

## **On the Trail of the Cornucopia: Between Myth and Reality**

By Emanuele Franz

One of the approaches that must be taken when dealing with symbols that embrace multiple civilizations and cultures, such as that of the horn, is to consider the existence of an original code common to religions as plausible and, above all, that between the ancient myths and the advent of Christianity there is not a conflict but a continuity. In previous research this had been found, in Colchis, a continuity between the ancient myth of the Golden Fleece and the first Christian communities of the Georgian Orthodox Church and, recently in Anatolia, on the border with Syria, in the devastated war zones on the trail of the original water of Genesis. The water of life could be identified with the water that the locals venerate and use to cure the sick on the outskirts of the city of Şanlıurfa (ancient Edessa) in a miraculous well that is believed to be the one where the biblical Job was buried for seven years.

Myth does not invent but always starts from something authentic that has its roots in the people, so we went to Greece to the places where the mythological events of the Myth of the Cornucopia took place, the legendary horn of abundance that Hercules obtained in the fight with the river god Achelous.

The story of the myth of Heracles takes place on the banks of the river Achelous. A great river in itself, it has always been considered a source of fertility because it infinitely produces life-giving water without running out or drying up. Just like the sun, which produces heat and light without being consumed.

Heracles, once he has recovered the Cornucopia from the dispute with the river-god, delivers it to the king of Aetolia who is called Oeneus and obtains his daughter Deianira as his wife.

For many, this story is just a fairy tale, one of the many exploits of Hercules.

The explanation of the myth of the Cornucopia given by historians is the following: the two regions, that of Aetolia, to the east, and that of Acarnania, to the west, border and are often in dispute. The natural border between the two is precisely the river Achelous which however continually erodes land on the sides, continually changing the spaces and borders and therefore increasing the disputes between the two bordering populations. The fight of Heracles with the river therefore represents, by allegory, the human attempt to stem the devastating force of nature and bring peace to the dispute between the two bordering peoples. The river God who in the myth changes shape indicates his sudden movement and the Cornucopia is a metaphor for the richness of the land. That's all. Nothing symbolic, nothing metaphysical. Nothing supernatural. A little story invented by the ancients at war over a field of potatoes. Must we really believe that the ancients were as foolish as the moderns claim, or is there more to it? Or must we believe, instead, that the myth of the horn of plenty conceals a cosmic secret that spans civilizations and millennia and explains the very origin of man on earth, the fruit of a celestial abundance that, with its love, has watered the earth with life?



Ancient maps of Aetolia with the river Achelous, setting of the myth of the Cornucopia.

Our hypothesis is that the Cornucopia must have existed in some form and that it is not a mere literary or poetic invention but represents something real.

We believe the existence of a physical horn is likely because Pausanias, in his work *Guide of Greece*, (VI,19, 6), speaks of Miltiades being given an ivory cornucopia as a sign of honor for his military exploits.

I find it plausible that a military leader like Heracles would give the king a horn of high magical-ritual value as a sign of a seal or political agreement.

Our approach was to consider that ancient pagan cults were assimilated and reiterated by religious communities that followed one another in the same territory.

In the area surrounding the current city of Missolonghi, in north-western Greece, we find that in the archaeological sites of the ancient cities of Calydon and Pleurone,, Christian basilicas were built: one from the 5th century on the acropolis of Pleurone and one dedicated to St. John the Baptist on the previous temple of Dionysus in Calydon. Continuity. Finally, the turning point in his research occurred when a church from the 7th-8th century dedicated to St. John the Baptist was identified, which stands on the banks of the river Achelous.



Ruins of a church dedicated to St. John the Baptist  
in ancient Calydon, built on the remains of the temple of the God Dionysus



The River-god Achelous, from whom comes the Cornucopia

This church was the seat of an eparchy dedicated to the pagan God Achelous and inside there are mosaics from the 5th century (preceding the church itself) which deal with pre-Christian motifs (flora, fruits of the earth, elements linked to fertility and abundance) finally surmounted by a fresco above the altar which shows the Virgin holding the Cornucopia in her hand in the form of a luminous disk from which fertility and abundance emerge.

It is certainly a surprising discovery that shows that the Cornucopia is not only not an invention but there was a Christian cult dedicated to it, a Christian cult that intertwines pagan motifs related to abundance. A sign of enormous importance that shows how the coming of Christianity did not destroy, but preserved, protected and also that the ancient myths announced the Revelation.



7th century church on the banks of the Achelous, dedicated to St. John the Baptist

The Cornucopia is represented as a luminous disk. The Holy Virgin has a luminous disk in her hand, the circle of life, the disk from which abundance and fertility follow and to which the underlying mosaic rich in the fruits of the earth is naturally connected.



The Virgin with the Cornucopia in her hand, in the form of a luminous disk, from which the fruits of the earth flow, near the Christian church that stands on the banks of the river Achelous from which comes the mythological horn of abundance

Clearly the disk is linked to the Cornucopia to the extent that we must imagine that the Cornucopia is represented as a luminous disk. First of all the Cornucopia, seen geometrically, is a set of circles such that from the small they go more and more to ideally expand into a circle with an infinite circumference. Here we find elements linked to North Africa, because the association of the circle with the horn is found precisely in North Africa.

The Goddess Hathor, in fact, which means house of Or, the solar God, is represented with the circle with horns and, among others, is also evoked to have abundance. But we also find the solar God Ammon, who the Greeks identify with Zeus, who was venerated with horns.

The fact remains that the association of the circle of life or the circle of light with abundance is a fact of enormous importance. To quote the Old Testament:

“He encircles the heavens with a circle of glory; the hands of the Most High have stretched it out.”  
Sirach 43:12:



Cornucopia with sphere. 2nd century BC National Archaeological Museum of Athens

In conclusion, we are faced with a discovery that demonstrates the very existence of the Cornucopia or in any case of the cult of the Cornucopia, which is the same thing. It is a journey that connects more civilizations, that makes an evidence that is this: Christianity does not arrive and destroy, as a certain propaganda wants to deceptively proclaim, but it is a Christianity that arrives and protects, absorbs and elevates.

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