

Marie König

1. Introduction

Marie Emile Paula Schwager was born in Forst (or Lausitz) on the Polish – German border in 1899. She graduated from high school in 1918 in Aachen on the Belgian-German border, took a teacher-training course for two years, followed by two years teaching elementary school in Pomerania (now part of Poland) and Thuringia in central Germany.¹ She married Heinrich König in 1923 and moved to Saarbrücken where Heinrich took over the family plumbing and heating business, Sanicentral, in 1935. After the end of the War, Sanicentral prospered along with most of West Germany and helped finance Marie König's research and publications.

Although in later life she often attended international conferences on paleoscientific themes, she was never a university-based scientist but what the Germans call a “private scholar” (Privatgelehrtin). In the hierarchic world of German science she was considered a second- or perhaps a third-class citizen. She was also the mother of two boys, and a grandmother who apparently enjoyed doing her work surrounded by children. She often said that she did not set out to write books or pursue scholarship but was compelled to do so because of the

¹ Details of her life are taken from Gabriele Meixner's biography, Auf der Suche nach dem Anfang der Kultur: Marie E.P. König, Eine Biographie, (Munich, Frauenoffensiv, 1999).

absence of any decent studies on the caves and rock-shelters that she so much enjoyed exploring, discussing, and observing. Indeed, her enthusiasm for prehistory began during the First World War when she explored the Inde Valley, east of Aachen in search of stone artifacts.

To understand Marie König's postwar work, however, we must also consider the state of German archaeology in 1945. Like much of German postwar science, particularly in the human sciences, archaeology had to deal with the long-term effects of Nazi enthusiasm for Aryanness and Aryan superiority. The work of Gustav Kossinna, particularly his two-volume Ursprung und Verbreitung der Germanen (1926-7), had been particularly influential and very much in step with National Socialism. Even merely nationalist and folkloric archeologists had benefitted from Nazi patronage, the purpose of which was to show that the archaic Germans conformed to the Nazi image.² One consequence was that, in the postwar milieu, even though very few archaeologists lost their jobs because of de-Nazification policies of the occupying powers, most German archeologists

² See H. Hassmann, "Archeology in the 'Third Reich,'" in Heinrich Härke, ed., Archeology, Ideology and Society: The German Experience, (Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 2000), 65-139. See also: Härke, "'The Hun is a Methodical Chap,'" in Peter J. Ucko, ed., Theory in Archeology: A World Perspective, (London, Routledge, 1995), 46-60; Bettina Arnold, "The Past as Propaganda: Totalitarian Archeology in Nazi Germany," Antiquity, 64 (1990), 464-78; Suzanne L. Marchand, Down from Olympus: Archeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750-1970, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996), Ch. 9-10; Martijn Eickhoff, "German Archeology and National Socialism: Some Historiographical Remarks," Archeological Dialogues, 12:1 (2005), 73-90; Bettina Arnold and Henning Hassmann, "Archeology in Nazi Germany: The Legacy of the Faustian Bargain," in Philip L. Kohl and Clare Fawcett, eds., Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), 70-81; David W. Anthony, "Nazi and Eco-feminist Prehistories: Ideology and Empiricism in Indo-European Archaeology," in Kohl and Fawcett, eds., Nationalism, Politics and the Practice of Archaeology, 82-98; Heinrich Härke, "All Quiet on the Western Front? Paradigms, Methods and Approaches in West German Archaeology," in Ian Hoffer, ed., Archaeological Theory in Europe: The Last Three Decades, (London, Routledge, 1991), 187-222. See also König's remarks in "Die Symbolik des Urgeschlichen Menschen," Symbolion, 5 (1966), 121-28.

responded by keeping their heads down and getting on with digging, measuring, and recording. In short, they avoided explicit “theorizing,” which is to say, they simply passed on existing and dated “theories” from the pre-Nazi period or from France.

Specifically, when König began to study the petroglyphs in the rock-shelters of the Fontainebleau forest (Ile-de-France) and the images on the cave walls at Lascaux, the standard interpretative strategy was to understand the images by analogy with contemporary “primitive” peoples. Indeed, even today such hunter-gatherer peoples are often said to be “living in the Stone Age.” The assumption, called “ethnographic analogy” by archeologists, is that a San or a Navaho exists today or at the time of European contact in a way analogous to a Cro-Magnon, notwithstanding the intervening 35KY.³ König maintained from the beginning of her work that Upper Paleolithic or as she sometimes said, “Ice Age,” art was unique in that it provided the foundation for all subsequent “historical” art, including contemporary “primitive art.” “Paleolithic humans,” she said, “found themselves in a state of transition towards the present-day civilized humans and their technology did not remain in a Paleolithic condition as did primitive peoples. This is why we have to attribute to them [the Paleolithic peoples] a mental

³ For an analysis of the problems of ethnographic analogy consider the observations of R. Lee Lyman and Michael J. O’Brien, “The Direct Historical Approach, Analogical Reasoning, and Theory in Americanist Archeology,” Journal of Archeological Method and Theory, 8 (2001), 303-42.

capacity quite different than primitive peoples.⁴ As a simple methodological issue, the problem practically resolves itself. Arguments from analogy maintain that X is like Y in this particular respect. This means that X is not like Y in other specifiable respects, which means only that such arguments need to be used with caution and in the context of suitable qualifications.

The reigning postwar theorists of cave or parietal art, Abbé Henri Breuil in France, whom we discuss in a subsequent chapter, and Herbert Kühn in Germany, advanced their interpretations on the basis of the assumption of a close and largely unqualified analogy between primitive contemporary art and Upper Paleolithic art. For the commonsensical reasons just given, König did not. Moreover, König also argued that Breuil and Kuhn interpreted the images on the basis of unjustified and a priori “theories” of prehistory (Urgeschichte) and primordial religion (Urreligion), namely that the images were evidence of magic practice designed to gain control over reality, especially over hunting success and fertility. That is, König was critical of the two leading authorities of her day because they did not

⁴ König, “Problème des Images Quaternaries,” Congrès préhistorique de France, (Strasbourg/Metz, 1953), Compte rendu de la XIVe session, (Le Mans, 1955), 361. See also her critical remarks in König, “Zur geistige Situation des Jungpaleolithikers,” Psychologische Beiträge, 3 (1957), 476f. An edited English version is: “The Mentality of Upper Paleolithic Man in Europe,” The Mankind Quarterly, 11:3 (1971), 153-63. König based her argument on the difference between the historically archaic and the contemporary “primitive” on Heinz Werner, Comparative Psychology of Mental Development, Rev.ed., (New York, International University Press, 1957), first edition, 1940; German edition, which König often cited, 1953. This distinction between developmental and evolutionary psychology was for Werner fundamental. The former had no concern with the speculative history of humanity or the factual aspects of culture but on “developmental levels” and formal characteristics of mental activity (Comparative Psychology, 17. As we argue below, König’s adaptation of Werner’s distinction was more precisely described in the distinction of Eric Voegelin, between compact and differentiated experience and symbolization of reality. Werner also spoke of differentiation in an equivalent way, though he did not contrast differentiation with compactness (see Comparative Psychology, 59, 104, 299).

attend with sufficient care to the actual imagery on the cave walls prior to developing a theory regarding what the imagery meant, which form them was “art,” or more specifically, “primitive art.”

Following Werner, among others, König rejected the dogma of a progressive evolution of humanity along a single line of development because it resulted in “a caricature of the mental condition of Paleolithic humanity and a false argument regarding its cultural capacities.”⁵ She agreed with the argument of Henri-Victor Vallois, longtime editor of the Revue d’ Anthropologie and director of the Musée de l’Homme, that the history of modern humanity began in the Upper Paleolithic. That is, she proceeded on the assumption that Stone Age humans were fully capable of abstract speculative thought, a position that is sometimes explicitly stated today by cognitive and postprocessural archeologists.⁶ In this sense, König was ahead of her time, which was cold comfort because, as everyone else she lived in a scientific present that largely rejected her work. By assuming that Upper Paleolithic humans were open to the same range of reality as her contemporaries, Koenig was caricatured in 1952 by Guy Gaudron, Secretary of the French Prehistorical Society as attributing “to prehistoric man the mentality of state-

⁵ König, “Interprétations paléolithiques d’après les plus anciens Textes de l’Histoire,” Congrès préhistorique de France, Comte rendu de la XV^e Session (Poitiers-Angoulême), 1956 (Paris, 1957), 632. One of the implications that König drew from her perspective was that Europe was the original “home” of culture and that contemporary Europeans were still in touch with their prehistoric and Paleolithic roots. See König, “Interprétations paléolithiques,” 633 and Meixner, Auf der Suche, 63-5.

⁶ Philip G. Chase and Harold L. Dibble, “Middle Paleolithic Symbolism: A Review of Current Evidence and Interpretations,” Journal of Anthropological Archeology, 6 (1987), 263-96; Robert G. Bednarik, “Paleoart and Archeological Myths,” Cambridge Archeological Journal, 2:1 (1992), 27-43.

qualified philosophy teachers.”⁷ She was thus dismissed as a “lay-person” carried away with a private enthusiasm.⁸

Prejudice of the German mandarins aside, a genuine hermeneutic problem was that no one in the world of scientific archaeology understood how cave images expressed such thought. Her call for a new approach to the ways of thinking (Denkformen) and spiritual development (geistigen Entwicklungen) of early humanity fell on deaf ears. As Meixner observed, “precisely the stylization and abstractions in the Ice Age human’s pictorial world gave her cause to suspect that spiritual capacities (geistige Fähigkeiten) lay behind these creations.”⁹

Accordingly, König’s book, Das Weltbild des Eiszeitlichen Menschen,¹⁰ completed in 1953, examined the cave images of Franco-Cantabria in light of a “universal” spiritual experience, common to human beings as human beings. Specifically, she first outlined her argument that the animal images were symbols that expressed the rhythms of lunar growth and decline rather than hunting or fertility magic and that the “signs” on the cave walls were also significant. She used several of the same examples that appeared in her later books, made comparisons between the cave imagery and the actual shape of a European bison, aurochs, or mammoth in order to argue that the “exaggerations indicated first, that

⁷ Meixner, Auf der Suche, 73.

⁸ See for example the condescending review of König’s first book by Karl J. Narr, later professor of prehistory at the University of Munster, in Anthropos, 49 (1954), 727.

⁹ Meixner, Auf der Suche, 77.

¹⁰ Marburg, N.G Elwert Verlag, 1954.

the animals were symbolic and second, that what was symbolized were phases of the moon.¹¹ She drew attention to the 3x3 red lines in front of the dappled bull at Lascaux and offered an interpretation, later expanded in detail of the enigmatic figures in the “shaft” at Lascaux.¹² This was followed by a brief analysis of “mobiliary” statues, usually interpreted as females or “Venuses,” and of the latter Bronze Age statues of chariots, ceremonial pots and so on. All these artifacts, in one way or another were understood as visual expressions of the experience of human orientation in the cosmos of time and space. A commonsensical practitioner of what Thomas Kuhn called normal (archaeological) science might concede that the argument elaborated in The Image of the World of Ice-Age Humanity could constitute a hypothesis. But such a commonsensical scientist would have plenty of follow-up questions regarding evidence and proof. The problem was, of course, that Upper Paleolithic art was non-textual. Where were the clues by which the imagery might be plausibly interpreted?

König addressed this fundamental methodological and hermeneutic issue in her larger and more interesting 1967 book, Am Anfang der Kultur.¹³ During the intervening two decades, König attended conferences of paleoscientists and presented her interpretations, and refined her approach to the materials. For the

¹¹ König, Das Weltbild, 35ff.

