Mother Ranaldi: a post-paleolithic goddess gives birth flanked by supernatural stags

Marco Merlini *

Abstract: Birth was one of the most magical, miraculous, and blessed events of post-paleolithic spirituality. The Mesolithic - Early Neolithic rock art paintings of the Ranaldi Shelter (Southern Italy) give distinct visual evidence to a universal subject: the woman during childbirth and the wild animal which, given the context data, is the adult male red deer. The pivotal personage of the drama, Mother Ranaldi, shares her iconographic canon with the Goddess of Childbirth in prehistoric art. She is a majestic, naked, corpulent and fertile anthropomorph who is delivering a new life between her generous thighs. The depiction of the newborn's head emerging from the vagina emphasizes her female power to procreate. Mother Ranaldi is birthing flanked by two adult stags which she touches with her sacred hands. They are not ordinary animals. Their supernatural nature is described by three features: exaggerated unnatural antlers, clear epiphanic seasonal nature, and bicephalism. They were symbol of worship to the Goddess of Generation, acting as her *paredri* (supporting, assisting partners). Ranaldi Shelter was used during the seasonal relocation of cervids, which in spring moved from the plains to the summer mountainous ranges. Then, the red paintings had not only a sacred value. Having totemic nature, they carried out a territorial function by contributing to organize and mark the territory, possibly associated with appropriate rituals.

Keywords: Mesolithic - Early Neolithic rock art, Symbolism of deer, Mother Goddess, Childbirth prehistoric iconography.

1. Unique Late Mesolithic – Early Neolithic rock paintings

Remarkable rock paintings occur in the Ranaldi Shelter,[1] one of the most significant sites of Southern Italy exploited by post-Paleolithic hunter-gatherer communities.[2]

The site is located at 879 meters above the sea level, in the most inaccessible and high area of the "I Pisconi Anthropological and Natural State

* Institute of Archaeomythology, marco.merlini@mclink.it.

[1] GPS coordinates: 40.82574, 15.78507.

[2] I would like to thank the Pro Loco of Filiano for the interesting visit to the Ranaldi Shelter. I would like also to express sincere admiration for their maintenance of the excellent open-air archaeological site and their promotion of the "Ranaldi Shelter Culture" towards the local community, schools, and curious tourists. Please, surf the website https://www.prolocofiliano.it/. The Pro Loco of Filiano collected in a booklet the most important articles on the rock art of the Ranaldi Shelter. Sabia V. (ed.). *Filiano. Le pitture rupestri di Tuppo dei Sassi, Riparo Ranaldi, Filiano, raccolta di scritti*, (Filiano, Associazione Pro Loco di Filiano, 2016).

Reserve", which is part of the large Lagopesole forest of oak (Basilicata region).[3] The inner wall of the shelter bears figurative paintings applied in red ocher by prehistoric artists using their fingers.[4] The images occupy a vertical, flat, parallelogram-shaped rock surface facing south.

The intricate scene involves around thirty motifs, mainly deer, dogs, polylobate anthropomorphic figures, pectiniform marks, and ramiform signs.[5] In particular, it depicts quadrupeds with branched horns (possibly stags) juxtaposed and contrasted with anthropomorphic figures, dogs and (perhaps) arboreal motifs. A number of shapes that are not simply interpretable as animals or humans make the scene even more complex.



Image 1. *Location of the Ranaldi Shelter within Italy.* https://www.bing.com/maps.

[3] The Ranaldi Shelter is generally known in literature and in Wikimedia as the "Palaeolithic site Tuppo dei Sassi", but it is an incorrect name originating from a wrong topographical indication by the discoverer. Borzatti von Löwenstern E., Inglis B., *Le pitture rupestri del Riparo F. Ranaldi (Castellagopesole - Potenza)*, in *Studi per l'Ecologia del Quaternario*, 12 (1990), 75.

[4] Biancofiore F., *Nuovi dipinti preistorici in Lucaperrinia*, in *Rendiconti della classe di Scienze Fisiche, Matematiche e Naturali*, fasc. V, serie VIII, vol. XXXIX, Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1965, 317-320. Biancofiore F., *I nuovi dipinti preistorici della Lucania*, in *Rivista di Antropologia*, LII (1965), 103-109.

[5] Arcà A., Bozzarelli O., *The Ranaldi Shelter and the first figurative expressions of man in Basilicata (Italy)*, in *TRACCE Online Rock Art Bulletin*, n. 43, December 2018.



Image 2. *The Ranaldi Shelter (Filiano, Southern Italy).* Photo by Merlini M.

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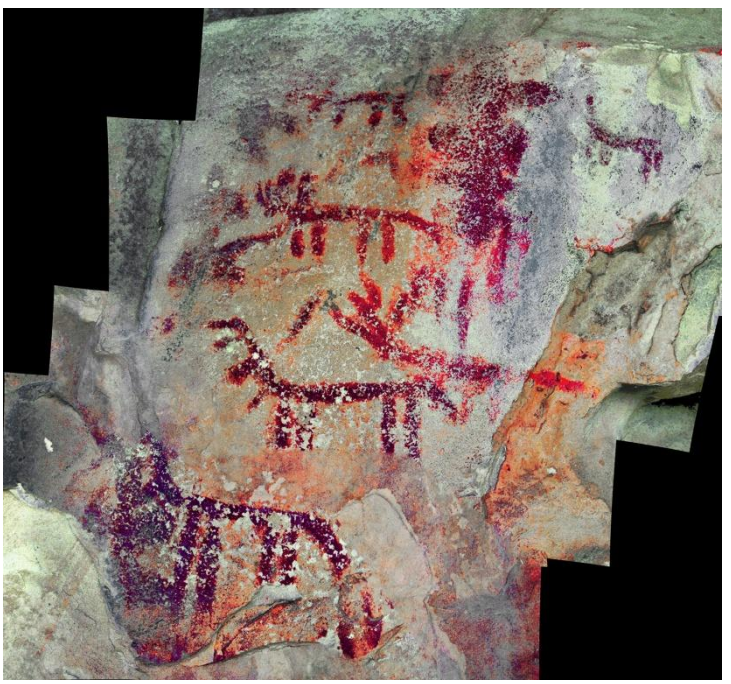


Image 3. *The tableau at the Ranaldi Shelter, photomosaic and chromatic exasperation.* https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a5/Riparo_Ranaldi_fotomosaico_1500_pixel.jpg

Meteorological, chemical, and mechanic factors have severely damaged the paintings, causing black-reddish color variations due to oxidation.[6] Despite the loss of the original liveliness of the "red wine color"[7] of the depictions over the millennia, it is still possible to appreciate the quality of the representations. They are a vibrant part of the very limited group of sites in Southern Italy with post-Paleolithic rock paintings, together with those of the *Grotta dei Cervi* (*Cave of the Deer*) at Porto Badisco (Otranto), the *Grotta del Riposo* (*Resting Cave*) at Rignano Garganico, and the *Grotta del Genovese* (*Genoese Cave*) at Levanzo Island.



Image 4. *Ranaldi shelter, core area of the panel and figure numbering.* Merlini M. in collaboration with Lazarovici Gh., 2021.

[6] Museo Archeologico Provinciale di Potenza, Sezione pre-protostorica, 08/2018, ondalucana.files.wordpress.com.

[7] Biancofiore F., *Nuovi dipinti preistorici in Lucaperrinia*, in *Rendiconti della classe di Scienze Fisiche, Matematiche e Naturali*, fasc. V, serie VIII, vol. XXXIX, Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, (1965), 317-320; Biancofiore F., *I nuovi dipinti preistorici della Lucania*, in *Rivista di Antropologia*, LII (1965), 103-109.

In 1971-1972, Edoardo Borzatti von Löwenstern, who investigated the nearby archaeological sites of the Atella-Vitalba Valley (Basilicata) for years, carried out a stratigraphic excavation in the Ranaldi Shelter at the base of the painted wall. He opened a 5×3 m trench with a depth of 4 meters. The dig did not reach the base of the rock. It had to be stopped due to the presence of large boulders, the removal of which would have caused dangerous collapses.

The archaeological stratification is synthetized below:

Layer G: white sands due to thermoclastic decay of the sandstone;
Layer F: compact blue or green-gray clay, rich in reddish ferric alterations (here the action of the waters is apparent);
Layer E: gray sand;
Layer D: scarce gravel of thermoclastic origin;
Layer C: large collapsed boulders immersed in a pale sediment;
Layer B: black sediment with large stones;
Layer A: dusty soil rich in stones.

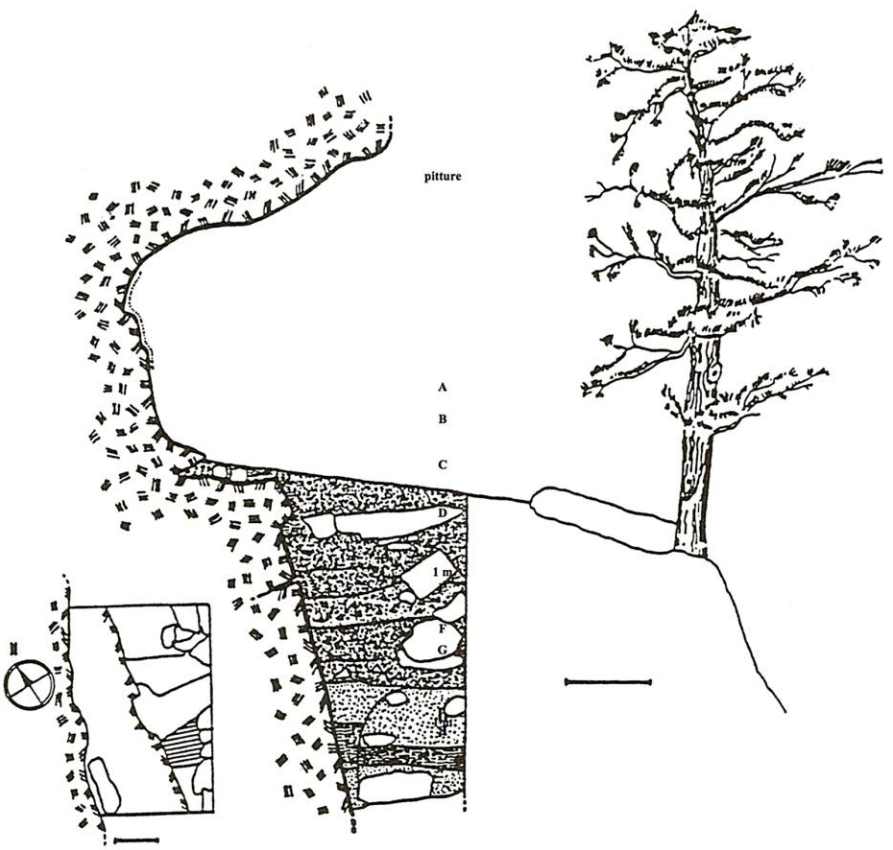
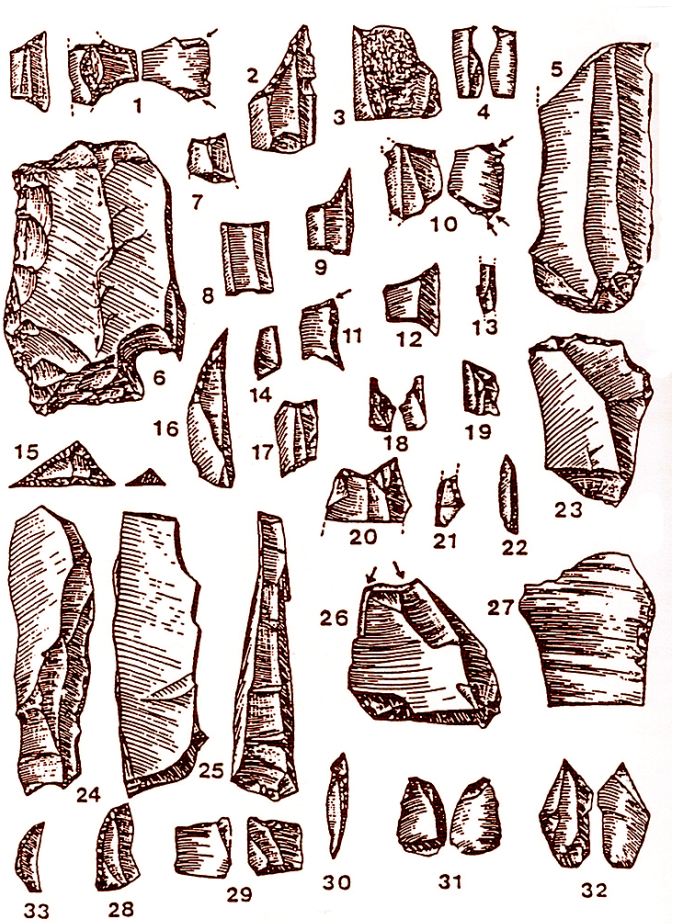


Image 5. *Ranaldi Shelter, archaeological stratigraphy at the base of the painted rock wall.* Borzatti von Löwenstern, 1971.

The excavation brought to light acid soil, which probably inhibited the conservation of any bone and faunal remains. As for the ceramic fragments, Borzatti von Löwenstern found very scarce evidence of them. Instead, 387 splinters or fragments of light flint emerged from the aceramic horizon (layers E1-C).[8] It is characterized by a strong overall microlithism and by the presence of numerous fragments of regular blades, retouched and not retouched. They have been worked on the spot and are not of high quality.



strati C D¹, nn. 0-5; strato D², nn. 6-10; strato D³, nn. 11-13; strato E¹, nn. 14-18; strato E², nn. 19-23; strato E³, nn. 24-32; strato G¹, n. 33.

Image 6. *Ranaldi Shelter, flint finds from the Mesolithic levels.* Borzatti von Löwenstern, 1971.

[8] Borzatti von Löwenstern E., *Prima campagna di scavi al Tuppo dei Sassi (Riparo Ranaldi) in Lucania*, in *Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche*, XXVI, (1971).

Discussing the strong microlithization, the large number of geometrics, the occurrence of backed tool fragments, the presence of rare scrapers, scratchers and micro burins, and the absence of pottery, the archaeologist in charge attributed these finds to a prolonged but not permanent frequentation of the site by several human groups during the Tardenoisian phase of the Mesolithic Continuum.[9] Consistently with the occurrence of a final Mesolithic industry, Borzatti von Löwenstern related the pictorial complex to the transitional period when Mesolithic communities began to exploit agriculture and domesticated animals (cattle, deer, and canids).[10]

In the scientific report of the Archaeological Superintendence of Basilicata, the finds are confirmed to be referred to the Italian Castelnovian lithic tradition (synonymous to the old-fashioned "Tardenoisian phase"),[11] which is the most recent phase of the Mesolithic (dated to between 7000 and 6000 BCE).[12]

The lithic industry of the Ranaldi Shelter shows significant comparisons in Southern Italy with the Latronico 3 Cave (in the district of Potenza too)[13] and

[9] Tardenoisian is a regional obsolete alternative name for Castelnovian. Kozłowski S. K., *Introduction to the History of Europe in the Early Holocene*, in Kozłowski S. K. (ed.), *The Mesolithic in Europe* (University Press, Warsaw, 1973), 331-366. The Castelnovian industry is named after a site in France and is distinguished by trapezes made on regular and slightly larger blade. Bogucki P., Crabtree P. J. (eds.), *Ancient Europe, 8000 B.C. to A.D. 1000: An Encyclopedia of the Barbarian World* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 2004).

[10] Borzatti von Löwenstern E., *Prima campagna di scavi al Tuppo dei Sassi (Riparo Ranaldi) in Lucania*, in *Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche*, XXVI, 1971, 373-392.

[11] Leonini V., *Filiano (PZ), proposta di dichiarazione dell'interesse culturale di Riparo Ranaldi, loc. Serra Pisconi, ai sensi degli artt. 13 e 14 del D. Lgs 42/2004*, in Sabia V. (ed.). *Filiano*. *Le pitture rupestri di Tuppo dei Sassi, Riparo Ranaldi, Filiano, raccolta di scritti* (Filiano: Associazione Pro Loco di Filiano, 2016), 221-222. The typological composition of the Castelnovian lithic industry of the last hunter-gatherers included many blades, presence of thin lamellae with denticulated borders according to the Montbani style (community of Mont-Notre-Dame, Aisne), absolute dominance of the trapezoids within the armors, pre-eminence of long scrapers on short scrapers, and primacy of symmetrical trapezoids. In the Ranaldi Shelter, the Castelnovian Mesolithic industry (Trapeze facies) was characterized by laminar flaking and regular bladelets with triangular and trapezoidal section. The exploited techniques indicate hand pressure and indirect percussion. The lithic typology includes symmetrical and asymmetrical micro and hypermicro trapezes, notched blades, side-scraper on blade, and long end-scrapers (Lo Vetro D., Martini F., *Mesolithic in Central–Southern Italy: Overview of lithic productions*, in *Quaternary International* 423 (2016) 279-302: 283, tab. 2.

[12] The Italian Castelnovian lithic tradition is dated to 8,500–7,300 years ago by Bogucki, Crabtree, 2004 (climatic subdivision: Atlantic). Stefan Karol Kozłowski suggested that the Ranaldi Shelter can be attributed to the "Southern Castelnovian tradition", a local variant of the Castelnovian phenomenon that appeared c. 7000 cal. BCE. *Kozłowski S. K., Thinking Mesolithic*, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010).

[13] Cremonesi G., *Latronico (Prov. Potenza)*, in *Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche, Notiziario*, XLI, 1987-1988, 380. Grifoni Cremonesi R., *Le Grotte di Latronico*, in Quilici L., Quilici Gigli S. (eds.), *Carta Archeologica della Valle del Sinni. Atlante tematico di topografia antica*, X suppl., fasc. 7, Rome, (2000), 241-236. Dini M., Grifoni Cremonesi R., Kozlowski S. K., Molara G., Tozzi C., *L'industria castelnoviana della Grotta di Latronico 3 (Potenza, Italia)*, in *Preistoria Alpina*, 43, Trento: Museo Tridentino di Scienze Naturali (2008), 49-74.

Grotta Marisa, Grotta delle Mura, Torre Testa in Puglia.[14] The radiometric dates of emerging industries with trapezes are placed between 9200-8000 cal. BP[15] or 8000-7400 years BP.[16] In any case, they are connected to the early Atlantic "climatic Optimum".[17]

However, our conclusions are tentative because the Ranaldi Shelter has a scant lithic industry without any scraper. The interesting aspect for the dating of this deposit consists in the presence, albeit weak, of geometric shapes, and above all of trapezoids. The total absence of faunal and human remains does not allow to reach any definitive assumption.[18]

Due to the absence of any stylistic parallel in the neighboring regions, the dating of the painted panel to the initial Atlantic makes it the only "artistic" manifestation of this type in the whole of the Italian Mesolithic.[19]

2. The majestic towering figure: the birthing Mother Ranaldi

According to the first description, provided by the discoverer of the Ranaldi Shelter, Francesco Ranaldi, the paintings illustrate a generic hunting tableau with men and animals (deer and goats) as protagonists.[20] Hunters are represented with the technique of overlapping ovals. In the center of the panel, the archaeologist in charge recognized a male hunter whose shape is outlined by the superposition of two oval bodies joined by a narrow and low trunk (n. 9 in Merlini's list). He is holding an animal in a lasso, or attacking it with a weapon.[21] The anthropomorphic figure has the upper oval in continuity, at the bottom, with

[14] Cremonesi G., *Industria litica di tradizione Paleolitico superiore rinvenuta a Torre Testa (Brindisi)*, in *Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche*, XXII, fasc. 2, Firenze (1967). Cremonesi G., *Nuovi rinvenimenti del Paleolitico superiore e Mesolitico a Torre Testa (Brindisi)*, in *Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche*, XXXIII (1978), 109-159.

[15] Lo Vetro D., Martini F., *Mesolithic in Central–Southern Italy: Overview of lithic productions*, in *Quaternary International* 423 (2016), 279-302.

[16] The dating is according to the Castelnovian industry of Latronico 3 Cave (Potenza, Italy). Dini M., Grifoni Cremonesi R., Kozlowski S. K., Molara G., Tozzi C., *L'industria castelnoviana della Grotta di Latronico 3 (Potenza, Italia)*, in *Preistoria Alpina*, 43, Trento: Museo Tridentino di Scienze Naturali (2008), 49-74.

[17] Franco C., *La fine del Mesolitico in Italia. Identità culturale e distribuzione territoriale degli ultimi cacciatori-raccoglitori*, in *Quaderno* 13, Trieste: Società per la preistoria e protostoria della regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia (2011).

[18] Taschini M., *Considerations sur le Mésolithique Italien*, in Kozlowski J. K., Kozlowski S. K., (eds.), *Les Changements, les Méchanisme, les Causes dans la Culture du 7e au 6e Millénaire ac. J.-C. En Europe,* Archaeologia Interregionalis (Warsaw, Warsaw University Press, 1983).

[19] Franco C., op.cit..

[20] Ranaldi F., *Unique prehistoric cave art found in Italian mountains*, in *The Illustrated London news*, January 15, (1966).

[21] The length of the animals is 18 cm for the lower one; 16 cm for the upper one. Ranaldi F., *Unique prehistoric cave art found in Italian mountains*, in *The Illustrated London news*, January 15 (1966). Ranaldi F., *Riparo sottoroccia con pitture preistoriche al Tuppo dei Sassi o Serra Carpino in agro di Filiano*, in *Bimestrale dell'Amministrazione Provinciale di Potenza*, novembre-dicembre (1967).

short and low appendages which make up the arms. The head is represented by a conical shape widened downwards.

A similar grouping of human and animal shapes is located in the lower area of the tableau (n. 14).

The same combination of human and animal silhouettes was repeated for the third time (but in minor proportions) in the upper area of the panel, on the left side (n. 4). Here, however, the actors are at a greater distance and do not appear to be connected to each other. The human depiction is then rendered with a different schematization: the hunter has a cylindrical body with clear indication of the arms.

Another animal (length 20 cm) was painted between the lower and the middle human-animal groups (n. 12). According to Ranaldi, it is certainly a deer, with horns that resemble those of a moose.

On the top right of this deer-moose, there is a much less intelligible figure (23 cm long, n. 13). It could be a dead animal lying on its back and with its paws in the air: a victim of the hunting. But the figuration is very confused due to the overlaid patina. Ranaldi did not exclude that the animal's legs are recognizable downwards. In this case, the two vertical segments would be interpreted as arrows or javelins hitting the animal.

The three small polylobate anthropomorphs follow a vertical alignment on the left side of the panel. By carefully looking at the enhanced photographs, Arcà and Bozzarelli confirmed their anthropomorphic nature. These schematic human bodies show the upper and lower limbs curved downwards; they are "male," with "fat" limbs and rounded torso.[22]

The most interesting polylobate figure is the fourth one, painted on the right side of the upper area of the tableau (n. 6).[23] According to Ranaldi, it is a large "male" being, 18 cm high, with head, arms and legs formed by three overlapping oval shapes. The archaeologist wondered: "Is it a male divinity or a sorcerer?"

Ranaldi then concluded by suggesting that an anonymous prehistoric artist traced red paintings with his fingers to represent an organized tribal hunt probably related to propitiatory rituals celebrated by a sorcerer or under the benevolence of a male divinity depicted in big size.[24]

A few years after their discovery in 1962, the paintings were analyzed by Franco Biancofiore.[25] The scholar confirmed they represent a hunting scene in

[22] Arcà A., Bozzarelli O., *The Ranaldi Shelter and the first figurative expressions of man in Basilicata (Italy)*, in *TRACCE Online Rock Art Bulletin*, n. 43, December 2018.
[23] Please, see image 11. The figure is n. 10 in Biancofiore's marked photograph.
[24] Ranaldi F., *Unique prehistoric cave art found in Italian mountains*, in *The Illustrated London news*, January 15, (1966).
[25] Biancofiore F., *Nuovi dipinti preistorici in Lucaperrinia*, in *Rendiconti della classe di Scienze Fisiche, Matematiche e Naturali*, fasc. V, serie VIII, vol. XXXIX, Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1965; Biancofiore F., *I nuovi dipinti preistorici della Lucania*, in *Rivista di Antropologia*, LII (1965).

which the zoomorphic images depict five deer, while the anthropomorphic figures describe four hunters.

As for the largest poly-anthropomorph (n. 6), Arcà and Bozzarelli noted that, in Iberian schematic art, this typology of figures wear hats of various shapes, including plumed ones, to indicate their prominence as characters with mythological value, or high religious practitioners. According to their interpretation, the three upper lobes (two lateral and one apical) of the large polylobed human being might represent a wide-brimmed hat with a possible ceremonial function. Based on comparisons with movable art, they linked this figure to those belonging to the less ancient phases, in particular to the Copper Age (around the III millennium BCE), in Iberian schematic art.[26]

However, why should this prominent anthropomorph be a man?

Let's take another look at the figure. It has chubby torso, limbs with rounded edges and a symmetrical shape like the other three polylobed anthropomorphs. However, it shows a dome head and four bilateral lobes protruding from the central body. Two of them, starting from the top, are the long and rounded arms. The last two pairs indicate the plump thighs. A similar, but smaller, anthropomorph appears as emerging from its belly. It looks upside down to its chest.[27]

In a previous article and based on precise parallels and correspondences in prehistoric rock art and mobile artworks, I have identified the majestic being as a woman at the peak of delivering, when the baby partially emerges from the opening of the enlarged vagina. The parturient is in labor among a herd of red deer stags and, in particular, supported by two of them: "**Mother Ranaldi**". [28] I have circled the outgoing baby in the image. The mother is represented with a cylindrical-globular head; the offspring with a triangular head (indicating a difference in sex?). Shape, dimensions, posture, and location on the panel suggest her identity as a female divinity caught in the act of giving life open air within a herd of deer.

[26] Filippi V., *Si intensifica l'attività della pro loco Filiano nella valorizzazione del sito archeologico delle pitture rupestri di Riparo Ranaldi*, in *Aviglianonline.eu, Il Portale della Nazione Aviglianese*, June 04, 2017. http://www.aviglianonline.eu/mobile/in_evidenza_dettaglio_m.asp?idto=1208; Arcà A., Bozzarelli O., *The Ranaldi Shelter and the first figurative expressions of man in Basilicata (Italy)*, in *TRACCE Online Rock Art Bulletin*, n. 43, December 2018.

[27] As noted by Borzatti von Löwenstern and Inglis, the three vertical strokes under the small upside-down figure (a sort of large trident) are not part of the interpretation, because they give the impression of belonging to an earlier stage of the pictorial ensemble.

[28] Merlini M., *Post-Paleolithic beauty and the beast*, in Marler J. (ed.) *Centennial publication for Marija Gimbutas*, forthcoming.



Image 7. *The identity of the majestic towering figure: Lady Ranaldi.* Photo by Merlini M.

Representations of human and divine birth-givers have followed one another for more than thirty thousand years, from the Upper Paleolithic through the entire Mesolithic and Neolithic to the present time. The majestic being of the Ranaldi Shelter, depicted at the crowning of the delivery within a herd of stags and supported by them, stands on a cult and artistic ridge. On the one side, it belongs to a distinct iconographic typology of childbirth, which finds its roots in a specific archetype that had an astonishing temporal depth because it developed during the Gravettian era of the Upper Paleolithic.[29] On the other side, it depicts a birthing pose that was seminal in later art.[30]

[29] We firmly inserted Mother Ranaldi in the canon of the nude steatopygic Upside-down Double Venus in childbirth of the Western European Upper Paleolithic. See instances from Laussel (Dordogne, France), Rideaux cave at Lespugue (Upper Garonne, France), and Savignano (from the banks of the Punaro River, near Modena, Northern Italy). See also a stone slab from the aceramic, pre-agricultural Neolithic site of Göbekli Tepe as well as the life totem poles discovered at the same site, Nevali Çori, and Kilisik (South-Eastern Turkey). Several specimens point on the illustration of the birth of a daughter. These images strongly evoke the long lineage of women who gave birth before, and those who will give birth in the future. They may express the ancestor who ruled the place in the female line, the very special relationship between (primeval) mother and daughter, the germinative energy flowing between mother and daughter, or the close relationship between two women along the female lineage. Merlini M., *Post-Paleolithic beauty and the beast*, in Marler J. (ed.) *Centennial publication for Marija Gimbutas*, forthcoming.

[30] We explored stimulating iconographic parallels between the iconographic canon of Mother Ranaldi and the Anatolian, Danubian, and Italian Goddesses of Childbirth throughout the Late Mesolithic, Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. Twin goddess representations are known from Çatal Höyük (Central-Southern Turkey, ancient Anatolia): a divine mother is giving birth to a bull, which stands upside down as in mirror to her; another large female figure is giving birth to a ram which head is emerging from the vulva. Figurines depicting a mature, naked, Divine Mother with the baby's head protruding between her munificent thighs and legs while sitting on her birthing throne and flanked by two female (?) felines (lioness, leopard, or panther) are known from Çatal Höyük and Hotărani (South-Western Romania).

In the Danube Civilization, the iconographic model of a female anthropomorph in birthing pose that closely recalls Mother Ranaldi was very successful, spreading throughout a long period (from the Early Neolithic to the Late Copper Age) and in a very wide area (from Greece to Serbia, from Albania to Romania, from Bulgaria to Italy). Significant instances have been unearthed from the Starčevo-Criş (Körös) sites of Donja Branjevina (Vojvodina, Republic of Serbia), Sarvaš, Slavonski Brod and Vinkovci (Croatia), the Vinča B Zorlenţu Mare (Caraș-Severin County, Romania), and the Turdaș III horizon of Turdaș – *Lunca* (Transylvania, Romania).

The profile, posture, position of the parturient in a wild landscape painted in the Ranaldi Shelter are so archetypical that they can also be traced in the Birthing Mistress of the Animals on the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age petroglyphs of Central Asia such as in Kalbak-Tash I Petroglyphic Site (Ongudai district, Altai Republic), Tamgaly Gorge (Kazakhstan), Tsagaan Salaa / Baga Oigor rock art complex (Ulaankhus, Mongolia), Aral Tolgoi (Mongolian Altai), and along the Chuluut River Valley (Mongolia). The most impressive representations illustrate pyramids of frontal birthing women to convey in a very powerful way the idea of procreation in the continuity of generations. Their reproduction on rocks assumed a magical force, which propitiated female fertility, facilitated the appearance of the following generations, and underlined the importance of kinship along the female lines. The iconographic canon of Mother Ranaldi occurs even on Birthing Rocks from Native American rock art in USA, such as at Chevelon Creek and Picacho Peak (Arizona), Birthing Rock (Southeastern Utah), Hantlipinkya (Middle Puerco River area, Arizona, New Mexico), and Mesa

In prehistoric times, birth was considered magical, miraculous, and sacred. It was probably one of the most blessed events of the Mesolithic and Neolithic spirituality. The generational chain was pressing, the parturient acquired a special status in the household and in society but the infant and maternal mortality rate was very high. The images depicting nativity eloquently attest the goddess' role as a life giver and aide to women in labor.

According to our survey, Mother Ranaldi shares her iconographic canon with the Goddess of Childbirth in prehistoric art. She is a majestic, naked, corpulent and fertile anthropomorph made up of three oval shapes (head, breasts, and wide thighs in spasmodic thrust). She is squatting to deliver a new life that is emerging from her vulva. The little head and arms of the newborn are spilling out between her generous thighs and legs.

Her enormous breasts, belly, buttocks, thighs, and shoulders convey ancestral ideas on beauty and health, believing that a chubby woman embodies the model of loveliness and, when she is fleshly below the waist, is always well fecund and rarely has troubles during childbirth with her pelvis.

Mother Ranaldi was painted in striking red, the pigment of blood and therefore the color of life. Color, symbolic posture, and position in the panel suggest that people who patronized the shelter viewed the birth as a magical-religious event and Mother Ranaldi as a Prehistoric Childbirth Deity. This buxom and generous mother was depicted at the crowning of delivering in exactly that place and location for ritual purposes. The depiction of the baby's head emerging from the vagina emphasizes the female's power to procreate.

In particular, Mother Ranaldi is birthing outdoors in a herd of red deer stags and flanked by two of them (n. 5 and n. 7) which are touched by her.

3. Myths and symbolism for male and female deer in relation to birth-giving goddesses

The panel of the Ranaldi Shelter clearly indicates the red deer stag (*Cervus elaphus*) as the central animal in the region. Male and female deer have a distinct, albeit interconnected, mythology and symbolism as they have marked different sexual features.[31] The female deer live in herds consisting of adult females and young deer of both sexes less than two years old. It is a matriarchal social structure; each herd is led by a doe leader generally followed by his fawn. The herd is based on the family group consisting of an adult female, her fawn of the year and the fawn of the previous year.

Prieta Petroglyphs (New Mexico). Merlini M., *Post-Paleolithic beauty and the beast*, in Marler J. (ed.) *Centennial publication for Marija Gimbutas*, forthcoming.

