

VELEBITSKA UDRUGA KUTEREVO
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Bear and Men

2012



SOMMAIRE

Context of the project	3
Introduction	4
An ancestral power	5
Prehistory	5
Antiquity	6
Pagan myths	7
Getting the bear strength.....	7
Stories of a brotherhood	9
Ceremonies of the slain bear	11
The medicinal bear	13
Bear and the seasons	14
The bear dethroned	16
A Christian fight	16
Hunting campaigns.....	17
The tamed bear	18
And today?	20
A marketable item.....	20
A lost relationship.....	22
Bibliography	25

CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

In 2011-2012, I spend one year in the village of Kuterevo, small community in the Velebit mountain. I was EVS with the local organization Velebistka Udruuga Kuterevo, which is running a refuge for orphan bears.

During this year, I got the chance to learn a lot about bears, their biology, their habitat... which is essential to get a view of how they can coexistence with humans. However, it was for me as well very important to understand the complex relationship between the two species at another level, not only through natural and environmental aspects but in a more cultural view. I wanted to understand the shared history of men and bears, to realize how much we are linked, how we used to live together, what is left from that, and which are the possibilities for coexisting peacefully in the actual world.

That is why, as an EVS personal project, I wished to explore myths and legends about bears, in order to understand better both their and our place in the world and the ties which bind us.

This document is the result of this project, synthesis of readings (see bibliography at the end), Internet researches, thoughts and talks. Not aimed to be exhaustive, this text simply offers an introduction to different aspects of the relations between bears and men through centuries.

INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years, bears and humans have been living in the same areas. Species of bears can be found in almost every continent, from the Asian forests to the polar ice fields, and even where they have been disappearing they still haunt human memory, in a mix of fear and fascination.

Relationships between bears and humans have been changing through centuries, depending mostly on human cultures, ways of life and religions. Bear and cults about him have had a strong place in popular imagination and culture and the huge amount of mythological, religious or folkloric stories still testify of that. Bear has been valued and respected, sometimes even considered as a divinity or an ancestor of men. He has been a symbol of power, but also of renewal, of seasons, and even of royalty since he had symbolically been a long time the king of animals in Europe. However, bear has also been feared, fought and mocked and he shares with men a complex and conflictual history.

Standing like us on the soles of his feet, the bear is a symbol of the wilderness, of our lost relation with nature. Going through the history of the relationships between the man and the animal can help us to get a better understanding of how we now live together and how our relations could evolve.

AN ANCESTRAL POWER

Nobody can say where and when the lore of the bear entered human cultures, but we can find evidence of this link for centuries in various places, and stories across vast distances and time are remarkably similar, even through their evolutions. Although various animals were sacred in the traditions, the bear has a particular place in human imagination, beyond all the others. Left legends, stories and myths give us some tracks of lost beliefs, ceremonies and rituals. Moreover, some of the ancient tales and practices continue today in few areas. Thus, we can discover that the bear has been respected for his physical strength, but also his sacred power. Humans have called on bears for food, medicine, power, spiritual protection and mystical roots. Mythic animal, full of mystery, the bear definitively has had a strong meaning and impact in a lot of human lives.

Long carried by oral traditions passed from generation to another, the stories and practices slowly weakened but can still appear, although fragmented, in myths, legends, religious texts, tales, songs, paints, which are our last sources of information from the former times. And they are as well the last evidences of a lost link which might has been far more important that we can now imagine.

PREHISTORY

The long story of bear and man starts in pictures on the walls of Paleolithic caves. Indeed, there can be found proofs of early relationships between man and bear since prehistoric times. According to some scientific theses, the bear was already considered as a divinity by early humans, since bear skulls and bones that have been found in several caves and their arrangement can be interpreted as human intent and even as prehistoric religious ceremony. Moreover, the oldest known evidence of association between bear and human culture is present in the Regourdou cave (France). Indeed, there were found in 1957, under the same slab, a human burial and a bear burial, dated to 70 000 years ago.

Bear appears also in parietal art, recalling bestiaries and hunting scenes of ancient times, where he represents about 2% of the animals drawn. He is especially present in the Chauvet cave (France) with more than fifteen representations.



Drawing of a cave bear in the Chauvet-Pont d'Arc cave (France).



Human and bear burials in the Regourdou cave (France).

ANTIQUITY

Myths coming from Antiquity let us guess that the bear used to have a special place in the beliefs of men. Even if the bear was not a divinity in the ancient mythology, he had a symbolical place as an attribute of several Greek and Roman divinities and he appears in several myths, often as a parent (or adoptive parent) of ancient heroes or as subject of metamorphoses. Thus, he is associated with Artemis, Hellenic goddess of hunt, forest, wilderness, and protectress of wild animals. Also bear-goddess and goddess of the moon, she is often depicted with a silver bow representing the new moon. Indeed, the link between the bear and the moon is usual in European and Arctic cultures. Artemis' name is even formed on the Greek name of the bear "arktos".

