

Meteorites in the Culture and Beliefs of Aboriginal Peoples in North America. J. Gill (jagdeep.gill024@gmail.com) No Affiliation, A. Mardon (11919 82 St NW, aamardon@yahoo.ca) University of Alberta

Introduction: Meteorites have been looked at with reverence by many groups of people over the years. In this article we will be looking at how aboriginal people in North America interacted with and viewed meteorites. We will also compare these views to Australian Aboriginals, and Greeks.

One of the earlier encounters of Native Americans with meteorites concerns the Hopewell tribe. Recent discoveries have shown that the Hopewell tribes used the meteorite metal to manufacture beads by fragmenting the meteorites [2]. These beads were later used in trade across the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers [2]. There is not much evidence to say that the Hopewell tribe venerated these meteorites but archaeologists have found beads made from meteorite fragments in burial mounds. These findings might mean that the meteoric objects were treasured possessions even if they were not worshiped [1]. There were other tribes besides the Hopewell that may have even revered meteorites. The Casa Grande was found in a "multi chambered tomb in northern Chihuahua, Mexico" [1] wrapped in maguey cloths. Human remains were found in other chambers and they were wrapped the same way. This may indicate that this Meteorite was revered and not just treasured [1]. The Skidi Pawnee Indians believed the meteorites were the children of their chief god, Tirawat [1]. The legend says that when warriors would offer prayer to the meteorites before battle they would be victorious and that they would ward off disease when inside the camp [2]. So in some cases the stones were not only revered but were also thought to possess special powers. There are more examples of these types of beliefs in Canada concerning the Cree and Blackfoot tribes. These tribes revered the Iron Creek Meteorite (also known as Pahpamiyahaw asiniy, the Manitou Stone, the Stone God) as a medicine stone [3]. This meteorite is believed to give power, a successful hunt, and victory in war [3]. When it was removed by the settlers a medicine man predicted the famine, plague, and war that later came.

In ancient Greece there were multiple meteorite falls that were recorded in the literature. These meteorites were believed to be from the heavens but their origins were debatable. Some philosophers gave a scientific account of the origins and thought they were extra terrestrial [4]. Others believed the stones were related to the gods and referred to them in their myths. For example, the Omphalos stone that is kept at Apollo's temple in Delphi is believed to be the stone that Rhea used to trick Cronos into eating by making him

believe that the stone is Zeus [4]. This worship of the stones seems to be due to their connection with the gods and legends but they do not necessarily need to have a special power to be venerated.

Lastly, the Australian Aboriginals believed meteors had supernatural origins as well. However, they related meteors to evil spirits and spirits of the recently deceased [5]. They believed that when a person dies their spirit ascends to the sky to become a star. The spirit then falls back to the earth as a meteor where it will find a mother to be born again as a baby [5]. In northern Australia meteors are seen as the eyes of celestial serpents [5]. The Tiwi people see meteors as evil spirits that steal the hearts of babies [5]. Meteorites were viewed as sacred objects, but certain meteorites were seen negatively [5]. For example, the aboriginal people were very afraid the meteorites from the Tenham meteorite fall. Also, where a meteorite lands is thought to be where enemy soldiers are present [5].

All three groups discussed saw extra terrestrial objects as having supernatural origins. However, a more detailed look at each group shows that their reasons for veneration may be different. The aboriginal people of North America seemed to worship these stones because they were believed to have supernatural powers. Greeks revered them saw them as significant to the events that happened with the gods. Lastly, the Australian Aboriginals viewed meteors and meteorites as signaling war or as something to be afraid of. The North American Aboriginals seemed to emphasize the utility of these extra terrestrial rocks more so than the other groups in that they used them for making beads and gave them special properties which seemed to validate the worship of these Meteorites.

References:

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