2

The First Remoteness of the Depth of Field

Rocks in Post-Egyptian Pre-Modern Images

Introduction

In this and the following chapters I will be turning my attention from the *how* of the pictorial space – the way in which the pictorial view shapes the space, and the way in which this shaping is connected to the perception of the world – to its *what*, i.e. which material phenomena – landscapes – are made visible in line with the expansion of the depth of field. This chapter will accordingly focus on the first zone, which is gradually incorporated into the depth of field of the pictorial view as the numinous force is drained from nature and converted into spirit: *the actual ground*. As the ground does not really take shape until the pictorial gaze has reached such a great distance from the surrounding environment that this environment can form the background for figures, the main emphasis will be on the post-Egyptian period, i.e. later Mesopotamia, Crete, the Greco-Roman culture and the Middle Ages.

Empirical corpus

It would be quite appropriate to begin the study of post-Egyptian pictorial grounds with what they *do not* show. In *De rerum natura*, Lucretius describes the first human efforts to cultivate nature:

> Day by day they made the forests climb higher up the mountains and yield the place below to their tilth, that they might have meadows, pools and streams, crops and luxuriant vineyards on hill and plain, and that a grey-green belt of olives might run between to mark the boundaries, stretching forth over hills and dales and plains; just as now you see the whole place mapped out with charming variety, laid out and intersected with sweet fruit-trees and set about with fertile plantations.[1]

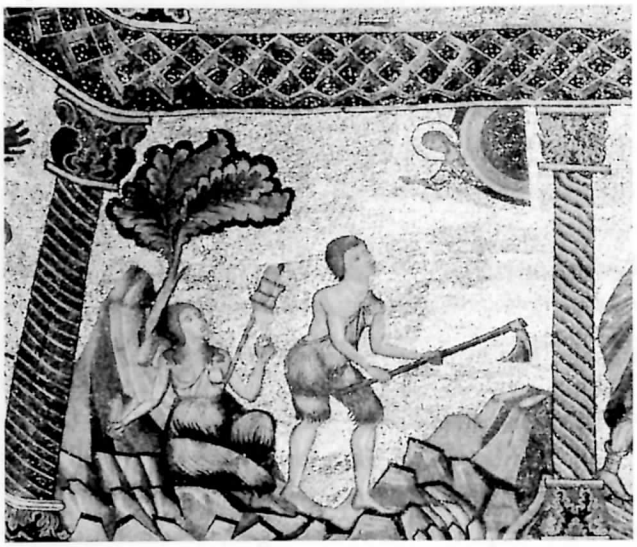


Fig. 2.1. *Adam at Work* (1271-1320s), mosaic. Florence, Baptistery.

However typical this kind of lush, cultivated landscape might seem to the beholder who is familiar with Western landscape painting since the 15th century – just think of 17th-century Netherlands or of Constable – we can but note how very odd it is that this type of landscape is not merely absent in the landscape painting of Lucretius' time – the sacral-idyllic type – but that it lacks any kind of exposition for the pictorial view in the post-Egyptian period, from Mesopotamia through the Greco-Roman culture to the Late Middle Ages.

The absence of the Lucretian landscape from the post-Egyptian pre-modern pictorial view applies firstly to every kind of utilitarian cultivation, not least *cornfields*. Even though fields, as we will see in chapter 4, might appear in the mapping-gaze verticality of late antique surveyor treatises, special thematic pressures – iconographies – are required in order to expose them for the proper pictorial view (cf. chapter 4). Along with the absent cultivation, I will also include traces of a more radical intervention in nature (which is not, however, mentioned by Lucretius): the extraction of raw materials from the bedrock via *quarrying* and *mining*. Similarly, we can search largely in vain for nature traversed by *roads, bridges, canals, hedges* and *fences*, indeed any kind of figure that *divides* a larger area of landscape. It is only if the themes are markedly secularised, as occasionally among the Assyrians and again in the Late Roman Empire, that divisions of terrain might, as an exception, find their way to the monumental pictorial space (cf. chapters 4 and 7).

The absence of fields, roads, canals, hedges and fences does not seem so strange

Fig. 2.2. *Rock with Lilies* (detail from what is known as the *Spring Fresco*) (*c.* 1500 BC), fresco. Thera, Akrotiri.

if we look at the actual ground depicted, because in very few instances do we see a terrain suitable for division – an extensive, gentle, not too hilly landscape with a surface of loose soil, humus, gravel, sand or other form of atomised ground. If we look, for example, at the Florentine baptistery mosaic from around 1300 AD of Adam at work (FIG. 2.1), we find that the 'soil', which Adam is supposedly tackling with his hoe, consists of a series of clearly depicted and not exactly cultivable chunks of rock.

These rocks are, on the other hand, representative of what we actually come across in the pre-modern, post-Egyptian landscape images. Generally it can be said that when the earth is bare and is not – as happens very occasionally – hidden away under a layer of green grass, it is in one sense or other monolithic: doughy, crystalline or, as is actually most often the case, *rocky*. It is as if the stone masses of the depths of the earth are exposed as nakedly as they can be, without surface layers of eroded earth and with no traces of any kind of utilisation. The only area of utilisation the rocks might more obviously have opened themselves towards would be bridges, mining and quarrying, but for some reason, then, these also seem to be absent from the paradigm of the period. Summing up, it could be said that the pre-modern, post-Egyptian landscape images show *terra* rather than the *territory*, virgin rocks rather than monitored and measured-out plains.

On the rocky *terra* ground a huge number of plants and trees can be distributed in almost any number of ways. Flowering bushes might sprout up on the upper edge of undulating rocks as in Aegean Bronze Age frescoes (FIG. 2.2); trees might

Fig. 2.3. *Hercules, Dejanira and Nessus* (*c.* 50 BC-50 AD), fresco from Pompeii, Casa del Centauro. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale.

grow singly or in groups as in Roman murals (FIG. 2.3); islands of vegetation might spread across the rocks as in Italian painting of the Late Middle Ages (FIG. 12); or small plants can be seen trickling out of crevices in the rocks as in late Byzantine painting (FIG. 2.4). The possibilities are, nevertheless, subject to certain limitations, for plants and trees never actually take root in the ground, this being a concept dependent on the presence of loose soil. And they never fill the pictorial space to give a simultaneous impression of a wide, actually unfolded depth of field as well as dominance of vegetation, as for example in a forest landscape by Pieter Brueghel the Younger or Roelant Savery.

When vegetation does take over the pre-modern, post-Egyptian pictorial space, on the other hand, it does so in a limited spatiality with only potential depth of field;

Fig. 2.4. *Agony in the Garden* (13th century), mosaic. Venice, San Marco, south side of the western aisle.

for example, in sumptuous shrubbery such as that found in Livia's garden fresco from Primaporta, Rome (*c.* 20 BC; PLATE 5). The plants are here so close together that they almost agoraphobically shut out the spatial surroundings and thereby an actual depth of field.[2] Similarly, the pre-modern pictorial vision is hesitant when it comes to larger areas in which the earth itself has become green, such as Lucretius' meadows that stretch across "hill and plain". In some cases, such as the little Pompeian sacral-idyllic painting in Naples,[3] we do see limited meadow areas in a rocky environment; however, for the meadow to supplant the rocks completely it would seem that the space has to be correspondingly indefinable. An example of this is the apse mosaic of Sant'Apollinare in Classe (550s, Ravenna), in which the paradisiacal meadow appears flat as a carpet, without any kind of actual depth of

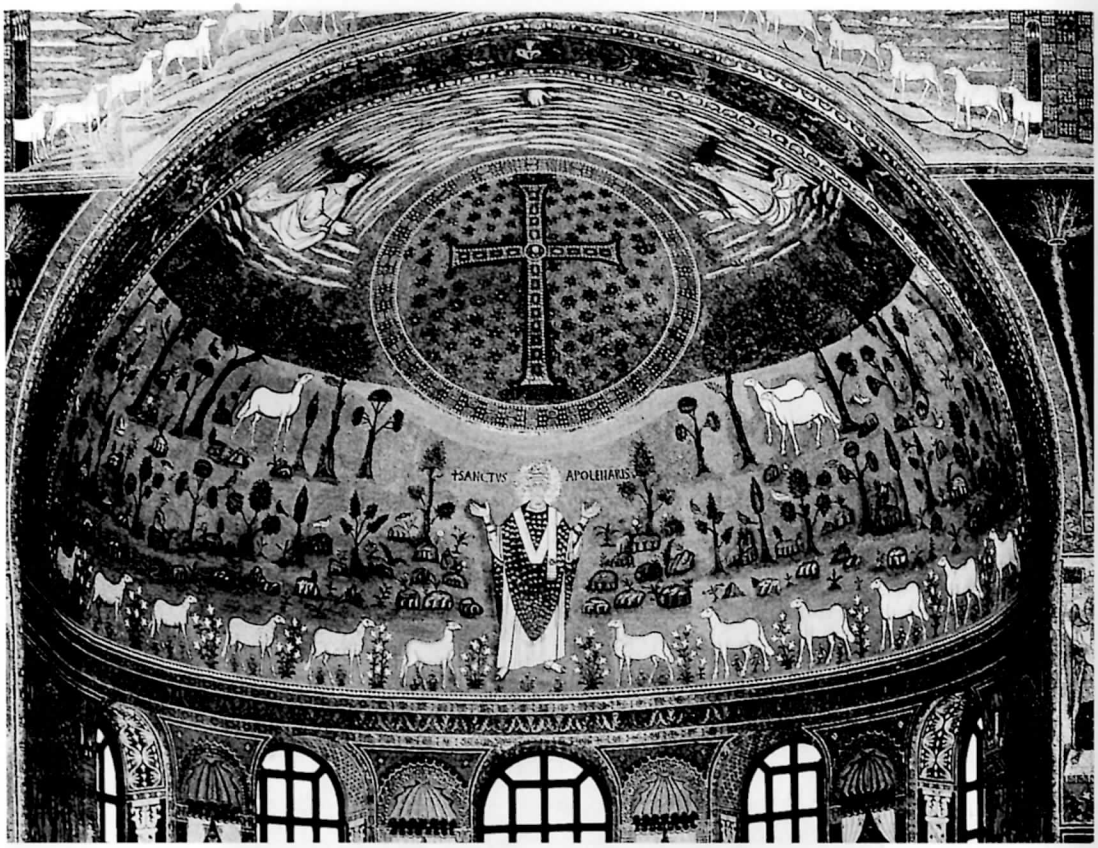


Fig. 2.5. *The Symbol of Christ above the Mount of the Transfiguration and Saint Apollinaris* (550s), apse mosaic. Ravenna, Sant'Apollinare in Classe.

Fig. 2.5a. Same scene as fig. 2.5 (detail).

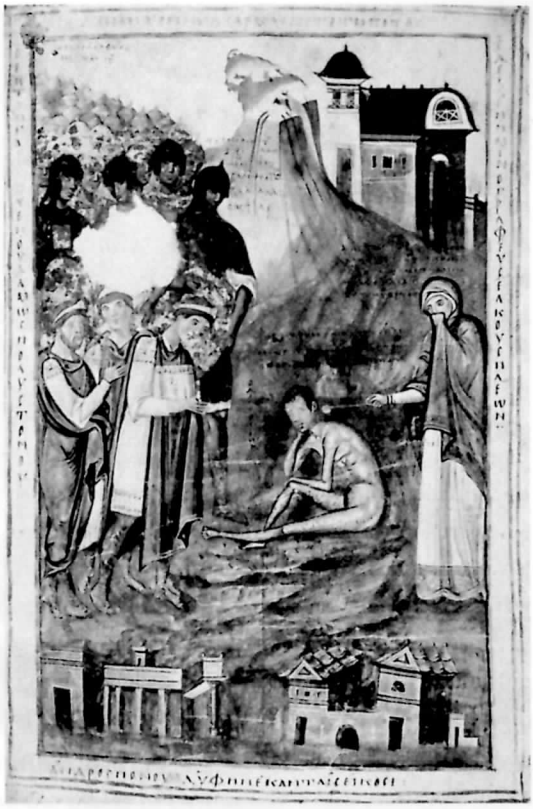


Fig. 2.6. *Story of Job* (*c.* 900-950), miniature from *Bible of Queen Christina*. Rome, Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms Vat. gr. 1, f. 17.

field (FIG. 2.5). In return, the stony ground is now only found in rudimentary form, as a series of miniature terraced rocks floating around on the turf like pieces of cork forced up by water (FIG. 2.5A).

That the post-Egyptian wide pictorial expanses are dominated by rocks does not mean that civilisation has been supplanted. On the contrary, the most advanced products of civilisation thrive on the rocky ground: temples, churches, towns, garden enclosures, shrines – every sort of highly-developed architecture. And yet the surrounding terrain still remains unmeasured and uncultivated. Outside the boundaries of what has obviously been civilised there are no *terrains vagues*, no suburban areas, but just pure *terra*, utterly untouched nature.

If we thus note *that* rocks dominate the landscape images of this epoch, we must be equally amazed by the way *in which* these stone formations are often depicted. Phantasmagoric, bizarre, surreal are words that spring to mind for the modern viewer when he or she is confronted with, for example, the peculiar mountains in which Byzantine images excel (FIG. 2.6). If we do not write off these features as being

Fig. 2.7. Ivory bookbinding from the Court School of Charlemagne (*c.* 846-69). Zurich, Schweizerisches Landesmuseum.

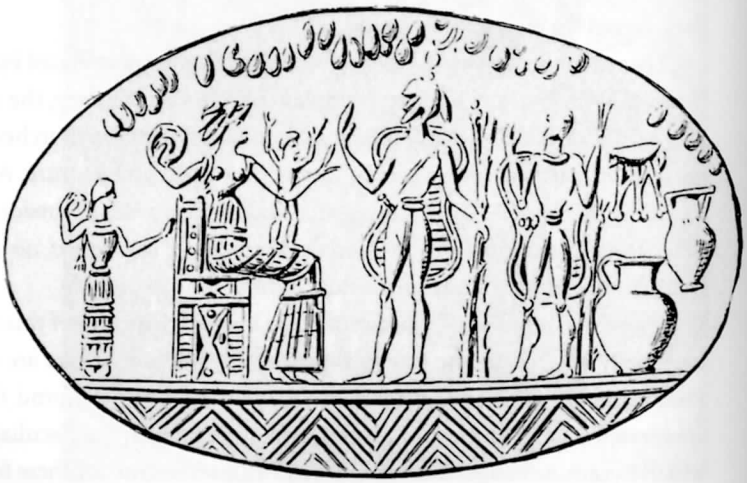


Fig. 2.8. *Adoration of the Mother Goddess and Child* (*c.* 1500 BC), gold signet ring from Thisbê. Heraklion, Archaeological Museum.

merely stylistic mannerisms, capricious ornaments on the margins of what can be iconographically substantiated, we will be able to detect various recurring features in the rock images, of which the following will be addressed here: [1] a chaotic and turbulent appearance, as if the world is pervaded by unrestrained forces (especially in the Western Middle Ages from and including the Carolingian period; FIG. 2.7); [2] an angular, terraced and abyss-like appearance, with many chasms and holes (antiquity and, in particular, the Middle Ages; PLATE 3); and [3] an organic appearance, in which the rocks seem to grow out of the earth (all the way from Mesopotamia to the Late Middle Ages; FIG. 2.8 and PLATE 4). It is here my intention to subject these phenomena to a systematic investigation that will allocate them a place in my overall model for the evolution of the landscape image.

Interpretative considerations

What kind – or kinds – of theory can we now turn to in order to interpret all these observations? The basic premise, *the dominance of rocks in pre-modern post-Egyptian landscape images*, is often remarked upon in art-historical literature, but no one would seem to have ascribed them a general significance. In his short thesis, Jahn wisely notes: "The rock landscape became landscape as such," but adds somewhat tamely: "It let one know that a scene took place in the open [...]."[4] The net closes somewhat when Kenneth Clark links rocks with "the World beyond the Garden" – the Garden understood as both Paradise and the plains of civilisation. Clark also aptly notes the fantastic appearance of Byzantine rocks, but as to the question of why they continue to feature long after other nature stereotypes have been replaced in the 15th century, his answer is merely that it is because mountains "were so large and incomprehensible."[5] Friedländer, and countless others after him, supplies a purely spatial explanation for the dominance of mountains. As early nature backgrounds often tower above the figures, they allude to remoteness – i.e. mountains.[6] Finally, Uta Feldges shrewdly observes "a thousand-year-old tradition of rock landscapes" and sees it in connection with "[a] clear boundary between rocks and individual plants". Why rocks dominate for so long and why they should be separated from individual plants is, however, a matter which neither she nor her successor Fechner consider.[7]

As far as my own explanatory model is concerned, an interpretation is initiated by combining two of the three lines of approach from my conceptual apparatus (cf. Interlude). If we first look from the pole of remoteness, the world picture of cosmology, the lens is pointed in a vertical direction, which asks of the rocks' place in the escalating world hierarchy: the dualistic and gradually geocentric world pictures with which we became acquainted in chapter 1. If we then zoom in to the middle

distance, the socially-determined perception of nature, the lens now flattens out in a horizontal direction in order to investigate the rocks' place in the relationship between civilisation and wilderness. Even though these lines of approach might, on the face of it, seem difficult to reconcile, I will show that they are actually closely linked, if not inseparable. In essence, the earth ground – the rocks – which appears as the first remoteness of the depth of field, can be seen as identical with the otherness from which spirit and civilisation must be delimited precisely in order to make land formations part of the depth of field – which thus means an otherness that can be seen, in a vertical sense, as the body of the world, Mother Earth, and, in a horizontal sense, as nature, more specifically the wilderness. These two directions can be said to converge in the very stone masses of the bedrock: at one and the same time civilisation's limit and the most concentrated form of the primordial ground's matter, *terra*.

In order to give a deeper impression of how the vertical viewpoint, that of cosmology, converges with the horizontal, that of sociality, the Sienese Giovanni di Paolo's (doc. 1420-82) panel of the *Creation of the World and the Expulsion from Paradise* (*c.* 1450; PLATE 15) is an instructive gem. Despite his origins in the modern paradigm, Giovanni presents us with an almost cinematic split picture of the pre-modern, newly-created world: to the left, a flying God pointing to a bird's-eye perspective of his creation; to the right, a close-up of this creation in the form of Paradise with Gabriel expelling Adam and Eve. The bird's-eye perspective shows a sectional view of the geocentric world picture, complete with *primum mobile*, zodiac firmament, planetary spheres, a red sphere of fire, a light-blue sphere of air and, innermost, the lower elements of water and earth. In the inner circle we move effortlessly from diagram to image as the water comprises the green world ocean, while the earth at its centre is a grey-brown, mountainous continent flanked by a pair of light-grey, gritty areas of plain – solitary, discreet reminders of the modern paradigm – and, moreover, traversed by a green river network linking to the sea. The network stems from Paradise's four rivers – Gehon, Pison, Euphrates and Tigris – which spring from the high Paradise mountain at the top, on the most easterly edge of the world.[8] It is this mountain that is pinpointed in the close-up image on the right, where the rivers are once more seen to spring from the grey-brown rock under the flowers and fruit trees in the Garden of Eden. From world picture we move to landscape.

From Giovanni di Paolo's image we are again reminded how much the pre-modern view of nature is founded on a conceptual basis. That *the element terra* is equated with *the world continent* of the same name is not merely a question of clarification, but is simply because there were extremely flexible boundaries between the earth's matter and the area of dry earth that was walked on and inhabited. And

that the continent's earth is monolithically connected with the mountains, so that we can but assume that both are made up of stone, is in turn because the stone – rocks and mountains – comprised the most concentrated form of earth matter, the heavy matter that makes up the underworld and the base of the world hierarchy. This matter, *terra*, is the same in the diagram, in the close-up image of the Paradise mountain and – it will be my contention – in all pre-modern landscape images. We come across it again in Monreale's mosaic of the *Creation of Sea and Earth* (*c.* 1185-91), where God on the celestial globe has taken a seat in his own newly-created landscape (PLATE 16). The lake with the jagged outline is marked *Mare*, whereas the typically Byzantine terraced rock is designated *T.ra*, i.e. earth. Thus the movement flows from the vertical concepts of the base of the world hierarchy, the element *terra* and the underworld, to the vertical concepts of the dry land, stone and mountains. Again: sectional view moves smoothly into landscape.

To this combined underworld and wilderness embodied by the rocks, we can see Western culture developing a highly ambivalent relationship. Expressed in Givanni di Paolesque terms, the reason for this could be described as a growing discrepancy between the world continent seen in bird's-eye perspective and Paradise seen in close-up – between the body of the world and that image of primordial unity between heavens and earth (Paradise) which culture continues to put forward as a vanished ideal state. As long as nature appears as self-fertilising mother, as was the case prior to the intermediate formation of city-states during antiquity, the paradisiacal state is identified with a fusion with the womb; a state that is relived cyclically every year. In this sum picture of nature – the body of the earth that unites chaos and fertility – the rock-filled underworld with its vaginal openings is the prerequisite for the wealth of animal and plant life displayed cyclically on its surface. Following the development of the monotheistic beyond, where the spirit finds itself liberated from the dominance of cycles and takes over the power of conception, the primordial unit is now, however, coloured by the spirit. The heavens, the superstructure of the dualistic world picture, which by this stage can be called geocentric, thus increasingly ensure that Paradise is an indestructible celestial phenomenon, a garden on a mountain top, whereas its former foundation in the earth, the rock-filled underworld, is marginalised to hell, a malignant split away from the primordial unity.

The result of this surgical interpretation of nature is the medieval tradition whereby Paradise and hell are absolute opposites: the one a sunlit garden with fruit trees, flowers and life-giving water; the other a demonic underworld, the setting for all manner of torment and death. Nevertheless, we are still able to establish that they stem from *the same terrain*: the mountains of the wilderness, as seen filling Giovanni's world continent. The mountain under his Garden of Eden, with its four

river caves, could thus be read as the omnipresent underworld, which no amount of theological surgery can ever effectively cut away.

If the underworld therefore projects right to the top of the Paradise mountain, then it must take over so much the more when we move down into the worldly, down into the ravines of the world continent. Here the substantiality of Plato's cave myth is confirmed, where everything earthly, cut off as it is from celestial ideas, is compared with the state of things in a subterranean cave. In *Phaedo's* variant of the myth, the following words are attributed to Socrates:

> Although we live in a hollow of the earth, we assume that we are living on the surface. [...] For this earth and its stones and all the regions in which we live are marred and corroded, just as in the sea everything is corroded by the brine, and there is no vegetation worth mentioning, and scarcely any degree of perfect formation, but only caverns and sand and measureless mud, and tracts of slime wherever there is earth as well [...].[9]

That the pre-modern pictorial space is filled with rocks, the most concentrated earthly form, could, therefore, be an allusion to a similar feeling of being deeply sunk in the earthly domain – so deep that one is almost engulfed by the underworld.

Whether the rocks in pre-modern landscape images are understood as paradisiacal or demonical, their substance is defined in conflict with spirit and civilisation. On the deepest level, they have to be seen as consciousness's memory of the body of the world – that body which directly gave birth to and accommodated the Palaeolithic images, but which now, at the remove of civilisation and the accompanying artificial pictorial ground, has to be reconstructed as part of the domain of depth of field. In a psychoanalytical light, this body of the world points back towards the original non-differential merging with the environment – Neumann's *uroboros*, Lacan's *real* or Kristeva's *chora* – a lack of differentiation that the human body must, however, distance itself from in order to become subject, and which at the distance of consciousness and spatiality is endowed with the firmer contours of the female gender, becomes the body of Mother Earth.

