

The Bird Symbolism

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We saw in Chapter 21, **African Expansion** that the sun-worshipping cultures considered the birds in general as being special animals, because of their capacity to fly towards the sky, the realm of the sun. Such a capacity was also accepted to be a feat belonging to the shamans. Therefore, the bird symbolism has been extensively used in all shamanic cultures. The original cradle of shamanism has been Central Asia and has spread to the ancient world from this region.

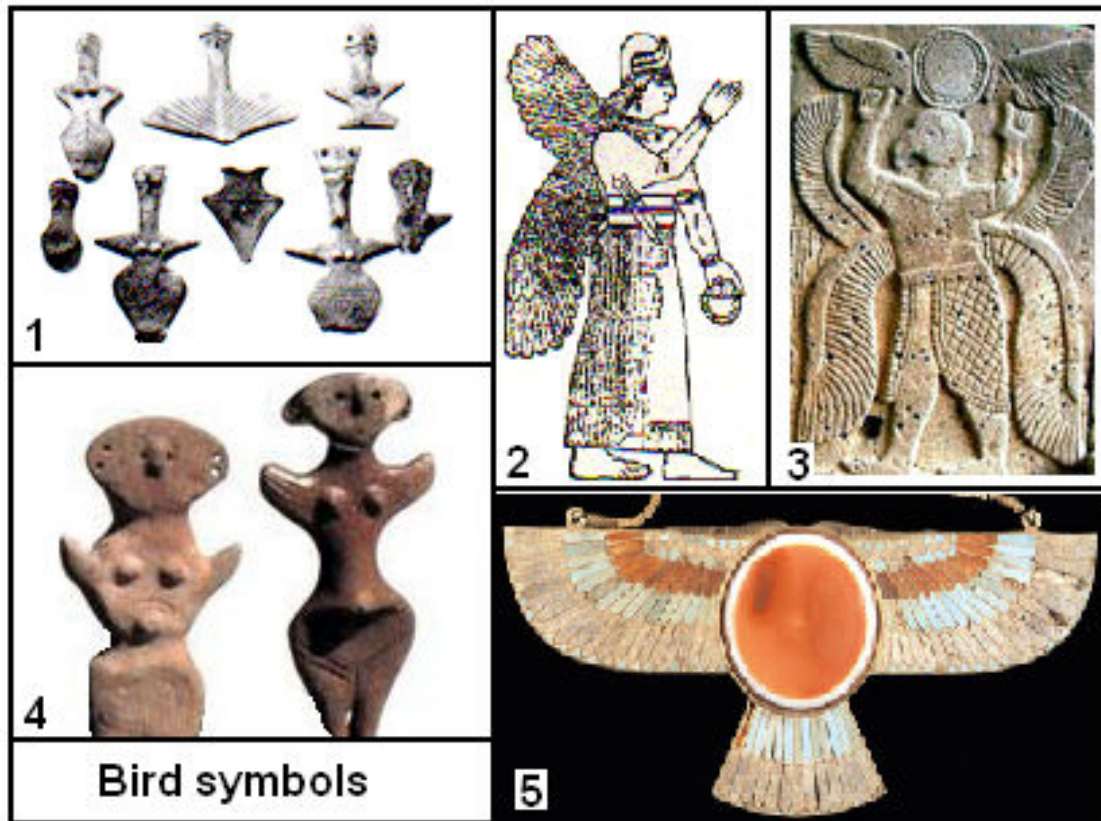
Below we see some totem poles of the North American so called "native people". Bird figures standing at the top of the totem poles represent the spirit of the ancestors as well as the sun-deity. For the northern tribes of America totem poles were the symbols of shamanic guardian-spirit experiences. The shaman or the medicine man would dress up like a bird and perform ecstatic, spiritual flights towards the sky in order to communicate with the deities and ancestors. **Trudy Griffin-Pierce** says (1):

"The figures on the pole were not actually totems because there was no sense of avoidance of the depicted animals or prohibitions against killing or eating them. Instead, they were special helping spirits from the animal world which had become heraldic crests."



Totem poles

The pictures below are examples of the birds symbolism found all over the world.



1. Small amulets excavated from a kurgan in Central Asia (2). These are symbolic figures of female shamans and were carried on the body or hanged from the neck in order to be protected from harmful spirits. They also indicate that shamanism was essentially a female activity.

2. The winged Sumerian sun-god Utu is clearly depicting the connection between the bird and the sun. His helmet has ram horns and he is holding a torque in his left hand. The torque had a special meaning for ancient sun-worshipping societies. The word "torque" is believed to have originated from the Latin word "torquere", but what was its original form? It is quite possible that "torque" was originally a solar symbol of the Etruscans. It suffered the following transformations: **Tur-Osc (Etrusc) => Torosc => Torque**. We find here the connection to the Tur (Toor) and Osc people that came to the Italian peninsula before the Romans. The torque, which has the form of a circle also means "the surrounding" or "the circle" and stands for the land or region under control by the Tur (see Chapter 8, **The double-edged ax**). The torque was either held in the hand or surrounded the neck of the Och leader and is found in many different cultures that originated from Asia. More detail will be given in the following chapters.

3. A Hittite deity from Karatepe – Anatolia (3). The winged deity takes its place among a series of wall relief at the entrance wall of a late Hittite castle. The anthropomorphic figure has a bird beak and is holding a winged solar disk above its head, indicating the clear connection between the bird and the sun.

4. Winged female amulets from Ikiztepe – Anatolia. These small idols are from the Bronze Age that lasted from 3300 BC until 1200 BC. The interesting point to notice is the slim bodies

and flat shapes of these idols. The reason for such flat shapes is most probably related to the need of carrying these amulets on the breast, attached by strings and hanging from the neck. The small holes on each side of the face were probably made for the purpose of passing a string through them (4).

5. The winged sun-disk on a chain is a pectoral made out of gold, carnelian agate, turquoise and metaphoric stone (5). It was made by Phrygian or Lydian artists of western Anatolia about the 8th century BC. A link has been claimed by Herodotus between the western Anatolian Lydians and the Etruscans of Italy. The original name of Lydia was **Luddu**, which became Ludia in ancient Greek. This name was most probably **ULU-OD-ÖYÜ** (the land of the sacred fire) transforming into **Ulu-ud-ia => Luddu => Ludia => Lydia**, indicating a sun-worshipping culture whose language originated from the Asiatic Proto-language. By the 8th century BC the whole region of western Anatolia came under Hellenistic influence and the languages of most city states became part of the Indo-European language group.

The origin of the Phrygians and the date of their appearance in Anatolia is an issue still debated among scholars. The technique of the sun-disk is found to be similar to the objects found in the graves of Susa, the capital of the ancient Elamite culture (see Chapter 18, **Towards Sumer and Elam**). Therefore, similar sun-god symbols shared among eastern Mediterranean, Mesopotamian and Anatolian cultures are clear indicators of their common Asiatic origin.

References

- (1) **Native Americans**, Trudy Griffin-Pierce, Metro Books, page 111, 1996, NY - USA.
- (2) Ref. 3 of Chapter 1.
- (3) **National geographic**, Turkish edition, January 2009, page 52.
- (4) **Mysterious Women of the Bronze Age**, Yapı Kredi Cultural Activities, page 31, 2006, Istanbul.
- (5) **The Lydian Treasure**, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture publication, page 174, 1996, Istanbul.