

Social Life in Paleolithic Age

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Nearly all of our knowledge of Paleolithic human culture and way of life comes from archaeology and ethnographic comparisons to modern hunter-gatherer cultures. The economy of a typical Paleolithic society was a hunter-gatherer economy. Humans hunted wild animals for meat and gathered food, firewood, and materials for their tools, clothes, or shelters.

Way of Life

- Human population density was very low, around only one person per square mile. This was most likely due to low body fat, infanticide, women regularly engaging in intense endurance exercise, late weaning of infants, and a nomadic lifestyle. Like contemporary hunter-gatherers, Paleolithic humans enjoyed an abundance of leisure time unparalleled in both Neolithic farming societies and modern industrial societies. At the end of the Paleolithic, specifically the Middle or Upper Paleolithic, humans began to produce works of art such as cave paintings, rock art and jewellery and began to engage in religious behavior such as burial and ritual.

Economic Life: Food Habits

- The types of tools and bones available at habitation sites suggest that large animals like bison, mammoths, horses, wild boars, reindeer, various species of deer and cattle were hunted along with smaller animals.
- The hunt of large animals was a group activity and confined to men folk.
- The hunted animals were to be shared by the entire group.
- Meat was consumed cooked, grilled or baked on fire.
- The new item in animal food now added was fish and other water animals.
- They also ate roots and fruits as tools for extracting roots and storage of plant food is also evident.

Human habitation

- The Lower Paleolithic people did not have permanent settlement. Habitation sites indicate that caves and sites were occupied repeatedly by different groups inhabiting these regions.
- During Upper Paleolithic period human made habitations and settlements are numerous as compared to the earlier period.
- Habitation sites were chosen near water bodies, rivers and ponds as also near places where prey animals were available.
- The construction of huts were made with wooden frames with covering made of skin.
- Bones, stones and mud were also used for house construction.

Use of Fire

- Fire was used by the Lower Paleolithic hominins Homo erectus and *Homo ergaster* as early as 300,000 to 1.5 million years ago and possibly even earlier by the early Lower Paleolithic (Oldowan) hominin *Homo habilis* or by robust Australopithecines such as Paranthropus. However, the use of fire only became common in the societies of the following Middle Stone Age and Middle Paleolithic. Use of fire reduced mortality rates and provided protection against predators. Early hominids may have begun to cook their food as early as the Lower Paleolithic (c. 1.9 million years ago) or at the latest in the early Middle Paleolithic (c. 250,000 years ago).

Burial of dead

- During the middle paleolithic age, strong evidence is available to suggest that the dead were disposed off or buried by the surviving members of groups.
- In Shanidar Cave in Iraq a burial, which is around 60,000 years old has been discovered.

Domestication of Animals

- During the lower paleolithic period, there is no evidence either of agriculture or of domestication of animals. But the dog was domesticated during this period which was probably an asset in hunting operations.

Discovery of Raft

- The Lower Paleolithic *Homo erectus* possibly invented rafts (c. 840,000 – c. 800,000 BP) to travel over large bodies of water, which may have allowed a group of *Homo erectus* to reach the island of Flores and evolve into the small hominin *Homo floresiensis*.

Sculpture and Painting

- Upper Paleolithic humans produced works of art such as cave paintings, Venus figurines, animal carvings, and rock paintings. Upper Paleolithic art can be divided into two broad categories: figurative art such as cave paintings that clearly depicts animals (or more rarely humans); and nonfigurative, which consists of shapes and symbols.

Music

- Upper Paleolithic (and possibly Middle Paleolithic) humans used flute-like bone pipes as musical instruments, and music may have played a large role in the religious lives of Upper Paleolithic hunter-gatherers. As with modern hunter-gatherer societies, music may have been used in ritual or to help induce trances. In particular, it appears that animal skin drums may have been used in religious events by Upper Paleolithic shamans, as shown by the remains of drum-like instruments from some Upper Paleolithic graves of shamans and the ethnographic record of contemporary hunter-gatherer shamanic and ritual practices.

Religion and Beliefs

- Some scientists have proposed that Middle Paleolithic societies such as Neanderthal societies may also have practiced the earliest form of totemism or animal worship, in addition to their (presumably religious) burial of the dead.
- The existence of anthropomorphic images and half-human, half-animal images in the Upper Paleolithic may further indicate that Upper Paleolithic humans were the first people to believe in a pantheon of gods or supernatural beings.
- Religion was possibly apotropaic; specifically, it may have involved sympathetic magic. The Venus figurines, which are abundant in the Upper Paleolithic archaeological record.



THANK YOU