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SYMBOLICS OF THE CONSTELLATIONS OF SAGITTARIUS AND CENTAURUS IN RUSSIAN TRADITIONAL CULTURE

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Centaurus falls into the category of 'imaginary animals'. The Russian tradition used not only the symbol Sgr (a result of its acquaintance with the circle of Zodiac), but also the symbol Cen, which fact, as we shall demonstrate, is an evidence of certain mythological-astronomical conceptions.

Both the constellations Sagittarius (Sgr) and Centaurus (Cen) are usually represented as versions of the picture of a fantastic being, a Centaur, shaped as man from head to waist, and as an animal, mostly, a horse, from waist down. 'Centaurus' (from the Greek word *κεν* (or *κενω*)) for 'kill' and *ταυρος*, for 'bull') means 'bull killer', and is probably related to the opposition of the zodiacal constellations Taurus and Sagittarius. When the latter begins to rise on to the night sky, the former disappears completely from view.

Sagittarius is represented at ancient monuments related to astronomy as a centaur holding a bow and pointing at certain stars. The constellation of Centaurus is also symbolised by a centaur, but holding not a bow, but a staff or a spear in one hand and an 'animal of sacrifice' in the other (Higinus, *Astronomica*, III, 37, I; Chernetsov, 1975, Figure 1). The attributes stand for the Peliases Spear (The Mithological Dictionary, 1991), depicted in astrological maps as The Spear of Centaurus¹, The Wolf (Lupus), the Panther or the Beast (Flammarion, 1994).

KEY WORDS Centaurus, Zodiac, Sagittarius, mythology, symbols, Ancient Russia, Solomon, Adoniram-Hiram, Kitovras, Polcan, architecture, Novgorod, archaic tradition, magic

1 SAGITTARIUS

The earliest pictures of Sagittarius are found on the boundary stones from the Casite epoch and in Dendera 'Round Zodiac' (van-den-Waerden, 1972, Figure 2)². In a Babylonian relief Sagittarius seems to emerge from the tale of Scorpio. Markus Manilius describing the Zodiac as a sequence of ever moving symbols also emphasizes this point: '...at whose [Scorpio] tail the man with the trunk of a horse aims

¹Ashen spear was given to Peleus by centaur Chiron. It is a more ancient symbol of power than sword.

²The author points to the Egyptian figures dependence on Babylonian origins.

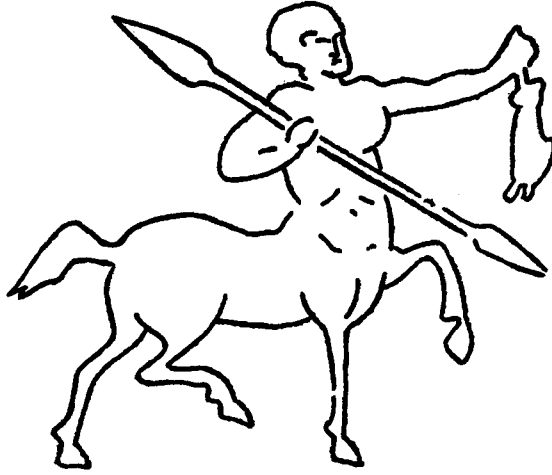


Figure 1 West-European type of Cen with Spear and Hare.



Figure 2 Sgr from Babylonian boundary stone (Cassite epoch).

with taut bow...' (Astronomica, 1, 269). The Middle-Ages orthodox East used to reproduce a composition that pictures a conventional allegoric Scorpio at the hind part of a backward looking Sagittarius³ (Chernetsov, 1975)⁴. 'Back looking' Sagittarius and Scorpio are found in miniatures in Russian manuscripts of Christian Topography by Cosmas Indicopleustes dating from 1495 (Uvarov coll. N1731, p.39, Figure 4) idem from coll. of P.I. Shchukin (17th century) (Redin, 1916).

In the major part of the 17th–18th cents. Russian versions of the Topography as well as in Byzantine manuscripts Sagittarius is pictured as pointing ahead – see

³Back-looking centaur, points at the mouth of the beast that raises out of its tail... (Chernetsov, 1975, Figure 3)

⁴This interpretation, probably originated at Muslim East, is present in Polish heraldry too.

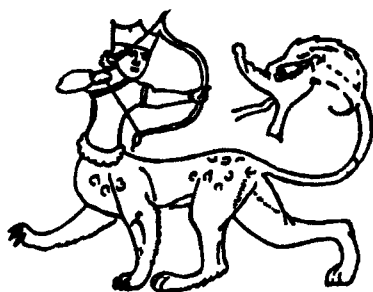


Figure 3 Centaur-Sagittarius (Georgia, 12th cen.).



Figure 4 The 'back-looking' type of Sagittarius from the Zodiac in the manuscript of *Christian Topography* by Cosmas Indicopleustes (1495); Scorpio's tail is seen behind Sagittarius.

the miniatures in the versions of 'Topography': that from 1542 at Synodal Library (N997); from 1593 at Kiev Religious Academy (N212, p.100); from 16th century at Moscow Religious Academy (N2, p.53) in Barsov's collection (N458, the reverse of p.85, Figure 5); from 17th century in K.I. Chertkov's collection (N1, p. 218) (Redin, 1916). Here the Centaurus is also bareheaded.

Sagittarius representations as fish-shaped from the waist down in some Russian miniatures finds explanation in the fact that the Biblical Flood started and ended while the Sun was travelling through that sign (Nicephor, 1990). On the 27th day (according to the Septuaginta and the Russian Orthodox tradition observed up to 19th century)⁵ of the 2nd lunar month (of the earliest civil calendar – Boul/Marheshvan) the waters of the Flood came on Earth and Noah and his sons stepped into the Ark (Gen., 7: 10–13). The date corresponds to the end of Julian November (it should be taken into account that the Jewish year began at the Autumn Equinox) (New Explanatory Bible, 1990). Ancient Russia scribes may have connected the sign of Sagittarius with the end of the Flood as well, but this is more difficult to prove, for the waters of the Flood receded gradually. In any case, 'by

⁵Translation of the Masoret redaction of the Bible (appeared in Russia in 18th century, so-called Synodal) gives the number 17.



