

# Paleolithic Women's Spirituality and its Relevance to us Today

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**Abstract:** In this paper, I consider Paleolithic women's spirituality as expressed through various aspects of their artwork found in the caves of Spain and the 'Venus figurines and suggest these icons may be seen as an attempt by some of early these women artists to translate their own inner experiences and insights cataphatically, and thereby reconcile the tension between the image-less I experience of ineffable transcendence using didactic expression grounded in images. This method was used later by the Spanish mystic Santa Teresa, who clearly felt the mystery needs to be related to personally; it is not an abstract mystery, but a mystery that is alive, that vibrates through us and is what animates every cell in our body; we are an embodiment of this living mystery. Whereas in the 16 Century it was normal for Teresa to consider the mystery as God, it was most likely customary for Paleolithic women to think of the mystery as the Universal or Great Mother, an insight some of them probably arrived at through analogy with the creative force expressing itself through their pregnant bodies. Whereas Santa Teresa employed images that meant something to the people living during her time, these ancient women probably did the same. From this perspective, their artwork may be seen as pointers to this 'entity' or mystery, which, is both immanent in creation and at the same time is beyond duality and all definitions. Here, I also submit that they probably realized the creative aspect of the enigma through their pregnancies, and, in their death, they recognized it as the destructive or dark phase in the cycle of life that is so necessary for 'rebirth' to occur, and, in its expression through celestial events, they probably celebrated it through their rituals and their pilgrimages which took place at specific times of the year.

**Keywords-** spirituality; Paleolithic; women; artwork; ineffable; mystery; didactic expression; Santa Teresa; embodiment; Great Mother; celestial events

## I. INTRODUCTION (HEADING 1)

In this article, I contemplate Paleolithic women's spirituality as reflected through their art. I feel them reaching out to us today across the span of about 30,000 years, to tell us their story which might help us find 'el Norte'<sup>1</sup> which is so necessary in a society that has lost contact with the mystery, which is really at the heart of it all no matter what name we care to give it. However, the enigma, as Santa Teresa so clearly felt, needs to be related to personally. For her, it was not an abstract mystery but one that takes us beyond appearances and makes us question if it is not God that is hidden inside of us? (De Piero 2014). It was normal for Teresa to consider the mystery as God, but it might be equally usual for others to think of the enigma as the Universal or Great Mother, Spirit, or any other name for this 'entity' which

is both immanent in creation and at the same time is transcendent and beyond duality and all definitions.

From the perspective contemplated here, we are considering a path where the mystery is lived, that vibrates through us, and is what animates every cell in our body, and at the same time, is beyond the material world. We, as such, are an embodiment of this living mystery. "Teresa ...(was) able to translate her own apophatic experiences kataphatically, and so reconcile the tension between the "image-less I experience of ineffable transcendence and a didactic expression grounded in images.... (Santa Teresa took her images from) the natural world, the world of merchants and markets, money and jewels, the *Domus*, or the hearth, and architecture, become the mediating bodies whose overarching purpose is to show the inward movement of mental prayer" (Tsoukatos 2011, p. iii). In other words, she took the images from the reality she was accustomed to and meant something to the people of her time. In retrospect, it also helps us understand more about early modern Spain of the sixteenth Century (Tsoukatos 2011).

In this paper, I suggest, by using the same lens, we can understand more about early Paleolithic art if we see it as a way by and through which these early women artists sought to reconcile the tension between their experiences and insights of the ineffable through the use of didactic expression grounded in images. I propose that through their art, these early artists (or at least some of them) were able to share with others the essence of their spirituality and, like with Santa Teresa's images, we, through them, may begin to understand what was relevant to the people of that period. What gives credence to this hypothesis are the images themselves, and also the findings of the anthropologist Prof Dean Snow (2006) who, based on the stenciled handprints found in the caves, determined that 75 percent of upper Paleolithic artists were women (Wang, Ge, Snow, Mitra, and Lee Giles, 2013; News staff 2013; Snow, 2006).

As background material, I include aspects of my history to help you, the reader, know a little about my past and also assist in understanding how we can tap into information that comes from paintings that are between 35,000 and 11,000 years old. I also give a brief historical overview of paleolithic matrilineal society and their art as found in caves in the Iberian Peninsula. In this, I am deeply indebted to Marianna Garcia Legar (2017) for her research into this historical period in Spain and her insights that inform much of this long-overlooked tale on which this article is inspired. I also briefly touch on the 'Venus

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<sup>1</sup> In Spanish they say '*ha perdido el Norte*' which means to lose one's way – which refers to contact with the northern guiding star which has always

orientated humans in finding their direction [Garcia Ledger, private talk online, 29 Jan. 2021]

figurines' which have been found throughout Europe and even Siberia. Although most of these figurines date back to the Gravettian period (26,000-21,000 years ago) (Fagen and Beck 1996), the Venus of Hohle Fels in Germany is dated to between 40,000 and 35,000 years ago (Eberhard and Eberhard 2011). In the telling, I am also embarking on a journey of unveiling the female equivalent of the hero's journey as described by Campbell, but instead of seeking to uncover the metaphorical heart of mythology as a unity (Campbell 1972, Campbell 1949), this account reveals the lived reality of (some) preliterate women, not as a myth, but as part of their everyday reality with the mystery in which they considered themselves as participants. This perspective comes close to Sarah Nicholson's (2008) understanding of the heroine's journey as "a metaphor for the female relationship with the divine: in the world and in herself" (p. 28). My approach to the topic is research-based which is also informed heuristically and intuitively.

