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ROCK ART

An attempt to understand rock art motifs through ancient literature, epics of creation and the history of metals

IN WORKS AND DAYS (probably written down in the 9th century B.C.) by the Greek Hesiod, the first humans are described as a golden race, "living like gods without sorrow of heart, remote and free from toil and grief. When they died, it was as though they were overcome with sleep … they had all good things; for the fruitful earth unforced bare them fruit abundantly and without stint". "The second generation which was of silver was less noble by far … when they were full grown and were come to the full measure of there prime, they lived only a little time and that in sorrow because of their foolishness, for they could not keep from sinning and from wronging one another". The third generation, that of bronze, was violent, "… they ate no bread, but were hard of heart like adamant, fearful men … their armour was of bronze, and their houses of bronze, and of bronze were their implements: there was no black iron". "They passed to the dark house of chill Hades and left no name." Hesiod also mentions a fourth generation, the Heroes. They "… were a godlike race of hero-men who are called half-gods … these last equally have honour and glory." Hesiod then laments over his own position, because he lives in the generation of iron, "… where men never rest from labour and sorrow by day, and from perishing by night". (Hesiod p. 110-200).

When Hesiod describes the first three generations as gold, silver and copper/bronze, he alludes to metals, which were introduced at different times. He possibly also believes that the different properties of the metals may have brought about the growing cruelty and greed of man. In which way may the social behaviour of man be influenced by the availability of metals and knowledge of their properties? First, a brief outline of the qualities of gold, silver and copper.

Gold

Thousands of gold occurrences, most of them less profitable have been discovered in Europe alone. There, and in Caucasus, Ural and the Himalayas, the heavy gold has accumulated in sea-beds and rivers through erosion of the rock. Already in prehistoric times, gold was sifted in large quantities. Parrish (p. 116) estimates that almost 30.000 tons were collected from Europe and Asia before the discovery of the Americas. Around the Danube, Don and Donets, upper Euphrates and Tigris and their tributaries, native gold was recovered in great quantities. Native gold at 24 carats purity does not bond with oxygen, thus it does not mineralise. It is easy to work without melting. Certain heating of the gold is required before it can be stretched and shaped by beating. The material is soft and could be used only for jewellery, minting coin and the like; seldom for utensils and weapons.

Silver

Silver is found in late deposited mountain chains but seldom as a pure metal because

the mineral is constantly exposed to air and sulphur which easily bonds to silver. To melt and purify silver, higher temperatures were required. During Roman times, lead was added to the melted slurry causing lower temperatures. Silver is also a soft metal which is not suited for tools or weapons. It was used early for minting and gifts in the form of costly worked discs and bowls. Some daggers and arrowheads of gold and silver have been found (II, Primas p. 1-185).

Copper

The easily found, easily recovered and easily melted native copper also occur in geologically young regions. The earliest traces of man's use of copper were found in Anatolia, Caucasia (Armenia is rich in all precious metals), the Carpathians, the Alps and in the offsets of the Himalayas in India and the Far East. Artefacts of native copper (a certain amount of different impurities always occurred, mostly below 0.5%, although silver and arsenic impurities could reach 15%), have been found close to these mining areas but also in far-away regions which had no mineable native copper of their own, such as the northern part of Europe. These axes, razors, sickles, vessels, jewellery, wagons and so forth were seldom usable as tools but were intended for religious services. The shining copper brought from deep in the mountains reflected the sun in shields and pectorals. The threshold between day and night, to the entrance of the netherworld, was made of copper. "It is an immovable threshold of bronze having unending roots and it is grown in itself" says Hesiod in the Theogony (p. 730-810). In Gilgamesh, the threshold in Uruk is made of copper.

Early on, lead-rich copper-mineral was found and used in Etruria and Sardinia. In some areas the native copper, as mentioned above, contained the impurity arsenic, which made the copper hard and less prone to damage. When, where and how the miners found and learned how to alloy the copper with tin in order to get a tougher material, may be disclosed by analysing archaeological bronze artefacts for their chemical composition. When man understood how to mine, melt, purify and alloy copper-minerals which contained oxides, sulphates and other frequently occurring elements like lead, iron and silica, distribution and trade multiplied (Chernykh p. 104-122). Religious copper artefacts of earlier epochs were replaced by the stronger bronze, which now also was used to manufacture tools and weapons. The Bronze Age had replaced the Copper Age and continued for more than 2000 years in many areas. Already before the 3rd millennium B.C., Phoenicians traded copper and bronze artefacts beyond Gibraltar (Ghirshman p. 185)

Thus Mesopotamians and Hesiod had compared the social and technical evolution of man with his increasing use of different metals like the archaeologists did in the 19th century A.D.

