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SEMANTIC STUDY OF IMAGES OF BULLS AND HORNS IN THE PETROGLYPH TRADITION OF WEST CENTRAL ASIA

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The semantic interpretation of visual representations, up to now didn't deserve serious attention. Moreover, when applied to petroglyphs, the interpretation of meaning (*semantic*) is a task made even more difficult and full of confusing dangers by the fact that coding patterns used by the authors are far by millennia from our decoding procedures. What seems to us an evident meaning consists most of the times of a quite banal undervaluation of the intentions and skills of the author. Other times the images suggest an exalted interpretation, often of magical-religious character, but with high risk of resulting out of subconscious subjective projections.

Being the general low profile of the interpretations today proposed by the specialists in the petroglyph field, in the last years we dedicated to these questions some publications, not so much for reaching stable conclusions but for showing the difficulty of the task, for elucidating some basic semantic procedures, and for stimulating the attention and the cooperation of professional semiologists.

In particular, an article has been published in Russian (Sala 2010) and English (Sala 2011) that summarizes the basic criteria of semiological and semantic analyses applying not to linguistic but to visual representations, in particular to the rock art representations of the Western Central Asian (*Centrasian*) petroglyph tradition. In that article the treatment of the matter is basically theoretical, with just few examples of tentative interpretation of petroglyph images.

With the present article we intend to apply those semiotic methods to the semantic interpretation of some exemplary cases of petroglyph performance from the petroglyph repertory of the Centrasian tradition, at two levels of complexity: the case of a single image and the case of the composition of several images. Being that animals represent more than the 90% of the repertory (with bulls totally dominants from the Archaic to the Late Bronze periods), and horns are one of the most numerous and by far the most emphasized iconographic unit (morpheme) of the entire petroglyph record, the exemplary single image will be the *auroch* and the exemplary composition will be the dyad *horn-sun*.

In order to reduce the gap existing between the prehistoric coding and the present decoding of the images of bulls and horns, are carefully considered some contextual elements of ethological-praxeological type that usually are ignored by present researchers but were surely well known by prehistoric shepherds and authors. Then the semantic analysis of the rock art images will mainly focus on the character of the rhetoric forms by which they are coded.

In fact most important is not the understanding of what our ancestors spoke, but of how they spoke. It is not so far from the truth to affirm that, during 4-5 millennia, the Centrasian petroglyph tradition is progressively transforming from a pictorial to an alphabetic writing by switching from a denotative concrete to an abstract rhetoric use of images of animals and horns.

The semiological nomenclature used in this article is based on the theoretical publication spoken above. In order to ease the reading, we report here below the definition of those few scientific terms most used in the present article.

- Any message (verbal, written or visual) is an element of a sixth fold process of communication made of: *source, coding, channel, message, decoding, receiver*.
- The semantic interpretation consists in relying a *signifier* (a sign) with a *signified* (visual or phonetic element only present in the author's or the receiver's mind)
- The difficult task of matching decoding and coding procedures can be made easier by analyzing not just the signifier sign but also its *semantic context*, which can be direct (archaeological, ethological-praxeological) or indirect (literary, ethnographic).
- Any group of signs and compositions of signs represent the *signifiers' repertory*. To it corresponds a *semantic cosmos* made of single *themes* and of compositions of themes (*isotopies* like *dyads, triads*, etc). The analysis of different frequencies of themes and isotopies allows the identification of the specific *structure* of the cosmos in question.
- The relation between signifier and signified is called *rhetoric form*. Three families of rhetoric forms are individuated, characterized by growing abstraction: denotation, metaphor, abstract.
 - *denotation family*: imitative analogy (*denotation*), part signifying the whole (*synecdoque*), part signifying another part (*metonymy*), denotation of real personages and events (*prosopography, narrative*)
 - *metaphor family*: when the relation between two objects consists of a property pertaining to just one of them (*metaphor*); *icon* (when fixed), *absurd construction* (when extreme). In that way the property, and not the objects, is emphasized.
 - *abstract family*: the signifier is related to a conventional meaning, which can be a property (*symbol*), a fixed symbol (*emblem, or archetype* when fixed in the unconscious), a system of sensuous symbols (*mythem*), an idea (*ideography*), or a phonetic vocalization (*gramma, alphabetograph*).

