One Godz

A People’s History of the Upper Paleolithic

Toward a Phylogeny of Art, Language, and Religion

Appendix 02

The Shaft

Male Rites of Passage
at
Lascaux

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Abstract

This paper identifies the narrative that accompanies the panel at Lascaux known as the Shaft. Discussion includes:

- A Mythic interpretation
- Functions of Lascaux within the greater landscape
- Ritual use of the interior spaces
- A review of the cultural and historic implications of the myth and archaeological evidence supporting or contradicting

I have tried to present this as a self-contained discussion, however, narrative analysis and character identifications are based on the interpretations presented in One Godz - The Index of Deities and Demons. Readers are urged to review it first.

Introduction

All evidence indicates that Lascaux served several explicit functions related to the Rites of Passage for the society it served. The Hall of Bulls appears to be singularly designed as a wedding chapel and the Axial Gallery may have functioned for women as the Shaft did for men as a starting point for their Hero’s Journey as Joseph Campbell so described it.

Language vs Art

Language depends on two or more observers sharing a common system of understandings. The mutual understandings of language could be as simple as a single tone or a complex assortment of symbols, sounds, gestures, glances, movements or other sensory stimuli. Language by its nature requires processing. Language requires specific pre-existing shared knowledge.

Art does not need a mutually agreed upon system only mutual experience or a common set of emotional responses. Art however requires a response, either conscious or visceral from the viewer. An artist can communicate thru art in ways he may not plan or even understand. The author’s’ intent is not requisite to understanding art. It may be requisite to understanding the artist but not the art. Art transcends time and place, art is universal.

The category of paintings and etchings discussed in One Godz is referred to as Rock Art, the operative word being Art. Interestingly, no one has ever described these panels as Rock Language. Because we are prewired for both art and language we are able to recognize each even if we do not understand why. However, we note three distinctions between Language and Art:
In between is a large world of gray and into this category we place the pictograms and rock art of the UP artists.

The Translation

*Verily at first Khaos (Chaos, the Gap) [Air] came to be, but next wide-bosomed Gaia (Gaea, Earth) . . . and dim Tartaros (the Pit) in the depth of the wide-pathed Earth,

Hesiod, Theogony 115 ff (trans. Evelyn-White) (Greek epic C8th or C7th B.C.)

This panel is only accessible thru an opening behind the Nave which leads to a shaft deep enough to require a ladder or rope. Opposite and above this panel is a small black horsehead with an abundant detached mane. The reference being Demeter who instigated her children to revolt against their father Kronos.

This location, known as The Shaft, apparently served as an important ritual location in a boys passage to manhood. Exactly how they used the space or applied this morality play in their day to day life is unknown. However, it is located in Lascaux as one small space for Male Rites of Passage in a larger landscape dedicated primarily to marital ritual. A quantity of oil lamps were found at the bottom indicating supplicants passed a substantial but calibrated amount of time in dark contemplation of a line art cartoon.

Technical Aspects of the Shaft

There are five characters totally in this scene though only four in this frame of the panel proper. There are seventeen devices (each icon that contains information is called a device). Cave panels are read in counterclockwise direction beginning top right as follows:
(Numbers = Characters   Letters = Devices)

1. Kronos the bull
   a. Testicles
   b. Spear
   c. Head position
   d. Horns
   e. Upright tail

2. Ouranos the Birdman
   a. Beak
   b. Penis
   c. Feet
   d. Claw hand
   e. Body positioning
   f. Dart

3. Ouranos the Rhinoman (half man half rhino spirit)
   a. Penis
   b. Feet
   c. Rhino head
   d. Drops of Blood
   e. Transition technique

4. Aphrodite the birdgirl
   a. Bird form
   b. Shaman stick

5. Demeter the horse above and directly behind the viewer( not pictured)

I do not include the Shaft itself as either character or device though one could make an argument, the Shaft, because it represents Tartarus is a character. One could argue that because the location constitutes the entire stage and the participant a player, it is a device.

NAIs have a saying that 'history lives in places' and it is my belief they understand this on several levels. I imagine the Shaft as a place where male rites of passage took place. A place of ritual circumcision, perhaps a place where a vision quest or other rite of passage would begin or end. Whatever other roles the Shaft may have played, it certainly played a central ritual role in marriage.
The Storyline

This Shaft represents the Tartarus or the Womb of the Mother. Here after being covered by Nix in Darkness did Great Sky lay himself upon the Earth. And from here in Tartarus did the Mother bear unto him children that he could view only with fear and hate. So did Sky stuff them all, one by one, back into Tartarus.

