

Mary the Dawn: Ancient European Symbols of Fertility and Pregnancy for Pedagogical Purposes

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I will trace Ancient European Symbols of Pregnancy and Fertility from pre-history to early Christian times. Whether ancient female images represented goddesses or not, is not under discussion here. I will explore the possibility that symbols of pregnancy and fertility take on a purpose beyond self-expression, art, or worship and suggest the plausibility of pedagogical purposes in a pre-literate world. By including symbols, I also hope to show how some the roots of our modern alphabet go back to pre-history, and speak of the sacred sciences of birth.

KEY WORDS: Pregnancy, fertility, goddess, female, symbols, pedagogy

The art historian Thomas F. Matthews (1993) notes that to some nominally literate people, "... images were their way of thinking out loud ...Indeed, the images are the thinking process itself" (p. 141).

The oldest handmade images we have are figurines, the Venus of Tan Tan (see Figure 1) and the Venus of Berekhat Ram, which are dated at about 300,000 BC¹ (Bednark, 2003). The earliest man-made temple we know of, built in 11,000 BC, is in Turkey and replete with mother goddess symbols (Curry, 2008). The temple shows that some early cultures surrounded themselves with symbols of life—life that is fertile and pregnant.

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¹The Venus of Berekhat Ram, made from "a basaltic tuff pebble containing scoria clasts" was found in the northern Golan Heights of Israel and appears to be the oldest image thus far identified. Another ancient image, the Venus of Tan-Tan, about 58 mm or 2.3 inches tall, made of Quartzite, was found in Morocco. Dating these ancient artifacts is difficult. But the best clues we have now date the images "...between 300,000 and 500,000 years. The Early Acheulian industry of Morocco and the Maghreb generally is older than 500,000 years." (Bednark, 2003).



Figure 1 – Venus of Tan Tan

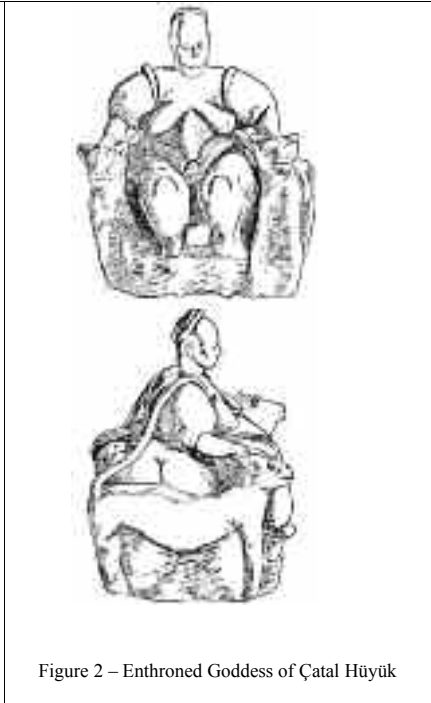


Figure 2 – Enthroned Goddess of Çatal Hüyük



Figure 3 – Etruscan Chariot facing



Figure 4 – Medieval Limburg

The Kahun Gynecology Papyrus, from around 1825 BC, is the oldest, intact written document we have. It is interesting to note the purpose of this most ancient document:

The Kahun Gynecology Papyrus] describes methods of diagnosing pregnancy and the sex of the fetus, toothache during pregnancy, diseases of women, as well as feminine drugs, pastes and vaginal applications (Arab, 2008).

At various archeological sites in Ancient Europe, we find female images covered with symbols. Considering how crucial successful childbirth was to survival, the speculation that the ancient feminine images may have been used for teaching purposes in a pre-literate world seems reasonable. Today, we speak of teachings *Set in Stone* to lend a venerable and authoritative quality to lessons. In pre-history stone, clay, bone, wood, and plant juices were the only available teaching and recording mediums. Many of the artifacts described in this paper were found in what seems to have been common areas or kitchens (Gimbutas, 1989). Not only would this indicate their prevalent, widespread, and everyday use, but their importance as well.

These were not sacred, as in set apart, holy objects. Neither were they insignificant rare objects. In considering the fundamentals of a society, passing knowledge from one generation to another is an important task in even the most primitive cultures. When these images and symbols are viewed in this light, their meaning, purpose, and prevalence become clear.

In discussing ancient female images, the names goddess or Venus are often used. The goddess enthroned, between two animals, as in Çatal Hüyük, 6,000 BC (see Figure 2), is seen in Etruscan Chariot facings (see Figure 3), and medieval churches such as in Limburg Netherlands (see Figure 4), or in Bully, France, (see Figure 5). The most popular and sophisticated version survives in Christian art as the Virgin Enthroned (see Figure 6). The theme of the divine birth/child between two beasts, also re-emerges in Christian settings thousands of years later (see Figure 7). Therefore, the very language I am using may influence readers to assume that the ancient images I refer to are of goddesses. Though I will use that term for the purpose of this paper, I leave others to debate the religious overtones the name implies.

The crude and amorphous shapes found in some ancient images may have resulted from wear over time, or may be due to primitive skill levels in pre-historic eras. The triangular figurine of possibly

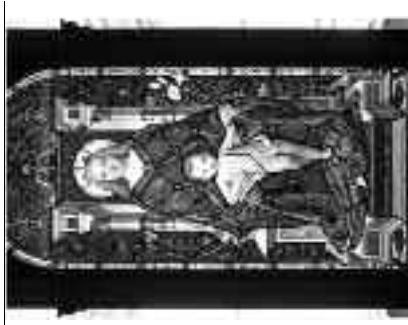


Figure 6 –Virgin Enthroned



Figure 5 – Medieval Church Bully, France



Figure 8 – 500,000 Year Old Carving



Figure 7 – Christ Between Animals



Figure 10 – Goddess from Višac, Yugoslavia c 4,500 BC

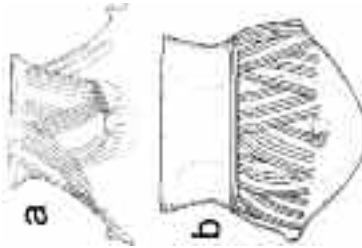


Figure 12 – Vases
a is from Vinča, Romania 5,200- 5,000 BC
b is from Lengyel, Hungary c 5,000 BC ng



