

THE ETHNIC UNCONSCIOUS

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BETWEEN THE PERSONAL and the collective unconscious lies a layer of psychological material about which very little is known. This layer consists of pockets of ethnic influence and for this reason I refer to it as 'the ethnic unconscious'. These pockets reveal themselves usually in the form of very dramatic dreams that are generally mistaken for either personal dreams or dreams arising out of a deeper, more truly collective level. The layer of the ethnic unconscious, however, is not personal because it is composed of contents that pre-date the life of the individual and that did not enter into the unconscious of the individual through the senses. This layer may be thought of as collective only in the sense that it is shared by all people; however, the symbols that are its contents appear as particular ethnic expressions rather than in the shape and guise of the more generalised, elementary archetypes. It is truly an *intermediate* layer.

Though Jung argues for two primary divisions of the unconscious (personal and collective), he also argues without elaboration, for several intermediate layers between these two divisions. This is most clearly seen in the model he used for a lecture on the structure of the psyche (HANNAH 4): Since layers B, C and D consist of contents that could easily be made conscious, I assume the only truly intermediate layer to be E. It is difficult to categorise clearly these layers and probably the best approach is to see the contents of the psyche as existing along a continuum. This was Jung's way:

The deeper 'layers' of the psyche lose their individual uniqueness as they retreat farther and farther into darkness. 'Lower down', that is to say as they approach the autonomous functional systems, they become increasingly collective until they are universalised and extinguished in the body's materiality, i.e. in chemical substances (JUNG 5, p. 173).

However, dream material is rising into conscious view at this time which lends greater understanding to the layer of 'ethnic groupings', and which seem to mark this layer off as peculiar to itself, a true 'third' to be added to the personal and the collective unconscious (see Fig. 1).

How do we know such a layer exists at all? As with the other divisions of the unconscious, the most accessible form in which to examine it is mythology. In myths we find elements that cover the entire continuum of

