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STUDIES OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

In Honour of Werner Jobst

8/2008

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Motív „Zázračného dažďa“ zo stĺpa Marka Aurélia v Ríme. V okienku: Vlys propylonu s tritonmi, Antiocheia v Pisidii (Foto I. H. Mert).

Motif of the „Miracle rain“ from the column of Marcus Aurelius in Rome. In the window: Frieze of propylon with Tritons, Antiocheia in Pisidia (Photo I. H. Mert).

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SATURNUS: An Eastern God in Rome

Mustafa Şahin*

Keywords: Saturnus, Eastern God, Rome

Abstract: Saturnus, the Roman god who is the subject of this study, is not widely depicted in figurative art. For this reason, he is not generally considered to be very important. With this in mind, this paper attempts to examine the cult and the origin of Saturnus with the help of iconography and the available specimens of figurative art. The god Saturnus who created terror in the early period by eating his own children had gone through an important change especially in the imperial period and protected the state treasury during the course of time and the harvest became a symbol of peace.

The function of Saturnus is varied and complex, sometimes a god of Etruscan nobles and sometimes of ordinary villagers Cicero strives to reveal the god's connection with astrology and time and Virgil attempts to reveal the connection with astrology and time and with astronomy¹. Yet it seems to be agreed that in the beginning Saturnus and his wife Ops were the protectors of the harvest and farmers².

In some ways Saturnus exhibits different characteristics. M. Crawford considers his being from Rome ahead of the most important of all his characteristics³. G. Lugli indicates that the city treasure was protected in the cella of the temple dedicated to Saturnus⁴. However, for Fausto Zevi the protection of the city treasure was considered to be more important than worship in the temple⁵.

Contrary to M. Crawford's claim, it can be said that the function of the god to protect the city treasure was not a Roman characteristic, but rather demonstrates the fact that he is of Eastern origin. Architectural monuments in Rome were generally built in either the Doric or Corinthian orders. However, the temple of Saturnus in the Forum Romanum was built in the Ionic order (Fig. 1), the reason for which is that traditionally treasury buildings were only built in sacred areas and only in the Ionic order, as is the case with the sanctuaries in Delphi and Olympia. This means that this tradition, which is thought to be Roman by M. Crawford, actually comes from the culture of the East where the sun rises.

In Italy, Saturnus, as a protector of harvesting, was the continuation of Kronos, who is not well known, because of his not being among the twelve great gods. Scholars virtually agree on this point. The continuity exposes a deity who is both a Hellenic and a Latin type of god. Another common feature of these two gods is the similar festivals which were organized in their names: Kronia in Athens and Saturnalia in Rome⁶.

Saturnus went to Italy as he was invited by Janus⁷, who had migrated there from the East, and settled in the area of the Capitol where Rome would be established later. There, he set

* I am grateful to Pat Witts for reading and improving the text.

¹ Vergil, Aeneid 6, 792 pp.; Panofsky 1962, 73 pp.

² Hamilton 1983, 31; Grimal 1997, 576, see Ops.

³ Crawford 1974, 719.

⁴ Lugli 1947, 29 pp.

⁵ Zevi 1987, 122.

⁶ Simon 1990, 193.

⁷ Grimal 1997, 312 pp., see Janus.

up a village called Saturnalia, and taught cultivation of the soil to the people and showed them how to prune the vines. For this reason the origin and dissemination of agriculture are related to him. The god is usually depicted with a sickle or a pruning knife. Therefore, a sickle at his side is an attribute of Saturnus.

Hesiod mentions a legend concerning different races that followed each other: In the beginning there was a golden race. This was at the time of Kronos' domination of the sky. At that time people lived free from care, without grief and misery, just like gods. They did not know what ageing was, they were continually youthful and spent their time at feasts and festivals. Then, when the time of death came, they fell into a sweet sleep. They were not bound by laws of labour. All the goods automatically belonged to them. The soil itself produced products in abundance and they lived in their arable fields in luxury. The gradual annihilation of this race began with the start of the domination of Zeus. Subsequently, the brilliant period in human annals was said to have been a golden age (see *Theogonia*, 106 pp.).