¹² König, Das Weltbild, 86ff.

¹³ König, Am Anfang der Kultur: Die Zeichensprache des frühen Menschen, (Berlin, Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1973). Some of the details of her argument are discussed in the following section. We discuss additional methodological issues below.

commonsensical (to normal science) reasons just indicated, her arguments by and large were ignored or given the briefest possible mention. At the third Valcamonica Symposium, for example, Arturo Schwartz referred to König's contribution at a previous Valcamonica meeting that took place in 1970.¹⁴ In 1970 König in fact made a rather significant intervention. Antonio Beltran, a distinguished Spanish archaeologist, delivered a lengthy paper toward the end of which he asked if anyone had anything to say about a previous paper on the Fontainebleau rock shelters (abris) by Gilles Tassé.¹⁵ Emmanuel Anati, who organized the Valcamonica Symposia, declared it was impossible to know what the figures and incisions meant. König replied: "the signs reflect the same cosmological conceptions as are found in megalithic art."¹⁶ That was it. No further discussion. She later delivered a paper summarizing the argument subsequently developed in Am Anfang der Kultur, that Upper Paleolithic symbolism existed in continuity with later myths. Her paper was part of a catch-all section on "General

¹⁴ Schwartz, "La Dimensions vertical dell'androgino immortale," Valcamonica Symposium, The Intellectual Expressions of Prehistoric Man: Art and Religion, (Brescia, Edizioni del Centro, 1979), 79-97.

¹⁵ Tassé later wrote a thorough and orthodox study of the Pétroglyphes du Bassin Parisien, XVIe Supplément à Gallia Préhistoire, (Paris, CNRS, 1982)

¹⁶ König's intervention is at p. 120 of A. Beltran et al., "Débat sur l'Art rupestre de la Péninsule Ibérique et de France," in Anati, ed., Valcamonica Symposium, (Brescia, Edizioni del Centro, 1970), 101-21. Anati had visited the caves and abris of the Ile-de-France precisely once, a decade earlier, guided by J.-L. Baudet, whom we discuss below. See Anati, "Quelques Réflexions sur l'Art rupestre d'Europe," Bulletin de la Société préhistorique française, 57 (1960), 692-712.

Problems.” The discussion of these problems was devoted chiefly to Alexander Marshack’s microscopic analysis, which is discussed in the following chapter.¹⁷

Meixner argued that König’s work on lunar symbolism was ignored because it was too “speculative,” which from the perspective shared by normal archaeological science it surely was. The way König saw her problem, as she remarked in the 1950s, was that the archaeologists and prehistorians rejected her work: “because I expected philosophical ways of thought from them, though certainly not of prehistorical peoples.” In fact, her early arguments seemed to rely more on her artistic sensibility (she was also an accomplished watercolorist) and the methods of art history. As she said in 1963 of her own work, “I don’t dig and date; I interpret (dente).”¹⁸ In fact, paleoscientist had little training in art history, let alone philosophy. And as for those pursuing philosophical ways of thought such as Karl Jaspers, to whom she referred in Am Anfang der Kultur, and the philosophical anthropologists, they “are perhaps unwilling to be forced to climb into caves with me.”¹⁹ Then, in the fall of 1968, she met Eric Voegelin, who was both familiar with philosophical ways of thinking and willing to explore the caves

¹⁷ See König “Étude des Incisions rupestres comme Manifestation d’un Stade d’Évolution de l’Esprit humaine,” in Anati, ed., Valcamonica Symposium, (1970), 515-30. A similar event took place at the 1972 Symposium. There König referred to images of bulls with crescent horns, initially discussed in Das Weltbild, as “organizing lunar time,” and other equivalent ways of symbolizing months. Anati replied: “It is impossible to generalize.” This was also part of the “General Discussion.” See Anati, ed., Les Religions de la Préhistoire: Actes de Valcamonica Symposium, 1974, (Capo di Ponte, Edizioni del Centro, 1975), 439.

¹⁸ Meixner, Auf der Suche, 95, 180ff.

¹⁹ Meixner, Auf der Suche, 74. See also König, “Die Symbolik des Urgeschichtlichen Menschen,” 124

and rock-shelters with her. To be more precise, after hearing her lecture at the Academic Institute of Rome, according to König Voegelin “came up to me straight away and said: ‘we must work together.’”²⁰

Voegelin may have entertained some highly traditional notions regarding the sexual division of labour, especially as it applied to academic life, but he did not allow his prejudices to get in the way of his ability to appreciate genuine insights by female scholars. After introducing himself, they did, in fact, meet several times at her home in Saarbrücken and she escorted him around the caves and rock shelters at Fontainebleau (Ile-de-France), and, no doubt partly in return for her help, Voegelin assisted her with the writing and publication of Am Anfang der Kultur. Voegelin even deputed two of his students, Tilo Schabert and Klaus Vondung, to assist her with some of the material in the first chapter dealing with archeological methods and assumptions. In short, it was a two-way street. As Schabert said to Meixner: “Frau König was also important to him. He wasn’t interested in her for no reason.”²¹

In a letter to her dated 14 October, 1968, Voegelin explained her importance to him:

Your essay [on prehistoric symbolism] is of great value to me because it shows that an historical picture can indeed be crystallized out of the most

²⁰ Meixner, Auf der Suche, 139 See also Tilo Schabert, “Voegelin’s Workshop: A Study in Confirmation of Barry Cooper’s Genetic Paradigm, in Thomas Heilke and John von Heyking, eds., Hunting and Weaving: Empiricism and Political Philosophy, (South Bend, St. Augustine’s Press, 2013), 242-4.

²¹ Auf der Suche, 141.

diverse specialized prehistorical archeological sciences that goes back at least to the beginnings of Homo sapiens. You can understand the importance such an account has for me from the fact that the prehistoric symbols are the same as those that are found in the earliest written texts on political symbolism, i.e., in the Egyptian texts of the 3rd millennium B.C.²² Through comparison of these Egyptian texts with the symbolism as you have presented it, the decisive step becomes possible in separating the remnants of tradition from those symbols specific to an imperial civilization. Up to now I have used the term “cosmological” for the Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilization. This term can still be used, but it is impossible to separate the cosmological from the imperial elements.

Many thanks, too, for the reference to the Handbuch der Vorgeschichte by Hermann Müller-Karpe. I immediately ordered it for the Institute.

I am happy to say that I can already use the insights that I have gained from you in this semester in my lectures on the philosophy of history.²³

In this letter Voegelin was not simply being a courtly Viennese gentleman.

He was expressing his genuine gratitude to a fellow scientist. As Thomas Hollweck said, the correspondence and conversation with König “opened up for him the depth of the unwritten human past that occupied him during a major part of the last decade of his life.”²⁴ In September, 1970 he wrote Hans Sedlmayr, a respected art historian and colleague at Munich:

In my Order and History I dealt with the symbols of the ancient Oriental societies in the manner in which they are depicted in the sources. However, this method has proved to be inadequate, since most of these symbols have a prehistory reaching back into the Neolithic, if not into the late Paleolithic. The symbols that appear in the ancient Oriental empires are adaptations of older symbols to the

²² The English translation substituted “third century” for third millennium (des 3. Jahrtausends) The original is in the Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Archive, Box 21, file 15.

²³ The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 30, Selected Correspondence, 1950-1984, ed. Thomas A. Hollweck, trans., Sandy Adler et al., (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2007), 576-7.

²⁴ “Editor’s Introduction,” Selected Correspondence, 5.

new imperial situation. I am now trying to research pre-imperial symbols as far as they can be followed back into prehistory.²⁵

Later that year he wrote Manfred Henningsen about König's "fantastic collection of photographs" of cave and rock-shelter images and inscriptions. "Once again ... we see evidence of the presence of the primary experience of the cosmos and its symbolization at least [back] into the Neolithic age, and perhaps even into the Paleolithic."²⁶

Despite having also acquired an impressive collection of photographs himself, Voegelin did not manage to integrate this new material into his later publications. In the course of his lectures, however, he would occasionally mention the cave images and petroglyphs in an offhand way that his audiences found disconcerting, indeed baffling, a response that he both anticipated and clearly enjoyed.²⁷ One conclusion seems obvious: like Eric Voegelin, Marie König looked for a constancy of equivalent meanings in the experience and symbolization of reality starting with the earliest possible evidence.

In addition to the encouragement and assistance Voegelin provided, his philosophy of history and philosophy of consciousness provided König with an anthropological argument that she was very much aware of not having been able to

²⁵ Selected Correspondence, 664.

²⁶ Selected Correspondence, 675.

²⁷ I witnessed one such performance in Montreal in 1970. I had little idea what he was talking about, but neither, so far as I could tell, did anyone else. See The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 33, The Drama of Humanity and other Miscellaneous Papers, 1939-1985, ed. William Petropulos and Gilbert Weiss, (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2004), 275-6. This approach reflected Voegelin's standard operating procedure. See Schabert, "Eric Voegelin's Workshop," 241-2.

provide herself. As Meixner said, “Voegelin supported her unselfishly. Through him she, who had been attacked from all sides and who had experienced much hypocrisy (Duckmäusertum) and pusillanimity (Feigheit), came to enjoy what Voegelin called the ethic of scientists.”²⁸

To Voegelin’s philosophical insights König brought her own interpretive skills from the area of Celtic numismatics. It was an error, she said, to judge Celtic coins by classical Greek and Roman standards of beauty. “Aesthetic considerations are essentially contingent; they are one thing, and symbolism is another. And the two categories are entirely distinct.”²⁹ The gods and the myths represented on classic Mediterranean coins “are entirely foreign to the spirit of the Celts.” The signs and imagery of Celtic coins, she said, reproduced many of the pictograms to be found in the Upper Paleolithic caves and rock shelters of the Ile-de-France, which indicated the Celts were part of a spiritual tradition existing without interruption from the much earlier period. “This decorative parallelism is absolutely striking.”³⁰ Again König was explicit in her commonsensical assumption that accounted for the decorative parallelism: “Every stage in man’s development,” she wrote, “takes over the intellectual property of his forebears so long as the tradition remains unbroken. New and more precise concepts are formed

²⁸ Meixner, Auf der Suche, 143-4.

²⁹ König, “Comparisons entres les Signes dans les Grottes de al Forêt de Fontainebleau et las Numismatique Gauloise,” Cahiers Numismatiques, 50 (Dec. 1976), 98.

³⁰ König, “Comparisons,” 89, 91., 101. See also König “The Development of Culture in the Light of Archaeology,” Mankind Quarterly, 13: 3 (1973), 151-7.

beside the earlier ones and require their own particular expression.”³¹ As Meixner put it, König saw not artistic incompetence in the “crude” Celtic symbolism on their coins, but “a conscious act of abstraction derived from the store of primordial concepts upon which the Celtic coin-makers drew.”³² But even here, the same interpretive problem arose: how to justify her premise of continuity and of its elaboration by way of later and more precise imagery?³³

König initially found support for her assumption of continuity and elaboration of experiences and symbolization in a philosophical anthropology associated with, among others, Adolf Portmann and Arnold Gehlen and in Karl Jaspers’ early book, Psychologie der Weltanschauungen (1919).³⁴ Jaspers was also important for König because he considered the insights of prehistorians important for his own philosophy of history. Her efforts to engage Jaspers in an epistolary conversation, however, were a failure.

