

## 17. Religious Beliefs and Practices as defining Features in Small-Scale Hunting-Gathering Societies

### 16203 - Ritual aspects of life in the Jomon period in Japan

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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The main types of activity of the Japanese archipelago population during the Jomon period were hunting and food gathering. There is some knowledge of the primitive forms of farming in Jomon culture. Different activities were closely connected with different ritual aspects: hunting along with use of a certain 'magic practice', for example. Making ceramic pots and clay figurines was also part of ritual life of the Jomon people. Death and funeral had their own specific ceremonies. The most famous Jomon vessels are called "flamed style pottery" used undoubtedly in ritual practice. Clay figurines "*dogu*" represent a special part of the first beliefs of the Jomon people. *Dogu* could be used in healing ceremonies, family cults, funeral ceremonies and fertility rituals. The emergence of farming was the main reason for the appearance of new kinds of rituals. In the Middle and Late Jomon periods, there were some quite big sites and these are complexes of settlements, cemeteries and ritual places, such as the Nukazuka, Miyagi prefecture, or the Tochikura, Niigata prefecture, Tateishi, Iwate prefecture and so on. As ritual settings could be considered large spaces, usually in the center of a settlement. In these spaces were found hundreds of *dogu* fragments. It's important that *dogu* figurines were broken intentionally. So it can be supposed that Jomon people held a special ceremony in this part of a settlement. During this ceremony, it seems, Jomon broke figurines and sowed them into the soil. *Dogu* figurines are likely to have been seen to provide fertility for the ground, society and nature. This ceremony could be connected with the origins of Indonesian "Hainuwele myth", telling of how edible plants were descended from the body of a sacrificed girl. It may be that Jomon people believed in some deity which could be a predecessor of Ohogetsuhime-no-kami, known from Japanese mythology. (This research has been supported by the Russian Humanitarian Foundation, project №140100017)

## **16189 - Many Forest Cosmologies: Bongando perceptions of and relationship to their environment**

Presentation type: Oral presentation

**Author(s):** *Alcayna-Stevens, Lys (University of Cambridge, Cambridge, Un. Kingdom / Ver Königr.)*

This paper examines Bongando people's perceptions of and relationship to their environment, in the context of increasing interest in their forests by environmental conservation NGOs. The Bongando are a multi-subsistence people who live between the Lopori and Tshuapa rivers in the rainforest of the Congo Basin. They plant manioc gardens, but also spend a large portion of their time hunting, fishing and gathering in their ancestral forests, including lengthy periods of time in forest camps during the caterpillar-gathering season. The paper reconsiders Bird-David's 'giving environment' and examines the multiplicity of relationships Bongando have with their forests; at times considering the ways in which their ancestors continue to feed them through the forest and good fortune – often a reciprocal relationship in which they must also feed their ancestors or other spirit allies with offerings; at other times placing emphasis on their own cunning in the forest, and on their powers of capture both in the visible and the invisible world; or on occasions reframing the forest within the narratives of value used by foreign NGOs, donors and REDD+ carbon credit projects. Descola's concept of 'analogism' is used as a lens through which to explore the resonances between different beings and perspectives in Bongando forest cosmologies.

## 16172 - Song in central Australian Aboriginal societies

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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Drawing on linguistic and musicological analyses of songs belonging to Arandic, Warlpiri and Warumungu-speaking peoples, we find that songs, the bedrock of Central Australian religious practices, show a high level of ritualisation and are remarkably fixed, while their interpretation is in some cases fluid. As in many hunter-gatherer societies, Australian music is primarily vocal and integrates with other artistic modes of expression: poetry, narrative, dance and visual art (what Medicine (1999) refers to as 'the expressive elements of culture'). The high mobility and little material culture of people in this region contribute to the great value placed on songs as the quintessential repository of history, law, topographical, ecological and cultural knowledge. Also common to many hunter-gatherer societies is the association of song with particular functions. One of Australian song's most well known functions is to punctuate the creation stories that traverse and explain the known world; hence the term 'songlines' (Lee & Daly 1999:4). The word for 'song' in many Arandic languages is *akerte*, meaning 'tip', perhaps reflecting the geographic dimension of these narratives. Songs can also be used to improve ill-health, bring about rain, increase the abundance of particular species, attract or spurn lovers, or improve one's chances of winning in a fight or game (Koch & Turpin 2008:169). The majority of central Australian songs are inherited patrilineally by land-holding groups (a unit larger than the band) (Myers 1999), along with the estate lands and their associated totems and narratives. Predicated on the existence, rights and responsibilities of these groups and their relationship to one another, melody and body designs become emblematic of the land-holding groups to which they belong; a sort of audio-visual equivalent to the tartan patterns of Scottish clans. Just as hunting and gathering is now an adjunct to the market economy (Morton 1999), today songs are mostly performed in new contexts. Here, as in other parts of the world, performances 'dovetail with ecological concerns and political action' (Medicine 1999), occurring at festivals, legal settings in relation to land, and public events where they are a statement of land-based identity and Aboriginal support. Given the massive social upheaval to Aboriginal societies since colonisation, it is perhaps surprising to find that the widespread Aboriginal ideology of songs as 'unchanging' (Clunies Ross 1987) is supported by musical and linguistic analysis of songs over time. Fluidity lies instead in certain performative details allowing adaptation to context, and in interpretation of their provenance and ownership. While this was probably always the case (Tonkinson 1978), the highly endangered status of songs as a result of colonisation has no doubt contributed a level of uncertainty to this social aspect of songs.

