ANCIENT SYMBOLISM IN LITHUANIAN FOLK ART

MARIJA GIMBUTAS

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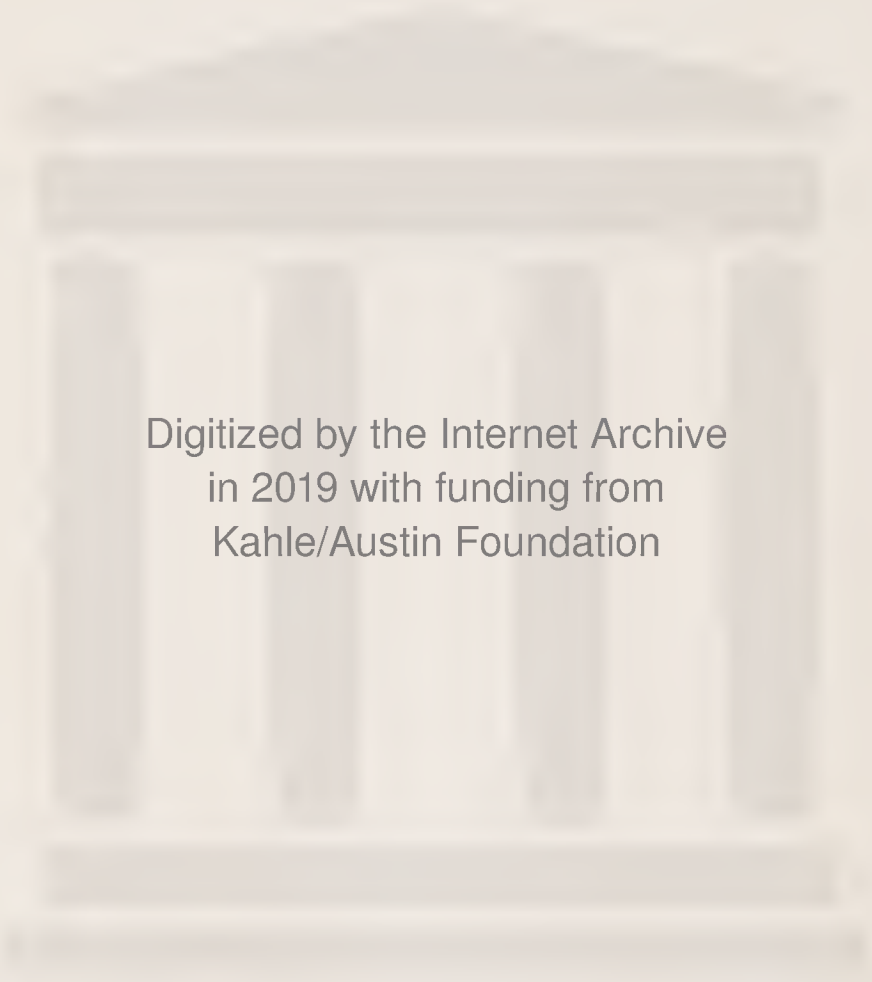

ANCIENT SYMBOLISM IN LITHUANIAN FOLK ART

By

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Mano Mamytei
To my Mother

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I. INTRODUCTION

Not so long ago the Lithuanian country side was dotted with beautifully ornamented wooden poles capped by roofs and crosses, whose symbols radiated brilliant sunlight. The landscape exuded religious spirit. These monuments, replete with ancient symbols alongside the Christian, were highly characteristic representatives of Lithuanian folk art, expressing the people's view of life and their ability in the field of artistic creation.

Roofed poles and crosses were encountered not only in places such as cemeteries or crossroads, but practically anywhere—in front of a homestead, at the edge of the village, amid fields, by "holy" springs, or in the forest. They were erected on the occasion of a person's marriage or serious illness, in commemoration of an untimely death, during epidemics among men or animals, or for the purpose of ensuring good crops. They rose from the earth, as the folksong had risen, as various customs had risen, out of religious beliefs that challenged definition through artistic creation.

Twentieth century civilization with its mechanical progress and urbanism has found its way into the culturally prehistoric nooks of Europe. Folk art dies a little more with each generation, and in every nation, lingering sometimes in the hands of an individual artist who cultivates a peculiar folk art. In Lithuania, where folk art blossomed for ages, the picture is also changing. Some decades ago, ancient roofed poles and crosses were already bent beneath the weight of age. The rotting roofs showed gaping holes, the arms of crosses were broken, the miniature ornaments were losing discernible contours, and parts of the sun discs were missing. Statistics show that between the years 1912 and 1932, forty-three percent of these monuments disappeared. Later on, this decline was even more marked, and in recent years, since Lithuania has lost its independence, they have been completely destroyed because of their national and religious character.

Fortunately, even before World War I the roofed poles

were undergoing a timely registration, for several people who appreciated the value of these monuments of art were preserving them in photographs and drawings. Among these individuals, the following deserve special gratitude: the artist, Professor Adomas Varnas, who photographed more than 2000 specimens, some of which are reproduced in the present work; the artist Antanas Jaroševičius, who painted more than 200 specimens at the beginning of the 20th century; and Professor Ignas Končius, who photographed and catalogued the roofed poles, crosses, and chapels of western Lithuania. To Professor Končius goes the credit for having made 1,111 photographs and for having registered more than 3000 objects.

The treasure of Lithuanian folk art is not confined to roofed poles and crosses. The art and ethnographical museums in Kaunas, Vilnius, Šiauliai and other towns in Lithuania are crowded with various wood carvings: distaffs, dower chests, laundry beaters, towel holders, pieces of furniture, etc. None of these artifacts is without ornament. Segmented stars, wheels, concentric circles, rosettes, moons—solar or sky symbols—are profusely engraved on them. As on roofed poles, these symbols appear here in association with birds and animals and sometimes with snakes, but most frequently with a blossoming flower or a fir tree. A large collection of wood carvings from the art museum in Kaunas was published in Lithuania in 1956 under the title of Lietuvių Liaudies Menas. Medžio drožiniai (ed. by P. Galaunė). In it are 571 large size photographs of distaffs, laundry beaters, towel holders, etc. This is the best and largest collection of Lithuanian folk art published so far, aside from the eight volume collection of textiles and national costumes published in the series Sodžiaus Menas (edited by A. Tamošaitis, Kaunas, 1931-1939).

Ancient symbols are well represented on painted dower chests and Easter eggs. Small sunlets, painted in different color combinations, and exuberant plants, snakes, birds and even horses occur. Mr. A. Tamošaitis, now in Canada, deserves gratitude for collecting and painting thousands of Lithuanian Easter eggs and dower chests.

Folk art symbolism in its very ancient form is also well preserved on old farm houses. Several decades ago, it was possible to observe horns, birds, twin stallions, he-goats,

rams, snakes, and axes as gable decoration. However, in modern times these symbols are fast disappearing. During the 19th century these animals, horns, and birds guarded almost every farm house. The samples of them reproduced in this book are taken mostly from the drawings of the 19th century.

Individual artists of our times have often sought inspiration from primitive art, finding therein a strong expressiveness, symmetry, beautiful ornamentation, and pleasing and rich color combinations. However, there is more to folk art than ornamentation, expressiveness, color; there is the heritage of past ages conserved in symbolism. The motifs of folk art symbolism may be compared to other monuments of ancient design representing concepts which reach back into the preliterate period.

Religion was the source of primitive art, an art which can be understood when we broaden our frame of reference to include voluminous supplementary material: old customs remaining to this day, folklore, and early historic documents—all the sources which reveal ancient religious beliefs. The duration of the symbolic tokens can be sensed by studying the prehistoric objects which, even for several thousands of years, exhibited symbols belonging to a single religious system. During the Christian era, peasants adopted new symbols but without forgetting the old ones. These became merged in recent centuries, expressing the spirit of a folk which was drawing its elixir of life from roots firmly set in the soil. For instance, Lithuanian wooden poles with pyramidal roofs and crosses are very rich in pre-Christian and Christian symbols. In our times, these monuments exhibited a peculiarly Lithuanian conception of Christian symbolism, one which was built on the remnants of a prehistoric foundation.

We believe that this study will be helpful to those seeking to solve the riddles of symbolism in peasant art. For those who are acquainted with the art of prehistoric periods, these Lithuanian monuments will be of interest as the last echo of the symbolic art of prehistoric agriculturists. They are eloquent as probable witnesses of the very last period in the development of this type of art, an art whose seeds had been planted over a period of many centuries and whose blossoming

forth into beautiful forms was favored and aided by the people's spiritual culture and their historic faith.

Lithuanian folkloristic treasure is to be found mainly in the Lithuanian Folklore Archives in Vilnius, in the publications of Dr. J. Balys and Dr. J. Basanavičius, and others (see bibliography) and the collections of J. Būga, now in the United States. Information about the ancient Lithuanian and Baltic religion also occurs in the available written records of the period from the 1st century A.D. to the 19th century A.D., the major part of which was gathered by W. Mannhardt in Letto-Preussische Götterlehre, in 1936. In addition, the Baltic, as well as the other continental European and Mediterranean archaeological materials known to the author, who is an archaeologist, have been used for this study. The more important books that provide insights into the meaning of the prehistoric and folk art symbolism of the European nations are listed in the bibliography.

II. THE CONCEPT OF THE TWO POLES

Symbols in folk art and its predecessor, prehistoric art of the agricultural era, were elements in a well-ordered system, not spontaneous, unconnected inspirations.

The concept of two poles, the masculine and the feminine, is clearly discernible in the symbolic system. Some symbols represent the male element of nature, and are linked with the sky: its movement, its phenomena, separate sky bodies and the sky-deity. Other symbols pertain to the female element, the earth: its hillocks, rocks, plants and the earth-deity.

A. Symbols of the Sky and the Sky-Deity

In the eyes of primitive man, it was the sky, rather than the earth, which revolved. The firmament was the dynamic phenomenon, while the earth was the static phenomenon. The sky presented dynamic and clearly observable bodies: the sun, which arrived each morning and disappeared each night, only to reappear the next day; the moon, which periodically changed from the crescent to the full orb; the morning star; the lode-star; and the evening star—all of which moved mysteriously about the sky.

These dynamic bodies, i.e. the sky element, are represented by the circle or the wheel. Associated with the circle or wheel family are swastikas, crosses, and spirals. Outstanding in this group of symbols is the cross within a circle, most vividly reflecting the dynamics of the sky. Up and down, forward and back, a rolling spiral symbolizes the rhythmic forth and returning of heavenly bodies. Depiction of these mobile figures was probably intended to maintain and stimulate their movement forever.

The sky made a twofold impression upon primitive man: that of an unchanging regularity; and that of a source of force influencing life on earth; a force which is paralleled in its expression in nature, in animals, and in man.

The male animals and birds—the elk, bull, goat, ram, stallion, swan, cock and other small birds frequently appearing in

folk and prehistoric symbolic art—are associated with the symbols of the circle family.[1]

However, not only the sexual nature, but other characteristics of such animals had divine significance. The color of these animals was that of the heavens: white, silver, or gold. To this day it is the white horse, and the white or golden cock, which survive in folklore. Their voices were associated with divine phenomena: the bellowing of the bull with thunder (the voice of the sky-deity), the prophetic crowing of the cock with the regular awakening of nature or a change in the weather.

Serpents, snakes, toads and other reptiles seemed to embody the very essence of life. To the symbolic artist, they were endued with vitality, the libido principle. They were believed to exercise a great influence on the development of human and animal life.

1. Circle, Sun, and Moon

The depiction of the circle or wheel, so dominant in the symbolic art of European peoples, is characterized in Lithuanian folk and prehistoric art by its richness of style. There is no trace of a heavy wheel. It is a light and graceful ring that, in its more complex variations, radiates beams, plant shoots, or geometric figures (Figs. 1-31). The circles, wheels, and segmented stars are frequently interconnected, symmetrically formed and arranged. Yet, in this family of symbols, we note markedly individual shapes: the sun, moon, and star.

Such bodies as the sun, moon, and stars in themselves suggest strong spontaneous powers. They observe their own definite paths of movement, their own manner of birth, transmutation and motion. They become living bodies, with powers supposed to be analogous to those of human and animal life.

Such fancies of animate force in the heavenly bodies inspired the personification of sun, moon, and stars in folklore. Old solar songs refer unmistakably to the dynamism and rotation of the sun. The sun is connected in thought to the wheel. In Lithuanian it is called ridolėlė— 'the rolling' sun. Old roundelays are built on constantly recurring refrains, which make us feel the motion of the sun:

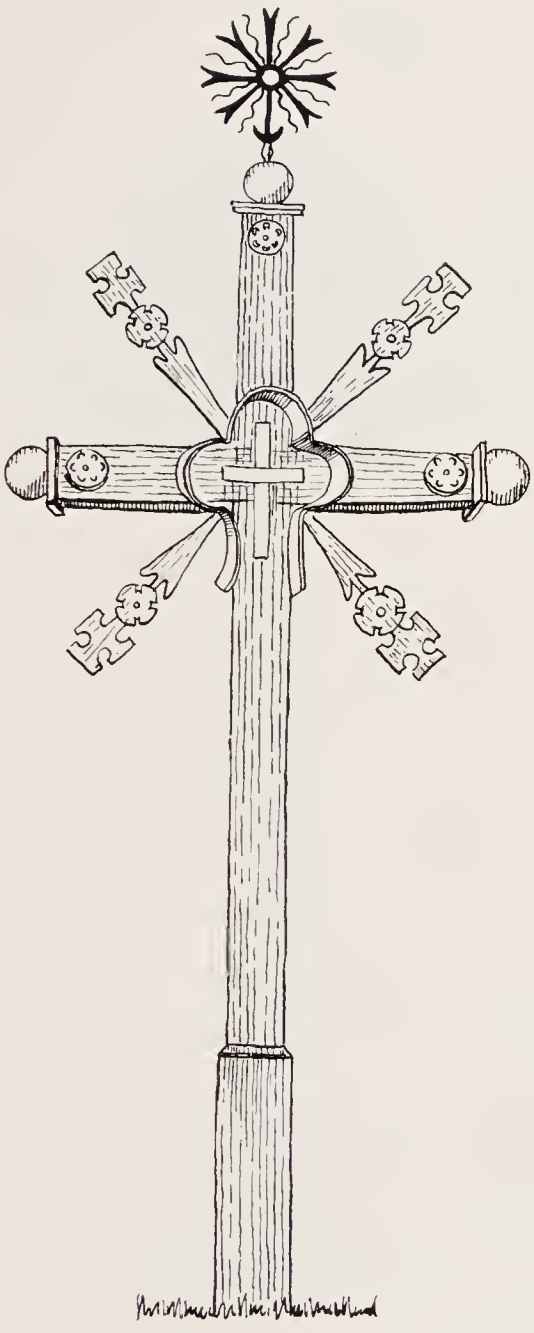


Fig. 1. Iron tipped wooden cross from northern Lithuania.

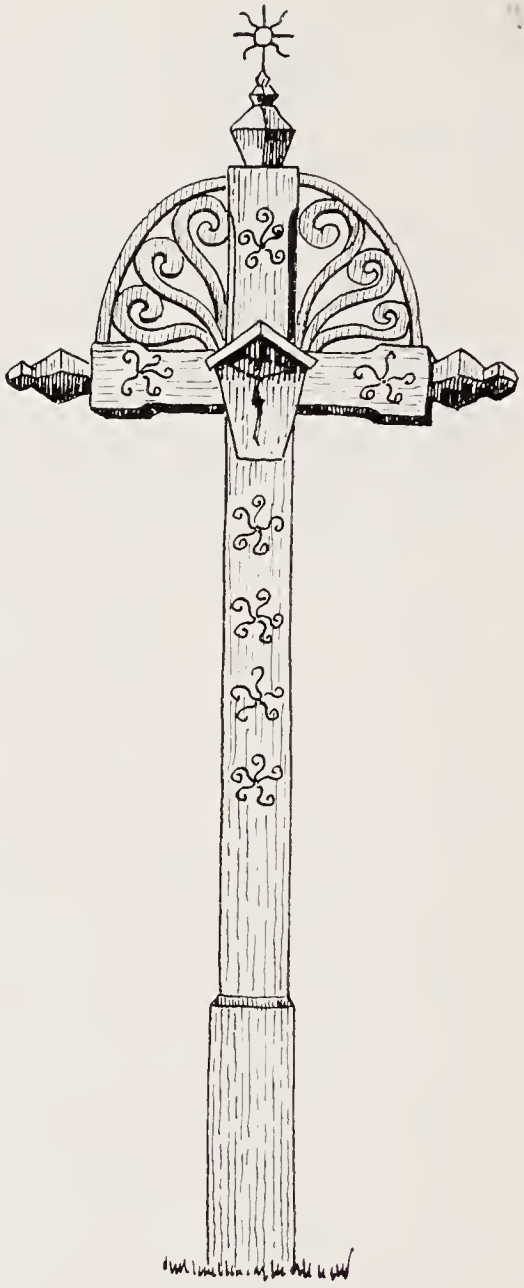


Fig. 2. Iron tipped wooden cross from southern Lithuania with swastika-like symbols on the pole and cross-arms.

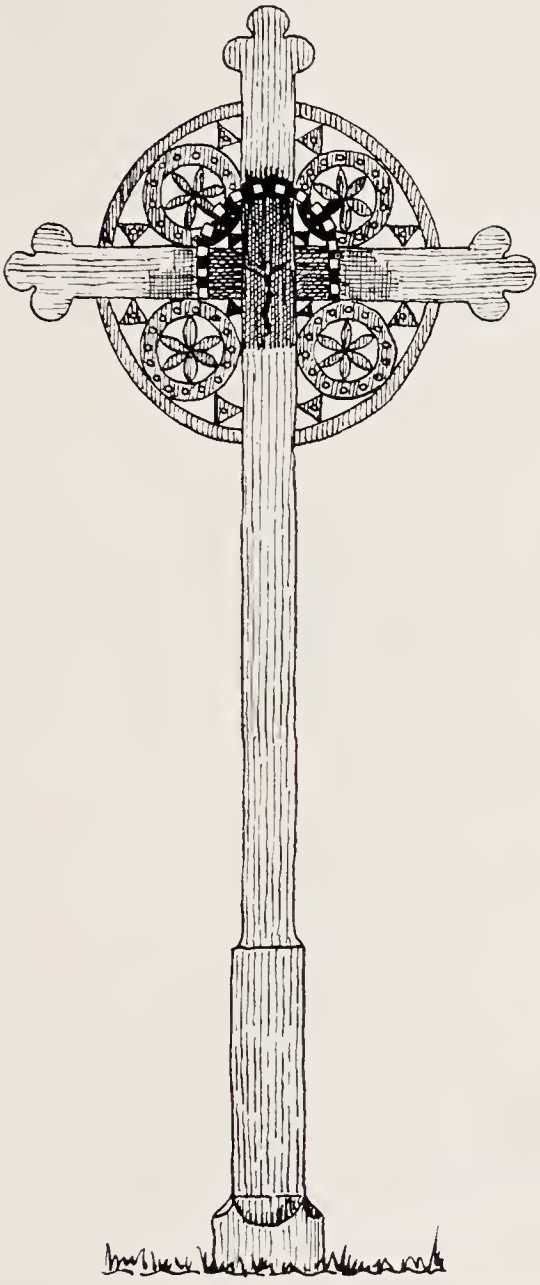
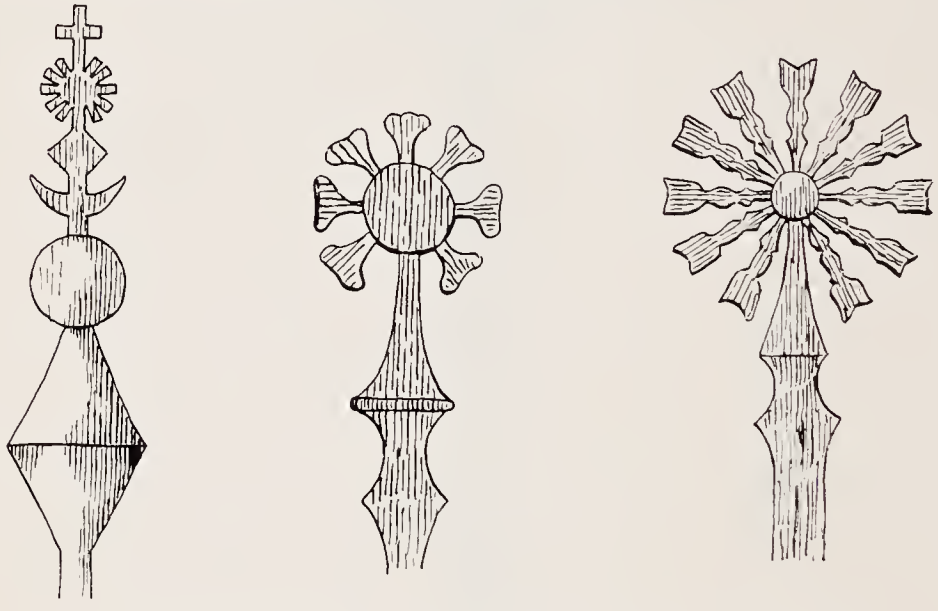


Fig. 3. Wooden cross from northern Lithuania.

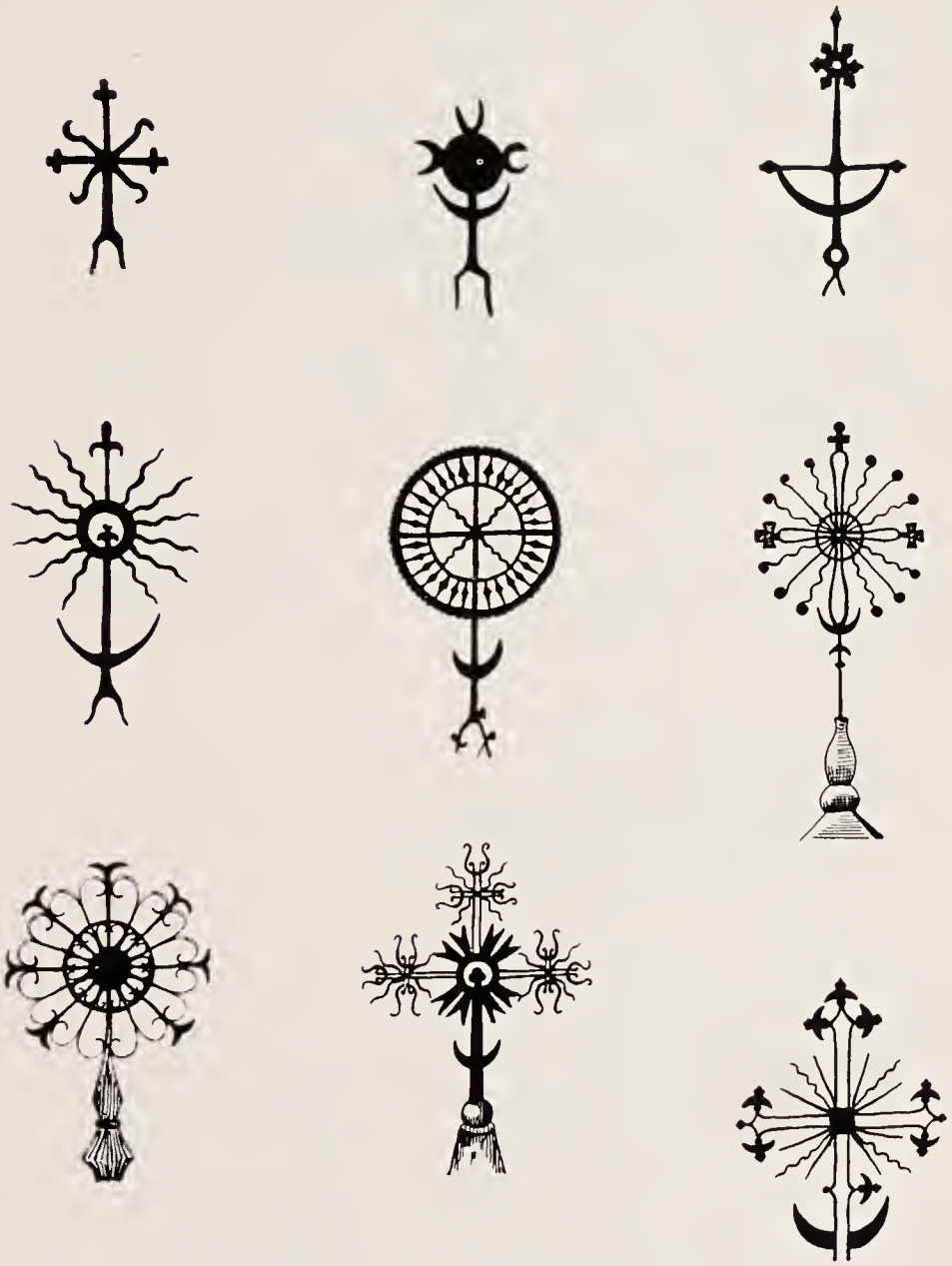
Kas tar teka per dvarelį?	(Who rises there upon the farm?
Saula ridolėla.	The sun, the rolling sun.
Saulala, saulala!	Sunlet, sunlet!
Saulala ridolėla!	The rolling sunlet!
Kų tar neša tekėdama?	What does its rising bring?
Saula ridolėla.	The sun, the rolling sun.
Saulala, saulala!	Sunlet, sunlet!
Saulala ridolėla![2]	The rolling sunlet!)

In Latvian, a language of the same Baltic family as Lithuanian, we find in solar songs the refrain līgo (līgot means 'to sway') or rotā, (from rotāt, 'to roll,' 'to hop').



Figs. 4-6. Wooden tips of Lithuanian roofed poles.