Given her argument that Celtic coins need to be understood not in terms of classical aesthetics but as conveyors of meaningful and very early symbols, it was

³¹ König, “Celtic Coins: A New Interpretation,” Archaeology, 19 (1966), 28. The most extensive treatment of the problem is Das Rätsel der keltischen Münzen, (Maschen, Hallonen Verlag, 1975), which incorporates much of her earlier work. Her final treatment was “Les Monnaies celtique: Témoignages de temps plus anciens,” in Colette Bémont, et al., eds., Mélanges offerts au Docteur J.-B. Colbert de Beaulieu, (Paris, Le Léopard d’Or, 1987), 501-13.

³² Meixner, Auf der Suche, 136-7. See also Meixner, 147-9 for a discussion of the reviews of König’s work in numismatics, and 155ff for an account to König’s relations with Count Colbert, the premier authority on Celtic coins.

³³ This is still a problem in “normal” archaeological science. See Margaret W. Conkey and Christine Hastorf, eds., The Uses of Style in Archaeology, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990).

³⁴ König mentioned several other paleoscientists who provided her with relevant evidence for her own interpretation in Am Anfang, 11-26. Of particular importance in this respect was James-Louis Baudet who helped introduce König to the caves and rock-shelters of the Ile-de-France but took a highly proprietary view of these “documents,” so much so that he did not wish König to publish anything on the subject. See Meixner, Auf der Suche, 117ff. For a discussion of Baudet and his work, see Gilles Tassé, Pétroglyphes du Bassin parisien (Paris, CNRS, 1982), 16-21.

no surprise that she found equally unsatisfactory the still prevalent opinion that the cave images were important because contemporary observers found them to be beautiful. For one thing, at the same time as nineteenth- twentieth- and twenty-first-century cave explorers were praising the beauty of the imagery and representations, they pretty much ignored the geometric figures and other imagery also present in the caves. Moreover, by looking at them as “art” rather than as religious images or “documents,” they were taken out of context so that whatever meaning they expressed was further obscured. Just as a painting of a dove ceased to symbolize the Holy Spirit outside the context supplied by a church and represented a mere bird, so the “paintings” in caves lost their significance when viewed outside their context. “When,” she said, “it is a matter of concepts that one cannot see but that can be believed in, it is necessary then to use material things to give them expression.” Thus a Cathedral symbolized all the truths of salvation in material form. And by analogy the same is true, she said, for the animal images. “What is presented to us as an animal can have an entirely different significance. The very context, the cave sanctuary, clearly shows us that we are dealing with representations that are part of a cult.”³⁵

In other words, when cave images were turned into “works of art” rather than be considered as documents or religious artefacts, they were understood

³⁵ König, “Problème des Images Quaternaries,” 360. A cult, she later wrote is “the symbolic form that gives substance to religion.” See König, “The Development of culture,” 153.

simply in a positivist context. Hence, for example, if traces of food were also found at the site where pictures of bison existed, this meant that bison were eaten –a fact that was well known on the basis of other evidence in any event. The notion of bison-as-food then led to the conclusion, for which there was no other evidence, that the imagery represented game sought by hunters. Any search for a symbolic significance, especially a religious one, was dismissed as “unscientific.” As she said (to no avail) at the 1972 Valcamonica Symposium:

Every tradition has a spiritual core, which is the source and determinant of all the details. This is crucial to the study of religion, for religion reflects ideas and we must study its development in the documents, which record changes. We must not tear details out of their context, but relate them to the essence and to the various stages of its development. This “core” approach may be useful for the study of prehistoric religions.³⁶

König also rejected ethnographic reports of contemporary “primitives” in exotic places as being analogous to Upper Paleolithic peoples insofar as they were all said to be “prelogical.” The corollary, that because primitives and Upper Paleolithic persons were outwardly similar they must also be inwardly similar, was also without evidence or foundation. The caves did not therefore contain “totemic” animals akin to the “Dema deities” of New Guinea. Nor was she persuaded by the arguments of anthropologists familiar with Siberian and Inuit cultures that found shamanic cults and “shadow souls” in the animals depicted on the cave walls. All such “theories,” along with the orthodoxy regarding hunting and fertility magic,

³⁶ König, “General Comments,” in Anati, ed., Les Religions de la Préhistoire, 587-8.

assumed that the painters were too unimaginative or just plain stupid to do more than reproduce what they wanted, usually food and reproductive success.

As indicated indirectly in Das Weltbild der Eiszeitlichen Menschen, König proposed an entirely different premise: “whatever we find in our excavations is always the outer consequence and never the inner cause. Since the causes are spiritual processes, leading to visible results, large areas of science based in reality are off limits to [positivist] historical research.”³⁷ But precisely the “spiritual processes” were of interest to her. Better, therefore, to follow the hints and arguments of philosophers –and here she mentioned Herder, Dilthey, and Bergson—as well as anthropologists who stresses the continuity of modern and early historical human beings.

In other words, a distinguished paleoscientist such as Leroi-Gourhan had things backwards: religion was not confined to fertility rites.³⁸ Rather, fertility rites were part of a religious or cultic practice the overriding meaning of which was to express a “primordial image of the world.”³⁹ Such an approach introduced an obvious new question: what was that primordial image? And how did it remain meaningful over long periods of time and yet find ever-new expressions? Some scholars grappled with this problem (and here she mentioned Bachofen, Jung,

³⁷ König, Am Anfang, 19.

³⁸ André Leroi-Gourhan, Les Religions de la Préhistoire, (Paris, P.U.F., 1964), Ch. 5.

³⁹ König, Am Anfang, 22. This was also the approach of Werner, noted above, in Comparative Psychology of Mental Development.

Jaspers, and Schwabe) by emphasizing the importance of looking at the Upper Paleolithic materials not just as instruments but as symbols or expressions of a “primordial oneness” from which later cultural forms were developed or differentiated.

Central to her argument here was the work of E. Dennert and Gehlen. Both stressed König’s initial premise, that human action that produced, for example, stone tools, was determined by thinking: “every tool may be understood as documenting a train of thought.” Even “mute” tools provide a glimpse of a “spiritual operation” (geistigen Vorgänge).⁴⁰ Accordingly, one must formulate accounts of early human experience based on authentic Upper Paleolithic material evidence that is more than positivistic “facts” insofar as it takes into account the world of the spirit (die Welt des Geistes), the supernatural, and the realm of belief that gives meaning to those facts. “If we chose the right path, it must lead to the intellectual categories (Denkkategorien) of high culture the rich spiritual life of which is familiar to us in writing and other documents.”⁴¹

Specifically, König would examine stone tools as “documents in stone,” or “concepts in stone,” as Gehlen called them.⁴² In this approach, König anticipated the now standard archaeological concept first introduced by Leroi-Gourhan, called

⁴⁰ König, Am Anfang, 34.

⁴¹ König, Am Anfang, 26.

⁴² See König, “A propos de l’Évolution spirituelle de l’Homme paléolithique en recourant à l’Exemple de différents Types d’Outils,” University of Lisbon: Review of the Faculty of Letters, 3: 10 (1967), 39-40. A “concept,” she wrote, is “the result of an act of thought.”

the “chaîne opératoire” or operational sequence by which archaeologists analyze the sequence of acts that produce an artifact such as a blade of an axe.⁴³ The assumption, again borrowed from Dennert and Gehlen, was that just as stone tools developed from basic and universal implements to complex and specialized ones, so too did early imagery develop from basic and universal symbols to complex and specific ones. That is, both tools and imagery followed similar trajectories of development within a common continuity because they were both expressions of the same “ordering spirit.” The “general idea” expressed in a simple implement “is differentiated and a stage of development is created called [by her] ‘Prägnanzstufe,’” or a potential to develop.⁴⁴

König now thought that she had an important key to understanding the petroglyphs of the Ile-de-France, most of which she had examined over many years in the Fontainebleau forest, often in the company of her family. Physically the petroglyphs were mostly scratches, sometimes cross-hatches, on the walls of caves and rock-shelters. Compared to the imagery of the caves of Franco-Cantabria, they were abstract and to modern sensibilities not particularly beautiful. For König however they were analogous to the development from the generalized Oldwan choppers to the biface hand axes of the Archulean, to the knives and scrapers of the

⁴³ See Timothy Darvill, ed., Concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology, 2nd ed., (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008) 84.

⁴⁴ König, “Comment l’Homme préhistorique pensait-il?” Congrès Préhistorique de France, (Monaco), 16 (1959), 774. See also her “The Development of Culture,” 151ff.

Mousterian, and to the blades of the Aurignacian and Magdalenian.⁴⁵ If the analogy held, the petroglyphs and rock-shelters of the Fontainebleau forest would express the most basic and universal experiences of human orientation in the cosmos. König expected as well that they would be chronologically older than the decorated caves. Dating the Fontainebleau rock shelters and comparing them to the decorated caves farther south proved to be a difficult, if not intractable problem.

Readers familiar with Voegelin's philosophy of consciousness will easily understand what he found so congenial in König's approach. Moreover, her argument regarding stone tools and images and the importance of change within continuity can be translated without distortion into Voegelin's language of compactness and differentiation.⁴⁶ In Voegelin's language, König was concerned with the most compact and elementary human consciousness. As we shall argue in detail in chapter XXX below, one of the meanings of the animal imagery is that it expressed the differentiation of human and animal consciousness within the continuity of human and animal being. These very early symbols were both immediate and simple. There is no "reflective distance" to use a later term of Voegelin, by which humans could contemplate with some detachment the meaning they conveyed. In addition, the earliest and most compact symbolic forms were

⁴⁵ This commonly accepted account of the development of stone tools is based on Grahame Clarke, World Prehistory: A New Outline, 2nd ed., (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969). Clarke's work is contemporary with König's, though I have found no evidence she was familiar with it.

⁴⁶ See Cooper, Consciousness and Politics: From Analysis to Meditation in the late Work of Eric Voegelin, (Notre Dame, St. Augustine's Press, 2015), Ch. 3 for an analysis of Voegelin's argument.

also the most universal and the most directly apprehended. Later symbolism, in contrast, was both more differentiated and specific and thus is more accurate, in the sense that it provides a more adequate representation of reality. This does not mean that later more differentiated symbolisms add to the stock of human knowledge in the sense of providing additional information about reality. The very notion of differentiation presupposes the presence of reality in a compact of comparatively inarticulate form. Differentiation simply brings to consciousness what is already present and inchoately “known.”

Voegelin discussed this process of differentiation within reality many times, especially in his later work. A particularly apt formulation regarding the problems associated with very early symbolism is found in the “introduction” to volume four of Order and History. Voegelin raised the question of why, despite the existence of more differentiated symbolism, the compact cosmological symbolism meaningfully persisted.

This peculiar structure in history originates in the stratification of man’s consciousness through the process of differentiation. The truth of existence discovered by the prophets of Israel and the philosophers of Hellas, though it appears later in time than the truth of the cosmos, cannot simply replace it, because the new insights, while indirectly affecting the image of reality as a whole, pertain directly only to man’s consciousness of his existential tension [toward the divine ground of being].

In conventional language, one speaks of the revelation of the hidden god beyond or transcendent to the intra-cosmic gods. Voegelin’s emphasis, however, was on the

visionary or auditory or meditative experience of the individual who responds to this revelation. More precisely, the individual discovers that his human consciousness is somehow also the site where this divine presence is experienced. Such an individual participates in a “theophanic event” and his or her consciousness becomes

cognitively luminous for his own humanity as constituted by his relation to the unknown god whose moving presence in his soul evokes the movement of response. I have circumscribed the structure of the event as strictly as possible, in order to make it clear how narrowly confined the area of the resulting insights actually is: The new truth pertains to man’s consciousness of his humanity in participatory tension toward the divine ground, and to no reality beyond this restricted area.

