

To deposit a fire – during the Bronze Age and in the present

Introduction

In 2003-2005 excavations were carried out at Madsebakke, a large rock carving field on North Bornholm, Denmark, with Late Bronze Age ship images. The excavation revealed that many activities had taken place here during millennia, from the Early Neolithic to the Late Iron Age. The creation of the rock carvings marks only one line of events related to the Madsebakke outcrop. Much of the activity at Madsebakke belongs to the Late Bronze Age (1100-500 BC). We shall focus on the finds from an originally large, nearly rectangular, natural depression in the Madsebakke rock, measuring c. 3 x 1 meter, with a depth of about 1 meter. In the Late Bronze Age, many pieces of burnt clay were deposited in the depression, undoubtedly being wattle of daub, representing burnt buildings.

The deposition of burnt clay is not limited to the Madsebakke outcrop. Excavations at other rock carving sites from Norway and Sweden have revealed similar evidence of depositions of burnt clay, as at Madsebakke often 'in' the rock, in cracks and hollows. It seems difficult to explain this recurring phenomenon, where burnt material was deposited deliberately.

It is the aim of this article to include relatively recent folklore material in order to extend the possibilities for explanations. Perhaps, the folklore material can provide us with some possible answers for the depositions of burnt clay and charcoal. We are not claiming that there is a direct connection or continuity of the related ideas, between Bronze Age and the present. However, the folk tradition can inform us of some 'logic' as to the ideas associated with

fire protection in time and space, ideas that we need to consider, even though they may seem alien for us today.

In *Adoranten 2020*, folklore evidence was presented, where the phenomenon "to place a fire" (Danish: "at sætte en ild") in a sacred stone or in a tree was discussed (Kaul 2020). Recently obtained evidence concerning this phenomenon, was shortly presented in *Adoranten 2021* (Kaul & Nielsen 2021). Archive studies at Bornholms Museum revealed that this tradition is also represented on Bornholm: It has been reported that a potential disastrous fire was placed under a cup-mark stone at Ringeby. The word "våild" is here used to describe such a fire. Taking departure in the records about the Ringeby stone, the word "våild", disastrous fire, will be trailed, also outside Bornholm.

An ominous fire could be placed in a tree in a more physical sense. After a vision of 'pre-fire', a wise man was called. He charred some wooden pegs over the fireplace or stove of the house while reciting a magic formula. Then the bark of the chosen tree was loosened, and a hole was drilled into the tree. The charred peg was driven into the hole (Schmidt 1928; Lidegaard 1996; Kaul 2020; Kaul 2021 a). As a supplement to these folklore accounts some further examples of depositions of charcoal are deliberated.

Madsebakke, Bornholm, Denmark

In Denmark, only the Island of Bornholm, in the Baltic Sea, has solid rock faces suitable for the creation of larger rock carving



Fig. 1. A larger part of the Madsebakke rock carvings, Bornholm. The rock carving figures are marked by water solution chalk paint. Photo: F. Kaul & G. Milstreu 1999.

panels. In other parts of Denmark, no such open rock surfaces were accessible. Here, glacial erratics created smaller, though suitable places for Bronze Age rock art.

The most prominent of the rock carving sites of Bornholm is Madsebakke, the rock carvings discovered in September 1884 (Vedel 1886; Glob 1948; Glob 1969). In 2001, the Madsebakke rock carvings were re-documented as part of the EU-financed RANE-project (*Rock art in Northern Europe*) (Kaul 2005 a; Milstreu 2005). Here 14 ship images as well as four wheel-cross figures, 'footprints', and cup marks could be identified (Fig. 1). By use of recently developed photo-processing techniques, faint traces of more than five more ships have been identified (by Michael Thorsen, Bornholms Museum and James Dodd, Aarhus University). Due to heavy weathering, some of

them are only partially discernable (not yet published).

The rock art of Madsebakke was not created at the same time, as one single composition. The ships covering the rock face were carved over a longer span of time. Due to the established ship chronology built on comparison with similar ship images on bronze objects from closed funerary contexts, confirmed by shoreline dating of Swedish rock carvings (Glob 1969; Kaul 1998; Ling 2008; Ling 2013; Kaul 2006), it can be determined that the Madsebakke ships were made between c. 1100 BC and 400 BC., thus including the first part of the Pre-Roman Iron Age. The peak period was Late Bronze Age, around 800-700 BC. The long duration of Late Bronze Age rock carving activity should be seen on the background of the excavation results, obtained

Fig. 2. The deep depression forming a rectangular cavern stretching into the Madsebakke outcrop. Emptied for its cultural layers, after excavation, seen from the top of the ridge, looking NW. A reestablished situation before human activity. Photo: F. Kaul 2020.

during 2003-2005, where traces of ritual activity can be followed from the early Neolithic to the Late Iron Age, though with a peak of activities during the Late Bronze Age.

Madsebakke, Bornholm, Excavations

In 2003, trial excavations were conducted at Madsebakke, financed by the EU Intercom RANE (*Rock art in Northern Europe*) Project (Milstreu 2005). The results were so promising that funding was granted by the National Humanities Research Council in Denmark, for further excavations, at this and other rock art sites of Bornholm. In 2004 and 2005 the main excavations were carried out at Madsebakke, as a cooperation between Bornholms Museum and the National Museum of Denmark.

