



## Ancient Animal Envoys From Caves And Cosmos

Jim Willis

*“The animal envoys of the Unseen Power no longer serve, as in primeval times, to teach and guide mankind. Bears, lions, elephants, ibexes and gazelles are in cages in our zoos. Man is no longer the newcomer in a world of unexplored plains and forests, and our immediate neighbors are not the wild beasts but other human beings, contending for goods and space on a planet that is whirling without end around the fireball of a star. Neither in body nor in mind do we inhabit the world of those hunting races of the Paleolithic millennia, to whose lives and life ways we nevertheless owe the very forms of our bodies and structures of our minds. Memories of their animal envoys still must sleep, somehow, within us; for they wake a little and stir when we venture into wilderness. They wake in terror to thunder. And again, they wake, with a sense of recognition, when we enter any one of those great painted caves. Whatever the inward darkness may have been to which the shamans of those caves descended in their trances, the same must lie within ourselves, nightly visited in sleep.” (Joseph Campbell in The Way of the Animal Powers).*

Exploring the Paleolithic  
Cathedrals  
(Gorodenkoff / Adobe Stock)



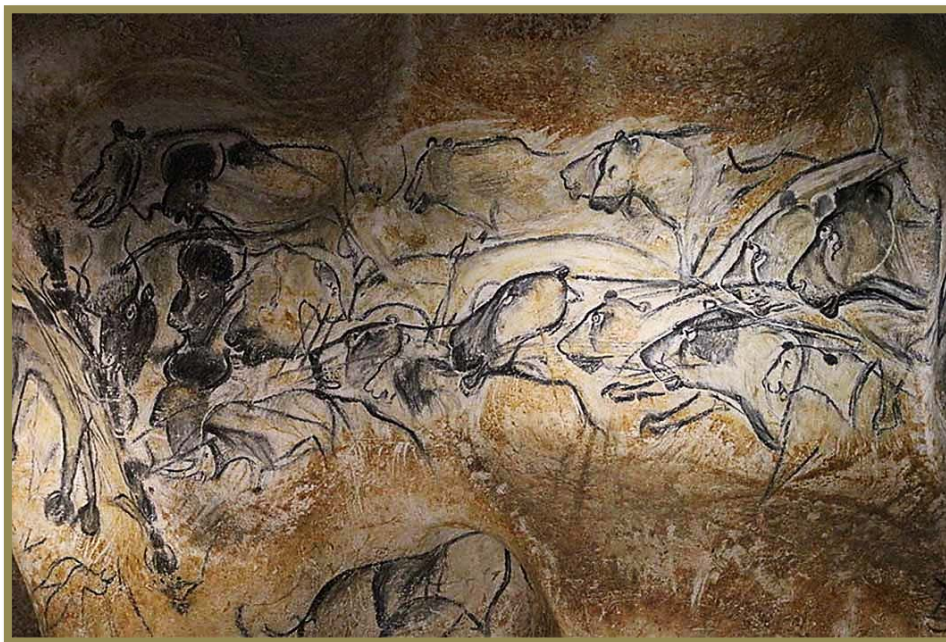
## Paleolithic Cathedrals: The Caves

To enter a great cave is to enter another world. Nowadays most people cross such thresholds in guided groups, walking on manufactured paths while traversing shored-up passageways lit by strings of electric lights. In ancient times the journey was quite different. The underworld cathedrals of Paleolithic times were dark, dangerous, dank, and depressing. There were no enlarged, government-inspected, certified passageways. The ancients had to crawl through small openings carrying torches or some other light source, fully aware that if it went out, leaving them in darkness so profound they could not even see their hand in front of their face, they would probably die there. The sharp, ragged rocks scraped their backs and knees, and unfathomable drop-offs opened up suddenly before them at every turn. They risked their lives and sanity every time. Who would do such a thing? As it turns out, artists did. Again, and again. For thousands of years.

A modern person can visualize the ancient experience by imagining a secret world beyond the human perception realm. Scientists have discovered its existence, right there on the other side of the Higgs Field. It is the quantum world of reality that exists outside human senses, above and below the range of sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste. This world exists. It can be traced through use of the scientific method and complex mathematics. Its existence can be deduced by reading thousands upon thousands of years' worth of mythology about elves and fairies, leprechauns, magic, and earth energies.

