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The Lascaux Testament

By

Gary J. Maier

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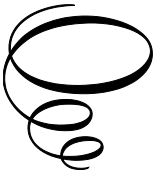

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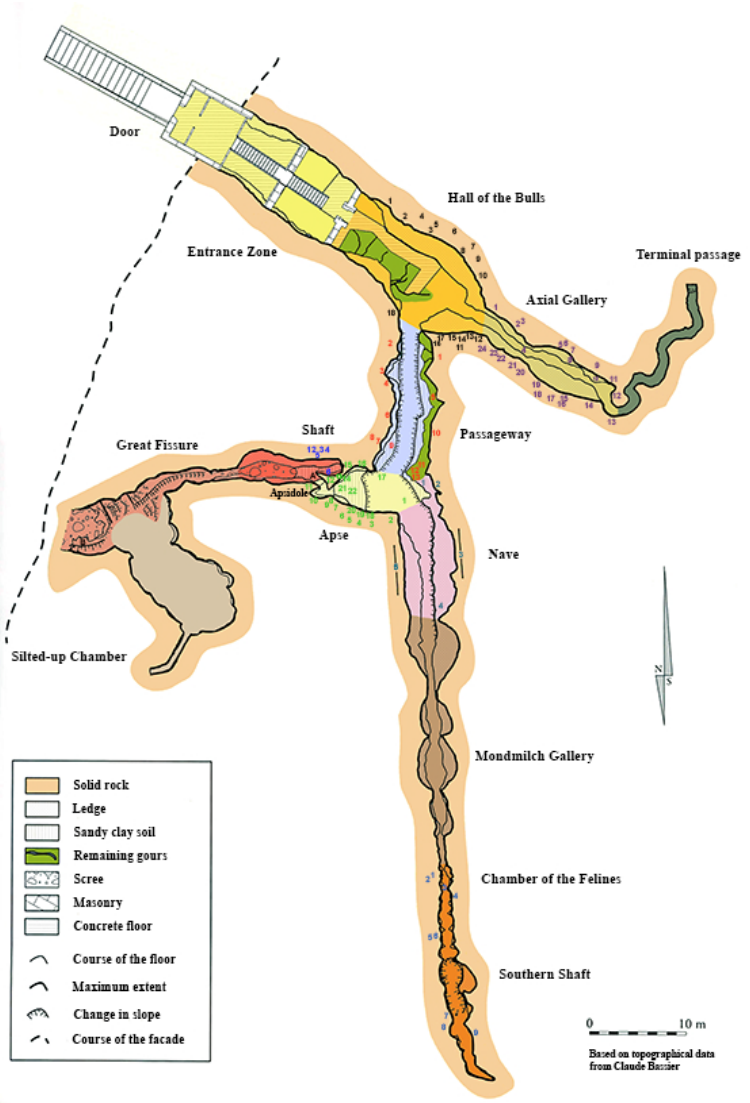
Figure T-1: The Lascaux Cave

The Chambers and Cardinal Directions



Restoration of the plan after Norbert Aujoulat, 1946 - 2001, by DH.
Source: https://web.archive.org/web/20130512213551/http://www.american-buddha.com/lascaux2.htm

Interpretive Disclaimer:

While individuals can experience any higher state of consciousness, once they return to their ordinary state, they can only interpret the higher experience in terms of the level of their overall development. Just as the community of shamans-artists had to contend with this issue, one can only interpret the cave artwork in terms one understands and can communicate. Thus, my specialized knowledge may limit my interpretive accuracy. It must be acknowledged that the observations offered may have only a distant relationship with the actual intentions of the artists. Nevertheless, the value of these observations offers an integrated approach to understand the possible meaning of these remarkable artistic figures.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author thanks his colleagues, the psychologists Edmond A. Musholt Ph.D. and Larry J. Stava Ph.D. who have been valuable companions on the journey to share perspectives on the meaning of the Paleolithic cave art described in this book. Their counsel has enriched the manuscript. The author thanks Marcie Boucouvalas, the editor of the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, who early in our research identified the contribution that our interpretive model could make in unlocking the meaning of the Paleolithic cave art. The author particularly thanks Don Hitchcock, who recently passed, for permission to use his photographs and maps which can be found at Don's Maps (https://www.donsmaps.com). Finally, he also thanks Aaron Wood B.A., a graphics expert, for his contribution to select figures.