That “restricted area” refers only to the immediate experience in the consciousness of the individual who responds to the theophany thus making it an “event,” which is to say: no response, no event.

Of course the human beings who undergo such experiences sometimes do not acknowledge the “narrow” or “restricted” area of reality involved, namely human consciousness. More specifically,

the differentiation of existential truth does not abolish the cosmos in which the event occurs. Regarding its existence and structure, however, the cosmos is experienced as divinely created and ordered. The new truth can affect the belief in intracosmic divinities as the most adequate symbolization of cosmic-divine reality, but it cannot affect the experience of divine reality as the creative and ordering force in the cosmos.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Voegelin, Order and History, vol. 4, The Ecumenic Age, ed. Michael Franz, the Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 17, (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2000), 52-3

That is, because the differentiation of consciousness occurs within the cosmos, the need to symbolize that reality does not disappear. What Voegelin called “the primary experience of the cosmos” and the earliest symbolization of it are not superseded by later forms.⁴⁸ In one sense this is self-evident: the earliest forms constitute the context or background in light of which all subsequent differentiations take place. If later symbolizations are, in some sense, an advance, we still need to understand what they have advanced from.

Using Werner’s comparative psychology, König developed her own commonsensical rather than philosophical version of the problem of compactness and differentiation. Once the notion of stupid and primitive human being is abandoned along with the outmoded theory of progressive development that supported it, we need to consider the best way of understanding the spiritual world of early humans. This approach must be based on “documents,” namely those materials that are available in the tools and images created by early human beings. Tools require humans to collect suitable stones and to develop an appropriate “operational sequence” that could be passed on to succeeding generations. New inventions were always possible and often made but not as a random or idiosyncratic accumulation so much as a sequence of types beginning, as noted above, with the all-purpose Oldwan choppers.

⁴⁸ Voegelin, The Ecumenic Age, 118-23.

The first human act that created a chopper from a stone (and for which there is no identifiable artifact) was entirely creative; it was an initiative. Once patterned it could be reproduced and inspire additional inventions. König envisaged this development in terms of a pyramid.⁴⁹ At the top was a basic principle –the tool, for example. Then, over the generations, cultures modified inherited traditions by adding new specializations without repudiating or destroying the basic concept. A tool such as a chopper could become a knife or an axe or a scraper without ceasing to be a tool. “The basic concept remains central and is essential to an understanding of the development of particulars, especially when we are dealing not with tools but with symbols, the significance of which is not always obvious.”⁵⁰

The assumptions, as noted above, were: (1) that “every cultural object concretized a thought. The idea is primary. It determines the executions;” (2) there is an analogy between “spiritual genesis” as expressed in the notion of a conceptual pyramid, and “cultural development,” which is attested by the improvement of tools; thus (3) the pyramid representing the excavated artifacts also represents “conceptual development.” Accordingly, the analogy with the development of

⁴⁹ König first developed her conceptual pyramid, so far as I can tell, in 1966 in “Die Symbolik des Urgeschichtlichen Menschen,” 129ff. See also König, “Über die Entwicklung der Begriffe des vorgeschichtlichen Menschen dargestellt am Beispiel der Werkzeugtypen,” in Jan Filip, ed., Actes de VIIe Congrès Internationale des Sciences préhistoriques et protohistoriques, (Prague, UNESCO, 1970), 70-3.

⁵⁰ König, Am Anfang, 30.

tools can be found in the spiritual development of humanity: in the beginning was a relatively undifferentiated experience and symbolization of the whole.⁵¹

2. Early Symbolization of Fundamental Experience

König's discussions of "fundamental experience," or "spiritual core," which are equivalent to Voegelin's "primary experience of the cosmos," continued her commonsensical account to the implications of "man the tool-maker" and of the human connection to the genesis of Homo spiritualis as well as what occasionally amounted to her own speculative philosophical anthropology.⁵² For example, the experiences of hunger and cold quickly inform anyone of the bio-physical basis of existence. Hunting and control of fire answer that experience with food and warmth –and it is perhaps worth stressing that for large stretches of early human history, the inhabitants of, say, South or East Africa, were refugees from extensive glaciation and desertification. In such refugia as existed, food and warmth would be high priorities. But the eyes of early humanity exceeded the ability to act directly within the world around them (Umwelt): the stars and the sky brought human beings new experiences, but of a different kind, and these too needed to be reflected on and accounted for.

⁵¹ See also Meixner, Auf der Suche, 108ff.

⁵² See König, in Anati, ed., Les Religions de Préhistoire, 587.

At the same time as hunger was sated and early human beings achieved what Hegel once called “sentiment-of-self,” a glance at heaven, as Aristotle said, initiated a new experience for which nothing is to be done except think about it. No tool, no material embodiment of such thought is possible. What is possible is a different mode of cognition that required an act of the imagination or what König called “faith” and Voegelin called “imaginative participation.” And at the same time, this mode of cognition was directed at the mystery of birth, life, and death, which are self-evidently connected to the material issues of eating and keeping warm, but are not exhausted by them. That is, if you don’t eat or keep warm, you die. But even if you do eat and keep warm, you still die. Thus the first mode of consciousness, Hegel’s Selbstgefühl, cannot account for, or be reduced to, the second, Aristotle’s wonder. Wonder is autonomous even while it is dependent upon a body that needs to be fed and kept warm. In addition to the stars and the sky and their rhythms, there were other forces that could not be seen but nevertheless were there –the wind and the seasons, for example-- and still others such as volcanoes that, even though they may be visible they could not be dealt with as hunting dealt with hunger and keeping warm dealt with cold: they could be observed but not measured, anticipated, or mitigated..

To put it another way, part of the primordial image of the world was that it was dangerous and that human existence within it was precarious. Humans were at

the mercy of unseen or uncontrollable forces or events and so they felt dependent, but they could reflect on their dependency and so feel connected to the world, participants in it, and grateful for their connection and participation. Existence may be precarious, but it is not chaotic; there is order and human existence unfolds within a cosmos, a little world of meaningful order. This complex of experiences required special behaviour –a cult, as König said, and a ritual space that could make these invisible realities visible, present, and so accessible to human participation. The primordial forces, more fundamental even than the material necessities of food and warmth, were accordingly symbolized not to control them, as contemporary prehistorians almost universally assume, so much as to connect early humans with an invisible reality. In Voegelin’s language, participation in reality, some of which was invisible and non-existent, and not the control of existent phenomena, was the motivation for this basic experience and symbolization of the primary experience of the cosmos.

“The oldest objects to have been found that were not tools and that therefore raised the question of their cultic purpose,” König wrote, “were spheroids.”⁵³ The oldest of these, she said, dated from the end of the Lower Paleolithic, the Acheulian, some 300KYBP. If this dating is accurate, it belongs to the very earliest possible time, according to the fossil record, of human habitation, shortly

⁵³ Am Anfang, 32.

after the separation of Homo erectus and Homo sapiens.⁵⁴ In any event, these spheroids were three or four inches in diameter and so could be held in the palm of the hand. That they were spheroids was of great significance to König. The spheroid, she said, “was the ideal shape (Gestalt) for the as yet undifferentiated fundamental concept (Grundbegriff) because alone it is the perfectly uniform figure” (Figur).⁵⁵ In addition, the visible or phenomenal cosmos, especially as made evident in the nocturnal motion of the planets and stars, made the sky look like a vault. So, König argued, the cosmos could be represented in this primordial way either from the outside, as a sphere, or from the inside, as a vault with the observer at the centre. The skull, being both spheroid and hollow was highly suitable as a representation of both perspectives. This may be why so many skulls and skull fragments have been preserved. In any event, for one reason or another, skulls have long been treated in a special way.

The undifferentiated cosmos/sphere/vault was, she argued, the primordial and unstructured representation from which developed a more differentiated structure of an above and a below or nether world, often understood to be lying in water --a spring, for example, emerging from the depths could also be an entrance

⁵⁴ The dating of “loess balls” (loess is wind-blown sediment) is technically very difficult. See F.E. Zeuner, “Loess Balls from the Lower Mousterian of Achenheim (Alsace),” The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 83 (1953), 65-7; see also Paul Wernert, “Les Boules de Loess d’Achenheim et les ‘liitte mirr:’ Essai de Paléo-Ethnographie comparée,” Cahiers alsaciens d’Archéologie, d’Art, et de Histoire, 5 (1961), 5-18. See also Stephen W. Edwards, “Nonutilitarian Activities in the Lower Paleolithic: A Look at Two Kinds of Evidence,” Current Anthropology, 19:1 (1978), 135-7.

⁵⁵ Am Anfang, 34.

to the netherworld. Occasionally skulls have been preserved in what once were springs, which is an indication of ritual treatment. Such rituals also indicate that the cosmos is not simply an assumed unity (Einheit gedacht). Now there was an above and a below, a here-and-now and a beyond. Thus was the cosmos more precisely understood, which also meant it could no longer be adequately represented as a spheroid. “Perhaps the hunter found a suitable comparison by looking at a shell,” the two halves of which expressed this newly discovered principle.⁵⁶ Whatever shells came to symbolize, they took on a significance that was unrelated to use as food or as a tool. That their meaning was nevertheless significant is attested by the survival of so many shells in locations far from their natural home.

Later Mousterian (ca. 50-40 KYA) cultural practices continued the use of spheroids and shells. Skulls were often separated from other bones and preserved separately, and the cult activity near springs continued. Moreover, if springs dried up or subterranean channels changed course, as happened in many places in France, the result was another liminal space, the cave.⁵⁷ A significant innovation that was based on a “bivalve” distinction of above and below was the practice of burying human remains, including those of Neanderthals, along an east-west axis and often in rectangular graves and placed in a fetal position, as though awaiting rebirth. Such practices presuppose close observation of the heavens and especially

⁵⁶ König, Am Anfang, 35.

⁵⁷ Leroi-Gourhan, Les Religions de la Préhistoire, 73ff.

of the sun, which rose on one side of the sky and set on the other. Observation and representation of the two sides of the sky, the “world axis” gave additional structure to the cosmos. This axis, however, cannot be represented by a sphere or a vault, but only by a straight line. Nor can it be derived from a sphere or vault. Even more remarkable, a north-south axis, which also appeared in the Mousterian period, cannot be derived from observation of the rising and setting of the stars but is, so to speak, an act of pure speculation. By the Middle Paleolithic, therefore, humans used their imagination to develop a cosmic focal point where the two axes intersected. At the same time, humans created the four cardinal directions. As indicated, this articulation of the cosmos may have been known to Neanderthals who, on the grounds that they also laid their dead in square burial pits. For the first time the cosmos had a centre or focal point: the intersection of the two world axes. The subsequent elaboration of the four cardinal points was, König said, the result of “conceptual thinking” (begrifflichen Denken) and thereby further separated the natural from the cultural world and contributed to the “spiritual genesis” of human being.⁵⁸ Of particular significance in this context, König argued, were the “cult-caves” of the Ile-de-France, which remained in use from the Mousterian until the Christian centuries.