In the telling of the tale, I also dispel the myth about man, the hunter, and the "belief that present-day inequality of the sexes had its roots in an ancient lifestyle and in inherent biological differences between the sexes" (Zihlman 1981, 76). It also helps to clarify our notions about early human beings and dispels the "thoughts of nineteenth and twentieth-century social theorists such as Spencer, Durkheim, Tonnies, Simmel, and Weber, who assumed that public sphere production was a male (and male-only) affair since the beginning of time" (see: Chafetz 2006, McPhillips 1995, Sydnie 1987 in Nicholson, 2008, 75). Besides, it questions the historical narrative of Wilber (1995;1996;1998), who, influenced by Habermas, starts with a gender system in place from the outset separating the social labourer (male) from the domestic nurturer (female) (Nicholson 2008). According to the research of Zihlman gendered divisions of labour "probably evolved late in human evolution" and was "never ... absolute" (Zihlman 1981, 104). "With gender being neither 'natural' nor pre-social, any delineation of gendered spheres within prehistoric societies, with pre-operative cognition, would have to have been tenuous and most definitely pliable" (Nicholson, 2008, p. 84). [10, p. 84]. Here I also question the appropriateness of applying Piaget's (1971; 1976) [15; 16] notion of a pre-operational cognition to prehistoric societies such as contemplated by Wilber (1998) and suggest that Hey and Nye's (1998/2006) findings regarding the experiencing consciousness of children probably better reflects the consciousness of most prehistoric people, a point I expand on later in this paper.

Although my main interest is not in the division of labour, it is relevant to the discussion in that for Marx and Engels (n.d.) socially organized labour allows us to distinguish human and animal life, whereas according to Habermas social labour alone was insufficient to distinguish between humans and other primates (Fleming 1998, 2). Thus, he proposed that the peculiar emergence of the human species was marked by the supplement of "the economy of the hunt" with "a familial [male-headed] social structure" which linked with what he considered to be two original, naturally occurring, subsystems – the male sphere of labour and the female symbolic-social sphere (Habermas in Fleming 1998 quoted by Nicholson 2008). However, this reconstruction of our past does not seem to hold water and female anthropologists have shown that in hunter-gathering

societies still in existence today the predominant source of food is not always animal protein, but plants, nuts, and berries which are gathered by females were often "provided the predominant food source" (Ruetter 2005, 18). Here foraging is defined as "subsistence based on hunting of wild animals, gathering of wild plant foods, and fishing, with no domestication of plants, and no domesticated animals except the dog" Lee and Daly, in Panter-Brick et al 2001, p. 2 in Nicholson, 2008). Except for the domestication of the dog, this description of foraging applies to many other species so once again we need to look for what makes us truly human.

Paleolithic women had a keen and knowledgeable connection with nature including the plants they collected (Garcia Legar 2017). [5]. More than likely she too was involved in the making of tools to extract and collect the plants she gathered (Torrence 2001; Hudecek- Cuffe 1996; Dahlberg 1981). But she was also intimately aware of the seasons and where and when she would find the different foods, both plant and animal including migratory birds, and when these arrived each year and where they nested. But most of all, it "was regularity of the motions of celestial objects (which) enabled ... (ancient people) to orient themselves in time and space" (Krupp, 2003, 1). This knowledge tied them to the cycle of life. However, here I suggest that it seems women in ancient times went further; on realizing nature expressed herself through repeating patterns, she elevated this insight into an elementary calendar system that consisted of dark and light alternating periods based on the equinoxes (Garcia Legar 2017). Her recognition and celebration of these cycles was a manifestation of her spirituality and connected her with an understanding of life beyond that of the material world where the mystery was also perceived within her own body. It is different aspects of this suggestion that I 'flesh' out in this article and is what makes humans distinctly human.

#### A. *My History*

Since my return to University in 2012 to undertake a Master in Transpersonal Psychology and a PhD. in Consciousness Studies which I earned in 2016, scientific investigation into Consciousness has become an integral part of my spiritual journey. As the Intuitive Meditation (IM) method of meditation which I practice and research is a heart-based practice with also involves the activation of 19 points in the whole body through the use of touch, a vibratory sound, and breath, my interest has centred around Embodied Spiritual approaches. IM is not a religious practice but a natural method of becoming aware of our feeling nature and also discovering or rediscovering our heart-based inner intuitive ability to connect to the 'Source' on our journey of Self-discovery (Arka 2013). Different methods of meditation can also be divided into thinking meditation or feeling meditation (Arka, 2003). [26]. IM is a feeling-based path that goes below the mind intending to discover our deeper essence or Self. Some methods go below the mind but do not meditate on the Self. For Swami Muktananda (1994) this is similar to "heron meditation", although it must be admitted heart-centred modern science-based meditation methods or techniques concerned with wellbeing and/or even coherence bring physical, mental, and emotional benefits as demonstrated by their many research results (Elbers and McCraty 2020; Field, Edwards, Edwards and Dean 2018; Edwards 2016). However,

it is also important to realize that in the past, meditation had different goals and intentions.

