Spindle Whorls: their Symbolism in the Villanovan Cemetery of Quattro Fontanili, Veii

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The hypothesis presented in this paper is that the apparently insignificant pottery spindle whorl is a symbol of transformation of death into new life by analogy with mankind's oldest abstract image, the circle, and with the important inventions of pottery making and spinning. This *funerary* symbolism, which earlier was dominated by the feminine principle, in the Villanovan culture receives the male figure. The Villanovan culture, in Central Italy, is a transition between the old, inward-looking, immobile village and the new expanding Etruscan city-state. During this transition the spindle whorl begins, as an abstract image, to symbolize the feminine principle in the *hieros gamos*, later represented as the intercourse between the goddess and the god.*

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"On Symbolism in Mortuary Ceramics" (Rydh 1929) is an important, although forgotten, article in which Hanna Rydh, fifty years before Marija Gimbutas, shows that the triangle and all pictures derived from it, as well as the comb and the shell, are universal funerary symbols of regeneration as a gift of life (p. 109).

Rydh's expression *regeneration* may be dangerous because it can easily be associated with *reincarnation,* of which there are no proofs, but, as I shall try to show, in prehistory "the gift of life" is expressed by images of transformation (Bloch 1988) and gestation more than by images of birth. Objects, images, movements, words and rituals are symbolic expressions, the best possible descriptions of relatively unknown facts (in this case, life as a transformation of death) which nonetheless are known to exist or postulated to exist (Jung 1921:473–474; Durant 1989).

The symbols cannot be wholly described because they are expressions of intrinsic values of such depth that they never completely rise to consciousness (Ries 1988; Vidal 1988). There are no words or images that at the same time express diachronicity and synchronicity (Jung 1952; Hall 1983:13–27), dynamic force and static immobility, the measurable "historical" time and the circular "divine" time (Eliade 1958, para. 147–149), the unity of everything that at the same time is the separate existence of each single particle (Eliade 1958, passim; Cassirer 1979:12). They are what make us human (Vidal 1988), although they remain hidden in the deepest recesses of our unconscious (Neumann 1963:6; Campbell 1968:18, n. 18). All our rituals, from table manners to funerals, are symbolic. The material remains of the funeral (the method of burial through cremation or inhumation, the shape of the tomb, and the objects given to the deceased) are symbolic, as was the ritual, of which nothing is left (cf. Thomas 1987). Consequently, how the deceased was placed in the tomb is also symbolic. Symbolic an-

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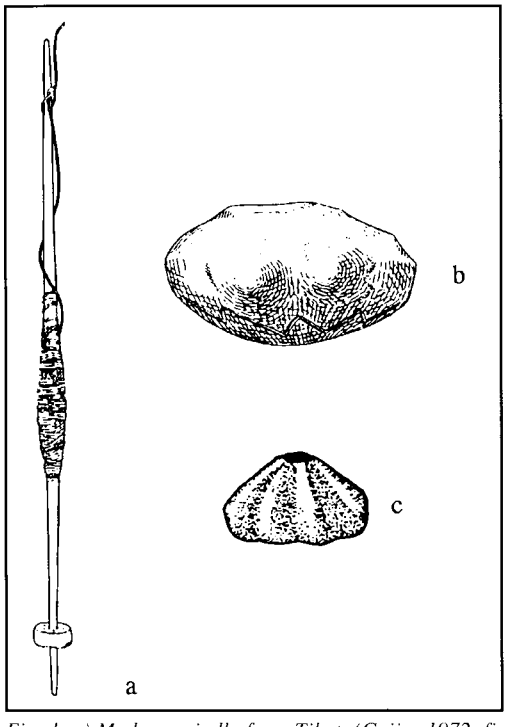

Fig. 1. a) Modern spindle from Tibet. (Geijer 1972, fig. 4); b) and c) spindle whorls: b) from Anza, c. 5000 B.C. (Gimbutas 1989, fig. 104); c) from Quattro Fontanili, tomb FF 14–15 (NSc 1965, fig. 37).

swers to the question that death poses differ according to whether the bones, after cremation, were placed in a pottery or a metal container with the ashes or without them, and whether the deceased was placed directly on the earth or in a wooden coffin. In the last forty-five years, we, the lucky members of Western society, have reached such a long life expectancy that we have banished the image of death and our old people who remind us of it; but earlier, when life expectancy was much shorter, death could not be ignored (Rydh 1929:108). It seems to be inherent in human nature to search for answers, especially to questions that cannot be ignored and cannot be answered, and to express these answers in the only way open to human mind: through analogy with our physical universe (Alleau 1983:69, 74–90). Although it is impossible to state just what prehistoric symbolic images meant to their users, it is at least possible to highlight the analogy between the symbols and the underlying physical phenomena. Among these I include the human characteristic of expressing symbols in abstract images, certainly no less developed in prehistoric man than in us (Lupacciolu 1989).

SPINDLE WHORLS

The earliest spindles – which continued to be used in Italy until after the Second World War and can still be bought in some village shops – consist of a rod on which a whorl has been threaded (fig. 1). The whorl can be made of any material heavier than the rod (Geijer 1972:26), but although similar spindle whorls made from bone have been found in protovillanovan habitation layers in North and Central Italy (Bellato & Bellintani 1984, Pl. 7; Berggren & Berggren 1980, Pl. 15) and in the Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia in Sparta (Dawkins 1929, Pl. 136:1), all the funerary ones are made of pottery. This is noticeable in the Lazial tomb published by Stefani in 1958, in which the pottery whorl lies beside the bronze spindle, and in KKLL 18–19 (NSc 1963:234–241) which, although very rich in jewellery and with a spindle of bronze (C.B. no. 49), does not contain any ceramic objects except the one pottery spindle whorl.

THE INVENTION OF SPINNING THE COMB

Spindle whorls are found in Eastern European tombs as early as in late sixth millennium (Gimbutas 1989, fig. 104), already decorated and with the finished shape that indicates long familiarity with their use. I think, in fact, that the invention must have been worked out in the Upper Palaeolithic period: the association of fish, net and water in the Mesolithic has been pointed out by Marshack (1983) and Gimbutas (1989:82–83). A fishing net, however, must be made from strings. The thicker strings may be twisted by hand, but the finer the net, the thinner the strings. Thin strings must be spun on a spindle. The material for the fishing nets cannot have been wool, which

