



Palaeolithic Geophysiology: archaic art & science versus modern, adult quasi-pathology (Part 1)

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This paper concerns both archaeology and modernity; but primarily it concerns modernity. A simple interpretation is made of the symbolic significance of a particular Palaeolithic female figure. And intrinsic to the interpretation is a justification of the label 'Goddess'. (The capital initial letter 'G' is used pointedly.) But the prospect of such a 'justification' will immediately tend to prompt two antithetical kinds of reaction: 1. "Wow! A real goddess! I must read on!" 2. "I've seen enough of this already." Such reactions are illustrative of the main focus of this paper: sc. the modern, adult human psyche. After all, the interpretation made of the archaic artwork may just be spot on. (It might be refuted by a simple discovery.) And this would have implications for our understanding and appreciation of far more than just the one female figure. Yet so simple and obvious is the basic idea of the interpretation, it might readily be understood by all. So the question arises: How come - at least in modern times - no-one had thought of it before? Moreover, if the basic idea is so very simple, then why make this abstract so long-winded? ... Why not just get on with the presentation?! ... Well, notoriously, revolutionary ideas tend to encounter enormous difficulties: such ideas may eventually be recognised as evidently correct, but they often prove to be extraordinarily difficult to accept initially. (Such ideas may continue to be controversial, for some people, even when the evidence in their favour is overwhelming: eg. evolution by natural selection, and anthropogenic global warming.) This paper both demonstrates and directly addresses the fact that the difficulties encountered in the presentation of revolutionary ideas - which may be not at all abstruse - can be difficulties having to do with the adult human *will*, rather than with the intellect. (Early on, evidence is taken from individuals who manifest no such difficulty.) That's a state of affairs which presents an intrinsically human paradox: one pertaining to the issue of the freedom of the will. And it will be shown in this paper's Part 2 that, strange to tell, even the potential for the resolution of the paradox at issue was in effect *prehistorically* envisioned.

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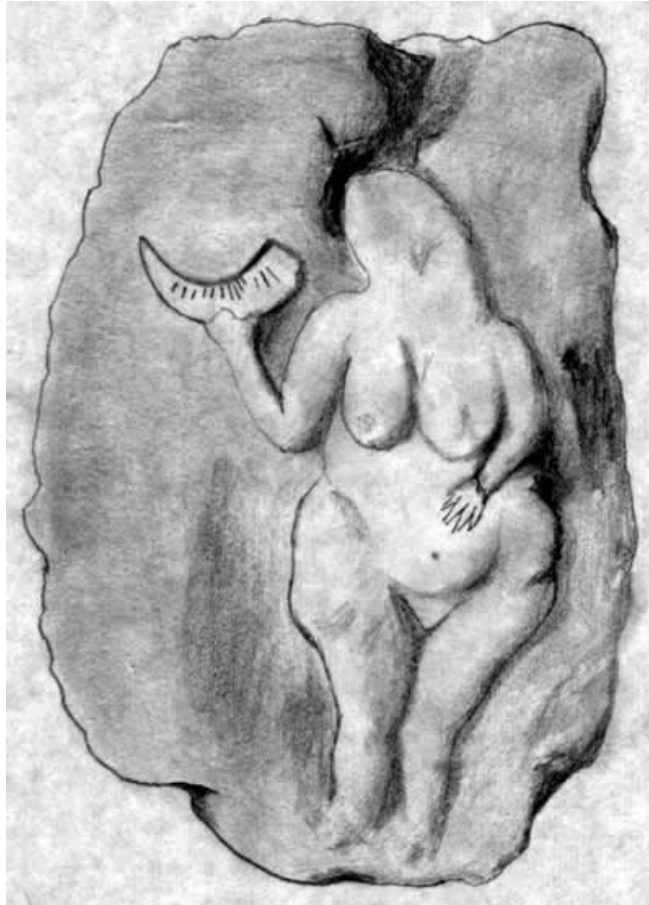
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Reproductive artwork by Christopher DeMartino

The figure and the block are inseparably interlocked. In the position selected by the artist for this relief, the block had a slight overhang, so that the figure swelled forward gently. When seen from the side, the curve appears as taut as a strung bow. It swells up to the supreme point, the maternal belly, then falls away at either end and sinks slowly into the rock, in which the feet seem to melt. The upper part of the body curves gently backward, and the head, resting between two rock projections, seems to be reclining as though on a cushion.

