Departure from the Homeland: Indo-Europeans and Archaeology

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IN SEARCH OF INDO-EUROPEAN STRUCTURES: THE DUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WARRIORS’ KNEES

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Aware as we are that the study of material representations as elements of the Indo-European ideological tradition is a delicate field, we consider it worthy of interest when it forms a part of structural research. Our study is based on two points of departure: firstly, a series of images of warriors with phalli on their knees and showing gestures linked with aggressiveness or fecundity, and secondly a series of linguistic, ideological, and mythical items showing a symbolism of the knee as the seat of virility in its aggressive or reproductive aspect. We explain how these two series fit together and attempt to establish a comparative methodology when textual and iconographic items from different cultural traditions and historical periods are involved.

Introduction

Based on the parentage of the languages that belong to the Indo-European family, studies derived from this field are divided into two main branches. One (involving archaeologists, linguists, or historians of religions) rummage through the prehistory of the Eurasian continent in search of the pathways and historical moments that led to the creation of the cultural-linguistic ancestry known throughout history. Others (formed mainly by historians of religions or mythologists) use the comparative method to seek out the Indo-Europeans in aspects of the cultures that inherited from them.
The difference between these two perspectives is radical, and both suffer from weaknesses. The first suffer from the uncertainties that underlie the reconstruction of the historical processes of prehistory, and in fact many archaeologists prefer to ignore the Indo-European question and recognize the impossibility of precisely dating the mechanisms of formation and diffusion of the Indo-European languages. Yet when the second group study historic cultures, the value of detecting Indo-European features becomes doubtful if it does not refer to a prehistoric past. Both groups explain the facts they study through their origins, with an evolutionist approach dealt with in different ways. For the first, the historical processes are specific, and must be tracked step by step (ideally) from the Proto-Indo-European origins until arriving at historical situations. For the second, the Indo-European genetic explanation is conceived as the milieu of the features detected in two or more cultures of Indo-European cultures that are mutually explained, without any concern for the transitional stages.

In this paper, we suggest that the structural approach—something that in itself is by no means novel—is a way of overcoming the dichotomy between both approaches. When something that at first appears insignificant is reflected in language, religion, or material culture in different traditions and historical moments, then this forms a part of a shared tradition, part of a more complex puzzle destined to explain the dynamics of the historical, social, and cultural processes involved. In this way the structure identified serves as an analytical element, susceptible to form a part of a line of explanation with other more or less similar phenomena in other types of areas, whether prehistoric or historical.

It is true that in Indo-European studies there is a predominance of research based on words and texts. However, the same people who spoke or wrote also represented figures who, in many cases, were previous to them, and are much more widespread than the texts analyzed by academics of the Indo-European world, which respond to the particular logic of the diffusion of writing amongst the speakers of the Indo-European languages (Sergent 2005). For this reason, from our perspective an essential step forward is the integration of material culture in the construction and identification of structures. We consider that this step contributes towards overcoming the dichotomy indicated in Indo-European studies, as it introduces an extensive corpus of documentation in the sphere of possible studies. Moreover, it may be legitimate to start out, as we hope to demonstrate, using a graphic representation that is apparently anomalous or imperfect from cultures without writing, to finally reach a conclusion of structural nature.

This means that images and texts cannot be related in an arbitrary manner. Any passage from a text in a language from the Indo-European family cannot explain a motive found in any corner of the continent populated by speakers of this family. This means it is necessary to define the conditions by which it is legitimate to establish relationships between heterogeneous documents, and so we would propose a type of comparison in six stages:

1. **HYPOTHESIS** - Observation of a relation between shapes in the present.

2. **SELECTION OF SHAPE AND MATERIALS** – Demarcation and identification of a shape: repetitions, sub-types, frequency in time and space, and a differentiation between the fundamental and the ornamental.

3. **SEPARATE ANALYSES OF CONTENTS** – Intentions, meanings, etc.