Why did the bronze age come to an end?

A combination of causal connections may be put forward. When the cuneiform script gradually went out of use and was replaced by other scripts, old traditions could not be upheld. The cultural development in the West where Greek ratio and logos became the first steps towards democracy may have contributed to this transformation. Was religion intimately connected with the use of copper and bronze? Ancient religion had spread from Anatolia and Mesopotamia to Europe via areas rich in precious metals over the Black Sea further through the Hellespont and/or the Danube with its tributaries and Don and Donets. Different cultures in the transit areas may have influenced the intrinsic meaning of the religion as well as its physical manifestations.

Artefacts of bronze were gradually replaced by the accessible and forgeable, stronger iron. That changed the demand. In the 4th century B.C. Herod (p. 106), was surprised that the Massagetes still used weapons of bronze instead of iron. The large depots of poorly cast, destroyed and discarded bronze artefacts all over Europe bear witness that bronze had become obsolete. Had the itinerant craftsman no consumers any more? Some models of axes, daggers, razors and sickles had for some time been cut up and had possibly been used as means of payment (I, Primas p. 36, Weiler p. 140-145). The custom of interring the dead

Fig. 1. Der Geschmiedete Himmel. Disc of copper, showing the paths of the sun, the moon and the Pleiades. 1700 B.C. Nebra, Germany

with artefacts of bronze weakened. During the 8th century B.C. in Iran, a dip in the prize of copper minerals is observed. Was this caused by decreased demand? Iron was evidently better suited for the manufacturing of farming implements and weapons.

Still copper and bronze must have had a religious significance which would not have been understood in a culture based on iron. Herod mentions that the god Apollo could only use razors made of bronze. Razors are deposited in most Bronze Age male burials in Northern Europe. Mostly, it is the eternally young Apollo and other youths which are represented beardless on reliefs and statues. Eternal youth was then, as now, hotly coveted and idolised. Old age and death was something to be vanquished, or at least postponed.

In addition, did the knowledge of the ancient astronomers (based on their observation of the changing star-filled sky during thousand of years), no longer correspond with the present? Could they not foresee the future any more? Did the priests have to move further from their earlier homes to be able to envisage the will of the gods? The Bronze Age chronology coincides in time with the majority of rock art in Europe.

Fig. 2. Astrolab. Bronze, mechanism showing time and months. 1st century B.C. Antikythera, Greece

The idea of universe in ancient Babylonia

To understand the culture, the significance of the stars has to be understood. Nilsson (1995) writes that the starry heaven can be regarded as an ancient monument with connection to most epics of creation as in the Epic of Gilgamesh, Enuma elish, the Old Testament and the Theogony forwarded in cuneiform scripts, reliefs and seals. In ancient Mesopotamia, as in Greece, the Earth was conceived as a flat disc surrounded by perilous water, Okeanos. Above the Earth, the sky formed a vault. Underneath the flat Earth was the shadowy dark netherworld. Thus, the starry heaven was viewed from underneath by man from Earth, his centre of universe. 1632, Galileo Galiei published his conclusion that the Earth was not the centre of universe. For this, the church placed him under a ban that lasted 200 years. Before Galilei, man believed that Earth was the centre of universe.

The periodical movements of the Sun, the Moon and the planets were more reliable for man than the unexpected changes that occurred on the flat Earth where he lived. During thousands of years, man had observed that the starry sky changed during the year from dusk to dawn in fixed paths. These yearly recurrent changes were used as a calendar which also established the equinox. Man organised his life according to the positions of the stars. The different phases of the Moon, the waxing and waning of the crescent, determined the division of the year into twelve months (Robson p. 46, 52-56, 72). The eclipse of the Sun and the Moon must have been regarded as disasters, but with time they could be predicted. Today, there is concrete evidence that Bronze Age man had learned to follow the movements of the stars. The updated sun-disc "Der geschmiedete Himmel" (2004) from Nebra in Germany dated to approximately 1700 B.C. (fig. 1) and the astrolab from Antikythera in Greece probably the 1st century B.C. (fig. 2) (Sempler 2009) bear witness to a highly developed technical capacity born out of an urgent need to foretell the future.

