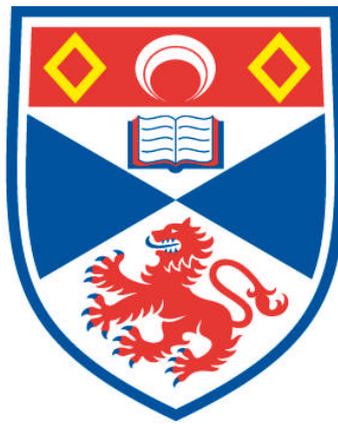


**IMAGES OUT OF WATER : ASPECTS OF THE
INTERPRETATION OF ANCIENT MARITIME GRAFITTI**

Elizabeth Le Bon

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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Abstract

Pictorial graffiti representing ships from prehistory, protohistory and the early medieval period are frequently examined by nautical historians and archaeologists seeking information about ancient ship technology. Examples of the academic discussion and interpretation of these images may be found from the nineteenth century to the present day, in a wide range of studies. Many of these works reflect their writers' casual, even disdainful attitudes to ancient graffiti. This may be seen in their approach to the information which these images appear to contain, which may concentrate, for example, on the certain aspects of particular subjects without reference to details in their immediate or wider contexts, which may have a bearing on the images' form and meaning. In a similar vein, other writers have interpreted ancient ship graffiti using concepts of art, such as the assumption of realism of depiction, which may be inappropriate to some early visual imagery. This thesis argues that ancient ship graffiti need a more detailed and systematic interpretation as both art and artefact before their contribution to nautical history may be more reliably evaluated.

In order to explore the many challenges which these graffiti offer, a multi-disciplinary approach is used, to consider aspects of the relationship between formal art and graffiti, the psychology of image making, symbolism, the philosophy of interpretation, archaeology, and the social meaning of physical context. Following these theoretical discussions, five case studies from a number of different regional and chronological groups have been chosen to provide some examples of many of the issues which were considered.

It is hoped that this study demonstrates that an approach to the interpretation of ancient ship graffiti which avoids a narrow concentration on nautical technology may reveal more of their potential as evidence, not only for the form and use of early ships, but also for other aspects of life in the past.

Declarations

I, Elizabeth Ann LeBon, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 78,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

date 14.2.97 signature of candidate [Redacted]

I was admitted as a research student in Sept 1990 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in Jan 1992; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 1991 and 1997.

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I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Ph.D. in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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The multi-disciplinary nature of this study took me to a number of different university departments. Dr Dave Perrett of the Department of Psychology, Professor Martin Kemp and Mrs Rosemary Muir Wright of the Art History Department, Dr Roy MacGregor of the Geology Department, Dr Colin Martin of the Department of Scottish History, Dr Jim Martin of St Mary's College, Dr Barbara Crawford of the Department of Medieval History, and Dr Li Xiao Chang, academic visitor to Britain, were both generous with their time and endlessly patient with my questions and theories. Also in St Andrews, Fr Brian Halloran drew my attention to an important paper. In Edinburgh, Dr Anna Ritchie gave valuable advice on a difficult problem, as did Dr

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Introduction

Image making is a universal human behaviour whose products and associated concepts have been modified and developed through time and culture, toward what different societies at different times have understood as formal art. Alongside this development, with all its complexities and sophistications, ordinary people have continued their depictive behaviour on a mundane level, observing, recording, and fantasizing in a pictorial way about the objects and experiences of their daily lives. Information has been encoded in these images, often in very simple forms, which may provide access to aspects of the past which might otherwise be inaccessible from the present. The intimate involvement of this picture making behaviour with human cognitive development has been discussed in the academic literature (for example Davis 1986: 193-215; Davidson and Noble 1989: 125-155; Mithen 1996), and these studies have often concentrated on examining the theoretical aspects of the mechanisms which are thought to have been involved. Rather than using these analytical approaches to understand casual image making, however, it is possible to see it from a functional point of view, as a provider of a valuable form of personal and social evidence for those who wish to study the past. The focus of this study is not on image making in the widest sense, but instead is on the problems and challenges which the interpretation of a group of graffiti imagery offers later students.

Nautical historians and archaeologists have referred to ancient pictorial graffiti representing ships as sources of technical information throughout this century, (Shetelig 1904-5: 54-66; Marinatos 1933: 170-235; Haywood 1991: 21, 65, 136; *inter al.*) recognizing their potential as evidence for the form and detail of the ships of the past. However, many people have based their use of these images on a superficial approach to what they appear to show of the form of ancient ships. The style, conventions, and function of ancient art, in terms of the images' design and their

artists' intentions, are rarely considered in these studies. Other writers, in their enthusiasm for particular subjects, have neglected the images' contextual associations, either the compositions in which the graffiti appear, or the nature of the site where they were found.

These approaches may produce conclusions about the information encoded in the images which are unreliable, either because they fail to consider all the evidence, or because they are based on concepts which are inappropriate to ancient visual imagery. This thesis will argue that ancient ship graffiti need detailed and systematic interpretation as both art and artefact, before their contribution to nautical history may be more reliably evaluated. I also hope to demonstrate that some of these images have a potential beyond their role as evidence for past technologies, and may reveal something of their creators' cognitive world.

As evidence for the material culture of the past, pictorial graffiti's greatest strength lies in their creators' potential freedom from the imperatives of organized codes of art, social propriety, and patronage. These images can provide us with a set of unposed snapshots of life in the past, whose richness and vigour may be unmatched in contemporary formal art. Graffiti's limitations, however, relate closely to the uncertainties of their associations, as well as to the difficulty in understanding their creators' intentions. The approximate date, original culture, archaeological context of pictorial graffiti, and the artistic details of their compositions may be either uncertain through the casual and informal circumstances of their creation, or incomplete through the effects of time. The information which they offer, therefore, may be difficult or impossible to relate to material in the archaeological record, or to historical fact. Furthermore, many pictorial graffiti are found in open sites, vulnerable to the whims of passersby who were free to adjust or add to their detail, confusing later attempts to understand the form and detail of the original image. This attribute of uncertain associations may mean that it is difficult or impossible to place a graffito with certainty

in a chronological, cultural or artistic context, a problem which can have serious implications for those attempting to use graffiti as technological or historical sources.

From the middle of the nineteenth century, antiquarians, art historians, and archaeologists have used the term "graffiti" to describe ancient inscriptions and pictures which appeared to have been produced by ordinary people, creating works which were outside the codes and constraints of contemporary formal art or craft processes. From its origins as a technical term, "graffiti" has found its way into modern usage, to describe the more recent equivalents of these early works. Dictionary definitions currently define graffiti by using pejorative descriptions such as "scribbling" (Oxford English Dictionary), and "by schoolboys and idlers" (Chambers Dictionary), to link graffiti to the twilight of human behavior. There are complex modern concepts of what constitutes art underlying these associations. The inappropriateness of some of these concepts to the visual imagery of the ancient world will be discussed in more detail further on. The larger question of whether ancient images may be defined or categorized according to a term which has strong associations with modern concepts of art and social behavior is a valid one, and some of its implications will be discussed in the first chapter of this study.

Usage has certainly given the word "graffiti" a persistence in both academic contexts and everyday speech, and it would seem to have no synonym. Meinardus's experiment with the term "akidographemata", as a substitute for "graffiti" in an academic paper (1972: 29-52), did not lead to its widespread adoption, presumably as it is a cumbersome word, insufficiently apt to displace its predecessor. Some academics, such as Lawrence Nees (1983: 67-91) have avoided the problems of modern associations with "graffiti" by using the more general term "drawing". Shimon Gibson and Joan Taylor, in their recent publication on the archaeology of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Golgotha, which includes a discussion of the Jerusalem ship graffito (1994: 25-47), have used the slightly arcane term "depinto" to

describe the little charcoal and ochre image. Their rationale for avoiding the word "graffito" relates to its dictionary definition as a scratched or scored work, rather than one which is drawn, daubed, or painted. However, the rarity of "depinto" in both common and academic usage, and the durability and perseverance of the term "graffiti" in both contexts, would seem to indicate that attempts to displace it will be doomed to fail.

Identifying pictures of any age as graffiti rather than "real art" seems to be largely an unconscious activity, and it is rare to find any explanation of the term's use in academic discussions of particular works. The identification of particular images as graffiti passes from hand to hand in technical discussions, and it is interesting to note that once the term has been applied, its use is very seldom, if ever, reconsidered. In discussing the distribution of paleolithic cave art through Europe, for example, Paul Bahn and Jean Vertut (1988: 19) note the co-existence of early "graffiti" from proto-history, the Gallo-Roman and medieval periods with prehistoric art in the Gargas cave, but do not describe the characteristics of the later images which led to their definition as graffiti. Perhaps significantly, the authors also do not describe how these later graffiti images were dated, nor for what reasons they were assigned to the periods which were named. These issues will be considered in more detail later in this study.

It was decided that the main purposes of this thesis would be best served by discussion of graffiti from a wide range of dates and geographical areas. Since this study aims to consider the many challenges which these images offer the later interpreter, concentration on one group of graffiti within a close geographical and chronological grouping would not ensure a wide view of the issues which arise. The oldest graffiti which will be examined date from the Mediterranean Bronze Age, and the most recent belong to the medieval period. The majority of the examples were found in Northern European sites. However, for the purposes of comparison some

images will be discussed which are outside these broad geographical and chronological boundaries. The Scandinavian rock carvings depicting ships will not be included in this study, as examination of the images themselves, and their physical and compositional contexts suggests the strong possibility that they were produced as part of a coherent artistic tradition, which may also have had ritualistic associations. In a similar vein, some other prehistoric imagery has been excluded from these discussions, because of the degree of speculation involved in assessing the place these pictures may have occupied in the societies which produced them, and hence in "calibrating" them in terms of contemporary codes of artistic activity or production.

Nineteenth and early twentieth century academics concentrated, for the most part, on the study of inscriptional graffiti, which were used occasionally in paleographic and philological study (Garruci 1856; Corra 1893: 245-260). Pictorial graffiti were largely ignored in English language studies, until G.G. Coulton's publications (1915; 1928), which drew attention to certain medieval examples. Coulton's work, however, is characterized by something of the academic disdain for representational graffiti which may be found in the work of many other scholars of his time. However, Brindley's account of the "Marissa" ship graffito found at Beit Jebrin (1919: 76-8) is noteworthy among the studies of this time, not only in making one graffito image the subject of an academic publication, but also in attempting to interpret its detail.

W.A. Laidlaw's account of the important group of ship graffiti at Delos epitomizes the dismissive attitude of many academics which was noted above. " In the latter house, as in others, graffiti were found. There are other sketches, pretty enough, of boats, a rose design, and representations of creatures..." (1933: 245). Other academics in Laidlaw's tradition were less dismissive and more documentary, referring to ship graffiti in footnotes, asides in the text of reports, (Kunze 1934: plate XXIX, 3) or as items in artefact inventories (MacKay 1938: plate LXIX, 4.) Schaeffer's report of the

Enkomi ship graffiti in Cyprus (1952: 102-3), for example, though only a little fuller than Laidlaw's, nevertheless marks a change in approach by attempting to place the carving in time. It is also interesting to note that Schaeffer prefaced his discussion of the stone and its images with the observation that they offered a glimpse into the mind of their artist (*ibid.*). Unfortunately, this tantalising statement is not developed in the following text.

An exception to the traditional academic approach to pictorial graffiti may be seen in Haakon Shetelig's notice of the Oseberg find (1904-5: 54-66). Shetelig included in this report a brief discussion of the several ship's prow graffiti found on material in the burial, in terms of the interpretation of the stem of the Gokstad ship. Unlike his contemporaries and some of his successors, Shetelig saw that these images could be used comparatively and interpretively, in terms of understanding archaeological material. This study would seem to be the first use of ship graffiti as technical sources in English language publications. Similarly, Spiridon Marinatos (1933: 170-235) included ship graffiti among the visual imagery which he assembled for his study of the ships of the ancient Mediterranean, foreseeing something of their potential as evidence for the form of ancient ships.

In 1951 Reginald Hine published a study of some medieval pictorial graffiti, in a larger work, which was almost visionary in foreseeing the potential of these images as first hand evidence, not only for the material culture of the past, but also for the cognitive world of some of its artists. Hine called for a catalogue to be made of the surviving examples of graffiti in English churches, but died before this could be undertaken. Shortly after the publication of Hine's book, Diana Woolner reported a large group of very early ship graffiti at a site in Tarxien, Malta, (1957: 60-67), giving them serious attention as part of the complex site in which they were found, and attempting to relate them to various early ship types. While Woolner's interpretation of the ships themselves may not be generally accepted today, her paper is still cited as

an important record of ancient ship images, which are now degrading through the effects of weather.

In the following decade, Violet Pritchard noted in the introduction to her survey of pictorial graffiti near Cambridge (1967: xi) that little had been published following Coulton, indicating the scant attention which had been paid to this important type of evidence in the twentieth century. Pritchard's study was an interpretative catalogue, biased toward historical, rather than artistic interpretation, and included some ships among the subjects which she recorded. Castrén and Lilius's (1970) account of the graffiti at the Palatino, Rome was similar to Pritchard's study in the sense that they recorded pictorial graffiti in one geographical area, in a catalogue or inventory form. Unlike Pritchard, they included little contextual information or interpretation of the images.

In a discussion of the Bantry boat carving (1964: 277-284), Paul Johnstone attempted to determine the form of boats contemporary with a group of images from Early Christian Ireland, among them, graffiti. He used the information encoded in this visual imagery in an attempt to elucidate an historical problem which was not accessible using any other approach, since these ships are virtually absent from the archaeological record. Johnstone did not set out a systematic critique of the evidence he considered, neither the artistic conventions which were used in these pictures, nor the artistic or physical contexts in which they appeared. Instead, he took what information they appeared to offer on nautical technology at face value. Lionel Casson (1971; 1994) used a similar approach to ancient visual imagery, including graffiti, in his study of the development of early ships and seafaring. Like Johnstone, Casson approached these images from a point of view which assumed that they were realistic depictions of historic ships. His approach provides an interesting example of a particular type of academic use of pictorial graffiti in technical discussions; he was sensitive to the potential importance of the graffiti images he noted and illustrated, but

not to the importance of understanding the complex compositional contexts in which some images are found. Furthermore, like some other academics of his generation, Casson used second generation copies of graffiti uncritically, accepting them without examining the original graffiti themselves or high quality photographs of them. These problems will be discussed in more detail further on in this study.

These studies were followed by the publication of Martin Blindheim's survey, record and interpretation of the surviving graffiti of all kinds in Norwegian stave churches (1985). Blindheim gave full accounts of the graffiti themselves, as well as their relationships to one another and to the sites in which they appeared. His discussion included an attempt to understand the underlying intentions of the images' artists, grouping them as graffiti of chance, piety, and prophylaxis. In considering the artists' underlying intentions, as well as the possible sources or inspirations for various designs and emblems, Blindheim introduced a new theme into graffiti studies, producing a meticulous study of a particular group of images found in one type of physical context.

Lucien Basch's study (1987) of ancient maritime art, including ship graffiti, closely followed Blindheim chronologically, but only indirectly in approach. Basch used visual imagery, including graffiti, as the core of his study, in a manner which recalled Johnstone's use of ancient Irish art. Basch's purpose was to determine, within the images he studied, the form of ships which were likely to have been contemporary with them. In this and other works, Basch considered individual pieces of graffiti separately, and disassociated from the immediate context of the composition in which they appear. This tended to obscure the artist's intention, as well as the possible historic or iconic meaning of the image, by omitting subjects which indicated the possibility of an underlying meaning for the whole composition which might have had implications for the way in which particular subjects were realized.

In another type of study, Uaininn O'Meadhra (1979; 1987) discussed graffiti in relation to craftsmen's trial pieces. These studies concentrated on the interpretation of artistic design, technique and intention, in relation to the norms of formal art, rather than the information content of the subjects of the images themselves. A. W. Farrell's paper on the Tintagel slate graffito (1984: 267-274) was strongly influenced by O'Meadhra's work, in that he attempted to identify the graffito as one of the craftsmen's trial or motif-pieces which she described. Like others before him, Farrell discounted the evidence of the other motifs accompanying the ship, and struggled to interpret the image as though it were a realistic depiction. Other writers of the recent past (Christensen 1988: 13-26; Crumlin-Pedersen 1990: 98-116; Haywood *op.cit.*), have followed in Haakon Shetelig's footsteps, using ship graffiti as points of reference in various studies of ancient nautical technology.

Shimon Gibson and Joan Taylor published an evaluation of the archaeology and history of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (*op.cit.*) devoting a chapter to an exhaustive discussion of the ship graffito which was discovered there in 1971. Not only has the interpretation of the drawing and its inscription been the subject of much debate over the last twenty years, but aspects of its cleaning and conservation have provoked heated exchanges and accusations of tampering between academics and archaeologists who have worked at the site. Gibson and Taylor's study is remarkable for its detailed examination of the graffito in its archaeological context, according it the status of an artefact. The evidence which it offers nautical historians is then considered in the light of the image's contextual relationships, both at the site itself and in the wider area of the design and detail of Mediterranean ships of the classical period.

Sybilla Haasum (1995: 241-247) has recently introduced a new note into graffiti studies in her discussion of the way in which the artist's handling of the physical properties of the ground influenced the final form of the image, as well as the

importance of relating graffiti images to the dating of the surfaces on which they appear.

Through this brief sample of academic discussions of pictorial graffiti, it is possible to see that two principal problems have beset the study of this type of visual imagery, particularly those which were written before the early 1980's. The first has been the dismissive attitude with which many scholars have approached pictorial graffiti, and, as noted above, this dated from the earliest use of graffiti as historical sources in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While this attitude has undoubtedly been modified through time and by changing opinions and standards in archaeology, its effects are still seen in a superficial or cursory treatment of ancient graffiti, with poor standards of recording and the sometimes careless transmission of inaccurate copies through subsequent publications.

The second problem has been the assumption underlying many modern interpretations that the images are naturalistic depictions of historic ships, which may be understood by a straightforward reading of form and detail according to modern principles of art. In the following chapter, I will discuss some of the questions which are related to this approach.

As the work leading to the present thesis progressed, I became increasingly inclined to accept as a truism Pritchard's statement (1967: xi.), " The study of graffiti embraces a great number of subjects. ". While artistic analysis of the image itself is fundamental to the study which follows, closely associated with it are aspects of perceptual and cognitive psychology and anthropology, as well as the more philosophical area of the problems of interpretation by the later viewer, or hermeneutics. Understanding aspects of the relationship between the image and its physical context relies on both

archaeological information about the site, where it is available, and some of the approaches of anthropology, in order to interpret the site's significance in terms of the wider community. This multi-disciplinary approach is essential in order to examine the many different strands which comprise such a complex product of human behavior.

The study will be divided into two parts. The first is principally a discussion of some of the theoretical questions which arise in the study of pictorial graffiti:

- their relationship to formal art and questions related to the concepts underlying visual imagery, interpretation and the problem of subjectivity of the later viewer,

- "insider knowledge "

- the symbolic image, symbolic style and visual metaphor.

More practical matters will also be considered in this first section, such as distinguishing between the effects of time on an ancient graffito and its original detail, and the relationship between an image and its context, both material and conceptual.

The second section will comprise a group of case studies of ship graffiti whose interpretation exemplifies some of the issues discussed in the theoretical discussions. The problem of the assignment of dates to the examples in this section will be discussed in each individual case. As noted above, many academic reports of ship graffiti omit archaeological information which would assist their dating, and some images, particularly those on fragmentary or portable material, lack firm cultural associations. These deficiencies, coupled with the phenomenon of deliberate archaism in art, make accurate dating difficult, and often impossible. They also highlight the importance of a close examination of the stylistic and compositional relationships of the images themselves, before the detail which they appear to contain may be evaluated in terms of nautical history. Early in this introduction, I described the strengths and weaknesses of ancient ship graffiti as evidence for the material and

cognitive life of the past. Even a brief examination of traditional academic uses of pictorial graffiti brings some of those weaknesses into sharp focus, particularly in terms of the problems which certain approaches to their interpretation have created.

On a stylistic note, I will often refer to artists, graffiti artists, and craftsmen as "he" when I do not mean that these groups of people were exclusively male, or that women were not participants in early image making. Equally, there is a tacit assumption in many, if not most discussions of ancient art, that early artists were adult when they created their work, when it is very likely that this was not always the case. Speculation along these lines may not be fruitful, unless it sheds light on particular problems in the interpretation of individual images. I will not observe any particular rules about the uses of the terms "ship" and "boat"; I will refer to the subjects of the graffiti as "ships", for the most part, "boats" and "vessels", sometimes, and "seacraft", never. I am aware that many academics make a distinction between the terms "Norse" and "Viking", and will attempt to observe this in my discussion of Scandinavian material. Also, many art historians do not use the terms "naturalism" and "realism" interchangeably, and a complex, even obscure group of concepts distinguishes one from the other. For the purposes of this study, however, I will use the two words synonymously. Simple prejudice has made me reject the word "graffitist", in favour of the slightly contentious term (in this context) "artist" to describe the makers of ship graffiti.

Some of the discussions which will follow centre on the use of "second hand" pictorial graffiti, images which are once removed from the original artefact by being interpreted in sketched or measured drawings or photographs. It has not been possible to examine directly more than a few graffiti which are the subjects of discussion in this study, and I have been forced to rely on either high quality photographs (where they exist), or on drawn copies. Occasionally, an even greater distance exists from the original artefact in images which are presented in academic

discussions as "copies of copies", and the particular problems which these examples present will be discussed in each case. It would have been unreasonable to have applied a totally purist approach in assembling the material for this study, and to limit it to graffiti to which I had direct access. It has not been one of the aims of this study to attempt to set up a new canon for graffiti illustration; I have used what has been available, discussing the advantages or problems of the material in each case as the discussions develop. I have included some of my own interpretive drawings, where this has seemed appropriate.

One of the challenges of exploring an interdisciplinary field such as this has been the necessity of reading widely in pursuit of background information to elucidate various problems which arose in the course of research. I am grateful to specialists in several disciplines who have given advice and direction in this, particularly Professors Jan Deregowski, Martin Kemp, and Matilda Macagno, Drs. Barbara Crawford and Dave Perrett, Mrs Rosemary Muir Wright, and Mr Ian Fisher. It has seemed necessary to include some record of this background reading, so that any biases which it may have engendered may be assessed, and also so that any readers with overlapping interests may use it on their own terms. This record is therefore given as an Appendix which follows the primary Bibliography. To facilitate rapid reference, this primary bibliography lists only those works which are cited specifically in the text of the thesis, in the customary way.

Chapter I: Art and Graffiti: Investigating Some Problems and Relationships.

The introductory section of this work begged a number of questions. The definition of graffiti, particularly in terms of their relationship to formal art, may seem to be relatively clear to twentieth century people whose concepts of art are the product of post-renaissance thinking. The focus of this thesis, however, is almost exclusively on examples of ship graffiti from protohistory, the ancient world, and the early medieval period. Many modern concepts of art do not apply to the work of these periods, and we are at the mercy of our partly formed understanding of the function and meaning of the art and conventions in the ancient world in attempting to interpret it. This deficient understanding conditions much of our cognitive response to the image, and its artist's use of convention, style, and technique. Our responses, as well as our underlying concepts of art, are certain to be different, in whole or in part, from that of viewers contemporary with the artist. There may be a distinction which is obvious to us, between an ancient society's formal art and the graffiti picture being evaluated, or there may not, and it is also possible that no such distinctions existed at the time the image was created. We may be completely or partially out of touch with the norms at work in the society which produced the art, and so be unable to understand, or frankly misunderstand, the place which a particular image occupied at the time which it was produced. It could be said, then, that the distinction between "graffiti" and "art" is a relatively modern concept which reflects a modern position, and that it is only possible to apply it to the visual imagery of certain periods. The art of these periods would have to be sufficiently well represented, and its means and circumstances of production well enough understood that particular images might be calibrated in terms of that information, and identified as graffiti or formal art. (I am very grateful to Mrs

Rosemary Muir Wright of the Art History Department, St Andrews University, for her help in this area.)

Also implicit in this view of the existence of a continuum between formal art and graffiti is a concept of art which is largely based on aesthetics, in which formal art provides society with valued and valuable works of beauty, and graffiti the despised and worthless products of "schoolboys and idlers" (Chambers Dictionary, *op. cit.*). While it is clear that many societies in the ancient world placed great importance on the achievement of a norm or standard of beauty in art (as discussed, for example, by Tatarkiewicz 1963: 231-240), it would be unsafe to generalize from this to see only aesthetic principles as dominating and conditioning the creation of all visual imagery. As was noted in the introduction, above, the focus of this study and, for that matter, of the nautical historians and archaeologists who have referred to pictorial graffiti as source material, is not on images as expressions of the aesthetic standard of particular cultures. Rather, it is on their function as transmitters of meaning, with an underlying view of image making as a universal human activity. It is important to note, however, that these two views of the function of art, based on aesthetics and the transmission of meaning, are not mutually exclusive, but may be seen to interact in many examples, including some pictorial graffiti.

Linguists and anthropologists have explored and discussed the importance of communication by the use of visual imagery in both pre-literate and literate cultures (for example Jensen 1970: 40-49; Schmandt-Besserat 1990: 16-31). These studies have considered both the emergence of this form of information exchange, in terms of human cognitive development, and the complexities of the different forms which it may take. While visual imagery could be used to represent real objects or simple ideas, as in the use of pictograms, the more subtle transmission of abstract concepts or beliefs might be achieved by using symbolism or visual metaphor. These images could be made to express messages or ideas within a form which was as graphically

simple or complex as the artist was capable of making. Underlying the message as well as the form of an image, either simple or complex, lie the artist's concepts of image making. As was noted earlier in this discussion, these concepts may differ radically through time and culture.

A visual image may use as part of its frame of reference the cosmology of its artist, that is his understanding of how the universe works. Therefore, ancient art may have been used in a way which was more than the transmission of a simple message, and reflected the artist's understanding of the underlying mechanisms of the natural and supernatural worlds. In line with his beliefs about the way in which the universe functioned, the ancient artist may have felt able to exploit the (to him) real power of certain symbols and symbolic relationships to make an image which was active, rather than passive. Such an image would be capable of influencing events in the natural world, by invoking supernatural forces. Within this use of art, an image's form and meaning are vitally linked in the creation of an image which could act on objects or events in the world. Interpreting the detail of such an image depends on achieving some understanding of the thought processes which underlie it.

This ancient use of art may be exemplified by the colophon drawing in the eighth or ninth century Book of Mulling, a non-representational image apparently created informally, outside of many of the conventions of manuscript art, which resists interpretation using modern approaches and concepts (fig. 1.1). Lawrence Nees (1983: 67-91) proposed that rather than being a map or plan (which it superficially resembles), the drawing was, in part, an evocation of protection for the monastery of Mulling and the monk who owned the Book, using a careful spatial arrangement of crosses, and the names of Christ, the evangelists, and the prophets in and around a double circle and the points of the compass. Nees suggested that the artist constructed the image to generate a spiritual power, and the exact placing of its component parts was vital to its success in protecting the monastery. The drawing is then an active,

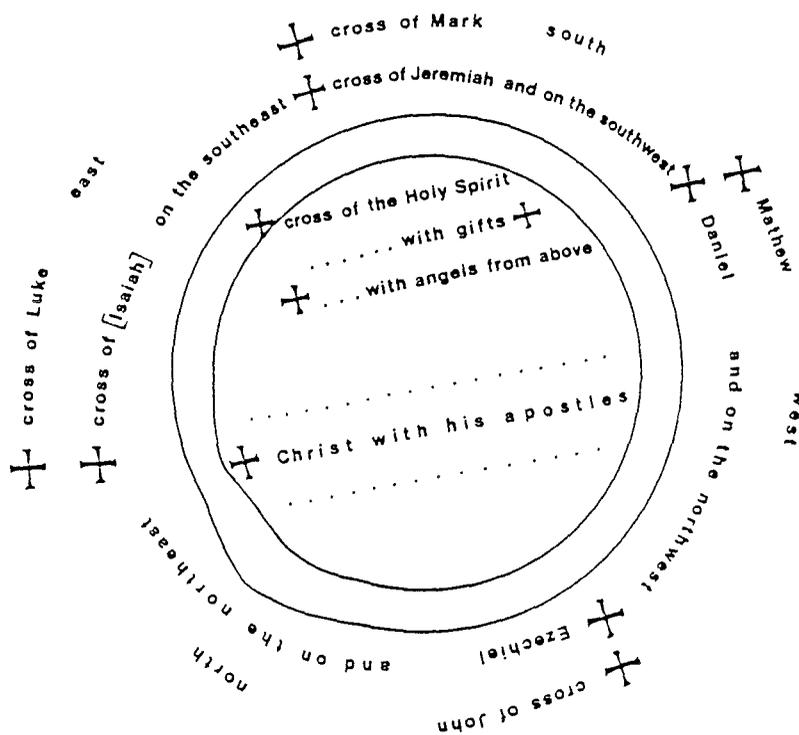


Fig. 1.1 Interpretive sketch by Virginia Greene of the colophon drawing of the Book of Mulling. Nees 1983.

rather than a passive image, and its power is fundamentally related to the symbols it uses and their relationships to one another. If Nees' interpretation is accepted, the Mulling colophon sketch may be seen as a purely functional work, not conditioned by aesthetic intention, nor, in all likelihood, meant to elicit a response from its human viewers.

This image appears indecipherable to modern eyes without an understanding of the belief system which underlies it, and this problem highlights the potential importance of understanding the link between form and meaning in ancient art. It is interesting to note in passing Nees's statement that the colophon drawing was, until recently, "Usually reproduced in the form of simplified sketches which vary widely from the original and from each other..." (*ibid.*, note 1). If one accepts that the image may only be understood by interpreting the relationships between its component parts and the spiritual power of the whole image, then these poor copies are likely to impede attempts to understand how the drawing worked. This example provides another instance of the disdainful and sometimes careless attitude of some academics to informal visual imagery which was described in the introduction to this study.

The difficulties encountered in understanding early non-representational art may also be found in the interpretation of ancient images illustrating objects which are recognizable to modern viewers. Although it is not possible to know how many very early images lack the right perceptual triggers to be recognized by viewers long after they were made, many ancient pictures do contain information, expressed using codes and conventions which are interpretable today, which allows their subjects to be identified. This point will be discussed at more length below. However, aspects of these representational images may be conditioned by a thought world unfamiliar to modern people, and so produce a puzzling blend of the recognizable and mystifying. The superficial accessibility of the objects in these images may cause the modern viewer to assume that the image may be read in his own terms, and so cause him to

misunderstand aspects of its style, form or detail, which may reflect, for example, a function of art in terms of cosmology which is alien to the later viewer. However, it is important to note that other frames of reference than cosmology might condition the form which the ancient artist used, which may be equally remote from our post-medieval thinking.

This is exemplified by Martin Carver's study (1986: 118-143) of the portrayal of real objects in Anglo-Saxon manuscript art, in which he considered the reasons which underlay the early artist's choice of particular forms in a highly conventionalized formal art. Carver's approach to the many possible reasons for an early artist's use of a particular form to represent a real object is useful in a study of pictorial graffiti, and it is important to consider the implications of this work in assessing the representation of ships as graffiti. A degree of caution is essential, however, in generalising from formal to graffiti art. While the graffiti artist was free from the constraints which tradition, fashion, and patronage imposed on the manuscript artist which Carver describes, it is entirely possible that he would have been as sensitive to the subtle meaning which the use of a particular conventionalized form would have conferred on his image as someone creating a work of formal art at the same period. The use of an archaic form to represent a ship, for example, might have satisfied the artist that he had given his image a little prestige by linking it with antique authority, but might confuse the modern archaeologist attempting to date the graffiti by the ship type illustrated. As was mentioned in the introduction to this study, those archaeologists and nautical historians who have accepted representations of ships as being photographically realistic may not have considered the implications of these factors.

There is sometimes a suggestion in academic reports which use ship graffiti as technical sources that a graphically simple image is also conceptually simple, or that the untutored artist was capable of creating a startlingly new view of a well known object like a ship. Concepts which may be related to the "innocent eye" idea, which

was developed and discussed by British artists and theoreticians in the 19th century, might be said to underlie this theory (this question will be explored in a little more detail in relation to a practical example in the second section of this study). However, this approach may ignore the many levels of meaning and information which can be present in a graphically simple image, from the subtle and profound to the practical and functional. Some of these meanings may be deducible by examining the relationships between the image and the context in which it appears. It may well be impossible to understand the intention of the artist who made it; nevertheless, this does not mean that the detail and form of the image cannot be interpreted in their own right. It is also important to understand the constraints which the background or medium may have imposed on the graffito artist, such as the hardness of the surface to be decorated, the sharpness of the tools available, and the amount of time which he had to execute the piece. These issues will be discussed in more detail in terms of several different examples, below.

In selecting examples for inclusion in this study, it would have been easy to follow the lead of earlier graffito identifications without questioning the basis on which they have been made. In some cases, these have been stylistic and to a greater or lesser degree comparative; in other cases, contextual information has determined the pieces' identifications. In rare examples, all of these criteria have been considered. As noted above, many simple or superficially crude early images cannot be calibrated in terms of their relationships to the formal art of their time, if a distinct and codified art existed in any way resembling the modern sense. Such images may be in danger of being inappropriately designated as graffiti. This would seem to be an insoluble problem, and one which forces the later viewer to apply a certain subjectivity to the evaluation of images.

Many images, however, are near enough to us in time and artistic convention to be understood as either graffito or formal art. The simple picture of a ship, scratched on

a font at Cairndow on Loch Fyne, Argyll (catalogued and illustrated in the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland *Survey of Argyll*, 7, 1992: 158) (fig. 1.2) provides an example of this. The font itself was severely damaged, presumably during the Reformation, and has only recently been restored to the parish church having spent many years unrecognized. It is thought to date from the 15th-16th centuries (*ibid.*). The font's uppermost ring of stone has been completely removed along with a large section of its side wall, but it is still possible to see that it has been partially decorated with incised vertical banding, possibly ending in straight sided arches, which divides half of the outer face of the font into five panels. The picture of a masted, rigged, double ended ship, represented in profile, has been placed between two of the central vertical bands and neatly occupies the upper third of one panel. The ship's hull, mast and yard have been firmly scored into the stone, and the rigging lightly scratched. It has been identified as a galley (*ibid.*), but there are no pits along the top of the hull to indicate oarports, and which are often seen in other representations of galleys carved in stone. The hull's crescent shape is somewhat asymmetrical, and it is possible to see minor "wobbles" in the outline where the artist has had difficulty in controlling the line's progress. The ship's yard has been angled slightly, giving a livelier, less static effect than would have been conveyed by a yard set squarely on the mast. The overall impression, however, is of a very simple yet confidently executed image, its minor eccentricities creating an attractive picture of an active ship.

In a lengthy paper on the use, design, and decoration of Scottish baptismal fonts (1887: 346-448), J. Russell Walker discussed the Church's view that the importance of baptism in Christian life should be reflected in the decoration of the font itself, and he explored in detail the subject matter and styles which were considered appropriate for their decoration. Amongst the elaborate and strongly conventionalized crosses, saints, angels, devils, fishes, kings, plants, Biblical figures and coats of arms which Walker described and illustrated, the Cairndow ship is unique. His mention,

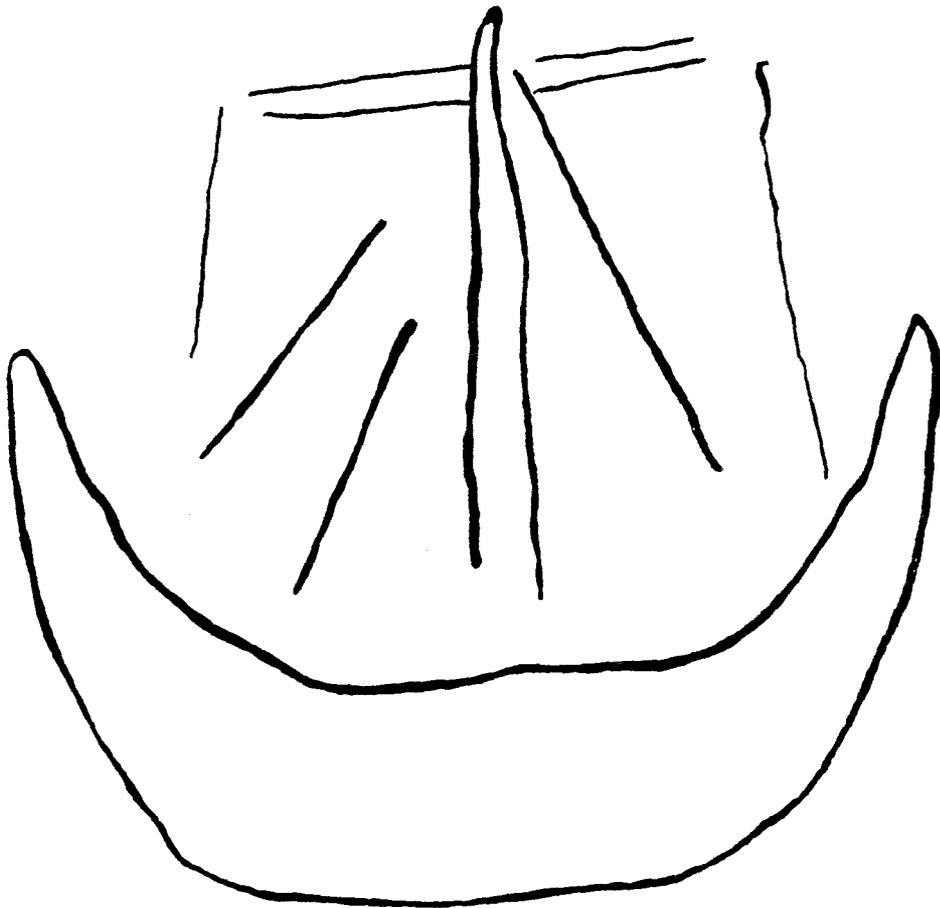
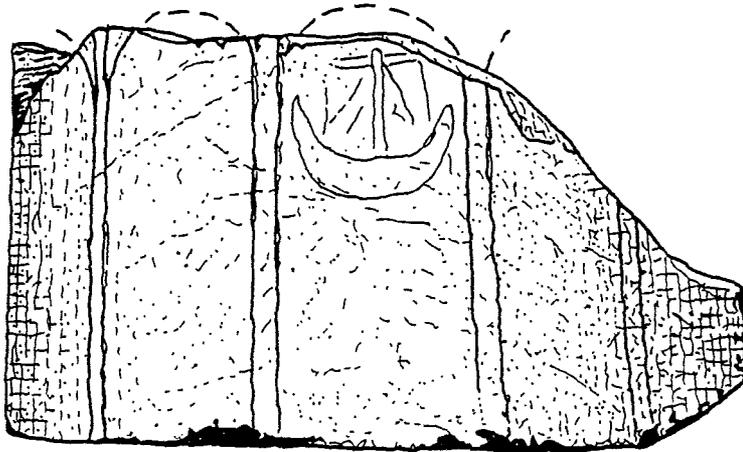


Fig. 1.2 The Cairndow Graffito. Interpretive drawing by le Bon 1996.

occasional use of imagery on fonts which reflected local legends and saints (*ibid.*: 348) possibly explains the ship's appearance, and this is supported by oral testimony (Rev. R. McAlpine 1994: pers. comm.). Whatever the explanation for the ship's presence on the font, the difficulty of locating it as a motif in the formal contemporary decoration of fonts, coupled with its undetailed style and the slight mistakes in its execution, indicate that it was created as a graffito image rather than a work of standard, formal, font decoration.

The modern viewer has no difficulty in understanding the conventions which the Cairndow artist used to depict a ship. However, the identification of subjects may provide the modern viewer with the most basic challenge in the interpretation of an ancient image. Elizabeth Shee Twohig grappled with this problem in distinguishing possible ship motifs among other subjects portrayed in Megalithic European art (1981: 63, 91, 114), and used comparative techniques with other known symbols to conclude that her subjects were not ships. However, in discussing a group of pictures which might represent early boats at prehistoric Iberian sites (fig. 1.3), Paul Johnstone (1980: 42-3) touched briefly on the sorting process which any viewer uses in evaluating a shape as a potential boat. This sorting process, by which an image is compared to the viewer's own store of perceptual experiences, belongs to the areas of cognitive and perceptual psychology. The characteristics which Johnstone considers as being "boatlike" are essentially those which psychologists would identify as its "typical outline". Dziurawiec and Deregowski (1992: 35-49) have recently described this process as one in which the viewer seeks identity between the image he perceives, and the view or aspect of a similar form which he retains mentally, which gives the maximum information about the real object. This preferential view, or typical outline, seems to be remarkably stable in humans through time and culture, and may relate to a basic survival mechanism.

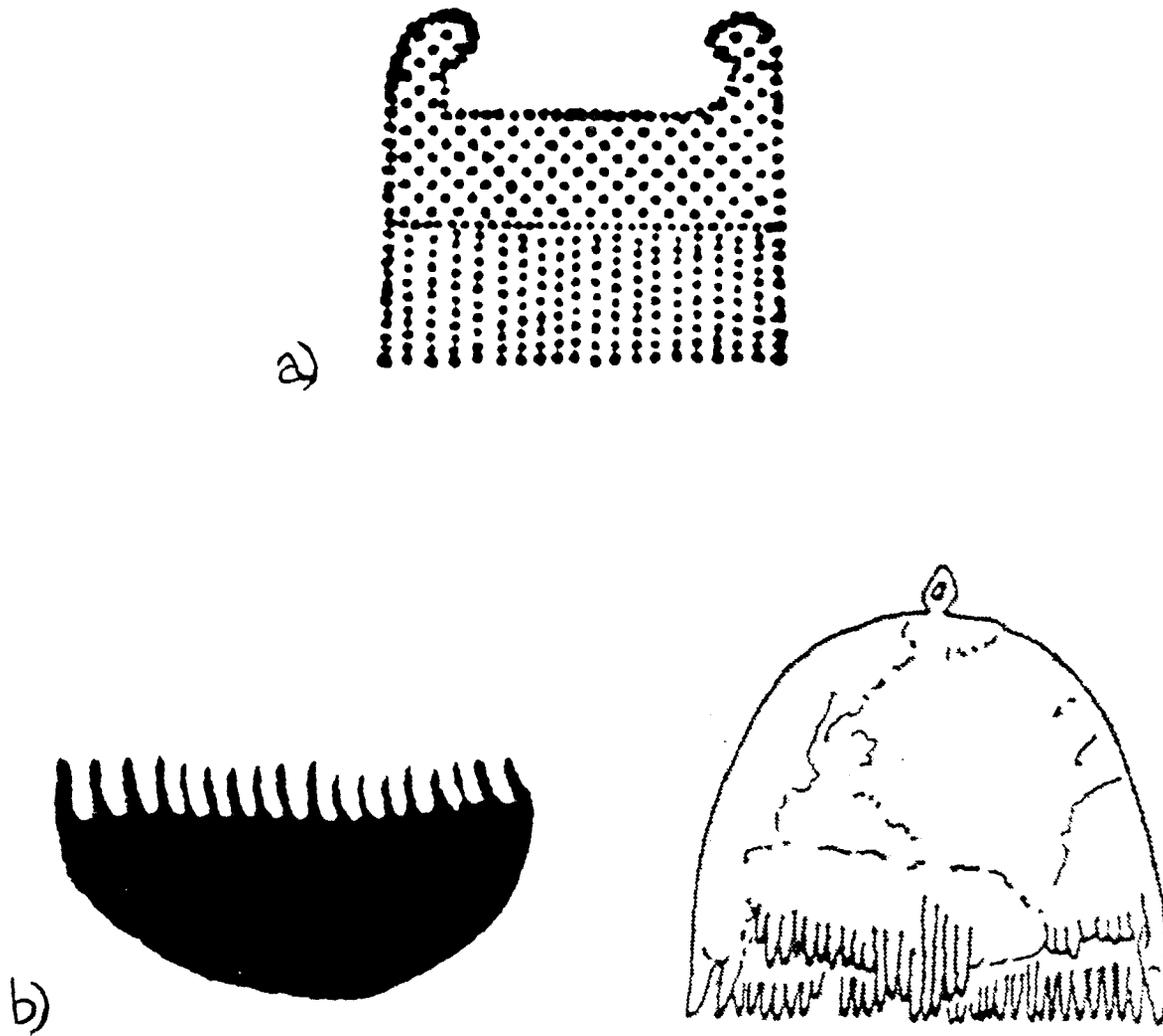


Fig. 1.3 Prehistoric Iberian images; two of which (a and b) may be interpreted as boats. Johnstone 1980.

Paul Johnstone's brief list of typical characteristics of the boat deals with the spatial relationships of the preferential view. Shown from the side, relationships between length, depth, and height may be illustrated, as well as the curving lower line, which boats, rather than rafts or floats, may display. While the side-on view may satisfy the psychologists as the typical outline for boats, examples of both plan and frontal views (De Graeve 1981: fig. 150; Blindheim 1985; illustrated, fig. 1.4) are occasionally seen in ancient as well as modern art. However, the potential for confusion is so great in the interpretation of these views, with objects of similar or frankly ambiguous outline, that the side-on view largely dominates even very early ship images. It is possible that there are early pictures of boats which do not use any of the more familiar views, particularly the side-on, typical outline, and so are not recognized by modern viewers through their unfamiliarity with the outline and detail which have been used.

There are also some simple or early boats such as rafts, which do not contain sufficiently "boatlike" characteristics to allow them to be conclusively identified as boats when represented graphically. Both the artist and the viewer must then resort to associated detail, such as human figures with fishing gear or propulsion mechanisms, and to the image's context to clarify its information. The picture illustrated (uppermost, fig. 1.5) appears out of its surrounding composition in recent works on the analysis of prehistoric abstract signs (Marshack 1972: 265), and appears to be a simple line sketch of a log boat. However, seen within its original composition, (lower illustration, fig. 1.5) surrounded by hunting subjects, it loses its resemblance to what is known of early boats, and gains, by association, resemblance to hunting tallies or notational systems which are notched along a baseline, and have been well recorded and interpreted (for example Marshack *ibid.*; D'Errico 1995: 163-206).

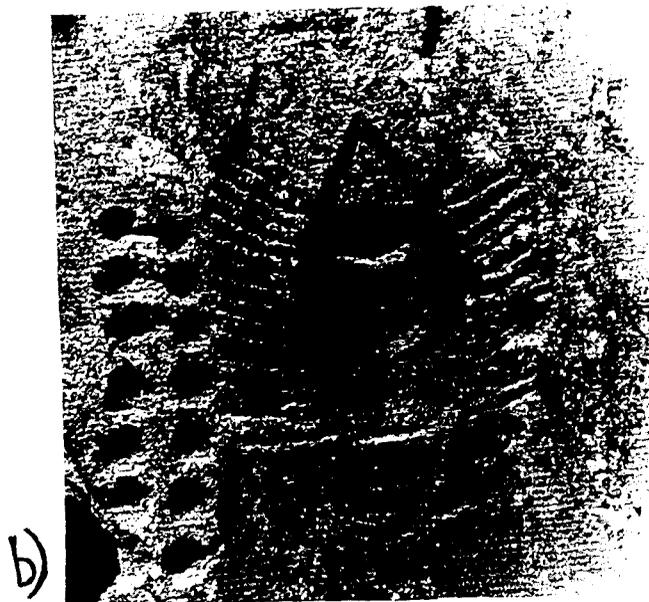


Fig. 1.4 Examples of ships shown using frontal and plan views. (a) Blindheim 1985; (b) De Graeve 1981.

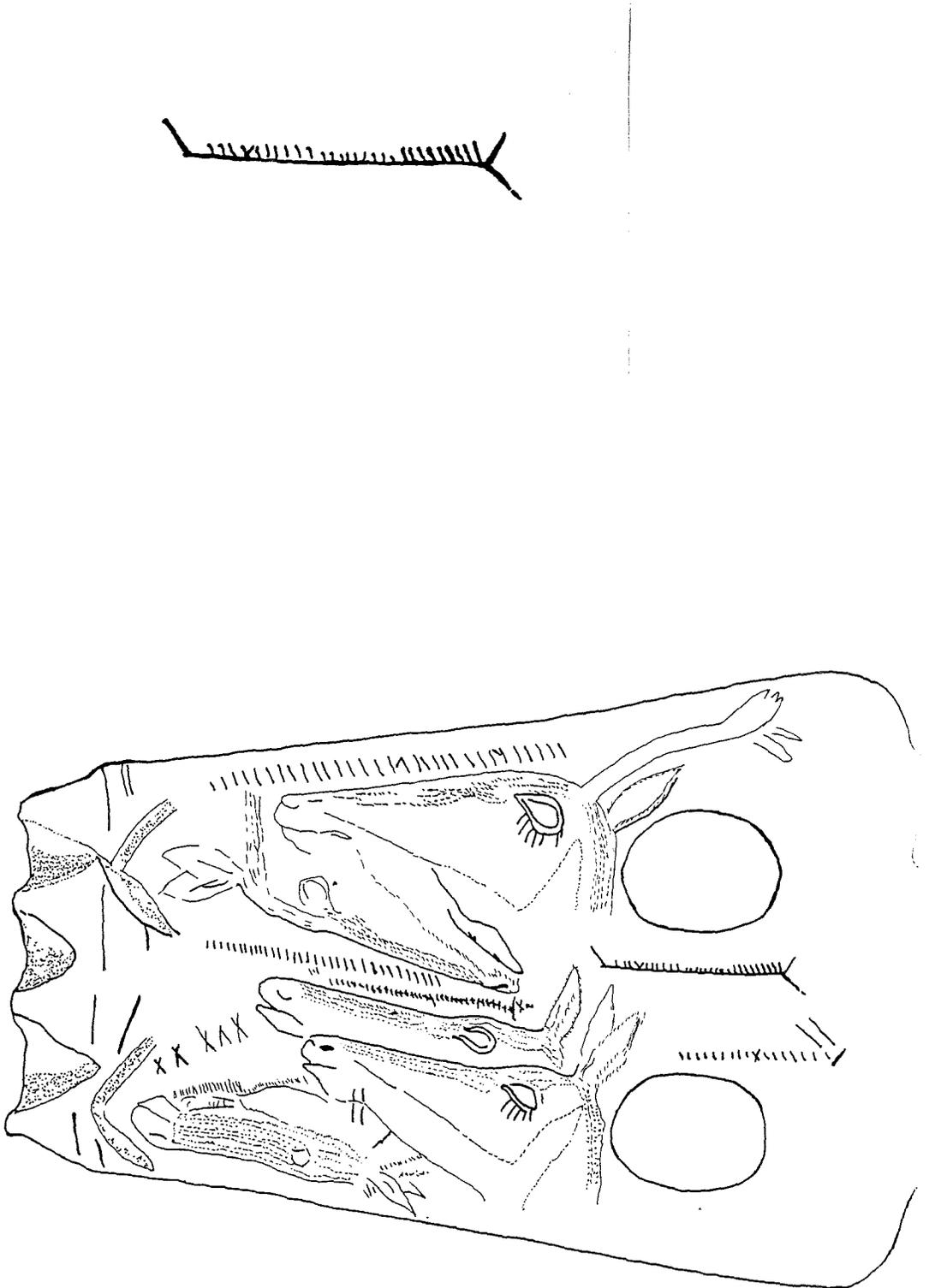


Fig. 1.5 Prehistoric carving with "boatlike" characteristics. Marshack 1972.

Graphically simple images may also evoke boats in the mind of the viewer when their artists may have intended to represent very different subjects. J.D. Lewis-Williams has recently described (1995: 3-23) " navicular " forms among South African rock art, which have many characteristics of the typical outline of primitive boats: length exceeding height, curving lower line, and some associated detail which could be read as crew within the hull (fig. 1.6). Lewis-Williams argues, however, that the artists of these pictures did not intend to depict boats, but instead meant to represent a neurological phenomenon, crescent shaped entoptic images, which were a very significant part of shamanic rituals. He refers to both neurophysiological research and ethnographic studies of the present day makers of such images to support his argument. Those undergoing drug or stress induced hallucinations, as well as migraine sufferers, commonly experience these as transitory visual interferences.

Modern viewers, or those out of touch with the cognitive and ritual aspects of the production of this type of art, may misunderstand these " navicular " images by matching their form, proportions, and detail with a common object, rather than the much rarer entoptic phenomenon which is outside the experience of many people. Difficulties in interpreting the form and contexts of these images, as well as their odd or anomalous detail, are often explained away by references to " colonists' arrivals" or " visiting Phoenicians " (Johnson 1960: 111-113), when ethnographic material or a more detailed examination of the art itself might lead the viewer toward a different interpretation.

The interpretation of the whole site itself where imagery is found may be equally important to the accurate reading of particular representations. Paul Johnstone's interpretation of the las Figuras picture, noted above (and illustrated, fig. 1.3) relies heavily on his research into the importance of the area as a prehistoric migratory stop-over for water birds, to argue that the shape may be cautiously interpreted as a hunting

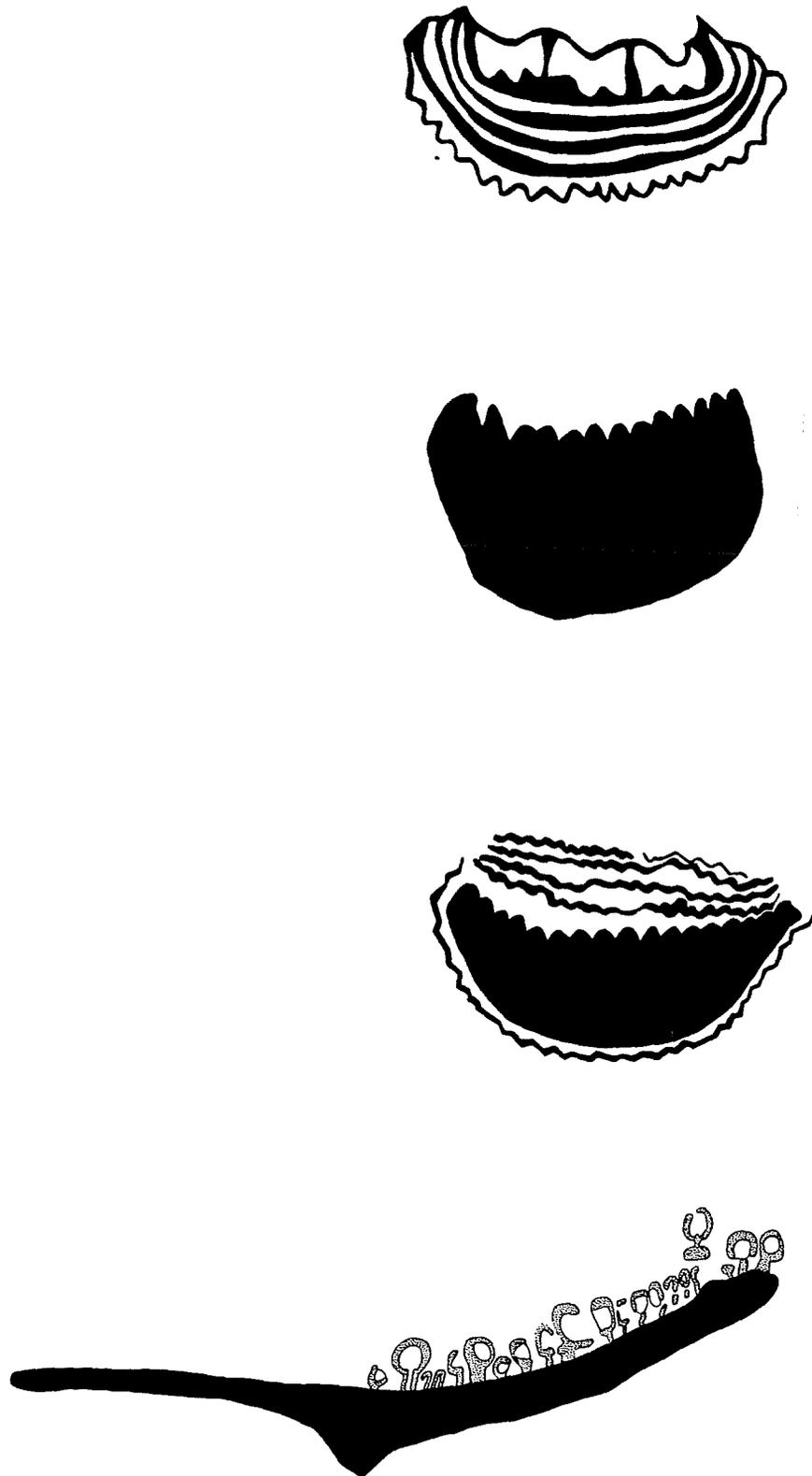


Fig. 1.6 "Navicular" forms, described by Lewis-Williams 1995.

boat. My own difficulties with Johnstone's interpretation of this image relate to a basic quibble about typical outline; it looks like a house on piles to me. This problem highlights the difficulty of interpreting ambiguous shapes, where two or more objects may be confused in certain views.

The discussion of shape recognition as it applies to early images of ships must also include a brief mention of the processes of abbreviation of form, which are commonly found in formal and informal art. Deregowski (1984) called these reductionist devices, by which the "*pars pro toto*" style of representation could be achieved. By this means, an artist could reduce the complexity of the detail of his work, without diminishing the quantity of information which the informed viewer could extract from the image. This understanding could be termed the first level of the cognitive processes involved in picture reading; the viewer must first respond to the perceptual triggers within the image to register what the subject is, and then proceed to interpret what he sees by responding to particular devices which have been consciously used, its cognitive triggers, which lead to the deeper levels of meaning encoded within the picture. The use of artistic device will be discussed in more detail elsewhere in this work.

It would be impossible to codify the typical outline of a theoretical yet universal boat so that enigmatic images could be more easily identified, simply because the possibilities arising from the wide range of known boat forms is too large, and could not encompass the essential factor of context. The characteristics which Johnstone mentioned, length to height ratio, and concavity of lower line also describe the typical outline of other objects, such as baskets and shoes. The later viewer of an ancient image is then at the mercy of his own store of perceptual experiences when he attempts to recognize the identity of the subject. If the boat shown in the picture has a sufficient number of shared characteristics in its typical outline with other boats in the viewer's past experience, then he will register it as a boat. Information to support or

alter this identification may be supplied by aspects of the image's composition and context.

Carlo Ginzburg noted (1990: 37) " Description presupposes interpretation.", an observation which opens the way to the more complex, and arguably more disputed area of the philosophy of interpretation. This aspect of understanding the material culture of the past has, with the work of Ian Hodder (1986a, 1986b: 352-356, *inter al.*) and numerous others, become a major issue in archaeology in the last fifteen years, although philosophers and art historians have debated its application to history since the eighteenth century and the development of the area of philosophy known as hermeneutics. While my inclusion of representational graffiti under the broader heading of art may be contentious, its definition as artefact should not be. The fundamental issue of this philosophical area is then eminently applicable to a discussion of the interpretation of graffiti, both as art and artefact; what are the preconditions for our understanding of the products of past human cultures ? The deceptive simplicity of this question conceals major problems, embedded particularly in the words "preconditions" and "understanding". While it would be inappropriate to attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of such a large and complex area in a study such as this, in the following discussion I will consider briefly a small group of theories which have an application to the question of the interpretation of ancient pictorial graffiti by modern academics. Some of these theories were discussed by Johnsen and Olsen in their recent critique of the work of Ian Hodder (1992: 419-436).

The first problem, the "preconditions", relates to the whole area of human subjectivity, extending from that of the past creator of the graffiti, to that of the present, and the subjectivity of the later viewer. Some philosophers of history have not been troubled by this problem, and, like J.G. Droysen (1986: 121), have stated their belief in a natural empathy, or kinship between the fundamental nature of man with "that of the utterances lying before us as historical material". Droysen's belief,

however, that understanding the intention of the creator depended on the analysis of the concrete situation or context, was central to his position. As I have noted above, many ancient ship graffiti have lost important contextual material along the way, either in excavation, the effects of time, or later reporting, and, using Droysen's approach, there is then no basis for an investigation of their meaning, let alone an understanding of their creators' intentions. André Malraux's doubt that ancient art was accessible to us seems to be a logical outcome of this position. This emphasis on the validation of context, and its essential importance to interpretation, was later mirrored in Ian Hodder's discussion of cave art (1986a: 45 - 53).

Other philosophers, like Wilhelm Dilthey, have opted for a faith in the human mind's ability to achieve a sort of transcendent objectivity, whereby one's own subjectivity might be shed to the point where the life experiences and minds of people of the past could be understood. My own difficulties with this belief in the attainment of objectivity, and the use of an "intersubjective" consciousness as a tool in its own right come down to two problems. First, this area has an enormous potential for projection, over-interpretation, and fringe theorizing, without the most rigorous controls. Second, I am very sceptical that the human mind is capable of achieving anything but a limited degree of objectivity, depending on its own concept of the nature of the subjectivity which it is attempting to eliminate. This criticism is not intended to be a rationalization for an unabashed subjectivity in interpreting ancient graffiti with or without archaeological contexts, but is rather a statement of caution about the use of this approach.