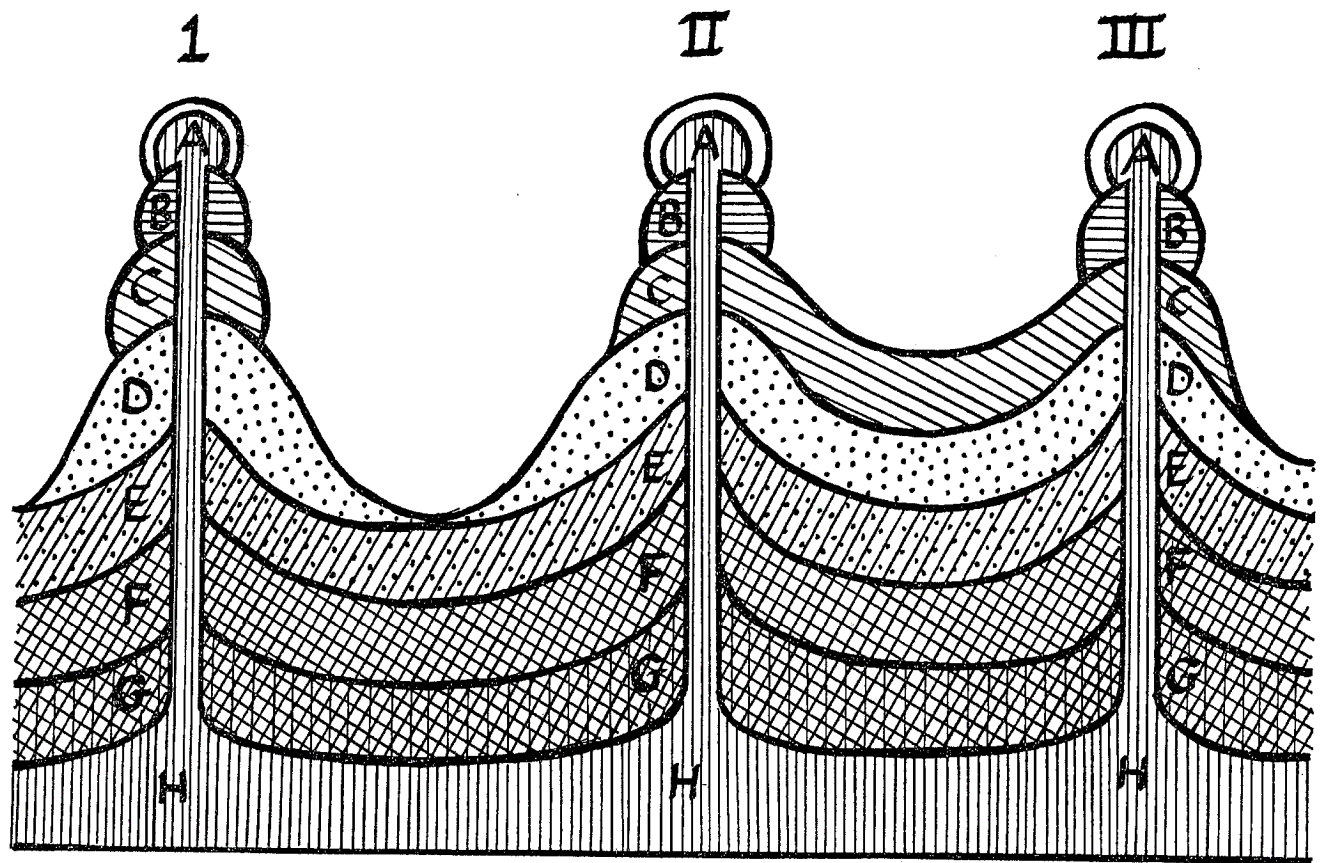


Fig. 1. A. Individual (highest point)—Vermilion; B. Family—Crimson; C. Clan—Green; D. Nation—Yellow; E. Large group (e.g. Europe)—Ochre; F. Primeval ancestors—Light Brown; G. Animal ancestors in general—Dark Brown; H. Central fire—Vermilion.

psychic layers, but myths are usually seen in the light of their ethnic setting. Dreams are only rarely seen this way, yet there are dreams—what I prefer to call ‘ethnic dreams’—that seem to be pure expressions of a particular culture. They seem to carry the spirit of a people in such a way that the whole ‘mood’ or ‘atmosphere’ of the dream is more important than any one particular symbol. It is a mistake, therefore, to examine the symbols of these dreams primarily as expressions of cross-cultural archetypes, even though the symbols may be of a collective nature. This can be seen only by looking at a dream.

The dream I wish to examine is the dream of a thirty-four-year-old American male:

I am with a group of friends, visiting a public park in Egypt. It is an ‘archaeological park’. The general public is allowed to dig into the sand in this park to search for ancient artifacts, but if any are found they must be turned into the park authorities who turn them over to the archaeologists for study. The park is mostly desert, but there are clumps of palm trees, three or four to a group, scattered through the park. Intuitively, I know that I will find something very important, but that it must be from a particular historical period, neither too ancient nor too recent. It must be from a ‘middle’ period.

I find something immediately in the sand. It is an ancient kneeling figure with its arms stretched up over its head in a posture of supplication. It is covered with much sand and I work very hard to brush all the sand away. The figure is crudely made and I know at once that it is not the object I am instructed to unearth. I give it to my friends, who are amazed that I found something so easily. They take it to the park authorities.

Then I feel something in my hands. Looking down I see the object I am looking for (see Fig. 2). It consists of a sculpted hand with ancient writing I am unable to read, a ring-shape with a tangent line, and a long, pencil-thin black cobra sculpted intertwined around the ring. I know this object to be from the ‘middle’ period. I am stunned at its beauty. Suddenly, however, I realise the cobra is alive and is uncoiling itself and hissing at me. In panic I hand the entire piece to my five-year-old son. Unafraid, he removes the cobra and flings it in my face. I was scared to death and woke up screaming. The last thing I saw was the ring with the tangent line.