A similar golden age was also relevant for Rome where Saturnus was identified with Kronos. This brilliant period prevailed during the domination of the god in Italy which was known as Ausonia. Gods and mortals lived together during this golden age. Gates had not yet been invented in those years as the people did not own any goods that could be stolen. For this reason there was no theft. The people simply nourished themselves with vegetables and fruits. As nobody had any notion of killing, the race developed and Saturnus instructed the people in cultivating the soil and gave them sickles⁸. Thus, various negative events started to take place in the word such as labour, work, misery and disaster. Consequently the golden age was over.

As a reminder of those brilliant days, feasts known as Saturnalia were held in Rome by later generations on the 17th of December every year⁹. In these feasts the feet of the cult statue of Saturnus were bound and the



Fig. 1. Temple of Saturnus in the Forum Romanum. A view of the Ionic Pronaos and of the Podium from outside (Simon 1990, 194, fig. 248).



Fig. 2. A pedestal including Saturnus on the Centaur. From the Augustan period. Louvre Museum, Paris. Inv. No. MA 610 (Simon 1990, 197, fig. 254).

⁸ Grimal 1997, 60, see Golden Age.

⁹ RE II A 1, 1921, 201 pp., see Saturnalia (Nilsson 1951).



Fig. 3. Silver Denarius. About 100 B.C. British Museum, London (Simon 1990, 195, fig. 250).



Fig. 4. A bronze bowl from Macedonia from the Hellenistic period. (Lost. LIMC VI, 1992, 144, no. 4).



Fig. 5. Crater from Sicily. Louvre Museum, Paris. Inv. No. G 366 (LIMC VI, 1992, 145, no. 21, pl. 65).

hierarchical order of social classes was reversed. In this way, slaves gave commands to their masters and the masters served them at tables¹⁰. The centre for these feasts was the temple of Saturnus, which was found in the Forum Romanum.

An embossed design etched onto the surface of a marble candlestick from the age of Augustus which emphasizes the occurrence of the feast in December is worth noting (Fig. 2).¹¹ The design depicts Saturnus sitting calmly on a Centaur. The Centaur holds a captured animal in the left hand and a weapon in the right as if to indicate his affinity with hunting. The god has his right hand on his head in a thoughtful manner. He may be thinking about the golden age when everything was so much better. He is holding a scepter of Jupiter in his left hand which represents power and there is an eagle next to him. The dates of these feasts, which were in honour of the god, are emphasized by the Centaur. As is known, Sagittarius the Centaur represents the month of feasts, December, in astrology. The figure of the Cancer Sol-Apollo depicted on the other side of the relief representing the month of July, also proves the fact that the inclusion of the Centaur was intentional¹². Centaurs were warriors. For this reason they

¹⁰ Also see for Saturnus: Servius Vergilius, *Komanteri I* (1881-1902), 235 pp.; Kenner 1970, 88 pp.; Graf 1979, 214.

¹¹ Simon 1990, 193 pp., figs. 248-9.

¹² Simon 1990, 197, fig. 254.



Fig. 6. A bronze figurine of Saturnus from the Early Empire from the Vatican (Simon 1990, 196, fig. 251).



Fig. 7. Saturnus on the marble altar dedicated to the god of the Sun. Mid first-century A.D. Mus. Cap. Rome. Inv. No. 107 (Simon 1990, 196, fig. 252).

were generally portrayed in the shape of horsemen. However, here the anatomical features of the legs and the tail of the figure imply a donkey instead of a horse. The Centaur was portrayed in the shape of a donkey not a horse because of the god's desire for peace (Vergilius, Aeneid 3, 537 pp.)¹³.

