The Rock Art and Runiform Calligraphy from Pagan Cave Temples Near Tsarevets

Nedyalko Ovcharov 2021, Gießen

Today, 122 years after the discovery in Pliska of the first Runiform characters and inscriptions by the Russian Constantinople Archaeological Institute, the Bulgarian Runiform writing is insufficiently studied and known. Despite the discovery over the years of hundreds of inscriptions and single characters, even the existence of such a script is still subject to controversy. Perhaps this is due in part to the specifics of an archaic religious script, but also the state of the Protobulgarian language research. This article will focus on the Runiform inscriptions and Pagan art found in the caves near the village of Tzarevetz, Vratza district, Bulgaria. Although it has been discovered a long time ago, this unique monument of Medieval Bulgarian art and religion didn't receive the attention that deserves.

The rock images and inscriptions from the caves located not far from the village of Tzarevetz were discovered in 1962. It gradually became clear that hundreds of drawings, geometric motifs, and inscriptions were carved into nine of the caves in the area. This makes the caves near Tsarevets the largest deposit of Rock art in Bulgaria. Unfortunately, nature and human activity are slowly destroying this wealth. Some of the images and inscriptions no longer exist and may have been lost forever. As archaeological excavations in the caves have not been made and different opinions have been expressed about the dating of the rock art from Tzarevetz. However, some experts believe that at least part of the Rock art there can be dated to the early Middle Ages.

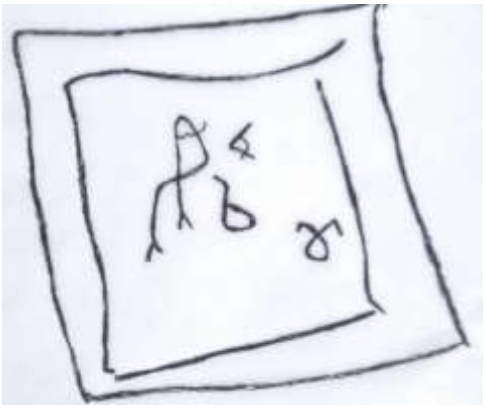


Figure 1,Inscription M 38, Murfatlar, Romania.

The fact that the local people call two of the caves "Biyarnitzata" speaks in favour of this opinion. At the root of this name is the medieval pronunciation of the Danube- Bulgar, or Protobulgarian[1] word for “god”, “master”: biy. In this case, "biy" is plural, and the name "Biyarnitzata" can be interpreted as "the sanctuary". Until now, the Danube-Bulgar word "biy" was attested only in the inscription M 38 by Murfatlar, whose reading was hypothetical, but this information confirmed the correctness of this idea (Ovcharov N. 2014, p. 43).

The Rock art from Tzarevetz is distinguished by an extremely important feature: the images of animals and people are accompanied by numerous Runiform characters and inscriptions. However, these inscriptions are made in a way very different from the usual horizontal linear writing: they are woven into the figures of mythical animals and



Figure 2, Panel “The Wonderful hunt “, Cave Biyarnitsata, Tsarevets. [2]

anthropomorphic deities, among plant or geometric motifs, or as difficult-to-understand ligatures. What makes this unique Runiform calligraphy easier to decipher is that its meaning is closely related to the Rock carvings in which it is interwoven.

The first panel from the Biyarnitsa Cave, named for clarity “The Wonderful Hunt”, is a hunting scene. It is dominated by a deeply incised cross and four animals. Two of them are deer with large branched antlers. The other two animals are horses, whose riders are symbolically represented with help of the Runiform character ᛟ (Ins. Tz 1, Fig. 4, in red).

[1] Protobulgarian (or as some scholars prefer to call it Hunno-Bulgarian) is supposed to be spoken by all non-Slavic speaking Bulgarians in the Pagan period. However, the archeological research and written sources, despite how scarce they are, suggest a different reality. Danube-Bulgar might be only one of two or three languages (or dialects) spoken by so-called Protobulgarians. Therefore, the borrowings in Old-Bulgarian that can be attributed to the Early Middle ages might not come from a single language.

[2] For photos of the panels from the caves near Tsarevets see Ovcharov N., Hristov H. 2020a and Ovcharov N., Hristov H. 2020b.

Such a symbolics is hard to understand, but fortunately, a similar scene can be found in the Oxford Codex[3] (Fig. 3). There the human figures are also two stylised characters ᛟ , but at the same time easily distinguishable as riders[4]. Since the meaning of the Runiform character ᛟ is "god", "master" it becomes clear that the two hunters are not ordinary mortals, and the scene is part of a well-known Bulgarian myth. Peter Juhasz published a legend recorded by Elena Ognyanova in 1952 in the village of Petarch, Sofia district (Juhasz, P. 1985, p. 388). The legend has it that the twin brothers Igril and Bagril fell in love with the same girl. The



Figure 3, A hunting scene from the Oxford Codex.

argument about the girl leads them to the wonderful deer they are trying to shoot. The deer enters a hitherto unknown lake. The brothers follow it and on the opposite shore of the lake, they come to a village, in the middle of which, the village's girls dance. The dance is led by a wonderful beauty. Both brothers fall in love with her, but they agree that one will stay here and the other will return to their homeland. According to Peter Juhasz, this tale is an echo of the legend told by Greek and Latin historians about the deer that showed the way of the Huns through the strait of the Sea of Azov.

In Bulgarian song folklore, however, the story of the hunt of the wonderful deer, preserved in many versions from different parts of the Bulgarian diaspora, has a completely different plot. The chaser of the wonderful deer is usually only one. His name is most often Dobar Yunak[5]. The names Bogdan Yunak, Rabar Yunak, Dan Voyvoda are also used. The purpose of the hunt in one version of the song is golden deer antlers. In another version, the meat of the deer is divided among the girls who help the hunter. In the third version, the shooting of a deer brings fertility to the whole country. The wonderful status of the deer in some of the versions of the song is especially emphasized:

сур еленка не йе съма на чело й ясното слънце	Sur (white) Deer is not alone the clear Sun on her forehead

[3] See Ovcharov 2014.

[4] It is hard not to detect some differences between the scene from the Oxford Codex and the panel "The wonderful hunt". Thus, in the case with the Oxford Codex, the hunted animals are not two deer but a deer and a hind. Also, the antlers of the two deer from "The wonderful hunt" and the antlers of the deer from Oxford Codex differ significantly in form. It is easy to notice an unaturaly oval form of the antlers of the deer from the Oxford Codex.

[5] The name means literally "Good Hero".

по гърди й ясния месец по снага й дребните звезди[6]	on her chest the clear Moon by its strength the small Stars

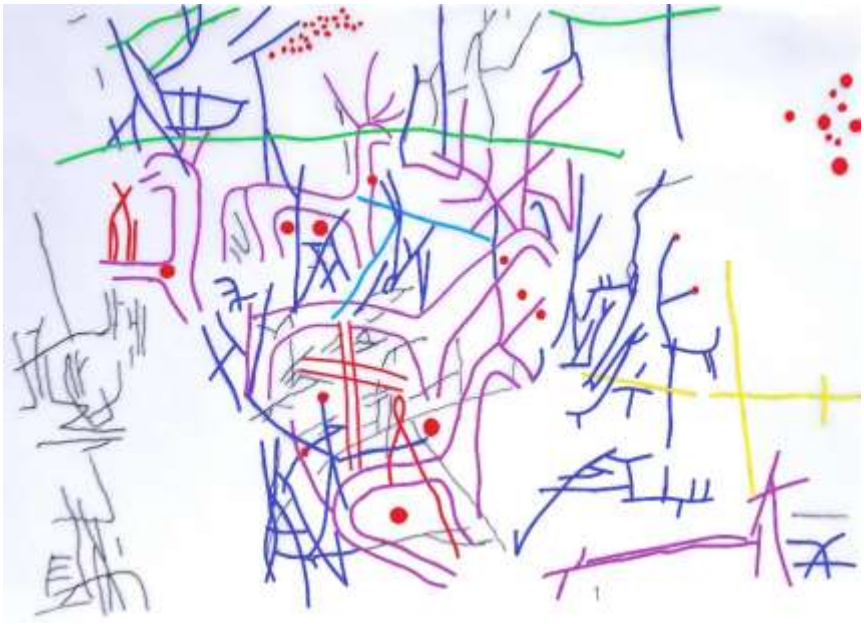


Figure 4, Deer Hunting scene. Biyarnitsa Cave.

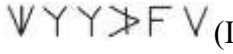
And just as it is sung in the song, in the image from the Oxford Codex the deer is marked with cup-shaped signs[7] that emphasize the miraculous nature of the deer. However, all those versions of the song differ in one element from the drawing in the Oxford Codex and the panel from Tsarevets: there is only one deer hunter. The version in which the hunters are two is rear. It is not a surprise that here the hunters are also twin brothers:

Цар Костадин войска бере Войска бере млади момци, Млади момци кривошапци, Па ги праща Цар Костадин По чаири, по ливади, Да му ловят дребна лова, ... Де го чули двата брата, Двата брата, двата близнака, Фля‘нали са в яхърето, Изведоха хран‘ни коне	Tzar Kostadin gathers the army An army of young men, Young boys with crooked hats, So Tzar Kostadin sent them On the fields, on the meadows, To hunt him the small game, ... How the two brothers heard it, The two brothers, the two twins, They're in the dungeon, They brought out well-fed horses

[6] „Добър юнак и сур елен“ (Good Hero and a Bright Deer) Bulgarian folk song by Valya Dragului, Romania, Bulgarian Folklore ... 2006-2020.

[7] The cup-shaped signs will be discussed later in the article, but here they most likely represent stars.

.....	.....
Не са нашле дребна лова,	They didn't find any small game,
Най са нашле два елена,	But they found two deer,
Два елена с златни роги:	Two deer with golden horns:
На чело им месечина,	On their foreheads the Moon,
На плешки им дребни звезди.	Small Stars on their shoulders.
Двата братя, два близнака	Two brothers, two twins
Откачиха лък и стрела	They unhooked a bow and arrow
Да се стреля два елена.	To shoot two deer.
Два елена отговарят:	Two deer respond:
-Ой ви вазе двата брата,	-Oh, you two brothers,
Двата брата, два близнака!	Two brothers, two twins!
Не трудете хран'ни коне,	Don't tire your horses,
По ливади по чаири,	On meadows on willows,
Не губете лък и стрела!	Do not lose a bow and arrow!
Ние не сме дребна лова,	We are not petty hunting,
Я най сме до два елена,	We are two deer,
до два елена, до два светца,[8]	two deer, two saints,

In the above song, the wonderful nature of the deer is clarified: they are saints who have reincarnated into deer. Such is the case with the deer from “The Wonderful Deer” panel. A ligature was passed through the antlers of the deer standing on the right, through which it became clear that it was a Pagan deity. The ligature can be interpreted as follows:  (Ins. Tz 2, Fig. 5). The presence of the verb  at the bottom of the

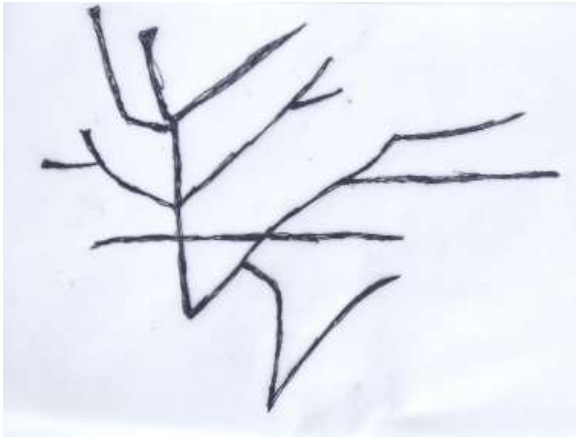


Figure 5,Inscription Tzarevetz 2.

ligature suggests that it is a religious formula praising a supernatural being. The key to understanding the ligature is the character . According to our research, it is used to convey the hieroglyph "Osh" (the goddess Osh) and the sound š (sh) (Ovcharov N. 2018b, p. 3).

[8] „Цар Костадин и два елена“ (Tzar Kostadin and two deer), a Christmas song from Plovdiv, Bulgarian Folk ... 2005.

Here, perhaps, the possibility of the grapheme ⩛ being interpreted as "Osh" should be ruled out.

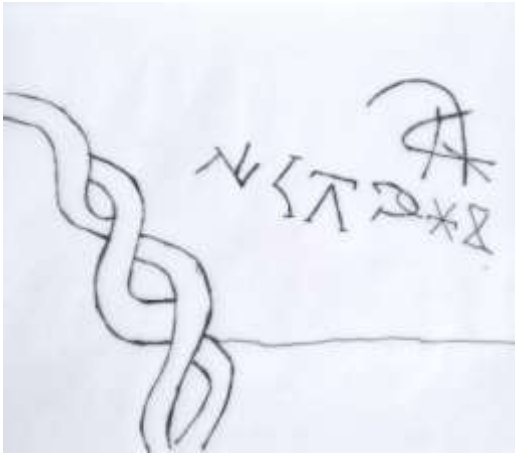


Figure 6, Inscription M22, Murfatlar.

The only other possibility is the name of Shom Ata, known from the Ins. M22 found in Murfatlar Cave Churches (Fig. 6). Moreover, the character ⩾ can be interpreted as "ata". Although it is found in several inscriptions, the meaning of the hieroglyph ⊏ is unknown. It



Figure 7, Ligathure from a cave near Karlukovo.

can be assumed that here we are dealing with a word closely related to one of the characteristics of Shom Ata. In this case, the inscription should be conveyed linearly as follows: ⩛⩾⊏⩒ "Ari Shom Ata Ari (?) Chit" (honour St. Shom Ata, the saint, (?). So far, our information about Shom Ata has been based only on the Murfatlar inscriptions. In the inscription M 22 from Murfatlar, the name Shom Ata is written phonetically which allowed the discovery of this long-forgotten Bulgarian Pagan deity. Also, the inscription M 22 is accompanied by a ligature with a similar reading. This helps us to identify a ligature found in the caves near the village of Karlukovo. In addition to the letters forming the name Shom Ata,

the character ᛉ has been added. Thus, the ligature reads: ᛉᛘᚲᚢᚦᛯ "Ari Shom Ata" (Saint Shom Ata) (Inscription Karlukovo 1, Fig. 8)[9].

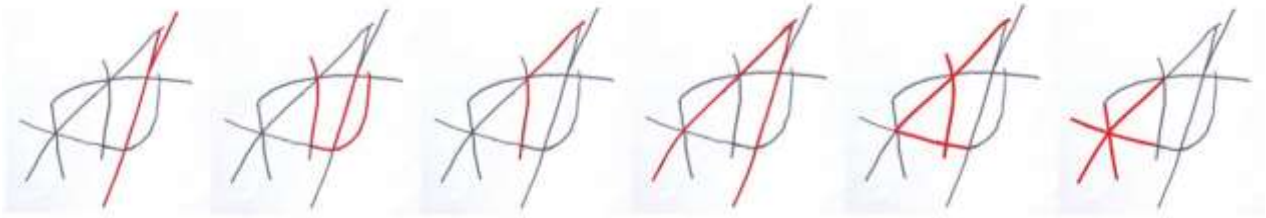


Figure 8, Inscription Karlukovo 1.

Shom Ata, represented as a deer, was also carved on a wall in front of the B4 church in Murfatlar. Its horns form a very short inscription: ᛘᛉ (preise Shom) (Ins. M82 - Fig. 9). In this case, it becomes quite certain that the wonderful deer from the scene with the two hunters is an incarnate supernatural being.

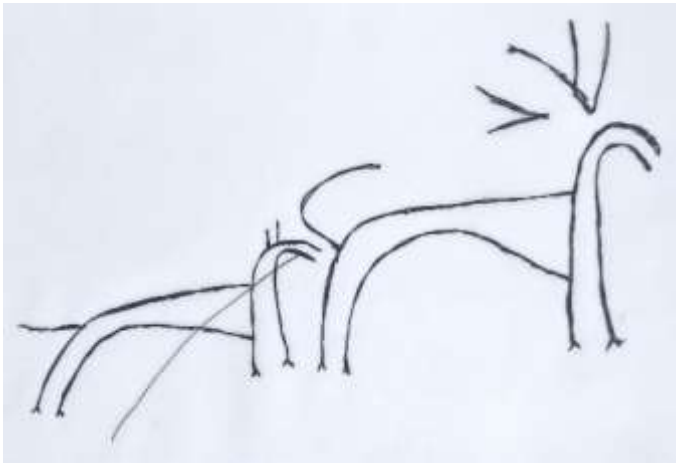


Figure 9,Inscription M 82, Murfatlar.

However, the panel "The Wonderful Hunt" includes many more elements than what we find in Bulgarian folklore. The story presented by the panel is complex and mysterious. The four animals are surrounded by images of dragons, cup-shaped signs, and Runiform inscriptions. Above the stage of the hunt are incised dozens of Runiform characters sometimes woven into ligatures, sometimes arranged isolated. A small ligature is carved quite separated on the upper left corner of the panel. It consists of the following characters: ᛞᛉᚿᛁ (Fig. 10, Ins. Tz 3). The upper part of the panel is dominated by a long and intricate inscription (Ins. Ts 4, Fig 10). It can be assumed that it runs horizontally, but its characters are mostly connected vertically in ligatures. Therefore, it is not easy to find the order in which characters have to be read. However, there a five horizontal lines (here coloured in green) that might serve the purpose of connectors and organisers. They help to some degree to separate the inscription in horizontal lines. Thus, the first horizontal line is carved on the top of the

[9] For the images and inscriptions found near Karlukovo see: Petrov J. 2001.



Figure 10, Inscriptions Ts 3 and Ts 4, Biyarnitsata Cave.

first line. It connects two ligatures and two separate characters. The left ligature consists of six characters: . The right ligature (coloured in dark blue) stretches far below to the next level of inscription. Here can be distinguished the owing characters: . The two separated characters are incised at the right end of the line: . The second horizontal line is incised to the left, slightly below the first. It connects five characters:[10]. An isolated character is incised to the right of them: (in blue). A group of two ligatures (1-, 2-) and a single character ( ) from the space between the first and second level of the inscription A huge intricated ligature, connected by the third horizontal line, raum the second level of the Ins. Ts 4. It can be separated into 9 parts: 1- (in green), 2- (yellow), 3- (dark blue), 4- , 5- (light blue), 6- (brown and dark blue), 7, (immediately under presented already)- (dark and light blue), 8 (maybe part of 7)- (yellow) and 9- (brown and yellow). On the last ligne are found 3 ligatures: 1-, 2- (dark blue),

A short vertical inscription starts under the inscription Tz 4 and continues over the body of the upper deer: (Fig. 4, Ins. Tz 5). Another inscription follows to the right, in front of the deer: (Fig. 4, Ins. Tz 6). In front of the second (lower) deer has incised another inscription in which 7 characters can be distinguished: (Fig.4, Ins. Tz 7). Another ligature appears immediately to its right It is composed of five graphemes (with the meaning "the Sun") and the characters (Fig. 11, Ins. Ts 8, in yellow). A symbolic

[10] Every character here (as in most of the ilustrations in the article) is coloured differenty for clarity.

figure of a deer, associated most likely with surrounding inscriptions was incised at the bottom.



Figure 11, Inscription Ts 8.



Figure 12, The panel "The wonderful hunt ". Cup-shaped signs.

