

THE MEDITERRANEAN MATRIARCHATE  
ITS PRIMORDIAL CHARACTER IN THE  
RELIGIOUS ATMOSPHERE OF THE  
PALEOLITHIC ERA

I wish to make it clear that this article will not be concerned with a general theory of the matriarchate. I have limited myself to a clearly defined cultural zone, from which I think that the hypothesis of a primitive matriarchal society cannot be rejected on the debatable grounds (recently stated<sup>1</sup>), that the matriarchate could not have been established until after the discovery of agriculture. If in fact the matriarchate cannot legitimately be separated from the divine cult of the Mother, this in itself presupposes a matriarchal constitution, not political and military save for exceptions, but based simply on feminine authority and prestige. On the other hand, ethnologists and historians of religion tell us that the great goddesses are not born of agricultural civilizations, which merely provide them with conditions particularly favorable to their development. They exist before these civilizations and are worshipped by peoples who live solely by hunt-

Translated by James G. Labadie.

1. M. Eliade, *La Terre Mère et les Hiérogamies cosmiques* (Zurich, 1954), p. 82. Cf. with p. 77 and pp. 65-66.

ing, fishing, and the rudimentary gathering of products from still virgin land.

The great mother goddesses go back thousands of years to the upper Paleolithic, whose deposits abound in representations of the “naked goddess” with sex characteristics intentionally exaggerated. Thus an inescapable and entirely natural conclusion is reached: the fact that men of the upper Paleolithic adored a great goddess who in her nudity showed herself essentially fecund indicates that they had already grasped the “divine” in their own women, projecting and exalting them in the forms and aspects of an immense and immensely powerful female who was to become the “Potnia” or “Dominating One” of the Mediterranean religious world.<sup>2</sup> Thus we see that the attitude of Paleolithic man toward his woman already engenders a primeval matriarchate, as we have just said, of privilege and prestige. From this we deduce that there is no solid foundation for the statement that the matriarchate could not be a primeval phenomenon because it could not antedate an agricultural civilization. It suffices to reflect that women themselves are at the origin of that civilization, since, for thousands of years, they constituted the mysterious and unique link between the community and the land not yet cultivated but spontaneously and inexhaustibly productive of vegetables, bushes, and plants in numberless variety; the link which expressed itself in terms of a secret and disturbing familiarity with a world inaccessible to men, placing woman in a clearly superior situation.

The inconsistency of the statement referred to becomes even more obvious when we return to Paleolithic man and attempt to determine more precisely his probable attitude toward woman, a creature often so enigmatic, a frequent source of unrest and almost of fear, and yet perfectly and necessarily united to the physical and intellectual being of the male.<sup>3</sup> But to understand this attitude better, it is perhaps necessary to recall if only briefly the life and surroundings of these upper Paleolithic communities of the Aurignacian, the Solutrean, and the Magdalenian epochs.<sup>4</sup> This was a difficult and perilous life for the men; the hunters struggled with brute force against *elephas primigenius*, *rhinoceros tichorinus*, *ursus spelaeus*, *felis spelaea*, *hyena spelaea*, and *bison priscus*, or pursued animals such as the

2. U. Pestalozza, *Religione Mediterranea* (Milan, 1951), *Preludio*.

3. “There is in them (women) something which disturbs man and before which he feels himself disarmed.” L. Lévy-Bruhl, *Le Surnaturel et la Nature*, p. 387.