⁵⁸ König, Am Anfang, 43. The discovery of the “Tata plaque,” dated at 100KYA, which may also have expressed the two world axes, pushed this spiritual genesis deep into Neanderthal times. See L. Vertes, “Churinga de Tata (Hongroie),” Bulletin de la Société préhistorique française, 56 (1959), 604-11. See also H.P. Schwartz and I. Skoflek, “New Dates for the Tata, Hungary Archaeological Site,” Nature, 295 (18 Feb., 1982), 590-1. See also Meixner, Auf der Suche, 192-3. The plaque is circular with a crack in it and a line inscribed at right angles to the crack.

König's discussion of the caves and rock-shelters of the Ile-de-France introduced another element to her narrative: the natural geological formation of the landscape.⁵⁹ The ground where a visitor can walk today in the Fontainebleau forest is comprised of very different kinds of material, from loose sand to hard quartzite. Much of the terrain is covered today with trees and other vegetation, but there are many outcrops of rock that have been eroded by wind, rain, and ground water. The result is, König said, a "bizarre landscape." This is certainly true. There are large rounded rocks that look like mammoths, others covered with a polygonal surface structure look like shells of turtles, and still others look like skulls, balls, and faces. There are flat bowls that humans can lie down in, some with holes opening to a limited section of sky that might serve at night as a kind of camera obscura allowing for the focused observation of celestial motions. There are also large caves, often accessible only by way of sink-holes, some of which are surrounded by standing stones.⁶⁰ Even today there is something slightly eerie about these rock formations.

What strikes the observer immediately, however, is the proliferation of lines and circles, cross-hatches and nets inscribed on the interior walls and ceilings of the rock-shelters and caves. These "documents," König said, have a common style

⁵⁹ See also Jacques Hinoout, "Abris ornés des Massifs gréseux du Tardenois (Aisne)," Cahiers archéologiques de Picardie, 1 (1974), 33-49

⁶⁰ At a hill called "Mont des Ancêtres" in the Coquibus woods near Milly-la-Forêt, the placing of stones or "walls" remind one of the "medicine wheels" of North America—that is these arranged stones may be remnants of observatory cultic sites.

even though some scratches are longer and deeper than others, which suggest frequent repetition of the original inscription. Baudet was able to date the tools that made the different kinds of scratches from the Middle to the Upper Paleolithic.⁶¹ If the earliest dates are accurate, some of the signs and ideograms date from Neanderthal times.⁶²

König then invoked her general assumption regarding increased specificity and differentiation indicating that the later scratches were more complex and the earlier ones, “and we can draw conclusions about their meaning. In the caves of the Ile-de-France are reflected the genesis of the symbols that, in later cultural provinces, are familiar to us as completed schemes in their final form (Gestalt).”⁶³ That is, the early symbols are preserved in later textual documents, for which discursive explanations are available so that we can “read back” meanings into the

⁶¹ König, Am Anfang, 69-70; Meixner, Auf der Suche, 117ff. Dating the signs and ideographs in the Ile-de-France complex and controversial. J.L. Baudet, “Les Industries des Grottes ornées de l’Ile-de-France,” Congrès préhistorique de France, Session XII, (Paris, 1950), 119-31, cautiously argued for a Mesolithic date, around 10KYA. In 1951, in “Les Figures anthropomorphes de l’Art rupestre de l’Ile-de-France,” Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société d’Anthropologie de Paris, X:2 (1951), 56-66, and “L’Art rupestre préhistorique de l’Ile-de-France,” Comptes rendus des Séances de l’Institut française d’Anthropologie, 71 (1951), 18-22, he dated the earliest figures as belonging to the Middle Paleolithic, at least 30 KYA. He repeated this argument in “Les Industries des Grottes ornées de L’Ile-de-France,” Congrès préhistoriques de France: Comptes Rendus de la XIIIe Session, (1952), 120-31, assigning the figures to the Aurignacian (35-40KYA). See also Baudet, “Contributions à l’Étude du Paléolithique ancien d’Europe septentrionale,” in Karl Grip, et al., eds., Frühe Menschheit und Umwelt, vol. I, Archäologische Beiträge, Festschrift für Alfred Rust, (Cologne, Böhlau Verlag, 1970), 34-51. In 1990, Michel Girard and Jacques Hinout, “Essai de Chronologie de Sites mésolithiques de Bassin Parisien par l’Analyse pollinique,” Bulletin de la Société préhistorique française, 87:4 (1990), 113-16, using C14 analysis of pollen in sites that were not disturbed by bioturbation dated the earliest evidence at 9KYA. In 1993, Anne Bridault and Angel P. Bautista, “La Grotte ‘à la peinture’ à Larchant (Seine et Marne), Lieu-dit Les Dégoutants à Ratard: La Faune (Mésolithique, Bronze final, et Gallo-romain),” Préhistoire et Protohistoire en Champagne-Ardenne, 17 (1993), 75-81, found evidence of Mesolithic animal remains at Larchant, which gives them a date of around 10KYA. Gilles Tassé, Pétroglyphes du Bassin parisien, Ch. 5, argued that the engravings can only be dated relative to one another, with the ones that show the most ritual use being the oldest. A survey of this problem is in Michele Bouyssonnie, Michel Cluchet, and Louis Girard, “Les Gravures rupestres de Fontainebleau,” Archaeologica, 82 (May, 1975), 8-23.

⁶² See König, “Die Symbolik des urgeschichtlichen Menschen, 135; and König, “The Development of Culture,” 154.

⁶³ König, Am Anfang, 69.

ambiguous earlier documents from our understanding of the more explicit later ones. As she put it in an earlier version, because the Upper Paleolithic people did not possess a written language to aid us in the decipherment of the meaning of their ideograms and imagery,

only characteristics of style can reveal to us their spiritual content. Thanks to recent finds from historical eras, we now possess material whose style corresponds to the prehistoric as regards the representation of both women and animals. This stylistic correspondence indicated a continuous ideological tradition.⁶⁴

She then made reference to the winged bulls of Assyria as lunar symbols along with the Celts who, according to Strabo, worshipped the moon.

König's use of historical evidence to interpret prehistorical symbols added to the weight of her argument discussed earlier that postulated an analogical development from all-purpose choppers to specialized cutting tools with the development from compact and simple symbolizations of the cosmos to more complex and differentiated symbolization. In the context of early human history she argued that the scratches on the cave and rock-shelter ceilings and walls of the Ile-de-France were ideograms that could also be found in the decorated caves of the Upper Paleolithic. Moreover, since there is at least one image of a spotted horse that unquestionably belongs to the "style" of the Upper Paleolithic caves, it is evident that in the Ile-de-France sites were in use for an extended and continuous

⁶⁴ König, "Zur geistige Situation des Jungpaleolithikers," 479. König used the term "ideological in an archaeological sense of a set of beliefs shared by members of specific community. See Darvill, concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology, 205.

period of time. Lastly, König concluded that the scratches –of lines and crosses, spheres, cups, and circles—indicate that such symbols, at least in the Ile-de-France, occur in the same cultic space and thus presuppose a shared world-view and spiritual experience. The newer forms (Gestalten) were simply added to the old without demolishing anything. The destruction and mutilation of these symbols, as distinct from adding to them or incorporating later forms into earlier ones, did not occur until Christian times.

3. Space⁶⁵

The subtitle to König's book, "the sign language of early man," indicated her major thesis: the lines, pictographs, ideograms, and images of the caves and rock-shelters were religious or speculative documents that could be decoded following the logic of compactness and differentiation of experiences and symbols. The remaining chapters of her book dealt with the orders of space and of time, with the lunar sequences as a symbolism of birth and death, with the symbolism of number, and with a brief account of the later development of Upper Paleolithic symbolism in the petroglyphs of Valcamonica, Italy. She began by reiterating her primary presupposition, that the initial symbolization of the cosmos was a sphere. This was followed by a distinction between the upper and the lower worlds,

⁶⁵ See Werner, Comparative Psychology, 167ff.

symbolized by “cups,” hollows of bowls that, as a clamshell, might come together to reconstitute the whole.⁶⁶ In addition, looking to the vault of the sky, the upper world, one could see lines traced by the movement of the celestial bodies. The most pristine beginning of this process of cultural and symbolic differentiation, which is to say, the initial representation of meaning, she argued, was expressed in the scratches of the cave and rock-shelter walls.

There are plenty of natural caves available, but only some were chosen for cult activities. There must have been a good reason for these choices. To begin to discover it, we must be alert both to the natural forms of particular caves and the evidence of human activity. Moreover, we must also be alert to the problem of compactness so that a multitude of forms, made up solely of straight lines and “cups” can be used to symbolize the same experience or express the same meaning. In addition, the cult-caves can sometimes combine natural formations with man-made ones, which meant that on occasion nature shaped the expression of the human spiritual world and humans simply recognized what was already there. Hence the importance of landscape, as noted above.

The lines traced by celestial bodies introduced a new ordering principle. To the extent that the cosmos was now understood as a symmetrical “above” and

⁶⁶ It should be added that once the above and the nether world were differentiated, it was self-evident that human being existed “between” the two parts of the world. This “in-between” status was central to the philosophical anthropology of Plato and Aristotle and was discussed at length in Voegelin’s later work. See Cooper, *Consciousness and Politics*, 276ff and William Desmond, *Being and the Between*, (Albany, SUNY Press, 2001) and his *God and the Between*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 2008).

“below,” lines may be expected to appear in the cup half as well as in the vault half. Occasionally cups were sculpted into the floor of a rock-shelter in such a way as to give them prominent rims; in Neolithic times, these “holy bowls” became quite large. There are also sculpted heads, symbolizing the older cosmic sphere, covered with ideograms and lines forming a grid, lattice or “net” that represented, König suggested, “a kind of system of coordinates covering the world,” and constituted perhaps a precursor to the houses of the Zodiac.⁶⁷

That is, the original cruciform image, which may be enclosed in a circle (as with the Tata plaque), was made more precise with additional vertical and horizontal lines thereby creating the ideogram of a net familiar from such famous later artifacts and the Willendorf or Brassempouy statues. “There is hardly any other idea as deeply rooted in human consciousness” than the symbolism of right-angled lines, whether expressed as a rectangle, a grid, or a net. Moreover, despite occasional appearances of right-angles in nature (as in a tortoise shell or the tortoise-shell-like rocks of the Fontainebleau forest) by and large right angles require human intervention. This very old ordering principle, we saw, began with the square burial pits of the Neanderthals and continued into the much later constructions of square or rectangular temples, palaces, and even cities laid out on

⁶⁷ König, Am Anfang, 94.

a grid corresponding to the cardinal points.⁶⁸ Granted that the early grids were reflections of the lines traced in the celestial sphere, it was also true that the stars and planets did not just move in straight lines. “They rose to a zenith (Kulminationspunkt) and then fell again thus tracing a curve across the sky.”⁶⁹ This rhythm, she said, may have been understood as a general law inasmuch as it corresponded to the natural growth and decay of plants and animals as well as to the course of human existence.

Her next topic of discussion therefore dealt with the symbolization of cycles (der Umlaufgedanke). Just as there was a stellar course from birth in the east to death in the west, death was followed by rebirth of the celestial bodies in the east. In order to return from west to east the celestial bodies had to pass through the subterranean mirror image of the celestial vault, the underworld. This rhythmic change might easily be symbolized by a ring or by a “ring-cross” which combined a circle, symbolizing the return of the stars to the east via the underworld, and a cross inside it symbolizing the four-fold structure of the cosmos. König also argued that using only straight lines one might equally symbolize the cycle of life and death. Here she first made reference to a later symbolization on Celtic coins that connected the four cardinal points to a curved line representing the course of the stars, sometimes with short side lines to make a curve “herringbone,” the rising

⁶⁸ König, Am Anfang, 100. See also Tilo Schabert, Stadtarchitektur: Spiegel der Welt, (Zürich, Benziger, 1990) and Schabert, Die Archetektur der Welt: Ein kosmologische Lektüre, (Munich, Fink, 1999).

