

Rock Art and Religion

The sun journey in Indo-European mythology and Bronze Age rock art

In this article I carry out an analysis of the sun journey in Bronze Age rock art in south Scandinavia. The story is based upon a widely shared Indo-European myth about the sun maiden and her twin brothers and helpers, the Divine or Heavenly Twins, who in disguise of ships and horses come to her help so that the sun can rise in the morning. This myth can be illustrated by combining Bronze Age iconography, bronze figurines, burials, hoards, and rock art (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005, fig. 139). Here I wish to explore if scenes referring to the sun journey can be identified in rock art alone. I apply the method of identifying singular motifs that relate to the overall narrative of the journey of the sun. On figures 1.6 to 1.12 I have selected and combined episodes from various rock art panels that refer back to the original mythological narrative of the sun journey. Although there is some regional variation it can be demonstrated that Bronze Age rock art in Scandinavia contains scenes from the shared Indo-European myth about the sun journey.

Religion and rock art interpretations

Why are religious interpretations in archaeology and rock-art studies the focus of research in some periods, while they are neglected in others? To answer that question let me begin by presenting a long forgotten scholar. In 1963 Åke Ohlmarks presented a popular synthesis on rock art and religion during the Bronze Age. Originally a specialist on comparative religion he was able to draw on a corpus of religious knowledge that archaeologists at the time did not possess, albeit they did not want to know about. He continued a research tradition founded by Oscar Almgren with the book from 1927; *Hällristningar och kultbruk*. In this book Almgren, an archaeologist, had studied European folklore and comparative religion to gain access to a better understanding of Bronze Age religion, as manifested in rock art. This ground-breaking book was part of a new culture historical revival, initiated by Gustav Kossina in the decades around 1900, which now expanded to encompass archaeological interpretation throughout Europe, although with other in-

terpretative perspectives, such as the study of religion.

The cultural-historical revival was a common phenomenon in the humanities and social sciences during this period, represented in anthropology by the works of Franz Boas and James Frazier in the USA and England, die 'Kulturkreislehre' in Vienna, in the rise of phenomenology and of a comparative Indo-European mythology in France and Germany, and Heidegger's search for an irrational Being in philosophy. Much of this was revived during the post-modern period in the humanities and social sciences (see also discussion in Bruce Lincoln 1999, ch. 3 and 7). Lincoln concludes in a rather defeatist manner that it is not possible to study myth without being ideological, and therefore he now abstains from it and concentrates on studying the ideological use of myth in the present. His arguments, however, pertains to most of the humanities. The implication is therefore not to stop researching the past, but rather pursue such research with a critical con-

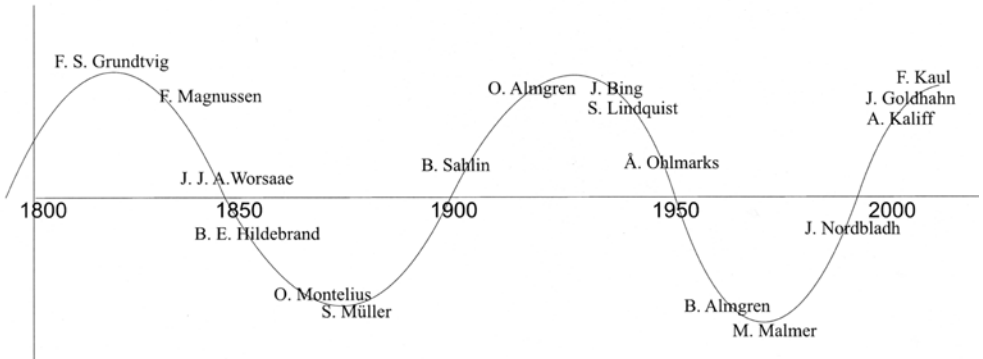
sciousness about the interaction between past and present.

Whereas Oscar Almgren's book earned him justified fame this was not the case for Åke Ohlmarks. Late in life Åke Ohlmarks summarised his views in a grand synthesis on the development of prehistoric religion in Scandinavia, based on a combination of Norse mythology and archaeology. The book was printed in 2000 numbered copies, and provides interesting reading, despite some rather bold interpretations of the archaeological evidence (Ohlmarks 1979). His book (and others before and after) was more or less ignored and forgotten by the archaeological establishment, who now favoured a more objective study of rock art. This research trend culminated in Göran Burenhult's and Mats Malmer's typological and quantitative exercises from 1980/1981, Bertil Almgren's formalistic curvature analysis (typology in disguise, only published in 1987, nearly two decades after it was written), and Jarl Nordbladh's structuralist interpretations from the late 1970s and early 1980s (Nordbladh 1978). Why this dramatic change? Here we need to situate rock art research in the wider historical cycles of archaeological interpretation and theorising. The ideological climate had changed after the Second World War, and so archaeology and the humanities followed suit. Pre-war historical interpretations were now considered ideologically tainted and methodologically flawed, and they were universally rejected, in the work of the Swedish Mats Malmer (Malmer 1963). Instead a new concern for objective science prevailed, much in the tradition of the later 19th century, which was to last well into the late 20th century. It is using objective science that rock art research followed the general global trends; as I have formerly summarized in a diagram of cyclical change during the last 200 years (Kristiansen 1998, fig. 14). On Figure 6.1 I have redrawn the cycle, but added new names to illustrate the point I wish to make, that the link between rock art research and interest in religion corresponds to a historical barometer determined by the global cycle of Rationality versus Romanticism in ideological climate

