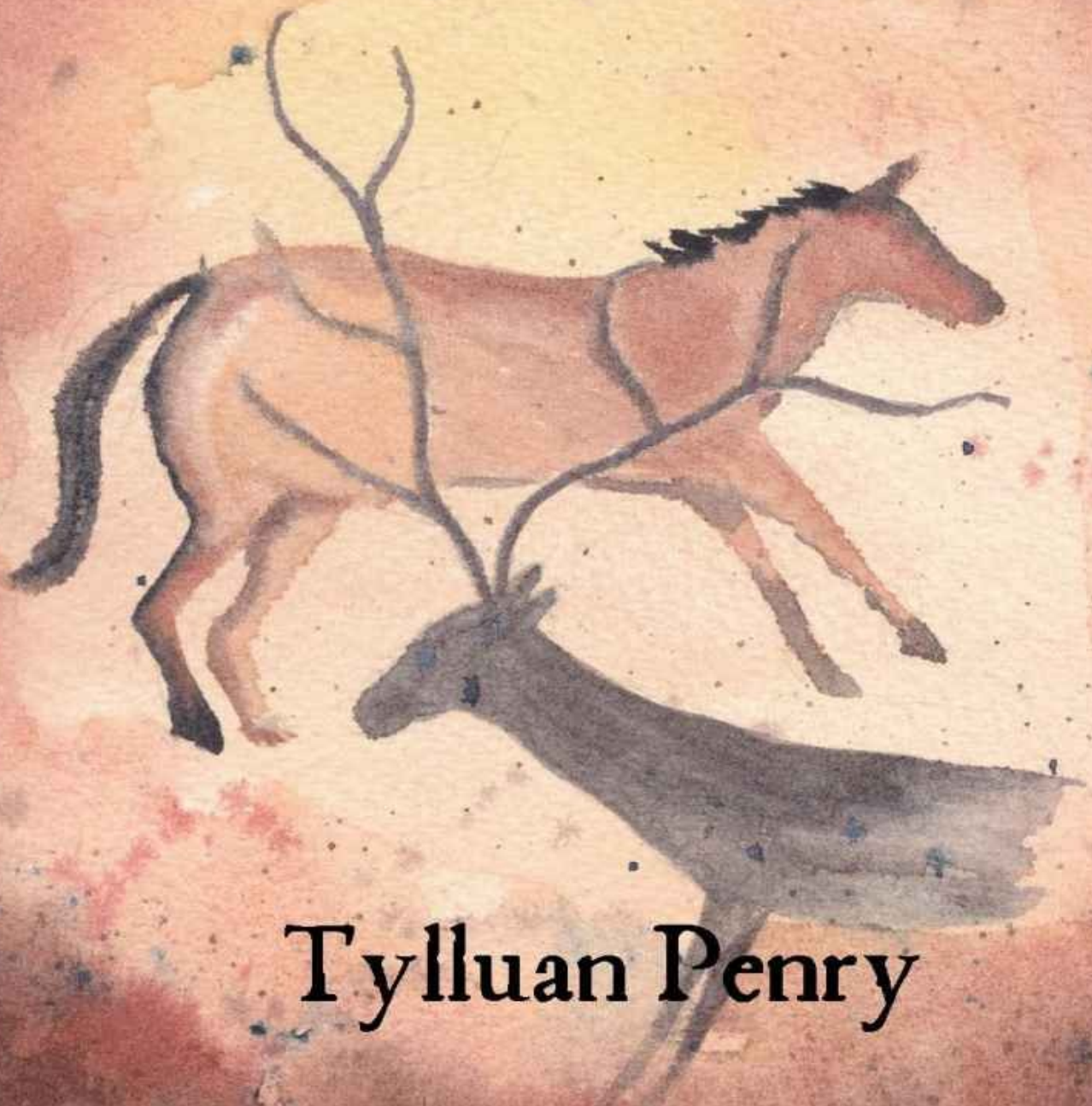
Sacred Shadows

Ice Age Spirituality



Tylluan Penry

Sacred Shadows—Ice Age Spirituality

©Copyright 2013 Tylluan Penry
ISBN 978-0-9570442-4-1
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Tylluan Penry has asserted her right under the Copyright Designs and Patents Act of 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, scanning, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the author and the publisher.

Cover Design and Illustrations by Tylluan Penry

Published by:

The Wolfenhowle Press, Redcroft, Nile Road, Trealaw,Tonypandy CF40 2 UY

http://thewolfenhowlepress.com

Printed by:

Book Printing UK, Remus House, Coltsfoot Drive, Woodston, Peterborough PE2 9BF

This book is dedicated with grateful thanks to Dr. KCMH—the best and most inspiring of tutors.



If the earth unveils its secret
It will eventually show its origin

Ferdowsi

Other Titles by Tylluan Penry :

The Magical World of the Anglo Saxons published by The Wolfenhowle Press 2012

Staying on the Old Track, published by The Wolfenhowle Press 2012

Magic on the Breath (published by The Wolfenhowle Press, 2011)

The Essential Guide to Psychic Self Defence (published by Capall Bann 2010)

The Magical Properties of Plants—and How to Find Them (published by Capall Bann, 2009)

Seeking the Green (published by Capall Bann, 2008)

All the above are available to purchase in paperback from:
http://thewolfenhowlepress.com

Also 'Eating With the Dead: Funeral Meal Practices' in the anthology *Memento Mori* (ed. Kim Huggens) Avalonia Books 2012

Fiction writing for children as T.P. Penry (available only as Kindle downloads)

The Dolly Run
Stalker's Moon
Silent Night, Deadliest Night

A note about references….

References are placed within the text of this book using the Harvard style of referencing, i.e. Author, Year and, where appropriate, page number. This is neater and easier than struggling to find endnotes after each chapter. If you wish to consult the referenced work for yourself, just go to the Bibliography at the end of this book and look up the cited author; you will find the full reference set out there.

Table of Contents

A note about references….
Chapter One: The problem of time
Chapter Two: Beginning at the beginning
Chapter Three: The Idea of Sacred Space
Chapter Four: More Sacred Sites
Chapter Five: The Disabled in ancient societies…
Chapter Six: The Ancient Mind
Chapter Seven: The visual evidence
Chapter Eight: More clues…
Chapter Nine: The Handprints of Gargas and other caves
Chapter Ten: Crosses, Masks, Serpents
Chapter Eleven: Mother Goddesses
Chapter Twelve: The horned uterus, gods and other thoughts
Chapter Thirteen: What were our ancestors really like?
Chapter Fourteen: Where do we look?
And finally…
Bibliography Primary Texts
Secondary Texts
Websites
Index



Chapter One
The problem of time

Many people find time a difficult concept. It's not just a question of 'telling the time.' A decent watch, clock or even a mobile phone can do that for us. The problem is in understanding time and finding the right words to quantify it. 'Once upon a time' or 'Long, long ago' can encompass anything from fifty years to several thousand or more. And as the distance in time becomes greater, so our perception often becomes more blurred.

For example, if we asked most people who lived first, Queen Victoria or John F. Kennedy, they would probably get the answer right. Victoria clearly belongs to the nineteenth century, with top hats and crinolines, while Kennedy belongs firmly in the twentieth century. Yet Victoria died in 1901 and Kennedy was born in 1917. There were in fact only sixteen years between the death of Queen Victoria and the birth of Kennedy when neither was alive.

Then, if we go further back and ask who lived first, for example, Henry II or Richard II it gets trickier. Go back still further and ask which came first, Alexander the Great or Attila the Hun, it gets trickier still.

And from this we can see that any problems we have with the perspective of time are very similar with the ordinary perspective we have to deal with every day. Basically the further away something is, spatially or in time, the more difficult it is to distinguish what is really there.

The ancient Greek authors, Hesiod and Homer, were near contemporaries and provide some of our earliest surviving texts, but these are barely three thousand years old. Even if we go back to an ancient civilisation such as the Egyptians, we find their known history does not go back much beyond the fourth millennium BCE. What should we make then of times so distant that we know virtually nothing about them?

It comes as something of a shock to realise that Mankind has been around for several *million* years. During that time people must have created many stories that were passed down for centuries if not millennia. Some of these may have eventually been written down, but most became little more than sacred shadows that haunt our dreams as they try to pierce the protective membrane we have created to protect our modern consciousness. Once the covering does break however, the past breaks through and reaches out, begging us to explore—and remember.

It may seem surprising that the past—long dead and gone – has the ability to reach out into the present and call us in this way. By rights it should be impossible, and yet most people who try to follow a spiritual path of any description eventually seem to enter a period of psychic awakening. When this happens the unconscious starts prodding the subconscious which in turn sends its messengers, instinctual forces that try to wake us up and make us notice them.

At first this awakening can be frightening, because it often brings vivid dreams whose memory lingers far beyond what we might reasonably expect. This is because they contain so much energy, which demands not only that we acknowledge it, but also that we should work with it.

Unfortunately modern western culture often is unsure how to react to these messengers from our subconscious. The usual response is to pretend that instinctual forces don't exist, or that they are all in the mind. Yet we need these ancient shadows to teach us how to control the more extreme aspects of our own being, those emotions and reactions that we might prefer to deny exist within us.

Now of course, it's tempting to dismiss all this. The ancient past is dead and mostly buried apart from a few bits and pieces of stone and pottery, and people are quick to remind us that we cannot possibly recover any of their beliefs or rituals. And yet I suspect that much of the story lies still within us, as these inherited or even past life memories turn up troubling dreams and instincts.

It must be said that not everyone agrees with this theory. For example, Lord Raglan (Raglan 1936:79,8), claimed that, '…since history depends upon written chronology … the Savage can have no history. And since interest in the past is induced solely by books, the Savage can take no interest in the past.' At a stroke, this attitude consigns millions of years of human history to the dustbin.

Luckily for us, however, history does not depend only upon written chronology and never has. We find it all around us in so many shapes and forms. For example, the landscape is a living map of its interaction with humankind over tens of thousands of years. People mark the landscape and are in turn influenced by it. A mountain takes us closer to the heavens and sky deities, and so it becomes regarded as sacred.

In areas without mountains, it is trees that push upwards, and so the tradition of the sacred (or World) tree is born. Later, when people created sacred buildings, they again aimed for the sky, with pyramids, ziggurats and even Medieval and Gothic cathedrals.

Looking again at Raglan's statement, we notice that he does not take into account how information could have been conveyed before the advent of writing. Writing does not prove anything other than literacy. It is not always even reliable depending on the bias of whoever wrote it. Besides, there were villages, towns, even cities and empires long before writing was invented and many of the great religious texts and myths circulated for centuries, if not millennia before being written down.

Then there are the archaeological finds. Often quickly removed from their original context, nevertheless they invite us to speculate about the people who originally made and used them. And when we begin to speculate like this, we are giving our subconscious a swift nudge. Jung believed that 'history could be constructed just as easily from one's own unconscious as from the actual texts' (cited in Henderson 1990, 104). History does not begin or end with the written word.

Nor should history focus exclusively on the famous, the kings and generals, politicians and heroes, battles and treaties. Ordinary people are history too, though they are rarely—if at all –remembered, let alone commemorated. Yet their history matters—and it is our history too. It is easy to become so preoccupied with the history of kings and wars that we forget our past as it relates to us.

For example, how many of us can remember family anecdotes going back more than a generation or two? As a result, any sense of ancient or archaic time is usually lost for good. We abandon our own mythologies, instead either harking back to a golden age that never was or relying far too heavily on the written word, which is rarely interested in us as individuals. Thus our personal family history, the story of our ancestors, is quickly forgotten.

Years ago I researched my own and my husband's family history. I never fail to be amazed at the sheer struggle our ancestors must have had just to keep alive. Labourers in their eighties turning up in the census, still working and trying to provide for orphaned grandchildren. What stories they must have had to tell!

Yet even though these are only just outside living memory, less than two hundred years, their stories are already forgotten. Nonetheless, this is the stuff that real history, *our* history is made of. Their hopes, dreams, fears, strengths and weaknesses as they fought to survive another day, all run in our veins. And we ignore them at our peril.

In the West we tend to believe that humankind as we know it exists only *within* history. It is as though we are walking on some giant stage that has been thoughtfully provided for us and all we have to do is say our lines, play our part and exit. We have one chance to get it right (unless we believe in reincarnation) and no prompter to help us if we forget something.

However there are other viewpoints. For example, the theologian and philosopher Henri Corbin, Professor of Islamic Studies at the Sorbonne believed that : '…history is *in man* … history whose events do not take place in exterior world of objects, but in the subtle world of lived states' (Corbin 1981, 13).

Now Corbin's view poses some interesting questions. If we accept what he says, then instead of being on the stage acting out history and later forgetting most of it, we are in fact the vessel that contains history itself. We become the carriers of history within us, while at the same time acting out a history of our own. If true, then that throws everything into an entirely different perspective.

For a start, it takes us back literally into the mists of time. Even the ancient Greeks will be modern by comparison. Herodotus, (Book II *The Histories*) writing 2,500 years ago in the 5th century BCE said that Homer and Hesiod gave the gods their names. There has been an unfortunate tendency to accept this at face value, as though there was nothing before Homer and Hesiod (who were both long dead before Herodotus was born) began writing.

Of course this simply is not true. Tens of thousands of years earlier, people had been dancing by torchlight, painting herds of animals wandering across cave walls, and even they were modern compared to those who made tools dating back half a million years and more. From a spiritual point of

view therefore, we have to recognise that we are dealing not with the beliefs of 1000 or 2000 years ago, but with figures so vast that the human mind usually boggles and retreats when confronted with them.

At this stage it's worth getting some idea of the approximate times and of the various ages and epochs. For our purposes we will look at five main ages, the Palaeolithic or Old Stone Age; Mesolithic; Neolithic or New Stone Age; Bronze Age and Iron Age. Within these groups there are many further subdivisions and we also have to remember that different areas across Europe entered these ages at different times.

The Palaeolithic period is made up of the Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic epochs. The most ancient art (sometimes called Ice Age art) belongs to the Upper Palaeolithic which may date back as far as thirty thousand years (Maringer 1979:215). Artefacts from this period are found in caves, on rocks, and small pieces of bone, horn and ivory. Obviously other organic media (plants, wood or even cloth) may also have been used but these have not survived.

While thirty thousand years may seem mind boggling to us, it is a drop in the ocean in the history of our ancestors. Man's oldest known work of art is thought to be a decorated ox-rib found at Sarlat in the Dordogne, which has been dated at between 100,000-230,000 years old (Davenport 2002:55). This is a staggering leap backwards, into a past so ancient we cannot begin to imagine it.

Although we may refer to 'The Ice Age' there were in fact several, and during each one the temperatures can warm and then cool again. They are thought to occur approximately one hundred and fifty million years apart, each one lasting for about a million years. Over the past 2.6 million years, for example, there have been extremes of cold punctuated by warmer, interglacial intervals. Ten percent of the world is covered with ice nowadays, but this has been as much as thirty percent. And the ice is not a mere surface sheet, sometimes it could be several miles thick. Even land that escaped glaciations was affected by the extreme and persistent cold temperatures.

While the freezing process was relatively gradual, taking the best part of ninety thousand years to reach its coldest point, the thaw was quicker, taking approximately ten thousand years. In the last Ice Age, the ice sheets covering Canada and northwest Europe did not completely disappear until

c. 7,000 years ago in Canada and northwest Europe. This marked the beginning of the modern, Holocene epoch (Peltier 1994:195).

All this has interesting implications. It is quite possible that civilisations have risen, flourished and then been virtually wiped out several times. Destruction of home and family due to natural disasters beyond our control leaves a massive imprint on the human psyche. The ice may eventually recede, but the memory of it still evokes terror in those who survived and their descendants.

The most recent Ice Age only started to recede around fourteen thousand years ago, which, as we can see, is nothing in human terms. Even when the beautiful caves of Chauvet and Lascaux were being painted, the climate was far, far colder than anything we can imagine today. The ice receded slowly, a process of one step forward and two back, which meant that people could only adapt very gradually to the changes.

Basically they were faced with two choices, to either stay and try to acclimatise while the cold tundra slowly turned into forests, or they could move north, following the herds. (We sometimes forget that plants and animals were affected by the Ice Ages too.) Those people who moved north would eventually become what we know as the Celtic, Germanic and Nordic tribes.

Once they had a reasonable choice, the survivors must have moved in many different directions. However no matter where they went, they must have taken something with them of their old beliefs, earlier cultures and memories. This may explain how people who were separated by such wide geographic distances still seem to have words and gods in common.

The change in climate from temperate to Ice Age and back again may have brought about other changes too. As the natural world appears more hostile and uncontrollable so the individual is drawn more towards the invisible world of religion and ritual. Conversely, when we no longer worry so much about providing ourselves with food, warmth, shelter and fertility then there is less need to appeal to the divine to provide it.

The dates of the different eras tend to be rather confusing and can vary considerably. Generally speaking, the are the approximate dates used in this book are as follows:

- Lower Palaeolithic ca. 2.5—2 million BCE
- Middle Palaeolithic ca. 2 million to 40,000 BCE

- Upper Palaeolithic ca. 40,000-8000 BCE
- Mesolithic ca 10,000/ 8,000-7,500/5,000 BCE
- Neolithic ca 8,000-3,000 BCE
- Bronze Age ca 3,000-1000 BCE
- Iron Age ca 1000BCE

There are also various cultural epochs in amongst these periods, especially the Upper Palaeolithic. They are named after French cave sites and include the Mousterian (associated with Neanderthals) Aurignacian, (c.30,000-20,000BCE), Perigordian, Solutrean and Magdalenian (c.15,000-8,000 BCE) etc. These are useful terms for defining specific groups in certain areas or with particular characteristics, although their dating tends to fluctuate wildly.

There is also the term Pleistocene which covers a huge period, approximately 2.6 million to 11,700 years ago. During this period there were a series of Ice Ages, alternating with warmer periods. However, not every part of the world entered into (or left) each 'Age' at the same time or in quite the same way.

As a very general guide, the dates for the different Ages in the Old World tended to be earlier than in the New World. For example, the Neolithic period began in and around the Middle East as early as c.8000BCE; however it would be another six thousand years before it reached the western coasts of north and south America.

Likewise the Bronze Age may be as old at ca 3000 BCE in the Middle East, but took up to another thousand years before reaching the westernmost areas of Europe or the easternmost parts of Asia.

Even in the Old World, there are some noticeable differences. The 'Stone Age' reached Scandinavia for example much later than, say, France, and the Neolithic period persisted as late as 2000 BCE in Scandinavia, while the Scandinavian Bronze Age did not really get underway until c. 1500 BCE. Scandinavia was still hunting while people in the south of Europe and also in western Asia were well-established with farming practices.

We must remember therefore that there is no generic 'Stone Age Man'—this tag is only the very roughest generalisation. We are dealing with periods, people and places we know very little about and time scales of thousands, even tens of thousands, of years.

Think about the changes we have seen in the last fifty years. Look back a hundred, two hundred years and then multiply these by, say, a hundred. And of course people vary a great deal depending on exactly when and where they live, their own personal traditions, ideas and beliefs. The idea of a Stone or Bronze Age etc., is only the very roughest of guides. Ideas, beliefs and rituals must have changed enormously, even within any given 'Age'.

Also it would be quite wrong to believe that our ancient ancestors cannot offer us anything of interest. Primitive religions and spirituality are every bit as much a response to the divine as modern ones. Unfortunately, the ancient world has often been regarded with curious suspicion. Even when compelling evidence has been recovered, people have sometimes refused to consider it simply because it is 'too old' and people must have been 'too primitive'.

This leads to the assumption that only the present (and the recent past) are 'civilised' but the rest is not. For example, when the Abbé Breuil petitioned UNESCO for funds after the Second World War in order to study the Lascaux cave paintings (which had only been discovered in 1940) UNESCO refused, on the grounds that the paintings were obviously fraudulent! (Davenport, 2000:59).

Part of the problem is the tendency to ignore the fact that what we call 'civilisation' is actually a very thin, very modern veneer. It's a bit like an iceberg, no matter how big it looks above the surface of the sea, this is nothing compared to what lies beneath. In this case what lies beneath is our primordial past, which—whether we realise it or not—forms much of the foundation for how we live today.

The problem with veneers of course, it that they tend to be fragile and before long, the cracks begin to appear. Usually this happens when we are under stress and we can often give way to some rather primitive behaviour. Indeed, I've known myself go out into the garden and give a great long silent scream as a way of releasing stress. Some days it's not even all that silent! Yet for many of us, instead of seeing this type of reaction as an important way of releasing tension, we tend to regard it as weakness.

Dealing with this vague feeling that something isn't quite as it should be can be very difficult, especially since we live in a world where we may be able to explain the mechanics of most things, but really don't understand their true nature. For example, what are we to make of our innate sense of

wonder? That feeling we get when we touch something old, gaze at the stars or look at pictures of ancient cave paintings? We may not understand that wonder, or know what to do with it, but it's there all the same and we sense it.

Dealing with an ancient past that keeps trying to nudge us into some sort of awareness is not easy. We may accept evolution as an idea, but emotionally we still persist in rejecting as a reality (Sabini 2008:46). This may be partly because the implications are so disturbing but also because we cannot countenance such huge time spans. Certainly most people know little family history beyond their great grandparents. Photographs prior to 1860 are rare, and even then, we often cannot identify who is shown in them.

In trying to recover our ancient past, we have to try and reach out to people who lived 10,000 or even 100,000 years ago. We know almost nothing about them and much of what we *think* we know is often misleading. Indeed, if we think of ancient man as primitive and apelike, we're not even sure that we want to identify with him! Part of the problem is that mankind has created a past that terrifies us. No wonder we set up barriers to protect ourselves by making it impossible to reach back very far.

Yet if we refuse to even try and reach back and connect through some sort of inherited memory, we are in effect distrusting the power of our own minds. How often do we hear the comment, 'It's all in the mind' as though the mind is some kind of rubbish heap? It isn't. The mind is so powerful that even now we understand very little about its true capabilities.

If we keep denying these vague yearnings for something we feel we know but cannot quite remember, then it's no wonder we feel adrift sometimes. The gods and archetypes of the ancient past still lurk deep in our hearts, minds and souls, yet we keep on denying them.

I should perhaps point out here that this is not about what religion we follow. It's much deeper than that. At its heart it this book is about recovering our own, personal ancient history, about understanding where we come from. And the irony is that while genealogy sites continue to thrive as people attempt to trace back their family trees for a century or two, we still try to avoid thinking in ages.

I suspect this may be due to fear of the unknown. And of course not only is fear is contagious, but it is also a very powerful means of manipulating people. For example, the 15th Century Borgia Pope, Pope

Calixtus III forbade Spaniards to carry out rites in caves that had pictures of horses in them. In 1598 Lope de Vega wrote a play describing cave paintings at Las Batuecas in Salamanca as frequented by powerful demons. Even in the 20th century, local people still often avoided the caves and their paintings, believing them to be dangerous haunts of malevolent spirits (Kühn 1966: xxi).

For too long we have been conditioned to associate the unknown with chaos, as though the two are walking permanently hand in hand. They are not. Chaos—wars, famine, unspeakable atrocities—has occurred well within living memory, let alone within the historic or prehistoric period. Yet the 'unknown' may produce pleasant surprises, everything from scientific knowledge to artefacts of great beauty. It really is nothing to fear.

As the great dancer, Isadora Duncan, is reported to have once said, 'You were once wild here, don't let them tame you.'



Chapter Two
Beginning at the beginning

Although we have collected plenty of dates so far, in our quest to reach back towards the ancient past, we are still left asking, "When exactly is 'the beginning'?" That well worn phrase, 'Once upon a time…' is hardly adequate for a problem people have been grappling with for thousands of years.

In the eighth century BCE, the Greek poet Hesiod described a Golden Age, after which everything declined. Others, influenced by the Bible, would later declare confidently that the Golden Age began in 4004 BCE with the Garden of Eden and the story of Adam and Eve. I can actually remember this date printed in the margin of the book of Genesis in my father's Bible. (He won it as a prize in school shortly before his brother blew up the classroom with gunpowder).

Another theory suggested that civilisation didn't begin until the Great Flood or Deluge (the story of Noah and his Ark). This presented the period from the Garden of Eden until *before* the Flood as 'then' when everything was unknowable, and all that came afterwards as 'now,' i.e. within the distant but just-about-reachable historical past. It was still all a bit vague but better than nothing.

Of course, with the rise of interest in geology and fossils, it was soon realised there was a problem regarding the continuity between prehistory and history. Marine fossils discovered on mountain tops were particularly challenging. Even though some argued that these in fact proved that the Great Flood had happened, it could not explain why fossils were being discovered deep within rocks. At some point the rock must have been in an non-solid state: a solid fossil could not enter a solid rock.

The Flood legends…

Nowadays it may be difficult to understand the importance attached to the Biblical view of history, and in particular to the Flood legends. The story as described in the book of Genesis was compiled from several earlier oral traditions. These include the J or Jahveh tradition from the south of Israel, the E or Eliohim tradition from the North of Israel and the P or Priestly tradition from the exile (Knight and Lomas:78). These were not combined into a single source until around 3000 years ago.

The Dead Sea Scrolls Tales of the Patriarch (1QapGen) also mentions Noah, his father Lamech, and great grandfather Enoch while the Book of Enoch 1 65:1-69:2 has Noah himself describing the Flood (Stone 1996:286).

Of course, the story of a great and devastating flood is not unique to the Old Testament. The Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh is probably much older, dating from c. 5000 BCE although it was not written down until 2000 BCE. Nor is the story of the Flood confined to the Middle East, since there are legends of great floods in cultures all over the world including Native American legends. Some of these also include the tradition of the rainbow (Lang 1985:609 Map1).

The similarity of flood legends found right across the globe suggest our ancestral memories may also be fairly universal, not least in the form of survivors' guilt. This is a common phenomenon after many major disasters, even nowadays when people feel guilty that they survived when others died (Pedretti 2005:212). If survivors' guilt *is* present then it can challenge many of our assumptions about life, and raise awkward questions about how we can go on living in any meaningful sense. Of course the opposite can also happen, that people believe they survived because they somehow deserved it. This could be because their gods single them out personally (or their family or community) because they were more righteous than everyone else.

There is so much physical evidence of worldwide flooding that it seems strange we normally think only of the story of Noah's Ark especially when there are clearly many other similar legends. But that just shows the power of the written word—folk stories are considered to be just fairy tales, whereas the written word can even rise to the 'word of God.'

Physical evidence of some cataclysmic world flood includes the inland salt lakes and seas in Europe, Asia and the Americas. There is even a sand layer over most of Scotland and fossilised sea shells have been found on Snowdon at this date. (Knight and Lomas 2000:175)

Many theories have been put forward to explain why there should have been such widespread flooding. These range from the sudden and cataclysmic (such as comets or meteorites etc) to rises in sea levels caused by the ending of the last Ice Age, c. 12,000 years ago. As the planet began to grow warmer, so the huge glaciers and ice sheets started to melt causing raised river and sea levels.

This process continued for several thousand years until about 7000 years ago when the Mediterranean Sea started to expand, pushing northwards towards Turkey and the Black Sea which was then probably little more than an isolated freshwater lake surrounded by farmland.

Unlike an ocean where the water has plenty of room to redistribute itself gradually, water from the Mediterranean entering the Black Sea went through the narrow channel of the Bosporus. The resulting torrent was equivalent to two hundred separate Niagara Falls and would have been heard almost 500 km away as it raised the level of the Black Sea by 15 cm per day and swallowed up the shoreline, changing the landscape forever (Kerr 1998:1132).

It is impossible to underestimate the effects that such flooding must have had. The most obvious is that it caused widespread migration with Neolithic farmers moving into central Europe and even to Egypt and southern Mesopotamia where a new and distinctive farming culture seems to have appeared at around the same time. Stories told by the survivors may account for the Mesopotamian accounts of a great flood.

When considering how myths and legends evolve, we should also take into account that a series of Ice Ages, cooling down the planet and then warming up again would produce similar cycles of flooding and their accompanying myths, each building on the one before. Eventually they could become so intertwined they become hard to tell apart.

This happens even in recent times. For example, when I was young there was a steep hill a few miles away known locally as ‘The Tumble.’ The name may derive from *tumulus*, meaning a mound, or simply describe the fate of riders as they tried to make their way down. It was certainly a blackspot for accidents when I was a child.

My family however, combined this name with ‘Tumble Down Dick’, which was a nickname for Oliver Cromwell’s son, Richard. Being an imaginative lot, they then went one further, declaring that ‘Tumbledown Dick’ was none other than the infamous highwayman, Dick Turpin, and that the Tumble was so called because that was the spot where he fell off his horse.

Actually Richard Cromwell lived in the seventeenth century, Dick Turpin in the eighteenth, and my family were busy rolling them all together in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Imagine then, what can happen to legends and myths with the passing of thousands of years.

With advances in archaeology and geology so the problem of dating the ancient past using the Bible as a benchmark was becoming untenable. For example, Biblical dating offered no explanation for how the bones of extinct animals could be discovered alongside stone tools.

The only viable solutions required rethinking the entire historical and theological landscape. Yet suggesting that man had been around for tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of years was regarded with some horror. In 1851, in Volume I of his *History of Normandy and of England*, the historian Palgrave had recommended, 'We must give it up, that speechless past.' But the past is not speechless, it has simply been ignored and stifled. And we, in turn, have forgotten how to listen, blinded as we are by our attachment to the written word.

However, Palgrave's approach proved both popular and persistent. In the late 19th century, the French historians Langlois and Seignobos (1898:17) declared, 'For want of documents the history of immense periods in the past of humanity is destined to remain forever unknown. For there is no substitute for documents: no documents, no history.'

But what happens to us spiritually if we take this advice? Well, some would say, nothing much. But as '…spiritual beings having a human experience,' (de Chardin, 1955) I believe the past *does* matter. We did not arise, like the goddess Athena, from the head of the god, fully armed and ready for war. What we are today is the process not of a few centuries, or even a few thousand years, but of hundreds of thousands, even millions, of years. And we need to cease fearing our ancient inner past and learn from it instead.

What can we learn? Well, perhaps first and foremost we can learn about survival. Our ancestors survived trials we cannot begin to imagine, not just floods but war, plague and famine together with extreme natural phenomena such as the Ice Ages. How did they do it? What inner strengths did they draw upon? What cultural and religious values must have sustained them?

And here we hit a stumbling block. Sometimes any information regarding the ancient past seems impossibly contradictory. Idyllic tales of Golden Ages jostle for our attention with claims that civilisation is locked

into a continuous cycles of progress and improvement. How do we reconcile the two? How do we know which is true?

One early solution was suggested by Turgot in his book *A Philosophical Review of the Successive Advances of the Human Mind* (1750). He agreed that yes, there had been ancient civilisations (which would account for a Golden Age or two) but that these had all been destroyed by the Great Flood/Garden of Eden or even by the Tower of Babel. Everything then reverted to a primitive state.

Turgot's contemporary, Goguet (*On the origin of laws, arts and sciences, 1758)* went further, claiming that the Great Flood had actually made humans somehow forget the use of iron and other metals and return instead to making and using stone tools.

Gradually opinions shifted away from the need to date everything according to the Bible as awareness grew of the great civilisations of Egypt, Chaldea, Sumeria and China etc., with their ancient dating systems. These clearly showed civilisations much older than had previously been considered possible.

Yet even then, when it was realised just how old Man must be, our ancestors were still being regarded as hopelessly primitive if not downright brutish. Some authors, as late as 1940, regarded Early Man as mentally quite undeveloped, and that any mysticism found in the Stone Age must be '…of a crass and sensuous type, for the soul of man was only just taking form in its animal chrysalis.' (Barton 1940:138)

The same author speculated that the earliest religious expectations must have involved mere thrill-seeking probably involving alcohol or sex (Barton 1940, :137). To highlight the difference, Barton then quoted several Biblical examples to support his ideas of 'higher' and (it was implied) more uplifting religious experience.

The truth is, of course, that we do not know what our ancestors expected from their religion. They may have been spiritually carefree or intensely enlightened. Yet when we look at images of the beauty and movement within the cave paintings (which in fairness Barton probably had never seen) it is impossible to believe they were mentally primitive in any way. Their art shows life and movement that was rarely seen even in the Middle Ages.

Even the way we view Ice Age art has changed since it was first discovered in the 19th century, when it was seen only as evidence of how the

primitive mind fashioned its magic. At first there were the theories that the paintings were a form of hunting magic or fertility magic—which may have been prompted by the fact there are more animals than people in the paintings.

Later, Jung would look at the art and see his archetypes, Freud would see sexual symbolism, while still others saw totems, clan signs and zodiacs and constellations. The truth may be some, all or none of these things. We do not know. And it is not the purpose of this book to 'solve' any puzzles, but to open ourselves up to the imagery and try to connect once more with the ancient past.

It is important therefore not to approach the past (or indeed other cultures) condescendingly. People do not simply seize upon an idea and believe in it without what they believe are good reasons. Usually beliefs are the result of observation over a long period of time. For example, some cultures believe that pregnancy is caused by a spirit that enters the woman. This is occasionally held up as 'proof' that such people are too ignorant to understand that pregnancy was caused by having sex.

However, even in the modern West, sex does not always result in pregnancy. Something happens at certain times—ovulation—that makes pregnancy more likely, but even then *it does not always happen.* So the idea that pregnancy is caused by spirit is not really so wide of the mark if we are going purely by what we can observe. Our ancestors must have observed that sex did *not* always result in pregnancy. Therefore some other agency had to be at work. And this is not really so different from people who once made the pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in Norfolk to pray for a child, just a few centuries ago.

It is important not to lose sight of our goals here. How or why Ice Ages happen is not the question we should be asking. What haunts us still is the how and why of *survival.* Because deep within each of us we seem programmed to survive as a species. To keep going. Part of this is down not only to our own personal survival instincts but because we want our descendants to survive too. And this includes not just our biological offspring, but the children of our family, tribe and society. Because without children there can be no future.

Unfortunately, nowadays children are routinely demonised and feared. Newspaper headlines scream 'Devil Child!' as though all children are potential mass murderers. In truth children are more likely to be victims

than culprits, yet they are condemned for their hair, their clothing, their tattoos and piercings, even their names (The Independent Newspaper online 2013). Nobody seems concerned to get to know them as individuals. But if we keep on demonising children—our own and other people's—we are creating a wasteland of the future.

The presence of children is essential for the future of any societal group. Of course more children mean more mouths to feed but there will also be more hands to help, to work, to defend, care, farm and hunt. Children learn what we teach them, and if we fail to teach them what they need, instead blindly handing over their education to the television screen or the internet, this bodes ill for the future of the human race.

Having children is not just about the ability to bear a child but also about nurturing and teaching those children, about imparting skills and values to the next generation. Without that, society regresses instead of progressing.

The values that are passed on to our descendants are vitally important. Each generation supports not only the next but also the previous one when its members become too old or sick to fend for themselves. When the late sixteenth/early seventeenth century poet John Donne wrote 'no man is an island,' he was stating the truth. We all belong to groups of one sort or another, for example, family, school, or the workplace. Sometimes we belong willingly, sometimes not.

It is easy to forget that no matter what our spiritual, religious, or cultural beliefs happen to be, there are always more things that unite than divide us.



Chapter Three
The Idea of Sacred Space

The idea of a sacred space, a spot set aside specially for religious or magical ritual is extremely ancient. There is no single concept of sacred space, of course, it may be anything from a simple shrine or grove to a large temple complex. Sacred spaces may be situated in remote areas, set aside from human habitations, or they may be central where everyone can visit them.

Or order to be considered suitable for worship, rituals or simply spiritual focus, natural spaces must possess some special quality, something that can be quickly recognised. Mountains soar towards the sky, waterfalls are spectacular whether they are in full spate or frozen and suspended in time. Caves, burrowing deep into the earth, may be considered special perhaps because they offer shelter and seclusion either for mortals or spirits and gods.

