The Serpent and the Demonic Feminine

Order of the Serpent

What follows is a brief exploration of the Serpent as a representation of the Demonic Feminine, in particular in Egyptian and Minoan cultures, with mentions of Hebrew and Mesopotamian cultures, and the significance of this relationship on the development of the ‘Ancient Serpent’ in Western Abrahamic mythology. There is much more to be said on the subject, not only in Greek and Mesopotamian cultures but in Eastern traditions with the concept of shakti, but for the purposes of this piece, we will limit ourselves largely to the Minoans (and their Egyptian influences) for their contributions to the concept.

The Demonic Feminine

The intent of this piece is not to imply that there is some discernible difference, spiritually, physically, or otherwise, between men and women. Rather, that there is a Demonic Feminine associated with protection, vigilance, wisdom, dominance, sexual independence, and self-actualization which has an esoteric significance, and which has been subverted and diminished by Western religion.

The Demonic Feminine is a concept first discussed by Zeena and Nikolas Schreck (as the ‘Feminine Daemonic’) in Demons of the Flesh. This is distinct from the new-age concept of the divine feminine, associated with motherhood, fertility, and nourishment, intended generally in a spiritual sense solely to be a counterpart to the masculine forces of justice and the patriarchal god archetype.

The traditional interpretation of the divine feminine is that feminine energy is nurturing, passing, accepting, and intuitive, whereas masculine energy is individualistic and active. This concept is not only ludicrous, but is damaging to the vital and active role of the feminine in the Left Hand Path.

In contrast, the Demonic Feminine is an entity unto herself. She refuses to submit, and she takes what she wants. She is an active force in the world around her, and does not accept the
status quo – rather, she changes the universe around her to empower herself, through her own discipline and her own desire, and never demure, submissive, or weak.

One may see the traditional divine feminine in the *Venus of Willendorf*, a feminine figure whose swollen breasts and belly coupled with her lowered face, nearly buried in her own buxom chest, seems to be a fetish built upon the idea that the sacred purpose of woman is purely concerned with the act of procreation. Consider, on the other hand, the incarnation of *Shakti* in the figure of Kali, blood dripping from her lips, a necklace of human heads around her neck. The Demonic Feminine is monstrous to her enemies, and just as Kali is frequently portrayed as literally standing upright on the prone body of the god Shiva, it is clear that She is subservient to no one.

This is not to say that LHP practice intersects with feminism as a political concept. As Zeena and Nikolas Schreck write,

“*Learning of left-hand path exaltation of the Feminine Demonic might lead those of our readers indoctrinated by the omnipresent feminist cant and dogma that slants much modern esoteric thinking to falsely assume that the left-hand path’s alternate definition as the Way of Woman allows it to be interpreted as some sort of feminist movement with spiritual trappings. It must be made clear that these mysteries have nothing to do with the politically correct vision of Woman promulgated by most feminist ideologues, nor can ancient magical and initiatory principles be credibly forced to serve any modern political creeds*”.

**The Serpent as a Feminine Symbol**

The Symbol of the Serpent in the ancient world has many well known interpretations. In Egyptian mythology, Atum the Self-Created springs forth from the primordial waters of Nun in the shape of a serpent, suggesting the eternal nature of the animal. Atum creates from his eye the goddess Wadjet, whom also takes the shape of the Serpent, the earliest incarnation of a snake goddess. As Wadjet, the Serpent represents vigilance, protection, and the land itself – the chthonic serpent to Atum’s cosmic serpent. In the city named for her, Per-Wadjet, her temple is also dedicated to Isis, and over time her identity as the eye of Atum will lead to her association

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with the Eye of Ra, and the fearsome warlike goddesses Sakhmet, Bast, and Hathor, and ultimately Mut, the Queen of the Universe.

