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THE DIVINE BULL FROM PARȚA

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Rezumat. În neolitic (cam 5000 îHr) la Parța, jud. Timiș, a existat o așezare protourbană înfloritoare, care a avut un sanctuar, reconstituit aproape în mărimea naturală în Muzeul Banatului din Timișoara. În acest sanctuar, Taurul Divin este reprezentat în mai multe ipostaze (ca statuie monumentală în altar, pe soclu alături de Marea Zeiță Mamă, pe coloanele de la intrare estică, pe masa altar A etc.). Prezentăm câteva aspecte ale simbolisticii din cultul taurului, în timp și în spațiu, din punct de vedere arheoastronomic.

Cuvinte cheie: arheoastronomie, Parța, neolitic, sanctuar, orientare.

1. Introduction

In the Neolithic (about 5000 BC), at Parța, Timiș County, RO, there was a flourishing, protourban settlement, which had a shrine. In this sanctuary the divine Bull is represented as a sign and symbol in several places (as a monumental altar statue, on a pedestal next to the Great Mother Goddess, on the eastern entrance columns, on the altar table etc.). The neolithic sanctuary from Parța is a 6000 year old temple dedicated to the Bull cult. The entire structure is reconstructed inside the Banat Museum from Timișoara, Timiș County, Romania.

Inside the temple, archaeologists have uncovered traces of various offerings in the form of grains¹. Two beautiful side-by-side statues, one representing a Bull and another a Great Mother Goddess, were discovered inside. They are indicative of some sort of cult of fertility². What is most interesting in this place is the way the sunlight falls on the shrine throughout the year.

At a special period (around the spring equinox), the Sun's light enters through a hole in the eastern wall, and through the middle wall opening window and touches the amphora on the pedestal of the double-bull pedestal³.

Another interesting astronomical aspect is that during the Parța shrine construction, the vernal point was between the constellation of Gemini and Taurus⁴. We present our study about the bull culture and symbol in time and space from the archaeo-astro-

¹ Lazarovici *et alii*, 2001.

² Lazarovici *et alii*, 1985.

³ Lazarovici *et alii*, 2002; Csillik *et alii*, 2001.

⁴ Szücs-Csillik, Maxim, 2015b.

nomical point of view.

2. The Parța shrine and the divine Bull sign and symbol

The Parța rectangular sanctuary (the longitudinal axis was orientated exactly E–W) was divided in two rooms by a partition wall: the eastern room with the double monumental bull-statue and the western room with altar tables for offerings deposited by community members (Fig. 1).

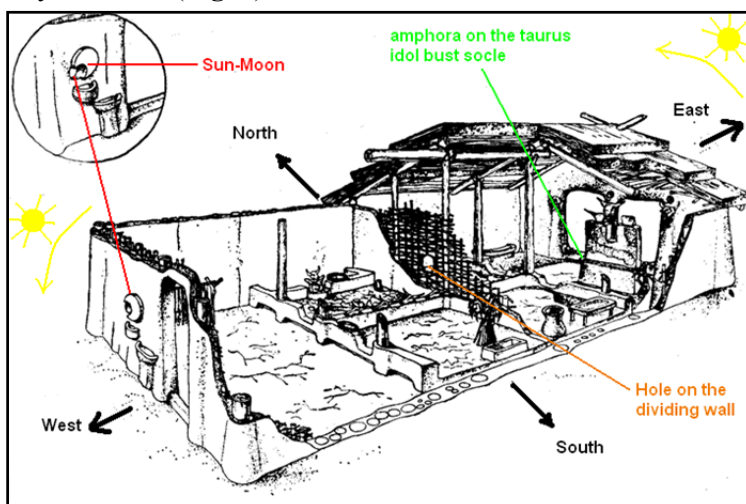


Fig. 1. Parța Shrine orientation (view from the SW corner) and some Bull signs.

On the dividing wall there was a round window-like opening about 35 cm in diameter. The sanctuary had another circular opening about 30 cm in diameter on the western wall too, between the entrance and the NW corner⁵. Next to this circular hole, an 8 cm thick clay relief was stuck on the wall, representing the Sun-Moon couple.