Sometimes a sacred space may become a home for the deity. If so then it needs the same sort of attributes as a home for human beings, i.e. to offer privacy, protection against the weather, be wind and watertight, and perhaps have some means of heating it. In the case of a home for the gods this might require a sacred hearth fire. And once you have a sacred space, then the people who use it must tend to its upkeep, even if it's only cutting back brushwood and keeping it neat and tidy. A more structured space might require offerings of firewood, and a permanent keeper of the site. Even a minimal effort suggests some sort of settled life, although not necessarily an urban one.

Not everyone needs a fixed temple however. If people are nomadic hunter gatherers, then they really have little use for any sort of fixed temple

and they certainly would not be around to help maintain it regularly. This might explain why there is little prehistoric evidence for such things as temples and shrines (although there is some). Instead hunter gatherers may have had sacred places such as springs or trees that they encountered on their regular hunting routes. These were natural rather than man-made, and their upkeep was minimal.

Until gods were anthropomorphised (given human characteristics) there was no need for them to actually 'live' in a sacred space, although they might be present there from time to time. This could explain why building temples was probably a much later development (Dowden 2000:127).

There is of course a third way: creating some sort of structure that echoes something already regarded as sacred within the natural world. It could be argued for example that Stonehenge with its huge stones, represents a man-made version of a grove of giant oaks. Yet even if this is true, we still do not know whether it replaces an actual grove that once stood (and died) on that site, or whether it was something entirely new, wishful thinking rather than replacing reality.

One of the oldest known shrines in the world, dating back c.14,000 years (i.e. into the Palaeolithic period) was discovered in 1978 at El Juyo Cave in northern Spain (Simon 1981:357). This sizeable complex shows that quite a large group of people (not just a few individuals or families) must have felt it was important to make the effort to create it. As there is no evidence that the site was every used for everyday living, this suggests that right from the start it had a special 'set aside' purpose as a focal point for a whole community or tribe.

Within the complex there was a further focal point, a large stone head fourteen inches high, thirteen inches wide and eight inches deep. The face is naturally divided by a deep vertical fissure in the rock. Possibly the ancient masons chose the stone for this very reason, because it allowed the face to be divided. One side shows a man with a moustache and beard, while the other is more feline, suggesting a lion or leopard.

Given the great age of the site, some might say the lion man is only wishful thinking, his appearance due to deliberate damage or to the erosive effects of millennia of wind, frost and rain. However, lions often appear as part of a trinity of animals (the other two usually being the Bull and the Eagle).

This is a motif that extends back into the Middle Eastern Bronze Age and forwards into the iconography of the Christian gospels (Leroi-Gourhan & Michelson, 1986: 16). Obviously it is sometimes difficult to be sure whether the groups or animals found side by side in Palaeolithic art belong to a single set of beliefs or to several. They may have been laid down over a period of time.

The stone head probably had a half man/half lion face right from the start, but we do not know whether *only* the lion was significant at the El Juyo site. There may once have been a bull, perhaps removed from the shrine in antiquity. Or it may still be there, waiting for someone to find it.

Archaeologists did discover a shallow trench at the centre of the El Juyo shrine. This had been filled with spear points, animal bones, shells and colouring material and suggests some sort of sacred deposit. Above the trench was a mound about 30 inches high, which was covered in clay, stone slabs and fragments of animals bones, especially those of deer. Vertical stone slabs had then been set up around the mound and supported a very heavy limestone slab. All this took time, will and effort to create.

Yet none of these discoveries tell us *how* it was used, what rituals were performed there, or why it was important to the community. Its use may have changed with the passage of time. What we do know however is that setting aside a specific place outside the everyday living area shows us that this area—this shrine, temple, whatever—was considered different. It was, in some way, important for ancient spirituality. And one characteristic of religious ritual that there should be rules concerning when, where and the manner in which it should be performed. Very little ritual is really spontaneous (Dowden 2000:25).

At one time it was believed that ancient religious belief focused mostly on ancestor worship (Spencer, 1885) while other contemporaries (Tylor, 1891) suggested people felt a need to worship ‘friendly spirits’ without ever specifying what exactly these were, nor how their friendliness (or indeed, hostility) was recognised or measured.

Although each of us we can remember the days when those we have loved passed over, within a group of people eventually there comes a point when we have so many ancestors that almost every day could commemorate somebody! In a long standing community therefore, it could make sense to have a single day set aside and shared by everyone to remember all the dead.

And of course this is exactly what we have in the modern All Souls' Day (November 2) and the much loved Festival of Samhain or Halloween, together with many others (often in November) celebrated around the globe.

Why this particular time of year should lend itself to commemorating the dead is difficult to say. In the northern hemisphere it could reflect the bleakness of the season, marked by grey skies, longer nights and dying vegetation. This would echo death and loss. Shorter days may also have been a potent reminder of the brevity of life, and once they began to 'grow' again, then the dead could be left in peace and people concentrated once more on new life and regeneration in the spring. It is a compelling thought, even though it cannot be proved.

Unfortunately, there is no single answer to the question of ancient religious beliefs, no single key to the problem that, once unlocked, can answer everything. We cannot assume that anything—practice or belief—was universal. It probably varied from place to place and time to time just as it does nowadays.

Even the placing of archaeological artefacts can be open to interpretation. For example, at El Juyo, there were hunting implements in one part of the shrine and sewing needles in another. One explanation is that this suggests gender differences in the way some rituals were performed (Simon 1981:357). However, from a more practical point of view it makes perfect sense to keep large weapons away from small, easily damaged needles and there may have been no more significance to their position than that!

When we look at ancient objects, we can only see them through modern eyes; we do not know for certain how they were viewed or used originally. Often, everything has been viewed from the relatively recent perspective of Western Christianity. For example, a cache of ancient shells immediately suggests a belief in a shell deity because it is taken for granted that ancient man was so spiritually simple that he attached a god to just about everything he knew.

Of course that is not necessarily what happened. It may be for example that he believed shells were attributes of certain deities (not necessarily shell gods) or that they helped connect him to some aspect of the divine. They may even have been grouped together for purely artistic reasons.

For example when I was a toddler, my father spent many hours at a local beach collecting tiny shells. He spent a long time carefully cleaning

and drilling them with a minute hand drill, before borrowing my mother's pearly pink nail varnish and painting them. Finally he threaded them together on a piece of fine elastic to make a bracelet for me.

His sole purpose as far as I know, was to create something beautiful out of natural objects. I don't believe there was anything remotely spiritual in his activity although it took many hours of his time and he was never a particularly creative or artistic person. Yet the desire to create beautiful things exists in most of us.

However, imagine if my father's ancient ancestor had done exactly the same for one of his children, (well, apart from the pink nail varnish perhaps) and it had somehow survived and been discovered tens of thousands of years later. More than likely, archaeologists (especially in the nineteenth century) would have believed this was proof that he and his contemporaries believed in a shell deity.

Having said that, shells do have a magic all their own, and perhaps some of our persistent folk beliefs about them are indeed rooted in the ancient past. The first time a young child holds a shell to her ear and 'hears the sea' is a good example (although as a rather curious child, I soon discovered that I could get pretty much the same result by holding a cupped hand over my ear!). Even so there is a sense of connection between holding an object that has come from the sea and actually hearing what sounds like the sea come out of its depths.

And this poses an interesting question: was this why shells were so popular for decoration? Not because it was thought that the voice of god was hiding inside, but because they provided a tangible link to the sea and whatever *that* symbolised.

Another reason may have been not what we can hear in shells, but the sounds they can make. Some are natural trumpets and have been used as such all over the world. Yet blades of grass can also make a piercing noise, and as far as we know, nobody has ever claimed divine properties for them.

There is some evidence that shells were valued in the ancient world since occasionally a shell will turn up which appears to have travelled many thousands of miles. For example, a *cassis rufa* shell was discovered in one of the burials of Cro-Magnon children at Grimaldi at La Grotte des Enfants. This shell would have travelled thousands of miles from Southwest Asia, carried either by the sea, traders, migrating tribes or perhaps a combination of all three (Mackenzie 1922:36).

The ability of shells to travel through rough seas and wash up on a beach relatively unscathed could have made them a natural choice for protective amulets as well as personal ornaments. In fact many things we take for granted today when we dress up to go out (wearing make-up which is a kind of mask, putting on perfume and wearing jewellery particularly necklaces and pendants) all seem to have had their origins in protective magic.

Shells may have washed up on ancient shores in their thousands, but what of the land itself, how did our ancestors view it? Again we can only generalise at best. Some areas may be seen as welcoming, or safe. Others may be seen as quite the opposite, an abode of horror, the Wasteland. In the old Testament for example we find a description of a place, 'In which there is no man.' (Job 38:26) or the 'Land not sown' (Jeremiah 2:2). Basically Wastelands are places beyond human control. They seem to be in constant conflict with people.

For example deserts or swamps may harbour dangerous animals. Myths then grow up around the area, with legends of shrieking monsters, will o' the wisps, etc. However areas can change—some deserts were once savannah grassland, some swamps were once natural harbours.

By comparison, anywhere that became adopted as a Homeland would have seemed welcoming, offering natural sources of water, shelter or defence. These attributes encouraged the creation of myths that explained how a god gave the land to the people, or how it was won for them by a great hero. It did not take much encouragement for people to start believing that in order to hold onto the Homeland (and divine favour), certain rituals or beliefs had to be followed. The bonds between people, land and divinity had to be constantly upheld and strengthened.

Homelands often contain sacred spaces such as groves, mountains, springs and even rocky outcrops. These act as a focus within an already well-regarded area. They are set aside, restricted and usually not intended not for everyday use. The presence of these sacred focal points placed more responsibility upon the entire tribe or community. If the sites were not properly honoured or tended then the land would either revert to Wasteland, or it would seek out people who would give it the respect it deserved. We can even see how some individuals or groups might be chosen to care for it and guard against improper use or desecration.

Living in the Homeland thus became a two-way process of giving and receiving. There were both benefits to be received and duties to be performed if people wanted to stay living where they were. And of course they probably *did* want to preserve the Homeland, not only because it seemed to favour them and because it represented the community's shared history, but also because it had been the home—and often the burial place—of their ancestors.

Those living in the Homeland must have compared it favourably with the 'Wasteland' beyond. The Homeland was valued, while the Wasteland was feared. The downside was that somewhere so valued could be coveted, and others (the Wastelanders or traitors within the Homeland) might try to appropriate the Homeland for themselves. It seems inevitable that protective rituals would have been performed in order to keep the land and people safe, and preserve the sacred relationship between them.

Although we may not know exactly what such rituals entailed, there are folk traditions that echo similar intentions. The rituals we know may be only a century or two old, even so they reflect a response to some deep-seated need. For example, the tradition of 'beating the bounds' to mark the boundary of a parish or village still persists in some areas.

In European folklore there are many examples of beating trees in order to increase their fertility. Beating the bounds may have been intended to increase the fertility of the land and there would be no sense in doing this in order for someone else to benefit from it. Therefore it is likely that protection and fertility were both intertwined in the same ritual. Also, the annual ceremony was a method of teaching the next generation where exactly the Homeland's boundaries lay.

Boundaries still matter. Throughout history, most wars occur (wholly or in part) due to land disputes. No matter how hi-tech our world becomes, we retain a strangely personalised relationship with it. Even in the twenty-first century people refer to the Mother Country, Mother Russia, the Motherland or Fatherland, suggesting that land was not only personified, but could also be gender specific.

While the term 'Mother tongue' may be a practical description of the language learned from one's mother, the term 'Mother Earth' suggests the belief that the earth had certain maternal characteristics. It nurtured, it fed, it could chastise, and when they died people were returned to its dark womb via burial.

It is interesting how Earth invites people to engage with her, even those who would be horrified if we suggested they were in any way honouring an earth goddess or earth spirits. For example when the Pope travels he often prostrates himself upon arrival in order to kiss the ground.

Viewing the earth as a Mother, Goddess or Sacred Feminine is not as preposterous as we might think. Nor does it ultimately detract from other beliefs and religions. After all, mothers nurture and feed their children at the breast, while fathers must work, farm or hunt in order to provide food. And whether food is grown or killed, or even bought in the local supermarket, ultimately it all comes from the land.

However, whereas Mother Earth requires respect and love, there are those who insist we are entitled to use the land and its resources as we wish. In the modern world this viewpoint (often described as patriarchal) is often used to justify exploiting and abusing the land for financial gain, with no thought for replenishment or respect.

Although we cannot know exactly how our ancient ancestors regarded the earth, if they relied upon it for food, warmth and shelter, there is a strong possibility they realised they had to treat it well and look after it. We should perhaps ask ourselves how might our lives change if we too, began to regard the earth as our parent and not simply as a resource to be exploited at our pleasure.

Such a change in outlook could have enormous spiritual implications. Rudolf Steiner (1994:16) once wrote that in order to develop unconsciously we must first develop a capacity for reverence. In this instance, that could include reverence towards ancestors (both known and unknown) and towards the concept of a Homeland and the earth as a parent.

We should also try to ‘feel’ the land around us. This is more than simply observing our surroundings. We need to cultivate that feeling of oneness, where the land is our body and our body is the land. Even if we live somewhere we do not really like, we still need to start first with our own locality, to try and find something loveable about it. Perhaps once we establish that connection, we may find our relationship with our present Homeland changes for the better.

Any religious or spiritual sites within a Homeland generally have two aspects. They can be an area, which is quite wide, or a focus, which is much

narrower. So we can have a shrine, such as El Juyo, which is quite a good sized area, or an altar, which is smaller and acts as a focus.

For example, a house or temple can be an 'area' while the hearth is the focus. Yet we cannot reach the focus without first entering the area. (This is not foolproof however. A forest may be a sacred area, but a single sacred or World tree usually stands apart and by itself so it is easy to identify).

Hearths and campfires act as a useful central focus, since people tend to gather around them. In huts they were usually set up in a central position so the smoke could go up through the roof. Indeed the word focus comes from the Latin word for a hearth fire (Dowden 2000:25). Sometimes sacred areas are permanent, sometimes they can be temporarily sanctified, which is useful if we follow a nomadic lifestyle.

Trees are natural focal points. Hawthorns are quite small and would be insignificant in a forest although traditionally single specimens are the haunt of fairies. Even an oak would need to be either exceptionally old or large. Sometimes even small trees could be valuable however, since their leaves—especially from oak trees—were used for making garlands. According to Pliny the Elder, Druids '…do not perform any rites without oak leaves' (Natural History 16.249).

We do not know whether sacred trees were ever regarded as gods in their own right, as gifts from the gods or even as places where it was easier to contact the divine. What we do know however is that natural sacred sites —of all descriptions—endured for tens of thousands of years. In the first century BCE (a relatively recent date as far as we are concerned) Cicero wrote, '…in cities they shall have the shrines; in the countryside they shall have groves and seats of the Lares' (*De legibus* .19).

Of course once we create a sacred space, the next question is who –or what—owns it. One god? Several? The land? Then we must decide how to treat it. It's like getting to know a particularly awkward aunt or uncle. We have to work out what will please and what will offend them. In the case of a sacred site, we might decide to restrict the type of visitors allowed. Or we might insist on certain times ('opening hours') or certain clothing or behaviour. We might require (or forbid) guests.

Dictating religious behaviour to others requires not only that someone —and individual or group—has the authority to do this, but also that the majority of people are prepared to allow them to do so. Those who will not or cannot accept it, quickly become outsiders, beyond the pale.

They may even be banished from the Homeland. Because they refuse to 'live the myth' they can be punished as 'evil attackers of cosmic law' (Meadow 1992:191).

This sounds rather dramatic, but of course these guidelines might not always have been strictly followed. In peacetime, when all was well, it might not have mattered so much. However, whenever a society feels itself to be under threat, then laws are tightened and it becomes increasingly important to observe every ritual so as to avoid offending the deity.

Some sacred sites would almost certainly have been viewed as places of safety and even sanctuary. Remote sites, or groves in large forests would be particularly suitable for this. Of course, there would be virtually no large forests in Europe until the ice sheets had well and truly receded.

Initially, c. 10,000 years ago, the landscape would have been little more than steppe-tundra and it would take many years before the forests re-grew. This is just one of the many problems in dealing with a concept such as 'ancient'. As ordinary individuals we simply cannot comprehend or measure the time-scales involved.

Eventually forests not only re-grew, they flourished. Nowadays it is difficult to imagine just how dense ancient forests were. It could be almost impossible to find anyone determined to hide in there which seems to support the idea of a sacred grove offering sanctuary. In modern times, the story of the Bielski Brothers, who helped hide over 1000 Jews from the Nazis in forests in western Belarus shows how a large number of people could successfully hide in a sufficiently remote area.

Because we know that nothing stands still, it is safe to assume that sometimes the status quo must have been overthrown. Even the gods could be deposed, often by their own sons. Then a new hierarchy was established. This could happen either as a new group took over the Homeland or even when old gods were seen to fail to protect their people. This might be particularly apparent as the successive Ice Ages threatened human survival.

This must have created enormous tensions. Some groups must have clung onto their old traditions and perhaps fought for them. Sometimes the changes would come about through a revelation, a direct approach from a god explaining what was required of the people. Either way, the creation of myth helped to explain changes so that people could make sense of them.

And yes, the myths may be long forgotten… but the yearnings, fears and hopes are with us still.



Chapter Four
More Sacred Sites

There are many natural sites that could be considered sacred so it is worth pausing here and looking at what they might have in common. The important thing about any natural site, be it a spring, lake, river or mountain, is that it should be easy to see and recognise. A single tall mountain is remarkable, but if we live amongst mountains we might disagree. If something is sacred then it is important, and we should not have to agonise over identification.

Springs and wells

Fresh, drinkable water is essential for human life. It is also heavy, meaning that ideally it should be fairly nearby, otherwise people cannot settle for more than a day or so. This may not matter quite so much in hunter gatherer societies on the move, but certainly farming would be out of the question.

Running water must have seemed particularly magical after the frozen wastes of the last Ice Age, as though the water itself was suddenly returning to life. This might explain why running water was specified in so many early charms and spells. Offerings were made at springs in Germany as early as the Stone Age (Dowden 2000:43).

Although too recent for the period covered in this book, some early Church edicts tell us a great deal about how our pagan and heathen ancestors worshipped near the sea, at springs or the sources of rivers. These practices proved very difficult to eradicate suggesting they were already long established.

Many of these sacred wells were eventually taken over and turned into Christian shrines presided over by a variety of saints. The Latin word for a spring is f*ont* something nowadays associated with the stone fonts used for baptism inside a church. This suggests that churches—and some chapels—were deliberately built near holy springs as a way of Christianising them.

Water sources are often associated with good health and purification, the latter perhaps because water was already being used for general cleaning purposes, making the progression to magical cleansing (purification) seem quite natural. Although the association of water with disease such as cholera was not established until the 19th century it took no great skill to notice that water from a fresh spring water was sweeter and more palatable than that from a stagnant pond.

Some springs also have a high mineral content which were recorded for use in treating certain types of illnesses in antiquity by authors such as Pliny the Elder (Natural History 31.5—12). Some wells were thought to have healing properties too, and rag wells are still popular in some parts of the UK. (This uses scapegoat idea of leaving a bandage or piece of clothing belonging to the sick person behind for the well—or in some cases, a tree—to absorb).

A vigorous spring can produce thousands of gallons of water, thus easily filling lakes or wells. To see the water bubbling up out of the earth is just as awe-inspiring now was it would have been to our ancestors. Hot springs are rare in Britain apart from the one at Bath, and although nowadays many people only associate it with the Romans, it had already been long established as a sacred site for thousands of years.

Apart from healing and purification, wells and springs had been used for public and private divination for many thousands of years all over the world. There were various methods of doing this. The most obvious was to observe the state of the water, whether it was muddy, clear or had changed colour. Sometimes people would throw in pebbles and count how many bubbles rose to the surface; these were thought to tell the number of years or even children that would follow. Some wells are known as ‘drumming wells’ because they produce a rumbling sound which is thought to foretell disasters (Cordner 1946:27)

However, it must be said that there is no way of proving that our ancient ancestors used springs for fortune telling or healing. However, considering how persistent these practices proved, even in the face of active Church

opposition and sanctions, we cannot help wondering how old these customs must be. On 4th August 1643, the minister of the Kirk of Kingussie told examiners that the reason why there were no censures of people frequenting holy wells in the area was because his entire congregation were guilty! (Cordner 1946:26)

While springs are a constant, self renewing source of clean water, lakes and ponds tend to be still. This gives them certain, quite different characteristics. Unlike streams and rivers, they cannot carry anything away, except into their depths. This gives it some permanence (except, perhaps, in very dry summers.)

Lakes and ponds provide a space that is almost impossible to enter with any safety. They also reflect the sky, while reaching down in its depths into the earth. While a well reaches into the earth, certainly, it usually has minimal chance to reflect the sky, especially if it is covered although it must be said we do not know for sure whether wells were covered in ancient times.

Like springs, rivers appear to travel (hence the fascination for sailing small paper boats along them!) This gives the impression of a living being, and may explain why some, such as the Rhine in Germany, had their own, special inhabitants such as Rhine maidens. Many rivers had their own water spirits, some of which demanded offerings if anyone was crossing a bridge.

Nowadays we tend to think of bridges spanning quite wide distances, but centuries ago they tended to be built at the narrowest point of a river, and were very narrow. From time to time they could collapse or be swept away, suggesting that offerings to the river may have been more concerned with preserving personal safety rather than placating a river spirit although it could be argued the two things went hand in hand.

In ancient Greece, river gods were so popular, in the Iliad they were called to attend an assembly (most of them went!) ‘There was no river that came not, save only Oceanus, nor any nymph, of all that haunt the fair copses, the springs that feed the rivers, and the grassy meadows’. (Iliad 20.4—9)

Some ancient bridges were quite sizable. One of the oldest in the world, over the River Havos in Mycenae, c.1600 BCE, is solidly made of boulders, runs for twenty-two metres, is over five and a half metres wide and four metres tall. If offerings were ever made from sturdy bridges such as these

(and it is a big 'if'), they were almost certainly intended to placate river deities or spirits.

Given that some rivers dry up or are even diverted, there may be many ancient bridges that are no longer recognised or such, or whose building materials were removed for other projects centuries ago.

Not only did the water appear to travel, but when they were not frozen they allowed people to travel by boat over relatively long distances. This enabled individuals and groups to keep in touch even when travelling by land was difficult. It is no coincidence that early settlements were usually along river banks and almost all the large western cities have a river running through or near them. It is sometimes claimed that the River Marne in France got its name from *matrona* (meaning mother) while rivers called Dee (and there are many of these) derived from *Deva*, a Celtic word for goddess (Dowden 2000:54).

Lakes seem to have attracted a wide variety of offerings. One of the best-known examples is the story of King Arthur and the sword Excalibur which was thrown back into the Lake for 'The Lady,' suggesting a water goddess. Possibly every lake had its own deity.

Gregory of Tours (On the Glory of the Confessors, 2) describes people throwing in cloth fleeces, cheeses, wax and bread. They also slaughtered animals there although he does not tell us what deity they were placating or what they hoped to achieve (presumably nobody thought to ask them). He does mention however that on the fourth day of the offerings, there '… would be a storm with mighty thunder and lightning,' suggesting the offerings were intended for a sky or storm deity.

Although we may never be able to recreate ancient rituals, we can certainly try to put ourselves in the position of using ritual to maintain our relationship with whatever happens to be our own Homeland. Many cultures and even individual families have myths explaining how they arrived at their present Homeland and also creation myths to explain how their Homeland came into existence. These may never have been written down, but we can still have our own personal mythology where we remember and pass on the stories of how we came to live where we do.

Unfortunately the concept of Homeland has become very politicised. Yet it does not have to be a country, and on a personal level we can be attached to an area or even a house. Or perhaps we feel that some areas are desirable and others not. We may fear the dark, inner cities, even though

common sense tells us they are usually well lit at night. But the darkness serves another purpose because it obscures the Other, the Wastelands. The world ‘out there.’

We see these arbitrary divisions time and again in modern life. Catchment areas for schools are a good example. Quite why children on one side of a street should go to one school, and those on the other to a different one is beyond me. But if the schools differ widely in reputation then one side of the street becomes associated with the ‘good’ (i.e. the Homeland) while the opposite side becomes associated with the ‘other.’ It is nonsense really. There is no real reason for the divide, we cannot see it, we cannot touch it, but those with school age children may be only too aware of its existence.

This combination of comforting Homeland and threatening Wastelands persists into our present consciousness. It makes us fear things we are only dimly aware of, things we barely understand, fears that haunt our dreams. Thus our fears were intensified by the migrations of our ancestors.

For example, a quick look at my own family tree shows that although I clearly sound Welsh the moment I open my mouth, in fact my ancestors—even in the past few centuries—came from all over the British Isles, and even northern Europe. None were living in Wales even a hundred and fifty years ago. So for me personally, the language of Exile is particularly poignant and meaningful. My ancestors rarely stayed in the same country for more than three generations which is nothing in the great scheme of things.

I suspect these ancient memories of Homeland, Wasteland and Exile have more effect on us than we realise. Inexplicable fears of water, heights and fire may all be rooted in the distant past. An irresistible urge to travel may be another symptom.

In my own family, I know that one branch was constantly on the move for many years, beginning (as far as I know) in the seventeenth century. They travelled back and forth from Ireland to Scotland before eventually settling in Wales. The ‘itchy feet’ manifested itself in many family members emigrating down the years, while others were (and still are) constantly travelling round the globe whenever and wherever they could.

Likewise, my family often had this sense of belonging elsewhere, even though none of them were entirely sure where this was. It was something I experienced for myself when I was growing up: a strange sense that I was

not where I should be. Obviously many teenagers feel a certain amount of disassociation, but it was more than that. I had the feeling that I was living in the wrong country. It seems likely that this is how the mythology of Exile manifests once the original stories have been suppressed or forgotten and only the emotional impact remains.

In contrast, over the past three centuries, my husband's family travelled much smaller distances and rarely over water, although they lived in an area prone to heavy flooding and criss-crossed by water channels and rivers. Mr Penry has never particularly enjoyed travelling and has a strong sense of home and hearth coupled with an intense dislike of water.

It was only much later, when I researched his family's history, I discovered that several children had drowned back in the early nineteenth century. So perhaps his rather irrational dislike of water (given that he's never had any near-drowning experiences) related to a family mythology about the dangers of the water where they once lived. Like so many things, it is possible, though not provable. However, both these examples are certainly food for thought, inviting us to explore what could be hiding under the surface of our outward *persona*.

As we look back to the ancient past and seek its lessons for us, we need to find ways to reconcile ourselves to these constant changes in our identity. Unless we do, we can end up feeling we do not belong anywhere. And in a funny way this is quite true. We do not really 'belong' to any single place.

Due to the climate changes of the successive Ice Ages, our ancient ancestors were forced to migrate not just once but many times. Therefore change is something built into our personal quest for survival. We are where we are, but only for the present. We may not want to be there, but that's how it is at the moment. When changes come, we have to be ready. Where we are now may not be where we will end up, and where we end up may be nowhere near where we began. None may be places of our choosing.

Feeling unsettled therefore is not necessarily a bad thing provided we understand that 'home' is within us and not just an address we write on an envelope. Homeland may denote a physical place, but it also represents that sense of 'home' that is always within us.

A collective feeling of not truly belonging is a far more serious matter than any individual sense of estrangement. At its most extreme it can be used to justify a need to colonise and subjugate others. With all the fervour of converts, people start trying to impose their own desire for a Homeland

onto everyone else, even if this means evicting or enslaving those who are already living there.

Over the millennia, human beings have tried to maintain a working relationship with the land they inhabit. Even if it does not feel like home, they do their best. Many of us are surprisingly quick at learning to adjust, and before long feel a sense of belonging. Some however always feel like strangers (or are made to feel that way) even when they have lived in the same place for a couple of decades.

One of the most popular coping mechanisms is to keep one's history alive, be it family history or the history of an area. Creation myths are another method, allowing us to reach even further back to the very beginnings of time. They may not be very accurate or truthful but nevertheless they help at an emotional level. At their most basic, such myths explain how the tribe, family or ancestor came to live in the present Homeland.

One of my ancestors, for example, arrived in England as a result of the Irish Potato Famine in the mid nineteenth century. Many years later he travelled on to Wales, while some of his siblings went to Scotland. Even though I lacked many details, the story formed part of my own, personal mythology for many years.

Nowadays, even though we might be newly arrived in our present 'Homeland' we should still aim to pass on stories of our arrival to the next generation. These cycles of arriving and belonging help us tap into an ancient tradition that has been all but forgotten in the modern western world. Also it will help those who come after us to remember *their* cultural and ancestral heritage too.

If the original occupiers of the Homeland are driven out then a new body of myth and legend springs up—the language of Exile. One of the most famous examples is found in the Old Testament story of Moses leading his people out of Egypt towards the Promised Land (Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy).

Of course our own story of Exile may not be so dramatic but nevertheless it is important on a personal level. Normally people move due to the principle of the carrot or the stick: something either pulls or pushes them. In ancient times a rival tribe, war or natural disaster may have driven people away, or the prospect of better hunting or farming land may have

tempted them to try their luck elsewhere. When I researched my own family history it was both carrot and stick.

Themes of exile also exist within cultures. Apart from the Irish Famine, there were millions of displaced persons after World War Two. So perhaps the sensation of loss that we sometimes experience when looking at certain landscapes has its roots in some early forgotten cultural memories of our own ancestors' exile.

We have developed a variety of coping mechanisms for the sense of Exile down the centuries. For example, small rituals to honour the burial place of our ancestors become more important to us, especially when we know that most of our ancestors are buried somewhere else.

Although we think of cemeteries full of headstones acting as markers for the dead, the truth is that these represent only a tiny fraction of all burials. Most people were buried not only in unmarked graves, but also in communal graves with strangers. Yet often we feel a need to place flowers on graves, perhaps as a way of marking where they have entered the earth and been reclaimed by it. In much the same way, accident sites (especially where there has been loss of life) and even a local cenotaph are often decorated with flowers.

Although the landscape of our Homeland may vary, the earth always mirrors the divine. Polarities—night and day, fire and ice, summer and winter, sun and moon etc.,—occur just about everywhere and it seems inevitable they must have been incorporated into spiritual belief and ritual. Yet we should not assume that these were unchangeable. Just as people learned to adapt to new homelands so they must have adapted to new spiritual practices.

For example, mountains and hills may be thought to bring people closer to the sky, and traditionally certain deities, especially those associated with lightning are found on mountain tops (Toutain 1917:131). Male deities such as Zeus, Jupiter, Woden, Thor, Perkunas and Baal could be all included in this group. And yet at Al'Ubaid on the Euphrates, the local mother goddess was known as the Lady of the Mountain (Levy 1948:95)

If we approach the ancient past from a purely personal point of view, it is difficult to stand on top of a mountain and not be moved by the sight of the world beneath us. Of course mountain landscapes look rather different now to the way they must have appeared to our ancestors. Snow and ice clung to the mountains long after the lower slopes began recovering from

the Ice Age. Although mountains are sometimes described as marginal or liminal locations, this really depends upon where we happen to be living at the time. Mountains are not marginal for me because they are all around me.

A quick look at an Ordnance Survey map often shows how mountains were used as sacred places because cairns, stones and other places not obvious to the naked eye are clearly marked. Our ancestors must have regularly made their way via narrow tracks up to the mountain tops.

Sometimes this was done as part of an annual pilgrimage to access better pasture lands. Not far from where I live there was a place known as Maes yr Haf, meaning the summer field where people would take their livestock for fresh grazing in the warmer weather.

Looking at local legends can also give us an idea of the atmosphere of an area. In Wales, for example, there are legends of the Brenin Llwyd, the king of the mists who dwelt high up in the mountains, along with water horses who tricked the unwary. Even travelling by car, it is still very easy to believe there is someone—or something—out there.

Once a place is regarded as sacred, then we have certain expectations. Firstly that it will be easily found (if we wish people to visit it) or that it will be difficult to access (if we wish to keep it hidden. Both ‘arcane’ and ‘occult’ can mean secret or concealed.) Since it takes some effort to reach the top of a mountain, it may only have been used for special rituals rather than everyday ones. Or perhaps it allowed only the fittest in the community to access it.

Mountains and hills lend themselves particularly well to certain types of rituals especially those involving fire. A blazing beacon helps people find their way at night, and can also act as a relay system from one mountain to another, carrying pre-arranged signals or messages over a large area in a short space of time.

In historical times mountain beacons were used to warn of invasion (e.g. the Spanish Armada) and were even planned in case Britain was ever invaded in World War Two. Obviously we cannot prove that our ancestors back in the Stone Age ever lit warning beacons on the mountainside, but it is such an obvious thing to do, it might seem strange if they did not.

The Seasons

The sense of Homeland is not confined to natural features in the landscape. Other things, often difficult to explain, may also be present. For example, the quality of light can vary from one area to another, which may explain why some places seem to attract 'schools' of painters, such as Newlyn or East Anglia. Light quality is difficult to quantify, but in a world without artificial lighting, people generally become more sensitive to such things.

It is much the same with the seasons. Nowadays, protected most of the time from the extremes of heat and cold, we barely glance as the seasons pass us by. Yet even fifty years ago, it was rather different. The weather and the seasons had a profound effect on how people dressed, lived and even fed themselves. Knowing what to expect and when to expect it was essential. It does not take a huge leap of imagination to realise that our ancient ancestors must have performed some rituals to strengthen their relationship with the seasons.

The important thing here is not just to observe but to *feel*. And in the same way, if we learn to feel the shift of the seasons, this too is a way of reaching back into the ancient past. Feeling the seasons is not particularly difficult. I always swear I can hear the earth changing gear at the solstices and equinoxes! It's certainly worth a try.

Whether our ancestors were hunter gatherers or farmers (or even a combination of the two), the seasons played a huge part in their lives. People did not suddenly start noticing summer and winter just because they began farming.

Societies that hunted would have already recognised certain cycles in the lives of their prey and would also recognise that certain seasons would give them better cover (i.e. because there were more leaves on the trees and bushes).

Likewise societies that relied largely on gathering would be aware how the seasons affected their work and realise that certain harvests (be they honey, eggs, berries or nuts) would only be available at certain times of year. Nobody will be successful if they seek to gather blackberries in January!

It is still sometimes claimed that the introduction of farming and agriculture introduced a more ordered society because one could anticipate a particular crop being available at a certain time. However, this changeover to farming would have been gradual. The interglacial warming was

inconsistent, sometimes cooling down again. Farming could only achieve what the climate allowed. Any certainty about harvests still relied heavily on weather conditions, blight and insects. Nothing was ever certain.

Nowadays, it is all too easy to forget how distanced we have become from the things that sustain us. Heating and water are available instantly and on demand, while our food comes from shops and supermarkets with little input from ourselves. However, it does not take much for Nature to remind us exactly how little control we have over her. Extremes of heat, cold, storms and blizzards quickly pitch us back to the ways of earlier times, wondering how to manage.

The changing seasons also remind us of the importance of reciprocity, i.e. of giving something back in return for Nature's gifts. This is a very ancient principle and can be applied in many different walks of life. In nature we see the spring bringing forth new growth, but in return we must nurture and protect the young plants. Autumn provides harvests—whether hunted, gathered or grown—to see us through the winter, but in accepting these gifts we have to offer something in return to ensure next year will be just as plentiful. We should not just grab everything like a greedy child.

This principle is important, because everything within the Homeland must not only be good, it must be better than it can ever be out beyond, in the Wasteland. Harvests must thrive, hunting must be successful. But although we seek abundance, this can only be achieved through give and take, not take and take. The way we live, the way we use the land and its resources has to be balanced in order for us the growth to be long term and sustainable.