[31] The deer is characterized by a marked sexual dimorphism, first of all for the presence of the antlers in the males and also for a notable difference in weight between male (180-220 kg) and female (90-120 kg).

The matriarchal, beautiful, elegant and agile doe-hind was sacred to the ancestral birth-giving goddesses. Its symbolic tradition extends far back into the Euroasiatic Upper Paleolithic, the same as the bear. In ancient cultures, this female cervid was considered a powerful, ancestral life-giver.[32] Therefore, it was not only at the service of the Birth-giving Goddess but the divinity itself: the deity often supported and protected the birth of humans and animals by assuming the primordial form of the pregnant or in childbirth hind-doe.[33]

Archaeological evidence points to the existence of pre-agricultural rituals associated with the worship of the abovementioned sacred doe as the incarnation of a divine pregnant Deer-Mother.[34] Coeval myths narrated of gravid women initiated to the Deer-Mother cult who ruled the world and looked like stags: covered by hair and with enormous branching deer antlers on their heads. It is the ancestral totemic myth of the matriarchal women-deer who were antlered as harts. They were the theriomorphic form of a great goddess, mother and owner of the land.[35] See for example the Central Asian Kirgiz traditions[36] and the Caucasian mythology.[37]

Boris Rybakov offered suggestive insights in his studies about the background of the mythical image of the deer and its life-giving power: the hunt for this ungulate was of great economic relevance in the Mesolithic period, so the human imagination created the justificatory belief that the killed deer was born

[32] The origins of the symbolism of the doe-hint as representing a childbirth goddess are more social than religious. This animal is a totemic figure and a founding ancestor of the related human group. This approach was in line with tribal cultures before the great monotheistic world religions reshaped these ancestral ideas (Siegeltuch M., *The Social Symbolism of Horns*, Academia.edu, undated, 15; Rzayeva S., *The Symbol of the Deer in the Ancient and Early Medieval Cultures of the Azerbaijan*, in *Peregrinations: International Society for the Study of Pilgrimage Art*, vol. 3, issue 2, Summer, 2011, 202, 206; Jackson A., *The Symbol Stones of Scotland*, (Stromness, The Orkney Press, 1984).

[33] Gimbutas M., *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 6500–3500 B.C.*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974) *[*1982 republished as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe]*; Gimbutas M., *The Living Goddesses*, edited and supplemented by Dexter M. R., (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 12.

[34] Gimbutas M., *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 6500–3500 B.C.*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974) *[*1982 republished as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe]*, 171.

[35]Anisimov ‿A. F., *Космологические представления народов Севера (Kosmologicheskie predstavleniia narodov Severa)*, (Moscow and Leningrad: Leningrad Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1959) 28, 49 ff; Rybakov B., *'Cosmogony and Mythology of the Agriculturalists of the Eneolithic (Part I)*, in *Soviet Anthropology and Archeology*, 4:2 (1965), 2, 35; Gimbutas M., *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 6500–3500 B.C.*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974) *[*1982 republished as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe]*, 171.

[36]Abramzon C., *Kirgizy i ih ètnogenetičeskie i istoriko-kul'turnye svâzi*, (Izdatel'stvo Leningrad: "Nauka" 1971), 281-283.

[37] Virsaladze E. B., *Gruzinsky Okhotnichy My if i Poeziya (Georgian hunting myths and poetry)*, (Moscow: Nauka, 1976), 34; Mykhailova N., *Sex as Transition between Worlds in the Deer Hunting Society (mythology and rock art)*, in *Expression*, 15, March 2017, 64.

from a divine Deer-Mother, which lived in the skies.[38] It is the motif of the beast that dies in our mundane world and subsequently rises to be projected into the otherworldly world.

Beliefs and cults of the Deer-Mother who created life and universe resurfaced in ancestral traditions. Historical sources, folk traditions, and fairytales narrate that the celestial patroness of childbirth turned itself into a supernatural deer or doe.[39] The belief in the gravid deer or doe as mystical life-giving mother existed from deep antiquity and was very strong for many thousands of years. The archaic Deer-Mother reappeared as a Mistress of the Animals in Caucasian folklore.[40] In Northern Asia, it is still believed today that the cosmic birthing Mother Goddess appears as a gravid supernatural deer.[41] Even a number of Mesoamerican myths narrate a passage in the story of creation in which a pair of double-headed female deer jump from the sky and was hunted by a male god.[42]

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[38]Anisimov A. F., *Religia evenkov*, (Moscow, Leningrad: Akademiâ Nauk SSSR, 1958), 104; Rybakov B., *Cosmogony and Mythology of the Agriculturalists of the Eneolithic (Part I)*, in *Soviet Anthropology and Archeology*, 4:2 (1965).

[39] Prehistoric and early historic paintings, reliefs, mosaics, and tiles associated Mother-Deer with wells, freshwater streams, and the waters of life. Gimbutas M., *The Living Goddesses*, edited and supplemented by Dexter M. R., (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 13. For a survey, see Gimbutas M., *The Language of the Goddess*, (San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1989), 113-115. See also Lazarovici Gh., Merlini M., Maxim Z., Lazarovici C.-M., *The Excavation of the Deer House (Casa Cerbului)*, in *Prehistory Knowledge*, Rome: Patrocinio del Comune di Roma, Dipartamento XIV (2006).

[40] Mykhailova N., *Celestial deer - the flight from the Stone Age to the Middle Age*, in *Expression*, 20, June 2018, 38.

[41] Gimbutas M., *The civilisation of the Goddess. The World of Old Europe*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 225. Northern hunters still worship the mother of the universe as a wild doe- moose or reindeer-doe. Gimbutas M., The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 6500–3500 B.C., (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974) [1982 republished as The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe], 171. The Evenks, Tungusic people of North Asia, imagined the "Mother of the World" as a deer or reindeer doe. Gimbutas M., *The civilisation of the Goddess. The World of Old Europe*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 225. John G. Mckay ventured to argue that "The deer-goddess cult was administered by women only, and both cults originated during a period when women were paramount, and man inferior, and when man himself was in the hunting stage of development". McKay J. G., *The Deer-Cult and the Deer-Goddess of the Ancient Caledonians*, in *Folklore*, vol. 43, Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 1932; McKay J. G., *The Deer-Cult and the Deer-Goddess Cult of the Ancient Caledonians*, in *Folklore*, vol. 62, Issue 2, Taylor & Francis, Ltd. (1951), 144.

[42] The myth narrates of two bicephalic deer that descended from heaven slipping into adventures of seduction, murder, and cannibalism. The legend is variously told. According to the *Historia de Colhuacán y Mexico*, the double-headed deer were chased by two "cloud snakes", actually humans, Xiuhnel and his younger brother Mimich. The two hunters pursued the animals with arrows for several days through forests and steppes, but the celestial creatures easily dodged them. One night, all of a sudden, the two deer turned into attractive women who tried to seduce the hunters. Xiuhnel succumbed and had intercourse with the goddess who was actually Coatlicue, making it possible for her to eat his heart out of his body. Instead, Mimich resisted all the advances of the other divine deer-woman, who turned out to be the goddess Itzpapálotl ("Obsidian Butterfly"). Mimich captured Itzpapálotl and with the help of the fire god, Xiuhteteuctin, he burned her up (*Historia de Colhuacán*

Among cervids, only female reindeer carry horns. They once inhabited vast areas of continental and Mediterranean Europe. The horned female red deer is a phantasmagoric animal like the unicorn or the phoenix. Only male red deer have antlers. When a horned doe exceptionally appears in nature, it is a *monstrum* viewed with a mixture of fear and scandal, as a violation of the natural norm. This is the case of the extraordinary doe mentioned by Giraldus Cambrensis in his *Itinerarium Cambriae*: it not only has huge powerful horns, but also magical powers. In fact, the man who struck it immediately got blinded in his right eye and fell ill. [43] Nevertheless, some ancestral memory of the remote existence of antlered female reindeer in Europe may have influenced the mythos of the horned red deer doe. The fantastic imagery passed through the whole Eurasian cultural-religious tradition. See the Homeric age, the classical period, the figure of the goddess Cernunna,[44] and the fantastic Middle Age.[45]

The doe-hind deity was also connected with fertility, lactation, and girl's transition to marriage and motherhood.[46] Also in this instance we can find the

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y México - Anales de Cuauhtitlân, 1906; Ingham J. M., *Human Sacrifice at Tenochtitlan*, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Volume 26, Issue 3, July 1984; Valotta M. A, *Mitos y leyendas toltecas y aztecas*, Colección Las Culturas "Mitos y Leyendas", (Madrid: Grupo Cultural Zero, 1985), 54-55; Seler E., *Collected Works in Mesoamerican Linguistics and Archaeology*, (Lancaster, California: Labyrinthos, 1996), 5, 53a; Motz L., *The Faces of the Goddess*, (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 160; Olivier G., *Hunting, sacrifice and power in Mesoamerica: In the footsteps of Mixcoatl, "Serpent of Cloud"*, (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2015). The Mesoamericans regarded the double-headed deer which jump from the sky as the first deified woman and mother of the ancestral twin heroes. Chevalier J., Gheerbrant A., *Dictionnaire Des Symboles: mythes, rêves, coutumes, gestes, formes, figures, couleurs, nombres*, vol. I-III (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont / Éditions Jupiter, 1969), 283.

[43] Cambrensis G., *Itinerarium Cambriae*, in Dimock J. F. (ed.), *Giraldus Cambrensis Opera* (London: Rolls Series), vol. VI (1868), 17.

[44] The cult of an antlered Celtic goddess, the female equivalent and partner of the god Cernunnos, spread across Europe from Bronze Age to Medieval times. Lambrechts P., *Contributions àl'étude des divinités celtiques*, Université de Gand, Collection de la Faculté des Lettres, 93, (Bruges: De Tempel, 1942), 25, n. 31; Alcock J. P., *Three bronze figurines in the British Museum*, in *The Antiquaries Journal* (1963); Piggott S., *A Romano-Celtic Bronze Head*, in *The Antiquaries Journal, 43*(1) (1963), 116-118; Boucher S., *Recherches sur les bronzes figurés de Gaule préromaine et romaine*, Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 228, Rome: Ecole Francaise de Rome, 1976, 174, 342, pl. 66, fig. 317; Scherrer P. G., *Der Kult der namentlich bezeugten Gottheiten im römerzeitlichen Noricum*, Wien: P. G. Scherrer, 1984, 121, n. 27; Deyts S., *Images des Dieux de la Gaule*, Paris: Editions Errance, 1992, 40; Šašel Kos M., *Pre-Roman Divinities of the Eastern Alps and Adriatic.* Series: Situla, 38, (Ljubljana: Narodni Muzej 1999), 137-138, photo p. 137.

[45] Gabriele Rossetti, in the third volume of his immense book *The Mystery of Platonic Love in the Middle Ages*, dedicated some remarkable pages to the antlered doe, both learned, bizarre and acute. (Rossetti G., *The Mystery of Platonic Love in the Middle Ages*, 5 vols. (London Richard and John E. Taylor 1840), 841 ff.).

[46] A paradigmatic representation of a girl's transition to marriage and motherhood is found on an Oxford Attic black-figure plate made between the mid to late VI century BCE. Young unmarried girls were considered partly savage. Their preparation to adulthood is symbolized on the plate by the "Hind Struggles", indicating Herakles and Apollo's fight over the deer. The metaphorical association between wild animals and young women, tamed through marriage, is evident. Sourvinou-Inwood Ch.,

figure of the horned doe, in particular engaged in the act of breastfeeding. An ancient scholium at the third Olympic by Pindar, for example, testifies that the nurturing doe par excellence of the mythical tradition, is the one that suckles Telephus.[47] The myth is represented on gemstone of chalcedony (ca. 450 BCE). Here the animal is nursing the newborn with an encouraging attitude.[48]



Image 8. *A gemstone of chalcedony (ca. 450 BCE) representing the myth of Telephus nursed by an antlered doe. Pellizer, 2000/2001: fig. 1.* Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

Some small bronze votive statuettes of archaic Greece show the intimate moment of an antlered doe nursing its fawn. They belong to the geometric period and have been found almost exclusively in sanctuary deposits. Both animals are

A Series of Erotic Pursuits: Images and Meanings, in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 107 (1987), 137-139; Sourvinou-Inwood Ch., *Studies in Girls' Transitions: Aspects of the Arkteia and Age Representation in Attic Iconography*, Athens: Kardamitsa, 1988, 102, n. 298, 104, n. 315; Bergeron M., *Revisiting a Plate in the Ashmolean Museum: A New Interpretation*, in Morais R., Leão D., Pérez D. R. (eds.), *Greek Art in Motion. Studies in honour of Sir John Boardman on the occasion of his 90th birthday* (Archaeopress Archaeology, Oxford 2019).

[47] Drachmann A. B. (ed.), *Scholia vetera in Pindari carmina*, vol. I. Scholia in Olympionicas, Lipsia: B. G Teubneri, 1903, 120, Scholium 52 a. Aelian maintained the existence of the doe with horns, citing the authority of famous poets such as Pindar, Anacreon, Sophocles, Euripides. Aelian, *On Animals*, 3 vols. (Scholfield A. ed. and trans., London: Heinemann, 1958-1959).

[48] Pellizer E., *Lector in imagine: varianti iconiche e varianti discorsive nella leggenda di Telefo*, in *Classica (São Paulo)*, 13/14 (2000/2001), 156, fig. 1. The piece is held in Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, inv. n. 25.097.

represented with reduced forms, particularly evident in their long slender legs and extended snouts. The deer (not the fawn) is decorated with a series of stamped concentric circles, especially on the antlers. The same circles also stand for her eyes. [49]



Image 9. *A bronze statuette depicting an antlered doe suckling its fawn from the Kabirion sanctuary near Thebes (750–700 BCE). Boardman, 1978: fig. 27*. Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

One group was discovered in the Kabirion sanctuary, near Thebes (last quarter of the VIII century BCE) and is kept in the Louvre Museum.[50] A similar fanciful pair was also found at the Kabirion (750–700 BCE).[51] It is characterized by a bird resting on the deer's rump, to highlight the celestial character of the antlered doe. The underside of the base on which the deer and its fawn stand is decorated with a meander pattern.[52] A specialist in ancient bronzes suggested that "the same gifted sculptor" of this work also created other bronzes in American and

[49] Heilmeyer W.-D., *Frühe olympische Bronzefiguren: Die Tiervotive* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1979), 89 n. 124, 106 n. 144, n. C10, 150 n. 193, 151 n. 1979; Barron J., *An Introduction to Greek Sculpture*, London: Atlantic Highlands, 1981, 10-11; Langdon S. H., *From Pasture to Polis: Art in the Age of Homer* (Columbia, MO University of Missouri Press, 1993), 60 n. 8, 156-157 n. 56, 200-201 fig. 24, 215 n. 85, 216-217 n. 86; Christiansen J., *Greece in the Geometric Period* (Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 1996), 48, n. I, n. 3425; Carter J. B., Morris S. P. (eds.), *The Ages of Homer. A Tribute to Emily Townsend Vermeule*, Austin: University of Texas Press (1995), 382, 396.

[50]Langdon S. H., *From Pasture to Polis: Art in the Age of Homer* (Columbia, MO University of Missouri Press, 1993), 200.

[51] The masterpiece is located in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (inv. n. 98.650). It is one of the most beloved animals in the collection and appears frequently in the museum's handbooks.

[52] Mitten D. G., *The Earliest Greek Sculptures in the Museum*, in *Boston Museum Bulletin*, vol. 65, n. 339, 1967, 13-16; Boardman J., *Greek Sculpture: The Archaic Period* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), 30, fig. 9; Vermeule C., Comstock M., *Greek, Etruscan & Roman Bronzes in the Museum of Fine Arts*, Boston: Museum of Fine Arts (1981), 200. Inexplicably, in 2016 John Boardman located its discovery place in Samos and dated the piece to 725–700 BCE.

European collections, giving him the nickname "The Master of the Boston Deer and Fawn".[53]

Ancient Greek artists show doe with antlers even in the classical period.[54] The Ceryneian Hind had magnificent solid gold horns similar to those of a stag in adulthood, a symbol of royalty and sacredness, and silver and brass legs, a symbol of the incorruptibility of its steps because the metal isolated the animal from the terrestrial soil. In fact, the doe was consecrated to Artemis. After chasing the animal for a full year, Herakles finally captured it on Mount Artemision (Arcadia). Then, according to one version of the myth, he tore off her golden horns. In another version, the civilizing hero brought the live doe to Mycenae, proving to have accomplished the third labor. Immediately afterwards he brought it back to the valley in front of the Temple of Apollo where he set it free again. By doing so, he soothed Artemis' wrath. [55]

In a somewhat obscure myth, the ancient Greeks considered the doe to be the incarnation of Artemis.[56] Deer, bears, and other animals may be intimately related to her, but she seldom adopts their shape. In the old myth of the Aloadai, two giant brothers who wanted to storm Olympus, Artemis turned into a deer between them. When the monstrous twin attempted to shoot her, they killed each

[53] Mitten D. G., *The Earliest Greek Sculptures in the Museum*, in *Boston Museum Bulletin*, vol. 65, n. 339 (1967), 13-16.

[54] Boardman J., *Greek Sculpture: The Archaic Period* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), 30, fig. 9. See for example a gemstone with carving on chalcedony from Ionia, Eastern Greece (V century BCE), held in the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Coll. Verkhovich 1886. Donà C. *La perigliosa caccia alla cerva cornuta*, in *Medioevo folklorico. Intersezioni di testi e culture* (2009), 62, fig. 2.3.

[55] Callimachus, *Hymn 3 to Artemis*, in *Hymns and Epigrams* (Mair A. W. trans.), (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969): 98 ff; Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 4. 12. 13 in *Diodorus of Sicily in Twelve Volumes* (Oldfather C. H. trans.), (Press, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1989); Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca 2. 81-82* (Frazer J. G. trans.), *Apollodorus: The Library*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1921); Seneca, *Hercules Furens*, in *Seneca's Tragedies. Volume I: Hercules Furens, Troades, Medea, Hippolytus, Oedipus* (Miller F. J. trans.), (Heinemann: Harvard University Press, 1960), 222 ff; Aelian, *On Animals*, 3 vols. (Scholfield A. ed. and trans.), (London: Heinemann, 1958-1959); Pseudo-Hyginus, *Fabulae* 30 (1960), *The Myths of Hyginus* (University of Kansas Press, Lawrence), 1960; Quintus Smyrnaeus, *The Fall of Troy*, (Way A.S. trans.), (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 223 ff.

[56] Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca 2. 81-82* (Frazer J. G. trans.), *Apollodorus: The Library*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1921), 1.4.7; Gimbutas M., *The Living Goddesses*, edited and supplemented by Dexter M. R., (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 12. The metamorphosis must also be connected to some associations of Artemis with deer, such as her epithets *Elaphia(ia)* ('of the deer'). The same connection is seen in the myth of Iphigeneia, in which Artemis replaces the heroine with a deer on the altar. Bremmer J. N., *The theriomorphism of the major Greek gods*, in Kindt J. (ed.), *Animals in Ancient Greek Religion*, Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2020), 104.

other. Some ancient Greek myth also identified Artemis with a Star Goddess in the shape of a young female cervid with golden antlers.[57]

The whimsical pair (antlered doe and its fawn) spread even in Scythia. In a silver breastplate from Semibratnyi kurgan (Ukraine), the attribution of hypertrophic male antlers to a female animal underlines its supernatural, mythical and sacred nature. Deer and fawns are positioned above birds, emphasizing their celestial character. This is further confirmed by the large body of myths from the Urals and Siberia which place the Deer in the dimension of the Sky and connect them with prosperity.[58] The couple is also an emblem of fecundity, as the antlers were considered analogous to the tree of life. Finally, it is a sign of the sovereign power of the antlered does over a land and a tribe.

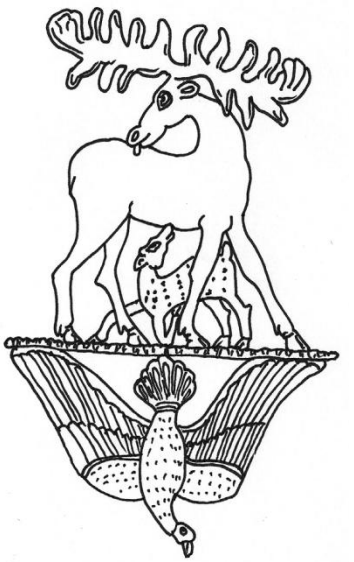


Image 10. *An antlered deer with its fawn on a silver breastplate from Semibratnyi kurgan (Ukraine).* Ermakov, 2011: 5, fig. 2C.

Regarding the adult male deer, it was the noblest in rank and among the strongest animals, its pursuit was an inevitable test of a hunter's skill and courage. Stags chased by hunters or animal predators is a common theme since the art of the last culture of the Upper Paleolithic. Representations occur in a wide variety of media including rock art, stone, ceramics, and metal.[59]

[57] Janos Makkay explored the ancient Greek myth of a female deer with big golden antlers. Makkay J., *The Miracle Stag in Ancient Greek mythical stories, and their Indo-lranian counterparts*, (Budapest: Published by the author, 2006), 14.

[58] Ermakov D., *Bön as a multifaceted phenomenon: looking beyond Tibet to the cultural and religious traditions of Eurasia*, in *Bon, Zhang Zhung and Early Tibet Conference* 10 September 2011, London: SOAS (2011), 5. This concept will be explored in a paragraph below.

[59] Siegeltuch M., *The Social Symbolism of Horns*, Academia.edu, undated, 14.

However, at the Ranaldi Shelter the scene cannot be identified as a bloody hunt but as a peaceful act. Here the Prehistoric Childbirth Deity manifests herself in an anthropomorphic form and is assisted in her birthing task by wild stags, which are not running away as stalked victims of game. Instead, they are silently on repose like supernatural animals. They are proceeding with their heads ahead or turned down, grazing or looking backwards.

The scene is not even a representation hinged on the ideal of virility. Ethno-historical sources document that men apply a metaphor of hunting when illustrating their sexual affairs. However, the Ranaldi Shelter panel avoids any implicit association between chasing cervids and 'hunting women' (the so-called 'two-legged deer').[60]

When in the ancestral times the birth-giving goddess revealed herself as a doe-hind, she had the stag as her natural *paredrus* (supporting, assisting partner). In the paintings of the Ranaldi Shelter, mature[61] male red deer support a Prehistoric Childbirth Goddess that manifests herself in an anthropomorphic form. She gives birth within a herd of stags and assisted, on the sides, by two mature harts, which are supernatural animals equipped with overstated branched antlers over a double head. Let us try to understand meaning and implications of their unusual features.



Image 11. *The two mature double-headed stags of the Ranaldi Shelter. Borzatti von Löwenstern, 2016.* Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

[60] Schlegel A., *Male and female in Hopi thought and action*, in Schlegel A. (ed.), *Sexual Stratification* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 259.

[61] The size of the antlers and their branching in many tines are indications of both the mature age and good health of the depicted stags. In males, social maturity i.e., the ability to reproduce, is reached at the age of 7-8 years. The illustrated stags are over 10-12 years old.

In the next section, we will explore the special relationship between the life-giving goddesses and the stag as their paredrus and cult symbol. Then we will focus on exaggerated antlers and bicephalism as attributes of supernatural assistants to Mother Ranaldi labor.

4. Male red deer and life-giving divine feminine

4.A. *Male cervid / Mother Goddesses association from the Early Neolithic to the Sumerian and Anatolian Bronze Age*

The stag has been the animal associated with the life-giving goddess since prehistory.[62] Its portraits in this role are frequent and exquisite. The most spectacular is a Karanovo I zoomorphic vase made with fine light-brown fabric and painted white on red. It was unearthed from the Muldava mound (Central Bulgaria)[63] and is dated to 6000-5600 BCE.[64]

The head with antlers and neck have been modelled with special attention to represent a young stag or a mature stag in spring, when the horns are growing back. The mouth has a round opening.[65] The use of this Early Neolithic large vessel in form of a male deer as an "oil lamp" in birth rituals highlights the symbolic connection between this cervid and zigzag motif (heavenly waters),

[62] By contrast, in the Iron Age the stag was a psychopomp animal. According to a popular belief shared from Western Europe to China, "the deer leads to the otherworld". Jobes G., *Dictionary of Mythology Folklore and Symbols* (New York: The Scarecrow Press, 1962), 1489. Studying the beliefs of Turkish peoples who inhabited Azerbaijan, Iran, Georgia and Armenia, Saltanat Rzayeva noted that the shaman rode the 'flying deer' to enter the spirit world, while exploited the horse to travel to the world of dead, to escort the souls of the dead. Rzayeva S., *The Symbol of the Deer in the Ancient and Early Medieval Cultures of the Azerbaijan*, in *Peregrinations: International Society for the Study of Pilgrimage Art*, vol. 3, issue 2, Summer, 2011, 203). In the Celtic mythology, the stag is mainly a chthonic animal, which accompanies the souls of hunters to the Other World. Ross A., *Pagan Celtic Britain: Studies in Iconography and Tradition*, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 338. Its chase in medieval literature, funerary visual art, tapestries and miniatures was a powerful allegory of the soul being carried over the threshold of mortality. Thiébaux M., *The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 44. More in general, the hart was a divine messenger and guide. For example, it was the emissary of Dionysus-Zagreus. Thiébaux M., *The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 44.

[63] It is kept in the Plovdiv Archaeological Museum.

[64] Merlini M., *Neo-Eneolithic Literacy in Southeastern Europe: an Inquiry into the Danube*, Biblioteca Brukenthal XXXIII, (Alba Iulia: Ministery of Culture of Romania and Brukenthal National Museum, Editura Altip, 2009), 466.

[65] Detev P., *Praistorichestoto Selishche pri selo Muldava*, in *Godishnik Na Napodniia Archialogicheski Muzei Plovdiv (Annuaire du Musee National Archeologique Plovdiv)*, 6, Plovdiv, 1968, 33, fig. 26; Gimbutas M., *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 6500–3500 B.C.* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974) *[*1982 republished as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe]*, 173, figs. 167, 168; Todorova H., Vajsov I., *Novokameniata epoha v Bulgaria*, (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1993), 214, fig. 146. Henrieta Todorova and Ivan Vajsov imaginatively considered the vessel a zoomorphic altarpiece. Todorova H., Vajsov I., *Novokameniata epoha v Bulgaria*, (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo (1993), 21.

parallel lines and triple bands (terrestrial waters), and S-shaped signs (the mythical serpent causing rain).[66]



Image 12. *Karanovo I deer vessel from Muldava (Bulgaria).*
https://www.tumbral.com/tag/Cucuteni

The male deer was sacred to many archaic goddesses related to life and re-birth, including the Mesopotamian Ninhursag and the Anatolian Cybele. The Sumerian mistress of wild animals and divine giver of life as well as the cause of death, Ninhursag, was sometimes represented as a hart.[67] In her role as birth-giver, she was known as Nintur, meaning the "lady of the birth hut".[68] In the tale *Enki*

[66] Gimbutas M., *The civilisation of the Goddess. The World of Old Europe* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 225, fig. 7-3. Gimbutas described the ungulate as a doe and connected the decoration with crescents in a negative design with a close relation of the animal to the moon symbolism. Gimbutas M., *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 6500–3500 B.C.* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974) *[*1982 republished as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe]*, 172. According to Golan, the vessel was intended for the rite of "watering the earth". In the text, we report his interpretation of the graphic symbolism of the decoration on the artifact. Golan A., *Prehistoric Religion, Mythology. Symbolism* (Jerusalem: Ariel Golan, 2003), 90.

[67] Heimpel W., *Hirsch*, in *Reallexikon der Assyrilogie (RLA)*, 4, 1972/1975: 418-421, 420; Gimbutas M., *The Language of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 113; Selz G. J., *Das Paradies der Mütter. Materialien zum Urspung der 'Paradiesvorstellungen'*, in *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 100*, 2010, 194-195. In the same way as the dog is Gula, the lioness is Inana/Ištar (when appearing in her martial form), and the lion headed eagle is Ningirsu/Ninurta. Steinkeller P., *Texts, art and archeology: An archaic plaque from Mari and the Sumerian birth-goddess Ninhursag*, in Chambon G., Guichard M., Langlois A.-I. (eds.), *De l'argile au numérique. Mélanges assyriologiques en l'honneur de Dominique Charpin*, Bristol: Peeters Publishers, 2019.

[68] Jacobson E., *The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia: A Study in the Ecology of Belief* (Leiden, New York, Koln: Brill, 1993), 218.

and Ninhursag, even the male divinity Enki, become pregnant after eating his own semen, and asked the help of Ninhursag to give birth and relieve his labor pangs.[69]

The close relationship between the goddess Ninhursag and the stag is expressed by a copper relief that once stood over a doorway of the temple consecrated to the goddess in Tell Al-'Ubaid close to Ur (South Iraq).[70] The lintel belongs to the Early Dynastic III culture of Southern Mesopotamia, 3000-2500 BCE. The impressive and deeply carved frieze displays the divine lion-headed eagle Imdugud/Anzu with wings extended and claws embedded in the haunches of two male red deer under it, looking in opposite directions.[71] The figures create a heraldic triangle that encompasses the entire scene. The fierce visual impact over the entrance would have been frightening and awe-inspiring for the believers who visited the temple.[72] The figures seem to burst out from the carved frame, emphasized by the large antlers that extend beyond the edge of the panel, as well as the god's head projecting above. The artist lengthened the bodies of the stags, going against a purely naturalistic representation.[73] The antlers were exaggerated for aesthetic purposes and to increase the emotional impact of the hunt.[74] The heads, by contrast, have been modeled beautifully and naturally.[75] Although the massive god grasps simultaneously the stags, he does so not out of aggression but out of affinity, as Imdugud was symbolized by both bird and deer.[76] In this instance, the stags are closely associated with the violence and strength possessed by the storm god, but this scene shows the natural balance and harmony instead of destruction and fear.[77]

[69] Kramer S. N., Maier J., *Myths of Enki, The Crafty God*, (New York, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020).
[70] The remarkable plaque is now held at the British Museum, London. N.114308.
[71] Wallis Budge E. A., *A guide to the Babylonian and Assyrian antiquities*, (London, British Museum, 1922), 57; Hall H. R., Woolley C. L., *Al-'Ubaid. A report on the work carried out at al-'Ubaid for the British Museum in 1919 and for the joint expedition in 1923-4*, Oxford: OUP on behalf of the British Museum, 1927, 28-29, 85, pl. VI; Frankfort H., *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1954), 30, pl. 27a; Barnett R. D., Wiseman D. J., *Fifty masterpieces of Ancient Near Eastern Art*, (London: The Trustees of the British Museum 1960), 14-15, n. 4; Braun-Holzinger E. A., *Figürliche Bronzen aus Mesoptamien*, in *Prähistorische Bronzenfunde*, Abteilung I, Band 4, (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1984), 77, pl. 16.
[72] Hall H. R., *Sumerian Relief in Copper, c. 3000 B.C.*, in *The British Museum Quarterly*, 4 (1927), 85.
[73] Ibidem, 85; Spycket A., *La statuaire du Proche-Orient Ancien*, (Leiden, Brill, 1981), 138.
[74] Hall H. R., *Sumerian Relief in Copper, c. 3000 B.C.*, in *The British Museum Quarterly*, 4, 1927, 87. Woolley C. L., *Mesopotamien und Vorderasien*, (Baden-Baden: Holle Verlag, 1961), 51.
[75] Hall H. R., *Sumerian Relief in Copper, c. 3000 B.C.*, in *The British Museum Quarterly*, 4, 1927, 86.
[76] Frankfort H., *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1954), 30.
[77] Chandler P., *Stags in the Sumerian Royal Tombs and their Anatolian Connections*, Undergraduate Honors Theses, Paper 329, Boulder: University of Colorado (2013), 45.

Goddess Inanna, lady of all lands and member of the celestial triad, the daughter of Nanna (the god of Moon),[78] was said to be born of a ferocious deer in the depths of the mountains.[79]

The Royal Tombs of Ur from Early Dynastic Sumer, ranging from 3000 BCE to about 2330 BCE,[80] provided male red deer representations in large quantities, even if these cervids were not native to that area and their occurrence was very rare in most Early Dynastic imagery. The Sumerians adopted the preference for stag imagery and its religious connotations from the Anatolians, who intimately associated it with the sun god. Significantly, the stag god was also the protector of the wild fields.

