

The Foundation-Stones of Culture

An Interpretation of Rock Scratchings and Cult-Objects

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Keywords: Rock carvings, prehistoric studies, psychohistory, rituals, postnatal images

Abstract: The text investigates what originally caused humans to cover rock faces with carved symbols. Examples are given to illustrate how simple geometric signs can be connected with a birth motif. A symbol that can be found in many different cultures is interpreted in this context as representing the umbilical cord and placenta. These drawings might have been done while giving instructions on how to behave while a woman was giving birth. The first three-dimensional images of humans not only very obviously show women, but were probably originally produced by women too. According to Lloyd deMause's model of fetal drama, birth-related elements can also be found in many other cultural artefacts. The article attempts to briefly describe which characteristic decorations show a link between rituals and actual birth and how a basic element of the fetal drama can be incorporated in rituals.

Zusammenfassung: *Die Grundsteine der Kultur. Eine Deutung von Felszeichen und Ritualobjekten.* Der Text geht der Frage nach, was Menschen ursprünglich dazu gebracht hat Felswände mit Ritzzeichen zu versehen. Anhand von Beispielen wird aufgezeigt wie einfache geometrische Zeichen mit einem Geburtsmotiv in Verbindung gebracht werden können. Ein Symbol, das in vielen verschiedenen Kulturen zu finden ist, wird dabei als Nabelschnur-Placenta Darstellung gedeutet. Diese Zeichen können im Zusammenhang mit der Vermittlung von Verhaltensanweisungen während einer Geburt entstanden sein. Die ersten plastischen Menschendarstellungen geben nicht nur zweifelsfrei Frauen wieder, sondern wurden wahrscheinlich auch zuerst von Frauen angefertigt. Nach dem Modell des fötalen Drama, von Lloyd deMause, lassen sich in vielen anderen Kulturäußerungen ebenfalls geburtsbezogene Elemente finden. Es wird versucht kurz darzulegen welche charakteristischen Dekorationen von Ritualen auf die leibhaftige Geburt verweisen und wie ein Grundelement des fötalen Dramas in Rituale eingebunden sein kann.

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This text will pursue the question, what initially lead humankind to decorate walls of rock with scratched symbols.

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At the beginning of the twentieth century extensive and coloured paintings, which had been placed there thousands of years ago, were re-discovered in the caves of Altamira, Lascaux and other European sites. Long before these meanwhile famous and frequently cited murals were created, early cultures had cultivated the knowledge and talent of decorating bones and stone with scratched symbols. Even palaeolithic men are supposed to have used an engraved stone slab not primarily as a tool but as a cult-object in ceremonial burials.¹ Prehistorics also link the oldest reliable evidence of the artistic treatment of objects to the ritual attitudes of humanity towards death.² Psychohistorics on the other hand, as the science of patterns in historical motives, emphasises mainly prenatal and birth-related experiences, as Lloyd deMause specifies in his *Grundlagen der Psychohistorie*,³ when e.g. he explains that bones from prehistoric sites, furnished with notches and female symbols served as calendars. In his opinion these counting-out helps did not serve as a lunar calendar, like some scientists assume, but have been a help for the calculation of the menstruation.

Stylistics of Early Rock-Scratchings

Some of the first distinct elements found in rock scratchings are small cavities, the so-called cups, or grooves. They are circular polished cavities with a depth of usually 2–3 cm and a diameter of 4–6 cm. They are arranged in rows, parallel columns, circles or randomly spread over the rock surface. These cups are often interpreted as sacrificial bowls. Some of these cavities however, are to be found in such slanted walls, that they could not have served as a receptacle. Further elementary symbol are grooves, long straight lines that do not appear just sporadically but also as seemingly arbitrarily overlapping *grid patterns*.⁴ These structures are not always looked at as an expression of conscious design, they are sometimes dismissed as “playful scribbles”.⁵ Moreover *vulva-symbols*⁶ can be found, consisting of purposely constructed lines or geometric symbols containing dots, circles, squares, waved or zigzag lines.

These geometric symbols are a leit-motif throughout the art of rock-drawing. They can be found at the oldest dated sites as well as in all later eras.⁷ From these symbols I would like to show to what extent a universal motif can be found in the history of humanity, a motif that reflects the “necessity”, that firstly initiated the storage of information via rock-scratchings, i.e. in a manner relatively independent from speech or gestures. In my opinion the circle-, maze-, spiral- and ray-designs here, that can be found world-wide on boulders, do not generally symbolise the celestial orbit of the sun or other physical phenomena. Equally the interpretation of many elementary symbols (wave, circle, zigzag lines) as decorative frills to early cult-expressions needs to be examined, as the following will show. Whereas we have to keep in mind, that neither archaeology, nor any other scientific department can make exact statements towards the age of the development of rock scratchings. The dates appearing in literature are very rarely specified by a method of analysis beyond all doubt. They are often just assumptions by the authors, differing strongly from one another. But from overlie and weathering we can draw a comparatively safe conclusion towards the *relative age*.⁸ Proceeding from these assumptions we can conclude, that in the beginning a similar graphic

development in all the different cultural groups of the world was made,⁹ concerning the creation of dot- and dash-symbols as well as the composition of complex pictures.

The Small Mammoth-Ivory

During an excavation in Siberia near Malta at Lake Baikal a small (13.5 by 8 cm) plate of mammoth-ivory was found (Fig. 1). Both sides are decorated with indentures, the centre has got a hole which was probably used for a string, so that the plate could be worn as an amulet.¹⁰ The different authors reporting on the object were not of the same opinion concerning the age, but shared the interpretation that the symbols on one side showed three (cobra-) snakes.¹¹ The snake symbol is often linked with death or the passage to the realms of the dead. This interpretation of the snake may be convincing on first sight, but for the time being I would like to disagree on the grounds of two relatively formal arguments.

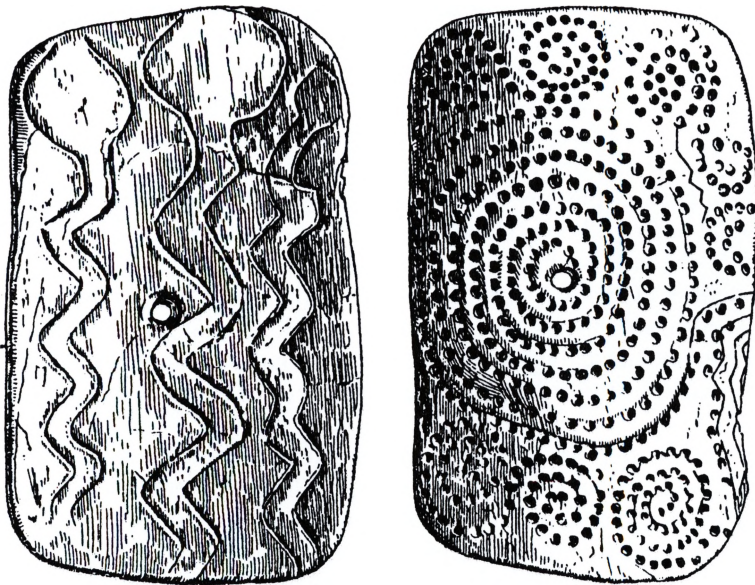


Fig. 1

1. Although snakes are able to roll their bodies very tightly, they are not able to achieve a sharp angle of more than 90° like the objects on the amulet.
2. The snake's tail-end is not open.

