

The Horn in Antiquity

By Richard Dibon-Smith

"The use of symbols springs from the human condition—from the perception of vital and cosmic correspondences, which was perhaps at its most seminal in archaic mankind."

Marshall G.S. Hodgson "Islam and Image" in *History of Religions*, III (1963)220

A previous paper (*The Ibex: History of a Near Eastern Time Symbol*) pointed out that the natural crescent-shape of the ibex horn made it an ideal lunar symbol in the Near East as far back as 5000 BC. The present paper will attempt to expand the study of this association between horn and moon. Dealing as we will with various cultures spread over thousands of years, it will be impossible to chronicle with any accuracy the shifts in thinking, the introduction of newer symbols into the established canon, as we attempted to do with the ibex of the Near East. We are instead forced to pick up the scattered bits of evidence from across the millennia and comment only generally upon their possible significance.

The fundamental assumption in this review of a prehistoric symbol is the universality of man's drive to impose meaning and order over his world. The present thesis sees this drive revealed in the very wide interest by early man in the horn as a religious symbol. To slightly paraphrase Mircea Eliade, by analysing the symbols of Time used by ancient man we can penetrate the disguises of his mythological behaviour.¹

The earliest evidence that Paleolithic man may have been interested in the moon as a time indicator comes from the systematic markings found on a bone dated at about 30,000 BC.

The bone, now housed in the Musée des Antiquités Nationales at Saint Germain-en-Laye, France, was found in 1865 in the Gorge d'Enfer, Dordogne. In the late 1960s it was subjected to a microscopic analysis by Alexander Marshack, who concluded that its markings were consistent with his hypothesis that early man used the phases of the moon to mark time.²



Figure 1a

The markings on the bone [Fig. 1a] add up to one lunar year, according to Marshack. He arrived at this conclusion by comparing the systematic groupings of the bone markings with the various divisions which the moon naturally makes in its lunar cycle, as seen in the schema, below [Figure 1b].

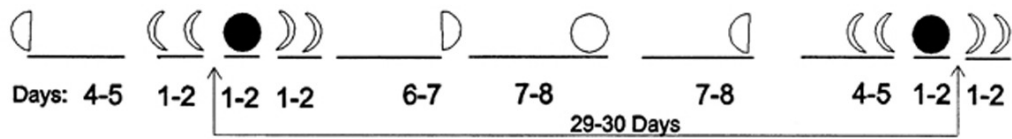


Figure 1b: Schema of lunar cycle

The contention that man as far back as 30,000 BC was sufficiently aware of the regular occurrence of the moon's phases and bright enough to act on this awareness has not been universally accepted in academic circles. Only thirty years ago the conviction was expressed that Paleolithic man had no reason to know how long a month or a year was, and that the calendar only began to evolve out of the needs of farmers, in Neolithic times.³ This thinking is in the process of being modified, but has not yet been succeeded by any widespread adoption of Marshack's theories, which some critics complain of as being amenable to any interpretation by virtue of the quantity of markings on any given bone. Certainly it would be useful to know that, of the total number of Paleolithic bones with patterned markings, how many fit the lunar model.

Fairly early in this calendar-making culture (that is, accepting Marshack's hypothesis) animal figures become included. The earliest example comes from the Perigordian culture, c25,000 — 30,000 BC. The calendar markings on this antler found in the southern France site of Isturitz, in the Basse-Pyrénées, add up to nine lunar months, although the arrangement of the markings on one face make it difficult to read the sequence. On the same face, a faint but clear image of the left horn and ear of an ibex can be seen [Fig. 2], approximately in the middle of the bone; the right



Figure 2

ear is also visible but the horn has been worn away.

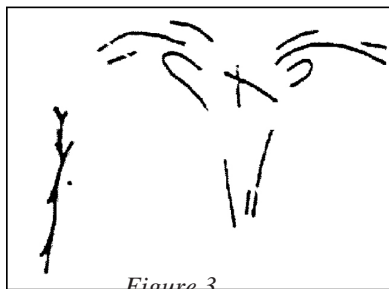


Figure 3

Other ibex heads appear later, especially on Late Magdalenian bones, c15,000—12,000 BC. The view is nearly always the same: full face. The Montgaudier bâton shows the ibex head with a plant sprout [Fig. 3]; a flower is also found on the bone, and what seems to be wheat shafts or leafy branches.⁴ On a delicately carved knife of the same date, from La Vache, Ariège, is seen an involved series of images, not only the small image of an

ibex accompanied by plants, but also a deer or bison and what seem to be nuts or pine cones [Fig. 4ab]. Two small strokes cross the right horn of the ibex [Fig. 4a]. Marshack considers face (a) to represent the Spring season and face (b) the Autumn.⁵ A second bone from the same area shows two engraved capridæ facing each other. While these bones have no 'calendrical'



Figure 4

marks, the consistent association of certain groupings suggests to Marshack that certain seasons are always intended.