Figure 9 – the Venus of Brassempouy



Figure 11 – Dishes from
a&b- Alba, Transylvania 4,500 to 4,000 BC
c&f- Cucuteni, Romania 3,800 to 3,600 BC
d- Sipontsi, Galicia 3,700 to 3,500 BC
e- Ruse, Bulgaria 4,500 to 4,300 BC

500,000 BC from Heidelberg Germany is one such example (see Figure 8). Yet, one of the oldest images we have, a 1.5 inch female head carved from a mammoth's tusk from around 30,000 to 22,000 BC, found in Brassempouy, France, is appropriately proportional and, appears to have an art nouveau quality about it (see Figure 9). Therefore, I look upon other examples of ancient art not simply as reproducing physical realities, but, in some cases, as purposely made abstract symbols as well.

One reason for claiming that certain symbols were used in teaching about birth is that they were typically found on female images or in places that are thought to have been birthing centers. Marija Gimbutas (1989) has studied more than 30,000 sculptures and artifacts from over 3,000 sites, and has found consistent themes, patterns and symbols supporting the position that the symbols written about here are related to birth, and obstetrical teachings in ancient Europe.

In medieval times, towns often grew up around sacred learning sites, such as temples, or churches (Haverfield, 1913). The size and configuration of a central structure would identify it as a special purpose building, capable of sheltering many people. The universality, similarity and consistency of the foot print of this type of town planning with the ruins of older settlements, leads one to assume that the roots of this European practice go back to antiquity. More to the point, all the great cathedrals of medieval Europe are dedicated to the Mother of God, Notre Dame. In classical times, the great cities of Ephesus and Athens sprung up from goddess temples. So not only was the central structure a sacred building, the finding of female images and goddess symbols carved into pre-historic temples show that the practice of dedicating the most important temples to a female deity was prevalent in pre-historic times as well.

To understand the pedagogical meanings these ancient symbols, I will explore some of the basic ones: lines, spirals, sets of three, anthropomorphic and anatomical shapes, other animals and follow them into the Christian Era².

Lines

The earliest cave wall markings and clay objects were marked, or chiseled, with straight lines. Curved lines came soon after. Early

² This is only a partial list of Goddess related symbols. See the bibliography for more exhaustive texts.

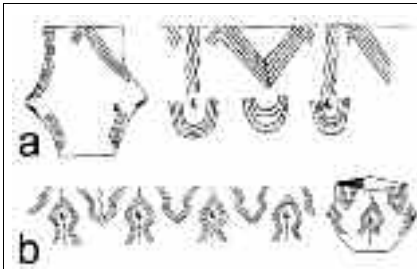


Figure 13
 a is from Tisvasvasvari-Josefháza, Hungary c 8,000 BC
 b is from Saraszadany-Templomdom, Hungary c 6,000 BC.



Figure 14 – Cucuteni, Romania 4,400-4,300 BC

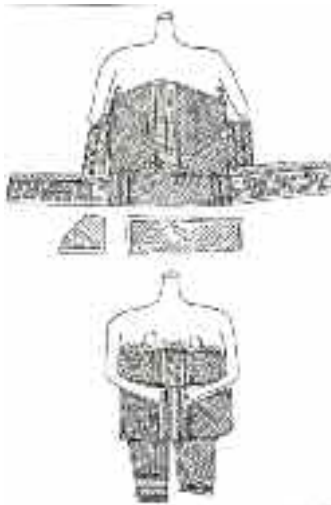


Figure 15 – Enthroned Goddess with Early Greek Keys.
 Szegvár-Tüzköves, Hungary 5,000 BC or Earlier



Figure 16 – Mammoth Ivory Figurine from Lespugue, France c 21,000 BC. (Note-damaged areas have been reconstructed.)

goddesses were marked with parallel lines, *raining* lines, and zigzags, often in sets of three (see Figures in 10). One may observe dishes (see Figure 11) and vases (see Figure 12) having three lines inside a swirl or seed implying power, especially as in the power of fertility and life generation. As a goddess, or mother, brings life by water (that is, rain, oceans, rivers, amniotic fluid, and/or breast milk), these lines may have a primary meaning³. When a man or woman is full of erotic life, he or she produces moisture. One may observe that after Mother Nature pours out rain, the womb of earth will spontaneously produce life, as in frogs. A child is born after a woman *pours out* water. Wavy lines represents breasts and flowing milk on figurines and pottery (see Figure 13). As artistic skill and technique improved, more stylized waves appeared, as in Cucuteni, Romania, around 4,400 BC (see Figure 14) or in combination with other symbols, such as elements of the Greek key pattern in Szegvár-Tüzköves Hungary at least as early as 5,000 BC, if not earlier (see Figure 15). Later, in Greece and Celtic Europe, we find strong goddess/water connections when the goddesses are depicted as connected to rivers, wells, and other forms of water.

Mother and child, during pregnancy, are one. Yet the one becomes two after delivery. One of the most basic symbols of the two that is one and one that is two in ancient female figurines is the often seen symbol of a double line, double egg, and double bulge (see Figure 16). We may see a lack of understanding about the mechanics of conception but, to be fair, Ashley Montagu notes that European scientists did not have a real grasp of the facts of life until the 1850s, (as cited in Lyons, 2004).

Three lines, especially as a triangle, are commonly interpreted as representing a pubic triangle or vulva, especially if partially bisected (see Figure 17).