4. J. Déchelette, *Archéologie préhistorique* (Paris, Picard, 1912), Chaps. VI to X (especially IX–X). See also C. Maviglia, *Le Civiltà Paleolitiche* (Milan, 1955).

wild boar, the reindeer, the elk, the stag, the ibex, the chamois, the roe, the horse; it was a life of watchful, tireless gathering for the women who, with the sureness of an almost infallible instinct, chose from the depths and the surface of the earth roots, grasses, flowers, leaves, barks, and fruits of the forest. The sense of terrestrial maternity, already born in these human groups, was to take hold with ever increasing firmness; at the same time the Great Female whom they had chosen as divine Patroness of their life and possessions tended more and more to be identified with the Earth, Mother and Nurse, and, like Earth, to extend her domain beyond the world of the living into that of the dead, piously placed with their ornaments and their furnishings in underground darkness. As woman rose, so did the priestess, to touch with her pure hands the sacred body of the Great Mother and to grasp immediately the secret affinities which bound them closely one to the other: affinities which must have become clearer and more remarkable in the agricultural era. Thousands of years later Plutarch was pleased to call the love meeting of man and woman a "labor of plowing and seeding."

The human groups of the Reindeer Age knew the use of coloring substances, red, yellow, and black, to paint their bodies and perhaps also for tattooing; they used masks for performing magico-religious acts; from seashells, animals' teeth, fishbones, imitations in ivory and bone, pure and colored crystals, bits of black amber—everything cleverly drilled with holes—they made necklaces, bracelets, and belts which accompanied man and woman into the tomb along with other objects of necessity and adornment. We become aware of a religion of the dead and of faith in a life which does not end here below, a more striking hypothesis if the red ochre found in traces on their skeletons was indeed intended as a magic substitute for blood to make life flow again into the dead. It is hardly necessary to mention the stupendous artistic sense of these prehistoric men, the variety and the extreme finesse of their hunting and fishing instruments and of the marvelous needles employed in their domestic industries. Let us content ourselves with this sketch which, though rapid, permits us to grasp, alongside the monstrously exuberant and overabundant nude female figures<sup>5</sup> (forms which are doubtless intended as more divine than human), a series of small heads of surprising charm and seriousness;<sup>6</sup> let us return to our Paleolithic man of the Aurignacian, the Solutrean, or

5. Hoernes-Menghin, *Urgeschichte der bildenden Kunst in Europa* (Vienna, Schroll, 1925), pp. 121, 163, 165, 167.

6. J. Déchelette, *op. cit.*, p. 215. Hoernes-Menghin, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

the Magdalenian epochs, dreamily reflective before the enigma of woman.

The first enigma is the menstrual phenomenon, which he must have found strangely astonishing and troubling. This periodic flow of what was not ordinary blood, this bloody cycle obscurely but surely linked to the lunar cycle which already dominated his imagination and his experience, made of woman a mysterious being who even at the moment of supreme intimacy failed to reveal her secret. Besides this monthly cycle there was pregnancy. It is probable that upper Paleolithic man, like some savages today,<sup>7</sup> did not know the real purpose of the love union. If he did realize that there was a necessary and undeniable relation between pregnancy and the sexual act, he remained in the dark as to the true origin of the creature his woman was to carry within her for nine months. Where did it come from? The man would never have dared spy on woman during her inviolable daily liberty. But she, the woman, knew. There is abundant evidence for the belief that the woman became pregnant after *mixis* if she approached certain specified spots, strange-shaped rocks, caverns, piles of stones, particular trees or streams. From these places babies' souls leaped into the bosom of woman, who conceived. Whatever might be the condition of these "animulae," whether or not they were the souls of ancestors (according to a belief of the Australian Arunta<sup>8</sup>), one thing is indeed sure: hidden at the bottom of a crevasse, in furrows or pools, among the leaves of the trees, awaiting the passage of women, these souls awaited the proper moment to become incarnate, to exchange a sort of embryonic life in the breast of their primordial Mother, the Earth, for a truly uterine life.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in a state of stupor made up of joy, fear, and anxiety, as well as of fear and desire of the unknown which surrounded and touched him, while it remained a closed mystery, Paleolithic man saw his woman's belly grow gradually larger; without being able to grasp the mystery, he guessed the significance of the magic rites she practiced upon herself to prepare for a safe delivery. I see no other possible interpretation of the engraving on bone which represents a naked woman in an advanced stage of pregnancy spread supine under the belly of a female reindeer.<sup>10</sup> Here already is a shining example of that feeling of reverence, almost a

7. See, for example, B. Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of the Savages in Northwestern Melanesia* (New York, Halcyon, 1929), p. 179 ff.

