



# Dance, Music, Art, and Religion

Edited by Tore Ahlbäck

SCRIPTA INSTITUTI DONNERIANI ABOENSIS

XVI

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**DANCE, MUSIC, ART, AND RELIGION**

*Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Dance,  
Music, and Art in Religions Held at Åbo, Finland,  
on the 16th–18th of August 1994*

Edited by  
**Tore Ahlbäck**

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**STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN**



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## Editorial Note

The present volume contains the papers delivered at the Donner symposium on Dance, Music, and Art in Religions held in 1994. We hope you will find the new volume useful, despite the broad scope. The organisers of a symposium such as this seem to face a problem that is impossible to solve: either they choose a very specific and regional theme, in which case they end up with a comprehensive and homogeneous volume but the specific theme excludes far too many from delivering a paper and attending the symposium, or they choose a very broad and woolly theme that results in a disparate, heterogeneous volume but gives almost every historian of religion in the Nordic countries a chance to deliver a relevant paper.

The Board of the Donner Institute intends to organise a meeting for all — and not just some — Nordic historians of religion every three years. The fact that researchers cannot get funds to attend a congress unless they give a paper is an additional reason for broadening the scope of our Nordic conferences.

As a consequence, we have a varied collection of papers, but I think we can live with that. Our congress volumes are documents illustrating the state of comparative religion in the Nordic countries and serve as a window for the outside world to see what is going on in Scandinavia.

The next Donner conference will be held in Åbo/Turku, Finland, on 4–8 August 1997. The theme, “Methodology”, should be broad enough by all standards. This will be a regional IAHR conference involving all the Nordic associations for comparative religion, especially the Finnish Association for Comparative Religion.

For more information on *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* or to view a complete listing of contents, please visit us at our World Wide Web site at: <http://www.abo.fi/institut/di/scripta.htm>.

Tore Ahlbäck



## **Art, Music and Religious Experience in Libation Pouring of Akan Religion**

The Akans of Ghana are traditionally accustomed to celebrating different rituals which are enshrined in their cultural life. Libation pouring, which accompanies the celebration of great rituals, amidst the subsidence of the sound of music and dance, can display a special art in religion.

The primary objective of this paper is to examine libation as a ritual experience, and in so doing to draw attention to its art forms and relevance as regards the psychological significance for the Akan society which practises it. At issue are the following kinds of questions. What do we mean by the term “libation pouring”? What beliefs connect the pouring of libation in Akan society? What are the occasions for practising this ritual? Are there some distinctions in the artistic prayer of libation? These questions lead directly to the proposition which states that libation is able to generate some forms of religious experience. It is then argued that libation ritual has psychological consequences beneficial to the group and the individual who privately engages in it.

### **What is Libation Pouring?**

Libation pouring is the activity whereby water, alcohol or any beverage, such as wine, is poured on the ground with the intention of invoking the spirits and requesting their assistance (Ayim-Aboagye 1993: 165). According to Platvoet, it is a verbal mode of address to one or more “meta-empirical beings” and has the purpose of initiating or maintaining contact with them (Platvoet 1982: 201). Libation pouring signifies an apparent recognition by those who engage in it that they are under the control and direction of forces far more “powerful” and “wiser” than themselves. This activity is an acknowledgement by those who practise it that their collective and individual destinies do not lie in their own hands. The responsi-

bilities are borne by God and the spirits of ancestors (Owusu-Mensa 1990: 3).

Libation is one of the commonest practices in Akan worship of the Supreme Being and the lesser beings or spirits. When any libation is poured, the personal name of the Supreme Being, *Kwame*, is mentioned first and He is asked to come and drink. The next to be called is the earth, personified as Thursday Earth (*Asaase Yaa*). After these two come the other Akan deities, ancestral spirits, etc. The drink which is poured on the ground is meant to “cool down the throats” of these deities and prepare them for a much more relaxed posture for hearing the petitions of human beings. Libation pouring has the function of welcoming God and the other spirits home into the human world (Owusu-Mensa 1990: 30).

An example of libation pouring is quoted by Opoku which portrays a priest inviting the Supreme Being, gods and spirits to wash their hands in preparation for a feast. According to Opoku, the priest recites the following words:

Oh Tweadumpon *Kwame*,  
*Toturobonsu*, the rain-maker,  
 Ammaowia-the giver of sunshine,  
 Receive drink,  
*Yaa*, the Earth goddess,  
 Receive drink;  
*Nana Ntoa*, receive drink;  
 Kyenku god, here is drink for you.

When I call one of you  
 I have called all.  
 Ye departed spirits of the seven  
 Akan clans,  
 Receive drink.  
 Today is your lustral day.  
 I have brought you a sheep, drink  
 and new yam.  
 Receive these and visit us  
 This new year with a good harvest,  
 Wealth and prosperity, fertility and  
 long life,  
 Peace and fame and rain and sunshine  
 At their appropriate times.  
 If ever we are called upon  
 To share three things with any other  
 nation,

Let us have two.  
 Let the evil one that plans evil for us  
 Receive evil in return (Opoku 1970: 1-31).

### The Prevalence of Libation Pouring

The pouring of libation expresses the sense of dependence on spiritual beings. According to Akan<sup>1</sup> beliefs, the universe is filled with different spiritual beings. There is a Great Spirit, the Supreme Being, who created all things, and who reveals his power through his deputies called *abosom* (Busia 1954: 191). *Nyame*, the Great Being, is seen as the most important one and He is the one who sustains all. His many honorific titles characterize Him as closely associated with the visible sky and its phenomena, especially the rain. Even though he has withdrawn to the distant sky, He may be approached in prayer by man (Platvoet 1982: 41). The gods who can be approached directly, derive their power from the Supreme Being. They originate from the latter and are parts of him. A god is but the mouthpiece of the Supreme Being, a servant acting as intermediary between Creator and creature. Among these deities, the most powerful are the river-gods (Platvoet 1982: 41).

The Akan also worship the *nsamanfo*, the spirits of the departed ones. They are the ever-present spirits of the ancestors whose constant contact with the life of man on the earth brings the world of the spirits so close to the land of the living. The ancestors rule, protect and, if need be, punish the living (Busia 1954: 201). They are supposed to visit the living sometimes; they are said to be custodians and makers of tribal laws. They are also said to send help to their relatives (Sarpong 1974: 38). The argument here is that when the Christians call their dead saints and refer to those of pagans as ancestors, they are not expressing different ideas. They are essentially the same (Sarpong 1974: 33).

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<sup>1</sup> To some extent libation pouring is common to some other ethnic communities of Ghana too (e.g. among the Gas and the Ewes).

## Libation is Embedded in the Traditional mythology

### *The okyeame in the Akan mythology*

With the belief in these spiritual beings, it is not surprising that the Akan constantly tries to maintain contact with them. The libation activity is enshrined in the Akan mythology and is associated with the work of the *okyeame*. The *okyeame* (spokesman) is the individual who is traditionally selected to mediate between the Chief and his subjects or between a healer and his patients. In Akan culture, the chief or the healer is seen as eminent and therefore cannot be directly spoken to. The myth of *okyeame* is something that is widely cherished by people in that he performs a special function that puts him or her in the limelight. The qualifications of *okyeame* are that he needs to be intelligent in the eyes of the people. He should be able to recite a number of Akan proverbs from memory. The *okyeame* needs to be someone who is very eloquent and at times has to come from a royal home. He travels with the chief or the healer on all occasions and he is supposed to be present when the chief presides over a case in *the Ahemfie* (the Chief's palace). The *okyeame* may act as the chief's or healer's advisor in times of difficulty. He is the dominant person supposed to pour down libation to invoke the spirits, lesser spirits, the ancestral spirits and requests for their assistance.<sup>2</sup> When the *okyeame* is absent, the choice of another person to perform this function becomes necessary. Usually a special staff of the *okyeame* which symbolizes his power and office is given to the individual before he can commence the pouring of libation.

### Occasions for the Pouring of Libation

The pouring of libation is frequently practised during certain well known occasions.

At the *Adae* ceremonies the departed rulers are invoked, food and drink are offered to them and their favours are solicited for the welfare of the people. An *Adae* occurs every twenty-one days, known alternately as *Kwasidae*, or *Adae kese*, and *Wukudae*. The former, the Great *Adae*, falls

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<sup>2</sup> Occasionally a chief or an elder with an outstanding respect can also pour libation, especially when it concerns libation in the stool-room (*nkonguafie*). Even on this special occasion it is the *okyeame* who becomes the major figure nodding in response while the group listens to the prayer.

on Sundays, and the latter on Wednesdays, so that there are six weeks between one little *Adae* (*Wukudae*) and the next little *Adae*. Hence every third week, on an *Adae* day, whether it is a Great *Adae* or a little one, an Akan chief, especially an Ashanti chief, officiates before the ancestral stools and prays to his ancestors on behalf of the tribe, asking that the earth may be fruitful, and that the tribe may prosper and increase in numbers (Busia 1954: 203; Opoku 1970:7). On the eve of an *Adae* the talking drums announce to the people that the *Adae* falls on the following day.<sup>3</sup> The stool treasurer and the stool carriers will already have secured the sheep and drink that will be needed. Early in the morning the chief, accompanied by his *akyeame* and elders, enters the stool-house (*nkonguafie*). As they enter the sacred place, they take their sandals off their feet and bare their shoulders as a mark of respect to the ancestors who are believed to be present where their stools are kept. The chief then reverently pours libation and offers drink and meat from a sheep that is slaughtered there to the ancestors. Placing a piece of meat on each stool, he pours libation with this prayer: "Today is *Adae*; come and receive this and eat; let the tribe prosper; let those of child-bearing age bear children; may all the people get money, long life to us all; long life to the tribe [ethnic group]" (Busia 1954: 203). Then he takes a bottle of rum, pours some into a glass and lets a few drops fall on each stool as he repeats the same prayer. When the rites in the stool-house are over, a public ceremony is held. The chief takes his seat in an open space or court-yard, surrounded by his councilors, drummers and minstrels. Each lineage head or sub-chief, accompanied by his subjects and members of his lineage, ceremonially greets the chief and takes his place in the gathering. There is drumming and dancing in which everyone is free to join. The minstrels chant the tradition of the tribe, and the brave deeds of its departed rulers (Busia 1954: 203).

The *Odwira* ceremony is an annual festival which can last from a week to a fortnight. Sheep, drink and the first harvest of the year are offered to the gods. As part of the celebrations, the chief and his people in a long procession visit the royal mausoleum (*ban mu*) and offer sacrifices and prayers. It is also a time of cleansing the tribe from defilement, and for purification of the shrines of the ancestral spirits and tribal gods. The rites of cleansing and purification usually take place in a stream where the chief takes a ritual bath, and water is sprinkled on the shrines and all who are present, as a symbolic act of cleansing. A particular sacrifice of a black hen

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<sup>3</sup> This refers to the beating of drums to convey messages.



symbolizes the removal of all that had defiled the tribe. At one *Odwira* ceremony libation was poured with a recital of these words:

Here is food; all you ancestors receive this and eat; the year has come around again; today we celebrate it; bring us blessing to the chief who sits on your stool; health to the people; let women bear children; let the men prosper in their undertakings; life to all; we thank you for the good harvest; for standing behind us well [i.e., guarding and protecting us]; Blessing, blessing, blessing (Busia 1954: 203).

Apart from these two occasions, regular meetings of chiefs and their elders in palaces are times when libation can also be poured to the Supreme Being, the gods and the ancestors. For instance, when an immediate answer or solution to a problem is needed, the *okyeame* summons the ancestors and the gods through libation. These circumstances can be any of these: illness; death of a person in a mysterious way; a missing person or a drowning in a river (Ayim-Aboagye 1993: 165). The summons of these spirits for assistance indicates the tribe's dependence on them, and they are treated with respect since the Akan believe they deliver assistance.

Healing settings are also places where libations are frequently poured to invoke the power and assistance of the Supreme Being, the gods and the ancestors. In fact nowhere are the powers of these beings needed more than the healing settings. At the healing setting, there is a healer who is the head of the cult and who is frequently possessed by the god (*obosom*) during gatherings. The healer has his *okyeame*, the spokesman, who mediates between the healer and his patients. The *okyeame* is, moreover, helped by many assistants, who are also members of the cult.

Funeral celebrations form an important aspect of the social life of the Akan. A funeral is an important social event carrying with it certain expectations in the behaviour of individuals. Its demand is often not solemnity or a quiet atmosphere, but rather the turbulence of a festival shorn of its glaring gaiety. Noises of drums and other musical instruments, the sound of guns and human voices singing, wailing or speaking intermingle on the situation of the funeral as related social expressions from individuals and groups of individuals (Akrofi 1955: 1).

Libation is poured at funeral ceremonies because the death of an individual means that he has to make a journey to the ancestors. On such occasions messages are sent to the ancestors who have already departed that they will soon be joined by one of the members of the family (*abusua*). Funeral celebrations in general therefore spring from the Akan conception of the Universe, and in particular from a belief in life after death. Funeral dirges are commonly sung during funeral ceremonies. Dirges deal with

traditional expressions stored in the minds of individuals and re-created by them in appropriate contexts. They are sung in musical form correlating with sobs, gestures or other bodily movements (Akrofi 1955: 3). One prayer (*Kankye*) in a funeral ceremony goes like this:

Nana, X Y, man has no power to deny death of its prey  
 If your life could have been redeemed with persons or with money  
 Your relations and your people would have hesitated in  
 saving your life  
 But this has not been so as God also delights in man's own desires  
 You go to join the company of the elders [that is of the dead]  
 We pray that you have a good account to give them and block the path of  
 death  
 Endeavour to save the few of us left behind from dying  
 Your people plan a grand funeral to honour you  
 We beseech you to help avoid any unpleasant occurrences at the funeral  
 A bad name is unpleasant  
 Whatever debts we incur let us find money to settle  
 (Kyerematen s. a.: 7–9).

### Some Analytical Distinctions of Libation's Prayer

I consider it appropriate to examine some analytical distinctions proposed within the framework of prayer. Prayer is simultaneously said during the ritual of libation pouring. Prayer is a "communication between believers and the meta-empirical beings [spirits]" (Platvoet 1982: 9).

There are three pairs of analytical distinctions of prayer. The first is that between "single" and "serial" prayers. The second type is between "introductory" and "supplementary" prayers. The third is that between "complete" and "incomplete", or "partial" prayer (Platvoet 1982: 9). A single prayer is "a unit of address in which only one message is sent." The message may be addressed to one "meta-empirical being", or to more such beings in their collectivity, or to a number of distinct meta-empirical beings who are summoned "serially", that is one after another, but to whom but one and the same message is directed (Platvoet 1982: 9). A serial prayer is a chain of single prayers, each addressing a different message to a different meta-empirical being or collectively of them. A serial prayer must be taken as many separate prayers as it addresses distinct meta-empirical beings for the purpose of discovering the structure underlying these prayers. Introductory prayers are the, often long, prayers at the beginning of a rite, or a phase or a major ritual episode in a rite. Their function is to initiate con-

tact between the believers and the being or beings to be addressed by them, to explain to them why the believers have come to them and to state the requests of the believers. Supplementary prayers are the, often short, prayers spoken in the course of a rite, or of a phase or major ritual episode which has opened with an introductory prayer. Supplementary prayers often have a truncated structure. They may lack one or more of the usual structural elements of a prayer, or comprise no more than the barest essentials of the structure of a prayer.

A complete prayer is one of which the full text is available. An incomplete or partial prayer has only some fragments available.

Prayers can have a "one-phase", "two-phase" or "three-phase" structure. A prayer which has a "three-phase" structure, for example, consists of an *opening phase*, a *supplicatory phase* and a *closing phase*. Three structural elements may be found in the opening phase of a prayer: invocation, explanation and offering. In the supplicatory phase, two structural elements may be found: requests and explanations. The concluding phase of a prayer, if present, consists of only one of the following three structural elements: the offering of the gift or the rite; the repetition of the offering of the gift or the rite; or a peroration (Platvoet 1982: 202–207). Rattray as well as Platvoet note that the two-phase structure, comprising an opening and a supplicatory phase, seems to be typical of Akan prayers (Platvoet 1982: 204).

Introductory prayers seem to be the longest and structurally most complete ones. Introductory prayers had the "liminal function of marking the transition from the commerce among the believers to that between the believers and their meta-empirical beings and 'created' the religious atmosphere and ritual context for further communication with them by other modes of address which more fully and more graphically expressed the message which had been stated in the preliminary way in the introductory prayer" (Platvoet 1982: 204). One complete prayer goes like this:

**Invocation** (opening phase)

Kwabena of the Asante nation,  
 here is wine,  
 by your kindness it is Monday today,  
 Ofiri is your wife,  
 and Pensan has married her,  
 and because he did not bring you your  
 marriage gift,  
 you lifted them both up  
 and dashed them to the earth,

Today Pensan has brought you a sheep,  
wine and a cloth.

**Requests** (supplicatory phase)

Long life to both of them,  
to me Agyeman, long life,  
do not let me become deaf,  
do not let me become blind,  
do not let me become impotent,  
long life to the 'Castle',  
to the white man, long life.  
Permit Pensan and his wife to have children.  
To all of us who are here.

(concluding phase)

Ye (all), come, receive this sheep and eat,  
and this wine and drink (Platvoet 1982: 210).

## Libation Pouring Generates Religious Experience

Libation pouring is particularly important in generating, cultivating and facilitating a religious experience. Different elements which make religious experience possible for the individual and also for the group can be found in libation. Libation contains the experience of participating in something different or sacred which disjoins the constraints of this world commonly known as the *Holiness dimension*. The experience possesses the confrontation with the "Thou", the unfathomable existence— which is *Mystical* or the *Dialogue with God and gods dimension*. Libation experience also involves being the object of the "Thou" or "the Other" and this contains the *Intervention dimension* which indicates an experience of being "struck" from without.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Wikström, 1993: 89. What Wikström discusses here is a reflection of what Otto developed in 1923. For the latter, it is the encounter with the "holy" that is unique in religion. Elsewhere Hood (1975) has developed what he calls a "mystical experience scale" which can be used to measure intense mystical experience states. They include a set of items such as: (1) a felt loss of identity; (2) a sense of being absorbed into a greater whole; (3) perception of an inner subjectivity of life; (4) a sense of timelessness and spacelessness; (5) belief in the experience as a source of new and valid knowledge; (6) elements of mystery, awe, and reverence; and (7) great difficulty in representing the experience in words. In libation pouring, some of these elements may be seen, for instance, at funeral ceremonies or festivals such as *Adae* and *Odwira*. Libation pouring

Religious experiences obtained in the pouring of libation during any ritual festival like *Adae* or *Odwira* can be described as peace, joy, forgiveness, nearness to the spirits of ancestors and the gods of the forefathers (Opoku 1970: 133). In addition, individuals perceive themselves as closely related to the spiritual beings. In the case of *the Odwira* festival, where purification of the whole state is involved, the people become confident and have hope to enter the new year.

At any context, be it a festival such as *Odwira* or *Adae*, a regular meeting of elders at the chief's palace or at a healing setting, there are some external factors which influence the faith of the one who makes it and its audience, that is, the *okyeame* and the social group or community. Music sung in unison constitutes a psychologically important factor since by taking an active part, the behaviour that many people are sharing in, which is a kind of "social facilitation", is increased. The linguistic expressions — the joint confession of faith and acceptance of what the *okyeame* is requesting from the ancestors and the gods by the people around — serve as a group plausibility structure (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 129–185). This is a fellowship through which the experiences can be legitimized verbally or symbolically in a social context.

There is a common body language waiting to confirm finally what the individual or *okyeame* leading this experience will say. The nodding of heads by members of the community is one example which indicates that "all this 'behavioural language' is in turn embedded in the overarching religious interpretive framework 'the relationship with the invisible but nonetheless real Other Being'" (Wikström 1993: 93).

The idea that these spiritual beings are in existence and that they answer prayers becomes alive for an individual only if it is confirmed by other important individuals. "The words, the conception of religious reality and its symbolic language — together with the experiences for which the words are an expression — have can survive value only if they are shared" (Wikström 1993: 91). The work of Sundén (1966) has shown that religious words are the bearers of a meaningful content primarily because the individual is part of a social field where others live in a language game where the words refer to similar experiences (Wikström 1993: 91). In libation pouring, the ritual language and its interaction with the holy space play an important function. Normally, the language spoken by the *okyeame* em-

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can lead some individuals to encounter the gods and be possessed, thus fulfilling items 1, 2, and 4. The experiences that ensue after engaging in libation can be said to be mystical and need to be explored in the future (see Spilka, Shaver and Kirkpatrick 1985:1–20).

phasizes the cognitive content of Akan. The “dual” character of the religious language is therefore of tremendous importance and interest in libation experience.

The interaction between the auditory, visual, verbal and spatial dimension of the place where the ritual of libation pouring takes place is important. The auditory element in the traditional drums and songs which precede the libation experience emphasizes the mythological content. The sound inspires associations with earlier childhood experiences and previous ritual celebrations. For instance, libation poured at *Odwira* or *Adae* brings to consciousness familiar close relatives who have recently passed on to the other world (*asamando*) to become ancestors. It offers a moment of introversion and private meditation which in turn affects primary processes.

The visual as represented by the courtyard (*Ahemfie*), the shrine or the stool-house (*nkonguafieso*) of the ancestors emphasizes the sacred. These are the different symbols in stylized form: pots containing water, black stools, knives, calabashes, drums, horns, camel-hair blankets etc. These point to the holy nature of the ritual itself. The shrine of the healer or the stool-house of the chief constitutes a space which is at the same time social and focused. There is an obvious focus of the eye on these sacred things by the *okyeame* and also the group/elders present. The garment worn by the *okyeame* and his staff of office emphasizes his role as a holder of office, that he is not present as a private person but a mediator who initiates the dialogue between subjects and the supernatural “Thou”. It is made quite clear that he plays a role that is typified, he represents the people to the ancestors and the gods; and ancestors and god to the people.

The *okyeame* is also a master of the art of gesture. Gestures by the *okyeame* and the nodding or movement of heads by the group or community members to signify acceptance of what is being said by the *okyeame* constitute a kind of body language. They point to the basic content of the myths and are all bodily expression of the cognitive content (cf. DeMarinis 1990: 193–210). Libation pouring itself is consequently a form of dramatized yet stylized expression of the religious content it tells about. It offers typified, established and theologically legitimized codes of behaviour (cf. Wikström 1993:94).

### **Socialization Theory and Libation**

The role of the *okyeame* is assimilated through the process of socialization. Through learning processes individuals become versed in the mythological

content, which according to Berger and Luckmann, is a “conception of reality that posits the ongoing penetration of the world of everyday experience by sacred forces” (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 110).

Three categories of people can be listed:

- (1) Those who constantly live in the courtyard of the chief (Ahemfie) and witness frequently the *okyeame*'s use of water, wine or beverages to invoke the ancestors and the gods and request their help or assistance. These individuals normally come from the royal family or they have been attached to the courtyard due to their work.
- (2) Those who live in a healer's compound and participate constantly in the gathering of the healer. These persons may be closely related to the healer, that is, relatives and friends of the healer. They can also be chief adherents of the cult.
- (3) Those who have been born and bred by parents who are traditionalists (adherents of Akan traditional religion) and have special interest in annual participation in the great festivals such as *Odwira* and *Adae*. These individuals can fall into any of the above categories.

These individuals meaningfully employ libation ritual when they encounter problems of an existential character.

## The Psychological Function of Libation Pouring

What does libation activity give to the social group and the individuals who *privately* engage in it? What are the psychological consequences of libation pouring?

### *The social community*

Libation pouring in general involves the social group or community and the individual chosen as the *okyeame* to lead the ritual. In a sense, the *okyeame* acts as a mediator who presents the social group in their interaction with the Supreme Being, deities and ancestors. Though he utters the prayers alone, the community show their involvement and acceptance of what he says by nodding their heads and responding in words. In short, that which is beneficial to the *okyeame* is beneficial to the social group. Concerning the community, the social solidarity thesis is relevant. This thesis suggests that “ritual exercises control through its promotion of consensus and the psychological and cognitive ramifications of such consensus” (Bell 1992: 171). Many authors, such as Robertson Smith, Evans-Pritchard, Fortes, and Munn have already appealed to this basic feature of ritual, in depicting



its role in socialization (Bell 1992: 171). Consequently, libation ritual which is an indispensable element in Akan occasional ceremonies, enhances social harmony, which is a prerequisite of every society. In the *Adae* and *Odwira* festivals, when all the community come together and libations are poured to invoke the ancestors and the gods, it integrates the social group and the individual both externally and internally.

Another function of ritual applicable to libation ritual has been put forward by M. Gluckman and V. Turner. They suggest that ritual deals with conflicts. Their work, which submits that "ritual controls by forestalling overt rebellion or other threats to social unity, has given rise to the 'channeling of conflict theory.'" According to Gluckman, ritual is like a "safety valve that formally arranges the diffusion of social tensions and personal emotions generated by social conflicts" (Bell 1992: 172). "Tribal rituals," Gluckman notes, "entail dramatization of the moral relations of the group" (Bell 1992: 172). Ritual is "effective because it exhibits all the tensions and strife inherent in social life itself" (Bell 1992: 172).<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, Edelman has extended the above approach by saying that ritual can be seen as "preserving strained social relations by simultaneously escalating and orchestrating conflict in such a way that it has to be and can be solved" (Bell 1992: 172). Libation ritual is basically dramatized in order to request peace and the avoidance of conflict not only within the community but also within families. It is the wish of every Akan that the Supreme Being, the ancestors and the gods should prevent anything that will bring discord into homes and the social group at large. When the *okyeame* who acts as the mediator stands up to utter words of prayer in libation pouring, he does not only remind of the social tensions and strife inherent in the group but he also entreats the ancestors and the gods to help them solve these problems. Often when there is a case in the courtyard (*Ahemfie*) which needs to be settled, libation plays a major role which helps the elders to settle the case through the direction of the ancestors. Indeed, libation pouring is not only a "tool of cultural management" but a "strategy for maintaining social control" (Bell 1992: 172).

#### *The individual in his private role-taking*

When we come to the personal level, there are also psychological effects of libation pouring for those who know and take the role of the *okyeame*

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<sup>5</sup> The work T. Driver (1991) mentions the three great gifts of religious ritual: the establishment of order, the deepening of communal life and the assistance of dynamic of social change through ritual processes of transformation.



model in the myth. As asserted already, such individuals normally find themselves confronted with existential crisis such as illness, being accused of stealing by another who has consulted a god to kill an individual etc. Once motivated by a "need situation", individuals through the backing of beliefs which consequently yield them "expectation" are able to take and adopt roles which result in partnerships with mythical gods or ancestors (Sundén 1970: 22). Dramatic experience of this kind, which leads to libation pouring offers individuals meaning, security in the face of death or illness, and control/power to continue living. The comprehensive meaning to existential questions which accrue to the individual sometimes takes an attributional form. When success as of a request is granted, at times the attribution of success is made to the Other's intentions which often leads to "totality"; "all that happened to him is experienced or seen as a sign about the activity of "the Other" (Unger 1976:16).

An individual who has personally participated in *Adae* or *Odwira* become strengthened, in that the prayer/libation provides him with an experience of the real Other (i.e., ancestor or a personal god) who invisibly accompanies him throughout his/her life. This provides him/her with strength and security. There is the notion of being furnished with moral guidance and rehabilitation and forgiveness of past wrongs. Finally, there is a strong feeling of wonder, awe, gratitude, joy and a feeling of being closely related to the Other. The libation experience boosts the self-esteem or self-perception of being protected by the Other and this psychologically blocks up any potential source of anxiety that one will be harmed by an enemy. The fear of being harmed by evil forces is eliminated completely.

### Concluding Remarks

This experience of libation pouring enables Akans to keep and maintain contact with the invisible world of the Supreme Being (God), gods and ancestors. Through the medium of libation, these spiritual beings are fed, purified and worshipped in the *Odwira* and *Adae* ceremonies. The experience of libation brings the Akan into the "real" world of the ancestors. The entrance into their world allows people to communicate with them by requesting for help and also informing them of what is happening in the visible world regarding the tensions and strifes existing in the community. In turn, promises are given to them or suggestions as to the way of solving a problem are given to them by these spiritual beings through the medium of possession of individuals by the spirits or through dreams and divina-

tion. Libation pouring therefore has some meaningful psychological significance for the social community of the Akan and also for the individual who employs it.

The case of libation pouring can be applicable to any private person who has assimilated the Akan myth. In Sundén's theory term, the background of an individual which has enabled him/her to imbibe the mythological material is able to capacitate him/her to take the role of the *okyeame* when confronted with existential problems. Like the *okyeame* in the Akan myth, he/she will take water, alcohol or any beverage, such as, wine to call upon a god or ancestor he/she is familiar with. The interaction that ensues between him/her and the spiritual being becomes the basis upon which attribution of the god's action or success will be made (any external action, happening or an answer to a request, e.g. money). "Intention" which is a concept in Sundén's theory commonly functions in the devotional role of libation pouring. Sometimes a situation can be full of intention in that the individual, without taking *okyeame* role in the tradition, nevertheless directly identifies a god's action or intervention with the aid of the spiritual role.

Nowadays most people do not regard the beliefs of their forebears as significant, because of the introduction of modern mission schools and the subsequent influence of Christian teachings. But for the traditional Akan these beliefs and the rituals of meaning-making are important. The rituals carry exceptional power and reconcile them with the events of the past and design for them meaning for the future. To these traditional people, "the old gods", forces or gods are not dead, they are part and parcel of their lives.

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## Rituals as Dance and Dance as Rituals

### The Drama of Kok Nji and Other Festivals in the Religious Experience of the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul in Nigeria<sup>1</sup>

Chadic-speakers perform annual festivals of the ancestors, *kok nji*; cropping *kop*; harvesting, *dyip* and hunting *kwat*, which are usually accompanied by dancing, singing and other numerous rites and rituals. These ritual dramas symbolically and overtly express the religious experience, feelings and emotions that are deeply buried in the religious consciousness of the people. This article intends to provide a vivid description of some of these festivals, particularly those of the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul. Our information is mostly from primary sources directly from the field. This paper has been divided into five sub-headings or sections to provide a clear understanding of the place of calendrical rituals in the indigenous culture of Chadic-speakers. In the first section, that is, the introduction, a brief description of Chadic-speakers is provided. An analysis of the place and the concept of time in determining the period for performing calendrical rites of passages is dealt with in the second section, which is titled Ritual time as a determinant factor for the period of dancing festivals. This is of great significance because calendrical rituals themselves act as markers and indicators of sacred/ritual and profane/secular time. In section three, the major percussive and musical instruments used during calendrical festivals among the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul are discussed. This paper analyses some of the dances and songs of calendrical rituals of passage in the fourth section. These include festivals of the ancestors, *kok nji*; planting, *kop*; harvest *mostar/dyip*; hunting, *kwat* and rain-making, *byang fwan*. This section forms the major focus of this paper and it is consequently the longest. We conclude this article by examining the importance of songs and

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<sup>1</sup> At various points in this article, we have used the works of Wambutda (1980; 1991), Goshit (1980; 1981), Danfulani (1982; 1986; 1991; 1994), Bulus (1986; 1990) and Dadi-rep (1987). See references for details.

dance in the calendrical rites of passages of Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul Chadic-speakers.

## Introduction

Apart from the Hausa of Northern Nigeria, Chadic-speakers are also found on the eastern edge of the Jos Plateau in Central Nigeria (popularly known as 'the Middle Belt') and in parts of Bauchi and Bornu. Those found on the Jos Plateau are a group of ethnic peoples who speak related languages and dialects. These languages, like Hausa, belong to the Chadic family group of languages. These ethnic groups include the Ngas (the largest of them), Mupun, Mwaghavul, M'ship, M'tel, Goemai, Kofyar, Pan, Mirriam, Bwall, Jipal, Njak, Bogghom, Kadun and the Zar (of Tafawa Balewa). The Chadic-speakers of the Jos Plateau are a little known people because very little has been written about their religions and culture. Moreover, these are pockets of minority ethnic groups of Nigeria with individual populations ranging from a few thousands to about a million. In this article we will discuss the calendrical festivals of three of these ethnic groups, namely the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul.

## Ritual Time as a Determinant Factor for the Period of Dancing Festivals

A general understanding of Chadic-speakers' concept of time will help us analyse their various festivals and the dances that usually accompany them. Chadic-speakers possess a two-dimensional concept of time (cf. Mbiti 1969: 16 f., Mendonsa 1978: 37, Tengan 1990: 12 ff.). It is viewed in terms of day and night, sacred/ritual and profane/secular time frames. This is a direct reflection of Chadic-speakers' world view, which is divided into two, the spiritual realm, *yil nji* and the human domain *yil gurum*. The mediating force between these two worlds is the mystical realm which is made up of supernatural forces such as medicine, *yen*; divination, *Pa*; sorcery, *lom*, meaning leprosy; witchcraft, *sot*; magic, *baak ka* (which refers to 'a person who has splitted his head'); etc. Chadic-speakers, like most Africans view the world, life, time and space very much in terms of a fluid cyclical historical process, with a past, present and future. The past is capable of being re-enacted in the present and future repeatedly. For instance, Chadic-speakers observed changes in the seasons, the marked differences between

day and night and that between the here and now, *yil gurum* — human world and hereafter, *yil nji* — spiritual world and set their time according to these. It is related to observable natural phenomena which determine and express objective time. The principal makers of this cyclical world view and history are the sun, *puus*; moon, *tar* and stars, *zar*; changes in weather and the seasons and natural phenomena. These become reference points because of their rhythmic, repetitive and cyclical patterns.

These two time frames and realms are the inverse of each other and are represented in terms of opposition: divine/human, sacred/profane, morality/immorality, and so forth (cf. Ray 1976: 41). These two opposing features of time are only harmonised and reconciled in ritual. This is what Ray (cf. Ray 1976: 41) correctly referred to as ritual time when he said:

Ritual time is cyclical, not linear, in this respect, ritual is an interruption of ordinary linear time, a time-out-of-time, when man may re-establish contact with the creative events of the cosmogonic period. In ritual, the mythical past is thus constantly recoverable. It is not as Mbiti suggests, an irretrievable 'grave yard' of time, but rather a constant source of new beginnings, of ontological renewal.

Time is located within experience, that is, historical events; events that occur regularly, rhythmically and cyclically. Time, therefore, has a life of its own, it has pulsation like the heart of mammals. Wambutda (1991: 90) rightly pointed out that the Chadic-speakers' term for passage of time is *when* (*shí kodanye/piranyi*). *Shí kondanye* means *when* or *every time* for the Ngas. *Piranyi* (*shipiranyi*) means *when* or *how much* for the Mupun and Mwaghavul. Referring to time as the passage of a moment, Chadic-speakers talk of here, *pe-di-si* and there, *pwensi*. On the ontological plane, *pe-di-si* also refers to *this world* of humans, fauna, flora and mineral organisms, that is *yil gurum*. While *pwensi* refers to the *other world* of spiritual beings — God *Naan*, deities *kum-mo*, ancestors *nji* and spirits forces *riin-mo*; that is *yil nji*.

