

## Labyrinth at Usgalimal Decoded – Goa - 1

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The labyrinth is the dominant central figure among the hundreds of other carvings at the petroglyphic site along the banks of the Kushavati River.

With stone as cutting tools, to carve out the hard iron-rich laterite rock bed, it must have been an undertaking involving hundreds of laborers, artisans working for many years. Such a project can only be carried out by skilled artisans and sky-watchers, all members of a structured society, under a powerful leader or a shaman. The slightly flattened circular figure has a diameter of 2.87m along the east-west axis by 2.7m, and, is tilted downwards towards the river.

This unique 3-dimensional labyrinth is considered to be the oldest in Asia by *Labyrinthos*, a publication dedicated to documenting similar engravings world-wide. At the Festival on Labyrinths at Hersonissos, Crete in 2013, the experts estimated that the labyrinth in Goa to be about 4500 years old.

Unlike a maze, with many dividing paths and dead ends frustrating the objective of reaching the center or the goal, the labyrinth at Usgalimal is a meandering one, with undivided continuous circular path - unicursal maze - leading to the center and back.



Labyrinth in England (source Alistair Park)



Model of the labyrinth



Labyrinth at Usgalimal

After studying several models to decipher the image, the one that fits very closely is that of a tightly-coiled python or a serpent with cup holes in the center and four creases or wrinkles at the folds. These “openings” at the folds could not be discerned readily, and, were most likely carved out so that the fructifying rain water or the sacrificial blood would flow freely throughout the labyrinth.

A pair of almost identical unicursal labyrinths (one shown above), discovered in 1948 on the rocky face of dark shale, along the southwest coast of England is estimated to be about 4000 years old.

The similarity in design between the labyrinths at these two sites, separated by nearly 8000 km is remarkable and it raises the question as to how this information was communicated in prehistoric times.

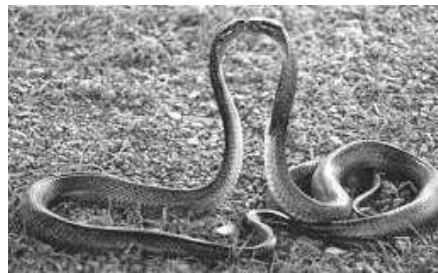
Interestingly, in 1852, Captain Meadows Taylor who had studied the habits, beliefs and history of the tribe in the village of Jivarji in Deccan, wrote; “The ancient remains at the village on the Bhima river.... appear evidently to belong to the same family as the Celtic and Druidical or Scythic of England and Brittany ... as well in Denmark, Russia ....”

The Druids viewed the Serpent with much respect, and treated it with veneration and, as a symbol of the sun. The Persians also worshiped the Serpent, which they considered as a representative of their god Mithras. According to B.H. Baden-Powel ... “there was an ancient serpent (and sun) worshiping race in Kashmir; that the people of Taxila, in Alexander’s time, were snake worshippers, and certainly not Aryans. It is possible that the known invasions about the time of Darius Hystaspes (sixth century B. C.) brought new Turanian tribes to North India. A Turanian royal family appears about that time to have succeeded to the earlier Aryan dynasty of the Magadha kingdom (E. Bengal). From them are derived the Andhra, who at one time dominated the upper part of the peninsula, and also the Nfiga or Snake Kings of Eastern Central India. These later invasions were of clans probably identical in race with the earliest Dravidians snakes or Alzi) of epic times” (Ref. Baden-Powell, B. H., The origin and Growth of Village Communities in India, London, 1908,

The other exotic carving of snake pairing (shown below) is a testimony of the artists’ intimate knowledge of their environment.



Carving at Usgalimal



Picture in real life - (source Internet)

Besides these two, the other carvings that depict snakes in various forms, suggest that the snake was one of core beliefs of the community. According to Marija Gimbutas, a native Lithuanian anthropologist/archaeologist, “The snake is the life force, a seminal symbol, epitome of the worship of life on this earth.... It is the energy exuded by this spiraling and coiled creature which transcends its boundaries and influencing the surrounding world.... They must have been guardians of the springs of life in prehistory, as they still are in the European folklore....” (*The Language of the Goddess*).

Snakes were also sacred symbols of the Great Goddess of the Minoan civilization (ca 3650 to 1400 BC), since, akin to the regeneration of the crops and edible plants in the springtime, they shed their skins or could be reborn.

The numerous rock carvings at one location in Usgalimal are indeed unique in the world, comparable to rock paintings of Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh, and, therefore must be protected similarly as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

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