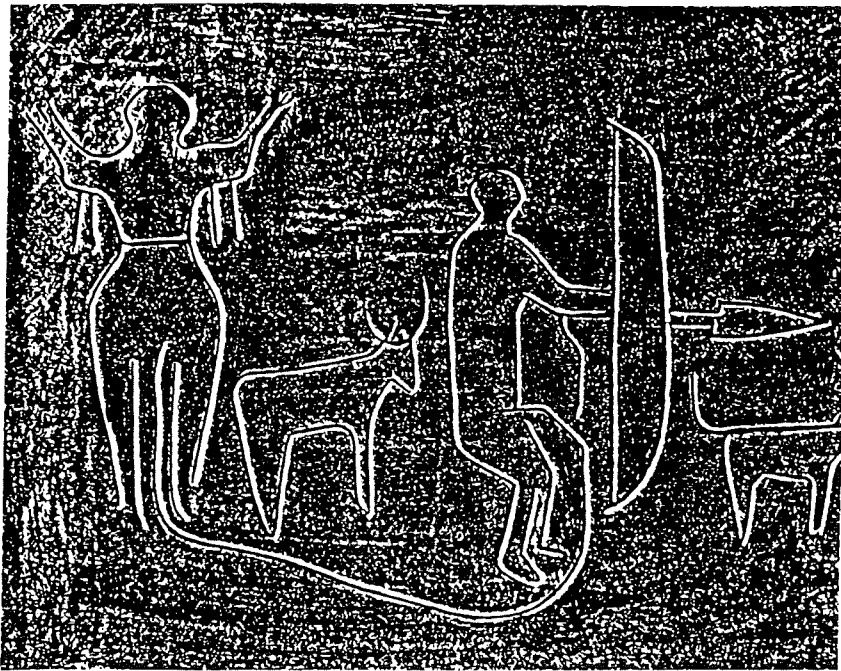


THE TRIBAL CULTURE OF OUR ANCESTORS
An Overview of Traditional Art
from the Stone Age to the Iron Age

by Lanier Graham



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NOTE: The Euro-American style of capitalization often trivializes non Euro-American realities, particularly divinities. For example, most Western textbooks spell the Christian God with a capital "G" and all other deities with a small "g". To give a more appropriate expression to the traditional meanings of tribal ideas and symbols, I have used capital letters to render pre-modern meanings.

This 30-page booklet was first published as the Introduction to RHYTHMS & REVERBERATIONS: MULTICULTURAL ART IN THE UNITED STATES & ITS DEVELOPMENT FROM THE TRIBAL WORLD, World Art Press, 1993. This was the third of my textbooks that has been used at California State University, Hayward. This book is dedicated to my students at CSUH because, with their questions, they have expanded my awareness of the relationships between traditional art and modern art.

THE OLD STONE AGE (The Paleolithic Period)

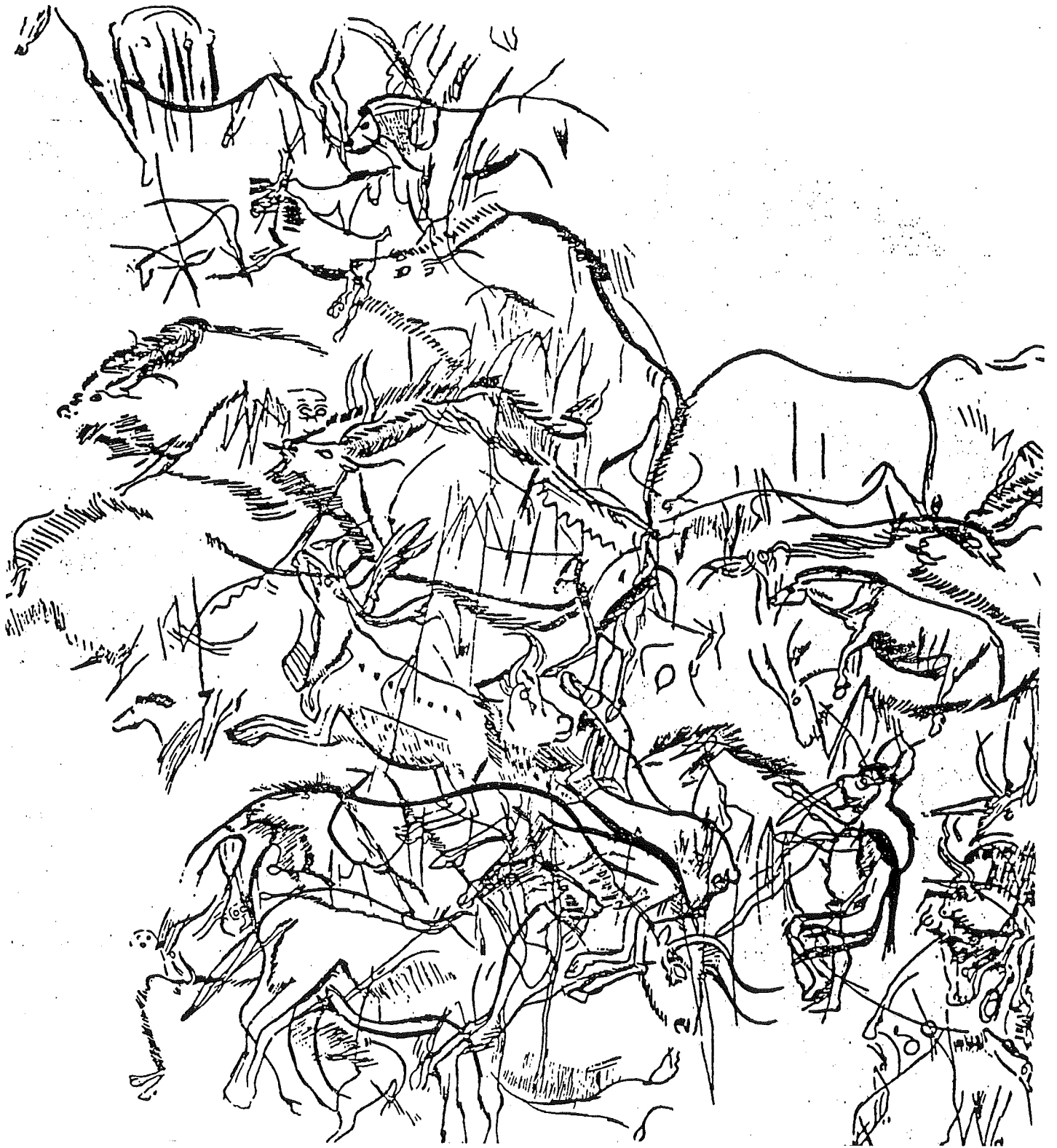
Historians of culture have divided human history into four great Ages: the Old Stone Age (the Paleolithic), the New Stone Age (the Neolithic), the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age. At the end of this introduction is a chart which outlines the basic characteristics of each Age. The purpose of this introduction is to provide a general overview of the art and culture of the traditional world which preceded the urbanized world of the Iron Age.

The ancestors of everyone alive today lived in a tribal world. The urban societies of the modern world have left tribalism far behind, but millions of people still live in a tribal way. By comparing what is known of the contemporary tribal world with the surviving evidence of our oldest known ancestors it is possible to have a reasonable picture of how people have lived since the beginning of human history.

Exactly when human history began is uncertain. Scientists and Creationists will be debating this question for a long time. In the physical sciences, there are many theories but not always a great deal of evidence. A clear and continuing body of evidence for human existence on earth begins about 100,000 years ago during the Old Stone Age.

The characteristic form of Old Stone-Age culture, or paleolithic culture, centers on hunting and gathering. People lived in small groups which usually followed from place to place the animals which were their food. Simple tools were made of stone, bone, ivory, and other natural materials. Stone tools were particularly important, hence the name Stone Age.