1 - The semantic context in the interpretation of petroglyphs: vedic, shamanic, ethological-praxeological

The only attempts of interpretation of the general semantic cosmos of the Centrasian tradition are two, both extrapolated on the basis of the correlation of the petroglyph repertory with external contexts: with literary contexts or with ethnographic contexts.

- The first approach is based on analogies with elements of southern Eurasian mix-farming cultures: formulas and mythemes included in 3500-2000 year old religious traditions and texts (Rig-Veda, Mahabharata, Avesta), or in the Ossetian mythology resumed by Dumézil. It interprets the general semantic cosmos of the Centrasian tradition as part of the mythopoetic Indo-Iranian substratum, where some natural forces are divinized as a superior order that can be contacted and revealed through collective religious rituals.
- The second approach is based on analogies with elements typical of northern Eurasian hunting and pastoralist cultures: Siberian magic practices for hunting, healing and thaumaturgy, as documented in the last two centuries. It interprets the semantic cosmos of the Centrasian petroglyphs on the basis of a similar shamanic substratum, where the division between the worlds of the living beings and the world of the dead and spirits can be crossed by exceptional individual personages through secret powers and magic practices.

The two approaches of interpretation can be respectively named *vedic* and *shamanic*. They are similar in the fact that both understand the presence, inside the semantic cosmos, of a sharp division in two different words (human and spiritual) difficult to relate.

They differ instead by the character they attribute to the two worlds (in the *vedic* case natural and supernatural, with the supernatural made of high spirits; in the *shamanic* case human and extra-human, with the extra-human made of spirits of dead humans, of animals and of natural places), and by the forms of ritual action that would open a bridge between them (collective or individual, without or with blood sacrifices).

The two approaches sometimes compromise each other by sharing the space and time of their respective validity: the *vedic* approach claims the meridional regions and the Bronze and Early Iron period; the *shamanic* approach claims the septentrional regions and more or less all the antecedent and subsequent periods, pretending in that way to represent an universal innate form of spirituality.

In reality, in the interpretation of the Centrasian rock art, this dichotomy between Indo-Iranian religions and Northern Eurasian shamanism, between ritualistic religion and shamanic magic, doesn't really stand up because both the positions are badly founded chronologically and conceptually.

Chronologically, the Indo-Iranian approach is based on verbal formulas expressed by stratified agricultural proto-urban societies following by 2000 years the most ancient petroglyph executions; the *shamanic* approach is based on ethnographic data collected among societies of hunters and shepherds of the XIX and XX centuries AD.

Conceptually, the categories of religion and shamanism are not well defined nor they totally exclude each other; and even weaker is the interpretation of the figurative elements of the petroglyph archive in which they pretend to recognize themselves. In fact exceptional powerful personages, sacrificial animals, cultic areas and collective rituals, dances and musical instruments, medical herbs, drugs and extrasensory travels happen in very different social and historical contexts: surely they preceded the *vedic* and *shamanic* societies, are present in both of them, and surely will continue to exist well beyond both of them for millennia. Of the two categories the one having weaker historical foundation is the one of shamanism, which, exactly because more generic, pretends to be applied retrospectively as substratum of the whole Paleolithic and prehistoric art.

The most ancient petroglyph executions of the Centrasian tradition must be wisely conceived as referring to a semantic cosmos more ancient of the religions of proto-urban agricultural societies as well as of the *shamanic* spiritism of recent groups of hunters and shepherds: a cosmos that is precondition and substratum of both, antecedent to the dualistic partition that characterizes the *vedic* and *shamanic* approaches, a cosmos still compact and concrete.