4. **SEPARATE ANALYSES OF CONTEXTS** – How can the results of the contents-analysis be explained from a societal perspective? Start from the shape and move outwards to investigate context and function. What possibilities are there?

5. **COMPARISON AND TESTING OF POSSIBLE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE LOCAL EXPRESSIONS OF THE SHAPE** – Which relations in the contents and contexts of the materials are supported and which are not?

6. **EVALUATION OF HYPOTHESIS**.

**Hypothesis**

We base this work on the formal similarity seen between two figures seen in places as distant as Valcamonica (Italy) and Bohuslän (Sweden) as shown below:

![Figure 1](image-url)

Figure 1: (A) The figure to the left is part of rock 4 at Dos Sotto Laiolo (Pasparo, Valcamonica, Italy), photo Fossati. (B) Villanovan "paleta" or razor. (C) Panel from Åby (Sotenäset, Bohuslän, Sweden).93
There are two similarities between the image from Camunna and Áby: on the one hand, there is the particular position of the phallus, halfway down the leg, and on the other, we know that razors like the one carried by the figure from Italy are decorated in the culture of Villanova with swastikas (Farina 1998), while the image from Áby is related to a shape similar to a swastika. Focusing on the first detail, is this due to a mistake made during its creation, or just chance? Should we attach importance to a detail that does not have it, or on the contrary, is it the result of a precise intention by the sculptor? We will concentrate our attention on a more precise region.

Bohuslän is the area in Scandinavia with the highest variation of different rock art figures and where representations of human figures are most abundant. Though cut in granite, the figures express many different details, attributes, and gestures that were undoubtedly important for the identification, interpretation, and significance of the human figures and their displayed activities. Considering the object of our study, the phallic knee, in order to exclude faults in documentation, it is necessary to make a survey of the phenomena that will confirm if the expression is intentional, repeated and if there are variations within the expression. Reviewing the published documentation on rock art panels in the sub-regions of Tanum, Kville, Svenneby, Bottna, Askum and some examples from Backa, Sotenäs and Ske (Högberg 1995; Bengtsson and Högberg 2000; Bengtsson et al. 1997; 1998; 2002; Milstreu and Prohl 1996; 1999; Fredsjö et al. 1971; 1975; 1981; and Fredell 2003: appendix, and we could visit and then include panels in Ske in Sotenäs and Backa). We may summarize that the phallic knee and some possible variations of it are present on some 27 panels, scattered throughout the area and including 35 human figures, meaning that the phenomenon is not very common, but it is too frequent and widespread to be considered unintentional, and the existence of possible sub-groups strengthens the hypothesis of a symbolic-semantic function. The expression is most common in Kville Hundred, found in 13 out of 35 human figures, followed by Tanum with nine representations. We may conclude that the existence of phallic knees in rock carvings in Bohuslän is not a fault in documentation, and it is more likely that this type of expression has been excluded from the documentation as it lacks any significance for us today, and it is possible that a small detail such as this, in some cases, may be confused with damage or a natural groove on the panel and therefore dismissed.

This leads us to choosing a methodological option that is not “innocent.” If we accept that we are only able to explain similarity using things that are similar, and the element used as an explanation must be as close as possible to the thing explained, then all we are left with is a statistical exploration of the rock carvings, in the hope that it provides an answer in itself. If, on the contrary, we set our sights on other horizons, the question is which should we consider as legitimate, which should we reject, and why.

For the sake of brevity, we may affirm that both options are based on firm foundations. The first is based on methodological caution, and the hope of making new findings, and would be the option preferred by most archaeologists. The second is based on an option that seeks answers, accepting the risk of making errors along the way. Finding ourselves using this option, we propose the hypothesis that we are faced with deliberate representations of symbolic forms articulated around the knee, within the framework of reflections on the symbolism of different parts of human anatomy. In order to support this hypothesis, we will continue in line with the method proposed.