Other creatures appear during the Magdalenian period—fish, deer, birds, and the like. Marshack points out that while some of these creatures were hunted and were eaten, the images do not represent ‘hunting magic’ as commonly supposed but rather “the birth of the ‘new year’ if not calendrically and arithmetically at least observationally and probably in story.”

If it is true that these animals already at this stage in man’s development stood symbolically for the annual regeneration of life on earth, of the ‘rebirth’ of nature, then clearly the ibex was an important part of this symbolism. The suggestion here is made that the reason the horn of the ibex was treated so special at so early a time was that the connection had already been made between the long, arching horn of the ibex and the crescent of the moon, the ‘horn’ in the night sky that served to announce the comings and goings of the months, i.e., of Time.

As time went on the artistic images of the ibex horn came more and more to approach an ideal lunar crescent, as we saw in the last chapter. Also, other connections between ‘horn’ and early religious concepts will make their appearance as man develops from hunter to farmer. The religious connotation that ‘horn’ has always held in these primitive cultures will not be given up until quite late, as the remainder of this chapter will illustrate.

Many images of a large and fulsome woman are found at pre-historic sites. The most famous of these is the so-called ‘Venus of Laussel’ [Fig. 5].⁶ Found near Les Eyzies, Dordogne, dated at c20,000 BC, this bas-relief is carved in limestone and covered with red ochre. The face is without detail, and turned towards the horn which she carries in her right hand. On the horn are very clearly marked thirteen regular incisions.

Marshack points out that “the count of thirteen is the number of crescent ‘horns’ that may make up an observational lunar year; it is also the number of days from the birth of the first crescent to just before the days of the mature full moon.”⁷

The number is therefore ambiguous, but the importance again of the horn is clear. Also, from this early time, c20,000 BC, we see an association of the horn in the abstract, shed of its animal characteristics, and used alone in pure symbol, of a possible ‘religious’ nature.

So far the oldest archaeological find showing an unquestionable religious signification is the Spanish paleolithic site of El Juyo in Cantabria, northern Spain.⁸ El Juyo was discovered in 1953 and excavated several years later. It was re-excavated in 1978-79 with a view to studying the subsistence practices of the cave dwellers, who occupied the cave about 14,000 years ago. The care and skill with which the cave was excavated unveiled a ‘sanctuary’ complex which reveals considerably more intellectual ability for paleolithic man than has hitherto been believed.



Figure 5; The Venus of Laussel, c20,000 BC

Among the major features of the sanctuary is a face, sculpted out of stone, set in the centre of a cleared area, about eleven square metres large. On the right of the stone face a hollow was dug out of the earth roughly 1.1 metres by 0.8 metres. The bottom of this hollow was covered with a white material, on top of which shells of limpets and periwinkles were scattered. Then a thin layer of sand, followed by several ribs and feet of deer placed in the hollow. Another layer of sand, this time ten centimetres thick, covered the bones and was then itself covered with a fairly thick layer of red ochre (in places up to one centimetre thick). The excavators noted that “the ochre layer made a vivid color contrast with all the surrounding deposits.” Near the centre of the hollow an antler tine—about 15 cm in length—was “stuck vertically, point down, into the ochre.” The hollow was then filled with “the debris of previous occupations.” The whole thing was finished off with more deer bones and red ochre.