*Bít* means a day, but it could also mean a year. Chadic-speakers reckon time beyond two to three years, unlike Ray's general contention to the contrary for Africans (1976: 41).<sup>2</sup> Chadic-speakers reckon the passage of the years according to religious rites related to festivals and their regular occurrences. For instance, boys' puberty rites, *chan* and *wan/pun* are important for reckoning time since they come up quadrilineally, in Mwagha-

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<sup>2</sup> Mbiti (1969) contended that the African time frame has a long past, a present, but almost no future. Ray extended the concept of the future in African indigenous thought to three years.



vul and some Mupun communities, septennially in Ngas and in every eighth year for other Mupun communities. As will be discussed later in this paper, the Mupun celebrate *bwenene*, festival of the dead every fourteen years. This necessitates preparations some years before the next festival. Age is thus determined according to the number of *vwan/pun*, *bwenene* or other major festivals one has seen and or/experienced in his/her life time. Berthoud (1969: 46) reports that the Jos Plateau peoples kept strict record of the passage of a year this way:

The high priest and his several assistants, in order that their manifold rites may be correctly adjusted to the appropriate times of the year, used a calendar in which each year consisted of twelve lunation or lunar months. The high priest was aware that after three lunar years, he would have fallen behind the civil calendar by one lunar month. Every three years, therefore, he applied a corrective to this by a month's alteration in the calendar date of rituals.

The Jos Plateau peoples thus have a twelve month lunar year, each counted as one moon, *tar nindong*. This roughly corresponds to the lunation of the moon. They reckoned time according to months thus, the month for sowing sorghum or maize, *tar shwe kop/tar kop shwa*, the month for sowing *tar kop*, the month in which cultivation is started, *tar byang maar*, the month for transplanting sorghum, *tar ka kas*, the month for transplanting millet, *tar ka shwa/shwake*, the month for second ridging, *tar gwom/le yil*, the month for harvesting sorghum or maize, *tar shwedyip/dyip shwa* and so forth.

The literal rendering of *tar* is moon, meaning one month, but its real dynamic equivalent as used by Chadic-speakers is more like season. They would talk of the season of particular festivals. For instance, the Ngas talk of *tar mos* Bwir, the season of Bwir beer festival (of Kabwir village), *tar mostar*, the season of the beer festival of the moon, *tar mos lun*, the dry season beer festival of the ancestors (cf. Wambutda 1991: 90). The Mwaghavul talk of the season of their festivals which must begin annually from Dikibin, to Npang (Ampang West) and to the other polities in this strict order: Kerang, Kopaal, Kumbun, Pianya (Panyam), Sulwa, Ruf, Bwai, Pushit, then Bungaha and Mangu, with Mangun, Chakfem and Jipal having separate festivals (Bulus 1986: 67). The Mupun celebrate their seasons according to the flute horn dance of the ancestors, *fer nji*, hunting season, *tar kwat* and various seasonal dances according to types of flutes, drums and other instruments used.

Chadic-speakers recognise four seasons which will correspond in time, but not in accord with weather conditions, to the European seasons. These are shown in the figure below.

Ngas	Mupun/Mwagavul		European
Tar Wep	T a r	W a a p	Autumn
Tar Pas	T a r	P a s	Summer
Tar Lun	T a r	L u n	Winter
Tar Fonton	T a r	L o k	Spring

Wambutda (1991: 90) correctly described the situation when he wrote that there were two major seasons, the dry *lun* and wet *pas*. *Lun* starts in October with the ceasing of the rains to April/May when they begin again. *Pas* extends from May, with the first rains, to the showers of October, when they gradually cease. *Wep/waap* is located within *lun*. It lasts from September to the end of October or early November. This period is signalled by the ripeness of the crops, especially maize, and by the onset of autumn, when the vegetation, flowers and the leaves go pink, ready to fall off. The Mupun and Mwaghavul have a rhyme which signals the passage of time. It describes the onset of the dry season usually recognised by the flowering of the *jermen* plant. It goes thus:

Jermen pel o pel, ki lun mang di-o mang,  
gere lep ka shin del, ki wur se gwom lipak dyi,  
gwom lipak ni dwol shang be,  
gurluk gurluk gurluk, gurluk gurluk gurluk.

The jermen plant has flowered, o, it has flowered,  
So that the dry season will come, o, it will come,  
The raven (*gere*) puts his head through,  
So that he will eat the maize that is roasted in its cob,  
The maize that is roasted in its cob is so sweet,  
(This is how the sweetness is),  
Gurluk, gurluk, gurluk; gurluk, gurluk, gurluk!<sup>3</sup>

This is followed by *tar fonton/lok*, which indicates the beginning of the wet season in March/April. The period begins with the budding of new leaves on trees with the climate becoming unbearably hot. *Tar pas* (wet season) then sets in. Wambutda (1991: 91) has given the following as the farming calendar of the Ngas within the year.

<sup>3</sup> *Gwom lipak* refers to maize that is specially roasted in its sheaf or cob, usually eaten by elders alone, and the last line of the rhyme indicates the sweetness of this specially roasted maize.

- |                                                             |                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 1) December–January,<br><i>tarshwedyip</i> -harvest (kwat). | 2) March–April, <i>tar fonton</i> -farms cleared    |
| 3) May, <i>tarswekop</i> -beginning<br>of sowing            | 4) June, <i>tar kwos</i> ( <i>nyaklim</i> )-weeding |
| 5) July–August, <i>tar gwak</i> -<br>second ridging         | 6) September, <i>tar gomper</i> -Amper harvest      |
| 7) October, <i>tar gombwir</i> -<br>Kabwir harvest          | 8) November, <i>tar ngongarm</i> -Garam<br>harvest  |

We see here that harvest festivals are celebrated by the Ngas village by village, beginning with Kabwir, Amper and Garram.

Rituals are “all forms of mechanical human behaviour ranging from the simple custom of shaking hands and daily etiquette of greeting, to such a complex and solemn act of ritual sacrifices” (Leach 1980: 523). Rites, therefore, are habits and behaviours, repeatable over a period of time in human and cosmic life. Rituals are also defined by Turner (1968: 15) as “prescribed formal behaviour for association not given to technical routine, having reference to beliefs and mystical (or non empirical) beings or powers”. In this light, we see rites of passage as patterned (or repeatable) actions, enacted from time to time in the life of an individual, community, natural phenomena or the ecological-system, to celebrate the passage of human or cosmic life from one phase to the other. Many typologies of rituals have been presented by various scholars.<sup>4</sup>

E. Ikenga-Metuh (1987: 185) sees rites of passage as “patterned action which celebrates the passage of time from one phase of life to another by phenomena such as plants, seasons, animals, insects and in lives of living peoples as an individual or community”.<sup>5</sup> Rites of passage are based on the African cyclical concept of time, observed from the rhythmic occurrences and the repetative constancy in the changes of time, the seasons and the life of a community and its individual members. Rites of passage could in this sense be referred to as calendrical rites, festivals or rites of temporary cycle. What we refer to here as rites of passage of temporary cycle are what Honko (1979: 376) and Steyne (1989: 99 f.) describe as calendrical rituals, because they emanate from the ‘natural calendar’ based on observations of nature and ecology, and on the ‘economic calendar’ based on economies which are linked together, and the ‘calendar of feasts’ which regulate social

<sup>4</sup> These include among others: Gluckman 1962: 30 f.; Turner 1968: 2 ff.; Theodorson and Theodorson 1969: 351; Radcliffe-Brown 1971: 122 ff.; Parrinder 1974:79; Honko 1979: 372; Leach 1980: 529; Ikenga-Metuh 1987: 185 ff.; Sørensen 1993: 16 ff.

<sup>5</sup> See also Gennep’s classic book *Rites des Passage* (1960). See references.

interactions. This is because they are connected with ecological cycles which encompass within them planting, harvest, hunting, fishing and liturgical calendars which were religious in character. This paper entirely leaves out a lucrative area of rituals of the Jos Plateau peoples — life crisis rituals which do not belong to the domain of calendrical rituals, though some of these are equally accompanied by dancing and festivals. We will discuss the major Chadic-speakers' calendrical rites or rites of passage of temporary cycle below.

### Percussion and Musical Instruments

It is vital to mention that though Chadic-speakers have various dances, with their accompanying songs, percussive instruments and dance steps, not all of these are used in all ritual festivals because some musical apparatuses are considered as sacred and others as secular. Moreover, instruments used for particular ritual festivals may not be regarded as suitable for others. Most *kok nji*, festivals of the ancestors are, for instance, dominated by the animal horn flute which the Ngas call *sombi* and the Mupun and Mwaghavul call *fer*. Consequently, the festival dance of the ancestors is called *fer Nji*, the horn flute dance (or festival) of the ancestors or simply *kok Nji*, the dance of the ancestors among the last two ethnic groups.

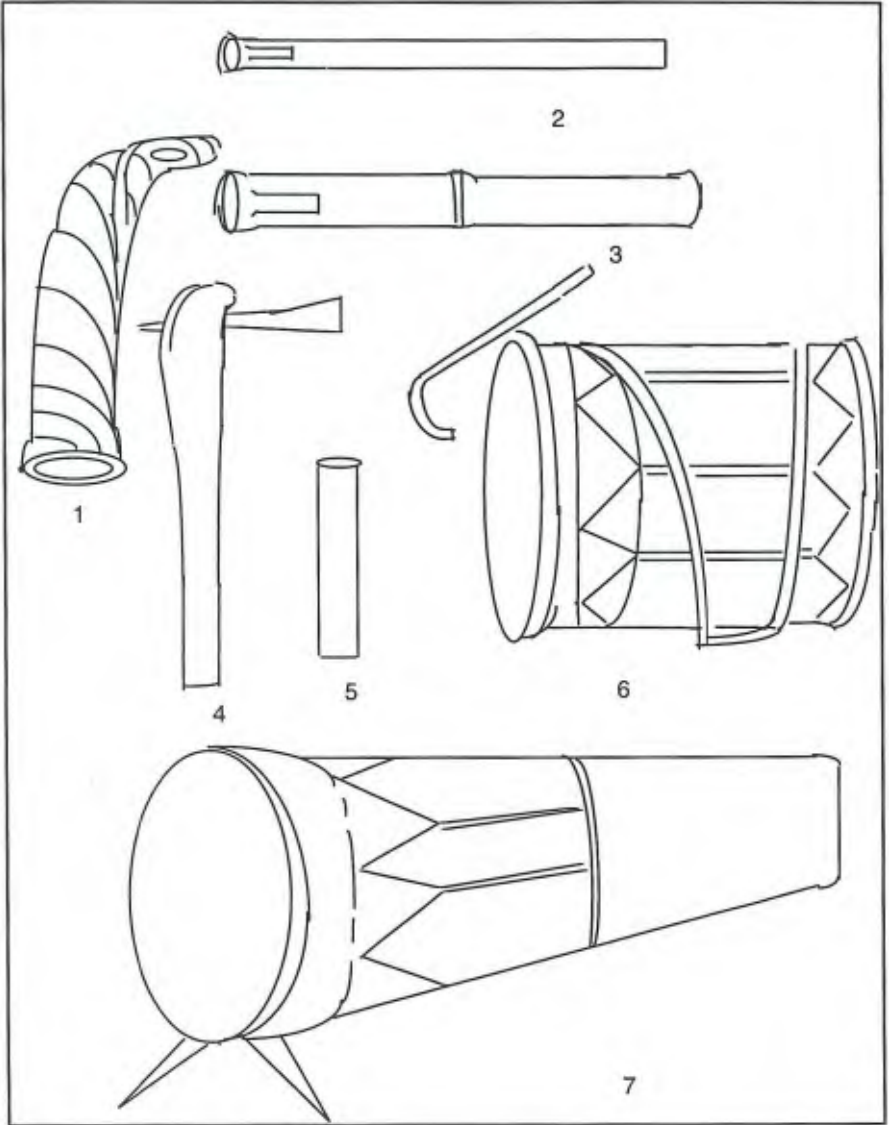
The horn flute is a musical instrument made from the horn of an animal. A complete set is made up of various sizes, shapes and lengths making a variety of sounds when blown. These are composed of horns from cattle, gazelles, antelopes, buffaloes, rams and other animals. A few may even be made from gourds that grow into the required shape while others still may be curved out of wood. A small oblong opening is usually cut in the side of the narrow part of the horn towards the tip and the sharp tip is cut open as well. The oblong opening is meant for blowing the horn and the two openings at the tip and the broad part in the opposite side are used for controlling the melody made by the horn. The horn flute dancers dance in a line or cycle according to the sizes of their horns. They blow the horns in unison and make music by controlling the passage of the air blown into the horn through the oblong opening at the tip. The sound is controlled by simultaneously blocking and/or opening of the passages at the base and the tip of the horn with both the left and right hands. Only certain rhythms, songs and dance steps are made during *fer nji*, the horn flute festival of the ancestors. Women and children can participate in some *fer nji*, as we shall observe below, while in most cases, when the *nji*, ancestors emerge sud-

denly in the form of masquerades, *nwong* sounding the animal horn flute accompanied with shouting and the supernatural appearance of dust in the air, women and children must hide. Only post menopausal women may go about their duties because it is believed that in their post-menopausal condition, they have become like men. Yet in crises periods such as attacks by enemies, wild animals and other such emergencies, they would be required to go into hiding too.

However, the songs of the *nji*, *ancestors* can also be sounded on three other instruments but with less dramatic effect. They are used only in social and festival dances, and not in dire emergencies in which the lives of people in the community may be at risk. These three musical instruments are the reed flute, *bel*, the thin corn-stalk flute, *yang/nvelang* or *velang* and the big corn-stalk flute, *kwarak*. The reed flute, *bel* is either used by young men and children as a musical instrument on its own or by elders who use it as a rule in conjunction with the animal horn flute. The horn flute dancers alternately switch from blowing the horn and the reed flute but maintaining the same rhythm and dance steps for the same songs. Thus as they dance, the reed flute is usually tied to the one hand while the horn is held with the other.

Animal horn and reed flute dance is more popular among Ngas and Mupun, the big corn-stalk flute dance predominates among M'ship and the Mupun of Gitong, Kagu, Awor-Dyis and Jiblik and the small corn-stalk flute dance is most popular among the Mwaghavul. All these musical instruments, however, are known among all these Chadic-speaking ethnic groups. It is customary for these instruments to be accompanied by other percussive implements. These include iron cymbals, *ndol* tied over rags of cloths from the ankle up towards the knee of the dancer. Some dancers tie these to only one of their legs, while expert dancers tie them to both legs. Other percussive instruments are gourd tambourines, *cha/che* made out of cut olive seeds sewn over a gourd, and axes, *sep* used by older women in the *chyer* dance after successful hunts, rain-making rites and harvest.

In all festival dances, two sets of drums are used: the small and big drums. The small drum *nging* is hung over one shoulder and is beaten by a curved stick which is held by the free hand. The other hand and one of the knees control the beat and musical messages communicated on the drum. This drum is used in all social events and two or more drummers may perform simultaneously with small drums of various sizes in a festival depending on the number of dancers present and the event. The big drum (*kung*) is a sacred drum which is so big that the drummer sits on it, stands over it or stands by its side when he performs. It is too big to be hung on



**Key**

- 1 *Fer (sombi)*, animal horn dance flute - curved from animal horns of various sizes. Some are curved from wood or the gourd plant.
- 2 *Yang (nvelang/velang)*, small-corn stalk dance flute - curved in many sizes from small stalks of the Guinea corn plant.
- 3 *Kwarak*, big-corn stalk dance flute - curved in various sizes from larger stalks of the Guinea corn plant.
- 4 *Sep*, axe - made of an iron blade fixed to a wooden handle.
- 5 *Bél*, the hollow reed flute - made from hollow reeds.
- 6 *Ngíng*, the small drum - made of a hollowed-out tree trunk, covered at both ends with animal skin.
- 7 *Kung*, the sacred or big drum - made of a hollowed out tree trunk, covered at the wider end with animal skin.





the shoulder and it makes bass baritone sounds only. The drummer moves the drum either by dragging it on the ground, in-between his legs, beating the drum while it is carried shoulder high by some youths or carries it on one shoulder while he beats it with his free hand. The big drum is beaten not with a stick but with bare hands.

### Calendrical Festivals — Dances and Songs

In this section we will discuss four festivals of the ancestors, *nji*. These are the cropping, harvesting, hunting and rain-making festivals of the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul. *Mos Won*, beer festival of the ancestors belongs exclusively to the Ngas, *Nwong Kum*, masquerade festival of the deities and *Kaat Nji/Kum Nji*, festival of the ancestors both belong to the Mupun and Mwaghavul, while *bwenene* is an ancestral festival of the dead celebrated only by the Mupun. The other festivals which we discuss below are all performed by these three ethnic groups though some of them go by different names.

### Festival of the Nji, Ancestors

#### *Mos Won, Beer Festival of Masquerades or Ancestors of the Ngas*

The Ngas refer to this festival as *mos won*, beer festival of the masquerades. They celebrate the beer festival of the ancestors, *mos won* septennially from July to August, if the economy can sustain it, then *mos tar*, an annual beer festival of the moon must be put off that year. The *mos won* of the Ngas takes six years to prepare; it lasts seven days and, it will be strange if the festival is not accompanied by intermittent drizzling rain throughout its seven days' duration. This is to cool the *nji*, ancestors. Thus *Pa/pe* diviners have to choose a most suitable week, or consult rain makers from among themselves. It is marked by the return of all Ngas daughters, *ripmwa* to their patri-clans. This festival is a period of family reunion, though it is not mandatory for a son who has established himself somewhere to return home, as it is for the daughter. *Mos won*, beer festival of the ancestors is also a period of general cleansing of the village and shrines. It is accompanied by cooking, feasting and eating. Special dishes are prepared for the *nji*, ancestors according to their tastes and favourite foods while they were still living.



A daughter from each compound, a virgin, called 'girl of the compound gate', *riip pobong* is chosen to take the prepared food to the grove of *nji*, ancestors in special goured-like calabashes, *de-pofil*. The ancestors are fed according to their rank with bits of food and meat. Each *won* masquerad is asked to bless the people, while the elders also wish the ancestors a peaceful life, as if, after all, they also need human blessing! The *won* masquerade dance, *tam won*, a communion dance in which the living and the dead jointly participate, begins after the sharing of the communal meal and beer. Four sets of horns, *sombi* are blown to signal the beginning of the dance. Stories about the appearance of phantoms and apparitions of the dead to the living are most common in Ngasland during this period. Though, unlike at other times, they would be quite harmless.

The men return from the grove in the form of *won* masquerads but without clothing. Since it is already night time, their identity will not be exposed to women and children. They move from compound to compound, blessing and warning the people. In compounds who lost their members recently, they give messages from their loved ones, comfort them and take back messages for the ancestors. In such cases, the *won* adapts the voice and personality of one of the departed from that compound for passing whatever message the dead want to convey to members of their living families. The message is given directly to a member of the compound, after he has been called by name, but in the hearing of the women and children. A woman who beats her husband, treats him with disrespect and is stingy to his relations may be warned to change her bad ways. Likewise a wife beater or an irresponsible husband. This happens on the third day of the festival. This is a period of real wailing for two paradoxically opposed reasons. On the one hand the people mourn the loss of loved ones, especially the recent dead. However, on the other hand, it is a wailing of victory over death. Since they believe that somehow the dead are with them, and they have even visited them, death has been defeated at the end. Psychologically, death is powerless, because the dead are not dead, but they are *nji*, the living dead, and they form an extension of the community of the living. The etymology of the term *Nji*, which denotes ancestors, emerges from the term *ji*, which means 'come' or 'arrival'. *Nji* may therefore mean 'the one who comes back or returns from the dead'. The belief in rebirth is thus very strong among the Chadic-speakers of the Jos-Plateau area, particularly, the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul. In each compound, the *won*, masquerade ends his message with a rhyme thus:

## Ngas

*Potambi 'dom nyin ke wo-mmm-h*  
*Potambi 'dom nyin ke wo-mmm-h*  
*Bwot nan ko na met d'e---mmm-h*  
*Na met Sar'a ka na kat mwa d'e*  
*Na ba Sar'a-----woo-wo-wo*  
*Na ba Sar'a--e-----woo-wo-wo.*  
 (Wambutda 1980: 12 f.).

## Translation

Dawn is about to break-mmm-h  
 Dawn is about to break-mmm-h  
 Release me to go there-mmm-h  
 To return to Sara and meet them  
 I am returning to Sar'a---woo-wo-wo  
 I am returning to Sar'a--e--woo-wo-wo.

Sara represents the historical home of origin in the east (towards the Chad-Borno basin) from where the dead are reborn according to Ngas traditions. According to the oral traditions of the Chadic-speakers of the Jos Plateau, they all originated from the Chad-Borno basin towards the east. Sara (or Sur) is actually a major stopping place on their journey towards the mountain ranges of the Jos Plateau. It is a place name that is traceable even in modern times. Thus the dead are buried facing Sara, the east, to facilitate return to the human world. The rhyme above therefore beautifully reconciles historical events with religious concepts of the Ngas people, such as belief in rebirth.

Pangs and anxieties are thereby psychologically exuded from death, while a bridge of solidarity and oneness is simultaneously built between the world of the living and the living dead on one continuing mode of existence. The drizzling of rain apart from symbolizing cool weather for the ancestors and their blessings, also depicts the soaking and eventual washing off of all the sins of the community and the setting right of soured relationships between the living and the dead.

However, *mos won may* be put off when there is a drought, in consequence of which there is insufficient food to stage it in full. In such circumstances, the Ngas will prepare a thick ceremonial dough, *gwim* cooked in the broth of animal meat or vegetables, especially garden eggs, *kwul* and some hot spices. This is prepared and eaten with the understanding that people will decrease from all wickedness, while witches, *sot* and sorcerers who partake of this ritual meal will die. This is because *gwim* is a rite of covenant making or an oath taking meal, whereby the people reach an agreement over an oath before the spirit realm that they will desist from committing evil and wickedness in the land. Drought is usually regarded as a consequence of communal and individual sins. The *gwim* rite is thus conducted as a part of cleansing and purification ceremony before the rain maker is invited to make rain. Without this rite of oath taking or covenant making, the drought it is believed will persist.

*Nwong Kum, Masquerade Festival of the Deities of the Mupun and Mwaghavul*

They celebrate it annually from April to July. The *nwong Kum* masquerade which walks in the nude comes out on the third day of the *nwong* festival and continues to appear for three days before they go back to the sacred grove, *lit kum*. From there they are believed to disappear into the ground. Among the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul, when the ancestors, *nji* visit the living to have communion with them, they are called masquerades, *won-mwa* or *nwong-mo* whether they are masked or unmasked. Another feature of this festival shared by these ethnic groups is the absence of clothed masquerades. The *nji* ancestors wear no masks but are 'clothed in clouds', that is in the nude. Whenever they *nji* appear in the nude, characterised by shouting, the blowing of *fer nji*, the animal horn flute of the ancestors and the raising of dust in the air through supernatural means, women and children must go into seclusion or incur the penalty of barrenness or perpetual ill-health. This is because *wong kum* is a naked masquerade. Since he wears no cloths, only post-menopausal women, whom as we have mentioned are considered of equal status with men, could go about their normal business when he appears.

*Kaat / Kum Nji, Ancestors' Festival of the Mupun and Mwaghavul*

The Mupun and Mwaghavul call this festival *kok nji / puus kaat nji*, the dance or day of the ancestors. It is also called *mwes nwong*, beer festival of the ancestors. Unlike that of the Ngas, this is an annual festival for the veneration of the *nji*, the ancestors. It is a period when the living receive love, care and blessing from the ancestors. Humans, livestock, tree crops and the whole land are blessed by the ancestors during this period. The festival is celebrated from one community to the other. Among the Mwaghavul, it is celebrated first by Dikibin, where the *nji*, ancestors are said to miraculously emerge from the ground. The dancing and celebrations are then moved to Npang (Ampang West), Kerang, Kopal, Kombun, Panyam, Sulwa, Ruf, Bwai, Pushit, Bungha and Mangu according to their set seasons in that strict order. The Mupun also celebrate *kaat / Kum nji* according to their polities, Jipari (Longdren, Asa and Kong) Jiblik, Abwor/Dyis, Kagu and Jing (but not in this particular order).

The *nji*, ancestors' festival starts with two spirits of the ancestors represented by an old man called *kamu* (the meaning of the term is obscure) and an old woman called *niwa nji*, which means mother of the ancestors. As they emerge, their cries are beaten on the large sacred or ritual drum,

*ngin-shi-ver-kung* (meaning the long-legged drum). The pair of *nji* talk in a ritually incomprehensible language. The feminine voice is ventriloquised by a man, sounding in a high-pitched squeaky voice, *hi wa wa wa wai, hi niwa nji!* It comes out in shrill falsetto shrieks. The male *nji*, *kamu* cries in exceedingly gruff, groaning tones, *mu mu mu mu mmm!* This is sounded from a big cow horn, *som ning*. By this, they indicate to the community that they are hungry and must be fed immediately. *Nuwa nji* is said to have a naughty child, *laa nji* which cries sirenously for being hit on the head. When such happens, a housewife is called (from behind her hut) to pet the child. This demands a fowl, symbolising food given to the ancestor child to stop crying, after the manner in which parents today give candies and other food items to their children to serve the same purpose. After these pair, the ancestor of the gorge, *nji wonkong* emerges first after the last Mwaghavul hunting festival, that is *Bwanzuhum* of Kerang/Kopal and stays for about a month before the arrival of others.

As observed with the Ngas *won kum* festival, women must keep off. As in Ngas, their role is to prepare dishes favoured by the *nji*, ancestors, especially *kwaklik/kwakil*, the most palatable food for *nji*, prepared from a species of large seed climbing bean plant. The life of a woman who has no *kwaklik* for the *nji* may be threatened. The women dread the noise of *nji*. They run home before nightfall when the *nji* appear, but as in Ngas, with the exception of post-menopausal women. A younger woman who sees *nji*, it is believed, must fall ill, and a goat is required for redressive ritual sacrifices (*tok kum*) after a session of *Pa* divination. All the *nji* ancestors during this festival emerge by night as *wong* masquerades to allow women to go about their normal duties during the day, except *nji puus*, the ancestor of the daytime (spirit of the sun). In Mupun and Mwaghavul, males, (not females) take food prepared by women to the *nji*, ancestors. Men carrying the food must not look back. As in Ngas, the *nji* move from compound to compound, feasting on food, meat and beer brewed from newly harvested corn and millet, *kas*. The beer must not be brewed from old stock of corn or millet.

Where they are fed, they bless the compound and its occupants for being generous to the *nji*, ancestors in their entertainment and sacrifices. They then invite the householder to come out and collect new seeds for cultivation in the next farming season in the following manner, "*woo da kom tak woo! A put a lap chirem si war ke! Kat puus ya pe be ni ba lom di a maar*". This means, "oh so and so (name of householder is called) oh! Come out and receive these seeds! When the sun comes out, it will multiply on your farm". Curses are rained on those who made inadequate provisions for

them in this manner, “*woo da kom tak woo! Shilak kaa, fuur kaa, chyar kaa!*” This means, “oh so and so (name of householder is called) oh! Weeds will germinate, grasses will germinate, reeds will germinate”! The first person is assured of fertility and prosperity, while the second householder is told that various species of weeds and grasses will take over his farms. With these blessings and curses, they depart to the spirit land, *yil nji*. Their visit is accompanied with dancing and wailing as that of the Ngas.

*Nji*, ancestors are seen as spirits, therefore they are believed to be invisible, but they are said to metamorphose into a type of brown ants called *nkamkos* or *kamkaghas* to devour their sacrifices and offerings. When these types of ants appear on the scene of any sacrifices, it is believed that the sacrifices have been accepted by the ancestors. Like the *kum won* of the Ngas, *wong nji* ancestral masquerades of the Mwachavul wear no masks, while those of the Mupun wear masks. Generally speaking, most Mwachavul masquerades *wong* wear no masks, except a particular type from Panyam. In Ngas and Mupun, most do, except *kum won* of the Ngas.

### *Mupun Bwenene, Festival of the Dead*

In addition to the annual *nji*, ancestors' festival, the Mupun observe a festival in honour of the dead once in every fourteen years known as *bwenene*. *Bwenene* is an occasion for remembering all the departed. It is an occasion of great feasting, wailing and jubilation, sadness and joy. Men, women and children participate in the dancing and feasting (eating and drinking). Women turn out in colourful wear and daub their bodies with *lip*, ritual red powder. A great deal of beer is brewed and many cows, horses and other animals are slaughtered. Here, the ancestors come out in the form of *nwong*, masquerades and feast, dance and have communion with the living. The history of the people together with the achievements of the ancestors are recounted. They chant, *tam* the virtues of the ancestors and sing songs of praise to them. The good and evil deeds of the dead are remembered and also sung in songs. At the same time they sing songs which state the moral virtues demanded of men by the ancestors, *nji*. They are composed of some of these lines thus:

#### **Mupun**

*Bwenene ki wal a gurum ki riin- oh-vi-ko-ha*  
*bwenene ki wal a biring ki dang-oh-vi-ko-ha*  
*bwenene ki wal a mat ki wur----oh-vi-ko-ha*  
*bwenene ki wal a nin ki som----oh-vi-ko-ha*  
*bwenene ki wal a mish ki dang-oh-vi-ko-ha*  
*bwenene ki wal a mat ki dyen---- oh-vi-ko-ha*

#### **Translation**

Bwenene needs a person with charm  
 bwenene needs a horse with a tail  
 bwenene needs a woman with breasts  
 bwenene needs a cow with horns  
 bwenene needs a man with a tail  
 bwnene needs a woman with character

The wordings of the *bwenene* dance song thus demonstrate the moral virtues and piety the *nji*, ancestors demand of human society in order to ensure prosperity, good health and the progress of individuals and the entire community. Hence a person without good moral virtues is not acceptable to the ancestors, just as one cannot imagine a horse without its tail, a cow without its horns, a woman without breasts and a woman who attracts men without *riin*, charm, charisma, enchantment and glamour.

As they sing and dance, drink beer, eat and chant, tears of remembrance pour down their cheeks. There is no bitter wailing as in mourning, but these are tears of a knowing reflection of the past, with a confidence that the dead are present with them as they face the future. The *Bwenene* festival is an occasion where a man may be seen simultaneously shading tears and jubilating. It is celebrated with all the grandeur, pomp and fanfares the people can put up. The Mupun saying, *shang baar do ter ki nen mbi gwom bwenene*, which means "the girl who likes to show off slept hungry yesterday because she put all her hopes on the food of the *bwenene* feast" paints a clear picture of the festival. It is one in which there is a lot to eat and drink, but children, as is the custom, are warned to feed properly at home before going to any festival to forestall what happened to this legendary girl called *shangbaar*, (its literal meaning portrays a girl who likes to 'show off') who left home hungry because she thought she would have much to eat at the festival. The dance may continue for a week, while the elders secretly perform some cleansing rites.

### *Kop, Planting Festival*

The Ngas call it *mos lun*, the beer festival of the dry season. This is a misleading name because it is actually a planting festival, celebrated at the end of *tar lun*, the dry season to usher in *tar fonton/lok*, the rainy or planting season. The Mupun and Mwaghavul call it *tenpe*, purifying the land by pressing it down. Most Chadic-speakers celebrate it in April/May, and generally in the same fashion. It marks the beginning of ridging and cropping and is celebrated as a rule before the first rains. The whole community is involved. Like the *nji*, ancestors' festival, this is also a cleansing festival, but unlike the former, it is targeted at the compounds, village and farm lands, not the sacred places. The compounds are cleansed of dirt. It is an occasion for renovation work in the compound. Old seats are replaced with new ones in the compound and 'under the tree' sheds outside. Pavements, terraces, *saak* and stone seats are rebuilt. The insides of huts are



plastered and redesigned with fresh shiny earth procured from clay blended with ant hills.

*Mos lun/tenpe* is a fertility festival aimed at stimulating productivity in man, animals and crops. This festival ensures that crops germinate properly on the farms. It is to secure peace, confidence and well-being from the ancestors, throughout the approaching farming season. It prepares the people physically and psychologically to face the rigours and hardships of the long hours of working on the farm. Any illness or accident at this time can be fatal, since that will mean fewer hands to till the ground, weed the farms, bring in the harvest and thresh it. The *kum-mo*, deities and *nji*, ancestors are therefore prayed to for protection. A date is set by the *mishkom*, priest chief and his *deskom*, council of elders at the palace. This is determined through divination or from a careful observation of the lunation of the moon, or both. The message is sent round the village through the usual shouting-relay system, *bwet do*. This does not mark the day the festival itself is started, but it signals the day on which the brewing of beer *mwes* for the festival starts. By this, the people know when the festival will start, since beer brewing takes three days. Grain which is needed for brewing beer is exacted from householders for the festival.

The compound deity, *Kum lu/Kum gulis* is specially worshipped during this festival, though it is also a general period for venerating all the *Kum-mo*, deities and ritual cleansing of the people and the land. Thus goats exacted from fines, especially adultery fines, are used at this festival as sacrifices. Where these are not enough or lacking, the priest chief provides them from his own stock to ensure purification, *tenpe*. The people demonstrate their allegiance to the deities during *tenpe*. Through it humans solicit good wishes for the whole community during the year.

The purification rituals culminate with the rites of *tenpe/pidan*, meaning 'the stamping of the land', 'pressing the land', 'suppressing spirituality' or 'cooling the land'. The action of stamping, pressing, suppressing or cooling is done through the ritual cutting of the leaves of wild custard apple, *amona senegalensis*. This plant is known in Ngas and Mupun as *yim wut*. These leaves (of the wild custard) are then dressed in *fonio* flour mix or sacrificial blood. They are then pressed or pinned down on the corners of farm lands with stones or earth, indicating purification. This also serves as a quasi-religious rite of asserting ownership over land, particularly when a man wants to reclaim a piece of land which has been leased out for a number of years. Thus the land is purified, and any trespassers on the land will fall ill. This is because the rites invoke the deity of harvest, *tenpe* to stand guard over the farm land.

The beer brewed for the festival is taken to the forest shrine or grove of the deities, *lit Kum* on the third day. Sacrifices are made and libations are poured to the deities in their various shrines and the ancestors collectively in the *lit Kum*, sacred grove of the deities. The beer is conveyed in the long necked pots of the deities, *tul Kum*. The pots of beer are taken from each compound to their high places by adult males on their shoulders. As a rule, men do not carry pots, the exception as in this case, being during sacred rituals, and even then, they must carry it on their shoulders, not on the head as women would normally have done. They are poured out as libations on the stones that individually represented the ancestors or spots recognised as the seats of the ancestors. Only initiated adult males are involved in these rituals at the grove. Wambutda (1991: 131) states that as they present the sacrifices, offerings and libations, the high priest utters the following incantations:

Here we have brought to you our fathers (ancestors) the food we are able to find, we pray you to accept it, that the community may live in peace (*tong zum*), that as we set out to farm this year, our lives may be spared to see the new harvest in good health. That no child may stumble. That the hands put forth to the terraces on the farms to get rid of weeds might not be harmed.