8. B. Spencer and J. J. Gillem, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (London and New York, Macmillan, 1889), Chaps. IV–V.

9. M. Eliade, *op. cit.*, pp. 66–67.

10. J. Déchelette, *op. cit.*, p. 223, fig. 2.

cult, toward certain animals reputedly superior to man—although in man too instinct was very strong—and at the same time that sense of familiarity, almost of intimacy, which became stronger and stronger during the Neolithic era, as domestication added to the human groups small and large animals, isolated and in flocks, and the understanding between the humanity of the former and the animality of the latter created a characteristic promiscuity capable of justifying all sorts of metamorphoses. One can readily understand that dominating the whole was the intelligent arbitrating instinct of woman, the magic touch of whose soft hands was much better adapted than the brute force of men to molding the sharp, unruly nature of the male animals. In all probability, Paleolithic woman, noting the extreme ease with which the female reindeer gave birth to her young, attempted to assume herself the favorable maternal attitudes of the animal by executing appropriate rites of sympathetic magic. After delivery—and even the extraordinary dilatation of so small an organ must have stupefied the man, mute and frightened witness of woman in labor—another prodigy was to take place. Again, the woman, in a state of absolute autonomy, gave the newborn being the special and unique food which it needed. From hidden sources within the female being an abundant flow of milk was endlessly provided, filling and swelling the ample breasts from which the nursing child greedily sucked its life. For upper Paleolithic man everything about woman, from puberty to maternity, was obscure, mysterious, marvelous. If we add to this testimony, fruit of an elementary physiological observation, the situation of woman in the domestic economy, not merely as she furnished the community with products of the earth known only to herself but also in her role as depository of a pharmacopoeia seized with infallible instinct from the earth itself, of mysterious understanding, of magic powers sometimes yielding stupendous effects in the community, the conclusion which man must necessarily have drawn from that state of affairs appears in all its striking truth! Not only did he recognize that his own attitudes, capacities, and powers were indeed modest compared to the powerful self-sufficiency of the woman, but he was also led naturally to admit that if, in the exercise of his own activities, the magic influence which arose from her to accompany and direct him should ever be lacking, he would be lost. There is no more significant and captivating scene in this regard than that offered by two rock engravings from the Mesolithic age, discovered at the oasis of Tiout in the Algerian Sahara.<sup>11</sup> Followed at a certain distance by his woman, a

11. C. Hentze, *Mythes et Symboles lunaires* (Anvers, 1932), pp. 46–47, figs. 6 and 7.

hunter is about to shoot an arrow. A line is drawn from the pubic region of the woman to that of the man. Interpretation is not difficult. This man needs constantly to undergo the influence of woman, to feel the irradiation of her feminine "nature," the intimate source of her life, the mystery hidden in her flesh, reaching him precisely at the point of his own virile force. This triumphant and irresistible "charm" of the feminine *aidoion*, already operative on men of the stone age, was to continue intact for millennia as a prerogative of goddesses and women: from the *anasyrma* (lifting of the skirts) of Elusian Demeter, of Egyptian Hator, of Indian Maya, of the Queen of Ireland in the Cuchulinn Saga, to the women who glorify with this propitiatory gesture the goddess of Bubaste and to those who raise their tunics before the menacing fury of the sea.<sup>12</sup> This clear motif of magic sexual action is not the only one we may observe between the upper Paleolithic and the Mesolithic ages. Remains from the Reindeer Age prove—beyond the shadow of a doubt, I believe—that these men of the upper Paleolithic already saw the lozenge, more or less blunted, as the double of the feminine *aidoion*, and the fish as the double of the *phallos*: lozenges and fish in series are widely employed with that precise signification on Chinese ceramics, on ceramics of Susa II (where the serpent is sometimes substituted for the fish), Bukovina, Bessarabia, southern Russia, prehistoric Spain,<sup>13</sup> on certain Attic vases with geometric decoration (where the signs may have lost their original meaning),<sup>14</sup> and finally on numerous Babylonian seals, where the lozenge-fish relationship is made extremely clear.<sup>15</sup> The Paleolithic lozenge yields in the Neolithic and the Eneolithic to true representations of feminine beings—certainly mother-goddesses—with enormous vulvas, very crudely realistic, or of isolated vulvas, identical to the preceding and having the same significance.<sup>16</sup> Ishtav, as well, chose one day to be represented by her own *aidoion* carved