Before the development of a very different kind of culture in the New Stone Age about 12,000 years ago, was a period of about 50,000 years (ca.70,000 B.C. - 20,000 B.C.) which is called the Upper Paleolithic. It is toward the end of this period (ca.30,000 - 20,000 B.C.) that we find the earliest known works of art: sculpture of various kinds, and images of astonishing power painted on the walls of caves. The most famous examples are from the region of southern France and northern Spain, but parallel examples can be seen on every inhabited continent. In short, art was central to the lives of all of our most-distant ancestors.



3 A

"THE LITTLE SHAMAN". c20,000 - 15,000 BC France

Neolithic cultures today

appear to have the same general structure they had 20,000 or 30,000 years ago, for example, small tribal groups in Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, as well as the aboriginal people of Australia.

To these people all life is sacred. Spirit and matter are one. Only later, in the Iron Age, did spirit and matter come to be thought of as separate realities.

The lives of paleolithic people, then and now, revolves around the lives of animals. Not only do they depend on animals for food and clothing, but their theology regards animals and people as aspects of each other. Paleolithic people, then and now, not only see animals as Gods & Goddesses, but also think of their ancestors and guardian spirits as animals. When they are initiated into the Wisdom of the Tribe, they come to see themselves as being-at-one with their own particular animal-nature. From this awareness of their totem animal comes their personal name, their clan name, and their vision of the Holy Universe.

Paleolithic art consists primarily of images of animals, images of the Great Goddess from whom all is born, and some images of the Shamans or Shamanesses who focus the spiritual life of the community. These Wise Ones do not sit quietly meditating all day but play an active role in community life. Shamans still lead hunting parties today, as they are seen doing in the world's oldest art. The image below, called "The Little Shaman" is from the Trois Frères cave in Ariège, France. Made 15,000 or 20,000 years ago, the scene shows a Shaman who appears to be leading the clan to Divine Animals either inside or outside a sacred cave.



3 B

"THE LITTLE SHAMAN". c20,000 - 15,000 BC France

The Great Goddess

is the central figure in paleolithic religion. She is regarded as the source of all living things: all the plants, all the animals, and all the people, and all the sparkling stars.

Many tribal rituals are conducted in order that She will "be fertile and multiply".

In some tribes, She is thought to give birth to the Holy Universe with the help of a male - a male she gives birth to for the purpose of fathering the world. However, Her power is so great that in what seem to be the oldest-known Creation Myths She gives birth to all without any help from a male.

There is a growing body of evidence that such Creation Myths, were developed in societies that were matriarchal (with mothers heading families not fathers), and perhaps also matrilineal (with kinship based on female lines). The oldest-known sculptures of the Great Goddess were found at many sites in what is now Europe, from the western edge to central Russia. They are thought to date from between 15,000 and 30,000 years ago. In these statues particular attention is paid to those aspects of the female body which emphasize fertility. These figures usually appear to be pregnant, with huge breasts filled with nutritious milk. While those features are naturalistic, the head of these statues usually have no facial features. Something other than a portrait of an individual obviously was intended. A universal being is symbolized, a being who is thought of as both the beginning and the ending of all life. This theological concept is somewhat like a giant lake, out of which the waters-of-life pour at the beginning of allotted time, and back into which they flow after their time on earth is finished. Everything comes from Her and returns to Her in an endless cycle of birth and rebirth. This is a powerful vision - one that was incorporated, in one form or another, into all modern world religions.

2 Venus of Willendorf, c. 28,000-25,000 B.C. Limestone, 4 1/2" high. Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna. (Cast of original.)



The cave paintings

of France and Spain are the earliest-known paintings in the world. They are thought to have been painted between 15,000 and 20,000 years ago, probably by Shamans and/or Shamanesses or under their direction. These painted animals are rendered with remarkable vitality, and with such accuracy that each animal can be identified today.

As a rule, the painted animals on cave walls such as these are the animals that were eaten by these people. It is with reverence that these animals are hunted and killed. In the eyes of paleolithic people, these Divine Animals give their bodies to the clan willingly.

We will never know exactly what took place inside the ceremonial caves of France and Spain 20,000 years ago. However, we have a general idea, because we can compare these works of art with similar works and ritual by paleolithic artists today. All indications point to the probability that three kinds of rituals were performed in front of these sacred paintings: fertility rituals, hunting rituals, and initiation rituals.



3 Hall of Bulls (left wall), Lascaux, c. 13,000 B.C. Dordogne, France.

The sacred rituals

would have taken place deep inside these dark caves because this place is seen as being inside the body of the Great Goddess, who is pregnant with all possible life, needing only to be stimulated by the correct magical rituals of her children, the tribe, under the leadership of the Shamans and/or Shamanesses.

In the mind of paleolithic people, fertility rituals "cause" life to come forth; hunting rituals "cause" the spirit of the animal to be killed before the spears are thrown by the hunting party (sometimes by stabbing the painted animals with spears); and initiation rituals "cause" young adults to go through a profound life-and-death experience which transforms one's consciousness.

Usually at the time of puberty, the young men and women of a tribe die to the self-image they had in childhood, then take on a new name and a new kind of awareness, an awareness which connects them in a new way with all other descendents of the Great Goddess, with their tribal totem, and with the Holy Universe as a whole.



4 Photograph of a contemporary paleolithic shaman. Australia 6

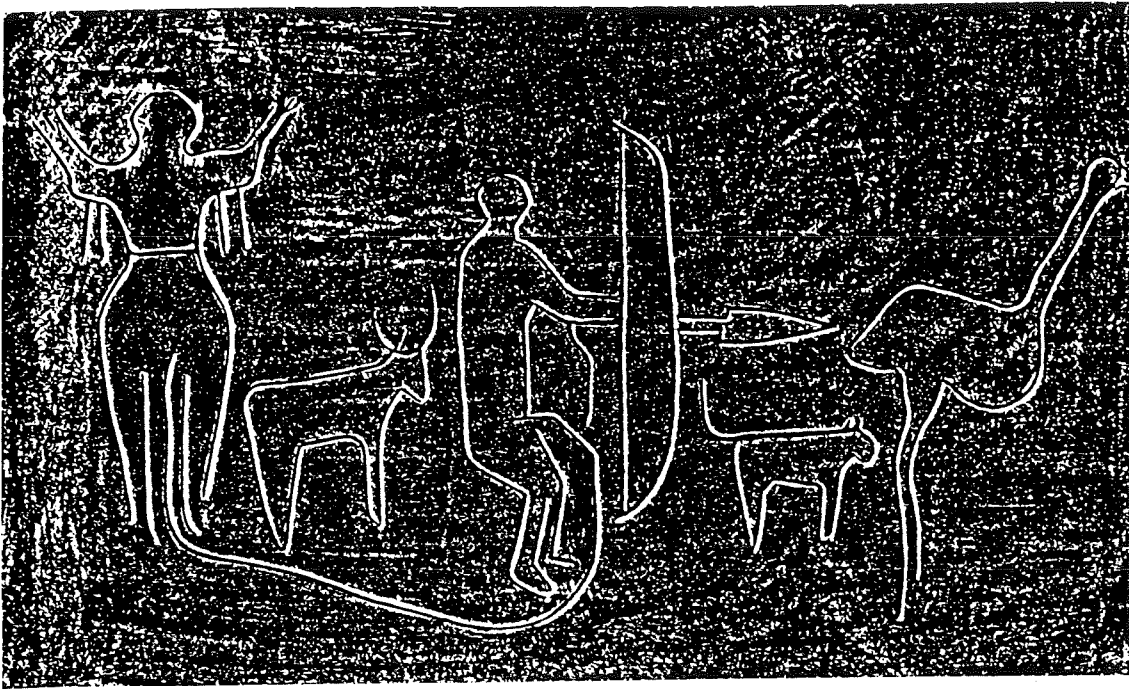
The certainty

that tribal people feel
about their position in the universe,
and the connectedness they feel with one another
is something non-tribal people find difficult to comprehend.
The perceptual gap that separates the two is difficult to bridge.
Urbanized, non-tribal people have traded
tribalism for individualism
a pervasive feeling of togetherness
for a pervasive feeling of separation and loneliness,
and spiritual certainty for spiritual anxiety.

