

The Upper Paleolithic “Double Goddess”: “Venus” Figurines as Sacred Female Transformation Processes in the Light of a Decipherment of European Upper Paleolithic Language

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After completing my doctoral dissertation on the myth and ritual of Britomartis of Crete and a companion study on Aristaïos, I was amazed and delighted to find reference—and a soul connection—to these same deities in the concluding chapter of Marija’s *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe* (1974), which I read in 1978. This led to a correspondence and exchange of writings, visits to Topanga, delivery of papers at the 1987 Valcamonica Symposium and the creation of a Prehistoric Religions program at the American Academy of Religion’s annual meetings of 1987 and 1988, at which Marija and I made presentations. I also participated in the Dublin conference of 1989, “The Transformation of European and Anatolian Culture, 4500-2500 BC.” I recall reading and discussing with Marija an early draft of *The Language of the Goddess* (1989) and especially remember those times at Topanga with Marija’s family and friends, which were so filled with warmth, joy and beauty.

I am indebted to Marija Gimbutas for her revolutionary decoding of the iconography of Neolithic Europe, for her inspiration and encouragement of my pursuit of the decipherment of the protolanguage and archaeomythology of Paleolithic Europe,

for her generous hospitality and love, and for guiding to me Patricia Reis, my partner, whose loving presence and wisdom have blessed my life. Patricia’s request that I write an article in honor of Marija led me to explore the Paleolithic psyche. Marija has given me all of this, and so much more.

Introduction

Over the past decade I have been working to decode the geometric signs and animal and anthropomorphic figures found in the cave art and portable art of Upper Paleolithic Europe (Harrod 1987a, 1987b, 1994). In this effort, Marija Gimbutas has been a continuous source of encouragement and inspiration.

I have arrived at a theory of decipherment of the protolanguage of Upper Paleolithic Europe, or “UP(E)” for short, which builds on the precise microscopic analyses of Upper Paleolithic engraved art carried out by Alexander Marshack, on Gimbutas’ semiotic research on the art of Neolithic Old Europe (1974, 1989, 1991), and on structural semantics, a linguistic theory developed by Algirdas Greimas (1966). A review of the research by Mary LeCron Fos-

ter (1978) on primordial language has been useful in refining the semantic nuances of UP(E).

In the brief space of this article, I will summarize the results of my decipherment of the geometric signs, with special focus on a set of female figures which I designate as the "Double Goddess." Since some of these figures are marked with distinctive geometric signs, the decipherment of UP(E) makes possible a translation of these signs and thereby a decoding of the story represented by these female figures. My decipherment of UP(E) suggests that there are six principle spiritual (or "goddess") transformation processes depicted in Upper Paleolithic art. The Double Goddess is one of these.

A Brief Summary of UP(E)

Leroi-Gourhan (1967, chart XXXIV) was the first to notice that Upper Paleolithic geometric signs are frequently paired, and he identified dozens of instances of paired signs. While Leroi-Gourhan believed that these pairings signified a dualistic cosmology structured by the simple semantic opposition male/female, I began with the hypothesis that such instances of paired signs were evidence of syntactic combinations in a complex linguistic system structured by multiple differential features. I worked out my new decipherment by re-examining examples of paired signs identified by Leroi-Gourhan, instances of paired signs in Marshack's microscopic analyses, and other illustrations of Upper Paleolithic paired signs.

My position is that the poetic, spiritual translations of UP(E) in this essay are essentially similar to those that would have been in the minds of the Upper Paleolithic users of these ideograms. I say "essentially similar" to indicate that my proposed semantics is generated from and by the structural semantic oppositions inherent in the identified subset of Upper Paleolithic geometric signs and that this generative semantic capacity would have been tapped into by the Paleolithic user of these signs. Although we remain ignorant of the full culture-bound amplification of these signs, I believe that my decipherments represent the essential core structural semantics of UP(E). To this essential core I have added certain nuances which I derive from the association of these geometric signs with particular "sign-like" visual imagery.

Interpretations of Upper Paleolithic art are frequently challenged on the grounds that any given corpus of rock art has suffered weathering and other geological damage and is therefore incomplete; that it often has multiple superimposed images which make it difficult to read; and that because precise datings are unavailable, it cannot be determined which images belong to the same structural whole. Therefore, I concentrated my research on the images engraved on portable art. Portable art is more likely to be unaffected by weathering and to have coherence of dating; and it usually is without superimposition of images.

What does UP(E) look like and how did I decipher it? In brief, there are four basic clusters of geometric signs, with each clus-

ter containing related shapes: (a) circle, oval, teardrop, uterus-vulva-seed shape and triangle; (b) dart, spear, arrow, stroke, bi-line (two strokes), X and claviform; (c) branch, plant, tree, feather or “penniform,” tectiform, vulvar or rectangular signs broken through by lines, open ellipses and birthing images; and (d) chevron, zigzag, running angles, tri-line (three lines), ray (comet), meander, spiral and arc. The four shape clusters constitute a complementarity system, a structural logic square, as defined by Greimas (1966).