The cup-shaped signs forming three groups and several single indentations are an intriging part of the panel “The Wonderful Hunt” (Fig. 12, in red). The practice of carving cup-shaped marks on stone surfaces has an extremely long life: from the Paleolithic to the late Middle Ages. They are known from all the inhabited corners of the globe. Since their use is forgotten, several different hypotheses about their meaning have been developed. According to one opinion, the cup-shaped signs were used as sacrificial offerings. This interpretation is supported by their use in historical times. For example, in Estonia until the beginning of the 20th century, the local population placed in the cup-shaped signs, carved on the so-called "Sacrificial stones", seeds, milk, meat, and blood. Sacrificial stones were also believed to have healing properties and help cure skin and eye diseases (Tvauri A. 1999, p. 138-141). According to another hypothesis, the water collected in the cup-shaped marks on the horizontal surface of the stone was considered live-water and was used for healing. It is also suggested that some of the cup-shaped signs could symbolize human head (Coles, J. 2003, 218) and others mark the female genitalia (Mandt G. 1986, 1987). It is relatively popular to think that cup-shaped signs symbolize stars and represent constellations in groups (Outlev P. 1968; Lukashenko V. 2994; Tilly, K. 1999).

The cup-shaped signs are often used in different contexts in the caves near Tsarevets. The most numerous are the groups of small holes applied in different quantities. Sometimes cup-shaped signs dominate the entire panel. For example, the panel of Fig. 13 is composed of an intricate tangle of cup-shaped indentations, symbols, and written signs. At the bottom left is an incised ligature formed by several Runiform characters meaning "the Sun". An unfinished figure of a deer is drawn at the base. To the right of this group is incised the Arable land (green), in which several dragons can be seen. The groups of cup-shaped signs and the incised figures of dragons and Runiform characters are placed above the Arable fields. It is believed that they depict the Upper Earth.



Figure 13, The panel "Cup-shaped signs", Cave Biyarnitsata.

Often the cup-shaped signs are surrounded by one or two lines incised in the rock. These “fences” or “borders” have the shape of a rectangle or an irregular circle. On the panel of fig. 15 between the groups of characters are incised dragons. On the panel of fig. 14c, both the border itself and the graphemes around it are made up of the bodies of several dragons. A



Figure 14, Cup-shaped signs. From left to right: panels A, B, and C.

Dragon is also present on the panel of Fig. 14a. The number of characters in the fenced and unfinished groups is different: 5 (Fig. 18, 19), 6 (Fig. 18), 7 (Fig. 15), 8 (Fig. 15), 9 (Fig. 4, 10, 11), 10 (Fig. 20), 12 (Fig. 18, 19), 13 (Fig. 14c), 14 (Fig. 20), 17 (Fig. 14a), 20 (Fig. 20).

Some of the cup-shaped signs are grouped symmetrically. For example, in two of the groups in the panel of Fig. 15, a cup-shaped sign is surrounded by six signs arranged in a circle. In the third group of the same panel, the sign in the middle is surrounded by four concentrically arranged indentations and the other two lie opposite at equal distances from the circle.

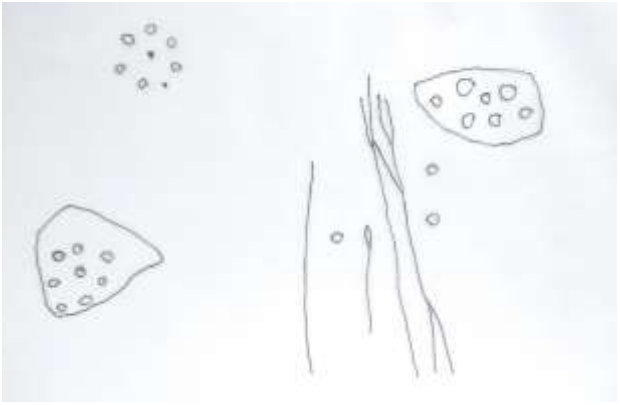


Figure 15, Cup-shaped signs, Tsarevets caves.

On the panel of Fig. 18 characters in the middle are surrounded by two circles: the first consists of six and the second of ten characters. These groupings of cup-shaped signs

resemble constellations according to the traditions of some ancient and historical peoples. For example, the Altai people imagine the North Star surrounded by the seven stars of the

An image resembling the Pleiades is also engraved on “the Wonderful Hunt” panel. The design on which the nine cup-shaped signs are arranged resembles a cross. The group of indentations seems to be isolated from the main group of the panel but is located high above a ligature representing the Sun (Fig. 17). constellation Die-ti-kaan - the seven jugs (Ursa Major). Also, the constellation of the Pleiades was represented in antiquity as a star in the centre surrounded by six concentrically arranged stars. A similar symbolic image of the Pleiades can be seen on the disk found near Nebra, Germany, and dated to 1600 BC (Fig. 19). This abstract representation of the Pleiades has been known since later times (Rappengluck M. 2015, p. 50 et seq.). Of particular interest are the images of the seven stars on Roman coins. These are engraved on the denarii of the emperors Hadrian and Septimius Severus (Fig. 16b).

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Figure 16, The disc from Nebra (Wikipedia) and a coin of Septimius Severus.

The Pleiades, called “hen”, “poles” or “chives” are some of the most popular constellations in Bulgarian folklore. They rise on St. Dimitrov's Day and set on St. George's Day and have therefore served as an orientation in many economic activities. For example, it was believed that “the hen” shook her feathers on summer St. Todor's Day, so the herds began to get sick. That is why the sheep at that time of the year used to be brought inside. (Georgieva 1993, pp. 29, 87)

In other cases, cup-shaped signs are inscribed on the bodies of animals (Fig. 4), graphemes (Fig. 4), or pagan deities. For example, in “The Universe” panel (Fig. 30) the figures of the Sun (or the Sun palace), the Fire, and the Moon are covered with cup-shaped



Figure 17, Left the Pleiades (Wikipedia), right image from the panel “The wonderful hunt”

signs (Fig. 18). Their number may not be random. There are twelve signs in the Sun palace, five in the possessions of the Fire, and five or six on the Moon. Single cup-shaped signs are incised near these three celestial deities between the Runiform characters and symbols that surround them.

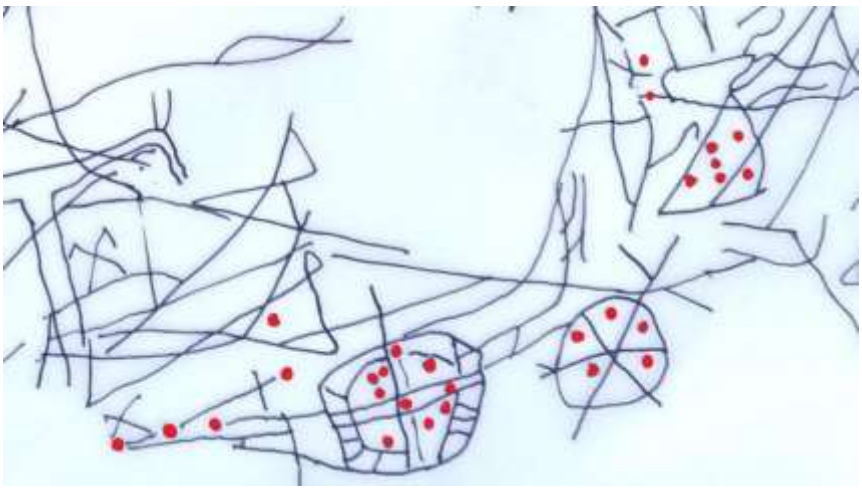


Figure 18, Cup-shaped signs connected with the Sun, the Fire, and the Moon. Biyarnitzata cave.

The twelve cup-shaped signs inscribed in the Sun palace can be associated with the twelve months. The personification of some of the months in Bulgarian folklore is well known: Golyam Sechko, Malak Sechko, Baba Marta[11].

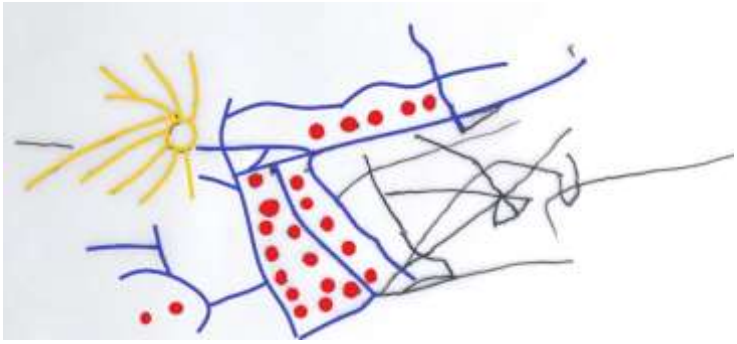


Figure 19, Upper-left part of the panel "A dragon and hins".

The round signs incised on the images of the Fire and the Moon probably represent deities closely connected with them. Here a parallel can be drawn with the religion of the Siberian Altaic people. They worship the god of Fire Aal-uot-esä (Аал-уот-ося) and his seven brothers: Byrźa-bytyk (Быржа-бытык), Kyryl-tüsümär (Къръл-тюсюмярь), Kündül-chagan (Кюндюль-чаган), Küra-chagan (Кюра-чаган), Khan-chagan (Хан-чаган), Khatan-soduä (Хатан-содуя), Ylgyn-sabiä (Ългън-сабия) (Sleptsov A. 1886, p. 125).

The Sun is often in the company of cup-shaped signs on the walls of the caves in the village of Tsarevets. In Fig. The 16 circular depressions are divided into three groups: 12, 5, 5, 2. The question arises: if these are deities, is their material manifestation in the sky stellar?

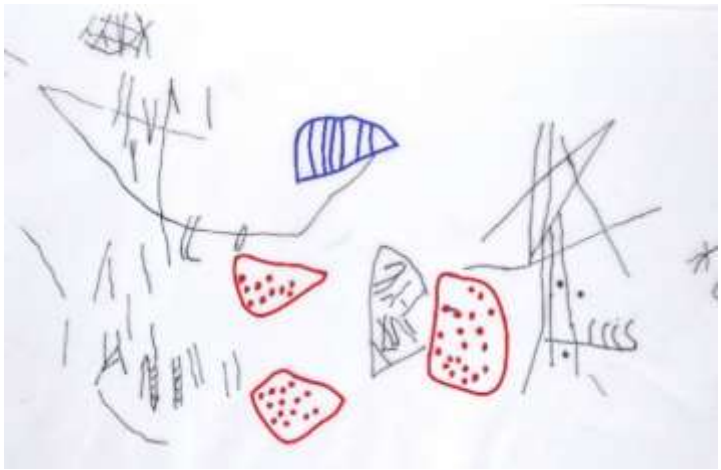


Figure 20, The panel "Cup-shaped signs and the Moon", Tsarevets caves.

[11] Personalised names for the first three months.

That is, do the groups of cup-shaped signs symbolize celestial constellations? The answer to this question may be given by a panel from the cave Malkata Dupka (Fig. 22). It consists of five separate but thematically related parts. Its lower left part is covered with countless small and large dots imitating cup-shaped signs. The view resembles the night sky, whether real or imaginary. A large winged bird of prey has entered into a fight with dragons coming from all directions. The bird caught two of the beasts with its foot and beak. Many of the dragons are woven to symbolize Runiform characters, in most cases ᛉ and ᚷ. Exceptions are several ligatures and single characters.

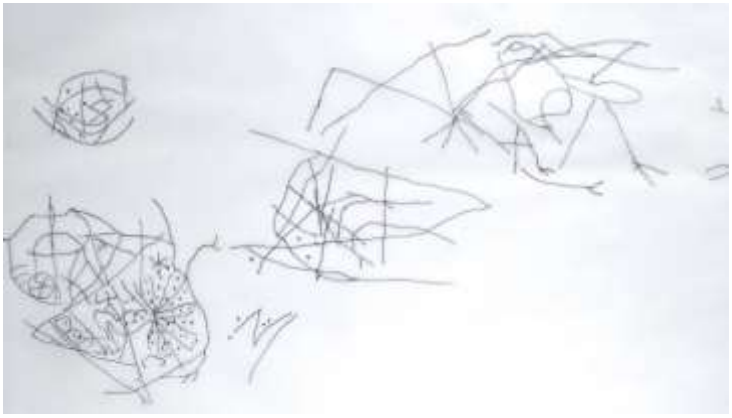


Figure 21, Panel "Starry sky", The cave Malkata dupka, Tsarevets.

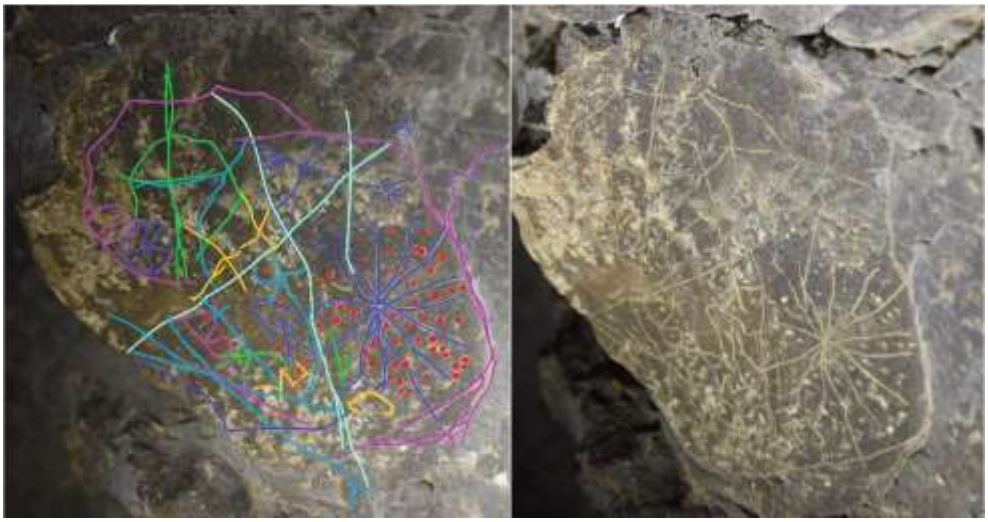


Figure 22, "The starry sky" panel. Malkata dupka cave.

The first ligature is incised in the upper left quarter of this part of the panel (coloured green). It is composed of the hieroglyphs: ᛏ, ᚴ, ᚲ, ᛉ and ᛏ (Ins. Ts 9). The second ligature covers the lower left part and consists of the hieroglyphs: ᛝ,ᛉ,ᛏ,ᚼ,ᚳ,ᛋ and ᚲ (Ins. Ts 10). Another ligature is woven into it: ᛒ,ᛉ and the grapheme ᚲ (Ins. Ts 11). The character ᛝ("ot" - fire) is engraved in the upper right quarter (Ins. Ts 12) and in the upper left quarter, the character ᛋ(Ins. Ts 13) is inscribed in a circle.

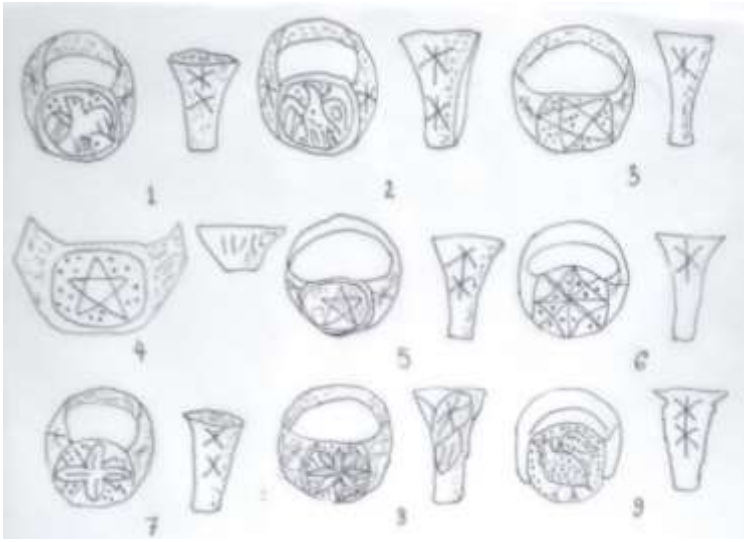


Figure 23, Finger rings from Odartsi, Bulgaria[12].

The other parts of the panel repeat the same theme. For example, to the right of the part just described, three bird heads and the character ᛉ meaning “star” have been incised (Ins. Ts 14). The several dragons surrounding the bird's heads are grouped in a ligature composed of four graphemes: ᚤᚦᚤᚦ (Ins. Ts 15). In the next part of the panel, to the right of its centre, a similar scene is cut: dragons attack a bird from all sides. To her left, two characters ᛇ are incised to symbolize an animal whose nature is not entirely clear. Almost the same scene is repeated in two of the other three parts. It gives the impression that a scene from an ancient Bulgarian myth is depicted here in which the Bird of Heaven fights dragons. The celestial bird Mercury, known from Altaic mythology, is similar. It has copper claws and covers the Moon with its left-wing and the Sun with its right-wing (Levin M. 1935, p. 188).

The hypothesis that the groups of cup-shaped signs in some cases symbolize a part of the starry sky is supported by the images on several rings from the time of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. On their surfaces are engraved miniature cup-shaped signs and a bird, pentagram or star, as well as Runiform characters, most often ᛉ (star). Also on one of the rings, can be seen a Dragon, depicted in the way typical of the caves near Tsarevets (Fig. 24-8). This type of ring repeats, albeit in a synthesized version, the plot of “the Starry Sky” panel. But not only that - the use of pentagrams and other signs symbolizing a star as well as the character of a star in combination with cup-shaped signs confirm the hypothesis that these signs symbolize stars.

[12] Doncheva-Petkova L. 1999.

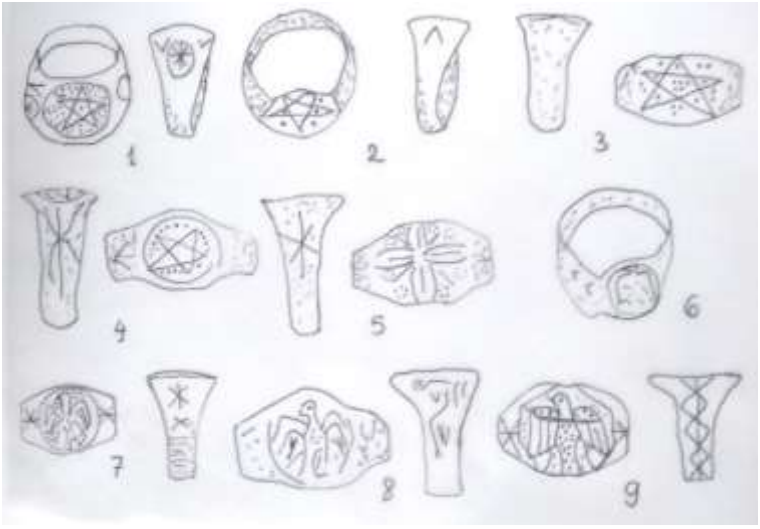


Figure 24, Fingerrings from: 1,2- Odartsi, 3-5- Stenche, Makedonia, 6- Belgrad, Serbien, 7- Kapidava, Romania, 8- Oradea, Romania, 9- Sentesh, Hungary.