The earliest steps of the petroglyph performance don't have the objective to distinguish and order, but to indicate and represent a compact coherent world made of a still indefinite flux of sensuous and concrete living forms. In the repertory of the earliest periods everything is sensuous and alive: birth-giving is often represented, rarely wounded bodies, never dead corpses... "death" is still unconceivable! Surely dead bodies existed and were consciously managed, as witnessed by traces of sophisticated funerary rituals exhumed by archaeological works. But the semantic cosmos of the petroglyph performance is located at a superior height, with the duty to represent that level of the phenomenal experience and of the cyclical becoming where the dead don't take part. The absence of life is not even thinkable or at least doesn't reach a level of significance sufficient to deserve a visual representation.

From this point of view, in case we want to trust the interpretations of the two approaches spoken above and admit that ultra-mundane divinities and extra-human spirits have really been represented by non stratified prehistoric societies, then we must be ready to deduce that, at that time, gods and spirits were still wandering, alive and perceivable, among the rocks and the trees.

In reality, in order to reduce the gap between the prehistoric coding and the present decoding, the first most profitable step is to consider some contextual elements having not literary or ethnological but *ethological-praxeological* character (what really is a cow?), which are usually ignored by modern researchers but were surely well known by prehistoric hunters, shepherds and petroglyph artists.

2 - The image of the auroch during the Archaic period

Isolated single images of big ungulates are characterizing the representations of the oldest substratum of petroglyph performances, i.e. the so-called Archaic period. And, among these ungulates, in the central and meridional zones of the Centrasian tradition, predominant is the image of the wild bull (*bos taurus primigenius*, auroch) (Figs 01-04). All the specialists who analyzed this image (and in particular the specialists suspecting a vedic substratum) are interpreting its presence as witness of the existence, within the Neolithic communities responsible of the executions, of a magic-religious cult of this animal, avoiding the problem of why exactly the auroch and not another personage or thing has been chosen as object of magical or devotional practices. Well, a contextual analysis of the ethological behavior of the auroch is sufficient for justifying its privileged place in the rock art representations of the Neolithic hunters of Western Central Asia, as well as for clarifying the character not immediately magical-religious but *scientific-environmental* of such a choice.



Fig. 01 - Auroch in polygonal style, Sarmish-sai, Archaic period



Fig. 02 - Auroch in polygonal style, Kuljabasy Valley-4, Archaic period



Fig. 03 - Auroch in plastic style, Kuljabasy V-3, Archaic period



Fig. 04 - Auroch in triangular style with sun spot, Saimaly-Tash, Eneolithic period

During the Holocene, in the faunal assemblage of the arid zones of Central Asia the auroch is (or at least has been until its local extinction around 1000 BC) the largest animal species, the one imposing more fear and respect. And is also the land animal most deeply connected with the water element, with its cycles and with its fertile powers, and that for several reasons. The natural habitats of the auroch are

humid lands surrounding rivers, lakes, marshes and springs, green areas well distinct from the yellow background of dry plains and unending deserts. Moist places provide water for its frequent beverages, and fresh herbs for its abundant diet; the surrounding arid expanses provide supplementary rare grasses, salts and medical earths. The high sensitivity of this animal for the humid element is witnessed by ethnographic inquiries among modern shepherds: the place this animal chooses for resting when far from surface waters is considered to hide groundwater deposits and so is profitable for digging wells. Again to the humid element refer its enormous round bulky body, the huge breast of the females, its roaring urination and powerful fecundation. The healthy state and large dimension of its herds are sign of good seasons, blessed by abundant rains, luxuriant vegetation and optimal life conditions for all living beings.