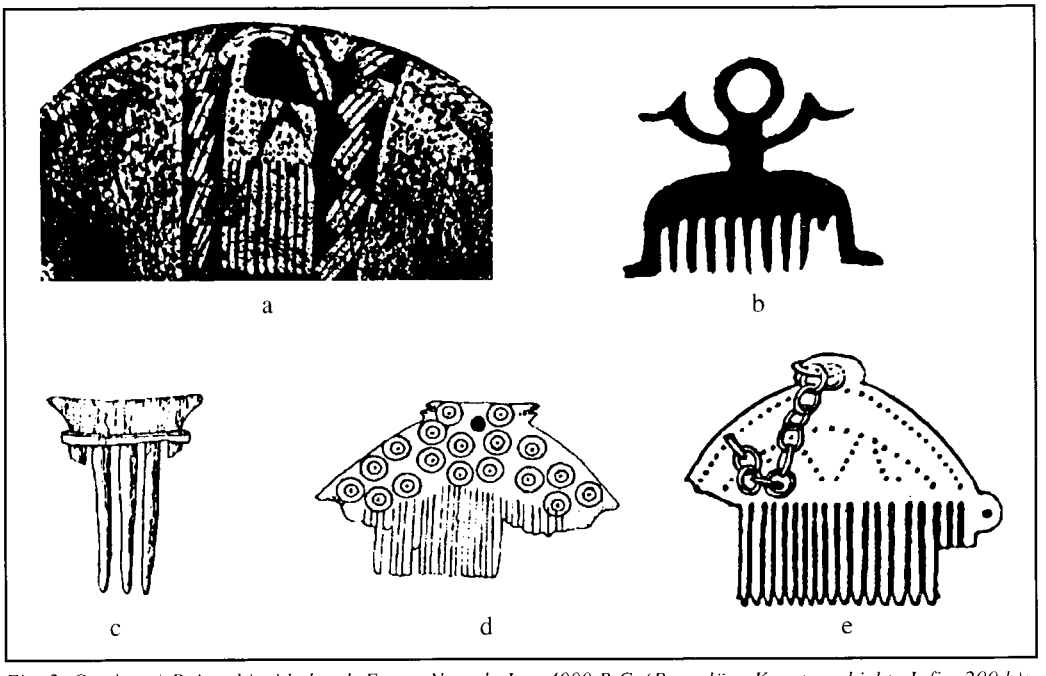

Fig. 2. Combs. a) Painted inside bowl. Egypt, Naqada I, c. 4000 B.C. (Propyläen Kunstgeschichte I, fig. 200 b); b) Bronze, France, Final Bronze (Briard 1987, p. 15); c) Bone. China, Neolithic (Chang 1971, fig. 50); d) Bone. N. Italy. Final Bronze (Bellato & Bellintani 1984, Pl. 6); e) Villanovan. Bronze. Quattro Fontanili tomb HH 11-12 (NSc 1965, fig. 55).

disintegrates in water, but vegetable matter– such as nettles, broom and hemp.

Miniature combs and abstract replicas of combs (fig. 2) have been found in tombs all over the world from Neolithic to Early Iron Age (Rydh 1929; Berggren 1991). Many have been found in the late Bronze Age tombs in Italy (Bellato & Bellintani 1984:239–240, 256; Säflund 1939, Pls. 5, 55, 64), some of which are probably contemporary with the early Villanovan culture and some in late Villanovan and Lazial inhumation tombs (Barnabei 1894, Pl.9:55; Montelius 1904, Pls. 71:9, 250:5; Stefani 1958; Gierow 1966:344, NSc 1965, fig. 55; NSc 1972, fig. 51).

"... The use of the comb is not only for combing the hair but it is also a textile implement, and not only in the weaving of fine, thin fabrics but even before the spinning begins. The wool plucked from the sheep is combed before it can be spun and, even more important, the stems of flax and nettles must be hackled. In prehistory, [in my opinion] this was done with a comb...The flax, and even more the nettles, when transformed into tufts ready for the spindle, have the same soft quality as newly washed hair. There is only a small step from combing a tuft of nettles or flax ... and personalizing it through play." (Berggren 1991).

The comb therefore symbolizes the very first step of transformation of a plant into a thread and then into a piece of cloth. Thus, the spinning from the beginning, continues the symbolism of the comb: the combed hair of the goddess is twisted and spun.

COMPARISON WITH THE BOW

Inventions not only give "food for thought" to the human mind, but widen its horizons by creating new and unexpected symbols: the atomic bomb and the computer as well as the bow and the spindle. The bow is the spectacular Mesolithic invention (Clark 1977:113; Harrod 1983), while the spindle, although a

symbol of transformation, is a female, daily tool. I shall compare the two in order to emphasize how the invention came to be and the difference between a male and a female invention. For this purpose, the bow, because of its elaborateness and its contemporaneity with the spindle, is more appropriate than the metal working.

The bow serves two diametrically opposed ends: to make music and to kill; life and death. Apollo uses his bow to send his arrows of pestilence into the Greek camp outside Troy (Il. 1, 49–54), but in Delphi he becomes the god of music, of aretê, of "know yourself". The *San* (the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert in present Botswana) still play the oldest instrument in the world, shaped like a long bow with one string (van der Post 1985:208). In our Western civilization, Eros shoots his arrows of blind love, while a San makes a miniature bow to shoot a small arrow into the girl he wants to court (van der Post 1985:245–246). Boys have always learned to shoot, girls very seldom; Artemis uses the bow because she is Apollo's twin sister; the amazons because they are mythical, symbolic creatures. The bow, even as a toy, has something heroic clinging to it.

According to Seidenberg (professor of mathematics at Berkeley, California), the only possibility for the bow to develop into the delicate and precise tool it indeed became, was within the ritual:

"A poorly made harpoon is of course inferior to a well-made one, but may be measurably effective. It may retrieve game half the time. But a bow which falls below a certain standard will not shoot at all, or will shoot so feebly as to have zero effiency. ... no implement has yet been found, or even satisfactorily imagined, which was not yet a bow ... In the ritual, the bow and arrow could serve a purely symbolic purpose; and could maintain itself at a mechanical level of efficiency zero. There (in the ritual), much as in a modern laboratory, it could be improved to the point where it became a mechanically, efficient instrument" (Seidenberg 1981:283–284).

Thus the bow became what Eliade (1958, para. 1, 3–5) calls a *hierophany*, an appearance of the Sacred: a deeply felt psychological experience that is placed in a precise historical moment: the personal exhilaration in drawing the bow and seeing the arrow fly in a perfect shot, and the historical fact of the bow found as a votive gift in the Maglemose bog (Harrod 1983). Thus the bow is not only a bow but also the images and feelings summoned by it.

THE BIOLOGICAL ROLE OF WOMAN MIRRORED IN THE ART OF SPINNING

The art of spinning, too, was certainly worked out in the ritual environment. But to spin is very different from shooting with a bow. The biological role of woman is to protect the infant while man's job is to protect the woman. Woman is in the centre with the new life growing inside her, man stands in the periphery (Stevens 1982:190). The female inventions, pottery making, spinning, and weaving, are therefore inwardly, in the immobile centre, concerned with giving birth and protecting life. In Mexico on the night of December 21st, the longest night of the year, the grandmother teaches the granddaughter to spin, because only thus will she become a good sexual partner to her future husband (Lévi-Strauss 1988:5). After the longest night comes the light of the day; the woman who spins, spins life. The Greek Artemis and the Roman Diana not only shoot with the bow, they also spin as do the Moire, the Parche and the germanic Norns (Neumann 1963:226–234). When the goddess spins, she spins life; when she cuts the thread, she cuts the life. Thus the bow and the spindle are both symbols of life and death, but in different ways.

THE CIRCLE

The spindle, however, is not a symbol of life only because it is a tool of transformation, but even more because its circumference either is a circle or can be inscribed in a circle. Accord-

ing to Seidenberg (1981) the circle was constructed through the ritual. The perfect circle can only be constructed from its centre. When the circle is divided in four equal parts through its centre, the cross is created. From the cross the square can be constructed (Seidenberg 1981:313). This, I think, must have happened before the introduction of the Acheulian tetrahedral "hand-axes" because I cannot concieve how they could have come into being without it. This happened c. 600,000 years ago. The earliness of this date is not surprising, because it derives from the physical fact that we live on the outside of a sphere, the Earth, and look at our surroundings through circular pupils. If the Earth had had another shape or our eyes had been made in another way, another symbol would certainly have taken its place.