Apart from this ‘fill’ was a built-up layer, or mound, also containing animal bones and ochre. The mound, composed partly of the earth excavated from the hollow, was carefully constructed out of ‘perfectly circular’ rigid-walled cylinders, like a child’s sand-castle. These cylinders were either ten centimetres across or twenty; most of them were of the smaller type. Moreover, the ten centimetre cylinders “were scrupulously positioned in regular patterns, one in the center and six surrounding it, with their edges touching but almost never damaging each other. Thus the mound is mostly constructed of a series of rosettes, each formed by seven cylindrical lots of earth,” i.e.: The face of each rosette was covered with a coloured clay, red, yellow or green. One rosette was particularly striking: “a central black rosette is surrounded by red ‘petals’ separated from one another by black rays.” As the excavators note, “this play of colors, though somewhat faded, was quite striking during our excavation, and must have been much more vivid when the clay was moist and fresh.”

The intelligence and artistry that went into the conception of and building of such a sanctuary, 14,000 years ago, more than hints at a philosophical bias, a cosmological concern: a religion. This religion was expressed symbolically in a number of ways—the seven cylinders that make up the rosettes (is this number even at that time ‘sacred’?), the one black central rosette surrounded by petals and black rays (does this relate to some astronomical occurrence or presence?). The layers of ochre, the use of deer bones, the shells, the stone face—all no doubt had some definite religious purpose. Central to this purpose is the vertical antler horn, stuck into the ochred hollow near its centre. Whatever the religious meaning of all these symbols, that of the horn must be considered, from its placement, as one of the most important.

Excavations of the Jordanian village of Seyl Aglat, Beidha, near Petra, have furnished some of the earliest neolithic findings which show a continuation in the respect for the horn, this time associated with a grave site.⁹ For the first time the ibex horn is found in profusion, and at the total exclusion of any other animal.

The village, dated at c6800 BC, was discovered in 1956; excavations began in the autumn of 1958. Among three rooms of one building excavated in 1959 was one in which “nine pairs of ibex horn-cores complete with frontals and two single horn-cores” were all found. Why so many horns of the ibex, a wild animal of the mountains, when the goat and the sheep would have been so plentiful and so convenient, unless meant as a religious icon?

Another room contained four infant burials, in the floor and in a mound resting on the floor; also “a large later grave dug through the floor in which from the top downwards were found a large pair of horn-cores, an intact infant burial ... and finally a carefully buried headless body.”

The excavator believes the ceiling of this room to have been coloured with haematite (ochre). Thus we see the carry-over of ochre and of the horn, both in a symbolic context, associated now in a neolithic community with infant burials.



Figure 6a

A number of rock paintings and carvings from neolithic north Africa (8000-6000BC?) show the development in the horn as an ornamental head-dress associated with ritual ceremony [Fig. 6ab].¹⁰ In Figure 6a the figure seems to be raising a plow in the air. In Figure 6b the figure wears a much more shallow crescent-shaped hat. In this series of drawings from the Sahara the predominant feature is the oversized penis.¹¹ The horn, as in paleolithic

times, is linked with fertility, this time human.



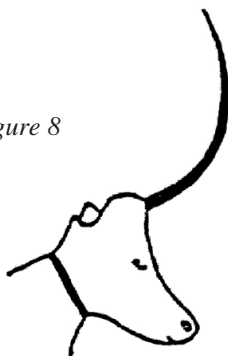
Figure 6b

Figure 7, below, from a rock drawing from the same area, shows an ithyphallic figure kneeling before a simple plant, his hand placed on the plant. He wears a crescent-shaped hat.¹²

From the same period comes a magnificent portrait of a cow that extends the symbolic meaning even further.¹³ The cow [Figure 8] has but one horn, a perfect

lunar crescent; its collar completes the message, forming as it does the handle of a splendid sickle. Here then is the symbolic linking of moon (or Time) with the annual harvest.

Figure 8



As a general recapitulation of the way in which neolithic man was viewing the skies, from Spain comes a combination of symbols found on one image (Figure 9) — a horned creature carrying two sickles.¹⁴ A leaf grows out of the end of one horn, and from the leaf sprout two more horns. Above the figure is the lunar crescent and, probably, the new moon. Horn, sickle, leaf, moon: the old association between moon and animal has been carried over into an



Figure 7

agricultural role. The moon is retained as symbol of Time, the horn as all-embracing shape of Time and Fertility, of Food, and now of Harvest.

It is in the Anatolian culture of Çatal Hüyük that the importance of the horn as a religious relic is fully appreciated. This large neolithic site flourished for over a thousand years, from c6500 to c5650 BC. It was a highly advanced culture, indicated by the commercial exploitation of the region's supply of obsidian, and the state of its farming and agriculture.

