

Genocide extends back 7,000 years.  
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Archaeologists have just found a 7,000-year-old Stone Age mass gravesite outside of Frankfurt, Germany! This horrifying find erases what we had always thought about human behavior at the beginnings of agriculture and village life. Genocide has a long human history, but we didn't know that it was that early in the agricultural revolution when population density could not have been large enough to provide for organized warfare.

This is just one of a number of similar mass graves. The Frankfurt find yielded 26 bodies, including children, many with broken skulls and smashed shinbones (torture?). Other sites have recently been found too: one with 34 bodies in Talheim, and 67 in Asparn-Schletz, Austria. All three sites point to a tribe of farmers who came up from the Middle East, bringing domesticated animals with them and the custom of genocide.

Particularly horrifying was that children ranging in age from six months to six years were murdered, along with most males, but few females. Adolescent bodies were not in these graves, nor were women of childbearing age. They were obviously of use to the killers.

Genocide was a regular pattern of warfare in the Greek and Roman worlds. When there was repeated warfare between peoples, the final battle would usually be genocide: murdering all males and taking nubile women as wives or concubines. Childbearing was so dangerous in those times that there was always a shortage of young women.

Greek literature brings us The Trojan Women, a play about the fall of Troy and the deliberate slaughter of all the men, even male babies, "lest they grow up and seek revenge." Greeks wiped out Phoenician cities this way (one such site found in southern Sicily) and the Romans famously did the same with Carthage. It was antiquity's "final solution."

During the Crusades, Jerusalem fell to the Crusaders and genocide produced so much blood that the knights were hip deep in it. In Medieval France (13th century), genocide was often the aftermath of a prolonged siege. The French declared a crusade against a heretical sect, the Albigensians, and wiped them out. One alternate method was to blind everyone and send them down the road to the next town, led by a one-eyed person. This was effective propaganda that generally worked.

In the 20th century, the Ottoman Turks wiped out most of their Armenian Christian population, some by direct violence, and most by death marches into the desert where they starved or were taken as slaves.

Stalin carried out mass genocides in the Ukraine, where he ordered a man-made famine. He carried out other genocides through forced exile, in which a majority of victims died (the Tatars in the Crimea and the Chechens, among others).

Hitler's genocide was the most organized and systematic, in accord with German efficiency. His intention was to exterminate every Jew in occupied Europe, and along with them, Gypsies and the handicapped.

Just when we thought genocide was no more, it was revived in Europe by the Serbs who were intent on killing off their Muslim neighbors. Rape camps were established to impregnate captive women, the intent being to wipe out the Yugoslav Muslim community altogether.

In Africa came the horrors of Rwanda, in which Hutu majority citizens were given Chinese-made scythes and instructions to murder every Tutsi (the minority) in the country.

Today, we have a new rash of genocidal programs being undertaken in the name of Islam. ISIS is the most notorious of these killers, going after Christian and Zaidi communities. They kill all the males and take all the women for rape and/or sale in newly revived slave markets. Their model is Mohammad himself, in his war to conquer the Arab peninsula. But an older model yet goes back 7,000 years.

The modern world now professes rule of law. The US has actually used the word Genocide in reference to ISIS. But what can we do about those like ISIS who get their marching orders from a medieval religion and beyond that, Stone Age ancestors? What is it in the darkest reaches of the human psyche that makes genocide live on?

683 words

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