Without stripping the rock masses of this level of meaning, we could, however, also assign them a more geographically-determined symbolism, which similarly applies to cultural evolution's later backward glance towards its origins. More specifically, they could be seen as a symbolic portrait of the wilderness against the background of which the Near Eastern and Mediterranean civilisations were born. For besides the fact that these civilisations in particular – from Mesopotamia, across Crete to Greece, Rome and Byzantium – base their images in rocky environments, it has to be noted that they also include mountains as a basic geographic condition.

An important feature of the analytical unit into which Fernand Braudel inscribes the Mediterranean (and as an extension, the Near Eastern) cultures is precisely the mountains: "What we can be certain of is the architectural unity of which the mountains form the 'skeleton': a sprawling, overpowering, everpresent skeleton whose bones show through the skin."[10] These mountains – from the Atlas Mountains and the Pyrenees, to the Apennines, the Alps and the mountains of Balkans, and further on to the Anatolian, Zagros and Caucasus Mountains – are the result of a clash between tertiary limestone strata and older rock masses; when the limestone strata folded, they collided with the older rocks, which were then either forced upwards or collapsed in the sea. In the belt around the Mediterranean, only the stretch from Tunisia to southern Syria has a relatively low mountain profile.[11] In particular, we can note that Egypt – the ancient culture without mountainous backgrounds in its images – is founded in a relatively low environment.

As Braudel shows, far into the modern era it was a general phenomenon – a *longue durée* – that the Mediterranean civilisations based in low-lying country only exercised limited or no control over the scattered mountain cultures, which existed at a distance to the cities, laws, language and history of the lowlands.[12] The mountains were an unmapped chaos that evaded the orderliness of civilisation. And yet, unlike the really impenetrable mountain ranges of the Far East – China, Japan, Indochina, Malaysia, India – the dialectics between lowlands and highlands in the Mediterranean area were conditioned by the very connections there were, in spite of everything, between them.[13] For these links can be seen as culture's thread back to its own genesis. As Braudel states of mountain culture that seeps down to the lowlands:

> It may have shaped the origins of that history, for mountain life seems to have been the first kind of life in the Mediterranean whose civilisation 'like that of the Middle East and Central Asia, cloaks and barely disguises its pastoral origins' (Jules Blanche), a primitive world of hunters and herdsmen, of nomads and migrating flocks, with now and then a few crops hastily sown on burnt clearings. This is the life of the high places, the first to be brought under control by man.[14]

The issue of the origin of civilisation is extremely complex, and perhaps we cannot simply accept, with Braudel, that everything prior to the rise of agriculture around 10-8000 BC can be characterised by the term "mountain life". And yet it is quite definite that all urban civilisations have their fulcrum in the lowlands and that, at least in Mesopotamia, a developed state was necessary before the water resources of the river valley could be tamed by irrigation and damming.[15] Agriculture did not thus emerge in the Euphrates-Tigris valley itself, but had a 'dress rehearsal' on an

edge of promontories stretching from Palestine up to Anatolia and Iraq and onward down through Western Iran – the so-called *Fertile Crescent*. It was not until several thousand years later that culture moved down into the river valley.[16] Therefore, the development of civilisation here must inevitably have felt like a *descent*, whilst the more primitive life – for example, hunting, fruit picking and pastoralism – continued in the mountains, where it was the only option. In the sense that mountain life resembled pre-urban ways of life, Braudel could be said to be correct in deducing that it constituted the origins of Mediterranean culture.

And, in so saying, we return to the dialectics between Paradise and underworld – and thereby also to the interplay between these dialectics and the rocks in landscape images. For, as some anthropologists have done, it is tempting to see the process of civilisation reflected in Western culture's key story about the foundation of civilisation: the Paradise myth. Whether it be the Judeo-Christian variant or the Greco-Roman version, the *Golden Age myth*, this story deals with a movement from conditions in which nature's resources are immediately accessible to conditions in which nature has to be cultivated in order to provide a livelihood. As we will see in chapter 4, all the primitive occupations of the mountains are reflected in the myth, which thereby not only applies to a distant past, but just as fully to an idealised present – the one that is put forward as otherness to civilisation and is mirrored in civilisation's fixated vision: the landscape image with its basis in the untouched mountain. Grain, the nourishment of the Fall, has to give way to the mountain, but fruit and berries, the nourishment par excellence of the Golden Age, can thrive in domesticated form on the lower reaches of the mountains and in their wild form all over the mountainous region. Another typical mountain occupation with paradisiacal connotations in Western culture is pastoralism. Whether to stay permanently or according to seasonal changes, the herdsman takes his livestock into the mountains, with their forests, grazing grounds and life-giving springs. *Locus amoenus*, the beautiful natural place of antiquity, can be seen as just such a mountain spring set in a cave and surrounded by the vegetation fed by its nourishing water. Exactly the same idea lies in the Fountain of Life, a Mesopotamian topos that is carried over into the Christian tradition.

But again: the image of the mountainous country and its culture is extremely ambivalent. The cave that is the source of the Water of Life is just as much the cave that is the source of the very opposite of Paradise: the rocky terrain of hell. Correspondingly, all life forms that thrive in the wilderness are of a potentially demonic nature. Herdsmen and hunters are barbarians with no laws or history. The deities linked with the domains of pastoralism and the uncultivated – Dionysus, Pan, the satyrs, fauns, etc. – all have *chthonic* origins, i.e. they are concerned with the earth and the subterranean (Greek *chthon*=deeper earth). This ambivalence again occurs

because fertility stems from the same body of the earth consuming it, because womb and tomb are two sides of the same subterranean hollow. As Job declares (1: 21): "naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return."

By including the Mediterranean and Near Eastern mountains in my interpretive model, I do not wish to establish an unambiguous object for that representamen which comprises the rocks of the landscape image. I will simply claim that these mountains stabilise the development towards an epistemic *field* that has liberated itself from the womb of nature to such an extent that its typical representations of primordial wilderness – the image of origin – can alternate ambivalently between Paradise and underworld, Golden Age and barbarism, while its depth of field in images stretches out to land formations that connote precisely to these double-edged concepts of origin. In other words, the mountains here act as attractor, as a terrain of forces that structure the drive of cultural evolution. The epistemic *field* that casts a nostalgic-ambivalent gaze out towards and back to the mountains, and at the same time depicts them as universal ground in its images, I will here designate the *Golden Age field*: a hyper-*field*, which thus in itself spans a succession of epistemic *fields* from Mesopotamia to Greece and Rome to the Late Middle Ages. Accordingly, this *field*'s similarly transverse imprint in images will be called the *Golden Age paradigm*.

As mentioned, my interpretive model is not only concerned with the mere presence of mountains and rocks in post-Egyptian pre-modern landscape images, but also with the ways in which they are represented. In accordance with the train of thought up to now, I will thus construe their 'bizarre' and 'phantasmagoric' features as quite literal manifestations of the body of the earth, from primordial chaos to abyss to creative womb. The psychoanalytical aspect is possibly particularly fertile in this context as, among the various terms used for the otherness in psychoanalysis – *uroboros*, the real, the mother, etc. – Kristeva's *chora* stands out for its features relating to both cosmology and landscape. Besides being identified by Kristeva with the child's earliest and I-less state – the non-differential symbiosis with the mother – in Plato's creation myth *Timaeus* this concept is one of the names for the formless container that precedes creation. Furthermore, vertically it can denote earth formations and horizontally the land beyond the city (cf. chapter 1.3).[17] And, indeed, in Plato's phylogenetic universe *chora* is seen as the maternal primordial principle, an invisible ground of matter that precedes the four elements as well as their impregnation through the immutable, intelligible pattern. Like Kristeva's semiotic parallel, the Platonic *chora* is in a state of constant changeability, and I will therefore permit myself to assess the two concepts within the same framework. As is further suggested by *chora*'s affinity with earth formations and wilderness, the primary building blocks of the underworld, rocks, are a particularly auspicious forum by means of which to trace *chora*.

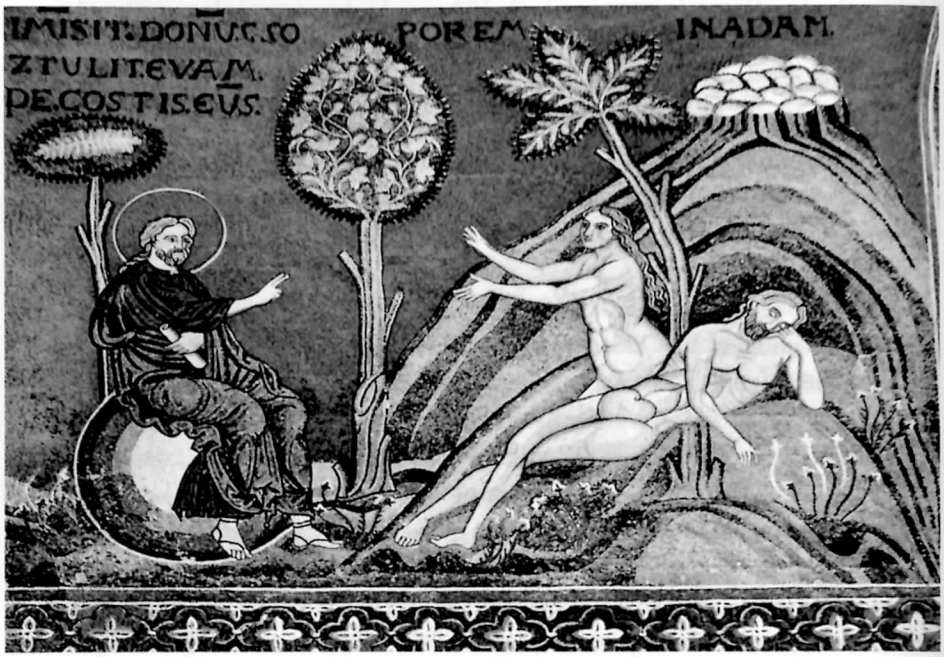


Fig. 2.9. *Creation of Eve* (*c.* 1185-91), mosaic. Monreale, Cathedral.

The chaotic and turbulent look of rocks in late medieval Western images, for example, could thus be interpreted as *chora*'s first and most fluid visualisation in the perceptive matter (FIG. 2.7). If, however, we turn our gaze to the abyss-like and jagged terraced rocks so typical of Byzantine painting, we encounter the primordial chaos in a more complex and contradictory form – a form which, on the one hand, points towards destruction, splitting and death, and, on the other, towards such fertile forces that the very minerals themselves are born and grow in Mother Earth's womb (FIG. 2.9 and PLATE 4). For, as will be apparent from a comprehensive lithic mythology, it was a widespread pre-modern concept that stones also took part in the life of the body of the earth. In fact, the most sumptuous testimonies to this belief could be found in one of the Great Goddess's last strongholds, the Minoan-Mycenaean culture in the middle of the 2nd millennium BC (FIG. 2.10).

The rocky grounds in post-Egyptian pre-modern landscape images can therefore be seen as a portrait of *terra* in its most diverse aspects: from fertile womb to inferno to virgin earth, wilderness and mountains. The cultural context cannot

Fig. 2.10. *Saffron Gatherer* (*c.* 1500 BC), fresco (partially reconstructed) from Knossos. Heraklion, Archaeological Museum.

only be used as a key to understanding why post-Egyptian landscape images look like they do; conversely, familiarity with the landscape images can also be used to fill holes in existing knowledge about the culture in general. It is only by means of a comparative interpretation between images and context that the contours are drawn outlining the epistemic *field* of which they both are a part – in this instance, the Golden Age *field*.

As the rocks of the landscape images are thus inscribed in an amazingly tenacious tradition, a veritable *longue durée*, I will permit myself to tackle them in a correspondingly broad vista. Different times might have their different accentuations – first on a cyclical context, later on demonism – but it will be my contention that cultural evolution has yet to reach a position where it can disrupt the fundamental image, the combined image of earth as underworld, womb and inferno: a disruption that is first effected with the breakthrough of modernity in the Late Middle Ages. The reader must therefore forgive me for taking him or her through some tremendous leaps in time, through which this continuity will hopefully become visible.

2.1 "There stands a house under the mountain of the world": rocks and their foundation in the underworld

Mother Earth

At least as far back as the Palaeolithic period, the earth was regarded as a body – meaning in particular, following the incipient breakaway of consciousness from nature, a female body: that of Mother Earth. Hills, rocks and mountains were fulsome swellings in its mass; valleys, ravines and caves were entrances to its living interior.[18] The first sculptures of Western culture – Mother Goddesses such as *Venus of Willendorf* (*c.* 30,000 BC) – are presumably incarnations of this all-encompassing body (FIG. 2.11). Here the woman is concentrated to the opulence and fertility that was wished for in the surrounding environment. The head is faceless and arms and lower legs shrivelled to rudiments, whereas breasts, stomach, thighs, vulva – in short: the body – have swollen to mighty dimensions.[19] Here the forms come from inside, a surplus of mass and fertility. The significance of the forms should be apparent from the longevity of this type of female figure, the Great Goddess, far into the Neolithic period when her attributes become explicit. A clay statuette from Çatal Hüyük (*c.* 6000-5800 BC), for example, shows a giantess sitting between two leopards or lions, all the while in the process of giving birth (FIG. 2.12). The birth testifies to her fertility, the predatory beasts to her connection with the dangerous wilderness, the sitting position on the mass of the throne to her affiliation to mountain and earth.[20] The nature of the goddess is extremely ambiguous; she might have power over the earth's fertility, but she also represents the opposite: chaos, disintegration and death.

The history of Western culture up until modernity could be described as a patriarchal struggle to wrest command of the fertile forces from The Great Goddess and instead emphasise her incarnation of chaos and death. Even though the situation is always extremely complex, historians of religion can confirm that the earth received its greatest veneration in the various Goddess cults that dominated religions until the 2nd millennium BC: Isis in Egypt; Ishtar in Babylon; Cybele in Asia Minor; Astarte in Syria; an unnamed goddess on Crete; Ge, Demeter and Persephone in Greece.[21] In this epoch the most important male deities chiefly function as the Goddess's partners – sons, husbands, lovers – who have to be sacrificed and rise again in order to ensure her fertility. As urbanisation increases during the last two millennia BC, and society is polarised in upper and lower classes (culminating in Parsons' advanced intermediate stage), this cult would seem, however, to be weakened in favour of patriarchal deities representing the new celestial power: the heavens. Civilisation's source of strength is hereby displaced from the mountain

Fig. 2.11. *Venus of Willendorf* (*c.* 30,000 BC), limestone. Vienna, Naturhistorisches Museum.

Fig. 2.12. *Goddess Giving Birth* (*c.* 6000-5800 BC), clay. Anatolia, Çatal Hüyük.

womb to its summit, which first becomes the abode of the celestial gods (as on Olympus), then the place of revelation for an even higher reality (as on Sinai or Sion). This development reaches its climax in the Greek Zeus, the Roman Jupiter and the Jewish Jahve. As far as Christianity is concerned, it could be regarded as a fusion of sorts between the cults of Goddess and those of the celestial gods, as at the same time as shifting the masculine god of creation to a new sphere of infinity, it endows the Goddess-partner's sacrificial role with a new ethical dimension.

The most extreme consequence of this development is that the Great Goddess's domain – the earth and the underworld – is demonised to hell, whilst the heavens have the monopoly of the form-creating forces. In practice, however, it is not so easy to eradicate the earth's fertility roles. In rural areas, on the periphery of the church's attention and control, variants of Goddess worship continue far into the modern period. If the rituals did not carry on in their pre-Christian form – as can still be read from European words for non-Christian (e.g. *heathen* from *heath,* or *pagan* from Latin *paganus* [=rural])[22] – they appeared in a more or less weak Christian guise. The Virgin Mary, mother of the male sacrificial god, is the unacknowledged earth goddess par excellence, whose virginal womb may be connected to the mystic Birth and Burial

Fig. 2.13. *Crucifixion* (*c.* 870), ivory relief from bookbinding. Munich, Staatsbibliothek.

Fig. 2.14. *Majestas Domini Attended by the Christ Child in Crib with Ocean and Earth* (*c.* 1015), miniature from the *Bernward Gospels*. Hildesheim, Cathedral Treasury, Cod. 18, f. 174.

Cave of Christ; and female saints such as Radegund, Macrine, Walpurga, Milburga and Brigid must all be seen as reinterpretations of the earlier corn goddess.[23]

In those areas of culture that were under the more direct control of the church – including, that is, most of the evidence we are dealing with here: the extant images – a somewhat more rigorous editing process of the past's afterlife in the present was carried out. Even though the Virgin Mary's incarnation of fertility was quite evident in the Late Middle Ages, attempts had earlier been made to obliterate the memory of her origin in the pagan earth goddess. This was, not least, possible because one of the earth goddess's original manifestations, *Terra*, was allowed a Christian afterlife – now just on harsher terms, by which she was assigned a subordinate role in the hierarchy of the Creation, if not directly demonised. When, having previously been repressed, she reappears in Carolingian

Fig. 2.15. *Earth* (11th century), miniature from Exultet roll. Monte Cassino, Abbey.

miniatures and ivory panels it is usually close to the bottom edge where, along with her companion *the Sea*, she can attend the cosmological order, whether it be focussing on a crucifixion (FIG. 2.13) or an adoration of the Lamb (PLATE 17). Nevertheless, she usually appears alongside one or more of the attributes with which her antique-pagan predecessor had been equipped (FIGS. 7.5, 7.10A and PLATE 25): in addition to, possibly, a seat of her own turbulent earth matter, also a bough, a serpent, a cornucopia and two children.

As can be seen from a miniature in the Ottonian *Bernward Gospels* (*c.* 1015), this amalgam is gradually associated with the Fall: the bough becomes the Tree of Knowledge, the serpent becomes the tempter in the Garden of Eden, and the two children become Adam and Eve (FIG. 2.14).[24] With this transformation of the serpent from antique-pagan fertility symbol to Judeo-Christian symbol of evil, *Terra* has moved closer to the Christian world picture, and thereby we are only a hair's breadth from her complete demonisation, as is seen, for example, in an approximately contemporaneous Exultet roll from the Abbey of Monte Cassino (FIG. 2.15). *Terra* has here quite literally become one with the earth: her body, from the breasts down, is made up of the surrounding terrain. As a sign of her power over the infernal forces she has two wild beasts – an ox and a serpent – suckling at her breasts. And yet, despite the obviously diabolic character of the animals, we are in principle still dealing with the same goddess as in *Venus of Willendorf* and in Çatal Hüyük's seated mother: an earth goddess who gives nourishment to the animals of the wilderness and who commands both fertility and chaos.

It is thus as a consequence of this surprisingly undiminished tradition that I shall permit myself to interpret the goddess's element – the rocks of the landscape image – in a corresponding bird's-eye perspective.

Wilderness and body of the earth

The connection of the rocks to Mother Earth is already suggested by the observation that they represent the landscape images' matter – a term that is etymologically derived from *mater* (mother).[25] Stemming from the maternal body of the earth were, first and foremost, minerals and their rooted superstructure, plants, these being the two lowest forms of existence in the world hierarchy. In Roman time, even the anti-metaphysical Lucretius notes how Father Ether casts his raindrops down into Mother Earth's womb, where they are turned into crops and fruit, which is further converted into nourishment for animals and humans.[26]

However, animals and, in particular, humans have lost contact with the earth. Unlike plants and minerals, they move around freely on the surface of the earth, and humankind even aspires to be liberated from this surface and become one with Father Ether. Even at the apex of this aspiration – the Middle Ages – it has to be accepted that humankind never relinquishes a longing for an existence akin to that of plants and minerals, an existence close to and generated from Mother Earth's body. This longing can in principle be said to be two-sided, albeit the sides often merge. On the one side it applies to a mythical and particularly fertile past – the Golden Age – and on the other side it applies to a weakened present, the fertility of which is, however, on the rise if we move away from civilisation, downwards to the underworld or outwards to the wilderness and its mountains.

As regards the first aspect, we must therefore note that, according to the creation myths of many cultures, even animals and humans were once born directly – *autochthonically* – of the body of the earth.[27] This is the case in many variants of the Greco-Roman Golden Age myth, also in Lucretius:

> The earth, you see, first gave forth the generations of mortal creatures at that time, for there was great abundance of heat and moisture in the fields. Therefore, wherever a suitable place was found, wombs would grow, holding to the earth by roots; and when in due time the age of the infants broke these, fleeing from the moisture and seeking the air, nature would direct thither pores of the earth and make it discharge from these open veins a liquid like to milk, just as now when a woman has brought forth she is filled with sweet milk, because all that rush of nourishment is directed towards the breasts.[28]

Fig. 2.16. *Mithras Being Born from a Rock* (3rd century (?)), stone. From Dacia. Deva, Museum.

Autochthonic thinking also finds its way into such a patriarchal creation ideology as the Judaic, for, according to several Genesis commentaries, Adam was created of the red clay, *adamah*, from the bottom of the Paradise cave, Machpelah.[29] The red colour of the clay here alludes to menstrual blood – the germ of woman's fertility – whilst the cave can again be understood as the telluric womb. Alternatively, humans could be created directly from the stones of the earth, which were often compared with Mother Earth's bones.[30] When the oracle of Themis, after the Flood, advises Deucalion and Pyrrha to throw "the bones of the great mother" over their shoulders so that the world could be repopulated, these bones are made up of the very stones of the earth (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, 375-90). In accordance with a tradition going back to hunter-gatherer societies, the bones could be seen here as containers for the essence of life. Similarly, many deities are said to have been born of rocks, possibly in the womb of a cave. This applies to saviour figures such as Zarathustra and Christ, and it applies to gods such as Zeus, Dionysus and Mithras. In several late antique sculptures, Mithras is only half-way grown out of a rock, which – occasionally wound round by a serpent – takes over from the thighs down (FIG. 2.16).[31]

However, as is true of all mythologies concerning the non-cultured, it has to be stressed that the autochthonic concept was not restricted to a lost Golden Age, but also existed in the border areas of the present. Thus every birth took place with the earth as its foundation, as if the individual wombs were an upwards extension of our common womb in the depths of the earth. The Book of Psalms (139: 15), for

Fig. 2.17. Akrotiri cave, Crete: the sacred water.

Fig. 2.18. Inside the nymph cave on the eastern slope of Mount Hymettus. Vari, Attica.

example, states: "My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth." According to numerous pre-modern myths, the woman even became pregnant as soon as she approached certain key points in nature: rocks, ravines, caves, rivers, swamps, trees. Every area of Europe knows of a rock or a spring that allegedly produces children: *Kinderbrunnen*, *Kinderteiche*, *Bubenquellen*.[32] Therefore, the chorus in Aeschylus' *Suppliant Maidens* sings: "to the rivers that through the land pour their gentle draught and give increase of children, with their fertilizing streams soothing its soil."[33] Even today it is actually a widespread practice to place children on the ground immediately after birth, so that contact with their place of origin is not severed too brutally.

