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WILD-BOAR MOTIF IN ARMENIAN MYTHOLOGY
AND ART



ՀԱՅ ԱՐՎԵՍՏԻՆ ՆՎԻՐՎԱԾ ՄԻՋԱԶԳԱՅԻՆ II ՍԻՄՊՈԶԻՈՒՄ
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For a true interpretation of cultural riches of any nation, it is of great importance to establish at least an approximate link between rather ancient and more recent epochs. In this aspect, as applied to Armenian culture, the works undertaken by us regarding the study of basic motifs of Armenian ornamentation ¹, especially of the motif of the mythological deer ² found therein and also of the motif-symbol in front of Musasir Temple ³, etc., were quite useful. A study of the elements of ornamental art is of definite interest for ethnography and philology, as well as in other areas of culture. It also enables one to evaluate the culture of the epoch of developed feudalism, or, as many specialists suggest, approach the problems of "revival". It is known that a re-evaluation of antique values, apart from the evolution of knowledge and aesthetic demands, and apart from the desire to conduct such a reevaluation, was a result of tenacity of ancient pagan notions and traditions in different branches of culture. Our investigations have shown that the main part of plant and animal motifs arose out of the process of growth of agriculture and is connected with the mythology of dying and resurrecting divinities. It is true that christianity as a new religion tried to destroy all notions of pagan ideology. But the results of the achievements of pagan culture were later adopted by christianity with suitable amendments and interpretations to suit the new outlook and aims. If the Life-tree was in ancient times a symbol of the Egyptian God Oziris, it now became a symbol of Christ. If the mythological deer was in ancient times a zoomorphic companion of the goddess Anahit (Artemid, Diana),

it later became a symbol of the Virgin and thus became associated with Christianity. Because of this, the motifs of Lifetree, mythological deer, etc. started, already in X-XII centuries, literally flooding the Christian art.

In this way, the old values were revived and used along with the new ones, they gave to a certain extent a new impetus to the culture.

According to our studies, the most important reason for this phenomenon was the similarity of ideas about dying and resurrecting divinities which formed the basis of both paganism as well as Christianity.

It is well-known that the image of Christ also is a result of these concepts; it reflects the symbolism of dying and resurrecting divinity.

A similarity of these views which formed the basis of both paganism and Christianity also served as the basis on which their enmity was partially resolved. Thanks to this, the century-old traditions of pagan culture, reinterpreted and revived, found their way into christianity.

It should be noted that in different countries this phenomenon occurred in different forms because of the differences in their socio-economic conditions. Consequently, the question of evaluation and characterization of this phenomenon in every individual case cannot be solved on the basis of mechanical parallels and artificial comparisons.

We shall not dwell here on this question -- this is a work requiring detailed exposition. In the present communication we shall consider only one motif--image of mythological wild-boar (hog), the study of which makes the above-stated

viewpoint more convincing.

Mention of wild-boar in Armenian literature as well as its representation in art has drawn the attention of specialists a long time ago. G. Alishan ⁴, G. Hovsepyan ⁵, B. Arakelyan ⁶, K. Melik-Ohanjanyan ⁷, L. Azaryan ⁸ and others have rightly pointed out that this image is of a mythological nature. Besides this common interpretation, one of the figures received a more concrete digression. B. Arakelyan visualizes in the relief on a coffin in Akhts, a scene of a dual between Haik-Orion and his celestial rival-- the wild-boar ⁹, (We shall return to this scene again.)

The above mentioned specialists have paid special attention to the legend connected with Gregory the Illuminator. They have interpreted the wild-boar (hog) mentioned therein as an echo of mythological ideas. G. Hovsepyan has rightly pointed out to the connection and correspondence between this legend and those parts of the Gospel mentioning about the healing of the ravaging ¹⁰. G. Kapantsyan is the first author known to us who treats Gregory the Illuminator as an image of dying and resurrecting hero, having the "Mission of Christ" ¹¹. However, he does not say anything about the image of the wild-boar. A. Matikyan studies this question closely, but not on the basis of Armenian materials available on the subject. Being well-acquainted with the mythological notions of the people of the Ancient East regarding dying and resurrecting divinities, and also with the studies dedicated to this theme, he clearly established a link between the wild-boar image and these notions. However, he did not find any mention of this in Armenian written language.