THE CIRCLE MOVING AROUND THE CENTRE

The spindle whorl revolves around the centre of the rod. Seidenberg (1981) illustrates the circular movement around the centre with examples taken from the whole world and from a long period of time, and ends by assuming an analogy between it and the constellations that slowly move in a horizontal circle around and above the earth at night. One of Eliade's fundamental hypotheses is that to repeat a *hierophany* means not only to repeat the historical act, but the feelings and emotions it once awoke, thus psychologically and symbolically returning to the first time (Eliade 1974). To dance in a circle (Seidenberg 1981), to swing in a circle (Alleau 1983:59–61; Seidenberg 1981), to play with spinning tops (Seidenberg 1981:286), to spin, fecundates the earth because it is a symbolic return to that first instant, when mankind became conscious of the earth as the centre of the constellations. To become conscious of something, means, psychologically, that, what did not exist comes into being. The *hierophany* of the earth as the centre of the constellations is psychologically and symbolically the beginning.

The circular movement, therefore, re-creates the fecundity of the earth and of all earthly beings, because it returns to the beginning, when the earth became fertile. To spin is, therefore, to create life by returning to the synchronic, mythical, and symbolic first time, which, against all logic, permeates the linear, historical one.

THE BOSTON "BIRD-WHEEL"

A ceramic wheel, now in Boston (Nelson 1940), corroborates this hypothesis (fig. 3). It is pierced in four points, so that it may be hung on a peg and rotated like a merry-go-round. Underneath, the ovals, I think, must be vulvas; the chess design has been shown by Marwitz (1961) to signify the shroud; the net design is among the most common designs in the ancient world, and, in my opinion, is to be

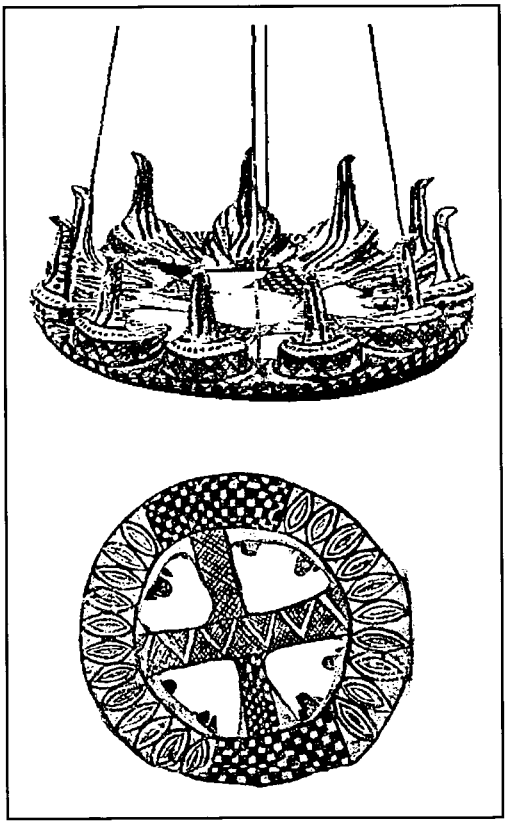

Fig. 3. Pottery bird-wheel (Nelson 1940, figs. 1, 3).

taken either as net or cloth; the V's show that the wheel is meant to be feminine (Rydh 1929) with all the symbols inherent in the feminine principle. The author has identified the birds with *Iynx torquilla* which, according to Pindar, was associated with the celebration of the birth of the New Moon. In analogy with the merry-go-round of the wheel, which re-creates the first instant of life; in analogy with the vulvas, which will open to let forth the new life; in analogy with the New Moon that always appears after the three black nights; in analogy with the textile designs on the wheel and the pottery, the end-products of transformations from nature to culture: life will be created, born and transformed.

THE SPIRAL

The spindle rotates and the yarn is wound around the rod in a spiral. The image of the spiral is closely associated with that of the circle, although in contrast with the circle, it has a beginning and an end. The serpent coils up in a spiral; the vortex of the whirlpool, and of the whirlwind, is a spiral. The spiral appears spontaneously to people under anaesthesia (Campbell 1987:65) and in coma. The spiral is an image (fig. 4). The Bulgarian "Mistress of Pazardzik" from c. 4500 B.C. (Gimbutas 1982, pls. 207–209) wears a double spiral on her stomach, which is an external sign of her internal womb. The spiral is, however, not only an image, it is also a dance,

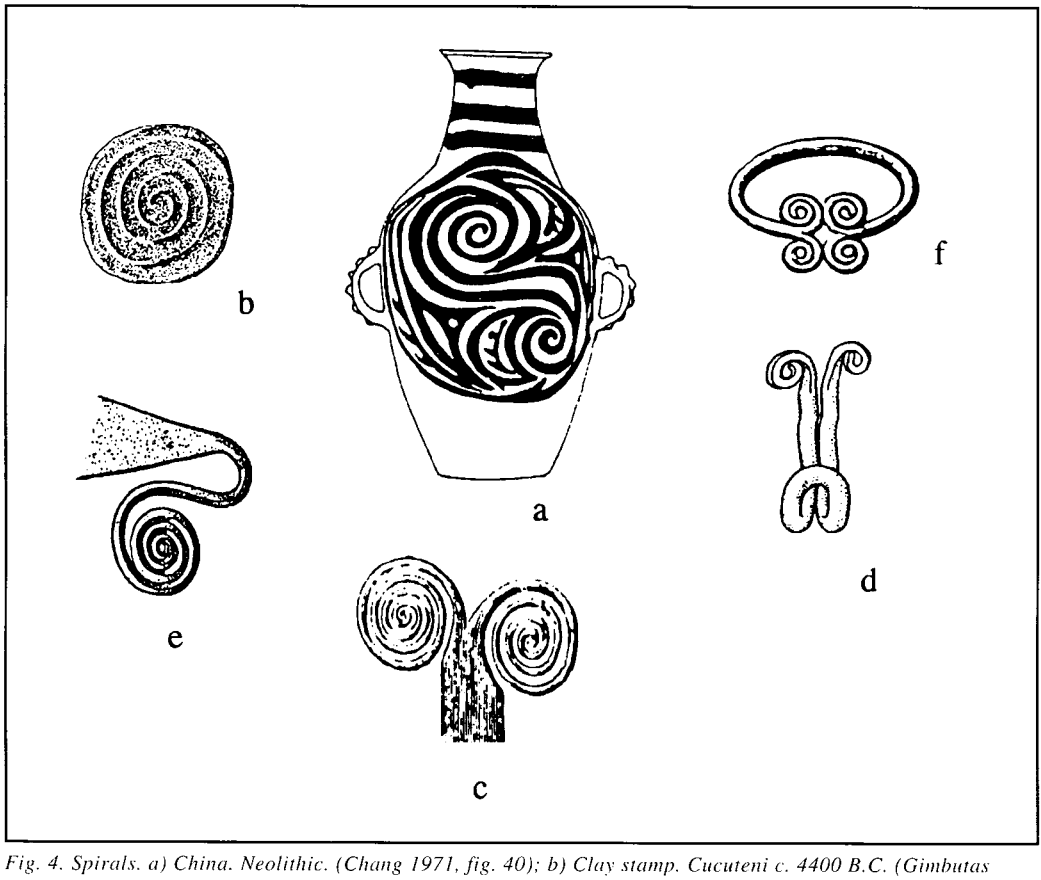

Fig. 4. Spirals. a) China. Neolithic. (Chang 1971, fig. 40); b) Clay stamp. Cucuteni c. 4400 B.C. (Gimbutas 1989, fig. 193); c) Bronze handle. Peschiera (Montelius I; fig. 8:14); d) Bronze hook. Quattro Fontanili tomb AA 1 (NSc 1970, fig. 81); e) Bronze handle. Denmark. (Sprockhoff 1954, fig. 26 b); f) Bracelet. Central Italy (Montelius I; fig. 158:11).

which I myself have danced at a wedding in Italy, and also at Christmas in Sweden, both highly symbolic events. This road out from the centre associates the spiral with the labyrinth (Kerényi 1982:67–68), which in turn is connected with the spindle through the yarn that Arianna gave to Theseus.