(also recently supported by Flemming Kaul 2004, ch. 1). In periods of rational, positivistic thinking, religion is considered an irrational epiphenomenon which functions as an ideological mirror of society. It can therefore be employed to understand social organisation, e.g. through analyses of grave goods. A classical example from the previous rationalistic cycle is Lewis Binford's 1971 article on mortuary analysis, which gave rise to a whole research tradition (Binford 1971). However, in more romantic periods, culture-historical thinking religion is considered an independent organising power, whose cosmology pervades all aspects of society. Therefore an understanding of the inherent nature of religion becomes a main objective. Lotte Hedeager's *Shadows of another reality* (title translated from Danish) from 1997 may serve as a classic example within the present Romantic cycle (Hedeager 1997). On Figure 6.1 I trace these changes back in time.

The early 19th century of Romanticism was the great period of culture-historical revival and translation of sagas (in Denmark N. F. S. Grundtvig, Danish poly-historian, poet and priest translated the Icelandic sagas and used them in his poetry and history writing), documentation and study of folklore (the Grimm brothers in Germany), just as historians such as Finn Magnussen in Denmark combined Norse mythology and archaeology. Here archaeology merely served to illustrate the historical sources. His work was critically scrutinized by Worsaae, which paved the way for presenting archaeology as an independent discipline with an own methodology derived from natural science (Kristiansen 2002). It led on to a Rationalistic period of positivistic research led by Oscar Montelius, Hans Hildebrandt and Sophus Müller from 1860 onwards. By the early 20th century a new culture-historical revival reintroduced the use of Norse mythology in archaeological interpretation in the works of Bernhard Sahlin, Oscar Almgren, Just Bing and late in the period Åke Ohlmarks. However, after 1950 the positivistic, rationalistic wave again swept through archaeology and the humanities, and empirical studies of classification took

Romantik + Religion



Rationalism - Religion

Figure 6.1: Cyclical changes between Rationalism and Romanticism in archaeological/culture-historical interpretation, and the corresponding value (\pm) attached to religion.

over in the works of Bertil Almgren and Mats Malmer, which owed much methodological inspiration to Montelius. It was later followed by structuralist analyses of rock art by Jarl Nordbladh, which paved the way for a re-introduction of religious interpretations by the 1990s.

So the answer to why Åke Ohlmarks was ignored and forgotten is, at least in part, that he was out of time. His book came at the wrong time, too late to be considered interesting by a new generation of archaeologists raised to resist the earlier paradigm (so Bertil Almgren could indirectly take a stance against his father Oscar Almgren in the new paradigm). And it came too early to be considered interesting by the new generation of archaeologists of the post-processual tradition who re-introduced the study of ritual and religion during the 1990s, in works by Anders Kaliff (1998), Flemming Kaul (1998), and Joakim Goldhahn (1999a and 1999b). They hardly knew Ohlmarks as we shall see. Jarl Nordbladh may be said to bridge the two paradigms by introducing a structuralist approach that paved the way for an analysis of the meaning behind the rock art, yet without taking religion into account. During the first decade of the 21st century we have seen more research on rock and religion in the

works of Åsa Fredell (2003), Lasse Bengtsson (2004), John Coles (2005), Camilla Fari (2006), Katherine Hauptman Wahlgren (2002), Johan Ling (2008), Lene Melheim (2006), Flemming Kaul (2004), Anders Kaliff (2007), Dag Widholm (2007), and Kristiansen and Larsson (2005, ch. 6). In short, Scandinavian rock art studies have entered the centre stage of archaeological research with an astonishing published output of 500 titles during the last 5 years (Goldhahn 2006).

However, I wish to return to the work of Åke Ohlmarks. In the book from 1963 he presented an interpretation of the sun as a personified god based on comparative evidence from Egypt (Ohlmarks 1963, 22–45). He borrowed the idea that the sun is carried on a ship, which passed through different stages during day and night. In Egypt there is a day ship and a night ship, and the sun has to change from one to the other at dawn, a scene often pictured in contemporary Egyptian iconography (Figure 6.2). He was then able to demonstrate that similar scenes can be identified on Scandinavian rock art (Ohlmarks 1960, 49), although some of them were later considered questionable (Fredell 2003, 212). He also found some rather scant evidence in Old Norse religion that referred to the sun god and the ship change. In an original study 40

years later, Flemming Kaul demonstrated that the sun journey could be reconstructed by combining select scenes from the artwork on Late Bronze Age razors (Kaul 1998, fig. 170), apparently without knowing of Ohlmarks previous work. He also introduced the helpers of the sun: the horse, the bird, the fish and the snake, of which Ohlmarks had already identified the horse. In his most recent work Flemming Kaul has now pursued the Egyptian connection put forward by Ohlmarks, and developed it further (Kaul 2004).