Spirals

Spirals have long been associated with goddesses, as in this goddess vase from Anatolia around 6,000 to 5,500 BC (see Figure 18). They have been depicted as, or with, waves like in the vase necks from Valea Lupului, Romania 3,800-3,600 BC (see Figure 19), or on the platter from Chalandriani, Syros C 3,500 BC (see Figure 20), or as Ram horns, as in these tomb wall carving from Perfugas, Italy c 4,000 BC (see Figure 21). A spiral sets you on a journey. And what awaits at the center, no one knows. The spiral draws you in to something beyond

³ Even today, we have the expression “The Water of Life.”



Figure 17 –
Left-Marble Syros, Greece 2,800-2,500 BC
Right-Bone Lovets, Bulgaria 4,500-4,300 BC



Figure 18 – Red Painted Goddess Vases from Anatolia
6,000-5,500 BC



Figure 19 – Vase Necks from Valea Lupului, Romania
3,800-3,600 BC



Figure 20 – Platter from Chalandriani,
Syros. Note Vulva above Legs.
c 3,500 BC





Figure 21 – Tomb Wall Carving from Perfugas, Italy c
4,000 BC

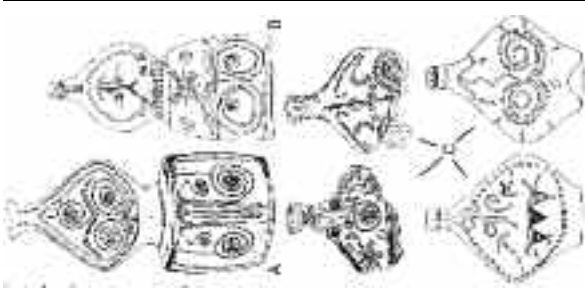



itself. Therefore, spirals decorated temples, like in Sicily 3,000 to 2,500 BC (see Figure 22), tomb-sanctuaries as in Newgrange, Ireland, 3,200 BC (see Figure 23), and cremation Jars in Slavic areas (see Figure 24). Temples in Malta during 4,000 BC contain these symbols (see Figure 25). A swirl over the pregnant belly of a goddess in Poduri, Romania, around 4,800 to 4,600 BC (see Figure 26) ties the swirl or spiral to pregnancy. A dish in Karanovo Bulgaria from 4,500 to 4,300 BC (see Figure 11c) intersperses eggs in with the spiral, showing a connection of spirals to fertility. According to Gimbutas (1989), models of bread loaves marked with spirals and lozenges, and baked in special ovens shaped like a pregnant belly and/or marked with goddess symbols, were probably examples of bread offerings to the Pregnant Goddess (see Figures in 27). Note the belly button or umbilical stump on the Hungarian oven.

Humans developed different ways to mark or record time, especially lunar and solar cycles⁴. Meanders and spirals are a symbolic way to indicate a cycle, yet not a circle (Baring & Cashford, 1993). One interpretation of a spiral is that of a circle moving through time. A spiral can represent a journey, not only of the moon, but also of the sun. Of the many ways one could organize the length of a pregnancy, trimesters are consistently the measure of choice. As the sun has four cycles in a year, solstice to equinox and so forth, the triskele, or triple spiral on tombs built in womblike shapes are thought to represent the length of time that is expected to bring a child to term, three solar cycles of three months each. This interpretation is strengthened by a megalith in an Irish tomb, adorned by triskeles (see Figure 28), which is positioned in such a way that the only day of the year the sun will shine upon it is the day the goddess gives birth to the sun, the winter solstice (Gadon, 1989). The high degree of astronomical and mathematical knowledge that is exhibited in the architecture of these edifices gives us another reason to consider the possibility that they were living classrooms, where a person could learn just by being in and observing the structure itself.

As spirals are often interconnected in such artwork on the tombs, this could also be interpreted as the soul beginning a new spiral, or lifetime after the soul finishes one. Another interpretation would be that the Triple Goddess was invoked to comfort the grieving

⁴ Anne Barring (1993), exploring Alexander Marshack's work (1972), sees the first recordings of man's abstract thought in the recognition of the full lunar cycle. We see the three phases, but the fourth must be assumed. The cross, dividing a cycle into four, and a crescent are both symbols associated with goddesses

	<p>Figure 22 – Tomb Facings Hewn from Rock, Sicily, Italy 3,000-2,500 BC</p>
	<p>Figure 23 – Newgrange, Ireland c 3,200 BC</p>

	<p>Figure 24 – Cremation jars from: A-Serbia, B-Romania, C-Yugoslavia c 3,000 BC</p>
	<p>Figure 25 – Temple Carvings from Top Two-Malta c 4,000 BC</p>
	<p>Figure 26 – Poduri, Romania c 4,800-4,600 BC</p>
	<p>Figure 27 – Left: Mártély, Hungary 5,000 BC Right: Vinča, Yugoslavia 5,000-4,500 BC</p>

(Gimbutas, 1989). In Ireland, Brigit was known to be both Fire or Sun Goddess and Triple Goddess (Gwydion, 2009).

Sets of Three

In addition to the above mentioned tombs, lines, spirals, and other symbols were often grouped in threes as early as 10,000 BC in Abri Mège, Southern France (see Figure 29), and in Thessaly Greece (see Figure 30). In physics, as well as world mythology, three is an important number. In pregnancy and birth lessons, three is an important number to teach, trimesters being the most obvious.