PROLOGUE

> No unitary explanation can cover all of Lascaux. D. Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave* (2002, p. 234)
>
> Ah, if only we could put spoken words to those signs! A. Leroi-Gorham, *The Cave of Lascaux: The Final Photographs*, Ruspoli (1986, p. 160)
>
> The limits of my words are the limits of my world. L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922, p. 7)

As there is no objective authority upon which to ground interpretations of Paleolithic artwork it appears there is room for "informed speculation" when interpreting the artwork. Therefore, when I am confident there is evidence to support an interpretation, I will declare it. But when the evidence is sparse, I will invite the reader to consider the elements I find relevant and join me in considering the best approximation of the interpretation. This means that the definitions of many of the current concepts used to describe the figures in the panels must also be tentative or at least given "era appropriate" meaning.

The journey to identify the meaning of the art in the Lascaux cave begins with a basic description of the Sapiens world as it can be understood today. I argue that the artwork shows that the following elements were apparent at that time: some of the animals they hunted, some of the weapons they used in the hunt, the tools they used to create the artwork including the chisels, paints, torch and lamp lights and the means to apply the art to the highest parts of a cave wall like scaffolding. More, because I cannot separate the artistic creativity from the actual artwork I identify the creators as the shamans-artists. They had to deal with a challenging environment which included the changing of the seasons, the movement of animals, like migration and hibernation, and obvious changes in the appearance of animals like the changing color of their coats as they adapted to seasonal changes. By identifying concrete elements of the

natural world and ethological changes in the animals I have developed an evidentiary strand to anchor some of my interpretations which adds a level of certainty to them.

I also argue that the artwork shows they were aware of the day-night cycle and seasonal cycles which are both aspects of natural time. From this I have concluded they were mostly in a waking state during the day and they slept mainly at night. I argue that they were aware of the dream state from which the trance state evolved. While they must have developed sufficient language to discuss hunting and artistic issues their language has not penetrated to modern times. The artwork then becomes the beginning of the pictorial tradition. It is fair to conclude they were storytellers since I have found that the artwork in the Lascaux cave tells a coherent story.

Here is an example of how I approach the interpretation of the figures in the famous panel called the crossed bison shown in Figure P-1. I am certain that these figures represent two full-bodied male bison that are moving away from the cave wall and from each other. The bison on the left is in front of the bison on the right because the back part of his body hides the back end of the bison on the right. This relationship demonstrates the modern gestalt principle of occlusion and adds a third dimension, that is, true perspective to the figures (Kandel, 2012, p. 399). I am certain that the bison on the right has a black coat and the bison on the left has a predominately black coat with a patch of brown over his left front leg going up his back. I am then reasonably certain that the black winter coat is sloughing off to reveal the brown spring coat beneath which represents the change in season, winter changing to spring. As I am certain the shamans-artists intended to show these color features it seems reasonable that they intended to identify the changes associated with spring. Then there could be a relationship between the bison moving away from the cave wall, the bison moving away from each other and the black winter coat "moving away", that is sloughing off, to reveal the brown spring coat beneath. Consider these relationships in more detail.

Figure P-1: The Crossed Bison in the Nave

I have found that these possible relationships can be integrated through analogy**,** a technique that relates the unfamiliar to the familiar by means of likeness (Campbell, 1988, p. 9). One analogy could be as follows: just as the bison are separating from each other, which identifies each one as a separate entity, the winter coat is separating from the bison on the left to reveal the spring coat beneath. There could then be three levels of separation identified by these figures. They separate from the cave wall to leave the spirit world and enter the natural world; they separate from each other to identify artistically how one figure differentiates from another just as overlapping figures in earlier artwork shown in Figure P-2 give way to sequencing figures shown in Figure P-3; and they can more plausibly identify the ethological relationship whereby the black winter coat separates from the brown spring coat as an example of molting which shows winter changing to spring. Further, they provide an excellent example of how the shamans-artists have added true perspective to the artwork. Nearly all the panels in the cave are shown in just two dimensions, but by placing the bison in front, thus occluding the bison behind, they identify depth as the third dimension.

In addition, I must identify some limits that govern aspects of the interpretations. For example, consider the concepts themselves. The concept of “ecology” as used by Lewis-Williams (2002, p. 72) identifies

the environmental conditions at the time the artwork was produced. While the set of relationships associated with this term existed before they were encapsulated in the word ecology, the word and its associated meanings did not appear in the western scientific literature until the 1850s AD. In fact, the meaning of the term as we use it today really began in the 1950s. This means that the concept had no functional meaning in Sapiens' consciousness at the beginning of the scientific revolution, say in the 1650s, let alone in the late Paleolithic period in the 20,050s BC.