THE LABYRINTH

The earliest images of the labyrinth show it to be roundish, not square (Kern 1981, figs. 73–83) (fig. 5). In the beginning it was a symbolic image and probably a dance (Kern 1981:42–47; 54–55, Kerényi 1981). The Greek story of Theseus finding his way in and out with the help of the string given him by Arianna, makes a very interesting point: the string is unnecessary. One cannot lose one's way in the old round labyrinth; it has no false roads; the only thing to do is to follow the windings into the centre and back out. It is impossible to take a wrong turn, because there is only one road in and out. Why, then, does Theseus unwind the yarn?

I think I have found a hypothetical answer to this question in the Villanovan cemetery of Quattro Fontanili.

QUATTRO FONTANILI

The Villanovan cemetery called Quattro Fontanili lies north of the Etruscan town Veii, north-east of the medieval village of Isola Farnese just north of Rome on the via Cassia. It was a salvage excavation jointly undertaken by the British School at Rome and the Istituto di Etruscologia e Antichità Italiche of Rome University between 1961 and 1972 and promptly published in the Notizie degli Scavi of the years 1963, 1965, 1967, 1970, 1972, 1975, and 1976, with drawings of all objects and information about their find-places, horizontal and vertical plans of nearly all the tombs, and an anthropological examination of the teeth from seven cremation and 87 inhumation tombs (Alciati & Passarello 1963; Passarello 1965, 1967). Hitherto it is the best

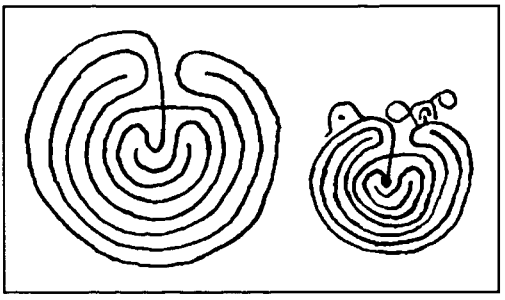

Fig. 5. Rock art. Pena de Mogor, Spain. Bronze Age. (Kern 1981, fig. 75).

publication on a Villanovan cemetery, and that is why I have chosen to work on this material.

The cemetery lies on a knoll overlooking the North-east Gate, which may have been in use already in Villanovan times (Ward-Perkins 1961:18), and the junction of two small streams, Valchetta and Pascolaro. The top of the hill had already been destroyed by deep tractor-ploughing, and here only the bottoms of the cremation tombs and a wealth of scattered surface finds could be recovered. Further down the hill, the earth was deeper, and although many tombs were damaged by the plough or by grave-robbers, many others were found intact. In all there were 641 tombs, of which 208 cremations and 435 inhumations were excavated. Of these, c. 189 were intact (some of the damaged tombs may be intact): 46 cremations and 143 inhumations. Among the surface finds from the centre of the knoll, 110 fragmentary cremation urns were reported.

The Villanovan culture is customarily regarded as an Early Iron Age development of the Final Bronze Age protoVillanovan culture. As such, its beginning is placed around 900 B.C., and its end, in Central Italy, in the last years of the eight century. Although I think that the chronology is too short to account for the great changes that occur within it, I do agree with the division into phases that Joanna Close-Brook proposed in 1965 for Quattro Fontanili (fig. 6). (As Close-Brook only worked on the material from the first campaigns, this division into phases was slightly

reworked by Judith Toms in 1986 and Gilda Bartoloni in 1989. Although these changes are not without significance, in this paper I have not felt the need to take them into consideration.) I prefer, however, to consider the phases as symbolic and cultural expressions, and not only as chronological signs of change. It is important to note that the assemblies belonging to one phase very seldom are mixed with more than one kind of object belonging to an earlier or later phase. An example of this is the Quattro Fontanili tomb CC16B (NSc 1963:144–147), which includes three fibulas of the old type 5 and four of the later type 38. Chronologically, the tomb, therefore, belongs to phase IIB, but stylistically and symbolically to phase IIA, where it has also been placed by Close-Brook (1965, fig. 4). This is, of course, only natural: religious conservatism is always to be expected, especially in times of change. But although the phases are well-defined, the objects themselves, and consequently also the tombs, show a bewildering individuality (cf. Kampffmeyer & Teegen 1986). This is also natural: the common funeral rites are mirrored in the unity of each cultural phase, while the individual beliefs are expressed by the single tombs (cf. Dottarelli 1989).

PHASE I

In phase I and the cremation part of phase IIA, the Urnfield funerary symbolism is evident: the corpse was cremated, the bones, but not the ashes, were collected in a pottery urn of a special shape; it was then buried in the earth (cf. Alexander 1979).

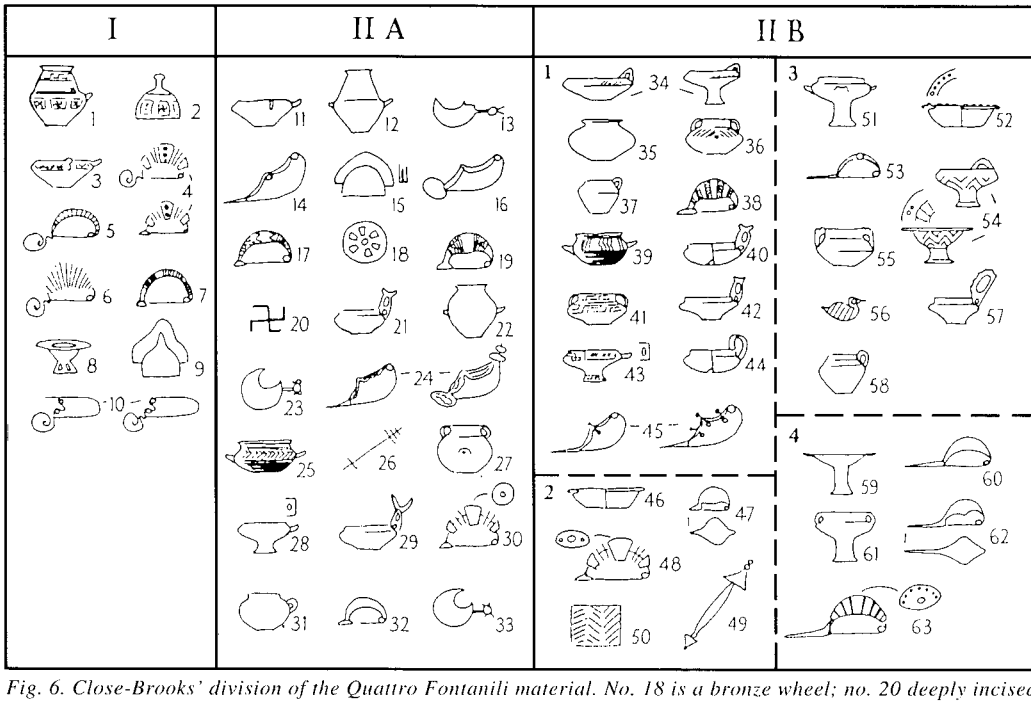

Fig. 6. Close-Brooks' division of the Quattro Fontanili material. No. 18 is a bronze wheel; no. 20 deeply incised single lines; nos. 26, 49 bronze spindles; no. 50 embossed and engraved decoration on bronze belts, urns, helmets and shields; nos. 44, 46, and 52 are bronze vases. In phase IIB the cup with a lunar handle (C.B. nos. 40, 42), the two bowls (C.B. no. 34) which later become the painted bowls no. 54, and the footed bowl no. 43 continue shapes found in phase IIA. The jug (C.B. no. 37) which develops into the wheel-made jug (C.B. no. 58) is a new shape and seems to have a special symbolism. On the amphoras (C.B. no. 36, 41, 55) the syncretism of pottery and metal continues that began on the bowls (C.B: no. 11) in phase IIA.