**Selection of shape and materials**

Apart from the phallic knee we found four other sub-groups related directly or, in the case of one group, indirectly to the knee, which deserves to be considered in this investigation as many factors indicate that these five groups of expressions are related in context (fertility or warrior) and chronology (approx. 700-500 BC).

The “phallic knee” is the most geographically widespread group. It is found in relation to nine human figures (Fig. 2A and E). A variant of this may be the representation of a snake biting or appearing out of the knee (Fig. 2B). This is the least frequent group, only found on two panels. The group with the highest number of representations (13) is where the knees and/or hips/thighs and/or ankles of the human figure are depicted as being bound together (Fig. 2C, E, G). A variant of this may be what here is called “ship bound” (Fig. 2D, G). The composition is made up of a larger human figure, or just its lower body, placed over a ship figure. The lines composing the hull of the ship figure are either related directly to the hips/thighs and knees of the figure or to the knees and ankles of the figure. In one case, the famous “spear-god” from Litsleby, the human figure is a giant (more than 2 meters in height) and the ship, probably dating from an earlier period, is seen behind the knees, binding them together. The positioning of human figures over ships in Bohuslän always follows this layout (the ship hull is never placed behind the upper body or the head of the human figure) and so it should most likely be considered as an intentional incorporation. It is also interesting in this case to note how the position of the ship behind the human figure “plays” with the image of transformation of the ship’s stems, as while binding
the lower body with its hull it simultaneously creates a phallus and a sword (Fig. 2D), which are the two attributes that are most common (13 and 19 cases) in relation to human figures with knee-related expressions. The last sub-group is the “indirect” group that is only found in three cases (Fig. 2F). In two cases the knee is clearly marked by a cup-mark, a common practice used to emphasize different body parts (phallus, foot, arm, shoulder, groin, head, and knee) in Bohuslän, and in the third case the knees are oversized. Tanum is the only parish that features all five subgroups. The other parishes (except Askum) all have the three more common groups.

![Figure 2: Examples of knee-related expressions in Bohuslän. (A) Kville (Värnikshede), (B) Tanum (Aspeberget), (C) Tanum (Vitlycke), (D) Kville (Torsbo), (E) Kville (Yllene) (F) Tanum (488) and G: Bottna (Valeby). The figures are a montage of different scales and types of documentation (tracings, rubbing, and photo).](image)

It is impossible not to note the similarities between these 35 investigated human figures. Even though they are scattered over different regions in Bohuslän, they reveal a coherency in terms of shapes and attributes, as well as in displayed gestures and contexts. A chronologically datable detail that some of the figures display is the sword with a winged cape (Fig. 2A, 4A). This is dated by Montelius (1917) to the last period of the Bronze Age, i.e., 700-500 BC. This type of sword-cape is often related to a gesture where the human figure’s hand is placed on the sword hanging from the waist. This gesture is also seen in relation to many of the figures we investigated. Other details or attributes, commonly dated to the final periods of the Bronze Age, are helmets (horned or with capes), rounded shields, belts and three- or five-fingered hands raised upwards. The practices of making giant figures (considering the fact that they often are placed over older and smaller ships in relation to the human figure) and depicting the head with a cup-mark are also considered to belong to the same period. Some direct relations to other figures such as a swastika (Fig. 1A-C), and horses with elongated bodies and short legs (Fig. 2A) confirm the suggested chronology.

However, it is also important to bear in mind the symbolic associations knees have in other cultures, as these shed light on issues that may become blurred if we focus purely on one area. For this reason, we will consider two images that are of interest to us in their modified form: representations of humans, with snakes sticking out of their knees. These are the descriptions of figures from specialists:

**Figure 3A. Padgett in Perseus Digital Library: Harvard 1925.30.125:**
In the centre, a quadriga and charioteer are shown in full frontal position, with the horses and chariot wheels drastically foreshortened. On either side of the quadriga are pairs of dueling hoplites, each of whom wears a cuirass, red greaves, and a red Corinthian helmet. In the group to the right, a spearman attacks to the left, his left foot raised to trample his enemy, who has fallen to one knee. The apparent loser carries a Theban shield, the victor a round shield with a large serpent device in the centre. The fight must be a legendary one, as chariots were not used in contemporary combat. (For variations of the motive see Chase 1902: entries n° xxxiv, cxx, cxxi, cxxxvi).