History was important on a personal level and genealogies were not simply memorized but the relationships discussed and understood. From their worldview Ouranos and Gaia are siblings and some of their offspring may suffer birth defects as a result of what the people may have considered the original sin. As the defects are passed along family lines it creates subtrees of good and evil. So Sky was repulsed by his own children and could not bear to look at them. He tried to get rid of them but eventually three sons, Hades, Zeus, and Poseidon led from behind by their mother Demeter usurp him.

“Now monstrous strength is powerful, joined with vast size. For of as many sons as were born of Earth and Sky,

155 they were the fiercest, and were hated by their father from the very first: as soon as any of these was born, he would hide them all, and not send them up to the light, in a cave of the earth, and Sky exulted over the work of mischief, while huge Earth groaned from within,

160 straitened as she was; and she devised a subtle and evil scheme. For quickly having produced a stock of white iron, she forged a large sickle, and gave the word to her children and said encouragingly, though troubled in her heart:

“Children of me and of a father madly violent, if you

165 would obey me, we shall avenge the baneful injury of your father; for he was the first that devised acts of indignity.”

So spoke she, but fear seized on them all, nor did any of them speak; till, having gathered courage, great and wily Kronos addressed his dear mother thus in reply:

170 “Mother, this deed at any rate I will undertake and accomplish, since for our father, of-detested-name, I care not, for he was the first that devised acts of indignity.” Thus spoke he, and huge Earth rejoiced much at heart, and hid and planted him in ambush: in his hand she placed

175 a sickle with jagged teeth, and suggested to him all the stratagem. Then came vast Sky bringing Night with him, and, eager for love, brooded around Earth, and lay stretched on all sides: but his son from out his ambush grasped at him with his left hand, while in his right he took the huge sickle, long and jagged-toothed, and hastily

180 mowed off the genitals of his father, and threw them backwards to be carried away behind him.”

Hesiodic Theogony
- Translated by J. Banks & G. Nagy

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Reading the Shaft

The panel describes the euphemistic *Rise of Kronus Rex* as follows:

There are seventeen devices totally in this panel. Typically when there are this many devices in a panel it is read in one direction or another, this particular image like most cave art is read counter clockwise or right to left. It starts on the right because that is where the geometry leads your eye. You probably focus first on Afrodite as the visual center then your eye moves to the bull butt by following the lines of the small dart and the long spear.

The Artistically Challenged (AC) may ask why doesn’t my eye follow birdman? The answer is because the artist did not want you to. The artist wanted your eye to return again and again to Kronos’ testicles which are roughly three times the size of his head. What does he have to do, smack you in the head with them? Start there.

The bull represents Kronos, one of many children of Uranus the Sky God and Gaia, the Earth Mother. Their children were known as Titans and this scene represents the moment Uranos was overthrown by his children led by Kronos.

Here he is represented by the bull. The spear on his flank has harmlessly passed thru him or avoided him, this device indicates Immortality and therefore we know the bull is a god. It is a very common device and in Lascaux and Chauvet you will always read darts arrows and spears as indicating Immortality. The spear size is meaningful in a machismo kind of way and Joseph Campbell tells us a spear was actually found leaning against the wall beneath the image at the bottom of the Shaft\(^1\). In terms of the narrative this would be the spear Polyphemus the Cyclops fashioned for Kronos.

Cronos’ head is turned around as though he is looking at you, look closely, his tongue is sticking out and his tail is sticking straight up waving at you. He is taunting you as though he is saying ‘kiss mine.’ Remember, you would be standing amid the Titans, his brothers and sisters, he has just overthrown your father Great Sky, so will you follow him or will you be next? This device appears on non parietal swag from the period. ‘Kiss mine.’

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\(^1\) Historical Atlas of World Mythology, Vol.1, Part1 - Joseph Campbell
The birdman is his father Uranus, the Original Skygod, though he was more of a primal force than a god because he had no active role in CGM. This is one of the few known images of Ouranus and he is pictured here as a part man part bird to indicate mortality and subsequent transition. The human devices demonstrate he is mortal (dead), the beak is merely to identify him as the skygod and founder of the Bird lineage.

His penis is a mere shred having been severed with a sickle and tossed into the sea. Compare the tiny fallen dart to Chronos’ large spear or compare his shredded penis with the shadow of himself morphing into Hecate.