Then beyond the limits of single ideas or concepts, some authorities like Wittgenstein (1922) consider that the structure of language itself determines one's world view. Many authorities continue to use modern concepts, like ecology, and accept the syntax that governs their primary language when addressing the meaning of the artwork, without identifying that these have a basic interpretive limit.

In a previous article (Maier, 2020, No. 2, p. 281), my colleagues and I noted that when Aristotle asked the question, "If A gives rise to B and B gives rise to A, which is prior?" it could not be answered by logic. But when Wisconsin farmers ask which came first, the chicken or the egg, possible answers arise. Creationists believe God created chickens. Evolutionists who are aware of the advances in the mechanics of reproductive science recognize that sexual reproduction came after asexual reproduction and that the logical question then dissolves because it was not real in the beginning. Just using these terms and their subsequent development without conceptual clarity is not neutral.

Consider then another set of modern concepts identified by Walsh in the context of understanding the relationship between the "spirits" and the "shaman". Walsh (2007, p. 146) recognizes that philosophers can confound the very beginning of that relationship when he states that "In fact, the nature of 'spirits' may be one of the great puzzles at the intersection of three major philosophical conundrums: incommensurability, under-determination of theory, and ontological indeterminacy". Consider that these three multi-syllable philosophical conundrums had not differentiated from the cognitive world in the Paleolithic period and could not have been addressed by our ancestors and can therefore be side-lined

when interpreting how the shamans-artists considered the relationship between the spirits and themselves. Like the concept of ecology and the limits of logic these conundrums appear to represent the end of lines of theoretical thought still in process.

For me the relationship between the spirits and the shamans is simple: shamans enter a trance, encounter entities they call spirits and discuss their relevance when they come out of their trance. From this simple relationship the artwork becomes the evidence that the shamans-artists could “form, entertain and manipulate mental imagery in social contexts” to identify elements of the natural world and to conceive of a spirit world (Lewis-Williams, p. 94).

The Recognition of Death

Campbell (1988, pp. 51-73) addresses this important issue in his Atlas, “Part 1: Mythologies of the Primitive Hunters and Gatherers”. He declares that our earliest ancestors became aware of death before they showed any evidence that they were aware of a spirit afterlife. Perhaps the earliest evidence that some aspect of an animal or human lived on past mortal death is the cave-bear skulls stored in caves by the Neanderthals before 60,000 BC. These have been interpreted to associate death with sleep. Just as one appears “dead to the world” when asleep but becomes active upon waking up, so too the deceased person appears “dead to the world” but becomes “active” upon waking up in the after-world. Campbell (p. 55) interprets the Bear Cult as an inspiration of “mystical thoughts and feelings of an Old Paleolithic population". The long speculative discourse that follows is important in that it addresses the idea of immortality and the earliest rituals that appear to address the transition from mortal life in the natural world as an inspiration of “mystical thoughts and feelings of an Old Paleolithic population" to immortal life in the spirit world. This issue is briefly identified here because it lays the base for an earlier belief system that preceded later cave art. It clearly begins to address the mortal-immortal relationship which appears to have already been imagined by the Neanderthals and by our true Sapiens ancestors.

But there are no burials in the Lascaux cave (Von Petzinger, 2016, p. 49). Anthropologists have documented evidence of body decorations which signal social identity (Lewis-Williams, p. 90) but there is no evidence of body decoration in the Lascaux cave art. Archeologists have documented that our Sapiens ancestors prepared the deceased for burial and included grave gear which is considered to be evidence they thought some type of life continued after mortal death. Grave gear identifies an expanded social identity beyond the "kinship family" and a belief in an afterlife. Thus, the cave art appears to assume this sleep-death relationship which has allowed the shamans-artists the freedom to address other aspects of that relationship (see Note One).

The Format

In the Introduction I make clear the basic tenets that underpin my interpretations. In Part One, I describe and then interpret the artwork on the cave walls, chamber by chamber in each succeeding chapter. In Part Two**,** I integrate aspects of the Lascaux cave art with selected artwork from other caves. I provide a Glossary of Terms to help make their use clear. In the Appendices I provide more detailed information to place the interpretive discussion in a broader context which serves to deepen the readers' understanding.