A basic principle for deciphering UP(E) is that the shape of a sign is an indicator of its meaning. In other words, UP(E) signs represent meanings iconically. A second principle is that UP(E) signs represent processes, rather than things. To clarify the semantics of these four fundamental sign clusters, I drew on the interpretations of Marshack and Gimbutas, where these appeared to fit the structural semantics implicit in the morphology of the signs themselves.

For instance, Marshack (1972, 1977, 1979) demonstrated that the meander, chevron, running angles, zigzag, tri-line and ray (comet) are associated with, and symbolize, various “waterine” processes. Meanders evoke the meandering flow of streams and rivers; running angles and zigzags suggest ocean waves, lightning and rain. Gimbutas (1974, 1981a, 1981b, 1984, 1989, 1991) demonstrated that this semantics survives into the Neolithic of Europe. She discovered that the chevron and tri-line signs are associated with aqueous imagery, such as cosmic waters, rain, rain clouds;

nourishing rain, water, and milk; they are also associated with water birds, snake and fish deities, waters of creativity, and the movement and energy of the life-force. Thus, the UP(E) cluster of signs can be translated, in short, as “Flow!”

Marshack (1972) interprets stroke, dart, X and bi-line signs as “ritual, ceremony or sacrifice,” and secondarily as “wounding, killing”. Gimbutas (1989:161, 167-173) decodes the Neolithic bi-lines as “progressive duplication, doubling, pregnancy, twinning, abundance, and the power of two.” To capture the paradoxical nature of this sign cluster, I propose to translate it, in short, as “Cleave, contact, feel irrupting spirit energies!”

Gimbutas (1981b:9, 12) captures the essential meaning of the third cluster of signs. She identifies a set of Neolithic “uterus-vulva-seed” ideograms with Upper Paleolithic antecedents, which she posits as signifying potency, the womb-seed, origin and source of life. Magdalenian disks from Isturitz and Mas d’Azil with central perforations, concentric circles and inward and outward directed rays suggest a semantic of centering, centeredness and inwardness and radiant source. Combining the two semantics results in the translation of vulva, triangle, seed, uterus, circle, hole, ellipse and phallus as, in short, “center inward!”

Marshack (1972:Figs. 109a, 109b) microscopically analyzed a Lorthet antler engraving, which, I propose, is a key for deciphering the meaning of the branch-sign, as well as the tri-line. It combines a pair of animals—newly hatched chicks and a snake—with a pair of geometric signs,

branch and tri-line, which thus appears to be a single analogical structure. The newly hatched chicks and the snake are imaginal equivalents of the branch and tri-line signs, and in this way constitute their translation from geometric sign to the image signified. If so, the branch sign connotes birth, hatching or emergence of the chicks, while the tri-line connotes the undulating, fluid movement of the snake. This suggests that branch-signs in general may signify "Be born, hatch, emerge into new life!"

In sum, I have discovered four fundamental geometric sign clusters which respectively may signify "center inward," "contact irrupting spirit energies," "sprout, grow and branch," and "flow." These are the four basic words of UP(E). The particularities of each sign within a cluster add nuances of meaning to these basic semantics. The four sign clusters and their respective decipherments are thus:

- (a) Circle, oval, teardrop, uterus-vulva-seed shape, triangle:

Center inward, centering yourself in your womb-phallus, seed matrix, your luteal/seminal generative potency, and access your originating, nourishing and sustaining source of energy!

- (b) Dart, spear, arrow, single stroke, bi-line (two strokes), X, Y and claviform:

Contact, sacrifice to, irrupting sacred energies, your animal and spirit body, gestating, bifurcating, doubling, redoubling, the creative interplay of opposites, the life energy!

- (c) Branch, plant, tree, feather or "penniform," tectiform, vulvar or rectangular signs broken through by lines,

open ellipses and birthing images:

Branch out, grow, emerge, sprout, unfold, give birth!

- (d) Chevron, zigzag, running angles, tri-line (three strokes), ray (comet), meander, spiral and arc:

Flow, streaming with the undulating exploratory movement of living things, spiraling, dancing with life!

As these decipherments suggest, UP(E) signs appear to refer to elemental processes of nature and of the human spirit.

The Lorthet engraving was my "Rosetta stone" for deciphering UP(E). Not only does it provide image translations for two of the four fundamental geometric sign clusters, it demonstrates how signs, each of which denotes a process (movement), could have been paired syntactically to generate complex pairs or series of processes or transformations. Thus, the entire composition (paired images plus paired signs) would represent a transformation process translatable as:

Unfold! emerge, branch out, blossom, sprout and then become filled with the self-moving, fluid, undulating spirit of life!