– Sigfried Giedion, *The Eternal Present*, vol. 1, The Beginnings of Art, Bollingen 35, 6.1. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962 (page 470).

1. MATERIAL EVIDENCE

Try showing the above picture to a three- to four-year-old child. And, pointing to the object held aloft in the figure's right hand, ask the child: "What's that?" or "What's she holding?" (A photographic representation of the actual 20,000-year-old figure is available here:

<http://donsmaps.com/images30/laussel105cm.jpg>) But first, what answer do you think you're most likely to get? For if small children tend to come out immediately with an answer that's unexpected by most modern adults - especially those adults who remain steadfastly uninspired even by the sight or sound of the magic words 'something in the sky' - then we might well reflect on the fact (and wonder just how it could be) that infants sometimes have an eye for things which adults can be effectively blind to.

There is one thing which, sometimes, small children tend to notice about the figure unprompted: not uncommonly, they will spontaneously announce their observation that the figure has *no feet*. (It's called a figure, rather than a figurine, because it's a bas-relief.) And indeed the *general* apodality of the Palaeolithic female figures and figurines is well noted by experts, and has been much puzzled

over. Many have lower limbs that are clearly damaged, of course. But in the case of many others, it can sometimes seem that the artist had some kind of point to make with the lack of feet: these female forms sometimes appear to be *pointedly* apodal. (Eg. See Sigfried Giedion's description of the Laussel figure, above.) And if this appearance reflects artistic intention, then it's evidently a point not entirely lost on many a small child.

By referring to the judgement of small children regarding the object held aloft by the figure from Laussel, I will show that the proper explanation of her apodality seems to be quite simple and obvious. And I will thereby demonstrate that the primary symbolic significance of *all* the Palaeolithic female figures and figurines seems simple and obvious too. Then I will address the main issue: namely, how modern experts - amongst others - could have failed to think of something so simple and obvious before, even just in order that it might be refuted. (The issue of refutation is addressed below, in Section 2.) Also still very much at issue amongst experts is the most appropriate nomenclatural designation for these works of Palaeolithic art. And, in the light of the Laussel figure most especially, that 'Goddess figure' and 'Goddess figurine' are the right and proper Modern English names for the works of this genre is another thing I aim to show.

To the normal modern *adult* eye, anyway, the Laussel figure holds in her right hand what appears to be a bison's horn - vaguely crescent shaped, and with thirteen distinct notches. But does the object *really* look somewhat crescent shaped, or is that merely my idiosyncratic interpretation? Well, that question seems to be effectively answered by the verdict of small children. For the most common answer that three- to four-year-old children immediately come out with, when they're asked, is that the object held aloft by the Goddess of Laussel is none other than *the moon*. (There's evidence that young children may have been a significant presence within the galleries of Palaeolithic artwork; see the first photograph showing human footprints - "mainly the footprints are of young children" - around halfway down the following page: <http://www.donsmaps.com/tucdaudoubert.html>) So let's try now to make sense of that.

Perhaps, though, there isn't really much to be made sense of. Perhaps the verdict of small children indicates nothing more than their ready perception of a similarity which is merely happenstance. Yet perhaps not; for if this evident bison's horn is properly seen also to be a symbolic representation of the moon, then this would very effectively serve to make perfectly good iconological sense of the Laussel figure itself, along with the curious and otherwise unexplained fact of its distinctive - and seemingly pointed - apodality.

For clearly, the transcendent moon is indeed held firmly in the grasp - and as we now know, that's the *gravitational* grasp - of the Earth, *mother* Earth. (The simple bodily association between Earth and moon *could not but* have been as evident to the unaided archaic artists eye as it is to our own; and, as noted below, it's scarcely less obvious that their association involves far more than the mere persistence - at least when the moon is visible - of apparent spatial contiguity.) Moreover, the possession of feet would naturally tend to imply, for the possessor, the need of something to stand on; whereas, for Palaeolithic people just as for ourselves, mother Earth was surely the *very ground* of life itself.