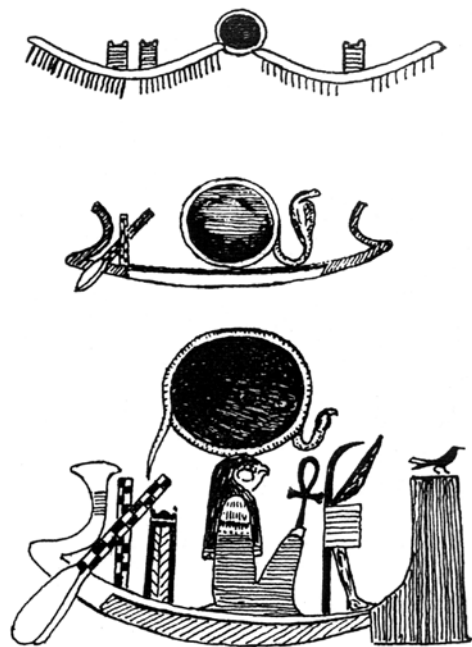
In the following I wish to carry out a reanalysis of the sun journey in rock art. It is based upon the recent interpretation carried out by myself and Thomas Larsson (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005, ch. 6.3 and 6.4), based upon old Indo-European mythology about the sun maiden and her twin brothers and helpers, the Divine or Heav-

enly Twins, who in disguise of ships and horses come to her help. In a recent article Daphne Nash observed that the same story is depicted on Iron Age coinage among the Belgae in south-eastern England. Here it found an afterlife, perhaps because 'in this nocturnal drama the Heavenly Twins served until the end of pagan antiquity as specialized saviours of soldiers in battle and of anyone in peril at sea. They were conventionally depicted as two handsome youths, as twinned horses, or two men with horses, and as two stars because they were set forever in the night sky in the constellation Gemini, as an aid to navigation' (Nash in press). She summarises the myth very succinctly:

'In the particular story... the bright daughter of the sky god, who personified theradiance of the Sun itself - Eos in Greek, Aurora and Mater Matuta in Latin, Sol, Sul, Brigantia, Brigit, and Eostre in various northern lands - is chased in her chariot through the daylight sky by primeval monsters from the night and the nether world - either dragon-snakes (here) or wolves (elsewhere). At the crisis of sunset they capture her and take her into the waters of night. Her twin brothers - one divine and one mortal - come to her rescue and one, at least, ships her towards dawn, defeating or shackling night's monster(s) until the eastern bounds of morning are broken and she and her sun-disc are released for another day.' (Nash in press, West 2007, 186-91 on the Divine Twins, and ch. 5 on the Divine Sun).

It follows from this that Kaul's interpretation of the sun journey should be modified, or rather expanded. The snake and the water dragons are enemies of the sun, not helpers, and several of the wave figures on the razors could well be interpreted as the water dragon or serpent. The more universal Indo-European drama between the thunder god and the water dragon/serpent encircling the waters and lands (West 2007, 255ff.), is in all likelihood unfolded on many Period 5 hanging vessels, where the

Figure 6.2: Egyptian depictions of the change of sun-boats from the Pre Dynastic period, below are night and day ships from the Late Dynastic period. It demonstrates the long continuity of this central religious myth in Egypt (after Ohlmarks 1963, 46)



centrally-placed sun is rising and setting in a sea of wavebands, some of them sea-monsters, some seahorses and sun-horses.

While this myth can be illustrated and materialised, as it were, by combining Bronze Age iconography, bronze figurines, burials, hoards, and rock art (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005, fig. 139), I now wish to explore if similar scenes referring to the sun journey can be identified in rock art alone. I apply Flemming Kaul's method of identifying singular motifs from the overall narrative of the journey of the sun. If it can be demonstrated that they cover the whole sequence in thematic form, I take it as confirmation that some rock art refers to basic Bronze Age myths albeit in another medium than bronze. A few rock art panels were already identified by Flemming Kaul as relating to the overall narrative of the journey of the sun (Kaul 1998, fig. 171 and 172). However, I wish to do a systematic coverage, based on all published evidence in Scandinavia. From Bohuslän I have used the documentation gathered in six reports from Vitlycke Museum, edited by Lasse Bengtsson that appeared between 1995 and 2002, and work is still in progress. Also the two reports edited by Gerhard Milstreu and Henning Prøhl from the rock art museum in Underlës were used. A wonderful monograph by John Coles: *Shadows of a Northern Past* appeared in 2005, and contains most of the best carvings from western Sweden and south-eastern Norway. From southern Norway I consulted mainly Marstrander (1963), Vogt (2000) and Fett and Fett (1941), from Scania Althin (1945), from eastern Sweden Nordén (1923), and from Uppland Coles (2000). From Denmark I have consulted Kaul (2004).

In addition I wish to test the range of variation in the rendering of this central myth in rock art, and I will discuss if variations are thematic or rather represent different renderings of a singular myth. I make no chronological distinctions, as most rock art panels display continuity of use, where later additions form part of the logic of previous scenes. Sometimes older ships would even be updated with new modern stems and sterns. Only few panels, not to

be discussed, display clear and conscious discontinuity. It should also be noted that rock art and Bronze Age iconography employ the method of episodic narrative. This is the logic behind the various select episodes of the sun journey on razors, each referring to a decisive moment in the myth, which would be known in its entirety by those using the razor.