These characters of the auroch are exalted in the Paleolithic cave paintings, and could not have been ignored by the Neolithic human communities of the Middle East and Central Asia, who were sharing the same river habitats and living in strict proximity with it. To their eyes this animal, by far the most imposing among the big mammals of the territory, appeared as the more impressive presence, the more dangerous concurrent and the more prestigious prey. And also as the easiest animal to domesticate thanks to its life exigencies and strategies quite similar to the ones of the humans, with herds fond of territorial stability and ruled by the strongest males, in analogy with the family structure of Neolithic communities.

It is not surprising if the Neolithic and Bronze age periods see the spread of the bull archetype among the proto-urban agricultural complexes of Egypt, Middle East and Indus valley as well as among the desert and steppe farming and pastoralist communities of Central Asia. Its attributes are feminine-lunar in Mesopotamia (meaning fertility) and masculine-solar in India (meaning power). In the Middle East and the Mediterranean regions the most widespread Neolithic archetype is the one of the “goddess and the bull” as representation of the dual (feminine-masculine, lunar-solar) power of nature. During the Bronze age its image in Mesopotamia provides the name for the springtide constellation. In the most ancient verses of the Avesta, the cow is the mythological progenitor of all beneficent animal life and its well-being constitutes the basis for evaluating the wellbeing of all creatures. In the early Greek mythology (Homer) the chief of all deities of rivers and springs, Achelous, is represented with bull attributes. He is described by Sophocles in the “Trachiniae” through the words of Deianira: “My suitor was the river Achelóüs, who took three forms in order to ask me from my father: a rambling bull once, then a writhing snake of gleaming colors, then again a man with ox-like face: and, from his beard's dark shadows, stream upon stream of water tumbled down. Such was my suitor.”

Concerning the role of the bovides in the early evolution of pictorial writing (petroglyphs), the behavioral and morphological qualities of the auroch made of its image the best candidate for *denoting* those fertile humid conditions that, in arid zones more than elsewhere, constitute the preconditions of life for animals and humans. This image can easily play as *metonymy* of a rich herd, of a moist locale, of an optimal hydrological season or of a pluvial phase. Or, by audaciously enlarging the spectrum of references, it can denote not just the humid niches of the living organisms but also the two humid extremes of the cosmos, the above and the below: above, the clouds and the cold starred sky of the night (the cow of the nocturnal sky of the Egyptians,) or, also by morphological similarity of the horns, the crescent of the moon and its humidifying effects; below, the subterranean waters, which in arid zones represent the most important water reservoir. In that way the image of the bull can support a maximal extension of its metonymical relations and become the *synecdoque* of the whole hydrological and vital cycles.

Finally, in later periods (Bronze) and more abstract rhetorical contexts, the bull provided with a solar spot between the horns will become a *metaphor* or a compact *symbol* of the three superposed worlds that the water cycle links together as complementary and interactive in the production of fecundity and plenitude: the stellar-uranian world (where the yoked bull of the Mesopotamians is plowing among the stars), the solar-terrestrial world, and the subterranean world.

If we analyze in detail the petroglyph representations of the auroch, we will note some particulars confirming and reinforcing the above considerations. Its image, during the Archaic period, is mainly

engraved as isolated figure on well patinated surfaces of rocky outcrops surrounding springs. Horns and tail are most often prolonged inside cracks of the rock, just for remembering their genetic links with the moisture of the underground world (Figs 01, 02, 05, 06). There are images of bulls urinating from the masculine or feminine member, or from both; and in the small site of Almaly (northern Chulii mountains) two humans in squatted position receive the urine (or the sperm) as fecundating rain. Rarely, already during this early stage, some elements appear that will become common during the Early Bronze: a spot between the horns, metonymy of the interaction of their growth with the sun (Fig 04, see below par 3); miniaturized figures of archers surrounding and shooting a large bull, metaphors of perforators of clouds for accelerating the hydrological circle and bringing more rain.

