

Raised open hands: divinities not worshippers

Introduction

This article deals with several stelae and rock engravings widely separated in time and space, from Ukraine to Scandinavia and Italy, but the material I have examined concerns also Spanish and French petroglyphs and pottery of various countries. Of course I could not include all this material here.

My aim is to search for an interpretation of the symbols we find on the European petroglyphs dated to an age including the Neolithic and the Iron Age before christianization. I will not propose any hypothesis about the possible contacts between peoples, the direction of the spreading of symbols, or the reasons for the similarity of images and symbolism. I will use a "comparative method" similar to that of the historical linguistics which suggests comparisons between words yielded in the wide area of diffusion of the Indo-European languages, although these languages were spoken and written in very different periods covering the space of three millennia.

In fact this comparative method has given good results not only in linguistics, but also in the study of old religions and since I think that the symbols carved on the rocks of Europe before christianization were essentially religious, I hope that the comparative method will also be useful in the study of the rock art symbolism.

The point of view which I adopt continues essentially that of Oscar Almgren who already eighty years ago wrote that the rock carvings were performed as a cult service addressed especially to the divinities of fertility, although he did not exclude that they were also connected with the cult of the dead

(Almgren 1925; 1927, 256). In his opinion, the carvings expressed a figured language probably understood by the participants in the religious ceremonies. The priestly engravers, I add, did not aim to represent social reality and daily life, as is often believed nowadays: carvings were a communication with the gods and for the gods. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the "ability" of those engravers was in expressing a religious-philosophical concept by means of symbols, in englobing the oldest symbols such as cupmarks, net patterns, chevrons into new compositions.



Not having available the immense repertoire of petroglyphs successively discovered in other regions of Europe, Almgren could hardly have been able to define with a greater precision the functions attributed to the divinities represented in the Scandinavian rock art: he could not specify that those divinities preside over the double principle "life-death" and regulate the universal cycles (that which explains the burial use of the symbols we find in both rocks and funeral items). Unfortunately most of the successive archaeologists followed other ways of study and interpretations, indulging in sociologisms, psychologisms or economical explanations which are unrelated to the *Weltanschauung* of those ages.

In my opinion the comparative method I would apply to the analysis of the petroglyphs makes both the interpretation of the single symbols and the reconstruction of the syntagmatic relations between symbols possible. But such a result may be reached if we leave aside clichés such as those according to

which any round figure is a sun or a symbol of the sun-god and any hand is a symbol of worship or a symbol of a generical power. According to Gelling & Ellis Davidson (1969, 56-59) there is "a connection between the sun-cult and the outspread hand": the hand "was a conventional gesture ... which was understood to refer to the sun". Gelling & Ellis Davidson note also that, being sometimes the hand associated with burial, the sun must have been "the symbol of resurrection *par excellence*". To my mind it would be too restrictive to identify the god in question as a sun-god, I would suggest that he was the Wheel-god presiding over the universal cycles of sky, seasons and life-death-life cycle. He guards the secret of life and the balance of life and death, good and evil which I call "double principle".

Anthropomorphs with open hands on the Ukrainian steles

The anthropomorphic stele called Kernosovka (from Kernosovo, Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine) is carved on all four sides. It is dated to the Aeneolithic age, III millennium B.C. (Krylova 1976; Telegin - Mallory 1994, 4-12; 1995, 319-326; Telegin 1998). On the anterior side (Fig. 1), the face, which exceptionally has eyes, nose, mouth, drooping moustaches and a short beard, is sunken between the shoulders. Various objects are represented on the "body" under the arms which are bent upwards at the elbows: one may recognize a knife (or the tip of a spear?) whose blade has a round point, a double-edged ax, another ax and a hammer. A bow with a notched arrow is parallel to the left arm. The fingers of both hands are parted wide. Under the right hand there is a rod whose lower tip has the shape of a holed pommel. A similar object is recognizable on the low part of the back side, near the right edge: it could be the companion to a rectangle carved near the left edge (see below). The figure between the two axes is probably a turtle. Under the "belt" one may see the genitals and, on the left, a rectangle. Two lines start from the lower side of the rectangle and extend downwards in opposite directions, recalling certain Camunian compositions. On

the right, further down, one may note two animals (horses, according to Telegin 1998): the lower of them is very damaged. In the back of the stele (Fig. 1), under the belt, on the left there are a couple of rectangles the lower of which is bigger: it is a further analogy with certain compositions of Valcamonica. Also the pair of foot-prints engraved between the double rectangle and the object having the form of a connecting rod () recalls the foot-prints of Camunian and Scandinavian petroglyphs. In my opinion, the whole composition, both the details I have already described and those I am going to describe, obeys a religious symbolism regarding the belief in the cycle of souls and in the "double principle" of creation-destruction. According to Telegin (1998), on the front side, in the zone under the arms and above the weapons, a scene of hunting is represented: the protagonists are two tailed animals and a man (he is also tailed) whose open left hand is armed with a cudgel. According to Krylova (1976, 40), the man with the open hand should be accompanied by two dogs. To my mind, the open hand does not "hold" a cudgel: the hand is merely associated to a -shaped object as well as the hand of the stele-anthropomorph. The object starts from the hand, it seems to touch the round point of the knife (or spear tip) on the "bust" of the stele and continues for some centimetres, ending in a ring partially superimposed upon the tail of a stylized bird. It is in fact a bird (Fig. 2), one of the two animals vaguely seen by Telegin, while the other presumed animal is a "legged phallus" who recalls the similar figures depicted in some Scandinavian and Camunian petroglyphs: it is one of the symbols of the god of fecundation. The bird strengthens this concept, since the divinities of universal fertility may assume the shape of birds (water birds in particular). Therefore I infer that the anthropomorph with open hands is involved in the cycle of regeneration. Since he seems to have a tail (Telegin 1998), such an attribute assimilates him to the *Sileni*, *Satyri* and *Fauni*, the agents of universal fertility later represented in Greece, in Etruria and later in the romanized regions. Some Camunian anthropomorphs also have

a tail. This suggests that the back appendix of many Scandinavian anthropomorphs is also a tail rather than a sword.

