

Sympathetic Magic, Animism, and Early Human Societies Analysis

Posted on June 22, 2023

What do the terms sympathetic magic and animism refer to? How do they play a central role in the development and survival of early humans? How does the Pygmy Hunting Ritual help us understand their use? How can we relate these ideas to early forms of art? Provide and explain an example of each.

Sympathetic magic utilizes the imitation of the environment or living things to influence the outcome of a situation, either in favour of or against someone. It is also known as imitative magic, and it can involve puppets, fetishes, or effigies. An example of this magic is voodoo magic, which uses dolls to imitate humans. This contact between the human and the doll is created by using the person's hair. Anything done to the doll is felt by the human. In contrast, animism refers to a belief that everything in this world possesses a spirit, whether it is a rock, a tree, a creature, or a place. It is believed that these spirits have the power to either help humans or harm them, so the people who practised animism would perform rituals to appease these spirits. Different tribes had different rituals and prayers for the spirit, but in essence, each tribe tried to achieve the same goal of pleasing the spirit. Early humans used animism and sympathetic magic to control the outcome of a difficult situation by praying and carrying out rituals. This would give them some comfort that the oncoming difficult situation would end up being favourable for them.

The depiction of both sympathetic magic and animism can be witnessed in the account of Leo Frobenius, who was travelling with three men from the Pygmy tribe through the jungle of Congo. At the request of Frobenius of antelope, the three Pygmies tell him that for the hunt, they would need to prepare in the morning, and the hunt could not be carried out right away. In the morning, they do a ritual by chanting and drawing a picture of the antelope being successfully hunted by the group. The chanting in the ritual is an example of animism, and the drawing is an example of sympathetic magic. The woman Pygmy chanted some prayers to appease the spirits so that they could aid the hunters in the hunt, while the drawing depicted the desired outcome. Later, they used the hair of the antelope and its blood to complete the ritual so that the spirit that still resided in the blood would be able to

return to the earth and continue its [life cycle](#) (Froebenius). In the Tasmanian cave, *The Stenciled Art at Carnarvon* depicts a ritual being carried out around an ancestral totem. This painting is an example of animism (McIntosh). The Bronze Age cave art is filled with sympathetic art examples; the painting “The Bison” is one such example as it shows arrows in the bison, which may be a ritualistic drawing (Wigington).

What was the Egyptian immortality ideology? (Think of everything involved in their development, conception, and belief in a life after death). Include (and explain) at least one example from each area of ancient Egyptian culture (art, literature, and mythology/religion) to support your answer.

The Egyptians believed in immortality, which is why they mummified their dead and buried them with different objects that would help them in the afterlife. This belief in immortality stems from the creation myth, which revolves around Osiris, one of the most important gods in [ancient Egyptian](#) history. It is believed that in the beginning, there was only the sun god, Ra, who was born from a silt mound called Ptah. Ra created the sky and earth. Osiris, Isis, and Set are born from the sky goddess. Osiris is a natural-born leader and is very popular; however, Set is jealous of his brother, so he murders Osiris and scatters his body around the earth. On hearing of Osiris’s death, Isis sets out to find his pieces in the hopes of resurrecting him. She assembles his body, wraps it in linen, and succeeds in resurrecting him. Osiris, due to his resurrection, is no longer the god of the world but has become the Lord of Afterlife.

This creation myth shows that after being resurrected, Osiris simply continued his godly duties in the afterlife, which the ancient Egyptians believed would also happen to them after death, that they would continue their daily routine. This is the reason that they also wrapped their dead in linen so that their soul would continue living in the afterlife. A wall painting from the tomb of Neb-Amon depicts him working in fields surrounded by his wife, daughter, and cat, resuming his duties even after death (Salt). “Scene of Dancing”, which was discovered in the Tomb of Shaykh, shows people dancing, singing, drinking, and enjoying themselves in the afterlife. This also showed that in the afterlife, there was no sadness and despair, so everyone lived happily for eternity. “The Book of Dead” was very important as it contained instructions for burial, rituals, and prayers that needed to be carried out to allow the soul to achieve immortality in the afterlife. It contained information about the things that would happen after death so that people would prepare accordingly. It is believed that the people who did not receive the proper burial would not go into the afterlife, and souls would perish. This is the

reason why it was important to follow the burial rights to the letter, as it was the only way to achieve immortality.

The “Enuma Elish” is the creation story of Mesopotamia, while the “Epic of Gilgamesh” is the continuation of that myth. Starting from the Enuma Elish, the reader is told that in the beginning, there was only sweet water, Apsu, saltwater named Tiamet, who was also the wife of Apsu, and a fog that covered them, which was their son called Mummu. Then Anshar and Kishar were born from Tiamet and Apsu, and they, in turn, had a son named Anu. He also has a son named Ea, who is wiser than the previous gods. The younger gods were extremely rowdy, which disturbed Apsu and Tiamet. On the counsel of Mummu, Apsu decides to kill all the younger gods, but Ea, upon hearing this plan, kills Apsu, then puts a rope around Mummu and drags him everywhere. After that, Ea and his wife, Damkina, live in the sweet waters. Here, he has a son, Marduk, who is wiser than all the previous gods. Ea is very happy to have such a capable son, which makes him a double god.

Meanwhile, a lesser god, Kingu, manipulates Tiamet to attack Ea, Marduk, and all the gods who stand with them to avenge her husband. She does so, but Marduk defeats her and then makes earth from her body, and from the body of Kingu, he makes man serve the gods. Then, he made a temple for the gods called Babylon (Rosenberg). In the Epic of Gilgamesh, the reader is told that Gilgamesh is a tyrant who is the king of Babylon and does not listen to the gods, so they send Enkidu to teach him a lesson. Both he and Enkidu form a strong friendship but later cut down the cedar tree forest along with its guardian. This makes the gods angry, and they take the life of Enkidu. Gilgamesh is devastated and searches for immortality; however, he returns as a wiser king who rules Babylon according to the will of the gods.

These two stories depict how the ancient civilization of Mesopotamia started. It tells the role of humans that they were made to serve the gods. It also states that Babylon is a very important city and the origin of Mesopotamian civilization.

Works Cited

Froebenius, Leo. *Pygmy Hunting Ritual*. 1905,

http://www.miotas.org/blog_body.cfm?id=A2738FBF-9ADD-2795-7C4712B98DAFC06B.

McIntosh, Matthew A. “A History of Animism and Its Contemporary Examples.” *Brewminate: We’re Never Far from Where We Were*, 31 Mar. 2019,

<https://brewminate.com/a-history-of-animism-and-its-contemporary-examples/>.

Rosenberg, Donna. “Donna Rosenberg – The Enuma Elish.” *Genius*,

<https://genius.com/Donna-rosenberg-the-enuma-elish-annotated>. Accessed 20 Feb. 2022.

Salt, Henry. “Tomb-Painting | British Museum.” *The British Museum*, 1821,

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA37977.

Wigington, Patti. "The History and Folklore of Sympathetic Magic." *Learn Religions*, 3 Jan. 2019, <https://www.learnreligions.com/sympathetic-magic-2561922>.