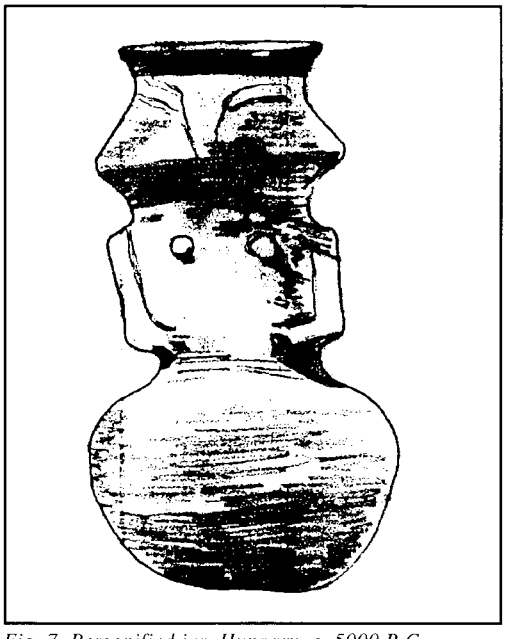

Fig. 7. Personified jar. Hungary, c. 5000 B.C. (Gimbutas 1989, fig. 61).

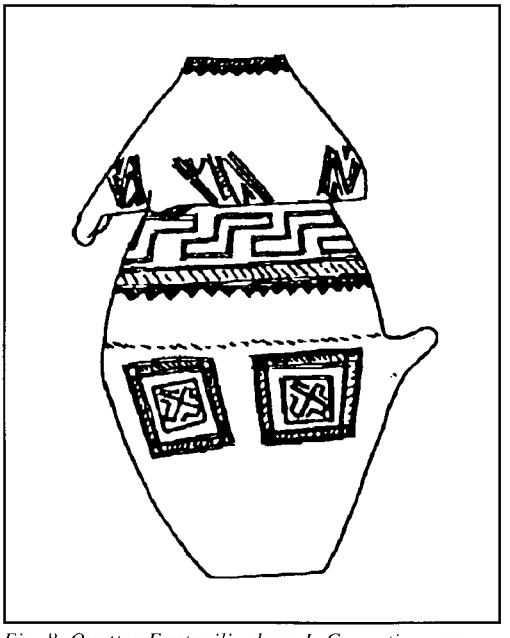

Fig. 8. Quattro Fontanili, phase I: Cremation urn, C.B. 1, and cover bowl, C.B. 2. (NSc 1967, fig. 62).

SYMBOLS OF TRANSFORMATION INHERENT IN THE FIRE

Mankind took its first step along the road that would bring nature into culture, when in the Middle Pleistocene Homo erectus domesticated the fire (Clark 1977:6). It is therefore not surprising that fire has been and still is one of our most important religious symbols (Edsman 1987).

CREMATION

My hypothesis is that the symbolism of fire inherent in the Urnfield cremation and thus also in the Villanovan ritual, was an analogy with the power of fire to transform one substance into another. The fire transforms the raw into the cooked. This is why the fire on the hearth received libations before and after the meals, according to Greek literature (Motte 1985:140–143). Even today in India and in Africa, as in ancient Rome, before every burnt sacrifice a special sacrifice is made to Fire, who will transform the offerings on the altar from a human gift into a divine substance (Dumézil 1970:314).

The analogy between the transformation of the raw substances into cooked food, the human gifts into divine substances on the altar, and the no-longer-living corpse on the pyre into Something is easily understood, if we consider it a feedback loop. The symbolic images of the mother and the earth are so closely associated that it is impossible to say which of them is pictured as an analogy of the other (Bachofen 1975:62–63; Neumann 1963:15–17). In the same way as the human mother's children participate in her human nature, the children of the earth participate in the earth's terrestrial nature. The ordinary mother is not divine, but the Earth as a symbol is. The children of the Earth consequently also participate in the Earth's divine nature. They are transformed by the fire into food for humans. Likewise, on the altar Fire, not only as itself but also as its own symbol – that is, as a divine being – transforms the food back into its divine substance and consequently, on the pyre, transforms the lifeless corpse into life.

POTTERY

But the fire does not only transform the raw into cooked, the human gift into a divine substance, death into life, it also transforms clay, the "crudest" of all raw materials (Lévi-Strauss 1988:177) into pottery. From early Neolithic tombs, onwards the pottery figurines with pubic triangles (for example Kalicz 1970, Pl. 3; Gimbutas 1989, figs. 9, 37, 140a, 219, 220) (fig. 15c) and the jars and drinking bowls with breasts (Neumann 1963:120–124; Gimbutas 1989:36–39, figs. 63–67; Lévi-Strauss 1988:180) (fig. 7) show that the pottery and especially the water containers – and the spindle whorls (fig. 1b) – were not only thought of as female things but were personalized as living beings.

The analogy is between the yet-to-be-born reposing in the amniotic water in its mother's womb, in the process of being transformed from foetus into human being, and the bones – the undestroyed remains of the once-living – preserved in a water container made of pottery, which is the end-product of the transforming power of Fire. Thus, it is not surprising that water containers, the jars, that carry and preserve, and the bowls used for drinking were placed in the tombs as symbols of the Mother and her womb. This concept continues in the Villanovan culture: the shape of the early cremation urns is that of a water jar, anthropomorphized by breasts (Delpino 1975, pl. 34:c, from Vulci), or by a helmet (Delpino 1975; Berggren 1990; 1991), or "dressed" in two fibulas and a belt (Dohan 1935; Quattro Fontanili tomb AABBβ, NSc 1972:260–263;), or with a bronze chain around the neck (Fugazzola 1985).

COMBS

One of the characteristics that separates the Villanovan from the proto-Villanovan culture is that the early Villanovan pottery is decorated with the help of a comb. As I have already explained above, I think that the comb is an early symbol of transforming nature into culture. Miniature combs have been found all over the world, but no comb has ever been found together with the "combed" Villanovan pottery (Berggren 1991). I therefore present the hypothesis that the comb as an object and the combed decoration are two images denoting the same symbol.

The strength of the symbol is shown by the variety of images it awakens and thus by all the different modes needed to express it. The urn with combed decoration expresses the same symbol in three different ways: through the combed decoration as the beginning of the transformation of the plant into a thread, through the cremation fire (the burned bones) as the transformer, and through the pottery urn as the end-product of the transformation of nature (clay) into culture (pottery). Death is not the end but the transformation of life. There is no need to say more, and the "pure" phase I assemblies consist only of the urn (C.B. no. 1) with its cover (C.B. no. 2) (fig. 8). Only when the symbol of combing begins to be less understood, are other objects such as fibulas introduced.

