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LUWIAN KURUNTAS AND CELTIC CERNUNNOS: TWO CLOSELY RELATED MANIFESTATIONS OF THE SAME INDO-EUROPEAN GOD

Abstract: In this note it will be argued that not only the names of the Luwian god Kuruntas and the Celtic god Cernunnos show a reflex of the same Pro-to-Indo-European root, but also the function of these two gods in, re-spectively, the Luwian and Celtic pantheon, is of similar nature.

From the period of the Early Bronze Age III, *c.* 2300-2000 BC, there can be traced in Anatolia the remnants of an Old Indo-European religious ideology which is patently trifunctional in Dumézilian terms. Thus the ceremonial bronze standards discovered in the Alaca Höyük house- or chamber tombs bear the testimony of solar symbols (F1) in combination with bulls (F2) and stags (F3). Similarly, in Hittite cuneiform texts from the Late Bronze Age one can come across the following order of deities invoked: (1) the sun-goddess of Arinna with her male companion the sun-god (F1), (2) the storm-god or an enumeration of various storm-gods (F2), and (3) the tutelary deity or stag-god (F3). The same verdict might well apply to Luwian hieroglyphic texts from the same period, in any case in the so-called Emirgazi text from the reign of the Hittite great-king Tudḫaliyas IV (1239-1209 BC) we happen to be confronted with an enumeration of deities which starts with the following sequence: (1) the sun-goddess of sun-city (F1), the storm-god (of) heaven (F2), and (3) a composite deity name in which the element *Kurunt-* features, which refers to the Luwian tutelary deity or stag-god (F3).¹

One of the most important objects informing us about the cult of the Luwian tutelary deity or stag-god, named *Kuruntas*, is formed by a silver rhyton in the form of the head of a stag from the Schimmel collection.² On this object, namely, which presuma-

¹ Woudhuizen 2016: 97-116; cf. Masson 1991.

² Watkins 1999: 14, Fig. 3.

bly dates to the late 15th century BC, there can be found a religious scene depicting the veneration of the stag-god by adorants. In this scene, the deity in question, standing on a stag before the altar and appearing together with his consort seated on a stool behind the altar, is associated with the head and hoofs of a stag, a hunting bag, a quiver, two spears, and the *eya*-tree (= ever-green “Turkey-oak” or *Quercus curris* < Proto Indo-European [= PIE] **h_{aeig}*- “oak” with the for Luwian regular loss of the voiced velar **[g]*). On the basis of the Luwian hieroglyphic legends added to the pictorial scene, reading *á-sa*^{UTNA} *infans*^m and *KURUNTSA(USKA)*, respectively, the object can be positively identified as a dedication by a functionary or representative of the western Anatolian country *Assuwa* to the stag-god *Kuruntas* and his consort *Sauska* (Fig. 1). It deserves our attention in this connection, finally, that both *Kuruntas* (Yalbur § 3, Emirgazi §§ 27, 30, 37, 39) and his consort *Sauska* (Südburg § 3) in Luwian hieroglyphic texts from the Late Bronze Age are associated with the adjective (*a*)*pára*- “(of) the field”, which phonetically represents /embra/ and corresponds to cuneiform Luwian *imra*- “field, countryside” (< PIE **ǵ^heym*-/*ǵ^him*- “winter, snow” with the for Luwian regular loss of the voiced velar **[ǵ]*).³

Now, from a linguistic point of view the name of the Luwian tutelary deity or stag-god *Kuruntas* is most closely related to that of his Celtic equivalent *Cernunnos*, both being derived from PIE **kerh₁*- “horn”. In both cases, therefore, the god is simply addressed as “the horned one”.⁴ The name *Cernunnos* is reconstructed for the so-called Paris Monument from the Notre Dame (*Nautae Parisiaci*), where it is associated with the image of an antlered god with torques hanging from his antlers and seated cross-legged.⁵ On account of the given pictorial features, the antlered god wearing a torque around his neck and seated cross-legged as depicted on the Reims altar can positively be identified as *Cernunnos*. A salient detail within the frame of our present purposes is the fact that the god is depicted here in direct association with a stag, featuring together with a bull below his image.⁶ This reminds us, namely, of the association of Luwian *Kuruntas* with the head and hoofs of a stag in the pictorial design of the Schimmel rhyton. If we include depictions of *Cernunnos* outside Gaul pro-

³ Woudhuizen 2013.

⁴ Watkins 1999: 15-20 (**keru-*, etc., and **k₁mo-*); cf. Delamarre 2003, 106-107, s.v. *carnon*.

⁵ Olmsted 1979, 160; Pl. 65, Fig. 2; Olmsted 1994: 335-337; Watkins 1999: 18, Fig. 6.

