

WHO CLEFT THE DEVIL'S FOOT: A SEARCH FOR THE MEANING OF AN ELUSIVE SYMBOL

CHARLES F. HERBERGER

An enigmatic symbol which, for lack of a better name is sometimes called “palette symbol” or “paddle symbol” because of its figurative shape, is found in rock art in Europe and also surprisingly in Peterborough, Ontario. Both its significance as a symbol and its appearance on both sides of the Atlantic ocean is a mystery that has puzzled investigators for many years.¹ It was identified in Sweden as early as 1932 and subsequently in Spain and France, but its abundant appearance was noted much earlier in the Alpine valley of Camonica in northern Italy.² Its distribution in Europe is illustrated in **FIGURE 1**. Published notice of it in Peterborough appeared in 1973.³ Barry Fell attempted to interpret it in *Bronze Age America* in 1982. Fell’s interpretation of the symbol and his theory of its Norse origin depends largely upon his highly questionable decipherment of alleged Tifinagh script at Peterborough. Suzanne Carlson has convincingly shown how shaky is Fell’s guess-work in jumping from Tifinagh to Old Norse to English.⁴ The professional linguist, David H. Kelley, considers that Proto-Tifinagh script is in fact identifiable in Peterborough, Scandinavia and Valcamonica in Italy, but he warns that Fell has gone far beyond what a specialist can consider valid in his attempted decipherment.⁵ Identifying the script is one matter, but deciphering it is quite another.

Fell equates the symbol in question with the mythical Norse God Thor’s hammer. Quite apart from Tifinagh and also apart from Thor, the symbol shown in the hand of a figure at Peterborough does give some credence to the view that it is a hammer (**FIGURE 2**). However, investigators of the European examples of the symbol, based on its association in context with other rock art images, have shown a wide divergence of opinion as to its meaning. It has been interpreted as a shovel, a mirror, a washboard, an animal trap, and many more objects including a hammer.⁶

Emmanuel Anati, Director of the Center for Prehistoric Studies in Valcamonica and an internationally recognized authority on Camonian rock art writes of “... ‘the symbol of the paddle’, that mysterious figure which has caused more discussions and interpretations than any other in Camunian art. It is believed that this was a magic symbol to which the prehistoric Camuni attributed much occult power.”⁷ After reviewing the many conflicting interpretations, Anati suggests that although it may have had its origin in a particular object, it has undergone a transformation into a schematic multifunctional symbol. It is suggested that it had a potent talismanic function promoting vitality in animal life, and



FIGURE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF THE LOCATIONS OF THE “PALETTE SYMBOL” IN EUROPE AND IN ITALY. (*B.C. NOTIZIE, ANNO IV, No. 4, OTTOBRE 1987*).

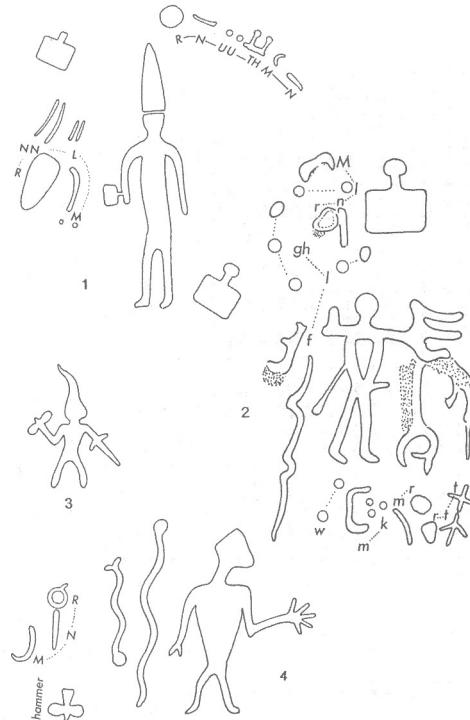


FIGURE 2. DRAWING OF PETROGLYPHS AT PETERBOROUGH SHOWING THE “PADDLE SYMBOL”. (*BARRY FELL, BRONZE AGE AMERICA, 1989*).

fertility, fecundity and abundance.⁸ That the symbol is schematic and abstract rather than specifically objective is well attested by **FIGURE 3** which shows its many variations as well as its general form.