Anthropomorphic and Anatomical

When not constrained by the shape of the material, such as bone, branch, or antler, a female image will usually be plump by modern standards whether as in the famous Venus of Laussel of Southern France, 25,000 BC (see Figure 31), Austria- the Venus of Willendorf⁵, 25,000-23,000 BC (see Figure 32) or Thessaly, Italy 6,000-5,800 BC (see Figures in 33), or Bulgaria 5,500 BC (see Figure 34). Smaller women had, and do have more trouble delivering healthy babies. As well, malnutrition interferes with the ability to bear healthy children⁶. Additionally, this would be an important lesson to teach in a society that may look upon swelling in other circumstances as indicating some form of edema. These images not only taught acceptance of weight gain during pregnancy, they idealized the beauty of a woman in her fullness. Teaching with these images might even encourage weight gain during pregnancy, thus enabling a woman to retain her self-image of attractiveness even after the pounds pregnancy might put on.

In the birthing houses of Çatal Hüyük (see Figure 35) as well as other places, a bull's head is a common motif. When one considers the female anatomical knowledge written about in 1825 BC (Arab, 2008), and the resemblance between the anatomy of the uterus and the shape of a bull's head (see Figure 36), the appropriateness of this symbol becomes clear. In Clyclades, Greece 2,000 BC, placement of the

⁵ Originally both the Venus of Laussel and the Venus of Willendorf were covered in red ochre. In India covering an image with red ochre is traditionally part of a worship service.

⁶ Encouraging women to nurture themselves, and not be overly judgmental about achieving a sexy, anorexic look may be a teaching we could use even today.



Figure 29 – Abstract Female on Bone
Abri Mège, France c 10,000 BC



Figure 31 – Venus de Laussel 25,000 BC



Figure 28 – Newgrange, Ireland c. 3,200 BC



Figure 30 – Zarkou, Thessaly c 5,000 BC



Figure 33 – Top Sesklo, Thessaly c 5,800 BC
Bottom Magula, Thessaly c 6,000-5,800 BC



Figure 35 – Birthing House at Çatal Hüyük c 7,000 BC



Figure 32 – Venus of Willendorf (4 1/2 inches)
25,000-20,000 BC.

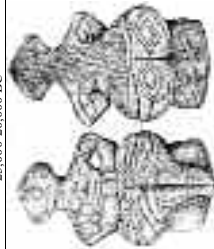


Figure 34 – Pazarjik, Bulgaria 5,500 BC

bull's head below the abdomen on this anthropomorphic vase would lead one to the same conclusion (see Figure 37). This would also explain why people in Crete, around 700-600 BC might also use such a symbol (see Figure 38).

Other Animals

Cave paintings in Southern France, from 15,000-10,000 BC (see Figure 39) depict pregnant animals. Some animals, such as bears, become associated with birth because of their reputation for ferociously defending of their young (see Figure 40), or maybe other qualities. In ancient Slavic cultures, barren women sought the bear's blessing to bear children (Moszynski, 1934). In Brauron, Greece,

...Attic girls between the ages of five and ten years...performed a propitiatory rite in which they imitated bears... the bear was sacred to Artemis... all women, before they could marry, should have taken part once in this festival, and have been consecrated to the goddess (Schmitz, 1875).

Other animals, such as the Sow, possibly became associated with pregnancy because of their great swelling when full of babies. Figurines of Pregnant Goddesses wearing sow masks indicate masks like this one was used in rituals related to the Pregnant Goddess (see Figure 41).

What started as pubic triangles evolved and diversified into, for one example, hour-glass shapes at least as early as 4,000 BC in Romania (see Figure 42) and earlier in Yugoslavia and Malta (See Figure 43). Similar shapes, such as possible butterflies, are seen in Bohemia around 5,000 BC (see Figure 44). Rebirth seems to be the enduring meaning of the butterfly symbol.

On hundreds of images from Vinča Yugoslavia around 3,000 BC, a symbol composed of facing chevrons, <>, was common (Gimbutas, 1989). At shrines in Çatal Hüyük, Bull's heads on the wall are covered with these symbols from at least 7,000 BC. Vulva stones (see Figure 45), along with the *Fish Goddess* (see Figure 46), who holds her genitalia open, were found on the same altar. We will see these themes repeated often in Christian Churches.

To early man, fish spontaneously appeared. As animal husbandry became more widely practiced and sexual reproduction understood, certain fishes' drive to spawn came to symbolize a strong drive to produce young. They also gave life to plants as well as animals. Hence fish have long been associated with the generative power of women. Fish depictions are reminiscent of uterine shapes in the Minoan Art of



Figure 37 – Cyclades, Greece, c 2,000 BC

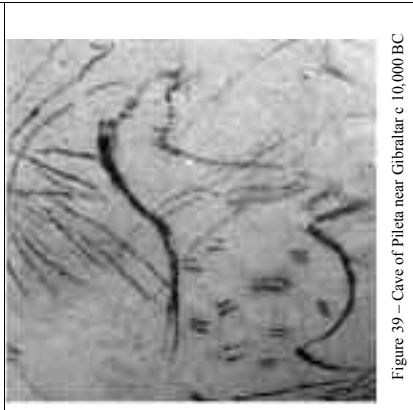


Figure 39 – Cave of Pileta near Gibraltar c 10,000 BC

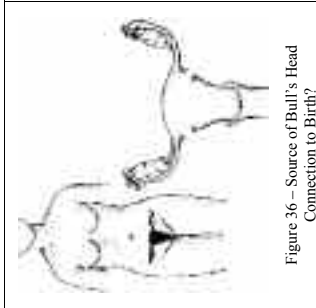


Figure 36 – Source of Bull's Head Connection to Birth?