These approaches deal with the state of mind of the viewer, or would-be interpreter, in his attempts to read an image or artefact, the "preconditions" which I picked out of the central question in the problem of interpretation. The other word I noted was "understand", which takes in the fundamental areas of both response and description. The philosopher and historian Collingwood's theory of social action described what

he believed to be the true nature of an event; that is, an action expressing an underlying purpose of its agent (quoted in Hodder 1986a: 96). Ian Hodder, heavily influenced by Collingwood, described historical events and archaeological remains (*ibid.*: 80, 82) as having an "inside" and an "outside", the inside being the concept or intention which underlay the concrete facts, the outside. My use of the word "understand" is to some extent an adoption of this position, that is, a graffito must be understood, if possible, on both these levels, and that information from one is relevant, even essential, to the understanding of the other.

It is interesting to note, in passing, that Hodder's more recent position on the interpretation of acontextual material is now the rather provocative idea of free reading (expressed, for example, in 1987: 87-91). This draws to some extent on the thought of the philosopher Gadamer, who noted "The meaning of a text surpasses its author, not occasionally, but always. Thus understanding is not a reproductive procedure, but rather always a productive one." (1979: 280). This view is developed by Shanks in a recent discussion of the question of the interpretation of artefacts, "Artefacts have an independence. A potter's skills of interpretation may or may not allow an apparent coincidence of intention and artefact. The designed piece is also open to all sorts of interpretations quite independent of the maker." (1994: 391).

Gadamer's concept of understanding might be seen as a justification for the interpretation of ancient graffiti without contexts, and more generally to artefacts without accompanying archaeological material. However, my difficulties with the concept of intersubjective consciousness, and its potential for projection, also apply to Gadamer and Hodder's approaches. Whatever my own objections, however, I must agree with Gadamer at least in part; after the viewer's basic perceptual processes have occurred, and the image has been recognized, the cognitive, interpretative activity which takes place is a function of his subjectivity in its interplay with the information encoded in the graffito by its creator. This interplay involves aspects of the image

itself, as well as in its relationships to the rest of its surroundings. His subjectivity, however, will lead him seriously astray in this synthetic activity unless he is able to identify and abandon those elements which are the products of his own cultural conditioning, those experiences and teachings which might be peculiar, for example, to the northern hemisphere in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Before I become too idealistic about the possibility of accessing the "inside" of a graffito, with a nod in the direction of Gadamer and using a cautious approach, it is important to note the results of some cross cultural studies of the recognition of drawings and photographs of real objects. Deregowski 's discussion of the problems of pictorial recognition (1973: 164-191) includes a number of examples of experiments with people from cultures unfamiliar with two dimensional images. It was found that not only did cultural cues and artistic conventions within the image make a difference to the subjects' ability to recognize the objects depicted, but their familiarity with the material on which the image was printed also influenced their response to the image.

This would then seem to be the point where philosophers and psychologists must meet to thrash out a common approach. It would seem that our perceptual and cognitive systems are profoundly influenced by our early experiences of form, materials, colour, patterning, in images and objects, within our own culture. Cognitive structures, such as concepts of art, roles in society, and conventions of expression, are the mental overlays which are also culturally determined, and interact with the individual's perceptual processes in the interpretation of the visual image.

Perceptual and cognitive structures may then be as simple or elaborate as the individual's experiences determine. They may also contain differing levels of personal modification between people, as well as differing nuances of interpretation and associated belief systems. At the broadest level, however, "insider knowledge"

within a culture at a particular time in its history provides contemporary people with the ability to express and interpret messages through the subtle use of symbol systems and conventions. The philosophical problems of the stand-point of the modern viewer are then vastly complicated, not only by the problems of accessing the perceptual and cognitive structures of ancient artists, but also in the importance recognizing his or her own cultural filters, which may cause inappropriate cognitive responses to triggers within the ancient image.

This area of insider knowledge may be said to be one of the major issues at the heart of the problem of interpretation, second only in importance to shape recognition. As the product of teaching and experience, rather than basic perceptual or cognitive functioning, insider knowledge must be seen as a part of the individual's interaction with his culture, expressed to him implicitly and explicitly. From the point of view of this thesis, the problem of insider knowledge governs the whole area of the selection and meaning of symbolism and visual metaphor embedded within a graffito, as well as its contemporary artistic conventions and devices. Decoding this symbolic information, as well as understanding the artist's use of convention, and approximating a meaning in terms of the whole image, is central to the problem of interpretation.

Art history contains numerous examples of ancient images created with layers of meaning, whose subtleties and implications were accessible to contemporary viewers, many of which may be lost to the later viewer. Changes in the processes of cultural experience in the teaching of social structures, myth, religious belief, and the symbolic meanings associated with all three produce alterations between generations, classes, and societies in the content of the insider knowledge understood and used by individual people. This, then, would seem to be the basis of responses to the cognitive triggers within an image.

Joseph Campbell, (1968: 9) illustrated a floor tile in Chertsey Abbey, of Tristan entertaining King Mark, and noted that the contemporary viewer would have recognized at a glance the picture's parallel with the Biblical story of David and King Saul. Another, later example from Restoration times is found in the enormous complexity of the temporary arches and decorations erected for the entry of King James to London in 1604 (Parry 1981: 2-19). These were rich in classical and Biblical allusions, intended to project a fully evolved Stuart mythology, but to our eyes, without seventeenth century familiarity with their references, their descriptions and illustrations appear chaotically cluttered with indecipherable detail.

Private imagery, as distinct from these examples of public art, may be even harder to decode as the references used in the image may belong to the individual's own store of personal symbols, or, rather, to his unique understanding of the particular brand of insider knowledge which he has derived from his culture. Van Gogh's painting of his bedroom at Arles exemplifies this private code at work. His subtle use of colour was carefully chosen for the evocation of rest and tranquillity, but in a letter to his brother describing the painting, (quoted, and the painting illustrated in Gombrich 1991a: 437-438) he explained the particular significance which the colour white had for him, and the reasons which had led to his exclusion of it from his composition, and his stipulation of its use for the picture's frame. But for Van Gogh's letter, this personal level of reference might well have been inaccessible to later viewers. It is a short step from this point to the problem of graffiti interpretation; few graffiti artists' letters survive explaining their work.

A recurring theme through this study will be to see pictorial graffiti as the product of the universal human activity of image making. Part of the mechanism of that activity involves the use of the mind's store of private and personal references: memories, associations, images and symbols, and graffiti production may allow the potential artist *carte blanche* in making his image from that private store. Therefore, the

meaning of a graffito, and the significance of its particular form, may be understood by its maker and not by anyone else if it originates in the artist's private store of symbols and references.

It is possible to suggest that the interpretation of ancient images may be broadly divided into two large areas, the cognitive and philosophical. These include the constituent parts of the subjectivity of both artist and viewer and their interaction at the level of the artefact or graffito, and the physical evidence of the piece itself, its form, context, relationships, date, and the conventions and techniques which have been used to create it. It could be said that the work of this thesis opens out from these two points, toward a more detailed discussion of the content of both, in relation to the graffito as art and artefact.

Chapter 2. Symbolism, Metaphor, and Some Practical Issues.

" But you who look on this picture, understand that it also has meaning for the inner
soul."

Hildegard of Bingen, *Liber Divinorum Operum*, P.1, v.II, 32.

The references to cognitive triggers and visual metaphors in the previous chapter dealt inadequately with the complex question of the use of symbolism in pictorial graffiti. The related area of insider knowledge was also included in that discussion, but only touched very briefly on the nature of that knowledge, concentrating instead on its function and effects. These areas, symbolism, metaphor, and insider knowledge, will be the focus of a more detailed consideration in the first half of this chapter. A number of issues which arise from the examination of these areas will also be explored in the second half; these are more closely related to artistic analysis than to the more theoretical subject of symbolism, and may be said to mark the beginning of the discussion of more practical matters.

Since this study argues, among other things, for the need to consider the possible existence and implications of an image's deeper meaning and relationships, it is important to explore the symbolic use of the ship in ancient graffiti representations. Meaning, form, and style itself are closely bound together in visual imagery, and the realization of detail, even in visual imagery which is outside the constraints of formal art, is then a reflection of the "inside" of the image (in Hodder's terms, *op.cit.*), as much as it is a reflection of the artist's skill. The symbolic meaning of an ancient image, either formal art or graffiti, to the artist who created it may be inaccessible from the perspective of the present day, and indeed may not have been fully accessible to contemporary viewers. This problem is especially relevant in the study of pictorial graffiti, simply because the creators of these works were not necessarily attempting to appeal to a particular audience or to please a patron, but instead produced pictures for

their own purposes. While some of these images may be so self-referential that they may be impossible to interpret and are therefore lost to us, it is important to assess the potential impact of symbolism on representation in pictorial graffiti in the hope that some may be accessed and understood, at least in part.

There are two aspects to this question which must be considered: first, the use of symbols in early societies which may or may not have been literate, and the role of the ship as a symbol in these cultures. Second, I will attempt to examine the various ways in which visual imagery may express symbolic meaning and the range of techniques which were used. The use of some of these may override other aspects of representation, such as the amount of detail which is depicted. Understanding the possible use of these techniques is of fundamental importance in interpreting pictorial graffiti.

For the purposes of the discussion in this chapter, it is understood that any image is a symbol in that it stands for or represents something else. This statement resembles most of the definitions of the term "symbol" which are found in dictionaries and academic discussions, in that it is general enough to include most aspects the term's application. Colin Renfrew used this sort of basic definition in his discussion of the central issues of cognitive archaeology. He looked at the nature of symbolism from a functional point of view (1991: 347), and listed five types of symbol, ranging from symbols used in measurement to those which regulated relationships with the supernatural. It is possible to locate ancient ship graffiti within two of Renfrew's categories: those symbols which describe the world through depiction, and those which deal with the supernatural or transcendental.

However, images representing boats may do so for a very wide range of reasons. These may range from the artist's simple decision to illustrate an attractive real object which has caught his attention, to the use of a depiction of a ship to express a complex

belief or wish, either in accordance with a received concept or as an idiosyncratic statement. As was noted in the previous chapter, the communicative use of art in preliterate societies, or by illiterate people, must have meant that pictures sometimes enabled a subtle, even convoluted message to be both expressed and understood comparatively easily. The Christian church has made use of this way of imparting information in the decoration of its buildings, through the distant past to the present day.

It is important, however, not to limit the use of symbols in art too narrowly to the use of particular forms and subjects as icons or discrete signs. Miranda Green (1992: 206-223) discussed the importance of understanding artistic style itself as potentially symbolic of an outlook, belief or observation held by the artist about the subject being portrayed. A particular style might then be used as a cognitive trigger, and although her example belongs to the formal Celtic religious art of the ancient world, it is not difficult to find other examples, even in modern times, in caricature, some religious art, or representational graffiti. Reductionist devices, mentioned in Chapter 1, might be used in this sort of symbolic way, if their effect was in line with an underlying philosophy or view, and represented a related intention. An example of this in modern art may be seen in Henri Matisse's startling version of the Stations of the Cross at the Dominican Chapel of the Rosary at Vence, in France (illustrated in Schneider 1984: 679, 685).

Symbolic styles are not necessarily bare or reduced of detail, however, although the *pars pro toto* or artistic shorthand is an important tool for expressing a complex message economically. Realism was also used in some forms of art, not to express symbolic meaning, but to increase the power of the image, and to enhance its efficacy as an active image by clearly representing the object of the artist's concern (Freedberg 1989: 155, 157). In this example, the desired outcome of the act of making an image was dependent on the way in which the subject was portrayed. Also, the artist may

use the spatial relationships between the various subjects in a composition as a way of potentiating his image, or of conveying specific information by the use of physical links. Understanding the possible use of this technique was an important aspect of Lawrence Nees's interpretation of the Mulling Collophon drawing (*op. cit.*), and it was seen that this image had to be viewed as a whole, with its meaning emerging both from the subjects depicted and from the spatial relationships between them.

Psychologists and anthropologists, considering the cognitive development of early humans, have theorized more or less convincingly about the development of symbolism in cognition. George Miller (1956: 44) saw it as a spin-off of an important adaptation for survival, as an efficient storage mechanism whereby high value tokens of information were stored as small units, whose easy recognition allowed large amounts of memory and understanding to be quickly retrieved. His discussion of the function of symbolism in terms of evolutionary processes did not include a theory of the way in which symbols are formed within particular human groups. However, Rudolf Wittkower (1977: 16-44) in tracing the meaning and use of important symbols through different cultures, described the link between visually powerful events or objects and their adoption into a culture's symbol lexicon. While reference will be made in a later discussion to the idea of "zoning" of human space, it is also important to note it here in terms of the very widespread use of the boat as a symbol.

Synkiewicz's recent study of the anthropology of corpse disposal (1990: 113-139) refers to the boat's use in this aspect of social function as an agent of transference, whereby a corpse was removed from one area of human meaning to be deposited in another (*ibid.*: 120). The meaning of these areas is to some extent defined by the function of the ship itself, the agent by which various interactions within the world are completed. The evocative, visual effect of the ship approaching and leaving the shore, added to its fundamental associations with movement between particular zones, danger, exploration of the unfamiliar, and potential death, create a powerful blend of

meanings and associations which could easily be seen in terms of Wittkower's description of the formation of symbols. Perhaps the conjunction of these factors explains in some way the occurrence of the ship as a symbol of belief in many of the world's religions. While this may also be understood in part by the original relationships between some religions, such as Judaism and Christianity, it must also be a reflection of the curiously durable symbolism of this product of human technology.

In the previous chapter, I mentioned J.D. Lewis-Williams's recent work on "navicular" or boatlike forms in South African rock art (*op.cit.*). Lewis-Williams argued that these forms were not intended to represent boats, but rather were depictions of entoptic images, neurological phenomena generated by the central nervous system under stress. Perhaps the curious power of the boat as a symbol in myth and religion and its frequent use as a motif in art may be explained, at least in part, by the place of a shape very like the boat's typical outline among the phenomena produced by the activity of the human neurological system.

Explanations which are based on the potency of visual experiences, neurology, and the zoning of human space may be insufficient to account for the complexity of symbols, however. Charles Kennedy's note (1975: 115-124) on the symbolism of the anchor for early Christians described its probable link with a pun between the Greek noun for "anchor" and the phrase "in the Lord". The power of the anchor symbol, therefore, was based not only on its straightforward associations with hope and steadfastness, but also in the added richness, for Greek speakers, of its pun with a phrase with religious meaning. Clearly, this linguistic level may be elusive or even lost altogether from our understanding of ancient or prehistoric visual symbolism, as may the area of myth and folk tale.

The use of a symbol, in the sense of its function in society, must also be seen as hugely complex, and conditioned by many factors. If Miller is correct in his view of the evolutionary origin of symbolism, then some symbols must have had a virtually stable meaning within some societies, if their function as information repositories was to be served most effectively. Outside of this basic information carrying activity, however, is the more subtle region of what might be termed the "fluid" symbol, where religious, cosmological or philosophical material may be involved, and where many layers of meaning, within the community and between individuals, may be found. These meanings may have been taught explicitly to a group of initiates, as in the case of Aboriginal art (Mowaljarlai *et al.* 1988: 690-696). It is interesting to note that these questions are currently emerging as subjects of discussion in the rapidly developing field of human cognitive evolution (for example, by Mithen 1996).

Stability or certainty of meaning in this group of "fluid" symbols is unimportant in terms of human survival, and the flexibility and creativity of the imagination may be fully expressed in their development and use. It must also be noted that this distinction between types of symbols according to their function is itself potentially very misleading, through its implication that no symbol may belong to both categories, when clearly such a restriction is impossible. While both the fixed and the fluid symbol may provide the subject matter of visual imagery, identification by a later viewer of the precise meaning of the symbol to the artist at the time of the piece's creation may pose great difficulty. When visual symbols are found outside their original frame of cultural reference, however, they can set interpreters particularly complex problems in identifying their meanings. The migration and mutation of symbols is itself a large area of study, but it is important to note here that a ship used symbolically in a graffito may represent the activity of elaborate mutative processes from the broadest cultural level through to the interpretation of the individual artist himself.

"Reading" the symbol, determining its meaning to the artist within the context of the composition and site in which it appears, has provided a challenge to many generations of interpreters of art, and, as attempts to codify this kind of interpretation, dictionaries of symbols and their meanings have been produced by art historians (for example, Hall 1974). E.R. Goodenough, in his paper on early Christian and Jewish art, attacked this sort of approach with what might be termed an Old Testament zeal, "A symbol of any importance is never an alternative way of writing a single word or concept, and limitation of its meaning to any one conception ...is always impossible. To try, for example, to express the religious value of the Menorah to Jews in a single word...will never satisfy more than a very few Jews, and those only in one mood." (1971: 188-9). A similar view was expressed by E.H. Gombrich in his discussion of symbolism in Renaissance art (1972: 11-13), the interpretation of which is somewhat compounded by the existence of a number of medieval and Renaissance texts which are devoted to the interpretation of symbols. Gombrich's emphasis on the importance of relating visual imagery to its context in attempting to ascertain its meaning, rather than relying on a "dictionary" approach which sees a one-to-one correspondence between symbol and significance, highlights an area which will become a recurring theme in terms of the interpretation of graffiti in this study.

Perhaps the greatest danger in attempting to find a one to one correlation between symbol and meaning is this approach's implication that symbols are discrete entities, understandable in isolation from one another. It is only in relationships between symbols, whatever their function, that their complex meanings may be approached, "A sign or symbol only acquires meaning when it is discriminated from some other contrary sign or symbol." (Leach 1976: 49). The art historian Erwin Panofsky, in his discussion of the analysis of meaning in the visual arts, called this level of analysis "iconology", as distinct from "iconography", which is the superficial or descriptive understanding of the subjects in a composition. (1970: 51-82). Panofsky's work provides another example of academic emphasis on the importance of evaluating not

only the whole composition in which a particular subject appears, but in understanding the relationship between the elements themselves.

The problem of contemporaneity of the parts of a graffito image is clearly fundamental to this analysis, and may provide an insuperable obstacle to its application in graffiti studies, as these images may be more vulnerable to tampering than many works of formal art. An example of this is seen in the remarkable ship graffito of the "Europa", found at Pompei (fig. 2.1). There are a number of stray or intrusive subjects and inscriptions accompanying the ship, shown around the hull area and near the sail, and it is possible that some of these were added to the graffito after its creation. This point raises the issue of "contagion" in graffiti creation, where one artist's graffito stimulates, and at the same time gives permission, to other people to add their own work to the existing imagery. This phenomenon is particularly apparent in the accumulations of pictures and inscriptions in public places (the graffiti on the tables in Edinburgh University's library provide a particularly rich instance of this). Later in this study, in the section devoted to the discussion of practical examples, I will consider an example of such an assemblage of graffiti from the ancient world, which seems only to include images of ships.

However complicated the evidence may be which is offered by these images which have been tampered with, or have been created in groups in response to the presence of other images, the question of the relationship between artistic realization and symbolic meaning provides one of the greatest areas of difficulty for the later viewer. For the contemporary viewer, the interplay between an individual's own understanding of the symbolic meaning held by certain subjects, and his ability to relate them to the broader area of cultural information which he shares with his fellows, may allow complex levels of meaning, encoded in visual imagery, to be understood. The later viewer's ability to reach these meanings then involves

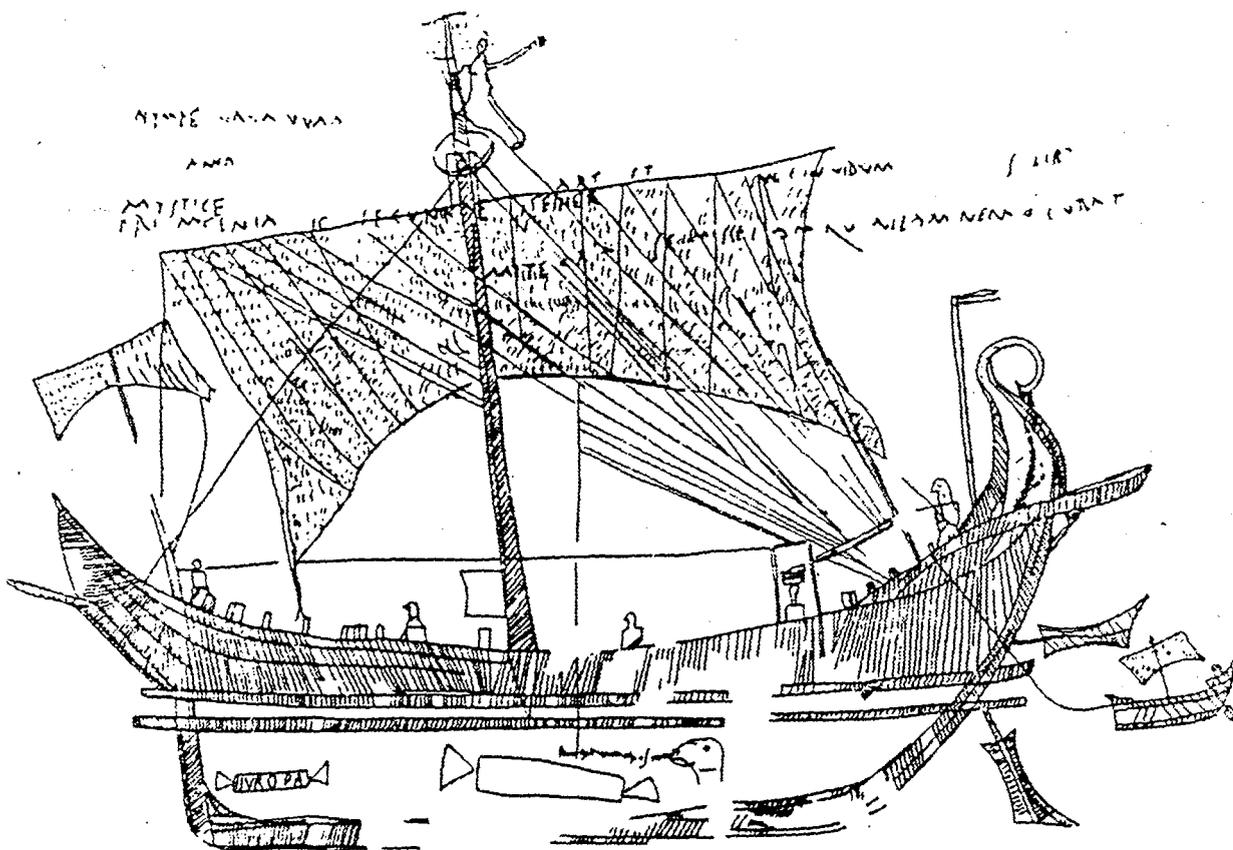


Fig. 2.1 The ship graffito "Europa". Basch 1987.

recreating something of the broad group of concepts and general information, held throughout the culture, which allowed the deeper levels in an image to be reached.

Raphael's painting of the meeting between Pope Leo I and Attila exemplifies this issue. The artist portrayed Leo I with the features of the living Pope, Leo X, a detail which would have been instantly recognizable to many contemporary viewers, but is very unlikely to be understood by more than a handful of present day historians. For contemporary viewers, registering this visual reference led the viewer toward the deeper meaning of the image, the miraculous and eternal power of the Church (Wittkower *ibid.*: 180). Insider knowledge, the ability to make the first vital recognition of the elements at work in the image, was then the essential mechanism whereby the painting's deeper levels of meaning might be reached. Although this example belongs to formal art, it is possible, and even necessary, to see the potential of this relationship between symbolism and insider knowledge as an important factor in the creation and later interpretation of informal art or graffiti.

It would be impossible to imagine a culture's complete lexicon of insider knowledge, from broad and simple statements to subtle nuances, to have been encoded in some form for later consultation. By definition, insider knowledge is diverse, fluid, and variable not just between individuals, but within one person's mind as it is altered by time and experience. The interpretation of the symbolic meaning of an early image, therefore, in the absence of a past culture's frame of cognitive reference, may ultimately be the product of inference and deduction, rather than the result of sifting and sorting material evidence.

This inference or deduction, however, can only be based on the material evidence, on evaluating relationships within the whole image itself, its internal, compositional relationships as well as its physical context. The analysis of a graffiti's form, style, and technique, as well as its physical and artistic relationships may become part of the

evaluation of the image's external associations, outside the immediate context or material of the image, in the broader area of comparative art history. This external analysis should also refer to the image's wider historical, artistic and cultural contexts. The importance of interpreting these contextual relationships, from the narrowest to the widest, is discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

Colin Renfrew's study of the ritual site at Phylakopi (1985) attempted this sort of multifaceted analysis of the form, style, and associations between material remains, to draw inferences about underlying meaning. However, the creators and artists of this site worked with reference to a particular canon, whose symbolism was, "regularly and repeatedly represented by the same form." (*ibid.*: 13). With Goodenough's statement about the individual's understanding of symbolism in mind (*op.cit.*), however, it would be wrong to see these meanings as necessarily stable even at the level of the individual believer. While a person's passive understanding of the symbol's meaning is likely to have had many shared characteristics with that of other cult members, the active or creative use of these symbols for private reasons may well have been more idiosyncratic. A pictorial graffito using a well known religious symbol in its composition cannot, therefore, be safely assumed to have a meaning in line with the orthodox belief of that religion. Comparative work between a graffito and other apparently contemporary art must then take account of this potentially eccentric meaning, at the same time acknowledging the possibility of equally eccentric inter-symbolic relationships.

Einar Østmo recently analysed a group of rock carvings featuring ships found at Dalbo, Norway (1991: 220-232). Although he closely evaluated their detail, technique and geographical location relative to other early carvings, he did not relate the various motifs on each rock to one another in terms of potential symbolic meaning or relationships, stating, "Each individual feature has its meaning in and by itself" (*ibid.*: quoting Gjessing 1939: 5). Østmo's disregard of the potential significance of

these relationships in symbolic terms may mean that his interpretation of the ships' meaning, as power symbols related to the metal trade, may be unreliable. My criticism of Paul Johnstone's evaluation of early Christian Insular art depicting ships (*op.cit.*), also centred on this point: their contexts and associations with other well known symbols from this period indicated clearly that the artists were making complex devotional statements. These statements entailed the use of particular style, techniques, and associations which Johnstone did not evaluate in terms of his interpretation of the ships as examples of early Christian Irish nautical technology.

I would like to consider two areas of artistic realization which might reflect underlying symbolic meaning: form itself, and the manner in which detail or motif might be used in an image to express specific meaning. (The *pars pro toto* technique, which is also an important technique for symbolic realization, has already been discussed, above.)

Form, the artist's choice of structure or arrangement by which his subject is portrayed, may itself reflect complex meaning. Sister Charles Murray's study of the transmutation of pagan imagery into early Christian art (1981) drew on representations of Noah in both pictorial graffiti and catacomb art to exemplify this, where Noah's ark was depicted not as a ship, but as a box. The Hebrew word for ark, "teba", means box or chest, but Murray believed that the meaning of the ark's representation as a box went beyond literal depiction. She proposed that it was also a visual reference to the myth of Danae, which had become interwoven with the story of the Flood in early Christian times, producing a hybrid image with a heightened or potentiated reference to escape through divine intervention (*ibid.*: 100 ff.). Recognition of this visual reference allowed the viewer to understand this strengthened meaning, and, although the resulting image may look odd to those out of touch with the right insider knowledge to decode it, no one could reasonably assume from it that Noah had escaped the Flood in a box. It may also be said that the oddity of this image to modern eyes acts as a clue to the existence of a further level, or levels of meaning in

the image. The superficial level of interpretation which assumes that the image is a realistic depiction makes little sense in terms of the Bible story, and the viewer is prompted by the form of the image itself to consider that some other message is being conveyed.

Specific details may be included within the form of a subject, or within the wider context of the composition, which are metaphoric rather than symbolic. Visual metaphor may be defined as the use of visual references which link with activities, states, or objects other than those which are immediately appropriate, in literal terms, to the subject portrayed. It is this level of reference to parallel ideas, to deepen or enhance meaning, which distinguishes visual metaphor from symbols. Within ancient images, however, it is possible to see the use of metaphor in features such as the so-called "x-ray" technique where interior structure may be illustrated as part or all of the detail within the subject's outline.

While this technique in ancient ship images has commonly been interpreted as the photographically realistic representation of the framing of a skin boat made visible by sunlight shining through the hide hull, (for example by Johnstone 1980: 107-8), it is possible that such a straightforward reading may not fully explain its meaning. Paul Taçon, (1987: 36-50) re-evaluating the use and meaning of the x-ray technique in the rock art of Western Arnhem land, described its metaphoric function as a way of indicating a profound message about the subject's particular state of being. Even with an awareness of the dangers of ethnographic parallels in mind, and Lewis-Williams's discussion of the dangers of the use of analogy is relevant here (1991: 149-162), Taçon's work indicates that a literalist interpretation of the meaning of this technique in ancient ship images may be unreliable as a basis, for example, for the reconstruction of the ships which these images portrayed (Marstrander 1976: 13-22). It is interesting to note, in passing, that Taçon rejected the term "x-ray" to describe this type of depiction because of its implication that detail within a subject which was

shown using this technique was realistically represented in a clinical or scientific way. Instead, he noted that "...specific internal elements are featured, highlighted or illustrated to the exclusion of others. Often these may be painted in an exaggerated form to make them more prominent, striking, or significant." (ibid.: 44). That these features were exaggerated or enhanced in the image would have been immediately understood by contemporary viewers, who would not have been in any doubt that this was not intended to be naturalistic depiction through their own familiarity with the subject. It is later viewers, and those from different cultures, who lack the right kind of insider knowledge to interpret these images accurately, and may be seriously misled as to their true meaning.

The use of colour is uncommon, though not unknown in ancient graffiti, and sometimes survives to the present. However, pigments which were used in an ancient picture may have been lost or seriously altered through the passage of time, and their use or original state (as noted above) must sometimes be detected by analytical techniques before their meaning may be inferred. Symbolic meaning of particular colours is well known in both art and religion, although its interpretation may be seriously hampered by its idiosyncratic reference to individual codes, such as in the example of Van Gogh's painting of his bedroom, noted above. As in the case of the interpretation of the x-ray technique, a strictly literalist reading of its meaning may be inappropriate. Also, a straightforward interpretation of the use of number in ancient art, in multiples of subjects or specific detail, may mislead the later viewer. An artist choosing to represent, for example, a particular number of ships in his composition, may be expressing a theological or philosophical position, which may range from the orthodox to the occult. He may be illustrating the real number of ships which were present during a real event, or may exaggerate or reduce this number for his own reasons.

The relative sizes of subjects within a composition may also be used to convey meaning. Maria Bunim (1940: 7) described the use of "hierarchic scaling", or the proportional sizing of figures within a group to indicate relative status, either earthly or supernatural. This technique is found in art from prehistoric times, through Egyptian art and well into the Middle ages, and is also seen in children's art. In ship graffiti, as in conventional art, its use may not be intended to convey a notion of relative size, but rather to indicate the importance or stature of particular ships relative to others in the composition. Vertical exaggeration of subjects or details may be present in art through an aspect of perception (Gombrich 1991b: 262), or it may be used deliberately in the same way as hierarchic scaling, to indicate relative importance. Anthony Anthony's illustration of the ships of Henry VIII's navy portrayed the ships as having an exaggerated top hamper, relative to the dimensions which the hull of the "Mary Rose" was found to have on its excavation, possibly with the intention of giving the ships a grand and formidable silhouette.

My discussion of the potential symbolic meanings of particular artistic techniques is in some danger of implying that the use of one meaning necessarily excludes others. To view the use of technique and meaning in this way would certainly be to undervalue the creative imagination and artistic capabilities of the creators of ancient images, and the work of both N.K. Sandars (1968), in the study of prehistoric art, and Paul Tacon (*op. cit.*), among many others, indicates that layers or levels of meaning were likely to have been an important informational component of early art. The task of the modern interpreter is then to be aware of the possible complexity of the meaning of form and technique, avoiding the assumption of photographic realism.

In what might almost be said to be an antidote to this discussion of the impact of symbolic meaning on the realization of a graffiti, it must be noted that there is an almost incalculable number of representational graffiti which are certain to be the products of fantasy and the imagination. The artists of these images have not

consciously drawn on a code of private symbolism or used metaphoric visual references with the intention of conveying a subtle message, but have created pictures as whims, without the intention of depicting a real ship, or of making a conceptually complex statement. Distinguishing these images from historic or iconic pictures may not be particularly difficult, through evaluating their more fantastic or unlikely qualities. For example, the single ship carved on the reverse of the branch bearing the Bryggen "fleet" of ship graffiti (fig. 2.2), has a deeply incurving sternpost decorated with a fuzz of lines. It is not difficult to identify these features as unlikely in an early thirteenth century Norse ship. However, identifying invented or capricious details within a conventional or historic form may be far harder, particularly where ancient images are concerned which depict boats poorly represented in the archaeological record or contemporary art. In these cases, where verification is difficult or impossible, the question of interpretation is perhaps best left open.

The question of fantasy ships, or ships with fantastic detail, opens the way to a more complex, even metaphysical issue. In the course of these discussions on the representation of objects, I have not touched on the deeper question of how a subject may be understood in terms of whether it ever existed, in a real form, or was entirely and literally a creation of its artist. John Coles touched on this problem when, referring to the problem of interpreting Scandinavian Bronze Age carvings, he recently commented, "Therefore there seems no reason to doubt, except for the sake of pure b.m. argument, that the carvings of boat-like designs represent real once-existing boats even if some were distorted or exaggerated for symbolic reasons." (1993: 25). This observation illustrates a common feature of human creative and imaginative activity, that subjects used in these activities, from the mythical ship "Skidbladnr" to Dr. Who's Tardis, are based on objects which were familiar to some degree to contemporary audiences or viewers. Relating these imaginatively drawn or described, enhanced or altered objects to their real antecedents, however, without

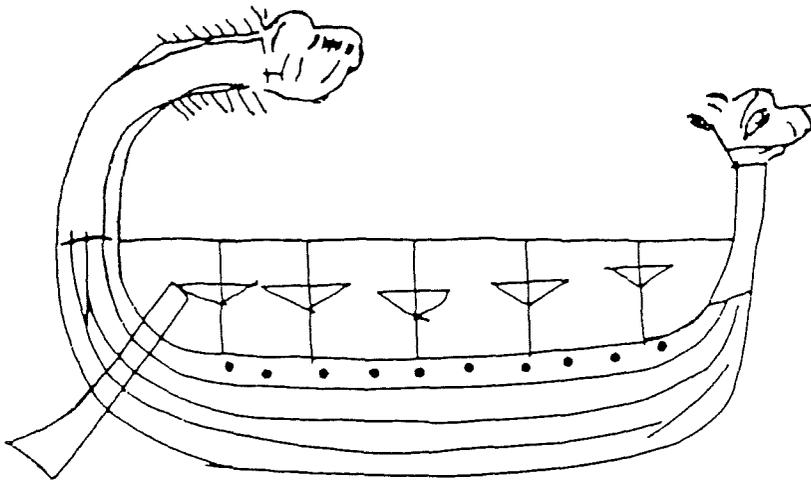


Fig. 2.2 The ship graffito on the reverse of the Bryggen artefact.
Herteig 1985.

concrete evidence such as naval architect's plans or archaeological material, may be an impossible task.

The discussion of this chapter has been in some danger of implying that all the aspects of a graffito image are intentional, and represent the form and detail which the artist wished. Formal art may contain minor slips or overt mistakes; the artists of simple, casual images such as graffiti are unlikely to have critical viewers to satisfy, and many of these images are likely to contain inaccuracies which may not have mattered a great deal to their creators. These may be broadly divided into four categories (Humphreys 1978: 78-9). The first are those which are made by the artist because he has misunderstood an aspect of his subject, but faithfully shows what he believes to be correct. The second group are mistakes which are made by the artist as an aspect of tool and medium handling, or eye-hand coordination, and reflect a difficulty in physically achieving a mental image. The third are those deliberate mistakes which are used intentionally because the artist believes that a more diagrammatic, rather than a realistic depiction more clearly shows the true arrangement of an aspect of detail or form. The fourth category is those incorrect details which are transmitted between artists over time, either as formulaic renderings when the artist wishes his viewer to read the subject as a cipher for a particular type of ship, or when unfamiliar or rare subjects are represented.

Later copies of a graffito may introduce incorrect detail to the original form, or omit aspects of it. The inaccuracies which are introduced to a direct copy of the graffito may result from the practical difficulties in interpreting faded, worn, or fragmentary graffiti, from the complex area of the copier's subjectivity and his preconceptions, or from a combination of both problems. An example of this may be seen in some copies of the Enkomi graffito, an important image found in Cyprus which may date from the Bronze Age, and which has been cited in a number of studies of early Mediterranean shipping (Vermeule 1964: 259; Casson 1971: plate 27; Wachsmann

1981: 207). Different renderings of this graffito show a surprising range of detail which varies considerably from that shown in Basch's photograph of the original (1987: 148, A). This graffito, and the problems which it presents, will be discussed further in this study.

La Roërie (1957: 184) noted the phenomenon of the "arbitrary multiplication" of detail in subsequent copies, when the original number of similar objects in one subject or composition may be increased in later renderings. While this may be a stylistic "improvement" by a copier who is not particularly concerned with fidelity to the original, it is also an example of the active role which an interpreter may have in the adaptation of original detail. Lewis-Williams's recent discussion (1993: 273-291) of the various interpretations of one particular San painting focussed in part on the problem of the academic copier's subjectivity and its interplay with his interpretation of the image, "Far from being objective, his copy of the painting was skewed by his limited understanding of the Bushmen and their art." (*ibid*: 279). Also, Anthony Cutler (1991: 223) noted the problem of the influence of previous academic readings on the later interpreter of ancient art, a view of "interpretation as reaction" which is an important addition to Lewis-Williams's work on the problem of the copier's subjectivity. The influence of these earlier writings and analyses on a later academic may be very difficult for him to identify and disentangle from his own, uninfluenced position or response, a problem which has a large bearing on the area of subjectivity and interpretation which was discussed in the previous chapter. I will return to these problems in later discussions.

The human copier of ancient images may misunderstand the detail he attempts to interpret and misrepresent the original image through the activity of his stereotypes and subjectivity, but it is important to note that even a high quality photograph is also an interpretation, conditioned by the camera's own limitations as well as by its handling of the available light at the time the picture is taken. While some ancient ship

graffiti which have been reported and discussed are no longer extant to be viewed and reinterpreted in their original form, it is essential to use caution in referring to interpretive drawings and photographs as primary sources for the study of ancient graffiti. The tiny Karlby ship graffito (Rieck and Crumlin-Pedersen 1988: 133, *inter al.*) has been interpreted in a drawing (presumably from the original), by Karrasch (*ibid.*; illustrated fig. 2.3) as having a weathervane of the distinctive Viking shape at the masthead. However, a more recent photograph of the stone (Mortensen and Rasmusen 1991: 200; illustrated fig. 2.4) does not show anything resembling this feature at the top of the mast, and it must be supposed that either intrusive marks have been misinterpreted, or the detail is so faint that it is invisible except under special conditions (in considering this problem, it is also important to consider the very small size of the artefact). It is then possible that Mortensen and Rasmussen's photograph was taken under conditions which minimized the detail which Karrasch had interpreted as a weathervane and is itself an inaccurate record of the stone's carvings.

Both Lucien Basch (1976: 231) and, more recently, Alec Tilley (1992: 55) have appealed for the development of an objective or "scientific" method for the interpretation of representations of ancient ships. Numerous issues have arisen in the course of this discussion of symbolism, technique, and the problems of interpretation which indicate that the reading of these images is open to far too many variable or frankly unknowable factors, to allow anything approaching an objective method to be developed. Furthermore, objectivity itself, as noted in the first chapter of this study, may be an unattainable state of mind.

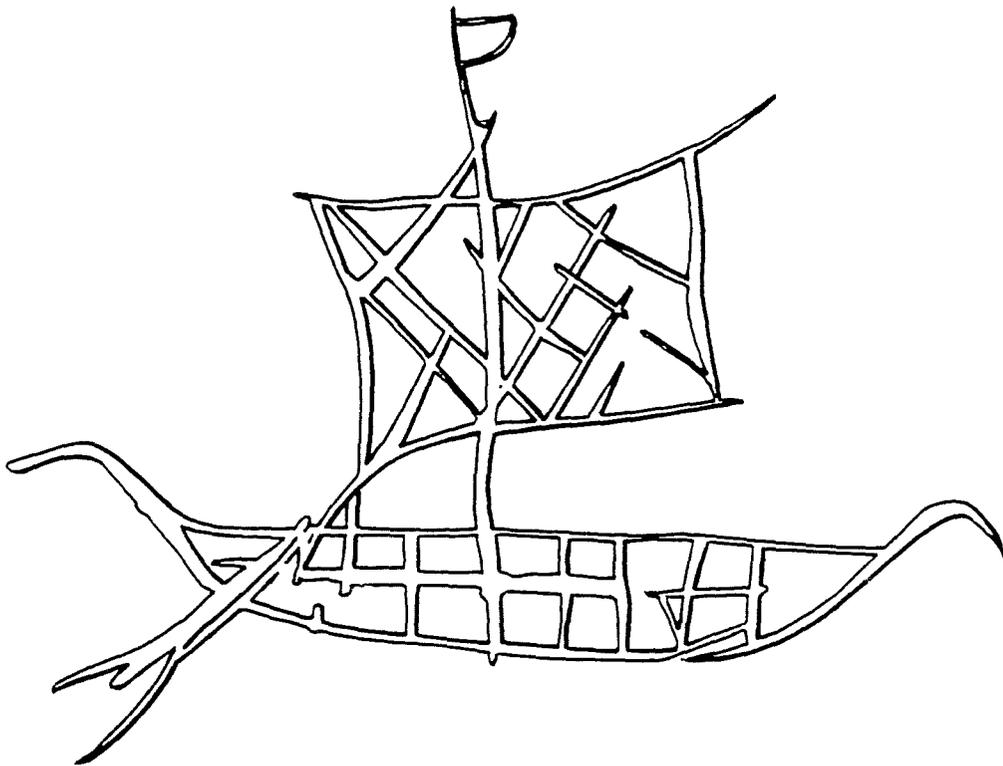


Fig. 2.3 The Karlby graffito, drawn by Karrasch, Rieck and Crumlin-Pedersen 1988.

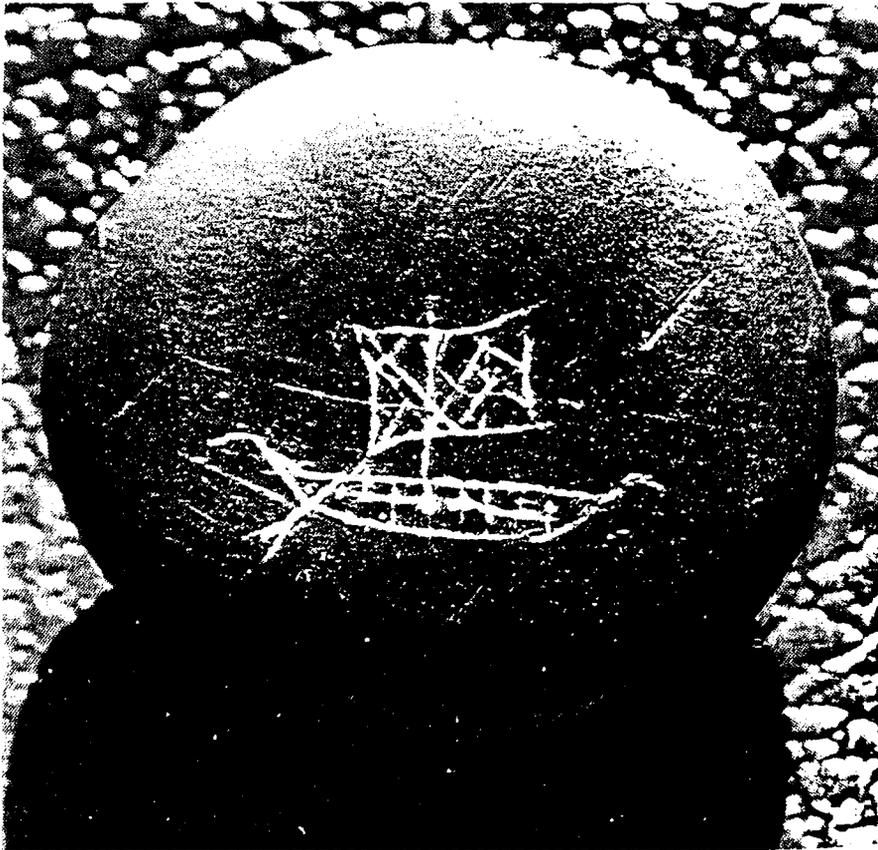


Fig.2.4 Photograph of the Karlby graffito. Mortensen and Rasmussen 1991.

Chapter 3 : More Practical problems

"...it is the assemblage, the ensemble, that matters, not the individual object in isolation."

Renfrew and Bahn, *Archaeology, Theories, Methods, and Practice* 1991:340

I have criticised authors who have used ancient ship graffiti as historical or technical sources without reference to such factors as the immediate compositional contexts in which the images appear, the archaeology and history of the sites themselves, or the "thought world " of the images' artists. My concern is based on the belief that the form, style, and detail of these images are the result of a complex interplay between the artists' intentions and several contexts, both cognitive and physical. In this regard, it may be said that pictorial graffiti closely resemble all other visual imagery. These contexts range from the artists' physical and conceptual experience of their own culture, to their choice of site and ground material, and the particular qualities and features of both which have led to their choice, which condition the types of marks they may make. Later human activities and environmental processes must also be understood in terms of their effects on the form in which the graffiti survives. Reading the resulting images, whether to interpret their symbolism or to learn something about the form of ancient ships, therefore involves achieving some understanding of the relationship between the graffiti image, its many contexts, and the processes which have affected it.

The discussion in the previous chapters of this study has centred largely on the philosophical, cognitive, and art historical aspects of image making, considering the broad questions of the graffiti's conception and creation by an artist, and its later reading and copying by interpreters. In this chapter, however, I will develop my

discussion of the more practical questions concerning the interpretation of ancient graffiti. This relative shift in focus, away from theoretical questions, is not intended to indicate that the theoretical and practical areas of discussion are without mutual influences. I hope that this chapter will illustrate that a number of the philosophical and art historical aspects of the interpretation of ancient ship graffiti are related closely to their analysis as artefacts.

Like any archaeological artefact, an ancient graffito which survives to the present bears physical traces of the activity of mutative processes which have altered the image from its original state. These processes and their effects act as filters or screens between the original graffito and the later viewer. Michael Schiffer (1987: 10) notes that these formation processes do not just degrade artefacts and deposits but can introduce patterning of their own, and understanding these patterns and identifying the nature of their screening effect may be seen as an important part of the artefact's interpretation. Distinguishing between the traces of formation processes and the graffito's original detail is clearly fundamental to this interpretative work. This concept is closely related to the art historian Erwin Panofsky's discussion (1970: note 38) of the importance of separating the later viewers' responses to the effects of time on a work of art from their responses to the techniques and details of the original piece.

Schiffer (*ibid.*: 22) classified the formation processes which affect both the site and the artefact in terms of their origins, either environmental or cultural. Graffiti on material in buried or sealed contexts, such as those found at Pompeii, will exhibit traces of the activity of naturally occurring formation processes following their burial, such as the chemical alteration of pigment through long contact with volcanic ash. Before the site's burial, traces of cultural formation processes might occur in the deliberate or accidental addition of extra detail to the graffiti, as may have been the case in the ship graffito "Europa" mentioned above (and illustrated, fig. 2.1), or in

areas of change such as damage or accretion resulting from other human activity. Graffiti in open sites, such as those on buildings, caves, or rock shelters, will be subject to alteration by both environmental and culturally related processes whose nature will be determined by the sites' various physical characteristics, such as accessibility to humans, and temperature fluctuation. The Jerusalem ship graffito (Bennett 1974: 307-309; Broshi: 1977: 349 - 352; Helms 1980:105 - 120, *inter al.*) provides an example of an image found in a sealed context which had been altered by both cultural and environmental processes. The discussion in the first part of this chapter will consider this remarkable image in some detail, because the many challenges which the interpretation of its many contexts offers later interpreters serve as a useful source of insights into the possibilities which need to be kept in mind when considering graffiti at many other sites.

The Jerusalem ship graffito and an inscription written below it (figs. 3.1 and 3.2) were discovered on a stone in the foundations of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, in November, 1971. (Although many photographs are available which illustrate the image at the time of its discovery and at various stages afterwards, I have chosen to use two interpretive drawings by Shimon Gibson because of both their high quality and the information which they give about the graffito in its original state.) The image measures 66 cm long and 31 cm high, and the inscription is 36.5 cm long and the letters are approximately 3 cm high. (Gibson and Taylor 1994: 29). It was photographed in black and white at the time of its discovery, and drawn by Svend Helms in the following month. This first drawing recorded only the black lines of the ship, and omitted details shown in ochre, apparently because Helms could not make sense of their rather chaotic form (Helms 1980: 108). Helms's decision to omit detail he could not interpret casts an interesting, if alarming, light on an aspect of the problems of copying enigmatic graffiti, which has implications for the impression of the image given by such a drawing to scholars with no access to the original. The image was left exposed following its discovery, cleaned in 1975 by Fr. E. Testa, and

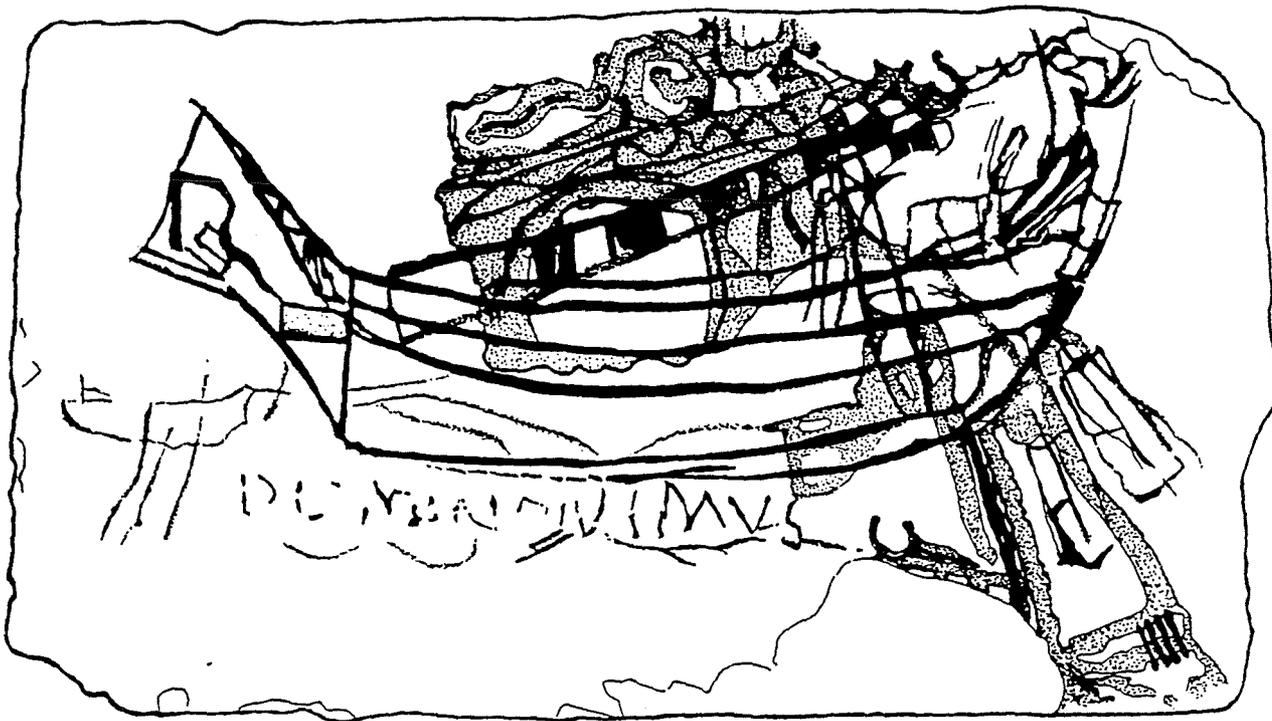


Fig. 3.1 Interpretive drawing of the Jerusalem ship graffito, from photographs taken at the time of its discovery. Gibson and Taylor 1994.

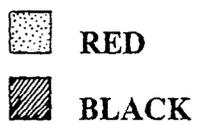
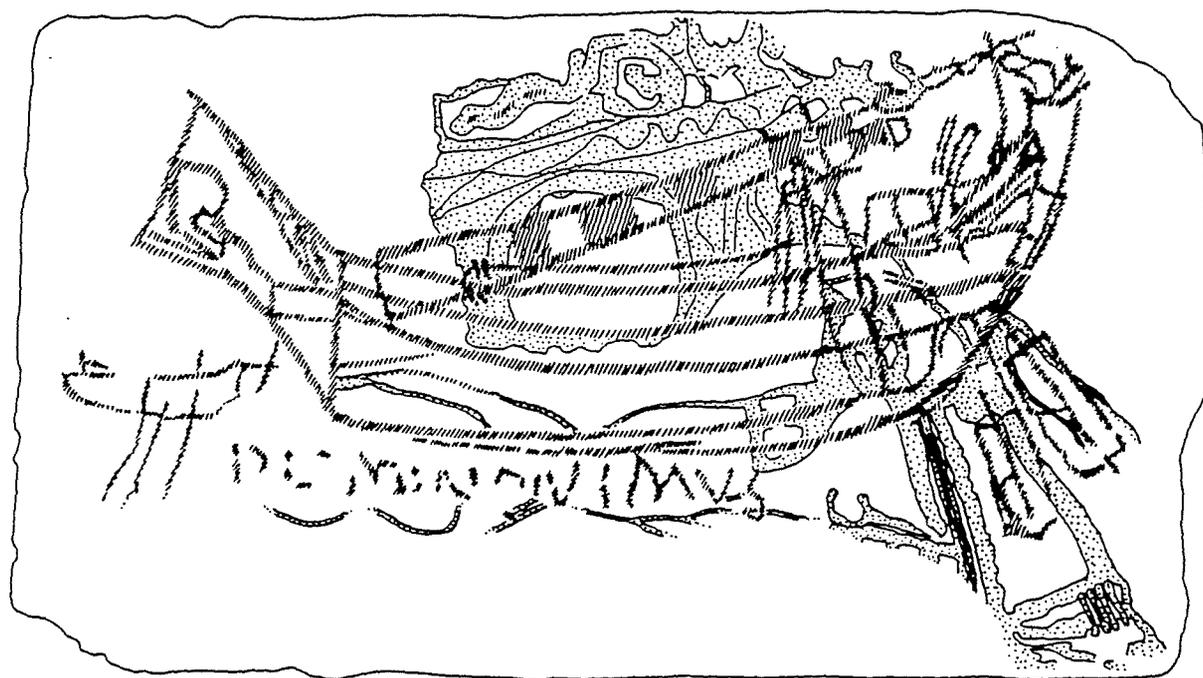


Fig. 3.2 Interpretive drawing of the Jerusalem ship graffito showing red and black sections. Gibson and Taylor 1994.

enclosed within a protective frame to prevent visitors to the site from touching it. The consequences of the graffito's cleaning for later viewers will be discussed in more detail, below.

Restoration work at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre had exposed an underground area (now known as the Chapel of St Vartan) which had originally been carved out as part of an Iron Age quarry, and subsequently incorporated and modified in Herodian, Hadrianic, and Constantinian building programmes. These had involved considerable demolition and remodelling of earlier structures, and it is certain that existing masonry was reused in each subsequent phase. The Hadrianic building had been a temple complex dedicated to Venus, created in 135 AD as part of the Emperor's attempt to "paganize" Jerusalem. This structure was levelled in 325 AD as part of Constantine and St Helena's plan to remove evidence of non-Christian worship, and to identify and honour important sites in the life of Christ with magnificent buildings. While the visible traces of Hadrian's temple were comprehensively flattened, Constantine's architects made use of the temple's deep foundations in their construction of the new basilica, which was consecrated in 335 AD. The building techniques used by the Hadrianic and Constantinian stonemasons appear to be easily distinguishable from one another, the earlier walls being drystone, and the later erected with mortar. Despite this, the archaeology of the Chapel of St Vartan, with its many remnants of walls and areas of fill, is extremely complex. The clearance of fill from this area, begun in 1971 under the orders of the Armenian Patriarchate, was undertaken without archaeological supervision (Gibson and Taylor *ibid.*: 9).

The ashlar block bearing the graffito was built into the northeastern corner of the second course of a drystone wall in the Chapel of St Vartan. The stone is 82.5 cm long, 46.5 cm high and 42 cm deep, and is a hard, fine-grained chalk which is found locally and was a common building material. Gibson and Taylor (*ibid.*: 17) are certain that the wall itself is Hadrianic through analysis of the building technique which was

used. It was built of fieldstones, a Roman ballista ball, some reused architectural rubble, and one dressed block bearing the graffito. They quote one of the archaeologists present at the time of its discovery as saying that the surface of the stone was "clammy and cold" when it was excavated (*ibid.*: 25). The significance of this observation for the modern condition of the graffito will be discussed below.

In the first stages of the construction of the basilica in the fourth century, the reused sections of the Hadrianic temple's foundations were consolidated and underground areas filled with rubble and soil, making a stable platform of support. Gibson and Taylor note (*ibid.*: 47) that the area bordered by the wall bearing the graffito was filled very soon after the construction of the adjacent fourth century walls, as their mortar contains encrustations of fill. It is clear that the graffito must have been on the ashlar block at the time that the adjacent area was filled in the fourth century. The question is, however, whether it was already on the stone before the wall was built in the second century, or was drawn when the wall was accessible through the demolition of the Hadrianic temple in the fourth century.

Gibson and Taylor (*ibid.*: 34-42; 42-47) interpret the lines and detail of the ship itself, and the writing of the inscription, to assign a first to second century AD date to the work. Their assessment of the masonry of the wall itself as belonging to the Hadrianic building phase supports this date (*ibid.*: 17-21). They interpret the creation of the graffito as the opportunistic use of a rejected block of building stone by a passing traveller, eager to record his or her arrival in Jerusalem, and the subsequent use of the block in a foundation wall of the temple to Venus. This interpretation of the graffito's physical context to date it to the second century AD relies not only on the analyses of second and fourth century building techniques, paleography and naval architecture, but also on the assumption that the delicate charcoal and ochre drawing survived the construction process, and that the mason took the trouble to position the stone to display the graffito, and to place the image the right way up. It is interesting

to note that there is a small chip out of the stone near its lower right hand corner which clearly postdates the drawing of the graffito, as it interrupts the detail in this area.

In Schiffer's terms, the cultural formation process, the fourth century packing of the site with soil and rubble, caused the occurrence of a natural process, the deposition on the graffito of a fine layer of material which protected and partially obscured it. As was noted above, the fill also appears to have created a stable, if slightly damp, environment, which greatly enhanced the preservation of the image. The excavation of the site in 1971 disturbed this environment, and led to the drying out and subsequent fading of the image in the early 1970's, which was probably compounded by the accumulation of dust on its surface as nearby restoration work progressed (Gibson and Taylor 1994: 33).

The resulting state of the graffito and inscription led to its being cleaned by Fr Testa in 1975. This cleaning, its processes and their consequences, provoked the heated controversy surrounding the image and its inscription, and led to the involvement of the Israeli Police Force in 1977, and accusations and counter-accusations in the 1980's. Helms claimed (1980: 109) that important portions of the original detail of the graffito, which were clearly present in the 1971 photographs, had vanished during the cleaning process. The small tender visible at the ship's bow, indications of rails near the stern, the mast truck and flag pole are among the structures which Helms believed had disappeared from the graffito which he saw and recorded in 1971. Moreover, Helms also hinted (*ibid.*: 110) that the enigmatic inscription had been subtly altered to fit a Christian reading. Even a cursory examination of the 1971 photographs indicates that Helms's accusations of the loss of detail from the image are fully justified. (Figs. 3.3 and 3.4 illustrate the graffito following cleaning.)

Helms's views have been endorsed and expanded by Gibson and Taylor (*ibid.*: 29-34), who have asserted that not only has detail been lost from the original graffito, but



Fig. 3.3 Photograph of the Jerusalem ship graffito after cleaning. Z. Radovan 1975; published by Gibson and Taylor 1994.