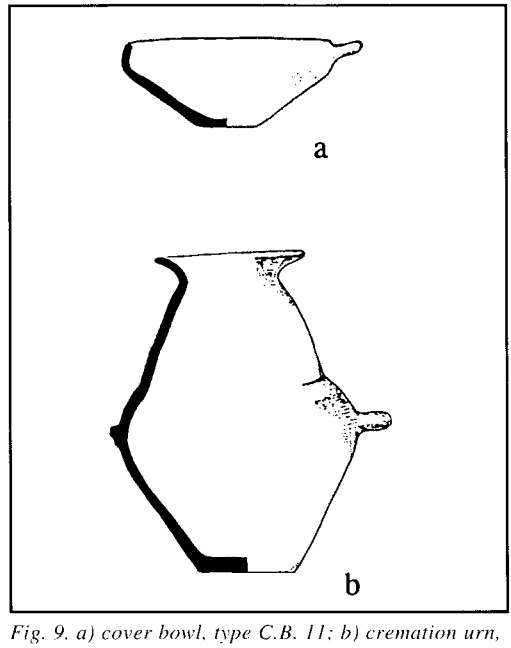

Fig. 9. a) cover bowl, type C.B. 11; b) cremation urn, type C.B. 12. Quattro Fontanili tomb C.C. 16 B (NSc 1963, fig. 44).

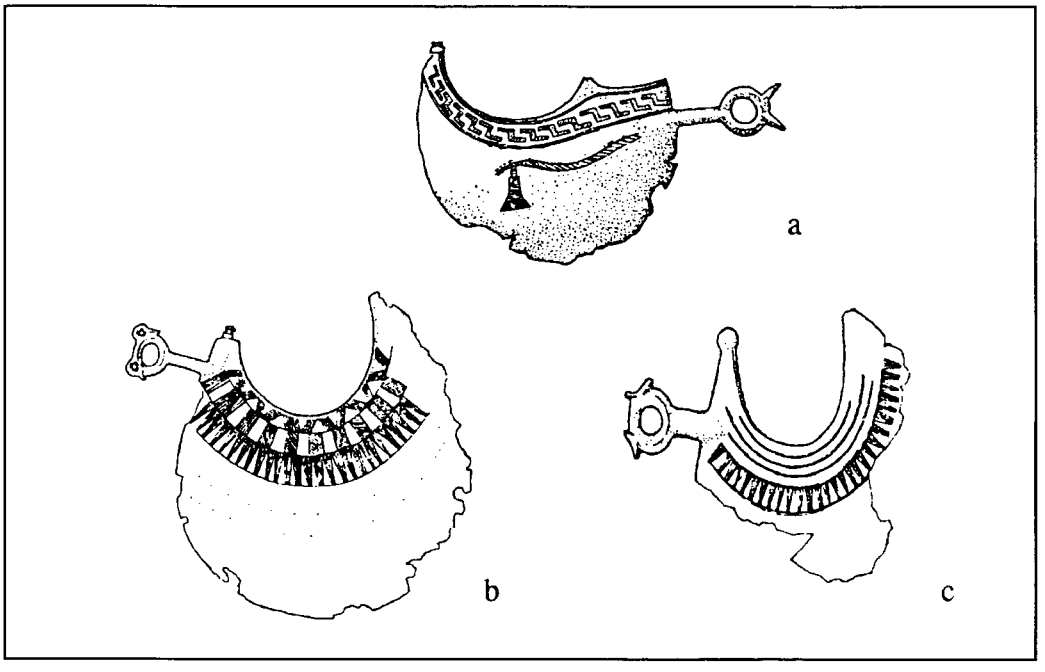

Fig. 10. Bronze lunar knives: a) C.B. 13 (NSc 1963, fig. 37); b) C.B. 23 (NSc 1967, fig. 65); c) C.B. 33 (NSc 1967, fig. 65).

PHASE IIA

The change begins by the comb having fewer teeth, then goes in two directions: the first leads to the plain urns (C.B. nos. 12 and 22) (fig. 9) of phase IIA, the second to urns and other vases decorated by deep incisions (C.B. no. 20) or by painted ornament. Although the basic decorative elements are the same as earlier, the two new methods, the incising and the painting, show that the symbolism of combing is no longer understood. Two different symbols take its place: the moon and the new metal, iron.

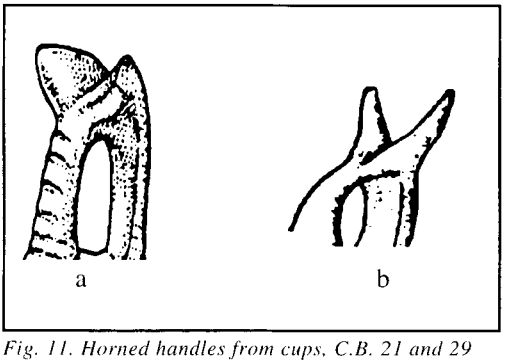

Fig. 11. Horned handles from cups, C.B. 21 and 29 (NSc 1963, fig. 64).

THE MOON AS A SYMBOL OF DEATH AND REGENERATION

The moon, which in the Mediterranean area is feminine, is among the most important (and in my opinion among the earliest) symbols of birth, death and rebirth (Eliade 1958, para. 47–59). The moon is symbolized by the bronze knives (C.B. nos. 13, 23, 33) (Berggren 1990;

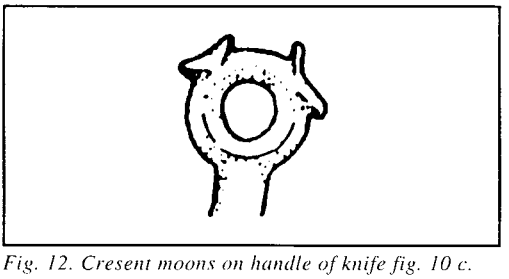

Fig. 12. Cresent moons on handle of knife fig. 10 c.

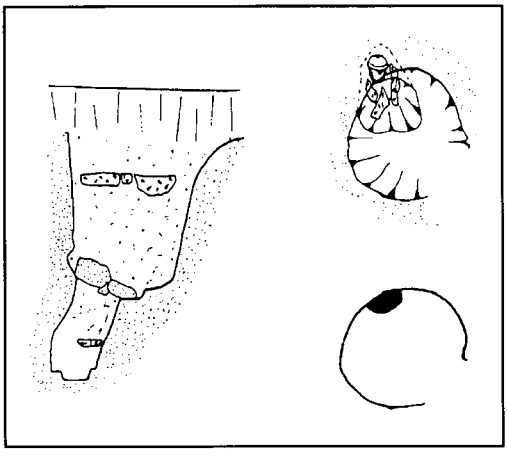

Fig. 13. Tomb AABB: the lunar plan. (NSc 1972, fig.41).

1991) (fig. 10). These knives cannot, of course, be razors, because the bronze lacks the elasticity needed to cut the hair. They will certainly scrape off the skin, but will leave the hair strands intact (Berggren 1990;1991; cf. Staccioli 1991). The crescent, the new-born or dying moon, is pictured in many ways. One example is the cow, a sporadic find in square Z5 (NSc 1967, fig. 66) whose horns have the shape of a crescent. This cow is pregnant (Berggren 1990): the hope death gives is life. The horned handles on the cups (C.B. nos. 21, 29) (fig. 11), the two small crescents on the knives (fig. 12), and the crescent-shaped horizontal plan of the cremation tombs (fig. 13) are other examples.