The majority of those who inhabit the modern world seem to have forgotten that such a world even exists. But those who get down on proverbial hands and knees and make the effort to crawl through the tunnel, as Alice traveled down into the rabbit hole, discover a world where much is familiar, even though it appears in a seemingly distorted manner. There lies a world of spirit, a world of alternate realities, the Multiverse, the place of alternative perceptions. Alas, it is far easier just to claim that such ideas are superstitious nonsense.

*Lions Panel Pont d'Arc cave,  
Chauvet Cave (Claude  
Valette/ CC BY-SA 4.0)*



What did the ancients find when they crawled down into those subterranean Meccas of magic? They were greeted by mystical messengers. To enter the famous European caves of El Castillo, Lascaux, Chauvet, Pech Merle, Altamira or more than 300 others, all containing magnificent rock art, is to be greeted by a whole menagerie of hauntingly beautiful representations of animal envoys. Bison, mammoths, bear, deer, and sea creatures abound, painted in such a way that the very rock formations of walls and ceiling accentuate their features. The famous *Hall of the Bulls* in Lascaux is a gallery that will easily accommodate up to 50 people.



*Lascaux Cave Art: Bison (©Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication)*

### **The Ancients Were Artists**

This immediately raises a comment and two questions. The ancients were artists. These paintings stand right up there next to Michelangelo's work. They are not as polished or composed, of course. After all, they are from a different tradition and use different material for pigment. But the raw effect is the same. The

first question: What were they thinking? Explanations abound.

Henri Breuil believed the paintings were meant to serve as magical aids to increase the success of the hunt or to initiate young boys into the society of men. This was a predominate theory for years, popularized in the 1970s by the late Joseph Campbell. Then David Lewis-Williams decided they were the work of Paleolithic shamans who, beginning as long as 40,000 years ago, figured out how to induce a trance state, either naturally or through the use of psychedelic plants or mushrooms, in which they would 'journey' to what they perceived as parallel spiritual dimensions. Upon their return they painted what they saw during their 'trips'. He believed, however, that the paintings were simple representations of hallucinogenic illusions. Being a trained scientist, he dismissed parallel dimensions out of hand. Others question his hypothesis. They wonder if the realms to which the shamans journeyed actually exist. In any case, this is when the great awakening of symbolic/religious thought began. In those caves, mankind became specifically human.



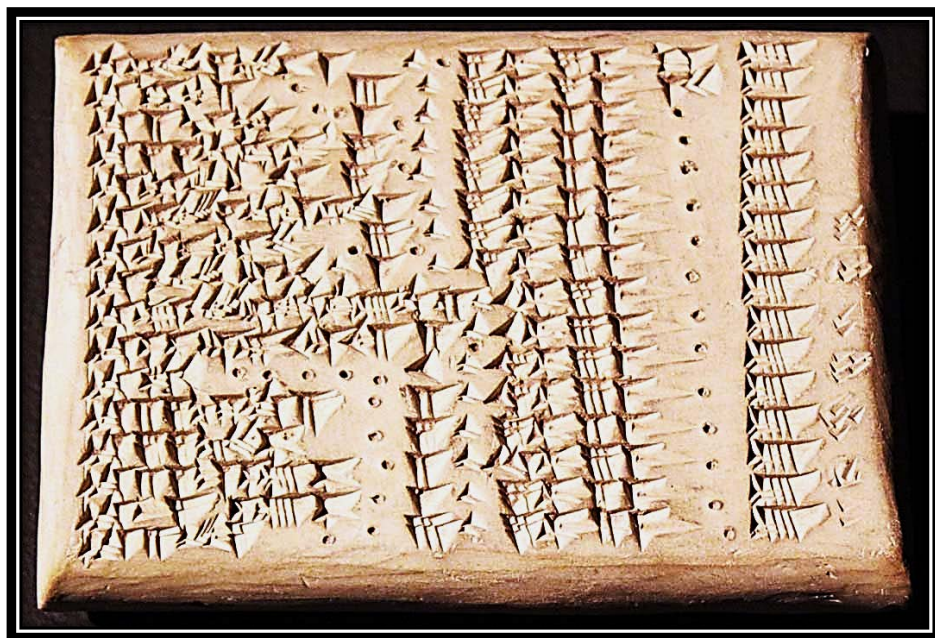
*Hands at the Cuevas de las Manos  
upon Río Pinturas, Argentina  
(Mariano /CC BY-SA 3.0)*