Depending on when the stars and planets appeared in the sky during the year, how they related to each other and other phenomena was either feared or longed for on Earth, as for example the Lion and the Scorpion signifying heat and drought, Aquarius bringing water and sometime deluge, the Twins and Libra with

the coming of spring and autumn equinox (Homès-Frédericq p. 44-48). The constellations of the stars were named after animals or occurrences common to the season; these then became synonymous with gods who supposedly controlled everything on Earth. In the myth, a god or goddess could appear in animal form and thus he or she could be confused with an animal. Hence an animal could embody a god and was consequently worshiped.

Variation in the paths of the Sun, the Moon, the stars and the planets could take a long time to confirm, but some could be observed from one generation to next. When a star or an entire constellation disappeared from the firmament, a new époque ensued. The astrologers feared this vanishing because it signified that something unexpected was going to happen. The reappearing of a constellation above the edge of the disc of the Earth was regarded as a good sign. The paths of the celestial bodies were also differently understood depending on where on the earth-disc they were viewed compared with the original observations made much earlier in Sumer (Robson p. 49-51, 69-72).

The knowledge of the paths of the Sun, Moon and the planets among the stars and their believed consequences for man was common knowledge in most civilizations around the Mediterranean. Today, as in ancient time, the path of the Zodiac is envisioned as a route where the sun, Helios, passes through the 12 constellations in the sky. This plane is called the ecliptic and crosses the equatorial plane at the points of spring and autumn equinox. The celestial equator, the assumed plane in the sky parallel to the Earth's equator, divides the sky in the northern and southern hemisphere and it crosses the ecliptic plane in two points. When the Sun is at these two points, the day and the night is equally long, the so called equinoxes.

The Moon has an orbital plane that is inclined to the ecliptic and it also crosses the ecliptic plane in two points. Only when the Moon and the Sun are close to any of these points at almost the same time a total solar eclipse will occur. The plane of the Moon revolves one time in the sky during a period of circa 18.6 years. Can these occations be connected with the times ripe to design radiant

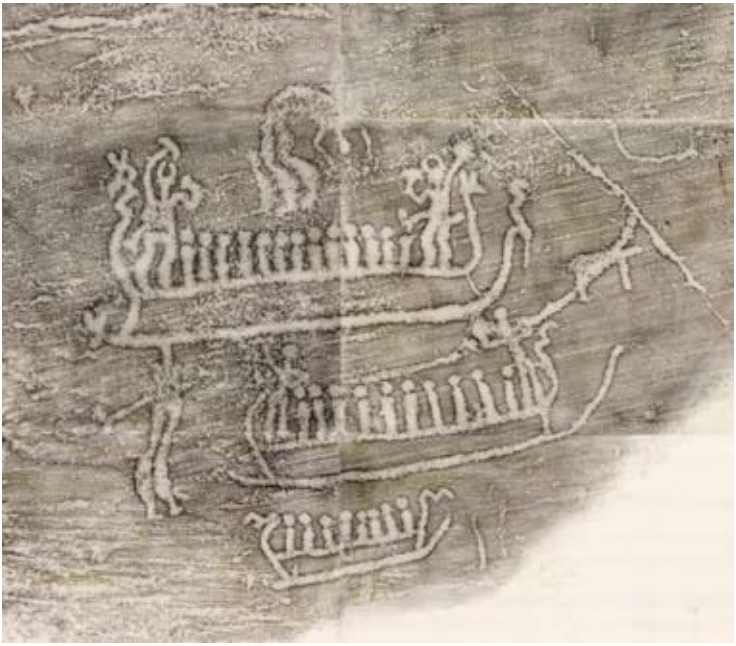


Fig. 3. Somersaulting twins on rock art panel 356 in Tanum. Rubbing: Tanums HällristningsMuseum.

suns on the rocks in Scandinavia like those at the Fossum panel?