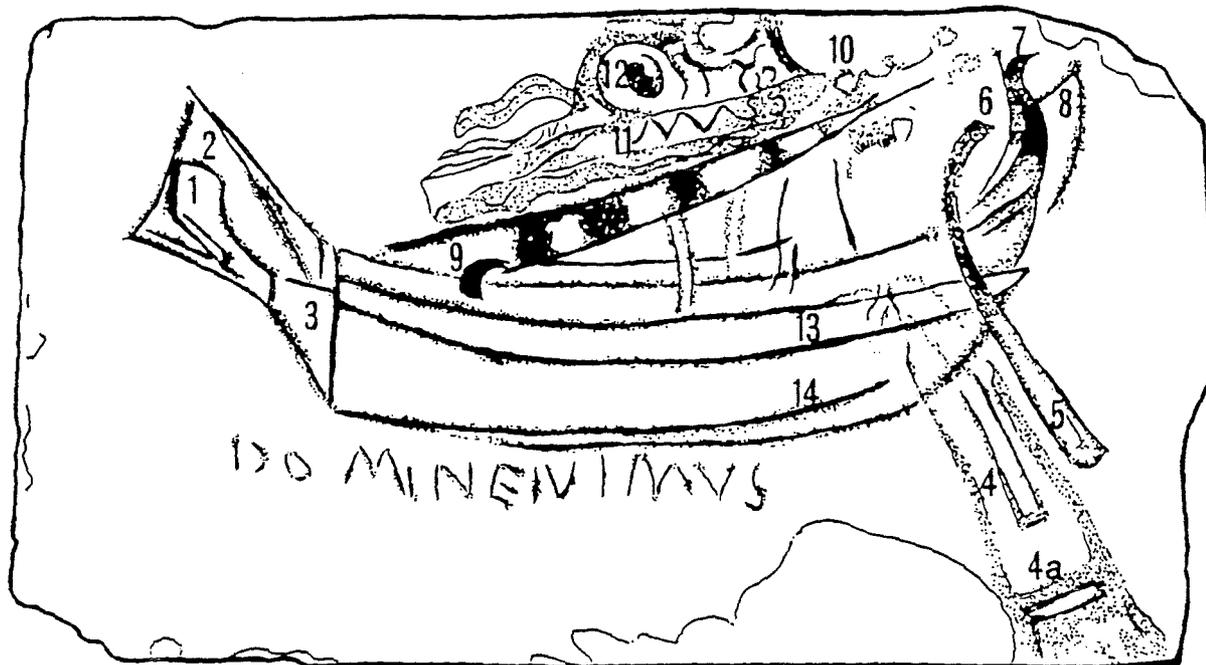


Fig. 3.4 Sketch of the cleaned ship graffito by Shimon Gibson 1975.
Published by Gibson and Taylor 1994.

also that attempts have been made, since the image's discovery, to enhance the state of the ancient charcoal and ochre lines using both pigment and tools which did not quite match the originals. This has produced an image which is effectively two drawings, one overlying the other. The underneath, earlier graffito's lines are blurred and indistinct, while the uppermost image is crisply drawn with sharp, clear lines. The ochre sections of this graffito are less orange than the older, underlying colour (*ibid.*: 33-34). Gibson and Taylor's attempts to discover the cause of this state of affairs, in particular the processes used by Testa to clean the graffito, have so far been unsuccessful.

There is clear evidence that the image and inscription as they appeared in 1971 no longer exist in the form in which they were found. While it is unfortunate and somewhat ironic that Helms's own drawings, made at the time of the site's excavation, cannot be said to be reliable copies, good quality photographs do exist which show the state of the graffito at that time, as well as the features which have been lost from it. In Helms's opinion (*ibid.*: 109), the original graffito has been lost, and the interpretation of the present, compound image cannot produce useful conclusions about ships of the early centuries AD. As noted above, the loss of detail was due not to the activity of inexorable environmental processes, but to human activity following its discovery, and this loss was made more serious by what appears to have been the deliberate alteration of the drawing and inscription. The related problem of forgery, in the sense of the creation of an image with the intention to deceive, will be discussed at more length elsewhere in this thesis.

This chapter is entitled "Practical Problems", and the discussion so far has dwelt exclusively on aspects of the Jerusalem ship graffito's physical context and its relevance in understanding the image. However, it is also important to consider its cognitive context, that is, the thought world of the period in which it was created. By considering this context and in particular the meaning of the ship as a symbol in the

first centuries AD, the image may be evaluated from a different point of view than simply as a spoiled technical drawing of a ship of the classical period. In a sense, then, the following discussion will attempt to pick up strands from the previous chapter's theoretical consideration of the issue of symbolism and visual metaphor, to discuss a practical example of a graffito's cognitive and symbolic context and its relationship to the image's interpretation.

The early academic papers on the subject of the Jerusalem ship graffito (Bennett 1974: 307-309; Humphreys 1974: 309-310; Testa 1976: 197-244; Broshi 1977: 30-31; Helms 1980: 105-120) include with their analyses of the ship graffito an interpretation of the whole piece in terms of its artist's reason for making it. All of these interpretations rely heavily on each particular author's interpretation of the inscription, in terms of the unmanned ship depicted with lowered mast. They are also united by their clear but unstated assumption that the ship graffito and the inscription below it are by the same hand, created at the same time, and intended to refer to one another as a complete statement. Various authors have read this inscription in different ways, from a pilgrim's triumphant announcement of his arrival in Jerusalem (Broshi 1977: 349) to a strongly metaphysical depiction of a Christian experience (Testa: 1976: 221) to a pagan seafarer's portrayal of his ship, the " Isis Mirionymus " (Helms 1980: 109-112). These interpretations all see the ship image as a portrait, a depiction of a real ship, which, as I noted above, is qualified by the content of the inscription. The considerable paleographic problems which the inscription offers are now complicated by the letters' enhancement with what appear to be the recent addition of charcoal.

While an assumption that an image and accompanying inscription are by the same hand may be secure and even necessary in dealing with a work of formal art, pictorial graffiti are the products of casual human activity and cannot be evaluated in the same way. This casual quality, which was noted in the introduction to this study, may allow chance associations or deliberate additions of detail after the original image was

made, as well as the removal or alteration of features. Several, or even many artists may be involved in the development of an image (and inscription) over a short period of time, particularly in an open site. In the case of a provocative or controversial graffito, as well as with the more banal or mundane, the additions or alterations which may have been made cannot be seen as deliberate attempts to falsify or mislead. Ancient, as well as modern examples may easily be found to support this. It would seem to be far safer to assume that there is, at best, a possible, but uncertain link between the inscription and the ship graffito itself. Perhaps future paleographic studies or chemical analysis of pigments may allow further conclusions to be drawn about the inscription which will provide more information about its relationship to the ship image itself.

Before leaving the question of the image and inscription to develop further the question of the graffito's cognitive context, it is worth noting Gibson and Taylor's discussion of the interpretation of the image in terms of its physical context (1994: 47). While considering the practical problems of the creation of a relatively complicated picture in a building site, they note that the piece has the "tenor of a proclamation", and refer to the well documented custom of pilgrims carving their names and crosses on the walls of shrines, caves, and churches. The foundations of a section of a partly completed building, certain to be buried as construction work progressed, cannot be seen to have been the most desirable spot to draw a detailed picture in two colours, whether or not its artist wrote an inscription with it. There would seem to be only two possibilities to account for this: either that the image was drawn on the stone before it was built into the wall (which is Gibson and Taylor's conclusion), or that the artist was not particularly concerned that his statement, whatever it was, should be visible to human viewers.

There are a number of examples of pictorial graffiti from the ancient world which were not made to be easily seen, but were placed underneath, behind, or within other

objects. The ninth century Oseberg graffito, for example (which will be the subject of a separate discussion further on in this study) was scored on the underside of the lid of a bailing hatch, and a naturalistic animal was scratched on the back of a square headed brooch from the Viking period (Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966: 28). Few conclusions may be drawn about the reasons for the artists of these graffiti hiding their work, but clearly some explanations which apply to modern graffiti making may account for these images, such as personalizing an object with a little hidden sketch, or passing the time by making an attractive picture on an unobtrusive surface.

It is also important to note the possibility that these ancient images were not intended to be seen by human eyes, but were created for supernatural purposes, such as invoking good luck and averting evil, or fulfilling a vow. Examples may be found from many different cultures and contexts in the ancient world which indicate the prevalence of beliefs that pictures, symbols, or inscriptions could be used to influence events in the future. Deities, supernatural forces, and the dead might also be contacted by these means. While everyday objects and buildings could be protected from evil by a drawing of an eye, a holy or important site might be expected to be a stimulus to the production of a range of magical images. The significance of the site of the Jerusalem ship graffito to pagans, Jews and early Christians may be said to have enhanced the likelihood that the ship was drawn for religious or superstitious reasons, and that its artist felt that it was unnecessary to place the graffito where it might be easily seen.

Gibson and Taylor interpret a very enigmatic group of lines at the lower right hand edge of the stone (which is partly interrupted by the flake in this area) as an attempt to represent a quay. The position of the ship's mast, lowered to the deck, is entirely in keeping with this reading of another aspect of the composition, although it is doubtful that there is firm artistic evidence in this complex area of the image to support this view. Further on in their discussion, they make the curious statement, " But a ship

docked in the harbour with its sails furled and its mast down is hardly the product of a Christian mind. " (*ibid.*: 46). This rather dogmatic assertion ignores the significance of the harbour in both literary and artistic Christian metaphor. Campbell Bonner's discussion of this question ("Desired Haven" 1941a: 48-67) indicates the importance of harbour symbolism for early Christians, as well as for those who came later. The position of the ship's mast and sails, stowed and furled, could not be said to be out of keeping with this symbolism.

In another discussion of ship symbolism in the early Christian period (1941b: 84-91), Bonner mentioned the potential importance of the east-west orientation of a ship image in terms of its symbolic meaning, particularly with the significance of the eastward position in Christian worship in mind (*ibid.*: 87, note 4). Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine from the published site maps and sections how the Jerusalem image is orientated. The interpretation of this aspect of the graffito's physical context might therefore shed some light on its potential symbolic meaning, as well as on its approximate date.

The specific example of the Jerusalem ship graffito only touches on a few of the issues which are involved in the formation of an archaeological site and its artefacts. In order to illustrate the wide range of factors which must be considered in achieving an understanding of the impact of the processes on the interpretation of an ancient image, it is necessary to look more generally at the relationship between an image and its background. The following discussion will focus first on graffiti which are found on fragmentary material, then on those which are on fixed surfaces. The nature of the ground material of ancient graffiti, whether it is fixed or portable, has significant implications for the interpretation of the images in terms of their physical transmission through time and space; this will be discussed in detail below.

The images which will be discussed here appear on portable objects; fragments of manmade artefacts such as potsherds, or on naturally occurring material such as fragments of wood, stone, or bone, as well as beach pebbles and flotsam. The work which survives to the present is generally carved or scratched, but examples of painting or drawing with pigments are also known (Ritchie 1971-2: 297-301; 1989: 50). Decoration of fragmentary material may be related to an aspect of the craft process as trial or motif-pieces for difficult or complex work (O'Meadhra, *op. cit.*), or, where the design predates the artefact's breakage, may be part of a group of contemporary decorative conventions. The images may also have been created as graffiti in their own right, rather than as steps towards a more finished piece of work, and scratched or drawn on the background fragment either after the artefact's breakage, or on other found material. However, as noted above in the discussion of the concept of ancient graffiti as opposed to that of art, it may be impossible for later interpreters to understand or place an image on a piece of fragmentary material within a contemporary artistic context. The decoration of naturally occurring found material, or manmade fragments such as sherds, exploits certain social concepts which may have a profound impact on the imagery itself. This area will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Those images of ships on potsherds, or other kinds of fragments of any artefacts, which predate the artefact's breakage and discard must be seen as being likely to have been units of a decorative composition, and part of a larger decorative concept which underlay the ornamentation of the complete artefact. Their relationship to the rest of the artefact's decoration may be sometimes inferred from other scraps of interrupted pattern on the fragment, but there is the danger that the area of image left by the breakage may suggest associations of detail which had no place in its original form as an individual motif. The disputed double masts of the Bronze age Orchomenos ship (Kunze 1934: plate 29, 3 ; Renfrew 1972: 357 ; Basch 1987: 83; 1992: 351; illustrated, fig. 3.5), for example, if accepted as being what they appear to be, would

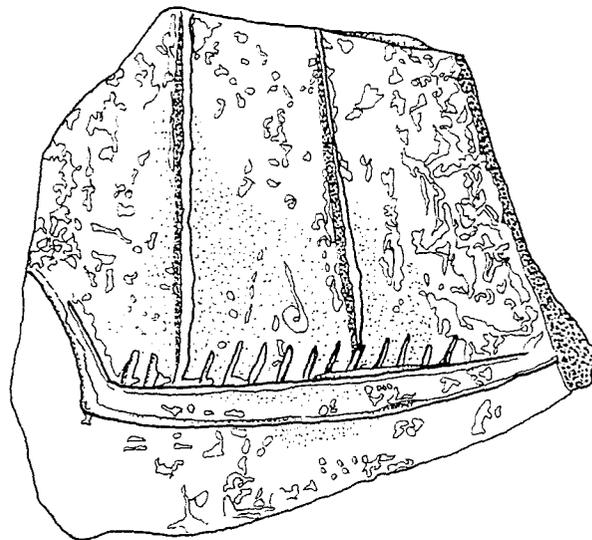
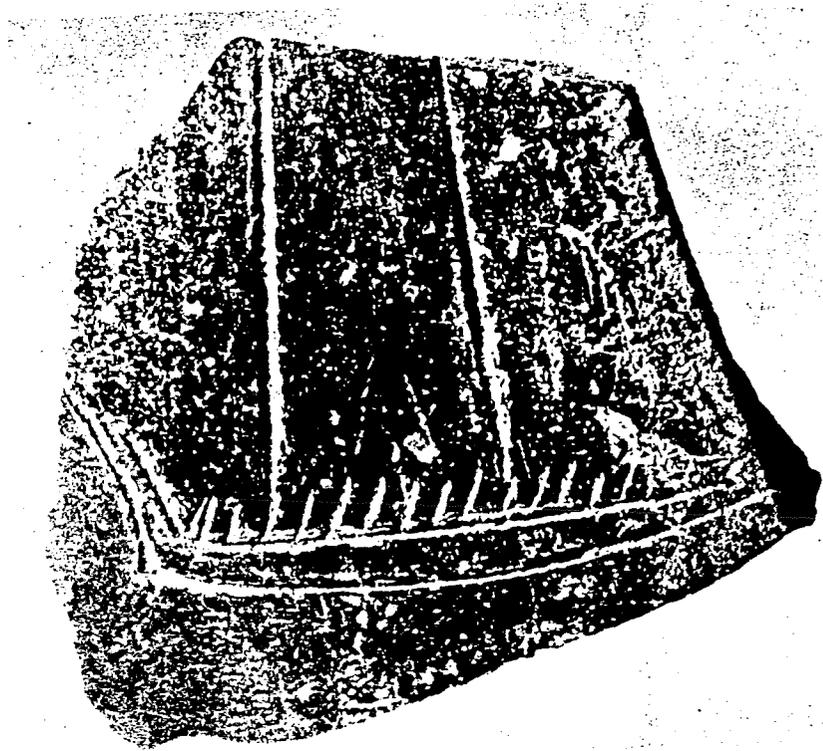


Fig. 3.5 The Orchomenos ship. Photograph by Kunze 1934; interpretive drawing le Bon 1995.

make an image with no parallels in what is known of contemporary nautical technology. Examination of the fragment bearing the image, however, shows that the lines in question extend well beyond the ship to the edge of the sherd, suggesting the strong possibility that they originally belonged to another aspect of the whole pot, such as a strap handle.

Relationships between a ship motif and the boundaries of its background, its style and technique of manufacture, and the presence of intrusive lines from other parts of the artefact's decoration, may indicate that the image was part of a decorative composition. However, the analysis of style and technique from a great distance in time may be complex, as in the case of "sgraffito" ware, (for example from the Byzantine period), whose decoration may now appear to be charmingly casual, but was well within a known contemporary artistic canon. It is essential to approach such analysis with as little artistic and cultural subjectivity as possible, and with reference to formal decorative work thought to be contemporary with the image in question. If analysis appears to show that the motif predated the artefact's breakage, and was part of its original decoration, then its form and detail must be interpreted with all the constraints and caveats of the analysis of formal decorative style in mind. Even if the artist had intended to portray an historic ship or ship type as a decorative feature, artistic conventions, fashion and popular taste, the size of the artefact and the curve of its surface may have led to distortions or variations in the representation of the ship's true form and proportions.

Many ancient images representing ships therefore survive on fragmentary material as graffiti, rather than aspects of formal ornamentation, in that they postdate the breakage and discard of the original artefact, and were the product of cultural formation processes in the reuse of fragments or debris for purposes other than the decoration of functional items. The artists of these images used their background material opportunistically, perhaps as part of a boredom reducing activity, with a disregard for

the identity or function of the complete item to which the sherd belonged. The circumstances of these images' creation may mean that they are difficult or impossible to interpret with any certainty, through the possible involvement of elements of fantasy in the subject's form or detail, or mistakes, crudities, or conventions resulting from aspects of tool and medium handling. Furthermore, the deposit of secondarily ornamented pieces in middens or on floors, such as the decorated stone fragments at Jarlshof (Curle 1934-5: 265-324; Hamilton 1956: 114-5, 121, 141, 145, 173, 180) may have meant that they were vulnerable to the effects of cultural and environmental processes which altered the original work in some way. The interpretation of these effects will be discussed in more detail below.

An example of a sherd decorated with a ship graffito may be seen in the so-called Indus fragment (MacKay 1938: plate LXIX, 4 ; Bowen 1956: 284-285; Johnstone 1980: 171-172; illustrated, fig. 3.6), which bears an important representation of an early masted ship. The fragment's discoverer noted that the ship graffito is accompanied on the inside face of the sherd by what appears to be an inscription of several scratched characters (1938: i, 183). The slightly concave surface of this face, and the presence of slip on the other surface, suggested to MacKay (*ibid.*) that the Indus ship graffito and inscription were formed on the sherd, after the original pot's breakage. His rationale for this conclusion was presumably that a simple decorative motif would be more likely to be found on the outside, rather than the inside of a pot. This conclusion may be unsafe, in the light of numerous examples of the interior decoration of cups, bowls, and basins which may be seen the ceramics of many ancient cultures.

Unfortunately, as neither the size nor shape of the sherd, nor the spatial relationship between the ship and the inscription are indicated in MacKay's illustrations, it is impossible to speculate about their relationship to the fragment's edges. This uncertainty seriously complicates the interpretation of the long parallel lines at the



Fig. 3.6 The Indus ship graffito. The upper illustration is accompanied by the inscription found with the ship; Mackay 1938; the lower is Bowen's version, 1956.

ship's masthead, bringing the problem of the intrusive lines on the Orchomenos fragment to mind. While the Indus ship's lines may represent yards or towing fittings, they may also be interrupted detail of other graffiti, or intrusive marks caused by environmental formation processes. It must be noted that Mackay's original drawing, which was unaccompanied by photographs, was "modified" by Bowen, and this version copied by Johnstone, introducing minor but possibly significant inaccuracies to the copy which appears in Johnstone's book, *The Seacraft of Prehistory* (1980: 172, fig.13.3). This example illustrates two of the factors which can be particularly problematic in cases when the original graffito has been lost or is otherwise not readily available for firsthand reassessment. First, the tendency of those interested in nautical archaeology as such, to regard the portrayed vessel as "the artefact", rather than to consider the graffito itself as an artefact. This focus of interest conditions the type of recording undertaken, so even the size, let alone the physical setting, of the image may receive at best a cursory comment, and only easily interpreted parts of the ship subject are included in the drawing. (Helms's interpretative drawing of the Jerusalem ship graffito, which omitted detail which he could not understand, is a good example of this.)

Second, the already edited image becomes, in effect, " the artefact " in the eyes of those specialists in nautical technology who turn to the published image, either of necessity, or for convenience. They may have their own concepts of what the image should represent in terms of current thinking on nautical technology, and may feel that the published drawing reflects an outmoded archaeological stereotype. Although they may not have viewed the original graffito, they may feel that it is legitimate or indeed necessary to modify the image in their own publications. In other cases, however, it is not clear whether unacknowledged changes on republication involve ignorance of more objective sources (for example, Johnstone's use of Bowen's interpretative drawing of the Indus ship, *op.cit.*). These modifications to copies of graffiti may

themselves be very difficult to interpret, as deliberate corrections, slips of the pen, or inadvertent copying errors involve ignorance of more objective sources.

Scrap material, driftwood, pebbles or slates, and bits of bone have all occasionally been reported as bearing decorative work (O'Meadhra *op. cit.*) and among this, ship graffiti. These images, like those on sherds, may be seen as the products of cultural formation processes which may then be altered from their original state by cultural or environmental formation processes, according to the circumstances of their deposit, as noted above. Like graffiti on potsherds, their relationship to the boundaries of their background material may indicate whether the original image had been damaged after its creation by these processes, an important aspect of their analysis. This damage might cause the loss of some portion of the form or detail of the ship image itself, creating difficulties in interpreting the remainder of the image. Formation processes may also cause intrusive marks to be added to the graffiti, and these may be difficult or impossible to distinguish from original detail. Microscopic examination of the characteristics of the graffiti's carving may be the only means of determining which lines are deliberately manmade, and which are caused by accidental cultural or environmental processes.

In considering the interpretation of graffiti images on fragmentary material, four points emerge:

- 1) The nature of the fragment itself, whether manmade or naturally occurring, determines the initial type of analysis which is needed to interpret the accompanying motif. The important question here is whether the design predated the breakage of the pot, or was added to a fragment of found material. The physical characteristics of the background material, its hardness, the curve of its surface, and its boundaries in relation to the image, provide some information about the composition itself, and the relationships and sequence of the design.

2) If the design occurs on a fragment of a manmade item, and appears by its style and technique, as well as its associations with other parts of fragmentary motifs, to belong to the original decoration of the piece, the ship it depicts should first be evaluated in terms of what is known of the norms of contemporary decorative style and convention, before turning to assessing it as a potential representation of an historic ship.

3) If the design was created opportunistically on a piece of found material, its physical relationships to the edges of the background material may allow some conclusions to be drawn about its completeness, as in the case of images on fragmentary material which belonged to a complete artefact's decoration.

4) Intrusive marks which result from the action of cultural or environmental formation processes, may considerably complicate the interpretation of an ancient image. They may also, however, provide environmental information about the circumstances of the artefact's use, deposit, and discovery. Intrusive marks may possibly be distinguished from the detail of the original graffiti by microscopic analysis. The absence of these marks may in itself be informative, and raise questions about the history of the artefact.

A carved pebble recently found near Karlby, in Jutland, and which was briefly discussed above and in the previous chapter (and illustrated, figs. 2.3 and 2.4), provides a curious example of an opportunistically decorated piece of found material whose traces of formation processes are somewhat at odds with the reported circumstances of its find. This pebble, known as the Karlby stone (Rieck and Crumlin-Pedersen, *op.cit.*, *inter al.*), was apparently found among other pebbles on a beach, and the carvings have been tentatively dated to the Dark Age. The stone has not yet been analysed lithologically, but appears to be of sedimentary origin and relatively soft (Crumlin-Pedersen 1993; personal communication). While the ship and the elk motifs on the stone are remarkable for their tiny size and the precision of their carving (the pebble itself measures barely 22 mm. in diameter), they are also

"crisp" and unblurred. The stone itself bears very few marks or scratches which might be expected after even a short period of time in the dynamic environment of a Jutland beach. The absence of both wear and intrusive markings at the edges of the carvings and on the stone itself would seem to indicate that it is unlikely that such a relatively soft stone lay for any length of time on the beach where it was reportedly found. This artefact, and its images, will be discussed again in more detail later in this study.

It is also important to note that portable material, either manmade or naturally occurring, may be transmitted through time and place if it has a place in a system of values which assigns some merit to it, either through its material or symbolic value. The exchange of these objects may lead to their eventual discovery in a context which is very far removed from their true origins, a fact which may severely hamper attempts to interpret their motifs in terms of local archaeological remains, or what is known of local nautical technology. In my more extended discussion of the Karlby stone, I will note the example of an engraved crystal amulet, found in a fourth century Danish grave, which originated in the eastern Mediterranean.

This chapter began with a discussion of some of the cultural and environmental formation processes which may affect graffiti found on fixed surfaces. While images which belong to this group may not have such complex uncertainties about their origins as those on portable material, the interpretation of their relationship to their physical contexts presents several problems which are similar to that of graffiti on fragmentary material, as well as those which are peculiar to their own circumstances. The nature of the background material itself, manmade or naturally occurring, the proximity of other decorative material, and the relationship between the image and the boundaries of its background, for example, are important factors in the analysis of images on both kinds of background. For the purposes of this discussion, graffiti on fixed surfaces, manmade or naturally occurring, which are still in position and appear

to be as complete as their artists left them, will be considered separately from those found on surfaces which were originally fixed but are now fallen or removed from their original position, through the action of cultural or environmental formation processes. As in the case of images on fragmentary material, the focus of this discussion is on the relationship between the image and the physical circumstances of its background, in order that past influences on both the creation and present condition of the image may be understood.

Decorated fragmentary material often lacks firm associations except in its immediate archaeological context, if it has been reported, since small, portable artefacts cannot be assumed to originate in the context in which they were found. Images which are still *in situ* on fixed surfaces where they were created, however, may be analysed in terms of their physical relationships with their environment. As noted above, the Jerusalem ship graffito is an example of an image whose relationships to the "frame" in which it was created, the confines of a piece of masonry, may be evaluated. Unlike the artists of images on plasterwork who may have a large area in which to work, only bounded by architectural features, the creator of this graffito was constrained by the convenient workable surface of a small ashlar block. Confining a composition to a small area might be expected to cause certain artistic effects within it, and Helms speculated (1980: 105) that the size of working space was the reason for the ship's mast being shown in the retracted position. While Helms's theory may be right, it is also possible that the artist might have accommodated an upright mast by altering the scale of his drawing. Showing it in the retracted position, however, might have been an important aspect of the composition if it was intended to portray part of an actual event, perhaps commemorated by the graffito. Handling the working space, then, becomes a blend of practicalities and artistic intention.

In the case of the Jerusalem ship graffito, it seems likely that the whole face of the block was available for the artist to decorate, and that the working surface's limitations

were formed by the stone's edges. Architectural features, however, may impose limitations on graffiti artists, and these effects may sometimes be more easily seen where numbers of ship graffiti have accumulated in one site. Many early graffiti in Norwegian stave churches, described by Martin Blindheim (*op. cit.*) represent ships and some are incomplete, but they appear to have been left in this condition by their artists, rather than to have lost detail through formation processes. Some of these incomplete images of ships may be examples of the "*pars pro toto*" form of symbolic representation which was discussed in Chapter 2 of this study; however, it is also possible that others were left unfinished because nearby joints in wood panelling made completing the graffiti difficult. Blindheim suggests that the images' condition reflects or parallels the runic magic seen in incomplete or garbled inscriptions (*ibid.*: 177). This explanation will be discussed at more length further on in this study.

The influence of structural features may be paralleled by that of adjacent decorative work (including other graffiti), pre-existing or contemporary with the graffiti. The size, subject matter, style, and technique of these features may influence the later artist to imitate or reject these aspects in his own composition, or to use a scale or view, for example, to fit his graffiti into a site as conveniently as possible. Furthermore, it is possible to see a phenomenon which rather resembles biological contagion at work in the accumulation of some groups of graffiti, where the appearance and subject of the first few images infect later artists, causing them to add their own work to the existing collection. The group of ancient ship graffiti at Delos, mentioned in the introduction to this work, appears to have developed as a large collection of discrete images, with very little overlay, on house walls which were covered in plaster. The group of graffiti on two standing stones at Tarxien, Malta, however (Woolner 1957: 60-67) feature on the accessible faces of the stones and one of their edges, but densely overlaid one another. Woolner believed (*ibid.*: 61) that the soft, rapidly weathering surface of the stone caused new ship pictures to appear for a short time as bright images, which quickly faded to dark shapes of the same colour as the background. The old images

did not completely disappear, but continued to exert an "infectious" influence over later artists, who added further ships to the existing collection. Their unobtrusive appearance allowed many artists to superimpose their graffiti on top of them, eventually making the resulting group a chaotic mass of faded lines and ship drawings. It is also important to note that the long-standing ritual activities at Tarxien may have contributed substantially to the ongoing graffiti production, a point which highlights the importance of interpreting the relationship between visual imagery and the history and use of the site in which it is found.

The accumulation of images in the three groups of graffiti discussed above, in Norwegian stave churches, at Delos and Tarxien, has been conditioned by the interplay of environmental and cultural factors. First, the accessibility of an existing background, soft enough to be carved with relative ease, allowed would-be artists to carve graffiti images. In the case of the Tarxien group, the rapid weathering of the stone caused quite new images to fade and to be incorporated in the ground of later work. Second, the form of these graffiti was influenced by existing background features, such as edges of the stones at Tarxien, or the panel joints of the Norwegian stave churches. Third, the earliest graffiti at the sites acted as artistic stimuli for further work along similar lines, in subject, scale, and sometimes style. The underlying reasons for the graffiti's carving, as well as their deeper meaning, may in some cases relate to other human activities at the site itself; this point will be discussed in more detail, below.

The graffiti discussed above appear to be complete, except where the addition of later images has created a screen which obscures part or most of their original form and detail. Many examples survive to the present, however, which are incomplete through damage relating to cultural or environmental formation processes. Schaeffer's photograph of the Enkomi graffiti (1952: plate 10), which was discussed briefly in Chapter 1, shows that the stone bearing the graffiti has lost a large flake in its upper

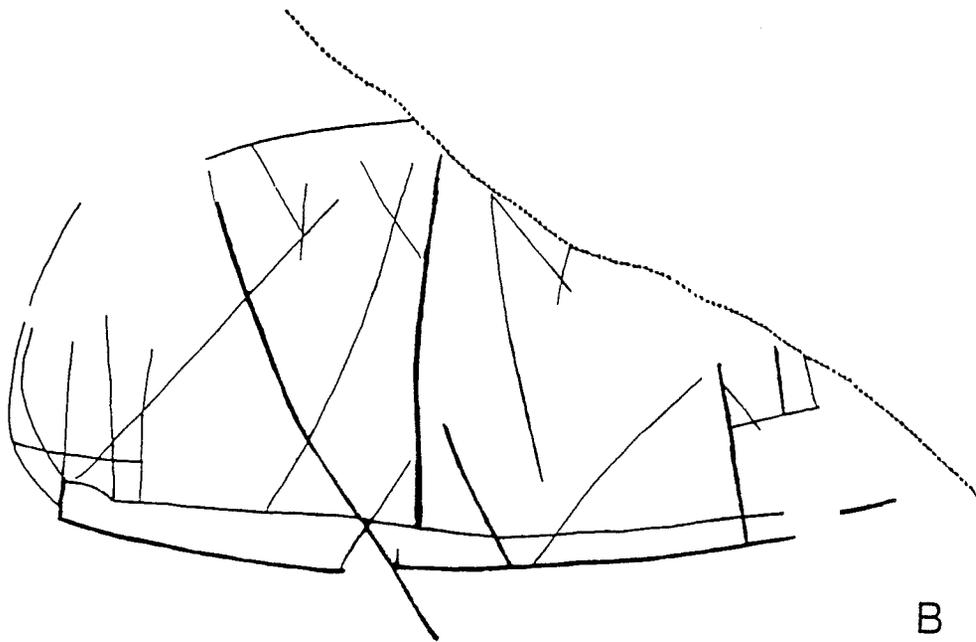
right hand corner, and this damage appears to interrupt the ship's sail area. In this case, it is possible to hypothesize the missing detail to provide an approximation of the original image (figs. 3.7 and 3.8), although two points must be stressed. The reconstruction must be based on careful comparative work with contemporary material, and any drawings of the result ought to indicate the reconstructed area as being hypothetical.

The problem of the reconstruction of lost detail is also encountered in the interpretation of graffiti which have fallen or been removed from their original positions on fixed surfaces. The formation processes which led to their removal may have caused the loss of aspects of the images themselves, as well as their original relationships to existing features. It may be possible to reconstruct these lost associations, as well as lost detail in the images themselves, although attempts to reconstruct fallen and damaged images in formal art, such as the Thera fresco, have been criticised for their probable inaccuracies. As in the case of graffiti on fragmentary material, it is necessary to establish whether the graffiti pre- or postdated the damage to the fixed surface, as it is possible for fallen plaster or masonry to be used opportunistically by graffiti artists. Clearly, images which appear to postdate the damage to the original surface may be evaluated in their own terms, without reference to a larger decorative composition. Establishing the image's place in terms of the original, unbroken wall is a similar exercise to determining the origins of a graffiti on other fragmentary material.

The interpretation of these images on fallen material is similar to that of graffiti found on the small pieces which were discussed earlier in this chapter. As with decorated potsherds, it is important to consider the potential influence of the form, style and subject matter of the original surface's decoration, if any existed. Assessment of the fallen material itself, its nature and the possible reasons for the collapse of the original structure, may give information to assist the interpretation of the image. The



A



B

Fig. 3.7 The Enkomi ship graffito, showing (a) Basch's photograph of the original (1987) and (b) his interpretive drawing (*ibid.*).

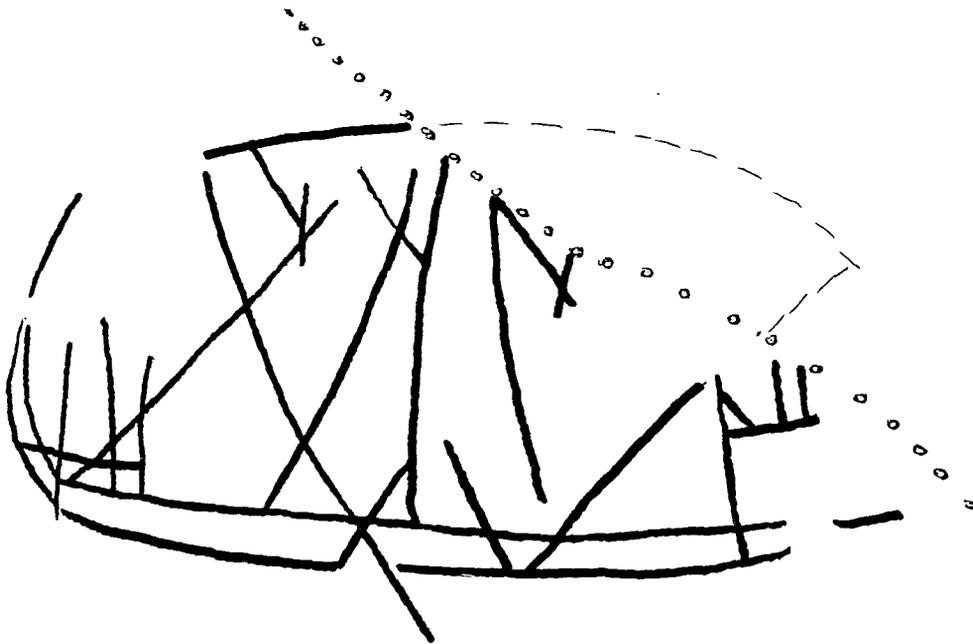


Fig. 3.8 Drawing of the Enkomi ship showing hypothesized detail. le
Bon 1996.

material's durability, for example, relates closely to the survival or loss of the image's detail through its response to the action of the formation processes which have occurred. Masonry, opportunistically decorated before or after the destruction of a building, may have been reused in a later construction in cultural formation processes, resulting in the appearance of graffiti in odd or unexpected locations. The group of ship graffiti described by Karageorghis at Kition (1976: 99; plate 73) for example, is found on the first course of masonry in what is known to be a rebuilding of an earlier temple, and is only a few centimeters off the ground. In this instance, it is likely that the stones bearing the graffiti were among those reused in the later building, rather than having been carved in their present position by contortionist artists.

It may be possible to date the original structure which has provided the graffito's ground through scientific or historical means, and so assign a *terminus post quem* to the image. While pieces of fallen plaster are perhaps less likely to be transmitted as prized possessions than other fragmentary material, the possibility of their transmission away from their original site should be assessed. The evaluation of the site, in terms of the origins of the fallen material and its associations where they may be surmised, the site's environmental and cultural characteristics, and the nature and dates of its use and abandonment, may provide useful information in the interpretation of its graffiti. This information may assist attempts to place the ships depicted in a geographical or chronological framework, and possibly to interpret their artists' intention in making the images.

At several points during the course of the discussion in this chapter, I have noted the importance of understanding the history and use of sites in which pictorial graffiti are found, as an important part of the interpretation of the images themselves and their artists' intentions in creating them. In the next chapter, I will consider the question of the meaning of a graffito image's physical context.

Chapter 4: Context and meaning.

My discussion of the relationship between ancient pictorial graffiti and formal art in Chapter 1 concentrated on the concept of the transmission of information by visual imagery. Further discussions considered some of the aspects involved in the interpretation of early pictorial graffiti, and the relationships between these images and their physical and cognitive environment. I would now like to turn to the question of the abstract or conceptual meaning of the site in which visual imagery is placed by its creators, to consider the relationship between an image and its physical context, from a sociological, as well as art historical, point of view. This issue entails taking a closer look at the relationship between formal art and graffiti, and therefore aims to cast a little more light on the nature of pictorial graffiti.

The subject and information content of a picture may be so far from the norms of particular types of formal art that it may be easily understood as graffiti (the little icon, "Kilroy was here", common in Britain and North America the middle of the twentieth century, is a good example of such an image). These aspects cannot be seen as the sole or reliable definers of graffiti, however, and scatology may be encountered in formal art, just as pious images may be seen in graffiti. However, this study concentrates on ships, a subject which has no characteristics which link it conclusively with either graffiti or formal art, so it is necessary to consider other aspects of visual imagery which may identify them as graffiti.

A casual style which is out of keeping with the accepted norms of formal art, and a low level of technical expertise may be popularly understood as the hallmarks of pictorial graffiti, but are as unreliable in defining graffiti as an image's subject and information content are. A gifted artist, amateur or professional, may produce a

elegant and technically competent pictorial graffito, just as clumsy, hurried, or crude image may be found within the boundaries of formal art. My brief reference to the apparently casual style of "sgraffito" ware in Chapter 3 touched on the difficulty of evaluating or calibrating some styles in ancient art from the position of the present. In this instance, however, the identity of sgraffito decoration as being within formal art is possible, at least in part, when it is located underneath the glaze on fired pottery, placed there as part of an artistic process. Furthermore, the existence of many other similar examples of this type of decoration supports its identification as a variety of ceramic art which enjoyed widespread popularity in various cultures and times in the past.

This link between imagery and the place it occupies has also been discussed, above, with an eye to questions such as the transmission of style, and the limitation of form by physical boundaries. The graffito image's location on a particular ground or in a particular site, in terms of its concrete and abstract relationships to the rest of the world, may also provide important information about its artist's intention. A graffito artist chooses his site and medium with attention to its suitability for his purposes, weighing up not only the physical qualities of the surface in terms of the tools which are to be used, but also the identity or meaning of the site in relation to the use which humans make of it. These acts of choice and evaluation may be extremely superficial and brief, and influenced by the amount of time which is available to the artist and the opinion of other people present at the time, but they may be said to be universal features of graffiti production. The graffito artist's understanding of the underlying meaning of a particular site is part of the insider knowledge which was discussed earlier in this study, and so closely relates to implicit and explicit teaching which is culturally determined.

The social anthropologist Edmund Leach discussed the importance of these meanings, and the symbolic zoning of time and place in human societies (1976: 33, 51). He

described the division of human landscape into areas where particular meaning was assigned, and where particular behaviours were appropriate. Mary Helms (1988: 22 ff) also considered the use of contrasts in these meanings which traditional societies may make, separating sacred and profane, hearth and horizon, the centre and the edge. Both Helms and Leach examined human behaviour within these zones, and in the areas of transition between them, seeing it as conditioned by the meaning which is understood to have been assigned there. These meanings are the product of the interaction between belief systems and the development of tradition, over very long periods of time within particular cultures. Social anthropologists have largely concentrated on the application of the concept of zoning to geography, and how understanding the meanings of particular zones or aspects of the landscape affects the behaviour of people.

Recently, Michael Camille published a study (1992) of how this concept of zoning affected the form and content of pre-Renaissance art. He considered the apparent paradoxes in the subjects and messages of medieval manuscript art as examples of the artistic expression of a cosmology in which the orthodox and controlled centre was brought into sharp focus by its juxtaposition with the dangerous, chaotic edge. In Camille's view, the manuscript became a microcosm of Creation, where the page's centre was identified with order, and contained the decorous and proper images controlled by orthodox form and conventions. The margins, however, away from the safe centre, had a different meaning, and were governed by a different set of rules. The artist took advantage of this meaning, and the margins' symbolic distance from the centre, to express the dark side of the cosmos, the chaotic and terrifying part whose presence in the complete image is an essential part of a whole Creation.

This "edge" locus then allowed the artist the freedom, in using subjects which would have been shocking in the centre's imagery, to explore and play with ideas and subjects which had no place in the ordered centre, and would have brought him

disapproval and censure if he had not confined them to the margins of his work. The style which was used in this imagery, however, was in many ways an echo of the strictly conventionalized style of the centre; the freedom conferred by the edge, in this instance, did not extend to matters of style and technique. In fact, the use of the conventions of the centre for the imagery in the margins was necessary artistically, for the symmetry of the whole work, and, theologically, to express the concept of the design of the whole cosmos. This rationale may be seen as having made the inclusion of the scandalous and disordered an important, even laudable, part of the whole composition.

Camille did not see the effects of the concept of the edge as being confined to manuscript art. He extended his study to medieval architecture and to the structure of cities, considering both the visual imagery and the organization of activities in these sites as further examples of the "edge-centre" dichotomy in action. It is this extension of the idea of zoning to influencing the form and style of art in society which is important to the interpretation of pictorial graffiti. It must be acknowledged that there is some risk in applying the work which Camille has done on the concepts underlying medieval art to a study such as this, which attempts to consider the product of a particular type of human behaviour through a wide span of time and cultures. My justification, however, is that through the work of both Helms and Leach, it is possible to see that the concept of zoning was very common in early societies, as an important part of traditional cosmologies, and may be seen to have influenced behaviour in a widespread and important way. It would be foolish to assume that the concept is not active today, in many subtle and overt forms in our own society, exerting a powerful influence on our behaviour and our understanding of our surroundings.

I suggest that ancient pictorial graffiti often occupy the conceptual "edge" context which Camille describes, and by their presence in a site with an understood meaning,

may draw an artistic or cognitive power from their juxtaposition with the meaning of the site which they occupy. In both style and subject, a graffito may reflect and exploit this zone and its meaning. As noted above, this context is defined by its underlying meaning, its conceptual space rather than its physical characteristics, which is recognized by those familiar with the site and parent culture as readily as are its physical qualities. The edge concept applies equally to fixed, stationary sites, such as the wall of a building or the back of a pew, as well as to loose, portable material such as domestic equipment, pebbles, or kindling. Decorating this material with a picture or non-representational design is then an opportunistic use of the ground material's meaning, and the artist's choice of subject, and the way in which it is represented may also be influenced by this transformation. Unlike the art of the manuscript margins which had to use the conventions of the ordered centre, graffiti are not necessarily constrained by purposeful juxtaposition with nearby formal art. The edge identity of the ground material allows the artist to use his own adaptations of the contemporary artistic canon in depicting whatever he chooses; he may make graffiti images which are faithful representations within his experience of his subject, or he may innovate, fantasize, or creatively "bodge" a subject with confidence that no one is likely to criticise or reject work which decorates useless or discarded material. Unlike the artist of the marginal art which Camille describes, the graffito artist need not confine himself to the techniques and conventions of nearby formal art in order to heighten the impact of the chaos and whimsy which he may choose to illustrate.

In decorating found material, naturally occurring or discarded, the graffito artist uses material which is removed or separate from the ordered centre of society, by breakage and discard, by its identity as useless material, or by its association with a zone, such as a beach, which is outside of society's more closely ordered meanings. I have already mentioned the group of decorated stones found at Jarlshof, Shetland, and reported and interpreted by Curle (*op.cit.*), and Hamilton (*op.cit.*). The nature of the Jarlshof images' ground material, and form and content of the pictures and patterns

themselves, make them interesting examples of the idea of the "edge" context conferring an artistic freedom on their artists. Of the hundred or so small pieces of incised slate and sandstone which have been found at Jarlshof, only a small group bear representational imagery, and of that small group, only three depict complete pictures of ships. I would like to consider briefly the relationship between the material which they decorate and the images, from the point of view of their conceptual context.

Although most of the Jarlshof stones are unfortunately lacking precise archaeological contexts which would allow us to relate them more closely to particular areas of the site, it is not difficult to associate them lithologically with nearby beaches. When I examined the whole group at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, I was very struck by the large quantity of stones which had been gathered and decorated, often with abstract " snail's trail " patterns which had no apparent meaning. The few representational images in the whole group stand out through their clarity and delicacy of their workmanship.

The important detail here, however, is not the achievement of the pictures or the muddle of the abstract designs, but rather the lowly nature of the beach-gathered ground material, whose qualities are not significantly altered by whichever sort of work appears on it. Belonging to what was quite literally the edge of Shetland, the slates bearing chaotic lines and patterns are unlikely to have been a significant part of the activity at the ordered centre. In other words, they were unlikely to have been controlled and restricted by stylistics and convention. The people who worked them were not constrained by particular codes imposed on them by virtue of the nature of the ground material itself. The fact that many seem to have been recovered from middens (Curle, *ibid.*) supports the idea that they had retained the edge identity of the slate even after they had been decorated.

The presence within the Jarlshof group of pictures which are very accomplished artistically does not refute the idea that their artists were unrestricted by contemporary conventions in decorating the slates. Choosing to create an image within a group of conventions, when no restrictions on form or style exist, is simply the exercise of preference. Uaininn O'Meadhra's inclusion of the Jarlshof group in her discussion of motif-pieces found outside of Ireland (1987: 80) raises the possibility that some of the stones in the Jarlshof group which are pictorial or interlaces had been incised as part of the motif-piece tradition, whereby a craftsman learned and practised techniques and styles on rough material. This possibility could only be proved by the discovery at Jarlshof of a craftsman's workshop, providing an artistic context in which to place the pieces. It is interesting to note, however, that an identification as motif-pieces does not contradict the notion of the edge context to which the slates belong, as it would only be good sense to use rough, useless material to practise craft processes which were normally worked on more valuable material.

Drawing or carving a pictorial graffito on a part of the ordered centre such as the wall of a public building, however, is an act which in itself may alter the identity of the ground. In this sense, the artist may subtly or overtly alter the site's deep meaning by what society may see as an act of defacement. This act in itself may be sufficient to effect a change in meaning, regardless of the subject matter of the image, which may be emotionally neutral and unprovocative, or patently challenging. However, the size of the image, its placing relative to the use of the site, and its subject are important factors in its impact on the integrity of the site's ordered identity. The graffito's relationships to its physical context, in the sense of boundaries, margins, and adjacent art or decoration, is again relevant, this time in terms of the graffito's conceptual impact on the site in which it appears. (It is interesting to note here the extraordinary accumulation of graffiti on the Berlin wall, which was placed there as an eloquent social statement with the clear intention of defying the authority whose power the wall

expressed. In this example, it is possible to see that the act of placing the inscriptions and images was as important a statement as the actual content of the graffiti.)

The cathedral at Cashel, Co. Tipperary in the Irish Republic, bears a crudely daubed ship graffiti on the interior of the north wall of its nave. The image measures some 1.5 meters from bowsprit to stern, and dominates the wall on which it appears. Although its plaster ground is in poor condition and the image is to some extent fragmentary, there is a suggestion of gunports in the hull area. The large size and prominent placing of the graffiti, combined with the inappropriate style for the interior of a cathedral, make the image likely to be the result of its artist's intention to vandalize the site. It is possible that the image's meaning may be bound up with the cathedral's history, recording, for example, the visit of a particular ship, but it seems likely that this meaning is secondary to that which emerges from its inappropriate and aggressive act of placing it within a holy site. (Unfortunately, the graffiti's large size and its location on the wall of the narrow nave made it very difficult to photograph with the equipment which I had available.)

The Cashel graffiti's rough style and inappropriate subject easily identify it as being a long way outside the highly achieved codes which governed the rest of the cathedral's art. Unlike pictorial graffiti on buildings, however, the marginal manuscript art which Michael Camille describes has a distinct and carefully defined place in the underlying concepts, as well as the meaning of the spatial relationships which govern the formal art it offsets. It is produced in the same style and with the same techniques and expertise, by artists who understood the rules of the game they were playing, and superficially resembles the art of the ordered centre. As Camille notes, "Marginal images never step outside (or inside) certain boundaries. Play has to have a playground, and just as the scribe follows the grid of ruled lines, there were rules governing the playing fields of the marginal images that keep them firmly in their place." (1992: 22). Graffiti, however, are not necessarily in a direct mutual

relationship with another form of art. Their artists exploit the unorthodox characteristics of the edge context to produce images which are artistically marginal, so to speak, in being unbound by the rules and traditions of contemporary art.

This conceptual context may be said to have a profound, even definitive, influence on ancient graffiti, conditioning their form, style, and the techniques which have been used to create them, and is an important consideration in their interpretation. This is the influence which allows the frankly whimsical, bizarre and inaccurate images which are found among ancient graffiti representations of ships, and which leads to the inclusion of inaccurate or fantastic detail in otherwise technically credible images. Its potential effect on the form, style and technique of a graffiti also exemplifies the impact which an aspect of an artist's thought world may have on the artistic realization of an image.

It is important to note, however, that the freedom which this conceptual "edge" context offers the would-be graffiti artist is not in itself mandatory, and the artist may choose to work within a formal code, as far as his own skill allows. This choice may be subtly conditioned by the style or technique of nearby work, or by influential formal art in his experience. A silver spoon was found during the excavation of the VOC ship "Amsterdam" (Marsden 1972: 92; illustrated fig. 4.1) which had a picture of a sailing ship carefully scratched into its bowl. The image may be identified as being a graffiti through its naive style and slightly off-centre placing, characteristics which are unlikely to have been found in the decorative work of a professional silversmith. It would seem that the owner of the spoon felt that its attractiveness was enhanced by the graffiti's addition, or that he had indicated his ownership in an aesthetically pleasing way. It is also possible that the ship which he chose to depict was a particular vessel which had fond associations for him, and that the image was then a ship portrait.

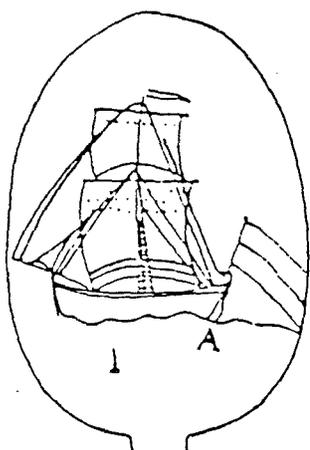


Fig. 4.1. The spoon found on the " Amsterdam ". Marsden 1972.

Enough is known of ship design of the period from which this artefact dates to be confident that, despite the limited skill of the engraver, the representation is portrays a contemporary ship, and does not embody anachronistic or fantastic elements. For periods and regions whose nautical technology is not well understood, however, it may be difficult or impossible to be sure whether the creator of a graffito has chosen to attempt a realistic depiction or to include some degree of fantasy.

This brief discussion has had the aim of considering an off-shoot of the concept of context, which has an important bearing on understanding the relationship between pictorial imagery and its physical context. Using ideas and research from both sociology and art history, it has attempted to develop a little further the question of the distinction between pictorial graffiti and formal art, as well as to propose a way of understanding graffiti which may have a relevance to the interpretation of the detail they contain. It brings to a close the first section of this thesis, which has been concerned with the consideration of the more theoretical aspects of the study of pictorial graffiti, and which is intended to "set the scene" for the detailed studies of ancient ship graffiti which will follow. These discussions will attempt to illustrate some of the questions and problems which have been highlighted in the preceding chapters, as having a central importance to the interpretation of ancient pictorial graffiti.

Chapter 5: Graffiti and cognitive life

The first three chapters in this section are unified by both the consideration of aspects of a distinctive motif, and by the underlying issues of graffiti interpretation which these discussions will attempt to elucidate. In the course of these chapters, a number of different images will be examined, but I hope that by considering them three general points may be illustrated. The first point is that the use of multi-disciplinary approaches may reveal more information expressed in some graffiti images than may be understood by a narrow concentration on aspects of material culture and technology. Second, I hope to demonstrate that some schematic, enigmatic or otherwise difficult graffiti may nevertheless provide access to aspects of cognitive life in the past, despite the problems which they may offer to academics only seeking information about early nautical technology. Third, I will attempt to use these discussions to illustrate that by interpreting graffiti as both art and artefact, insights may be gained into aspects of their meaning which might otherwise have been overlooked. This artefactual interpretation requires attention to be paid to the graffiti's context, rather than being confined to the image in isolation, separated from its material and cognitive qualities and associations. These chapters may be seen as an *apologia* for the approach which I have used in this study. Those which follow these discussions will take up the artefactual questions in a little more detail.

In the first of the series of discussions which centre on practical examples, I will turn to the question of what some graffiti images may have to offer later interpreters, beyond the level of basic information about contemporary material culture. Ancient ship graffiti which are graphically simple or bare of detail, abbreviated or schematic, may frustrate the nautical historian who is interested only in attempting to obtain technical information from them. Elsewhere in this thesis, I have discussed and

illustrated the importance of evaluating ship graffiti from the ancient world more widely as art. My justification for using this approach was based on a view of art as an aspect of human behaviour, that is, to see graffiti images, like other visual imagery, as primarily bearers of meaning, rather than simply as expressions of contemporary aesthetic codes. The discussion in this chapter will attempt to work with that concept, to demonstrate how ancient ship graffiti may have been used by their creators to express meaning beyond the simple representation of objects, using symbolic style and visual metaphor.

Material for such a discussion is plentiful in many parts of the world. Rather than mix examples eclectically, however, it seems preferable to focus initially on one coherent cultural area. The graffiti which will be discussed in this chapter either originate in or have close associations with Scandinavia: specifically, with the areas which are now modern Norway and Denmark. While it is difficult to be precise about the dating of most of these images, it is not unreasonable to locate them between the ninth and the fourteenth centuries AD.

The examples which will be described in the first section of this chapter are comparatively useless as sources of information about ancient Scandinavian ship technology. A number of these graffiti may be found on a wide range of artefacts in many different contexts, opportunistically using their ground material simply as a means of display. They are, for the most part, bare of detail and only represent one section of a ship, with little more elaboration than a single line which describes the ship's form. In the second part of this chapter, one image will be discussed. This is a more detailed and highly achieved graffiti which has a spatial and conceptual relationship with the object which it decorates. The interpretation of this image and its detail also poses a number of difficulties, however, and it resists a straightforward realistic reading. Nevertheless, by considering aspects of its form, as well as its

relationship to its ground, it may be possible to understand something of the meaning which its creator intended it to express.

As a prelude to considering the specifics of these Scandinavian examples, it is important to recall some of the general points explored in the earlier sections. Sometimes a graffito may be read comparatively easily from its detail alone, and understanding its context enriches the evidence it offers. These images often originate in traditions of art which are, in some ways, close to our own in their use of concepts and conventions. The well known Roman graffito of the ship "Europa" (Maiuri 1958: 21; Basch 1987: fig. 1051; illustrated fig. 2.1) which was briefly discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, is an important source of technical information about ships of the Classical period. It does not require complex interpretation of the artistic conventions which have been used, as the value which Roman art placed on realism is reflected in the considerable care which the artist has taken in the depiction of the ship's lines and rigging. A version of the "x-ray" technique has been used to show the hold and some of its contents, and this may be easily understood by modern viewers. The wider potential of the x-ray technique, as a means of expressing complex information in the art of some cultures, was discussed in Chapter 2.

However, the underlying meaning or meanings of a graffito may have dictated the use of complex or enigmatic style and convention, causing later viewers, out of touch with the levels of meaning which may be expressed in these ways, considerable difficulty. As I have noted above, other images which are graphically very simple in both form and detail may be of little use to those only seeking information about early nautical technology. The deliberate limitation of detail, for artistic, practical, or symbolic reasons in a complex subject such as a ship may lead to considerable confusion for the later viewer who is seeking information about aspects of particular types of historic ships. Earlier in this study, I noted a recent work by Miranda Green (*op. cit.*) in which she discussed aspects of Celtic religious art which, unlike Roman art, did not

make either naturalism or aesthetics a high priority, but rather sought to express the essence or *numen* of a subject using a particular style. The complex meanings which might be encoded by Celtic artists in what appear to be very simple forms were also described, and she considered the ways in which symbolic style might be expressed.

I also described earlier the *pars pro toto* style of representation in a wider discussion of symbolic style and visual metaphor. In this particular style, a subject's distinctive or individualistic detail is greatly limited, without reducing the information content in the image. Green gives many examples of Celtic art where the artist has captured his subject's essential nature, by including only a few details or attributes which evoke this very clearly. The resulting image then may appear, to those out of touch with the subtleties of this art, to be simple to the point of childishness, a bare, even rough depiction whose seemingly primitive appearance evokes nothing in the mind of the viewer beyond the most basic level of object recognition. To the informed viewer equipped with the right insider knowledge to read it, however, it was a potent icon which captured a transcendent concept, a profound religious truth.

It would seem unduly simplistic to assume that in graphics, simplicity of form necessarily represents simplicity of meaning. Adopting such an assumption, particularly in interpreting the art of cultures which are very distant from our own, may result in inaccurate readings, as well as the potential loss of other levels of information which they may contain. Similarly, concentrating only on aspects of material culture which may be illustrated in these images may be a sterile approach to their full meaning. Taking as a sample study a group of ship graffiti which share the characteristics of minimal, or *pars pro toto* representation which I have described, I will attempt to consider how these concepts may apply to their interpretation.

During my research into Scandinavian ship graffiti of the Dark Age and early Medieval period, I noticed the frequent repetition of a particular motif. This is the prow of a

ship, often indicated by little more than a few lines, with the occasional inclusion of detail such as weathervanes or the joint between the strake ends and the stem post. In its general form, it recalls the ship's prow motif which is occasionally found represented in the formal art of the Mediterranean Classical period (illustrated, for example, by Basch 1987: 419). The lines of the Scandinavian examples clearly indicate that the ships which were depicted were Nordic, but their minimalist style makes them comparatively uninformative about other aspects of the ships which they represent, beyond the clear depiction of the form of the prow, its decoration, and possibly its joint with the hull. It is interesting to note, however, that Haakon Shetelig referred to examples of the ship's prow graffiti, found on the Oseberg ship burial, in attempting to interpret the design of the prow of the Gokstad ship (*op.cit.*). As I noted earlier, this would seem to be the first example of the use of ship graffiti as technical sources in English language publications.

Examples of the ship's prow graffiti are found on many different types of artefact. Their dating may be at best only approximate, through the accessibility of their ground artefacts to later graffiti artists. As I described at the beginning of this chapter, the examples which will be discussed here are found on artefacts and in sites which date from the ninth century AD to the mid fourteenth century AD. The uncertainty which accompanies many ancient graffiti means that it would be unsafe to conclude that these dates are the chronological boundaries of the images' appearance. They also have strong associations with the area which is now modern Norway, but it would also be unsafe to assume that the ship's prow image was only produced there, or that all of the examples which I will describe necessarily originated in this region. What is clear, however, is that within the archaeological remains of one geographical area it is possible to find many examples of a specific type of subject or motif represented in pictorial graffiti, which appear to have originated in one particular period.

The identification of these images as graffiti is clear from their stylistic and technical difference from the art of the artefacts which they decorate. In general, they were

lightly incised or scratched into the artefact's surface, and this technique is very much at odds with that of the more formal art which co-exists with the graffiti. Many examples of other motifs from this period have been scratched in the same manner into wood, metal, and stone surfaces, and indicate the popularity of this technique by graffiti artists. Their naturalistic style has been identified (Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966: 28) as co-existing with the highly conventionalized Norse art of this period. Examination of the subjects of this latter type of formal art does not indicate that the ship's prow was a common subject, as it was in formal Mediterranean art of the Classical period.