The apparently aerial object held in the Laussel figure's right hand appears to be related, via the evidently pointed placing of the *left* hand, to the figure's swollen belly. (The morphology of the rock having been exploited by the artist, this gravidness is evident when the figure is seen side-on; see Sigfried Giedion's description, above.) And indeed, not only does the cycle of illumination from the transcendent moon conspicuously meter the local yearly cycle of fecundity of the Earth, it is also apparently associated - however that may be - with the *monthly* cycle of fertility of the particular human female.

The horn carries thirteen notches. But there are *between* twelve and thirteen lunar months to the year. (This has been noted as a problem for precise calendrical measurement since ancient times.) Yet given that we count lunar *faces* rather than count months - ie. given that we count each celestial

appearance of the moon at a particular phase, rather than count *cycles* of the moon - and given that we start counting from some identifiable point in the cycle of seasons (eg. the onset of the annual inward migration of some important prey species, such as bison), then there will by and large be *thirteen* such lunar faces to the year thus measured. (Counting between more-or-less readily identifiable summer or winter solstices, then, however the moon appears in the sky at the start of the count, there would always be *precisely* thirteen such lunar faces counted; and indeed, there still are.) For however the moon appears in the sky at around the time of, say, the coming of the bison - or the deer, or the salmon, or the fruiting of the trees etc. - then you know that *a further twelve* such faces of the moon may fairly well be expected to be observed before the imminent return of the bison (or whatever) in the following year. Indeed counting lunar faces is simpler and more elegant than counting months; and it's really all that's needed. (Counting lunar *cycles* - counting months, conceptually-abstract periods of time, where you start counting from *zero* rather than *one* - is conceptually and mathematically more sophisticated.) Moreover cloud cover is no problem at all; for given an awareness of the lunar cycle and its period, counted in days, occasional glimpses of the moon allow interpolation where necessary, and serve as a check on one's record-keeping more generally.

The figure was found overlooking a valley, in an area surrounded by caves upon whose womb-like walls had been depicted some of the bewildering variety of the forms of life to which *Nature* had given birth. And in that highly stable Ice Age environment, Upper Palaeolithic people's effective command of mother Nature's *horn of plenty* was indeed dependent upon their firm intellectual grasp of the seasonal pattern of the migration of herd animals - a Terrestrial pattern conspicuously metered by the celestial cycles of the moon. ("Certainly, many of these species [reindeer, wild horse, steppe bison] are known to have formed large, roaming herds ..., which followed more or less regular migration trails between summer and winter pastures, at regular and largely predictable periods of the year. There can be no doubt that the Upper Palaeolithic communities of Europe were keenly aware of these seasonal migrations and ... frequently located their settlements directly astride these migration trails in order to anticipate and intercept the movement of the animal herds." (Mellars, p. 44))

So, if the primary symbolic significance of the Laussel figure is that it is a simple iconic representation of none other than our very own mother Earth, then it looks difficult to argue that the significance of all her Palaeolithic sister figures and figurines could not have at least this basic symbolic simplicity about them too. For clearly, the basic representation would appear to have a *universal* human significance. (Note that all the English 'geo-' words - 'geography', 'geometry', 'geology', 'geophysiology' - sprouted from (Attic) Greek 'gē', 'earth', a word of unknown origin, probably pre-Indo-European, whose Homeric form 'gaia' was also used as the name of the Greek goddess of the earth: Gaia.) And that may pertain to more than just the material artwork. (The point here is effectively alluded to by the title of this paper's present section; the point will be elaborated in this paper's Part 2.) Moreover the role played by human observation of the moon in the firm establishment of the concept of measurement in many, if not all, human cultures seems likely to have been a major one. (Note that English 'moon', 'month', 'menses', 'menstrual', 'mensural', 'metre', 'meter' *and* 'measure' all appear to have shot from the same Indo-European root.)

Accordingly, perhaps we may say we're getting close to the heart of the matter in hand, which now seems to pertain to the present at least as much as to the past. For the following questions naturally arise: How come modern experts never spotted so simple and straightforward a possibility? Why on earth did it not occur to experts (and the rest of us) that the Palaeolithic female figures and figurines might be simple symbolic representations of the very Earth on which we stand? - *mother* Earth. Why did the idea not occur, even just in order that it might be refuted? (The issue of refutation is addressed below, in Section 2.)