Closely related to Wadjet and also connected to the land is the goddess Renenutet, another serpent goddess, herself associated with the grape harvest, wine, and with nourishment. Snakes also may have a connection to menstruation, as the shedding of their skins is akin to the shedding of the uterine lining in women, and this Hymn to Renenutet, ostensibly a reference to the flooding of the Nile, may have a connection to menstruation as well:

*I will make the Nile swell for you,*
*without there being a year of lack and exhaustion in the whole land,*
*so the plants will flourish, bending under their fruit.*

*The land of Egypt is beginning to stir again,*
*the shores are shining wonderfully,*
*and wealth and well-being dwell with them,*
*as it had been before.*

**The Snake Goddesses of Crete**

In 1911, Sir Arthur Evans discovered in the ruins of Knossos on the island of Crete a number of votary figurines which he interpreted to be religious in nature\(^2\). The statuettes are of women, evidently in Minoan attire, breasts exposed, holding a snake in either hand (by conjecture, none of the figurines possessed both of their arms), along with another female figure entwined by a single, long serpent whose head sat in her right hand and its tail in her left. It is via these figurines that we will draw our connection between the symbol of the serpent in the Ancient World and the Demonic Feminine.

The figurine usually identified as the snake goddess wears a dress of Minoan fashion, her breasts exposed, and is entwined by a pair of snakes. The first lays its head in her right hand, drapes over her shoulder, down her

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\(^2\) [http://arthistoryresources.net/snakegoddess/discovery.html](http://arthistoryresources.net/snakegoddess/discovery.html)
back, under her buttocks, resting its tail in her left hand. The second loops from her right ear, around the curve of her breast, below her waist, up around the other breast, by the right ear, and around her tall hat, its head sitting at its peak. She may have a third shake entwining her waist, forming a knot in the front. She also wears a long, entwining sacral knot, a symbol for holiness, between her breasts. The figurines identified as votaries are also dressed in Minoan fashion, breasts exposed, holding a snake in (conjecturally) both hands, wearing a hat with a feline figure on top of it, either a lioness or leopard. Like the goddess figurine, they wear a sacral knot between their breasts.

These women are associated with symbols of power and, quite often, fearfulness. Snakes and lionesses are among the most fearsome beasts in the wild, and just as they are feared and respected, these figurines would indicate that the priestesses and women who were adherent to the Minoan religion were similarly regarded.

**Connection to Wadjet and Isis**

In addition to the Snake Goddess and Votaries, Evans also found a statuette identified as Egyptian, and a ‘Priestess of Wadjet’ at the same site in Knossos. While Evans tentatively links the Snake Goddesses and Wadjet, he does not pursue the connection. It is not controversial to think that the Minoans were in contact with the Egyptians, and borrowed some of their culture and religion, as many Minoan religious symbols, including the Sacral Knot and Sacral Horns have clear counterparts in the Egyptian religion (more on this later). Additionally, Egyptian magical wands are frequently shaped like snakes (a representation of Weret-Hekau, a form of Wadjet), and Egyptian figurines exist showing priestesses holding these wands, wearing the head of a lioness, a parallel to the Minoan votaries.
Connection to Astarte, Inanna, Ishtar, and Lilith

Astarte is a goddess who first appears in Egypt as a Semitic deity. She is often pictured topless, or naked, standing on a sacred lion and holding serpents in her hands – very similar in form to the Minoan votaries. In Egyptian mythology, she is sometimes given in marriage to Set. She is depicted as a deadly warrior, a divine mother, and having unbridled sexuality, and is associated with the planet Venus.

She is an earlier form of the Sumerian goddess Innana, and the Babylonian goddess Ishtar. In this guise, she is presented in sometimes paradoxical roles – that of a coy girl subverting patriarchal rule, or as an ambitious and powerful goddess seeking to expand her sphere of influence. She bears not only a connection to Wadjet in Egypt through the serpent as a symbol, but also with Sakhmet with her association with the lion and with war (the reader will recall that the Minoan Snake Goddesses also had a feline association).

She is also associated with political power, and many of her myths involve her hubris and often violent refusal to accept a diminished role in divine affairs. As with Astarte, she is frequently portrayed as having a voracious sexual appetite, and is quoted in poetry as demanding ‘plough my vulva, man of my heart.’ She is the patron goddess of prostitutes, and is connected to the Hebrew demoness Lilitu, also known as Lilith.

The Sacral Knot, The Labrys, and the Ankh

Each of the Snake Goddess and Votaries wears a Sacral Knot. This looped knotted fabric appears quite often in Minoan art, worn by both men and women, and is thought to be a symbol of holiness. It is similar in appearance to the Egyptian symbol tj(et), also called the knot of Isis. This is crucial to the pattern, because Isis was worshiped along with Wadjet in the city named for her, Per-Wadjet, and Isis is also associated with the planet Venus.