For Louchakova (2007), the core of practices associated with ego transcendence and contemplation of the Self is the "experimental phenomenological introspection into the living topological construct of the Self" (Louchakova 2007, p.82) [p. 82] whereas for Arka, the term meditation entails "serious self-pondering [which involves] the process of making profound inquiry into the depth of the soul about . . . [our] existence or how the Universe was created or the laws that governed living and non-living matter (Arka, 2013, 29). [25, p. 29]. In this sense, the objectives of meditation are not so different from that of science but the way they go about it is traditionally different; the latter looks at the nature of nature using their senses or extensions of them whereas the inner scientist or yogi turns his or her attention inwards to study, explore, and discover his/her inner Self and the laws behind existence. The rationale behind this was if they came to know their own nature, they would know the nature of the universe (Arka, 2003, 2013). As the aim of present-day meditation methods is mainly focused on human well-being, Arka calls the meditation method he developed Intuitive Meditation (IM) to preserve the original meaning of the term.

My research into the IM method has led me to contemplate the different ways we have of obtaining knowledge, which in turn has guided me to distinguish between the male and female principle based on different epistemological ways of knowing. From a psychobiological perspective, the order in which our body unfolds starting with our embryological development including the development of the prefrontal cortex is relevant to this distinction. Although the PFC shows developmental changes during the first year, it only reaches maturation during early adulthood (Diamond 2002). The latter area is connected with our thinking mind, a level of consciousness that is enhanced through the training of our intellectual ability through our educational system (Arka, 2013). I associate this way of knowing with the male principle and the female principle with a primary body-based way of knowing which leads to feeling-based intuitive insights involving the heart area (Lindhard 2020a). In the embryo, the heart system starts its development before the neural system indicating its primacy. Both sexes can tap into both ways of knowing although the Western world has favoured the training of our intellectual ability associated with the male idea of excellence encapsulated in the Ancient Greek concept of *Paideia* (Lindhard 2020a; 2019). Although Bettisia Gozzadini achieved a higher degree as early as 1237 in Italy (Bonadede 1845), it is really only during the last two hundred years women have increasingly had access to institutionalized education, especially higher education. However, rarely is it considered what we lose when we over-intellectualize our thinking ability and, in my case, it is only on recovering my feeling-based way of knowing that I realized the role this level of consciousness has on the quality of our lives particularly when it comes to receiving intuitive guidance, and the sense of connection we have with Nature and with other beings. Bodily-based awareness is also always 'real' time, ie synchronized with the intelligence expressing itself through our body, and is perceived as being endless or so much slower than when we are in our thinking minds.

Coupled with my academic training, I am also a qualified therapist in Craniosacral therapy and Family Constellation Therapist. The link that runs through all my undertakings started from a desire to heal my personal trauma. It was only in retrospect I became aware that I had dissociated from my body (and from my deeper essence or soul), and where my need to be touched led me to a meditation method built on one's own touch and giving body-based craniosacral therapy, also based on touch. I also realized personal trauma when coupled with an education system that favours thinking connected with knowing about the world, is a powerful mixture that keeps many people in their heads rather than fully experiencing life, which includes our primary perception system linked to bodily-based awareness and also possibly the other vestigial senses (Lindhard 2020b). My path involving embodiment has evolved to embrace the collective level of trauma many women face (and also some men) when they do not find their personal aspirations and vision of the world based on caring both for nature and all other beings reflected in the patriarchal culture in which we live. This is consistent with Gilligan's (1988), breakthrough research where she found care and connection are salient to women's thinking and that in women the "self is known in the experience of connection ... interaction, the responsiveness of human engagement" (Gilligan's 1988, 7). Although women have certainly made in-roads in today's society, often it has been at the expense of their inherent caring female nature Lindhard, 2020a), which may account for the criticism of Gilligan's work by some feminists.

The enforcements taking place because of COVID where the family has not been able to be present when their loved ones have died during the pandemic reflects a new shift; even in war soldiers risk their lives to recuperate the body of an injured or even dead friend whose body is in enemy territory. For many people, these new rules indicate a trend that is further alienating us from our intrinsic human nature. This points to the need for the healing of society at a very deep level. In some women, including myself, this concern about society is coupled with a deep desire to discover the truth, even in the end maybe the truth when spoken is always relative and needs to be lived deeply to be fully understood.

### *B. Prehistoric History of Spain*

Based on these concerns, in this article, I look primarily at Paleolithic women's spirituality in the Spanish Peninsula as a way of bringing attention to aspects of our history that have not been or at least not been fully acknowledged. Through tracing the DNA in the maternally inherited mitochondria within our cells, it was discovered that all humans have a theoretical common maternal ancestor (Wilson, Stoneking, Cann, Prager, Ferris, Wrischnik, and Higuchi 1986). This woman, known as 'Mitochondrial Eve', lived between 100,000 and 200,000 years ago in Africa, and has given rise to the 'Out of Africa' theory (Cann, Stoneking and Wilson 1987). This does not mean she was the first woman, as other earlier matrilineal lines probably died out. What it does mean is that all humans today share this female-line common ancestor. Not all scientists agree with the data on which mitochondrial Eve is based (Darlu and Tassy 1987), however recent research has found this claim to be fairly

robust. From this data, it is possible to construct a family tree based on DNA where mitochondrial Eve is the common ancestor before the main branches, which are known as clades, branch out. These clades define different haplogroups. According to the Hopi tradition, the people of the world have been divided into four main clans associated with the different elements, the Hopi with earth, the Yellow people with air, the Black tribe with water, and the White tribe with fire<sup>2</sup>. There may or may not be a certain overlap with this division and the different haplogroups, but in this article, we are talking of the history of the ‘white tribe’, where we shall centre on homo sapiens who lived in the Iberian Peninsula including the territory south of the river Rhone in France before the patriarchal Indo-European invasion. Following Garcia Ledger (2017), I refer to this area by the Basque name *Izpania*, meaning the land between two seas.