But contact with the earth could also be of vital importance beyond the context of birth. Closeness to stones, rocks or mountains, or simply touching the surface of the earth provided *chthonic energy* – a force that gave increased strength and visionary insight.[34] Antaeus, son of the earth goddess Gaia, has become dependent on this chthonic strength when he engages in a wrestling bout with Hercules in Libya. Simply by holding him above the ground, so that Gaia cannot renew his strength, Hercules is therefore able to vanquish him. The other, visionary, aspect of chthonic energy was usually generated by certain stones or rocks, select sites which were treated as shrines in all pre-modern cultures. The story of one such stone – one of those dispersed around the shrine at Bethel – is found in the story of Jacob's ladder. It was by using the stone as his pillow that Jacob received his dream; and in recognition of the stone's power, the following morning he set it up as a pillar and poured oil on it.[35]

As an upward extension of the subterranean matter and the most extensive form of stone, the mountain appeared to be the epitome of Mother Earth: solid, protective, nourishing, crushing. The identity of the mountain is apparent in, for example, the German word *Berg*, which is related to *bergen* (to shelter), *verbergen* (to hide) and *Burg* (fort).[36] The power of the mountain was particularly apparent from the many springs emanating from its womb. In fact, the general belief was that the rivers stemmed from an enormous underground reservoir that had ramifications in the mountains. This belief was fuelled by the observation that caves are always damp and often contain springs, and thus these caves embodied the chthonic womb (FIG. 2.17). In antiquity countless caves were the focus of cults, especially of spring nymphs, the genii of the water (FIG. 2.18), and the prolonged life of the cult in Christianity is seen, for example, in the many Italian cave shrines dedicated to Santa Rosalia, the Virgin Mary or Saint Michael, the subjugator of the underground dragon. Mothers would go to these shrines with their new-born babies in order to procure strength for them; the spring water, cleansed of demonic powers, was called *latte di monte*.[37] Exactly the same notion of the mountain as Mother Earth's breasts is found in the Mesopotamian creation myth, in which the hero Marduk "piled up

clear-cut mountains" from the udder of the female primeval monster Tiamat.[38]

Just like the human body, the rock-based earth was full of hollows, liquids, air and heat. Whether reading literature of religion or natural philosophy, the underworld is generally described as a rock mass cut through by cave systems, which are the abode of winds, water streams and fire. Lucretius declares "the earth below as above to be everywhere full of windy caverns, bearing many lakes and many pools in her bosom with rocks and steep cliffs."[39] In his *Naturales quaestiones* Seneca compares this image of earth to a human body, juxtaposing the earth's water channels with veins and arteries. Like the human body, the earth also contains many types of liquid, of which some cause the formation of metals.[40] Even a natural philosophy innovator such as Leonardo perseveres with this line of thought:

> So that we might say that the earth has a spirit of growth; that its flesh is the soil, its bones the arrangement and connexion of the rocks of which the mountains are composed, its cartilage the tufa, and its blood the springs of water. The pool of blood which lies round the heart is the ocean, and its breathing, and the increase and decrease of the blood in the pulses, is represented in the earth by the flow and ebb of the sea [...].[41]

A variant of this idea, which stresses the more sordid aspects of the body of the earth, is found in Robert Fludd's diagram of the male body as a microhistorical reflection of the macrocosmos (1619; FIG. 2.19). Whilst the brain, with its consciousness, intellect and sense, towers up into the upper celestial spheres – un-created light, created light and empyrean respectively – the region from the midriff down is left in the sublunary domain, in the world cave, vaulted by a row of stalactite-like shapes. In this lower zone, the genitals – seat of pleasure – correspond to the centre of the earth, whereas the winding intestines signify the underworld's labyrinth of caves. The intestines also indicate the underworld through their faeces and production of malodorous gasses. For, just like a fertile womb, the underworld was also a chaos of mud, filth, blood, slime and gas – a quagmire of constantly flowing faeces, as noted in Aristophanes' *The Frogs*.[42] In the same way as the individual organism converts nourishment into faeces in order to function, the underworld has to grind the living to death in order that the earth mother can yield new fertility. As per this viewpoint, the openings in the earth move from the vaginal area to the oral and anal domain – a displacement that is summed up in the notion of *vagina dentata*, the toothed vagina.

This whole complex of ideas is given further rationale in the limestone mountains around the Mediterranean. All the mountains abound in caves and grottos, many with trickling springs that could give the impression of an underground

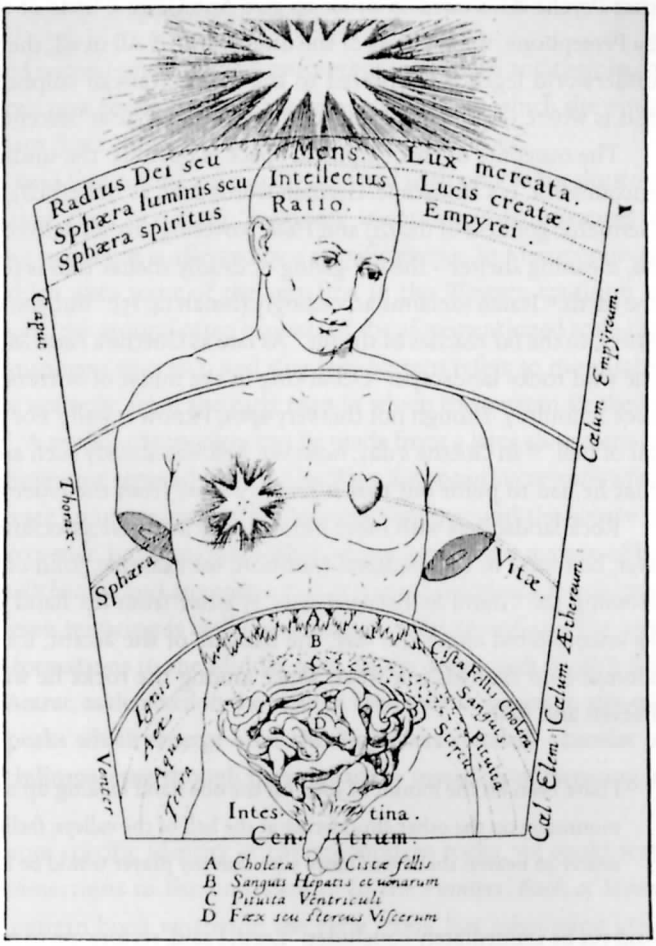


Fig. 2.19. Robert Fludd, diagram of connections between the parts of the male body and the spheres of the cosmos (1619).

reservoir. In Greece, for example, almost 80 per cent of the mountain regions are made up of limestone mountains, the majority full of caves.[43] As to the heat and fire that are found in the more excruciating parts of the underworld, they must clearly have been inspired by experience of volcanic openings: geysers, scorching tuff rings, sulphur springs, volcanic craters. In Lucretius' description of Etna, its eruptions are assumed to have been caused by heated air in its network of subterranean hollows.[44] The classic location for descent into Inferno – the site chosen by Aeneas – is thus Lake Avernus in southern Italy: a water-filled volcanic crater, whose sulphurous gasses could still in Roman time make the birds drop dead into the water.[45] Another opening in the underworld, the Taenarus cave in the southern Peloponnes, is designated by Apuleius "the breathing-place of Hell". It was here

that Psyche descended in order to give Aphrodite a little of the beauty possessed by Persephone, the goddess of the underworld.[46] All in all, there are countless local underworld legends connected to the Mediterranean sulphur springs and caves: this is where Orpheus descended, this is where Christ descended, and so forth.

The outcome of this empirical space is obvious: the underworld, wherever we encounter it, is a landscape. German words such as *Hölle* (hell), *Höhle* (cave), *Hel* (the Germanic goddess of death) and *Hülle* (covering) are all derived from the same root: *hel,* meaning shelter – the life-giving or deadly shelter that is found in the womb of the earth.[47] Isaiah exclaims accordingly (Isaiah 14: 15): "But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit." As late as Goethe's *Faust* Mephistopheles says of the wild rocky landscape: "Debarking in the midst of horrors,/ In grimly yawning rock redoubt?/ Though not this very spot, I know it well,/ For properly this was the pit of hell."[48] In Goethe's day, however, hell was already such an antiquated concept that he had to point out that it *properly* came from the hideously yawning rock.

Rock landscapes with more immediately intrusive associations to hell can, however, be found in the medieval tradition; for example, John of Salisbury (*c.* 1115-80) crossing the Grand St Bernard pass. A letter from his hand refers to the ordeals he encountered along the way, the dangers of the ascent, ice and snow and such intense cold that his ink froze. Once among the rocks he was stretched between heaven and hell:

> I have been on the mount of Jove; on the one hand looking up to the heaven of the mountain; on the other shuddering at the hell of the valleys; feeling myself so much nearer to heaven that I was more sure that my prayer would be heard.

And yet he immediately concludes: "Lord, I said, restore me to my brethren, that they come not into this place of torment."[49] A similarly infernal encounter with rocks is later experienced by the 15th-century humanist Leonardo Bruni, who writes in a letter: "The descent from this mountain ridge was much harder than the ascent, on a narrow, steep path which in many places in a wide bend leads to steep rocks, as if it originated from the underworld." Of the Alps in the Konstanz district Bruni writes that they fill him with terror and that he has difficulty in understanding what nature – the mother and creator of the world – intended with them.[50] Far into the 17th century, mountains, springs, rivers and volcanoes were a self-evident part of the subterranean world – to such a degree that they can all be included in Athanasius Kircher's *Mundus subterraneus* (1664), a monumental work published in Amsterdam, bringing together all classical and medieval scholarship relating to the subterranean field, including astronomy, meteorology, mineralogy, metallurgy, alchemy, botany and zoology.[51]

Pictorial rocks

From the religious and natural-philosophical concepts of mountains and their basis, the underworld, we can now zoom in on the pictorial tradition, in which the world of stone is omnipresent from Mesopotamia to the Late Middle Ages.

Even though the land formations are usually depicted with only vague illusionism or direct stylisation, their persistent 'rockiness' is confirmed by instances in which the overarching paradigm is affected by a specific theme. In Mesopotamian landscape images, which were some of the very first in the Western tradition to include land formations, the ground often consists of the aforementioned scale-like pattern of small hemispheres or crests, and that this pattern refers to mountains became apparent, for example, from the early map in which the pattern flanked a river valley (**FIG. 1.17**). A similar observation can be made from a later characteristic land formation: the Byzantine terraced rock and its West European successors; when Petrarch wants to create an impression of his beloved Vaucluse and the source of the River Sorgue in Provence, he places just such a terrace form in the margin of his copy of Pliny's *Naturalis historia* and annotates it as "my most delightful transalpine solitude".[52] But not even terracing is really necessary in order to indicate the rock identity of the land formations in the Middle Ages. In the scene with Noah's Ark stranded on Mount Ararat, as depicted in the Sicilian Monreale's mosaics (*c.* 1185-91), these mountains – peaks which emerge after the Flood has receded – consist of three unadulterated hilltops, even though there are many instances of terracing in the mosaics.

As regards the more specific identity of the pre-modern rocks, we could start with their explict connections to the underworld. In the *Painters' Book of Mount Athos* – a Byzantine pattern book written in the early 1700s, but containing ideas that go back in an unbroken line to the Middle Ages – the recipe for the depiction of hell is quite bluntly that it should be like "a dark cave under mountains".[53] In most medieval inferno representations, from the scenes taking place in front of the underworld mouth in the *Vatican Virgil* (late 4th century) to the Limbourg brothers' *Hell* (*c.* 1413-16), hell looks exactly like such a rocky landscape penetrated by caves, ravines or shafts (**FIG. 11**).[54] One example with distinctive landscape features is Giovanni da Modena's fresco (*c.* 1410) in San Petronio, Bologna, in which sins are punished in ravine-like hollows between the rocks (**FIG. 2.20**).

In order to understand how specifically such representations of hell are connected with the mountainous wilderness beyond civilisation, and at the same time the extent of the feeling of ambivalence towards this wilderness, they can be compared with representations of hermits lives in the desert, whether they be single saints or the *Thebaid*'s extensive community (**FIGS. 2.21-23**).[55] In both types of image – hell

Fig. 2.20. Giovanni da Modena, *Inferno* (*c.* 1410), fresco. Bologna, San Petronio, Cappella Bolognini.

Fig. 2.21. Francesco Traini (?), *Legends of the Hermits* (1330s), fresco (section). Pisa, Camposanto.

Fig. 2.22. *Hermit in Cave* (1084), from Byzantine manuscript of Johannes Climacus' *Scala paradisi*. Princeton University Library, Garrett ms 16, f. 66v.

Fig. 2.23. *Hermits in Caves* (*c.* 1310-20), miniature from Palermo manuscript on lives of the monastic saints in Egypt. Rome, Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms Vat. lat. 375, f. 19.

and hermit life – we see people in the same kind of landscape: complexes of rock-bounded caves. To the anchorites, the wilderness indeed had the appearance of a partially infernal region in which one was tempted by devils, harlots and monsters. However, even though their primitive way of life makes them savages themselves, only a hair's breadth from the diabolical,[56] they overcome the ordeals by means of asceticism, via which they come into contact with the life-giving power of the underworld. Given the way in which the anchorites are encased by their caves, they actually radiate an almost antenatal feeling of security; so, all in all, the indicator of the wilderness image alternates indefinably between inferno and Paradise.

In a way, however, it is not necessary to turn to specific wilderness portraits to pin down the significance of the rocks, as their identity is registered in *all* pre-modern rocky grounds. The iconography of the wilderness portraits could simply be said to highlight features of the overarching paradigm: the Golden Age paradigm. Another theme that demonstrates the connection between inferno, wilderness and the pre-modern landscape image in general is the triumph of Christianity over the Devil.

Fig. 2.24. *Saint Michael* (*c.* 1000), miniature from the *Menologion of Basil II*. Rome, Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms Vat. grec. 1613.

Fig. 2.25. *Christus militans et triumphans* (6th century), mosaic (partially reconstructed). Ravenna, Cappella Arcivescovile.

Fig. 2.26. *Deposition* (after 1164), fresco. Nerezi (Macedonia), Church of St Panteleimon.

That there were so many cave shrines dedicated to Saint Michael was because the archangel cleansed the underground water of demonic influence. In the Book of Revelation (12: 7-9), Saint Michael and his angels fought a battle against the Devil in heaven: "And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world – he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him." What the word "earth" entails is apparent, for example, in the image of Saint Michael in the Byzantine *Menologion of Basil II* (*c.* 1000; **FIG. 2.24**). Here the archangel is lingering in a rocky landscape that leads into a gaping black hole, the entrance to the underworld, into which four of the fallen angels are being sucked. In the image of *Christus militans et triumphans*, it is Christ who has the Devil underfoot, a Devil in the shape of the monsters of the wilderness: a lion and a serpent (**FIG. 2.25**).[57]

Images such as these make it quite clear how closely the Judeo-Christian image of the Devil is derived from the beasts of the wilderness, especially reptiles in close contact with the surface of the earth, the fallen matter. The wild beasts suckled by *Terra* (**FIG. 2.15**) turn into the monsters of hell who are trampled down by the messenger of light. Similarly, Christ's cross can just as well be placed above a serpent, Satan's vermin, as above the death cave at Calvary, the jaws of the underworld (**FIGS. 2.13** and **2.26**). The idea is of course also apparent in the numerous representations in

Fig. 2.27. *Illustration for Psalm 6* (*c.* 1200), miniature. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms lat. 8846, f. 11v.

Fig. 2.28. *Harrowing of Hell* (before 1217), miniature from the *Landgrafenpsalter* commissioned by Hermann I, Landgrave of Thuringia. Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek.

Fig. 2.29. *Pluto and Persephone in the Entrance to Hades* (14th century), from a French *Ovid moralisé* manuscript.

Fig. 2.30. Cornelis Cort (?) after Maarten van Heemskerck, *Triumph of the World* from *Cycle of the Vicissitudes of Human Affairs* (1564), engraving. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet.

which the entrance to hell is quite simply a monster's jaws (FIGS. 2.27-2.29).[58] Here the beast is often identified with the Leviathan, an Old Testament sea monster which in prehistoric times was vanquished by Jahve, but remains a constant menace lurking in the depths.[59] To end up in hell is here the same as being devoured by the *vagina dentata* of a wild beast, whether it be the incarnation of wilderness on earth or wilderness in the sea.

Having observed the connection between mountain, underworld and earth, it comes as no surprise that a mountain is often chosen when the element *terra* is to be illustrated in an allegorical context. Thus, in the form of a towering peak with a castle at its foot, we still see it employed in Maarten van Heemskerck's *Triumph of the World*, published as an engraving, supposedly by Cornelis Cort (1564; FIG. 2.30). The mountain is held by the earth goddess from Asia Minor, Cybele, a seated woman with a castle on her head, the symbol of the foundation of architecture in earth. Along with the three other elements – water, air and fire – Cybele is seated on a Pegasus-drawn

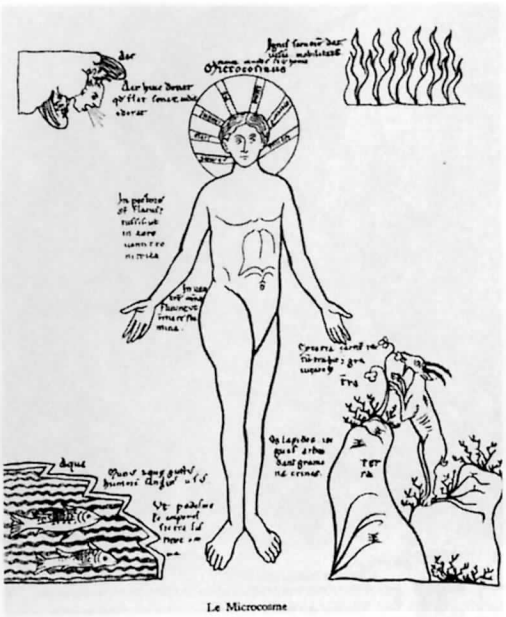


Fig. 2.31. *Man Surrounded by the Four Elements* (*c.* 1167-95), copy after miniature from German manuscript of Abbess Herrad von Landsberg's *Hortus Deliciarum*. Formerly Strassburg, Dominikanerkirche (burnt 1870).

chariot which, as a sign of the changeability of the world, represented by a globe in the middle, is steered by Tempus, with scythe in hand and hourglass on his head.[60]

Another example, 400 years older, is a (now burnt) German illumination of the human as microcosmos surrounded by the four elements (FIG. 2.31). In this attendant illustration to the creation of Adam, the earth is made up of a pair of rocks with a mountain goat eating the shoots of vegetation. The rocks have been inscribed with the word "terra".[61]

The chthonic wilderness

Even though the wilderness can have many faces – desert, plain, forest, mountain and also sea – and these faces are often combined, the rocks and mountains comprise a form of quintessence of that which is wild. Urban civilisation has, inevitably, to be terminated where mountains dominate. The sloping mountainsides are inaccessible to cornfields. Tracks are only constructed in moderation and on terms dictated by the landscape.

Distinctions between mountain and wilderness are therefore quite fluid right from Mesopotamian time. Where the Semitic stem *sadw* in, for example, the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (*c.* 1700 BC), refers to the open plain (*sadi*) ("on the steppes [*sadi*] [...] with the wild animals"), in Oriental areas it refers to the mountain. Similarly,

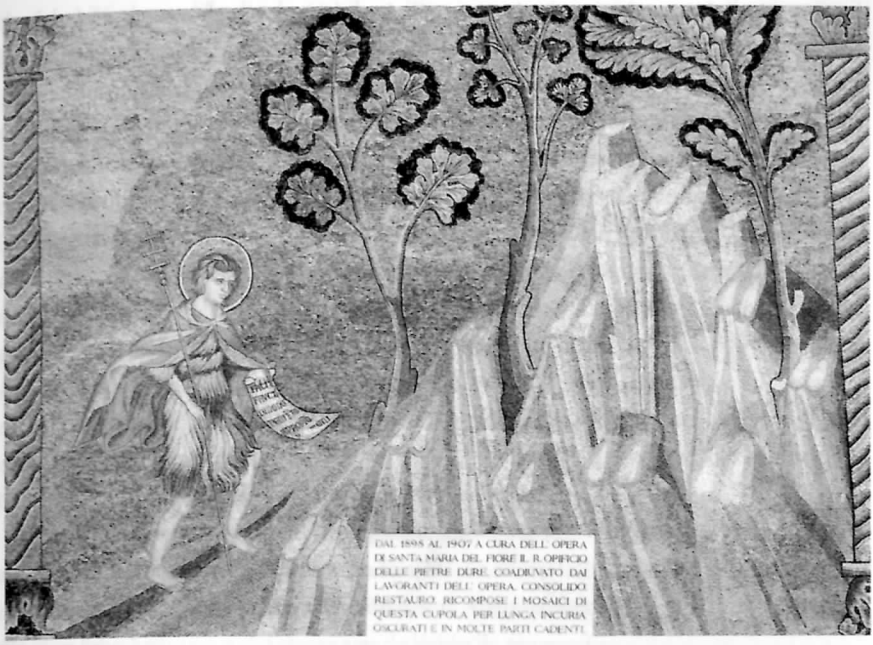


Fig. 2.32. *Saint John the Baptist Departs for the Wilderness* (1271-1320s), mosaic. Florence, Baptistery.

the stem meaning 'land' (that is, land beyond the city) in the northwest Semitic language (*dubr*) can also mean 'highland'.[62] The persistence of this tradition equating wilderness with mountain is again displayed in the Florentine Baptisery's mosaic *Saint John the Baptist Departs for the Wilderness* (1271-1320s; **FIG. 2.32**). With the extraordinarily broad format allotted to the rocks in relation to the insignificant hermit in the left-hand side of the mosaic, the landscape almost has the character of a portrait, which precisely establishes the rocks' quality of wilderness.

As my analytical model would have it, the horizontal merging between wilderness and mountain can, however, also be turned in a vertical direction, for going back to the Mesopotamian and Semitic cultures there is an established topos that the wilderness runs continuously over into the underworld. The chthonic gods are encountered beyond civilisation, in the steppes, deserts and mountains.[63] In the words of Nicholas Tromp: "The cosmos consists in the territory a people or tribe is occupying; outside of it is a strange, chaotic space, where demons and the spirits of the dead are roaming."[64] The Sumerian word *kur* thus means 'earth', 'ground' or 'underworld', but it was also used, and often with a great deal of ambiguity, of

'foreign land', 'mountain' or 'mountains'.[65] *Arallu* was both the name of a desert near Uruk and the underworld generally.[66] And if we move to the Semitic family of languages, we see that *edin* and *seru* could mean both underworld and mountain, just as *tohû* – the wet chaos – was also used of the dry desert.[67]

These fluid boundaries are clearly illustrated in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* where the underworld is located in a twin-peaked mountain, Mashu, at the furthest end of the wilderness.[68] This dual mass, the world mountain, is guarded by menacing creatures, half scorpion, half human, and the sun sets in its womb, to rise again in the morning. Gilgamesh's mission is indeed to cross through the mountain in the darkness of night in order to track down the garden of the immortals in the East, where the sun rises, and inferno is transformed to Paradise. The mountain is also described in an earlier Sumerian poem, a song of self-praise by an unnamed god of the underworld:

> There stands a house under the mountain of the world, a road runs down, the mountain covers it and no man knows the way. It is a house that binds bad men with ropes and clamps them into a narrow space. It is a house that separates the wicked and the good; this is a house from out of which no one escapes, but just men need not fear before its judge, for in this river of spent souls the good shall never die although the wicked perish. This is my house, on its foundations stand the mountains of the sunrise, but who shall see into the pit? [...] It is the house of the setting sun, the pallid god in livid splendour; the sill is a monster with jaws that gape and the jambs of the doors are a sharp knife to slash down wicked men. The two rims of the river of hell are the rapier thrust of terror, a raging lion guards it and who can face his fury? Here also lie the rainbow gardens of the Lady.[69]

From this poem it is again apparent how extremely ambiguous the mountain actually is. The interior of the underworld's house not only comprises the womb of sunset, hell, which punishes evil ones, but also the Paradise of dawn, the rainbow gardens, which procure eternal satisfaction for the good.

