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The idea of the circular motion of time in the thought of the Greeks of the 8th century B.C.

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to reveal the specifics of a perception of calendar time among the Greeks of the 8th century B.C. Through an analysis of iconographic sources and original texts, we have made an attempt to determine the peculiarities in their perception of the flow of time, changing of the seasons, and annual circulation of time. By studying the imagery as it is shown in the pottery decoration of the Protogeometric and Geometric periods, we have come to the conclusion that the symbols depicted in it were reflected in the representations about calendar time as connected to the natural environment and alteration in the surrounding space in accordance with the annual changes in nature.

Keywords

mythological thinking; calendar time; Homer; Hesiod; iconography; natural rhythms; solar cycle

Introduction

Observation of the surrounding space by the people of archaic cultures let them eventually realise that all the phenomena in the world were dependent on definite rhythms. Scholars point out that the ideas of space and time based on natural rhythms existed interchangeably in the minds of people with mythological thinking.¹ The consequence of the involvement of human life into the natural processes and prevailing of sensual perceptions was the comprehension of the passage of time in accordance with changes in the surrounding space.² Primarily, the initial orientation in time, as well as the initial orientation in space, was based on the solar cycle and an alternation of seasonal states in nature.³ In this paper we will argue that the annual renewal of nature, the repetition of natural processes, and a return to the initial state, together with sensual perception, resulted in the emergence of the idea of the circular motion of time⁴ that, in its turn,

- 1 Bouzek (2018: p. 74); Calame (2009: p. 56); Giannakis (2019: pp. 238–239); Whitrow (1961: pp. 73–78). E. Cassirer (2010: p. 100) thus noted that the reflection of space and time in mythological thinking was implemented by sensual perception. He also argued that the basis for the emergence of a sense of time was laid by the same natural conditions that had influenced the formation of ideas about space. A regularity of a change of various states of nature thereby facilitated the development of the ability to comprehend time intervals: Cassirer (2010: pp. 120–123).
- 2 The perception of time in early Greek poetry was associated with the perception of space that revealed itself through the description of movement. A. T. Zanker (2019: pp. 61–64) notes that the concept of time in ancient Greek thought expressed itself through motion and shifting in space. Various objects in space played the role of metaphors and thus emphasized the specifics of the passage of time in a definite episode or in common sense: Zanker (2019: pp. 76–78). A. C. Purves points to the interconnection of space and time in Homer by referring to the description of the blowing of the wind in his similes: Purves (2010: pp. 334–335, 337–338, 341). On the similar interconnection of space, time, and movement see also Purves (2006: pp. 181, 187–188, 197). J. F. De Jong notes that the description of the passage of time as an action in Homer is revealed through the spatial images which create definite spatial and temporal relations: De Jong (2007: pp. 21–22, 24–25, 33–34). E. Husserl (1973: pp. 298–300) argues that the perception of space is based on the kinaesthetic orientation which forms the system of initial spatial coordinates. The main role in this orientation belongs to the human body, in accordance with the position and movement of which the initial representations about space are formed. Taking into account Husserl's concept, we are inclined to suppose that, in addition to the motion of the human body, the motion of the objects filling the surrounding space, as well as observations of the changes of space in the immediate vicinity to the observer, produced the initial representations about time.
- 3 Cassirer (2010: pp. 120–123); Giannakis (2019: pp. 238–239); Heidegger (1967: p. 96).
- 4 There are two models of time, linear and cyclic time, which are the result of a perception of changes in the surrounding space and human life. Speculating on the character of linear time, A. Bartolotta considers this concept of time from the two positions. The author argues that, on one hand, time was perceived in its duration as the sequence of events. On the other hand, it has a subjective nature dependent on the individual characteristics of the percipient. In both cases, time is regarded as a linear motion of events when two spatial positions (in front of and behind) are the initial points of reference for an orientation both in space and time: Bartolotta (2018: pp. 2–4, 8). On a similar interpretation of linear time in Homer see also: De Jong (2007: pp. 20–28); Zanker (2019: pp. 65–78). The concept of linear time was present in the thought of ancient Greeks as expressed by the word *χρόνος*. On this concept of time see: Beekes (2010: pp. 1651–1652); Philippson (1949: pp. 89–93); Zanker (2019: pp. 72–73). The linear model of time reveals itself in the representation of the flow of time as a successive change of various states in cosmic being and human life. Among the Greeks of the 8th century B.C. linear time is implemented, with some traits of cyclicality, in the Myth of Generations as told by Hesiod. On the interpretation of this myth see: Brown (1998); Currie (2012); Falkner (1989); Most (1997); Querbach (1985); Smith (1980); Zanker (2013).