Figure 38 – Vase painting Cyprus, Greece 700-600 BC



Figure 41 – Leskavica, Yugoslavia c 4,500 BC

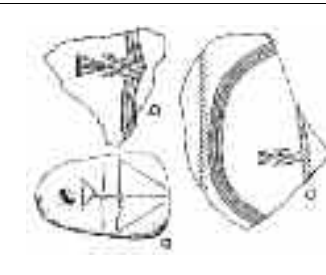


Figure 43 – A Loom Weight Gumelnita, Yugoslavia c 5,000 BC boke Maltese Funerary Pot Shards 5,500-5,000 BC



Figure 40 – Kosovska, Yugoslavia 4,500-4,000 BC



Figure 42 – Tratin dealul Fintimilor, Romania c 4,000 BC

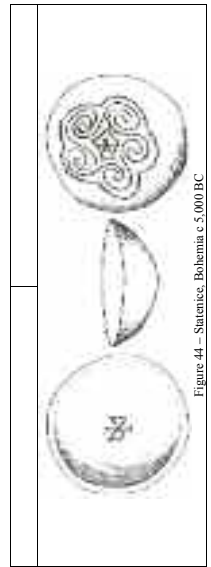


Figure 44 – Strenice, Bohemia c 5,000 BC

1,100 BC (see Figure 47), and are found later in Thebes, Greece, around 700 - 675 BC (see Figure 48). The Greek tradition of using animals in teaching can be seen in Aesop's Fables. The fish, as a teaching symbol, was directly imported into Greek Christianity and has since spread to many Christian denominations.

Architecture

Birth and death are part of the cycle of life. Though we do not know the philosophy of early man, many burial sites had vaginal shapes, such as tree hollows, or were in womb-like hills with vaginal entrances (see Figure 49). The bodies were put into a fetal position, facing the east, towards the new born sun, presumably in preparation for their next adventure (see Figure 50). Ancient floor plans in Ireland reveal the container for end of life resembling the container for the beginning of life (see Figure 51).

Whether one's philosophy sees death as a birth into another dimension or existence, or one simply needs to give birth to creative ideas, as in civil meetings, drawing upon inspiration and strength from sources of life are important. Many ancient buildings and structures configure in a pattern consistent with the shape of a pregnant woman. Not only are the shapes based on pregnant women, the most important or chief focal point is placed at the point of birth. We will find interesting descendants of this practice as we move towards Christian Europe.

Early Historical

From at least 6,000 BC, we find images of goddesses exposing their genitalia. From 500 BC into the Christian era in Priene and other parts of the Hellenic empire, realistic images, representing a goddess known as *Baubo*, are found (see Figure 52). As of 100 AD a historian, Hyginus supplies us with a story to go with these particular images⁷. Agnodice was a Grecian woman who wished to practice medicine, at that time, an exclusively male profession in Greece. Disguising herself as a man, she learned the art, but having been discovered, was forbidden by law to practice. One day, she heard a woman cry out in labor. The woman who cried out, thinking Agnodice was a man, refused assistance. Agnodice lifted her skirt, exposing her genitalia, thus

⁷ Besides the Hyginus account (Apollodorus & Hyginus, 2007, pp. 180,181), there is also another myth tradition that Baubo exposed herself to Demeter to relieve Demeter's depression. The laughter worked. Some refer to Baubo as the Goddess of mirth and laughter and the healing that laughter, light-heartedness, and letting go can bring (Baring & Cashford, 1993).



Figure 46 – Fish Goddess Found on Same Altar as Vulva Stone



Figure 48 – Thebes, Greece 700-675 BC



Figure 45 – Vulva Stone Lepenski Vir, Yugoslavia 6,000 –4,560 BC



Figure 47 – Ammenoi, Greece c. 1,100 BC



Figure 50 – Fetal Burial in Womb of Earth-Boscombe Down, England c 3,000 BC (awaiting carbon dating confirmation)



Figure 52 – Baubo from Hellenistic Areas c 0 AD



Figure 49 – Vaginal Entrances to English tombs c 3,000 BC



Figure 51 – Shanballymond, Ireland c 4,000 BC

proving her sex. The woman accepted assistance, and so Agnodice began her career as the first female obstetrician. Practicing openly as a woman, she became increasingly popular. As she took business away from the men, they hauled her into court and began prosecution. The women of the city created so much civil unrest, they influenced the lawmakers to change the law and allow free-born women to study and practice medicine. While some historians question the veracity of Hyginus' account, the power of the myth, empowering female birth professionals to stand their ground, openly protest against being marginalized, and refusing to be subjugated under men, seems to have been reason enough to popularize the image. (Encyclopedia of World Biography, 2008).

As we go from pre-history, through classical to early Christian times, a good point to keep in mind is that the Apostolic Fathers of the Christian faith planned on a diverse church. After a few fundamental beliefs, similar to Buddhist doctrine, all other areas of ritual, practice and belief were left up to local populations. Christianity did not have the monolith of doctrine that it does now. Local practices, rituals, and beliefs were left intact. In the Bible, Acts 16:14 (King James Version), we hear of people who "worshipped God" and yet were not Christian. Irish Christianity, on the other hand, was so non-conformist to Roman Religion that in the 1100s the Pope authorized the invasion of Ireland by Norman forces to make the Celtic Christians conform to the Roman version of Christianity. One will find much evidence of earlier rituals, practice, and beliefs in many forms of Christianity, East and West. This very diversity is a hallmark of early Christian religion.

Sheela-na-gigs

In the Bible, we discover that Saint Paul and his companions "... have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess [Artemis]" Acts 19:37 (New International Version). Though the early Church did not have any problems with goddess worship, art was another matter. Modern Christians do not embrace explicit sexual art in any way, and most people have the impression that the early Church was the same⁸. Therefore, the prevalence of Sheela-na-gigs, as they are known today, is interesting. These are stone carvings of females holding open and exposing their genitals (see Figure 54). They are found on homes, bridges, town walls, gateposts, and, most commonly, on churches

⁸ It is interesting to note that in Medieval Churches, in addition to homoerotic scenes (p. 84), exhibitionism, and masturbation, there is, in Maillezais, a graphic sexual scene in which a lustful couple wears halos (see Figure 53) (Weir & Jerman, 1986, p. 90).