This dream is Egyptian in nature and its ‘Egyptian-ness’ evokes themes that are missed if the dream is seen only as an expression of the deeper layers of the unconscious. Three symbols in the dream point to Egyptian themes that the man was not conscious of: the *shen* (the ring with the tangent line), the cobra, and the hand with the ancient writing. In the *New Larousse encyclopaedia of mythology* (8) the following picture appears (see Fig. 3). This figure is the goddess Uatchit, the cobra goddess of ancient Egypt’s Northern Kingdom. She is seen winding through the *shen*, the ancient Egyptian symbol for eternity, the rising sun on the horizon. This goddess, according to an ancient hymn copied down in the twentieth dynasty (1200 BC, but much older than that in origin) was flung into the face of the ancient phallic, solar deity Min-Amon as he made his journey into the netherworld (MULLER 7). This symbol is mentioned by name in only a few texts (BUDGE 1, CAMPBELL 3, LANGE & HIRMER 6) and the man who had the dream had no knowledge of having seen it before, though

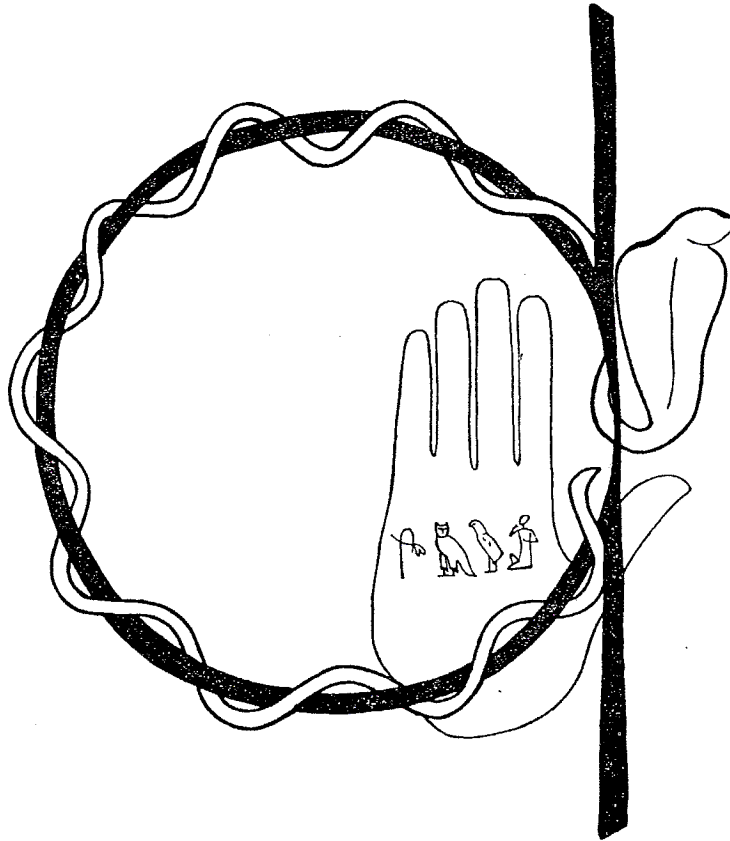


Fig. 2

this possibility must be admitted. However, he positively had no knowledge of its meaning.

The second symbol is that of the cobra, already recognised as the goddess Uatchit. Chapter 172 of *The book of the dead* describes the embalming of the deceased Pharaoh by a priest who chants the following:

The Goddess Uatchit cometh unto thee in the form of the living uraeus cobra to anoint thy head with their flames. She riseth up on the left side of thy head and she shineth from the right side of thy temple without speech; they rise up on thy head during each and every hour of the day, even as they do for their father, Ra, and through them the terror which thou inspirest in the holy spirits is increased, and because Uatchit and Nekhebet rise upon thy head, and because thy brow becometh the portion of thy head whereon they establish themselves, even as they do upon the brow of Ra, and because they never leave thee, awe of thee striketh into the souls which are made perfect (BUDGE 2, pp. 443-4).