The fact that the ship's prow was a common subject in informal Scandinavian graffiti art, however, is clear from the many examples which have been reported. Martin Blindheim's catalogue of the graffiti in Norwegian stave churches (*op. cit.*) records a large number of ship's prows among the many subjects, both religious and secular, which he reported (fig. 5.1). Examples are also found on the wood of the Oseberg ship itself as well as Shetelig's sled, and the "hornlökke" which was found in the burial itself (fig. 5.2). The base of "Ranveig's Casket" also bears three examples of the ship's prow graffiti scratched near the runic inscription (Blindheim 1987: 203-218; O'Meadhra 1988: 3-5; Unfortunately it has not been possible to obtain a sufficiently clear photograph of these images to reproduce here.). Runes also accompany the group of three prows on the reverse face of the incised stick found in the excavations at Bryggen (Herteig 1959: 177-186; illustrated fig. 5.3), which is discussed elsewhere in this study. The Tingelstad weathervane has a tiny example of the motif in a space in its formal decoration (Blindheim 1982: plate 55; illustrated fig. 5.4). The majority of these examples are orientated with the stem of the ship to the viewer's right, but Blindheim records a number in which the stem lies to the left. The intriguing question of the significance of right-left orientation is compounded somewhat by the occasional occurrence of "reversed runes" (described, for example, by Jansson 1987: 12), whose side strokes were cut on the left of the stave rather than

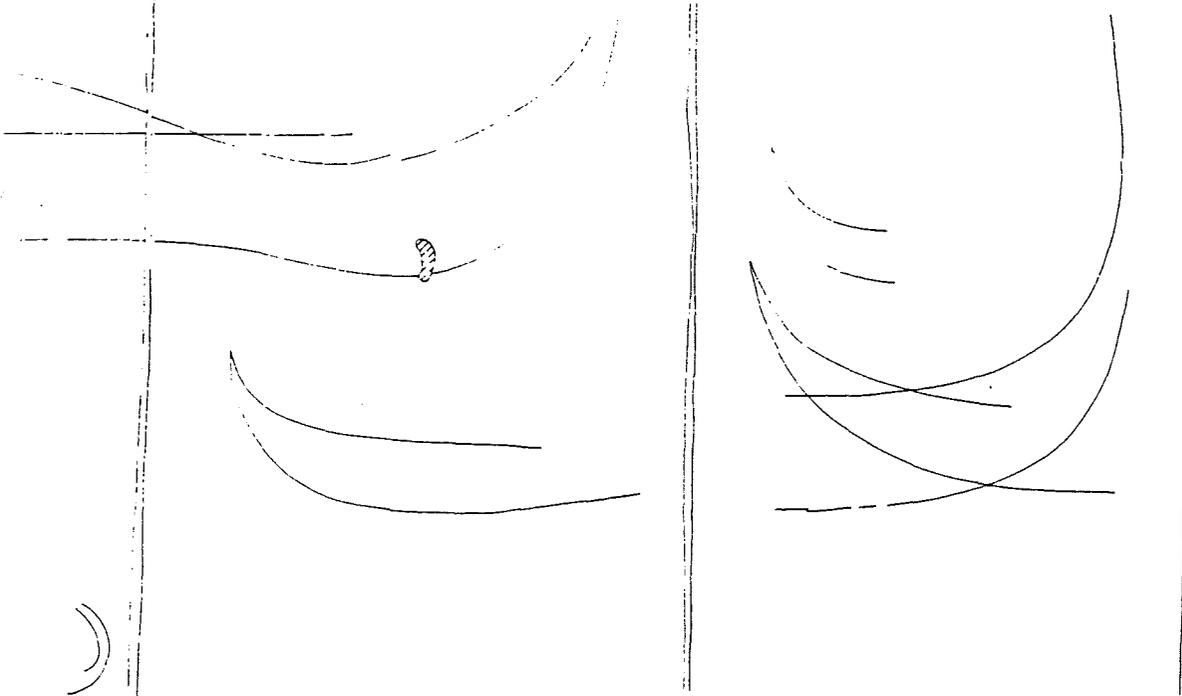


Fig.5.1. The ship's prow graffiti found in Norwegian stave churches. Blindheim 1985.

Fig. 5.2. The ship's prow graffiti found in the Oseberg ship burial. Christensen *et. al.* 1992.

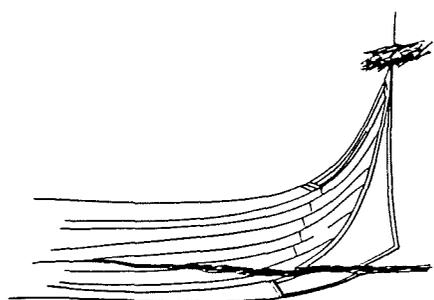
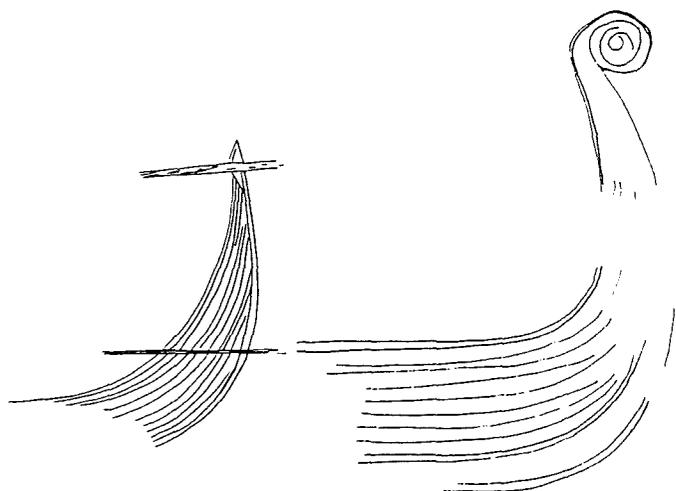
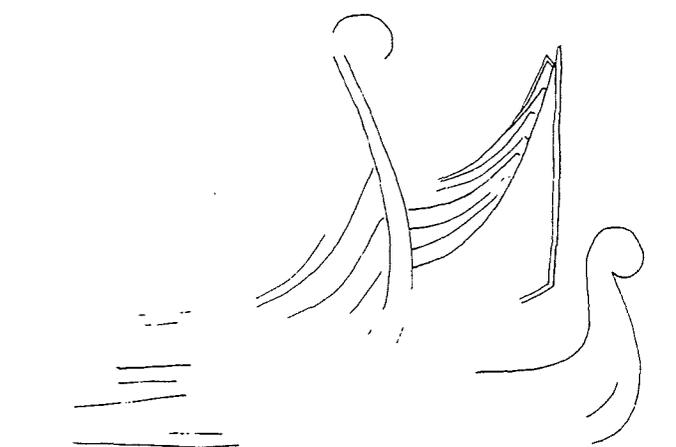




Fig. 5.3 The Bryggen prows. Herteig 1959.

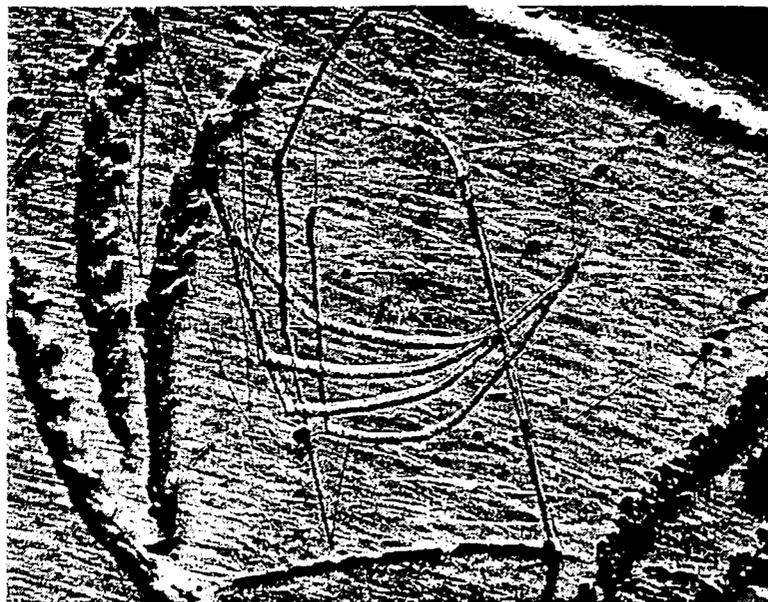


Fig. 5.4 The Tinglestad weathervane prow. Blindheim 1982.

the right, and whose meaning was apparently undisturbed by this reversal. It seems reasonable, therefore, to assume that right-left orientation of the prow may not have been significant, beyond perhaps indicating the individual artist's laterality.

The detail which is included in the examples described above varies from the comparatively extensive, for example, in the depiction of strakes and stem post joint in the ship's prow on a timber of the Oseberg ship, to the minimal, seen in the Tingelstad image, on Ranveig's Casket, and in many of the stave church examples. The majority of the images described here are minimal representations, the simple outline of part of the hull and the stem. Some of these simple images, such as the Tingelstad and Bryggen examples, contain a few lines within the hull outline to indicate strakes. The shape and detail of the stem posts varies from a simple point relatively near the level of the gunwale, to taller, more complex structures, which may be squared at the top. In some cases, such as the graffiti on Shetelig's sled, the stem top is formed with considerable artistry. For the most part, the prows appear singly, but when they appear together they are grouped in threes, usually with two prows superimposed on a third. These groupings of three prows would seem to belong to the earlier period of their appearance, rather than the later, but it would be necessary to conduct a much larger survey of the occurrence of the ship's prow motif to prove or disprove this observation.

As I have described above, the graphically simple forms of these ship's prows makes them comparatively useless as sources of general technical information about Norse ships of the Dark Age and early Medieval period. Equally, many examples do not contain enough detail to allow artistic comparisons with other, roughly contemporary, ship graffiti. They have been mentioned in passing in various academic studies, but it would seem that only Martin Blindheim's has attempted an interpretation of their artists' intentions. Another short study of the ship's prow motif which has considered

the artists' underlying motivation has seen them simply as "magical" signs (O'Meadhra: *ibid*).

Blindheim's analysis of the ship graffiti which he recorded in Norwegian stave churches may be divided into two parts. In the first (*ibid.*: 60-63), he attempted to identify various ship types, knarrs, hulks, and cogs, among the graffiti by identifying their lines with the known characteristics of these types. This analysis works from the assumption that the ship's prow graffiti were intended to be realistic representations of contemporary ships. While this may not be particularly contentious, it overlooks the possibility that the artists of these graffiti intended something other than realistic ship portraiture, and that this other intention might have required the use of appropriate style or convention. Furthermore, as I have noted elsewhere, the tacit assumption of realism is unsafe in the context of ancient art.

In the early paragraphs of this chapter, I mentioned that the ship's prow motif appeared as a common subject among many others which appeared as pictorial graffiti in ancient Scandinavian contexts. Human faces (usually, but not exclusively, identifiably male), domestic or fantastic animals, plaited or twisted rope, and, later, crosses are also frequently seen in the early Norse graffiti. The distinctive features of some of these human and animal images mean that it is tempting to see that they recorded or caricatured individuals. As the form of the ship's prow does vary quite widely in its form and decoration, it seems likely that there was a significant level of individual choice in the form which the motif took. It would, however, be difficult to make a case that this variation indicates the representation of individual ships. The standardization or the selection of the prow as motif, however, stands out from many of the subjects of Norse pictorial graffiti in a way which itself argues that they were intended for a purpose other than recording or commemorating specific vessels.

The second part of Blindheim's analysis (*ibid.*: 60-63) considers the motivations of the graffiti artists and the deeper meaning of the images, dividing them into three categories: graffiti of chance, piety, and prophyllaxis. In discussing the function of the third category, he suggests that the ship's prow motif might be linked with an evil-averting strategy which is also seen in the writing of individual runes, or groups of jumbled runes, on graves. The intention of this was to divert evil spirits by presenting them with a puzzle, or in the case of the part ships, of an incomplete image, which was tempting (to devils) to solve or finish, thus distracting them from causing mayhem. This interpretation has the advantage of linking the graffiti with other forms of behaviour and concepts in contemporary Norse culture. Its weakness, however, lies in the absence of supporting evidence in the graffiti themselves and their contexts; for example, there are no instances of unfinished pictorial graffiti on the lead crosses and plates which Blindheim notes in his discussion of protective rune writing.

The frequent repetition of a motif in a fairly stable form in one area and period in time suggests that it carried a distinct meaning beyond that of the simple depiction of a well known object. However, rather than following O'Meadhra and seeing this meaning as exclusively magical, I would like to refine this somewhat, to suggest that it was communicative. To argue that "magical" or spellbinding graffiti are also communicative (that is, with the supernatural forces) would seem to be playing with semantics; the concepts, as well as the purposes, involved in magical behaviour and in the communication between human beings are quite distinct, with little shared territory between them. A challenge for the later interpreter, who has lost touch with the thought world of the past, lies in interpreting the different symbols, as well as the contexts in which they appear, as evidence for these different sorts of cognitive activity.

I suggest that the ship's prow motif's simple, abbreviated form was an important part of its function as an ideogram, that is, a sign which was devised to convey a concept, rather than to represent an object. Such a sign may be pictorially recognizable, but

may not be pictorially read, without the understanding of the abstract meaning which was understood by the members of the culture which developed it. This caveat recalls the question of insider knowledge which was discussed in the first section of this study. In discussing the formation of ideograms, the linguist Hans Jensen (1970: 40-49) noted the importance of stripping a symbol's subject of all its detail, to the point where it became an outline which only expressed the subject's main characteristics. This process had two effects. The first was to make the sign easy to copy in a stable form, by making it easily remembered and recognized. The second relates to the difficulty, in Jensen's phrase, " of rendering visually the non-visual " (*ibid.*), which required using symbolic style to render abstract concepts. To identify the part-ship image as an ideogram would be to take the essentially realistic interpretations of Shetelig and Blindheim a little further; the prows are identifiable as characteristic Norse forms, but there their role as portraits ends.

The question of rendering visually the non-visual recalls Miranda Green's discussion (*op.cit.*) of the artistic process whereby a subject's *numen* was expressed by removing detail which would only distract the viewer's eye. It would also explain the simple form which many examples of the ship's prow image take, as well as the abbreviated appearance of other ideograms. Jensen also described the possible co-existence of symbolic communication in ideograms by people with a much more advanced script (*ibid.*: 45). This observation could account for the appearance of the ship's prow symbol alongside runic inscriptions, as is seen on the Bryggen stick and Ranveig's Casket. The example which Jensen used to illustrate this point refers to the recording and communication of basic information, listing items for errands in a notebook. Reading the meanings of the symbols in Jensen's example is comparatively straightforward, as they are pictorially related to the objects which they represent. Furthermore, their context, a notebook, supports the reader's understanding of their meaning and function.

Attempting to understanding the meaning and function of the ship's prow motif from its various contexts, however, is a far more difficult exercise. The examples seen in the stave churches are prominently placed, although the effects of time would have made the scratches which formed them progressively more difficult to see. The subjects of these graffiti are often secular, and Blindheim noted the oddity of finding them in such numbers in a medieval religious setting (1985: 13). The Tingelstad graffito was also placed on an object which would have been in public view, but it is so small that it could not have been seen without very close inspection, which would have been very difficult when the weathervane was in use. The possibility that this motif was a maker's mark would be easier to accept if similar examples of such a use were found on other metal objects from this period. The ship's prows on Ranveig's Casket would have been normally hidden from view, and, as they almost certainly predate the runic inscription which described the casket's ownership (O'Meadhra: *ibid.*), they cannot be understood as part of the meaning of the inscription. They, like the Oseberg examples, are stylistically distinct from the formal art of the artefact which they decorate. The graffiti on the Bryggen stick are equally enigmatic in terms of their context, and the relationship between the small group of prows on the reverse face of the artefact and the adjacent runic inscription will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

The interpretation of physical contexts may not be a productive way of establishing a possible meaning of the ship's prow motif. However, investigating the way in which ideograms in another culture carry meaning may indicate something about the way in which it might have functioned. The illustration (fig. 5.5) shows, at the top, the Chinese character which corresponds to our word for the substance " wood ". Even in its modern form, shown here, it is possible to see that branches, trunk, and roots are represented, albeit schematically, making a simple conceptual link with the notion of " tree ". The combination of two " wood " characters alters the basic meaning, to represent " grove ", a small group of trees. The addition of a third character changes

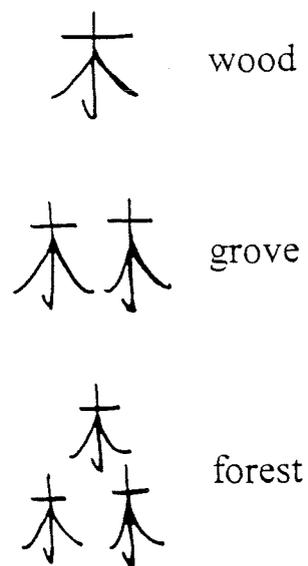


Fig. 5.5 Chinese characters demonstrating the function of symbol repetition in ideograms.

the original meaning still further, to represent " huge forest ". The repetition or grouping of the same sign indicates more than the simple addition of single objects; the basic concept expressed by the single character is altered to become a related, but different concept which also conveys an idea of magnitude (I am very grateful to Dr Li Xiao Chang, academic visitor to Britain, for his help with this matter).

I noted above the occasional occurrence of groups of three ship's prows together, seen in the graffiti on Shetelig's sled, and in the images on the back of the Bryggen stick. Applying the concept of reinforcing a symbol's meaning by repetition, the Bryggen images may be seen to have a particular relationship with the runic inscription which lies directly beneath them, "Here sails the dauntless master of the waves " (Hougen 1974: 24). This reading becomes far more evocative and dynamic if the group above the inscription was intended to represent a mighty fleet, rather than three ships. The possibility of irony should not be ruled out, however, and must be seen as an important feature of some graffiti.

It is not necessary to travel quite so far away from Scandinavia as China to find another example of the repetition or grouping of symbols for the purpose of reinforcing the single symbol's meaning. In Sven Jansson's description (*ibid.*: 14-15) of the manipulation of runes in ancient Sweden to provide protection for their creators, he mentions the triple repetition of the magical "t" rune as providing an ideogram of special potency. Miranda Green (1992: 169-205) discussed the importance of the number three in ancient Celtic art, highlighting the importance of the repetition of images in multiples to achieve magical effects. She also described the aesthetically pleasing effect of the triplication of a subject in art, providing an important reminder of the need to bear in mind the interplay between superficial and deeper meanings and considerations when interpreting visual imagery. While it is important to be cautious about taking a parallel between the manipulation of runes, triplism in Celtic imagery, and Scandinavian ideograms too far, it may be possible to

see a link between ancient concepts and the behaviour which underlay them in particular contexts.

Another example from inter-cultural studies may offer a way to establish the motif's meaning. I have already noted Charles Kennedy's paper (*op. cit.*) on the early Christian use of the anchor as an ideogram, which was based on a similar observation to mine. He noticed the frequent repetition of a specific symbol in a fairly stable form among a particular group of people over one period in time. This symbol, an anchor, appeared in pictorial graffiti and more formal art in early Christian contexts. Kennedy used a study of ancient Greek, and the writings of the early church Fathers, to identify the anchor symbol with a pun between the Greek word for anchor, *ankura*, and the phrase "in the Lord", *en kurio*. In Kennedy's view, the potency of the symbol faded when the language of most Christians ceased to be Greek. The anchor's later revival as an important symbol in art was based in scriptural texts which used it as a metaphor for faith. Using Kennedy's example as a model, it is possible to see that the ship's prow motif could well have expressed some form of a visual pun, which in turn offered the viewer access to the image's deeper levels of meaning.

Part of the evidence that the ship's prow image was an ideogram rests, like the anchor in Christian contexts, on the potency of the ship as a symbol in Scandinavian cultures. While for the early Christians the anchor had clear links with concepts of hope and steadfastness, Norse people would have understood the ship to represent the pinnacle of nautical technology, the means by which they had attained wealth and power, and had explored and colonized many lands. It had also found its way into pre-Christian religion, as a god's magical possession. The ship's prow motif, stripped of detail and representing a part of the ship which is easily identified and evokes its power, bears characteristics seen in the formation of other ideograms. The motif's frequent use in graffiti over time and in one broad geographical area suggests that it had a meaning for ordinary people, beyond the simple decoration of artefacts.

This discussion suggests a number of possible areas of investigation which might shed more light on the meaning and function of the ship's prow image. A complete inventory of its surviving examples would serve as the basis of a distribution map, which would provide information for a linguistic analysis. Such an analysis might reveal a previously overlooked visual pun which the motif expressed. A distribution map would also provide a useful indication of the motif's use by people in coastal zones and inland, which would be an interesting adjunct to other studies of these areas. The interpretation of the physical and artistic contexts of the surviving examples in terms of, for example, early merchant's and craftsmen's marks might reveal early connections between the ship's prow motif and these symbols. Also, it might be possible to see the ship's prow symbol as evidence for an individual's adherence to the Vanir cult, and examining the incidence of the motif's occurrence at sites associated with the cult might establish or refute this.

I have already suggested that pictorial graffiti and formal art share a common origin in the basic human activity of image making, both kinds of images acting as bearers of meaning which the artists have conveyed using particular choices of form and style, as their ability allowed. Ideograms, as Jensen noted (*op. cit.*), "render visually the non-visual". They may do so without their artist's involvement with the formal, contemporary artistic canon, or of complex techniques of medium handling, or of reference to aspects of contemporary taste or fashion, all of which conditioned the creators of formal art.

The ship's prow motif in Scandinavian graffiti, while perhaps not of great value to students who are only concerned with the facts of Norse ship technology, may therefore offer an intriguing glimpse into an aspect of early medieval human behavior; that is, communication of concepts by image making. Furthermore, considering these images in this light allows us an opportunity to understand a little more about this

aspect of human behaviour. Having looked at the ship's prow motif as a general class of graffiti, I would now like to consider the evidence which another ancient ship picture from Scandinavia offers for the cognitive life and behaviour of the ancient world. (This image was briefly discussed in the second chapter, and illustrated, figs. 2.3, 2.4, and is repeated, fig. 5.6.)

In 1987, a beachcomber found a small, symmetrical, biconvex pebble (measuring 22 mm. in diameter) on a beach near Karlby, in Jutland, Denmark, only noticing later that the pebble had been minutely carved with three images: a ship on one side, and a branching curved line, and an elk on the other. The carvings are remarkable for their precision and tiny size; the ship, for example, barely measures 12 mm. across. A slight irregularity on the edge of the stone below the ship is visible on both sides, and seems to be of natural origin. There is no matching flaw elsewhere on the stone's edge which might suggest wear caused by a metal setting, and it had not been pierced for use as a pendant. While the stone has not yet been subjected to a full lithological analysis, it is sedimentary, and relatively soft (Crumlin-Pedersen 1993: pers. comm.). In the absence of a datable archaeological context for the stone, it is necessary to consider the evidence which is revealed by the comparative interpretation of the object's other contexts, for example, artistic and artefactual, as well as to consider the form of the ship itself, in an attempt to date and interpret the stone. I will return to these problems below.

The absence of an archaeological context for the Karlby stone is also relevant to an analysis of where the images belong in terms of human activity. Before considering the Karlby images and the information which they offer later interpreters, I wish to examine briefly the reasons for my identification of them as graffiti. My definition of graffiti, for the purposes of this thesis, relies heavily on comparative study of individual images and formal art which is roughly contemporary with them, as well as on the interpretation of the images' contexts. Graffiti are defined by their casual and

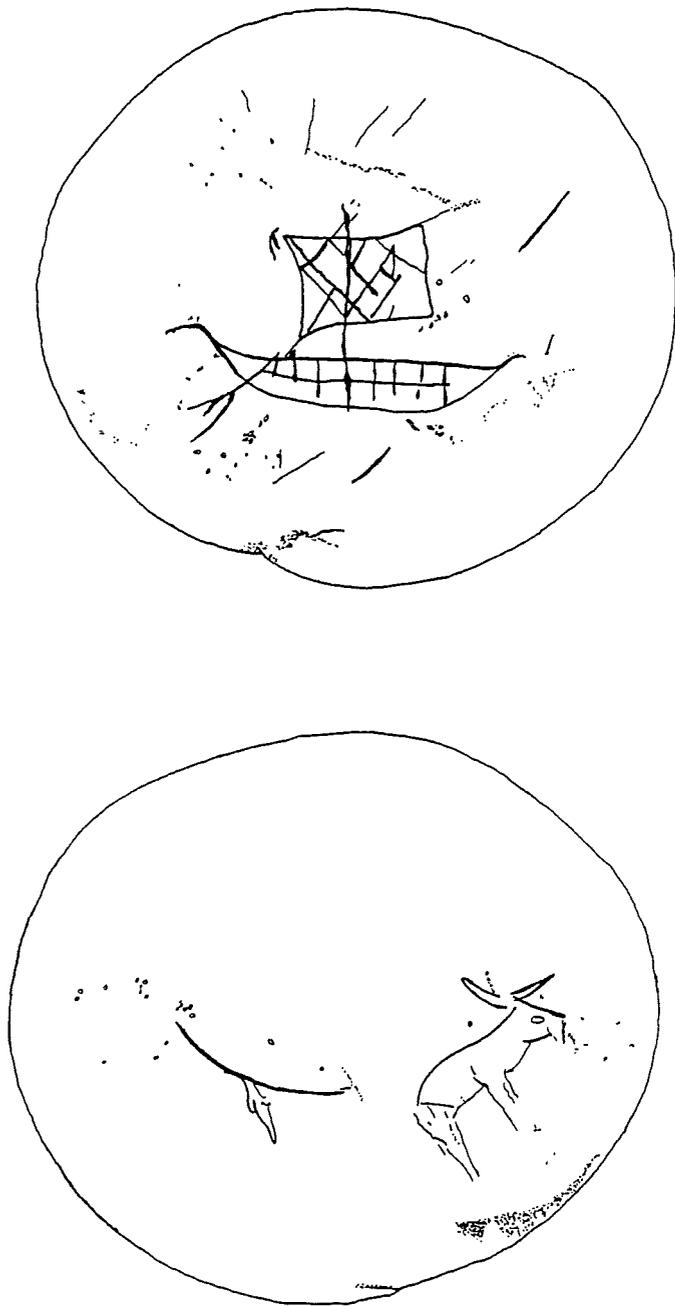


Fig. 5.6 Interpretive sketch of the Karlby stone. L. le Bon 1995.

informal style and technique, by the nature of the contexts in which they appear, and by the relationship between the images themselves and these contexts. In the case of the Karlby stone, however, it is very difficult to relate the pebble and its images to any other artefact from the ancient world, in order to compare their technical and artistic achievement. Such a comparison would have to rest on a reasonably secure date for the Karlby images.

Artistic interpretation of the Karlby carvings themselves must be the only means to establish an identification, and such an interpretation must be seen as being, at best, open to question. The naturalistic style of the ship and elk recall several other graffiti images which are dated to Dark Age and early medieval northern European contexts, and this context is not unreasonable for the Karlby artefact, as will be described in more detail, below. It is the naturalistic style of the carvings, the lightly scratched technique which their artist has used to form the images, and the minor flaws in the drawing of their lines and curves, which allow the strong possibility that they were not produced by a formal art or craft process.

The ship carving on the Karlby stone has been discussed briefly in the academic literature (Rieck and Crumlin-Pedersen 1988: 129-130; Crumlin-Pedersen 1990: 111; Haywood 1991: 21; le Bon 1994: 391-396). The ship has been associated by Rieck and Crumlin-Pedersen (*ibid.*) with the seventh century AD, and the pre- or proto-Viking ship type, and it has also been linked with the ship carvings on the Gotland picture stones. John Haywood (*ibid.*) drew a parallel between the Karlby ship and the ships found at Nydam, suggesting that the pebble and its carvings may predate the seventh century, and belong to the early Dark Age. Øle Crumlin-Pedersen's view of the ship's type (*ibid.*) was that it was essentially Nordic, citing its bent down raking stem and stern posts and sloping side rudder as being distinctively Scandinavian. He also drew attention to the use of in-filling lines in the hull, and to what may possibly be a weathervane at the masthead. The effect of these associations between the Karlby

ship, the Gotland picture stones, and the Nydam boat, has been to link the tiny ship carved on the Karlby pebble firmly to one ship building tradition, at one point in time.

Elsewhere in this study, I referred to the art historian Anthony Cutler's concern (*op.cit.*) about the biases which develop over time in the interpretation of material by academics. He noted that writers commonly base their work on reactions to what their predecessors have said about particular pieces of art, rather than starting afresh, as it were, to approach the material itself with open minds. This tendency leads to specific emphases or biases being perpetuated through succeeding interpretations. Apart from the work of Haywood, who questioned a seventh century AD date for the Karlby carvings, it is possible to see this process occurring in recent studies of the Karlby stone. It is appropriate, with this in mind, to consider the evidence contained in aspects of the ship itself to support these conclusions.

Ole Crumlin-Pedersen identified the Karlby ship's characteristics with the Scandinavian tradition of shipbuilding. As noted above, chief among the qualities which he saw as being definitive were the ship's bent and raking stem and stern posts. However, these are also seen in a ship graffito which was found far from the Norse world, in the Palatino, Rome (le Gall 1955: 43; illustrated fig. 5.7). While the Palatino ship may represent that of a Nordic visitor, its cosmopolitan site and lack of specific detail make it very difficult to place in terms of time and cultural origin, leaving the question of the association of these characteristics open. Crumlin-Pedersen drew attention to the ship's possible weathervane (which is also seen on the Palatino ship), and to its sloping quarter rudder, as further evidence that the ship belonged to the Scandinavian tradition. While he may be right, it is important to note that many ancient ships of widely differing shipbuilding traditions carried a weathervane on the masthead, (Roman ships of the classical period, for example), and used a quarter rudder or rudders. In an earlier discussion, I noted that more recent photographs of the stone (Mortensen and Rasmussen *op.cit.*) show the "weathervane" to be very faint and incomplete, and it is possible that fine, possible intrusive



Fig. 5.7 The graffito found in the Palatino, Rome. Le Gall 1955.

markings at the masthead have been misinterpreted. It would seem, therefore, that there is some question about whether the ship is certain to be of Nordic origin.

If one works from the assumption that the ship on the Karlby stone was intended to represent a real ship type (and there is no very good reason for thinking that, at the most basic level, this was not what the artist intended), the question of dating such a "real" ship according to its characteristics is made far more difficult by the problem of establishing its origins. However, as Haywood pointed out (*ibid.*), "... almost anything that can float, from a log raft to a reed boat or a dug-out canoe, can be, and has been, successfully sail-driven.". With this statement in mind, the presence of a sail on the ship cannot be said to rule out a very early date for the carving, even earlier than the seventh century AD date which has been discussed. The evidence of the rudder is also intriguing, particularly through the problem of interpreting its forked end. While this may be understood as a mistake in the incising, a slip of the scribe, the minute precision of the rest of the ship tends to argue against this. The forked end may have been a deliberate attempt to represent two rudders, one on either side of the ship, an arrangement which is well known from various ship types in the ancient world. On the other hand, pronged punting poles were developed to deal with particular conditions; for example, the so-called "quant", was known in Norfolk from the fifteenth century, and possibly much earlier, as an adaptation for soft or muddy river beds. It is not impossible, then, that this detail of the ship is naturalistically represented.

If one accepts the possibility of a Dark Age date for the stone and its carvings, then the search for an artistic context in which to place them leads to other small disc shaped decorated objects such as coins, pilgrim tokens, and carved gems of this period. It is possible to find ships depicted on all of these, but none provide a close match for the art of the Karlby ship, through their conventionalized form and the decoration which often accompanies them. Coin and pilgrim token representations of ships also often

contain distortions or exaggerations of the ship's end posts which are related to the constraints of the circular shape of the ground material, which are also, in theory, shared by the Karlby ship. Examination of the relationship between the Karlby ship and the face of the pebble which it decorates, however, shows that there was ample room on either side of the ship to extend its end posts if the artist had so wished. Unfortunately, le Gall's illustration of the Palatino ship does not place the image in its physical context, so it is impossible to understand its artist's management of this problem in terms of the ship's design. The style of the Karlby carvings appears to us to be naturalistic, rather than codified or formulaic, which is seen in the depiction of ships in coin, glyptic, and pilgrim token art. As I noted in the first part of this chapter's discussion, Wilson and Klindt-Jensen (*op.cit.*) describe a naturalistic form of art which co-existed with the highly formalized art of the Viking period. The Karlby carvings, many other pictorial graffiti and such tapestry art as was seen in the textiles of the Oseberg ship, exemplify this style.

The ship picture on the stone resembles in its naturalistic style some of the pre- and proto- historic Scandinavian ship carvings, in that an " outline and in-fill" technique has been used to represent both the hull and sail areas. Interpretations of early rock carved ships which have led to reconstructions of these vessels (Johnstone 1972: 269-274; Marstrander 1976: 13-22) have seen the in-filled hull area as representing a side-on view of framing visible through the wet hide of a skin boat. Two other possibilities exist, however, to explain the use of this technique to represent the hull, both of which are equally likely in the context of ancient art. First, mixed or multiple views within the outline of one subject are seen in prehistoric, Aboriginal and children's art. They allow the artist to provide, for example, a plan view of his subject within its profile, a twisted perspective (as discussed, for example, by Dziurawiec and Deregowski 1991: 37-8). In the light of this, the lines in the hull of the Karlby ship might represent its keel and ribs.

The second possibility relates to the so-called " x-ray " technique, which is also seen in the art of prehistoric and traditional societies. A subject's interior structure is depicted, also within its outline, not as an attempt to represent an actual appearance, but as part of the complex meaning of the whole composition. The potential of this technique as a visual metaphor has been explored in the areas where ethnographic material is available to support its interpretation, and was discussed in the second chapter of this study.

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned the use of visual imagery to express complex meaning in the absence of writing. The use of the x-ray technique in any art, including graffiti, is an important example of the means by which a detailed or conceptually complex message may be encoded. Reading such a meaning, however, depends fundamentally on the viewer's familiarity with the technique and its potential, in association with particular subjects. The examples cited by Paul Taçon (*op. cit.*) and which were discussed earlier belonged to the hunting art and magic of Western Arnhem Land; by using the x-ray technique, the artists of these images were able to make complex statements about their subjects' state of being. David Mowaljarlai's description (*op. cit.*) of the teaching which was needed to enable Aboriginal initiate males to read x-ray images indicates the existence of several levels of meaning in the images. Clearly, it is dangerous to generalize from the art of western Arnhem Land to images from ancient Scandinavia, but Taçon's discussion provides an intriguing example of the potential of visual metaphor as a means of human expression, a potential which may have been realized in the art of many different cultures.

Before moving on to discuss the elk picture and its relationship to the ship, it is important to consider briefly the use of crossed lines as an in-fill technique in the ship's sail area. Clearly, the use of the x-ray technique seems to be an impossible explanation for this aspect of the sail's representation. The possibility that the artist was depicting an actual appearance is not unreasonable in this case, through the

presence of evidence to support it. Many of the ships on the Gotland picture stones (for example, the Ardre church stone, Nylén and Lamm 1988; fig. 5.8) show cross banding or hatching within the rectangular area of their sails. Through the difficulties posed by understanding the conventions of the Gotlandic artists, this evidence would be somewhat tenuous if it stood alone. However, several literary references from the sagas mention patterned and coloured sails, such as this short excerpt from Sturluson's Saga of Saint Olaf (Laing translation, 1978: chapter CXXIII).

" The ship was good, and all that belonged to her was of the best, and in the sails were stripes of cloth of various colours. "

However, one interpretation of the use of a particular technique does not necessarily rule out all others. Filling the area within the sail outline with a delicate web of lines may have been intended to depict an actual appearance, and as an artistic bonus, satisfied the artist that the form and substance of the sail had been indicated. The use of a technique like *intaglio* to excavate fully the area of the sail on such a small scale, would have given this part of the tiny ship a very bulky appearance, and severely limited the amount of detail which could be included. These problems could have been overcome by careful sculpting of the patch of *intaglio*, but on such a tiny scale this would have required the sort of expertise seen in glyptic art, by an artist who was a highly skilled craftsman, with access to specialized tools. However, even in graffiti pieces created with delicacy and precision, it is necessary to consider not only the ways in which deeper meaning might have been expressed, but also to evaluate the artistic considerations which relate to the artist's choices of form and technique.

Like the ship, it is possible to trace the elk as a subject in northern European art a very long way. It was frequently associated with the ship on pre- and proto-historic panels of rock carvings (as was discussed by Coles and Harding 1979: 321). These subjects often appear carved in a comparatively naturalistic, rather than a stylized manner, which recalls the style of the Karlby elk. Discussing the ancient relationship between

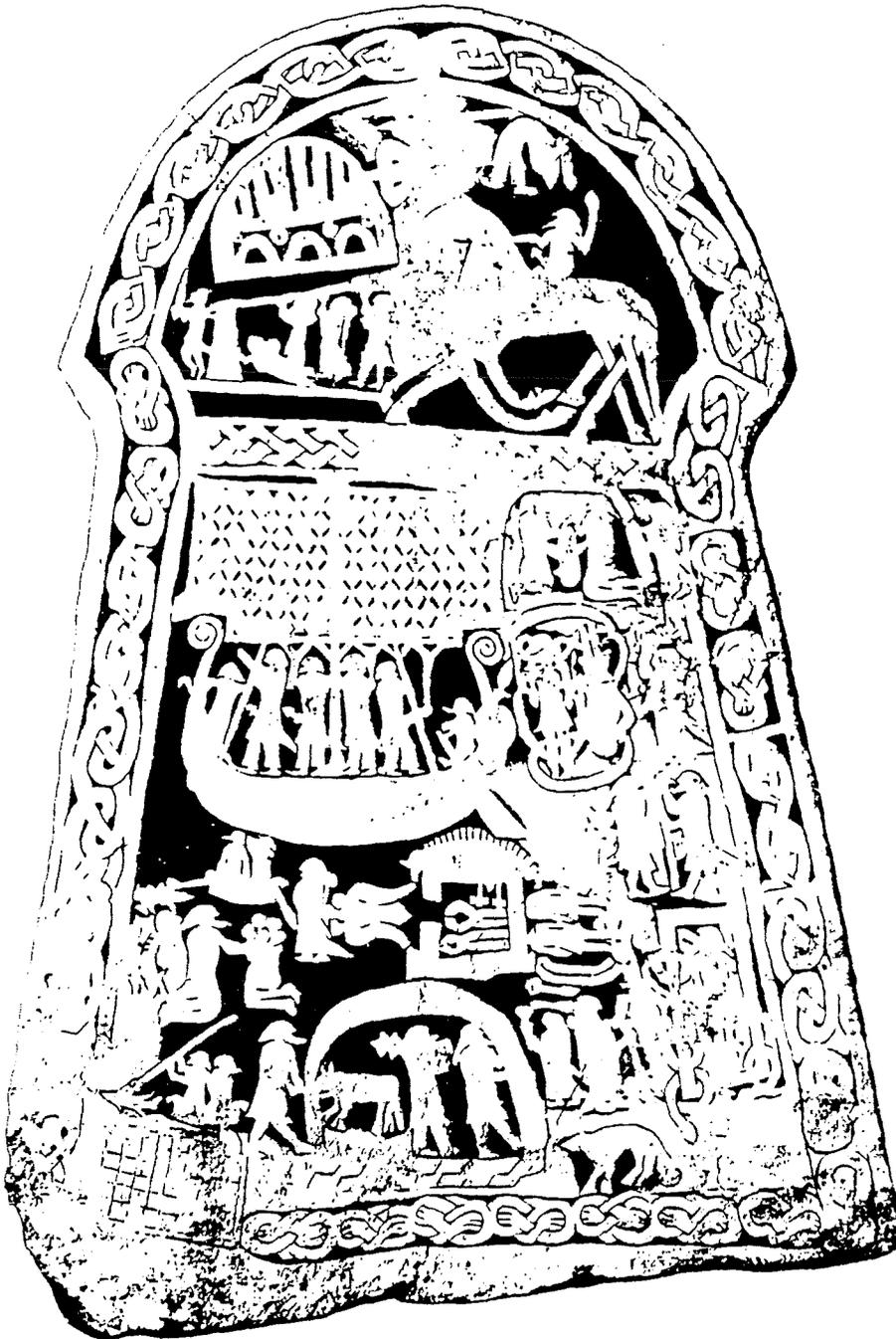


Fig. 5.8 The Ardre church stone (VIII). Nylén and Lamm 1988.

the ship and the elk as subjects in art, Coles noted that the elk had to be, or could be hunted from the water (1991: 135). Linking these two subjects, the ship and the elk, evokes an ancient tradition of hunting art in a powerful, even magical relationship.

A detail of the elk carving may shed a little more light on the artist's use of art to express complicated ideas. Although the animal is drawn with remarkable precision, and is a striking representation of a beautiful animal, its feet are missing, this being indicated by the unfinished lines at the ends of the legs. While there may have been a practical reason for this, it is also possible that this detail was intended to convey information about the elk's state of being, captured and prepared for butchery, for example. The very high quality modelling of the elk's limbs gives it a strongly naturalistic quality which is not seen as clearly in the representation of the ship. This quality, as well as the different manner in which the area within the outline of the animal is represented, could be said to argue that the stone's two main subjects were the work of different artists, despite the very small size of the pebble. The branching curved line which is seen to the left of the elk is very difficult to interpret, except as an incomplete subject, possibly part of another animal.

On a more technical note, the Karlby stone and its carvings have suggested the characteristics of Dark Age gem cutting to at least one writer (unattributed source, *IJNA* 1992 cover notes). The tiny size and precisely drawn forms of the subjects make such a link not unreasonable, and W. Karrasch's drawing of the ship (Rieck and Crumlin-Pedersen 1988; illustrated fig. 2.3) supports it further. His use of flowing double lines smoothes out the slight irregularities which are visible in photographs of the carvings, and gives a strong impression that they were formed with a gem cutter's wheel. G.A.Kornbluth's (1986: 66) discussion of the various "signatures" left by techniques of glyptic cutting, however, indicates that the Karlby images' lines were formed by hand cutting with a fine metal point, producing the minute irregularities and splintering which can even be seen in photographs of the

stone. Karrasch's drawing is a fine piece in itself, giving the viewer a strong sense that the original picture of a ship was powerful and deftly cut; sadly, however, it also gives the viewer some incorrect impressions.

While linking a simple beach pebble with a highly evolved art such as gem cutting may seem dubious, it is conceivable that the Karlby stone might belong to this tradition of art at a lower level in its production. I have noted at several points in this study O'Meadhra's description of motif, or trial pieces in Dark Age Insular art (*op. cit.*), which were produced by both apprentices and artists as a way of perfecting techniques and designing compositions. As was noted in an earlier discussion, complex or technically difficult pieces could be practised in this way, on rough or poor quality material which found its way onto a midden when the work had been finished. It is then possible that the Karlby stone was incised, not as an individual whimsy or talisman, but as a craftsman's trial piece. Kornbluth also described the popularity and production of pre-Carolingian Alsen gems, which were layered glass gems cut with various designs or motifs, using a simple metal point (*ibid.*: 68). A trial piece within the Alsen gem tradition might closely resemble the Karlby stone, and the distribution of Alsen gems, through the Netherlands, Denmark, and Germany, would also be in line with the Karlby stone's find site. Also, such an accomplished pair of carvings seem unlikely to have been to product of a child or a casual doodler, but rather give the impression of being the work of someone with considerable experience of carving small motifs on hard surfaces.

There is a sharp discrepancy between the technical achievement of these images and the humble nature of the pebble which they decorate. Elsewhere in this thesis, I have discussed the importance of understanding the relationship between graffito images and the material which they decorate. It may be possible to understand the Karlby stone and its carvings in terms of human concepts and behaviour which belong not only to northern Europe, but to a much wider context. Audrey Meaney, in her study

of amulets and curing stones in the Anglo-Saxon culture (1981), described pebbles which had been collected for their pleasing symmetry or for the symbolic importance of their mineral composition (*ibid.*: 88-90, 98-100). The widespread incidence of this behavior through time and culture indicates the truly fundamental nature of this human activity. While modern amulets are generally viewed as being unimportant fringe paraphernalia, their importance in the ancient world may be understood, at least in part, by the Christian church's anxiety to eradicate them (*ibid.*: 70).

Meaney's discussion of the use of pebbles as amulets is generally confined to undecorated quartz stones. She also referred to the group of beach pebbles which were painted with non-representational designs, and found at Pictish settlement sites (Ritchie 1971-2: 297-301). Various other types of pebbles are mentioned in Meaney's study as apparently having been used as amulets and curing stones. It is interesting to note that very few of the examples which she described were engraved or decorated in other ways. If the Karlby stone was selected and carved to be used as an amulet, then the symbolism of the ship and the elk might be assumed to have had a meaning which was sympathetic with the identity and use of the stone itself. Furthermore, like many other amulets, particularly those bearing attractive or magically potent decorations, the Karlby stone might have been transmitted from hand to hand, over a wide geographical area, as a prized possession. An example of such a transmission may be seen in Meaney's description of an engraved crystal amulet, originating in the eastern Mediterranean, which was found in a fourth century AD Danish grave (*ibid.*: 91). This possibility again raises the uncertainty of the Karlby stone's origins and cultural relationships.

The Karlby stone also bears a superficial resemblance to small gaming pieces, such as those found at Jarlshof and currently in the collection of the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. These, like the Karlby stone, were *objets trouvés*, pebbles collected for their colour, smooth symmetry, and small size, but, unlike the Karlby

stone, were undecorated. Decorated gaming pieces are known from ancient northern European contexts, such as an example found in the excavation of Viking Dublin (Christensen 1988: 13-26; illustrated, fig. 5.9) which was incised with a schematic design which may represent a ship. However, the decoration of gaming pieces, apart from dice, is generally confined to one surface of the piece. The detail and complexity of the Karlby images would seem to argue against the stone's identification as a gaming piece, as their production would have been a lengthy, labour intensive activity to decorate an item with comparatively little value among human possessions. Furthermore, the discussion, above, of the possible use of visual metaphor in the creation of two subjects with well-known associations with hunting magic would seem to mean that they were an important aspect of an artefact with a deeper conceptual meaning than that of a gaming piece.

Although the graffiti which have been discussed in this chapter have similar geographical and roughly chronological boundaries, there are many differences between them, both in their detail, and in the contexts in which they were found. The ship's prow images attracted my attention by presenting what might be interpreted as a pattern of recurrent use, which suggested that they had a stable meaning to contemporary people. This link between their pattern of use and their artists' intention to communicate meaning may be observed in similar images from different periods and cultures, and suggests that they may be the products of cognitive activity and behaviour which are fundamental to humans. The form of these images, bare of detail and often reduced to the most basic level needed for their recognition, may be seen as the product of a deliberate artistic process, a conscious use of symbolic style. It is interesting to note that all of the examples of the ship's prow graffiti which I have cited in this discussion use their ground material to support the image, rather than decorating or enhancing it, a distinction which was noted by Uaininn O'Meadhra in her discussion of craftsmen's trial pieces (*op.cit.*), and which has a useful application in graffiti studies. It is a consideration which possibly supports the idea that the

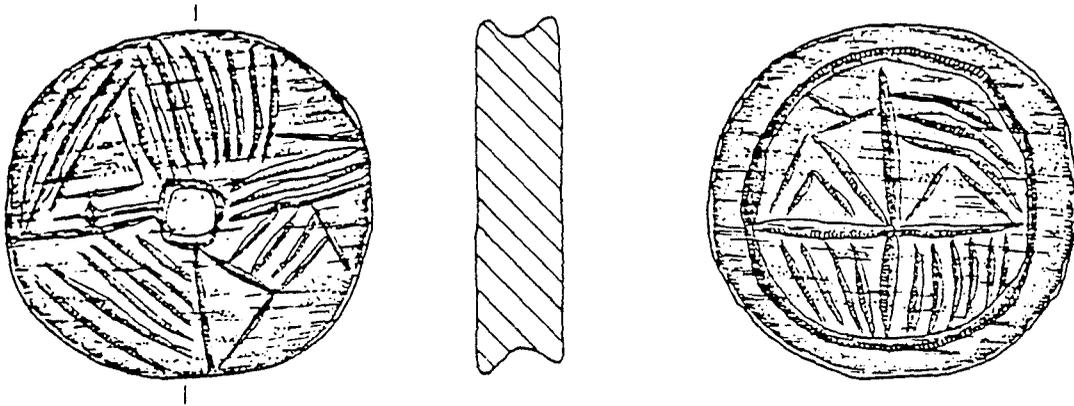


Fig. 5.9 Gaming piece decorated with a possible schematic ship. Christensen 1988.

ship's prow motif had a particular function for their creators, rather than having been the work of idle moments.

The images on the Karlby stone, like the ship's prow graffiti, have aspects of form and detail which may be understood as their artist's intention to encode complex meaning in them. Unlike the ship's prow images, however, the Karlby graffiti decorate their ground, rather than simply using it as a means of display. It may be possible to understand this as an indication of how the whole artefact functioned for its maker and user. The ancient and magical relationships between the ship and the elk as subjects in hunting art, as well as to the possible identity of the stone as an amulet, indicate the likelihood that their artist created the piece with an underlying intention, and that the artefact and its images work together to make a complex statement, which reflects and expresses this intention.

Both groups which I have discussed in this chapter present images which are not straightforward, naturalistic representations of ancient Nordic ships, easily read by modern students of nautical technology. Examination of the artistic devices which have been used to create them indicates that the images were made with the intentional modification of form in order to express particular meaning, to work as cognitive triggers for the informed viewers who saw them. The common link between the ship's prow graffiti and the Karlby images lies in a fundamental aspect of human cognitive behavior, the use of visual imagery to express complex meaning.

The meaning of some early ship graffiti is undoubtedly lost to us, and their form and detail may offer little reliable information about early nautical technology. Some images offer clear and unequivocal evidence which plays an important part in the interpretation of the archaeological record. Many others, however, provide us with considerable challenges in their reading, but may have the potential to offer us information about their creators' thought world, as well as their ships.

In the first section of this chapter, I mentioned some of the images scratched on the Bryggen branch as examples of the ship's prow motif. The main graffito, which fills one face of the artefact, presents modern interpreters with a complex problem, which has caused some authorities to doubt its authenticity. In the following discussion, I will consider this image, as well as the other graffiti on the branch, using an interpretative method which is based on the approaches of art history. Such an approach, however, must include an examination of the images and the branch which they decorate as artefacts. I hope to demonstrate that the use of these methods of analysis, combined with an understanding of the form and content of the other graffiti on the branch, leads to an understanding of the artist's achievement in creating a powerful and evocative picture of medieval Norse ships. I will also consider the usefulness of this depiction to nautical historians and archaeologists.

Chapter 6: The Bryggen artefact

The Bryggen area of Bergen, Norway was excavated over a number of years following a disastrous fire in 1955. Among a wealth of material which was recovered was a large group of worked pieces of wood, bone, and leather, incised with runes. In 1988, A.E. Herteig noted in the foreword of Supplement 2 of the Bryggen papers that some six hundred of these pieces had been excavated at Bryggen. Small, three dimensional figures carved from bone and wood were also found at the site, and were interpreted as the work of artisans such as comb makers (Herteig 1959: 185). These form a group which is distinct from the runic inscribed pieces, which are almost exclusively unaccompanied by decoration. An intriguing exception, however, is a small piece of roughly prepared wood, approximately 25 cm long, which was carved not only with a runic inscription, but also with a complex group of ships, and three other images (fig. 6.1).

The largest image on the artefact, the group of ships, is so striking in both its unusual form and clear depiction of Nordic ships that it has been reproduced as a logo or motif on book covers (*The Bryggen Papers*, 1985), and even in wrought iron in the Bergen museum. While these reproductions convey something of the image's charm and the memorable impression of Norse ships which it conveys, they are often abbreviated or schematic, and so do not do justice to the original.

The discussion in the first section of this work was based on the proposition that the potential of ship graffiti as historical and technical resources might be more fully realized, not by a superficial response to what they appear to show of early ships, but by a multi-disciplinary approach to their interpretation both as art and artefacts. The intention of this chapter is to examine the Bryggen graffito carvings in detail, using artistic analysis of the images, and technical evaluation of the ships, in order to explore this proposition in terms of another example, and in so doing to show that the

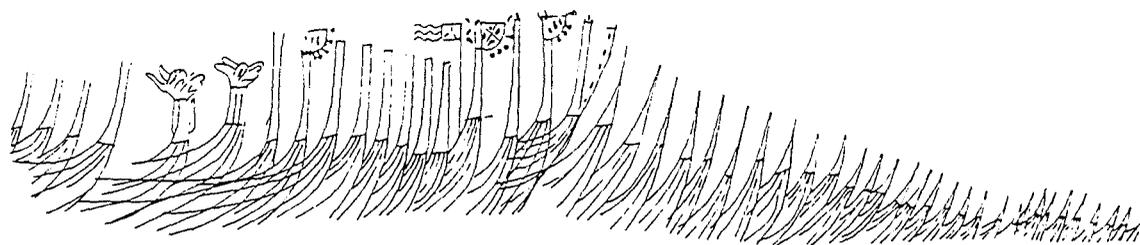
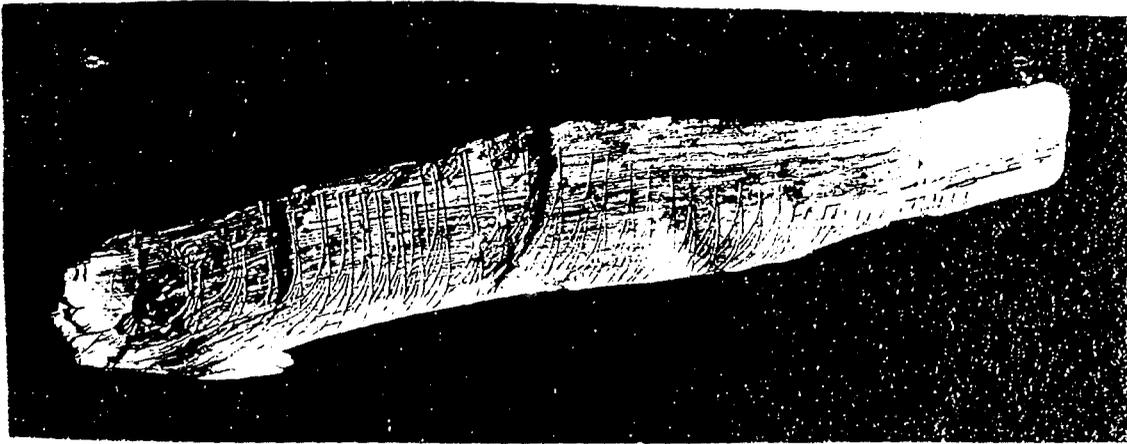


Fig. 6.1 The Bryggen ship graffiti; photographs supplied by the Bryggen museum (above); interpretive drawing, Rieck and Crumlin-Pedersen 1988.

piece's potential far exceeds its immediate appeal as an attractive image. For practical reasons, after a preliminary discussion of the artefact and its carvings, I will discuss the images separately, beginning with the well known graffito and turning to the smaller, individual carvings later in this discussion. The possible inter-relationships between all the pictures, and the association between them and the branch (or "cudgel" as the Bergen museum curators engagingly call it) on which they appear, will be considered at the end of this chapter.

For such a widely reproduced object, it is surprisingly difficult to place the Bryggen artefact satisfactorily in an archaeological context from the published reports of the site. One of Herteig's preliminary reports (1958: 130-137) mentions its discovery, and assigns it an early thirteenth century date through paleographic analysis of its inscription. Herteig's brief discussion of the branch treats it as a curiosity, with a touch of the academic disregard for pictorial graffiti which was discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Subsequent publications (Herteig 1959: 177-186; Liestol 1980; Herteig 1985; Johnsen et al. 1990) shed no further light on its archaeological context, and nowhere in these reports does the artefact appear with a finds number, making it impossible to locate in the site's artefact inventories. However, contact with the archaeologists at Bergen indicates that this is likely to be a problem of finds' recording, rather than evidence of questionable authenticity.

Many of Bryggen's runic inscriptions are carved on so-called rune sticks, narrow strips of wood prepared with flattened surfaces. Some runes also appear on discs, crosses, or tally sticks. A few, like the Bryggen artefact discussed here, are on small pieces of branch, which have been worked without a great deal of preparation. The branch bearing the ship carvings was split and carved on both the cut surface and the naturally curved face. Photographs of the artefact taken with strong cross lighting show three parallel grooves on the cut surface of the wood, which may have been caused by the splitting process. The well known group of images was carved across

the wood's grain on the split surface, and extends along its full length. Forty-eight ships are represented in this image, and are shown in profile, or frontal views which have complex and varying degrees of turn toward the viewer throughout the composition. All of the ships partly overlie one another.

On the reverse face of the branch, a single ship is carved in profile, near the centre of the working space; this image was briefly discussed in an earlier chapter. To the left of this ship, and some distance away, is a group of concentric lines. To its right is another, small group of three ships which resembles the large group in that they are only partially represented, overlie one another to some degree, and show both the short pointed stems, and the elongated, rectangular stempost of the large ships in the main group. This group was considered in some detail in my earlier discussion of the ship's prow image. The runic inscription is carved beneath this small group of ships, and, from artefact photographs, appears to lie just on the edge of the flattened end of the stick. The runes have been written using the later, twenty-eight character futhark, with the word dividers which are characteristic of the medieval period, and it is these characteristics which have led paleographers to date the inscription to the thirteenth century. In view of the nature of the artefact, it seems reasonable to assume that all of the images on the branch are of this date. While it may have been a treasured possession whose carvings were gradually created over a period of time, it is more likely that the whole piece was worked over a fairly brief interval, after which it was discarded.

The close proximity between the inscription and the small group of ships may indicate that the inscription, " here sails the dauntless master of the waves " (translated by Hougen, *op.cit*) relates to this picture. It must be noted, however, that it is impossible to be certain that the separate images and inscription on this face necessarily relate to one another. The exception to this, of course, is the group of three overlying ships, whose spatial relationships indicate the near certainty that they were carved together.

The ships of the main group are also related to one another in both space and concept, (and both of these will be discussed in more detail below) which allow the same conclusion of contemporaneity to be drawn.

The images on the reverse face of the Bryggen artefact have been placed on the branch's convenient working surface, between knots and other natural features. The single ship is roughly centred vertically, as are the concentric lines at one end of the branch, but the small group and inscription are perched at the lower edge of this face. The artist of the main carving has used the margins of the split surface as the composition's natural boundaries, and the lower edge of the group of three ships' prows shares a common imaginary baseline. The ships to the extreme left of the group are shown in profile, although only their forward ends are illustrated. Towards the middle of the group, this view is altered, ship by ship, to a few degrees turn from a frontal view. From the centre of the group to the extreme right, the ships' prows are diminished proportionally in size, from occupying the whole of the working space to become tiny peaks at the branch's edge. At first glance, these appear to represent waves, which would not be out of keeping with the rest of the composition, particularly as the artist has not shown the ships to the keel. However, closer examination shows that the artist has indicated that even these minute peaks represent ships by adding lines within the hull outlines to indicate strake runs, as well as some indications of joints at the lower end of the stemposts. Similar lines appear in a more elaborated form in the carvings of the larger ships.

To twentieth century eyes, this picture appears to be a sophisticated and successful exercise in the use of perspective to show a large, closely massed group of ships, which are nearer to the viewer on the left of the composition, and recede into the distance to its right. This effect is the result of modern viewers' reading the combined techniques of overlaid forms and their proportional diminishment as indicators of pictorial space. We are well practised in interpreting these techniques and their effects

in the art of our own time, and our experience of photography has greatly increased our sensitivity to them. While this heightened sensitivity is to our advantage in enabling us to interpret quickly and accurately the visual imagery of our own period, it may mislead us in reading ancient art which did not use spatial relationships in the same way.

If the early thirteenth century date for the artefact is correct, then an intentional achievement of pictorial space in a work of this date would be astonishing. Pre-renaissance images are often found from many different cultures which are composed with an overlay of forms to create an impression of multitude, such as the group of people shown mourning the death of King Edward in the Bayeux tapestry (fig. 6.2). However, I have been unable to find parallels for the artistic convention of proportional diminishment of forms in order to indicate pictorial space, either alone or in combination with overlay, in northern European medieval art, which would provide an artistic context for the Bryggen image. Studies of the development of perspective in art (Bunim 1940; White 1967; Kemp 1990) show that experiments in the representation of pictorial space led to its achievement by the Italian artist Brunelleschi around the year 1413, and its widespread use was established by about 1500 (Kemp *ibid*: 7-9). It would be wrong, however, to link the technique of the Bryggen image with the artistic experiments of the Italian renaissance, and either to make assumptions about the Bryggen artist's experiences, or to discard the carving as a forgery because its apparent achievement of perspective precedes Brunelleschi's work by more than one hundred years. The possibility that the image was the result of a naive, but remarkably able attempt to depict what an artist actually saw, will be discussed in more detail further on in this chapter. (It is interesting to note that when I showed this graffito to Professor Martin Kemp of this university, a leading expert in early renaissance art, his initial reaction was to doubt the graffito's authenticity because of its remarkable appearance. He later withdrew this opinion.)



Fig. 6.2 Group from the Bayeux tapestry, showing overlay of forms.
Wilson edition, 1985.

There are several ways of looking at this problem, in order to find an explanation for the image's extraordinary effect. The first is that the artist composed the image with the intention of creating the impression of pictorial space which modern viewers perceive. In accepting this explanation, one would then have to account for the apparent absence of a Northern European artistic context in the thirteenth century for the techniques which the artist has used. In theory, at least, this would not be an impossible exercise; occasionally, examples of art which have been created using highly evolved styles and techniques are found associated with cultures which are far removed from their place and time of origin. I have already noted the northern Indian Buddha figure, found in a sixth to seventh century context at Helgo, Sweden (Nordic Council of Ministers, Roesdahl and Wilson (eds.) 1992: 257), for example, which may be interpreted as the result of long range contact such as raiding or trade. The influence of such widely travelled pieces' subjects, styles and artistic conventions on the art of the cultures which they reached may only be surmised. Furthermore, it would be wrong to assume that successful experiments in depiction were not being carried out long before the "milestone" achievements were made, which marked stages in the development of art, and captured the attention of many contemporaries as well as later students of art.