Figure 5 Sgr shooting along the direction of motion (Topography manuscript, 16th century).



Figure 6 'The Sagittarius of the Flood' (with the trunk of a fish). Psalter, Buslaev's coll, N738.



Figure 7 Sgr from the 5th cylinder of the staff of Gerontius, Moscow Metropolitan (15th century).

the 27th day of the 2nd month ... the earth dried' (Gen., 8:14). That was because of the coincidence of dates, we believe, that the symbol for the sign has suffered the 'fishward' transformation. The 'Sagittarius of the Flood' is found in the Zodiac in the Psalter from Buslaev's collection (N738, 35, Figure 6). That version is the earliest and here we see the 'fishlike Sagittarius' placed just above the Ark of Noah that had come to a halt 'at Mount Ararat'. Other pictures of the 'Sagittarius of the Flood' are found in the Topographies of: 1495, from Uvarov's collection (N1713, 97, reverse); 16th century, from the collection of OLPD (N399, 205, reverse); 17th century, from Undol'sky's collection (N190, 183, reverse).

A 'back-looking type' Sagittarius is engraved in the 5th cylinder of Moscow Metropolitan Gerontius's staff (15th century, Figure 7). A bearded Sagittarius points his arrow over his right shoulder at a coiled up monster with 'its jaws wide open and its poisonous tongue reaching the tail of the horse' (Chernetsov, 1987). One front hoof of the centaur is slightly bent. This image goes back to the iconography of Sagittarius and Scorpio⁶. Besides the symbols of the two constellations, two Rams and a Bull, possibly of an astral meaning as well, appear on the same cylinder. A 'zodiacal' medallion from a plafond at Kolomenskoe Palace (17th century) described in a poem by Semion Polotsky (Zabelin, 1990) is another example of the 'back-looking' version. In the miniature 'Heavenly Races' from the manuscript 'The Eagle of Russia' (the end of 17th century)⁷ the picture of the 'back-looking' Sagittarius is circled by a vermillion quotation from Psalter (18:6): 'Rejoice, for the hard journey is over'; here the zodiacal symbolism is inserted into a biblical context.

An allegory of the constellation is found on leaf B of the 'ABC-book by Karion Istomin' (1693) a Centaurus, naked down to the waist and standing on its hind legs points the bow to the right; the picture is captioned 'Sagittarius' (Tarabrin, 1916, Figure 8). On the leaf 13 (reverse) of the same manuscript (composed at the order of the Queen Praskovia Fedorovna for education of the daughters of Tsar Ioann Alekseevich) there is a picture that as much as repeats the one described above in almost all the details and is captioned 'Hyppocentaurus'.

In 'Brjnsov Calendar' (begining of 18th century) Sagittarius is depicted in the mappings as long-haired, having no beard and pointing with the bow to the left (Rovinsky, 1881). The sign 'Sgr' encircled in a round medallion is found in a colour picture made in Russian traditional technique (lubok) on the leaf for the month November of 'Church Calendar' by Grigory Tepchegorsky first printed in Moscow in 1713-1714⁸ and repeatedly reprinted afterwards. A coloured 18th century Zodiac includes a Sagittarius, in a round medallion, on its hind feet, and pointing in the direction of the motion⁹; the inscription goes: 'The Month of November (the astrological sign Sgr). The Archer warm and dry by nature, lasts for 30 days' (see the miniature in colours from Rovinsky's collection: Le loubok..., 1984). According

⁶The possibility of the picture representing Centaurus and Hydra can not be excluded. For details see below.

⁷Stored in the Academic Library at SPb. Repr.: *Monuments of Ancient Russia Literature*, Vol. 12.

⁸See, for example: an etching of the 2nd half of 18th century from Rovinsky's collection. Exhibition 'National Miniature of Russia', GMII (Pushkin State Museum of Art), 1997.

⁹The retreating motion of the Sun, that is, toward Sagittarius.

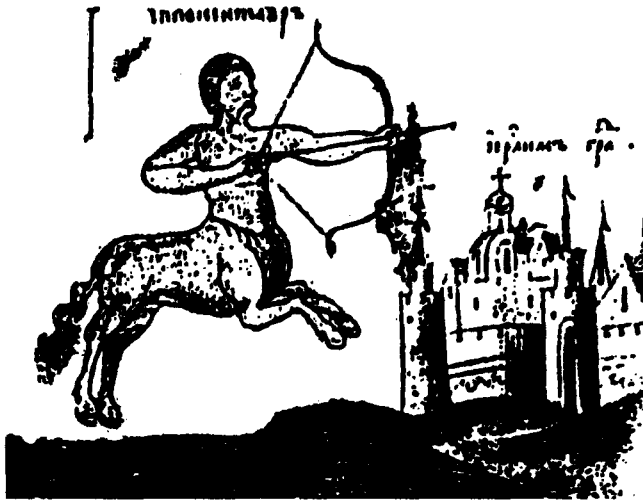


Figure 8 Sgr from ABC-book by Karion Istomin, 1693.

to Zabelin (Zabelin, 1853), the Archer together with the other signs of the Zodiac is drawn on the outer side of an enamelled cup fabricated in Russia.

Some scholars argue that the month under the sign of Sagittarius was sometimes called 'Kitovras': 'On an unlucky day of the month Kitovras...' (Chernetsov, 1975). The same term was sometimes used for the heraldic mark of Centaurus shaped as an archer (Arsenjev, 1908)¹⁰.

