



## FOOTPRINTS AS A SYMBOL OF A DIVINE GUIDE OF SOULS: FOCUS ON THE SCANDINAVIAN ROCK ART

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### SUMMARY

*According to the author, footprints are one of the symbols of a divine guide of souls. He is a deus Viator like the Germanic Odin, the Celtic Lugus and Hermes-Mercurius and other divinities involved in the universal cyclical fertilization. Therefore in Scandinavian rock art footprints are commonly associated with other symbols alluding to the cyclical regeneration of the souls such as boats, wheels (sometimes two paired and joined footprints are laid out in the shape of a wheel) or with anthropomorphs and zoomorphs representing peculiar aspects of the divinities concerning the cycle of rebirth. The presence of footprints on funeral steles of other European regions should confirm this thesis.*

### RIASSUNTO

L'A. ritiene che l'arte rupestre scandinava debba essere studiata nel contesto dell'arte rupestre europea precristiana e che la maggior parte dei suoi simboli sia di carattere religioso. Dopo una breve disamina di altre interpretazioni, l'A. presenta la propria, secondo la quale le orme di piede sono uno dei simboli del dio psicopompo, deus Viator e ciclico come il germanico Odhinn ed il celtico Lugus. Quindi le orme di piedi sono generalmente associate ad altri simboli che alludono alla stessa credenza nella ciclica reincarnazione delle anime, come le barche, le ruote (a volte due orme appaiate assumono la forma di una ruota) o con antropomorfi e zoomorfi che sarebbero manifestazioni di grandi divinità.

Secondo l'autore, la presenza di orme su stele funerarie di altre zone d'Europa avvalorano l'interpretazione che le orme alludessero a dei conduttori di anime verso e dall'Altromondo.

### RESUME

*L'auteur estime que l'art rupestre scandinave doit être étudié dans le contexte de l'art rupestre européen préchrétien et que la plupart de ses symboles sont à caractère religieux. Après un court examen des autres interprétations, l'auteur présente la sienne, selon laquelle les traces de pieds sont un des symboles du dieu psychopompe, deus Viator, et cyclique comme le germanique Odhinn et le celtique Lugus. En outre, les traces de pied sont généralement associées à d'autres symboles qui font allusion à la même croyance dans la réincarnation cyclique des âmes, comme les bateaux, les roues (parfois les traces de pied couplées prennent la forme d'une roue), ou bien elles sont associées à des anthropomorphes et zoomorphes qui seraient manifestations de grandes divinités.*

*Selon l'auteur, la présence des traces de pied sur des stèles funéraires d'autres régions de l'Europe confirme l'interprétation que les traces font allusion à des dieux conduisant les âmes vers et à partir de l'au-delà.*

In the famous panel in Lökeberg, Foss, (Fig. 1) many ships are represented. One of them, associated with two trees, the one blooming, the other one stunted and bare, demonstrates that ships – as the great scholar Marija Gimbutas (1989, 247-249) asserted – must be commonly considered as “ships of renewal”. To my mind, the concept of renewal is also expressed by the small circles with an inner cupmark which in Fig. 1 protrude from the deck of some ships. Here I would confirm my thesis stating that a circle with a central dot expresses the concept of cyclic fecundation, while the dot and the cupmark are the simplest symbol of the fecundating power (see e.g. Zavaroni 2006, 61).

In this interpretative frame, the ithiphallic and tailed anthropomorph in the upper part of the panel could represent a god involved in cyclical regeneration: moreover, he could be a god leading souls from the earth to the Otherworld and back. The souls are schematically represented by the strokes protruding from the deck of the ships (Zavaroni 2006, 51). In the few cases in which humans are present, only a careful analysis of the composition can perhaps lead us to establish whom they represent. To my mind, in Fig. 1 the short stick held by the phallic anthropomorph symbolizes also a soul or a vital embryo: it recalls the strokes we see on the ships and certain sticks held by other characters of Scandinavian rock art (Zavaroni 2006, 61).