PALETTE - VALCAMONICA		TIPOLOGIA GENERALE	
TIPI	S. ①	S. ②	S. ③
IMPUGNATURA DIRITTA SEMILUCE	■	□	●
POMO A DISCO PIENO	■	□	●
POMO A DISCO VUOTI	■	□	-
POMO PIATTO CORTO	■	-	-
POMO PIATTO LUNGO	■	-	-
IMP CONVERGENTE VUOTA	■	-	-
IMP CONV PIENA	■	-	-
POMO SEMICONVERG	■	-	-
POMO E IMP VUOTI	■	-	-
IMP CONVESA	■	-	-
POMO ASIMMETRICO	■	-	-
POMO A CORNA	■	□	-
CON APPENDICI	■	-	-
IDEM	■	-	-

Nella pagina accanto:
Siti con figure di palette
A. Europa; B. Valcamonica.

Di fianco: Tipologia delle
palette comune.

Qui sotto: Forma generale
della paletta.

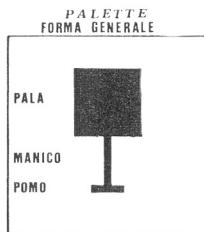


FIGURE 3. VARIATIONS IN THE “PALETTE SYMBOL” AND ITS GENERAL FORM. (*B.C. NOTIZIE, ANNO IV*, No.4, OTTOBRE 1987).

The European examples of this symbol are dated very early. It appears in Valcamonica in the Neolithic, then in the Copper Age, the Bronze Age, and most abundantly in the Iron Age. It is dated in France in the Neolithic Period, in Sweden in the Bronze Age, and in Spain in the Late Bronze Age.⁹ The age of the inscriptions and images at Peterborough is uncertain but David Kelley does not rule out a date as early as the Bronze Age.¹⁰ That the symbol may have undergone an evolution between the Neolithic (c. 5000 BC) and the Iron Age (c. 1000 BC-300 BC) is not unlikely.

Although the earliest written accounts of Norse mythology occur in the Icelandic Eddas of the Middle Ages, it is possible that myths of a Proto-Thor and his magic hammer may have roots in the Bronze Age. There are in fact petroglyphs in Bohuslan, Sweden of the Bronze Age which show figures brandishing a large mallet or hammer¹¹ (FIGURE 4). Mythological thunder gods, of which Thor is only a varia-

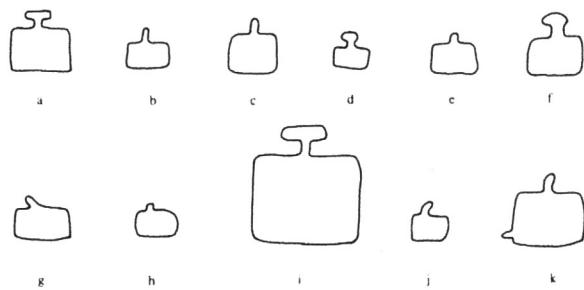


FIGURE 4A. PETROGLYPHS FROM PETERBOROUGH, ONTARIO (*NEARA JOURNAL*, Vol. 34, No.2, WINTER 2000).

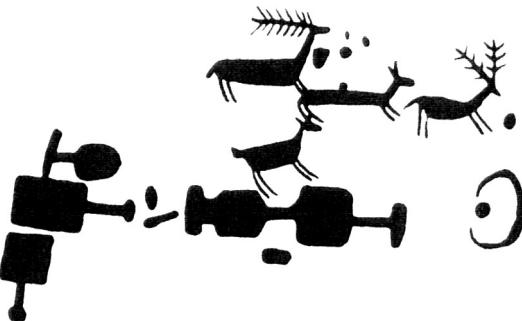


FIGURE 4B. PETROGLYPHS FROM CAMONICA VALLEY (*NEARA JOURNAL*, Vol. 34, No.2, WINTER 2000).



FIGURE 4C. PETROGLYPHS FROM BOHUSLAN, SWEDEN (*NEARA JOURNAL*, Vol. 34, No.2, WINTER 2000).

tion, are known in many cultures. The Greek Zeus and the Roman Jupiter are classical examples. Jupiter Pluvius throws thunderbolts to bring rain or work his will. The hammer of Thor was not merely a weapon but a magic symbol with benevolent as well as destructive potency.