Much of the activity at Madsebakke belongs to the Late Bronze Age (1100-500 BC), including a post fencing in front of the rock carving face, where an opening/entrance was marked by two standing stones, one of them was still present at excavation, though fallen, the other discernible as a faint stone trace in the soil. Outside this, several cooking pits were uncovered, some with late Bronze Age pottery sherds and animal bones, including horse bones, probably representing ritual meals (Kaul 2005 c; Sørensen 2006; Nielsen 2006; Sørensen, Reports 2004 & 2006).



Here, we shall focus on the finds from an originally large, nearly rectangular, natural depression in the Madsebakke rock, measuring c. 3 x 1 meter, with a depth of about 1 meter. Originally it had an appearance as a chamber-like opening in rock outcrop. It opens out towards Northwest, where it is almost possible to walk into the rock (Fig 2). However, during the Neolithic, the depression was partly filled up with cultural layers, and during the Late Bronze Age the process was completed, the depression obscured by debris and rubble. The finds and findings, obtained during the excavations of this large hollow in the rock, seemingly represent evidence of ritual activity, covering



Fig. 3 Excavation of the depression in progress, Madsebakke 2005. The stone packing covering the burnt clay depositions has been removed. Behind the depression, at the edge of the rock, the continuation of the stone packing is seen, cleaned up. In the foreground a typical Late Bronze Age ship, with its high keel line extension. The ship is outside the frame of fig. 1. Seen towards NE. Photo: P.Ø Sørensen.



Fig. 4. Almost the same motif as fig. 3, the ship in the foreground serving as a 'land' marker. Quite another situation, here, before excavation: No clear, deep depression is visible. Photo: F. Kaul & G. Milstreu 2001.

millennia. Before the excavation campaigns, no one had any idea that this prominent depression even existed, since it was completely packed with material, and totally covered by bush vegetation. A couple of meters from the depression, a prominent rock carving ship is seen (Fig 3; Fig. 4). It is considered among the first ships of the long duration Late Bronze Age Madsebakke ship carving sequence (Kaul 2005 a; Kaul 2005 b; Kaul 2006 a).

Neolithic

The oldest activity at Madsebakke dates to the Early Neolithic Period, c. 3600 BC, including a couple of postholes within this particular rectangular depression. A rim sherd of a funnel beaker decorated with horizontal lines of two-ply cord, found in one of the postholes, belongs to the Early

Neolithic Funnel Beaker Culture, EN B (Nielsen & Nielsen 2020: 208; Sørensen, Reports). During this period (the Early Neolithic Funnel Beaker Culture) some pits were dug at the foot of, as well as North of the outcrop, not far from the rectangular depression. Cultural layers gradually filled up an area outside the rock, sherds of Funnel Beakers were found in the fill. The depression itself became less marked; a cultural layer was formed here.

Today, when we regard this now emptied-out space, as it must have appeared before human beings started to focus on the Madsebakke rock, it extends mysteriously into the rock. The space could have connected the world of the living with the underworld, inside the rock. The two postholes indicate that a roof may have been used to create a small, enclosed



Fig. 5. Stone layers covering a shelf, during excavation, at the northern edge of Madsebakke, some stones already removed. Similar layers of stone were also uncovered just behind, here still covered by vegetation. Finds of burnt clay/wattle-and-daub are marked. Photo: F. Kaul 2003.

cavern, perhaps appreciated as a sort of semi-megalithic chamber, the Madsebakke rock itself in the shape of a huge naturally formed long barrow or long dolmen?

There are faint traces of activity at Madsebakke during a late period of the Funnel Beaker Culture, c. 2900-2800 BC. However, traces of activity in the rectangular depression appear again during the Late Neolithic period, c. 2000 BC. A large pit was dug through the older layers all the way to the clay subsoil horizon. Large quantities of flint fragments (flint chips) and pottery were found in the fill of the pit. A few of the sherds are ornamented. Many appear to originate from the same vessels, meaning that they could have been more or less intact when deposited in the pit (Sørensen 2006; Sørensen, Reports). The pottery material mainly consists of fragments of roughly shaped, thick-walled vessels, decorated with horizontal cordons below

the rim, as well as barbed-wire ornamentation. The shape, the coarse fabric of the pottery, and in particular the decoration reveals close similarities with the Bornholm Limensgård Late Neolithic pottery material, such as from *House R* and *House S*, indicating a date at around 2000 BC (Nielsen & Nielsen 2022).

Close to Madsebakke, at the large Late Bronze Age rock carving at Stakkebakken, with 16 ship images, sherds of similar cordoned vessels have been uncovered by excavation in hollows of the rock (Kaul 2006 c).

Late Bronze Age

During the Late Bronze Age, layers of stone were deposited within the rectangular space covering the pit from the Late Neolithic period, and the previous traces of activity. The entire rectangular hollow was filled in, and moreover irregular stone



Fig. 6. A portion of burnt clay material from the uppermost layers of the rectangular hollow, Madsebakke. Note the presence of deep branch/withies impressions as well as impressions from flat surfaces. Photo: R. Laursen, Bornholms Museum.

material was laid out across larger sections of the outcrop to the North, Northeast and West. Under and in this stone material was found burnt clay material, wattle-and-daub, small pieces of charcoal, some pottery material and flint chips. These layers extended beyond the Northeast extremity of the outcrop, to cover a natural ledge or shelf half-way down this Madsebakke end-face, facing the sea (Fig 5). Similar stone layers were found at the foot of the outcrop below the shelf (Kaul 2005 c; Sørensen 2006; Sørensen, reports 2004 & 2006). The people of the Late Bronze Age seemingly converted the northern section of the rock into something resembling a cairn. It is worth noting that no rock carvings were found beneath the layers of stones. Apparently, some sections of the outcrop became reserved for rock carvings, whereas other sec-

tions were converted for other purposes, albeit, also in relation to ritual activity.