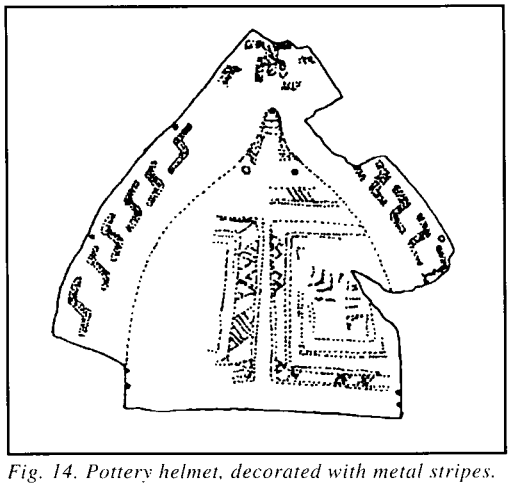

Fig. 14. Pottery helmet, decorated with metal stripes. (NSc 1967, fig. 107).

The lunar goddess is, however, both the cruel goddess who kills and the mother who gives birth and cares. (The great Mother, Kālī, in India is still doing just this.) As there is no contrast between the warrior who kills and the goddess who kills, the lunar goddess in the Villanovan culture is symbolized by the pottery helmets (C.B. nos. 9, 15) (Berggren 1990; 1991) (fig. 14). The moon who, without ever failing, every month is born and begets, every month dies and kills, is born again and gives life again after the three black nights.

METALLURGY AS A SYMBOL OF BIRTH

Contemporary with the change from the symbols of transformation found in the pure phase I, to the symbols of death and life by the lunar warrior goddess, the Fire, which has been the transformer, is changed into a tool, because it is with the help of its heat that the smith gives birth to the metal objects. If cooking, pottery making, spinning and weaving are feminine symbols of transformation (Berggren 1990, 1991), metallurgy is the male one. In the womb of the Mother Earth the minerals slowly mature with the terrestrial rhythm of their mother (Eliade 1976:64–67; Briard 1987:12–14; Vacano 1955:178–180). (Alchemy takes up this symbol in comparing the cosmos to a golden tree (Jung 1954). This image is not as strange as it may seem at first: we accept silver and golden Christmas trees without question. The symbol is the same: Mother Earth gives birth both to plants and metals and thus also to plants of metal. But the Earth also gives birth to man-made objects: King Arthur drew his sword from a stone, which symbolically means that he received it from England, his Mother Earth.)

The minerals extracted from the mines, the womb of the Earth, are still immature, yet-to-be-born. It therefore becomes the task of the smith to transform them into objects using the fire as a tool. Thus, the smith takes the

place of the Mother and transforms – that is, gives birth to her children, who are his objects. The application of metal stripes, symbolizing the male power of procreation, to the female pottery, the water jars and bowls, at the end of phase I, introduces the Father into the domain of the Mother. When the fire becomes a tool, the long work of preparing the cremation pyre (Wells 1960) becomes unnecessary and is replaced by the inhumation ritual which is less work-consuming and more eye-catching.

This, in fact, is, what happens in phase IIA.

PHASE IIB

The tomb contents of phase IIB differ far too much from those of phase IIA to be only a logical development. Not only are new shapes introduced but also a new pottery technique. Arnold (1981;1985:206) has pointed out the great role the unconscious neuro-muscular patterns play in the making of pottery. These patterns are formed in childhood, and this is one of the principal reasons why potters are so conservative. Consequently, it seems to me that the new pottery in phase IIB[3] must indicate a new generation of potters who have not learnt the technique as children and are ready to adopt foreign methods.

Phase IIB is the period of very rich tombs – rich in the amount of personal jewellery and other gifts found in some tombs. This, however, does not necessarily imply that the person was rich or an aristocrat. Four of the very rich tombs in Quattro Fontanili: EE 7–8 (NSc 1967:129–134), FFGG 7–8 (NSc 1967:162–170), GG 6–7 (NSc 1967:244–250) and HH 6–7 (NSc 1967:252–258) belonged to children from three to eleven years of age (Passarello 1967). The gifts to the children may very well have been given not only by the family, but by the community, just as we bring flowers to the deceased at funerals (Collis 1984:19–20).

When no more tombs of phase IIB appear, the transition period is over.

INTACT TOMBS 189

	cremation		inhumation	
	tombs	whorls	tombs	whorls
I	(81)	2		
IIA	35	9	50	21
IIB	12	6	63	24

Chart no. 1

THE SPINDLE WHORLS IN THE TOMBS

In the Quattro Fontanili cemetery, 61 out of the 189 intact tombs contained one or more spindle whorls (chart 1). As is evident from the chart, phase I is very poorly represented: only two spindle whorls have been found in the vicinity of, or in the same tomb as, the 81 combed urns (square N 19, NSc 196:112; tomb X 15, NSc 1965:167). Considering that the number of spindle whorls is very small, it seems that the spindle whorls in Quattro Fontanili do not appear until the combed decoration begins to lose its symbolic importance. They do not, however, simply take over the symbolism inherent in the combing of the urn. Not only are they the second step of transformation of nature into culture, but, as I shall try to demonstrate, they also add something very important as a result of their shape and movement.

There are no spindle whorls in the cremation tombs that contain a pottery helmet or in the tombs with a bronze, lunar knife. The reason does not seem to be that the helmets and the knives are male attributes, because the anthropological examination of the teeth from the six Villanovan cremation tombs (of which one, DD 19A, was covered by a helmet) shows that five of them contained two people, one adult and one small child (Alciati and Passarello 1963) and the sixth a three-year-old child (Passarello 1965). The studies of initiation (Kaelber 1987) have shown that the small boy belongs to his mother, until he has been initiated into adult society. The possibility must therefore be considered that the reason why no spindle whorls have been found in

	ASSEMBLIES containing whorls	no whorls
with		
Iron	0	8
Iron, bronze	1	70
Iron, bronze, gold	3	10
Iron, bronze, electron	0	1
Iron, bronze, silver	0	3
Iron, bronze, gold,electron	0	1
Iron, bronze, gold, silver	1	1
Total	5	94

Chart no. 2.

these tombs is that the symbols of transformation were considered incompatible with the images of the moon, which is a symbol of death and regeneration.

As chart no. 2 shows, the difference between the tombs with and without spindle whorls, but with metal objects, lies in the presence of iron. It may be that the bronze objects were still considered to be female, because the *furnace* was a symbol of the womb. This is still the fact in Zimbabwe (Goodison 1989:43). Only five tombs with an iron object contained a spindle whorl. I did not expect that the 37 intact tombs without pottery would contain any spindle whorls either, but 14 of them do, and the tomb AA 5–6 (NSc 1967:223) belongs to those five tombs with iron and a spindle whorl.

