

The History of Humans Demonizing the Snake

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I'm being repetitively told its only Christianity and Unificationists that demonize the snake - serpent. ... Not true. The serpent demonized himself for starters but here's a short account of negative snakes all over the place:

As for the frightening part of serpent symbolism, it obviously includes prototypes of dragons and sea serpents (western folklore) or serpentine hybrids, e.g. the children of Echidna (Hydra, Chimera) and the snake-tailed dog from the underworld (Cerberus) in Greek mythology, which symbolize numerous dangers catching people in their life. A bite of a venomous snake caused the death of Eurydice, Orpheus's wife. Eurydice got into the underworld where the snake-tailed Minos judged dead souls. Thus, killing a snake was a feat, especially if it is regarded as a symbol of fight against the power of fathers and elders as in the legend of Heracles (Hercules) who smothered two snakes when he was yet a baby and later on conquered the Lernaean Hydra. In order to establish his cult in Delphi, Apollo had to kill dragon Python that had reared the terrible monster Typhon.

In Egypt, the first feat of grown-up Horus was killing a serpent. On the other hand, the soul of every deceased had to fight with Apep snake and overcome it or die.

In India, the bloodthirsty goddess Kali was half-woman half-snake. The first feat of young Krishna was his victory over a giant serpent, although this is a mere symbolic repetition of Vishnu's victory over Kalinaty serpent. Birds associated with the light, e.g. an eagle, a falcon or the legendary Garuda, were often depicted killing snakes, just like many deities and heroes.

In Persian Zoroastrianism, a snake is one of the worst signs betokening the appearance of Satan, and it symbolizes the darkness of evil. Ahriman (Ariman) was thrown down from heaven to the earth in the form of an enormous serpent.

In Tibetan Buddhism, “the green snake” is the name of one of the three major animal instincts inherent in a human being – hatred.

Tsi Seu, the Chinese genius of evil that got a swelled head over the Almighty Lord, is first and foremost a giant serpent. A snake is one of the five harmful animals in China, although sometimes it appears in positive roles, too. The Japanese main demon is also a serpent that rose against God because of pride. There is a legend in Japan, dedicated to the heroic victory of young Iomato over a snake.

In German mythology, Thor and Beowulf killed serpents-dragons, but died themselves in the fight. Siegfried’s feats, described in the German Song of the Nibelungs, start with a victory over dragon Fafnir. In Scandinavian mythology, the elder son of the fire god Loki is an embodiment of evil and represents a serpent that endeavors to entwine the world with its lethal coils and kill all living creatures with its venom.

In western folklore, serpent symbolism is mostly negative because of the snakes’ forked tongue associated with hypocrisy and lies and bringing unexpected and instantaneous death. A snake is blamed for causing that people have lost God’s gift of eternal life, and not only because of the story of Adam and Eve, but also owing to the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh where the main character covered an enormous distance to find a magic plant that restored youth, but when he found it a snake stole it.

Judaic and Christian traditions present a serpent as an enemy and even identify it with Satan. Therefore, in western arts a snake has become a major symbol of evil, sinfulness, temptation and lies. It is depicted at the foot of the cross as an emblem of the original sin, in the scenes where Christ was tempted, and under the foot of Virgin Mary. In memory of the fact he was poisoned, Apostle John is depicted with a bowl around which a snake has twisted, but the poison failed when John crossed the bowl. St. George the Winner riding a horse and striking a serpent with his spear is the patron of Moscow and Georgia.

In medieval Europe, killing adders was considered to be a godly act. Snakes were an indispensable attribute of witches whose potions included parts of snake bodies. There is the following allegory widespread in popular tales: evil words and curses turn into snakes that fall from one’s mouth. Legends of many-headed snakes, namely the terrible Typhon which Zeus persistently fought against for a long time, gave rise to fairy tales about serpents / dragons with which valorous heroes fight, chopping off one head after another. In Russian folk tales serpent images emerged much later, in the times of the Mongol yoke, and symbolized the worst enemy.

These are just a few but remember the deadliest of all is Monty Python: If you don't protect yourself and cross yourself with holy water he will make you laugh, and we don't want that do we?