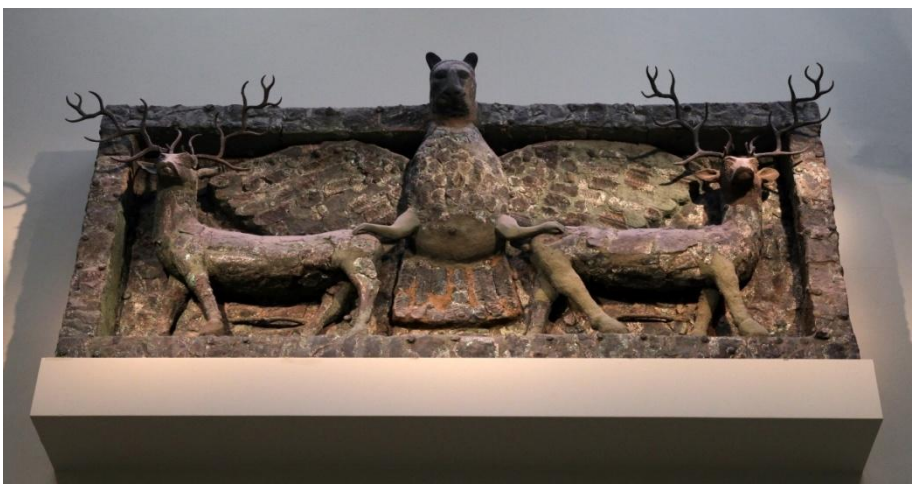


Image 13. *The close relationship between the goddess Ninhursag and the stag as expressed by the copper lintel that once stood over a doorway of the temple consecrated to the goddess in Tell Al-'Ubaid close to Ur (South Iraq).*
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:British_Museum_Middle_east_14022019_Panel_Imdugud_2500_BC_3640.jpg

These divinities controlled the successes of society as a whole by allowing for plentiful crops, wildlife, and habitable weather. The Sumerians, too, linked the harts to the strength of the gods and their protective powers, but also to the fertility of the land and people and abundance in rain, as southern Mesopotamia often lacked sufficient rainfall to sustain its agriculture.[81] This exotic zoomorphic

[78] Komoróczy G., Kalmár É., *Fénylő ölednek édes örömében*, Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó (1983), 147, 419.
[79] Ibidem, 135.
[80] Moorey P. R. S., *Ur 'of the Chaldees': A Revised and Updated Edition of Sir Leonard Woolley's Excavations at Ur*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 16.
[81] Zettler R. L., Horne L., (eds.), *Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 1998), 48.

imagery in the royal tombs may be used to express the concept of life and its regeneration and renewal even after death. Manufacts representing exotic animals were also used as offerings to the gods responsible for the natural forces that were to produce fertility and fecundity.[82] The Imdugud/Anzu relief from Tell al-'Ubaid documents how this culture respected and feared the power and strength of the gods who presided over nature and society. As for the power of the stag, the Middle Babylonian *Shà.zi.ga* ("Rising of the heart") incantations suggested to use its penis, well-known to have high sexual potency, as a key element to create concoctions against erectile dysfunction.[83]

As early as the beginning of the I millennium BCE (and perhaps earlier), local workshops in Anatolia produced numerous bronze stag figurines used in the worship of a primitive fertility goddess.[84] In Asia Minor, on the great spring festival of Cybele, the shorn genitals of her priests were consecrated to her and the stag was a particularly appreciated sacrificed animal.[85] Its offering was not very common, precisely because of its special character.[86]

4.B *Artemis as deer patron and killer*

In ancient Europe, terms used for deer in a ritual context first appeared on Linear A.

On Linear B tablets, the deer is the rare Ideogram B104 now known as *CERV* (Cervus elaphus). The animal is drawn in profile with jutting well-detailed antlers. Ideogram B104 is attested three times in the Linear B archives analyzed by Michael Ventris and John Chadwick. It is referred to on PY Cr868 + 875 (Ci) and PY Cr591 + fr. (Cii) from the Mycenaean palace of Pylos. The tablets have been written by two unidentifiable scribes. They were unearthed from Room 8 of the central archives, an indication that they had probably been important enough to be processed and preserved. [87] Each ideogram has multiple entries and one to three

[82] Chandler P., *Stags in the Sumerian Royal Tombs and their Anatolian Connections*, Undergraduate Honors Theses, Paper 329, (Boulder: University of Colorado, 2013), 59.

[83] Biggs R. D., *The Babylonian Sexual Potency Texts*, in Parpola S., Whiting R. M. (eds.), *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East*, (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2002); Budin S. L., *Fertility and Gender in the Ancient Near East*, in Masterson M., Sorkin Rabinowitz N., Robson J. (eds.), *Sex in Antiquity*, (London: Routledge, 2018).

[84] Peppers J., *Four Roman Votive Bronzes in the Getty Museum*, *The J. Paul Getty Museum Jurnal*, (1980).

[85] Gimbutas M., *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 6500–3500 B.C.*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974) *[*1982 republished as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe]*, 199.

[86] Since deer were not commonly sacrificed animals, the bones and horns found in the sanctuaries probably belong to hunted animals consecrated as a first «fruit» offering. Klinger S., *On Women with Deer in Black-Figure Vase-Painting*, in *Numismatica e Antichità Classiche*, 31 (2002), 14.

[87] Palaima Th., *Mycenaean Scribal Aesthetics*, in Laffineur R., Crowley J. L. (eds.), *Eikon. Aegean Bronze Age Iconography: Shaping a methodology, Proceedings of the 4th International Aegean Conference, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia, 6-9 April 1992*, Aegaeum 8, Liège (1992), 72.

deer are listed after place names. For convenience, I have circled the deer ideogram in the images.[88]

Ventris and Chadwick interpreted the deer on these tablets as carcasses, possibly the quarry of the hunt. [89] Deer hunting was also associated with feasting and consumption of venison.[90] Emmet L. Bennet suggested that cervid meat was a contribution to feasts by elites.[91] Deer were also herded in small numbers in remote cervid parks. Then they were selected either for ceremonial hunts or for sacrifice.[92] From a religious point of view, they were possibly firstling offerings.[93] The zooarchaeological data from Troy inform us that deer was used as meat sources for communal feastings in Early Bronze Age.[94] The capture of deer as spoils of war from the defeated countries and the appearance of laws against their theft in the second millennium document the social and economic institutionalization of deer celebrations linked to social status, identity, prestige and regeneration and the

[88] The symbolic and economic value of the deer can also be traced to the palatial bureaucracy of the palace of Pylos, which found it necessary not only to create an ideogram for deer in the Linear B archive, but even name one of the locations in the principality of Pylos as *e-ra-po ri-me-ne*, *Ελάφων Λιμήν*: the port of the deer. See An 657. Ruipérez M., Melena J., *Los griegos micénicos*, Historia 16, (Madrid: MELSA, 1996), 166, 210, 229–230; Papazoglou-Manioudaki L., *A stag's head rhyton from Pylos. The Minoan Connection and the Mainland Spirit*, in Blakolmer F. (ed.), *Current Approaches and New Perspectives in Aegean Iconography*, Aegis 18, (Louvain: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 2020), 311.

[89] Ventris M., Chadwick J., *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, 132); Chadwick J., *The Decipherment of Linear B*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 119.

[90] Wright J. C., *A survey of evidence for feasting in Mycenaean society*, in Wright J. C. (ed.), *The Mycenaean Feast*, Hesperia, special issue 73, Princeton (2004), 171.

[91] Bennet J., *Agency and Bureaucracy: Thoughts on the Nature and Extent of Administration in Bronze Age Pylos*, in Voutsaki S., Killen J. (eds.), *Economy and Politics in the Mycenaean Palace States*, Cambridge Philological Society, Suppl. 27, Cambridge (2001), 34-35.

[92] Palaima Th., *Mycenaean Scribal Aesthetics*, in Laffineur R., Crowley J. L. (eds.), *Eikon. Aegean Bronze Age Iconography: Shaping a methodology, Proceedings of the 4th International Aegean Conference, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia, 6-9 April 1992*, Aegaeum 8, Liège, 1992, 72– 73, pl. XXI. Melena J., *40 Joins and Quasi-Joins of Fragments in the Linear B Tablets from Pylos*, in *Minos*, 31-32, 1996-1997, 159-178, 163; Palmer R., *Deer in the Pylos tablets*, in Carlier P. (ed.), *Études mycéniennes 2010*, in *Actes du XIIIe colloque international sur les textes égéens*, Sèvres, Paris, Nanterre, 20-23 septembre 2010, Biblioteca di Pasiphae, 10, (Pisa, Roma: Fabrizio Serra editore, 2012), 357-382, 361–368; Palmer R., *Managing the Wild: Deer and Agrimia in the Late Bronze Age Aegean*, in Touchais G., Laffineur R., Rougemont F. (eds.), *Physis. L'environnement naturel et la relation homme-milieu dans le monde égéen protohistorique, Actes de la 14e Rencontre égéenne internationale, Paris, Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (INHA), 11-14 décembre 2012*, Aegaeum 37 (Leuven – Liege: Peeters, 2014), 392–393.

[93] In Archives Room 7 of the palace at Pylos, the remains of a deer were found near those of the sacrificial bovines. Stocker S. R., Davis J. L., *Animal Sacrifice, Archives, and Feasting at the Palace of Nestor*, in Wright J. C. (ed.), *The Mycenaean Feast*, Hesperia, 73 (2) (2004), 190.

[94] Çakırlar C., *Early Bronze Age Foodways in the Aegean: Social Archaeozoology on the Eastern Side*, in Pernicka E., Ünlüsoy S., Blum S. (eds.), *Early Bronze Age Troy: Chronology, Cultural Development and Interregional Contacts: Proceedings of an International Conference held at the University of Tübingen* (Tübingen: Verlag Rudolf Habert, 2016).

transformation of the stag and its imagery into manifestations of power within and between the centralized and hierarchical societies that began to appear in Early Bronze Age.[95]

In the Mycenean world, the most famous goddess related to birth who accompanied herself with a stag was Artemis. Linear B tablets from Pylos record the theonym Artemis. [96] It is attested as *A-ti-mi-te* (in the dative form) [97] and *A-ti-mi-to* (in the genitive form).[98] The word *A-te-mo* (*Artemon*) occurs at Knossos.[99] From the Linear B inscriptions, we know that large quantities of edible and drinkable products, as well as animals, were offered to the goddess Artemis or for her ritual feasts.

The Mycenaean Artemis as a deity of childbirth assisted women in labor in the form of Eleuthia/Eleuthyia.[100] In a society where motherhood was strictly

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[95] Arbuckle B. S., *The rise of cattle cultures in Bronze Age Anatolia*, in *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology & Heritage Studies*, 2 (4), (2014), 288.

[96] Chadwick J., *The Mycenaean World* (Cambridge, London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 89; Burkert W., *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985, 85-86; Gimbutas M., *The Living Goddesses*, edited and supplemented by Dexter M. R., Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999, 156; Merlini M., *Pre-Christian Mount Athos: Goddess Artemis-Diana and her Afterlife Among the Monks*, *Journal of Archaeomythology*, Institute of Archaeomythology, vol. 8, 2018, 143. Based on disputable linguistic argument, Gérard Rousseau and Christiane Souvinous rejected the interpretation that the name of Artemis was mentioned. Rousseau G. M., *Les mentions religieuses dans les tablettes mycéniennes*, (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1968), 46-47; Souvinous C., *A-TE-MI-TO e A-TI-MI-TE*, in *Kadmos*, 9, 1970, 42–47. According to Souvinous, it may designate a cult person. Souvinous C., *A-TE-MI-TO e A-TI-MI-TE*, in *Kadmos*, 9 (1970), 42–47. Their negative answer to the question was definitively contrasted by Tassos Christidis (1972: 125-128).

[97] See tablet PY Un 219 (scribe 15, found in Archive room 8). It mentions Artemis in a list of divinities, individuals, or groups of people. Nosch M-L. B., *Approaches to Artemis in Bronze Age Greece*, in Fischer-Hansen T., Poulsen B. (eds.), *From Artemis to Diana. The Goddess of Man and Beast*, Danish Studies in Classical Archaeology, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2009, 25.

[98] See tablet PY Es 650 (scribe 11, found in room 7). We are informed that "Aikiwaro, Artemis' slave (*Artemitos dohelos*), has so much wheat: 1 unit (96 liters) of wheat".

[99] Chadwick J., Godart L., KilJen J. T., Olivier J.-P., Sacconi A., Sakellarakis L. A., *Corpus of Mycenaean Inscriptions from Knossos* Vol. l, II, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986; Godart L., Killen J. T., Olivier J. P., Sacconi A., Sakellarakis I. A., *Corpus of Mycenaean Inscriptions from Knossos: Volume 2, 1064-4495* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 95; Merlini M., *Pre-Christian Mount Athos: Goddess Artemis-Diana and her Afterlife Among the Monks*, *Journal of Archaeomythology*, Institute of Archaeomythology, vol. 8 (2018), 143. The tablet is Dc 1298. It is held in the Ashmolean Museum.

[100] The goddess is mentioned as *E-re-u-ti-ja* in a Mycenaean Linear B fragment of tablets from Knossos. In the tablets from scribe 103 found in area G1, Gallery of Jewel Fresco - KN Od(2) 714, KN Od(2) 715, and KN Od(2) 716 - it is stated that the goddess *E-re-u-ti-ja* receives wool from the palace administration. Nosch M-L. B., *Approaches to Artemis in Bronze Age Greece*, in Fischer-Hansen T., Poulsen B. (eds.), *From Artemis to Diana. The Goddess of Man and Beast*, Danish Studies in Classical Archaeology (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2009), 27-28. In KN Gg(3) 705 (scribe 140, found in area G1, Gallery of Jewel Fresco), it is specified that her temple in Amnisos is given an amphora filled with honey. Chadwick J., Godart L., KilJen J. T., Olivier J.-P., Sacconi A., Sakellarakis L. A., *Corpus of Mycenaean Inscriptions from Knossos* Vol. l, II,

connected to fertility but not necessarily to love and sexual desire, Artemis' role in relation to female biology and reproduction was pivotal.[101]

Mother Ranaldi documents the duration of this generative aspect that Artemis inherited from the prehistoric stratum.[102] "The links between Eileithyia (Artemis), the earlier Minoan goddess, and a still earlier Neolithic prototype are, relatively, firm".[103] The bridge was constituted by the Aegean Bronze Age Potnia Thêrôn - "Mistress of wild animals," and "Stag huntress" (*elaphêbolos*)[104] - in

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(Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 268; Hägg R., *Religious syncretism at Knossos and in post-palatial Crete?*, in Driessen J., Farnoux A. (eds.), *La Crète mycénienne: actes de la table ronde internationale organisée par l'Ecole française d'Athènes, 26-28 mars 1991*, *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, Supplément 30, Paris: Ecole française d'Athènes, 1997, 165; Hiller S., *Cretan sanctuaries and mycenaean palatial administration at Knossos*, in *Suppléments au Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*, 30, École Française d'Athènes, 1997, 206; Nosch M-L. B., *Approaches to Artemis in Bronze Age Greece*, in Fischer-Hansen T., Poulsen B. (eds.), *From Artemis to Diana. The Goddess of Man and Beast*, Danish Studies in Classical Archaeology (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2009), 28; Merlini M., *Pre-Christian Mount Athos: Goddess Artemis-Diana and her Afterlife Among the Monks*, *Journal of Archaeomythology*, Institute of Archaeomythology, vol. 8, 2018, 156). *E-re-u-ti-ja* is a dialectal form of the goddess name, variously written in Greek. In classical time, she was called Eileithyia. Athanasios Antoniou documented how Artemis and Eleuthia/Eleuthyia often occur together, and how Eleuthia/Eleuthyia becomes one of Artemis' epithets. Antoniou A., *Minoische Nachwirkungen im Kult der Artemis der historischen Zeit*, in *Platon*, 32, 1980; Antoniou A., *Minoische Elements im Kult der Artemis von Brauron*, in *Philologus*, 125, 1981. She was worshipped all over Greece as a Minoan legacy. For example, in Argos a cult statue was placed in a sanctuary of Eileithyia to be worshipped as the protector of childbirth. Charitonidis S., *Recherches dans le quartier Est d'Argos*, in *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellenique*, 78 (1954), 414-415,425 and fig. 1. However, this goddess of life played a major role in Cretan religion where she is mentioned in her own name and right. Her cult focused on the primordial fertility of animated nature, biological reproduction, and the sexual act as experienced by women (Merlini M., *The Pagan Artemis-Diana attending the Christian Annunciation in a Post-Byzantine Athonite fresco*, in Sabin Adrian Luca (ed.) *International Symposium: The Image of Divinity in the Neolithic and Eneolithic. Ways of Communication* (Muzeul Bucovinei Suceava, Academia Română-Filiala Iaşi, Suceava: Institutul de Arheologie Iaşi, Editura Karl. A. Romstorfer, 2019), 271. Concerning pregnancy and labor, she was the divinity in charge to help women giving birth and those with gynecological problems (Gimbutas M., *The Language of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 109; Merlini M., *The Pagan Artemis-Diana attending the Christian Annunciation in a Post-Byzantine Athonite fresco*, in Sabin Adrian Luca (ed.) *International Symposium: The Image of Divinity in the Neolithic and Eneolithic. Ways of Communication*, (Muzeul Bucovinei Suceava, Academia Română-Filiala Iaşi, Suceava: Institutul de Arheologie Iaşi, Editura Karl. A. Romstorfer, 2019), 307.

[101] Merlini M., *The Pagan Artemis-Diana attending the Christian Annunciation in a Post-Byzantine Athonite fresco*, in Sabin Adrian Luca (ed.) *International Symposium: The Image of Divinity in the Neolithic and Eneolithic. Ways of Communication*, (Muzeul Bucovinei Suceava, Academia Română-Filiala Iaşi Suceava: Institutul de Arheologie Iaşi, Editura Karl. A. Romstorfer, 2019), 307.

[102] Merlini M., *Pre-Christian Mount Athos: Goddess Artemis-Diana and her Afterlife Among the Monks*, in *Journal of Archaeomythology*, Institute of Archaeomythology, vol. 8 (2018), 142.

[103] Willetts R. F., *Cretan Eileithyia*, in *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 8, n. 3/4, 1958, 221. See also Willetts R. F., *Cretan Cults and Festivals* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 168-172.

[104] Scholars have sought Artemis' origin in various periods and cultures. However, "the image of this divinity might be seen as combining both pre-Greek and Greek traits". Artemis "in her role of

Homeric Hymns and Iliad,[105] as well as by the pre-Greek "deer-killing" Taurian goddess mentioned by Euripides in his *Iphigenia in Tauris* by her later name of Artemis Parthenos (the Virgin Goddess).[106] These goddesses were deer killers, but at the same time they demanded respect for this animal and protected it. An ambivalent role closely connected to their virginal nature.[107] These goddesses were introduced into the Aegean and Greece from the Near East during the second millennium BCE and became common in Minoan and Mycenaean cult and art. Near Eastern centers such as Assyria and Cyprus furnished additional source material during the Early Iron Age.[108]

As inheritor of the prehistoric youthful Birth and Life Giver Goddess,[109] Artemis never acquired features of an Indo-European divinity, nor was she married to a god. She belongs to the female divinities who contain their own life source, a parthenogenetic (self-generating) potency.[110]

Artemis lived in the wild, untouched forests, surrounded by stags and hounds. The stag plays a key role in her myths and tales.[111] The adult male deer is

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'Mistress of Animals' suggests a pre-Hellenic mother-goddess" (Zaidman L. B., Pantel P. S., *Religion in the ancient Greek city* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 5. Potnia Thêrôn, the Mistress of Wild Animals, is a sort of precursor of Artemis, according to Antoniou. Antoniou A., *Minoische Nachwirkungen im Kult der Artemis der historischen Zeit*, in *Platon*, 32, 1980, 227. Nevertheless, as 'Huntress' she appears to be a product of the Greek newcomers". Zaidman L. B., Pantel P. S., *Religion in the ancient Greek city*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 5.

[105] Homer, *The Homeric Hymns* (Translation Athanassakis A. N.), (Baltimore, Md: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Homer, *The Iliad* (Translation Fagles R.), (New York: Penguin Books, Revised ed. Edition, 1998), 21.470–71; Gimbutas M., *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 6500–3500 B.C.,* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), 1974 *[*1982 republished as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe]*, 198; Gimbutas M., *The Living Goddesses*, edited and supplemented by Dexter M. R., (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 156.

[106] Diehl E., *Parthenos 2*, RE, 18.4, 1957–1967; Bilde P. G., *Wandering Images: From Taurian (Chersonesean) Parthenos to (Artemis) Tauropolos and (Artemis) Persike*, in Bilde P. G., Højte J. M., Stolba V. F. (eds.), *The Cauldron of Ariantas, Studies Presented to A.N. Ščeglov on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, Aarhus: Black Sea Studies 1 (2003), 169.

[107] Artemis allowed the hunt on the condition that "the hunter obeyed the rules and rituals" of the practice. That is, they killed for survival and sustenance, and never for sport. Hughes D. J., *Artemis: Goddess of Conservation*, in *Forest & Conservation History*, 34, n. 4 October 1990, 193.

[108] Roller L. E., *In Search of God the Mother: The Cult of Anatolian Cybele* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 135.

[109] Gimbutas M., *The Language of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 87.

[110] Gimbutas M., *The Language of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 87; Gimbutas M., *The civilisation of the Goddess. The World of Old Europe*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 223.

[111] By controlling the weather, the goddess kept King Agamemnon's fleet blocked in the port because of a calm. She wanted to punish him for the killing of a stag in her sacred grove, and for his boast he was greater than her in hunting. An oracle informed the Greeks that there would be wind only when Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia to Artemis.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* the hunter Actaeon (Aktaion) suffered a particularly demeaning death. He used a hart's pelt to sneak up on Artemis whilst she was bathing undressed with her nymphs in a spring in the forest. Angered, she turned him into a stag. Foreshadowing Narcissus' lethal reflection,

her traditional standing companion in plastic art such as her famous Ephesian cult statue. The sacred stag is depicted on Ephesian and Ionian coins.[112] Significant is a coin from Magnesia ad Maeandrum (Ionia), minted after 190 BCE. On the one face, a stag stands to the right, with an eight-pointed star above; on the other side is represented the cult statue of Artemis Leukophryene from her temple at Magnesia.



Image 14. *A coin from Magnesia ad Maeandrum (Ionia) with a stag plus an eight-pointed star, and a cult statue of Artemis.*
https://www.wildwinds.com/coins/greece/ionia/magnesia/SNGCop_853.jpg.

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he looked horrified at the reflection of his horns and muzzle into a pool". When the transformation was completed, the goddess planted a blind fear in his heart, and the stag Actaeon fled away. His own dogs then chased him all over the grounds around Mount Cithaeron. After they finally got it, they tore him apart (Ovid, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, Complete Edition, Amazon Digital Services LLC, 2017, lines 136–250). The painter Tiziano set the tragic event in an autumn forest of golden leaves and dark storm clouds. The scenery foretells the fate of Actaeon: the skull of a stag is exhibited like a trophy on top of a square column, the pelts of the deer killed by the goddess is hanging from the trees above (National Gallery). Van Dyck fixed the moment of Actaeon's metamorphosis: his head is becoming that of a stag, complete with antlers.

[112] Larson J., *Venison for Artemis? The Problem of Deer Sacrifice*, in Hitch S., Rutherford I. (eds.), *Animal Sacrifice in the Ancient Greek World*, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 51. See also *The Diana of Versailles*, a Roman Imperial copy of the original IV century BCE bronze attributed to the Greek sculptor Leochares (Louvre Museum). Artemis wears the Amazon-style chiton that falls to her lap. This short garment was usually worn by men, aside from the Amazons, to symbolize athleticism and activity – both traditionally masculine features. Harden D.B., *A Series of Terracottas Representing Artemis, Found at Tarentum*, in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 47, part 1, 1927, 94; Bron C., *The Sword Dance for Artemis*, in *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal*, 24 (1996), 75. The goddess and the stag are midway through a stride. Though she is armed and turns her head to the side, perhaps spotting some prey, her hand rests cherishingly on the head of her animal companion, just between its antlers. Hughes D. J., *Artemis: Goddess of Conservation*, in *Forest & Conservation History*, 34, n. 4 October 1990, 191).

Sometimes the goddess holds her preferred young deer or fawn in her arms. When positioned next to her breasts, they are held like fruit and flowers as offerings from nature, implying fecundity, not affection.[113]

Artemis' chariot was pulled by four hinds or stags with exaggerated golden antlers.[114] According to ancestral Greek mythology, there were five golden-horned deer sacred to the goddess. Four of them were harnessed to her chariot, while the fifth roamed free. Herakles was sent to fetch it as one of his twelve labors. A number of coins represents the goddess driving a chariot drawn by four stags.



Image 15. *Diana on a deer chariot, holding the reins in her left hand and a lit torch in her right hand; Crescent Moon rises from under the chariot. Anonymous denarius, dated 143 BC.* https://www.pinterest.it/pin/356699232969670582/

[113] In a terracotta figurine, kept in the Israel Museum (Jerusalem), Artemis holds a newborn deer to her breast illustrating the mythos of this goddess "as mother of living creatures," a "patroness of childbirth and guardian of the young". Klinger S., *A Terracotta Statuette of Artemis with a Deer at the Israel Museum*, in *Israel Exploration Journal*, 51, n. 2, 2001; Klinger S., *Fauna in the World of Women in Ancient Greece and some observations on the animal votives at the Demeter and Kore sanctuary at Acrocorinth*, in Lang-Auinger C., Trinklauf E. (eds.), *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum Österreich Beiheft 2, ΦΥΤΑ ΚΑΙ ΖΩΙΑ. Pflanzen und Tiere auf griechischen Vasen*, in *Proceedings of Forum Archaeologiae — Zeitschrift für klassische Archäologie 68 / IX / 2013, Symposion "Pflanzen und Tiere auf griechischen Vasen"* (Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2016, 38).

[114] Bornmann F., *Callimachi Hymnus in Dianam* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1968), 13, 81, 90. Apollodorus, *The library*, Frazer J. G., (trans.), London: W. Heinemann (1921), 5. § 3; Harts also sometimes drew the chariot of Dionysus, the Roman Bacchus. Sax B., *The Mythical Zoo: An Encyclopedia of Animals in World Myth, Legend, and Literature*, Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO (2001), 143.

Dating to the VII century BCE, a four-wheeled bronze funerary wagon shows a goddess accompanied by four harts with giant horns. The divinity supports a massive vessel with her head and two hands. She is surrounded by naked men and women, horsemen with shields, and an ithyphallic character holding an upraised ax. The outstanding cult vehicle was discovered at Strettweg (Austria). According to Gimbutas, it reflects a spring regenerative ritual similar to that of the Germanic life-giving goddess Nerthus in which the goddess was carried on a cart across her land.[115] More in general she probably embodies the representation of a Great Nature Goddess.[116]



Image 16. *A VII century BCE four-wheeled bronze funerary wagon. It shows a goddess accompanied by four harts with giant horns.*
https://www.pinterest.dk/pin/545428204865013302/

[115] The rite was described by Tacitus in I century CE. Gimbutas M., *The Living Goddesses*, edited and supplemented by Dexter M. R. (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 178.
[116] Egg M., *Das Hallstattzeitliche Fürstengrab von Strettweg bei Judenburg in der Obersteiermark*, Monographien, 37 (Mainz: Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, Forschungsinstitut für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, 1996).

Some terracotta statuettes of chariots driven by Artemis and pulled by stags suggest also a close connection between this goddess, marriage and deer. The figurines, probably connected to wedding preparations in the sanctuary cult, illustrate Artemis' powers of control and domestication over both wild animals and young women.[117]

Significant are some ancient Greek vessels directly associated with wedding rituals, which feature Artemis male deer, but without the goddess, in wedding processions. The stags in all of these scenes stand either at or near the head of the procession. The parade, loaded with metaphors, was significant in the wedding ceremony because it illustrated the literal and symbolic transition to adulthood through marriage, with its sexual maturation but also with dangers therein involved. Deer were most likely included in wedding processions because they are attributes of Artemis and represent the deity's functions in transforming young women into sexually mature adults.[118]

In ancient Greek art, Artemis is portrayed as the symbol of intangible virginity of nature and the aid of girls and women throughout important moments of life change such as adolescence, preparation for marriage, bridal, pregnancy and childbirth.[119] At the same time, she is an emblem of the violence inseparable from both the key passages in women's lives and hunt. The Sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron had a cult of Iphigenia for women who died in connection with pregnancy and birth.[120]

5. The mature stag with supernatural antlers as *paredrus* and cult symbol of the parturient divinities

In prehistory, the prestige in symbolism of the mature red deer stag as a partner of the Goddess is first and foremost connected with its masculine

[117] Morizot Y., *Autour d'un char d'Artémis*, in Linant de Bellefonds P. (ed.), *Agathos daimon. Mxthes et Cultes. Etudes d'iconographie en Vhonneur de Lilly Kahil*, BCH Suppl. 38, Paris (2000), 388-391.

[118] Klinger S., *On Women with Deer in Black-Figure Vase-Painting*, in *Numismatica e Antichità Classiche*, 31 (2002), 18.

[119] Artemis had been associated with midwifery immediately after her mythical birth. It was when, over the course of "nine desperately agonizing days," she assisted her mother Latona in the birth of her twin, Apollo. Downing C., *The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 161. Votive offerings to her commonly included sculpted reproductive organs, such as breasts, vulvae, and even uteri. Cole S. G., *Domesticating Artemis*, in Blundell S., Williamson M. (eds.), *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece*, (New York: Routledge, London, 1998), 36. Statues of Artemis Ephesia, originated from her myth "as the mother of living creatures" and a "patroness of childbirth and guardian of the young", Hughes D. J., *Artemis: Goddess of Conservation*, in *Forest & Conservation History*, 34, n. 4 October 1990: 192. The abovementioned terracotta figurine, property of the Israel Museum, latch on to this role.

[120] The association of Artemis and Eleuthia/Eleuthyia in Crete could be paralleled with the first millennium association of Artemis and Iphigenia at Brauron and their care for various aspects of female life. Nosch M-L. B., *Approaches to Artemis in Bronze Age Greece*, in Fischer-Hansen T., Poulsen B. (eds.), *From Artemis to Diana. The Goddess of Man and Beast*, Danish Studies in Classical Archaeology (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2009), 32.

appearance: large antlers with massive beams and six or more points,[121] impressive size,[122] broad shoulders, vigor in combat, athletic beauty, haughty appearance, nervous grace, mighty baritone roar, alertness, swift agility, and the ability to run fast even if for short distances. Prominent genitalia and propensity to fight together by hitting the horns epitomize the aggressive sexual potency of this animal.[123]

In rock art, included the one of the Ranaldi Shelter, the role of mature stags as partner/assistants and cult symbol of the prehistoric birth giving goddess was directly indicated by the majestic and ramified structure of their horns. Visual art celebrated the motif of the stag with majestic antlers since Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic, as evidenced in the rock art of the Northeastern Iberian Peninsula.[124] It was one of the main characters in the prehistoric scenes and was depicted not always according to anatomical criteria but for what it symbolized, reflecting how it was perceived in society and the totemic and / or shamanic myths and rituals related to it.[125] For example, stags were described in the livery of the season corresponding to their heat period (autumn), the time fixed by the paintings in the Ranaldi Shelter. Their regal antlers are so emphasized that in some cases they are not only clearly delineated, but also depicted in a "twisted" perspective.

Its peculiar artistic rendering is consistent with the fact that in the Paleolithic and Mesolithic documentation the occurrence of the red deer is noticeably more frequent than other species, while it was not the priority among the hunted animals and was not the most important in the food spectrum, as it is demonstrated by the highest percentage of reindeer remains in the Lascaux and other Upper Paleolithic caves in South-western Europe. It was possibly its rare presence, its spectacular distinctiveness, its more regal, bigger and better-formed antlers than that of the reindeer, for which the red deer was chosen for images, and ritual activities.

The images of deer often mark the "borders between the worlds" in caves,[126] such as entrances, room margins, and remote places.[127] André Leroi-

[121] In castrated deer, antlers neither fall out nor grow back. Goss R. J., *Deer antlers: regeneration, function, and evolution* (New York: Academic Press, 1983).

[122] A mature stag can stand more than a meter and a half at the shoulder and can weigh as much as 150 k.

[123] The hind looks comparably feminine, with its relatively modest size, gracefulness, and delicate stride of cautious steps (Istituto nazionale di biologia della selvaggina Alessandro Ghigi, 1991).

[124] Among the most renowned example are Las Chimeneas Cave dated 13940 BCE, El Castillo, El Pendo Cave, La Pasiega cave, Pindal cave (Cantabria); Lascaux, Chauvet Cave, Cosquer Cave, Niaux cave, Les Combarelles, Cougnac Caves, Font-de-Gaume, Grotte de la Mouthe, Grottes d'Isturitz (France).

[125] Rather than referring to them as "shamans" according to the Siberian typology, the enlistment of the Ranaldi religious practitioners under the "shamanistic" umbrella here serves to describe those aspects that appear to conform to practices classified as universal shamanism.

[126] Bayburin A.K., *Ritual: svoe i chujoe*, in *Folklor I etnografia,* Problemy rekonstrukcii faktov tradicionnoy cultury, Leningrad (1990), 9.

[127] Mykhailova N., *Cult sites and art. Images of a deer and the cult places of Europe and Northern Asia,* in *Expression*, 17, September 2017, 38.