The obscure black shape on the panel left side has invited argument as to its nature ever since modern man first cast eyes on it. In fact, it represents Ouranos’ human spirit leaving his body and returning to Gaia. He has been rammed by Cronus so hard it has ripped him in two. He morphs into Hecate, a rhino which is the Order of the Nursemaids and the Meliae Nymphs.

According to the myth Zeus, son of Ri or Demeter, cherished Hecate above all others and he said that she had raised him. The subtext is that Uranus and Gaia as dualistic sides had cared for him while he was being held in the prison Tartaros.

It can be a confusing visual so to elaborate, the black shape can be viewed by itself as a human figure pitched backward or it can be viewed as the upper outline of a rhino with a tail or penis and haunches that double as limp legs. The black line of the rhino’s back to his shoulders is made by smudging charcoal with a palm and creating the broken effect. It is incredible that someone could have visualized this image and produced it, probably in seconds.

In ancient times they introduced and ended mythological characters like soap operas but the show still went on. This panel demonstrates a clever narrative device still used today to remove an artifact from an old storyline or religion to make room for a new order. This is effectively the end of Ouranlos who was apparently the chief Sky god in a prior evolution of the theology. He still received respect and sacrifices but his narrative is effectively over, within this culture. This morality play somehow describes the end of a previous period and beginning of a new one.
There are three pairs of dots below the penis which according to the narrative represent the Furies, the Gigantes, and the Meliae respectively. Two vertical dots are a common device in Chauvet Lascaux and French memorial caves representing a soul. Probably a reference to the eyes of someone who has been buried on their side in fetal position prepared for rebirth.

“….for as many gory drops as jetted forth from there, Earth received them all; and when the years rolled round, 185 she gave birth to stern Furies [Erinyes], and mighty Giants, gleaming in arms, with long spears in hand, and nymphs whom men call Ash-nymps, [Meliai] over the boundless earth. “ - Hesiod’s Theogony

The little bird on the stick is Aphrodite, goddess of eternal beauty. She has been associated with Doves but Martens, which are closely related, were an important food source in the caves that were easily bred nearby. The quantity of Marten remains found in the cave seem to imply they served as an important food source.

“But the genitals, as after first severing them with the steel, he had cast them into the heaving sea from the continent, 190 so kept drifting long time up and down the deep, and all around kept rising a white foam from the immortal flesh; and in it a maiden was nourished; first she drew near divine Kythera, and thence came next to wave-washed Cyprus. Then forth stepped an awesome, beauteous goddess; and beneath her delicate feet the grass throve around: 195 gods and men name her Aphrodite,” - Hesiod’s Theogony

Within this panel she represents the idea that as one life leaves another enters. It is clear the artists and priestly order introduced her intending to replace some other goddess most likely Persephone or Demeter. Native American shamans placed a bird totem (or a dead bird in the old days) atop a ‘Shaman Stick’ on the outskirts of the village to alert visitors to a death in the community. The following image represents use of Shaman sticks from Alaska but they are common.

“Fig. 459 illustrates information with regard to distress in another village, which occasioned the departure of the party giving the notification. The drawing was made in 1882 by the Alaskan, Naumoff, in imitation of drawings used at his home. The designs are traced upon a strip of wood, which is then stuck upon the roof of the house belonging to the draftsman.
Fig 459.—Alaskan notice of distress. - Mallery

a, the summer habitation, showing a stick leaning in the direction to be taken; b, the baidarka, containing the residents of the house; the first person is observed pointing forward, indicating that they “go by boat to the other settlement”; c, a grave stick, indicating a death in the settlement; d, e, summer and winter habitations, denoting a Village.2 (Any totems or fetishes associated with it are considered Good Spirits)

There is a small Y below her on the panel, this is one of her many logos and probably most common but on almost every wall of female hand prints from Chauvet to Argentina you see at least one three toed claw representing her and lots of little hands reaching for her among the handprints.

The rock wall itself is like a portal to the other world. If you needed to speak to a friend or relative who had passed away this is where you would come. If you had a favor to ask of the Goddess you would come to the cave. You would come if you were starving and had nothing to eat. You would pray to the Goddess for help and later you would come to thank her.

The significance of the Shaft here within the greater landscape of a cave whose almost sole purpose seems to be marital ritual (weddings) sets up a duality against the Axial Gallery in the opposite leg of the Y shaped cave. Not only is the motif of the Axial completely the opposite of the Shaft but its plane is even opposite. The Axial is horizontal while the Shaft is vertical.