In order to accommodate these huge changes in outlook and lifestyle as people settled and turned to farming, so symbolism must have adapted too. Possibly crosses and swastikas represented either the four corners of the world or the four seasons or yearly cycle.

The problem with this theory is that we do not know whether our ancestors believed the world had four corners or recognised four seasons. Rather than crosses and swastikas they may have believed the passage of the seasons and their effect on agriculture was best represented by the spiral or cosmic serpent (Marshak 1985:538).

Ancient Sites

Ancient sites such as Avebury, Stonehenge or whatever our local equivalent happens to be, have attracted attention for centuries. Some have remained prominent, others have been lost to a combination of the elements, undergrowth, and local building projects. Nobody seems quite sure what their function was, or who built them. They have attracted a variety of legends to explain their presence, ranging from dancing on a Sunday to various intrigues involving giants and the Devil.

Of course there are other types of sacred site, such as a naturally occurring rocky outcrop, pond, spring or tree. All that is needed is for us to recognise it. Yet an ancient site, with its long history of ritual and attention, has long been held as the best place to contact the gods or even the Fae Folk. Personally I have had more interesting experiences in places such as car parks, roads and even down the bottom of my garden than I have ever had at any designated ancient site. So it pays to keep an open mind.

There is still a certain amount of snobbery towards outdoor worship. Perhaps this is because we equate civilisation with buildings, a view that seems to have come down to us from the Romans. The unfortunate result has been that any tradition conducting its religious rituals, public or private, out of doors is viewed rather condescendingly, as though people should grow up and come indoors!

In fact however, even the early Christian Church seems to have acknowledged the influence of such open air sites because they built many of their churches on the sites of earlier pagan shrines and groves. Whether they believed that the sites themselves had innate power or whether they just wanted to stop people visiting them and come under one roof instead, is of course, another matter entirely.

I suspect—though cannot prove—that our expectations affect our experiences, i.e. what we bring to ancient sites, rather than what they bring to us. If something speaks to us, we should attempt to communicate with it. But never write things off simply because for now we do not understand. We still have a great deal to learn about our own, personal, ancient past.

Stones have occasionally been regarded as the abode of spirits or deities a view we even find in the bible for example, when Jacob set up a stone pillar as a permanent Beth-El or abode of God (Genesis 28.18). Monoliths and menhirs are always much bigger than they appear above ground because they have to be buried some distance to avoid them falling over.

This takes a great deal of work, something unlikely to be undertaken unless it was profoundly important for the local community.

The presence of a large stone does not always indicate humans at work however. Often they were ‘dropped’ by melting glaciers. They may be remarkable for their natural shape, resembling anything from a chair to a human or animal. They may even have come from the sky; I have a meteorite in my garden which fell into a farmer’s field long ago. It is not much bigger than a football, and its remarkable history could have been forgotten had someone had not told me the story.

Stones can also be carved and even moved to a desired setting, an exercise requiring a great deal of planning, manpower and effort. However once they *are* in place, stones are generally intended to be permanent fixtures. We find some evidence for this in the many legends that stones either cannot be moved, or that if they are, then they will turn up again in the same place the following morning!

In the light of much later deliberate attempts to destroy or smash stones such as those at Avebury, it is all too easy to jump to the conclusion that those doing the damage must have been motivated by their religious beliefs. It may have been true for some people, but it is also likely that the stones simply inconvenienced farmers wanting to plough their fields more efficiently. And of course breaking up the stones provided a rich source of much needed building material.

Nowadays ancient sites are again attracting attention, especially during the solstices and equinoxes. It does not follow of course that each and every visitor views a site as sacred, or intends to perform a ritual there. What it might show however is a growing awareness of the many choices we now have for practising our spirituality. It shows also that for some—but by no means all—pagans, there is a growing need to have a special ‘place’, a focus for ritual.

Sometimes ancient sites are seen as having particular associations with the ancestors. However, given how much people have moved around even in the last thousand years or so, we cannot really have much idea where our families or tribes originated. Of course, it could be argued that what is present is an emotional or psychic link rather than a blood one. Or perhaps we are simply responding to some ancient imagery trying to force its way upwards into our consciousness.

Because stones—even when they have been moved from their original home in the earth—tend to stay in the same place, they come to be associated with the area and embody the sense of place (Dowden 2000:61). Many Anglo-Saxon names ended in *–stan* (for example, Wulfstan, Athelstan) suggesting the importance of stones although of course it does not actually prove the stones were worshipped.

Myths and legends often name stones, such as the Merry Maidens, but obviously we do not know what they were called originally nor what sort of rituals were performed there. When I was young my school textbooks usually showed old stone circles as the site of human sacrifices. This was how we viewed the past at that time; it was a dark and fearful place where people did despicable things. Hopefully nowadays we realise there was a lot more to the past than that.

In late Victorian times it was sometimes claimed that if a folk tradition could be traced back to, say, 1700, and then another, much older tradition could be found that was similar, that it could be assumed the two were linked. This is rather like finding a famous person back in the past and assuming that because we share a surname he must be one of our ancestors.

However, occasionally some strange folk traditions *do* turn up at such a late date, and in the face of so much opposition that we cannot help feeling they must be very old indeed. For example, in the late 16th/early 17th century, Jesuits in Lithuania complained that people there kept stones (whom they regarded as gods) in their granaries and worshipped them as 'guardians of their corn and herds.' (various reports of the Society of Jesus, all cited in Dowden 2000:64) The observers noted that the people poured the blood of slaughtered animals over the stone, and also offered a portion from any meal to it.

It is very unlikely the Jesuits condoned such behaviour, yet the stones clearly exerted a powerful attraction on the local people. It is tempting to assume the blood offering was done in order to ensure that food supplies remained plentiful, although of course we cannot be sure. Even those performing the ritual may have done so purely from a sense of 'tradition' rather than understanding why.

Whatever their history , stones make an excellent focal point, borne out by local garden centres who seem to do a roaring trade in large pieces of stone for landscaping. This suggests we have an innate need to bring

smaller versions of great Ice Age boulders into our gardens. What later generations will make of them is anybody's guess.

Stones, whether naturally occurring or not, are extremely versatile. They can mark events, or represent people or gods. The famous omphalos (meaning navel) at Delphi was supposed to mark the centre of the world.

Even today we still use stones to mark burials, a practice that has been carried out for over two thousand years in Western Europe. The thinking behind it must have been that just as the stone was permanent, so the memory of the deceased would be preserved forever. To emphasise this, stones were (and still are) often engraved with names, and even with images of the deceased.

The preservation of name and memory was nowhere more important than ancient Egypt, where obliterating a pharaoh's name (such as that of Akhenaton) was a punishment intended to deny the dead any further afterlife.

Sometimes stones in the landscape bear what seem to be hand or footprints. Whether these were chiselled out in ancient times and then eroded with the weather, or whether they were naturally occurring and the likeness is coincidence, is difficult to say. Many were later taken over and Christianised, in order to tell the stories of local saints. The fact it was felt necessary to do this at all suggests the stones were already 'storytellers' of earlier myth, although whatever they had to say has long been suppressed and forgotten.

Often the folk customs of stones and churches are similar (walking around them in certain directions or at certain times of the day or year, for example), suggesting that many of the earliest churches were built on previously sacred sites including those with standing stones. We know the Christian Church adopted this sort of approach in England, since Pope Gregory the Great wrote a list of instructions for the conversion of England in 601 CE. In particular he recommended that Christian missionaries should take over what they could of the pre-existing heathen beliefs, advising, '… the temples of the idols in that nation ought not to be destroyed' (Bede EHEN I:30).

We may not know exactly how our ancient ancestors behaved towards stones nor how they regarded them, but sometimes we carry within us an innate spiritual sense of 'what seems right.' This may show itself by bowing

one's head or leaving small offerings at places we feel are appropriate though we have no way of proving whether this is what our ancestors did.

The *way* one walked might also have been important. For example, there are folk traditions about walking around stones (or churches) in order to see one's future bride or husband, or in order to wish for or curse something. The outcome depended largely on the direction one walked. To walk with the sun, i.e. clockwise, was positive, while anti-clockwise was negative. Sometimes you had to walk backwards at the same time, which is surely a case of trying to have one's magical cake and eat it. Back in the nineteenth century, my grandmother walked backwards in a circle three times to greet the first day of each month!

Sacred Groves

Stone avenues or circles may have been permanent versions of long vanished groves, while solitary standing stones may have represented particularly large solitary trees. Cycles of falling temperatures during an Ice Age would have decimated whole forests, but perhaps their memory was later marked with more permanent stone reminders.

Sacred groves were certainly popular among almost all the Indo-European peoples, and were particularly popular with the Celts, Slavs, and Germanic and Baltic tribes. Discoveries in bogs in Thuringia and northern Germany show humanoid posts that presumably fenced off the areas around cult sites (Jankuhn 1966:421).

The practice—like so many 'pagan' traditions—seems to have been very persistent and there are many edicts down the centuries in historical times against worshipping trees and groves across Europe. However removing sacred groves was not unique to the Christian Church; in the Annals (14.30), Tacitus described how, after defeating the Druids in Anglesey, the Roman Governor of Britain, Suetonius Paulinus ordered the destructions of their groves. This suggests the groves held political as well as magical and religious power.

The very nature of a sacred grove being within a forest means that archaeologists will struggle to find proof it ever existed. Yet being part of the natural world could also have helped them survive even as temples and statues were being destroyed or supplanted by the early Church.

It is difficult for us nowadays to envisage just how thickly forested Europe was even three centuries ago. Very few of us have the opportunity to wander deep into any forest, especially a deciduous one. Yet even if we try walking into a modern pine plantation we cannot get very far before we have a sense of entering a totally different world. It becomes dark, totally quiet, so that even a falling pine cone sounds like a bomb going off! If we are not careful we soon start to feel we are being watched. Seneca the Younger suggested that a dark grove could create, '…the conviction that there is a divine power.' (Letter 41.)

So it is not that difficult to imagine how our ancestors, entering a sacred grove with all its associated mythology, were already primed for a religious or spiritual experience. Pliny the Elder, (Natural History, 12.1, 12.3) claimed that, '…trees and woods were understood as the supreme gift to mankind. This was where food first came from,' and he also stated that, '… trees were the temples of the divinities … the simple countryside even today dedicates an exceptional tree to a god.'

The trees Pliny had in mind are long since dead and gone, but there are still exceptional trees to be found everywhere. They may not be record breakers, but they stand out in our Homeland. And it's no bad idea to pause occasionally, and just give a nod to them, in recognition of the glories they might once have expected.

Of course how we respond to trees depends very much on the type of tree involved. Thorn trees such as hawthorn and blackthorn for example, do not invite humans to come too close for obvious reasons. That does not normally bother me. The first and only time I tried hugging a tree, I ended up covered in spiders!

My usual response to any tall tree has always been to sit beneath it (where possible) and listen to the rustling of its leaves. It is a type of 'instant oracle' and for all I know, it may have a long and honourable history. Who are we to say that one action is more spiritual than the other? Or that one is more ancient than another?

Nowadays people who campaign to preserve trees are often accused of being 'tree huggers' or 'New Agers.' I remember not far from where I used to live was a large Victorian vicarage that became too expensive for the Church in Wales to repair and heat and so it was decided to sell it off. The purchasers planned to knock it down, clear the land and built some flats. None of the locals minded about the vicarage (the church was not

particularly well attended) but they did mind about a big old tree that stood in the grounds. People protested, wrote poems, painted pictures, did all they could. And the tree was saved.

I mention the story because it is very similar to a story told by Sulpicius Severus c.4th/5th century CE in his Life of St Martin (13.1 f). In it, he describes how people did not protest when their pagan temple was destroyed but became extremely angry when the saint announced his intention to cut down the pine tree that was next to it.

Long before Tolkien created his wonderful Ents, trees were already believed to have some human-like features. Generally speaking they grow upright, with roots in the earth and their branches (arms) reaching towards the sky. Some deciduous trees look very human indeed, especially in winter when their leaves are gone. It is not difficult to imagine them acting as intermediaries between Mother Earth and Father Sky, especially since most live far longer than human beings, and age is often equated with wisdom.

Since trees remain in one place, people tend to come to them. Quite apart from any spiritual significance they might have, on a purely practical level they have, in historical times been used as meeting places and even places of execution (the gallows tree). People are sometimes even named after trees (and other plants), e.g. Holly, Hazel, Cherry, Willow and Rowan.

Trees provide firewood and sometimes nuts or berries although it was traditionally frowned upon to take anything from a sacred as opposed to an ordinary tree. This difference was important, since if all trees were sacred then ships and houses could never have been built.

The Romans certainly distinguished between trees that were *felix* and *infelix.* According to Pliny the Elder (Natural History 16.108) the *felix* trees bore fruit (and were therefore valuable and protected) while the *infelix* did not and were regarded as damned (*damnata religion*).

While there is plenty of evidence in Church edicts etc., showing that the early church deliberately set out to destroy many sacred trees, this does not take us back far enough in time. And trees were not always plentiful in the northern hemisphere. For example, around sixty thousand years ago, much of the UK was uninhabitable. It had been inhabited long before, but the glacial climate of that period drove most people out. Even afterwards, as the ice sheets receded, there was grassland but few trees. The summers were short and cool while the winters were long and cold, with strong winds and plenty of snow (White 2006:548).

Some trees withstand cold better than others—for example, birches, conifers and willows are more hardy than oaks. This lack of trees (though there may have been isolated clusters in more sheltered areas) also meant there was little firewood. This meant not only little protection against the cold but little hope of cooking nor even of melting ice for water.

And this of course is one of the limitations of something like cave paintings and artefacts—they can only show us a very limited view of the prehistoric world. We rarely see a tree in cave paintings, suggesting perhaps that rituals involving trees were kept outside and well away from the caves. The two sites must have had quite different purposes.

The sort of rituals performed near trees in the open air can only be guessed at. We know from folklore that people sometimes tied rags in the branches, but that does not prove an ancient tradition, just an old one. Likewise we know that some trees were 'nail trees', where a nail was covered with blood or pus then hammered into the trunk, in the belief this would leave the patient's disease with the tree, which is very much the same principle as using a scapegoat.

Henry the monk's 'Life of St Germanus' (quoted in Dowden 2000:74) describes how the young Germanus (c400 CE) hunted deer and then hung the heads and antlers in the branches of a pear tree, apparently as an offering to the god Woden. It must be said however that Henry the Monk was writing some four centuries after the events he describes.

Yet the act of making offerings—be they rags, nails or severed heads – does show that the tree was considered important, set apart and above all *different.* It was worthy of offerings. The species mattered too—Germanus seems to have made offerings only to a pear tree. It could even be argued that in some ways, the practice continues, for many a country house still displays preserved animal heads around its walls, perhaps a faint echo of earlier practices. After all, if hanging animal heads in trees was forbidden, then bringing them indoors and (mostly) out of sight might have been regarded as a practical alternative.

Of course we cannot know for sure what sort of rituals were carried out in prehistory, nor the intention between them. There is only have written testimony of trees in ritual going back around two to three thousand years. Even then, such practices leave no trace in the archaeological record. For example, if blood is smeared on the trunk, or beer or wine poured on the roots (Dowden 2000:73) this is impossible to verify.

We can make a few cautious suggestions based on our own experiences, however. For example, when we perform rituals—whether it's the ritual of brushing our teeth in a certain way, or a ritual dedicated to some religious purpose, it helps us give a meaning and structure to our lives. It helps us contact a type of reality—yes, even the tooth brushing! Deep down of course, we know that brushing our teeth may not make them Hollywood-white, or even completely banish plaque or decay. But we do it anyway because we seek the *reality* of white (or at least clean) healthy teeth.

Basically we perform rituals (secular and sacred) because we believe and hope they will do some good—more good than doing nothing, anyway. And for those who use religious ritual, we perform certain actions and say certain words in order to make something real simply because it *is* sacred to us.

We also use religion and spirituality to try and resolve conflicts within ourselves. We know what we would like to do, what we should do, but it doesn't always match up to what we *can* actually do. This leaves an uncomfortable gap—a dark shadow if you like—that can be difficult for us to live with.

One solution is to transfer it onto something else—a devil or demon—and then credit that entity with having the power to *make* us do (or fail to do) something. It is a popular choice because it absolves us of any blame for our actions, but at some point that is something each and every one of us has to face.

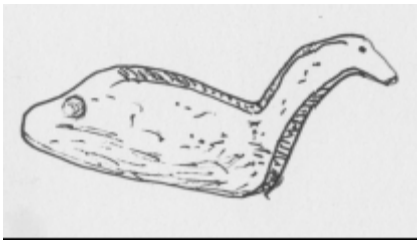
We do not know how our ancient ancestors felt about such things. Early Christian edicts mention pagans in many parts of Europe lighting candles and lamps at trees, sacred stones and springs. And yet, human nature being what it is, not everyone did so, perhaps through fear or apathy or because it just was not part of their spiritual practice. But of those who could have done, how did they feel? Did they blame someone or something else, or did they accept it was their own choice?

The fact that some persisted with their lights, even while it was being actively contested by the early missionaries suggests deep seated traditions that were felt to fulfil an important need. The lights suggest that the rituals were carried out when it was dark, perhaps some sort of offering to either the tree, the god in the tree, or a deity in the area associated with the tree.

Because this is where the great gap forms between what is known, and what is felt. New evidence is coming to light all the time, and theories about

the ancient past may be forced to change. So go to a tree or stone and light a candle (but please bring the debris home with you afterwards). Go without expectations, and see what the action brings to you.

The past we carry inside us, the history of our ancestors is there and waiting to be rediscovered…



Chapter Five
The Disabled in ancient societies…

Sometimes myths describe certain prohibitions (against either people or actions) to avoid defiling certain sites defiled. For example, in Ancient Greece it was forbidden to give birth or die on the sacred island of Delos, birthplace of Apollo and Artemis. The penalties for breaking taboos were severe, because they would make the land become polluted and infertile so that within a generation or so it would revert to Wasteland. This is a common fear and to avoid it certain acts are prohibited. If these taboos are broken accidentally, then a series of rituals had to be enacted to try and restore the land to its sacred state.

We cannot be sure what constituted a pollution in ancient times and the rules probably changed over time and place. And this brings us to a difficult and sensitive question—what happened to those children born with an obvious deformity in ancient society? If they could not hunt or farm, were they simply done away with?

In some situations, the answer was almost certainly 'yes,' although weak babies and children may have died through lack of medical care rather than any deliberate act. However archaeological evidence from a variety of sites suggests otherwise. For example, A 12,000 year old grave at a Natufian cave site at Hilazon Tachtit (Israel) contained a small, elderly and disabled woman, accompanied by grave offerings suggesting she may have been a shaman.

This could suggest—though cannot prove conclusively—that disabled people were not only accepted in the tribe but that some were highly

regarded and held an important spiritual position. It is one of the earliest shamanic burials known in the archaeological record. (Grosman *et al* 2008: 17665)

Although there are accounts of physically disabled individuals being ascribed healing and spiritual powers (Formicola & Buzhilova 2004 :124:189-198) it is a wild leap to assume that being disabled was a requirement for becoming a shaman. All that the burial at Hilazon Tachtit shows is that in some areas and in some periods, being disabled was not a barrier.

Since shamans have been recorded in many different cultures, including both hunter gatherers and small agricultural societies, (Winkelman, 1990:18:308-352) it may well have been that *some* disabled children were chosen for such training. They would then have fulfilled an important role as mediators between the spirit world and their people, and perhaps also worked as healers and magicians.

Unfortunately, there are no standard criteria for identifying shamans in the archaeological record (Grosman et al 2008: 17665). We know from modern shamans that most have several things in common: they are associated with spiritual, magical, and healing powers; they assume animal form in order to ask for help from spirits, they have specialised knowledge, high status and are treated differently at their death. This latter may suggest they are expected to have a different type of afterlife from everyone else. Their graves often contain items such as animal remains and even the contents of healing kits (Jakobsen 1999) .

However, we should be careful of projecting modern ideas about shamans back into the distant past. We really do not know whether our prehistoric ancestors used priests or shamans at all and even fleeting glimpses from the archaeological record, such as the woman in the Natufian cave, cannot stretch right back into the truly distant past (she dates back just 12,000 years).

It would therefore be wrong to assume that a priest in Palaeolithic times (always supposing there was anything resembling a priest in that period) performed the same sort of function as, for example, a Catholic priest today. The word ritualist might be a better option.

However, even if such individuals did exist, we still do not know how they were chosen. Possibly it was hereditary, and there were families who took charge of certain rituals for the community. Or maybe they were

chosen in some other way, by age, gender or even some physical attribute which might include disability.

Rather than a single ritualist having all the attributes, another possibility is that a handful of people within each tribe or family were recognised as having spiritual authority only in certain matters. For example, the oldest woman in a household might perform certain rituals surrounding childbirth or rearing children. Or the oldest or strongest man might perform rituals concerned with hunting or war. Even so, there is usually some sort of training to perform any unusual or uncommon activity such as ritual.

If a ritualist is required to give advice, especially if this is through divination, then this too required training, presumably from someone already skilled in the art. There are many different methods of telling the future, such as interpreting clouds, the stars, the behaviour of birds and animals, fire, dreams and matters revealed by sacrifices such as reading entrails.

We may not know what sort of methods were used in the ancient past, but whoever trained others must have been well respected and trusted within the societal group. He or she would also have needed fairly extensive experience.

Such experience and learning requires time, skill and concentration, and it would not be unusual for this to take several years. Sometimes, in the historical period, we know that priests and druids etc., were consulted about legal matters and their decisions carried great authority. If their counterparts in the ancient past performed the same role—and it is a big ‘if’—then again it implies a need for training. It is not only literate societies that have laws; most social groups need rules in order to function.

Human Sacrifices

Occasionally we come across claims that disabled children or young adults were sacrificed. Although children and young adults have been executed throughout history for crimes we might consider trivial nowadays, (teenagers were still being executed in the UK in the mid twentieth century) there is something chilling about the idea of killing a human being as part of a ritual.

We have to look at the reasoning behind killing young, disabled children. If they were regarded as useless or a burden to the community,

then we might expect to find no burials of any children past, say two or three years with congenital deformities. Yet there is evidence that in some areas such children were allowed to survive. For example, there is a double burial known as the Sunghir children in Russia, together with a triple burial at Dolnı´ Veˇstonice (Moravia), and an adolescent dwarf from Romito Cave (Italy).

Each example includes an individual suffering from some sort of disability or deformity that must have been evident from birth, but none of the bodies are of newborns. The burial in the Romito cave includes the body of a young male, aged about seventeen years who suffered from of acromesomelic dwarfism (Formicola 2007:449). The burial is certainly unusual in that he is lying in the arms of a female skeleton, but surely the fact he lived so long suggests he was accepted and cared for by his community. It does *not* prove that he was ritually sacrificed.

The Sunghir double burial included thousands of ivory beads (probably sewn originally onto the children's funeral clothes), hundreds of perforated canine teeth from arctic foxes, various pins, pendants and long spears of mammoth tusk. The ivory beads were proportionally smaller than those used in adult burials. Although this suggests that the beads were manufactured specifically for these two children, it does not necessarily mean that their death was part of a sacrifice.

If they were of high status, their clothing might have been worn for certain special occasions. Just because the grave goods were ready and waiting when the children died, does not necessarily mean that their death in childhood was anticipated, far less that it was caused deliberately.

Many old graves that could have answered our questions have never been recovered, and of those that have, it was usually the burials of kings and wealthy men who have attracted the most attention. Many archaeologists up until relatively recent times had a lot in common with Indiana Jones. Gold and precious objects were considered far more important than reconstructing how people lived and died. Of course attitudes have changed a great deal now, but we shall never know how much useful evidence was lost forever.

This lack of archaeological evidence means we cannot know what percentage of babies were born with a deformity. In small communities, if interbreeding was common, we might expect the percentage to be quite high. Some would undoubtedly have died shortly after birth or during their

first few years, no matter how much they were loved and wanted. The lack of evidence might be explained by their treatment after death; if the bodies were simply exposed to the elements and wild animals there would be nothing for archaeologists to recover.

Yet in the examples listed above, none were exposed or killed immediately after birth, but seem to have been reared by the community even if they did die at a relatively young age. Possibly deformed children of high status members were more protected than others, we do not know. But it seems unlikely that children were reared purely in order to be sacrificed. Also, in the examples above they were not buried alone and those with them were not deformed.

One theory is that such additional burials were also sacrifices. In my opinion this idea has been too readily seized upon by journalists wanting a sensational headline. By believing it, we are putting emotional space between ourselves and the past.

In small societies, children are an important resource. They are the future providers and care-givers for the elderly tribe members. Yet still the idea persists that multiple burials must mean the deaths were simultaneous and therefore are proof of human sacrifice.

However there are other explanations. A quick look at nineteenth century parish registers shows how infectious illness laid low entire families who died within a few days of each other. Burying a human being in a grave deep enough to prevent animal predators from making off with the corpse is a strenuous task. In the case of communities ravaged by epidemics, I would be surprised if those left to do the burying had the energy to keep on digging graves.

One solution was to dig one larger grave to take the bodies not only of those who had died, but of those who were clearly dying. The first bodies could be lightly covered with earth or stones for a few days. Even when a body was buried, it would still be possible to re-open a grave with minimal disturbance to the original burial. This is because—depending on temperature and soil condition—the soft tissues and ligaments may decay only slowly (Duday *et al* 1990).

Another popular theory is that when there are group burials of the same sex or age group this shows selective practices which could be evidence of human sacrifice. Yet sometimes particular age groups or genders may be more prone to succumb to certain illnesses. For example, during World War

I, and epidemic of Spanish flu was observed to take its ‘toll of the most robust, sparing neither soldier nor civilian,’ (quoted in Kolata, 1999:47) which is quite the opposite of what we might reasonably expect.

It is also worth noting that sometimes the sex of ancient skeletons cannot be determined. The triple burial at Dolní Věstonice is made up of two young males buried either side of an adolescent, whose pelvic deformities have made its gender the subject of much disagreement (Formicola 2007:447).

Anyone who has ever dug a grave knows that disposing of dead bodies is not easy whether we bury them or burn them. Actually, cremation requires a great deal of combustible material. Firewood would have been scarce for many centuries after the ice sheets retreated since much of the land had been reduced to steppe-tundra. It could not have been a very practical method until there was plenty of wood available.

Another problem with cremation is that bodies take a great deal of time —and heat—to burn away. We cannot simply collect a few sticks and expect it to burn a human being! Collecting enough firewood also requires time, and if it is not dry it will not burn properly so there must have been some sort of system for storing it under cover. Also, certain types of wood burn better than others. For example, the resin in pine trees is particularly flammable. Even so, it needs to be dry. During times of war, famine or epidemics, there would be more bodies than usual to dispose of.

It seems likely therefore that in times of crisis some communities compromised in the way they disposed of their dead. Some seem to have practiced excarnation, which is exposing the body to the elements so that it rots down naturally. Without some sort of protection however, wild animals would simply tear the bodies apart and carry them away. Of course there may have been some societies that had no problem with this.

Burial also has its problems. If the body is not buried deep enough, wild animals will come and dig it up. Bodies buried near water that is being used for drinking will soon cause disease. To dig a proper grave the sides need to be vertical, whereas most people will dig a hole with sloping sides which is quite unsuitable. To dig such holes requires tools and manpower.

The way people dispose of their dead may also indicate the type of afterlife—if any—they expect. The process of cremation, in which the body undergoes transition from a recognisable human being into ashes and charred remains may have been regarded as the best way of carrying the soul or spirit to the next world or to the gods.

We also do not know how long bodies were kept with the tribe before being disposed of. Some cultures even nowadays insist upon burial before

the sun sets on the same day as the death occurs. Other societies (such as the tenth century Estonians) were supposed to have feasted and drank with the corpse in their midst. (Dowden, 2000:265).

Much earlier c. 500 BCE, Herodotus recorded that the Scythians drove the corpse around to friends of the dead to feast over a period of forty days (Herodotus, *The Histories,* 4.73.1) This may sound a little extreme, but even in some modern western societies, corpses may be present at their own funeral feast or wake, where food and drink are consumed and the atmosphere is one of celebration rather than mourning.

Sacrifices at wells and springs

The question of sacrificing animals or humans, especially at a spring is something many modern neo-pagans prefer to ignore although doubtless it did happen. We know from the Roman author, Horace (Odes 3.13) that animals were sometimes sacrificed to a holy spring, implying the presence there of some power or deity.

Ancient human skulls have occasionally been found in English wells (Dowden 2000:47). Of course this does not prove human sacrifice was practiced there, since the skulls may have been brought to the wells long after death. However it is interesting how many beheaded Christian saints such as St Winefride or St Osyth are associated with springs that suddenly gush forth wherever the head as fallen. Given the early Church's habit of 'taking over' pre-Christian sites, this suggests there was already a tradition of death by beheading at the same location.

Nowadays we often forget how even in the relatively recent past, nothing was ever wasted. People would not have sacrificed their domesticated animals without good reason. Animals represent a large investment in time and effort, and also represent wealth. This could not be squandered without good cause. It had to be of benefit somehow.

Even when animals were sacrificed, most of their meat was eaten by the group or tribe. We seem to have lost this thriftiness in the twenty-first century. Old cookery books can be an education in ingenuity showing us how every last scrap was used even without allowing for additional skills such as tanning the hides and making glue from the bones.

What constitutes a sacrifice?

Of course it is one thing of course to sacrifice an animal whether it is being hunted or bred for food, but quite another to sacrifice human beings. It is one of the most horrific, and dramatic events imaginable.

Sometimes it has been used as a convenient method of getting rid of prisoners of war. This happened in historic times certainly, the sixth century CE author Procopius reported that even Christianity was no bar to making a human sacrifice of the enemy's women and children at a bridge (Gothic War, 2.25 .10 f.).

There are many reasons why human beings persist in looking for signs of human sacrifice in the ancient past. Sometimes it is a form of thrill-seeking, sometimes it is due to a desire to feel superior to our ancient ancestors. While society may accept our differences, it fears our similarities. And what it fears, it either demonises or ridicules. Sometimes it manages to do both.

It is worth remembering that there are many different types of sacrifice and not just animals and humans. Both plants and animals have life, though they were regarded, even in the ancient Indo-European language as separate and distinct. One word, **Hwes* described the 'being' of men and animals, while **bheuH* described the being or growing of plants (Dowden 2000:66).

Although we tend to think of sacrifice as being always bloody or consisting of burnt offerings, people can also pour libations of wine, oil, water or milk on the ground, which could also be considered a form of offering or sacrifice.

We have no idea how our ancient ancestors viewed the sacrifices they may have made. Sometimes cave paintings have been interpreted as showing sacrifices, but the images are ambiguous and might show something quite different. The Indo-European term for sacrifice was probably **adbher-* or **obbher-* both with a sense of 'to bring'. Similar terms have survived in Irish (*adpair*), Welsh (*aberth*); both were taken from the proto-Celtic word **opber* which again implies something that has been brought (Dowden 2000: 175).

What this shows is that what makes something a sacrifice is the fact that it has been brought. It is not about the type of offering, nor how it is offered. It is the fact of bringing of it. And of course whatever is chosen has to be brought somewhere. Presumably if a sacrifice was intended to be burned then it would need to be brought to a fire or hearth, or to a nearby

altar. This could be either some sort of domestic setting, i.e. where the tribe or family lived or in a ritual setting such as a sacred grove or caves.

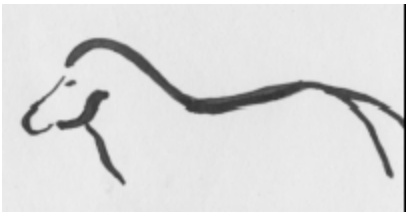
It is difficult to say what the purpose of ancient sacrifices might have been. Generally speaking, the purpose of bringing or giving is essentially to please—or even bribe!—the recipient. Therefore anything of value is a suitable offering, within the customs and rules of the culture involved. Many offerings were probably food and drink and therefore perishable, so we cannot recover their remains. Basically though, provided people believe that something is valuable then it is appropriate as an offering.

One method of offering was to burn the plant or animal sacrifice (a 'burnt offering'). When we burn things, they cease to exist in their usual form in the everyday world, and the smoke—which always rises—may carry the essence of the offering skywards towards the gods.

Not everything offered as a sacrifice has to be killed or destroyed. Animals may be offered to a deity and then kept alive as sacred animals, perhaps used for divination. In the historic past people sometimes offered their children to temples to serve the deity—there was never any intention that they should be murdered!

If we kill a living thing—plant or animal—then in a sense we have broken it. It is dead and no longer functions as it was intended to. In the same way as if we offer something inanimate such as a weapon, or a pot, then that too needs to be ‘broken’. This may explain why offerings (such as those thrown into lakes) are often broken. Swords are snapped, cauldrons are smashed. The gift is therefore irreversible, it cannot be reclaimed and perhaps more importantly, cannot be stolen and re-used.

And that of course, is the real motivation behind any sort of sacrifice: it is a gift, and once given it can only ever belong to the recipient.



Chapter Six
The Ancient Mind

Back in 1931, the psychologist Carl Jung argued that the unconscious could be personified as a human being, combining male and female, all ages and even transcending birth and death. It would therefore have at its command the whole human experience of between one and two million years (Sabini 2000:36).

Jung's claim may sound impossible, but before dismissing it completely, remember that we do inherit physical characteristics from our ancestors. While writing this book, for example, I was surprised to notice my newborn granddaughter had a distinctive red birthmark which was traditionally passed on only through females in my maternal grandmother's family.

It was not just an interesting link with the past, but also with all the family mythology that surrounded it. For reasons I never really understood the birthmark was supposed to be linked to the arrival of comets (and right on cue, my granddaughter was born as Comet PANSTARRS was passing the earth).

If we can inherit physical characteristics, it is likely we can also inherit emotional and psychological characteristics—perhaps even memories—from our ancestors. There is a famous example (Whitmont 1993:17) concerning a young man raised as a Catholic, who intended to enter the priesthood. During his preparations he had recurring dreams about wearing a yellow star, and eventually discovered that his grandparents had actually been Jewish.

So if it is possible to inherit memories through a generation or two, then why not also through centuries, or even millennia? The links back to our ancient ancestors—the unknown men and women who first responded to

what they saw and believed was divine—may be far stronger than we realise.

For example, if we allow a generous thirty years per generation, and double the number of ancestors each time, by about the year 1000 CE we end up with numbers too vast for the average calculator to handle. In other words, the further we go back, the more ancestors we have. Finally we reach a point where we must have more ancestors than there were people alive at the time, and this applies not just to you or me, but to every single human being who is alive now. In other words—we are *all*, at some level, related to each other. We *all* share some common ancestors.

In fact, the mitochondrial Eve—literally the mother of all mankind—is thought to have lived somewhere between c. 180,000-360,000 years ago (Knight and Lomas 2000:5). The implications of this are huge. Every race is related. We are all kin at some level. And yes, we do share a universal mother. Perhaps this is why the idea of a great mother goddess figure is so appealing and still exercises such a strong pull on modern pagans even today.

It is also possible this explains the shared dreams and imaginings people often have in common. For example, many years ago when I was still in my teens, a friend's boyfriend had drawn a picture of shadowy people who lived in caves that were lit up with stars. At the very top of the picture was a landscape with trees and the underground cavern (which formed the bulk of the picture) was joined to the top by means of a very narrow fissure in the rock, rather like a mine shaft. I too had been drawing pictures like that. They were curiously similar.

Of course it is possible we were both unknowingly influenced by something we had seen or heard. However although I have searched, I've never found anything like those drawings in all the many years since then. Recently while researching this book I found legends of 'star people' but never any pictures. So were our drawing some strange, inherited memory that we both felt an urge to draw? Perhaps. Or perhaps there is some other explanation awaiting me.