Similarly, a panel of signs at the entrance to the El Castillo cave sanctuary, Middle Magdalenian, which has, instead of a circle, a red, bell-shaped vulva-sign juxtaposed to a black branch-sign, may be read:

Center inward and access your vulva-seed source! your fertile, luteal power, the originating source of your life energy; and then branch out, emerge, sprout out, and opening your heart, blossom, emergent with new life!

These examples show how the pairing of UP(E) signs could have been used to express combinations of processes, i.e., a process which leads to another process, a transformation from one form to another. Pairing UP(E) signs could have generated ritual injunctions or formulae—a series of complex narrative sequences of transformations. At this higher level of complexity, UP(E) could have been used to evoke personifications (divinities, goddesses, gods) who presided over natural (elemental) and spiritual transformation processes and who participated in mythopoietic or theopoietic stories. Using these sacred signs, the Upper Paleolithic shaman could have conjured fundamental life-forces, formative spiritual transformation processes and the healing powers contained within the individual and communal soul.

After I developed my initial decipherment along these lines, Marija Gimbutas showed me the great catalogue of Upper Paleolithic signs assembled by Marthe Chollot-Veragnac (1980). This work contained some stunning examples of paired signs, and one example of four signs—one from each of the four sign clusters—on portable objects. This was a remarkable confirmation of my original ideas.

If we take this decipherment of elemental signs a step further, by applying the inherent logic of the four sign clusters as a mathematical set, a matrix is generated of six possible combinations of the four, taken two at a time. This gives rise to the basic transformation processes of UP(E) spirituality, which appear to have been viewed as gendered, male and female. Two matrices

result in six female and six corresponding male transformation processes. Reviewing Upper Paleolithic engravings, paintings and figurines, I have been able to identify and decode aspects of the UP(E) mythology for each of these twelve transformation processes (Harrod 1987a, 1987b). For this tribute to Marija Gimbutas, I will describe one of the six female transformation processes of Upper Paleolithic Europe, the Double Goddess.

The Double Goddess

Drawing upon her decoding of the symbol system of Neolithic Old Europe, Marija Gimbutas (1981a, 1981b) made a significant contribution to revisioning the so-called Venus figures of the Upper Paleolithic. She demonstrated that images of vulva, breast and buttocks in Upper Paleolithic art were not analogous to modern-day “sex symbols” or “pornography,” but were philosophical and religious symbols. The vulva symbolizes germination and birth, the origination of life, death and regeneration; exaggerated breasts or breasts alone symbolize sources of life-giving nourishment, rain, milk and abundance; and exaggerated buttocks—which like vulva images are often associated with eggs and seeds—symbolize the magic of duality, doubling, fertility and happiness. All of these are aspects or functions of the Goddess Genetrix, the Giver-of-All, the Great Goddess, the female cosmogonic principle. Gimbutas further refined and elaborated this interpretation in *The Language of the God-*

dess. In a discussion most relevant to understanding the Upper Paleolithic Double Goddess, Gimbutas clarifies the symbolism of “the double Goddess” and the “power of two,” which in Neolithic Old Europe are associated with the Pregnant Earth Mother (1989:151–154, 161–173).

I have found this interpretation a breath of fresh air, full of insights relevant to decoding the Upper Paleolithic imagery. However, my decipherment of UP(E) suggests that the Upper Paleolithic Double Goddess is a more complex and paradoxical figure than the divinity Gimbutas names as the “double Goddess” of the Neolithic. In the Upper Paleolithic, the Double Goddess is represented by two distinct and virtually opposite shapes: (a) the so-called Venus figures with exaggerated breasts and bellies, such as those from Willendorf, Laussel, Dolní Vestonice and Grimaldi, and (b) the so-called rough-hewn figures, having a thin stick-like appearance, such as those from Brassempouy, Pechialet, Gagarino, and Avdevo. While in the Neolithic these two thematics seem to belong to distinctly different deities—the Pregnant Earth Mother and the Goddess of Death and Regeneration—in the Upper Paleolithic they seem to belong to one transformation.

The paradoxical complexity of the Upper Paleolithic Double Goddess is also evident in her associated geometric signs. Some Double Goddess images are engraved with signs from the sign-cluster pertaining to bifurcation, doubling and manifoldness. For instance, there is a Y-sign on the thigh of the “Woman with Bison Horn” at Laussel, two bi-line signs on the back of the fa-

mous Dolní Vestonice figurine, probable X-signs on the back of the same and two other figurines from Dolní Vestonice and a possible zigzag sign on the Venus of Willendorf. The bi-line signs on the back of the Dolní Vestonice figurine can also be read, metaphorically, as two chevrons from the sign-cluster signifying flow. As the metaphorically combined signs on the Dolní Vestonice figurine reveal, the Double Goddess figurines represent a spiritual transformation process moving between processes of bifurcation (doubling) and flowing.

As the following analysis suggests, a brief but nuanced thematics of the UP(E) Double Goddess may be formulated:

Stand in yourself, sacrifice, contact and cleave to irrupting spirit energies, and flow, streaming with life!

or:

Grieve tears (in the land of the dead), and contact irrupting spirit energies, becoming pregnant, twinning, doubling again, manifold and alive!