Figure 53 – Siantonge, France- Notice the halos



Figure 54 – Sainte-Radegonde, Poitiers France



Figure 55 – Our Lady of Amiens, France



Figure 56 – Old Roman Mosaic Sousse, Tunisia
200 AD



Figure 57 – Greek Helmet 350 to 325 BC

(Freitag, 2004). The <> symbol, as seen on the earlier *Fish Goddess*, is more pronounced in the Sheela-na-gigs. Some even have the wavy lines, triangles, parallel lines etched on their faces, reminiscent of some of the aforementioned goddess images (ibid). There are indications that some Sheela-na-gigs were taken from older, so-called pagan buildings, and were kept or incorporated when the buildings were converted into early Christian churches (Clibborn, 1840/1844; Guest, 1936).

Some view these images as portraying a type of female pagan exorcist who, as a part of her banishing ritual, would display her genitals (or door through which blessings and life come) to drive away the Evil Eye (harbinger of curses and death) (Freitag, 2004). Thomas Wright in 1866, reminded us of the common dual purposes of depictions of the phallus⁹ and vulva, fertilization and protection (ibid). Both are needed for both. Rolt, stated unequivocally in 1875 that Sheela-na-gigs originated from a “pagan cultus” (as stated in Brash, 1875 p. 60).

Descendants of the Spiral

The spiral or swirl diversified into the swastika¹⁰ and is found all over the world from classical times; Europe is no exception. For instance, swastikas are found on Grecian vases from 700 BC (see Figure 48). In Greco-Roman architecture the symbol was mostly used in floors and walls as in Amiens (see Figure 55) and Rome (see Figure 56). Certain Greek key patterns are considered to be interlocking swastikas. Grecian helmets from about 350 to 325 BC invoked protection and inspiration with a swastika on top (see Figure 57). In Bosnia-Herzegovina, tombstones from the 1200s retained many Goddess symbols of power and rebirth, including spirals, crescent moons and swastikas (see Figure 58). The stole, part of the ritual garb of Christian priests, is an insignia and symbol of the power of the priesthood. Therefore, it is logical that the early church would decorate stoles with insignias of the divine feminine Holy Spirit (see Figure 59).

⁹ There are many explicit phallic examples in church architecture (Weir & Jerman, 1986).

¹⁰ The Swastika was a common symbol of power in prehistoric Indo-European cultures and has been found in Asia and Pre-Columbian America as well. Because this powerful symbol was all over the world, or *uber alles*, Hitler saw it as appropriate to his self-concept and political ideals. It is a sad note however, that this one man has now ruined this historic symbol of divine Motherhood, as many now consider it a symbol of evil. The fact that Hitler chose to relegate to himself a feminine symbol, rather than a male power symbol, might make an interesting topic for another paper.



Figure 58 – Bosnian Grave c 1200 AD



Figure 59 – Tombstone of Abbot Simon de Gillans C 1345 AD



Figure 60 – Bulgarian Coins Under King Clovis c. 466-511 AD



Fig 61 Basque and Other Cross Types



Figure 62 – Example of St Brigit's Cross



Figure 63 – Greek Key Pattern Around Building



Figure 64 – King Arthur Receives Sword and Power from the Lady of the Lake



Figure 65 – Christian Lamp from C 200 AD

In the world of more mundane items, swastikas have been found on beauty items from 300 AD in Nydam Mose, Denmark and coins from the Celts of the late 400's AD (see Figure 60). As a form of a cross, the more curved swastika can adapt as a lauburu or Basque cross (see Figure 61). Truncated, the swastika becomes an equal bar or Greek cross.

According to Catholic tradition, Saint Bridget¹¹ lived in the 300-400s AD when the lines between Druid and Christian were still blurred in Ireland. Many today look upon her as the fertility goddess Bridget of earlier origin. Irish folklore tells of her weaving a simple cross out of rushes to transmit some of her blessings and power, or Bright Fire to others (see Figure 62). Usually, this shape is thought of as a cross, yet when seen as representing fire, or energy, the *Bright Fire* cross has a spiral or swastika quality.

Wavy Lines

The signs of water became formalized into the Greek key pattern seen on Classical temples (see Figure 63) and used today. The goddess/water connection was also kept alive in myth as in Arthurian Legend. The sword Excalibur, borne by the hand of a goddess, rose from the water (see Figure 64). Pre-Roman Bath, England, was a sacred healing shrine dedicated to the veneration of the Triple Goddess called the Suleviae (Littleton, 2002). An old Celtic myth tells of the goddess Morrigan haunting the waterways of Ireland (ibid.) In one version of the myth of *Odinallfather* or Odin the All-father of the Norse, Odin gained some of his mystic power and wisdom from a sacred well (ibid.) Many Irish goddesses such as Aine, Airmid, and Danu were associated with water, rivers, and holy wells (Heath, 2009).

The famous Oracle at Delphi derives the goddess's name from *Delphos* meaning both *fish* and *womb*. The Roman goddess of love and fertility, Aphrodite Salacia, was also a fish goddess, whom her devotees honored by partaking of fish on her sacred day, Friday. In Scandinavia, the goddess Freya, whom Friday is named after, was honored by eating sacred fish. We find mermaids and fish with goddesses on sacred liturgical vessels (see Figure 65) as well as in many churches, such as in France (see Figure 66).

¹¹ As Bridget is transliterated, and an old name, there are many spellings. For example Bride, Brigit, Bridgit, and Brid are all common spellings too.