12. U. Pestalozza, *op. cit.*, pp. 34, 57, 64, 298, 300–301.

13. C. Hentze, *op. cit.*, pp. 124, 125, fig. 117; p. 121, fig. 113; p. 96, figs. 74–76; p. 99, fig. 82; p. 78, fig. 48; p. 116, pl. VI; p. 80, fig. 52; p. 81, figs. 54–55; p. 134, fig. 130; p. 78, fig. 50 (cf. *Anthropos*, Band IX, 1914, Hf. 5–6, p. 971, fig. 30); p. 77, fig. 46; *Anthropos* (same year), p. 976, fig. 43.

14. W. Hahland, *Neue Denkmäler des attischen Heroen und Totenkultes, dans Festschrift für Friedrich Zucker* (Berlin, 1954), Taf. 9, Abb. 4; Taf. 11, Abb. 7; Taf. 12, Abb. 9; Taf. 13, Abb. 10; Taf. 16, Abb. 12; Taf. 19, Abb. 17.

15. C. Hentze, *op. cit.*, pp. 128–130, figs. 121–128; Morris Jastrow, Jr., *Bildermappe zur Religion Babyloniens und Assyriens*, Nrr. 193, 198, 220, 223; 41, 14; 43, 8; 45, 3.

16. Glory, Sanz Martinez, Neukirch, Georgeot, *Les peintures de l'âge du métal en France méridionale in Préhistoire*, tome X, 1948, pp. 7–122; p. 9, fig. 2; p. 66; p. 88, fig. 18; p. 95, fig. 76; p. 96 (also p. 66); pp. 113–114.

in a block of lapis-lazuli<sup>17</sup> and more than one of the mother-goddesses has included in her name that of her own intimate lozenge.<sup>18</sup>

In the light of the above facts I believe that it is not indulging in pure and simple fantasy to imagine a man of the upper Paleolithic who, fixing his gaze on the flourishing *ephebaion* of his woman, dark with violet reflections like the hair of Sappho, finds himself at the same time contemplating a mound of earth covered with a bushy, deep purple growth. Here I am merely plagiarizing the poet of the *Song of Songs*, who took his inspiration from old Canaanitic, that is, Mediterranean, sources, and describes a similar scene with more richness and color.<sup>19</sup> Immediately operative on affinities grasped in this fashion is the law of primitive mentality, so characteristic of Mediterranean peoples, which quite naturally transforms relationships based on nearness, presence, or contact into relationships of identity; such transformations are encouraged by ignorance of the clear and inviolable separations among various elements of the natural order, which are believed to blend into one another, justifying all imaginable metamorphoses, exogamies, and conceptions.<sup>20</sup> These relationships of identity lead to an unshakable belief in simultaneous existence: in this case, the double aspect of the feminine mystery, womanly and vegetable, both sharing an absolute reality without any symbolic allusion. In such a way Paleolithic man finally saw woman as a small earth and the earth as an immense female, indissolubly united through the privilege of maternity common to both. Thus there was ever more deeply rooted in the Paleolithic mind a religion of the earth, mother and nurse, whole light was reflected upon the minor queens of families, mothers as the earth, nourishing as the earth, closely linked to earth by mysterious ties which the slower mentality of men could not grasp. Women were little mothers as compared to the great mother, universal generatrix; they were elevated by the supreme goddess to a divine function simply because of that sovereign dignity, the highest of all.