The art of prehistory also contains examples of extraordinary artistic effects, such as in the carving of reindeer from Teyjat, in the Dordogne region of France (Deregowski 1984: fig 2.4; illustrated, fig. 6.3) which is occasionally illustrated in discussions of very early art. The striking effect of this carving is very reminiscent of the Bryggen graffito, through the Teyjat artist's use of proportional diminishment, albeit without any significant overlay, in the reindeers' antlers. It must be seen as part of a highly evolved and distinct art form, however, which flourished at such a great distance in time and culture from the Bryggen image that no connection, in the sense of influence, between the two pictures may be seen.

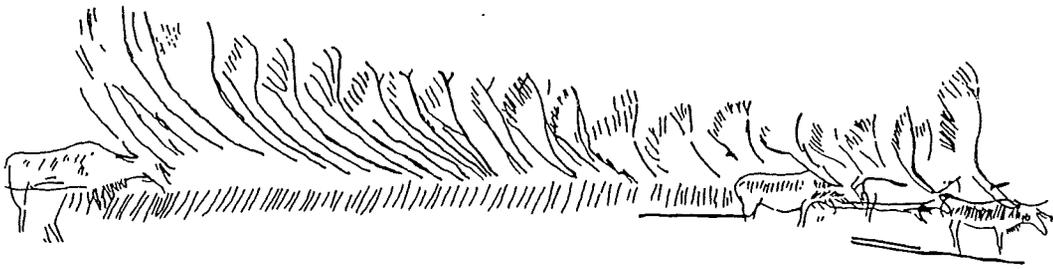


Fig. 6.3 The Teyjat image. Deregowski 1984.

It is worth noting, however, that the psychologist Jan Deregowski discussed the interpretation of the Teyjat image in his work on distortion in art (*ibid.*: 39-40). His analysis of the picture has some relevance to the interpretation of the Bryggen graffito, in that it is an attempt to interpret an ancient image which contains an unusual visual effect, and which may have been created using spatial relationships in a way which is completely different from modern conventions. Deregowski proposed four possibilities to explain the reasons behind the artist's use of multiple forms of diminishing size:

- 1) that it was the result of repeated attempts to represent a reindeer.
- 2) that it was an attempt to draw a herd of reindeer.
- 3) that it was a similar attempt to that noted above, with a conscious decision to represent perspective.
- 4) that it was a depiction of a single reindeer in movement, in a manner common in strip cartoons.

Possibilities 1 and 4 cannot be applied to explain the Bryggen graffito, as it was clearly the artist's intention to represent multiple ships in the image, which are represented using different decorative detail and prow designs. The second option, the artist was depicting a herd of reindeer, could be said to apply to the Bryggen graffito, and that the artist intended to show a fleet of ships. Possibility 3, the intentional representation of pictorial space, brings us back to the problem of whether such an effect may be deliberately achieved in the apparent absence of an artistic context.

A concept which rather resembles the "innocent eye" theory, the subject of much discussion among Victorian artists and academics, has sometimes been suggested in informal discussions among nautical historians as the means by which the Bryggen artist achieved the effect he did. This explanation of the graffito conjectured that a gifted but untaught amateur might achieve remarkable effects of power and realism,

simply by applying an unsophisticated directness to drawing exactly what he or she saw. The emphasis was then on the individual, and the validity and purity of the perceptions which he experienced, and which were unshaped by the teaching of artistic convention, for use in making visual imagery, in its interpretation, or both. Using this theory, the Bryggen graffiti could be seen as the happy result of an attempt to illustrate what a competent but artistically naive artist actually perceived, a fleet of ships drawn up on a beach, for example.

Psychologists experimenting with perception and visual illusion have discovered that a person with no experience of art, nor specific teaching in reading artistic conventions, perceives depth within a picture constructed using the so-called corridor illusion (Newman 1969: 418-420; illustrated, fig. 6.4). This illusion was designed in as part of an investigation of the perception of size as determined by distance, and used figures of the same size placed at intervals within a grid of converging lines which resembled a panelled corridor (illustrated, for example, by Luckiesh 1965: 60, and fig. 24). While the Bryggen ships are not the same size, the near convergence of their common baseline and the imaginary line of their prows creates a similar, though not identical, effect to that of the background grid of the corridor illusion, whose purpose was to establish the illusion of depth. Experimental findings concerning the effect of the illusion have a relevance to the interpretation of the art of the Bryggen graffiti, in indicating that the artist might have used a form for its composition which triggered a basic human perceptual response. Registering the image is then a blend of basic innate perceptual mechanisms which function in response to triggers embedded within it, and of learned responses to the deliberate use of particular artistic conventions. Both the artist's use of conventions and the viewer's reactions to them are culturally determined, and may not necessarily coincide.

This perceptual phenomenon may be said to be related to the concept of the naive artist which was described above, in explaining the positive response of the human brain to

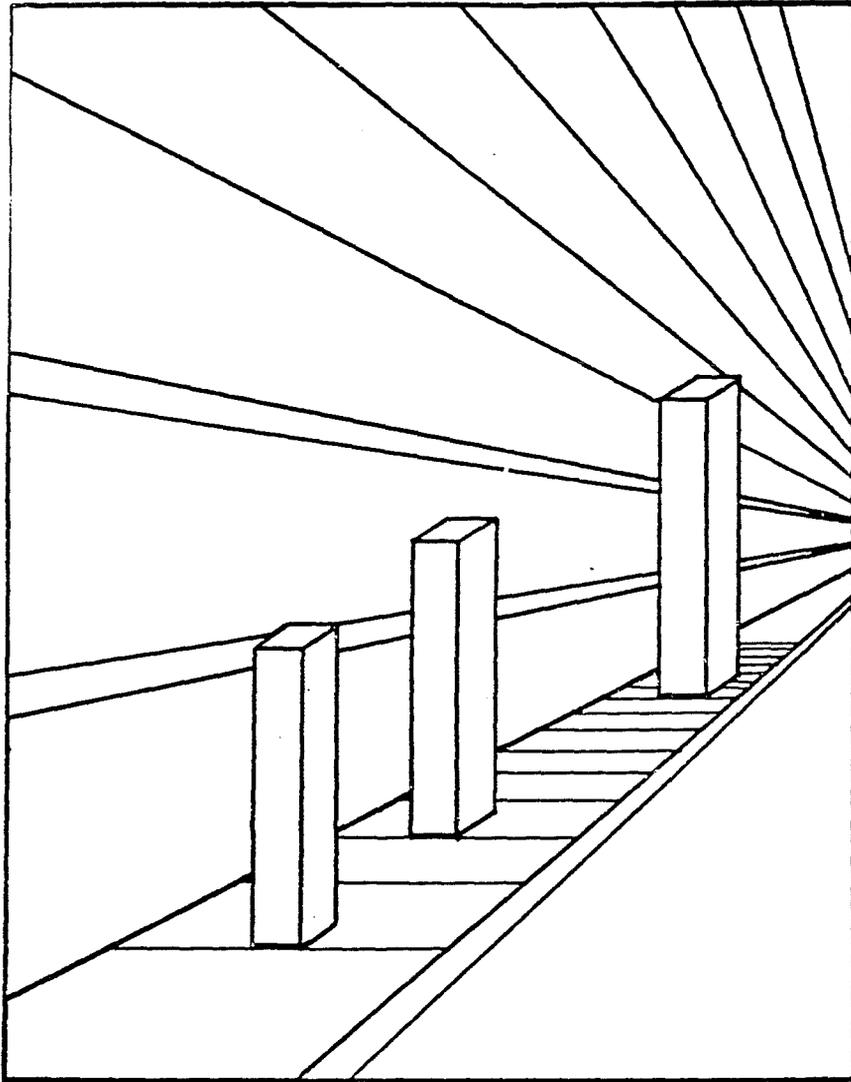


Fig. 6.4 The "corridor" illusion. Luckiesh 1965.

certain effects in visual imagery, in the absence of previous experience or teaching of the techniques. What must be emphasized, however, is that the perception of an illusion created in a work of art, rather than an experimental image, does not necessarily dominate the viewer's response to the image, in the sense of overriding his response to the use of artistic convention. Some effects within an image, then, are fortuitous, unintentional triggers of responses which are bound up with the perceptual system, but may be stronger or weaker according to other aspects of the composition. This variability allows the meaning of the deliberate effects, the conventions and techniques, to exert their influence on the viewer. This discussion does not solve the problem of what response the Bryggen, or for that matter, the Teyjat, artist intended to evoke in the viewers of their images. It does, however, allow the possibility that while the effect of pictorial depth may not have been intentional in these early images, contemporary viewers might have perceived it through the action of their perceptual systems.

Another possibility to account for the apparent achievement of perspective in the Bryggen image is that the artefact is a forgery. This notion would see the piece as the work of an artist who was familiar with the post-medieval techniques of achieving pictorial space, but who did not realize their anachronism relative to the style of carving he or she was attempting to imitate. However, the artefact itself closely resembles many other undoubtedly genuine pieces found at Bryggen, and the lines and detail of the ships depicted, and the nature of the runes, all fit comfortably with the date which Herteig assigned to the artefact.

The third possibility is that our well practised response to these techniques, leading to our perception of pictorial space, may not be what the artist intended the contemporary viewer to see. Other examples of early art, like the Teyjat carving, can be found which resemble the Bryggen carving in that they appear to achieve an effect which was outside of contemporary artistic conventions. They probably do so because the

modern viewer's perceptual experiences and particular understanding of the meaning of certain conventions create the impression in his or her mind, as a synthetic effect rather than an interpretive one (White 1967: 238).

We may not only misunderstand, but frankly overlook through unfamiliarity, the use of an ancient artistic convention in the Bryggen graffito, which is expressed in the technique of proportional diminishment. In this convention, the spatial relationship between forms is the means by which a conceptual relationship between the small ships to the right of the carving and the larger ones to the left might be represented. Miriam Bunim described this use of size differentiation between figures in a composition, to convey meaning about their relative importance, as "hierarchic scaling" (*op.cit.*), which I noted briefly in an earlier discussion.

Hierarchic scaling is found in ancient art from prehistory, through Egyptian art and well into the medieval period, and caused important mortal or supernatural figures to be represented as being larger than associated figures of lesser status. The information about the ranking of the subjects in an image which the contemporary viewer received from such a technique might be further supported by the dress or associated detail of the large figures. It is possible to interpret the differentiation of size in the Bryggen ships as resulting from this technique, conveying a message to the contemporary viewer who would have been familiar with it, about the relative importance of the ships within the composition.

The large ships to the left of the Bryggen carving carry figureheads, weathervanes, and a flag, while those to the right are unadorned. Early Scandinavian prestige ships in the archaeological record, such as the Oseberg ship, were richly ornamented with highly achieved works of art as part of their public display of status. The flag, which is clearly associated with one of the large ships near the centre of the Bryggen picture, may be linked with early medieval flags which were in use from the early twelfth

century. Colin Campbell described these in a recent work (1989), and two of the types he discussed are very similar to the Bryggen flag in being rectangular, with three tails, and worked with detail in the flag's field, usually the owner's arms. Both of these flags, the *gonfanon* and the *senā cabdal* (*ibid.*: 2), were appropriate to leaders or senior noblemen, or to institutions such as the orders of knighthood. Several very similar flags may be seen in the Bayeux tapestry, carried on the ends of lances by knights of the Norman army, and, notably, by the dukes of Normandy and Brittany. If the Bryggen flag may be linked with this type of chivalric flag, its use was likely to have been meant to denote the presence within the group of a person or institution of considerable stature. The weathervanes and figureheads on the ships which are close to the flag strengthen this message of imposing presence, and work with the conceptual relationship of relative size between the large and small ships by enhancing the difference between the two groups.

Intriguingly, Bunim noted in the course of her discussion of hierarchic scaling that, "All the figures, though differing in size, may stand on the same line." (*ibid.*: 8). This observation may provide the key to solve the puzzle of the interpretation of the art of the Bryggen graffito. Rather than deliberately constructing an image which indicates depth, perhaps the artist used an extended form of hierarchic scaling, not to indicate a few status relationships within a composition, but to show a complete fleet in order of importance, from the impressive and decorated ships of the commander and his nobles, to the smallest unornamented tenders. Our comparative unfamiliarity with the use of hierarchic scaling to carry meaning within an image, and our considerable familiarity with overlay and proportional diminishment to indicate pictorial space, in conjunction with the functioning of our perceptual mechanism, may lead us to misread the spatial relationships between the figures in the Bryggen graffito, with perplexing results.

Separating the possibilities in this discussion has the unfortunate effect of implying that one meaning rules out all others, and to view the image in this way as a "single concept statement" would be to underestimate the artist's achievement. It is likely that the form of the image is the product of a group of interrelated concepts, which were expressed using overlay of ships and proportional diminishment. The possibility that one of these concepts was the representation of pictorial space, by the same technique which was used to indicate status relationships between the ships, cannot be ruled out.

I have touched briefly, above, on the relationship between the ground material of the Bryggen image, and the carvings themselves. Before leaving the discussion of the interpretation of the graffiti, it is important to note the possible influence which the physical characteristics of its ground exerted on the artist, both in the scratching of the ships themselves, and in the variations of ships size and type which are seen in the composition itself.

As was noted earlier in this discussion, photographs of the artefact show a series of three parallel grooves along the cut surface of the stick, which may be the result of attempts to split the wood. The groove at the centre of the stick marks the point where the group of large ships with rectangular stemposts ends, and the group of smaller ships with pointed prows begins. It is possible that the distinct change in the style of the ships which occurs at this point is directly related to this feature (if, for example, it marked a change in the working qualities of the wood), but it would be necessary to examine the artefact at first hand to establish this. Furthermore, even if this feature were the cause of the change in representation, it would be difficult to see how this effect could have influenced the use of proportional diminishment through the rest of the composition, which continues well past the groove.

Whatever the true explanation of the apparent effect of pictorial space in the Bryggen carving may be, reading the image provides a useful example of the complex interplay

between the artist's intention in making it, understanding the artist's handling of the ground material, and the problems posed by the later viewer's response to the conventions used to create it. The basic level of object recognition provides no difficulty. Modern viewers share an understanding with the artist of the typical outline which has been used to represent the ships. This modern understanding may be said to include a stereotype, derived from films and drawings, of what a Viking ship looked like. We also register the effect of depth through the workings of our perceptual mechanism, in the same way that contemporary viewers did. It is at the more complex and culturally bound levels of the interpretation of artistic conventions, however, where the difficulties for later viewers occur. Lacking the insider knowledge of the contemporary viewer, and applying our own reading, we may miss levels of meaning which are present in the image, and, perhaps more seriously, be so confused by our inappropriate responses that we attempt to find explanations for both art and artefact which further mislead us. Furthermore, without making a replica of the graffito on a similar piece of wood using similar tools, we may not be able to understand fully the artist's reasons for carving the ships in the way he did.

The previous discussion has centred on the possible meaning of the concepts which underlie the spatial arrangements in the main Bryggen graffito. Before ending my discussion of the art of this image, I would like to turn to more practical areas of artistic analysis, to look at the way in which the artist has created some of its other aspects.

Part of the success of the Bryggen graffito as a vivid and evocative image lies in its artist's choice of an unusual view to represent the ships. As I have noted above, this is mainly frontal, and the use of profile view is confined to the large ships to the left of the carving. By limiting the representation of the small ships to what is virtually the minimum needed for their recognition, two effects are achieved. First, many ships are shown within a small area, conveying an impression of a large fleet. Second, a

frontal view of an object in art may give the viewer a sense that the object is approaching, thus drawing him into a more direct relationship with it and so achieving a visual effect with a heightened power.

All of the ships overlie one another from left to right, suggesting the possibility that they were carved by a left handed artist who used this sequence to achieve control over the curves of the ships' hulls. It must be noted, however, that this suggestion is purely speculative, and that there may have been other reasons for the ships' arrangement in this way. Some of the large ships near the centre left of the group have been shown with detail of their length and strakes visible through the hulls of the ships which overlie them. While it would be possible to interpret this appearance as the result of the so-called x-ray convention at work, it seems more likely that these extended ships were carved first, and then overlaid from the left by other forms as the concept of the composition was developed. Using this interpretation, it is possible to see a sequence of carving, with the three large ships to the right of the animal figureheads, and one in the centre of the branch, having been carved first, then overlaid left over right, through to the tiny prows at the extreme right side of the branch. It also supports the notion that the images on the stick were made quickly and casually, without a preconceived plan. The blank area above the group of small ships to the right clearly had an important artistic purpose as the proportional diminishment of the ships developed, but may also have served a practical purpose in acting as a hand hold for the artist's right hand.

The large ships which are shown in profile are partial representations, in that generally only a fraction of their hulls is illustrated. Enough is shown of their large stemposts and forward strake runs, however, to indicate that much more is hidden within the whole group by the adjacent ships, so achieving an impression of their considerable size. There are many parallels for the partial representation of ships in other Scandinavian ship graffiti; the Oseberg graffiti (which will be discussed separately,

below) contains a ship which is also shown in profile, with only an end post and a section of hull indicated. Martin Blindheim's study of the graffiti in Norwegian stave churches (*op.cit.* ; illustrated figs. 1.4a and 5.1) includes numerous examples of other similar representations, broadly contemporary with the Bryggen graffiti, some of which may be compared with it. While the interpretation of the ship's prow image has been discussed in more detail elsewhere in this study, it may be possible to see its use in medieval Scandinavian graffiti as the result of the *pars pro toto* convention at work, with the possible intention of creating an ideogram capable of expressing complex meaning. However, its use in the Bryggen image clearly has a practical purpose apart from a symbolic one. It is interesting to note that among the graffiti which Blindheim records is an example of a ship incised using a frontal view, (illustrated, fig. 1.4) providing a note of reassurance that its use has a parallel in medieval Scandinavian art.

Even in examining secondary sources of the Bryggen graffiti such as slides , one can see that a considerable degree of skill went into the carving of the images on the artefact. The main graffiti was incised across the wood's grain, with a deftness which allows the detail to be clear, even on a very small scale such as in the fringes or telltales of the weathervanes, and the tails of the flag. These tails have been shown with a rippling curve, in order to suggest movement. Enlarged photographs of the graffiti show that tiny chips have been lost from the carving at some of the angles between lines, such as at the corners of the stemposts' flat tops, but the artist was sufficiently in control of the pressure he used in incising the image that this tendency to flaking did not become a serious problem. Several of the ships with long but undecorated stemposts have a diagonal, rather than a horizontal line indicating the stem top, perhaps as an adaptation of technique to avoid the loss of small chips. This observation highlights the importance of considering the practical factors which influenced the way in which details were realized, when we speculate about the actual appearance of historic ships from such images.

There is only one apparent "false start" in the carving, a stempost at the edge of the group of large ships, which was lightly sketched and then abandoned. As this feature lies within the deep groove at the centre of the branch, it may be that the artist was not certain of the working quality of the wood in this flaw, and was able to leave the incomplete ship without significantly marring the effect of the whole piece.

The level of artistic achievement in the Bryggen graffito, however, is distinct from its usefulness as a technical source for northern European ships of the medieval period. I would now like to adjust the focus of my discussion from the interpretation of the concepts underlying the art of the Bryggen graffito, to the consider the form and detail of ships themselves.

The long sweeping stemposts, weathervanes and animal head ornaments of the large ships are characteristic of the Scandinavian shipbuilding tradition. The curving lines within the hulls seem to indicate clinker construction, although the joints between the planks in carvel construction could also have been represented in this way. Closer examination, however, reveals some intriguing aspects of the ships' form which might appear to suggest that they are nearer to the ships of the medieval period than to those of the Dark Age.

The artist has taken considerable care to indicate the hooding ends of the planks, their point of contact with the stempost, by incising a horizontal line between them and the ships' stems. Where an animal head ornament is included, a short section of stempost is indicated between the line marking the end of the strakes and the figurehead itself. Where the stem is sharply pointed, in the smaller ships to the right, the line forms the base of a triangle which is completed by the lines forming the stem. This detail gives the clear impression that the upper strakes rise together to end at a common point, a characteristic which is thought to have typified the hulk.

While actual examples of the hulk have not yet been found, or recognized, in the archaeological record, it is known from plastic, coin, and manuscript art of the medieval period, and documentary sources provide information about its distribution (Greenhill 1988: 62-7). Basil Greenhill viewed its development as being quite distinct from either the cog, or the ships of the Scandinavian tradition. Dispute continues concerning the hulk's antecedents and dates of development and use, but Greenhill notes that ships with its distinctive characteristics appeared in northern European art of the early twelfth century. However, A.E. Christensen, describing the boat finds at Bryggen (1985: 217-9), summarized current Scandinavian theory about the use of ship types in Norway in the medieval period. He concluded that the cog, and ships built in the Scandinavian clinker tradition, dominated medieval shipping in this area, until 1365 when royal permission was given for the new, smaller levy ship to be built (*ibid.*)

The long stemposts which feature on the large ships in the Bryggen graffito cannot be linked with the hulk tradition. Greenhill (*ibid.*) stated categorically that the hulk was always without a stem and stern post, a view which is supported by other authorities (for example, Christensen: *ibid.*), and by the evidence of medieval artistic representations of hulks. The ship carved on the twelfth century Winchester font, for example, which is accepted as a hulk (Costa 1981: 25; illustrated fig. 6.5), gives a clear indication of long strake runs terminating together beneath an animal figurehead, which is unsupported by a stempost. It would seem that there were hybrid forms, however, where the arrangement of strakes at the stem of the hulk was used in building the otherwise traditional Scandinavian hull, and these are referred to in the royal letter of 1365 (Christensen: *ibid.*). It seems likely, however, that these hybrids were also built without stem and sternposts.

While the hulk was likely to have been known in Scandinavia in the first half of the thirteenth century, it is likely that it was much less common than the cog and the



Fig. 6.5 The Winchester font ship. Costa 1981.

Nordic clinker built ship, until the second half of the fourteenth century. It is important to note that Christensen draws attention (*ibid.*: 219) to the wide range of forms which the traditional Scandinavian ship could take, noting the ships of the Skuldelev find as providing some examples. The Bryggen graffito ships' long stemposts are clearly characteristic of the Nordic ship tradition, and despite the faint suggestion of hulk characteristics in the ends of the strake runs, it would not be safe to see the ships as primarily related to the hulk. Some confirmation of the possibility that ships in the medieval Nordic tradition were built with their upper strake runs curving up to meet at a common point may be seen in other pictures of this period, notably in the ship on the town seal of Bergen itself (illustrated in Unger 1991: fig 29; illustrated fig. 6.6).

There are many other representations of ships from the medieval period which display upswept strakes ending together, with a banding or simple line marking their joints with the stempost, just below the figurehead. On the Winchester font hulk's figurehead, as well as a number of the prestige ships in the Bayeux tapestry, a decorative collar is indicated just below the head itself, parallels which may provide an interpretation of the horizontal line beneath the Bryggen figureheads. Collars were an important part of the illustration of animals in Dark Age and medieval Scandinavian art, and may be seen in numerous examples of two and three dimensional works, including a graffito animal scratched on the wood of the Oseberg ship. Their inclusion here would be well within the conventions for an early thirteenth century image. The inclusion of tiny details in these figurehead illustrations, such as the collars and the facial features, add considerably to the artist's achievement in making the Bryggen image.

Martin Blindheim's survey of graffiti from stave churches identified a number of ships with these details (*op.cit.*: plates XVII, 6; XXVII, 6; XXXVI, 4). They may also be seen in the illustration of Noah's ark, in the thirteenth century Huntingfield manuscript



Fig. 6.6 The town seal of Bergen. Unger 1991.

(illustrated in Unger *ibid.*: fig. 17; illustrated fig. 6.7), and in the ship's prow decorating a gaming piece (Christensen 1985: fig. 16-20; illustrated fig. 6.8). Christensen interprets the horizontal lines at the stems as the joint which made the stem top independent of the lower segment, and draws attention to the group of boat models found at Bryggen, whose stem tops were detachable from the hulls (*ibid.*: 206). The difficulty with this interpretation, however, is the very scanty evidence for this feature in full size ships which have been found in the archaeological record, and Christensen remarks that this clearly indicates that the picture we have of medieval Scandinavian ships is far from complete.

It would seem that Christensen's interpretation works from the assumption that the detail in the Bryggen graffiti is represented realistically, and that the lines relate directly to the closed joint when the stem top is in place. Ample evidence exists to show that this assumption of realism is unsafe, particularly in dealing with ancient art, and I have noted, in an earlier discussion, Martin Carver's study (*op .cit.*) of the representation of real objects in Anglo-Saxon manuscript art. His conclusions indicate that there were a number of other considerations, relating to artistic intention and contemporary conventions, which determined the form an object took in the art of this period. While it is hard to dispute the evidence of the Bryggen ship models themselves, the detail seen in the graffiti and other illustrations cannot be automatically related to the models without some consideration of another possibility.

Rather than showing the point where a loose stem top detaches from the hull, perhaps the arrangement of strakes and horizontal lines is the result of an attempt to indicate, in a sort of artistic shorthand, the important and complex group of joints between the strake ends and the stempost, without having to show it in all its detail. A *pars pro toto* form of representation in the case of the Bryggen graffiti would save the artist an extremely lengthy and minutely detailed job, and also signal to the informed viewer that the joints had been included, and that he was looking at an informed and carefully

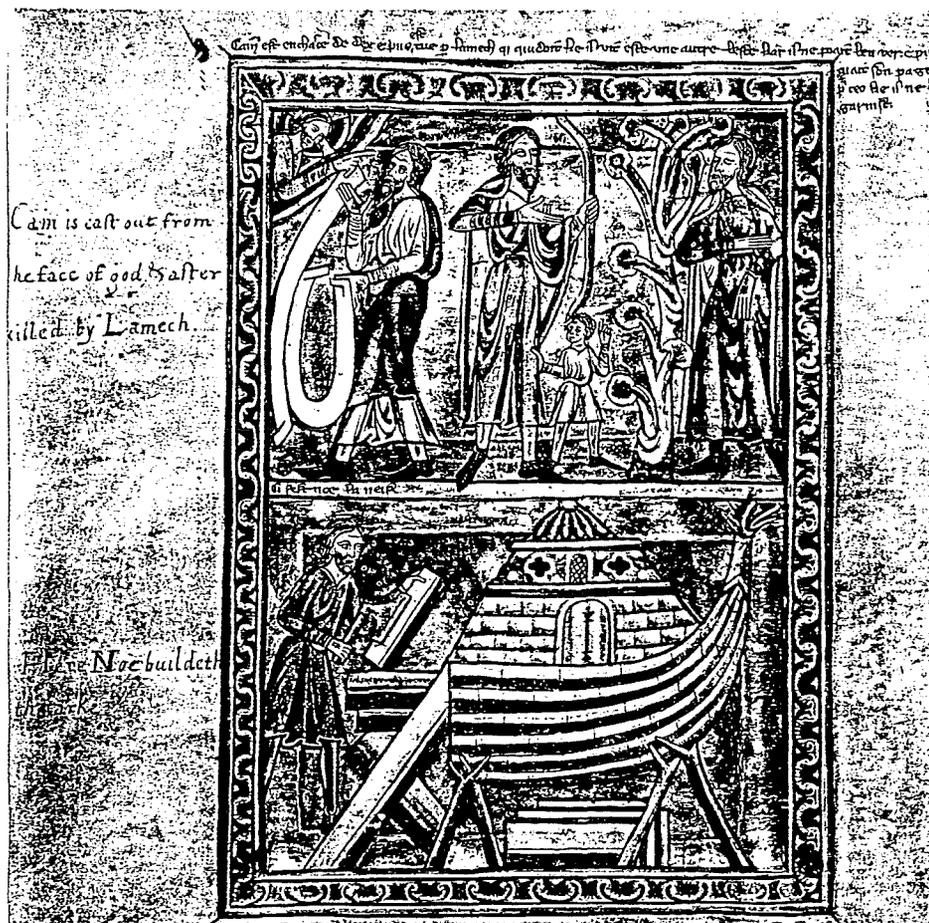


Fig. 6.7 Noah's ark, depicted in the Huntingfield manuscript. Unger 1991.

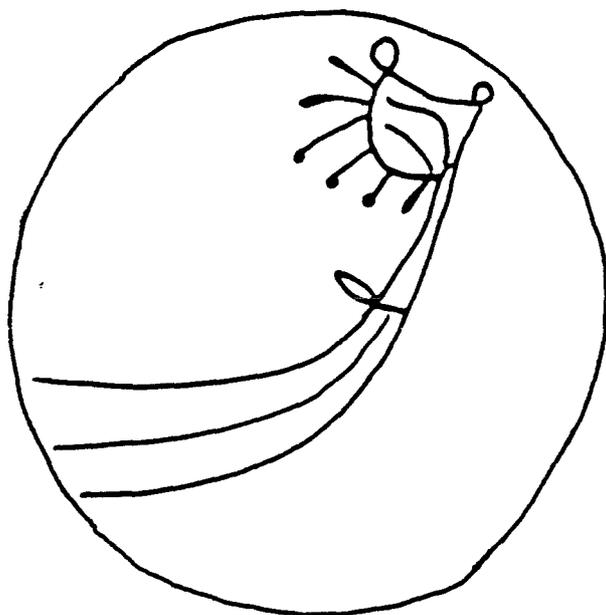


Fig. 6.8 A ship's prow decorating a gaming piece. Christensen 1985.

executed image. Where this hypothesis differs in a point of interpretation from Christensen's, the difference lies in terms of its application to the use of graffiti as a technical source. While Christensen interprets the horizontal lines on the graffiti ships' prows in a way which is reasonable in terms of the evidence of the ship models, he attempts to extend this interpretation to elucidate attributes of some of the real ships of medieval Scandinavia, which are so far unrepresented in the archaeological record. Not only do other possibilities for the interpretation of the horizontal lines have to be considered, but it is dangerous to take the application of any interpretation of ancient imagery too far, in the absence of firm and conclusive evidence from archaeological finds to support or refute it.

Enlarged photographs of the Bryggen graffiti show that the artist deliberately "thickened" the stemposts beneath the two animal figureheads by adding extra lines on either side of the posts themselves. In one case, this addition takes the form of a fin, which significantly adds to the zoomorphic quality of the figurehead itself. While the artist may have been dissatisfied with the appearance of these posts and felt they needed more substance, (and indeed some of the unornamented stemposts are very slender), it is possible to see a rather similar addition to the stemposts of one of the ships of the Bayeux tapestry (fig. 6.9). These details are curving, rather than straight vertical bands, and are worked in different colours from the posts themselves, possibly in order to represent separate parts. It is also interesting to note that King Harold's ship has an intermediate section between the tops of the strakes and the figurehead, a sort of spacer, a detail which is also seen in one of the two ornamented stemposts. I will return to a discussion of the parallels between the Bryggen graffiti and the Bayeux tapestry, below, but it is important to note here the difference in time, culture, and artistic context between the two works, and therefore the caution which is needed in comparing the similarities between them.



Fig. 6.9 Ship from the Bayeux tapestry with a "fin" on its stempost.
Wilson edition 1985.

It is rather easier to interpret the smaller ships illustrated in the Bryggen graffiti, and to place them within a particular shipbuilding tradition, than it is the larger ships. Their distinctive characteristic, the relatively short, sharply pointed stem, gives these ships a strikingly different profile from those of the large ships in the graffiti, through the absence of the high, roughly rectangular stempost. The profile of these small ships may also be seen in ships found in archaeological excavations. The ninth century Klastad ship (Crumlin-Pedersen 1983: 12), and the eleventh century Skuldelev ships (Olsen and Crumlin-Pedersen 1976), for example, display this distinctive, sharply pointed stem. These archaeological parallels are also of some use in supporting the hypothesis that the artist of the Bryggen carving was representing a complete fleet, from the largest and most prestigious, to the smallest.

I touched briefly, above, on two apparent parallels between details of the Bryggen graffiti ships and the ships illustrated in the Bayeux tapestry. While considerable caution is needed in considering parallels between an apparently informal, though highly achieved graffiti and the complex and highly conventionalized Bayeux tapestry, comparisons shows a further similarity. Both pictures represent similar types of ships: large, prestige craft with upswept strake runs ending together at a point below their stemposts, some with animal figureheads, and smaller ships with short, pointed stem profiles. In parts of the Bayeux tapestry and in the Bryggen graffiti, the different kinds of ships appear in close association with one another, apparently with the same intention of representing a complete fleet. It may be reasonable to see this use of the two contrasting ship types in these images as a formula, or cipher, by which a large group of ships could be indicated.

While these parallels indicate that the artist used a form which would have been readily recognisable to contemporary viewers, its use had an artistic function as well. As I have noted, above, by using a ship profile on a small scale, which lacked the more

flamboyant characteristics of the large ships with their long stemposts, the artist was able to increase greatly the number of ships in the image, without the viewer's ability to recognize them being disturbed by the technique of proportional diminishment's progressive reduction of their size. The image is then a careful blend of artistic and technical considerations.

As I have mentioned in my discussion of the possible use of hierarchic scaling in the Bryggen graffiti, the two animal figureheads on the large ships may also have an artistic purpose in signalling the ships' importance relative to those on the right of the graffiti. Furthermore, their presence in the image also functions as a trigger for the immediate recognition of the origins and type of ship being depicted; they make a substantial, even definitive contribution to what we consider to be the Viking characteristics of the image. While these figureheads do not closely resemble the sleek dragon head ornaments of the high Viking period, such as the decorative terminals found in the ninth century Oseberg ship burial, their bulky form and well marked ears are very like the medieval figureheads illustrated in other art of this period. The animal head on the ship carved on the twelfth century Winchester font (noted above), for example, and the figureheads of the "Merry Serpent" in a fourteenth century Danish mural (Crumlin-Pedersen 1983: 21; fig. 6.10) are chunky, rather than serpentine shapes, with large ears which give their silhouettes a distinctive, almost giraffe-like appearance. It is also possible to see further examples of animal head ornaments with the same characteristics of the Bryggen examples in some of the ships of the Bayeux tapestry. The possible practical reasons for the depiction of these features was discussed, above.

The weathervanes which are carved at the stem tops of two of the large ships provide valuable evidence for the use of these artefacts in ancient Scandinavian ships, and Martin Blindheim referred to the Bryggen graffiti in his discussion of the manufacture and use of weathervanes (1982: 116-127). The four surviving weathervanes from

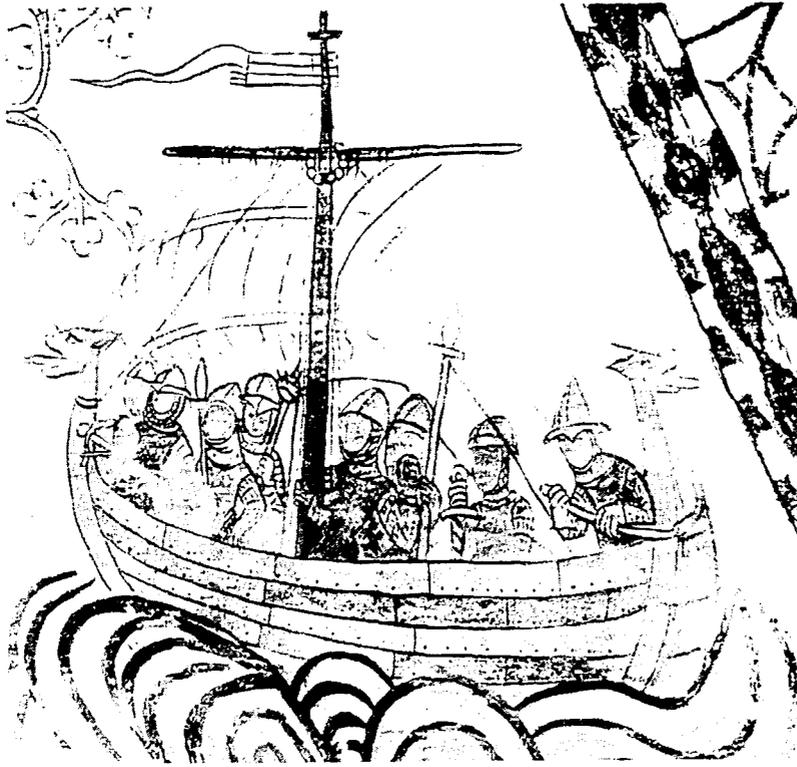


Fig. 6.10 "The Merry Serpent". Crumlin-Pedersen 1983.

church towers in Scandinavia have been dated stylistically to the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Blindheim: *ibid.*), making them roughly contemporary with the Bryggen artefact. Using evidence from the sagas as well as the Bryggen and stave church graffiti, Blindheim notes that the use of weathervanes was a feature of prestige ships, and that they served both as status items and recognition devices, since their gilding would have made them visible at a considerable distance.

Comparisons between the evidence of the graffiti images and the existing weathervanes has led Blindheim to assume that very faint marks at the forward edges of the Bryggen weathervanes are intended to represent the small three dimensional animals which are perched in the same position on the surviving weathervanes. (*ibid.*: 121) It may be that actual examination of the artefact would disclose these marks and their characteristics more clearly, but it must be noted that Blindheim's photograph of the Bryggen artefact (*ibid.*: plate 51) shows them to be enigmatic. The absence of this animal ornament of the weathervanes in the Norwegian stave church graffiti may indicate that it was not a universal addition to the Viking weathervane, and this point, coupled with the difficulty in reading the tiny marks on the Bryggen image indicates the need for caution in interpreting them. Other use which Blindheim makes of the graffiti as a technical source is less problematic, however, as he notes the stem mounting of the two weathervanes in the graffiti to support the idea that the usual position of these items in the earlier medieval period was at the stem, not the masthead. He also refers to the evidence of the sagas to prove that they were removeable (*ibid.*: 120) and must have been mounted independently of the actual stempost in order to move freely, but neither the Bryggen nor the stave church graffiti offer information about this.

Three of the four surviving weathervanes have perforations along their curved edges, and Blindheim refers to the Bryggen graffiti to interpret these as points where telltales were attached (*ibid.*: 122). The graffiti shows these telltales clearly, as the artist has

taken considerable care to show them almost as ball fringes. This evidence is further supported by two of the stave church graffiti, which also show telltales on the edges of stem mounted weathervanes.

I would now like to consider the pictures which have been carved on the reverse face of the branch (the ship is illustrated, fig. 2.2, and reproduced here, fig. 6. 11; the other subjects are shown in fig. 6.1). I noted, above, that this is the naturally curved and contoured surface, and relatively unprepared except for the stripping of bark. Spaced among the natural features of the wood are images which appear to be independent of one another because of the distance between them. This surface is dominated by the picture of a single ship, sitting more or less centrally in the working space, which differs in view from the ships of the main image in that it is shown from stem to stern in profile, with no part obscured by overlap.

Superficially, however, this ship appears to be of the same type as those in the large graffito. It is distinctively Scandinavian in its lines, with the same arrangement of upcurving strakes which end at an angled line at the base of a long, ornamented stempost. The ship differs in the addition of detail, some of which are associated with the profile view, in that it has a steeply incurved sternpost, single quarter rudder, oarports, and a horizontal line which extends from stem to stern above the gunwale. The area between this line and the gunwale has been decorated with five vertical lines, each with a triangle set near its upper end.

Interpreting this area poses some difficulty, at least in part because of the almost complete lack of iconographic parallels in medieval Scandinavian art for it. In discussing the interpretation of a ship graffito found on a small piece of slate at Jarlshof (fig. 6.12), A.O. Curle (1934 - 5: 310) suggested that the rather chaotic detail over its gunwale might be read as a *tjald*, a tent or awning, known from the sagas to have been used as temporary covers under some circumstances. Drawing too

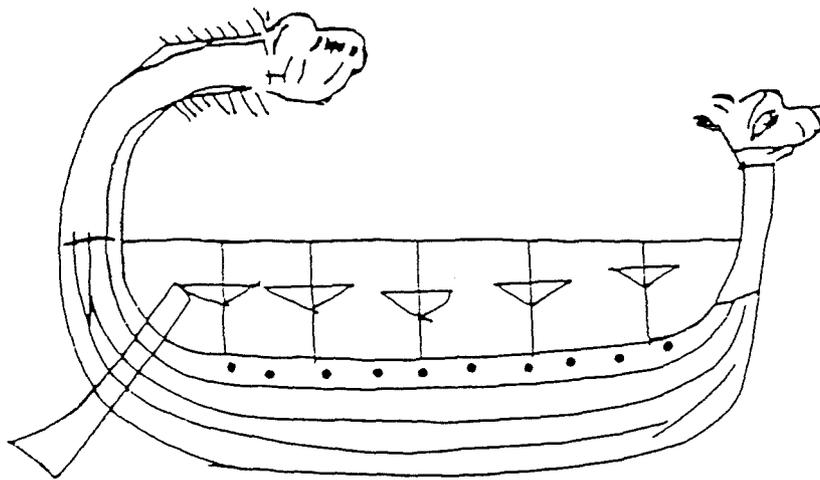


Fig. 6.11 The ship graffito on the reverse of the Bryggen artefact.
Herteig 1985.

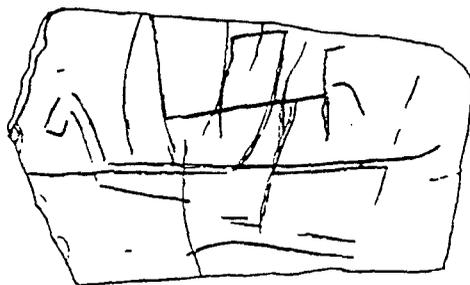
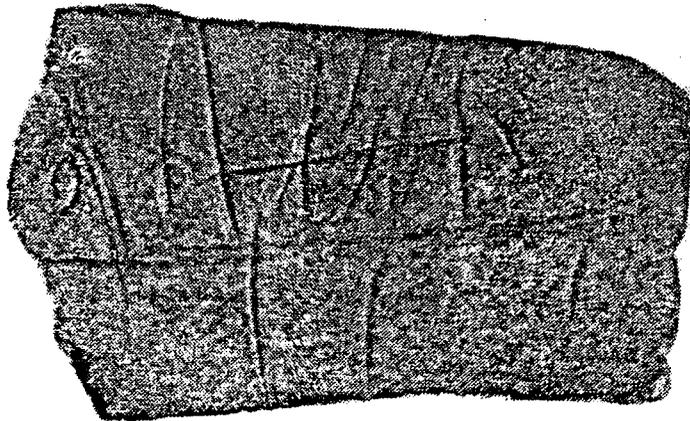


Fig. 6.12 Ship graffito from Jarlshof, showing a possible *tjald*.
Photograph and interpretive drawing Curle 1934-5.

close a parallel between the Jarlshof and Bryggen images may be unsafe, however, because the style of the Jarlshof graffito is, to say the least, casual, and the interpretation of its detail is problematic. However, if the Bryggen ship's detail is read as a *tjald*, then the vertical lines and triangles might be seen as the woven decoration of the cloth used for the awning, and might have resembled the banding known to have been a feature of the sailcloth used by Norse ships. It is also possible that they represent another structure within the ship, such as a support for the awning.

These readings, of both the Jarlshof and Bryggen graffiti, are based on the assumption that the whole ship, including this feature, is shown using a profile view. While the uniform use of a single view within the outline of a subject is customary in post-medieval art, it is unsafe to generalize from this to ancient art. I have referred elsewhere in this work to a recent study in the psychology of image making (Dziurawiec and Deregowski *op.cit.*) which describes the use of "twisted perspective" within subjects. This convention provides the viewer with preferential views of aspects of a subject which are contained within its outline.

If the artist of this picture used a twisted perspective to show a plan view of the inner hull area within its profile, then the horizontal line between the two end posts could be read as the port gunwale, and the vertical lines below it, the thwarts. The problem with this reading, however, is in the absence of thwarts from Viking ships, such as the Oseberg and Gokstad ships. The triangles also pose a problem to the reading of these features as thwarts, as does the placing of the oarports relative to the hypothesized thwarts. Ten oarports are shown, spaced along the washstrake with one roughly below each vertical line, and one in between.

However, too literal an interpretation of the image's detail may not be productive, particularly in view of the detail at the ship's stern. Its curious sternpost, with its fuzz of lines and enigmatic finial, appears at first glance to be a fantasy. Remarkably,

it is possible to find a parallel for this feature among the ships of the Bayeux tapestry, in the endposts of the ship which King Harold is shown boarding for his return journey to England. These curve back into the space in the inner part of the ship, albeit without the exaggerated curve and considerable length of the Bryggen ship's sternpost. It is difficult to know what to make of these sternposts.

I have referred to the Bayeux tapestry several times in the course of this discussion, and it is appropriate here to note the considerable difficulty, not only in relating the detail which the tapestry ship representations show to historic ships, but in using this material comparatively to understand ship graffiti. The Bayeux tapestry belongs to a distinct and highly evolved art form which undoubtedly served a decorative purpose, but also was an important way of transmitting complex information which might contain levels of allegorical meaning. Understanding that meaning, by reading the artistic devices which were used to convey it, formed a part of contemporary insider knowledge. Bernstein's study of the Bayeux tapestry (1987) in terms of its deeper levels of reference to Old Testament stories, draws attention to the use which its artists made of late Dark Age and early Medieval manuscript illumination as sources for the tapestry's art. These links reinforce Carver's work on the reasons behind the choice of particular forms for the representation of real objects in Anglo-Saxon art (*op. cit.*), as well as emphasizing the danger of using a work such as the Bayeux tapestry for comparative purposes. The possibility that the Bayeux ships are formulaic representations, or contain details which are allegorical rather than realistic, cannot be overlooked in attempting to use them to interpret the detail of the Bryggen ship graffiti. All that can safely be said about the parallel between the sternposts of King Harold's ship and that of the Bryggen graffiti is that a striking resemblance does exist; until archaeological evidence is found to elucidate what these representations appear to show, no conclusions about their reference to historic ships may be drawn.

I touched briefly, above, on the possibility that the ship on the reverse face of the Bryggen artefact is, at least in part, a work of imagination. I have noted elsewhere in this study that the artists of ancient pictorial graffiti were free to exploit the liberty which this form of art conferred on them, to create pictures which were based in whimsy or fantasy, rather than objects in the real world. Whatever the tiny lines at the top of the sternpost represent, they and the sternpost's length and deep curve are characteristics which would be impractical in a real ship, and might be seen to support the notion that the artist was playing with form. Studies in the technique of caricature have considered the accentuation of characteristic features (for example, by Gombrich 1991b: 279-302), both to call attention to their use as recognition devices and to reduce the subject's high seriousness, and perhaps this is part of the concept underlying the ship graffiti. Its odd features might then have also looked odd to contemporary viewers with experience of the ship type being lampooned. This possibility, that the image has a humorous intent, has relevance to the possibility that the runic inscription was ironic, which was mentioned earlier in this discussion.

The group of three ships to the right of this ship more closely resemble the ships of the main graffiti than it does, in their partial representation, the types of ship which are shown, and their overlaid grouping. It is tempting to conclude that the artist who carved these ships was also the creator of the large image on the other side of the artefact, and that it may have served as a sort of preliminary sketch for the more developed and extended piece. It is also possible that it was a work of imitation by another artist, who was inspired by the larger graffiti's form and style. As I noted above, the close proximity of the inscription to this group suggests that there is a meaningful link between it and the runes.

The other image which appears on this face of the branch is a group of concentric lines at the extreme left side. This carving seems to have been recognized as a manmade feature rather later than the rest of the carvings were identified. Herteig's photograph

which accompanied his publication of the artefact in 1958 (fig. 6.13) shows the ship carvings and inscription clearly, emphasized, either in the photograph or on the artefact itself, with a dark pigment. These lines had not been highlighted, but in spite of this are just visible. They are not mentioned in the accompanying text.

Professor Mathilde Macagno, a hydrodynamicist who researches the depiction of water in art, has suggested that these lines may possibly be interpreted as the small waves which form behind a slow moving object (personal communication: 1993). Her concern about this reading, however, relates to the orientation of these lines relative to the single ship to their right, in that they are shown in plan view, while the ship is in profile. Seeing a conceptual relationship between the lines and the ship, to her mind, necessitated a close spatial relationship and a uniformity of view between the two images.

While Dziurawiec and Deregowski's work on twisted perspective in early art concentrates on different views of aspects of a subject shown within a single outline, it is possible to generalize from this to the wider field of the whole composition (Deregowski 1993: personal communication). The decision to use a different view to show a particular subject in a picture would then relate to the need to show its distinguishing characteristics clearly enough so that it might be easily recognized, provided the viewer understood the artist's use of twisted perspective in the context of the whole composition. The use of a plan view to show a particular form characteristic of water has a certain logic, since a profile view of small waves in a concentric formation would be relatively uninformative. Furthermore, an artist who did not use the concept of making his or her picture a "window into nature", where subjects are shown using a naturalistic interrelationship which determines view and proximity, might have opted for views of subjects which maximized the information which the viewer could extract from them. Practical reasons, such as the availability of a good working surface, might have determined the placing of the concentric lines

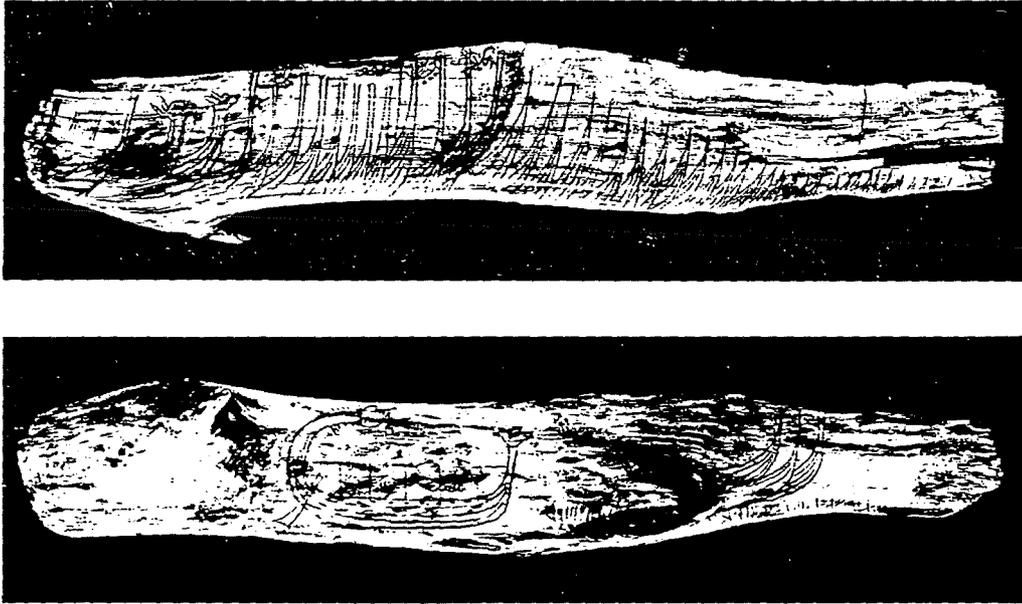


Fig. 6.13 Photograph of the Bryggen artefact with concentric lines on the stick's edge unmarked. Herteig 1958.

at a greater distance from the ship than the naturalistic portrayal of a relationship between the two images would require.

It is very difficult to interpret the artefact and its graffiti in terms of deeper meanings, or even of a unifying theme underlying and conditioning all the pictures on the branch. The graffito style of the carvings, and the lowly nature of the artefact itself, seem to argue that the piece was produced as a hobby or pastime activity, and that to look for heavily symbolic or transcendent meanings would be inappropriate. However, the importance of the ship as a symbol in medieval Scandinavian society cannot be overlooked, and the use of the partial representation of the ships' prows, in a manner which is seen elsewhere in Scandinavian graffiti, strongly suggests that the artist was making use of a contemporary symbolic style which had its own meanings, and would have been readily recognized by viewers of his own period.

The difficulty of the interpretation of the whole artefact and its carvings, in terms of wider meanings and relationships between the images, is compounded by its uniqueness among the artefacts from the Bryggen site. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, while a huge number of inscribed pieces have been recovered, no others are decorated in a way which is remotely comparable with this artefact. Attempts to find artistic parallels for it outside of Bryggen have either been unsuccessful, or have produced material such as the Bayeux tapestry and the town seal of Bryggen, which belong to distinct and highly formalized art forms whose use as comparative examples carries numerous problems. I have mentioned several pictorial graffiti from other Scandinavian sites whose subjects and form offer some help in understanding the Bryggen images (and these will be discussed in more detail elsewhere in this study), but none of these have been created with the stylistic complexity of the main image on the Bryggen artefact.

The intention of this chapter has been to demonstrate that whereas, superficially, the Bryggen artist has created an informal group of graffito images, these may well have underlying concepts of considerable subtlety and complexity. Interpreted cautiously and with attention both to practical considerations of the medium and to the use of stylistic devices to achieve artistic effects, the representations of ships which are shown on the artefact may be of use to nautical historians attempting to understand Scandinavian ship design of the medieval period. Further information derived from archaeological excavation may provide insights into the transition between the cog and the hulk, which may in turn be of use to the interpretation of the Bryggen graffiti. I have aimed to demonstrate that these graffiti cannot be used simplistically as historical or technical sources without artistic interpretation. Furthermore, a shallow response to the carvings' charming and evocative portrayal of Norse ships underrates the considerable artistry which has gone into their creation.

In the next chapter, the final in the group of three discussions which have centred on the ship's prow motif, I will consider one of the images which was scratched on the wood of the Oseberg ship burial. As I noted in Chapter 5, a number of ship's prows are depicted on various parts of the ship and its equipment, but in this discussion, I will focus on one example. This graffito was incised on the undersurface of a bailing hatch, and, like the Bryggen image, presents modern interpreters with a remarkable, though very different problem of interpretation. In this discussion, I will consider how the interpretation of the graffito's cognitive and symbolic context may allow the modern viewer some access to what appears to be a puzzling image. The work in this following chapter will also attempt to demonstrate the importance of examining the relationships between the different subjects in one graffito composition.

Chapter 7: The Oseberg graffito

In Chapter 5, I discussed the interpretation of the ship's prow motif, which is frequently found in pre-medieval Scandinavian graffiti, but is comparatively useless as a source of technical information about the ships of this period. I suggested that rather than being a realistic representation of a ship's prow, the motif was intended to be conceptually communicative, and was an ideogram which was capable of carrying complex meaning in a simple form. In this chapter, I wish to return to one particular example of the ship's prow motif from that discussion, which is a part of a larger graffito image found on the Oseberg ship (fig. 7.1. Due to conservation problems in the early twentieth century, the board bearing the graffito is in poor condition. The artefact photograph which is available from the Oslo museum is Shetelig's original, and is printed on a glass plate which is now, sadly, cracked across the centre. For the purposes of this discussion, I have decided to use an interpretive drawing of the image which omits this flaw.). It is important to note at the outset that I will refer to this image in this chapter as a " graffito " rather than "graffiti", because my feeling at the present is that the image was the work of one artist, and was intended to be seen as a unity. I hope that my discussion of the art of the picture, below, will justify this decision. As I mentioned in Chapter 5, a number of graffito images, both representational and geometric, were found on the Oseberg ship itself as well as on items of equipment associated with the burial. The focus of the discussion in this chapter will be on the complex image described above.

In the introduction to this study, I criticised some other academics' use of pictorial graffiti for, among other things, their tendency to separate the individual elements of a complex image, focussing on one or two of particular interest to them, and thus not

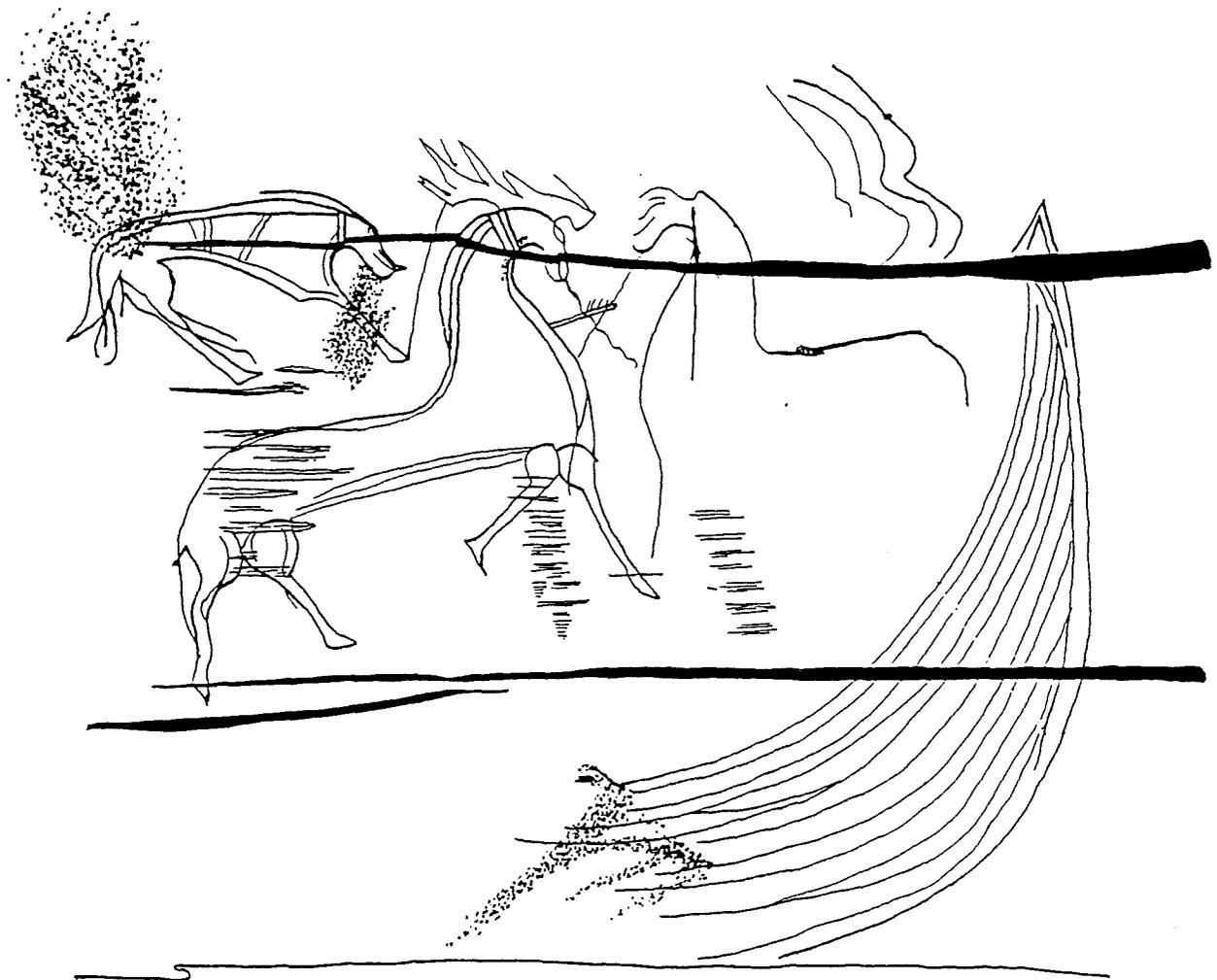


Fig.7.1 The Oseberg graffito, interpretive drawing by E.A. le Bon 1995.

considering the spatial and cognitive relationships which the artist created, and their potential meaning. Furthermore, I argued that to fail to consider the graffiti artist's reference to and use of material from contemporary artistic canons and symbolic lexicons would be to overlook the possibility that important meaning had been encoded in them. In this chapter, I hope to demonstrate the richness of meaning which may be expressed in these relationships, and which is lost when individual subjects of particular academic interest are removed from their compositional context. I also intend to consider the importance of considering the wider artistic and symbolic pools which graffiti artists may have drawn from in creating their images, and the information which may emerge from such a study.

One of the most extraordinary finds in Scandinavian archaeology was the ship burial which was discovered near the village of Oseberg in south Norway, on the west coast of the Oslo fjord, and excavated in 1903-4 (Shetelig 1904-5). The grave contained the bodies of two women, and a large quantity of important artefacts. It has been interpreted as a royal burial, and although this view may not be universally accepted (Ellis-Davidson 1988: 117), it was undoubtedly the grave of a very high status woman. Among the many extraordinary finds in the ship were a number of pictorial graffiti, some of which depict parts of ships.

Recently, dating by dendrochronology showed that the wood of the burial chamber or "tabernacle" structure had been felled in 834 AD (Bonde and Christensen 1993: 575-583). The tabernacle is thought to have been constructed at the time of the burial (*ibid.*), although the ship itself appears to be rather older. Shetelig suggested (Brogger and Shetelig 1971: 158-9) that it had been laid up out of use for some time before the burial, as parts of its equipment, such as some of the oars, were only partially completed, indicating that the organization of the funeral had had to include

some hasty replacement of missing equipment. It is likely, therefore, that the ship itself dates from the early years of the ninth century, and represents the very high level which Viking ship technology had reached at this time. It is interesting to note that this was also roughly the period of the first recorded Viking raids on Insular monastic and lay communities.