Naturally, the female figures and figurines must be more than *mere* symbolic representations of mother Earth. Indeed, associated with them, there must surely also have been a significant body of myth. That is to say: no doubt they are, properly speaking, *mytho*-symbolic representations of reality. But their *symbolic* significance is utterly undiminished by any associated mythic elements. And the reality they

symbolically represent is no less real on account of any such elements which may tend, with or without our witting, to attach to them still.

And it's precisely the same with our modern-day names 'mother Earth' and 'mother Nature'. (Our Palaeolithic forebears may have made no such differentiation; but we've long since come to recognise that everything *over* the moon lies within the realm of Nature as much as does the Earth itself.) For whatever the mythic elements with which they may or may not be associated in human minds, either in the past *or* at present, there is no more a question as to the existence of mother Earth *or* mother Nature (or Nature, or mother nature) than there is - at least ordinarily - as to the existence of our mother country, our mother tongue, our mother courage, or our mother wit.

Clearly, 'mother Earth' and 'mother Nature' are names of *personifications*: respectively, of the living Earth and the whole of nature. Well, they're not names of *persons*. Or rather, only in *mythic* terms might they ever properly be said to be names of persons (*mythical* persons); in terms of straightforward reality, they name reality itself. And I believe that the Palaeolithic female figure and figurines are the earliest iconic representations of cosmic reality - albeit that they're representative of (mostly) Terrestrially *immanent* cosmic reality - that we possess.

But it's at that elementary point of distinction where modern archaeological and anthropological expert thinking goes into seizure. For in the context of the Palaeolithic female figures and figurines, the mere mention of the commonplace names 'mother Earth' or 'mother Nature' can have an extraordinary mind-flipping effect. The effect on the expert psyche is just like the effect of asking someone (an adult), out of the blue, whether or not they believe in the *existence* of mother Earth or mother Nature - the effect of which is just like that of asking people whether or not they believe in the existence of fairies. (Few adults will simply retort, "Why do you ask such an idiot question?") *So what on Earth is going on?!*

Well, on the other hand, try entering 'Goddess figure' or 'Goddess figurine' in a search of the internet: there will be unearthed a whole load of 'Earth Goddess' this, 'Mother Goddess' that, and 'Great Goddess' or 'Great Mother' the other. And by and large, it will be a mother-lode of *myth*. Not that there's anything wrong with myth as such. But these archaic artworks appear to be mytho-symbolic representations of *reality*: sc. the reality of mother Earth (the living planet) and of mother Nature (though as noted earlier, the realm of Nature as recognised by our moderns selves - unlike, evidently, our Palaeolithic forebears - is unlimited). However, in the context of mentioning the Palaeolithic female figures and figurines, mentioning the names 'mother Earth' and 'mother Nature' to the *non*-expert psyche can have a similarly mind-flipping effect as it has upon the expert, though very often in a precisely *inverse* form.

A little bird tells me myth in itself is just fine: human myth *per se* is not at all unreasonable. ("[Mythic motifs] might be put to use by reasonable men to reasonable ends - or by poets to poetical ends - or by madmen to nonsense and disaster." Joseph Campbell, 'On Completion of *The Masks of God* (foreword to later editions of books in the series).) But there's something seriously wrong with the thinking whereby down-to-earth reality is surreally *misapprehended* as myth; or myth, as reality - as opposed to an allegorical representation thereof. Moreover those tendencies, it appears, manifest two sides to the same quasi-pathological coin of thought: they appear to be *reciprocal, complementary, symbiotic*. And so, evidently, the enigma presented by the Palaeolithic female figures and figurines is not one involving the people that produced them so much as our modern adult selves.

2. COUNTEREXAMPLES? - PLUS SOME IMPLICATIONS IN THE ABSENCE OF

A single well-attested example of a Palaeolithic female figure or figurine clearly showing well-formed feet would, in effect, demolish the interpretation set out above. And in Henri Delporte's *L'Image de la Femme dans l'Art Préhistorique*, there are drawings of a figurine - front, back, and profile views - showing well-formed, if somewhat doll-like feet. But in Grahame Clark's *The Stone Age Hunters*, photographs of the same figurine reveal that the drawings, especially the profile view, are seriously inaccurate. (Somewhat suspiciously, the drawings show precisely the same front, back, and profile

views as do the photographs.) Due to a slender gap carved between the legs at the level of the lower calf, it's true that the figurine seen in the front- and back-view photographs initially appears pigeon-toed. But the two-dimensional appearance is misleading. Indeed, contrary to the side-view drawing, the unequivocal side-view photograph shows neither toes nor heels, and the legs clearly end in a stump. Graphic reproductions of both the drawings and the photographs are shown below:



The outlines of the top images were traced from Henri Delporte's *L'Image de la Femme dans l'Art Préhistorique* - "Kostenki 1-I Statuette 3", illustration no. 168; page 163. (Reproductive artwork by Janice Bland.) The outlines of the bottom images were traced from photographs in Grahame Clark's *The Stone Age Hunters* - illustrations 46-48, page 60: "Mammoth bone female figurine from Site I, Kostienki, South Russia." (Reproductive artwork by Janice Bland.) The actual photographs are shown here too: <http://donsmaps.com/kostenkivenus.html>



There is no shortage of Neolithic, and later, female figures and figurines showing well-formed feet. (Some of them may be representations of actual women; but in any case, there are plenty of exceptions. There's a relatively recent example, very recently unearthed, which *lacks* feet - seemingly pointedly so - shown here: <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/archaeology/1.705396> And there's this one: <https://mobile.twitter.com/DrVictoria01/media/grid?idx=19> The absence of a gap between the jar and the figure's head seems to suggest that the figure and vessel are inseparable, like Earth and moon are inseparable. There's also this one: <https://mobile.twitter.com/DrVictoria01/media/grid?idx=16>) And that anatomical distinction seems to symbolise a fundamental change between the mytho-symbolic representation of reality that evidently came before - as illustrated, *par excellence*, by the figure from Laussel (a far earlier example, the Tan-Tan figurine, has been dated to as early as half-a-million years

BP: <http://donsmaps.com/tantanvenus.html>) - to a more *purely mythic* representation that came later.

With the realisation of an apparently intimate initial association between simple and straightforward symbolic representation and *mythic* representation of reality, the following issues suddenly become realistically addressable and answerable: not only is there a question as to how it comes about that it should come so naturally to we humans sometimes to represent and think about reality in mythic terms (a question effectively addressed in Section 2, below), there is also a question as to the genealogy of mythic figures *generally*. And a single, initial mythic personification of reality (whose artistic depiction occurs in a multitude of Palaeolithic forms, the earliest of which may be half-a-million years old: <http://donsmaps.com/tantanvenus.html>) might at least serve partially to account for the genesis of later personifications: the idea being that an initial mythic Goddess eventually effectively gave birth - through a variety of cultural paths, with the offspring manifesting differently in different cultures - to a pantheon of intrinsically lesser goddesses, gods and godlets of this, that, and the other. (The question as to the genesis of that initial mythic figure will be addressed in this paper's Part 2.) Then at some point in the relatively recent past, the lesser and mostly rather mundane mythic personifications of reality were intuitively recognised to have *feet of clay*. (The Biblical expression 'feet of clay' presumably acquired its figurative meaning only relatively recently in human history.) And they duly gave way to a super-transcendent *super-god*: God.

But entirely aside from any myth whatsoever, past or present, the perfectly material Goddess steadfastly remains our perfectly real personification of *immanent* reality. The following passage is illustrative of the utter triviality of such personification: "**Mother Earth**. When Junius Brutus (after the death of Lucretia) formed one of the deputation to Delphi to ask the oracle which of the three would succeed Tarquin, the response was, "He who should first kiss his mother." Junius instantly threw himself on the ground, exclaiming, "Thus, then, I kiss thee, Mother Earth", and he was elected consul." - *Brewer's Dictionary Of Phrase And Fable*. (Note that some modern commentators sometimes come tantalisingly close to the spirit of the elementary principle effectively expressed in the above passage, albeit only transiently: "Entering one of these caves is like making a journey into another world, one which is *inside* the body of the goddess." - Baring and Cashford, page 16; original emphasis.) And by the same token, equally aside from any mythic picture, the sublimely transcendental God is our necessarily real personification of *transcendent* reality. (Cf. <https://thewinnower.com/papers/5417-the-god-problem>) The pair are perfectly complementary, and they go naturally together hand in hand.