Particularly during the spring festivals, primitive peoples observed sunrise. On such mornings as the 24th of June, the sunrise seemed unusual; in their eyes, the sun actually danced. In anticipation of St. John's Day, Lithuanians and their neighbors scarcely slept the night before, in order not to miss even the first rays of the blessed sunrise. Everyone wanted to see how the sun danced, how it ascended and then descended for a moment, and how it finally shone in various colors. In Latvian songs about such feasts we find the refrain: "The sun, dancing on the silver hill, has silver shoes on its feet." Lithuanians believe that the sun not only dances and sparkles, but also



Figs. 7-15. Iron tips of Lithuanian roofed poles and crosses.

adorns itself with a wreath of braided red fern blossoms.[3] On the 24th of June, Lithuanians fashion an abundance of braided wreaths, symbolizing the sun's victory: the resurrection of life forces.

Even youthful pastimes, such as swinging on Easter Day, expressed symbolically the sun's dynamism. Comparably, the seesaw of the Indic Mahavrata festival played an important role, and the priest even addressed the seesaw with the words: "You are the sun."[4] Closely related conceptions of the sun and its influence during spring festivals are found in Slavic, Germanic, Greek, Iranian and Indic nations.

Spring festivals are festivals of joy, often expressed by rotating, hopping, or swinging. Artistically, this dynamism was depicted in wheels, concentric circles, and wreaths. Folk art and folklore depict the sun's influence: its vigorous dynamism, its variety of form, the peculiar changing of colors and their harmony. The various forms and colors found in the sun are expressed particularly in the folksong:

> In the evening the sun sets
> And adorns the green tops of the forest:
> It gives the lime-tree a golden crown,
> The oak-tree a silver wreath,
> And for each small pasture
> It gives a golden ring.
>
> Latvian folksong[5]

Folk and prehistoric art present the sun in various forms: radiating sun, wreath, wheel, or circle. These are not realistic depictions, but rather portrayals of the dynamic power of the sky or the world, bringing forth the rebirth of life.

This conception of the sun is poetical. The eyes of our ancestors were so accustomed to the embodiment of the sun and the wheel in their art, that they associated these forms with everything observed in nature. Daisies and roses therefore became the flowers of the sun. The daisy is called in Lithuanian saulutė, i.e. 'sunlet,' or ratilas, i.e. 'halo,' or 'wheel.' In folk songs there is reference to a daisy in the words, Ratile, ratilėli ratilio... ('wheel, wheel, little wheel...'). The apple tree with its "nine branches" is compared to the rays of the sun.

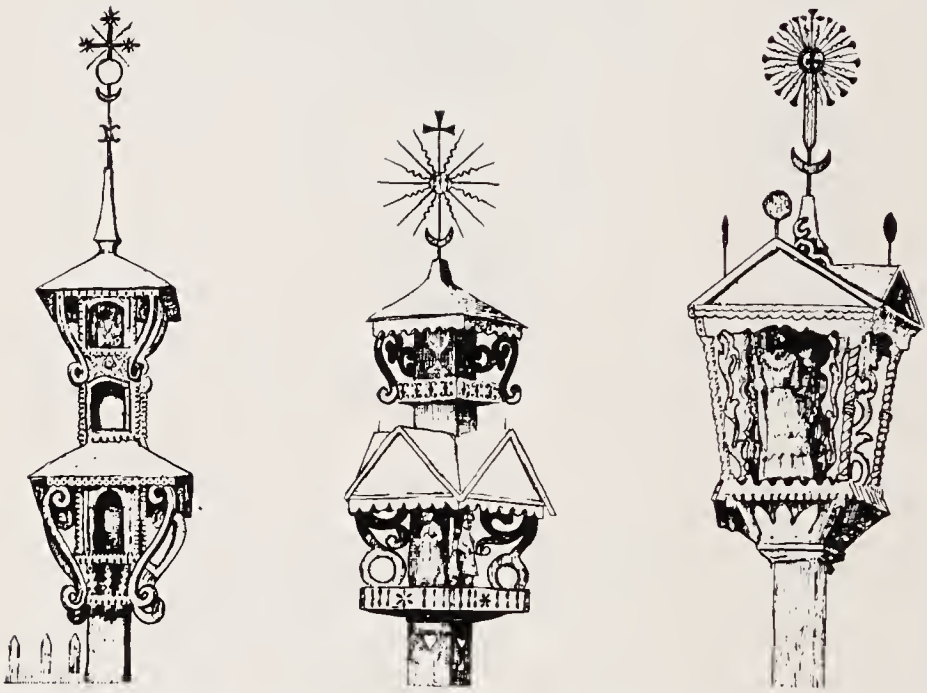
Figs. 16-18. Iron tips of Lithuanian roofed poles and crosses.

The changing shape of the moon was evidently a principal cause of its veneration. Man's attention was especially attracted by the young moon. Old customs and superstitions attribute a deep influence to it on plant and animal life. Like the periodical appearance of the sun, its disappearance and renewal in the form of a young moon bring well-being, light, and health. Thus, flowers must be planted either at young or full moon; the growth of the moon influences the growth of the plants. There still remain in folklore many prayers to the new moon, in which the "young" and "bright" moon is called the "God" (Lith. Dievaitis) or the "prince" (Lith. Karalaitis) of the sky:

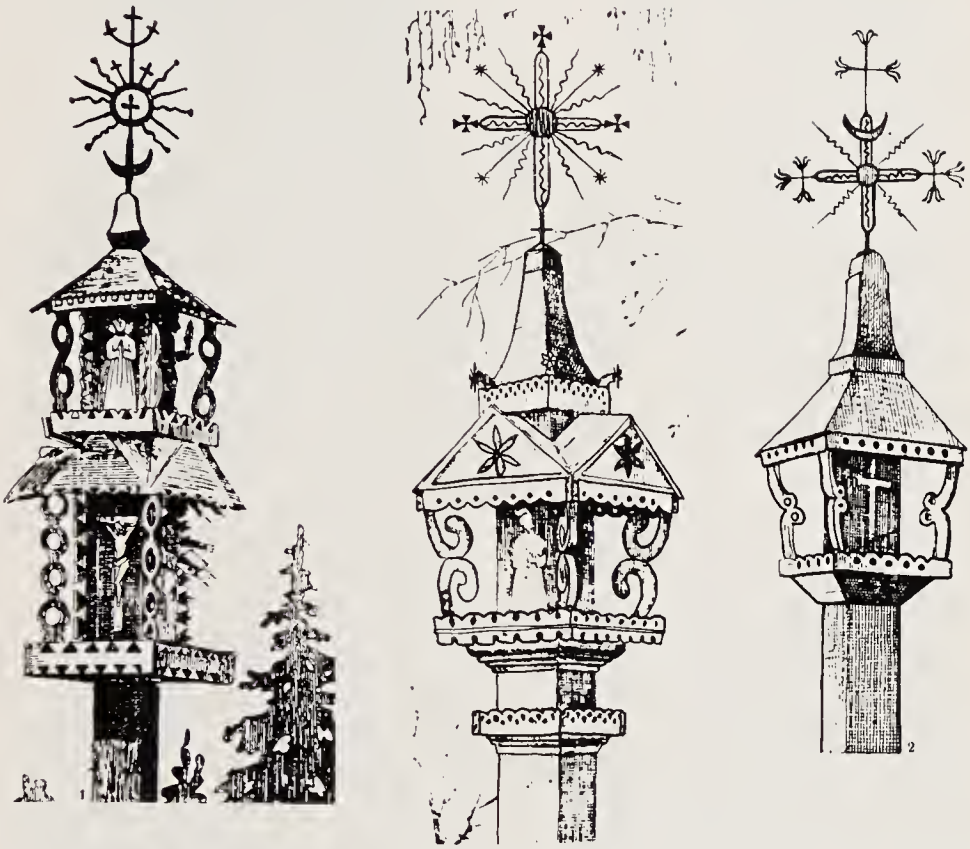
Mėnuo, mėnuo, mėnulėli,
Dangaus šviesus Dievaitėli!
Duok jam ratą, man sveikatą;
Duok jam pilnatį, man Perkūno karalystę![6]

(Moon, moon, little moon,
Bright god of the sky!
Give him orb, give me health;
Give him completion, and unto me the kingdom of Perkūnas!)

or:



Figs. 19-21. Roofed poles (chapels) from northern Lithuania. Iron tips show sun and moon symbols. Chapels are decorated with an ancient geometric design—eyelets, circles, triangles, segmented stars, etc.



Figs. 22-24. Roofed poles (chapels) from northern Lithuania. Iron tips show sun and moon symbols. Chapels are decorated with an ancient geometric design—eyelets, circles, triangles, segmented stars, etc.

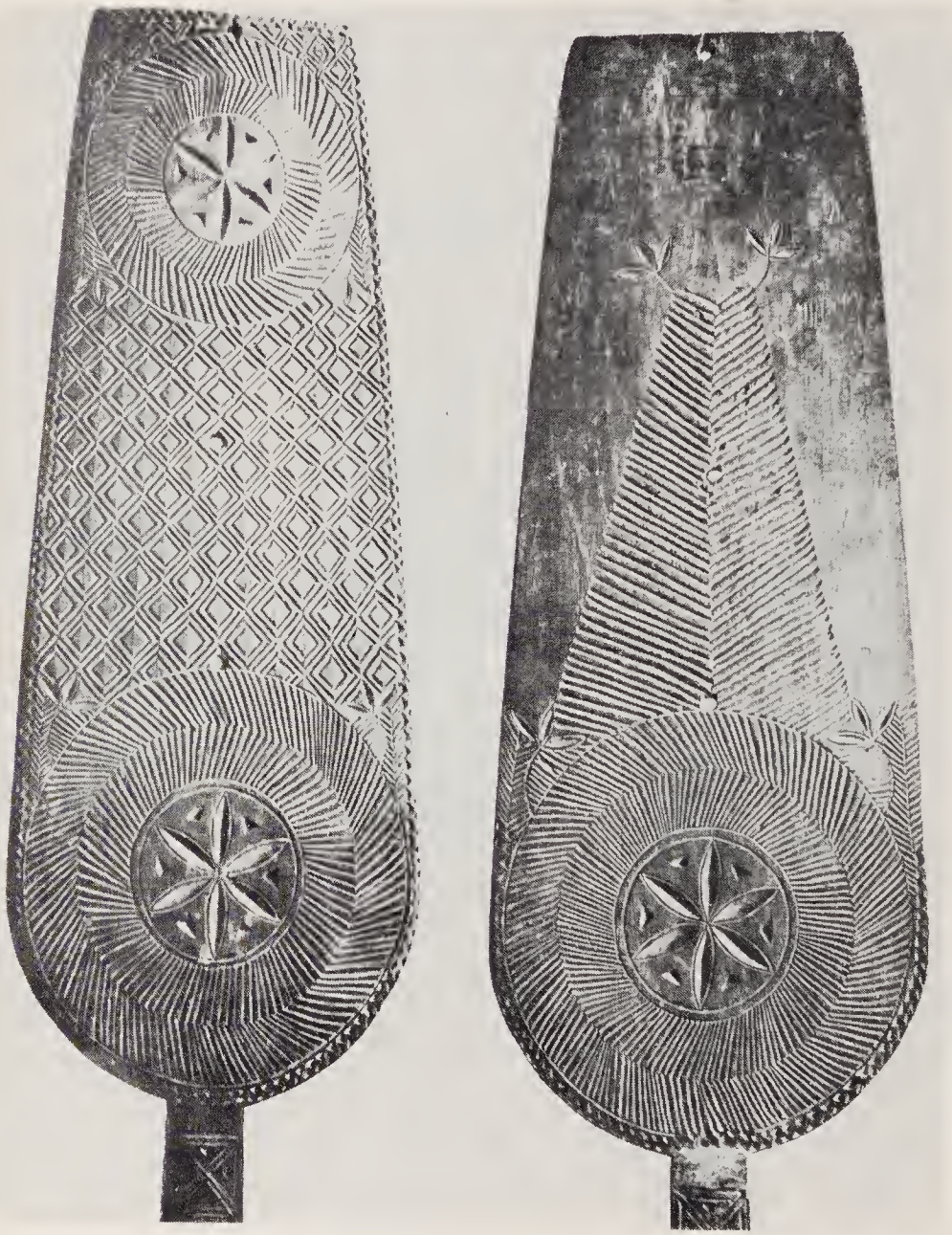


Fig. 25. Both sides of a carved distaff. Solar symbols and life-tree motif. Northeastern Lithuania.

Figs. 26-31. Lithuanian Easter eggs decorated with sunlets.

Jaunas Mėnesėli, mūsų karalėli, tu visados švieti, visados mus linksmini, atneši mums linksmybę, naudą ir gerą laimę. Kad tau Dievas duot pilnystę, man Perkūno karalystę.[7]

(Young moon, our prince, always you shine, always cheer us, always you bring us wealth and happiness. Give him, O God, completion, and unto me the kingdom of Perkūnas.)

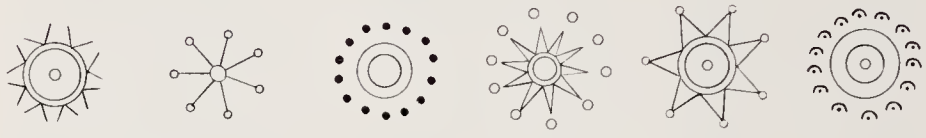


Fig. 32. Fifth century A.D. symbols on the fibulae from East Prussia and Lithuania.

The wheel, the sun, and the moon are continually appearing in prehistoric art in European countries. Beginning with the Neolithic period, i.e. with the dawn of agriculture, the first symbols occur on pottery, showing how far back into the past we can trace the roots of folk art symbolism. Baltic prehistoric art is full of sun, moon, wheel, cross, or swastika motifs (Figs. 32-37).

These same symbolic features are encountered in grave-mound architecture of the prehistoric period throughout the Baltic area. In Lithuania, they have been identified with the period 1200 B.C.-c. 6th century A.D.[8] Such features are circles, wheels, or concentric rings of various sizes expressed in wreaths of stones or earthen terraces. Many examples of such earth-mound architecture, dating back to the Bronze Age, are known from the southeast Baltic area. They remind the student of a concentric circle—the enlargement of a wheel by a series of gradations—which conforms to the method of reiteration, so frequently encountered in folk art and folklore. The earthen tumulus was erected by laying a series of terraces in tiers similar to those of a roof or a pyramid.

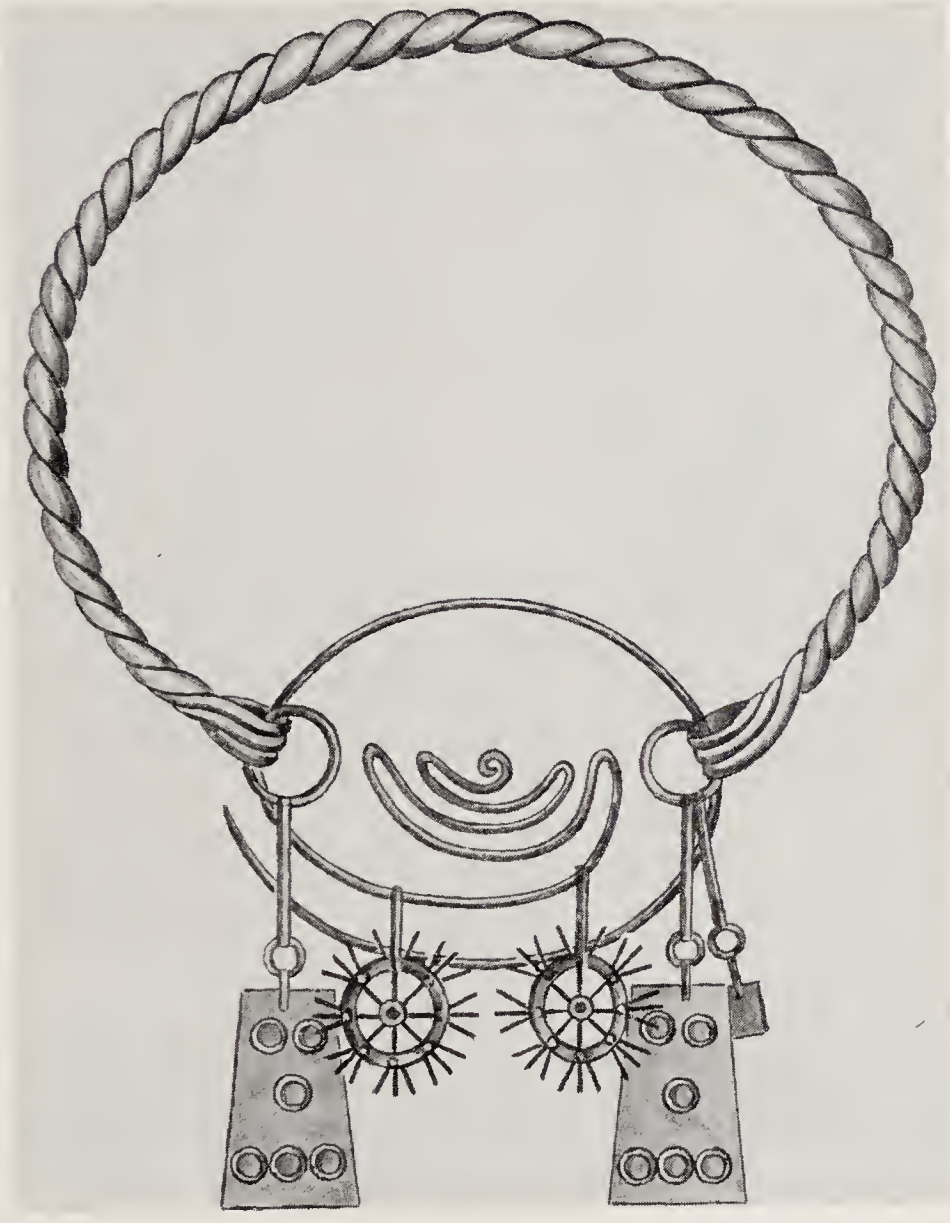


Fig. 33. Bronze necklace of the third to fourth century A.D. Eastern Lithuania. Sunlets and trapezoidal pendants are attached on a wire set in a lunar form.

Fig. 34. Bronze chest ornament from the third to fourth century A.D. Chain is formed of circular and rectangular wheel or sun symbols. At the end of the pendants are seen hanging lunulae—the most characteristic form on prehistoric Lithuanian ornaments. From around Klaipėda in Lithuania.

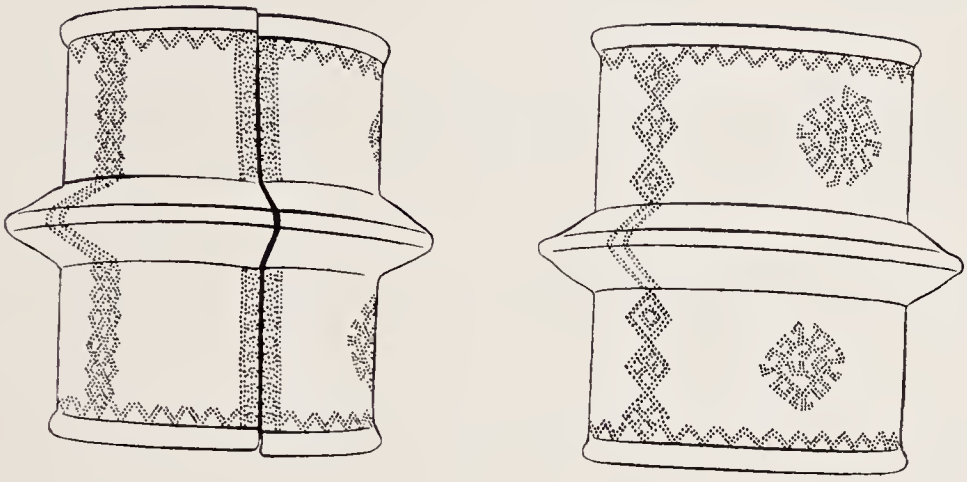


Fig. 35. Bronze armring ornamented with geometric and multi-hooked swastika motifs dating from the tenth to eleventh century A.D. Northern Lithuania.

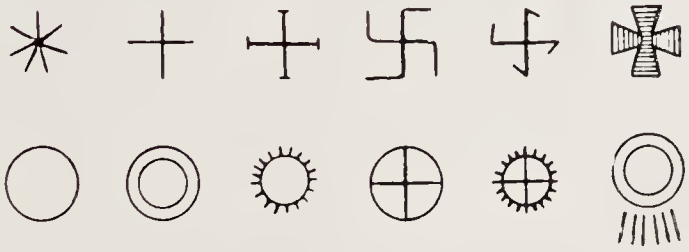


Fig. 36. Cross, swastika, circle, concentric circle and sun motifs engraved on Neolithic pottery from central Germany and dating from the beginning of the second millennium B.C.

Fig. 37. Circle, wheel, sun and moon in Greek geometric art (a) from the eighth century B.C. and in Persian art (b) from the fourth millennium B.C.

All over Europe, tombstone monuments of prehistoric and early historic ages whose symbolism is of the same character have been found. Among the rock carvings of Scandinavia are found those depicting a mass of wheels, concentric rings, and high stelae topped with wheels (Fig. 38a). The large wheels or

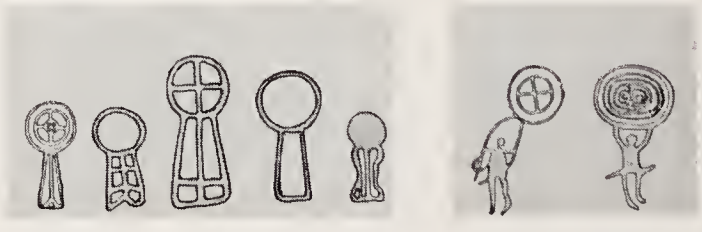


Fig. 38. Scandinavian rock engravings dating from the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age: wheels and concentric circles on stelae and upraised by men.

concentric rings are occasionally shown raised on high by male figures (Fig. 38b).

In southern Europe from the time of the Völkerwanderung —viz., the Visigothic monuments of the 4th-7th centuries A.D. in Spain and southern France—to early historic times in the British Isles and Scandinavia, we find everywhere replicas of a wheel, concentric ring, encircled cross, rosette or plant, or

the motifs of birds and animals. On the Scottish and Irish stone monuments of the 5th-10th century A.D., symbolically related to the Lithuanian crosses, we find figures of male animals, snakes, fish, stylized spears alongside two connected concentric circles, a ring, sun, or cross.[9]

In Sweden, particularly on the Gothic Island, a great many monuments consisting of stone crosses wreathed in a ring, and sometimes containing carved symbols of a cross, circle, rosette and star are found. Many of these date back to the first centuries of the Christian era.[10] Analogous wooden crosses of recent centuries, with a ring encircling the cross arms, have been found on Gothland Island.

In Germany, as in Scandinavia, low and fairly massive stone monuments have been found, in the shape of ring-encircled crosses (Fig. 39). These are of various historical and prehistorical periods but, unfortunately, precise dating is in many cases impossible. Wheels, rosettes, and birds are the symbols most frequently encountered on the stone monuments of Germany.[11]

Fig. 39. Old Norwegian tombstones.

Parallel prehistoric and early historic monuments of western and northern Europe indicate that the most characteristic shapes are stone crosses with a circular wreath, or boulders ornamented with carvings of ring, wheel, concentric circle, spiral or rosette. Monuments of identical type mark graves or stand at crossroads or in the fields to signalize an accidental death. Their symbolism is similar to that of Lithuanian monuments, though many centuries and long distances separated the two types.

Pendants of bronze, silver or gold in the form of a crescent moon are known in the Bronze and especially the Iron Age of Europe from France in the west to the Urals in the east.

2. The Axe

A miniature axe motif is sometimes found in the iron tips of the roofed poles and crosses (Fig. 18). The iron spokes appear to culminate in the shape of an axe, or an axe may be embossed on the spoke. Frequently an axe is placed beside the symbol of lightning—the zig-zag spoke. Two roughly-shaped wooden axes are found as a gable decoration on villagers' houses (Fig. 73.).

The axe symbolizes the power of the sky-deity. In the religion and art of European peoples, axe symbolism goes back to the Stone Age. Already in the Late Stone Age, amber axe amulets were popular in the Baltic area. The axe symbol is also known in the art of ancient Egypt, in the Minoan culture of the island of Crete (Fig. 118), in ancient Greece, and throughout Europe from the Late Stone Age to modern times.

Among the relics of prehistoric Lithuania and Latvia, the miniature axe of iron or bronze is frequently found either alone or as an item of breast ornament (Figs. 151, 152). Similar specimens have been discovered in neighboring countries, particularly among the Teutonic nations, where miniature axes were called "Thor's axlets." Their role in a cult is attested by the fact that they were most often made of unnatural size: either in miniature or in gigantic proportions. Jerome of Prague, a missionary of the time of Vytautas (1431) noted that Lithua-

nians honored not only the sun, but also the iron hammer of rare bulk, by whose aid the sun was said to have been liberated from imprisonment.