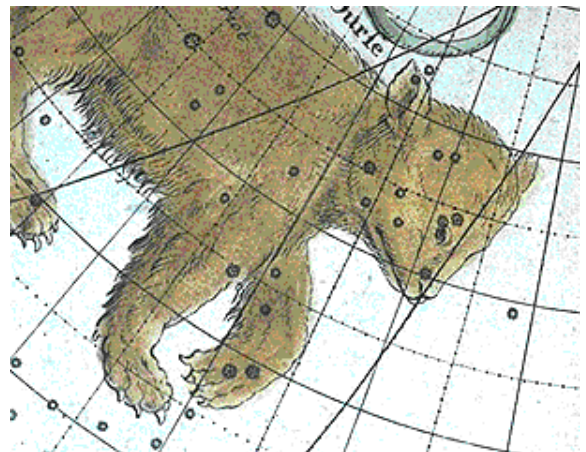
Several ancient heroes are also linked to bears, because, for various reasons, they were abandoned in the wild and found and raised up by bears (Atalante, Paris) or were born from a relationship between a human and a bear (the brothers Agrios and Orios, Arcisios). The bear was then symbols of strength, wisdom and courage for these heroes.

But the bear did not have only a place in the myths during ancient times. Although spiritually respected, his strength could also be used to entertain people. Like many other big animals, the bear was part of shows and fights in amphitheatres where people used to go to enjoy extremely violent and bloody scenes. There, bears had to fight with lions, buffalos, dogs, etc. Among the most famous fights involving bears, there is the much talked about day when Caligula (first century AD) had four hundreds bears killed in a single day in combat with gladiators and other animals. As another cruel example, Probus Emperor (third century AD) made build up an artificial forest where one hundred of bears, but also lions and leopards, were massacred with spears.

However, bears were not the most popular animals for the fights and were abandoned because they did not offer scenes spectacular enough. Indeed, there way of fighting did not leave enough blood in the arena and they were not interested enough in human flesh.

Callisto and the Bear constellations

Since ancient times, men have recognized the silhouette of the bear in the sky, in the Big Bear and Little Bear constellations. According to the Greek myth, this is due to the fate of Callisto, one of Artemis' virgin companions who used to live and hunt with the goddess. Zeus, in love with Callisto, used a stratagem to approach her and made her pregnant. As a punishment, she was turned into a she-bear by Artemis or by Hera, Zeus' wife, according to different versions of the myth. Arcas, Callisto's son, grew up and one day met his mother in the forest and was ready to hunt her. To avoid this matricide, Zeus metamorphosed him as well into a bear and fixed them both in the heavens, as the Great bear and the Little Bear.



Never going under the horizon axis, the two bears in the sky are seen as the wheels of the seasons.

PAGAN MYTHS

Bear also appears as an important symbol in other cultures, in pagan rites and legends. He was strongly venerated and respected for his strength but he was also believed to hold other powers. Thus, various types of ceremonies could be linked to the bear: rituals about the slain bear, protection from and by the bear, healing ceremonies, seasonal or fertility rites, initiation rituals, etc.

GETTING THE BEAR STRENGTH

Since immemorial time, particularly in the Germanic world, for the Vikings and in Scandinavian countries, the bear was considered as the strongest animal in the forest, fascinating and uncontrollable. As such, warriors wanted to imitate him and to get his strength through rituals. These rituals could be linked to hunt or to war, and could be very violent. During magico-religious ceremonies they could enter in trance, possession, frenzied excitement and even reach extreme degree of aggressiveness, feeling inhabited by an invisible and fierce strength. Thus they could run and fight, imitating the animal's behavior. They could believe being the animal itself, feeling guided by the animal's spirit.

This kind of ceremonies could be used for young warriors' initiation. Indeed, to be efficient and strong, so cruel and pitiless, they had to find their origins, the fury and the strength of the ancestor, the bear.

During battles, warriors could also wear bearskins, or drink bear blood before going to fight. It was believed that thus the bear's power and strength would flow into the men during the fight. That is for instance the case for the "Berserkers", spoken of in the Scandinavian sagas. They wore bear skin in order to be ritually changed to beasts. Some even thought that at critical moments such warriors became "shape-shifters" and really turned themselves into bears. For others, it could be enough to wear a helmet or a shield with a bear painted on, and thereby evoking the spirit and the power of the bear.

Being able to kill a bear was also a very important mark of courage and strength. In the Germanic world and Scandinavia these practices were highly developed and a lot of chronicles and literary texts transmit to us examples of heroes who defeated a bear and thus became leader of their people. And bear, as the stronger beast known, was often an attribute for leaders and kings, and he could be represented on their weapons and emblems. This tradition of using the bear as a symbol extended to families, organs of power and even cities, but the reasons and meanings can be various, as you can see below.

Coats of arms and symbols

Through the centuries, the bear became an important symbol used in various places around the world. The bear has indeed been used as heraldic emblem by families, communities, cities, etc. This is for instance the case for three capital cities of Europe: Berne, Berlin and Madrid.



Berne (Switzerland)



Madrid (Spain)



Berlin (Germany)

For Berne and Berlin, a word game links the name of the cities to its coats of arms, with the presence of the etymological root “ber”, referring to the bear, in the names.

As an example, Berne was named in this way because, according to a legend, its founder was looking for a name for his new town and decided to give to it the name of the first animal that he would meet in the forest. It was a bear, so the town got this name. Another legend says that the founder, hunting in the forest, met a bear and fought with him. To keep memory of his victory on the animal, he decided to found a town in this place and to give to it the name of the animal. But whatever the origin of the name, the bear became a true symbol for the town and still is. A statue dedicated to Artio was even exhumed in the township of Berne in 1832. This Celtic bear goddess, whose name means “bear” in the Gallic language, is represented offering fruits to the symbolic animal. The statue can still be seen in the Historical Museum of Berne.



Artio, the bear goddess.

