



THE

# UNDERWORLD

in Myth, Magic and Mystery

*SYDNEY and JOAN BAGGS*

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# PREFACE

*Death is life and life is death*  
 (from the *Third Degree of the Eleusinian Mysteries*)  
 (Charles Leadbeater, 1910)

The sky over Le Loire River was a brilliant blue streaked with the vapour trails of Mirage aircraft. As my wife Joan and I descended into the gloom of the subterranean limestone cavern beneath the hamlet of Mousseaux in the district of Dénéze-sous-Doué, France, I recalled a past time when, as children, my friends and I dug deeply into the sand hills of Botany Bay in Sydney, Australia. There we created our own underground meeting place with cool sand walls and perforated metal supporting the sod roof. Half a century ago, we initiated each other into a 'secret' society. Now I was entering an underground space where rituals had probably been conducted by a secret society hundreds, or even a thousand years ago. This was one of several caverns in the district, all laboriously dug into butter-coloured, soft limestone. I could feel the nape of my neck prickle as I turned around. Some of the carvings appeared to depict initiatory rites while others could have been satanic. What had occurred here? Could this gloomy place have been a retreat where the workmen who carved the images over hundreds of years would have been safe from the cruel purges of the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

As our eyes adjusted to the dim light, startling faces and figures peered out from the gloom and I felt the same atavistic thrill experienced in my childhood hideout. Joan and I stared intensely into the dim shadows, not understanding the kaleidoscope of images around us. Some of the sculptures seemed to parody Bacchanalian scenes of ceremonies performed at a time when their practice was forbidden by the Church and punishable by torture or death. No wonder the people who carved those strange images, probably a guild of stonemasons, stonecutters and quarrymen had retreated to hidden and secure places such as Dénéze-sous-Doué. Elsewhere in the world, people had sought the security and safety of similar subterranean places to meet and conduct rituals that bound them together, bringing them closer to the natural world or deity they worshipped. Through countless millennia, the use of caverns has enabled the underground or Underworld to become an integral part of the human psyche.

Throughout our travels over the years in the United States, Britain, Europe, Russia, the Middle East, China, the Asian Pacific, Canada and Australia, we visited and measured many modern, historical and



prehistorical underground spaces. Sometimes we found sects or a priestly elite had used these places for rituals connected with esoteric teaching.

Joan and I have pursued the subject of underground space for some thirty years or so. Coupled with my lifelong interest in esotericism, prehistory and history (the basis of some of my teaching at The University of New South Wales) the knowledge gained formed the background to this book. Some of the material presented arose from discussions with my mentor (now deceased). He was Dr P. W. Van den Broek ('Wim' as he was known to his friends), humane physician, esotericist and philosopher. He freely gave of his time over more than two decades—often into the midnight hours. Yet for most of my professional life, I found that science only provided part of the historical and archaeological story. As an academic, architect/landscape architect and environmental scientist, I preferred the scientific path whenever possible. But as the years passed, I realised this approach often fell short. When such a deficiency was encountered, I looked beyond the physical sciences and decided to investigate both the esoteric and exoteric to follow the quest for the meaning of the 'Underworld'.

Researching the human use of underground space eventually had to be set aside for doctoral research and engaging in a university career, as well as in architectural practice. It was many years before I was able to devote more time to my interest in the Underworld.

# CHAPTER ONE

## AT THE PORTAL TO THE UNDERWORLD OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

*The logos of the soul, psychology, implies the act of travelling the soul's labyrinth in which we can never go deep enough.*

(James Hillman, 1979)

### **The Underworld as a Symbol in Depth Psychology**

Certain ancient cultures held the notion of a world beneath the earth's surface where the souls of the dead and various spirits resided. This concept is also held in some modern cultures. A reasonably common theme in many religions is that this region may be reached through an orifice in the earth's crust, that is, a tunnel, cave, dungeon, or even through the vent of a volcano (as in Icelandic tradition).

For many who follow the ideas of Freud or Jung, the general tendency in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis is to view the Underworld symbol as representing the unconscious, particularly in the Jungian tradition. Firstly, the nightly 'journey' into sleep and dreams can be likened to the journey of the mythical hero's descent into the depths of the Underworld and subsequent emergence into the Light. Secondly, it is a metaphor for initiation. In the general anthropological sense, it is the rite through which an initiate passes and usually experiences a transformation in social or religious status. Finally, the experience may be accompanied by imparting special knowledge to the initiate as a significant part of the initiation. Arunta Aboriginal Australians, the Ojibwa, Iroquois and Mohave Amerindian societies use dream initiation in similar ways (Lewis, 1995).

In all cultures, from a personal viewpoint, the unconscious is the repository of a past that can return to haunt us. This is the sense in which the unconscious was used in ancient religions. To better understand the effects of the unconscious, the psychoanalyst helps us try to resurrect the past and review it. We are asked to descend into our personal underworld, as did the ancient hero, and return with some long-lost part of the Self, back into the clear light of understanding and reason.

### **Dream Theory and the Underworld of the Unconscious**

When we spend around one third of our twenty-four-hour day in the sleep-underworld of the unconscious, we are in a state of forgetfulness and bodily ease. In the sleeping state, we dream. At certain times, once thought