In his essay *Die fötalen Ursprünge der Geschichte*¹² deMause clearly explains what lead him to the opinion, that the prenatal and birth-related experiences usually have a deep traumatic effect on every human being. In this context he gives an impressive description of an object, which has a stronger connection to human life than snakes: the afterbirth, consisting of placenta and umbilical cord. This object can also be represented as a disc-shaped form with a hose-shaped extension with sharp bends and turns leading into an open end. Following deMause' approach, the objects on the ivory-plate have to be interpreted as placenta and umbilical

cord. Similar pictures of the afterbirth can be found in many places and various designs, but they are rarely recognised as such.

It is probably a problem of an affective defence in our culture towards the afterbirth. Because if the interpretation of such symbols as serpents is no longer tenable, one frequently falls back upon other naturalistic explanations (fish, tails, entrails) or abstract systems of representation (maps, trigonometrics, astronomical orbits), but rarely upon placenta and umbilical cord. Although the afterbirth is a vital organ, like e.g. the heart or liver, not much attention is paid to it, it will rather be disposed of in a distressed manner.¹³ But when in the European societies of the twentieth century a continual perception of this organ is hindered by births behind closed hospital doors and fathers-to-be rather enter a pub than spend comfort during the labour-pains, it is not surprising that some researchers lost this object out of sight. A close look at the afterbirth is not a neglected sideline of obstetrics, but imperative regarding the mother's health. An essential part of the midwives work is the inspection, whether chorion and placenta have left the uterus completely. Because within a few days, undiscovered parts clinging to the uterus would lead to a blood-poisoning resulting in death. The knowledge about the importance of the complete excretion of the afterbirth is of existential importance to humans of all cultures and I regard the already mentioned circular designs as an advice and demand to control its completeness. Considering this objective, there is not necessarily a need for exact naturalistic descriptions of the afterbirth, which also would be quite difficult to execute with the comparatively simple methods of petroglyphs, but rather for simplifying symbols. A formal resemblance with the portrayed object would be a help towards understanding, but what basically matters here is a fundamental reference towards the abstract concept of "completeness". Circles, spirals and mazes would be suitable according to formal as well as abstract aspects. But however, some historical reflections and a single amulet can not cancel out the persistent and regular misinterpretations, especially since psycho-historics can also offer only theories towards the context its origin.

In contrast to this unique amulet a lot of rock scratchings can be found, where nearly identical *serpents* appear among other symbols. Groups of pictures with different kind of symbols can be found in the whole world on cave-walls, precipices and boulders. In these surroundings the interpretation I offer for the so-called snakes is substantiated many times: that in the prehistoric art zigzag- or waved lines connected to a circle symbolise umbilical cord and placenta. For these symbols of the afterbirth can often be found in a simply drawn scenic context showing birth. With this interpretation I am in opposition to the valid scientific opinion till now. But I maintain that these designs speak a clear language. Next to many geometric symbols a woman giving birth or bleeding from the abdomen can be identified as the central figure. Presently there is always the emphasises on the spread out legs and between them a line which shows the umbilical cord, leaking amniotic fluids or blood. Here and there a small figure can be seen between or next to the legs, symbolising the new-born. This kind of compositions are no regional exception, but can be found on all continents. I would like to describe three examples in more detail.

Nevada

In the deserts of Nevada great boulders can be seen with geometric symbols and figures (Fig. 2).¹⁴ Sometimes it is just a single marking on the stone, sometimes the whole block is covered with pictures. The rocks are found outside settlements in not easily accessible ground like mountain sides or dried up river beds. The geometric symbols are very often circles and waved lines.¹⁵ Next to them simple strokes represent humans. These figures are nearly all shown in the same position (legs apart, arms spread out), but the execution, size or the details are very different. As if not a single person created many pictures but many persons put the same single subject into scene.

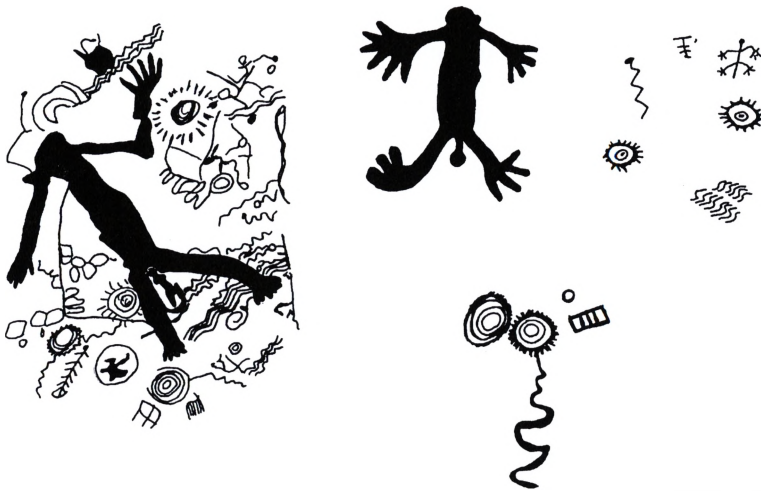


Fig. 2

The ethnological literature tells of many tribal cultures where women give birth outside the village in secluded places.¹⁶ I interpret these figures and symbols as a reproduction of scenes of birth and I can well imagine that the rock scratchings are supposed to mark e.g. special places for birth. Places which have a reputation for a “helpful magical surrounding” might have been visited more often and thus received more decoration. The scratchings could have the purpose to either document experiences and medical knowledge concerning birth as well as the aim of creating or thanking for a good omen. I don’t think they are the markings of hunters concerning game trails as some researchers assume.¹⁷

Peru

In a river valley in Peru there are also some places with petroglyphs. Here too geometric circle / wave symbols and figures with spread out legs can be found on boulders outside of the villages in this area (Fig. 3). The same choice of place and subject as in Nevada leads to the assumption that similar, if not identical contents are to be conveyed. These individually designed figures with astraddled legs reflect the different possible stages and events during birth. So these figures would be delivering women and their new-born.¹⁸

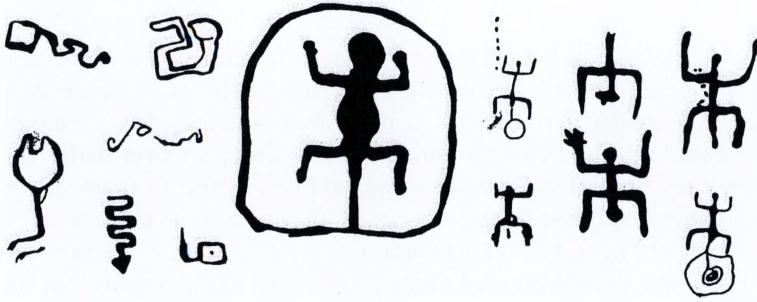


Fig. 3

In Peru there are also symbols in existence, in which the afterbirth is turned into independent beings. The umbilical cord / placenta forms don't appear just as abstract geometric symbols but are sometimes shown with eyes and mouth. What is represented in Siberia and Nevada as an impersonal object can appear here in the "disguise of a snake" i.e. as a demonic being (Fig. 4).