The religious concerns of these people are best reflected in the display of bulls' horns in its sanctuaries from about 6150 to about 5700 BC, that is, for nearly the entire life of this culture.¹⁵ Figure 10 shows a portion of one of the forty shrines, this one on level VI (c6000 BC). Although mostly devoted to the bull, the ram is also represented, and it is clear that not the animal, but its horn, was important.

Mellaart considers the religion practised here as a kind of fertility cult based on 'the procreation of life, and the insurance of its continuity and abundance both in this life and next'. Frequently this is symbolised by statuettes in which a female goddess is giving birth to a bull's head.

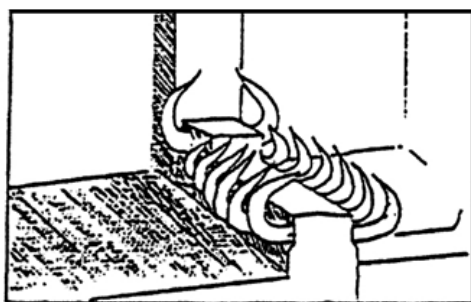


Figure 10: From Çatal Hüyük

The importance of the ibex in the Near East as an early symbol of the moon crescent and of fertility has been discussed at some length in the previous chapters. We simply repeat here the ibex figure on a vase, c5000 BC [Figure 11] with its clearly developed crescent horns wrapped around the moon.

The Yugoslav site of Rudna Glava has produced the earliest known copper mining yet discovered, c4000 BC.¹⁷ Recent excavations have turned up—besides stone-made mining tools and antler scrapers—a superbly crafted 'altar terminal' in the form of



Figure 9

The horn as a subject of artistic attention did not end with these people's demise but continued with that active and artistic people who came soon afterwards, represented by what is known as the Halaf Culture. The art here reflects yet again the same interest in horns, perhaps of the bull, but most probably of the goat, and also, occasionally, of the ibex.¹⁶

The importance of the ibex in the Near



Figure 11: An example from the Neolithic Near East

half-moon on either side of two vertical stripes'. Whatever significance the object had, Masson stresses the relevance of both the moon and its crescent: "Our knowledge of ancient Mesopotamian religion implies that this associated symbolism is directly significant." As we have seen, it is but one instance over several tens of thousands of years during which time man has ceaselessly venerated the crescent of the moon.

According to the Old Testament, the Hebrew people of the second millennium BC placed horns on the corners of their sacrificial altars. *Exodus 27.2* explicitly commands the builders of these altars to "... make the horns of [the altar] upon the four corners thereof ..." These horned corners were considered the holiest part of the altar—the blood of the sacrificed animal was sprinkled over them. Any refugee, upon grasping the horns of the altar, was allowed asylum. And when God threatened to punish the Israelites (*Amos 3*) it was to the altars that he would go "and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground."

Until 1973 no excavation in the Holy Lands had ever unearthed any of these horned altars.¹⁹ In that year, however, the altar of Beer-Sheba was discovered. Not only was the existence of the horns verified, but one stone also had an engraved decoration of a writhing snake. The snake, like the horn, dates back to ancient Mesopotamia and beyond,

some kind of horned animal [Figure 12]. The excavator thought it might be a deer, but the tine-less horns and squat appearance are not deer-like. It resembles rather a stylised goat; it could also be a sheep. In any event, there seems to be clear evidence here of a horned animal associated with mining and of some ritual.

If the bull came to dominate religious symbolism in third millennial Sumeria, there is further evidence, from Central Asia, to show the continually pervasive nature of the Bull Cult on into the second millennium. At Altin-depe the significant finds of Professor V. M. Masson show the conscious connection made at this time between bull and moon.¹⁸ Among the artifacts excavated at this Near Eastern site (dated c2200 BC) was a small golden bull's head with, on its forehead, a representation "of what unequivocal astrological symbol, the moon." In the same sanctuary was also found 'a composite plaque' showing 'a

cross and

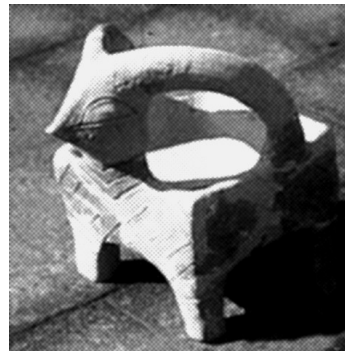


Figure 12: From Rudna Glava

and—again like the horn—symbolised fertility and long life and as such was for many years worshipped by the Israelites (i.e. *Num.* 21:8-9).