Uatchit is the twin-sister of the vulture goddess, Nekhebet. As Uatchit is the goddess of the North, the Delta Region, Nekhebet is the goddess of the South. The Pharaohs in their tomb inscriptions preferred to place re-

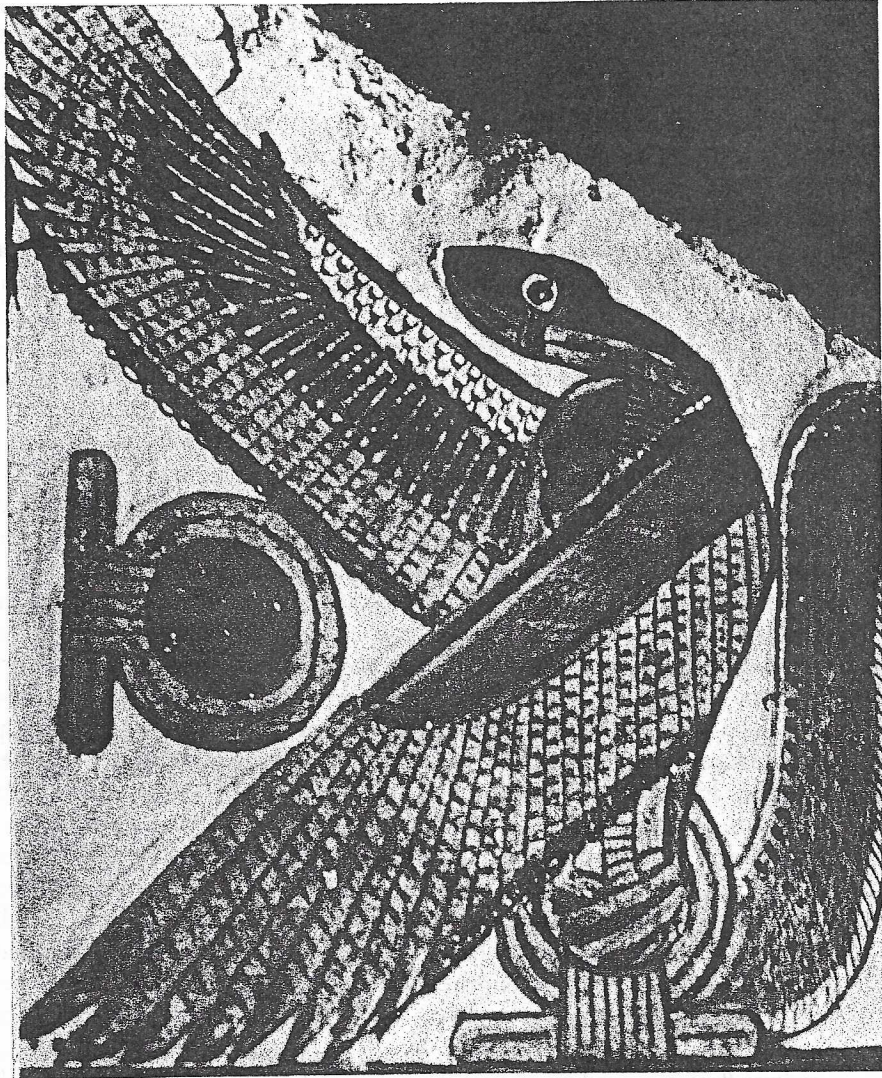


Fig. 3

presentations of the signs for Nekhebet and Uatchit before their names to indicate their sovereignty over both kingdoms. When they died, as is seen in the quotation from *The book of the dead*, these two goddesses assumed their place on the Pharaoh's brow as a sign of his power and protection by them for his journey in the netherworld. Repressed during the period of Akhnaton, these figures along with the *shen* make a dramatic reappearance during the reign of Tutankhamun, the half-brother of Akhnaton.

Finally, the symbol of the raised hand is important in Egyptian art. It appears in a number of places, but its most significant manifestation is in the image of the archaic god Min, an early form of Amon-Ra and Osiris. Min is, like Uatchit, a deity of Lower Egypt. He is always depicted holding his erect phallus in his left hand and raising an open right hand. He is a vegetation god who is usually pictured standing in a desert region with groves of three or four palm trees behind him. This is the same type of setting that the man's dream takes place in.