3. INSTINCTS AND AFFECTS

In 1910, 1910-11 and 1912 respectively, Eugen Bleuler coined the words 'schizophrenia', 'ambivalence' and 'autism'. (Following the adoption of 'autism' by Leo Kanner in 1943 and Hans Asperger in '44, its meaning became *ambivalent* though also very strongly *one-sided*; cf.

<https://thewinnower.com/papers/5270-lord-kelvin-the-body-snatchers>) And here's how Bleuler characterised what he called 'autistic thinking', in two sweet sentences:

1. "Whenever we airily give free rein to our fantasy - as happens in mythology, in dreams, or in some pathological states - our thoughts are either unwilling or unable to take notice of reality, and they follow paths laid out for them by instincts and affects."

2. "[Autistic thinking] makes the playing boy into a general, the girl with her doll into a happy mother."

- *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie*, 1918, 2nd edition, pages 33-4 (my own translation).

(Nb. The benign autistic thinking characteristic of normal childhood make-believe play is just what you *don't* get developing very much at all in severe cases of the condition for which the word 'autism' nowadays tends very widely - in a wholly one-sided, quasi-pathological autistic fashion - to be restricted.)

So if a small child identifies the object held aloft by the Goddess of Laussel as the moon, for example, that's an illustration of benign autistic thinking. (Equally, if the child says it's an ice-cream cone, that too

would be benign autistic thinking - just a little less instructive.) Accordingly it appears that even though our thoughts are sometimes 'unwilling or unable to take notice of reality', it doesn't necessarily follow that our instincts and affects are likewise disoriented. (The small child, though unable to recognise the object as a bison's horn, may nevertheless be perfectly sensitive to what that bison's horn seems to symbolically represent.)

Yet they may sometimes be completely so disoriented. And that's precisely the case when modern adults' thoughts in relation to the names 'mother Earth' and 'mother Nature' are unwilling or unable to take notice of the simple reality - as opposed to any necessarily notional mythic figure - which those names represent: the instincts and affects involved are *completely divorced* from straightforward reality. Those wayward instincts and affects may be followed either directly and *positively*, or inversely and *negatively*. And the resultant wholly fantastical mental pictures of mother Earth and mother Nature - pictures involving mythic figures - are either simple and straightforward (insofar as a fantastical mental picture can be simple and straightforward) or they have a red line struck through them (so to speak). But whichever way those fantasied instincts and affects are doctrinally followed (either positively or negatively), the respective fantasied doctrines' perverse effects - though opposite in polarity - are effectively *identical*. For indeed, unlike the truth yielded from the negation of a false notion, the negation of a fantastical notion - which may at heart be perfectly benign and edifying - is precisely as fantastical as the notion that's negated. (Hence, for example, I would *never* say that I *don't* believe in fairies.)

Mercifully, our more down-to-earth instincts and affects never lose touch with straightforward reality; and they are ever-present. Otherwise, we wouldn't live. Moreover the passage from *Brewer's Dictionary Of Phrase And Fable*, quoted at the end of this paper's last section, would be rendered opaque and practically incomprehensible. The fact that it's really quite funny demonstrates that humour can counteract the otherwise overriding effect of fantasied instincts and affects, which, though more-or-less predictably recurrent, are intrinsically fickle. (This paper's Part 2 will involve the issue of humour.)

Evidently, just such realistic and ever-present instincts and affects are crucially involved in the functioning of human language: "Words have a history and associations, which for those who use them contribute an important part of the meaning, not least because their effect is *unconsciously felt* rather than *intellectually apprehended*." (W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greek Philosophers: From Thales to Aristotle*, page 4; my own emphases.) And by implication, affect must have been involved in the evolution of language from the very beginning. Also by implication, that 'very beginning' should in principle be discernible even now: our words should be like living, speaking fossils. Though naturally, in addition to the will to hear, *feeling* must surely be required in order to properly get to grips with what they have to say.

This paper's Part 2 will involve some linguistic palaeontology. In particular, it will be argued that the weaning infant (ironically enough, in view of that last word's etymology) will have been absolutely crucial to the establishment of the likely mother of all linguistic roots. But just here, on the identity of that 'likely mother of all linguistic roots', my lips are sealed: I'm keeping mum.

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