The idea of an inherited memory may manifest in other ways too. For example, my family often remark upon what they call 'Mother's famine gene' which causes me to make excessive amounts of soup and bread whenever cold weather (especially snow) threatens. They believe it is

probably an inherited memory from my Irish ancestors, an obsession with feeding the family whenever food threatens to run short.

Yet although it is meant as a joke, it is also quite true that I do have a dreadful fear of starvation and famine. Even though I live in western Europe in the twenty first century, that niggling terror needs little prompting to rise to the surface of my psyche. Of course it may have been in place long before the Irish Famine in the late 1840s. It may date back hundreds, perhaps thousands of years.

So what does all this prove—if indeed it proves anything at all? Firstly that we are all interconnected, which in itself has massive implications for humanity as a whole. It is no longer a matter of us and they, but 'we'. And that is important because experience suggests we are less likely to turn on those we regard as somehow linked to us.

Demonising groups and individuals has long been used as a method of justifying unfair or cruel treatment. But once we understand that the whole world and everything in it is interconnected, there can be no excuse for cruelty towards our fellow human beings.

And this is why the idea of the collective unconscious, our evolutionary background, is not so far-fetched. Even though the term 'collective unconscious' is rather vague, Jung gave it other names too, including archaic man or 'the two-million-year-old in us.' (Sabini 2008:35) And it influences each and every one of us because we are all made up of millions of years of human experience, including religion, belief, magic and rituals etc. This is sometimes called the ancient phylogenetic experience and it somehow manages to live on to some extent in each of us.

We may never know the precise identity of those gods who lurk in the shadows, but many of us do feel moments when we 'almost' touch the divine, moments when we sense the gods (no matter what our religion happens to be) lurking somewhere in the shadows only just out of reach. They are part of the primordial memories passed down not only in our DNA, but also through the psyche, and even in past lives, if we believe in reincarnation.

(At this point it's worth mentioning that the words primordial and archaic are often used inter-changeably, whereas in fact they differ. A*rchaic* means things that are past or antiquated, whereas *primordial* is reserved for things that are original or present from the beginning. Something that is primordial may well be archaic, but something archaic is not necessarily

primordial. Archetype on the other hand, comes from the greek, *arkhe* meaning ancient and *tupos* meaning a model.)

In considering what makes us what we are today, obviously our ancestors—known and unknown—have played a huge part. If we seek the gods that dwell in the shadows and the corners of our hearts, minds and spirits, (often called the psyche) then we will have to dig deep. And when we do, we have to be prepared to reach out and reconnect with aspects of ourselves reaching back through the two-million-year period of our *Homo sapiens* ancestry. It sounds daunting, but perhaps Jung was correct in believing our ancient foundations were still accessible deep within our contemporary psyches (Sabini 2008:36).

For most of us however, it can be very difficult to reach back in time. Our minds cannot grasp the huge periods of time involved in our evolution. So much has happened to bring us where we are today, events we cannot even begin to know because for most of us, history is barely two thousand years old.

Also, nowadays, when obsolescence is built into almost everything, our world is speeding up, making even the recent past seem more distant than ever. It is akin to being on an ever-accelerating roller-coaster; all our attention is taken up with trying to hang on, instead of trying to get off. As a result we dismiss our dreams. We distrust our intuition. We have allowed our creative imagination—something we are all born with—to wither and die from childhood onwards.

Jung identified another problem too. He suspected that because Man was still very young in evolutionary terms, appearing quite late in the overall history of our planet, our consciousness must also be very young. It developed only as it 'woke up' out of the darkness of primordial unconsciousness.

In other words, we are still groggy and only half awake. And while we are in this 'hung over' state, our consciousness doesn't seem to take our subconscious (the next level down from consciousness) or unconscious (the next level down again) very seriously.

We can see this every day, whenever people dismiss something as being 'all in the mind,' or 'all in the imagination' as though the inner mind (the subconscious) were some sort of scrap heap where no self-respecting thought ought to ever venture. In fact we should be paying far more

attention to these ‘blips’ in our consciousness. They often bring important messages for us.

Unfortunately there is little co-operation between the conscious and unconscious, even though our subconscious, which exists rather like the filling in a sandwich, is frantically trying to get our attention. It is hardly surprising then if we sometimes manage to baffle ourselves.

For example, our dreams (which tend to come from the unconscious) contain much material from our everyday lives, including friends, family, places we know etc. Sometimes they make perfect sense, but mostly they are chaotic and bizarre.

Our dreams also contain vivid material from our earliest ancestral memories, bits and pieces that seem to make very little sense. When this happens we can wake up wondering what the dream was about. But rather than pondering, or exploring further, most people dismiss it as ‘Just a dream’ and leave it at that.

This is a pity, because dreams often have a great deal to teach us. Sometimes they can help trigger our creativity, or solve specific problems. There is a famous story about how Elias Howe (who invented the sewing machine in 1845) had a dream that lead to the invention of the modern sewing machine needle, which unlike ordinary sewing needles has the hole at the pointed end, rather than the base.

Even dreams that do not lead us to invent something still have a purpose and should be taken seriously. Dreams can provide us with important problem-solving methods, messages about the future and explanations regarding the past. Keeping a dream diary can often help sort out which is which.

Jung had some fairly incredible dreams himself. For example, in 1909 he dreamed about finding skulls, bones and Neolithic artefacts beneath a layer of dust in a tomb or cave. However this cave was not in some remote desert or mountain, but down in the basement of a four-storey house that had once belonged to his family (his mother had lived there.) Jung concluded that each floor of the house represented another step back into a different era of cultural history. So the dream was in fact ‘a structural diagram of the human psyche.’ (Jung 1961 158-161)

This could be just another interesting theory, except it does not end there. Decades later, excavations at the house in question discovered an underground cave containing archaeological remains. Certainly Jung, who

had originally wanted to become an archaeologist, was very excited about the finds and believed they were connected with his much earlier dream (E A Bennet 1985:24). Possibly the dream was the result of some kind of inherited memory that Jung had tapped into.

Dreams about houses and places with inner rooms are very common, although the subject rarely crops up in everyday conversation. I've certainly had dreams like that. Usually mine feature the same few houses, places I believe I know in the everyday world, but which have surprises in store for me in the dream world. This usually takes the form of another room, a long passageway and occasionally another building (almost always a mill on the verge of collapse) down in the garden.

These dreams began for me—as they do for many people—in childhood, when I became so convinced that these hidden rooms actually existed, I even started going around, banging on all the walls in my home, hoping to find them!

When I was first researching this book I began asking others and was amazed how many people had had similar experiences. So if large groups of unrelated people, all with different life experiences, share similar types of dream, perhaps we share other things within our unconscious. Maybe all those dreams and interior visions that confuse and yet refuse to be forgotten on waking are trying to make us remember things that our conscious mind has probably done its best to forget.

With these 'hidden room' dreams we often encounter things that are almost familiar, but not quite, as though the everyday world has been twisted out of shape. And when we wake the memory stays clear, unlike ordinary dreams. The reason this happens is because they are not simply a rehash of whatever has been happening in our everyday lives—they have come from deep in the unconscious mind. The subconscious then drags them up nearer the surface, trying to force us to remember our own evolutionary and cultural background.

Of course we could just ignore all this. Many people do. But the reason it matters so much is because it leads us not only back into the past but also forward into the future. Understanding that we have a shared history with the rest of humanity is the first step to eradicating conflict, and conflict is expensive in terms of lives, resources, energy and money. There are fortunes to be made in conflict, heroes to be created, dark deeds to be concealed. But there is no happiness or hope to be found.

Compare this with peace, or lack of conflict. There is nothing dramatic or sudden about peace. Peace never breaks out. Conflicts are usually brought to an end with calm, patience, understanding and prolonged effort. People rarely make a fortune from peace, although (unlike war), it bestows a comfortable level of prosperity for the average person. It seems incredible that anyone could prefer war to peace.

Yet if we look at how our present world operates, we can see time and again the way certain groups of people are demonised by those in power in order to create conflict. The poor, the sick, the 'chavs', different religions and cultures, the unemployed… At one time or another all have been blamed for the mess in which society finds itself.

Now look at it another way. Suppose the mess was created deliberately *in order* to allow the demonisation of certain groups. What would this achieve? Conflict. Demonising a group, blaming it for all society's ills, allows anyone within the group to be treated with great cruelty, and nobody will raise an eyebrow. It is like the ancient scapegoat, laden with blame and driven out of society.

Like it or not, such demonisation is a modern form of sacrifice. And its purpose is to draw attention away from society's ill and project them outwards towards a common 'enemy'. Those who create the scapegoats in our society are in fact often the cause of the problem in the first place. And once the demonised group are destroyed, a new one must be manufactured. It is an endless cycle of destruction.

Instead we should be trying to understand how much we all have in common with each other, because of our shared heritage, shared history and shared collective unconscious.

Jung believed that 'history could be constructed just as easily from one's own unconscious as from the actual texts" (cited in Henderson 1990: 104). It should therefore be possible to use dreams as a prompt to encourage us to seek out our original, primordial self, and all the hidden secrets that we carry. And if enough of us can do that, then the chances are very good that we will find those links, connections and associations that bind us—humankind—together. And the world may well be a better place as a result.

Obviously it's important to get a sense of perspective here. Sometimes the things we see and experience in dreams are just what they seem and no more. We often dream variations on things we've recently read, seen, or experienced.

Dreams of the ancient past are different, they do not relate to our everyday experiences and nothing seems to have 'prompted' them. They stand out precisely because they *are* distinct and different. And it is important to take the time to think about such dream images, because this critical reflection is an excellent exercise for helping to bring our ancient past to life.

Even though we may be unaware of it, a memory of the ancient past lurks deep within each of us. Usually it comprises a series of seemingly unconnected images but because we cannot physically get inside our heads, we have to use the dream images—as and when they occur—instead.

This can be tricky. Sometimes these dreams, which contain fragments of memories, ideas and images, are so strange we barely understand what they are before they leave us again. Yet they continue to haunt us. And rightly so because they are part of us in a way we have either never recognised or have long since forgotten. Think of it as seeing a face you think you recognise in a crowd, but cannot put a name to it.

In many ways the modern mind must be poles apart from the primordial one. Our surroundings, our lifestyle, the pace at which we live are all very different. This creates tensions we must learn to overcome. Yet dreams can convey information and messages from the past using familiar images and themes from our modern everyday life.

Images, even in dreams, can be frightening yet sometimes their very existence gives them power. For example, some societies believe that photographs can cast the evil eye, and so people either tend to shun them, or turn away or conceal their face with their hand or hat when they think they are being photographed.

This suggests the deep-seated belief that images capture something of the essence of the subject, therefore he who possesses the image possesses power over its subject matter. In ancient times, the way a person was presented was important. For example, in Egypt portrayals of people were stylised so that the original subject was not harmed by being shown in a position such as profile, which made them look as though they were missing an arm or with only half an eye.

Dreams are not the only way to try and reconnect with the ancient past. There is also something called interior vision. If there really is a two million year old man inside each of us, then we all must have a primitive hunter gatherer (and who knows what else?) buried somewhere in our psyche too.

This is something we can test for ourselves whenever we try gathering berries, nuts or mushrooms, chopping logs or sitting round a bonfire with a group of people. In an instant we feel transported back in time and sometimes even place. We sense that something is nearby, something ancient yet essential to our inner being, beckoning from the shadows.

Looking for some answers

Modern life rushes by at a dizzy pace for many of us, and it seems to be accelerating. It is easy to forget there was a time, not so very long ago, when keeping in touch meant writing a letter. Yet in the UK, the Royal Mail was not set up until the 1840's—before that people had to find somebody who could actually take and deliver their letter personally to the addressee. This could take days or even weeks, whereas nowadays we can send texts and emails in seconds.

These 'improvements' sometimes have their drawbacks. Ease of communication can be wonderful, but it can also encourage us to write and send messages without proper thought. We do not have to collect together paper, pen and ink, writing each word laboriously by hand, and ever on the look-out for the dreaded ink blots. For many people a trip to the local post office to buy a stamp and then post the letter is a thing of the past. It is hardly surprising therefore, that newspapers are full of stories of embarrassing emails that were sent by mistake, or to the wrong recipient. Speed and haste are questionable friends unless handled firmly.

The speed of change also means we must not only learn, but endlessly re-learn. And this is an important distinction between our ancient primordial beginnings and the modern present. In the past, survival was the driving force behind most changes. Human nature being what it is, of course there would have been some novelty value or one-upmanship. Yet generally speaking, better methods of hunting, finding fuel, growing crops, making clothes, or improving weapons and farming implements were developed to help people survive.

Just as traditional skills took time to master, so improvements and adaptations could be equally slow. Nowadays we have to hit the ground running in order to keep up with new gadgets, many of which we do not really need. We find we must keep moving just to stand still, and this constant pressure can be unsettling.

Now obviously, progress has never stood still. Empires have risen and fallen. Lands have been conquered, people enslaved. Gradually, the colonisation of other countries seems to have become the norm, and after colonisation came globalisation. The result is that in many areas the indigenous cultures have been almost eradicated.

Hopefully things are beginning to change. People are trying to recover and preserve endangered cultures, languages and traditions. Attempts are made to reconstruct ancient beliefs and practices, not just in terms of a personal quest but also as a collective one. People are realising there may be much more to life than just the present or recent past.

Some ancient gods have already risen again into our consciousness. The idea of a Great Mother, or Mother Earth is no longer regarded as bizarre as it once was. Likewise, the Horned God and the Green Man are also re-emerging and there may be many more yet to make their presence known.

Again Jung was ahead of his time in recognising how traditional practices were under threat. Almost a century ago, in 1923, he stated that the four aspects of the modern psyche to have undergone the most severe depression were: nature, animals, creative fantasy and primal man (Hannah, 1976, 150–151).

Since then much has happened to aggravate that decline still further. And yet it is these very areas that are experiencing the greatest research and interest nowadays. Certainly these are the subjects that anyone on a spiritual path must try to investigate and recover for themselves.

Of course it is not only indigenous cultures that are under threat. We each have an endangered past within us. This may sound fanciful, but it is true. We are the product of our distant ancestors, even if, as in my case, you discover a gang of cutthroats and highwaymen in their midst. I might prefer not to be their descendant (there was nothing remotely romantic about any of them and several met very sticky ends) but I have to accept that I am. And it is the same for each and every one of us. We need to explore and recover our ancient ancestral memories in order to make sense of where we are today in a spiritual sense.

Unfortunately it is easy to either denigrate or over-romanticise the past. The Victorians often referred to their ancient ancestors as primitive, barbaric and even tragic. But the past was none of these things. In fact it was highly efficient and successful, otherwise nothing would have survived

and there would be no present. We have to stop thinking of the ancient past as unstructured and chaotic.

In the past hundred and fifty years, we have become so used to the idea that we can control everything around us, we forget there are still many things over which we have no authority whatsoever. Volcanoes still erupt, tsunami wash away everything in their path, earthquakes still crack open the ground like a walnut shell. From childhood, we have been conditioned to fear chaos, so we retreat from it. Worse, we encourage everyone else to retreat too.

But it does not have to be this way. The past—however ancient—must have had an order of its own even if all we know of it now is confusing and incomplete. And just as we must accept there are things in the modern world we cannot control, so we must accept that the past is beyond our control too. Even when it appears at its most chaotic, it still has something very important to tell us.

As the philosopher Nietzsche once wrote (*Thus Spake Zarathustra -1995:26)* 'One must still have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star.'



Chapter Seven
The visual evidence

Much of the most ancient art (sometimes referred to as Ice Age Art) dates from the Upper Palaeolithic period, i.e. c. 50/30,000,000-10,000 BCE. It has mostly survived in caves, on rocks and small pieces of bone, horn and ivory. It may be two dimensional, in the form of painted or incised figures, or three dimensional as moulded figures. It was probably first produced by hunters, featuring animals and hunts, although sometimes there are human beings and even what seem to be inhabitants of Other Worlds.

Of course, it is one thing to look at any type of art, but quite another to interpret it or to work out what relevance it had in the past let alone what message it might bring to us in the present day. Unfortunately a certain mystique seems to have grown up around art and iconography. One the one hand we have the 'I don't know anything about art but I know what I like group' and at the other extreme are 'experts' who would prefer it if the public never expressed any view about art whatsoever. Little wonder that many people are reluctant to try and interpret art, believing it must be beyond their reach.

Yet even those who claim to be knowledgeable and understand art, will not understand *all* art. Imagine then, the difficulty in understanding art from societies we know almost nothing about. The temptation is always to project our own beliefs backwards and hope they will stick. Some will, but many will not, especially since even our own beliefs can date quickly.

For example, in the nineteenth century, it was suggested that all rock carvings etc., were 'picture fixed prayers', narrative stories or visual

guidelines for established rituals (Worsaak 1882:61). Nowadays we would probably disagree with such a simplistic viewpoint.

We should not allow others to discourage us. Most of us unthinkingly interpret visual images dozens of times each day. Indeed, the entire advertising industry depends upon it! From a formal point of view, provided our vision is relatively normal, we see patterns of colour, shape, and lines. Our brains then arrange these according to what we know or expect to see. So if you are a baker, something rectangular and brown may immediately suggest cake or bread. If you are an antiquarian bookseller however, the same image may make you believe you have just spotted a very old leather-bound herbal.

Once we have identified something successfully, it becomes an object, and any changes in detail due to movement become events. With everyday life, this is fairly easy unless something has been disguised in some way (or if, like me, your vision is compromised).

With art however, the image (which could be anything from painted paper, stone or canvas to a bronze sculpture) is merely a representation and not the object itself. It can also (depending on the artist's skill) show expressional qualities, such as emotions or atmosphere.

So when we see a piece of art, the first thing we must do is work out what we are seeing, and what it is trying to show us. We would probably regard this as a first impression; the art historian Erwin Panofsky (1962:5) rather grandly called it a pre-iconographical description of the work of art!

Sometimes a little background knowledge is helpful, sometimes not. For example, even if we are lucky enough to hold a patterned ivory figurine from the Upper Palaeolithic in our hands, and someone tells us it dates from circa 18,000 BCE, we are still not much wiser. We do not know anything about why it was created, or who made it. We can see what is there, but not understand what the shape or patterning means or what it was used for. Any message or story there is very well concealed.

Patterns can be easily recognised yet still remain a mystery. Abstract decorations have a magnetic quality, curiously rhythmic and often mirroring each other. And indeed that may be the precise reason they were used, not for some symbolic representation of a goddess (let alone '*the* Goddess') but because they are easily reversible and can be made to fit into just about any space available. Patterns can be soothing or energising, depending how they are placed and what other patterns are used nearby.

All images that have a deeper story to tell, tend to reappear either in our everyday life (often dismissed as coincidences), in our subconscious or our dreams. Some images are well known shorthand for more complex meanings although they can vary over according to topic, let alone time and space. They can also be subtly subverted.

For example, in a comic or cartoon, a man wearing a cap, a mask and a striped jumper, carrying a sack over one shoulder, usually represents a burglar. If we take that a little further and put a well known politician in the same outfit, then we are hinting he is some sort of thief!

Sometimes even though the imagery is hopelessly out of date, the visual shorthand is unchanged. For example, in cartoons, a man wearing a suit covered in arrows represents a prisoner even though such uniforms are rarely worn nowadays.

With ancient art we have the added problem of time spans so large it is difficult to get our heads around them. Fifty years, a hundred, a thousand—these figures are nothing when we are dealing with the ancient past. Palaeolithic cultural traditions are very much lost to us, and their 'keys' disappeared long ago.

However, ancient art is not just about cave paintings, nor does the style remain static. In the first epiglacial period, the Mesolithic (which is roughly dated at between 10,000-5,000 BCE give or take a few thousand years) art became more geometric, mostly made of bone and horn (Maringer 1979:219. At some point there was a conscious desire to change styles, although we do not know why. It might suggest that somehow symbolism—and patterns—became more important.

It seems likely the paintings had their own visual language since so many are accompanied by abstract symbols. Some scholars have tried to interpret these, suggesting for example, that each species depicted in the caves at Lascaux corresponds to a particular part of the calendar such as horses marking the end of winter and beginning of spring (Aujoulat 2004:194).

However with this theory a great deal depends on the original viewer's skill at interpreting the images. For example, if we ask most people nowadays to draw a stag, they will show it complete with antlers. Yet for several months of the year, a stag's antlers are growing but not fully grown. Showing them fully grown may ensure there is no doubt which animal is depicted, but it could be confusing if we relied on the image to show a

particular time of year. Of course it may well be that the original viewers understood the subtle differences better than we do.

Another problem with art—even when the subjects are as obvious as horses or bison, etc.,—is that it usually captures only a single moment in time. (There is a theory that some pictures were animated which we will discuss later. Even if it is true though, they could still only show a few seconds of artistic narrative at most.) This leaves it to the view to fill in the rest of the story, and this is usually done from prior knowledge. Nowadays however, we do not know the rest of the story, and so we cannot fill in the gaps.

Over the years there has been a great deal of speculation on the purpose of ancient art. To persist in viewing it only as 'primitive' is rather missing the point, since much of it is extremely sophisticated and modern in appearance. Images do not have to be lifelike in order to inspire and uplift the viewer. For example, mosques contain no realistic images, and yet the overall effect is one of transcendence and beauty amidst the patterns.

Art has always had many purposes. It can be decorative, or used in propaganda, advertising, or to illustrate stories. It can be public or private, viewed by millions or just by a handful of people. Certain styles are associated with certain cultures or periods but some people like the old fashioned or retro look. Original art can cost millions or a modest few pounds, depending on the artist. Yet few ordinary individuals buy original art for its own sake, although they will often buy prints for their homes. Art in books tends to polarise between upmarket, expensive tomes, and cheerful children's stories.

When we look at images or sculptures placed in spaces set aside for ritual work no matter what the period, we can see an attempt to relate or connect the everyday world with the divine, and perhaps even the worshippers with each other.

Yet art can not only have a complex relationship with its surroundings, but also with other art nearby. For example, many quite modest churches contain images of wealthy or important parishioners that are difficult to differentiate from other, more religious images. During the Renaissance wealthy patrons sometimes paid to be included in religious paintings.

Even if we do not know exactly what ancient art portrays, we can still respond to it on a purely emotional level and its images often enter our dreams. The world of sacred shadows, the gods we know but cannot sense

is thousands—even tens of thousands—of years older than the earliest written texts.

It takes a certain type of mentality to move from realistic pictorial representations towards a more symbolic imagery. In ancient art, both in the caves and small sculptures, realistic images often feature alongside symbols. There has to be a reason for this. Possibly the symbols were intended to convey extra information, like a caption.

This could support the ideas that the symbols were really a form of writing or notation. If we look closely we can often see patterns amongst the symbols themselves, especially in the way they are distributed. Yet even there we should be careful since there are patterns in just about everything in the world around us.

The explanation that patterns and symbols are forms of writing is not as strange as it seems. When I was young and first learned to do 'joined-up writing' we began by writing out pages and pages of patterns, including Ms Vs Ws and Xs. These repetitive patterns often have a soothing effect upon the viewer, rather like a soft drumbeat. For me they were a part of writing, certainly, but they did not convey any information.

Also with ancient symbols it does not follow that everyone in the community understood their message, nor even that everyone was privy to seeing them. Even in modern societies, not everyone knows how to read. Also knowledge of an esoteric kind is often jealously guarded.

In orally-based societies it is easy to lose a huge body of knowledge once those who are entrusted with caring for it and preserving it are no longer able to do so. It can be lost within two or three generations. The loss may be accidental, such as if several knowledgeable people die around the same time, without having had chance to train others to take over from them. Alternatively the loss may be deliberate, when one culture conquers and superimposes its will on another. This is especially true when the conquering culture is literate, because then it chooses which information—if any—should be preserved.

Yet even writing can sometimes be lost such as the proto-Elamite script from Bronze Age Iran and Cypro-Minoan scripts c. 1500 BCE. These are both considerably more recent than the symbols used in Ice Age art (Powell 2009:257).

When writing has survived, its texts must always be considered in their proper context. For example, taken at face value, we find Roman authors

such as Tacitus writing about barbarian tribes. His texts are interesting but these descriptions are not always what they appear to be. Often they tell us far more about the authors themselves and their times than they ever can about Gauls or Germania.

Obviously the claim that Palaeolithic artists used some sort of text may remain unproven for some time yet, and we are even further away from being able to translate such texts. Nevertheless it is an interesting theory because it opens the way for a new view of our ancient ancestors.

Even if we disregard the possibility of writing, and concentrate only on the visual images, the drawing skill and sheer movement in many cave paintings was not equalled until relatively recent times. Compared to the stiff and unrealistic Medieval drawings, they are full of life and vigour. What if those people were advanced in other ways too, including matters of magical and spiritual thought? It would be a pity to miss important clues simply because we are afraid of their implications.

For most of us the best we are going to manage is to respond to the art on a visceral level. Our ‘gut instincts’ if you like. We have no access to the original artwork apart from pictures in books and these can look very different from the originals. Even an original artefact in a museum has been removed from its original context. Yet if we allow for all this, and see the images as best we can, we still have to explore what they say to us, how they move us. What aspect of our inner self can respond to them?

This can be a very interesting challenge. For example, years ago when I was young I remember seeing a number of religious paintings in a Venetian museum, and although some of the artists were quite famous, the images left me totally unmoved. This was not a spiritual reaction, but because the portrayal of the infant Jesus showed such an ugly child. Had he seemed ‘cute’ (according to my own ideas at that time) I may have responded quite differently. My response was dictated by what I had expected to see, and I was disappointed.

So when we look at ancient art, our first task is to put aside our own ideas of what we ‘should’ be seeing. We can do that later. Instead we should concentrate on the effect the images actually have on us. We must not only observe but also absorb. For if the sculptures or figures do not speak to us, then there will never be any communication. And communicating back with the past, with our ancestors, is an important part of any spiritual quest.

Some of the most famous visual images from the ancient past come from cave paintings found in France and Spain (although there are many others all over the world). They are full of movement and incredibly beautiful, each figure representing a huge amount of effort.

Often the images were painted deep within the cave system, in almost inaccessible places. This required unbelievable dedication and determination, with the artists forcing their way into the dangerous darkness where huge cave bears still lived, simply in order to paint these glorious pictures on the walls. These cave paintings (often referred to as parietal art) were certainly not on view to any passing member of the public.

Clearly the artists did not work in the dark, and they may have used hollowed stone lamps or the sort of rough clay bowls found at the Magdalenian cave at Montespan. Some of the bowls found may also have held ochre or been used for grinding up the pigments (Beaune 1987:570). The use of lamps shows us something else, too, that people did not simply go to bed when it got dark or stay away from dark places. They found ways to challenge the darkness and work around it.

What is particularly interesting about these lamps is that most (71.5%) are found in sites that did not actually need them, places that were already well lit by the sun or moon. Yet archaeologists have rarely recovered any lamps in dark and deep cave sites, whether or not they were painted (just 9.5%) (Beaune 1987: 570-1). To me this is not really so remarkable. If we are in a dark place and we have a lamp, we need it to get out again, so we take it with us. Leaving it behind is not really a good option.

The effort and skill expended on creating cave paintings shows their importance. It was not idle daubing on any old slab of rock. And any society that can achieve such things is unlikely to be living a bare, hand to mouth existence. There was time to create art (even though they may not have had the concept of ‘art’ at the time), and there was also the time to learn the skill and pass it on to others since cave paintings span thousands of years.

Unfortunately, despite the brilliance of the cave paintings, we have still been conditioned to think of our ancient ancestors as little more than a band of yokels painting with their fingers. We are often told how they must have feared the world around them, and resorted to endless rituals to ensure their hunts were successful and their tribe produced plenty of children. Well into the early twentieth century, everything was either a ritual image or a ritual

figure, terms that covered just about all the bases without actually explaining anything about the way ancient peoples interacted with the earthly or divine worlds they perceived around them.

For example, ancient prints of dancing feet have been found near two models of bisons (male and female) at in a cave at Tuc d'Audoubert. The models are two feet long and approximately fifteen thousand years old. Possibly footprints were made as part of a ritual dance, perhaps for coming of age, and perhaps the bison figures were used in some sort of hunting or fertility rituals. Or maybe they are all connected, we cannot be sure. But the rhythm of those long dead dancers, and the haunting image of those two bison, standing alone in the dark cave down through the millennia is just the sort of thing that still haunts our dreams.

Visual evidence alone cannot provide much information about what was going on at the time it was made. For example, a quick look at popular modern prints could suggest that most of us are living in thatched cottages! In much the same way, we cannot be sure whether the animal bones recovered from archaeological sites are a true picture of the availability of animals to the people who made the rock paintings and engravings.

Some of the animals could have been symbols of the tribe or group who created the paintings. They may even have been some sort of totem—although we cannot be sure whether totems existed then. Just because an animal appears in a cave painting (or indeed in any portable art) does not mean it was necessarily eaten. It might have had another purpose and meaning.

Some of the cave art shows apparently wounded animals or paintings with holes pierced in them. Even here we have to be careful of the meaning —a heart pierced by an arrow on a Valentine's Day card has never symbolised the slaughter of other human beings. And most people buying a Valentine's Card would be quite unaware of the similarity with the poppets of historical magic, or *katadesmoi* and wax effigies. Yet these are all well attested within historical times.

Paracelsus, writing in the sixteenth century stated, 'There are, for instance, some sorcerers who make an image representing the person whom they desire to injure, and they drive a nail into the foot of that image, and evil will and malicious thought cause the person whom the image represents to experience a great pain in his foot, and to be unable to walk until the nail from the image is removed.' (Hartmann 1896:145) Of course, the idea that

piercing a picture subdues it is not the same as magically killing the animal concerned.

It seems unlikely that every painting or symbol had a magical intention. For example, a wall painting in Cueva Saltadora shows an archer apparently collapsing beneath a shower of arrows.



Kühn (1966:63) suggests this is a magic picture intended to harm men. But of course it could equally have been a picture of a well known hero of that time, or even a story about the gods.

It is sometimes claimed that fertility only became more important once people began to grow their own crops and abandon the old hunter gatherer lifestyle. However fertility is important no matter what our lifestyle. If the animals we hunt for food do not bear their young and raise them successfully, then we will suffer also.

Seasonal changes can be just as important to those who hunt as to those who farm. Just as one does not fish for salmon when they are swimming upstream to lay their eggs, so one does not normally kill a pregnant female animal. In my view it is a mistake to believe that only farming societies were concerned with fertility. Fertility and growth are essential no matter how we live.

Whenever we see these ancient images in books, postcards and on the television, we must remember that those who choose the modern captions and descriptions and speculate about the meanings of ancient art and belief have rarely taken part in such rituals themselves. They stand well away from those they describe, and whose motives they try to imagine. Even modern researchers who study remote tribes, often arrive with their own prejudices, sometimes not realising how these influence the questions they ask, or how they interpret the replies. Magic—and ritual for that matter—are not part of their daily life.

However, looking at things from a slightly different, more magical viewpoint, we find many alternative explanations. For example, the bison sculptures mentioned earlier may have been intended as a sanctuary for the generic spirits of the bison. By keeping them within the homeland, it may have ensured the animals remained physically close to the tribe (and therefore easier to hunt). Or it may have been intended as a tribute to the spirits of bison that had been killed. Perhaps the people even identified with bison on a spiritual level. We do not know, but any of these suggestions are possible and there may be others yet to be discovered.

Another possibility is that the sculpture was intended solely as a beautiful object to be admired. Who are we to say that all ancient art was functional or had to have a magical purpose? The same applies to the footprints. Modern art galleries would have no problem in exhibiting imprints of dancing feet as works of art in their own right. It may well have been that it was the *imprints*—and not the dance itself—that were considered important. The dance is long gone—but the imprints have remained for thousands of years.

Small pieces of portable art are easily overlooked when compared with the impressive scale of cave art. However, these small pieces of bone or pebbles are just as important because they show how people kept art close. This may have been decorative purposes or because they were protective amulets or good luck charm. We cannot be sure but perhaps small artefacts were particularly popular due to the nomadic nature of hunter gatherer societies because they were so easy to carry.

Moving Pictures…

Since visual art is can show only a single moment in time, its meaning can be confusing if we do not already have some idea of the story being told. Sometimes artists have tried to get around this problem using a technique called continuous narrative where several scenes appear alongside each other in order to show what is happening (rather like a cartoon strip). Yet even this can still be confusing to the modern eye which expects to see only ‘moving pictures’ showing narrative sequences.

And yet… what if there *were* moving pictures down in the caves? Maybe not hour-long blockbusters, but pictures that definitely appeared to move even if only for a few seconds? This is not as far-fetched as it seems, and Marc Azéma, an archaeologist and film-maker, claims that ancient

artists were far in advance of anything that would be achieved until relatively modern times, producing images that appeared to move (Azéma:2008).

In particular, Azéma's theory could explain all those pictures with multiple heads and limbs. Previously, the traditional view was that such images had been repeatedly re-drawn or were even sketches or 'hesitations' by the original artists. Instead Azéma argues that extra limbs and tails etc., (one bison in the caves at Chauvet has eight legs!) were deliberately drawn this way so they could be animated by torchlight.

Now obviously such a claim is—and probably always will be—controversial. And even though drawings *could* be animated in this way, there is no proof that it was done intentionally, or that our ancient ancestors were aware of the special effects. However, the discovery of small bone discs (thaumatropes) dating from the Palaeolithic era suggests that our ancient ancestors were in fact only too aware that pictures could be made to move.

Of course pictures do not really move at all though they can *appear* to move by exploiting something called the 'persistence of vision.' This works due to the way our brains store data, so that similar images briefly appear to stay 'joined up' and thus seem to move.

Even the most exciting motion picture is really a series of single images strung together. Played back at the right speed, the images linger just long enough on the human retina to give the impression that they are joined together continuously.

Persistence of vision is not a new phenomenon. It was recognised over two thousand years ago, when ancient Greeks noticed the circle of light produced by a whirling firebrand (Macgowan 1954:1). You can test this for yourself by writing your name in the air using a sparkler on Bonfire Night. It will appear to draw a continuous line in the air.

After the ancient Greeks however, the phenomenon was not really explored again until about 1825 and even then its potential remained unrecognised, and was mostly used to make toys. Only much later would it usher in the beginnings of the motion picture industry.

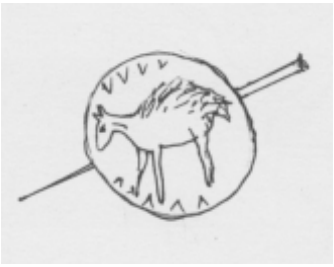
A thaumatrope (the name literally means a 'wonder turner') works on a similar principle to the 'flicker-books' of my childhood, where multiple, similar images incorporating minute changes one after another seem to show figures moving as the viewer flicks through the pages.

With a thaumatrope, the ‘movement’ is caused by spinning the small disc. So the presence of these small bone discs shows that our ancient ancestors were exploring the possibility of making pictures appear to move much earlier than anyone had imagined.

One such disc, found in the Dordogne in 1868 shows a doe standing on one side, and lying down on the other. A hole runs through the centre, probably to allow the disc to be threaded onto a string or thong. Stretched tight on the string, the disc can be spun quickly, and the human retina will ‘join the gaps’ in the two images, so that the doe appears to stand and lie down alternately.



A doe lying down (from a Palaeolithic thaumatrope from the Dordogne, France)



The second side of the same disc shows the doe standing. Spun at the correct speed the animal appears to be rising and then lying down again.

Azéma believes that long, long ago, cave artists had already observed this phenomenon, and used the persistence of vision to create drawings that appeared to move when illuminated by flickering torchlight, creating a far more sophisticated ‘moving picture’ than was possible with a simple thaumatrope disc.