The bear also appears in flags, like in the one of the State of California:



frontal plane, he consumes a great variety of food, he can climb, swim and he is very skillful with his paws. And if modern sciences make a clear difference between men and animals, the popular imagination has always transcended the division. All around the world, myths and legends testify of the existence of fantastic creatures being both human and bear or tell us about a common origin between men and bears. In Romanian Carpathian Mountains, but also in the Himalaya and for tribal peoples of America, the bear was even considerate to be the ancestor of all the mankind.

From North America to Siberia, tales relate how humans, most of the time women, married bears and got children. Such a huge geographical range lets think that this universal story may be thousands of years old. Thought to copulate face to face, like humans, bears were long supposed to be able to have relations with people and to be especially attracted by young women. In Western Europe, this kind of beliefs was also widely spread and mountaineers often related stories about young women disappearing, taken by bears, and giving birth to children gifted with extraordinary strength or some bear abilities and physical characteristics. Testimonies of these legends still appear in few celebrations, for instance in some carnivals in the South of France, where people commemorate old traditions by wearing bear costumes, taking a young woman and sometimes even performing the killing of the animal followed by a resurrection.

It was also very common for Northern Asian tribes to say that they came from the marriage between a young woman and an animal, often a bear. Thus, the tribe had an animal ancestor in which they recognized themselves and that they venerated. It was a usual practice to use the bear in lineages, thereby getting legitimacy and symbolical strength for the family or clan.

Lots of legends give a bear as an ancestor of heroes or kings. For instance, according to Danish legends but also to Danish official genealogies, the great-grand-father of the king Sven II Estridsen (1047-1076) was the son of a bear, which had kidnapped a young woman, and so all the Danish dynasty has kept this symbolical heritage.

Bear names

With his symbolic power, the bear gave his name to many places. Besides well-known cities like Berne or Berlin, numerous towns and villages got their names from the animal: Bergen, Bernburg, Baerenbronn, Baerendorf, Berenzweiler, Baerenbach, Berstheim, Bernardvillé, Bernardswiller, just to name a few. In places where the bear was present not so long ago, like in Swiss mountains and in France, the bear also left his trace in the names of local places: Val del Orso, Bagn del Uors, Orsière, Urseren, Ursins, Vallorcine, etc.

The bear is also the root of various first names: Bernard, Bertha, Gilbert, Herbet, Robert, Hubert, Ursula, etc. Even the mythic king Arthur held his name from the animal, to which he is strongly related. At some periods, it was also common to use the bear name to build patronyms: Behr, De berhr, Deber, Debert, Behrer, Bernegger, Baerenfels...

CEREMONIES OF THE SLAIN BEAR

Being highly respected did not mean that the bear used not to be killed. On the contrary, the hunting of the bear has been a very important tradition and celebration in most of the places where the bear has lived. With an extreme respect to the animal and its spirit, various peoples used to hunt it.

We can find such a kind of practices in the Native Americans people and in people from Northern Asia and Europe (Nivkh, Aïnos, Ket, Sami, etc.). The practices are different and we can find a lot of variations according to the places, but they also all contain main features that appear among various tribes and rites are similar enough to be linked. Indeed, customs about the bear are very ancient and probably have a common origin. Changes appeared locally over the centuries and each tribe got to have its own specific ways of hunting and celebrating the slain bear.

Most of the time, this killing was not link to the necessity of getting food or fur, or at least this was not the main goal. The hunt could have different meanings according to the people. But the purpose of the hunt was the most often about getting the strength of the animal or communicating with ancestors and spirits and the practices around the hunt and the following ceremonies were a very important social activity. For instance, for the Sami (northern Sweden, Finland, Norway and West Russia), killing solemnly a bear allowed to eat his flesh to get his strength and virtues but also to free his soul and send it with messages to the other bears. The bear was considered as an ancestor or a spiritual guide or a nature god and it was important to communicate with him.

For the Ainu people (indigenous group still living in Japan and Russia), the bear was, and still is, the most revered animal. They see him as an ancestor and have different rituals linked to him (hunts, sacrifices, banquets, initiations...). They hunt bears but also have a particular sacrificial custom: a bear cub captured very young can be breastfed by a woman, together with her own child. The animal is then raised and pampered during three to four years, before being sacrificed and eaten during a ritual banquet. The goal is to put the tribe under the protection of the beast, and to get a part of his strengths or even of his soul.



Sacrifice of a bear by the Ainu (Japanese painting, 1870).

Each people respected very strict rituals for the hunt as well as for the following ceremony. All the acts were strongly ritualized, from the search for the bear to the way of cooking, eating and burying him. Every part was important and was pursued in a specific way. According to the tribes, the ceremonies could include fasting, incantations, dream experiences, dances, sexual abstinence, etc. This was associated with the strong respect due to the bear and the importance of the goals of the killing, but the magic and rituals around the hunt could also have the purpose of putting away the animal's revenge and/or to get a more abundant game. Angering the bear's spirit by not respecting it enough or correctly could be very dangerous. For instance, several Native American peoples believed that the bear controlled all the other animals. Thus, offending his spirit could prove very dangerous because it could prevent the hunt and the people would starve. On the contrary, well done and respectful hunts and ceremonies would provide animals' good will for being killed and avoid their anger against men.

For these people, doing a proper ceremony of the slain bear was also very important because they thought that it would allow the bear to come back to life with a new body. The killing was not really a killing, but just a passage to a new life. Not showing enough respect to the animal could prevent its return. The Cheyennes thought that the only animals who allowed themselves to be caught did it because the ceremonies to send their spirits home were done in a good way on previous occasions. Moreover, the slain bear was killed only because he allowed the hunters to do so. He was willingly going to this death, knowing that he would be born again. Thus, the Asiatic Eskimos saw the bear as coming to men as a guest, who, highly honored, would come again.