R. Dale Guthrie wondered whether the paintings were the graffiti of adolescent boys who, as boys often do, fantasized about becoming great hunters. The presence of so-called 'Venus' figures - richly endowed, voluptuous female figures - fueled his speculations. Recently,

however, while analyzing hand prints and stencils in both French and Spanish caves, some of the work is now thought to be done by female artists. This discovery helped push Guthrie's work into the background. Not many today believe the caves to be an ancient version of Playboy magazine.

The second question: How did they do it? It is not just the technical questions concerning materials that they used, but much more basic questions. Why did they crawl as far as a mile into such dangerous, cramped places? What was their light source? What was their motivation? Why animals? One would think the place to placate the spirits of the hunt would be the forests and plains - the natural abode of the animal kingdom. Bulls and bison never roamed the galleries of Lascaux.

*Star list with distance  
information, Uruk (Iraq), 320-  
150 BC, the list gives each  
constellation, the number of  
stars and the distance  
information to the next  
constellation in cells  
(Anagoria /CC BY-SA 3.0)*



## Animals Of The Cosmos

Animal envoys did not make their presence known only in the caves, however. In *Psalm 19:1*, when an unknown musician declared that "the heavens declare the glory of God," he was speaking a truth reflected in almost every religion on earth. Given clear skies and an unimpeded horizon, a full moon appears once every 29 or 30 nights. When it rises it does so against a pattern of stars. Every month or so, that pattern appears to change by a little less than 30 degrees to the east because, due to earth wobble, the moon appears to have moved along the horizon. So, over the course of a lunar year, the pattern of stars behind the full moon will have changed approximately 12 times.

In other words, over the course of a lunar year, the full moon will have risen in front of 12 patterns of stars, each of which makes up one compartment, or 'house', about 30 degrees wide. To assist astronomers in identifying each house, the ancient Babylonians superimposed an image of a

different animal over the stars that formed that particular compartment. One was a lion (Leo), one was a fish (Pisces), one a dragon (Draco), one a bull (Taurus), etc. This system was taken over by the Greeks. The Greek word for animal, or 'living being', is spelled, in English, *zoon* (hence the word 'zoo'). The 12 animals together formed, in Greek, a *Zodia*. It means 'animal circle'. In English, it is spelled 'Zodiac'. It was not long before these animal figures were given god-like qualities, seemingly affecting life on the planet.