On the top of the opposite page is a dramatic expression
of tribal connectedness. It was carved centuries ago in what is
now the Sahara desert of Africa, when this region was not a
desert but a lush land full of water and animals.
The scene is of a man and a woman hunting together.
The functions they perform are different. He is aiming the bow
and she is doing the praying, but both are engaged in the hunting.
Notice the cord that connects these two co-hunters.
The artist seems to be symbolizing the inseparability
of the male function and the female function, not only in
the magical act of hunting the Divine Animal, but in the
entire life of those who are at-one with nature.

Totemic tribalism continued to be the life-style of all our
ancestors, even after the paleolithic period came to a close
in many regions. Tribalism continued to be characteristic
of life in the New Stone Age, and life in the Bronze Age.
It was not until the formation of classic Iron-Age culture,
in Greece during the 6th century and 5th century B.C.,
that human beings in a newly urbanized and individualized world
started to think of themselves
as separate from nature, and separate from each other.
That may well have been the worst mistake in human history.
This line-of-thinking has led to a planet in danger of dying.





6

MALE-FEMALE HUNTING RITUAL. Tassili culture. Sahara, Africa.
c7th BC?

7

Theodore de Bry's engraving shows that the American Indians were still using prehistoric hunting techniques at the beginning of the 17th century. Dressed in animal skins, they killed their prey with bows and arrows when the deer came down to the water's edge to drink. Openings were left in the mask so that the hunter could watch the animal and aim at it properly. Ethnologists tell us that ritual dances took place before and after great hunting expeditions.



8



8 Indian farm methods, Florida
 Indians, engraving by DeBry
 from painting by J. LeMoyne.
 Courtesy of the American
 Museum of Natural History.

THE NEW STONE AGE (The Neolithic Period)

The characteristic form of New Stone Age culture centers on agriculture and animal husbandry which gradually replaced hunting and gathering in many places. In other places, then and now, many Stone-Age societies have both economies. Historically, wandering tribes who preferred agriculture started to settle in small groups, and then in villages and then towns.

Agriculture was able to feed many more people than hunting. The rice, maize, and wheat our neolithic ancestors developed continues to feed the world. They also developed weaving, pottery, and stone tools that are not simply chipped but polished, often highly polished. Sometimes there are objects made of copper, but no bronze or iron.

The Creation Myths of the New Stone Age more often than not, tell the tale of how The Great Goddess and the Great God together formulate the Holy Universe, not once but regularly, in non-linear cycles. Sometimes the Divine Couple is the Brother Sun & Sister Moon. Sometimes it is a pair of animals. More often than not it is Mother Earth & Father Sky, or Father Sky & Mother Earth depending on which psycho-social value-system comes first in the collective mind of that particular culture. On earth, the Most High Male and the Most High Female are personified by the Divine Rulers of the tribe.

As populations grew, different forms of social order were required for a more complex society. The leadership of an Old Stone Age clan usually is a head man, or head woman, who is one of a small group of equals or near-equals. As a rule, none of these people can read or write, as we define those terms today, nor do they have any need for such activities.

In New Stone Age cultures there usually is a Chief, and a Council of Elders. In more complex societies, the Wise Ones become a new class within the society, a kind of aristocracy of wisdom and priestly knowledge which acts in concert with the Divine Ruler (or Divine Rulers) and those who are warriors, and those who are farmers. In more urbanized tribes, these literate people become theocrats who are responsible for the administration of the society, and for the correct calculations and interpretations of the motions of the sun, and the moon, and the stars.

The New Stone Age started about 10,000 BC.

This neolithic culture, the world's second planetary culture, continues to be the culture of about 100 million tribal people. In almost all Stone-Age theologies, whether paleolithic or neolithic, there are both Gods and Goddesses, as well as many ancestors alive in the spirit world.

Sometimes male divinities are more important, and sometimes female divinities are more important, but it is very rare for there to be only one gender in the theology. The rule is bi-singularity. In Meso-American tribes, the serpent and the bird are not two. Together they are the Feathered Serpent. In Chinese tribes, Yin & Yang are not two. In East Indian tribes, Shiva & Shakti are not two. To the semi-tribal, pre-Socratic philosophy of the Greeks, there is only "single nature's double name".

Among Stone-Age people, there also is a Shaman or Shamanesses in almost every clan or tribe. They can remove the mystery of duality. Usually they function as a combination of priestly magician and healer. Shamans can be tricksters, appearing in frightful shapes. All the time, no matter what they look like, they are acting as keepers of the Sacred Way, embodiments of Wisdom. They are central to traditional religious practice around the world. Stone-Age religion can be defined as pan-planetary Shamanism.

From many points of view, this primordial spiritual tradition - variously described as Tribalism, Animism, or Shamanism - can best be understood as the first of the world religions. This religion is alive and strong, with much wisdom to share.

Stone-Age religion is larger than any aspect of it. Tribal religion does not exist apart from the rest of tribal life, as it does in most urban societies where people are no longer bonded with the Earth and the rhythms of Mother Nature.

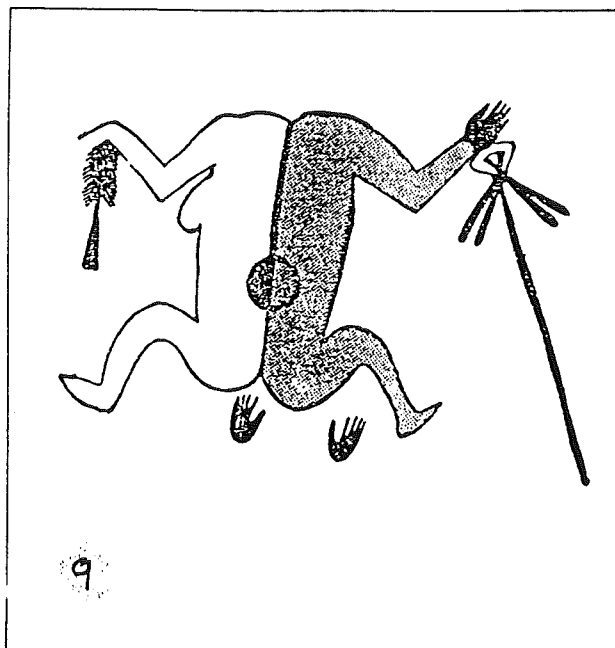
For most city-dwellers of the Greco-Roman world & the modern world, matter is one thing, and spirit (if it exists) is another. The sacred simultaneity of spirit and matter envelops and permeates every moment of traditional tribal life. In an urban world, secular materialism becomes the philosophy of many.

Within the sacred community of the tribe, which regards itself as connected with the universe as a whole, the male-female principle of family structure, and the male-female principle of universal structure, are considered sacred truth. Divinities of both genders continue in the semi-shamanic cultures of the Bronze-Age type, when they first developed about 5000 years ago and in Bronze-Age societies of today.

The theological balance of male & female

continued to be typical of agricultural cultures as the Bronze Age was ending and the Iron Age was beginning about 3000 years ago. As Iron-Age cultures took on their characteristic forms, during the First Millennium B.C., a radically new form of theology was established by the urbanizing Semetic people of West Asia and Arabia from whom come the Iron-Age religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These three religions present a picture of the Holy Universe which is very different from the picture of the Stone Age & the Bronze Age. These three religions say there is only one God. He is male, and male only; and He created the Holy Universe only once. With the institutionalization of these principles, a linear concept of time replaced the traditional concept of time as a reality that pulsates in and out of existence in an unbroken continuum of natural cycles. The traditional male-female balance also disappeared from religion and society. Iron-Age societies for the next 2000 years were based on these male-oriented assumptions. Females had only a secondary existence in the theology and in daily life. In many of these societies, women have been regarded as little more than property. As a rule, only males were qualified to serve the Divine directly. The traditional social position of the revered priestess disappears.