The slaying, although being a cruel process, had to be done in a proper way, respecting the animal, his spirit, his strength. A traditional practice was to fight with the bear with a knife, in a close combat: the man had to confront the bear with a dagger, letting the animal standing up and taking him in his paws to strangle him. Once taken by the bear, the hunter had to plant the blade in the heart. The bear could also be put away from his den with smoke and killed by several hunters. Some tribes, like the Inuit Eskimos, hunt the bear imitating the animal's own strategy, moving against the wind and only when the prey is looking away. This kind of fight was very prestigious for the hunters but also had always a heavy meaning. For the Sami, the hunter who had killed the bear was then supposed to stay some days alone and to follow particular rituals to get purified. The ceremonies after the killing of the animal could also serve to ask the animal for forgiveness.

Many tribes thought that the bear was able to understand human speech but also to hear everything, even through long distances, and to not forget anything. According to Altaic Tartars, the bear uses to put his head on the floor and to listen to talks through the earth. Thus, the hunters used to communicate only with gestures while preparing the hunt.

Moreover, the bear was believed to remain conscious of what was happening during hours or even days after his death. It was thus important to be very careful during the preparation of the hunt and the ceremony in order to avoid offending him.

These beliefs, as most of the others, were shared among many Native American, Scandinavian and Siberian tribes.

For some tribes, the hunt was followed by a big feast where the bear was cut, cooked and eaten according to precise rules, often dictated by genders but also age, marital status, prestige, etc. Thus, everyone had different roles and was supposed to eat different parts of the animal. The Finns even used to drink blood from the skull of the beast.

But other tribes, like some Native American ones, although hunting the bear, refused to eat the meat because this would be eating their own ancestor. The ceremony was thus more about dance, music and celebration of the animal.

Some names...	
By respect, fear or according to rituals, it was usual for many tribes to refer to the bear with other names, euphemisms or periphrasis. Most of these names get a strong resonance of spiritual power and strength:	
Navajo (Southwestern United States)	"Fine Young Chief"
Koyukon of Alaska	"Dark Thing"
Khanty and Mansi of Central Asia	"Swamp Darling", "Old One of the Forest", "Darling Old One", "Sacred Animal"
Finns (ethnic Finnish group)	"Master of the Forest", "Pride of the Woodlands"
Yukaghir (Northern Siberia)	"Owner of the Earth"
Lapps (or Sámi – Northern Europe)	"Mountain Grand-father", "Sacred game", "The Dark One", "The One who sleeps during the Winter", "The Old with fur".

After the feast or the various ceremonies, the burial of the bones was also highly ritualized. The skeleton could be reconstructed in order to allow the bear to come back to life. Some tribes, like the Tungusic (Siberia) could keep parts of the animal as protector totems. They for instance used to nail a paw on their door to be protected from bad spirits. For some Native Americans, the bones were not kept but the portrait of the animal was pictured on totems in order to protect the tribe.

These long traditions have disappeared with the tribes which used to practice them. In Scandinavia, the hunt and its rituals have been conserved until the end of the 19th century and the Ainu (Asia) and Sami peoples are perhaps the last practicing some rituals towards the bear. Thus, while the bear is now widely dispraised in European cultures, he stays an important symbol in other parts of the world.

THE MEDICINAL BEAR

The bear is said to hold a considerable power, an unnatural strength coming from all the parts of his body. For many pagan cultures, he is a "doctor". The Buryats (aboriginal Siberian group) even say that "the whole bear is a cure". The properties

of the bear medicines are very diverse. For example, in Asia, their bile has been used to cure various diseases and their teeth to treat toothache. The Kalac (Russia) collected frozen bear excrement as a cure for constipation while the Eskimos believed that a sterile woman should eat a raw penis. The Blackfoot (American Indians) derived the power of their medicine pipes from various bear concoctions and could intensify the power of the pipe by being dressed with grizzly skins.

In the Balkans, where the dancing bear tradition was very strong, the bear leaders used the animal as having magical healer properties. When someone was ill, it was possible to pay a bear master to make the bear dancing in front of the house. Breathing smoke or eating ashes from burnt bear hair was also used to reduce fever. In order to heal arthritis, rheumatism or fever, the patient should lie on his stomach so the bear could walk on his back. Thus, the animal was supposed to transmit his power and to take the weaknesses upon himself. In some cases, the bear could have a bad influence. For instance, pregnant women should not watch a dancing bear or this could give a bad temperament to the child.

Kwakiutl prayer on hunting and slaying the black bear

When the black bear is dead, when it has been shot by the hunter, the man sits down on the ground at the right-hand side of the bear. Then the man says, praying to it,

Thank you, friend, that you did not make me walk about in vain. Now you have come to take mercy on me so that I obtain game, that I may inherit your power of getting easily with your hands the salmon that you catch.

Now I will press my right hand against your left hand

Says the man as he takes hold of the left paw of the bear. He says,

O friend, now we press together our working hands, that you may give over to me your power of getting everything easily with your hands, friend

Says he. Now it is done after this, for now he only skins the bear after this.

But the bear was not only a “medicine”. According to various tribal accounts, he also knew how to heal himself and so to be a master healer. Thus, many tribes (Cheyenne, Eastern Cree, Penobscot, etc.) have believed that it is possible to learn what plants are beneficial to human health only by watching what the bear eats. They also believed that their Shamans, sometimes called “bear doctor”, received their healing powers from bears. For the Tewa tribe (American Indians), the word kieh, or “doctor”, is even synonymous of “bear”.