produced in their consciousness some images that were connected with this sense of time. When referring to the interpretation of Greek iconography of the 8th century B.C., scholars foremostly pay attention to its social context or its association with religion and eschatology. Considering the crucial meaning of the research done in studies of early Greek iconography, we would like to emphasize another significant aspect, namely that it could have also depicted representations of time. In our research, we will consider the images associated with the solar cycle and the life of nature as they are connected with the ideas of the Greeks of the 8th century B.C. about the calendar time. Another aspect that we regard as important is that the human life and cosmic processes were involved into a specific framework which existed subconsciously in people's thought, despite the culture or epoch, and this is the sense of the circle.⁵ The idea of the circle as a basic sense of the world arrangement, inherent subconsciously in people's minds and reflected in their culture, is seen e.g. in the human tendency to bring circularity into their organisation.⁶ We are inclined to suppose that this circular essence of the cosmic being was based on the solar cycle as the initial point for an orientation both in space and time that was reflected in iconography.

1. The idea of the circular motion of time in poetry

The idea of the circulation of time was inherent in the thought of the Greeks of the 8th century B.C., as follows from the literature of this period. When denoting the passage of a certain period of time, both Homer and Hesiod use verbs which could refer to the

Though regarding this concept of time as crucial, in this paper we refer to another model of time which is more essential for us when considering the perception of calendar time, namely its cyclical concept. Pointing to the simultaneous existence of representations about cyclical and linear time in the ancient Greek thought, A. T. Zanker (2019: p. 81) notes that "when it comes to cosmic time, things are often represented in cyclical terms".

- 5 The idea of the "roundness of being" is thus argued by G. Bachelard (1961: pp. 192–193, 211–213). Speculating on the nature of human being, G. Bachelard comes to the conclusion that "tout est circuit, tout est detour, retour" in its essence. Being, by its circular nature, is itself a spiral, and the round form is the archetypal core on which the human perception of the world is based: Bachelard (1961: pp. 193, 213). R. Caillois (2015: p. 79) connects the sense of the circle with the aspiration of people with mythological thinking to demarcate the sacral space and to divide it from the profane one. The sense of the circle in their world perception had thus an utterly positive meaning as the lifegiving and protecting source. On a similar opinion see Hertz (2004: p. 102). M. Roblee (2018: p. 133) emphasizes the association of the circle with the sense of movement, solar cycle, and natural rhythms. On this aspect see also Kaul (2005: pp. 137, 145–146). E. Husserl (1973: pp. 309–310) argues that the initial space perception, which is based on the specifics of the human body structure, forms a so-called "okulomotorische Raum" that is created "Ein geschlossener, zweidimensionaler Raum konstituiert sich durch Drehung des Kopfes um seine Grundachse", by means of which the "ein kugelförmig geschlossener Raum" is formed. From Husserl's analysis of his kinaesthetic system, it follows that the initial space, defined by the specificity of the human body structure, has a round form.
- 6 On the round form of cult buildings and living houses of the Neolithic time, see Gates (2011: pp. 17–18, 24–25). The sense of the circle as the form of cosmic organisation is seen in the Empedocles cosmologic ideas. For an analysis of these ideas, see Lincoln (1986: pp. 34–37). Durkheim & Mauss (2009: p. 34) notice the round shape of the tribe camp of one of Omaha tribes.

sense of a circular motion of time. These verbs are περιτρέπω⁷ meaning to rotate, to turn around, περιτέλλομαι⁸ and περιπέλομαι⁹ meaning to go round, and περιτελέω¹⁰ which implies to complete and then recur.¹¹ When mentioning the expiration of an annual cycle, both authors use, in variations, the following word formula:

ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ ῥ' ἐνιαυτὸς ἔην, περὶ δ' ἔτραπον ὥραι¹²
 μηνῶν φθινόντων, περὶ δ' ἡμέατα πόλλ' ἔτελέσθη,¹³
 “when a year had passed, and the seasons had revolved
 as the months waned, and many days had been completed.”¹⁴

In this variation of the formula the flow of time is represented as an expiration of an annual cycle,¹⁵ a rotation of the seasons,¹⁶ and a revolving of days.¹⁷ We can see, then, that time was perceived as a circulation of days, months, and seasons, which had as its sequence the completion of the annual time cycle and the coming of a new year.