Figure 66 – A England Misericord - St Laurence, Ludlow (Shropshire) - 1430 – 1450 AD
 B France Auvergne Basilique St-Julien c 1050 AD
 C Italy Pavia S Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, c 500 AD
 D France Otranto (Puglia) Cattedrale di Santa Maria Annunciata Large floor mosaic (c1150),



Figure 67 – Church brought to Life through Mary



Figure 68 – Madonna and Child (detail), Sta Prassede, Rome



Figure 69
 Our Lady of the Sign

The Pregnant Goddess Refined

One of the first indications in the New Testament we have of Mary's position in the Christian hierarchy comes when, at the wedding of Cana, she asks Jesus to turn the water into wine. When Jesus began to object, saying it wasn't God's will, she ignored him and, "saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he [Jesus] saith unto you, do it" John 2:5 (King James Version). Jesus obeyed her request without further comment. She did not justify her request, nor did she even honor Jesus' protest with an answer. St. John is showing the reader the status of the Mother of God, that is, the will of God is second to her wishes. The goddess arrived in full power in the Christian religion.

Art historian Thomas F. Matthews (1993) was referring to Christian art when he noted, “the images were their way of thinking out loud ...Indeed, the images are the thinking process itself.” (p. 141). Christian iconographers developed a symbolic style in painting built on previous styles. As Michael Goltz (2009) says,

The earliest Christian defense of iconography was that of the icons use as a teaching tool. Through different periods in the history of the Church, people have not always been educated and literate. Thus a church full of icons served as a method to teach the Gospel to the masses. The images of the saints and feasts were preferential to the plain cross because with their colors the icons effectively communicated to the masses what was otherwise unreadable ... one of the practical reasons for the use of icons in Orthodox life are as a teaching tool ... In this role of education, the uniform style of iconography does much to assist with its teaching function.

Mary the Dawn, Christ the Perfect Day (Mulcahy & Cross, 1956), so starts the Medieval English hymn. In keeping with the religions of old, focus was not exclusively on the Mother aspect, Mary. Jesus was also worshipped¹². When early Christian art depicted the inception or empowerment of The Church on the day of Pentecost, Mary is portrayed as the great source, channel, or transformer of the power of the Most High (see Figure 67). For from her flows the “power of the Holy Spirit” spoken of in Acts, Chapter Two. According to these ancient icons, Mary is the source, not only of the incarnation of Jesus, but of the power of the Church, especially the priestly powers.

History says St. Luke was the first iconographer. According to Christian iconography, baby Jesus is depicted as a small adult, because the artists wished to express the belief that Jesus had full divinity at birth, or rather before. Following Coptic tradition, the size of the figures relative to each other shows their importance. Faces are shown meditative and reflective. How does one express the mystery of She who contained the uncontainable? How can we depict her who is *More Spacious than the Heavens*?¹³ The pregnancy symbol of choice has been

¹² There are many assorted male and phallic symbols from the same times and places I refer to in this paper. I do not mean to infer that those symbols do not exist, rather, I am focused on symbols of pregnancy and fertility.

¹³ Many of the classical compositions in early Christian art have acquired names such as *Holy Kiss, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Holy Protection, or More Spacious than the Heavens*. This provides a framework within which a traditional artist may be expressive.



Figure 70 – Remaining Door of Church on Tor Hill, Glastonbury



Figure 71 – Santiago de Compostela (Note the crowns on the females either side of Mary)

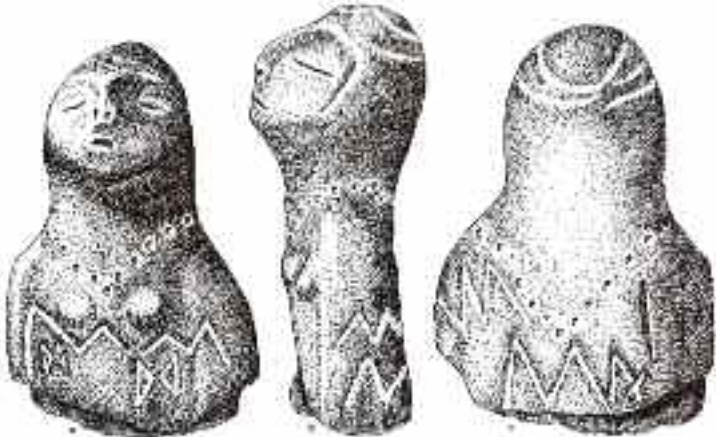


Figure 72 – Near Foggia Italy Capital M c 5,700- 5,300 BC

to depict Jesus the son/sun, pun intended, in a halo at the womb level, or, with artistic license, a little higher. As in St. Luke's gospel, his art focused on the Virgin Mary as well.

Long before any churches were built, Christians followed the tradition of earlier mother goddess cults by using tombs, that is catacombs, and burial sites for their rituals of renewal, re-birth, and resurrection. Often those catacombs reserved the central, most prized position for the Mother of God, pregnant, containing Life in her womb. Christ enthroned in the Virgin Mary, (see Figure 68). The popular composition, referred to as Our Lady of the Sign, keeps alive the honoring of pregnancy in depicting that great mystery of carrying a divine child for nine months, containing an uncontainable soul (see Figure 69).

Once Christians began building places for worship, how did they design entrances? How did one begin the journey into a temple of that ancient mother-goddess worshipping cult, Christianity? In keeping with the tradition of using sacred elements to make sacred dwellings, entrances to medieval churches were often shaped similar to the life-giving portal of birth, sometimes even imitating the labia majora and labia minora (see Figure 70). Often, the Virgin Mary stands as the matriarch, under whom you must pass, entering between her doorposts (see Figure 71). But sometimes the builders were not so cryptic.

If one went to the small 1226 AD K appli-Joch chapel in Basel Switzerland, as did Boswell in 1764, behind the picture of the Virgin Mary over the door, you will find a graphic depiction of a woman's "thighs wide open and all her nakedness fully displayed." (Pottle, 1953 as cited in Freitag, 2004, p. 24). As one might imagine, not many Sheela-na-gigs survived the Victorian Era.

