [Kilpeck](#), England

Sexual Carvings

Sheela na Gig, stone carvings, are surviving visual representations found in Romanesque Christian churches scattered across Europe.

The figurative carvings are said to be there to drive off evil spirits. The concept may have survived from ancient forms of yoni (female genitalia) worship and sacred prostitution practiced in ancient goddess temples that the churches replaced.



A stone yoni found in Cát Tiên sanctuary, [Lam Dong, Vietnam](#). Yone is the Sanskrit word for female genitalia, the source of all life. Its counterpart is the lingam, the phallus. It is also *the divine passage, womb or sacred temple*.

Miraculous Births

Miraculous births are a **common motif in historical literature and religious texts**.

Stories often include miraculous conceptions and features such as intervention by a deity, supernatural elements, astronomical signs, hardship or, in the case of some mythologies, complex plots related to creation.

Miraculous births (with or without God's intervention) include Immanuel, Moses, Isaac born of sterile and aged Sarah; John the Baptist son Zachariah, an old man, and his wife Elizabeth who was sterile; and the historical Jesus, born of Mary, who learns from the angel Gabriel that the holy spirit will "come upon her" and that nothing will be impossible with God.

Other stories include Marduk in the Akkadian "Creation Epic"; the Hindu avatar concept of descending deities and Buddha's appearance in the mother as a shining gem; Krishna descending into the womb of Devaki; Perseus as the son of Danae (who was locked away to prevent her having children) then impregnated by Zeus in the form of a shower of gold; Vedas Mithra born from a rock; and Zoroaster's birth foretold from the beginning of time and born conceived by a shaft of light in the womb of his virgin mother, Dughdova.

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And yet these are veritable fables, which have led to the invention of such stories concerning a man whom they regarded as possessing greater wisdom and power than the multitude, and as having received the beginning of his corporeal substance from better and diviner elements than others, because they thought that this was appropriate to persons who were too great to be human beings.

Origen, Against Celsus, Book 1, Chapter 37. Pagan Origins of the Christian Myth:

The way the ancients figured it, to have a god-man on Earth, a story needed two things. 1. A source for His **Godness**, and 2. A source for His **humanity**.

Ancient books are chock a block with stories of divine men. Over and over those stories include details showing exactly these two details. Where'd the divinity come from? *A God*. Where'd His humanity come from? *A woman*. Just as the fact of a miracle is evidence that a God is at work, the **-divinity-came-from-a God** facts in these stories were evidence that the godman was different from a regular human.

Analogous stories involving Plato, Alexander the Great, Romulus, Melanippe, Auge, Antiope, Antiope, and Augustus.

Pagan Practices and Issues

- Money changers at temples, vendors, taxes on sacrifices, cost or economic loss of sacrifices.
- Animal sacrifices, blood and guts, fat of calves, blood of bulls and goats, reeking blood that smoked from holocausts.
- Buying and selling of priesthoods, qualifications of practitioners, lucrative posts, hereditary rights that could be sublet.

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Pagan Practices and Issues 2

- Hierarchies of gods. Many gods and cults— imperial, provincial, city or estate. Mysteries, philosophies, dreams, spells, divinations, magic and chicanery.
- Social wickedness, holy prostitution, effigies of pagan gods, idols.
- Fear of gods leading to persecution of atheists.



Casting out the money changers by [Giotto](#), 14th century

Presumably the historical Jesus traveled to Jerusalem where he expels the money changers from the Temple.

The money changers were accused of turning the Temple into a den of thieves through their commercial activities. The courtyard of the temple was described as being filled with livestock namely sheep and oxen. The money changers were changing Greek and Roman money for Jewish and Tyrian money. Also expelled were sellers of doves who were purchased by the poor since they could not afford grander animals. The Temple was also a scene of reconstruction, one estimate is the year was 27 to 29 CE when Jesus might have in his mid 30's.



6th BC representation of an animal sacrifice scene in Corinth

Some villages in Greece also sacrifice animals to Orthodox saints in a practice known as [kourbània](#). Sacrifice of a lamb, or less commonly a rooster, is a common practice in [Armenian Church](#). This tradition, called [matagh](#), is believed to stem from pre-Christian pagan rituals.