It must be stressed, however, that only general parallels may be drawn between the design of the Oseberg ship and that of the long range raiding warships used in the Viking period. Many authors have commented that the structure of the Oseberg ship, in particular its broad beam, shallow draft, and the piecing of its keel and twelve strake runs, would have made it unsuitable for long voyages or heavy seas. This observation is further borne out by a peculiarity in the arrangement of the ship's floorboards, in that they were trenailed to the cross beams, rather than left loose to allow access for stowage in the bilge, as is seen in the Gokstad ship. Shetelig noted (*ibid.*: 155-6) that only a few of the Oseberg ship's floorboards were removable for bailing: those on either side of the mast, and the two nearest the stem and stern. These aspects of the ship's construction, coupled with the high quality of its decorative wood carvings, have suggested to at least one authority (Davidson: *ibid.*) that it had had processional function in the religious observances of the Vanir cult, and that the woman buried in the ship with her female attendant was a Vanir priestess, rather than a member of the ruling family. The significance of this point will be considered in more detail later in this discussion.

The undersurface of one of the ship's bailing hatches bears a complex graffito image, scratched deeply enough to be easily visible (Shetelig 1904-5: 66). Arne Emil Christensen (*pers. comm.* 1996) believes, from Shetelig's account of the excavation of the ship, that the graffito was found under the forward bailing hatch, in the first room of the ship, although the description of the image's position is somewhat enigmatic. The vitality of the figures in this picture, and the confidence with which

they have been carved are in sharp contrast to the unprepossessing location in which they appear. They are also stylistically very different from the decoration of the ship itself, as well as from the ornamentation of most of the rest of the material found in the burial.

The formal wood carving of the Oseberg ship and some of its artefacts, often cited as an important landmark in the development of Norse art (Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966: 87 ff; Hicks 1993: 198-199; *inter al.*), served an important purpose in terms of the use of the ship itself. It was not only a display of aesthetically pleasing renderings of well-known subjects and mythology, but in use must also have made a considerable visual impact, as a memorable testimony to its owner's rank, wealth, and taste. The ship was carved in its most prominent, visible areas, its stem and stern posts and the adjacent sections of gunwale, in compositions which were designed for both close and distant inspection. These carvings were not only meant to be viewed and admired, but were also intended to work with the design and role of the ship itself, to make a complex statement of prestige and power, which was readily understood by contemporary viewers.

In contrast, the graffito image on the bailing hatch lid may be said to occupy what Camille called "the edge" (1992: 11 ff.); that is, it was not only generally hidden from view, but was also spatially and meaningfully distinct from the parts of the ship which were readily visible, and which were adorned with familiar subjects and patterns so spectacularly depicted in a formal style. The graffito's message was not placed among the ship's other artistic declarations of wealth and status which were intended to be seen by a large group, but instead was located where it would have been seen by only one or two crew members carrying out a specific task. In my earlier discussion of the relevance of "the edge" to the graffito artist, I noted that it conferred on the artist a measure of liberty from the protocols of formal art and propriety, and allowed him to explore, experiment or fantasize artistically as well as

thematically. Further on in this chapter, in my discussion of the identity of the subjects in the image and their potential symbolic values, I will return to this issue in more detail.

It is perhaps fitting that even the graffiti found on such an extraordinary archaeological find as the Oseberg ship have found their way into academic studies of Viking art (Wilson and Klindt-Jensen *ibid.*: 28) as *exempla* of a particular type of art. This art which was characterized by a naturalistic or realistic style, was also described by Carola Hicks (1993) in her recent study of the representation of animals in early medieval art. She also referred to the main Oseberg graffiti, (the subject of this chapter), as typifying it (*ibid.*: 198). This naturalistic style of representation has been used to depict three animals, one incompletely, as well as the end section of a ship. Four parallel wavy lines have been scratched between the ship's prow and the incomplete stag, and recall the concentric half-circles which are seen to the left of the ship on the reverse face of the Bryggen stick, in both form and their relationship to other graffiti images. Although it may not be immediately clear what the wavy lines in the Oseberg image represent, it is certain that they not closely related to the conventions of interlace, but rather also belong to the naturalistic style. As I noted in the previous chapter, during the course of my research into the carvings on the Bryggen stick, I discussed the interpretation of one of its images with Professor M. Macagno, a hydrodynamicist researching the depiction of water in early art. She also believes that the wavy lines in the Oseberg graffiti may be interpreted as representing water, although, as in the case of the Bryggen graffiti, it is necessary to suspend the modern assumption of uniformity of view throughout the image for this reading.

Both Ole Klindt-Jensen (*ibid.*: 28-9) and Carola Hicks (*ibid.*: 196) describe the "naturalistic" style of art which co-existed in Dark Age or early medieval Scandinavia with the highly conventionalized style which is seen, for example, in the interlace and gripping beasts of the ship, and the Oseberg wagon's wood carving. Examples of the

contrasting, naturalistic style may also be seen in the graffito found on the lid of the hunting basket found in the Gokstad ship burial (fig. 7.2), which is near to the Oseberg ship in date, as well as a few other pieces of Viking pictorial graffiti, such as the animal scratched on the back of a square-headed Viking brooch, illustrated by Wilson and Klindt-Jensen (*ibid.*: 28; fig. 7.3). It is interesting to note that their discussion of this piece includes a mention of other such pictorial graffiti of this period which were part of an artefact but were normally hidden from view. The question of hidden graffiti was briefly considered in Chapter 3, in terms of the interpretation of the Jerusalem ship graffito.

The art of the Gotlandic picture stones is also based on a naturalistic concept of representation, which, although highly codified and formal, depicted its subjects with a strong reference to their actual appearance (one of these stones was mentioned in Chapter 5 and illustrated, fig. 5.9). A parallel between the art of the Oseberg ship and the picture stones may also be seen in some geometric graffiti, in particular the interlocking triangle motif which is seen on a small group of Gotlandic stones (Nylén and Lamm 1988: stones 170, 184, 279) on an artefact lid found in the Oseberg ship burial (Christensen, Ingstad, and Myhre 1992: 112; these examples are illustrated together, fig. 7.4). It is possible to see that the use of a naturalistic style does not preclude an underlying symbolic intention, as is suggested by the juxtaposition of naturalistic images with geometrical signs which are likely to have had important evil-averting functions.

Ole Klindt-Jensen's description of the development of Scandinavian art in the Viking period (*ibid.*) draws attention to the important relationship between what he calls "the simpler, more popular art" expressed in the naturalistic style of the Oseberg graffito and the complex, non-naturalistic art of the more formulaic style. An examination of the art of the Oseberg graffito may provide some insights into some of the implications of this relationship.

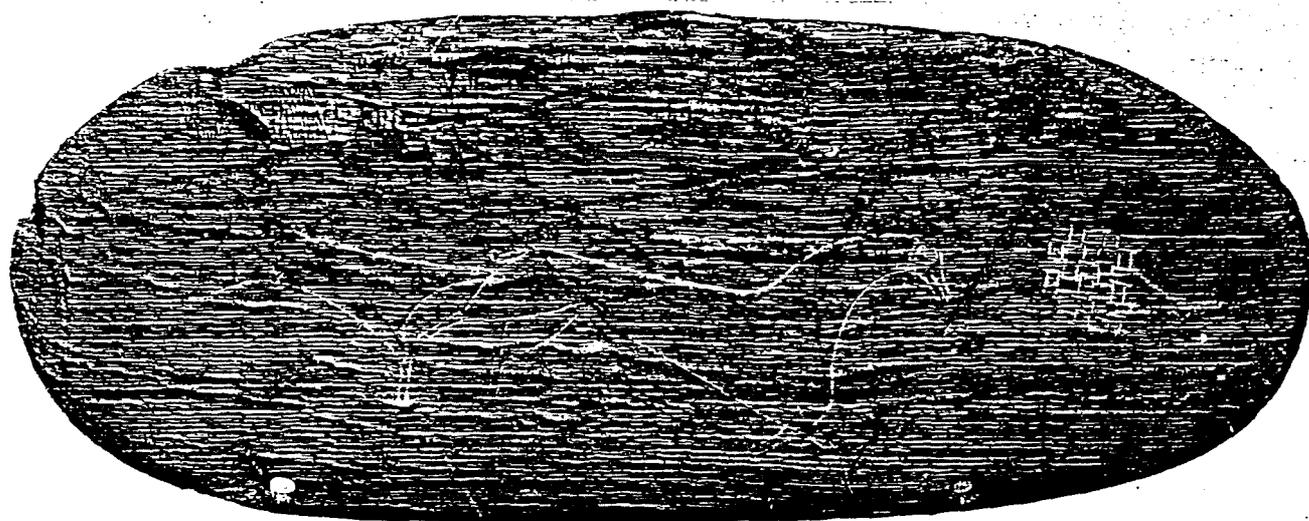


Fig. 7.2 The Gokstad graffito. Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966.

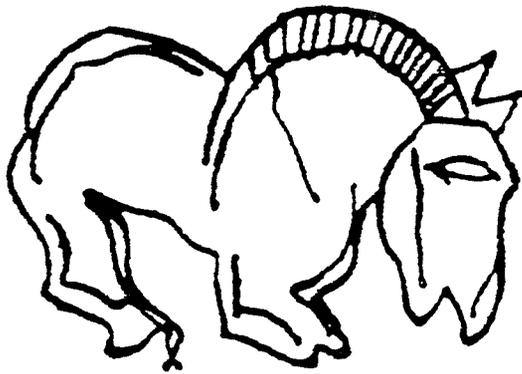


Fig. 7.3 Graffito animal on the back of a Viking brooch. Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966.

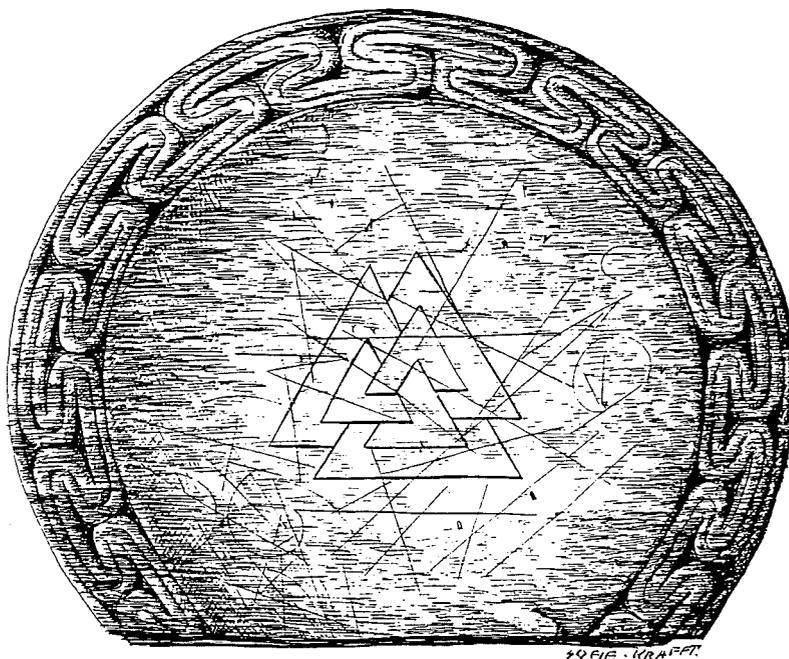


Fig. 7.4 Interlocking triangle motifs: (above) Nylen and Lamm 1988,
(below) Christensen *et.al.* 1992.

In the previous chapter, I focussed on the Bryggen artefact and its carvings in terms of the importance of looking beyond the superficial appeal of attractive imagery, to consider the complexity of meaning and information which may lie beneath apparently casual pictorial graffiti. The discussion was based primarily on the interpretation of the artistic conventions which had been used to create the images, as an essential preliminary to understanding their potential as sources for the nautical historian and archaeologist. Decoding these conventions brought together studies in both perceptual psychology and art history, and related these areas to contemporary iconographic and artefactual parallels, and to material in the archaeological record.

Reading the Oseberg graffiti, however, provides some different challenges. The main image on the Bryggen artefact creates a startling visual effect of pictorial space, without apparent parallel in medieval Scandinavian art, which has even raised questions among some authorities about the piece's authenticity. However the Bryggen graffiti is interpreted, there is no doubt that the spatial relationships between the massed ships, which the artist has used to achieve such an unusual effect, also mean that they are certain to have been carved by the same artist contemporaneously with one another. The art of the Oseberg graffiti poses no such awkward problems of lack of artistic context. There is no complex or possibly anachronistic use of convention. Its incorporation in a sealed grave deposit gives it a firm *terminus ante quem*. There is, furthermore, no obvious compositional concept at work among the individual subjects, such as may be seen in the Gokstad "hunting basket" image, which will be described, below, where the graffiti's simple narrative scene may be readily understood by the modern viewer. The subjects in the Oseberg graffiti are placed within the field with considered spatial relationships between some of them, however; the two confronted stags clearly relate to one another in the pleasing symmetrical shape which the curve of their necks makes. The animal at the top left of

the image is carefully connected to the complete stag by a line between its paw and the stag's antler.

The modern viewer is likely to bring certain assumptions to the Oseberg image, however, which are the products of twentieth century concepts of art and as such may be inappropriate and even misleading if applied to the Oseberg graffito. The grouping of five subjects in one comparatively small area strongly suggests to the modern eye that they were intended to be understood as a group, with a relationship between them which expressed, for example, an historical scene. This reading is based on the assumption that the working space in which the image was scratched represents a "window into nature", in which subjects are depicted in spatial relationships which parallel those in the real world. While this assumption is not universally borne out in modern visual imagery (and examples may be easily found in abstract art and advertising where subjects are not placed together in realistic relationships), it is very common, and is perhaps fostered by the twentieth century viewer's familiarity with photographic images.

However, it is a characteristic of most early medieval Scandinavian art to fill a working space with figures, as it seems that contemporary taste favoured a cluttered field, and these figures need not have been related to one another in a narrative way. For example, the patterning of the gripping beasts on the Oseberg animal head posts produces an effect of texture and complex symmetry, whose primary aim was very unlikely to have been exclusively narrative. Elsewhere in early medieval art, it is possible to find examples of motifs which were grouped together within one field, probably for purposes which were other than those of simple narration or realistic depiction. The Pictish symbol stones are an example of this. As I noted above, it is also possible to find non-narrative modern images in which naturalistic motifs or subjects are grouped together, the advertising of hotel facilities, for example, which may be easily read pictorially without inscriptions to support meaning.

A nearly contemporary Norse graffito which was clearly intended to represent a narrative scene was found in the Gokstad ship burial, scratched in the same manner as the Oseberg image, on the lid of a hunting basket (Wilson and Klindt-Jensen *ibid.*: plate XIX; illustrated, fig. 7.2). Both the Gokstad and Oseberg graffiti were made using the same naturalistic style; however, the Gokstad image is formed using two subjects only, a dog and a larger animal, probably a deer, which has been caught by the hind leg, and is easily read as a narrative scene. The hunting theme of the graffito works well with the archaeologists' postulated identification of the artefact on which it was scratched, as a visual statement of the activity for which the basket was intended. One further detail in the Gokstad graffito provides an unexpected link between the two graffiti. The Gokstad deer, like the Oseberg stag, is shown wearing a collar or band high on its neck. The Oseberg stag's collar differs from the Gokstad animal's in being in a double band rather than a single one.

Earlier, I explained my use of the term " graffito " in respect to the Oseberg image by saying that I believe that the subjects in the image were probably scratched by the same artist, rather than being a compound work which was the product of several hands. There is some evidence in the form of two of the animals, however, which might be taken to suggest that these subjects were drawn by different artists. The animal at the upper left of the group is remarkable for its dynamic pose; hind legs braced and back arched. Its artist has understood the effectiveness of overlay in depicting a naturalistic relationship between the animal's hind legs when it is seen in profile. The use of this technique has been continued in the representation of the animal's forelegs, where a single form was used to evoke both legs in the viewer's mind.

The stag which appears immediately below this animal is rather more clumsily drawn. Its legs have the same shape as those of the creature above it, parallel lines indicating

the lower leg with a bulbous top for the thigh. No attempt at overlay has been made, however, and the animal's hind legs stand awkwardly side by side. The effect of this position is to give the stag an ungainly, static appearance, which is augmented by the crude representation of its belly using virtually straight lines. The other upper animal is shown as having a lean waist by its hips, the margin of its ribs neatly indicated by an angle between its forelegs and the curve of its belly.

My initial response to these differences was to conclude that the two animals were the work of different artists. However, there are as many similarities between them as there are differences, and the similarities have a more compelling quality than the differences. For example, in both animals the single eye has been drawn in the same way, with a curved line below the outline making a disproportionately large eye for the size of the face. Also, all the animals, including the third one which will be discussed below, carry their heads with a virtually identical curve of the neck. Although in the two considered here, the hind legs are depicted differently, there is a similarity between them in the modelling of the bulbous upper thighs. There is a confidence in the scoring of parallel lines in the ship's prow image, the double contour lines of the stag and dog, and the complimentary curves of the stags' necks, which suggests that the images were all drawn by the same hand.

It would be rash to attempt to draw absolute conclusions from these observations; what is more fruitful in terms of understanding the graffito is a consideration of its artist's (or artists') reference to styles in contemporary art, as well as his use of symbols.

Before moving on to this question, it is worth considering the identity of the animal at the upper left of the graffito. Its long, full tail and thin belly are the characteristics of a dog, rather than a boar, yet its muzzle appears to bear a tusk. This is clearly visible and protrudes slightly forward of its snout-like square nose, where it could

alternatively be viewed as a hound's tongue. While the uppermost line on the animal's back may be an abandoned outline, it is also possible that it was intended to represent bristles, although these are not represented using the conventional scored crescent which may be seen in numerous depictions of boars. The creature's ambiguous, dog-boar characteristics perhaps should not be taken too seriously as an indication of deep symbolic meaning, as they equally well reflect the artist's freedom in drawing whatever he pleased, or whimsically evolving a sketch as the work progressed and working mistakes or false starts into other details. The "edge" identity of the graffito's site allowed him a degree of liberty rarely shared by the artist working within the conventions of formal art and patronage.

Both complete animals in the Oseberg image have been drawn using a double contour line, and a triple contour has been used to emphasize the arch of the stag's neck. It is easy to locate the use of double contour outlines through much early medieval Scandinavian art, from Style E of the pre-Viking period (which, incidentally, also included a large oval or pear shaped eye) to the animals carved in the slightly later Ringerike style, as seen on the Alsted stone (Wilson and Klindt-Jensen *ibid.*: fig 59; illustrated, fig. 7.5). The Alsted animals are particularly useful as comparisons for the Oseberg graffito, as they also echo the Oseberg animals' double contours, arched necks, and small heads. Furthermore, their stance, with the trailing foreleg somewhat flexed, also evokes the pose of one of the Oseberg stags, although the line which forms it is not continuous with the curving breast line, as is seen in the Alsted animals. The two stags' confronted pose has many parallels throughout early medieval northern European art, and Carola Hicks (*op.cit.*) cites numerous examples of many different kinds of animals depicted in this way throughout the Dark Ages, sometimes in apparently heraldic art. The strong "S" shaped profile of the Oseberg stags' breast lines may be seen in other formal art which uses a naturalistic style: the bronze horse from Veggerslev, for example (*ibid.*: plate III b), and the more strongly



Fig. 7.5 The Alsted stone. Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966.

stylized animal on the Cammin casket (*ibid.* plate LVI; both of these examples are illustrated, fig. 7.6).

While the artist of the Oseberg graffito was clearly influenced by some of the techniques and style of the formal art around him, he also chose not to include other stylistic devices. The animals' hips, for example, were not decorated, nor were their outlines filled with the curious segmenting, or "billeting" seen within the animals' outlines on both the Alsted stone and the Cammin casket, although the body of the dog-like creature above the complete stag is subdivided with lines which almost resemble a harness. It is somewhat surprising that the relatively empty space (for the Viking eye) of the central stag has been left undecorated, when the outline of the ship's prow in the lower right of the image has been carefully filled with lines representing strakes. While some indication of strakes is not uncommon in other examples of the ship's prow motif, it is uncommon to find virtually every strake meticulously represented, as they are here. (It is interesting to note, in passing, that eleven strakes above the keel line are indicated in the Oseberg graffito, while the ship itself has twelve.)

Although the artist did not conform slavishly to conventions, examination of the art of the Oseberg graffito does certainly appear to reveal some intriguing parallels between it and contemporary formal and monumental art, indicating its artist's sensitivity to his cultural environment and his interest in echoing some contemporary conventions. Pursuing these parallels a little further into the realm of the identity and choice of subject material reveals some even more remarkable details.

The complete stag, at the centre of the graffito, has a collar or double band around its neck, its breast is pierced by an arrow, and a serpentine line descends from its mouth. These three attributes would seem to link the stag to ancient mythology, and the legend of Caesar's deer, a curiously persistent myth with many variations, which may

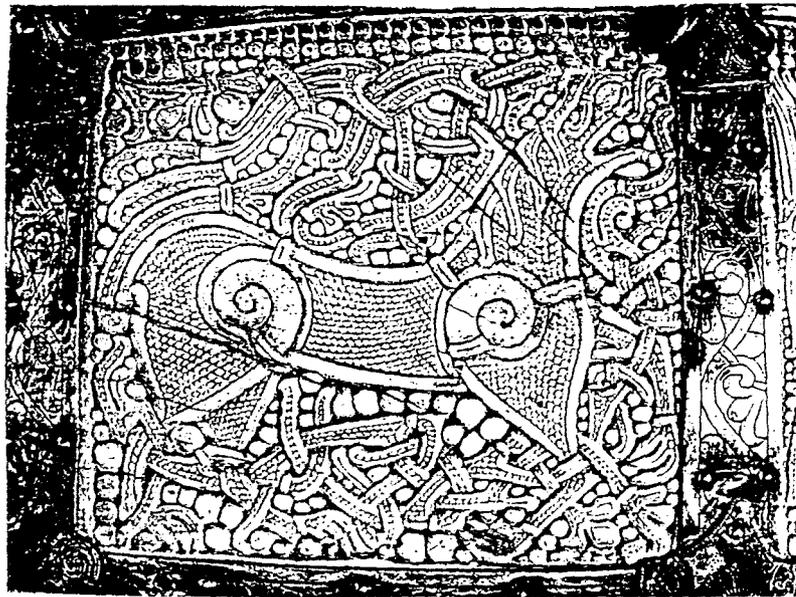
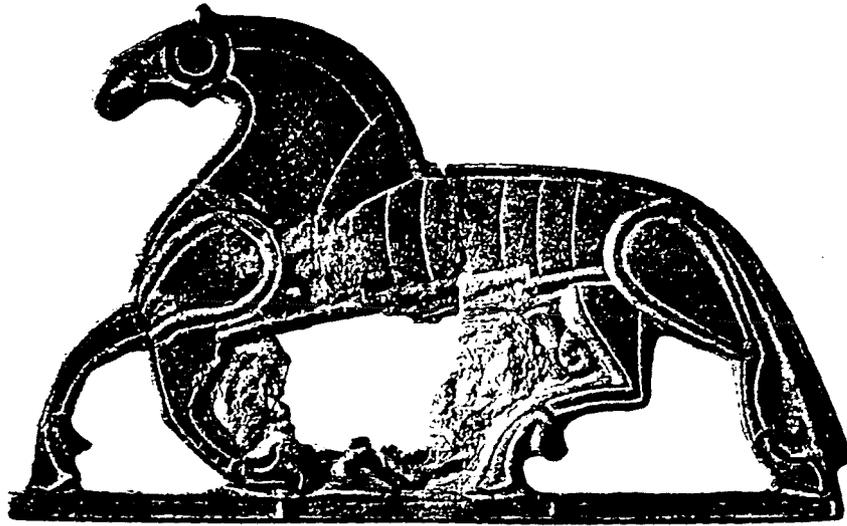


Fig. 7.6 (above) The Veggerslev horse; (below) the Cammin casket.
Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966.

be found from Hellenic Greece, India and Asia in pre-Christian times, through most of Europe during the Renaissance, to emerge finally in twentieth century British pub signs. (I am very grateful to Mrs Rosemary Muir Wright, of this university, for drawing my attention to this possibility). The deer, or stag, also makes a brief appearance in Psalm 41(2), and was adopted from pagan legend by Sts Jerome and Augustine as a metaphor for Christ. The collared stag is also an important feature of the iconography of the Wilton diptych, where not only the human but also the angelic subjects in the images wear jewelled badges representing it.

In two works published in 1979, the art historian Michael Bath attempted to trace the origins of the myth of Caesar's deer, and to interpret its meaning and use as a symbol in European art. Although undoubtedly the origins of the myth are now lost, Bath located two early variations of it in classical literature: in the *Physiologus* which inspired the medieval bestiaries, and in the *Naturalis Historia* of Pliny the Elder. It is interesting to note that a twelfth century manuscript of the *Physiologus* survives in the Reykjavík museum, indicating that the myth was not unknown in the Norse world.

The version of the myth in the *Physiologus* has two distinct strands. The stag, shot by an arrow, can cure its own wound if it finds and eats a particular plant; also, it can renew itself in the fiftieth year of its life by eating a snake and then quenching the venom by drinking from a stream (Bayet 1954: 21-68). The curving line from the stag's mouth in the Oseberg graffito may conceivably be read as representing a snake, but just as convincingly may be seen as depicting blood flowing from a wounded animal's mouth.

Pliny's version of the myth adds a twist to the idea of renewal which is present in the *Physiologus*, in describing a stag which was given a golden collar or crown to wear around its neck by Alexander the Great. This royal gift then became proof of the

stag's miraculous longevity. Bath sees Pliny's contribution to the myth as reinforcing the ideas of royal longevity and stability, as well as ethnogenesis (1979 (1): 55-6).

Although superficially it may appear unlikely that such an image with associated myths could have found its way from the classical world to northern Europe to emerge in a ninth century Viking graffito, other examples of the long range transmission of art and ideas may be found from this period, apart from the early manuscript described above. Elsewhere in this study, I have described the sixth or seventh century Buddha figurine found at Helgo in Sweden, demonstrating distant contacts between the Norse and other cultures. The eleventh century apocalypse scene found at Flatatunga in Iceland (Jónsdóttir 1959) which is stylistically and thematically related to the great mosaic at Torcello, Italy (Polacco 1986), also indicates the movement of concepts during this period, and their adaptation and realisation by Scandinavian artists anxious to transmit important concepts through visual imagery.

The Oseberg stag may be said to have details from both of the classical sources cited by Bath: the potentially fatal arrow and the possible snake from the *Physiologus*, and the collar from Pliny. The resulting, hybrid image potentially carries several layers of meaning, through its associations with royal and heroic figures, longevity, renewal in age, and magical self-healing. These are intriguing concepts in the sense of their potential relationships to the meaning of the ship as a whole, in both its use and ownership in its active life, as well as in its later role as a burial vessel. Before going too far with these ideas, however, it is important to emphasize two points. First, the apparent link between the details of the stag and classical mythology may be entirely coincidental. Many collared or banded animals may be seen in other images contemporary with the Oseberg graffito (the Gokstad graffito to name but one), and the wounded stag may be simply a visually potent image, such as the eagle holding a serpent in its beak, described by Wittkower (1977: 16-44). Second, the Oseberg image is a graffito, not a work of formal art, and its position on the undersurface of a

bailing hatch conferred a freedom on its artist to break the rules or invent in any way he wished. The stag and its detail may have been the result of a chance visual contact with a striking image, or the memory of an elaborate tale from classical sources told by a story-teller. The image may have no symbolic meaning, or it may have been a profound emblematic statement.

The stag motif had an important place in Scandinavian, as well as other northern European art of the Dark Age, and although it has been difficult to locate a version of the myth of Caesar's deer in Norse mythology, it is worth noting Ellis-Davidson's comments on the stag's role (1988: 56-7). She discussed the stag's appearance on the Sutton Hoo sceptre (Bruce-Mitford 1978: vol. 2, fig. 237), as well as in the name of Beowulf's mead hall, "Heorot", meaning "hart". She concluded from these sources that the stag had strong royal associations for the Vikings, and also that the importance of the stag hunt as a Norse metaphor for the death journey should not be overlooked.

While the collared stag appears to have strong classical links, it appears in the Oseberg graffito between two distinctly Norse symbols. Both the dog (or boar) and the ship have potent associations in Norse religion and mythology; the animal through its links with hunting (and in particular with the stag hunt mentioned above), as well as with Guldbristles, the boar which carried the Vanir goddess Freya to the underworld. The ship also has links with the Vanir cult in its associations with Skidbladnir, the magical ship of the god Freyr which could be rolled up like a cloth when not in use. Ellis-Davidson believes that this ship was the origin of the Viking practise of ship burial (1969: 82-3), and it is important to note these links in considering the meaning of the whole graffito. Earlier in this study, I concentrated on the more functional interpretation of the ship's prow motif as a communicative symbol, and my focus was on the parallels which may be seen between it and other ideograms. Considering the ship's prow motif in conjunction with a small group of other powerful Norse symbols

of the Vanir cult, however, may allow a little more light to be shed on its meaning for contemporary people.

It is unfortunate that the illustrations which accompany some of the discussions of the Oseberg ship and its graffiti reproduce two of the subjects of the image separately, thus losing the spatial and thematic relationships between them. In Wilson and Klindt-Jensen's book, for example (*op.cit.*: 28), one of the stags and the dog are selected from the graffiti, and are shown side by side, without the line which connects them together. Christensen *et al.* (1992: 140) reproduce the ship's prow image from the main Oseberg graffiti, without the rest of the composition in which it appears, but grouped with the other ship's prow motifs which appear in other locations on the ship.

In this example, however, considering the associations between the ship's prow motif and the subjects which accompany it as a single image may indicate something more about its meaning. I have raised a number of questions about the interpretation and possible associations of the subjects which appear with the ship's prow motif on the Oseberg graffiti. None, however, offers conclusive evidence which irrefutably connects the image with other conceptual or artistic strands, but does indicate the artist's sensitivity to the styles and conventions of formal contemporary art. In this sense, it is an important example of the stylistic influence of contemporary formal art on a graffiti artist.

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned how the subject of the narrative scene illustrated in the Gokstad graffiti harmonizes well with the hunting basket on which it was scratched. While it is not possible to perceive such a clear and direct link between the Oseberg graffiti and the context in which it was found, it is important to explore this area a little further. My description, above, of the potential symbolic identities of three of the four subjects in the graffiti indicates that while the stags and the ship's prow

may be the products of idle doodling, it is also possible to identify them as potent symbols in the Norse world. The dog-boar and the ship were accessories (for want of a better word) of the central figures of the Vanir cult, and in this context, it is worth noting again Ellis-Davidson's suggestion (*op.cit.*) that the important woman buried in the Oseberg ship was not a queen, but rather was an important Vanir priestess. Furthermore, Ellis-Davidson also interpreted the ship itself as having had a processional function in Vanir ritual, and having been richly decorated in keeping with this important use. Thus, locating the graffito subjects among the symbol lexicon, not only of Dark Age Scandinavia but also of the classical and pre-classical world, allows some intriguing associations to be made which could in turn have implications for the interpretation of the Oseberg ship itself.

It is possible to see the graffito, then, not as a jumble of subjects without a unifying theme, but as symbolic statement in which important religious symbols were linked with an emblem of royal or dynastic longevity, prestige, and heroic associations. To see the Oseberg graffito in this way may shed some further light on the meaning of the ship's prow motif, which I approached from a completely different angle in the previous chapter of this thesis. The hypothesis that the ship's prow was an ideogram fits well with its interpretation as a Vanir emblem, but its association with the stag in the Oseberg graffito adds a further dimension to it. The stag symbol's associations, noted above, add concepts of family, and ascendancy through time (Bath 1979a: 63-4) which may elaborate the ship's prow motif's meaning as the family badge of a lineage with royal connections.

However complex and tantalising the imagery of the Oseberg graffito may be, perhaps the only firm statement which may be safely made about it is about the extraordinary nature of this imagery in the context of ninth century Viking art. In discussing the use of the stag motif in later Danish art, Michael Bath wrote, "I think we must posit some kind of popular tradition - a tradition lasting from at least the seventh century BC to

the seventeenth century of our own era - in which the popular imagination of several European countries understood the collared deer as a symbol of dynastic continuity, as a pledge for the survival of the heroic figures of the past in their modern successors, which associated the deer with the founders of cities, abbeys or empires, and which saw its inviolability as a sign of the sanctity and endurance of the national identity. " (*ibid.* : 63-63). Whatever the Oseberg graffito meant to its creator, perhaps its safest place in archaeology and social history is as evidence for the kind of tradition which Bath describes, and, as such, for the remarkable durability of powerful symbols. Although the specific interpretation of this image is likely to remain beyond a definitive solution, this very fact serves as a vivid illustration of the proposition that it is unsafe to assume that the simplicity of technical execution, typical of graffiti, is matched by an conceptual simplicity.

Chapter 8: Art and Artefact: The Enkomi Ship Graffito;
and the Tarxien and Dramesi graffiti.

The focus of the three previous chapters was on different examples of one particular motif, the ship's prow, to illustrate how artistic analysis, as well as the interpretation of symbolism, may be relevant to the understanding of enigmatic or schematic graffiti. In the following discussions, I will attempt to combine this emphasis on the importance of understanding the art of ship graffiti, with the investigation of some questions which are closely related to their identity as artefacts.

Earlier, I noted that one of the strengths of pictorial graffiti as evidence for life in the ancient world is their vitality and immediacy, which derived from their artists' comparative freedom from the codes and constraints of contemporary formal art. Some early ship graffiti have captured the imagination of later historians, who have not only attempted to interpret their detail in terms of what is known of contemporary ships, but also have used them as motifs or logos in publications or museum displays. The Bryggen graffito, which I discussed in Chapter 6 of this study, provides an example of such an image, representing a mighty fleet whose power is emphasized by the unusual view of the ships which its artist has used. The fact that the ships which are the subjects of the work are still some way from being fully understood by nautical historians, and are not well represented in the archaeological record, increases the importance of images which illustrate them. In this chapter, I will discuss a group of very early graffiti which also depict ships which are very scarce in the archaeological record. Among them is an example a graffito from the late Bronze Age site at Enkomi, Cyprus (briefly discussed and illustrated in Chapter 3), which, like the Bryggen graffito, has succeeded in catching modern imaginations as expressing some of the essential qualities of a type of ancient ship which is poorly understood.

The first section of this chapter will concentrate on this image, known as the Enkomi graffito (fig. 8.1. As will be described, below, two photographs and many differing interpretive drawings of this image, the original of which is now apparently lost, are available in the academic literature. I have decided to use Claude Schaeffer's 1952 photographs as my primary illustration because they provide the only complete record of the stone's visual imagery. For comparative purposes, I have included Basch's more recent photograph of the ship graffito, fig. 8.2. Other representations of the image will be included in the course of the following discussion). The Enkomi graffito has been used not only as a technical source for the historic ships of its era, but also as a motif on a book cover (Westerberg 1983), as an emblem of the swift, sleek ships of the ancient Mediterranean. If the date which has been assigned to it is correct, it is roughly contemporary with the Bronze Age ships found at Cape Gelidonya and Ulu Burun, and so could provide an important point of reference for the study of these wrecks.

The discussion in the second section of this chapter will consider two other groups of Mediterranean ship graffiti which may also be dated to the Bronze Age. These also exemplify the importance of interpreting ancient pictorial graffiti as artefacts, and bear some resemblances to aspects of the Enkomi graffito. These images, found at sites in Dramesi in Greece, and Tarxien, Malta, have also found a place in historical and technical discussions of the ships of the ancient Mediterranean. The possible relationship between aspects of their style and that of contemporary formal art will be briefly discussed.

My discussion of the Bryggen branch was not confined to the curious problems which its art presents to modern interpreters. I noted the interplay between the composition of the main image and the physical properties of its ground, as well as the problem which its lack of archaeological context presents those attempting to interpret its

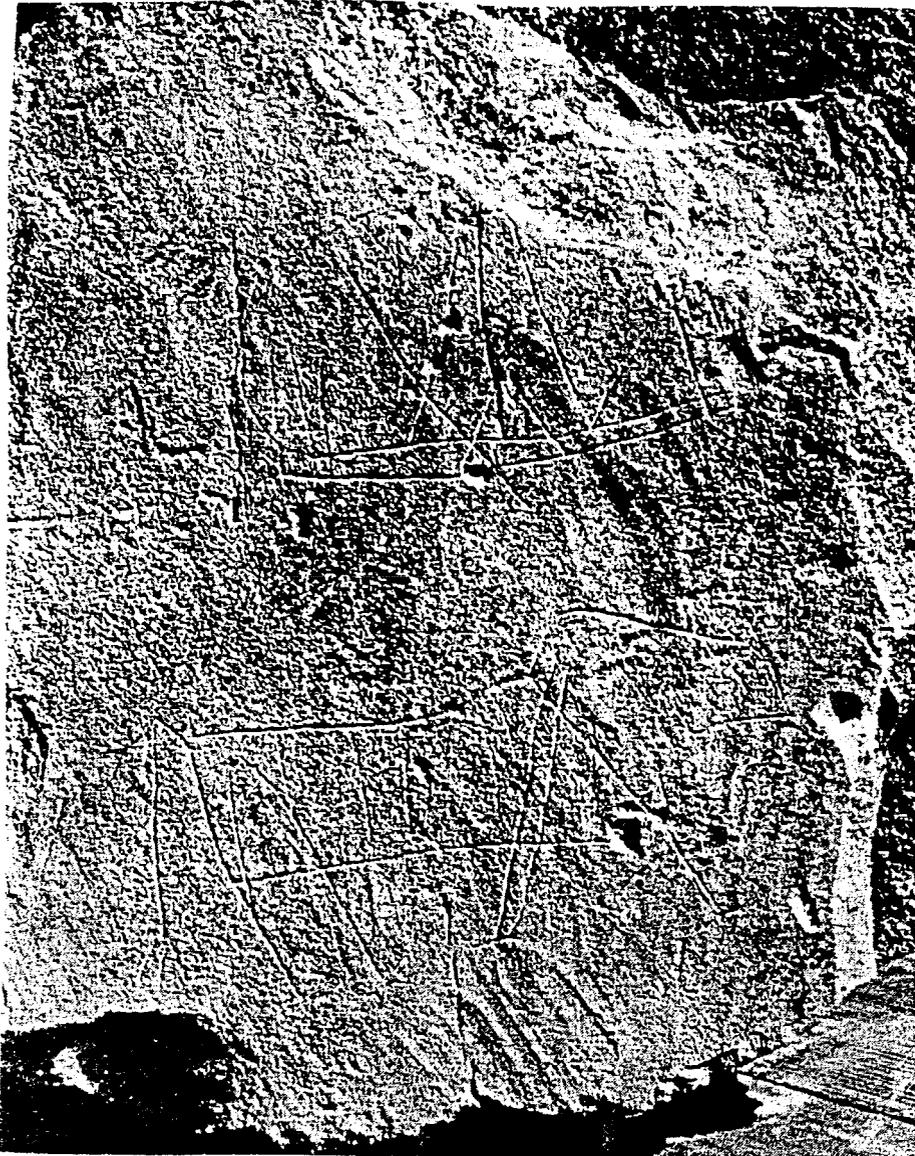


Fig. 8.1 The Enkomi graffiti. Schaeffer 1952.

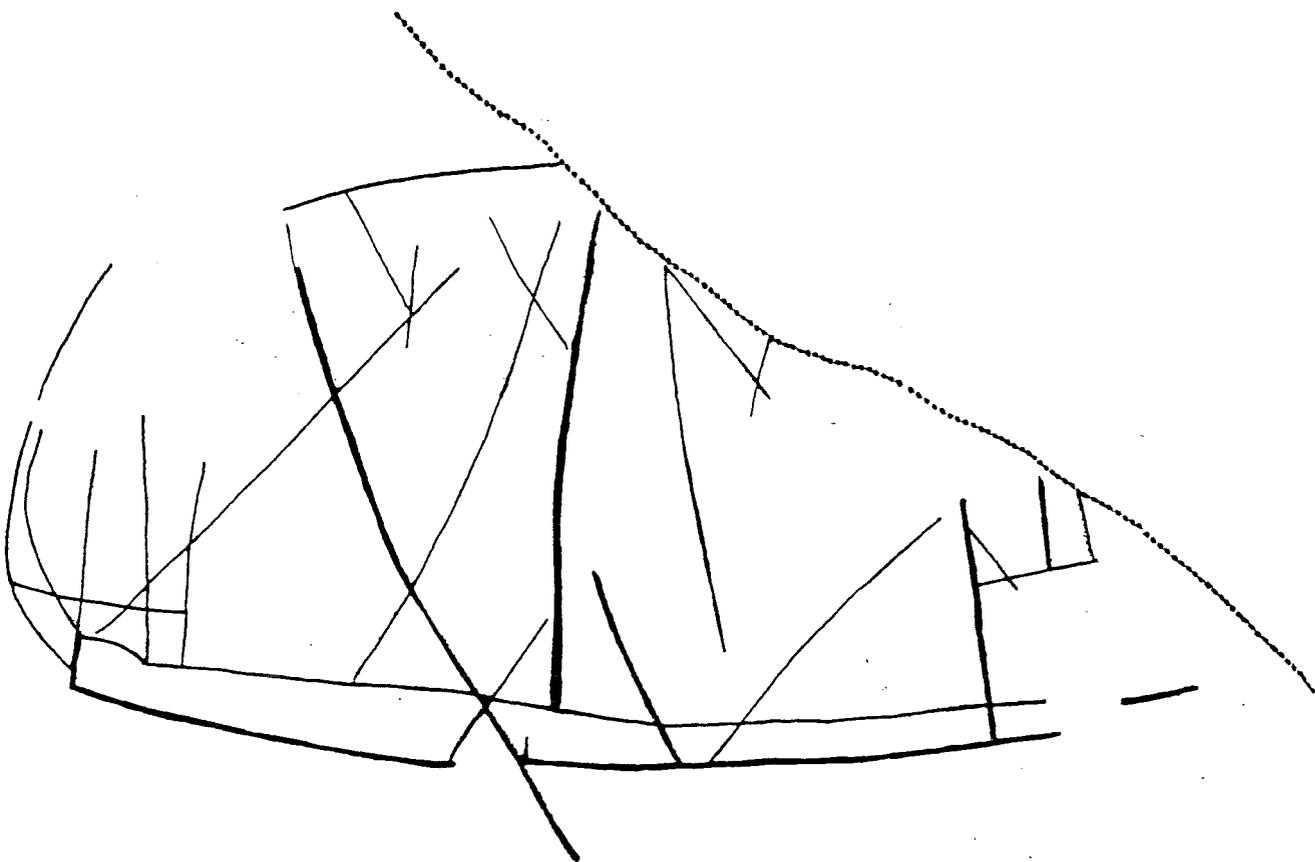


Fig. 8.2 Basch's photograph and interpretive drawing of the Enkomi ship graffiti. 1987.

images. Through both the recording standards of the time, and the low value placed by academics on pictorial graffiti, the Enkomi stone also lacks a detailed archaeological context, and the consequences which the condition of the stone has on the ship graffito has posed a major problem for later interpreters. The interpretation of both the Tarxien and Dramesi groups of graffiti also raises complex questions which derive from the recording and reporting of the archaeology associated with them, and from the present condition of the stones themselves.

The discussion of the Enkomi graffito will also focus on the manner in which modern scholars have approached the image's interpretation since its discovery forty-eight years ago. Over the intervening period, initially because of the inconvenience of access to the original, and subsequently because of its apparent loss or destruction, a group of authorities have offered interpretations which have not been based on first-hand study of the artefact. Instead, their interpretations have tended to take a serial form, that is, one copy and interpretation of the image inspiring the next, without the control of reference to the original artefact, or to high quality photographs of it. This is a new theme in the present study, but it requires serious consideration, since the problems resulting from this approach are by no means confined to the Enkomi ship graffito.

Although the focus of the following discussion will be on the more artefactual aspects of the Enkomi images' interpretation, they also provide another example of an issue related to artistic analysis which was raised in the chapter concerning the Oseberg graffito. In this example, I criticised academics who separated one or more subjects from a compositional group, focussing on it in isolation without reference to its spatial, stylistic, and cognitive relationships with the rest of the image. This problem is also seen in publications which have referred to the Enkomi ship graffito, which have often discussed it in isolation, separating it from the three other subjects carved in the same style on the stone block on which it occurs.

The artist of the Enkomi picture did not pose posterity the difficulties of interpretation and explanation which the Bryggen artist did by using a view which, in terms of contemporary artistic context, is baffling in its apparent anachronism. The Enkomi ship is represented in profile, using the easily recognizable typical outline of a boat which is common in ancient as well as modern art, and which was discussed at some length earlier in this study. It would be impossible to discuss the Enkomi graffito, however, without considering how the artist achieved such a striking effect, which has captured the imagination of later viewers. Before embarking on this discussion, however, it is necessary to set the image in its geographical and cultural context.

Like Bergen in medieval Northern Europe, Enkomi was an important port in the ancient world. It lay at a point of intersection of numerous Mediterranean trade routes, in what was described by Emily Vermeule as a "caravan terminus region" (1964: 228). Cyprus's geographical position in the eastern Mediterranean made it a central location between the Levant, Crete, the Cyclades and mainland Greece. Many authorities, including Emily Vermeule (*ibid.*: 221), have remarked on the hybrid, or frankly mixed styles in ancient Cypriote art which reflect the island's wide ranging cultural contacts. Furthermore, Enkomi was colonized by Mycenaean settlers after the fall of Knossos, adding another strand to the complex web of influences which created Cypriote culture during this period. It is certain that alongside the mixed styles of art were mixed religious beliefs and world-views from both the Orient and the Mediterranean, creating a richly varied cognitive world. Cyprus's material culture, including the design and construction of the island's ships, is therefore very likely to have encompassed a wide range of styles and traditions, and its far flung trading links would have ensured the frequent presence in its harbours of many different types of ships which were products of diverse ship building traditions.

The French archaeologist Claude Schaeffer directed a large excavation of the ancient port of Enkomi, on the east coast of Cyprus, publishing a report of his work in 1952. In 1949, during the course of the excavation, a roughly rectangular block of fine grained limestone was recovered, measuring 50 cm long, with two prepared surfaces on which were carved four images: a ship and a bull on the stone's broad surface, and a manned chariot and a rectangular structure on its edge. Schaeffer's account included scant information about the stone's stratigraphical context, but did give co-ordinates for its find site, noting that the stone lay at a depth of 1 m 37 cm. No burials appear to have been associated with the stone, which seems, from Schaeffer's plan, to have been found beside the site of a house. He assigned a date of approximately 1200 BC to the artefact, apparently through its associations at its find site, and this date has been widely accepted by later authorities. In Schaeffer's own chronology of Cyprus, this date fits into the earliest phase of the Iron age; however, it is most common to find the ship described by more recent authorities as belonging to the late Bronze age. It would not be appropriate here to consider the problems of the unquestioning acceptance of Schaeffer's chronology for and dating of the site, but it is important to note that his views may not now be widely accepted.

As I wrote in the introduction to this thesis, Schaeffer mentioned briefly in his discussion of the images that they offered some insight into the mind of their artist, (*op cit.*) but he did not elaborate this observation, beyond noting the artist's choice of subjects. The images on the Enkomi stone were lightly incised into its prepared surfaces, in a technique which should be described as "scratching" rather than carving. The subjects were drawn in a simple linear style, bare of detail but vigorous, their essential qualities competently conveyed. Elsewhere in this thesis, I have discussed a style of art in which the characteristics of a subject are reduced to the minimum needed for recognition, and which may produce an effect of simplicity or naivety which can mislead viewers without experience of the style's potential as a means of symbolic expression. It is possible that the Enkomi images have been

created with this intentional use of symbolic style; I will return to this matter, below. Whether or not it was the artist's intention to use a style which enhanced his images' symbolic meaning, however, it is easy to separate them stylistically from the formal Cypriote art of the Bronze age.

The pictures on the Enkomi stone may be identified as graffito, rather than formal art, through the simple, scratched technique with which they have been created. Other scratched images are known from this period, and appear, at least to twentieth century eyes, to be outside of the canon of contemporary formal art. It is important to note, however, the difficulty of "calibrating" visual images from the distant past as either formal art or graffiti, and it is likely that such distinctions were comparatively meaningless, or at least inappropriate, in the context of early art. Some of the discussion in the first chapter of this study considered this issue.

Unlike some of the other graffiti which are discussed in this study, there is a strong sense of premeditation or composition underlying the Enkomi images' arrangement on their ground, which is heightened by the similarity of style and technique in all four subjects. The neat angles of the stone's corners, and its carefully smoothed surfaces, convey a sense that the stone was prepared in order receive the graffiti. This observation belongs to the realm of intuition, however, and it is also possible that the artist used the stone opportunistically. Be that as it may, there is a monumental quality about the stone and its images, and this will be discussed in more detail, below, in terms of both the Dramezi and Tarxien groups of ship graffiti, which are found on standing stones. To modern eyes, the Enkomi stone strongly resembles a grave stone, although, as I noted above, it does not seem to have been found at a burial site. In a study of Mycenaean art which was published early this century, Tsountas and Mannatt discussed and illustrated Mycenaean tombstones (1903: 91-3), describing the traditional division of the main face of the stone into equal halves, and the frequent use of charioteer imagery in this art. As both of these features are seen in the images of

the Enkomi stone, it seems reasonable to infer that the artist of these images was influenced by Mycenaean style.

Even allowing for the lost detail in the area of damage at the stone's top, the two subjects on its front surface, the bull and the ship, are very similar in size, and more or less aligned with one another. These aspects strongly suggest that there was a meaningful link between them, rather than that they were a random juxtaposition. Both the ship and the bull had deeply rooted symbolic meanings in the Bronze Age; the ship, through its associations with power and trade, as well as with concepts of dangerous journeys and contact with distant lands. It would be simplistic to link the bull image on the Enkomi stone only with the Minoan civilization, as even a brief glance at dictionaries of classical mythology indicates a wide range of bull symbolism through Egyptian, Hellenic, and Judaic traditions in the ancient eastern Mediterranean (described, for example, by Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1994: 131-136).

Of particular interest in studies such as these is the link between the sea god, Poseidon, and the bull, which was commonly sacrificed during maritime rituals (*ibid.*: 131). Perhaps it would be straining credibility too far to see the braced hind legs of the bull as a sacrificial posture. Spatially and symbolically, however, the identity of the two images which dominate the main and most visible face of the stone strongly suggests the possibility that the artist was making a religious statement.

The pictures on the stone's edge are of similar size to each other, but the spatial relationship between them, and a possible link between their subjects, makes them much more enigmatic than those on its front surface. The manned chariot is abbreviated, even schematic, and yet the charioteer, horse, and chariot itself are clearly indicated despite the minimum of detail. The conceptual relationship between this subject and the simple rectangular shape beside it, however, is much less clear.

One possible reading of these two graffiti was proposed by Schaeffer himself (*ibid.*: 101). While the ship and the bull depicted on the main surface of the stone seem most likely to have been placed there as a symbolic statement, Schaeffer interpreted the images on the stone's edge as a narrative scene, depicting a building, possibly a fortified tower, under attack by a war chariot. The images' placing on their ground, and their relationship to one another, do not refute this analysis, which relies on reading the rectangular structure as a building, its interior subdivisions representing windows. It is interesting to note, however, that in a discussion of the chariot in Bronze Age Aegean art, Sara Immerwahr (1990: 124) discussed its use in Aegean, and particularly Mycenaean culture as being different from that in Near Eastern societies, where it had originated. " ...they are depicted not as fighting or shooting platforms, but rather as conveyances to the battle or the hunt. " (*ibid.*). While this observation does not disprove Schaeffer's reading of the graffiti (and who is to say that the Enkomi artist was not depicting a scene set in the Near East ?), it does propose a question about this interpretation.

It is equally possible to interpret the rectangular shape as an altar, and Immerwahr illustrates a painting of a shrine (*ibid.*: plate 77; fig. 8.3), depicted as a subdivided rectangle, which closely resembles the form of the Enkomi image. Elsewhere in her discussion, she illustrates a painting of a ship's cabin from a house in Akrotiri (*ibid.*: fig. XV; fig. 8.4) whose basic form, without its garlanding, also strongly resembles the Enkomi rectangle. Maria Shaw (1982: 53-58) examined the symbolism of the ship's cabin in Bronze Age Aegean art, concluding that it was an important emblem of power in the art of this time. Unfortunately, the schematic style of the graffito does not allow a firm identification of the subject to be made.

Whether chariots were used as machines of war or of the hunt, or merely as conveyances to these events, they were also important symbols of personal power in the Mediterranean, frequently used in the formal art of various cultures in this area.



Fig. 8.3 A painting of a shrine. Immerwahr 1990.

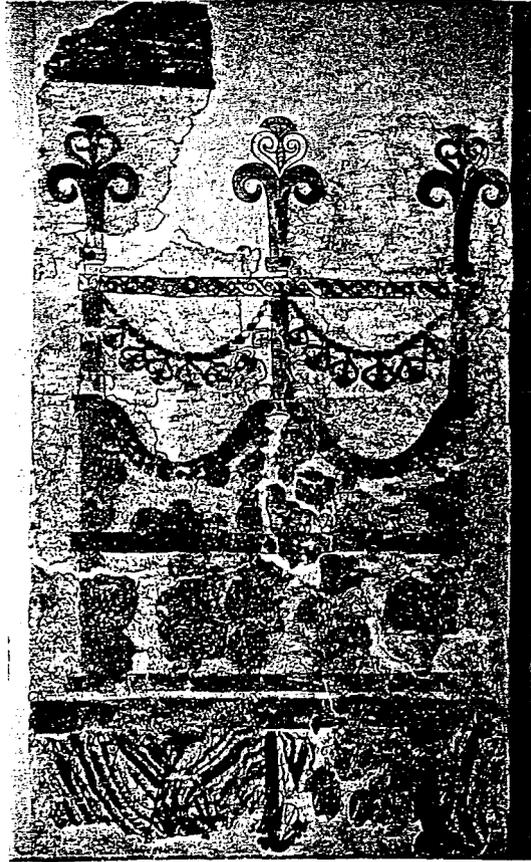


Fig. 8.4 A ship's cabin. Immerwahr 1990.

Linking the chariot with another important symbol, either a shrine or a ship's cabin, introduces the possibility that the images on this face of the stone were not intended to form a narrative scene, or simply a random pair of attractive subjects, but were perhaps intended to be an strong evocation of personal power and religious belief. It is interesting to note that, like the ship and the bull, the subjects of the graffiti on the edge of the Enkomi stone may be identified as important symbols in the Bronze Age Mediterranean.

At the beginning of this chapter, I drew a parallel between the Enkomi ship graffito, and the main image on the Bryggen artefact, as being remarkable examples of pictures which captured something of the essence of their subjects. As I noted, above, the Enkomi ship has not been created using an unusual view, and neither challenges the modern viewer, nor is out of keeping with contemporary conventions. Its artist has used the standard, profile representation of boats which is almost ubiquitous through time and culture. Elsewhere in this thesis, this choice of view has been described as being the product of the human perceptual system's need to obtain maximum information about an object being viewed, and its so-called typical outline. In the case of the Enkomi ship, as in many other depictions of ships, the artist has included detail around and within the hull outline, thus adding to the information content of the picture.

Curiously, it may be the effect of the area of damage to the stone's top which adds most to the ship's swift and sleek characteristics. From Schaeffer's photograph of the stone at the time of its excavation (*ibid.*: Plate X; illustrated fig. 8.1), it is clear that a substantial flake has been lost from the upper part of the stone, the flake's lower edge taking with it some of the graffito's upper detail. It is probable that part of the ship's sail area, as well as associated rigging lines, were lost from the original image by the removal of the flake, and that these features were approximately symmetrical with the curves of the remaining detail. What is left of the sail then appears to be tilted

forward, making the ship appear to be leaning into the wind. This effect, coupled with the diagonal lines to the viewer's right of the ship, has the sort of graphically simple, but dynamic qualities, which the modern viewer most often sees in cartooning. It would be wrong to imply that the graffito's artistic success in evoking a fast ship is solely due to this accident to the stone; even with the lost detail hypothesized, (this was illustrated in an earlier discussion, fig. 3.8) the ship remains a powerful image.

The effect which the area of damage has on the interpretation of the ship image recalls the work of the art historian Erwin Panovsky, who emphasized the importance of separating the later viewer's responses to the effects of time on a work of art, from their responses to the details of the original state of the piece (1970: note, 38). The danger which Panovsky saw in misinterpreting ancient art by blending together these two aspects is clearly demonstrated by the example of the Enkomi graffito. It is this issue which has caused considerable misunderstanding about the graffito's form among archaeologists and nautical historians, who have referred to the image in their discussions about the form of early ships of the eastern Mediterranean.

As a preface to my discussion of the use of the Enkomi ship graffito by nautical historians seeking information about the ships of the ancient Mediterranean, it is important to note that Schaeffer published a very influential interpretative drawing of the ship graffito with his publication of the find (*ibid.*: 103; fig. 8.5). This drawing renders the ship's high end as an extended straight line; the large area of damage to its sail area is not indicated, nor are the smaller flakes missing from the hull area, and the complex group of lines at the ship's lower end omits one which is plainly visible in the photograph. Furthermore, Schaeffer's reading of the connections between the long, diagonal lines through the hull area, is open to question. This drawing, or versions of it, has been used repeatedly in the academic literature (Vermeule 1964: fig.

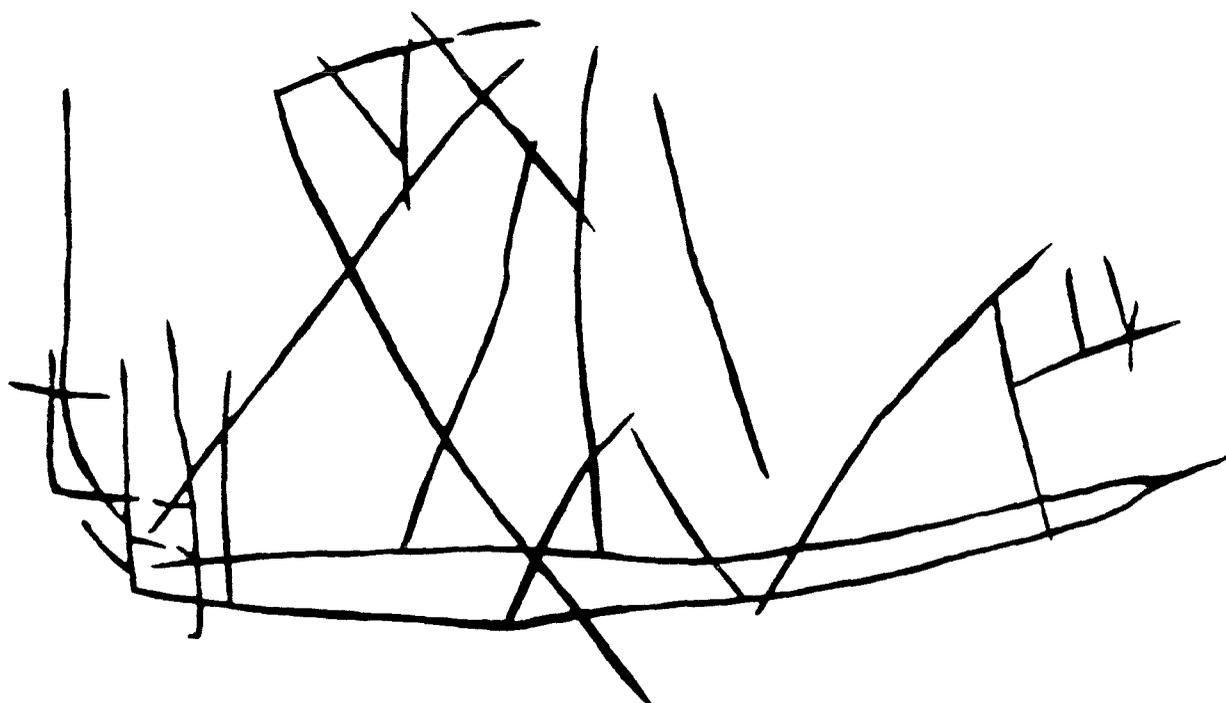


Fig. 8.5 Interpretive drawing of the Enkomi ship. Schaeffer 1952.

43; Casson 1971: fig. 27; Wachsmann 1981: 207; Westerberg 1983: fig. 13), to accompany technical discussions.

Of these studies, Lionel Casson's was the first to use Schaeffer's drawing of the Enkomi graffito in a study of the form of ships of the Bronze Age Mediterranean. Emily Vermeule only referred to it briefly, in a short discussion of Bronze Age ships. Casson apparently used only Schaeffer's interpretative drawing and not the photograph of the image, and saw the detail of the ship as offering conclusive evidence in the long-running controversy concerning the bow-stern orientation of the ships of this period (*ibid.*: 31). His conclusion was based on the representation of the sail and yard in Schaeffer's drawing as lying to the right of the mast. In this reading, the sail appears to be full of a following wind, and bellying toward the ship's high end, leading Casson to conclude that this was the ship's bow. In my discussion of the art of the stone's images, I mentioned the curious effect which the damage to the upper part of the stone has on the impression given by the lines of the ship. It is also the factor which has led to Casson's conclusion about the bow-stern orientation, since Schaeffer's drawing does not indicate that the blank area to the viewer's right of the sail is actually incomplete through damage. Part of the graffito's artistic success, then, rests on the effect of time on the image, which has altered or modified the artist's original work in a way which is artistically felicitous, but technically misleading. This point provides a useful example of the importance of referring back directly to the original graffiti, or, if that is not feasible, to good artefact photographs, rather than relying exclusively on interpretive drawings.