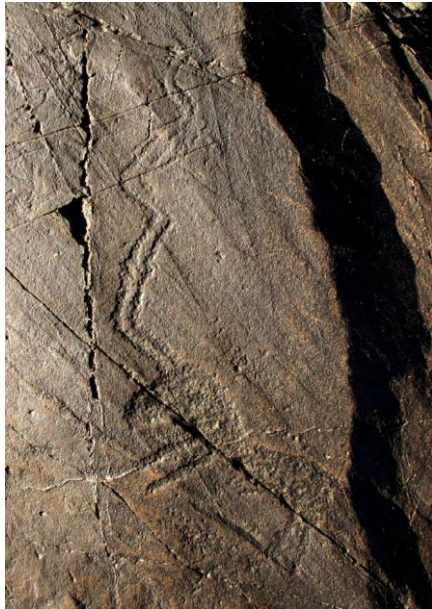


Fig.05 - Bull with horns reaching rock cracks, Akkol (Chulii mts), Early Bronze period



Fig. 06 - Bull sacrifice (worship and killing), Kuljabasy V-14, Middle Bronze period

The image of the auroch of the Archaic period refers, in its simplicity, by denotation, to a semantic cosmos compact and concrete. Compact, because there are not antinomies able to part it in different worlds. Concrete, because there are not qualities independent from their supporting subjects: there are condensations of meaning in the form of metonymy and synecdoque, but rare is the fragmentation and displacement of meaning in the form of metaphors, and totally absent are abstractions in the form of symbols.

In this sense, the semantic form of the representation shows a scientific-environmental concern. The hieratic impression that this sumptuous image inspires in the modern spectator must not mislead: it is not necessarily due to the special nature of the represented subject, but more in general to the sense of ancestral temporality carried by the whole petroglyph art and, in particular, to the psychedelic effect provoked by any well founded scientific formula.

The Archaic and Bronze age representations of the auroch and the semantic cosmos to which they refer are not corresponding to but underlying the magic and religious practices and verbal expressions posterior to those images by millennia. Irreducible partitions of the semantic cosmos, abstract rhetoric forms generated by those partitions, magic-religious conceptions built by those abstractions, are all characters that in Central Asia became affirmed only around the end of the II millennium BC, most probably together with the appearance of ideological partitions in the context of a progressive increase of social stratification.

During this process of partition and abstraction of the semantic cosmos, the Archaic image of the auroch has not been abandoned but submitted to multiform syntactic, semantic and pragmatic transformations coherent with the growing complexity of human societies. The transformations of this image, on the wide territories of the Centrasian tradition and of Asia Minor, went on for thousands of

years in several directions. Being that the detailed analysis of these directions is a task beyond the dimensions of the present article, just two extremes cases are briefly quoted: the trajectory along which the auroch image acquires a metaphoric meaning; and the trajectory along which it acquires a symbolic arbitrary meaning.

In Kuljabasy (Chu-Ili mountains) a wonderful scene attributable to the Middle Bronze period (1500 BC) represents an auroch in naturalistic three-dimensional style, surrounded from the left by humans and animal predators that pierce and bite him, and from the right by a man, a woman and a child in worshipping attitude (Fig 06). A regime of tragic-sacrificial oppositions are here metaphorically expressed, anticipating some basic iconographies of the Christian religion that will manifest 1500 years later and 4000 km far. The relational structure is the same, only the central personage changes: during the II millennium BC the tragic-sacrificial subject is the auroch; with the start of the I millennium BC this role shift to the ram; with the end of the same millennium to the human being.

Different is the abstract trajectory traveled by the auroch image in its condensation to the most simple primary iconographic element, i.e. head and horn, which will provide the sign (at first still morphologically phonetic and finally purely conventional) of the letter α (alpha), first character of the Phoenician alphabet and of all the western alphabets derived from it.