To sum up the ancient Russian iconography of Centaur-Sagittarius¹¹ known to us, it should be stressed that the features present in all the icons are: the head is always bare, the two front hoofs risen, the bow aimed in some cases in the direction of the motion, and in some cases in the opposite direction. Different orientations of the pointing/shooting archer are explained, in the frame of the astrological approach, by the 3 decans that gradually replace one another during the passage of that constellation.¹² When shooting in the direction of motion, the centaur probably marked the accession of Sagittarius onto the sky, when 'looking back' it marked the setting of the constellation; the racing at full pace or reared up centaur corresponded to the culmination of the constellation Sagittarius. Analysing other Russian sources, we come to the conclusion that the iconography of Sagittarius had impacted the iconography of the creature centaur. Starting from 17th century the Western version of the Archer naked down to the waist becomes more and more common.

¹⁰In West-Europe Christian symbolic Centaur and Sagittarius frequently were identified.

¹¹In Russia, this constellation was designated not only by centaur but also a bearded dismounted archer (Chernetsov, 1975, p. II).

¹²We thank Sh.M. Shikverdiev for the consultation.



Figure 9 Centaurus near the Southern Astrolabium and the Wolf from the Astrological Atlas by Al-Sufi.



Figure 10 Centaur Chiron with staff and hare on a wall from the Western Chapel of St. George Cathedral in Juriev-Polskoy (1230–1234).

2 CENTAURUS

Examples of the first version of representation of Centaurus are the ‘Centaurus-hunter’ on the walls of the Cathedrals in Vladimir (the Dmitrovsky, 1194–1197) and Yuriev-Poljskoy (Georgievsky Cathedral, 1230–1234) (Chernetsov, 1975, Figure 10). In interpreting the pictures, we should take into account the figures of centaur Chiron and Kitovras (see below) (Chernetsov, 1975).



Figure 11 Centaurus with Staff and Hydra on a 14th century Persian miniature.

Another version of Centaurus portrayal offers a more extended representation of its starry surrounding in the Southern hemisphere. The version goes back to traditions of the Muslim world,¹³ successful in observations of the constellations on the Southern hemisphere (Figure 9). One property of the version is the presence of symbols for Hydra (Hya), a constellation very close to Centaurus. The Persian miniatures of the 14th century depict a winged Centaurus carrying a starry staff in the left hand (a Thyrsus, according to Ptolemy – *Almagest*, VIII, 1)¹⁴; the tail is replaced by a knotted hydra that bites its back¹⁵ (Figures 11, 12). The image finds its explanation in the Hercules myth: the hero poisons his arrows with the blood/bile of the Hydra and later killed the centaur Ness guilty of attempting to get the hero's spouse with one (DA, 1992); the centaur Phol was accidentally killed with a poisoned arrow, as well as another centaur, Chiron the Immortal, that rejected his immortality out of too hard a suffering (Graves, 1955). According to some sources, the constellation of Centaurus was created in honour of Chiron, other sources attributed it to Phol's honouring (Graves, 1955). In any case, the serpent-tailed image of Centaur-the-prophet goes back to archaic art (Graves, 1955). The myth underlying the representation of dragons, (including Hydra)¹⁶ as knotted or coiled, is one of the most ancient human myths (Golan, 1991).

The sign of Hydra is also a characteristic attribute of the Centaurus image in Ancient Russia. Its other special feature was his having no bow; instead, the fantastic being carries in one hand a staff, a wand, or another similar weapon, and in the other, in any case, a shield. Such is the Centaurus engraved in a pare-shaped plate of bone recovered in Pskov (12th century – PIHAMS 8251/1334, Figure 13). A detail of a purse, the plate should be placed so the Centaurus looked to the outside,

¹³About the importance of Muslim science see: Anavati (1982).

¹⁴We thank S.V. Zhirmunsky for providing the information.

¹⁵Unbearded Centaurus with a snake from Bestiary's miniatures falls into the same category of images.

¹⁶In the relief at St.Dmitry Cathedral (Vladimir) Hydra is depicted as winged dragon.

