

# Report on lion through centuries and cultures

[Environment](#), [Animals](#)



In the history of human kind, there is probably no such well-known and often used image as a lion symbol. Those beautiful and strong creatures were accompanying mankind during all its known or conscious history, when people became able to comprehend the surrounding environment, fear threats and worship strength of stronger and braver creatures than themselves. It is true that each epoch and culture had its own interpretation of the lion symbol, but attitude to this animal had always showed the human perception of the animal world in general and its place in the surrounding environment. In order to understand the integrity of lion's place in human history and specifics of its cultural perceptions and national interpretations, it is essential to research the real behavioral pattern of the existing animals. The development of human perception of the lion can be tracked through the analysis of lion symbols in three different cultures Egyptian, Greek and Roman. Thus, the main aim of the current paper is to explain what kind of animal lion is, what was its place in the Ancient believes and how their differences contributes to the current perception of the animal.

The lion as a living animal is characterized as a big cat, belonging to the Panthera kind. Historically, it is considered to be the king of all animals. From the biological perspective, this can be conditioned by the high level of lionesses hunting techniques and a predator nature of existence. On the other hand, from the perspective of size and weight, the first place is taken by another wild cat - tiger. Lions are characterized by pack style of life, not the wolfish style, but they have one male leader, who has the right to fertilize all the lionesses of the tribe (Shinaberry 2002). The leadership and right of the alpha-male are constantly won in numerous fights with young

males. Lionesses are the one to hunt and bring food into the pack. The main visual distinction between lions and lionesses is that lions have mane, and their muzzle's bones are massive; while lionesses are slenderer and gracious in movements and hunting. Irrespective of a wide-spread belief that lions prefer day for the active life conduct, in fact, they prefer night for hunting and day for sleeping (Shinaberry 2002).

In order to track the symbolical meaning of the lion in Ancient cultures, three artifacts from were chosen. Egyptian interpretation of the lion is depicted in the most magnificent monument of the cat divinity in the world - Sphinx. Greek symbol of Nemean lion is depicted on the Attic stamnos of 490 B. C. Roman perception of lions can be found in balcony figures and wood carving and marble statues of the churches' decorations (the chosen one is wood carving). From those three images, the closest to the real depiction of a lion are the last two. The Egyptian Sphinx describes a semi-human creature with lioness body and human head. Although human head is not a characteristic feature of the real lion, the rest of the body corresponds to the actual proportions. On the other hand, due to its grandness, this monument lacks detailed curves of muscles and body motion (Gadalla 2007). Greek and Roman images are more realistic, because they depict lions in motion and emphasize each muscle of tension and action. In Greek work, the lion is depicted in its struggle against Hercules; his whole body expresses tension and stubbornness of the fighter (Evans 2003). Although, in Roman depiction, no struggle is present, lions are described in all their beauty of standing on their back legs and holding the symbolic shield. They are shown strong, athletic and in volume of three dimensions, which makes them more realistic

(Evans 2003).

The main contrast between those cultural images of a lion is in technique of depiction and symbolical meaning for the contemporaries. The Egyptian Sphinx is depicted in a stone monument, which in its nature is constant, imperturbable, calm and wise in his face expression. It is characterized by stability and magnificence - embodying the whole Egypt and Ra himself (Gadalla 2007). Greek Nemean Lion is shown in a two-dimensional perspective, which corresponds to the struggle of two forces depicted on the stamnos. Unlike Egyptian lion, Nemean lion expresses rage, desire to conquer and win at all costs. Such strength was inevitably resulting in counter-force, in the face of a hero and his will to defeat the enemy. This struggle and motion symbolized eternal tensions between Greek city-states. Some scholars believe that this fight shows eternal rivals of Athens and Sparta (Evans 2003). Unlike previous two images, Roman lion loses its independence and wilderness. It is shown as beautiful, gracious and strong animal but in service of the empire and people in it. Its strength does not serve it, but others. Roman lion is tamed (Evans 2003).

Overall, it can be concluded that, through the history of human civilization, the image of lion had changed or rather perception to it in those societies. Described above images show weakening of influence and respect to the lion symbol by coming generations. In the most Ancient culture of all three, lion or rather lioness was worshipped as goddess of sun, the Eye of Ra. She symbolized wisdom, life and eternity, just as the monument of Sphinx still does. In the Greek culture, the lion image became entirely male and gained subsequent aggression and bravery. It was contrasted to the rage of another

male - Hercules. In other words, the epoch of men and feuds had begun. While lions were still respected in Greece, Roman Empire had ended this. In the Roman perception, lions were just a tool in their hands. They were holding shield in the carving; and, in reality, they were used for entertainment and destruction of slaves and Christians in Coliseum. In other words, in the last four millennia symbolical meaning of lions had diminished from the worshiping as divine creatures of the female deity to the symbol of male aggression and struggle and finally to the subordinate tool of human blood thirst. Through the time, lions had lost much of their human warship but had finally gained their wild nature. The crucial task for the modern civilization is not in returning to the initial worshiping of those gracious animals. Modern humanity should protect them from people and let them live on their own, in their sacred environment of wilderness and freedom.

## **Bibliography**

Evans, EP 2003, Animal Symbolism in Ecclesiastic Architecture, Kessinger Publishing,

Whitefish.

Gadalla, M 2007, The Ancient Egyptian Culture Revealed, Tehuti Research Foundation,

Greensboro.

Shinaberry, TH 2002, Lions, Writers Club Press, Lincoln.