⁶ Olmsted 1979: 165-166; Pl. 65, Fig. 1. For Gaulish reliefs with the likewise antlered consort of *Cernunnos*, see Berresford Ellis 2003: 161 and note the parallelism with *Sauska* being the consort of the Luwian *Kuruntas*.

per, like the one from Britain on the Risingham altar (Northumberland), it might be of interest to note that this monument is inscribed with the legend reconstructed as *deo cocidio et sil[vano]*. As the text after *cocidio* is severely damaged and no longer legible on the photograph, its reconstruction may perhaps be lined with the so-called Housesteads inscription, which reads *deo silvano cocidio*.⁷ If so our horned god would be identified as Latin *Silvanus*, the god of the fields and woods, which strikingly recalls the alignment of Luwian *Kuruntas* with the adjective (*a*)*pára*–“(of) the field”. In any case, the horned god on the Risingham altar is clearly equipped with a bow, which likely comes into consideration as a weapon for hunting and may be compared in this connection with the quiver associated with *Kuruntas* in the scene of the Schimmel rhyton.

Another famous depiction of Celtic *Cernunnos* is the one of the first inner plate of the Gundestrup cauldron.⁸ The god is rendered here with stag antlers, a torque around his neck and another one in his right hand, while being seated cross-legged. Here, again, *Cernunnos* is directly associated with a stag, this time at his right side, in like manner as on the Reims altar and just like Luwian *Kuruntas* is in the pictorial design on the Schimmel rhyton.⁹ The reconstruction of the Gundestrup cauldron and the story its scenes conveys is in my opinion most convincingly achieved by Jan Best on the basis of Thracian religious and royal ideology as deducible from the relevant monuments, be it decorated artifacts mostly from treasures or sanctuaries which came to light by means of regular excavations. But even while he explains the role of the antlered deity in the story as that of Thracian *Orpheus*, he makes it very clear that the iconography of the god in question is Celtic and executed by a Celtic artist, for which reason he sticks to the name *Cernunnos* as the form of address of the god (Fig. 2).¹⁰ In the same publication, Flemming Kaul on the other hand wants to attribute a Thracian origin to *Cernunnos* altogether, because, “apart from a rather doubtful rock carving from Val Camonica in northern Italy”, the known illustrations of *Cernunnos* date from the Gallo-Roman period and therefore postdate the one on the Gundestrup cauldron by at least 100 years.¹¹ This latter view, however, cannot seriously be entertained, as the distinguished Danish archaeologist clearly fails to observe the fact that the antlered deity in the rock carvings from Val Camonica is directly associa-

⁷ Olmsted 1994: 320; Ross 1968: 161, Fig. 112.

⁸ Watkins 1999: 19, Fig. 7.

⁹ Olmsted 1979: Pl. 64, Fig. 2.

¹⁰ Best 1991: 81; 87.

¹¹ Kaul 1991: 34.

ted with a serpent (Fig. 3) in like manner as *Cernunnos* is in the scene of the Gundestrup cauldron, where he holds it in his left hand. Therefore I side with Emmanuel Anati in identifying the anthropomorphic stag-god of the Val Camonica rock carvings as *Cernunnos*,¹² from which it follows that this particular deity is genuinely Celtic—if not in actual fact Ligurian or Old Indo-European.

If the preceding argument holds water, it may safely be concluded that Luwian *Kuruntas* and Celtic *Cernunnos* are not only reflexes of one and the same PIE root, but that the deities in question also share an association with stags in their imagery and the wilderness—be it the fields and/or woods, depending on the specific natural environment—in the epigraphic evidence with a bearing on them. Hence we are no doubt dealing with two manifestations of the same Indo-European god.

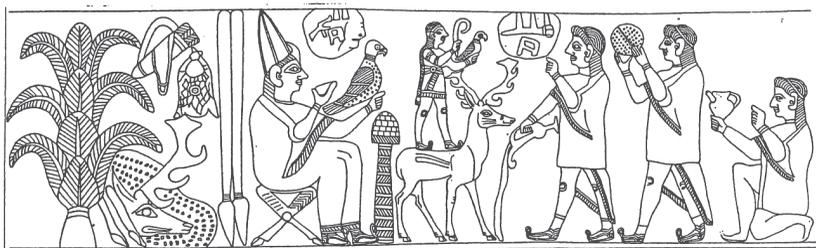


Fig. 1. Drawing of the scene on the Schimmel rhyton (from Hawkins 2006: 71, Fig. 5).



Fig. 2. Detail from the first inner plate of the Gundestrup cauldron (from Olmsted 1979: Pl. 64, Fig. 2).

¹² Anati 1964: 171-172. For Gaulish reliefs in which *Cernunnos* is associated with snakes, see Olmsted 1979: 163 with Pl. 69, Fig. 2; 164 with Pl. 72, Fig. 1.



Fig. 3. Rock carving from Val Camonica (from Anati 1964: 172).

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