If this claim is true, then the mind boggles at what it must have been like to view those ancient cave murals in their original context. After making their way deep into the caves, often through difficult and steep

passageways, viewers were confronted by herds of animals that moved. Not only that, but they moved as they would in life.

Azéma meticulously recorded dozens of movements that were possible just of a horse's head and neck alone (Azéma 2008: 124 Fig 2).

Viewers must have found themselves in the midst of a world of colour and moving images. The effect must have been overwhelming—and magical. A perfect sacred space for performing or experiencing magic and religious rituals had been created. Unless we can make a convincing argument for Palaeolithic cinemas, then there must have been a very good reason why our ancestors went to so much effort.

The way the images were presented—whether or not they appeared to move—made it easy for viewers to feel part of the picture. This is true of parietal (cave) art in general. It is easy to underestimate the effect that ordinary picture frames have on the way we view art nowadays. A quick trip to an art exhibition bears this out. An imposing gilt frame can make a mediocre picture seem more important than it deserves while a poorly framed work can give the opposite impression.

In the caves, where images were painted directly onto the walls, there is no sense of framing. This invites the viewer to merge with the images because there is no barrier. Even without consciously being aware, audiences find themselves becoming part and parcel of a virtual mythic world. And it is easy to imagine how this could be increased further if some of the pictures really did appear to move.

Even without animation, these ancient cave paintings from over 30,000 years ago are breathtakingly beautiful. Ancient artists clearly invested enormous effort and skill in their work. No doubt life *was* hard, but they still had time to develop artistic skills, religious ritual and magic.

Not only that, but they had the dedication and determination to force their way into dark inaccessible parts of these cave systems in order to paint these gorgeous murals. We learn something else too, that somewhere along the line many skills were lost. Animals were portrayed more realistically 30,000 years ago than they were a mere 600 years ago.

Azéma's scrutiny of the cave paintings he studies shows the absurdity of the theory that the images of hunting were intended to strengthen the hunters and to ensure success. Many animals we would consider as good prey, such as birds, fish and hares are relatively scarce amongst French cave art (Azéma 2008:120).

Now of course, it could be argued that although birds and hares are plentiful, they are small and provide little by way of food. So perhaps larger animals were portrayed because they provided more meat in a single killing. Yet if this were true, we should animals such as giant elks to feature regularly in the caves. Instead, they too, are surprisingly rare (Azéma 2008:120).

This suggests that certain animals were portrayed in order to represent specific ideas, powers or even deities. For example, horses are frequently depicted. They are also the animals most commonly shown with multiple heads, legs or tails. Even if we reject the 'moving picture' explanation, it still suggests that horses occupied a unique place in ancient belief and ritual.

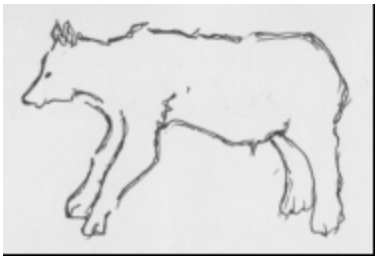
Palaeolithic animal art was clearly meant to be realistic. These were shown as real animals, not fantasy creations. Yet some disagree, arguing they are 'symbols rather than faithful transcriptions of reality' (Clottes *et al* 1994). However animal tracks are sometimes found in the caves near the paintings (Levy 1948:15) suggesting that hunter and hunted shared the same religious and magical spaces, at least occasionally. Perhaps animals, like humans, were expected to play an active part in ritual and magic.

It is of course quite possible that the paintings were both faithful representations of real animals *and* operated on a religious or magical level, intended to symbolise divine power or magical intention. Perhaps the painted caves were deliberately kept physically and spiritually separate from where the rest of the community lived in order to emphasise the separation between sacred and secular. Another possibility is that everyone took part in rituals, not just priests, shamans or a few chosen initiates. In this case, the painted caves would have still represented a separation between sacred and secular worlds, but everyone would have been familiar with both.

Against this theory is the fact that many of the painted caves are difficult to access, suggesting not everyone in the group either knew about them or was allowed (or able) to visit. This ties in well with the persistent theme (which extends into modern times) of magical and religious knowledge being arcane or hidden. Indeed the world occult derives from the Latin *occultus,* meaning hidden or secret. Perhaps the painted caves were intended as a repository of hidden knowledge and wisdom. Whatever

their purpose, the sheer beauty must have inspired awe and reverence amongst those who first visited them.

It still does…



Chapter Eight
More clues…

For as long as human beings have existed, they have needed to connect not only with each other, but also with the world around them and whatever they perceived as the unknown or divine. At times of turmoil, such as the migrations following the gradual retreat of the Ice Age—people will often cling to their former beliefs more strongly as a means of keeping in touch with their roots. This still happens. Years ago, for example, I knew someone who retained his strong Irish accent throughout his long life, even though he had left Ireland, never to return, when he was just seven years old.

As the original Homeland is left behind, people take on the language and mythology of Exile: what once was, rather than what is now. This, together with the original myths and legends was transmitted to future generations by means of songs, images and storytelling. This was all done orally up until relatively recent times.

As we have already noted, nowadays we place a great deal of trust in the written word, but writing is a relatively recent method of communication. Oral methods, including songs and pictures have been used much longer, and have built up a language of their own.

The greatest drawback is that these methods are vulnerable. If something happens to the keepers of that knowledge before they can train the next generation, then most of the information and mythic lore is lost. Others will try and keep the stories alive, but often they can change so much that their original sense is lost. And since oral traditions require an audience in order to work as intended, community break-ups due to war, famine and natural disasters can cause irretrievable losses.

With the best intention in the world therefore, we must accept we will never recover everything from the primordial past, since time has not been kind to it. Even spoken languages can be forgotten, as can songs and chants. Art may have proved surprisingly persistent although much was probably lost due to natural disasters such as landslides and deterioration. Also, the rising sea levels from the melting ice sheets may have flooded many such caves such as the Cosquer Cave near Marseille, which was not discovered until 1985 (Clottes & Courtin 1996).

While the written word uses alphabets and grammar that require careful deciphering, music uses use melody, pitch and rhythm. To date, the oldest pieces of ancient music are Hurrian cult songs from Ugarit which date to the middle of the second millennium BCE (Kilmer 1974:69).

It is very likely that music was used in some ancient rituals, and there are images of animal musicians c. tenth century BCE at Tell Halaf on the Khabur in Northern Syria (Levy 1948 :90). It is difficult to be certain though whether these are really animals who play music, or men in animal masks. Certainly the theme of an animal orchestra persisted right up into modern times with the Grimm Brothers' story of the Musicians of Bremen (Cambridge Ancient History 1975:434).

French palaeologists have discovered that certain places within caves seem to have their own pitch and resonance so that certain notes resonate in different parts of the cave. In modern terms this is rather like someone singing or playing an instrument and causing a glass to vibrate nearby. It would be easy to dismiss these theories as just coincidence, except that the places where the resonance works were actually marked on the walls of the cave (Montague 2004:174).

Nor were our ancient ancestors apparently content with exploiting available phenomena, they also created some of their own. There are those who theorise that stalagmites might have been struck as instruments rather like a set of orchestral chimes (Dams 1985:31-46). Again this might seem like a coincidence, but some have clearly been broken off in ancient times, while others show signs of striking *beneath* later layers of calcite (calcite, combined with water is what drips and creates the formations).

Some even appear to have been marked with black and red pigment as though indicating the best places to strike for the required sounds. The black is usually placed on top of the red, with a layer of calcite inbetween,

showing how the same importance was given to these marks not just over a few decades, but over centuries and perhaps millennia (Montagu 2004: 174).

Of course all this again contradicts the popular view that ancient man was primitive and unsophisticated. Vocal resonance is not something that most of us think about, apart from making our voices echo sometimes. The ability to work out the best place in a cave for sending the voice echoing around it, and creating specific pitches and tones suggests a very sophisticated culture was in place around fifteen thousand years ago during the Aurignacian period.

As with aft, any society possessing music and such complicated musical knowledge is unlikely to be living a hand to mouth existence. Such skills indicate the availability of leisure time, and needs beyond simple survival.

It is quite another matter though to guess what the purpose of such music might have been. We know that very ancient flutes made of bird bone have been recovered, dating back circa forty thousand years have been found in a cave on the banks of the Danube (see Bibliography under Websites for full link).

Cave paintings elsewhere, especially in Scandinavia, show shamanic figures playing flute-like instruments and interestingly, the Indo European word ‘to blow’ is ‘*an*’. It is possible that this word eventually evolved into the Old German *As,* the Old Norse *Ass,* and the Anglo-Saxon *Os,* all meaning a god (Kühn 1966:111). If true then perhaps blowing a flute was a method of summoning a deity.

This theory might shed some light on the Venus of Laussel, the limestone figure of a woman 1.5 feet high, carved in relief and painted with red ochre originally, though now much faded. As it was found in a cart track, we cannot even know where it was from originally. The figure carries what seems to be a horn in her right hand although this has sometimes been interpreted as a crescent moon. Personally I think this unlikely since the top of the horn is flat and not pointed. The horn shape is marked with lines, perhaps tally marks connected with the menstrual cycle, or the lunar months.

Another possibility is that the horn symbolises the contact between a goddess and those who wish to invoke her, reminding them either of the best way to contact her or the means by which she contacts them. The

figure places her left hand over her belly, which may suggest pregnancy, or perhaps is a gesture protecting the womb and fertility.

Gestures

We often take gestures for granted although we use them every day to reinforce and emphasise what we are saying or to point at other people and objects. The movements may be subtle or more obvious, but they are there if we look for them. As there is no universal grammar of gesture or body language, an innocuous movement in one culture can be deeply offensive in another. Even so, gestures can be powerful tools in communication.

Gestures are also important in art because they can help emphasise the message contained in the image. However, they can also be very ambiguous. For example, raising both hands may indicate supplication, an attempt to reach out to the divine, towards what cannot be seen. Even if that is true, we still do not know how the divine manifested nor why people wanted to reach out to it. In cartoons however the same gesture might indicate surprise.

The position of the palms of the hands may also be significant. When raised arms are shown with palm facing outwards, for example, it seems *likely* (though not provable) that heavenly powers are being invoked. The secular world trying to get the attention of the divine, rather like school children putting up their hands to get a teacher's attention.

Yet people also raise their arms at concerts and football matches, which surely have little spiritual content and signifies only enjoyment and solidarity. It might even be a movement within a long lost sacred dance, similar to those still practised in places like India and Africa. For all we know, such dances may once have been part of the spiritual heritage in northern Europe. So perhaps the best we can hazard is that in ancient art, a figure with both arms raised *might* have been trying to make a deity aware of their presence. The possibilities just grow and grow.

Raised arms have also been interpreted as the living attempting to contact the dead (Maringer 1979:221). When we look at the image below, however, we can see how ambiguous the gesture really is. The outstretched, uplifted arms could also represent a person connecting with others, an attempt to find balance (perhaps necessary on a perilous spiritual journey or in a hectic sacred dance) or even the deity or power attempting to reach out to the viewer.



The lower half of the figure is also interesting. The rounded ‘blob’ below the waist is surely not accidental but must represent *something.* It’s tempting to assume that if this is an attitude of prayer that they must be kneeling, although this would not really explain the almost circular shape. It is possible however that they are sitting cross legged and wearing a long robe, although this is not a posture of prayer that we are nowadays familiar with.

Other figures (usually female) shown with their arms slightly raised and the face lifted to the sky are often found in Eastern Europe. The position is sometimes described as ‘the attitude of an adorant’ (Maringer 1979: 224). Unfortunately that has become something of a catch-all phrase to cover just about any human position in ancient art. What it cannot tell us however is what was being adored (if anything) nor why. We are never simply adorants.

In Christian imagery one hand is often raised in blessing. Yet we see the same gesture in the 31,000 year old ‘Venus’ statue of Galgenberg, the earliest known female figurine so far found in Europe.



Sometimes gestures are obvious, sometimes covert, as though inviting the viewer to look deeper into the picture. This is nothing new. During the Renaissance, for example, many patrons delighted in incorporating visual

puzzles into the artwork they commissioned. We may yet discover the idea is much older than we ever imagined.

And of course there is far more to gestures than just hand signals. Sometimes a series of actions can make up a single gesture. For example, a ‘gesture of apology’ implies a series of actions intended to make amends. When we look at images in cave paintings, we usually see animals and people engaged in some sort of activity, standing, sitting, kneels, prostrating themselves or even raising one or both arms above the head.

Presumably all these activities represent activities and ‘gestures’ of some sort, but interpreting them can be a risky business. Are these deliberate signs for the viewer to interpret, or simply a case of knowing where to place the hands for the best artistic effect? Anyone who has ever sat for a portrait photograph can appreciate the difficulty of trying to keep their hands relaxed and still!

It is also difficult to be certain where body positioning ends and gesture begins. Does a hand gesture for example, change its meaning according to whether we are sitting down or standing up? Does it change according to the way the head is facing? Although we cannot answer these questions, we should still try and be more aware of gestures and how we use and interpret them.

One of the best ways to understand gesture and ritual movement is to actually practice it. To go through the motions and see how they affect us. Unless we has actually attempted some sort of ritual outside the confines of organised religion, it can be difficult to appreciate the many subtle ways that gesture can enrich our spiritual purpose.

For example, if we raise our arms, is this a gesture of appeal, entreaty, thanksgiving—or something else? And if the human figures are making ritualistic gestures, then could there also be something similar in how the animals are portrayed?

Other common gestures show people either clasping their hands, placing their palms together, or crossing them above the breast. Statuettes often stand with their hands either just under or upon the breast, interpreted by some as a gesture of prayer (Schuchhardt, 1935:30). Of course, another interpretation is that people sometimes place their hands in this position protectively.

Human figures on some French menhirs are often shown with their arms on the breast or womb in an attitude that has been interpreted as one of

reverence and adoration (Maringer 1979 :224). Yet people often clasp their hands when they are anxious, while the dead are often shown with their hands crossed over their breasts.

We do not know why some gestures are so popular. Perhaps the arms on the breast show peace, confidence or are a gesture intended to keep the soul safe within the body until it reaches the other world. It is not even easy to interpret something as simple as hands together, palms facing. Although most people might feel this is a traditional position for prayer it may just as easily show someone clapping her hands with delight!

Also, sometimes it is difficult to be certain whether we are seeing a single figure in several different poses, or a group of figures. For example, a greenstone cylinder seal from northern Babylonia c.2000 BCE (British Museum ME 89126, Room 56: Mesopotamia) shows three figures, each differently robed, approaching a seated, bearded man (for a link to the image, please see the Bibliography).

We know from the inscription on the seal that the scene probably shows the king, Ur-Nammu (seated on the right) bestowing the role of governor on Hashhamer, and although there are no obvious deities involved here, the gestures of the three figures on the left suggest they are showing respect. Each figure has at least one hand bent at the elbow, palm facing outwards and with the hand just below the chin. It looks as though they are saluting the king.

Mesopotamian cylinder seals portray a wide range of hand gestures implying that each had a specific purpose and meaning, now lost to us. The fact that we know so little, even about a relatively recent period shows the difficulties we face in dealing with the ancient past.

Sometimes it is the number of symbols or images in a group that seems significant. Most numbers do have some religious or magical significance. For example finding three figures (or multiples thereof) for example, immediately suggests to us that the number must have been significant.

Many traditions, from Babylon to Egypt, Greece and Rome had divine triads and even tri-form deities such as Hekate but we do not know whether this was also true of the people who created cave paintings. Just because we *think* we recognise something, does not mean that is what was originally intended!

There may even be more to a number than simple numerical value. Aristotle (De Caelo 1.1.268a) pointed out that '…the world and all that is in

it is determined by the number three, since beginning and middle and end give the number of an ‘all’, and the number they give is the triad. And so, having taken these three from nature as (so to speak) laws of it, we make further use of the number three in the worship of the Gods.’

Finally, never underestimate the power of gestures. I had an elderly aunt, much given to travelling but not, alas, to learning foreign languages. Plus she was rather deaf. Yet she managed to have quite long and complicated ‘conversations’ wherever she went, simply by using gestures—and many of these were facial rather than using the hands.

I often think it was such a pity she was never given the task of translating some of the ancient symbols—we might have been in for quite a treat!



Chapter Nine
The Handprints of Gargas and other caves

There are many instance of disembodied hands in ancient parietal art. The caves at Gargas in the Hautes Pyrénées show hundreds of hands, belonging to both adults and children, and are believed to date from around twenty-seven thousand years ago. They were most likely created by blowing pigment over the hands, rather like the technique of airbrushing. The lighter image of the hand then appears on the wall surrounded by the coloured pigment.

These handprints are found in several caves over a wide area. The entrance to the Cosquer cave, discovered as recently as 1985 was long ago submerged under the sea, and can only be accessed now with extreme difficulty (some divers have died there). Its handprints have been dated to c. 27,000 years ago (Clottes & Courtin 1996).

Almost all cultures attribute certain characteristics and meanings to the right and left hands or sides of the body, even though these meanings may differ through place and time. In many societies, the right hand is in fact 'right', with it therefore following that the left is somehow 'wrong', dirty or otherwise in some way inferior. Its Latin name, *sinister* still has rather menacing connotations. The right hand however is regarded as masculine, powerful, correct and associated with the elite, while the left is feminine, feeble, subordinate or in some cases just dirty (Hertz 1973:3-11).

In the Gargas caves, handprints where the colour is applied around the outside of the outline usually show the left hand (Leroi-Grouhan & Michelson 1986:18). This suggests that most of the people featured in the group were—as now—mainly right handed. If the hand prints were made

by each individual, then it would make sense to use the dominant right hand to handle the application of the pigment, placing the less active left hand on the cave wall. This would suggest that everyone participated and that artwork was not simply the preserve of a few, gifted individuals. And of course this is perfectly possible, since it does not require any specific artistic skill to produce a handprint.

Of course, if someone else helped create the handprints, the choice of the left hand becomes more significant. It was clearly a conscious decision, even if we do not know the reasoning behind it. Possibly the choice of hands was dictated by gender with the left hands representing women or children. It would not be unusual for a group or tribe to have more women than children, especially if the men were either away hunting or had been killed or taken in battle.

Neanderthal skeleton samples dating from c. 35,000 BP show they too were mostly right handed (Llaurens et al 2009: 881) Older tools, c. 300,000-400,000 old also show a prevalence of right handers although it is perfectly possible for left handers to use right handed tools or even to change hands for certain tasks. Even nowadays, living as a left hander in a largely right handed world still presents an obstacle course of practical difficulties.

Time and again we see how right and left seem to play an important if subtle role in ancient art. For example, the central figures in Egyptian stone carvings often look to their right, and Egyptian male figures are often placed to the right of women (Robins 1994:19) Sometimes right and left hands were reversed on the arms of human figures because certain objects had to be carried in the proper hands; left hands could carry certain staffs while right hands held specific sceptres (Robins 1994: 1 S2 1).

Regardless of which hand was generally used by the people of Gargas, we do not know what was the overall purpose of the handprints. Possibly they symbolised offerings and/or requests for help made to the spirit or deity residing in the cave (Maringer 1979:218). However, they may just as easily represent an early census of all the tribe members.

One interesting feature of the Gargas hands (and those at Cosquer Cave) is that although they all have thumbs, most seem to have missing or shortened fingers. At one time it was believed this was the result of deliberate ritual sacrifice, although this would inhibit all sorts of activities,

such as hunting, preparing food, making tools or clothes etc., which are all vital to ensure survival.

In particular, over half the hands seem to have *all* the fingers missing. If the theory of voluntary self mutilation were true, then these individuals would hardly be able to function at all (Leroi-Gourhan & Michelson 1986:20).

Another obvious problem with the theory that people merrily chopped off their own—and their children's—fingers is that there seems to be no pattern to their removal. If fingers were important enough to be sacrificed, then presumably this would be done in a certain order. This is not the case at Gargas (or at other sites with mutilated hands, e.g. the nearby Tibiran, Cosquer Cave and Maltravieso in Spain).

Sometimes it is suggested that the fingers were lost due to diseases such as leprosy. Against this however is the fact that the thumb is always present whereas leprosy would be just as likely to attack the thumbs as any of the other fingers. Which still leaves the question: what did happen to the 'missing' fingers?

The most obvious explanation is that the fingers were never really missing at all, but were tucked beneath the palm as the print was being made. This could have been intended to make the handprint easily identifiable, something that might have been important if the prints represented some sort of census.

Another possibility is that the hand shapes served as a kind of sign language perhaps in order to tell a story. This might explain why certain hand shapes are only shown in black and never in red (Leroi-Gourhan & Michelson 1986:30). It has been noticed however that not every permutation of finger arrangements is present. The ones that are missing are those that are particularly difficult to reproduce with the hand held upright as opposed to palm pressing against the rock (Leroi-Gourhan &Michelson 1986:22).

If this theory is correct, then perhaps the hand shapes were intended to represent gestures, rather like hand signals or sign language. In some shape or form these are still much used, not just by the hearing impaired, but many different groups, including bookmakers on racetracks and policemen on traffic duty.

What is particularly intriguing about the hand signs in the cave at Gargas is that they are identical to hand signs used by hunters in the

Kalahari desert to denote monkeys, giraffes and warthogs (Leroi-Gourhan and Michelson 1986:22). If this theory is true, then the handprints may well have provided a commentary or message (whether or not it involved warthogs).

The fact that the hands are divided into three sets at Gargas further strengthens the theory that they were meant to convey certain information to the viewer. If this theory is true, then again we must admit that our ancient ancestors were capable of 'writing down' information for others to read.

It is also interesting that not all the Gargas handprints are outlined in the same colour. Usually they are red or black, but we do not know why one colour was chosen for some hands and not for others. It may have been a purely artistic decision, or perhaps colour denoted gender, age, family group, occupation or specific skills. If the handprints were indeed intended to represent gestures, then colour may have added extra meaning to the messages.

However, among the handprints at Gargas are two that stand out from all the rest because they are white. This might suggest their owner (or owners) was set apart in some way, perhaps as a ruler or priest. Or they may have had some other meaning, unconnected with the owner of the hands at all. For example, they may have indicated a point where the grouping of hands changes, or where the narrative shifts in some way, rather like punctuation. At any rate, the presence of these white hands is striking. It identifies them as being somehow set aside from the others, either as individuals or in the meaning of gesture and colour.

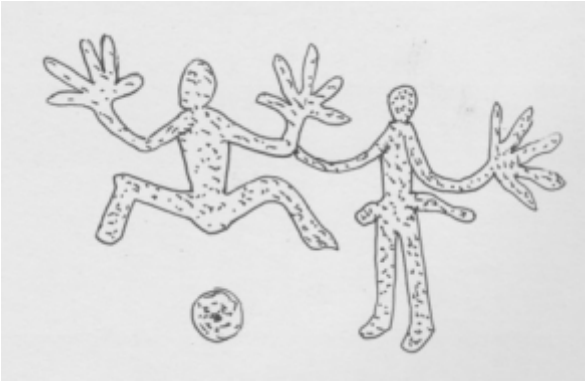
Children's handprints have been found imprinted in the softened surface of a limestone wall in the cave at Cosquer. What is interesting about these is that they were made quite high up the wall, over eight feet from the ground and in some of the deepest parts of the cave. Clearly the children must have been taken there by adults, and may even have been lifted up in order to make their marks.

In the Cosquer cave, the handprints appear mostly on the east side of the chamber with none in the west. Possible the wall surface was unsuitable at the time on the western wall, but another explanation could be that the west is traditionally associated with the land of the dead, the place where the sun 'dies' each evening. Possibly the handprints of young, or 'new' people were positioned in the same direction as the 'new' sun each day.

Possibly the handprints were an attempt to reach out to the spirits of gods within the stone walls or within the cave space. By touching the wall, perhaps they touched the divine. Or perhaps, by recording the hands of all their members, an entire tribal group were putting themselves under the gods' protection. The truth is that we do not know what the hands are trying to tell us. We only know they are there and that there must have been some good reason for going to so much trouble to include so many.

Of course, hand prints and stencils are not the only way to portray hands. In Northern Europe we find numerous examples of human figures with extremely large hands. Sometimes they are accompanied by solar symbols, either in the form of a small disc or a solar wheel.

On closer inspection though, the imagery is ambiguous. For example, the figures shown below, which come from the Baltic island of Zealand may be dancing, leaping in the air or over something or perhaps even symbolically giving birth to the solar disc (Maringer 1979:225). The figure on the left may well be female, although this is not clear.



There are also many similar figures in the rock art of Norway, shown with arms raised to head height, the palms facing the viewer and the fingers outstretched. What do they mean? Perhaps the hands are gesturing to stop, in which case it may be some sort of protective magic, and the figures may be human or divine, we do not know.

Another figure, this time from Flyhoff in Sweden, (Maringer 1979:225) shows a man with one arm outstretched with fingers spread, while the left hand holds an axe. Beside him is a solar cross, sun wheel or perhaps even an ordinary wheel, we do not know. The outstretched, exaggerated fingers may have been a gesture associated with the sun, or he may have been holding rods, staffs, or sceptres.



Other solar symbols can include boats, wheels and even a two wheeled solar chariot. As for the axe, in more recent times these were regarded as protective and Christian churches sometimes walled up an axe over the church doorway (Kühn 1966:149).

As we explore these curious communications from the ancient past with their symbols, lines and colours, we seem to invite them into our lives. Synchronicity, where things that are seemingly unconnected seem to occur at precisely the right time and place, suddenly forces us to sit up and take notice. Of course we may never truly 'know' what the handprints, axes or solar symbols are saying, but being aware brings its own challenges. We can either try to rise and meet these, or return to spiritual sleep again. The choice is entirely ours.

We also find that more we look, the more there is to see. For example, prehistoric art in Spanish caves such as Cogul and Cueva Vieja shows figures and animals in complex groups. Some females appear to be dancing with their arms mostly upraised, although the purpose of the dance is long forgotten. Yet seeing a group of people together suggests some sort of organised ritual or even an illustrated myth, a piece of artistic narrative telling some long forgotten story. Somewhere, in our hearts, some of us might one day remember it.

The portrayal of women in some cave art seems to invite all sorts of speculation. Were they goddesses, priestesses, priests dressed as women or what? Some (Maringer 1979:220) have suggested these Spanish scenes may show women conjuring up the animals for the hunt. This implies that women were involved in the magical aspect of hunting while men attended to the more physical side of it.

Yet apart from showing that at some level both sexes co-operated and worked together, the images cannot tell us much more. If we wanted to

believe this is proof of a matriarchal society, then this is exactly what we will find because it is human nature to read whatever we secretly want to find into the images. And in a way, this tells us something too, that we have an inbuilt need to believe in a particular interpretation of the ancient past.

Of course 'ancient past' can only ever be a broad term. How ancient, and where this past happened to be, is a question as long as the proverbial piece of string. Answers will vary from one place and time to another. The world of thirty thousand years ago was quite different that of from twelve thousand years ago. But at least in looking, we are being forced to confront something very primitive within our own inner self: the archaic vision we have of *ourselves.*

It is easy to forget how much we use in fantasy in our everyday lives. Quite apart from hobbies such as re-enactment societies, we may indulge in miniature worlds such as train sets, model armies and dolls houses, or we may look out for retro-clothing, or buy antiques.

The past—and it does not have to be all that distant—already calls us in various ways. But the ancient past is different because it seems to alien, so distant. We become afraid to answer its call. This is a pity because it is a chance for us to learn more about the common humanity that binds us all together.

Visual imagery can be helpful, but it does not have all the answers. Almost any image may be interpreted in many different ways. For example, archer figures may represent sorcerers, hunters, or even a magically conjured hunter deity. The 'truth' is very elusive. However, that should not deter us from reflecting on the ancient past since even the simplest actions may have profound implications for changes in ancient thought and spirituality.

For example, we know that people began weaving baskets in epipalaeolithic times (that rather transitional period between the Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic) (Levy 1948:84). This is interesting because it shows that people were no longer just using found objects such as gourds that looked like what they needed and then adapting them.

Instead they approached the problem by beginning with an empty space which they then surrounded with cloth, hides, clay or basketry so that objects could be placed inside them. This shows a huge change in thinking. Instead of adapting, they were creating. Not only that, but they were

creating around nothingness, a notional space, because obviously one cannot make a container around say, water; it has to be created first before being filled. So before we even begin we have to imagine the filling—its size and weight—before creating the container.

It is this realisation that everything is open to so many different interpretations that finally begins to open our own minds and unleash our curiosity, and that in itself is one of the most important tools on any spiritual quest. It helps us begin, it keeps us going, and even if we never find all the answers, it will have enriched us.

Albert Einstein claimed that curiosity had its own reason for existing.

He was right.



Chapter Ten
Crosses, Masks, Serpents

It can be a little surprising to discover there were crosses in amongst the cave paintings or decorating ancient clay pots etc., but of course the symbol is not unique to Christianity. In fact it has been around for over ten thousand years, during which time it must have had many different meanings. However, it can be difficult for us to interpret it when our viewpoint has been coloured by two thousand years of Christian iconography.

The cross is basically a unit of four: four spaces, four arms around a central point. Very much the same could be said of the swastika, another ancient symbol. At its simplest it could represent four parts of a whole, such as the seasons of the year, the compass points etc. And this is a very popular view, although it presupposes that our ancestors recognised four seasons although we don't know for certain that they did. They may have had three, or even five or more, especially considering how changeable the climate must have been in the aftermath of the last Glacial Maximum, that period when the ice sheets reached their greatest coverage over the earth and were several miles thick.

We also do not know for certain that our ancestors recognised compass points, although, considering the sophisticated alignments of ancient sites such as Stonehenge and Newgrange, it seems likely they did. It is even possible that crosses represented stylised crossroads. Certainly in historical

times, these were associated with deities such as Hekate and Woden. Perhaps cross symbols were meant to represent or describe the divine predecessors of such deities.

Even if we do not know exactly what the cross shape represents, we can see how the crossing lines offer space or sanctuary between their arms, or even choice (in the lines themselves.) Depending on their context therefore, they may have a practical, ritual, religious or magical purpose.

For example, a crossroads might represent the crossing from childhood to adulthood at coming of age rituals. In fact ancient footprints of young people have been found in the clay floor near the sculptured bison of Tuc d'Audoubert, while many of the handprints in the Gargas caves were of adolescents and children (Leroi-Gourhan & Michelson 1986 :30).

Likewise at the Cosquer cave, children's handprints have been pressed into the soft limestone surface of the walls. If nothing else, this suggests that children were included in at least some cave-based rituals although probably there were many others that took place outside.

The Use of Masks…

Human beings have worn masks for thousands if not tens of thousands of years. We still do, sometimes. When I was young they were made of papier maché, then plastic and now we can buy very realistic latex ones that cover the entire head.

It is usually the face that people recognise which is why most masks are worn on the head or face. Sometimes they cover everything down to the neck, while others, such as carnival masks, cover just the area around the eyes. The presence of a mask, even a small one, signals that the wearer is disguised, even though they might still be recognisable through say, a moustache or hairstyle.

Masks do not need to be realistic, conferring a wide range of identities such as other human figures (e.g. politicians) or fantastical figures such as devils. Although nobody really believes the wearer has changed into Frankenstein's monster they can conceal identity of the wearer—which explains their popularity with bank robbers!

Nowadays we use the word 'mask' as both verb and noun. It describes things and actions. We may wear a mask, or we may try and mask the truth. Masks have taken on not just the ability to change identity, but to hide reality, just as we do to some extent with masking fluid, or masking tape.

Usually it is the intention of the wearer that dictates the type of mask and how it is meant to be perceived by the viewer. A mask intended to be worn in a bank robbery will need to hide as much of the wearer's true identity as possible. With a small eye mask worn at a party however, the original identity is not really intended to be concealed.

In ancient sculptures, it is sometimes difficult to be sure whether the figure is wearing a mask, or whether the head really is that of an animal. Masks sometimes feature symbols, presumably to offer the viewer extra information although nowadays we may no longer know how to interpret it.

We also do not know whether masks were worn in order to allow people to infiltrate the animal world or to show animals infiltrating the world of humans. Of course, it is one thing to describe what a mask 'does' but quite another to know how it actually works. We do not even know whether ancient masks had one function or many. It is one thing to announce a change in identity, but quite another to bring it about.

Another consideration is that if a mask had magical or religious properties, then what happened to it when it was not being worn? Did it, for example, act as a container for the power it bestowed on the wearer, or did the wearer always retain that essential power within himself/herself? The difference in approach is fundamental, since the one makes the mask important in its own right, while the other means the mask can easily be discarded or replaced.

Of course, there are other ways to conceal or change our identity. Nowadays we may not think of make-up as a mask, but that is really its function. Another method is to wear a certain type of hat or uniform since this identifies us to others as belonging to a specific group. Sometimes while the clothes are the same, the colours have meaning—as in team games.

When we wear any sort of mask e.g. a uniform, then certain behaviour is expected of us. A traffic warden for example, has a set of duties to perform and we expect her to do this. But if she changes her job and becomes a bus driver, then that same person will be required to perform a different set of tasks. The person remains the same, but the mask—and therefore the actions—change.

The wearing of special clothing or masks therefore suggests either a concealment of their human identity or the adoption of some other *persona*.

Although it is easy to jump to the conclusion that this other identity must have been some sort of shaman, we cannot take this for granted. Bishops of the Church of England often wear elaborate clothing such as copes and mitres but would probably not appreciate being describes as shamans!

In ancient cave art, the animals are often more realistically drawn than the humans, who usually seem to adopt a position of humility and awe, as though in the presence of a deity. Yet when human beings are portrayed on weapons or statuettes (items that were taken and used *outside* the cave) they are shown upright and often wearing an animal mask (Levy 1948:22).

Clearly something important, of a physical, magical, or religious nature happened inside the caves. Possibly masks were worn in order to allow the wearer to become one with the power being invoked. That way might allow hunters to placate the spirits of the animals they had killed. They might even have used the masks as some sort of sacred vessel to contain such spirits.

Another possibility was that a mask could allow the wear to pass safely not only among animals, but also among the powers in the cave or the spirits of the dead. This would mean the mask was protective. We do not know whether masked figures in cave paintings and sculptures were intended to communicate only with viewers or with a specific audience such as gods or spirits.

It is also important to bear in mind that masks need an audience. They are usually only worn when someone or something else will see them. We rarely put them on when we are alone, because there is no need. Anthropologists have suggested that men in ‘primitive’ societies wear the masks while the women are terrified, believing that spirits are amongst them (Pernet 1982:58).

Of course, this is not necessarily true, and sometimes we must wonder where the researchers found their information. Nobody is afraid of condemning Herodotus for blithely believing everything he was told as he compiled his Histories in the fifth century BCE. Yet anthropologists may be guilty of exactly the same mistakes.

Possibly the women’s reaction of fear towards the masked men was an essential part of the ritual. It would be condescending to feel that scripted or rehearsed reactions can never be genuine, since those taking part really might feel the emotions they portray especially if it is the first time for them

to take part. It is rather like the ‘Method’ school of acting—to portray something, we must first experience and feel it.

In much the same way, since we cannot know exactly how our ancient ancestors regarded these masked figures in the cave paintings, we should not assume they were feared because they threatened established security and expectation (Schlobin 1995:7). For all we know, they may well have been loved and respected for the power they wielded on behalf of the tribe or community.

Likewise, we should not presuppose that masked figures were not tolerated because of their ability to transcend the limitations forced on ordinary mortals (Eliade 1964: 511). People certainly can be jealous of those with greater talents, but it is also possible that their abilities (real or imagined) may have been the very thing that made them so valued. Sometimes human beings prefer that others take on the responsibility that accompanies special powers because it leaves them free to continue with their everyday lives.