For me it evokes an image of two animals caged before a match, perhaps separated the night before the wedding ceremony while two fathers hammer out a dowry. Then ultimately left alone in the dark in silence, absolute silence to meditate.

For him, it is about overcoming his demons to go on and achieve great things, maybe even become Chief one day. But first he has to learn to get in touch with his Hecate side, his softer side. He must learn to separate his Thunderbird from his Rhino if he is to move on with his vision quest and reach the next level of being a good husband and father. If the number of oil lamps found in the Shaft is any indication, it could take a lot meditation.

For her initiation see the section on the Axial Gallery.

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2 Mallery - Picture Writing
Myth and Meaning

It is an amazing work in its simplicity, just five characters and 17 devices. Yet within, it summarizes five meanings of life. It represents Act 5 Scene 5 in the play known 40 000 years ago as “Kronos Rex”. It probably served as the inspiration for Oedipus Rex.

It has been suggested that the geometry of the panel is indicative of an asterism called the Summer Triangle. It consists of

- Spica in Virgo
- Arcturus in Bootes
- Denebola in Leo.

Earlier we noted the possible appearance of the Summer Triangle in the Brunel Gallery associated with the red palm print bull. In the Brunel the cross of Deneb appears to be smashing into the head of the bull indicating that the swan represents Zeus and the Bull of course represents Kronos. It is possible that the Brunel was used to initiate certain Rites of Passage in Spring and the Shaft was used to conclude them in Fall prior to a nuptial ceremony in the Hall of Bulls? It would be interesting if someone more qualified could confirm appropriate angles of the art to the horizon for the seasonal interpretation.

Vision Quests begin in Spring and for them weddings would have taken place in Fall. It would seem a reasonable association, however, I cannot speak to any mythological associations or narrative connections between these three asterisms. Though they are important in terms of navigation and celestial observation.

Our Godz and Ourselves

The purpose of an origin story is to answer three basic questions: Who are we? Where did we come from? Why are we? Those are actually the easy questions to answer, the tough one really being, Did we make this up or is this a preserved history.

Like all religions Auriginal CGM sets up the meaning of the society and the codes they live by in the creation myth with archetypal allegories. It lays out what Confucius called “The Five Bonds:

- Ruler to ruled,
- Father to son,
- Husband to wife,
Each relationship has its own set of duties, rights, and responsibilities.

The first clue to reaching the meaning of the Shaft is its location. It is in the belly of Lascaux in a shaft deep enough that it is only accessible with a ladder. It is in a very real sense the basement of the basement. To the audience this represented Tartaros (the Pit), a kind of prison deep inside the Earth. However because neither divinities nor humans have been created yet in the myth, it is simply a deep pit at this point in their narrative.

and Eros (Love), fairest among the deathless gods, who unnerves the limbs and overcomes the mind and wise counsels of all gods and all men within them.

From Khaos (Chaos) [Air] came forth Erebos (Erebus, Darkness) and black Nyx (Night); but of Nyx (Night) were born (Aether, Bright Upper Air) and Hemera (Day), whom she conceived and bore from union in love with Erebos.

And Gaia (Gaea, Earth) first bore starry Ouranos (Uranus, Heaven), equal to herself, to cover her on every side.”

- Hesiod Theogony (www.theoi.com › Greek Gods)

Golub’s First Law

Civilizations advance when science becomes the basis of religion,

Civilizations decline when religion becomes the basis of science.

Religion at its core is a way to explain the universe, no different than physics. They both create rules that everything in the universe must obey, forces to test the rules, and objects to test them on. They are the hypotheses we create in the absence of all the information. Similarly, they can both be understood on many levels, science can be understood on a high school level or it can be understood on a professional level; religion can be understood on any range of levels from icon, dogma, and ritual to the highest mysticism. On any level they are complete but levels become depthier as they rise.

In order for a scientific theory to succeed it must be valid on all levels of exploration and likewise for a religion to succeed it must prove equally valid on all levels. Ergo, Religion and Science never seem to peak in popularity at the same time. In the Aurignacian religion was closer to science than Shamanism and we know this simply from looking at the art.

- they observed
- they counted
• they organized
• they remembered
• they taught others and
• they accumulated knowledge.
• Their brains were 10% larger than ours and organized exactly the same way.