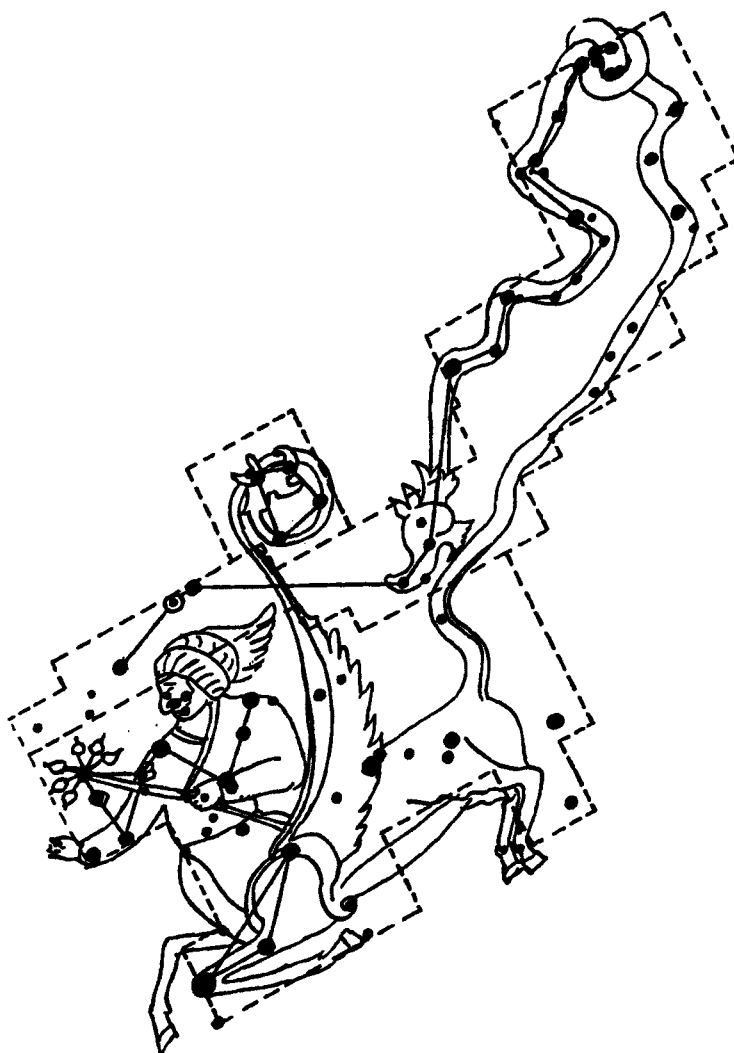


Figure 12 Centaurus with Staff and Hydra combined with a star map on a Persian miniature.

while the other side of the plate with an animal resembling the arms of Pskov (a Panther? a Wolf?) should be turned towards the owner's clothes. The Centaurus gallops to the right, carrying an almond-shaped shield in its left hand and in the right hand a staff¹⁷ raised for the strike (Labutina and Kondratjeva, 1975). It has no beard, its hair curls where it reaches the shoulders. The Centaur wears a shirt with a four-coal cut and two strips on the shoulders. The horse part of its body has

¹⁷Corresponds to the versions of staff I, II, III according to A.N. Kirpichnikov (Labutina and Kondratjeva, 1975, pp. 228-229).

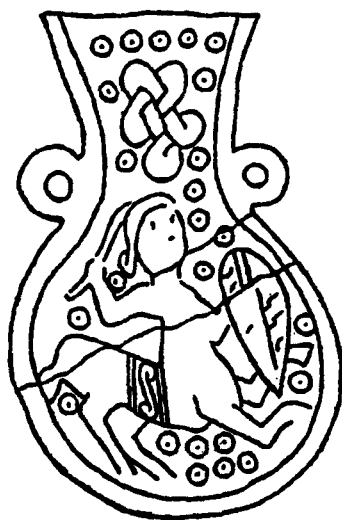


Figure 13 Centaurus with Staff and Hydra tied into a knot on a 12th century boan plate from Pskov.

a belt (or a saddle-girth) with typical S-shaped spiral bordered along both edges (Labutina and Kondratjeva, 1975). Above the Centaur's head a hydra is seen coiled up into a knot. A.V. Chernetsov argues that the circles filling the background may symbolise the starry sky (Chernetsov, 1975). True, circles with a point at the center (as those that fill the background in the picture on the plate) have been used as solar symbol since the times of Ancient Egypt (Foley, 1993).

I.K. Labutina and O.A. Kondratjeva argue that 'it is only natural to consider the centaur engraved in a horn plate from Pskov as just one of many portrayals of the fantastic being spread all over the 12th century land of Novgorod' (Labutina and Kondratjeva, 1975).

Another example of Ancient-Russia Centaurus iconography is an original in a 14th century hand-written Psalter (Nekrasov, 1913; Stasov, 1887): a centaur, turned backward, is about to strike with a club a coiled Hydra (Figure 14).¹⁸

The most complex of all the ancient Russian representations of Centaurus is the one on the 'neck' (basement of minor cupola – 'head') of St. George 'so-vzvoza' Cathedral at Pskov (1494). On the upper part of the tiles a bearded soft-pawed centaur half-turned backward, gallops to the right. In his right hand he holds an iron ball and a shield in his left. On his tail there are a small and a bigger bird, the bigger one pecking his back. In front of the centaur there is a beast on its haunches, stretching the front paws forward. By the sides appear two female figures in long garments, the one at the right side holding a cross, the left one having three dots marked on the head. At the bottom of the composition there are four round

¹⁸A centaur with a tree-trunk on a shoulder is found in the West-European iconography (Milan, capital, 12th century) (Chernetsov, 1975, p. 108).

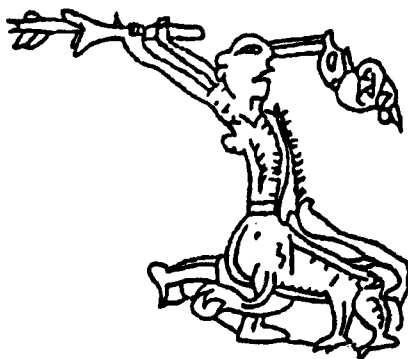


Figure 14 Combined image of Centaurus and Hydra in an initial from 14th century Russian Psalter.



Figure 15 Ceramide with constellations Centaurus, Wolf (Beast), Raven, Scales, Virgo, and several southern sky constellations in round medallions. A 'drum' of the dome of St. George 'so Vzvoza' cathedral (1494) in Pskov.

medallions with (from left to right): two birds looking at each other; a bird looking to the right; a beast on its hinds looking right; and a beast looking left (Pleshanova, 1963, Figure 15).

Comparing the picture from the tiles with a star map, we may find many similarities. It should be taken into account, though, that on a map constellations look as observed from inside a sphere; pictured on a sky globe, they are situated as observed from the outside. Well, the symbols of the constellation are represented on the tiles from Pskov as if they appeared on the outer side of a sphere.