⁶⁹ König, Am Anfang, 103.

side of which points up to life and the falling side down to death, akin to the imperial Roman gesture pronouncing on defeated gladiators.⁷⁰ She then “read back” into the symbolism of the rock shelters, which did not contain a curved line or arc, an equivalent meaning. Here the straight-line “herringbone” and “antler” ideograms were interpreted as also symbolizing the cycle of life and death and thus adding a further complexity to the structure of the cosmos.

Just as the “ring-cross” became an element in the “spiritual property” of humanity, so did the “line-cross,” a graphic but also generalized expression of human orientation in the cosmos, become the center of human spiritual existence and the fixed point at the center of the cultural world. The discovery of this central point led to the understanding of the four cardinal points and the four directions that converged on it. Then, once discovered, the four cardinal points were understood as the corners of the world and so the cultural world was conceived as a rectangle or square. The four “corners of the world” could be expressed in straight lines and thereby provide a more organized and limited image of the cosmos than was conveyed by the spheroids. Interestingly enough, the “net” as the sign of an ordered cosmos could be conceived as covering both the sphere and the rectangle.

Equally important to the quadrangle enclosing, and so ordering, space was the number four, which could be expressed as four scratched lines, four dots (or

⁷⁰ Tassé, who made no reference to König in his later work, also noted that the circles and “antlers” carved on the walls suggested “attributes of certain Celtic divinities” represented on Celtic coins. See his Pétroglyphes du Bassin Parisien, 72.

cup marks), four painted lines, and so on. In addition, however, this quadrangle “world-plan,” when surrounding a cross, introduced a fifth cardinal point that could initially take the form of a vertical-horizontal cross, the cross of St. George, or of a diagonal cross, the cross of St. Andrew. The vertical-horizontal cross divides the quadrangle cosmos into four squares; the diagonal cross into four triangles. And the two can be combined, as in the England-Scotland Union Flag. With the addition of a third intersecting line, with or without a surrounding rectangle or circle, one finds the third axis to the cosmos extending from the zenith to the nadir, the two poles connected by a line passing through the center. That is, once the center of the cosmos was symbolized as the intersection of the two lines, a third intersection, of the sky and the underworld, could also be discovered.

König’s point, as the thoroughly modern example of the British Union Flag illustrated, was that, although the imaginative range of ideograms may be limited, as befits a compact symbolism, the “sign language” conveyed an essential meaning that was transferred across generations. Indeed, she said, “ideograms hold the key to the understanding of pictorial symbolism” such as may be found in the painted caves.⁷¹ Given that the basic purpose of all the ideograms was to present, express, or symbolize the whole cosmos (das All), the two-dimensional scratches supplement the spherical forms of nature. They give cosmic space more precision,

⁷¹ König, Am Anfang, 142.

more structure, and more order, “but the conception (Vorstellung) of the world as spheroid remained rooted in human consciousness.”⁷² Even so, something fundamental had changed when the cosmos was symbolized with “corners.” The three-dimensional representation was a cube, not a sphere. Accordingly one finds, for example, pebbles from the Mas d’Azil that, like a die, contain dots on the face to represent the five cardinal points. The development of a world image as a cube in the Upper Paleolithic depended, however, on the prior image of the cosmos as sphere.

4. Time⁷³

After discussing how Upper Paleolithic humans oriented themselves in space, König turned to the problem of orientation in time, starting, naturally, with the succession of day and night and the passage of the sun across the sky from east to west followed by the return to the east via the netherworld. Then came the experience of the phases of the moon and how those changes were integrated with solar motion. In this context she mentioned the work of Alexander Marshack, which we discuss in the next chapter.

König began her interpretation not by considering evidence for the sequence of the phases of the moon, as did Marshack, but by postulating the basic principle

⁷² König, Am Anfang, 143.

⁷³ See also Weerner, Comparative Psychology, 182ff.

of three. That is, she began with an interpretive principle of equivalence: three dots expressed an equivalent meaning to three lines. The representational form might vary, but the significance could remain the same. The reason why this assumption appeared reasonable to her was that the moon appeared in three phases to all human beings everywhere. Accordingly, “the three” could not disappear from human consciousness even though the way it was represented or symbolized might vary enormously.

König found confirmation for the interpretation in the previously mentioned image of the large white/dappled bull in the Hall of the Bulls at Lascaux: in front of his snout are three groups of three red lines. A hunter of aurochs might easily identify the horns of the bull with the “horned moon” (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, V:1, 125). The hoof print of a boar or the tusks of a mammoth would likewise remind a hunter of the phases of the moon. That many of these images were painted in what Breuil called a “twisted perspective” only served to emphasize the lunar imagery of the horns.⁷⁴ If it is accepted that the horns and tusks of beasts, often exaggerated, were intended to express the order of time as it is manifest in lunar changes, then the importance of the symbolism of “the three” is

⁷⁴ One might make the same argument regarding North American “rock art,” with the racks of bighorn sheep, which are often “exaggerated” serving in the place of European aurochs. See David S. Whitley, *Cave Paintings and the Human Spirit: The Origins of Creativity and Belief*, (Amherst, Prometheus Books, 2009), 93-4; 145. The notion that the horns on the Lascaux bulls are images of the moon and so of the order of time is supported by the argument of Eduard Hahn, that aurochs were first domesticated not for beef but for “religious purposes” such as sacrifice. Animals were selected and selectively bred, he argues, because the “gigantic curved horns resembled the lunar crescent.” Hahn’s *Die Haustiere und ihre Beziehungen zur Wirtschaft des Menschen*, (1896) is summarized in Eric Isaac, “On the Domestication of Cattle,” *Science*, 137 (1962) 195-204.

emphasized. Bulls, lines or dots all expressed an equivalent symbolic meaning. To which may be added triangles, including “double triangles” with tips touching at the center and even a double-headed axe with a handle to represent the cosmic spatial axis. The bull, often with a triangle on his forehead, survived as a cultic representation almost to Christian times. Again König’s point is not that double triangles can be found in rock-shelters of the Ile-de-France, which is simply a fact. Rather, it is that the symbolism first encountered in the Upper Paleolithic was transmitted well into literate historical times, in Crete, for example, even when later human beings forgot its origins as lunar symbolism.

Armed with the insight that the principle of the ordering value of “the three” could be expressed in many different ways, König found several variations besides triangles and parallel lines. Three lines could be placed around a common center to make a T, sometimes with cup-marks at the ends of the extremities thus constituting a triangle as well. Or it could appear on Neolithic statues by way of eyebrows and the bridge of the nose or, of course, the pelvic triangle. Similarly the chin of the ivory head of Brassempouy is triangular beneath the aforementioned net-covered skull. By König’s interpretation, then, the famous Upper Paleolithic “Venuses” are more cosmological- than fertility-related. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the fertility aspect of the Venuses was one constituent of the cosmological, which in turn included both decline and death and regeneration and

life, especially in lunar symbolism. That the Venus figures looked pregnant was therefore discounted.⁷⁵ Rather than embodying the realism of pregnancy, the large rounded stomachs and deep navel cup mark were meant to represent the sphere of the cosmos. This interpretation would explain why, for example, the figures usually had no feet. Or rather, where realistic feet would be, one finds only the apex of a triangle. Lunar ideograms sometimes take an almond shape flanked by two sickle moons, one waxing and the other waning. Or there is the well-known bison from the cave wall at LeMouth (Dordogne) whose outsized horns represent the beginning and end phases of the lunar cycle and whose outsize single eye in the middle represents the full moon.

König next devoted an entire chapter to the new moon as an especially important measure of time. Much of her argument reiterated the points already made. In addition, however, she argued that the fourth phase, the “death” of the moon in the three days when it disappeared from the night sky, also promised the hope of resurrection.⁷⁶ That is, the common human anxiety regarding death could be both expressed and reduced by ritual integration with cosmic lunar rhythms. As evidence, she pointed to three lines with a fourth drawn through them or to cosmic-symbolic bulls accompanied by three lines and an arrow. Likewise, an axe, a

⁷⁵ See Meixner, *Auf der Suche*, 168ff.

⁷⁶ Hence the words of the Apostle’s Creed regarding Jesus: he “was crucified, dead and buried: He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven.” This version is taken from the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* (1549) familiar from my youth. Even then I wondered why Jesus was out of sight for three rather than one or twenty days.

triangle with a shaft touching one corner, is a symbol as well as a (rather ineffective) tool. Its proximity in Upper Paleolithic caves to vulva expressed the intimate connection of death and life. Accordingly, death and life, including new life, were thus constituent elements of the order to the cosmos for Upper Paleolithic humans.

König offered an interpretation of the well-known figure in the “shaft” at Lascaux that is consistent with her general interpretive argument and more detailed than her previous effort in Das Weltbild. Unlike most of the images in the cave, which are oriented around the cave vault, this one is at its lowest point. To the right is a dying bison, the symbol of the waning moon. New life is expressed in the ithyphallic anthropomorphic image with the bird’s head. It has a rectangular body with outstretched hands, each of which has four digits (like Mickey Mouse). The bird’s head and the bird nearby (and below) “connect the concept [of the ensemble] to heaven and to resurrection (Erweckung).” The anthropomorphic figure, she said, was “marked with all the signs (Züge) of cosmic order.”⁷⁷ The imagery also showed that the moon did not renew itself on its own, that a cosmic power, in the shape of the anthropomorphic figure, was there to attend or even command “rebirth.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ König, Am Anfang, 235.

⁷⁸ Jean Clottes, much later, considered this anthropomorphic image a shamanic psychopomp tasked with conducting souls to the netherworld. See his “Retour à Lascaux,” in his Passion Préhistoire, (Paris, La Maison des Roches, 2003), 69f, 77f. We discuss the “shamanic hypothesis” in Chapter XZ.

König concluded this chapter on the meaning of birth-death-resurrection, as symbolized by the new moon, with a brief methodological reflection. “Each single object indicated an act of thinking (Denkact) and we set ourselves the task of recapitulating the execution of the movement of thinking (Denkbewegung),” which is to say the movement of differentiation of experience and symbolization. “To that end we first must find a common denominator for the entire complex of symbols that sustained the fundamental concept.” And then, having grasped the fundamental concept, for which the symbol complex furnished equivalent meanings, “the documents are marked with increasingly clear meanings.”⁷⁹

It was particularly difficult to symbolize time. The moon was a heavenly clock that could be compared with earthly objects –but which ones? And these earthly objects could change from one thing –a pair of bison horns—to another –a triangle, three dots, etc. So “any number of symbolic images that bore no external relationship to one another” might yet be responses to the same experience. If her interpretation of the new moon as an “answer” to the anxieties of life and death is accepted, and if we examine the Upper Paleolithic “documents” with this perspective in mind, one thing is very clear: the earliest cultures sustained a highly specialized spirituality.

⁷⁹ König, Am Anfang, 238.

5. Number⁸⁰

The spiritual comprehension of the world began with the development of an image of the world as spheroid. This image was subsequently differentiated first into above and below, then into space and time, all of which nevertheless remained parts of a single whole. But how were the parts related to the whole? Did the parts retain their analytical distinctiveness? To understand such questions, König said, “analysis must be followed by synthesis.”⁸¹ However, once the notions of space and time had been differentiated, one could not simply return to the more compact symbolism of the spheroid. Rather, a new synthesizing symbolism that integrated the now differentiated symbolism was called for. This synthesis, moreover, remained within the symbolic form of ideograms to be found in the Upper Paleolithic cave imagery and such later imagery as could be linked by an intelligible narrative to the older symbolism.