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3 http://www.scientiapress.com/snakegoddess
5 http://www.ancientegyptonline.co.uk/tjet.html
Another of the symbols of Minoan culture is the Labrys, or double-axe. As a symbol, it is thought to be a stylized representation of the labia\(^6\). The labrys is often seen in Minoan art paired with the Sacral Knot, forming an ankh – placing the feminine at the center of not only Minoan religion, but of Egyptian, and – by its own influence – in a place of significance in religious thought across the Mediterranean and Mesopotamian regions. This significance will be diminished by the force of patriarchal Greco-Roman and later Hebrew and Christian sects, but one cannot deny that woman was once a powerful and feared figure in the Ancient World.

Additionally, the ankh is the likely basis for the Alchemical symbol for the planet Venus. It bears mentioning, of course, that Venus is also associated with the figure of Lucifer, the Morning Star, as well as being associated with Astarte, Ishtar, Inanna, and Isis. It is crucial, I believe, to point out that prior to the association of Venus with Lucifer, all major mythological associations in the Egyptian, Minoan, Greek, Sumerian, and Mesopotamian worlds with Venus are feminine in nature. The fact that Venus, in Abrahamic monotheism, is reinterpreted as a symbol of Lucifer, and stripped of its feminine connotations, is an important connection.

**The Serpent and Woman as Deceiver**

After the ancient Hebrews turned away from their polytheistic religion to the worship of Yahweh, they turned their backs on their old gods, particularly the female ones. While Serpents do have a role to play in the Torah, particularly in the bronze serpent Moses uses to heal the Israelites, and the Rod of Aaron which turns into a serpent in the court of the Egyptian Pharaoh. However, potentially nowhere is the Serpent more prominently featured than in the book of Genesis, as the enigmatic chthonic serpent who beguiles the first Woman and bestows upon her the knowledge of Good and Evil, and the ability to become a Goddess herself. It should come as no surprise, given the cultural connections between the sacred feminine and the Serpent, that it is

\(^6\) http://www.ancient-symbols.com/symbols-directory/labrys.html
woman whom the Serpent speaks to, casting not only the Serpent itself but Woman herself in the role of deceiver, a role she will occupy for much of the remainder of Western civilization. It is not only the Serpent, then, who is the liberator of Man, but Woman as well. From the serpent bearing goddesses of Crete to Wadjet and Isis in Egypt to Astarte, Inanna, and Ishtar to Genesis, the symbol of the Serpent has always been associated with the feminine, and where once that association was born of the ideas of protection, nourishment, war, sexuality, strength, vigilance, and power, the Serpent was usurped and twisted into a mockery of its legacy; one wherein the Serpent and the feminine are associated with deception, weakness, fertility (as a vessel for male seed, and little more) and subservience.

Remember once again that the association of Venus, the Morning Star, Eosphorus, with Lucifer, Satan, and the Adversary is a departure from the heavenly body’s previous associations, and while both are associated with Serpents, the previous ones are entirely feminine. Once again the feminine is subverted and diminished, and the Serpent becomes deceiver. For the Left Hand Path practitioner, the Demonic Feminine is a key component of our philosophy. It is the feminine (albeit a re-interpreted and submissive variant) who, after all, accepts the liberation the Serpent offers and delivers it to her male counterpart. It is she who refuses to submit, it is she who is the first among humans to rebel, and it is she opens the door to our own consciousness. Even in Adam’s submissive wife Eve, the Demonic Feminine has sway. It is she who, along with the Serpent, is recast in the role of deceiver, albeit in a much more subtle way. While the Serpent is reinterpreted as a figure of evil rather than the protector and healer of previous uses, the divine feminine is buried deep within the myth, and woman herself reduced to a mere victim of the Serpent’s influence. This new, diminished role of woman would ultimately be recast as a new, subservient kind of divine feminine, associated with fertility, chastity, and acceptance – a far cry from the powerful and imposing figures of Wadjet, Inanna, and the Snake Goddesses of Crete.

This transition from Demonic Feminine to a new role as deceiver, victim, and submissive wife and mother makes it clear that Abrahamic monotheism associates the source of evil with feminine strength and a woman’s will to power. As those who revolt against this tyranny, LHP practitioners must recognize this subversion of the Demonic Feminine, and work to celebrate and restore it. The path of the individual, and the true path to empowerment, no matter the sex of that individual practitioner, is rooted in the Demonic Feminine.