Spain has a very old history of human presence and DNA dating as far back so 1,200,000 years has been found in Atapuerca and Granada. There are various hypotheses about why Neanderthal humans became extinct and more precise dating has shown they were still present in Spain (Zilhão et al 2017) when homo sapiens arrived about 40,000 years ago, probably by crossing the Pyrenees. There are many tenable reasons why the Neanderthals died out and it is likely some of them also interbred with the new arrivals who had different cultural habits. It seems they coexisted with homo sapiens for some 2,600 to 5,400 years (Zilhão et al 2017). It has been suggested that the new arrivals to Spain lived in matrilineal clans, which were made of about 25-30 members and included males, but, in those days, marriage did not exist (Borneman 1975; Garcia Ledger 2017). In anthropological terms, sexuality was termed promiscuous as it was spontaneous and the father was unknown or at least not officially recognized, hence the lineage was through the mother line. As these clans were foragers and had no fixed abode, their constant moving around facilitated their meeting of other clans and therefore allowed for intercourse with male members outside of the mother clan (Garcia Ledger 2017).

### *C Matrilineal Society*

Homo sapiens of *Izpania* shared a common social-cultural system which was matrilineal, a terminology Borneman (1975) coined in 1975 to refer to a system that characterized European cultures during the Paleolithic age before the Indo-European patriarchal invasion from the East. This is consistent with Gimbutas’s (1982) version of the Kurgan hypothesis. There are two distinguishing features of matrilineal societies: one, they are matrilineal, ie the ancestral lineage is through the woman, and two, they are matrifocused or matricentered, in other words, society is organized around the mother. In matrilineal societies, there is no central authority and therefore must not be confused with matriarchal societies. Ninety percent of the early culture of our species was matrilineal and it was a period when we were still deeply connected with nature. It predates written laws and is prehistorical in the sense there is no written history. The maternal basis of matrilineal societies is what provides the genesis of human culture (Garcia Ledger 2017). and it is “*the magic of maternity through which the principle of divine love, unity and*

*peace manifests (itself) in a life full of violence.* In looking after the fruit of her body, a woman, before a man, develops her capacity to love beyond the limits of her own being. This caring (nature) is the basis of the development of culture. From it, comes all good work in life, all dedication, all care and all final mourning” [Bachofen in Garcia Ledger 2017]. It is interesting to note aspects of this caring nature is also present in other species such as the lioness, even though it does not flourish into the development of culture as we know it. So, we also have to look for other factors which permitted this leap in what makes us truly human.

Garcia Legar (2017) also suggests that, through the magic of maternity, the body of every woman was seen as a representation of Mother Earth. Through it, she births both male and female beings and as such males were never excluded or oppressed in matrilineal societies- both sexes were fruits of her loins and were loved equally. Subsequently, one can also find the roots of the notion of “universal freedom and liberty” in matrilineal cultures (Garcia Ledger 2017, 21). In general, anthropological consensus also indicates that “foraging societies demonstrate the lowest levels of structural inequity between the sexes, for reasons including significant levels of female participation in subsistence production (the capacity to both generate and distribute resources), minimal public/private separation, and the relative rareness of war” (Nicolson 2008, 43).

In matrilineal societies, no definable male gender role was tied to fertilization. Within the clans, it is possible that males also played the role of scouts and assumed a relevant role when additional force was required. Reconstructive work suggests that gender roles linked to work in prehistoric times would probably have been interdependent, overlapping, complementary, and flexible in nature (Hudecek-Cuffe 1996, 93). Early women, as Garcia Legar (2017) points out, were also very strong, tall, and well-built with well-developed arm muscles and both sexes probably undertook many roles, including that of hunting; a fact is supported by fossil remains (Wei-Haas 2020). Interestingly both genders showed none of the degenerate diseases that start developing during the Neolithic age that included the domestication of cereals.

Although it is thought that matrilineal societies existed during benign times (Chafetz 2006, 11), this is far from the reality. Between 30,000 and 10,000 BC, the ice age in Europe began to melt, and the land underneath filled with trees. This slow-melting changed the habits of the people, and although many followed the movements of the mammoth migration to the northeast, some clans in the south of France and Spain stayed where they were with the climate being somewhat milder in the shadow of the Pyrenees. Although by 12,000 BC the climate was slightly better, in the north of Spain the average temperature would have been between -5 and +5 in summer, and in the south of Spain, it was about 15 degrees lower than present-day temperatures (Garcia Legar 2017, 36). The length of life was short, being on average about 34 years, and to survive under those extreme must have been a challenge. Bringing up children was not tied to food production as these early people were hunter-gathers, hence birthing and bringing up a child was an act of generosity and sought no gain for the self. It probably

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<sup>2</sup> Garcia Ledger, private talk on-line, 29 Jan. 2021.

involved the participation of all the women and maybe the whole clan. It seems caring has been part of human nature for thousands of years. The fossil remains of “Benjamina”, a nine-year-old girl suffering from “left lambdoid synostosis” found at *Sima de Los Huesos* site in Atapuerca (Burgos, Spain) has “been dated to a minimum age of 530,000 years” (Ana Garcia et al, 2010, abstract). The impediments of this disease indicate that pre-Neanderthal humans looked after and cared for one of their tribe who showed a severe psychomotor dis-capacity and difficulty in walking from birth. This child would have needed more caring than that given by her parents indicating that the whole group was probably involved in this task. “Is there something more human than choosing to take care of someone? Comments Gracia Téllez and adds “that is why we call her Benjamina. Because Benjamina in Hebrew means the most loved” (in Sanchez Romero 2020, para. 2).