Personally I believe the portrayal of masked figures in cave paintings suggests they played an important part in the tribe’s ritual life, otherwise there was no point in showing them. They may have been loved, feared or respected, maybe a combination of all three. But wearing a mask put them somehow outside of normal human limits. Whether that was temporary, or whether masked figures were always regarded as different, even with the mask off, we do not know.

There are more mundane explanations too. Both the artists who created the masks, the person who wore and those who viewed it may all have understood that it could never be more than a human being wearing a mask. They may even have believed they were seeing an artistic representation of something believed to exist. A modern comparison would be pictures of fairies and angels. Not everyone has seen them for themselves, nor even necessarily believes that they exist, yet everyone recognises what they are when they see them in pictures.

With regard to what the masked figures might have done, there is a significant difference between a ‘man in the mask’ hiding from and someone hiding *amongst* other entities (or even animals) in order to learn their secrets and plans. The one does not wish any contact, the other wishes

to dictate the terms of it by concealment and listening. Alternatively, he may have contacted other entities to ask for help or knowledge.

At a most basic level, by hiding among the animals the masked man might learn where the herd was heading so they could be hunted. Yet when hunters are portrayed in cave paintings they rarely wear masks, implying that the mask had a magical or ritual function quite separate from the action of hunting itself.

Nowadays it is taken for granted that human beings are superior to all other animals, but we cannot be certain that was always the case, nor even that it is in fact true. Many animals have superior skills: birds can fly and fish can swim underwater, neither of which we can do without fairly recent technological aids.

It is therefore quite possible that our ancestors regarded some animals as superior beings and wore animal masks as a way of reaching out to them and learning some of their wisdom in order to apply these skills magically to their own lives.

Compared to some animals, humans are puny and weak. It could therefore make sense by our reckoning for our ancestors to have worshipped strong animals in the hope of magically absorbing some of that power. Yet if physical strength was all that mattered, we could surely have expected to find some evidence that our ancestors worshipped the physically powerful Neanderthals, which never seems to have happened.

Evidence for any sort of relationship between Neanderthals and Stone Age Man is very sparse and ambiguous. The popular idea that Neanderthals were hairy, grunting creatures that were barely sentient is simply not true. They buried women and children with offerings and grave goods.

They also painted bones with red ochre and buried weapons with their men. It is thought that the red ochre may have symbolised blood and perhaps healing or new life. Another explanation is that the body was originally wrapped in a piece of hide or skin that had been tanned or treated using ochre and that the colour subsequently transferred to the bones (Levy 1948:6).

In 1960, at Shanidar cave (in northern Iraq) archaeologists discovered the burial of a Neanderthal man, two women and a small child. What makes these remarkable is that they were buried with flowers c. 60,000 years ago. The man had been laid on a bed of horsetail plants and the burial was

accompanied by hyacinths, ragwort, groundsel, white yarrow, cornflowers, hollyhock and St Barnaby's Thistle.

There have been many rather wild claims about this burial, but the presence of flowers is undisputed. What we see therefore is that Neanderthals took care with the burial of their dead. Whether or not the plants had some healing qualities (Solecki 1975:881) someone took the time to gather and arrange them at the burial. And this shows tenderness, respect, and ritual, not characteristics naturally associated with Neanderthals.

Returning to the function of masked figures, we know that shamans—during the historic period at least—fulfil a long list of duties. Obviously these may vary according to place and time, but the most commonly found include controlling the weather and acting as mediators between the different worlds.

This ability to pass freely between worlds sets them apart from ordinary mortals (Campbell, 1962: 284). Shamans can also liaise with entities, animals and even the dead (Campbell, 1949: 99). Some preserve the knowledge of past lives (their own and other peoples'), or can make themselves invisible or fly like a bird (Eliade, 1964: 140-41).

As we have often noted, visual images such as paintings and sculptures capture only a moment in time. So although sometimes we come across captions where figures are described as 'masked 'dancers' they could well be doing something entirely different. Yet these masked figures are quite widespread, found not only in wall paintings but also on small carved objects (Kühn 1966:9).

The famous Cave of Les Trois Frères shows several sorcerers or shamans, dressed in skins and with horned masks. One appears to be playing a flute or recorder-type instrument. It seems likely the shaman wore coverings on his head, body hands and a belt of an animal tail possibly from his waist. He is not just masked—he wears a costume from head to foot.

The images from Les Trois Frères are relatively well known and easily found on the internet. The images of masked people from another French cave, that at La Marche, are more difficult to find. Yet they show masks were worn along with clothing, so the mask only transformed the face while the body remained clearly human (Lwoff, 1962:87). The binding on the wrists and hands makes the fingers appear almost claw-like.



Another engraved figure (see image below), again from La Marche wears quite a different mask (Lwoff 1962 :89). Yet the posture on the two figures from this site is curiously similar and quite unlike those at Les Trois Frères.



The gesture implies an appeal to some higher power, which could make a good case for such figures being shamans. Notice that on the second figure there is no binding on the wrists, and yet the figure carries what

seems to be an instrument with a hoof, rather like a deer's, hanging from his belt. Perhaps the old tradition of carrying a lucky rabbit's foot stems from something like this!

If indeed shamans were believed to cross between worlds, then this action is probably what we are seeing at Les Trois Frères. The sorcerer and the bison men there are literally walking or dancing, perhaps approaching or leaving the Other World. The figures from La Marche however, have already arrived as they sit and make their requests. The differences between the two sites may show different practices or they may show a different part of the shamanic narrative.

The idea of several worlds co-existing is obviously a difficult concept, especially for those whose own religious and spiritual practice never deals with such things. However it is common in many cultures, and where it is present, some people are believed to have the gift to cross easily between them.

In all cultures where such beliefs are present, walking between worlds is not undertaken lightly. It may be done in order to cure the sick, to gain protection, to help the dead and the living, or to see into the future. The animal mask may represent the shaman's spirit helper and is sometimes thought to inhabit the shaman's body while he journeys to the other world.

We see a similar association with animals even in ancient Egypt where Pharaohs are sometimes depicted wearing what appears to be a bull's tail. One famous example is the Narmer Palette, an early piece that suggests the Pharaoh was already assuming not only temporal and political authority, but also spiritual and ritual power.

Associating with animals ritually and magically is always a complex process and has many variations in practice and belief. Yet such imagery is very persistent in our inner vision. Even today, many modern neo-pagans adopt 'Craft' names that include animals. Personally I do not believe this is co-incidental, but something buried deep within our ancient selves.

Serpents

Masks are not confined to the faces of men. Some animals, such as serpents (and scorpions), carry their masks with them, covering their entire bodies and then shedding them from time to time. There is no bleeding, no wound beneath, they emerge from behind the mask looking just the same as before. There is no transformation into anything else, the creature remains

what it always was, which may explain why snakes are so often associated with immortality and rebirth. (Pratt 1978:167).

Although snakes can travel through water, or climb trees, they are traditionally thought of as sacred creatures connected with the ground and therefore associated with chthonic entities such as the goddess of death (Maringer 1979:220). The gesture where the arms are lowered, or the palm of the hands face downwards are thought to signify interaction with such deities or powers. However, there are always exceptions. For example, human figures depicted on a rock at Vintlyke, Bohuslin in Sweden are shown with arms upraised near serpents (Althin 1945: 204, Fig. 103)

Serpents (along with ships, trees, suns, animals and even dancers) appear frequently in later Scandinavian Bronze Age (c.1500-500 BCE) rock carvings (petroglyphs) from southern Sweden. These could represent anything from enacting a myth or narrative, to religious or magical rituals. Whatever they represented was considered important enough to record in stone, a material that is difficult to work with. This shows it was intended to be permanent and viewed repeatedly through the years.

Snakes may also symbolise power. In the Old Testament, the serpent in the Garden of Eden was said to possess the knowledge of good and evil. Snakes were also associated with healing and divination, while in Ancient Greece, some households kept a ‘house snake’, who received offerings in return for protection (Pratt 1978:167).

Other famous mythological characters associated with snakes include Medusa, the Gorgon who had snakes instead of hair. Nowadays we think of Medusa as ugly and evil, but there is more to her legend than this. Popular stories of heroes conquering Dragons, Gorgons, snakes and other monsters may be ways of describing the overthrow of earlier deities. Goddesses for example, may have been transformed into fearsome, ugly creatures (such as Medusa, a dragon or serpent) so that heroes such as Perseus or St George are justified in destroying them. This allows new gods to replace them (Pratt 1978:168).

It is surprising how many people have recurring dreams about snakes even though few of us live in areas where we see them regularly. Most are fairly shy and will slither away when they hear anyone coming. Due to the Old Testament story of the Garden of Eden, many people in the west nowadays view the snake as evil, although traditionally it represents life energy and regeneration.

It is possible that the serpent in the Garden of Eden is an example of the demonization and replacement of its benign qualities in much the same way as happened with Medusa. If so—though we cannot prove it—then the snake is the *victim* of deception, not its perpetrator. Whatever it represented originally has been reframed so that it is now presented as the embodiment of evil. Wisdom has become cunning, advice has become temptation. If we dream about snakes therefore, it is possible we are actually in contact with our ancient memory, a world where change is inevitable, and nothing is what it seems.

At first sight it might seem strange to associate serpents with healing. Many people connect them with venom even though most snakes are not dangerous. What binds them to the art of healing however is regeneration, in the form of shedding their skin since most healing is concerned with regeneration in some shape or form.

For example a wound heals by regenerating tissue, muscle and skin. A broken bone regenerates as it grows back together again. Therefore through observation alone, we see how serpents could have become associated with healing. If they could regenerate their own skin, then an appeal to that 'serpent energy' would have helped regenerate human wounds and cure sickness.

Even venomous snakes are not precluded from producing healing energy. In the Graeco-Roman world, many gods were agonistic, meaning it was possible to be both for or against something. For example, Apollo could both harm and heal, a paradox that may have originated tens of thousands of years earlier. It is also interesting that Apollo and his son Asklepios were not only healers, but also closely associated with serpents. In fact much healing was performed at the Asklepian shrines by the use of incubation and healing serpents (Krappe 1942) :231).

Incubation was a process where the patient spent the night either in the temple precinct or *abaton* (sacred hall) and was visited by either the god, his attendants, sacred snake or sacred dog (Talbot 2002:153). These dream visitors would then effect a cure by touch, surgery or medicine, or in the case of animals by licking the affected part of the body (Compton 1998:303).

Serpents may be indicated by a variety of symbols. The most obvious is a rippling, horizontal line, or a spiral. However, the meander sign (better-known as the Greek or Celtic key pattern) is another possibility, albeit in a

more developed form. It is found all over Europe as early as 18,000 BCE (Gimbutas 1989:26) and may mimic the way snakes move. Alternative explanations for the meander symbol include secret walkways and labyrinths.

It is easy to dismiss symbols as nothing more than pretty decorations or space fillers, but they can also be used to represent the inexplicable. Even today, when most people in the west are literate, we still use symbols and there is a roaring trade in the creation (and copyright protection) of logos and trademarks. So if we still use symbolism for such mundane things, how much more might symbols have been needed to explain ancient numinous concepts in a spiritual environment?

The term 'numinous' was first used by Rudolph Otto, (1937:8) to describe the sort of deep spiritual emotion that can be understood only by those who have experienced it. It is a useful word, no matter what one's path happens to be, since describing emotion is never easy. One of the most common methods is to use an analogy, i.e. to compare it to something else so that others can understand.

Jung (1981:Par 814) described these analogies as symbols and believed they could include images, figures, dances and rituals, although nowadays we might also add books, adverts or even films. If Jung is right, then the patterns and symbols that cover so much ancient pottery and parietal art may well have been intended to convey complex religious and emotional messages.

However, we do not know whether our ancestors felt the need to convey religious and emotional messages to each other. Perhaps they did. Or perhaps they felt a need to leave a message for the future. For us.

In which case, it's high time we tried to find out what it is.



Chapter Eleven
Mother Goddesses

Here we come to one of the most controversial aspects of the sacred past, the concept of a Great Mother Goddess. Some want to believe in her, others do not. There were certainly ancient, prehistoric goddesses, but whether there was one Mother Goddess with many different facets is almost impossible to prove. There are no straightforward answers.

Nevertheless, it is an attractive concept and there are some who claim that in the very ancient past, society was matriarchal and peaceful, (sometimes described as 'Old European'), or that if it was not matriarchal, at least it was matrilinear, tracing all descent through the female line. This lifestyle was eventually overthrown by patriarchal and warlike tribes (described as 'Indo-European.') Others believe that society was always very much as it is now.

It is a complex and difficult web to unravel and one that makes emotions run high. However in exploring our own response to the sacred shadows of the past, there is no harm in examining our instinctive reactions. Even if they are inaccurate, there may be good reasons why they appeal to us in the way they do.

For example, those who support the idea of a peaceful matriarchy may be looking, deep down, to justify a golden age. They need to feel that a peaceful, female dominated society once existed. Perhaps it did. What we should be asking ourselves is why such the idea should matter so much to us now, many thousands of years later. Perhaps we need more nurturing in

our lives, or a powerful Mother figure to claim and protect us. Perhaps it is a reaction against the wars of the past two hundred years or so.

Likewise if we believe that society was always warlike and male dominated, then we may be naturally attracted to a warrior code. Perhaps we seek long lost ideals of honour, family and tradition that we feel are lacking in modern society.

Another possibility is that those who claim that society has always been much the same as it is now may in fact be trying to justify the present state of affairs, or seeking evidence to prove that nothing ever changes. Because if there has never been any change, there is no point trying to rise to any challenge. The *status quo* will—they argue—always be upheld. But then we should wonder why we feel that nothing should—or can—ever change.

Of course things *have* changed over time. They always do. Received wisdom may insist that our ancestors lived a very basic, hand to mouth existence, yet they created huge stone monuments positioned so accurately that they could capture a shaft of sunlight from sunrise on a precise date. The need for such work is something most of us nowadays could not even begin to contemplate.

At one time it was thought that all these advanced ideas, agriculture, building etc just happened out of the blue around 10,000 years ago. Yet stone tools dating back 2.5-2.6 million years ago have been found in Ethiopia. So Jung's 2 million-year-old man is not too wide of the mark. The archaic man within us will have seen not just one Ice Age, but several.

Throughout the writing of this book I became aware that the hand of synchronicity was at work. Most of us have experiences of these strange yet significant coincidences throughout our lives. They may not be meaningful to other people of course, who all too readily dismiss them as change, or 'Just one of those things.' However what we must remember about synchronicity is that these coincidental events *are meaningful to the people who experience them.*

And so, when I was writing this part of the book, and sitting in my garden wondering about the great interconnectedness of the world, I came back into my kitchen and discovered an old newspaper. It was waiting to be used to wrap some glasses, and it wasn't even my newspaper but one my local library had very kindly donated to me. (I mention this only to show that I had never read the article in question before that moment.)

However the headline, ‘Are you related to Cleopatra?’ caught my attention at once and I went on to read about how everyone shared a common ancestor. In fact it even stated, ‘the common ancestor of everyone alive today lived something like 3,500 years ago.’ (Daily Telegraph 8th March 2013).

So although it is tempting to feel our ancestors must be either ‘Old European’ or Indo European, the truth is probably that most of us are a complex mixture of both. It is not a case of recovering ‘the Goddess religion’ and discarding everything else. That would be no more balanced than accepting only a male-centric religion.

Our aim should always be to see the wider picture, rediscover both legacies, as they run through our thoughts and dreams. And once discovered, we have to learn to reconcile them with our present.

Of course we should always bear in mind that all these ancient images, whether in books or museums, are now completely out of their original context. We cannot be present at the time they were created and used nor can we see what else was present in the area. Yet still our innermost memories, those sensations that are just on the edge of everyday consciousness, keep pushing us to discover the fuller picture.

Unfortunately all too often we fight against these sensations, insisting that dreams are just crazy distortions and should be ignored when we finally wake. In fact, dreams give us important insight into who we are and what we are made of. They are a way for our earliest experiences of the gods to rise to the surface of our consciousness.

Goddess Symbols

‘Goddess’ symbols are a good example of certain images that seem to keep appearing in everyday life. Whether they are solely the properly of the Divine Feminine or something much, much more, we do not yet know.

It is likely that at least some of these symbols once had a precise meaning, but nowadays the best we can manage is an educated guess. Zigzags—and even the letters M, Z and W—suggest a stylised form of water complete with ripples and waves. So perhaps these became a shorthand for not only water, but also for all water deities and spirits.

That such deities were often female can be seen in the way rivers were named during historical times. For example, the River Boyne in Ireland is named after the goddess Bóand, and the River Shannon after the Goddess

Sinann. The River Seine is named after Squana a goddess of the Gauls who was worshipped at the source of the Seine (Gimbutas 1989: 43).

However rivers and streams are not only comprised of water. There are other types of streams too, such as streams of knowing, or of consciousness etc. Comets have tales that look like streams as do shooting stars. Even rays of moonlight and sunlight share similarities in that several straight lines converge towards a single point or source.

According to Gimbutas (1989:19), the zigzag is the earliest symbolic motif recorded and even occurs in Neanderthal sites dating circa 40,000 BCE. The M and W shapes may be a truncated zigzag, so perhaps again they symbolises water, although it may mean a particular type of water, such as tears or even amniotic fluid.

Of course, those of a cynical mind reading this may see little more than the hand of coincidence at work. A figure of a woman decorated with the letter M? 'Meaningless!', they cry. And yet… look at the astrological sign for Virgo.  A stylised letter M.

Another reason for linking water with a goddess rather than a god is that each of us grows in the waters of the womb. We see this most graphically when a woman's 'waters break' just before giving birth. So it seems a reasonable assumption that a goddess associated with birth could be associated with water too. It may not be proof, but it shows a strong link between the two.

In the past forty or so years it became very fashionable to claim that just about every squiggle and line represented an ancient goddess—or perhaps even *the* goddess. While it is likely that this is correct in some instances, we have to remember we do not even know how many goddesses were recognised in ancient societies, let alone their names or divine attributes.

Certainly creating figures from stone, clay, bone, antler etc., required effort, skill and time. It would be appropriate for something intended to serve or represent a deity. However it seems unlikely that every figure featuring the face or female figure portrayed the divine. Both the human face and female figures are intrinsically beautiful in their own right, and they may even have been created solely for their aesthetic quality.

Over the years we have been conditioned to view most deities in terms of Graeco-Roman gods. This is slowly changing nowadays, yet still any sculpture of a voluptuous woman is automatically tagged as a 'Venus' figure, and therefore associated with love and fertility.

Yet if we look at such figures as the Venus of Willendorf more carefully we realise they often depict older women who have borne children. So what we are seeing is not a young goddess of love or even fertility, but rather a figure who has almost certainly once been a mother. The figure was originally painted with red ochre, perhaps to signify life or regeneration.



The Venus of Willendorf

It is a subtle difference, but very important especially since we live in a society that worships youth and manipulates its idea of beauty with scalpel and Botox. In modern society older women, and particularly those who look their age, have become well nigh invisible. Clearly this was not the case in the ancient past—The Venus of Willendorf was made around 26,000 years age. So why did our ancient ancestors create this older female figure? What could she offer that others could not?

Probably the answer is wisdom and experience. Even nowadays, elderly aunts and grandmothers can be wise and compassionate confidantes. They not only have a wealth of experience to offer young women on the brink of motherhood, but also about relationships, raising their children and the whole business of looking after the family, of intervening and making peace between family members.

However, honouring a female deity who has already had children does not prove that ordinary women were confined to the home or restricted to dealing only with family matters. We must not apply some Victorian ideal of womanhood to societies we know so little about.

Indeed, the Victorian ideal of women staying at home, being waited on hand and foot and whose children were banished to the nursery only applied to women of a certain class. In poorer families, the women worked just as hard as the men, not only in the home but outside, earning money in factories, on the farm and with domestic service.

If things have changed for us in less than two hundred years, then it would be unrealistic to assume that all ritual and religious thought must have continued without change between the old and new Stone ages. In fact, the Venus of Willendorf is as distant from the sorcerers in Les Trois Frères as those sorcerers are from us!

Although it is tempting to argue that even if the Venus figure represents an older woman, this does not prove she was regarded as a goddess, there are some clues. If we look closely, we see that she lacks a face and is therefore generic i.e. the figure is meant to represent a type rather than individual.

We know that sometimes the face of the deity was something altogether different from the body. There is even an example in the Bible where the face had to be veiled when in the presence of one's god (The Bible, Exodus 34, v33-35). Since respectful behaviour could not be guaranteed, it could have made more sense to create a faceless figure. This ensured the face was concealed no matter who gazed on it.

If it was necessary to conceal the deity's face, it could also be argued that prayer and communication with gods might have involved putting a hand in front of one's own face. I certainly remember my own father praying in this way. It might even be the origin of the familiar 'face palm' gesture that was made so popular in the Star Trek TV series. The word itself is relatively recent, but the gesture seems quite old and has even been noticed amongst some primates.

The link between the face palm, the hand in front of the face and prayer could be an appeal to the gods when faced with a situation of intense idiocy. Obviously neither this nor the prayer theory can be proved, but they are interesting ideas nonetheless.

It is always tempting to see figurines such as the Venus of Willendorf as being somehow ‘proof’ of the primitive beliefs and abilities of our early ancestors. Of course this is not true. Firstly, we have no idea why the figures were created or needed, nor how they were treated. Also, we do not understand their artistic approach.

For example, twentieth century artists such as Picasso and Matisse stripped visual imagery down to its most basic while at the same time reaching out to a very sophisticated and elite audience. Using apparently simple lines and colours, it is possible to show highly complex narratives, emotions and ideas.

It may well be therefore that, far from the Venus sculpture being evidence of the simplicity of Ice Age art, it reveals instead an extremely sophisticated culture. It could have been intended to show magical or spiritual concepts that even now we would struggle to explain.

Of course the ‘Venus’ figures are not the only representations of women and we can identify a wide range of female divinities including bird goddesses, pregnant mother goddesses, fish goddesses etc.

The identity and purpose of anthropomorphic figures (where human and animal/bird or fish are fused together) pose some challenges for us. They are not adorants, nor even dancing girls or concubines. They are a visible sign of a higher power due to being beyond the normal appearance for either humans or animals.

Therefore claiming such figures must have been deities is not that farfetched. People may have been aware of the Divine Feminine long before the Divine Masculine since everyone living has grown, been nurtured and finally emerged from the bodies of their mothers. The man’s role in procreation may not have been fully understood until much later. Certainly it was not so obvious.

Of course it is one thing to accept the existence of several, varied female deities but quite another to believe there was a single Great Goddess or even a Great Mother Goddess. Yet really it is not more strange than believing in a single, omniscient Male God.

Regardless of gender, there has long been a tendency to group ancient deities or powers into three classes: Sovereign, Warrior and Pastoral-Agricultural (Dumézil 1947: 1352). Unfortunately, most goddesses did not fit into the first two groups and were placed in the third. As a result they

seem to have been regarded as lesser divinities even though many of them actually performed in all three groups.

There are myths to support this from the historical period. For example, goddesses such as Athena, Artemis, Hekate, Morrígan, Hera etc., were not 'Venuses' of fertility and prosperity but were powerful and forceful individuals who could have certainly been placed in the Warrior category (Gimbutas 1989:xvi). Possibly (according to Gimbutas) this was because they originated in Old Europe whereas the Venus figure more properly belongs to the Indo-European tradition, intended to be taken as brides to the 'horse riding warrior gods' (ibid xx).

The tendency to see all female goddesses as fertility deities watching over agriculture and fertility reflects more of the historical view of women than it ever can about the ancient world. We should not persist in seeing women's functions as confined to childbearing. In societies where everyone had a part to play, it is surely nonsense to believe that all that was required of women was that they should get pregnant and give birth to a healthy child.

Unless we challenge these ideas, we will end up believing that all any self respecting goddess had to do was bring fertility to women, animals and plants. The truth is that we simply don't know how much autonomy women had in the ancient world. Over time and place there may have been massive differences in female roles, duties and expectations. For all we know, female deities may well have operated in a variety of ways that might seem incredible to say, a Victorian antiquary or a mediaeval cleric!

It is generally accepted that around ten thousand years ago, as the ice sheets were receding, food gathering gave way to food producing, i.e. farming. Hunting may well have continued to some extent, but generally life would have become more settled. One cannot plant crops then move on and expect them to harvest themselves.

Of course nothing would have happened quickly; traditions usually die hard, and besides, the climate could change dramatically for a centuries at a time. As life did start to change however, so new myths had to evolve to account for the transformation, and then new symbols would be needed (or old symbols given new meaning.)

This could lead to the emergence of goddesses as in specific roles such as the Creatrix, Life and Birth Giver (Gimbutas 1989: xxii). Each of these carried her own specific iconography but the sculptures of the basic types

can be traced back to c.25,000BCE, and are marked with much older symbols such as vulvas, triangles, breasts, chevrons, zigzags, meanders, and cup marks.

Of course sometimes symbols are ambiguous. What Gimbutas interprets as a double fruit sign (1989:166 *fig 258)* I would have interpreted as testicles. Perhaps I am more Indo-European than I thought! Likewise sometimes it is difficult to know whether we are seeing a rudimentary figure with large breasts (i.e. a female figure) or an erect phallus with testicles.

The most obvious way to portray a goddess as Birth Giver is to show her about to give birth, and this is how she has often be depicted. When a goddess shown in the act of giving birth it invites the viewer to fill in the gaps in the narrative. However this requires knowledge that we simply do not have any more.

Sometimes this birth-giving figure is accompanied by symbols representing the vulva. In this form she can be found from the Upper Palaeolithic period, through the Neolithic period and even later. Many even resemble the medieval Sheela-na-Gig figures.

Strangely, these Sheela-na-Gigs, whose hands are pulling their vulva open, are often found on Christian Churches although their presence seems quite out of place. One popular theory was that the Church allowed 'the goddess' to stay in order to attract the faithful. Another theory is that the figures were teaching aids to reinforce the Church's anti-sexual and anti-feminine teachings (King 1993:13).

Natural objects such as flower buds or shells can also resemble the female vulva, and therefore could have come to symbolise a goddess or the reproductive process of women. Not all flowers or shells are suitable however. It would be difficult for example to equate the average limpet shell with a vulva although it could symbolise a breast.

Likewise, cave openings, especially when they have an elongated oval shape, may also have been viewed as a vulva, with the cave beyond representing the womb. It is a pity that such symbolism is so often interpreted solely as 'erotic' art, as though the appearance of a vulva has only one possible function. The primeval mother image has also been associated with female bears, deers, elks, bison and mares.



A selection of ideograms that may represent vulvas

Sometimes it is difficult to know where a fertility goddess's duties begin and end. Is it with pregnancy? Or does it follow through to the birth? And given that—even in the early twentieth century—many mothers and children died in the first few weeks after birth, might women and their families have appealed to one goddess or two? Any deity associated with giving birth may well slightly overlap the role of the fertility goddess, or the two may be one and the same.

Giving birth can be seen in other ways too, with the goddess as a great Creatrix, giving birth to all things (not just human babies) from her womb in the earth. This is more controversial because it implies a more monotheistic religious belief. Of course there is no reason why the various aspects of the Divine Feminine—the bird and fish goddesses, the Venus figurines etc.,—should not be all aspects of the same deity, but there is no way at the moment we can prove or disprove this.

Moving on from the birth itself, a mortal mother needs to feed, nourish and protect her children, often for several years, before they are strong enough to fend for themselves. Therefore this aspect of a goddess would be both nourishing and protective with all that implies. According to Gimbutas (1989: xix) this form of goddess would be shown as a woman with birdlike features, breasts and protruding buttocks.

The transformation from a realistic looking pregnant female or a figure in the act of giving birth, into a bird woman is difficult for the modern mind to accept. However in any society where symbolism was linked to the natural world it makes perfect sense. One of the easiest ways to see nurturing in operation is to watch how birds feed their fledglings.

Modern neo-pagans, while honouring goddesses in many forms, tend to focus on her fertility and mothering aspects. Another characteristic, where she functions as a Receiver of the Dead is less recognised. This is hardly

surprising since western society tends not to engage with its dead very much nowadays. When I was young, funerals were often held from the home of the deceased. Nowadays they are usually handled by a funeral director, miles away from where the dead person actually lived.

If we accept there was a goddess associated with death (and it seems likely, considering the role of the Divine Feminine in bringing to life) then her task was to receive those whom she magically birthed so that they could be returned to the earth. There may have been two separate deities, one for birth and the other for death, or they may have been two aspects of the same goddess. The role of the earth however, may explain why burial has always been such a popular way of disposing of the dead because it certainly is not the easiest method (which would just be to expose the corpse and allow wild animals to do the rest).

Burial is physically demanding and time consuming if we are going to dig a grave deep enough so that animals cannot dig it up again. Heavy clay soil or bad weather can make the task even more difficult. Yet there is little iconography discovered so far to suggest a goddess associated with cremation.

The role of a goddess of death or the dying may also explain why burial mounds are often shaped liked a pregnant belly, and must be entered on all fours along narrow passage ways. Depositing a body within a mound is rather like the process of birth in reverse and perhaps that what was intended.

Of course it is also possible the mounds had other purposes, such as incubation for healing or divination. Because most of the mounds were opened many years ago we do not know how many burials they once held. But even if they were used for healing instead of (or as well as) burials, the same ‘birth in reverse’ process seems to be in operation.

On a more personal note, throughout my early life I experienced recurring dreams about leaving a burial within an ancient mound via a long dark passageway that ended in a tiny entrance slightly above ground level, so that I had to half climb, half crawl out. It was only many years later that I first learned about passage graves, especially those in the Orkneys.

I mention this because it is so typical of the way that sacred shadows reach out to us. Was this a memory that my soul had somehow carried with it across many millennia? Perhaps it was a memory that had come from a previous life. I have no answer, all I know is that I was having recurring

dreams about somewhere I had never visited in my present life and when I finally did read about passage graves and saw photographs of those in the Orkneys, I finally made the connection between reality and my dreams.

For thousands of years human beings have been unable to accept the finality of death. There is a feeling that some part of us must continue, perhaps reborn as another human being, an animal or that it must go on to some other dimension. The idea that a goddess who brings life to individuals and entire communities should also be in charge of our departure from this life and whatever happens next is therefore not so unreasonable.

What connects all these things together, death and life, male and female, old and young, sky and earth etc., is energy. We use energy in almost everything we do until the day we die. To breathe, eat, even to sleep burns up the calories which are themselves just measures of energy. Little wonder then if some of the symbols we see were meant to portray energy, either its generation or the uses to which it could be put.

Yet still, symbols are often dismissed as mere ornaments whereas some at least must have been a language in their own right. According to Gimbutas (1989:3) some of the earliest signs of the bird goddess were the V sign and the Chevron (basically a repeated V or M) that appeared on bird figurines and bird/women as early as the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods. These signs, together with meander ones, were popular on Neolithic spindle whorles and loom weights together with the familiar M and V signs (Gimbutas 1989:68).

But why the V sign? Partly it must have been because it is such a useful sign for so many meanings. With the point uppermost, it indicates a mountain, volcano, spearhead and even a rudimentary penis. Pointing downwards it can represent a valley, riverbed or female pubic triangle. Pointing sideways, either to the right or the left can indicate direction or movement in a straight line.

The letter is not so different from some of the triangle signs for a vulva, but it could also represent a bird, because when we think about it a simplified V sign can depict birds especially in the distance!



The V sign can also represent the arrangement of the bird's feathers. Of course if we accept the existence and importance of the V sign, our next question should be why it would be used as shorthand for a bird goddess. Partly it comes down to observation and expectation. It is not easy—in northern Europe at any rate—to differentiate many male and female birds from each other.

Yet when we observe birds we see how they care for their family, building nests, feeding their young. Again, we can rarely tell whether it is male or female who is shovelling insects or worms into their offspring's beaks. Perhaps this was also the way with our ancient ancestors, that 'once upon a time' child care and nurturing was equally shared. We cannot prove this, but it is worth considering.

Perhaps birds and goddesses are so entrenched in our archaic self that we cannot remember when it all began. The words 'bird' and 'chick' are still used generically for a woman especially for young women. The clues are there, even though it might not be wise to automatically assume that every single V sign, dot and line represents a Goddess.

Birds are often associated with music and many, such as nightingales, thrushes and blackbirds, are well known for their singing. Magdalenian whistles made of hollowed out equal bones were decorated with chevrons and rows of tiny angles that might be interpreted as V signs (Gimbutas 1989:71).

Before jumping to conclusions however, the symbols may just have been a way to beautify something that produced a beautiful sound. Alternatively the music played on those particular instruments was dedicated to a bird goddess or used in rituals associated with her.

On human images the V shape is also simple way to draw a necklace and in historical times, a number of goddesses were associated with necklaces, such as the Norse Freyja and her treasured Brísingamen. The breasts of these birdlike figures are often very exaggerated and it is possible that pendants hung on necklaces were deliberately meant to be breast-shaped.

That theory sent me scurrying to my own jewellery box and I discovered that yes, many of my pendants are pear or breast shape, although I've never regarded them in that way. This may show how easily we overlook things now that were once extremely important.

Birds can also be associated with divination, mystery and death. Nocturnal birds such as owls are also predatory, although most birds kill their prey, even if that happens to be worms or insects rather than mice and rats. In Egyptian hieroglyphs the owl means death. Celtic triple goddesses in Ireland were known as *badb (*crow) while the Morrigan was sometimes known as *an badb Catha* (the battle crow) and the Germanic Valkyrie means a raven (quoted in Gimbutas 1989:189] . In ancient In Mesopotamia, the goddess Lilith's name meant a screech owl.

The birds most associated with death, such as vultures, eagles, owls, crows all tend to have wide wingspans. They may not be massive, but they are certainly wider than those of most other birds. In fact this is sometimes exaggerated in ancient art, so that the wings look like wide brushes (Gimbutas 1989: 298).

It is rather tempting to believe this may be somehow connected with the origin of the witch's broom, although there is no proof of this whatsoever. Still, it remains an interesting nudge from the past within us. Probably the only connection we can safely make is that some birds were associated with death, dying and with deities associated therewith.

At the cave of Les Trois Frères (c.13,000 BCE) a Gallery of Owls has been engraved into one of the walls (Gimbutas 1989:191). The fact that these are generally thought to be snowy owls rather than the more common barn owl may be significant. Apart from being extremely large, (their wingspan can be anything up to five feet across) they are mostly white, a colour traditionally associated with death in many parts of the world. Within historical times however, black is more likely to be the colour of death.

It makes some sense that she who brings us to life should also take care of our passing thus bringing us full circle back to her womb. But does she bring us back to life *again*? On the face of it, there is no reason she should not.

But of course there are also *male* gods responsible for regeneration. We cannot be certain exactly when the idea of a dying and rising vegetation deity began although it was probably connected with the rise of agrarian societies and the decline of hunter gatherers somewhere around the beginning of the Neolithic period 8,000 BCE (i.e. 10,000 years ago).

This change, which came about as the ice sheets began to recede, may also explain why such dying and returning gods are claimed to have

introduced the knowledge of agriculture (a later example is the Egyptian Osiris). This shows that the god was not just passively born from the goddess, living out a brief span and then dying, he was part of the generation of life itself.

Belief in reincarnation is widespread throughout the world, especially among Hindus and Buddhists. It also proved surprisingly persistent even within the early Christian Church. Origen, the third century CE theologian —who was eventually condemned as a 'pernicious heretic'—certainly believed in it, writing: 'If it can be shown that an incorporeal and reasonable being has life in itself independently of the body… then beyond a doubt bodies are only of secondary importance and arise from time to time to meet the varying conditions of reasonable creatures. Those who require bodies are clothed with them…' (from St Jerome's letter Number 124 to Avitus).

Part of the attraction of reincarnation may be because it answers a basic human need, to believe that death is not the end. If we accept it as part of our spiritual practice, then our existence becomes first a circle of birth, life and death before becoming a spiral of regeneration, where we re-enter this life before leaving again.