BEAR AND THE SEASONS

In most of the cultures where the bear appears, the human nature of the animal and his various powers are important themes, but a great symbol is also the bear linked to the seasons. He is often seen as a master of renewal, responsible for the change of seasons, knowing when to die and when to reborn. Indeed, the bear, disappearing during the winter, buried under the ground, and coming back for the spring after several months fasting, became a cosmological animal linked to the cycle of time in myths and beliefs

Thus, the bear, emerging from the underground for the spring, after months without eating, came to symbolize the resurrection ability. And even more because the she-bear goes out from her den with cubs. Men, distressed by death, found there a sign of a possible return to the life, a hope for revival. It was a proof that a part of a living being could be immortal. This eternity did not mean that the living beings would never die, but it was seen as a part of the perpetual nature cycle: the spring following the winter, the rebirth following the death. The bear, in its hibernation cycle, is a perfect metaphor of immortality and bear myths and rituals centered on the theme of renewal can be found in numerous cultures. It could be seasonal dances, like the Bear Song Dance of the Crow Indians, or mimicking the awakening of the bear like for the Utes and the Paiutes.

In most of the ancient European cultures, which used to celebrated the end of the winter and the coming back of the light with rituals (the Roman Festa Candelarum, the Celtic Imbolc, etc.) at the end of January and/or beginning of February, the seasonal celebrations could be related to an important moment of the animal's life: when the bear wakes up and goes out of his den to see if the winter was over. At that time, he is supposed to observe the sky, the clouds, the wind and to take a decision about his hibernation. If the sky is clear and if the sun is shining, that meant that the winter is not finished and the bear comes back to his den to sleep 40 more days. But if the sky is cloudy, or of it is raining or snowing, that means that it would be soon the end of the winter and the bear does not come back to sleep but starts to look for food and to wait for better days.

In a lot of parts of Europe, this major event was thought to occur on an average of 40 days after the winter solstice, near the end of January or beginning of February, and a lot of celebrations took place on the second of February, sometimes on the third, or during several days. During this period, celebrations commemorated the bear going out with songs, dances, games and bear masquerades. For instance, men were wearing bear costumes and pretended to kidnap young women, like in the stories told in lots of beliefs and legends, in which bears were taking women to their den.



Traditions about the bear are still alive in some villages in the South of France.

THE BEAR DETHRONED

A CHRISTIAN FIGHT

Practices and beliefs related to the bears have disappeared slowly through the centuries. They are more and more rare nowadays and survive only in some preserved areas. According to some theories, this could be the fact of the Catholic Church, which, wanting to fight pagan cults and traditions, did everything to desacralize animals and especially to depreciate and demonized the bear. Indeed, during the Middle Age, the bear was still venerated, sometimes as a god, in lots of parts of Europe. The old cults were still strongly anchored and especially for warriors who still practiced rituals which appeared as diabolical for the Church. That was to be eradicated in order to convert pagans to Christianity and to empower the Christian faith.

Thus, in the Christian world, the bear is evil. St. Augustine (4th century), in his *Sermones*, even literally say “*Ursus typum diaboli praefigurat ; ursus es diabolus*” (*the bear prefigures the type of the devil; the bear is the devil*). And in most of the Christian texts the bear is presented as a cruel animal, image of the devil, trying to deceive men and to turn them away of God. But the violence of the bear can be overpowered by spirituality, by the power of saints which are able to overcome the



Saint Amand and the tamed bear

animal thanks to their faith. This is the case of Saint Corbinian (see p.9) but also of Saint Sergius of Radonezh, who shared is bread with a bear cub and finally tamed it, Saint Columba, who is usually represented with a bear on a chain, or Saint Amand who as well used the bear which killed his donkey to carry his cart. Thus, the Christian faith appeared as stronger than the animal and the wilderness.

Fighting the bear power could also be done by converting old beliefs. For instance, the bear goddess Artio was venerated from the Rhine region to Switzerland and this pagan cult seems to have stopped after the building of religious monuments in the places where the bear was idolized. However, the change was progressive, with a transition period while the bear was associated with the Christian saints. For example, in the legend of Andlau in Alsace (France), the imperatress Richarde Andlau, falsely accused of adultery devotes her life to god. Looking for a place to build a monastery, she met a she-bear crying on her dead cub. Full of compassion, Richarde took the dead body in her arms and it came back to life. After that, the bear did not leave the woman, and all the bears in the forest respected strongly her

until her death. This kind of mix allowed establishing a soft junction between old and new beliefs.

Another example of Christianized pagan ritual is the celebration of the waking bear: at the date when people used to celebrate the coming back of the spring and of the bear is now in the Christian calendar the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple and the Purification of the Virgin, but as well Candlemas, the Roman candle celebration which was christianized.

The bear pagan celebrations were replaced by Christian events, but souvenirs from the ancient beliefs survived during centuries. Thus, people have mixed their old cultures and beliefs with the new ones. For example, in France, from the 12th to the 18th century, the second of February was often called, "Chandelours" (ours = bear) instead of "Chandeleur" (French name for Candlemas). In one word, souvenirs from old pagan cults to the light and/or to the bear were surviving through a Christian ceremony. And even today, some villages are still commemorating old traditions and rituals every year in February during bear festivals.