The cult statue that was found in the temple of Saturnus has not survived to the present day. From archeological data it is possible to discern the existence of two separate cult statues. The first one had been used until the late republic. In this one the head of Saturnus is uncovered. It can also be observed on coins of the republican era (Fig. 3)¹⁴. The god, who is pictured as bearded and without head covering, looks to the right. There is a sickle or a harpe as some claim it to be behind his head¹⁵. The harpe represents not only the device which was used to castrate his father, but also represents the weapon that was used by Perseus to cut off Medusa's head. In other words, it represents the spilling of blood. For this reason Nilsson thinks this tool is a sickle used to collect crops from the arable fields by the people¹⁶. In this way it must be intended to show the relationship between the god and agriculture. A similar conclusion can be reached from the depiction on a Macedonian bowl from the Hellenistic period (Fig. 4)¹⁷. On

¹³ Simon 1990, 31, fig. 27.

¹⁴ Simon 1990, 199.

¹⁵ Simon 1990, 195, fig. 250.

¹⁶ Simon 1990, 194.

¹⁷ Nilsson 1951, 122 pp.

this bowl Kronos is naked and is sitting on some rocks. He is clearly holding a sickle in his right hand. Another important characteristic of this bowl is that the god's head is uncovered as on the one found in Rome. A Cilician coin from the classical period also indicates that the god has an uncovered head¹⁸. Vase paintings also depict Kronos bare-headed (Fig. 5)¹⁹. Therefore, the god in the first type cannot be considered to be of Roman origin.

Julius Caesar, who sacked the temple of Saturnus, was the turning point in the god's iconography. After the sacking, again by order of the dictator, the construction of a new temple had been started and the expense of construction had been paid by an important ally of Octavius, L. Munatius Plancus²⁰. Then a new cult statue was erected for the newly-built temple. The written sources and archaeological data on this statue give valuable clues²¹. A bronze figurine from the early imperial era can be taken as an example (Fig. 6). The god's head covered by the end of his cloak is the most important observable difference of the new statue. The god is raising his himation over his head with his right hand. This gesture must have been intended to emphasize power. It is said that his cloak was purple²². The upper half of his naked body is covered with ivory. His ankles are crossed with his left ankle in front of his right ankle. This must be to hide the bound leg. The side of the himation forms a band across his knees and the ends trail down between his legs. In the creation of the figurine the style of the cult statue of Jupiter in the Capitol must have been considered²³. As is visible in the surviving piece, he continues to hold a sickle in his left hand. It is possible to increase further the evidence indicating the use of the sickle as an attribute in the new cult statue. For example, on the surfaces of a marble altar from the middle of the first century of the late Neronian age, the god is depicted with covered head and sickle (Fig. 7)²⁴. On a Fourth-Style wall painting from Pompeii²⁵, it is possible to see the pictured god with a cover over his head. This time he is apparently holding a sickle in his hand.

Hesiod mentions in *Theogonia*²⁶ the intrigues of the gods. After defeating Uranus, Kronos swallowed his own babies to secure the future of his newly-usurped sovereignty. Like Gaia, Rhea became sorry for the children swallowed by her husband. A marble pedestal from the Hadrianic era is important in that it shows this story was taken from Greek religion to be used in Rome (Fig. 8).²⁷ Saturnus and Cybele are on the pedestal. They symbolize Kronos and Rhea. Mother Earth is depicted on this pedestal giving her child to Saturnus who swallows it because he does not wish to lose his sovereignty. The swaddling clothes are tightly wrapped to indicate that there is no baby inside. The manner of depiction indicates that she did not give her last child, Jupiter, to Saturnus, and so instead of the baby she wrapped up a stone. A similar story can be seen in the Kronos myths which preceded the end of the domination of Saturnus.

As can be understood from the pedestal of the Hadrianic period, Ops who appears to have been Saturnus' wife in the early days changed her identity when the influences from the east began to be deeply felt. The same figure, transformed into Cybele, who came to be a symbol of various characteristics such as abundance and fertility, has been shown as Saturnus' wife. On the Fourth-Style wall painting from Pompeii (Fig. 9)²⁸, Saturnus is depicted sitting on a throne carved into a rock. Both arms are on the arms of the throne, and while his right hand is empty he

¹⁸ LIMC VI, 1992, 144, no. 4.

¹⁹ Franke and Hirmer 1972, 140, no. 667, pl. 193.