The outlines of the centaur ready to strike with the iron ball coincide ideally with those of the corresponding constellation (Figure 16). Then, the bigger bird picking the centaur back stands for the constellation of Raven (Crv), the beast on

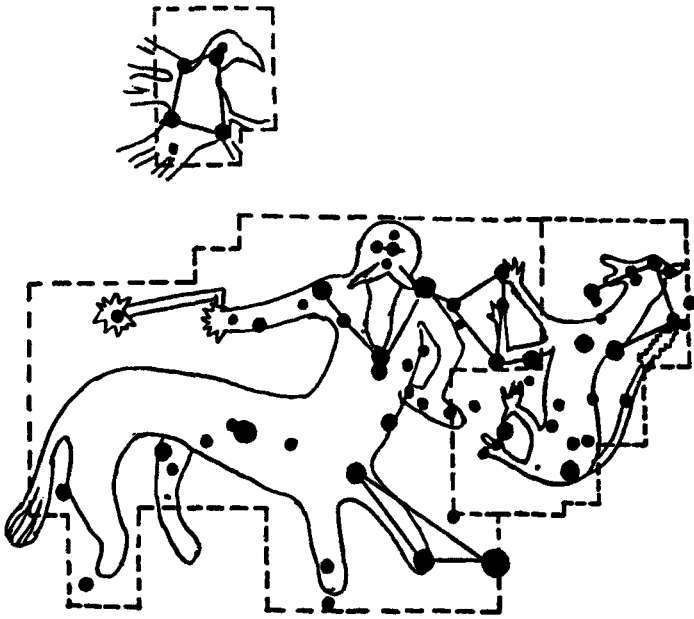


Figure 16 A fraction of hemisphere sector combined with the composition from Pskov ceramide.

its hinds is Lupus (the Wolf, or the Panther, or the Spear of Centaurus, or just the Beast). Maybe, here we find the explanation of the enigma of Centaurus and Pardus/Wolf linked together on the bone plate also proceeding from Pskov? Many a hypothesis has been brought forward on the Beast or Centaurus alone, but none of them have ever explained the combination of the two images.

The left-hand figure on the Pskov ceramide (the one with the three points on the head) obviously brings to mind the outlines of the constellation of Scales (Lib), traditionally symbolised by a female figure (Foley, 1993). The right-hand figure holding a cross is Virgo (Vir). Maybe, the cross in her hand stands for the Southern Cross, which in later times (see below) used to be placed under Centaurus belly, between its hind and front hoofs. The authors of the picture, for moral reasons, could have found it improper to place a cross under a belly and moved it into a more decent place.

The order of the medallions at the bottom of the compositions becomes clear too. The nearest 'given-to-birds' constellation below the centaur hoofs are the Peacock (Pav), Tucan (Tuc) and the Bird of Paradise (Aps). The first two of them are the pair on the rightmost medallion, the third one is pictured alone. Those three constellation were officially mapped by Jean Baye in 17th century as a result of his observations during Amerigo Vespucci's voyage (Flammarion, 1994). We should not forget, however, that the most advanced European scholars could get information about the southern sky from the Arab scientists through personal contacts. This is true of Dante, who has described in his 'Comedia Divina' four stars

of the southern sky, which fact, many years later, when the Europeans learned of their being quite real, provoked great excitement. Frascator (and others, following him) assumed the great poet had been informed about the Rhombus by the Arabs (Flammarion, 1994; Dante, 1995).

Counterparts for the beasts at the right side are not found so easily. We do not know what names could the constellation have had in the 15th century. They may correspond to our Southern Hydrus (Hyi) and Chameleon (Cha), but it is difficult to couple the assumed astral symbols with real starry figures lacking additional sources. So then, the familiar constellations listed by Ptolemy: Centaurus, Virgo, Corvus, Lupus, Libra (with the exception of the Southern Cross) are placed in the upper part of the belt of tiles. On the other hand, the southern constellation, (probably, part of a secret knowledge of the composition authors) were confined to round medallions at the bottom of the tile (the closed circles should mark here the hermetic character of the knowledge).

The ceramic belt, situated at a considerable height, could not be seen in detail from the ground. Only the builders and caretakers of the cathedral could watch the composition with the Centaurus in all its glory. Here we obviously are faced with a transferring, in a symbolic form, of some knowledge on Centaurus, the literary prototype of which was Kitovras, the night Lord of wild beasts.

The apocryphic 'Solomon's Judgments' spread in Russia from the 14th century on, (DBBAR) mention Kitovras in connection with the erection of the 'Sanctum Sanctorum'; for the Russian architects, Kitovras was apparently a figure similar to Adoniram-Hiram of Western 'Free-Masons' (Bagdasarov, 1997).

Kitovras has a wonderful power and mind, and the twofold form of a centaur (Chernetsov, 1981). He is King Solomon's brother, but at the same time the 'untrue king' that rules at the so called 'Lukomorje' (literally meaning 'curved seashore') over the wild beasts. Lukomorje is located at the edge of the earth, or else, in the underground world. The two-headed man presented by Kitovras as a gift to King Solomon tells of his master's kingdom: 'I belong to the people who dwell underground'. And as King Solomon asks: 'Have you Sun and Moon?', he is answered: 'From your West the sun ascends to our sky, and at your East it descends. So while it is day with you, it is night with us' (MARL, Vol. 4). This idea influenced the interpretation by Ancient Russian scholars of the verse from Psalter: 'the Sun has known its Occident. The darkness comes and it is night and in the night all the beasts of the wood (e.g. wild) will pass (Ps.103: 19-20)'. The verse quoted is reproduced among the paintings in the imperial Gold Chamber of Moscow Kremlin (15th century). Below them a personification of the Earth is painted with this inscription: 'The Sun falls into the ground' (Podobedova, 1972). According to Ancient Russia cosmology, the Sun does not simply disappear behind the edge of the earth, but really 'falls' into it. And at that moment the time of the underground king Kitovras governing 'over the wild beasts' would begin. The southern constellations from Ptolemy's catalogue were 'those shining over the Antipodes land' for the dwellers of the northern hemisphere, remained under the horizon for the most of time (Wright, 1925). This astronomical baseline is literally pointed at in 'Solomon's Judgments' and illustrated by the composition on tiles from Pskov.