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What I consider to be a tail is generally interpreted as a scabbard. For instance, J. Coles (2005, 42) writes:

*Weapons most commonly worn are scabbards and humans of all sizes and styles may be shown with these. Often the wearer is phallic. The scabbards may have forked terminals which probably are of the latest phases of the traditional Bronze Age. Illogically, we see little of the swords drawn from the scabbards, and it is as if the sword was a special piece of the equipment, an emblem of prestige, perhaps a traditional and long-lived element in leadership or other important role in society. Most of the square-bodied humans with exaggerated sexual organs have scabbards...*

The truth is that most of the presumed scabbards are forked and the handle of the imagined sword is never drawn. Coles does not say that an exaggerated sexual organ too was an emblem of prestige, but this would be the logical consequence of his argumentation. I have never seen scabbard figures of the Bronze and Iron Age with a bifurcation, but perhaps I have not gathered exhaustive information. Certainly, tails are not bifurcate either,<sup>1</sup> but my suggestion concerns mythical beings who, as rock art itself shows, can have the strangest attributes; and on symbolic grounds this bifurcation may find a very simple explanation: it is one of the many allusions to the double principle (life-death, good-evil) pervading whatever form of new life. As we will see later, the god psychopompos is also dual: he can divide himself into two twins or two Genii contending their own influence on the soul. Among the ancient religions the Germanic one was certainly founded upon the conception according to which the dual principle permeated the universe (Zavaroni 2005). To conclude, I think that to mistake tails for swords is the fruit of the skepticism that many scholars reserve to the idea that Scandinavian rock art is a religious expression. Such skepticism, fortified by the dominant sociological trend in fashion today, diverts research away from the comparative study of the symbols portrayed in the art of Old Europe.

On the Ukrainian stele called Kernosovka (from Kernosovo, Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine; Bronze Age) an act of sexual intercourse between a man and a woman is represented. Both are lifting up great open hands and are similar to many humans depicted on Scandinavian rocks. The male has, undoubtedly, a long tail. The same character is represented on the front of this stele and on another one (Zavaroni 2007: 77-80). Such an attribute makes him look like the Sileni, Satyri and Fauni, the agents of universal fertility, later represented in Greece, Etruria and then in the Romanized regions. But the most important data for the comparison with the Scandinavian characters is that in Valcamonica, for instance at Cimbergo, Pià d'Ort and Sello, we undoubtedly have tailed anthropomorphs (Fig. 1). Some of them are fighting. Therefore I would suggest that the appendix on the back of many Scandinavian anthropomorphs too is a tail rather than a scabbard. For instance, in a panel at Varlöv, Tanum 273, an act of sexual intercourse is depicted and the phallic male has a horizontal appendix on his back: I cannot think that in the age of this carving it was fashionable to make love wearing a scabbard.

Coming back to Fig. 1, another boat of the same composition is associated with a footprint and circles with cupmarks. This association is frequent and the analysis of the compositions shows that "boat" and "foot" are so strictly connected on the grounds of the symbolic function they perform that the figure of a boat can contain the contour of a foot (Fig. 2) or a foot can be shaped like a boat (Fig. 3). It does not deal with superimpositions, but with composite figures.

This association, to which wheels and circles are often added, has only one plausible explanation: boat and foot allude to a god who knows the ways of the universe and to the journey by sea and/or land that the god cyclically embarks on from this to the other world guiding the souls of the dead and from the netherworld back to earth bringing regenerated souls or embryos.

In Boglösa 138 (Fig. 4; after Kjellén 1975, Coles 2000), amidst the many associations of footprints with boats of rebirth, one of the most interesting groups is formed by paired shoe-soles laid out in such a way as to allude also to a wheel with four spokes symbolizing the universal cycles. The concept of the cyclical journey of the traveller god is effectively expressed by the composition of Boglösa 138F, where a dog-like image is also drawn as an assistant of the god, a role played in various Scandinavian and Camunian scenes.

In the Lökeberg panel (Fig. 1), under the bow of the boat of regeneration associated with the footprint, a circle and a wheel with four spokes are drawn. The allusion to the cycles is clear. On the right of the circle there is an "incomplete" human without arms. To my mind, "incomplete" figures denote a deadly aspect (e.g. see Zavaroni 2006, *passim*). The problem is that more than a divinity can normally have or temporarily assume such a nature. In fact in the age of the Scandinavian rock carvings most divinities are ambivalent just as the preclassical divinities were all over Europe. In my



opinion the most powerful god, lord of the universe, was identifiable as a Vulcan-Saturn-Cernunos: creator and destroyer, giver of life and death, custodian of the secret of life. The cycle of rebirth was certainly the dominant thought in the Weltanschauung and this leit motiv was the main source of inspiration of the craftsmen of rock art.