Iron Age

Among the latest evidence of prehistoric activity at Madsebakke was a small house on top of the rock, a few meters south of the main rock carving. The house (traced by three pairs of postholes representing the roof carrying posts), measures about 10 meters in length. Its peculiar position closely bordered by the protruding cliffs indicates a non-secular function. This house may be related to Late Iron Age cremation burials, close by. One cremation burial, with relatively small amounts of burnt bones, was preserved in a narrow crevice in the rock, covered by small stone slabs and a pottery sherd. In the same area, scattered burnt bones and a glass bead were uncovered,





Fig 7 (a, b, c & d). Madsebakke. Examples of pieces of burnt clay wattle-and-daub. On one side with clear impressions of small branches, and on the opposite surface, impressions of a smooth and level kind, probably reflecting wooding and straw-like wall construction surfaces. Photo: R. Laursen, Bornholms Museum.

probably representing several disturbed humble cremation graves of the Iron Age (Sørensen 2006).

Bronze Age burnt clay

Now, back to the rectangular depression or hollow, which, with its stratigraphic evidence forms a chronological key as to the general sequence related to the Madsebakke activities. Many finds of burnt clay daub were recovered here, in the thick uppermost layers, in particular in its South-eastern section, where larger pieces were concentrated; at some spots, the burnt clay appeared much condensed, almost as small buckets were emptied (Fig. 6).

These pieces of burnt clay daub with its thick withies' impressions as well as impressions of 'wall material' whether wooden or straw-tempered must have come from a house/houses (Fig. 7, a-d). The material awaits closer microscopic investigations, including macro-fossil analyses determinations of the impressions. Further interesting features could be emphasized, such as flat surfaces interrupted by 'cordons' (Fig. 8, a & b).

The buildings in question could have been located close to Madsebakke, or further away. The wattle-and-daub pieces appear to have been deposited here at repeated occasions, though within a limited



Fig. 8 (a & b). Madsebakke. Some interesting features seen on the burnt clay material. Photo: R. Laursen, Bornholms Museum.

Late Bronze Age period. Did they come from 'ordinary' buildings, which had burnt down by accident? – Were parts of house walls placed here to ward off future fires, perhaps using material from a former fire to avoid or control future fire? – or is it more likely that the clay daub instead belonged to buildings possessing a unique status (sacred, temple like buildings, cult houses)? – If the wattle-and-daub represents a sort of cult building, could we then consider this as remains of a deliberately ignited fire, further controlled by the deposition of its burnt material? (Even though not Bronze Age, the deliberately burning down of a sacred building, cult house, is a phenomenon as such to consider; here the cult buildings of the Danish Neolithic Funnel Beaker culture to mention, c. 3000 BC, from Jutland (Fab-

ricius & Becker 1996: 340), from Bornholm, circular buildings (Nielsen et al. 2015)).

Burnt clay at other rock carving sites

While trying to answer these questions, it is worth noting that this phenomenon of depositing pieces of burnt clay at rock carvings is not limited to the Madsebakke site. From Sweden and Norway, excavations at rock carvings have uncovered pieces of burnt clay, though not with the clear characteristics as fully tenable pieces of wattle-and-daub, belonging to houses, such as seen at Madsebakke. (Kaul 2006 b).

The 1975-76 excavations carried out at the Hornes rock carvings, Østfold, South Norway, provide an excellent example of ritual activity to some extent comparable

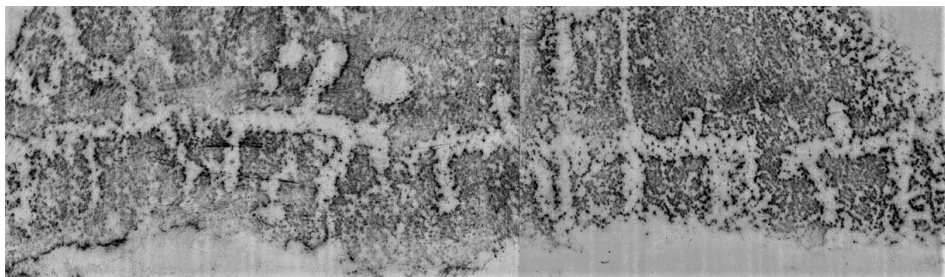


Fig. 9. Five stylized horsemen, Oppen, Tanum 1371, Bohuslän, Sweden. Pre-Roman Iron Age. Rubbing: Tanums Hällristningsmuseum, Underslöv.

to what was later observed at Madsebakke. In front of an almost vertical cliff bearing a magnificent line of ship images, archaeologists unearthed a low wall of stones. Inside the narrow enclosure a fill of burnt stones, pieces of charcoal as well as large quantities of burnt clay in the shape of irregular round lumps; finds of pottery indicate a Late Bronze Age date. The discussion of the meaning of the burnt clay is concluded as follows: "An adequate explanation of all the burnt clay is difficult to give. Possibly it has had one or other functions in the cult, but we do not know what. It is outside our experience." (Johansen 1979: 113).