The next panel, which depicts Shom Ata, but this time in an anthropomorphic image, is incised not far from the Deer Hunting panel. Here Shom Ata stood in front of a deer with large branched horns (Fig. 25). The sign ⩛ (Ins. Ts 16) on his left side is painted on his face. Above Shom Ata and the deer, a Cyrillic inscription is incised: ⷭⷧⷯⷭ ⷮⷮ. The popularity of Shom Ata in Medieval Bulgaria is suggested by another image, this time incised on the wall of the church St. Sophia in Ohrid, North Macedonia. The character ⩛ is incised this time on the forehead of a bearded a men's head (Fig. 26).



Figure 25, Cave Biyarnitsata. The panel "Shom Ata and a stag".

On the left side of the inscription of Shom Ata from Murfatlar (M 22) is depicted a headless dragon. A scene with a decapitated dragon was also incised in the Biyarnitsa cave (Fig. 13). It is possible that in both cases there is a hint of an episode from a Bulgarian myth

in which Shom Ata decapitated a dragon. A story about a battle with a dragon, or more precisely Sura Lamya, has been preserved in Bulgarian folklore.



Figure 26, Grafitti from the church "St. Sofia" in Ohrid (Ovcharov N. 1994).

There are several dragon fighters in Bulgarian folklore: St. George, Gruitsa Detence, Dobar Yunak, and Bratya Bliynatsi. They are all fighting the Dragon, which looks like a dark cloud and carries hail and droughts or has blocked the roads of the Kingdom. A similar story of the victory over the dragon was added to the life of St. George in the 12th century in Byzantium (Kaloyanov A. 1998). In it, St. George defeats a dragon that has taken over the waters of a lake and requests every year a local girl in order to release them. Thus the victory over the Dragon embodies the victory of Christianity over Paganism.

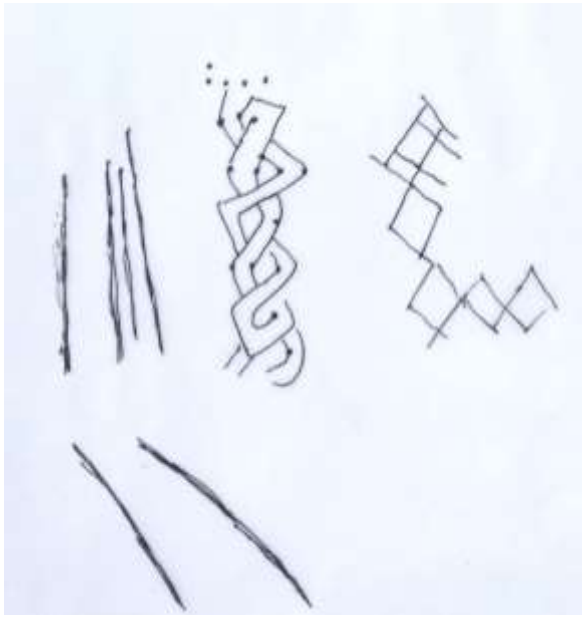


Figure 27, Headless Dragon, Eastern wall of the Biyarnitsata cave.

The hagiography of Mikhail Voin from Potuka, which has a similar plot, also exists in Bulgarian Orthodox literature. It is believed that Michael Voyn was a real person from the 11th century, a Bulgarian of Byzantine service who fought against the Arabs and Normans in southern Italy.

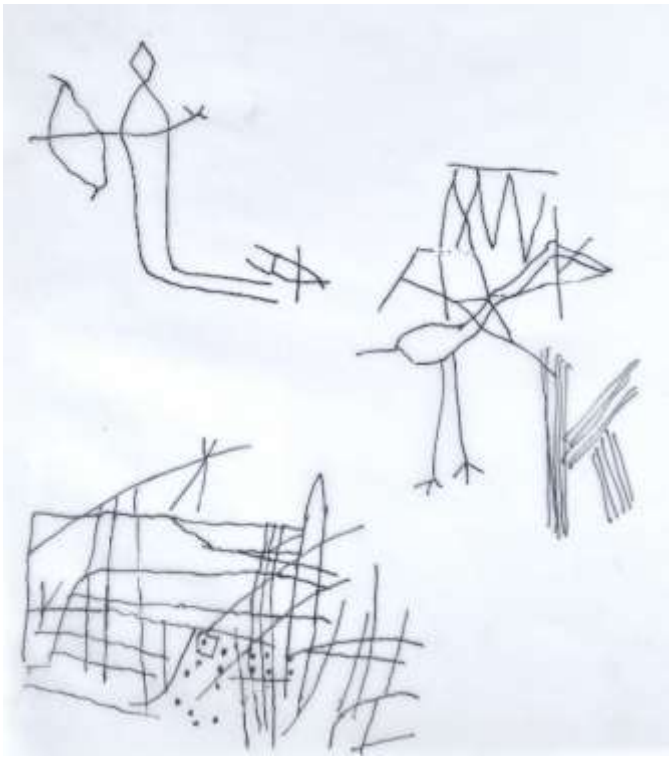


Figure 28, The panel "The Archer and the Bird", cave Biyarnitsata.

However, as we will see, his image is built based on medieval Bulgarian pagan myths. On the eastern wall of the Biyarnitsa cave is engraved the image of a human figure shooting a bow and near it a figure of a bird. Since the bird is in the back of the shooter, the impression is that the two images are part of two different compositions.

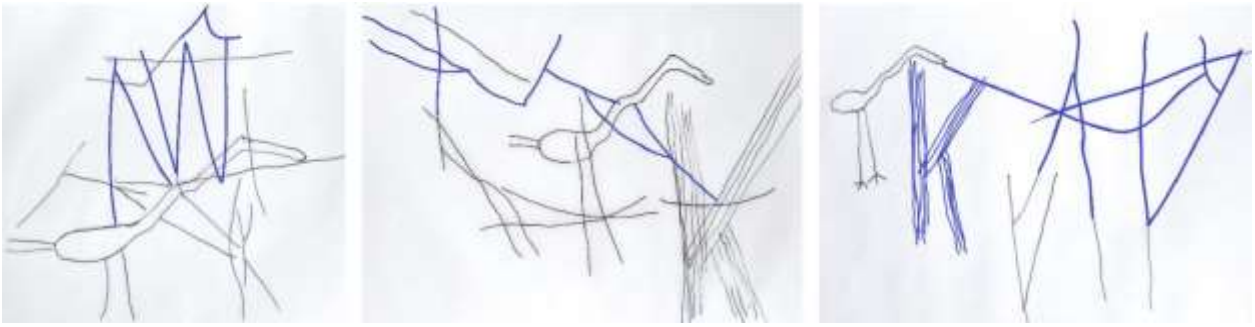


Figure 29, Inscriptions Ts 17, Ts 18 and Ts 19. Cave Biyarnitsata.

It should be noted here that the body of the archer is drawn to symbolize the character ᛟ. Three inscriptions (which may be part of one inscription) can be spread next to its body, as well as around the bird's body. The first of them is cut over the bird: ᚢᚹ (Fig. 17). The second inscription starts from the space between the bird and the shooter and passes over the body of the bird: ᚦᛏᛉ (Fig. 18). Parts of the third inscription are not well preserved (Fig. 29c). Only two of his graphemes are indisputably distinct: ᛕ and ᚡ. They are characterized by their significantly larger size. The character ᛕ is made up of many thin parallel lines, which probably symbolize crawling snakes.

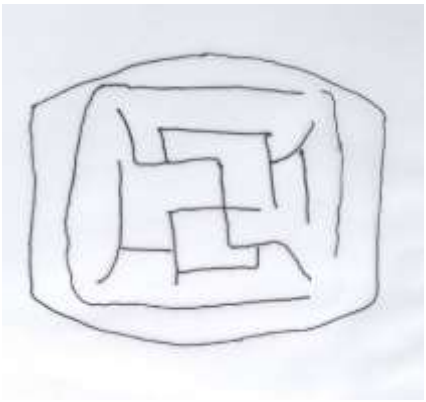


Figure 30, Inscriptions on finger ring from Shumen, Bulgaria (Minkova M., Ivanov I. 2018).

This may correspond to the so far unknown meaning of this character. Graphs with such an appearance can be seen in two other inscriptions. The first of them is engraved on a silver ring from the collection of the Historical Museum in Stara Zagora, which was discovered near the town of Shumen, North-eastern Bulgaria. It consists of four signs woven into a closed swastika (Ins. Sh 2, Fig. 30).



Figure 31, Part from the Sitovo inscription, village Sitovo, Plovdiv district, Bulgaria.

The second is part of the famous Sitovo inscription, carved on a stone slab, part of a rock sanctuary not far from the Plovdiv village of Sitovo. It is one of the few examples of a horizontally incised Runiform inscription. The character ᛕ is incised almost in the middle of the inscription (Fig. 31 - the leftmost sign in green).

An image of an archer and a bird similar to that of the Biyarnica cave was found in a cave complex near the village of Holerkani, Moldova. The several images of Bulgar Runiform characters found in the complex give grounds for the claim that there was a Pagan sanctuary there during the time of The First Bulgarian Kingdom.

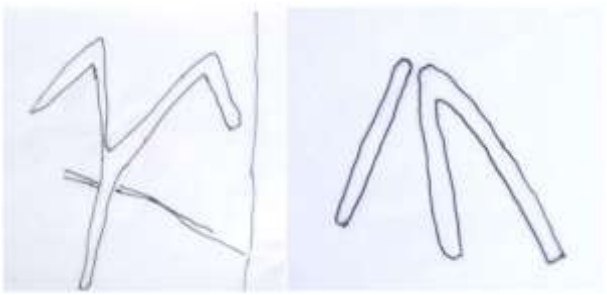


Figure 32, Runiform characters from cave complex near Holercani, Moldova after (Vyahhi I. 2012).

In the Holercani panel, however, the bird is directly in front of the shooter and he seems to shoot at it. The impression is that both the image from Tsarevets and the one from Holerkan illustrate a myth of great popularity in the medieval Bulgarian lands.

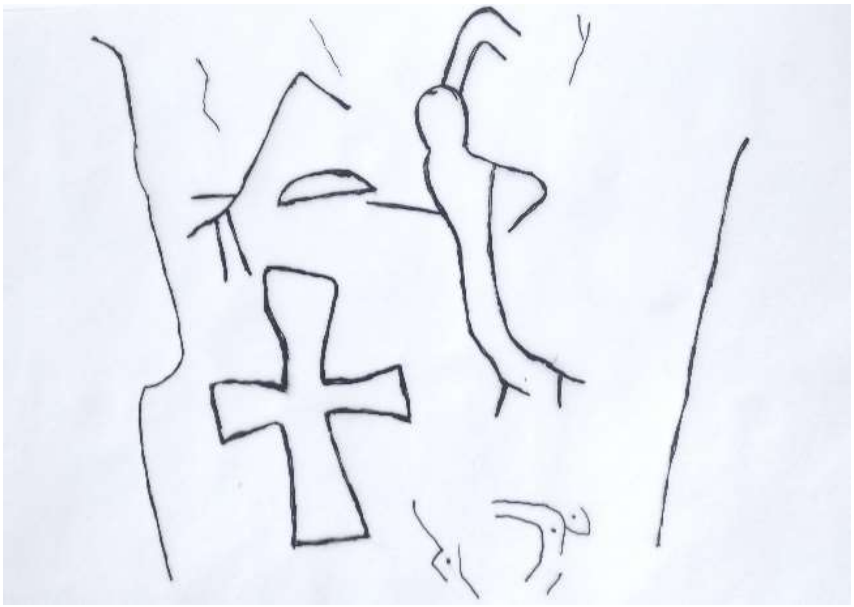


Figure 33, Archer and bird, village Holercani, Moldova. After (Vyahhi I. 2012).

The myth has been preserved this time in the Russian north as an epic about the exploits of Mikhail Ivanovich Potok. In the 19th and 20th centuries, when it was recorded, it was sung in many variants, some of which were of great length[13]. Its plot can be divided into two parts. In the first part, Mikhail Potok meets Maria, the White Swan and cais captivated by charm, and marries her. There are also several versions of the acquaintance itself. In one of them, Mikhail Potok goes hunting for birds, but one of the swans he targets turns into a beautiful girl named Maria. In another version, the girl is a hind that the hero hunts. In the third version, Maria goes to the hero's tent by herself. Either way, each of the options ends in marriage. Maria sets a condition: if one of them dies, the other enters the tomb with him. Suddenly, Maria died soon after. True to his oath, Mikhail Potok enters the grave with his dead wife. There, according to one version of the epic, Michael catches a dragon, which he kills and sprays his beloved with his blood, thus bringing her back to life. According to

[13] The langest variant of the bylina of Mikhail Potok is 1149 verse (Propp V. 1999, p. 111).

another version, the captured dragon begs for his life, against which he brings living water to the hero and Maria is revived. In the second part of the epic, Maria flees with a foreign king. Michael tries to get her back, but eventually kills her and marries her sister or the king's sister. There are only three similarities between the life of Mikhail Voyn from Potuka and the epic about Mikhail Potok: the name of the hero, the battle with the dragon and the fact that he saved a girl as a result. After the adoption of Christianity, the ancient Bulgarian myth has changed so much that only traces of the names of the participants and the original plot remain in the life and the epic. That is why Russian scientists deny any connection between both stories. However, E. Miller, after meeting the name Potok in a Galician song, assumes that some influence is possible due to the cultural ties between Byzantium and the Galician-Volyn principality. In the 8th-10th century, however, the contact zone between the Pliska-Preslav culture and the Ancient Russian culture was large enough (Rashev R. 1995) and the linguistic difference between the two peoples was very small for such a transfer of ideas and plots to be feasible. For example, Russian epics often use two expressions typical of Bulgarian heroic folklore: добрый молодецъ (Good Hero) and добра коня (Good Horse).

А и садился-то Добрыня на добра коня Этта видли добра молодца ведь сядучись А й не видли ведь удалого поедучись. Проезжает онъ дорожку-ту ведь дальнюю,[14]	And then Dobrynya sat on a Good Horse Here they saw the Good Hero sitting down And they didn't see the bold one. He is driving a long way,
Ай же ты удалый добрый молодецъ, Старый казак Илья Муромецъ, Ведь на той дорожке прямоезжія Есть заставы великія[15]	Ay, you are a daring Good Hero, Old Cossack Ilya Muromets, After all, there is a straight line on that path There are great outposts

And in the Bulgarian version:

Огряло ми бяло зори, коладе ле, низ убава Влашка ми земя, коладе ле, то не ми било бяло зори, най ми било Добър юнак, Добър юнак с добра коня,[16]	A white dawn set, collate le, through beautiful Wallachian land, colade le, it was not the white dawn, it was the Good Hero, The Good Hero on the Good Horse,

[14] Onezhki byliny 1873, Dobrinya I zmej, p. 320.
[15] Pesni 1910, Ilja I Solovej, p. 295.
[16] Dobar Yunak... 2002, „Добър юнак с добра коня“, village Asparuhovo, Varna district.

These two expressions are an adaptation of the Danube-Bulgar "ari tura" and "ari (horse[17])“.)". Indeed, in the scene "Deer Hunt" from the Biyarnitsa, the horses are marked with the grapheme ("Ari" holy, good).

To this must be added the fact that in Bulgarian folklore three motifs identical to the exploits of the Russian Mikhail Potok have been preserved, albeit only in fragments. The first is „Лов на мома-кошута“ (Hunt of a Maiden-hind):

Снощи Яврум сърдит дойде, ей коладе, мой коладе, сърдит, гневян, кон му потян, кон му потян дребна роса, ош въздига темна мъгла. ..... Снош отидох татък долу да си лова дребна лова, дребна лова яребица, ош по дребна преперица. Не намерих дребна лова, дребна лова яребица, ош по дребна преперица, най намерих две кошути; аз ги гоня, кон ги не гони. Отговаря Яврум майка: – Ой та тебя, Яврум синка, то не било две кошути, я най било две девойки, да ти опитват юнаството![18]	Last night Yavrum came angry, her colade, my colade, angry, angry, sweaty horse, his horse swept a little dew, a dark mist rises. ..... Last night I went over down to hunt small game, small partridge and even smaller quail. I didn't find any small game, small game, partridge and even smaller quail, I found two hinds; I chase them, the horse does not. Yavrum's mother answers: - Oh, you, Yavrum son, It wasn't two hinds, there were two girls, to try your bravery!

The second song tells of a hero who hunts a maiden bird:

Вяхнал юнак бърза коня да отишол честа гора, лов да лове диви пилци, диви пилци, йеребици. Не изловил диви пилци, тук изловил малка мома, пременена, наредена, като китка накитена, като перо насузено. Да го фати за ръката, за ръката, за колбата, та го метна на конята, та го носи у свой доми.[19]	A Hero rode a fast horse to go to a frequent forest, hunting to hunt wild chickens, wild chickens, partridges. He didn't catch wild chickens, caught a little girl here, dressed, beautified, like a flower-adorned, like a feather- glamorous. Took her by the hand, by the hand, by the waist, and threw her on the horse, and carried her to his home.

[17] Unfortunately, Danube Bulgar word for “horse” is not known.
[18] Century... 2005, „Юнак лови мома-кошута“ , Bulgarian folk song from North Dobrudja, Romania.
[19] Bulgarian Folk… 2007 „Вяхнал юнак бърза коня“,Bulgarian folk song from Kukush (Kiklis),Macedonia, Northern Greece.

In the third motif, the hero is Tsar Yassen, whose wife was stolen by the Turks while he was not in his stronghold. Although the story told in the song is from the end of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, a fragmentarily preserved version with Greek invaders suggests that it is based on an old myth. Here, as in the epic about Mikhail Potok, Tsar Yassen kills his wife at the end of the song:

Германа дума продума: - Царо ле, честит царо ле, тизе си седиш на Роба, проклети турци дойдоа у Урвич, у калето, и ти царица заробиа! … Овчарче овци пасеше у това равно ливадье. Царо му дума продума: - Овчарче, младо овчарче, да проминаа ли некакви турци проклети? Овчарче дума продума: - Царо ле, честит царо ле, минаа турци проклети и си караа робиня! Царо му дума продума: - Овчарче, младо овчарче, дали са далек ил не са? Овчарче дума продума, - Царо ле, честит царо ле, не са си турци далеко, скоро че турци да стигнеш! На слезни, царо честити, та коню да ти отсъпнем! Той час си слезна цар Ясен, та па си коня отсъпна. …	Germana uttered a word: -Oh my King, marry King, you're sitting in Roba, the damned Turks came in Urvich, in the fortress, and captured your Queen! … Young shepherd sheep grazed in the flat meadow. The Tsar uttered a word: - Shepherd, young shepherd, Did some damn Turks pass from here? The shepherd did answer: -Oh my King, merry King, damn Turks passed and carried a she-slave! The King uttered a word: - Shepherd, young shepherd, are they far or not? Young sheperd utterd a word, - My King, marry King, Turks are not far, you are about to catch them up! But get down my merry King, let me untie your horse! Tsar Yasen got down at the moment and untied his horse. …
Та па се качи на коню, три пати рипна със коню, та стигна турци проклети. Дека си рипна със коню, изврела вода студена, направи три кладенци. Погуби турци проклети, отъмна лепа царица. ..... Тогай си дойде у Урвич,	And he mounted his horse, three times jumped the horse, to catch up with the damn Turks. Where the horse stepped, cold water came out, three wells appeared. He executed the damn Turks, and saved the beautiful Queen. ..... Then he came to Urvich,

царица дума продума: - Царо ле, честит царо ле, нийе сме чистя, пречисти, а турци са още по-чисти! На царо жалба дожале, извади сабля от пояс да посече царица….[20]	the Queen uttered a word: - Tzar my, marry Tzar, we are clean, purified, and the Turks are even cleaner! The King appealed, take the sabre out of his belt to cut down the Queen….