The sun journey and related myths in Scandinavian rock art

While many singular motifs have been identified as belonging to the sun journey, such as the horse pulling the sun, few attempts have been made to reconstruct from the many rock art scenes those who thematically belong together by retelling a myth, in our case about the sun maidens journey during night and day, helped by her twin brothers (the Divine Twins), and the drama accompanying the journey. It should be noted that the Divine Twins shapeshift, from horses to ships, or from horses to axes, and they are mentioned in the texts as sailing in hundred-oared ships. Their original name in Rig Veda is the Asvins, meaning horse born and those who control horses. The Greek Disocuri and a similar divine pair of twins in Baltic folklore all share a common origin with the Asvins as sons of the sky god, just as they have similar functions, linked to horses, speed and travels, as well as in their role as rescuers. They are the third generation of gods, and belong in the mature pantheon of Indo-European religion, and in opposition to the original sky god whose name is shared in all Indo-European languages, their names were later adapted to local traditions, which suggests that they belong in a later historical sequence of interactions during the early Bronze Age, linked to the spread of chariots and horse dressage (Kristiansen in press).

The relationship between ships and horses on rock art has been recognised as being part of an original Indo-European package of myth and rituals (Østmo 1998). However, there have been few attempts to analyse their specific relationship and religious meaning in a systematic way. In

more recent studies by myself, and Thomas B. Larsson, the descriptions of the Divine Twins and their functions in the texts have been used to identify their attributes in iconography, rock art and material culture (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005, ch. 6.7). By establishing a correlation between text and material culture the Divine Twins could be safely dated to the Bronze Age in Europe. It could be demonstrated that twin ships is a common motive on metalwork and rock art. It symbolises the Divine Twins in one of their functions as protectors of sailors, while carrying the sun safely through the night. This symbolism further demonstrates continuity throughout the Bronze Age, as seen on Figure 6.3.

It should be noted that Flemming Kaul did not employ Indo-European mythology in his work. He was therefore unaware of the Divine Twins, and consequently he ignored those few examples where they are depicted on decorated razors, either in person (Kaul 1998, fig. 165, catalogue no. 210 and 273), or the more numerous examples of twin ships (Kaul 1998, fig. 143–4, and many more in the catalogue). The motifs are also found on Central European bronze iconography and pottery. The two decorated axes from Hajdu Samson in Hungary from the early Bronze Age depict a double ship, one upside down (day and night ship), a form employed on Danish Late Bronze Age iconography a thousand years later

(Kaul 1998, fig. 175, and 176 from Roumania). It suggests that the symbolism linked to the Divine Twins was already widespread from the early Bronze Age (Pasztor 2008, Vianello 2008).

The intimate, symbolic relationship between ships and horses is also demonstrated in the use of horse heads on the stems of rock art ships during most of the Bronze Age. The head of a swimming bird (swans, ducks etc.) takes over on metalwork during the late Bronze Age, but rarely on rock art. It lends special significance to the mythological connection with the Asvins (horses) that rock art ships are depicted as transformed horses. They are animated and retain their capacity to become horses that pull the sun or sun chariot at dawn, as we shall see. Such shape shifts and animations also pertain to other objects, such as axes.

The divine horse ship often carries the sun, as illustrated on Figure 6.4. I collected 12 examples that show how the sun is carried in various ways: in the middle of one of the ships or between oarsmen, standing on a pole, or simply hanging over the ship. When there are two suns, we may think of it as day and night sun, as on Trundholm. The sun appears in the most common symbolic forms, as simple cup marks, as a circle, concentric circles, or as a wheel.

I have now demonstrated that twin ships – often with horse attributes on the stems symbolising the Asvins – carried the sun on

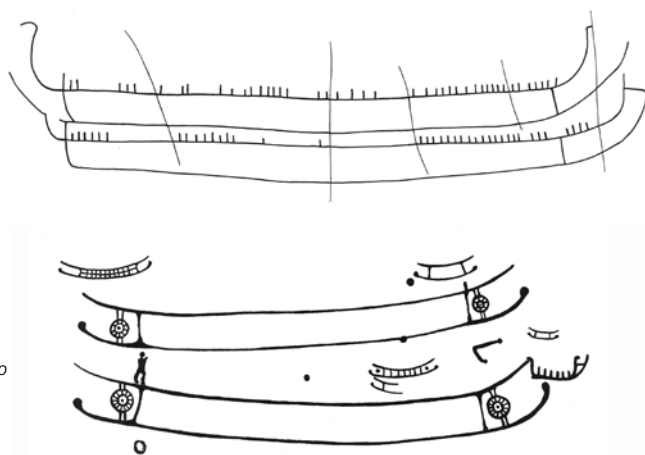
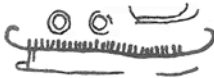
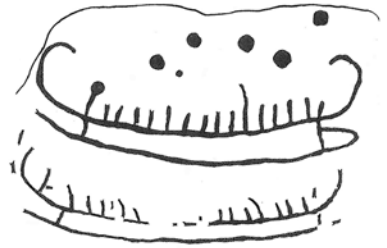
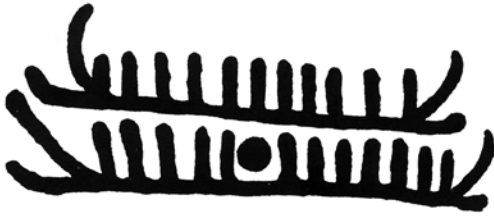


Figure 6.3: Two examples of twin ships, on top from the Early Bronze Age, and bottom from the Early Iron Age. They cover a time span of 1000 years. The ship in the middle from the Early Bronze Age, illustrate that already at that time could the sun be added to the stem.