To go thoroughly into the meaning of this symbolism in the life of the dreamer would, unfortunately, be a vast project. It should be taken into consideration, however, that this man was in the midst of a divorce from his wife of thirteen years and was in a state of deep depression. The ancient symbols of the *shen*, the cobra, and the raised hand suggested to the dreamer that his own suffering might bear a special relationship to Egyptian religion. The quick glance that we have taken into Egyptian symbolism suggests a possible answer to the question of why this man had this particular dream at this time of his life. The dreamer sensed a connection between his own depression and the descent of Min-Amon into the Egyptian netherworld. The flinging of the cobra into his face by his own son seemed to echo for him the flinging of the uraeus in the face of the ancient god. In its Egyptian context the cobra's function was protection. Upon learning this, the dreamer wondered if the cobra in his dream might have come to protect him from the forces of his own unconscious. These intuitions were strengthened when he recalled a dream he had written into his journal three days after he had had the dream of the cobra:

I dreamed I was sleeping at my cousin's house on the floor. While sleeping an enormous vulture flew in a window up near the ceiling and descended over my body where it wrapped its wings about me in a death-like grip. I struggled to free myself but could not. I lost consciousness and felt I had died. She must have released me because I revived, but she returned over and over again to repeat the process of killing me and letting me go. This continued until morning when she returned for the last time, only this time she simply hovered over my body and did not squeeze me with her wings. Now I could see her true form: she was a beautiful woman. She stared deeply into my eyes and I was transfixed. I tried to kiss her but her body was transparent and I could not touch her. We stared into each other's eyes for a long time, then she disappeared.

Later in the dream I tried to tell some friends what had happened, but in the middle of my telling as we walked along a street I looked to my right and caught the eye of a very large Afghan hound with shaggy hair. Her stare penetrated me again. I knew it was the vulture-goddess and that she would return that night.

This vulture, the man felt certain, was Nekhebet, the twin-sister of Uatchit, and came to him in the night for the same purposes of protection that had drawn the cobra. What had initially appeared as a nightmare with only negative connotations now seemed a good omen.

In addition, the historical connections are important. The dreamer, in looking into Egyptian history, felt a deep connection between his dream and the period of Pharaoh Akhnaton (Amenophis IV: 1364–1347 BC). During this period the *shen* symbol disappeared from the royal art and the assumption is that it must have been suppressed along with the images of the god Amon as part of the Tel Amarna suppression of the Theban priesthood. Without going into detail, this period was of extreme psychological importance in the development of Egypt. Like fourteenth-century Egypt, the dreamer suddenly found himself in a situation of newly-developed consciousness. He felt disoriented and uprooted, somewhat like the average Egyptian must have felt during the Tel Amarna period. He was learning more about life, according to his own account, than he could hold in his consciousness. He was learning too much too rapidly. The symbol of the *shen* speaks eloquently to such a psychological state, whether it be in ancient Egypt or in a modern dreamer, by reminding the newly-developed consciousness of something old and more stable, i.e. the eternal cycle of death and return. Because of the details provided in the mythology and in the history, the *shen*, the particular ethnic expression of the archetype, has more to say concerning the dilemma than does the more generalised image of the circle.

Another example of an ethnic dream, also Egyptian, is that of an eight-year-old boy:

I was walking down a pathway with trees on both sides, a mountainous area. As I was walking I carried a camping bag over my shoulder. I noticed a big cave covered with old branches and small rocks. It seemed as if someone had tried to cover it but had not done a very good job. I entered the cave which was very dark; however, I had a flashlight in my camping bag and I used it. As I walked through the cave, the opening got smaller and smaller until I had to crawl through. All of a sudden the small pathway opened up into a huge cavern. It was so big that when I put the light up against the ceiling or opposite wall it did not reflect. I put the light in the direction of the floor and began to walk. I noticed some writing on the wall of stone. The writing looked like this:



and there were many of them all along the wall. I walked on and picked up a stick to use as a cane. I could not help but notice how damp and cold everything seemed to be.

