

## DEEP ROOTS: MYTHOLOGY AND US



### Albon Elfed: Giving Thanks at Mabon

- Wednesday is the Autumnal Equinox. The Druid Albon Elfed (The Light of Water) celebration.
- It is a time of 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. Fruitfulness of the land being the result of their mutual-ness, the bounty of the harvest will be brought in and stored against winter and for the dark times.
- In Welsh mythology, this is the day of the year when the God of Darkness, Goronwy, defeats the God of Light, LLew, and takes his place as King of the World.
- In Japan to this day the equinox is celebrated by visits to the graves of family members at which time offerings of flowers and food are made and incense is burned.

### Mea'n Fo'mhair

- The Druid celebration honors the Green Man, The God of the Forest, by offering libations to trees: ciders, wines and herbs.
- 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" are escorting Welsh souls to the underground.
- 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.

## The Horned God of the Wicca

- 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.
- 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 Wednesday, September 23, should be a busy day starting at 3:09 a.m.

## Your Instructor

- 75 years young
- Economist:
  - Human nature is predictable
  - Self interest, profit, control as human motivators
  - Sociology, human psychology, behavior
- 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.
- Campbell, Joseph with Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. Six PBS programs, 1980s.
- 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.
- Other material from the Internet, primarily Wikipedia.
- Other references that I will mention via slides.

## General Outline

- Mythology, creation stories, early beliefs, legends and a seemingly confusing set of gods are common to all cultures. Around the world peoples enjoy and perform rituals at major holidays and celebrations (both religious and secular) and in their daily lives that have their roots in mythology and paganism. We will attempt to put this into perspective.

## General Comment

- Mythology and paganism seem to form the roots of most of our spiritual and philosophical thought through the ages. Understanding these deep roots might just make us a bit more tolerant and understanding in today's world, which seems to be characterized by fundamentalism, conflicts and wars. I am not trying to force alternative views on anyone or to interfere with your beliefs or values. If we can learn together, it is great, and that is enough.

## General Outline 2

- Weeks one and two: Deep roots and origins from the formation of the Universe through the evolution of mankind, the emergence of cultivated agriculture, oral myths, shamans, gurus and elders. Time for some definitions of mythology, fables, legends and comparisons of mythology and religion.
- Weeks three through five or six: The great themes of myth around the world:
  - creation - the origin of the world
  - cosmic architecture - the structure of the universe
  - humanity - causes of life and death
  - supernatural beings/gods-spirits-demons
  - body and soul - spirit and the afterlife
  - a smattering of marriage and kinship/myths of the social order, animals and plants, heroes and tricksters, and cosmic disasters and the end of the world
- 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).
- The meaning of myth will be of one of our primary interests.

## General Outline 3

- Weeks six and seven: More modern mythology of the past 3000 years, cultural practices and paganism. Mythology's importance in the development of religions and mythology in the Middle Ages to current times.
- Week eight: Topics not previously addressed, including modern day cults, practices and rituals at major seasonal celebrations. The impact of science on the mythology of today versus ancient times. What we can conclude.

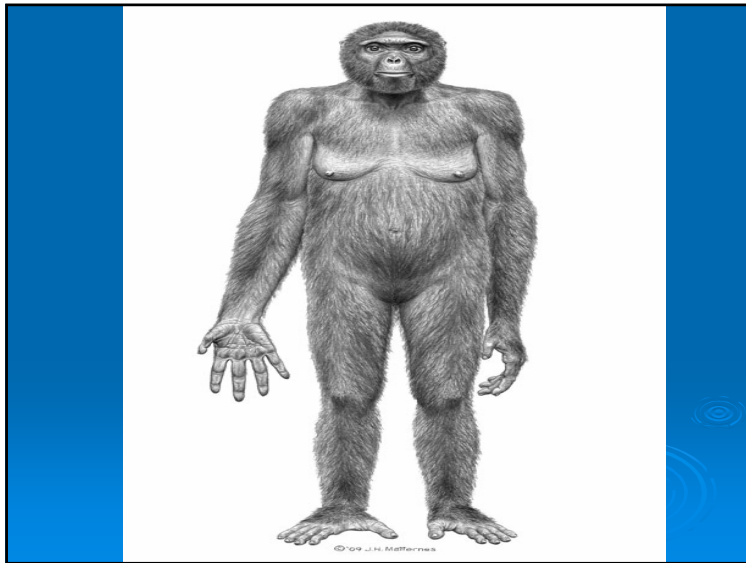
## In the Beginning

- The Universe is 13.73 +/- .17 billion years old: Big Bang to date.
- There are more than 170 billion Galaxies in the Universe.
- The Sun is one of 200 billion stars in the Milky Way Galaxy or one of 34 billion trillion stars in the Universe.
- The Kepler Mission results suggest there are likely 100 million inhabitable planets in the Milky Way and up to at least 140 earth-like planets. (7/26/2010 news item).
- The Sun is at the center of the Solar System (The earth, seven other planets and associated smaller bodies).
- The Solar System is approximately 4.54 billion years old.