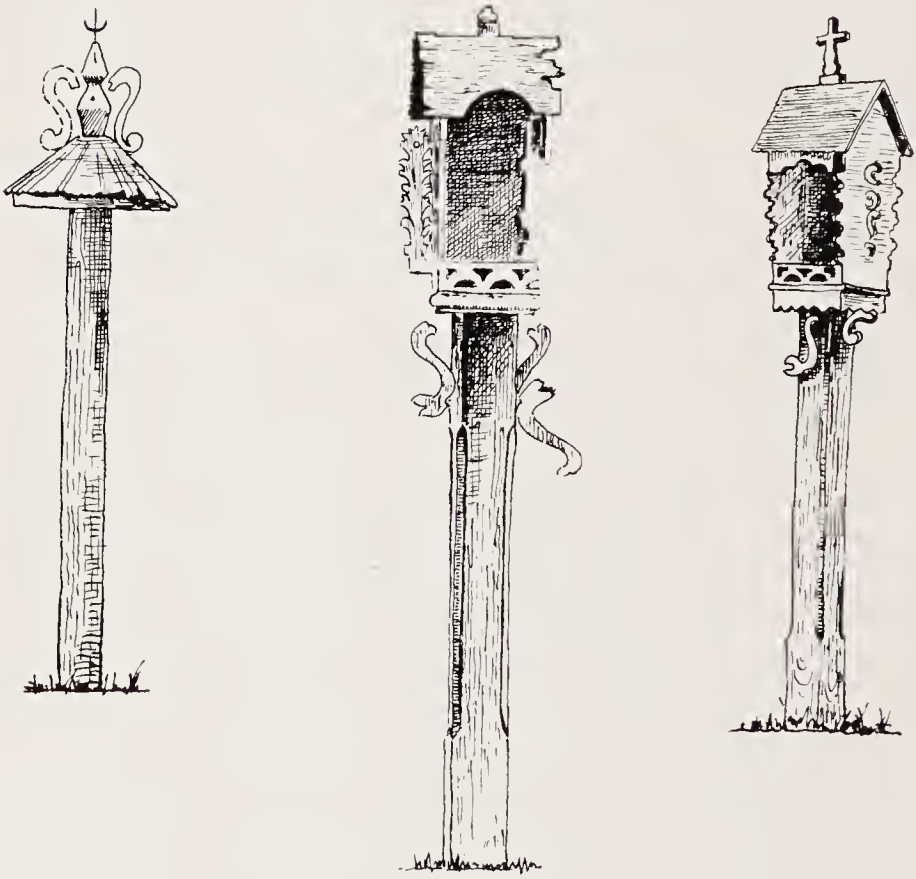
Folk beliefs bear witness to the important role of the axe. Even as late as the 19th century, Lithuanians equipped their dead with an axe for protection against evil powers, and it was generally believed that the axe is one of the best defensive weapons against the devil. As a life-stimulating symbol, the axe is laid under the bed of a woman in labor, on the sill which the newly-wedded couple must cross, or on the doorstep of a stable lest cows be barren or dry up. To protect crops from the hail, the axe was set up in the fields, blade side up, or thrown toward the sky. During sowing, they are thrown on the field.

Folklore attributes the axe to the Lithuanian sky-deity, Perkūnas, as it is attributed to the Slavic Perun, the Germanic Thor, the Roman Jove, the Indic Indra, the Hittite Teshub.

3. Reptiles

Representatives of the animal world vividly clarify the character of pre-Christian symbolism. Many examples show reptiles or snakes clinging to both sides of the pole, or to the roof, or on both sides of the cross (Figs. 40-44). In a number of monuments of a more recent period, the artistic forms are but remnants of reptile worship: frequently, spirals on two or all four sides reflect reptilian characteristics of an earlier period. Snakes are found carved on distaffs (Figs. 45,46), on the corners of villagers' houses (Fig. 47), or painted on Easter eggs (Figs. 48-50).

In West Lithuania, along the East Prussian frontier, and in Prussian Lithuania of the mid-19th century, very valuable and interesting tomb monuments are found in Protestant cemeteries. These are neither crosses nor roofed poles, but monuments that recall the shapes of toads, reptiles, or lizards of a scarcely recognizable type (Figs. 51-58). Some of these are combined with motifs of plants or flowers. For instance, a lily, tulip, or small cross replaces the animal's head. Other departures from a purely naturalistic representation are also



Figs. 40-42. Lithuanian roofed poles ornamented with carved snakes on the sides.

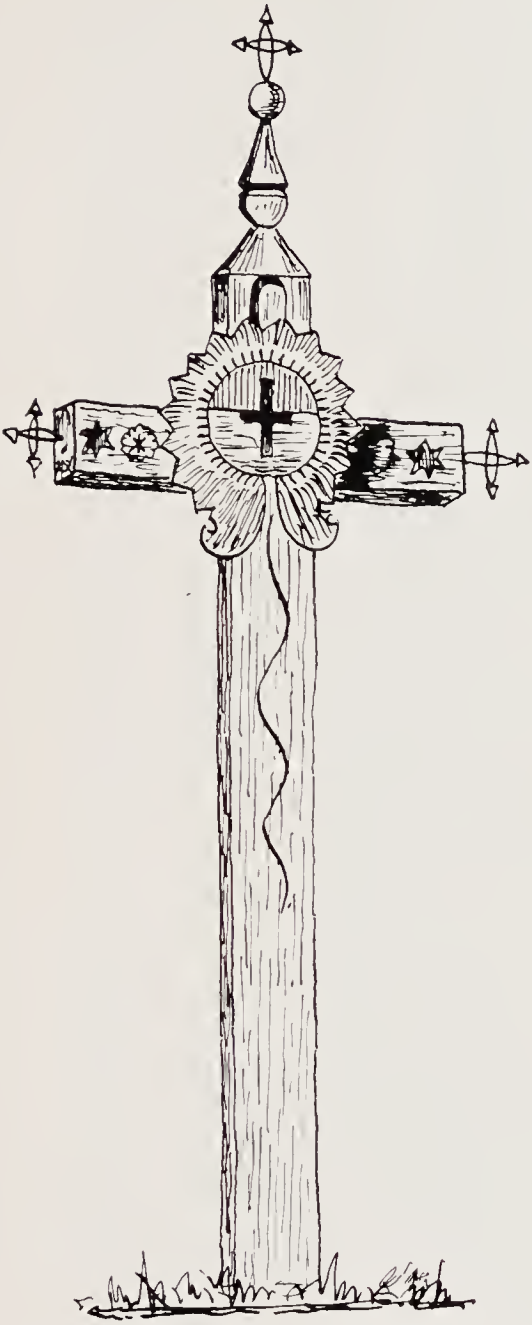


Fig. 43. Wooden cross with a painted snake in the middle of the pole. Southeastern Lithuania.

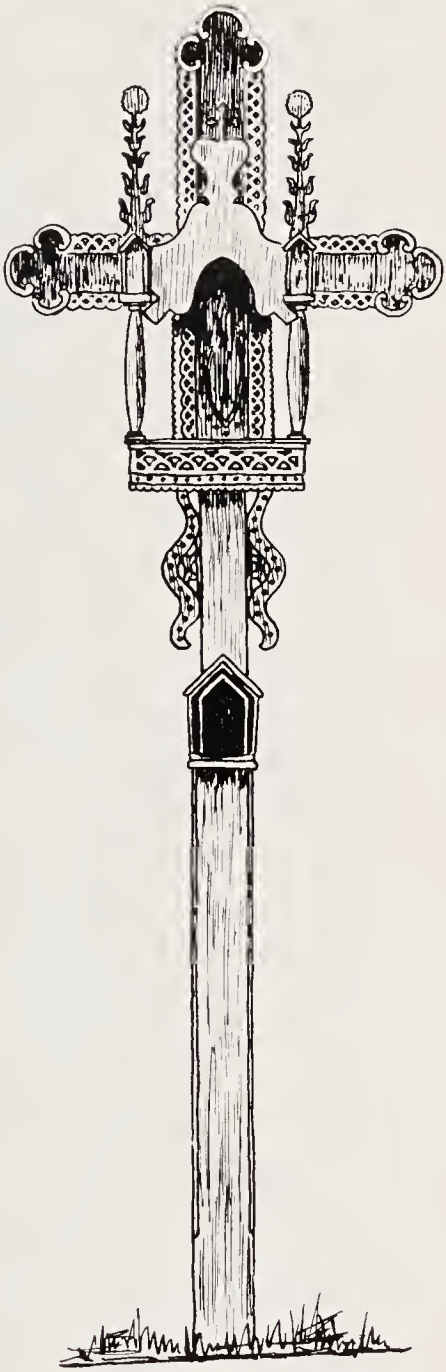


Fig. 44. Wooden cross with carved snakes on both sides of the pole. Eastern Lithuania near Utena.

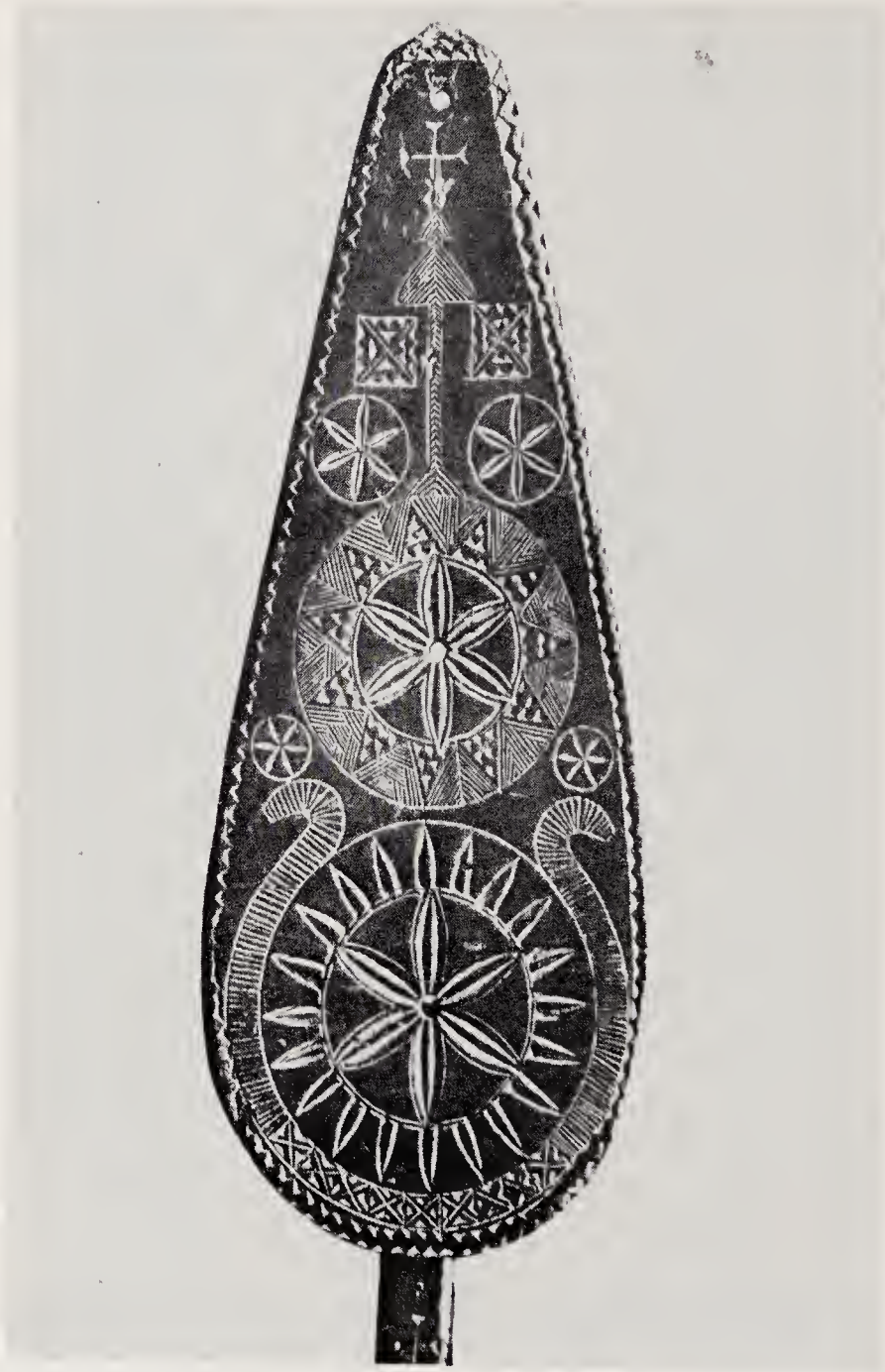


Fig. 45. Snakes in association with solar symbols carved on a distaff from eastern Lithuania.

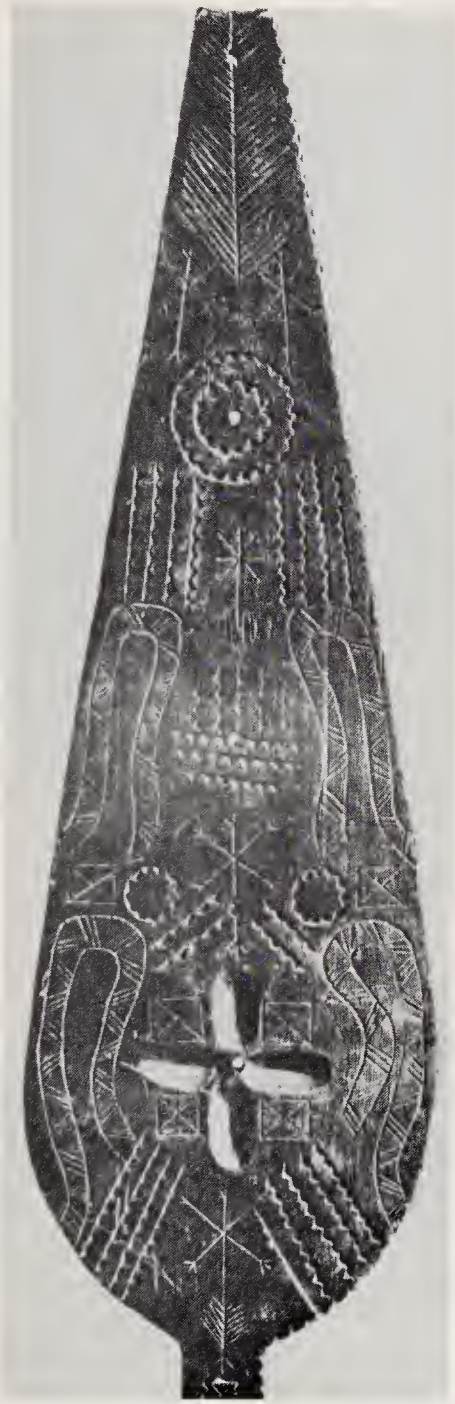
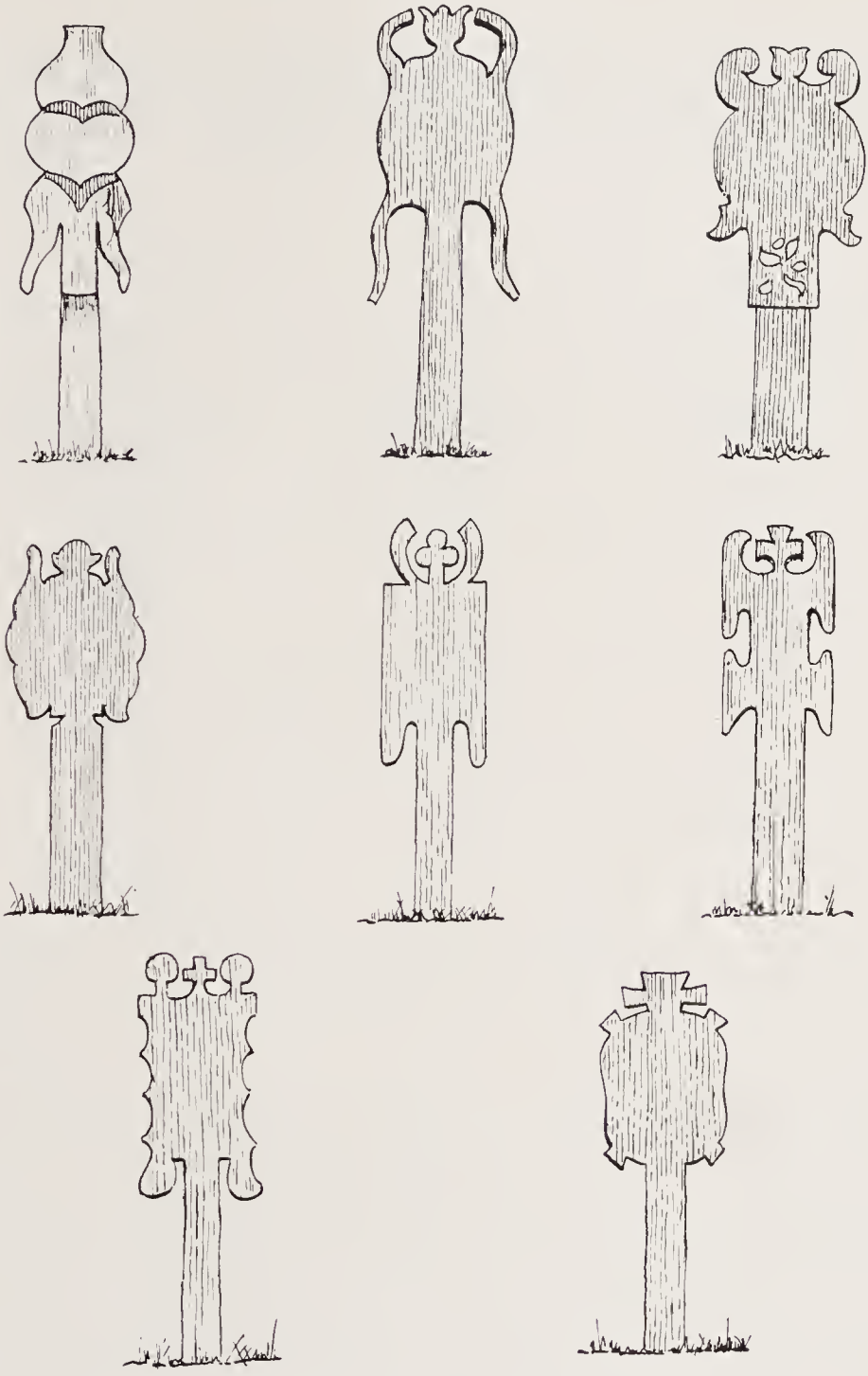


Fig. 46. Snakes in association with solar symbols on a carved distaff. Eastern Lithuania.

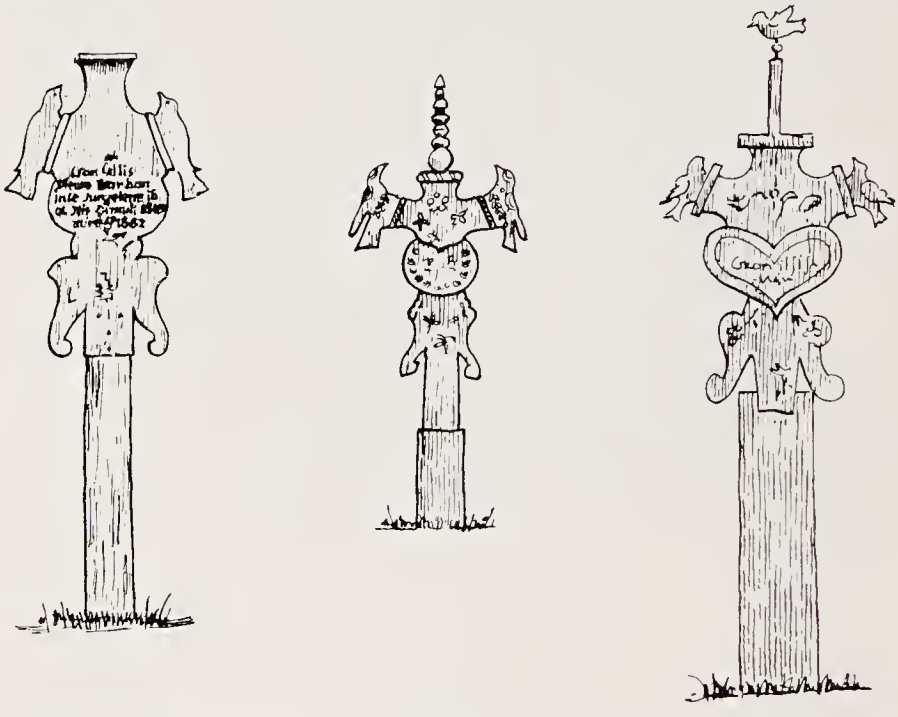
Fig. 47. Snakes decorating the corner of a farm house in northeastern Lithuania.

Figs. 48-50. Lithuanian Easter eggs decorated with snakes, and sun and moon symbols.



Figs. 51-58. Reptile-shaped wooden tombstones from nineteenth century cemeteries in Lithuania Minor (Southwestern Lithuania).

observable, e.g., limbs resembling a toad's legs growing from the lower part of a lizard-reptilian type. The center of the board is frequently left blank for the inscription, and birds adorn either the sides or the roof (Figs. 59-61).



Figs. 59-61. Wooden tombstones carved in bird and toad leg motifs from the nineteenth century cemeteries in Lithuania Minor.

Such tomb-monuments of the reptile type are among the rarest archaic treasures of Europe. Only in Germany and Poland (around Danzig) have the toad motifs survived.

The ancient Lithuanians paid particular attention to the žaltys (harmless green snake), toad, and other reptiles and lizards. Figures of these animals still encountered in Lithuanian folk art recall the respect bestowed on them in antiquity. Though reptiles and lizards have practically disappeared from modern Lithuanian folk customs and beliefs, we have abundant testimony to the prominence they enjoyed in the past. Beginning with the historical records of the 14th century, snakes and toads receive frequent mention. Foreign chroniclers were

impressed with the unusual respect paid by Lithuanians to various reptiles. They were kept inside homes, under the bed or in the corner, and fed with milk. A Jesuit missionary reported in 1604:

> The people have reached such a stage of madness that they believe that deity exists in reptiles. Therefore they carefully safeguard them, lest someone injure the reptiles kept inside their homes. Superstitiously they believe that harm would come to them, should anyone show disrespect to these reptiles. It sometimes happens that reptiles are encountered sucking milk from cows. Some of us (monks) occasionally have tried to pull one off, but invariably the farmer would plead in vain to dissuade us ... When pleading failed, the man would seize the reptile with his hands and run away to hide it.[12]

To the end of the 19th century, scientific and other writings continued to amass information regarding the unusual significance attached to žaltys and other reptiles.

In folk beliefs and folklore, the žaltys is associated with sexual life. (We may recall, for instance, the well-known legend of "the queen of snakes.") Encountering a snake prophesied either marriage or birth. In general, it was deemed fortunate to come across a reptile, just as it used to be considered a blessing to have a žaltys in one's home, where it had a privileged place: under the bed of a married couple or a place of honor at the table. The žaltys was said to bring happiness and prosperity. The element of fertility is essential to the concept of prosperity, and the žaltys was supposed to ensure the fertility of the soil and the increase of the family. The wealth-bringing creature, called aitvaras, is often depicted with the head of a žaltys, and with a long tail which emits light as it flies through the air.[13] To this very day in Lithuania, rooftop cross-beams are occasionally topped with carvings of reptilian shape, to ensure the well-being of the family. This mystical and gift-bestowing creature is known to Lithuanian folklore as "the sentinel of the gods" (Dievų siuntinėlis).[14] The ancient Lithuanians would never harm a žaltys. If, while mowing a field, they noticed one lying in the grass, they refrained from mowing that particular spot.[15] Žaltys is loved by the sun, say

the Lithuanians. It is often found lying in the grass or winding itself around the trunk of a tree to bask in the sunshine. It is of course a crime to kill it, and a proverb says: "Do not leave a dead žaltys on a field; bury it. The sight of a dead žaltys would cause the sun to cry."[16]

Testimony regarding the cult of toads is not so ample as that concerning the snakes. Nevertheless, it reaches back to the early part of the 14th century. Writing in 1326, Peter von Dusburg, chronicler of the Teutonic Order, included a fair characterization of the pre-Christian religion of the Prussians and Lithuanians:

> And inasmuch as they did not know of (the Christian) God, it so happened that they worshipped the entire creature-world instead of God, namely: the sun, moon and stars, the thunder, birds, even the four-legged animals in-including toads. They also had holy groves, sacred fields and waters.[17]

Salomon Henning, writing in the second half of the 16th century, similarly described the "paganism" of Lithuanians and their kinsmen:

> They practised secretly their paganism; they adored the sun, stars, moon, fire, water, springs; they held snakes and evil toads to be deities, which (as I myself witnessed in part) were fat and puffed-up and, whenever they were cut in half or struck or tossed, exuded much milk from their bodies.[18]

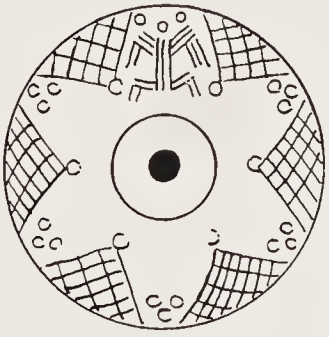
The very significant role of the toad in religion was in part the result of long observation by farmers of the usefulness of the toad in the fertilization of the soil.

But historic sources as well as surviving folk customs and beliefs disclose also the firmly rooted pre-Christian veneration for those reptiles which evokes a feeling of mystery: these creatures which periodically drop their old skin and undergo a sort of rejuvenation. There was an instinctive feeling that such reptiles were full of dynamic power and vitality. The very name for "snake" in Lithuanian—gyvatė—is clearly associated with the term for "life" or "viability, vitality"

(Lith. gyvybė, gyvata). The "divinity" associated with žaltys is nothing but this mysterious power of life. The ancient Lithuanians respected and venerated, not the reptile's outer body, but the viable force inhabiting that body—the same force which, when observed in other animals, plants or human beings, appears not so concentrated as in the petite body of a snake or toad.

In addition to their significant and awesome status as carriers of the life-force, reptiles were also credited with embodying the souls of ancestors. Only inhabiting, like living quarters, their reptilian hosts, were beings like penates Dii (God's messengers) to quote the Polish chronicler Długosz of the 15th century. Nor was this understood as a personal reincarnation of one entity in another body; it was visualized as inextinguishable life-force, capable of moving from body to body. Thus in reptiles encountered as living bodies or represented in art, the holy life-giving force is expressed in a perceptible shape.