On the left side of the stele (Fig. 1) a sexual intercourse between a man and a woman is represented. Both lift up great open hands which express their function of cosmic fertilizers rather than a generic divine supernatural power. Their legs are slightly bent and the male has a long tail. This confirms his function as a *Silenus* or agent of universal fertilization.

In the lower register, under the human couple, an animal with great open horns is engraved: in such a context it can represent nothing else than the zoomorphic aspect of the great fertilizing god. In order to understand better other compositions, it is important to note the motive of the rain or fecundating sprinkle constituted by the lines // // // // which incumb on the head of the female.

On the right side of the stele, above the parallel lines of the "belt", there are six zigzag bends and, further down, fillets with trap-



Fig. 2. Detail of the Kernosovka stele (front)

ezoidal Greek frets which are similar to those hanging over the anthropomorphic couple on the left side. It is wrong to consider these frets as simple decorations (Telegin & Malory 1994, 10). To my mind they allude to the cyclical courses of universal fertility and to the passage from earth to the underworld. The belt is interrupted by the insertion of a scalene triangle whose symbolism is not clear to me.

On the same side, below the "belt", a fish is probably represented (Telegin 1998). Its tail intentionally runs round the side, on the

Fig. 1. Kernosovka: right side, front, left side and back.



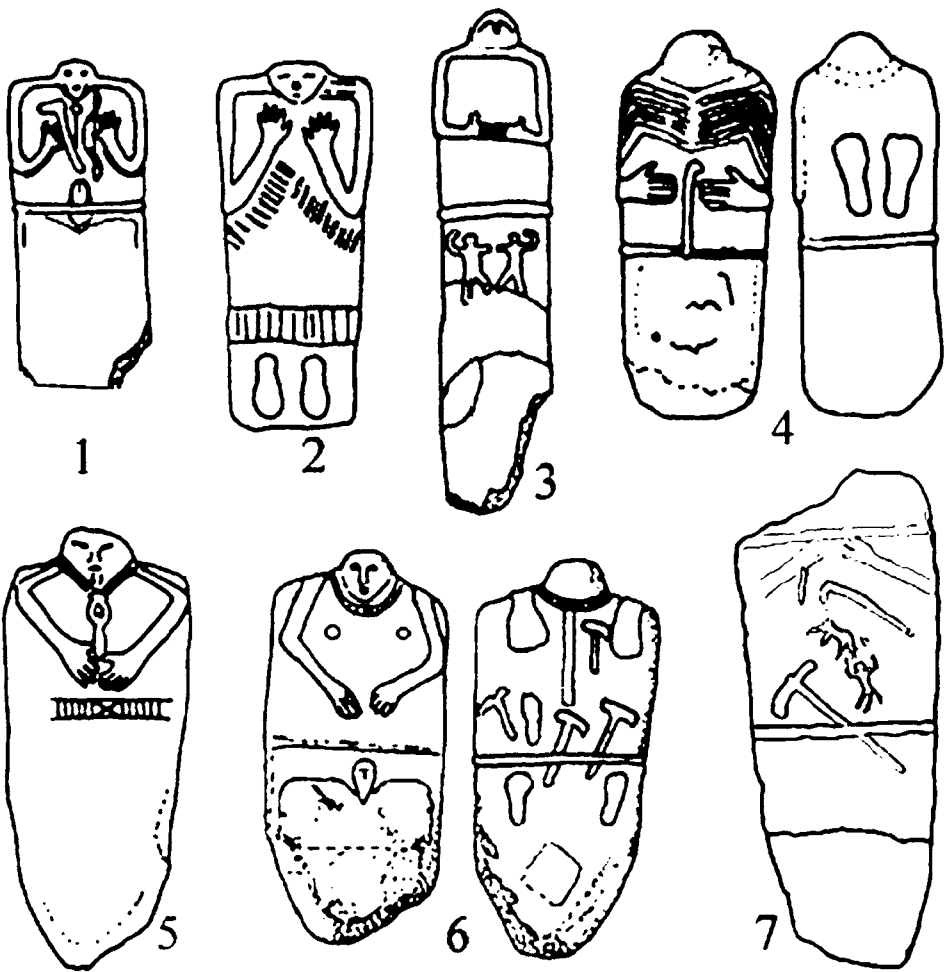




Fig. 3: Statue-stelae of the Ukraine : 1 = Natalevka; 2 = Belogradovka; 3 = Kazanki; 4 = Novoherkassk; 5 = Alexandovka; 6 = Hamangia; 7 = Fedorovka

front, near a rectangle. Perhaps the fish is the companion to the bull depicted at the same height on the left side. We may also note that the bull is facing the front, where we find two horses and two snakes (the lines starting from the rectangle), while the fish is facing away from the front. All these animals are concerned with the transformations of the gods of fertility and perhaps of the human beings also, as we can see from the mythic-religious Celtic tales and from later European representations. The function of fertility is clearly expressed by the phallus represented under the belt in the front.

A second phallus may be noted on the back: it is the prolongation of the median line of the composition developed above the "belt". A pair of rectangles and the symbol  are drawn in the lower area of the back. It is similar to the object (or symbol)  depicted on the breast of the stele. On the statue-stelae 1 and 5 of Fig. 3 the symbol "ring+rod" occupies the position of the sternum. Analysis of these kinds of figures, that one may also see in Camunian and, more rarely, Scandinavian petroglyphs, lead me to assume that they are symbols concerning the double principle of fertility "female" (ring)

/ "male" (rod). Hence, the personage represented by the stele, under the right hand of whom the rod with the ring starts, would also preside over the reproduction of the double principle "female / male" and presumably state the sex of the new born beings.