Gourhan defined the deer as "the animal of the entrances and depths".[128] The 'peripheral' areas of caves "fit the revelation pattern" and the passage between the different worlds.[129]

The most important Upper Paleolithic instance of antlered red deer is the Lascaux cave with 91 representations of harts and 3 or 4 hinds, very small in size compared to males.[130] It is worth mentioning the swimming ride of five stags with large horns. It is a single frieze that occupies the whole right panel of the "Nave". The animals may represent either several individuals or a single stag in motion.[131] Another superb work of art, located in the Apse, has to be cited because the outlines of an engraved stag with huge antlers have been colored to highlight the shape of the carving.



Image 17. *The swimming ride of five stags with large horns in the nave at Lascaux cave.* https://br.pinterest.com/pin/369576713142723264/

[128] Leroi−Gourhan A., *Prehistoire de l'art occidental*, Paris: Mazenod, 1965, 259, 441-446.

[129] Anati E., *World rock art. The primordial language*, in *Bollettino del centro Camuno di studi preistorici*, 27, 199, 28.

[130] Vialou D., *Les cervidés de Lascaux*, in Bandi H. C., Huber W., Sauter M. R., Sitter B. (eds.), *La contribution de la zoologie et de l'éthologie à l'interprétation de l'art des peuples chasseurs préhistoriques, 3e colloque de la Société suisse des sciences humaines* (Editions universitaires, Fribourg, 1979); Aujoulat N., *Lascaux: peintures et gravures*, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communciation, Direction du patrimoine, CNC, CNMHS, CNP, réalisation Willemon J., Laser vision 4 faces (1988); Aujoulat N., *Lascaux. Le rôle du déterminisme naturel: des modalités d'élection du site aux protocoles de construction des édifices graphiques pariétaux*, Thèse, université de Bordeaux 1, 1001, 2002; Aujoulat N., *Lascaux, le geste, l'espace et le temps* (Paris Seuil, 2004); Averbouh A., Feruglio V., Delluc M., *L'ancrage du symbolique dans le réel: réflexions sur les représentations de bois de cerfs à Lascaux*, in *PALEO Revue d'Archéologie Préhistorique,* Société des amis du Musée national de préhistoire et de la recherche archéologique (SAMRA) (2016).

[131] Leroi−Gourhan A., *Prehistoire de l'art occidental* (Paris, Mazenod, 1965).

In the Salon Noir of the Niaux cave (France), the artist focused on a hole in the wall that suggests the shape of the head of a stag. Then he/she just drew majestic antlers above and around this hole-head.

In the Mesolithic, substantial for us is the red painted image of a super-antlered stag in rest position from the second niche of the Cueva de la Araña (Valencia County, Spain), c. 8000 - 6000 BCE.

There are several reasons why Mother Ranaldi is supported during childbirth by stags with king-size, branched and elongated antlers. To find the answer, it is necessary to review in the period to which the paintings belong- Late Mesolithic and Early Neolithic[132] in Eurasia, at least the features and associated symbolic meanings of antlers that are direct expression of the masculine strength of the stag in association with its role as *paredrus* of the birth giving goddesses.[133]

The first characteristic is their lethal danger and high protection against predation because of hardness and sharpness.

The second attribute of antlers is their regenerative fecundity due to their cycle of fall, renewal and growth.

The presence of a herd of super-antlered deer on the panel of the Ranaldi Shelter is also linked to their intimate identification with the forest and the myth of the Primordial Tree (*arbor mundi*).[134]

Fourth, the thrusting capacity of the mythological deer-sun motif that even originated in the Upper Paleolithic Eurasian hunter societies has to be taken into account.

Fifth, the huge horned deer was conceived as a totemic animal with a sacred genealogical status and closely linked to the exploitation and possession of the landscape and its resources.

Finally, in the process of transition from the Later Mesolithic to the Early Neolithic, this cervid possibly became a symbol of status, wealth and prestige for the group of hunters that lived in the Ranaldi area.

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[132] Deer antlers were so significant in the Neolithic that, according to some authors, they were not commonly exploited as a source of raw material for everyday objects. Banks Courtney E., Reese D. S., *Lerna a preclassical site in the Argolid. Results of excavations. The Neolithic Settlement*, Volume VII (Princeton, N. J.: The American school of Classical studies at Athens 2015). However, the suggestion is speculative. Contrariwise, see for example the survey on their extensive use for common tools, weapons, and jewelry in the Vinča culture carried on by Selena Vitezović. Vitezović S., *Antler exploitation and management in the Vinča culture: An overview of evidence from Serbia*, in *Quaternary International*, 450, 2017. Emblematic examples from the Italian Neolithic are in Berto C., Bon M., Zampieri S., *I reperti faunistici provenienti dal sito del Neolitico recente di Botteghino (Parma)*, in De Grossi Mazzorin J., Saccà D., Tozzi C. (eds.), *Atti del 6th Convegno Nazionale di Archeozoologia* (Pisa: Pisa University, 2012); Curci A., Michalopoulou S., Langella M., *Baselice: zooarchaeological study of a Neolithic village of Beneventano area*, in De Grossi Mazzorin J., Saccà D., Tozzi C. (eds.), *Atti del 6th Convegno Nazionale di Archeozoologia* (Pisa: Pisa University, 2012).

[133] Horns are absent in the hind or, in some species, have relatively small size.

[134] The Tree of Life, connected to the eternal life, is a much later symbol. Golan A., *Prehistoric Religion, Mythology. Symbolism* (Jerusalem, Ariel Golan, 2003), 84.

5.A. Lethal danger and high protection of all forest creatures

Regarding the first highly symbolic feature associated with huge antlers, i.e. their efficiency as a weapon and a shield at the same time, a stag draws them to challenge and defeat other males and to impress hinds for mating. Super-horned male deer chasing hornless females is a common theme in prehistoric art.[135]

The fame of hart's gigantic ramified horns as harmful weapons fascinated Pliny, who mentioned the "Gallic stag-wolf" (*lupus cervarius*)[136] exhibited in the games financed by Pompey.[137] Mythic polymorphic animals such as winged dragons were often depicted holding the terrifying antlers of adult male deer added by poison.[138] Pazyryk Kurgan 5 (V–IV century BCE) offers an excellent representation of a winged stag-demon facing a horned phoenix.

The excavator of the tomb, Sergei Rudenko, interpreted the winged stag-demon as inspired by Near Eastern motifs, while the phoenix was likely of Chinese origin.[139]

Nonetheless, in mythology the stag is the natural enemy of the dragon.[140] It is capable of killing the monster exploiting the fear that it has of water.[141]

Antlers have also a secondary function in deterring predation against the stag and its harem of hinds. During the rutting season each stag is very protective of his own groups of hinds. By conceptual extension, the mature deer with enormous branched antlers was believed to have a strong and aggressive commitment to the protection of all other creatures of the forest. In this sense, its role in the wild nature overlaps and is associated with the shielding responsibility of the Ladies of the animals in the different cultures such as the abovementioned Ninhursag, Cybele, Potnia Thêrôn, and Artemis. This cervid acts a powerful paredrus of these goddesses with the task of connecting heaven and earth.

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[135] Siegeltuch M., *The Social Symbolism of Horns*, Academia.edu, undated, 14.

[136] Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1856), 8.34.84, 11.79.202.

[137] This fabulous and dangerous animal was actually identified as a lynx from the Latin 'Luchs' (and not 'Wolf / Wölfin') by Jean Pruvost. Pruvost J., *Le loup*, (Paris H. Champion, 2010). See also Rackham and Jones, Bostock and Riley. cf. Wiener L., *Contributions Towards a History of Arabico-Gothic Culture. Vol. 4: Physiologus Studies* (Philadelphia: Innes & Sons, 1921), 66–67. The *lupus cervarius* in the identity of the mythical dangerous lynx was also one of the three wild animals that hindered Dante Alighieri's steps in Canto I of the *Divine Comedy*.

[138] It is the representation of Fei-Lian, a Chinese "Patrarch of the Wind". Golan A. op. cit., 91.

[139] Rudenko S. I., *Kultura naselenia gornogo Altaya v skifskoe vremya (The Culture of the Altai Mountain Population during the Scythian Period*) (Moscow and Leningrad: Nauka, 1953). For discussion, see Barkova L., "The nomadic culture of the Altai and the animal style", in Aruz J., Farkas A., Alekseev A., Korolkova E. (eds.), *The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Scythian and Sarmatian Treasures from the Russian Steppes* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2000), 273.

[140] However, in ancient China the dragon was sometimes called a "celestial stag". Cooper J. C., *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979), 158.

[141] Werness H. B., *Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in World Art*, (New York, Continuum, 2004, 191). Christianity adopted this myth and followed the analogy that Christ killed the devil through the purifying water of baptism.

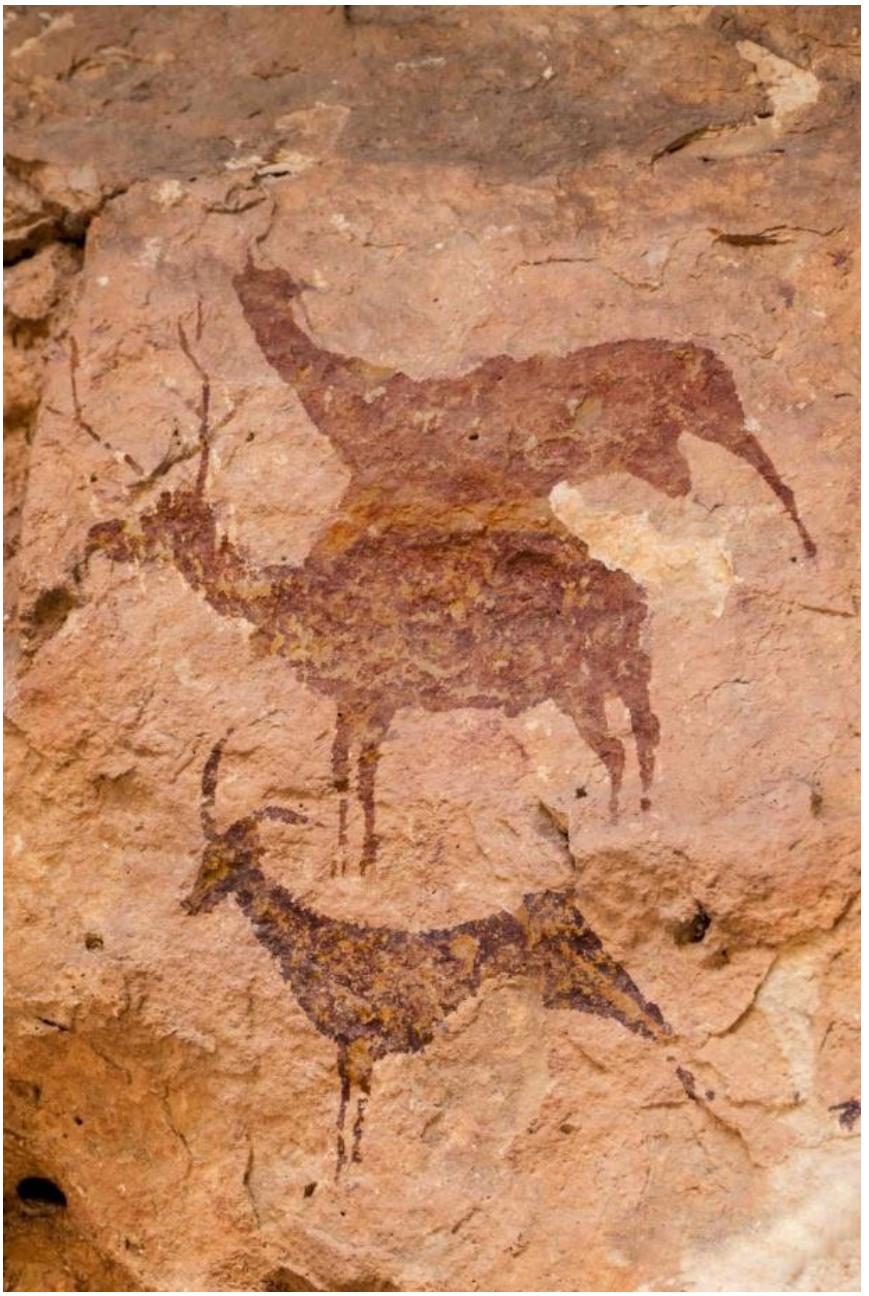


Image 18. *A super-antlered stag in rest position painted in red in the Cueva de la Araña (Valencia County, Spain), c. 8000 - 6000 BCE.* https://mas.levante-emv.com/el-nostre-patrimoni/participa/participa/art-rupestre-arc-mediterrani/escena-cueva-de-la-arana-bicorp/

5.B. Regenerative fecundity of antlers

Regarding the regenerative fecundity of stag antlers, the second characteristic linked to its task and responsibility as partner of a prehistoric goddess who gives birth, the physiology of this ungulate (like plants, but unlike most other animals) clearly reflects the annual solar cycle and the seasons. The antlers are a temporary structure where the cycle of their fall and regrowth is linked to the hormonal cycle, regulated in turn by the photoperiod, i.e. the variation of hours of darkness and light per day that occurs over the seasons.

The life renewing attribute of hart horns and their connection with the rhythms of life had great symbolic significance and power because they are discarded in late fall / early winter to re-appear in springtime while covered in a furry skin called velvet. When growth is complete, the velvet is rubbed off and the antler is clean. At the end of this season, the new antlers reach their final size for the year.

Stags reflect the seasonal cycle also in connection with their coat. Their grayish-brown winter pelage sloughs off in spring, giving way to a brighter reddish-brown summer coat.[142]

Even the sexual organs of this cervid follow an annual cycle. Until the Elizabethan age, it was widely believed that the stag penis was released and regrowth every summer as its antlers do.[143]

The red deer exhibit an annual cycle in reproduction. Hinds tend to remain in a herd with calves, suggesting to human imagination the traditional female role as housekeepers. Stags, by contrast, live alone or sometimes in small groups, away from herds of females, except in the mating season. During the rut, the solitary males join females in mating fields. Male dominance hierarchies determine which individuals will acquire and hold a harem of hinds for mating. The breeding season runs in fall. After it, the testosterone reaches its lowest level and the stags enter in a state of reproductive quiescence and shed their now useless antlers. After giving birth in spring, hinds hide their newborns in the thick vegetation while they forage.

The death and life-renewing aspects of the stag explain its symbolic expression of yearly cycles and seasonal change, but also its liminal role straddling the natural world and the supernatural world.[144] This description fits the

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[142] Sax B., *The Mythical Zoo: An Encyclopedia of Animals in World Myth, Legend, and Literature* (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 2001), 142.

[143] Actually, during May and June testosterone is barely detectable in testicular tissue, the seminiferous tubules regress and also the accessory organs fully regress. Around August, there is a marked increase in testicular testosterone, spermatogenesis is complete, the tubules reach their maximum diameter and the accessory organs increase in weight considerably. Lincoln G. A., *The seasonal reproductive changes in the Red deer stag (Cervus elaphus)*, in *Journal of Zoology*, 163 (1), May 2010, 105-123.

[144] Morris J. T., *Red deer's role in social expressions on the Isles of Scotland*, in Pluskowski A. (ed.), *Just Skin and Bones? New Perspectives on Human-Animal Relations in the Historical Past*, in BAR International Series 1410, Oxford: British Archaeological Reports (2005), 10–11, 14.

archaeological discoveries on the Late Mesolithic and Early Neolithic of the Danube Gorges around the VII millennium BCE. Archaeologists often found mature red-deer antlers, along with shoulder blades and teeth, in burials to reveal the seasonal nature of certain funerary sacrifices and regenerative rites. In Lepenski Vir, a surprisingly large number (13) of structures contained a red deer skull with horns.[145] They were inserted into altars joined by two rows of stones to delineate a passage towards the uterus of the divinity. Antlered skulls were to increase her forces of life and regeneration and/or represent her aspects of birth and regeneration.[146] Stag antlers were also placed on the floor of the houses at the time of their abandonment.[147] The custom of offering antlers was the culmination or a symbolic replacement of deer sacrifice. In Lepenski Vir and other places of the Danube gorges, deer were sacrificed to the regeneratrix divinity along with fish, dogs, roe-deer, and wild boars. A comparable ritual, involving masked men and captive deer, is repeatedly depicted in Mesolithic rock art of the Iberic Peninsula (Murieha, Spain).[148]

In Lepenski Vir, unworked horns of red deer were placed in graves, mainly accompanying burials of women of *adultus* and *maturus* age.[149] Burial pit n. 7a, situated in the rear of the trapezoidal structure n. 21, is particularly stimulating for our survey. The grave contained the skeleton of a man in extended position, who was buried with the skull of an elderly woman, the skull of a red deer with imposing horns, and the skull of a bovid.[150]

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[145] Bökönyi S., *Animal Remains from Lepenski Vir*, in *Science*, New Series, vol. 167, n. 3926, March 27 (1970), 1702.

[146] Gimbutas M., *The civilisation of the Goddess. The World of Old Europe* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 223, 244, 286.

[147] Radovanović I., *The Iron Gates Mesolithic*, Archaeological Series 11, Ann Arbor, MI: International Monographs in Prehistory (1996).

[148] Utrilla P. M., *El arte rupestre en Aragón. 100 años después de Calapatá*, in Hernández M., Soler J. (eds.), *Actas del Congreso de Arte rupestre en la España Mediterránea, Alicante, 2004,* Alicante: Instituto Alicantino de Cultura Juan Gil-Albert y Caja de Ahorros del Mediterráneo (2005), 171.

[149] Srejović D., *Lepenski vir: nova praistorijska kultura u Podunavlju*, Belgrade: Srpska Knjizevna Zadruga, (1969); Radovanović I., *Mezolit Derdapa*, Ph. D. Dissertation, Belgrade: University of Belgrade (1992), 224-225; Borić D., *Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices in the Neolithic: A Case Study*, in *Starinar N. S.* XLVII, 1996, 71; Radovanović I., *The Iron Gates Mesolithic*, Archaeological Series 11, Ann Arbor, MI: International Monographs in Prehistory, 1996. Numerous antler artefacts have also been placed in graves, sometimes with incised decoration. Boroneanţ V., *Decouverte d'objets d'art epipaleolithique dans la zone des Portes-de-Fer du Danube*, in *Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche* (*RSP),* XXIV, 2, 1969; Boroneanţ V., "La période épipaléolithique sur la rive roumaine des Portes de Fer du Danube", *Praehistorische Zeitschrift*, 45, 1, 1970; Radovanović I., *The Iron Gates Mesolithic*, Archaeological Series 11, Ann Arbor, MI: International Monographs in Prehistory (1996).

[150] Srejović D., *Lepenski vir: nova praistorijska kultura u Podunavlju* (Belgrade: Srpska Knjizevna Zadruga, 1969), fig. 69; Radovanović I., *The Iron Gates Mesolithic*, Archaeological Series 11, Ann Arbor, MI: International Monographs in Prehistory, 1996, 180, fig. 4-3; Borić D., *Deconstructing essentialism: unsettling frontiers of the Meso–Neolithic Balkans*, in Bailey D., Whittle A., Cummings V. (eds.), (*Un)settling the Neolithic* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2005), fig. 3-3.

The deposition of the red deer in graves of the Danube Gorges and the participation of its image in funerary rites are consistent with the belief that this cervid was capable to change shape and had psychopomp aptitudes, forming a transitional category between the living world and the supernatural world. Indeed, red deer were also deposited in other liminal areas, such as moats and palisades that surrounded and defended the settlements. Nearly complete stag antlers were found in pit Y in the first layer of the Neolithic settlement at Gomolava (Serbia).[151]

Spring rituals connected to the new horn set have ethnographic evidence in the same region. Representations of the life-renewing deer are depicted on a number of medieval funerary monuments, and today some traces of these beliefs are preserved in the folkloric tradition, especially among Vlach groups in Eastern Serbia.[152] Around 3600 BCE, animals were sacrificed in the Maltese hypogeum of Hal Saflieni (underground tomb). Roe deer skulls with mature antler racks were buried with the dead. The growth stage of the antlers demonstrates that the sacrifice must have taken place in spring, the only time when deer grow back horns. So at least some burial rituals took on seasonal significance.[153]

5.C. Identification with the forest and the myth of the Primordial Tree

The identification between the stag and the forest and between its antlers and tree branches, the third attribute that explains the role of this ungulate as companion of a pre-agricultural goddess of childbirth, was solid from prehistoric times to present days.[154] The panel depicting Mother Ranaldi within a herd of harts was painted in the depths of an oak forest that was home to red deer. The branched antlers of the stags are visually plant-like. And the animals have already grown them after annual regeneration.

Antlers were actually intended as branches of a tree. They grew as trees and bushes and the skin covering them was thought to be a kind of bark. This belief guided scientific research until the late XVIII century. Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, one of the leading zoologists of the XVIII century, theorized that because stags nibble so much on trees, branches eventually grow from their head.[155]

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[151] Clason A. T., *The Farmers of Gomolava in the Vinča and La Tene Period*, Radvojvodanskih muzeja 25, Novi Sad (1979), 67.

[152] Ivanović M., *Prilozi o spomenicima Metohije, Novobrdske Krive Reke, Sirinićke i Nikšićke župe (Contributions relatives aux monuments de la Metohija, de la Novobrdska Kriva Reka et des joupas (cantons) de Sirinić et de Nikšić)*, in *Saopštenje XV*, 1983; Marjanović V., *Osvrt na zabrane nošenja obrednih maski na evropskom i srpskom Prostoru*, in *RVM*, 50 (2008).

[153] Gimbutas M., *The Living Goddesses*, edited and supplemented by Dexter M. R. (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

[154] In countless epics and fairy tales, the stag appears to the hero / heroine and guides him / her through the forest. For example, in the Medieval search for the Holy Grail the adventure begins when knights of King Arthur follow a white stag into the woods.

[155] Sax B., *The Mythical Zoo: An Encyclopedia of Animals in World Myth, Legend, and Literature*, (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO) (2001), 143.

The association between the deer and the forest was particularly significant in the case of the Ranaldi Mesolithic Shelter, that was located within a primeval oak woodland where the most representative animal and the most sought-after hunting prey was the deer. The resemblance between stag antlers and the branches of the imaginary Primordial Tree (*arbor mundi*) caused their mythical association since ancient times. Antlers resemble a real tree, thus becoming a good prototype for the Primordial Tree. We will enquire in a subsequent paragraph how bicephalic stags are represented with enormous branching antlers shown as lush plant shapes in the Upper Paleolithic Lascaux cave.[156]

The intimate association of the stag with the trees and the intangible forest explains the archaic beliefs about the longevity of this animal. For example, Norse mythology narrates that hart gnawed at the base of Yggdrasil: the immense primordial tree, saturated with life-giving holly honey. Consistently, deer were often credited with an enormous lifespan, like that of the large trees in the forest they were tasked with protecting.[157]

A male red deer with majestic antlers like a tall tree with intricate foliage is ridden by a standing equilibrist warrior in an engraving at Rock 1 in Naquane (Val Camonica). The stag galloping in front of it, on the other hand, has large antlers, but of a naturalistic shape. The scene suggests a semi-domestication of the deer at the end of the megalithic period.[158] The first stag is about seven to ten years old, in full physical vigor and depicted in winter, when its antlers are clean. It is involved

[156] Aujoulat N., *Lascaux: peintures et gravures*, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communciation, Direction du patrimoine, CNC, CNMHS, CNP, réalisation Willemon J., Laser vision 4 faces (1988); Aujoulat N., *Lascaux. Le rôle du déterminisme naturel: des modalités d'élection du site aux protocoles de construction des édifices graphiques pariétaux*, Thèse, université de Bordeaux 1, 1001, 2002; Aujoulat N., *Lascaux, le geste, l'espace et le temps* (Paris, Seuil, 2004); Averbouh A., Feruglio V., Delluc M., *L'ancrage du symbolique dans le réel: réflexions sur les représentations de bois de cerfs à Lascaux*, in *PALEO Revue d'Archéologie Préhistorique,* Société des amis du Musée national de préhistoire et de la recherche archéologique (SAMRA) (2016).

[157] The *Legend of the Oldest Animals* affirms the longevity of the stag and its association with concepts of universal time in texts by Hesiod. Bath M., *The image of the stag in literary and iconographic traditions of the Middle Ages* (Strathclyde: University of Strathclyde, 1981). The archaic imagination about this animal's longevity and potency was so strong that it fueled popular medieval legends. One of them narrates that a stag received a golden collar from Alexander the Great (Julius Caesar, King Charlemagne, or King Alfred in other versions). This animal was reportedly found hundreds of years later, still fully vigorous, with folds of skin grown around the gold. This recurring legend interprets a dynastic myth associated with ideas of royalty symbolism and imperial renewal. The belief in classical Greek zoology that the stag prolongs its life by eating snakes had a rich development in Patristic writings, Islamic sources, bestiaries and encyclopedias, ecclesiastical art, and Renaissance badges. Bath M., *The image of the stag in literary and iconographic traditions of the Middle Ages* (Strathclyde: University of Strathclyde, 1981). The Asian tradition guarantees the male deer an even greater longevity. According to ancient Chinese beliefs, the stag can live at least 2,500 years if never killed. Shou Hsing, a Chinese god of longevity, mounted on a hart.

[158] Fossati A. E., *L'età del Ferro nelle incisioni rupestri della Valcamonica*, in *Immagini di una aristocrazia dell'età del ferro nell'arte rupestre camuna. Contributi in occasione della mostra a Milano, Castello Sforzesco* (Milan: Comune di Milano, 1991), 12.

in a hunting scene, perhaps an initiatory test that young warriors had to pass in order to enter adulthood. Another acrobatic warrior on a male deer is engraved on another sector of the same boulder. There are four representations of ridden deer on Rock 57. Horsemen ride seated or standing.[159]

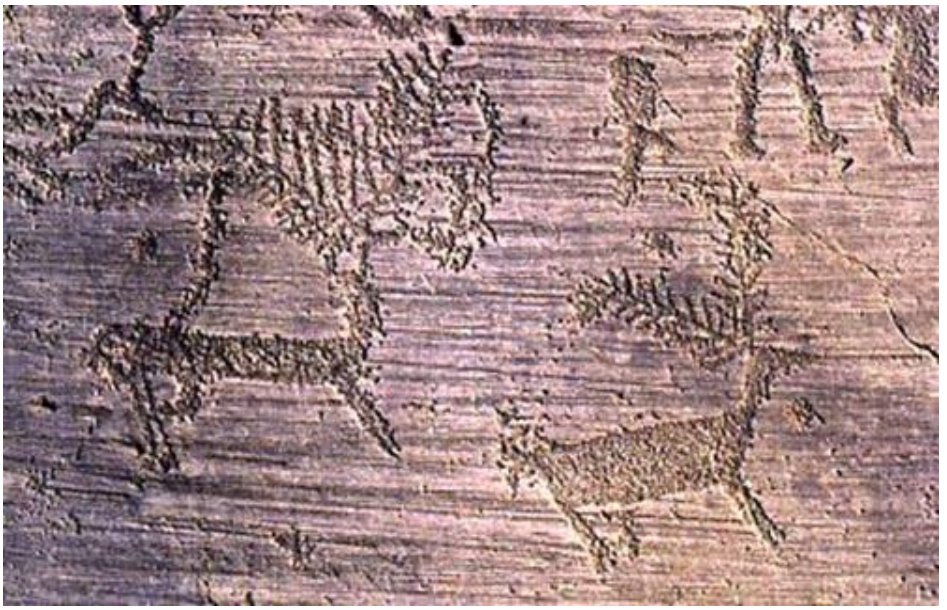


Image 19. *Deer tree Roccia 1 di Naquane*. http://www.rupestre.net/tracce/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Camuri21.jpg

Stags with glorious antlers and unnatural number of tips appear among the petroglyphs of Val Camonica (Italy) as early as the end of the Pleistocene (XV-XIV millennium BCE), [160] but become more frequent in the Copper Age (III millennium BCE) and in the Iron Age (I millennium BCE).[161] These depictions often marked the crossing places or the resting places along the routes of the deer

[159] Morello F., *La "scena" nell'arte rupestre dell'etá del Bronzo e dell'etá del Ferro in Valcamonica*, in *Bulletin d'Etudes Préhistoriques et Archéologiques Alpines*, n. XXII, Société Valdôtaine de Préhistoire et d'Archéologie, Aoste (2011), 166, fig. 12.

[160] Ravazzi C., Peresani M., Pini R., Vescovi E., *Il Tardoglaciale nelle Alpi italiane e in Pianura Padana. Evoluzione stratigrafica, storia della vegetazione e del popolamento antropico*, in *Il Quaternario*, n. 20, 2007; Poggiani Keller R., *La capanna più antica della Valle. 13.000 anni fa sulle rive del fiume*, Bassano del Grappa (VI), Itinera (2010).

[161] Anati E., *Lo stile sub-naturalistico camuno e l'origine dell'arte rupestre camuna*, in *Bollettino del Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici*, XI, 1974 ; Sigari D., Fossati A. E., *The 'proto-cammunian style' engravings of Luine. A systematic review, in Standing on the shoulders of giants*, in *20th International Rock Art Congress IFRAO 2018. Book of Abstract*: 165, Valcamonica Darfo Boario Terme (BS): Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici, 2018; González García A. C., García Quintela M. V., Belmonte J. A., Santos-Estévez M., *Calendaric deer, time reckoning and landscape in NW Spain iron age*, in *Archaeologia Baltica*, 10 (2008), 68.

herds migrations.[162] They were hunting places. It is also the case for the Ranaldi Shelter.

The tripartite archetypal pattern of e Primordial Tree dates back to the Upper Paleolithic and is so universal and stable that a long-term epoch can be named for it. As a rule, the central part of the tree is occupied by cervids, very often by stags. A Scythian bowl from Khanlar (Azerbaijan) allows us to step forward in our research, even if it is from a much later period, because it directly correlates the symbol of the stag not only with the tree in the center of the world but also with childbirth.[163] The piece was discovered in barrow n. 33 and is dated back to XII-XI century BCE.

Here a deer bows before a geometrically shaped Primordial Tree, whose form resembles a woman giving birth with the baby's arms emerging from below. The kneeling deer sports antlers, a tail that turns inward, and a body covered by dots.[164] As in the Ranaldi panel, the wild animal is depicted in the bowl as the symbol of the superhuman world that supports the Mother Goddess in childbirth as her companion. It is expressly worshiping her sacred act in a very active way, acting as a source of life.[165] It was not yet the time when the horns revealed themselves as the eternal Tree of Life.

The bowl combines a geometric image (the parturient in the shape of the Primordial Tree) and a more naturalistic figure (the bowing deer). This abstract and schematic Mother Goddess might be the prototype of the symbol of the Primordial Tree. Her image is transformed into the semantically identical symbol of the rhomboid (the diamond) on other vessels. The rhomboid itself is the symbol of the feminine source; in agriculturalist societies it will represent the planted field.[166]

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[162] Bradley R., *Rock art research as landscape archaeology: a pilot study in Galicia, northwest Spain*, in *World Archaeology*, 1994, 25 (3), (1994); Lahelma A., *A Touch of Red: Archaeological and Ethnographic Approaches to Interpreting Finnish Rock Paintings*, in *Iskos*, 15, Finnish Antiquarian Society, Helsinki (2008), 20.

[163] Scythians and Sarmatians directly correlated the symbol of the deer with childbirth and the World Tree. Tsaqarayev quoted by Rzayeva S., *The Symbol of the Deer in the Ancient and Early Medieval Cultures of the Azerbaijan*, in *Peregrinations: International Society for the Study of Pilgrimage Art*, vol. 3, issue 2, Summer (2011), 205.

[164] Guseynova M.A*., Keramika Vostoçnogo Zakavkaz'ya epoxi pozdney bronzi i rannege zheleza XIV-IX vv. do n.e* (Baku, Elm, 1989), table XIV, fig. 7; Rzayeva S., *The Symbol of the Deer in the Ancient and Early Medieval Cultures of the Azerbaijan*, in *Peregrinations: International Society for the Study of Pilgrimage Art*, vol. 3, issue 2, Summer (2011), 189, 190, fig. 35a, b.

[165] It was typical of Bronze Age imagery.