In traditional art, one of the most widely used symbols of the cosmic truth of male/female balance is the Androgyne whose physical and spiritual body is bi-sexual. The example on this page is from the Hopi in southwestern United States. Other examples are found in the art of Stone Age and the Bronze Age. This universal symbol is often misunderstood as symbolizing bisexuality or homosexuality. The symbolic reference is not to sexuality. Actually what is being symbolized is the psycho-cosmic harmony the two "sides" of the universe - the Yin & Yang of Taoism, the Shiva & Shakti of Hinduism, the Circle & Square of Buddhism, the Serpent & the Bird of the Meso-American world - in short, the two "sides" of universal consciousness to which one's individual consciousness can be attuned.



The role of the Shaman

continues to be central to neolithic culture as it had been to paleolithic culture. Shamans and Shamanesses know how to bring the spirit of people into harmony with the spirit of the Heavenly Bodies - the Gods & Goddesses who live in the spirit world. They know that time is not linear but pulsates in cycles. They can harmonize the psychological pulsations of the tribe,

Often there is a shift in the shamanic sociology of neolithic tribes. Before, the shaman's role was crucial to a hunting society. He and/or she performed the essential hunting magic both in the painted caves and in the hunt itself. As societies of hunters become societies of farmers and herders the shamanic role frequently changes direction. Both men and women Shamans continue to have the Power, but they sometimes live lives on the side of their society's daily activity rather than in the middle. They are no longer at the center of every working day. Many of them also can change shapes at will, and are often known to be tricksters. Shaman and Shamanesses can be loved or feared, but they are always revered. It is known to all members of a tribe that these people of the Power hold the knowledge of physical and spiritual regeneration, hold the knowledge of how to heal the body and the soul, and are willing to travel to the ends of the Holy Universe to accomplish the mission. Shamans and Shamanesses often play an active role in central tribal decisions, and continue to initiate the young people into the Wisdom of the Tribe.

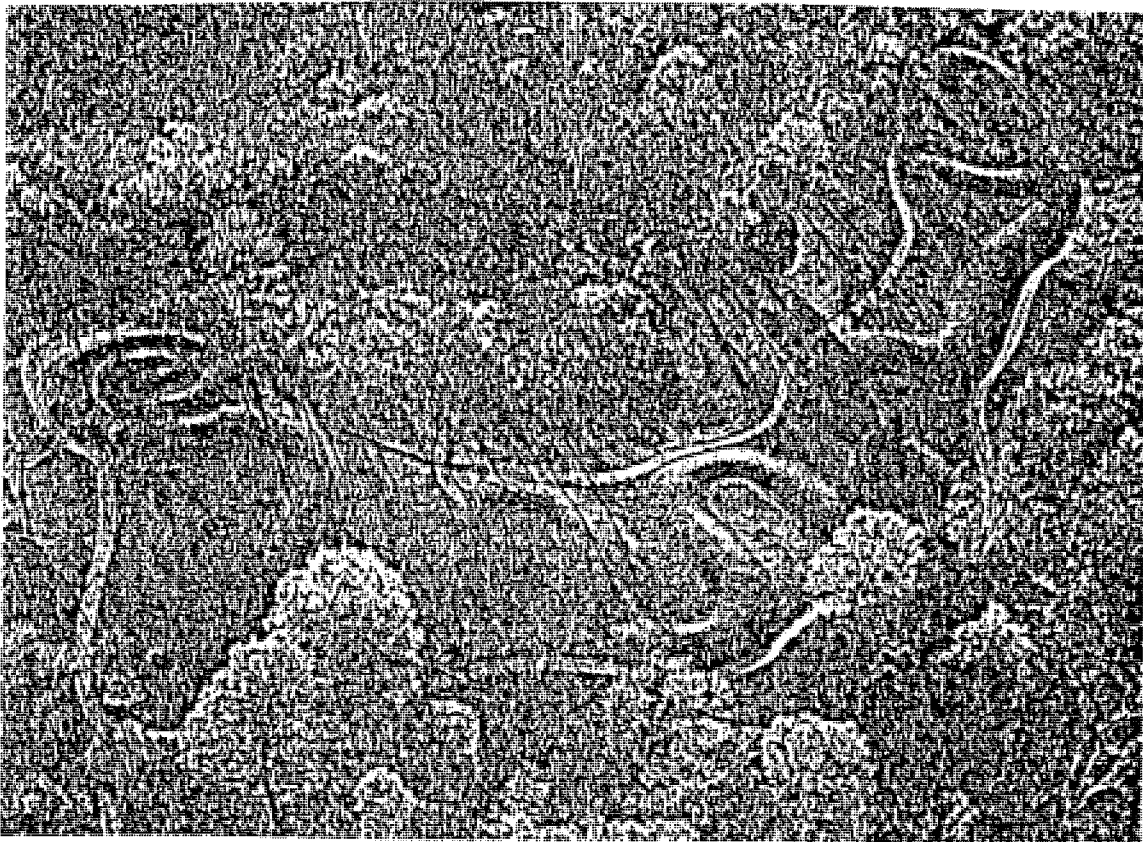


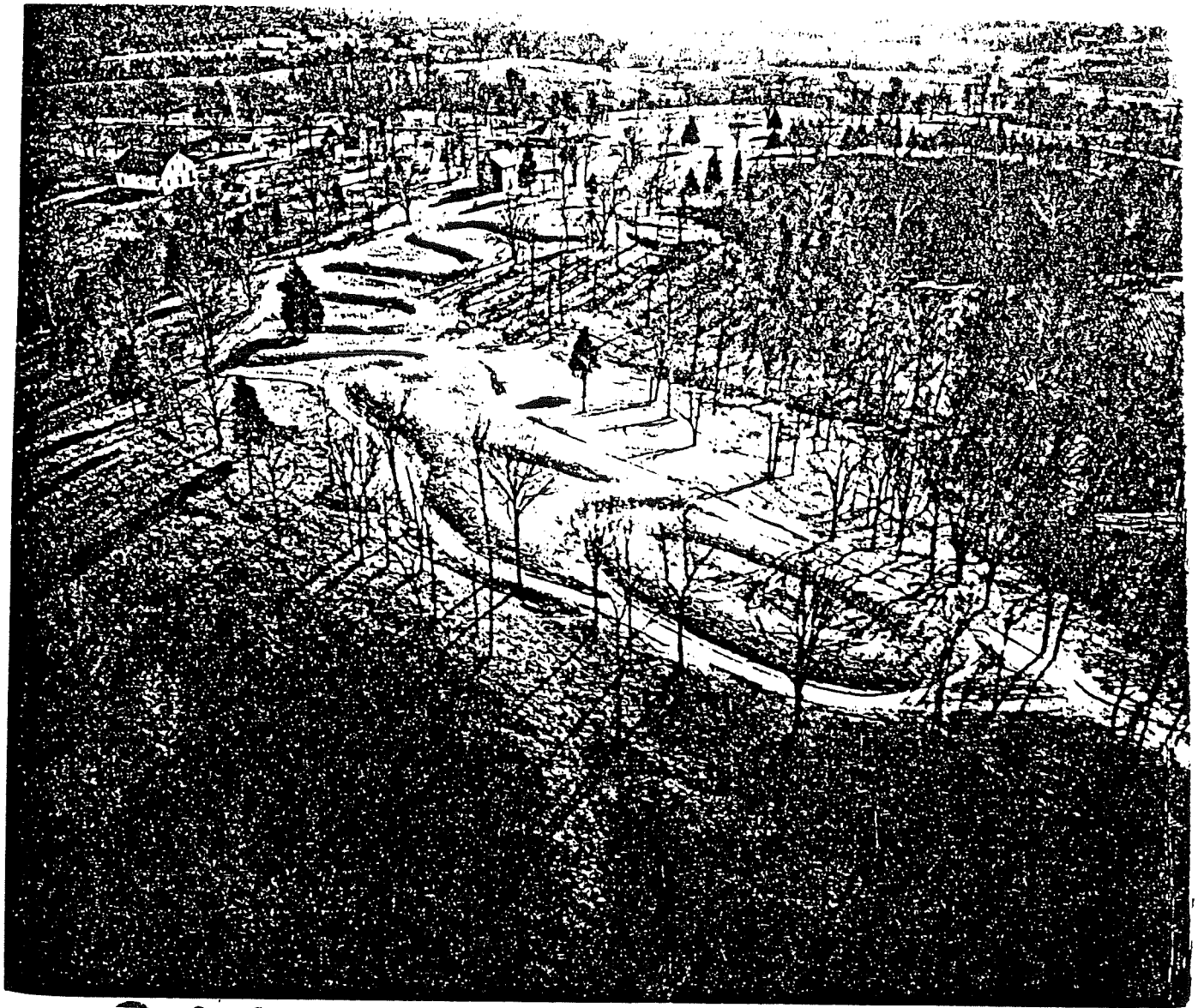
 Painted wooden raven-head mask, opened to show the face of the sun-god. From Bilchoola, on the north-western coast.

