




The Cross in Changing of Times and its Significance in Ancient Society

The cross is the most widespread symbol appearing worldwide right from the prehistoric times. Though being formed of a very simple shape of two intersecting lines the significance is far reaching. This dissertation looks at the cross both as a sign pointing beyond itself and concentrates on the diversity of its visual appearance. It tries to trace back the possible factors preceding Antiquity influencing the formation of the actual shape in that particular period of history.

Although for most part the cross is understood in its connection with the Crucifixion of Christ its history is far more complex beginning in pre-Christian era. The biblical texts present more or less mere allusions of the cross itself. Seen typologically the cross may be understood as the element connecting both Old and New Testament creating a sort of a bridge between them. The careful analysis of the Early Christian documents brings several terms used for the same reality. The most significant are - σταυρός with the Latin equivalent crux and ξύλου (wood) with the Latin equivalent lignum. Later on these give a way to a more general term of σημεῖον (sign) and finally to a symbolic expression „σύμβολον σωτηρίας“ (sign-symbol of salvation).

The early Christian writers in order to describe the shape of cross recur to comparison with the objects of their contemporary world. The Fathers of the Church make use of some older pagan schemes invested with a new meaning. Their works bring numerous proofs of a spreading use of the cross in their times always with the same connotation of salvation, certainty and life.

Many Christian communities in Antiquity practised the traditional ritual of blessing oneself or crossing oneself with a sign of cross signum crucis. The Roman military terminology had played an important role in comparing the cross in between the various cultures. There are several key pre-figurations of the cross, first of all we mention the old-Egyptian ankh, reference to the life itself. This sign had been later adopted as the Christian crux ansata . Another distinctive pre-figuration is staurogram , considered so called nomina divina.

Another way of approaching the issue of the cross is the completion of the mysterium tav. Having its origin in the Hebrew letter ת (tav) used to be written in the period of Ezechiel's prophecy as a small cross  or +, been signed on the forehead of those leading righteous life according to the Law of God. Later it had been transformed in the written form in the Greek T having preserved the same symbolism right until the Christian era where it appears in various representations. The Jewish-Christian cross therefore needs to be understood in this connection to tav as seen in the works of many Christian writers.

Representation of the cross in the early Christian times was far from being unproblematic. It was not without difficulty that the cross symbolizing the Crucifixion of Christ would find its way through. The process was gradual with rather allegoric representations at the outset as it was quite unthinkable for Christians to even depict the

Crucifixion scene. Therefore the earliest examples of this use of the cross have come from the non-Christian circles namely crux commissa T and crux immissa † .

With the rise of the Emperor Constantine to power a new era begins for the symbol of the cross. The Emperor has a vision of the cross shining in the sky and is inspired to launch the cross with christogram ✠. In 3/4th century the pagan cult of the divinity of the Sun is being converted and Christ is being now worshipped as the new Sun. The same applies for the sign of the cross becoming the core of the human life. The cross symbolizing the Sun becomes the symbol of Christ.

The aim of this disertation is to show the use of the representation of the cross in the pre-Constantine era and it aims to demonstrate how throughout the first Christian centuries the cross has become the symbol of Christ. The symbol of cross has had the most significant place in the psyche of humans until this very day.