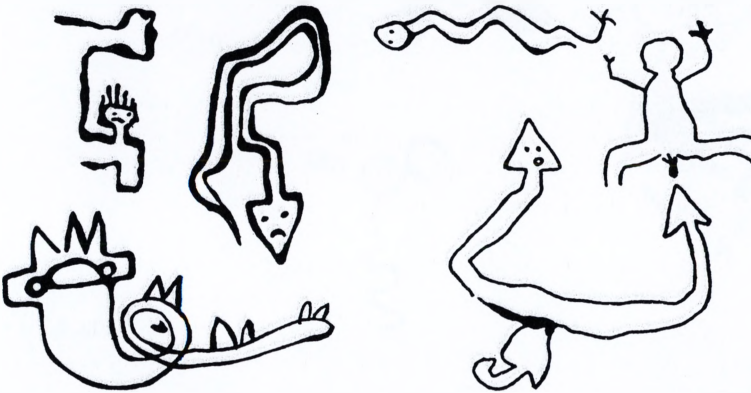


Fig. 4

Clearly the mythological snake still refers to the umbilical cord and placenta, as these designs show, like the amulet in Siberia, characteristics untypical of snakes, such as right angles and open body endings. In connection with prenatal sensory perception, especially the tactile experiences of the skin, which will be treated later, the radiant new interpretation of the umbilical cord as a snake might have stood not only in South America at the beginning of a religious doctrine which developed in later periods into *snake-gods* or *serpentine elements in cults of fertility*.

In Meso-America this could have led to the god-king Quetzalcoatl ("feathered snake"), who is shown as a young man looking out of the jaws of a feathered snake and of that we hear that human life sprang from its blood.¹⁹ India has stone slabs with snake symbols where childless women pray for an offspring.²⁰

Hawaii

In the middle of the Pacific lies the group of islands called Hawaii with great fields of rock from cooled-off streams of lava into which about 140,000 symbols have been scratched.²¹ Lava suffers substantially from weathering compared with granite or other kinds of rock. Since the rock surfaces in Hawaii are under the

open sky and exposed unprotected to wind, sun and sea, the oldest symbols are easily distinguished in accordance to their state. The islands have been inhabited for 1,200 years and the most ancient scratch-pictures have not been estimated any older.²² But the same geometric symbols (“cups”, lines or circles) can be found as in European rock-scratchings, which have an estimated age of about 30,000 years.

The Hawaiian scratchings can be regarded as complete microcosm of graphic design. The hill called “Puuloa” offers a good insight into the development of these symbols. The top of the hill shows nearly exclusively geometric symbols in a very weathered state. The nearer we get to the edge of the rock-formation, the more diverse and detailed the symbols get. Here we find accurately worked figures or whole groups of figures. Most of the figures are shown frontally with their legs spread apart. Over all there is no systematic overlapping of older symbols. The work obviously just continued at the edges of the decorated hill.

(It is no surprise to me, that later pictures contain sailing-ships, horses, churches and Latin characters. These pictures derived from the contacts with European seafarers and missionaries, which have visited Hawaii since the 18th century. The inhabitants might have thought them very “alien”, but unlike some esoterically inspired people I don’t believe these aliens to have come from outer space.)

The “Puuloa” hill is very interesting, because an oral explanation has been recorded for the “cup”-motif. 1914 an original inhabitant²³ told, that these “cups” were used as a receptacle for a piece of the umbilical cord of the new-born child. Right after birth a “Piku”-hole, as the “cups” are called here, is chiselled out of the lava-ground and a piece of umbilical cord is inserted. This is supposed to be a good omen for the child. The name of the hill “Puuloa” can be translated as “hill of long life”. So it is not a classic burial-ground, where homage is paid to the dead ancestors, but a “birth-ground”. Scientists of the Bishop-Museum have interpreted some of the figural designs in Hawaii as scenes from the parturition and the geometric symbols, like the circle/ wave-motif not as a snake, but as the placenta (Fig. 5).²⁴

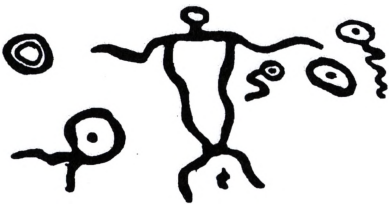


Fig. 5

Venus-Phenomena vs. Match-Stick Man

Plastic portrayals of humans, with an estimated age of approx. 23,000 to 25,000 years, are without doubt a reproduction of women²⁵. Breasts, pelvis, belly and privy parts are accentuated, whereas the head and the lower extremities are partially just suggested. This famous prehistoric venus-reproduction is not a unique phenomena, but exists in great numbers and constitutes the greater part of stone-age sculptures.²⁶ This makes it even more astonishing, that the rock-scratchings figures

are nearly exclusively interpreted as males: they are supposed to have been made by men and show these men. In my opinion this seems to be a penis-orientated point of view, a point of view quiet predominant in literature on prehistorics, even in cases where the shape as well as size make such a conclusion quite ridiculous.²⁷ The third leg, that seems to be growing out of the abdomen in some early rock-drawings, does not need to have any connection with the penis. There has probably never been and is no yard-long penis. The long, often wavy or bent lines are better interpreted as a symbol for the umbilical cord and the circle / wave motif better as a reproduction of the afterbirth.

On the other hand, there are of course stone-age pictures which show unquestionably men.²⁸ These show the primary sexual organs, if shown at all, in quite realistic proportions. In contrast to the already described figures in Nevada, Peru and Hawaii, the stylistic elements of such scenes are often of a more mature kind, as if these pictures were built upon an earlier painting tradition. The figures are usually of nearly equal size and arranged in groups, which enables the description of group-experiences rather than mainly individual experiences. The design of places, where the initiation-rites for young boys are held and where the circumcision takes place, show too rock-drawings nearly identical to the reproductions of birth-scenes.²⁹ In my opinion the long groove between the legs also represents blood and does not primarily refer to the penis. Some male-groups of Australian hunting-tribes claim the exclusive right to the setting of these symbols. Under the penalty of death, it is forbidden for women of the tribes to enter such places or make these designs themselves (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6

These male-dominated pictures are a matter of a later historic (or psycho-historic) development, where men imitate female patterns and try to superimpose it with a claim of omnipotence. The first rock-drawings, as foundation-stones of culture, surely don't show "match-stick men", no dancing men with dangling penises, but belong to the context *women and the problems of birth*. We have to go back into the times before the "penis-envy" and "castration-complex" regime, i.e. to pass through the prehistoric pilfering and its Freudian Reflection (to execute the inversion of a twofold inversion) in order to return the robbed meaning to the sacred objects of birth.

The choice of perspective is noteworthy in which humans are shown on the rock-surface. In contrast to the representation of animals, who are shown nearly exclusively in profile, the match-stick figures are predominantly shown in front view. But there are too some etchings on bones, that show men and women in side view.³⁰

This leads to the conclusion that early artists had a conception of how to shape an object (or circumstance) and would not choose a perspective at random. To relate to a figure just the predicate male or female by distinctive characteristics the profile would have offered itself. The female breast, a pregnant belly or a swollen penis is shown best in this manner. But if a picture is to convey knowledge of parturition or circumcision, the design is exclusively tied to the front view, because only this point of view makes sure of an unhindered look at the essential happenings between the legs.

Palpable Memories

At this point the question should be considered, why humans started thousands of years ago to make rock-scratchings and sculptures at all? As already mentioned, I put this cultural achievement in the vital functional context of pregnancy and assistance at birth, where they have a totally different object-character compared to e.g. a vulva-symbol reduced to just a *sexual stimulus*. Although the business with these stimuli is today probably quite powerful, as one can see in the displays of newspaper kiosk and surely sexuality has too always been an important factor in social co-existence, I do not believe that prehistoric rock-scratchings can be reduced to "Playboy- or Hustler-Rocks with engraved girls". In comparison to sexuality, birth as a cultural motivating force is of greater significance to me. Especially when considering, that this vital initial position in the course of human development seems to have reached an extremely dramatic point. Compared to our evolutionary ancestors (e.g. homo erectus) today's human skeleton has undergone drastic changes during the transition from a rather stooped to an up-right posture. The space between the hip-bones became narrower. At the same time the average brain volume grew and with that the head size.³¹ The coincidence of such circumstances during birth can lead to many complications and is a specific problem for the homo sapiens, as a comparison to our close evolutionary relatives, the apes, can make quite clear.³²

But human pregnancy and birth do not necessarily have to end in a catastrophe; parturition is no illness, but can become an extremely stressing and dramatic event and mastering these circumstances belongs to a unique cultural achievement in the anthropogenesis.