As this formula and the analysis below suggest, Double Goddess figurines are not “Venus” figurines; indeed, the classical Greco-Roman Venus is a survival of a distinctly different UP(E) female transformation process, the one of the six that pertains to a thematics of centering and flowing. To reach a nuanced understanding of the archetypal significance of the Upper Paleolithic Double Goddess, I have found the writings of Adrienne Rich (1976) on the power of a mother’s “courageous love” and “efficacious tears” and the energetic “flow” between mothers and daughters and Mar-

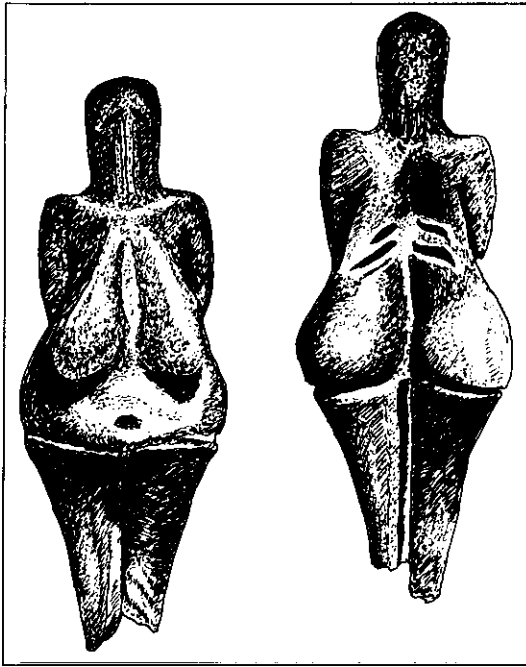


Figure 1: Figurine from Dolní Vestonice, Moravia, c. 26,000 BP (H. 11 cm.)

ion Woodman's (1985) insights into the mythic transformation between "matchstick" girl and self-nourishing woman most helpful. I would like to make it clear that I have drawn on some insights and felicitous phrasings from these works only after decoding a similar meaning directly from the UP(E) usage.

A review of the corpus of Upper Paleolithic figurines suggests that the Double Goddess transformation is represented by four categories of stereotypical figures.

Type 1

This includes many well-known Upper Paleolithic figurines. Examples are widespread and include a figurine from

Lespugue and the engravings from Laussel in France; and figurines from Willendorf, Dolní Vestonice, Moravany in the Rheno-Danubian basin; and from Grimaldi, Parabita and Savignano in Italy; Kostenki, Avdeevo and Gagarino on the Russian plain; and possibly Siberian Mal'ta. Sometimes their arms are folded over their breasts, e.g., Lespugue, Willendorf, Kostenki and Gagarino; or underneath, e.g., Parabita, Kostenki and Mal'ta. Most are dated from the early to the late Aurignacian (Perigordian), c. 30,000–20,000 BP, although the dating is not well established in many cases.

These figurines are thought to emphasize pregnancy, the pregnant belly and enlarged breasts often of exaggerated proportions. In some examples, the enormous bulging breasts, full and ripe with nourishing milk, seem even more prominent than the pregnant belly, which almost seems to function as a support for the breasts.

The well-known figurine from Dolní Vestonice (Dolní Vestonice I, 27,000 BP), both in plastic form and in the geometric signs engraved upon it, is an excellent representation of the Double Goddess (Fig. 1). On one hand, it has the exaggerated breasts and possibly pregnant belly signifying creative, self-nourishing energies. On the other, its face, a mask or helmet, almost death-like, has slit eyes slanting upward, and instead of a nose or mouth, there is a brush line stroked into the wet clay from the eyes down toward the neck. These brush lines seem like tears streaming down, and the whole figure appears to be an image of grief

and loss. The shape of the eyes might be taken as a chevron sign, the sign of flowing waters. The mask suggests the spiritual nature of the figurine as a deity, a goddess, and her transformation processes.

This figurine seems to capture the polarities of pregnancy and nourishing abundance and death and grief, a major thematic of the Double Goddess:

split, watery, grieving, become pregnant, twinning, doubling again, manifold, alive.

On the back of the figurine, the complementarity of themes is repeated in a graphemic register: four deeply incised strokes, which could be read simultaneously as two bi-lines or two chevrons. A bi-line and chevron are the two paired geometric emblems signifying the Double Goddess transformation.

In both its plastic form and its ideograms, the Dolní Vestonice figurine could speak of grievous loss or abandonment, perhaps death, and an overcoming of this: becoming pregnant with the self-nourishing possibilities of life. The figure is stained with red ochre as if to reiterate the thematic of death, grieving, and flowing, nourishing life in touch with the earth.