Figure 6.4: Select examples of rock art scenes where the sun or suns are carried on a ship or on twin ships. The examples show both night ships (sailing from right to left) and day ships (sailing from left to right).



many rock art panels. The next question is if this representation was part of a more complex narrative of the journey of the sun. It can be stated that twin ships may appear both as an isolated mythological and episodic statement, and as part of a more complex narrative. But before turning to such more complex pictorial statements it is necessary to discuss principles of cosmological geography. How was space on rock art employed? Did the Bronze Age rock carvers employ more than one principle of cosmological space? An understanding of this is of utmost importance for our ability to read the panels correctly (discussion in Fredell 2002, Hauptman-Wahlgren 2002, Bradley 2006).

On Figure 6.5 I have assembled some examples of the use of mythological space. They demonstrate two things: the conception of up and down (upper and lower realms) could be shown as upside down for the lower realm. And movements between them would take place by literally turning ships or other things vertical. Other panels, however, from the later Bronze Age do not apply this principle of upside down any longer, and demonstrate instead the day and night ships by the direction they sail – towards the right during day, and towards the left during night (and mostly below the day ships in the underworld), as demonstrated at Fossum (Figure 6.6). We also see horses and humans come down and land on ships. So there are probably several perceptions of space at work simultaneously.

Now that we have identified the divine ships as carriers of the sun, let us begin to look for some possible action. On Figure 6.7 I have assembled a number of examples that introduce other actors and actions to the twins' ships. On the top examples we see how the two ships are artificially linked together, and some form of horned human figures is added. Animal figures, most probably horses are added, in pairs, as Divine Twins. Also human twins (divine?) are found, mostly as axe-bearers. On the last two examples the human figures and the sun are set in motion. Not only figures, but also the sun is moving. On Figure 6.8 I have assembled further examples of how the sun

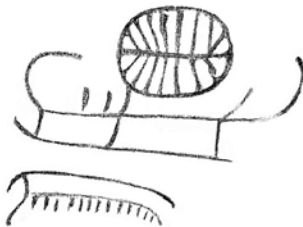
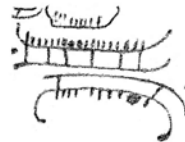
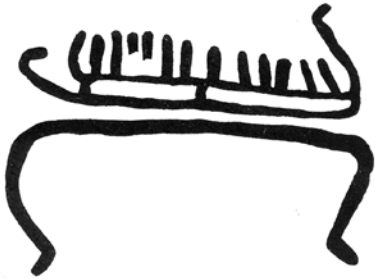
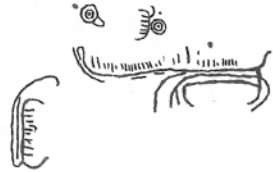
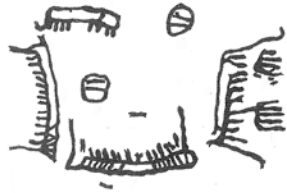
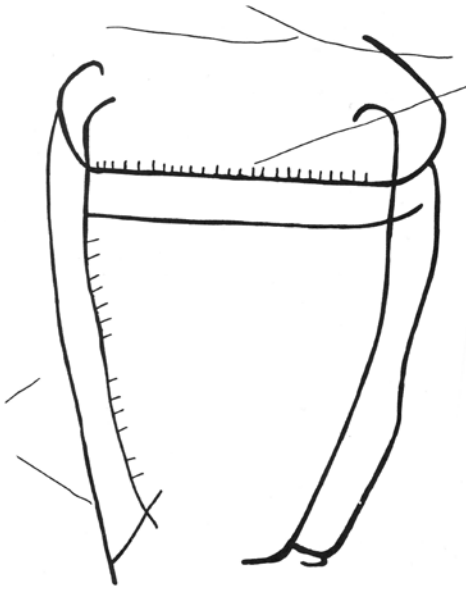
can be moved around and change position on the ship, from the middle of the ship to the stern, when it is either leaving or arriving. Human figures may carry sun discs, or the sun may become animated with arms or legs, in this example sitting on the stem. However, it looks as if the ship or its stems/sterns are also animated and can move or carry the sun on their own.

A smaller helping ship is introduced in one of the examples on Figure 6.8, which is a recurring theme, just as the Divine Twins appear regularly as lure blowers (illustrated by two curved figures or signs on the ship), or they appear in full person as axe bearers. Some of the ships are sailing from east to west (night ships), some from west to east (day ships). This allows us to understand the meaning of the figures. In one of the examples the two horses have just arrived to take the sun on a ride. On the other figure we see the ship lifting god, lifting the ship up from the underworld/sea, and helped by the Divine Twins with axes and with sun discs waiting to be mounted for the day trip.