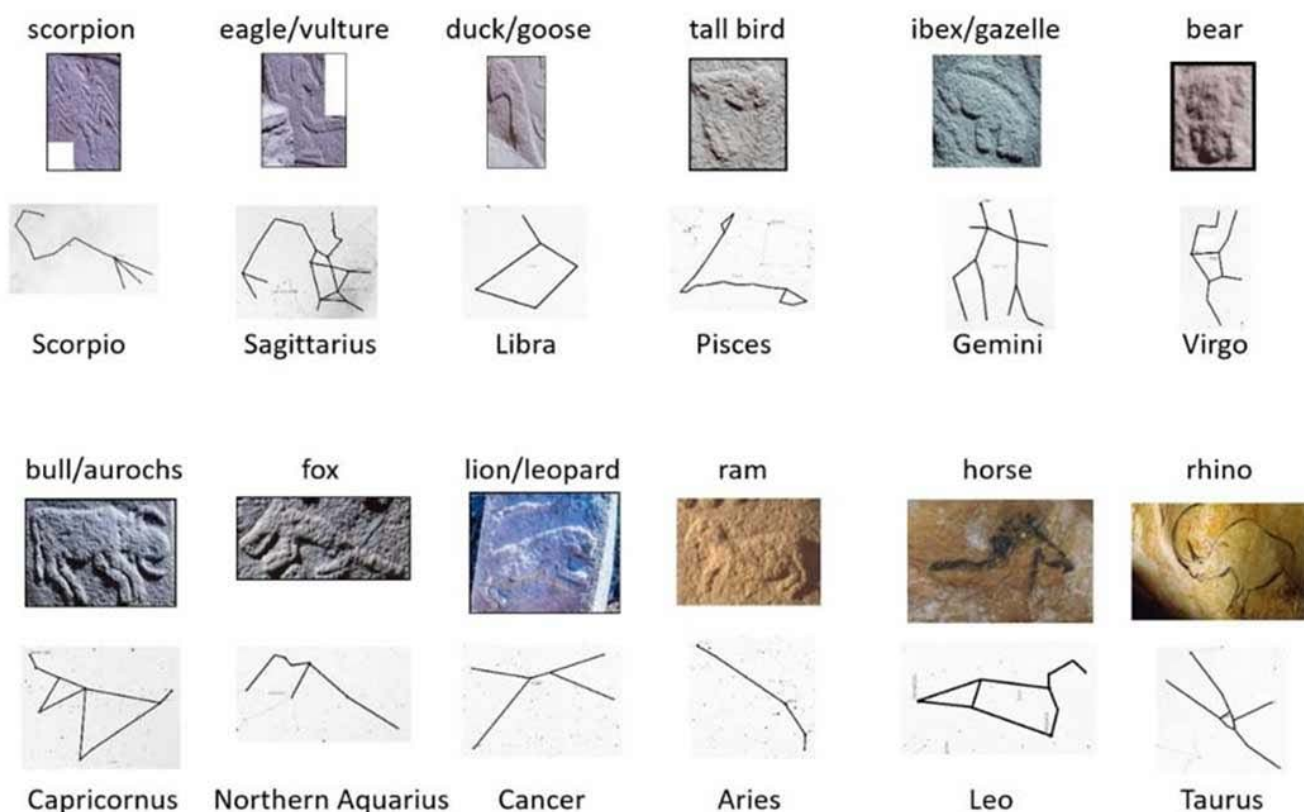
*'The Sorcerer', Trois Frères, France*

## The Therianthropes

In short, humankind's ancient ancestors saw gods, or god-like figures, in both cave and cosmos. As above, so below. In their mind, the gods both created and directed the activities of humankind, and the image of those gods were depicted both in the sky above their heads and the earth below their feet. There is even evidence that certain humans had somehow developed the ability to travel between the upper and lower worlds of the animal spirits and the middle realm of human perception on earth. Some of these shamanic figures were known as shape-shifters. They were thought to be able to take on the properties of certain animals and actually change their physical form into those creatures.

Is this the answer to the riddle of the *Therianthropes*, (from the Greek *therion*, meaning 'beast', and *anthropos*, meaning 'human') the half-animal, half-human figures that appear in rock art all over the world? Is this the explanation that lies behind the various horns and antlers found on helmets and headdresses from Africa and the American west all the way to the Vikings of northern Europe? Is this why the devil of Christianity, and Pan of the Greeks, are often pictured with horns?

Other shamans and visionaries, while not changing their physical form, encountered animal envoys while in a trance state brought about by physical ordeal, sickness, or intentional spiritual journey. When an animal appeared to a young Native American engaged in a spiritual quest, that animal became a totem. If it was a hawk or eagle, for instance, the young man was expected to obtain a feather from his totem animal and carry it with him in his medicine bag for the rest of his life. The animal would be his protector and spiritual guide forever.



*The Ancient Zodiac (Image Courtesy: © Dr Martin Sweatman)*

## The Path to the Present

For thousands of years, and even to this day in some cultures, the ancestors believed they could receive messages and guidance from forces and powers that inhabited and governed the natural world. This belief system formed the most predominant religion in the history of the human race. It is probably why humans drew pictures on cave walls in Spain and carved bas relief images on the rocks of Göbekli Tepe. It is why they buried their dead along with weapons needed in the next life, raised huge pyramids in the deserts of Egypt, and built medicine wheels on the tops of mountains in America's Northwest. It is why they spread pollen, traced the stars, and studied animal entrails. It is why they observed the paths of planets and suns, went on vision quests, feasted, fasted and contemplated sunsets. It is why they talked to the trees, listened for voices from the ocean's foam, and consulted hermits and oracles, all of whom inhabited the wilderness so as to be close to natural spirits.