²⁰ LIMC VI, 1992, 145, no. 21, pl. 65.

²¹ Simon 1986, 242.

²² Simon 1986, 92 pp.

²³ Simon 1990, 196.

²⁴ Krause 1983, 12 pp.; Simon 1990, 196.

²⁵ Simon 1990, 198, fig. 255.

²⁶ LIMC VI, 1992, 144, no. 13, pl. 65.

²⁷ See Hesiodos, *Theogonia*, from line 126 onwards.

²⁸ Simon 1990, 199, fig. 256.

holds a sceptre, the symbol of the kingdom, in his left. His himation which does not cover the top part of his body is painted in light purple. The colour of the himation and the way it is wrapped are reminiscent of the cult statues from the early Augustan period²⁹. A woman is pictured near the throne. The intention of showing the relationship between herself and Saturnus is achieved by the fact that her left hand is on his right. Also the veil in her hand is reminiscent of the sacred marriage. However, her plump and fleshy appearance and her mature age in no way reflect Juno's appearance. In Roman art she is shown as being youthful and slender³⁰. Lions on the pilasters and a plump woman's figure in the background indicate that she is Cybele³¹. In this picture the start of the golden age, namely the marriage of Kronos and Rhea or Saturnus and Cybele, is portrayed. Everything is started anew and the three naked figures in the foreground are witnesses to the new beginning³².

With the help of the examples in *Theogonia*³³, traces of Saturnus or Kronos can be followed in the Eastern myths. In *Theogonia*, Gaia (the earth) appears from Chaos and gives birth to Uranus (the sky). In the following lines Kronos' courage in preventing the massacre of his own descendants is portrayed. Uranus exhibits the kind of courage Kronos had previously shown and shows the same tough manner as Kronos who defeated his father. In the end Zeus defeats his father, Kronos, and attains total domination.

The Kumarbi mythology of the Hittites was found among the writing tablets in Boğazköy shows that the stories of the generations of gods originated in Anatolia³⁴. This mythology portrays the battles fought between these generations for the domination of the universe. It means that the legends created in the West about both Kronos and Saturnus can be compared with those of the



Fig. 8. A pedestal from the Hadrianic period. Mus. Cap. Rome. Inv. No. 1994 (Simon 1990, 199, fig. 256).



Fig. 9. A wall painting from the atrium of the Casa del Poeta tragic, Pompeii. The return of the Golden Age with the marriage of Saturnus and Cybele (Simon 1990, 198, fig. 255).

²⁹ Simon 1990, 198 pp., fig. 255.

³⁰ Simon 1990, 13, fig. 3.

³¹ Simon 1990, 13, fig. 3.

³² Curtius 1926, 95 pp.

³³ Simon 1990, 199.

³⁴ See footnote 27.

Hittites³⁵. This leads us to the question of whether this mythological relationship with the East is also relevant to the iconography of the gods.

As we have attempted to document above, one of the most important attributes of Saturnus is the sickle which is always present either in his hand or nearby. Up until this time there is no sign of any god carrying a sickle on any of the statues or reliefs in Eastern art, but if we focus our study on the iconography of the god Tarhundaš we see a different story³⁶.

The place in which the sickle is first seen is Chamber B at Yazılıkaya, the famous Hittite rock temple. Here there are twelve gods standing together side by side with tools in their hands. As these tools are large we may be mistaken in calling them '*sichelswert*'³⁷ or '*krummschwert*' in German³⁸. As these tools may be related to agriculture and not hunting or combat we can assume that they are a kind of sickle and therefore a relationship between the twelve gods and agriculture could be established³⁹.

The holiness of the sickle is proven quite clearly in the origins of the Kudurru relief from Babylon which is dated to the 11th century BC⁴⁰. Here, among the attributes of the sky god such as the pedestal in the form of the body of an animal, the altar and the thunderbolts, a sickle with a bird's head design on the handle is found. This shows the holiness of the sickle in a very clear way.