Next on Figure 6.9 there are some more clear-cut examples of the transition from day to night and from night to day. Again we meet the ship-lifting god, taking the ship out of the underworld. We also see the little helping ship has landed on a bigger ship. On another example the sun god or a helper carries the sun out of the night ship. Animated axes are linking the two ships together and a horse is ready for taking the sun on the day ride. The waiting horse is also seen on two other examples. A more complex transmission from night to day is found on the bottom example. First the day horses are landing above the ship, directed by the god on the stem. Next they are drawing the night ship up, with the sun in front of them, again being directed by a helping god. One could also assume that this is a day ship drawn by horses.

The transition scenes are further elaborated on Figure 6.10, mainly representing the day ship and the transition to sun horses. On top the horse is standing on the ship with a big sun disc in front of it. Below the ship a smaller helping ship is arriving,

Figure 6.5: Examples of the inverted use of mythological space, where the underworld or the lower realm is presented with ships turning upside down.



being directed by a helping god, while the sun disc is being lifted in a rope (sun disc in rope is also seen in Figure 6.8). On the next example the sun disc is leaving the

night ship, while the twin horses are waiting, with the twin ships. On the example to the right in the middle things are in more flux or being more



Figure 6.6: Section from complex scenery at Fossum in Tanum. It shows day ships sailing towards the right on top and night ships sailing towards the left at the bottom. Between them mythical narratives are inserted. Documentation by Tanums Hällristningsmuseum and reproduced by courtesy of SHFA (Swedish Archive for Rock art Research).

transformative, the helping ship apparently lifting the sun away. In the next example the two horses have landed, and the same is repeated on the next scene, while in the last example horses drawing a chariot are landing on the night ships to take over the sun for the day ride.

On Figure 6.11 I have assembled some examples from eastern Scania and eastern Sweden where axes are acting as helpers to the night ship. As twin axes are also an attribute of the Divine Twins we may here be seeing how axes are personified as divine beings. On top they guard the sun on the night ship. Below we see how they are moving the sun from the night ship and in the process also draw the ship on land, so the sun horses and the chariot can take over the

ride. It exemplifies the transformative nature of gods and their helpers, and it makes it clear that axe bearing humans on rock art truly represent gods, mostly the Divine Twins.

Finally, I have chosen a panel (Figure 6.12) where we see a complex scene that might constitute a single narrative from the myth of the sun journey, with day ships and horses above and night ships below. It suggests that ships may also take part in the day journey of the sun, at least on some panels.