The book starts in the Apse where the artwork began and then proceeds to the connected chambers, the Nave and then the Shaft as shown in Figure T-1 in the Table of Contents. I assert that before they completed the two panels in the Shaft, they formulated the rest of the narrative and then moved to the cave entrance where they continued the narrative by connecting the panels in the Shaft with the panels in the Hall of Bulls. Thus, I move to the cave entrance and interpret the artwork on the north and south walls of the Hall of Bulls and then move into the Axial Chamber and interpret the artwork on the north, south and end walls. I believe the artwork at the entrance to the cave to be the beginning of the Testament which closes with the panels in the Shaft. I do not address the many figures in the chamber called the Passageway because there are no good representations of these figures available and because I believe that the

artwork in the chamber represents hunting strategies as a continuation of the artwork in the previous chamber called the Nave.

Because there are no figures on the south wall of the Hall of Bulls up to the Passageway, I argue that the shamans-artists meant to direct an observer's attention to the artwork on the north wall. In this way they have given an observer a direction for observing the artwork in order to understand it. The artwork and narrative start on the north wall and continue, after the observer has passed the Passageway and comes near the entrance to the Axial Chamber, on the south wall of the Hall of Bulls. The observer then moves into the Axial Chamber and observes the artwork on the north wall, the end wall and the south wall as s/he returns to the entrance of the Axial Chamber and then moves down the Passageway.

Because this is novel material some figures and parts of figures are repeated so the reader can see how their meaning might become more evident in a specific context. While this book is written for the middle path, between common sense and scientific truth which both have limits, as a base and everywhere possible I have relied on the most current scientific evidence to support my interpretations. Finally, because the shaman is such a key figure, I agree that the Paleolithic shamans were true anatomically modern humans and the person of the shaman included the emergence of "advanced consciousness" with a stable sense of the separate self. But I think of this figure as Smith (1991, p. 380) called him, a "spiritual savant". The shaman had special knowledge of a spirit world and applied it in the service of the kinship group in the natural world.

At the end I will offer a unitary explanation that gives meaning to the artwork today. I will give a voice to some of the graphic signs by interpreting their meaning in the context in which they are presented. I will use words assembled with English syntax but am aware of the limits inherent in this form of communication (see Note Two). As it is not available, I cannot use ethnological evidence as a base to provide meaning to social relationships portrayed in the artwork, but I will use the ethological relationships of the animals with each other and with the environment as evidence to support and provide a level of certainty to some of the interpretations.

Notes

Note One: Long Bones and Movement

According to Campbell (1988, p. 55), a femur has been inserted into the mouth of a number of cave-bear skulls (the skull represents the identity of the animal). This has been interpreted as a sacrificial offering of the deceased bear to the archetypal bear, an offering as Campbell says of "himself to Himself". Later tribes defleshed skeletons and took the long bones of the arms and legs, those associated with movement, and tied them together into a bone bundle. This bundle was then carried by the family until it was buried in a common grave with other clan members. As an alternate interpretation then, it is possible that early Paleolithic Neanderthals inserted the femur into the mouth of the bear skull to show that the movement associated with the femur when the bear was alive in the natural world was "eaten", and incorporated into the skull of the deceased bear which represented the identity of the individual animal when alive. Since animals come alive and move after waking up in the natural world, by analogy the deceased was expected to come alive and move after dying, presumably in the spirit world. This then would be indirect evidence that they believed in a "spirit world" beyond the natural world. It appears both Neanderthals and our Sapiens ancestors became aware of death before they developed a sense of immortality in an afterlife. This interpretation supports the idea that death is analogous to sleep and points to a place where the deceased "wakes up", which is now called the spirit world.

Note Two: Pictorial Syntax

In Latin the pronoun is attached to the end of the verb as in Caesar's "veni, vidi, vici" which reads: came I, saw I, conquered I. The subject is identified but comes after the action word, the verb. As the romance languages evolved out of Latin, the "I", that is the subject or pronoun, became more important and was detached from the verb and moved to the beginning of a sentence: "I came. I saw. I conquered". Some authorities consider that earlier languages were less focused on the subject and are thought to represent a process that is active in the present, which in this

case would be exhortations such as “coming, battle-viewing, conquering” (Jaynes, J., 1982).

While the oral tradition associated with Paleolithic art has not penetrated the present, I believe the pictorial tradition appears to be action-oriented, consistent with earlier process-oriented languages. The figures in the artwork are placed to represent action and, in my opinion, the lost language would have been process-oriented in the present. Thus, the progression from overlapping animal figures shown in Figure P-2 to sequencing animal figures in the cave art shown in Figure P-3 is one of the major advances in the evolution of the pictorial syntax because it activates the figures and shows them “moving” in a meaningful way toward some goal. This is evident in the figures in the Lascaux cave art shown in Figure P-3.