Depiction of reptiles is frequent in prehistoric European art. Already in the Danubian culture of the 3d millenium B.C., drawings are found of reptiles on pottery[19] (Fig. 62). Figures of snakes occur on neolithic whorls of clay, on axes of stone or bronze, in Scandinavian rock pictures, on Iron Age pottery (Fig. 63), and elsewhere. Snake motifs are frequent in the ornaments of the Bronze and Iron Age. They often appear in pre-



Figs. 62-63. Toad motif on prehistoric pottery. Fig. 62: Neolithic pot with an incision of toad form. Second half of the third millenniurn B.C., Danubian I culture in Czechoslovakia. Fig. 63: Figure of a toad on the bottom of an Early Iron Age pot from Central Germany.

geometric, geometric and Corinthian art of Greece (Fig. 64). In the Baltic countries, the snake motif is particularly frequent on the fibulae and bracelets of the 9th-11th centuries A.D.

Fig. 64. A Corinthian (Greek) vase showing a snake in association with rosettes and eagles.

4. Birds

The birds were dynamic intermediaries between heaven and earth, linking the deity with mankind. Their mysterious power of flying from great heights toward earth, their habit of alighting on growing things, their remarkable capacity for uttering distinct sounds that variously affect human feelings—all combined to make them very real representatives of the vital powers. Birds, moreover, were also thought to embody reincarnated souls, i.e., life-powers. They were, indeed, "God's little birds" (Lith: Dievo paukšteliai).

Not all birds, however, were of the same type; some were connected with the powers of fertility, while others were related to the idea of reincarnation. In the first class were such birds as the swan, the stork and the cock; in the second, the cuckoo, pigeon, nightingale, oriole, swallow, crow, falcon and owl, which were considered "soul-carriers" or possessors of prophetic powers.

In this connection we might consider the several interpretations placed on bird calls. The cry of the cuckoo, for example, sometimes predicted misfortune; at others, it prophesied happy events, such as weddings. The cock, on the other hand, was thought to predict changes of weather.

All these large and small feathered friends are familiar to Lithuanian folksong. Frequently such songs tell of a mother's or sister's reincarnation as a cuckoo; a brother's or swain's transformation into a dove, falcon, or starling. Beginning with the 13th century, chroniclers mention Lithuanian respect for birds and stress their oracular powers.

Birds are found carved not only on tombstones, roofed poles, and crosses, but also on rooftops, dowry chests, doors, windows, spinning wheels, laundering beaters, etc. (Figs. 65-66, 71). In many representations we find trees or flowers with birds on either side, just as they are found on both lateral sides of crosses or roofed poles. Similar positions are assumed by birds in the folk art of other European peoples, e.g., everywhere we find a cock on a willow or may tree.

This avian motif in art and religion has sources deep in the past. In the art of central and northern Europe, the earliest bird motifs have been traced as far back as the Bronze Age. They go even further back in the monuments of Crete, Egypt, and the Near East.

In prehistoric European art, birds, wherever reproduced —on tombstones, ornaments or rocks—are shown resting on both sides of a tree, on both laterals of a post, or singly on top of a monument, pole, or obelisk. Birds are inseparable accompaniments of circles, concentric rings, horses, or bulls' horns. They are pictured standing on both sides of a circle, or sitting in a circle on the rim of a wheel, or on its spokes. (Examine, e.g., the Hallstatt and Greek geometric art.) In brief, the celestial character of birds is stressed. Sometimes

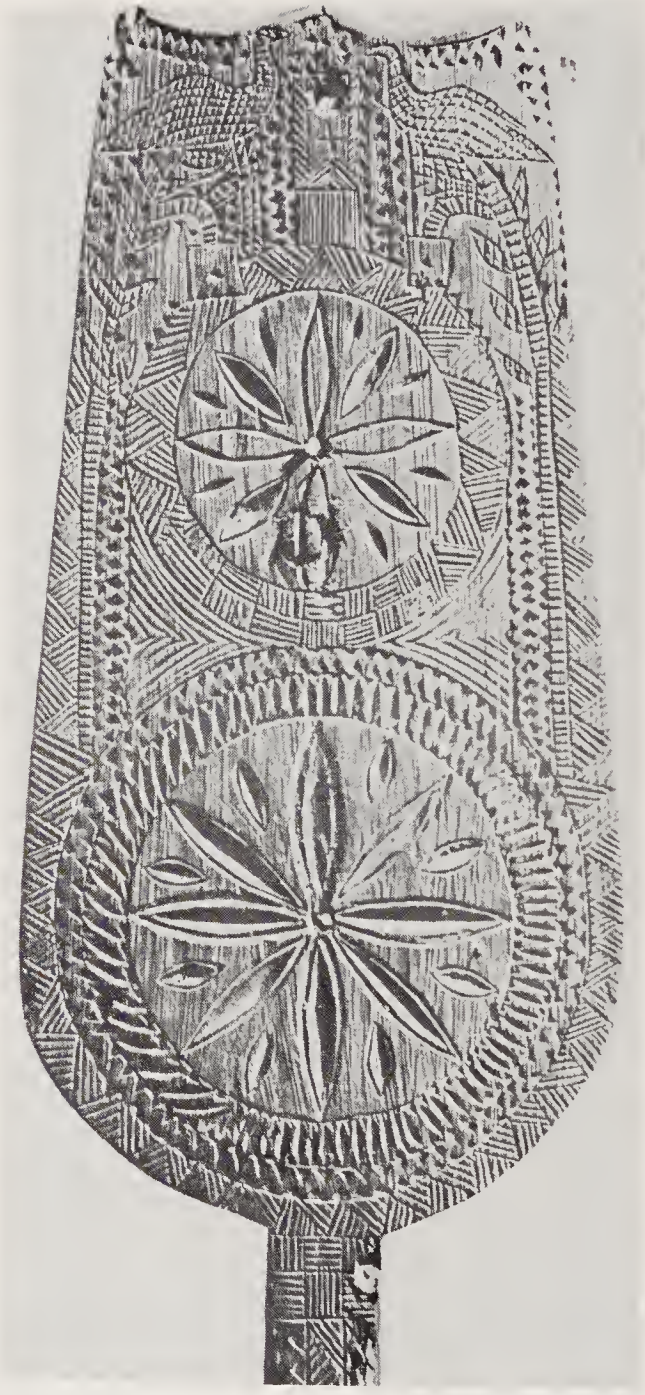


Fig. 65. Carved distaff from eastern Lithuania with two birds (upper part) in association with solar symbols.

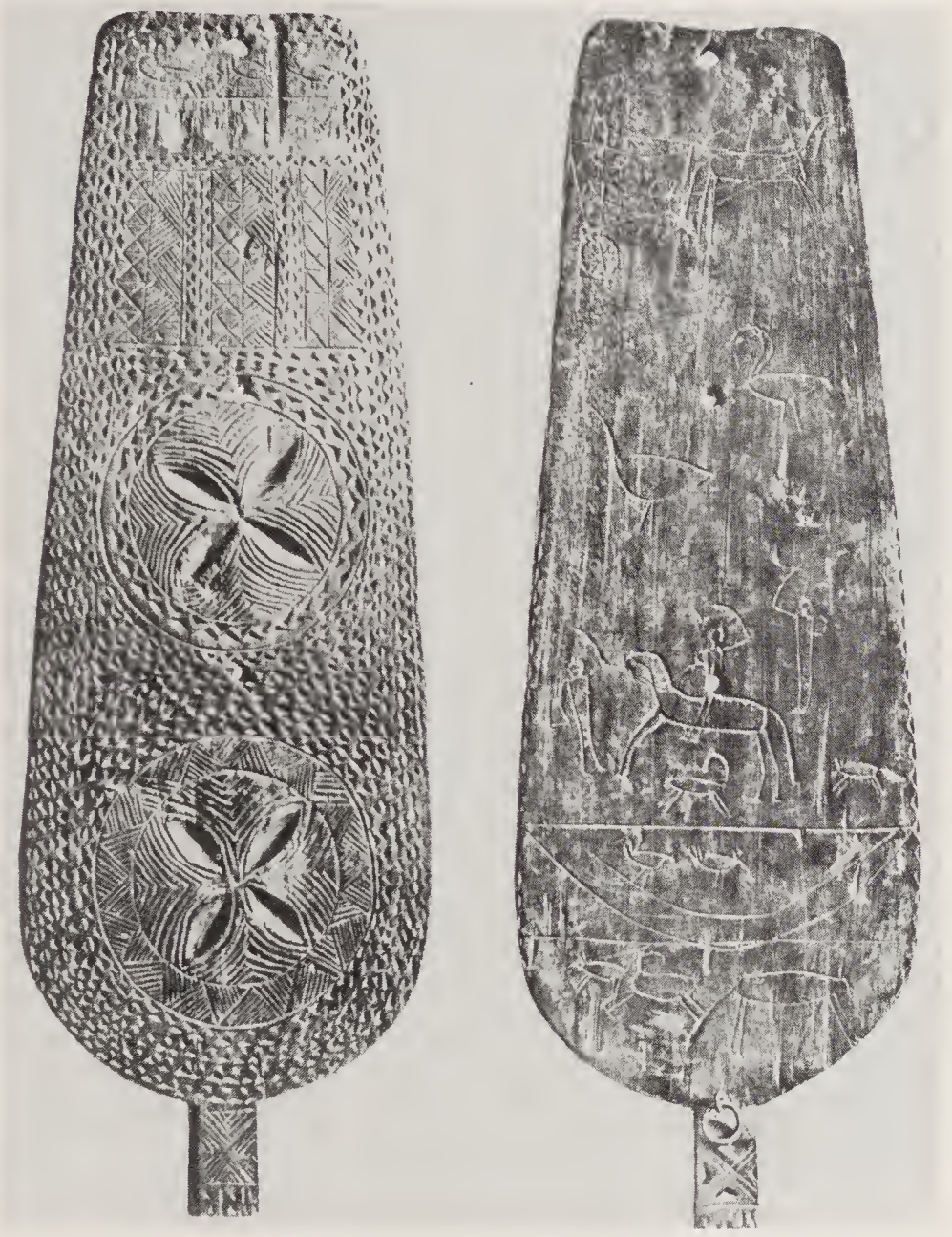


Fig. 66. Carved distaff from eastern Lithuania, 1847. On the front side: solar, geometric and animal motifs; on the back side: a horse drawn four-wheeled chariot with a horned figure seated in it, possibly the god Perkūnas, water bird and horned animal figures, male figure riding horse with upraised arm holding sword or bow and two other human figures with upraised arms. The engravings strikingly recall the engravings on rocks and pottery of prehistoric northern Europe.

a wheel or swastika is traced on the bird's body, and its head is shown as being radiant (Figs. 67, 79).

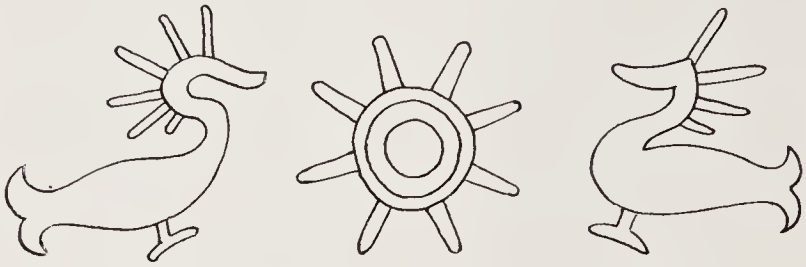


Fig. 67. Central European Hallstatt birds from the seventh century B.C., with radiating heads and in association with the sun.

In prehistoric art, as well as in folk art and folklore, the depiction of water birds is very frequent. (Cf. the birds on north European Bronze Age vessels, razors, etc; the birds of Etruscan, Hallstatt in central Europe and Greek geometric art; and the swans carved as gable decorations on Dutch houses up to the present day). The bird's alighting, whether on water, treetop or obelisk was a symbolic representation of the union between earth and water. The swan, that beautiful white bird with a curved neck, attracted special attention and fitted very well into the system of symbols. From earliest times, the swan and the stork have been thought of as bringing babies. If a swan alights on the water, "the water gets muddy," says Lithuanian folklore, and this is the symbol of the meeting of swain and maiden:

Atlėkė gulbonėlių pulkelis,
Sudrumstė vandenėlį...
Bijaus, berneli, bijaus, jaunasai,
Motulei pasakyti.[20]

(There came a flock of swans,
They riled the little stream...
I fear, beloved, I fear, dear one,
To tell my mother.)

Folk art simply continues the bird tradition of thousands of years. Though birds carved on tombstones may symbolize the reincarnation of a soul in a bird's body, we might more accurately affirm that the bird symbolizes the cosmic dynamism and inextinguishability of life.

Like reptiles, birds bring prosperity to men. The aitvaras who brings wealth in Lithuanian folktales, is usually represented as a bird, especially a cock. He is pictured hiding beneath a millstone or openly sitting on top of it, the kernels falling from his mouth as the woman grinds her grain.

In the prophetic singing of birds, particularly of the cock, people sensed a relationship to the rhythm of nature with its perennial changes and rejuvenations. Ancient man, in endowing a species of animal life with symbolism, chose one in which he sensed a rhythm, reminiscent in one way or another, with that of the universe. So the dynamism of bird and reptile was particularly attractive to primitive man.

5. Horse, Bull, and Goat

Nineteenth century sources tell of tombstones in the Protestant cemeteries of Lithuania Minor capped with carved horseheads. Horseheads on rooftops of older structures have been familiar sights in Lithuania until very recently (Figs. 70, 99-109). Such figures are encountered occasionally in other countries, particularly in northern Europe. They adorn not only rooftops but spindles, distaffs (Fig. 110), looms, newlyweds' bedposts, chairs, etc.

Such representation of horseheads in folk art is closely associated with religious traditions in folk customs: with horse skulls elevated on high poles, hung on fences, or placed under the roof, above the hearth and in other "sensitive" places, where it was thought to be helpful. The skull of a horse (more rarely of a bull or goat) elevated on a post or otherwise strategically placed, was thought to assure human and animal well-being, fecundity and good crops, and to protect both men and animals from pestilence, diseases, parasites, and the evil eye.

Both the horsehead (signifying the horse) and the entire horse figure, as folklore richly attests, used to carry special

Figs. 68-76. Gable decoration on Lithuanian farm houses: rams (68), horns (69), horses (70), birds (71), head of a he-goat, horns with birds sitting on top and plant motif (72), axes (73), stylized roosters (74, 75) and stylized snakes (76).

significance. In Lithuanian folksong, the steed is the object of great love and admiration, and a living horse is considered endowed with god-like powers.

Should we glance into the distant past, we should be able to trace a predominant significance attached to the horse of prehistoric Europe. Respect for the horse is generally conceded to have been a specifically Indo-European characteristic which has survived very clearly among the Baltic, Slavic, and Indo-Iranian peoples. In the art of prehistoric Europe, the horse is one of the most frequently encountered representations. It was usually associated with certain other symbolic figures; like the bird, it was connected with wheels, concentric rings, circles, suns, moon, and snakes. The horse is symbolically represented in carvings, drawings, bronze etchings, stone cuttings and ceramic ware, and is found thus in southern, central and northern Europe among Bronze Age and later relics (Figs. 77-79).

The horse played a great part in religious ritual. His most important role is associated with the ritual of the year's seasons: he is sacrificed. During the season of rejuvenation, he is the object of great attention. In Lithuania, horses were bathed and adorned on St. George's Day (23 April). The fecundity innate in the horse is not limited to the animal world but may enter the sphere of human life. The horse, especially the shining white horse, is symbolical of love and happiness. In Latvian and Lithuanian mythological songs the horse, or more frequently, two horses, are inseparable from the sky-bodies, particularly the sun. In such songs they are called "the Sons of God."

In European religious symbolism, the horse has been gaining prominence ever since the Bronze Age. But the bull and the he-goat were predecessors of the horse in this connection. At the beginning of the agricultural period, the deity of the sky was symbolized by the bull, who claimed attention by virtue of his great vitality, physical strength and powerful voice. Among the Hittites and the Babylonians, the bull was associated with the deity of the air, and deity itself frequently assumed the shape of a bull. In their art, the deity of air is pictured mounted on the bull, and holding in his hand a lightning bolt, topped with sun and moon. In Egyptian, Minoan, and Mycenaean

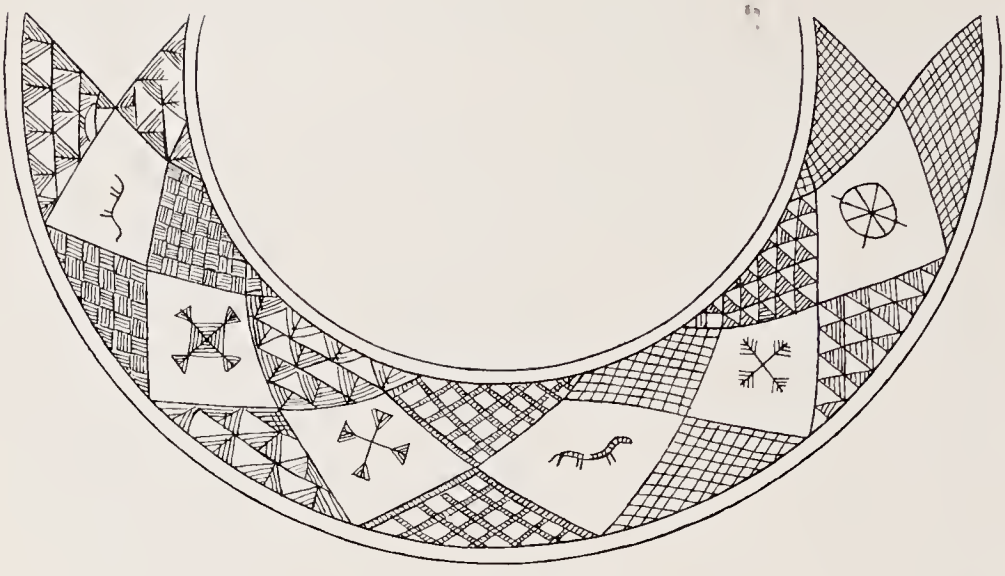


Fig. 77. Horse and sun motif on a second century A.D. pot from Prussian Lithuania.

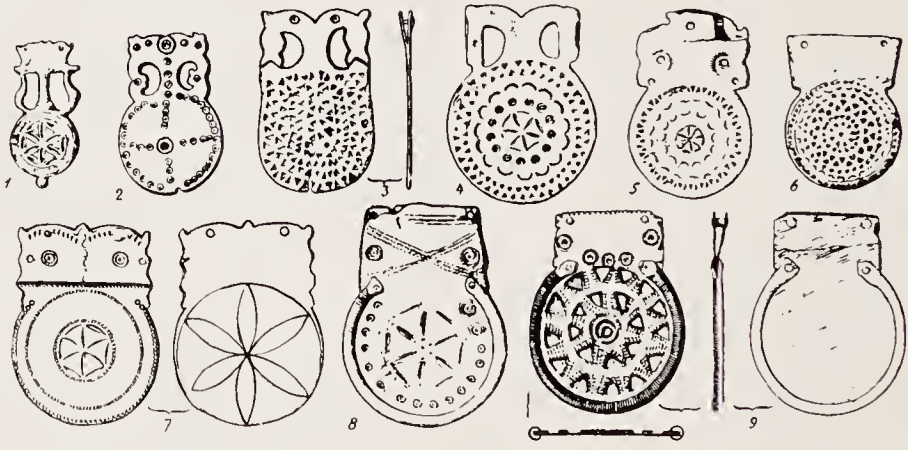
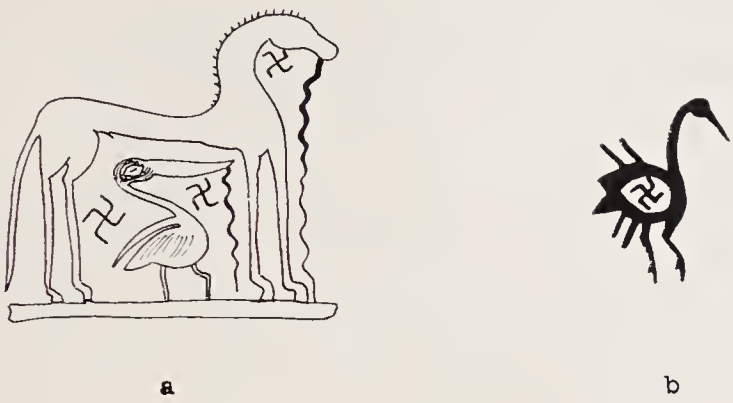


Fig. 78. Horse heads in association with sun symbols on bronze belt tongues from the late Roman period in the Rhein-Main area, Germany.



a b

Fig. 79. Analogies from Greek geometric art. Horse and pelican in association with snakes and swastikas (a), water bird and swastika (b).

art, the bull's head is associated with satellites; and axes, circles, rings, rosettes, and stars are painted on the bull's forehead or between his horns.

A similar association of the bull with sky-deities is seen in the prehistoric art of Europe. In central Europe, clay figurines of bulls, frequently ornamented by pit impressions, are known from the 3rd millennium B.C. in Danubian I and later periods.[21] The Scandinavian rock engravings, presumably dating back to the Bronze Age, show pits or rings cut between the bull's horns.

The significance of a bull with a white star on his forehead has not disappeared from the Lithuanian villager's observations to this day. Bull horns or bull heads are still found as roof ornaments alongside the horseheads among both northern European and Mediterranean peoples.

Along with the bull, the goat made a significant appearance in religious rites. In Lithuania, the goat (ožys) was the energetic escort of Perkūnas, the Thunder. In Lithuanian folklore the goat is well known as a symbol of virile power (the oželis of songs), as a weather prophesying animal, and as a sacrificial object. Folksong refrains retain traces of this role:

Tu, oželi, žilbarzdėli	(Thou little goat, thou greybeard,
Auk, auk, auk,	Grow, grow, grow—
Dievuks mūsų tavęs	Our God for thee
Lauk, lauk, lauk...	Waits, waits, waits...)[22]

The bull, the goat, and the horse have been dominant symbols of the male element in the religion of peasants since the Neolithic period, and they have survived in folk art to this day. They may be termed the central and most naturalistic figures of symbolic art. The wheel, circle, swastika, sun, moon, and birds represented the rhythm, the activity of the heavenly element, of the abstract deity of the sky. The figures of bull, goat, and horse were associated, on the other hand, with concrete visualization of the male deity.

6. The Sky-Deity

The above mentioned symbols are conceived as pertaining to the sky-deity. All of them are "divine," "heavenly"; they belong to the god, the sky. They are connected with each other because of the principle which forms them all: likeness to the sky, which combines in itself inexhaustible energy, rhythm, light and sound.

The sky-deity itself was visualized both as (a) an abstract entity of the cosmos, with all its expressive phenomena and natural elements, transmitting its activity to the terrestrial world, and (b) as a personified entity.

God is where the sky is. In the Baltic languages, as in the old Indic, the meaning of "sky," "god" and "light" are inseparable. In the old Lithuanian, Latvian, and Old Prussian languages, dievas 'god' means also 'the sky,' 'the vault of heaven.' In the Finno-Ugrian language, this word, borrowed from the Baltic, has the same old meaning, 'the vault of heaven' (Finnish taivas, Estonian taevas, taivas, Livian tēvas, Lappian daivas). Sky was called dievs by the Latvians. In many old Lithuanian idioms, the word dievas signifies not the being but the place. There remain some old forms of the locative case, for instance: "He has already gone dievop" (i.e., 'to heaven,' 'to the kingdom of light'); "You will be happy dieviep" (i.e., 'in the heaven'). The Latvians say: "Saule iet dievu" ('The sun is going over the sky'). The various sky bodies and phenome-

na are called in Lithuanian by the name of "god" (dievas): Perkūnas, the Thunder, Dievas or Dievaitis; the moon, Dievaitis; the rainbow, Dievuliukas; the sun, dievo dukrytė 'daughter of god.' This meaning goes back into ancient times, as is attested by old Indic dyaus 'the sky' which is also a masculine Vedic deity, by the Greek Zeus and the Latin diūs, dies.

The Lithuanian sky-deity (personified by Perkūnas) or as impersonal thunder, made itself felt through movements over the firmament, through light and sound. It affects the deity of the soil, it encourages her giving birth, and effectively combats death and evil. The first thunder in the spring moves the earth to action: all life revives, the grass begins to grow rapidly, grains take root, trees turn green.

In popular fancy, Perkūnas, also named Dundulis (the Thunderer), is pictured as a grey bearded old man with an axe in one hand who traverses the sky with great noise in a fiery two wheeled chariot, dragged by his companion, the goat. When thunder is heard, a proverb says, "God is coming—the wheels are striking fire." The horned figure riding in a chariot dragged by a horse, as it is engraved on one of the eastern Lithuanian distaffs dating from 1847, is possibly a representation of Perkūnas (Fig. 66).

According to old beliefs, the axes dropped by Perkūnas (i.e., the stone axes from the Neolithic) possess a peculiar power of fecundity. Analogous powers are attributed to the skulls of the horse, the bull, or the he-goat. Great power is thought to reside in an object which has been struck by lightning—the touch of Perkūnas. Every flash of lightning, therefore, was conceived of as the firing of God's archer.[23]

B. Symbols of the Earth-Deity and the Concept of the Life-Tree

The grey, peaceful, but mighty earth could not be represented by the same symbolism as the multicolored, irresistably dynamic and thundering sky, shooting lightning across the horizon. The dynamism of the male element was matched by the earth's great power of giving birth.

The entire living world bears testimony to the earth's blessings. Everything born of earth is brimming with life forces granted by the earth. The tree, the flower, the stone,

and man—all are born from the earth. All are equally endowed with the strength of the earth, though in each life, all assume different aspects and forms. Because of the uniform nature of this life force, all living creatures and plants feel closely related.