In this context a variety of examples can be given. An ivory relief which is a part of the throne decoration and dated to the first part of the 8th century BC was found in the North-western palace in Nimrud. Asshurnaširpal II is depicted on the relief in a belted ceremonial robe⁴¹. He is seen to be carrying a symbolic bowl used for libation with the finger tips of his right hand at a ceremony⁴². He holds a bird-headed sickle in his right hand⁴³. The existence of another statue depicting the same king with a kind of sickle in his hand suggests that these examples will further increase in the future⁴⁴.

In Mallowan's view, the reason for the bird-headed sickle in the king's hand in the Assyrian examples is that it is related to the harvest festivals in the autumn. On the first day of the festival the king reaps the first grain of the harvest with his sacred sickle in god's name⁴⁵. The king having himself portrayed as joining the festival with the sacred sickle in his hand in god's name indicates that the sickle had been used as a sacred symbol of religious ceremonies. Symbols used in figurative art were not chosen at random, because in religious ceremonies the king's attire and accessories had to be carefully selected according to the kind of festival celebrated⁴⁶.

³⁵ The equivalence for Kumarbi, the Hurri God, is Kronos: Guterbock 1948, 123. We do not discuss it in detail as it will exceed the content of our subject. See Guterbock 1946, 1 pp.; Alp 1945, 1 pp.; Götze 1949, 178; Nilsson 1955, 486 no. 2.

³⁶ Eyüboğlu and Erhat 1991, 200 pp.

³⁷ Şahin, 1999, 165-76.

³⁸ Bittel 1975, 160, pl. 8: 2.

³⁹ Cremer 1988, 183.

⁴⁰ This time another sickle, in the same style but smaller, is seen in the hand of the woman pictured in the same monument in Chamber A: Moortgat 1932, pl. 92; Bittel et al. 1975, 141, pl. 22: 3-4. These examples demonstrate that the gods were depicted with sickles in Hittite Art.

⁴¹ Seidl 1968, 165, fig. 15, no. 82.

⁴² Mallowan 1952, 9, pl. 1; 1978, 16, fig. 7; Mallowan and Davies 1970, 2 pp., pl. 1. See the similar ritual costumes: Budge 1914, pl. 35; Contenau 1928, pl. 33; Madhloom 1970, 67, pl. 35: 2-3; Mallowan and Davies 1970, 16.

⁴³ See for similar examples: Contenau 1928, pl. 33; Madhloom 1970, pl. 34: 1.

⁴⁴ See for the sickle: Ebert 1928, 71 pp., see Sichel. See for the similar use of the sickle in daily life: Petrie 1917, pl. 54, no. 11. Hrouda described this kind of sickle as a curved sword (*Krummschwert*). However he provided no description of where and how this type of sword was used: Hrouda 1965, pl. 22. During the Assyrian age, silver and gold were not only merchandise but also the origin of money and the sickle also existed among them and was used as money in exchange: Götze 1957, 78, no. 15.

⁴⁵ Hrouda 1991, 326.

⁴⁶ Mallowan 1952, 9; 1966, 58.

H. Th. Bossert does not mention this for gods, but it would not be wrong to think of this rule as suitable for the portrayal of gods as well.

In accordance with these conclusions it is time to take a fresh look especially at the two reliefs depicting the libation of Sulumeli, king of Malatya, 'in front of the god'⁴⁷. In both examples the god has a sword at his waist and a number of thunderbolts in his upraised left hand and he is holding an L-shaped object in his right. The common view is that this is either a curved stick or a boomerang⁴⁸. It is possible to come across other examples of such a curved stick of Assyrian origin on statues and reliefs⁴⁹. A relief⁵⁰ and a sculpture⁵¹ from Tell Halaf and a relief⁵² from Zincirli are just a couple of examples of this eastern art. E. Akurgal maintains that the tool which he thought to be a curled stick has a resemblance to lion-headed creatures; and so he claims that this tool could be used as a weapon by 'hunting demons'⁵³. Yet, including the example from Malatya which is used in Akurgal's own study, the club-type weapons resemble a simple mace as they thicken towards the end. They have nothing to do with the L-shaped form held by the god⁵⁴. Therefore, the two types of tool should be evaluated separately. In the Malatya example the carrying of a curved stick or a boomerang seems to be pointless as it would be carried in a hunting or countryside situation⁵⁵. Taking all this into consideration, the tool held up in the right hand of the god in the Malatya relief should be thought of as a sickle rather than a weapon⁵⁶.