In Fig. 1, near the boat containing the two trees, there is an ithiphallic and tailed anthropomorph. It is not clear if his arms are bent or, rather, incomplete. However, he is not the Creator of the vital embryos who, to my mind, is symbolized, in his positive aspect, by the open hands. As the anthropomorph is surrounded by ships full of souls, represented by the sticks protruding from the deck, the character is probably a divine guide of souls.

Many times footprints are vertically set out before or after a ship, but sometimes they are engraved above the deck of the ship. When panels have as few figures as the panel of Underslös, Tanum 271 (Fig. 5, after Milstreu & Prøhl 1999, 101), it is impossible to elude the problem of the relationship between boat and footprint. Here, inside the boat, near the prow, there are three humans that are evidently not souls: in fact the souls are symbolized by some strokes engraved on the upper level. Under this one, another boat is schematically drawn, but it is empty. Therefore the composition alludes to the journey towards the Otherworld (the empty boat) and to the return from it (the boat with strokes carrying three presumed gods also).

In a nearby composition three humans are engraved, two of which have raised hands. If we suppose that they are facing each other, the clenched fist of the one (or is the arm with one hand missing?) is opposite to the open hand of the other one. But the open hand has three fingers. This form, seen several times, is obviously symbolic: it indicates that the god has power on all three worlds of the tripartite universe. Then we may suppose that the arms of the gods facing each other in Fig. 5 denote that their power in the three worlds alternate. It may be noted that the double principle personified by the two characters is symbolized, in the simplest way, by the two lines engraved under the boat. Between the two characters with raised arms there is a smaller "incomplete" without arms: he has, therefore, at least temporarily, a chthonian nature. It is difficult to say what its relationship is with the other two humans. Initially (Zavaroni 2007: 87), as I had not noted that the three standing humans are probably in relationship with those on board the ship drawn in the nearby panel, I had hypothesized that the "Armless" simply represented "the chthonian aspects of the two alter egos", but now I doubt that such an interpretation can be valid. In some compositions one sees a smaller anthropomorph which could represent a *deus puer*, a divine child. In the old European religions the divine boy (then developed into the *Diônysos puer* of the Greek-Roman iconography, the Germanic *Baldr* and the Celtic *Maponos*) can act as an impulsor, a pulse generator which is concealed in the underground world, although his effects are seen in this world.

On a rock in Skjellin, Frederikstad (Fig. 6), there is another example of association of footprints, boats, wheels and cupmarks. Since there is only one anthropomorph, he possibly represents the god guiding souls. He is not completely armless; he seems to have a maimed arm. As similar humans or humans with arms reduced to stumps are also associated with ships in some other compositions, we may hypothesize that maimed arms allude to a particular nature of the represented god: perhaps they symbolize the fact that the god must live in the underground world for most of the time as in the case of *Baldr*, *Maponos*, the archaic *Dionysos*. In the panel of Fig. 7 (Tvette, Onsøy) the anthropomorph with only one maimed arm is represented twice. Other anthropomorphs are present in any case: one of them, with raised arms but not open hands, is sitting astride a small boat. Two other anthropomorphs raising a three-fingered hand, recall the similar one shown in Fig. 5.

In both Fig. 6 and Fig. 7 one may note pairs of footprints joined by a small stroke. In rock art, a line or stroke joining two objects generally alludes to their bond and in particular to the indissoluble bond of the double principle. It is therefore probable that joined footprints too allude to the double principle to which not only the souls brought by the divine guide, but also the god himself is being subjected. For instance the Gaulish *Lugus*, who also acts as a guide of souls besides being the most important god, dies and resuscitates as well as the souls, while periodically the Germanic *Odin* disappears (leaves for a journey) and is replaced by *Ullr*.

At *Boglösa*, South-West Uppland, two compositions may be seen (here Fig. 8) which find an easy interpretation and give useful indications, if they are framed within the perspective suggested here. What is most striking about them is the object resembling the side of a case whose supports are the ends of an arch cut out of the base. I think that it is a schematic representation of the Otherworld into which the souls of the dead go. In *Boglösa* 131, on the left of the Otherworld, two empty boats

are going in (“empty” denotes “no living being”); in the center there are some cupmarks alluding to the divine fecundating power preserved in the Otherworld; on the right, water birds are getting out: they too are considered carriers of revitalized souls (rather than souls themselves). In the lower part of the Otherworld, to the left, out of the structure, there is a line (a half boat?) under which small strokes symbolize the souls; then in the inner part the souls are above a second line. The “below/above” opposition here denotes the opposition “death/life”. A cupmark symbolizing the fecundating power is marked under the foot of the Otherworld. To the right, inside the arch, a footprint is sketched: it is an allusion to the divine guide of souls.