Let us mention that the composite symbol of disk and crescent occurs abundantly among ancient monuments in Europe, western Asia, and the Caucasus⁶. The symbol may be interpreted as conveying the notion of the heavenly couple, the Sun and the Moon. The Underworld God possessed the woman in his underground kingdom, but in the sky, where he appeared as the Moon, the Great Goddess, the woman is his spouse and the Mother of the Sun. When the Moon appears in the sky, it meets there not the Sun but the planet Venus, a personification of the Heaven Goddess. The disk was an emblem of the Heaven Goddess, while the crescent symbolized the Earth God. A combination of these two signs implied the connection between femininity and masculinity in nature, embodied in the images of the Great Goddess and the Great God.

The eastern room contained the idol pair statue, presumably a couple representing the Great Mother Goddess and the Bull God⁷. Near the statue's back was found

⁵ Szücs-Csillik, Maxim, 2015b; Lazarovici, 1982; *Idem*, 1989, Lazarovici, Maxim, 1995.

⁶ Golan, 2003, p. 143-144, fig. 27, n. 101.

⁷ Lazarovici, 1998a; *Idem*, 1998b; Lazarovici *et alii*, 1994.



an amphora, that was probably filled with liquids, which were used during the ceremonies. In springtime the Sun sets more or less parallel with the sanctuary's longitudinal axis. The sunlight of the springtime sunset entered the sanctuary through the western wall opening of the Sun–Moon couple, illuminated the hole on the dividing wall, and the light path ended on the idol pair pedestal, presumably illuminating the amphora⁸. Let us present the signs and symbols linked to the *idol pair* Divine Bull statue.

Fig. 2. The double-idol statue with Divine Bull symbol (reconstruction, Banat Museum, Timișoara).

The image of a half-woman half-cow entity found among Bronze Age monuments persists until recent time in folklore⁹. The present-day veneration of sacred cows in India is a survival of these ancient outlooks. The bull was a usual image of Great God, and the Great Goddess must be the bull's consort. Their relations were expressed in symbolism (see the idol pair statue in the Parța shrine). The names of the Great Goddess and her partner, the Earth God, often are similar – the Great Mother Goddess in the Parța shrine and her partner the Great Bull represent the Divine Bulls. The ancient tribe from Parța venerated the Divine Bull God and Goddess.

The prehistoric Great God was seen as an example of *masculinity*. The bull was a suitable personification of the male reproductive power. This association was one of the reasons why the bull was considered an incarnation of fecundity¹⁰.

Horned *feminine* figurines were found among remains of Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures. Near Eastern goddesses were sometimes depicted as horned, or even bullheaded¹¹. In the Upper Paleolithic period, pictures of animals allegedly served as magical means for ensuring a successful hunt, and female portrayals were supposed to favour childbirth¹².

The bull as symbol in Old European Art is diametrically opposed to that of Indoeuropean mythology, where he is an animal of the Thunder God. This figure provides the key to understanding why the bull is linked with regeneration, not as a bull's

⁸ Szücs-Csillik, Maxim, 2015b.

⁹ Lazarovici, Lazarovici, 2006.

¹⁰ Drössler, 1986.

¹¹ Golan, 2003, p. 124.

¹² Golan, 2003, p. 124.

head, but the female reproductive organs¹³. Here we can see how the *female* uterus and the Fallopian tubes form a simulacrum of the head and horns of the bull.

From an astronomical point of view, the double power of two symbol is for example the Gemini constellation and mythology. It is very interesting that around 5400 BC the vernal point was between the Taurus and the Gemini constellations.

A characteristic of the two-horned, or two-peaked form was a religious symbol as early as the Upper Paleolithic (in the Gemini Age, when the vernal point was in the Gemini constellation). Images of doubles indicate progressive duplication, and hence potency or abundance. Moreover, the fat female posteriors, or the robust female body in Neolithic had a significance quite other than erotic. This symbolism expressed reverence for supernatural potency, which took form by doubling, the “power of two”. This belief is also demonstrated in a German proverb: “*Double does not break apart*”. In Lithuanian tradition, if the field is ploughed in a circle by twin oxen (bulls), the field is protected from hailstorms, thunderstorms, diseases, and other disasters¹⁴. The double-headed Goddess is known throughout the Neolithic and Copper Ages.