The great meaning of life-giving earth was deeply conceived in the religious life of the ancient Lithuanians. But here we rely not so much on an examination of folk art as on a scrutiny of folklore, customs and historical sources. Reconstructed on the basis of all this evidence, the emphasis on the deity of earth will be seen to balance the importance assigned to the deity of the sky.

But the birth-giving, female element is practically invisible in art; rather, it must be felt. Only its fruit, the plant rising from the soil, is depicted clearly. The earth itself is sometimes represented in folk art in the shape of a heart or a plant pot.

1. Plants

All plant motifs, from the simplest three leaves or three branches to the richly-clad leafy, budding or fruit-displaying trees are the response to the male element's action by the miracle of earth.

The Lithuanian folk art is profuse with plant motifs. They are the most frequent along with concentric circles and segmented stars. On both lateral sides of the cross are shown either a flower or a tree, and plants are also depicted on both cross arms. Along the shores of the Nemunas in the area between Kaunas and Raseiniai, the sun-ring of the cross radiates plant motifs (Figs. 80-87). In the graveyards of Prussian Lithuania, where tombstones are not associated with crosses or roofed poles, the low monuments of wood are shaped like trees or other plants. Similar wooden monuments are found in the Protestant graveyards of Latvia.[24] Such plant, tree, and flower motifs are observable in the graveyards of many European nations; for instance, in Germany, where plant motifs are found hewn in metal tombstones.

Plant motifs were deemed appropriate on tomb monuments, for they stress the irrepressability of the life force. The fable of Cinderella, e.g., mentions a nut tree growing on the

Fig. 80. Plant motifs of the sun rings on Lithuanian crosses.

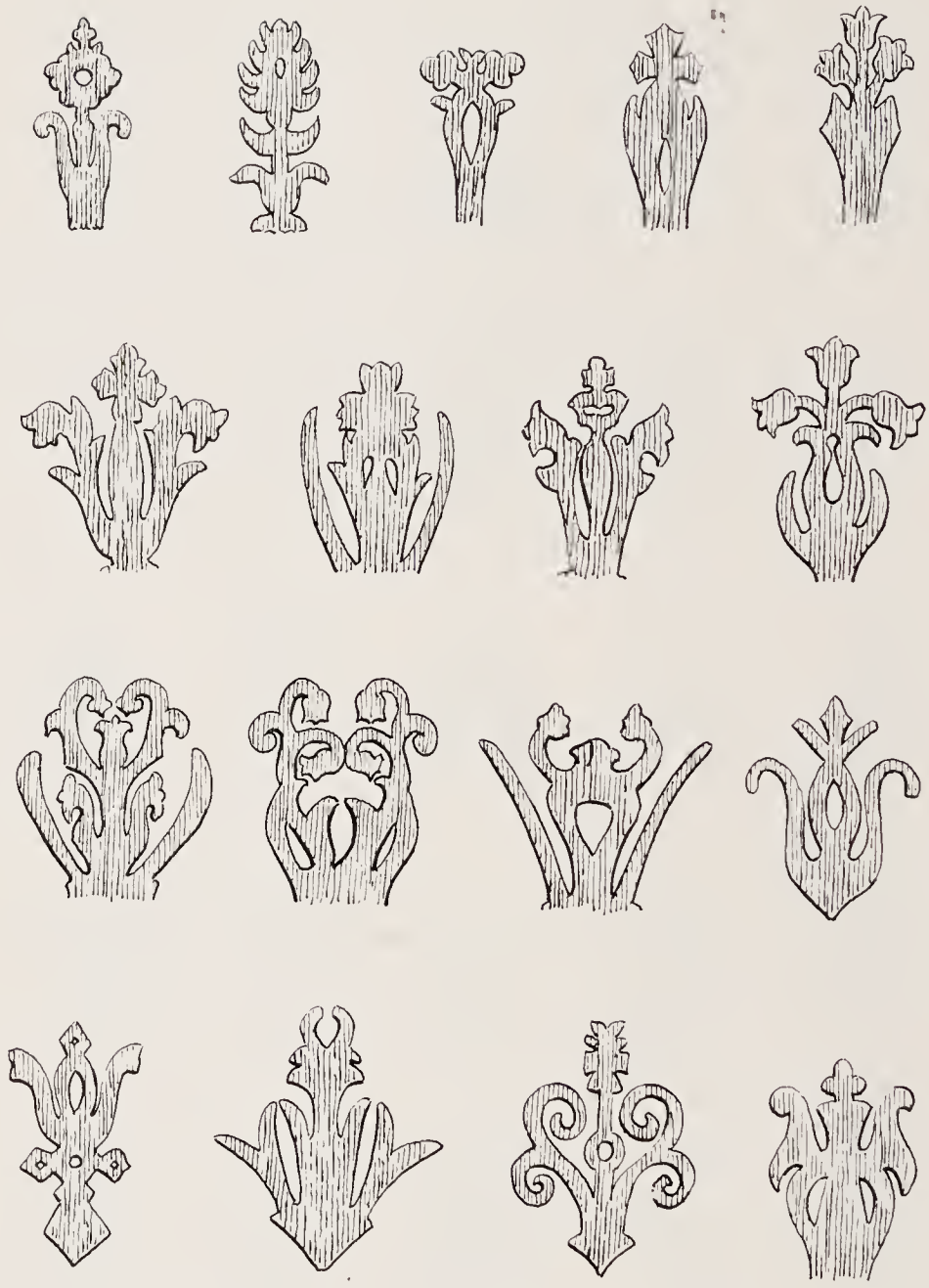


Fig. 81. Plant motifs of the sun rings on Lithuanian crosses.

Fig. 82. Wooden cross with plant motifs forming a sun disc. Near Raseiniai, western middle Lithuania.

Fig. 83. Wooden cross with sun discs formed of plant motifs. Near Raseiniai.

Fig. 84. Wooden crosses with plant motifs forming sun discs. District of Tauragė, western Lithuania.

Fig. 85. Iron-tipped wooden cross from the district of Kaunas. The rays between the cross arms are in the form of long plants based on wheels and ending in sunlets.

Fig. 86. Iron tipped wooden cross from the district of Kaunas. Sun disc around the cross arms is formed of plant motifs.

Fig. 87. Wooden cross with stylized plant shoots filling the space between the cross arms. District of Kaunas.

mother's grave, with plenty of nuts. The old cemeteries of Lithuania held trees that had never been touched by a pruner's hand, for the folk adage says that to cut a cemetery tree is to do evil to the deceased. In no case may a live cemetery tree be cut and consumed for fuel. Only the fallen dead branches may be collected for this purpose by the poor. Neither is it permissible to mow the grass: "From cemetery grass our blood flows," says the old proverb.

Veneration of Trees and Forests

Every tree and flower exudes life and energy. Each exhibits a mysterious miracle of life and brings blessings upon human beings by healing diseases or safeguarding them from misfortunes. Certain plants, however, show a particularly vital force, especially those gnarled, writhing trees growing together from several stumps. Though the oak, linden, birch, ash and spruce are especially prominent among miraculous trees, it is the two-stumped trees in particular that are believed to possess strong healing powers, even in our own day. Villagers of older times used to pray before two-stumped trees, and were reported miraculously cured. It was forbidden to cut down such old, mighty, peculiarly grown trees.[25] Even today, Lithuanian peasants have dreams, directing them to pray for health before a two-stumped tree. Sometimes they dream that someone is attempting to cut down the respected tree. These dreams recall the former strong belief in the earth's power to convey blessings, and the intuitive tendency to protect the holy powers.

Among Lithuanians, and Balts in general, a deep respect for forests and trees was characteristic of their ancient religion. The oldest historical sources (11th-15th centuries) constantly mention holy forests, groves and trees. The "ignorants," such as Christian foreigners, were barred from such places. They might not even break a branch from the holy trees; even the Lithuanian king Mindaugas in the 13th century did not dare break a branch. These holy groves were a kind of reservation: a concentration in a single location of the instinct to preserve all "blossoming" life.

Many sources attest to the unusual respect for plant life. Adam of Bremen, the first author of a descriptive Baltic geog-

raphy, written about 1075, gives some information about the religion and customs of the Prussian-Sembians, who lived west of the Lithuanians and belonged to the same Baltic family. In one sentence he notes that Christians were not permitted to approach groves and springs because, according to the beliefs of the pagans, such holy places would be contaminated by the approach of Christians.[26] Pope Innocent III (1198-1216), proceeding on information provided by the first Christian missionaries in Livonia, noted in his bull proclaiming a crusade against the Livonian pagans: "They pay respect, which is due to God, to animals, leafy trees, clear waters, green herbs..."[27] Characteristic is the testimony of Cardinal Oliver Scholasticus, Bishop of Paderborn, in his description of the Holy Land, written about 1220, wherein he refers to Baltic heathens. Using the terms of Greek mythology, he reports that the Livs, Estonians and Prussians honor forest nymphs (Dryades), forest goddesses (Hamadryades), mountain spirits (Oreades), lowlands (Napeas), waters (Humides), field spirits (Satyros) and forest spirits (Faunos). The Baltic tribesmen expected divine assistance from virgin forests, wherein they worshipped springs and trees, mounds and hills, steep stones and mountain slopes—all of which presumably endowed mankind with strength and power.[28] Holy groves and trees are mentioned in a number of chronicles specifically describing Lithuania; as, e.g., by Jerome of Prague who visited Lithuania in the 15th century, and by the Polish chronicler Johannes Długosz (1415-1480).[29]

Even in accounts of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, we find constant mention of sacred trees: mostly sturdy, ancient oaks, limes, or firs which are untouchable; none dare cut them down. In the 18th century, near Vilnius, in Paneriai, there was left a tremendous sacred oak at which people congregated and gave offerings. On a certain occasion, the Catholic archbishop, Lithuanian and Polish dukes and magnates came personally to see that the tree was destroyed. However, the belief of the crowd gathered at the tree (that whoever touched the sacred tree would cut himself with the axe) was so strong that for a long time nobody was bold enough to try to fell the tree. Finally a young newcomer from Poland had the courage to do it.[30] Even in the 20th century, when a grove is cut down, one very tall oak or fir tree is left standing alone in the cleared

area, illustrating the fact that the belief in the sacredness of such trees persists.

Feminine and Masculine Plants

Not all trees and flowers were identified as feminine. The world of plants, like the world of animals and men, was regarded as divided into male and female elements. The oak, the holy tree of Perkūnas, was considered most masculine. Linden and fir were feminine trees. This sexual distinction was also applied to the world of flowers, the shape of the bud usually determining the sex popularly assigned. Bell-shaped flowers like lilies were feminine, while the rosette, clover, flax-blossom and all sun-shaped flowers were masculine.

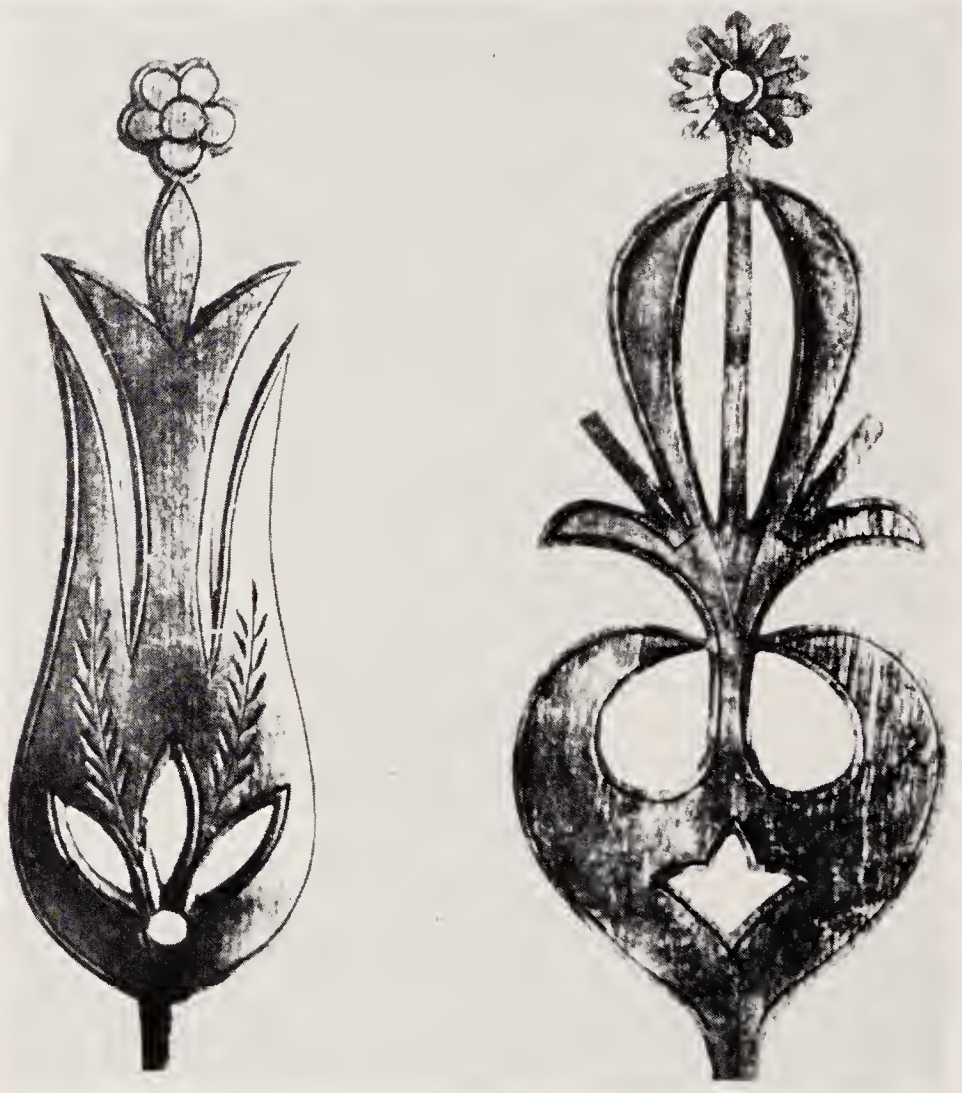
The souls of deceased human beings moved into male or female plants, according to the sex of the dead. The souls of men were reincarnated in male trees: oak, ash or birch; women's souls moved into lindens or firs. A lily, not a rosette-shaped flower, grew out of a dead girl's mouth. A cross of oak marked the death of a man, whereas women were given crosses made from linden or fir trees.

Man divided the world of nature into male and female mostly according to his optical impressions. Bodies attracting attention because of their strength, vitality or circular form were classified as masculine. Bodies associated with man's impressions of a life-imparting earth, i.e., such as were full of buds or fruit, were classified as feminine.

Growing and Blossoming

The plant shoots that form the sun discs of Lithuanian crosses or distaffs used on a spinning wheel show a magnificent variety of shapes (Figs. 80-89). The baroque lines of leaves, buds, and blossoms express budding and blooming vitality. On Easter eggs, those important objects of folk belief symbolizing the earth power, we find a range of plant motifs from the simplest to the most highly developed (Fig. 90). Blossoming flowers on dower chests represent a bride's wealth and her future happiness (Figs. 91-94).

In folklore the growth of plants is emphasized. Trees are usually several "stories" high; they grow up into nine story high "tops," cf. the folksong:



Figs. 88-89. Carved distaffs in a stylized plant form used on a spinning wheel. Eastern Lithuania.

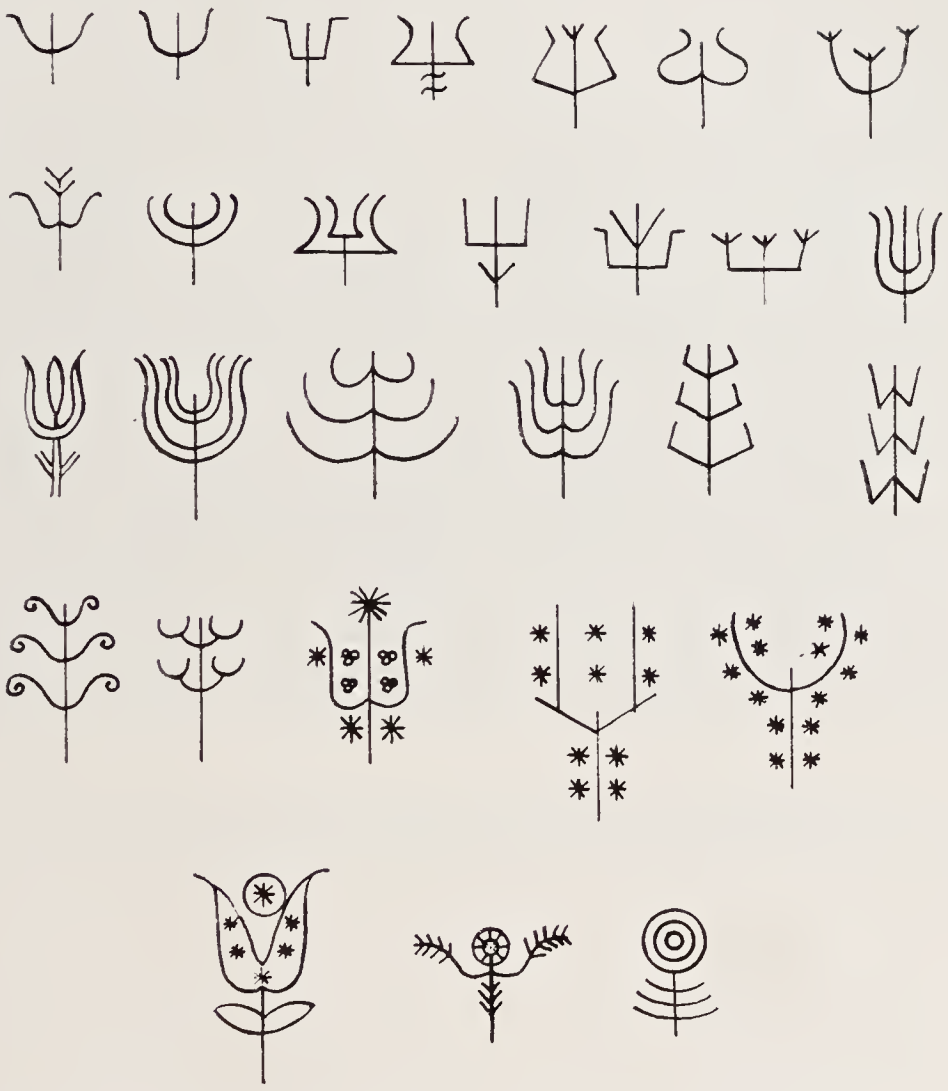


Fig. 90. Stylized plant motifs on Lithuanian Easter eggs.

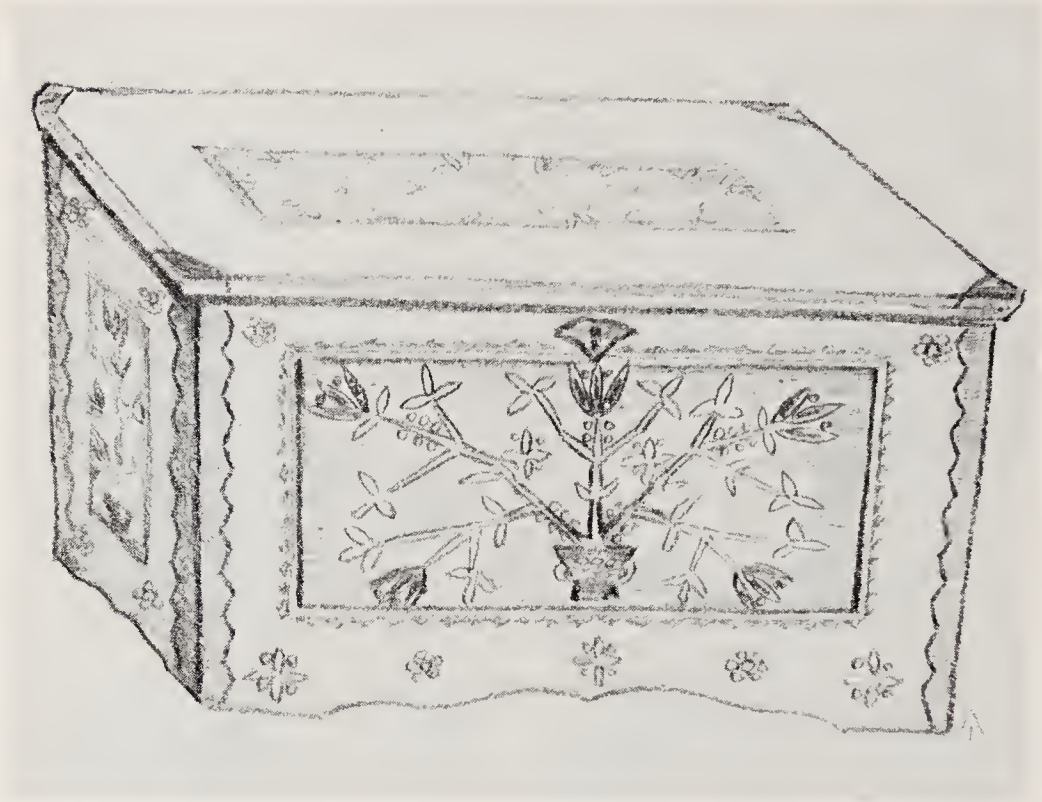


Fig. 91. Dower chest with painted plant motif from Girkalnis, district of Raseiniai, western Lithuania. Made in 1749.

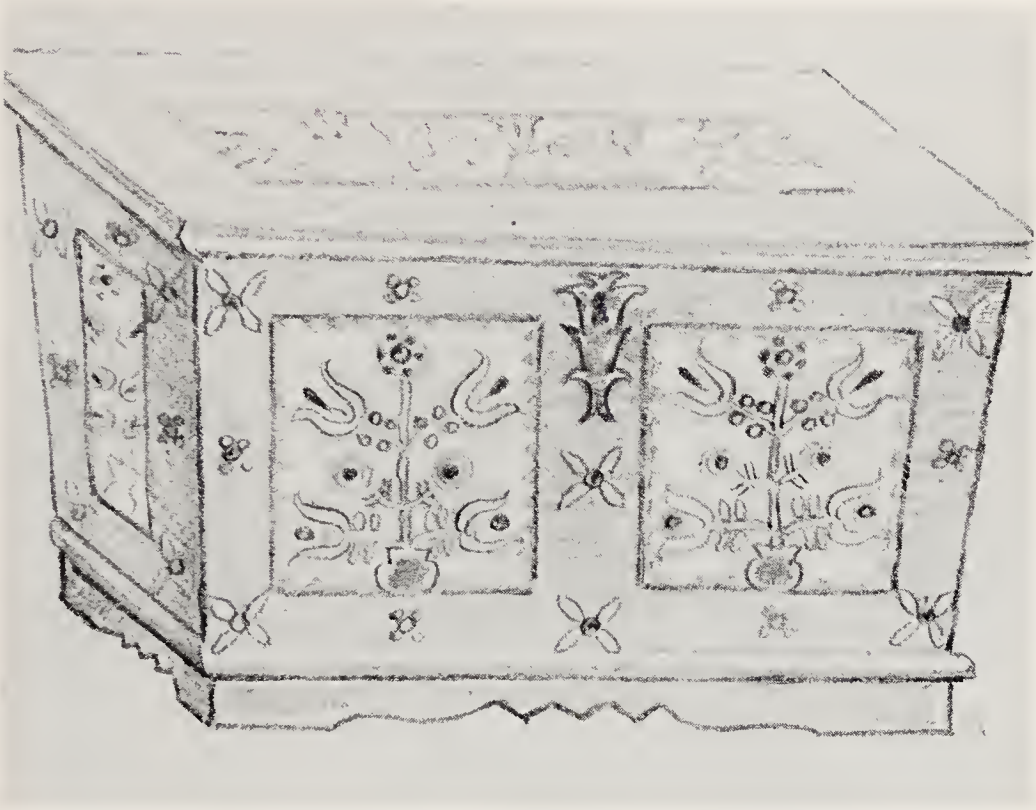


Fig. 92. Dower chest with painted plant motif from Sintautai, district of Šakiai, southern Lithuania. Made in 1836.

Fig. 93. Dower chests from southern Lithuania with painted plant and bird motifs from Barzdai, district of Šakiai. Made in 1891.

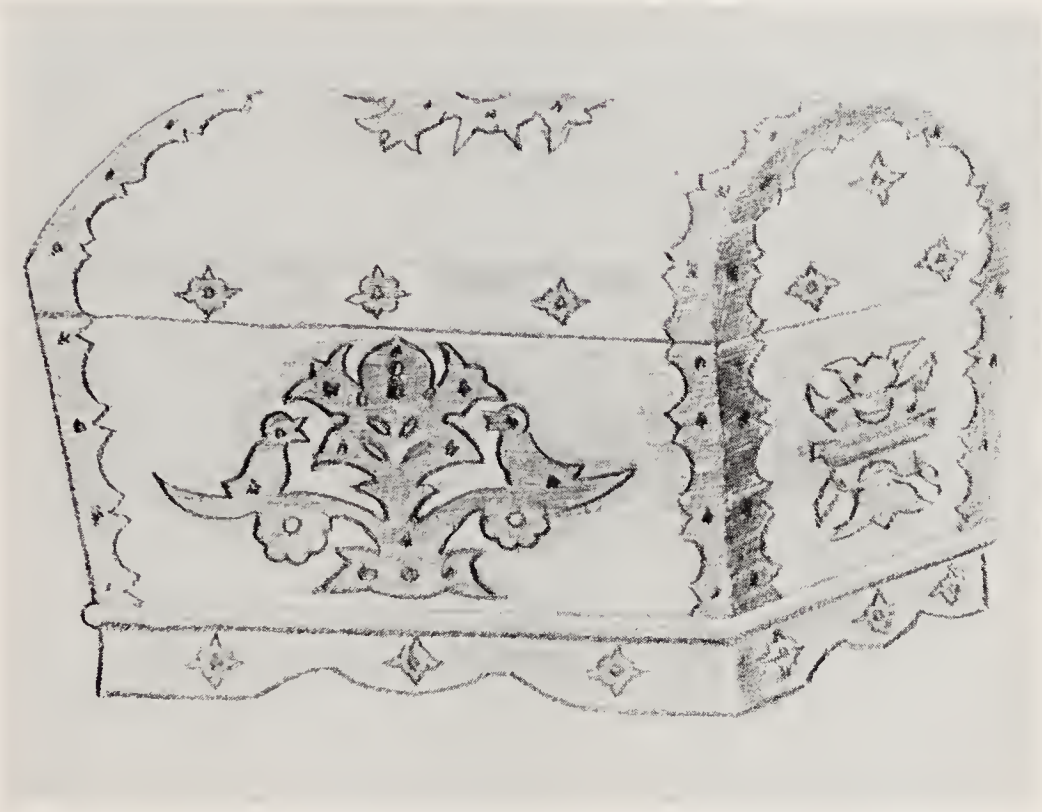


Fig. 94. Dower chests from southern Lithuania with painted plant and bird motifs from Marijampolė, southern Lithuania. Made in 1875.

