

The Bull headed Mace - the Gurz.

Firoza Punthakey Mistree

Fareidoon's Weapon of Choice

The use of a mace with a horned-bull's head at one end, (see picture) is mentioned in Zoroastrian myths as well as in stories from the Shaname. Famed Zoroastrian warriors such as Fareidoon and Rustom, were known according to legend to have used it as a favoured weapon of war. In fact Rustom's bull-headed mace was universally feared in the region. In the story of Fareidoon Athywan versus the evil King Zohak, set in the epic Peshdadian period, it is Fareidoon who attacks Zohak with the bull headed mace to knock him unconscious, before Zohak is trussed up and sent as an eternal prisoner to Mount Demavand. Since then, the Zoroastrians have seen it as a weapon to protect the religion and themselves from the forces of evil.

For Zoroastrian Priests, it is their weapon of office, to be used to protect the sacred fire in times of danger. Thus every priest when initiated is ceremonially given a mace when he undergoes the Navar ceremony. The priest is duty bound to use the mace to safeguard the sacred fire, when the religion is in danger. The crescent shaped horns, symbolizes the moon, which

as per Zoroastrian mythology, is the repository of the seed of the bull. A mythical Bull Hadyans, will be sacrificed, at the end of time, possibly as an act to purify the world during the Yasna ritual, performed by Ahura Mazda and the last Shaoshyant. The half-moon horned symbol of the bull, is also found in the implements used in the Yasna ceremony. It is called, the Mah ruh, the Spirit of the Moon and the barsom rods used in the Yasna ceremony, are placed on these half-moon stands. (See picture)

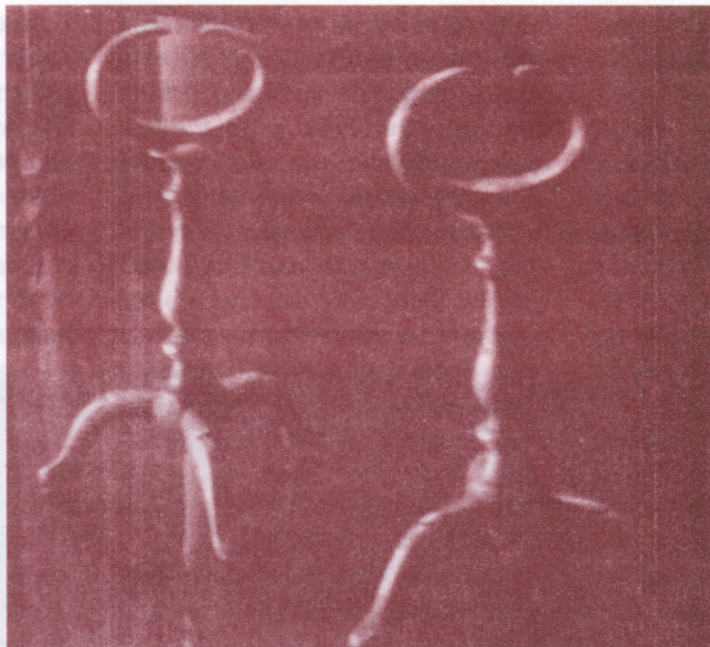


The bull-headed mace, is also given to a newly initiated priest as a symbolic reminder of the sacrifice of this Primordial Bull. According to Zoroastrian eschatology, this will take place at the end of time, linking the Yasna ceremony performed for the first time by the newly initiated priest with this cosmic event.

The Bull-headed mace is also kept on the walls of the inner sanctum of a Fire Temple and until a few years ago, a very large Bull-headed mace decorated the inner sanctum of the

Banaji Atash Behram in Mumbai. It was an arresting sight for the devotees when worshipping before the sacred fire.

A variation of this symbol, that is of the winged bull, with a human head, is to be found at Persepolis and Susa, and at the entrance of Fire Temples. These are said to guard the Gates of Heaven. The winged-bull represents the spiritual, physical and animal worlds and is known as "gavpatsha" or "ghoda". Its important features are its long ears which are meant to help it to hear God's command. The human head represents the physical world in which man lives, the wings represent the spiritual world and the bull's torso



Mah-ruh half-moon stands used in the Yasnaritual

represents the Primordial Bull Hadyans, who is to be sacrificed at the end of time. Thus the winged bull has authority and sway over the physical, spiritual and animal world.

Historical Information

The horned-bull mace also known as 'the Mace of Mithra', assumed popularity when the symbol was appropriated by Roman soldiers and taken to Rome as a symbol of Roman Mithraism. Scholars have suggested, that soldiers and civilians based in the surrounding countries of Pontus, Cappadocia and Commagene, retained some Iranian traditions after these countries were conquered by the Iranian Kings. The soldiers were later

recruited into the Roman legions and they brought with them the worship of Mithra – the Iranian deity of light, contracts and friendship, who is closely linked with the sacrifice of the Bull. Mithra is said to shake his mace over the regions of Hell three times a day to restrain the demons gathered in hell from inflicting greater punishment on the damned then they merit, further emphasizing the use of the mace to drive away the evil forces. (See Hinnells, *Persian Mythology*)

It is interesting to note that the crowns of Sasanian Kings, Khusrau II, Peruz I and Yazdegird III were also adorned with the half moon motif symbolizing the bull. After the Arab conquest of Iran this symbol which was once seen on Sasanian fire temples & coins was adopted from Sasanian material and religious culture by the muslims who conquered Iran. The crescent and star motif found on mosques, is so well identified with Islam today that its, Zoroastrian antecedents have been long forgotten. The motif of the half moon with the star also represented the honorific title adopted by some Sasanian Kings who officially took on the royal title of being "The Brother of the Moon and Stars".