

THE PERSISTENCE OF SYMBOLS.

AS INSTANCED BY THE DOUBLE EAGLE AND THE STAFF OF
HERMES.

BY THE EDITOR.

BABYLONIAN excavations and kindred archæological researches have brought to light many interesting facts, among which not the least important is the observation that mankind of former ages was more conservative than might appear to the modern generation who are accustomed to rapid changes. Thus Professor Banks informs us to-day that the coat of arms of Turkey, which in the opinion of many Mohammedans originated with the rise of Mohammedanism upon the ruins of the Greek Empire after the conquest of Constantinople, is really much older and dates back to the dawn of civilization when the same symbol was used as a charm to ward off evil. Similarly we have found that most of the Biblical traditions and institutions are in their essence much older than the Bible, and we will add here another strange instance of the preservation of an old symbol in calling attention to the prototype of the double eagle of the old German Empire which is still retained in the coat of arms of Austria and also of Russia. Russia adopted it when the ruler assumed the title of Czar, which means Cæsar or Kaiser.

The double eagle as a coat of arms of the Holy Roman Empire has not been definitely and positively dated before the Emperor Sigismund, but it also occurred much earlier in the coat of arms of Emperor Wenzel. Professor Roemer, however, in his book on the seals of the German Emperors* claims that this double eagle does not represent the coat of arms of the emperor but designates the united coats of arms of Silesia and Brandenburg, thus suggesting the combination of two eagles as the origin of the double eagle.

Much has been written on the subject, especially by Gatterer,

* *Siegel der deutschen Kaiser.*

von Ludewig, Pfeffinger, and Samuel Oetler, but no satisfactory explanation has been offered as to the source and original meaning of the double eagle. Since the days of Emperor Sigismund, however, the emblem of the emperor has continued to be the double-headed eagle placed on a golden field, holding in its claws the scepter, sword and imperial globe. The two heads are surrounded by a halo. The breast of the double eagle always carried the coat of arms of the imperial house. The double eagle has been explained by lovers of mysticism as designating the double nature of the Roman Empire in both its spiritual and secular aspects at once. The Roman Church represents the spiritual world and the imperial government the worldly affairs of this monarchy which tacitly claimed to be of a universal nature.



COAT OF ARMS OF AUSTRIA.



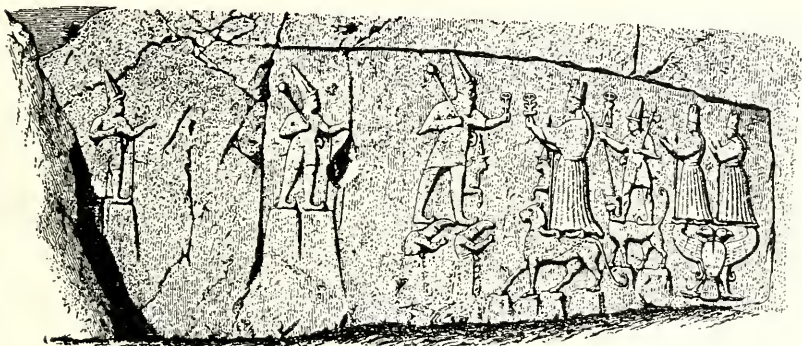
COAT OF ARMS OF RUSSIA.

The double-headed eagle, however, does not appear first as the emblem of the emperor. It occurs also in other coats of arms of minor significance. The first mention of it in heraldic books is in the illustration of the seal of the Count of Würzburg, dated 1202. Another is mentioned by Falme in his "History of Rhenish Families."* It was also the coat of arms of Henricus de Rode, dated 1276. Among the other double-headed eagles of an ancient date is one of 1278 which was borne by Philip of Saxony, and another by the Archbishop of Cologne, an evidence of which is its appearance upon the coat of arms of the city of Cologne. At present there are two little principalities which still bear the double eagle. One is

* *Geschichte der rheinischen Geschlechter*, Book I, Plate 3.

Schwarzburg-Sondershausen, the other the principality of Liechtenstein, a small territory on the upper Rhine, situated between the Austrian Tyrol and Switzerland. It is so small that in the peace made between Austria and the German Confederacy on the one side and Prussia on the other, it was absolutely forgotten, so that no treaty was made between Prussia and the Prince of Liechtenstein. The result was that through the dissolution of the German Confederacy this tiny district became an independent principality without any attachment to the old German Empire of which it had once formed a part.

Whether the double eagle of the Holy Roman Empire developed on German soil or whether it was derived from a monument in Boghaz Köi in ancient Phrygia is an open question. Springer in his "History of Art" states this view as a matter of course, as if



MONUMENT FROM BOGHAZ-KÖI.

there were no doubt about it; but we know of no conclusive argument except that the double eagle as a coat of arms makes its appearance in German history soon after the Crusades.

The double eagle is said to appear on some old Turkish crests, which suggests the possibility that the chief who used it had seen the emblem on the rocks of Boghaz Köi. He may have lived near by and so have come to appropriate it. We may further assume that a crusader obtained possession of a shield of this kind by conquest, or even that he happened to see the rock of Boghaz Köi himself and adopted the design for his coat of arms. In this way it may have found its way into Germany; but one thing is sure that once in Europe the strange design attracted widespread attention. It pleased many and became frequently used until at last it received a place in the coat of arms of the Empire.