Suddenly I fell down. The flashlight rolled away and off a ledge. I looked but I could not find it, then I heard the loud splash of it hitting the water below. I began to panic and moved on my hands and knees. I felt an edge and backed up. I found the stick and took my shirt off to use as a torch. I was really frightened and could not find my way out.

I stayed close to the wall because it seemed to be only a ledge and I could not see the bottom. I moved faster and faster in a panic to get out, when suddenly I fell down again. The torch went out and I was again in total blackness. I began frantically looking for the torch when suddenly I grabbed a snake of some sort. It was slimy cold and very big in width. When I grabbed it it moved. I jumped back and slipped, falling off the ledge. I woke up screaming and my parents came into the room.

When my parents left I fell back asleep and had a second dream. It began in a strange place I had never seen before. I was not completely aware of what was going on and things did not make sense. Then two men seemed to drift in and took me away. They were dressed in unusual clothes that I cannot remember. I do remember that one of the men was wearing two gold bands on the upper part of each arm.

The next thing I knew I was on a boat or ship of some kind. It seemed like an Egyptian boat with men on both sides rowing the boat. I could not tell exactly where I was in the boat. As I looked down I saw an odd-looking stand at the far end of the boat, made of very dark wood. Next to this stand was a short chair with a very high back. The men kept rowing, when through an archway a woman appeared. She was very beautiful with dark skin, black hair, and wearing a gown that came down to the floor. Around her neck and shoulders was some sort of a necklace that was made of gold. Around her head was a very thin gold band with a cobra in the middle where her forehead was. The cobra had a jewel in its eye. She did not speak a single word but pointed down to a very big black man who was rowing the boat. Two men walked to him and he stopped rowing. Then they all walked away.

In this dream also the theme of appropriate protection in the netherworld is developed by means of Egyptian symbolism. One cannot help but recall the spells cast against the underworld serpents in *The ancient pyramid texts*. The question again suggests itself of why this particular imagery would come up in the dream of an eight-year-old boy raised in an American Roman Catholic home where there had been no exposure to Egyptian symbolism. As in the case of the first dreamer, the dream occurred at the time of a crisis in family life. The details, though interesting in themselves, would not materially strengthen my theme. I simply wish to point out that there is an ethnic group composed of Egyptian symbols in the unconscious of modern man, just as there are ethnic groups of Celtic, Teutonic, and native American symbols.

It should also be noted that, as far as I can tell, the ethnic dreams that I have collected have not arisen because of the influence of my ideas on the dreamers. In fact I developed my ideas *after* collecting the dreams. I have collected many ethnic dreams in the last few years and most of these have come to me from people who knew nothing of my ideas regarding the ethnic unconscious. I feel convinced that the abundance of dreams of this type tells us something important concerning certain processes in the psyche and that these processes would occur whether I had developed my theory or not.

An adequate detailed model is essential if appropriate interpretation of ethnic dreams is to be possible. To have a single stratum with no detail serve as a model for that part of the mind that developed between our earliest ancestors and the modern nation-state is not sufficient. I propose,

therefore, the following model as a detailing of the model Jung has already provided.

The model I propose is by no means definitive. I conceive of the major ethnic groupings functioning somewhat in the manner of rows of hammers inside a piano with each ethnic group represented by a single hammer. A row of such hammers struck at the lowest line would represent the parallel development of those first true civilisations (Egypt, Sumer, India, and China) which in the words of Kurt Lange, '... after an early rejection of barbaric elements, have contrived to develop a systematic style coinciding with the richest and purest possibilities of human endeavour' (LANGE & HIRMER 6, p. 1). A note struck by a single civilisation would resonate against the hammers of contemporary and later civilisations like synapse between nerve endings. When the hammers representing these more ancient ethnic groups struck the strings at a later time, their particular sound would be not only their own, but would be their own sound as affected by the preceding resonance. These sounds would in turn affect the sounds made by even later ethnic groups.

