PART FOUR

ELEMENTS OF THE SKY AND OF NATURE

The fundamental myth of the whole Danubian cult is pictured on the principal field of the plaques, but in order to analyse and understand it completely the reliefs must be studied as a whole. In the registers above it are ranged important elements of the celestial world—the busts of Sol and Luna, the solar chariot, the snakes widely buttressing the cosmos over the deities' heads, the morning and evening stars, the ordinary stars, the raven, the triad of busts, the lunar crescent, the *lucernae*, the eagle, and so on. Some of these have already been analysed in the chapter on symbols.

The celestial symbols are to be found on the earliest Danubian plaques, and on almost all the monuments from then on. As the religion acquires momentum, these elements become more and more frequent and comprehensive. This is not the case, however, with the natural elements, which remain infrequent and occur only on the Class B pieces.

1. *Sol* and *Luna*

*Sol* and *Luna* are the divinities identified with most assurance on the Danubian plaques. It is only on very rare reliefs that they do not appear. Their absence is then to be explained by inadvertence, of the individual craftsman who made the monument, or by lack of space (45, 46, 47, 78, 90, 98, 102, 103, 114, 188, 189, 195, 196). Most often these divinities are reproduced in bust, but sometimes also in the form of the sun's disc or the lunar crescent or in the cosmic chariots. In keeping with their place in the cosmos they are figured in the upper part of the register, either in the corners or at the very centre. In only one example is a register with the bull placed above the busts of *Sol* and *Luna* (29, b). It is none the less true that quite often the busts of these two divinities are carved in such a rudimen-
ary manner that they can only be recognized from the place they occupy on the plaque. They are figured in profile, facing one another from opposite sides of the plaques.

Generally it is Sol who is seen to the spectator’s left, that is on the right hand of the array of figures. But in exceptional cases the places are interchanged, with Luna on the spectator’s left (15, a; 42, a; 71, a; 81, b; 120, a; 137, b; 191, A). Two explanations have been offered for this arrangement of the sun and moon deities. According to Saxl,\(^1\) the Danubian craftsmen rejected the Oriental system which placed Sol-Helios on the right. Apparently the artist of the original design imagined himself facing south so that for him the Sun travelled from left to right over the vault of heaven. Sometimes, too, though rarely, Sol and Luna occupy positions assigned by chance, but then they are not accompanied by other elements.

The busts of the sun and moon deities figure on the Class A plaques in 13 cases, in most of which, however, the drawing is rudimentary, with indications merely of some details of clothing (1, b; 29, b; 58, a; 59, a; 64, a; 79; 106, a; 183, a; 200, a; 202, a; 203, a). In one case only Sol’s clothing is fastened at the left shoulder by a circular brooch (9, a). While on the Class B reliefs the sun’s nimbus and the moon’s crescent are frequently indicated as marks of recognition for these divinities (42, a; 113, b; 187, a; 189; 191, B; 192, A, a; 197, a), on those of Class A there is only one case in which Sol’s head is shown haloed with rays and the horns of the crescent sprouting from Luna’s shoulders (174).

On the Class B monuments, the two busts are figured with more circumstance and accompanied with various symbols. In a good number of them Sol is shown with radiate head (the number of rays is variable) and Luna bearing on her head or shoulders the two horns of the crescent (6; 34, b; 37, a; 42, a; 48, b; 57, a; 71, a; 72, a; 75, a; 81, b; 83, b; 120, a; 125, c; 126, c; 135, a; 137, b; 140, a; 162, b; 190, a; 191, a; 193, A, a; 194, A, a; 199, a). Some Pannonian lead roundels show Sol’s head surrounded by a constant number of (rays 120, a; 125, c; 126, c; 162, b), but no religious significance can be attached to this detail. The same cannot be said,