**Figure 3C. Thevenot (1955:27):** We see a naked, strongly muscled warrior, in a seated posture. He wears a rounded helmet, and rests his left arm on an oval shield. In his right hand he lifts a cup running over with boiling water. Facing him, resting over the right knee of the character, is a horned snake, rising in the direction of the cup. Dr. Morlet has no doubt that this fragment was an attempt by the potter to recreate the lost statue of Mars Vorocius. This is possible, although what is sure is that it is identified with a god. The helmet and shield are typical of Mars, who is often represented naked. The seated position is exceptional, although not impossible; it may have been chosen to make the god of the season appear more majestic.
Before continuing, it is important to note that this is an equivocal similarity. On one hand, the warlike attributes of the Gallic Mars are clear, although the figure is not in an aggressive posture. On the other, in the Hellenic figure the snake rises out of the shield, although the position of the knee coincides with the point from where the snake is rising. However, both images require explanations inspired by M. Mauss (1950:365-88) writing on the "techniques du corps." We will continue with the Greek cup. The posture of the warrior over his adversary, while appearing natural, is contrary to the usual posture for Greek warriors. Warriors facing decisive action are described as firmly planted on both legs from the Iliad (12.458) to the archaic poetry (Archilocus fr. 60 D) or the Spartan world (Tirtaeus fr. 6-7 D, 11; fr. 8 D, 21-22, in verse 31, the position of warriors stood in line is described according to their feet). In the classic period, Thucydides (5.73) emphasizes how static the Spartan battle formation was, making it an anecdote on how it highlighted the value of the lame in combat (Plutarch, Moralia, 211C, 234 E). In a mythological context, Euripides (Heracles, 162-4) played with the idea of the position of the feet to define the warrior, and he presents madness as a wild dance (Heracles 836-7, 878-9, 892-5, 1085). This idea had already appeared in the Iliad (16.617-18), as considering the enemy as a dancer was an insult leveled at survivors (24.261), and cowards were characterized by wobbling on their feet (Iliad 13.281), in the same way as dancers.

We may therefore argue that our hoplite shows a hubris unbecoming a good warrior. The snake represents this mood. In fact, the head of the Medusa, surrounded by snakes, is frequently seen on Greek shields, starting with that of Athena. On the cup, one of the snakes around the Medusa's head appears from the image on the shield, doubling the effect of the spear to finish off the vanquished enemy. However, the Medusa is frequently found on supports such as enemides, precisely at knee height, πόρπυρα or shield supports at elbow height (Kunze 1950:65-72), and regularly on the façades of arcaic temples (Lapalus 1947:74-105). W. Deonna (1939) explained how the common denominator in these situations was the angular shape (in Greek, γόνα means 'angle', 'joint', 'elbow') that was susceptible to magic attacks that the Medusa would shrug off. In this case, on our cup we see how the snake appears magically, from an image, and naturally, as it appears from the place it frequents on the shield. But it also appears from the elbow and the knee, if we consider the warrior's posture. If we also consider the easy association between snake and phallus (Sterckx 2005:135-39), we see a similar symbolic concept in the Greek image to that seen in the rock...
carvings that interest us, emphasizing the aggressive aspect that may be represented by the erect snakephallus.

Moving on to the example from Gaul, amongst the motifs represented on other fragments from the same pottery, we find a horned snake surrounding a triangular figure, perhaps a breastplate, or appearing out of a warrior’s knee (Morlet 1958). And so, the places where ancient Greek snakes appear now reappear here in the context of Romanized Gallic traditions.