Many Jewish sources discuss the deeper meaning behind *korbanot*. For example, [Sefer Hachinuch](#) explains that an individual bringing an animal sacrifice for a sin understands that he personally should have been sacrificed as punishment for the rebellion against [God](#) inherent his the sin, but God mercifully accepts the sacrifice in his or her place. Furthermore, it is considered fitting that an animal is used as a sacrifice because at the moment of sin, the individual in question disregarded his elevated human soul, effectively acting as an animal.

The sacrificed animal in ancient times was killed according to Jewish ritual slaughter, was often cooked and eaten by the offerer, with parts given to the priests and parts burned on the Temple mizbe'ah (altar).

From a practical point of view sacrificial animal slaughter had to be noisy, smoky, bloody and somewhat chaotic which could have affronted local religious practitioners.

From a practical point of view animal slaughter



[Dante](#) speaks to [Pope Nicholas III](#), committed to the [Inferno](#) for his simony, in [Gustave Doré's wood engraving](#), 1861. (portrait of the [Third Bolgia](#) of the Eighth Circle of Hell)

Simony (pron. [¹saɪ.mə.ni:] or [¹si.mə.ni:]) is the act of paying for [sacraments](#) and consequently for [holy offices](#) or positions in the hierarchy of a church, named after [Simon Magus](#) (Also, Simon the Sorcerer), who appears in the [Acts of the Apostles](#) 8:9-24. Simon Magus offers the disciples of [Jesus](#), [Peter](#) and [John](#), payment so that anyone on whom he would [place his hands](#) would receive the power of the [Holy Spirit](#). This is the origin of the term *simony*^[1] but it also extends to other forms of trafficking for money in "spiritual things".^{[2][3]} Simony was also one of the important issues during the [Investiture Controversy](#).

With the emergence of Christianity a variety of economic arrangements developed regarding priesthoods. Greek priesthoods involved pedigree and wealth, both were basic requirements for attaining office. Lack of training or qualifications and part-time status were concerns. For women only citizen wives and daughters could qualify. Clan "gentilician" priesthoods and open "democratic" priesthoods were granted. Hellenized Asia Minor developed institutions including the sale of priesthoods, the ability to inherit priesthoods and the practice of buying priesthoods for ones children.



[Mosaic](#) from [Pompeii](#) depicting masked characters in a scene from a play: two women consult a witch

Roman times around the Common Era:

Romans could offer cult to any deity or combination of deities as long as it did not offend the *mos maiorum* the “custom of the ancestors,” that is Roman tradition.

Rome’s oldest form of religion, religion of Numa, was attributed to Rome’s divine ancestors, founders, and kings (based on myths and lesser deities).

Priesthoods were originally the preserve of the patricians, the hereditary elite, but in recent times were open to the plebeians, along with political office.

Some religions were embraced officially, others merely tolerated. A few were condemned as alien hysteria, magic, or superstition. Attempts, sometimes brutal, were made periodically to suppress religionists who seemed to threaten traditional morality and unity.

In the eyes of conservative Romans, the Dionysian mysteries encouraged illicit behavior and subversion; Christianity was superstition, or atheism, or both; druidism employed human sacrifice. There were gods of the upper heavens, gods of the underworld and a myriad of lesser deities.

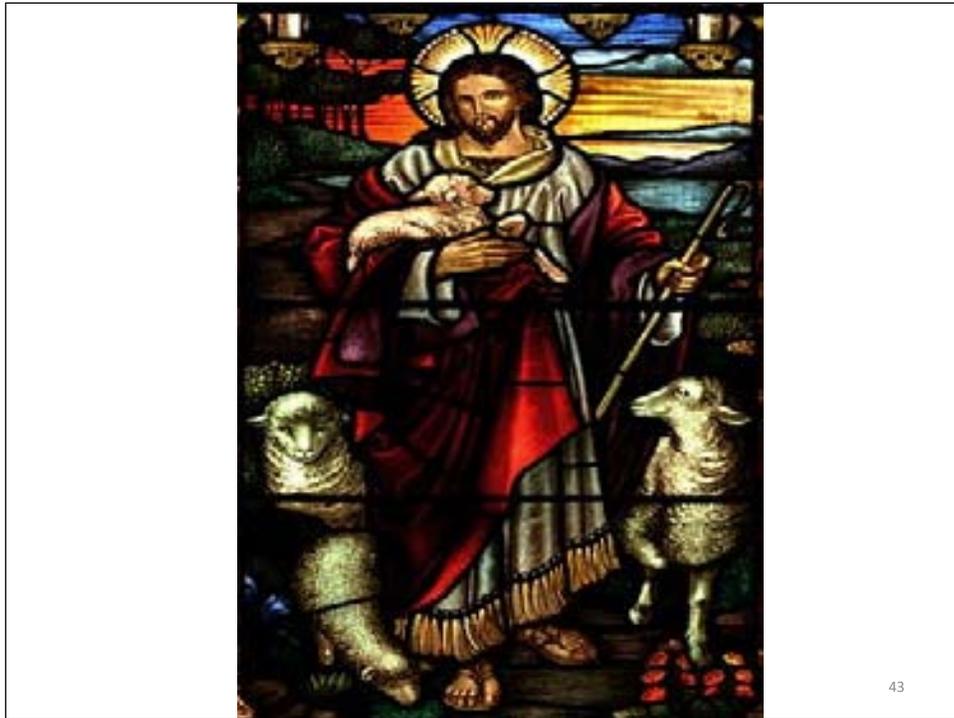
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The impressive, costly, and centralized rites to the deities of the Roman state were vastly outnumbered in everyday life by commonplace religious observances pertaining to domestic and personal deities, the patron divinities of Rome's various neighborhoods and communities, and the unofficial, local, and personal cults that characterized Roman religion.