The women in paleolithic societies (and most likely societies predating this as well) probably worked out a way of tying their child to their backs so they could go about their daily tasks and move around in an uninhibited way. They lived in caves, and in the open-air probably protected by skins of animals, but, as there was no agriculture, they had to keep moving to obtain food; the clan had no fixed abode.

#### *D Patterns in Nature*

As stated earlier, celestial events are surprisingly regular. From the sky, ancient humans gained “a profound sense of cyclical time, of order and symmetry, and of the predictability of nature....The sky was a practical tool and it helped people survive (Krupp 2003, 1). For example, earthworms come to the surface during the phase of the “worm moon” and birds migrate to the warm climates in the south during the hard winter months. Through their feeling capacity birds can “orient themselves on migration paths using internal compasses guided by Earth's magnetic field” (Morrison 2014, para 2). Equally certain plant seeds begin to grow when the temperature of the earth reaches a certain level and others produce seeds when the earth begins to dry out. These cycles are regular year by year and, being tied to nature, early humans were part of this cycle and they too were probably guided through feeling. Based on the Theory of the Six Main Levels of Consciousness (Arka, 2013) and my work into different levels of perception which indicates body-based awareness predates our secondary perception system linked with the senses and the neural system, I suggest that we are first and foremost feeling beings (Lindhard, 2020a), which also gives rise to a body-based level of knowing. Also, when one taps in through the heart-mind (or heart-mind consciousness) is when many intuitive insights can arise. These insights can be in the form of thoughts, images and dreams. This ability requires that we are humble and have a deep desire to know how things work including the laws of nature. As pointed out earlier, this potential is what meditation was traditionally all about (Arka in Lindhard, 2016); it is a natural capacity. This desire to know and understand might be what distinguishes us from other animals, even though they, and all living entities, have a certain level of conscious awareness.

Although paleolithic people lived close to nature, women's menstrual cycle probably made them much more sensitive to nature's rhythms than men. Before the advent of electric lighting

of a night, it has been found that “women temporarily synchronize their menstrual cycles with the luminance and gravimetric cycles of the Moon” (Helfrich-Förster, Monecke, Spiouzas et al 2021, title). When coupled with observation and memory, some early humans realized nature expressed herself through alternating periods of light and dark cycles which was both diurnal and seasonal based on the equinoxes. This is probably what led to an early calendar system (Garcia Legar 2017). Pregnancy also tied women to the moon and the length of their pregnancy would have been counted in moon months. The connection and mirroring of their own experiences during pregnancy would also have helped them realize nature too goes through a period of darkness before it is ‘born again’ in spring. We of course do not know exactly when these insights occurred to homo sapiens, and although we normally associate these alternating cycles with the Yin and Yang (Taijitu) symbol of the Taoist tradition, it seems it was part of old Europe. Ceramic vessels decorated with reverse spiralling forms have been found on ceramic pottery dating about 5,000 BC in the Neolithic Cucuteni culture of Rumania, Ukraine, and Moldavia (Gimbutas 1982).

Scholarly opinions regarding when the *Teo Te Ching* was written ranges between the 8th and the 3rd century BC (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica), while Stenudd (n.d) suggests it was no earlier than the 6th and no later than the 4th century BC. The legend has it that Lao Tzu wrote it after leaving a high official position in the Chinese empire in dismay and disillusionment with the charade of the government. It also seems the Cosmic cyclical nature was also known to the Druids. In 1987, bronze plaques dating from the 2nd Century were found in Leon, France. Although the Druids normally only wrote about their financial transactions, Kondratiev (1999) suggests they made an exception in writing about their traditional culture and the sol/moon calendar as they knew they were about to be defeated by Rome.

We must also remember that “people look at the same bones and stones and see alternatively, conclusive evidence of hunting, conclusive evidence of scavenging, and no conclusive evidence at all” (Wenke 1999, 143). The problem in interpreting prehistoric evidence, “requires the acknowledgment of complicated, perhaps even contradictory, possible meanings. Neither ignoring nor dismissing ambiguity, the process of building theoretical conclusions from pre-modern evidence requires continuous shifting and sifting to deal with the contradictions that naturally occur” (Nicholson 2008, 87). Bearing this in mind, it seems probable that even during the Upper Paleolithic period (c.30.000” BCE), people were also consciously aware of the alternating cycles of light and dark periods of Nature that repeat themselves yearly (Garcia Legar 2017; Gimbutas 1982). The harsh conditions under which they lived make this a likely and tenable hypothesis. As such both sexes would have had this realization, however, because of woman's link to the celestial rhythms through her menstrual cycle, and through pregnancy, it is probable women were more deeply involved in refining a calendar system.

I also suggest here it is also through being pregnant that these early women were led to reflect on the mystery that is behind the visible world, but at the same time is participating in creation through its presence in their bodies. This is the consideration of

most women when they become aware of the stirring of new life in their belly. We must remember the nature of sperm was first observed through the microscope in 1677. Likewise, the ovum was first observed in 1827 and the process of conception involving the sperm entering the ovum was discovered by Martin Berry in 1843 (CBC News, 2007). Before this, speculation into the nature of pregnancy was most likely in mystical terms, and maybe we are the losers for having a scientific explanation that removes us from a mystery that is still at the heart of all creation. These early people surely knew about fertilization. Sperm in present-day indigenous cultures is referred to as *male fluid* (Berglund, 1976, p. 94) and it is the heat of the male that drives out the water than then mixes with the blood of the female (p. 96), it is possible that it also was thought of similarly in prehistoric times. In matrilineal societies, no specific male gender role was tied to the progeny who resulted through fertilization.