The symbolism of the snake in Gallic and Celtic culture is more complex. According to C. Sterckx, the Celts associated snakes with the phallus and male creative power, as may be seen in the phallic appearance of the divine serpent of Celtic and Romano-Celtic iconography, and its well-documented rams’ heads (Sterckx 2005:137-39). Beyond this immediate iconic value, the snake personifies a complex social and physiological symbolism, as it represents the soul, based in the brain and the spine, and which is “ejaculated” in order to achieve procreation at cosmic and theological levels, or in terms of social practice. These concepts are the ideological basis for the Celtic custom of cutting off their enemies’ heads, as they were the vessel that contained their souls, as explained throughout Sterckx’ s book (2005).

And so, the images found on pottery lead us to two different symbolic universes. One, the Greeks’, oriented towards the expression of an unbridled violence, within a well-defined code of morals and gestures, and another of the Gallic-Roman world, oriented towards a manifestation of fecundity and creative power, also related to war but in a less direct manner, with the purpose of combat lying in eliminating the reproductive and vital capacity of the enemy.

And so, are these observations relevant in order to interpret the phallic-knees in Bohuslän? It is quite clear that the rock carvings of Bohuslän were made intentionally with the purpose of communicating meaning, but without contemporary literate sources to complement the pictures, we are liable to interpret their meaning more or less directly. Bearing in mind the assertion by Peabody (1975:1) that “despite the implications of its name, literature does not seem to have been the invention of literate people,” we can assume that pictures, as a means of communication, could have been used to communicate the same things that the written texts later came to express, namely speech. It is therefore logical to search for structures within the pictures that are found within language and its different forms of communicative expressions (Fredell 2004). We may do this while studying groups and sub-groups within intentional expressions and their compositions, scenes or other forms of divisions or additions that create similar and different contexts for the studied figures. This will provide us with a stable and testable ground for our interpretations.

The hypothesis that the “phallic knee” is an expression of the duality of male virility-fertility-aggressiveness—seems to be highly applicable in the figures investigated in Bohuslän. All of the figures in the different sub-groups may be related either to a fertility scene or composition (figs. 2A, C, F, G) or to a warrior (figs. 2B, D, E), and in some cases simultaneously to both. For example, there is a scene where a phallic warrior with sword, shield, and helmet has his knees held together (Fig. 4A). His phallus is connected to an antler of a deer. The antler of the deer is known to have been a symbol for fertility, since every year the stag looses its antlers, which grow back within three months.

Figure 4: (A) Combined warrior-fertility composition from Kville (Södra Ödsmål). (B) Group of warriors from Kville (Hede), where three of them with horned helmets have their lower bodies bound. The figure is a montage in different scales.

Choosing between images of fertility or warriors, we find that 19 figures of our Scandinavian sample are warriors and that 16 are related to fertility-scenes (of which 5 also are sword-bearing warriors). The warrior contexts are most common in Kville. Of the five sub-groups, the only one dedicated exclusively to warrior contexts is the human figures with a snake-figure biting or appearing out of the knee. The warrior, when presented in a context with another warrior or warriors, always appears within a group. The warriors are never seen confronting each other, and always facing in the same direction (Fig. 4B). The “phallic knee”-group shows an over-representation in favor of fertility scenes while the “ship-bound” group does the same, but in favor of the warrior context. An
interesting detail in the fertility-related compositions or scenes, is the presence of female figures in 7 out of 16 examples (Fig. 2C, G, S). Women are rarely depicted on panels, but within this context they seem to be quite common. Another interesting observation among the fertility scenes is that in some cases only the lower body is depicted—as if the upper body, the arms and the head were superfluous (Fig. 2G). This type of depiction is limited to fertility compositions. This reminds us of the Irish story of “Lugaid three stripes” and its Indo-European background, where the three functions (sovereignty, force, and fertility) are situated within the body: the first in the head, the second in the arms and the upper body, and finally the third in the lower body, where logically also the reproduction organs are located (Dumézil 1986:351-53; 1983:228-38). The “bound” figures all show the binding on the lower part of the body and they are often placed where it is possible to bend the body (the waist, the knees or the ankles). In one case the binding of knees can be seen between two human figures—a woman and a man (Fig. 2C). In all cases, where the expression is limited to one knee (not bound), it is the knee placed in front of the other knee that has the alteration (phallus, snake, or cup-mark). This could be considered as an intentional choice of the most active and forward-going knee.