A recent analysis of the "clay" used to make the female and animal figurines at Dolní Vestonice, which was similar to that used at other sites of the Pavlov culture, c. 30,000–24,000 BP, suggests that the material was apparently intentionally designed to explode during the process of firing, perhaps serving some ritual or divinational purpose (Vandiver et al. 1989; Soffer et al. 1993). This motif of "exploding" precisely

fits one of the themes of the Double Goddess:

Sacrifice, death, cut, torn apart, disrupted by irrupting spirit energies.

The Lespugue figurine, c. 21,500 BP, represents the Double Goddess, with special emphasis on the motifs of pregnancy and doubling. The figurine expresses a complex energy dynamic: an inner flowing, pulsing life force, like a kind of surging sap juice; a bursting, splitting open, in contact with this irrupting spiritual force; and a self-creative, gestating inner power, doubling, twinning and redoubling as it manifests in self-nourishing abundance.

Like the figurine from Lespugue, a contemporaneous figure, the Laussel "Woman with Bison Horn," has a Y-sign on her right hip—as befits the Double Goddess. It may be interpreted as a kind of cultic wand, a sign of reverence, but, if it is intended as an ideogram in UP(E), as seems likely, then it yields the reading:

Couple, join, twin, become pregnant with the possibilities of life, join the left and the right, become whole, conceive!

—or more mystically:

The one becomes two and the two become one! Let mother and daughter become one with the energy that flows between them, the intergenerational continuity of life!

Become one with the one source of overflowing self-nourishment that sustains all life and irrupts within every living thing and in every form of new life!

The Goddess holds a bison horn, engraved with thirteen notches. This may refer to the thirteen days of the menstrual cycle which culminate with ovulation; or it may refer to the thirteen months of a lunar year, which culminate in the New Year. Either or both referents fit well with the Double Goddess themes of conception, new life, fullness and wholeness. The Goddess who presides over the totality of the year presides over the totality of all living things, the creative source of self-nourishing abundance, the power of the bison spirit and the calling together of the community as a whole, calling up and evoking its health, wholeness and new life. This is truly the Goddess of the Cornucopia.

Another female figurine from Dolní Vestonice (Delporte 1979:Fig. 87; Marshack 1991a:Fig. 175 a, b, c; 1991b, plate 3), highly abstracted, depicts only a pregnant belly and thighs, a deeply engraved "belt band" around front and back and a deeply incised groove down the spine meeting the belt band at the perineum. This descending groove seems inexplicable, unless the artist intended to depict a geometric cross shape, analogous to the UP(E) X-sign, which would be an appropriate sign for a representation of the Double Goddess. Interestingly, the back of the previously discussed Dolní Vestonice sculpture is similarly cross-grooved. This cross-sign emphasizes the doubling and redoubling thematics, which may indicate the wealth and richness given by the goddess, which is also represented by the pregnancy on the front side.

Marshack has carefully reexamined the "Venus" of Willendorf. He observes that it

is covered with red ochre as are other figurines, such as the Laussel "Venus" and fragments of female figurines from Kostenki II. Since ochre was used in Paleolithic burials, Marshack aptly suggests that the ochre on the figurines "may have had symbolic or metaphorical meaning related to life or a supposed renewal of life." Marshack also notes that the Willendorf figurine wears a bracelet on each wrist, "carved in the form of a 'zigzag' pattern of alternating notches and seeming to represent bracelets made . . . of entwined or plaited perishable material" (1991:18). I propose that this zigzag shape represents not simply plaited material in general, but a UP(E) zigzag-sign, as would be fitting for an image of the Double Goddess. The bracelet would then signify *flowing movement, flood, pour out, rain, drip, overflow*, a semantics which Marshack himself discovered in his study of meander symbolism. This reading of the Willendorf bracelet suggests that the Double Goddess also might have presided over rain, which nourishes all growing things.

Type 2

These are the so-called rough-hewn or rough sketch figurines. They have stick-like, match-stick or clothespin-like shape. In contrast to the usual interpretation of these figurines as unfinished, incomplete or rough-made female images, Marshack (1987) demonstrated that the "rough hewn" figures frequently have wear indicating use over extended periods of time, probably in ritual. In other words, Type 2 figurines were

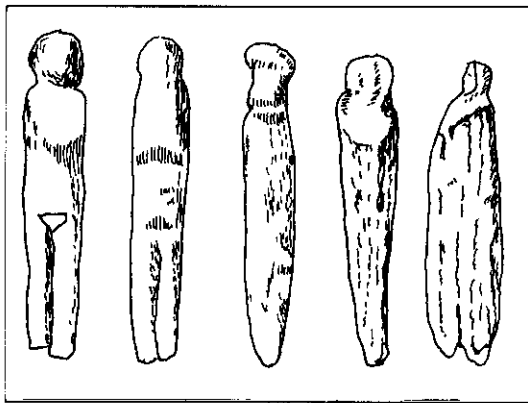


Figure 2: Upper Perigordian “rough hewn” figurines, c. 25,000–23,000 BP: **a)** Brassempouy, France (H. 4.75 cm.); **b)** Brassempouy, France (H. 4.65 cm.); **c)** Gagarino, Russia (H. 7.2 cm.)

designed to be just as they are; they were finished objects used and reused in ritual.