Gradually, with the growing influence of the Christian Church, the bear lost his power. His death was symbolical but also physical with wide hunting campaigns organized to exterminate the animal symbolizing so much the power of the wilderness and so linked to pagan cults and seen as an enemy of the Christ. For instance, Charlemagne organized at the end of the 8th century real bear massacres, where thousands of animals were killed.

HUNTING CAMPAIGNS

The action of the Catholic Church had probably a strong impact on the perception of the bear, but the evolution of the way of life, started for centuries but changing faster and faster, also took an very important part in the depreciation of the animal. Indeed, with the growth of the agriculture, the bears' forests were progressively cut down, decreasing the symbolical power of the animal. Turned to stupid, the bear appeared as a menacing brute, a threat to the agricultural life. He became to be seen as an obstacle to progress, his hunt was fostered and his disappearance applauded. From venerated, the bear came to be the animal-to-be-killed for cultivators and herders wanting to protect their crops and cattle. The bear seen as harmful, it was an important glory to kill him. With overhunting and extensive clearing of forest to farmland, the Middle-Age was terrible for the bear, which became rare and sought refuge in the mountains.

The hunt of the bear, former ritual to enter into manhood, came to be an act of extermination. During centuries, the bear was seen as nothing more than a dangerous creature and killing him was a great prestige. Thus, a hunter who has killed a bear could be very popular for weeks. He was the one who clear the area from a flail. This was still the case at the beginning of the 20th century, when the brave hunter and the dead bear could be seen on pictures in local newspapers or even on postcards.



Killing a bear could also be a very valuable action. For example, in the 19th century in France, hunters got primes from the administration for their killing. Moreover, they could get money by selling the meat and the fur. If they captured a bear alive, they could sell it to menageries.

Proof of courage, the bear hunting became a sport or a hobby: since the Middle-Age for the nobleman and even more in the 19th century with sportsmen and hunters, men have enjoyed hunting bears as trophies, prizing their heads and fur, getting fame and recognition for their brave fights. In Russia, Finland, Romania, Bulgaria and in a lot of other countries, the bear has been the highest hunting trophy. In Romania, when Ceausescu was governing (1967-1989) bears were even raised in farms in order to increase their natural number and so to have more to kill. Bears were also fed to help them to get bigger and so to get more beautiful trophies, often kept for rich foreigners coming to enjoy an exotic hunt.

Thus, through the centuries, the bear has been killed for various reasons: it could be for religious ritual and be done with a lot of respect, or in order to exterminate the animal and its symbolical representation of the wilderness and so to affirm the man supremacy. It could also be a way for the men to show their courage and strength, killing a bear being a great prestige. Today the bear is still hunted in most of the countries, but this is more and more controlled and regulated.

THE TAMED BEAR

The bear as a devil and harmful animal became a real archetype in popular imagination and in literature and this led to a symbolic death: the bear as "king" of the animals no longer exists, his prestige is gone.

Popular entertainment with bears has always existed. It was already the case during Antiquity, with the fights in the Coliseum and then during the Middle-Age with bear baiting in villages and at fairs throughout Europe where bears were muzzled, tied to a pole and attacked by dogs until their death (tradition still existing in some part of Asia). Later, the tradition of dancing bears appeared, with bears forced to dance on their hind legs or to play music.



While the tamed bear already existed, it became more and more normal after this wide depreciation. His end of reign appeared with the diminution of bears in the wild and so in human lives but also with a growing humiliation: in the 12th-13th centuries in Europe the bear became an object of

laughter, he was trained by jugglers to dance and to do acrobatics. The bear masters used to steal cubs from their mother and to raise them. When the animal was big and strong enough, they cut off or removed their claws and teeth to make him harmless. But to be able to really control the bear, people used to drill his nasal septum or lips with hot iron to put a steel ring to which they could tie a chain. Then the bear could be train, submitted by pain and hunger. A whole process terribly cruel and painful for the animal.

At the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, the bear arrived in circus. They danced, juggled, walked on a beam, rided a bike or played music... The wild animal let place to a subservient animal copying human movements to amuse some public. This power upon the bear embodied the growing mastery of men over the wilderness.

Another common use of the bears for entertainment and commercial profit is the tradition of menageries. Dating back to Ancient Egypt, also used by the Romans and then by kings, popes and nobles, it was usual for important people to keep menageries where various animals, including bears, were exhibited to show their power and impress guests and rivals. Often offered as gifts, big and exotic animals served in diplomatic relationships for centuries. White bears were especially appreciated.

Bear in literature

Literature is a valuable marker of the human imagination and way of thinking and offers an interesting testimony of how the perception of the bear gradually became totally different. In the texts of the end of the 12th century to the 13th century, the bear lost his qualities and royal aspects (exceptional strength, courage...) and appeared more and more as a coarse creature, lonely, irascible, bounded, naive, timid, clumsy... He is often showed as slow in body and mind, victim of his greed and stupidity.

When animals were often used to drive moral lessons and to illustrate personality traits, the bear appeared like strong but stupid. The strength of the bear is his first remarkable trait but this is not necessarily positive. For instance, a Sami proverb says "the bear has the strength of nine men, but the mind of one". The same idea is in the fable *L'Ours et l'Amateur des jardins* by the French writer La Fontaine: a bear, trying to drive away a fly, kills his friend throwing a stone on his head.

Another typical aspect given to the bear is his greed. For example, in *the Roman de Renart*, in which animals embody human traits, the bear is the oaf and greedy character, whose gluttony leads to act with stupidity. In Medieval bestiaries, the bear is associated to five of the seven capital sins: lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth.