The rhythms of nature

are the primal rhythms of the Stone-Age world.
There were (and are) many rituals to maintain
the individual and collective feeling of attunement
with the the most important rhythms of the natural world:
the rhythm of the rivers, and the stars;
the rhythm of children and animals being born;
the rhythm of the crops growing and dying
back into the Earth Mother who gave birth to them;
the rhythm of dancing and singing of the sacred songs
of psycho-cosmic harmony;
the yearly rhythm of The Sacred Marriage
when the High Priest and the High Priestess
(functioning as embodiments of Earth Mother & Sky Father)
make love in order that New Year will be born.

The ceremonial centers where important rituals
were performed can be modest or gigantic
depending on the size or the populations.
Mound-building tribes in what is now the eastern United States
created huge earth sculptures such as a profoundly beautiful
serpent that is a quarter of a mile long (below & next two pages).
Further south, in what is now Alabama and Mississippi,
thousands of ceremonial centers were designed as relationships
between the circle & the square. Moreover, these tribes built gigantic
earthen pyramids (next page). The cubic volume of the largest
known structure, at Etowah, is as large as the Great Pyramid of Egypt.



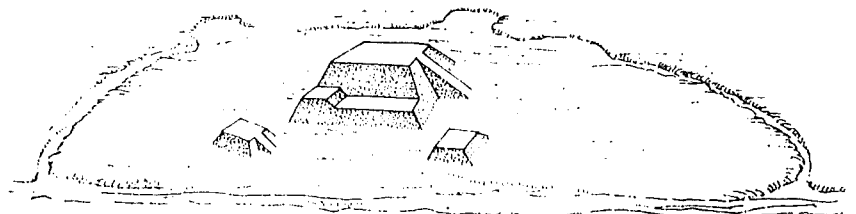
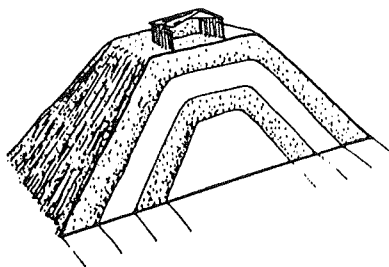


12

Great Serpent effigy mound, southern Ohio

Smithsonian Institution

About a thousand years ago the Indians in the midwestern United States built their extraordinary "effigy mounds," huge figures of animals or birds made of raised earth.



13

Left Cross-section of an idealized pyramid mound showing the constructional stages and temple summit. Right Reconstruction of mounds at Etowah

Contemporary neolithic societies

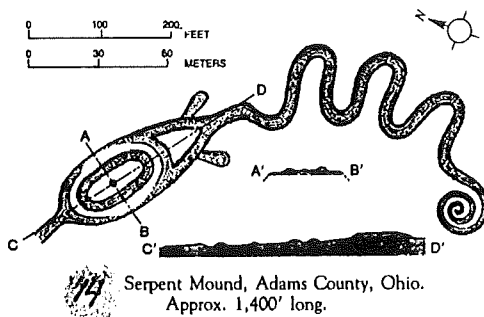
continue to occupy a large portion of the earth. Those who live this way include a majority of the people who live in Africa, and Oceania, as well as many tribal people in Asia and the Americas.

Most of the beautiful objects created by tribal artists are in the form of sculpture or decorative art. Usually neolithic sculpture, which always is sacred sculpture, can be placed into one of three categories: mask, ritual figure, and fetish.

Fetishes are private art, private packages of Power. However, most neolithic sculpture is public sculpture. It takes on its true meaning during the public rituals in which it is used. One cannot really begin to understand the meaning of a tribal mask unless one sees it being used in the ritual dance for which it was made, when the Powers descend to occupy the Faces-of-Power and to animate the bodies of the dancers.

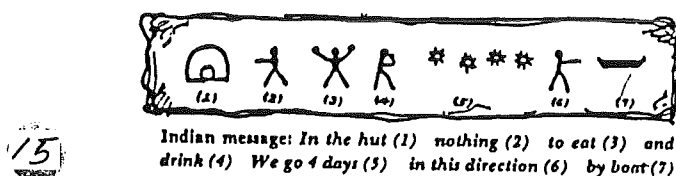
Among the most important rituals are those of initiation, and those of fertility and rain. Fertility for plants, animals, and people is the continuing central theme of neolithic art and myth. Rain makes it all possible. Often the deities of the raining Sky and the moistening Earth are worshipped at the same time in the same place. Their Sacred Marriage is what makes certain the fertility of all that is alive.

In the theologies of neolithic cultures Earth Goddess and Sky God typically are regarded as the Mother and Father of all Creation. They must come together regularly to produce the Holy Universe, and all that is in it, on a regular basis. It was (and still is) the function of the priest-astronomers to see that this event takes place regularly, by advising the Divine Ruler when to perform the magical act that unites Heaven and Earth.



Sign-language

which uses fingers, developed as a means of inter-tribal communication, as previously isolated tribal groups interact and sometimes develop regional confederations. A more complex mode of writing developed in the New Stone Age. Stone tablets and engraved skins replace the painted walls and carved bones of the paleolithic world as the society's "books". In the sign-language which is written, the inscribed words are pictured in a mode of writing known as pictographic. For example, a picture of an animal represents that animal. In early pictographic writing, as it developed in the New Stone Age, the visual units are called pictographs or pictograms. They stand for the things they look like.



In more developed pictographic writing styles, such as that created in late neolithic & early Bronze-Age China, two pictographs can be combined to form other words. For example, the Chinese circular pictograph for "sun" is combined with the crescent pictograph for "moon" to form the image for "light". Later picture-writing, as it developed in Bronze-Age societies all over the world, is called ideographic. The visual units are called ideographs or ideograms. These are pictures that represent ideas. A well-known example is the ideograph of the crying eye. It stands for the idea of "sorrow" in the ideographic language of the Chinese, the Maya, and the Aztec, as well as in a number of California tribes. The best-known example of ideographic picture-writing is the hieroglyphic writing ("sacred carving") the Egyptians developed at the beginning of the Bronze Age about 5000 years ago. It was not until the early centuries of the Iron Age, about 2700 or 3000 years ago, that writing became alphabetic, and entirely non-pictorial. Non-pictorial writing has been typical of Iron-Age societies ever since in the urbanized West. The societies of the Far East continue to use the pictorializing mode of writing, developed by their Bronze-Age ancestors, as do the Arabians and the Persians who learned the art of writing from their Bronze-Age ancestors in Egypt and Mesopotamia where writing was practiced by the priestly theocrats 5000 years ago.