[166] Kotovich V.M., *Nekotorie Dannie o svjazjax Dagestana I Peredney Azii v drevnosti*, *Srednjaja Azija, Kavkaz I Zarubezhniy Vostok v drevnosti* (Moscow, Nauka, 1983), 4-10. Flourishing diamond forms with triangles or lozenges have been found on Early Neolithic pottery in Hacilar, Asia Minor. Mellaart J., *Excavations at Hacilar*, Edinburgh: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara (1970), 350, 383, 395, 401, 409, 411; Merlini M., *Neo-Eneolithic Literacy in Southeastern Europe: an Inquiry into the Danube*, Biblioteca Brukenthal XXXIII (Alba Iulia: Ministery of Culture of Romania and Brukenthal National Museum, Editura Altip, 2009), 354-355, figs. 5.383, 5.384, 5.385, 5.386). In Gumelniţa, Gradešnica, Precucuteni-Ariuşd-Cucuteni-Trypillia, Stoicani-Aldeni and neighboring Neolithic and Copper Age cultures, the quartered lozenge was engraved on the belly or loins of

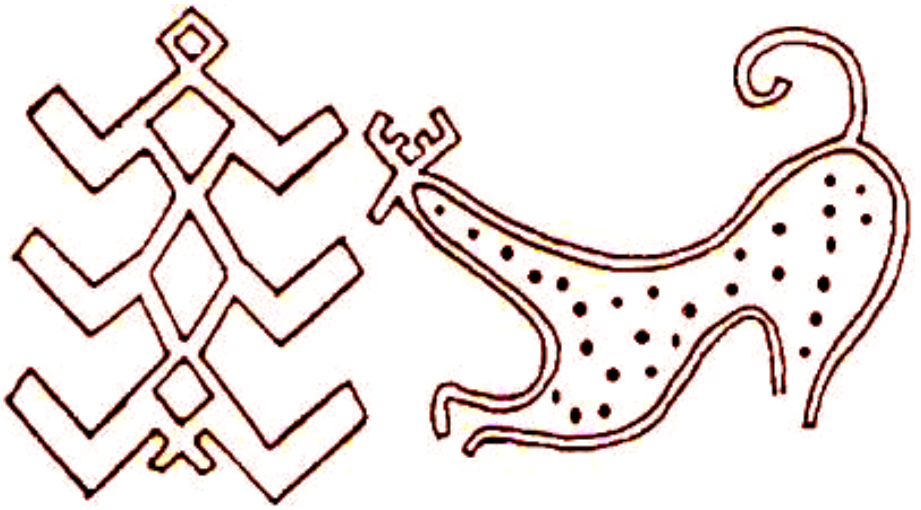


Image 20. *Childbirth, World Tree and kneeling stag, from Khanlar (Azerbaijan), I century BCE – I century CE. Rzayeva, 2011: 189, 190, fig. 35a, b.* Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

A ceramic rhyton from Mingechevir (Central Azerbaijan) strengthens the links between the stag and the Primordial Tree depicting a wonderous tree above a deer head (I century BCE – I century CE).[167]

Even today, deer with head-top imposing antlers are depicted in the patterns of carpets and in the embroidery of the mountainous areas and steppes from the Caucasus to Central Anatolia.[168] Often tree-like forms stem from the antlers, communicating their second nature: vegetal, connected with the inviolable forest and its intime central point, the Primordial Tree.

5.D. Thrusting capacity of the celestial Deer-sun motif since the Upper Paleolithic

An instance from the Upper Paleolithic Lascaux cave[169] - a Megaloceros also known as the black stag[170] - introduces us to the symbolic chain that connects

anthropomorphic figurines to represent the female organ. Sometimes, before baking, a grain of wheat was pressed in each of its sections, which represented a furrowed and seeded field. The womb is a fertile field on the goddess's body to be plowed and sown. Merlini M., *Neo-Eneolithic Literacy in Southeastern Europe: an Inquiry into the Danube*, Biblioteca Brukenthal XXXIII, (Alba Iulia: Ministery of Culture of Romania and Brukenthal National Museum, Editura Altip, 2009), 272.

[167] Rzayeva S., *The Symbol of the Deer in the Ancient and Early Medieval Cultures of the Azerbaijan*, in *Peregrinations: International Society for the Study of Pilgrimage Art*, vol. 3, issue 2, Summer, 2011, 205.

[168] Golan A., op. cit., 83, fig. 84.

[169] The painting is located on the right side of the entrance to the Axial Gallery of the cave. The location of male deer depictions in places considered to be borders or crossroads between the worlds, such as entrances or the depths of caves, demonstrates their symbolic significance. See also the deer images on the crossroad in the Font-de-Gaume cave. Antlered stags are also found in remote and hard-to-reach areas of caves such as the so-called Deer gallery in Altamira (Spain), considered the oldest in the cave.

the male red deer, the tree/forest and the radiant sun. Here the antlers represented are tree-like branching, but they are also arranged as solar-astral signs.



Image 21. *Anatolian carpet with two tree-antlered stags in front of the World Tree, 15th (?)* Vakiflar Museum Istanbul.

Hence, with the help of comparing rock-art images, we can assume that the mythological deer-sun motif originated in the Upper Paleolithic Eurasian hunter societies.[171]

The close relationship between deer antlers with the sun and light is due to three factors. First of all, the horns of the deer have a radiant shape like the sun. Second, they are born, grow, fall and grow back in parallel with the daily and annual solar cycle. Finally, when the antlers pop up they are thickly covered with a very fine velvet that reflects the sunlight in an extraordinary way, they seem made of light.[172]

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[170] This cervid of a great size is now extinct.

[171] See for example a painting in red in the Pech-Merle cave (Department of Lot-Célé, southern France) and an engraving in the Cueva de la Peña de Candamo (Cantabria, Spain). See Fossati A. E., *Deer in European Rock Art*, in Camuri G., Fossati A., Mathpal Y. (eds.), *Deer in Rock Art of India and Europe*, Ignca Rock Art Series-2, Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (1993), 76, fig. 9, 77, fig. 10.

[172] Green M. J., *The Sun Gods of Ancient Europe* (London, Batsford Ltd, 1991).



Image 22. *Megaloceros with tree-like antlers from the Lascaux cave.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Lascaux,_Megaloceros.jpg.

The semantic series of celestial hunting continues in astral myths, in particular the chase of a deer associated with the constellations, usually the Big Dipper or Orion.[173]

The association between antlered deer and the Sun was common in the European Copper Age and mostly in the Bronze Age.[174] This zoomorph often has half-mooned antlers in which the lateral tines recall the rays of the sun. Such an

[173] Mykhailova N., *Celestial deer - the flight from the Stone Age to the Middle Age*, in *Expression*, 20, June 2018, 37.

[174] Briard, J., *Mythes et symboles de l'Europe préceltique: les religions de l'Age du Bronze (2500-800 av. J.C.)* (Paris: Errance, 1987); Kristiansen K., Larsson T.B., *La Emergencia de la Sociedad del Bronce. Viajes, transmisiones y transformaciones*, (Barcelona, Bellaterra, 2006).

iconographic identity is consistent with the parallel between the life cycle of the deer, that is, the loss of antlers in winter and their rebirth in spring, and the daily rising and setting of the sun, as well as its journey through the seasons.[175] Then the adult male deer became an analogue representation of the sun. Sun and stag seem to share the same symbolic meaning in Northern Italian Copper Age. This imagery is evident in decorations from the Remenello Copper Age (3400 – 2200 BCE) and the Bell Beaker groups.[176] Significant is the Copper Age monumental stele-statue called "Capital of the Two Pines" found at Paspardo (Val Camonica, North Italy), ca. 2900-2400 BCE.[177] It presents a composition articulated according to an archetypal landscape. In the upper register, semilunate-circular deer antlers replace the rayed sun or the solar symbol is constructed from the horns of a deer, because the antlers are shown in the upper dominant position that the radiant solar symbol occupies in other coeval monuments. The sun rendered with deer antlers contains twelve strokes/tines per side, equal to the months of a year.[178] According to Emmanuel Anati, this symbol has "a triple meaning: a solar disk, radiating antlers of a deer and the face of the entity depicted".[179] In the lower right area of the panel, a male deer is depicted armed with majestic horns, in a heraldic position and without resting its paws on the ground. It is facing the sun at dawn.[180] The composition is completed by water lines or plowing marks, five daggers, and two halberds with leaf blades. The site may have been part of a sort of astronomical observatory of the III millennium BCE.[181]

Similar semilunate antlers analogous to radiant suns occur on Rock 12 of the Corno di Seradina (Iron Age). [182]

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[175] Marchi E., *La Roccia 20 di Redondo (Capo di Ponte - Valcamonica)*, in *Notizie Archeologiche Bergomensi*, 5, Bergamo (1997), 168.

[176] Fossati A. E., *Deer in European Rock Art*, in Camuri G., Fossati A., Mathpal Y. (eds.), *Deer in Rock Art of India and Europe*, Ignca Rock Art Series-2, Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1993, 99 ff; Garrido P. R., Muñoz L.-A. K., *Visiones Sagradas para los Líderes. Cerémicas campaniformes con decoración simbólica en la Península Ibérica*, in *Complutum*, 11 (2000).

[177] Anati E., *La Lombardia prima dei Romani rivelata dall'arte rupestre preistorica*, in *BC Notizie, notiziario del Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici*, May 2003, fig. 5.

[178] Brunod G., *Un calendario per gli uomini dell'Età del Rame: Paspardo (Brescia) – Un antico osservatorio astronomico*, in *10° Seminario di Archeoastronomia, Genova Osservatorio Astronomico di Genova, 12 aprile 2008*, Associazione Ligure per lo Sviluppo degli Studi Archeoastronomici (2008).

[179] Anati E., *La stele di Ossimo*, in *Bollettino del centro camuno di studi preistorici*, Luglio (1972), 88.

[180] Camuri G., *Facies locorum paesaggi e arte rupestre*, in *TRACCE Online Rock Art Bulletin*, n. 39, July 2016.

[181] Brunod G., Cinquetti M., *Un calendario per gli uomini dell'Età del Rame: Paspardo (Brescia) – Un antico osservatorio astronomico*, Sant'Eufemia (Brescia: Print Broker, 2008).

[182] Poggiani Keller R., *Museo nazionale della preistoria della Valle Camonica. Guida Breve* (Milan, Polo Museale della Lombardia, 2014), 104; In the Ossimo 5 boulder, the symbol of the sun is associated with a group of three deer (a stag and two does) that occupy the central part of this menhir, exactly the same as in Ossimo 7. Deer are also portrayed in the Valtellina stelae associated with



Image 23. *The adult male deer as an analogue representation of the sun on the Capital of the Two Pines found at Paspardo (Val Camonica). Anati, 2003, fig. 5.* Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

Stags with gigantic horns are associated with the solar-ocular motif on typical megalithic symbolic design of vessels found in the tombs of Los Millares c. 3000 BCE (near Almeria, Spain). This subject describes the regenerating role of the female divinity through her supernatural owl eyes emitting solar rays. The numinous harts are also connected to two deer, triangles, hourglass, bands of parallel lines, comb shapes, columns of curved lines, zigzags, and dots.[183] The

figures connected with solar imagery. See Caven 1 stele, Caven 2 stele, Vangione 2 stele. All the representations belong to the Remedellian period.

[183] Grave 15; Gimbutas M., *The Language of the Goddess*, (San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1989), 57, fig. 94 2a, 2b. Idem Gimbutas M., *The civilisation of the Goddess. The World of Old Europe* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 206, fig. 6-25; Fossati A. E., *Deer in European Rock Art*, in

association of the stag with eyes that emit sun rays is not accidental at all. See the extraordinary shale plaques in the megalithic area of the Alentejo (Portugal).[184]



Image 24. *Semilunate antlers analogous to radiant suns on Rock 12 at Corno di Seradina (Val Camonica).* Poggiani Keller, 2014: 104.



Image 25. *Ceramic bowls decorated with deer, geometric patterns and stylized eyes from Los Millares (Spain). The bowl is displayed in the Ashmolean Museum.* https://www.ashmolean.org/advent-prehistoric-deer.

Camuri G., Fossati A., Mathpal Y. (eds.), *Deer in Rock Art of India and Europe*, Ignca Rock Art Series-2, Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (1993), 108.

[184] Fossati A. E., *Deer in European Rock Art*, in Camuri G., Fossati A., Mathpal Y. (eds.), *Deer in Rock Art of India and Europe*, Ignca Rock Art Series-2, Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (1993), 108.

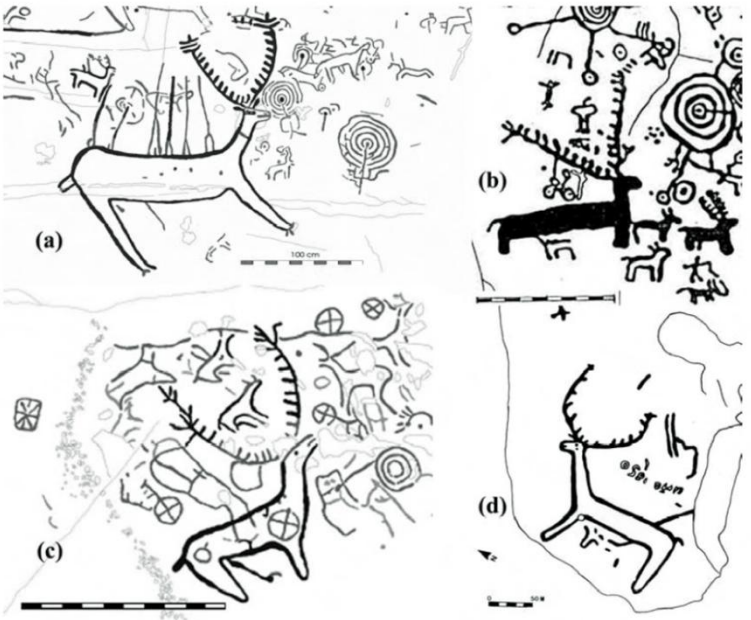


Image 26. *The four great deer found in the carvings of south-western Galicia: (a) Laxe dos Carballos, Campo Lameiro, Pontevedra; (b) Laxe das Cruces, Tourón, Pontevedra; (c) Rotea de Mendo, Campo Lameiro, Pontevedra; and (d) Campo de Cuñas, Ponte Caldelas, Pontevedra.* González García et al., 2008: 67, fig. 1.

Numerous engravings on megaliths associate depictions of huge antlered stags with solar symbols in Galicia (Spain) since the beginning of the Iron Age, within an Indo-European or Celtic cultural context, around 800 BCE.[185] It was a common cultural phenomenon widespread in several areas. Let's take as an example three panels from Laxe dos Carballos (Campo Lameiro, Galicia, Spain). They are carved with large male deer facing an open horizon to the southwest, where the winter solstice and/or major southern lunistice occur at certain points of reference. Their antlers are oversized and have an unnatural number of tips per horn (i.e., 10 as opposed to the standard 7), which possibly represent a calendar count.[186]

[185] González García A. C., García Quintela M. V., Belmonte J. A., Santos-Estévez M., *Calendaric deer, time reckoning and landscape in NW Spain iron age*, in *Archaeologia Baltica,* 10 (2008), 66–70; García Quintela M. V., Santos-Estévez M., *Astronomical Symbolism in Bronze-Age and Iron-Age Rock Art*, in Ruggles C. N. (ed.), *Handbook of Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy* (New York, Springer, 2015), 1216.

[186] González García A. C., García Quintela M. V., Belmonte J. A., Santos-Estévez M., *Calendaric deer, time reckoning and landscape in NW Spain iron age*, in *Archaeologia Baltica,* 10 (2008), 66–70; Belmonte J.V., García Quintela M. V., González García A. C., *Ciervos, tiempo y paisaje*, in Boado F. C., Cortizas A. M. (eds.), *Arte Rupestre, Paleoambiente y Paisaje. Miradas Interdisciplinares sobre Campo Lameiro. Col. Trabajos de Arqueología y Patrimonio*, Madrid:

The symbolic chain deer - tree/forest – sun occur also in Central Asian nomadic rock art. On Yazil Hill (Gobustan, Azerbaijan), a human figure is engraved on a petroglyph with arms bent at the elbows, fingers spread wide and two protuberances growing on the head, resembling antlers. An antlered deer, standing under the praying figure, turns and looks at the worshipper. Above, solar symbols are engraved. The petroglyph, stone 14, is dated to the mid I century BCE[187].



Image 27. *Worshipper, antlered deer and solar symbols from Yazili Hill (Azerbaijan). Dzhafarzade, 1973: stone 14, fig. 12.* Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

An emblematic scene is depicted on a bowl from the Khanlar barrow, located on the right bank of the Ganjachay River in Azerbaijan (XII-XI century

CSIC-IEGPS (2009); García Quintela M. V., Santos-Estévez M., *Astronomical Symbolism in Bronze-Age and Iron-Age Rock Art*, in Ruggles C. N. (ed.), *Handbook of Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy* (New York, Springer, 2015), 1219, fig. 104.5.

[187] Dzhafarzade I.M., *Kobustan (naskal'nye izobrazheniya) [Gobustan (rock carvings)]* (Baku, Elm, 1973), stone 14, fig. 12; Rzayeva S., op. cit., 190, fig. 37.

BCE). Humans depicted in stylized geometric forms pray between a standing deer with huge and elongated antlers and a butterfly motif. The worshippers have their hands lifted up, only three fingers and body filled with dots.[188]

Bronze Age 'Deer stone' stelae, expressing a deer-sun-bird imagery, are typical of Central Asia (largely in Mongolia and Siberia). Their sculpted images include groups of stylized deer with a bird-like muzzle and long, extremely ornate, flowing antlers, which are flying in the air. They are associated with belted warriors, a multitude of other animals, patterns such as circles (variously interpreted as the sun, moon, or earrings), weapons, and tools.[189]

To sum up, the annual fall and regrowth of stag antlers induced their association with both the plant leaves and the sun (which daily rises and sets and gains strength and becomes evanescent throughout the annual cycle). The deer linked the earth and the sky.[190]

5.E. Totemic animal and sign of sovereignty that legitimized the control of a territory

Due to the aforementioned factual and mythological features, red deer antlers - especially the large and branched ones - have venerable ancestry as a cult symbol with deep roots in prehistory, since the Upper Paleolithic but particularly among Mesolithic communities of deer hunters in the Eurasian forests.[191] The stag was a totemic animal with a sacred genealogical status that gave rise to rights to control a territory. Studies on the behavior of red deer indicate that they often live in the same area in distinct herds as other mammals. People of the Ranaldi Shelter possibly associated this location with a specific group of red deer. The painted deer with royal antlers were part of the site's guard-protection systems, just as their

[188] Guseynova M.A., *Keramika Vostoçnogo Zakavkaz'ya epoxi pozdney bronzi i rannege zheleza XIV-IX vv. do n.e*, (Baku, Elm, 1989): tab. 12, fig. 29; Rzayeva S., op. cit., 190, fig. 36.

[189] Vitebsky P., *The Reindeer People: Living with Animals and Spirits in Siberia* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005); Allard F., Hatagin E., Houle J.-L., *Recent Archaeological Research in the Khanuy River Valley, Central Mongolia*, in Peterson D. L., Popova L. M., Smith A. T. (eds.), *Beyond the Steppe and the Sown: Proceedings of the 2002 University of Chicago Conference on Eurasian Archaeology (Colloquia Pontica)* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006), 203-204; Fitzhugh W., *The Mongolian Deer Stone-Khirigsuur Complex, Dating and Organization of a Late Bronze Age Menagerie*, in Bemmann J., Parzinger H., Pohl E., Tseveendorzh D. (eds.), *Current Archaeological Research in Mongolia*, Papers from the First International Conference on "Archaeological Research in Mongolia", Ulaanbaatar, August 19th-23rd, 2007 (Bonn: Vor- und Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 2009); Fitzhugh W., *Stone Shamans and Flying Deer of Northern Mongolia: Deer Goddess of Siberia or Chimera of the Steppe?*, in *Arctic Anthropology*, 46 (1–2), (2009), 72–88.

[190] However, we cannot know if it implied the belief that the deer had a close dependence on the sun, exactly like the leaves of plants. We cannot even know whether the hart merely represented the vehicle of the sun, like swans in the Iron Age, or if it symbolized the sun zoomorphically.

[191] Mykhailova N., *The Cult of the Deer and 'Shamans' in Deer Hunting Society*, in *Archaeologia Baltica*, n., 7 (2006); Vitezović S., *Animal Symbolism in Starčevo Culture*, in Rișcuța N.C. *et al.* (eds.), *Representations, signs and symbols: proceedings of the symposium on religion and magic*, Deva, 27-29 martie 2014 (Cluj-Napoca, Mega, 2015), 17.

trophies were displayed on buildings and at the entrance of the settlements with a protective role.



Image 28. *Some examples of ornate antler detailing on 'Deer stones' in Central Asia.* https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c2/Classic_Mongolian.jpg.

Significant for our comparanda is a manuport yielded by the Upper Magdalenian rock shelter of Laugerie-Basse (Dordogne, France). It is a fragment of a bovine shoulder blade[192] with the incision of a supine woman under and beyond a male cervid, whose rear limbs are illustrated in front of her legs.[193]

[192] The artifact is kept in Le musée des antiquités nationales, Saint-Germain-en-Laye (France).
[193] Bahn P. G., Vertut J., *Journey Through the Ice Age* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997), 140.

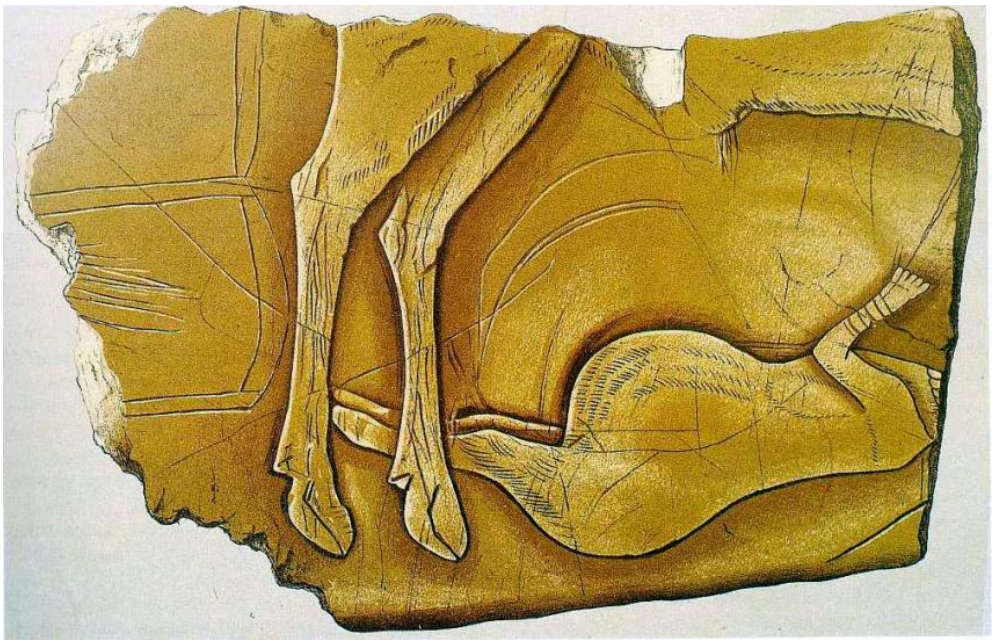


Image 29. *Supine parturient woman under and beyond a male cervid from Laugerie-Basse (Dordogne).* Lithography by J. Pilloy published in Piette, 1907.

Sometimes even the best known and most studied masterpieces like this one still have secrets to reveal. The woman is obviously pregnant and is preparing to give birth. She is adorned with bracelets and seems to wear a collar. Concentric hatched rows upon her swollen abdomen and thighs illustrate stretch marks and/or grown fur. The belly carrying the fetus is getting furry like an animal. Her legs are not human, but actually of a large herbivore including the hocks; they are similar to those of the cervid above her. The travailing woman is undergoing the transformative process into a cervid as she gives birth in front of the animal between the legs of which she lies. She is a feminine therianthrope giving a supernatural birth.[194] The carving from Laugerie-Basse is notable for our enquiry, because it is the most ancient visual evidence of an art universal subject also depicted on the paintings of the Ranaldi Shelter: woman in childbirth and wild cervid.[195]

[194] Caldwell D., *Palaeolithic whistles or figurines? A preliminary survey of prehistoric phalangeal figurines*, in *Rock Art Research*, 26, 1 (May), 2009, 65-82; Idem, *Supernatural Pregnancies. Common Features and New Ideas concerning Upper Paleolithic Feminine Imagery*, in *Arts & Cultures*, 2010, 52-75.

[195] Kubarev V. D., *Aral-Tolgoi: novyi pamyatnik naskal'nogo iskusstva Mongolii [Aral-Tolgoi: new monument the rock art in Mongolia]*, in *Arkheologiya, etnografiya i antropologiya Evrazii*, 1(29),

The same matter is raised from the small Cave of Addaura II or Engravings' Cave, within the vast cavity complex called Caves of Addaura (Monte Pellegrino, Sicily).[196] Spectacular Late Upper Paleolithic - Early Mesolithic engravings occur on the left wall of this cave, dated to ca. 12000 cal. BP[197] or to a period comprised between 14040 and 13360 cal. BP,[198] or between 17 ka cal BP and and c. 14 ka cal BP (start of GI Ic/Allerød oscillation).[199] A frieze depicts the silhouettes of several animals rendered with thin lines and linked to the naturalism and simplicity of the Mediterranean style of the nearby carvings in the Genovese cave in Levanzo Island.[200] Among the zoomorphic representations, there is the gorgeous head of a deer submitting to an anthropomorph, the profile of an isolated deer, and the figure of an outstretched deer. Made with even deeper engravings, it is a supine large horned fallow deer rendered with a verist-naturalist style (realism, accurate proportions, and good visual perspective); perhaps it is dead. The swelling of its belly is linked to a fattening process during its breeding in captivity. We are perhaps in the presence of a typical Paleo-Mesolithic clan skilled in deer domestication.

(2007); Jacobson E., *The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia: A Study in the Ecology of Belief* (Leiden, New York, Koln, Brill, 1993).

[196] It is the main locus of Sicilian rock art. Tusa S., *Funerary practices and rituals on Sicily from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age (Sixth through Second Millennia BCE)* in Blakely S., Collins B. J. (eds.), *Religious Convergence in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Studies in Ancient Mediterranean Religions 2, (Atlanta, Lockwood Press, 2019), 253. The engravings were discovered thanks to the accidental explosion of the explosives the Allies had stored in the caves after the invasion of 1943. Kelder J., *Sicily and the Sea in Prehistory*, in Kelder J., Burgersdijk D., Calis R., Tusa S., Beek R. van (eds.), *Sicily and the Sea*, Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam (2015), 29. Unfortunately, the archaeological deposit was mixed because it had been wiped out before excavations began. Mannino M. A., Thomas K. D., *New radiocarbon dates for hunter-gatherers and early farmers in Sicily*, in Herring E., Whitehouse R., Wilkins J. (eds.), *The Accordia Research Papers* (London: Accordia Research Institute and University of London, 2007).

[197] Tusa S., di Maida G., Pastoors A., Piezonka H., Weniger G.-C., Terberger T., *The Grotta di Cala dei Genovesi - New studies on the Ice Age cave art on Sicily*, in *Praehistorische Zeitschrift*, 88 (1–2), (2014). Unfortunately, the archaeological deposit had been wiped out before excavations began.

[198] Mannino M. A., Thomas K. D., Leng M. J., Di Salvo R., Richards M. P., *Stuck to the shore? Investigating prehistoric hunter-gatherer subsistence, mobility and territoriality in a Mediterranean coastal landscape through isotope analyses on marine mollusc shell carbonates and human bone collagen*, in *Quaternary International*, vol. 244, Issue 1, 1 November 2011, 2011.

[199] García-Diez M., Terberger T., Di Maida G., *Radiocarbon and U-series age constraints for the Lateglacial rock art of Sicily*, in *Quaternary Science Reviews*, vol. 245, 1 October 2020, 15. This suggests that, in Sicily, the process of schematization of the figures started at the very least in the Older Dryas; Di Maida G., *Marks on the rocks: rock and mobile art as an expression of the hunter-gatherers' groups Weltanschauung in the Sicilian landscape from lateglacial to early Holocene*, Universitätsforschungen zur prähistorischen archäologie (Bonn, Rudolf Habelt, 2020).

[200] Bovio Marconi J., *Incisioni rupestri dell'Addaura (Palermo)*, in *Bullettino di Palentologia Italiana*, ns, VIII (1953).

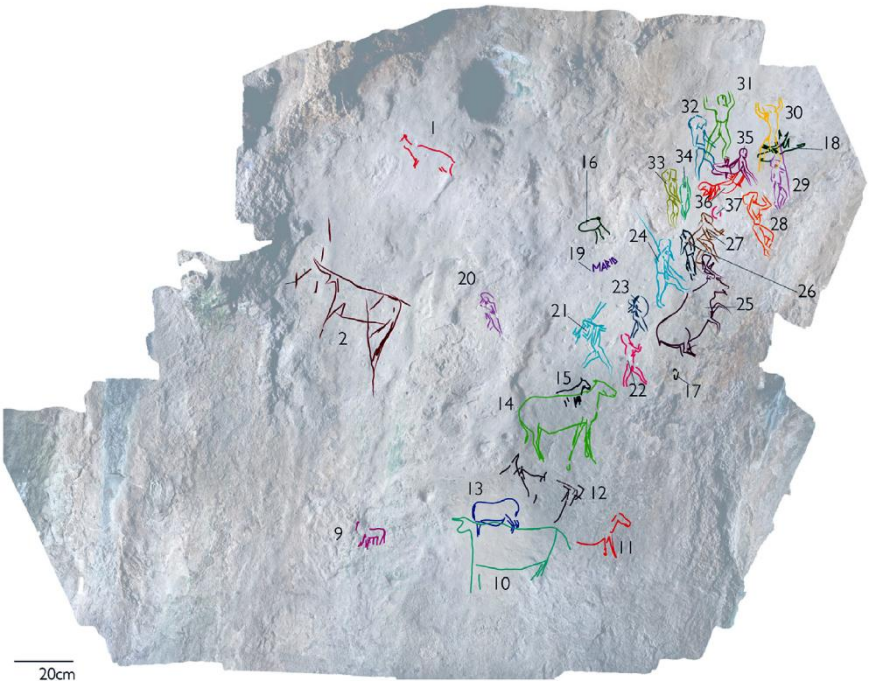


Image 30. *Drawings of the main engraved figures on the frieze of the left wall of the Grotta delle Incisioni all'Addaura. The lines in the render have been thickened for visualization purposes.* Photos and graphics by Di Maida G. after García-Diez M., Terberger T., Di Maida G., *Radiocarbon and U-series age constraints for the Lateglacial rock art of Sicily*, in *Quaternary Science Reviews*, vol. 245, 1 October 2020.

The dead deer is part of a complex and unprecedented composition which is a "mythogram", i.e. the narration of a myth through the action of figures engraved along the walls of the cave; a myth that was ritually performed on the spot using sacrifice, dance, music, animation, and fantastic storytelling.[201]

Deer, aurochs and horses are in fact engraved together with a group of human beings many of which are connected together in a whirling common action, as they actively participate (raising arms to the sky, carrying poles…) in a kind of circular dance proceeding counter clockwise.[202] Almost all the characters wear a ceremonial headdress: a mask consisting of a bird protome with a beak at the front and enriched at the back by a fluffy mane of plumage.[203] The small gathering of

[201] The image of the frieze of the Addaura cave II is in García-Diez M., Terberger T., Di Maida G., *Radiocarbon and U-series age constraints for the Lateglacial rock art of Sicily*, in *Quaternary Science Reviews*, vol. 245, 1 October 2020, 5, fig.4.

[202] Iconographic synthesis is based on the "dance indicators" described by Garfinkel. Garfinkel Y., *Dancing at the Dawn of Agriculture* (University of Texas, Austin, 2003).

[203] The pointed and beak-like heads decorating men are similar to that of an individual in the Deer Cave (Mussi M., Zampetti D., *Le raffigurazioni parietali dell'Addaura in una prospettiva europea*, in

people encircle two human figures who are perhaps sacrificial victims (figures n. 35 and n. 36 in the drawing).[204]

In total, there are 16 human figures that seem to intentionally participate in a glowing and pressing synchronic activity from which the unity of the scene is deduced within a heterogeneous and articulated environmental representation. There are also about 10 animal representations that do not get confused with the "dance". The artist successfully faced a rather complex problem that is absent from coeval cave art elsewhere in Europe: how to express the dynamism and choral character of the personages in what is one of the oldest figurations in which the human being is the protagonist of a real "scene".

Dance facilitates the religious experience thanks of its power to express emotions and states of mind. Circular dance, in particular, can lead to a trance state that allows for communication between humans and the supernatural entities. Induction of an altered state of consciousness can be useful to healing rituals, rites of passage or for invoking divinities or spirits.[205] The whole scene inspires a

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Grotta G., Scuderi A., Tusa S., A. Vintaloro (eds.), *Primo Congresso Internazionale di Preistoria e Protostoria Siciliane*, Corleone (PA) 17-20 July 1997, Corleone: Cortimiglia, 2004, 257-266) and another man in the Cave of Cala Genovese in Levanzo Island. Tusa S., *Considerazione sulla religiosità delle popolazioni pre-elleniche siciliane tra il Paleolitico superiore e l'età del Bronzo*, in *Mythos*, 3, 1991, 169-170, figs. 1-2). According to Leighton, the detail is simply a stylistic convention for beards. Leighton R., *Sicily before History*, (London, Gerald Duckworth & Co., Ithaca NY: Cornell University, 1999), 46.