On the back of the Kernosovka idol, the shoulder blades are replaced by a circle (on the left) and a square (on the right). Inside both of them a little tree is drawn in herring-bone form. The little trees could represent the tree of life which is also represented by the vertebral column and ribs. Since the circle alludes to the god of sky and cycles, the square could schematically represent to mother Earth. The oblique lines under the branches (ribs) of the great tree (chest) recall those incumbering on the head of the female of the intercourse depicted on the left side of the stele (Fig. 1). Perhaps these lines symbolize the *aqua vitae* fertilizing the universe, while the cup-marks at both sides of the trunk (vertebral column), being symbols of the power of fertility (see below), allude to the couple of fecundating divinities. The representation of the tree of life (or World-tree) is very early: we may see it on a Neolithic figurine from the Riparo Gaban (Trento, Italy), where a tree rises from the feminine genitalia (Gimbutas 1989: 103, from Graziosi 1973), while below the head of the figurine a pair of horns (or a crescent?) alludes to the double principle of "creation-destruction" inherent in every creature.

On the Kernosovka stele the heels of the pair of foot-prints on the rear side are above the "belt", while the fore part of the prints are below it. But on other statue-stelae one sees foot-prints wholly above or under the "belt". Therefore Telegin & Mallory (1994, 48) write that "there is no consistent pattern in the placement of the foot-prints, but there is sufficient negative evidence to indicate that the lower register [under the belt] was not the canonically ascribed place for the foot-prints". They seem to prefer the thesis that the artists, neglecting to represent the legs, employed "the *pars pro toto* principle where the foot-prints were intended to represent the entire leg" (Telegin & Mallory 1994, 7). In my opinion, craftsmen, far from having realistic intentions, must express canonized

symbols. Foot-prints have nothing to do with the legs of the idol: in my opinion they allude to the journey of a divine *psychopompos*, the redeemer of souls that may return to the earth (Zavaroni 2004a, 234; Zavaroni 2006). Certainly, these foot-prints on a stele, as well as those exceptionally drawn on an Etruscan burial stele (6th century B.C.) of the Bologna Archaeological Museum, one one hand shows how unfounded is the thesis, already stigmatized by Coles (2005, 52) that "paired feet indicate or commemorate union, a single shod foot a widowhood, a naked foot an unmarried or a death" and so on; on the other hand drives me to doubt that "the arrangement of footsoles and feet on some sites is a direct incitement to directional looks, often downslopes as at Lökeberg (Foss 6)", as Coles (2005, 123) himself suggests.

The small footsoles used as rays from a disc at Boglösa (Coles 2000, 47), the others joined together and forming basically asymmetrical wheel crosses and over all the footsoles closely associated with boats, wheels and other items show that one deals with a symbol. If we remember that the great Celtic God Lug had been a shoemaker and Mercury, which was the *deus Viator* and *Clavariatis*, was particularly worshipped by shoemakers and travellers; and if we remember that he was the *psychopompos* god, we may connect this function to the footprints.

If the "belt" of the Ukrainian stelae represented, as I think, a border between this earth and the otherworld that the *psychopompos* had to step over, foot-prints symbolized this journey, no matter how they were situated in comparison with the border. But perhaps another border was more difficult to get over for the *psychopompos*: it was the border of the place of the Otherworld where the embryos of life were reproduced or the souls revitalized. In a rock engraving at Leirfall (Central Norway: Marstrander 1970, 262, Fig. 118), a foot-print is drawn half inside and half outside a rectangle dotted by cup-marks, while another foot-print is tangent to a second rectangle (Fig. 4). Perhaps this rectangle, as well as the Labyrinth in other countries and ages, was a schematic symbol of the secret place where life was created. According to my thesis (Zavaroni 2004; 2006)

the dots inside the rectangle, as well as most cupmarks, symbolize the fecundating power of the gods alluded to through the various symbols. Then I think that the spatial relationship between rectangle and foot-print could denote a stage of the journey from this world to the Otherworld, where the coupling of the divinities of fertility creates the embryos of (re)generation. Since, following Gimbutas (1989, 247), I generally consider the boats of the Scandinavian rock carvings as “boats of rebirth”, I infer that the foot-prints associated with them allude to the journey from the Netherworld (Fig. 5). On the rock T-262 at Tanum (Milstreu & Prøhl 1999, 86) two-headed snakes are visible, the one, forming a ring above a boat, the other above a pair of foot-prints: for millennia snakes were considered carriers of embryos and experts of the paths leading from the bowels of the earth to the surface. Obviously, the interpretations I propose here contrast with the thesis that the so-called anthropomorphic stelae represent kings or men to be commemorated. To my mind, the Ukrainian stelae are full of symbols expressing only religious and cosmological conceptions. One cannot affirm, though, that they represent exclusively divine supreme personages. As the stelae were erected when human personages died, we cannot exclude the belief that the deceased would have become an ancestor and would have interceded with the great gods of fertility for the continuity of his stock. This second hypothesis does not change my point of view, according to which those that at first sight seem decorative and descriptive elements have to be considered symbols representing functions attributed to the divinities.

Fig. 4. Detail on a rock at Leirfall (northern Norway). After Marstrander.