We saw in previous sections that the order of space found expression in the four-sided rectangle and the order of time based on lunar phases in “the three.” One synthesis, therefore, was the additive seven. That is “the seven” could express the unity of the spheroid symbolism articulated into its spatio-temporal (4 + 3) components. This ideogram could take the form of seven lines, of a triangle with four cup marks inside, a grid of three long vertical lines connected in the middle

⁸⁰ See also Werner, Comparative Psychology, 287ff.

⁸¹ König, Am Anfang, 240.

with three horizontal lines creating four squares, and so on. The last described grid of 3x3 lines also expressed the number of nights of each phase of the moon. Such a combination of lines and dots grouped in threes and fours, crosses, grids, squares and nets are all present in the decorated cave at Lascaux. According to König, the details of the large animal images are to be interpreted in light of the ideograms, the meaning of which has largely been forgotten. Or, as she put it, “with the end of the Ice Age, graphic symbolism (bildhafte Symbolik) was abandoned but the signs of [earlier] meaning (Sinnzeichen) were still in use.”⁸²

A second “synthesizing” symbolism König discussed was the spiral. Spirals were developed from circles but unlike the circle, the spiral does not return to its beginning. Rather it leads to a center and back out again. At Newgrange, a Neolithic site, they are wound up in opposite directions and placed amid squares and triangles. They point above and below, to the zenith and the nadir, and so also express the mystery of life and death. If you follow the line of the spiral it turns back on itself and returns to the beginning; if we assume the center of the spiral is the nadir, following its line is a path to the depth, followed by a return from the kingdom of the underworld to life. Thus, “the spiral expressed the hope of resurrection,” a notion still present in Christian representations of the labyrinth.⁸³

⁸² König, Am Anfang, 246.

⁸³ König, Am Anfang, 250.

The earliest spirals, at the decorated cave of Altamira in Spain, for example, date from the Upper Paleolithic.

König next turned to the symbolism of Celtic coins. She was, as noted above, a recognized expert in Celtic numismatics. Here, as in Das Weltbild, she used her extensive knowledge of these artifacts to argue that Celtic symbolism “preserved the spiritual heritage of the [remote] past.”⁸⁴ Such coins were not, as noted above, crude versions of the “realistic” symbolism of the Greeks and Romans, but an expression of more fundamental, earlier, and prehistoric cosmic order. Though they were minted relatively late, many during the first and second centuries BC, they provided a glimpse into the spiritual universe of a much more temporally remote period. Unlike their contemporaries, the Romans, who expressed their spiritual life in myths, the Celts retained ideograms: dots, lines, nets, and so on. When they incorporated classical figures such as that of a horseman, it was overlain with dots, crosses and cup marks that sometimes practically obliterated the equestrian imagery. What mattered to the Celtic minters was not the horseman but the older symbolism that could be incorporated into the equestrian image.

Section four, the central section in this seven-part chapter, dealt with the first “composite” (zusammengesetzte) number, “the nine.” This 3x3 ideogram of the

⁸⁴ König, Am Anfang, 252. See J.-B. Colbert de Beaulieu’s review of Am Anfang der Kultur in Cahiers Numismatiques, 49 (Sept. 1976), 78-80

nine-day phases of the moon could be arranged in a square and then cut by diagonals to create a comprehensive ideogram of the cosmos. The 3x3 time-pattern of dots and squares might become more complex as the 3x4 spatio-temporal ideogram, “the twelve.” Then one might add the upper-lower world and create a 2x3x4 ideogram, “the twenty-four.” All these increasingly complex ideograms served to represent the order of the cosmos in more detail. Indeed, “the twenty-four,” visualized as three nested rectangles with three cup marks on each side of each rectangle, if a twenty-fifth hole is placed in the center to the innermost rectangle to support a pole, the result is a sun-dial that also represents the third axis of the world extending from the zenith to the nadir. König made the obvious connections to the zodiac, the months of the year, the number of hours in a day, and so on. Her point, once again, was to stress the great antiquity of the order of the cosmos that endures in our own contemporary symbolism. Or, once again, to put it the other way around, the human beings of the Upper Paleolithic were as spiritually alive as we are.

6. Valcamonica

König concluded her book with a long chapter, a kind of case study, on the petroglyphs of Valcamonica in northern Italy. She began with a striking

observation: “the instruction book of humanity is written in the sky.”⁸⁵ Whether hunter or agriculturalist, humans found in their observations of the planets and stars confirmation of the principles of order. Recalling the conceptual pyramid detailed in chapter one of Am Anfang der Kultur, König reiterated her thesis that later cultures preserved earlier insights.

According to Emmanuel Anati, who had studied the Valcamonica petroglyphs extensively, the creation of these ideograms took place during the Neolithic. The spiritual heritage found there, in cup marks, for example, extended back to the period of exclusive Neanderthal occupation. The depth of the grooves or incisions suggested repeated ritual beating of the rock, and the numerical values —“the three,” “the four,” etc.—are familiar from the Upper Paleolithic symbolism of the rock shelters and decorated caves. Many of the petroglyphs were pecked or incised on smooth glaciated rock with a fabric similar to the smooth lava of Hawaii (pāhoehoe), which was also incised or pecked with petroglyphs. Anthropomorphic figures, triangles, dots, crosses, ladders —all the Upper Paleolithic ideograms—are present, thus reflecting the earlier symbol complex. In addition, new ideograms, of a bull-drawn cart, for example, indicate technological progress, but they also repeat the phases of the moon. “There was no going back to the undifferentiated origins;

⁸⁵ König, Am Anfang, 213.

the many familiar elements combined into something new” even while they expressed a very old meaning.⁸⁶

König called these developments “spiritual additions” (geistiger Zuwachs) the traces of which could easily enough be found in documents in the megalithic monuments of the Neolithic.⁸⁷ A discovery peculiar to Valcamonica was the symbolization of a vertical world axis, later represented in Greek and Norse myth as the tree at the center of the cosmos, reaching from the netherworld to the sky where the four “stags” (constellations) lived.⁸⁸ Next to be differentiated within this spiritual world, she said, were anthropomorphic shapes developed from square ideographic symbols surmounted by a circular head without features and supported by triangular thighs and calves. These are not crude semi-realistic portraits of humans, König said, but representations of cosmic order combining right angles, circles, and triangles. Again one might point out the striking similarity of the Valcamonica petroglyphs to those of Hawaii. König drew attention to similarities with Swedish petroglyphs as further evidence for her major thesis, that the several “cultural provinces” of the world often reverted to a common spiritual heritage using very old Upper Paleolithic forms to express the primary experience of the cosmos.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ König, Am Anfang, 314. Again König provided more details than she did in Das Weltbild.

⁸⁷ König, Am Anfang, 314ff.

⁸⁸ See E.A.S. Butterworth, The Tree at the Navel of the Earth, (Berlin, De Gruyter, 1970).

⁸⁹ König, Am Anfang, 326.

The closing sections of her book dealt with the persistence of the Upper Paleolithic symbols and their transformation into myths that eventually were written down. Thus, to recall an earlier noted example, one finds the images of the lunar bulls of the Upper Paleolithic changed into the great statues of bulls by the Mesopotamians, only now adorned with wings to indicate their celestial symbolic status. Likewise Pegasus grew wings and the lunar ox-drawn cart and Apollo's fiery horses appeared on the scene. What had changed was how the horses and bulls appeared. No longer were they clearly symbolic creatures attested by the "twisted perspective" that presented horns and hooves from one viewpoint and the torso in another, along with ideograms that added to the meaning of the imagery. Rather the animals were more or less presented as they actually appeared in the world and an element of anthropomorphism or "personification" was introduced. "The cosmic symbol was brought down into the here-and-now; the cultural world was presented as the world of nature."⁹⁰ This additional differentiation of consciousness required new ways to express itself, which König argued could be found in myth.

The pictorial anthropomorphism, as when a celestial chariot is endowed with a driver, led the human imagination to find novel ways of expressing the primary experience of the cosmos that was outside the limitations of ideograms. That is,

⁹⁰ König, Am Anfang, 346.

instead of ideograms one finds pictures that provided “an inexhaustible source for further differentiated into to actual worldly events, and myths were told to describe the cosmic order in terms of visible processes. Thus did a view of the cosmos turn into an explicit narrative; and then the spiritual context faded and the narrative was understood as an account of “facts.” And so the gods became more human, distinguished only by their greater powers –and then the creation of the gods was seen not as a cosmic event but as a kind of biology. That is, the divine context gradually seeped away from myth once stories intervened between the primary experience of the cosmos and its immediate and relatively compact expression in ideograms.

7. A Deeper Past

In the decade following the research that led to the publication of Am Anfang der Kultur new information came to light that radically changed König’s understanding of early prehistory. That was one of the motivations for writing Unsere Vergangenheit ist älter: Hölenkult Alt-Europas.⁹¹ The focus, as indicated by the subtitle, was on the “cave cults” of very early Europe. How early?

⁹¹ Frankfurt, Fischer Verlag, 1980. A French translation by Frédérique Daber, Notre Passé est encore plus ancien, (Paris, Laffont 1982) also exists. As with the relation of Das Weltbild to Am Anfang der Kultur, there is some repetition of points made in Am Anfang, which we will ignore apart from the observation that König seems to be much more confident of her position in this book.

The occasional tentativeness regarding dates in Am Anfang der Kultur had been dissipated owing to “new observations concerning the age of humanity and their spiritual capacities” (ihrer geistigen Fähigkeiten).⁹² König referred specifically to the 1979 publication of Henri de Lumley, which reported on an excavation he and his wife had begun in 1964 at Arango Cave, near Tautavel (Pyrénées-Orientales).⁹³ Lumley discovered several skulls from which the brains had been deliberately removed. This evidence, for Lumley, indicated a religious and so a human attitude.⁹⁴ More interesting was the age of the fossil: over 400,000 years. Hence its trinomial designation: Homo erectus tautavelensis. It was, therefore, a pre-Neanderthal specimen. Moreover, Lumley considered the Tautavel skull to be evidence of an even older cult, which meant that continuity had to have been established with an earlier period. But how? Only, König said, by an oral tradition, which meant that this early man could speak. König again mentioned the 300KY-old loess balls of Achenheim, which she called a “turning point” (Anschnitt) in human spiritual history because it indicated that humans were not content simply to collect subjects with symbolic shapes, such as skulls, but instead shaped material, in this example, loess, into spheres, which then were passed down through generations.

⁹² König, Unsere Vergangenheit, 28.

⁹³ Lumley, “L’Homme de Tautavel,” XI Congrès de l’Union internationale des sciences préhistoriques et protohistoriques, (1979), xxxzxxx.

⁹⁴ See also Weston LaBarre, Muelos: A Stone Age Superstition about Sexuality, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1985).