Joan Vastokas, in discussing the Peterborough petroglyphs, sees shamanic visions as the inspiration for many of the images. The Valcamonica images also show shamans, their rituals and their lore. A vivid figure of a running shaman is illustrated in FIGURE 5. A smith swinging his hammer at an anvil is pictured on the rock of Naquane in FIGURE 6. The smith with his hammer is evidence of shamanism. “myths and shamans are from the same nest,” declares a Yakut proverb cited by Mircea Eliade.¹² The transformation of raw metal into tools was thought a magic process.



FIGURE 5. PETROGLYPH FROM VALCAMONICA, ITALY. A RUNNING SHAMAN. (*EMMANUEL ANATI, CAPO DI PONTE*, 1975).

My first attention was drawn to the “paddle symbol” in 1991 in connection with an article

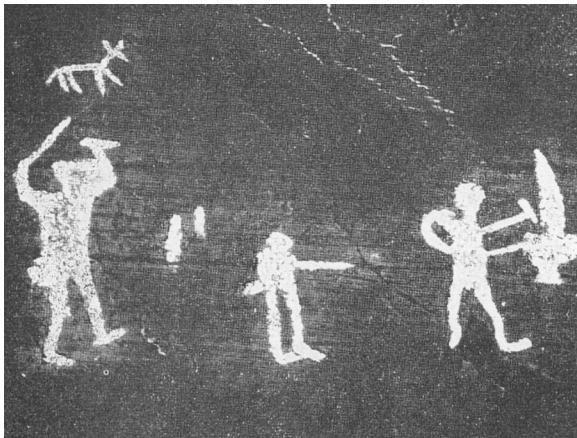


FIGURE 6. PETROGLYPH FROM VALCANONICA, ITALY. A SMITH WITH A HAMMER. . (*EMMANUEL ANATI, CAPO DI PONTE, 1975*).

“The Classical Labyrinth: Old World and New,” published in ESOP, Vol. 20. There is a petroglyph of a labyrinth at Valcamonica which features the symbol with its protruding appendage pointing directly at the labyrinth. Since my article presented abundant evidence that the labyrinth is an essentially feminine symbol related to the womb and the tomb, I concluded that the symbol stood for male potency and fertilization of the labyrinth as womb.

I visited and talked with Professor Emmanuel Anati at Valcamonica in Italy in 1985 and although I did not at that time mention the “paddle symbol”, he alerted me to the periodic publications of his Center, some of which throw light on this symbol. In a number of cases the symbol is shown in con-

junction with an ithyphallic male image as in **FIGURE 7**. This also supports the opinion that the symbol promotes fertility, fecundity, and abundance as previously suggested.

I also suggested in my labyrinth article that although the Valcamonica symbol was not the hammer of the Norse Thor, it might be the magic hammer of a cognate divinity. This brings us to the question of the ethnic origins of the Camunions. Anati does not think the early Camunian people were Ligurians or Italic people but rather of a northern



FIGURE 7. PETROGLYPH FROM VALCAMONICA, ITALY. AN ITHYPHALMIC FIGURE WITH THE “PADDLE SYMBOL”. (*B.C. NOTIZIE, ANNO II, NO.2, APRIL 1985*).

Alpine stock. Of course in the late period there is evidence of Etruscan influence and by the first century BC, there is even Roman influence. Whether the early Camunions were Celtic we do not know, but it is certain that they were influenced by the Celtic Hallstatt Culture of the Austrian alps (750 B.C. - 500 B.C.) and by the Celtic La Tene Culture of Switzerland (500 BC- 100 BC).¹³ We know little about the divinities of these early northern Celtic people but we do have knowledge of their gods in Roman times from artifacts and from the comments of Roman writers

Was there a Celtic god associated with a hammer or with a symbol similar to the “paddle symbol”? Surprisingly the answer is, yes. **FIGURE 8** is a bronze statue found at Vienne in France from the Gallo-Roman Period. It has been identified as the Celtic God Sucellos. He carries a staff in one hand and an ambrosial cup in the other and behind him is an enormous hammer with five small hammers protruding from its head. Joseph Campbell calls him an early Gallic divinity “who as here depicted is a manifestation of the power of his own world-creating, world annihilating hammer.” And he adds, “The five hammers fixed to this large bolt suggests the energies of the five elements of which... the world and its creatures are composed: ether, air, fire, water, and earth.”¹⁴ This explanation of the significance of the hammer tallies very well with the suggested meaning of the “paddle symbol” discussed above.