## In the Beginning 2

- 3.8 billion years ago simple cells without a nucleus (prokaryotes) appear on earth. "Karyose" in Greek means kernel, "Pro" means before.
- 600 million years ago simple animals appear (multi-cellular plants previously exist).
- Our cousins, the banana (50 percent of our DNA) and the chimpanzee (98 or 99 percent of our DNA) evolve.
- Anthropoids Ardi 4.4 million years ago, Lucy 3.2 million years.
- *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.



## Ardi

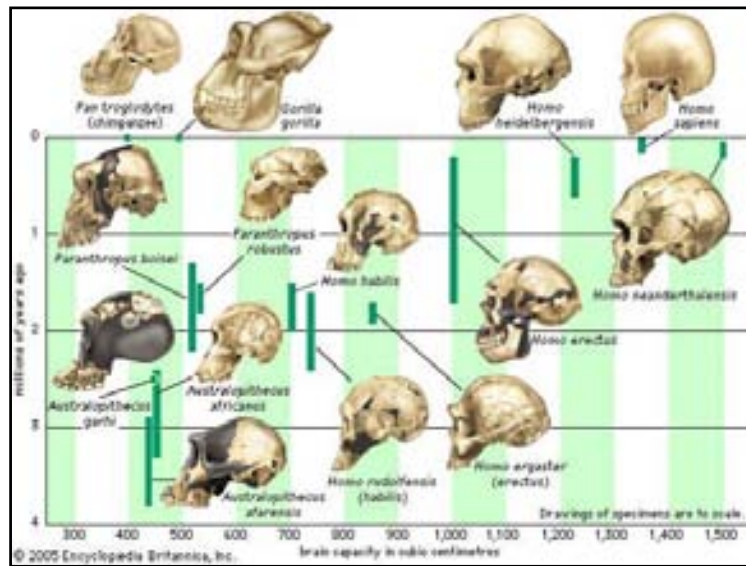
- Ardi (*Ardipithecus ramidus*) was estimated to have lived 4.4 million years ago in Ethiopia. She could walk upright and easily climb trees and move along branches (like monkeys or apes) but she probably couldn't swing from branch to branch.
- Ardi was four feet tall and weighed about 110 pounds. Her teeth were relatively small suggesting that male Ardis rarely fought, in contrast to male apes with large canines. This is a good indicator that Ardi was in the beginning of an evolutionary process that led to human beings.





## Lucy

- Lucy (*Australopithecus afarensis*) was a hominid estimated to have lived 3.2 million years ago. Her small skull capacity was akin to apes, but she had a bipedal upright walk akin to that of humans.



## Homo Erectus

- Originated in Africa 1.8 to 1.3 million years ago (spread as far as China and Java).
- Males were about 25% larger than females.
- Likely were the first humans to live in hunter-gather societies. More socially like modern humans than *Australopithecus*.
- 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.



## Just a Few Days Ago

- Paleolithic Period or Old Stone Age, 2.6 million years ago, when hominids (*Homo habilis*) used stone tools to the introduction of agriculture around 12,000 years BP (before present).
- Old Stone Age artifacts indicate the use of handmade tools and a mobile lifestyle—caves, huts, hovels—and bands of plant gatherers and hunters (25-100 people). Earliest works of art, cave paintings and jewelry, and religious and spiritual behavior such as burial and ritual.

## Neanderthals

- Either subspecies (or race) of humans (*Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*) or a separate species. Human and Neanderthal DNA are some 99.5% to 99.9% identical.
- Appeared 600,000—350,000 years ago in Europe and parts of western and central Asia. Complete characteristics had appeared by 130,000 BP or the Middle Palaeolithic period. Disappeared in Asia 50,000 BP and in Europe 30,000 BP ago.
- Current evidence (2010) suggests interbreeding with *Homo sapiens sapiens* (anatomically modern humans) between 80,000 and 50,000 BP in the Middle East. Caucasians and Asians have about 1 to 4 percent Neanderthal genes; Sub-Saharan Africans have little or none.