The god joins in the harvest season in order to hand this duty of cutting the first crop over to the king. The god must have come down to earth for this reason. This kind of reasoning demonstrates the god as providing abundance through his relationship with agriculture⁵⁷.

The sickle which was very rarely found in Eastern art later passed over to the West. At first the sickle continued its existence with Kronos and then with Saturnus and this is not coincidental as Kronos and Saturnus were both harvest gods⁵⁸. The harvest festivals were arranged in their names. For this reason the sickle was used to represent the harvest god⁵⁹.

Consequently, it would not be mistaken to think of the transferring of the Kumarbi myths into Western beliefs as like bringing the god over there to life in the person of Kronos. While still being an Eastern motif⁶⁰ the sickle coming from the same source represented the personality

⁴⁷ „Der König hat sich, wie wir im weiteren verlauf unserer Untersuchungen noch deutlicher sehen werden, zu jedem Kultakt ein besonderes Kostüm, zu der auch die Haar- und Barttracht passen musste, ausgewählt“. Bossert 1959, 6. Also see Alp 1983, 192 pp. This tells in detail how the King prepared for the Kl. LAM ceremony „(Der König) legt (den goldenen Ohring) an. Die schwarzen Schuhe zieht er sich an...“. Also as an example at the "Nuntariyashas Ceremony": Gurney 1977, 31, no. 4. God Telepinu is in the shape of a farmer: Hoffner 1974, 43. The king, king and the queen or less frequently the sons of the king were the leading persons of the ceremony: Otten 1971, 11, Rs IV.

⁴⁸ Delaporte 1940, pls. 20: 1 and 24; Bossert 1942, fig. 778; Vanel 1965, 181, no. 63; Orthmann 1971, figs. 40: b and 41 pp.; E. Akurgal, *Die Kunst der Hethiter* (1976), figs. 104 the second on top and 105 the top one figs 104 (second from top) and 105 (top).

⁴⁹ See Akurgal 1949, 96; Orthmann 1971, 238 pp. Cremer thinks that this tool is an axe: Cremer 1988, 183.

⁵⁰ See Delaporte 1920, pl. 93, no. 16; Bachmann 1927, 10, fig. 8; Contenau 1928, pl. 38.

⁵¹ Orthmann 1971, no. Ba/5, pl. 12: e

⁵² Orthmann 1971, no. Bc/4, pl. 13: a.

⁵³ Contenau 1928, pl. 38.

⁵⁴ Akurgal 1949, 96, n. 49-50.

⁵⁵ See Luschan 1902, 224 pp., figs. 126, 128; Woolley and Lawrence 1914, pl. B14b; Oppenheim 1931, pl. 33: a; Moortgat 1932, pl. 16; Akurgal 1949, 24: a.

⁵⁶ For the god being illustrated as a hunter with a curved club and a bird in his left hand see Muscarella 1989, 435 pp., pl. 75.

⁵⁷ For the similar sickles see Vandier 1978, pl. 12: 1.

⁵⁸ For the examples of real curved clubs see Contenau 1928, pl. 38; Moortgat 1955, pls. 19-20; Mayer-Opificius 1993, 357 pp., pls. 66-7.

⁵⁹ RE XI, 2 (1922), 1987 pp., see Kronos; Nilsson 1951, 121.

⁶⁰ Nilsson 1951, 124.

of Kronos and Saturnus⁶¹. The god Saturnus who created terror in the early period by eating his own children had gone through an important change especially in the imperial period and protected the state treasury during the course of time and the harvest became a symbol of peace. Festivals held annually in December which reversed the hierarchical order of social classes continued throughout the Christian period for many years. As it has retained a place in harvest depictions in churches, it is quite remarkable to see the sickle as being a link in a chain of cultures over thousands of years.