The established experiences of early societies can be preserved in a number of media. In the same way the choice of perspective is important for the pictorial depiction of objects, the choice of medium is important for the placing of contents. The venus-sculptures can not just be looked at, but moreover as a tactile object they convey a spatial orientation. A pregnant woman can internally feel the growing foetus, e.g. when it begins to turn in the amniotic flood or bumps against the abdominal wall. This sensation needs no help with the point of way. But towards the end of the pregnancy the position of the unborn gains greatly in importance.

The arms and hands of the venus-figures are often positioned on the belly. This could lead a pregnant woman to likewise put the arms around the belly, thus protecting the unborn and additionally being able to feel its position. At the same time the sculptures visualise an advice towards the most simple externally applicable aids to rectify possible problems of positioning, i.e. to influence the child's position positively by massages, change of motion or position.³³ In contrast to the picture firmly affixed to the rock, the handheld sculpture has the advantage of being able to be revolved in all directions. The knowledge of this possibility is to be conveyed.

In connection with the remarkably constant basic form of these venus-figures, the critical phase of birth is also made an issue: when the form ascends in a rhythm of swellings from a thin end to the voluminous middle, the broadest piece always at the pelvis, where at the same time in real life the narrowest passage is. Between plastic form and tactile sensation the venus-figures conveys the complex functional course of pregnancy and birth. The sculptures intensify contrary inversions, an upturn which leads from the outside to the inside (from looking to feeling) and from the inside to the outside (from the thickest through the thinnest).

The phenomena, that statues often hold hands onto their bellies is a quite constant component of statue design and can be found in many of the sculptures, that ethnologists or missionaries appropriated in primitive cultures during the last 200 years. Such statues, which are today stored in museums of ethnology, can have had a high material or social status in their original settings. This seems not necessarily to have been the case with the early venus-sculptures, which were often found in the rubbish pits of stone-age villages.³⁴ So as if they are cult objects, which are not met with unreserved reverence. If the venus figures had, apart from transmitting medicinal information, a function as a talisman (talismwoman?) used to conjure up magical support during pregnancy, the belief in the supporting power of the statue might have declined in the case of a miscarriage or death of mother/ child. It could suddenly have been recognised as a cursed object, which had to be discarded as fast as possible. The statues might have gone directly from the family's altar into the rubbish pit, just as we today dispose of a broken television set.

The statues are symbolic for the pregnancy, the petroglyphs mostly represent the parturition. In opposite of the statues the designs of the rock-scratchings frequently spread out their arms & legs, just as newborns often do. That the detached umbilical cord is almost exclusively shown in the scratch technique and then too appears as a jagged sharp-edged object refers to a symbolic character of similar complexity. The character tells symbolically and formally, crossing over the execution and action, of what to do in the phase of the expulsion of the afterbirth. The message is tied to a sharp-edged motif and contained in the scratch technique medium: in the same way the motif itself is carved or struck, the umbilical cord is to be cut or chopped through. The clearly appearing motif of the knife next to the figures with their legs apart in some engravings of the bronze- or copper-age must therefore not necessarily be seen in connection with war or hunting. The message of these characters must not be interpreted according to the pattern "knife = wound = death"³⁵, but can in this case be: "here was given birth, here a umbilical cord has been cut" or "here the bond of blood was cut" or tied in a ritual of initiation.

Psychohistorics vs. Prehistorics

Pre-historians should recognise that birth is a universal constant and that the observance of birth related elements can be a necessary extension to many of their previous expositions. Like a slow-motion replay the relicts of previous cultures can be explained more precise and comprehensive from this point of view. Because through the slow-motion of psycho-historics I review the material, which has already been submitted by ethnologists, sociologists and scientists in comparative religion, but when reviewing the materials, details can suddenly come to be of greater importance. Also new solutions for problems in prehistorics might offer themselves. Yves Coppens noted that in the beginning just a small variety of basic symbols have been used for petroglyphs³⁶ and in fact similarly by cultural groups with no known connection in time or space. Emanuell Anati tries to explain this circumstance by putting back all basic designs to a common origin. According to him this origin can be explained out of a common language³⁷, though that would have had to be spoken by all humans 40,000 to 50,000 years ago, so as to be passed on in a consistent use of forms. In my eyes similar basic forms in different cultures can be better explained, when these characters were developed autonomously. If there has ever been a consistently perceived world language, it is the beseeching cry of the new-born infants. To develop the same expressions for desire and fear the humans of all cultural groups need not have been in a constant relationship to one another, when they derive from the same background.

In this context, Lloyd deMause' concept of the *foetal drama*³⁸ becomes important. Just like the pre- and perinatale psychology³⁹ he assumes that the foetus is on a limited basis already able to collect and store experiences. In contrast to Freud he denies that the foetus experiences the stay in the womb as a state of continuous sheltered bliss. In a normal pregnancy the maternal organism is just not able to supply the foetus evenly and sufficiently with nutrient and oxygen at least during the last three months of pregnancy. The lack of oxygen results in experiences of great pain. The foetus connects the resulting confused anger, fear and longing for relief to his surroundings, i.e. the uterus. Depending on the course of pregnancy, the more constricted the foetus feels and the more threatening and painful the temporary oxygen deficiency is experienced, until the foetus is driven to the final act: birth. Due to the deformation of the skull and other circumstances birth itself is experienced as very painful. One of the basic assumptions of psycho-analysis is, that an intensive painful experience leads to a trauma for the individual. As analysts found out a long time ago for all traumas, the individual must later re-experience the trauma in a *specific recidivism*, until he has sufficient psychic defences at his disposal, to handle the massive fear and anger.

In the vernacular it is said: "*we are all born naked*". Although in later life we may not remember the nakedness or other circumstances of birth, pre- and perinatale experiences seem to fundamentally influence our perceptive and creative faculty. Because if everybody's emotional basis is moulded by the experiences made inside the womb and psychological conditions like feelings of pain or happiness are established in a general way, individuals in later life can judge further perceptions in the same manner by these basic co-ordinates of feeling. The foetal drama would be so to speak simultaneously the first shaping experience of the individual, as well as in its basics a jointly shared experience by all humans. The

simultaneously smallest and largest common denominator in social life. Feelings of fear and pain can be eased in later life by care, if this is recognised as loving and helpful, whereas all actions experienced as injuring will increase and reinforce states of panic. The individual behavioural patterns of children or adults would accordingly be much less dependant on genetic factors or environmental set-ups, than on the social climate we grow up in. It doesn't make any difference for our spiritual welfare, whether we grow up in the mountains, the jungle or the desert, neither if we belong to a peasant or hunting culture. But it is important for the development of mental skills, whether children are subject to arbitrary bodily assaults or benefit from a caring and supportive upbringing. The conditions of upbringing in early childhood are very important for later development, because this period sets lasting characteristics. Persons, who have been subject to similar manners as young children, will later show similar behaviour and at last similar petroglyphs will too only refer to similar kinds of upbringing.