On the stele n. 7 of Fig. 3 a tailed anthropomorph and another figure (a bowed woman waiting for intercourse with the tailed man?) are represented above the “belt” between a double-bladed ax and a sickle. On the back side, under the ribs which in association with the vertebral column allude to the tree of life, a pair of foot-prints intersects the “belt”. Below the foot-prints a pair of horns is visible. Once again, the pair of horns symbolizes the double principle. Since the double-bladed ax and the sickle are shown with other symbols, I would conclude that they are not the weapons of the deceased, but the attributes of the ambivalent god of fertility: he is the creator of mankind and the universal destroyer. The double-ax itself is apt to symbolize the double principle: one blade kills, the other one raises the dead as well as Thórr’s hammer.

An anthropomorph with open hands is also engraved on a funeral stele from Bakhchi-Eti, Crimea (Telegin & Mallory 1994, 27, Fig. 18); but it is inverted compared with another anthropomorph whose head is tangent to the blade of a double-ax. Telegin & Mallory (1994, 27) seem inclined to accept Formozov’s thesis (1969) that “the upright figure embodies a ‘living person’ while the second, inverted figure with outspread fingers suggests someone who is dead”. In my opinion, instead, the anthropomorph with open hands represents a chthonian god of fertility as in other Bronze and Iron Age compositions, where capsized figures mean that the scene regards the Otherworld (Zavaroni, 2006). The figure on the right of the inverted anthropomorph seems to be a “legged phallus” which too is inverted: this figure confirms the concept of chthonian fertility. The same god

Fig. 5. Rock T-271 at Tanum: a detail. After Milstreu & Prøhl



of fertility is represented as upright (in our world) and his head is tangent to a double-ax alluding to his power of life and death. Among the axes and weapons engraved on the stele (especially on the opposite and left side) some pairs allude to the double principle. It is remarkable that the pair whose blades touch each other and whose shafts have opposite directions recalls a configuration which may be also noted on several Valcamonica engraved rocks.

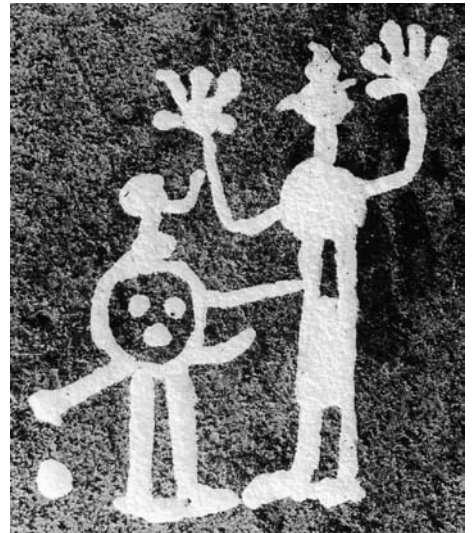
Anthropomorphs with open hands on Swedish and Danish petroglyphs

Various presumably divine figures with open hands are represented in Scandinavian rock engravings. For instance, on the great panel T-158 at Tanum (Southern Sweden) an anthropomorph with a showy phallus stands before a presumable goddess raising large open hands (Fig. 6). A line – the simplest symbol of union – joins the two. According to Coles (2005, 36), both are bird-headed: if so, their reproductive function would be confirmed, since ornithological features commonly allude to the regeneration of souls. The god is characterized by the round chest containing three cup-marks (“marks of fecundity power”). To interpret the round chest as a shield decorated with three balls would mean to ignore the symbolic syntax of the religious rock art. Indeed, images of animals or other figures in the shields depicted on the early Greek and Etruscan vase paintings were still symbolic rather than decorative. Other cup-marks scattered here and there show that fertilization and its divine agents are the subject of the composition. On the left of the couple there is a disk surrounded by birds (it is not visible in Fig. 6): this subject, represented on other Tanum rocks, symbolizes the wheel of time as well as the swastika carelessly drawn above another unclear figure, perhaps an “incomplete” formed by the lower part of the human body. From analysis of the Scandinavian and Camunian compositions in which they appear I infer that “incomplete” figures symbolize chthonian and deadly deities and in particular the infernal aspect of the ambivalent Creator-Destroyer (Zavaroni 2004a, 232; 2004b, 471).

On the upper part of the same rock another god lifting open hands is represented (Fig. 7). He is drawn under two boats: one of them has the usual strokes symbolizing regenerated souls; the other one, immediately below, is empty. Several empty boats and other boats containing a unique element († or I) are visible in the same panel: they correspond to the boats of the dead in their journey to the Otherworld. As the chest of the god with open hands is constituted by a circular crown which certainly cannot be a shield, one may assume that he is concerned with the cycle of rebirth. The appendix behind the buttocks of the figure is peculiar to many Scandinavian anthropomorphs: I suggest that it is a tail rather than a sword or a scabbard and alludes to a function of fertility. A bifid tail symbolizes that the character is involved in the double principle. This is better alluded to by the two horn-headed figures (Norrgården, Bottna, Fig. 8) which raise one hand (= good, favour), while the other hand is lowered (= evil, deadly fate) and touches the bifid tail.

In Fig. 9 (Tanum T-120) an anthropomorph has a big hand with four fingers above which 28 marks of fecundity power are disposed in four ordered lines. It faces an “incomplete”

Fig. 6. Rock T-158 at Tanum: a detail. After Milstreu & Prohl



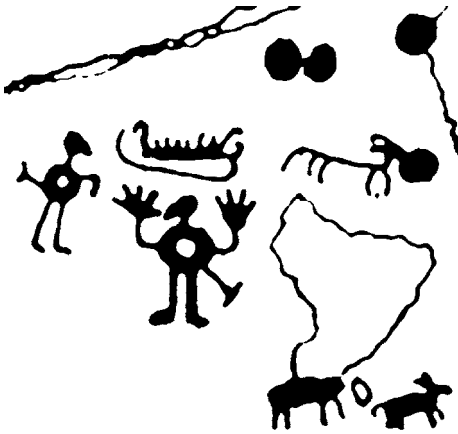


Fig. 7. Rock T-158 at Tanum: another detail. (from Milstreu-Pröhl 1996-1999).

infernal god without an arm (the other arm is reduced to a stump) and with a shorter leg. The phallus of this god has been transformed into a spear. An unclear figure is engraved between the two anthropomorphic figures: perhaps it is a bird with a long body. Further below, a long line seems to be an empty boat as intentionally "incomplete" as the infernal god: hence, it too symbolizes the voyage into the kingdom of death. Further down on the right, four tailed anthropomorphs (only one is visible in Fig. 9) whose chests are wheel-shaped allude to the cyclical alternation of the two antagonistic figures, the life donor "Raised-open-hand" and the deadly chthonian "Incomplete".