## II. THE ART OF PALEOLITHIC WOMEN

When one contemplates the alternating cyclical pattern of nature, one is brought to a realization of there is something invisible that joins the different poles; that behind visible nature is the Mystery or invisible Nature. We may consider this the spiritual, or non-visible dimension. Just like today, we have no way of fully portraying this spiritual dimension that is giving rise to or 'birthing' all of visible nature. However, it seems these preliterate women found a way through comparison with their own bodies; for them, the vulva or vaginal opening was the gateway to the mystery, or "origin of life" (Garcia Ledger, 2017, 48). From cave drawings, it appears the sexual dimension of the vulva was not considered so important, however, the connection between the vulva and the uterus, the cave, darkness, the womb, and giving rise to new life or birthing seems to be what is being expressed through their art. Abundant drawings of the vulva are depicted in the Chamber of Vulvas in a cave known as Tito Bustillo in Cantabria. "Although initially considered to be from the Magdalenian era, formal and stylistic similarities in their execution have now placed them in the later moments of the Upper Paleolithic" (Centro de Arte Rupestre n.d., para 3) [60, para 3]. This makes them about 30,000 years old and the cave has been proclaimed a World Heritage Site. "These representations show strong links with other sites in northern Spain (La Lluera II, Micolón, and El Castillo) and beyond in south-west France (Anglessur-Anglin, Abri du Poisson, and La Ferrasie)" (Centro de Arte Rupestre n.d., para 5) but it is in the Chamber of Vulvas where the most important and abundant depictions of the vulva in the whole of Europe are found.

While constructing the replication of the Ekain cave (Gipizkoa, Basque country), a world heritage site, new features were discovered by a Karen Mariezkurrena, a Zooarchaeologist, who was responsible for being present in the cave during the construction work. Despite being studied by world-known male experts, Mariezkurrena noticed various facets which had not been observed before. Like in other rupestrian caves, natural features of the caves were transformed by the artists to represent different phenomenon such as "like the horse's tail" in Altamira

and the mask in the cave of Castillo (Altuna and Mariezkurrena 2008). In the Ekain, Altuna and Mariezkurrena suggest that a certain natural feature of the cave might represent the abdomen of a bovine animal where its legs, legs, head, and thorax have been removed [61, abstract]. In addition to this, many black lines or strokes, red stains, red and black dots are found in various parts of the cave. But what is of interest to us here is a vertical streak in the panel of the horses which divides the drawings of the horses into two parts. In the superior part of this streak, a natural oval crease in the rock resembling a vulva has been painted over in red many times. Once again, we find this symbol which represents the entrance to the womb which is the origin of life. As the drawings of some of the horses are fat and well-rounded, it occurs to me that these animals might be pregnant. The use of relief in their pictures makes them dynamic but also it seems the artists often went out of their way to depict the specific and sexual features of the animals they drew as well as the texture of furs and manes of the different species (Altamira, n.d.).

The symbols and images expressed in the caves were probably important to the artists of that time making it a communication system. It is also interesting that symbols such as the uterus, the cave, darkness, the womb are found later in the Taoist and also Goddess traditions. In Taoism, they talk of the Womb from which all arises [Stenudd n.d. chap 6; Anderson 2017] and seeks no gain for itself.

In the caves, which in themselves are a symbol, we also find the symbol V or V with a line through it. This is probably related to the shape of a woman's pubic area as a V or a V with a line through it that probably represents the legs, and the the 'dark cave'. Based on her extensive study of Old Europe, Gimbutas (2001) suggests these hieroglyphics represent Mother Goddess and express her vulva.



Through association, the goose's capacity to produce eggs, its ability to travel by water, land and air as well as its distinctive V-shaped feet and line in the middle, it the totem or emblematic



of paleolithic women from *Izpana*<sup>3</sup> but possibly a candidate for the creative force behind the manifest world. In this case, it, through analogy, is associated with the Great Mother and/or her creative aspect. Later it became one of the symbols of the Templars and the symbol is also sometimes represented as a trident (El Camino a Santiago n.d.). When contemplating the art from the later Neolithic period, one can observe paintings or sculptures of women where one or both feet are depicted as being that of a goose. The Mesopotamian 3,500-year-old figurine nicknamed the 'Queen of the Night' is a case in point. The other symbols found in this figurine point to the association of the feminine with darkness, the lionesses with caring, and the owls, creatures of the night also with goose feet (Mark, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Garcia Ledger, unpublished private talk

Swans are grouped with the closely related geese in the subfamily Anserinae where they form the tribe Cygnini; I expand the relevance of this connection in the discussion section.

#### A 'Venus Figurines'

The sculptures, known as the 'Venus figurines', are another enigma of the Upper Paleolithic period. These little sculptures lack a face and for the most part, have very plump bodies. Dixon and Dixon (2011) suggest that these "depictions of corpulent, middle-aged females were not "Venuses" in any conventional sense. They may, instead, have symbolized the hope for survival and longevity, within well-nourished and reproductively successful communities" (abstract). Benigni (2013) considers them as being primordial archetypes of the goddess which according to Neuman (1955) contacts with the celestial order of the universe as Regeneratrix, an intermediary position between worlds establishing the lineage of the goddess of regeneration and cyclical cosmic times. McDermott (1996) suggests they were made by women and proportions are consistent when the person looks down at their own body. Vandewettering (2015) cautions on us transposing our own ideals onto the Venus figurines, (and acting) as colonizers and appropriators of the past and calls for the need of "constructing archaeological methods of interpreting representations of gender and gender relations in a way that more accurately reflects the ancient peoples who crafted these figurines" (Vandewettering 2015, abstract). Bearing this in mind, the figures might also represent the Great Mother as the force behind creation which is mirrored in the body of the human female form, a suggestion which is consistent with the hypothesis presented here regarding the drawings of the vulva as representing the Great Mother.