Roman calendars show roughly forty annual religious festivals. Some lasted several days, others a single day or less; sacred days outnumbered "non-sacred" days. The meaning and origin of many festivals baffled even Rome's intellectual elite. Sacrifices could be expensive and a burden.

Many individuals sought to divine the future through magic, seek vengeance with help from "private diviners". Curse tablets (binding spells) were in use as was magic papyri and so called "voodoo dolls".



Jesus as [Good Shepherd](#) ([stained glass](#) at [St John's Ashfield](#)).

Most critical historians agree that Jesus was a [Jew](#) who was regarded as a teacher and [healer](#), that he [was baptized](#) by [John the Baptist](#), and was [crucified](#) in [Jerusalem](#) on the orders of the [Roman Prefect](#) of [Judaea](#), [Pontius Pilate](#), on the charge of [sedition](#) against the [Roman Empire](#).^[17] Critical [Biblical](#) scholars and historians have offered competing descriptions of Jesus as a self-described [Messiah](#), as the leader of an apocalyptic movement, as an itinerant sage, as a charismatic healer, and as the founder of an independent religious movement. Most contemporary scholars of the [historical Jesus](#) consider him to have been an independent, charismatic founder of a Jewish restoration movement, anticipating a future apocalypse.^[18] Other prominent scholars, however, contend that Jesus' "[Kingdom of God](#)" meant radical personal and social transformation instead of a future apocalypse.

Some historians and scholars conclude Yeshua bar Yahosf ("Joshua, son of Joseph, son of Jocab") was born around 6BC in the spring of the year in the countryside near Galilee. Born as one of possibly six children of a middle class family with funds sufficient for his education, literacy and learning Greek (3-4% of children), his parents were general contractors a supportive family. Yeshua likely married, was clean shaven with short hair and was short.

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A charismatic speaker, he was effective in a ministry of 12 to 15 years, had a large and diverse group of followers (estimated at 5,000 to 10,000) who rivaled any of the contemporaneous religious groups in Israel at that time. Women were steadfast followers of his teaching, men (particularly disciples of which there were hundreds) were unpredictable.

As a result of incurring the wrath of Roman officials in protesting some of the religious practices of the times (likely over several years), he was beaten, but not severely, tied to a cross with other criminals and crucified. His body likely was left for the beasts and his remains buried in a common grave consistent with the common practices of the time.

The "Prince of Peace" likely had a harsher side that could involve violent actions as well as vindictive and unforgiving actions. In the end he chose peace over violence, not that he was without any violent impulses.

Post Common Era, Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages

- Saint Paul and Christianity
- Persecutions
- Mythology in the Middle Ages

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Armstrong argues that after the Axial period that the major intellectual, spiritual, and social revolutions that forced peoples to revise their mythology slowed for more than a millennium. Hindu's feel more at home in the archetypal or repeating pattern of myth. Buddhism is a deeply psychological religion and finds mythology very congenial. In Confucianism, ritual has always been more important than mythical narratives. But Abrahamic religions (Jews, Christians, and Muslims) believe that their god is active in history.