But the Bulgarian "connection" does not end there. Some Russian researchers believe that the prototype of Mikhail Potok's favourite, Maria, is the Slavic Mara, the goddess of dying and resurrecting nature. The birds of Biyarnica Cave and the Holercani Cave do not look like a swan, but rather like a stork or an ardea. This leads us to the custom of martenitsa, preserved to this day in the former territories of the First Bulgarian State. Bulgarian grandmother Marta is known for her changeable temperament, and its holiday, March 1 is associated with spring rituals.

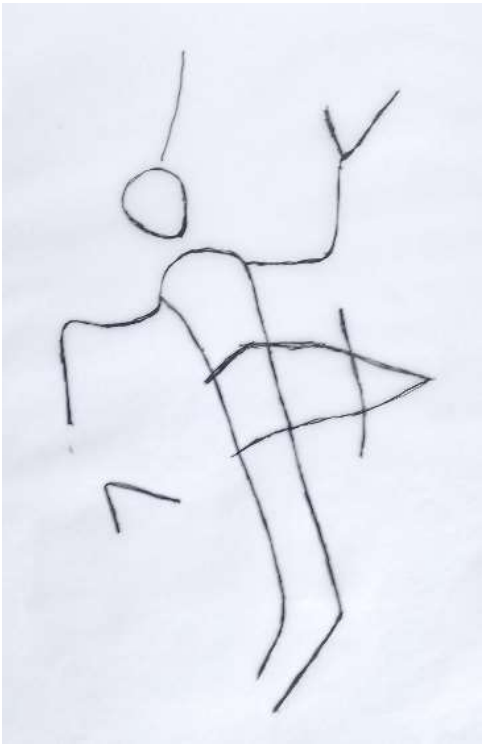


Figure 34, Inscription Ts 20, Cave Biyarnitsa.

Also, the second name of the white swan Maria is Avdotia, and the day of Saint Evdokiya is March 1. This gives us reason to see in the image of the bird, which was aimed at the shooter in Biyarnitsa Bulgarian Pagan deity Ma. Its image is presented in one of the Tsarevets caves (Fig. 34). The drawing is accompanied by a three-character inscription: "chit Ma"

[20] Bulgarian folk song from Kokalyane; Sofia district, Bulgaria, (Bulgarian Filk… 2006- 2020).

(pray Ma) (Fig. 37, Ins. Ts 20). It is not clear hear whether Ma's name is written in one or two graphemes.

The suspicion that in this case the character ᛉ was used to represent the third word in the inscription was caused by an extremely interesting finding.

In 2000, a two-sided icon painted on a birch bark leaf was discovered during the Trinity excavations in estate E in Novgorod (Fig. 35). The layer in which it was found dates back to the first third of the 11th century (Chernov A. 2018). On one side of the icon is inscribed Saint Barbara, and on the other is the pagan goddess Ma.



Figure 35, Medieval icon from Novgorod, the first half of the 11th century.

Most likely, Ma's secret admirer kept her face away from the eyes of his Orthodox contemporaries. Strangely, Russian researchers see in the face of Ma an icon of Jesus Christ. The photos of the icon published on the Internet show the inscriptions with Bulgarian Runiform characters, which unambiguously identify the goddess, and some of its attributes: a bow and an arrow and a hind. There are several inscriptions on the icon in ᚷ are woven on both shoulders. A third smaller character ᚷ is woven into the halo of the goddess (Inscription Novgorod 1). To the left of the base of the large one is a woven ligature that should be read: ᚹᛉᛊ or ᚹᚢᛉᛊ"chit Ma ana" (chit the mother Ma) (Ligature Novgorod 2). On the right is a second ligature: ᛉᛝ "ana izge" (Holy Mother) (Inscription Novgorod 3). Finally, the character ᛝ(izge-saint) is inscribed above Ma's left hand. Apart from being a testimony to the presence of Bulgarians in Novgorod at the beginning of the 11th century, this invaluable find partly explains why the epic about Mikhail Potok is known in the Russian north.

Biyarnitsa Cave offers us a unique opportunity to peek into hitherto unknown spheres of the religious world of the Medieval Bulgaria. An extremely rich picture of the universe is painted on its western wall. Here most probably some gods are depicted by drawings, and others only by inscriptions (Fig. 39)

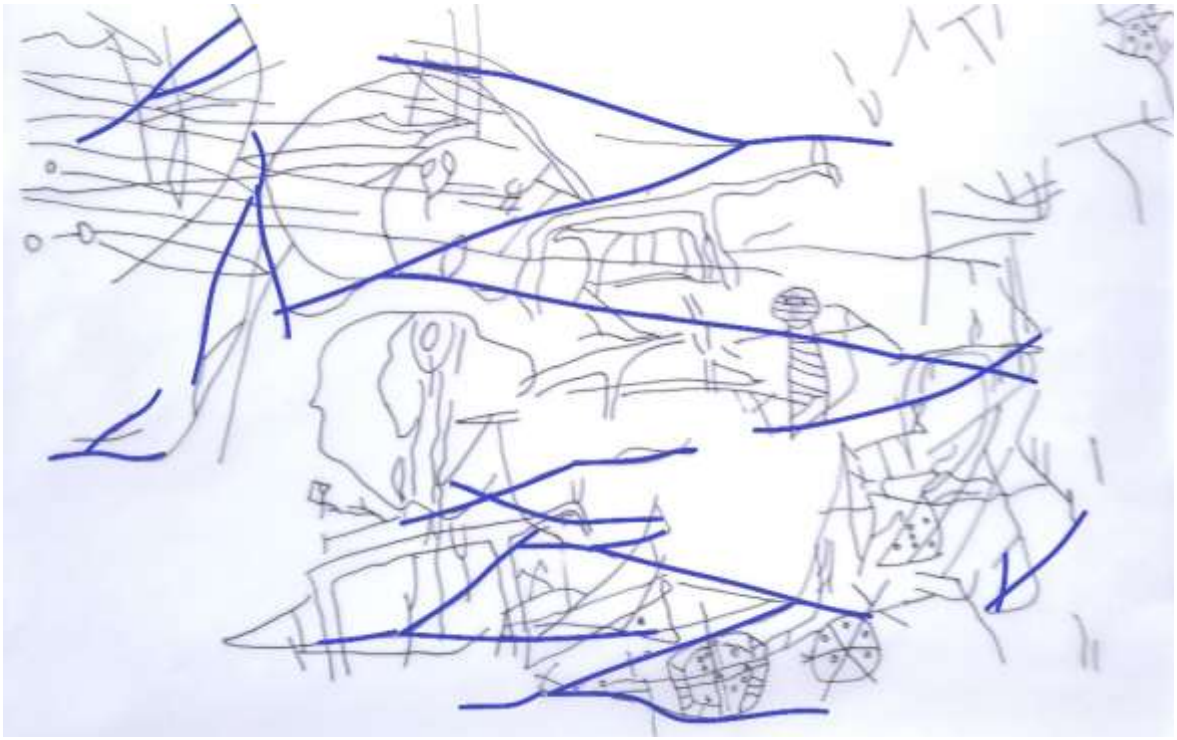


Figure 36, The panel "The Universe", Biyarnitsa cave.

The universe is dominated by the cosmic White Dragon with nine or maybe a hundred heads (coloured blue in the figure). The Sun is incised down to the left of the image of the Fire. Perhaps here is depicted known from Bulgarian folklore palace of the Sun. His plan is complex and not every detail is understandable.

In its centre is the Sun represented by a two-sign inscription: ᛉ+(Ins. Ts 21). 12 small cup-shaped marks are incised around the centre. They represent the twelve months, perhaps children or brothers and sisters of the Sun. To his right is the god of Fire, or perhaps in this case the round palaces of the Fire. There are five children or brothers of the Fire, presented as cup-shaped marks. The Fire itself, like the Sun, is represented by a ligature: ᛉᚹᚲᛟ (Ins. Ts 22). To the right above the Palace of Fire is situated the Moon. Three dotted incisions were made on it, most probably representing deities associated with the Moon. The Moon is represented by a single character: ᚢ (Ins. Ts. 23). Around the Moon there are three ligatures and one single character that are incised deeper than the other lines, perhaps to emphasize their importance. The first ligature (coloured red) is located above the Moon. In it only two of the graphemes can be identified: ᛉ and ᛏ (Ins. Ts 24).

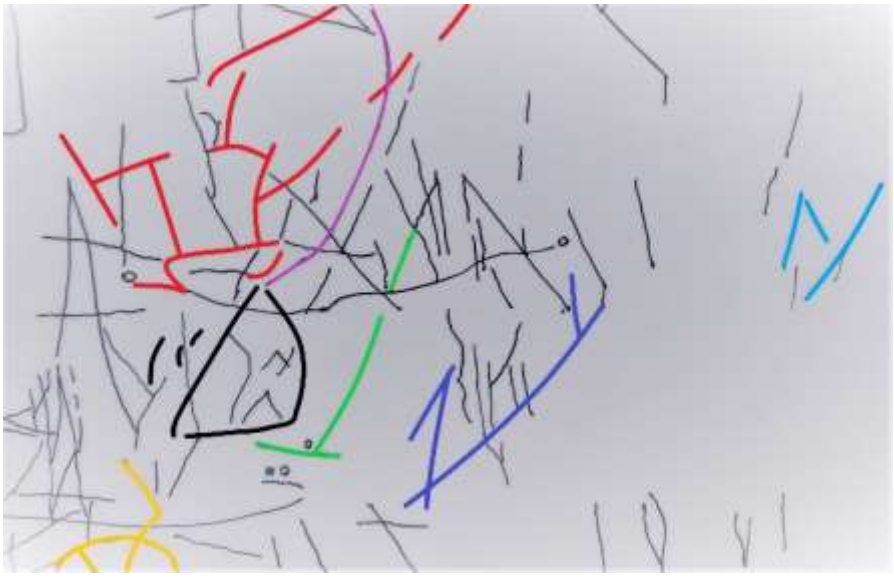


Figure 37, Inscriptions Ts 23- 25, Biyarnitsa cave.

The second and third ligatures are incised to the right of the Moon. One (coloured here in dark blue) is a combination of the characters: ᛉ and ᛏ (Ins. Ts 24), and the other of the characters ᚬ and ᛉ and respectively is an inscription in honour of the goddess Ma (Ins. Ts 25).

Above the Moon is depicted a mythical male animal, probably a dog, next to the head of which is engraved the character ᚦ (Ins. Ts 26, Fig 38).

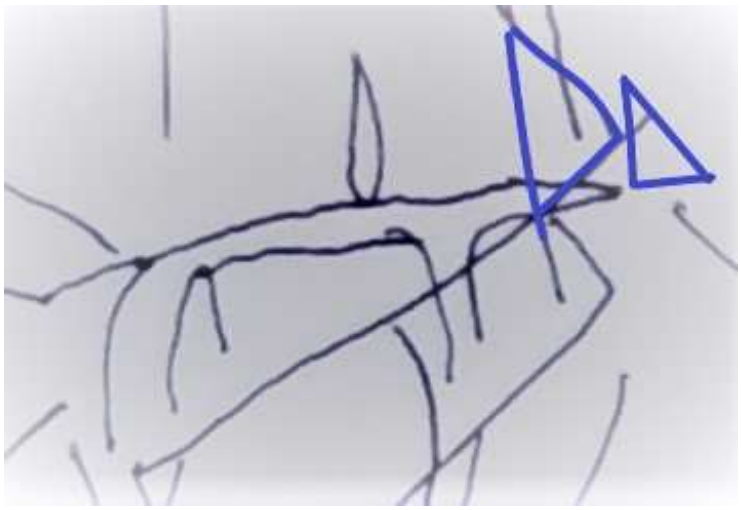


Figure 38, Inscription Ts 26, Biyarnitsa cave.

This Runiform character ᚦ is found together with the images of demonic beings in the frescoes of the Biyarnitsa Cave. His connection with the dog is not accidental, as according to the Bulgarian calendar ritual the dog was considered a mediator with the world of the dead.

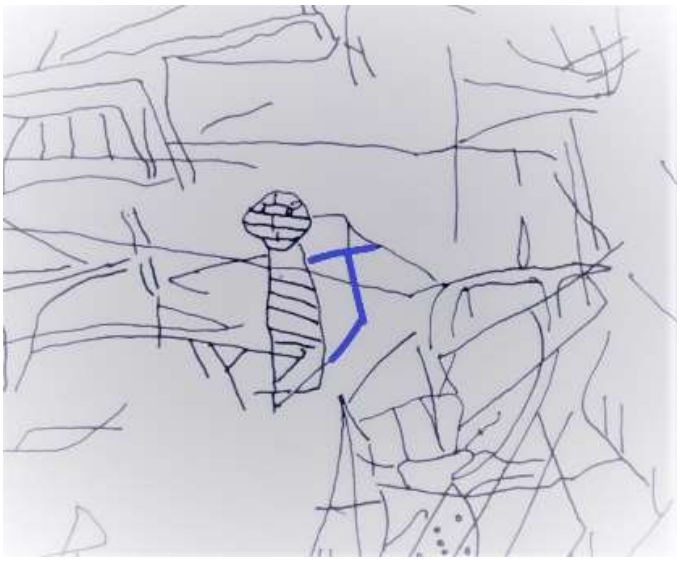


Figure 39, Inscription Ts 27, Biyarnitsa cave.

To the left of the image of the Moon, part of the panel is missing. It is unknown when the hands of the perpetrator broke off part of the rock. Unfortunately, the inscriptions on both sides of the gaping hole at this stage do not give an idea of what was incised there. Above the hole, to the left of the dog, is an incised figure of a child wrapped in diapers. A short ligature was added to his body, most likely containing the name of this deity (Ins. Ts 27, Fig. 41).

Children heroes are known from the old Bulgarian literature and Bulgarian folklore. Such is the offspring of Ispor Tsar from the Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle. This legendary king, whose prototype is Khan Asparuh, reigned for 172 years, created the cities of Drustar and Pliska and a great presidency from the Danube to the Sea. But he is also a child carried by a cow for three years. There are several heroic children in Bulgarian folk songs: Dete Malechkovo, Dete Golemese, Dete Dukadinche and Dete Sekulovo. All of them, although children are endowed with unprecedented strength, defeat heroes and are dragon-slaughter. In the song "Дете Малечково и ламиа" the little hero is three days old when he belts his sword and goes to fight the Dragon:

Збила ми се млада вдоʻичица, Да постигна она мъшко дете; Седум баби що ми я баби'е, Одвай ми го дете постигнала. Кога дете от майка се роди Ми се роди и в час ми зазборва: -А егиди мила моя майко! Пови ме во кумаш пелена, та стегни ме со сърмени повой, остаʻи ме три дни и три нокье, остаʻи ме малу да поспиа.	A young widow became a child, She had a male child; Seven midwives helped, When the child was born. When a child came, He was born and immediately uttered: -Oh my dear mother! Wrap me in a silver diaper, and fasten me with a tinsel bandage, live me three days and three nights, leave me to sleep a little.

Как‘ йе рече, майка така стори; на трите дни дете се разбуди и говори дете малечко‘о: -А егиди майко, мила майко! Али имаш татко‘а бърза коня, Али имаш татко‘о оружье?[21]	As he said, her mother did so; after three days a child woke up and a Little child speaks: -Oh, my mother, dear mother! Do you have my dad's fast horse, Do you have the father's weapon?

To the left of the figure of the child-hero are carved two mythical animals: a mother with her cub. Perhaps these are the celestial cows and her calf, as to the left of them an animal with a similar iconography is marked with a character ᛉ, whose meaning is “cattle" (Fig. 43). Behind the cow with a calf we see the image of the emerging universe (Fig. 41). The embryo (coloured yellow) gradually grows (light green) and expands to its normal size (green). But it seems that the creation of the world is not over. Downstairs, a second cow gives birth, this time perhaps to the Earth. Here the embryo is more like an egg, which, just like in many ancient myths, breaks and flows down and from its yolk, egg white and shells the sun, moon, stars and gods are born. The growing drought here, however, resembles a human face in profile who seems to be "riding" the third animal, perhaps a bull.

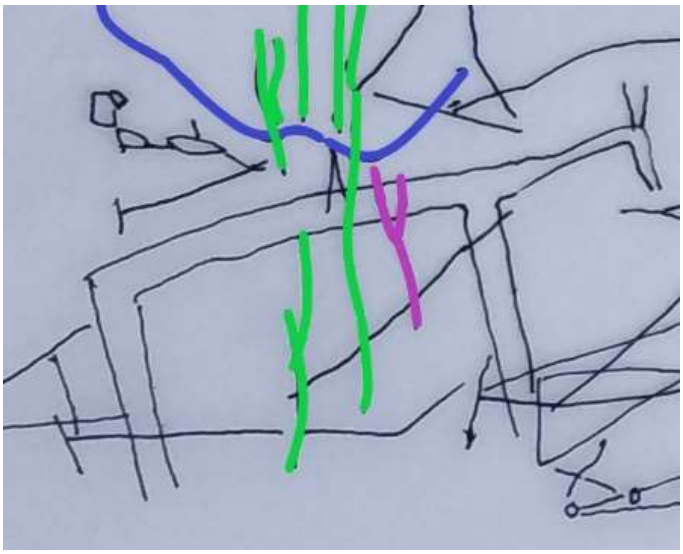


Figure 40, Inscription Ts 28, Bijarnitsa cave.

Such a scene is well known in medieval Bulgaria: the so-called horses ridden by a human head. There is a hypothesis that their iconography belongs to the cultural tradition of the Pannonian Bulgarians who settled in the western part of the Balkan Peninsula at the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th century (Todorova K. 1998). Maybe then the cave complex near the village of Tsarevets was one of the important cult centres of the Pannonian Bulgarians, and the motif "human head" was one of the features of their religion.

In the myth of the creation of the Finno-Ugric Sami people, creation begins with the head of an old man: In the beginning, there was nothing but the head of an old man. There

[21] „Дете малечково и ламиа“, Bulgarian folk song from Struga, Northern Macedonia, Bulgarian Folk… 2007).

were wells on the top, but because the head was covered with a hat, the wells were inaccessible. But thunder tore the hat and the water gushed from the wells and flooded the world. The duck flying over the water finds grass protruding above the water on which it lands and lays five eggs (Petrukhin V. 2005, p. 155).



Figure 41, The panel "The birth of the Universe", Biyarnitsa cave.

But apart from the presence of a human head, the old Bulgarian myth is completely different. The universe there was born of the Heavenly Cow. An inscription is woven into the space below this mythical animal, which perhaps lists the gods in the order of their origin. Although the ligatures are intertwined, their sequence can be roughly restored. The first may be the ligature or conveying the name of the Celestial Cow.