Since similar experiences in childhood also result in developing similar behaviour, similar strategies of managing conflicts or similar wishes, persons whose way of upbringing largely corresponds, can later enter easier into continual relationships, than persons living according to different behaviour patterns, who proverbially "are not to be brought into line". This circumstance leads individuals sympathising with other to form extended groups in society, which in conflict are confronted with one another as "psycho-classes". According to deMause' psycho-genetic theory⁴⁰ (the word psycho-genetic is not supposed to refer to the genetically determined psyche, but to the genesis of the psyche, which results from a change in the dealing with children during the course of history) social change occurs, when a new stronger psycho-class becomes predominate. The strength of a class does in this case not result out of physical power or material superiority, but is developed out of a greater psychological stability of the individuals. The mother of all things would therefore not be war, but love and care. The ability to express love and sympathy in a greater extent results from a progressive bringing up of children and is the heart of social change.

Motivation and Decoration

To describe rituals religious studies and ethnology often use expressions, that are borrowed from obstetrics. In his interpretation of the initiation rites of Australian hunters Mircea Eliade writes of "foetal position", "embryonic stage" or "rebirth". But he expressively draws attention to the fact, that he uses these phrases just metaphorically for postures or other circumstances, meaning that the initiation, i.e. the "second birth" is no characteristic repetition of the first – the biological – birth to him.⁴¹ Lloyd deMause, in contrast, sees in the biological birth the deepest layer of significance and the hidden pattern, that is inherent in all rituals, performed by different groups in all ages. It would though occupy too much room to go into that in more detail, so I'll confine myself to a brief explanation of how:

1. a basic element of the foetal drama can be integrated into rituals and its possible variations;
2. characteristic decorations of ritual objects or sacral places refer to the physical birth.

1. A widespread motif in mythological tales is that of the hero being devoured by an animal / mythical creature and having being held captive in its stomach. After a time of hardship the hero regains freedom in a glorious struggle, as for example the serpent-god Quetzalcoatl or the christian legend of Jonas. Since there are no animals whose stomach would be suitable for human abode, these tales are easily dismissed as fantasy. But the belly of a pregnant woman is capable to accommodate a human being for several month and without doubt we all have taken advantage of this service. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century some doctors seriously disclaimed, that new-born had sensory perceptions, such as pain. Meanwhile many studies verify, that on a simple basis all senses are functioning at birth.⁴² The foetus begins weeks before the parturition to train physical abilities and collect sensorial perceptions. A foetus can hear its mother's heart-beat and other sounds, as soon as daylight shines upon the taut abdominal wall the unborn is not in complete darkness, but in a kind of "red light district" and towards the end of pregnancy it can feel how an integument draws ever closer. The perception of this integument is not just reflected in the devouring beasts of folk legends⁴³, but also in the disguises of all sorts, used for covering persons or objects in ritual.

Once when recognising the limited role allocations and the standardised scope of action . . . in ritual, . . . what earlier seemed like a series of cultural achievements in history is quickly reduced to a few reiterating group fantasies in different levels of development, present in these groups and corresponding to the predominant manner of upbringing of children.⁴⁴ Although the manner of upbringing determines the way in which the drama of birth is repeated in later life, deMause's concept of the formative foetal drama can nevertheless always be discovered beneath later overlies, whether pre-oedipal or oedipal. The better an upbringing is orientated to the needs of children and the more it contributes to the binding respectively lessening of the child's subconscious fears, the less later life will be ruled by fantastic bloodsucking poisonous monsters and the more seldom it will happen, that processes of idealisation, splitting personalities, anger and passivity hinder a person's pursuit of love and happiness.⁴⁵

The cave, into which the stone-age people withdrew to perform rituals, may have been the most simple variant on integument.⁴⁶ But I would like to show some examples of transpositions of an integument, where written interpretations can already be found. The archetype of an integument is the skin of the mother, that the foetus feels from inside of the uterus. One drawing from the Spanish painter Francisco Goya is titled *The dream or sleep of reason breeds monsters* and the temporary absence of reason may have lead the Aztecs to act like monsters and include in their rituals the skin of a sacrificed woman.

During the harvest festival in honour of the Aztec god of maize a priest settled on the floor in front of the main temple's stairs. He was dressed in the removed skin of a sacrificed woman and was supposed to embody *Tlazolteotl*, the mother of the god of maize, while pretending to give birth to the god of maize. This act was the most significant event of the year for the people, whose most important food maize was. A similar custom seems to have existed in honour of the god of spring and sowing. He was called *Xipe Totec*, which can be interpreted as "Our Lord, the broken one". The stone sculptures in his name consist of a priest, whose visible

body parts are painted red, whereas the rest of the body is covered with the skin of a sacrificed woman.⁴⁷

The great sacrificial rituals in other cultures differ in furnishing, but not essentially in their thematic build-up. On the whole they all follow a typical plot, which is described by H. Hubert and M. Mauss in their book *Sacrifice*⁴⁸: The sacrificing priest is shaved and cleaned, then clad in a skin. "This is a solemn moment, when the new being moves with him. He has become a foetus. His head is covered and his hands are clenched to fists, because in his sack the embryo too has clenched fists. He moves around the fireplace in the manner of a foetus moving in the womb. He then kills the sacrifice-beast and eats its body – actually or symbolically –, drinks its blood, pours it onto the altar or smears his body." (cit. deMause). *Sacrifice* was published in 1898 by Hubert and Mauss. I presume, that they too regarded these birth related expressions altogether just as a play on words or as symbols, without being aware of the fact, that these cleansing rituals actually derive from a try to psychically cope with the dramatic and bloody passage, that a foetus experiences when the integument is shed at birth. In later adaptations of sacrificial rituals the skins are not wrapped or put around the priest, but the religious idol is covered by a canopy during processions.⁴⁹ Today these canopies are usually made out of textiles, as e.g. in the christian religion, but they are connected with the same phenomena of covering that can be seen with Australian hunters, who in their rituals nowadays cover the initiated with cloth,⁵⁰ instead of skins as before. During initiations on Papua-New Guinea giant masked beasts are supposed to devour small boys, i.e. covering them, before they are brought out again as "new-born men".⁵¹

But a ritual covering can be observed too, when just parts of the body are concealed. People, who live according to traditional customs, need not be conscious of the customs origin. This can become clear, when the explanations for the wedding veil are: "that's traditional with us", "it's all part of it" or "the bride needs to be protected against the evil eye". In my opinion, not the glances thrown at the bride are to be diverted, but the accustomed point of view of the bride herself is supposed to be changed. The still unmarried woman is covered for a short time, and immersed into a separate sphere, characterised by a restriction, shrinkage or fixation of her accustomed field of vision. This is a state nearly identical to the trance of hypnotised persons. Milton H. Erickson and Ernest L. Rossi note: hypnotic "trance is a state, where a reduction of the attentive focus" of a person "to but a few inner realities is achieved, the consciousness is fixated and concentrates with a rather restricted point of view, instead of covering a broad field".⁵² When among the Aztecs a priest annually stages the birth of a god for the people, the dramatics were perhaps reinforced for the audience by dressing the priest in the skin of a sacrificed woman. But this cruel masquerade can at the same time have served as an aid to the priest, if his attention was held to an extent, where he could enter for a short time into an autosuggestive state of trance in which he really believed to be reborn or respectively give birth to the gods himself. At the same time the covering with a veil can have been used, to "enchant" the bride for a short while, i.e. put her into a trance-like state, that makes it easier for her to meet the demand to push aside to the greatest possible extent her previous experiences as an unmarried self-confident girl. When the veil is lifted, she sees the light of the world again, this time as a "new-born" wife. The covering veil is reminiscent of

the same trance-theme as in all masks, that were temporarily worn to proclaim social change.