The altar is not the only use to which the horn was put in the Christian context. Later than the period now under discussion Moses was to acquire a magnificent set of horns. We will review the Horned Moses after first examining the horned gods of the Celts and commenting briefly on the sacrifices by pagan religions of horned animals at the dawn of the Christian era.

It is in the study of Celtic deities that the past and the present are seen to form a smooth transition, from their horned gods of fertility and as 'lord of the animals' to the eventual clash with Christian ideals, and the final abandonment by these latter people of the whole concept of the horn and its rudimentary message of life.

Just how far back the Celtic culture goes is a matter of dispute. If the Halstatt culture of c750 BC is not considered Celtic, then La Tène of c450 BC, which replaced it, certainly is. The gods of these Celts are for the most part lost; one can only speculate about them based on the later deities of the Gauls, the Celts of Britain, and the early peoples of Scandinavia. The fact that since, when the trail is again taken up, the horned god emerges as one of the most popular deities, must mean that throughout the development of the Celtic culture this god was most probably always highly venerated in one form or another.



Figure 13

A number of horned Celtic gods and goddesses have been unearthed throughout Europe, most of them dated at about the first century BC. Some, such as that found at Meaux, carry a large horn-shaped sack.²⁰ This particular god has his right hand stuck into the sack, apparently as if to scatter seeds or coins. Another statue, from Besançon, shows a goddess with a magnificent set of horns [Figure 13].²¹ She is seated cross-legged, a common pose for Cernunnos. Her right hand carries a round object, perhaps a kind of fruit, or celestial object. Under her left arm is a long narrow horn full of fruit and other edibles—the so-called cornucopia or horn of plenty.

The most familiar of the horned Celtic gods is Cernunnos, 'the horned one'.²² This name is generally given to all horned gods, but in fact only one such statue—now in the Cluny Museum—bears this inscription. Our example [Figure 14] comes from eighth century Scotland and can be seen at the Meikle Museum.

Cernunnos is considered the god of fertility, lord of the animals, and perhaps giver of material wealth. His holy animals are the stag and the bull. The best representation of Cernunnos is from a panel of the Gundestrup cauldron, named for its place of discovery in 1891 in Denmark. It might be more Tracian than Celtic, possibly forged in the Balkan peninsula in the second century BC.²³ On one panel [Figure 15]

Cernunnos sits in a near cross-legged fashion, holding up a torc with his right hand and a snake with his left. At his right stands a magnificent stag. Other animals encircle Cernunnos: a boar, a lion, and a bull. Totally dominating the scene, however, are the two pairs of antlers, with those of Cernunnos identical to those of the stag.

Stag-horned gods are also found on some French examples, such as the one we saw from Besançon [Figure 13]. Gassies²⁴ considered all statues with stag-horns as hermaphroditic, that is, being both male and female, since many of them have both horns and breasts. Furthermore, he explained the adoption of the stag as a divine animal by picturing the Gaulish hunters living in their forest huts, listening in the night to the noisy rutting of the stags.



Figure 15: From the Gundestrup cauldron

the stag by the Celtic deity Cernunnos to a far older religious motif already discussed in Chapter Two, namely, the Tree of Life. It will be recalled (see Note 5 of that chapter) that due to the multi-tined horns, Arthur Tobler confused the ibex with the stag, as found on stamp seals dated about 4500 BC. We have already seen that the horns of the ibex of c4500 BC were represented on pottery as symbolic of the Tree of Life (Figure 2 of Chapter Two). It remains to trace the means by which this art motif became transferred from the ibex to the stag, in order to claim that the Celtic stag is only a late variation of the Near Eastern ibex. Fortunately such work has already been done.

In his article "The 'Snake-Eating Stag' in the East" Richard Ettinghausen traces an ancient art motif known both in the East and the West.²⁶ He shows how the theme of the stag, killing and consuming a snake, was a popular subject of commentary in the time of Pliny, Martial, and Lucretius and how it was then taken up as a religious motif by the early Church Fathers: the stag as Christ destroying the snake as Devil.