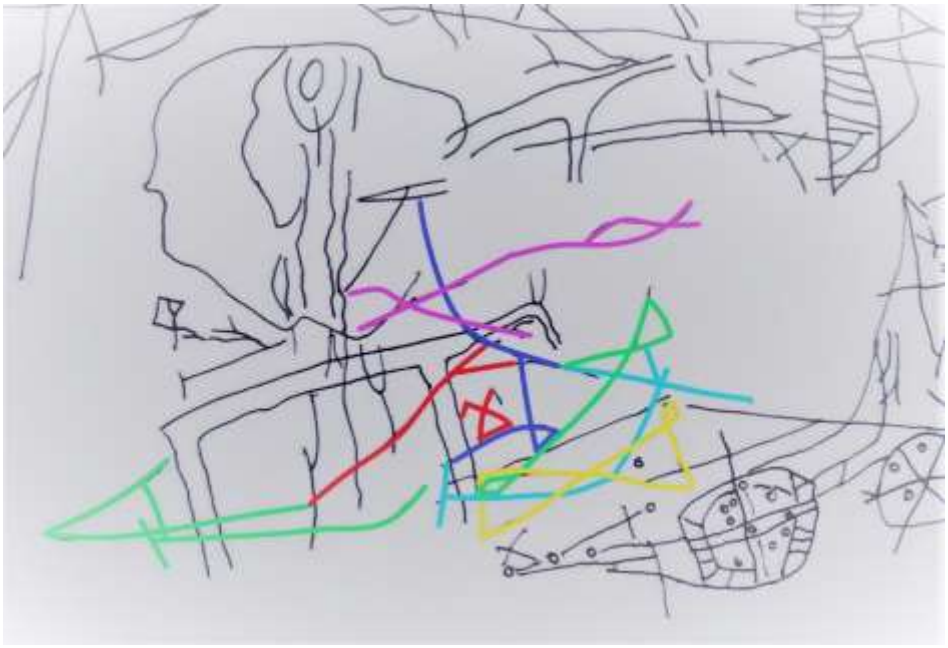


Figure 42, Inscription Ts 29, Biyarnitsa cave.

The second is the ligature containing the hieroglyphs of the Sun and the Moon: . They may be followed by = . The third is the ligature or . The following is perhaps: . The fifth is also the sixth (Ins. Ts 29).
In the upper left corner of the panel is a circle with radially protruding lines. This may be the Upper Earth, connected to the Middle Earth by several celestial rivers. But this may be a picture of the universe in a state of primary chaos.

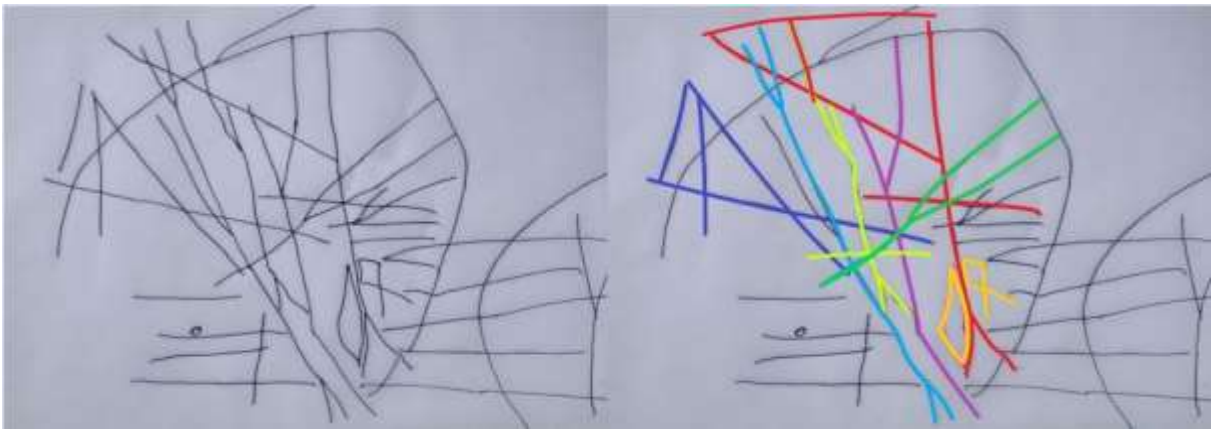


Figure 43, "Te Universe before the Creation", Biyarnitsa cave.

There is almost nothing in it except the first heavenly gods (Fig. 46). The names of five of them can be identified: (Ari ata tengri), (? Biy), (Rod) and (? Biy) (Ins. Ts 30). The Runiform character is present in the formulas of several demonic beings in various panels from the Biyarnitsa. Perhaps conveys the name of the Bulgarian god of evil, the opponent of the good god Ari Ata Tengri.

The realm of darkness, as expected, lies beneath Middle-earth. It is inhabited by demonic creatures: a dragon, a dog, perhaps a crocodile (Figs. 44 and 45).

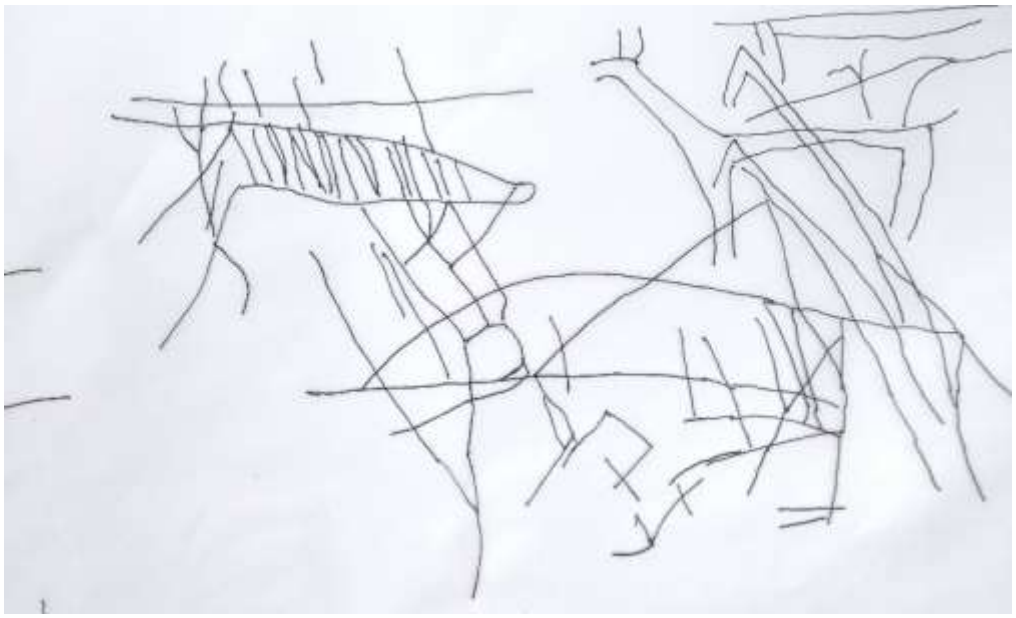


Figure 44, The panel "Low Earth"- left part, Biyarnitsa cave.

Three inscriptions can be identified there. The first is on the left and occupies the entire space under the three animals painted there. Several characters can be distinguished in it: ,,, and (Ins. Ts 31, fig. 49). The second is a ligature consisting of two characters, which is incised under the dragon: (Ins. Ts 32). The third inscription is located between the two mythical animals to the right of the dragon.

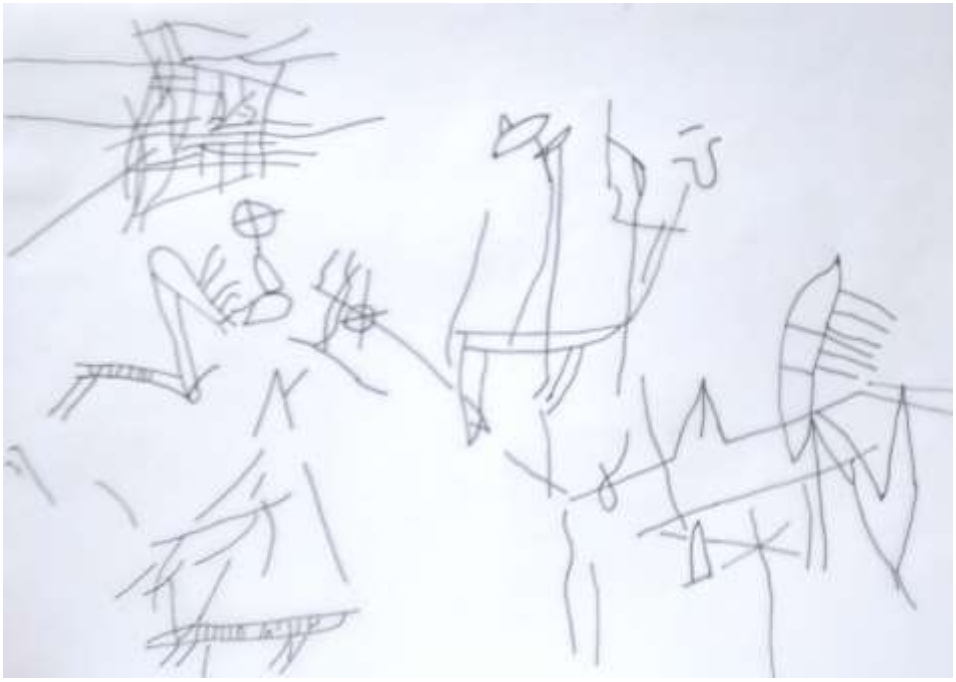


Figure 45, The panel "Low Earth"- right part, Biyarnitsa cave.

Although probably long, only three of its characters can be identified: ᛟ, ᛗ and ᚦ. Since its characters ᛗ and ᚦ are mostly found next to demons, their semantics are most likely related to words associated with the Underworld (Ins. Ts 33).

Such a creature is undoubtedly the Dragon of the Deep known from the myths of many peoples, in which he was defeated by the Supreme God. In Bulgarian song folklore, the dragon-fighter is most often St. George.

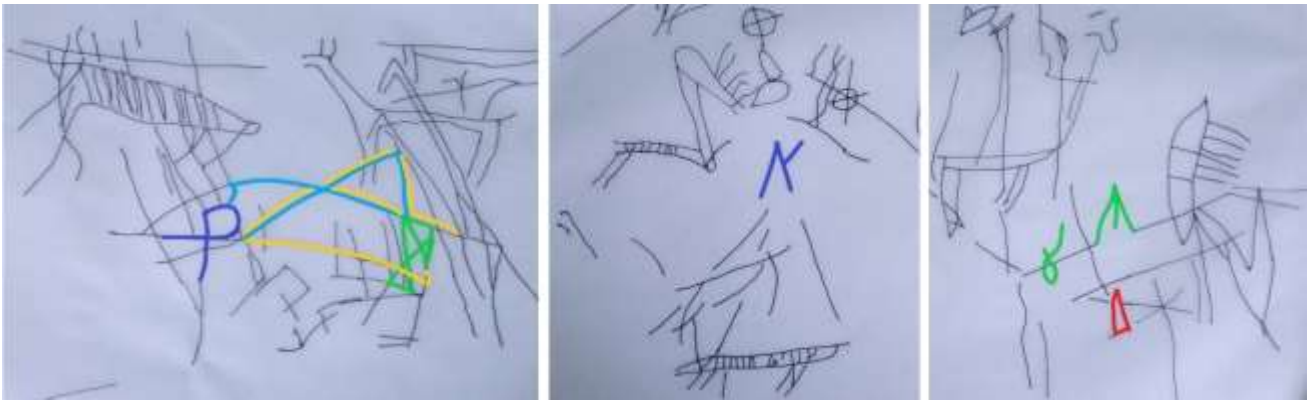


Figure 46, Inscriptions Ts 31- 33, Biyarnitsa cave.

It should be noted that there are several storylines of the song. In the most common St. George finds the Surah dragon and cuts it down.:

Припаднала ми тъмна мъгла по хубава Гюргюлюм града То не било тъмна мъгла, най е било Суфра ламя Суфра ламя с три глави. че изсуши дор три земи първа земя е Влашката втора земя е Тракийската, трета земя е бре Богданската. Не се нае нийде никой, да отсече дор три глави; най се нае свети Гьорги. Че отсече дор три глави, Потекоха дор три реки: първа река - мед и масло, втора река - златно жито, трета река - руйно вино. -Хайде жито на чуфчии, мед и масло на овчари руйно вино на лозари!...[22]	A dark fog came down in the beautiful city of Gyurgyulyum It was not a dark fog, the most was the Sufra[23] Lamya Sufra dragon with three heads. that dried up dor three lands the first land is Wallachia the second land is the Thracia, the third land is Bogdanska. No one had the courage, to cut off those three heads; but St. George dared. He cut off those three heads, Three rivers flowed: first river - honey and butter, second river - golden wheat, the third river- strong wine. -For the farmers- golden wheat, honey and butter for the shepherds for winemakers- strong wine ! ...

[22] Bulgarian Christmas song from village of Khan Krum, Shumen district, Bulgarian Folk… 2006-2020).
[23] Mistaken form of "sura" (white, bright).

In the rock painting from Biyarnitsa, the three rivers of abundance are cut to the left of the slain dragon, but there is no inscription to suggest who the serpent fighter is. Bulgarian folklore also does not give an unambiguous answer to this question. In some of the songs, it is The Good Hero, in others Krali Marko, in the third Gruitsa Detentse, in the fourth Bratya Bliynatsi. In one of the versions of the song, however, the plot has a completely different development. In it, a saint or a hero (Krali Marko, Gruitsa Detentse) uses the help of three dragons to defeat the White dragon:

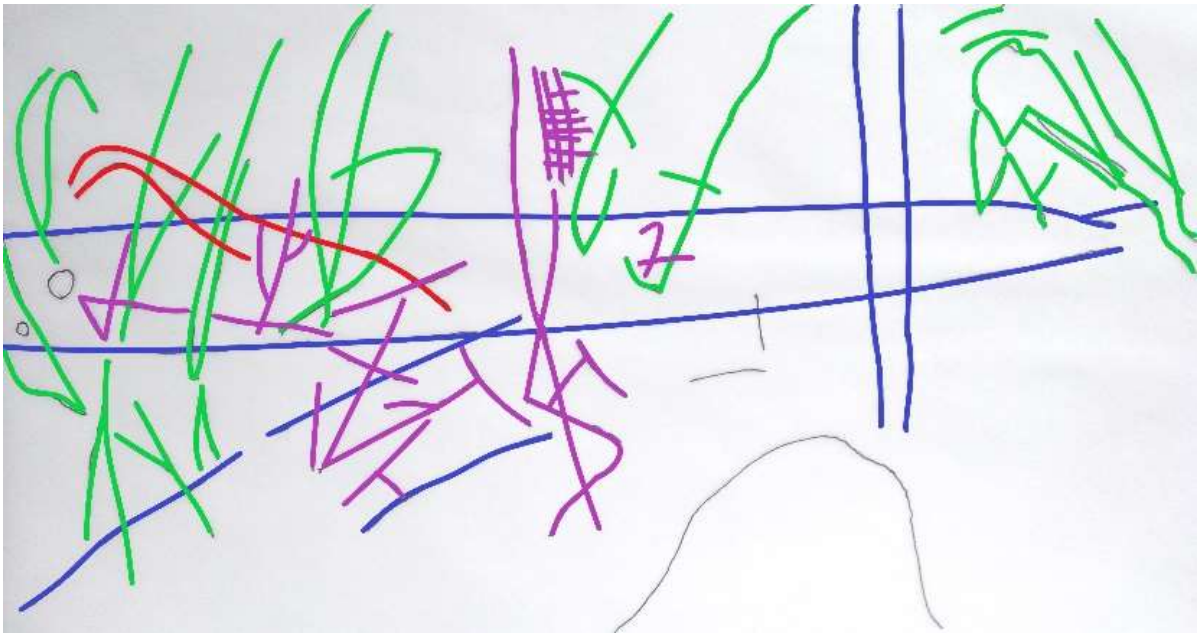


Figure 47, The panel "The Dragon and snakes", Biyarnitsa cave.

...Отговаря свети Никола -Ой, ви вази всички светци, Що стоите, що гледате. Я вземете намерете, намерете три змийчета, три змийчета, три стрелчета да ги пуснем в тъмна мъгла. Тъмна мъгла веч се вдига. Текнали са дор три реки:…[24]	... Saint Nicholas answers -Oh, you all saints, Why do you stand, why do you watch. Do find, three snakes three snakes, three arrows to let them into the dark fog. A dark fog is already rising. Three rivers have flowed:…

Perhaps this myth is illustrated on the panel carved on the north wall of Biyarnitsa. In it, a huge serpent-like monster, probably the White Dragon, is torn apart by many smaller dragons. In the central upper part of the Rock, the image has symbolically represented the

[24] Christmas song, from Chervena, Veliko Tarnovo district, Bulgarian folk... 2006- 2020.

result of the battle: a section of cultivated fields. One single character and two ligatures (in purple) are incised on the panel. It is very possible that all of them, due to their proximity, are part of one inscription. The character ⚔ is incised on the left (Ins. Ts 34). In the ligature to the right of it three graphemes are recognized: ┼, ∨, ⊤ (Ins. Ts 35). The second ligature consists of three graphemes: ⊤, ⚔, ᛟ (Inscription Ts 36).

A third version of the myth is presented on a wall in one of the caves in Govedarnika[25].. Here the cultivated fields are cut at the bottom, and above them in the sky is a battle between three deer and the White Dragon. The deer are symbolically represented, and their horns resemble green branches. Two short captions have been added to the stage. The first is composed of two large characters: ☓☽ (? Month) (Ins. Ts 37).



Figure 48, Panel "The Three Ari" locality Govedarnika, village Tsarevets.

телно на трита елена.). The second inscription is incised at the bottom of the panel. ᛉ|||: "the three Ari" (holy) (Ins. Ts 38), apparently called the three deer. The popularity of the myth in medieval Bulgaria is confirmed by a phrase engraved on a metal plate found in Pliska (Fig. 49). The inscription reads: ∨≡ᛉ (pray the three Ari).

[25] Locality near by village of Tsarevets, Lovech district, in close proximity to Golemio Kamik.

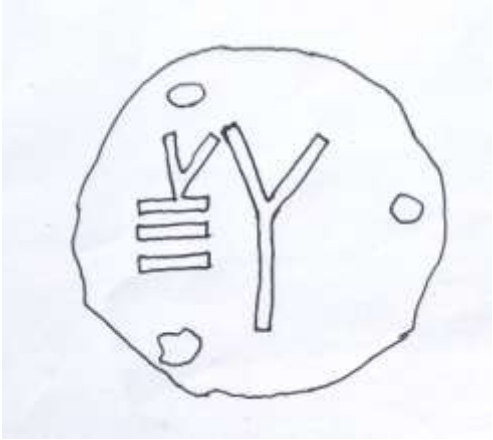


Figure 49, Inscription on a metal plate discovered in Pliska (Rashev R. 1998).

As we have already seen, the deer in the old Bulgarian myths are sympathetic and are sometimes incarnations of pagan deities (Shom Ata). It is strange in this scene, however, that the Moon, not the Sun, is associated with victory over the Dragon and the achievement of fertility.