For the Judaic tradition, the patriarchal belief in heaven has, however, triumphed to such an extent that the underworld – Sheol – no longer contains a Paradise, but only a dark chaos that alternates between extremes of drought and wetness.[70] In the Book of Jonah (2: 5-6), we read: "The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit. O Lord my God." And in Job (26: 5-6): "The dead tremble under the waters and their inhabitants. Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon [the abyss] has no covering." This realm of the dead is "the land of darkness and deep shadow,

the land of gloom like thick darkness, like deep shadow without any order; where light is as thick darkness." (Job 10: 21-22)

If we now compare the vocabulary used of Sheol with the vocabulary used of wilderness in general, we discover that there is no difference. According to Jeremiah (2: 6) the fathers evaded the question: "Where is the Lord who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that none passes through, where no man dwells?" And in Deuteronomy (8: 15) we read of the one "who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; who brought you water out of the flinty rock."[71] All in all, Sheol is a constantly lurking power, which appears immediately upon the cessation of order. Weakness, need, illness, injury, ruin are all signs of the presence of the realm of the dead. In Ezekiel (32: 17ff.), for example, there are fluid boundaries between those slain by the sword and their graves to Sheol in general.

However, if we move on to the Greek and Roman image of the underworld, we again find the ambivalence between fertility and death that was evident in the Sumerian underworld poem. In misty Tartarus, the lowest region of the earth and the place in which the roots of the sea and the earth grow, sinners are punished behind walls and bronze gates,[72] and in the region above, Hades, the spirits of the dead rush around restlessly with no hope of resurrection. Nevertheless, the god of death, Pluto, is also the god of wealth, with the cornucopia as his attribute. The explanation for this is again that the gods of fertility belong to the same earth that disintegrates the dead in its embrace. And, again, the connection not only applies to the vertical domain – that which lies *underneath* civilization – but it can also be extended horizontally – to the wilderness *outside* civilization. So important an underworld god as Dionysus, whose rhythmically repeated sacrifice and resurrection ensured the fertility of the earth, was surrounded by such rural figures as nymphs, satyrs, silenes and fauns. These figures are chthonic demigods, for as Ovid's Jupiter says:

> I have demigods, rustic divinities, nymphs, fauns and satyrs, and sylvan deities upon the mountain-slopes. Since we do not yet esteem them worthy the honour of a place in heaven, let us at least allow them to dwell in safety in the lands allotted them.[73]

This earth is thus to be understood simultaneously as the underworld and its upwards extension in the wild, forest-clad mountainous land. Callistratus (4th century AD?) states: "For though soft skin and dainty limbs befit a beautiful girl, the appearance of a Satyr is unkempt, as of a mountain spirit that leaps in honour of Dionysus."[74] The goat-god Pan is also linked to the wild mountain heights. In Theocritus's first *Idyll* we read: "O Pan, Pan, whether thou art on the high hills of Lycaeus, or

rangest mighty Maenalus, come to the Sicilian isle and leave the mountain peak of Helice and that high tomb of Lycaon's son wherein even the Blessed Ones delight." That Theocritus celebrates all these peaks is because mountains, besides covering over the underworld, were regarded as sacred. In Greece this sanctity included, for example, Mount Ida, Olympus, Helicon and Mount Parnassus above Delphi, the twin peaks of which were dedicated to Dionysus and Apollo respectively.[75]

Dionysus, a son of the Great Goddess, was celebrated in ecstatic rituals carried out high up in the mountains. Every year, in the most famous of the Greek cultic caves, the stalactite-filled Corycian Cave on the slopes of Mount Parnassus, the Dionysian women, the Thyiades, re-enacted his death and resurrection in the glow of burning torches. At the centre of the ritual was a leather bag full of mead – the *korykos* – the fermentation of which corresponded to the overflowing of blood when Dionysus was born of Persephone. Simultaneously, on the bare peaks of Parnassus outside the cave, there were wild orgies, playing on the dialectics between the cold, irreducible stone and the hot, mobile bodies. As Dionysus was reborn of death, so was the coldness of stone converted into bodily energy.[76]

The success of Christianity is partly due to its deep understanding of the need to uphold key features of the pagan fertility cults, especially the Dionysian. As is abundantly corroborated by later Byzantine painting, a cave was not solely the setting for Christ's descent to the realm of the dead and subsequent resurrection, but also for his birth. The canonical gospels might designate the place of birth as a stable, but for shepherds in the mountainous regions it was normal practice to use caves as stables. And in Jacob's and Matthew's pseudo-gospels it is stated quite unequivocally that Christ is born of the mountain's womb. In Pseudo-Jacob's account, there is even the emission of a dazzling light from the birth cave, reminiscent of the gleam when Dionysus was born.[77]

The Dionysus cult's afterlife in Christianity verges, however, on the schizophrenic as, alongside Christ's chthonic features, the underworld is demonised into hell; and hell's occupants, the devils, replicate features of the satyrs: horns, goat legs, covering of hair. This duality had far-reaching consequences because, as indicated, the fertility cults thrived wherever in Europe Christianity gained ground, and the saints – Christ's successors – were often slightly modified local deities. Apart from the gift of grace, there are therefore rather vague boundaries between the wilderness-seeking saint, the anchorite (FIGS. 2.21-23), and the medieval *wild man* – a semi-bestial, hairy creature with that ambivalent identity which the West always associates with wilderness (FIG. 2.33).[78] The wild man is unspoilt, has superhuman powers and communicates with the animals, but is also cruel, aggressive and chaotic. In Latin-influenced languages the term for 'wild' (English *savage*, French *sauvage*, Italian *selvaggio*, *salvatico*) is tellingly derived from the Latin *silva* (forest). The forest

Fig. 2.33. Jean Bourdichon, *Wild Man, Wild Woman and Child by Their Cave* (15th century), miniature. Paris, École des Beaux-Arts.

in question will often be in the mountains, the most resistant barrier against the civilisation of the plains, for, as Richard Bernheimer notes, rituals and mythology relating to the savage survive largely in mountainous areas such as the Alps.[79]

Through studies of etymology, medieval literature and modern folklore, Bernheimer also established that variants of the wild man are part of a *longue durée* as they can often be traced back to the fertility deities of antiquity. This applies, for example, to the modern Tyrolean wild man Orke (or Lorke), who descends from the Roman underworld god Orcus.[80] The wild man is inextricably connected with a belief that mountain cultures have access to powers that have been lost in the plains. As Goethe's Faust says:

> You know the mountain folk reflect and pore,
> Versed in the scripts of rock and nature lore.
> The spirits, *long estranged from lowland sites,*
> Prefer more than before the craggy heights.
> They mutely toil through intricate crevasses
> In rich metallic vapors' noble gases [...].
> [my italics][81]

That the lowland civilisations continued to turn to the mountains for their strength is due in no small part to the apparent absorption of the earth's power of growth in the depths of the earth. And what were the mountains other than exposed subterranean rock masses, places where the chthonic had become immediately accessible? That there is not enough power in the surface of the earth, the ploughed top soil of the plain, was a truth experienced by Demeter, the Greek goddess of grain. The plants will only grow on Demeter's earth surface in the spring if her daughter, Persephone, spends the wintry half of the year with her abductor, Hades, in the underworld. The mechanisms of the pact become entirely comprehensible in Hesiod's description of the ages of the world, in which each new epoch is literally a burial of its predecessor. The Golden Age race, which is covered with earth of the Silver Age, is thus called

> pure spirits dwelling on the earth, [...] kindly, delivering from harm, and guardians of mortal men; for they roam everywhere over the earth, clothed in mist and keep watch on judgements and cruel deeds, givers of wealth [...].[82]

As this race, the representatives of Golden Age autochthonic growth, is subject to another couple of burials – those of the Bronze Age and the Iron Age – it must logically end up stone-solid in the lowest regions of the earth along with the infernal forces.

In accordance with this tellurian absorption, the earth would seem to be stratified everywhere in the ancient world. In Egypt it is divided between: topmost, the loose soil; in the middle distance, *aker*, the entrance to the underworld; and lowest, the realm of the dead, Anubis' domain. In Mesopotamia, the earth god Enlil's domain lies above the so-called underworld mountain, which is divided between the infernal deities and Enki (Ea), who ruled the life-giving freshwater ocean *apsu*.[83] The distinction between arable land and chthonic depths is certainly complicated by the fluid boundaries between the corn goddess and the goddess of earth in general: that Gaia (Ge) could also be incarnated by Demeter.[84] Their mutual relationship, not least as regards cultural evolution, is an issue in need of a systematic analysis, however. Until such a time as that is available, I will assume that the Great Mother – the original goddess of earth and wilderness – possessed powers that could not entirely be replaced by Demeter, her more surface-bound and cultivated successor.[85] The corresponding observation with reference to the pre-modern landscape images would be that the chthonic depths, the Great Mother's domain, are manifest in the rocky ground, whereas Demeter's looser earth, closer to the surface, is absent.

The connection is confirmed by the agricultural cultures' continued veneration of the chthonic. All the abundance of nature – springs, wild beasts, plants and also the power of growth that the valleys needed – emanated from the goddess's body masses:

Fig. 2.34. *Mountain God* (*c.* 1300 BC), stone relief. From Assur's fountain in the temple of Assur in the city of Assur.

the mountains.[86] In his studies of the ancient religions of Asia Minor, Volkert Haas thus states that the purpose of vegetation festivals was to ensure the mountain's power of growth, and that mountains and springs were often amalgamated on the same lists of gods and sacrifices. According to a Hittitic example: "After that he [the king] drinks in a sitting position for the mountain Aguliri, the mountain Kalistabi, the spring Samura, and the river Sitarbu." Another example refers to the rock Timuwa, to which the people of the town Talas dedicate a silver-coated wine cask and two annual festivals.[87] There is no doubt about this fertility role in Hittitic and Hurritic depictions of mountain gods. On a monumental stone relief in Hurritic style from Assur's fountain (*c.* 1300 BC), the mountain god's skirt and hat are covered with the scale pattern as specification of rocky ground (FIG. 2.34). His fertility is indicated partly by two goddesses, one on either side, each holding a pair of vases from which water is streaming, and partly by two pairs of leafy branches projecting from his hands and hips. On the branches from his hips a pair of mountain goats rear up in order to eat of the upper paradisiacal leaves, in exactly the same way as their successor 2,500 years later in the aforementioned German illustration of *Terra* (FIG. 2.31).[88]

Thus the closeness of the connection between the Western underworld image and a concrete life practice is again corroborated. The underworld, Mother Earth's

domain, is an actual presence where the stone masses of the bedrock protrude, and whether it is subject to veneration or terror-stricken denunciation, it is related to tangible nature, experiences of a terrain.

2.2 Chora

Chaos

This whole conceptual complex as regards the mountainous wilderness, the earth and underworld is again perceivable in the pre-modern Western landscape images. Having so far mainly focused on the fact *that* there were many rocks, I can now also bring in the issue of *how* these rocks are pictured. As I have mentioned, the categories are not separate. Both originate in the pre-modern concepts of the make-up of the earth.

If we take a broad general view of the land formations in the pre-modern landscape images, it does, to be sure, seem difficult to make out common denominators for the very way in which their materiality is accounted for, beyond the rock-like character itself. In Roman wall paintings we come extremely close to a visual naturalism, but is it possible to imagine anything further from naturalism than the unruly undulating landscapes that appear in Carolingian manuscripts 800 years later? And what could link the latter to the angular terraced rocks of contemporaneous Byzantine manuscripts? Absolute common denominators are not given. Nevertheless, I would think that a number of apparently different land formations can be linked via a concept that could be called *dynamics*. The concept comes to expression in countless ways, but all bear witness to a kind of *natura naturans*: that the formations are not merely created once and for all (*natura naturata*), but still seem to be filled with a fluctuating energy. As mentioned by way of introduction, a common framework could thus be made up of the female primordial ground – *chora* – which Plato places before to the world took form and which Kristeva also connects with the child's pre-cultural state:

> Neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization [Lacan's mirror phase, see chapter 1], and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm. [...] Though deprived of unity, identity or deity, the *chora* is nevertheless subject to a regulating process, which is different from that of symbolic law but nevertheless effectuates discontinuities by temporarily articulating them and then starting over, again and again.[89]

Fig. 2.35. *Entombment* (*c.* 1119-23), miniature from the *Albani Psalter*, produced in St Albans. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek.

Fig. 2.36. Miniature with Genesis illustrations (*c.* 1230-50). Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, ms 330.

This "regulating process", *chora*'s kinetic rhythmics, is also found in Plato, as after *chora*, the nurse of generation, received the elements and "all the affections which accompany these", she displayed "a strange variety of appearances" and "was never in any part in a state of equipoise, but swaying unevenly hither and thither, was shaken by them, and by its motion again shook them".[90] If we link these onto- and phylogenetic characteristics of *chora*, it is then an obvious step to compare them with the aforementioned dynamics in the rocks of the landscape images, so that these then are articulated in an equivalent succession of alternating creation and disintegration.

The land formations in the Western High and Late Middle Ages give an impression of the concept in its most general terms. In many images from the period between 800 and 1300, the ground is the subject of the most unruly fluctuations; it curves, undulates, spirals and folds as if it were just as fluid and changeable as the sea (**FIGS. 2.7, 2.27** and **2.35-36**).[91] In a manuscript with the Proverbs (*c.* 1140-50) by the "Master of the Avila Bible", these waves have even been channelled with gash-like

hollows.[92] It is therefore extremely tempting to interpret these whirling, undulating and folding effects as a sign of the rocks, or in a broader sense the earth, belonging to *chora*'s first manifestation, the unformed matter – *materia informis* – as it exists at the bottom of the polarised world.

In the early Western creation myths, the world is usually generated from chaos. In the Babylonian and Greek tradition the earth goddess (Tiamat or Gaia) is created spontaneously by this chaos, whereas the celestial god, who is to make the earth fertile (Marduk or Uranus), does not appear until afterwards. However, if we move to the climax of antiquity's patriarchal tendencies, Judaic culture, the spiritual celestial god exists before all else, so that he can erect a boundary between the light and a chaos comprising dark earth and an aqueous primordial abyss (Genesis 1: 1). Whether the primordial chaos in itself is creative or is subjugated God's will during Creation, it keeps on leading a reduced existence at the bottom of a two-part world, the upper part of which is cosmos. At this depth it can denote everything from a destructive hell to the so-called *prima materia*, which is the pure, uncultivated matter, the starting point for, *inter alia*, alchemical transformation. The role of the primordial mass in creation can, moreover, still be traced via etymology: European words such as *machen* and *make* derive from the Latin *massa* (mass). Every process of creation thus begins with the doughy, weighty chaos.[93]

Interest in this primordial chaos flared up in the Late Middle Ages precisely at a time when there was a desire to rehabilitate material nature. Bernhard Silvestris' poem *Cosmographia* (1148, alternatively entitled *De universitate mundi*) describes, for example, how Natura – the goddess of nature – will get the primordial chaos *silva* into shape (the contemporaneous appeal of the phenomenon is reflected in the derivation of Bernhard's byname).[94] Even though *silva*, which is also called by its Greek name *hyle*, originally appears as a formless chaos, a mass out of harmony with itself (*informe chaos, sibi dissona massa*), she is still the primordial ground of every living thing.[95] After she has been shaped by Natura and the world soul, Noys, she is also designated bosom (*gremium*), womb (*uterus*), earth (*tellus*) and mother (*mater*). There is no doubt that here Bernhard wants to rehabilitate the cosmos' female aspects as, in addition to *silva*'s central role, it is altogether innovative to present Natura as such an independent force. Moreover, Noys, the world soul, can be seen as a late variant of the Gnostics' female spirit of wisdom, Sophia.

That the fluctuations of landscape formations do actually refer to this primordial chaos is confirmed by late medieval images of the creation, in which the chaotic substance is given various amorphous manifestations. In a mid-13th-century *Bible moralisée*, for example, the Lord is seen as the architect holding the newly-created world: a ball of cloud encircling a *materia informis* comprising a spiral-folding, viscous substance (FIG. 2.37).[96] And in a 12th-century manuscript with Honorius

Fig. 2.37. *The Lord as Architect of the World* (*c.* 1250), miniature from *Bible moralisée* manuscript. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 1179, f. IV.

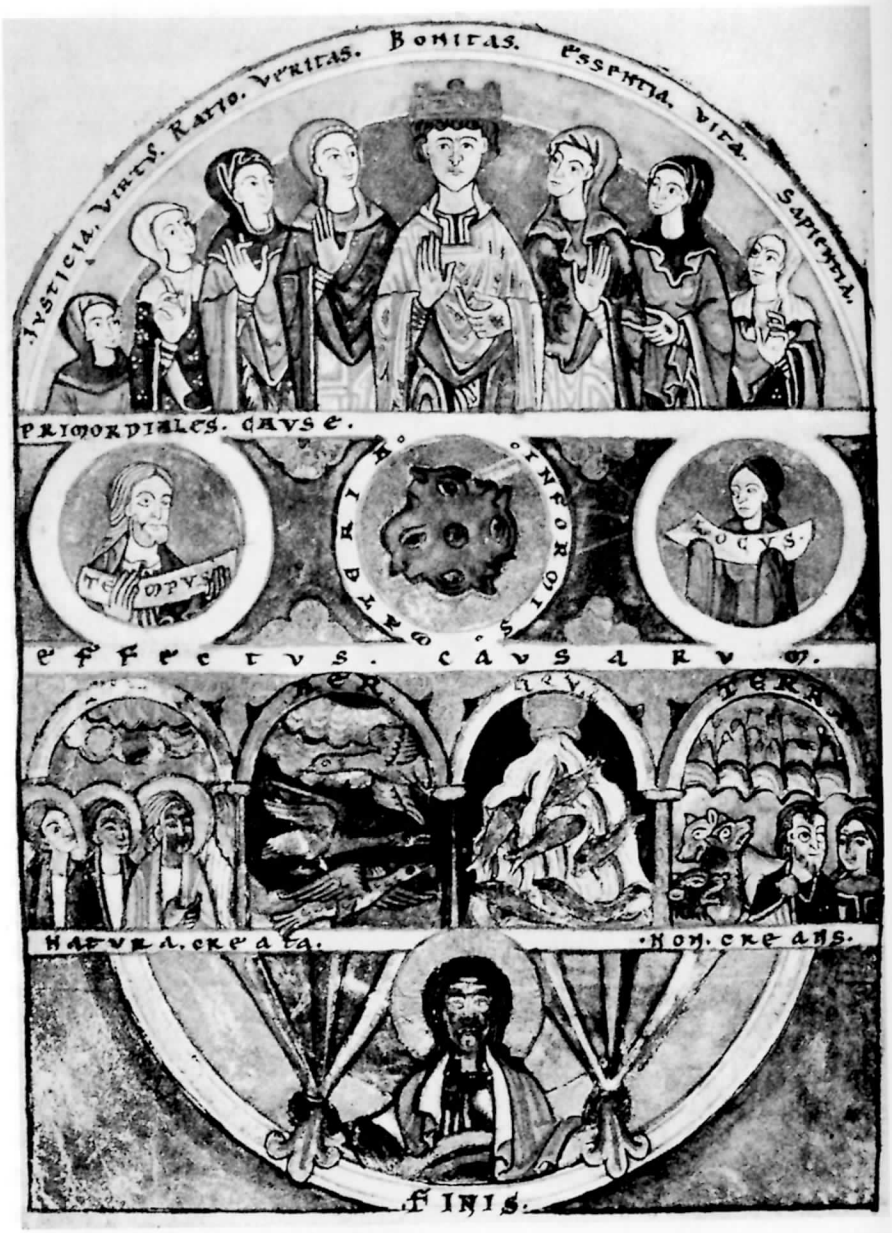


Fig. 2.38. Miniature from a French manuscript of Honorius Augustodunensis' *Clavis physicae* (12th century). Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms lat. 6734, f. 3v.

Fig. 2.39. *Scenes from Genesis* (early 15th century), miniature from *Ovid moralisé* manuscript. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms fr. 871, f. 1.

Fig. 2.40. *Filius regis and Hermes on Mountaintop*, engraving from Lambspringk, "De lapide philosophico", fig. XII, in *Musaeum hermeticum*, Frankfurt am Main, 1678, p. 365.

Augustodunensis' *Clavis physicae*, the chaos mass appears as a monstrous lump with four face profiles. So that we should be left in no doubt, an inscription reads "materia informis" (**FIG. 2.38**).[97]

And, as was again to be expected from my horizontally- as well as vertically-oriented model of analysis, chaos not only denotes the underworld, but also that which lies outside civilisation: the disorderly wilderness. In a creation series from an early-15th-century French *Ovid moralisé* manuscript, the Lord is placed in a split landscape (**FIG. 2.39**).[98] The spot where he is standing is filled with scattered tufts of grass, but towering up beyond his outstretched right hand there is a wild and angular rock mass. That this is the untouched earth, before animals and plants arrive, is apparent from the little word *chaos* inscribed above the rocks.

If the mountain's more specific affiliation with *prima materia* is to be illuminated more visually, we have to look to a more esoteric culture, alchemy; for example, the illustration to Lambspringk's booklet "De lapide philosophico" (not later than 1625)

in the collection of writings *Musaeum hermeticum* (FIG. 2.40).[99] The engraving (of 1678) alludes to the warming up of *prima materia*, which makes the volatile substances, identified with spirit and soul, rise into the air. These two are symbolised by two men, *filius regis* (son of the king) and Hermes (escort of souls), standing on a mountaintop, for as the picture caption says: "Another Indian mountain is placed in the container which spirit and soul as son and guide have ascended." This symbolism will be further discussed in chapter 12, when we will look more closely at the mysteries of alchemy.

Abysses

Another feature of the rocks in pre-modern images – with roots in antiquity, but culmination in Byzantium's more stylised landscapes – is the earth's character of *abyss*. Horizontal plateaus or gently curving hills suddenly crack into ravines that open up to underlying terraces, if not an unfathomable deep. The sides of the ravines are fluted in vertical sequences with round, zigzagged or squarer moulding, exactly as often seen in real abysses. A widespread and excellent term for this type of rock is the *terraced rock*.

Harking back to antique images such as *Dionysus on a Tiger*, a prevalent forum for the terraced rocks' ravines is the immediate foreground (FIG. 2.41). The action of the image seems to take place on a rock plateau, and if we zoomed back in the space a chasm would open up below us.[100] Another forum is found in the many caves that are typical of medieval landscape images, from the birth and death of Christ, to hell, to hermits in the wilderness. The cave entrances are fluted in the same way as the terraced rock, and their inner sides are often abruptly cut short, as if they were broken shells giving access to hollow mountains. This effect can be seen, for example, in a Byzantine composition such as the *Nativity* in the Church of the Peribleptos, Mistra, Greece (*c.* 1350; PLATE 3). On this fresco the jagged and ragged edge of the cave is less than a hand's breadth in cross section.

It is striking that these effects of abyss and cavity also apply to depictions of many water reservoirs: rivers, lakes and seas. Were the typical medieval lake to be drained of water, it would not leave a shelved sandy bottom, but a yawning chasm. The effect is seen in, for example, the *Vienna Genesis* scene with *Rebecca at the Well* (6th century), in which the well is supplied from a rock pond sited like a vertical hole in the sloping terrain (FIG. 2.42). And in the Daphni Monastery mosaic of the *Baptism of Christ* (*c.* 1100), the Jordan River resembles a water-filled cave of the shell-like variety (FIG. 9).

It would seem quite patent that these image phenomena should be regarded as structurally homologous with the pre-modern concepts of the nature of the earth, as regardless of whatever else the ravines, caves and waterholes represent, they all have connotations of the depth of the underworld: the very depth which, with its

Fig. 2.41. *Dionysus on a Tiger* (*c.* 100 BC-79 AD), mosaic from Pompeii, Casa del Fauno. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale.