This last line of the prayer is in reference to snake bites and the havoc caused by scorpions, which are by no means uncommon. They then end by wishing the ancestors peace.

The major difference between *mos won/puus kaat nji* and *mos lun/tenpe* is that the former is conducted by the ancestors themselves in communion with the people, whereas the latter is conducted by the people in communion with the deities and ancestors. In the former, the dancing is only for the ancestors *nji*, appearing in the form of *won/nwong*, masquerades but without masks. In the latter, the dancing is done by all and sundry. The dance lasts a whole day. Starting from the palace, they move from compound to compound, until they return to the palace where they had started. There may be some brief mourning in a compound where one has died recently. The feasting (eating and drinking) is organised according to age grades, *gan* and communal farming groups. Young men in their separate farming groups, *wuk zilang*, young girls, *wuk jirap*, older men and women slaughter and prepare goats and fowls they have been able to barter in exchange for labour, *kàt* and feast in groups. They drink beer, *mwes* and gruel, *waar* and dance through most of the night.



### *Mostar/Tar Dyip, Harvest Festival*

Chadic-speakers and their Jos Plateau neighbours observe rites of harvest which is more famous among the Ngas, where they are called the beer festival of the moon, *mos tar*. It is also an end of year festival and popularly translated as “festival of the shooting of the moon”, since the ritual of shooting of the moon, *pus tar*, forms the climax of this rite. It is therefore annually held in anticipation of the appearance of the new moon, in October/November, depending on the polity concerned. It must be celebrated before new crops are eaten. Amper usually leads the Ngas polities, followed by Kabwir, Gyangyang and Garam.

A special sighting of the moon, *tar* is required for this festival, unlike the others. The time for the sighting of the moon, *tar* corresponds with the calendrical month of September. *Mostar* can be referred to as first fruits rituals. The Gomper (the people of Amper) celebrate it in September, the Gombwir (the people of Kabwir) in October, the Gongaram (the people of Garam) in November, and so on, as the Ngas move from one polity or village to the other celebrating *mostar*. With time the *mostar* of the Gomper (Amper) has become more famous, and people from all Ngas troop down to Amper to participate in its merriment, which attracts even non Ngas people. If *mos won*, the beer festival of the ancestors (or masquerades) takes place in a particular year, *mos tar* is put off because of the overlapping in period and also for economic reasons. *Mos won* is preferred in such circumstances because it is not an annual event like *mos tar*, but is celebrated septennially. *Mos tar* is another occasion for cleansing of the community. This time all roads and dumping sites of rubbish, *zuk* are all cleared. This preliminary cleansing is called *nawut*, and *wongan*, a particular masquerade (named after the Ngan people, a Ngas name for the Tarok, their neighbours to the South-East) goes round inspecting the cleanliness of the roads and dumping sights in a mask.

The date of *mos tar* is chosen just a day before everyone can see the new moon with the naked eye, referred to as the day when animals see it, *nam mwa ni* (Wambutda 1991: 139). For its sighting, persons of second sight (*zari/potur*) are required to determine its appearance on the night which other ordinary persons cannot see it. A piece of rope might be used for determining the calendar, beginning from *mostar* period, (for instance taking October for Amper), the high priests who keep such ropes will begin to tie knots of equal distance along the rope as each *tar*, moon passes. The brewing of beer has to begin three days before the festival, thus the special sighting needs persons with *zari/potur*, intuitive powers. The taking of

beer to the sacred grove or forest of the deities, the usual requests for good health, peace and so forth, are the same as those described above. However, the emphasis of prayer here is on a special request: *ko mu lep shwe mpwi nyi po zum*, "that we may put the new corn into our mouths in peace".

Then follows the rite of *pus tar*, the mock shooting of the moon. This is not done with the usual poisoned arrows, but with stalks of a plant akin to elephant grass. The high priest who shoots at the moon, *ngo-pus-tar* goes to one of the bush shrines in the company of other priests. As he prepares for *pus tar*, the mock shooting of the moon, his companions continue with the performance of some rituals such as the pouring of libations to the ancestor and deities. He takes a bow and two arrows, and then aims one at the new moon and shoots at it, and then the second. Then he shouts, *Woi hui! Wep da mang kwat! Ko mat mwa se bira mwa da! Mu chin zum da!*, "Oh!, the year has ended! Autumn has come for women to eat those things again! Celebrate it in peace!" It is from this ritual that the festival derives its name. Throughout the ritual, none of the priests talk to anyone. The ritual is then followed by shouts and the blowing of small horn flutes, *sombi*, first in the palace, then followed by other villages. The major deity associated with *mos tar* is *Kum Tau* or *Tawu*. This is because *Tau* is the patron deity of all Ngas. Symbolised by a metal object, he is the protective deity of the community and the whole of the Ngas ethnic group. A group of young boys called 'the children of the moon', *jep tar*<sup>6</sup> or 'macho men' come out with whips in their hands and their bodies painted as white as the moon itself. They beat anyone they meet, even each other, as they run and chase people they find on their way to the dancing square. People run helter-skelter, but still turn up in the square for the *mos tar*, beer of the moon dance. As a festival of first fruits, women and men sing and dance side by side, holding hands in a chain gang across each others' shoulders, jubilating and thanking the ancestors and deities for a bumper harvest.

*Wonngan* appears on the last evening before the beer is ready for drinking wearing a mask. Its mask is made of two parts: the main body of the mask being made of dry guinea corn leaves measured to the knee and the headgear being made of neat twines, knitted into a spiral shape with two

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<sup>6</sup> The term *tar* should not be confused with madness, since the word denotes both 'the moon' and 'madness'. This caution should be heeded because the children of the moon, *jep tar* behave like mad men. For instance, they beat each other without mercy, pretending not to feel the pain. It is similar to the Fulani *shoro* beating festival, the main difference being that in the Fulani *shoro*, a debt of beatings is either being paid or contracted against the next *shoro* season.

small sticks pierced at right angles through the apex of the gear. A little opening is left in the headgear to allow for sight and breath. This facial aperture is decorated with red and black local seeds surrounded at the outer margin by dried red garden eggs which are left hanging loosely. At about 8 pm. *wonngan* leave its shrine for the palace without the mask since it is now dark enough for it to conceal its human identity. At the palace it speaks in an esoteric language in Tarok giving messages from the world of the *nji*, ancestors. The conversation goes thus:

**Ngas**

M. Nkara 'n 'da mwa yal nye 'da?

C. E, mwa yal nyet.

M. Wok kam k sh k ke?

C. Mwa yal k sh k nyet doo.

M. D de mwa lep nyan.

**Translation**

Are all the souls well?

Yes, they are all well (they all woke up well).

Is all the compound well?

Yes they are all well indeed.

Our fathers (the ancestors) sent me.

Silence! M.

Ka a, da pe wu tap ke k lon damwa.

ke k pyan koce ka!

Dan mante wu cadir,

Pifana na we e soon dundun,

Nya we m na yil k dyis,

Me k tori mwa dun dun.

K pocokfi dan na ji ru Garu,

Na yal di shi wurn wurn,

Dan na ru.

As it is, please take care of the wealth in the Land

Headache will not afflict any one of them!

However do not forget the one thing,

I come from a very far place,

I come (my own) from the land of sand, which is full of baobob trees.

With thirst I arrived at Garu,

with haste I left there,

To arrive here (Wambutda 1980: 10).<sup>7</sup>

The high priest translates the message to those who are listening from their various rooms within the compound. After the speech, the priest chief thanks the masquerade who is given some beer and returns to the shrine at midnight after a drinking debauchery. At dawn the Queen (first wife of the priest chief) or her representative shouts out, *mwa dur tar wo!* "the moon is closed", indicating that the festival of the moon has come to an end, and the people disperse. Again, the *jep tarmwa*, children of the moon run home whipping each other and anyone they meet on the way.

The Mupun and the Mwaghavul, like the Ngas, celebrate their harvest festivals community by community. As with the other Jos Plateau peoples, new crops such as yams, cocoa yams, *fonio* and maize are taboo to humans until ritual sacrifices have been performed in honour of the deities and an-

<sup>7</sup> The letter 'M' in this dialogue stands for the *won gang* masquerade and 'C' denotes the *ngolong Kum*, the High Priest of the palace shrine and the spokesman of the *ngolong*, Priest Chief

cestors. Culprits are believed to fall sick, except perhaps in the case of maize, which could be eaten secretly but very seldomly. The Mangun celebrate these rites in what they call *pe kaat nji*, the meeting place or market of the ancestors. In Mangun, like in Ngas, young men whip themselves with jute plaited ropes, which make snapping sounds and could hit hard. Thus this first fruit festival is also used for testing manhood and endurance, "after all, the harvest is just around the corner". Three days before the festival, *Pa* divination is used to procrastinate what the new year holds, after new crops have been offered to the deities and the ancestors in the form of sacrificial meals and libations of beer brewed from them. They thus taste the first fruits before humans. The date is announced to the people through the usual shouting method, thus: *Kai o! kai o! kai o! Puus kaat ni a bit si*: "Attention! attention! attention! The day of the harvest festival is three days away". On the festival day, people engage in harvest and roasting of new yams, cocoa yams and maize, especially in the form of *gwomlipak*, maize roasted in its cob. All sorts of delicacies are prepared for old men and women, who eat and shout, "we have eaten something new", *ging-ging mbi po*. They give praise and thanks to God, the deities and ancestors, saying:

We have seen this (new year), we have eaten new crops, may you grant us the opportunity to see the next one. We shall eat this one (referring to the harvest) before we say, "it is too small, (*se dan mu baak*) as the hen that eats and wipes her beak on the ground as if she has eaten nothing". We thank you for the harvest. May we eat it in peace and good health.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the harvest period and the whole of the dry season, various age groups and dance clubs engage in active dancing in the evenings. They evolve a convenient calendar for the dances depending on whether they are village or inter village in nature. The various groups use this period to solicit for funds both in cash and in kind to be used for the forthcoming cropping festivals with the first rains. The harvesting and dry season is also a time of great social events, which include marriages and various dances. The most popular dances during this period include *kok jirap*, the dance of the maidens; *chyer*, the dance of the elderly; *fer*, the horn flute dance; *kwarak* and *yang*, two types of corn-stalk flute dances and *bel*, the reed flute dance. A popular *kok jirap*, maidens song titled *ka mu tok shik ki mishkom*, 'we went up to greet the chief' is sang with the following opening lines:

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<sup>8</sup> The author observed several such rites of praises to God when he was a child. Even Christians chant the words of these rites during harvests.

<i>Ka mu tok shik ki mishkom</i>	<i>oye yewo</i>
<i>Ba mu kat wur lap mun kas</i>	<i>oye yewo</i>
<i>A dyel ah a muut yi Gwa?</i>	<i>oye yewo</i>
<i>Ba a byang mun mu wa nbun dako!</i>	<i>oye yewo</i>
<i>Sak mar dan ter ki nen ah?</i>	<i>oye yewo</i>
<i>Tu ning dan se ner ni ah?</i>	<i>oye yewo</i>
<i>mmmmmmm oyeyewo mmmmmmm</i>	<i>oye yewo</i>

We went up to greet the chief	oye ye wo
We found out that he did not answer us	oye ye wo
Is it a legal issue or ill-health little boy?	oye ye wo
Then tell us so that we may go home	oye ye wo
Do I farm and then lack food to eat?	oye ye wo
Do I kill a cow and then eat only the vagina?	oye ye wo
The white man has brought a new world	oye ye wo
mmmmmmm, oye ye wo! mmmmmmm!	oye ye wo

However, there is room for artistry and creativity in the singing of songs during festivals, and in fact, all dancers are expected to be creative in this respect. After a lead singer (and any one could play this role) introduces a new song, s/he is allowed to sing the opening lines after which other dancers join in, spontaneously creating in their own words new lines which must actually rhyme with the rhythm of the song being sang and danced. From time to time, gifted artists and song constructors create entirely new songs which comprise of short rhyming opening lines as the one above. These usually emanate out of concrete historical, economic, political and religious experiences of the people at that particular time. A song may be constructed when someone *ta shon*, resurrects in the form of a ghost after his/her death, is accused of *put sot*, bewitching others, when a girl becomes pregnant out of wedlock, *gam aak nkujing* and any other scandal of the times. Some songs and rhymes are constructed based on the beauty of nature, the gods, taboos, sacred rites, etc. Thus some songs are new while others are very old. All these form part of the rich cultural heritage of folklore and folk songs inherited by every generation of Chadic-speakers of the Jos Plateau.

### *Kwat, Hunting Festival*

All Jos Plateau peoples organise annual hunting festivals each dry season from the month of December when all the harvest has been gathered in. It is a period in the year of peace when warriors retire to hunting and a new crop of the ethnic soldiers emerges as hunting champions. The Mupun, Mwaghavul and Ngas refer to this festival as *kwat*, while the Birom call it

*jamo*. It is important for *kwat* to come after the harvest and before cropping, a period when men have leisure time for hobbies such as cotton spinning, cloth weaving, hat and mat making, thatching, etc. Certain high priests are entrusted with the duty of performing the hunting rites in the respective polities. Women are warned three days prior to the festival to start brewing beer. On the festival day, the high priest mounts his horse and rides to the customary spot for performing hunting rites, *chan kwat* in the company of other elders. Prayers are offered to the deities and ancestors for a successful hunting year. Fire is then made by friction, *piyor wus*. The rite involves the rubbing of a soft wooded stick against a hard one, by holding the soft stick between two hands and twisting it at high speed over a small hole made on a flat hard one. The former represents masculinity and the phallus and the former symbolises femininity and the vagina. Fire is then set to the bush which is dry by this time of the year. Hence the need for *kwat* to come before the harvest, not after. In Mwaghavul, some polities like Bwai and Ruf make it mandatory for old women to shave the hair from their heads during *kwat*, because hunting is considered a sacred rite.

Chadic-speakers co-ordinate and celebrate *kwat* from one polity to the other in a strict order which has been handed down more clearly by the Mwaghavul. Thus while *mostar*, the beer festival of the moon (or harvesting festival) of the Ngas is more famous in Amper, *kwat*, hunting festival assumes that position among the Mwaghavul, communities where each has a distinct name and period. The Mwaghavul *kwat*, hunting festivals follow this strict order: The first is *Wus* festival of Pianiya (Panyam), then *Riyem* festival of Pushit, *Tiduu* festival of Kombum, *Kopshuu* festival of Npang (Ampang West), *Dilen* festival of Bwai/Ruf, *Alagham* festival of Alagham, *Mugo* festival of Mangu and the last being *Bwanzuhum* festival of Kerang/Kopal. Those of the Mangun, Chakfem and Jipal do not fall in line with these. Like in the Bache, Afizare, Irigwe and Birom, Mwaghavul *kwat* festivals are colourful and are marked by horse racing. The preparations for hunting are the same as those for war. *Kwat* lasts up to the beginning of cropping in April. The hunting festival is celebrated in two phases; the first constituting the actual hunting in the bush, which lasts from morning to afternoon. When the men return with the kill in the afternoon, women, girls, children and the elders come out in colourful dresses and begin *Kok/tam Kwat*, the hunting dance. This begins the second phase, which will go on throughout the night celebrated by dancing, singing, horse racing, eating of *Kwaklik*, a species of large beans, *kusuk*, *fonio* meal and meat and the drinking of beer and gruel.



The hunting season, *tar kwat* is also a time of great social events, such as night dances, parties, romance and adventure. It is a period of exchange of gifts between friends of both genders. Invitations to sumptuous dinners, especially of chicken or goat meat with *kwaklik* are organised on a reciprocal basis according to age grades known as *gwom shaar*, friendship meals. Mature girls may eat this meal for the last time as girls. After Bwanzughum hunting festival, among the Mwaghavul, they could be way laid, kidnapped or stolen as brides, while others may elope with their grooms. This is because Chadic-speakers of the Jos Plateau practice wife-stealing, bride kidnapping and elopement, with little or no room for any grandiose formal marriage or wedding rites.

### *Biyang Fwan, Rain Making*

The Mupun and Mwaghavul refer to rain making as *biyang fwan*, piercing rain; *ya fwan*, catching rain; *kaat fwan*, meeting for rain; or *pun fwan*, chasing rain out of hiding, but the Mwaghavul of Mangun refer to it as *foyen*, throwing away medicine. *Biyang fwan* is not an annual event, but is resorted to only in a year of drought, *yi puus chan*, which could bring about famine or provide conditions conducive for the breeding of small pests, known as *nambur* and *yilambul* that destroy crops. *Byang fwan* is a communal affair among Chadic-speakers. Rain making rites are the closest rites to instituting a direct worship of *Naan*, God in their societies, because it is the only ritual where *Naan*, God is directly called upon to act in mercy and save the people from total annihilation. The Chadic-speakers of the Jos Plateau have no direct worship for God. Rain-making is the closest religious rite they have to the institution of direct worship of the Supreme Deity, *Naan*.

There are some extended families among Chadic-speakers who possess the secret medicines, *yen* for making rain. The rain-maker, *ngu-byang-fwan*, also called *pobang* by the Mwaghavul of Mangun, is a *mishkom kum*, the chief priest of a deity and *Pa* diviner, medicine man, *ngu yen* and a man of *zari/potur*, intuitive powers in his own right. The rite of *byang fwan*, rain-making is a post divinatory one. Chadic-speakers conduct thorough village by village, clan by clan and extended family by extended family *Pa* divination rites to know the cause of lack of rain, and purify the land through *tok kum*, sacrificial redressive rites before the rain-maker is called upon. The Ngas, as already observed above conduct the rites of *gwim*, oath taking and covenant making, affirming that they will not sin again, so that rain may come.

Rain is not made for pleasure, but it is brought about by an emergency where the *mishkom yil*, priest chief sends for the rain-maker to come and make rain to save natural phenomena, humans and animals from perishing. On arrival, he is officially apprised of the drought situation which is already known to him. The chief may address him thus, "shall we bury the people alive? Shall we wait to die as a people? You who cause the drought must speak (referring to witches and sorcerers). You must be cursed if you refuse to speak". It is believed that witches, *sot* cause drought by suspending an invisible tray *hitit* between the sky and the earth, thereby blocking rainfall. It is also believed that sorcery, injustice, immorality — especially adultery and incest, shedding of innocent blood, unjust wars and many such sins may be the causes of drought and other natural catastrophes.

The *ngu-byang-fwan*, rain-maker sets a date not too far away for *byang fwan*, rain-making after consulting his *Pa* divining pebbles. On the appointed day, the rain-maker secretly performs some rituals in which some herbs are secretly burnt to cause smoke. He then symbolically takes 'the disease of the drought', *muut*, composed of some medicinal substances, on the tip of his ritual spear. He does this in his capacity as medicine man with *zari/potur*, intuitive powers and *jyom*, the power of second sight; and leads the initiated male folk of the community, who gather for that purpose at the palace of the *mishkom*, priest chief, to a designated spot. This is usually marked by a brook, small holes in the ground covered by sacred broken pots, *yir/hgir*, flat stones or a stony pit, *junglughut*. Places used for *byang fwan*, rain-making must be a source of water which never dries throughout the year. The men march to the rain making spot, *pe byang fwan*, most on foot and some riding on their horses, the *ngu-byang-fwan*, rain-maker being closely followed by a group of men, holding a spear each. These are the spear-men. At the spot, he sits down first, and all others follow suit, sitting far off, round the brook. He instructs some of his assistants to tie a local rain coat, *shilip* to a tree called *chilim*. He then points out the spot to be pierced by the spear-men. They are first asked to remove rotten leaves and dirt from the pit or brook. The *ngu-byang-fwan*, rain-maker then dips 'the disease of the drought', *muut* at the tip of the spear into the brook. The spear-men then scoop the water and throw it into the sky. The rain-maker provides some powdery medicine which he throws into the sky or he chews some herbs and spews the substance up towards the sky to induce rain. The spear-men are then asked to pierce, *byang* the rain spot with their spears. And everybody earnestly takes to his heels, shouting with joy and jubilation. The *ngu-byang-fwan*, rain-maker comes out first. In some cases, he goes into the brook alone, and in haste, while the



clan heads and their male folks watch the rites from far off. He recites some prayers and incantations in the form of magical formulas known to him alone. This is usually followed by a heavy downpour of rain reminiscent of the novella of Prophet Elijah on Mount Carmel (KGs. 18). Footmen are usually drenched by rain water. Only exceptionally good runners and the horsemen may escape the downpour.<sup>9</sup>

The people's confidence in the deity is unshakeable once the land has been purified through divination and post divination rites. The people have confessed their sins. Fines have been paid by wrong doers and the people have entered a covenant with the spirit realm after taking an oath not to repeat mistakes of the past. After these rites, the people see no reason why God and the gods will withhold rain from them. Thus both the rain-maker and the people act in absolute faith. This is demonstrated in their running home so that they will not be beaten by the rain they are expecting and their shouts for joy. The deity is appealed to directly. While water, rain-coat, *shilip*, spears and medicine (*yen*) are needed for *byang fwan*, the secrets of the art are fiercely guarded as family secrets. Thus the heads of the medicines, *ka yen-mo* used are never disclosed. The womenfolk then start a *chyer* dance in the down pour with their axes until they are completely drenched. In their joy, they embrace and welcome the life giving rain water.

### **Conclusion: The Importance of Songs and Dance in Calendrical Rites of Passage**

The Chadic-speakers, like most other Africans, love to sing and dance. In the process of celebrating in the form of dance and songs, they celebrate religious rites and rituals. For the Chadic-speakers, *kok*, dance/music is not only the expression of feelings, emotions and anxieties; it is indeed a way of life. It is drama of performance, a novella where dances, songs on the one hand, and religious rites and rituals meet in complete harmony. Dancing and singing celebrate life itself. They celebrate life in crisis, in this case, the crises that come with seasonal changes which we denote here as calendrical rituals. The rites are performed together with accompanying songs and dances to cushion the crisis and pain that may come with the passage of each phase in the life of a human community and natural phenomena,

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<sup>9</sup> The author has witnessed such heavy downpours of rain on the day rain makers went out to make rain in Mupunland, but has never been at any venue where the rituals were performed.

such as that of fauna, flora, the seasons, and the whole life of the ecological-system.

However, we may ask the question, did rituals give birth to dance or did dance give birth to rituals? The answer is very clear. Africans have always performed the footlights of dancing and singing in a certain rigid or acceptable way which makes society to recognise its type. This is what we call ritual. The theatre of African dance has always been within the sphere of rituals; it is not haphazard in its performance. For instance, the importance of dance and music in African societies has been described thus by Olukoju (1987: 118),

[...] [M]usic is [a] language continuum for the expression of the mind in joy or in sorrow and in praise and thanksgiving. It is a vehicle for communicating thoughts and desires, and it also provide a forum for fellowship in corporate existence. Music-making could be in form of drumming, singing or dancing or a fusion of these in a musical setting in which some other non-membranophoneous musical instruments of the idiophone, the chordophone and the aerophone families feature as percussion to bring lustre to a performance.

Songs and dance have a prominent place in the religious life of the people, such as in the worship of the *Kum-mo*, deities and *nji-mo*, ancestors. Each divinity or cultic group has its own set of songs and chants. These songs and chants provide information about the history, theology, theogony and mythical experience of the people. The people express their desires, aspirations, joys, anxieties, hopes and frustrations in these songs and chants. They are a media for expressing inner religious experience and emotions. Music, dance and songs used in religious worship are an expressive language of the mind (cf. Nabofa 1990: 14, Olukoju 1987: 118). They celebrate life in joy and sadness, in life and in death, in the conquest of death as seen in the triumph of life after, that is, life after life.

Dance and songs celebrate the arrival of various seasons. Seasons are either welcomed with sombre reflections and low-keyed celebrations, as in the cropping festivals which prepare men, women and children for the hard farming season ahead, or with jubilation and joy, as in harvest. In the former, the emphasis is on the feasting — the eating and drinking which presage good health and strength for cultivating the land. Whereas in the former the emphasis is on dancing and young men may whip each other, as we have seen in *mostar*, harvesting festival of the Ngas and *pe kaat nji*, harvesting festival of the Mangun people. This is done in the belief that if one did not die through the difficult cropping season from fatigue, one can-

not die now in the midst of plenty and at any rate, a little more hardship (in the form of whipping) is still bearable with the harvest in sight.

Harvest festivals are thanksgiving rituals. In these festivals the people joyously thank the Supreme Divinity, the deities and ancestors for granting them a good harvest, good health, long life, plentiful sunshine and rainfall. Thus *Tenpe/Tempi*, the deity of fertility and harvest is usually at the centre of the harvesting festival dances and songs. The cropping festival in contrast takes the form of prayers to the spirit realm for good health, rainfall, sunshine, fertility and protection from hazards such as pests, drought, locust and deadly snake or scorpion bites.

The main aim of calendrical festivals, particularly those of the ancestors, is to harmonise both secular/profane time with sacred/ritual time frames. Calendrical festivals thus serve to link the world of the living with the spirit world of the ancestors and deities. This emphasises the fact that ritual time very frequently overlaps with secular time.

The festival of the masquerades helps the people to explain and bear the inevitable fact of death. In it, the pangs of death are exuded and accepted not only as a legitimate end to life but as a triumph of the living over death itself since it is now seen as the beginning of new life. This is sound psychology which removes the fear of death, since in death, there is (belief in the) continuity of life and rebirth. The festival demonstrates not only the conception that there is another 'life after this life', but it exhibits publicly that there is a close and active bond of historical, existential and ritual identity between the living and the living dead and that the former exists for the benefit of the latter. For the departed are consulted in times of affliction, crises and traumas. The spirits of the departed are believed to manifest themselves in the form of masquerades, *nwong*, that is the spirit of the living dead to share in physical fellowship and communion with their living relatives on earth through the sharing of meals, drinking of beer, dancing and singing. The masquerades thus serve as the cross-roads between the living and the living dead. At the end of each festival of the ancestors, it is believed that all the masquerades return to 'heaven', *bid'r/shiblang* with the messages of the living (cf. Aremu 1983: 47). Masquerades, though mystified in the eyes of women and children serve the purpose of shielding them from danger in times of emergencies, such as during attacks by enemies, wild animals, etc. Thus when the masquerades appear with dust in the air and shouts of their peculiar cries, women and children must go into hiding. This mystery also serves to reduce casualties, moreover, with them out of the way, the men can tackle the real problem at hand. Furthermore, if it happens that some men die in the process, or they

falter and fail in the face of crisis either due to cowardice or grave mistakes, the women and children will not be there to witness it. Thus, the art of masquerading gives the men room to manoeuvre and manipulate situations to their own favour. Thus after recovering, the men would prefer to tell their own version of events to the women, doubtlessly leaving out the not so palatable parts. This is because it is considered dishonourable for a woman to see the weakness of a man at such critical moments as these (cf. Wambutda 1980)

The living receive psychological satisfaction in three areas from the dances and songs during the festivals of the ancestors. Firstly, they receive the ritual satisfaction that they have performed their duty in maintaining a righteous and balanced relationship vertically between them and the spirit realm and horizontally among themselves. Having executed their duties to both the 'gods' and human beings, nothing can possibly go wrong. Moreover the ancestors are physically in their midst. And if something did go wrong, the spirit realm will very unlikely be blamed for it. It will be the fault of the witches and sorcerers and persons with the evil eye. Secondly, it is a time as observed during *bwenene*, the Mupun festival of the dead for venting frustrations and exuding pangs of death and anger for departed ones. The people sing, dance, laugh, cry, get angry, get drunk and sober again at different times during the rituals of this festival. Finally, it is a time to send messages to their loved ones in the spirit land, *yil nji* and be assured that such messages are carried. The living thus receive psychological comfort in the knowledge that messages shouted to the ancestors will surely be conveyed to their departed loved ones. The ritual of masquerading, *nwong* here thus plays the vital role of defusing the grief and shock of losing a loved one and removes the fear of death itself. At the end of it all, death is absolutely defeated and removed, since the dead continue to live after death — this group is what we refer to as the living dead. Moreover, the living dead can be reborn in a number of children. Thus rites as exhibited in the drama of dance, and dance as exemplified in rituals serve various purposes in the life of the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul Chadic-speakers of the Jos Plateau in Nigeria.

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VALERIE DEMARINIS

## With Dance and Drum

### **A Psychocultural Investigation of the Ritual Meaning-Making System of an Afro-Brazilian, Macumba Community in Salvador, Brazil<sup>1</sup>**

(Note: Afro-Brazilian terms used in the text are found in the Glossary at the end of the paper)

The western-trained researcher who is approaching the world of Macumba would do well to keep in mind the academic caution expressed by Roger Bastide, one of the most influential sociological researchers on Afro-Brazilian religion, "with a way of thinking ... shaped by three centuries of Cartesianism ... an ethnocentric mode of thought, ... I (realized that I) would have to 'convert' myself to a new way of thinking if I ever hoped to understand it." ... "the sociologist who studies Brazil no longer knows what set of concepts to use. The ideas he has learned in Europe or North America are no longer valid", Cartesian distinctions between past and present, sacred and profane, the living and the dead, no longer hold (Bastide 1978: viii). This caution holds true for the researcher in psychology as well. And so it was with an awareness of the need to proceed with caution and a critical suspicion of the limits and often limitations of my research tools that I began, in the summer of 1984, an on-going psychosocial, field research study of a Macumba community in Salvador, Brazil.<sup>2</sup> As a psy-

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was also presented at the 1994 American Academy of Religion Conference in Chicago. Initial funding for this research was provided by a grant from the American Academy of Religion, further support has been provided by a doctoral faculty grant from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California and by the Swedish Research Council (Forskningsrådsnämnden).

<sup>2</sup> My interest in Macumba began several years earlier in my psychotherapeutic work with a young woman from Salvador, Brazil who was able to use her tradition's rituals and resources to assist with the therapeutic process. An account of this clinical case is found in DeMarinis (forthc.).



chologist of religion my interests have been directed primarily to an investigation of phenomenological and functional dimensions of individual and community existence and the role of religious experience in that existence.

This research paper focuses on the Macumba community's way of making meaning in its Afro-Brazilian cultural context.<sup>3</sup> The community's meaning-making system is analyzed through five central points relating psychosocial function to religious ritual experience. First, an overview is presented of the use of religious ritual and its psychosocial function for the Macumba community within the larger context of Afro-Brazilian culture. Second, attention is given to the nature and role of ritual in developmental and life-cycle perspective, including attention to gender issues and to the involvement of children in the community's ritual process. Third, an analysis is given of ritual process as a community-wide process of empowerment and energy-containment. Fourth, the use of ritual trance and communication with the Yoruban gods and spirits in the development of preventive and interventive strategies for addressing the particular needs and problems of community members is explored. And fifth, attention is focused on the larger social impact of such Macumba communities through their grassroots projects for social change; and through the use of Macumba religious rituals and symbols by Afro-Brazilian practitioners in the healing arts of medicine and psychotherapy in Salvador, Brazil. Before proceeding to these points, a brief community profile is given.

### **Profile of Macumba Community**

This paper is based upon the findings of my field research in Salvador, Brazil with a Macumba community of men, women and children, composed of families and single individuals numbering approximately fifty persons. Females and males are equally represented in the membership. Though the members live separately, it is a community-based model of existence and development which predominates. Afro-Brazilian communities such as this can be found throughout Salvador and Brazil.

Macumba is best understood as both a cultural and a religious system whose roots are in the African, Yoruban tradition. In this particular com-

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<sup>3</sup> See references to the work of Strum (1977) for resources on the Afro-Brazilian context and Sullivan (1988) to the South American context of religion in general. See Myskofski's (1988) work for a historical source analysis of women's initiation rites in Afro-Brazilian religions. See Verger's (1981) volume (also available in English) on the nature of the African gods (orixás) in the Brazilian context.

munity the interweaving of Yoruban, Christian and Amer-Indian symbols is prevalent. Ritual dancing and drumming in community religious services are essential dimensions of communication and energy-containment for the community. It is the community's task, in coordination with the work of the priestess, priest and trance elders, to provide preventive as well as interventive psychosocial care for each of its members.

The community (*terriero*) is under the direction of a priest Ezechial (*babalorixá*) (over age seventy-five) and a priestess Jupira (*yalorixá*) (in her middle thirties).<sup>4</sup> The community has five trance mediums: three female and two male. Both priest and priestess use the term *Macumba* because this particular community represents a more syncretistic grouping of African, Christian and Amer-Indian traditions. There are also certain rituals of *Macumba* magic used in a limited number of ritual practices. This community sometimes uses the term *Candomblé* as well because of the focus on the Yoruban gods (*orixás*). However, for our purposes *Macumba* will be the term used as a more-or-less umbrella term for the variety of Afro-Brazilian religious and cultural communities in the Bahia area of Brazil with the understanding that differences do exist between communities and each community needs to be studied as a special unit.

There is a saying in Brazil: "Afro-Brazilians are 98% Christian and 150% *Macumba*." Whatever varieties of cultural and cross-cultural adaptation and acculturation, Afro-Brazilians remain, from a functional standpoint, within the *Macumba* worldview. As Bastide observes, "As long as acculturation has not penetrated the mentality, or as long as the compartmentalization principle confines the change of mentality to the domains of politics and economics and excludes it from the domain of religion, reinterpretation always occurs in terms of the African values, norms, and ideals (1978: 388)." As we proceed with our five points the nature and necessity for both historical and contemporary adaptation yet foundational preservation of the Afro-Brazilian traditions, values and religious rituals in community context will, it is hoped, become clear.

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<sup>4</sup> This male and female team of priestly direction for a *Macumba* community is not a very frequent pattern.

*1. An overview of the use of religious ritual and its psychosocial function for the Macumba community within the larger context of Afro-Brazilian culture.*

An overview of Macumba religious ritual, psychosocial function and Afro-Brazilian culture can be constructed with reference to the words of an Afro-Brazilian psychologist Roberto Derceao, "There are three words to keep in mind: slavery, survival and deep symbols."<sup>5</sup> In the 1500's African persons, from different areas on the western coast, were brought as slaves to the Portuguese plantations in Brazil. The objective of the plantation owners was, as Derceao explains, to "destroy the communication systems of the slaves at every level: familial, social, cultural and religious. But the white man and the black man communicate and live differently. And this helped to keep the traditions of Macumba alive despite the slaughter and dehumanizing treatment of African men, women and children. Our music and dance provided a way to communicate and to keep alive our hope and our traditions. We survived through our deep symbols of music and dance"

In psychosocial terms, slavery effected a breach between the superstructures and the infrastructures. The African social structures were shattered, the values preserved. "In brief, the superstructures had to secrete a society. The movement is not an upward one from the morphological base toward the world of symbols and collective representations but the opposite: a downward movement of those value and collective representations toward the institutions and groupings" (Bastide 1978: 56-57).