Ant motulės kapo	(On mommy's grave
Žolelė nedygo,	Grass did not grow,
Žolelė nedygo,	Grass did not grow,
Jokis žolynėlis.	No grass.
O tiktai išdygo	Only a little green linden
Žalioji liepelė	has grown
Devyniom šakelėm	With nine branchlets
Buini viršūnėlė.	A gorgeous toplet.)

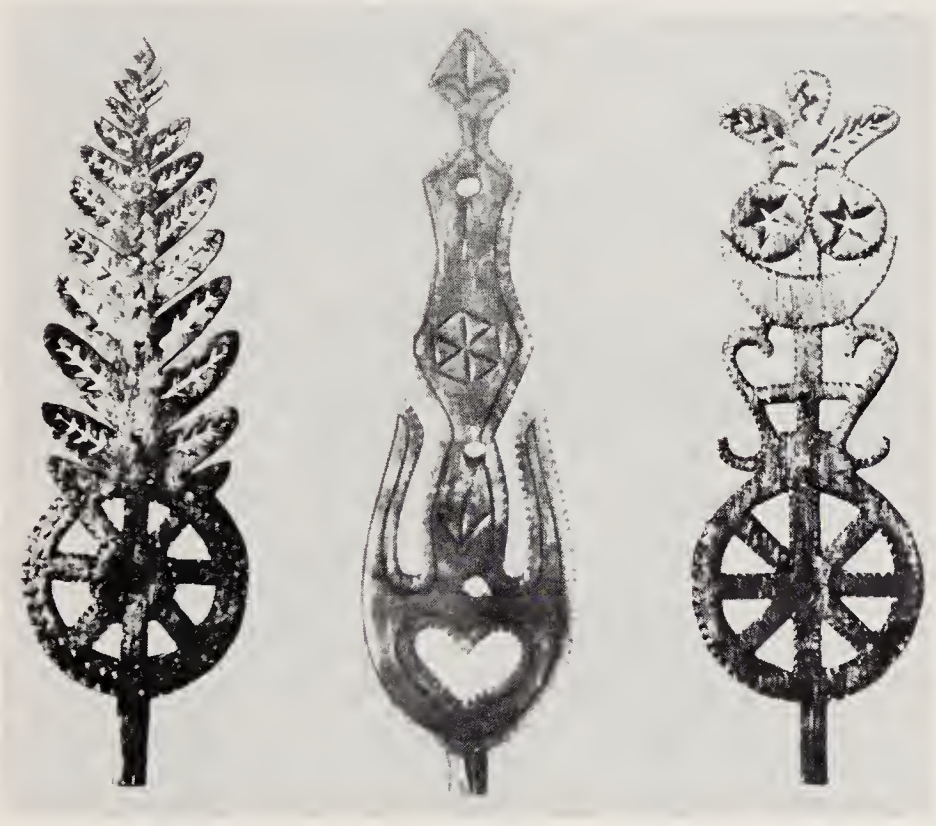
In many songs we find a tree growing: "first—a branchlet, second—a toplet." This is reminiscent of the unrealistic depiction of plants in folk art, for symbolically, the important parts of a tree and a flower are the top and the bud, and in portrayals of them, the realistic form is transmuted as if seen through a prism of beauty and belief. So the Lithuanians have the miraculous blossom of a fern and a branch called jievaras or jovaras, the "golden bough" of Lithuanian folklore. In vain do we seek the natural form of such plants; they are symbols of human happiness, of mystery, of knowledge, or even omniscience.

The green rue is the symbol of the maiden's happiness and chastity. The young girl, mother's daughter, grows like a rue, and blossoms like a lily or rose. As the rue thrives, so does the maiden:

Jei skirsi, rūtele,	(If you will wish me, rue,
Man gerą dalelę,	Good fortune,
Šakok, rūtele,	Branch out, rue,
Lig dešimtai šakelei!	Up to the tenth branchlet!
Jei skirsi, rūtele,	If you will wish me, rue,
Man blogą dalelę,	Ill fortune,
Tai išdžiūk, rūtele,	Dry up, rue,
Iš baltų šaknelių.[31]	From the white roots.)

Plants in Association with Heavenly Symbols

The budding plant is fecund. It seems to be disseminating the wealth of the earth. It is sacred; it is a "life-tree." Lithuanian and generally European folk art depicts the life-tree associated with the guardian twin figures or heads of male animals, viz.: stags, he-goats, bulls, stallions, swans. They are encircled by scattered suns, stars, daisies, or circles; or else a bird perches on them (Figs. 88-113). In folksongs



Figs. 95-97. Carved distaffs on a spinning wheel. Fig. 95: A fir tree based on wheel. Fig. 96: Plant motif ending in a bud and decorated with solar motifs and three leaves. Fig. 97: Wheel, spirals (stylized snakes?), moon, segmented stars and plant leaves.

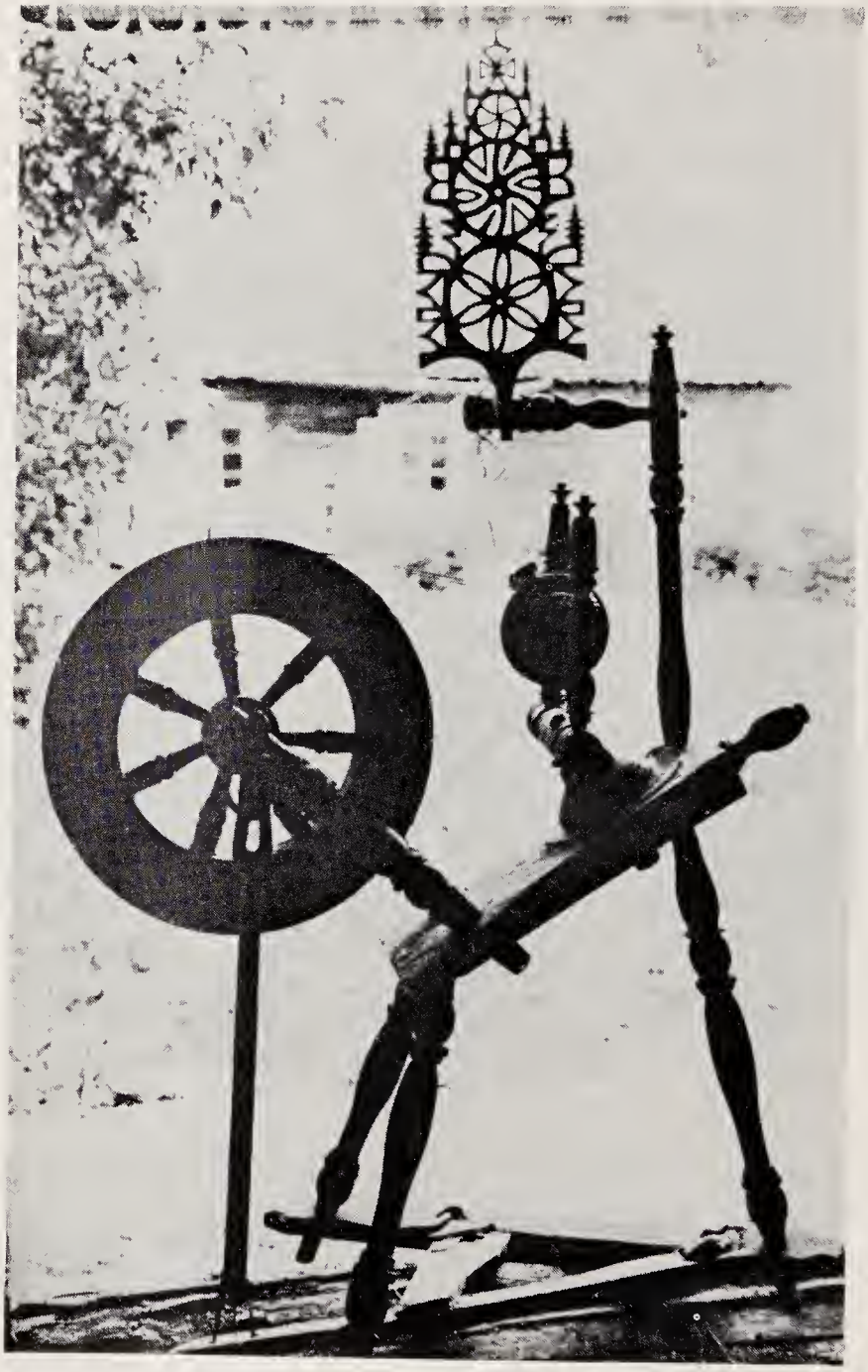
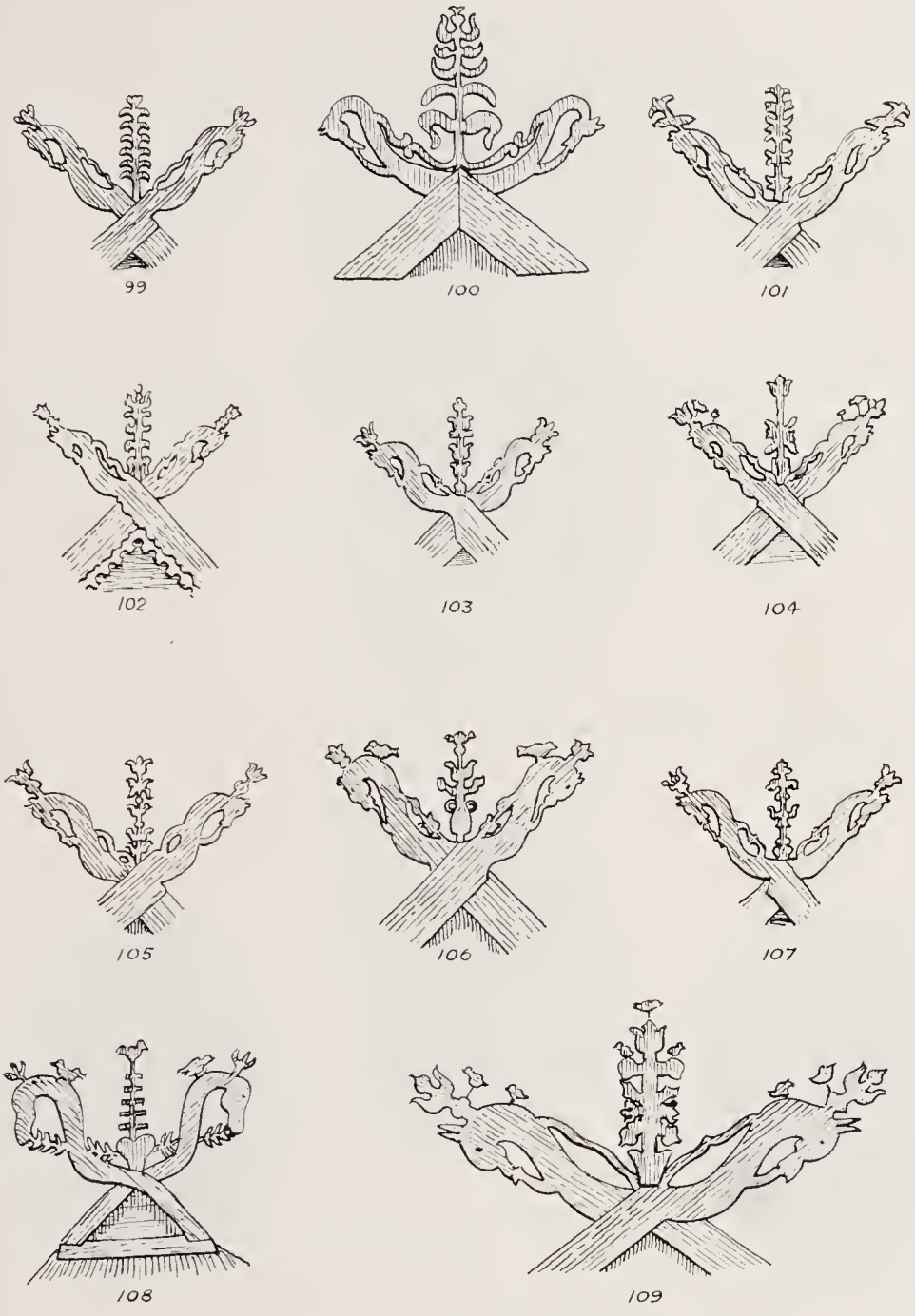


Fig. 98. Spinning wheel with a distaff carved in the form of three solar symbols, each of different shape, and flanked with small fir trees. Northern Lithuania.



Figs. 99-109. Gable decoration on the houses of Lithuania Minor. Life-tree guarded by twin horses. Plants grow from horses' heads and small birds sit atop the horses' necks.

Fig. 110. Carved distaff used on spinning wheel. Twin horses, with a bud growing out from between them, and twin men. Northern Lithuania.

Figs. 111-113. Lithuanian Easter eggs depicting the life-tree associated with suns, birds and horses.

we find plants with golden or silver buds, and that constant prophet of human fate, a cuckoo, sits atop a tree:

Kožnoj šakaitėj aukso spurgaitė	(In every branchlet a golden bud
Ant viršūnėlės rymi gegutė...	On the toplet the cuckoo leans).

The association in art of plant motifs or figures of the mother goddess with the symbols of the sky-deity is deeply rooted in prehistoric Europe and Asia. The primitive fir tree motifs are frequently surrounded by pits, circles, wheels, suns, swastikas, and snakes. On the Scandinavian rock engravings we can discern firs associated with birds (Fig. 114). On the

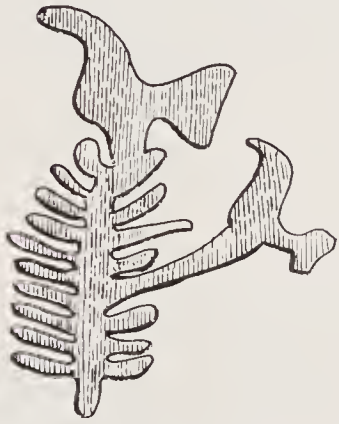


Fig. 114. Scandinavian rock engraving from the late Bronze Age (beginning of the first millennium B.C.?). Fir tree (life-tree) guarded by birds.

northern European bronze razors of the Late Bronze Age, a tree is frequently companioned by male human figures, stylized horses, swans, serpents, birds, suns and concentric wheels (Fig. 115). In the art of the Villanovans in Italy, and of Hallstatt in central Europe during the eighth-sixth centuries B.C., we know the so-called "heraldic group": a goddess surrounded by male animals or birds, most frequently twin figures. In Cretan-Mycenaean art, especially of the late Minoan period (second half of the second millennium B.C.), we find two he-goats, bulls or

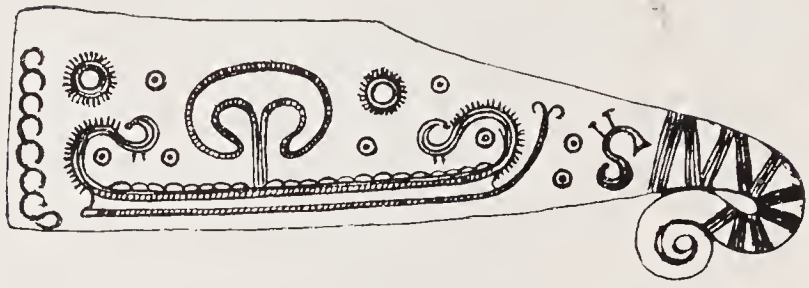


Fig. 115. Bronze razor dating from the Late Bronze Age with incised symbols: a life-tree on boat in association with suns and snakes. Denmark.

birds associated with a plant or mother goddess (Figs. 116, 117). A rosette or double axe blesses the growing flower from above (Fig. 118). In the art of ancient Egypt we can observe depictions of buds tipped with rosettes. Frequently wheel, rosette or sunlet is portrayed on the stem below the bud (Fig. 119). Similar or almost identical combinations of symbols in the Lithuanian folk art are seen in Figs. 88, 89, 95-97, and others. Among the art monuments of the Hittite Empire symbols of analogous nature are also known. Figure 120 reproduces a life-tree guarded by two he-goats, a bas relief from the gate of Senshirli palace. In the art of the Near East, especially of Mesopotamia, the life-tree is one of the most widely diffused subjects. On Chaldean cylinders it appears as a stem surmounted by a fork or a crescent, or it changes into the palm, the pomegranate, the cypress, or the vine, etc. In later periods, trees became more complex. In Assyrian bas-reliefs the stem is crowned by a palmette. On both sides of it branches spread out symmetrically, bearing conical fruits or fan-shaped leaves at their extremities (Figs. 121, 122). Above this mysterious tree is frequently suspended the winged circle, personifying the supreme divinity, and nearly always it stands between two personages facing each other, who are priests or kings, lions, goats, sphinx, griffins, unicorns, winged bulls, men, or genii, with the head of an eagle, and so forth (Fig. 123).[32]

Fig. 116. Life-tree guarded by twin bulls. Mycenaean gem.

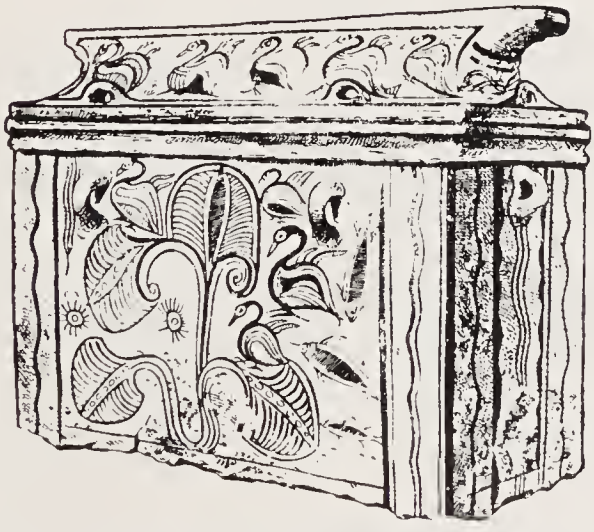


Fig. 117. Painted clay sarcophagus from Anoia, Crete. Late Minoan III, ca. middle of the second millennium B.C.

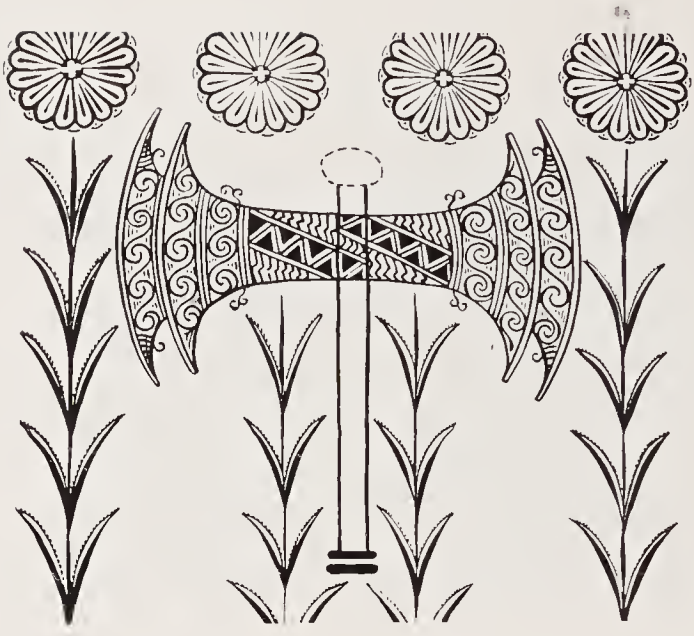


Fig. 118. Double axe, rosettes and plants on a Late Minoan vase, Crete.

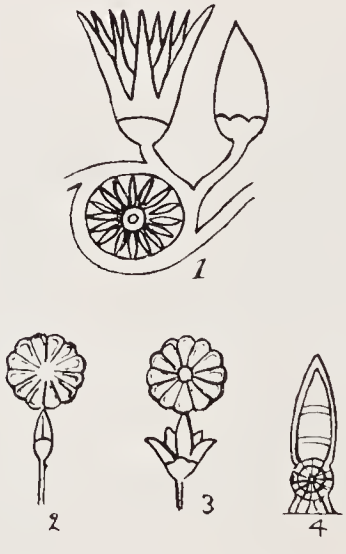
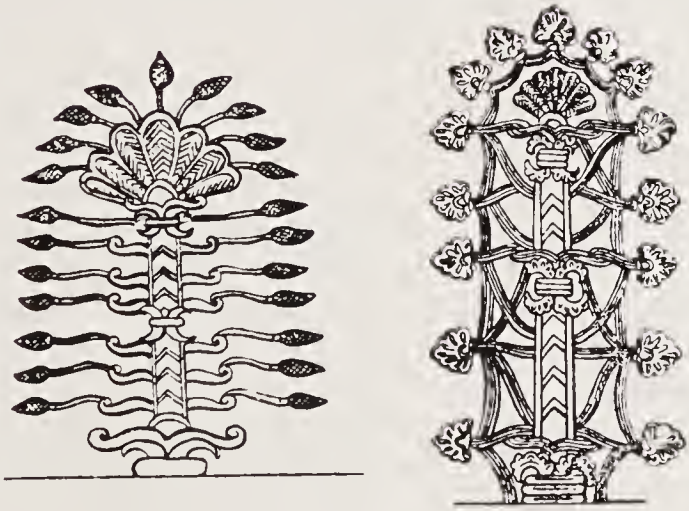


Fig. 119. Egyptian buds in association with rosettes. From the period of the eighteenth dynasty.

Fig. 120. A Hittite life-tree guarded by he-goats. Bas-relief. Gate of Senshirli.



Figs. 121, 122. Life-trees from Assyrian bas-reliefs.

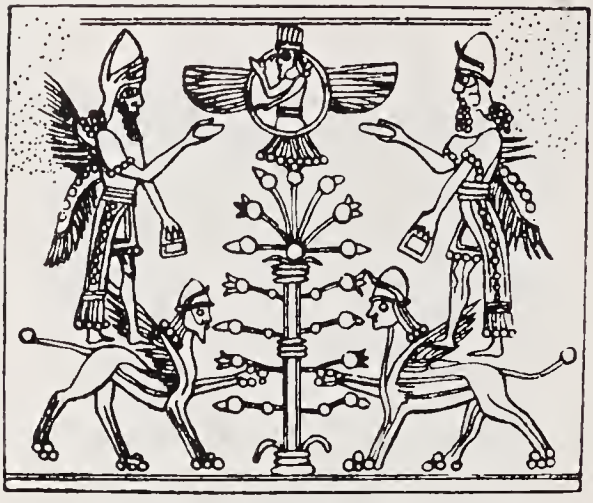


Fig. 123. A life-tree between two priests and genii. Above it is suspended the winged circle. Assyrian bas-relief.

2. Roofed Wooden Poles

The roofed pole recalls the living tree. In folk art the plant motif usually had the shape of an ascending triangle with a sharp top, like a fir tree or a bud rising from the earth (Figs. 124-135).

Many of the roofed poles are very simple: a quadrangular, sloping roof over a bare timber spar. Technically, this resembles the most natural and primitive roofs. Because of the very simplicity of these ordinary poles, they attracted little notice. But there are other, more complicated roofed poles, with roofs of two or three stories, rising regularly upward, and growing smaller and sharper as they ascend (Figs. 130-135).

We may visualize the wooden roofed poles as plants growing upward. In shape they are not unlike the trees and flowers, sometimes of several stories, known from such folksongs as those quoted previously. There are no similar wooden roofed poles of several stories in the countries bordering on Lithuania. but a parallel phenomenon may be seen in the artificially formed trees, mostly lime trees, three or seven stories high, found in present-day Germany and mentioned in records of past centuries (Figs. 136, 137). A may tree is also found similarly shaped

Fig. 124. Iron tipped roofed poles in the cemetery of Debeikiai, eastern Lithuania.

Fig. 125. An old roofed pole from eastern Lithuania near Utena. Erected in 1817.

Fig. 126. Roofed poles from eastern Lithuania in the trict of Utena. Stylized heads of roosters are mounted on iron tip.

Fig. 127. Roofed poles from the cemetery of Kuliai near Telšiai, western Lithuania.

Fig. 128. Silhouette of a roofed pole from western Lithuania.

Fig. 129. Iron tipped roofed pole finished with ancient geometric motifs. From Salakas, eastern Lithuania.

Fig. 130. Two-storied roofed pole from eastern Lithuania.

Fig. 131. Three-storied roofed pole standing in the forest near Ukmerge, eastern Lithuania.

Fig. 132. Three-storied roofed pole from eastern Lithuania.

Fig. 133. Two-storied roofed pole standing close to a farmer's house in northeastern Lithuania. Iron tip and carved suns at the sides of the lower roof are missing.

