

Cannibal is a person who eats human flesh. Throughout history, many individuals and societies in all parts of the world have committed acts of cannibalism. Archaeologists have found **evidence of cannibalism that occurred more than 500,000 years ago.** Today, cannibalism **no longer exists** in the world **except perhaps among some societies in isolated areas of Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands.**

Cannibalism **may also be practiced today by people who can obtain no food** except human flesh. Survivors of a plane crash in the Andes Mountains in 1972 ate their dead companions to survive.

Through the centuries, **most cases** of cannibalism have been **connected with religious or other traditional beliefs.** Most cannibals **ate only the parts of the body that they considered important.** For example, some cannibals believed that the heart contained such qualities as courage and wisdom. They ate the hearts of the dead in order to acquire those qualities themselves. The inhabitants of ancient Gaul (now mainly France) thought that eating parts of another human being cured diseases.

Some cannibals **showed respect to dead relatives and friends by eating them.** The Aborigines of central Australia thought this practice **strengthened the ties between the dead members of the family and the living ones.** Some mothers ate their dead babies to get back the strength they thought they had given the infants during pregnancy.

Some societies thought that **eating the corpses of enemies prevented the souls of the slain foes from seeking revenge.** The Maori of New Zealand felt they **insulted their enemies by cooking and eating them.** Some cultures in southern Africa believed that their members **gained such qualities as courage and wisdom by eating the enemies they had killed.**

The word *cannibal* comes from *Carib*, the name of a warlike people who lived on islands in the **Caribbean Sea** when the Italian navigator Christopher Columbus sailed there in the late 1400's. Neighboring native groups told Columbus that the Carib people ate human flesh. However, some historians and anthropologists doubt this claim. Columbus called them *Canibales* by mistake. The term *cannibal* **also refers to any animal that eats others of its own kind.**

Contributor:

• Wade C. Pendleton, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, San Diego State University.

How to cite this article:

To cite this article, World Book recommends the following format:

MLA:

Pendleton, Wade C. "Cannibal." *World Book Advanced*. World Book, 2013. Web. 10 Sept. 2013.

APA:

Pendleton, W. C. (2013). Cannibal. In *World Book Advanced*. Retrieved from <http://worldbookonline.com/advanced/article?id=ar091620>

Harvard:

Pendleton, WC 2013, 'Cannibal' , *World Book Advanced*, World Book, Chicago, viewed 10 September 2013,

<<http://worldbookonline.com/advanced/article?id=ar091620>>.