There is also further evidence of the “paddle symbol” from a Celtic source. **FIGURE 9** is a Gaulish coin from the 1st century BC. On one side is a boar, a sacred beast of the Celts, and on the other is a squatting god with a torc in his right hand and a forked staff in his left hand. Because of his squatting position, this god may be identified as the Celtic Cernunnos. As his name suggests he was a horned stag god whom the Romans equated with Pluto, Lord of the Underworld.¹⁵ The significant factor is the shape of



FIGURE 8. THE GOD SUCELLOS, FRANCE, GALLO ROMAN PERIOD. (*JOSEPH CAMPBELL, CREATIVE MYTHOLOGY, 1968*),

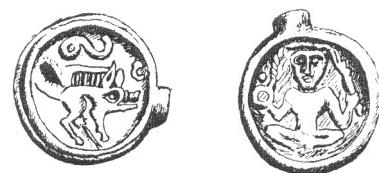


FIGURE 9. GAULISH COIN, 1ST CENTURY B.C. (*JOSEPH CAMPBELL, CREATIVE MYTHOLOGY, 1968*)

the coin. Ordinarily coins are merely circular, but this coin has a prominent protrusion which gives it the same shape as the “paddle symbol”. Here we have a simplified form derived originally from a hammer but schematic as a magic talisman.

Of course, these examples are from a period much later than the Bronze Age, but mythic traditions are long-lasting and this peculiar hammer shape has its roots in the distant past. A wonderful poem by John Donne begins,

“Go and catch a falling star,
Get with child a mandrake root,
Tell me where all past years are,
Or who cleft the Devil’s foot.”

This would seem to be a challenge to the impossible. But strangely enough, both the God Sucellos and the Stag-God Cernunnos with his forked staff (like the Devil’s pitchfork) were equated by the Romans with Pluto/Hades, God of the Underworld. The stag also has a cleft hoof. Later the Christians associated Pluto and the Celtic Underworld God with Dis, Satan or the Devil in Hell. Then who cleft the Devil’s foot? Was it the mythic imagination of the ancient Celts (**FIGURE 10**)? And is this same Celtic hammer god the missing link between the Bronze Age Scandinavians and his symbol found in France, Spain, Valcamonica, Italy and Peterborough, Ontario?

As far as I am aware, the “paddle symbol” does not occur in American Indian rock art or other Indian art except at Peterborough. The symbol as hammer is too much like the European examples to be an independent invention of the Algonquian Indians. The most likely candidate for its diffusion to America from Europe would seem to be the early Scandinavians who were a seafaring people. The northern



FIGURE 10. PETROGLYPH FROM VALCAMONICA, ITALY.
HORNED FIGURE WITH PITCHFORK AND HAMMER OR AXE.
(EMMANUEL ANATI, *VALCAMONICA ROCK ART*, 199)

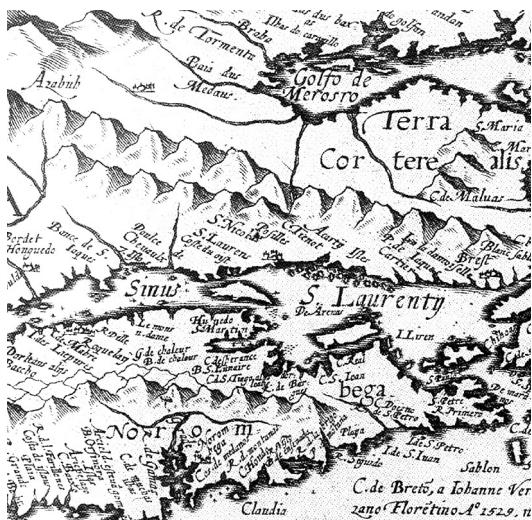
route via Iceland, Greenland and the arctic Canadian islands was more free of ice in the warmer period of the Bronze Age than it is today.