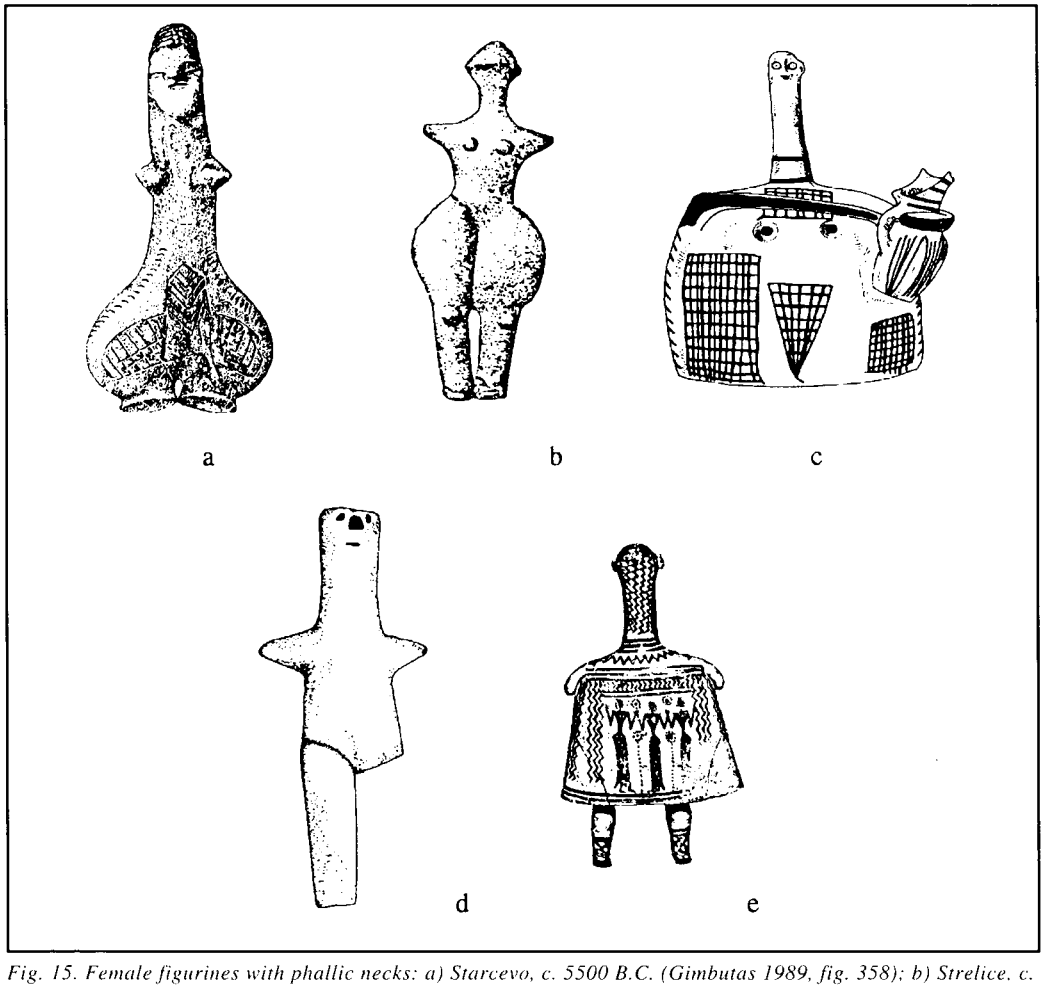

Fig. 15. Female figurines with phallic necks: a) Starcevo, c. 5500 B.C. (Gimbutas 1989, fig. 358); b) Strelice, c. 3000 B.C. (Müller-Karpe 1970, fig. 208:33); c) Myrtos, Crete, c. 2700 B.C. (Warren 1972, fig. 92); d) Caltanisetta, c. 1700 B.C. (Procelli 1991, fig. A1); e) Tebe, c. 700 B.C. (Ruckert 1976, Pl. 29).

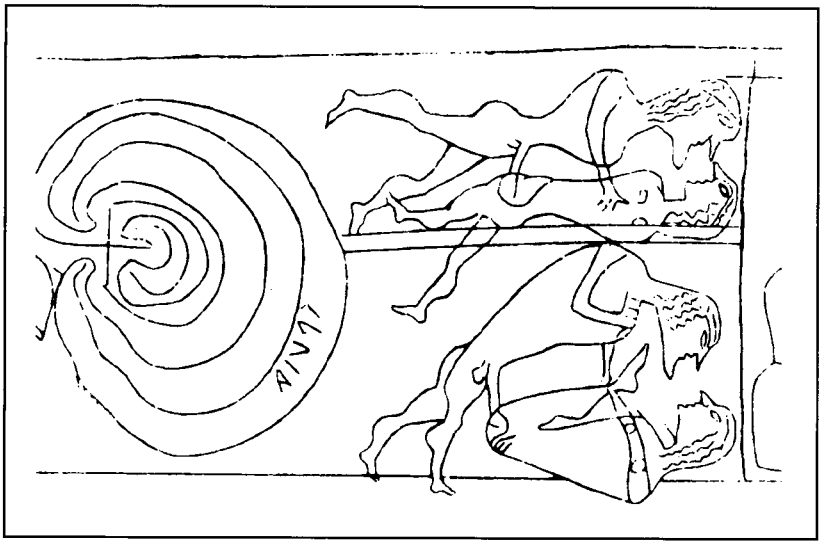

Fig. 16. Detail from the Tragliatella pitcher, c. 620 B.C. (Kern 1981, fig. 93).

Now, the two problems converse: why does Theseus, the man, need the unnecessary string, symbol of the feminine power of transformation, to enter and exit from the labyrinth? And what is the new symbolic association of the spindle whorl with the iron objects, which are symbols of the male principle, and the work of the smith as foster mother to the iron, which is prematurely taken away from its Mother, the Earth?

The pottery decorated with metal stripes, at the end of phase I, is not limited to the Quattro Fontanili cemetery, but is found in all the Villanovan cemeteries in Central Italy (Stjernquist 1960; Bartoloni & Delpino 1975). This way of decorating is shortlived and is replaced in phase IIB[1] by bronze buttons on bowls, amphoras and jugs. As I understand it, it is an evolution of the androgynous figures, abstract female statues with phallic necks (fig. 15); from the Mesolithic Age onwards, they probably represent the power of giving birth and the symbol of totality. I believe that the high neck of the Villanovan biconical cremation urn is an abstract image of this symbolism. When the water containers, the amphoras, the jugs and the bowls, begin to be decorated with metal stripes and bronze buttons – in other words, when the androgynous is no longer expressed through one material – we have two different materials that symbolize gestation and transformation, but in different ways: the female through pottery, and the male through metal. The male principle is further accentuated by the iron objects: the emphasis is so great that only five tombs with an iron object also contain a spindle whorl.

On the Tragliatella pitcher (Kern 1981, 87–91), beside the famous labyrinth two copulating couples are depicted (fig. 16). The number two does not only mean one plus one, but doubleness, 1^2 (Gimbutas 1987). It is the number one, expressed in a very strong manner; and that is what I think we are meant to see here: not two acts of intercourse, but rather the one *hieros gamos*.

I think this is the formulation of a new interpretation of the symbol of conception: not the androgynous figure, in which the masculine principle is a part of the feminine (the woman conceives and gestates; she is in the centre; the man is far less important, being a part of the feminine), but the new importance of the male, of the smith who gestates the iron in the female furnace. No longer is conception symbolized by unity seen as doubleness, 1^2, but as one plus one: two as the unity of the separate feminine and masculine principles.

The beginning can be seen in the five tombs in the Quattro Fontanili cemetery that contain two distinct objects: a spindle whorl and an iron object.

Thus, the female pottery spindle whorls, which are used to spin the thread of life, are not only symbols of the feminine principle, but the feminine principle which cannot create life without the masculine. The man, Theseus, who enters the labyrinth unwinding the yarn, cannot create life without the help of the feminine. To me, the spindle whorls in the Villanovan tombs express the birth of this new symbolism.

ABBREVIATIONS

C.B. Close-Brooks, J. 1965. Proposta per una suddivisione in fasi. NSc.

EncRel. *The Encyclopedia of Religion.* 1986–1987. Ed. M. Eliade. New York: Macmillan.

NSc. *Notizie degli Scavi.*

The Quattro Fontanili excavations are published in the following numbers of NSc: *1963,* pp. 77–279; *1965,* pp.49–236; *1967,* pp. 87–287; *1970,* pp. 178–329; *1972,* pp.195–384; *1975,* pp. 63–184; *1976,* pp. 149–220.

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