The values and core dimensions of the African worldview existed in the collective memory and through the religious and social rituals of Macumba. Communication of values took place through dance and drum. These functioned as the deep symbols for cultural and spiritual survival during slavery. Communication through African tribal music and dance took place without the knowledge of the Portuguese colonists. Mistaking Macumba music and dance for a means of surface entertainment, the colonists unwittingly allowed communication to continue and the Macumba traditions to be passed from generation to generation. Communication here needs to be understood at every level. As priestess Jupira notes, "Our music and dance and symbols are not split between soul and body. To dance this way will give a message about some need, something to be done, and will also

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<sup>5</sup> From a personal interview, July 17, 1984, with R. Derceao, Afro-Brazilian psychologist in private practice in Salvador, Brazil. All quotes are taken from this interview text.

give us energy and a kind of food inside. There are always many layers of meaning.”<sup>6</sup>

The historical methods of cultural and spiritual survival captured in Derceao’s “slavery, survival, deep symbols,” accurately describe as well the contemporary struggle for survival of Afro-Brazilian communities. As Jupira notes, “Slavery is still here, not in chains of iron but in poverty, political torture and pressure, and a lack of education for our children and ourselves. For a time I tried to find a way to fight all this and not use Macumba. This was not possible for me. Not only is that like trying to ride a bicycle without wheels but more Macumba is life and resource. We need to keep from going crazy here, with all this suffering and dying. Macumba lets us see without becoming blind and do without becoming dead inside.”

*2. The nature and role of Macumba ritual in the developmental and lifecycle perspective, including attention to gender issues and to the involvement of children in the community’s ritual process.*

To begin to understand the nature and role of ritual in the lifecycle perspective for this Macumba community, we must first understand the nature and role of ritual. Recent developments in the umbrella field of Ritual Studies, especially the contribution of Bell’s ritual features, provide a means of entry into ritual experience. These features include: “strategies of differentiation through formalization and periodicity, the centrality of the body, the orchestration of schemes by which the body defines an environment and is defined in turn by it, ritual mastery, and the negotiation of power to define and appropriate the hegemonic order” (Bell 1992: 220).

In the Macumba community established rituals and evolving ritualizing activities (see Driver 1991) both mark and shape psychosocial reality. This double-function of ritual process, marking and shaping, is evident in the four types of ritual or ritualizing activity within the community.

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<sup>6</sup> Quotes used in the text are from recorded interviews with priestess Jupira during the summer of 1984 in Salvador, Brazil.

## Typology of Macumba Rituals<sup>7</sup>

**Type 1.** Containment rituals for initiated and mediums — preparation of initiates at the highest level in the wisdom of the orixás, use of sacred herbs and powers. Inside the terreiro or at designated sacred places.

**Type 2.** African-based rituals of the gods (orixás) — community-wide participation, coordinated with Macumba calendar of holidays and feasts usually coordinated with Catholic feast days. Inside the terreiro, sometimes coordinated with special ceremonies at sacred places.

**Type 3.** Healing and renewing rituals — community-wide weekly participation, focusing on specific issues, problems drawing on the resources of the community's orixá Yemanjá, Yoruba goddess of the sea. Inside the terreiro. Smaller gathering are sometimes coordinated between the weekly celebrations. Smaller gatherings can be at terreiro or outdoors or in someone's home.

**Type 4.** Ritualizing containment for children — meetings organized by priestess with the community's children. Older children meet in the terreiro. Younger children meet outside in nature and on occasion at sacred places.

Rituals of Type 1 and 2 can be considered as rituals which mark events, feasts, communal celebrations. These draw upon and engage the collective memory of the community. The collective memory includes both the intellectual and the motor memories. The intellectual memories contain the myths and sacred stories. The motor memories, stored in the body, contain the rituals, movements and actions. And as Bastide notes, "The more closely collective representations and myths are interwoven in the web of actions, the more resistant to change they will be (1978: 258)." And it is important to note that in Macumba, a primarily oral tradition in itself and as demanded through its beginnings in Brazil, the motor memory (rituals and movements), has had a more predominant role than the intellectual memory (myths and stories). "Myth's principal function is now to justify or explain rites or the forms and types of sacrifices, taboos, and ceremonial sequences" (Bastide 1978: 258). Memories inherited from the ancestral tradition(s) survive to the degree that "they can insinuate themselves into the existing framework of society" (Bastide 1978: 258).

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<sup>7</sup> The typology is the author's categorization based on analysis of field data, in consultation with Afro-Brazilian, North American and European consultants.

Rituals of Type 3 and 4 actively shape the identification and use of community resources. Here the focus is on using the rituals as resources in themselves and as resources for shaping the outcome of a certain situation or problem. Type 4 rituals, with the community children, can best be understood as an expression of the community's preventive and anticipatory approach to development which is itself an expression of Macumba's logic as culture and religion. Here the concerns of individual community members are "acted upon" through the ritual use of shells, herbs, animal sacrifice, trance and other ritual components in community context. It is not uncommon for dimensions of these healing and renewal rituals to become over time a part of the collective memory. In this sense the different types of Macumba ritual serve in the preservation and evolution of collective memory as well.

Macumba's logic, as its rituals embody, is compactly described by the words of Macumba priest Ezechial, "What happens after we die is unknown to us now. What has taken place before we are born is also unknown. What happens between birth and death is our concern. And this is hard enough!!! We use what we have, all that we have, the dance and drum, and the help of the powers to live between birth and death."<sup>8</sup>

Macumba rituals provide a microcosm of Macumba meaning-making. The microcosm as found in the community (terriero) of Ezechial and Jupira is organized to address false and destructive dualities and power asymmetries including: the mind over the body; male over female; light over darkness, intellect over instinct and virginity over sexuality. Through a functional and phenomenological analysis of the typology of rituals in Macumba as practised and experienced in this community the conclusion must be reached that ritual serves as one of the bases, if not THE foundational and developmental base upon which meaning-making throughout the lifecycle is grounded. From a psychology of religion perspective, which will be outlined in points 3 and 4, the nature and function of ritual in Macumba can be thought of as the primary resource for Macumba Psychosocial Ecology.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> From interview material collected during the summer of 1984 in Salvador, Brazil.

<sup>9</sup> Macumba Psychosocial Ecology is a theoretical approach and model for understanding the psychosocial function and consequences of ritual participation. The approach and model were designed in consultation with members of the Macumba community as well as with a group of psychological and medical consultants in Bahia, Brazil.



3. *The dynamics of Macumba Psychosocial Ecology: approaching ritual process as a community-wide process of empowerment and energy-containment.*

The perspective of psychology of religion used both to coordinate the research process and analyze the data builds upon a clinical and theoretical framework begun by the late Dutch-American Paul Pruyser. Central to this framework is the understanding that human, multi-dimensional reality is concerned with three worlds: Autistic, Realistic and Illusionistic. An individual's psychological function is dependent upon how these worlds interact.

Pruyser's framework places religion and culture in the Illusionistic World. Religion and culture, when functioning in the service of psychological health, will serve as creative resources for the tutored imagination. The Illusionistic World can serve to balance the Autistic and Realistic Worlds.<sup>10</sup>

The autistic (inner) world, dominated by primary process, is subjective, solipsistic and dominated by ineffable fantasy (Pruyser 1991: 174). This is the world of the infant and child, but this world does not disappear as the child develops psychosocially. Instead, the autistic world learns to live in interaction with the realistic (outer) world. The realistic world is dominated by secondary process activity, coordinated through sense perceptions, reality testing, logic, facts and external objects (Pruyser 1991: 177).

Interaction between the autistic world and the realistic world comes through the function of the third world, the illusionistic world. In this world of tutored fantasy, orderly imagination, cultural needs, symbols, playing, creativeness, transcendent object and inspired connections (Pruyser 1991: 177) the negotiation process between the autistic and realistic world takes place. Ritual can be understood as one of the primary resources of the illusionistic world which serves to balance the processes of the autistic (inner) and the realistic (outer) worlds. Ritual activity takes place in the transitional space between persons, unlocking the creative imagination, restoring psychological energy and providing active engagement of person in the context of community.

The illusionistic world is the shared, transitional world which has the symbols of religion and culture contained therein. Religious experience in general and religious ritual experience in particular are among the resources of the illusionistic world. Through religious ritual experience an individual joins his or her world as part of a community of meaning-making. The ritual experience together with its symbols and actions serve a transformative purpose for

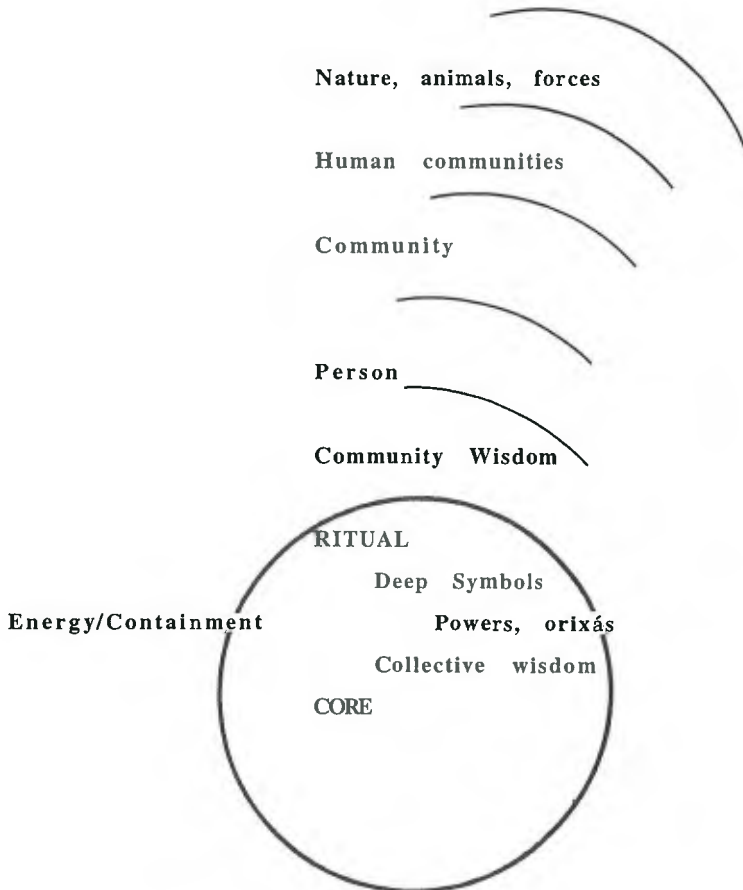
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<sup>10</sup> See DeMarinis 1994, DeMarinis 1996 and DeMarinis and Grzymala-Moszczyńska 1995 for a theoretical development of Pruyser's Illusionistic World in relation to the study of religious ritual experience.

the community, a means by which multi-level communication and organizing take place. DeMarinis 1994: 12-13.

Pruyser's framework is appropriate for understanding the nature and function of ritual in Macumba because its phenomenological and functional means of assessment can be responsibly adapted to the Afro-Brazilian context. As both culture and religion Macumba can be understood as functioning in the Illusionistic World. In this adaptation we need to understand the Illusionistic World's functioning in a model which includes both intra-personal, inter-personal, natural and cosmological dimensions. The model, see diagram below, is termed Macumba Psychosocial Ecology.

Model of Macumba Psychosocial Ecology





At the core of the psychosocial model of both intra-personal development and of inter-personal development, lie the deep symbols, powers and collective wisdom of Macumba, the ritual core. To understand how a person can safely gain access to this core, an appreciation of three operative concepts is necessary. These concepts are: community, energy and containment. In the model diagrammed above, community is featured as two of the circles surrounding the individual person. Community wisdom is needed for access to the Macumba ritual core. Community also surrounds the individual as a means of approach to the larger circles of life and to the world of nature, animals and spirits. Though the individual person is certainly recognized, the psychosocial ecology of Macumba locates the individual within a community context for understanding both intra-personal and inter-personal development. And each individual in the community is functioning simultaneously in the three, different circles of the model of Macumba Psychosocial Ecology: within the circle of community; within the circle of person; and, within the circle of community wisdom.

The concept of energy together with the related concepts of movements and process, capture the heart of Macumba psychology. Whether we are discussing personal development, social development or understandings of psychological or physiological conditions of health and illness, the operative concept of energy is found. In the words of psychologist Derceao, "We think in terms of energy, that is as you say a metaphor for us as African-Brazilian persons, believers, Macumba practitioners and as psychological or medical professionals. Energy is a cultural metaphor for us. This has to do with the way we live and approach reality. It is not the static way of thinking sometimes found in North America. We live and work with movement, energy, dance and drum. Finding and diagnosing how energy is working, where and how things are in balance and out of balance is critical for prognosis and for treatment whether it be in the terriero or in my clinic."

Derceao's words signal the need for investigating energy's function as pivotal for approaching the provinces of psychological and/or spiritual diagnosis. And the emphasis in both provinces is on finding energy's proper balance. Why is the balancing of energy necessary? This leads us to the third operative concept, that of containment. Energy, in the Macumba psychological worldview, is the medium or force operative at all levels and dimensions of interaction. Energy in itself is not neutral, neither good nor evil. The human use of energy or the energies available determines how assessment will be made. In any case energy is in a pure and powerful form which requires, for human use, containment and safe passage. With-

out such containment, which is accomplished for the individual person through community wisdom and participation, access to energy may be lethal, this includes energy emerging from the Macumba ritual core. Community functions both literally and symbolically as the containing apparatus for ritual core energy as well as for other forms of energy entering from the outer levels represented in the model. The function of community containment of energy allows for the process of energy empowerment for community members. A parallel process of energy containment and empowering release takes place within each individual person as he or she, from childhood onward, learns how in the words of community member Maria, age twelve, "to pull the community inside us so that when we are in a bad situation or afraid or something we can use the community strength to stop this time and get energy in a safe way to decide what to do." As Maria's words indicate, Macumba psychology and its operative concepts of community, energy and containment allow for the Macumba Psychosocial Ecology model to operate whenever it is needed. An illustration of how this takes place is offered in the next point which focuses on the psychosocial function of trance in Macumba.

*4. The use of ritual trance and communication with the Yoruban gods and spirits in the development of preventive and interventive strategies for addressing the particular needs and problems of community members.*

Ritual trance, the mystical possession process (*santidade*)<sup>11</sup>, provides an opportunity to illustrate the interworking of the three operative concepts of Macumba Psychosocial Ecology outlined above: community, energy and containment. Ritual, ecstatic trance within the context of Macumba involves a long process of training and initiation. The process continues throughout the medium's lifecycle. The community's priest and/or priestess, themselves mediums, work to nurture the gift and responsibility of becoming a medium. The individual person cannot be forced into this role, but must come to this role by choice. The community members are there to encourage those members with this gift, and to discourage members who may wish to be mediums but who are unable to function in this way. The mediums, several levels are represented in any given community, are the

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<sup>11</sup> The contribution of Herskovits' approach (1952) is assumed here, placing the study of trance in the Afro-Brazilian religious context in cultural context: "By treating trance as a ritual element, this new (Herskovits) viewpoint not only frees us... from interpretations of ecstasy based on the data of mental pathology; even more important, it initiates the unification of the psychological and the cultural aspects." Bastide 1978: 23.

responsibility of the community. It is a two-way process of responsibility as the mediums help to provide access to and translate the Macumba ritual core for the community members. Likewise, the community members need to care for the mediums to insure their safety during the trance state as well as to assist with providing for physical needs of food and shelter whenever possible and necessary.

Trance is involved as a part of the rituals in the entire Macumba typology, with a somewhat lesser frequency in the Type 4 rituals involving children although children as well can themselves be mediums in training after the age of seven. The mediums and initiates-in-training have their own rituals during which strategies of containment are learned as well as developed. Though the entire community is not present at these rituals, the "community wisdom" (see above diagram) is assumed to be present. This wisdom is necessary to strengthen the containment process as the energy of the gods and/or spirits (orixás) is very powerful and the medium needs to be ready to be "mounted" by the god. If unready or ill-prepared, containment may not be possible and both the medium and community members may be harmed.

Let us briefly examine the three-stage trance process which takes place during a Macumba Type 2 ritual (celebrating a feast of one of the orixás). It is worth noting that during the ritual there is a specific ordering of persons in the terriero. An outside circle at the edge of the room is comprised of community members considered very wise and experienced. The next circle in is of newer community members and younger members. Then comes the circle of the mediums together with the priest and priestess. Though there is a great deal of movement, dance and exchange during the course of the ritual, these three circles of persons remains. The three-circle assignment of space is significant for the containing process. When the ritual has advanced to the point that the mediums are beginning the trance process, the priest and priestess as well as the community members in the outer circle make a final decision together with each medium as to her or his readiness. In the rare case of conflict, the community's assessment is final. As the trance process begins, specified community members (yaba) assist the mediums physically by holding them by the waist or shoulders. Meanwhile the community elders and priest and priestess prepare the mediums to "be safely mounted" by the god or spirit. The next stage in the trance process is the giving of messages by the spirit in a variety of open, coded and/or physical forms. The mediums begin with messages to those in the outer circle working inwards. The priest and priestess are frequently the last to enter the trance process and appear to enter it in a somewhat different

manner. Likewise, they are often the last to “return” to the group. In this second stage of the trance process the community members use special rhythms, movements and drum-beating patterns to assist with the containing process as well as to in the words of the sacred drummer José “to help the god or spirit keep moving and not get too attached to the body of the medium.”

The third stage of the trance process involves the community’s help to assist the mediums to return to the group. This stage can have a great number of surprises as the god or spirit may temporarily refuse to “leave” the medium. In such cases the community members try a number of different strategies including special music, dance and offerings to negotiate with the god or spirit. When the mediums and priest and priestess have “returned” the work of the community has just begun. The community must together decipher and interpret the various coded message from the gods or spirits for each person in the community. This is done together with attention to both individual and community problems and concerns. After many hours of exchange which includes both verbal and non-verbal forms, the community members have decided just who will do what and how in both short-range and long-range planning. Analysis of this decoding and application process of the messages from the trance state result in two types of working assignments for community members. There are intervention assignments related to specific problems or situations needing immediate attention. And there are preventive assignments where community members direct efforts towards anticipating needs in the community or larger social context, especially directing efforts to the developmental concerns of children and young adults. Community members often work in coordinated small groups to address these interventive and preventive assignment. Macumba ritual, dance and drum are virtually always a part of the process helping members to contain, focus energy and be guided by community wisdom as they go about the work they need to do. Two of these assignments, representative in nature, are discussed in the following final section.

*5. Fifth, the larger social impact of such Macumba communities through their grass-roots projects for social change; and through the use of Macumba religious rituals and symbols by Afro-Brazilian practitioners in the healing arts of medicine and psychotherapy in Salvador, Brazil.*

Time and space permit us only a brief look at the larger social impact of this and other Macumba communities’ grass-roots projects. Two will be

presented here. Project 1: This Macumba community has an on-going project for a group of former street children (ages ranging from three to thirteen) providing a place to live, study, learn simple agricultural skills and participate in the work of a small farm attached to the housing unit. Priest Ezechial together with various community members visits the children, provide clothing and food for them and coordinate the children's learning about the African and Afro-Brazilian culture. Children are also invited to participate in a specially designed program of Type 4 rituals (see above) to give them a sense of belonging to a Macumba community and for their own self-development. Coordinated with these rituals are special training for boys in the capoeira, and special training for girls in female rites of protection and care for the body.

Project 2: This Macumba community through the central efforts of Priestess Jupira and community members is involved in a region-wide effort to coordinate the healing work of visiting nurses and healers from the variety of Afro-Brazilian folk healing traditions. Several healing teams have been working successfully for the past five years in some of the most needy and desperate areas in Salvador. In keeping with Macumba philosophy, wherever possible the healing team tries to use interventive and preventive approaches in their visits.

Finally, the work of another group connected to Afro-Brazilian culture and religion needs to be mentioned. Through the coordinating efforts of psychologist Derceao mental health professionals of Afro-Brazilian heritage are bringing in and transforming the services of the mental health clinic through the attention to and responsible inclusion of dimensions of Macumba philosophy, psychology and ritual experience. Working in this way professionals are making a significant impact on addressing issues of intra-familial abuse, recovery after rape and abuse, psychosomatic illness and in the treatment of neurotic patterns. As Derceao notes, "In my training I had to place both feet in the Western way, this did not allow me to use the tool of dance in my work. Now I try with one foot in the Western and one foot in my Afro-Brazilian way, I can begin to see and use dance and drum in my work with my people. In the future maybe we can create our own way bringing in the knowledge from the outside ways of diagnosing but healing through the wisdom of our culture and Macumba and Candomblé communities."

## Concluding Note

It is hoped that through this five-point presentation the reader has at least an initial understanding of the nature and importance of community within the Macumba religious and cultural system. In this Macumba community context ritual, through dance and drum, serves as the basic multi-dimensional vehicle for psychosocial and spiritual development. As a researcher permitted to conduct field research and continuing research projects with this particular Macumba community I need to express my gratitude and appreciation for the community members and for their decision to trust an outsider to be present and to be privy to the inner workings of Macumba religion and culture.

## Glossary

**babalorixá:** Cult (sect) leader in northeastern Brazil, popular name, (pae de santo)

**caboclo:** An Indian god. Person of mixed Indian and white blood.

**candomblé:** Afro-Brazilian religion in Bahia region. The great ceremonies honoring the orixás. The sanctuary in which these ceremonies are held.

**capoeira:** African contest and special training, considered also as a dance form in certain regions, introduced by Angola blacks.

**macumba:** African sect primarily in Rio. The practice of magic.

**orixás:** Generic name for the Yoruban deities.

**santidade:** Mystic power that possesses a person in ecstatic trance. A seventeenth-century Indian religious movement.

**terreiro:** Afro-Brazilian cult center (temple).

**yaba:** Cult member who attends those during trance

**yalorixá:** High priestess of a candomblé, popular name (mae de santo)

**Yemanjá:** Yoruba goddess of the sea.

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MONICA ENGELHART

## The Dancing Picture — The Ritual Dance of Native Australians

“How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things!” (Romans 10:15)

Native Australian ritual was to a great extent performed as dance. In many anthropological reports, the term ‘dance’ is used as a synonym of ‘perform a rite’. To say that “the men danced Goanna” means that the men performed a rite pertaining to the mythical Goanna lizard. Even now, dance is used both as a religious rite and as a means to revive and present Native Australian culture for Westerners. The dance is accompanied by rhythmical clapping, short songs, sometimes also by playing the Native Australian trumpet, the didjeridoo. Another important item of the ritual dance is the bodily decorations, representing various mythical personages. Thus, dance, music and picture are interwoven in a significant whole referring to the mythical dimension of existence, the Dreaming.

Two items will be discussed in this respect. First, the communicative faculty of the ritual dance will be surveyed. What kind of message does — or did — the dance convey to the Native Australians? Several types of communication can be distinguished in ritual dance. There is the narrative aspect, i.e., the dramatization of a myth, or of certain social relations, there is an aspect of explanation, i.e., the visual performance of significant conditions, an expressive aspect of worship, and even an aspect of transmission, as when the body of the dancer is thought to mediate divine power to the audience. When a dancer is considered possessed, the boundaries between his human identity and the divine are wiped out (Hanna 1987: 205–210).

This last aspect leads us to the second item of interest regarding the ritual dance in Australia, an issue that has been discussed at length regarding masked dancers in other societies, i.e., the question of whether the dancer is identified with the being represented, or merely performs as an

actor in a play<sup>1</sup>. In this discussion, the very technique of dancing may have some explanatory faculty, at least as long as we are dealing with Native Australian ritual dance.

## The Setting

The religious notion of the supernatural source of every living being was rather concretely expressed through the belief in "spirit children", i.e., the substance left by mythical actors on the earth, in water pools or in certain natural formations to get incarnated in plants, animals and human beings. The faculty of creating life was entirely a property of those mythical personages, the Dreaming heroes, who also shaped the earth, instigated social rules and created rituals for keeping the world alive and nature abundant. When they disappeared they left their creative essence behind to be called forward by men in ritual. Every human being is alive due to a part of this Dreaming substance having vitalized the foetus. Consequently — but apparently this was seldom clearly put — Dreaming powers were necessary to vitalize nature, make plants grow and carry fruit, and animals to bear young or birds to lay eggs. But even if these facts were not always expressed in terms of ontology, they underlie practically all ritual activity. Through his spiritual descent, man is related to the Dreaming ancestors to the extent that prayer and sacrifice are unnecessary in the communication with these sacred beings and their power, as T. G. H. Strehlow points out (1978: 14). This is not a trait special for the Central Australian peoples, discussed by Strehlow, but noticeable in many other areas. The religious duties were not so much to keep contact with the supernatural beings as to administer their powers to the well-being of the world.

Since early contact times, it has been noted that dance is an important and much-liked part of Native Australian life. There are "open" dances (the so-called corroborees) that may be seen by anyone, blacks or whites, and where anybody is able to participate, by shuffling around, or clapping the rhythm. These dances have a desirable social function: the delight of coming together and meeting friends and relations from distant parts of the land. But even in these all-profane gatherings there is always a reference to the Dreaming dimension and the dancers are not altogether ordinary human relatives and friends, as they also bring the Dreaming substance in

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<sup>1</sup> For a survey of the theories of the identity between the mask bearer and the character represented, see Pernet 1988: 123–127.

their persons. Moreover, both open and secret dances relate events in the mythical past, and repeat the actions of the Dreaming heroes, their wanderings and deeds. Thus, the dances in an open ceremony are similar to the secret, ritual dances in content or in technique. The difference lies in the significance of the songs (there may also be special, secret songs to the ritual dance) and the movements of the body, in the selection of participants, and, of course, in general attitude (Berndt and Berndt 1988: 382). The ritual dance brings about more than personal well-being for the people present: it conveys life and well-being to the earth.

One of the most awkward problems of studying Native Australian religion is that so much is held secret of the ritually effective actions. Anybody is entitled to read the Bible, and through this reading get information of certain Jewish and Christian beliefs. But the greatest part of Native Australian religious knowledge is concealed from everyone except those who have got access to it through a personal initiation. This is a central principle in the religious thinking: that religious knowledge is personal, private and impossible — mostly dangerous — to reveal to the world at large. Nowadays, most anthropologists have acknowledged this fact, now and then making small excuses in their publications for not reporting every detail of, e.g., a song, or there are requests for caution in the end paper, such as: "this book should be used only after consultation with local male religious leaders" (Berndt 1974). In some open ceremonies there may be parts closed to others than the specially initiated, and thus everyone else has to crouch down or cover his or her eyes to ascertain that the secret parts are seen exclusively by the select group (Berndt and Berndt 1988: 383).

The theme of an open dance does not necessarily have to be related to mythical events. Recent events or significant circumstances may be commented upon as a dance drama, ridiculous points being stressed. The Berndts describe a satirical dramatization of a policeman, leading some young women, all roped together, to a court to bear witness. Now and then another actor tried to take away one of the girls, but the policeman chased him away, wanting to keep all the young women for himself. The Berndts conclude: "The side play, gestures and impromptu remarks of the actors, punctuating the singing, kept the audience in a state of hilarious laughter for over an hour" (Berndt and Berndt 1988: 385).

However, the mythic events constituted the theme of many of the performances, particularly in secret rituals, but also in open ones. After all, there is a notion permeating the lives of the Native Australians to anchor their existence in the dimension of the Dreaming, which in older days

meant walking the same tracks as the mythical ancestors had wandered, living close to their life-giving substances, and repeat their actions in ceremonies. Today it constitutes the *raison d'être* of the land rights' movement, and in this respect open corroborees can be useful. Like so many other indigenous peoples, threatened by extinction through a dominating Western culture, Native Australians have started a revivalistic movement to show white Australians that they have a culture of their own, well worth preserving and fostering. Art exhibitions are one means to this end; public dance performances are another. Several dance companies have been created for this end, presenting their shows on occasions such as "Aboriginal Day" or "Aboriginal Week". It also happens that the groups come together for a big gathering, dancing for each other, and for the public, just as people used to do before at the big initiation assemblies. Some of these groups have been abroad to entertain people in various Western cities and others assist tourist agencies to illustrate "Aboriginal Life" for charmed overseas visitors. But this policy is in itself a concession to Euro-Australian demands. It implies an objectification of an ideology which did not distinguish between "culture" and "politics", as Western ideology does. In Native Australian tradition, land rights ("politics") and dance performances ("culture") were two parts of the same concept, i.e., man's affinity with nature, and with the land through his Dreaming connections. The inability of Euro-Australian authorities to grasp this subtle complex of notions has forced the Native Australians to present them as objects of "culture", e.g., products and performances, or of "politics" such as questions of ownership and authority (see for example Merlan 1989).

## The Dance

The ritual dances consisted of short, intensive rhythmic and imitative sequences, accompanied by song-lines, clapping with the hands (this could be the only contribution from the women in open corroborees) or with sounding sticks, or in certain areas, the didjeridoo. They were performed on a spot that had been prepared in the bush at a certain distance from the general camp for this particular reason. It was often held that the size and form of the dance place had been designed by the mythical ancestors. In some dances, the representations of the actors were obvious. Some imitated a kangaroo's hopping, or the jerking movements of a small bird, the crawling of a goanna or the howling of a wild dog. In other cases, the movements

consisted of a mere stamping or shuffling, and the characters were shown by the song-lines and the body decorations.

The song-lines referred to the myth of the danced personages. Native Australian mythology concentrates on the wanderings of the Dreaming ancestors, carefully indicating the exact localization of their tracks in the ordinary geography. What the ancestors did on a certain spot was almost less interesting than where this spot was situated. In the Aboriginal worldview, localization was, and still is, the basic notion. "All cosmology focused on discrete, known, observed sites" (Swain 1993: 29). This is expressed in the careful establishing in geographical terms of where things happened in the myths. When the actions of the mythical heroes on these sites, e.g., meetings, eating or hunting together, quarrelling, even killing, were reproduced in the dance, it happened in a stylized way, just as the songs and the dance-place were stylizations of the mythical story. The code was well-known to each participants — but it would not have been so for the non-initiated.

In the accompanying songs the myth was told in highly condensed form. A myth on the saw-fish, rendered on Groote Eylandt to the north-east of Arnhem Land was condensed to seven words only when it was chanted in a dance. Mountford relates:

"The sting-ray, *Imadoija*, and the saw-fish, *Ingurudungwa*, both members of the *oranikapara* moiety, travelled together during creation times.

These ancestors began their journey at Wunda-wunda, a place near a small fresh-water creek in Bennett Bay [...]. Leaving Wunda-wunda, the pair entered the water and, travelling round Cape Barrow, camped at Amataita, where the saw-fish ancestor made a small fresh-water creek. From Amataita the stingray and the saw-fish set out eastward for Groote Eylandt, transforming themselves from human beings to sea-creatures. On reaching the western shore of Groote Eylandt they continued their journey overland, the saw-fish cutting out the channel of the present Angoroko River. Finally, the saw-fish and stingray reached Urulgurupa on the eastern coast of Groote Eylandt, near Lake Hubert. This was their final camp. Today their bodies are groups of rocks on the sea-shore" (Mountford 1956: 33).

The myth was condensed in these words when it was chanted in a ceremony held in 1948 and recorded by Mountford: "saw-fish/saw on nose/rested/ walked/ran/country belonging to saw-fish/sleeps", i.e., the saw-fish travelled to a certain locality, resting and sleeping many times on his journey (Mountford 1956: 33–35).

Just as the ceremonial songs consisted of certain key words from the myth, rendering it in a condensed form, the dance place represented the area over which the protagonist travelled, but compressed. The dance place

does not even have to be in the same area as where the mythical ancestor walked, or close to it. As soon as a ritual has been set in motion through songs and paintings on a certain cleared area, the place is transformed into the area mentioned in the myth. The localization of the place into the mythical geography can also be done by shouting the names of the sites and areas relevant to this part of the myth. This means that a ritual to strengthen a piece of land can take place far away from that special area.

It is assumed that every dance was invented by the mythical ancestors and transmitted to a chosen human individual. This can happen in a nocturnal dream, where the ancestor teaches the dreamer every detail of the dance, the steps, the decorations and the song lines. Then he, or she, has to teach other people this new dance, which may happen at the big assemblies, earlier very often at initiation gatherings. In this way, dances can be spread to far distant areas; in fact, dances have constituted an important item of trade (McCarthy 1939: 83–86). Even in the last decades, the mythical ancestors have continued to make up new dances, and to instruct certain religiously gifted people, also where the dances are not related to a certain land area (see for example Engelhart 1991). Nowadays a dance is first spread amongst domiciled Aborigines in stations or in the small towns, and later brought to larger assemblies. Some of these rituals are connected with new, far-spread cults, primarily in the northern and north-western areas (see, for example, Kolig 1979; Meggitt 1966; Petri 1950; Petri 1967). Dances may be known to a wider public at the meetings of such cults, or at dance gatherings where various dance groups from all over Australia come together for shows, like the big Aboriginal Dance Gathering on Groote Eylandt in the late 80's. But also at a profane gathering like that one, open to whites as well as all kinds of Aborigines, there is always an allusion to sacred dimensions of the world, through references to the mythical ancestors and their deeds.

The step sequences in a dance are very short, lasting for less than a minute, maybe just 10 to 15 seconds. Royce (1977) has discussed "size units", comparing meaningful units in European ballet — which are the steps, "all named and fitting into phrase lengths" (Royce 1977: 33) — with similar units in some Mexican dances, where the size units are much longer. It may seem as if the short sequences in the Native Australian dance constitute the meaningful units. The myth or the event dramatized is split up into small parts, each characterized by one or two special song-words, and a small number of steps, often ending with a confirming shout. The sequences may be more or less clearly imitating the movements of the ancestor represented. Some dancers have displayed a remarkable skill in acting



like a certain animal, to the extension almost of acrobatics. But when, say, the dancer imitates the wriggling of a snake on the ground for a few seconds, while words from a snake myth are sung, and then gets up, this short sequence refers to a walk made by an ancestral snake from a defined place in nature to another well defined place that may be localized far off. It is hardly possible to recognize smaller units carrying a narrative meaning. But the wriggling position itself carries a significant meaning, namely that this dance refers to or even repeats the travelling of a certain ancestral snake, maybe even the Great Snake himself, who is associated with water-holes, rain or flooding and was known all over Australia (Mountford 1978: 25).