In addition, the model shows (in this case only for Egypt, see Appendix) the various stages of development for each ethnic group. The intention is to aid the dream interpreter in the translation of the dream's meaning by

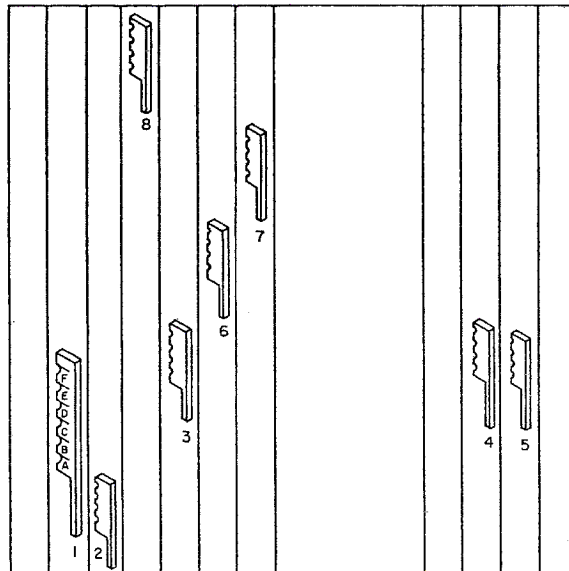


Fig. 4. 1. Egypt; 2. Sumer-Akkad-Babylonia; 3. Greece; 4. India; 5. China; 6. Rome; 7. Levant; 8. Europe.

Egypt's historical stages: A. Thinite Period (3000-2778 BC); B. Old Kingdom (2778-2263 BC); C. Middle Kingdom (2133-1786 BC); D. New Empire (1552-1085 BC); E. Late Period (1085-525 BC); F. Ptolemaic Period (305-30 BC).

locating the dream itself in as specific a historical period as is possible. The practicality of this attempt is based on the assumption that the psychology of the dream is related to the psychology of the period for that ethnic group. This can only be tested empirically by the use of dream material.

In summary, it should be said that ethnic dreams do not prove a blood descendance connection. For example, American Indian dreams appear in Americans whose family background is European only. In other words, the value of ethnic dreams is clearly symbolic. The unconscious presents images in their ethnic guise in order to communicate a meaning with greater detail, and the model I have proposed is intended to aid in the drawing out of these details. It is possible, for instance, that a psychological conflict left unresolved at the time it occurred in history is seeking a resolution in the life of the modern individual. The life of the individual, on the other hand, may stand in need of a resolution that was reached to a similar problem in the past. These connections should be made. Ethnic dreams should be seen in the light that renders their meaning most visible. It is probable that the themes developing out of their ethnicity will have a more far-reaching effect than will the meanings derived from examining the symbols at a lower, more collective stratum.

APPENDIX

BRIEF PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE OF THE STAGES OF EGYPTIAN HISTORY

1. *Thinite Period (3000–2778 BC)*

This period is chiefly characterised by the fact that the two kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt were united for the first time. A contributory factor in the uniting of the two Egypts was the conscious suppression of uncivilised elements and the consequent development of a rigidly held symbol system, peculiar to Egypt, that was to last for the next three thousand years. The symbolic expression of the union of the two Egypts generally took the form of Horus and Set, or two kings, holding intertwined plants around the hieroglyph signifying 'union'. The hieroglyphic system, itself, was developed during this period in order that the Egyptian establish for himself a new level of relationship with the gods. As a result, the Thinite Period is marked by great optimism and religious fervour, a period of intimate involvement with an array of newly developed symbols.

2. *Old Kingdom (2778–2263 BC)*

This was the period of the great Pharaohs, powerful personalities such as Zoser and Snofru, who were venerated as divine incarnations and could command without the benefit of a slavery system the construction of the great royal pyramids at Giza, Abusir, and Dashur, the sphinx at Giza, and the sun temples of Abu Gorob. It was the period of great artistic achievement that later generations looked to for inspiration when their own creative powers were waning. In addition, this was the period of development for the central Egyptian symbology surrounding the dead. The worship of the sun god became the national religion.