"It is surprising", wrote A. Matikyan, "that even an indication has not been made in Armenian written language of the description of the mythological hog". However, these mentions do exist and the present communication deals with the same. Before going on to these sources, let us turn attention to the work of the English scholar J. Fraser, "The Golden Bough", which is one of the best works known to us dealing with the mythological concepts of the Ancient East about dying and resurrecting deities. The author studied in details the connections of Osiris, Athis, Adonis, Demetra with their mythological rival, the wild boar. The study of mythological links between plant grains (seeds) which form the material basis of the ideas of these deities and the wild-boar (hog) deserves attention. The sections of Fraser's work dealing with these questions are titled as follows:

1. The spirit of bread in the aspect of hog or swine,
2. Demetra-- the hog and the horse, 3. Attis, Adonis and the hog, 4. Osiris, the Hog and the Bull ¹³.

Let us also recall that the plant life of foodgrains as well as the life of heroes come to an end in the autumn and the hog causes the death, and that resurrection takes place in spring with the cooperation of loving things. This is mythology of nature and its two seasons, in which of great importance are circumstances connected with the new year as a time when the dying and resurrecting deities-- the foodgrains-- are born. This day was celebrated to the accompaniment of special rituals and festive ceremonies.

Tales about dying and resurrecting heroes and heroines as well as their foes are well-known in the history of Armenian people. The legend about Ara the Handsome, for

example, is popular. Although wild-boar does not figure in this legend, A. Matikian was able to find evidence from the Greek mythology that Ara the Handsome died when a wild-boar struck him ¹⁴. This is a very valuable evidence and requires further investigations. It should also be pointed out that the Greek mythology also contains a lot of important information about the legend of Ara the Handsome, which is missing in the Armenian sources.

The legend about Artawazd-Shidar is also interesting in connection with the wild-boar image. According to this legend, the hero goes hunting the wild-boar and, vanquished by evil forces, falls into one of the abysses of the Massis mountains together with his two hunting dogs. In our view, the legend in its contents is similar to the Greek sculpture showing the death of Adonis following a blow by the wild-boar --here also two hunting dogs are shown ¹⁷. It is known that dogs appear in the legend about Ara the Handsome also, where they try to bring him back to life by licking his wounds. Dogs assume the same role in the legend about Artawazd-Shidar, wherein it is said that one dog was white and the other black, and they both kept on incessantly licking the chains of Shidar, and when the year was coming to an end, the chains became thin as hair, and the hero was close to freedom. But on the first day of the new year every artisan had to strike thrice with his instrument so that the chains strengthened again. ¹⁸

In similar legends, the circumstances connected with the ending of the year are extremely important since dying and resurrecting divinities were reborn on this very day and

the new year (or Navasard) started with their birth. In this connection the motif of two dogs is of interest as they symbolize the days of the year--the white one representing the days and the black one, the nights. The sacred images of white and black rats in Indian mythology are results of similar ideas. In the story of Hovasap and Brahma they gnaw at the roots of a tree, representing the idea of the year. In the Armenian translation of this history, carried out by Arakel Baghishetsi, it is indicated that "the black and white rats are day and night" ¹⁹.

The image of the old man, found in Armenian fairy tales and symbolizing the idea of time is still more interesting. He is rolling two balls of thread--one white and the other black ²⁰. Also interesting are the new year celebrations and theatrical presentations connected with the legend of Artawazd-Shidar and similar to the ones marking the birth of Oziris, Tammuz, Attis, etc. One of the sources of these legends states: "The festival was established (founded) by magicians with masks and theatrical (presentations)... in the beginning of the year of the first Navasard". ²¹ Since Christ also appeared as a similar new divinity, the new year festival Navasard was linked with his birth also. On the background of these statements, the last wish of Artashes the First, father of Artawazd, which he made before dying, is understandable:

Who will give the smoking hearth
And the morn of Navasard... ²²

It is worth noting that at the time of Artashes' death,

many of his servants and also his dear friends, who believed in resurrection of the dead, committed suicide so that they could serve him in the other world.