#### B Bones

We do not know much about rituals concerning death during the Paleolithic period except the bodies were left for carrion to eat. It seems the bones might have been buried, or at least some of them. In the Mirón Cantabria, one of the caves of Spain, archaeologists discovered the bones of a woman dating from about 20,000 years ago. Her DNA shows she was an ancient of 40 years old. She has been named the Red Lady of Mirón. Her bones were placed in a small excavation in the ground between the wall of the cave and huge stone that had fallen from the roof. They also found the remains of mushrooms, which might have been hallucinogenic, had been placed between her teeth. "Her bones had been sprinkled with red oxide on more than one occasion and drawings had been made on the stone. The burial site was also surrounded by ritual fires...and another peculiarity, unique for that moment, was that a great number of flowers which had been deposited on the grave... (Garcia Legar 2017, 39). The inscriptions on the stone include the two forms of V one on top of the other, a drawing of the goose's foot above these, and above that, a vulva (Garcia Legar, 2017, 39). In other caves in Europe, they have discovered more female bones with red oxide scattered on them. Although we might not know the reasons behind these funeral rights, it is obvious these women were considered special by their clans.

Powder of red oxide was obtained by grinding red hematite, and it was scattered on the bones during Paleolithic funeral observations and also used in the drawings of the vulvas in the cave of Tito Bustillo and the paintings of bison in Altamira.

### III. DISCUSSION

In talking about rupestrian art of Africa, Davis (1984) suggests rock art functions as "a medium of communication in three principal contexts: an extended network of ritual acts and beliefs, to out-of-the-ordinary perception and knowledge, and to adaptively significant local information" (abstract). To these aspects, I suggest that when referring to Paleolithic art in Spain, we may see them as a way through which these early women artists tried to reconcile the tension between the I experiences of the ineffable and at the same time provide a didactic expression grounded in images.

In Paleolithic times, like in present-day society, not everybody would have been interested in discovering the secrets and laws of nature. However, now and then, a person was able to go further than his/her everyday experiencing consciousness and began tapping into something greater which enabled he or her to obtain insights about their nature and the nature of nature. Wilber too acknowledges that "in each epoch, ... a very small number of individuals (penetrated) not only into the higher modes of ordinary cognition ...but also into genuinely transcendental, transpersonal, mystical realms of awareness" (Wilber 1995, 173). For him, this ability can occur at "virtually any stage or level of development" (Wilber 2000, 227). As such, extraordinary transpersonal insights have presumably been limited to an extremely small proportion of the population in each of the stages" (Nicolson, 2008, 129). Throughout the ages, many of those who did manage to obtain these insights not only shared their understanding with others, but left pointers in how they obtained these higher states, and I suggest here that we can consider some of the contents of Paleolithic cave art in this light.

Although the upper Paleolithic period extended for some 20,000 years, the culture of the people seems to have been rather stable. It is also possible that several individuals during this period were able to enter into these higher states through the same portal, hence the similarity of symbols and drawings found in the caves, even though the drawings themselves might be thousands of years apart. For me, Paleolithic women's spirituality was one of embodiment, where the undefinable was seen as living and vibrating through them. This resonates with Ferrer's (2011) participatory approach which holds that human spirituality emerges from people's co-creative participation in an undetermined mystery or generative power of life. In its creative aspect, the mystery was experienced through their womb and pregnancies, in their death, it was recognized as the destructive or dark phase in the cycle of life which is so necessary for 'rebirth' to occur, and in its expression through celestial events, it was celebrated through their rituals and their pilgrimages which took place at specific times of the year. Extrapolating backward from Celtic celebrations, there were probably 4 minor and 4 major festivals, with the 4 minor festivals falling on the equinoxes and the summer and winter solstice (Garcia Ledger, 2017).

Hay and Nye (1998/2006) found that there is a natural predisposition for children from irreligious backgrounds to see

the world relationally. Nye (1998) named the quality of the consciousness 'relational consciousness' and it refers to

an awareness of our interdependence with other beings, including God, animals, and other humans. It suggests a nuanced sensitivity to the complexity and connection of all creatures. More specifically, the phrase refers to an intuitive, experiential awareness, a felt sense, rather than a mere intellectual awareness. (Exhumator, 2009).

God, being an abstract term, might be a name used by Western children but not by preliterate people or children of other cultures. Hey and Nye's findings are contrary to the developmental theory of Piaget (1971; 1976) and Fowler (1981) who suggests children's spirituality must advance through literalist and conventional stages that necessitate identifying with one belief system. Although the methodology of Hay and Ney's study has been criticized, their findings open us to the possibility that Paleolithic societies might have similarly perceived the world. The Zulu and Xhosa word *ubuntu*, which means "humanity towards others" or "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity" (Adotevi n.d., para 2) supports the existence of this type of consciousness in indigenous people. However, I suggest that relational consciousness of Paleolithic societies, like that found in children, extended to all living creatures including Earth, which was seen as 'Mother' and also to beings no longer living. Although Nature as a concept that was worshipped has not been well documented, indigenous cultures recognized and venerated individual natural celestial and terrestrial entities such as air, fire, water, and earth. They also recognized invisible forces (Britannica, n.d.).