Fig. 2.42. *Rebecca at the Well* (6th century), miniature from the *Vienna Genesis*. Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Theol. Gr. 431.

derivation from the Mesopotamian *apsu*, is often described at *abyssus*, abyss. This abyss could apply to the dry land – *terra* – or the underground ocean, or simply chaos in general, including its physical features: the Greek *chaos* means gap or chasm (related to *chaino*, *chasko* = to open, to gape open).[101] And as far as the cavity effects are concerned, they bear witness to the cave systems of the underworld, which could just as well be flowing with water as with air. That the effects are anticipated in antiquity, but culminate in medieval images, can presumably be attributed to the medieval enhancement of the archaic symbolic content, which was more discreetly alluded to in the partial illusionism of antiquity. With the medieval 'deconstruction' of this illusionism, the antique world picture fossilises, so to speak, in the hard edges of the abyss, the simplest form of three-dimensionality.

Abysses bear witness to the chaotic character of the earth, to destruction and ruin. The perception of rocks as ruins is widespread in the contemporary literature. In Virgil's *Aeneid* (8, 190-92), for example, Aeneas is asked to observe the setting of the monster Cacus' cave, "this rocky overhanging cliff, how the masses are scattered afar, how the mountain dwelling stands desolate, and the crags have toppled down in mighty ruin." And of the climbing of Dante's Mountain of Purgatory, we read: "We through the broken rock ascended [...]." [102] Ruskin even commented: "To Dante, mountains are inconceivable except as great broken stones or crags; all their broad contours and undulations seem to have escaped his eye."[103]

As we will see in chapter 5, Jews and Christians indeed developed a concept that mountains were literally ruins of the original earth: an earth with a virtually perfect spherical shape. Whether ascribed to the Fall, Cain's murder of Abel or the Flood, the surface of the earth was destroyed in response to the sins of humankind. The theory was thoroughly discussed in Thomas Burnet's *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681-89), which may in other respects be placed halfway towards a more modern aesthetics, the perception of mountains as sublime. Where the prediluvian earth was smooth and unscarred – i.e. without rocks, mountains, caves or gaping channels – we later come across wild, huge and non-integrated rocks. According to Burnet, these mountains, generated by the Flood, are: "Ruins of a broken World."[104]

But even without this theory there was a consensus to link ravines and cracks with catastrophic events: if not the Flood, then earthquakes, volcanic eruptions or lightning. Irrespective of the actual circumstances, in antiquity it was a widespread observation that land formations appeared, were deformed or vanished during earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Pliny the Elder (who himself died due to the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD) names a number of islands that emerged during earthquakes, including Rhodes, Delos and several of the Cyclades Islands and islands along the Campanian coast. And Strabo refers to a rocky island near Methone in the Hermionic Gulf created by a fierce volcanic eruption.[105]

As Alexander Perrig has pointed out in an eye-opening, but also somewhat uneven analysis of the rock formations in late medieval Italian painting, earthquakes were attributed to abrupt movements in the underground cave systems. The caves might become overfilled with water, necessitating an earthquake in order to liberate the masses; or they might suck in too much air or fire and suddenly set off underground winds, overloads which also led to cracks in the surface of the earth. Isidore of Seville (*c.* 462-536) puts it quite bluntly in *Etymologiae*, writing that chasms (*hiati*) are "created through the movement of water in the lower regions, or through repeated thunder, or through winds that erupt from the cavities of the earth."[106] And even though Aristotle believes solely in underground winds as the cause of earthquakes, he nonetheless states: "Water has sometimes burst out of the earth when there has been an earthquake." Allegedly, the majority of and the most severe earthquakes normally occur in areas where the subsurface is porous and full of caves.[107]

As we will see in chapter 3, the way in which the underground winds are thought to create earthquakes is completely analogous with the way in which fire and wind trapped in clouds are thought to produce thunder. In accordance with anthropomorphic thinking, moreover, Aristotle compares thunder with stomach rumbling: wind trapped in the bowels' underworld.[108] Stomach rumbling, *borborygmus*, indeed concerns the same mud, *borboros*, that Plato ascribes to the underworld. In a late Orphic hymn, the goddess of death is even called *borborophoba* (literally 'shit fear') in reference to the diarrhoea provoked by anxiety, and the faeces expelled completely on death.[109]

If the abysses and earth openings in paintings are not the result of a ready-made theory (as Perrig deduces), they are at least constituents of an epistemic *field* in which they, as parts of an image paradigm, become structurally equivalent with concepts of penetration of the ground: of places where the body of the earth is opened with violence. The opening, the jagged fracture, is like a gateway between the upper and the lower: a scar left by *hierogamy*, the celestial god's union with Mother Earth. When the celestial god appears, the whole world tremors with a mixture of thunder and earthquake. There is an earthquake during the crucifixion, causing the temple curtain – the cover of the heavens – to rip, rocks to crack and graves to open (Matthew 25: 51-52). And when God appears in a thundercloud sparking lightning (Psalms 18: 8-16), the earth trembles, exposing its very foundations and those of the waters. The gods of thunder were accordingly supplied with axes, because the axe is compared with the cleaving lightning, the thunderbolt. Conversely, the cleft – that which had been penetrated – became the archetype of the female. Therefore, the name of the most famous ravine in Greece, Delphi, means the female genitals.[110]

This penetration takes in the entire ambiguity of birth and death, protection

and destruction, that is connected to the earth. During an earthquake, or at the end of the world, an abyss might appear, suddenly swallowing up cities and people on the surface.[111] And chasms appear during sacrifices, such as when the tilled ground opens up after Abel's death and swallows his blood, or when the ground of Rome's Forum gapes open and only closes after Marcus Curtius and his horse have plunged into the deep.[112] But the earth also opens up – and by so doing the mountain reveals its *bergen* function – when fugitives seek a place to hide. This applies to the Holy Family or saints such as Barbara and Elizabeth. When Elizabeth flees to the highlands with John the Baptist, she finds no hiding place, but invokes the mountain: "O mountain of God, receive thou a mother with a child. For Elizabeth was not able to go up. And immediately the mountain clave asunder and took her in."[113]

However, as indicated, the mountains are not only cleaved and toppled by the underground tremors, they are also created by them. If the encapsulated water and air masses do not succeed in finding an outlet through a chasm, they might, as Alexander Perrig has pointed out,[114] push the ground upwards, thus making a mountain or a hill. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (15, 296-306) explains this most graphically:

> Near Troezen, ruled by Pittheus, there is a hill, high and treeless, which once was a perfectly level plain, but now a hill; for (horrible to relate) the wild forces of the winds, shut up in dark regions underground, seeking an outlet for their flowing and striving vainly to obtain a freer space, since there was no chink in all their prison through which their breath could go, puffed out and stretched the ground, just as when one inflates a bladder with his breath, or the skin of a horned goat. That swelling in the ground remained, has still the appearance of a high hill, and has hardened as the years went by.

That this idea of how hills were formed was widespread is again evident from, for example, Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, in which *tumulus* is regarded as a compound of *tumens* (swelling) and *tellus* (earth), and thus the word would mean 'swollen earth'.[115] Nevertheless, the idea cannot be restricted to hills – as is Perrig's belief – because when the 13th-century philosopher Albertus Magnus considers the phenomenon, he connects the inflation of air that provokes earthquakes with the formation of mountains in general, especially the high coastal mountains, which are allegedly formed by large air bubbles under the sea bed.[116] Albertus presumably took this idea from the Persian Avicenna (980-1037) who, in his Aristotle commentary *Kitab al-Shifa* (*Book of Healing*, 1021-*c.* 1023), cites the underground winds as the chief cause of mountain formation. Wind raises the ground and "a height is suddenly formed."[117] The notion of earthquake as maker of mountains is also put forward by Restoro d'Arezzo (1282), who goes on to link the idea to the hollowness of mountains. Having

tramped upon such a mountain, Restoro claims that it "boomed and echoed, as if the interior was loose and hollow."[118]

If these notions of rock formation confirm the impressions we get from medieval images of mountains as hollow and of the close association between the upper rock shell and the underworld's labyrinths, they can also contribute to an understanding of the outer form of the rocks. As we will see shortly, the round hill shape is widespread in Byzantine images and, as far as the terraced form is concerned, in the later Middle Ages this assumes a quality of reaching skyward, which could be indicative of chthonic upward pressure.[119] It will, however, also soon be clear that it would take more than the effect of underground winds to explain this upward rise.

This extra factor is not to be found in the other theory of mountain formation to which Perrig refers – a theory according to which mountains are created by fire rather than air and wind. The Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo maintains that mountains are fossilised flames formed when underground fire seeks ways out of its prison.[120] Perrig sees this flame shape replicated specifically in the type of rock I have called terraced. As will soon be shown, however, the terraced form has nothing to do with flames.

Water

That medieval art presents water as placed in ravines and caves is also in structural harmony with the pre-modern concept of nature. Even though there is water both in the heavens and on earth, water is, like the earth, a downward seeking element, and from archaic time it was assumed that the depths of the earth housed a gigantic freshwater reservoir – Mesopotamia's *apsu*, the Greek's *abyssos* ('bottomless') or Tartarus – connected to and taking in water from the encircling world ocean, the Greeks' River Oceanus. The general concept was that rivers and springs, rather than deriving from rain water, arise when desalinated water from this reservoir reached the surface of the earth via a network of subterranean channels.[121] Isidore of Seville, for example, writes of *abyssus*:

> The abyss is an impenetrable depth of waters, either caves of hidden waters from which springs and rivers rise, or waters that secretly flow below the earth, whence it is called the abyss [*abyssus*]. Indeed, all waters, even if they are torrents, return through hidden passages to the central [*matrix*=womb] abyss.[122]

This notion of springs and rivers arising from subterranean caves is still going strong in Athanasius Kircher's *Mundus subterraneus*. From a map-like diagram it is apparent, for example, that the interior of the Alps contains a subterranean reservoir which

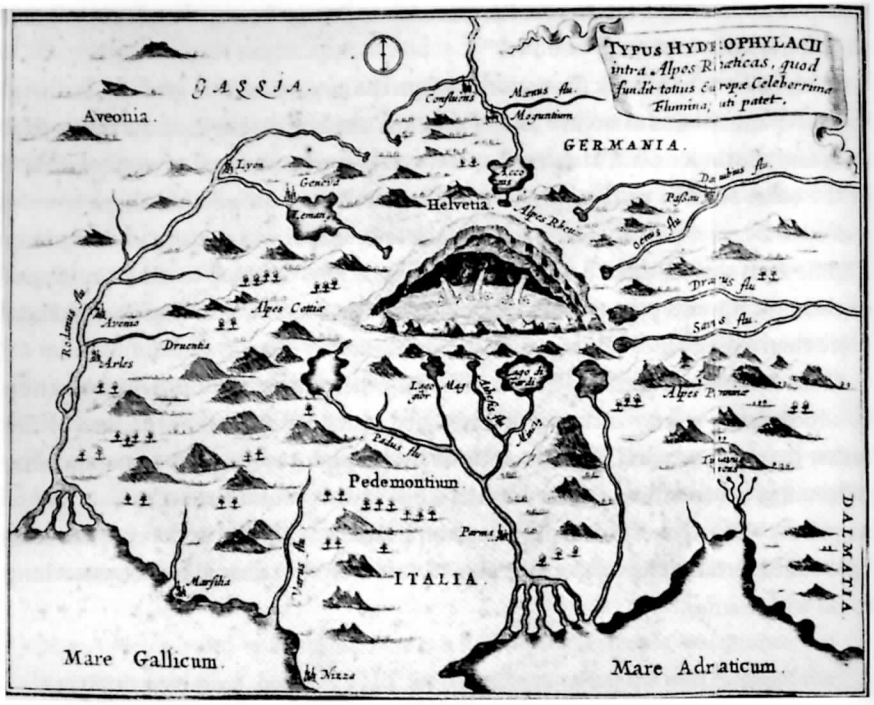


Fig. 2.43. Subterranean water reservoir, feeding the rivers around the Alps. From Athanasius Kircher, *Mundus subterraneus* (1664), vol. 1, p. 71.

Fig. 2.44. *Paradise of the Virtues* (13th century), miniature from *Somme le Roi* manuscript. London, British Museum, Add. ms 54180, f. 130.

Fig. 2.45. *Crucifixion Group in Rinceau* (*c.* 1125), apse mosaic. Rome, San Clemente.

supplies all the surrounding rivers, in northern Italy, Gaul, Helvetia, Germania (FIG. 2.43).[123] Like tailed spermatozoa, the rivers expand into whole lakes near their sources. The manner of presentation, emphasising the origins of the spring in the earth, is in complete accordance with the typical medieval manner of depicting springs, including the Paradise rivers with their sources in the Paradise mountain (PLATE 15 and FIGS. 2.44-45).[124]

As a consequence of its origins, all water – of the sea as well as of the rivers and lakes – is given a chthonic identity. Water nymphs were found in seas and springs, and the same affiliation applied to Dionysus, god of the underworld.[125] In Greek as well as Judaic belief, it was thought that the sea actually rose from the lowest point of the underworld: the roots of the mountains.[126] As is true of the underworld in general, there are two routes to this point, one from below and one from above: River Oceanus, which encircles the inhabited world, is at home in subterranean caves as well.[127]

The chthonic identity of water is also nourished by a widespread notion that at certain points rivers dived down under the earth. Even the underworld river Styx was assumed, for example, to spring from the Aroania mountain in northern Arcadia and then to vanish into a harsh rock ravine; having dived into Tartarus, it rose again as a tributary of the eternally flowing Krathis.[128] And Christianity had many a speculation regarding the four Paradise rivers into which the Fountain of Life divided outside the Garden of Eden: Pison, Gihon, Euphrates and Tigris (Genesis 2: 10-14). Pomponius Mela and Bede assumed that the rivers had already disappeared into a series of subterranean tunnels before they left Paradise. They then went on to supply major or smaller sections of the river network we saw in Giovanni di Paolo's painting (PLATE 15). This either took place directly or – in accordance with Greco-Roman thinking – via a detour to the encircling world ocean, from which they rose again miraculously clean and desalinated. As inscribed above the font in the Constantinian Lateran Baptistery: "This is the Fountain of Life which flows throughout the terrestrial disc."[129] Whatever form this branching of subterranean rivers was thought to take, Gihon was usually identified with the Nile, whereas whether Pison turned into the Ganges or the Danube was a debatable point.[130]

As was the case with everything chthonic, water was also subject to ambivalence.[131] Freshwater was the Fountain of Life, and both fresh- and saltwater abounded in a flourishing fauna, which is part of the pictorial image of water from earliest times, be it of rivers, sea or jets of water flowing from vases (FIGS. 5.3 and 5.13). As the Flood myth testifies, the life-force could, however, easily turn into its opposite. Water was also a threatening underworld power that could engulf, disperse and drown all life on the fragile earth at its centre. In Ezekiel (26: 19-20) we learn that:

> When I make you a city laid waste, like the cities that are not inhabited, when I bring up the deep over you, and the great waters cover you, then I will make you go down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of old, and I will make you to dwell in the world below, among ruins from of old [...].

That this infernal watery deep has its domicile in the female body is apparent from Job's reference to its uncontrollability (38: 8): "[...] who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb."[132] The Last Judgement mosaic in Santa Maria Assunta on Torcello (13th century) has a telling example of the death aspect of water (FIG. 2.46). The passage from the Book of Revelation in which the sea gives up its dead is here accompanied by a water reservoir set in a cave and a female personification of *The Sea*. In this pool the dead emerge from the jaws of fish and water monsters, which thereby supplement the sea cave in the role of *vagina dentata*.

Fig. 2.46. *Last Judgement*, section: *The Sea Gives up Its Dead* (13th century), mosaic. Torcello, Santa Maria Assunta.

Aquatic submersion followed by re-emergence was therefore synonymous with rebirth from the chaos of the underworld. That this function is implicit in the Christian baptism can be deduced from, for example, a comparison between medieval presentations of *Abyssus* – the abyss of the underworld – and the *Baptism of Christ*. In two Bibles from the first half of the 11th century, *Abyssus* is depicted as a monster with a mountain-like body made of water, in which there is a thriving fauna of fish and aquatic birds (**FIGS. 2.47-48**).[133] As a signifier for the underworld chaos, the body of water is divided into layers of turbulent waves. Exactly the same mountain-like form combined with fierce lines of waves are seen in the Jordan River as represented in a number of high and late medieval images of the baptism of Christ; for example, the *Benedictional of Saint Aethelwold* (from Winchester, 975-80; **PLATE 18**).[134]

The fertilising rain water from the masculine heavens also meant, however, that the water, not least the baptismal water, had the role of intermediary between

Fig. 2.47. *Abyssus* (*c.* 1000-1050), miniature in the *Roda Bible*, Spain. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms lat. 6, f. 6.

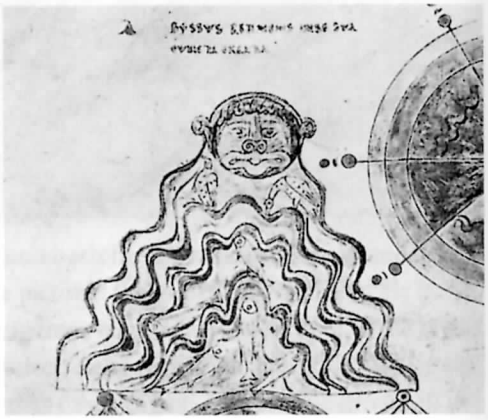


Fig. 2.48. *Abyssus* (*c.* 1000-1050), miniature in a Bible from Santa Maria de Ripoll, Spain. Rome, Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms Vat. lat. 5229, f. 5v.

heavens and earth. The symbolism is manifested in, for example, the octagonal form found in so many baptisteries, baptismal fonts and cloister fountains. The octagon is the incarnation of longing for the squaring of the circle, the fusion between the celestial (the circle) and the earth (the square).[135]

As container for growth and the growth-promoting water that rose in caves, the mountain – and, in a broader sense, the earth – became comparable with a vase. In Mesopotamian images, streams from the Euphrates and Tigris often rise from vases, and in antiquity and the Middle Ages any and every river might be seen stemming from a vase, usually held by a river god (PLATE 18 and FIGS. 2.42 and 2.49-50).[136] In accordance with this line of thought, a Greek epigram refers to a spring bubbling up through "the generous rock".[137] This notion is also apparent when Dinocrates lets Alexander the Great into his proposed design for an anthropomorphic statue of Mount Athos. According to Vitruvius, the Athos man's left hand would span the

Fig. 2.49. *River God* (5th century, restored by Jacopo Torriti in the 13th century), section of apse mosaic. Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore.

Fig. 2.50. *October* (11th century), miniature. London, British Library, ms Cotton Tiberius B.v. (part i), f. 7v.

ramparts of a huge city, while the right hand would hold a cup containing water from all the rivers of the mountain.[138]

Being the treasure that it was, however, the life-giving liquid was often sealed up in its rock container. In such cases – when the Israelites thirsted in the desert, for example – it was necessary to strike the rock in order to release the water (Exodus 17: 6). After Moses had struck the stone with his rod, in Isaiah's words, God "made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and the water gushed out."[139] In Greece, too, there are many examples of springs made to rise by striking the earth or rock: the knocking of Atalanta's spear (Laconia), the beating of Dionysus' thyrsus rod (Messenia), the blow of Poseidon's trident (Lerna and the saltwater spring on the Athenian Acropolis), the kick of Pegasus' hoof (*inter alia* Hippocrene on Mount Helicon and Castalia on Mount Parnassus), the scraping of a cow's horn (Plataiai), the stamping of Achilles, Chalcon and Hermes (the first two Troas and Burina on

Kos, respectively).[140] In Euripides' *Bacchanals* it is the presence of Dionysus that provides the necessary spur to release the earth's miraculous liquids:

> One grasped her thyrsus-staff, and smote the rock,
> And forth upleapt a fountain's showery spray:
> One in earth's bosom planted her reed-wand,
> And up therethrough the God a wine-fount sent:
> And whoso fain would drink white-foaming draughts
> Scarred with their finger-tips the breast of earth,
> And milk gushed forth unstinted [...].[141]

Touch, striking, penetration retrieve that Golden Age state in which the cosmos is whole, the heavens in contact with the earth, and the earth's interior immediately accessible. The liquids brought forth by Dionysus are thus ingredients of a widespread image of Paradise. In Ovid's Golden Age, for example, it flows with milk, honey and nectar, and according to Paul's vision (3rd century) the rivers of Paradise gush forth with wine, milk, oil and honey.[142] The longing for free access to the subterranean liquids also supports the idea of Christ as the rock whence the Water of Life springs. In Corinthians (1, 10: 4) there is reference to the fathers who drank "the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ." And Christ remarks (St John 7: 37-38): "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" This passage describes a corporeality passed on to the believer, making him part of Christ's body. In addition, this body can be considered a part of the body of the earth, for the way the crucified Christ is pierced by nails and spears causing blood and water to pour forth corresponds to the aforementioned violent-sacred penetrations of Mother Earth. The stigmata are therefore often compared with the rivers of Paradise, just as Calvary is likened to the Paradise mountain.[143] A visualisation of this thought complex is seen in, for example, the Roman San Clemente's apse mosaic, *Crucifixion Group in Rinceau* (*c.* 1125), in which the crucifix is placed above the four sources of the Paradise rivers (FIG. 2.45).

These comparisons have, of course, a keenly spiritual dimension. The Paradise rivers flowing from the stigmata were often, for example, considered to be the gospels that transformed the divine into the worldly. But as Caroline Walker Bynum has shown, the spiritual originates in a particularly concrete corporeality. The Virgin Mary might very well be Christianity's successor to Mother Earth, but she does not have a monopoly on chthonic corporeality; it is also passed on to Christ, whose body is occasionally described in female terms. As the female visionary Julian of

Fig. 2.51. *Glorification of Christ's Wound* (*c.* 1375), French miniature.

Fig. 2.52. *Baptism of Christ* and *Miracle of the Wine* (early 12th century), miniature from Lectionary from Limoges. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms lat. 9438.

Norwich stated in the 14th century: "So our Lady is our mother, in whom we are all enclosed and born of her in Christ [...]; and our Savior is our true mother, in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom we shall never come."[144]

The womb from which the church was hereby born was often assumed to be the wound in Christ's side, which had indeed issued blood and water – birth fluids – and which could, moreover, be suggestive of Eve's birth from Adam's side. The role of the wound is occasionally seen in pictorial representations in which its form is remarkably vaginal (**FIG. 2.51**). This shape is also used to delineate the Jordan River in images of the baptism of Christ, which in the most literal sense thereby becomes a rebirth from the body of the earth (**FIG. 2.52**). The form of the Jordan River is also suggestive of the mandorla, the halo through which the celestial Christ reveals himself, so all in all every elliptical gateway between two zones of existence could be interpreted in vaginal terms.