3 - The isotopy horns-sun

During the Bronze age period become very frequent images of wild aurochs, ovines and caprides carrying horns of exaggerated length with a spot, sometimes even a circle, at their center. The spot has been correctly interpreted as an image of the sun, so that this recurrent scene can be defined as an *isotopy* of the *dyad* horns-sun, characteristic of the entire Bronze period. At first the meaning of this isotopy looks mysterious and, as always in these cases, the problem is briefly solved by classifying the scene as endowed of a magic-religious character: the sun is lord, the animal is solarized and totemic. It seems to be an intrinsic feature of religious paradigms to be used for veiling what we cannot understand by other ways! Luckily in this case another way exists, and consists in trying to understand what a pair of horns really is. In facts horns, more than any other physical organ and independently from the animal on the head of which are located, have the property to evolve cyclically depending from seasons and years, in strict correlation with the movements of the sun, with such a precision that they can provide a quantitative measure of the sun cycles.

Horns of *ovines* (ram, arkhar, mouflon) and *caprides* (goat, mountain-goat) represent the most sophisticated chronometers of prehistory. They develop by discrete rings that constitute the marks of a real chronometer (or better, at those times, of the best possible chronometer!). The horns of the ram grow by 4 rings per year, with rings more or less consistent depending from the season. They elongate twisting as a spiral and reaching a rotation of 360° at the end of the life of the animal, of which the life span is around 20 years, i.e. half of the one of the humans of the II millennium BC. A solar spot engraved between the horns remembers, as a metonymy, the strict relation existing between the action of the sun (to create seasons, years, life cycles, and horn rings) and the horns of the ram (to measure such cycles). Also the mountain-goat carries horns that grow by rings and witness the plenitude of life by elongating and turning until touching the bottom back: in that way the horns and the back define the circumference of a circle that deserves a solar spot at the centre (Figs 07-08).



Fig. 07 - Goat with ringed horns (20 rings), Bayanjerek G-4, Late Bronze period



Fig. 08 - Goats and sun circles, Kuljabasy V-2, Late Bronze period

Also the horns of the *auroch* grow and twist, but without visible discrete rings. Anyhow, in some subspecies, they arrive, by the end of the life of the animal, to touch each other and to define a circle: the quantitative memory of years and seasons is lost but the duration and apotheosis of the life cycle are signaled by the horns' conjunction, which so deserves a solar spot at the center (Fig 04).

The horns of the *deer* have a different and more complex development conferring to the isotopies of this animal a chronometric character more seasonal and terrestrial when compared with the solar-astronomical character of the horned ungulates spoken above. Female deer don't have horns at all; male deer have horns that fall in winter, grow and ramify during spring and summer, and reach their maximal development in autumn, the season of duels and love. The image of a solitary deer, when without horns, is denoting by metonymy the winter season, and when provided of well developed horns the summer season; the couple male and female will denote autumn, and the couple or the female deer with fawn will denote spring.

The morphological ramification and the seasonal cycle of male deer horns are characters shared with the vegetation, its cycles, and the cycles of the sun; and, when very ramified, deer horns can also mean an old age that saw several solar years.

In that way the deer, because characterized by physical transformations and behaviors strictly correlated with seasonal and solar cycles, provides an image endowed with a very high isotopic potential, i.e. capable to enter in significant composition with many other subjects of the repertory for denoting several levels of the cosmic order: celestial subjects (the solar disk and its seasonal and annual cycles), terrestrial subjects (vegetation), subterranean subjects (the snake, with which the deer shares the property of regenerating annually a most evident part of the body). Occasionally a compass is added to the scene (Fig 09). Thanks to this high isotopic potential, during the Archaic period, in the high latitudes of Southern Siberia, the deer image played as best synecdoque of the solar cycle and of the seasonal regeneration, exactly the same role that, in the arid zones of Southern Kazakhstan and Median Asia, has been played by the *auroch* as synecdoque of the hydrological cycle and of its fertilizing power.

In all these examples, the concreteness of the relations established between the image of the horns and its isotopic partners is witnessing the presence of rhetoric forms not symbolic but denotative: imitative analogy, metonymy, synecdoque.