The idea of the circle in its cosmic significance in Greek archaic cosmology, as is followed from literary sources of the 8th century B.C., is seen clearly in the image of the river Oceanus, encircling the earth.¹⁸ As a spatial image, Oceanus was also connected to the solar cycle, being the place where the sun rises from and sets into, and thus it could have been connected with the idea of the circular motion of time based on it.¹⁹ Another significant circular image in the thought of the Greeks of the 8th century B.C. is the shield of Achilles.²⁰ In its compositional unity, it functions as the model of the universe

7 Il., 2. 295; Od., 10. 469–470; Theog., 58–59.

8 Il., 2. 551; 8. 404; Od., 11. 295–296; 14. 293–294; Theog., 58–59. In the Homeric hymn to Apollo, we can also find the use of this verb in the lines 349–350.

9 Il., 23. 833; Od., 1. 16; 11. 248; Erga., 386; Theog., 184.

10 Od., 10. 470; Theog., 59.

11 In these verbs the preposition περί denoting the circular motion is used.

12 The noun ὥραι is used here with the meaning of seasons: spring: Il., 2. 471; 6. 148; 16. 643; Od., 18. 367; summer: Erga., 584, 664; winter: Od., 5. 485; Erga., 494. From Hesiod we know such seasons as ἔαρ: Erga., 678; θέρος: Erga., 502–503, 664; ὀπώρα: Il., 22. 27; Od., 11. 192; Erga., 674; χειμῶν: Erga., 524, 644.

13 Theog., 58–59. For other variations of this formula see: Od., 10. 469–470; 11. 295–296; 14. 293–294.

14 Transl. by G. W. Most (2006).

15 ἐνιαυτὸς ἔην. The noun ἐνιαυτός, which is used both by Homer and Hesiod, defines the time period of the whole calendar year at the moment of its expiration and coming of the new one: Il., 2. 134; 21. 444; 19. 32; Od., 1. 288; Erga., 561–562. On the circular character of this word see: Celotto (2017: pp. 225–226); Philippson (1949: pp. 93–96); Zanker (2019: p. 82). This noun denoting an annual cycle is often present in combination with the “circular” verbs: Il., 2. 295; 2. 551; 8. 404; 23. 833; Od., 1. 16; 11. 248; Erga., 386; Theog., 184.

16 περὶ δ' ἔτραπον ὥραι.

17 περὶ δ' ἡμέατα πόλλ' ἔτελέσθη.

18 Il., 18. 399, 606–607; Od., 20. 65.

19 Il., 8. 485–486; 18. 239–241; Od., 23. 244; Herm., 68, 184–185.

20 For its cosmological meaning, see Carruesco (2016: pp. 70–72, 78–79); Hardie (1985); Hubbard (1992). On the structure of the Bronze Age shields to which the Shield of Achilles comes back, see Molloy (2018).

and represents events occurring in space and time as well as depicting the astral bodies and the natural rhythms, calendar, and cosmic time in accordance with which the universe exists.²¹

The idea of the circular motion of time connected with the idea of an annual renewal of nature and its rebirth in a new state in accordance with the solar cycle could be present in the iconography of Proto-geometric and Geometric styles. We can trace the existence of this idea in such symbols inherent in the iconography of the Dark Ages and the early Archaic age as concentric circles and semicircles as well as spirals in earlier Minoan and Mycenaean art, plentifully present in pottery decorations. In this research we will argue that the circular symbols on ceramic vessels could have been connected with this idea. Despite the main field of our research being the 8th century B.C., the pottery of the Proto-geometric period will be considered as well in order to follow the continuity of images and ideas connected to them. The iconography of earlier periods (Cycladic, Minoan, Mycenaean) is also the subject of our research with the same purpose.

2. Symbols associated with the idea of the circular motion of time

The most ancient motif associated with the idea of circular motion is the spiral. We would like to emphasize the ancience of this symbol present on objects of art since the Neolithic time, as, for example, in the case of the spherical vase from the Late Neolithic I with the spiral in the centre (Fig. 1).²² As an image which, in accordance with its circular nature, could have visualized the idea of movement in circles, the spiral might have been connected to the sea. The derivation of the spiral from sea waves is clearly seen e.g. in the decoration of the Mycenaean kylix of the 14th century B.C. depicting the sea waves enclosing the spirals (Fig. 2). Another example of the correlation of the spiral and the sea could be the depiction of octopuses as one of the most popular marine motifs, with their tentacles curving into spirals (Fig. 3). One of the aspects of marine semantics in archaic thought is its apparent connection with the ideas of death, afterlife, and regeneration at the same time.²³ Another aspect of the sea is its connection to the sun, namely its setting and rising in definite spatial points, which, in their turn, influenced the emergence of the double semantics of the sea in its connection both to life and death. Spirals in the decoration of Cycladic “frying pans” appear in their evident association with the sea and sun. On the frying pan from Naxos there is a composition of four spirals

21 J. Carruesco (2016: pp. 78–79) points out the presence of the verbs denoting the circular movement when naming the actions of the archetypal character for human activity mentioned in the Homeric description of this shield, as well as the circular arrangement of the space where these actions take their place. Scenes of human life enclosed in circles in their spatial and temporal meaning are supplemented by the scenes of astral bodies moving in circles as well.