Besides this we must not forget the perfect accord established between a matriarchate of feminine prestige and privilege and the specifically con-

17. F. J. Dölger, *Der heilige Fisch*, etc. (Münster im Westf., 1922), p. 186 (in a hymn to Ishtar-Tamuz).

18. U. Pestalozza, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19; 41-42; 66-67; 70.

19. *Cantique des Cantiques*, IV, 13 ff., VII, 2; P. Haupt, *Biblische Liebeslieder* (Leipzig, 1907), p. 90, nn. 35, 36; p. 34 ff., n. 20; U. Pestalozza, *op. cit.*, p. 13, pp. 20-22. For the Paleolithic flora, see H. Obermaier, *Diluvialflora*, in the *Lexikon der Vorgeschichte* (Berlin, 1924), II, pp. 414-419.

20. U. Pestalozza, *op. cit.*, p. 16 ff., p. 223, p. 270 ff.

servative function of woman within the community: woman was enriched by all the experiences and all the values known from then on, the most important of which were these mystical relations with Mother Earth, imperceptible to the senses and yet real. This function tended essentially to keep, to nourish, to save from degeneration habits established with difficulty. Woman would, for thousands of years, guard faithfully the traditions developing out of such habits. Let us go a step further and employ an expression in no way anachronistic when applied to the era under consideration: woman was already functioning as guardian of home and fireside in the fullest meaning of this expression. Certain analogies between the hearth and the mystery of woman, which were real identifications in ancient times—they persisted into Ancient Greece—go back to this pre-historic era. *Eskhara*, a word of Mediterranean base, meant hearth in general but also denoted the wooden tablet used in ritual lighting of the fire, and the feminine *aidoion*, very precisely described.<sup>21</sup> Here we grasp the primitive conception which identified woman, source and giver of life, with the domestic hearthside, in its turn a source of life by means of heat and light. It is as if the woman, mystically become one with the *eskhara*, provided from within herself the warming and light-giving flame. While there is no doubt that this image was born in the Mediterranean Paleolithic, it is curious to note that it appears elsewhere in accordance with the ever valid law of elementary ideas. A myth of British New Guinea recounts the story of an old woman who prepared food for the men in the heat of the sun but cooked her own food secretly by fire from her own private parts. The rest of the story tells us that this is no ordinary woman, but rather a magic “rainmaker,” related to the serpent who is himself related to fire: she is in a word an epiphany of the earth.<sup>22</sup> It should also be observed that the Italian Mediterranean substratum maintained much more fully than the Greek this primitive mystical identification of woman and hearth in the figure of Vesta, not a divinity of the hearth, but a hearth-goddess, whose sanctity was more vital and operative than that of Hestia; it was preserved in the order of Vestals, originally virgins of a very particular sort of virginity, for already they enjoyed a divine subsidiary, the “genius Populi Romani,” always present above the hearth as a *fascinus qui*

21. U. Pestalozza, *Pagine di Religione Mediterranea* (Milan, 1945), pp. 69–70; *Religione Mediterranea*, p. 231.

22. C. G. Seligmann, *The Melanesians of British New Guinea* (Cambridge, 1910), pp. 379–380; P. Hambruch, *Südseemaerchen* (Jena, 1931), p. 68.



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*deus inter sacra romana a Vestalibus colitur*,<sup>23</sup> (“phallus which is worshipped as a God in the Roman sacred rites by the Vestals”) they were in the most extreme degree tabu to human contact.