In Boglösa 138, from one side (here on the right) four armless anthropomorphs (=lifeless) are entering the median part of the Otherworld; two others are engraved at a greater distance. One of the two has only one arm which is a stump like the one commented apropos of the panels in Skjellin and Tvete; therefore presumably it denotes a psychopompos. Both the arms of the other human are reduced to short stumps. This figure seems to be repeated immediately below, near a quadruped (horse?). Near the right foot of the structure alluding to the Otherworld, an empty boat (= without living beings) is going in, while only just inside there is a boat with souls. In the lower right extremity of the structure a cupmark (= fecundating power) and a dash (= soul) are marked. Further below, boats with souls and footprints confirm that the theme of the composition is the journey to and from the underground world.

In the panel of Uppergärde, Hogdal 211 (Fig. 9), we have a different representation of the Netherworld which is imagined as a round site surrounded by three walls. The central cupmark alludes to the mysterious fecundating power held in the Otherworld. On the right, we have the usual symbols: a footprint, an empty funeral boat, a boat of rebirth, a cupmark, a god with a the hands with a three fingered hand symbolizing power over the tripartite world and his servant or son. In the composition under the figure of the Netherworld one may see the divine guide of souls, whose hands are three fingered. Please note that a cupmark is carved between his legs. The god, who is probably represented at the moment of his return to earth, stands in a boat which is trailing a boat of rising souls. No less important is the presence of two characteristic figures of Swedish Rock Art: the one inappropriately considered as an “acrobat” (e.g. see Elverheim 1986; Coles 2005, 35, 43, 47 etc.), the other erroneously (in my opinion) considered as the wearer of a horned helmet.<sup>2</sup> This panel, whose figures to my mind are strictly connected, should indicate that both characters belong to the sphere of the cycle of souls.

Unlike other interpretations of the meaning of footprints in the context of Bronze and Iron Age rock art,<sup>3</sup> I think that the thesis pointed out here is suitable for any context and for every kind of prints: single or paired feet, naked or shod feet of any size, whatever is the direction towards which they seem to be proceeding. It is possible that in certain compositions a shoe-sole may denote some particular features in comparison with a naked foot, but to my mind, both generically allude to an entity involved in the cycle of souls. This interpretation also explains the incomplete profiles of footprints which cannot be considered as attempts, subsequently abandoned, to engrave the footprint itself. Their incompleteness, which corresponds to that of humans, animals and boats intentionally incomplete, alludes in particular to the part of the journey which is made in the underworld, where bodies (or their spectra, *eídôla* “images”) are maimed, simplified, ghosts.

Coles (2005, 52, 123), after rejecting speculations according to whom “paired feet indicate or commemorate union, a single shod foot a widowhood, a naked foot an unmarried or a death and so on”,<sup>4</sup> writes that “the arrangement of footsoles and feet on some sites is a direct incitement to directional looks, often downslopes as at Lökeberg (Foss 6)”. Certainly, in various cases footprints seem to mark a direction or a point of view, for instance from the land toward the sea or from the rock toward a watercourse – directions that in actual fact were also attributed to the souls –; or, in the same rock, simply toward a cleft which was considered as a symbolic door of the underworld. But also when they seem to mark a direction, footprints allude to the journey of the guide of souls.

This interpretation develops, I think, what various authors had already observed. For instance Gelling & Ellis Davidson (1969, 153) write:

*The symbol of footprints on the ground is often taken as a sign of visitation by a supernatural power. A strange point made more than once in the Icelandic prose sagas is that when some evil troll or shape-changer disappears, he sinks into the earth so that ‘they saw the soles of his feet’; such, for instance, is the last glimpse of Ogmund in Þorsteinar Saga Víkingssonar. It is possible that this convention may be based on a confused memory of a divine visitant or of the returning dead being commemorated by the symbol of feet in an earlier*

period. Local traditions in the British Isles of the hoof-mark of the devil left on rock or bill offer another example of this symbolism. The sagas also refer to a custom of binding 'death-shoes' on the feet of the dead (Ellis, 1943, p. 59), which, if genuinely based on funeral practices in the heathen period, suggests a symbol of the journey to another world, and the hope that the dead might not remain in the vicinity of the grave to trouble the living.