Further north, at the farm of Benan in Beitstad, northwest of Steinkjer, North Trøndelag, Central Norway, excavations of a hollow in the rock revealed a cultural layer containing charcoal and pieces of burnt clay (Lindgaard et al. 2006). The dating of the layer seems open. In an area in front of the rock carving a cultural layer and some post holes representing a house was excavated. Also here pieces of burnt clay appeared, where the pieces as representing daub walls are considered (Lindgaard 2006). Regarding ship chronology, a number of fine ship images on the rock in question can be dated to Latest Bronze Age and Pre-Roman Iron Age.

In Bohuslän, Sweden, excavations at some rock carving sites have yielded similar evidence. At Oppen, Tanum Parish (Raä 1371), stone packings were found just in front of the rock. Charcoal gives evidence of activity during the Pre-Roman Iron Age (370-170 BC). In a crevice in the rock was found fire-cracked stones, flint chips and

pieces of burnt clay. A row of five stylized horsemen, should be dated to the Pre-Roman Iron Age (Fig. 9). From Tanum Parish (Raä 367) a stone packing was observed, and with finds of burnt clay (Bengtsson 2004).

At a rock carving in Tossene Parish (Raä 446), Bohuslän, pieces of pottery, burnt clay, and stone packings were uncovered. A crevice in the rock contained pottery, flint chips, pieces of quartz, and many pieces of burnt clay. The pottery sherds indicate an Early Iron Age date. Another similar crack in the rock, also yielded pieces of flint and quartz as well as burnt clay. From a bottom clay layer of one of the stone packings, charcoal has given a C14-dating: 1150-890 BC. The upper parts of a stone packing were rich in pieces of burnt clay. Charcoal from the stone packing covering one of the crevices has given a much later C14-dating: 360-280 BC. Bengtsson considers these finds, including burnt clay, as traces of deliberate depositions, and in this case, the depositions were sealed by layers of stone (Bengtsson 2004: 124-128). The rock carvings consist of three human figures, one animal figure, six boat figures and cup marks (Bengtsson 2009). The ships are stylized and may be difficult to date; but a Pre-Roman Iron Age date should not be ruled out.

At Skredsvik, Bohuslän, excavations have revealed a concentration of burnt clay, close to the middle part of a cup mark panel (Bertilsson & Bertilsson 2006).

In southernmost Bohuslän, on the island of Tjörn, a triangular hollow in the rock contained pieces of burnt clay, seen as possible remains of daub walls (Pettersson 1982: 68).

The presence of burnt clay at rock carvings seems to be a recurring feature, recognized when excavations have taken place, smaller or larger, from North Trøndelag, Norway, to Bornholm, Denmark (Kaul 2006 b). A register covering excavation results from Swedish rock carving sites shows that 15 out of 30 sites have produced burnt clay fragments (Bengtsson 2004: 106-107). An interesting, related feature is the burnt-clay connection with stone-packings, covering and masking fissures or hollows in the rock. Even though the archaeological dating evidence in many cases is not quite clear, a tendency can be seen, this sort of activity seemingly covering a larger time span of the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age.

In most cases, it is not possible to determine whether these pieces of burnt clay originally were part of buildings, as wattle-and-daub wall material, even though this possibility is considered in many cases (Johansen 1979; Pettersson 1982; Hygen & Bengtsson 1999). When it comes to the evidence from Madsbakke Bornholm, the wattle-and-daub solution is undeniable (Kaul 2006 b). It has been suggested that the burnt pieces of clay were used as a sort of pen, painting up the rock carvings, making them more visible (Bengtsson 2004). At any rate, we are dealing with burnt material, deposited deliberately, often 'in' the rock, in cracks and hollows. However, these depositions seem enigmatic: "The presence of burnt clay at the rock carving sites in most cases evades – in our understanding – a rational or functional explanation." (Bengtsson 2004: 113, FK translation); or: "An adequate explanation of all the burnt clay is difficult to give. Possibly it has had one or other functions in the cult." (Johansen 1979: 113). Perhaps, relatively recent folklore material can provide us with some possible answers for the depositions of burnt clay. We are not claiming that there is a direct connection or continuity of the related ideas, between Bronze Age and the present. However, the folklore material can inform us of some 'logic' as to the ideas related to fire protection in time and space.

To place a fire in the stone, and to release this fire

Fire, illness, and other catastrophes always have been conditions of life. In the past and in present, humans have attempted to control the immense powers that could create distress, death, and chaos.

A devastating fire was among the worst things that could happen. It was not just the farm, the house, the shelter, which was destroyed. It was the whole basis of life, which could vanish within minutes: the storage, the seed grain, and even the livestock.

In folklore from historical times potential fire, seen in a dream or as a sort of vision could be 'placed' by a wise person into the firmness of stone or wood, probably using a magical spell. If such a stone or tree, holding a fire, was destroyed, disturbed, or felled, the fire could be released.

Dyvelstenen, on the Island of Samsø, Denmark, should be considered as the most splendid example among the Danish sacred stones, packed with layers of legends. Dyvelstenen is the last remains of a Neolithic long dolmen, probably its capstone. The stone embodies a variety of themes and related actions. (1) A giant has thrown a huge stone after a new-built church, or a church under construction, but missed. Dyvelstenen is one of those 'missed shots', here aimed at the Church of Nordby. (2) Fertility: The children came from Dyvelstenen, they were fetched here. (3) Offerings: Bread offerings on Dyvelstenen, probably related to fertility cult and birth, and the wish for healthy children. (4) Relations to fire. The memory of the stories related to Dyvelstenen is still vivid (Kaul 2020; Kaul 2021).