We may say here that we have arrived at a conclusion: a primitive matriarchate is possible, for it is born spontaneously of the attitude of prehistoric man toward woman in whom he recognizes and admits an explicit superiority heightened by the aura of mystery surrounding her; this superiority fills him with a feeling not too far from adoration: *aidos*, as the Greeks put it, a word which has inspired my friend Kerenyi in some of his most important pages. Prehistoric man venerates woman in the disturbing periodic sign of the feminine nature, in the astonishing autonomy of mother and nurse, in the extreme assurance and liveliness of instinct and intelligence, in the domain of a magic world closely linked to the vegetable world. Paleolithic man derives an ensemble of particularly profound impressions from the physiology and the psychology of woman; he interprets these in a completely rudimentary way; they are penetrated by the mystic sense which, unaffected by the law of contradiction, obeys with docility, on the contrary, the law of participation; according to this law, in the collective representations of primitive mentality, objects, beings, and phenomena can, in a manner incomprehensible to us, be at the same time themselves and something else. In other words, Paleolithic man lived in the affective category of the supernatural, where nothing is rationally perceived, but everything is mystically felt.<sup>24</sup> This ensemble of ineffaceable impressions already favored as a natural consequence in the age which concerns us, the genesis of the matriarchate, independent of any cyclico-cultural consideration and, with the matriarchate, the birth of the religion of the mother. We must only stop speaking—and more from polemic taste than from real conviction, I would say—of an absolute preponderance of woman in the matriarchate and of a religion exclusively feminine.<sup>25</sup>

No serious scholar interested in the matriarchal phenomenon has ever been known to refer to an absolute matriarchate. The matriarchate is a social phenomenon where the woman, for reasons we have seen, occupies a position of particular prestige within the field established by her own

23. Pliny, *Natural History* XXVIII, 39. See J. G. Frazer, *Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship* (London, Macmillan, 1905), p. 221. See also pp. 218–220. For real hearths with remains of burnt wood from the upper Paleolithic, see C. Maviglia, *La Civiltà Paleolitiche*, p. 28.

24. J. Przulski, *La Participation* (Paris, Alcan, 1940), pp. 3–4; U. Pestalozza, *Religione Mediterranea*, p. 15.

25. See M. Eliade, *op. cit.*, pp. 31 ff.

nature; the situation is honestly recognized by the men, the exercise of whose functions is equally important to the well-being of the community. Such was the rule, which had its exceptions however, for behind the figures of Semiramis and the Amazons one senses a very special feminine preponderance. For my part, I concur completely with the views of Charles Picard,<sup>26</sup> who sees the Amazons as deriving from a Pre-Hellenic social and religious state, established after the cult of the Great Goddess in southern Russia and in Anatolia (Momolina Marconi points out that the Amazons were the “very faithful ones” of the Asiatic Great Mother<sup>27</sup>) had undergone at one and the same time its political and its military development. Nothing could be more sensible and plausible. I would add that in the Pre-Hellenic world, as J. G. Frazer has shown with abundant examples,<sup>28</sup> the chief of state was usually a foreigner who became king upon marrying the eldest daughter of his predecessor. Obviously such a marriage reflected upon the queen a new prestige which heightened her fundamental prestige, that of being a woman. Neither can one speak seriously of an exclusively feminine matriarchal religion which, in my opinion, is unimaginable. A religion of the mother thus conceived would be deprived of those basic elements of contrast which are one of its most striking characteristics. A religion of the mother, that is of the female deified and identified with the earth, itself mother and nurse, is inconceivable without a whole series of masculine deities or, let us say, divine males, who are subordinate to her. The brother, the son, subsidiaries of the Great Goddess, are constituent figures in the religion of the mother; together with her they form the basis of the religion. A supreme female deity emerges who possesses—and often unleashes—all the instincts of her sex, and who at the same time shares with women (and this is profoundly admirable) the difficulties inherent in their nature (Leto endures the pains of childbirth for nine long days and nights), all the while enjoying a generative autonomy, the form and guarantee of her supreme liberty. It is for this very reason that she is so often virgin, for an intact, immaculate state of nature, to which no external force has ever done violence, is no doubt the state which represents, confirms, and proclaims the ideal of absolute independence in its most perfect form. But equally congenial in her nature are autogenerative maternity, accomplished without mating, and which