Gods and their "platforms" in the sky

In the EPIC of GILGAMESH written down probably around 20th century B.C., the son of the king in Uruk, Gilgamesh, undertook a long perilous journey to attain immortality. With the help of his comrade Enkidu, whom he first had met in a wrestling bout, he killed the giant Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven. Enkidu, leapt on the Bull and seized it by the horns (fig. 3) (Tanum, panel 356, somersaults, Ling p. 202) and Gilgamesh thrust his sword between the horns and the nape. Somersaulting is an ideogram repeated in Crete and Tanum. Gilgamesh killed lions and wore a lion's pelt like later Herakles (p. 88-91).

At the end of his journey (life) he had to pass monstrous scorpions which could kill with their gaze. He travelled in a boat where the bow was formed as a serpent or a dragon. With divine help he found the flower of life in the cosmic ocean. He wished to bring it back to Uruk to give it to the old men to eat and at last eat it himself and thereby get his lost youth back. On his trip, "Gilgamesh saw a well of cool water and he went down and bathed, but deep in the pool there was lying a serpent, and the serpent sensed the sweetness of the flower. It rose out of the water and snatched the flower and immediately the serpent sloughed its skin and returned to the well." Gilgamesh missed the chance to become immortal but the serpent was reborn (p. 116-117). At the end Gilgamesh accepted his fate and realised that all humans have the same destiny, all must die. "The search is over, there is nothing more to do but go home."

ENUMA ELISH, the Babylonian epic of creation, possibly from the 16th century B.C. but written down around 9th century B.C., tells us that generations before the powerful storm-god Marduk, there was only the sweet and the salt water. These two, Apsu the male water and Tiamat the female water, blended their waters and became one. From this union came the first gods, the Great Twins Lahmu the hairy and Lahamu were created. They guarded the gates to the netherworld and stood ready to cut the dead to pieces (Black and Green; 124).

After several cosmic fights and murders, Marduk was proclaimed king over the gods of heaven and earth. He killed the monster of chaos, Tiamat, the Primeval Mother when, armed with net, bow and arrow, flashes of lightning and gales, Marduk vehemently rushed forward in his chariot drawn by four horses. He has the same attributes as the later Greek god Orion. Marduk created the gods and their "positions" in the sky, he created the Moon and the Sun and ordered them to move over heaven and he divided the year into parts, writes the translator Ola Wikander in his introduction to Enuma elish (p. 14). Marduk also founded Babylon which possibly signifies the Gate of the Gods.

The signs of the gods were to be found in heaven. To interpret the constellations of the stars was to interpret the will of the gods. The gods were, as said before, synonymous with the constellations of different stars, which were in their turn related to air, fire, water, soil, the nether-world, sun, moon, stars, the nature, its fertility and death. The Babylonian male Moon-god Sin "… travelled in a boat at night bringing light to the lapis lazuli heavens." (Gilgamesh p. 24) The crescent Moon was often represented lying down and its two points were perceived as horns of a bull (Black and Green p. 54, 135). The bull was attributed to Sin, the Moon (Homés-Frédericq p. 46). The Sun god in Babylon was named Shamash. His presence in the form of an encircled many-pointed star is mostly represented at the top of kudurrus, founding and boundary stones, and steles. Sin, the crescent, is also represented on kudurrus.

In Enuma elish, in the two last clay tablets, Marduk is about to create man. He (man) should carry all the burdens of the gods so the gods can rest. Man was only meant to be a servant who should support the gods and make sacrifices. Marduk is given fifty names, which make him ruler of Heaven and everything on Earth. He takes over the work and the names of older gods. Among other duties, he shall dispense seed, he will become helmsman, he shall conquer his enemies, he shall be the shepherd and he shall produce rain. Finally Marduk orders that "… the father

shall repeatedly say the names and teach the son." "Man shall sing the song of Marduk, he who conquered Tiamat and usurped the power of the king."

To mediate the culture of ruling dynasties, scenes of subdued peoples, heroic lion hunting and hunts for sacrificial animals were depicted on rock faces along main routes with symbols of the Sun and Moon on top. The cuneiform script has made it possible to interpret some of these images. In ancient times, only a few people would have mastered the art of writing; however, common man could probably understand pictograms and ideograms. When the cuneiform script ceased to be used, misunderstandings could occur through misinterpreting the symbols.