## Neanderthals 2

- Cranial capacity is thought to have been as large as that of *Homo sapiens*, brain size as large as that of modern humans at birth and larger as adults. On average, height was comparable to contemporaneous *Homo sapiens*. Arms and hands stronger than modern humans, better adapted to cold climates.
- Almost exclusively carnivorous and apex (dominant) predators.
- Children may have grown faster than modern humans. Early maturity.



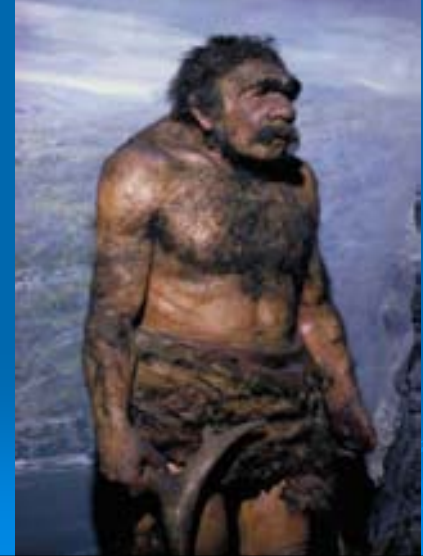
## Neanderthals 3

- Language abilities not clear, perhaps a proto-linguistic system of communication more musical than modern language.
- Tools of the Mousterian (Neanderthal) class often produced by soft hammer percussion, with hammers made of bones, antlers, and wood. Definite evidence of stone implements including sophisticated stone-flakes, task-specific hand axes and spears. Many tools very sharp, used lots of wood.
- Controlled fire, constructed complex shelters, skinned animals. Some construction of animal traps.
- Pendants and other jewelry showing traces of ochre dye and deliberate grooving have been found.



## Neanderthals 4

- Hunted large animals such as the mammoth. Used stone knives and poleaxes for butchering and skinning animals.
- Intentional burial and the inclusion of grave goods are the most typical representations of ritual behavior and denote a developing ideology.
- Anthropologists, based on cut marks made by stone tools, find both evidence of cannibalism and also of ritual defleshing. Both ancient and later *Homo sapiens* practiced cannibalism.



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

- Not an easy read, but the many observations on what makes us human are worth considering.
- Genetic mixing between Neanderthals and anatomically modern humans would have been in the context of trade. Trade between technologically primitive tribes is usually accompanied by the exchange of women, often in the context of building political alliances.
- “Modern” humans had three very important features: bipedalism, a big brain and introspective consciousness. The first “modern” humans were warm climate people as opposed to the Neanderthals who tended to favor colder climates.

## Richard Leahy 2

- In many ways it is language that makes us feel human. He argues that our language skills are firmly rooted in the cognitive abilities of ape brains.
- It is known from research that vervet monkeys produce three distinct alarm calls, a different one each for snakes, leopards, and certain eagles.
- Most of the early stone knappers—presumably *homo habilis*—were right-handed. This implies that left-hemisphere dominance in the brain had already emerged, a significant fact in the evolution of language.
- It is inconceivable to Leahy that the rapid rise in brain size we see in the genus *Homo* would not in some way reflect a growing ability for spoken language.



## Richard Leahy 2 continued

- Sometimes a troop of baboons will split in two at the beginning of the day. The parties forage for food in different parts of the troop's range, and at the end of the day meet again to settle down to sleep. There is communication and "agreement" taking place; the day's activities are planned in some as yet inexplicable way.
- He believes language abilities, something novel in the world of primates, emerged gradually in the human career and were part of an evolutionary package built around the hunting-and-gathering way of life.
- He argues that the "vastness of the gulf" between man and brutes is not as great as many people believe. The evidence of primate language studies suggests we are not as special as we would like to believe. He states "our language skills are firmly rooted in the cognitive abilities of ape brains."

## 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.
- 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.

## End of the Upper Paleolithic Epoch

- The use of fire by at least the Middle Paleolithic Epoch reduced mortality rates and provided protection against predators. It also allowed for the development of more sophisticated tools that were more effective in hunting.
- *Homo Erectus* possibly invented rafts and were more advanced than previously thought. Around 200,000 BP stone tool manufacturing allowed for more controlled and consistent flakes, the creation of stone-tipped spears and much later bows and harpoons. Early dogs were domesticated 100,000 to 30,000 BP as aids in hunting.