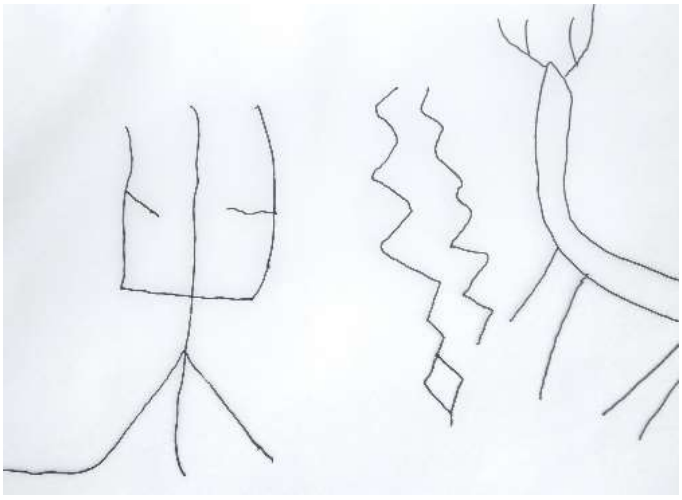


Figure 50, Inscription Ts 39, locality Govedarnika.

On one of the panels from the caves to Tsarevets was found an inscription in which a ligature was used with a relatively wide distribution in medieval Bulgaria (Fig. 56). It is mistakenly considered by researchers to be a monogram of the Shishman family, known for its many medieval images on coins and murals. However, its design is different: . The second sign in the ligature is in contrast to the Shishman monogram whose second character is . The ligature from Tsarevets is identified with a ligature engraved on a medieval bronze ring found during excavations of the church of St. George in Trudovets, Sofia region. Here, along with the ligature , two more ligatures of the sun and the moon are engraved: .



Figure 51, Coin of Bulgarian Tsar Michail III Shishman[26].

The vertical connection of two Runiform characters in a ligature is not uncommon in the written practice of medieval Bulgaria. Ligatures similar to Shishman's monogram were discovered during excavations in Madara in the early twentieth century in an archaeological environment typical of the time of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. One of them is even part of a three-character inscription (Fig. 53). Such a combination of two characters is the ligature ⰅⰈ which may be a monogram of King Rasate (Ovcharov N. 2018), as well as the ligature meaning Jesus ⰊⰎ (Ovcharov N. 2014a).

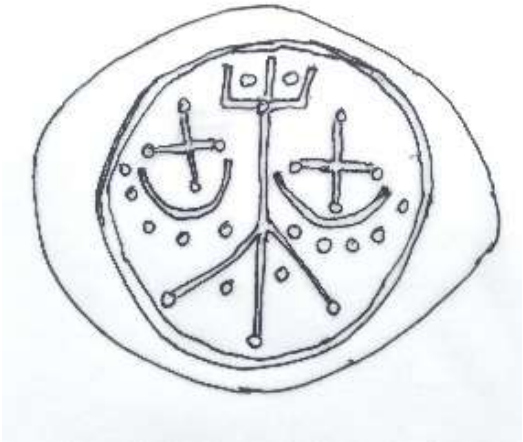


Figure 52, Bronze finger ring, village Trudovets, Sofia district, Bulgaria.

An interesting example of this practice is found engraved on a lead seal found in the fortress near the village of Zlati Voyvoda Sliven region and dated to the 10th – 11th century (Fig. 54). In this case, the monogram ⰅⰈ was used as a personal sign of Euthymius. The choice is extremely appropriate because the Greek letters V and Y, which are part of the name Euthymius, coincide graphically with the characters Ⰵ"chit" (honour) and Ⰸ"ari" (holy). Shishman's monogram is also one such example. The characters ⰔⰛ(Shom) and Ⰽ (Ma) fit exactly the name Shishman. Here ⰔⰔ is a graphic variant of the character ⰔⰛ used most probably to avoid the resemblance to the character ⰈⰛ .

[26] Coin of Bulgarian Tzar Michael III Shishman, (Radushev A., Zhekov G. 1999, p. 125.

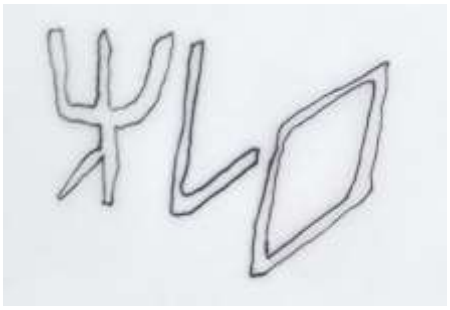


Figure 53, Inscription Kalugeritsa 1 (Fecher G. 1935).

The context in which the ligatures ᛣ in Tsarevets and in ᛘ Madara were found speaks in favour of their religious Pagan meaning. They most likely carry on the names of Pagan deities.



Figure 54, Lead seal discovered near village Zlati Voyvoda, Sliven district (Rashev R. 1998).

One of the most common Runiform characters used at Caves along the Iskar River is ᚷ. It is used in different contexts and this allows its semantics to be understood. This character is often present in deer-related inscriptions. Such is the case with the rock image from Karlukovo (Fig. 55).

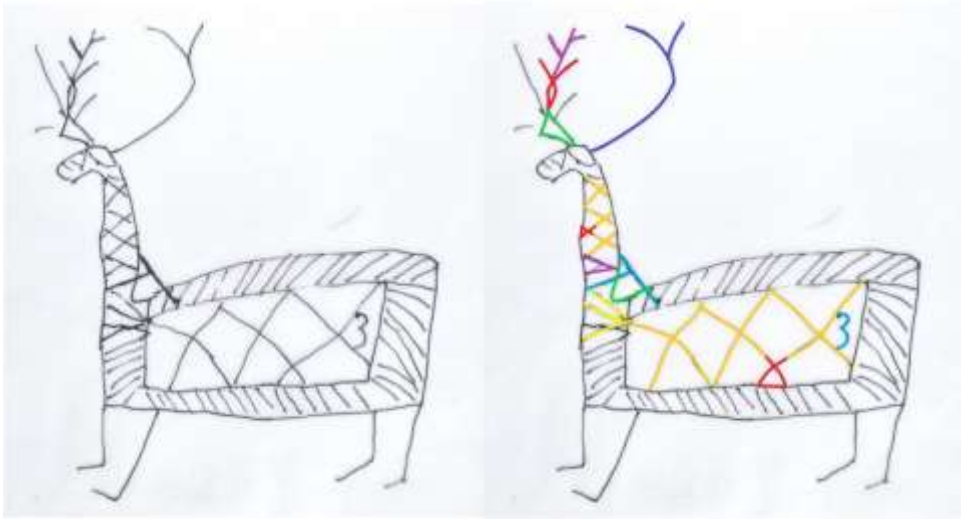


Figure 55, Gravure of a Stag, village Karlukovo.

Here the first part of the inscription is symbolized by the deer's horns, and the second part is incised on his body: ᚹᛝᛃᛉᚲᚹᚢ (or ᚺ) ᚷᚷᚷᛝᚹᛉᚿᚹᚷᚷᚷᛝᛒ (Ins. Karlukovo 2). Virtually the entire body of a deer is covered with the character ᚷ. This is a common practice among the panels from the caves near the village of Tsarevets. Most often the deer's body is hatched, as if the character ᚷ has been repeated countless times.



Figure 56, The panel "The Solar Stag", Cave №4, locality Govedarnika.

Such is the case with a deer from the panel "The Solar Stag" from Cave №4 situated in the locality Govedarnika[27]. Here a beautifully executed deer is a survival shape rounded with other animals and vegetation. The body of the Stag is covered completely with a set of character ᚷ. In the same way are covered the two small deers above and below it, as well as a snake coming from above and perhaps trying to swallow one of the small stags. The antlers at least of the large stag have an unnatural antlers just like the ones of the stag from the Oxford Codex. This leads to the conclusion, that such a deer is one of the embodiments of the Sun. The swallowing of the little stag can be interpreted as a myth inspired by lunar eclipses. Three inscriptions are incised around the large deer (Fig. 57). The first one, incised behind the deer, consists of four characters: ᚷ (Ins. Ts 40). The second inscription is incised above the back of a deer (Ins. Ts 41). Here can be identified characters: ᚷ, ᚢ, ᛏ, ᚳ. The inscription Ts 42 is cut between the deer's horns. Not everything is easy to understand here, as

[27] Cave № 4 (according to M. Asparuhov) situated in locality Govedarnika (Asparuhov M. 1984, p. 157 and 221).

lines are not clearly visible in the available photographs. Moreover, characters Y, Vand K are to some degree of certainty recognisable.

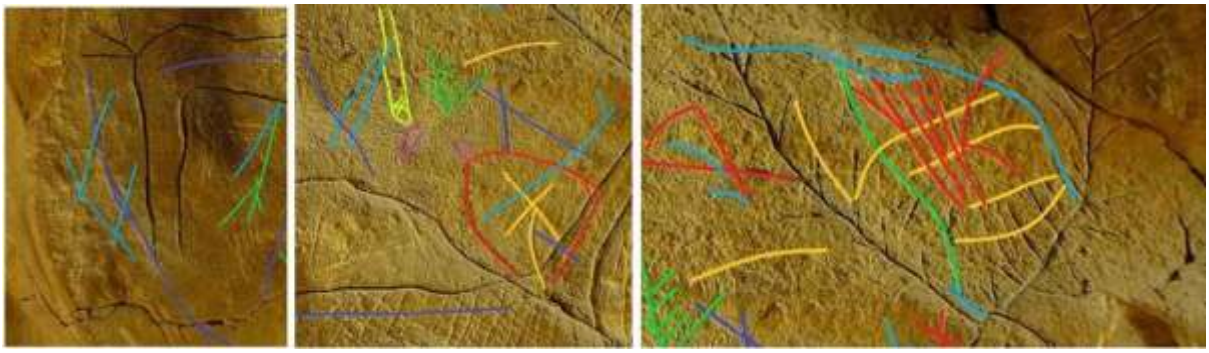


Figure 57, Inscriptions Ts 40- 42.

The significance of the panel “Te Solar Stag” lay in the way the bodies of the deers and the Dragon are covered completely with characrers X. This observation leads to the conclusion that the character X is an adjective that describes the external quality of the skin of the deer and the dragon. The word that fits into this description is "sur". Preserved in Bulgarian dialects, this adjective is used in several stable expressions two of which are very important: сур елен (white deer), сура ламя (white dragon). To them can be added: сура медведа (white bear), суро пиле (white chicken), сура вука (white wolf). Its meaning varies in a few colours: grey, light grey, light brown, and beige. According to Zoya Barbolova, the adjective sur had the original meaning bright, sacred (Barbolova Z. 2012). The same adjective is part of the name of the Khazar city of Sarkel: sar = white. The name of the town is compared with the Chuvash shură = white and kil = dom (Fedotov M. 1996, p. 463). The tradition of giving this name to a city was applied in the First Bulgarian Empire. Several towns with the name Belgrad (white town) are known, two of which, according to their Hungarian names, are closely related to the Bulgarians: Nandor-Fehervar (Onogur (Bulgar) White city) and Gyula-Fehervar (Dulo white city). This name is usually explained by the white colour of their walls built in ancient times. But the walls of the Bulgarian capitals Pliska and Preslav are also white. Although limestone is an easy stone to handle, this practice may be due to cultural reasons. It is possible to draw a parallel with the religions of some Siberian and Ural peoples, in which the colour white has an important sacred significance. It is a symbol of purity and holiness. For example, the Altai heavenly god Ülgen is called in prayers Ak Ayas (white splendour) (Levin M. 1935, p. 183). In the same way, the main Mari god Yumo is nicknamed Osh Kago Yumo (the white great Yumo) (Sitnikov K. 2006, p. 145). Among the Buryats, white shamans, sagani-bö serve the good gods and spirits (Levin M. 1935, p. 137). Also, Bashkir mythology gives many examples: ak donya – heaven (ak=white), ak er- sunny side, ak uybri- good thoughts. The Bashkir White Dier, Ak Bolan, is regarded as a totem ancestor, and Ak Yilan (White Dragon) is a mythical dragon king who brings happiness and success. Aktash haliu is a custom in which a white stone is placed in the foundations of the house for its strength and good luck to the owners (Hisamitdinova F. 2010, p. 14 et seq.).

However, to the identification of the character ᚷ can be added more evidence. In 1977, the tombstone of Prince Presian, son of the Bulgarian Tsar John Vladislav was discovered in the Slovak town of Mihalovce, in the ruins of a medieval building. The inscription is composed of five raws and in addition to Cyrillic letters contains Runiform characters and Pagan symbols. Two of them have a clear meaning: ᛝᚷ birth and death.

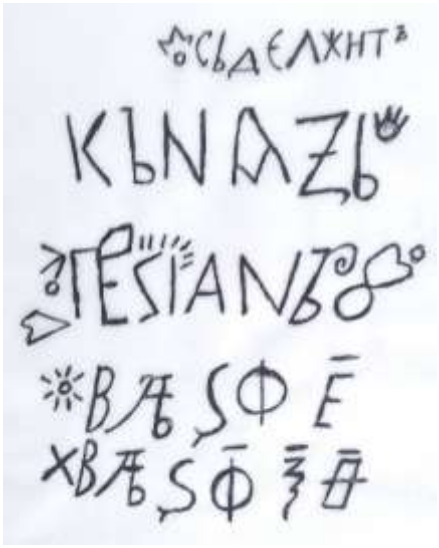


Figure 58, Gravestone of Knyaz Presian found in Mihalovtsi, Slovakia (Tkadlchik V. 1986).

The use of the character ᚷ in an inspiration from a composition carved on a rock in the Govedarnika locality is also related to the meaning of death. Here a horseman stabs his opponent in the head with a spear. An inscription is woven into the body of the pierced hero: ᚷᛉᚲ (Ins. Ts 43) which identifies him as the god Rod. In “The Tale of the Interpreter”, the

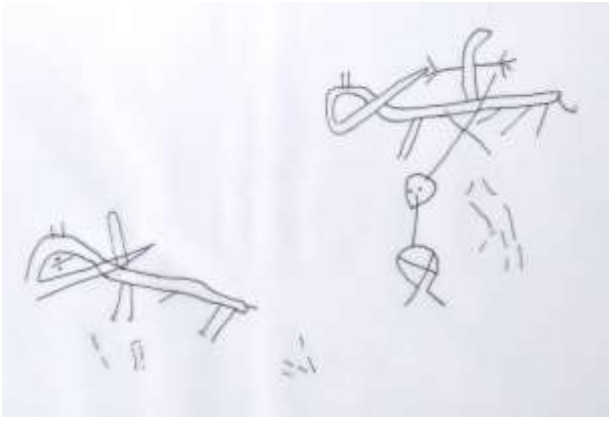


Figure 59, The panel "The dead of Rod", locality Govedarnika.

cult of Rod and Rozhanitsa is compared to the cults of Osiris, Artemis, and unnamed Chaldean gods. It is believed that Rod breathed life into newborns and that, following the example of the gods he is compared to, he died and rose again.

The panel from Govedarnika unequivocally confirms this assumption, but how can the use of the character ⵅ for both the words white and death be explained? These words probably had a similar pronunciation in Protobulgarian. A parallel can be found in Chuvash where shur, shor, shură, shoră, which means “white”, but also “to turn pale”, “fade”, “bloom”.

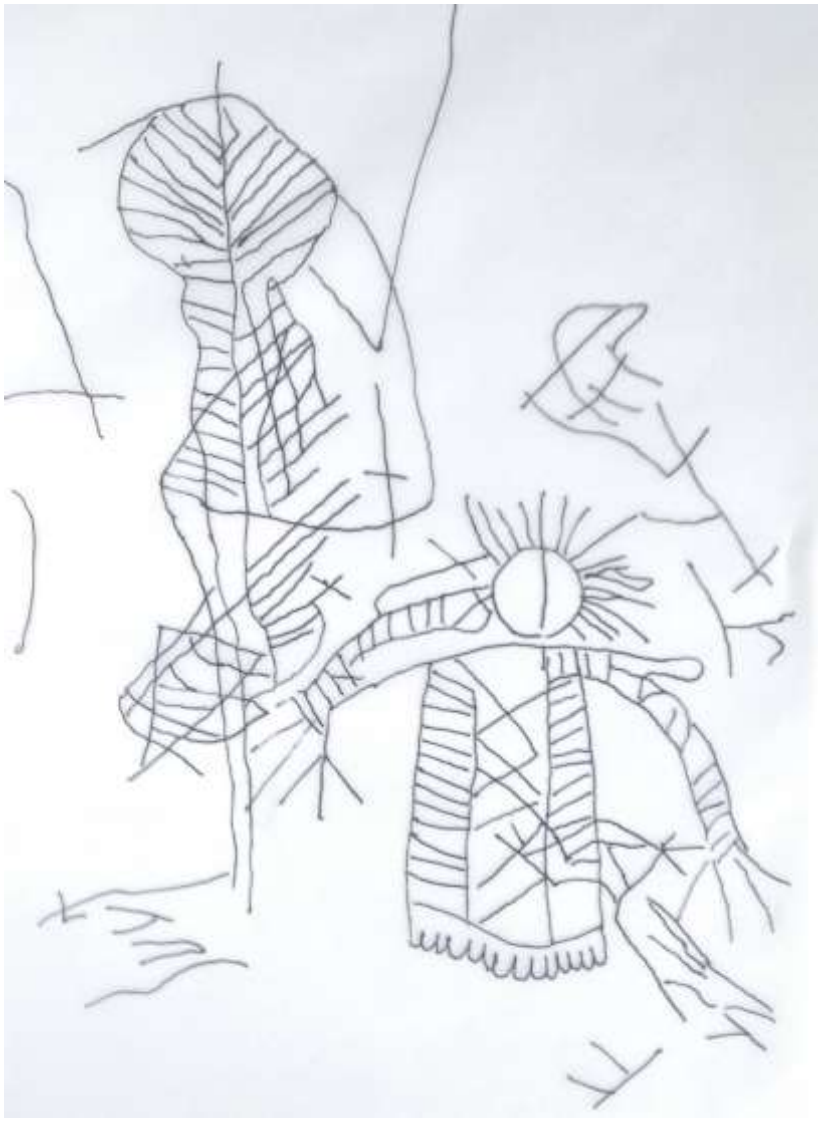


Figure 60, The panel "The Sun", Caves near the village of Tsarevets.

Most of the panels from the caves near the village of Tsarevets depict the Sun, presented in different ways. Once only with a character ⵜ, other times it is a circle with an inscribed cross, swastika or has adopted a human image. On the Sun panel, the pagan deity is

solemnly dressed. To his right is the Tree of Life, and to his left is a sceptre decorated with a serpent's head (Fig. 60). An inscription is inscribed on the garment of the Sun: ᛝᛦᚷᛝᛏ hdr (Ins. Ts 44). Dragons crawl on their left side and in the roots of the Tree of Life.

The Sun is represented in the same way in Bulgarian folklore. It passes through the same mysteries as ordinary mortals: birth, initiation, marriage, and death. The Mother of God gives birth to the Young God from St. Ignatius to Christmas. The baptism of the Young God took place on St. John's Day:

Замъчи се, замъчи се Стара божа майка, Вишне ле, божне ле, коладе ле, чистом прелом- гелом, от Игнажден до Коледа да си роди Млада бога Родила го на Колада в града Русалема. Отговаря Млада бога: -Повикайте всички светци, Всички светци, свет Димитра Да си вери Млада бога ... Повикаха свет Ивана, повикаха и той дойде да си вери Млада бога. Погъна го да го вери, То си тежи като камък и си пари като огън...[28]	Old Mother of God being in labor Almighty God, kolade le from St. Ignatius to Christmas to give birth to a Young God She gave birth to him at Christmas in the city of Rusalem. Answer Young God: -Call all the saints, All saints, Saint Dimitra To trust the Young God ... They called St. John, they called him and he came to baptise the Young God. He tried to baptise him, It weighs like a stone and burn like fire ...