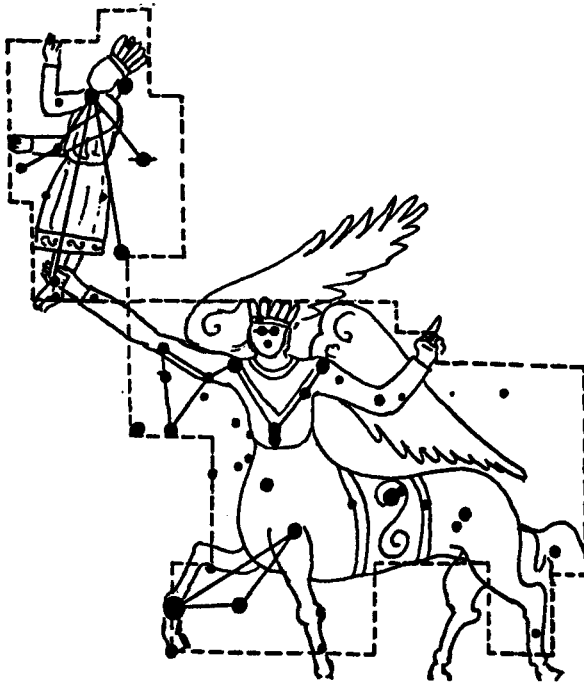


Figure 17 Location in relation to each other of the constellations of Centaurus and Scale against the detail of 'Basil's Golden Gates' of St.Sophia of Novgorod (1336) with pictures of Kitovras and Solomon.

The tradition of providing the upper part of temples with a picture of a centaur was steadily observed by the Russian builders until the end of 17th – beginning of 18th century. We shall try to prove that those centaurs are to be interpreted as the constellation of Centaurus – which follows from the most ancient tile on the cathedral of St.George 'so-vzvoza' in Pskov.

Another astral illustration to the legend of Kitovras is the composition on the 'golden' Basil's gates of St.Sophia cathedral in Novgorod (1336, Figure 17). It is connected with educational activities of Novgorod and Pskov Archbishop Basil 'Kalika' ('the Pilgrim'), 1331–1352. Kitovras, crowned, is painted at the left side. In his right hand he holds King Solomon, far smaller in size than himself; with his left hand he lifts king Solomon's ring. An inscription confirms the episode to be one from the 'Judgments' when Kitovras gets hold of his brother's ring and throws it 'onto the edge of the world' (the Russian verbatim is: 'over thrice nine lands'). At the right a chapel (a church?) is painted with a cross on its dome and the roof starting to catch fire. Inside the building a figure in long garments is sitting, most likely, Solomon's wife kidnapped by Kitovras while the king was away. The picture as a whole finds its correspondences on astronomical maps as easily as its elements find its interpretation as known literary heroes. The figures of Kitovras



Figure 18 12th century Romanesque draught from Pridneprovje Region (Khanenko's collection) with pictures of Kitovras and Solomon.



Figure 19 Centaurus and Raven on a coin of Archduke Mikhail Borisovich of Tver'.

and Solomon correspond exactly to those of Centaurus and Libra on the southern sky. There is a direct connection between the part Solomon plays in the sacred legend and the sign of Libra. Libra symbolizes justice, that is the balance of guilt and punishment (Cirlot, 1971). The same functions are set on Solomon, the very collection of descriptions of his deeds being called 'Judgments', the main principle of his governing being justice. Consider also the statement attributed to him: 'Statera dolorosa abominatio est apud Domini' ('Unjust scales are an abomination in front of the Lord' (Prov 11:1).

The measure of variety of the plots on Centaurus accessible to the population of Russia is illustrated by a very interesting 12th century Romanesque draught from Pridneprovje (Khanenko's collection – Darkevich, 1966; Labutina and Kondratjeva, 1975, Figure 18). On the draught appears a soft-pawed Centaurus with a tail in the form of a hook, holding a caduceus¹⁹ with the right hand and a staff²⁰ with the left hand (Chernetsov, 1975). If the staff (Thyrus) is a feature proper of Centaurus, the caduceus stands for another constellation: the Southern Crown – CrA (Flammarion, 1994).

¹⁹ A.V. Chernetsov calls it 'tree' also it is clearly a caduceus.

²⁰ This detail is a strong evidence in favour of the image symbolizing Centaurus and not Sagittarius.



Figure 20 Centaurus with Chalice and Sword on a coin of Archduke Petr of Dmitrov.



Figure 21 Centaurus on the seal of Felix, Novgorod vicegerent over Zavolochje 1st half of the 14th century).

The constellations of Centaurus, Raven and Crater serve as prototypes for compositions that appear on the coins of the North-East Russia Dukes and the seal of Felix, the vicegerent from Novgorod over Zavolochje (Figure 21).

On a coin of Mikhail Borisovich, the Archduke of Tver', Centaurus is moving to the right, the left hand on the waist, the right hand holding a bird (Oreshnikov, 1901, Figure 19).²¹ A centaur with hoofs, moving to the right, with a sword in the right hand and a chalice in the left hand is found engraved in the reverse of the coins issued by Petr Dimitrievich the Duke of Dmitrov (1389–1428, Figure 20). On the face of some of the coins there is a two-faced head (like that of Janus) with a short inscription at the bottom (Oreshnikov, 1901). This version may be a relation to the legend about the two-headed man Kitovras has presented Solomon with (see above) (Chernetsov, 1975). But how to interpret, from the astronomical point of view, the bird and the chalice? The possibility of such interpretation is evidenced by the centaur on Dvina vicegerent Felix's lead seal (1st half of the 14th century) that holds in the hands the both the items. That centaur, looking to the right, has the bird in his right hand and the chalice in his left hand. The centaur has long hair, a crown on the head, and a long-sleeved garment. The starry counterparts of the picture components are the constellations of Centaurus (Cen), Crater (Crt) and Raven (Crv) placed close to one another on the sky as well as in most European

²¹A.B. Oreshnikov assumes it is 'The Maiden Gargones' from 'Alexandria', an old Russia novel. But the Gargonea as represented by old Russian art differs strongly from the image on the coin (Chernetsov, 1975, p. 111, figs. 2, 13).