The spiral is a useful symbol. It is not only easy to draw, but may represent a host of different meanings, including snakes and the umbilical cord. The sign represented fertility especially in Crete and the lands around the Mediterranean. Spirals were often placed on the pubic area of female statuettes. Even though they are painted or carved as two dimensional, it is possible the sign was actually viewed as three dimensional, either descending into the earth or climbing up towards the sky.

Because we are dealing with people who have left no written material that we can yet understand, we must to rely heavily upon symbols and ciphers. The archaeologist, Marija Gimbutas identified a huge range of symbols during the course of her excavations, many of which she believed she could decipher.

Of course her claims were controversial, largely because nowadays we tend to assume that dots, lines and squiggles are purely surface decoration. Yet, at their most basic, most forms of writing could be viewed as decorative and still are, just look at the attention we pay to choosing the 'right' font for a particular document.

Although we may not realise it, even modern writing is symbolic—after all, the word ‘cat’ is just three symbols arranged in a particular order. It is not a cat, nor does the word look or sound like one. So perhaps Gimbutas was right, and the various patterns of nets, triangles, ovals etc., do indeed all have a specific meaning and language of their own.

I believe that many of these symbols are still embedded deep within our own consciousness since they recur across time and space, suggesting their importance in communicating specific ideas. We may have forgotten their original meaning and purpose but they are still ever present, just waiting to be re-awakened.

One way of trying to help this reawakening along is to cultivate a habit of doodling while relaxing, perhaps when watching television. We quickly notice how certain repetitive patterns keep appearing especially when we are not really thinking about them. Your patterns may not be the same as mine, but they are significant for both of us. And you may notice, as I have, that some people are attracted to certain patterns more than others.

Patterns and Water

It should not come as any surprise to find that zigzag patterns traditionally represent water because they do look like ripples and waves. As we have already noted, zigzags can also be shown as Ms and Ws which are just shortened forms of the same shape. These could easily have become a shorthand for a water deity or for properties associated with water.

Water features in our lives in so many different ways, that a single symbol would surely not be enough. There must have been a difference between a symbol that meant just water, and one that meant a water deity or spirit. Perhaps it was the angle, position or the number of times it appears, we cannot tell.

Just as water is a useful means of transport, so it can transport us from one state to another. Again this is connected with observation; we know for example that water can be present in three states, liquid, solid (ice) and gas (steam.) It would be unthinkable that our ancestors never noticed such things.

Therefore it must possible there was some sort of magical or spiritual connection between water undergoing transition from one state to another, water making it possible for people to travel from one place to another, and

water being somehow magically connected with humans and animals moments of transition from one state to another.

These changing states could all be observed. For example, the moment of birth, is a change of state from nothingness to life, from being invisible (inside the mother's body) to becoming visible. Then there is the moment of being named which takes an infant from being just a baby to being a specific person in his or her own right. There is even the time of becoming an adult, with all its implied changes in duties, responsibilities and status. Many of these transitional moments require some sort of ritual to safeguard the participants otherwise harm will result.

Why harm? Although we can understand medical risks and physical safety, it is harder to understand why people might feel they were at risk in other ways. Perhaps they feared jealous deities, left behind as the child passes from childhood to adulthood, although we have no proof that our ancient ancestors believed in hostile spirits. Another explanation could be a fear of 'slipping through the gaps' at the moment of transition, rather like crossing from one stepping stone to another.

Whatever rituals were used to deal with this probably involved an offering to ensure that all went well, rather like a sacrifice or bribe. The same sort of approach may well have been involved to ensure recovery from sickness.

Death is another transitional event falling as it does between life and whatever we believe comes afterwards. The rituals of death are clearly very ancient and operate across many different cultures and traditions. Traditionally the dead are usually treated with respect, although the bodies of dead enemies are a different matter.

Unfortunately, archaeological remains can only tell us a part of the story. They can discover what was done, the red ochre on the bodies (Levy 1948:70) or the flowers and herbs at Shanidar Cave. Yet they can rarely tell us *why* these things were done. Nor can archaeology tell us about the grieving process or how it was expressed. Some cultures still engage in wailing or 'keening' and outward displays of grief while others do their best to suppress this.

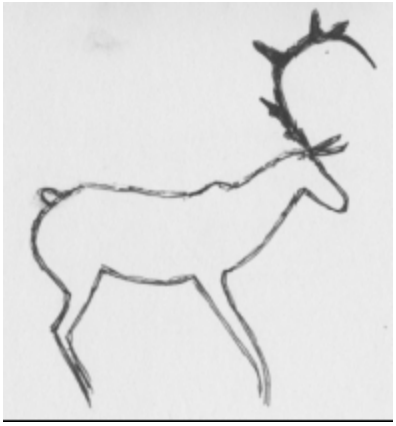
Also, many societies honour their dead because they fear them which strongly suggests belief in some sort of afterlife. Therefore watching over the corpse during the period between death and burial may have been either

to protect it from wild animals or other threats such as evil spirits, or in order to protect the living from the dead at a time of transition.

There is no harm in speculating upon these things—indeed, I believe they form an important part of our own spiritual progress —as long as we remember that just because two things are 'ancient' does not mean they must have shared the same symbolism. We can see what a nonsense this is if we look back just a few centuries to, say, the Middle Ages. So much has changed since then, the way we think, dress, work etc. Yet the ancient past takes us back through vast passages of time not just half a millennia.

As L.P. Hartley wrote in his famous novel, *The Go-Between,* 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.'

They did indeed.



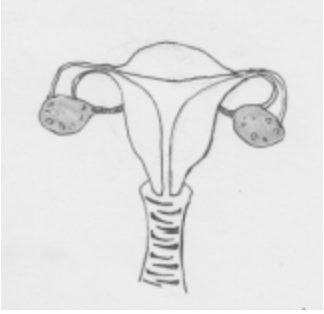
Chapter Twelve
The horned uterus, gods and other thoughts

Looking at the various symbols that make up the huge body of ancient art, we realise how these abstract decorations are curiously rhythmic and often mirror each other. It takes a certain type of mentality to move from pictorial representations of a deity towards a symbolic imagery.

Yet symbols and their meanings can change dramatically in a short space of time. For example, the swastika was a popular motif on nineteenth century jewellery, long before it was hijacked to serve Nazi propaganda. Nowadays it is banned, or at least frowned upon, in many parts of Europe.

In much the same way certain symbols—often linked to their counterparts in nature—may also undergo change. For example, in Neolithic times the ram seems to have become associated with a goddess as patron of spinning and weaving. This makes a great deal of sense, since it is ram and sheep's wool that is being spun and woven.

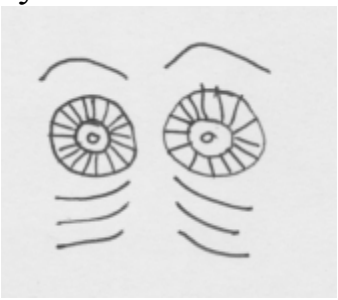
However, ram horns are visually similar to owl eyes, double headed axes, the shape of the human uterus, skull, or even an inverted omega sign with the curve of the fallopian tubes forming the curved arms of the omega. It may resemble an amphora or jar; even today we speak of 'carrying a child' as a euphemism for pregnancy. This shows persistent such imagery can be. The more we look at the human uterus, the more symbols we see, including the ubiquitous V sign at the centre.



Indeed an image of a uterus and ovaries can almost be said to be 'horned.' This shows how a popular figure such as a horned god, often thought of as quintessentially male, could also be associated with the Divine Feminine because the human uterus looks so much like a horned animal. Magically horns are not even restricted to the male, since in ancient Asia and Africa, some goddesses wore cow horns (Levy 1948:86).

Looking more carefully and using our imaginations, it is possible that the curved fallopian tubes may be the source of symbols such as spirals, coils and even 'radiant eyes' which look rather like those of an owl. The eye symbol is extremely popular in many cultures, from the Egyptian Eye of Ra and Eye of Horus to the 'radiant' eye on US banknotes. It may refer to actual vision, or to some sort of inner vision.

The radiant eye symbols have many similarities with the *oculi* opening at the top of the dome of the Roman pantheon, and also with the wheel, rose and Catherine windows that were so popular in medieval churches, such as those at Chartres, Rheims and Notre Dame. In the natural world, the radiant eye may be represented by flowers such as daisies. It may be shown with eyebrows or with crease lines beneath it (see image below).



An example of radiant eyes

Of course lines radiating around a central point or circle may also represent either the sun or a solar deity. Sometimes stags are thought to represent the sun because their antlers resemble rays. In the Italian Alps at Naquane, a piece of rock art shows a horseman complete with halo, lance and shield who may be a sun god preparing to 'gallop through the heavens and across the sky' (Maringer 1979:227).

This link with a solar deity may be no coincidence, since the area (now a protected World Heritage Site) includes two mountains facing each other across the valley. One is pyramid shaped, the other fan-shaped, and during the Spring and Autumn equinoxes, the sun's rays create an optical illusion that cause the mountains to appear to double in size. (See Bibliography for website link to images for this)

However, we do not know how our ancient ancestors viewed the sun. Perhaps, in view of the extreme cold of the Ice Age, they began to wonder whether the sun was, in fact invincible at all. The idea that the Land of the Dead lies to the west (a view held in many cultures including ancient Egypt) might have originated through observing that the sun appears to 'die' there every day.

Although many modern neo-pagans feel at ease with the idea of goddesses, there are some who either feel the gods have been airbrushed from the past and present, or feel a little uneasy with them. This creates an uncomfortable imbalance, even though, of course, the past two thousand years in the west have done pretty much the same thing in reverse by obliterating the Divine Feminine.

Gender can be manipulated and we simply do not know how evenly it was balanced out in the ancient past. We do not know how certain tasks were allocated, and these can change in a relatively short space of time anyway. For example, while spinning was traditionally considered a woman's work, just a few centuries ago it was men who did the knitting. Nowadays we would be hard pressed to find many men knitting, even for pleasure.

In viewing paintings and sculptures, we look for the obvious clues to gender: breasts and penis. If the breasts are prominent or the penis erect all well and good, particularly if the body is naked. But not all figures are naked, and clothing would have been essential due to low temperatures even as the ice sheets were receding. Clothes, especially if they are bulky,

can obscure gender. ‘Stylised human figures’ is a term often given to vaguely human shapes that cannot be accounted for otherwise.

Sometimes, the ancient past even teases us with the occasional hermaphroditic image, such as the small, headless figure from Thessaly (c. 6000-7000 BCE) of a seated nude who has both breasts and penis. The pose is very masculine, with the figure sitting with hands resting on the knees, but the breasts and penis are unmistakable. Such a figure may have been a divine ancestor of an hermaphroditic deity such as the Greek Hermaphroditos.

Other interpretations include the theory that the small sculpture could have been an Old Hag and a dying Vegetation God rolled into one (Gimbutas 1989: 182). Quite why the two needed to merge is not clear and besides, the breasts look young and firm, suggesting this figure was meant to be in the first flush of youth.

Unfortunately so many small sculptures have lost their heads that it is difficult to be certain who or what is being portrayed. The face is, after all, the most recognisable part of us. Provided the face is exposed, we can usually recognise each other even when we’re wearing a hat and coat. That is not to say that the missing heads on so many small sculptures ever actually had faces. We have already seen this with figurines such as the Venus of Willendorf where the face has been deliberately covered.

Faces may well have been regarded as powerful—perhaps too powerful or too private for ordinary mortals to gaze upon. Hence when iconoclasts damage statues, they almost always smash the face. They literally ‘deface’ it. The faces of painted portraits are also almost always the first to be deliberately damaged. A complete head—even if the face is veiled or hidden—at least shows the original intention of the artist. Once the head is broken off, it is more difficult to work out what might have been there originally.

It is possible of course that sometimes there never was any head. Such figures are sometimes captioned and described as ‘stylised human forms’ or even demons. Alternatively, the deliberately headless form may portray a divinity, ghost, entity or even the spirit of an ancestor. This could explain the popular image of a headless ghost (like the refrain in the old music hall song ‘…with her head, tucked underneath her arm’).

Another possibility is that headless figures might show corpses. A combination of a fresco showing headless bodies, and a disembodied skull

(from a shrine at Level VII in Çatal Hüyük) may suggest a long forgotten tradition or burial ritual that separated the head from the body. (Gimbutas 1989:188 figs 285-6).

Male gods were sometimes shown as anthropomorphic—a composite of man and animal although the image could just be a man in costume and mask. Unfortunately this means we sometimes cannot be sure whether we are seeing a man or a god.

For example, there are bison-men dancing or walking, who may be gods, men or shamans. One from Les Trois Frères at Ariège seems to carry a bow, although it could be interpreted as a syrinx, the type carried by the much later deities, Pan and Silvanus. It might even be a bow drill used for starting a fire perhaps as part of a ritual.

If the latter suggestion is true then the possibility of rituals involving fire opens up many new avenues for us to explore. We do not know exactly how fire was kindled and maintained nor whether any specific ritual had to be performed. Basically there are two main methods of making fire, either by friction or by percussion (making sparks by striking flint or quartz, usually against iron pyrites or iron.)

Whatever method was used, the spark had to fall on something that would catch fire easily. The best and most easily available material was probably rotten wood or fungus, especially *Fomes Fomentarius*. Several pieces of this were found with the body of Ötzi the Iceman. Apart from providing heat and light, fire could also be used for tempering and strengthening wooden spear points or for oxidising paint pigments such as ochre.

It is possible—but not provable—that the Bison Man at Les Trois Frères could have been some sort of Master of Fire character, of slightly higher status than a shaman (Eliade 1955:206). He might even have been an ancestor of later ‘smith’ gods such as Vulcan, Hephaistos or Wayland Smith.

The famous ‘sorcerer’ figure, also from Les Trois Frères, wears a full animal costume including stag horns, making it impossible to decide whether he is really a man at all. What is a little unnerving about him is the way he looks out of the scene as though fully aware of the viewer’s presence.

He may have been a sorcerer, priest, shaman or some sort of otherworldly guardian of the wild woods and surrounding area beyond the

caves. Yet although the ‘wild woods’ sounds wonderfully romantic, we must remember that much of the wooded landscape was been completely devastated by Ice Age, and for centuries would have been little more than steppe-tundra. It would be many, many years before Europe was covered once more in lush woodland and vegetation.

Yet the ‘horned man’ has remained an important part of our consciousness, reappearing thousands of years later as Cernunnos, and as the seated figure on the famous Gundestrop cauldron. His popularity in modern paganism is proof of his enduring attraction. We may never know exactly how he was regarded by the people who used the caves at Les Trois Frères, but the figure looking out of the rock towards us still wishes to be seen and acknowledged.

Another possibility is that both the Sorcerer and the Bison Man were some sort of Master of Animals. (A similar title was applied to some later goddesses such as the Greek Artemis, with her title *potnia theron* meaning Mistress of the Animals). This could suggest a deity who was worshipped in sacred groves, out in the wild where he felt at home, a forerunner of much later deities such as Pan, Faunus and Silvanus or even of centaurs and satyrs. Bringing a god of the wild into a dark cave may seem strange, yet Pan was sometimes worshipped in caves. In the 2nd century CE, the author Pausanias described a ‘remarkable Cave of Pan’ (Description of Greece 1. 32. 7).

It is one thing to wonder at such figures, but quite another to imagine what they must have done. Perhaps their function was to encourage the return of spring and fertility with their dancing, flute playing or fire-making. Or perhaps there were more specific rituals involving the entire community.

For example, an ancient rock painting from Altamira in Spain) shows a group of men, some wearing bird masks, performing a ritual (Gimbutas 1989:179 Fig.277). Some are bound and lying down, with others apparently dancing around them.

Of course—as always—there could be other explanations. Rather than a group of men, the artist may have been using the technique of continuous narrative to show just one or maybe two men, and the sequence of their sacred dance or rites. This piece of art also shows that birds could be associated with men as well as women.

The cave from La Marche (c.15,000 years old) features what might actually be a male bird deity although the archaeologists who first recorded it thought it might be just a caricature (Péricard and Lwoff 1941:160).

What makes this particularly interesting is that had this figure been female, it would almost certainly have been acclaimed as a bird goddess. Instead, lacking breasts, and with a strong masculine looking chin, it is simply dismissed as a rather frivolous cartoon.



The Bird Man of La Marche

Yet perhaps this is exactly what the figure was meant to be, an Ice Age bird man with the powers of a superhero. Stranger things have probably happened…



Chapter Thirteen

What were our ancestors really like?

Cave art was an incredibly persistent medium. Some of the oldest examples are from at Chauvet Cave which is about thirty thousand years old, while the more recent ones date from around twenty thousand years later. The changes during that huge time span must have been immense. A quick glance at medieval wall paintings in churches will show just how much things can change in less than one thousand years.

I keep referring back to the Middle Ages because almost everything about them is strange and alien to us and yet we have plenty of evidence from that period. We can be aware of their differences in some detail; their thinking, their way of writing (try reading Chaucer in the original English), the way they dressed, all were quite different. With cave art we must also factor in the weather which did not really begin to warm up until about ten thousand years ago and even then, would sometimes cool down again for centuries.

Much of the cave art has survived for tens of thousands of years, although obviously some must have been lost to landslides and rising sea levels (as at Cosquer cave). By comparison, Leonardo da Vinci's *Last*

Supper painting became so badly damaged after just a few centuries that it had to undergo extensive restoration.

Cave art was clearly a strong, artistic—and perhaps spiritual—tradition that flourished for over twenty thousand years although now we know very little about its purpose. It did not evolve out of nowhere, it had to be learned.

We know for example that in some areas the artists used a type of airbrushing, while others worked with feathers and even dry colour and crayons since some of the latter have been found at Altamira (Kühn 1966:27). There were almost certainly other types of art too, perhaps made to be seen out of doors or created from more perishable materials.

Whatever media were employed required skill and training. Such things do not happen overnight or in a vacuum. They must be taught and passed down to the next generation. Such training takes not only skill but time, suggesting that certain individuals were allowed to pursue their training, and that their talents were recognised and fostered. Possibly they were exempt from other daily tasks undertaken by the rest of the community. There must have been some status to their work, since it is not the sort of thing one does as punishment!

As we begin reaching back into the ancient past, we start to wonder what our ancestors must have been like. We might be able to see their art and sculpture in books and journals, but we cannot hear their voices. We do not hear them laughing or singing or telling stories. We can only imagine them hunting or working in their fields. There seems to be nothing to give us a better picture of their everyday lives and characters.

At least, that was what I used to think. But back in 1937, at Lussac-les-Châteaux in western France, two men, Léon Pericard and Stephane Lwoff had discovered what was to become known as the La Marche cave art. The cave revealed approximately fifteen hundred engraved slabs scattered and stacked over the floor, dating from around 15,000 years ago. Nothing would ever be quite the same again.

The engravings—which are sometimes difficult to make out because of they are line drawings—show various animals together with over a hundred and fifty humans. And what humans they were! They could have stepped right out of the modern world, not stylised figures but real people.

Some of the men have trimmed hair, some have goatee beards or are clean shaven, suggesting they had both the time, skill and desire for careful

grooming. Their clothes were properly tailored, they wore hats and even perhaps helmets. The faces show a wide range of emotions expressions, rather like cartoon images. They look like the sort of people we see every day.

Of course the discovery, so close to the coming chaos of World War II, caused controversy. Orthodox science immediately declared the pictures to be fake (something that even befell Abbé Breuil a few years later when he petitioned UNESCO for funds to study the Lascaux cave paintings).

Yet despite the initial scepticism from the academic world, Lwoff and Péricard persisted in publishing their discoveries for over twenty years although few seemed to take them seriously. Not until 2002 did the scientific community finally agree that the engravings in the La Marche cave were indeed genuine.

Unfortunately even nowadays, the significance of the discoveries at La Marche seems to be lost on some people. So what, they say, if people were wearing tailored clothing then? So what if they trimmed their beards?

The reason it matters is because it shows us *how* our ancestors survived. Anyone who has ever been caught out of doors on a cold day without suitable clothing knows what it is like. And this was no ordinary chill, but a deep, persistent freeze.

Yet the people in the engravings were not primitives who wrapped a sheepskin around their shoulders in sub-arctic temperatures and hoped for the best. They would not have lasted very long like that because garments that do not fit properly cannot hold in the heat against the body. Even though people can become used to the cold, there are still limits, beyond which we risk death by hypothermia.

To be most effective in protecting us from the cold, clothing needs to be shaped so it fits around the body and limbs. Several layers are best, and the innermost layers nearest the body should always be fitted. So the complex, fitted clothing shown on the figures at La Marches is significant because it enabled people to survive at a time when the ice sheets still covered so much of the landscape. Any land that was not under ice would be little more than steppe-tundra with little shelter from icy winds.

Certainly our ancient ancestors must have used animal hides for clothing, but these need proper treatment if they are to last and not go rotten. Firstly the hides have to be scraped and cleaned, requiring not only skill but also a range of suitable scraper tools. Ideally the hides must then be

tanned or treated to prevent them smelling and becoming infested with maggots.

Before skins can be made into clothes they also must be cut to shape and sewn, and thick or long fur often has to be trimmed along the seams before it can be stitched. Even then the leather has to be carefully pierced for the stitches, since most needles will snap and break if we put this sort of pressure on them.

We know that needles were used in Europe and Russia as early as c. 29,000-24,000 years ago (Soffer *et al* 2000:514). Needles can come in many shapes and sizes, including curved. Many of those found in ancient sites were quite small, made of ivory and totally unsuitable for stitching hides together.

Anyone who has ever sewn knows that the thicker and heavier the fabric, the thicker and stronger the needle must be. Nowadays people sewing leather by hand use a special type of needle, which has three sharp edges down its length instead of the usual rounded shape.

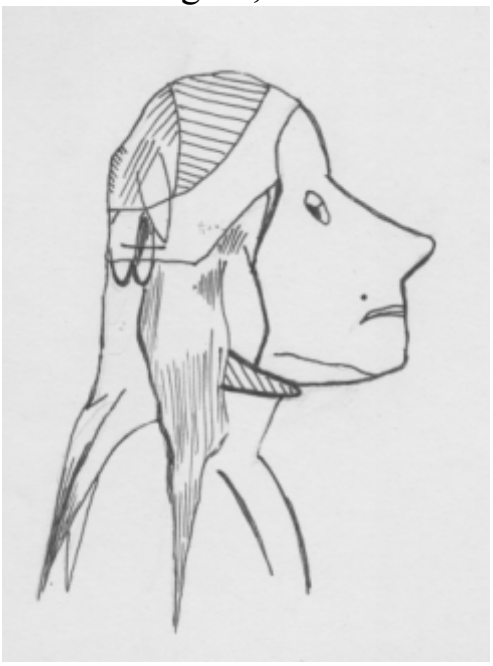
So the discovery of rather small needles in Palaeolithic sites shows they were either used on woven fabrics, or perhaps for some sort of embroidery. But of course these early fabrics have not survived, so we can only guess what they must have looked like. The pictures from La Marche—although considerably later than the earliest needles thus far discovered—show they were very sophisticated indeed.



The picture above shows a young person (the gender is hidden beneath all the bulky layers of clothing) sitting down, waiting (Lwoff 1957:625). Waiting for what? We do not know. He or she is clearly well wrapped up against the cold, with a hat that comes right down over the nape of the neck, trousers, boots, coat and gloves. The lines over the figure, at first so confusing, may well show embroidery or braids made using the small needles mentioned above, since the outer garments would have been made from hides.

And even though we do not know any more about this figure, we do know that he or she has waited, very patiently, for over ten thousand years to be rediscovered. Unless of course, that person was present in our own subconscious all along…

Some of the engravings from La Marche look curiously medieval. The headdress below, for example, looks not unlike a wimple, and the parallel lines may be lines of stitching (rather like pin tucks) or embroidery. But above all it is the haughty expression that intrigues and reaches out to us. Why does she turn up her nose? Who has offended her? We not be able to name the figure, but we feel she must have a story to tell.



Lwoff and Pericard 1943:168 Fig.5

We also know that even in much earlier periods, some ten thousand years before the pictures at La Marche were created, that women were making a range of headgear including woven caps (probably from woven plant fibres), hats and even snoods made of netting (Soffer *et al* 2000:531). Although nowadays we tend to think of net used only for fishing, in skilled hands it can produce elaborate and beautiful decorative fabrics.

And just as we noted regarding the skills of the cave painters, so this high standard of tailoring and garment production require time and training. People were being taught and passing on their skills for over fifteen thousand years.

Making decorative hats from soft fibres and hides is one thing. Making sturdy peaked helmets is quite another (Lwoff 1957:626). For one thing, the cutting must be more precise, and such a rigid item has to be properly constructed. There may even have been specialist makers of such garments, a group of Palaeolithic milliners!



I make no apology for devoting so much attention to the figures from La Marche because it is these, more than the wonderful horses or mammoths elsewhere that seem to capture the character of our ancient ancestors. They invite us to speculate not only about what people did and wore, but about what *sort* of people they were too. The man above for example, seems watchful, a little dour perhaps, lost in thought and perhaps quite unaware that he was being sketched. The sort of man who took his duties—whatever they were—very seriously.

By comparison, some of the figures seem to have stepped right out of an Asterix book. For example, in the picture below there is what appears to be a dancing man, but labelled a ‘warrior’ and who may be holding a club or even some sort of musical instrument in his left hand Péricard and Lwoff (1941:153).

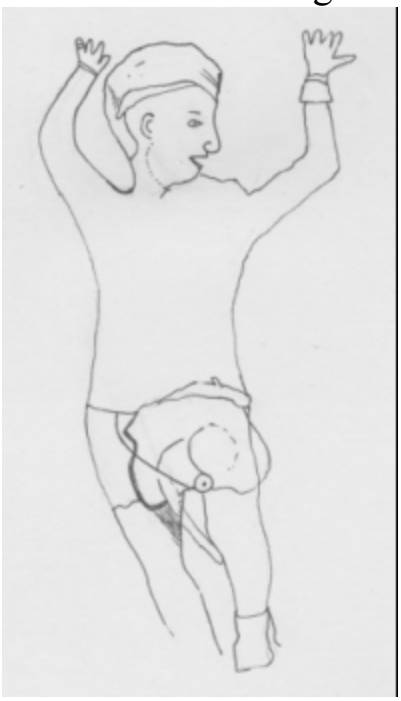


The figure looks as though he is wearing an all-in-one outfit, with an elaborate neckline or some sort of necklace and a hooded, pointed cap ending in a bobble slung carelessly over his left shoulder. His beard is well trimmed and he wears some sort of head covering.

But it is the expression and stance—comical but filled with self importance—that catches our attention. Whatever he is doing, he has been captured at a moment in time when he looks a little ridiculous. The artist invites us to smile at his antics. He may have been (or at least considered himself) a great actor, dancer or warrior, but here he looks as though he just might trip and fall at any moment.

This type of image shows the human side of our ancient ancestors, their sense of fun and mischief. We can almost hear their laughter and chuckles. Exploring the ancient past in a spiritual sense is not about learning the dates of the various epochs and ages, it is about reaching out to touch those sacred shadows in order to allow them into our lives. They are never as far away as we think.

The figure of the dancer (or warrior) shown above is not unique. Another, this time actually captioned ‘danseur’ is shown with his arms upraised (Péricard and Lwoff 1941:154). Elsewhere in this book we have interpreted this gesture and interpreted as reverence or supplication. But here in the figure shown below, he may be throwing up his hands in horror or because he has been startled. He shows great energy and exuberance, whatever he is doing.



There appear to be bands around his wrists, perhaps cuffs, bracelets or even the edge of his gloves. His underwear is in disarray and we can see his penis exposed. There is clearly a story being told here, perhaps a bawdy one, but it has long ago been forgotten.

There are so many of these curious caricature type drawings with their obese women and pompous men, it is rather like discovering a series of old fashioned seaside picture postcards! The artists could not only capture a fleeting expression, they managed to show us their own opinion of the subject too.



For example, the man above, (Péricard and Lwoff 1941: 157) in his long robe and cloak is clearly someone of importance (real or imagined). The tilt of his head, his long robes, even his trimmed beard and twirled moustache all show his status. The line work is exceptional, engraved without hesitation or correction in many instances.

One of the other interesting things about this set of engravings from La Marche Cave is that the artists even left a record of their observations of people outside their own family or societal group. For example, one drawing shows the head and shoulders of an apparently Neanderthal man (Péricard and Lwoff 1941:146).



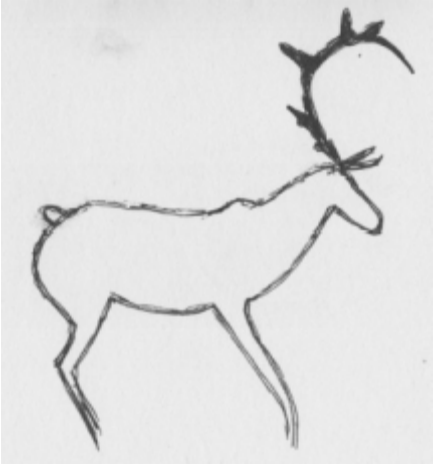
Of course, a single engraving cannot tell us much about the subject of the picture, nor about his relationship with the artist. He may have been a friend, or traded with the group, he may even have been someone spotted from a distance. Indeed he may not have been a Neanderthal at all, and the artist simply exaggerated certain features to make him resemble one! It would certainly be in keeping with their rather mischievous approach to the world around them.

What all these images do show however is that our ancestors were far more like us than we realise. In reaching back into the distant past, we are not moving amongst strangers. Some of the engravings from La Marche would not be out of place in a comic strip—they are lively, skilful caricatures. They are of people, old young, male and female, who paid attention to their appearance—just as we do nowadays.

But just as the engravings from La Marche were initially dismissed and ignored, so we must beware doing the same with these inner promptings from our subconscious. The important thing is to keep looking, and not turn away just because the answers may not be what we want or expect to hear. And this again is why the ancient past haunts us so remorselessly, because it seems to have been ignored and hidden, even when the knowledge becomes available.

I believe knowledge of these engravings deserves to be better known. Yet if most of us think of the ancient past at all, we may at best summon mental images of some of the mighty painted animals in Chauvet or Lascaux, the horses and bison, or maybe the handprints.

But the chances are that most people will never have heard of the lively figures from La Marche.



Chapter Fourteen
Where do we look?

Sometimes we expect both far too much and far too little from our dreams and interior vision. It is easy to overlook their significance, just as it is easy to attach too much importance to the wrong things in them. Yet we can use our dreams to take us back into a past so distant that we can barely comprehend it. And once there, we have a chance to discover what it is that keeps calling to us in our spiritual lives.

What we find will almost certainly be confusing and fragmentary, but like archaeologists sieving the soil, we have to be patient and thorough. Because once we know more about whatever really dwells within ourselves, then we can go looking the gods, magic and ritual of the ancient world.

Humankind is much older than any known organised religion, and this has created cracks beneath the modern veneers of civilisation and spirituality that simply cannot be contained by a quick dollop of spiritual Polyfiller. Also there are deep wounds to our personal psyche that cannot be treated with sticking plasters. What this book has tried to do is encourage us to look at those cracks and wounds, to find out their causes and the best way to heal them.

Obviously there is no single answer that will suit everyone. We are all different, we all have our different spiritual histories and mythologies. But

if nothing else, starting to look at how the distant past relates to our present life will begin the process of healing. Each of us may reach different conclusions. Again, that doesn't really matter. What matters is that we have at least started to look for some answers.

Sometimes what we see in dreams and interior visions may indeed look ancient. So ancient that we doubt there will ever be a way of reconnecting with it. Yet just as we reach out to this past—trying to re-tie the links that once bound us all together with our phylogenetic ancestors, so the past is desperately trying to reach out to us. In fact, when we are trying to do this work, it can be a good idea to perform a short ritual or prayer of thanks afterwards in order to cement the links we've discovered.

Just as Jung dreamed about a four-storey house back in 1909, so each of us has a house or dwelling inside our own personal psyche. This is the framework of our own personal evolution, and this is the place where we will ultimately discover our own ancient ancestry. And like our own homes, each one will look quite different.

Jung argued that people were the carriers of the entire history of mankind and that each of us had two souls. One soul (according to Jung) was only as old as the body that carried it. The other—which lived in the *psyche*—could be millions of years old (McGuire & Hull 1977: 57). So while a part of us is modern, the other part is primordial or ancient.

It is hardly any wonder then that we keep having strange experiences, or that we feel haunted by shadowy images of gods and the rituals and magic that bound them all together. Whichever 'soul' is dominant—the ancient or the birth soul—will determine whether we feel at home in the modern world or strangely out of sync.

Of course, what we think of as 'the modern world' has only been around for a few centuries. A hundred and fifty years ago, there was no electricity. People went to bed when it was dark or managed their tasks by candlelight and moonlight. There were no cars, little by way of machinery. It was not really that far removed from the ancient past.

In Europe at least, things had begun to change during the period known as the Enlightenment, around the eighteenth century. This was a time of great advances in industry (both the Agricultural and Industrial Revolution) combined with a series of challenges to religion. There was a huge growth in rationality, a growing interest in science. But still orthodox religion was powerful. Even Darwin had hesitated to put forward his theories about

evolution because he knew the uproar it would cause and the detrimental effect it would have on religion.

For centuries prior to the Enlightenment, religion had seemed fairly unshakeable for most people. There had been some changes of course, especially during the Reformation, but most people whether Protestant or Catholic, believed in a God, a being external to themselves who was all knowing and all powerful. If God was challenged or threatened, then everything else was also under threat. And since spiritual matters are very difficult to prove because they are so subjective, i.e. personal to the individual concerned, it was inevitable that religious belief would sooner or later find itself under threat.

One side-effect of the Enlightenment was the growing demand that everything should be provable. It may not have been as immediate or dramatic as the invention of the Spinning Jenny or the coming of the railways, but it had massive implications all the same.

Once people began asking more questions, events that at one time would have been viewed as an act of God were now almost impossible to explain. It became difficult to make any sense of what was happening and the much lauded ‘light of reason ‘ actually had the opposite effect and plunged many people into spiritual darkness.

Many of us experience some kind of spiritual awakening at some point in our lives. In some cultures the story of a spiritual awakening would be considered very important and the individual would be expected to share it with everyone else. But in the West we do not seem to value such stories anymore and tend to keep them to ourselves. Society is almost embarrassed by them. So we are encouraged to ignore that niggling something, that sacred shadow, that wants us to wake up.

Nowadays, instead of looking within and sifting through the data of dreams and experiences, we cast our gaze outwards instead. We look at books, websites, Wikipedia and YouTube. But of course, not all information is what it seems, whether it comes from within or from outside sources.

This is not always a deliberate deception, but sometimes the way we perceive things can lead us to deceive ourselves. Worse, sometimes we want to believe something so badly that we allow ourselves to be deceived.

Once we understand this we realise how information and knowledge can be manipulated. The most obvious form of manipulation is propaganda. This is where information is given out in such a way that it encourages a

specific response from its audience. It is particularly popular with politicians and political ideas.

Therefore it is always important to look beneath the surface for patterns that will warn us what is really going on. The old Latin phrase *cui bono* (meaning literally as a benefit to whom?) is always worth bearing in mind.

Then there is misinformation, where the information is untrue or mistaken. For example, a quick voyage around the internet will often introduce us to urban legends and hoaxes. A few of these arrive every week in my e-mail inbox. These are stories, often sent with the very best intentions from people I know, which are nevertheless quite untrue. They don't really serve any purpose (apart from clogging up the inbox of course) but while people are distracted by them they may never see the reality going on all around.

Finally there is disinformation, misinformation's evil twin. This is where facts are deliberately distorted, omitted or twisted to suit a particular agenda. A few things may be true, just enough to convince the audience but mostly it is deliberate lies. Again, it is often associated with politics which probably says a great deal about how we are governed.