STONEHENGE

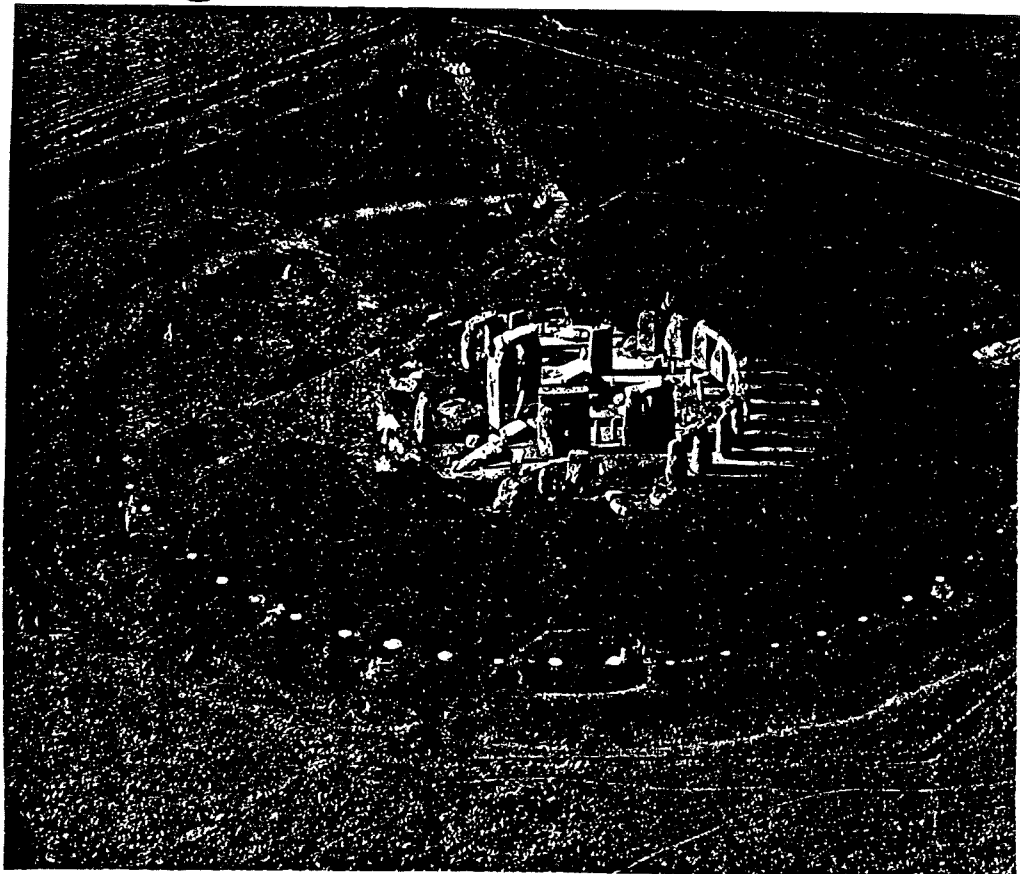
The most famous ceremonial center created during the New Stone Age is Stonehenge in what is now southwest England. It was started about 5000 years ago (ca.3000 B.C.) as one of many stone circles in western Europe that were aligned with astronomical phenomena. Various parts were built at different times, with the final form being completed about 1500 B.C., as that neolithic culture was moving into the Bronze Age.

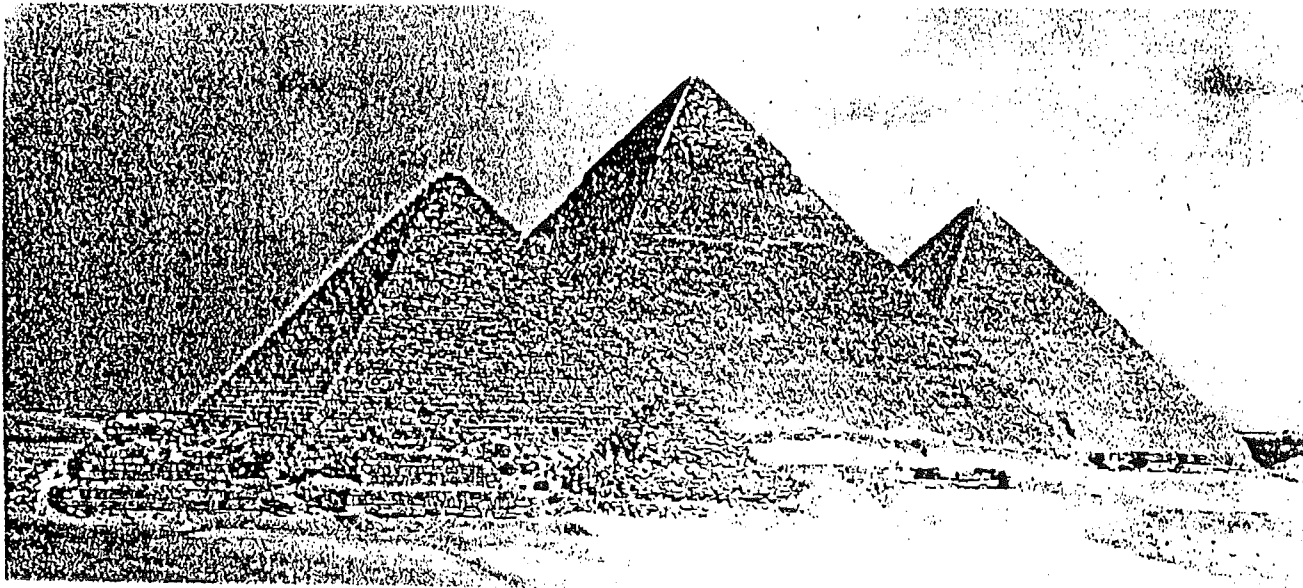
The highly sophisticated architects of Stonehenge, and similar stone circles in neolithic Europe, constructed these monumental works of spiritual sculpture centuries before the Egyptians built their pyramids.

One of the primary purposes of this ceremonial center was to be the place of the annual Sacred Marriage. On the morning of the Summer Solstice, the sun would rise over the "heelstone" at the center of the great axis of Stonehenge, and project its first ray of light into the center of the magic circle of the Earth Goddess. Thus would the Sacred Marriage of the Sky Father & the Earth Mother be consummated so that the Holy Universe would be born to live another year. Ceremonial centers with a similar purpose can be found throughout the world in Stone-Age cultures and Bronze-Age cultures, from the cave of the brilliant Anasazi of the American Southwest to the greatest temples of ancient Egypt.



Stonehenge, c. 2000 B.C. 97' in diameter. Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire, England.





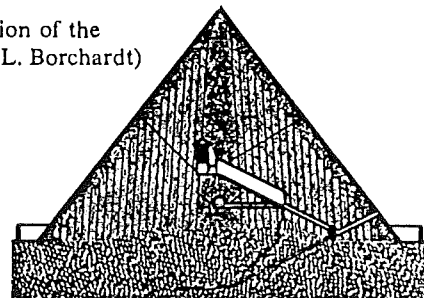
Pyramids of one type or another are common in cultures of the Bronze Age. They were constructed in Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas. The history of the best-known type begins in Mesopotamia where they were constructed by people of the Indo-Sumerian culture, the earliest known civilization, during the so-called "protoliterate period" of about 3500 B.C. to 3000 B.C. These stepped pyramids, called ziggurats, were built of mud bricks as symbolic mountains on top of which were temples. These symbolic mountains were described by the Sumerians as the "Bond between Heaven and Earth".

The Egyptians took over this sacred architecture at the beginning of their Bronze Age civilization, which unified upper and lower Egypt, and made it their own. The first example is the tomb of King Zoser which was designed by the vizier Imhotep about 2750 B.C. The climax of this architectural development was the group of pyramids built shortly thereafter at Giza (right). All three pyramids were built of stone, and originally had a gleaming white outer casing of dressed stone. Nearby the Great Sphinx was carved with the head of a man and the body of a lion.

The bronze-age cultures of Mesopotamia and Egypt were important in the development of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Mesopotamia was the home of both Abraham and Ezekiel. Moses was raised in Egypt as the son of the Pharaoh's daughter. It is in the art of Egyptian and Indo-Sumerian cultures that the first dated examples appear of the double-serpent which has played such an important role in the esoteric traditions of the east and the west.