The regenerating god with big open hands and a long phallus is again represented on the panel T-12 A at Tanum (Fig. 10). The row of 15 boats, one below the other (the row is partial in Fig. 10), on the left of the god, probably alludes to the fertility of the god himself. The long phallus of the god is superimposed on an anthropomorph with lifted arms which is certainly not a worshipper, but a divinity (goddess?), while a third anthropomorph with the circle-shaped chest and without arms represents the cyclical antagonist of the god of fertility.

That raised open hands are symbols of a divine power rather than marks of worship is shown by the compositions in which they are not connected with a human body. In the

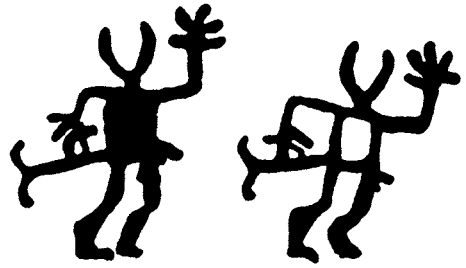


Fig. 8. Rock at Bottna: a detail (from Coles 2005, 35).

well-know Fig. 11 a long arm with an open hand rises from a boat amidst the strokes symbolizing new lives. In the centre of the boat two strokes are contained between two horns whose points are joined in order to represent the antagonistic forces of the double principle.

Two pairs of divinities with big open hands are engraved on a rock at Rished, Bohuslän, Sweden (Fig. 12). A couple is ready for intercourse: a showy "mark of fertility" is engraved below the woman. The male has the tail. The same pair is perhaps engraved on the right, where the sketch of the woman is superimposed on that of a wagon hauled by horses. Further above, there is a line of eight anthropomorphs with long legs, seven of which are armless. Their chests have the form of a cup-mark or a circle. It is not clear if they are provided with tails or sexual organs. The eighth one has an arm and perhaps a sickle pointed toward the other seven men. Probably this scene is connected with the underlying couple and represents a line of dead who will be regenerated thanks to the sexual union of the gods of fertility. An even more numerous row of anthropomorphs without arms is drawn on a rock near Tanum (T-25, Milstreu & Pröhl 1996, 72). Some of them are provided with the phallus, while others are presumably females. That they too are connected with regeneration may be inferred by the fact that on their left there is an empty boat, while above, under and on the right, other figures certainly allude to fecundation: two cows, a bull whose horns form a closed circle from which the "god with the ax" sticks out, boats with souls, big "marks of fertility".



Fig. 9. Rock T-120 (3) at Tanum: a detail (from Milstreu-Prohl 1996-1999).

Glob (1969, 170) compares the scene of Rished (Fig. 12) with some compositions on Danish rocks, in which one may recognize a female figure between the legs of which there is a cup-mark. Glob suggests that the cup-mark denotes, at least in such figures, the feminine kind. I share this thesis, adding that in general a cup-mark is a "mark of fertilization": when it is not associated with

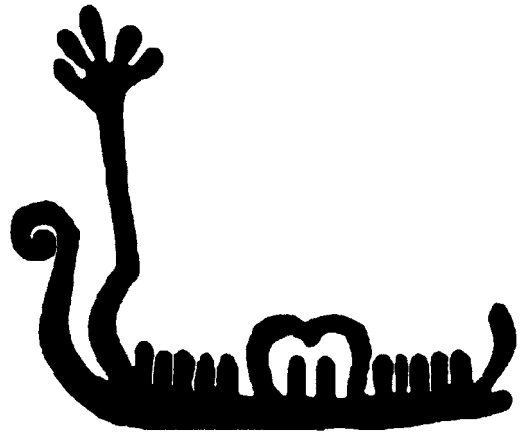


Fig. 11. Detail on a rock at Valla, Bohuslän.

figures it expresses a wish of fertility and/or rebirth; in association with anthropomorphs with spread legs it denotes females and more generally (close to animals or masculine anthropomorphs) it alludes to the fecundating function of a divine agent of the universal fertility. Such a symbolism may also be seen in several Valcamonica rock carvings. On the stone at Engelstrup, Denmark (Glob 1969,

Fig. 10. Detail of Tanum T-12 A. Photo: Gerhard Milstreu.