The beginning of the Old Kingdom was a time when the Egyptian lived in a stable and cohesive society, a period of psychological stability and relative calm, grounded on the deepest layers of psychological material. However, during the sixth dynasty, particularly during the reign of Merenre II, Egypt experienced a period of dramatic social upheaval as a result of the deterioration of Pharaonic power. The art of this time reflects the confusion and suffers from a regression to the undisciplined forms of the distant past. It was a period of profound disillusionment: what had seemed eternal, the institutions of the divinity and the monarchy, now seemed corruptible. The morality which had arisen naturally and unconsciously at the beginning of the Old Kingdom was at its conclusion suspect because it had been based on the concept of an 'eternal' tradition now seen as finite. Immortality itself was questioned for the first time and a period of insecure scepticism closed the age.

3. *Middle Kingdom (2133–1786 BC)*

The Middle Kingdom begins in the same mood of uneasiness and moral confusion that marked the end of the Old Kingdom. Reflecting this mood, the faces of the sculptures during this period express a sense of individual isolation. To counterbalance the tendencies toward political chaos, a movement in the direction of a centralised government was undertaken and a rejuvenated monarchy was established at Thebes. Nevertheless, this period is characterised by a great deal of mistrust and suspicion on the part of those in power; they had not forgotten the destruction of the previous monarchy at the hands of the rebellious nobles.

The Middle Kingdom marks that period in Egyptian history when the worship of the dead and resurrected Osiris received its greatest expression. Along with the worship of Osiris Egypt developed a new morality based on the notion that a positive judgement in the afterlife depended upon the lack of evil deeds committed in this life. Egypt's new sense of order and social stability did not last long. From 1835 to 1786 BC the new monarchy experienced a gradual loss of power and Egypt entered into another phase of political chaos, this one marked by foreign invasions.

4. *New Empire (1552–1085 BC)*

Immediately following the period of successive foreign invasions, there was an era of prodigious military and political power. The art of this period is known more for its abundance than for its high quality, and one senses a distant remove between artist and archetype. Foreign influences were gradually eroding away the intimate connection the Egyptian had felt with his own symbol system and a new sense of individualism was replacing the conservative traditions. The most extreme expressions of this new consciousness occurred during the reign of Akhnaton (1363–1347 BC), but this period was followed by a reaction that refocused attention on Egypt's time-honoured classical forms. The later period of the New Empire gloried in the production of gigantic buildings and sculptures as a show of national strength and Pharaonic power. With the passing of the last Rameses in 1085 BC, the New Empire concludes in an exhaustion of artistic creativity.

5. *Late Period (1085–525 BC)*

This was the period that saw the end of Pharaonic rule (525 BC) and the retaking of Egypt by foreigners. Nevertheless, in its old age, Egypt experienced several significant creative developments in the arts, especially during the twenty-sixth and thirtieth dynasties. This creativity was possible because of the conservative nature of the culture itself, and because the artists for their inspiration harked back to the days of the Old Kingdom with its

strict adherence to the archetypal structures. This honouring of Egypt's classical forms is all the more striking during the Late Period because it was during this period that foreign influences were at their highest point. On the other hand, there were also sculptors during this period who in a very bold manner struck out on new avenues of expression, particularly in the sculpting of the human form. The vitality of Egyptian portrait sculpture at this late stage can be measured by the profound influence it made upon the Greeks who were to develop this form to near perfection. Judging from the artistic expression of the Late Period, one senses in Egypt a fierce national pride, especially during the thirtieth dynasty, and an unwillingness to give into premature senility despite the Persian invasions.

6. Ptolemaic Period (305–30 BC)

Egypt experienced a resurgence of cultural creativity following the victory of Alexander the Great over the Persians. The ruling Ptolemies fostered a revival of the ancient gods of Egypt and the Egyptian priesthood responded with a gracious allegiance to the foreign kings. The Temple of Horus, constructed at Edfu, testifies to the vitality of the ancient symbol system even in Egypt's old age. Finally Egypt dies, but in a mood of religious strength that can be witnessed in the late architecture, specifically in the temple of the crocodile-headed god Suchos at Kom Ombo and the temple of Hathor at Dendera.

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