Figure P-2: Overlapping Figures (Trois Frères cave)

Figure P-3: Individuated Figures Placed in a Sequence (Lascaux cave)

INTRODUCTION

The intention of this book is to share the narrative described by the artwork in the Lascaux cave in France and provide supporting evidence from artwork in other caves created during the Paleolithic period between 35,000 BC and 11,000 BC. My interpretive model is based on the following assumptions, authorities and definitions and, notwithstanding well-reasoned presentations like those of Campbell (1988) which offer one of the most documented dissertations on the origins of our Sapiens ancestors, it cannot begin with mythology because there is no oral or written record to support interpretive claims (see Note One). I will also attempt to account for aspects of the shifting baseline syndrome (Soga & Gaston, 2017).

Assumptions, Authorities and Definitions Influencing the Interpretive Model

1. Assumptions

First, there is no way of knowing today the meaning of the artwork created by the authorities of the kinship communities who created it. Nevertheless, I identify the shamans as the individuals who inspired the art and developed the themes addressed in the art. Then there are the artists who had the skill to draw, engrave or paint the art. As I cannot separate the inspiration from the actual art production, I identify the creators as the shamans-artists. I agree that in some cases the shamans may also have been the artists. Second, because the figures are good representations of actual animals that can be identified today, I argue that the school of art interpretation called the representation model, where a valued aspect of an art piece is its accuracy compared with the entity being depicted, is the most appropriate model. Third, I embrace the mirror mind, that is the representational mind as the primary brain-mind structure of the shamans-artists. This means that the cognitive development of the shamans particularly included long-term object constancy where images of the

natural world were accurately recorded in the memories of the shamans and could be retrieved at will when they composed an art piece in the depths of a cave. Fourth, notwithstanding the fact that where there is other, there is fear, I argue that the meaning of the artwork derives from the conscious intention of the shamans-artists which means I believe there are no relevant "unconscious" influences in the artwork. Also, the word "meaning" points to a sign, picture, image or word which exists as something other than itself. The image of a bison has meaning because it points to a real bison. Fifth, I believe that the Paleolithic artworks in the caves that I address are products of our true Sapiens ancestors and not of our cousins the Neanderthals.

2. Authorities

I begin by honoring Lewis-Williams and the ideas he presented in his book, *The Mind in the Cave* (2002) and his later works which include *Image-Makers: The Social Context of a Hunter-Gatherer Ritual* (2019) as these focus directly on the subject. I appreciate Clottes who addresses the Paleolithic artwork in *Cave Art* (2008) and other works including *What is Paleolithic Art?* (2016). I acknowledge that transcultural art interpretation as it might be based on a neurological model is a growing field (Kandel, 2012). The references reflect the other sources found to be valuable.

Much of my expertise arises from interpreting the animal figures in the effigy mounds in Wisconsin which are earthworks constructed on the ground to tell stories (Maier, 2001). I thank Prof. Scherz for his work in mapping effigy mound sites and then offering an interpretation of the meaning of some mound groups, aided by Elders of the Ho-Chunk Nation (Scherz, 1987). Of particular importance is the meaning attributed to animal figures that align with points on the horizon which mark the summer and winter solstice and the equinox. Understanding these relationships is valuable because by chance there is an alignment between the summer solstice sunset and the long axis of the Hall of Bulls at the entrance to the Lascaux cave. I believe the shamans-artists took advantage of this solar alignment to give meaning to some of the animal figures painted in the Hall of Bulls and the Axial Chamber where the light from

the setting Sun on the longest day of the solar year shines into the mouth of the cave for several hours a day over a three-day period.

Regarding the overall theoretical framework, I rely on Wilber's AQAL model because he has incorporated many authorities from multiple disciplines that identify the origins of the development of human consciousness in our Sapiens ancestors (Wilber, 1980) and connects these early experiences, including those of entranced shamans, with higher states of consciousness found in the spiritual traditions, both east and west. Wilber's book (2007) *Integral Spirituality* has been a frequent resource when attempting to present aspects of consciousness in this novel Paleolithic art in an understandable form. For example, one can see that the conventions that I believe were developed by the shamans-artists, hold the meaning of their artwork constant for both the figures themselves and for the rules that determine their meaning when placed in a context. Wilber offers a simple way to instruct readers to understand how our shaman ancestors in the Lascaux cave documented aspects of their worldview.