A motivation for European contact in the Bronze Age would be the raw copper (not merely copper ore) known to have been mined from the Lake Superior region at that time. It has been estimated by reliable research that about 1500 million pounds of copper were extracted from these mines in the Bronze Age.¹⁶ Extant American Indian and Meso-American artifacts of copper or copper alloy do not even begin to amount to this enormous amount of copper. On the other hand, sources of Old World copper were very limited in Europe and the Mediterranean. The fact is that great quantities of copper were lost to the American continent at the same period when great quantities of copper were used in the production of bronze in various parts of Europe and Eurasia. The obvious inference is transatlantic copper trade in the Bronze Age. A recent book by Roger Jewell, *Ancient Mines of Kitchi-Gummi*, explores this problem in depth and supports a theory of transatlantic shipment of copper. His theory does not focus on the Scandinavians as the agents, but that is problematical. The elusive symbol that has been traced to the hammer god is a possible factor in this problem.

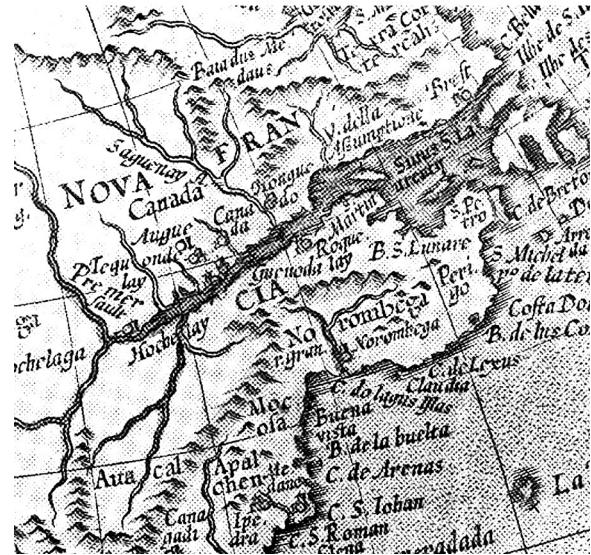
NOTES

- ¹ Betty Peterson, “Painted Dreams, Native American Rock Art”, *NEARA Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 2 and others.
- ² B.C. Notizie, *Notiziario del Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici*, Anno IV, No. 4, Ottobre 1987, p.20.
- ³ Joan and Romas Vastokas, *Sacred Art of the Algonkians* (Mansard Press, Peterborough, Ontario, 1973).
- ⁴ Suzanne Carlson, “Woes for Woden - Lithi,” *NEARA Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 1 & 2.
- ⁵ David H. Kelley, “Identification of the Proto - Tifinagh Script at Peterborough, Ontario”, *Across Before Columbus?*, ed. Donald Y. Gilmore and Linda S. McElroy (NEARA Publication, Edgecomb, ME, 1998).
- ⁶ Notizie, 1987, pp. 21 - 24.
- ⁷ Emmanuel Anati, *Capo Di Ponte, Camunian Studies*, Vol. 1, Brescia, Italy, 1975, p.24.
- ⁸ Notizie, 1987, p.24.
- ⁹ Notizie, 1987, p.21.
- ¹⁰ Kelley, p.182.
- ¹¹ Peterson, p.99.
- ¹² Mircea Eliade, *Foraerons et alchimists* (Paris, Flammarion, 1956), p.83.
- ¹³ Anati, p.42.
- ¹⁴ Joseph Campbell, *Creative Mythology* (New York, Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 416 - 417.
- ¹⁵ Campbell, p.410.
- ¹⁶ Roger Jewell, *Ancient Mines of Kitchi-Gummi* (Fairfield, PA, 2000), p.13.