The internet is particularly good for passing on all sorts of disinformation because it is so easy to copy and paste or share, and thus the lie grows, rather like a snowball running downhill. I once knew somebody who said she would always believe something if she could find it in three separate sources. Nowadays it's quite easy to find disinformation in thirty or three hundred different sources, but it would still be a lie. And that is quite terrifying.

Sometimes, as we attempt to find our own personal truths—which is really what any spiritual path is all about—it can feel as though we are wading through a swamp filled with the monsters of misinformation, disinformation and propaganda. It's not a bad analogy. People may tell us to trust our instincts but this only works if our instincts are good. For many of us, I suspect our instincts have become blunted.

But all is not lost. Even a blunt tool can be sharpened. The trick is to start slowly when working with our instincts. We must let them know that we have finally woken up and realise we have need of them. We must find a way to tell them that their time has come. I know when I started working on this book that nothing could have prepared me for how it would awaken so

many vivid and powerful images and ideas. I thought I already knew and understood most of them. I soon learned how wrong I was.

If we begin by working slowly and carefully, relying our instincts for small things, then if anything goes wrong it will not be such a disaster. As we feel more comfortable, and our instincts become more trustworthy, then we can rely on them more. Sometimes the lessons we learn are not those we expected. Yet these are often the very best of lessons because they are what we need rather than what we want or expect.

Once we begin to 'open up' we may get the strange feeling of time standing still, or passing more slowly than usual. What has happened is a slight shift in how we perceive time. Sometimes we can even enter some sort of time warp. When I was young I regularly encountered one of these on a local bus. It happened as it passed through some particularly old areas of the city, when the present seemed to fall away and I went back in time. Even the landscape seemed to change.

I do not believe it affected other passengers though, so it is probably more accurate to think of it as an altered state of consciousness on my part. Yet once we can accept these experiences as relatively normal, so we seek out more, and in fact we start to enter other, mythic worlds.

It is important to keep ourselves open to messages arriving in any shape or form. And when they do, we should never be afraid to investigate further, because the fact that we are taking them seriously enough to do this is an invitation for more dream lessons to approach with further messages.

For example, earlier in this book I mentioned about doodling. We might not expect lessons to arrive in such an unlikely format, but they do. Although Mr Penry is not particularly keen on drawing, sometimes he will doodle at great length, although I always felt this was just to pass the time.

However, earlier this year (2013) over a period of two days he drew a pattern quite unlike anything either of us had ever seen before. He could not leave it alone until he was satisfied it was complete. When he had finished, it looked so unusual that he joked it must be Mayan.

About a week later, I was doing some research for this book using a text I had not opened for many years. Mr Penry had never opened the book at all. And yet there was a picture virtually identical to what he had been drawing, taken from a brazier decorated with a solar design from Mikil'ske, Lower Dnieper, north of the Black Sea. This was part of the North Pontic culture c.3500-3000 BCE (Gimbutas 1991:370 Fig 10-15)

I've included this little anecdote because it illustrates so well the sort of lessons that come our way when we least expect them. I am still not entirely sure I can explain what the lesson of this strange doodle might have been, not yet, anyway. The cynical would pass it off as co-incidence.

Yet the fact that the design appeared on a five thousand year old brazier may be significance. It has, after all been a longstanding family joke about Mr Penry's great fondness for bonfires.

But what if that fondness has some deeper meaning, a connection to his ancient past? Even though the Black Sea area is so many miles away from the Welsh valleys, thousands of years ago people undertook long migrations. This was necessity, not tourism, since the weather was changing and whole countries had been rendered uninhabitable with ice and then flooding. A series of such migrations could well have resulted in someone whose roots were in the Black Sea area ending up in the British Isles.

When I traced my husband's family tree back for him, by the time we got back a hundred and fifty years, he had only a handful of ancestors living in Wales. We pushed back two hundred years and there was only one. By the time we went back a further century there were none. Which raises the question: if things could change so much in just three hundred years, where were his ancestors three thousand, five thousand, eight thousand years ago? Suddenly the Black Sea doesn't seem quite so preposterous any more.

Apart from doodling, storytelling is a good way of opening up our consciousness, of making ourselves more receptive to whatever might come our way. I have long believed that storytelling can help us get through difficult times. I did it myself when I was a child. It was more than escapism. Above all it used the medium of 'imaginary' characters and settings as a way to express feelings that could never be expressed otherwise.

And just as our childhoods often leave us with a legacy of stories we never managed to voice, so too does the ancient past. It is there always, for everyone, just lurking beneath the surface. We need to try and recover these stories—and even though we may never fully succeed, just making the effort is sometimes enough to restore our mental and emotional balance.

Otherwise, if we never learn to tell our story—either our own personal one, or that of our ancestors—then our story has a nasty habit of starting to tell us! And when this happens the sacred shadows darken, we become unhappy, or start acting out of character without really understanding why.

We need to find our story, we need to tell it, and we also need to help others find the words.

I have been very lucky. I found my voice. I told—and am still telling—my stories. Many are not so fortunate. I hope this book will be helpful to them in some small way…



And finally…

My original intention was that this book would end on the previous page. Yet there is no point in looking towards the ancient past if we do not also look towards the future. And I began to wonder whether the ancient past is trying so hard to contact us precisely because it has a message we ought to heed.

One thing we know from the ancient past is that Ice Ages are cyclical. We are presently in an inter-Glacial phase, i.e. the warming up part, but that is probably due to end very soon (in geological terms). We may have accelerated reaching the turning point (with Global Warming) and then comes the cooling down which will take tens of thousands of years. Change may not be really noticeable for centuries, even one or two millennia.

Yet as we have seen so often in this book, two thousand years is a drop in the ocean when compared to the ancient past. Mankind *should* have plenty of time to adjust and migrate towards the Equator and warmer climes if necessary. But the way ahead is still fraught with difficulties.

What we have to remember about an Ice Age, is that the amount of land available decreases dramatically. It is not just about having to avoid the ice sheets, because the land near them is too cold to support humans and animals. And migration is only possible provided there is enough space to settle at the end of it.

Yet if the early twenty-first century has taught us nothing else in the West, it is that migration is a political hot potato. Migration on the scale demanded by climate change is a potato so large and so hot that we cannot begin to contemplate it. And we cannot expect a warm welcome if most of Europe and North America suddenly decide the time is right to move

towards the Mediterranean or the Middle East just because our homelands are becoming ice-bound.

It is time we learned the lessons of the ancient past. We should be trying to learn not only about *this* interglacial period, the past ten thousand years or so, but also all the interglacials that went before. We know next to nothing about the cooling down periods and the descent into the Ice Age because the frost and snow destroyed whatever civilisations had gone before.

Yet even if we may not know much, we can certainly make a few educated guesses. And we need to ask ourselves soon—before the thermometer starts dropping—what is happening *now* that could be preparation for what is to come?

The answer—and this is just my opinion—is war. War, genocide and murder on a grand scale. For example, the 1990's conflict in Rwanda killed over a million people. A staggering one fifth of that country's entire population. Further conflicts in the Middle East have killed still more.

And yet it was these very countries that remained the most fertile (think of the Fertile Crescent in Mesopotamia, modern day Iraq) when the ice sheets covered so much of the world during the Glacial Maximum (i.e. the coldest part) of the last Ice Age. If another Ice Age is coming—and it seems inevitable, given past history—then the Middle East might just be a good destination for humankind fleeing from the encroaching ice before it is too late.

The possibility that there could be some sort of agenda for the staging of the present conflicts in these areas hardly bears thinking about. With our present levels of technology, we still cannot prevent a new Ice Age. And if there are those with a hidden agenda who are provoking war and death in order to 'make room' for their descendants when the time comes, well, frankly we cannot do much about that either, other than resist the warlike rhetoric and raise awareness.

But all is not lost. That is the message of the ancient past to us. There is always hope that our descendants will survive provided we learn what really matters. The ancient past is out there. Our ancestors deserve our love and respect—for their survival skills if nothing else. Without them you and I would not be here. We carry the past within us, but we must start listening to it, too. Old skills are not outdated. They are as vital as ever, even if they remain little more than a back-up. Keeping them ready is vital.

Look around, and we will see how we are becoming people who know the price of everything and the value of nothing. But Oscar Wilde (who wrote the original quotation as a line in his play, Lady Windermere's Fan) was describing a cynic. Now he could equally be describing a good proportion of the western world's population. All we seem to value is money.

However in a real crisis, the value of money is nowhere near the value of goods and services that can be bartered and traded. And this is a problem in the west, because we are quickly losing basic skills. Once lost, they will be extremely difficult to recover. Better not to lose them in the first place.

Best of all is to pass them on to those who follow.





Bibliography

Primary Texts

Aristotle, McKeon R., (Ed) (2001), *The Basic Works,* Modern Library; Reprint edition

Aristotle, *De Caelo* can be read online at :
http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/heavens.1.i.html

Bede, Jane L.C., [Trans] (1903) *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation,* London: J.M. Dent; Can be read online here:
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/bede-book1.html

Cicero, Barham F. (Trans) (1841-2)The Political Works of Marcus Tullius Cicero: Comprising his Treatise on the Commonwealth; and his Treatise on the Laws, London, Edmund Spettigue can be read online here :
http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=545&Itemid=99999999

Gregory of Tours, Van Dam, R. (Trans) (1988) *Glory of the Confessors* (Translated Texts for Historians), Liverpool University Press

Herodotus, Rawlinson, G., (Trans) *The Histories,* can be read online at :
http://classics.mit.edu/Herodotus/history.html

Homer, Murray A.T. (Trans) (1924) *The Iliad,* A T. Loeb Classical Library Volumes 1, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1924. Can be read online here:
http://www.theoi.com/Text/HomerIliad20.html

Horace, Michie, J. (Trans. and Intro) (1976) *The Odes of Horace,* Harmondsworth, Penguin

Origen's writings (discussed in the letter of St Jerome) can be read online at:

http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001124.htm

Pausanias, Jones W. H. S., and Omerod (Trans) , *Description of Greece.* (1918) H. A. Loeb Classical Library Volumes. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1918. Can be read online at :

http://www.theoi.com/Text/Pausanias1A.html

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Bostock J., Riley, H.T., (repring 2009) Bibliolife

can be read online here:

http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plin.+Nat.+toc

Procopius, Dewing H. B., (Trans) (1919) *History of the Wars,* Cambridge Massachusetts, William Heinemann Ltd, Harvard University Press.

Can be read online here:

http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20298/20298-h/20298-h.htm

Secondary Texts

Althin C.-A., (1945) Studien zu den bronzezeitlichen Felszeichnungen von Skdne*, Lund*

Aujoloulat, N. (2004) *Lascaux. Le geste, l'espace et le temps,* Le Seuil, Paris.

Azéma, M., (2008), Representation of movement in the Upper Palaeolithic: An ethological approach to the interpretation of parietal art, *Anthropozoologica,* (43.1) Publications Scientifiques du Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris (pp117-154)

The above document (in English) is available online here:

http://www.mnhn.fr/museum/front/medias/publication/19960_117_154_AZEMA.pdf

Beaune, S.(1987) Palaeolithic Lamps and Their Specialization: A Hypothesis, *Current Anthropology,* Vol. 28, No. 4 (Aug.—Oct.), pp. 569-577

Bennet, E. A. (1985) *Meetings with Jung.* Zurich: Daimon Verlag

Campbell, J. (1949) *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* Meridian Books

Campbell,J. (1962) *The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology* New York

Campbell, J. (rev. Ed 1969) *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* New York: Penguin

Clottes J., Garner M & Maury, G. (1994) Bisons magdaléniens des cavernes ariégeoises, *Bulletin de la Société Préhistorique de l'Ariège* : 49 :15-49)

Clottes J. & Courtin J. 1996, *The Cave Beneath the Sea. Paleolithic Images at Cosquer*. New-York, Harry Abrams.

NB: as Clottes and Courtin's books are sometimes difficult to find, there is a useful article here:

http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/cosquer/index.php

Compton, M.T., (1998) The Union of Religion and Health in Ancient Asklepieia, *Journal of Religion and Health,* Vol. 37, No. 4 (Winter) pp. 301-312

Corbin, H. (1981). *The Concept of Comparative Psychology.* Ipswich, UK: Golgonooza Press.

Cordner, W.S. (1946), The Cult of the Holy Well, *Ulster Journal of Archaeology,* Third Series, Vol. 9, pp. 24-36

Dams, L., (1985), Palaeolithic lithophones: Descriptions and Comparisons, *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 4:1, 31-46;

de Chardin, T., (1955, reprinted 2008) The Phenomenon of Man, Harper Perennial

Dowden, K., (2000) European paganism, the realities of cult from antiquity to the Middle Ages, Routledge, London and New York

Duday, H., Courtaud, P., Crubezy, E., Sellier, P., Tillier, A-M. (1990) L'anthropologie "de terrain": Reconnaissance et interprétation des gestes funéraires *Bulletinet Mémoires de la Sociét*é *d'Anthropologie de Paris* 2: 29–50

Dumézil, G., (1947), *La tripartition indoeuropéenne*, *Psyche* 2:1348-56

Edwards, I.E.S., Gadd, C.J., Hammond, N.G.L., Solberger, E. (editors), (1975) *The Cambridge Ancient History Volume 2, Part 2: The Middle East and the Aegean Region, c.1380-1000BC*, 3rd edition

Eliade, M., (1955) Smiths, Shamans and Mystagogues, *East and West,* Vol. 6, No. 3 (OCTOBER 1955), pp. 206-215

Eliade, M., Trask W.R., (Trans) (1964) *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques in Ecstasy*, Bollingen Series LXXVI, New York: Bollingen Foundation/

Pantheon, 1964

Formicola V., Buzhilova A.P., (2004) Double child burial from Sunghir (Russia): Pathology and inferences for upper Paleolithic funerary practices. *Am J Phys Anthropol* 124:189-198

Formicola, V., (2007) From the Sunghir Children to the Romito Dwarf: Aspects of the Upper Paleolithic Funerary Landscape, *Current Anthropology,* Vol. 48, No. 3 (June), pp. 446-453

Gimbutas, M., (1989), *The language of the goddess*, Thames and Hudson

Gimbutas, M., (1991), *Civilisation of the Goddess*, Harper, San Francisco

Goguet, A-Y., (1758) *On the origin of laws, arts and sciences*

Grosman, L., Munro, N.D., Belfer-Cohen, A. (2008) A 12,000-Year-Old Shaman Burial from the Southern Levant (Israel), *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America,*Vol. 105, No. 46 (Nov. 18) pp. 17665-17669

Hannah, B. (1976), *Jung: His Life and Work,* New York: G. P. Putnam

Hartmann, F., (1896) The Life of Philippus Theophrastus Bombast of Hohenheim, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd., London

Henderson, J. (1990) 'The Cultural Unconscious' in *Shadow and Self: Selected Papers in Analytical Psychology.* Wilmette, IL: Chiron Publications

Hertz, R., (1973), The Pre-eminence of the Right Hand: A Study in Religious Polarity. In *Right and Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification*, (Editor: Needham,R.) pp. 3-31, Chicago, University of Chicago Press

Jakobsen, M.D., (1999) *Shamanism: Traditional and Contemporary Approaches to the Mastery of Spirits*, New York, Berghahn Books

Jankuhn, H. (1966), Archäologische Bermerkungen zur Glaubwürdikeit des Tacitus in der Germania', *Nachriichten der Akademie der*

Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Ohil.-hist. Klasse 10:411-26

Jung, C.G., (198l) "Psychological Types", in *Collected Works 5***,** London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

Jung, C. G., (1961), *Memories, Dreams, Reflection,* New York: Random House

Kerr, R.A., (1998) Black Sea Deluge may have Helped Spread Farming, *Science, New Series,* Vol. 279, No. 5354 (Feb. 20, 1998), p. 1132

Kilmer, A.D., (1974) The Cult Song with Music from Ancient Ugarit: Another interpretation, *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*, Vol. 68, No. 1, pp. 69-82

King, H., (1993) A 'Face' in the River: A Sheela-na-gig Rescued *Archaeology Ireland* , Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring)

Knight, C., Lomas, R.(2000) *Uriel's Machine, The ancient origins of science,* Arrow books

Kolata, G. 1999, *Flu,* New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Krappe, A.H., (1942) Guiding Animals, *The Journal of American Folklore,* Vol. 55, No. 218 (Oct.—Dec.) pp. 228-246

Kühn, H., Broderick, A.H.(Trans), (1966), *The Rock Pictures of Europe,* Sidgwick and Jackson

Lang, B. (1985), Non-Semitic Deluge Stories and the Book of Genesis a Bibliographical and Critical Survey, *Anthropos,* Bd. 80, H. 4./6., pp. 605-616

Langlois, C.V., Seignobos, C., Berry G.G. (Trans)., (1898) *Introduction to the Study of History*, New York

Leroi-Gourhan, A., Michelson, A., (1986), The Hands of Gargas: Toward a General Study, *October,* Vol. 37 (Summer), pp. 18-34

Levy, G.R., (1948) The Gate of Horn, Faber

Llaurens, V., Raymond, M., Faurie, C. (2009) Why Are Some People Left-Handed? An Evolutionary Perspective, *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences,* Vol. 364, No. 1519, Mechanisms andFunctions of Brain and Behavioural Asymmetries (Apr. 12), pp. 881-894

Lwoff, S., (1941) La Marche: Commune de Lussac-les-Châteaux. (Vienne). Fouilles L. Péricard et S. Lwoff, Gravures à représentations d'humains du Magdalénien III, *Bulletin de la Société préhistorique de France*, T. 38, No. 7/8 (Juillet-Août), pp.145-161

Lwoff, S., (1943), La Marche: Commune de Lussac-les-Châteaux (Vienne). Fouilles Péricard et Lwoff, *Bulletin de la Société préhistorique de*

France, T. 40, No. 7/9 (Juillet à Sept.), pp.166-180

Lwoff, S., (1957) Iconographie humaine et animale du Magdalénien III: Grotte de La Marche, Commune deLussac-les-Châteaux (Vienne), *Bulletin de la Société préhistorique de France,* T. 54, Fasc. 10 (Octobre), pp. 622-633

Lwoff, S., (1962) Industrie de l'os—Iconographie humaine et animale du Magdalénien III: 7 e Grotte de la La Marche, Commune de Lussac-les-Châteaux (Vienne), *Bulletin de la Société préhistorique de France,* T. 59, Fasc. 1/2, pp. 73-91

McGuire, W., Hull, R. F. C. (Eds), (1977) *C. G. Jung Speaking,* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

MacGowan, K., (1954), The Coming of Camera and Projector: Part I,*The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television,* Vol. 9, No. 1 (Autumn), pp. 1-14

Mackenzie, D.A., (1922), *Ancient Man in Britain,* Blackie & Son Ltd., London

Maringer, J. (1979) Adorants in Prehistoric Art: Prehistoric Attitudes and Gestures of Prayer, *Numen,* Vol. 26, Fasc. 2 (Dec.), pp. 215-230

Marshak, A., (1985) More on Serpents in the Mind, *Current Anthropology,* Vol. 26, No. 4 (Aug.—Oct.), pp. 537-539

Meadow, M.J. (1992) Archetypes and Patriarchy: Eliade and Jung, *Journal of Religion and Health,* Vol. 31, No. 3 (Fall), pp. 187-195

Montagu, J. (2004) How Old Is Music? *The Galpin Society Journal,* Vol. 57 (May), pp. 171-182

Nietzsche, F., Common T., (Trans) (1995) *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* Pennsylvania State University. Can be read online a*t*:

http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/nietsche/tszarath.pdf

Otto, R., Harvey J.W. (Trans)., (revised edition 1937) *The idea of the Holy: An inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational,* Oxford University Press, London

Palgrave, P., (1851) The History of Normandy and of England, Vol 1, Parker & Son, London)

Panofsky, E. (1962) *Studies in Iconology,* Harper & Row, New York.

Can be read online at:

http://tems.umn.edu/pdf/Panofsky_iconology2.pdf

Pedretti, M., (2005), A disaster by any other name, *Qui Parle,* Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 197-225

Peltier, W. R. (1994) Ice Age paleotopography, *Science, New Series, Vol 265*, No. 5169, (July) pp195-201.

Pernet, H. (1982) Masks and Women: Toward a Reappraisal, *History of Religions*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Aug.), pp. 45-59

Powell, B.B. (2009) *Writing: Theory and History of the Technology of Civilization,* Wiley-Blackwell

Pratt, A., (1978), Aunt Jennifer's Tigers: Notes toward a Preliterary History of Women's Archetypes, *Feminist Studies,* Vol. 4, No. 1 (Feb.), pp. 163-194

Raglan, Lord Fitzroy. (1936/1979), *The hero, A study in tradition, myth and drama,* New York: Meridian (reprint)

Sabini, M., (2008) Encountering the Primordial Self, *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche,* Vol. 2, No. 4 (Fall), pp. 34-69

Schlobin, R.C., (1995), Pagan survival: Why the Shaman in modern Fantasy? *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS),* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1995), pp.5-12

Schuchhardt, C., (1935) *Alteuropa: Kulturen, Rassen Völker*, 3. Aufl. Berlin

Simon, C. (1981) Stone-Age Sanctuary, Oldest Known Shrine, Discovered in Spain, *Science News,* Vol. 120, No. 23 (Dec. 5), p. 357

Soffer, O., Adovasio, J.M., Hyland, D.C. (2000) The "Venus" Figurines: Textiles, Basketry, Gender, and Status in the Upper Palaeolithic, *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (August/October), pp. 511-537

Solecki, R., (1975) Shanidar IV, a Neanderthal Flower Burial in Northern Iraq, *Science, New Series,* Vol. 190, No. 4217 (Nov. 28) pp. 880-881

Spencer, H., (1885) *Principles of Sociology, Pt. VI*, London

Steiner, R., (trans. Christopher Bamford), (1994) *How to Know Higher Worlds* MA, Anthroposophical Press, 16.

Stone, M.E., (1996) The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Pseudepigrapha, *Dead Sea Discoveries,* Vol. 3, No. 3 (Dec.), pp. 270-295

Talbot, A-M., (2002) Pilgrimage to Healing Shrines: The Evidence of Miracle Accounts, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers,* Vol. 56,pp. 153-173

Toutain, J.(1917), *Les cultes païens dans l'empire romain,* vol iii, 'Les cultes indigènes nationaux et locaux', Paris (repr. Rome 1967)

Turgot, A-R-J., (1750), *A Philosophical Review of the Successive Advances of the Human Mind*

Tylor, E. B., (1891), *Primitive Culture*, London

White, M.J., (2066), Things to do in Doggerland When You're Dead: Surviving OIS3 at the Northwestern-most Fringe of Middle Palaeolithic Europe, *World Archaeology,* Vol. 38, No. 4, Debates in "World Archaeology" (Dec.), pp.547-575

Whitmont, E., (1993), *The Alchemy of Healing,* Berkeley C A , North Atlantic Books

Winkelman, M. J., (1990), Shamans and other "Magico-Religious" healers: A cross-cultural study of their origins, nature, and social transformations, *Ethos* 18:308-352

Worsaak, J. J. A., (1882) The Industrial arts of Denmark from the earliest times to the Danish Conquest, London

Websites

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/9917945/Are-you-related-to-Cleopatra-Or-are-genealogists-fishing-in-the-Nile.html

(accessed 22nd May 2013)

The Independent newspaper online (dated July 5th 2013) regarding the naming of children:

http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/katie-hopkins-branded-an-insufferable-snob-after-this-morning-debate-on-childrens-names-8690468.html (Accessed 20th July 2013-09-30)

Website regarding discovery of Danube flutes: http://www.sci-news.com/archaeology/article 00343.html

Accessed September 2009

Cylinder seal from northern Babylonia c.2000 BCE (British Museum ME 89126, Room 56: Mesopotamia) (can be viewed online at http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/me/g/greenstone_seal_of_hashhamer.aspx

The optical illusion of the sun and mountains at Naquane:

(http://www.archeocamuni.it/naquane_en.html

(accessed September 2013).

Index

A

Abbé Breuil, 9, 160
Age of Enlightenment, 172
Agriculture, 43, 44, 130, 137, 145
Airbrush, 106, 159
Akhenaton, 48
All Souls' Day, 23
Altamira, 156, 159
Anglesey, 50
Animal musicians, 98
Animated images, 83, 91, 92
Antlers, 53, 83, 133, 152
Archaic, 69, 70, 113, 130, 143
Archaic Man, 69, 130
Aristotle, 105
Arrow, 82, 89
Asklepios, 127
Asia, 8, 14, 25, 151, 176
Athelstan, 47
Aurignacian, 8, 99
Avebury, 44, 46
Axe, 111, 112
Azéma, 91-95

B

Babylon, 13, 104
Basket, 113
Bath, 33
Beacons, 42
Beating the bounds, 27
Beth-El, 45
Bible, 12-15, 17, 45, 135
Bielski Brothers, 31

Bird goddess, 136, 142, 143, 156
Bison, 83, 88,90, 91, 116, 139,
Bison man 124, 154, 155
Black Sea, 14, 175, 176
Brenin Llwyd, 41
Bridges, 34, 35, 64
Brísingamen, 143
Bronze Age, 5, 8, 9, 22, 85, 125
Brothers Grimm, 98
Bull, 22, 124
Burial, 25-28, 40, 48, 140-41, 148, 154
Burnt Offering, 64, 65

C

Çatal Hüyük, 154
Celts, 7, 35, 49, 65, 127, 144
Cernunnos, 155
Cicero, 29
Chaldea, 17
Chauvet Cave, 7, 91, 158, 169
Chevron, 138, 142, 143
Children, 18-19, 25, 56-60, 65, 106-110, 116, 121, 140, 150
China, 17
Church edicts, 32, 52
Consciousness, 2, 36, 46, 71, 77, 131-2, 146, 155, 175-6
Cosquer Cave, 98, 106, 108, 110, 116, 158
Crayons, 159
Creation myths, 36. 39
Cremation, 61, 62, 141
Crow, 144
Cueva Saltadora, 89
Cylinder Seal, 104
Cypro-Minoan script, 85

D

Dance, 88, 90-1, 101, 112, 122, 125, 128, 156, 165, 166
Danube, 99
Da Vinci, 158

Dead Sea Scrolls, 13
Deer, 22, 53, 124, 139
Delphi, 48
Deluge, 12
Dick Turpin, 15
Disabled, 56, 57, 59
Disinformation, 173, 174
Divination,33, 58, 65, 125, 141, 144
Dolnı´ Veˇstonice,59
Doodling, 146, 175, 176
Double Headed Axe, 150
Dreams, 2-4, 36, 58, 67-76, 82, 84, 88, 126, 127, 131, 141, 170, 171, 173, 175
Druid, 29, 50, 58

E

Eagle, 22, 144
Egypt, 1, 14, 17, 39, 48. 75, 104, 107, 124, 144-4, 151, 152
El Juyo Cave, 21-22
Enoch, 13
Ethiopia, 130
Excarnation, 62
Exile, 13, 37, 39, 40, 97
Eye of Horus, 151
Eye of Ra, 151

F

Face, 21, 22, 101, 122, 125, 135, 145, 153
Face palm, 135
Fallopian Tubes, 150, 151
Felix/infelix trees, 52
Fertility, 7, 17, 27, 88-90, 100, 133, 137, 139, 140, 146, 156
Fire, 20, 29, 37, 40, 42, 58, 61, 62, 65, 154, 156
Flood legends, 12-16
Focus,20, 26, 29, 46
Fomes Fomentarius, 154
Footprints, 48, 88, 90, 116

Fossils, 12, 14
Flute, 99, 122, 156
Flyhoff, 111
Freyja, 143

G

Gallery of Owls, 144
Garden of Eden, 12, 16, 125, 126
Genesis, 12, 13, 45
Germanus, 53
Germany, 32, 34, 49
Germanic tribes, 7, 49, 144
Gesture, 100-5, 109-111, 123, 125, 135, 166
Gilgamesh, 13
Glacial Maximum, 115, 179
Glacier, 14, 45
Goddess of Birth, 138-140
Goddess of Death, 125, 141
Golden Age, 4, 12, 16, 129
Gorgon, 125, 126
Gothic War, 64
Green Man, 77
Gregory of Tours, 35
Groves, 20, 21, 26, 30, 31, 45, 49, 50, 65, 155
Gundestrop cauldron, 155

H

Headless Bodies, 153, 154
Hearth, 20, 29, 37, 65
Hekate, 104, 115, 137
Henry the Monk, 53
Hephaistos, 155
Hermaphroditos, 153
Herodotus, 5, 63, 119
Hesiod, 1, 5, 12
‘Hidden room’ dreams, 72, 73
Hilazon Tachtit, 56, 57
Holocene, 6

Homeland, 26-31, 36-40, 42, 44, 50, 90, 97, 179
Homer, 1, 5
Homo sapiens, 70
Horned god, 77, 151
Human Sacrifice, 47, 59, 61-4,
Hunter Gatherer, 20, 21, 32, 43, 57, 76, 89, 91, 145
Hurrian cult songs, 98
Hypothermia, 161

I

Ice Age Art, 5, 17, 80, 85, 136
Ice Sheet, 6, 14, 30, 52, 61, 98, 115, 137, 145, 153, 161, 178, 179
Iliad, 35
Incubation, 117, 141
Interglacial, 6, 43, 179
Interior Vision, 73, 76, 170, 171
Iran, 85
Iraq, 121, 179
Iron Age, 5, 8

J

Jacob, 45
Jesuits, 47
John Donne, 19
Jung, 3, 18, 67, 69-72, 74, 128, 130, 171

K

Katadesmoi, 39
King Arthur, 35

L

Lady of the Mountain, 41
La Grotte des Enfants**,** 25
Lake, 14, 32-35, 65
La Marche (cave), 122-4, 156-169
Lamech, 13
Lamps, 54, 87
Land of the Dead, 110, 152
Las Batuecas Cave, 11

Lascaux Cave, 7, 9, 83, 160, 169
Last Supper, 158
Leather, 161
Left hand, 100, 106-7, 111, 164
Les Trois Frères (cave) 122, 123, 135, 144, 154, 155
Libation, 64
Lion, 21, 22
Lithuania, 47
Loom weights, 142
Lower Dnieper, 175

M

Marseille, 98
Mask, 25, 82, 98, 115-125, 154, 156
Master of Animals, 155
Master of Fire, 155
Meander symbol, 127, 138, 142
Medieval, 3, 86, 138, 151, 158, 162
Mediterranean, 14, 146, 179
Medusa, 125, 126
Mesopotamia, 14, 104, 144, 179
Meteorite, 14, 46
Middle Ages,17, 148, 158
Mikil'ske, 175
Misinformation, 173-4
Mistress of the Animals, 155
Mitochondrial Eve, 68
Montespan, 87
Morrigan, 144
Moses, 39
Mountain, 3, 12, 20, 26, 32, 40-2, 72, 142, 152
Mousterian, 8
Moving Pictures, 91, 93, 95
Music,98, 99, 143, 154, 164
Musicians of Bremen, 98
Mycenae, 35

N

Naquane, 152
Natufian cave, 56, 57
Neanderthal, 8, 107, 121, 132, 167, 168
Necklace, 25, 143, 165
Needles, 23, 24, 72, 161, 161
Neolithic, 5, 8, 14, 72, 138, 142, 145, 150
Noah, 12, 13
North Pontic culture, 175

O

Oak, 21, 29, 52
Oceanus, 35
Old Hag, 153
Old Testament, 13, 26, 39, 125-6
Omega symbol, 150
Omphalos, 48
Orchestral chimes, 99
Origen, 145
Osiris, 145
Other worlds, 80, 104, 124
Ötzi the Iceman, 154
Our Lady of Walsingham, 18
Ovulation, 18
Owl, 144, 150, 151

P

Palaeolithic, 5, 7, 8, 21-2, 57, 80- 82, 85, 92-5, 113, 138, 142, 161, 164
Paracelsus, 39
Parietal art, 87, 106, 128
Pendant,25, 59, 143, 144
Persistence of vision, 92, 93
Petroglyph, 125
Phylogenetic, 69, 171
Pleistocene, 8
Pliny the Elder, 29, 33, 50, 52
Pope Calixtus III, 11
Potnia theron, 155
Primordial, 9, 70, 71, 74, 75, 77, 98, 171

Procopius, 64
Propaganda, 83, 150, 173, 174
Protective magic, 25, 111
Proto-Elamite script, 85

R

Radiant eye symbol, 151
Rag wells, 33
Rainbow, 13
Raven, 144
Resonance, 98, 99
Rhine Maidens, 34
Right hand, 100, 106, 107
Ritualist, 57, 58, 103
River Boyne, 132
River Dee, 35
River Havos, 35
River Marne, 35
River Shannon, 132
Rivers, 32, 34, 35, 37, 132
River Seine, 132
Roman, 33, 45, 50, 52, 63, 85, 127, 133, 151
Romito Cave , 59
Russia, 27, 59, 161

S

Sacred groves (see Groves)
Sacred Space, 20, 21, 26, 30, 94
Sacrifice, 47, 58-66, 74, 108, 148
Samhain, 23
Scandinavia, 8, 99, 125
Scapegoat, 33, 53, 74
Sceptre, 107. 111
Scotland, 14, 37, 39
Seasons, 23, 42, 44, 90, 115
Seneca the Younger, 50
Sewing, 59, 71, 72, 161

Shanidar Cave burial, 121, 148
Shaman, 56-7, 95, 99, 118, 122-4, 154-5
Sheela-na-Gig , 138
Shells, 14, 22, 24, 25, 78, 139
Shrine,18, 20-3, 29, 32, 45, 127, 154
Sinister(left handed), 106
Slavs, 49
Snowy Owl, 144
Solar symbols, 110-12, 152, 175
Sorcerer, 89, 113, 122, 124, 135, 155
Snowdon, 14
Spain, 21, 86, 108, 156
Spindle whorles, 142
Spirals, 44, 127, 145, 146, 151
Springs, 21, 23, 26, 32-5, 44, 54, 63
St Winefride, 63
St Osyth , 63
Staff, 107, 111
Stag, 83, 152, 155
Stalagmites, 98
Star Trek, 135
Steppe-tundra, 7, 30, 62, 155, 161
Stonehenge, 21, 44, 115
Storytelling, 97, 176
Stream, 34, 90, 132
Subconscious, 2, 3, 71, 73, 82, 162, 168
Suetonius Paulinus, 50
Sumeria, 17
Sunghir children, 59
Swastika, 44, 115, 150
Sweden, 111, 125
Syria, 98

T

Tacitus, 50, 85
Tell Halaf, 98
Thaumatrope, 92, 93
Thessaly, 153

Thuringia, 49
Tolkien, 51
Totem, 18, 88
Trees, 3, 21, 27, 29, 33, 43-4, 49- 55, 62, 68, 125
Tuc d'Audoubert, 88, 116
Turkey, 14
Two-million-year-old-in-us, 69

U

Ugarit, 98
Unconscious, 2, 3, 28, 67, 69, 71, 73, 74
UNESCO, 9, 160
Uterus, 150, 151

V

'V' Sign, 142, 143, 150
Vegetation god, 145, 153
Venus of Galgenberg, 102
Venus of Laussel, 100
Venus of Willdendorf, 133-36, 153
Vulcan, 155
Vulva, 138, 139, 142
Vulture, 144

W

Wasteland, 26, 27, 36, 37, 44, 56
Waterfall, 24
Wayland Smith, 155
Weather, 20, 41-3, 48, 69, 122, 141, 158, 176
Weaving, 113, 150
Wells, 32-34, 63
Wings, 144
Woden, 40, 53, 115
World Tree, 29
Wulfstan, 47

Z

Zealand, 110