[204] They are interpreted as sacrificial victims, because they are lying horizontally on the ground in odd positions, one above the other, facing two opposite directions, with their heads covered and their backs strongly arched back due to a string stretched between the ankles and the neck that is suffocating them (Blanc A. C., *Considerazioni su due figure dell'Addaura*, in *Quaternaria*, I, (1954), 176–180; Blanc A. C., *Il sacrificio umano dell'Addaura e la messa a morte rituale mediante strangolamento nell'etnologia e nella paletnologia*, in *Quaternaria*, II (1955); Chiappella V., *Altre considerazioni sugli "acrobati" dell'Addaura*, in *Quaternaria*, I, 1954; Tusa S., *Sicilia Preistorica*, (Palermo, Dario Flaccovio Editore, 1994); Mussi M., Zampetti D., *Le raffigurazioni parietali dell'Addaura in una prospettiva europea*, in Grotta G., Scuderi A., Tusa S., Vintaloro A. (eds.), *Atti del I Convegno Internazionale di Preistoria e Protostoria Siciliana, Corleone, 17-20 luglio 1997*, Vol. A. Corleone, 2004; *Tusa S., Funerary practices and rituals on Sicily from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age (Sixth through Second Millennia BCE)*, in Blakely S., Collins B. J. (eds.), *Religious Convergence in the Ancient Mediterranean*, in *Studies in Ancient Mediterranean Religions* 2, (Atlanta, Lockwood Press, 2019, 253). These two individuals have been alternatively defined as "acrobats" performing evolutions during a ritual scene of initiation into puberty or virility. Bovio Marconi J., *Sui Graffiti dell'Addaura*, in *Rivista di Antropologia*, 40 (1951–1952); Bovio Marconi J., *Incisioni rupestri dell'Addaura (Palermo)*, in *Bullettino di Palentologia Italiana*, ns, VIII (1953); Bovio Marconi J., *Sull'esegesi del graffito dell'Addaura (Palermo)*, in *Quaternaria*, II (1955); Graziosi P., *Qualche osservazione sui graffiti rupestri della Grotta dell'Addaura presso Palermo*, in *Bullettino di Paletnologia Italiana*, 65(1), 1956; Graziosi P., *L'arte preistorica in Italia* (Florence: Giunti M., 1973); Mezzena F., *Nuova interpretazione delle incisioni parietali paleolitiche della Grotta Addaura a Palermo*, in *Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche*, XXXI (1) (1976); Leighton R., *Sicily before History* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., Ithaca NY, Cornell University, 1999), 46. The interpretation of the panel is hotly debated in the literature.

[205] Budano P., *The Addaura Cave: Dance and Rite in Mesolithic Sicily*, in *Open Archaeology*, 5, n. 1, December 2019 (2019), 596.

propitiatory sacral atmosphere that seems to include, in the ritualistic modalities and in the masks with bird's beak, the allusion to an avian divinity, perhaps inspired by the great raptor of the cliffs, "a model of hunting ideality to fear, emulate, adore and ingratiate".[206] Therefore, according to Sebastiano Tusa, scene and actions had a magical-religious character and were addressed to a "celestial" divinity.[207]

However, the dance is spiral. At the beginning of the human spiral, a woman appears going in the opposite direction from all the others (figure n. 23 in the drawing). She is conspicuously pregnant, as she displays swollen breasts and a prominent belly in profile. She carries a voluminous egg-shaped pack on her back[208] and is in perfect opposition with the dead cervid (figure n. 25 in the drawing).[209] It is perhaps this small figure, with all its symbolic and generative strength, that illuminates the engraved panel an extraordinary expressive quality capable of giving the whole a skillful scenographic intent,[210] because she marks exactly the point of origin of the dance: the future birth of a new life.

The complex liturgy included ecstatic states of mind, perhaps connected to rites of passage,[211] possibly an initiation,[212] and included a dramatic action linked to the animal world. The ceremony was performed in the context of a rhythmic accompaniment (also musical?). It centered on the figures of the pregnant woman and the stag and culminated in a sacrifice in favor of a celestial entity, perhaps a Mother Goddess. The use of the cave itself as a ritual structure should not be forgotten.[213]

5.F. Symbol of status, wealth and prestige for the related hunting groups

The mature stag with majestic antlers was possibly not only a magic-religious symbol but also an emblem of status, wealth and prestige for the Later

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[206] Tusa S., *L'arte preistorica della Sicilia*, in *Bollettino del Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici*, XXXIV (2004).
[207] Ibidem.
[208] Mussi M., *Palaeolithic Art in Isolation: The Case of Sicily and Sardinia*, in Pettitt P., Bahn P., Ripoll S., Muñoz Ibáñez F. J. (eds.), *Palaeolithic Cave Art at Creswell Crags in European Context*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 200.
[209] Filippi A., *I danzatori dell'Addaura. Le radici preistoriche della religiosità in Sicilia* (Erice: Il sole editrice, 2015), 86.
[210] Vigneri M., *Narrazione, comunicazione, trasmissione nell'arte preistorica. Una lettura psicoanalitica*, in *Pre-Atti del XXIV Valcamonica Symposium 2011* (Capo di Ponte: Edizione multilingua, Edizioni del Centro, 2011).
[211] Budano P., *The Addaura Cave: Dance and Rite in Mesolithic Sicily*, in *Open Archaeology*, 5, n. 1, December 2019 (2019), 596.
[212] Tusa S., *Funerary practices and rituals on Sicily from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age (Sixth through Second Millennia BCE)*, in Blakely S., Collins B. J. (eds.), *Religious Convergence in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Studies in Ancient Mediterranean Religions 2 (Atlanta, Lockwood Press, 2019), 254.
[213] Lo Vetro D., Martini F., *Il Paleolitico e il Mesolitico in Sicilia*, in *Atti della XLI Riunione scientifica: dai ciclopi agli ecisti: società e territorio nella Sicilia preistorica e protostorica, San Cipirello (PA), 16-19 novembre 2006*, Istituto italiano di preistoria e protostoria (2012).

Mesolithic / Early Neolithic groups of hunters who lived in the area of the Ranaldi Shelter and seasonally exploited the site. Thorough the complex process of passage from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic, the main connotation of the hart and its huge branching antlers changed from a totemic animal to one of the main symbols of fertility and wealth of the community. The symbolic transformation imposed the direct relationship of this cervid with the signs of power, life, and the sun. Consistently, it was increasingly accompanied by insignia of prestige such as the tree of life and solar symbols.[214]

Some instances from the earliest phase of the Danube Civilization are paradigmatic of this symbolism. Reliefs of red deer stags with huge and ramified horns are frequent on the vessels of the Early Neolithic Starčevo-Criş (Körös) cultural complex, where in its early phases this cervid was the most hunted mammal, although its percentage varies from sample to sample. A deer with supernatural antlers is depicted in relief on a fragment of a large storage vase from the Körös site of Czépa (South-Eastern Hungary).[215] Antlered male deer occur on several other Körös potshards.[216] Trantalidou, Masseti Archaeozoology of the red deer Balkan and Aegean 2014

In the Danube civilization, zoomorphic figurines are common since the beginning of the Early Neolithic, i.e. the Starčevo-Criş (Körös) I (6100-5900 BCE), Karanovo I (6000-5600 BCE), and Sesklo I (5900-5800 BCE) assemblages.[217] This art appeared mainly in the form of small clay animal statuettes or applications of animal figures on different clay objects, such as protomes on altars/plates.[218]

Figurines depicting red deer with imposing antlers have been discovered in the Starčevo sites of Banja[219] and Donja Branjevina.[220] Figurines that likely

[214] Mykhailova N., *Deer offerings in the archaeology and art of prehistoric Eurasia*, in *Expression*, 10, December 2015, 55.

[215] Bognár-Kutzián I., *The Körös Culture, Volume 1*, (Budapest: A Pázmány Péter Tudományegyetem Érem-És Régiségtani Intézete, 1947), pl. II/1; Gimbutas M., *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 6500–3500 B.C.* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974) *[*1982 republished as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe]*, 171, 173, fig. 166. Id., 1991: 29, fig. 2-19.

[216] Bognár-Kutzián I., *The Körös Culture, Volume 1*, (Budapest: A Pázmány Péter Tudományegyetem Érem-És Régiségtani Intézete, 1947), pl. XVII, XX.

[217] Merlini M., *Neo-Eneolithic Literacy in Southeastern Europe: an Inquiry into the Danube*, Biblioteca Brukenthal XXXIII (Alba Iulia: Ministery of Culture of Romania and Brukenthal National Museum, Editura Altip, 2009), 466.

[218] Animal statuettes usually only represent an unspecified quadrupedal animal, sometimes with distinctive features such as horns, antlers, or snouts. The animals identified include bull, deer, goats, sheep, pigs and hybrid animals. Stanković S., *Станковић С., Представа бика у старијем неолиту (Bull representations in the Early Neolithic)*, in *Starinar* N. S. XL–XLI, 1990; Stanković S., *Kultna mesta i predmeti u starijeneolitskim kulturama centralnobalkanskog područja*, PhD thesis, Belgrade: Belgrade University (1992).

[219] Ibidem.

represent a red deer have also been unearthed from the Körös sites of Endrőd 3/45,[221] Endrőd 39,[222] Miske–Becsali I–II,[223] and Maroslele–Pana settlement.[224]

Stag vessels are known from the Near Eastern Neolithic. A notable example is from Hacilar VI.[225] We have already mentioned the Karanovo I stag-like vase discovered in Muldava (Central Bulgaria). [226] From the almost coeval Donja Branjevina comes a zoomorphic vessel or altar in the shape of a horned animal representing a red deer (or chamois).[227] The artifact has a container on the back: a censer with traces of very intense fire. The outline of its body shows the tense muscles of a running animal. It is decorated with deeply engraved meanders, zigzags and motifs that look like letters 'M', 'W', and 'V'. The archaeologist in charge, interpreted identical or similar symbolic decorations found on many Neolithic cult vessels (or censers) as schematic horns to indicate male virility.[228]

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[220] Karmanski S., *Donja Branjevina: A Neolithic Settlement Near Deronje in the Vojvodina (Serbia)*, Società per la preistoria e protoistoria della regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia, quaderno 10 (2005), 39, fig. 30.

[221] Makkay J., *The Excavations of the Early Neolithic Sites of the Koros Culture in the Koros Valley (Hungary)*, Quaderni Società Preistoria e Protostoria della Regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Edizioni Svevo (2007), 190.

[222] It is a horned creature with a pointed tail. See Bánffy E. (ed.), *The Early Neolithic in the Danube-Tisza interfluve*, BAR International Series 2584 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2013).

[223] Bánffy E. (ed.), *The Early Neolithic in the Danube-Tisza interfluve*, BAR International Series 2584 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2013).

[224] Trogmayer describes the altar fragment found in the Pit 4 as a deer head. It is a "yellowish-brown, polished, carefully modelled [artifact] … the form of the snout recalls a pig, but the two small stubs between the ears indicate the place of the antlers that broke off" (Trogmayer O., *Megjegyzések a Körös-csoport relatív időrendjéhez (Remarks on the relative chronology of the Körös group)*, in *Archaeologiai Értesítő*, 91, 1964, 68, Fig. 5-1. He identified another fragment from the same pit as the stubs of the antlers. Trogmayer O., *Megjegyzések a Körös-csoport relatív időrendjéhez (Remarks on the relative chronology of the Körös group)*, in *Archaeologiai Értesítő*, 91 (1964): 68, Fig. 5-2.

[225] Mellaart J., *The Neolithic of the Near East*, The World of Archaeology Series (London, Thames and Hudson, 1975), fig. 64.

[226] A ritual archaeological complex belonging to the Petrești culture indicate the existence of the continuation of the deer cult over time. It was discovered at Ghirbom (Alba County). Within it, it was unearthed a deer head (made of clay) covered with brown paint and with linear and angular motifs along with a clay tablet covered with incised signs. Aldea I. Al., *Altarul magico-ritual descoperit în așezarea neolitică de la Ghirbom (com. Berghin, jud. Alba)*, in *Apulum*, 7 (1974), 41; Luca S. A., *Ritual deposits of the Petrești culture in South-Western Transylvania*, in *Acta Terrae Septemcastrensis*, XIX (2020), 227. The ritual complex in its whole consists of 8 vessels, the deer's head and a cult clay table. Aldea I. Al., *Altarul magico-ritual descoperit în așezarea neolitică de la Ghirbom (com. Berghin, jud. Alba)*, in *Apulum*, 7 (1974), 41.

[227] Stanković S., *Kultna mesta i predmeti u starijeneolitskim kulturama centralnobalkanskog područja*, PhD thesis, Belgrade: Belgrade University, 1992; Karmanski S., *Donja Branjevina: A Neolithic Settlement Near Deronje in the Vojvodina (Serbia)*, Società per la preistoria e protoistoria della regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia, quaderno 10 (2005), 39, fig. 30.

[228] Karmanski S., *Donja Branjevina: A Neolithic Settlement Near Deronje in the Vojvodina (Serbia)*, Società per la preistoria e protoistoria della regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia, quaderno 10 (2005), 39, fig. 30.

Although the vase/altar/censer is complete, there are different opinions on the animal it represents. Head and neck show stag features; the horns are similar to those of a chamois. The ambiguity is not due to the artist's failure, but to his/her intent to model an animal whose supernatural nature is expressed by its hybrid body. The occurrence of interspecies entities in Early Neolithic imagery is confirmed by closer analogies at Endrőd 39[229] and at Donja Branjevina itself.[230]

The significance of the male red deer is confirmed by its appearance in the Neolithic rock art of the Italian Alps with people riding on them.[231]

From early IV millennium on, stylized red deer with colossal, many-tined antlers appeared on vessels of Chalcolithic Tepe Sialk (near Kashan, North Iran).[232] The antler spokes branch off in an almost expressionist manner. In some instances, a waterfowl takes place on the hindquarters of the deer.

To sum up the results of this chapter, our hard comparative work on mythology, visual art and archaeology on the mature red deer with oversized, branched and elongated antlers suggests a preliminary fact: the discovery of this type of stag painted and engraved in rock art, carved into bone and modelled in clay indicates that its importance went beyond hunting. It was instead the natural *paredrus* and cult symbol to indicate the presence of the prehistoric life-giving divinity at the Ranaldi Shelter. Several ancient beliefs and symbolisms behind this double role are useful for interpreting Ranaldi paintings within the rock art universal subject of the woman in childbirth and wild animals, in association with some features of the shamanistic myth-ritual complex related to the deer cult.

This ungulate was credited to embody the male principle in nature and masculine energy, sexual potency, direct association with fertilizing power (and, more generally, abundance). Therefore, the adult male red deer stag with lethal and high protective antlers acted as the natural caretaker of life power and assistant to the divine birth.

The imposing antlers identified the stag as a life renewer, reflecting seasonal change and the rhythms of life in its physiology. According to a locally

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[229] Makkay J., *The Excavations of the Early Neolithic Sites of the Koros Culture in the Koros Valley (Hungary)*, Quaderni Società Preistoria e Protostoria della Regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Edizioni Svevo (2007), 190.

[230] Karmanski S., *Donja Branjevina*, Odžaci: Muzejska jedinica pri Narodnom univerzitetu "Odžaci", 1989, XLVI, 1A and 1B; Karmanski S., *Donja Branjevina: A Neolithic Settlement Near Deronje in the Vojvodina (Serbia)*, Società per la preistoria e protoistoria della regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia, quaderno 10 (2005), 40.

[231] Szabó G., *How and why do the deer and the bars appear on the belts used in the Caucasian Koban culture?*, in *Nartamongae. The Journal of Alano-Ossetic Studies: Epic, Mythology, Language, History*, 14, n. 1, 2, The Abaev Centre for Scythian-Alanian Studies (2019), 60.

[232] Ghirshman R., *Fouilles de Sialk près de Kashan 1933, 1934, 1937*, Musée du Louvre, Département des antiquités orientales et de la céramique antique, Serie archéologique, Paris: P. Geuthner (1938-1939), pl. XXI, 1. The excavations discovered a settlement sequence from Late Neolithic (Sialk I–II) to Chalcolithic (Sialk III–IV), dating from the early VI to the late IV millennium BCE.

precise timing marked by the annual antler regrowth cycle, stags mate in autumn after a rate of antler growth as high as six centimeters per day, shed their antlers in late fall / early winter, and renovate them each spring. It then becomes evident that on the paintings of the Ranaldi Shelter the emphasis was posed on male deer with branches in their full expansion, that is in adulthood, and in autumn, the period of heat.



Image 31. *Deer on a cream-colored pottery beaker from Sialk III (North Iran), ca. 4000-3600 BCE. The National Museum of Iran is located in Tehran. After Ghirshman, 1938-1939: pl. XXI, 1.* Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

The ability of the red deer stag to regenerate itself and to participate to the renewal of the whole nature was linked to its intimate identification with woodlands. In particular, its majestic, branched and elongated horns were associated with the Primordial Tree and its forest, the ideal center of the world of the group of hunters which made seasonal stops in the Ranaldi Shelter.[233]

[233] Mykhailova N., *The Cult of the Deer and 'Shamans' in Deer Hunting Society*, in *Archaeologia Baltica*, n., 7 (2006), 197.

The depiction and reverence of the male red deer are evident as early as from the Stone Age in an area as wide as its habitat due to sacred notions related to its astral symbolism. The stag, as an antlered creature, was part of the astral world and indicated the way to the superhuman reality, and helped the passage to and from it.

The big-horned deer was possibly conceptualized by the hunters of the Ranaldi Shelter as a totemic animal closely linked to their exploitation of the landscape and possession of its resources. The targeted placement of the ritual painting in this specific topographical location (a discrete juncture within the mountain range) documents that they were deeply connected to their landscape and to the way they conceived their landscape.

Finally, the mature red deer stag with grandiose horns carried with pride and solemnity was a symbol of sovereignty, status, wealth and prestige as evidenced, in historical times, by impressive hunting trophies made of deer skulls with enormous, branched antlers.[234]

6. An event solemnly attended by supernatural double-headed harts

At this point of our investigation, we have to remember that on the paintings in the Ranaldi Shelter the imposing anthropomorphic entity gives birth assisted, on the sides, by mature red deer stags equipped not only with overstated antlers but also with double heads / necks supported by a single torso and looking at the same direction. See n. 5 and n. 7 in Merlini's numbering.

Since the Upper Paleolithic, magical-religious symbolism is permeated with various versions of double animals. This suggests that they were endowed with a special significance. Regarding to our enquiry, we have at first to distinguish two- and multi-headed animals (as in our instance) from twins, and from double-faced beings.[235] Hence, we must make a distinction between bicephalic animals (as in our case) and polycephalic animals. As for the double-headed and doble-necked stags, at the center of our examination, we have to differentiate when they are facing the same direction (as in the Ranaldi Shelter), in opposite directions, or each other.

6.A Two-headed stags depicted in Upper Paleolithic caves and shelters

Various monsters have a plurality of heads such as the bicephalic chimera and the snake Nehebkau in Egyptian mythology, the tricephalic Cerberus, and the evil Zahhak in Iranian mythology, the six-headed sea monster Scylla, the six to

[234] Morris J. T., *Red deer's role in social expressions on the Isles of Scotland*, in Pluskowski A. (ed.), *Just Skin and Bones? New Perspectives on Human-Animal Relations in the Historical Past*, BAR International Series 1410, (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 2005), 12–13.

[235] Samples of these entities are the god Usumu or Izimud by the Sumerians, Izumi by the Hittites, and Janus by the Romans, who was associated with the two halves of the year. In plastic art, see a faience aryballos (perfume vase) in the form of two Nubian heads Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv, n. 1972.118.142.

nine headed Lernaean Hydra, the seven-headed dragon/serpent in Sumerian mythology,[236] the seven-headed celestial horse Uchchaihshravas in Hindu mythology, the eight-headed snake Yamata no Orochi in Japanese mythology, and the hundred-headed serpent-like dragon Ladon.

The typology of animals with a pair of heads facing opposite directions is the most widespread. It first appeared as early as in the Upper Paleolithic.[237] Images of these animals are found in the archaeology and mythology of several ancient cultures. They are mostly eagles and snakes,[238] but also horses,[239] rams,[240] dogs, wild boars, toads, birds (vultures, waterfowl).[241] This motif is also found in the more recent folk art of the Mediterranean, Continental Europe, Russia, Western Asia, and the Caucasus, reaching even China and the pre-Columbian America.[242]

Scholars most often consider animals with two opposite heads as a reflection of ideas about the dichotomy and cyclicality of the world and its phenomena associated with mythological beliefs, such as summer / winter, sun / moon, sunrise / sunset, world of people / world of spirits, life / disease, birth / death, death / rebirth. These images may also have symbolized the action of the divine forces that control these dual phenomena, and in particular the semiannual solar cycle.[243]

According to Ariel Golan, this opposition scheme could involve the mythical movement of the sun, half a year to the North and half a year to the

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[236] It was Mušmaḫḫu, related to mythology of Ninurta and Ningishzida (Wiggermann F. A. M., *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: the Ritual Texts*, Cuneiform Monographs 1, Groningen: Styx Publications, 1992, 164).

[237] See for example the Late Upper Paleolithic double headed bison found in France and published by Müller-Karpe H., *Handbuch der Vorgeschichte Bd. 1 (Kupferzeit: Text, Register, Tafeln: Band 1)* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1974), pl. 80.

[238] Huaca Prieta (Peru), Pre-Ceramic VI period, c. 2500 BCE – c. 1800 BCE. Collon D., Peterson S., Wilson E., Villiers J., Baer E., Mckay W. I., McLeod M., *Ornament and pattern*, (Grove Art - Oxford Art Online, 2003).

[239] Iran, ca. 3000 BCE. Herzfeld E. E., *Iran in the Ancient East*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1941, 67. Greece, ca. 1000 BCE. Thompson M. S., *The Asiatic or Winged Artemis*, in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 29, Issue 2 (1909), 291. North Ossetia, ca. 1000 BCE. Chantre E., *Recherches anthropologiques dans le Caucase: Tome 3*, Publications de la Société Linnéenne de Lyon, Lyon: H. Georg, 1887, pl. 6. Daghestan, ca. 1000 BCE. Golan A., op. cit, 334, fig. 389-3. Iran, ca. 500 BCE. Herzfeld E. E., *Iran in the Ancient East*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1941), 58.

[240] Iran, ca. 3000 BCE Herzfeld E. E., *Iran in the Ancient East*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1941), 75.

[241] Iran, ca. 4000 BCE (Herzfeld E. E., *Iran in the Ancient East*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1941), 81. Denmark, ca. 1500 BCE; in this piece, the opposing heads are combined with a symbol that may be solar. Dechelette J., *Manuel d'Archeologie Prehistorique Celtique et Gallo-romaine, vol. 1 Manuel d'archéologie préhistorique* (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard, 1908), 427. Central Caribbean and Colombia between 1–500 CE, Hoopes J., *The Emergence of Social Complexity in the Chibchan World of Southern Central America and Northern Colombia, AD 300–600*, in *Journal of Archaeological Research*, 13 (1) (2005), 27. The bicephalic eagle have been employed as signs of sovereignty or heraldic devices (emblems of office held).

[242] Golan A., op. cit., 334.

[243] Ibidem, 336.

South, or the Twins as double symbols of the Neolithic God of the Earth (for the author, it is a male).[244] A fabulous petroglyph from the Altai Mountains in Eastern Kazakhstan exploits a sixth-headed stag to represent the seasonal change of the solar year. It belongs to the Early Scythian Period (VIII-VII century BCE).[245]

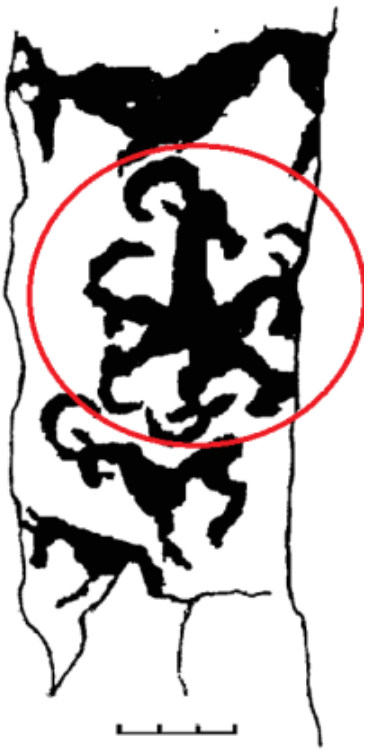


Image 32. *An Early Scythian sixth-headed stag to represent the solar cycle of the year from the Altai Mountains (Kazakhstan). Miklashevich, 2004: 95, fig. 7-6. (the solar motif in red)* Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

A focus on Eurasian prehistoric bicephalic stags facing the same direction, to which the Ranaldi Shelter rock art belongs, provides us very few cases. A remarkable example of a painted hart with heads doubled in the same direction that carry only one pair of antlers comes from the Lascaux cave.

The result of the representation is a "plethoric" branching that does not correspond to reality, but insists on the idea of exemplifying the adult male deer in

[244] Ibidem, 335.

[245] Miklashevich E., *Rock Art Research in North and Central Asia 1995–1999*, in Bahn P., Fossati A. (eds.), *Rock Art Studies: News of the World II. Developments in Rock Art Research 1995-1999 (v. 2)*, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2004), 95, fig. 7-6.

the breeding season. The antlers are rendered with emphasis (their volume is 5 to 7 times that of the head) and are shown as lush plant forms.[246] The intention is to display an adult male deer in the strength of age, in the fall season, and associated with notions of hierarchy. As in the panel of the Ranaldi Shelter, symbolic quintessence prevails on anatomical precision.[247]

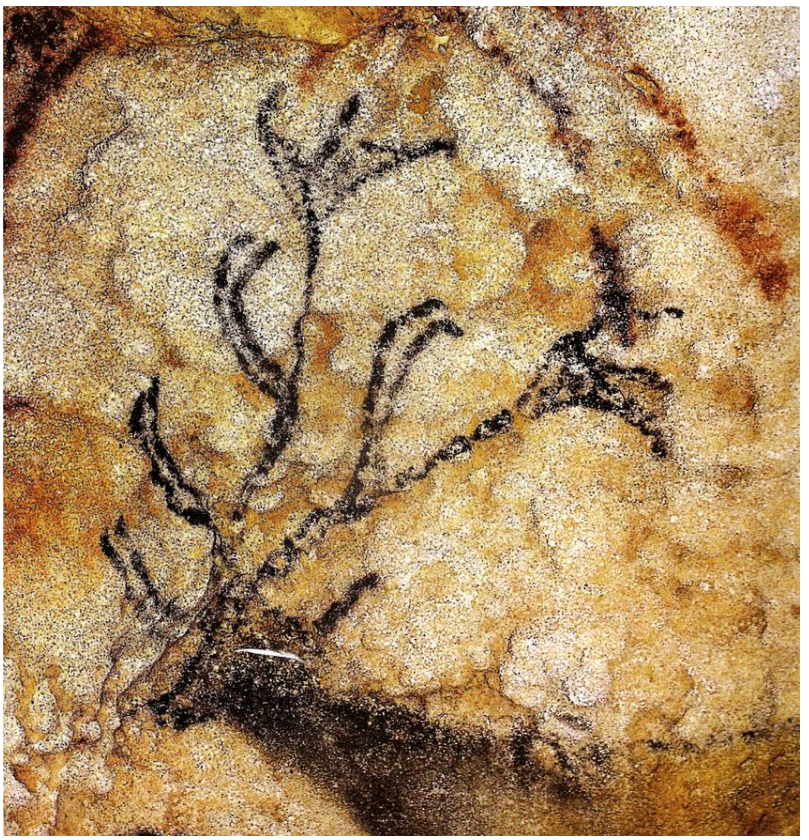


Image 33. *Stags painted with their heads doubled from Lascaux.* Averbouh A., Feruglio V., Delluc M. *L'ancrage du symbolique dans le réel: réflexions sur les représentations de bois de cerfs à Lascaux*, in *PALEO Revue d'Archéologie Préhistorique,* Société des amis du Musée national de préhistoire et de la recherche archéologique (SAMRA), 2016, fig. 7, photo N. Aujoulat.

[246] We have already discussed this typology.

[247] Aujoulat N., *Lascaux: peintures et gravures*, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communciation, Direction du patrimoine, CNC, CNMHS, CNP, réalisation Willemon J., Laser vision 4 faces, 1988; Idem, *Lascaux. Le rôle du déterminisme naturel: des modalités d'élection du site aux protocoles de construction des édifices graphiques pariétaux*, Thèse, université de Bordeaux 1, 1001, 2002; Aujoulat N., *Lascaux, le geste, l'espace et le temps*, (Paris, Seuil, 2004); Idem, *The splendour of Lascaux: rediscovering the greatest treasure of prehistoric art*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2016.

An Upper Paleolithic petroglyph of a deer (a doe) with the two heads in the same direction is found in the La Sudrie rock shelter (Dordogne, France).[248]

The figure has considerable dimensions and is the only one identifiable on the walls. Its massive body with a stiff dorsal line is supported by the four limbs. The cervid is flanked by a quadrangular oval sign and an unfinished figure. It is crucial to point out that the second head is not due to an error or a rethinking of the artist, but to his/her intention to express the animal movement by superimposing the muzzles. His/her style has been compared by the abbé André Glory to the shelters of Poisson, Parpallo, Labattut, Laussel, Belcayre, the cave of Comarque and the engravings of the Ardéchoise, which belong to a period ranging from the Aurignacian to the Magdalenian.[249] Genevieve von Petzinger dated the associated abstract geometric sign to the Gravettian archaeological industry of the European Upper Paleolithic.[250]

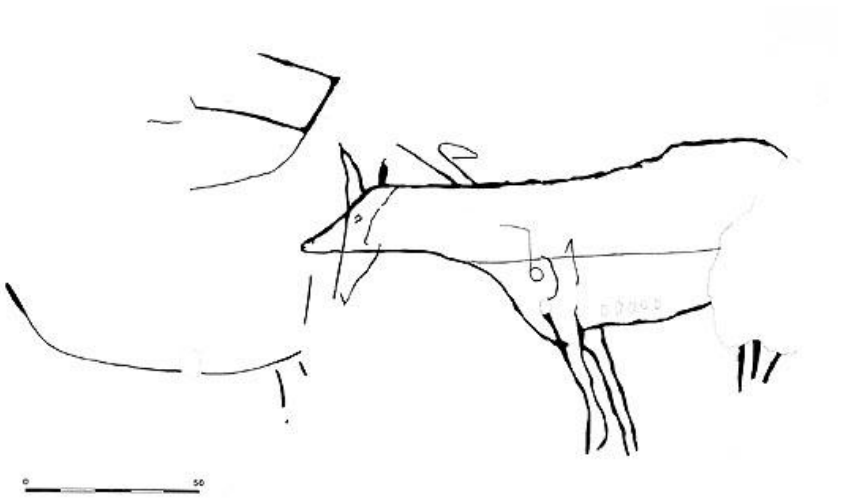


Image 34. *bicephalic deer from La Sudrie (Dordogne, France).* Aujoulat, 1984: 247.

The graphic pattern of the stag with two heads looking in the same direction can be found very far in time and space. It is replicated on a petroglyph

[248] Delluc B., Delluc G., *La grotte ornée de la Sudrie à Villac (Dordogne)*, in *Bull. de la Société historique et archéologique du Périgord*, 113, 1986, 271-282; Idem, *L'art pariétal archaïque en Aquitaine*, in *XXVIIIe supplément à Gallia Préhistoire*, Paris: C.N.R.S. (1991); Van Hoek M., *The Book of Janus. Polycephalic Creatures in Rock Art*, Oisterwijk (Holland, Maarten Van Hoek, 2020), 15.

[249] Glory A., Bay R., Koby F., *Gravures préhistoriques à L'Abri de la Sudrie (Dordogne)*, in *Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche*, IV, fasc. 1-2 (1949).