Wilber explains the difference between the phenomenology of experience and the rules that structure and govern that experience (see Note Two). Consider a card game where the cards represent images of the four suits. One can study each card and differentiate it from the others. What one cannot do is see in the cards themselves the rules that govern a particular game. Phenomenology has limits. But by studying a number of games one can determine the rules that govern how the cards are played and give meaning to a particular game. This is called structuralism. The images of Paleolithic animal figures are found in a number of caves that stretch back over a 20,000-year period. Each of the major caves that I consider shows evidence of the expression of a separate group of shamans. For me the images of the six body types of the animals in the artwork of these caves are the cards, and the way that the shamans-artists sequenced the animal figures identifies the rules of a "game" which is designed to reveal aspects of the worldview of the shamans-artists for that cave. This book addresses aspects of the worldview of the shamans-artists in the Lascaux cave at that time in history.

Finally, I have also found Damasio's theory of mind and model of consciousness to be helpful (1999, 2010, 2019). He considers that the proto-self that began in animals evolved into core consciousness which is the basic conscious sense of being a separate self that orients that self to the present. Then as the long-term memory developed, the life history of an individual could be included in his/her concept of being a separate self. This evolution continued to become the autobiographical self. The context of these references will identify the specific authority and the influence of their models.

The conceptual mind needed to form before organisms could develop a concept of the self. Aspects of the self concept then included an awareness of objects outside the organism represented by patterns in the brain identified as images, and objects inside the organism also represented by patterns in the brain identified as feelings (Damasio, 2018, p. 80, 1999, p. 25). While aspects of these connections included a growing sense of an individual personal identity, the autobiographical self awaited the evolution of long-term memory (Sykes, 2019). In time, self-awareness continued to evolve so that our true Sapiens ancestors experienced a secure sense of being a separate self. This included the two main aspects of Damasio's model arising from the proto-self, the core self which orients the organism in the present and the autobiographical self which provides the organism with extended consciousness and a "personal" history (Damasio, 2018, p. 140, 1999, p. 22).

3. Definitions

Below I define the meaning of the concepts used in this book as derived from the artwork itself. I applaud those who attempt to give more scientific definitions to concepts like soul, spirit, mind, self and consciousness (Maier et al., 202, No. 2, p. 250). Definitions must be understood in the context of the shamanic model of a three-tiered world system which included the lower, middle and upper worlds. For me non-corporeal "spirits" reside in the lower and upper worlds because the shamans-artists used the same legless, head-only figure to identify the site of those worlds. Mortal animals and humans reside in the middle world, that is the everyday natural world. Further, I argue that the artwork shows

that spirits were incorporated inside the mortal body as the soul of that individual. The soul entered the mortal body during conception and was released from the mortal body at the time of its death. Then I accept the three common states of consciousness: waking, dream and non-dream sleep, as the template from which altered states of consciousness evolved. For me the trance state is a modification of the dream state. Finally, it must be obvious that these concepts are inter-related and co-evolved and cannot be considered as separate cognitive capacities.

The mortal body represents the obvious gross body of each animal, born into the natural world, that dies in the natural world.

The soul body represents the ethereal "spirit" body that originally resides in the spirit world and may join with an individual mortal animal/human for a sojourn in the natural world. It is released back to the spirit world upon the death of the mortal figure. The soul body is the individual spirit of the mortal animal. When a shaman enters a trance he leaves his mortal body, enters his soul body and travels in the spirit world; he returns to his mortal body when he comes out of the trance.

The spirits are ethereal non-material entities that reside in the spirit world and communicate with shamans during a trance. Because they give "magico-religious powers" (Eliade, 1972, p. 74), that is boons, to the shamans they are considered to have more knowledge and to be in a higher state of consciousness than shamans.

The mind is a cognitive construct which is considered to include the knowledge of the natural world informed by the senses that evolves over time. Because researchers like Freud considered the earliest evidence of the human mind to be governed by "magical" laws and in its mature form to be governed by the rational laws of logic, our first articles refer to these ideas. In this book the mind as an evolving construct with early and mature forms, is the locus of knowledge, the site of individual consciousness and located in the head of each figure.

The self is a psychological construct that refers to the formation of the identity of a figure that has evolved to the point where it recognizes it

exists; it is the seat of agency for an individual and as such it has a sense of permanence called self constancy. It is also located in the head.