It was well known that a fire was placed in Dyvelstenen. In the years 1975-1980 this knowledge was invigorated. In 1975, Dyvelstenen was cleared for vegetation, and many smaller stones were removed. It was believed that these stones had been piled up around Dyvelstenen by clearing the nearby field for stones during decades. However, some of the stones may represent the last remains of the original stone packing around the dolmen chamber. The aim of these works was not to destroy Dy-

velstenen, but to make the stone visible in a nicely cleared zone in the field. In 1977, the inn in nearby Nordby burnt down. It has been mentioned that the fire in Nordby Inn might have had a sort of connection with the 1975 clearing works at Dyvelstenen. In 1979 new clearings of vegetation and improvement of the road at Dyvelstenen were carried out. However, not all Nordby people were happy with the activities at Dyvelstenen. While the work was in progress, an old man from Nordby protested. He knew that a fire was placed in the stone, and if cleaning up around the stone, that fire – somehow kept in the stone – could be released (Lidegaard 1994: 92-93 & personal communication, FK with Nordby informants). And so it happened, when following this ancient cause-and-effect reasoning: On Sunday, 20th of April, 1980, a fire started at a larger farm in Nordby Village – the fire sprung to three other houses. In the aftermath of the fire, we can read in the newspaper (*Kalundborg Folkeblad*, 24th of April 1980) about the possible connection with the Nordby fire and Dyvelstenen (FK translation): “From ancient times, it has been told that it is not allowed to clear or tidy up around the stone – then a fire will come to Nordby... What is superstition, and what is coincidence? Dyvelstenen has been cleared, just before the tourist season, so that the tourists can get a better view of the stone. What happened: Last Sunday, there was fire in Nordby”.

Similar evidence regarding the placement of a fire and its disastrous release has been recorded all over Denmark. Here, we shall just mention a couple of such ‘fire-stones’. In a stone on Harreby Mark at Hygum, West Jutland, a fire had been ‘placed’. In 1907, the stone was cleft into pieces by a new owner, despite warnings by the neighbors. Soon after, in 1908, his farm, Harrebygård, burnt. Apart from his own loss, the acts of the owner caused resentment, and it was said not to touch the remaining pieces of the stone, in order to avoid further disasters. Most recently, Harreby has come into the archeological record, when the great Viking Age golden treasure of Fæsted, close to Harreby, was discovered in

2016. Additional archaeological investigations have demonstrated that the Harreby area should be considered as an important place of Pre-Christian sanctity and cultic activity reflected by remarkable Iron Age and Viking Age depositions (Schmidt 1933: 330-331; Grundvad & Albris 2020).

At Sennels at Thisted, Northwest Jutland, a stone was broken into pieces, and one of the houses belonging to Ullerupgård burnt. It was told that if the stone disappeared, a fire would break out at Ullerupgård. The villages at Verninge, Funen, were at a time haunted by fire. Then, the priest, apparently a “wise man”, selected a stone and placed it in the stone dyke of the church yard. He said, that if this stone was not removed, the parish will not suffer from fire. For 100 years, there was no outburst of fire. But then, the dyke with the stone was removed, and in the same year several fires broke out in the parish (Schmidt 1928: Schmidt 1933).

Also, if destroying Neolithic megalithic tombs, dolmens, a fire could be released. This is the case with three dolmens on the Island of Als, South Jutland. If the chamber of a dolmen in Kegnæs Parish was destroyed or the capstone was removed, the people of the nearby farm would die, or the farm of the owner would burn. The stones of a dolmen in Lysabild Parish are “fire-stones” (*brandsten*), and if the dolmen chamber was destroyed, the farm of the owner will catch fire. A fire has been placed in a dolmen in Tandslet Parish, and no one dare to destroy it. If this happened, the farm of the owner will be stricken by fire (Schmidt 1933).

A potential fire was placed in a cup-mark stone at Ringeby, Bornholm. A recent archive discovery

Until most recently, no records of such sacred ‘fire-protecting’ stones were known from Bornholm. However, in 2021, archive studies, by Finn Ole Nielsen, Bornholms Museum, have revealed further evidence as to the ideas of a fire being ‘kept’ in a powerful stone, only released if the stone was broken or destroyed (Kaul & Nielsen

Da en Jarsel som er frasolgt Stangegård
 ligger en stor Sten hvori der er en Kæde
 Skælfersnige Fordybninger. Da den ligger midt
 i Agerjorden vilde Ejeren have den bortsprængt
 men da fik han at vide af en Nabo, at un-
 der den Sten var Væld blevet nedmanet engang
 og ligeså snart Stenen blev borttaget blev Vælden fri
 og så vilde hans Husbrænde af. Derfor ligger Stenen
 der endnu. Den kunde måske fås til Fredlysnings-
 Daglin og Befodringsgudtjeneste 6 Str
 Stangegård den 10 April 1913
 Hans Anker

Fig. 10. Part of the text, about the Ringeby stone, Bornholm, in the diary-notebook of Hans Anker Stangegård, dated 10th of April 1913, the archives of Bornholms Museum, in Danish: "Da den ligger midt i Agerjorden, vilde Ejeren have den bortsprængt men da fik han at vide af en Nabo, at under den Sten var Væld blevet nedmanet engang og ligeså snart Stenen blev borttaget blev Vælden fri og så vilde hans Hus brænde af. Derfor ligger Stenen der endnu. Den kunde måske fås til Fredlysnings."