Separate analysis of context

Inspired by E. Durkheim’s sociology, A. Meillet (1866-1936) and his followers believed that words did not work as simple phonetic “operators.” and that it was of interest to identify the social practices, institutions and precise gestures that determined their original meaning, and therefore “material” significance in many cases. Following this methodology, these researchers produced a series of studies relevant for us.

The first was the work of the Celtic scholar J. Loth (1923), who indicated that in Irish Gaelic glún means ‘knee’ and ‘generation’ and that the expression glún ar ghlún is translated as ‘from generation to generation’. Also, the verb glúinighim, derived from glún, means ‘engender’, ‘descended from’, from the ancient Celtic glínus. He suggests that this is a case of homonymy, as glún ‘knee’ is different from glín ‘generation,’ as in Latin genus and genu have a different meaning.

A. Meillet (1926) returned to the theme in a study offering a sociological explanation of the Latin genuinus, ‘authentic’, as ‘that which is received on the knees’, referring to an ancient rite of recognition of a son, based on the belief that the knees are the seat of all strength. Other Latin terms such as genus, progenie, gigno-genus, fit within this semantic field. The next year E. Benveniste (1927) indicated that in

Sogdian, a language of the Iranian family, knee is pronounced as z’nwk- and son as z’tk, although in written texts the expression z’nwk’ z’tk means ‘son of the knee’, a form he relates to the ancient Irish glún-dalae ‘infant of the knee’ and the Anglo-Saxon expression cnéo-maeg—constructed from cnéo, ‘knee’—meaning a direct relative. The fundamental institution is presented in the Odyssey (19.399-404):

Now Autolycus, on coming once to the rich land of Ithaca, had found his daughter’s son a babe new-born, and when he was finishing his supper, Eurycleia laid the child upon his knees (ἐπὶ γούνασι) and spoke, and addressed him: ‘Autolycus, find now thyself a name to give to thy child’s own child; be sure he has long been prayed for’ (see Iliad 9.455).

In turn, M. Cahen (1927) explained the formula of the ancient Norse setja i kné as the action of placing a child on your knees, as seen in the Homeric passage quoted above, and which was the origin of the composite verb knesetja, ‘to adopt’, and the noun knéssetingr, ‘adopted son’. He also indicates that the nurturing father takes possession of the baby entrusted to them, and that it is a rite on the verge of extinction. At a later date, R.B. Onians (1988:175-80, etc.) developed the Hellenic aspect by confirming that knees were considered as the seat of virile strength in its aggressive form, or connected with fecundity, procreation or social recognition, as in the texts mentioned above. Here we may add for clarity’s sake a passage from Euripides (Electra, 1208-1215) where γόνιμα μέλεα are the ‘generative members’. However, also a mythological dimension may also be added to the socio-linguistic backdrop.

A myth from Athens and another from Teuthys in Arcadia emphasize the creative power of Athena’s thigh. One of the versions of the birth of Erycto-nius tells how Hephaestus wanted to seduce Athena, but she resisted, although the by now excited god ejaculated on her thigh. Athena soaked up the god’s semen with a cloth which she then wrung out over the earth, leading to the birth of Erycto-nius, who she then nursed, and from whom the Athenians received the name of the goddess (Loraux 1981:28-9, 57-60). In Arcadia, Teuthys, tired of waiting to board ship in Aulis to fight against Troy, began his journey home; Athena then attempted to make him change his route, and Teuthys, annoyed, struck the goddess on the thigh with his spear, but Athena appeared to him in dreams with her thigh in bandages. Arcadia then suffered a terrible
famine, until an image of the goddess was erected as seen in the dream (Pausanias 8.28.5-6).