Karin Westerberg included Schaeffer's drawing of the Enkomi graffito in her study of Cypriote ships of the Bronze Age (*ibid.*: 17; fig.13). Her comments, referring to the ship's "wind-blown sail", seem to indicate that she was also misled by the evidence of Schaeffer's drawing (or was influenced by Casson's interpretation), and had not examined photographs of the graffito. However, she also pointed out that the three

shorter vertical lines at the viewer's left could be interpreted as steering gear, making this end the stern, not the bow. It is important to note that Westerberg observed that "As the graffito has disappeared after the Turkish invasion, it is not possible to give a more detailed description." (*ibid.*). I have been unable to confirm this statement; it would be unfortunate if the stone were no longer available for modern photography and recording.

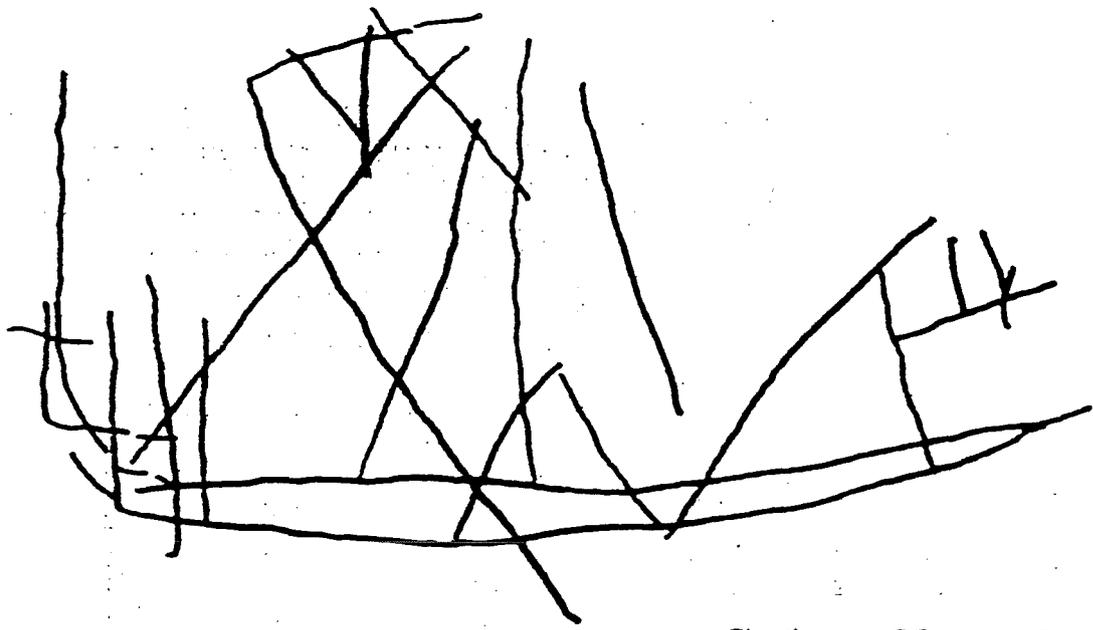
Shelley Wachsmann also referred to Schaeffer's drawing in his discussion of the ships of the Sea Peoples (1981: 187-220). Wachsmann's use of the image (*ibid.*: 206-208) was more extensive than those of Casson and Westerberg, considering the bow-stern orientation problem (in which he, like Westerberg, followed Casson's interpretation), and the type of rigging represented in the graffito. He also attempted to interpret the triangular shape at the mast's base as a ship's cabin, and examined the possibility that the ship bore the stylized bird's head ornament which was characteristic of the Sea Peoples' ships. Wachsmann's interpretation was based firmly on the assumption that the image's detail may be read realistically, although, intriguingly, he touched on the matter of the relevance of understanding artistic style elsewhere in the paper (*ibid.*: 210-211), in terms of the possible depiction of a bird's head ornament in the image. The question of the interpretation of ancient art using the assumption of realism has come up repeatedly in this thesis, and its dangers have been discussed. Perhaps it is worth repeating here, however, that such relatively abbreviated representations as the Enkomi graffito cannot be interpreted realistically, particularly where they appear in an artistic or geographical context which has symbolic or ritualistic associations. It is important to note, however, that Wachsmann's link between the Enkomi ship and the ships of the Sea Peoples may be a reasonable one, as Vermeule notes the occurrence of major battles, involving the Sea Peoples, off the east coast of Cyprus toward the end of the twelfth century BC (*ibid.*: 207). It is perhaps unwise, however, to place too much emphasis on this link, through the uncertainty of Schaeffer's dating of the site.

In Lucien Basch's study of early maritime art as sources of evidence for early ships (*op.cit.*: 148, fig.A) a photograph was published which, quite literally, cast a different light on the Enkomi stone and its carvings (this has been reproduced, figs. 3.7 and 8.2). The strong contrast and cross lighting of the main surface of the stone in this photograph makes the naturally occurring irregularities on its surface easier to see than in the photograph published with Schaeffer's report, particularly in relation to the ship graffito's detail. This is most notable at the much discussed high end, where it is clear that there is a fissure, or crack, in the stone at the point where one end of the image is scratched. Schaeffer's drawing appears to have blended the graffito's features with this crack in the stone, following it to render the line at the ship's high end as straight. Basch, however, reads this end of the image in his interpretative drawing as curved, not straight, and his photograph clearly shows this curved line, to the viewer's right of the crack in the stone. His drawing also indicates clearly the stone's damaged area, and its intrusion into the detail of the ship.

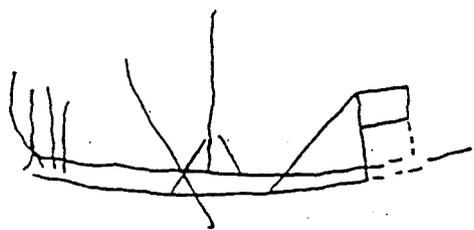
There are two problems to be faced in the fundamental issue of reading the ship's detail. Both are related to the question of defining the actual image, and distinguishing it both from aspects of its ground material, and from features which are the product of later processes which have had positive or negative effects on the graffito. G. Sieveking (1981: 123-125) discussed the first of these, in drawing attention to the possibility of mistaking naturally occurring geological formations for prehistoric images. I have noted Panovsky's observations (*op.cit.*) about the need to separate the effects of time on an image from its original features above, and elsewhere in this study. It is interesting to note the conjunction between archaeology and art history in attempting to deal with the problems which may arise from modern misinterpretations of the features of an image.

However problematic Schaeffer's interpretation of the Enkomi ship may be, it has been so frequently reproduced that it has virtually assumed the authority of the original graffito as a reference artefact. The Enkomi ship has been defined for the academic world in Schaeffer's terms, and has subsequently been redefined by later interpretations, such as the drawing published by Westerberg, which were based on Schaeffer's drawing. These second generation renderings have been grouped together with Schaeffer's drawing (fig. 8.6), to demonstrate how far removed from this interpretation some of the later versions are. Vermeule's is the most striking in this sense, but it is worth noting that in the preface to the book which features this drawing, she acknowledges that some of the drawings are of uneven quality, due to problems in obtaining photographs of the original artefacts (1964: xi). Lucien Basch's publication of an enhanced photograph and drawing of the original ship graffito, highlighted the fact that the detail of the original is, to some extent, ambiguous. Schaeffer's version is only one possible interpretation, and an interpretation which had several serious problems. The possible loss of the Enkomi stone, noted above, makes Basch's presentation of a new photograph and drawing an important step in clearing up some of the questions which are raised by Schaeffer's interpretation, as well as offering current researchers the opportunity to re-evaluate the image.

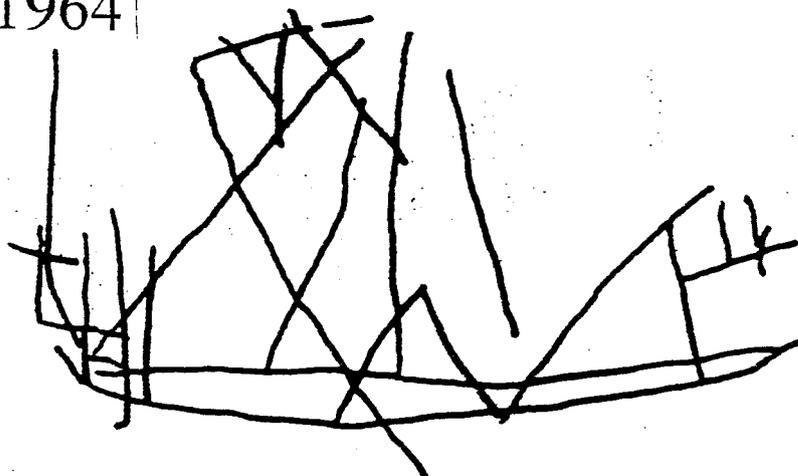
It is also notable that all of these reinterpretations, including Basch's, focus only on the ship graffito, ignoring the place which this image had with other subjects on the stone. The bull which accompanies the ship on the main face of the stone is absent from all of them, as is the curious group of subjects of the stone's edge. This removal of the ship graffito from its compositional context has the unfortunate effect of losing the important symbolic and artistic links which were employed by its artist to express its deeper meaning, and which in turn may have had an effect on the art of the images themselves. While the information encoded in the Enkomi ship graffito is not completely lost through this separation, it is somewhat diminished.



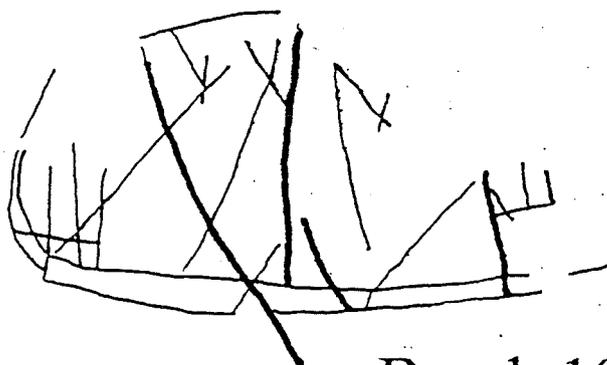
Schaeffer 1952



Vermeule 1964



Westerberg 1983



Basch 1987

Fig. 8.6 Different interpretive drawings of the Enkomi ship.

I would now like to consider another group of ship graffiti which are thought to date from a roughly similar period of time, but from a different region of the Mediterranean. These images on two adjacent stones in the Third Temple at Tarxien were recorded by Diana Woolner during a visit to the megalithic site in Malta in 1956, and a report was published in the following year (fig. 8.7). I have chosen to illustrate the graffiti using Woolner's own interpretive drawings which were published with her report, but it is very important to note that they do not represent the graffiti as they are today. The stones at Tarxien have weathered badly since Woolner's visit and many of the images are now extremely faint. Her drawings are accompanied by photographs of some of the graffiti which provide useful information about both their form and technique of manufacture.

Previously unnoticed during the archaeological work at the site during the early years of this century, the Tarxien ship graffiti are just visible in photographs accompanying the reports of the excavations (Zammit 1930: plate II). Although Woolner did not include a plan of the site with her report of the graffiti, she did describe the location of the stones in some detail. Her account, in conjunction with aspects of Zammit's discussion of the site (1916: 135) indicates that the stones form part of the entrance to what may be called a side-chapel of the third temple. Zammit's excavation revealed a Bronze Age layer above part of the Neolithic site at this spot, and it is important to note that at this level in the temple's stratigraphy the remains of many cremation burials were discovered. Zammit referred (*ibid.*: 136) to the discovery of the remains of many cremations and "hundreds" of cinerary urns, indicating that the Bronze Age use of the site extended over a long period of time, and that it was an important area for funeral activity. The stones bearing the graffiti are located on the northern edge of the burial site; it is impossible to know whether the ships are associated with the temple itself, or with the later burials. It is also possible that the graffiti are the result of other activities at the site which are unrepresented in its archaeology.

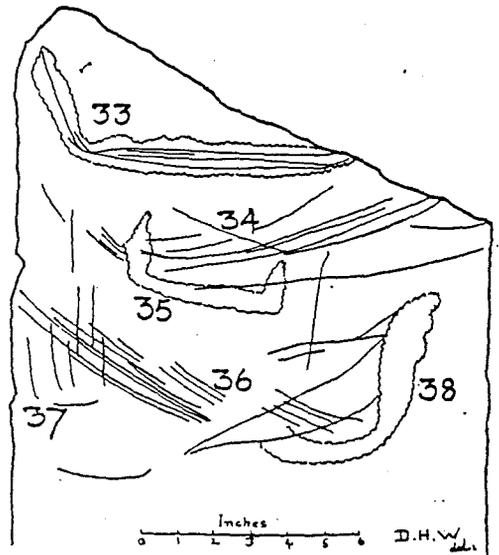
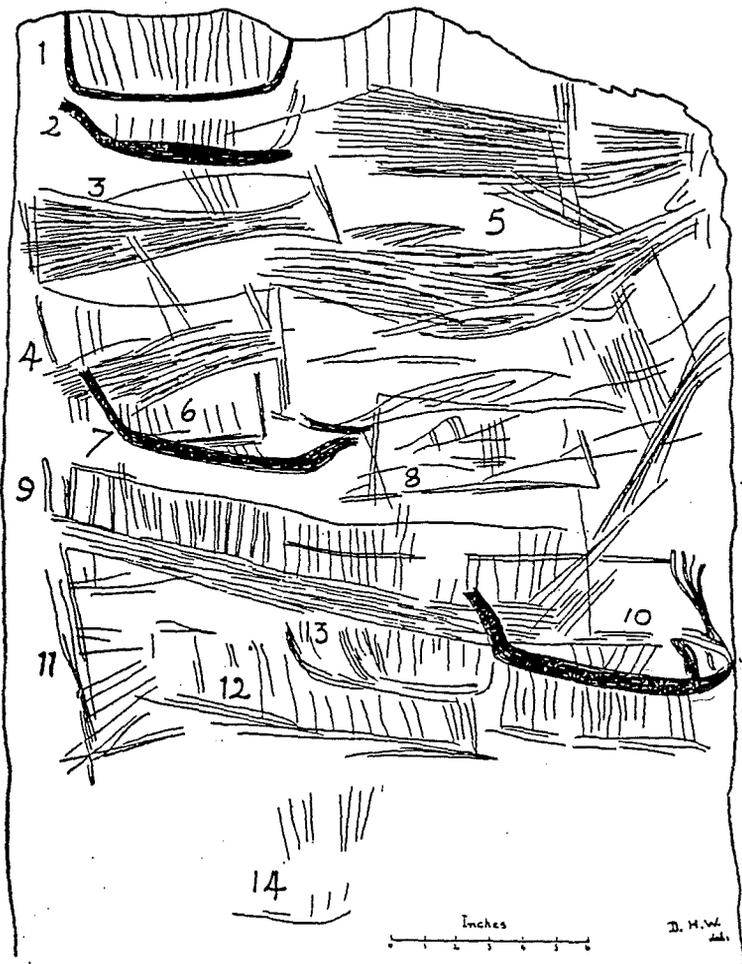
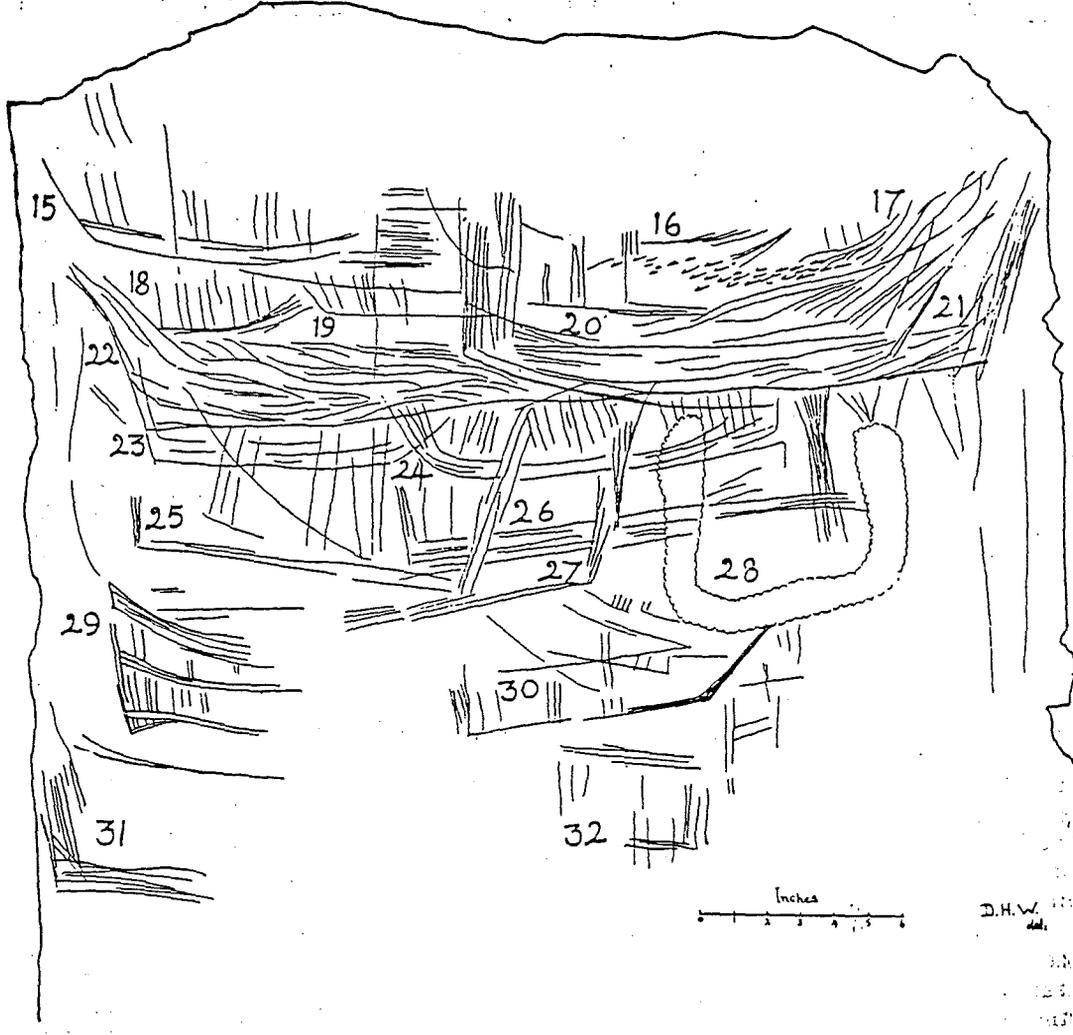


Fig. 8.7 The Tarxien graffiti. Interpretive drawing by Woolner 1957.

Woolner noted that the stones bearing the graffiti were the local limestone, soft, honey coloured, and easily marked to produce a temporary light line which rapidly weathered back to the stone's original colour (*ibid.*: 60). As was noted, above, the weathering effect which she described has led to the serious degradation of the graffiti from the state they were in which she recorded in 1956 (Wenc: pers. comm. 1993). While the deeper scratched images are still visible, the lighter ones are now so faint as to be almost invisible.

The stones themselves are large: 1 m 52 cm x 78 cm x 35 cm (5 ft x 2 ft 7 in x 1 ft 2 in), and 1 m 52 cm x 60 cm x 22 cm (5 ft x 2 ft x 9 in), and taper slightly toward the top. These apparently had been hacked off when the site was levelled for cultivation. Woolner noted that the graffiti are found at about 2 ft 6 in (76 cm) from the present surface of the site, and continue up to the present tops of the stones. The images are mainly confined to the fronts of the stones, but are also found on one edge, and one or two examples may also be seen on the backs.

Woolner's detailed observations about the graffiti in her report in 1957 include an important detail which distinguishes these images from the Enkomi ship graffito. Many of the Tarxien graffiti are superimposed, one over another, and although it appears that all are orientated the same way relative to the vertical of the stones, their artists have not bothered to avoid existing images in creating new pictures. Woolner explains this by referring to the stone's properties of rapid weathering, so that the old images would not have appeared to be different in colour from their background, but the new ones would have briefly appeared to be white. The considerable number of images which are found on the stones, coupled with the factor of overlay, would suggest that the graffiti had been made over a considerable period of time. The problems which may result from the interpretation of the overlaid forms may be seen in Casson's illustration of part of the group (1971: figs. 24, 31; illustrated, fig. 8.8),

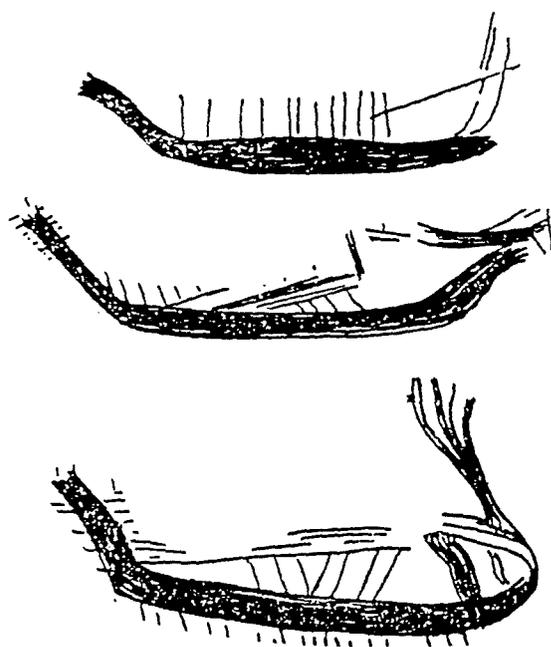


Fig. 8.8 Casson's illustration of the Tarxien graffiti, 1971.

in which three boats are reproduced. Two of these ships appear to contain extraneous detail from over or underlying ships. Not only does this mean that the interpretation of these images from Casson's illustrations is made more difficult, but it provides an example of another danger in separating particular images from their compositional context; that is, the possibility of their contamination with detail from nearby subjects.

It appeared to Woolner that the graffiti had been made in a number of different ways, from scratching with a simple point, to pounding, chipping, and scraping. She particularly noted the occasional use of a double or multi-pointed tool, which she believed were fossilized sharks' teeth. I will return to the possible significance of this aspect of the images, below.

While it may not be particularly difficult now to find approximate parallels for the Tarxien assemblage of graffiti, Woolner was hard pressed to do so, and had to resort to sixteenth century AD votive ship graffiti, and ship images at a megalithic site in Japan, at the ornamented tombs at Kiushu (Hamada et al. 1918-19), to use as parallels for the Tarxien images. While post-medieval votive graffiti do not provide a satisfactory parallel, it is worth considering for a moment the Japanese example which she cites. Although Woolner notes, " The mass of superimposed graffiti [at Kiushu] is strangely similar [to the Tarxien group], although the forms of course differ. " (*ibid.*: 61).

When I examined Hamada's publication (*ibid.*) of the tombs at Kiushu, I was surprised to find that there is a very strong resemblance between the boats depicted in the illustrations and some of the graffiti at Tarxien (fig. 8.9). While the vast geographical and cultural differences between Kiushu and Tarxien mean that contact between the two areas was most unlikely, I feel that there is a valid point to be made about the resemblance between the depiction of boats at the two sites. At both, accumulations of pictorial graffiti representing ships are found to accompany human

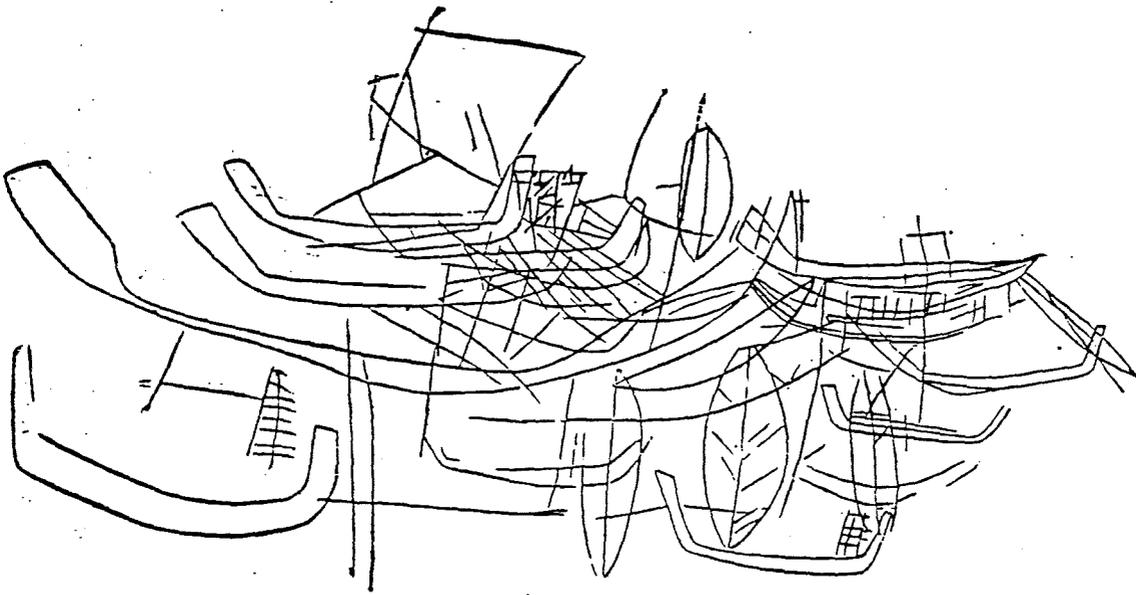


Fig. 8.9 The Kiushu graffiti. Hamada *et al.* 1918-19.

burials; the creators of the images have used similar forms, views, and methods to depict similar objects, thus linking the making of visual imagery with particular types of behaviour. It is impossible to say whether the beliefs, or cognitive structures which underlay the activity of making the ship graffiti was also similar, but it is possible to observe a common perceptual and behavioural strand which links the people of Tarxien to those at Kiushu. On a more cautious note, however, it is impossible to link with certainty the graffiti with the archaeology at both sites. Both were excavated at times which had different standards of archaeological excavation and recording than those of the present; furthermore, the secure dating of rock carvings continues to present an unresolved problem, a combination of difficulties without an apparent solution.

Woolner referred to the use of a multi-pointed, or serrated tool which was used to scratch some of the Tarxien graffiti, and it is possible to identify these images among her drawings and photographs. It is interesting to link this method of making an image with a different sort of artistic activity, producing similar results, which may have been contemporary with the Tarxien graffiti. In a paper published in 1960, John Boardman described the use of what he called the "multiple brush technique" in pottery decoration, where several brushes were fixed together and used simultaneously to create a number of parallel lines. Outlines of forms could then be rapidly filled in, with pleasingly uniform and evenly spaced lines which gave the impression of the mass of an object without conveying a heavy or clumsy impression.. Boardman believed that this technique had originated in Egypt, and was used widely in the Mediterranean, particularly in the 8th -7th centuries BC. Perhaps, through visual contact with this method of pottery decoration, this technique was transmitted to the creators of some of the Tarxien graffiti, influencing their selection of tools to produce an effect similar to the familiar patterns on contemporary pottery. Images of ships could be produced rapidly and easily using this technique, to make pleasing representations, factors which are attractive to all types of artists.

Woolner went to some trouble to try to discern and identify different types of ships which were represented among the Tarxien graffiti, despite the difficulties involved in such an exercise through the weathering of the stone and the overlay of many ships. She grouped the graffiti according to her perception of their characteristics and the method of carving used (that is, with single or multiple pointed tools). She saw the group as being dominated by one basic ship type, whose identifying characteristic was numerous vertical lines above the gunwale. Many of these ships differ markedly from one another in their hull profile, and in the length of their end posts relative to overall length. While it seems clear that the various artists of the graffiti did depict different types of ship with different levels of skill, I am uneasy that enough information exists in the images to identify them with particular ship types. Perhaps more important, I believe that it would be inappropriate to try to read these pictures realistically; that is, to assume that their artists intended future viewers to perceive particular traditions of ship building among the pictures made at such a site.

The dating of any images cut into rock in an open site is notoriously difficult. Regarding the date of the Tarxien group, Woolner stated, " It can, however, be demonstrated that they are probably contemporary with the latest temple period ...about the middle of the second millenium BC. " (*ibid.*: 65). From the discussion of the accumulation of silt on the site's floor and the abandonment of the temple, it is difficult to see how this date for the graffiti is actually demonstrated. Further in her report, she stated that the cremation burials appeared to follow the abandonment of the temple, and interrupted the accumulation of silt on the floors. While she may well be right in her view that the graffiti belong to this period, it would seem to be unwise to interpret the evidence of the ship graffiti themselves as supporting this date. Furthermore, in a recent letter to the journal *Nature*, Valladas et al. (1992: 68-70) discussed the use of scientific dating methods to date prehistoric rock art which had previously been dated by stylistic means, or by interpretation of the use of the site and

its artefactual remains. Their conclusion was that dating early art from the remains of human activities should be used with considerable caution, as it was demonstrated that these dates needed a good deal of adjustment in the light of results from radiocarbon analysis. The more recent controversy surrounding the dating of the rock art of the Côa valley in Portugal by scientific or stylistic means (Bednarik 1995: 877-83; Zilhão 1995: 883-901, *inter al.*) emphasizes this need for caution. In the final chapter of this study, I will consider the question of the dating of ancient graffiti in a little more detail.

Elsewhere in this study, I have discussed the use of visual imagery to express complex meaning. The identity of the site at Tarxien, the temple itself and the cremation burials, strongly suggest the possibility that the making of the graffiti was for a purpose with a deeper meaning than that of simple ship portraiture. I discussed, above, the site at Kiushu, Japan, and the similarity between the use of this site and Tarxien, to suggest that this parallel may exemplify a universal in human behaviour.

Before concluding this discussion, I would like to consider another, smaller group of graffiti which also provide an intriguing parallel to the Enkomi and Tarxien pictures. The two stones bearing the images were discovered and reported by Blegen in the late 1940's (fig. 8.10. I have used the photographs reproduced by Lucien Basch, 1987: 144. In an unfortunate parallel to the apparent fate of the Enkomi stone, one of the stones is now missing, and Basch uses Blegen's photograph of it for the purposes of his discussion).

Following Homeric clues, Blegen looked for the site of Hyria, and believed he had found it near the modern village of Dramesi. (I will refer to the group as the Dramesi graffiti.) The villagers of Dramesi had disturbed the site in quarrying it for stone shortly before the discovery of the ship carvings. However, Blegen noted (1949: 41) that the quantities of human bone, pottery fragments, and bronze weapons found both

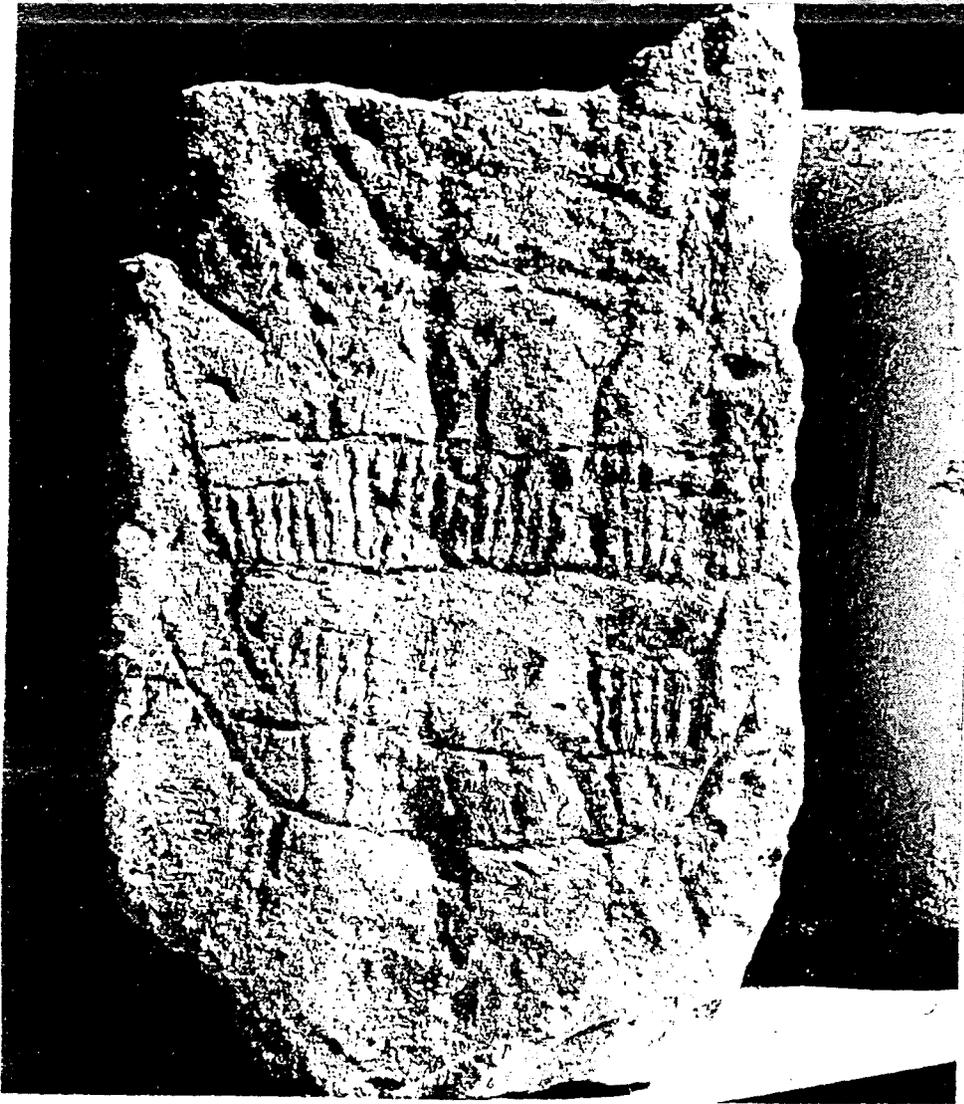


Fig. 8.10 The Dramesi graffiti. Photographs published by Basch 1987.

in the quarry spoil and at the site itself suggested that the structure was a tomb of the mid to late Helladic period. The possible relationship between the tomb and the ship carvings is intriguing, but no safe conclusions about it may be drawn due to the lack of secure associations. The relevance of the Dramesi images to the present discussion lies in the relationship which may be seen between the basic outlines and other systematic linework of the graffiti, the "monumental" qualities of the ground material, and the proximity of a site with possible ritual associations, all of which are attributes seen in the Enkomi and Tarxien graffiti.

At the Dramesi site, in all, six boats are deeply scored into the stones in two groups of three; five boats are scratched using an outline and in-filling technique, and one is a simple outline. Basch believed that the in-filling lines are intended to represent the interior of the ships, depicted using the x-ray technique (*ibid.*: 143), and drew a parallel between the Dramesi ships and the ship depicted on the Gazi sarcophagus (*ibid.*: 145; fig. 8. 11) which is dated to about 1200 BC. As the vertical lines in the Gazi painting are continuous from the hold area above the gunwales and into the sail, it is difficult to believe that the artist intended the viewer to understand that they indicated the inner structure of the hull. It is also possible to understand the use of this technique in terms of artistic intention. For example, under the influence of the multiple brush technique in pottery decoration, mentioned above, the Gazi artist might have used this technique to indicate mass or bulk, without using blocks of colour within the outlines which would have interfered with the delicacy of the whole composition. Equally, the lines may have had a more practical function, perhaps indicating crew or passengers. It is also important to bear in mind, however, that a particular technique or convention in art may have had more than one meaning.

Before leaving the interpretation of this technique, however, it is important to note that there are a number of other examples of its use in Bronze Aegean ship art (Basch *ibid.*: 141-2), ranging from banding on boat models to other ship depictions

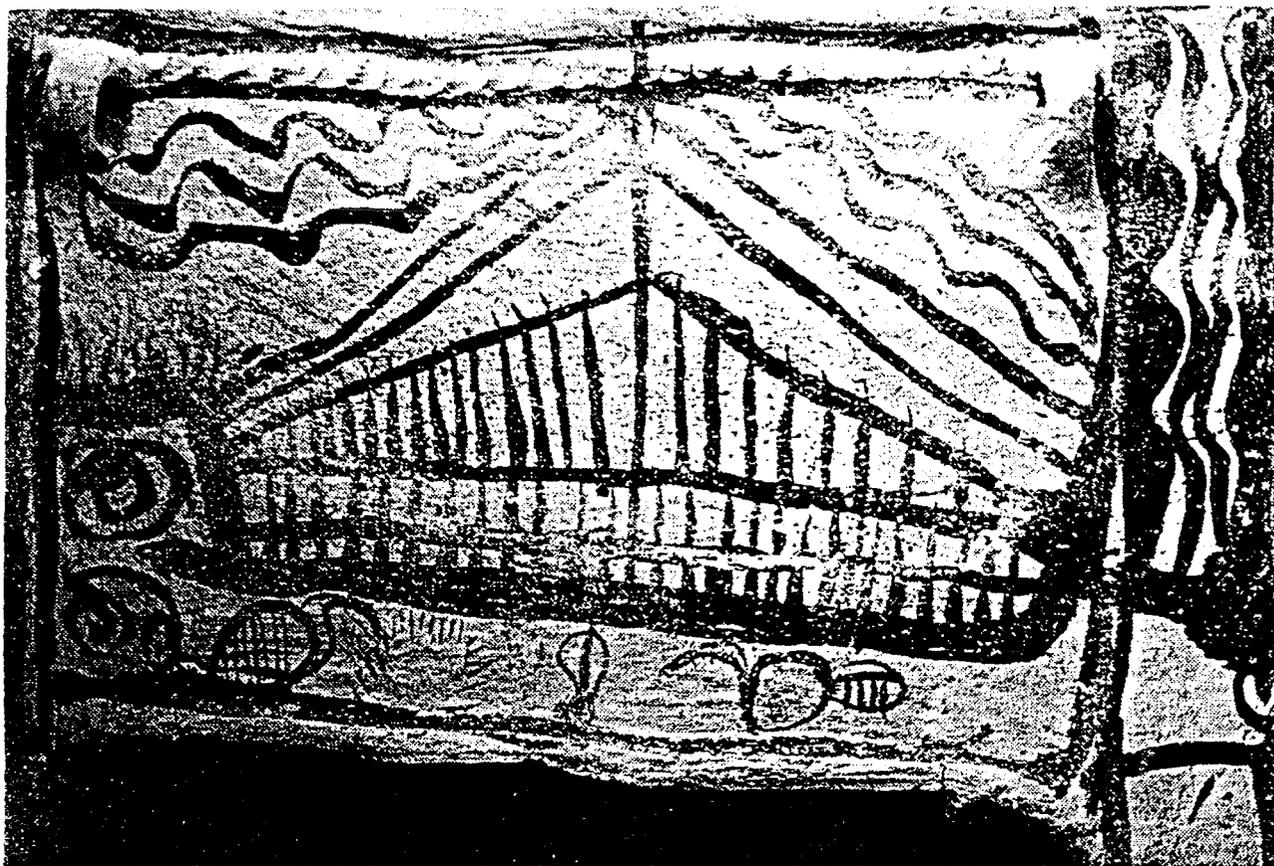


Fig. 8.11 The Gazi sarcophagus ship. Basch 1987.

decorating pottery. It might be argued that the Tarxien ships which were scratched with a multi-pointed tool, together with the Dramesi, Gazi and pottery decoration ships, are all versions of a similar artistic technique for the rendering of a subject's interior aspect. As elsewhere in this thesis, I am inclined to avoid interpretations of this technique which are based on the assumption of realism of depiction, and so believe that the banding does not represent internal structure in any of these examples. While offering any other interpretation may be just as tenuous, looking at the use of a similar technique in another form of art may indicate something more about its meaning, or the reasons for its use.

John Betts (1973: 328), in a discussion of ships in Minoan seal art, described the convention in late Minoan art in which seals were filled, or as Betts put it, "cluttered", with tooth patterns, points, and diagonal lines within the working space and around the main subjects. In some ways, this resembles the abhorrence of unfilled space within working areas characteristic of many Viking artists and patrons. In both these widely separated contexts, this preference has led to confusion in the modern interpretation of detail. While seeing parallels between this convention in Minoan seal art, and the other examples of "banded" ships of the Bronze Age Mediterranean may be unwise, it is interesting to see the recurrence of the same or similar technique within a geographical and chronological area.

While it seems reasonable to accept Blegen's view that the Dramesi stones and their graffiti were not reused from another site, I feel that his suggestion linking them directly with the Trojan war is difficult to accept, however romantic and appealing this notion may be. Lucien Basch identified the ships as early bulk transports, with the exception of one subject, which he believed was intended to represent a military vessel (1987: 143-4). Both Blegen and Basch worked from the assumption that the ship graffiti were intended to represent historic ships in an identifiable manner. I have already considered the problems which this assumption may cause, and the reason

why I believe it is unsafe in the context of ancient art, particularly where the images' physical context has associations with symbolic or ritual behaviour. It will be recalled that the Dramesi material may have had associations with a tomb.

There are closer links between the Enkomi and the Dramesi ship graffiti than there are between either group and the ships at Tarxien. Through their arrangement on their grounds and the spatial relationships between the subjects on the stones, the Enkomi and Dramesi images have a simple monumental or even commemorative quality which is not as clearly seen in the chaotic, overlaid Tarxien graffiti. Perhaps this difference is best expressed in terms of the time factor: the Enkomi and Dramesi graffiti seem to be the products of a single event, and also express that by their stylistic and compositional coherence. The relative simplicity of their imagery strongly suggests that they commemorate or record a single event or individual. The Tarxien group, however, seems very likely to have been the product of on-going activity over a long period of time, and, as such, cannot be said to have been intended to represent an isolated occurrence or person. The absence of inscriptions on any of the stones, however, makes these observations impossible to confirm. However, the three sites are united by strong similarities between various aspects of their use, and the site at Kiushu may also be added to this group, in that the making of images of ships may have accompanied burials.

At many points in this study, I have criticised nautical experts for attempting to interpret the images' form and detail as though it were photographically realistic, and, as I have stated several times, my concern about this sort of interpretation is based on the difficulty in making such an assumption about visual imagery produced in the ancient world. Two points, however, do emerge from this discussion which indicate ways in which ship graffiti may be used to provide a different sort of information. The first point is a specific one. In two examples described above, the Dramesi and Tarxien graffiti, it is possible to observe the use of an artistic technique, the filling in

of an outline with parallel lines, which may be linked to a technique which was widely used in contemporary formal art. Furthermore, the abbreviated or schematic style used to make a number of the graffito images discussed here may be observed elsewhere in formal art, as a means of expressing complex levels of meaning. It would seem from the images described here that the transmission of ideas or fashions between formal art and graffiti may be hypothesized, the images described here may be said to provide examples of it.

The second point relates to the more general area of human behaviour. By considering the available information about the sites in each example, and observing the similarities in both the assemblage of artefacts, and the type of use which unites several sites, some intriguing observations may be made about human behaviour in the past. These observations involve the use of a particular image, the ship, in a particular context, on standing stones, in a particular association, with human burials, at a number of sites from as different cultures as Bronze Age Malta and Neolithic Japan. If we are to ignore the possibility of teleconnections, it seems that there may be grounds for considering these images and the sites in which they appear as evidence for remarkably widespread and time-transgressive human behaviour.

At the beginning of this chapter, I described my intention to look in more detail at the artefactual aspect of ancient pictorial graffiti, blending that with artistic analysis, to explore a little further the potential which these types of interpretation have to offer the study of ship graffiti. In the next chapter, I will consider a particular example which illustrates a problem which has links with graffito imagery as both art and artefact, but whose importance for graffiti studies has been underestimated.

Chapter 9: The Jonathan's Cave boat carving: a problem of contexts.

The emphasis throughout this study has been on the importance of attempting to interpret ancient ship graffiti from a multi-disciplinary point of view, focussing not only on the evidence offered by the image itself, but also on the relationships which it has with its physical and cognitive contexts. As I noted at the end of the last chapter, a developing theme through these discussions has been on the importance of identifying the graffiti as both art and artefact, on the interdependency of these aspects, and on the significance of understanding the image in these terms.

Having advocated the use of contextual interpretation throughout the second half of this study, my aim in this chapter is to use a detailed examination of the various contexts of a particular image to demonstrate a particular problem, the question of authenticity, which may arise in the course of contextual analysis. This question is often considered by art historians who use ancient visual imagery, and in particular formal art, as technical or historical sources, but less commonly by nautical historians and archaeologists. It is a truism to state that the matter is of central importance to the usefulness of any image as a reference artefact. Pictorial graffiti are very much the "poor relations" in the wider category of visual imagery in these terms, however, in that there seems to be an assumption among those academics who have a dismissive attitude to graffiti that no one would take the trouble to forge or counterfeit an ancient graffiti. It would seem to be unsafe to be too confident of this. Before developing this discussion, it is important to note briefly the enormous complexity which is involved in the question of authenticity, as well as the fact that an image or artefact's authenticity can seldom be established by the testing of only one of its artistic attributes or a single aspect of its history. In an attempt to explore the many issues

which are involved in the example discussed in this chapter, it is necessary to consider a wide range of material.

The image which I will focus on for this discussion is the representation of a ship which is found on the wall of Jonathan's Cave, at East Wemyss on the south coast of Fife (fig. 9.1). This ship carving is frequently referred to in academic discussions, having appeared in studies of the possible form, use, and distribution of ships in prehistory (Lethbridge 1952: 124; Johnstone 1964: 282; 1980: 152-153, fig. 11.17), as well as in an inventory of prehistoric rock art in Britain (Morris 1989: 55, 69, 88), studies of Pictish art (Ritchie and Stevenson 1993: 203-8; Ritchie and Fraser 1994: 6), and Pictish history (Foster 1996: 102).

The Jonathan's cave ship carving is rather different, in size, form, technique, and physical context from the other graffito images which have been used as examples in the preceding chapters. Its physical associations in the site where it is found, such as ancient incised symbols and figures, give *prima facie* support to its identification as another example of the ancient imagery which is found in the cave. The ship represented in the carving has a simple form: a roughly symmetrical hull with high stem and stern posts, five oars, and a helmsman (or woman, from the image's pronounced breast line) shown grasping a steering oar. It is the largest image in Jonathan's cave, measuring 88 cm (2 ft 11 in) in length, and is at adult eye level on the rock, approximately 170 cm from the present level of the floor of the cave to the centre of the carving. It has been pecked into the rock wall of a cave with considerable confidence and precision, and the overall effect of the subject and the technique which has been used to represent it is that of a very early picture of an ancient ship. With the aid of cross lighting it is possible to see this pecking, particularly in the centre of the hull and along the oars; under the same conditions flaking may also be seen at various points along the subject's outline (fig. 9.2). The ship's *intaglio* technique, with which it has been completely cut into the rock surface,



Fig. 9.1 The Jonathan's Cave ship carving. Photograph by Martin Dean and Liz le Bon 1992.



Fig. 9.2 The bow of the Jonathan's cave ship, showing pecking and flaking. Photograph by Martin Dean and Liz le Bon 1992.

is unique among the rest of the cave's images and symbols; I will return to this matter further on in this discussion.

To modern eyes, the image is "right" in the sense of meeting present day expectations of ancient art, and within the context of Jonathan's cave, in the company of many other clearly early works, it easily convinces viewers that it is what it appears to be. Paul Johnstone (1980: 152) readily accepted it as the representation of a Pictish boat, and T.C. Lethbridge (*ibid* : 124) even considered the possibility that the carving dated from the Bronze age. Before looking more closely at the problems which it actually offers nautical historians, archaeologists and art historians, however, it is important to consider the image's physical context.

There are seven caves at East Wemyss, cut into sandstone by the sea in prehistory, and now under threat of destruction from coastal erosion. In compiling an exhaustive inventory and interpretation of Scotland's early art, J. Romilly Allen and Joseph Anderson described the site and noted that they had found five of the Wemyss caves to be decorated (1903: 370) . All but one are named, but there has been considerable confusion about these names over a long period of time. It is likely that some of the caves have been renamed over the course of time, and that local usage still uses different names for the same caves. An example of this may be found in the Jonathan's cave itself, which was until relatively recently known as the Factor's cave. Occasional mention is made of a well in Jonathan's cave in discussions of East Wemyss, (for example, by Findlay 1924) but as no sign of such a feature is visible today it seems likely that Jonathan's cave was being confused with its near neighbour to the west, the Well cave, which contains a natural well. Some of the confusion about the caves' names is also obvious in the antiquarian literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, (in Maclagan 1876: 107-9, for example) and the relevance of this problem to a study of the Jonathan's cave carving will be discussed below.

A number of the East Wemyss caves are now inaccessible, or dangerous through rock falls, and one, the Michael cave, was filled with concrete in 1929, to provide a base for a new boiler at the nearby Michael colliery. Tantalisingly, before the work began this cave was found to contain two images which appeared to date from prehistory, and which were photographed and drawn at the time of the cave's destruction. One was a simple cup and ring mark, and the other was a curious, complex arrangement of pecks (this is illustrated, fig. 9.3). When these were connected together with chalk lines by the cave's investigators, an image emerged which was interpreted at the time as a hunting scene, and was shown to the Abbé Breuil. It is an interesting measure of the growing esteem in which the caves' art was held that such a discovery was reported to the foremost contemporary authority on prehistoric art. While it is difficult to form a clear impression of the image from the photograph which was published (Edwards 1933: 164-175; fig. 7), there would appear to be some problems involved both in interpreting what it represents, and in assigning a possible date to it. This example embodies a group of problems which beset the interpretation of the caves' carvings, and which will be discussed through this chapter. At this point, it is important to note the issues of uncertain interpretation and dating, as well as the growing attention which the cave's images were attracting, as a preliminary to the consideration of another image in the East Wemyss group.

The caves' site borders the Firth of Forth, one of northern Britain's most important seaways, making them easily accessible to people using this major waterway over many millenia. It is important to note that the Forth is certain to have been navigated by native British as well as foreign seamen, including Romans, Irish, and Vikings in the historic period, and also that the caves have been easily accessible by land as well as sea. The proximity of Roman military bases at both Crammond, on the south side of the Forth, and Carpow, on the south side of the Tay, indicates an important interval of cultural influences on the indigenous people. It is also likely that another sort of



Fig. 9.3 Above, the representational image found at the Michael Cave; below, a photograph of the same image, enhanced with ink. Edwards 1933.

invader, Christian missionaries, brought attitudes and fashions with them, as well as a spiritual message, which made a significant impact on ordinary life. The potential contribution of these visitors cannot be quantified, but must at least be considered in any evaluation of the identity and use of the site as a whole, and of the art and artefacts which are found in the caves.

Human activity in the caves at East Wemyss is evident in the large number of motifs, representational, geometric, and written, which are found incised into the sandstone walls of a number of the caves in the chain. These symbols and figures were brought to the attention of the antiquarian community in Edinburgh by Sir James Simpson, who visited the caves in the summer of 1865 and presented a paper describing their carvings to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in early January of the following year. Simpson had recognized many of the carvings he saw in the caves as having parallels with some of the material which had been described and illustrated by John Stuart in the first volume of his study *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, which had been published in 1856. The friendly rivalry between Simpson and Stuart in terms of reporting previously unrecognized carvings is clear in a biography of Simpson written by Professor J. Duns, which contains an account of the 1865 visit. Duns accompanied him on a number of his expeditions, and was present on the trip to Fife (1873: 435).

A visit to the caves today provides the student of graffiti with an extraordinary experience of a wide range of informal visual imagery and inscriptions, with examples of aerosol painted declarations of love juxtaposed with ancient non-representational symbols and fantastic beasts. Interspersed with these motifs are incised and dated initials of more recent passersby, as well as records of other earlier visitors such as an early nineteenth century naval cannon, incised on a wall of Jonathan's cave. It is the absence of material with strong ritual associations both in the archaeology of the site itself and in the imagery found there, and the large accumulation of all types of

pictures, which has led me to apply the term " graffiti " to the caves' art. Not all of the work in the caves can be categorized this way, however; indications of the caves' use by early Christians may be seen in numerous small crosses cut into the stone, and these should be interpreted as evidence of a different sort of human behaviour than casual image making.

It is important to note that not all of the carvings in Jonathan's cave are what they appear to be, and at least two apparently ancient pictures have been challenged by modern historians. One of the two salmon on the cave's west wall has been shown to be a modern image (Ritchie and Stevenson 1993: 204), and the animal variously described as a dog or horse has been queried, on stylistic grounds, by Charles Thomas (1963: 31-97). Clearly it is impossible to determine the motivation of the artists of these two questionable carvings, and to understand whether they intended to deceive modern viewers, or were simply inspired by the other work in the cave and wished to emulate it. Whatever their motivation, these two images provide evidence of ongoing decoration of the cave using styles and subject matter which are not necessarily modern, indicating that the caves have been, and continue to be, open to those who wish to add to the existing assemblage in whatever style they choose.

Jonathan's cave is also remarkable for containing several groups of manmade marks, somewhat resembling ogham script but lacking a stem line. These appear to be intentional, but their significance is unknown. There is a potential parallel for them in marks cut on a rock at Tollard House (R.C.A.H.M.S. 1992 *Argyll, an Inventory of the Monuments* 7: 529, No. 288. I am very grateful to Dr. Graham Ritchie for drawing this example to my attention). It may be possible to date these marks to the Bronze age (Katherine Forsyth pers.comm.1993). Their significance in terms of the ship carving in Jonathan's cave will be considered in more detail later in this discussion.

Many more functional items are found throughout the East Wemyss caves as well: numerous "holdfasts" had been dug to leave a small stone bridge around which a rope or tether could be fastened. Sockets and niches have been cut into the caves' walls and are often easily visible, and it is likely that these had a structural purpose. Also, in the Doo cave (as its name suggests), a complex arrangement of roosts was dug into the walls to provide housing for a large number of pigeons, possibly for use by the residents of Macduff's castle, whose ruins overlook the caves. Several of the caves have rock ledges or shelves within them which may have been exploited for various purposes in the past; for example, the bench-like seam of rock near the entrance to the Gasworks cave has a hemispheric mortar cut into it. Even as recently as the 1870's this mortar was found to contain traces of grain (MacLagan *ibid.*: 108), indicating the ongoing use of the caves by local people, and also perhaps the fairly stable environment in some of the caves. The surfaces of the walls near the entrances to the caves are encrusted with lichen and moss; the dark interior walls are damp but free from growth.

The interior of Jonathan's cave has two prominent stone ledges, one at ground level which resembles a bed, and an overhanging one on the cave's east wall which is approximately 1m 20cm (nearly 4 ft.) from the level of its floor. It is on the vertical face of this shelf that the ship is carved. The opposing, west wall of the cave is richly decorated with motifs and inscriptions, a placement which has an obvious logic because the angle of the entrance of the cave causes this wall to be in indirect light for most of the day, while the east wall is always in deep shadow. It is possible to find a few broken holdfasts on this wall (one of which is continuous with the upper part of the ship carving's stern), but extensive searches have revealed no other manmade features, except some modern painted graffiti, on this side of the cave. I will return to the significance of this point.

Because the caves have been open from prehistory to the present day, dating the carvings and other manmade features within the caves at East Wemyss has provided historians with considerable problems. Charles Thomas (*ibid.*) has proposed that Pictish cave art preceded and overlapped Class I field monuments, and to accept this theory would be to assign early Iron age dates to the carvings. However, archaeological work conducted elsewhere in Fife has indicated the very lengthy period of human use of the area, before the Pictish period, for example finding traces of Mesolithic communities occupying sites seasonally and apparently exploiting maritime resources (described, for example, by Coles 1971: 284-366). It must be noted that Mackie's experimental excavations in front of the Well cave and Jonathan's cave in 1980, (1986: 74-77) did not reveal mesolithic use in the areas he considered, but indicated five phases of use in prehistory and history through the Iron age in these sites. The likelihood of use of the East Wemyss caves long preceding the Pictish period cannot be ruled out, nor can the possibility that at least some of the motifs, and adaptations of natural features within the caves, reflect this lengthy and extensive occupation, rather than dating to one specific period in history. The ogham-like marks in Jonathan's cave which were mentioned earlier in this chapter would seem to provide a useful example of this point. There are other incised marks in the caves which appear to be very early: one schematic vulval symbol on the west wall of Jonathan's cave, for example, has strong parallels with similar images in prehistoric French cave art (discussed, for example, by Bahn 1986: 99-120). The development of scientific dating methods to establish the age of rock carvings (Bednarik 1992: 279-291; 1995: 877-883, *inter al.*) will provide an important tool in the interpretation and authentication of the East Wemyss carvings, as studies such as this particular discussion, which attempt to consider one subject in terms of its artistic, technological, and historic context, are severely hampered by the lack of secure dating. It is important to note, however, that modern interaction with the Wemyss caves images, such as using chalk to demonstrate them or taking resin casts as part of

recording procedures, may have spoilt their surfaces and their potential suitability for sophisticated analysis.

Ships are very rare subjects in pre-Medieval British rock carving, the only other example in Scotland being found on St Orland's stone, at Cossans, near Glamis. Analysing the Jonathan's cave boat carving would have been much easier if there had been a corpus of ship imagery with which to compare it. The Cossans ship is not a simple image, but is part of a highly conventionalized artistic statement conveying, in all likelihood, an important Christian message, and it is essential to use caution in separating it from its physical and compositional contexts in order to interpret it. The lines of its hull, for example, may well have been largely dictated by the working space available on the stone amidst its other motifs and borders. As I have described elsewhere in this study in terms of other ancient imagery, it is unsafe to assume that the boat carved on the Cossans stone is a naturalistic representation, in every detail, of an historic ship. Furthermore, comparisons between a subject depicted in Dark age monumental art, and one in a cave which is likely to have been decorated and used opportunistically over many thousands of years, may be both difficult and unsafe.

It is possible to find ship motifs on medieval grave slabs on the west coast of Scotland (described by Steer and Bannerman 1977), but these examples are too far removed from the form and style of the Jonathan's cave boat to provide useful parallels. Early Christian monumental stones and crosses in Ireland contain a number of ships among their subjects, discussed by Paul Johnstone (1964: 277-284). Like the Cossans ship, however, these are strongly conventionalized representations which are difficult to relate to the Jonathan's cave ship. However, among these, the boat carved on the Bantry pillar (Johnstone *ibid.*) bears some resemblance to the Jonathan's cave ship in being double ended, unrigged, and with four oars and a helmsman at what is possibly a stern rudder. Other early pictures of ships found in British contexts include those on the Alectus coins (Dove 1971: 15-20) but they provide no satisfactory comparisons in

their style, form, or probable date. Also, the shape of the coins which these images decorate may have had important effects on the representations themselves. The Jarlshof ship graffiti, which I have described elsewhere in this study, may be said to provide approximate parallels for the Jonathan's cave ship, but only in that one graffito in particular exhibits a similar hull profile (fig. 9.4), rather than in any aspects of style or technique.

The form and proportions of the Jonathan's cave ship's hull provide nautical historians and archaeologists with a considerable challenge. It is very difficult to place the Jonathan's cave ship carving confidently within a context of early British shipbuilding, through the difficulty in finding examples of ships depicted in art which provide satisfactory parallels for it, and also, just as important, because of the problems in relating it to ships in the local archaeological record. These problems are greatly compounded by the impossibility of accurately dating the carvings in the cave. Also, the carving's artist has made no attempt to indicate the type of construction of the hull, clinker or skin, for example, nor has he represented such details as the shape of the blades of the oars or rudder, details which might have assisted in the search for a shipbuilding tradition in which to place the ship. There would seem to be no aspect of the image which would support Foster's assertion (1996: 102) that the Jonathan's cave ship was built of wood, as opposed, for example, to it being the representation of a skin boat. The image is the simple, *intaglio* form of a distinctively shaped hull, propelled by five oars, and steered from the stern by a helmsman, and it is those details which must provide the basis for any investigation of the shipbuilding tradition which the image may depict.

The photographer and amateur antiquarian, John Patrick, used the term " Viking " to describe the ship in his first notice of his discovery of the carving (1906: 37-47) , and it is certainly to Northern Europe, in particular Scandinavia, that a search for similar hull profiles in the archaeological record leads. It is interesting to note, however, that

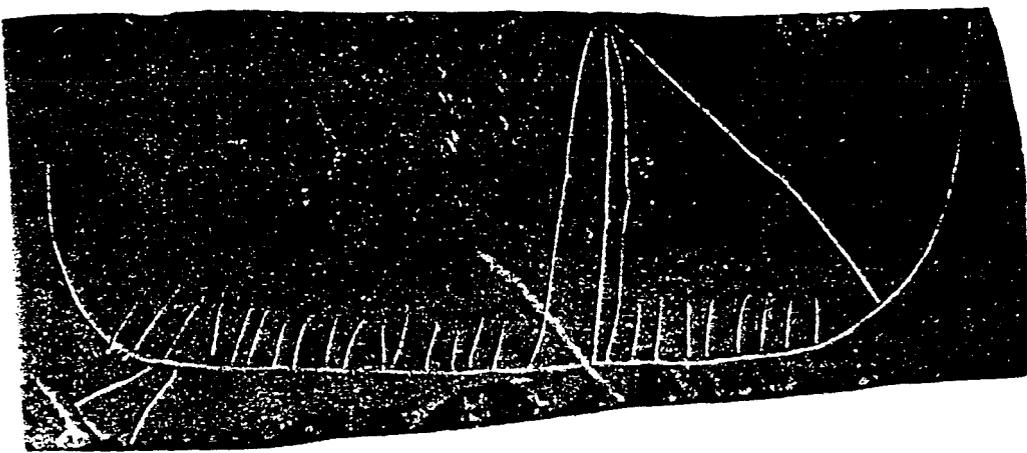


Fig. 9.4 One of the Jarlshof ship graffiti. Curle 1934-35.