Gelling & Ellis Davidson (1969, 154) recall also the attention on some archaeological data:

*A stamp in the shape of a human foot is found beside a wheel on a cremation urn of the Roman period in Jutland (...). A marble offering slab with two human feet outlined on it was found at the Ritona temple at Trier-Allbachtal (...). The usual interpretation given to symbols of this kind is that they were thankofferings for healing, or, when the feet wear sandals, for a successful return from a journey. Sandals are, however, also found on Christian gravestones, perhaps as a sign of resurrection.*

My interpretation refers not only to the footprints engraved of the rock art, but also to those depicted on any handmade item. Gimbutas (1989, 309), who is inclined to see a reference to the "Goddess" (i.e. the "Great Mother") in any symbol, notes that "feet also appear in megalithic graves" like the orthostats of Petit Mont, Arzon (France, c. 3000 B.C. or early) and Calderstones, Liverpool. Gimbutas writes: "It is significant that her [= of the Goddess] feet appear not in isolation but in association with life stimulating symbols, hooks, crosses, concentric circles, oculi motifs, and snakes". Besides, she reports some figures of seals found in Balcanic regions which "leave a foot-shaped pattern of chevrons, linking the foot with the Bird Goddess". Their age should be comprised between 6500 and 4500 B.C.

Circles and double spirals really do not symbolize fertility, but rather the cyclical feature of fertility and rebirth. Furthermore, to my mind, the figures of foot quoted by Gimbutas allude to a guide of soul who generally is a male, and not to the Great Mother. Most Ukrainian steles (Copper Age: 4000-2000 B.C.) on which footprints are engraved certainly allude to male divine beings or divinized ancestors. As "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 footprints", Telegin & Mallory (1994, 7) seem to prefer the thesis that the artists, neglecting to represent the legs, employed "the pars pro toto principle where the footprints were intended to represent the entire leg". In my opinion, craftsmen, far from wanting to represent real men and garments, desired to express canonized symbols. Foot-prints have nothing to do with the (unmarked) legs of the idols: they allude to the journeys of a divine psychopompos. The print of human bare foot exceptionally engraved on an Etruscan burial stele (6th century B.C.; Bologna Archaeological Museum), whose decoration in relief consists in a stylized tree of life, can only refer to a guide of souls.

Priuli (1991, 211) suggests that footmarks "abbiano una funzione dedicatoria: o meglio, una funzione di richiamo e di evocazione" of a divinity. He bases his hypothesis on the footprints dedicated to Zeus Likhtaïos, Apollo and Mithra near the Samonium Fanum in Crete. Apollo and Mitra, concerned with the sun which in the evening goes down into the netherworld and at the dawn rises up, are clearly guide of souls. Moreover, Mithra, Solis socius, is also associated with a divinization of the Transitus "(subterranean) Passage" itself.

A dedication is also present on Rock 50 at Naquane, Valcamonica, where one reads nuθu priauis priaus / uaθias / ilsas / iplas "dedicated to Venus, Amor, Uathia, Wheel and Partner" (Zavaroni 2004). The word uaθias is written vertically between two footprints **that seemingly allude to a narrow passage**. On the same panel, on the right, the godname uaθiau is associated with a footprint and a horse. It is not clear if the horse has two heads, drawn at both sides of the fore legs, or a normal head and an enormous phallus. Certainly, a big "fecundation mark" indicates its relationship with fertility. It is well-known that the horse itself was generally considered to be the mount of the psychopompos gods during the Iron Age.

In a previous paper (Zavaroni 2004) I suggested that uaθiau has **the same root (\*wōt- / wāt-) as Lat. vātes, Gaul. ovrat̄is (pl.), Goth. wōpeis 'furious', OS wōdian 'rage', so that uaθiau could be assimilated to Ódhinn-Wuotan**. Such correspondence seems to be confirmed by a **human figure holding a purse - the most frequent attribute of Mercury in Gaul and Roman Germany - depicted near two other footprints under the horse (Fig. 9)**. These footprints are intersected by a second inscription which is readable as uainiu (the last letter is uncertain), a name to which we may attribute an Indo-European root denoting 'disgrace, bad-luck' (Zavaroni 2004). Such an epithet would be suitable for an Odinic deity, given that this god is a dispenser of good and bad luck, wealth and pain; but it would be also suitable for his companion Loki, the wicked god who, as we are told in the Skaldskaparmal, "had some shoes with which he could run across sky and sea". These shoes recall the winged feet of Hermes-Mercury.