In the Parța sanctuary the Great Mother Goddess, the Divine Bull Goddess has a red spot, representing her belly.

The old European Pregnant Goddess is the likely prototype of the Grain Goddess, young and old, such as Demeter, and of the Earth Mother of all European folklore. She is endowed with the power to nurture the seeds of the Earth. However, the pregnant type figurine first appears not in the Early Neolithic, but earlier still - in the Paleolithic. The symbol of the fruitful womb is as old as figurine art, associated from the very beginning with earth fertility and (uncultivated) plant life.

At Parța, the Great Mother Goddess with a painted womb can clearly be identified as the Earth Fertility or Grain Goddess. In the Copper Age, the Pregnant Goddess remains one of the most revered divine characters¹⁵.

The Earth Mother, with her pregnant belly, her miraculous womb, represents emitting life energy and receiving it back at death¹⁶. She is more than that, she is earth fertility incarnate, twisted, mysterious, strong. She is pure and immaculate, creating life from herself. She continually performs the miracle of magical transformation. Everything born from the Earth is brimming with life force.

In the anthropomorphic shape, the Earth Mother is a metaphor of the human mother: “*Mother, I came from you, you carry me, you nourish me, and you will take me after my death*” is a phrase still heard in European villages¹⁷.

The Earth Mother is regarded as being pregnant in the spring and thus has to be protected and respected, especially on her “name-day”, the 25th of March. The triumphant days of the Earth Mother are in August: the Feast of the Ascension of Mary (into Heaven), is a feast of herbs, flowers, and corn richly celebrated to this day in all

¹³ Gimbutas, 1989, fig. 411.

¹⁴ Golan, 2003, p. 129.

¹⁵ Gimbutas, 1989, p. 142.

¹⁶ Evseev, 1996.

¹⁷ Chevalier, 1995.

Christian countries.

In summer, near the summer solstice, the sunlight illuminated the grain on the altar table. The Great Mother Goddess represents the Grain Goddess, who gave fertility (water) to nature, which is very important for agriculture.

The theme of a bull attacked by a lion is found quite frequently in ancient Oriental art, and has an astronomical meaning. Hartner has ascertained that in the fourth millennium BC, the constellation Taurus disappeared below the horizon in the beginning of February at the geographic latitude of Summer, whereas Leo stayed in the zenith¹⁸. It could be that the changes in the position of the constellations were interpreted as “the lion’s victory over the bull”. Determining the moment when this event took place was of practical significance: the annual cycle of agricultural work started in February. At the latitude of the Parța Neolithic shrine, the period begins in the first part of March, and the lion could be a snake, a wolf or a man who sacrificed the bull¹⁹.

On the altar-table in the Neolithic Parța shrine, the archaeologist found bull horns as decoration in a line. Horned altars similar to the altar table at Parța and to Cretan ones were common in ancient Israel, too²⁰.

Excavations of the early farming settlement of Çatal-Hüyük, in Asia Minor, dating from the seven to six millennium BC, have revealed shrines in which sculptured bull heads are a regular feature. Here, bull heads were sometimes arranged in rows, like later in ancient Egypt. Moreover, Minoan monuments testify to a ritual significance of the bull in ancient Crete. Images of the bull’s head, clearly cultic and symbolic in nature, occur among the finds of the Cucuteni - Tripolye culture.

Bull’s horns are a feature of gods in many ancient cultures. Summerians crowned the heads of their deities with bull horns, seeing in this a symbol of holiness in general, as later did Hittites and Babylonians. Apparently identifying themselves with a god, or striving to ensure the protection of the god, Neolithic and Bronze Age warriors wore horned helmets. Ancient portrayals of kings in western Asia show them wearing bull’s horns²¹.