2021). In a diary by a local antiquarian, Hans Anker Stangegård (1858-1923), containing a lot of information as to archaeological sites of Bornholm, it is mentioned (1913) that (in the last part of the 19th century) the owner of the stone wanted to break it into pieces. This did not happen, because a neighbor mentioned that a dangerous fire (Bornholm dialect: "Væld") in a magical way was placed under the stone. As soon as the stone was damaged or removed, a devastating fire would be released, set free, aiming his house and farm. The farmer listened and understood. Consequently, the stone was left unharmed, today as a protected prehistoric monument (registered site number: *Fund og Fortidsminder*. Vestermarie Parish: 060305-23B; protection number: 5234:7). In the short and precise text in the diary notes, 1913, a protection possibility is mentioned (Fig. 10). Just two years after, in 1915, the Ringeby Stone was officially recorded (Danish: *Tinglyst*) as a protected ancient monument. Apparently, members of the local historical society had made a strong effort in saving the stone (as an ad-

ditional benefit, the nearby farm remained under fire protection).

The word "væld" is here mentioned twice by Hans Anker, as though it for him was a well-known phenomenon including the placement and the setting free the perilous "væld". Other Bornholm accounts gives further evidence of the use of the word. A certain Anders Jørgensen lived in Vallensgårdhusene, and from his house he had seen "væld" at a nearby house. It looked like a fireball coming out of the ground, and it continued up following the roof. It was a common belief, that when a "væld" has appeared in a house, and an actual fire broke out, then it would be impossible to extinguish that fire. Thus, in 1837, Brandsgaard in Aaker Parish burnt down to the ground, because there had been "væld" in the farm (Dansk Folkemindesamlings Håndskriftsamling, arkiv registrant 1906/023, top. 684). The two Bornholm examples relate evidently to the notion that a seen potential fire was a bad omen: A "væld" glimpsed in a vision or a dream was regarded as a prediction for the coming of the actual devastating fire. However, in



Fig 11. The Ringeby stone, Bornholm, before the cup-marks being painted. To the right the official protected monument stone marker. The hollow in the landscape behind the stone is a result of modern gravel digging. Photo: F. Kaul.

Fig. 12. The Ringeby stone, full view. For clarity, the cup-marks are painted with water solution chalk paint. Photo: F. Kaul & G. Milstreu.





Fig. 13. The central part of the rock carving surface, Ringeby, Bornholm. Photo: F. Kaul & G. Milstreu.

these cases, seemingly, no 'fire-protection' was involved. No wise person had placed the ominous in a stone. Or, perhaps, we have just not heard about a sacred stone being destroyed, with consequences as seen above, like the Hygum example. At any rate, the Ringeby stone was not broken, the fire has stayed in the stone, no fire has broken out.

A few words about the word "*vâild*": The word "*vâild*" consists of two elements "*vâ*" and "*ild*". The last part means fire, the first means dangerous, perilous, dreadful or accident. "*Vâ*" is a shortened (Bornholm dialect) version of Danish "*våde*", known in old modern Danish, for instance as "*ildsvåde*", the two elements here switched around. The word has old roots in Germanic languages and Old Norse. In old modern Norwegian: "*Våde*", in certain Norwegian dialects in the shorter version as on Bornholm: "*Vâ*". In Swedish: "*Våda*". In German: "*Weh*". And in English: "*Woe*". – Well, meaning: Woe! (SAOB 2019).

The Ringeby stone stands as a fine example of a boulder covered with cup

marks, as seen in many parts of South Scandinavia. The cup-mark as such is the most common (worldwide) rock art motif, and a large range of meanings and interpretations can be discussed. In Scandinavia the cup-marks are often found together with other motifs such as ships and circle motifs (Horn 2015; Milstreu & Dodd 2018). In many cases, as with the Ringeby stone, no other motifs than the cup mark is present. The cup marks of the Ringeby stone cannot be dated as such; but other Scandinavian image-connections as well as closed well dated finds, indicate a Bronze Age date. It should be noted that we do not find any close connection between the making of the cup-marks and the much later folkloristic accounts; Apart from the fact that the protection of the stone is seemingly attributable to the beliefs of a fire held in the stone.

The 3, 4 m long and 2 m broad stone of greyish granite carries on its even and slanting upper surface of somewhat rhomboid shape about 130 cup-marks, most of them with a diameter of 5 cm (Fig. 11; Fig. 12;



Fig. 14. The Ringeby stone with its cupmarks. East of the stone a tree-covered hillock is seen, named Stenshøj. On Stenshøj, Iron Age burials have been recorded, as well as remarkable settings of standing stones.

Fig. 13). In ten cases two cup-marks are connected by a short line, not so deeply pecked as the cup-marks themselves. This phenomenon of short lines or 'bridges' connecting the cup-marks is a recurrent feature in South Scandinavia.