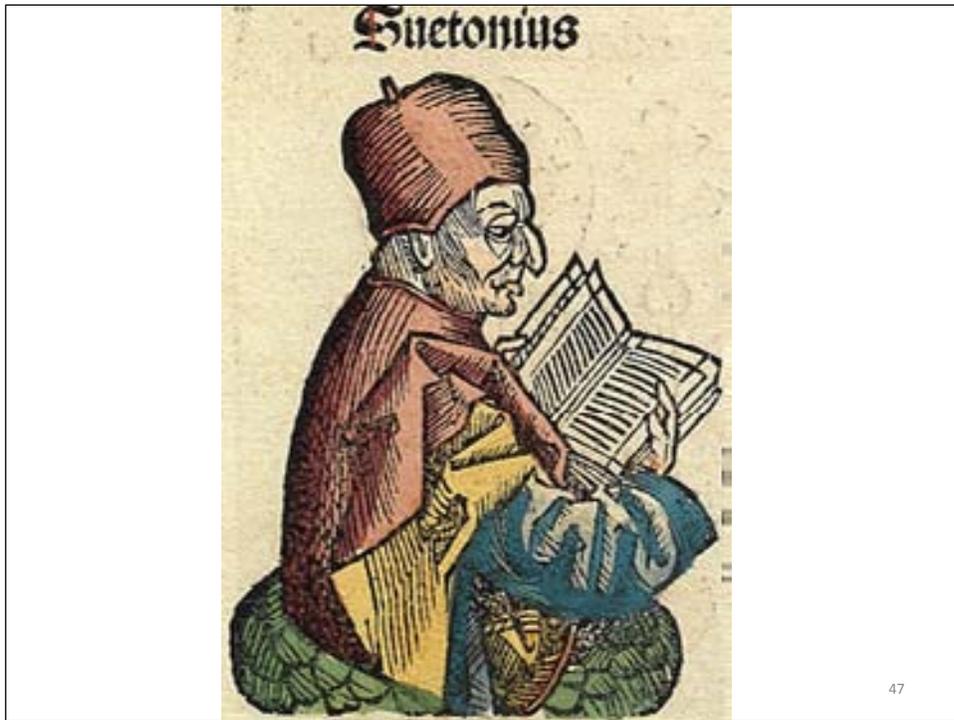
With respect to the Western World, Judaism seemed antagonistic towards the myths of other nations, but yet would draw upon these foreign stories to express the Jewish vision. One of these is Christianity. Jesus and his first disciples were Jewish and strongly rooted in Jewish spirituality, as was St. Paul, who can be said to have transformed Jesus into a mythical figure. Note: Jesus was a real historical being who was executed. But unless historical events are mythologized it cannot become the source of religious inspiration. A myth has to happen once but also happens all the time. It has to speak to current times and contemporary worships otherwise it will remain a unique unrepeatable incident, or even a historical freak.

St. Paul was not as much interested in Jesus's teachings, which he rarely quotes, or in the early details of his earthly life. What was important was the "mystery" of his

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death and resurrection. Paul had transformed Jesus into the timeless, mythical hero who dies and is raised to a new life. After his crucifixion, Jesus had been exalted by "God" to a uniquely high status. But everybody who went through the initiation of baptism entered into Jesus's death and would share his new life. Jesus was no longer a mere historical figure but a "spiritual reality" by means of ritual and ethical discipline of living a selfless life. They knew that the myth was true, not because of historical evidence but because they had experienced spiritual transformation. Thus the death and "raising up" of Jesus was a myth: it had happened once to Jesus, and now was now happening all the time.



Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, commonly known as **Suetonius** (ca. 69/75 – after 130), was a [Roman historian](#) belonging to the [equestrian order](#) in the early [Imperial era](#).

The first documented case of imperially-supervised persecution of the Christians in the [Roman Empire](#) begins with [Nero](#) (37–68). In 64 AD, a [great fire broke out in Rome](#), destroying portions of the city and economically devastating the Roman population. Nero himself was suspected as the arsonist by [Suetonius](#),^[8] claiming he played the lyre and sang the 'Sack of Ilium' during the fires. In his *Annals*, [Tacitus](#) (who claimed Nero was in Antium at the time of the fire's outbreak), stated that "*to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians [or Chrestians^[9]] by the populace*" (Tacit. *Annals* XV, see [Tacitus on Jesus](#)). Suetonius, later to the period, does not mention any persecution after the fire, but in a previous paragraph unrelated to the fire, mentions punishments inflicted on Christians, defined as men following a new and malefic superstition. Suetonius however does not specify the reasons for the punishment, he just listed the fact together with other abuses put down by Nero.^[10]



The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer, by [Jean-Léon Gérôme](#) (1883).