Furthermore, each single step may confer meaning through its very style. An organized dance is always a system of symbols, referring to parts of a tale (the narrative aspect) or to social, political or mythological circumstances (the expressive aspect) but it is also always a flow of concrete bodily movements. This rather simple fact tends to be overlooked to the benefit of the symbolic content of these movements. "Since movement is the essential material of dance, it is amazing how little this basic element has been explored in most of the published work on dance," the dance-anthropologist Lange states (Lange 1975: 41). One explanation for this negligence is certainly the difficulty of talking of movements at all. Not until Rudolph von Laban constructed a practicable notation system containing symbols for time value, direction of movement, part of body doing the movement and level of execution (Royce 1977: 45) did it become possible to describe dances of any kind in an "etic" way. However, just as musical notation demands a special skill of reading, dance notation has to be thoroughly learnt before the symbols start to make sense, and I am not going to even try to describe the bulk of the movements in Native Australian dance by using some dance notation system<sup>2</sup>. I will just point out a small detail of the movement complex as being clarifying in an analysis of Aboriginal ritual dance, namely, the steps, which may impart knowledge as to important features of a group's world-view. This is rather clear in a comment to the dance gathering on Groote Eylandt made by the Czech choreographer Jiri Kylian<sup>3</sup>. For Kylian, dance is primarily motion, bodily actions, and to renew his own choreography, he studied the bodily language of Aboriginal dancers. One conspicuous feature is the close contact with the

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<sup>2</sup> Most of the various systems are developments of Laban's notation.

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Michael Frankenstein for having drawn my attention to the film on Jiri Kylian's research, released by Arts International.



ground. Many steps are executed in a stamping style, stirring up the dust of the dance place to whirling clouds. There are various kinds of stamping steps, depending on the theme of the dance, i.e., which ancestral being is represented. Animals and birds are to a very great extent characterized by their movement patterns, their way of walking and turning. In Native Australian learning, there was of course a thorough knowledge of these movements, as can be expected of former hunting and gathering peoples. Hundreds of different ways of walking or stamping had been developed in the various dances.

Shuffling is another frequent feature in the dances. Shuffling means an unbroken contact with the ground, it raises extensive dust-clouds, and it leaves distinct marks on the earth. In a shuffling dance, the imitative facet has been toned down. The steps seem to express other aspects of the Dreaming dimension than the copying of mythic deeds. However, shuffling steps can be united with movements of the arms and body that may have a reference to some special mythical ancestor. Besides, shuffling is also a way of walking and may thus represent somebody's travel over a certain area.

In contrast to the earth-bound shuffling, there are also high jumps. These jumps intrigued Kylian, since they were made without the preparation necessary in European classical ballet, where much stress is laid on airiness, lightness and an upwards direction. Native Australian dancers do not have to "go down into the earth" to prepare a jump, since they are firmly connected to it all the time. Their dance was "something very earthy", Kylian noticed.

Thus, also the very style of the steps executed throws light upon some basic notions manifested in the Native Australian dance. Stamping, shuffling and jumping directly from the ground without foregoing preparation express the tight bonds with the land itself, the land which is a central theme of Native Australian religion, in fact, it constitutes *the* central theme. Everything in the Aboriginal world-view revolves around the connections with land, sites and tracks. The land is not held sacred as a symbol for something else, a transcendent being, or a community, but sacred in itself, as land, as geographical area, as nature, a this-worldly element. The firm connection with the ground is a connection with the sacred dimension of life. Thus, the dance as an instrument of ritual manages to concentrate a whole complex of belief into the movement of the human body.

## The Dancers

Both men and women can perform dances, but ritual dances have in the overwhelming majority of cases been performed by men. Even when female characters have been impersonated, their parts have been played by men<sup>4</sup>. The rituals were mainly a male business, even though it has been reported from some communities in the later decades that there are special rituals that belong to and are carried out exclusively by women (see, for example, Bell 1983; Berndt 1949; Berndt 1950; Chesson 1983; Kaberry 1939). Although men are the active performers, the presence of women is often required, as food providers, commentators, or rhythm musicians, clapping hands or thighs to the songs. Sometimes they have to "witness" a dance in a passive way, crouching under blankets, hearing everything but not seeing anything. Women in a special social relationship to the actors can participate in parts of the dancing, e.g., at initiation rituals (see, for example, Meggitt 1962: 291; Warner 1958: 257; 276).

The dancers decorate their bodies for the performance. Since the Native Australians in earlier times did not wear any clothes, they had no special dresses for dancing. Instead the decorations were painted directly upon the body. Nowadays the upper part of the body is stripped of clothes and painted. Lines, dots or depicting drawings are painted with red or yellow ochre, white clay and charcoal. In Arnhem Land the patterns can be made with thin brushes but in other areas the fingers are used to draw the lines. The decorations can also consist of feathers, birds' down and shells. For a secret ritual, blood is let from an arm vein or from the penis and when it has coagulated a little, it is spread on the body as glue for the decorating birds' down.

The decorating process constitutes part of the rite. The right to wear a certain pattern depends on a man's spiritual descent. He is said to be the "owner" of this special pattern that is said to have been invented by his mythical ancestor, who has deposited the "child substance" that animated him. It is also assumed that the dance that he afterwards performs has been invented by the same mythical ancestor. In the western and north-western parts of Australia the man who helps with the painting should belong to the opposite moiety from the dancer himself. This co-operation between moieties is reciprocal. During the painting, certain song-lines have

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<sup>4</sup> Because of that, I will use male forms of pronouns exclusively when speaking of the dancers. However, the reader will keep in mind that when it comes to the ontological aspects of "double descent", the male form is used as grammatical gender only.

to be sung to call forward the mythical hero that should be impersonated in the dance. To make the ritual effective, the power of the mythical dimension has to be actualized. If blood is used, it may have this mythical power, and in some cases, song-lines also have to be sung when the blood is let.

Other decorations used in the dances are bunches of leaves, tied round wrists and ankles, or held in the hands. In Central Australia, poles could be carried in the dance, painted and decorated with feathers or leaves (Meggitt 1962: 292). Also elaborate head-dresses were used, sometimes even covering the dancer's face and upper part of the body (Isaacs 1984: 62). Some dances demand that the actor carries a string cross on his shoulders. The cross could be made by two oblong boards, lashed together at rightangles. The arms of the cross are united by strings of hair into a diamond-like shape. The string-cross can also be decorated with paint, blood and feathers (Meggitt 1962: 299). Every detail of the body pattern and other dancing paraphernalia refers to some Dreaming character or symbolizes an event in the relevant myth.

### **The Message**

The message of the dance in an open corroboree is often of an historical, commemorative or entertaining kind. The audience and the dancers become bound together by the common memories acted out in the dance, in addition to the general well-being fostered by a social get-together. But dances are also a kind of "infotainment" utilized in the training of children. Teaching the children to dance is an important facet of up-bringing and it can be done at any time at pauses during the day, or at the evening in the camp. In the dance, the stories of the Dreaming events are visualized and the children become familiar with the traditions of their society. Particularly important are the myths pertaining to a child's "own" Dreaming ancestor and the land where he or she travelled, which is the land that the child itself belongs to. Every child, females and males alike, should have knowledge of its own Dreaming, i.e., the mythical ancestor, and learn at least the open dances associated with it. Earlier, the myth, the dance, and the land areas could in many cases be concretely connected, since the myths could be told in the landscape where the primordial events had taken place. Nowadays it is desirable for knowledgeable grown-ups to have a chance to visit schools to teach the black children mythology and dances<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> However, not all schools are co-operative in this respect!

In the open corroborees they get an opportunity to imitate the grown-ups and to train their dexterity together with the more skilled. Their mythological-historical knowledge will be reinforced through the visualization of the events so that the dancing performances strengthen the transmission of knowledge in a nice and merry way.

Though most Native Australians have been forced to "emigrate" from their old living areas into stations or towns, many of them still build their identity upon the concept of the mythical ancestors, who were born out of the land itself. Thus, the central notion of the belief in the life-creating Dreaming powers is locality. Individual, space and myth are indissolubly interwoven in a coherent whole to the extent that myth is almost identical with land, and the human beings are thought of as being born out of the land, belonging to it and being responsible for its well-being. "To take care of the land" is a still acknowledged duty which in early-contact times was currently done, either in the course of the day, or at specially staged ritual occasions. Nowadays, this obligation meets great obstacles, since the Native Australians have been forced away from those land areas that they had to "grow up" and tend. In traditionally oriented groups, however, people try to get out in the bush by truck to perform the reinforcing rites and get strengthened themselves by the closeness of the land.

When the dance place has been constructed according to the directions of the Dreaming ancestor whose dance should be performed, and when the dancers have been decorated according to those directions, the song-lines chanted and the dance performed call forward the situation where the mythical hero him- or herself acts on the surface of the earth. The deeds of the Dreaming characters created the forms of the world and the flow of events, the results of their actions being clearly visible and tangible in the geographical landscape. Hills, stone clusters, riverbeds, waterholes, trees and everything existing are remnants of the mythical characters' wanderings. But these deeds can be repeated by their spiritual descendants, the Aborigines, and it is highly desirable that they are repeated, because otherwise the land would suffer privations. The participants of the rite are the representatives of the Dreaming actors by virtue of their spiritual descent, by social relations or by initiation and as such they are assumed to be capable of duplicating the mythical acts. This creates new life for the land and makes all living things thrive and multiply.

This — to look after and preserve the land — is the main purpose of the secret ritual dances, but in the open corroborees something of this beneficial effect is also felt. After all, there are still the same actors performing, i.e., the characters of the Dreaming dimension, through their human represen-

tatives. The commemoration of the ancestral deeds is a source of personal well-being for every person present and even if the performances are open, not secret, they keep the quality of sacredness that permeates the secret rites. In Native Australia, sacred is not identical with secret. It is a quality that clings to everything associated with the Dreaming dimension, and this dimension meets the knowledgeable Aborigine everywhere in the land and in society. Watching a dancer impersonating the primordial Goanna ancestor, or the primordial Rock Wallaby ancestor, the audience is reminded of the blessed works of these ancestors.

### **Who Is the Dancer?**

This takes us to the second item mentioned in the introduction, the question of the identity of the dancers. I do not pretend to be able to solve this problem at all, since it is a rather thorny subject which touches on all kinds of masked dancing where supernatural characters are assumed to be present. The Native Australian ritual dancing is virtually a kind of masked dance, even when the face of the dancer is seen, which is not always the case. Some dancers have to cover their faces entirely with feathers and in some dances the face is painted all over with clay. But the body decorations dress the actor in a stage costume relevant to the particular dance to be performed, which involves a transformation of his personality into one of the Dreaming characters. The question is: how far is this transformation accomplished?

The body painting part of the rite is said to transform the dancer to his mythical ancestor and to make him a part of the Dreaming, if it is done correctly. This identity is built up partly through the painting and partly through the singing. It can be expressed as to "sing" the decoration on the body by the painting assistants. By this procedure the borders between the everyday person of the dancer and his mythical ancestor are wiped out. The actor in the dance is in fact the Dreaming being, not the human individual (Elkin 1961: 205). This has also been stated by the Berndts: the dancer did not only feel that he played the role of his mythical ancestor, but he felt that he actually identified with this character (Berndt and Berndt 1988: 239). Meggitt has also asserted this: "The people believe that, by performing the appropriate rituals and songs, living men can actually 'become' these beings for a short time and so participate briefly in the dreamtime" (Meggitt 1962: 60). At the same time, he feels his relationship with the natural object that is the other incarnation of his ancestor's spiritual

depositions, and whose movements should be copied in the imitative dance styles.

"Identification" is here not equal to the extinction of consciousness or self-awareness. Pernet (1988: 123–139) has convincingly shown that a dancer impersonating a sacred being far from losing his self-control needs to keep it through the whole dance: "... loin de se laisser aller à son délire et à sa frenesie, le danseur doit jouir de toute sa concentration et être pleinement conscient de ce qu'il fait afin de respecter le pas et les rythmes..." (1988: 132). Hanna's statement that "iconic" dancers, i.e., dancers that are regarded as impersonating some deity, are "found among groups who believe in possession" (Hanna 1979: 41) must be taken *cum grano salis magno* in this respect. Possession is not a characteristic feature of Native Australian religion.

Equality, however, is. The dominant factor of this circumstance is the belief in the double mode of existence. Man is human, different from plants and animals, subject to Nature's laws of growing, ageing and death, but he is also to the same extent a divine being through his spiritual descent. Because of this, every human is a part of the abiding existence of the Dreaming, which is time-less and unchanging. It is this Dreaming-part of the dancer that is actualized in the performance, by localizing the dance place to a spot that had been trodden by the relevant ancestor, by putting on the decorations made by her or him and by singing the song-lines pertaining to the myth. The dancer keeps his human character while acting out the Dreaming part of his personality.

However, spiritual descent is not the only way to partake of the Dreaming dimension of the world. There is also the possibility for an individual to extend his ritual area of action by getting initiated into cults that belong to other mythical ancestors than the one who deposited the spiritual substance animating him. A man with extensive social contacts can get admission to several such cults. The crucial precept would be that the Dreaming essence actualized in the cult is transferred to him through men who already had a part of it, usually men with the right spiritual descent, "owners" of the cult, or, as in the case of non-localized cults, by initiated men. It was not unusual for this initiation to be part of trade or other alliance negotiations. Still, the identification with the Dreaming ancestor impersonated was recognized by the participants and by the on-lookers, if any.



## The Land in Dance

Let us now return to how the style of dancing may show a central aspect of the Aboriginal world-view. The dancer expresses, as has been stated above, his share in the Dreaming. When he dances, he “becomes” the impersonated character. But those characters, impersonated in the ritual dance, the Dreaming ancestors, have a very special connection with the land itself, with the ground and everything that has come out of this ground. In fact, they themselves are impersonators, i.e., they act as personifications of the land, or parts of it. In most of the myths, it is said that the Dreaming heroes emerged out of the land and sank back into it when they had finished their work on it. The sites where they had emerged or wandered or disappeared are regarded as sacred, not secondarily because of the divine presence there, or as memorials of a divine appearance, but sacred in themselves because of the particularly high concentration of life essence deposited there.

In a recent, and extremely thought-provoking work, Swain (1993) has suggested that in the Aboriginal world-view, time is a nullity; creation is nothing that can be associated with any time, primordial or not. Instead, space is the category solely structuring this world-view, the priority of place appearing in every work of art or imagination. The land emerges, and takes shape as walking mythical heroes, who again shape the land, and eventually go back into it. In the ritual staging, this is expressed partly as localizing the place into some part of the relevant myth, partly as making distinct marks on the ground where the rite is held — marks that after finishing the dance will be swept away.

In consideration of this tight constraint to the earth, it is not surprising that the dancing styles have also been shaped in accordance with the preference of place. Stamping and shuffling are a way to express the bonds between the earth and all living creatures, the human beings and the natural objects that they imitate in dance, which both are descendants from the land-born ancestors. The decorated body, the picture, is a reproduction of the Dreaming hero, the dance is the ancestor dancing and the distinct marks in the sand are the tracks of his feet as the world was created through his walking. These tracks, which shaped the world, are repeated by the dancer's feet and thus the world will be regenerated again and again by the marks of his steps.



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## Images as Messengers of Coptic Identity

### An Example from Contemporary Egypt\*

#### Introduction

During the past thirty years the production of two-dimensional images designed to be used in religion has flourished in the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt. After generations with little or negligible activity, enterprising ateliers can today be found all over the country.<sup>1</sup> Many of them are strategically placed in influential convents and monasteries and at important educational institutions. In this production of art, the Section of Coptic Art at the Higher Institute of Coptic Studies in Abbasiya in Cairo occupies a leading position. Under the direction of Professor Isaac Fanous Youssef the section is attempting to develop a Coptic iconography and style — which the Coptic Orthodox Church does not have. Images of Christ, Mary, and the saints are central in Coptic cultic life, but there is a traditional openness to all kinds of styles and the dominant ones are European and Byzantine, well-known in both Western and Eastern Christianity. Also other artists are engaged in developing an especially Coptic iconography and style, but Isaac Fanous and his pupils have received the greater attention and also have the support of official church authorities.

The primary aim given for images in Coptic religion is that of being tools for communicating with and partaking of the Holy World.<sup>2</sup> But my interest lies in the usages and functions which the images have in Coptic life, in

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<sup>1</sup> The movement is presented in Meinardus 1987a: 61–67; Meinardus 1987b: 21–27; Meinardus 1987–1988: 11–27.

<sup>2</sup> “For the Coptic icons are part of this redeemed Creation, which, together with other material objects such as relics, are given to the Church as a way for believers to reach God”. Fanous 1991: 2.

particular how they serve the construction of ethnic consciousness and cohesion of the Copts. Coptic identity is an important issue for the Copts. The images in question are included in a conscious effort to formulate and mediate who the Copts are. Through choice of themes, composition of motifs, and style, the images impart Coptic self-conceptions. In my approach to this transmittance I shall focus on intended meanings. As vehicles of social communication images can have both intended and unintended meanings. Pictorial communication is a complicated process. Both sender and receiver partake of the meaning-creating operation and various circumstantial factors condition and influence it. Communication can be governed directly through explicit verbal expositions of how the images are to be read and interpreted according to the intentions of artists or employers. Such verbal expositions — written and oral — are given for the images we are studying. Indirectly, communication is governed through the contexts of conceptual traditions and usage, and through conventions of perception and interpretation.

I shall present significant features of the particular messages concerning Coptic identity which are mediated through the images under consideration. I shall also discuss some general properties of pictorial language, in an attempt to throw light on the sensitive relationship between the exclusively ethnic and the universally religious (Christian) components of Coptic identity.<sup>3</sup>

Before proceeding with these tasks, I have a few words on the Copts. The Copts are Egyptian Christians. Ca. 95% of them belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church, the rest belongs to other Christian Churches. They are a minority in Egypt, where the majority are Muslims.<sup>4</sup> The relationship between Copts and Muslims exhibits classical minority-majority features. Throughout history, harmony and disharmony have alternated. The Copts are integrated in all areas of social activity but they have often been under pressure and restriction and have frequently felt discriminated against (cf. Pennington 1982; Vogt 1986a: 27–43; Vogt 1986b: 44–69).

There are conflict areas where violent confrontations have occurred, also during recent decades. However, the relationship between Copts and Muslims is more ambiguous and multifaceted than the reports of militant alienation indicate when taken alone. Even if Copts and Muslims may regard

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<sup>3</sup> The word “identity” is here not used to denote a clearly delineated entity, but rather a given cluster of values, some of which are consciously stressed, while others are conventionally taken for granted

<sup>4</sup> There is dissension concerning the numbers of Copts, but they are generally ranged from 12%, i.e. 7.8 million, to 20% of the total population, i.e. 13 million.

each other with mistrust, they share basic cultural traditions — language, customs, even important religious traditions.<sup>5</sup> In values and habits of every-day living, the Copts are more attuned to their Muslim fellow countrymen than to Western Christians. So, with regard to actual life in its broad spectrum the question of identity has great complexity and should be differentiated. The Copts have a Coptic identity but also a national identity shared with other Egyptians. A number of factors decide when the one or the other of these identities come into prominence: the situation in question, social class, place of residence, education, sex, age, personal disposition.

But it is not only vis-à-vis other Egyptians that the Copts feel that it is imperative to profile who they are. The Coptic Orthodox Church is a minority among Christian Churches. Contacts with Western Churches have been slight during the centuries, but since 1954, when the Coptic Church became a member of the World Council of Churches, there has been a markedly extended dialogue. This fact has created a need to accentuate distinctively Coptic characteristics as a Christian Church. It is primarily this border line which the images we are studying imply, but as we shall see, a demarcation in relation to Muslim Egyptians is involved.

Concluding this excursus with an eye on our topic, it can be said that religion is at the core of Coptic identity.<sup>6</sup> The choice of images in religion as vehicles for formulating and transmitting messages of ethnic identity is a natural one.

## **I. Significant Features of the Pictorial Messages Concerning Coptic Identity**

### *a) Suggestive motifs*

Motifs that allude to the theme of Egypt's role in the formation of Christianity strike a vibrant cord in the Copts. Examples are St. Mark, whom the Copts regard as the founder of the Church in Egypt, and the Fathers of the Desert, the initiators of monasticism. (ill.s 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). But the most highly charged motifs in contemporary religious art are those which refer

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<sup>5</sup> In particular connected with the dead, the tombs and the saints' cults.

<sup>6</sup> Emphasizing the need for strengthening Coptic identity is the fact that the Copts can only survive as a religious group through their children: missionary activities are prohibited and every year Christians convert to Islam, in 1982, ca. 8500, according to *World Christian Encyclopedia*, Nairobi 1982.

to the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. (ills 6, 7, 8, 9, 10) The wealth of literature centring around this theme gives an indication of its significance: apocryphic childhood gospels, medieval legends and homilies<sup>7</sup>, and their modern re-interpretations and re-applications.<sup>8</sup> This literature presents stories about the visit to Egypt by the child Jesus and his Mother who, together with Joseph and the midwife Salome, travelled through the country. The theme has crystallized into clear-cut pictorial motifs, easily recognizable for all Copts. Deciphered within their thematic context, the motifs communicate that the Copts have played a decisive role in the genesis of Christianity: the people of Egypt were the first to recognize and welcome the Mother and her Son. Thus the Copts are no insignificant minority living on the outskirts of Christendom, on the contrary, they hosted its cradle. This message is not (and cannot) be read directly out of the images, it is rather released by them — created through an act of interpretation in which the pictorial motifs act like emblems of this generally shared and cherished self-conception.

These motifs distinguish the Copts primarily from other Christians, not from Egyptian Muslims. Egyptian Muslims, too, claim that Jesus spent his childhood in Egypt. Muslim traditions go even further: it was in Ehnas, ancient Herakleopolis, that the palm grew, under which Mary gave birth to her child, according to the Quran, sura 19 (Maspero and Wiet 1919: 28). However, when we expand our conceptual field of reference for the reading of the motifs, an implicit line of demarcation vis-à-vis Muslims can be discerned. Both the attempts of Copts to formulate a special group identity, and the attempts of state authorities to formulate a common national identity, direct attention to the glorious, ancient Egyptian culture — of which all Egyptians are proud. But the Copts tend towards the opinion that they in particular have reasons to be proud, as Egyptians were Christians before Islam came to Egypt and they had inherited important ancient Egyptian religious-cultural traditions. Most Copts also hold the view that

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<sup>7</sup> Armenian and Arabic childhood gospels, the Latin Pseudo Matthew (Graf 1944; Hennecke 1959); Abu Salih 1969: 217–251; the Homily of Zachariah, bishop of Sakha (Graf 1955: 228 f.); the Vision of Theophilus (Mingana 1929); The Coptic Synaxarium. See also, Fabri 1975; Tafur 1926.

<sup>8</sup> Alluded to in sermons and hymns, the legends are kept alive through the regular church cult. They are also referred to in exceptional situations, such as the famous apparitions of Mary at Zeitun in 1968, which have been interpreted as signs that the Mother of God has not forgotten how she was received by the Egyptians, see Zaki 1977: 103; El Masri 1978: 558; Nelson 1972: 98–102; Nelson 1973: 5–11.

they are racially more genuine descendants of the ancient Egyptians than are the Muslims<sup>9</sup>.

This self-conception and the interpretation of history involved are connoted by the popular theme of the Flight into Egypt and the pictorial motifs alluding to it. The world-famous pyramids and temples on the banks of the Nile identify the landscape in which the Mother and her Son moved. (ill.s 6, 8) Their journey through this ancient, celebrated territory lends authority to the Coptic conception of themselves as its heirs: Egypt is being "conquered" by the Son of God; his journey through the land implies a taking over and a re-sacralization. The motif of his sailing on the Nile<sup>10</sup> is reminiscent of the new pharao who, like Horus, comes sailing victoriously on the Nile, vanquishing his enemies<sup>11</sup> and taking possession of his kingdom.<sup>12</sup> Written and oral traditions relate that Jesus and his Mother founded sacred wells and trees all over Egypt, and that the first Christian church in the world was erected in the "middle of" Egypt.<sup>13</sup> In tune with this idea of a Christian re-sacralization of Egypt, the entire landscape can be pictorially presented as a church — with palms and papyri formed in the shapes of columns and arches. (ill.s 9, 10) Coptic identity is at home in a sacred territory. A deep sense of belonging to Egypt has been expressed in Egyptian religion through thousands of years. It can be seen in these recent pictorial expressions of Coptic identity. The close attachment to the land of Egypt is explicitly mentioned by two leading artists, Boudour Latif

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<sup>9</sup> E.g., Shenouda Hanna, Coptic Orthodox priest, "The genuine Egyptians of today are the Christian Copts who alone trace direct descent from the ancient Egyptian races" (1967: 3); Verghese 1973: 56. — The view is naturally provocative to the majority of Egyptian Muslims, who reply that their ancestors were Copts.

<sup>10</sup> According to oral tradition, Jesus and his Mother embarked at Maadi, across the river opposite to ancient Memphis, and sailed southwards. Meinardus 1986: 41.

<sup>11</sup> It is a standard piece of information in the literature about the journey that the old gods crumbled at his arrival. It is referred to by Iris Habib el Masri, professor of Coptic Church History at the Higher Institute for Coptic Studies in Cairo, in her presentation of the history of the Copts. El Masri 1978: 11.

<sup>12</sup> The concept of Christ as the New King is an old, universally Christian tradition, and is reflected in the NT stories about his childhood, e.g. Matthew: 1–2.

<sup>13</sup> According to the medieval pseudo-epigraphic *Vision of Theophilus*, immediately after the resurrection a luminous cloud brought Christ, his Mother, Salome, Mary Magdalene, the apostles, the angels Gabriel and Michael to a place near Qusiya, where the present Deir el Muharraq is situated, to consecrate the first church in the world. Min-gana 1929: 420.



and Youssef Nassif, as having influenced both ancient Egyptian and Coptic art<sup>14</sup>.

The view that the Copts are the authentic heirs of ancient Egyptian land and culture implies a view that ancient Egyptian religious traditions have been continued, or rather, brought to their completion by the Copts. The two most popular motifs in Coptic iconography are understood within this perspective of continuity: Mary with the child Jesus on her knee, and the rider saint (Girgis, Tadros, Botros, Abu Sefein) killing a dragon or another representation of evil power. (ill.s 11, 12) These motifs are traced to the well-known ancient Egyptian iconography of sacred kingship: the pharaoh depicted as the god Horus sitting as a child on the knee of his mother Isis, queen of the sky, or as piercing crocodiles and hippopotami or other representations of evil (ill. 13). Coptic artists and iconographers point out the role played by these ancient motifs in the process of assimilation which produced Christian art.<sup>15</sup>

This evaluation of Coptic religious traditions has the approval of influential theologians and church historians in the Coptic Church<sup>16</sup>. It is an accepted view that ancient Egyptian religion prepared the ground for Christianity, the former religion being regarded as a kind of proto-gospel: the ancient Egyptians were the first people to receive the Saviour, because they were led by their religion to understand his evangelium.<sup>17</sup> It was not a co-

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<sup>14</sup> «Nos premières oeuvres sont très marquées par l'influence de la nature qui se manifeste surtout dans la force et la couleur de ces oeuvres. Il me semble, en effet, que la nature et l'homme reçoivent la vie grâce au même fleuve qui irrigue la terre et l'esprit de l'homme. C'est pourquoi, il existe une continuité entre l'art de l'Égypte pharaonique et l'art égyptien de l'icône, tous deux marqués par un cadre commun et porteurs d'une empreinte profondément et typiquement égyptienne», Latif and Nassif 1991: 45.

<sup>15</sup> In this explanation of the roots of the motifs, Coptic artists and iconographers are influenced by the history research of the 19th and 20th centuries.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., Tadros Malaty: "Scott Moncrief states that 'origin of the Icon of St. George and the Dragon, is to be found in the Egyptian representations of the fight between Horus and Seth'", Malaty 1982: 408. In the following passage from his popular book Malaty brings in the ethnic aspect of Coptic art: "The native group found in the new faith, that is Christianity, the essential elements of their ancient Egyptian religion, such as the Trinity (Horus, Osiris and Isis), and the life to come. Naturally, the Egyptians earnestly embraced Christianity, while many of the Greeks in Egypt persisted, for the most part, in their paganism, so that until the fourth century one could with good reason call the Greeks in Egypt pagans and the Copts Christians", Malaty 1982: 384.

<sup>17</sup> Iris Habib el Masri, "In Egypt, the people were given countless gods and goddesses to revert to for different needs, yet the priests and sages expressed their faith in one God, and spoke of the coming redeemer. They conceived of a triad of gods, and they worshipped the Mother Isis suckling the Child Horus. They, therefore, glimpsed the Light

incidence that Egypt was the land of the Saviour's childhood; it was part of God's long-term soteriological plan. Inherent in this interpretation of history is the view that illustrious Fathers of the Church, like Athanasius, were taught by the ancient Egyptian priests, widely known for their deep religious thought (El Masri 1978: 114).

The images give no explicit endorsement of this assessment of the ancient Egyptian religion; pictorial language is suggestive rather than precise; the motifs communicate the message indirectly, by alluding to knowledge and points of view which many Copts have today.

Ancient Egyptian pictorial motifs can also be repeated and adapted by Muslim artists, but Muslims have no possibility of interpreting these traditions as belonging to a prestige of Islam.<sup>18</sup> Islam has no Egyptian aura for Egyptian Muslims, the way Christianity has for Copts. The Egyptian identity of Egyptian Muslims has no religious sounding-board and lacks the strong backing given by religious authorization. When Muslim artists handle ancient Egyptian motifs, these motifs refer to an all-Egyptian — or even to a universally human — identity. (ill. 14)

### *b) Suggestive stylistic elements*

During his iconographical studies with Léonide Ouspensky in Paris, Isaac Fanous made the resolve to create a Coptic style, different from European and Byzantine styles. The procedure adopted was to revert to the oldest Coptic images that have survived, dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, and to develop their distinguishing features as regards colours and outline of forms, into a synthesis with modern art.<sup>19</sup> (ill. 15, cf. ill. 16) Where European and Byzantine images display brilliant colours and elongated, soaring figures, the neo-Coptic ones distinguish themselves by their sober and solid simplicity. Their colours are earthen — yellow and red ochre, indigo, green out of ochre and blue. Thus a pupil of Isaac Fanous points out that while Italian images paint the Virgin's garment in bright, light blue, Coptic images paint it in brown and indigo<sup>20</sup>. These colours are said to have been preferred by the earliest Coptic painters, and even by the ancient Egyptian

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of Christianity beforehand, and many of their writings run parallel with those of the Hebrew prophets". "Their spiritual unfoldment across the ages led to their acceptance of the New Faith". El Masri 1978: 10 f.

<sup>18</sup> Apart from that, the Koranic view of the ancient pharaohs is negative, cf., suras 28,3 and 26,9.

<sup>19</sup> His art programme is presented i.a. in Fanous 1991.

<sup>20</sup> Jackie Ascott. Personal communication 10.12.1987.

painters. The figures are heavily outlined and give an almost severe impression: "typically Coptic faces are drawn with round faces, thick nose, protruding forehead and cheekbones, large eyes, thick eyebrows. The bodies are sturdy, thick-set, down-to-earth".<sup>21</sup> Again, these are features which artists adhering to neo-Coptic art extensively regard as characteristic of the earliest Christian images in Egypt.<sup>22</sup> Some of the stereotypes used by neo-Coptic art go even further back. Thus the water of the Nile can be drawn in the manner of the ancient Egyptians. (ill. 17)

The extensive and long-lasting influence of Byzantine art on icons used in Coptic churches is generally regarded by these contemporary artists as a degeneration from the original, Coptic style. By re-applying the allegedly Coptic features in their own images, the artists paint images heavily laden with "Egyptianness".<sup>23</sup> One of the representatives of neo-Coptic art gives this explication of the stylistic differences with regard to correlated characteristics of mentality: Coptic iconography is more earthly, concrete, quiet, solemn, since Coptic mentality is more down-to-earth, and this is reflected in the sturdy, thick-set figures which do not have the elongated spirituality of Byzantine figures.<sup>24</sup> According to this appraisal, neo-Coptic art repeats stylistic features which communicate that the Copts are Egyptians in mind and body.

## II. The Reception of the Message

### *a) The role played by the context of usage*

According to current theory of pictorial communication the context of usage has a hand in the production of a given message. The context of usage also influences its acceptance. In particular, religious usage, is influential in preparing the ground for its acceptance by the beholders. Images representing the characters of the Holy World are extensively used in Coptic

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<sup>21</sup> Jackie Ascott. Personal communication 10.12.1987.

<sup>22</sup> As a concept of the history of art, *Coptic* is problematic. It is a matter of debate how exclusively Egyptian the styles of the earliest images actually were, and also, how representative of Christian art in Egypt they were. Important contributors to the discussion of early Coptic art include, Ebers 1892; Gayet 1902; Strzygowski 1904; du Bourguet 1967; Drioton 1937; Wessel 1963; Effenberger 1975; Thomas 1989.

<sup>23</sup> Jackie Ascott, pupil of Isaac Fanous, gives the following summary characteristic of neo-Coptic art: «Art égyptien, art sacré, il incarne la foi ancestrale des Coptes, l'histoire de cette foi et l'exprime dans un contexte artistique contemporain». Ascott 1991: 15.

<sup>24</sup> Jackie Ascott. Personal communication 10.12.1987.

devotion. Images of Christ, Mary and the saints are central in church as well as in the more unpretentious "extra-mural" religious life. The Copts enjoy images of holy persons, and have a simple, uncomplicated appreciation of them. Images of all forms and sizes are found in church, at home, at work, in books, in wallets, glued as small stickers to all kinds of objects; they serve a variety of needs and purposes and are integrated into everyday life, in a natural, taken-for-granted way. This position of images is unparalleled in Islamic piety. They are thus an obvious choice as vehicles for the communication of Coptic self-conceptions. The message is not given in a dry lecture but is conveyed through a medium which is loved and close at heart, and the medium functions in contexts of usage that are exclusively Christian.

There are additional circumstances that enhance the suitability of this medium, such as the fact that the images are used by all types of Copts; the use of images transgresses age, sex, education, and other social lines of demarcation. The images are really a unifying medium: they can express a common identity.

Another favourable circumstance is the fact that there is a generally shared conventional code for identifying the iconographical signs, which enables artists and beholders to decipher this language in much the same way on important points. This is not to say that the heterogeneity of the actors partaking of this process of transmission is of no concern. Actually, it plays a considerable part in all pictorial communication. Artists as well as beholders are socially differentiated; the images are experienced within various frames of interpretation. In this article, however, I focus on a particular collection of pictorial stereotypes and on a particular section of their semantic range — officially explicated in ways that are accessible for common Copts and generally shared by them.

Finally, a special conception of images used in veneration stresses the importance of the message communicated. Such images — *icons* in the narrower sense — are conceived as containing the presence of the holy persons depicted. This capacity, attributed to visual representation, is most clearly demonstrated with images used in church. Images in church are supposed to have undergone a rite of consecration, during which the Holy Spirit is blown into them through the bishop's mouth.<sup>25</sup> It is the same Holy Spirit that is present in the holy person depicted.<sup>26</sup> Copts prefer to reserve the

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<sup>25</sup> Malaty 1982: 298 ff.