Another episode in the life of the sun, the solar marriage, is also preserved in folk art. In folk songs, the Sun entices its chosen one by lowering a swing to the ground:

Прочу се мома Драганка, хубава Мома Драганка, хубава хубост на света, деня Слънцето надгрява, а ноща Месеца надсяда. Слънчо се чудим чудеше, как да си мома излъже, излъже да му престане. Слънчева стара майчица, тя си на Слънча думаше: Я спусни, Слънчо, я спусни, я спусни дур две ми люлки между Великден и Гергьовден, да се люлеят момите,	Girl Draganka became famous, beautiful girl Draganka, the splendid beauty of the world she heats the Sun in the daytime, she overruns the Moon at night. The Sun wondered, how to trick the girl to trick her to come. The Sun’s old mother, she spoke to the Sun: Let down, Sunshine let down, put down two swings between Easter and St. George's Day, girls to swing

[28] Chrismas song from village Asparuhovo, Varna district (Dobar Yunak… 2002).

за здраве да се люлеят. Мома Драганка ще дойде за здраве да се люлее и тогаз ти я прибери[29]	to swing for health. Meiden Draganka will come to swing for health and then you take her away

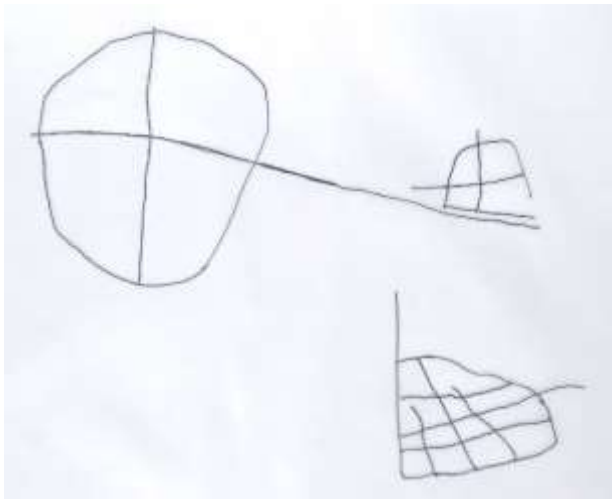


Figure 61, The panel "Sollar swing".

This theme is presented symbolically on a panel in the Biarnitsa cave (Fig. 76). The sun has sent a ray to the earth symbolically transmitted through arable fields. We find the same plot in the rocks near the village of Kragui, the Pleven region and the rock temples of Murfatlar. But here, as in the Biyarnica cave, the images are symbolic.

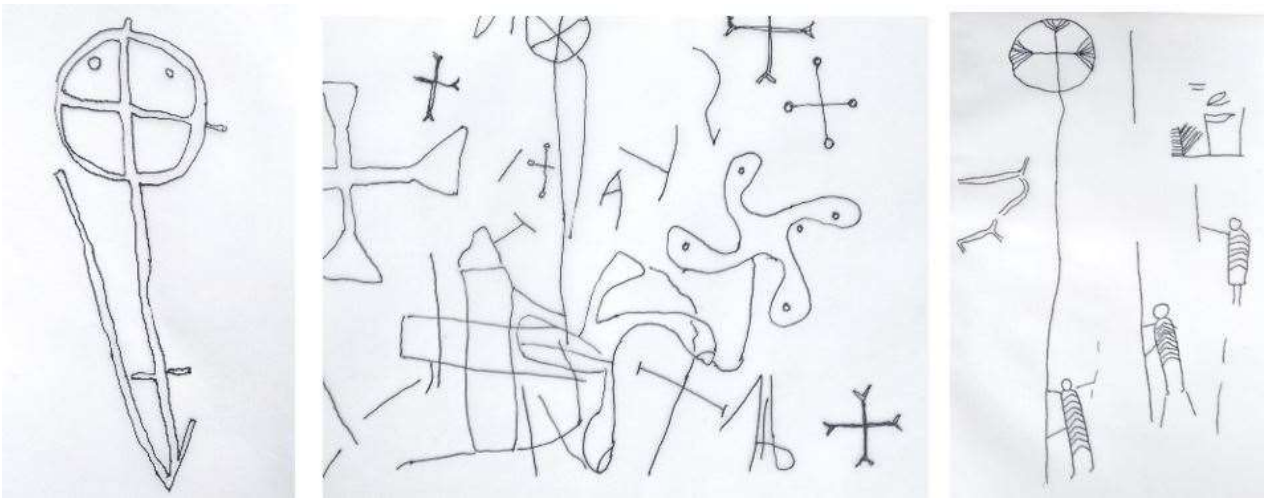


Figure 62, Sun swingers: A-village Kraguy, Bulgaria, B- Murfatlar, C- Mountain Kushnitsa (Pangea) Greece.

[29] Folksong from Karnobat, Bulgaria.

However, the myth is illustrated in detail in one of the paintings carved on a rocky surface in the Kushnitsa (Pangea) Mountains near the town of Syar (Serres), Greece. Here the sun has set its rays, and three girls have clung to them.

The sun is represented as a large cross on a panel from the Biarnitsa cave. The right shoulder of the cross ends with a medium-sized cup-shaped sign symbolizing a star. Above it is the lunar crescent and three other stars nearby. The panel can be divided into two parts: the left is dominated by images of the Sun, and the right is by images of the Moon. An equally large inscription is woven on the large solar circle: T Y (Ins. Tz 45).

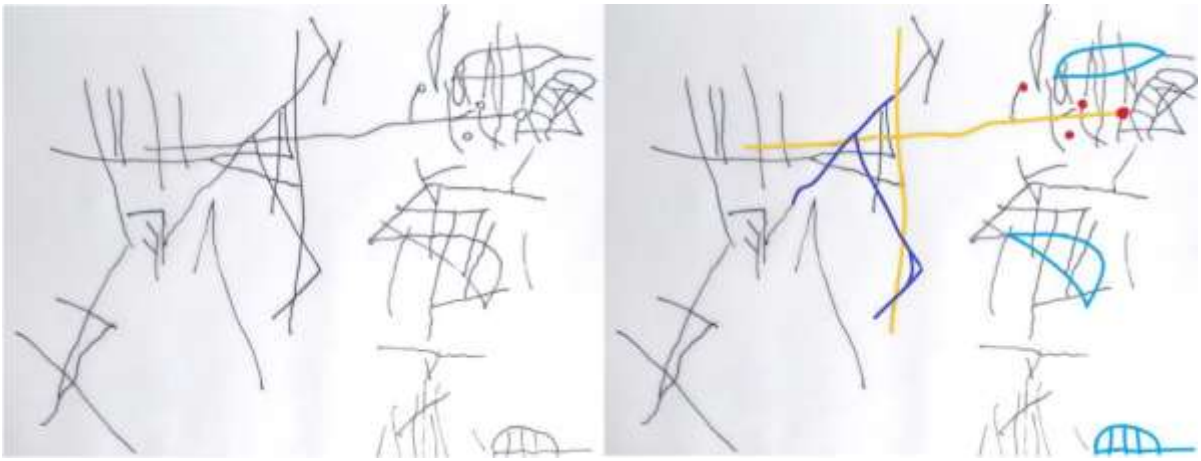


Figure 63, Upper part of the panel "The Sun and the Moon", Biyarnitsata cave.

At the bottom of the panel is symbolically depicted a deer whose body depicts a cross, thus symbolizing the Sun. Two solar circles are incised among two groups of cup-shaped signs. To the right, the Moon is represented as a crescent, a circle and once a horn. Probably here are depicted astronomical phenomena important for the pagan religion in which the Sun, the Moon take part and the stars.

The great importance of the celestial bodies in the Bulgarian Pagan religion is expressed through the solar-lunar ligature: ☥ (Ins. Tz 15). In it the hieroglyph of the Sun is inscribed in the sign of the Moon (Fig. 65). This ligature is also used in the rock churches of Murfatlar, always in monumental images (Fig. 66). Perhaps her image has enjoyed special veneration.

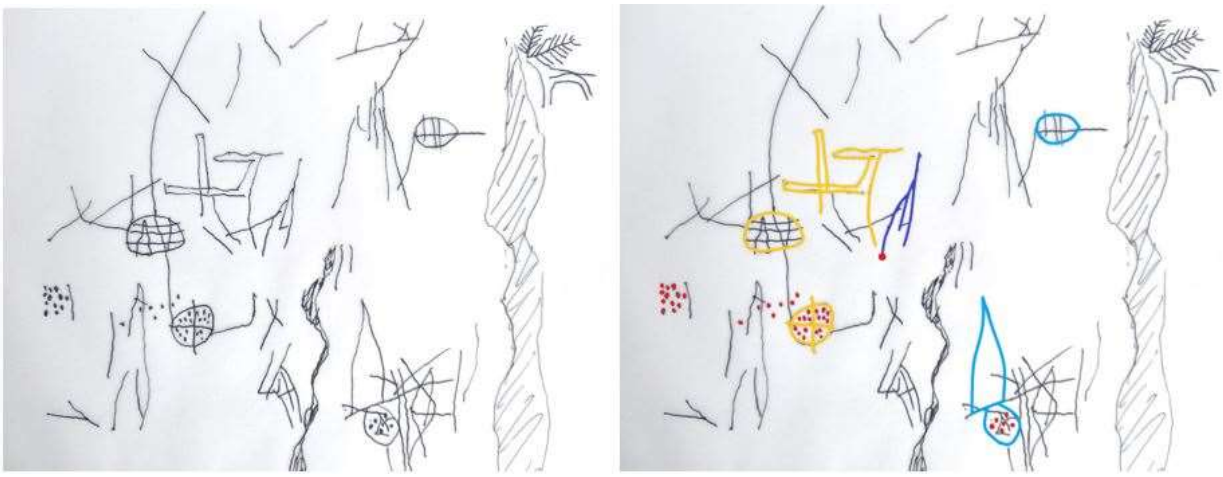


Figure 64, the lower part of the panel "The Sun and the Moon", Biyarnitsata cave.

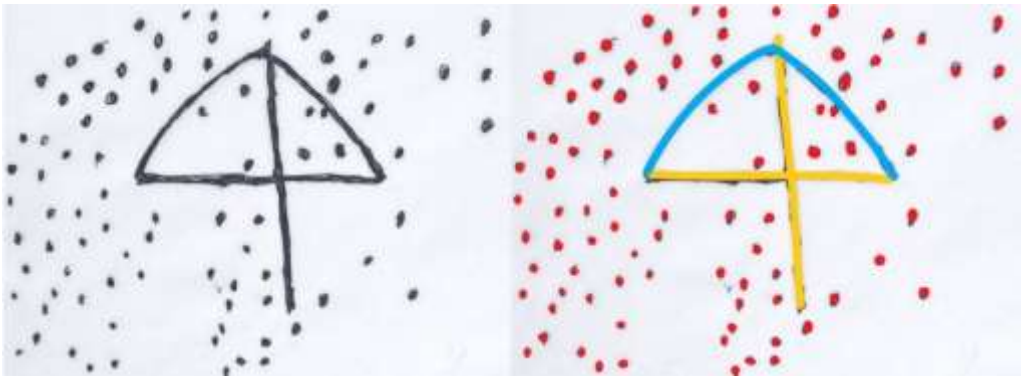


Figure 65, Solar-lunar ligature, locality Govedarnika.

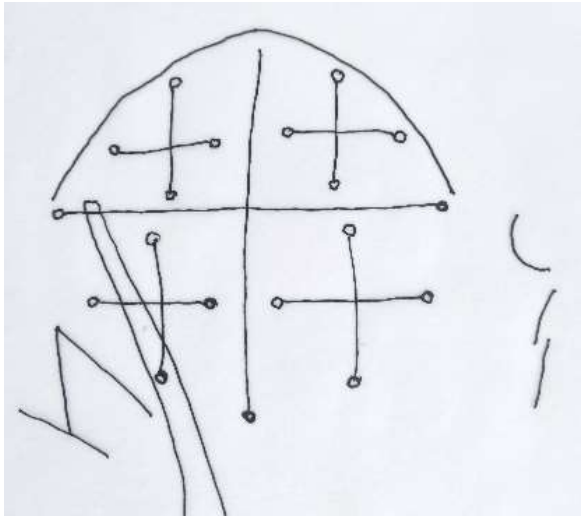


Figure 66, The sollar-lunar ligature from Murfatlar.

At the top of the “The Sun and the Moon” panel, the inscriptions are woven into the hieroglyph of the Sun. This inscription may convey the name of a pagan deity who enters into a relationship with the Sun - a relationship that causes seasonal changes. In Bulgarian folklore, the song "The Sun and the " tells a myth with such content:

Похвалил се Добър Юнак, вечер, вечер, на кладенец че си има добра коня, добра коня, чер гарвана, за ден земя обихожда, обихожда, пак дохожда. Де го зачу Ясното слънце: Отговаря Ясното слънце: Ой те тебе, Добър юнак, хайде с тебе на обзалоҗа! Ко аз тебе надмина, ще ти взема хранен коня! А ти мене ко надминеш, ще ми вземеш милната сестра, милната сестра Ангелина![30]	The Good Hero boasted, In the evening, at the well that he has a good horse, a good horse- a black raven, it goes around the Earth for a day, goes around and comes again. How the Clear Sun hear him: The Clear Sun answer: Oh you, Good Hero, Let’s place a bet! If I surpass you, I will take your well-fed horse! If you surpass me, you will take my dear sister, my dear sister Angelina!

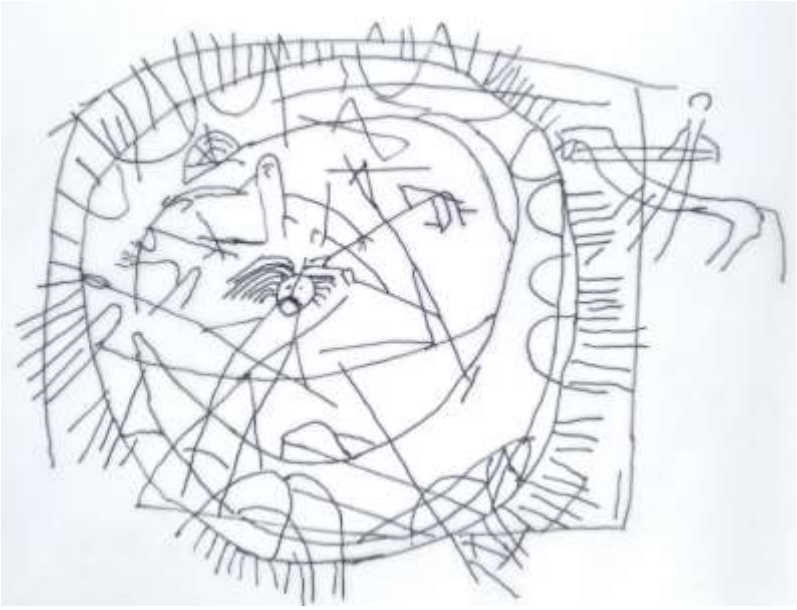


Figure 67, A engraving on a stone from Pliska (Ovcharov D. 1982).

The Good Hero defeats the Sun and receives his sister's hand. According to Ancho Kaloyanov, the pagan prototype of the Good Hero competing with the Sun is the Almighty God (Kaloyanov A. 2002b). Scenes featuring interaction between a Hero and the Sun are known from paintings from Pliska and the Rock Churches in Murfatlar, Northern Dobrudja,

[30] „Добър юнак надминава ясното слънце“- Chrismas song from Asparuhovo, Varna district, (Dobar Yunak... 2002)

but in them, the Hero is armed with a spear. In the drawing from Pliska, the hero is standing with a spear in his hands in front of the Sun.

Behind him is carved the moon crescent. Maybe it's a solar eclipse that the Hero-deity is trying to prevent. On the panel from Murfatlar (Fig. 68), the moon is missing. Here the Hero stabs in the head a mythical four-legged animal that has covered the solar disk. Maybe here the animal is a symbol that represents the Moon.

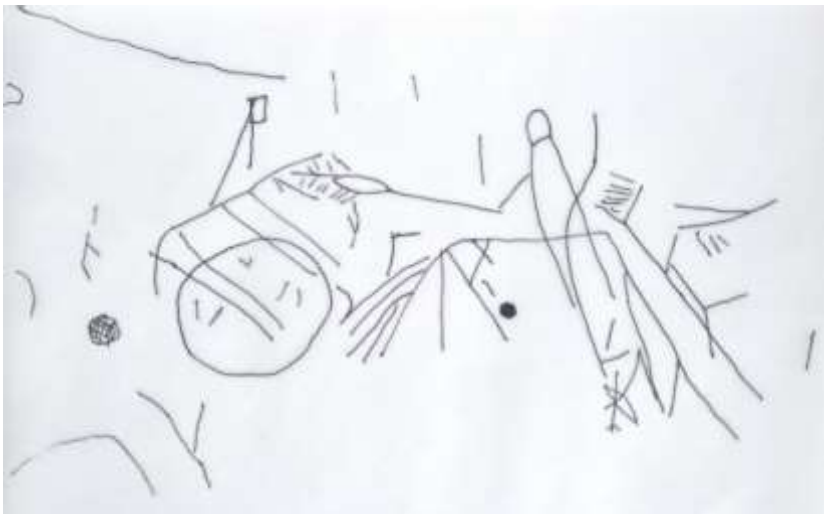


Figure 68, A panel from church B3, Murfatlar.

The same plot but with completely different participants is presented on two panels from the cave “The Little Hole”. On the first panel, the solar disk is attacked on all sides by a large number of dragons (Fig. 68). Here the Burd of Heaven, depicted by a large bird head, comes in the protection of the Sun.

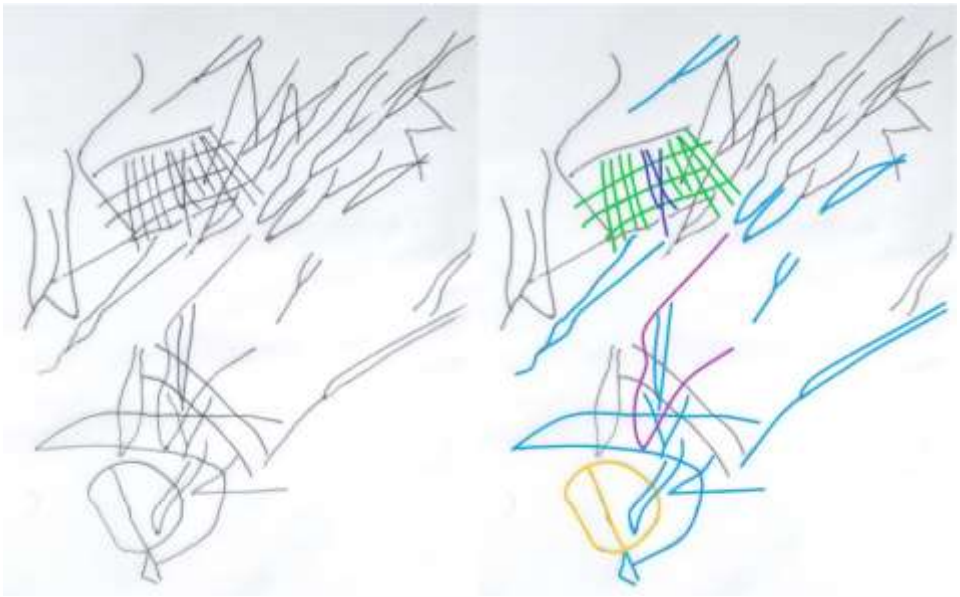


Figure 69, The panel "Dragons and the Sun". Cave Malkata dupka.