The Ringeby stone is situated in the fertile landscape of Central Bornholm, between Rønne and Aakirkeby. It is part of the prehistoric landscape in a broad sense. A hillock, named Stenshøj, now covered by trees, about 200 meters east of the Ringeby stone, has served as an Iron Age cemetery, including both inhumation burials and cremation burials (registered site number: *Fund og Fortidsminder*. Vestermarie Parish: 060305-20). Here, 36 standing stones were recorded during the first half of the 19th century. Some of the menhirs formed a remarkable stone circle, destroyed by gravel digging (Vedel 1870) (Fig. 14). Other burial

mounds and records of burial grounds have been recorded in the vicinity, one of them called Træhøj.

To place a fire in a tree

A similar phenomenon is the idea that a potential or foreseen fire in a magical way could be placed in a tree. If a "fire-tree" was felled, then the fire would be released. If it was felled by storm or lightning, by natural causes, it was important not to remove its remains. While the tree rotted, the potential fire could move down into the ground. In some cases, a fire-tree growing on a burial mound could protect the mound (Schmidt 1928; Lidegaard 1996). The accounts of placing a fire or rather the threat of a fire in a tree are more common than the records of placing a fire in a stone. From Denmark (1928), 75 examples are recorded, the majority from the southern parts of Jutland. Only four examples are known from the Danish Isles east of Jutland, two from Funen and two from Zealand (Schmidt 1928: 55-57).

There are no records of these fire-trees on the Island of Bornholm. However, a related account exists: An ash tree on a burial mound close east of Julsgård (5. Selvejergård), Bodilsker Parish, must not be felled, and in case, then a new replacement tree should immediately be planted. Once, this procedure was not respected; consequently, the livestock of the owner was troubled with malady and woe – until a new ash was planted (Schmidt 1928: 71). This story has repeated itself in recent times (as recorded in *Fund og Fortidsminder* under the barrow's registered site number: *Fund og Fortidsminder*. Bodilsker Parish: 060201-34). In 1979, the then old ill-fated tree fell, by natural causes. However, a replacement tree was not immediately planted. Three months after, in the winter, same year, the farm's byre was destroyed in a snowstorm. A new building was erected. The old procedure was restated: The farmer planted a young oak tree on the burial mound "for maintaining the tradition"! (Fig. 15).

As mentioned above, the fire-tree phenomenon is mainly distributed in West



Fig. 15. The burial mound at Julsgård, Bodilsker, Bornholm. A younger tree standing on the mound is seen just to the right of the center: A replacement of the old 'woe tree'. Photo: Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen.

Denmark. However, a hitherto unpublished example demonstrates its presence east of Zealand, in Scania, South Sweden. In the autumn 2022 the present author (FK) had a meeting with the archaeologist Professor Lars Larsson, University of Lund, Sweden. During our conversation it turned out that Lars Larsson himself had been told about the fire-tree, not as a faint memory, but as vivid tradition. In 1976-79 he conducted an excavation at the round dolmen Trollakistan at Bosjökloster near Ringsjön, Central Scania. Pottery was found confirming that the dolmen belongs to the Neolithic Funnel Beaker culture. It was probably built around 3400 BC. During the excavation, a visitor advised the team to be cautious when digging, so that no tree growing in the remains of the barrow would die. In that case, the vicarage a couple of hundred meters from the dolmen would catch fire (Personal communication (FK) with Lars Larsson 2022; Larsson 1979). Again, a fire was seemingly placed in a tree.

Finally, when considering this fire-tree tradition, it is worth noting that in some cases a fire could be placed in a tree in a more physical sense, a tradition seemingly restricted to Southern Jutland. After a vision of pre-fire, a wise person was called. He charred some wooden pegs over the fireplace or stove of the house while reciting a secret magic formula. Then the bark of the chosen tree was loosened, and a hole was drilled into the wood. The charred peg was driven in the hole, which was closed by a wooden plug. Finally, the bark was carefully put back, so that the tree could heal, the fire becoming totally contained in the tree. In fact, such black-charred pegs have been found in fallen fire-trees on the island of Als, South Jutland (Lidegaard 1996; Kaul 2020). Thus, not just spells were used, but physical pieces of burnt material representing a fire were placed in such trees. The attempted control of fire and burnt material has become physical, as part of material culture. Here, we can surely speak about depositions of charred material, of

true depositions of a fire, of burnt material, though after a 'pre-fire' was seen in a vision.

This leads us to the final section, where a few records of deliberate depositions of charcoal will be highlighted.

Depositions of charcoal

We can now return to Bornholm and the "våild" (disastrous fire; woe fire) phenomenon. When a "våild" (in a vision) has been seen on a farm, the fireplace must be cleaned. A still glowing spark, inextinguishable, was found. This is "våilden" (the woe fire). The people on the farm must carry "våilden" out and dig it down, though on the land belonging to the farm. It is important that you find that very corner of the land, which is furthest away from the farm itself. Because every new year's night the "våild" moves a 'cock stride' (Danish: *Hane-fjed*) closer to the farm (Dansk Folkemindesamlings Håndskriftsamling, arkiv registrant 1906/023, top. 673).

Another version of this narrative informs us of what you could do after a "våild" has been in force, securing that another (or the same) 'våild' would not break out again: When a "våild" has devastated a farm, it could be identified as a shining (nearly glowing) charred spot in the destroyed building. It was of utmost importance that "våilden" was carried away as far as possible from the farm buildings, though still within the borders of its land. Every year the 'våild' would move a 'cock stride' towards the farm itself, and in due time the 'våild' would cause yet another tragedy (Tang Kristensen 1891, no. 293, 80-81).