Consciousness is the awareness available to an entity that allows it to interact with the objects in its environment. Humans in an alert state of consciousness interact with objects in the natural world and with aspects of their bodies toward the goal of survival. There are different levels of consciousness depending on the evolutionary state of the entity which can be influenced by external sources, like drugs or modified by internal training, like meditation. The artwork shows four levels of consciousness available to shamans from the herd instinct, to the awake state, to the trance state and then the higher state of the spirits.

The Shamanic Conventions and My Interpretive Model

After I had found an interpretive path through the artwork in the Lascaux cave, I identified six conventions which I argue were developed by the shamans-artists to hold the meaning of their artwork constant (Maier et al., 2019). Then, as I interpreted more art panels, including some in the Chauvet cave and the Trois Frères cave, I uncovered more repeating patterns derived from the artwork itself that were subsequently identified as conventions. Fifteen of these conventions are identified below (Maier et al., 2020, No. 2). These provide interpretive integrity for the meaning of individual figures and for animals grouped in a panel and they provide a connecting link between the artwork in one cave and that in another. While aspects of these conventions apply to figures in all the caves I have examined, I argue that the animal figures in the Chauvet cave, which has the earliest Sapiens art, represent animals in known situations that can be applied to the hunters. When evidence of human-made weapons appears in the artwork, for me the animal figures also represent human activities. Then the animal figures in the Lascaux cave and later caves also represent human figures. The identity of these figures is clarified in the context of the artwork described at each site.

The Conventions

1. The alert awake state is the default state of consciousness.*

2. The head is the site of consciousness, knowledge and agency for each figure.

3. Headless figures are alive and represent figures in an unconscious state like sleep or under instinctual control like giving birth.

4. Figures which show an animal turning its head in an acute manner show the animal moving from a less conscious state into the alert awake present, which is part of the spectrum of consciousness.

5. Overlapping animals show there is a primary connection between the animals through touch, which is understood as the herd instinct. These figures represent how the early mind represented a correct view of an early but partial view of reality, which was later considered to be magical.

6. Full-bodied figures represent animals alive in the natural world.

7. Legless, head-only figures represent the souls of animals alive in the spirit world; except when they sojourn inside the mortal body of an animal for its life cycle in the natural world or they are spirit helpers.

8. Composite figures, part human and part animal, are shamans.

9. There are two well-defined worlds: the natural world and the subterranean spirit world. The celestial spirit world was in the process of differentiating from the upper part of the natural world represented by the Sun, the Moon and the stars.

10. Shamans could communicate with all three worlds, at will.

11. The animal head placed on a shaman, either a bird or bison, depended on the meaning of the shamanic ritual. If the ritual addressed issues in

* This is the common experience of being awake and not to be confused with the default mode network (see Note Three).

the spirit world, they placed a bird head on the human figure. If the ritual addressed issues in the natural world, they placed a bison head on the human figure.

12. Half-body animals with a head represent a figure in transition, which moves back and forth between the spirit and natural worlds.

13. Figures that represent a clearly known ethological change like the bison sloughing its winter coat or a ritual like the bison head-butting can be interpreted with confidence because the meaning of these ethological features transcends time.

14. Depending on the context, the ethological characteristics of the animals can be intentionally attributed to humans.

15. There is a spectrum of consciousness which starts with unconscious instinctual behaviors like head-butting and reactions to seasonal changes like migration and hibernation. Overlapping figures identify touch as a means of communication which was later called the herd instinct. Second, the spectrum advances into the present as hunters consciously react to external stimuli by intention. Third, shamans have advanced consciousness when they enter an ecstatic trance which gives consciousness an intentional direction and reveals novel experiences. Finally, spirits represent a higher state of consciousness and knowledge because they give boons to the shamans.

Conventions 3, 6, 7, 8 and 12 identify the body types in the artwork. One can recognize all the full-bodied animal figures. The other animals are also known figures but the shamans-artists have modified some of their bodies in order to describe unique aspects of the narrative. There is a plausible parallel between these modified body types and the way that Renaissance artists depicted angels, winged figures that were presented in their art as part human and part spirit. Renaissance angels come in two primary types, first as legless head-only human forms with wings and second as full-bodied humans with wings; the latter were used when artists wanted to depict a well-known encounter between an important angelic figure and a human (see Figure I-1). These angelic figures are not confusing because they are accepted as mere depictions of spiritual entities given a human

face and at times a human body. Then consider that the Holy Spirit was represented, by convention, as a bird. When St. Francis received inspiration from a bird representing the Holy Spirit which is seen sitting on his left shoulder in Figure I-2, the artists created another understandable relationship between the saint and the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Blessed Trinity, as a convention.