Conclusion: rock art and Bronze Age religion

We may conclude that rock art repeatedly depict motifs from the shared mythical

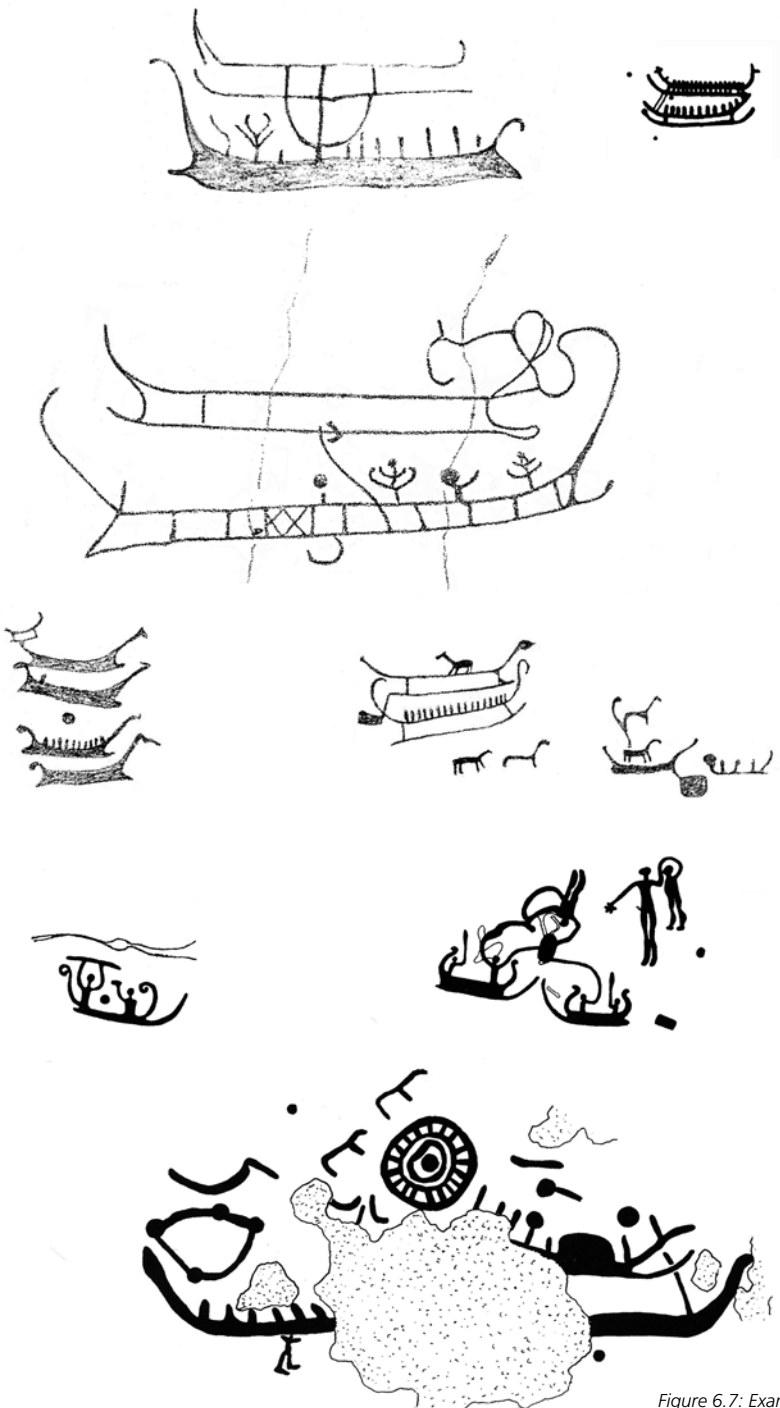


Figure 6.7: Examples of twin ships with some actors and action added.



Figure 6.8: Moving the sun around with ships and sun in various positions.

repertoire of Indo-European/Bronze Age religion, whose basic structure has been convincingly demonstrated in recent research (Fredell 2003, ch. 7). I have exemplified the various stages in the myth of the journey of the sun, as handed down to us in texts from India to the Baltic, and represented not only in rock art but also in figurines, iconography, hoards and burials (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005, fig. 139). It indicates

that Bronze Age religion was complex and possessed a pantheon of gods with various functions, and among the most important were the sun god/goddess and their helpers and rescuers the Divine Twins, which in various disguises, as ships, axes and horses, and as twin stars (the morning and evening star) ensured that the journey would successfully pass through its transitions and overcome the dangers underway. It may well be that

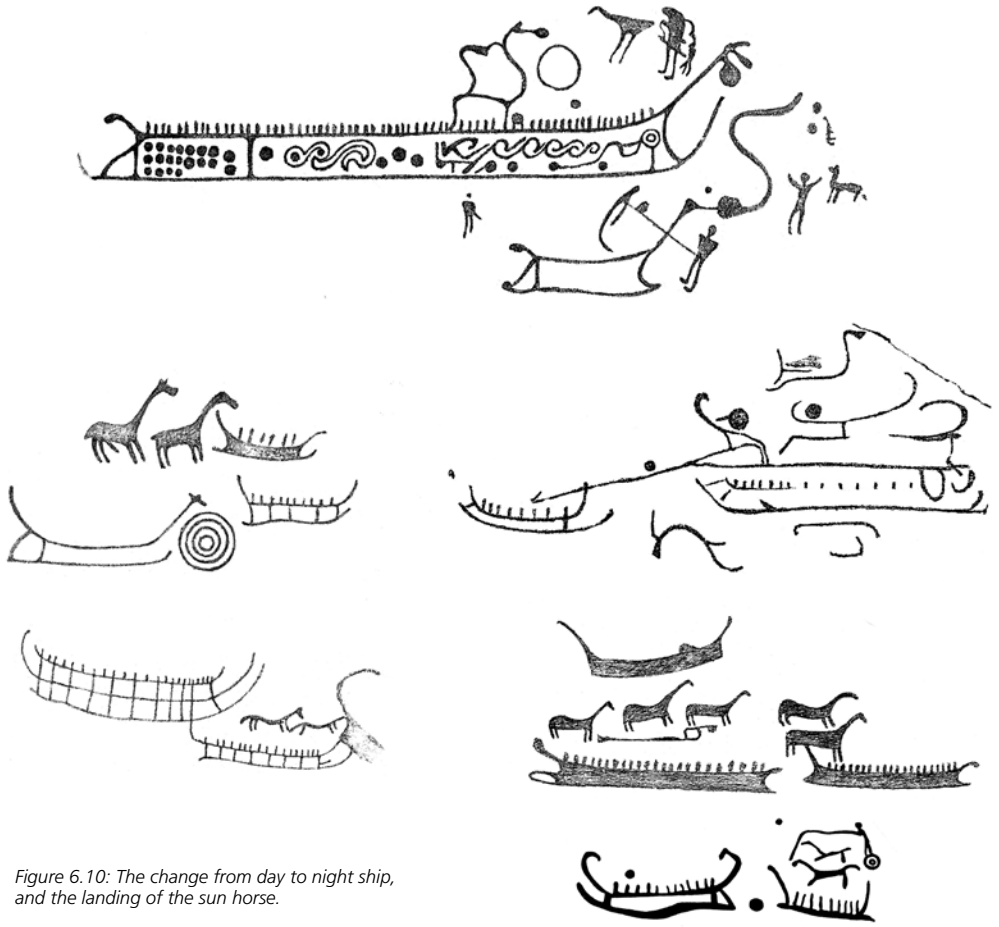


Figure 6.10: The change from day to night ship, and the landing of the sun horse.

tif in rock art, whether displayed in pairs or as part of the nocturnal drama of the sun in its eternal journey through the dangers of day and night.

I have also demonstrated that local and temporal variation existed in the depiction of the journey on rock art. The various scenes may concentrate on different aspects of the journey, but true variations also occur. In some scenes horses land on the ship to take over the sun journey or transfer the sun, in some they draw the ship, in others axes draw the ship. In this we see the transformative and animated nature of gods, things and animals at play.