Figure 14

Picturesque, and probably accurate, the scene could equally apply to prehistoric days long before the Celts were a distinct race, and in fact the stag was not the first animal to be honoured for its powers of reproduction. Both the bull and the goat were revered for their sexual prowess in antiquity, especially the goat, for as soon as it finishes weaning, it is ready for copulation.²⁵

However, I believe we are justified in linking the adoption of

In much earlier artistic representations, the theme was somewhat more diffuse. Not fighting the snake, the stag may even appear as a mountain goat or other horned animal, including the ibex. Thus, from the pre-Muslim Near East, “on a silver bowl in Sasanian style in the Hermitage the snake is twisted around the trunk of a tree and apparently hissing at one of the two ibexes standing unconcerned on either side of the tree. Or, there are some early seals which show the two animals merely juxtaposed. We need further proof to show in each case whether a feeling of enmity between the two animals is implied in these representations, or whether they might be interpreted in a different way, for instance, as symbols, divine or otherwise.”²⁷

It may be to over-simplify a much more complicated issue to suggest that the once overwhelmingly popular ibex slowly became replaced by the stag in both the East and the West, but the evidence does strongly suggest this possibility.²⁸ In the West the adoption of the stag as an animal worthy of artistic expression (and perhaps devotion) was taken up by the Scythians, most probably because of their heritage; they were of Iranian extraction, having moved to South Russia in the eighth century BC.²⁹ The motif was later taken up by the Celts, but just under what circumstances is not clear.

Most, if not all, of the animal symbolism in pagan religions seems to repeat over and over the theme of fertility, of the regeneration of life. The snake is one such symbol. Whether found on Hebrew sacrificial altars, or on the Scandinavian cauldron, or on the image from eighth century Scotland, the snake was a universal symbol of fertility.³⁰ Other pagan religions, just at the onset of Christianity, featured the same symbolisation. In Mithraism, the strongest rival to the Christian sect, the snake and the scorpion were both important symbols for the renewal of life.³¹

In 313 Constantine experienced his famous conversion to Christianity; from that time on the little band of Christians grew into a powerful, state-sanctioned religion. It was the culmination of a long struggle fought mostly against the established pagan religions which reached far back into antiquity and which practised various forms of sacrificial and fertility rituals. While Christianity would not find it politic to reject all pagan symbolism, it could—and did—vigorously oppose all overtly sexual manifestations of the re-enactment of the regeneration of Nature. In other words, orgies were no longer tolerated, even in the name of religious fervour. Sex, once openly celebrated in ritual and in symbol, became taboo.³²

The dualistic nature of Christianity eventually ascribed all forms of ‘life-giving’ symbolism (such as the snake, the horn, and the general ‘goatish’ appearance) to the Devil, overseer of death. But these changes did not occur overnight, and well into the Middle Ages the one symbol now associated strongly with the Devil—his horns—was first given to Moses.

The origin of a horned Moses comes from the translation of a passage in *Exodus* [34:29-35], with Moses descending Mount Sinai, the ten commandments in his hands, his head full of the instructions which God had given him over the preceding forty days. The people, when they saw him, were afraid ‘because his face was horned’. At least this is the interpretation of the Vulgate text (c400 AD): “quod cornuta esset facies sua.” More recent translations, including the King James version, speak rather of the ‘shining face’ of Moses. Yet throughout the Middle Ages the horned Moses was a persistent art

motif, appearing in this guise on the north rose window of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris (c1250) and in Germany on the baptismal font in St Amandus, dated 1518. [Figure 16].³³

From the Premonstratensian abbey at Dryburgh, Scotland, c1180, comes a description of Moses written by Adamus Scotus, in which Moses is pictured with horns when dealing with earthly, secular affairs and without horns when inside the tabernacle, thinking heavenly, righteous thoughts. The neat division is not considered to have been widely held, and it is not known just what Adam's influence was in church circles toward the eventual elimination of the horns of Moses. The total abolition of a horned Moses was not complete until during the Counter Reformation, so when Michelangelo sculpted his famous Moses, now in the S. Pietro in Vinculi, Rome, the horns he gave Moses came straight out of a long medieval art tradition.



Figure 16: Horned Moses, as shown on the baptismal font, St. Amandus, Bad Urach, Germany. Sculptor Christoph von Urach, 1518.