## Richard Leahy 3

- The evidence that points to an ancient establishment of spoken language comes from three sources:
  - Anatomical evidence on the organization of the brain and the vocal tract
  - The most tangible of all products of the human mind, stone tools
  - Some of the more abstract products of the human mind, including abstraction through art and in ritual behavior

## Consciousness

- Awareness, wakefulness, subjective experience or the executive control of the mind. From the Latin *consciūs* meaning 1. having joint or common knowledge with another, privy to, cognizant of; 2. conscious to oneself; esp., conscious of guilt.
- Stanford encyclopedia – creature consciousness.
  - Sentience. One capable of sensing and responding to its world, fish, bees, shrimp, etc.
  - Wakefulness. An organism actually exercising such a capacity only if it were *awake and normally alert*. What if dreaming?
  - 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*. A being is conscious if there is recognition of what it is to be another creature.
- 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.

## Cognition

- The process of thought. In psychology it usually refers to an information processing view. Other interpretations link it to the development of concepts; individual minds, groups and organizations.
- A faculty for the processing of information, applying knowledge and changing preferences. Includes many fields, such as linguistics, psychology, philosophy, anthropology and computer science. Abstract concepts such as mind, reasoning, perception, intelligence, learning and many others describe capabilities of the mind.

## Homo Sapiens

- *Homo sapiens* or modern humans first appeared Africa around 140,000 BP and in Ethiopia around 120,000 BP. Cro-Magnons were the first early modern humans, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, of the European Upper Paleolithic period around 35,000 BP.
- Some speculation that Cro-Magnons shared the landscape with the Neanderthals for some 10,000 years or more before peaceful co-existence(?), competition, interbreeding, assimilation and genocide evidently took it's toll.

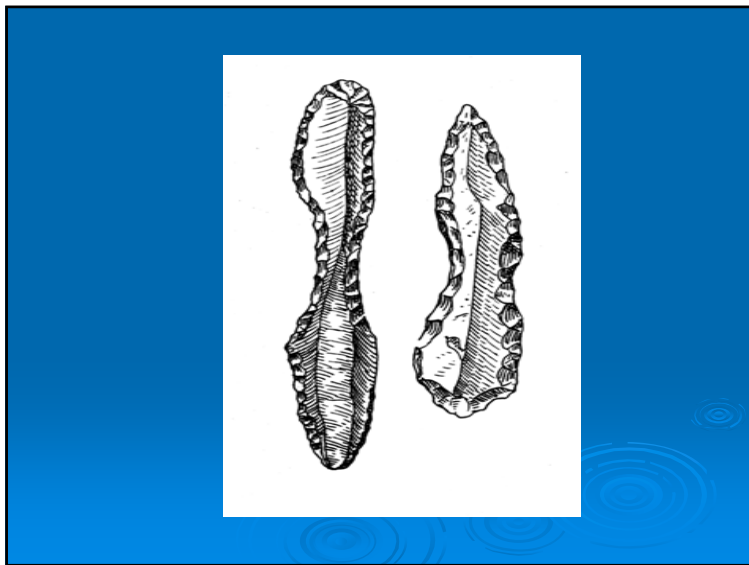
## Cro-Magnons

- 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

- 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.





## Venus of Hohle Fels

- Upper Paleolithic Venus figurine of a voluptuous woman was found near Schelkingen, Germany. It is dated between 35,000 and 40,000 years ago. 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."





## Richard Leahy 4

- 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.
- 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."
- We will discuss Leahy and Campbell's views of the race of man later in the course.

## End of the Upper Paleolithic Epoch

### 2

- 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.

## End of the Upper Paleolithic Epoch

### 3

- 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.

## Leahy 5

- The archeology of warfare fades in human history, rapidly disappearing beyond (before) the Neolithic, ten thousand years ago.
- Leahy believes that "warfare is rooted in the need for territorial possession once populations started to grow and to develop the ability to organize large military forces."
- He "does not believe that violence is an innate characteristic of humankind, merely an unfortunate adaptation to certain circumstances."

## End of the Upper Paleolithic Epoch

### 4

- 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. Note: shaman and shamanism will be discussed later in the course.
- 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 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" in English.



## Ancient Roots: The Last Step

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