We may further conclude that the rock art depictions of the journey of the sun correspond to the same motives depicted on bronze razors from the Late Bronze Age, as reconstructed by Flemming Kaul (Kaul 2004, fig. 67, Fredell 2003, fig. 2.3). However, there are also differences. On the razors the helping animals are the fish, snake and bird. The snake and fish obviously belong in the netherworld of the sea, and we do not find them very often on rock art – at least we cannot identify fish – whereas snakes appear from time to time. However, the snake/serpent belonged to the enemies of the sun, as we have seen. In addition, there is more variation among the ships on rock

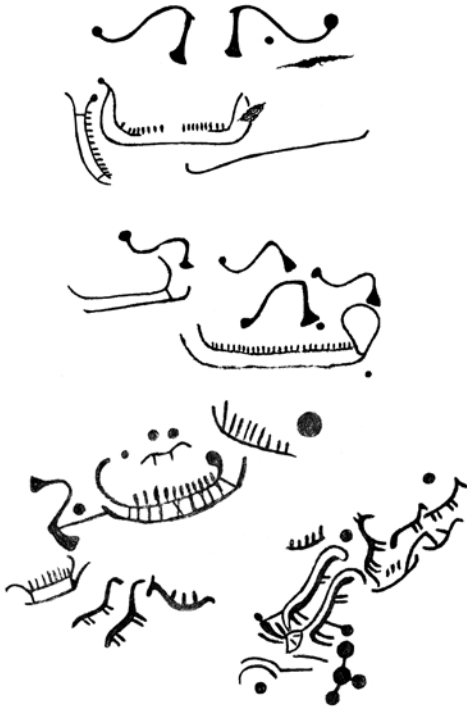


Figure 6.11: Night ships with animated helpers from eastern Sweden

art: the twin ships appear regularly and a little helping ship as well. On some razors we do find the twin ship or helping ship on top of the larger ship. But clear-cut double ships on bronzes belong with the elaborate neck rings with oval end plates from period 5, where the oval plate itself is a ship (making up twin ships), just like the razor. In this way a kind of symbolic double effect was achieved, a common phenomenon on Bronze Age metalwork and iconography. On rock art we often have difficulty in delimiting individual scenes; other mythical scenes also appear. Therefore we have even greater difficulty in delimiting the relevant scenes, but this in itself offers various points

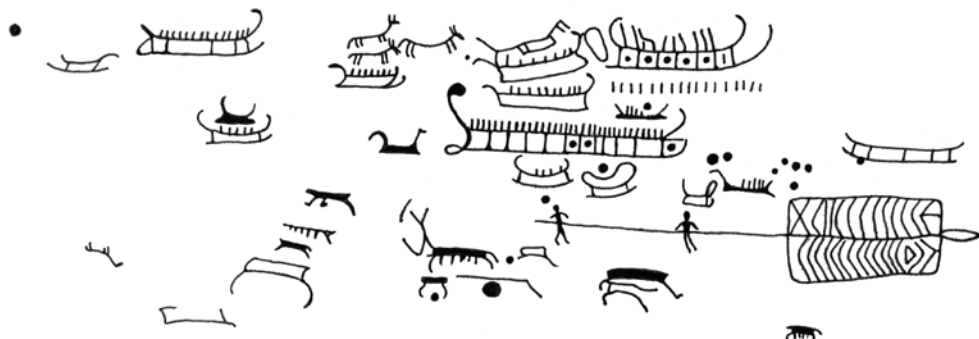
for consideration: how do the various figurative components relate to each other. Are different readings of the same panel possible, depending on the combinations of motifs, forming different mythological narratives? Finally it should be borne in mind that most rock art is located along ancient coastlines, and thus has a clear maritime focus (Ling 2008). Therefore most scenes are dominated by myths linked to sea-faring journeys, and to rituals where ships play an important role, as in the journey of the sun, where the Divine Twins acted in their double role as rescuers of the sun from drowning in the sea and as protectors of sailors in general. We should then expect non-maritime motives to dominate on inland rock art, which has indeed been demonstrated (Ling 2008, fig. 9.3 and 9.4, Bradley 2006, fig. 9).

I found it comforting that Richard Bradley quite independently reached rather similar conclusions (Bradley 2006). At the time of writing none of us knew about the other's work. See also Bradley and Widholm (2007). As a next step it would be a worthy task to trace the drama of the journey of the sun more systematically in Eurasian Bronze Age iconography. For the Late Bronze Age this was admirably done by Ernst Sprockhoff more than 50 years ago (Sprockhoff 1954).

The fact that the basic motifs in the narrative of the sun journey can be documented independently on metalwork and on rock art indicates that we are dealing with a shared Bronze Age religion throughout the Nordic realm, albeit with some regional and local variations. While some researchers have emphasised the variations (Skoglund 2008), I have focused on the shared elements, as they constitute a basic mythological storyline from which local interpretations could be made when it was applied to different media and materials - from rock art over metalwork to ship settings and burials.

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Figure 6.12: Example of panel from eastern Sweden with day ships and inverted night ships.



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