The trance experience is of great significance to shamanistic cults. In many cultures shamans are regarded as magical healers able to make a direct mental connection to the gods.⁵³ In this context many different techniques of ecstasy can be found, that help to put oneself into a state of trance. But many similar visions can be found in the visual description of their intellectual travel impressions, that can be subdivided into mainly three interlocking phases. "At the beginning of the trance - that is the most superficial of the three phases - you 'see' geometric forms, like dots, zigzag lines, grids, rows of parallel lines, focused curves and meandering lines. They are of flaming colours, flickering, vibrating, expanding, retracting and mixing with each other . . . In the second phase the persons try to put some sense into the perceived forms. The objects can vary according to the emotional state of the individual persons. A member of the western culture group being on such a journey, he would e.g. when thirsty see a water-filled cup in a round shining object, if afraid he might perhaps interpret it as a bomb. Shimmering zigzag lines can take the shape of a crawling snake . . . The third phase is entered through a kind of whirlpool or tunnel. The involved persons feel attracted by the whirlpool, with its shining bright light at the end. At the sides of this funnel there are grid patterns, that were adopted from the first phase. Now the first real hallucinations appear: Inside of the subdivisions of this grid humans, animals and other creatures are perceived. When the tunnel is left at its far end, you'll find yourself in a strange trance world; beasts, humans and the whole scenery is of vivid reality. The geometric patterns still continue to have an effect, but mainly on the fringe of the hallucinatory perception . . . At the same time the surfaces come alive: A picture on the wall starts to grow in all three dimensions, its colours intensify, it moves, becomes alive. In this phase people believe they can fly and turn themselves into birds or other animals. They don't just 'see' unusual things - by their own hallucinations they become a part of them."⁵⁴ Jean Clottes and David Lewis-Williams describe these phases in *Schamanen; Trance und Magie in der Höhlenkunst der Steinzeit* and make their point of view clear, that stone-age cave-paintings can be interpreted as an expression of a shamanistic view of life. They also point out, that these phases are common to all people and have their base in the functions of the nervous system. In their opinion the contents of the geometric patterns in the first phase, the fantasised transformation of objects during the second phase as well as the hallucinations in phase three are exclusively conditioned by the specific cultures. Humans hallucinate at least to some extent what they expect to see. But the shamanistic experiences in this model can at the same time - and in my opinion better - be interpreted as a visionary account of pre- and perinatale experiences. In phase one and two, the shaman is like the foetus situated inside the womb, in a network of blood vessels. At this point the first sensory experiences are made and stored. In phase three he is pressed through the birthcanal and afterwards seems to fly, which is similar to an infant being lifted into the air.

The phenomenon of covering can also be hidden from our eyes and just be experienced by local feelings of pressure. When wearing ceremonial head-dress, the often very heavy ornamental hats, headbands or crowns on the scalp can be experienced as a wrapping. During the course of a normal birth, when the head of

the new-born passes the birthcanal, the nearly regularly appearing skull deformations would be the archetype for this local tactile experience. Such build-ups on the skull could have helped similarly as the masks, in reaching the autosuggestive trance state more easily.

But primarily the integument is experienced as a tactile perception of the whole body. One of the obscure customs in various cultures is the crawling through holes in tree trunks, crevices or arches of roots.⁵⁵ The Teutons are supposed to have tried to shed off any kind of complaint with the help of a god of vegetation by crawling through a hole in the trunk of a tree. Even in the 19th century there were pilgrimages to a tree, that was supposed to have been in Mecklenburg near Gadebusch. The tree was regarded as especially miraculous, because of the lower part of the trunk resembling the astraddled legs of a woman. Bulges were interpreted as belly, hips or navel. Gout sufferers or cripples without the strength to crawl through the opening themselves, were dragged through.⁵⁶ The trust placed in the cure of crawling through healing stones and rocks must have been great, since churches, chapels and mosques established special opportunities to crawl through. There existed a squeezing procession in Echternach in Luxembourg. The crawling pilgrims had to work themselves through an opening about two feet above the ground. When an abbot wanted to make it more comfortable for the pilgrims by lifting the stone one foot, the stone lost its miraculous powers in the eyes of the pilgrims and the procession stopped. Obviously the healing effects were expected to result from the direct contact with the stone; the holes had to be tight.⁵⁷ In other places it was proper procedure for the sick to pass through the healing hole naked. In Scandinavia sick children were not dragged through trees, but also through special wooden rings, called *luomarengas* (*luoma* = Creation, *rengas* = ring).⁵⁸ In Austria near St. Wolfgang stands a chapel where a pregnant woman is supposed to crawl through a stone, so as to later have a safe delivery. At the Lower Rhine even during the 18th Century there was a ritual, by which young men were able to clean themselves of moral misdemeanours. Whoever caused a moral offence in the village by severing a liaison, had to crawl through a bottomless basket. It was proclaimed, that he is: "pure and single, as a child from the mother's womb, pure as the moon, pure as daylight".⁵⁹

2. When all humans are shaped by the foetal drama and the memories thereof are unconsciously lived up in ritual, then there would be no great principal difference, with which sex or colour we were born. If all women and men were subject to the same basic shaping, they should consequently tend towards the same rituals. In early tribal cultures a group-fantasy can regularly be found among men. It concerns the overwhelming of supernatural monsters or beasts, that otherwise would soil, devour or attack the community. This battle is usually reserved to men and only he who endures specific initiations, such as the circumcision is recognised as man. But actually the circumcision of the genitals is not a solely male expression of ritual, there are furthermore many customs where young girls are circumcised by the adult women of the tribe.⁶⁰ Of course now the question arises: But why do men and women not practise their rituals together? There are gradual differences, but basically men and women exercise similar standardised plots. On average the female rituals take up less time, are not staged quite as effusive and instead of the – not predominate – circumcision "just" scars may be inflicted onto the back of

girls, whereas the male rituals, containing impressive decorations, regularly last over longer periods of time and nearly always include massive aggressive acts. But what seems to compulsively divide these two groups, when we are all born equal? A conclusive answer to this question might lead to a useful tool, to do away with the tiresome traditional division of societies into men and women and to also end the discrimination of the other sex as “filthy”, “weak” or “inferior”. Especially the extremely rigid division of sexes in some tribal cultures can not solely be explained by the different physical constitution. Above that, it has to be paid attention to the fact, that as a phenomena the female ability to give birth can create enormous emotional tensions, especially strong anxieties. Concerning the partially panic-stricken reactions in connection with birth, that can be observed in all cultures, the motive of a male *birth envy* is less significant than a manic *fear of birth*. But fear is not an only male domain. The stone-age venus-sculptures too can only be explained inadequately with the term “fertility”. Why should women not experience birth as a natural constant, that according to the motto “being pregnant is woman’s business anyway” needs no great fuss. The facts, that women can be overwhelmed with immense feelings of happiness during pregnancy, that thought transfers between mother and child have been reported,⁶¹ reminding of spiritual experiences of healing or that towards the end of pregnancy the pain threshold is higher – all these circumstances may influence the perception of pregnancy and birth positively, but they will never have clouded the awareness to an extent, that pain, miscarriages, infections or a high mortality rate were completely ignored. Not the fruitful, but the *dreadful* circumstances have at all times drawn more attention. According to the twin function of the venus-sculptures they were used in protective magic, but I would rather speak of “fear-tility goddesses” than “fertility goddesses” that were asked for help. “Please, great Goddess, give me broad hips or give the women next to me broad hips, so that everything works out more easily.”