These related accounts are most important, because they show that "våild" was not seen as visionary phenomenon alone, 'våild' had a certain materiality: To avoid a potential fire or in the aftermath of a fire, it could be treated in a physical way, being repositioned, deliberately deposited; the 'våild' thus being kept as far away as possible from the farm. However, it could still be a threat to the farm, even when deposited, since it could 'jump' closer year after year.

Another Bornholm example referring to a deposition of charcoal does not relate to a fire, as such. In 1588, the boundary lines between Østermarie parish and the old outfield owned by the king were relocated. An official document is preserved, where features in the landscape as well as new boundary stones are mentioned. Representatives of the Bornholm "Thing" and the parishes certified these seemingly important land allotment regulations (Olsen 1950: 75). On 29th of October 1588, the 'commission' went out in the landscape, following the newly agreed parish boundary. Where clear landscape features could not be followed, marking stones were set. Under the stones, charcoal was deposited: "*Forst fra it Bjerg og Backe, som kaldes Sandaasehofuitt, huor udi blev Marchesteene sat og Kuol underlagt*". In English: "First from the mountain and hill, called 'Sandhill-head', where marking stones were set, and coal laid underneath". In the document, more boundary stones are specified, in each case the deposition of charcoal under the stone is explicitly mentioned.

Obviously, in this case we are dealing with a secular practice of depositing charcoal. It is as though the deposition of charcoal underneath a stone could strengthen an important agreement related to boundaries, perhaps underlining the durability of an agreement, charcoal being almost indestructible. Some underlying magic associated with the deposition of something which has burnt should not be excluded. Earlier Medieval sources hint at certain symbolic meanings related to depositions of charcoal, Bornholm 1588, and what may lay behind, seem to have deep roots back in time.

In a widely disseminated Medieval script, "*Etymologiae sive Origines*", by the Holy Isidor of Sevilla (dead 636) about "cargo" (not glowing charcoal; coal without fire), Isidor writes as follows: "Its durability is ... so immense that no moisture can destroy it, no ageing can obliterate it. Even though its glowing has been extinguished, it remains so imperishable, that those (officials), who delimit the borders/boundaries inter

it (charcoal) in the ground, and stones are set above." The Church Father Augustin (353-430) mentions in his work "*De civitate Dei*", that charcoal distinguishes itself – by the aid of fire – to emerge out of something destructible into something stable and enduring (Madsen 2001: 96). The main point is that when buried in the ground, charcoal can stay unharmed for eternity, after the metamorphosis through fire. Christian or philosophical connotations can be seen in the mystical change of something perishable into something imperishable and eternal.

Finally, a few examples of quite another sort of deposition of charcoal is worth mentioning, involving some magical element, and again including the word "*våild*". In the Norwegian Gudbrandsdal dialect we meet this word in the same short version as on Bornholm (see above).

When a farm had suffered from a fire, the charcoal from the wooden walls was still of importance, this charcoal even carrying its own name: "*våkul*" (English: Woe charcoal). The "*våkul*" could be 'deposited' as an ingredient in an ointment serving as a cure against painful and burning skin or nerve diseases, such as hives (*urticaria*) or shingles (*herpes zoster*). At Balestrand in Gudbrandsdal the cure is described as follows: "The "*våkul*" is crushed into a powder being blended with sour cream, making a lotion called "*våkulssmøring*". The person who makes the ointment should not belong to the household of the troubled one (Reichborn-Kjennerud 1940: 33). A similar record is known from Sweden; charcoal from a burnt building used in folk-medicine: A 'burning' rash was treated by an ointment made of charcoal from a disastrous fire (Swedish: "*vådeeldskol*") mixed with a woman's milk (SAOB 2019). Also here, this specific 'charcoal-type' has its own name, suggesting that it was a well-known concept.

It is interesting to follow such logics of folk medicine, where some power retained in the charcoal from a disastrous fire could be transferred into a healing ointment 'deposition' on human skin: The power of an old

fire could in a way be used to extinguish a painful fire burning in your skin, and when mixing with a woman's milk, then an even stronger medicine was created.

Concluding remarks

It might seem too farfetched to bring together sources of so different kind, in time and space: From Bronze Age archeological sources, telling about depositions of burnt clay to recent folk tradition accounts, even including distant Medieval written sources as well as Norwegian folk medicine.

When considering the folklore material, we are mainly dealing with records of oral tradition, where a potential fire in a magical way was placed in a stone or in a tree, and where there only rarely are records of a physical deposition of burnt material, and no true materiality is involved.

We shall never know what songs or magical spells that were recited when burnt clay and charcoal was deposited at the rock carvings. However, the same goes for the folklore material, where the magical spells themselves seemingly have remained as secrets.

Even though it seems difficult to combine the variety of sources with their possible multitude of meanings, some common denominators can be found. By a disastrous or deliberately ignited fire destroyable matter was transformed into something indestructible. The inherent power in this material could be utilized for securing land allotment agreements, as well as used for fire protection.

We are not claiming that there is a direct connection or continuity of the possible related ideas, between Bronze Age and the present. However, in a structural sense, the incorporation of folklore material may give us some hints as to the ideas lying behind the depositions of burnt clay at the Madsebakke rock carving – and further.

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