22 On the survey on this symbol in different cultures of Neolithic and Bronze ages, see e.g. Gelling & Davidson (1969: pp. 15–23, 80–81); Van Hoek (1993); Van de Velde (2003: pp. 139–148).

23 Goodison (1989: pp. 34–37, 144–150). Spirals in this context are present in the decoration of Minoan larnakes: Dietrich (1997: pp. 26–27); James (1966: p. 201); Morgan (1987: pp. 189–190); Watrous (1991: p. 289).

connected together and symbolizing sea waves, encircling the sun image in the very centre. Out of the spiral band there emerge four fish images (Fig. 4). From this example it is clear that the spirals symbolize the sea, and the sea here is connected to the solar cycle. Being associated both with the solar cycle and the sea as its spatial background, the spiral as defining both the motion of the sun and the motion of the sea waves could have been connected to the natural rhythms depending on the solar cycle.

Another symbol in Greek iconography connected with the idea of circular motion in space and time is the image of concentric circles and semicircles. They could have been associated with the sun, representing the idea of its circular movement from east to west, as well as the sense of circulation of time within the year expressed with the changes of nature as dependent on the solar cycle. Concentric semicircles, as the most popular motif on the ceramics of the Dark Ages (Fig. 5), are often depicted in the upper part of the vessels while the vessels are divided by horizontal lines into three parts (Fig. 6). We are inclined to assume that in this case it might be a depiction of the division of the cosmos into three spheres while concentric semicircles in the upper part of the vessel could have symbolized the sun rising from or setting into the Oceanus. If so, these vessels may have represented the cosmic model inherent in Greek thought in this period. These semicircles sometimes contain an image of a double axe inside (Fig. 7), which, in its turn, in Minoan and Mycenaean iconography could have been associated with the Great Goddess as a deity connected to fertility and regeneration,²⁴ so this symbol could have been based on the idea of natural rhythms dependent on the solar cycle as well.

In the case of the circles, the concentric image is usually depicted in the centre of the vessels. The positioning of these circles in the central part in accordance with the very significant semantics of the centre in the archaic mind²⁵ could thereby emphasize their crucial meaning. This motif is characteristic of the iconography of the 10–8th centuries B.C. A wheel, as the symbol of spinning and moving in circles, is sometimes enclosed in the centre of a concentric circle (Fig. 8). Another element related to concentric circles is the cross (Fig. 9), which in ancient thought could have existed as a solar symbol,²⁶ or it could have been associated with a potter's wheel.²⁷ Concentric circles, like semicircles, as a visualization of such an abstract concept as time in its annual circulation, obtained a spatial character as well by expressing this idea in its visual form. The concentricity of these images thus emphasized the idea of alternation of natural processes in their relation to the solar cycle. The concentric nature of both circles and semicircles could have been connected with the sense of the regular circular movement of the sun and the annual circulation of time that was perceived by changes in the surrounding space.²⁸

24 Bouzek (1993: p. 121); Burkert (1985: pp. 61–63); Nilsson (1949: p. 15). For the association of women with fertility and vegetative processes, see Goodison (1989: p. 22). In iconography the processions of women or dancing scenes are supplemented by vegetative images. See Lawler (1944: p. 76); Shaw (1993: p. 666).

25 Caillois (2015: pp. 79–80); Eliade (1961: pp. 41–43, 51–52); Hertz (2004: p. 102).

26 Goodison (1989: p. 31). On the wheel and cross symbolics in its connection with the solar cycle see also Kaul (2005: pp. 145–146).

27 Carruesco (2016: pp. 78, 83).

28 It is interesting that the shield of Achilles, mentioned above as a cosmic model, is depicted as a concentric

3. The idea of circular motion of time and the spring season

The idea of the circular motion of time, as pointed out above, was also associated with the idea of a point of time with which the beginning of a new year was associated, while this initial point on the border of alternation of years when the process of annual renewal of the nature began was the spring. Hesiod in *Erga.*, 561–562 with the phrase εἰς ἐνιαυτὸν could imply a renewal of nature correlated with the coming of the spring.²⁹ As follows from the *Works and Days*, markers such as the appearance of the Arcturus in the night sky after sixty days counted from the day of the winter solstice and the return of swallows heralded the coming of this season, as can be seen from the lines 564–569. Homer in *Od.*, 10. 469–470 apparently correlates the coming of a new year with the day of the vernal equinox, implying as “the long days”³⁰ the point of time when the length of the day starts to prevail over the night. A direct association of the long days with the springtime is found in *Od.*, 18. 367.³¹ Considering the significance of this season for the Greeks of the 8th century B.C. as the beginning of the new year, we are inclined to assume that it could have had some symbolic markers which could have been reflected in the iconography of this period. Homer, like Hesiod, associates spring with the return of some birds, as can be traced in the following fragment of the *Iliad*:

τῶν δ' ὡς τ' ὀρνίθων πετεηνῶν ἔθνεα πολλὰ
 χηνῶν ἢ γεράνων ἢ κύκνων δουλιχοδείρων
 Ἀσίῳ ἐν λειμῶνι Καϋστρίου ἀμφὶ ῥέεθρα
 ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα ποτῶνται ἀγαλλόμενα περὺγεσσι.³²
 “And as the many tribes of winged fowl, wild
 gees and cranes or long-necked swans on the Asian
 mead by the stream of Caystrius, fly this way and
 that, glorying in their strength of wind, and with loud cries
 settle ever onwards, and the mead resoundeth.”³³

circle. Possibly, this concentric nature of the shield generated, in the mind of the Greeks, the association of this piece of armour with a cosmic structure based on the solar cycle and the natural rhythms which are also reminiscent of this concentric nature. In descriptions of this shield, words referring to the idea of circular motion are used, so it is represented in its dynamic state in accordance with the life processes and the flowing of time. See Carruesco (2016: pp. 77–79). Here, then, we can draw a parallel between the round shield of Achilles as a cosmic model enclosed in a definite time frame, a time of performance, and cosmic time existing simultaneously, and the concentric circles found in Geometric pottery. Both these examples, literary and the iconographic, represent the idea of circular time obtaining a visual nature.

29 εἰς ἐνιαυτὸν ἰσοῦσθαι νύκτας τε καὶ ἡμέρας.

30 ἡμέρας μακρὰ.

31 ὥρῃ ἐν εἰρηνῇ, ὅτε τ' ἡμέρας μακρὰ πέλονται.

32 *Il.*, 2. 459–461.

33 Transl. by A. T. Murray (1924).

As follows from Hesiod's *Works and Days*, the cranes' migration to the south foreboded the coming of the autumn.³⁴ By analogy, their return back to Greece, like of other species of migratory birds, could signify the coming of spring. Besides the mention of migratory birds, this fragment holds another important marker associated with the semantics of springtime, namely the notion that this scene takes place in the spring meadow. Abundant vegetation is an attribute of spring as well. In his similes, Homer compares the warriors in the battlefield with the flowers and leaves, mentioning that:

ἦλθον ἔπειθ' ὅσα φύλλα καὶ ἄνθεα γίγνεται ὥρη,³⁵
 "Out of the morning mist they came against us –
 packed as the leaves and spears that flower forth in spring."³⁶

ἔσταν δ' ἐν λειμῶνι Σκαμανδρίῳ ἀνθεμόεντι
 μυρίοι, ὅσά τε φύλλα καὶ ἄνθεα γίγνεται ὥρη.³⁷
 "So they took their stand in the flowery mead of Scamander,
 Numberless, as are the leaves and the flowers in their season."

We also find mention of the spring flowers in another scene describing the battle.³⁸ From these instances of poetry we may suppose that use of the floral images in scenes with an absolutely different thematic context might have been done by the author subconsciously if these images had extraordinary significance and existed in his mind as archetypes. We can suppose that flowers as the symbol of spring, which, in turn, was a period with exceptional cosmological importance as a time of regeneration and rebirth, acted as the visualization of this time. The idea of the springtime as the beginning of a new life can be found in *Il.*, 6. 146–148, where Homer compares human life to the vegetative cycle, using the image of the leaves with this purpose:

οἴη περ φύλλων γενεῆ τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν.
 φύλλα τὰ μὲν τ' ἄνεμος χαμάδις χέει, ἄλλα δὲ θ' ὕλη
 τηλεθόωσα φύει, ἔαρος δ' ἐπιγίγνεται ὥρη.
 "Even as are the generations of leaves, such are those also of men.
 As for the leaves, the wind scattereth some upon the earth,
 But the forest, as it burgeons, putteth forth others when
 The season of spring is come."

In another fragment, we again find this association of people's life with the leaves:

34 *Erga.*, 448–451.

35 *Od.*, 9. 51.

36 *Transl.* by R. Fagles (1996).