[250] Petzinger G. von, *A place in time: Situating Chauvet within the long chronology of symbolic behavioral development*, in *Journal of Human Evolution*, September 2014.

from Eagle Rock Shelter (Colorado, USA). Depicted here is a huge antlered deer with a second neck plus head emerging just below the main neck.[251] As for the stags of the Ranaldi Shelter, the two heads / necks are supported by a single torso and look in the same direction. The first head has huge, elongated and branched antlers, typical of an adult male in full mating season. The second head looks like that of a male deer with regrowing antlers. They reflect the two-half-year phases (from the vernal equinox to the autumnal equinox) and the seasons in their appearance. The animal has a large body, long, thin legs and cloven feet. The image belongs to the Archaic Period (ca. 2400 BP).[252]

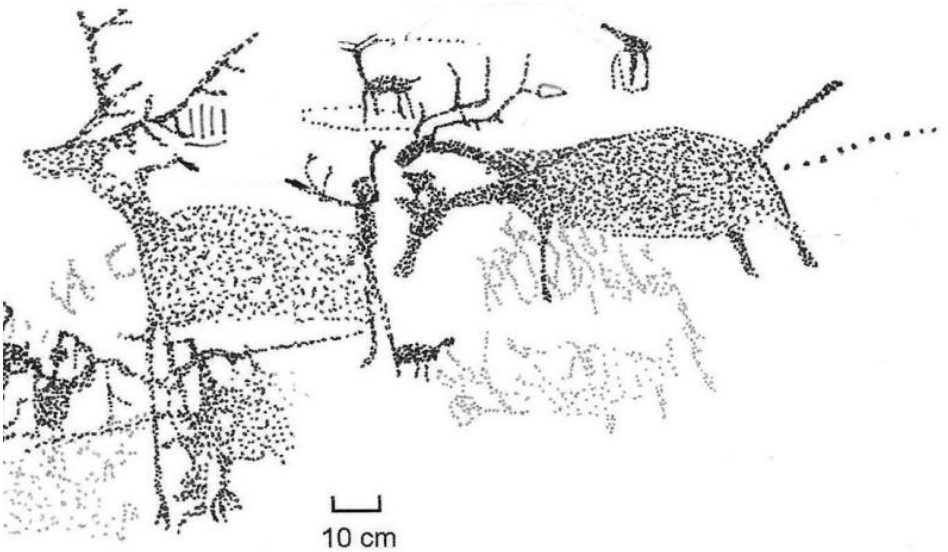


Image 35. *Double-headed stag from the Eagle Rock Shelter (Usa). Drawing of panel 1.* Patterson C., Watchman A., *Gunnison River Rock Art Site (5DT813)*, (Montrose: BLM Uncompahgre Field Office, 2006).

6.B Bicephalic deer in the Danube civilization and around

6.B.a Statuettes

As for the representations of two-headed deer on statuettes, a figurine with two capriovid heads turning back to each other and sharing a common body is

[251] Patterson C., Watchman A., *Gunnison River Rock Art Site (5DT813)*, (Montrose, BLM Uncompahgre Field Office 2006); Van Hoek M., *The Book of Janus. Polycephalic Creatures in Rock Art*, Oisterwijk (Holland: Maarten Van Hoek, 2020), 106, fig. 110.

[252] Patterson C., Watchman A., *Gunnison River Rock Art Site (5DT813)*, (Montrose, BLM Uncompahgre Field Office, 2006), 26 & 27; Banister C., *Eagle Rock Clovis/Paleo Tour*, *The Surveyor, Newsletter of the Colorado Archaeological Society*, vol. 11, n. 4, Fall 2013.

listed among the finds of the Middle Neolithic Vinča culture in the eponymous settlement.[253]

Some bicephalic figurines, also described as "T" or "Y" shaped forms, are vertically perforated through a round hole in the center, to be worn as amulets. They might also have been used as tokens. Typical of this categorization are some statuettes representing deer heads associated with two knobs reminiscent of female breasts. Indicative is a specimen from Zorlențu Mare (Banat, Romania).[254]

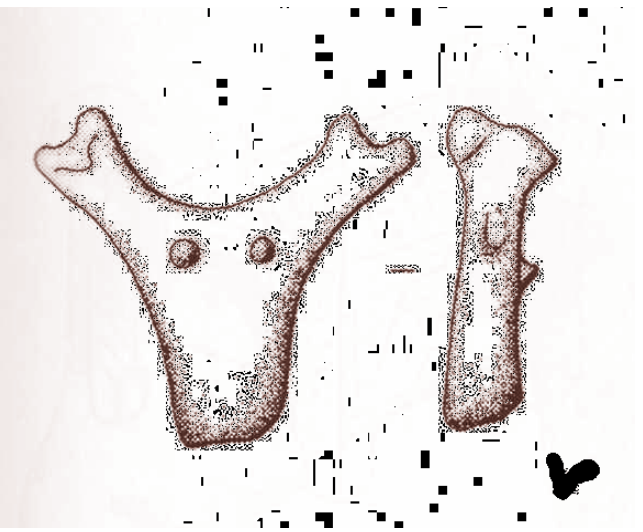


Image 36. *Bicephalic dear heads associated with female breasts from Zorlențu Mare (Romania). Lazarovici Gh., Neoliticul Banatului, Bibliotheca Musei Napocensis, IV, (Cluj-Napoca, Muzeul de Istorie al Transilvaniei, 1979).* Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

An assemblage belonging the late Vinča culture was found in a cult corner at Jakovo/Kormadin (Serbia). A deer figurine with two opposing heads was placed next to a life-size bucranium.[255]

The visual culture of the two-headed stag lasted a very long time in the Danube civilization. A miniature bronze statuette of this type was discovered in a ritual pit (C 23) at the Unip - *Dealu Cetățuica* site (Sacoșu Turcesc, Timiș County,

[253] Bánffy E., *Notes on the connection between human and zoomorphic representations in the Neolithic*, in Biehl P., Bertemes F. (eds.), *The Archaeology of Cult and Religion*, (Budapest: Archaeolingua, 2001) 56.
[254] Lazarovici Gh., *Neoliticul Banatului*, Bibliotheca Musei Napocensis, IV, (Cluj-Napoca, Muzeul de Istorie al Transilvaniei, 1979).
[255] Jovanović B., Glišić J., *Eneolitsko naselje na Kormadinu kod Jakova (Station éneolithique dans la localité de Kormadin près de Jakovo)*, in *Starinar*, 11 (1961), fig. 18.

Romania). The statuette can be dated to the I century BCE.[256] One of the heads was intentionally broken in antiquity during the ritual offering.

The artifact was deposited together with a red deer antler sleeve and a large number of votive goods such as objects made of deer antler and bone, jars, so-called Dacian cups, fruit bowls, parts of a large storage vessel, spindle-whorls, metal items, and lithic objects (a large grinding stone, elongated phallic-looking stones, and a small egg-shaped stone).

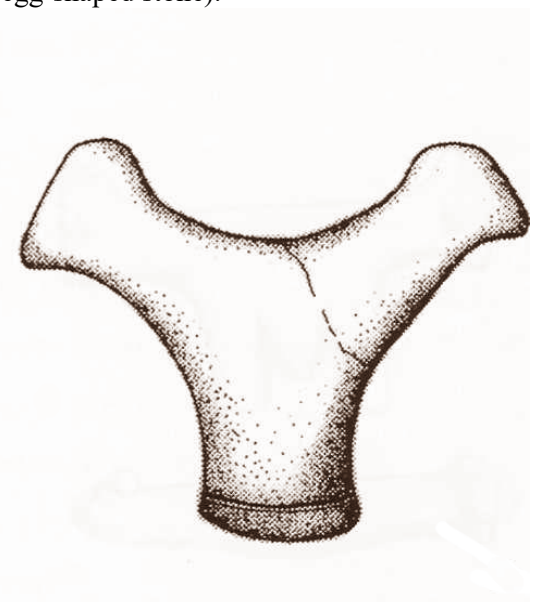


Image 37. *Deer figurine with two heads from Jakovo-Kormadin (Serbia). Jovanović B., Glišić J., "Eneolitsko naselje na Kormadinu kod Jakova (Station éneolithique dans la localité de Kormadin près de Jakovo)", in Starinar, 11, 1961, fig. 18.* Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

6.B.b Protomes on altars

The second typology of deer figurines we deal with is the adornment on pottery pieces in the form of multiple deer heads. It records protomes on altars/plates and handles of vessels. The most significant instance are triangular and rectangular miniature "altarpieces", "offering tables", "oil lamps" or "plates" that act as animal bodies with two, three, four or even eight heads at the corners. The heads can be in parallel in a similar way to the Ranaldi case, in opposition, or turned backward facing each other and inward in the vessel.

The richness of these two- or multi-headed deer representations is spectacular and full of symbolism. The platforms were employed for individual family or community rituals. Some podia were used for offering deposition of

[256] Berzovan A., Floca C., Micle D., Stavilă A., Rogozea O.-C., *The Dacian ritual pits from Unip – Dealu Cetățuica*, in *Mousaios*, 19, Muzeul Judetean Buzău (2014), 14, 17.

miniature figurines or certain substances (liquid, mineral, and vegetal). Others have animal or bird form and display a large perforation in the middle. These were not intended to place anything on their surface, but to pull or pour an item or liquid through their plane. Thus, the liquid from the vessel was pouring as if from the very figure of a distinct animal or bird. The application of zoomorphic heads to the corners of these "altars" indicates that the ceremonies were performed under the patronage of the related supernatural mythical entity that observed, blessed, and/or motivated the cult activity.

Deer heads on the corner section of the geometric altarpieces first appeared in the early Starčevo-Criş (Körös) assemblage.[257] Their heads can be realistic or stylized and abstract. An Early Neolithic school case is an “altar” from Kaniške lve (Western Slavonia, Croatia). A rectangular Starčevo altarpiece with four opposing animal heads (possibly fawns) was found here.[258]

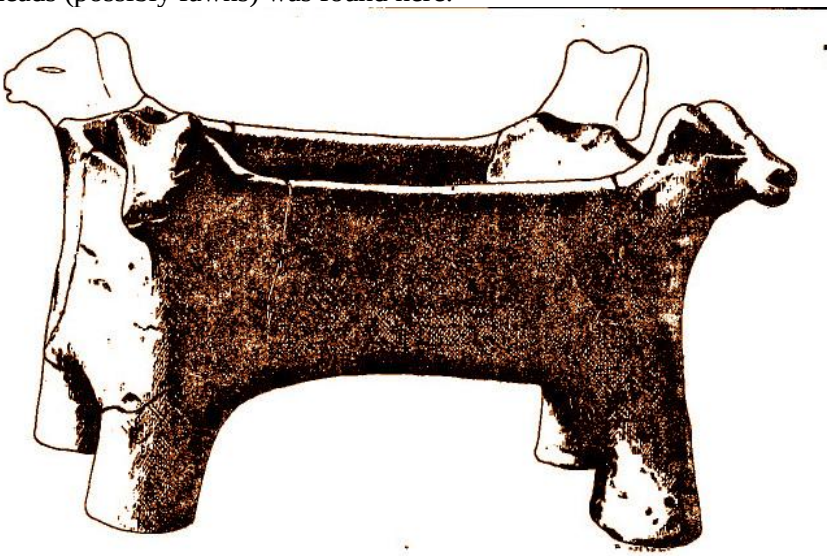


Image 38. *Early Neolithic altarpiece with fawn heads from Kaniške lve (Croatia). Težak-Gregl T., Naselje korenovske kulture u Kaniškoj Ivi, in Opvscvla archaeologica, vol. 15, br. 1, Zagreb, 1991: fig. 6-1.* Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

[257] Other animals are represented on protomes more frequently than the deer. One of the best examples discovered so far in the earliest phase of the Danube Civilization is a protome of a realistic-shaped head and neck of a pig on a censer from Slavonski Brod in Croatia (this is the find SF 1703. See Minichreiter K., *Radionica glinenih predmeta i tkanine u naselju starčevačke kulture na “Galovu”u Slavonskom Brodu*, in *Prilozi Instituta za arheologiju u Zagrebu*, 21, Zagreb (2004), fig. 7,1a and 7,1b).

[258] Težak-Gregl T., *Naselje korenovske kulture u Kaniškoj Ivi*, in *Opvscvla archaeologica*, vol. 15, br. 1, Zagreb, 1991, fig. 6-1; Minichreiter K., *Starčevačka kultura u sjevernoj Hrvatskoj (The Starčevo culture in Northern Croatia)*, Zagreb: Arheološki zavod Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta (1992), pI. 5.

Similar animal heads on the edges of altars were discovered in the Starčevo settlements of Cernička Šagovina[259] and Zadubravlje (Croatia), possibly depicting a young deer or a dog.[260]

The subsequent Vinča culture influenced the middle and late Neolithic development of the Danube civilization. Animal protomes appeared since the earliest horizons of the Vinča culture, spread throughout the central Balkans where the communities of this culture settled and remained almost unchanged in shape until its final period. Two stylized double-headed cervids or caprids stand out from the top of a Vinča zoomorphic offering vessel found in Priština-*Mitrovica* (Kosovo).[261] Emblematic triple chevrons adorn the neck of the animals, and triple circles are located on their legs. An inscription of the Danube script is marked within a rectangular "cartouche" positioned on the haunch.[262]



Image 39. *A text inscribed within a metope cohabit with decorative triple chevrons and parallel lines on a Vinča offering vessel with double-headed cervids or caprids from Priština-Mitrovica (Kosovo).* Daniela Bulgarelli Prehistory Knowledge Project.

[259] Težak-Gregl T., *Prilog poznavanju obrednih predmeta u neolitiku sjeverne Hrvatske*, in *Opuscula Archaeologica*, vol. 27, Zagreb (2003), 43-46, fig. 1.
[260] Minichreiter K., *Starčevačka kultura u sjevernoj Hrvatskoj (The Starčevo culture in Northern Croatia)* (Zagreb: Arheološki zavod Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta, 1992), pl. 21,6. Id., 1992b: 9, pl. 1,2.
[261] Gimbutas M., *The Language of the Goddess*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 76, fig. 117 3a-3b. Idem, *The civilisation of the Goddess. The World of Old Europe* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 315, fig. 8.16.
[262] Merlini M., *Neo-Eneolithic Literacy in Southeastern Europe: an Inquiry into the Danube*, Biblioteca Brukenthal XXXIII, (Alba Iulia: Ministery of Culture of Romania and Brukenthal National Museum, Editura Altip, 2009), 227.

A good example of the realistic deer head type is a rectangular "altar" found in the Middle Neolithic Starčevo milieu of Porodin (Republic of North Macedonia, near Bitola, just north of the Greek border).[263]

Here two long-necked heads of a male red deer are facing in the same direction. Although this artifact is fragmented and the protomes have been reconstructed, the numerous remains of ceramic deer heads unearthed from the same site suggest they were applied to an altar representing a dwelling, an oven, or a symbolic replica of a dough tray intended for bread production.[264] The occurrence of stags is not surprising because a large number of figurines representing this cervid are found in this region (Pelagonia), which indicates that this animal was a favorite religious-artistic subject.[265]



Image 40. *Deer altar from Porodin (Republic of North Macedonia).* Zdravkovski, 2008: 98.

[263] Grbić M., Mačkić P., Nadj Š., Simoska D., Stalio B., *Porodin: kasno-neolitsko naselje na Tumbi kod Bitolja*, Bitolj (1960), fig. 249; Merlini M., *The enigma of the charred human being, the cultic sacrifice and the cannibalistic ritual*, in Lazarovici Gh., Lazarovici C.-M., Merlini M. (eds.), *Tărtăria and the sacred tablets* (Cluj-Napoca, Editura Mega, 2011), 153.

[264] Naumov G., *Visual and Conceptual Dynamism of The Neolithic Altars in The Republic of Macedonia*, in Nikolov V., Bacvarov K., Popov H. (eds.), *Interdisziplinäre Forschungen zum Kulturerbe auf der Balkanhalbinsel*, (Sofia, Nice, 2011), 109.

[265] Grbić M., Mačkić P., Nadj Š., Simoska D., Stalio B., *Porodin: kasno-neolitsko naselje na Tumbi kod Bitolja*, Bitolj (1960), 55, 61; Naumov G., *Neolithic visual culture and rituals*, in Naumov G., Fidanoski L., Tolevski I., Ivkovska A., *Neolithic communities in the Republic of Macedonia*, (Skopje, Dante, 2009), 98, 102, 110.

This is the only Neolithic altar with a clear depiction of *Cervus elaphus*.[266] The development of hybrid relationship between the stag and some distinct architectonic elements, intertwined through the function of the altar, opens up a series of possibilities for defining the significance of this animal, but also the symbolic features of the living area (abode or oven).[267]

Among the rich ritual assemblage of zoomorphic representations from the classical Lengyel site of Santovka (Slovakia), there are small clay altarpieces bearing animals (possibly deer) with two symmetrical but opposite heads.[268] They belong to the Early Copper Age and are dated to 4600-4400 cal. BCE.[269]

Another example of this type was found in Bošovice (Moravia, Czech Republic).[270] The heads are aligned parallel on an altar from Hradiště (Moravia, Czech Republic).[271] In both cases, the animals are deer or cattle.

[266] The protomes have been attached to the front corners of the artifact during its reconstruction. According to their appearance the species of the animal represented cannot be confirmed with certainty. Our interpretation is suggested by the applied antlers, the accented ears, the elongated muzzle and the short tail, typical of the red deer (see also Naumov G., *Visual and Conceptual Dynamism of The Neolithic Altars in The Republic of Macedonia*, in Nikolov V., Bacvarov K., Popov H. (eds.), *Interdisziplinäre Forschungen zum Kulturerbe auf der Balkanhalbinsel*, (Sofia; Nice, 2011, 109. The Porodin protomes were previously interpreted as the heads of aquatic animals, snakes, birds, and turtles. Grbić M., Mačkić P., Nadj Š., Simoska D., Stalio B., *Porodin: kasno-neolitsko naselje na Tumbi kod Bitolja*, Bitolj (1960), 62; Garašanin M., *Centralnobalkanska zona*, in Benac A. (ed.), *Praistorija jugoslavenskih zemalja II: Neolitsko doba*, Sarajevo: Svjetlost – ANUBiH (1979), 112, pl. VI, 4; Gimbutas M., *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 6500–3500 B.C.*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974) *[*1982 republished as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe]*, 101; Bánffy E., *Notes on the connection between human and zoomorphic representations in the Neolithic*, in Biehl P., Bertemes F. (eds.), *The Archaeology of Cult and Religion* (Budapest, Archaeolingua, 2001).

[267] Naumov G., *Visual and Conceptual Dynamism of The Neolithic Altars in The Republic of Macedonia*, in Nikolov V., Bacvarov K., Popov H. (eds.), *Interdisziplinäre Forschungen zum Kulturerbe auf der Balkanhalbinsel*, (Sofia, Nice, 2011), 107.

[268] Pavúk J., *Umenie a život doby kamennej* (Bratislava, Tatran, 1981), fig. 63; Idem, *Santovka. Eine beteutende Fundstelle der Lengyel-Kultur in der Slowakei*, in *Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt*, 24 (1994), fig. 5a-d.

[269] Merlini M., *Neo-Eneolithic Literacy in Southeastern Europe: an Inquiry into the Danube*, Biblioteca Brukenthal XXXIII, (Alba Iulia: Ministery of Culture of Romania and Brukenthal National Museum, Editura Altip, 2009), 466.

[270] Podborský V., *Neolithische Kultsitten der Bevölkerung im mährischen Gebiet*, in Schlette F., Kaufmann D. (eds.), *Religion und Kult in ur- und frühgeschichtlicher Zeit*, (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989), 184, fig. 5/1.

[271] Podborský V., *Pravěké dějiny Moravy* (Brno, Muzejní a Vlastivědná Společnost, 1993).

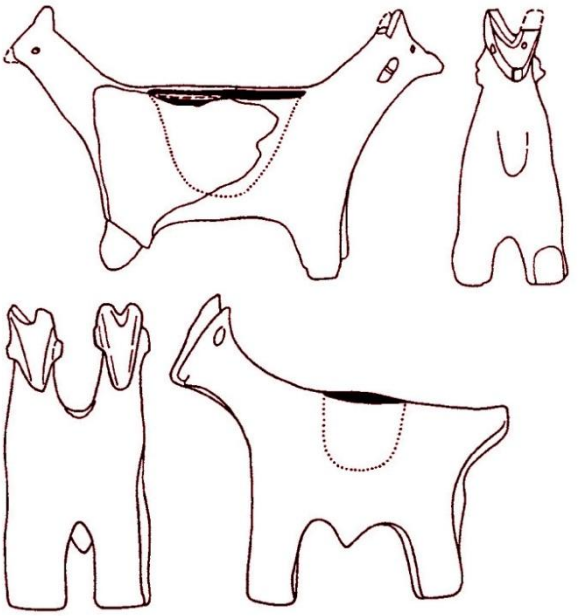


Image 41. *Clay statuettes of pairs of cattle from Bošovice and Hradiště (Czech Republic).* Podborský V., *Pravěké dějiny Moravy* (Brno, Muzejní a Vlastivědná Společnost, 1993).

Zoomorphic figurines often received less aesthetic attention from the craftsman / craftswoman than the more attractive anthropomorphic representations and were modeled quite roughly. Hence, the identification of the species is rarely conclusive. However, sometimes the ambiguity or ambivalence of the human/zoomorphic head is intentional. See for example the deer / human two-headed "Y"-shaped statuette placed as terminals of Early Vinča altars from Crnokalačka Bara (near Ražanj, Serbia).[272] It is a typical case where the ambiguity is deliberate, expressing the dual nature (human and animal) of these ritual figurines.[273]

[272] Tasić N. N., Tomić E., *Crnokalacka Bara* (Krusevac, Belgrade: Narodni muzej, 1969), fig. 14/5, 14/8.

[273] Significant of this typology are two specimens produced by the Vinča site. A terracotta vertically perforated stand characterized by two masked heads (VI millennium BCE) was engraved with signs of the Danube script. Tasić N. N., Tomić E., *Crnokalacka Bara* (Krusevac, Belgrade: Narodni muzej, 1969), pl. XIV; Gimbutas M., *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 6500–3500 B.C.*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974 *[*1982 republished as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe]*, 117, 275, fig. 79. The same settlement yielded, in the mid phase of its development (early V millennium BCE), a terracotta human figurine with two masked heads of animal. It is marked with signs of the Danube script and has remains of red paint (Vasić, *Vinča II*, 1932-1936 (1933), pl. 86, fig. 323; Gimbutas M., *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 6500–3500 B.C.*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974 *[*1982 republished as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe]*, 287, fig. 90).

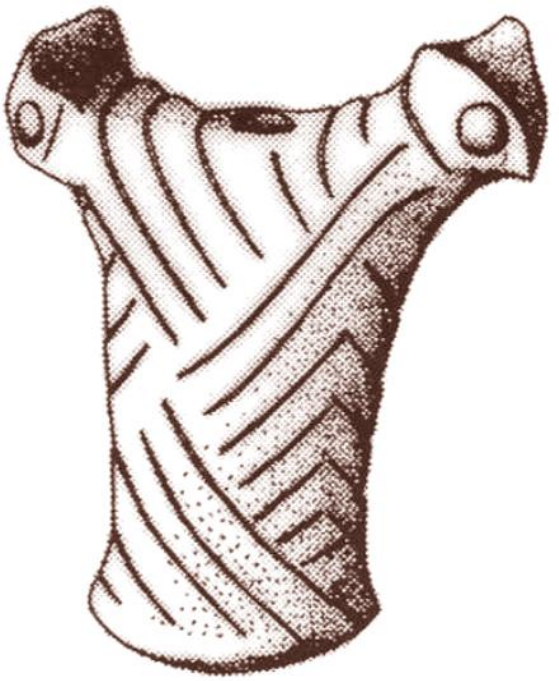


Image 42. *Early Vinča statuette with two heads with double nature (human and animal) from Crnokalačka Bara (Serbia). Tasić, Tomić, 1969: fig. 14/5, 14/8.* Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

6.B.c Handles of vessels

Concerning the animal heads employed as lid handles, Eszter Bánffy established a connection between them and the polycephalic altarpieces, interpreting the former as the two-dimensional variant of the latter. The double-headed animal figure slowly developed as handles of vessels starting from the protome form on zoomorphic altarpieces.[274]

An in-depth discussion was fueled by the discovery of a small,[275] flat, unusual clay animal statuette in 1993, during the excavation of a waste pit in a large settlement of the youngest Lengyel culture in Transdanubia (Hungary): Zalaszentbalázs-*Szőlőhegyi*.

[274] Bánffy E., *Notes on the connection between human and zoomorphic representations in the Neolithic*, in Biehl P., Bertemes F. (eds.), *The Archaeology of Cult and Religion*, (Budapest, Archaeolingua, 2001), 57.
[275] The figurine is 5,7 cm high and 9,3 cm long.



Image 43. *Early Lengyel two-headed stag from Zalaszentbalázs-Szőlőhegyi (Hungary).* Bánffy, Goldman, 2003, fig. 24.

The artifact belongs to the Lengyel III culture of the Middle Copper Age (4400-4300 BCE).[276] It depicts a cervid with one body and two heads. The second head is attached where the tail should be. The front and rear legs of the animal are made up of a piece of clay each. The male genital organs are emphatically represented in the middle of its belly. Eyes and mouths are not shown, but the ears appear in the form of small round applications on either side of the heads. Although the tops of the heads are somewhat damaged, the pairs of horns in the form of divided vertical protrusions are clearly visible, indicating that the animal is a young stag, a ram, or a billygoat. The double-headed object is not a three-dimensional sculpture standing on its own, but was used as the handle of a vessel.

The zoomorphic bicephalic lid handles are typical of the Moravian Lengyel culture. In the Western area, a vase handle almost identical to the Zalaszentbalázs protome was found in the early Lengyel site of Falkenstein-*Schanzboden* (lower Austria),[277] 4700-4600 cal. BCE.[278] An interesting "Y-shaped" piece comes from Santovka (Southwestern Slovakia).[279]

[276] Merlini M., *Neo-Eneolithic Literacy in Southeastern Europe: an Inquiry into the Danube*, Biblioteca Brukenthal XXXIII, (Alba Iulia: Ministery of Culture of Romania and Brukenthal National Museum, Editura Altip, 2009), 466.

[277] Lenneis E., Neugebauer-Maresch C., Ruttkay E. (eds.), *Jungsteinzeit im Osten Österreichs*, Wissenschaftliche Schrftenreihe Niederösterreich (Wien: Verlag NÖ Pressehaus, 1995), 71, fig. 29/4.

[278] Merlini M., *Neo-Eneolithic Literacy in Southeastern Europe: an Inquiry into the Danube*, Biblioteca Brukenthal XXXIII, (Alba Iulia: Ministery of Culture of Romania and Brukenthal National Museum, Editura Altip, 2009), 466.

[279] Pavúk J., *Santovka. Eine beteutende Fundstelle der Lengyel-Kultur in der Slowakei*, in *Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt*, 24 (1994), fig. 4/4.

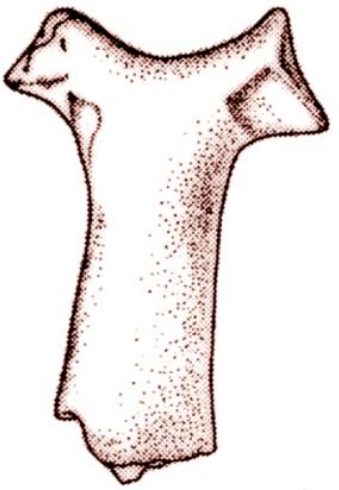


Image 44. *Double headed "Y-shaped" piece from Santovka (Slovakia). Pavúk J., "Santovka. Eine beteutende Fundstelle der Lengyel-Kultur in der Slowakei", Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt, 24, 1994*. Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

Zoomorphic lid handles are also quite common in the Eastern Lengyel area. Private collectors have accumulated numerous fragments of such objects in the area next to Zengovarkony and Moragy (Southern Transdanubia).[280] One of the pieces is a simplified form of the double-headed type under discussion. Zoomorphic bicephalic handles of vessels are also found in the settlement of Polgár–*Csőszhalom* (Eastern Hungary), which was a sort of center of interaction and mediation between the late Lengyel culture and the Eastern Hungarian Tiszapolgar culture.[281]

From such a wide distribution of two-headed protomes, Eszter Bánffy inferred that this unusual zoomorphic representation was widely employed not only in the assemblage of the Lengyel-Moravian painted pottery, where it had its

[280] Dombay J., *Die Siedlung und das Graberfelder in Zengővarkony. Beitrage zur Kultur des Aeneolithikums in Ungarn*, Arch. Hungarica, 37 (Budapest, Akademiai Kiado), 1960, pl. 31/9, 11. Bánffy E., *Notes on the connection between human and zoomorphic representations in the Neolithic*, in Biehl P., Bertemes F. (eds.), *The Archaeology of Cult and Religion* (Budapest: Archaeolingua, 2001), 55.

[281] Raczky P., Meier-Arendt W., Kurucz K., Hajdú Zs., Szikora Á., *Polgár-Csőszhalom – A Late Neolithic settlement in the Upper Tisza Region and its cultural connections. Preliminary report (Egykéső neolitikus lelőhely kutatása a Felső-Tisza-vidéken és annak kulturális összefüggései)*, in *Jósa András Múzeum Évkönyve*, 36 (1994), 234.

origin, but also in neighboring cultures.[282] The production of vessels handles with bicephalic animals reached artistic heights in the area during the Bronze Age.

6.B.d Bronze Age trophies

A privileged subject of the Late Bronze Age Nuragic art is the deer, the adult male with large branched horns. Cervine protomes often adorn the prow of "navicelle" (boat models), which we now know at times to be lamps.[283] Bronze stag figures with a double head characterize the votive swords, typical oplolatric insignia (i.e., emblem of the cult of weapons).[284] Their subtlety and fragility did not allow for their military use, but only for display on acroteria of sanctuaries or on models of nuraghi. This type of weapon was also intended for the parades, as it often appears among the armaments carried by "warriors with rapier and shield".[285]



Image 45. *Nuragic votive bronzes. From left: two double cervine protomes on rapiers; opolatric insignia (i.e., emblem of the cult of weapons) on a rapier; archer on a bicervid figurine hoisted on a rapier; two double cervine protomes on rapiers. After Lilliu G., Sculture della Sardegna nuragica, Nuoro Ilisso, 1966*. Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

[282] Bánffy E., *Notes on the connection between human and zoomorphic representations in the Neolithic*, in Biehl P., Bertemes F. (eds.), *The Archaeology of Cult and Religion* (Budapest, Archaeolingua, 2001), 55.
[283] Donati L., Bruschetti P., Mascelli V., *Luci dalle tenebre, dai lumi degli Etruschi ai bagliori di Pompei* (Camucia, AR: Tiphys edizioni, 2021).
[284] Lilliu G., *Sculture della Sardegna nuragica*, Nuoro Ilisso (1966), 364-367.
[285] Merella S., *Le armi*, in Moravetti *et al.*, Moravetti A., Alba E., Foddai L., *La Sardegna nuragica: storia e materiali* (Sassari, Carlo Delfino editore, 2014), 308.

The "Trophy of Padria", from the XIII/XII century BCE, is a masterpiece of great symbolic and artistic value.[286] This votive insignia consists of a long straight central sword ending at the top with the tip of a dagger and two oblique side swords. The three swords are arranged in a fan shape. The cardinal sword is surmounted by a large plaque with two opposing deer protomes. The plate has a quadrangular shape, widened at the top in a sinuous line due to the design of the cervine backbone and heads. The short horns of the stag protomes converge backwards, the necks are short and smooth, the heads are slender and pointed, the eyes are globe-shaped.[287] This work of art was found in Padria (Sassari), in the locality of Sos Cunzados or Funtana Coberta, in ancient times perhaps a source or a sacred well.[288]



Image 46. *The "Trophy of Padria", from the XIII/XII century BCE.* Galli F., *Padria. Il museo e il territorio* (Sassari, Carlo Delfino editore, 1991), 9, fig. 5.

[286] Zervos C., *Civilisation de la Sardaigne* (Paris, Editions Cahiers D'art, 1954), 325, figs. 399-400; Lilliu op. cit., 364-367, figs. 512-513; Lo Schiavo F., *Il Museo archeologico G.A. Sanna di Sassari* (Piedimonte Matese (CE), Carlo Delfino editore, 2000), 118-119, fig. a p. 120. The piece is kept in the Sassari, Museum Nazionale "G. A. Sanna".

[287]The quadrangular plaque is completed by two symbolic doors that could be opened and, at the bottom, by a series of rings from which some pendants are hung.

[288] Moravetti A., Alba E., Foddai L., *La Sardegna nuragica: storia e materiali* (Sassari, Carlo Delfino editore, 2014).

As reported by Giovanni Lilliu, "... It is impossible to define the meaning of this sort of "labarum"... One would be tempted to see in the object of Padria the abstract image of a god of war, whose external signs were weapons and whose double totemic was the deer".[289] According to Francesca Galli, the artifact was perhaps dedicated to the "hunting magic".[290]

Hilts of some votive swords representing an archer standing on the body of a deer with head protomes at the two ends are held in the National Archaeological Museum of Cagliari. They belong to the Nuragic Civilization and were forged in the IX-VIII century BCE. The deer supporting the archer is made up of two half bodies – necks - heads in opposition with wide antlers and legs modeled in thin rods. The necks of the animals are very long, stretched and wrapped in concentric little rings.

The meaning of these objects is not yet clear. Giovanni Lilliu put forward three possible hypotheses: the image of a war divinity; the portray of a warrior chief with two stags sacrificed in honor of the divinity; the synthetic representation of "hunting magic" (the deer that the warrior chief was intended to capture and then sacrifice, perhaps as a thank for a victory in war).