The skull-cult, practiced in caves, was continued by Neanderthals, König argued, and eventually by Sapiens. The combination of rectangular Neanderthal tombs, grave goods, etc. and cave skull-cults indicated that they, like us, were concerned with the questions of life and death. By the close of the Ice Age, the cult of the cave and the symbolism of the skull had lasted 320KY.⁹⁵ Lumley also argued that the orderly changes in the sky –solar, lunar and astral—were connected to the cave cult because of the belief that the heavenly bodies traversed the underworld to start over again each morning. Because caves often had water at the bottom of them and the heavenly bodies sunk into the sea, yet another connection was made: water was the realm of the sun and the moon, and animal sacrifices near springs, the earliest of which date from 200KYA, represent the acknowledgement of a “higher power.”⁹⁶

König reiterated her argument regarding the horns of animals and the crescent moon. In addition she made explicit once again her earlier remarks on the significance of drawing animals rather than signs. “When human beings took a colored crayon in hand, it was their thought that was expressed.”⁹⁷ It was therefore significant that the artists drew bison, aurochs, mammoths, and so on, rather than

⁹⁵ König, Unsere Vergangenheit, 45. In fact, later dating of H. erectus tautavelensis would increase the number to over 400KY.

⁹⁶ König cited Alfred Rust as the source of this interpretation. Like her, he was also a “private scholar,” best known for his work on a late Paleolithic complex on the North European Plain called the German Hambutgian. Unlike the entirely apolitical König, Rust joined the Ahnenerbe, an SS-sponsored institution designed to produce archaeological evidence of Aryan and Nordic greatness and racial superiority.

⁹⁷ König, Unsere Vergangenheit, 50.

rabbits or mice. The day the first image of an animal was drawn was “fateful” (eine Sternstunde) for humanity because, among other things, images were so much more easily and directly understood than abstract signs. Moreover, the spiritual intensity conveyed by the images was enhanced by having been created in a supernatural milieu, the underground.

König drew a few additional conclusions that went beyond her remarks in Am Anfang der Kultur. First, she emphasized that access to the caves was always limited so that the experience in a cult cave was strongly distinguished from ordinary life. This was one reason why, despite changes in “style,” the imagery was passed on for thirty thousand years. Second, when persons entered the dangerous depths of the caves, they were not simply seeking adventure. To be sure, they sought to contemplate representations of the heavenly bodies, but also sought to distinguish among them, and to reproduce the basic order of the cosmos initially expressed in the crossed lines discussed above. Third, Sapiens simply continued the orientation of humans to the cosmos that was already explicit with Neanderthals and inchoately present with Homo erectus tautavelensis. Sapiens added color, which was no small achievement, but it was done within a very ancient tradition. König’s conclusion was therefore obvious: it is no longer acceptable to speak about the “obscurity” of prehistoric symbols. This is not magic thinking or hunting magic or anything equally “primitive” –such are the

consequences of our errors, she said, which are deeply rooted in contemporary dogmas of positivism and progress. Rather, prehistoric symbols are expressions of compact spiritual sensibilities of the reality of cosmic order.⁹⁸

König then illustrated her interpretive procedure by reconsidering the evidence from Lascaux. The most interesting thing about Lascaux from her point of view is that the same animals were painted again and again, in sizes big and small. The bulls, as she remarked several times, convey a lunar symbolism and in this relatively late cave, a symbolism that is clearly structured. They run as if they are on the solid ground of the earth and their horns point to the top of the vault. Compared to them, we are tiny. Thus did the cult of the heavens measure human being. But they are traditional images and, like the skies, are in continual motion. As noted above, in front of the big white/dappled bull, whose head only is painted in detail, is “the three” signifying the three phases of the moon, repeated three times (in red). Likewise, the great black bull, as much by his horns as by his hooves, signified that he is a celestial bull. “No one needs either syntax or grammar; a child can understand the symbolism.”⁹⁹

Horses, she said, symbolized the sun. But they are, compared to the bulls, disproportionately small. Perhaps this was because the course of the sun was more regular and did not involve the complications of death and resurrection. In later

⁹⁸ König, Unsere Vergangenheit, 70.

⁹⁹ König, Unsere Vergangenheit, 84.

mythological accounts, the horse continued to symbolize the sun –the sun/chariot of Apollo was drawn by horses as was the chariot of the Vedic Surya. (The chariot of the moon was as likely to be pulled by oxen as by horses.) Antlered deer, she said, symbolized summer and the ibex winter. In any event, the regular placement of these images was designed to assure humans of the regularity of the cosmos, a kind of expression and assuaging of their existential anguish. “Humans look for counsel and help from the heavens. Lascaux is for us a mirror of their beliefs.”¹⁰⁰

König also expanded her interpretation of the figures in the “shaft,” the famous lanced bison, the bird, and the ithyphallic man. The shaft is the lowest part of the cave and difficult to access (in prehistoric times). It was originally much more red than it is today --and red remains the color of hell. The entrails of the bison are spilling out of his belly –in three loops. The tail of the bison ends in three points and the hooves are in a twisted perspective: all are lunar symbols. “The night stars are dying here; we witness the drama of their death,” not that of a natural animal. Nor is the ithyphallic man a human, König said. He has a bird’s head, suggesting a messenger from the sky, and as noted above, four fingers on one side and three on the other, with a “correction” resulting in four on both hands. If the four phases of the moon include the death of the moon, the figure reinforces the lunar death of the bison. If the figure is “dead” his erection symbolizes the

¹⁰⁰ König, Unsere Vergangenheit, 105.

generation of new life. Lascaux, she said, provided a unique vision of Ice-Age humans. We have seen that the vaulted ceiling reproduced the celestial vault –the bulls were celestial bulls. In the shaft, the ground of the cave became the ground outside the cave, just as the deep shaft opening to the red evening sky in the west represents the entry to the underworld. Indeed, the shaft represents “an image of the cave itself.” It is a “place of mysteries where the old moon dies, an unknown power restored new life to him and the new cycle begins.”¹⁰¹ This account of one of the most famous, controversial, and enigmatic parts of Lascaux cave combined cosmic rhythms with death-and-resurrection. It is a masterful exposition of what Voegelin meant by compact consciousness.

König’s conclusion could almost be anticipated: “The heavenly bodies do not change; nor does the human being.” The analogy between human and cosmic order survived the change to agriculture from hunting and gathering. This is why in the myths passed on to us, caves are so important: Zeus was born in one, Jesus was resurrected from one and grottoes, not a manger in a cowshed, are often depicted as his birthplace as well. Jesus’ birth was even attended by the celestial animals, a lunar cow/ox/aurochs and a solar horse/ass; and his birthday is next to the winter solstice. This may be a long road, but it is not an arbitrary one.

¹⁰¹ König, Unsere Vergangenheit, 111.

8. Conclusions

We begin by summarizing the conclusions reached by Marie König and then provide some conclusions about her work.

Human beings continue to live beneath the stars, to believe in a beyond, and to hope for an afterlife secured by ritual behavior. However, the cultic expression of these continuities changed: pictorial expression of these experiences was abandoned but the signs, points, and indices that accompanied those representations were continued. What appears to be a mere cipher (Zahl) fully contains the ancient notion of cosmic order. This abstract method of expression was an improvement because, unlike the use of animal symbols, it cannot be depreciated into a kind of demonism. There exists a clarity with this abstract symbolism that has continued to the present. This is why the pebbles of the Mas d'Azil, decorated with dots, retain their fundamental importance.

Neanderthals first discovered the motion of the celestial bodies from east to west, which furnished the two cardinal points by which humans could orient themselves and which continued until the Middle Ages. The East-West line was crossed at a right angle to define the now four cardinal directions, symbolized by four dots or four lines. From the Tata plaque of Neanderthal times to the large bulls of Lascaux with four dots (and the rhino in the shaft at Lascaux is also accompanied by four dots) to the “Lord of the four quarters” of Mesopotamia, the

symbolism persisted. Likewise the great megalithic structure at Newgrange combined the three and the four, along with other numbers. Our understanding of history, König argued, required the uninterrupted transmission of memory and the willingness to rely on it in order to project it into the future. “The great festivals have always had a relationship with the calendar; astronomical observation is the basis of cultural life.”¹⁰² Such coincidences still exist in the present: the old tradition sustains the Christian celebrations of Christmas and Easter.

“Number and signs speak to reason, not to feelings (Gemüt). They presuppose astronomical observation; they make precise the laws of astronomical motion and serve to express them. They express the order to the world of which the heavenly bodies are the instantiation.”¹⁰³ However, in times of difficulty humans turn not to numbers and signs but to the heavenly bodies themselves and their rhythmic course. The celestial cycle is universal as is the cycle of human life or the “wheel of life” that is understood to conform to the return of the stars each evening and of the sun each morning. Because humans know they will die, in their funeral arrangement they mimic what they see in the cosmos: they are buried in the earth on an east-west axis and consigned to the protection of the heavenly bodies, to the celestial bulls of the Upper Paleolithic and to “our Father who art in Heaven” in the contemporary Christian West.

¹⁰² König, Unsere Vergangenheit, 149.

¹⁰³ König, Unsere Vergangenheit, 200.

Death, even today, remains mysterious although birth can at least be observed as taking place from the maternal womb, which in turn becomes a fine symbol of resurrection. This is why in the Upper Paleolithic one finds not only dying and resurrected bulls, but often vulvas as well, symbols of the beginning of life. The presence of vulvas, to reiterate a point made above, is not therefore evidence of a “fertility cult” because the notion of fertility is only one constituent element of a more comprehensive spiritual ensemble that also includes cult of death and belief in the beyond.¹⁰⁴

Regarding Marie König’s work, it seems to me that two points stand out. The first is that she provided an extensive and coherent argument and a large amount of evidence to support Voegelin’s concept of compactness and differentiation of consciousness. Her insights and conclusions can be translated without difficulty or distortion into the comprehensive philosophical anthropology of Voegelin. The earliest humans, arguably Homo erectus tautavelensis, were distinguished by a recognizable and compact consciousness. Likewise Neanderthals and the earliest Sapiens can intelligibly be discussed in terms of compactness and differentiation of consciousness based on the non-utilitarian artifacts they left behind.

¹⁰⁴ König, Unsere Vergangenheit, 235-6.

A second equally obvious point is that König was an outsider, a member neither of the German academic community nor of the narrow guild of archaeologists or of other paleoscientists. She did receive acknowledgement by academics concerned with Celtic numismatics. More broadly, she held the view that the Celts were an important element for understanding the cultural development of humanity by their position mediating between the very early peoples and their beliefs in the stars and the people of antiquity whose forms of thought belong to literate civilization.¹⁰⁵ Despite the Roman and Romanocentric deprecation of Celtic history, she argued that such an attitude cut us off from our remote past. In this respect there was no better proof than the Celtic coins, so many of which expressed representation of the heavens. That is, Roman contact with the Celts needs to be understood as contact between two spiritual cultures with distinct ways of differentiating experiences of reality: the one from the east mediated by divinities, the other in the west still in contact with the primary experience of the cosmos. The Romans were unthreatened by the cave cult but the Christians were, largely because of the importance of the cross as a Christian as well as a cosmological symbol. Thus many “pagan” crosses dating from the Upper Paleolithic were obliterated, even though Christian churches recapitulated the

¹⁰⁵ König, Unsere Vergangenheit, 127.

cruciform symbolism of the caves. Only the Celts maintained the old traditions, until they, too, were Christianized.¹⁰⁶

Those who seek to live only in the present, Marie König observed, annihilate the inheritance of collective memory and come to grief in isolation, which is synonymous with barbarity.¹⁰⁷ And that, of course, was her chief criticism of professional archaeologists. She may have found her rejection by the professional archaeologists an irritation and their rudeness occasionally exasperating, but she must also have found their lack of imagination at times amusing.

¹⁰⁶ König, Unsere Vergangenheit, 263ff.

¹⁰⁷ König, Unsere Vergangenheit, 136.