18 The Pyramids of Mycerinus (c. 2500 B.C.), Chefred (c. 2530 B.C.), and Cheops (c. 2570 B.C.), Giza

19 North-South Section of the Pyramid of Cheops (after L. Borchardt)



20 The Great Sphinx. c. 2530 B.C. Height 65', Giza



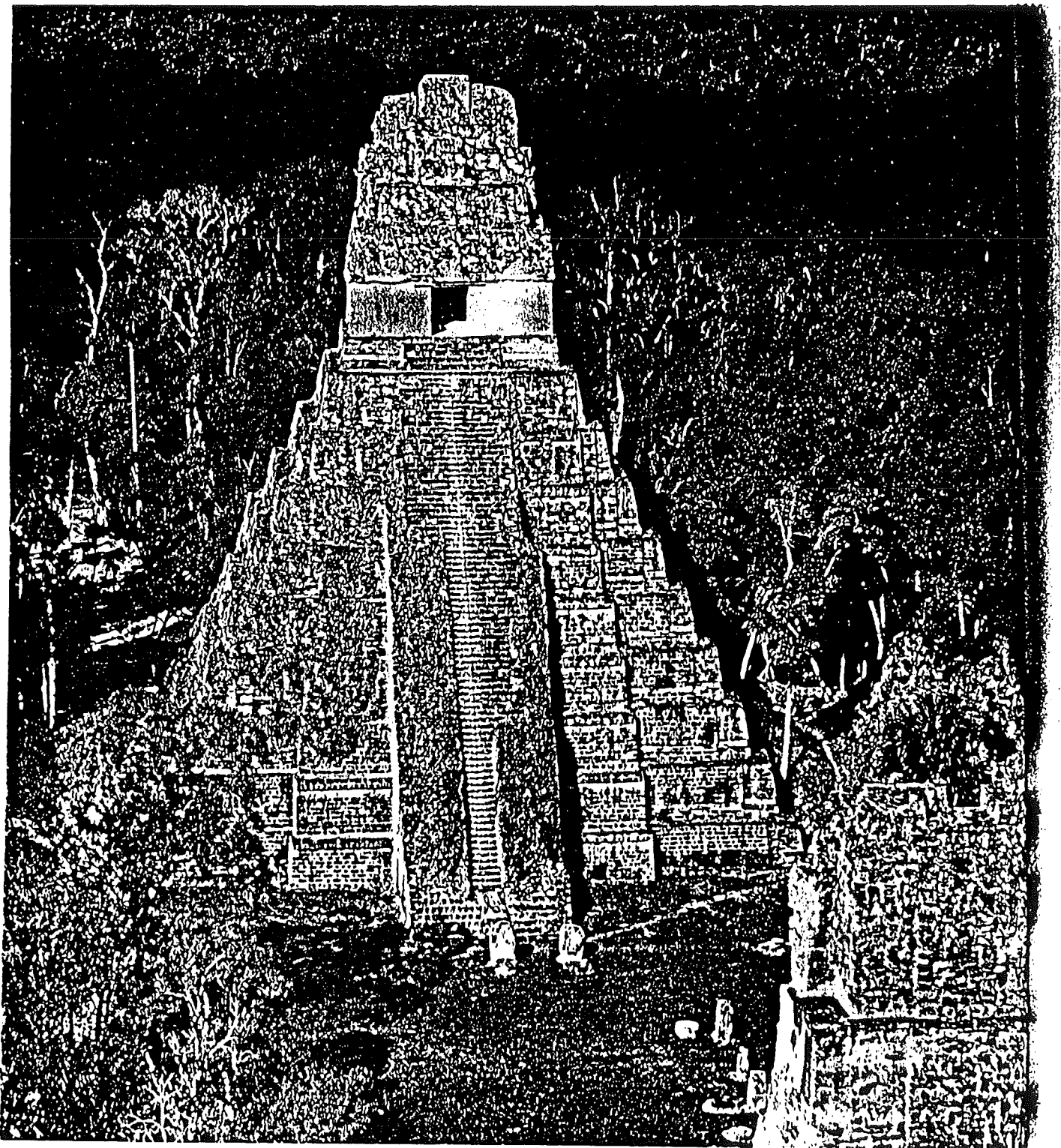
THE BRONZE AGE

Bronze-Age cultures developed as cities came into being. The classic definition of civilization is a culture that has monumental sculpture, monumental architecture, the capacity to write, and a society of at least 10,000 people. Such a society usually is administered by a semi-shamanic theocracy (a bureaucracy of priestly scribes) under the direction of a King-Priest and/or a Queen Priestess who are regarded as divine beings, human embodiments of the Great God and Great Goddess.

As a rule, the Creation Myths of Bronze-Age cultures tell of Great God and Great Goddess together being responsible for the creation of the Holy Universe not once but regularly. The Divinities are served by Priests and Priestesses who are often dressed in the skins of their Totem animals, and often portrayed in painting and sculpture and mythology as part-animal, part-human. The art created by these priestly men and women can be very naturalistic, or very abstract depending on their purpose. Nevertheless the fundamental link between animal nature and human nature remains central to the art and mythology of all our ancestors until this totemic bond was broken at the start of the Iron Age.

Bronze-Age civilizations developed in every inhabited continent, during various periods, between about 5000 and 2000 years ago. They developed in fertile areas where agriculture was so successful that it enabled very large populations to grow. Cultures of the Bronze-Age type still exist in some regions, such as Africa, Tibet, and other parts of Asia where God-Kings are responsible for the spiritual and political well-being of their nation-states. The concept of monarchy, established at this time, with a Divine King and/or Divine Queen of special blood lines, continued to be the primary form of statehood around the world for thousands of years, and still dominates the structure of modern European monarchies.

The best-known civilizations of the Bronze-Age type include the first urbanized cultures of Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Indus Valley, China, and Meso-America. All of them built pyramids as a bridge between Heaven & Earth. It is the civilizations of East Asia and Meso-America that have had a major influence on the development of the new multicultural traditions in the United States in the 20th century.



Temple No. 1, called Temple of the Great Jaguar, the eastern end of the Great Plaza at Tikal, Guatemala. Height to top of the roof comb: Mayan Late Classic Period, c. A.D. 700.

As one of five such towers marking the ceremonial center of what formerly was a Mayan urban area of some 222 square miles, it has been observed that in the course of the hour of sunset during the equinoc-

tial seasons (late March and late September) a broad shadow cast from Temple No. 2, at the western end of the Plaza, climbs slowly the tall stairway of sacrifice to enter the chapel door.

The clan or the tribe

is the most sacred social unit
of Stone-Age people.

This allegiance expanded with the development
of urbanization and the advent of the city-state.
The city-state itself became sacred in the Bronze Age.

Eventually, in the cities of the Early Iron Age
people came to identify with their neighborhoods
rather than their clans, and gradually
associated with the rhythms of urban life
rather than the natural rhythms of the
traditional tribal world.

Civilized thinking, dis-associated from
the daily realities of growing, and herding, and hunting,
lost its psychological bonding with the Earth.
Finally, the secular world of the urban individual
replaced the sacred world of the tribe.

In Bronze-Age cultures the greatest art-form is architecture.
Remarkable monumental constructions, such as the pyramids of Egypt,
declare and celebrate the sacred collective of the nation-state,
the Holy Nation which is seen as a reflection
of the Holy Universe.

Pyramids of one type or another are common in Bronze-Age cultures.
They were built in Egypt, Asia, and the Americas.
The best-known forms began with the step pyramids of Mesopotamia.

That form was taken over by the early Egyptians
who then developed their characteristic pyramid shape
at the start of the Egyptian Bronze Age about 5000 years ago.

The societies that created the greatest number of pyramids
were the societies of Meso-America.
These astonishing structures can still be found
in the rainforests that connect southern Mexico
with the top of South America, and as far north as Mexico City.