We present the most interesting piece, because one protome head has short, stunted antlers, whereas the other has gorgeous elongated antlers with many points. The first head might belong to a fawn, while the other to a mature male deer, to symbolize the two key phases of life. Otherwise, the first head might belong to a deer during antler stage regrowth (spring), whereas the other might belong to a mighty hart with big antlers during the mating season (autumn). According to this second interpretation, the hilt synthetizes the topic moments of the seasonal change of the bisected solar year (the vernal equinox and the autumnal equinox). The masterpiece comes from the storage room inside the sacred enclosure of the Abini-Teti Nuragic complex (Nuoro). The body of the stag is fixed on a rapier with a long and thin blade, but elastic and resistant. The necks of the deer are decorated with metal wire, the eyes are globe-shaped, and the horns are lunate on the ears. The archer's right hand is raised in orant position and the left hand holds the bow, resting it on the shoulder for greater comfort. On his head he wears the typical helmet with long erect horns.[291]

The storage room inside the sacred enclosure of the Abini-Teti Nuragic complex revealed another important insignia, consisting of a double, standing figure of a bronze stag fixed on the tip of a votive sword. It was forged in the X/VII centuries BCE. The body of the two-headed deer is made up of opposing

[289] Lilliu op. cit.
[290] Galli, op. cit, 16.
[291] Lilliu, op. cit, 367- 370, n. 259, figs. 515-517 ; Bernardini P., Tronchetti C., *L'effigie*, in AA.VV., *La civiltà nuragica* (Milan, Electa, 1985), 213, 224, n. 18, fig. 18; Torelli M., *Il rango, il rito e l'immagine. Alle origini della rappresentazione storica romana* (Milan, Mondadori Electa, 1997), 13, 32, 73-79, fig. 3; Foddai L., *Sculture zoomorfe. Studi sulla bronzistica figurata nuragica* (Milan, Documenta edizioni, 2008), 79, 85-86, 135-136, 164, fig. 14.

figures arranged in a single composition. It is hollow and perforated to provide a support for a votive sword to be inserted. The branched antlers stand out with a vertical lunate development on the elliptical and hollow ears. The heads have a square muzzle, on which globe eyes, an open mouth and a dangling tongue are represented.[292]



Image 47. *The deer supporting the archer is made up of two half bodies representing a fawn and a stag. Nuragic Civilization, IX-VIII century BCE.*
https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Spada_votiva_nuragica.jpg.
Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

Concluding our review on the illustration of the bicephalic stag in the Danube civilization and around, we can sum up an observation quite useful for the interpretation of the male deer that attend the labor of Mother Ranaldi. The zoomorphic figures investigated in the survey suggest that the masters who reproduced them started from the careful observation of living animals. However, the depiction of key anatomies such as antlers and genital organs contrasts with naturalistic features and contradicts any everyday experience. These stags have not only a double head, but also a double nature. They are partly a realistic

[292] Lilliu op.cit., 360-361, n. 252, fig. 506; Lo Schiavo F., *Il Museo archeologico G.A. Sanna di Sassari* (Piedimonte Matese (CE), Carlo Delfino editore, 2000), 55, note 9; Foddai L., *Sculture zoomorfe. Studi sulla bronzistica figurata nuragica* (Milan, Documenta edizioni, 2008), 79, 85-86, 133, 135-137, 166- 167; Moravetti A., Alba E., Foddai L., *La Sardegna nuragica: storia e materiali*, (Sassari, Carlo Delfino editore, 2014), 414.

representation, as there are some indications of their species, gender and age. Yet, they remain fictional creatures.[293]

The imagery of the Danube civilization on the two-headed deer documents that in prehistoric times a dividing line between realism and imagination was not sharply drawn. The strange bicephalic entities had a hidden meaning that cannot be interpreted by the representation itself, but by the idea on which the representation was based and the message that was to be conveyed. Even in the paintings of the Ranaldi Shelter, the phantasmagorical bicephalic stags appear much more significant than if they had been depicted with a realistic figure. The two heads express the dual nature (supernatural and natural) and exceptional masculine power of the harts that flank Mother Ranaldi. Bicephalic animals were probably thought to have a higher productivity in mediating between the physical, human domain and the supraphysical, superhuman domain.

6.C Pre-Bronze and Early Bronze Age double-headed stags from Central Asia

Esther Jacobson has proposed that the deer image is an indigenous and archaic symbol with a strong cosmological meaning that goes back to the social practice and identity building of the Neolithic societies in Western Siberia with an original visual and mythical energy.[294] Significant hints on double-headed stags with elongated and branched antlers come from some Pre-Bronze or Early Bronze Age petroglyphs located in Central Asia.

A composite petroglyph with a bicephalic stag is found in the Baga Oigor rock art complex (Mongolian Altai).[295] It was engraved in the rock art site Tepsei II, in the Wolf's Ravine of Mount Tepsei.[296]

The deer runs straight to the right as evidenced by the slightly shorter front leg and the stretched hind leg. The rump is elegantly rounded. Luxurious antlers are flowing along the back. The beaked muzzle is raised and an eye is depicted. Its body is filled with numerous rounded strokes, imitating the curl of its coat. The additional head displays an almost vertical set of graceful antlers. It was added in a second time in place of the tail. The master was very meticulous, the picketing was very accurate.

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[293] Bánffy E., *Notes on the connection between human and zoomorphic representations in the Neolithic*, in Biehl P., Bertemes F. (eds.), *The Archaeology of Cult and Religion* (Budapest, Archaeolingua, 2001), 55.

[294] Jacobson E., *Siberian roots of the Scythians: Stag image*, in *Journal of Asian History*, 17 (1983); Idem, *The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia: A Study in the Ecology of Belief* (Leiden, New York, Koln, Brill, 1993); Idem, *Petroglyphs and the qualification of Bronze Age mortuary archaeology*, in *Archaeology, Ethnology, and Anthropology of Eurasia*, 3 (11) (2002).

[295] Van Hoek M., *The Book of Janus. Polycephalic Creatures in Rock Art* (Oisterwijk, Holland: Maarten Van Hoek, 2020), 15, fig. 7B.

[296] Sovetova O., *О НОВОМ НЕОБЫЧНОМ ПЕРСОНАЖЕ С ТЕПСЕЯ*, in *Научное обозрение Саяно-Алтая*, n. 1(9) (2015), 91, fig. 1, 1; Van Hoek M., *The Book of Janus. Polycephalic Creatures in Rock Art* (Oisterwijk, Holland, Maarten Van Hoek) (2020), 15, fig. 7C.

Compared to the truly phantasmagoric animals of the same area and period, chimeras that combine features of different creatures, this image looks quite naturalistic. Olga Sovetova interpreted the form of the bicephalic stag as a kind of "Cosmic body". Each anatomical organ is related to a certain element of the universe.[297]



Image 48. *Bicephalic deer from Tepsei II (Mongolia).* Sovetova, op. cit., 91, fig. 1, 1.

Another remarkable petroglyph with a two-headed stag with exaggerated antlers occurs in the Baga Oigor rock art complex (Mongolia). The heads are looking in opposite directions.[298]

A relevant example of a double-headed deer is found engraved on the lower part of the stone n. 22 from the Dashqishlaq collection in Gobustan (about sixty kilometers south of Baku, Azerbaijan), dating to 4000-3000 BCE. Next to this superhuman deer, a human figure stands out with three deer horns engraved on the top of the head and hands raised in praying position. The body of the character is made up of geometries very similar to Mother Ranaldi: two round parts and a rectangle divided in half. One foot is extended.[299]

[297] Sovetova, op.cit, 93.
[298] Ibidem, 91, fig. 1, 3.
[299] Rzayeva op.cit., 191.



Image 49. *Two-headed stag with exaggerated antlers from Baga Oigor rock art complex (Mongolia).* Sovetova, op.cit., 91, fig. 1, 3. Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

A similar tri-horned human with lifted up hands can be found among the rock paintings of Absheron in Gobustan, dating to 4000-3000 BCE.[300] This unusual type of tripartite deer antler on human figures served as a visual synecdoche.



Image 50. *Tri-horned human figure with hands lifted up from Absheron (Azerbaijan).* Farajova M., *Rock Art of Azerbaijan* (Baku, Aspoliqraf, 2009), 23.

Notable for our survey is a stone pintadera,[301] perhaps a fishing sinker, made of fine-grained sandstone with talismanic character. It was found in Mingechevir, XIII-VIII centuries BCE.

[300] Farajova, op. cit., 23. Rzayeva op. cit.,191, fig. 39.



Image 51. *Mistress of Animals flanked by two stags with two heads / necks supported by a single torso from Mingechevir, XIII-VIII centuries BCE (Central Azerbaijan). Mistress of Animals on a Scythia openwork plaque from Alexandropol' barrow (Ukranian Steppe), ca. 400 BCE. Hasanov, 2018: 69, figs. 9,6 and 9,7.* Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

A woman with hands raised to the sky (worship pose) is flanked by two stags with two heads / necks supported by a single torso.[302] The animals are portrayed one above the other, in profile.[303] The character's dresses diverge at the bottoms, forming a long robe.[304] In literature, the figure is often supposed to wear a pointed hat. However, it is possible that she has hair gathered in the shape of a tall cone pointing skyward, as for the Kurgan woman buried individually in Tashanta II/3 (Chuya steppe in Southwestern Siberia), dated between the III and I centuries BCE.[305] A pin with the head of a cervid or a caprid decorated the top of this special woman's hair. Antlers or horns are missing, but are indicated by holes. A diadem of opposed symbolic conception (a double-bodied, single-headed animal) was set somewhere near the lower front of her conical hair. The fringe under the animal's

[301] Aslanov, Vaidov and Ione believe that this piece resembles a clay pintadera in its function. Aslanov G. M., Vaidov R. M., Ione G. I., *Drevniĭ Mingechaur (epokha eneolita i bronzy)* (*Ancient Mingechaur of the Eneolithic and Bronze Ages*) (Baku: Azerbaijan SSR Academy of Sciences, 1959) XXXVII, 2.

[302] The manufact is kept in the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan (Baku); inventory n. AF 27042.

[303] Rzayeva op. cit.191, fig. 38; Hasanov Z., *The Prehistory of Knowledge Exchange between the Caucasus, the Black Sea Region and Central Europe: First Millennium BC*, in Gutmeyr D., Kaser K. (eds.), *Europe and the Black Sea Region*, Studies on South East Europe, vol. 22 (Zürich: LIT VERLAG GmbH & Co. KG Wien, 2018), 69, fig. 9,6.

[304] Hasanov, op. cit., 137.

[305] Kubarev V. D., *Kurgany Ulandryka [Mounds of Ulandryk]*, Nauka, Novosibirsk, 1987. Kubarev V. D., *Aral-Tolgoi: novyi pamyatnik naskal'nogo iskusstva Mongolii [Aral-Tolgoi: new monument the rock art in Mongolia]*, in *Arkheologiya, etnografiya i antropologiya Evrazii*, 1(29) (2007), 199-200, pls. XCI-XCII; Jacobson E., *The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia: A Study in the Ecology of Belief* (Leiden, New York, Koln, Brill, 1993), 72-73.

throat suggests a deer, a goat or ram. Holes on its head received leather antlers or horns. Around the woman's neck, exquisite rampant felines were the terminal element of a necklace.[306]

The result was a tall, conical structure with the following imagery at display:

cervid or caprid
caprid or cervid
feline-feline

Svetlana S. Bessonova suggested that the character carved in stone at Mingechevir might illustrate the Mistress of the Animals as on a silver mirror from Kelermes (mound n. 4).[307] It occurs also on a Scythia openwork plaque with fluted ornaments from the Alexandropol' barrow (Ukranian Steppe), ca. 400 BCE. The piece is made of gold-covered iron.[308]

The goddess-stags motif was very persistent in the region, with ethnographic evidence. It was replicated even on ceramics found in 1950 in Dagestan and on XIX century Russian embroidery.[309]

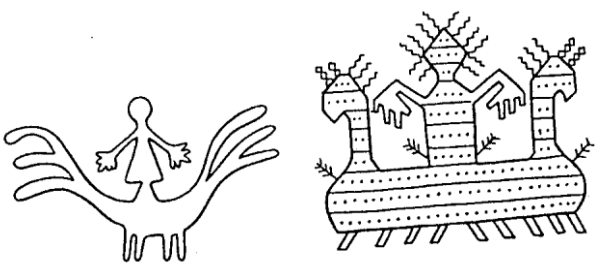


Image 52. *On the left, Mistress of Animals acrobatically rides a bicephalic stag from Dagestan. On the right, Mistress of Animals astride a two-headed stag in Russian embroidery.* Golan, op.cit., 384, fig. 466-5, 466-6.

[306] According to Vladimir Kubarev's interpretation. Kubarev V. D., *Kurgany Ulandryka [Mounds of Ulandryk]*, Nauka, Novosibirsk, 1987. Kubarev V. D., *Aral-Tolgoi: novyi pamyatnik naskal'nogo iskusstva Mongolii [Aral-Tolgoi: new monument the rock art in Mongolia]*, in *Arkheologiya, etnografiya i antropologiya Evrazii*, 1(29) (2007), 199; Jacobson E., *The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia: A Study in the Ecology of Belief* (Leiden, New York, Koln, Brill, 1993), 72-73. The element is not visible in the drawing I publish from Rzayeva, op. cit., 191, fig. 38.

[307] According to Svetlana S. Bessonova, the winged Scythian goddess Argimpasa is represented on the mirror as the Mistress of the animals. Bessonova S. S., *Religioznye predstavlenija skifov [Religious views of the Scythians]* (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1983), 81–83, fig. 8, 1. See also Hasanov Z., *The Prehistory of Knowledge Exchange between the Caucasus, the Black Sea Region and Central Europe: First Millennium BC*, in Gutmeyr D., Kaser K. (eds.), *Europe and the Black Sea Region*, Studies on South East Europe, vol. 22 (Zürich: LIT VERLAG GmbH & Co. KG Wien) (2018), 69, fig. 9,2.

[308] On the plate, the winged goddess is displayed with a deer to each side of her. See Bessonova, op.cit., 81–83, 87; Hasanov, op.cit., 69, fig. 9,6; Golan, op.cit., 379: fig. 452-2.

[309] Golan, op. cit., 384, fig. 466-5, 466-6.

A magnificent celestial woman mounting on a two-headed, two-necked phantasmatic stag is depicted on a bronze buckle found in Racha (Georgia), ca. 1000 BCE.[310] The Mistress of the Animals, with her hands raised, touches their twisted antlers and is also accompanied by two upright snakes and a dog.[311]

In the traditional hunting lore of the Caucasus Mountains, the Mistress of the Animals owns wild animals, both prey and predators, and looks after them. Sometimes, she assumes the form of a deer (or an ibex) in front of the chosen hunter and lures him into the forest or high into the cliffs. There, she takes on the appearance of a woman, the Queen of the Forest. There, she gives the hunter her token or amulet – here in the shape a clasp - in which she has settled. Thus, an unusual success and safeness begins to accompany the hunter.



Image 53. *Mistress of Animals mounting on a two-headed, two-necked phantasmatic stag. Bronze buckle from Racha (Georgia), ca. 1000 BCE. Hunt, 2003: 79, fig. 4.* Graphic elaboration Merlini M.

The Mistress of the Animals is willing to allow a certain number of the beasts she owns to be killed by hunters, as long as their numbers are within the limits of population sustainability. When she gets angry at hunters for overhunting or because the animals had been killed without her permission, she punishes the pursuers by not sending them deer. However, killing her companion animals is always taboo. They are traditionally marked in some way. In the buckle, we

[310] The masterpiece is held in the State Historical Museum, Moscow. Inv. 54321. Collection of P. Uvarova. According to Hunt, it belongs to the Old Hellenistic Period (Hunt D. G., *The Association of the Lady and the Unicorn and the Hunting Mythology of the Caucasus*, in *Folklore*, vol. CXIV, n. 1, (2003), 75-90.

[311] Khidasheli M., *Brinjaos mkhatvruli damushavebis istoriisatvis antikur sakartveloshi* (*Towards the history of the artistic treatment of bronze in Antique Georgia*) (Tibilisi, Metsniereba, 1972), 67; Hunt, op. cit., 79, fig. 4; Golan, op.cit., 383, 384, fig. 466-1.

recognize a tri-circular mark on the chests and unusually intertwined and twisted antlers.[312]

A unique bronze pendant unearthed from a burial in the village of Dolanlar (Karabakh, Azerbaijan) consists of two connected half-bodies of stags with oversized antlers (VIII-VI century BCE).[313] The elegant bicephalic deer was possibly an ancestral animal to be worshiped. It points to the existence of a totemic twin deer cult, as described by Maria Nikolaevna Pogrebova.[314]



Image 54. *Two connected half-bodies of stags with oversized antlers on a bronze pendant from Dolanlar (Azerbaijan), VIII-VI century BCE.* Ibrahimov T. I., *Sculptural Arts of Caucasian Albania* (Baku: Ecoprint, 2019), 8.

Bicephalous reindeer with prominent antlers occur among the conventional symbols on Lapp shamans' magic-drum membranes made of reindeer hide.[315]

[312] Virsaladze E. B., *Gruzinsky Okhotnichy My if i Poeziya (Georgian hunting myths and poetry)* (Moscow, Nauka, 1976), 32-33.
[313] The masterpiece is kept in the State Religion History Museum, Baku.
[314] Pogrebova M. N., *I Zakavkazie v rannem zheleznom veke* (Moscow, Nauka, 1977), tab. XV, fig. 1. Rzayeva, op. cit., fig. 46.
[315] Mundkur B., *The Bicephalous "Animal Style" in Northern Eurasian Religious Art and its Western Hemispheric analogues*, in *Current Anthropology*, vol. 25, n. 4 (1984), 467, fig. 46 (detail).

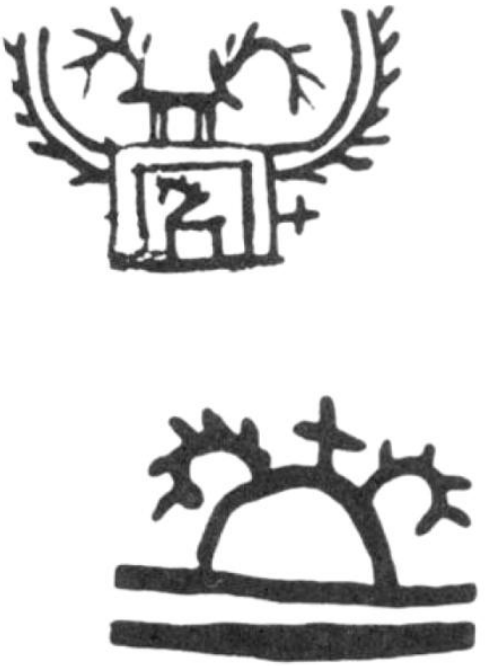


Image 55. *Bicephalous reindeer with prominent antlers occur among the traditional symbols on Lapp shamans' magic-drum membranes.* Mundkur, op. cit., 467, fig. 46 (detail).

In Central Asia, the pan-Eurasian cult of the Sky Deer has Paleolithic roots.[316] A large number of myths of the later religions place the Deer firmly in the Sky, recognize its ability to fly between different dimensions and universes, accept its authority to mediate between different classes of beings, and link it to good luck and prosperity. Its celestial nature is indicated by its multi-head. Its celestial power is illustrated by its crowns of antlers.[317]

A *perm'-yugra* platelet from the Bön religion (VI-IX c. CE) confirms this imagery, depicting a powerful tri-headed Celestial Deer carrying fawns that fall to earth from the sky to populate the forests.[318]

[316] Ermakov D., *Bө and Bön: Ancient Shamanic Traditions of Siberia and Tibet in their Relation to the Teachings of a Central Asian Buddha* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2008).
[317] Ermakov D., *Bön as a multifaceted phenomenon: looking beyond Tibet to the cultural and religious traditions of Eurasia*, in *Bon, Zhang Zhung and Early Tibet Conference* 10 September 2011, (London, SOAS, 2011).
[318] Rybakov, op. cit., 56. Ermakov, op. cit., 5, fig. 9.



Image 56. *Bön tri-headed Celestial Deer carrying fawns that fall to earth from the sky.* Ermakov op.cit., 5, fig. 9.

A two-headed white deer was one of the five heraldic, immortal and supernatural creatures that illustrate the cosmic five phases theory of Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE).[319] See, for example, a carved stone in the famous tomb excavated in 1953 at Yi'nan (Shandong Province). The heads that distinguish fantastic beasts from those seen in real life range from two to nine in Han art.[320]

In brief, Pre-Bronze and Early Bronze Age petroglyphs and artifacts from Central Asia confirm the bicephalism of the mature red deer with majestic antlers as a key expression of its heavenly nature. Some scholars interpret this peculiar typology of deer as a "Cosmic entity", a “Sky Deer”. There are close ties between this phantasmagoric animal and the prehistoric goddesses, especially the powerful Mistress of the Animals. Sometimes she assumes the form of the Birthing Mistress of the Animals, reminiscent of the archaic Deer-Mother that appeared as a gravid supernatural deer. She mounts the double-headed stags and touches their glorious intertwined and twisted antlers with a magical gesture. The bicephalic hart is her celestial companion animal.

Double-headed cervids are also found in zoomorphic and abstract drawings of northern North America. I have selected as an example four small flat pebbles from the Ipiutak culture (Northwestern Alaska), ca. 250 C.E., each depicting a two-headed reindeer. They are crudely engraved in an abstract and schematized style. However, their design is very complex and meaningful as portraying "supernatural

[319] Silbergeld J., Wang E. Y. *The Zoomorphic Imagination in Chinese Art and Culture* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2016), 70.

[320] Zhu Xilu, *Jiaxiang Han huaxiang shi (Han pictorial stones from Jiaxiang)* (Jinan, Shandong meishu chubanshe, 1992); Sun J. Z., *Age of Empires: Art of the Qin and Han Dynasties* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2017), 219.

guardian spirits" associated with astral and plant symbols.[321] James Louis Giddings argued that " they possibly symbolize prayers or divinations".[322] According to Balaji Mundkur, these Ipiutak cervid motifs are stylistically analogous to Iron Age artifacts of Northern Eurasian art and derived from them. As an example, we can refer to the aforementioned bicephalic reindeer on the drum membrane of the Lapp shamans.

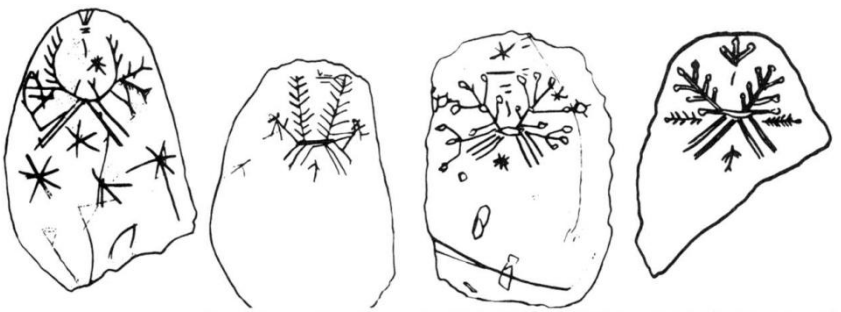


Image 57. *Double-headed cervids on flat pebbles from the Ipiutak culture (Northwestern Alaska), ca. 250 C.E.* Mundkur op. cit., 469, fig. 61.

Concluding chapter 6, we can observe that the double head and doble neck of the Ranaldi stags, which solemnly attend the event of a divine birth, not only mark their high-ranking status within the herd hierarchy, but make explicit their liminal nature, connecting the human and superhuman spheres, expressing seasonal rotation, and symbolizing the cycle of birth and re-birth. Therefore, they protected the vital cycle and its rhythms, the nature in its unchanging balance from rebirth to rebirth.

Mother Ranaldi and the pair of flanking superhuman and wild animals make up a sacred triad, anticipating the ancient religious iconographic composition of a divine female character between two mature male figures of deer.[323] This theme was widespread and persistent in ancient Eurasian art. In later religious imagery, the goddess in the three-figure composition is sometimes depicted winged, while the stags are running or in a heraldic posture as in the images already presented.[324]

Finally, a key gesture of Mother Ranaldi has to be decoded. She gives birth outdoors in a herd of mature male red deer while she touches with her sacred hands

[321] Giddings J. L., New York: *Ancient men of the Arctic*, Knopf (1977), 147-149, fig. 61; Mundkur, op. cit., 469, fig. 61.
[322] Giddings op. cit., 147-149.
[323] See the imagery illustrating the statuettes of a divine Mother who gives birth to a baby while sitting on her birthing throne and flanked by two felines. See this typology in Çatal Höyük and in Hotărani.
[324] An emblematic triad with a winged goddess and a couple of running stags is the abovementioned Scythian openwork plaque from the Alexandropol' barrow.

two of them, which are bicephalic and flank her. She touches the tail of n. 5 and one of the heads of n. 7. In the almost coeval Iberic rock art, there are numerous images representing women, often with flared skirts and globular headdresses, who touch antlered stags with their hands or feet, or place themselves their midst or next to them.[325] In Solana de las Covachas (Nerpio, Albacete), at least five women with a very stylized waist and globular headdresses touch male deer with bushy antlers or stand next to them. It was a ritual and magical gesture related to ceremonies of symbolic fertilization and the acquisition of the genetic capacity of the deer.[326] At Solana de las Covachas as well as in the Ranaldi paintings, the achievement of the believers was to be imbued with the sacredness and fertility of the deer under the power of a feminine divinity.[327]

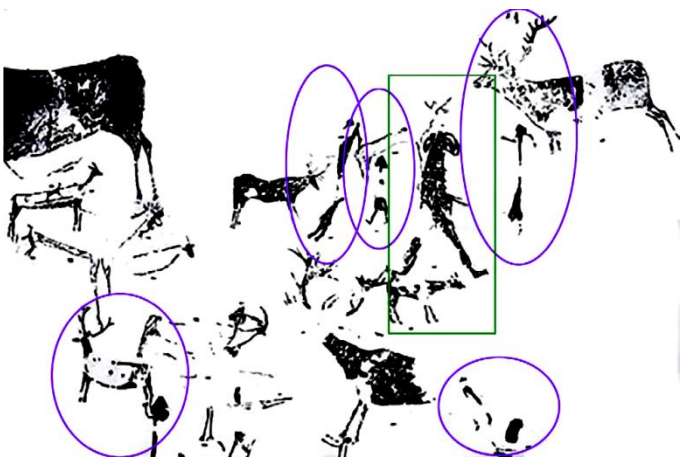


Image 58. *Women who touch deer in a ritual and magical gesture within a clear religious context. Solana de las Covachas (Nerpio, Albacete).* Jordán Montés J. F., *Arte rupestre levantino: mitogramas y territorios. Minateda como encrucijada*, in Viñas R., Vallverdú (eds.), *I Jornades Internacionals d'Art Rupestre de l'Arc Mediterrani de la Península Ibèrica*, Centre d'Interpretació de l'Art Rupestre de les Muntanyes de Prades (CIAR), Montblanc (Tarragona): Museu Comarcal de la Conca de Barberà, 2019, 274, fig. 4.

[325] For a survey, mainly in the Alto Segura and Alto Guadalquivir, see Jordán Montés J. F., *Arte rupestre levantino: mitogramas y territorios. Minateda como encrucijada*, in Viñas R., Vallverdú (eds.), *I Jornades Internacionals d'Art Rupestre de l'Arc Mediterrani de la Península Ibèrica*, Centre d'Interpretació de l'Art Rupestre de les Muntanyes de Prades (CIAR), Montblanc (Tarragona): Museu Comarcal de la Conca de Barberà (2019), 272 ff.

[326] Idem, *Narraciones de mitos entre los cazadores postpaleolíticos de la Península Ibérica: cuerpos estilizados, escalas con miel, animales en trance de muerte y la Hija del Señor del Bosque*, in *Cuadernos de arte rupestre: revista del Centro de Interpretación de Arte Rupestre de Moratalla*, 3 (2006), 89.

[327] Idem, *Arte rupestre levantino: mitogramas y territorios. Minateda como encrucijada*, in Viñas R., Vallverdú (eds.), *I Jornades Internacionals d'Art Rupestre de l'Arc Mediterrani de la Península Ibèrica*, Centre d'Interpretació de l'Art Rupestre de les Muntanyes de Prades (CIAR), Montblanc (Tarragona): Museu Comarcal de la Conca de Barberà (2019), 273.

Juan Francisco Jordán Montés interprets the five female characters at Solana de las Covachas as possible deities of great magnitude. The central female figure stands slightly downward in front of a stylized and silhouetted, yet powerful, male deer, that stands protectively above her. Another goddess acts by sitting on a doe (depicted in the lower area of the green rectangle in the figure I publish).

Similarly, the Prehistoric Goddess of Childbirth painted at the Ranaldi Shelter is surrounded by a herd of supernatural stags to ritually celebrate the event. If she is an Earth Goddess, they came down to her from the sky. Alternatively, the divine labor takes place in the sky. The place of the divine birth remains an enigma.

Conclusions

The Ranaldi Shelter was isolated and quite inaccessible in the mountain range. However, the local groups of deer chasers had there an excellent visual dominance over the whole wooded hunting ground. The main corridor movements of the herds between low-altitude pasture and the higher-altitude plateau was partially detected without being discovered by them.[328] The red deer also had obligatory crossing points due to the landscape configuration. The source of the Brandanello stream is at a short distance away. Towards Castel Lagopesole, the current extensive and fertile plain was occupied in the post-paleolithic era by a lake.[329] Observation, prediction and control of animal movements could be achieved leaving them undisturbed.

Isolation and dominant view made the shelter a perfect ceremonial venue. It was possibly used for ritual purposes, in analogy with what is documented for the nearby Latronico caves in the middle Sinni valley (Basilicata)[330] and in several Apulian caves.[331]

Birth was probably one of the most magical, miraculous, and blessed events of post-paleolithic spirituality. The paintings of the Ranaldi Shelter give distinct visual evidence to a universal subject in Mesolithic and Early Neolithic

[328] The annual vital area can exceed 5000 hectares (Istituto nazionale di biologia della selvaggina Alessandro Ghigi, 1991).

[329] Ranaldi F., *Riparo sottoroccia con pitture preistoriche al Tuppo dei Sassi o Serra Carpino in agro di Filiano*, in *Bimestrale dell'Amministrazione Provinciale di Potenza*, novembre-dicembre, 1967.

[330] Bianco S., *Testimonianze archeologiche nel territorio di Latronico,* Mostra Documentaria, Galatina: Congedo Editore, 1984; Grifoni Cremonesi R., *Le Grotte di Latronico*, in Quilici L., Quilici Gigli S. (eds.), *Carta Archeologica della Valle del Sinni. Atlante tematico di topografia antica*, X suppl., fasc. 7, Rome (2000).

[331] Grifoni Cremonesi R., Radina F., *Guide archeologiche: preistoria e protostoria in Italia*, 11, Puglia e Basilicata (Forlì, A.B.A.C.O, 1995); Larocca F., *La grotta di Santa Barbara a Polignano a Mare (Bari). Evidenze funerarie e cultuali di età neolitica*, Istituto Italiano di Preistoria e Protostoria, *XLVII Riunione Scientifica Preistoria e Protostoria della Puglia, 9-13 ottobre 2012*, sezione poster, Ostuni (BR), 2012.

rock art: the woman during childbirth and the wild animal (which, given the context data, is the adult male red deer).

The pivotal personage of the drama, Mother Ranaldi, shares her iconographic canon with the Goddess of Childbirth in prehistoric art. She is a majestic, naked, corpulent and fertile anthropomorph who is squatting to deliver a new life pouring between her generous thighs. The depiction of the newborn's head emerging from the vagina emphasizes her female power to procreate.

Mother Ranaldi is delivering among a herd of stags, indicating the relevance of the wild nature in supporting birth with the figurative use of adult male cervids regally living in the forest. Behavioral studies of red deer indicate that they often live in the same area in distinct herds. The hunting communities of the Ranaldi Shelter possibly associated this location with a specific group of red deer. The stag was perhaps their totemic animal. Its sacred genealogical status gave them the rights to control the territory and the valley below.

Mother Ranaldi is birthing flanked by two adult stags which she touches with her sacred hands. They are not ordinary animals. As assessed by our survey, their supernatural nature is described by three features: exaggerated unnatural antlers, clear epiphanic seasonal nature, and bicephalism. They were symbol of worship to the Goddess of Generation, acting as her *paredri*.

Ranaldi Shelter was used during the seasonal relocation of cervids, which in spring moved from the plains to the summer mountainous ranges. Then, the red paintings had not only a sacral value. Having totemic nature, they carried out a territorial function by contributing to organize and mark the territory, possibly also associated with appropriate rituals.[332]

[332] They represented a territorial sign, but it doesn't mean that they carried topographic representations.