37 *Il.*, 2. 467–468.

38 ἐπ' ἀνθεσιν εἰαρινοῖσιν. *Il.*, 2. 89.

εἰ δὴ σοὶ γε βροτῶν ἔνεκα πολεμίζω
 δειλῶν, οἳ φύλλοισιν ἐοικότες ἄλλοτε μὲν τε
 ἀφλεγέες τελέθουσιν ἀρούρης καρπὸν ἔδοντες,
 ἄλλοτε δὲ φθινύθουσιν ἀκήριοι.³⁹
 “if I should battle you because of mortals.
 Mortals resemble a tree’s leaves. Sometimes
 they absorb the earth’s bounty, bursting with life.
 Other times they weaken and die.”⁴⁰

From the fragments above we can thus conclude that two kinds of images in Greek literature and Greek mind were correlated with the springtime as the beginning of a new year and new life, and that these symbols were birds and vegetative images, namely flowers and leaves. In the following part of our paper, we will observe these images in detail in their interconnection and correlation with the symbols of the circular motion of time discussed above.

3.1 Spring images: vegetative symbolism

Floral imagery is abundant in Minoan art while the flowers there seem to be connected to the cult, probably to the cult of the Great Goddess, which was associated with fertility and regeneration. The flowers which might have been the attributes of the cult in honour of this deity include crocuses,⁴¹ lilies,⁴² and roses.⁴³ The floral motif becomes popular again after a long period of oblivion in the Dark Ages as an element of pottery decoration in the Late Geometric period. It is difficult to say what kinds of flowers are depicted there because of the schematic and stylized character of these images. We are inclined to suppose that the first spring flowers growing in Greece, such as narcissi and poppies, could have been perceived as the symbols of the spring. Poppies as spring flowers are mentioned in *Il.*, 8. 36–37.⁴⁴ Narcissi are mentioned in the *Hymn to Demeter* which acts as an etiological myth explaining the processes of annual renewal of nature.⁴⁵ The correlation of the spring flowers with Persephone’s return is seen in the lines 401–402 of the hymn:

ὁππότε δ’ ἄνθεσι γαῖ’ εὐώδεσιν εἰαρινοῖσι
 παντοδαποῖς θάλλῃ, τόθ’ ὑπὸ ζόφου ἠερόεντος

39 *Il.*, 21. 463–466.

40 Transl. by H. Jordan (2008).

41 Day (2011: pp. 369–370); Rehak (2004: pp. 86–96).

42 Lawler (1944: pp. 76–78); Marinatos (1993: p. 95); Watrous (1991: p. 295).

43 Charin (1997: p. 20).

44 μήκων δ’ ὡς ἐτέρωσε κάρη βάλεν, ἥ τ’ ἐνὶ κήπῳ / καρπῷ βριθομένη νοτίησιν τε εἰαρινῆσιν.

45 On the cosmological significance of this flower see Brockliss (2019).

αὔτις ἄνει

“When the earth blooms in spring with all kinds of sweet flowers,
then from the misty dark you will rise again.”⁴⁶

Taking into account the importance of the spring flowers as the symbol of regeneration in poetry, we are inclined to assume that the floral images in iconography might have been associated with the spring season. In the pottery of the Late Geometric style, rosettes are frequently combined with an image such as a swastika,⁴⁷ which in this period was the main symbol connected to the solar cycle and could thus have been associated with the idea of the circular motion of time as well (Fig. 10, 11) or with concentric circles (Fig. 12–14).

The analogical interconnection of vegetation and the solar cycle in the earlier period represented in the art of the Minoan and Mycenaean periods can be traced in a combination of vegetative elements with the spiral. One of the variations of this motif is represented by petals or leaves curving into spirals, e.g. as in the case of the lilies in Fig. 15. On the jug decorated with ivy leaves curving into spirals, in the middle of the composition there is a round image with spiral curves on its ends, visually similar to the swastika (Fig. 16). Above it is a small schematic image of two wavy lines which could depict the sea waves and the circle which, in turn, could be an image of the rising or setting sun. Another Mycenaean jug (Fig. 17) has three decorative bands: concentric semi-circles in its upper part, sea wave shaped spirals in the middle, and the floral motif as ivy leaves in the lower part. The combination of three motifs is thus present on this vessel: the solar, in the case of concentric semi-circles, the marine, represented by the spirals, and the vegetative, in the case of the ivy leaves. All these motifs are connected with the sun and natural cycles based on it.