Figure I-1: The Archangel Michael

Figure I-2: St. Francis with a Dove

The Six Body Types

In sum, the Paleolithic animal figures are full-bodied figures which represent mortal animals that live in the natural world; legless, head-only figures which represent the souls of animals that live in the spirit world; two figures having a head and half a body, either front or back, which represent figures moving between the natural and spirit worlds; therianthropic or composite figures with a bird or bison head and a human body which represent shamans; and finally, headless figures which represent animals under the influence of an unconscious mechanism like sleep. There are minor variations of several of these body types. For example, there are three head-only soul figures that also have some aspects of their front legs. Three of these body types are identified in the Famous Scene located in the Shaft of the Lascaux cave shown in Figure I-3. Briefly, the mortal bison has a full body which has been struck by a human-made spear and it is dying. The mortal body of the rhino is dead and in losing the front half of its body it will become just the soul of the rhino. The bird-headed human figure has an erection which shows it is in a trance state, and it is considered to be a shaman.

Figure I-3: The Famous Scene in the Shaft of the Lascaux Cave

Beyond the artistic conventions my interpretive model is simple. Campbell (1988) calls this period in human history “The Age of Animal Powers” because some animals were considered more powerful than humans. Our Paleolithic ancestors became hunters and gatherers. While hunting themes

are identified in the artwork, there is not yet any evidence of gathering (Maier et al., 2021). It appears that some of the earliest cave art attributed to our Sapiens ancestors began in the Chauvet cave around 35,000 BC. Animal figures at that time appear to represent actual animals and the meaning of the artwork arises from the situations that the shamans-artists depicted in each panel. Hunting is depicted in the Grand Panel shown in Figure I-5 below. In time, the animal figures in the Lascaux cave, around 22,000 to 15,000 BC, began to represent humans as identified by their hunting weapons. This allowed the shamans-artists to identify that humans were comprised of a mortal body and a soul body, to make a clear connection between the natural world and the spirit worId. By using animals, the shamans-artists were able to identify ethological aspects of their lives to provide a specific meaning to a figure or an art panel. For example, Figure I-4 shows the crossed bison in the Nave of the Lascaux cave. The black winter coat of the bison on the left is sloughing off to reveal the fresh brown spring coat beneath. This annual seasonal change in the body morphology of the bison allowed the shamans-artists to identify the change from spring to summer. More, it allowed the shamans-artists to show there is meaning beneath the surface, which added depth as a third dimension to the panel.

While the conventions identify the six body types used by the shamans-artists to portray their worldview, I argue that the shamans-artists identified the four levels of consciousness available to them (Maier et al., 2020). These form a spectrum of consciousness beginning with the lowest level, the unconscious herd instinct. Next, the alert awake state is the default state of consciousness for each animal/human (see Note Four). This is followed by shamans with advanced consciousness and finally the spirits in the spirit world with higher consciousness. As the shamans experienced all levels of consciousness, I believe they were able to communicate with the animals and the hunters in the natural world. In a trance state they could communicate with the spirits in the spirit world.

On this point, shamans were the first Sapiens humans to experience transcendent states of consciousness. At first these experiences were spontaneous. Then the shamans met each other and developed a ritual whereby a candidate could be initiated into their group, ultimately called

the shamanic lodge. Spontaneous experiences then became "trained" experiences. This is important because it identifies shamans as early representatives of the mystic tradition whose training resulted in the ability to reliably transform their level of consciousness. Consider shamans in an alert waking state. They could change their attention level to respond to events in the natural world around them. However, they learned to change their level of consciousness through the trance experience of the shamanic initiation process. This change is qualitatively different from just a change in attention in the awake state. Later traditions not only identified the three natural states of consciousness: waking, dreaming and non-dream states; through their rituals, shamans modified the dream state into the trance state which they could access at will. Shamans were the first human figures to develop this skill. This issue will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter Nine, through the figures on the end wall of the Axial Chamber.

Figure I-4: The Crossed Bison

Conceptual Clarity

In his book *The Mind in the Cave*, the archeologist Lewis-Williams (2002, p. 46) asks the question, "is it possible to understand Upper Paleolithic art without recourse to analogy? By using analogies, do we not simply create a past in the image of the present?" Then, on page 260, he agrees that