Still, the yearly fertility and rebirth celebrations at the equinox contributed to the understanding of the will of the gods. The myth of creation was revived as well as the attributes of the gods and their significance. The ruler or the priest in each city symbolically "married" a young woman, hieros gamos (fig. 4) (Amiet p. 850:63). The meaning of the celebration signified rebirth of the world and a cure from disease and death. There was no fertility without this yearly religious death. Enanna, goddess of fertility, could not conquer death, therefore, she dwelled half the year in the netherworld like the serpent. When she was reborn in the spring, it was regarded as a guarantee that also man, like nature, would be born again. Mesopotamian myth pictured the world as a living organism which was constantly threatened by chaos and flood and which had to die to be born again. By the construction of great temples, ziggurats and performing hieros gamos rites, the gods could be pacified (Eliade p. 77-80, Gurney p. 152-156). The overall prevailing belief in the rites of creation, the influence of the gods, and myths about half-gods constituted a clear sign of how man should live his life.

In the Middle East and around the Mediterranean, there were the more and the less important gods, all with their special functions. This was due to historical reasons, stories of creation and as an explanation of the unpredictable behaviour of both man and nature. These gods had been taken over from earlier cultures; they received new names but often retained their special attributes, history and symbols (Pollock p. 186-187). In Greece, the needs and dreams of man were mirrored in the composition of the world of gods. Insufficient offerings to the gods were equivalent to lack of hospitality between men and disobedience to parents. As punishment, man was threatened with dwelling in Hades (Otto p. 24).

Gods and heroes with possible connection to rock art

According to myth, the first gods created in Mesopotamia were the twins LAHMU and LAHAMU with the important but inscrutable role of cutting the dead to pieces before these could be let down in the netherworld. Why was this believed? In this amulet (fig. 5) from the Neo-Assyrian period (Black and Green p. 124), "... the luminous Twins" are

Fig. 4. Hieros gamos couples on seal from Susa, 3rd mill B.C., with the sun, the moon and the stars above which signify the religious aspect of the action.

Fig. 5. The Great Twins engraved in chalcedony from the Neo-Assyrian Period, end 2nd millennium B.C.

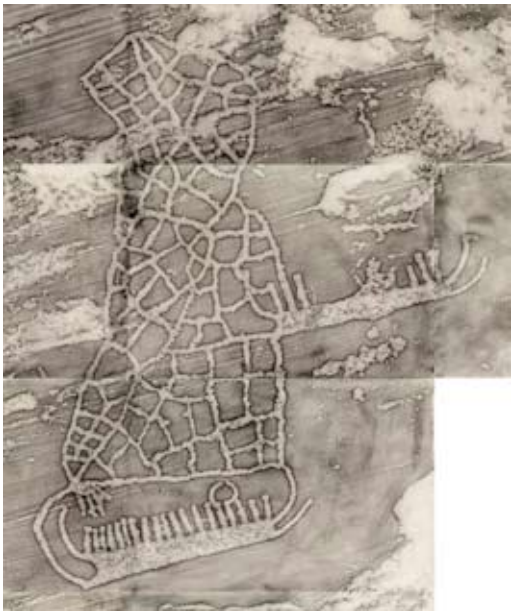


Fig. 6. Ships in a net or wave-like image on rock art panel 361.Tanum. Rubbing: Tanums HällristningsMuseum.

depicted with ceremonial double-axes, swords and conical hats made of horns. At the side of one twin, there is a sign of a serpent representing rebirth and beside the other is a crescent, representing the horns of the Bull of Heaven, the Moon-god Sin. There are several stories about the Twins in later times. In Greek myth they seemingly have lost their archaic function of cutting the dead to pieces, but they have continuously been depicted with raised double-axes. They are now called Kastor and Polydeukes and have kept their illuminating importance, especially for people travelling at sea, but only Polydeukes is regarded as a half-god.

The fourth generation of man, according to Hesiod, lived in the Heroic age where we find most of the hero-stories like those of Herakles and Perseus and those in the Iliad and Odyssey. The mythical travel of the Argonauts has given rise to several versions. Homer and Strabo tell about the travel of Jason on the ship Argo to fetch the Golden Fleece in Colchis.