<sup>26</sup> The theological premise for this view is the Incarnation, which according to Coptic orthodox thought "made it possible for materials to receive Him. The icon is a material

term "icon" for these consecrated images. But according to reports, any image that is venerated can, under given circumstances, be experienced as effectuating the presence of the holy power depicted. This conception of image lends seriousness and authority to the messages about identity and strengthens their credibility.

*b) The response by the users*

Religious image traditions are imparted to Copts from earliest childhood. Together with associated traditions of beliefs and knowledge, they play an important role in the shaping of the Coptic world. Images that represent religious traditions in themes, motifs, and usage, can be said to belong to the basic cultural traditions that constitute and maintain the community of individual Copts. Consequently, the neo-Coptic images are in a very favourable position with regard to becoming an important medium for communicating and supporting the discussed Coptic self-conceptions.

However, in actual life unforeseen realities abound. The neo-Coptic images are not particularly popular. Their style creates a barrier; it still tends to be perceived by the great masses as unfamiliar. The stylized figures and postures, the lack of facial expressions, the economy of details and colours, can be found "unnatural" and artificial. Correlated with this opinion, there is a tendency to apprehend the popular images as being more *beautiful* than the neo-Coptic ones. (ill.s 11, 18, 19, 20)

Aesthetics have undeservedly been in the background when pictorial communication is analyzed. The style of the images we are studying not only has an Egyptian-Coptic aspect, it also has an aesthetical aspect which can be decisive in determining whether the message gets through. The aesthetical side is important for both sender and receiver in our case of study. However, they obviously do not agree on aesthetical norms. While the large group of users prefer the European and Byzantinesque images, and find them the more satisfying images aesthetically, artists adhering to the neo-Coptic style regard many of the popularly preferred images as banale, sentimental, gaudy, cheap — and the often glaring clashes of styles as witnesses to a lack of artistic discrimination.<sup>27</sup> But not only do they find the popular images aesthetically inadequate, they can even hold the opinion

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object which in reference to the Church, is part of the New, redeemed, Creation" (Malaty 1991: 76).

<sup>27</sup> The lively *pot-pourri* of styles might be taken as symptomatic of the free and uncomplicated relationship which Copts usually have to images.

that the worst specimens are not worthy for use in religious veneration; in short, aesthetical norms are given *religious* values.

Aesthetical norms are an interesting topic for the historian of religions. The experience of beauty is variously estimated in religion. In Christianity there has been a markedly ambivalent attitude to it; beauty has been regarded as a revelation of God but also as an illusion created by the devil. There is a long tradition in Christianity connecting beauty with the Holy World. In Eastern Orthodox Churches, there is a focus on the beauty that can be seen, for instance, in icons. From various quarters, however, there have through the centuries been warnings against the trappings of beauty. A critical stance has frequently been taken especially in Western Churches: beauty can lead away from truth, or, more conciliatorily, is only a decorative shell clothing truth; truth is inside it, or behind it, not in it. "To beautify reality" is a common Western idiom, implying, "not wanting to see reality as it truly is". Also authoritative Copts may warn against giving a religious significance to the beauty of images used in veneration.<sup>28</sup> However, there is no doubt that the majority of Copts experience an intimate connexion between aesthetical satisfaction and the truthfulness of the representation. The Holy World is beautiful<sup>29</sup>; if the image of the Holy World does not communicate this quality, it has a drawback and may not be readily embraced as a convincing representation of the Holy World.

Theoretically, the neo-Coptic images have the best of terms for being a successful means of communicating Coptic self-conceptions. They are authorized by the highest religious authorities; they have influential positions in educational institutions; they are suggestive — their motifs and style are laden with "Coptiness"; their language can be deciphered by everybody. The actual lack of broad success seems to be connected with their lack of popular aesthetic appeal. The favourable terms mentioned have not counteracted this disadvantage. Aesthetical appeal, then, is not something which one can overlook in the communication process. It is the images

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<sup>28</sup> E.g., Tadros Malaty, "Due to the fact that the pagan world of that time was beauty-oriented, some Fathers were hesitant not only in painting Christ, but also in proclaiming the beauty of His countenance lest it should wrongly be related to the Lord's divinity in the minds of the simple"; Matta el Meskyn, «Lorsqu'on regarde une icône, on ne doit pas s'arrêter à sa valeur artistique, ni au choix des couleurs ou à la beauté de la composition: l'icône est, en effet, bien autre chose» (El Meskyn 1991: 61).

<sup>29</sup> Malaty refers to St. Augustine who "praises the art of painting as an action assisted by the divine grace, as he says (Confession 10:34), "The beautiful things transmitted through the souls of artists to their hands, come from that Beauty which is above all souls, that Beauty for which my soul sighs day and night'" (Malaty 1982: 354).



which are found to be most pleasing that will interest the great mass of users.

We are dealing with matters of taste, and taste is apt to change. The neo-Coptic images may perhaps some day be perceived as more beautiful than the European ones by the great majority of beholders. Habit plays a role in such transitions. But an aesthetical re-assessment is not solely a change of taste. It is also a change of perceptual conventions for identifying reality, which will affect the capacity of these images to represent the Holy World truthfully.

### *c) Pictorial vocabulary and normative religion*

The images of Isaac Fanous and his pupils have obtained a footing in the Coptic Orthodox Church. They are accepted and supported by official Church authorities. Not all modern Coptic artists re-formulating Christian religious motifs with a view to the ancient Egyptian heritage have had such an acceptance; George Onsy, for instance, has not. We shall take a closer look at this artist's images, in an attempt to answer the question of why some images are officially approbated, while others are discarded.

The most striking feature of Onsy's images is their daunting combinations of Christian and ancient Egyptian motifs<sup>30</sup>, as is demonstrated in three images<sup>31</sup> presenting nuclear events in the Christian story of salvation. One of the images depicts three ancient Egyptian gods paying homage to the child Jesus Christ. The scene is clearly a re-formulation of the adoration of the magi who, led by their wisdom, find the New King. (ill. 21) They present him with gifts: Horus gives him kingship, Amon gives him the function of mediator, the priestly office, and Anubis gives him suffering and death — the road to victory. Thus the scene alludes to two widely accepted ideas concerning the relationship between ancient Egyptian religion and Christianity, namely, that the deep insight of the ancient religion leads to the birth place of the new religion, and that ancient Egyptian religion has contributed to Christianity.

The second image carries pre-Christian and Christian elements a step further into a synthesis articulating a particular interpretation of the death of Christ. Christ is depicted riding on Anubis, the god for crossing the boundary between life and death. (ill. 22) The road is lined with ears of

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<sup>30</sup> Unlike Isaac Fanous, George Onsy does not emphasize style as an element of continuity.

<sup>31</sup> Published by courtesy of the artist. The images were first made known to a wider public by Otto Meinardus (Meinardus 1987a: 61–66).





Fig. 1. St. Marc in Alexandria.  
Isaac Fanous.

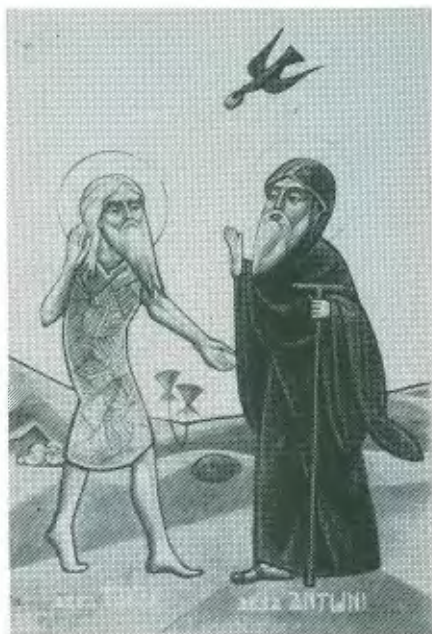


Fig. 2. St. Paul and St. Anthony.  
Isaac Fanous.



Fig. 3. St. Marc in Alexandria. Isaac Fanous.



Fig. 4. St. Pachom. Isaac Fanous.



Fig. 5. Athanasius. Isaac Fanous.



Fig. 6. Isaac Fanous. Photo: Solveig Greve.





Fig. 7. Boudour Latif and Youssef Nassif.



Fig. 8. Isaac Fanous.



Fig. 9. Isaac Fanous.



Fig. 10. Isaac Fanous.



Fig. 11.



Fig. 12. Isaac Fanous.



Fig. 13. Horus spearing a crocodile;  
5<sup>th</sup> century. Musée du Louvre.





Fig. 14. Mohamed Abla. Photo: Solveig Greve.



Fig. 15. Boudour Latif and Youssef Nassif.



Fig. 16. Fresco from the monastery of Bawit; 7<sup>th</sup> century. The Coptic Museum, Cairo. Photo: Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad.



Fig. 17. Photo: Solveig Greve.



Fig. 18.



Fig. 19.



Fig. 20.





Fig. 21.

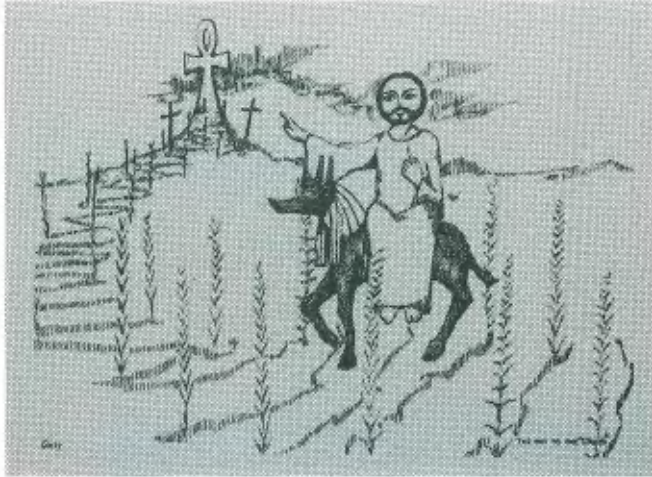


Fig. 22.



Fig. 23. The Coptic Museum, Cairo.  
Photo: Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad.





Fig. 24. The Coptic Museum, Cairo.  
Photo: Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad.

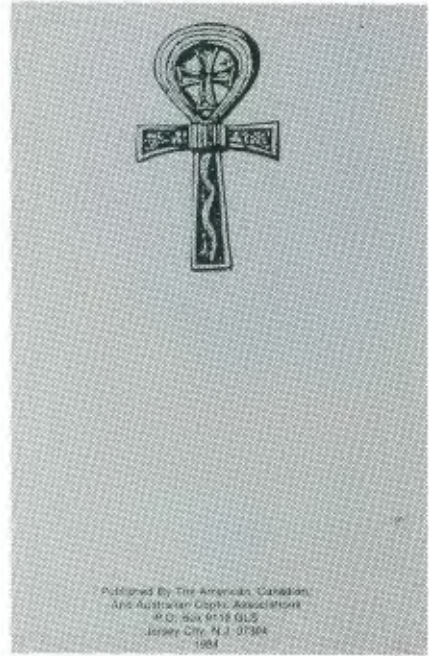


Fig. 25. Modern periodical; frontispiece.



Fig. 26.

corn. They refer to an idea that is found both in Osirian traditions and in the New Testament, namely, that new life arises out of death. In both traditions the idea has been expressed through the symbol of sprouting grains lying buried in the earth. The road leads to Golgatha, on which is placed the ancient Egyptian sign and symbol<sup>32</sup> for life, *ankh*. Even on this point the artist is in agreement with traditional Coptic symbolism. The Christian cross is a symbol with two poles of meaning: life and death. Which pole is emphasized varies with form and religious context; thus a crucifix stresses the meaning of death, as does Good Friday, while a naked cross stresses resurrected life, as does Easter Sunday. The other pole of meaning is always implied; it is a matter of shifts of accents. It is also a matter of general preferences. In the Coptic Church there are few crucifixes; Coptic crosses tend to focus on the meaning of resurrected life. In line with this tendency the Copts, relatively early, took over the *ankh* as a suitable Egyptian variant of the cross, used alone, or in a combination with other cross-forms.<sup>33</sup> (ill. 23, 24) Today the early Coptic *ankh* -variants have had a renaissance in certain milieus (ill. 25). Not only the form of the cross, however, but the entire pictorial vocabulary used in Onsy's depiction of Christ on the road to Golgatha articulates conceptual traditions that are deeply rooted in Coptic soteriology and are in accordance with officially accepted theology.

Also the third image presents the crucifixion the "Coptic way", i.e., stressing the meaning of resurrected life. (ill. 26) It outlines the cross in the shape of the *ankh*. The Golgatha drama is conceived as a cosmic event, another conception that is firmly established in orthodox Coptic expositions of the implications of the Resurrection.<sup>34</sup> But the artist expresses this orthodox cosmological soteriology through an ancient Egyptian pictorial language, by positing the ancient Egyptian *ogdoad* of pre-cosmic creative powers around the cross, in the conventional place of the closest members of family and friends of Jesus Christ. Christ himself is in their midst as the ninth member of the group. This is the place of the ancient creator god, and the position of Christ indicates his cosmogonical position — again an idea

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<sup>32</sup> In my terminology, a *sign* is univalent and its meaning is closed and fixed, while a *symbol* is multivalent and semantically open: new meanings are added to old ones by association and the semantic accent is labile. A given graphic figure can function both as a sign and as a symbol, i.e., have more meanings than it denotes.

<sup>33</sup> See, Cramer: 1955.

<sup>34</sup> In the Eastern Orthodox Churches there is an emphasis on the idea that the Resurrection initiates a transfiguration of the whole work of creation.

in agreement with traditional Christology.<sup>35</sup> Christ's face is drawn as a white circle, eliminating the individual, human features of the saviour and, striking another connection with Egyptian cosmogony, the face suggests the sun disk rising on the hill; this is the ancient symbol of the solar creator having vanquished the power of chaos.<sup>36</sup> Through these connoted meanings, resurrection is anticipated; the crucifixion scene is drawn in a way which connects it with the victoriously coming out of death.

In these three images, ancient Egyptian motifs do not merely exhibit a view on the roots of Coptic religious thought, and explicate the contribution of the ancient Egyptians to Christian theology, but even expose central points of Coptic dogma. Onsy keeps to accepted evaluations of pre-Christian symbols. Nevertheless, his images are commonly regarded as being too extreme; they create uneasiness. What is the reason for this reaction? The question is complex and can be approached from various angles. There is the immediate explanation of the role played by habit. It is not unreasonable to assume that the reaction is conditioned to some extent by the almost canonical status that particular ways of depicting these sacred events have received through the years. The historical framework given to the events presumably helps cement the accepted formal treatment; the events are believed to have actually happened, not only figuratively, and this seems to imply that one should not depict them "as one wishes". But in addition to these answers, I want to take two further circumstances into account. The one has to do with the characteristic properties of pictorial language in general; the other has to do with the functions of images in religion.

Differences and similarities between verbal and pictorial language have long been the object of lively discussion. I want to extract from this discussion some insights concerning our issue. Pictorial language has its shortcomings and its strength. On the one hand, it cannot match the ability of verbal language to make clear, precise, stringent statements; explicitness is not the *forte* of pictorial language. Nor does it present its message in a step-by-step argumentative way and thus cannot be used for discursive expositions. It should be added that without the support of verbal texts, and detached from the governing contexts of established usage, images cannot

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<sup>35</sup> John 1,3.

<sup>36</sup> In various parts of the Roman Empire there are early instances of a transfer of sun symbolism to Christ, a famous pictorial example is the 3rd century mosaic in the mortuary chapel found underneath the church of St. Peter in the Vatican, which presents Christ as *Sol Salutis*.

be used as carriers of intended messages. Left to itself, the image can mean anything.

On the other hand, pictorial language has great connotative power. Images can associate a conglomerate of meanings in addition to the primary ones; their contents of meaning are labile and expanding. Images can easily connote meanings that are not intended. Words can also connote a conglomerate of meanings. But the capacity of words to make explicit statements has the consequence that they are given tasks in religion which images cannot perform. For dogmatic expositions, words are chosen; they can define contents of belief clearly, sharply, unambiguously. Confronted with this kind of message pictorial language has both its obvious limitations and its dangerous sides in the eyes of the guardians of religious doctrines. There are certain areas of Christian dogma that simply cannot be satisfactorily formulated in pictorial language; for example, Christian artists have always had difficulty visualizing basic doctrines like those of the Trinity<sup>37</sup> and the two natures of Christ. George Onsy steps into these sensitive areas of Christian thought. He has put before the eyes of the beholder not only the figure of Christ, but even the forms of alien gods; they are *there*, together with Christ, in the most sacred areas of dogmatic imagination. The highly suggestive constellations of iconographical forms associate strongly with ancient Egyptian religion, and the numerous connotations running in this direction create a fear that the religious messages of the images do not intend to remain orthodox. In actual fact, the meanings generated through his choice and composition of forms may be difficult to control, because the images are not beheld in institutional contexts.

Added to this, there is the powerful representational power of images to be considered. In religious usage, images of holy persons represent a *presence*, and this function makes images in religion into something more than "mere images", and makes their forms into something more than "mere formalities". It should be remembered that the religious significance of beholding images of the Holy World does not primarily lie in identifying signs and reading a message, but in the fact that it is a *vision* of the Holy World. In this vision, a fusion between reference and referee can take place — and is in the context of veneration "programmed" to take place. In visual expressions generally, the distance between reference and referee can be small, but it is especially close in veneration, where beholding the person depicted is meant to be an act of communication. The representation can be experienced as live presence. An intense emotional appeal to the holy per-

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<sup>37</sup> See Grabar 1969: 122–146.

son depicted may trigger off the paradoxical experience that the image is "alive": its eyes, or its hand, or its mouth move, the image bleeds, sweats.<sup>38</sup> This is common knowledge among people who are accustomed from childhood to appeal to saints through icons. Even if the images of Onsy are not icons in this sense, their themes and motifs automatically connect them with images that are credited with the power to evoke the presence of the holy persons depicted. This function of pictorial representation in religious veneration makes the mere act of seeing the anthropomorphic representations of the ancient gods surrounding Christ into a heavily significant act — bordering on a verification of their presence. Even if no Copt "believes in" them, the pictorial suggestion of their having existence on a par with Christ is so strong that it provokes a negative reaction. The orthodox believer (i.e., the majority of Copts) feels called upon to take a stand against the suggestion. The images of the school of Isaac Fanous content themselves with alluding to the pre-Christian gods obliquely, and never through anthropomorphic representations. Take for instance the image of the Flight into Egypt as painted by Stéphane René, a pupil of Fanous.<sup>39</sup> It contains a representation of Thot, which the artist interprets as the principle of reason and equates with Logos. But the form of the god is theriomorphical; he is depicted as the ibis, and rather small, having a normal bird size, not the exaggerated ones that the ibis may have in ancient Egyptian images of Thot. Moreover, the artist avoids repeating the ancient conventional shape of the ibis; his bird is reshaped. It strikes no associations with an alien god. There is no doubt about who are the holy persons present in the image. The artist explains in his commentary to the image that he has depicted Thot flapping his wings for joy at the sight of "God, the Only One, in Egypt".<sup>40</sup> Thus he tries verbally to fend off the possibility that the bird might connote non-Christian contents of belief and suggest an iconic presence that challenges the monotheism of Christianity.

### Closing Remarks

Despite their important position in religious praxis and reflection, images have generally been disregarded by historians of religions. This negligence is regrettable. When the images are left out, a valuable source of informa-

<sup>38</sup> Meinardus 1970: 269–279. When asked, people will readily give examples.

<sup>39</sup> The image is published in René 1991: 28.

<sup>40</sup> "D'Égypte j'ai appelé mon fils". René 1991: 29.



tion emphasizing or complementing the information given by verbal sources is overlooked. Especially when studying a religion in which images are central, as is the case with Coptic Christianity, iconographical traditions and image usages should be included as a methodological matter of course.

The material we have studied offers various kinds of information. For closer study we have singled out information concerning the construction of Coptic identity. Regarded from this point of view, the images guide our attention to a selection of Coptic self-conceptions of particular importance for this identity. The images also make us aware of its composite character. The Copts are a group of people who belong both to oriental Egypt and to global Christianity. This duality is reflected in our images. Moreover, our material witnesses the attempt at joining these two aspects of Coptic identity. As Egyptians, the Copts define themselves as the rightful heirs of a revered territory and a glorious culture; as Christians, they define themselves as one of the oldest and most influential of the Churches — precisely in their capacity of being Egyptians. The deep sense of belonging to the land and history of Egypt is the pivot of both self-conceptions. These are not sharply separated, but are major components of a Coptic identity that fluctuates between exclusiveness and universality. Finally, our material reflects some of the theological dilemmas of this encompassing identity and gives a hint as to the heavy demands made on the artists who try to express it through their pictorial art. Their attempt is a project that requires attentive and careful maneuvering through a veritable field of stumbling iconographical blocks.

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M A R I A N N E G Ö R M A N

## The Necklace as a Divine Symbol and as a Sign of Dignity in the Old Norse Conception

### Introduction

In the last century a wooden sculpture, 42 cm tall, was found in a small peat-bog at Rude-Eskildstrup in the parish of Munke Bjergby near Sorø in Denmark. (*Picture 1*) The figure was found standing right up in the peat with its head ca. 30 cm below the surface. The sculpture represents a sitting man, dressed in a long garment with two crossed bands on its front. His forehead is low, his eyes are tight, his nose is large, and he wears a moustache and a pointed chin-beard. Part of his right arm is missing, while his left arm is undamaged. On his knee he holds an object resembling a bag. Around his neck he wears a robust trisected necklace.<sup>1</sup> At the bottom the sculpture is finished with a peg, which indicates that it was once attached to a base, which is now missing (Mackeprang 1935: 248–249). It is regarded as an offering and is usually interpreted as depicting a Nordic god or perhaps a priest (Holmqvist 1980: 99–100; Ström 1967: 65).

The wooden sculpture from Rude-Eskildstrup is unique of its kind. But his characteristic trisected necklace is of the same type as three famous golden collars from Västergötland and Öland. The sculpture as well as the golden necklaces belong to the Migration Period, ca. 400–550 A.D. From this period of our prehistory we have the most frequent finds of gold, and very many of the finds from this period are neck-ornaments.

Neck-rings are also frequent in finds from the Early Bronze Age, ca. 1000–550 B.C. Around 1000 years separate these two periods. Far later necklaces are mentioned in the Old Icelandic literature. For instance, the

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<sup>1</sup> A similar trisected necklace can be seen on a small bronze figure found in a grave-mound at Søholt on Lolland. This figure is said to have been placed as a mounting on a wooden stick, with a still preserved ring at its end. A bronze cylinder and a bronze mask were found in the same grave-mound. The symbolism and function of this bronze figure are unknown, but it can help to date the Rude-Eskildstrup sculpture. Both belong to the Germanic Iron Age. See Mackeprang 1935: 245–248.

goddess Freyja was the owner of the *Brísingamen* necklace, according to Snorri Sturluson in his *Edda*, written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D (Snorri Sturluson 1931: 38). He also tells that the god Óðinn was in possession of the ring *Draupnir*, from which eight new rings fell every ninth night (Snorri Sturluson 1931: 66).

Thus, necklaces appear in three quite distinct eras: the Early Bronze Age, the Migration Period, and the early Middle Ages. Is this interest of our ancestors in neck-ornaments concentrated on these periods, or were they used continuously during this long space of time?

What meaning did the neck-ring have for prehistoric man? The finds indicate that the ring was not only used for decoration, but served other purposes as well. It might have been used as a sign of prestige or it might have had a religious significance.

A necklace and a ring are the attributes of Freyja and Óðinn. Is it possible to find a connection between these divine accessories and the neck-ornaments which appear so abundantly in the finds from earlier periods? Could such a connection contribute to the understanding of the religion of the Viking Age?

The object of this article is to answer these questions. The starting point is taken in the Migration Period, ca. 500 A.D. and the investigation of neck-rings in southern Scandinavia goes backwards in time through the Roman Iron Age, the Pre-Roman Iron Age, and up to the Early Bronze Age. (*See time-sheet.*) The necklace as a divine attribute is related to other offerings from these periods. The presence of necklaces in southern Scandinavia is compared to finds of necklaces in Central Europe. Testimonies from classic Greek and Roman authors concerning the use of neck-rings among Germanic and Celtic people add to the picture. Finally the finds of neck-ornaments during the Vendel and Viking Age are investigated as well as the necklace as a theme in Old Icelandic literature.

### **Necklaces from the Migration Period (400–550 A.D.)**

#### *The golden necklaces from Västergötland and Öland, Sweden*

As I have mentioned, the neck-ring carried by the sculpture from Rude-Eskildstrup is of the same type as the famous golden necklaces from Västergötland and Öland. They consist of a number of tubes, three, five and seven, bent as rings and placed beside each other. The gold collars are divided in two halves connected by a hinge, by means of which they can be opened. Their diameter is largest at the opening, to be placed on the chest

## Time sheet

Sweden and Denmark	Central Europe
Early Middle Ages 1050-	Middle Ages 750--
Viking Age 800-1050	Merovingian Age 600-750
Vendel Age = Late Germanic Iron Age 550-800	Migration Period 300-600
Migration Period = Early Germanic Iron Age 400-550	Roman Period 050-300
Roman Iron Age 0-400	La Tène Period 400 B.C.-050 A.D.
Pre-Roman Iron Age = Celtic Iron Age 500 B.C.-0	Hallstatt Period 700-400 B.C.
Late Bronze Age 1000-500 B.C.	Late Bronze Age -700 B.C.



of the wearer, and smallest at the hinge, to be placed on the nape of the neck. The tubes are decorated with a number of larger and smaller bulges. Between the tubes small golden plates with engraved pictures, representing animals, human beings, and geometric figures, have been fixed.<sup>2</sup>

The design of the collars as well as the technical details, such as the hinge, connect them to South-East Europe. Holmqvist, who has made a thorough study of the necklaces, finds their closest counterpart in a cloisonné decorated golden necklace from Petroassa in present Romania (Holmqvist 1980: 21).

Two men found the first golden necklace in 1827 at the foot of a steep hill at Ålleberg in Västergötland, while looking for stones suitable for use in baking ovens. The necklace from Ålleberg is damaged and might have been divided into pieces when discovered. It is composed of three tubes, decorated with exquisite filigree-work and a dense granulation. Its maximum diameter is 19.5 cm and its smallest 17 cm. It weighs 620 gr.

A second gold collar was found as soon as in 1860 at Färjestaden on Öland. It consists of five tubes with a total weight of 707 gr. Its maximum diameter is 22.6 cm and its smallest 18 cm. The goldsmith's work is perfect.

Four years later the crofter Johannes Andersson found a still larger golden necklace in a mound of stones at Möne in Västergötland. (*Picture 2*) The mound is only 25 km from the site where the gold collar from Ålleberg had been found. It consists of seven tubes with a total weight of as much as 820 gr. Its maximum diameter is 21 cm and its smallest 15.5 cm.<sup>3</sup>

Holmqvist considers the gold collars to be of Nordic origin and created by three different masters, and he dates them to the sixth century A.D. (Holmqvist 1980: 27–29, 84). Thereby he refers to the understanding of Oscar Montelius, who also regards them as local products, but created during the fifth century A.D. (Montelius 1912: 11–12). Holmqvist suggests that the magnificent collars might have been part of the king's/priest's equipment (Holmqvist 1980: 99).

These necklaces are all stray finds from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As the detailed circumstances around the discoveries are not known, they cannot contribute to the understanding of their original use.

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<sup>2</sup> Holmqvist 1980 and Lamm 1991 both give accurate descriptions of the appearance and construction of the necklaces. Lamm 1991 tries to construct a system by means of which one can orient oneself among the motives.

<sup>3</sup> Concerning the history of the finds see Holmqvist 1980: 10–11.

*Köinge, Halland, Sweden*

The collars from Öland and Västergötland are not the only ones of their kind. At Köinge in Halland fragments have been found of a still larger necklace of the same type. These fragments indicate that its diameter was ca. 30 cm. According to Holmqvist it is unlikely to have been used by a human being, because of its size. He is more inclined to think that it was created for a god, like the collars from Västergötland and Öland (Holmqvist 1980: 17).<sup>4</sup>

*Hannenov, Falster, Denmark*

The Swedish rings have counterparts on Danish territory. In 1937 a farmer, ploughing a field at Hannenov on the island of Falster, found a thick golden ring with alternating large and small bulges. (*Picture 3*) The ring has a diameter of 24–25 cm and weighs 526.3 gr. Its gold content is 84%. It is abundantly ornamented with filigree-work and decorated with animal figures. Like its Swedish counterparts it is considered to be a local product. The style of the animal figures, which is interesting from a historical point of view, indicates, according to Brøndsted, that the ring was created during the first half of the fifth century A.D. Munksgaard, however, dates it prior to ca. 500 A.D. The meadow where the Falster collar was found was a bog in prehistoric times, and the neck-ring was probably deposited there as an offering.<sup>5</sup>

*Hjallelse, Fyn, Denmark*

In all essentials, the Hannenov ring resembles another necklace from Hjallelse, situated south of Odense on the island of Fyn, which was found the year before, in 1936. (*Picture 4*) The ring from Hjallelse was also found during ploughing and was damaged by the plough. It is made of one big tube, equipped with bulges of different thickness. It is decorated with stars and suns, triangles and pairs of curves. The hinge and the end of the tube are missing, although the ring was probably complete when found. Its inner diameter is 36–37 cm and its weight 459 gr. Its gold content is 90%.

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<sup>4</sup> Montelius, in his day, however, argued that the size of the ring should indicate its use as a belt and not as a collar. See Montelius 1912: 12–13.

<sup>5</sup> For investigations of the Hannenov ring see Brøndsted 1938 and Munksgaard 1952. Even Holmqvist 1980 has a discussion of the Danish rings in relation to the Swedish necklaces.

Brøndsted and Munksgaard both date the necklace from Hjallelse back to the beginning of the Germanic Iron Age.<sup>6</sup>

*Other neck-rings from 400–550 A.D.*

In addition to the neck-rings discussed above, some 50 large rings, mainly from Denmark and Sweden, but also from southern Norway and northern Germany, have been dated to the same period, 400–550 A.D. Among these, two types can be discerned. One type is made of a single golden bar, thinner at the back and thicker at the front, where the two thick ends are crossed over each other to some length. This kind of ring, which cannot be opened, must be wide enough to be put on over the head.

Two rings of this type have been found in Skåne. Both of them are heavier than the magnificent golden rings from Västergötland and Öland. One of these was found slightly more than one meter below the ground south of Højeå at Trolleberg near Lund, while digging a ditch. (*Picture 5*) This golden ring has an outer diameter of 23.2 cm and a weight of 1.255 kg. The other necklace of the same type was discovered at Ryd in the parish of Skabersjö, in connection with ploughing. Its diameter is 23 cm and its weight 967 gr., slightly smaller than the ring from Trolleberg (Strömberg 1963: 76–79).

At Bragnum in the parish of Floby in Västergötland another ring was found which is very similar to these two rings from Skåne. Its maximum inner diameter is 20 cm and its weight 827.7 gr. It is made of solid gold and decorated with crescent-shaped stamp ornaments. Montelius dates this ring to the second half of the fifth century A.D., as well as the two necklaces of the same type from Skåne. As an argument for this he points out that several rings of this type have been found together with Roman and Byzantine *solidi*, i.e. gold coins from the fifth century, or together with other objects belonging to this time (Montelius 1912: 10). The largest Danish neck-ring of this type originates from Øland on Limfjorden. It weighs ca. 1 kg.

The other type of neck-ring can be opened and is made of two thin golden bars. Several neck-rings of this kind are often found together. This is, for

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<sup>6</sup> Concerning the ring from Hjallelse see Brøndsted 1938 and Munksgaard 1952. An almost exact counterpart to this ring, although made of bronze, was found in Malax in Finland. This ring, however, has no stamped ornaments. The Danish and Swedish rings are stray finds. Unlike to this, the necklace from Malax was found in a grave. Concerning the ring from Malax and other similar rings from Finland, see Kivikoski 1947: Taf. 30: 233, Taf. 31: 236.

instance, the case with the find from Frær in Himmerland, Denmark, where five rings were discovered together.

### *Discussion*

A great number of neck-rings have been found in the ground or in peat-bogs. Several types of necklaces can be discerned. Their function has been a subject of discussion. Brøndsted is ambivalent between interpreting them as offerings to the gods or as hidden treasures. He points out that uncoined gold was the standard of value of this time, but he considers it most likely that the undamaged neck-rings should be understood as offerings (Brøndsted 1929: 67–68).

Holmqvist is more detailed in his interpretation of the three golden collars from Västergötland and Öland. He considers it possible to discern a programme in the construction of the necklaces, and he regards them as carriers of a message, expressed in pictures. It is, he claims, plausible that they “were made in a surrounding where astrological ideas were common and where magical opinions connected to runes and numbers played a crucial part in people’s world-view, in fact in their way of living in general” (Holmqvist 1980: 98; my translation). Holmqvist points out that people in southern Scandinavia had good connections with the tribes of southern and western Europe, and he presumes that they were influenced by their conceptions. Hence, for the interpretation of the neck-rings we must take into account “not only the narrow Nordic aspect, but the spiritual current of the time as a whole” (Holmqvist 1980: 99; my translation). He further hints at the possibility that the collars were part of the priest’s/king’s equipment and that they might have been used as “a kind of shamanistic instrument, a counterpart to the troll-drums of the Laps” (Holmqvist 1980: 99; my translation). Holmqvist is of the opinion that the golden collars were worn by men, and he rejects the idea that they might have been used as women’s jewellery.

In my opinion several reasons indicate that a number of neck-rings had a ceremonial function during the Migration Period. One reason is their often considerable dimensions. The diameters of the golden collars from Västergötland and Öland are, respectively, 19.5 cm, 21 cm, and 22.6 cm. The remaining fragments of the collar from Köinge indicate that it had a diameter of ca. 30 cm. The ring from Hannenov measures 24–25 cm, while the ring from Hjallelse has an inner diameter of no less than 36–37 cm.

A further argument that the neck-rings from the Migration Period had a ceremonial function is the costly material, gold. A golden neck-ring repre-

sented a fortune. For the gold alone needed to produce the Hannenov ring, with a weight of 526.3 gr., it would have been possible to buy 7.5 tons of wheat in the Roman empire during the fifth century.<sup>7</sup> In order to understand the importance of this, one must keep in mind that agriculture was almost entirely manual, so that a certain amount of food required many times more work than today.

Many rings from this time are the work of a precise and extremely qualified goldsmith, and they have an overwhelming beauty. To a very great extent this applies to the golden collars from Västergötland and Öland, but they are not unique. Several other neck-rings are the result of a highly developed craftsmanship. In the presentation above I have offered many examples of this. The golden neck-rings are the results of very great investments, not only in raw material, but also in work expended.