Now, though, I wonder if *uaθias* – which is the genitive-dative of *uaθia* – and *uaθiau* have the root \**uadh-* of Lat. *vadō*, OIsl. *vaða* ‘go, wade’ rather than *wāt-* ‘rage, enthusiasm’, being both hypotheses phonetically acceptable. This new suggestion would not imply a change of assimilation of the god, because *uaθiau* would mean “Wayfarer” or similar: this epithet is also suited to *Odhin*, one of the nicknames of whom is *Gangleri* ‘der Wegemüde’, while his Gaulish correspondent is just called *Viator* “Wayfarer”.

The whole composition of Rock 50 in Naquane alludes to gods connected with rebirth. The names *Ilsa* and *Ipla*, which are ascribable to Etruscan and Italic roots expressing “revolution, cycle” and “union, company” respectively, are associated with drawings which recall both serpents (the most primitive carriers of souls) and boats with ornithomorphic extremities. The names *Priaiu* “Venus” and *Priau* “Love” are associated with footprints superimposed to “ladder-forms” (Ital. *scaliforme*) which, in my opinion, symbolize two connected serpents carrying souls. The souls should be represented by the rungs of the presumed ladder.

After this digression, let’s get back to the Scandinavian footprints. In one of the sections of Rock 1 at Backa, Brastad, we have interesting “footprint” / “boat” associations. Two prints of naked feet turned towards opposite directions cover the extremities of a boat whose strokes protruding from the deck are very short. One may suppose that the two feet allude to the opposite directions – earthly surface and netherworld – towards whom the boat of souls goes alternately. In other words they refer to the dual principle which is also alluded to by the cupmark (fertility power) and by the incomplete human (death) carved near the boat and the feet. In another “footprint”-“boat” association, the boat, whose horned prow alludes again to the dual principle, contains only one stroke which could refer to the soul as a general entity. A third association is constituted by a pair of footmarks and a boat whose bow and stern contain a big hand. Instead of the usual strokes, two humans occupy the deck of the boat. One of them is phallic. It is difficult to understand if they represent a male and a female divinity or two males, who anyway are involved in the universal fertility denoted by the open hands.

At Massleberg, Skee, the boats of regeneration are associated with two underlying single footprints. A small disk surrounded by nine shoe-soles set out like rays is carved over the boat. On the right of the footprint one may see an animal (a dog, I think, which is the faithful assistant of the psychopompos) whose head is associated with a four-spoked wheel. But the most amazing figure is a boat with souls whose keel is sustained by a human two-legged trunk. The allusion to the god carrying souls could not be more direct. Similar figures may be seen in other Scandinavian compositions. The disk with rays in form of footprints recalls the disk enclosed by 8 footprints set out like rays on a rock of *Boglösa* (South-West Uppland, Sweden). Here the allusion to the solar nature of the ambivalent psychopompos is clear.

The interpretation of the rock art symbols here presented is founded on a comparative method which, like comparisons in historical linguistics, has the advantage of setting aside the problems of dating, when we remain within the period of the 3-4 millennia preceding the Romanization. It is though opportune to bear in mind the work by *Helskog* (2000) on the figurative phases of the Rock Art in Arctic Norway.

A pair of shoes-soles appears in *Apana Gård*, Alta fjord, Northern Norway, on a panel of Phase V (ca. 100 B.C. - 200 A. D), where the shoe-soles are associated with an empty boat turned upside down that *Helskog* (*Helskog* 2000, 13) misinterprets as a whale. In the previous phases – the first of which covers the period 4200-3300 B.C. – shoe-soles are not attested, but footmarks of animals are sometimes present. In the composition of *Slettnes Stone 2* (*Hesjedal et al.* 1996, 77-82), containing various animals, a five-fingered bear footprint is placed under the abdomen of an elk. In *Stone 5* four bear footprints with four fingers are carved. One of them seems to be associated with an elk, a boat and a large bird. In both *Stones 2* and *3* the bear footprints have, to my mind, the same function as the human footprints: they allude to a supernatural being who can assume the semblance of a bear: he knows the way towards and from the nether world and leads souls or carries embryos. *Helskog* (1999, 85) himself seems to be inclined to suggest an analogous interpretation when, analyzing the panel of *Kåfjord*, Alta (Fig. 11), writes:

*Let me return to the bear and to the bear tracks that connect the different parts of the composition. the bear appears to have moved from an area in between the moon and the sun (i.e. in a cosmological upper world) to the den (in the cosmological world where humans and animals live) where it once walked around and then left. The bear appears to have walked in two directions; one to the den inside the fence to hibernate; that is, it*



*disappeared simultaneously with the migrating fauna. Judging from the difference in the footprints compared with the den to the left, the bear stayed, or if it left then it was the spirit or the soul of the animal that travelled into the heavens and to the underworld during winter.*

*So, features of the upper and the middle world can be recognized while the lower world cannot be recognized, or it is not represented by readily recognizable figures.*

According to my interpretation, the lower world is represented by the fence, which contains, just in the middle, several incomplete figures of reindeer (Fig. 11). We have to observe that in the age of these carvings reindeer had the religious symbolic function that three or four thousand years later will be attributed to the horse. In the fence there is also a human figure holding a rod with which he seems to touch an incomplete animal, as if he wanted to transform it into the complete being carved near the incomplete one. But the most important fact, not commented by Helskog, is that a second human figure is going out from the fence, following tracks which initially are similar to those of the bear. This anthropomorph holds a little stick which in my opinion symbolizes a soul: he could represent the same god who went into the fence disguised as a bear. The same god could be also represented on the right of the panel in a peculiar way: his head is contained in a large ring from the upper part of which a set of strokes protrudes. In my opinion these strokes have the same symbolic meaning as the strokes protruding from the deck of the boats: they would allude to the souls carried by the god.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, near the two figures of the god with the ring of souls there are two other anthropomorphs: they hold a particular weapon which seems to have the form of an elk or reindeer antler.<sup>6</sup> A similar weapon could be also represented in Tanum 326, at Kasen Ryck. In the Edda by Snorri we are told that Freyr, having given his own magic sword to his servant Skirnir, must use a stag's antler when fights the giant Beli, killing him (Gylfaginning 37). Freyr, god of the universal fecundation (he was represented with a big penis in the temple of Uppsala), was also the owner of the foremost ship called Skidbladnir "which was made with such great art that it can be folded up like a cloth and put in one's pocket" (Gylf. 43).

#### FOOTNOTES

1 In the engraving on the Etruscan mirror ES 105 a divine being embraced to one of two winged lasa (lasa is a female deity whose function seems to correspond to that of a Lat. Genius) has feral ears and a tail whose hair comes out from a bifurcate appendix recalling that of the Scandinavian anthropomorphs. In the mirror ES 104 a similar character is drawn between two lasa and his forked appendix has not hair. In ES 57 a similar being with an animal ear and a normal tail, acts as an assistant of Turms-Mercury who notoriously is a guide of souls. Turms and his servant are turned toward a third character (a sort of Dioscur?), while a dead man lies on the ground. The function of the tailed character as a carrier of souls is clear.

2 To my mind this divine character is assimilable to the goatish god or divine ram personifying the double principle on some altars of Roman Gaul and Germany. He was called Habrus and Gebrinus "the Gautish one" and could correspond to the Germanic Heimdallr.

3 According to other interpretations footprints generically allude to a deity. For instance, Mandt (1986, 119) suggests that they are a part symbolising the whole of a fertility deity. Fossati (1991, 24), writes that a footprint "sia che ricordi la presenza della divinità o il passaggio del pellegrino, come accadeva nel mondo medioevale europeo, è indice di particolare sacralità del luogo". This suggestion is though associated with the thesis according to which small footprints let us think of "adolescenti, forse iniziati".

4 See also the old suggestion by B. Almgren (1962, 62), according to which bare and shod footprint motifs represent female and male gender respectively.

5 According to Helskog (1988, 43), these objects could represent amulets to hang around the neck. Their "fringe" could be formed by chlorite or rather by bear teeth, since "we have reasonably large security claim that this animal has a special religious significance". In Kåfjord there is also a group of six of these rings, indeed similar to collars, which are not associated with humans: they are carved between two reindeers. I doubt that the carvers of the panel were interested in depicting amulets or other objects which were not involved in their religious Weltanschauung. Since the strokes of the rings could be considered as both rays of light and souls, I wonder if similar collars could be later assimilated to the shining Freyja's collar called Brisingamen.

6 A similar weapon seems to be represented in Tanum 326, at Kasen Ryck, while in Svenneby 270 (after Fredsjö 1971) a human on a boat seems to brandish the forked part of a big antler.

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