Fig. 134. Two-storied roofed pole in eastern Lithuania. Wooden bells are attached to the roof and the horseshoes at the lower part of the pole.

Fig. 135. Three-storied roofed pole with crucifix and sculpture of saints attached under the roofs. Eastern Lithuania.

Fig. 136. An artificially formed tree symbolizing a life-tree. A fragment from a picture by Lukas Gassel from the year 1548.

Fig. 137. An artificially formed seven-storied lime tree, from a village near Schweinfurt in Germany.

(Fig. 138). The connection of the roofed poles with the idea of a living tree is indicated by frequent depictions of leafy branches on the sides of the pole (Figs. 127, 128). The roofed poles sometimes were even made from raw tree stumps.

The Lithuanian poles with small roofs tipped with suns and moons have wide analogies in beliefs and art of the Indo-European and Finno-Ugrian nations. We may find similarity in the imagination of a cosmogonical tree. As Mannhardt reports, the Russians worshipped an oak tree on the island Bujan, on which the sun retired to rest every evening and from which it rose every morning. The cosmic tree of Hindu mythology sprang from the primordial egg in the bosom of the chaotic ocean. It spread out into three branches, each of which supported a sun, whilst a fourth and larger sun was placed at the bifurcation of the branches (Fig. 139). The roofed poles symbolically are very close to the simple high pole or the house column

Fig. 138. May tree from Germany, England and Austria.

which supported the roof. On the top of it, or on its bifurcation, skulls of a bull, he-goat or horse were fastened for protection against the evil. According to old beliefs, the sky is a roof supported by a column or tree—a cosmogonical pole or tree—which connects the earth and sky. As Holmberg (1923,22) presumes, this belief was created by a culture still in the nomadic stage. The oldest Lithuanian roofed poles may well represent the echo of this imagination.

Although wooden poles are not conserved from times older than two hundred years, their roots undoubtedly reach back into the pre-Christian era in the Baltic area. Historical sources of the early 15th century indicate that such monuments were considered relics of old religion. The regulations of Bishop Michael Junge in 1426 banned open air gatherings in the woods, and the erection and consecration of crosses in Samland (East Prussia). Violations were to be punished by fines.[33] In 1630, prohibitive instructions were issued against the practises of the Livs. This decree banned the erection of roofed poles and crosses, and the clergy was urged to destroy the poles and crosses before which the peasants made offerings and exercised

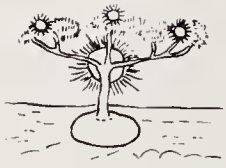


Fig. 139. A cosmic tree of Hindu Mythology.

other pagan rites and customs. In 1650, the instruction read: "All ungodly chapels, holy bushes and crosses must be completely destroyed and demolished." The instruction of 1693 urged the peasants to renounce and abandon their paganism and to overturn, chop up, burn and destroy the instruments of paganism such as crosses, holy hillocks, bushes, trees, stones, etc. Historical sources indicate that in that period ordinary poles and crosses were associated with un-Christian practices. In 1641, reports of ecclesiastical visitations in Estonia mention that ordinary poles were erected alongside crosses and roofed poles, and that ancient rites and customs were observed in front of these monuments. The following text has been found: "Should it be noted that here, as elsewhere, superstitutions and pagan customs are observed in front of bushes, poles, roofed poles, crosses and chapels, the authorities are requested to demolish them immediately, in order that these be removed from the sight and hearts of the poor blinded people."[34] For several centuries, the apostles of Christianity, predominantly foreigners, tried to stamp out the strangely persistent old customs and carved or engraved symbols. However, the

Lithuanian roofed poles managed to escape destruction as they gradually came under the protection of the new faith. Under the influence of the Church, small chapels began to be built on the ground, in addition to the chapels elevated on poles. The roof of the roofed poles, passing through a series of various metamorphoses, has finally assumed the shape of a walled house, with an aperture or window. Inside the small chapels are housed the Madonna and certain Saints: St. George, St. John Nepomucne, St. John Baptist, St. Isidore and St. Rocco.

3. Stones and Hillocks

Characteristic is the Lithuanian tradition, still prevalent, of erecting a wooden or stone monument atop an elevation or hillock, as if pointing up the power emanating from the earth. A number of small chapels have been erected above stones legendarily associated with former "heathen altars," and some of these chapels, upon examination, have proved to be built on top of millstones.

Because stones and hillocks protrude from the earth's surface, the earth power was supposed to be stronger in them than in plains and lowlands, and all outgrowing elevations are popularly endowed with peculiar powers rising from this great source. Lithuania is full of holy hillocks, called "Alkos Kalnas," "Perkūnalnis," "Rambynas," etc. Throughout the eight centuries of recorded Lithuanian history, we have frequent testimony of the great homage paid to certain hills and elevations, and to stones.

The stones are presumably those which have been venerated since very ancient times. Old legends cluster about huge stones bearing holes or "footprints." Even recently, such imprints of inexplicable origin have been associated with miraculous occurrences. Similar stones with holes or footprints are found extensively in northern and western Europe, dating back to the Bronze Age or the Late Stone Age.

Some holes have obviously been drilled into the stones. This drilling of a round hole was part of a ritual, signifying nothing else than the connection of the stone with the male element in nature: the fecundation of the power of earth which resides in the stone. (Rain-water falling into these holes acquires magic properties: women coming home from the milk-

ing, or after mowing, usually stop by this rock to cure their aches and pains by washing themselves with such water.) So the pits, suns, circles and snakes found on prehistoric rocks are prototypes of the circle, wheel or sun and snake symbols of folk art (Figs. 140,141).

Fig. 140. Stone with incised circles. District of Lyda, southern Lithuania.

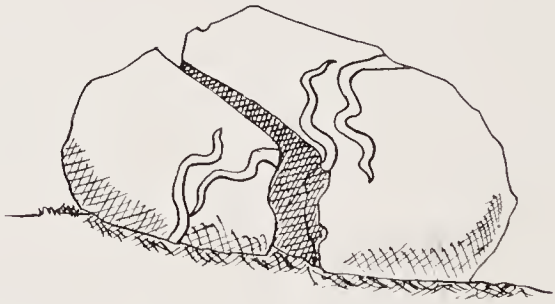


Fig. 141. Stone with incised snakes from northern Lithuania.

Stones definitely embody the female element: they contain a female deity of whom women implore benefactions, or they even assume a female shape. According to a note of 1899[35] there lay in Lithuania, on the Naruš̌eliai village field, a huge stone in the shape of a woman's torso which could magically bestow fecundity on allegedly barren women. Childless women laid offerings on top of it. It is quite likely that the woman-

shaped stones of Lithuania are related to the bone, clay or stone figurines of the mother goddess extensively found in the European Neolithic culture of the third millennium B.C.

Also from Lithuania, we have a very interesting description of stone worship from the year 1836,[36] in which it is noted that the stone monuments were usually two yards high, smoothly cut, symmetrically placed and surrounded by a ditch. Such monuments were erected at places dedicated to the goddesses who spent their time at the stones, spinning the fates of men, or walking along the banks of streams, where, at places sacred to them, every Lithuanian had his own stone upon which he laid offerings of grain, flax, a.o. Such goddesses' stones were said to have been plentifully found all over Lithuania, but were now getting scarce, inasmuch as the inhabitants, no longer aware of their significance, were using them for construction.

Several stones in western Lithuania, near Kretinga, have been held in great esteem up to the present time.[37] The significant Rambynas Hill on the northern bank of the lower Nemunas, mentioned in records ever since the 14th century, retains great respect to this day. A stone with a flat, polished surface formerly crowned this hill. Offerings were made on the Rambynas, particularly by newly married couples seeking fertility at home and good crops in the field. An 18th century source reports that the water found atop the Rambynas was eagerly sought for drinking and washing. (Such testimony bears out that attributing of magic qualities to the rain-water accumulations in stone holes).

Large, flat stones with polished surfaces are repeatedly reported. In 1605 a Jesuit reports the survival of the stone cult in western Lithuania: huge stones, with flat surfaces, protruding from the ground, were called goddesses and were covered with straw. Such stones were venerated as protectors of crops and animals.[38]

Flat stones with polished surfaces were known in other nations as well. Such stones characteristically endow women with fertility; young brides used to visit these stones, sit on them, or crawl over them. The Germans called such a stone Brautstein, bridestone.

The significant role of stones in popular religious beliefs has been largely continuous up to the present day in Ireland,

France, Germany, etc. In Scandinavia (at Kivik, Skåne) grave monuments of the Bronze Age have preserved some valuable pictorial mementoes, including one classic triangular or pyramidal stone, on both sides of which are depicted masculine axes.[39] The equivalent of the same symbol system is very prevalent in Late Minoan art in Crete, where the double axes or bull horns are associated with a stone pillar.[40]

4. The Mother Earth or Great Mother

The earth holds the mystery of eternal life; she continually produces the miracle of resurrection and magic transformation. She is to be worshipped, that life may be perpetuated from generation to generation.

When we consider all accounts of the veneration of the earth, from all possible sources, we sense that the entire territory of Lithuania was sacred. It was dotted with thousands of roofed poles, holy forests, holy trees and flowers, holy hillocks, sacred rocks, holy rivers, lakes and springs. The earth teemed with visible objects of its great procreative power. These evidences of the earth's fecundity were lovingly cared for and protected, and their number was to be increased. Offerings to the might of the earth, i.e., symbols of fertility, like food, bread, grains, herbs, or a sheaf of rye, were interred in the ground, laid before stones, attached to trees or placed near springs.

From 17th century sources we learn that food, coins, clothing, and wool were offered to stones or interred under the millstone or storehouse of the farm. Offering at certain times of the year was especially important, and it was believed that anyone failing to fulfill such duties would be punished: his limbs, or those of an animal of his, might become paralyzed; the serpent might obstruct his way home; or block his passage on his very threshold.[41] Even in this century, a great hill covered with hundreds of crosses enjoyed great popular respect in Lithuania. It was called "The Hill of Crosses." Masses of people converged annually on the village of Jurgaičiai, near Šiauliai, to bring offerings, make vows, etc.

The Earth was The Mother: "Earth, my mother, I am born of you; you feed me, you carry me, you will inter me after my death." These significant words, recorded in the area of Salan-

tai, may still be heard in various refrains in rural Lithuania as a prayer to the soil. Between Mother Earth and the human being exists a mystic bond. According to a popular saying: "The person who strikes his mother will not be accepted by the earth after his death; the earth will reject him."[42]

The earth is the mother of all life: human beings, animals, and plants. The name "Mother Earth" survives in Latvian beliefs and folksongs as Zemes Māte. Its other Latvian variants have acquired the concepts of mother of forests, fields, springs, and rivers. In Lithuania, the Mother Earth deity is called Žemyna, Žemynėlė, "Terra Mater"; a sort of universal deity similar to Cybele or Cybebe of Asia Minor, or Artemis of Greece, or Nerthus of the Germanic peoples. Žemyna was a great goddess of nature who was not anthropomorphic, and hence differed from Isis, Sumer-Akadian Ishtar, Syrian or Canaanite Anat, Astarte, the Greek Demeter, Britomartis and other deities resembling man.

In the records of rural customs of the 17th and 18th centuries, Žemyna is called by such picturesque names as Žiedkelė, 'the bud raiser,' Žiedeklėlė, 'the blossomer,' etc.[43] In songs, too, Žemyna is most frequently associated with plant life, fields and hills.

Žemynėle, mus kavok	(Dear Žemyna, protect us
Dirvas mūsų peržegnok,	Bless our tillages
Peržegnok girias, laukus,	Bless the forests, the fields,
Kluonus, lankas, ir šlaitus.[44]	Leas, pastures, and slopes.)

Lithuanian folk beliefs embody a feeling of unusually close cohesion and comradeship between man and earth, man and plants. Folklore is enriched by countless comparisons of man with nature: man is born of the earth; babies emerge from springs, pools, trees or hillocks. As recently as the 18th century, Lithuanians offered gifts to Žemyna upon the birth of a child.[45] After death, man is reunited with the earth in order to be reborn later. The spirit (siela) of man's temporal earthly life reunites with the Cosmos, while his spiritual soul (vėlė) — the separate ethereal substance, the individual shadow retaining the peculiar characteristics of the deceased—is either admitted to the post mortem kingdom or doomed to roam over the earth.

The reunion with earth begins during the interment. The separated living force of the deceased remains in and around the place of interment, especially in the trees, flowers and grass growing on the grave. Folksongs provide the deceased with a new family from the elements of the natural environment:

Žalias ąžuolėlis tai bus jo tėvelis,
Baltos smiltukės tai bus jo mamužė,
Žali kleveliai tai bus jo broleliai,
Baltos liepelės tai bus jo sesytės.[46]

(The green oak will be his daddy,
The white sands will be his mommy,
The green maple trees will be his brothers,
The white linden trees will be his sisters.)

C. The Blissful Association of Heaven and Earth

We have already seen that in folk and prehistoric art, the stone, stone pillar, tree stump or flower was surrounded or guarded by satellite male animals, birds, axes, wheels, circles, suns and moons. The conical roof of the Lithuanian roofed pole was capped with sun, moon, and bird; serpents climbed both sides of the pole; the budding plant motifs were connected with the symbols of the sky. Rising high from the ground, the pole or the cross connected the life producing power of Earth with the life-stimulating power of Heaven. Obviously, these are expressions of a religious intent to unite man with the cosmos. The symbolic system seems to chime with Goethe's words:

Wo Erd' und Himmel sich im Grusse segnen—
da ist das Göttliche,
(There is divinity where earth and heaven meet).

How deeply this concept is rooted in the past, we know from prehistoric art, the "scripture" of long-existing religions. There is no doubt that the worship of Heaven and Earth as inseparable parts of the universe was characteristic of the ancient Lithuanian (i.e. Baltic) as of Indo-European generally. Its antiquity is attested in the Hindu Vedas, preserved orally

and passed on thus for generations before they were written down ca. 1000 B.C.; cf. this chapter from the Atharva-Veda:

To Heaven and Earth:

All hail to heaven!
All hail to earth!
Mine eyes is sun and my breath is wind and earth my body.
I, verily, who never have been conquered, give up my life to heaven and earth for keeping.
Exalt my life, my strength, my deed and action; increase my understanding and my vigour.
Be ye my powerful keepers, watch and guard me, ye mistress of life and life's creators! Dwell ye within me, and forbear to harm me.
(R.O. Ballou, The Bible of The World, 1939 ed.)

So the landscape of Lithuania, dotted with pyramidal roofed poles and sun disc crosses, may be compared to the early landscape painting in the Far East, behind which lay philosophical beliefs as to the origin of the universe. These beliefs, too, held that from the union of male and female principles, everything in the world had come into existence, and the depiction of mountains, shrouded in mist, was a symbolic representation of the operation of these two principles.

III. THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE

The contest perennially waged between the male and female elements in nature was not the only one determining human happiness. Death stands beside life, and evil and misfortune appear to ruin good. The destructive and demonic current of power is constantly worming its way upward to menace life. Consequently, our ancestors were forced to struggle for survival, to preserve not only the lives of human beings but nature itself, which exudes the vital spark. Man tried to fan this spark of vitality, the source of all blessings in human life. He nurtured and fought for the dynamic force which rules all life and makes possible its forward progress. Our ancestors knew that this fight for good and well-being could not be relaxed; otherwise, the evil lurking in the shadows would triumph over the unpropitiated good. The power of death, in the subconscious mind of primitive man, was not only the source of all ill; it was believed to be so strong that it grew and expanded unattended, bringing, as well as death, disease and misfortune, visualized sometimes as parasites or external fantastic bodies. Because of this evil force, forever active and aggressive, the element of good had to be carefully nurtured, protected and defended.

This fight for life, survival, and welfare claimed incessant attention, for existence without the struggle to preserve it was unthinkable. The concept of this fight was so basic that the struggle became the center of a religious ritual, the traces of which were preserved in folk art. The destructive and harmful power of death, disrupting the life of all nature, plants and animals as well as of men, was sensed and resisted everywhere by the same means: a fight. Though even lifeless nature goes through a periodic regeneration after winter, man felt obliged to aid this process every spring. His struggle against evil forces, against the demon of winter, is tellingly and picturesquely represented in the customs associated with the observance of spring festivals at Shrovetide, Easter, St. George's Day (23 April), Whitsuntide and the 23-24th of June (St. John's Day).

The might of death was seen as an abstract force, identified

not with the human world but with the world of nature. When a man died, this force menaced his entire surroundings: his home and fields. The Lithuanians believed firmly that should a corpse be transported over a field, nothing would ever grow there.

Popular belief shows a deeply rooted feeling of the necessity of combatting this evil force everywhere: in human and animal diseases, epidemics, pestilence, parasites, the "evil eye," etc. Evil of this sort is particularly dangerous, as it creates fear: fear of unnatural death, of sterility or childlessness, etc., and robs life of enjoyment.

Lithuanian folk beliefs contain numerous demons, mostly of masculine gender: the wolf, horse, snake and human specters. One who dies an unnatural death constantly haunts and troubles the living.

The concept of velnias, the devil, developed in more recent centuries, is closely associated with this haunting by spirits. The word (formerly vel-inas) originates in the words vel-ys, vel-uokas, 'the dangerous or menacing person deceased.'

Lithuanian laumės, or fairies—those peculiar, naked women with long hair, dwelling in forests, near springs, expanses of water and stones—are yearning for motherhood, and for this reason they kidnap human infants and young children. They dress these kidnapped infants in the most attractive clothing, unless they wish to revenge themselves on the mothers. The irrational element is stressed in the entire concept of the life of the laumė, as in the shape they assume. They never complete the work they begin; they start spinning thread and never finish; they work fast and spin and launder rapidly, but once angered, they destroy their handiwork in an instant.

This element of disorder, of failure to act with precise regularity, was noted by primitive men in human life and cosmic nature. When the sun is eclipsed and there is untimely darkness, man feels fear. "Someone is spoiling the sun," he says; "The eclipse is the sign of the devil's might." This "someone" or "something" must be resisted.

The basic weapons of resistance to evil in primitive beliefs were: the certain motion, sound, fire, and water. Animals thought of as escorts of the sky-deity, such as the bull, horse,

goat, cock, snake, toad—all full of vitality—were also suitable instruments of combat. Other efficient weapons were upraised arms (Fig. 142), iron, the willow twig, a stick from an ash tree, the green bough exuding life, or the sheaf or wreath of corn-stalks, symbolic of good crops and fertility. And it is these selfsame "weapons" which are employed in symbolizing the struggle both in customs and in art; indeed, folk art is an inseparable participant with religion in the fight for survival and the resistance to evil.

The fight of the personified sky-deity Perkūnas against evil, and especially against the personified evil power, the devil, is still extant in folk beliefs. Perkūnas is the great enemy of evil spirits, devils and unjust or evil men. He is imagined as always seeking out the devil and smiting him with lightning. Trouble, as the devil, is pictured lurking in hiding in a house or tree. The devil enjoys taunting Perkūnas, especially during a storm, when he teases, shows his tongue, or turns his hind quarters toward the sky. Then the enraged Perkūnas gives vent to his wrath; he throws his axe at sinning people, or he tosses lightning bolts at them or their homes. The grey-beard Perkūnas does not tolerate liars, thieves, selfish or vain persons. To this day we may hear phrases going back to the superstitions of former ages which regarded Perkūnas as the enemy of evil men. Thus people say: "May the dear god Perkūnas smite you because of your lying." The wife in the folksong, abused by her husband, exclaims: "Flash light, dear lightning; strike, dear Perkūnas, smite the evil husband." (In Lithuanian: Žaibuok žaibeli, trenk, Perkūnėli, nutrenk piktą vyrelį.) The tree or stone struck by lightning gives protection from evil spirits. It heals maladies, especially the toothache, fever, fright and nervousness. The devil avoids objects touched by Perkūnas. Many symbols of the fight for survival are associated with the activities and influences of the sky-deity.

Dynamics and Sound as Effective Means in the Struggle

Evil influences avoid the dynamic might of life and retreat before it. The eternal mobility of the cosmic world brings blessings; its permanence ensures the victory of life. In a crisis, when forces of death are virulently active, this perpetual

Fig. 142. Iron cross from the district of Kaunas, Lithuania. The cross arms apparently are in the shape of a human figure with upraised arms.

motion and action guarantees the rejuvenation of life. Now, as the circle or wheel, the sun, moon, swastika, spiral, and cross represent the bodies permanently in motion, we may assume that the majority of Lithuanian crosses (Figs. 1-35, 143-150) chiefly express the idea of combatting evil.

A wooden or stone monument in the form of a wheel or of a cross in a circle is very frequently erected on the spot where death has intruded into human life, either in the cemetery or at the site of an accidental or untimely death. Such monuments are necessary because of the virulent power exercised by death at such places. Or if a person dies without having lived his full span, for instance in adolescence or prior to marriage, the power of death is felt to be especially dangerous, as it has transgressed against the principles of order and periodicity.

The symbolic circle is likewise noticed in customs and dances. The circles and wheels of folk art are never dissociated from the custom, on St. John's Eve, of raising a wheel on a long pole on hillocks. The tall poles surmounting the wheel and the burning barrels of tar retain the essential significance of combatting the powers of winter, and stress the rejuvenation of nature.

Much dynamism, fire, and noise is present in the customs associated with these spring rejuvenation festivals. The demon of winter does not retreat without being driven away; it is necessary to fight energetically on behalf of nature's resurrection, and men must clean out and evict the evil forces that have germinated and grown during the winter. The fight is strongest at those moments when evil forces seem to leap into action with the approach of spring: on the eve of Lent, on Easter Sunday, on St. John's Eve. The evil spirits are successfully evicted by such actions as: rolling burning wheels downhill; dancing in rings around the fireplace; couples jumping over the fire on St. John's Eve; young and old energetically taking to swinging or fast horseback riding on the eve of Lent or Easter; races over the fields; ploughing a furrow all the way around the field when a plowman begins his spring plowing.

Even the aspect of the sky must be dynamic. Lithuanians believe that crops will be poor if seed is sown when the sky is clear; it is necessary to wait for a cloudy sky, when small clouds are spread out in long tresses.

Fig. 143. Iron tipped wooden cross. Horse heads are seen on the gable of the farmer's house. From Raudondvaris, near Kaunas.

Fig. 144. Iron tipped wooden cross from the district of Raseiniai.

Fig. 145. Iron tipped wooden cross from the district of Raseiniai.

Fig. 146. Iron tipped wooden cross from Jurbarkas, middle Lithuania.

Fig. 147. Iron tipped wooden cross from Jurbarkas, middle Lithuania.

Fig. 148. Iron tipped wooden cross from the district of Raseiniai. The space between the cross arms is filled with a portrayal of plant motifs combined with sunlets or small wheels.

Fig. 149. Wooden cross adorned with spirals and baroque plants between the cross arms. District of Tauragė, western Lithuania.

Fig. 150. Wooden cross from the district of Raseiniai. At the end of the cross arms are three small crosses.

The employment of motion and dance, often in conjunction with the very important element of fire, is not restricted to customs of the seasonal festivals. Much dynamism and fire-making may be observed at weddings and funerals. Thus, e.g., the "daughter-in-law dance" is danced prior to the final acceptance of the bride in her new community in East Lithuania. The bride dances within a circle of dancers, participants in the wedding festival, holding a burning torch or a strip of dry wood. During the funeral wake, fire and candles are kept burning. The earliest historical sources, like the reports of Wulfstan, the Anglo-Saxon traveler of the 9th century, mention that races and other action-filled customs were associated at that time with the funeral rites of the Old Prussians.

The symbol of the cross is variously employed to ensure good crops, or as protection from maladies and misfortunes. When the plowman comes out to the field for the first time, he frequently runs crosswise furrows before he begins the actual plowing. Two furrows plowed lengthwise and two crosswise add to the expectation of good crops. It is said: "Lest the incarnate forces of evil should carry the planted seeds to the surface, it is necessary to plow crosswise two furrows, and to put a drop of quick-silver at the spot where the furrows cross each other." Before he starts sowing, the farmer sprinkles the first few handfuls of grain crosswise toward all four sides of the field. To ward off all manner of misfortunes, water is sometimes spilled crosswise on the floor, or food or other offerings may be buried at all four corners of the house. When a house is built, a cross-shaped space is carved out between the logs and this hole is filled with candle wax in order to ward off misfortune, especially fire. Little crosses, made of round logs or sticks, are nailed above stable transoms for the protection of animals.[47]

Lest "evil eyes" cast a spell on bees, a horse skull is raised on a high pole above the center of the beehives. A horse skull buried beneath the stove or table protects the home from diseases and the sheep from death. The skull of horse or bull (or the horns alone) were believed to possess protective powers against animal or human illness, parasites, "evil eyes," hailstorms or other threats. For this reason the symbol was elevated where the danger threatened, usually in a prominent

spot. A toad suspended on a rope or nailed over the door performed the same protective function. A toad or frog touched to a wound healed it immediately, according to one superstition. The significance of animal skulls, snakes, and toads in combatting evil is closely associated with their symbolism in folk art.