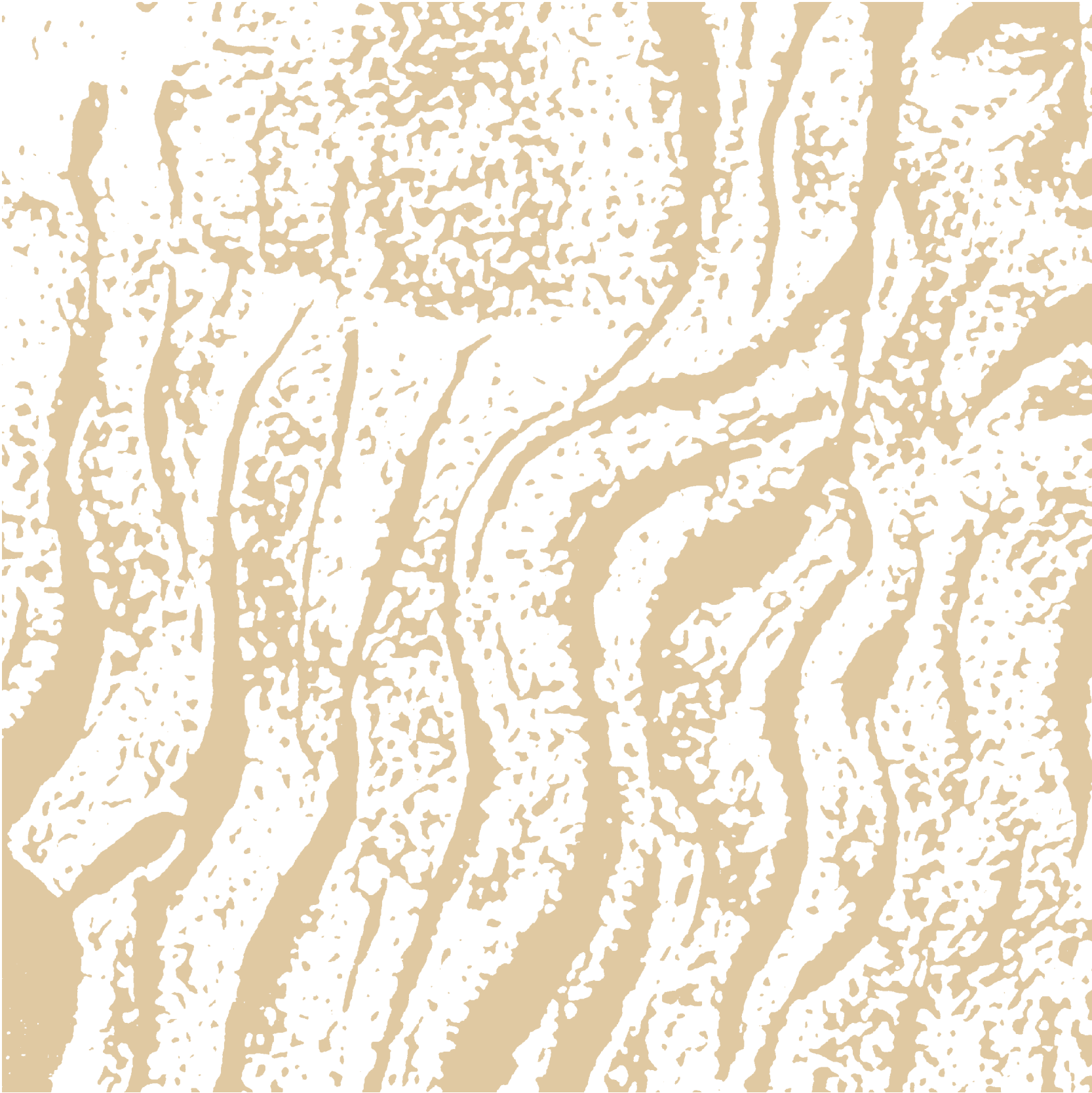
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⁶¹ As the symbol of Kronos see Nilsson 1951, 121-4; LIMC VI, 1992, see Kronos 142 pp., pls. 64 pp.

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