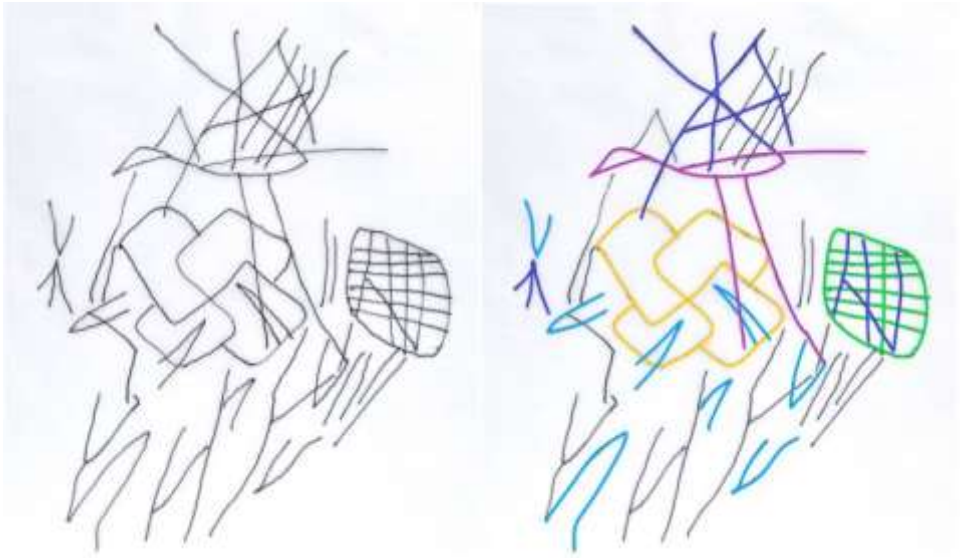


Figure 70, The panel "A Svastika-Sun", cave Malkata dupka.

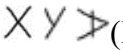
The fertile land is depicted in the background, whose fruitfulness is expected as a result of the battle. The inscription  (Ins. Ts 16) is woven among the arable lands.

In the second panel, the Sun is represented as a closed swastika and the earth as a circle covered with fields.



Figure 71, The panel "Three hives and a dragon". Cave Biyarnitsa.

As with the other panel, the dragons are symbolized only by their heads. The protector of the Sun is the god of thunder depicted as a bird. The protector of the sun is the bird of heaven. The inscription  (Ins. Ts 17a) is woven in the fields and the character  to

the left of the Sun. An inscription consisting of three graphemes is incised above the Bird of Heaven: (Ins. Ts 17b).

The Celestial bird striking the Evil is also presented in composition from the Biarnitsa. In it, three animals, probably hinds, stood against a demonic creature, perhaps a dragon. High above them are the Sun and 22 other star deities. A large bird of prey is depicted high to the right. Behind the back of the dragon are two more demons and above them is a deer.

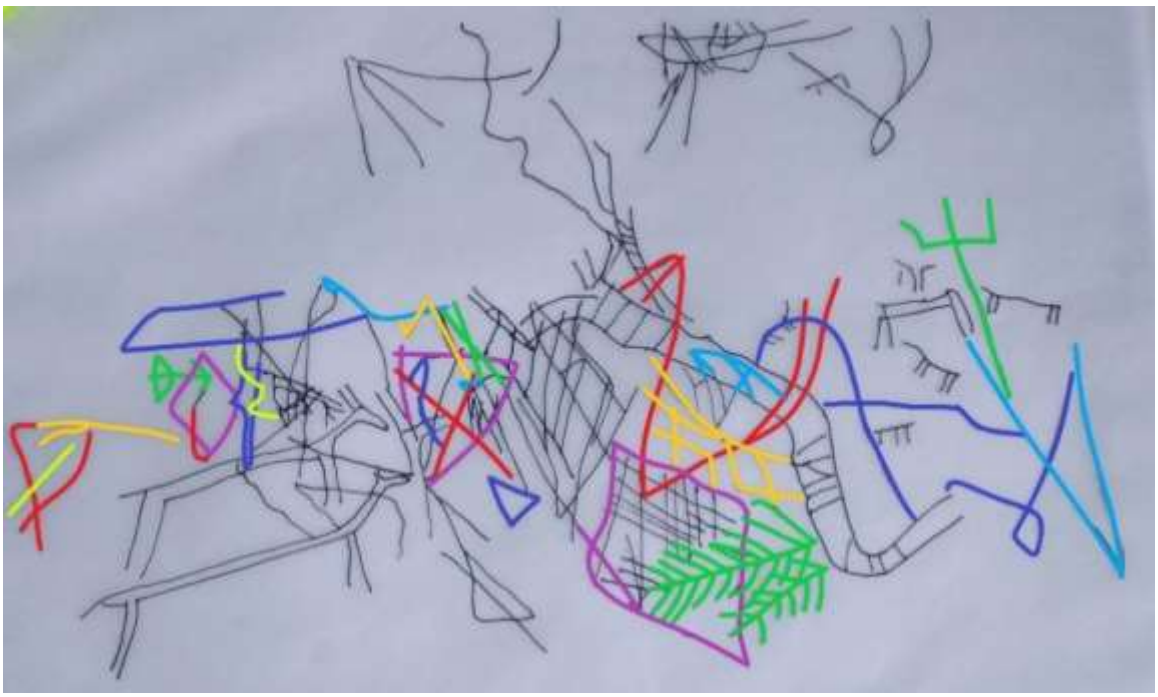


Figure 72, Inscription Tsarevets 30. Cave Biyarnitsa.

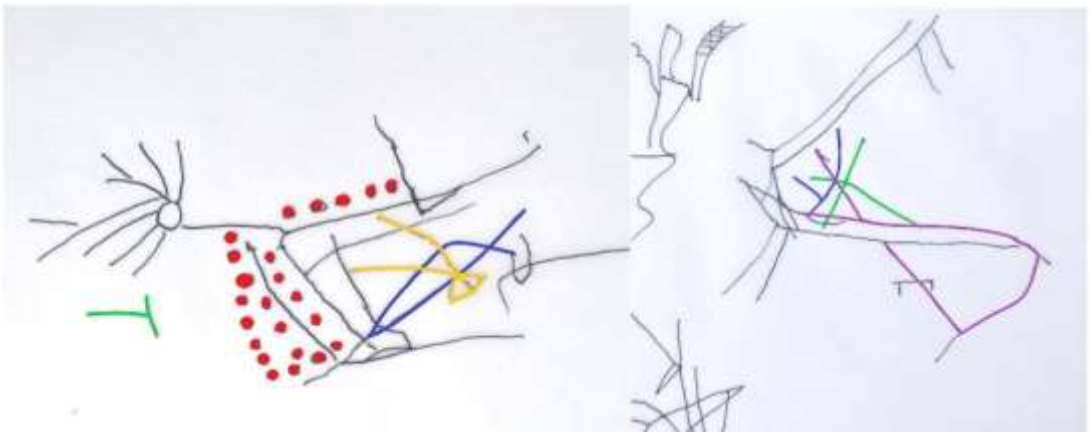


Figure 73, Inscriptions 18b and 18d, Cave Biyarnitsa.

The space around and between the hinds and the dragon is filled with a multi-layered inscription composed of graphemes of different sizes (Ins. Ts 18a). Due to the presence of many unknown characters, it is difficult to determine both the sequence of the individual graphemes and where the inscription begins and ends. Some short expressions or even just the names of gods may be written here. A suitable candidate for the beginning of the inscription is the group of characters incised behind the hinds: . They are most likely followed by characters or . After them begins a tangle of familiar and unfamiliar characters that at one point are connected in some way with the two large characters standing at the top: . Then again the graphemes are tangled almost incomprehensibly. Some of the characters are recognizable, but not their sequence: , , , .

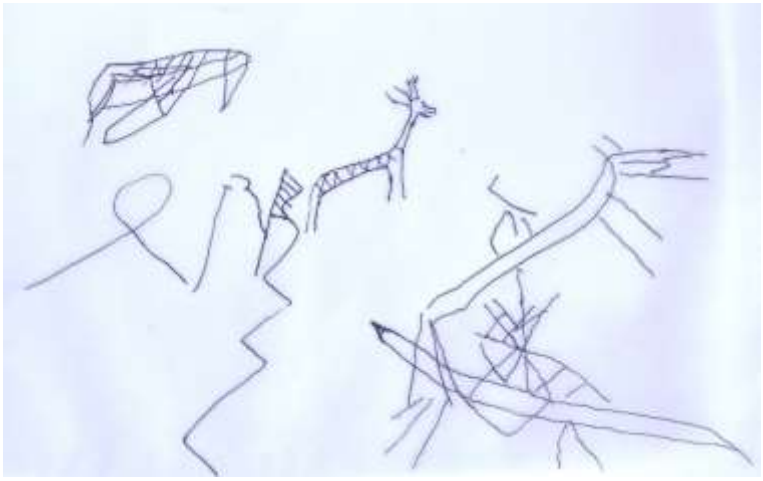


Figure 74, A bird, a stag and demons. Cave Biyarnitsa.

In the lower right part, the composition is not so loaded. The body of the dragon is written in small characters and with large ones. They, in turn, are combined with the combination of characters. Here, two branches are intertwined in the character , which suggests that perhaps its semantics are related to vegetation and nature. Behind the dragon the hieroglyphs are large: or . It is also not clear how the ligature fits them.

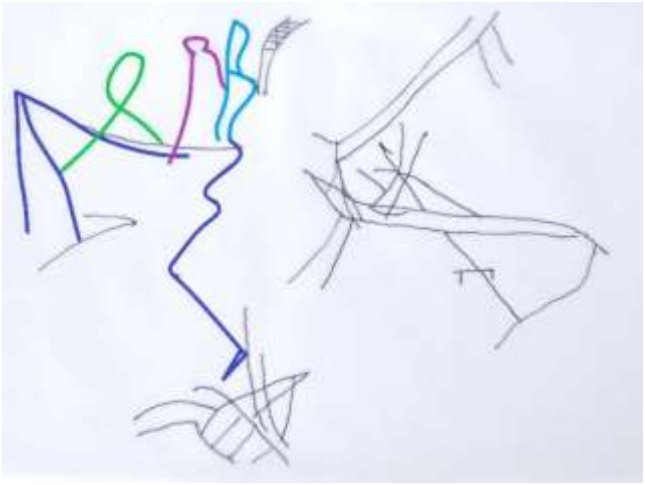


Figure 75, Inscription Ts 18b, Cave Biyarnitsa.

Next to the Sun and the 22 deities represented by small cup-shaped signs is an intricate inscription in which only the character ᛟ can be identified (Fig. 73, Ins. Ts 18b). In the right part of the Upper World under the big bird of prey and to the left of the deer below are two demonic animals. An inscription filled with graphemes of large size is incised under the bird near the deer: ᛏᛟᚱᛒ (Inscription Ц 18в). From the inscription comes the lightning that strikes the Dragon. And so the annual cycle continues with the revival of nature. This inscription makes it possible to identify the phrase ᛏᛟ. Since the character ᛟ (biy) means god, master, ᛏ should convey the name of this god, the Thunderbird. An inscription is also woven into the body of one of the demonic creatures, resembling an insect. It can be interpreted as: ᛉᚷᛝ (Fig. 73, Ins. Ts 18d).



Figure 76, Inscription Ts 37. Cave Biyarnitsa.

On the panel to the right of the entrance of the Biarnitsa is engraved the rare character ᚿ (Inscription Ts 19a). There, under the dragons crawling in different directions, is an oval-shaped object hatched with the character ᚷ. Among the group of dragons in the upper left is the ligature: ᚷᛉ. Interestingly, a possible equivalent of the character ᚿ is incised at the entrance to the Large cave in Madara. Another similar hieroglyph was found there, but already in the cave itself: ᛞᛉᚲ. The application of this written sign to the entrances of two caves suggests that its semantics should be sought in this direction.

A relatively common Runiform character in the caves near the village of Tsarevets is ᛪ. The images associated with it suggest that it is associated with the goddess Ma and fertility, and most likely its meaning is "land".



Figure 77, Depiction from Perperek, A-after D. Ovcharov (Ovcharov D. 1982), B- actual state.

On the rock image from Perperek, the character ᛞ is inscribed in the body of the goddess. The fertility of the earth is symbolized by the reproductive organs of the goddess. The same character is also known from a ceramic amulet found in the medieval fortress Rusokastro (Nikolov M. 2009). On one side is an incised ligature consisting of two characters: ᛞᛟ - "er bij" (the goddess of the Earth). On the second side of the amulet is incised only one character: ᛇ .

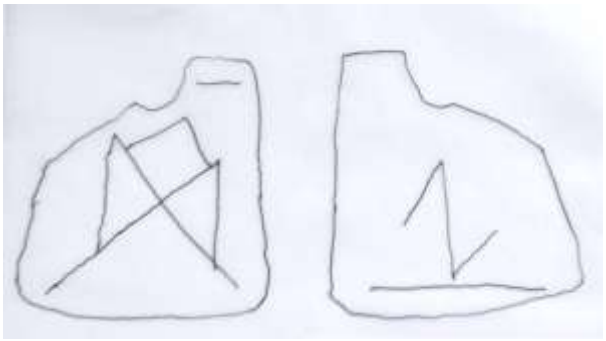


Figure 78, The amulet from Rusokastro.

In the rock temples near the village of Tsarevets, the character ᛞ is found in several panels. On the panel "The Wonderful Hunt" from the Biarnitsa cave it is woven into a ligature composed of four graphemes: ᛞᚢᛁᛁ (Page 8). This character is also engraved on a panel from the Govedarnika massif (Fig. 79).



Figure 79, The panel "The character Earth", locality Govedarnika.

The vertically running lines below it probably symbolize dragons. The other panel, in which this hieroglyph is used, shows a human-like figure with animal ears resembling a bear (Fig. 80). The character is incised to the right of the human-like figure (Ins. Ts 21a). Two ligatures are placed on the left and above it. One consists of two graphemes:  or  (Ins. Ts 21b). The other can be interpreted as "ot bij" - (the master of the Fire) (Ins. Ts 21c).

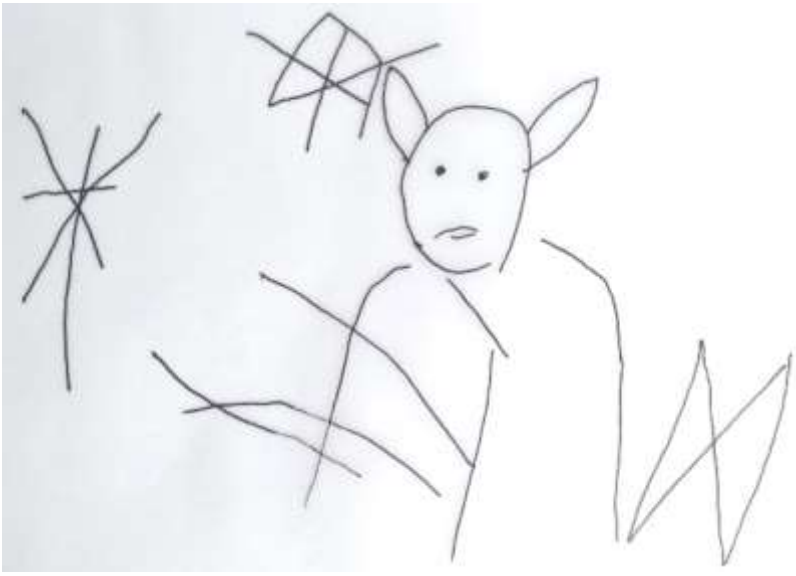


Figure 80. The panel "The Bear", locality Govedarnika, Tsarevets.

At the entrance to the Malkata Dupka cave, there is a carefully incised inscription. Unfortunately, part of the surface of the rock there was destroyed and some of the graphemes of the inscription are unclear. Eleven of them can be recovered: ᛉᛉᛉᚭᛟᚴᚷᛝᛉᛉ.

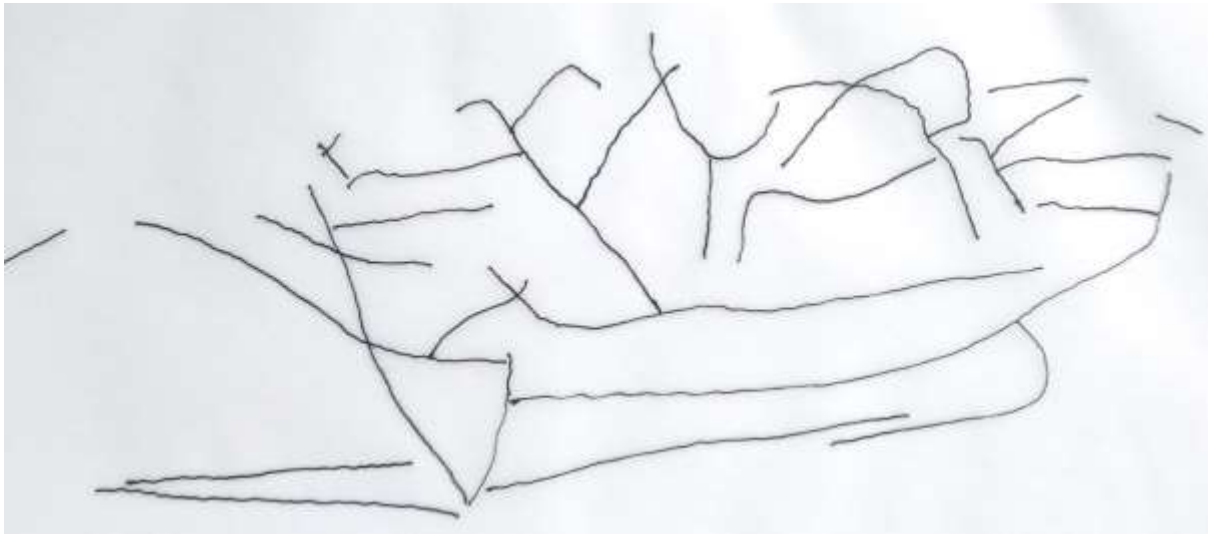


Figure 81, panel "The Inscription", cave Malkata dupka, Tsarevets.

The rock images from the caves in the middle course of the Iskar River are an inexhaustible source for the Pagan Bulgarian religion and writing. This study was a modest attempt to reveal the secrets of the Bulgarian shamans. The temples from the caves in localities Malkiot Kamik and Govedarnika reveal the existence of an artistic vein and written culture, a stereotype that is certainly not limited to the Iskar River valley. While the Pagan Bulgarian temples of Murfatlar and Krepcha are already known, the cult centres of the Bulgarians from the territory of the First Bulgarian Kingdom and the lands inhabited by the Bulgarian tribe in older times are waiting for their discoverers.

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