Not only had the needs of empire changed the older mother goddess worshipping cults, but the needs of empire were soon to change the character of the new one as well. If citizens emulated the worshipped, and the worshipped one was a loving, nurturing mother, how could the worshippers be induced to go around the earth killing other people? If the focus of religion honored life-giving principles, can the populous be inspired to government approved death-giving? If a people worship the nurturing and life-giving of women, then could they build an empire built upon the oppression of the poor? Who would wage war against the great *them*? Emperors feared for their lives and that of their kingdoms. Great leaders of Europe destroyed crops, decimated and enslaved populations around the globe. What if someone did the same to them?

Religion is a major influence on a population. At the turn of BC to AD, in the Europe of the Roman Empire, the old religions had lost their spark. There is an old Jesuit saying, "Give me a child... until he is seven, and I will give you the man" (Alhamedi, 2009). European rulers looked upon infant Christianity in a similar fashion. Rather than try to again remake the old, so-called pagan religions, simply embrace and remake the new, up and coming religion, Christianity. The rulers saw no need for a new name. The most popular practice seemed to be simply call in the religious leaders, get yourself declared holy, as the emperor Justinian did, and begin defining, or rather redefining religion as you want. And thus the Mother Goddess worshipping cult known as Christianity was transformed into a The Great Male worshipping state religion. Despite this denaturing, many pregnancy and birth symbols survived.

Symbols to Written Word

As humankind spent more time developing the arts, depictions of goddesses inspired and awed viewers with more beauty and grace. The skill and time needed to produce fine art made it limited, for only the rich, the temples, or churches could afford the great works. Though we can go to a university to learn *about* art, books are the common pedagogical medium, not the art itself.

As symbols developed, they split into two groups. Some symbols were relegated to decorate borders or provide interesting patterns filling in empty spaces. Some symbols were codified into written language beginning circa 1,600 BC. (Drucker, 1995). Cuneiform seemed to be the marking system of choice when our ancestors created an alphabet from pictographs, though the exact nature of this evolution is unknown (Stieglitz, 1971). This root script then branched out to become Canaanite (ibid). P. Wilson (2006) feels the Phoenicians, who shared the Canaanite language base, codified their written language around 1,100 BC. F.M. Stawell (1931) sees the Hebrew script being updated with Phoenician characters around 1,500-1,000 BC. The first letter in Phoenician, aleph, was written like a sideways Capital A. Cuneiform letters could be written at any angle (ibid, p.136) and the A began to take the shape we recognize. In this paper I am not addressing who borrowed what letters from whom or who codified the letter A first. But I do think it worth noting how many scripts start, or give birth to the written word with the letter A. As a shape symbolizing two widespread legs with the sacred womb in the center of the letter, we have seen this shape earlier in architecture (see Figure 51). As

mentioned earlier, wavy lines represented water. In at least Italy and Greece, *M* was associated with water and with the goddess from before 5,000 BC (see Figure 72). In ancient Crete, and other Greek cultures, we saw ancient Birthing Centers and tombs decorated with bull's heads, and horns, and ram horns, we find their first letter's associate is the goat and bull (Stawell, 1931, pp. 10-11). While we may not with certainty assert the letter *A* was associated with birth: we may see many correlations.

There was a further evolution of language when, in western Greece, a small tribe gained in prominence. This Grecian tribe, the Latins, founded Rome. So our Rome script has Coptic, or Phoenician roots¹⁴. The beginning of the alphabet, earthly life, heavenly life, intellectual life, and life on this planet, all begin with a birth of some kind. These lessons may have been imbedded in the very shape of the letters that make up our alphabet. Today, these lessons seem all but lost. But what if there was a reason for using pregnancy shapes in the very form of the alphabet? What if they wanted to pass down a teaching that was so precious, so intimate, so needed for humankind, that the founders of our society inexorably intertwined into our very language the fundamental shapes that spoke to so many previous generations?

CONCLUSION

Generally, we do not keep old computers, old televisions, or old eight track cassettes. After all, why would we keep information systems that are centuries old? We might well ask, then why bring up the subject of pedagogical tools of primitive peoples? One reason is that pregnancy and fertility are central to the survival of life on the planet. Human beings around the world have been contributing to our store of knowledge for thousands of years. Who knows what bit of knowledge combined with some other fact might inspire some, as yet unthought of, revolution in science or improved prenatal care.

Throughout history, humans have sought not only the best education for a Mother about to deliver a child into this world, but to understand, honor, and even worship these sacred events. Birth-giving is a limit situation¹⁵. Therefore, words alone often fall short of providing the best

¹⁴ Traditionally, the Greeks are said to have imported their written symbols from the Phoenicians. The Roman modified their ancestral Greek tongue, so the Roman alphabet is Phoenician twice removed (Unknown, 2006).

¹⁵ H. Shulman (2008) defines a limit situation as one in which the ability to comprehend, understand, process and communicate are limited. Used in trauma work, limit situation emphasizes the inability to properly communicate a traumatic experience.

prenatal, perinatal, and postnatal education possible. Often, the focus of education is on providing the essential skills and knowledge to hold a job and integrate into one's culture. When I speak of education in this paper, I am referring to the handing down of information that enlightens the heart and soul to enhance the art of birth-giving. The symbols mentioned, as well as other archetypal symbols, strike a deep cord in the human psyche. Many of the symbols mentioned actually span the globe in their history. Today, ancient European symbols are being used in various pedagogical contexts throughout the world by therapists, shamans, priests, counselors, mid-wives, and others to teach prenatal classes, help reduce stress, and otherwise enhance the health and well-being of mothers, babies, with good results (Achterberg, 1985; Ansa, 2008; Oaklander, 1988). Once you have the key to that kind of understanding, you'll find mother goddess worship and teachings about pregnancy in forgotten places (see Figure 73). When one familiarizes one's self with the pedagogical symbols of the sacred event of birth, one has simultaneously ancient and new tools to aid in the revered act of teaching and assisting goddesses bringing life into the world.



Figure 73

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