When not giving birth, the wound in Christ's side might alternatively suckle, for it was a widespread belief that the foetus lived off its mother's blood and that the

blood, after the birth, was transformed into milk. Furthermore, every kind of bodily secretion – sweat, milk, sperm, urine, etc. – was compared with bleeding.[145] Bearing in mind the Eucharist's transubstantiation of wine to blood, we can see that there were quite vague distinctions between every kind of bodily fluid and those invigorating fluids that emanated from Mother Earth. In a sermon on the Song of Songs, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux may therefore long to enter the wound in Christ's side, as if it were another Paradise cave, and there to "suck the honey of the stone and the oil of the very hard rock, that is to taste and learn how sweet is the Lord [...]."[146]

The idea of the Saviour's body as body of the earth is ultimately elaborated by the impression of the solidity of rock. The Old Testament has many examples of analogies in which the Lord is compared to rock because of his firmness and confidence-inspiring authority, and this symbolism often carries over into Christianity: the rock is Christ himself, his doctrine or the foundation of the church. In Matthew (16: 18), Christ says: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."[147]

An examination of these topoi should, therefore, substantiate that the premodern complexes of ideas concerning, on the one hand, the human body and its fluids and, on the other, earth and water, are approximately identical. Applied to the post-Egyptian landscape images, the correlation is apparent in its most ambivalent version: acting as a container creating space for the figures, the land formations revert to *chora*, to a field of suspense between the nutritional power of the body of the earth – creation – and the destructive force of the selfsame body – chaos.

2.3 The living rock

Growth of the rocks: the Minoan-Mycenaean landscape images and their cultural basis

In order to form a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the landscape grounds, especially its connection with physical nature, we must now displace our previous chronological fulcrum and move backwards in time to the Aegean culture of the 2nd millennium BC. From Minoan Crete to the Cyclades to the Mycenaean cultural sphere in the southern Peloponnese, a goddess cult was practised that was seemingly more markedly matriarchal than in any other Mediterranean area.[148] The goddess could split into a series of different functions – of war, weather, fertility – yet her basic affiliation was to the earth; an earth which, even after the rise of post-2000 BC mountaintop shrines dedicated to worship of the heavens, retained its importance in the culture.[149] A strong indication of this situation are the at least 34 caves on

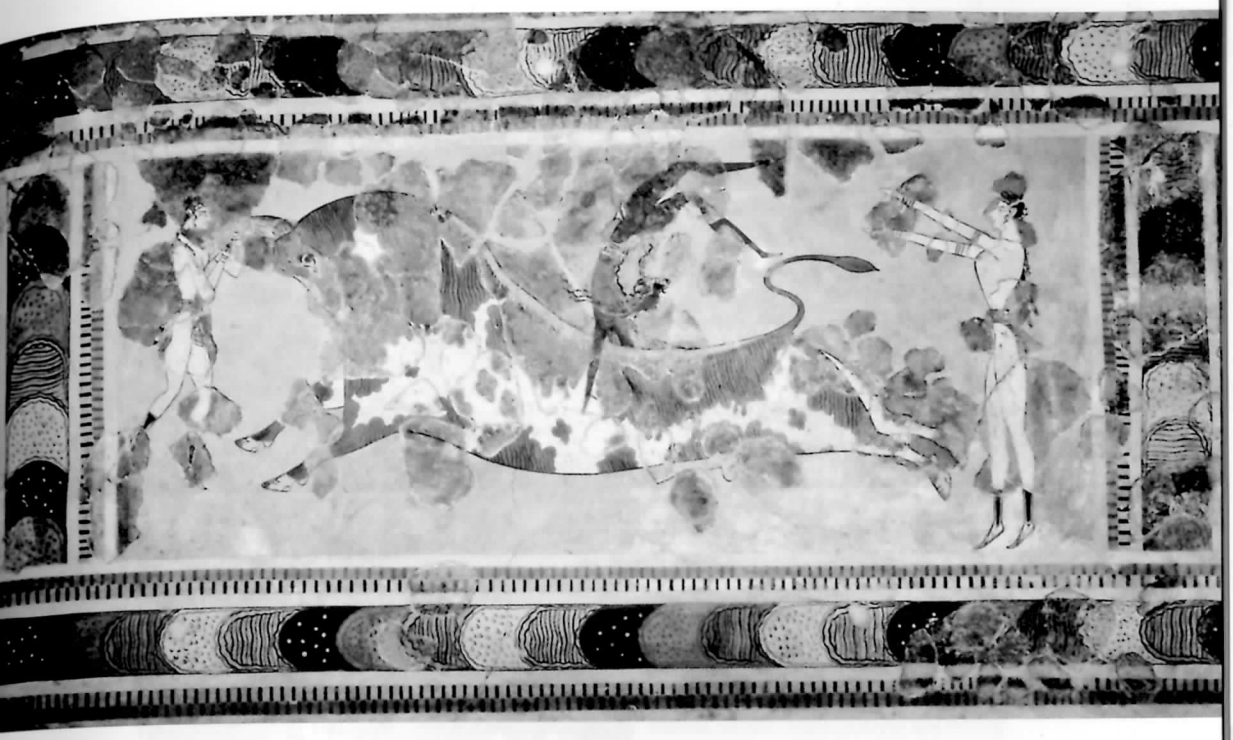


Fig. 2.53. *Taureador Panel* (*c.* 1500 BC), fresco (partially reconstructed) from Knossos, Court of the Stone Spout. Heraklion, Archaeological Museum.

Crete which bear archaeological traces of cultic activity, and which in the case of some (e.g. Ida and Eileithyia near Amnisos) were so important that they were even passed on to later Greek mythology and Homer.[150]

Another indication of the goddess's association with the earth can be found in the Minoan pictorial art. As the excavator of Knossos, Sir Arthur Evans, noted, it betrays a peculiar trait: "[t]he passion for rock scenery".[151] This passion, which remains unexplained to this very day, can again reasonably be described, as I shall show, against the background of the cave cult and veneration of the earth.[152]

Everywhere in Aegean art – on pottery, metalwork, seals, wall paintings and reliefs – the rocks make themselves felt. A recurring pattern in fresco borders and pottery decoration is a multicoloured sectional view of the inside of the stone, often surrounded by undulating contours (**FIGS. 2.53-56**).[153] In frescoes from palaces

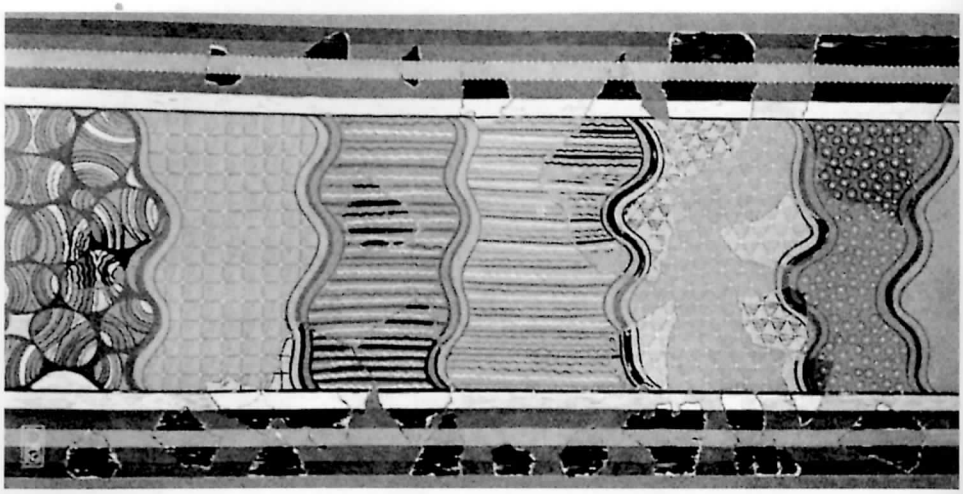


Fig. 2.54. Spandrel wall panel with rock decoration (*c.* 1500 BC), fresco (partially reconstructed). Pylos, palace, northwest side.

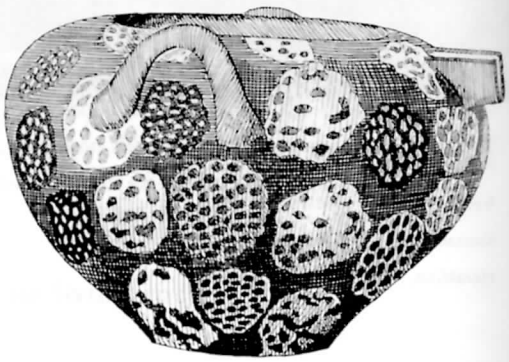


Fig. 2.56. Vase with rock decoration, from Crete, Kamares cave. Heraklion, Archaeological Museum.

Fig. 2.55. Vessel with dolphins and rocks (*c.* 1500 BC), from Pachyammos. Heraklion, Archaeological Museum.

Fig. 2.57. *Hunting Dogs and Rocks* (*c.* 1500 BC), fresco (partially reconstructed). Pylos, palace, Room 64.

in Knossos and Pylos we see accumulations of varied stone formations shooting up from the baseline of the fresco or hanging down from the edges of the image, above series of animals (FIG. 2.57).[154] And in the *Monkey frescoes* from Knossos and Akrotiri, the rocks comprise cave-like networks through which the monkeys make their way – in the former accompanied by birds and abundant plant life (FIGS. 2.10 and 2.58-59). To sum up these multifarious phenomena, it could be said that they all make the subterranean strangely visible. We would seem to be sunk into a world in which the chthonic is the condition of existence.

The stone formations budding in the upper and lower edges of the pictorial space should more specifically be linked with stalagmite and stalactite concretions, for, as we have already seen with the Palaeolithic cave paintings (see chapter 1.1), these dripstone structures were an evocative component in the cave cults. As anyone who has visited a dripstone cave knows, the dripstone structures are disturbingly reminiscent of living matter – plants, genitalia, viscera – and so, in cultures that considered the earth to be an omnicreating source, it is understandable that these growing forms were thought to be actually alive. In the wet interiors of the caves, the stalagmites grow forth as offspring from the earth's womb, a sight which, in tandem with the praxis of bringing forth innate images, must have contributed to the many legends about gods and humans born autochthonically in or outside caves.

Fig. 2.58. *Monkey Fresco* (*c.* 1500 BC), fresco (partially reconstructed), from Knossos, House of Frescoes. Heraklion, Archaeological Museum.

Fig. 2.59. *Monkey Fresco* (*c.* 1500 BC), fresco (partially reconstructed). Thera, Akrotiri, Room B6.

Fig. 2.60. Stalagmite, carved to resemble two goddesses joined at the spine (c. 1500 BC (?)). Crete, Eileithyia cave near Amnisos, central enclosure, 2nd idol.

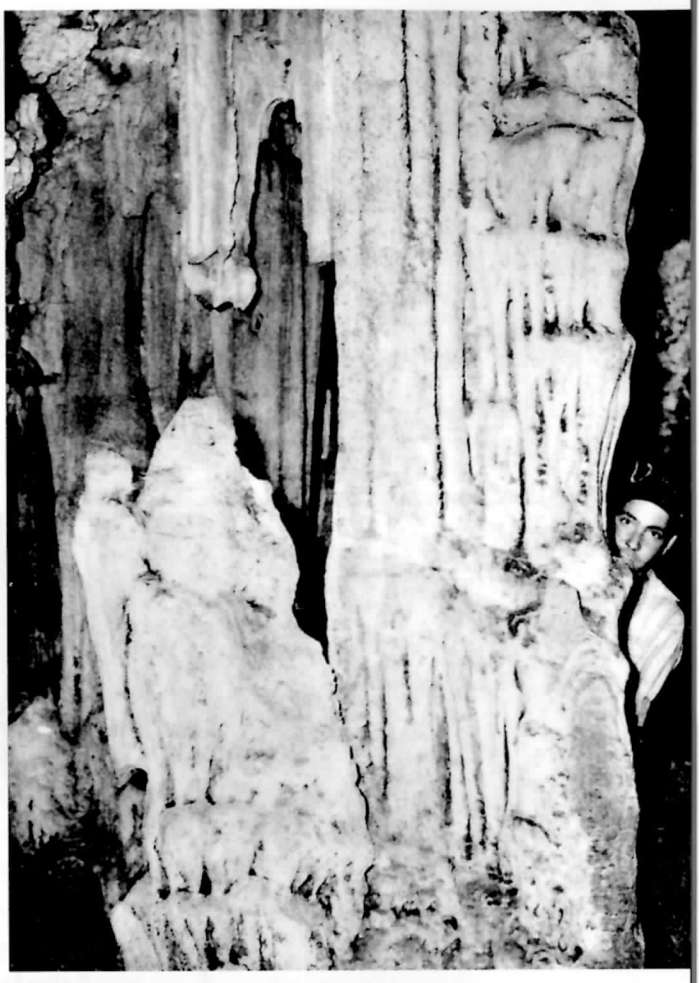


Fig. 2.61. "Mother and Child", stalagmite. Crete, Bigla cave in the mountain of Keraton, Keratokampos.

Indeed, archaeological evidence confirms that the caves' stone concretions were considered divine. In the Psychro Cave on Crete, for example, a stalactite pillar was perforated with various bronze instruments: double-headed axes, sticks, knives. In this cult practice Mother Earth is penetrated in the same way as the subsurface is later breached by Dionysus' thyrsus rod and Christ's body is pierced by nails and spears. And again, in a *long durée* with roots back in the Palaeolithic period, in many places the stalagmites were worshipped as idols due to their natural or slightly assisted likeness to human beings, animals, altars or columns (FIGS. 2.60-61) – a function that is not least corroborated by the fact that the idols were often later battered (e.g. had their heads knocked off) by Christians. Inner cave structures were

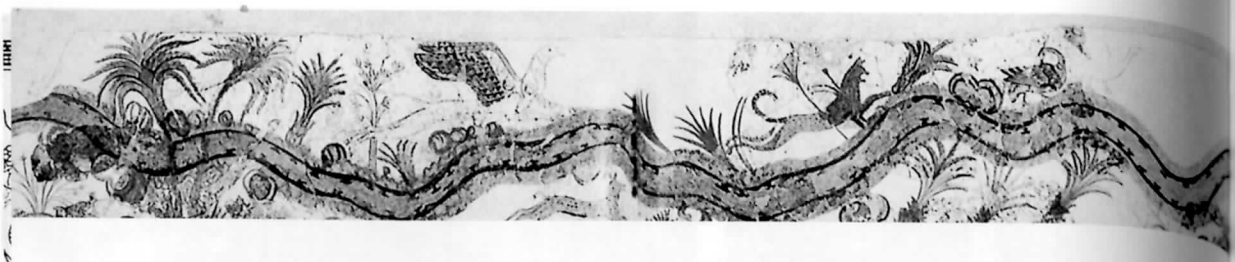
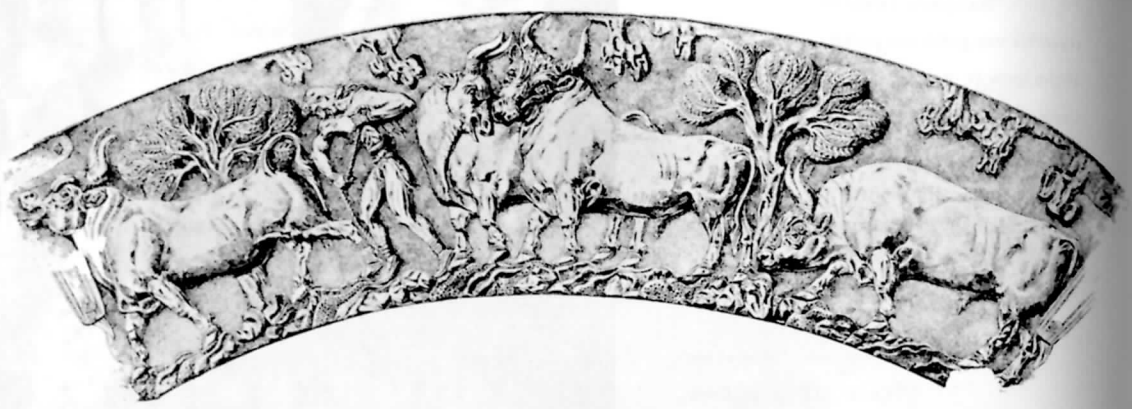


Fig. 2.62. *Animals in River Landscape* (*c.* 1500 BC), fresco. Thera, Akrotiri, West House, Room 5.

Fig. 2.63. *Man and Bulls in Landscape* (*c.* 1500 BC), relief from gold cup found in Vapheio tomb. Heraklion, Archaeological Museum.



also worshipped outside, for human-formed rocks or fragments of stalagmites have been found in Minoan private houses, a grave and in the Little Palace of Knossos.[155]

This perception of caves and their growing stones is apparently a key influence on the landscapes in Aegean art. As can be seen, for example, from Akrotiri's river landscape and from the Minoan landscapes with bulls, the land formations can be undulating and stratified, with pockets of multicoloured stone sections (**FIGS. 1.13** and **2.62-63**). The form suggests that the rocks grow in strata and that they develop precious stones inside, almost as if these were fruits.[156] Rocks also appear as fungous accumulations of circular units, so that it looks as if they were the result of some kind of cell division. This form – seen meticulously implemented in, for example, Minoan shield shapes (**FIG. 2.64**) – is inseparable from the concept of the subterranean: labyrinthine cave systems feature in the space between the silhouette-like accumulations (**FIG. 2.65**).[157] As can be seen from the Minoan bowls set with barnacle work, coral-like

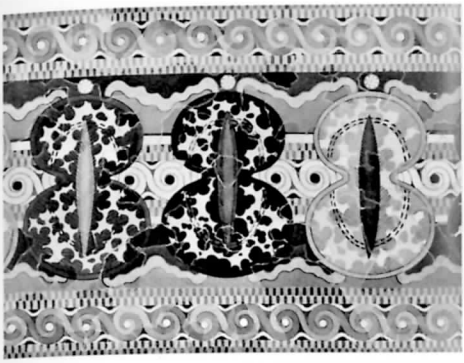


Fig. 2.64. *Shields* (*c.* 1500 BC), fresco (partially reconstructed). Tiryns, Old Palace.

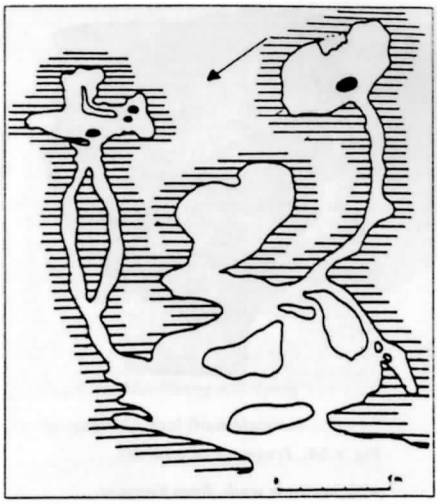


Fig. 2.65. Plan of Chostro Nero cave, Crete.

accumulations of crayfish (FIG. 2.66), associations are also made to the depths of the sea where coral reefs grow with interior networks of hollows.[158] This ambiguous play on the relationship between hollow and mass is employed to the full in a Minoan fresco in which the positive imprint of a sponge is transformed into yellow-ochre labyrinths on a black background (FIGS. 2.67-68).[159] Faced with these chthonic warrens, we understand why Crete was home to the myth of King Minos' labyrinth.

Even though the rocks thrive in the border zone of the thematic, they are almost begging to be emblems of a world outlook. While it might still seem 'naturalistically' reasonable that the dolphins in the Knossos fresco are framed by black corals (FIG. 2.69), it is, for example, surprising that there are so many Minoan and Mycenaean seals on which figurative scenes, no matter what the action, are surrounded by dripstone shapes growing up from the ground or hanging down from an imaginary cave ceiling (FIGS. 2.8 and 2.70-74).[160] If the landscape images of the Golden Age paradigm can generally be said to be marked by the chthonic, then this feeling is here accentuated because the rocks – almost like a sparking plug between on and off – are fixed in a depth of field limbo: located between inside and outside, between Egypt's sectional view through the earth and Assyria's background mountains, they expose the intimate space of the cave, the underworld labyrinth with its irregular profile of dripstone formations.

In this respect the Aegean rock forms are also a weighty testimony to the

Fig. 2.66. Fragment of bowl set with barnacle work, from Knossos.

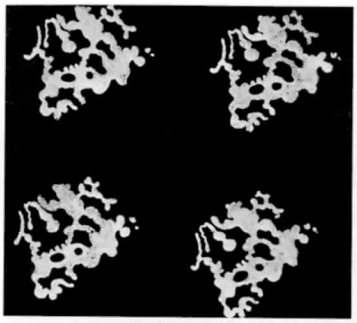


Fig. 2.67. *Sponge Pattern* (*c.* 1500 BC), fresco, yellow ochre on black (section), from Knossos.

Fig. 2.68. Modern-day sponge impressions.

Fig. 2.69. *Dolphin Fresco* (*c.* 1500 BC), fresco from Knossos, Queen's Megaron. Heraklion, Archaeological Museum.

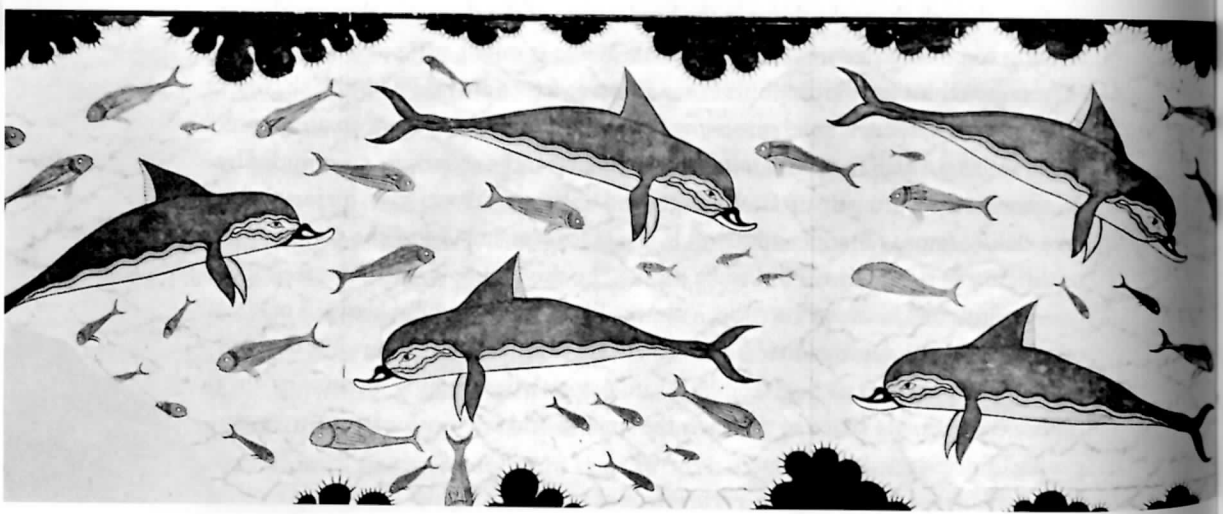


Fig. 2.70. *Battle Scene* (*c.* 1500 BC), gold signet ring from Mycenae, 4th shaft grave.

Fig. 2.71. *Lion Fleeing with Young* (*c.* 1500 BC), seal from Mycenae.

Fig. 2.72. *Lion Trying to Extract an Arrow* (*c.* 1500 BC), sardonyx relief from Vapheio tomb.

Fig. 2.73. Scene on electrum signet ring (*c.* 1500 BC), from Mycenae.

Fig. 2.74. Clay matrix from Knossos (*c.* 1500 BC).

pre-modern belief that the world is alive. It was against this very background of dripstones, marine animal shells and corals, and motivated by the common concept of the earth as the source of all life, that minerals, stones and even metals were assumed to originate and grow in the same way as more obviously living things such as plants and animals. Stone might very well be *petra genetrix* – Mother Earth's bones and the incorruptible site of the source of life – but according to the enormous amount of lithic mythology current in many pre-modern cultures, stones could also, possibly with a celestial seed as starting point, ripen in the interior of the earth, just as if they were embryos.