The wooden sculpture from Rude-Eskildstrup supports the view that the neck-rings from the Migration Period had not only a ceremonial use in general, but also a sacred function, as this figure most likely represents a god. I shall give some arguments to support this view.

My first argument is that the wooden statue was found in a peat-bog. Bogs and wetlands were in prehistoric times used as places for cult, and they were often cult centres of whole regions for considerable periods. This is evident from the fact that great numbers of weapons of different kinds, jewellery, coins, tools, etc., from far different periods have been found in the same peat-bog. The objects have often been folded or torn to pieces, sometimes even damaged by fire.

Their locations sometimes indicate that they were thrown into the water from the same place on the shore. In this case they are lying together in a fan-shaped form. Sometimes they were dropped into the water from boats. In some cases the objects were sorted according to their function before being packed together in bundles and submerged. The custom of making offerings in bogs and wetlands can be found from the Neolithic Period and well into the Iron Age, reaching its peak during the Iron Age. For this reason finds from peat-bogs are usually interpreted as offerings.<sup>8</sup>

My second argument is that the wooden statue was placed *standing* in the bog. This indicates that the sculpture was considered to be or to repre-

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<sup>7</sup> The Hannenov ring has a gold content of 84%. One solidus, the Roman gold coin, had a weight of 4.55 gr. pure gold. Klindt-Jensen 1957, who gives interesting information concerning the economic circumstances in the Roman empire during the Migration Period, states that one could buy 78 kg of wheat for one solidus. See Klindt-Jensen 1957: especially 144.

<sup>8</sup> Extensive research supports this view. For some examples, see Görman 1987: 131.

sent the god who reigned over the place. It can hardly be interpreted as an offering.

The strange object, resembling a sack, which he holds on his knee constitutes a third reason to conceive this figure as a god. Scholars have found this object difficult to understand. I should like to point out, however, that this is precisely the way fertility gods were depicted in Central Europe during the first centuries A.D. An excellent example can be seen in *picture 16*, which represents the Celtic god Cernunnos with a similar sack in his arms. The sack, from which a stream of coins is flowing, is a symbol of fertility.

Thus, there are good reasons to believe that neck-rings had a sacred function during this period of time. But, as we shall soon see, this is not an innovation in the Migration Period, but is based on an older tradition.

As I have mentioned, the neck-ring has often been understood as a piece of jewellery and as a sign of dignity. This could be regarded as an understanding, which excludes the interpretation of it as having a sacred function. In my view, however, that would be an anachronistic way of transferring a modern interpretation of the relation between sacred and profane to past times. In our secularized environment, religion is often regarded as a separate sphere, distinguished from other parts of human life. This view deviates from the understanding of religion common in other times and societies. In past times questions people asked about life and death were expressed in religious beliefs and actions, and religion permeated all social life.

### **Neck-rings from the Roman Iron Age (0–400 A.D.)**

#### *Skedemosse, Öland, Sweden*

Numerous of finds were made when Skedemosse, the largest fen on Öland, was excavated in 1959–1962 under the leadership of the Swedish archaeologist Ulf Erik Hagberg. The finds consist mainly of weapons of different kinds, and bones from animals and men, but the most impressive discovery was a gold hoard with a total weight of 1.3 kg. This hoard consists of seven heavy golden rings, each weighing between 174.8 gr. and 204.5 gr. Six of these neck- or arm-rings were found within an area of 225 square meters. They are all of the same style, the snake-head type with profiled end knobs. The seventh ring, which was found earlier in the same area, is of a simpler kind. None of the rings show any traces of having been worn. For this reason Hagberg wonders whether they may have been produced for the



purpose of being offered. A common trait of all these rings is that they have been exposed to deliberate damage. They have been rolled up and some of them show signs of fire. Consequently, the people who once offered these rings in the lake, which has in the course of time turned into a fen, first subjected them to the same violent destruction that characterizes many objects from the Bronze and Iron Age found in peat-bogs.<sup>9</sup>

Hagberg dates the neck- or arm-rings to the third or fourth century A.D., i.e. to the Roman Iron Age. The bulk of the finds, however, belong to the whole period from 200 to 500 A.D. This means that Skedemosse served as a place of sacrifice for a long time. Hagberg himself considers Skedemosse to be the holy place of a tribe where religious acts were performed continuously.

### *Havor, Gotland, Sweden*

In 1961 the ring fort of Havor in Hablingbo parish in the south of Gotland was excavated. This fort is situated on the south shore of a former lake, now a peat-bog called Mästermyr. On the very first day of the excavation a sensational find was made in the inner part of the wall of the fort, built from mould and stones. In the wall a well kept bronze situla was found standing. It contained a large golden ring—a torc. (*Picture 6*) A torc is a Celtic neck-ring which is almost fully closed. In the situla were also found a wine ladle and a strainer, kept together with a leather strap, and below them a few drop-shaped bronze bells and three more wine ladles. Finally, a bronze ring was found, the function of which was not understood at first. At last, however, it was realized that the bells had been fastened to the bronze ring with strong leather straps. Together they had formed a kind of rattle. Most of the bronze objects originate from the Roman area or from the Roman provinces.

The gold ring itself has a diameter of slightly more than 24 cm. Its two end knobs, each with a diameter of five cm, are united with an ingenious locking device. Adjacent parts are covered with abundant ornaments in filigree and granulation technique. Each end section is decorated with stylized cow or bull heads, face to face with each other.

Erik Nylén, who was the archaeologist responsible for the excavation, dates the golden torc to the years around the beginning of our chronology, or slightly later. And further, he finds it credible that it was produced in the Black Sea region. His main argument for this is the fact that three very

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<sup>9</sup> The finds from Skedemosse are described and discussed in Hagberg 1967, the golden rings above all in Hagberg 1967/1: 52–53 and Hagberg 1967/2: 9–12.

close counterparts to the ring from Havor are known from southern Russia. Two of these originate from a hoard in Kiev, and one of them from a grave in Olbia. However, he does not want to exclude the possibility that the Havor ring is of Nordic origin.

Nylén interprets the remarkable find as a temple hoard, i.e. articles of great value belonging to a temple. In connection with this he emphasizes that our knowledge of the former function of the ring forts is very limited. They may very well have been used both as havens of refuge and as places for cult. Counterparts to the rattle are known from the Roman province, where they were used in the cult. The large gold ring shows no traces of wear. This fact, together with its size, its material, and the circumstances under which it was found, indicates that the gold torc once had a sacred function. Nylén himself considers it to have been an adornment for a god (Nylén 1962: 94–111; Nylén 1967-68: 50–52).

The find from Havor originates from the first part of the Roman Iron Age. The gold hoard from Skedemosse dates to the second part of the Roman Iron Age. Many other abundant finds of golden objects, dating from the Roman Iron Age, have been made in southern Scandinavia, mainly on current Swedish territory, although the greatest number of golden finds have been dated to the Migration Period.<sup>10</sup>

### *Neck-rings as divine attributes on some cauldrons*

#### *The cauldron from Gundestrup, Jylland, Denmark*

Several neck-rings of the same type as the rings from Havor and Dronninglund,<sup>11</sup> i.e. torcs, are found on the enormous silver cauldron from Gundestrup in Vesthimmerland. (*Picture 7*) Like the torcs this cauldron is now generally dated to the years around the beginning of our time. However, there has been great disagreement on this matter, and different scholars have dated it from the third century B.C. to the third century A.D.

The Gundestrup cauldron, which has a diameter of ca. one meter, was found in a small peat-bog called Rævemosen. Once it had been placed there quite openly on a strong moss surface, after having been divided into pieces. It consists of a number of silver plates, with chased, partly gilded busts of Celtic gods and goddesses, and pictorial scenes, probably repre-

<sup>10</sup> Many other examples of golden necklets from the Roman Iron Age are described by Stenberger 1964: 417–420 and Brøndsted 1960: 195.

<sup>11</sup> The ring from Dronninglund is discussed below under the heading “Necklaces from the Pre-Roman Iron Age”.

senting offerings. As many as ten of the gods wear torcs. In addition, one of these gods, Cernunnos, is holding a torc in one of his hands. One of the goddesses is wearing a neck-ring which almost completely corresponds to the above mentioned ring from Olbia. This ring is a close counterpart to the torcs from Havor and Dronninglund.

The place of origin of this silver bowl has been the subject of discussion, as has its dating. Some scholars have looked for its origin in the eastern part of the Celtic area, others in the western part.<sup>12</sup> It has also been argued that the cauldron could have been produced in Scandinavia, by Sophus Müller as early as 1892 (Müller 1892: 61), and later by Erik Nylén. The latter argues that the cauldron is a local product, created by Thracian silversmiths in the Celtic style. To support this interpretation he points to a number of finds from Denmark and Sweden of similar cauldrons, as well as face masks and statuettes made by a similar technique and style (Nylén 1967-68: 133-166).

#### *The cauldron from Rynkeby, Fyn, Denmark*

A vigorously modelled female head, surrounded by two bull heads, is reproduced on another large bronze cauldron from Rynkeby. (*Picture 8*) It is generally understood as a goddess. This vessel was once placed on a strong surface in Illemosen, a peat-bog near Rynkeby on the island of Fyn. As time went on, it sank into the bog. Before it was set out on the moss it was divided into pieces, but it is estimated to have had a diameter of ca. 70 cm and held ca. 600 litres (Müller 1933: 42-44; Albrechtsen 1990; Mortensen 1991: 375).

#### *Discussion*

In Skedemosse weapons, coins, and pearls have been found, as well as many other things. The bulk of the findings, however, consists of several tons of animal bones. This indicates that great numbers of animals were offered to the gods on this place. Skedemosse has become famous, above all because the Skedemosse finds are the biggest collection of gold ornaments ever found in Sweden.

Skedemosse is strategically situated on the centre of the isle of Öland. There is good reason to understand it as the central holy place of a whole district, as Ulf Erik Hagberg does. Consequently, the expensive neck-rings

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<sup>12</sup> An origin in the eastern area is advocated, for instance by Drexel 1915, and in the western area, for instance by Arbman 1948 and Klindt-Jensen 1961.

should probably be interpreted as offerings. This interpretation is also supported by the destruction they have been exposed to.

With no doubt I can agree with Erik Nylén, who understands the find from Havor as a treasure belonging to a temple. The size of the ring, its material, as well as the magnificent handiwork, indicate its sacred use. Its size is remarkable, as it is a torc. Characteristic of such rings is that they were worn tightly fitting round the neck. Even the circumstances around the finding support a religious interpretation.

The silver cauldron from Gundestrup is decorated with a number of gods and goddesses. There is general agreement that these busts represent a Celtic pantheon, with one of them depicting a god with the same attributes as the Celtic god Cernunnos. He is characterized by his sitting pose, by his antlers, and by the snake with the head of a ram. He is wearing a torc around his neck and he is holding another one in his hand. This picture of Cernunnos indicates that the torc was a divine attribute in the Celtic world at this time.

It is a matter of discussion whether these cauldrons are local products or imported objects. If they were produced in Scandinavia, they may represent local deities. If they are imported objects or produced by imported foreign craftsmen, they may represent gods worshipped on the continent. In any case they were used here in religious rites.

To sum up: During the Roman Iron Age neck-rings were used as offerings. There is also good reason to believe that during this period they were used as divine attributes. This interpretation is supported by the busts of deities on the vessels from Gundestrup and Rynkeby, who are provided with torcs, and by the ring from Havor.

Now, did the neck-ring have a religious use during the previous period, i.e. the Pre-Roman Iron Age, as well?

### **Neck-ornaments from the Pre-Roman Iron Age (500 B.C.-0)**

#### *Dronninglund, Vendsyssel*

One single neck-ring of the same kind as the Havor ring was found in a peat-bog near Dronninglund in Vendsyssel, ca. 0.9 m below the ground. (*Picture 9*) The ring from Dronninglund is a torc, with a diameter of 16 cm and a weight of 613 gr. Like its later counterpart from Havor, it is made of gold with hollow end knobs, but unlike the Havor ring, it is solid. The locking systems of the two rings are similar, but the decoration techniques are slightly different (Müller 1900: 140–143; Brøndsted 1960: 73–74).

Sophus Müller believes the origin of the Dronninglund ring to be southern Russia, with reference to a similar find from Smyela close to Kiev, and another from Olbia on the Black Sea (Müller 1900: 142).

### *Smederup, Jylland, Denmark*

The torc from Dronninglund belongs to the Pre-Roman Iron Age. From this time originates also the large find of rings from Smederup Mose, five km south-east of Odder on Jylland. (*Picture 10*) This little peat-bog, covering an area of not more than 80x200 m., is a typical bog used for offerings. In 1942 a few farm-hands were digging out peat in this bog, when they found some standing boards. It appeared that they were part of a well, made from robust oak planks. The well was filled with small stones and potsherds from 14 pots. The find has been dated to the early Pre-Roman Iron Age. A few years later a find of more than 300 bronze rings was made close to this well. These rings are neck-rings, arm-rings, and loop rings. Most of them have been well kept, although some of them show signs of fire. Two neck-rings were bent together and fastened to each other being put down in the bog.

These two finds from Smederup are regarded as offerings. The objects seem to belong to the same period, but it is unclear whether they were laid down on one and the same occasion. A similar find, consisting of ca. 120 thin neck- or arm-rings, has been discovered in a peat-bog called Sattrup Mose, only about 30 km from the Smederup find.<sup>13</sup>

### *Neck-rings with reversed twist*

A common form of neck-ring during the first part of the Iron Age as well as the latest part of the Bronze Age is a twisted ring, where the twist is reversed several times (Oldsager 1979: 207). These rings were worn in pairs and they are often found in pairs. The fact that they are found in pairs proves that these ornaments are not lost properties but deliberate offerings in lakes and bogs.

One find of this type of neck-ring originates from a Danish peat-bog called Hallenslev Mose at Høng on the island of Sjælland. Two rings with reversed twist were found lying above each other, ca. one meter down, close to the border of the large bog. Distinct marks of wear indicate that they were carried together (Müller 1917: 162-163).

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<sup>13</sup> Concerning the finds from Smederup and Sattrup see Vebæk 1944: 21-28.

The majority of these sometimes very heavy neck-rings with reversed twist were worn, but pure votive rings have also been found. The fact that they are not intended for wearing is evident, as they cannot be opened, while they are too small to be put on over the head, even for a half-grown person. It is a common interpretation that they were produced only for the purpose of being offered (Brøndsted 1958: 237; Müller 1917: 165–166).

Another common type of ring from the Pre-Roman Iron Age is the torc with ball shaped terminals. Its end knobs are decorated in Celtic style, with small bulges or triangular motifs. Neck-rings of this type have been found in eastern Denmark, in southern and central Sweden and in Norway. In the central parts of Sweden they have been found in graves, while especially on Danish territory they have been discovered in peat-bogs (Kaul 1991: 540).

### *Discussion*

From the Pre-Roman Iron Age a number of neck-rings have been found, which evidently were offered. This proves that sacrifices of neck-rings were no innovation during the Roman Iron Age but existed in Pre-Roman time as well. Some finds from the Pre-Roman Iron Age are characterized by their large number of rings. This is typical of the finds from Smederup and Sattrup, and it distinguishes the Pre-Roman period from later periods. From this time as well as in later periods we find neck-rings which were evidently not intended to be worn. They might instead have been produced in order to be used in the cult.

But when did this custom of laying down neck-rings as offerings begin?

### **Neck-rings from the Late Bronze Age (1000–500 B.C.)**

In the Late Bronze Age it was a custom for women to adorn themselves with collars. During the middle period of the Bronze Age these collars were replaced by neck-rings. At the end of the Late Bronze Age the neck-ring is the dominating object in the finds.

To begin with, a neck-ring was made up of a simple twisted or ribbed bronze rod, but it was soon made larger and heavier. It was held together by hooks in the ends. During the Late Bronze Age these ends grew larger and became plates, decorated with geometric ornaments and figures of the



same kind as those occurring on contemporary razors and on rock-carvings. The ends of the plates were turned into a spiral form.<sup>14</sup>

The reversed twist is another design, characteristic of neck-rings from the Late Bronze Age. (*Picture 11*) It is possible to observe a development even in these rings, from slender rings of regular thickness and a uniform twist, via heavier rings with a reversed twist, to the so called Wendel rings. These rings, with elevated, sharp ridges and a reversed twist, were used into the Pre-Roman Iron Age. Signs of wear indicate that several of these rings were worn together, one resting on the other.

Thus, the neck-ring was used occasionally as an ornament in the Early Bronze Age. During the middle period of the Bronze Age it became more frequent, at the expense of the older type of collar. In the Late Bronze Age it became more and more frequent, as indicated by the finds in ground and bogs. Usually they are found in pairs.<sup>15</sup>

In his book *Helleristninger i Danmark* the Danish archaeologist P V Glob reasons about the Danish sacrificial finds from the Late Bronze Age. He notes that the neck-rings constitute 23% of the finds in the fourth period, 53% in the fifth period, and no less than 94% in the sixth period (Glob 1969: 198–199). More than 70 offerings containing neck-rings, including more than 200 rings altogether, are known from southern Scandinavia (Stenberger 1964: 302). Most of these finds have been discovered in bogs and streams.

Glob, as well as many other scholars, makes the interpretation that a goddess with the neck-ring as her prime symbol comes to the forefront during period VI of the Bronze Age. (*Picture 12*) The small statuettes from this time, representing a naked woman, wearing only a neck-ring, have been interpreted as pictures of this goddess. The figures are only 10–12 cm high, and their neck-rings can be single, double, and sometimes even manifold. Her arms are bent, with the hands held over her bosom in a position indicating a mother goddess. Some scholars have assumed that these small bronze figures were simple copies of larger wooden idols, now lost (Bjørn

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<sup>14</sup> The fact that these motifs are found on rock-carvings and razors is interesting. According to a current view the pictures on the rock-carvings are connected to religious ideas and rituals. See Görman 1987 and the literature quoted there.

The concentration of razors in the Late Bronze Age is striking. They can be found even in women's graves. For this reason it has been assumed that the razors had not only a practical use, but also a religious function, and that they were in some way included in the rituals around death. See Hyenstrand 1968: 185–189.

<sup>15</sup> Concerning the development and use of the neck-ring during the Bronze Age see Broholm 1943–49.

1926: 42–44). Statues have occasionally been found in the ground and are generally dated to the latest part of the Bronze Age.<sup>16</sup>

### *Discussion*

Offerings of neck-rings no doubt increased considerably during the latter part of the Bronze Age, and the deposits containing both male and female objects were gradually replaced by neck-rings. Usually they were deposited in pairs, but sometimes individually or three together. Women used to wear two neck-rings during the Bronze Age, and hence it is natural to believe, like Glob and others do, that the sacrifices of neck-rings were directed at a goddess with a double neck-ring as her symbol. Contrary to Glob, however, I should like to raise the objection that even men used to wear neck-rings during the Bronze Age, in this case single rings. Consequently, the ring offerings cannot be interpreted exclusively as offerings to a goddess with the neck-ring as her special attribute. Single rings may have been offered to a male god with the neck-ring as his attribute. Three rings together may have been intended for a pair of gods. This remains, however, to be proved.

People during the Bronze Age used the neck-ring as an ornament, at first on a very limited scale, and gradually more and more frequently. At the end of the Late Bronze Age neck-rings dominate the finds from ground and bogs. What can the reasons for this change have been? One possibility might be that a new religious significance was attributed to the neck-ring. Another explanation could be that existing religious connotations gained impact. A third reason might be that the cultic expression of religion changed. I have myself argued that new religious rites and conceptions, proceeding from Central Europe, exerted influence in southern Scandinavia during the Late Bronze Age (Görman 1987).

### *Conclusions so far*

The custom of laying down neck-rings as offerings in the ground and especially in bogs and streams was a continuous habit in southern Scandinavia from the Late Bronze Age until the Migration Period, i.e. a time span of more than a thousand years. At the end of the Late Bronze Age and in the Migration Period, the frequency of these sacrifices increased.

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<sup>16</sup> The finds from Fårdal at Viborg and Grevensvænge at Næstved, both containing neck-rings, are other Danish finds from the Late Bronze Age that have been interpreted as sacrifices. Concerning the Fårdal find see Kjær 1927 and Glob 1969: 191–193. Concerning the find from Grevensvænge see above all Djupedal & Broholm 1952.

The form and decoration of the neck-rings changed during this long time span. It is possible that these changes reflect the different taste of each time. But there is also a continuity: the neck-ring was used as an offering, i.e. donated as a sacrifice to one or more gods. At some times it was a symbol of the god itself, used to decorate his or her idol, to indicate his or her presence, etc.

### Neck-rings in Central Europe

During the Hallstatt and La Tène Periods neck-rings were in frequent use on Celtic territory in Central Europe. Men and women adorned themselves with torcs, which sometimes even followed them into their graves. Both men and women used neck-ornaments, which is evident from finds in graves. They made deposits of neck-rings, one by one or several together, in the ground and in peat-bogs. It is well known that the torc had an important sacred function among the Celts.<sup>17</sup> I am going to illustrate this fact by a few examples from the Hallstatt and La Tène Periods. Karl Hauck has given evidence that the neck-ring continued to have similar functions even later, above all in the period 300–600 A.D. on Germanic territory on the continent (Hauck 1954).

During the Hallstatt Period the torc was a common burial gift in well-equipped men's and women's graves, especially the latter. Such graves from Hallstatt D (600–475 B.C.), containing gold torcs, are known from Eberdingen-Hochdorf, Ludwigsburg in Baden-Württemberg and Vix in Burgundy (Collis 1984: 93–97).

Somewhat later, from the La Tène Period, are the graves from Rheinheim and Waldalgesheim in southern Germany. The costly grave goods contained several golden neck-rings (Moreau 1958: 124, Collis 1984: 128–129). From 400 B.C. and on, graves as well as grave goods became more stereotyped, and neck-rings are more uncommon even in female graves (Collis 1984: 130).

Neck-rings are also found deposited in the ground alone or several together. At Elgin in Scotland as many as three dozen twisted neck-rings of the type common in the Late Bronze Age have been found (Walker 1857). Several finds of gold torcs have been discovered in Snettisham, Needwood Forest, and Ipswich in England. (*Picture 13*) The first-mentioned find also

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<sup>17</sup> Concerning the occurrence and use of the torc on Celtic territory, see Moreau 1958, Ross 1967, MacCana 1970, Collis 1984 and Green 1989.



Fig. 1. Wooden sculpture with a trisected neck-ring from Rude-Eskildstrup, Denmark. Ström 1967: 155.



Fig. 3. Gold neck-ring from Hannenov, Falster, Denmark. Holmqvist 1980: 16.



Fig. 2. Golden collar from Möne, Västergötland, Sweden. Holmqvist 1980: colour appendix 4.





Fig. 4. Gold neck-ring from Hjallelse, Fyn, Denmark. Holmqvist 1980: 15.

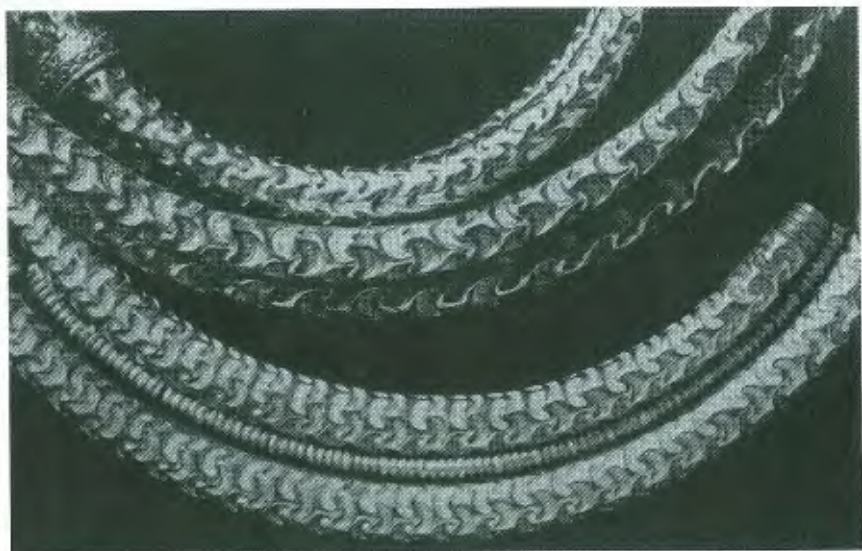


Fig. 5. Three golden neck-ornaments from Sweden, the one at the bottom from Trolleberg, Skåne. Holmqvist 1980: 18.



Fig. 6. The hoard from the ring fort of Havor on Gotland, Sweden Sweden. Burenhult 1991: 37.



Fig. 7. God with torc (Cernunnos) on the cauldron of Gundestrup, Denmark. Klindt-Jensen 1961: 8.





Fig. 8. Goddess with torc on the cauldron of Rynkeby, Denmark. Albrechtsen 1990: 99.



Fig. 9. Gold torc from Dronninglund, Jylland. Vebæk 1944: 24.



Fig. 10. Find of more than 300 bronze rings from Smederup, Denmark. Brøndsted 1960: 73.

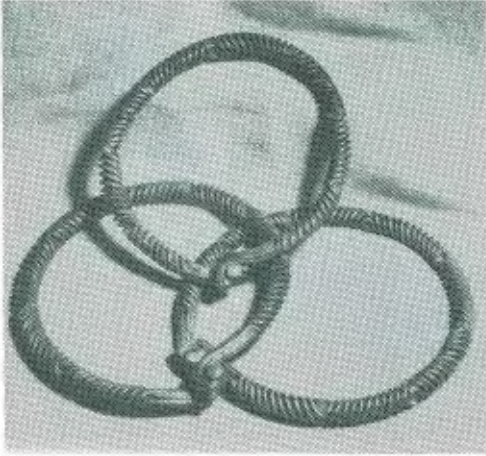


Fig. 11. Three neck-rings with reversed twist from a Swedish bog. Stenberger 1964: 300.

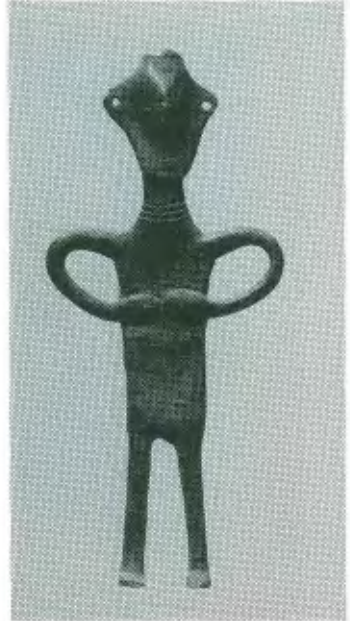


Fig. 12. Female bronze figure with a double neck-ring from the southern part of Sweden. Stenberger 1964: 299.

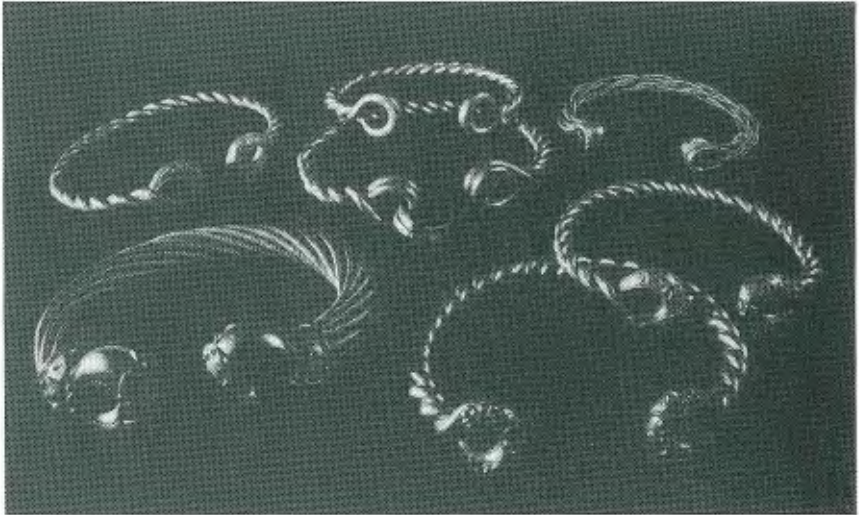


Fig. 13. Gold torcs from Ipswich, Snettisham, and Needwood Forest, England. Raftery 1991: 568.





Fig. 14. Silver torc from Trichtingen, Germany. MacCana 1970: 65.

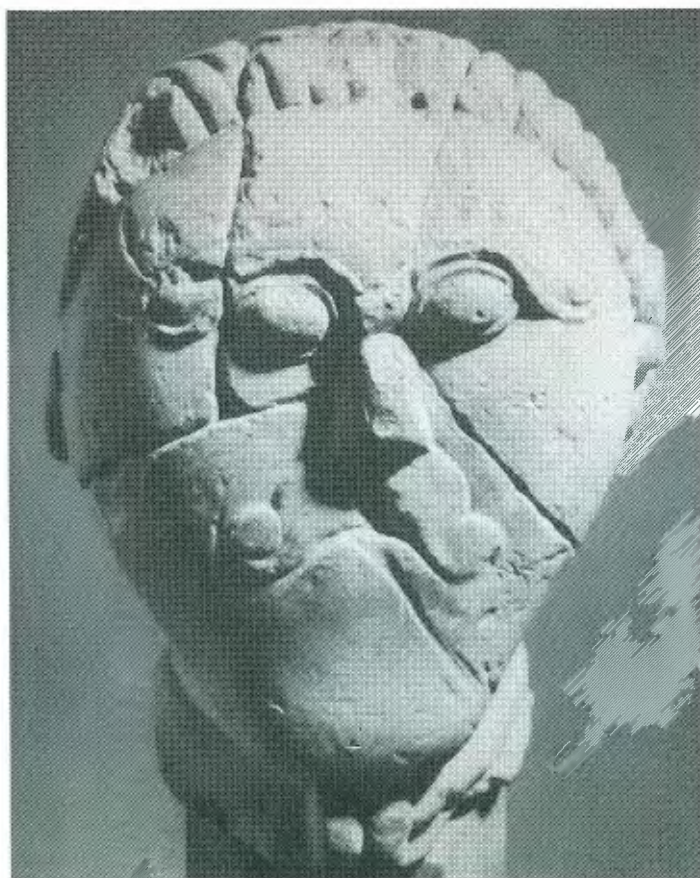


Fig. 15. Head of a god with torc from Msčké Žehovice, Bohemia. Duval 1991: 28.



Fig. 16. Cernunnos with torc and a sack from which round objects, coins, are flowing. The relief is from Reims, France. MacCana 1970: 43.



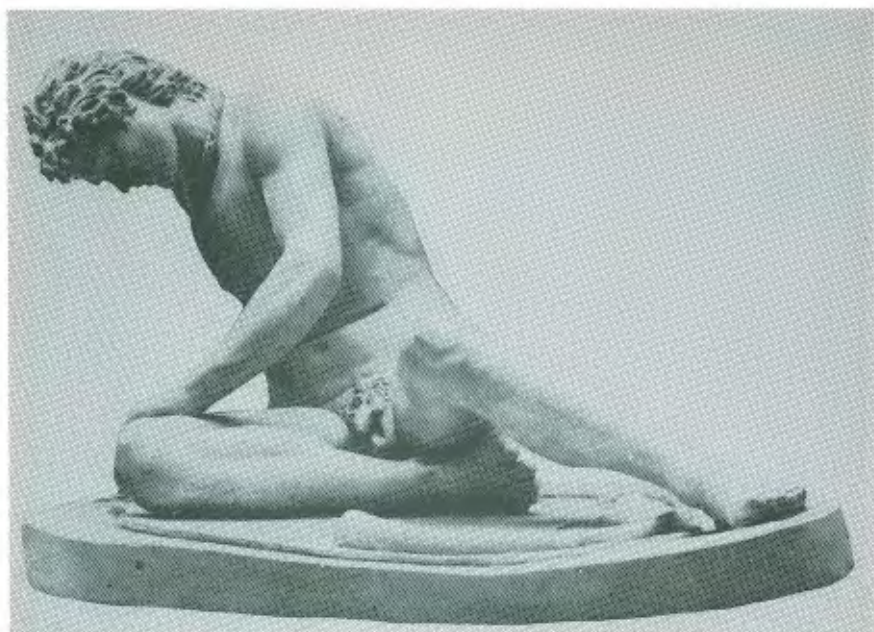


Fig. 17. The "Dying Gaul". MacCana 1970: 100.



Fig. 18. Silver hoard from Öland, Sweden, containing twined neck-rings. Stenberger 1964: 725.

contained coins, by means of which it can be dated to ca. 50 B.C. The details of these findings are unknown (Collis 1984: 161–162). At Ersfeld in Switzerland four amply decorated gold torcs from the early La Tène Period were found under a large stone, together with a few arm-rings (Collis 1984: 118–119).

In 1928 an enormous torc was found at a depth of ca. 60 cm during draining work at Trichtingen in the Black Forest in Germany. (*Picture 14*) This ring is oval, its maximum outer diameter being 29.4 cm and it weighs 6.744 kg. It consists of an iron kernel, coated with silver, equipped at each end with a bull head, which is in turn carrying a torc. Goessler, who described and discussed this find in 1929, considers the neck-ring to be a Celtic product from the northern part of the Balkans. He considers it credible that the torc was produced in the second half of the second century B.C. and intended for a god. Its size as well as its weight should indicate this. He sums up:

Der Ring ist als ein Votivring für einen Gott im Donau-balkankreis bei den Kelten entstanden und ist dann die Donau heraufgenommen ... Seine weiteren Schicksale auf dem Boden der Fundheimat liegen bis jetzt im Dunkeln. (Goessler 1929: 36)

Two neck-rings, probably with the same function as the Trichtingen ring, originate from a Celtic cult place in Libenice at Kolín in Bohemia. These rings are made of twined bronze thread, and they were found close to a few pole holes with rests of wood. The excavators, B Soudský and A Rybová, believe that the pole holes with wooden pieces are the remains of two wooden poles which once constituted idols, and around which the neck-rings were hanging. It is estimated that this cult place was used during the La Tène Period, above all during the fourth century B.C. (Filip 1970: 63–71).

At another cult place in Msěcké Žehrovice in Bohemia, a man's head of stone equipped with a torc was found in 1943. (*Picture 15*) This head was found in a 80 cm deep pit, together with animal bones and potsherds from the La Tène Period. The circumstances at the find indicate, according to Filip, that the head was once placed on a pedestal, serving as an object of cult on this holy place. Filip suggests that the head was knocked from the pedestal and thrown into the pit when the cult place was destroyed during the last century B.C. (Filip 1970: 71–73).