Fig.09 - Deer, snake and 8-fold compass, Kuljabasy V-3, Late Bronze period *Fig.10 - Horned horse, Tamgaly G-3, Late Bronze period*

The horns' isotopies spoken above are typical of the Archaic or of the Early-Middle Bronze period. But the semantic power of the horns' image is so high that horns continued to play an absolutely dominant role in the repertory of all the following periods of the Centrasian tradition...at the price of supporting more abstract rhetoric functions.

During the Late Bronze period, a time of incipient internal partition of the semantic cosmos, horns in Central Asia have been applied to the head of the horse (Fig 10), and in the Sinai peninsula to the head of Moses ¹, in both cases as metaphors (or, better, as absurd constructions) of the communication with the outer world. Again, like in the case of the sacrificial auroch of Kuljabasy, the same relational structure applies to two different subjects, an animal and a human, located 4000 km far from each other but in this case contemporary: the animal in the context of remote pastoralist societies (prototypes of both the subsequent vedic and shamanic cultures) that through the bull or the horse (mainly through its bloody sacrifice) open a door between the two worlds; and the human in the context of the most ancient urban societies (prototypes of the western urban and religious culture) that are opening such a door through a man (and even in that case through his bloody sacrifice).

Few centuries later, in Median Asia, the horns of the ram start to apply on the heads of both positive and weird beings, and with the Christian era they get finally fixed on the head of the devil. Around the V century BC ram's horns appear on the head of Ahriman ('destructive spirit'), the Zoroastrian embodiment of evil. But a couple of centuries later they appear again as positive attributes on the head of Alexander the Great, who inherited them in 332 BC in Siwah (Western Egypt), out of direct initiation, from the high priest of the supreme Egyptian god, Ammon-Ra, who with ram's horns was represented already at the end of the III millennium BC. Alexander kept them "hidden" until death, after which his horns have been openly manifested on coins by his successors in order to underline the celestial origin of the Alexander royalty. Someone didn't agree with such glorious symbol and tried to change it into devilish. The writer of the biblical book of Daniel, around 175 BC, portrayed Alexander as a strong beast with 10 horns and iron teeth.

¹ Moses overturns the golden calf and sacrifices the ram, signing the switch from a Mesopotamian solar-lunar (masculine-feminine) archetype to a strictly solar and patriarchal cult of pastoralist origin.



Lysimachos silver tetradrachma representing Alexander the Great with ram's horn and a headband of ivy leaves (288-281 BC)

Something similar happened further to the west during the same time (second half of the I millennium BC). Deer horns appear on the head of Cernunnos (the “horned”, lord of wild things, natural fertility, renaissance and passage between worlds), an important archaic divinity of the continental Celts often represented with ram's horn and holding a horned snake. With the establishment of the Christian era, in particular after the XI AD, the formidable iconographic power of such horned image has been tamed by the early Christian church only at the price of its adoption as symbol of the antichrist.

From very early until recent times, asides with their pictorial expressions, horns have been used by human cultures in several material and gestural ways more or less connected with their celestial or terrifying meaning.

Among Late Paleolithic cultures they constituted, together with stone and wood, the main material for making tools. Then, in prehistorical and historical times, have been used as medical powders, amulets, ritual objects (burial markers), musical instruments (the ceremonial shofar of the Hebrews or the bukkehorn of the ancient Norwegians), drinking vessels, horn bows and horned helmets (which appear in Europe during the Late Bronze and become widespread during the Early Middle Ages).

A quite sophisticated gestural and social use of the horns is still widespread in the entire northern Mediterranean region, namely in Sicily. Here horns are conceived as a thing that everybody sees at the exception of the one who carries them on his head. And such property makes of them the metaphorical attribute of a sexual partner who has been secretly betrayed: the ‘cornuto’ is always the last one to know about his horns.

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