

A RARE AUSTRALIAN MOTIVE OF ART AND ITS POSSIBLE AFFILIATIONS TO INDONESIA, MADAGASCAR AND EVEN THE AMERICAS

by

Dr. Andreas Lommel
Former director of the Museum of Ethnology, Munich

Summary

In this article will be shown an art-motive about copulation. Because the motive is rare in Australia an over-sea migration can be supposed.



**Fig.1: Rockpainting site Sundron:
Two crocodiles and later added two human figures. 230x300cm.
Copy Katharina Lommel.**

IN THE SUNDRON cave in the Kimberley region in Northwest Australia we were told to find a painting of two crocodiles, very dangerous ones, but still we could copy them with some precautions. (Fig.1)

Our Aboriginal companions were eager to show the painting to us, so we set out to find it. The painting showed two crocodiles in the usual style of animal paintings, which belong to the Wondjina paintings. A bird and two little human figures a later addition.

But the position of the crocodiles is unique: they are shown copulating, creating "crocodile souls". Regarding the position: one head left, one head right we never found something similar in aboriginal Australian art.



**Fig.2: Shield with two painted figures.
Southeast Borne; 58x40cm.
Copy Katharina Lommel.**

LATER COPYING ornaments on shields in the Netherlands especially in Leiden, Museum voor Volkenkunde, we found painted shields from Southeast Borneo with the same motive, one head up, the other down, in quite different styles, one more natural like the other; the figures were humans not animals. (Fig.2)

The fertility motive, the sexual act, is not very evident on these shields or has been lost altogether. Left is only the protective meaning of the original.(Fig.3)



**Fig.3: Shield with two painted figures.
Southeast Borneo, 57x41cm.
Copy Katharina Lommel.**

BUT VERY evident in a funerary sculpture from Madagascar. I include this funerary sculpture from Madagascar as it shows the motive in question. Two persons head up head down in the sexual act. The naïve bluntness of the sculpture is amusing to us but those erotic sculptures of the Sakalava tribe on the eastern coast of Madagascar are famous – they are meant as a protest against death emphasizing life by showing the sexual act in various positions. (Fig.4)



Fig.4: Funerary sculpture, Madagascar.
After: Archdeacon Sarajane.
Les Tombes erotiques de Madagascar.
Pleus II. 1967 Paris.

In the Americas the motive is again executed as animals only once in a textile; in Peru we find human figures, not so convincing, but still our motive could be sifted out. (Fig.5)

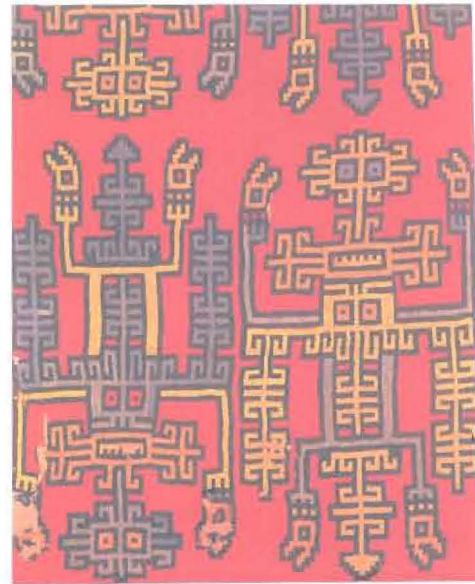


Fig.5: A Peruvian textile Morro style 400-600 AD. Wool, 190x97cm.
Collection Heinrich Hardt, Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Munich.

A STONE cutting from the Northwest shows the motive in remarkable precision: it presents water-demons rising up and drifting down.(Fig.6)



Fig.6: A stonecutting two nonidentified animals. Tribe Haida Northwestamerica.
After: Enrico Hillier Ciglioli.

THE LAST example two fishes painted in a bowl may give away the secret meaning of our motive: the lower fish, the female one, is shown with his belly up, the upper one, the male, in normal position. The fishes are shown in the sexual act, the insemination of the eggs of the female is done without bodily contact, a fact, which must have impressed early artists and philosophers.(Fig.7)



**Fig.7: Painted bowl Peru. Fertility motive.
Nazca style around 500 AD.
Postcard Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin.**

I don't believe that America is the origin of the motive. I rather think Asia, the idea of yang and yin, is at the bottom, but have to admit that I didn't find a very convincing example.

The finding-history of this rock-painting is interesting enough to be told. It shows the difficulties of rock-painting research even in 1955, which have worsened in the meantime. We had Aboriginal guides who led us to the sites, today you are depending on helicopters.