*Egyptian Dendera zodiac with original colors (reconstructed) (Alice-astro /CC BY-SA 3.0)*



## The Age Of Enlightenment?

Then came the Age of Enlightenment when, at least in academic European circles, humans left their primitive superstitions behind and became fully mature, rational, scientific adults who no longer believed that the great and wonderful natural world, awesome as it was, really possessed anything that

could be construed as consciousness, let alone the ability to communicate. A few still wondered how fish could find their way home after years in the oceans, how birds and butterflies could keep such a precise schedule, and how a million or two minor miracles of coincidence and process could exist within the world of plants and animals. But most people assumed it would be only a matter of time before it was all figured out.

Has this path come to a dead end? Perhaps the ancients can yet show a way into the future. Their view of the cosmos, minus the spiritual implications of the Zodiac, resonates in a world of telescopes and Martian probes. But do moderns still need caves and animal envoys? Why not scrap the concept for something more mechanical, in line with a modern, technological age?

The answer is that some people still experience other realms in that way. In vision, dream, sickness, meditation, or through hallucinogenic material of some kind, defenses built and maintained by the five predominate human senses are somehow relaxed and overcome. A crack appears in the window of space-time. Something is perceived that normally resides outside normal perception reality.



*Cave art, bison of Altamira, Spain  
(40,000 years BC) (Public Domain)*

### The Metaphor Of Art

How to explain it? One almost has to use words. A gifted few might be able to use art. They might be able to draw or paint what they saw. But the result is the same. It consists of an

attempt to recreate an otherworldly scene in a familiar medium so that others will understand the experience. The only way to reproduce such an experience is to run it through the neurological pathways of the physical brain. Thus, one cannot say, "This is what I saw." After all, the vision was outside the parameters of anything anyone normally experiences in this perception realm. So, since language was invented for use only on this side of the perception fence, the best one can say is, "What I saw was *like* this..." In other words, to conjure up an image of a similar experience one resorts to metaphor.



*Lascaux Cave Art: Horses (©Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication)*

In order to make an other-worldly vision make sense, people's brains have to run through the individual rolodex of experiences everyone all carries around in their heads, find something similar that all will recognize, and then project it onto the screen of common consciousness. What usually appears on that screen? The closest a human's experience can come up with, is a picture of animals. Do actual animals exist on the other side of our reality? Probably not. But that is the closest image the human brain can come up with, so that is how the experience is presented.

This idea goes all the way back to Plato. He taught that an actual animal, a horse, for instance, is not a reality. It is an expression of a reality. A 'horse' is an expression of 'horse-ness', according to Plato. What he called his *Idea* is that 'horse-ness' is not this or that horse. It is the general concept of all horses - the universal Horse. What are called horses are simply expressions of an eternal idea which is unchangeable and imperishable. According to this view, what is called a solid horse is actually just a passing phase, a material expression of a metaphysical concept called 'horse-ness'. 'Horse-ness' is the eternal reality. 'Horse' is simply a temporary embodiment of that reality. By extension, everything human see around them, including their own selves, is a material expression of a metaphysical idea. It takes shape as its energy passes through the Higgs Field and clumps together to form the realm perceived through the senses - the realm humans call 'reality'.



*Woman shaman in ritual garment with hawk  
(Nejron Photo/ Adobe Stock)*

### **In Cave And Cosmos**

In both cave and cosmos, this idea is found in vivid relief. The animals pictured there are not as important as what they represent. They are not animals as much as representations of animal envoys.

Animals have different senses than humans. They see, hear, taste, think and smell a different reality than humans do. In many ways, they inhabit a different sensory world than humans do.

Sometimes their abilities seem almost magical. So why shouldn't animal envoys be a perfectly acceptable image for both inner and outer truth?

Perhaps that is why the ancient ancestors drew pictures of those animal envoys on the walls of caves and projected their images in the constellations of stars in the heavens above them. The great physicist and philosopher Albert Einstein summed it up well: *“The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle. To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is something that our minds cannot grasp, whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly: this is religiousness”*.

*Top Image: Great Hall of the Bulls, 15,000–13,000 BC, Paleolithic rock painting, Lascaux, France ©Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication*

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