People no longer worship in the
empty pyramids of Mesopotamia, Egypt, or China.
However, the pyramids of Meso-America, and the
language of the people who built them, are still
sacred to millions of people who descend from those
astonishing Native-Americans who brought civilization
to the American continent thousands of years ago.

THE IRON AGE

The first Iron-Age cultures started to develop about 1200 B.C. when metal-working people achieved such a high level of technology they were able to make iron tools and weapons. This probably took place for the first time in the region of modern Turkey which was dominated by the Hittites.

The technology spread to other Indo-European tribes in that region. Iron tools, being stronger than bronze, increased productivity in agriculture and hence in population sizes. Iron weapons also put into the hands of uncivilized people the power to destroy Bronze-Age civilizations.

That is exactly what many of these horse-riding Aryans did, as they smashed and occupied large portions of the civilized world from Greece and Egypt to India. These Indo-Europeans (or Aryans) were so effective in their conquest of non-Indo-European people that their descendents continue to dominate the regions they occupied 3000 years ago, from India and Iran to Europe. At a later date, Iron-Age tribes also terminated the Bronze-Age social order in other regions. About 2000 years ago, East Asia entered the Iron Age, while retaining a great deal of Bronze-Age culture.

The Aryans of Western Asia were totally uncivilized. They were a hard-riding, hard-drinking group of tribes whose sociology was an aggressive warrior aristocracy. They worshiped the Sky-God and had little interest in Goddesses.

The pattern of the social hierarchy they established in Europe, Persia, and India, was so firmly institutionalized that it remained the established pattern of those societies for thousands of years. Its structure is still in place in much of Europe and Central Asia.

The Aryans settled down with the civilized people they had conquered, and developed a new form of civilization, a form which became characteristic of Iron-Age culture, the world's fourth planetary culture.

What constitutes the time-span of the Iron-Age has been defined in different ways over the last two centuries. Many archeologists still use the narrow definition established in the 19th century which states that the Iron-Age cultures of Europe and West Asia started to take shape about 1200 B.C. and continued for about a thousand years.

Historians of art and culture have a much wider perspective. Looking back over the shape of human history as a whole, most cultural historians state the Iron Age is not yet over. This larger definition is a useful way to perceive world history. It enables all of human history to be seen within the framework of the general structure of four world-wide metacultures.

This wide-spread definition of Iron-Age chronology can be found articulated in any number of standard references such as the New Columbia Encyclopedia of 1975 which states that the Iron Age "begins with the general use of iron and continues into modern times. ... The casting of iron did not become technically possible until the Industrial Revolution." In other words, most of us are living in the Late Iron Age.

The Early Iron Age usually is given a start-date of about 1200 B.C. (the established date for the Battle of Troy) and continues through the rise of Greece to the Fall of Rome. In these early centuries, the following new ideals were established: capitalism, democracy, optical realism in the arts, scientific speculation in philosophy, books for the general public, a linear, analytical, alphabetic way of writing in place of traditional pictorial writing, a preference for urban life over rural life, the replacement of tribalism with individualism, and the very strong domination of the male principle in the basic structure of theology and society.

The three religions of Eastern Asia that emerged directly from a Bronze-Age culture - Taoism, Hinduism, and later Buddhism - continued to respect the Great Goddess in the Iron Age. She and other Goddesses remain alive in the theology of Iron-Age cultures which continue a Bronze-Age theology.

However, the three religions that began in Western Asia during the early centuries of the Iron Age - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - are monotheistic, and state that God is male, and male only.

At the point most of western civilization had been destroyed, that is to say about 500 A.D., historians usually date the end of the Ancient Era of the Iron Age and the beginning of the Medieval Era of the Iron Age (that is to say the end of the Early Iron Age and the beginning of the Middle Iron Age).

Medieval Europe returned to a non-urban agricultural life-style for about a thousand years. Urban life slowly returned. By about 1500 A.D., approximately 500 years ago, most of the leading artists, writers, and capitalists were living urban life-styles.

Medieval feudalism was fading rapidly,
and the Modern Era of Euro-American history began
under the inspiration of the urban values of Greece and Rome.
The year 1500, as a general approximation,
marks the start of the Modern Era
(that is to say the beginning of the Late Iron Age).

Iron-Age value-patterns have endured for about 2500 years.
This is true for art, philosophy, economics, and politics.
This also is true for the metal
that means the most to us in our daily working lives.
Iron and steel (an alloy of iron and carbon)
remains the primary structural element of
most of our weapons, multi-storied buildings, ships, planes,
cars, and mainframe computers.

One of the most interesting things about the Iron Age is how rapidly
it developed as an alternative to traditional tribal life.
While people were working iron by 1000 B.C., typical Iron-Age cultures
did not form until the 6th & 5th centuries B.C.
The pathway from tribalism toward urbanized individualism
was encouraged by many developments, including the rise of commerce,
shipping, coinage, and urbanism. By the 6th century B.C.
one might say that the world was ready for a new Age.

During the 6th century B.C. an extraordinary number
of great spiritual teachers were alive: Lao Tzu in China;
Buddha in India; Zoroaster in Persia; Ezekial in Hebrew
Mesopotamia; and Pythagoras in Greece and southern Italy.
Each of them turned their teachings away from tribal assumptions
toward the perspective of the individual.

Until that time, most of the story-tellers
and most teachers of the sacred path to Wisdom
operated from a tribe-oriented perspective.
Tribal and semi-tribal poems, like those of Homer,
were learned by all members of ancient Greek society
as an oral tradition that told the stories of the glorious
history of the Bronze-Age ancestors of the Greeks.
Esoteric teachings also were passed down as part of
an oral tradition. Socrates was the last of the great philosophers
in Athens who did not write. Plato began to write philosophy books.

In the religion and sociology of most Iron-Age cultures
the male principle is dominant.
The primary occupations are farming, commerce, and war.
Individualism eventually replaces tribalism in urban environments.
Secular feelings become as important as sacred feelings,
as egoism leads individuals in many strange directions
while seaching for a return to the kind of wholeness
which is a natural part of the traditional tribal world.

APPENDIX:

OUTLINE SUMMARIES OF HISTORICAL OVERVIEWS

The culture of each Great Age is world-wide, and has a characteristic pattern of economy, sociology, language, metaphysics, and aesthetics. It is useful to keep in mind all these elements when forming an image of the global metaculture of each of the four Great Ages.

THE GREAT AGES	ECONOMICS How do they live?	ART SYMBOLS Typical subjects?	METAPHYSICS Who creates the universe?	SOCIOLOGY Who serves Divine directly?
OLD STONE AGE c40,000-10,000 BC+	Hunting & gathering. Tribal	Divine beings: Goddess & totem animals	Goddess does it alone e.g. Gaia	Shamans, male & female
NEW STONE AGE c10,000 BC +	Farming & herding. Tribal	Divine beings: human & totemic	Goddess & God do it together regularly	Shamans, plus priests & priestesses
BRONZE AGE c3500-c1000 BC	Farming & cities. Semi-tribal	Divine beings: w. & w/o totemic aspects	God & Goddess do it together regularly in Taoism, Hinduism & Buddhism	Semi-shamanic priests & priestesses
IRON AGE c1000 BC to present	Early cities leveled. Greece & Rome grow & develop	Divine beings in forms that are all human. Totemic ideas pass with tribalism.	God does it alone & only once in the new religions of the Iron Age: Judaism, Christianity, & Islam.	Priests only. In religion & society the value of femaleness radically reduced following the Indo-European conquests.
Medieval c500 to c1500 AD	Cities leveled. Farming	People relate to the Divine collectively again. Artists render space & time as luminous & infinite using gold backgrounds & multi-point perspective.		
Modern c1500 AD to the present	Cities dominate economy again. Individualism replaces tribalism	People relate to the Divine individually again. Artists render space & time as particular using single-point perspective. Institutionalized Individualism: capitalism, protestantism, nationalism & democracy. Secular art develops during the Renaissance & eventually dominates art in 19th & 20th centuries, when most forget all art was sacred for 90% of human history.		

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