The Earth God was also the thunderer, therefore the Weather Gods exhibit characteristics of the former. For example, the Hindu Thunder God Indra was personified as a Divine Bull, and the Scandinavian Thunder God Thor was depicted with bull horns. In archaic legends of Britain, a hunchbacked bull taught people agriculture and craft.

The bull is a mystical life-source, an earthly manifestation of the cosmogonic primordial waters.

The life power inherent in the bull manifests it-self in plants and flowers springing up from the bull’s body. The concept of regeneration was dramatically perceived as the birth of young life from a sacrificed bull (a connection between insects, bull and emergent life).

¹⁸ Hartner, 1965.

¹⁹ Szűcs-Csillik, Maxim, 2015a.

²⁰ Golan, 2003, p. 130.

²¹ Golan, 2003, p. 130.



The Divine Bull symbol appeared in the eastern entrance in the Neolithic sanctuary of Parța, on the column head of the eastern entrance (**Fig. 3**).

There is a heaven symbol between its horns. We mention that there are statuettes of Apis carrying a disk on his head. The disk as a solar (star, Venus, North Pole Star?) or a heavenly symbol appears as a survival of the early farmers' usual religious formula.

In myth and ritual, all over the world, the Moon is seen as a major deity, because "*the waxing and waning of the moon is a metaphor for the circularity of change, of time measured against eternity, of light into darkness and life into death and back again*"²². The Moon is deified because the crescent was likened to bull's horns. Both verbal traditions and symbolic pictures bear evidence of the interrelation between Bull and Moon images in mythological thinking.

Fig. 3. The eastern entrance column with the Divine Bull symbol (reconstruction, Banat Museum, Timișoara).

The Sumerians envisioned their moon god as having the appearance of a bull. He was called "*the great bull of heaven*".

The images of the Bull and the Moon were related in ancient symbolic art, the bull's horns are often likened to the crescent Moon.

Some mythologies consider the crescent a symbol of the sea, the Moon as the source and controller of water and rain (important for agriculture). The Earth God was looked upon as the source of the earth's fertility and fecundity in general, as these faculties were attributed to the Moon. All over the world, the Moon was regarded as the producer of vegetation²³. Plutarch gives the following explanation: "*The Moon is, with its fertilizing and fecund light, favorable to the issue of animals and growth of plants*"²⁴.

Mircea ELIADE writes: "*As people discovered the agricultural cycle, they came to see the Earth relating to the Moon*"²⁵. Pliny writes in his *Natural History*: "*It is generally recommended to make seed-plots when the moon is above the horizon*"²⁶.

On the wall of the Parța sanctuary inscriptions in red colors were found. The link between the Divine Bull and the Earth God could be the red color. Bulls react upon seeing the color red. Red ochre is widely used, and at the Parța shrine we found decorations with red ochre on the wall. It could be noted then that the color red attracted

²² Green, 1992, p. 24.

²³ Guiley, 1991, p. 147.

²⁴ Pike, 1944, p. 177.

²⁵ Eliade, 1968, p. 304.

²⁶ Pliny, 2015, chap 75(32).

the bull's attention. We mention that this red color must symbolize the color of the Mother's regenerative organs.

The V-sign can be interpreted as a two-horned symbol of the Divine Bull. In the Parța shrine we found many V-signs between decorations on the walls and columns. Gimbutas believes that the V marks found in the Neolithic are the goddess' symbol, as the "shorthand" representation of the pubic triangle.

Zig-Zags on the walls, the role of the bull in regeneration - an immediate transformation from death to life is most impressively revealed by the altar table. Bulls are incarnated with the generative force of the Goddess.

Dualism is also expressed by two lines on a wall (double V, W). Moreover, the dualism symbolized intensification, which can be seen in energy symbols-whirls and double snake spirals (see the Neolithic Parța decorations).

3. Conclusions

The Divine Bull sign and symbol appeared in many forms in the sanctuary of Parța, which emphasize the importance of this sign. Astronomically the vernal point is in position between Gemini and Taurus, as in the symbolism in Parța shrine (Paleolithic and Early Neolithic). Moreover, the new C¹⁴ data shows that the Parța shrine flourished around 5400 BC, and the Neolithic community from Parța had a good astronomical knowledge.

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