

Ancient Afterlife

Europe's prehistoric hunter-gatherers may have practiced human sacrifice, a new study by Vincenzo Formicola of the University of Pisa, Italy claims.

Investigating a collection of graves from the Upper Paleolithic (about 26,000 to 8,000 BC), archaeologists found several that contained pairs or even groups of people with rich burial offerings and decoration. Many of the remains were young or had deformities, such as dwarfism.

The diversity of the individuals buried together and the special treatment they received could be a sign of ritual killing.

Most of the hunter-gatherers who lived in Europe during the Upper Paleolithic buried their dead, and their graves—numerous and usually filled with offerings such as beads and ivory—are considered a good source of information on what they thought about spirituality and the afterlife.

Two or more people were occasionally buried together if they died in an accident or during times of disease, a cross-section of the graves reveal, however, that many of the multiple burials were more common than thought and had special circumstances surrounding the individuals.

"All these multiple burials (one out of five) can hardly be the result of natural events ... [and] human sacrifices could represent an additional explanation,"

For example, at a site in the Moravian region of the Czech Republic, three Paleolithic youngsters, one of whom was afflicted with congenital dysplasia, were discovered lying in unusual formation. The remains of an adolescent dwarf lying next to another female in Italy, as well as a pair of pre-teens in Russia treated to an elaborate grave offering of ivory beads, were also found.

"The time required to prepare all these ivory goods is enormous," Formicola said. "It was made for a ceremony and it was made specifically for the children. This leads [one] to wonder if this ceremony was foreseen long before the children's death."

The mix and match of ages and sexes buried in each grave indicates that they were put together for a reason and not just due to a common disease, said Formicola.

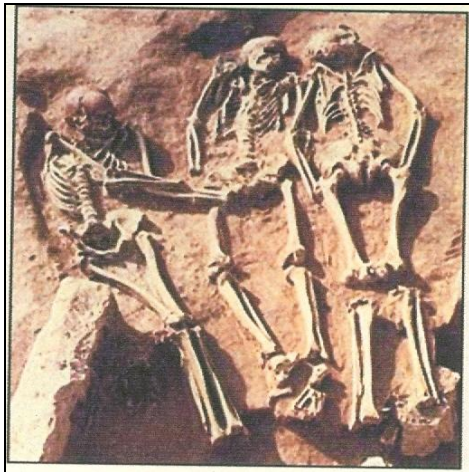
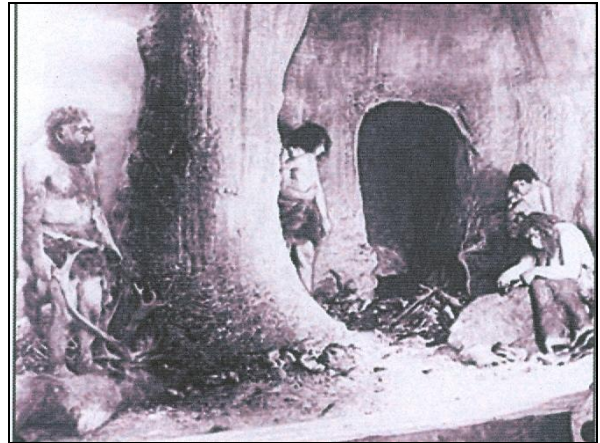
"These individuals may have been feared, hated or revered," said Formicola. "We do not know whether this adolescent received special burial treatment in spite of being a dwarf or precisely because he was a dwarf."

Human sacrifices have never been apparent in the archaeological record of Upper Paleolithic Europe. The new findings could mean the hunter-gatherers were more advanced than once thought.

Study the attached photographs and answer the questions that follow:

From what time period of man's history does this picture belong?

Identify two events taking place in this picture



These skeletons were deliberately buried in this position. Why do you think this was the case?