As Aegean culture has not, however, left any literary evidence beyond dry administrative statements in the so-called Linear B script,[161] we must draw on later references to this idea – although this does not seem to be particularly problematic as the belief in a growing earth is also a *longue durée*. For example, as late as 1672 the jeweller Pierre de Rosnel states (*Le Mercure Indien*): "The ruby, in particular, gradually takes birth in the ore-bearing earth; first of all it is white and gradually acquires its redness in the process of ripening. [...] Just as the infant is fed on blood in the belly of its mother so is the ruby formed and fed."[162] For antique testimony to this idea, we can begin with the Neoplatonic Plotinus, who explains:

> One should not consider an earthy body the same when it is cut off from the earth and when it remains connected with it, as stones show, which grow as long as they are attached to the earth but remain the size they were cut when they are taken away from it.[163]

In return for this suspension of growth, the scars left by the cut-off stones or metals regenerate in their place of origin. In Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, for example, we come across the most startling information, that:

> Among the many marvels of Italy itself is one for which the accomplished natural scientist Papirius Fabianus vouches, namely that marble actually grows in its quarries; and the quarrymen, moreover, assert that the scars on the mountain sides fill up of their own accord.[164]

Strabo mentions the effect of this lying fallow in the iron mines on Elba, the rocks on Rhodes, the marble quarries on Paros as well as the salt mines in India.[165] In the pseudo-Aristotelian work *On Marvellous Things Heard* we read, moreover, about gold mines in the Macedonian Philippi, the waste matter of which produces more metals of its own accord. And in Tyrrhias on Cyprus copper was cut into small pieces "and then, when the rains have come on, it grows and springs up [...]."[166]

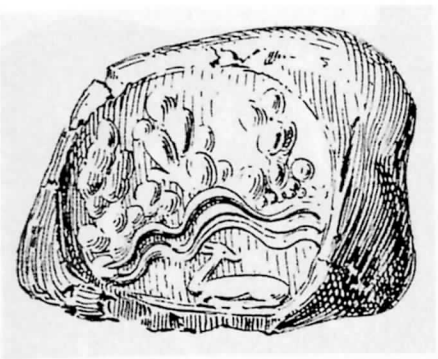


Fig. 2.75. *Stag in River Landscape* (*c.* 1500 BC), cameo impression in clay, from Knossos, "Hieroglyphic Deposit". Heraklion, Archaeological Museum.

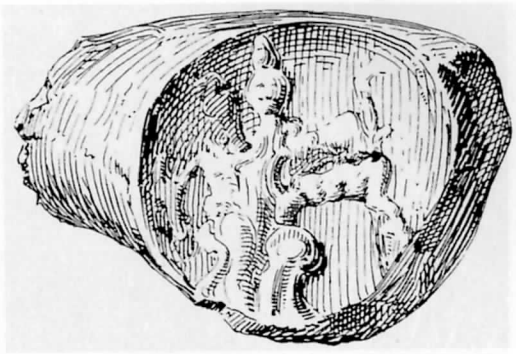


Fig. 2.76. *Rocks* (*c.* 1500 BC), cameo impression in clay, from Knossos, "Hieroglyphic Deposit". Heraklion, Archaeological Museum.

Stones were also thought to have a sexual life. There is already evidence from Mesopotamia that stones, precious stones, salt and veins were divided into masculine and feminine. According to Assyrian sources, the masculine stones had a livelier colour, while the feminine were paler.[167] The Assyrians also referred to the so-called eagle-stones (*aëtitae*) as "pregnant stones", due to the fact that they rattled when shaken.[168] In *De lapidibus* a slightly sceptical Theophrastus mentions that stones are supposedly able to bear other stones: "But the greatest and most remarkable power, if this is true, is that possessed by the stones which bring forth other stones."[169]

If we now turn again to the Aegean culture, it would be obvious to assume that the concept of the biology of the mineral kingdom must also have been highly developed here. That rocks ripple, jut out and bud in the Aegean images is presumably because they illustrate the cave cult's belief in the life of the telluric body. It is even occasionally easy to think that the images actually show plants rather than stone formations (FIGS. 2.75-76).[170]

But if belief in the living rock is in itself much older, we might also ask if it is first here that it is given visual illustration, or if the Aegean rock images actually clarify something that already existed? The traditional rock form from Mesopotamia to Anatolia to Crete is, as already mentioned, the *scale pattern*, constructed of small crests. The crests are usually curved, but can also be pointed – edgy, bud-like or having the shape of a lancet arch – just as they can be drawn with double outlines (FIGS. 1.17 and 2.77-81).[171] We are familiar with them in a triangular form from the pre-dynastic Egyptian vases of 3200 BC (FIG. 1.7) and in a curved shape from

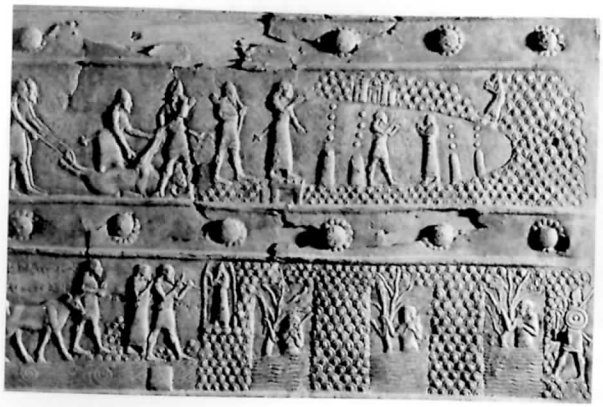


Fig. 2.77. *Sacrifice at the Tigris Tunnel* (853 BC), relief on King Shalmaneser's bronze gates from Balawat. London, British Museum.

Fig. 2.78. *Tree on Mountain Flanked by Two Goats* (9th century BC), Hittitic semi-oval plaquette from Tell Halaf.

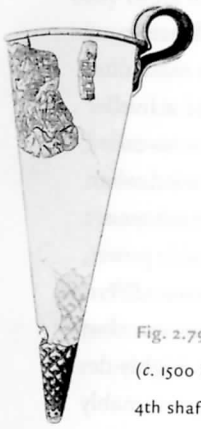


Fig. 2.79. *Attack on Fortress* (*c.* 1500 BC), silver rhyton from 4th shaft grave, Mycenae.

Fig. 2.80. *Dolphin among Rocks* (*c.* 1500 BC), Minoan rhyton.

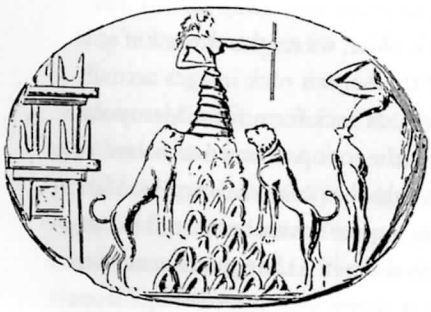


Fig. 2.81. *Male Adorant of Goddess on Mountain* (*c.* 1500 BC), Minoan seal. Heraklion, Archaeological Museum.

Fig. 2.82. *Mountain God Flanked by Creatures with Bird Heads* (10th century BC), orthostat relief from a Hittitic temple in Ain Dara, 5 km south of Afrin in North Syria.

Fig. 2.83. *Mountain God* (14th-13th centuries BC), Hittitic ivory statue from Hattuša.

Fig. 2.84. *Leaping Goat* (*c.* 1500 BC), hieroglyphic pearl seal. Heraklion, Archaeological Museum.

Fig. 2.85. *Hunter Spearing a Wild Boar* (*c.* 1500 BC), gem from Vapheio. Heraklion, Archaeological Museum.

Mesopotamia around 2900 BC.[172] The crests are used to indicate both rocky ground and actual mountains, and their identity is made clear in that they often, although sometimes in a rather square-built mode, constitute the material in the mountains gods' skirts (FIGS. 2.34 and 2.82-83). In view of the fact that serpents and saurians were the earth animals par excellence, the scale pattern could be interpreted quite concretely as the clothing of the earth serpent.

In addition, it could be tempting to interpret the crest form as signifier for a dynamic upward-striving, not least when it has a double outline – a form that anticipates the stratification of the Aegean rock forms. Such an assumption could, firstly, be confirmed by the presence of crests in Aegean art, not just as the mountain under the goddess or the shrine, but also specifically in the role of stalactites and stalagmites (FIGS. 2.84-85). Secondly, the latter role is not new as a Mesopotamian cylinder seal from *c.* 2000 BC shows the water-god Enki (Ea) placed in his *apsu*, depicted as a wave-encircled cave with triangular, double-outlined stalactites, which correspond to the contrapuntally positioned triangles of the mountain in front of the cave (FIG. 1.12).[173]

It would thus seem probable that the concept of the living rock – one of many manifestations of the chthonic – is already a component of the landscape image from the point at which land formations become part of the depth of field. An urban forum for the cultic worship of dripstone formations that is even older than the Minoan culture is interestingly comprised of the aforementioned Çatal Hüyük in Anatolia (established *c.* 6000 BC). Here a shrine was found to contain a large number of rock concretions and stalactite fragments, and a house contained a goddess statuette crudely shaped from a stalagmite.[174] This would seem to close the circle: the Great Mother, worshipped on Crete, is a descendant of Çatal Hüyük's wild animal mother and of the Palaeolithic *Venus of Willendorf*, and her place of origin, the chthonic underworld with its growing stone forms, is the basis for all the early Western images. But whereas the Palaeolithic animals grew and were accommodated in the chthonic womb itself, on the stone wall deep in the caves, the cave concretions in Mesopotamian and Aegean landscape images appear in simulated form. The evolution of pictorial space might signify a move out of the cave, but the move is a slow one. The stone of the earth cave is transformed into the representation of the world cave.

The growing Paradise mountain: Takht-e Suleiman and Zendan-e Suleiman

We can also shed light on the concept of subterranean and rock fertility via a case story from another of the West's archaic intermediate civilisations: the Early Iranian cult around two water-gushing volcanoes in the Caucasus Mountains. The story

begins in a pair of bronze dishes found in Nimrud in 1845 and now in the British Museum (FIGS. 2.86-87). The dishes were made around the year 800 BC, one in Phoenicia or Assyria, the other probably in Urartu in what was later Armenia. Both represent a kind of world picture: a mountain range grouped in a ring around a lake. The area is patently fertile: between the mountain cones we can see trees and various animals, particularly deer and goats, and the lake is studded with precious stones, set in silver on the Armenian dish. The mountains also seem pregnant with such stones, as each peak bulges into three spherical shapes, as if they were 'triplets' of the archaic round arch with bud. The connection between lake and mountain is emphasised in the Phoenician-Assyrian dish, as both on the bottom of the lake and in the body of the mountain there is an additional star-shaped spotted pattern, this being the general pre-modern sign for precious stone.

As Lars-Ivar Ringbom has demonstrated in his strangely overlooked book *Paradisus Terrestris* of 1958, the dishes should presumably be interpreted as a kind of world map with Paradise at the centre.[175] Ringbom had the bold idea that the Paradise myth is not merely a legend, but can be linked to an actual place in what is now Azerbaidjan in the Caucasus Mountains. Even though German archaeologists working on the site around 1960 and again in the 1970s have not taken Ringbom's thesis into consideration,[176] their results indicate that the sought-after location must have been the volcano Zendan-e Suleiman. This volcano is located in interesting concurrence with the legend's site for Paradise – to the east of Palestine, north of Babylon,[177] and beyond the so-called Tigris Tunnel, which was thought to be one of the subterranean tunnels into which the Tigris River dived after leaving Paradise. The mythological role of the river is reflected in the fact that it was visited by the Assyrian kings – King Shalmaneser, for example, whose sacrifice was engraved on the bronze gates from Balawat (853 BC; FIG. 2.77). And, later still, it was visited by Alexander the Great.[178]

As far as Zendan is concerned, it was also, like the Paradise of the myth, endowed with an eternally running spring, a crater lake, that supplied just as much water to the surrounding valley as it was supplied with from the underground. As was the case with many springs and lakes in the area, the volcanic water deposited a white and yellow marble-onyx, so that the edge of the crater lake was constantly growing. With the added knowledge that Zendan was located in an exceptionally fertile valley, amidst mountains rich in minerals and metals – amethyst, emerald, marble, gold, silver, mercury, lead – it is not so surprising that it was presumably thought to be the place where Zoroaster was autochthonically born. In any event, from around 1000 BC, temples dedicated to a fire and water cult were built there.

Looking again at the bronze dishes, we must therefore assume that the stones at the bottom of the lake represent the mountains' precious stones, marble and valuable metals, whereas the budding peaks are signifiers for the force of germination

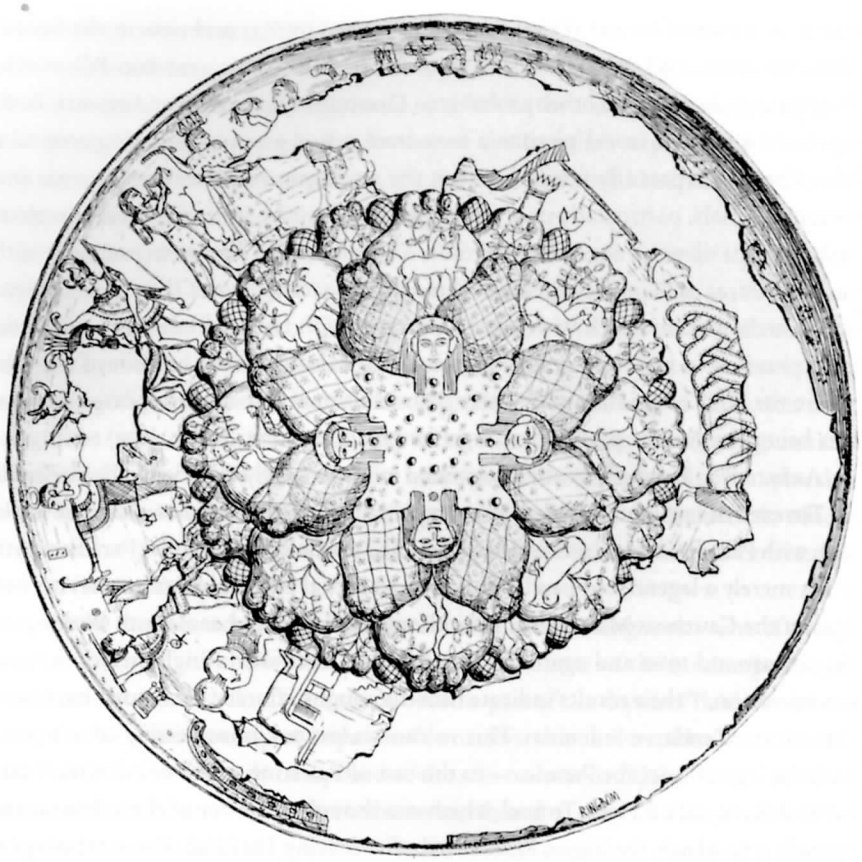


Fig. 2.86. *Sacred Lake at the Centre of the Earth, Encircled by Mountains* (*c.* 800 BC), bronze fragmentary bowl from Phoenicia or Assyria, found in Nimrud. London, British Museum.

as displayed in the growing volcano. From around 700 BC, however, the water level began to drop and the cult had to transfer to another, half as high water-gushing volcano a few kilometres away, Takht-e Suleiman. While this new centre, Shiz, took over Zendan's paradisiacal connotations, the old and by now completely drained volcano changed its significance and became identified with the entrance to hell. Could we imagine a more illustrative example of the delicate line between Paradise and hell? Ringbom, writing at a time that was only aware of the infernal fate of Zendan (Zendan-e Suleiman means 'Solomon's prison', in contrast to Takht meaning 'throne'), identified Paradise exclusively with Shiz.

Fig. 2.87. *Sacred Lake at the Centre of the Earth, Encircled by Mountains* (*c.* 800 BC), bronze fragmentary bowl from Urartu (later Armenia), found in Nimrud. London, British Museum.

Even though the roots of the Paradise myth extend, of course, far too deeply into the epistemic *field* to have sprung from one single place – as Ringbom would seem to think – it does not seem improbable that wondrous localities such as Zendan and Takht could actually later have played a part in determining its setting. Whatever the case may be, the two volcanoes have much to tell us about the properties of holy sites, not least subterranean influence on fertility. Ringbom reports that the paradisiacal Fountain of Life in the areas around Azerbaidjan is often referred to as a lake of milk, which has a certain resonance in the fact that the water flowing from Takht is milky white to this very day.[179] And the growing mountains of the bronze

dishes have parallels in the Iranian book of creation *Bundahishin*, in which it is said that the creator, Ahura Mazda, made the earth of water, whereas the mountains "burst forth and grew from the earth".[180]

Between growth and abyss: the terraced rock

If we move on in time, we of course encounter the question of whether subterranean fertility also survives in images from Greco-Roman antiquity and the Middle Ages. The answer is affirmative. We could first note that the Aegean practice of setting narrative scenes among cave concretions survives right into the Etruscan period. On a sarcophagus with images of the Greeks' battle with the Amazons – Vulci's Tomba delle iscrizioni – undulating rocks hang from an imaginary cave ceiling (*c.* 100 BC; FIG. 2.88).[181] As the battle is flanked by winged chthonic gods, it is possible that the rocks here specifically indicate that the scene is set in the underworld. Beyond the narrative context, the dripstone formations are found in the garden fresco from the House of Livia (*c.* 20 BC), in which they make up the upper rim of the view towards the garden thickets (PLATE 5). The garden is thus being viewed from the interior of a cave.

Otherwise, an important illustrative signifier for the fertility of the underground is *terraced rock*. I earlier described this rock as being a result of the cleaving of the ground, but I will now show that the same formations can also be understood as the result of growth.[182] We can get an impression of exactly how this occurs by comparing a late representation of this type of rock, the anonymous panel, perhaps from Ferrara, of *Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata* (1480s) in Pesaro, with an early example, the Roman mosaic of *Lion Attacking Panther* from Pompeii (1st century AD) (PLATE 4 and FIG. 2.89). It is clear that here, despite the considerable time difference – and thus in another *longue durée* – both display fundamentally the same kind of rock formation. The building blocks are the flat cylindrical units which in the mosaic are seen projecting diagonally upwards in the lower right-hand corner. In three to four cases they are isolated, whereas a couple of others would seem to have huddled together into two- and three-part units. The same building blocks, in a more angular version, are seen in the anonymous panel: in the top left-hand side of the fantastically bending rock formation, in which they are simultaneously presented individually and bound together. The terraced effect comes in when the bundled units comprise a coherent front, as is the case, for example, in the lower left-hand corners of both works, where two 'storeys' are built up.

No one could really be in any doubt that the rocks in the anonymous panel are growing, shooting up like plants from the ground, and my hypothesis will be that the growing effect is integral to the very shape of the rock. More precisely,

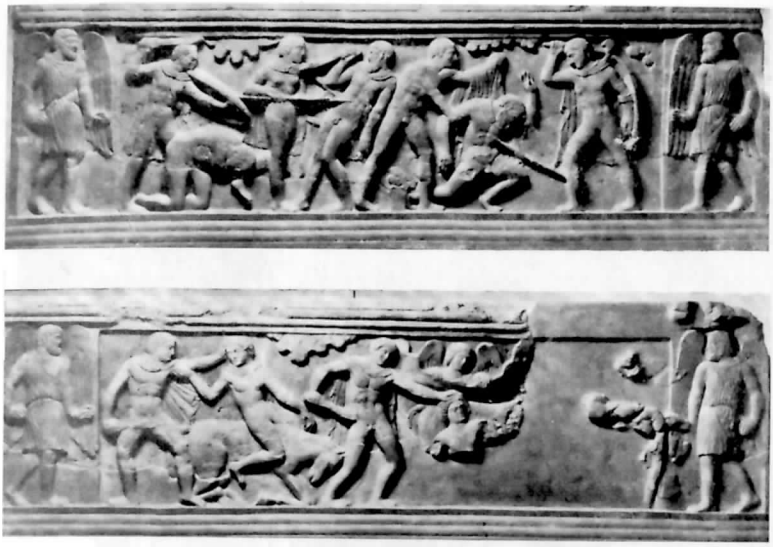


Fig. 2.88. *The Greeks' Battle with the Amazons* (*c.* 100 BC), sarcophagus from Vulci, Tomba delle iscrizioni. Rome, Museo di Villa Giulia.

Fig. 2.89. *Lion Attacking Panther* (1st century AD), mosaic from Pompeii. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale.

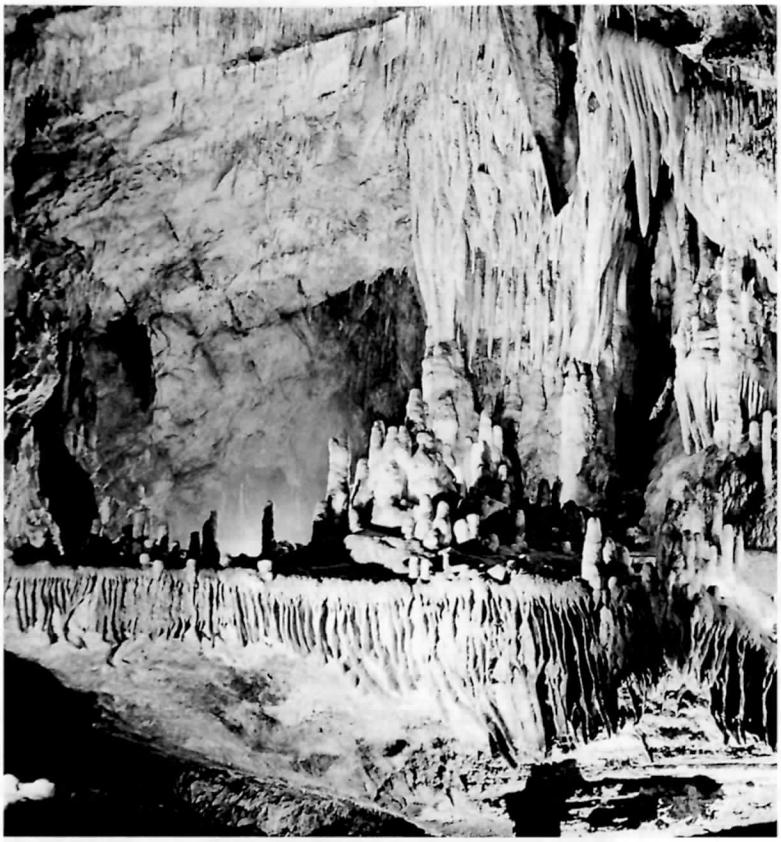


Fig. 2.90. Han Cave, Han-sur-Lesse, Belgium.

there would seem to be further echoes of the cave world, in that cylindrical units, bundling-together and terracing are all characteristics of stalactite and stalagmite formations. As the stalagmites grow up, fertilised by drops from the roof of the cave, they put out stalactites, which gather in terrace-like bundles (FIGS. 2.90-91). The terraced plateaus would have been especially eye-catching in the cave cults because they were illuminated from below by burning torches. It is the often very long, fluted moulding of the stalactite bundles that provide the connecting link from the growth- to abyss-effect.

The two phenomena – rugged chasm and fluted cylindrical bundle – can thus not be separated, *they are identical*. The chasm describes something negative, something that has broken apart; the bundle describes something positive, something that has got together; but through the concept of the smallest building unit – the

Fig. 2.91. Stalagmite formations in the Cave of Psychro, Crete.

stalagmitic cylinder – the difference is cancelled out: the fracture is simply there where the huddling together is interrupted. If the concept of the living underground was a connecting link between the Minoan-Mycenean and the antique-medieval cultures, these building blocks are thus another link: the images of both cultures indicate that cavities occur in the cracks between accumulations of growing building blocks. In the medieval terraced rocks, the underworld is moreover integral to the bundle form itself as, with its vertical lines, it would seem to point directly into the deep.