## **16157 - Cannibals in East Siberia: From cosmology to contemporary metaphors**

Presentation type: Oral presentation

**Author(s):** *Brandisauskas, Donatas (Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania / Litauen)*

In the post-Soviet environment of shortage and competition, the indigenous Evenki of Zabaikal Region (Russia) have experienced various constraints imposed on them by the state, industries as well as overhunting and poaching of taiga territories by outsiders. The Evenki also encounter constant misfortunes, tragic death and illnesses caused by the activities of evil humans and non-human beings. Vernacular notions of cannibals (*arenki*, *mangi* and *diaptar*) found in many early reports are also used by Evenki describing the character and nature of different evil beings (humans and non-humans) that reindeer herders and hunters encounter in the taiga. In my presentation, I will demonstrate how ideas linked to cannibalism are creatively used as powerful tools describing different human and non-human identities as well as morality. Thereby, I will show how recent political and historical events, including Soviet repression as well as contemporary social challenges, can be seen reflected and incorporated into the local animistic cosmology and storytelling of the Evenki.

## **16057 - Re-envisioning the religious perspectives of early northern hunters: From cosmology to spirituality?**

Presentation type: Oral presentation

**Author(s):** Damm, Charlotte (*The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsøe, Norway / Norwegen*)

Religious beliefs and practices have never loomed large in archaeological interpretations of early Holocene hunter-gatherers. However, the vast increase in the discovery of rock art sites in northern Fennoscandia over the last 3-4 decades has also led to considerable interest in the religious aspects of these. Dating predominantly between 5000-2000 cal BC the rock art corpus now consists of close to 300 sites, the largest of which has more than 6000 individual motifs, mostly large mammals, human 'stick figures' and boats. Recent research has typically linked the motives to in particular shamanism and animism and to a lesser degree to totemism and hunting magic. The discovery that some panels may be interpreted as cosmological narratives, and the recognition that there are significant similarities across a large geographical region (from the Atlantic coast to the Onega Lake in Russia) may implicitly suggest the existence of a coherent cosmology. While variations in motifs, execution and locations between different geographical regions are well known the consequences of this for ritual practices are only rarely discussed. This paper will argue for diversity in time and space and challenge the present Nordic rock art research by investigating an approach that looks beyond the rock art, incorporating other archaeological remains such as slate artefacts, clay idols and red ochre graves. In particular the paper will explore alternatives to a fixed and coherent cosmology, opening up the possibility of many overlapping, but independent ritual practices. This may suggest that while certain practices and spiritual perceptions were transferred between regions these were at the same time reinterpreted locally.

## 15940 - Hunter-Gatherers and the Origins of Religion

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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Religious behavior is unique to humans. The universality of religion in human society points to a deep evolutionary past, suggesting that religious beliefs and behaviors may have emerged before the appearance of the first modern human foragers. Recent studies of the evolution of religion have focused on the cognitive underpinnings of belief in supernatural agents, the role of ritual in communicating cooperation, and the relationship of morally punishing gods for the growth and stabilization of human society. However, the specific traits of nascent religiosity have remained unknown. Until the advent of agriculture about 12,000 years ago, all human societies foraged for wild foods by hunting, gathering and fishing. Little attention has been paid to the religion of hunter-gatherers whose religious beliefs and behaviors developed during the prior 99% of human history. Although ethnographic hunter-gatherers are not direct analogues of those early societies, they can provide a window onto traits selected for in the Pleistocene, including the origins of religion. Here we reconstruct ancestral states for seven characters describing traits of religiosity in a global sample of ethnographic hunter-gatherers using maximum likelihood methods on a time-calibrated phylogenetic supertree, based on published genetic phylogenies and linguistic classification. We test for correlated evolution of characters to investigate possible co-evolution of characters and infer patterns of trait emergence. We show that probably the oldest traits of religion, shared by the most recent common ancestor of present-day hunter-gatherers, were Animism, Belief in an Afterlife, and possibly the concept of a single creator deity or High God, albeit one that is not active in human affairs.

## 15807 - The 'New Animism' and the San

Presentation type: Oral presentation

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Despite resurrecting its central concept from one of the discipline's Founding Fathers, the so-called "new animism" is a very much current branch of symbolic anthropology (amongst scholars such as Philippe Descola, Eduardo Vivieros de Castro, Tim Ingold, Rane Willerslev and Nurit Bird-David). With its focus on the rituals and beliefs and modes of thought specifically of small-scale hunters, hunter-gatherers, hunter-herders and hunter-horticulturalists, it is concerned with how humans conceive of their being in relation to non-human beings, in particular animals. Studies of the relational ontologies of such peoples in Amazonia, sub-arctic America, Siberia and south Asia have revealed a number of commonalities, chief of them human-non-human ontological instability and continuity, and deriving from it, the attribution of personhood to non-humans. This suggests that a human-animal relational framework may be integral to the belief systems of hunter-gatherers and peoples like them. African hunter-gatherers have been excluded from the purview of the researchers who work with the relational ontology paradigm. The paper looks at one of them, the San of southern Africa, in order to examine the extent to which this hunter-gatherer group falls in line with the new animism schema.