Figure 22 Centaur on a 14th century chandelier from St.Sophia of Novgorod.

astronomical maps of the whole sky (Mori, 1987). As well as in the sky, the Corvus of these heraldic is placed to left from Centaurus (i.e., it sits on his right hand), and the Crater is to the right (in the left hand). The Crater on both the seal and the coins is depicted as communion-cup.

Why the centaur was so popular in Novgorod (in the centuries 15th–16th he repeatedly portrayed on church-chandeliers) is still unknown (Figure 22). Kitovras (the image of Centaurus could be derived from the stories about that figure) was understood as the emperor of the extreme northern confines of Russian lands, Lukomorje, that boundary of 'oikumena' and the unknown 'underground' kingdom. With time going, the mysterious Lukorje or Lukomorje was more and more often interpreted as a sort of real landscape: some curved sea-shore or the northern shores of Russia (at the Arctic Ocean near Obskaya or Tazovskaya bays) (Pliguzov, 1993). The kingdom of Centaur-Kitovras acquired for the Russian travellers, first of all, merchants and industrialists, a fixed geographical allocation.

Zavolochje, a region by the Dvina River, the northernmost possession of the Republic of Novgorod governed by a special vicegerent had a natural north frontier – the coast of Arctic Ocean, but extended towards the east to an uncertain distance.

Setting off for that land 'of the peoples of earth' or the 'eastern land of the unknown people' the Russian used to take with them copper mirrors with ritual pictures of Kitovras – a replica of those of its astral prototype. Such mirrors repeatedly reproduced by local artisans got widely spread among the Trans-Ural peoples: Nentsy, Mansi, Khants, etc. (Okladnikov, 1950). The 17th century mirror recovered in 1941 on Thaddeus Island (Museum of Arctic Region, SPb, N47) together with other belongings of perished polar sailors is the best, example of Kitovras portrayal (Figure 23). Engraved in it is a winged, crowned Kitovras, the Lord of Lukomorje, with a rhomb-shaped shield in one hand and a staff in the other, against a starry background: there are 6 minor stars with beams and as many stars-rosettes of 18 petals each (Okladnikov, 1950). The four stars under the horse's belly are located exactly as those forming the Southern Cross (earlier



Figure 23 The 17th century copper mirror with a picture of Centaurus-Kitovras recovered at Thaddeus Island.

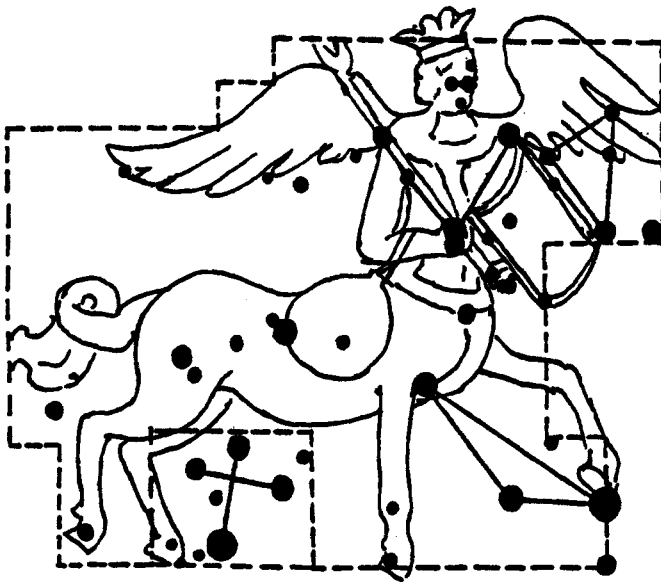


Figure 24 The composition from the 17th century copper mirror against a star map.

referred to as Rhomb)²² under the constellation of Centaurus are usually located on astronomical maps (Figure 24).²³

²²By the way: four, not five stars were therefore originally perceived in Cru.

²³The tradition of depicting symbols of constellation against starry background is traced already in antique art. See, for example, the Nemrud-Dag monument of King Antioch 1 (69–34 B.C.) (van-den Waerden, 1972, pl.18).

Gradual (until 14th century) spreading over Russia of South-Slavic 'false manuscripts' containing 'lies and jeers about Kitovras' (DEBAR, v.2, pt.1) resulted in dropping the image as a means for passing on professional secrets of builders and artisans (Bagdasarov, 1997). That role of Kitovras was partially taken over by Polcan, a protagonist of the Serbian version of the story about Bova, the King's Son. The story was first mentioned by a Moscow literary source in the 2nd quarter of 17th century (MARL, Vol. 10) and in the subsequent period became extremely popular in Russia. The name of the hero originally sounded as 'Pul'can' or Pulican (spelled 'Pulicane'), but later, having been subjected to archetypical reception, turned into Polcan (Afanasjev, 1994; Kuzmina, 1964). Polcan is described as a mighty warrior, who was defeated by a Christian knight, Bova, and later became his 'sworn-brother'. Polcan has a twofold form: 'up to the waist, dog's paws; from the waist up, like any other man' and extraordinary abilities (MARL, Vol. 10).²⁴