A poem by Guillaume de Deguileville, “Le pèlerinage de l’homme” (c1330), explains how Moses got his horns. According to the character ‘Reason’ in the poem, Moses is given his horns in order to give battle to the terrible horned beast that dwelt in the house of God. With his horns Moses succeeds in driving out this horned beat “wych lyeth in helle, Makynge here hys mansion ...” An interesting sidelight to this story is that the horns of Moses are the apparent precursor to the vicar’s (and bishop’s) mitre: the church leaders would henceforth be armed like Moses to keep the beast away.³⁴

So now, in the fourteenth century, the ‘thorny best lyeth in helle’ and, gradually, despite Michelangelo and others, the idea of a horned Moses became anathema to the church, whose leaders nevertheless now wore the tall cleft hat in symbol of the same.

While the horn has become one of the most familiar features of the Devil, it has kept its symbol of ‘abundance’, for instance in the cornucopia, or horn of plenty. although known in the West from the Greek myth of Amalthea, the story of the broken goat horn as a source of inexhaustible abundance is without doubt much older.

In a sexual context one horn in particular has come to be honoured. In many Asian countries and in India especially the rhinoceros is on the edge of extinction because of the powers thought to be contained in its horn, which is pounded into a powder and sold as one of the most sought-after aphrodisiacs. Traditionally the horn of the fabled unicorn was said to be the best antidote to poison, such as snake bite. If this horn were placed on the king’s table—it was said—it would break out in a sweat if any venom were present.³⁵ Any number of other uses of various horns exist, derived from the way in which the horn has been interpreted throughout antiquity.

Lastly, we could do no better than to reproduce the thoughts of Gerard Manley Hopkins, as a young Oxford student. The entry in his journal for 24 September 1863 gives a whole page of etymological derivations from the word 'horn':

The various lights under which a horn may be looked at have given rise to a vast number of words in language. It may be regarded as a projection, a climax, a badge of strength, power or vigour, a tapering body, a spiral, a wavy object, a bow, a vessel to hold withal or to drink from, a smooth hard material not brittle, stony, metallic or wooden, something sprouting up, something to thrust or push with, a sign of honour or pride, an instrument of music, etc. From the shape, *kernel* and *granum*, *grain*, *corn*. ...³⁶

Hopkins goes on to consider other possible off-shoots from this single word, including a number of birds (heron, crow, crane). Whether he is correct in all his examples or not, there can be no doubt that for thousands of years the word has indeed engendered a great many other words and ideas.

I believe that the origin of this interest in the horn as both a religious and a sexual symbol is due to that very first 'horn' as seen in the night sky, the crescent of the moon that tens of thousands of years ago began the process of man as a marker of Time. After early man noticed the regular phases of the moon, he strove to put some meaning to them. No doubt there was an animistic association: the moon was 'alive', its face bright and turning in the night sky. When was it noticed that this turning face was regular, predictable, such that not only the days could be counted from the moon's motion, but the seasons as well? The crescent of the moon, that horn-like sliver of light that marked the 'return' of each monthly cycle, is perhaps the first instance of 'science' in the lives of early man. Was it this imposition of Time on man's own life cycle that created all of his examples of religious expression: Birth, Life, Death, Resurrection? If early man did have a cosmology, it would have come from the horn in the moon.

...