However, traces from pagan tradition also appear in literature, especially in tales. All around the world, stories about bears mating with humans testifies of the old believes: *Jean-de-l'ours* or *the Story of the noble Valentin and Orson* in France, *Ivanka medved* in Russia, *The child with a bear paw* for the Sami, etc.



AND TODAY?

Centuries of hunt and persecutions have led to a huge decrease in the number of bears if the world. However, even when the bears are not directly killed, human activities are threatening the species. Demographic increase, deforestation, expanding infrastructures and agricultural areas are fragmenting more and more the bear habitats, impacting strongly his life. Seen as a threat and fought as an enemy, the animal has already disappeared from lots of regions where he used to live and he is threatened almost all over the world.

In this context, the place of the bears in societies is often unstable and paradoxical, the animal together loved as an icon and treat as a danger. Men are now looking for a way of living with the animal, not necessarily being aware of that. While killing their ancestral brother, men also keep him in their lives, using him as a symbol and making profit from him and sometimes trying to protect him.

A subject of studies

Depreciated during centuries in Europe, the bear was often forgotten or scarcely examined in scientific researches, zoological treaties until the 17th century. He did not interest scientists and knowledge about him (habits, sizes, weights, etc.) was only gathered from older works, mixing truths and falsehoods. Even in the 19th, century of the natural history, bears are not an important subject of interest in researches.

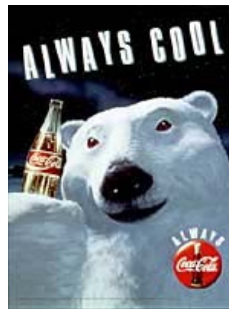
The rise of paleontology in Europe, in the 19th century, led to the study of prehistoric bears and so of the cave bear. The growing interest for sociologist and ethnologist studies also helped to put the bear in a central place, because of his long cultural role.

But the knowledge really improved in the 20th, when the preservation of wilderness, nature and animals started to become a subject of interest. As an animal among the others, the bears slowly became a subject of research and he is now a flagship species, his particular fascination power raising easily support. The possible coexistence of men and bears also entered the debates. Scientifics have studied the impact of the men and of their civilization on the bears but they have also wondered how bears could be dangerous, if they would attack humans or not and if this depends on the species.

A MARKETABLE ITEM

As the wilderness was destructed, so too was the wild bear. And when people started being alarmed about the disappearing of the animal, they started to make him an icon but also a marketable item, making profit from him. Not sacred anymore, the bear has however always kept a kind of magical power, fascinating men who have exterminated him. Thus, the bear became a figure widely used: stamps, postcards, movies, toys, songs, advertisements, etc. Without even realizing

it, men are keeping the bear all around them, for his strength, his softness, his mysterious power, his wild nature.

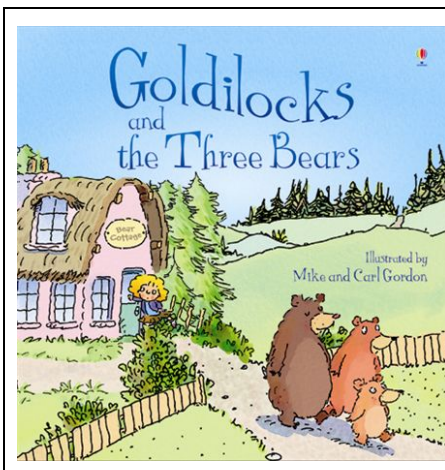


While the wild bear is seen as a threat, the symbolical bear is endowed with positive traits like friendliness, loyalty, strength, trust, etc. All these traits make him a widely used figure in advertising industry and for different commercial products. As an example, a huge market is made with the “Teddy Bear”.

Present as an icon, the bear attracts people in museums, like if he was already dead, but also alive in zoos, parks, where he is most of the time seen only as a cute animal, a teddy bear, and not really understood for what he really is.

Symbol of wild nature and flagship species, the bear is moreover often put as an issue in economic projects and political struggles. Men use and sometimes abuse of his aura/karma for their own profit, while pretending to fight for the animal.

Disappearing from the forests, the bear is today present everywhere in human lives.



Bear in children's books

If the bear used to appear as a stupid and clumsy creature in the European Medieval literature and during the following centuries, his situation is different in the modern literature, especially in children books. The bear, popular again after the appearance of the Teddy Bear, is not depreciated anymore but he is no longer a real and wild animal living in the woods: he became a toy. He may live in the forest as Winnie the Pooh but also in a house, as Paddington. The bear is not an animal anymore, he is just a talking toy with human-like behavior.

Teddy Bear's story



Despite a long dishonor in the European cultures, the bear came back to men's lives in an unexpected way with the invention of the "Teddy Bear" at the beginning of the 20th century.

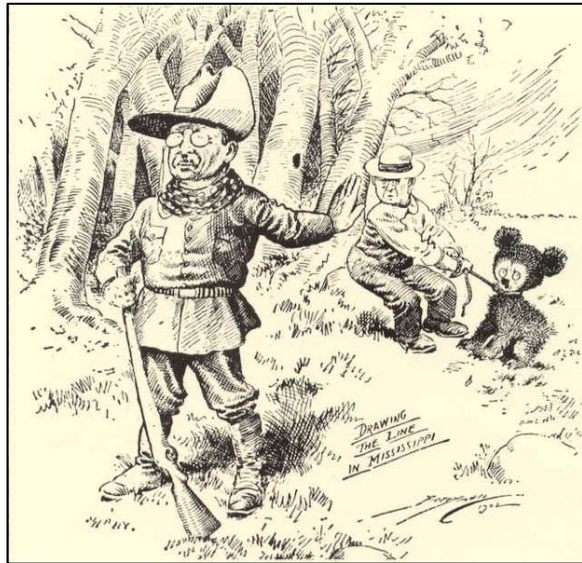
The more famous and widely accepted story of the creation of the Teddy Bear is linked to the American president Theodore Roosevelt. In 1902, after few days of unsuccessful hunt by the president, one of his associates had the idea to tie a bear cub to a tree so the president could easily shoot him. Roosevelt refused to kill the bear and this story appeared in newspapers, in cartoons illustrating the merciful president.