I propose that the appearance of Type 2 figurines is intentional; they are designed as they are to symbolize something, and what they symbolize is indicated by their appearance. These figures may symbolize unfinishedness, forlornness, rigidity, starvation or death. These figures gain their full significance as an integral aspect of the paradoxical Double Goddess.

The Type 2 figure has a semantic complementary to the Type 1 figure. Whereas Type 1 figures may signify the transformation *doubling, redoubling, overflowing, manifold, abundant, grieve, letting tears fall like rain*, Type 2 figures could signify the transformation *weak, dwindling, abandoned, rejected, corpse-like, self-devouring, nourish yourself, abundantly!* and emphasize the motifs *weak, dwindling, corpse-like, death, the sacrificed*.

Type 2 examples of the Double Goddess are widespread and include figurines from Petersfels in Germany; Brassempouy

and Pechialet in France; Russian Gagarino and Avdevo; and possibly Siberian Mal'ta and Bouret (Fig. 2). They are dated mostly to the Upper Aurignacian, c. 23,000–20,000 BP, although the Petersfels figurine comes from the Upper Magdalenian, c. 15,000–13,000 BP. Sites including Brassempouy, Gagarino, Avdevo and Mal'ta contained both the thin Type 2 figurines and the corpulent Type 1 figurines.

From the perspective of the Neolithic, these Upper Paleolithic figurines depict the “stiff white lady,” Death, who in the Neolithic is associated with a Goddess of Death and Regeneration, distinct from the Earth Mother Goddess who is associated with doubling (Gimbutas 1989:161–171, 198). In the case of the Upper Paleolithic, these motifs are combined in one divinity; one goddess presides over “death” and “the power of doubling.”

The Type 2 figurines sometimes subtly suggest their relationship to the Type 1 aspect of the Double Goddess. For instance, some Type 2 figurines from Mal'ta hold their arms and hands underneath their breasts in a manner similar to more corpulent Type 1 figurines from Mal'ta, Kostenki and Parabita.

Type 3

This type combines the Type 1 and Type 2 “opposite” aspects in one sculpture. This combined type seems intentionally designed to signify the full polarity of the Double Goddess transformation, and it supports my proposed assignment of the



Figure 3: “Hermaphrodite” figurine. Grimaldi, Italy; Gravettian, c. 28,000–20,000 BP (H. 5.2 cm.)

Type 1 and Type 2 figures to one and the same deity (transformation process). Type 3 figures represent both the abandoned, unfinished, forlorn, rigid, starved and corpse-like goddess and the pregnant, nourishing, doubling, abundance goddess. This may be achieved by carving opposed characteristics on front and obverse sides of a statuette, or end-to-end, or in two otherwise connected figures.

For example, a stone pendant figurine from Grimaldi, c. 28,000 BP, called the “Woman with Perforated Neck” or “Janus” (Marshack 1987, 1991a:282 and Fig. 155),

has the large breasts and prominent pregnant belly of the Type 1 goddess on its front side; on its obverse is a faint outlined, flat, nonpregnant female figure suggestive of the Type 2 aspect. A tall figurine from Avdeevo (Delporte:Fig. 110, no. 1), c. 23,000–17,000 BP, has a similar front and back pregnancy/nonpregnancy opposition.

A Grimaldi figurine, the “Hermaphrodite” (Fig. 3), finds its true meaning as a depiction of the Double Goddess. An odd detail in the thigh area has been described as dangling arms and male genitalia (Delporte 1979:106–107), hence the hermaphrodite interpretation. But a simple exercise shows that this interpretation is incorrect. This figure has the all-nourishing breasts and the pregnant belly typical of the Type 1 stylization, but if the figurine is turned upside down, magically, the “odd” detail reveals itself to be a woman with hands over her face, grieving. This figurine is a masterpiece depicting the Double Goddess. In its stunning and beautiful design, this figurine represents the double perspective of the Double Goddess spiritual transformation: grievous loss, abandonment and death; and pregnancy, the engendering of a creative and abundantly nourishing life.

Type 4

Whereas the Type 3 figures combine opposite aspects of the Double Goddess in one image, the Type 4 sculpture depicts two separate, but related, female figures. These may be read as a mother-daughter pair,

two sisters, or simply two women. They have a combined thematics of loss and reconnection, splitting and integration, or finding the courageous mother and creatively pregnant daughter within. Examples of Type 4 figures occur at Gagarino, Kostenki and Laussel.

It has been suggested (Bahn and Vertut 1988:86) that the “double statuette” from Gagarino, c. 22,000 BP, in which two female figures, one about twice as tall as the other, are set head to head, is more likely two figurines “not yet separated” by the artist than one figurine having some special significance. On the contrary, examination indicates that the shorter of the two figures has the large breasts and pregnant belly of the Type 1 style; the longer figure, the more stick-like, featureless body of the “rough-hewn” Type 2 style. This being the case, it is irrelevant whether the artist meant to separate the figures or not; they are still the Double Goddess in her complementary aspects.