In 1955 my wife and I worked for 6 months in the Kimberley Region of Northwest Australia. Our base was the Gibb River Farm. Katharina copied Aboriginal rock-paintings.

ALL SITES were in the surrounding – two or three days ride away from the farm. We worked there two, three or four weeks, returned to the farm and prepared the trip to the next site. The paintings were always in the Wondjina style. Other styles: variations of the so-called Bradshaw-style we found also and copied them.

At the end of our stay at the farm our guide proposed a trip to a very interesting painting site. This site was an exception as we were told, it was still "alive". The painting showed two crocodiles and those were very sensitive. A passing stock-boy cracked his wiper to loud and annoyed the crocodiles, who caused a large flood. The farmers wife recalled vividly how the puppets of her children were swimming on the waves which flooded round the house.

Our guide wanted us to work on this site, at the same time he was afraid and reluctant, because the crocodiles were "alive" and he did not "belong" to this site. There was another man on the station, Charly, who belonged to this site: That is, his soul came from the painting and would return there after his death. But being old and weak he refused to accompany us and stayed behind.

After a three days trip we reached the place, a hill with a water hole nearby. We camped there and Nipper, our guide, tried the next day to find the painting. He did not find it, so he kindled a huge fire, burned all the trees on the hill and tried the next day again to find the painting. Again without success.

HE HAD A BAD conscience having treated the painting site so roughly, became sick with fever, phantasized and asked for "strong medicine". Sitting beside him we heard a sizzling noise in the night, which we could not explain. But Nipper at once said that this was the rib of the spirit Wamaluru, who threw his rib like a boomerang at the sky, where his rib became the moon, disappeared and came back again.

I never heard this fascinating myth about the boomerang, so the boomerang is not only a work of art. It is also a sort of "mobile", representing the moon. Nobody had ever told me this myth, but fever and fear allowed the sick man to reveal a most secret myth.

Becoming better the next day he decided to return to the farm, a ride of three days and bring back Charly, the man, to whom the site belonged, three other days.

CHARLY FOUND the site at once, approached it very cautiously and admonished us not to touch the painting. Nipper of course knew that we had to touch it for copying. So he said that Katharina, my wife, was anyhow old enough "close-up" – to death of course – and so it did not matter. Both left us in a hurry and we worked in a hurry. We copied the painting, photographed it and rolled the copy tight and brought it back to the camp.

Returning the next day we passed by a rock wall with a beautiful Bradshaw-painting. I photographed it, Katharina copied it in a hurry, arriving at the farm we were admonished again not to show the copy to

anybody and only to show it later at home in "our farm".

Crawford tried once more to visit Sundron, but Charly had died and alone he couldn't find the painting.

A GRAHAM L. Walsh also tried to find the painting, but having no Aboriginal guides anymore, only my insufficient descriptions, he also did not succeed.

SO PROBABLY nobody will find the rock-painting of Sundron, the two crocodiles, ever again.

Now to the two little black figures at the painting with the two crocodiles: Working on another rock-painting site a black old man

passed us accompanied by few meagre dogs in absolute silence. Later we were told that this man had added the little black figures to the painting. Of course we never found out what he may have meant by painting the two little figures.

According to Dr. Lommel's wish the publisher would like to add the following comment concerning figure 1 (crocodiles): The structure of the painting indicates a belief in rebirth. The moving figure in the middle of the painting represents the living human on earth. The crocodile on the top, looking to the left side is devouring a man (we can detect a head and arms in its mouth). The animal shows in western direction, which is a symbol for death. The other crocodile, showing to the right, in eastern direction, spits out a new man. This is a symbol of rebirth. The eyes of the two crocodiles, represented by two concentric circles, indicate a sun-symbol, which includes death and rebirth of the sun.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archdeacon Sarajane : Les Tombes erotiques de Madagascar. Pleus II. Paris 1967.

Enrico Hillier Ciglioli : La collectione ethnograficitta di Castello. 1912 plate between page 132 and 133. Tribe Haida Northwestamerica. No size given.

I.M. Crawford: Wandjina – Aboriginal Cave Paintings in Kimberley. Western Australia. Oxford University Press. Melbourne 1968.

Peruanische Kunst. Catalogue of the "Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde". Munich 1956.

Zusammenfassung

In diesem Artikel soll ein Kunstmotive vorgestellt werden, das die Kopulation darstellt. Da wir dieses Motiv in Australien höchst selten vorfinden, ist anzunehmen, dass es über den Seeweg den Kontinent Australien erreichte.

Correspondence address:

Dr. Andreas Lommel
Former director of the Museum of Ethnology, Munich
Bad Brunnthal 4
81675 München
Germany
Tel: 0049-89-98-62-14