Many gods and heroes took part in the journey, among them Herakles and the Twins, the Dioskouri, "the boys of Zeus". Several pirates were conquered during Argo's journey over the Black Sea and the ship also faced storm and high tide at the Maelstrom at the "Clashing Rocks" (fig. 6) (Tanum, panel 361, frame-figure in rock-art? Ling p. 198). The Twins came to be regarded as protectors of seafarers and seamen, especially those in peril at sea. The radiant constellation of the Twin stars, one stronger and one weaker, guided the seamen at night. The Twins were generally regarded as helpers and excelled in games, athletics and dance. They were looked upon as models for youth as they also were friends and defended each other. At a double wedding in Colkis, the Twins fell in love with one each of the brides. During the ensuing fight, everyone died except the immortal Polydeukes. Devastated, he asked Zeus to be permitted to die; his request was denied. Then he asked to bring Kastor back to life, which was also denied. As a solution, Zeus let the brothers live

every second day in the Olympus and every other day in Hades (Grant p. 252-259 retells Apollonius Argonautica).

There are several versions of the Argonaut myth, but all of them render the close relationship between the Twins and their destiny in alternating light and dark and their separation at the equinox, when the weakly shining star, Kastor, disappears under the edge of the flat Earth. The Twins were often represented with a white horse each; the horse was equated with swift communication on land. In the Odyssey, Penelope says that swift ships serve as horses for men at sea.

POSEIDON was believed to be the younger brother of Zeus. He ruled over the sea and may earlier have had a more important position in the Pantheon as he was previously spoken of as the earth-shaker, a role later taken over by Zeus. Poseidon ruled over the sea and in Greece he is often represented by a horse. Poseidon was also the protector of horse-races. In order to pacify him, "the ruler of the sea" and thereby the sea, horses were sacrificed. As earlier mentioned, an animal could embody a god and was consequently worshiped. This custom was practised in Greece for a long time and depicted in stories, sculptures and paintings. The attribute of Poseidon is a trident, possibly a fishing spear. Twins are often represented in Tanum rock art, while images of Poseidon seem to be absent if not confused with images of Orion.

ORION was the son of Poseidon. The Babylonians called him "the faithful shepherd of heaven". During his journey in the underworld, Odysseus sees in the sky the "monstrously large Orion" who is turned towards sunset hunting wild animals with a mace of bronze. Other attributes are a dagger, a spear and a net. Hesiod writes in Work and Days (verses 599-620) that the best time to thresh is when Orion is visible and when he disappears it is time for ploughing and sowing. During this period, it is dangerous to sail the sea because hurricanes roar and the waves boil. This description may also allude to the net-like figures in Tanum rock art. The constellation of Orion is composed of several stars that are visible to the naked eye, seven of which are very bright, of these, three are in his belt, just above the equator of heaven.

PERSEVS, in spite of his mortal status, received his constellation in heaven primarily because of his victory over Medusa. The deadly gaze of Medusa was avoided by Persevs when he let the gaze be reflected in the shield of copper he had borrowed from Athena. Later, Persevs put the decapitated head of Medusa on the pectoral of Athena. Consequently shields, pectorals and mirrors have had great significance in myths and representations on artefacts as well as rock art.

Artefacts and rock-reliefs from the Bronze Age, point to common beliefs over wide areas

Ships

Some of the largest groups of figures in Tanum consist of ships. They were created as land bit by bit rose out of the sea. This may explain the different styles of ships as they represent different periods of time (Ling p. 107-158). In the beginning, the ships may have represented how the Sun was transported over the vault of heaven from dawn to dusk. Often, it was the horse that was depicted transporting the Sun. Had the horse received this role before or after the ships? By dusk, at sunset, the serpent was supposed to escort the Sun back to dawn, sunrise, where the ship presumably waited to take over anew. The serpent may have signified rebirth (Forshell p. 10-11). In rock art, sun-horses as well as ships move either to the east or to the west. Has the role of the ship as transporter of the Sun changed through the generations to become transporter of goods? Or was the engraving of new ship images simply offerings to both Poseidon and the Twins for a safe return journey at sea? Thus, the role of the ships may be a mixture of myth and reality.