The Gagarino “double statuette” may be poetically translated:

Let mother and daughter become one with the deep streaming life energy that flows between them, the intergenerational continuity of life!

or:

Ravished, raped, wandering, lost, through efficacious tears, reconnect, be reunited with the courageous mother, joined, twinned, contacting resonant spirit energies, and conceive, be pregnant with new possibilities! with surging life!

N. D. Praslov’s 1987 excavation at Kostenki uncovered a habitation site and burials, c. 23,000 BP. He noted, “We found two types of female figures: one of limestone, painted red and apparently intentionally broken; the second of ivory, painted black, all in good condition. This is a mystery” (Putnam 1988:449). With the decipherment of UP(E), this is no longer such a mystery; this is a beautiful representation of the Double Goddess, in Type 4 style. Poetically, this representation of the Double Goddess signifies, on the one hand, *brokenness*, and red, the color of *life*; on the other, black, the color of *fertility, richness, abundance, wholeness*. The intentional breaking of the Kostenki female image is similar to the “exploding Venus” of Dolní Vestonice, and poetically suggests *irrupting spirit energies*. Poetically, the Kostenki Double Goddess figurines signify:

Irrupt with the spirit energies of life, creation, abundance, richness and wholeness, even in the midst of brokenness and death.

The bas-relief from Laussel that depicts two figures entwined face to face has been given many different interpretations. As Leroi-Gourhan has noted (1967:406), the figure has the same outline shape as the nearby Cornucopia Goddess. From this we may infer that it, too, represents the Double Goddess. One of the figures has the typical exaggerated breasts and pregnant belly; the other is not so clear. The latter might be a Type 2 figure, but more likely, the relief represents two goddesses, facing and entwined, to symbolize the mystery and creative energy flowing between mother and

daughter and between the mother and daughter aspects within one woman or between two women. Working backward from Neolithic religion, Marija Gimbutas proposed that this Laussel relief depicted the “double Goddess” (1989:171–173); my decipherment of UP(E) confirms the accuracy of her inference.

Survivals

The Upper Paleolithic Double Goddess transformation survives with its entire iconography intact right through Neolithic and Chalcolithic Old Europe. The Type 1 (Kostenki-Lespugue “Venus”) stylization, with its exaggerated breasts, pregnant belly and folded arms, reappears in Neolithic figurines of the “androgynous and corpulent goddess with folded arms” type found at Hacilar in central Anatolia, in the Sesklo culture of northern Greece and in the Starčevo culture of the Balkan Peninsula. The Type 2 (“rough hewn”) stylization appears in Chalcolithic figurines of the “chrysalid goddess with folded arms” type found at Cycladic, Cucuteni, Moldavia, Vinča, Gumelnita and Aegean sites, frequently in graves (Gimbutas 1974:152–163; 1989:141–173; 186–211).

A typically Neolithic version of the Double Goddess consists of one female figure with two heads. Examples of this type have been found at Çatal Hüyük in Anatolia and Vinča and other Neolithic and Chalcolithic sites throughout Old Europe (e.g., Gimbutas 1989:170–173). These also continue to be found at Bronze Age sites.

A figurine of a double-headed goddess having four breasts but only two arms was discovered at Çatal Hüyük, shrine VI.A.10 (c. 5900 BC). This, as Mellaart notes, represents two aspects, mother and maiden, of the Great Goddess, a motif recurring later at Hacilar I and Kültepe in Anatolia, at Knossos on Crete and at Mycenae and Eleusis in Greece (1967: plates 70 and 71).

One stunning example, a double-headed figurine from Vinča (Gimbutas 1974: plate 90) with a bird mask on each head, is covered with X and chevron signs. These two signs are precisely those that in the Upper Paleolithic are paired to represent the Double Goddess transformation process. A similar semantic pairing, this time of bi-line and chevron, marks a double-headed figurine from Anatolia, Çaykenar type, c. 2600 BC (Gimbutas 1989:Figs. 271, 272).

A figurine from Rast, western Romania, early fifth millennium BC, depicts a double-headed goddess, with one head slightly larger than the other, one torso and one pair of breasts and meander and chevron markings (Gimbutas 1989: Fig. 271; 1974: plate 86). Another example from Gomolava, northern Yugoslavia, depicts a double-headed goddess incised with meander markings (Gimbutas 1974: plates 100, 101). X or bi-line and chevron or meander—the UP(E) geometric sign pair for the Double Goddess—continues through Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age Europe.