The analogy with the goose and the creative force and/or Universal Mother in nature is interesting. This connection might be limited to places in the northern hemisphere, such as Spain and Europe. But interestingly, there is also a link to traditions in India where the creating, maintaining and destructive to recreate aspects of the forces behind the manifest world are known as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva (BBC n.d). Although Brahma, the creating aspect is considered as a male, he is riding on a *hamisa*, which can be translated as a swan or goose, implying Brahma might have a female root. Aditi is somewhat forgotten 'goddess' in the Indian Parthenon and is referred to as the mother of many gods or forces. She is seen as boundless or innocence and is goddess of the earth and sky, the future and fertility. She is also seen as the celestial mother of every existing form and being, making her the female form of Brahma (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica). The three forces together are referred to as *Trimurti* and are representations of as the three highest manifestations of the one ultimate reality. Trimurti is represented by a trident (Jones 2005). Brahman is considered the highest Universal Principle or Ultimate reality in the universe which is behind the manifest world. Brahman is seen as eternal, conscious, irreducible, infinite, omnipresent, and the spiritual core of the universe of finiteness and change.

Different schools see the relationship of the individual soul to the Absolute Principle as being dualistic, nondual, or qualified monism, which at the same time recognizes the inherent uniqueness of each individual. The Hansa (हंस) or swan is the

symbol for Brahman (the transcendent)/Atman (individual soul or Self) in Indian iconography (Jones, 2005, page 8894).

#### IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In Paleolithic times the role of the women-mother was complex and probably multidimensional. However, I, like Garcia Ledger (2017) feel that in the ancient clans, women were not thought of a god, an idol, nor a queen, nor the mother of a god (p. 40). However, I do feel that their capacity to give birth helped them draw a parallel or analogy between themselves and the creative power behind the manifest Universe which would also have been seen as Mother. For me, the ineffable for them was not an abstract ground of being, but an entity that could create and give birth to a natural world that was dualistic or polar in nature but was also manifesting through them and all creation. This relationship to the mystery as Mother seems to be at the heart of their spirituality. For women, embodied spirituality comes naturally as demonstrated by Santa Teresa many thousands of years later, even though she related to the mystery as God.

Through the little we know about paleolithic women's funeral rites it seems they also honoured some of the women who died. Whether they saw death as part of the cycle of life linked to the regenerative aspect of the Mystery, or Nature, we cannot be sure. But the scattering of red oxide on the bones of certain women and on drawings or natural clefts that represented the vulva, seem to indicate that life and death might have been closely linked. Throughout the eons making up the Paleolithic period, the creative aspect of the Mother might have expanded to include the destructive aspect of nature representing death as a necessary part of rebirth. However, as these ancient women were also intimately aware of celestial events and how they influenced the expression of nature (they would have had to, to be able to survive under the extreme conditions they lived), it is possible they also honoured the maintaining or ordering aspect of nature or the Great Mother. In this, it seems probable Garcia Legar's (2017) hypothesis that the ancient matrilineal clans also celebrated the same celestial events as the Celts, which consisted of 4 minor festivals falling on the equinoxes and the summer and winter solstice and the 4 major festivals falling 40 days later. Researchers are not quite sure why exactly 40 days, but this figure crops up again in the Christian tradition as do the other dates but now transposed to coincide with events in the Christian calendar. But interestingly, Christians are still celebrating the same dates as those which meant so much to our long-forgotten ancestors in the Paleolithic age. It appears that in India their understanding of the Universe and the events they celebrate might also have been influenced by an early matrifocal understanding of the Universe. The similarities of symbols and/or hieroglyphics found in Mesopotamia, India and Spain including other parts of Europe, seem to point to this possibility, but this needs to be researched.

The way we approach the mystery behind our visible world has changed throughout the ages, but what is constant is that we have tried to understand the ineffable through whatever lens we are guided or feel most attracted. At times we have been purely spiritual; at other times, we have been religious, probably



transforming the Great Mother into a Goddess and then substituting her with a male God. These changes indicate there might be a relationship between our socio-cultural system and the way we perceive the Absolute, with matrifocal societies comprehending the Absolute as Mother, and later patrilineal societies seeing the Absolute as Father. However, this entity of necessity is beyond duality, including gender. What has stayed constant throughout these transformations is our concern for others, our Great Mother/Goddess/God was never impersonal. She or He has always been perceived as embodying the highest a human can aspire. Maybe it is time to rethink some of the trends modern humans are making, both in their approach to the mystery behind the visible manifest world and in our comportment on this planet. We are not robots, and neither are our fellow human beings, we are feeling and thinking beings intimately connected to the Universe and above all to each other and every other living being. Our ability to love the ineffable no matter how we conceive of 'It' and to love and care for the creative material expression of the mystery even if these beings as not our own prodigy, is probably what makes us truly human. In family constellation therapy, Hellinger (1999) talks of the need of restoring the order of love through the recognition of all our ancestors, but this is equally applicable to other systems, including human spiritual development. Here I suggest we need to recognize the spirituality of early Paleolithic women as part of finding a new way forward which includes our early roots. This may enable us to find a common core to various religions and later models of the ultimate nature of reality. We can also learn from these ancient women that spirituality is not something that is separated from life, it is a reverence for life as part of the mystery. Women and men together need to be involved in this endeavour if we really want a viable future for the next generation and all living beings on this planet.

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