Ceremonial axes

Early ceremonial axes were made of solid, hammered copper or cast bronze. In later axes, a thin copper or bronze shell is cast over a clay mould. These axes have the shape of a crescent. The size of the axes can be half a meter wide. Many of them were found in the soil

Fig. 7. Ceremonial axe, silver, 2100 B.C. Urartu, Armenia

Fig. 8. Ceremonial axe, copper, 1500 B.C. Urartu, Armenia

in Sweden, Denmark and Poland (Sjöberg). Furthermore, two axes come from Urartu, one made of silver, possibly from around 21st century B.C., and the other is made of copper or bronze and is from around 15th century B.C. Both are cast over clay moulds (fig. 7 and 8) (Au pied du Mont Ararat p. 51, 68). In rock engravings, the Twins and sometimes an oversized figure, most probably Orion, carry raised axes. Orion the hunter is most often shown with a club, but can also be depicted with a hammer or a spear. Some less elaborated Bronze Age axes have been found in Bohuslän in connection with some rock art panels. The

Fig. 9. Twins, bronze, 600 B.C. Sardinien, Italy

chemical composition of this items will be discussed (Forshell, forthcoming).

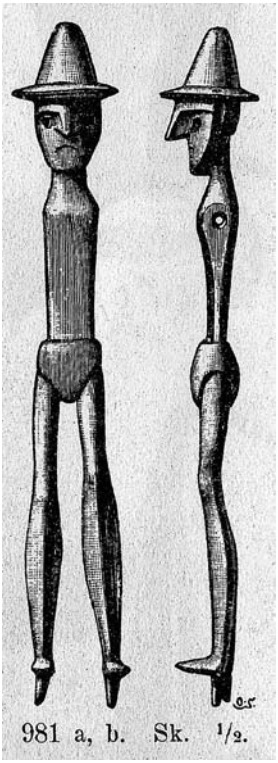
Twins

Several twin figurines made of bronze have been found in Sweden and Denmark. Similar bronze statuettes have also been found in Sardinia (fig. 9), (Ichinussa p. 215), twins with spears and shields, one horned, the half-god, and the other with a flat cap, the hero, dated around 600 B.C. In Armenia (fig.10) (Au pied du Mont Ararat p. 164) a single figure was found similar in shape and size to the twins from Sardinia but with a minimal shield in the left hand, probably dating from around 600 B.C. He may be a boxer or a shield-dancer. All figurines have different body postures, some have had movable arms that are now missing, such as the twins found in Stockhult, Scania, Sweden (fig. 11)(Montelius p. 65).

A few of the twins are performing somersaults. In the 1770s A.D., in Grevensvaenge, Denmark, bronze figurines with flat caps performing somersaults were found. They are now lost, but an old drawing show them and twins with conical horned hats and arms holding raised ceremonial axes. Some of the figurines may have been fastened to standards (fig. 12) (Bröndsted p. 303). As mentioned above, many figurines have conical god-hats. Some, like the somersaulting figurines, have flat caps. Some have the horns of the bull, the god Sin, the moon. Some have shields or mirrors made of bronze. They have ceremonial axes, spears or clubs. On this 8th century B.C. conical bronze hat from Urartu, serpents and sacrificing figures are in front of kudurrus (fig. 13) (Au pied de Mont Ararat p. 114) This god-hat made from bronze picturing serpents, may have replaced those from earlier cultures

Fig. 10. Twin, bronze, 600 B.C. Urartu, Armenia

Fig. 11. Twins, bronze, 600 B.C. Stockhult, Sweden



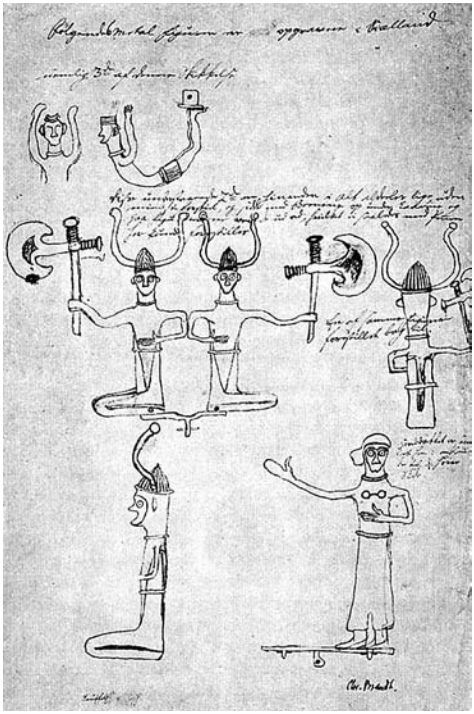


Fig. 12. Twins somersaulting, bronze, 500 B.C. Graevensvenge, Denmark

Fig. 13. Conical hat, bronze, 770 B.C. Urartu, Armenia

such as those from Mesopotamia, which were made of horns.