Notes

1. Eliade's words are " ... it is, above all, by analysing the attitudes of the modern man towards Time that we can penetrate the disguises of his mythological behaviour." [*Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (New York, 1960 ed.)34]. The comparison, of modern man with ancient man, is appropriate, I believe, for the basic drive to understand his place in the universe has changed little over the millennia.
2. A. Marshack, "Notation dans les Gravures du Paléolithique Supérieur" (Bordeaux, 1970)9-15.
3. *Ibid*, 17.
4. A. Marshack, *The Roots of Civilization* (New York, 1972)170f.
5. *Ibid*, 174.
6. *Ibid*, 334-6.
7. *Ibid*, 335, fn. 17.
8. L. G. Freeman and J. González Echegaray, "El Juyo: a 14,000-year-old Sanctuary from Northern Spain" *Hist. Rel.* 21(1981)1-19.
9. Diana Kirkbride, "The Excavation of a Neolithic Village at Seyl Aglat, Beidha, near Petra" *PEQ* (1960)136-145.
10. Henri Lhote, *The Search for the Tassili Frescoes* (London, 1973, 2nd edition)205, fig.a; see also pp. 192-3.
11. Leo Frobenius, *Ekade Ektab* (Graz, 1963) plate 61(#1362). Frobenius gives a large number of further examples, figs. 96-108.
12. *Ibid*, plate 51 (#1303).
13. Jean-Dominique Lajoux, *The Rock Paintings of Tassili* (London, 1963)102-3.
14. Herbert Kühn, *The Rock Pictures of Europe* (London, 1966) fig. 79. The point is also made that here in Spain the crescent moon is often a subject of imagery (fig. 83).
15. James Mellaart, *Earliest Civilizations of the Near East* (London, 1965)89f; fig. 85.
16. That the ibex is a carry-over from a more ancient worship is seen from the Anatolian site of the Palani cave, in which Paleolithic cultures drew images of the ibex accompanied by astronomical signs. Emmanuel Ananti, "Anatolia's Earliest Art", *Archaeology* 21(1968)22-35.

Concerning the Tel Halaf motif, the long-held contention that this represents bull's horns was questioned in Chapter One (p. 11).
17. William H. Ward, *The Seal Cylinders of Western Asia* (Washington, 1910)Fig.120.
18. V. M. Masson, "Altin-depe and the Bull Cult" *Antiquity* 50(1976)14-19.
19. Yohanan Aharoni, "The Horned Altar of Beer-sheba" *Bib. Arch.* 37(1974)2-6.
20. G. Gassies, "Le Dieu Gaulois au Sac" *REA* 7 (1905)372-4.

21. G. Gassies, "Note sur les Déesses-Mères" *REA* 8(1906)53-8.
22. Phyllis Fray Bober, "Cernunnos: Origin and Transformation of a Celtic Divinity" *Amer. J. Arch.* 55(1951)13-51; a very full treatment including bibliography and plates.
23. *Antiquity* 61(1987)10f
24. G. Gassies, "Groupe de Dis Pater-Cernunnos" *REA* 9(1907)366.
25. Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Four-Footed Beastes* (London, 1607)231: "There is no beast that is more prone and given to lust than is Goate, for he ioyneth in copulation before all other beasts." Topsell, an Anglican minister, produced this 'history' in an attempt to separate fact from myth, and while he did not completely achieve his goal, he did write a marvellous compendium of what the ancients believed and wrote about concerning much of the animal world.
26. In Kurt Weitzmann (ed.) *Late classical and Mediaeval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathais Friend, Jr.* (Princeton, 1955)272-286.
27. *Ibid*, 282.
28. E.g.: E. D. Phillips, "The Scythian domination in Western Asia" *WA* 4(1972)129-37.
29. M. I. Rostovtzeff, "South Russia in the Prehistoric and Classical Period" *AHR* 26(1921)203-24 and *The Animal Style in South Russia and China* (Princeton, 1922); G. I. Borovka, *Scythian Art* (New York, 1928); T. Talbot Rice, *The Scythians* (London, 1957); Pierre Amandry, "Un Motif 'Scythe' en Iran et en Grèce" *JNES* 24(1965)149-60.
30. Bober, *op. cit.*, 18.
31. John R. Hinnells, "Reflections on the bull-slaying scene" in Hinnells (ed.), *Mithraic Studies* (Manchester, 1975)ii, 290-312.
32. The Phibionites, a Gnostic sect, perpetuated the honouring of the regeneration of life in most graphic terms, including orgiastic meetings at which both semen and menses were apparently offered as 'the body and the blood of Christ'. See Stephen Benko, "The Libertine Gnostic Sect of the Phibionites According to Epiphanius" *Vigiliae Christianae* 21(1967)103-119 and Mircea Eliade, "Spirit, Light, and Seed" *Hist. Rel.* 11(1971-72)1-30.
33. Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Horned Moses in Medieval Art and Thought* (Berkeley, 1970); also of interest is Norman Cohn, "The Horns of Moses" *Commentary* 26(1958)220-226.
34. This is Mellinkoff's conclusion; see her pp. 113 and 138-140.
35. Topsell (*op. cit.*) 714-721.
36. *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Humphry House and Graham Storey (London, 1959)4. See also *Journal of Semetic Studies* 24(1979)169-72 for further etymological examples.