Allusions to a secret meaning (related to astronomical realities, trade secrets and stages of spiritual evolution of man) are found in the very composition of the story of Bova, names and properties of the protagonists. L. Benoist has said referring to the stories of such type 'the very absurdity of magic story plots helps to reveal its symbolic meaning and make any literal interpretation impossible' (Benoist, 1965). The content of such legends is 'by no means a puerile invention, as it is usually considered, but represents a set of data of doctrinal character' (Benoist, 1965). Putting aside the the Story of Bova (it would be enough to mention the three Polcan's poles, corresponding to the three poles of Kitovras) (Rybakov, 1957) we shall concentrate on some astronomic items. Thus, the figure of King Gwidon (Bova's farther) corresponds to Caer-Gwydion, the Milky Way of the Celtic tradition (Flammarion, 1994) – compare it with the Italian *guida* – Gwidon – 'guide', *guidare* – to 'guide'. The figure of Lukoper, the son of Tsar Saltan Saltanovich, corresponds to Lucifero, the 'Morning Star' (2 Pet 1:19) or Venus. Scenes of the struggle of Bova and Polcan were depicted on 17th century frame tiles. Bova, on the left, holds Polcan by the waist with one hand and lifts a club with the other (Figure 25). In the top right corner of the tile the 'object' of dispute of the warriors is seen: the princess Druzhnevna (Rozenfeld, 1961; Ovsjannikov, 1968). A significant fact: the tiles with pictures of Polcan appear rather frequently on buildings in North-East Russia from the middle up the end of 17th century. It seems that for the builders of that period (the latest period of Ancient-Russian architecture) the topic of Polcan and Bova was equivalent to that of Centaurus-Kitovras, used by the architects of earlier periods (Kitovras of Novgorod churches, Pskov tiles, etc.).

Comparing the Pskov Centaurus surrounded by two figures (it becomes evident now that one of them, the Scale, stands for the King Solomon, and the other, Virgo, for his spouse) and the 17th century Polcan with Bova and Druzhnevna on each sides, we see, that also the literary heroes are different, the iconographic composition remains unchanged. The composition with Kitovras, Solomon and Solomon's wife on the gates of Novgorod (dated 1336) represents the same system of three components. The metaphysical core of the topic descends to the vedic

²⁴Cf. *canis* (lat.): a dog; *pullus* (lat.): young animal, puppet; *pullus equinus*: a foal.



Figure 25 Struggle of Bova and Polcan as depicted on a 17th century frame tile.

prototypes – a fact Afanasjev has pointed to (Afanasjev, 1994): Gandharva, archer Krchanu – Indra (as falcon) – Soma. This triad corresponds to the relations between: Kitovras – Solomon – Solomon's wife; Polcan – Bova – princess Druzhnevna; the beast Koutour – Seth – Garden of Eden (from the 'Tale of Adam') (Tikhonravov, 1863).²⁵

In all these myths the two-formed creature, Centaur,²⁶ acts as a guard, a rival interfering with the epic hero to get hold of the source of bliss / to get into Paradise. The fact that both Soma and Eden symbolize bliss evokes no doubt; concerning Solomon's wife, it should be mentioned that according to the Christian theology, she was an ancestor of Christ in His human nature, and His Flesh and Blood in Christian rituals are identical functionally to the Indo-european Soma-Haoma (participle of a Deity). The Chant of Bova is a late medieval interpretation of the same scheme. It is connected with translating of medieval metaphysics into the symbolic language of the courtesy culture.

Comparing the picture of Polcan on the tile with earlier Russian pictures of

²⁵This analogy was kindly specified to us by V.I. Karpets.

²⁶The fact that Centaurs were also depicted as centaur is evidenced by a composition on the 6th century Byzantine consular dyptich (Bayet, 1954).

Kitovras we note, that the animals that surround the Kitovras at Pskov are absent from the tile, but a blossom has 'grown' under Polcan's belly, playing the same role as the four asterics, palmetts and other similar objects symbolizing the Southern Cross²⁷ in the picture of Kitovras-Centaurus. Polcan has a staff in his hands, the same way the Centaurus at Pskov holds the iron ball that corresponds to the Thyrsus. The fact that tiles with pictures of Polcan were deposited in places almost out of reach of common spectators sight testifies that the compositions were not just ornaments, but had a ritual or magic functions with the builders.

The evidence we have now allow for an analysis of the role of Polcan not only in the story about Bova translated into Russian, but also in Russian magic practice, that, affected by Christian Church has transformed the cult of Pecols-Pluto, the Lord of the Underground Fire (MD, 1991). Polcan may be the prototype of clay figurines from Kargopol. A.S. Milovsky connects his name with the verb *polykhat*, 'to blaze' and the cult to 'Jarilo the Sun'. The traditional toys makers up to now depict on the toy-Polcan breast cross-shaped signs (Milovsky, 1994; Dajn, 1981), that fall among the oldest solar symbols.

So we see that not by accident does Polcan fall in the same sequence that Kitovras, the Lord of the underground world and, Centaurus, a southern sky constellation.

From the complex of ancient Russian symbols for the constellation Cen we may conclude that its permanent typical features are: he has no bow; he holds some other weapons or signs of power (scepter, staff, iron ball, club, etc.); it is depicted together with other constellations (Hydra, Southern Cross, Raven, Beast, etc.). The duplicate picture of Centaur on the northern and southern sky is accompanied with duplicate serpent-like features: the tail of the Scorpio near Sagittarius and Hydra near Centaurus. The symbols for Sagittarius in Russian tradition outlived those for Centaurus because only a small part of the population was interested in the transmission of the knowledge on Centaurus while the Zodiac with one of its components, Sagittarius, was known to everybody.

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²⁷ Compare it with Dante's cosmology that combines the symbols for Cross and Rose (Hall, 1926).

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