In Tanum rock art, many humanlike figures have birds-heads or crescent/horn-heads instead of regular heads, signifying that they are gods. In this well-known panel (fig. 14) (Fossum, Tanum, panel 255. Ling p. 181), many of the above discussed figures are present, ships, Twins, ceremonial axes, Orion with his club and possibly Poseidon with his fishing-spear. The Fossum panel in Tanum lies at a high altitude, which means that it is one of the older reliefs.

Why this overwhelming amount of rock art along the shores of Scandinavia?

Why did people from afar travel to Bohuslän during Bronze Age? Were they "Argonauts" looking for a "Golden Fleece" in the North? But there were no precious metals. Had they something to offer a small and sedentary population other than objects of copper? What were they expecting in exchange? Did they take part in the long distance trade with copper and bronze?

Did they come from overpopulated areas? Had they founded settlements of their own? Were the deep narrow inlets in Bohuslän used as harbours to reload goods to the farming inland? What made this archipelago so attractive other than its calm waters, good landing-places and possibly meagre farming and fishing? Were the geographical position and the topography important?

Only hard flat rock could be used for this type of ideogram. In the North, such material could be found not only along the coastlines but it is here it has been used to picture ships. In less rocky, barren areas, along coasts and rivers, boulders have been used for engravings, cupmarks, steles and ship-formed stone-settings. The marine conditions are evident.

Could the ice-polished shelves of rock in all cardinal points be used for different rituals for fertility and rebirth or sacrificing for hunt during dawn and evening in time of equinox? Were the seafarers regarded with awe and therefore able to freely practice their rites? Were they missionaries who wanted to teach a message?

Fig. 14. Variety of ideograms on rock art panel 255 Fossum, Tanum, Sweden (after Milstreu & Proehl 1996)

Rock art from Neolithic time and onwards, has been discovered all over the world. Val Camonica, a narrow high-altitude passage connecting the southern parts of the Alps with the north, is rich in rock art (Anati p. 16, 26). There, representations of herds of deer, adorants, hieros-gamos couples, twin-figures with raised ceremonial axes and clubs, larger humans, maps and barns/huts/temples/tombs are common. There are no ships and it goes without saying that the conditions required to survive in high altitudes are clearly different than conditions near the sea.

Summing up

When man managed to conquer the open sea with sturdier ships he found new ways of spreading his religion. The archaic society changed fundamentally when the technique of working copper was established. Shiny copper was used early on for religious purposes, its use probably contributing to a powerful priesthood. With the gradual shift to the use of bronze, effective farming implements and weapons brought about increased trade, agriculture and warfare .

The rock art in Bohuslän comprises an endless number of figures in low relief. Only a few humanlike figures and their attributes have been studied here. More questions than answers are raised in seeking to understand the intrinsic meaning of the ideograms. Ove Wikström (Uppsala Nya, 2009) summarises: ”Religion is an extensive narrative which fuses people together in a collective understanding of her need for cognitive sense and belonging”.

Ships, Orion, Twins, Hieros gamos-couples and animals dominate the rock art in Bohuslän. The archaic role of these figures, may constitute the main keys for understanding rock art motifs in Bohuslän. The Twins, the first created gods (in Mesopotamia), equipped with double-axes and conical god-hats seemingly had an important role as priests, organisers of religious ceremonies, illuminators and as guardians of the gate to the underworld. The

sacrificing of animals to Orion for man's successful hunt is also fundamental and this hunt could in turn be offered to Poseidon in order to assure safe voyage on the sea.

The gods alone inhabited the heaven.

The precarious conditions under which man lived may have caused a pessimistic attitude towards human life and the world. Therefore, man turned his hope to the heavens and the gods. Offerings to the gods permeated daily life of the common man as he hoped to be reborn like the cyclic nature.

Hence, the rock art motifs may be understood as common religious ceremonies to be sure of rebirth, which could be hoped for through sacrifice to the gods.

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