The Upper Paleolithic Type 4 stylization—two separate female figures with similar or opposite qualities—also reappears in the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Megalithic

cultures of Old Europe. For instance, the Neolithic rock-cut tombs and hypogea of Malta, Sicily and Sardinia, with their “usually uterine, egg-shaped, or roughly anthropomorphic” shape, belong to the Pregnant Earth Mother, just as the stone temples of Ggantija, Gozo and Mnajdra on Malta, with their paired anthropomorphic shapes, represent a variant of the Double Goddess (Gimbutas 1989: 151–154, 172). The recent discovery of a statue depicting a pair of large, seated women daubed with red ochre, holding a cup and a tiny person (baby) in their laps, and other artifacts (nine sculptures, including human figures and a pig) at the Brochtorff Circle, Gozo (Malone et al. 1993), confirms Gimbutas’ hypothesis—in spite of the protestations of their excavators—that Ggantija and Mnajdra were devoted to the worship of the Double Goddess, the Pregnant Earth Mother.

At the Chalcolithic Cucuteni ritual complex at Nedeia, north-eastern Romania, six painted vases were arranged in a circle around a large vessel intentionally placed over an egg-shaped, lidded vase. At its base, four figurines had been placed at the cardinal points; two had faint traces of red ochre; the other pair were painted black with chevrons and parallel lines (Gimbutas 1989:172–173). This manifestation of the Double Goddess is a parallel or survival of the recently unearthed pairing of red and black figurines at Upper Paleolithic Kostenki.

One remarkably rich survival of the Upper Paleolithic Double Goddess manifests in the Eleusinian Mysteries, which

celebrate the mother–daughter pair, Demeter and Persephone. On the last day of the festival, called Plemochoai (“Pourings of Plenty”), the contents of two vases were poured into a cleft in the earth, while a mystic formula was recited: “Hye kye!” The first word was cried to the heavens, the second to the earth. These words may be translated “Flow! Conceive!” (Kerenyi 1967:141–142) or “Rain! Be Pregnant!” This formula has a transformational semantics identical to that of the Upper Paleolithic Double Goddess. If this ritual is not an actual survival from the Upper Paleolithic, the coincidence is extraordinary. It could be explained only by an underlying “deep structure” of the human (female) psyche, which expresses itself in identical ways throughout human history.

In conclusion, the application of my decipherment of Upper Paleolithic (European) to the iconography of the so-called Venus figurines reveals that a subset of Upper Paleolithic female figurines, which I designate “the Double Goddess,” were intended to represent archetypal, spiritual transformation processes pertaining to the intergenerational flow of powers between mother and daughter, between death-like sacrifice and abundant self-nourishment, and between grieving tears and the irruption of new life.

Poetic Hermeneutic

My decipherment of UP(E) has enabled a decoding of the poetic sensibility inherent in the imagery and signs of the Upper Pa-

cultures of Old Europe. For instance, the Neolithic rock-cut tombs and hypogea of Malta, Sicily and Sardinia, with their “usually uterine, egg-shaped, or roughly anthropomorphic” shape, belong to the Pregnant Earth Mother, just as the stone temples of Ggantija, Gozo and Mnajdra on Malta, with their paired anthropomorphic shapes, represent a variant of the Double Goddess (Gimbutas 1989: 151–154, 172). The recent discovery of a statue depicting a pair of large, seated women daubed with red ochre, holding a cup and a tiny person (baby) in their laps, and other artifacts (nine sculptures, including human figures and a pig) at the Brochtorff Circle, Gozo (Malone et al. 1993), confirms Gimbutas’ hypothesis—in spite of the protestations of their excavators—that Ggantija and Mnajdra were devoted to the worship of the Double Goddess, the Pregnant Earth Mother.

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Poetic Hermeneutic

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leolithic Double Goddess. I have tried to articulate the complementary qualities of the Double Goddess in the following poem. It is phrased in the first person, after the manner of the Gnostic tractate, "Thunder, the Perfect Mind" (Robinson 1977:271-277), which itself is similar in style to many

Hellenistic hymns to the Goddess. The poem concludes with a quote from the tractate itself—just those lines that contain the theme of manifoldness and multiplicity, which, as I have shown, belongs to the Upper Paleolithic Double Goddess.

The Double Goddess

*I am the scorned one
and I am welcomed by my own compassion;
I am the one who cries out
and I am the one who listens;
I devour myself and I feed myself;
I am the wounded one
and I am the one toward whom I have mercy;
I am immobilized and I magnify my own powers;
I am my body of gravity and light
and I am the spirit that lives through its dance;
I am the belittled one
your child within
and I cherish the child, my soul, within;
Give heed to my poverty and to my wealth.
I am the mother and I am the daughter;
I am the pregnant one
and she who was pregnant with you;
I am the abducted and the restored
and I am the abandoned and the embraced;
I am the split one, with tears of grieving,
and I am the barren one, and conceiving;
I let go of all things and I receive all things;
I rage at my separation and I rejoice in my reunion;
I am the dissolution and I am the reconnection;
I engender and am engendered
I nourish and am nourished;
From out of my death all life flows
from myself, to myself
I become alive.
"I am the silence that is incomprehensible
and the idea whose remembrance is frequent;*

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