A Brooklyn candies and toys shop owner saw the cartoon and had the idea to make stuffed toy bears, in reference to the president. The success was huge and in few years the handmade production became industrial.

Become the most famous of the zoomorphic toys, the bear has entered all the homes and children's rooms. He is also a star in children books and in cartoons, and a large number of bears have become icons, like Winnie the Pooh, Baloo, Michka, etc.



Endowed with positive qualities, like loyalty or friendliness, the teddy bear became the more faithful and reassuring of the figures of our childhood. While real bears are seen as fierce and dangerous animals, their stuffed alter-ego are loved, seen as soft and comforting. Thus, the number of toy bears growing and outnumbering the number of real bears, the teddies fill the need for tenderness of humans who are leading bears into extinction.



A LOST RELATIONSHIP

Through the centuries, the image of the bear has been evolving in various ways. He has been a wild and dangerous beast or a cute toy, but since 30 years, the situation has also been changing to a search to protect the animal. After killing (symbolically but also physically) their "ancestor", men started to act to protect the last survivors of the species. However, these actions are often far too weak in comparison with all that the "civilized" men keep doing that threat bears (degradation and fragmentation of their habitat, hunt, extension of human construction, etc.). The coexistence between men and bears seems to be corrupted forever, at least in its former way allowing the bears to be the "kings of the forest". Killing the bear, men killed their memory and many things are already lost and cannot be found again.

Most of the societies now look at the bear as a problematic animal in a crowded human world. Seen as potentially dangerous, the bear has the right to live only if he

can be controlled in one way or another, or if he can be exploited. While meeting a bear in the wild would have been a spiritual encounter for most of the ancient cultures, this could today mean the death of the “menacing” animal or be seen as a potential lucrative touristic attraction. Over the time, men forgot how to live and act with bears. Going to hike, bike or camp in bear countries, looking for adventures in national parks or wild areas, people can be confronted to bears while they do not know anything about them and their behavior. Wanting a “wild adventure”, they often ignore signs or safety tips and put themselves in danger. This can lead to dangerous situations, resulting sometimes in injuries or deaths for the man or the bear. This is very rare in Europe, but more often the case in North America and in the Arctic. For instance, confrontations between men and Polar bears happen every year. Not with Inuits, who know, respect and understand the animal, but with tourists and oil company workers who go to the bear territory without caring about it.

These situations of rare meetings between men and bears are most of the time sensationalized by media and they added to centuries of cultural fear of the bear (the ideological bear, image of the unseen, the dark force of the forest). They have led to an often exaggerated and irrational fear. People are still afraid of the bears years after seeing them in an area. What would be the solution? Killing all the bears? Cleaning up the forest from their “wilderness”? Tolerate it only in a controlled way usable for profit? Cannot we accepted the beauty of the wild world and live in peace and harmony with its inhabitants?

Bear are intelligent and used to adapt easily, they can learn to live in areas restricted by human activities. The doubt is more about men being able or not to live with the bears. With the opportunity to try and a proper education, we still hope that the coexistence is possible.

Even if the link between men and bears does not longer exist in the “civilized” world, bears are still seen as spiritual or semi-sacred creatures in a few cultures. Thanks to them, we have still the opportunity to remember what the bear used to be for us and that we could act in a different way. They also remind us that the world would be sadder and poorer without bears. Our collective imagination says the same, keeping the bear all around us even when he is not anymore in our forests. Somewhere in themselves, people know that losing the bear would be losing a part of them cultural and natural heritage, but also a part of themselves. Proofs of that are visible with an increasing number of foundations and organizations fighting to protect the bears and other animals. Their actions provide the hope that it is not too late to influence the future of the bears in the world. In a materialist society, the old values are perhaps not yet totally dead and might live again.

About a name

All over the world, the bear has taken various denominations. From Himalaya to Western Europe, a great number of names are phonetic variations of the same Indo-European etymological root “orks”:

Sanskrit	rksah	Greek	arktos (modern Greek : arkouda)
Hindi	rich	Old Irish	art
Gypsy	rič	Welsh	arth
Persian	khers	Albanian	ari/arush

The latin form “ursus” gave the romance languages:

Romanian	urs	French	ours
Portuguese	urso	Italian	orso
Spanish	oso		

However, the root “orks” disappeared in several linguistic groups because of taboos linked to the name: some people used to avoid saying the name of the bear. The name was therefore replaced by qualifiers or periphrasis.

In the Germanic languages, the bear is qualified with names derived from his brown color:

German	bär	Deutch	beer
English	bear	Danish	bjørn
Swedish	björn	Icelandic	björn

For the Baltic languages, the bear is the animal which licks his cubs to give them a shape:

Lithuanian	lokys	Lettonian	lakis
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In the Slavic languages, the bear is the “honey eater”:

Russian	medved	Croatian	medvjed / medo
Slovanian	mêdved	Czech	medvěď

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