Patrick's description should be understood in the context of his pet theory, shared by at least one other contemporary antiquarian (Southesk 1893) that the Pictish symbols and other carvings were Scandinavian in origin. If a Dark age, rather than an earlier date for the carving is surmised, then it is possible to find examples of small to medium sized hulls with high, symmetrical stem and sternposts, and without mast and rigging in the archaeological records of Scandinavia and the Viking colonies; in fact, one form of the classical, almost stereotypical Viking ship is expressed in these characteristics. For example, the Arby ship (Arbman, Greenhill, Roberts 1993), from Sweden and dated to approximately 850-950 AD, is a small, unrigged, " five plank " boat propelled by oars, with shortened versions of the high stem and sternposts seen in the Jonathan's cave ship. The eighth century Kvalsund ship, as well as the larger Nydam ship, discovered in northern Germany in 1863, somewhat resemble the Jonathan's cave ship; also, a boat model discovered in the excavations at Viking Dublin (Christensen 1988: 21) could be said to exemplify this particular type of profile, although its incurving prow and short sternpost distinguish it from the Jonathan's cave boat. Other examples from the Dark Age such as the Graveney boat (Fenwick 1978; Greenhill and Morrison 1995: 214), do not provide sound parallels for the Jonathan's cave ship through their lack of all but the most superficial resemblances, that is, being double ended and unrigged.

Scandinavian rock carvings of ships may be found which have been pecked or pounded into stone to produce a shape which was fully recessed into stone (a particularly fine example is illustrated by Coles 1993: pl.5.3; illustrated fig. 9.5). These carvings are dated, through their similarity to decoration on metal objects, to the early Bronze age (Coles and Harding 1979: 317). While it is possible to see some resemblance between examples of these images and the Jonathan's cave ship, there are important differences between them in both the representation of detail and in types of sites in which they are found. The form of the human figure, the placement of the oars, and the representation of many of the Scandinavian hulls as having separate keel



Fig. 9.5 Scandinavian ship carving using the excavated or *intaglio* technique.
Coles 1993.

and gunwale lines, and lines connecting the two, are all characteristics which are not seen in the Jonathan's cave ship. Furthermore, the type of sites selected by the artists for the carvings themselves, that is, the wall of a cave as opposed to a boulder on open ground, are notably different.

It would seem to have been the similarities of hull form and artistic technique in the Scandinavian ships, however, which led T.C. Lethbridge (*op.cit.*) to suggest that the Jonathan's cave ship could conceivably be dated to the Bronze age. However, in the absence of any other similar imagery found in Scotland, or of archaeological remains which would support a theory of nearby Bronze age habitation or some Scandinavian presence, however brief, it would seem to be unsafe to see the Jonathan's cave ship as the work of a Bronze age Scandinavian artist. It would be unwise to imply that a Bronze age date is completely out of the question for the Jonathan's cave carving, however, and before leaving this point, it is important to recall that there are intentional markings in Jonathan's cave which appear to have parallels with marks which may possibly date from the Bronze age in Argyll, which were noted above. The fact that these markings are non-representational means that they are less convincing as evidence to support a Bronze age date for the ship carving than if they depicted subjects, but they do indicate the presence in the cave of people, possibly from the Bronze age, who made marks on its walls.

Alexander Okorkov's recent publication of discoveries of log boats in Russia (1994) contains illustrations of early rock carvings depicting boats, most of which have been pecked into stone. One (plate 19, fig.1; fig. 9.6) resembles the Jonathan's cave ship in both the form of the hull depicted, and in the technique which has been used to represent the subject. As with the Bronze age Scandinavian rock carvings of ships, however, such far flung and early parallels may not be useful in an attempt to find a shipbuilding tradition for an image on the south coast of Fife. Furthermore, as I have already mentioned, it is important to bear in mind that the concrete evidence for a

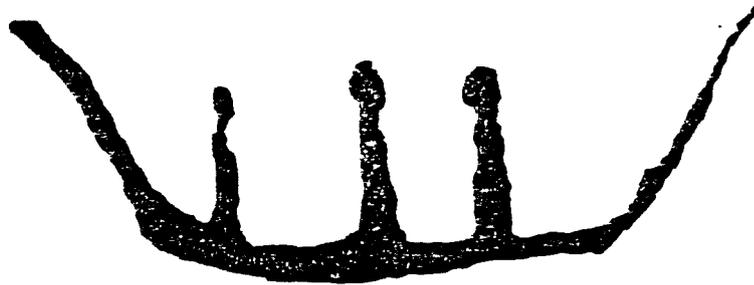


Fig. 9.6 Early rock carving of a boat found in Russia. Okorkov 1994.

particular type of nautical technology which the Jonathan's cave ship offers is very slight, and that the similarities between it and the examples which I have described above can only be seen as relatively superficial.

Other subjects may be found in Jonathan's cave which have patches of *intaglio* within their outlines (le Bon 1992: figs. 3a, 3b), but by comparing photographs taken in 1902 with the present condition of these motifs, it is clear that these areas are modern alterations (fig. 9.7). It comes as a surprise on examining a recent index of Pictish art (Ritchie and Fraser 1994) to discover how relatively uncommon fully excavated or *intaglio* subjects are in Dark age Scottish rock carving. Although an extended discussion of the techniques used in Pictish rock carving must remain outside the boundaries of this study, it is perhaps safest to note that some excavated subjects are known within Scottish rock art, but are confined to caves. (I am very grateful to Dr. Graham Ritchie for his comments and suggestions on this problem). However, comparing the Jonathan's cave ship with other figurative subjects in Pictish art, realized either by incised lines or in varying degrees of relief carving, gives one an odd sense of looking at an image represented in negative.

Not only is it difficult to locate the Jonathan's cave ship satisfactorily in a particular context of nautical technology, but placing the image in an artistic context is also problematic. Indeed, the problems which are encountered in the search for a technological context are almost identical to those found in trying to identify it artistically. The search for both of these contexts, as I described above, is greatly complicated by the lack of even an approximate date for the image. Some rough parallels can be found, but at a considerable distance from the Jonathan's cave ship in both time and geography. The absence of material, either artistic or archaeological, with which to assist in understanding the Jonathan's cave ship carving, therefore leaves the image very much in isolation.



Fig. 9.7 An animal carved on the wall of Jonathan's Cave showing evidence of tampering between 1902 (above, photograph taken by John Patrick) and 1992 (below, photograph by Martin Dean and Liz le Bon)

The ship carving has been identified with the Picts only through its close proximity to Pictish symbols which are also present in Jonathan's cave, through the assumption in the mind of the viewer that one style of art exemplified in one site must necessarily account for other images present in the site. Had it been found in isolation, that is without the surrounding imagery which is so closely linked with early Pictish culture, the difficulties which it poses modern interpreters seeking to find parallels for it would perhaps have been more obvious, and more creative explanations would have been found to account for it, than simply declaring it to be an example of a Pictish ship. The dearth of information about Pictish ships has allowed these assumptions to continue, and to encourage the ongoing mention of the Jonathan's cave ship in discussions of Pictish nautical technology.

However, the carving has evoked Scandinavian ships in the minds of those viewers with experience of seeing pictures of prehistoric Nordic or Viking ships of a wide range of dates, or those, like John Patrick, who were interested in proving a theory of Scandinavian influence on early rock carving in Scotland. The search for contexts for the hull profile, as well as the art, of the Jonathan's cave ship has not only highlighted again the problems of the subjectivity and expectations of the modern viewer in viewing and interpreting ancient art which were discussed earlier in this study, but also some significant difficulties in terms of understanding where the image belongs, as it were, in the wider fields of technology and art.

Researching the history and early accounts of the Jonathan's cave ship carving raises further questions. As was described earlier in this discussion, the East Wemyss caves have been the subject of antiquarian and historical interest since Sir James Simpson's announcement of his discovery of their carved symbols and figures in a public lecture in 1866. This account was followed by a discussion of the caves' carvings in the wider context of ancient British stone carvings, which was published

by Simpson the following year. In this account, Simpson described a curious carving which he located in the Doo cave,

" On one of the smooth portions of the wall in the Doo cave a large anomalous figure is cut, two feet nine inches long, consisting of a large excavated irregular head - if we may term it so - an elongated body, and six limbs stretching downwards from it to the length of six or nine inches each. This forms the largest individual sculpture, but its shape and contour are most indeterminate. Perhaps it is intended as the figure of a boat; or possibly it is meant to represent some of those anomalous serpents or monsters which are occasionally found on the sculptured stones, as on those of Strathmartin and Meigle." (1867: 167-8).

Unfortunately, Simpson did not include an illustration of this feature, whose measurements are within 1-2 cm. (approximately 1 in.) of those of the ship carving which is the subject of this discussion, as it exists today. It is also important to note here that Simpson appears to have been the only antiquarian who surveyed the caves to have described this feature, which is remarkable bearing in mind the measurements which he gave for it. There has been at least one major rock fall in the Doo cave since the nineteenth century which has destroyed some carvings (Ritchie and Stevenson 1993: 203), and a possible explanation for this difficulty is that the "anomalous figure" was lost at this time.

John Stuart (1867) incorporated a more comprehensive description, with illustrations, of the Wemyss caves' carvings and adaptations such as holdfasts in the second volume of his survey *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, and Christian Maclagan, "lady associate of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland", described her own investigations of the caves in 1876. It is interesting to note that she took the precaution of having the caves' walls cleaned of moss and lichen before her survey, although whether this was standard practice in antiquarian cave surveys is unclear. The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland commissioned a comprehensive survey of all carved stones and other monuments, whether previously recorded or not, which was compiled and

published by J. Romilly Allen and Joseph Anderson in 1903. This study is remarkable, not only for the detailed and meticulous approach of its authors, but also for the use of photography wherever possible for its illustrations. It is very surprising, therefore, to find that not only is the Jonathan's cave ship carving absent from Allen and Anderson's catalogue, but it is also absent from all of the other antiquarian studies which had been published through the latter half of the nineteenth century. Its absence from Stuart's survey of 1867 is particularly remarkable because of the fact that Stuart included the caves' holdfasts in his survey. Referring to the distribution of holdfasts in Jonathan's cave, Stuart noted, " There are also some on the east [wall, on which the ship carving is found today], but no other sculpture is to be found on this side." (1867: xcii). At the beginning of this discussion, I described the large, broken holdfast which is continuous with the stern of the ship carving; if Stuart had observed this prominent feature in examining the cave's east wall, he could not have failed to see the ship carving which is so closely associated with it. Christian Maclagan's account of the caves, although very brief, supports Stuart's observations of this wall, when she wrote of the carvings, " We found none on its eastern side." (1876: 107).

It was only in 1906, with John Patrick's notice of the ship carving in his series of papers on the caves at East Wemyss, that the carving was described and recorded by measurement and photography. Patrick struggled to explain the carving's absence from the previous inventories of the caves' art, noting (1906: 42) that Simpson had seen a figure in the Doo cave which, superficially, resembled the ship carving, but that he had failed to recognize it as a boat. The photograph which Patrick included with his paper shows the boat in very nearly its present form, complete with helmsman. Had this distinctly human figure, its arm continuous with the steering oar, been present in the anomalous figure described by Simpson in 1867, it seems extremely improbable that he would have been in any doubt about identifying it, or hesitated for a moment between "monster", "boat", or "serpent". It is difficult to ignore the

similarities between Simpson's figure, however, and the form of the boat carving as it is today, and that it was not recorded by other visitors to the caves and is unavailable today only increase the mystery surrounding it and its relationship to the ship carving. While Simpson was apparently certain that what he saw was manmade, it is worth noting again Sieveking's caution, discussed in the previous chapter (*op.cit*) about the danger of interpreting natural features of flakes and fissures as early cave art.

It is possible that the anomalous figure was not located in the Doo cave, but in Jonathan's cave, and that Simpson, an Edinburgh man, unfamiliar with the East Wemyss area, simply confused the names of the caves in writing up his notes. The ongoing confusion about the names of the caves was described at the beginning of this chapter, a confusion which was also obvious in some of the antiquarian literature of the last century. Furthermore, in describing "sculpturings", Simpson often grouped carvings from one particular site together and related them to one another in terms of their style and subject, but the anomalous figure is described in isolation. Attempts to find his antiquarian notebooks to settle this issue have so far proved unsuccessful. (Frustratingly, this search revealed a letter to Simpson, in the possession of the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh, which described a set of photographs of the Fife caves taken in 1866 by a Captain Playfair. These photographs might have provided more information about the carvings which were present in the caves in the mid nineteenth century, but they appear to have been lost.)

If the ship carving did not present the problems in locating artistic and technological contexts which it does, Simpson's anomalous figure would occupy an uncontroversial position as another feature of the Wemyss caves, accessible during the last century but now lost. However, its remarkable similarities to the ship carving in both form and measurements cannot be ignored, and enhance the atmosphere of doubt surrounding the ship which arises from its apparent isolation in Insular art and technology, by hinting at a possible source or inspiration for the carving as we know it today. Except

for a brief period in the early part of the 1990's when the entrance to the cave was barred, Jonathan's cave has been accessible to the public, and this has led to the alteration of the existing images, as in the case of the patches of *intaglio* which have appeared over the course of this century on the animal described and illustrated above, and addition to their number with "forged" antiquities and new graffiti. The form and size of the anomalous figure would seem to suggest the possibility that it provided the basis of an image in the style of an ancient Scandinavian ship.

The failure of the antiquarians to describe the carving may only be explained in one of two ways: first, that the carving was there but was overlooked, and second, that the carving was not there to be seen, at least in the form we know it today, and appeared in its present form after Allen and Anderson's survey, eventually published in 1903, and before Patrick's reported visit to and photographs of the cave in 1902, published in 1906. The first option would have to take into consideration the fact that the nineteenth century antiquarians who visited the cave, although amateur, were highly experienced observers and recorders of small carvings in dim recesses, and friendly rivalries often existed between them regarding tabulating the imagery in particular sites. Furthermore, one antiquarian, Christian Maclagan, took the trouble to have the walls of Jonathan's cave cleaned of lichen and moss before her survey. As I have noted, above, Stuart's omission of the ship carving from his account of the cave is most perplexing, in view of his description of the holdfasts, and his report of " no other sculpture " on the cave's east wall, a statement which is supported by a similar one from Maclagan nine years later.

The second option, that the carving was not there to be seen, in its present form, until the early years of this century, allows for a number of possibilities. These range from identifying the carving as a late Victorian graffiti, which was created *ab initio* at some point in the early twentieth century, to seeing it as an ancient image which was retouched by latter-day artists to create something which was immediately

recognizeable as a boat, but had previously baffled an expert antiquarian. This latter possibility, seeing Simpson's anomalous figure as the antecedent of the present day carving, would have to incorporate the existence of a confusion in Simpson's mind between the Doo and Jonathan's caves. The enhancement, however radical, of an existing image may not have been done through any intention to deceive and in a spirit of hoax or forgery, but through a desire to make more readily visible what an enthusiast believed he or she saw. It is also possible, however, that such an image could have been made with the specific intention of using an ancient style, technique, and form in order to mislead later students of the cave's art, for a wide variety of reasons.

The question of forgery is a complex one. The last years of the nineteenth century saw the appearance of a number of hoaxes in archaeology in Scotland, some of which were brought to light by Robert Munro in his book *Archaeology and False Antiquities* (1905). While this work drew particular attention to the addition of forged artefacts to excavations, he also discussed the problem of forgery in the wider context of Victorian and Edwardian prehistoric archaeology. Few and poor analytical procedures existed to enable artefacts to be tested, and even where deception did not exist or was unintentional, the periods to which poorly or totally undocumented artefacts were attributed may have been erroneous. As I have noted above, to some extent this state of affairs still exists where early rock carvings are concerned, and will continue to do so until scientific methods of dating this art are reliably developed.

My aim in this chapter was not only to demonstrate that there is some question concerning the authenticity of the Jonathan's cave ship carving, but, more generally, that the detailed examination of the various contexts of a particular image may lead to the consideration of some unexpected possibilities. The question of modern

assumptions about ancient imagery has come up in several different forms in this discussion, from those concerning the date and culture which produced a large group of symbols and motifs in an open site, to a picture's origins and identity through the influence of other visual imagery in its physical context. The detailed examination of an image's form, artistic technique, relationships to other possibly contemporary imagery, and its more modern history in terms of its appearance in surveys and inventories, may challenge some of these assumptions and lead to a new view of the image's place as a reference artefact.

This chapter concludes the series of examples which aimed to illustrate some of the issues which were raised in the earlier, theoretical discussions. The next, and final chapter will work toward a series of conclusions.

Chapter 10. Conclusions.

The focus of this study has been on the depiction of one particular subject, the ship, in a type of visual imagery, pictorial graffiti, which may be found running as a common strand throughout human behaviour from the remote past to the present day. My primary intention in undertaking the present investigation was to examine some of the problems arising from traditional academic use of graffiti images of ships from the ancient world as sources of information about nautical technology, and to consider ways in which these images might be better understood as documents of the past. In the initial stages of my research, it became clear that a case could be made that previous interpretations of ship graffiti often gave insufficient consideration to many aspects of these images which had a direct bearing on their interpretation. As work on the project proceeded, however, it became clear that something more than a negative critique might be attempted, and that it could be demonstrated not only that the potential of some of these graffiti may exceed their usual role as technological sources, but also that some might provide insights into other aspects of life in the past.

In order to explore these areas, it has been necessary to consider some more general questions relating to the nature and interpretation of pictorial graffiti, and also to draw on other areas of academic study which appeared to offer insights into aspects of these images which have not previously been examined. To this end, graffiti from many different regional and chronological groups have been discussed using a multi-disciplinary approach, and this method has been applied through the theoretical and practical sections of the study.

In the introduction, I gave a brief account of the academic use of pictorial graffiti in discussions and expositions of historical, archaeological, and nautical subjects since the middle of the last century. By including this summary at the outset of this study, I hoped to demonstrate not only the way in which these images, and in particular those representing ships, have been presented in academic studies, but also the underlying attitudes and assumptions which have shaped both the approaches and conclusions of these discussions. The dismissive, even disdainful attitudes of scholars such as G.G. Coulton (*op.cit.*) and W.A. Laidlaw (*op.cit.*), writing earlier this century, were also seen to be detectable in more recent use of pictorial graffiti which had neglected to consider some important aspects such as their archaeological, symbolic, artistic, and compositional contexts. Graffiti emerged from this early discussion as the "poor relations" of the art historical and archaeological worlds, their casual and informal characteristics having encouraged some academics who considered their place as evidence for ancient technology to use a similarly cursory or even superficial approach. Such an approach may overlook important material, either encoded in the images themselves or in their various contexts, which can have a direct relevance to their use in such disciplines as nautical history and archaeology. I have attempted to show that a more detailed and multi-disciplinary approach, which pays close attention to the interpretation of graffiti as both art and artefact, may allow a fuller understanding of the information which is encoded in them.

In an attempt to consider some of the many issues which are involved in both the making of early ship graffiti and their interpretation by later viewers, in the first chapters of this study I considered questions arising from such disciplines as art history, philosophy and psychology, in order to look at such issues as ancient and modern concepts of art, the basics of image making, and the distinction between pictorial graffiti and formal art. Aspects of the philosophy of interpretation, or hermeneutics, were discussed in terms of the various ways in which a later viewer might approach an early graffiti in attempting to understand its emergent meaning.

The abstract, or conceptual meaning of physical context for the people who created visual imagery was examined, an area with particular relevance to the study of graffiti. The problems which may be presented by the use of symbolism in pictorial graffiti were also discussed, and the impact of an artist's use of symbolic style and visual metaphor on the form of an early image were also examined. The related issues of insider knowledge and the subjectivity of the later viewer were considered in these discussions, as posing significant problems in the interpretation of a graffiti image which had possibly been created outside of the conventions of formal art but with some passing reference to them.

These discussions attempted to consider aspects of ancient pictorial graffiti which might have a relevance to their interpretation and use by later academics seeking information about life in the past, and in particular, about ships. The focus, however, at that stage in the thesis was on the graffiti as art; that is, as an aspect of the universal human activity of image making. The third chapter of the study, however, contained discussions of more practical questions, which concentrated on the identity of the ancient graffiti as an artefact, bearing traces of the activity of the processes which, through time, could alter the image from its original state. The importance of understanding the nature of these changes was explored, in part, in the discussion of a small group of examples. This shift in focus, from a purely artistic to a more artefactual analysis, was continued in subsequent discussions of the relationships between an image's meaning, and its physical and cognitive contexts. It was argued that the removal of a graffiti from its context (in the broadest sense of that word), as is still seen in some academic discussions, may destroy relationships with a bearing on both the form and meaning of the image, thereby jeopardizing its usefulness to those wishing to use it as a reference artefact.

In order to demonstrate the importance of some of the points which had been discussed in the first four chapters of this thesis, a group of sample studies was

included which provided illustrations of them. These studies ranged widely, from the possible use of a particular motif, the ship's prow, as an ideogram, to the link between the Karlby ship graffito and the artefact which it decorates as potential evidence for cognitive life in the past. The problems arising from the apparent lack of artistic context for an unusual technique of representation which was apparently used to create the Bryggen graffito were also examined. The relevance of interpreting symbolic context was considered in another example, the Oseberg graffito, which was found to have possible connections with a persistent classical myth, a link with implications for the interpretation of the ship's prow which is found among its subjects. The importance of understanding the whole composition in which a graffito image of a ship appears was also developed in this chapter. The emphasis in these discussions was mainly on the analysis of the graffiti's subjects, style, and technique, although the interplay of more artefactual questions with this interpretation was also considered. A recurring theme in the examination of many examples in the second section of this study was the dangers of the assumption of realism of depiction in ancient art.

The subsequent chapter considered the Enkomi, Tarxien, and Dramesi ship graffiti from a more practical or archaeological point of view, with the intention of exploring further the relationship between graffito imagery and its physical context. This discussion also considered the problems which may arise from the unquestioning use of an interpretive drawing of a graffito by later academics, without reference either to the image itself, or to high quality photographs of it. This example demonstrated the danger of the transmission of mistaken interpretations of the original image through later studies. A section of this chapter also explored possible evidence for a link between the use of a technique in contemporary formal art and some features of the ship graffiti at Tarxien and Dramesi.

The final chapter considered the question of authenticity, and was illustrated by the discussion of an example of the ship carving found at East Wemyss, Fife. While it is rare, if not unknown, to find questions of authenticity raised concerning ancient ship graffiti, certain aspects of this particular image indicated that there is reasonable doubt about its antecedents. It was hoped that this discussion showed that the possibility of forgery, often considered by art historians and archaeologists in terms of the interpretation of formal art and artefacts, should also be considered in studies of ancient pictorial graffiti.

At frequent points in this study, I have emphasized the importance of assessing the many contexts of particular graffiti, as a crucial part of interpreting their meaning and potential usefulness to present day historians and archaeologists. In order to draw together the observations and suggestions which have been made, it is appropriate here to examine in some detail what is meant by the term " context ", both at the theoretical level and in relation to the particular examples which have been discussed.

The word context describes the physical associations and situation of an artefact from the narrowest, most immediate circumstances of its deposit or occurrence (the material which surrounds it, its position within or on that material, and its associations with other artefacts or features in the same deposit), to the wider features of the site itself in relation to its identity and use. These include the geography and landscape of the whole site, for example, its proximity to river systems, mountains and sea coasts. Interpreting these many associations may be comparatively straightforward, where the artefact is found in an undisturbed deposit, or may be extremely difficult, where its physical associations are disturbed or lost altogether. As well as relating to the physical world, an artefact's context includes what might be described as the mental landscape in which it originated, its creator's religious beliefs and symbol system, understanding of the mechanisms of the natural and supernatural worlds, and knowledge of contemporary artistic styles and conventions and their meaning. Like physical

context, the concept of cognitive context may be said to have a narrow, immediate application, at the level of the individual, and a wider aspect, which is the cognitive world of his culture. The interpretation of cognitive context may pose the modern archaeologist considerable difficulties, particularly in dealing with images produced in those societies where little or no documentary evidence survives to supply information concerning their cosmology and patterns of belief and symbolism. Although it is convenient to discuss the broad categories of physical and cognitive context separately, it is important to note that they are intimately interrelated, and cannot be understood without reference to one another. Material remains, however they are defined or identified, must be understood in terms of their associations with the physical circumstances of their deposit, its wider relationship to the surrounding land, and, where possible, aspects of their design, manufacture, use, and symbolic value, in terms of their original culture's thought world.

Understanding the physical contexts and associations of pictorial graffiti from the widest, the geography and landscape of the sites where they are found, to the narrowest, the deposit itself and its associated artefacts, is central to understanding the images, providing pointers or guides to their interpretation. For example, the question of an image's deeper meaning may be explored in part through examining a ship graffito's proximity to harbours, waterways and shorelines, which may suggest the possibility of relatively superficial meaning, while its association with sites or structures with cognitive significance, such as churches, tombs, or cult centres increases the likelihood of it being a symbolic expression. Equally, an image's cognitive context, and determining its place in a culture's symbol system and its links with other associated material with cognitive meaning, provides information which is essential to its interpretation. Understanding something of the place of the ship in an ancient culture's system of religious symbols, for example, may be of considerable help in understanding the meaning of an image from that culture.

In order to explain and demonstrate the meaning and relevance of the concept of context to the study of ship graffiti, the following discussion will return to the examples which were considered in the second half of the thesis, to consider the evidence which is offered by their physical and cognitive contexts. Before embarking on this discussion, however, it is necessary to note that the casual treatment which some artefacts bearing graffiti have received in the course of site excavation and recording has meant that precise and detailed accounts of their physical contexts may not be available.

The graffiti considered in Chapter 5, " Graffiti and Cognitive life ", were selected to offer a wide range of contextual problems. The discussion centred first on a group of images, all of which depicted a ship's prow. These examples presented what appeared to be a pattern of recurrent use, which itself suggested that the image had a relatively stable meaning. The discussion of these graffiti therefore concentrated on the cognitive context which they appear to share: the repetition of the same graphic form on a range of different artefacts, the context of communication by ideogram among nonliterate or preliterate people, and the stylistic means by which a simple graphic symbol is created. It was shown that the individual ship's prow image was a potential source of information about the cognitive world of the Norse when it was seen in the context of other examples of similar images, and that considered in isolation and read as realistic depictions, they had little information to offer nautical historians.

The ship's prow images which were discussed came from a wide range of physical contexts, ranging from the secure and datable, in the case of the Oseberg ship examples, to a group found on the walls of Christian sites, and to those found on the base of an acontextual Dark Age casket. Attempting to understand the meaning of the ship's prow image by relating them individually to their physical contexts, and the artefacts on which they appeared, produced a range of more or less secure dates and

geographical locations for their occurrence and use, but few clues to their deeper meaning. It is interesting to observe, however, their appearance on the walls of stave churches which were public sites of religious practice, some at a considerable distance from the sea or major rivers. As was noted above, this association adds some weight to the image's identification as a symbol rather than as the simple depiction of a real object.

The discussion of another graffito on the Oseberg ship was used to bring into focus another aspect of cognitive context; that is, the possibility of the far reaching transmission of ancient symbols. This image is very distinct in form and content from the *pars pro toto* ship's prow image found on two of the ship's accompanying artefacts, and its informal, naturalistic style provided a contrast to the complex achievement of the richly detailed art of the ship itself, and the decoration of some of its accompanying artefacts. The graffito's style could be placed within the context of the naturalistic art of the Viking period, and roughly contemporary examples of this were noted. The identity of the immediate physical context of the image, the undersurface of a bailing hatch, provides a startling contrast to the cognitively complex graffito, and the tension between the image and its site on the ship suggests the possibility that its meaning was somehow subversive.

This graffito is a composition comprising a number of different subjects, and the importance of discussing the various subjects in relation to other features of their compositional context, was considered. It is interesting to note, before leaving this example, the geographical setting of the burial. Although it is in the countryside and at a distance from local settlement, it is in proximity to a major waterway, the Oslo fjord, suggesting the possibility of a point of contact with distant travel, and therefore a way of accounting for the presence of symbols with such remote links.

In sharp contrast to the Oseberg graffito, the Karlby stone exemplifies another sort of contextual problem, in that it lacks any certain physical context and associated finds, the reported circumstances of its find locating it among other pebbles on a Jutland beach. This problem is somewhat compounded by the fact that to date the stone has not been analysed lithologically, and so cannot even be identified as originating in that region of Denmark. As I noted in my discussion of the Karlby stone and its carvings, it is very difficult to believe that such crisp and delicate carvings could have survived for any length of time in such a physically dynamic environment as a beach. This observation indicates the relevance of understanding the impact of the characteristics of a particular physical context on an artefact deposited within it. In this case, the present state of the artefact is very surprising in terms of the nature of the abrasive environment in which it is said to have been found. The implications of this problem will be discussed at a later point in this chapter.

In the absence of a secure physical context and associated material for the tiny stone, it is necessary to consider the possibility of locating it within a cognitive context, in terms of both the artefact itself and its carvings. As was discussed earlier in this study, amulets were a common, necessary part of daily life and thought world of many cultures. Through similarities in its size and appearance, it would not be unreasonable to identify the Karlby stone among this group. Not only are the subjects on the stone, the ship and the elk, locatable in the context of the early art of Northern Europe, but also aspects of their style, artistic convention, and technique of manufacture also fit approximately with this association. Despite these links, the difficulties posed by the disparity between the reported find site of the stone and its present, almost pristine condition, require explanation.

The contextual problems offered by the Bryggen artefact may be said to lie somewhere between the Oseberg and Karlby examples. Found during the course of an archaeological excavation, yet separated from its precise find site and associations

through a problem of finds recording, the Bryggen artefact presents two contextual problems. The first concerns its relationship to the six hundred carved rune sticks, of similar size and material to the Bryggen artefact, which were described by Herteig in the second supplement to the final reports of the site (1988). Despite its superficial resemblance to these sticks, the Bryggen branch is the only one among them to be carved with representational images, which may weaken the assumption of a secure physical association between it and the whole group. The second problem is the difficulty of finding an artistic context in which to place the artefact's largest carving, and which appears to represent pictorial space. The technique of diminution is so remarkable in the context of thirteenth century European art that its use has led some authorities to question the artefact's authenticity. My discussion of this image attempted to address this difficulty by finding another artistic context for it, hierarchic scaling, which was well known in the ancient world, but whose use and meaning was both unfamiliar to, and misread by, most modern viewers.

I have noted, above, the possibility of deducing something of the meaning of a ship graffito by considering its site in the wider context of its geography, and suggested that, for example, proximity to the sea, or association with structures with particular meaning or cognitive identity might provide information about what might be termed its "symbolic loading". In the case of the Bryggen artefact, the identity of Bergen in medieval Europe as a major port of international importance, and the geographical location of the Bryggen area at the centre of the trading activities, increases the likelihood of the graffito's being the comparatively superficial depiction of well known objects in daily life, and decreases the possibility that it is an image with strong symbolic meaning.

Three other examples of graffiti were discussed whose sites' geographical location, coupled with their cognitive meaning, may shed light on their interpretation. Ship graffiti carved on stones from Enkomi in Cyprus, Dramezi in Greece, and Tarxien in

Malta are all found in sites, while not at ports or on major waterways, are in areas with some proximity to the sea. The Dramesi and Tarxien graffiti's sites have further physical associations with sacred sites; for example, the stones on which the Dramesi graffiti are carved were looted from what is likely to have been a tomb (Blegen 1949: 41), and the Tarxien graffiti are found at a major feature in the Maltese landscape, a massive, complex prehistoric temple. These associations with sites of heightened ritual or symbolic meaning increase the probability that images placed there expressed a meaning beyond the simple representation of familiar objects.

The extensive looting at Dramesi makes accurately locating the stones bearing the images within the site problematic, and has disturbed the primary associations between artefacts and structures. At Tarxien, however, disturbance of the site was minimal until its excavation (Zammit 1930: 1). I described, above, the importance of the site in prehistory as an important physical and cognitive feature of the landscape, and its use over a long period of time as a religious centre. A reflection of that importance to contemporary people may be seen in the very large accumulation of cinerary urns within the temple floor near the stones bearing the ship graffiti. This must be seen as the physical juxtaposition of two very different groups of material, cremation burials and images of ships, with no certain or even probable cognitive or intentional associations between them. The contextual associations which are readable, however, are between the graffiti and the temple's identity and position in the landscape as a site of physical and cognitive importance. The images' schematic, abbreviated form suggests symbolic representation which is completely in keeping with their site's identity as a ritual centre.

Consideration of the Enkomi graffiti's contextual associations recalled in some ways the discussion of the Oseberg graffiti. Both were concerned with the assemblage of symbols together in a composition, and both looked to wider cognitive contexts in which to identify these symbols and their meanings. In both discussions, the

importance of understanding the interrelationships between symbols in a composition was considered. In the case of the Enkomi graffito, the wider geographical context of Cyprus as, in Vermeule's phrase, " a caravan terminus region" (*op. cit*), was considered in terms of both the symbolic meaning of the ship, and of the other subjects scratched on the stone.

The boat carving found in Jonathan's cave at East Wemyss, Fife, is located at a site on the Forth estuary, a major conduit of travel and trade routes in the past. In the more immediate context of the cave itself, the image is found in close association with a rich assemblage of Pictish symbols, in a site with a long history of human use which has to some extent been explored by archaeological excavation (Mackie 1986: 74-77). These immediate contextual associations, coupled with the ship carving's form, style, and technique of manufacture, strongly suggest that it is an ancient image. The problem that the image's subject is almost completely lacking an artistic context in early Northern British rock art may be explained by interpreting the carving's more general physical site, on the edge of one of the great waterways of eastern Britain, and suggests the possibility that the image was the work of a foreign visitor. However, the image's absence from another sort of context, the historical documentation of the site following the nineteenth century antiquarian surveys of the Wemyss caves, raises major questions concerning its true date and origin. If the carving is an early twentieth century forgery, then it should be considered in terms of the cognitive world of its modern creator, his concepts of what an ancient ship image should look like, and the techniques which would be appropriate to make such an image convincing.

The practical and theoretical problems which the interpretation of ancient ship graffiti offer later interpreters have been noted at many points throughout this work, and examples of these have been described and discussed. With an eye to future study, however, it is appropriate here to draw together what might be described as a set of "rules of engagement ", to provide a set of guidelines for the interpretation of pictorial

graffiti. This is approached in two ways: the first is to consider the ideal situation; that is, the range of information about images which would provide the optimum framework in which to assess their form and meaning, and the methods which may be used to obtain this information. The second method of approach is to suggest some procedures for the interpretation of pictorial graffiti with reference, not to the ideal situation, but to those images actually found in the real world. These are almost by definition problematic, in the sense that they always present only a proportion of this ideal level of information.

The fullest and most reliable interpretation of graffiti would require the following details to be available concerning the image in question. The information which they provide is of primary importance in determining the extent to which pictorial graffiti may be interpreted. It must be stressed that this list describes both the kind of information which should be sought, and the means by which it may be obtained:

The establishment of a reliable date for the graffito, through its presence in an undisturbed context which may be dated through scientific means, would provide information concerning the original culture of the image's artist, and serve as the basis for stylistic and artefactual analysis of the image and its ground. These factors, date and original culture, would also determine the material which was selected for comparative work between the graffito and other visual imagery.

From the sealed context noted above, the full excavation of the image's immediate associations would allow the later interpreter to assess aspects of the image's meaning through its relationships to material remains. For example, a graffito representing a ship, found on an artefact identified as a seaman's box containing an individual's personal equipment, might be assessed as representing a particular ship with special meaning to the artefact's owner. That meaning might be historic, symbolic, or a complex combination of the two. The image's immediate associations, however, are not only confined to the artefactual material which accompanies the graffito, but include the other images which may appear with it in the same

composition. These associated images must be interpreted, and their interrelationships understood, using the artistic analysis described below.

In terms of the wider physical context of the site, the availability and evaluation of such information as its proximity to seacoasts, ports, inland waterways, other important sites, as well as geographical features such as fording places, would offer the potential of understanding the image's place in the landscape in terms of its significance to the person who created it. This issue was considered in the discussion of contextual interpretation, above, when it was noted that something of an image's "symbolic loading" may be understood by relating it to its landscape. A sketch of an animal found at a fording place, for example, might be related to that site in terms of its use in hunting, allowing the possibility that the image was iconic, with links to hunting magic, rather than simply a representational piece.

In more human terms, the interpretation of the graffito creator's level of artistic ability would allow the image's form, detail, and information content, to be evaluated more effectively. The transference of a mental image into a physical one is a challenge which is met with varying degrees of success, and the interpretation of an image's detail must be based on an understanding that this process is conditioned by the artist's skill in depicting his subject.

The availability of material in the contemporary archaeological record which appears to parallel the graffito's subject would allow a more objective assessment of the image in terms of the form of the the subject itself, and the detail which is represented. Clearly, however, it is essential that such comparative work should be based on a reasonably firm date for the image being considered. It was noted in Chapter 6, in the discussion of the weathervanes which are depicted in the Bryggen graffito, that Martin Blindheim (1982: 116-127) interpreted these minute details of the composition in terms of examples of weathervanes which have survived to the present, testing them, as it were, in the light of evidence from real artefacts.

The existence of documentary or artefactual evidence to supply information about the cognitive landscape of the artist of the image being interpreted would allow

the later interpreter to evaluate it in terms of its place in that context. Aspects of this thought world range widely, from belief and symbol systems, myth and cosmology, to the potential symbolic meaning of contemporary artistic conventions, and concepts relating to the power of visual imagery. The way in which cognitive landscape may influence both the form and style of pictorial representation was considered in the second chapter of this study. As was noted above, this concept of cognitive context has a narrow, immediate aspect, at the level of the individual, and a broader, culture-wide application, and ideally, information about both aspects of cognitive context should be considered.

Access to information about the historical and political context of the period in which the graffito originated would allow its potential links to events to be understood, such as naval battles or maritime domination by particular powers.

The full and detailed artistic analysis of an early graffito is a fundamental part of the evaluation of the information which it contains, and ideally would require access to information concerning the artistic traditions and conventions of the image's original culture. This information would range from the theoretical, expressed in documentary sources, to practical examples of other, comparable art of the graffito's period. The possibility of the use of deliberate archaism in the form chosen to depict the subject should also be considered. The questions of symbolic representation and visual metaphor, noted above in relation to the analysis of cognitive context, are also clearly closely involved with this aspect of interpretation, and may be understood, at least in part, through the contextual analysis of the image and its associations.

An evaluation of the effects of weathering, damage or other forms of degradation which have led to the image's present condition, is an essential part of a graffito's interpretation. Information gained from understanding these factors is an important component of other interpretive processes, such as artistic analysis and relating the image to material in the archaeological record. As was seen in the case of the Enkomi graffito, the information which it appears to offer about ships of the Bronze Age Aegean must be understood in terms of the area of damage to the stone in

its sail area. Overlooking the effect of this damage on the ship's form has misled some authorities in interpreting it, who have referred to drawings of the graffiti which do not represent this feature of the stone's present condition.

Changing the focus of this discussion from the ideal to the real situation, ancient pictorial graffiti are available for study in the present day having lost at least some important information, such as their dates and aspects of their contextual associations. These may vary from those which may be described as "worst case" graffiti, which only exist as copies of copies of a lost original image, to those graffiti, still available for examination, which have some firm links in terms of dates and cultural relationships. Other images may present different challenges, such as the graffiti at Tarxien, which are severely degraded through the effects of weather, and whose interpretation must be supported with reference to earlier photographs and drawings. While it is clearly impossible to describe all of the conditions in which graffiti may survive to the present, it is possible to see some basic procedures which apply to the interpretation of problematic images.

At the most basic level of the image and its condition, it is important to consider whether it contains enough detail to be examined and analysed; or if, for example, that detail is too blurred, chaotic or frankly enigmatic to be deciphered. One of the Jarlshof graffiti, (illustrated, page 171), for example, exemplifies the question of subject recognition, in that its identification as a picture of a ship may be uncertain, or at least, open to question, through its tangled and amorphous form. This initial process of evaluation should also consider the impact of mutative processes on the image, both positive and negative, which were discussed and illustrated the first half of the third chapter, above.

If the subject which is represented is thought to be identifiable and retains enough of its original form to be interpreted, then the multi-faceted questions of the image's dating and the interpretation of its contextual associations, both physical and cognitive, should be addressed. Aspects of these and their potential were discussed,

above. It is important to understand the implications of the absence of information in particular areas of these questions, and the limitations which these gaps in the ideal level of information impose on further interpretive work. Clearly, lack of a secure date for a graffito, or its appearance on portable material which may have been moved a considerable distance from its place of origin, for example, will considerably complicate its interpretation, hampering all but the most subjective and superficial comparisons with other archaeological material or visual images.

The identification of an image's "positives and negatives", that is, what is known about its date, cultural relationships, and contextual associations, and what is unknown, then forms the basis for the evaluations which are possible of the image's information content. An extreme situation may exist where the amount of missing information far outweighs that which is actually known about a graffito. For example, the Orchomenos ship (illustrated, page 76), was scratched on an acontextual artefact which is now lost, and the only record of the image is a photograph. Understanding the limitations which these problems impose on interpretations of the image is an essential part of any work which is done on it. In the case of the Orchomenos fragment, the reverse face of the sherd as well as the curvature of its surface cannot be examined, and so some details about the original artefact are unobtainable. Where significant amounts of contextual information and a secure date for an image are lacking, then any use which is made of the information which a graffito appears to contain must acknowledge these gaps and the consequent degree of caution which is necessary in referring to it.

In the case of a graffito which presents many problems, such as the Karlby stone, the matter of authenticity must be considered if, in the light of comparative and analytical studies of the artefact's present condition in terms of the physical context in which it was found, its art and the subject which it represents, reasonable doubt is shown to exist. Other kinds of contextual analysis may indicate that there are doubts about a graffito's authenticity, as in the example of the Jonathan's cave ship carving.

Where a graffito only survives to the present as a drawn copy, such as the Indus ship (illustrated, page 79) then its use in academic study, such as evidence for the form of ships of a particular period, may be very problematic. The potential subjectivity of the copier, and his inclusion of mistaken detail, is an unknowable factor which adds a considerable degree of uncertainty to the interpretation of such an image. Assessment of what is known about the graffito's provenance, date, and contextual associations may provide some guidelines as to its interpretation and use, but any reference to it and its information content should acknowledge the copy's distance from the original and the consequent questions about it.

Returning to the practical examples of ship graffiti which were discussed in the second half of this study, some personal conclusions are offered, below, following on from the more theoretical discussions of problems and procedures of the earlier chapters.

The first of the practical examples considered the interpretation of the ship's prow image. Through the wide variety of the physical contexts in which they appear, they present a complex picture in terms of the "positives and negatives" of the information which interpretation of their sites and associations offers. The minimalist, *pars pro toto* style of representation meant that the images were virtually useless as sources of information about nautical technology. As was noted in the discussion of context earlier in this chapter, however, these graffiti could be seen to share a cognitive context in the Norse world, operating as symbols rather than representations. This allowed the image's recurrent use on a range of artefacts and physical contexts to be understood as part of a process of information exchange, rather than merely the repetitive representation of a part of a ship.

The ship's prow image might have functioned as the identifying symbol of a family or tribal group, rather as the broom plant was adopted as the emblem of the Plantagenet royal family. Examining briefly some of the contexts and associations of the ship's

pro image may offer further support to its identification as a family emblem. The symbol's addition to an object, such as the base of Ranveig's casket, might then be seen as a way of personalizing it, just as scratching the symbol on the wall of a stave church commemorated a member of a particular family's visit to the site, or as an act of patronage. The examples which are seen on the Oseberg ship appear, not on prestige items or as part of the public statement of the ship's formal art, but on lowly, functional material. Interpreting this aspect of the image's physical context may then add some information to the Oseberg ship's interpretation, marking, for example, the existence of a particular ownership or family identity among the crew.

The Karlby stone and its carvings were also considered in the fifth chapter concerning the way in which graffiti might be evidence of cognitive life. Despite the associations between the carvings and the styles and techniques of early art, the interpretation of their pristine and unblurred condition presents a major question in terms of the reported circumstances of the stone's discovery. This problem has been noted at several points in earlier discussions, both of the artefact itself and of the wider question of physical context. Either the artefact is a forgery, or it was found in circumstances other than those which were reported. The first option, that the piece is a modern forgery, would simply explain the carvings' crisp condition as resulting from their recent manufacture, the artefact's creator having been unaware of the need to add traces of abrasion to his work which would have been appropriate to an artefact found in the physical environment in which he claimed to have found it.

The second option would see the stone having been discovered during the illegal excavation of an archaeological site, interpreting it as a genuine artefact, perhaps from the early Dark Age, which had been buried in context such as a grave where wear of the stone would not have occurred. Its finder, in publicizing it, would have had to have invented a find site for the artefact which would have protected him from suspicion or prosecution. Given the authenticity of the artistic context for the graffiti

on the stone, the incompatibility of the find site with the artefact's condition must undermine claims made for it. The balance of the evidence is weighted towards its having been removed from its original site.

The question of authenticity has been raised concerning another example, the Bryggen branch, which presented a group of contextual problems. These problems have explanations, however, albeit tentative ones, which have been noted in earlier discussions of the artefact.

My view of the artefact and its carvings is that they are probably authentic, and analysis of the ships represented in the main carving, in particular their "proto-hulk" characteristics, the form of their figureheads, and the shape and detail of the flags depicted, would seem to support a medieval date for it. The striking visual effect of this image, and the inclusion among the ships of heraldic flags, strongly suggests to me that its artist was recording an important event. There are differences between the art of the main image and that of those on its reverse face, and these may be indications that the carvings are the work of different hands. The minute and painstaking detail of the main carving provides an important example of the fact that graffiti art may be the product of a lengthy and highly skilled effort, perhaps, in this case, during the hours spent waiting for the tide to turn.

The Oseberg graffiti differs considerable from the Karlby and Bryggen examples, in that its authenticity is not in question. Its challenge, however, lies in the interpretation of the complex group of subjects which appear together, and of relating this interpretation to their immediate site, the underside of a bailing hatch, and, in turn, of understanding these in the wider contexts, not only of the ship burial itself, but of the cognitive world of ninth century Norway.

I think that the confronted animals, one collared and shot with an arrow, represent stags, which may be identified with powerful myths relating to longevity, regeneration, and ethnogenesis. The association between these stags and the ship's prow symbol, tentatively identified, above, as a family emblem, may be intended to express the power and prestige of a particular family. The richness and splendour of the burial itself might be seen to be in keeping with this interpretation, but for the oddity of the image's position, hidden away on the back of a drably functional item. One possibility, noted above, is that that the graffito expressed a subversive message, such as the pre-eminence of one family over another. The graffito cannot be read today in terms of the fully detailed meaning it had for its artist, but the power of some of the symbols which are represented, and their possible connections with symbol systems of the classical world, offer an intriguing glimpse into both the cognitive world of the past, in terms of the use of a pictorial graffito to express a complex message, and the possibility of the long distance transmission of concepts.

The Enkomi, Tarxien, and Dramesi graffiti, all dating approximately to the Bronze Age, were considered together, and, although they originated in different parts of the Mediterranean, they bore some similarities to one another in the monumental qualities of the images' relationship to their ground. Secure association with archaeological excavation has meant that their authenticity has not been questioned, and artistic evaluation of their subjects and style has supported this. The Enkomi and Dramesi examples lack detailed information about their physical contexts, and so their assessment must rely heavily on artistic analysis.

The spatial arrangement of the subjects of the Enkomi graffito on a prepared stone block has parallels with Mycenaean gravestones, and the links between the subjects themselves and well known symbols in the Bronze Age Mediterranean was considered. The image's casual, though competent and energetic style, and the scratched technique which was used to form them, coupled with the associations with

funeral art noted above, suggest to me that the Enkomi stone was an informally made gravestone, intended not as a temporary or ephemeral piece, but as a durable statement, a graffito monument. The subjects were used as symbols rather than as realistic representations, although the possibility that the ship was also intended to indicate the deceased's profession should not be overlooked. Like the Oseberg graffito, the Enkomi image is comprised of a group of symbols whose emergent meaning to contemporary viewers is lost to us, but it does offer an example of the use of symbols in a society with wide reaching cultural contacts.

A more secure association between visual imagery and a grave may be seen in the example of the Dramesi graffiti, whose physical context, a tomb of the mid to late Helladic period, supports their interpretation as funeral art. The site's excavator, eager to find Homeric links with the site, interpreted them as monuments to a commander in the Trojan war (Blegen 1949: 42), but I feel that this is unsupportable. However, the grouping of ships with differing hull profiles and associated detail does suggest the depiction of a fleet or array. I am unconvinced that there is sufficient evidence in the images to identify them with any confidence to historic ship types, as was attempted by Basch (1987: 143-144). As part of the structure of a tomb, then, the stones bearing the graffiti may be seen as monumental, and possibly commemorative of the ownership or control of a fleet.

The difficulty of understanding the Tarxien graffiti in terms of the archaeology of the site where they were found has already been discussed in relationship to the wider cognitive meaning of the whole site, as well as the cinerary urns which are found in juxtaposition with them. As I noted in an earlier discussion, it may be possible to understand the highly schematic form of the images by relating them to the cognitive significance of the site itself, seeing them as purely symbolic statements, with only the most superficial relationship to objects in the real world. I suggest that the images were never intended to represent real ships. Their large numbers and repetitive forms,

in the context of the temple site, suggest that the possibility they had a cultic meaning, not unlike Christian pilgrims' crosses of later periods.

The Tarxien graffiti are now badly degraded by weathering, and current study of them must rely heavily on Woolner's drawings and photographs, taken in 1957. Woolner believed that all the images on the stones represented ships, and her interpretation of the images worked from this assumption. However, while a number of the graffiti are very likely to depict ships, having forms and associated detail which has comfortable parallels with other examples of early ship art, some of the images are so vague, shapeless, and overlaid by other graffiti that it is impossible to understand what they were meant to represent. To interpret the assemblage as comprising only representations of early ships would therefore be unsafe.

The assessment of the Jonathan's cave boat carving involves a return to the question of authenticity. As was mentioned in an earlier discussion, this image is repeatedly cited in current studies as an example of very early British ships, its form, style, and technique of manufacture fitting well with modern concepts not only of what an ancient ship looked like, but also with present day expectations of early art. My curiosity about the carving's authenticity, however, was aroused by its absence from the extensive nineteenth century inventories of the site's art. In view of the nature and extent of the surveys of the caves on which the inventories were based, it seemed most likely that it was not present in Jonathan's cave before Allen and Anderson's survey of 1900, but was there to be photographed in 1902 by its discoverer, John Patrick.

The adeptness of the carving, and the "rightness" of the ship's form indicate that the image's forger was an expert artist with a clear vision of how a carving of an ancient ship should look, and the technical expertise to realize that image. Its discoverer, John Patrick, was a native of the Wemyss area, a photographer whose work is still

collected and exhibited, and who had many contacts among antiquarian circles in Edinburgh. He was also a disappointed man, a bankrupt, whose interest in the history of the Wemyss caves had led to the publication of three brief articles in a respected antiquarian journal. I think it is quite possible that he was not only the carving's discoverer, but also its creator, his motivation being either to play a cynical joke on the academic establishment, or in order to make a name for himself as finding an important image which had been overlooked by distinguished predecessors. These two possibilities are not mutually exclusive. It is possible that further information will come to light on the antecedents of this carving, through the discovery, for example of Sir James Simpson's antiquarian notebooks.

The question of the authenticity of graffito images has been considered in three examples considered in this study. Two points may be drawn from these discussions. The first relates to a simple fact of graffiti production: through the nature of the style and technique with which all but the most exceptional pictorial graffiti are realized, it is clearly much easier to forge a graffito than it is, for example, a Raphael. This has allowed the relatively easy production of material which, through its informal and casual characteristics, has easily passed the scrutiny of those experts who may be so eager to assess the evidence which it appears to offer that they overlook its problems and inconsistencies. This observation may explain the unquestioning acceptance of the Karlby stone by historians of Scandinavian ships. The second, related issue is that the rather dismissive treatment which ancient graffiti are often accorded by the academic community has meant that the question of authenticity may not be even be considered, through the underlying assumption that no one would bother to forge a graffito.

The definition of graffiti, in terms of its relationship to formal art, was considered in some detail in the first chapters of this thesis. At this point in the concluding section it

is appropriate to reconsider this question in the light of the discussions of both theoretical material and practical examples.

Pictorial graffiti may be broadly defined as the casual art of the common man. Embedded within this definition, however, are some complex issues which may be grouped under three headings: circumstances of production of the image, the relationship between the image and its site, and its style, subject, and technique of manufacture.

The first of these issues, circumstances of the image's production, relates to practical considerations outside those which relate directly to the content, form and detail of the image itself. Seeing graffiti as necessarily being quick sketches, the work of a moment, is to ignore images produced by people with large amounts of time available, who created complex and painstaking graffiti as boredom reducing activities. Prisons, slave centres like, for example, the island of Delos, and such sites as the Ellis Island immigration centre in New York provide examples of minutely detailed graffiti which were the products of many hours of work. The Bryggen image, discussed above, is also an example of a graffiti which must have taken its creator a long time to produce.

Another aspect of the circumstances of production of an image concerns the tools and materials which the artist uses. Frequently, the opportunistic use of whatever is available to make a picture is characteristic of graffiti, and includes the tools and pigments which may be employed, as well as the ground. The material which is used may be inappropriate for the realization of the artist's mental image. In the case of the crude, daubed ship graffiti found in Cashel cathedral, this inappropriateness works with the deeper meaning of the image to heighten its aggressive impact on the site where it was made. Equally, however, chance may mean that appropriate tools and ground are available for the artist to realize the image in its optimum form, but the important factor here is that the artist makes opportunistic use of them.

The third subject in this category is the more theoretical question of the image's place in the society in which it originated. Unlike formal art, graffiti images may be defined as those which are produced outside of a system of patronage where the artist manipulates artistic codes and conventions to meet requirements which are imposed by a patron supplying money, goods, or simply approval in exchange for the image. This distance from the formal artistic norms of a society confers a freedom on the graffiti artist which he may exploit to its fullest extent, producing work which is so self-referential as to be uninterpretable by later viewers. It must be noted, however, that graffiti artists may produce their work in the presence of a critical audience, such as at the centres described above, but in graffiti production these audiences have no real authority over the image's subject and form. As was discussed in the first chapter of this study, while the relationship between graffiti and formal art may be clear to modern people with post-renaissance concepts of art, understanding this in terms of early art, and the place which a particular image occupied in terms of its society's codes of art, may be extremely difficult. The relative modernity of the concept of graffiti must be mentioned here, as well as the strong probability that it is inappropriate to the visual imagery of some cultures, at certain points in the past.

The second area which must be considered in the definition of graffiti concerns the relationship between an image and its site. A characteristic of graffiti is an artist's evaluation of the meaning of the site relative to the image which he places there, a process which is closely connected to other aspects of the creative process, such as his choice of subject. The graffiti artist exploits the meaning of the site he chooses, for either its "edge" qualities, which may allow him further liberty to play with the techniques of visual imagery, or its "centre" identity, and to comment on it, to embellish it, or to vandalize it with visual imagery for his own reasons. The Jarlshof graffiti exemplify the former, where artists used found material, originating in what was literally the edge of Shetland, to sketch and scribble work which was very

probably outside any of their society's evaluative processes. The latter use of a site's identity is illustrated by the graffiti on the Berlin Wall, but also by the Tarxien graffiti, which may be said to have reflected the cognitive meaning of the whole site.

The third area which needs consideration in a definition of graffiti concerns the subject, style and technique of manufacture of an image. I noted in the fourth chapter of this study that while some images may be identified as graffiti by their subject and information content, others may not, as, for example, scatological pictures may be seen in formal art just as pious images may be seen in graffiti. Equally, the low level of technical expertise in a picture cannot be said to be definitive of graffiti, as many examples may be found which are the work of talented artists.

The test of an image as a work of graffiti or formal art must be seen as being its comparison with other visual imagery which is contemporary with it. The use and features of the site where the image is found, its subject and meaning, and the conventions and techniques which have been used to create it, are all factors which, when seen in the context of other contemporary art, will provide information about its relationship to its society's concepts of art. Visual imagery which is undatable and acontextual cannot, therefore, be reliably identified as graffiti or formal art.

In the course of discussing the sample studies, as well as in the chapters which preceded them, possibilities for further research, both theoretical and practical, suggested themselves. It would be inappropriate to recapitulate all of these here, but some examples may be described which, by the contrast in their natures, demonstrate the range of opportunities for future investigations.

The question of the reliable dating of ancient imagery found on stone, by scientific or stylistic means, has come up at several points in the course of this study. Current discussions in archaeological journals concerning the scientific dating of the

Portuguese petroglyphs (Bednarik 1995: 877-883; Zilhão 1995: 883-901 *inter al.*) indicate how complex this problem is and, arguably, how far it is from a satisfactory solution. A great number of pictorial graffiti from the ancient world (and many of the examples which were discussed in this thesis) are found on stone. Advances in the scientific dating of early visual imagery on stone would clearly be of great importance to their use for comparative or analytical purposes, particularly in terms of work which attempts to relate information which they contain to material in the archaeological record. Equally, the further development of dating by stylistic analysis would be of considerable use in graffiti studies, although the underlying assumption of stable or predictable use of artistic conventions in graffiti production is in itself problematic.

At the beginning of this study, I noted that there is a tacit assumption among academics that ancient pictorial graffiti are the products of adults. In recent years, great deal of academic work has been carried out on the analysis and interpretation of children's drawings. As most (if not all) children are at some time creators of graffiti, a useful study might be made of the reliability of drawings of complex subjects such as ships which are made by children, in terms of such aspects as the detail which is included, and the proportions and relationships of parts of particular images. Some ancient ship graffiti are very likely to have been made by children (and in some cases there are hints of this in aspects of their physical context, such as the image's height from the contemporary floor level). The analysis of these images in terms of their potential usefulness as sources of information about nautical technology could be an important area of study. On a similar note, Arne Emil Christensen has recently raised the question of the gender of the artists of ship graffiti, hypothesizing that these images are generally the work of males (1995: 184). While I am unconvinced by the evidence which Christensen offers to support his theory, it is possible that further work in this area, in terms of the interpretation of some pictorial graffiti's physical

context, might allow some conclusions to be drawn about aspects of graffiti made by male and female artists.

In the first chapter of this study, I discussed the relationship between early graffiti and formal art, and the difficulties which arise in trying to assign an image to either category using modern concepts which may well be inappropriate to ancient art. Rather than struggling to propose theories which would allow these distinctions to be made, I have attempted to approach the study of pictorial graffiti from the point of view of understanding its place in the universal human activity of image making. This position would seem to allow the use of very early pictorial graffiti by those exploring such developing fields as the study of human cognitive development in pre- and proto-history, as evidence of the exploration of the depiction of subjects in two dimensions. The representation of a particular subject such as the ship, which has a dual role in the visual imagery of many cultures as both a technical representation and an important symbol, provides modern academics with the opportunity to trace the development of both of these roles through time. Also, the analysis of ancient graffiti may provide further insights into the development, use, and transmission of conventions and styles both within and between particular cultures, in the hands of individual artists acting outside of formal artistic constraints.

During the course of my research, I examined a very large number of pictorial graffiti, and of these, approximately thirty in considerable detail. Some of these images offer the potential for further research in specific areas. An example of these are the graffiti of ships found in Jewish tombs dating from roughly the sixth century BC to the first century AD, such as the images in Jason's tomb and in the burial at Khirbet Rafi in Israel. A detailed study of the pictorial graffiti found at these sites, and possibly a catalogue of existing examples, could provide further information about both Jewish seafaring and the use of the ship as a funeral symbol during this period.

The role of pictorial graffiti as evidence for life in the past has been explored and described by academics since the nineteenth century. The full potential of the information which they offer, however, has sometimes been obscured by academic attitudes and approaches which have overlooked important aspects of their content and associations. It is hoped that this study may have drawn attention to some aspects of their interpretation which allow a little more of this potential to be realized.

Bibliographies.

As was noted in the introduction to this study, the references are organized in two lists. The primary one deals with those cited specifically in the text. This is supplemented by an Appendix of other works which were found useful as background reading in this inter-disciplinary work, and includes some sources of published ship graffiti which are not the subjects of discussion but provided important points of reference and comparison.

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