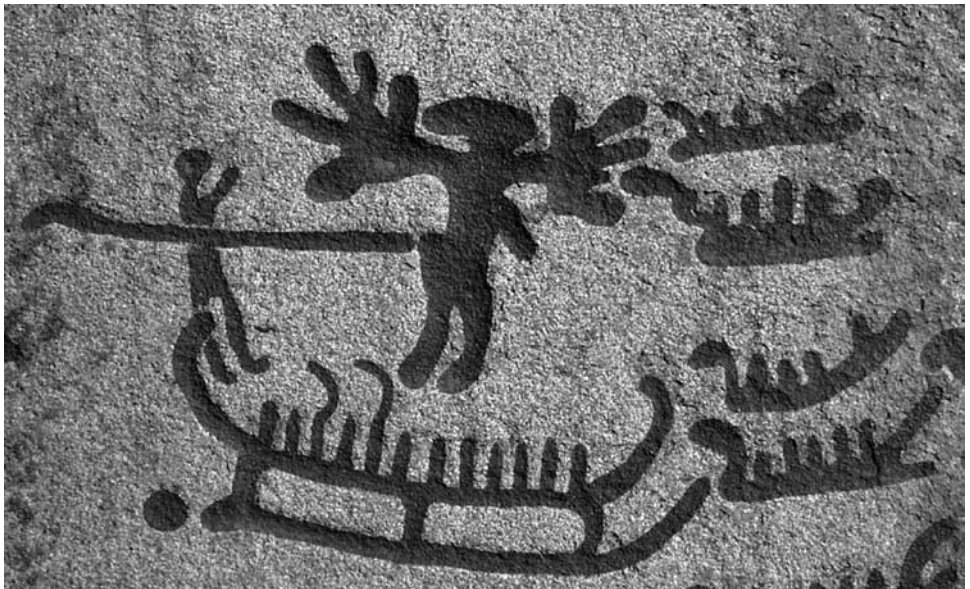




Fig. 12. Detail on a rock at Rished, Bohuslän. After Fred Gudnitz.

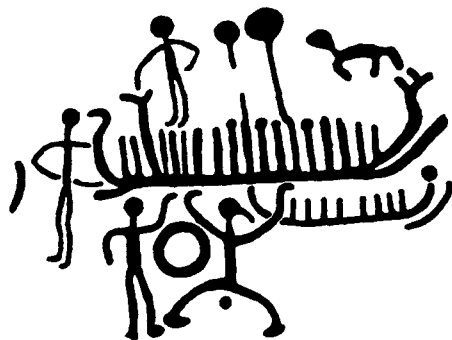


Fig. 13. Stone at Engelstrup, Denmark. After Kaul/Milstreu. Graphic: F. Kaul.

19) two gods of fertility are represented (but Glob 1969, 218 defines the goddess a *kvinde i adrantstilling* "a woman in worshipper's attitude"). They do not have open hands and lift only the right arm; but the right arm of the goddess significantly is superimposed on a boat of rebirth (Fig. 13). The sex of the goddess is denoted not only by the cup-mark between the legs, but also from the braid of hair. The circle between the two deities does not symbolize the sun, as Glob (1969, 294) suggests, but more generally the universal cycles, including that of regeneration. On the left, above the "souls" of the larger boat, a god with phallus and tail sets a hand on a bifurcated rod ("double principle"); on the right a presumable dog (the assistant of the *psychopompos*) is represented. Between

Fig. 14. Stone at Maltegård (from Glob 1969)



the man and the dog there is the symbol ♀ ("female+male").

A presumable woman with a mark of fertility between the legs is also represented on the stone at Hjels Søndermark (Denmark). The woman lifts the arms, but the hands are not open: the left hand is replaced by a V-form denoting the double principle. The double principle is also expressed by the symbol engraved in front of the body: it is constituted by the sign → intersected by two vertical lines. This symbol can be noted in other Scandinavian and Camunian petroglyphs which allow us to confirm such an interpretation. On the left of the woman some big cup-marks are graven, while on another face of the stone one may note two cup-marks, an oval hollow and a presumable feminine genital organ probably alluding to the goddess of fertility.

The disk of stone perforated in the center and finely engraved (Fig. 14) found at Maltegård, Nordsjælland, Denmark dates from the period VI of the Bronze age (Broholm 1933, 175). The two anthropomorphs, male and female, are separated by the central hole: between the legs of the female there is the mark of fertility, reduced to a very short line. The tree behind the woman could allude to the tree of life. The particularity of the composition is that the two anthropomorphs extend their arms towards each other instead of lifting them. The couple is surrounded by a woven crown which could represent a snake biting its tail: its body is constituted by lines among which are woven short lines



Fig. 15. Stone at Lille Havelse.



Fig. 16. Detail of Vitlycke panel, Tanum

that could symbolize new lives brought to earth by the snake. One may recall what Macrobius (*Sat.*, 9, 12) says of *Ianus*: "Phoenicians represented their *Ianus* as a snake biting its tail and wound as a circle, because it was the symbol of the world nourishing itself by its own substance and rotating on itself". On the other face of the disk four rays intersect a circle. This drawing alludes to the wheel of time.

A particular symbol drawn on Danish stones often found in burial sites, is the arm with the open hand. Above the hand four short lines are commonly engraved. On a stone (Glob 1969, 87) there are two cup-marks (power of fertility) and two oblong oval hollows; on another stone (Glob 1969, 89) the four lines are replaced by a circle (cycle of rebirth). I suggest that the hand symbolizes the fecundating power of the Creator-Destroyer and the lines symbolize souls returning to life. On a burial slab from Lille Havelse (Fig. 15: from Glob 1969, 89) two perpendicular arms with four spread fingers superimpose the palm of the hand, while another "arm" ends with a *bucranium*-shape (double principle).

Nobody is able to affirm that the phallic "great-hands" with lifted arms depicted on a panel at Vitlycke (Fig. 16) is a worshipper. Being two-horned (nothing lets us think that he as a helmet), it can only be a divine being standing on a schematically drawn wagon:

the wagon is hauled by a goat, while the circle representing the wheel symbolizes the alternation of the two principles alluded to by the two-horned head and the goat. The wheel seems constituted by a snake which grazes the horns of the goat and acts as a bridle. The little snake in front of the god recalls that he presides over the universal fertility.