There is no proof of this hypothesis, and the main argument in its favor consists in the improbability that such a strange combination should have been invented twice. As soon as the double-headed eagle had become an emblem of the Empire it was adopted by all other monarchs who assumed the title of emperor or kaiser. However, when Napoleon made himself emperor he returned to the simple eagle, which as we know, had been the royal coat of arms of the German kings before they went to Italy to be crowned as Roman emperors.

The name Boghaz Kõi means "village of the gorge," and the place is now a small hamlet* remarkable for its interesting ruins whose history is as yet by no means definitely determined. In the *Encyclopædia Britannica* the present state of the controversy is summed up as follows:

"Dr. Barth thinks the city was probably founded by Cyaxares, the Mede, and explains the groups of sculpture as commemorating the peace between Cyaxares and Alyattes, which is described by Herodotus in the 74th chapter of his first book. M. Texier's hypothesis, on the other hand, is that the carvings represent the introduction of the worship of Astarte into Phrygia; and this interpretation has been provisionally accepted by Van Lennep, in whose *Travels in Asia Minor*, 1870, carefully-drawn copies of the sculptures will be found."

We are inclined to believe that neither hypothesis is correct, yet we grant that the carving indicates the welcome given to the great goddess (Astarte, Istara, Cybele or by whatever name she may be called) by the chief male deity of the country, presumably the god of heaven or of the sun, for if he were the moon-god he would wear the crescent on his scepter.

We need not suppose that the worship of the goddess Astarte was introduced at once and in such an ostensible way. We have reason to assume that the goddess was worshiped in Phrygia since times immemorial and that her cult was handed down from pre-historic ages. Accordingly the Boghaz-Kõi monument can scarcely represent the introduction of Astarte worship into Phrygia, but it may be a representation of the annual festival of the god's marriage, and this interpretation seems to me the most probable.

In the procession of the goddess we see two persons standing upon a double eagle, but we have not the slightest cue as to the meaning of this strange emblem.

* It is situated at about 40° N. latitude on the banks of a creek that falls into the river Kizil Irmak.

In this connection we may also state that the famous staff of the Chthonic Hermes (Mercury) consisting of two intertwining serpents, is much older than Greek mythology. As some of the more archaic representations indicate, the staff consisted originally of the solar disk surmounted by a crescent, which is obviously a combination of the two symbols of the moon and the sun. It is not uncommon that a misunderstood symbol received a new interpretation by the after-thought of later generations that were not familiar with its history.



DESCENT OF DIONYSUS TO HADES.

It is natural that all the gods that have anything to do with the dead and the restoration of life, would in their capacity as Chthonic deities, that is to say when visiting the underworld, bear in their hands the staff of Mercury. Thus for instance Dionysus, who also incorporated in his personality the idea of restorer to life is represented with this emblem. On the picture of an ancient Greek vase he rides on a goat which unquestionably establishes his identity, and he is welcomed by the torch-bearing Hekate.

The combination of sun and moon represented the quintessence of the life principle and so their symbols placed on the staff of the deity who conducts the soul to Hades, represent thereby the power of calling the dead back to life.

Our illustrations indicate a progress of the symbol from its old

form to the new one until finally even the combination of the crescent with the disk is lost, as may be seen in a medallion here represented.

It is noticeable that in those representations of Hermes which refer to the funerary cult the old form is more rigorously adhered to, as appears, for instance, from a votive tablet found in Southern



THE STAFF OF HERMES.



HERMES RESURRECTING THE DEAD.

Italy. Here the connection of Hermes with the restoration of life is most apparent, and for this reason he confers with the Chthonic Aphrodite. She stretches out her arm apparently granting his request for the resurrection of the dead, holding in her hands a pome-



CHTHONIC HERMES.
Votive tablet from South Italy.

granate which is practically the same symbol as the apple in the hand of Venus. On her arm stands Eros in this connection called the Chthonic Eros, who is naturally deemed accessory, perhaps even indispensable, in the procreation of new life.

In the current mythological representations of Hermes the

staff bears the wings as a last reminiscence of the winged disk of the Egyptians, and the snakes are gracefully intertwined, recalling the seraphim, the protecting genii of fanes and deities.

The persistence of symbols is beautifully instanced in the double eagle and the staff of Hermes as well as the crescent and star of Turkey. But we ought to mention also the cross which has become the symbol of Christianity and yet it is as ancient as mankind. We have set forth this subject in a series of articles published some time ago in *The Open Court* and can only say that it is typical of the



HERMES PRESENTING SOULS TO PLUTO AND PERSEPHONE.

development of mankind. When new thoughts rise into prominence old forms of thought, old emblems, old institutions, continue in use, but they are filled with new meaning, they are re-interpreted, they gain a new and often a deeper significance than they had before. In this way the cross which symbolized to primitive mankind the combination of the two life-giving principles, the four quarters of the world, fertilization through rain, and many other things important for the life of primitive man, came to signify the death of Christ and the symbol of salvation.