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Identity and Fear – Burials in the Upper Palaeolithic

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Abstract

Ritual burials probably appeared, when human beings became aware of their existence not only at a given moment, but also in the future. Death then became something to be afraid of, since it annihilated the identity of the deceased. Consequently a belief appeared that rituals at the time of death and proper handling of the corpse could preserve the identity of the dead, so that they only enter a different "world", that is afterlife, where life and personality continue in some way. Since finds of deformed and damaged skeletons in Upper Palaeolithic graves are relatively frequent, it may be possible to conclude, that people at that time were particularly cautious with the bodies of those who, for a variety of reasons, deviated from normal in their lifetime.

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