Both myths indicate the thigh of the goddess as the seat of fecundity: directly in Athens, where the muscle is a type of ephemeral yet fecund womb, and indirectly in Arcadia, where damage to the thigh caused a correlative sterility in the land of Arcadia.

Figure 5: Rock carving from Bottna (Gisselgårde) representing a synoptic scene (a composition where different events in a story are presented simultaneously, as used, for example, on the Greek vases, Snodgrass 1998, or in rock art, Fredell 2004:140-44), where a man (dated by his attributes to around 700-500 BC) is directed towards a woman. The man has a phallic knee from which another irregular line is connected. The woman has an elongated object (perhaps a spear) penetrating her thigh. The lower body above the woman could be an attribute of fertility. The position of the woman's feet (and the feet of the attribute) is representing the known, and in rock art used, gesture of giving birth (open, separated legs seen from the front). Could this scene perhaps be a Scandinavian counterpart of the myth of the birth of Eryctonius? We are aware that this Athenian myth is closely linked to the Athenian ideology, and that the hypothetical relationship between the Swedish carving and that myth certainly implies the existence of earlier oral versions of the "mytheme" without "polis-Athenian" implications: a matter open to new research.

In turn, C. Sterckx (1997) has brought together equivalent versions of these tales in Mediaeval Celtic literature and Arthurian literature, where there are several tales of kings who were injured in their knees or thighs, making it clear that in each case the injury represented a type of castration leading to the sterility of the kingdom.

These myths also seem to indicate something else: the relation between the leg, foot, and knee of certain figures with the landscape. Kings who had been incorrectly seated on the throne, Athena injured in her thigh, led to the sterility of their domains. However, the legitimate Celtic kings guaranteed the fecundity of their kingdoms. This theme, with its Indo-European roots (Campanile 1981:27-52; Sauzeau, unpublished) is represented in Greece in the government of the just king according to Hesiod (Works and Days 225-38), in a similar way to the virgin Athena receiving the help of the earth as a womb for Eryctonius.

Returning to our rock carvings, we see that the contexts and function of knee-related expressions in the rock art of Bohuslän indicate that they are being used as symbolic attributes for the two sides of male virility, to strengthen and clarify the meaning of a scene or composition. Perhaps the same may be said about the carvings from Cambunia? In our example (Fig. 1A), the 'paletta' has been interpreted as a semantic device to stress the image of the victorious warrior (Simoes de Abreu et al. 1988:18). The question open for investigation is if there also are knee-related expressions related to fertility contexts.

The structure of the phenomenon investigated in Bohuslän is highly semantic, with different sub-groups and a certain contingency depending on the spatial relationships or proximity of closely-related figures, and perhaps the phenomenon is also being used in synoptic scenes rendering orally transmitted stories (Fig. 5).

In comparing and testing possible relationships between the local expressions of the shape, we should not forget how difficult the images we are attempting to interpret are. How legitimate is it for us to suggest that one development or another in relation to the images on pottery included in the discussion, or in relation to the linguistic or mythological concepts presented, refer to the rock carvings found in Bohuslän and Valcamonica? The answer is that it is impossible to say, although we should not consider the whole argument void just for this reason.

A more positive response is possible, on the condition of accepting a less rigid question: that we recognize that it is impossible to offer a specific explanation of the images, but at the same that it is legitimate to suggest that they are a variation of a sequence of images and ideas based on the symbolism of the human anatomy, particularly the phallus and the
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knee, and underlying those formal aspects, important aspects of the Indo-European warrior ideology.