We find some echoes of the mythological ideas of dying and resurrecting divinities in another legend--about Tigran, elder brother of Artawazd. It is known in Ancient East, in accordance with existing customs, hog meat was served at the time of ceremonies like New Year Day or other festivals, and sometimes the whole carcass of a hog was served on the dining table to symbolize the single-handed combat and victory of the hero over the wild boar. According to the Armenian legend, Tigran the Second, son of Artashes, forced his Jew prisoners to eat wild-boar meat on the day of festival. The Jews try to refuse, but the king commands them to do so and they are forced to accept it and "agree to eat the hog meat sacrificed by the king, although they themselves did not make sacrifices during worship".

The last, most well-defined representation of dying and resurrecting deities is found in the legend about Gregory the Illuminator, and his rival, King Trdat the Third, who appears in the form of wild boar. The hero wins. The echoes of this legend are found in history, fiction, as well as in sculpture and miniature. Since the appearance of this image in miniatures has never been a subject of special investigation, we consider it proper to give a few examples of some of such presentations found in the painting in the books ²⁴ 25.

Having investigated the facts and information, we return to the abovementioned relief on the tomb in Aghtz,

which shows a dual with the wild-boar ²⁶. This scene is completely identical with the tale about Artwazd-Shidar, and also with the Greek sculpture showing the death of Adonis.

The relief on the tomb in Aghtz is in accord with the basic ideas of the ancient and new religion on the possibility and hope of resurrection of the dead. Consequently, the relief represents either the earlier notions, or notions of the same nature of a later period. In the first case the hero shown here is one of the ancient kings; if the sculpture belongs to a later period then we can see Gregory the Illuminator here. But then the presence of dogs helping the hero is inexplicable. Therefore, on the basis of the facts that we have now, we are rather inclined to see in this sculpture echoes of ancient notions. It is clear from above that it is worthwhile to reconsider the explanation that it shows Haik-Orion.

Following conclusions can be drawn from the investigation:

Firstly, in classical Ancient Eastern as well as Armenian mythology, the myth about dying and resurrecting deities and heroes and connected with it the image of wild-boar, the rival of the heroes, was quite popular.

Secondly, in the notions of Ancient East as well as Armenian people, the mythological heroes appear both in abstract and generalized forms, as well as in the form of pagan kings. If pharaohs in Egypt were accepted after death as specific Osiris, then in Armenian reality, the mythological heroes were identified with Armenian kings Ara the Handsome, Artashes the First, his sons Tigran and Artawazd and grandson

Shidar, etc. There are justifications in seeing similar echoes in mythological materials pertaining to the dynasty of Eruandides as well as in the national epic--"Sasna-Tsrer".

Thirdly, the legend about Ara the Handsome, being associated with the Assyrian queen Shamiram (IX century B.C.) shows that notions of dying and resurrecting deities existed in Armenia from ancient times. They continued till early middle ages.

Fourthly, if for a long time the images of kings and heroes on the one hand coincided with one another and on the other, with the kind forces of nature, there was a fundamental change at the dawn of christianity. In christianized Armenia, the King Trdat the Third appears in the role of hero's rival and is shown in the form of a wild-boar, whereas in the role of hero appears Gregory the Illuminator, an ideologist of new religion. The motif of the king-hero in fact disappears. Sometimes national heroes appear in the role of hero, for example, Musheg Mamikonyan.

Fifthly, just thanks to the legend about Gregory the Illuminator and Trdat the Third ancient mythology, having got reincarnation, enters the medieval ages, where the image of wild-boar is linked once again with the symbol of evil forces and paganism in general, and Gregory the Illuminator appears as a symbol of christianity.

Sixthly, to find, at present, new materials concerning the existence in Armenia of mythological notions about dying and resurrecting deities and heroes means, in effect, to find information about the positive heroes among pagan kings and also in the image of Gregory the Illuminator whereas the

negative hero is shown in the form of wild boar or a similar wildboar-like thing. Also the changes which took place in Armenia as a result of accepting christianity should not be forgotten.

Seventhly, a detailed and fundamental study of the question touched upon here will undoubtedly help to establish a clearer and all-round understanding of the problems connected with the mythology and ornamentology of not only ancient but also medieval culture. This is important also for a study of similar questions linked with the culture of other nations.

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