If birth had not generally been connected to pain and the new-born had not prenatally learned the meaning of pain, then the course of birth could have been taken as calmly as for example that only the female breast is able to give milk or that toe-nails should be cut when too long. But that is obviously not the case. The anecdotes of “strongest men” fainting in the delivery room are numerous. Many tribal cultures also did not regard birth as “every man’s cup of tea”, as the men in these societies often use rough ways to ban these biological events out of sight by sending the pregnant women out to remote places.⁶² Possibly in these cultures some men would faint as well and would then blame the pregnant women. With great foresight women might have retreated to places where they would be relatively undisturbed. Men, who are clearly deeply moved when “it gets down to the nitty-gritty” during a birth, can in fact and in contrast to the women giving birth decide whether they want to turn away at this moment, but by sparing themselves this sight they can’t shake off the fears, that humans are repeatedly confronted with in their nightmares.

To conclude I would like to describe, how birth among the so-called primitive people generally takes place, that deeply fascinating impressions are made onto the spectators and that these impressions influenced the decoration of ritual objects and sacral places considerably. The women in such cultures usually go to

sites outside the settlements,⁶³ for the most part simple women's huts, that were marked by special signs of taboo. They often consist of blood-smeared bunches of plants or fabrics. The term taboo goes back to the Polynesian word *tapua*, also meaning menstruation blood.⁶⁴ There they give birth mostly in the presence of elder women (midwives), that are helping them with instructions. Usually the only means of help are massages of the belly, a warming fire at night, supporting pole, bamboo or shell knives and thread to ligature the navel. After the successful birth it will be controlled whether the placenta has completely detached itself from the uterus, since pieces remaining in the mother's womb can lead to severe attacks of child-bed fever and to the death of the mother. During this procedure elder children can be present and watch the birth of their younger brother and sisters. In the process these children can possibly be involuntary witnesses of how their mother, i.e. the person to whom they relate most closely in their present life, will writhe on the ground for hours.

I agree with deMause, that the profound reason for rituals results from the foetal drama and I would like to add that later observations of birth can combine themselves tightly with this basic motif. So decorations on ritual objects can also be lead back to secondary observations of birth. From that point in history, where birth does not regularly take place in front of smaller children, a disruption in the understanding of ritual symbols seems to have taken place. Earlier when the *Gorgo Medusa* with her serpentine attributes was also known as the "Following" or "Child-bed Demon" in Mediterranean culture, this refers clearly to the after-birth. But in 20th Century the Medusa's serpents are hardly ever interpreted as the network of veins in the placenta, but almost exclusively as a phallic symbol.⁶⁵

In this context, it is quite understandable to me, that women in tribal cultures will perform a slightly toned-down ritual without over-ornate decorations, since they are able to comply with a subconscious yearning to repeat birth much more easily, because as an expectant mother will be able to relive a birth so to speak "true to the original". Little girls, that are told: "pay attention, remember this", could grasp their observations as a lesson for later and similar events. Small paralysed boys, also present at this spectacle, do not have the possibility for a biological repetition. Nevertheless, they seem to have marked even the most minute detail and go back to it – often in a grotesque way –, when they try to satisfy the subconscious urge for repetition.

On the ritual circumcision on the South Sea Island of Pentecost, Margaret Jolly noted, that this collective event has in her opinion less to do with hygiene than with the idea of a common fatherhood. Female giving-birth is to be covered by the male rebirth,⁶⁶ in the way that without any female help, adult men of a clan create their own offspring from young boys whose circumcision is a figurative cutting of the umbilical cord. Among many tribes, for a boy the rites of initiation can stretch over months,⁶⁷ where the boys often have to live separated from the women of the village community in special initiation huts.

In Australia, at the actual moment of circumcision, which can be called the climax and end of the ritual, initiated men get the holy *tjurangas* – disc-shaped slates of stone or wood – from a secret hiding place.⁶⁸ In the course of this a man kneels above the hiding place, stretches out his belly and moans and groans like a

woman in labour. Meanwhile another man strokes his belly with little stones until the stone-tjurunga is suddenly lifted from beneath his bottom.

The tjurunga is then taken to the men's assembly ground, where the circumcision is supposed to happen. Such tjurungas are supposed to have been created from the flesh of a mythical original being and the men are supposed to have received them a long time ago.⁶⁹ These tjurungas often carry designs of concentric circles similar to the designs on rocks. During the circumcision the boy's blood has to drip onto the tjurunga. The men run their fingers along the grooves while they reveal the secret of this tjurunga and of the men of the tribe to the boy.⁷⁰ The circumcision should make the young men loose the remaining motherly blood in them, so that they may later be reborn by the men's blood. The relation between human and *tjurunga* in the beliefs of the Australian *Aranda* is best expressed in the sentence, that the young men get to hear: "from this tjurunga you are made" (originally: *nana unta mburka nama* = this [i.e. the *tjurunga*] you body is).⁷¹

Apart from the *tjurungas*, there is a globally spread ritual object, the *bull-roarer*. In Australia these noise-making objects not only have nearly identical decorations (circles, zigzag-lines), but also similarly sounding legends of origin. I would like to give an account of an African bull-roarer legend, in which many analogies to birth and ritual acts appear.⁷²

"In the oldest time there was a place surrounded by shrubs and trees and sometimes people could hear a cry like: 'mamu, mamu!'. They were so startled, that they didn't dare to enter the bush. Once the god OLORUM told the people in a dream: 'you've got to go away, the place is full of the ghost ORO'. But the people proposed to sprinkle the ground with the blood of sacrificed animals and so pacify the ORO. However the dreams came back and the people's children died. Then ORO, the hunter, came to the land and showed them another place, where they could bring him sacrifice. So it happened, and ORO ate the sacrifice and told them, that he made these noises every night. He cut a piece of flesh from his body (in one version from his forearm, in another from his penis) and told them to equip it with a string. The piece of flesh would now make the same noises, if used as a bull-roarer. But women are not to be there. After use the flesh is to be buried in the earth and not to be taken home. But the place is to be called oro-bush. Now the children stopped dying, the people multiplied, a king was elected. His curious wife once secretly watched the assembly for the oro-celebration. This time, as the piece of flesh was swung around, it did not make a noise, but the string ripped and the flesh flew into the wife's throat and pierced it. Then the flesh said: 'I'll go and tell all to my father.' This happened and ORO, the hunter said: 'Come back to my flesh.' Instead of the piece of flesh he attached a piece of wood to the string and put it on the ground. Then ORO left the world, because he was insulted that a woman had seen a part of him."

In the light of birth related themes, some elements in rites of circumcision or bull-roarer legends, such as stones of origin, knives or little telltales, that run to their father appear like weird references to the real placenta, navel scissor and childlike observers. Other actions in rituals do not have such a clear connection to birth. In Papua-New Guinea initiates have pieces of wood shoved into nose and throat,⁷³ or men swallow up sticks of wood.⁷⁴ In my opinion these gestures can hardly be regarded as coincidental cultural peculiarities, but they can be recog-

nised as completely excessive and inappropriate imitation. Because in Papua-New Guinea a custom can be found among midwives, to remove shortly after birth the sometimes existing mucus out of the new-borns mouth or nose with the help of a little elastic stick.⁷⁵ This is done to ensure that the respiratory tract is free of foreign bodies. In other parts of the world, this measure is carried out with a finger.⁷⁶

Concerning other cultures I have so far not found any reports on the gesture “sticking pieces of wood into the nose”, but there is a wooden north-american statue, that shows the “finger in the mouth”-motif.⁷⁷ Such plastics convey instructions on midwifery in a relevant and in a compassionate way, instead of parodying them in rituals with a high potential of violence.