If we accept this, then we have taken a major step forward, as we have eliminated the possibility of considering these images as the result of a mistake or pure chance. On the contrary, they are representations that were sought out by artists who were immersed in a complex ideological framework, some of whose component we have been able to establish in our discussion.

We have already concluded that the duality of male virility—fertility and the aggressiveness of the warrior—is clearly echoed within the figures with knee-related expressions in Bohuslän, and that these sides are not separated (as in the Greek and Celtic-Gallic examples). It is therefore possible to say that the idea of male potency residing within the knee was a known and expressed fact in the rock carvings of Bohuslän.

Other related issues, such as the fact that the knee-related expressions are not too common, and that they seem to be relatively limited in time, lead us to believe that this phenomena was a selected and locally adjusted addition to the more traditional elements and attributes already used in rock art to express these type of characteristics. It is also interesting to note that when comparing the similar expressions in material from Greece, Valcamonica, Celtic Gaul and Scandinavia, they possibly come from the same period, supported by the relative chronology of the rock carvings.

There are also some interesting differences. One is the case with the snake directly related to a warrior’s knee. It is true that all figures within this sub-group in Bohuslän are warriors, but there are only two examples, and in both the body of the snake is located below the knee and not in front/above as in the Greek or Celtic-Gallic examples. In the examples from Bohuslän, the snake appears to be hanging on to the knee and not appearing with force from within it (Fig. 2B). Also, the warrior, in the material from Bohuslän, is never facing or fighting another warrior. They are always shown alone, or in a group of two or more warriors belonging to the same group.

It is obvious that the local adjustments of the phenomenon were very important. In Bohuslän we find five variants of the same expression, used in different contexts, even though all these contexts, in general, may be related either to fertility or/and to male warriors or male strength. There is also one single example of a “bound” woman (Fig. 2G). Perhaps it comes as no surprise that what are bound, on the woman’s lower body, are not her knees but her thighs. The binding of the angles (hips/thighs, knees, ankles) of the lower body with a unifying line or the hull(s) of ship(s) seems to be a Scandinavian phenomenon that we have observed in other rock art centers such as in Trondelag, Norway (Mandt and Ladeen 2005:104-06). The only case, in Bohuslän, where a line is used to connect the knees of two different human beings is in the famous couple on the Vitlycke-panel. This couple is joined by their heads, their arms, the phallus of the man, and interestingly by a line connecting the knees (Fig. 2C). If we apply an Indo-European terminology, a perfect union would be supported by the three functions, which in bodily terms would mean the head, the arms (upper body), and the lower body. The case with the line between their knees is unique. Other examples of couples, depicted on the rocks of Bohuslän, are often only united by the phallus of the man and perhaps by the arms. It is as if the line between the knees was an additional or superfluous attribute, but still important—as if they learned a new word to say the same thing and added it to demonstrate their literacy.

Evaluation of the hypothesis

The map of our graphic record does not coincide with the map of our verbal record. We lack any Roman or Indo-Iranian images that would be important for the verbal manifestations of the relationship between the knee and fecundity (Sauzeau, unpublished). The “Celtic” images are only so at the expense of the recognition of this culture by Alpine carvers and the native traditions of the potter Cinnamus from Vichy, areas that are indirectly related to the Irish testimonies. In Scandinavia we have a whole group of images and examples of the verbal use of the expression “son of the knee,” with these images representing both the aggressive sense and sense of fecundity highlighted by the linguistic data. In Greece we also have the full sequence, both aggressive and in relation to fecundity, in graphic, linguistic, or mythical format.

However, the difficulties of dealing with a record presented to us as the jumbled pieces of a jigsaw puzzle may be at least partly overcome if we consider them as the component parts of an Indo-European structure, and the different iconic, socio-linguistic or mythical sequences, together with other possible variations or expressions—such as a very generalized concept about the physiological and symbolic value of the knee—within the framework of a complex evaluation of the symbolism of the human body, underpinned by a particular idea of the body of the warrior or hero, and its component parts.

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