26. Ch. Picard, *Ephèse et Claros* (Paris, Boccard, 1922), p. 449.

27. Momolina Marconi, *Riflessi mediterranei nella più antica religione laziale* (Milan, 1939), p. 103.

28. J. G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, pp. 239 ff.

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originates in the fulguration of a god or a man. Between these two poles, the virginal sign which she loses or magically reestablishes at will, and the maternal sense, the divine and human life of the Great Goddess unfolds.<sup>29</sup>

That the cult of the mother (the Earth-Mother) forms the nucleus of Mediterranean religion is, I believe, an unquestionable truth, just as a religion of the mother presupposes the existence of matriarchal communities. The two terms are inseparable. Traces and occasionally vivid evidence of the ancient matriarchate are frequent all the way from the Anatolian to the Iberian worlds, in Crete, the Aegean Islands, Greece, Egypt, Libya, Italy and its islands, and north Africa as far as the Pillars of Hercules.<sup>30</sup> Following from this, and from what has been shown in these pages, it is entirely legitimate to conclude that even in the Mediterranean basin, the matriarchate must go back beyond the Neolithic, therefore beyond the origins of agriculture, and precisely to the upper Paleolithic, where, as I have attempted to show, there existed in nature and in life the most favorable conditions for the birth of the matriarchate.

In a tantric work, the *Shaktisamgama-Tantra* (I quote from the very recent and interesting pages of Giuseppe Tucci in his *Earth in India and Tibet*<sup>31</sup>) are the following lines:

Woman is the creator of the universe.  
She is the veritable body of the universe;  
    woman is the support of the three worlds,  
    she is the true essence of our body.  
There exists no happiness other than that which woman can give.  
There exists no other way than that which woman can open to us.  
There has never existed, nor exists, nor will exist.  
    a fortune comparable to a woman; no reign,  
    nor place of pilgrimage, nor yoga, nor prayer,  
    nor mystic formula, nor asceticism, nor riches.

If we bear in mind—as Mr. Tucci points out—that the *Tantras*, the branch of Indian literature most often scorned, found their basic religious conception in the deepest regions of the pre-Aryan world; that their *Shakti*, “the most sacred of sacred things,” derives not from the

29. U. Pestalozza, *op. cit.*, pp. 37–38. See also the *Preludio*.

30. R. Briffault, *The Mothers* (London, 1952), Vol. 1, pp. 388–414. See also V. Bertoldi, *Onomastica Iberica e Matriarcato Mediterraneo*. Reprinted from *Revista Portuguesa de Filologia*, Vol. II (Coimbra, 1948).

31. In *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 1953, Vd. XXII (Zurich, 1954), pp. 359–360.

Vedic *Prithivi* but from the aboriginal mothers, products of primeval intuitions preceding any exercise of reason, cosmic or moral research; that these mothers are skilled as creative powers which are never exhausted and which support everything that exists—like incarnations of the mystery of life and death, sometimes terrible and frightening, sometimes good and helpful; that they are identified by their worshipers with the earth and thus become miniature earth-mothers; that these mothers are born of the same archetype and are reflected in a considerable series of very changeable forms within their fundamental unity, confused here and there today with a *Dūrga* or a *Kālī*; if we recall that extraordinary yeast of feminine religion which fermented in the most primitive sub-stratum of India, we get the impression that something similar must have been operative in the consciousness of upper Paleolithic man, to whom the verses of the *Tantras* quoted above might not have been incomprehensible; I believe he would also have understood the following verse, which is also taken from the *Tantras*:<sup>32</sup>

“By adoring Kumari (the maiden fully blossoming in her adolescence) Man bends the Universe to his will.”

32. *Op. cit.*, p. 361.