The persecutions culminated with [Diocletian](#) and [Galerius](#) at the end of the third and beginning of the 4th century. The [Great Persecution](#) is considered the largest. Beginning with a series of four edicts banning Christian practices and ordering the imprisonment of Christian clergy, the persecution intensified until all Christians in the empire were commanded to sacrifice to the gods or face immediate execution. Over 20,000 Christians are thought to have died during Diocletian's reign. However, as [Diocletian](#) zealously persecuted Christians in the Eastern part of the empire, his co-emperors in the West did not follow the edicts and so Christians in Gaul, Spain, and Britannia were virtually unmolested.

This persecution lasted, until [Constantine I](#) came to power in 313 and legalized Christianity. It was not until [Theodosius I](#) in the later 4th century that Christianity would become the official religion of the Empire. Between these two events [Julian II](#) temporarily restored the traditional Roman religion and established broad religious tolerance renewing Pagan and Christian hostilities.



A [Migration Period](#) Germanic gold [bracteate](#) featuring a depiction of a bird, horse, and stylized head wearing a [Suebian knot](#) sometimes theorized to represent Germanic god [Wōden](#) and what would later become [Sleipnir](#) and [Hugin or Munin](#) in [Germanic mythology](#), later attested in the form of [Norse mythology](#). The [runic](#) inscription includes the religious term [alu](#).

The **Migration Period**, also called the **Barbarian Invasions** (and in [German](#): *Völkerwanderung* "migration of peoples"), was a period of [human migration](#) in [Europe](#) that occurred from c. 300 to 700 AD.^[1] This period marked the transition from [Late Antiquity](#) to the [Early Middle Ages](#). Migrations were catalyzed by profound changes both within the [Roman Empire](#) and on its "[barbarian](#) frontier." The migrants with the most lasting influence were the German tribes, such as [Goths](#), [Vandals](#), [Lombards](#), [Suebi](#), [Frisii](#), and [Franks](#), although important roles were also played by [Huns](#), [Avars](#), [Slavs](#), [Bulgars](#), and [Alans](#).

Woden or **Wodan** ([Old English](#): *Wōden*,^[1] [Old High German](#): *Wōdan*,^[2] [Old Saxon](#): *Uuōden*^[3]) is a major deity of [Anglo-Saxon](#) and [Continental](#) Germanic polytheism. Together with his [Norse](#) counterpart^[4] [Odin](#), Woden represents a development of the [Proto-Germanic](#) god *[Wōdanaz](#).

Though less is known about the [pre-Christian](#) religion of Anglo-Saxon and continental Germanic peoples than is known about Norse paganism, Woden is attested in [English](#), [German](#), and [Dutch toponyms](#) as well as in various texts and pieces of archeological evidence from the [Early Middle Ages](#).



An Anglo-Saxon parade helmet from [Sutton Hoo](#) (7th century AD).

The **Early Middle Ages** was the period of [European history](#) lasting from the 5th century to approximately 1000. The *Early [Middle Ages](#)* followed the [decline](#) of the [Western Roman Empire](#) and preceded the [High Middle Ages](#) (c. 1001–1300). The period saw a continuation of trends begun during late [classical antiquity](#), including population decline, especially in urban centres, a decline of trade, and [increased immigration](#). The period has been labelled the "[Dark Ages](#)", a characterization highlighting the relative paucity of literary and cultural output from this time, especially in [Western Europe](#). However, the [Eastern Roman Empire](#), or [Byzantine Empire](#), continued to survive, and in the 7th century the [Islamic caliphates](#) conquered swaths of formerly Roman territory.

Many of these trends were reversed later in the period. In 800 the title of [emperor](#) was revived in Western Europe by [Charlemagne](#), whose [Carolingian Empire](#) greatly affected later European social structure and history. Europe experienced a return to systematic agriculture in the form of the [feudal system](#), which introduced such innovations as [three-field planting](#) and the heavy plow. [Barbarian](#) migration stabilized in much of [Europe](#), though the north was greatly affected by the [Viking expansion](#).