Along with the depiction of the flowers, another vegetative motif is popular on the pottery of the Late Geometric style. This motif is represented by the depiction of petals or leaves. Like the petals being possibly correlated with the floral images depicted on ceramics, the leaves might have been connected with the idea of the Tree of Life.⁴⁸ This motif is widely represented in the iconography of Late Geometric pottery. An example to illustrate this idea can be the pyxis, decorated with the petal motif on its lid (Fig. 18). In the centre of the vessel there is a rosette with a wheel in the middle. The petals may be both the part of this rosette as well as its departed elements in parallel with the idea of life and death illustrated in the fragments of Il., 6. 146–148 and Il., 21. 463–466 cited above. The wheel in the centre of the rosette could depict the idea of circular motion, change of seasons, and rebirth.

46 Transl. by H. P. Foley (1993).

47 On its connection with other symbols associated with the solar cycle, fertility, and regeneration see Baldwin (1915: pp. 118, 128, 131).

48 See, for example, Vlachou (2012: p. 438). In Anatolian, Syrian, and Mesopotamian iconography the image of the tree was connected to the fertility gods. See Lambert (1985: p. 438). In Minoan religion, trees also could have been the objects of the cult. See Burkert (1985: pp. 51, 64); Dietrich (1997: p. 30); Goodison (2009: p. 52); James (1966: p. 163); Marinatos (2004: pp. 28–29); Nilsson (1949: p. 17).

3.2 Spring images: birds

Along with the vegetative symbolics, another significant image abundantly present in Late Geometric ceramics and connected with the ideas of time, especially with the semantics of spring, as we have seen above from the literature, is the bird. The birds depicted on the vases could have had multiple symbolism. The first symbolic meaning of birds from iconography is that they could have acted as the symbol of a deity.⁴⁹ Another case of using of the bird images in iconography is their association with death.⁵⁰

In our discussion of the symbolism of time and its visual representation in the iconography, one more semantic connotation of the bird image is important for us, namely its connection to spring and regeneration. The iconography of the birds depicted on the ceramic vessels, judging by the images which could be associated with some species of migratory birds, despite their schematical depiction, may be correlated with spring as we have seen from Homer's similes above. There are plenty of images of aquatic birds which were also popular both in the iconography of Minoan and Mycenaean time or in the art of the Archaic age. Our assumption about the image of a bird as the symbol of rebirth may be supported by the fact that this symbol in the iconography of the Late Geometric period was used in combination with the vegetative symbolics and the symbols associated with the solar cycle. The interconnection of bird and vegetative images is evident in Minoan and Mycenaean art, and there they are connected with symbols associated with the idea of the circulation of time as well. An interesting example for us is the Mycenaean krater with its depiction of two aquatic birds. Their bodies are decorated with dotted circles, which could be the solar symbols (Fig. 19). In the upper part of the vessel and in the middle, between the birds, there are solar symbols as well. Another example of the connection of birds with the solar cycle and the idea of the alternation of seasons is the amphora from Mycenae, depicting an aquatic bird surrounded by spirals with rosettes inside (Fig. 20).

One more motif in pottery decoration which may be associated with birds and their connection to the idea of the circulation of time is a combination of bird images with concentric circles as is depicted on the Middle Geometric oinochoe with two birds sitting on the concentric circle (fig. 8).⁵¹ Another later example from the 7th century B.C. is a crater with the depiction of two aquatic birds surrounded by spirals (Fig. 21). In the very centre of the composition there is a fragmentary round image resembling a wheel in shape with poppy buds on its ends. A similar combination of bird, vegetative, and solar images can be found on the pottery of the Late Geometric period and can be shown

49 Altmann (2019: pp. 62–63, 65–68); Bouzek (2018: p. 80); Burkert (2004: pp. 6–7); Marinatos (2004: p. 36); Morgan (1987: p. 184); Nilsson (1949: p. 18); Watrous (1991: p. 293).

50 In case of funerary imagery, the birds could have represented the soul. See Vermeule (1981: p. 18); Watrous (1991: p. 298). On the larnax from Knossos, a bird flying to the left is present. See Morgan (1987: pp. 183–184). The left side was associated with death as it was connected with the western direction, where Hades was located: *Il.*, 12. 239–240.

51 For other examples of the combination of birds with vegetative images see Crowel & Morris (1995: pp. 169–170, 174).

in the following examples: combinations of birds and concentric circles (Fig. 22) and of birds and swastikas (Fig. 23); birds and rosettes, supplemented with the serpentine motif⁵² and vegetative symbols (Fig. 24); a combination of swastikas, rosettes and birds with the bird figurine on top of the amphora (Fig. 25); and two aquatic birds surrounded by astral symbols (Fig. 26).

