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SUMMARY

ZOOMORPHIC, THERIOMORPHIC AND TETRAMORPHIC SYMBOLS ON COINS - PART FOUR

In the fourth instalment the author studies the symbolism of the bull on coins. Of all the zoomorphic symbols used during history, the bull symbolism went through most changes and transformations, sometimes in the same regions and within the same cultures. These transformations were known to happen when changes occurred in lunar and solar beliefs, which changed the symbolism of the bull. Also, during time the bull symbolism changed to the ox symbolism, thus resulting in a symbolical antithesis going from strength and power to a symbol of sacrifice, obedience and docility.

Representations of the bull and other animals were linked to many deities in the age of totemism, the practice of which was taken over from prehistoric ages. In all paleo-oriental cultures the bull symbolised power and brute strength. Its symbolism is very complex, both from the historical and psychological aspect. It was linked to the symbolism of Taurus, and in the earliest cultures the bull symbolized fertility and a link to the heavens and deities. He was equalized to the god Thor, son of the sky and forests.

He symbolized royal blood, and as an ancient symbol of mankind was used in religious rituals and sacrifice in the service of the celebration of life, prosperity, nature and the like. Basically, this symbolized the superiority of mammal over reptile.

The bull was the most frequently-shown tamed animal in the Middle East, appearing both as lunar and as solar symbol. This difference resulted from the way in which the lunar and solar cults were interchanged. The lunar bull became the solar bull when the solar cult replaced the older cult of the moon. It is very possible that the bull was the first and most important lunar symbol because it morphologically matches the moon as its horns are similar to the crescent. In the solar cult of the lion, the bull symbolism is of a secondary nature.

These interpretations were lost with the appearance of Early Christian art, in which, as in the Romanesque period, the bull got a new iconographic meaning. At the same time the bull symbol increasingly became replaced by the ox symbol, so it is sometimes difficult to interpret the symbolism of the motif.