In Fig. 17 a "large-open-hands" faces a phallic and tailed anthropomorph whose hands have only three fingers. The three fingers allow one to identify the second figure as the "Three-points", that is another form of the "Three-headed" god presiding over the three kingdoms (Heaven, Earth and Netherworld). The "Three-headed" is also assimilable to the great Creator-Destroyer. A hypostasis of the same god is the "incomplete", the "half-man" without arms and legs: from analysis of the compositions in which it appears I infer that it symbolizes, as well as other incomplete human figures, the deadly aspect of the ambivalent Creator-Destroyer (Zavaroni 2004a, 232; 2004b, 471). Therefore I assume that the three figures of Fig. 17 represent the same god in his different aspects: the fecundating and regenerating one ("Great-hands"), the lethal one ("Incomplete") and the ambivalent one ("Three-finger", "Three-headed"). The last one is also represented on other Scandinavian and Camunian rocks, while



Fig. 17. Detail in a petroglyph at Bohuslän (from Milstreu & Prohl 1999, 101).



Fig. 18. Panel T-271 at Tanum (from Milstreu & Prohl 1999, 101).

the symbol of the three points is however found all over Europe.

On the panel T-271 at Tanum (Fig. 18) two anthropomorphs raise their arms: each of them has a closed hand, while the other hand has three fingers. If the two men face each other, the 3-finger hand is the right one for one of them and the left one for the other. Thus we may suppose that their characters are contrasting (left = crooked = bad). A third figure, without arms, is engraved between them. It represents the chthonian aspect of the two alter egos.

On a rock near Åby, Bohuslän (Fig. 19) the Three-finger is associated with two boats: the smaller, carrying souls, is superimposed on one of his hands, recalling the analogous situation on the stone at Engelstrup, Denmark, mentioned above; the larger one is below his feet. From the bottom of the larger boat three signs \uparrow protrude (the same number as the fingers): they probably allude to the fertilization of the three worlds. The big 4-spoke wheel alludes to the universal cycles including the cycle of rebirth.

The "Three-finger" god is also attested to in Valcamonica. He appears in two identical scenes on the Rock N° 60 at Coren del Valento, where the god has sexual intercourse with a mare. A "cloud" or *aura*, denoted by many light dots, rises from the fingers and symbolizes the fecundating wind (Zavaroni 2004b, 471). If one recalls the goddesses that in Indo-European myths may assume the aspect of a mare in order to have intercourse with a god, the scene of Coren is not strange.

Therefore I cannot agree with Anati (1982, 301, fig. 317) who, dating the composition to the early Iron Age (850-700 BC), interprets it as a "scene of sodomy associated with a knot of rope, a symbol of union and alliance." Indeed, above the "Three-finger" and the mare there is an unusual sketch, where the presence of acute angles leads us to reject Anati's interpretation: I see a grouping of two phalli forming an angle (V) and two axes. Therefore I interpret the grouping as a symbol of the double principle "fertility" / "destruction" which confirms the ambivalence of the "Three-finger" god. His intercourse with the mare is a representation of the universal fecundation.

Anati (1982, 301) sees scenes of bestiality and evacuation in the composition on Rock N. 6 at Foppe di Nadro (Fig. 20). The idea that the Camunian engravers, commonly considered priests, were so fond of artistic realism that represented human erotic scenes and evacuations on the rocks is the fruit of a vision of "art" that the alpine craftsmen of the early Iron age could absolutely not conceive. Alpine and Scandinavian carvings were sacred art, a way of communicating with gods or representing deities, their attributes, functions and symbols.

At the center of the composition of Fig. 20 there is the "Three-point" god that here is not characterized by the three-fingered hand, but by a staff having three points at one of the extremities. Below the "Three-point" god one sees a squatting figure, presumably a woman, lifting her arms. A dog puts its muz-

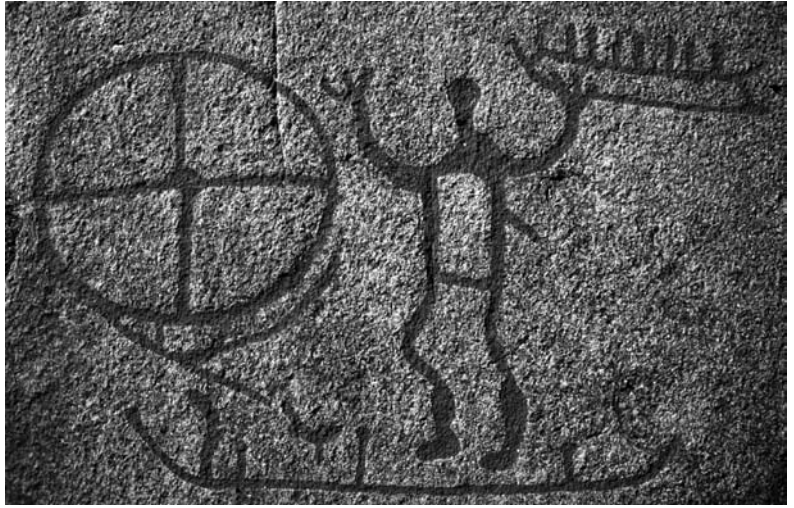


Fig. 19. Detail on a rock at Åby, Bohuslän. Photo: Gerhard Milstreu.

zle between the thighs of the figure. In other petroglyphs, usually interpreted as scenes of hunting, a dog sniffs the rear of a hind or also a deer. As the deer and the hind are one of the animal forms assumed by the divinities ruling creation and destruction, the dog, an assistant of the *psychopompos* redeeming the souls, sniffs the genitals of the divinities of the universal fertility in order to inhale their procreative aura and its vital embryos that it will bring to this world. In other words, the dog appropriates the fecundating power inhaling it as *aura*. An analogous conception is connected with the archaic centaurs and the Indian *gandharvas*.