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that the images represented in the iconography of the Proto-Geometric and Geometric periods, as well as in the earlier Cycladic, Minoan, and Mycenaean periods, were interconnected and expressed the ideas of time inherent in Greek thought and transferred from one epoch to another. The key idea of the perception of time was correlated with the sense of the circular motion of time, which apparently emerged under the influence of alternations of states of nature dependent on the solar cycle. This sense of circularity was formed in the human mind as a consequence of observing various objects in the surrounding space, such as the sun and its rising and setting in definite points in space, the stars and their shifting in the sky, sea waves, vegetation and its seasonal changes, the migration of birds, etc. This principle in iconography is expressed in such images as a spiral, concentric circle and semicircle, wheel and swastika. The other principle which we were able to trace in our research is the association of some images with the definite season of the year as the time of annual renewal, rebirth, and regeneration of nature, namely the springtime. The idea of the circulation of the seasons is present in the literature of the 8th century B.C. as we have pointed out above, and it is also represented in the iconography of this period by bird and vegetative symbolism combined with the symbols of circular motion.

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52 This symbol in Greek mentality had double semantics. The first semantic meaning of a snake was that it could have been perceived as the symbol of death associated with the underworld and the hero cults. See Hurwitt (2006: p. 128); Salapata (2006); Vermeule (1965: pp. 38, 42, 45). Another semantic meaning of the snake, correlated with its connection to the ground, is its role in iconography as a symbol of fertility. See Burkert (1985: pp. 52–54); Butterworth (1970: p. 22); Dexter (2010: pp. 32–38); Keller (1988: p. 32); Mundkur (1978); Nilsson (1949: p. 13).

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The list of illustrations:

1. Spherical vase of Neolithic I from Thessaly, 5300–4800 B.C. National Archaeological Museum, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
2. Kylix from Crete, 14th century B.C. Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
3. Jar from Mycenae, 1500–1450 B.C. Archaeological Museum of Mycenae (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
4. Ceramic „frying pan“ from Naxos, 3200–2300 B.C. National Archaeological Museum, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
5. Small amphora, late 11th century B.C. Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
6. Lekythos, 980–960 B.C. Museum of Acropolis, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
7. Cinerary amphora, 10th century B.C. Museum of Kerameikos, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
8. Trefoil oinochoe, 775–750 B.C. Museum of Kerameikos, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
9. Geometric ornament on the cinerary amphora, 850 B.C. Museum of Agora, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
10. Olpe, 750–730 B.C. Museum of Acropolis, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
11. Pyxis, 750–700 B.C. Museum of Kerameikos, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
12. Fragment of the funerary crater from Athens, 750–740 B.C. National Archaeological Museum, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
13. Fragment of the Attic krater from Dipylon, 750–730 B.C. National Archaeological Museum, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
14. Oinochoe. Unknown provenance, about 750 B.C. National Archaeological Museum, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
15. Three-handled bowl from Mycenae, late 15th century B.C. Museum of Agora, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
16. Jug from Grave Circle A, Mycenae, 16th–early 15th B.C. National Archaeological Museum, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
17. Jug from Grave Circle A, Mycenae, 16th–early 15th B.C. National Archaeological Museum, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
18. Lidded pyxis, 750–700 B.C. National Archaeological Museum, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
19. Krater from the Mycenaean acropolis, 14th century B.C. National Archaeological Museum, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
20. Mycenaean amphora, 15th century B.C. National Archaeological Museum, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
21. Krater, 650 B.C. Museum of Agora, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
22. Oinochoe from Boeotia, about 750 B.C. National Archaeological Museum, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
23. Small jug, 750–700 B.C. Museum of Kerameikos, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
24. Oinochoe, about 750 B.C. Museum of Acropolis, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
25. Amphora from the Dipylon grave, 730–720 B.C. National Archaeological Museum, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).
26. Two-handled cup, 750–730 B.C. Museum of Agora, Athens (photo: Lebedeva, I.).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

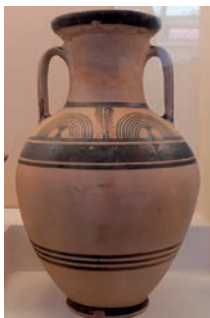


Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15

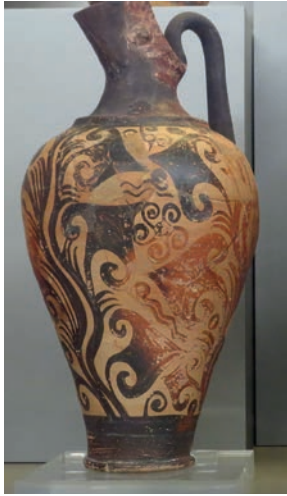


Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Fig. 26



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