The point of view of obstetrics can now explain a further number of decorations in sacral rooms, that would have remained mysterious without this key. The simplest “holy places” are the already mentioned mainly natural boulders, often with just a circle or a maze. Following the records of ethnologists and doctors, rock-scratchings can too be found where single scenes correspond with the different positions of women giving birth. So next to a river in Polynesia a stone can show two women back to back⁷⁸ and in Africa just the same position has been observed as a position for giving birth.⁷⁹

The engraved stone slab on a secluded island in North-America⁸⁰ would not show a shamanistic dance, but a scene of birth where a mother holds on to a supporting stick. These sticks were the chief signs among some north-american Indian tribes to a place or hut for birth.⁸¹ The supporting stick motif can be found in many pictures of different cultures and its trace could be followed from North-America to the staff of Aesculapius.

In the beginning sacral places were marked by partially engraving natural rocks, in the next step blocks of stone were either made entirely into figures or put together to artificial constructions. The so-called megalithic graves are usually interpreted as graves, because of the numerous sharp-edged shards or knives found next to the remains of skeletons. On these large stone-monuments many maze- and “cup”-designs can also be found. I claim, that for a short term these stone monuments were used for one or more burials, but in the longer term had the function of a birth-place. There are still many hints in folk literature like the “Witte Wievers” (the wise women, i.e. midwives), that were supposed to have been at work at these places or the tales for little children: “we got you from beneath the flintstones; the stork has found you under the flintstones”.⁸² Naturally prehistoric graves can be found with knives as burial objects. But still it seems ridiculous, when sometimes the only findings that appear in large stone-monuments are knives instead of skeletons, that are then nevertheless declared to burial objects, because similar knives - although too fine-cut for fighting use -, had already been found in real graves.⁸³

The birth-place subject is shown to even more advantage in pre-Columbian stone-monument, where the supporting pillars are sculpted into figures. Some figure hold their bellies, like the venus-sculptures, others hold little beings in their arms. Inside this objects hollows were driven into the stone, that in my opinion are of better use for bathing mother and child after birth, than for a grave.⁸⁴

Large prehistoric stone-monuments and monolithic steles are as a rule found far away from human domiciles or places of work. In a slow development these institutions moved from places far away, first closer then into the settlements. In North-Peru a prehistoric rotunda was reconstructed,⁸⁵ whose outside decorations show the motif of figures with spread legs and comprise a meandering ornament, which can be found in similar design on many European stone-age monuments and which remind me of an intricate string symbolising the umbilical cord. A pillar on the forecourt of the building is similar to the supporting sticks, that show the way to a birth-place in North-America.

Three kilometres from the Peruvian town Cuzco on a rock hilltop lies the magical site Kenko, which means “that, which winds”. Stairs, magical signs and seats were chiselled into the soft rock, that are interpreted in this case as a throne, but in Europe are also called *witches' chair*.⁸⁶ In a central place seats are found with two cylindrical capstans of 20 centimetres height in front of them. According to Peruvian guides these two stones used to serve as gynaecological chair. This interpretation is dismissed as absurd by an European author; in his opinion these capstans served “in reality” as a sighting aid for the observation of stars.⁸⁷ But stones were already mentioned in the bible as aids for birth and also the old Egyptian character for “giving birth” shows two stones.⁸⁸ In nineteenth century Iran they were used as aids as well.

But not only sticks or stones were used as support during birth to enable specific positions. Marija Gimbutas describes in her work *Die Sprache der Göttin* early shrines in Europe with mostly and distinctly female symbolism. She repeatedly mentions a seat or throne showing *pregnant goddesses*. But unfortunately I could not find any reference, whether she regards these objects as a delivery-chair too. She rather passes over these furnishings, e.g. in the description of a shrine of the serpent-goddess.⁸⁹ In one building there a few small clay figures were found on a bench. Beside that there is an oven and a “chair”. Up to the beginning of the twentieth century birth in parts of Eastern Europe and Russia took place in the village sauna huts.⁹⁰ The clay figures from this shrine must not show women worshipping a serpent, as Gimbutas apparently presumes, it could rather be showing a group of women surrounding a woman supporting herself on a stick. The building Gimbutas calls a shrine, might have been used in an earlier settlement at the same time as women's sauna, bathing- and birth house with a delivery-chair. Similar seating constructions can be found in other early sites (e.g. Catal Hüyük, Lepinski Vir, Beykesultan) that are again described as shrines. If a holy ghost had been worshipped in these sacral rooms, this ghost was presumably supposed to guarantee a safe birth, just like the venus-figures.

The extent to which religion and birth are connected even in recent times, can be shown exemplary with Nakayama Miki⁹¹ (1798–1887). She is the foundress of the religious sect T'enrikyo with allegedly two million members in Asia today. A deity had taken possession of her after the death of two daughters. After her family at first refused to accept the existence of a deity whose voice only Miki could hear, she was accepted as the medium of God the parent. Her spiritual consciousness has lead her to introduce a form of dance / prayer, that appears to the modern observer as antenatal exercises. Next to that she has developed a special diet for pregnant women and arranged the building of a complex that is supposed to con-

tain the hub of the universe.⁹² But above all, she has substantially been part in the ending of a centuries old tradition in Japan, i.e. the custom of women, to wear a tight belt during pregnancy. "When the people experienced, that Miki helped women to an easier birth, they gathered around to worship her as a living deity."⁹³ I have read just a few articles on this religious group and can't really be a judge on this; but I presume that Tenrikyo is as dogmatically orientated as other religions, and that modern antenatal exercises are a better way to prepare for birth than dancing around the Kanrodei-stand (the holy centre of the Tenri City), but I can't help admiring Nakayama Miki. Her religious mission seems to me a subconscious attempt to solve the foetal drama and later traumatic birth experiences in a way that pays attention primarily to interhuman relations and then to technological aspects.

She seems in any case more sympathetic to me, than a number of scientists promising solutions to birth problems too, but in whose experiments I can't find much of an interest in improved social relationships. The experiments where aborted foetus artificially continue growing in an artificial uterus⁹⁴ were perhaps justified with space-travel. The driving force behind this kind of research may derive from the foetal drama, but it appears to me, that it is covered up by the obsession to make one's mark, by the greed for profits and childlike fantasies of omnipotence. The same feelings arise when seeing newspaper articles, that propagate the opportunity for men to get pregnant via the implantation of an embryo into the abdominal cavity.⁹⁵ Either these men just want to get attention with these reports to improve the acquisition of research funds or the pharmaceutical producers want to gauge from public reactions whether there is a chance to earn money in this field. I hope science will show in time the miscalculations of the feasibility delusions of industrial exploitation.

"Men" don't have to be superior and before humans start to conquer other worlds in space, we should, i.e. men and women primarily try to recognise our own human nature and also stand up together to abolish social divisions instead of just reverting single aspects in a crude way, like: "look, I can get pregnant too now or clone myself, that'll make you envious, won' it?". Keeping in mind all kinds of problematic issues, women have got the indisputable sole biological competence to give birth. I don't see any reason to change this. I regard it as irresponsible, when European pharmaceutical companies make their profits partially with the global sale of diagnostic material for the prenatal determination of hereditary factors. Because in a multitude of cases such examinations are not used to protect the lives of the unborn, but to specifically abort female foetus.⁹⁶

At last psychohistoric research has lead me to the conclusion, that men and women are equal. That all humans are equal and that it doesn't matter with what kind of sexual organs we were born, but in which social climate. In short: Love is more important than money and atomic/biologic weapons.

Remarks

The bibliographical references cited in the appendix represent the sources I have used. These texts had partially been translated into German. Since I occasionally had no access to the original texts, some citations have been re-translated together with my own text.

These passages will probably not be in exact correspondence with the originals. I would like to ask for leniency in case of these possible alternations and I hope there are no distortions regarding the content.

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