In folk art two animal heads are usually placed together. Greater power is supposedly generated by doubling such symbols, since two have more strength than one. The two animal heads representing greater might are to be associated with the dioskurs known to ancient religions in the Orient and among the Greeks, Romans, Teutons, Slavs, and others. Figures of two bulls, two elks, two horses or birds are frequently encountered among the relics of both historic and prehistoric art. They are usually placed on both sides of a pillar or column. From southern Lithuania is recorded a custom of plowing in the spring with two, strong, black bulls, called "holy."[48] Twin horses, associated with the sun or sky-deity and called "sons of God" (Lithuanian Dievo sūneliai) are known in Lithuanian and Latvian folklore.[49]

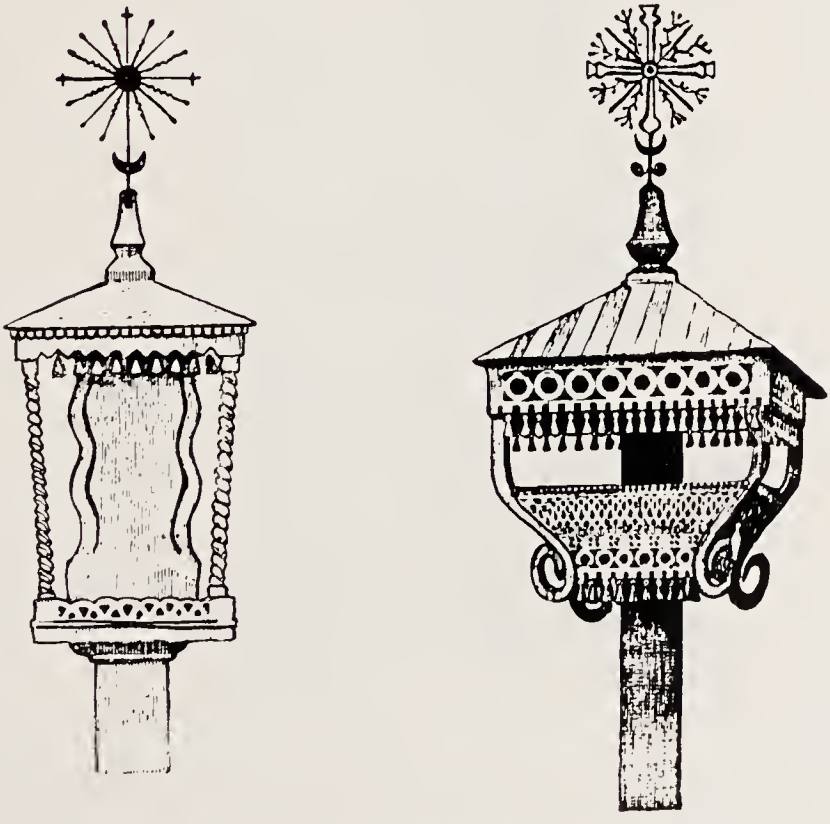
The strengthening of power in the fight for survival is variously represented in customs and folk art. Doubling, multiplication, and iteration are popular. To achieve a stronger effect, folk customs often combined fire, water, sound, and motion. In folk art we observe two birds, not one; two horse or goat heads, not one; one symbol seems to chase or follow others and hundreds of circles and wheels, suns or stars are repeated in the same carving or weaving. Duplication is particularly evident in the construction of roofed poles, where we frequently find several stories of unequal size, several tiers of small wheels, several rows of semi-circles, arcs and zig-zags, winding figures of snakes on both sides of the post, four, five or six sunlets rising above the chapel roof.

Both the religious intention and the sense of aesthetics were influential in the doubling and repetition of symbols in art. We can see a union of geometrical and plant dynamism in the radiating motifs blossoming forth and intertwining with such forcefulness on the crosses raised high on the poles. Everything that moves and grows and lives combats evil and death.

These geometrical, animal, and plant motifs express rhythm and action in folk art. But beside the figures expressing dynamism, we encounter also symbols of sound.

Sound is symbolized in folk art by a wooden or metal bell. Small triangular wooden bells, neatly and symmetrically arranged, hang from the roof or base of the raised chapel (Figs. 151-153). To this day the visitor to ancient rural cemeteries receives an unexpected sensation when the deep silence surrounding the tall roofed crosses is broken by the sound of little wooden bells striking "clack-clack" against the wood of the cross in a puff of wind. This peculiar arrangement makes one aware that these wooden bells are not used for their aesthetic value alone.

Archaeology has discovered bronze rings and resounding discs worn as breast ornaments, etc. Such bosom ornaments tinkled when the wearer moved or walked, and thus protected him or her from evil. Not even the dress ornament escaped



Figs. 151-152. Iron tipped wooden roofed poles. Below the roof are attached triangular wooden pendants.

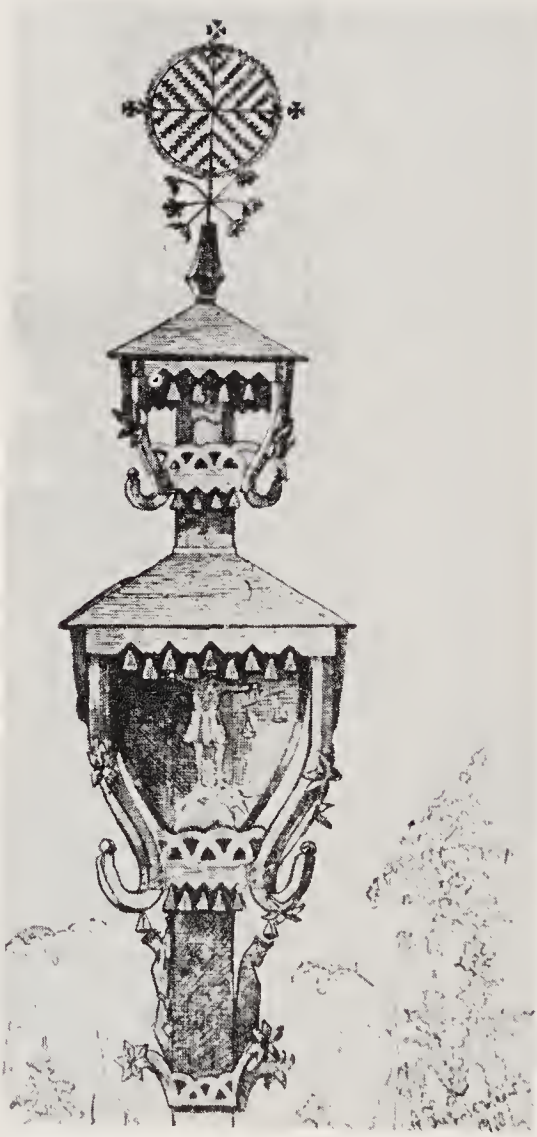


Fig. 153. Iron tipped, two-storied roofed pole with triangular wooden pendants attached below the roof. Inside the lower chapel sculpture of St. George. Northern Lithuania.

having a part in the fight for survival and well-being. In general, the bronze, silver, or gold ornaments worn by the Balts from the pre-Christian millennium until about the 14th-15th centuries served as amulets. With the aesthetic sense was connected the desire to escape evil. The basic designs of these ornaments featured circles, wheels, eyelets, crosses, sunlets and moonlets (Figs. 154-157). Horses manes and saddles were decorated with bronze pendants and soundmakers. The tempestuous, quick-paced, prancing, white steed, snorting and shaking his head covered with sound-making pendants must have created an impressive picture of a power capable of warding off evil.

The tinkling "suspendia" of folk art has numerous counterparts in the sphere of folk customs with their general noise-making: clattering, ringing, clacking, whip-swinging, bull-roaring or cock-cackling. All these sounds were intended to help repel evil spirits.

Sound plays an important role among the instinctive measures one takes in response to sudden fear. "When Perkūnas thunders, it is necessary to run around the house and to make noise (Lithuanian: kankaliuoti) in order that the devils should flee away and Perkūnas smiting the devil should not strike the house. When a thunderous cloud approaches, start beating the bells, for the sound of the bell splits the clouds."[50] Up to the 20th century in some villages of Lithuania, children were told to beat pans and other metal implements with sticks, in order to dispel the evil spirits at the time of the sun's eclipse.

Spring festivals present a noisy aspect. At the beginning of Lent, whip-snapping and yelling accompany sleigh riding; everyone tries to fall off the sleigh and roll in the snow, and the sleighs are decorated with all manner of noise-makers. The year will be plentiful and crops abundant if there has been enough noisy sleigh riding and rolling in the snow. On Holy Thursday, youths engage in the noisy breaking of furniture (bedsteads, tables, etc.) and throw the pieces into the water. Noisy breaking, burning and drowning of the deceased's furniture was prevalent at funeral wakes in the past.

It is believed that noise, water and fire are instruments in repelling the powers of evil. No major undertakings are entered into without doing everything to ensure success, and this requires effort. So violent motion and sound, etc. are employed

Fig. 154. A prehistoric chest ornament: wheel-headed pin with chains and pendants attached, dating from the third century A.D. Northern Lithuania.

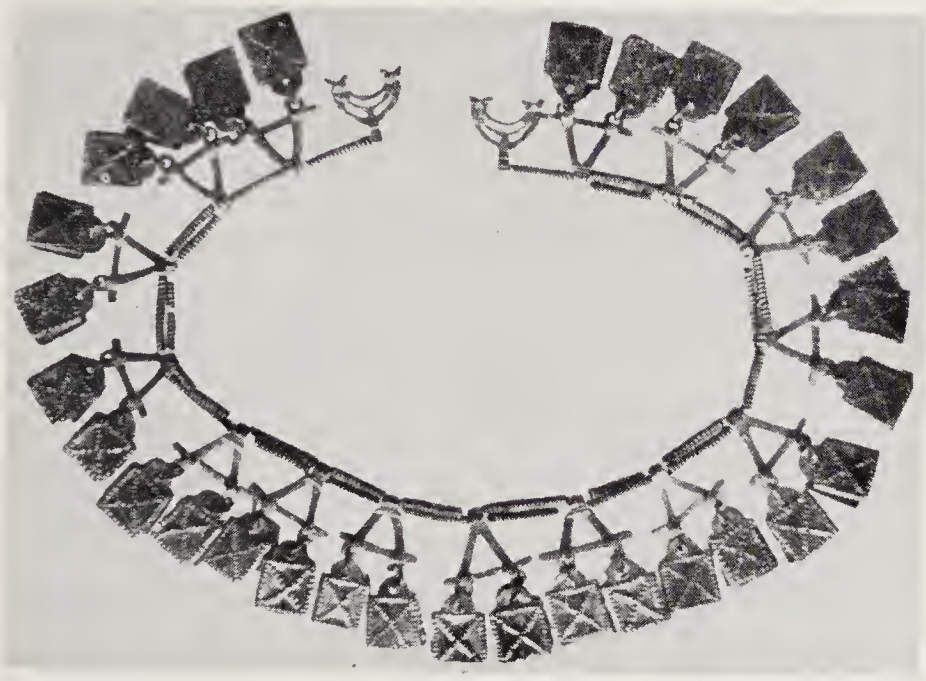


Fig. 155. Chest ornament of bronze dating from the fourth century A.D. Hanging plates are decorated with cross motif, at the ends are lunulae. From the cemetery of Veršvai near Kaunas.

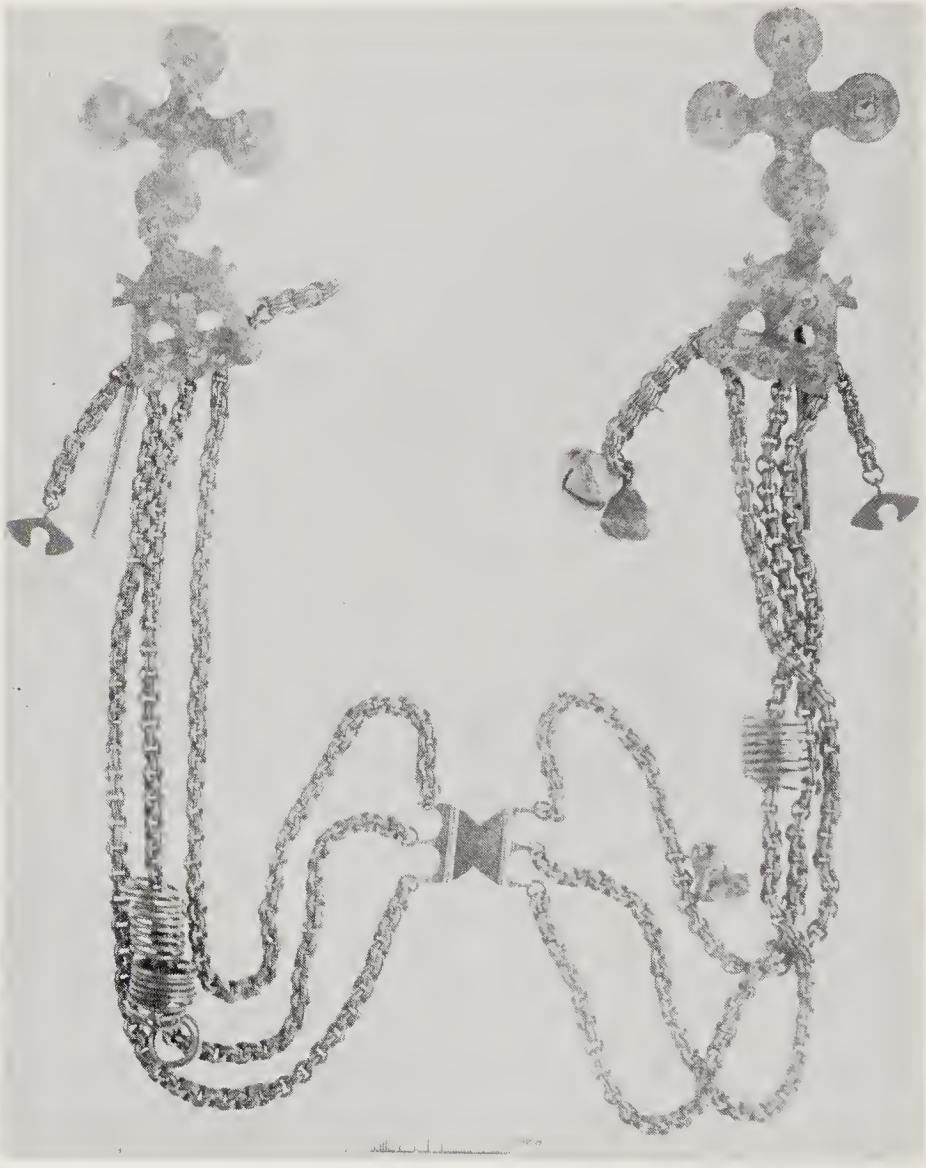


Fig. 156. Chest ornament of bronze worn by men from ca. tenth-eleventh century A.D.: cross-headed pins, originally covered with silver plate decorated with concentric circles, chains on which are attached miniature axelets, spiral rings and jingle bells. From the cemetery of Ringuvėnai near Šiauliai, northern Lithuania.

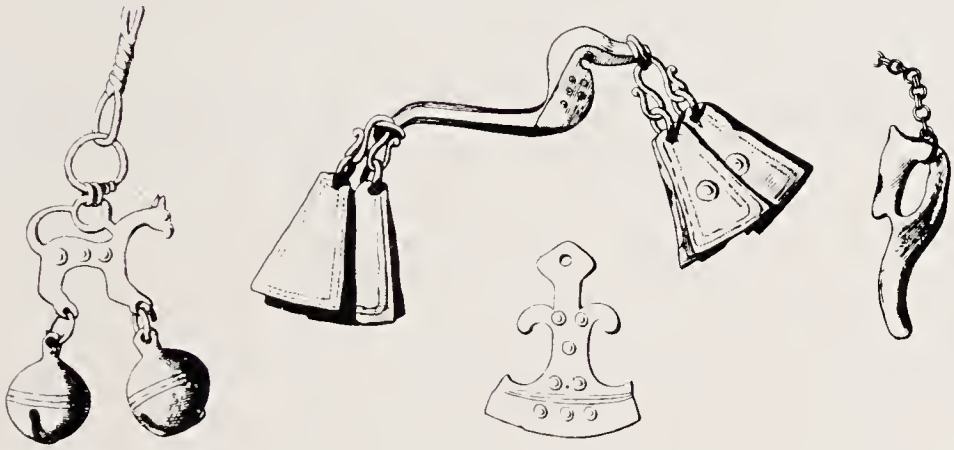


Fig. 157. Horse, water bird and axe pendants with jingle bells and clattering plates dating from the twelfth century A.D. Worn attached to the chain as chest ornament. From Aizkraukle, Latvia.

on all important occasions, that seeds may be activated and crops be good, that horses and pigs will fatten, and that youths may marry sooner.

B. The Power of Life as Essential Principle in the Struggle

Until recently, attempts at reconstructing pre-Christian religions took little note of folk art symbolism, though folk art can provide us with authoritative and uncontaminated sources. Unfortunately, only individual details were noted in connection with this or that cult, viz: the sun, the moon, ancestor worship. The fact that individual symbols are born of underlying religious ideas was generally overlooked.

Lithuanian crosses provide a connecting link between the separate phenomena of ancient religion, making clear one basic pattern. The best developed cults characteristic of Lithuanians, and of Balts generally, were associated with the worship of fire, trees, serpents, sun, moon and the souls of the deceased. Such cults are the most important segments in the whole pattern of ancient religion. Furthermore, there were forms of worship centered about water, stones, horses, etc. The worship of each of such phenomena, from the hallowed earth to the simple tree branch, from the sky to the moon, we call only a cult, because each worshipped object represents only a part of the common force of life. The struggle for existence was the motivating power which not only gave birth to, but unified all the separate cults.

The ancient Baltic religion, and in general, North European religion, has been called "Natural Religion" or "Pantheistic Religion," because its content was worship of and spiritualization of nature and natural phenomena. It was therefore logically included among the naturalistic primitive religions in common with a great many others. This conception, however, is proper only if we answer the question: "Why are nature and its phenomena revered?"

The power of life is the essential principle in the struggle for existence; it is the source of all dynamism in the cosmos and in man. It embodies everything to some degree; it is present even in water or stone. It is the force that impels the struggle for life, and can be diminished only by an overpowering

of death and evil. Man must be constantly alert to channel this force into the creation of new life, and in the ritual of primitive religion he is fighting to do so. For this reason alone he worshipped fire, the death-destroying element; or the serpent, which exuded life's dynamic strength. For this reason, he worshipped trees, poles, mounds of earth—all part and parcel of life-giving Earth. All worship in this religion is addressed to an impersonal, all-pervading, eternal, creative force, which is in all animate and inanimate objects. The pre-Christian religion of the peasants was the "Religion of Existence."

So the roofed pole and the cross in their ancient and common meaning stood guard over the forces of life. This power of life embraced the whole category of circular designs and the symbols of animals and plants, because it was designed to combat and overcome death and all evils.

IV. ON THE ORIGIN OF THE SYMBOLS

Should we ask ourselves "When did the symbols come into existence?" we should have to reply that they are indistinguishable and inseparable from the entire religious ritual; further, that they are closely associated with the ideas which ancient man attempted to express in his symbolic art. Their origin must therefore be traced to the era which produced the figures of the earliest symbolic art of this kind. Some elements, which have survived in folk art and customs, may be supposed to be associated even with the pre-agricultural period. For example, the erection of a wooden pole topped by the skull of an animal or a bird goes back to the Mesolithic or to the Upper Palaeolithic period. These symbols survived the millennia by being repeatedly recreated. All parallel materials akin to these, traced back more than 4000 years in Europe, prove their indubitable connection with the monuments under our examination.

Parallel materials in many countries of Europe provide, upon examination, additional evidence of similarities and analogies. The notion of importation must be excluded; these symbols have not travelled around in late, i.e., historic periods; they have not migrated from one country to the other. Symbolic art with closely related figures was widespread, both in area and time. Groups of symbols of the same system had iterated and reiterated thousands of years later and in many widely separated places. For example, let us compare Figs. 99-109: the horses as gable decoration, and the twin bulls of the Mycenaean gem (Fig 116), with a plant sprouting between them, and the figures of both horses and bulls sprouting plant buds. The symbol of the life-tree alone, or guarded by male animals, or surrounded with sunlets in a generally related form, appears in almost every prehistoric period and in all cultures of the food-producers between Mesopotamia, Egypt and northern Europe. The Neolithic culture represented the most important symbolic group expressing essential ideas of pre-Christian religion. The tradition of the gable or roof top decoration with bull horns, rams, he-goats, water birds, or horse heads is evidenced in various

prehistoric periods. The house urns made of clay dating from the 9th, 8th and 7th centuries B.C., found in Italy and central Germany, show gable decoration in bird, horse, or horn forms. Gable decoration with the same kind of animals and birds is attested by many later finds and by early historic records. Let us take another example and compare the tip of the Lithuanian roofed pole or cross (where nearly always the moon is shown below the sun) and the sun and moon symbols found in Neolithic European, in Greek geometric and Persian art (Figs. 36, 37). These symbols are more than 2,000 years apart and geographically far removed.

A similar, inherited religious idea causes the recurrence of the same elements, and symbols and groups of symbols are much more likely to persist throughout millennia than to be gradually borrowed from one area by another. During the past two decades a number of monographs and papers have been published in western Europe, especially in Nazi Germany, dealing with the problem of the meaning and origin of symbols. Attempts have been made to solve the problem by attributing evolution to the forms, and by tracing the routes of their spread back to alleged places of origin. Nevertheless, many uncertainties and conflicting opinions prevail. The question of the origin of the swastika evoked many varied arguments, inasmuch as this symbol was equally well-known in northern and southern Europe, and in the Orient, especially in India. The finding of the solar and related symbols in Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, in the Hallstatt art and in the art of the greater part of Europe, has made the explanation of their origin "rather hopeless," as some researchers have stated.[51] One thing is clear: a single emblem should not be dissociated from the entire group of symbols which form a well-developed system.

The roots of this symbolic art can hardly be traced to their origin among European people. The basic impulse which encouraged the rise of symbolic art is to be found in the spread of agricultural occupations. Food producing may be generally estimated to be around 5,000 years old in central and northern Europe. It diffused to Europe from the Near East during the fourth millennium B.C. With it the seeds of the symbolism created by peasants were sewn in all directions, across the Aegean to the

Balkans and central Europe, across the Caucasus to eastern Europe. This migration was the most important one. Other migrations of symbols during the later prehistoric and historic periods were of local character; they were migrations either of certain styles or of separate motifs, but not of the original meaning of the symbols or new symbolic systems.

We have mentioned how early the circle, wheel, sun, moon, axe, bull, he-goat, ram, horse, swan and other symbols appeared in prehistoric European art. Clay figurines of the horned animals are known from the earliest sites showing agricultural occupations in the Near East (cf. Jarmo site in Mesopotamia).

The naturalism in art that lasted for long periods in Palaeolithic and Mesolithic stages of culture, has been replaced since the Neolithic by fundamentally symbolic art. Wild animals or hunting scenes were no longer depicted; their place was taken by domestic animals. Geometric figures expressed the rhythm of nature. Art now served the rejuvenation of nature, the fertility of crops, animal and human life; no longer the hunt magic.

Symbols of a mother goddess, an axe, a bull, circle, cross, swastika, serpent and toad were already present in the peasant culture, called Danubian, in central Europe in the third millennium B.C. These symbols were incised on the pots or made in clay. The forms of some symbolic emblems, e.g., like those of the double axes, show that their origin must be sought for in the Aegean area, many other emblems show their origin in the Near East.

Archaeological remains demonstrate that people of the cultures from ca. 2,000 B.C. in central and northern Europe portrayed practically all the symbols that have repeatedly occurred in later prehistoric periods and up to our own times in places where urban influences have hardly affected rural life. On pottery, stone axes or amber axelets were incised circles, crosses, crosses within a circle, swastikas, sunlets and plants, especially fir tree motifs. This symbolic art came to northern Baltic lands with the food-producing economy and the domestication of animals in the beginning of the second millennium B.C. To the culture attributed to the earliest Indo-Europeans in Europe (the Corded Pottery and Battle-axe complex in central and northern Europe, the House-grave or Pit-grave complex in southern Russia and the northern Caucasus, as well as other related

complexes) of the beginning of the second millennium B.C., the above mentioned symbols were already known. The swastika, the cross, the circle, the concentric circle and the sun were frequently engraved on pottery. The role of a horse, snake and ram or he-goat in religion is evidenced by the sacrifice of these animals, traces of which are found in graves. The spiral motif, due most probably to connections with the Aegean area and the Balkans, was distributed over northern Europe during the Bronze Age. In this period, burial mounds with several concentric circles of stones are characteristic of the Baltic area. The Late Bronze Age carvings, found on the rocks of Scandinavia, which are considered some of the most valuable relics of prehistoric symbolic art of northern Europe, are replete with male figures holding axes or concentric circles in the upraised arms; with figures of elks, bulls, he-goats, horses, serpents and figures half animal, half man; plant motifs, boats, spears, circles and moons, depicted separately or interconnected with one another.

Pre-Christian symbols of European folk art can be regarded as remnants of closely related symbols that had a very long life in Europe. There is no point in attempting to evolve their typological continuation from prehistoric times, or to trace a gradual development of their form. Art styles changed continually throughout millennia, but the religion of existence characteristic of the peasants persisted for long periods, keeping the same symbols alive.

V. CONCLUSION

The wooden monuments of art under our examination were intended basically to communicate ideas. Faithfulness to the conception of an impersonal, all-pervading creative force, of the unity of man and nature, displayed a persistent, unbroken survival of ancient symbols.

The value of archaic symbols conserved in the Lithuanian folk art is similar to that of the Lithuanian language, which maintained forms that are very close to the mother tongue of the Indo-Europeans. The ancient words serve for the reconstruction of old linguistic forms; the ancient symbols of folk art as well as of folklore serve for the reconstruction of religious ideas. This faithfulness to antiquity, though, does not mean any retrogression of the rustic culture; on the contrary, it seems to have been a source that never dried up and constantly gave impetus for artistic creation profuse in aesthetic and lyrical emotion. Lithuanian crosses also indicate the people's individuality in their ability to adopt new elements from outside into the background of traditional culture.

Northern Europe is the specific area where folk art manifested itself almost exclusively in wood. How much treasure for art history, for ethnology and religious history has been lost with this perishable material, is well demonstrated by the wooden monuments of Lithuania.

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VII. SOURCES OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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