But, of course, here we are dealing with parallels, not with stringent representations: in reality stalagmites rarely grow obliquely, just as the bundled stalactite units cannot in themselves stretch upwards, but only do so via the stalagmites out of which they grow. The terraced rock would seem rather to be of free derivation, which only discreetly attests to its origins. Nevertheless, the terrace concept provides an elegant confirmation of the pre-modern notion of life on earth as life in a cave: the world cave. Drops from the cave ceiling hereby become identical with pneumatic germs from the firmament, which make all earthly things grow: animals, plants, minerals.[183]

I have not with any certainty been able to trace the terraced rock further back than Roman wall paintings and mosaics – unless we see it on a Hellenic

Fig. 2.92. Map of the Ephesus area, tetradrachma from Ephesus (336-34 BC (?)).

Fig. 2.93. *Centaur Fighting Beasts* (1st century AD (?)), Roman mosaic. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.

Fig. 2.94. *Tiger Attacking Ox* (*c.* 100 BC-79 AD), fresco from Pompeii. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale.

tetradrachma of 336-334 BC (FIG. 2.92).[184] The mountain ranges, which depict the landscape around Ephesus, are here made up of small perpendicular units, together creating a terraced effect. In Roman wall paintings the terrace comprises only one of several types of rock formation. As we see, for example, in the mosaic of *Centaur Fighting Beasts*, it often simply appears as a naturalistic accent of irregular rocks: a plateau here, a ravine there (FIG. 2.93). Occasionally, however, as in *Bacchanalian Scene* or the two mosaics from Casa del Fauno, the *Battle of Alexander* and the *Marine Animal Mosaic* (PLATE 20),[185] we can but marvel at the fantastical stubbled or terraced rocks. And in some cases we encounter completely disorderly formations such as the curved crystals in the Pompeian *Tiger Attacking Ox* (FIG. 2.94),[186] or the large coral-like swaying concretions in *Bear and Ox Fighting* from the amphitheatre in Pompeii (FIG. 2.95).

This fascination with the biology of the mineral kingdom has obvious parallels in the contemporaneous Roman literature: Virgil, Ovid, Tacitus.[187] When Aeneas sails along the coast of Libya, he finds a cave "of hanging rocks; within are fresh waters and *seats in the living stone*, a haunt of Nymphs." [my italics][188] That this living

Fig. 2.95. *Bear and Ox Fighting* (1st century AD), fresco (no longer extant), Pompeii, from podium wall of amphitheatre. Lithograph from Niccolini (1890), tav. III.

stone is not only a speciality of cave interiors, but is applicable to mountains as a whole, is emphasised in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which Polyphemus states "I have a whole mountain-side for my possessions, deep caves in the living rock [...]."[189] The living stone is often mentioned in connection with running water, as if it were fed by the water in the same way as plants. Aeneas states, for example, that "Past Pantagia's mouth with its living rock I voyage [...]."[190] On the other hand, for Ovid the Tiber river god dives down into "the dripping cave of living rock".[191] Apart from the dripstone in the caves, pumice stone and tufa are obvious candidates for this kind of growth as they are porous like fungus and can be formed by sedimentation in water. This is apparent when, for example, Ovid's Diana and her nymphs go to a cave where nature "had shaped a native arch of the living rock and soft tufa". [192] The latter example is particularly telling in my context, as the 'natural arch' on the Pesaro tablet is similar to such a native arch. Here we touch on a related aspect of subterranean fertility: nature as artist. I will, however, not be addressing this aspect until chapter 12.

I will here restrict myself to noting that, interestingly, fertility does not exhaust the more resolute aspects of rocks: that hardness and growth pull happily together. When Ovid's Anaxarete is rejected by Iphis, it is because she is "more savage than the waves that rise at the setting of the Kids, harder than steel tempered in Noric fire, or living rock, which still holds firmly to its native bed [...]".[193] And when, in

Tacitus, Halicarnassus' delegates apply to build a temple in honour of Tiberius, they justified their project by observing that "for twelve hundred years no tremors of earthquake had disturbed their town, and the temple foundations would rest on the living rock."[194]

Pre-modern theories of stone formation

In order to approach a balanced understanding of the appearance of rocks in the pre-modern images, we must, however, consider the question of which theories on the formation of mountains and stones were current in the pre-modern era, and what part each might play in a description of the visual concept. To judge from writers such as Plato, Aristotle, Lucretius and Pliny, theories on mountain morphology did not play a role in the canonical classical natural philosophy.[195] Nevertheless, in places mountain formation is touched upon in themes such as the creation of the world, formation of land, origin of stones, volcanoes and earthquakes; and in Roman antiquity and the Middle Ages we find, as indicated, several explicit discussions. In summary, three traditions can be identified: [1] a 'mechanical', which sees the mountains as the result of catastrophes such as earthquakes, hierogamy, floods and volcanic eruptions; [2] an 'animistic', according to which rocks are the result of mineral growth; and [3] a 'geo-chemical', which regards stone and rock as a condensation of soil.

Even though these traditions might seem very dissimilar, they are often surprisingly interwoven. The 'geo-chemical' model, which sees stone as a condensation of soil, could, in the first place, be regarded as a rationalistic replacement for 'animistic' growth. Where the animist sees tufa and dripstone as growing, the rationalist sees them as solidifications of the water's pulverised soil. This line of thought can be traced in Plato's *Timaeus*, where rocks and stone are described as being the result of aqueous soil that is compressed by the subterranean air. And later, petrified clay is one of the candidates itemised by Avicenna and Albertus Magnus for rock formation.[196] Restoro d'Arezzo (1282) similarly regards water to be the source of mountain formation, but now so that we sense the connection to growth:

> And we have already gone out on the mountains that are all white, almost as snow; those mountains that are grown and made from water turning into stone. An evidence of this is that water leaves from the top of those mountains, and at the time it comes out and spreads around them, the water condenses and creates stone, whereby the mountain always grows. And on the top of one of those mountains there was a basin with hot water in which we bathed, and our hair which was in the water got stone around it; as the wax sticks to the wick, when it makes a candle.[197]

Restoro's white mountains thus bear a striking resemblance to the aforementioned growing volcanoes in Caucasus. Both parties grow because a crystalline material condenses on the banks of a spring.

But the concept of mineral growth does not seem to have pleased the classical natural philosophers, who displace it to the periphery of their thought. As can be seen from the passages where it is mentioned explicitly – within as well as outside natural philosophy – it belonged to the domain of the extraordinary and magical, and we may also ask if it posed a threat to the patriarchal ideology that was, after all, attempting to drain the earth of forces of growth.

From mineral growth and soil condensation in the microscopic domain – the 'animistic' and 'geo-chemical' traditions – the leap to the 'mechanical' model in the macroscopic domain might seem wide. But in the pre-modern period notions of large and small are so alike that there is no essential difference between mountains and the stones of which they are constructed. Thus, the 'animistic' and 'geo-chemical' lines of thought can still be traced in geological references which could seemingly be attributed to 'mechanics'. Even though, for example, Aristotle declines to mention mineral growth directly, he states that the size of the earth in relation to the water changes according to a cycle, for "[t]he interior parts of the earth, like the bodies of plants and animals, have their maturity and age." Whereas in the case of the organisms "[t]he whole creature must grow to maturity and decay at the same time", the earth's processes occur in parts. "[T]he whole natural process of the earth's growth" takes place, however, over such vast periods of time that the changes cannot be observed.[198]

These animistic elements in Aristotle's geology are presumably echoes from the Presocratic philosophers. Thales of Miletus (*c.* 585 BC) not only presumed that the earth floated around in an enormous ocean, but also that it grew in this water. The growth was fed by moisture as, according to Thales, water was the origin of everything.[199]According to Aristotle, another of the Milesian philosophers, Anaximenes, linked this growth to earthquakes: "Anaximenes says that the earth breaks up when it grows, wet or dry, and earthquakes are due to the fall of these masses as they break away."[200] Would it be possible to find a more elegant description of the terraced rock? Its cylindrical units grow in bundles up from the ground and where the bundles stop there is fluted ravine moulding, features left by a catastrophic breaking. Such descriptions link together the whole spectrum of genesis, from catastrophes to condensation of soil to actual growth.

In the previous chapter – the chapter dealing with evolution of pictorial space – I made two detours from phylogenesis to ontogenesis by demonstrating that the child's perception of space develops in a sequence that has clear echoes of cultural evolution as a whole, and that the child's concept of world picture goes through a

corresponding process. It would seem we can draw a similar parallel within the question: how are stone and mountains created? As Piaget has pointed out, children's answer begins with a mixture of artificialism and animism. Stone and mountains are assumed, on the one hand, to be made by humans, especially house builders, and, on the other hand, children often believe that they grow and develop of their own accord. Of the stones along the Salève river, Cour aged five explains: "It must be people that plant them [...]. You plant little pieces and then you put the cement and then you stick them together." And of mountains in general, Ol aged six states that at first they are the work of God "and since then they have always been growing".[201]

In this manner of perception there are thus clear echoes of the pre-modern belief in the biology of the mineral kingdom. As far as the notion of humans as creators of stone and mountains is concerned, it has a general parallel in the belief in the gods as the creators of nature and a more specific echo in the pre-modern thinking together of art and nature – a theme which, as mentioned, I will be studying in chapter 12.

Here I shall simply observe that the 'primitive' explanatory model is abandoned when the child reaches the age of 9-10, i.e. in the middle of the concrete operational stage, also during which the perspectival mode of vision begins to develop. The creation of stones is now attributed to a hardening of atomised components such as soil, sand or dirt. This explanatory model thus also finds phylogenetic resonance in cultural evolution's concrete operational stage, more specifically in the 'geochemical' model of antiquity and the Late Middle Ages.

The terraced rock in medieval landscape images

While the terraced form is only one element of the antique paintings' rocky landscapes, it is strikingly dominant in the Middle Ages. From the mosaics in the Roman Santa Maria Maggiore in the 5th century, to the Macedonian Renaissance in the 9th-10th centuries and on to Duccio in the 14th century, the landscapes are characterised by cylindrical forms, edges and steps (**FIGS. 2.96-97** and **12**). The development takes place synchronously with a softening of the semi-naturalistic rock forms of antiquity, which supplies the medieval landscapes with a chaotic energy. Terraces therefore often appear in the company of, if not as excrescences on, unruly curving hills.

Even though the terraces in many ways follow a developmental direction far from that of the schema of antiquity, their building blocks – the stalagmitic cylindrical forms – constantly reappear in isolation, showing that the origin of the terraces is never deleted from the collective memory. We thus come across solitary cylindrical forms in such scattered contexts as Hosios David in Thessaloniki (*c.* 450; **FIG. 2.98**),[202] the *Khludov Psalter* in Moscow (*c.* 830; **FIG. 2.99**), the mosaics of San Marco in Venice (13th century)[203] and the Florentine Baptistery mosaics (1272-1320s; **FIG. 2.32**).[204]

Fig. 2.96. *Moses Delivering the Book of the Law to the Sacerdotes and Anzians* (432-40), mosaic. Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore.

Fig. 2.97. *Story of Jacob* (*c.* 880-83), miniature from *Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms gr. 510, f. 174v.

Fig. 2.98. *Majestas Domini* (*c.* 450), apse mosaic. Thessaloniki, Hosios David.

Fig. 2.99. *Transfiguration* (*c.* 830), miniature from the *Khludov Psalter*. Moscow, State Historical Museum, ms add. gr. 129.

The cylindrical forms – the actual terraces – appear in a number of variations. The most prevalent comprise places where the ground is specifically exposed: at water holes, ravines and caves. The phenomenon is independent of the appearance of the rocks generally. A telling example of this is Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Effects of Good Government in the Countryside* (1337-40; PLATE 13), Siena, Palazzo Pubblico, in which the river meanders through a medieval ravine, even though the rest of the landscape is made up exclusively of hills.

In addition, the terraces can be said to undergo three phases of development: [1] a 'classical' phase, from Roman antiquity to the 10th century AD, in which the terraces are isolated from the hills; [2] a 'Byzantine' phase, from the 4th century AD to the Late Byzantine period, in which the terraces define a crescendo-like upper closure of the hills; [3] a late medieval, Italian and northern European phase, in which the hills and terraces are completely fused together so that the 'crescendo' effect is cancelled out. This is, of course, an ideal model, which can only be particularised on the basis of a large number of comparative studies. In practice, the mechanisms are generally only seen discreetly and in glimpses. Nonetheless, an image such as the anonymous panel in Pesaro (PLATE 4) demonstrates that the mechanisms are

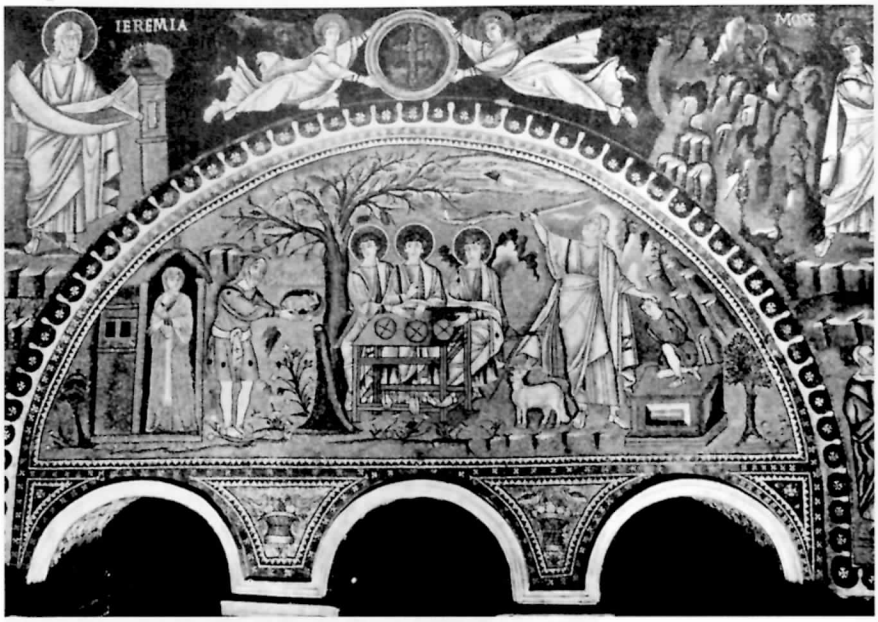


Fig. 2.100. *Sacrifice of Isaac* (6th century), mosaic. Ravenna, San Vitale, north side of the presbytery.

Fig. 2.101. *David the Shepherd* (*c.* 900-950), miniature from the *Paris Psalter* executed in Constantinople. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms gr. 139.

Fig. 2.102. *Crucifixion* (741-52), fresco. Rome, Santa Maria Antiqua, Cappella di Teodoto.

never forgotten, that they simmer beneath the landscapes throughout the whole of the Middle Ages.

Early, medieval examples of phase [1] include the mosaics in the Roman Santa Maria Maggiore (432-40) and in Ravenna (5th-6th century; **FIGS. 2.96** and **2.100**); in both places sharply profiled terraced rocks and cloud-like curving hills exist side by side. The latest examples would seem to be found in the Macedonian Renaissance; for example, the *Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus* (867-86), the *Paris Psalter* (*c.* 900-950) and the *Bible of the Patrician Leo* (*c.* 940) (**FIGS. 2.97**, **2.101** and **4.22**).

Phase [2] is perhaps launched by the already strangely medieval mosaics in Piazza Armerina, Sicily (*c.* 300 AD; **FIG. 1.44**). The cylindrical forms no longer make up their own blocks but have here, in the same ways as certain knoll-like growths, placed themselves on the top of some of the landscapes' hills.[205] An actual synthesis of the two components, however, did not happen until the 8th century. A fresco (741-52) in Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome, shows, besides ordinary hills, upper hills split into small steps (**FIG. 2.102**).[206]

Fig. 2.103. Miniature from the *Menologion of Basil II* (985). Rome, Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms Vat. gr. 1613, f. 106.

Fig. 2.104. *Scenes from the Legends of Constantine and Saint Sylvester: Empress Helena Discovers the True Cross among the Three Found on Golgotha* (1243-54), fresco. Rome, Santi Quattro Coronati, Cappella di San Silvestro.

Fig. 2.105. *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem* (*c.* 1143-71), mosaic. Palermo, Cappella Palatina.

The terraces' new symbiosis with the hills leads to an ecstatic upward-striving quality. The subdued character of the hill components throw the terraces into relief, so that we have the impression that they form the climax of the rocks' upward-reaching dynamic, if not their actual fruit. Initially, as in *Bible of Queen Christina* (*c.* 900-950; FIG. 2.6) and the *Menologion of Basil II* (985; FIG. 2.103), for example, the textural effect is mainly stone-like. But later the growing quality is given a more pictorial equivalence as, in addition to the customary cylindrical forms,[207] something decidedly plant-like begins to make itself felt. Now and then the organic quality is emphasised by the cylindrical forms themselves, as is seen, for example, in the stalk-like components in the cathedral in Monreale (*c.* 1185-91; FIG. 2.9)[208] or Santi Quattro Coronati in Rome (1243-54; FIG. 2.104), but in particular we must note the upper parts of the rocks, whether it be the foliage-like covering in Monreale (FIG. 2.9),[209] the gently serrated 'petals' in the mosaics of San Marco, Venice (13th century; FIG. 2.4),[210] or, perhaps most remarkable, the fungous growths in Cappella Palatina's mosaics, Palermo (*c.* 1143-71; FIG. 2.105).[211] That the latter originally derive from cave formations could be suggested by a non-Western example, the Chinese alchemical philosopher Ge Hong (*c.* 283- *c.* 343), who similarly describes stalactites

and stalagmites as variations of magic fungi.[212] The growths clearly belong to the tradition that created the spherical mountaintops of the bronze dishes from Nimrud, made 1,900 years earlier.

If we turn our attention to the last part of the Byzantine rock phase [2], a development that begins in *c.* 1280, we find that the upward-striving tendencies are undiminished, but that the plant-like aspect has now shifted into the crystalline. As can be seen in the Church of the Peribleptos, Mistra (*c.* 1350), the cylinders have transformed into shining steps and sharp spikes that are darting off with their own desperate energy (PLATE 3; see also FIG. 10).[213]

The situation that leads to phase [3] of the terraces – the late medieval, European – is complicated, because the West is already carrying the high medieval ballast of 'chaotic' rocks, which I discussed earlier in this chapter. Nevertheless, in 13th-century Tuscany we see a local adoption of the Byzantine phase [2], a type of rock that can be described as a stepped succession of hills, looking like pieces of scenery, which project ever-larger upper folds as they rise into the depth (FIG. 2.106).[214] However, around 1300 this hierarchical type is broken down and the hitherto prevalent terraced rocks become hill-like mountains, such as Duccio's or Giotto's, in which the terracing can be just as distinct at the bottom of the image as at the top (FIG. 12).

The traditional rock formulae – the terraced rock or simply the hill with no moulding – actually survive for a surprisingly long time in Italy. While mountains in North European painting are brought into line with common naturalism by the work of Jan van Eyck around 1430, it is not until Mantegna in the Italy of the 1450s that mountains gradually begin to subject themselves to the objective gaze – and then, as we will see in chapter 12, with considerable complication. Cennino Cennini must thus be read with the very greatest scepticism: when he, in the *Libro dell'arte* (early 15th century), recommends that when painting a mountain from nature one should do so on the basis of small and dirty stones, this is not an manifestation of an existing practice, but rather a dream of the future, fostered by the new ideals of the imitation of nature.[215]

In order conclusively to render probable the thesis that the rocks in pre-modern images are influenced by the concept of mineral growth – not just in their origin, but throughout the Middle Ages, a period that formally transforms the underworld into a frigid inferno – we need more comprehensive information about the significance of the cave cults to Western culture. As the cultic caves of antiquity comprise dripstone caves in particular, it would be natural to expect a long afterlife for the Cretan dripstone cult: an afterlife that stretches into Christianity. A high medieval poem such as Alcuin's *On the Destruction of Lindisfarne*, for example, states that "[t]he living stones perished about the altars."[216] And mineral growth would again seem to be cited as a factor in the first book exclusively devoted to the origin

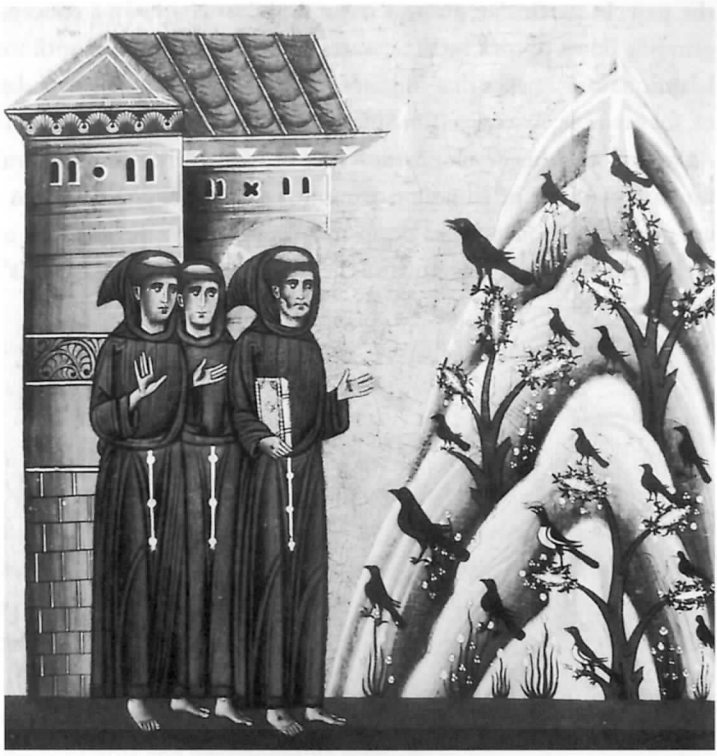


Fig. 2.106. Bonaventura Berlinghieri, *Saint Francis Preaching to the Birds* (1235), panel from an altarpiece showing stories from the life of Saint Francis. Pescia, Basilica di San Francesco.

of mountains, Valerio Faenzi's *De montium origine*, published in Venice in 1561. The book, which is structured as a dialogue, ends with the conclusion: "Some mountains arise directly at the command of God. Others through earthquakes, deluges, the stars (particularly the sun), by the force of winds, all of these, with the Mineral Virtue [i.e. the mineral growth (?)] as a contributory factor."[217]

No matter which forces influence the rocks in pre-modern images, *time* is not among them – time understood as a phenomenon that builds up and undermines in the course of aeons. The distinct outlines of the rocks testify to a certain freshness; ruination and growth would seem to have taken effect within a manageable time span. This observation is confirmed by the fact that pre-modern thought has no concept of actual geological time: a span that stretches back staggeringly far into

the past. In particular, antique natural philosophy lacks a concept of *erosion*: the grinding down of rock by time, water and weather. It is not until 10th-11th-century Islamic natural science that this aspect gradually begins to be articulated, in the work of, for example, Avicenna (Ibn Sina) and in the encyclopaedic *Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa*.[218] As we will see, this development – that of modernity – finds a parallel in pictorial art with the shift of paradigm around 1420. At this point in time the mountains are no longer growing, and begin to crumble in the distant blue mist, just as the architecture, the manufacture of the mountains, appears as ruins demolished by the ravages of time.

Jacob Wamberg

Landscape as World Picture

Tracing Cultural Evolution in Images

VOLUME I

From the Palaeolithic Period to the Middle Ages

Translated by Gaye Kynoch

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