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DETAIL FROM CORNELIUS DE JODEE'S 1593 MAP,
AMERICA PIAS BOREALIS, FLORIDA, BACCALAOES,
CANADA, CORTEREALIS. (BAKER)



DETAIL FROM MICHAEL MERCATOR'S 1595 MAP, AMERICA SIVE INDIA. (BAKER)

MAPS SHOWING THE ISLE OF CLAUDIA IN NORUMBEGA



DETAIL FROM CORNELIUS WYTFLIET'S 1597 MAP, NURUMBEGA ET VIRGINIA. (BAKER)

NORUMBEGA ON THE HUDSON

BETTY BUCKELL

There has been much discussion about the location of the fabled city of Norumbega even though early maps show its locale and at least two travelers, Allefonsce and David Ingram, claim that they had visited it.

MAPS

It is difficult to pinpoint some early North American sites on ancient maps because of their lack of latitude and longitude. It is surprising how inaccurate mapping was for the northeastern states. Canada's maps are much more accurate for the period. Map makers cannot be faulted; they could only show available information.

Today, many believe that Norumbega on the Norumbega River, was located in Maine by the mouth of the Penobscot River. But was it depicted there on the first maps? One trick is to look for a nearby place on the map that remains constant. The island of Claudia provides us with Norumbega's location because this island always remains in the same location on old maps. Claudia later became Block, the island south of Rhode Island. Therefore if the Norumbega River is depicted west of Claudia, what river would it correspond to today?

There are only two rivers west of Claudia, the Connecticut and the Hudson. Since early maps depict a western branch, the Connecticut should be eliminated. However, the Mohawk joins the Hudson at Cohoes, therefore the Hudson has to be the Norumbega.

Some early names for the Hudson river:

- Rio San Antonio
- Rio de Gamas, Rio de Gomez
- Grande River de Montagnes, Montague, Groote, The Great River
- Norumbega, which means the river of the Steep Hills

Some other names for Norumbega:

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| - Norambegue | - Norembege |
| - Norembegue | - Norombega |
| - Norumbega | - Oranbega |
| - Anorobagra | - Aranbega |
| - Bega | |
| - L'Anormee Berge, anormee means grand, vast, majestic | |
| - La Terre D'Enorme Berge | |
| - La Terre de Normeberge | |
| - La Terre de Norumbega | |
| - La Terre de Nore | |

JEHAN FONTENEAU DIT ALLEFONSCE (1543)

Perhaps the first traveler who "saw" Norumbega was Jehan Fonteneau dit Allefonsce. Jean Fonteneau was born in Saintonge, France. He became a sailor, head of a pirate fleet, and married Valentine Alfonse, a Portuguese girl, whose name he decided to adopt.



FIGURE 1: DETAIL FROM MICHEAL LOK'S 1580 MAP, MAP OF AMERICA. (BAKER)

The Sieur de Roberval and Jacques

Cartier received a patent from Francis I in 1540 to establish a colony on the St. Lawrence. Roberval left France on 22 April 1541 and took with him as pilot, Jean Allefonsce. Within a year or two, Allefonsce sailed from the St. Lawrence down the Atlantic coast for a considerable distance and made a crude map.

Weise¹ used this translation of Allefonsce's three page manuscript ... *Beyond the Cape of Norombegue [Cape Cod], the river of Norombegue descends about 25 leagues [75 miles] from the cape. This river is wider than 40 leagues at its mouth [entrance of Long Island Sound]. And within, this width is as much as 30 or 40 leagues. It is full of isles which stretch out 10 or 12 leagues in the sea [or sound?] and are very dangerous on account of rocks and swashings. The river is in 42 degrees of the height of the Arctic circle.*

Up the river, 15 leagues, there is a town which is called Norombegue, and there is in it a good people, and they have many peltres of all kinds of animals. The inhabitants of the town are dressed in skins, wearing mantles of martens. I think

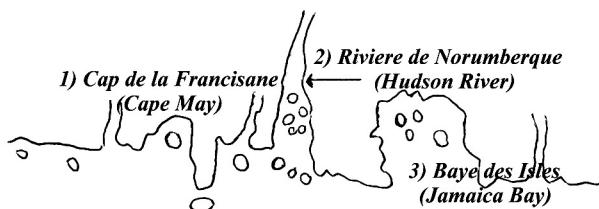


FIGURE 2: THE LOCATION OF NORUMBEGA ACCORDING TO ALLEFONCSCE'S 1545 MAP. (BUCKELL)