Not far above, one see a goddess with raised open hands and spread legs: the *aura* or vital *fumus* flows from her uterus, going down towards a couple intent on sexual intercourse. The male of this couple has large hands with spread fingers.

On a side of the god lifting the three-pointed staff there is a snake representing another animal form of the same god. The construction depicted above the snake symbolizes the Otherworld (Zavaroni 2004b, 470).

For obvious reasons of space we cannot examine here other Camunian compositions containing figures with raised open hands. We would though recall that at Luine (Rock N. 73) a pair of big open hands is associated only with a male sex organ. Anati dates this

composition to the end of the third period (1200-1000 B.C.). In my opinion it is an indication of the meaning attributed to the open hands. Therefore I cannot agree with my friends Sansoni and Gavaldo (2001-2002, 52) when they suggest that figures with big open hands, carved during a long period from the Neolithic to the late Iron Age, indistinguishably represent "spirits", priests or shamans, inside this magic-religious circle. Indeed Sansoni and Gavaldo are inclined to consider the figure with big open hands as shamans represented during their "flight of the soul" ("*volo dell'anima*"). One of the scenes commented on by Sansoni and Gavaldo contains two anthropomorphs with big open hands whose heads are detached from the bodies. The authors suggest that one deals with the representation of the "splitting of the shaman during the trance". I do not think that we can apply a similar modern psychoanalytic concept to the old shamanism; anyway, if it were true, it would mean that the head was considered the seat of the soul. It would be just the same to me if we consider these anthropomorphs, which are also marked by a mark of fertility power between the legs, as bodies destined for rebirth. Such a representation, in my opinion, must be connected with the representation of the severed or isolated head which later characterized the art of other European regions.



Fig. 20. Foppe di Nadro (from Anati 1982, 301).

Dr. Adolfo Zavaroni
Via Porta Brennone, 11
I-42100 Reggio Emilia
zavaro@libero.it

References

- Almgren, O.** 1925. "Felsenzeichnung". In *Eberts Reallexikon*, B. III, Berlin, 1925.
- Almgren, O.** 1927. *Hällristningar och Kultbruk*, Stockholm, 1926-27. Germ. transl.: *Nordische Felszeichnungen als religiöse Urkunden*. Frankfurt 1934.
- Anati, E.** 1982. *I Camuni. Alle radici della civiltà europea*. Milano.
- Anati, E.** 1995. *Valcamonica Una storia per l'Europa Il linguaggio delle pietre*. Capo di Ponte.
- Broholm, C. H.** 1933. *Studier over den yngre Bronzealder i Danmark med særligt Henblik på Gravfundene*. Årb.
- Coles, J.** 2000. *Patterns in a Rocky Land: Rock Carvings in South-West Uppland, Sweden*. Uppsala.
- Coles, J.** 2005. *Shadows of a Northern Past. Rock Carvings of Bohuslän and Østfold*. Oxford.
- Formozov, A. A.** 1969. *Ocherki po Pervobytnomu Iskusstvu*. Moscow
- Fredsjö, Å.** 1975. *Hällristningar i Kville härad, Bottna socken*. Göteborg.
- Krylova, L.P.** 1976. "Kernosovskiy idol". In: *Eneolit i Bronzovy Vek Ukrainy*, Kiev, 36-46.
- Gelling, P. & Ellis Davidson, H.** 1969. *The Chariot of the Sun*. London.
- Gimbutas, M.** 1989. *The Language of the Goddess*. San Francisco.
- Glob, P. V.** 1969. *Helleristninger i Danmark, København*.
- Graziosi, P.** 1973. "Nuove manifestazioni d'arte mesolitica e neolitica nel riparo Gaban presso Trento". In: *Rivista di scienze preistoriche* 30, 1-2, 237-238.
- Macrobius, A.** *Saturnaliorum convivia*.
- Marstrander, S.** 1970. "A newly discovered Rock-carving of Bronze Age type in Central Norway". In: *Valcamonica Symposium 1970*, Capo di Ponte, 261-268.
- Milstreu, G. & Pröhl H.** (eds.), 1996–1999. *Documentation and Registration of Rock Art* N°. 1–2. Tanumshede.
- Sansoni U. & Gavaldo S.** 2001-2002. "L'ipotesi sciamanica nell'arte rupestre della Valcamonica. Note per un'indagine". In: *Sciamanismo e mito (Bollettino del Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici* 33). Capo di Ponte, 49-56.
- Telegin, D. Ya.** 1998. "Kernosovka". In: *Dei di pietra. La grande statuaria antropomorfa nell'Europa del III millennio a.C.*, Ginevra-Milano, 134.
- Telegin, D. Ya. & Mallory, J. P.** 1994. *The Anthropomorphic stelae of the Ukraine: the Early Iconography of the Indo-Europeans*. Washington: Institute for the Study of Man.
- Telegin, D. Ya. & Mallory, J. P.** 1995. "Statuenhirs of the North Pontic Region". In: S. Casini, R. C. De Marinis, A. Pedrotti (eds.) *Statue-stele e massi incisi nell'Europa dell'Età del Rame (Notizie Archeologiche Bergomensi* 3, 1995), 319-332.
- Zavaroni, A.** 2004a. "Teonimi e figure divine camune sulla Roccia 50 di Naquane (Valcamonica)". In: *Ollodagos* XVIII, 225-264.
- Zavaroni, A.** 2004b. "Gli dei della Roccia delle Iscrizioni a Cimbergo (Valcamonica)". In: *XXI Valcamonica Symposium* (pre-atti). Capo di Ponte, 468-475.
- Zavaroni, A.** 2006. "Souls across the Labyrinth: Representations of Rebirth in the Bronze/Iron Age in Europe". In: *Ollodagos* XX, 29-97.