Celtic gods as well as goddesses are depicted with torcs. Usually they are wearing a torc around their neck, and sometimes they are holding yet another torc in the hand as an attribute. A large number of examples can be



found.<sup>18</sup> This means that the torc is a frequent attribute of Celtic deities. To a specially high degree it is a characteristic of Cernunnos, who is regularly reproduced with at least one, and often several, torcs (Green 1989: 87–96). (*Picture 16, compare also picture 7*)

In Greek-Roman sculpture, Celtic warriors were also portrayed wearing neck-rings. These were probably regarded as a sign of dignity. The most famous sculpture is the “dying Galatian”, a dying Celtic warrior naked except for his torc. (*Picture 17*) Attalos I of Pergamon had this statue raised in the third century B.C. to commemorate the victory he himself and Eumenes II had won over the Celts in Asia Minor (Rankin 1987: 208–209).

To sum up: On Celtic territory in Central Europe, neck-rings are found in graves, principally from the Hallstatt and La Tène Periods, and from later periods especially as deposits in the ground or in peat-bogs. There is evidence that they were worn by gods as well as by prominent persons. In Greek-Roman pictorial art and literature the torc is the distinctive feature of a Celt. In Central Europe like in Southern Scandinavia, the neck-ring was used as a religious symbol. It was used as a sacrificial gift and considered as a divine attribute.

### **Evidence from Greek and Roman Authors Regarding the Use of Neck-Rings Among the Celts and Germans**

Testimonies concerning the taste for neck-rings among the Celts and Germans can be found not only through archaeological finds but recorded by a number of ancient authors as well.

The oldest statement comes from Polybius, who was active during the third century B.C. He described the history of Rome in 40 books, of which five have been completely preserved. In his second book he describes the battle at Telamon in 225 B.C. In this fight two Roman armies completely defeated a large Celtic army. A Roman consul was killed, after which his head was cut off and carried to the Celtic king on a spear. One of the Celtic kings, Cocolitanus, was taken prisoner, while the other one, Aneröestes, managed to escape but committed suicide.

καὶ τὸ μὲν Καπετώλιον ἐκόσμησε ταῖς τε σημαίαις καὶ τοῖς  
μανιάκαις· τοῦτο δ' ἔστι χρυσοῦν ψέλιον, ὃ φοροῦσι περὶ τὸν τράχηλον  
οἱ Γαλάται· τοῖς δὲ λοιποῖς σκύλοις καὶ τοῖς αἰχμαλώτοις πρὸς τὴν

<sup>18</sup> A large number of pictures illustrating this can be found in Green 1989, MacCana 1970 and Moreau 1958.

εἴσοδον ἐχρήσατο τὴν ἑαυτοῦ καὶ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ θριάμβου διακόσμησιν.  
(Polybius 1960: II, 31, 5–6)

He sent to ornament the Capitol the standards and necklaces (the gold necklets worn by the Gauls), but the rest of the spoil and the prisoners he used for his entry into Rome and the adornment of his triumph. (Translation by W. R. Paton)

From the report of Polybius it may be concluded that L. Aemilius selected two types of things from the rich booty to dedicate to the gods at Capitolium. These were the banners of the enemies and their neck-rings. The banners were to a special degree perceived as the attributes of the defeated Celtic army. The fact that the Romans, beside the banners, chose the torcs of the vanquished indicates that they also stood out as powerful symbols for the defeated Celtic army.

Diodorus Siculus was a Greek historian from Sicily, living in the last century B.C. His world history comprises 40 books and covers the space of time until 54 B.C., i.e. to the time of the Gallic wars of Caesar. Diodorus incorporated many statements from earlier authors, including Poseidonios. Thanks to this, valuable information has been preserved to posterity from sources which have since vanished.

In the text below Diodorus describes how the Celts, women as well as men, adorned themselves with heavy torcs of solid gold, which they also brought forth as sacrifices to their gods.

τοῦτῳ δὲ τῷ τρόπῳ οὐρεύοντες χρυσοῦ πλῆθος καταχρῶνται πρὸς κόσμον οὐ μόνον αἱ γυναῖκες, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ ἄνδρες. περὶ μὲν γὰρ τοὺς καρποὺς καὶ τοὺς βραχίονας ψέλια φοροῦσι, περὶ δὲ τοὺς αὐχένας κρίκους παχεῖς ὀλοχρῶσους καὶ δακτυλίους ἀξιολόγους, ἔτι δὲ χρυσοῦς θώρακας. ἴδιον δὲ τι καὶ παράδοξον παρὰ τοῖς ἄνω Κελτοῖς ἔστι περὶ τὰ τεμένη τῶν θεῶν γινόμενον· ἐν γὰρ τοῖς ἱεροῖς καὶ τεμένεσιν ἐπὶ τῆς χώρας ἀνειμένοις ἔρριπται πολὺς χρυσὸς ἀνατεθειμένος τοῖς θεοῖς, καὶ τῶν ἐγγχωρίων οὐδεὶς ἔπτεται τοῦτου διὰ τὴν δεισιδαιμονίαν, καίπερ ὄντων τῶν Κελτῶν φιλαργύρων καθ' ὑπερβολήν. (Diodorus Siculus 1952: V, 27, 3–4)

In this manner they amass a great amount of gold, which is used for ornament not only by the women but also by the men. For around their wrists and arms they wear bracelets, around their necks heavy necklaces of solid gold, and huge rings they wear as well, and even corselets of gold. And a peculiar and striking practice is found among the upper Celts, in connection with the sacred precincts of the gods; for in the temples and precincts made consecrate in their land, a great amount of gold has been deposited as a dedication to the gods, and not a native of the country ever touches it because of religious scruple, although the Celts are an exceedingly covetous people. (Translation by C.H. Oldfather)

The significance of the torc as an ethnic attribute for the Celts and as a sign of bravery is evident from the following report by Livius. Titus Livius, who was active in Rome in the days of the Emperor Augustus, wrote 142 books, giving an account of the history of Rome from the earliest time.

armatum adornatumque adversus Gallum stolidè laetum et—quoniam id quoque memoria dignum antiquis visum est—linguam etiam ab inrisu exserentem producunt. Recipiunt inde se ad stationem, et duo in medio armati spectaculi magis more quam lege belli destituuntur, nequaquam visu ac specie aestimantibus pares. Corpus alteri magnitudine eximium, versicolori veste pictisque et auro caelatis refulgens armis: media in altero militaris statura modicaque in armis habilibus magis quam decoris species. Non cantus, non exsultatio armorumque agitatio vana, sed pectus animorum iraeque tacitae plenum; omnem ferociam in discrimen ipsum certaminis distulerat. Ubi constitere inder duas acies, tot circa mortalium animis spe metuque pendentibus, Gallus velut moles superne imminens projecto laeva scuto in advenientis arma hostis vanum caesim cum ingenti sonitu ensem deiecit; Romanus mucrone subrecto, cum scuto scutum inum perculisset totoque corpore interior periculo vulneris factus insinuasset se inter corpus armaque, uno alteroque subinde ictu ventrem atque inguina hausit et in spatium ingens ruentem porrexit hostem. Iacentis inde corpus ab omni alia vexatione intactum uno torque spoliavit, quem respersum cruore collo circumdedit suo. ... Inter carminum prope in modum incondita quedam militariter ioculantes Torquati cognomen auditum; celebratum deinde posteris etiam familiaeque honori fuit. (Livius 1953: VII, X, 5–11, 13)

Armed and accoutred, they led him forth to the Gaul, who in his stupid glee—for the ancients have thought even this worth mentioning—thrust his tongue out in derision. They then retired to their station, and the two armed men were left by themselves in the midst, like gladiators more than soldiers, and by no means evenly matched, to judge from outward show. One had a body extraordinary for its size, and resplendent in a coat of shifting hues and armour painted and chased with gold: the other was of a middling stature for a soldier, and his arms were but indifferent to look at, being suitable but not ornate. He neither sang nor danced about with idle flourishes of his weapons, but his bosom swelled with courage and silent wrath, and all his ferocity was reserved for the crisis of the combat. When they had taken their ground between the two embattled armies, while the hearts of the surrounding multitude were suspended betwixt hope and fear, the Gaul, whose huge bulk towered above the other, advanced his shield with the left arm, to parry the attack of his oncoming enemy, and delivered a slashing stroke with his sword, that made a mighty clatter but did no harm. The Roman, with the point of his weapon raised, struck up his adversary's shield with a blow from his own against its lower edge; and slipping in between the man's sword and his body, so close that no part of his own person was exposed, he gave one thrust and then immediately another, and gashing the groin and belly of his enemy brought him headlong to the ground, where he lay stretched out over a mon-

strous space. To the body of his fallen foe he offered no other dignity than to despoil it of one thing—a chain which, spattered with blood, he cast round his own neck. ... Amidst the rude banter thrown out by the soldiers in a kind of verse, was heard the appellation of Torquatus, and thereafter this was given currency as an honoured surname, used even by descendants of the family. (Translation by B. O. Foster)

Livius describes a duel between the Roman Titus Manlius and a Celt. Before the beginning of the fight the latter jeered at Manlius by sticking out his tongue at him. The two men fought with each other, dressed in swords and shields. The Gallic warrior was defeated and killed by Manlius, who then took away his torc. As an award for his victory Manlius received the honorary title Torquatus with the right, even for his descendants, to carry this name.

The following text describes an event, which is said to have taken place around 390 B.C. in the vicinity of Massilia in the ancient Gaul. It is described in *Epitoma Historiarum Philippicarum* by Marcus Junianus Justinus. This work, which was probably written in the third century A.D., is in its turn an extract from *Historiae Philippicae*, the world history of Pompejus Trogus, from the beginning of our time. The text below describes how the Celtic tribal king Catumandus sacrificed a torc to Minerva.

Dux consensu omnium Catumandus regulus eligitur. Qui cum magno exercitu lectissimorum virorum urbem hostium obsideret, per quietem specie torvae mulieris, quae se deam dicebat, exterritus ultro pacem cum Massiliensibus fecit, petitoque ut intrare illi urbem et deos eorum adorare liceret, cum in arcem Minervae venisset, conspecto in porticibus simulacro deae, quam per quietem viderat, repente exclamat illam esse, quae se nocte exterruisset, illam, quae recedere ab obsidione iussisset. Gratulatusque Massiliensibus, quod animadverteret eos ad curam deorum immortalium pertinere, torque aureo donata dea in perpetuum amicitiam cum Massiliensibus iunxit. (Justinus 1935: 43, 5–7)

The tribal king Catumandus was elected commander by general agreement. While surrounding the city with a great army of his best warriors, he saw in his sleep a threatening woman, who said she was a goddess. Terrified, he voluntarily made peace with the inhabitants of Massilia and asked them to be allowed to enter the city in order to worship their gods. When he entered the temple of Minerva he saw in its arcade a statue of the goddess he had seen in his sleep, and at once he exclaimed that this was the goddess who had terrified him in the night and had ordered him to relinquish the siege. He congratulated the inhabitants of Massilia, as he now understood that they were under the protection of the immortal gods, and he presented the goddess with a golden torc and made a treaty of everlasting friendship with the inhabitants of Massilia. (My translation)

Tacitus tells us in his *Germania*, written in the first century A.D., the following:

Mos est ciuitatibus ultro ac uiritim conferre principibus uel armentorum uel frugum, quod pro honore acceptum etiam necessitatibus subuenit. Gaudent praecipue finitimarum gentium donis, quae non modo a singulis, sed et publice mittuntur, electi equi, magnifica arma, phalerae torquesque; iam et pecuniam accipere docuimus. (Tacitus 1935: XV)

It is the custom in their states for each man to give away to the chiefs some portion of one's cattle or crops. This is accepted as an honour but serves their needs as well. Above all they rejoice in the gifts of neighbouring tribes, which are sent not only by individuals but also by the community: selected horses, excellent armour, bosses, and necklaces. Nowadays we have taught them to accept money as well. (My translation)

Tacitus describes how luxury goods were sent as gifts from one leader to another and from one tribe to another. Torcs were evidently among the things that were used and highly appreciated by the Germans.

Another Roman author, Lucius Annæus Florus, who was active in the second century A.D., describes how the men of Ariouistus<sup>19</sup> dedicated a torc, which had been captured from the enemy, to their warrior god.

Mox Ariouisto duce uouere de nostrorum militum praeda Marti suo torquem. (Florus 1967: I, XX)

Soon afterwards, when Ariouistus was their leader, they vowed to dedicate to their War-god a necklet made from the spoils of our soldiers. (Translation by Edward Seymour Forster)

Here the torc is a votive offering to the Germanic warrior god, delivered with the hope of further success in the field. However, it is clear from the text of Florus that this expectation was not fulfilled.

The fact that torcs were not only reserved for men, but could also be worn by distinguished women, is confirmed by Cassius Dio. This Greek-Roman politician and historian has given an account of the history of Rome until 229 A.D.

ἦν δὲ καὶ τὸ σῶμα μεγίστη καὶ τὸ εἶδος βλοσυρωτάτη τὸ τε βλέμμα δριμυτάτη, καὶ τὸ φθέγμα τραχὺ εἶχε, τὴν κόμην πλείστην τε καὶ ξανθοτάτην οὖσαν μέχρι τῶν γλουτῶν καθείτο, καὶ στρεπτὸν μέγαν χρυσοῦν ἐφόρει, χιτῶνά τε παμποίκιλον ἐνεκεκόλωτο, καὶ χλαμύδα ἐπ' αὐτῷ παχεῖαν ἐνεπεπόρητο. (Dio Cassius 1955: LXII, 2, 3-4)

<sup>19</sup> Ariouistus was the leader of the Suevi, a Germanic tribe comprising Semnones, Marcomanni and Alamanni, who were defeated by Caesar in Gaul in 58 B.C.

In stature she was very tall, in appearance most terrifying, in the glance of her eye most fierce, and her voice was harsh; a great mass of the tawniest hair fell to her hips; around her neck was a large golden necklace; and she wore a tunic of diverse colours over which a thick mantle was fastened with a brooch. This was her invariable attire. (Translation by Earnest Cary)

In this text Dio describes Buducia, a Celtic woman of royal descent, who was distinguished by the fact that she wore a huge golden torc. We know of this Boudicca (Buducia) that she was not only a queen but also an eminent military commander during a violent and bloody rebellion against the Romans in Britain. At last the army of Boudicca was defeated by the Roman commander Suetonius Paulinus, and in 61 A.D. she committed suicide to avoid being taken prisoner and executed.<sup>20</sup>

Prokopius, a Byzantine historian in the sixth century A.D., who served as a secretary to the East-Roman commander Belisarios, has described the many military campaigns of Belisarios. Among others Belisarios defeated the Vandals and the Goths on account of the Roman emperor Justinianus I. In this connection Prokopius mentions with enthusiasm Belisarios' generosity towards his soldiers, who to a great extent had been recruited from the Germanic tribes.

τῶν τε γὰρ ἐν ξυμβολῇ ἡτυχηκότων χρήμασι μεγάλοις παρεμυθεῖτο τα πρότερα τραύματα καὶ τοῖς εὐδοκιμήσασο ψέλλιά τε καὶ στρεπτοὺς ἔχειν ἄθλα παρεῖχεν, ἵππου δὲ ἢ τόξου ἢ ἄλλου ὄτουσῶν στρατιώτου ἐν τῇ μάχῃ ἀπολωλότος ἕτερον ἀντ' αὐτοῦ πρὸς Βελισσαρίου αὐτίκα ὑπῆρχεν· (Procopius 1924: VII, I, 8)

for when any had met with misfortune in battle, he used to console them by large presents of money for the wounds they had received, and to those who had distinguished themselves he presented bracelets and necklaces to wear as prizes, and when a soldier had lost in battle horse or bow or anything else whatsoever, another was straightway provided in its place by Belisarius (Translation by H.B. Dewing)

In the account of Prokopius the neck-rings are rewards for courage in battle. Consequently they stand out as counterparts to the medals for bravery of today. They are signs of dignity, distinguishing the courageous warrior from the great mass of warriors.

This interpretation gets support from another passage in Prokopius' description of the war against the Goths. In VIII, XXXI,8-9 he describes how the Gothic king Totila and his adversary Narses arranged their armies for battle. Both Totila and Narses tried to infuse courage and fighting spirit

<sup>20</sup> Concerning Boudicca and her destiny see also Rankin 1987: 220-223.



into their soldiers by raising arm- and neck-rings as well as golden bridles into the air.

καὶ ὁ Τουτίλας δὲ τρόπῳ τῷ αὐτῷ τοῖς πολεμίοις ἀντίαν τὴν στρατιὰν ξόμπασαν ἔστησε. καὶ περιῶν τὴν οἰκείαν παράταξιν τοὺς στρατιώτας παρεθράσυνέ τε καὶ παρεκάλει ἐς εὐτολμίαν προσώπῳ καὶ λόγῳ. καὶ ὁ Ναρσῆς δὲ ταὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐποίηει, ψέλλιᾶ τε καὶ στρεπτοὺς καὶ χαλινοὺς χρυσοῦς ἐπὶ κοντῶν μετεωρίσας καὶ ἄλλα ἅττα τῆς ἐς τὸν κίνδυνον προθυμίας ὑπεκκαύματα ἐνδεικνόμενος. (Procopius 1928: VIII, XXXI, 8–9)

And Totila arrayed his army in the same way opposite his enemy. Then going along his own battle-line he kept encouraging his soldiers with voice and expression and urging them to boldness. Narses likewise did the same thing, holding in the air bracelets and necklaces and golden bridles on poles and displaying certain other incentives to bravery in the coming struggle. (Translation by H.B. Dewing)

### *Discussion*

In the documents from the centuries around the beginning of our time, quoted here, the Celts are at the focus of interest of the Romans, and the texts describe their use of torcs. Later accounts describe how Germanic people value and use neck-rings as well. Thus, the importance of the neck-ring is certified among the tribes called Celts by the Romans, as well as among those they called Germans. The most probable explanation for this might be that the Romans first came into contact with the Celts, and somewhat later with the Germans.<sup>21</sup>

The account of Polybius makes it clear that the Celts were characterized by their use of the torc as early as in the third century B.C. For the Romans the torc was understood as an ethnic characteristic of the Celts.<sup>22</sup>

The fancy for beautiful and expensive golden objects among the Celts is a well known and certified fact, not least through the archaeological finds. Diodorus Siculus recounts how the Celts made golden torcs and dedicated their gold to the gods by setting it out on holy places. The neck-rings were

<sup>21</sup> Our current picture of certain peoples and tribes as Celts and others as Germans rests on an arbitrary division made by the Greeks and Romans. The river Rhine became a boundary. People living north and east of this line were called Germans, while the tribes to the south and west were called Celts. With regard to cultural forms and behavioural patterns Germans and Celts were very similar to each other. This similarity was early pointed out by Poseidonios. See Strabo 1923: 4.4.2. This is also evident from research, described among others in Hachmann, Kossack and Kuhn 1962.

<sup>22</sup> This conclusion gets support also from the well-known statue of the dying Gaul, created in the third century B.C. See *picture 17*.

carried by men as well as women. Consequently, it seems as if the neck-ring had several meanings. It was a sign of personal wealth and prestige, but it also had a function in the cult which cannot be explained by the value of the metal only.

This is also evident from Trogus' description of the siege of Massilia and its abandonment. The Celtic commander Catumandus presented a golden torc to the goddess Minerva as a sign of his deep reverence, after having raised the siege.

Livius, active at the beginning of our time, points to the torc as a symbol of the warrior. The fact that Manlius received the name of Torquatus after his victory over the Celtic warrior indicates that the torc had not only an economic value, but that to have obtained a torc was a special honour.

The account of Tacitus makes it clear how the Germanic tribal kings exchanged prestigious objects as a sign of friendship. The transfer of such objects, including torcs, so common among the Scandinavian archaeological finds, might have taken place in the way Tacitus describes.

Cassius Dio makes it clear that the torc was not an exclusively male symbol. But Boudicca, who used to wear a torc, was not an ordinary woman, but a queen and a military leader. In this case the torc seems to have been a sign of leadership.

The two excerpts from the books of Prokopius, written as late as in the sixth century A.D., show that the torc served as a reward for and as an incentive to bravery in battle.

Consequently, the written accounts collected here show that above all men, but at times also women, used the neck-ring on Celtic as well as on Germanic territory. The texts also make it clear that the neck-ring was a symbol of bravery, leadership, and prestige, and that it served a sacrificial function as a divine attribute and as an offering. The archaeological finds from both cultural territories confirm the image given by the ancient and medieval authors.

### **Necklaces in the Vendel and Viking Age (550–1050 A.D.)**

The custom in southern Scandinavia of depositing neck-rings in bogs and swamps as well as in the earth, which characterized the period from the Late Bronze Age to the Migration Period, did not come to an end with the Migration Period, but it became weaker and took new forms.

The finds from peat-bogs, which are clearly offerings, are fewer from the Vendel and Viking Age than from earlier times. The custom of laying down

objects in bogs and swamps as offerings to the gods can be traced as far back as to the Neolithic time, but now it seems to have decreased. Instead deposits in the ground became more common during the Viking Age, even if occasional offerings in bogs were still made. A find of this kind originates from Hon in southern Norway. This find, consisting of both gold and silver objects, was found in a bog and has been interpreted as a temple hoard (Brøndsted 1960: 345)

The golden objects, so dominating in the finds from the Migration Period, are much less frequent in the finds from the Viking Age. For instance, a golden neck-ring was found in Fjälkestad in Skåne. It is a twisted ring with a loop in one end and a hook in the other. This ring was found in connection with ploughing (Strömberg 1963: 116–117). Similar twisted gold rings are parts of finds from, above all, the later part of the Viking Age. In the finds from this time, however, silver objects are much more frequent (Munksgaard 1970: 28).

Silver objects deposited in the ground constitute a large group of finds in Denmark as well as in Sweden and Norway. In Sweden alone around 1100 silver hoards have been found. The Viking Age has even been called the Silver Age of Scandinavia, because of the importance silver had during that time as a metal for jewellery and as a standard of value. Silver was acquired through commercial connections with the Arabs, who had started to exploit new silver finds in Arabia (Munksgaard 1970: 25). The majority of the Swedish silver finds have been made on the isles of Öland and Gotland, but a great number of finds are also made in Skåne and in the area around Lake Mälaren.<sup>23</sup> Many of the finds, especially from Gotland, are very large. An example is the find from Burge in the parish of Lummelunda, with a total weight of more than 10 kg of silver. The largest Danish silver find, which originates from Terslev on the isle of Sjælland, weighs 6.5 kg. The great majority of the finds are dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, and a minority to the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

The silver finds often consist of different kinds of jewellery. These are dominated by artistically twined neck-ornaments and arm-rings. (*Picture 18*) The Danish find from Vester Vedsted, including two neck-rings, and the find from Terslev mentioned above, containing four silver neck-rings, might be mentioned as examples.<sup>24</sup> In Sør-Trøndelag in Norway several

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<sup>23</sup> Stenberger 1947 makes a description of all finds of this type from Gotland dating to the Viking Age, known in the 1940s.

<sup>24</sup> Concerning these two finds, see Munksgaard 1970: 28–29, and for the Terslev find also Asmussen 1985: 243–244.

finds have been made of as many as six large, heavy rings, often found together with ring needles and golden arm-rings (Hårdh 1992: 103).

The finds consist not only of intact jewellery, but also of silver bars or rods, coins and hacksilver. The coins are often of Arab or Western European origin. Hacksilver consists of silver cut into pieces, generally considered to have been used for payment according to weight.

Even neck-rings, cut into pieces, count as hacksilver. This is not a completely new phenomenon. The finds from the Migration Period sometimes contain neck-rings and arm-rings, cut into pieces. One instance of this is the great gold hoard from Broholm on the southern part of Fyn in Denmark consisting of 51 gold objects with a total weight of 4.154 kg. The find contains, among others, three solid neck-rings, the largest of them with a weight of 1.356 kg. Around the ring a thin golden thread has been wired. It further contains some pieces of jewellery, such as seven bracteates, as well as gold fragments from rings, which have been cut into pieces, and gold bars. Thus, the hoard consists both of intact pieces of jewellery and of fragments, which archaeologists regard as payment gold (Munksgaard 1970: 11–12).

The question of payment gold and silver raises the problem of the interpretation of the silver finds from the Viking Age. Scholars have suggested many different explanations for the fact that they were once deposited in the ground. Two suggestions, however, have dominated the debate. According to one of them they were buried out of fear of war or assaults from pirates. The ground would then have been used as a kind of safe deposit. According to the other suggestion, the silver objects were offerings to the gods.<sup>25</sup>

The question why the silver was deposited in the earth has become complicated, because so many of the silver finds have been made by chance while preparing the ground. Because of this the precise circumstances of the finds are often unclear. Many objects have been lost or left in the ground. Because of this the Swedish Central Board of National Antiquities took the initiative in 1977 to make supplementary examinations of familiar finding-places on Gotland. These new investigations have proved that the finding-places have often been situated in dwelling-houses in farms from the Viking Age. The silver was left there when the houses were abandoned. The common understanding among archaeologists was previously that the silver was deposited outside the farms. Majvor Östergren, who was responsible for this project on Gotland, suggests that the silver might have

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<sup>25</sup> A survey of the different interpretations can be found in Stenberger 1958: 307–320.

been individual property, which was left untouched after the death of the owners (Östergren 1983). On this presumption a possible explanation might be provided by a passage in the *Ynglingasaga* of Snorri Sturluson, which has often been quoted by archaeologists as an explanation for deposits from divergent times:

sagði hann [Óðinn] svá, at með þvílíkum auðœfum skyldi hverr koma til Valhallar, sem hann hafði á bál; þess skyldi hann ok njóta, er hann sjálfr hafði í jörð grafit (Snorri Sturluson 1911: 8)

[Óðinn] said that each man should come to Valhall with the properties he had on his funeral pyre, and in addition he should use all that he had buried in the earth. (My translation)

### *Discussion*

In the Viking Age offerings only exceptionally took place in the bogs and swamps that had been functioning as cult places for such a long time. However, the depositing of objects in the ground continued and increased. On Gotland new investigations have been able to show that the silver was to a very great extent buried within the houses and left there when the houses were abandoned. This is a new theory that could contribute to an understanding of the finds from the Viking Age.

While gold was the precious metal typical of the Migration Period, the Viking Age is characterized by silver. The silver finds often consist of entire ornaments as well as those that are cut into pieces, rods and bars of silver, and coins. Neck-rings and arm-rings dominate the finds of ornaments and are in general found together, while finds of only neck-rings are uncommon, contrary to earlier times. Neck-rings and arm-rings cut into pieces, which are common in the silver finds from the Viking Age, are in general believed to have been used as means of payment. Occasional finds of this kind are known from the Migration Period. This is something quite different from the deliberate, violent destruction, that characterizes so many of the great finds in peat-bogs from the Iron Age.<sup>26</sup>

So far I have given evidence that there exists in southern Scandinavia a continuous tradition of deposits of neck-rings, mainly in bogs and streams, but also in the ground, from the Early Bronze Age into the Viking Age. Over a time span of more than 1000 years neck-rings were given as offerings to the gods, they decorated idols and probably also served as symbols for one or several deities.

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<sup>26</sup> Concerning ritual demolition see Görman 1987.

During the Viking Age some changes seem to have taken place. The swamps lost their exceptional position as places for cult. Silver replaced gold and bronze as the foremost precious metal. Neck-rings and arm-rings still dominated in the deposits, but offerings of neck-rings only were uncommon. Moreover, the rings were now often cut into pieces, although there is no reason to believe that this was a ritual practice. In Norway, however, the old custom of depositing large and heavy neck-rings continued.

### Some Examples of the Neck-Ring as a Motif in Old Icelandic Literature

In this section I use a number of examples to point out that the neck-ring is also a subject of interest in Old Icelandic Literature.

Óðinn is the owner of the ring Draupnir. Snorri describes how this ring came into existence. The two dwarfs Eitri and Brokkr made it together, and later they presented it to Óðinn with the information that every ninth night eight new rings, as heavy as Draupnir, would drop from it (Snorri Sturluson 1931: 123–4). A kenning for gold in the Icelandic poetry is “dögg Draupnis” (the dew of Draupnir), hinting at the capacity of Draupnir to multiply.

Draupnir appears again in a poem of the Poetic Edda, called *Skírnismál*. The poem describes the love of the god Freyr for Gerðr, the fair daughter of a giant. Freyr’s servant Skírnir makes a proposal of marriage to Gerðr on behalf of the god, and he promises her gold if she is willing to love Freyr. Gerðr, however, is not tempted. Then Skírnir raises the bid:

{Skírnir} kvað:

Baug ek þér þá gef,  
þann er brendr var  
með ungom Óðins syni;  
átta ero iafnhöfgir,  
er af driúpa  
ena níundo hveria nótt.

[Gerðr] kvað:

Baug ek þikkak,  
þótt brendr sé  
með ungom Óðins syni;  
era mér gullz vant  
í görðom Gymis,



at deila fé föður.  
(Eddadigte 1952: 27)

(Skírnir said:)  
“Draupnir, the ring,  
then thy dowry shall be,  
which with Baldr was burned;  
eight rings as dear  
will drop from it  
every ninth night.”

(Gerth said:)  
“Draupnir, the ring,  
I do not want, though it with Baldr was burned;  
gold I lack not  
in Gyimir's halls,  
to deal out daily.”  
(Translation by Lee M. Hollander)

Thus, Gerðr was not convinced even by Skírnir's promise to present her Draupnir.

Snorri informs us that Óðinn placed his ring on the funeral pyre of Baldr when the latter was killed by the blind god Höðr by means of a mistletoe branch. Hermóðr made for Hel in order to offer a ransom for the dead Baldr. Baldr then sent Draupnir back with Hermóðr.<sup>27</sup>

Freyja, the goddess, had many names. One of them was Menglöö, “the neck-ring-lover”. This name was probably attributed to her because she was in possession of the necklace Brísingamen. This ring was, together with her cats, her main attribute.

Snorri writes:

Hvernig skal Freyiv kená? Sva, at kalla dottvr Niarþar, systvr Freys, konv Ops, Mopvr Hnossar, eigandi valfallz ok Sesrvmnis ok fressa, Brisingamens, Vana goð, Vana dis, it gratfagra goð, [asta gvð. (Snorri Sturluson 1931: 110)

How shall Freyia be referred to? By calling her daughter of Niord, sister of Freyr, wife of Od, mother of Hnoss, possessor of the fallen slain and of Sess-rumnir and tom-cats, of Brisingamen, Van-deity, Van-lady, fair-tear deity.  
(Translation by Anthony Falkes)

Freyja is also called Mardöll, and a kenning for gold is “Mardallar tár” or “Mardallar grátr” (Mardöll's tears).<sup>28</sup> This designation might hint at the golden Brísingamen, which Freyja was in the possession of.

<sup>27</sup> Baldr is also called “the owner of Draupnir” by Snorri. See Snorri Sturluson 1931: 97.

<sup>28</sup> Concerning the name see Snorri Sturluson 1931: 38.

The fact that Brísingamen was the special characteristic of Freyja is also evident from *Prymskviða* in the Poetic Edda. This poem recounts how *Prym*, the giant, ran away with the hammer of *Þórr*, the god. In order to return the hammer *Prym* demands Freyja as his bride. When she refuses, *Heimdallr*, the god, finds a way. He proposes that *Þórr* himself should dress in bridal linen and the Brísingamen of Freyja and make for *Prym*. The trick is successful and after some complications *Þórr* regains his hammer.

Þá kvað þat Heimdallr,  
hvítastr ása,  
vissi hann vel fram,  
sem vanir aðrir:  
»Bindo vér Þór þá  
brúðar líni!  
hafi hann it mikla  
men Brísinga!  
(Eddadigte 1952: 60)

Whereon Heimdall,  
whitest of gods—  
he fathomed the future  
as foreknowing Van—  
“Busk we Thór then  
in bridal linen,  
and buckle on him  
the Brísings’ necklace.  
(Translation by Lee M. Hollander)

In *Sörla þáttur* we are told how Freyja acquired Brísingamen. In a stone close to the dwelling-place of the goddess some dwarfs were living. A golden necklace, which the dwarfs were forging, caught her attention, and she was charmed by it. She bargained with the dwarfs and offered them gold, silver and other articles of value. This, however, did not tempt the dwarfs. Instead they demanded that she should sleep one night with each one of them in order to receive the desirable object. This was done, and Freyja acquired the necklace. But then *Loki* told *Óðinn* how Freyja had gained it, whereupon *Óðinn* gave him the task to extort it from her.

*Loki* managed to sneak into the dwelling-place of the goddess by turning into a fly. Well inside he managed to deprive her of the necklace by taking on the guise of a flea. Now Freyja reclaimed the neck-ring from *Óðinn*. But in order to regain it she was forced to arrange for two kings with many vassals under them to fight under wizardry, so that they could stand up

again as soon as they had fallen and continue the battle (Flateyjarbók 1860: 275–276).

### *Discussion*

It is evident from the texts that the neck-ornament is an important attribute both of Óðinn and of Freyja. Draupnir, as well as Brísingamen, is the subject of great interest from the surrounding individuals. The rings carry names of their own. Freyja is named by reference to her necklace. In Skírnismál Óðinn's ring was offered as a bridal gift. Draupnir has a special function, as it is placed on the funeral pyre of Baldr. In several stories one of the rings has an important part in the course of events.

In the scientific discussion Óðinn's ring has sometimes been understood as a neck-ring, but also as an arm-ring. Its power to multiply itself, by dropping eight new rings of the same weight every ninth night, has been interpreted as a symbol of constantly growing wealth. However, more far-reaching speculations can be found as well. For instance the theory advocated by Jan de Vries might be mentioned. According to his conjecture, Draupnir is a symbol for a week with nine days. His theory includes the idea of an old calendar based on a moon year (Vries 1957: 78–79).

Brísingamen has also been understood as a necklace in the scientific discussion. But it has also been interpreted as a symbol of the red light of dawn, of the sun, and even of the cultic fire (Vries 1957: 311–312). An imaginative explanation, which has gained some influence, has been put forward by Birger Pering. In his version Brísingamen is an amulet, consisting of a reddish brown fruit from a specific West Indian plant, carried towards the north by the Gulf Stream. According to Pering, this fruit could in the popular tradition alleviate throes of childbirth, and the pregnant woman could carry it in her hand or tied to her body (Pering 1941: 210–227).

This means that research on the whole has been characterized by scholars who have not been aware of the continuity I have pointed out in this article.

### **Conclusions**

It is no coincidence that the neck-ornament occupies an important place in Old Icelandic Literature. Instead this reflects a long tradition, where the neck-ring was used as a distinctive feature, as a symbol of prestige, and filled a religious function. In a religious connection it served as a divine

attribute as well as an offering to the gods. This tradition was not limited to Scandinavia; it is also accounted for in large parts of Europe.

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## Like a Prophet — On Christian Interpretations of a Madonna Video

Throughout the history of Christianity, its relationship to art has been a complicated one, concerning the use of art in worship as well as the views on “secular” art. This article deals with a current example of the latter. More specifically, the article examines some examples of Christian views on popular music.

The best-known reactions to pop and rock music<sup>1</sup> by Christians are likely to be negative ones, probably because these are usually the most loudly declared. But there is also another aspect to the Christian discourse on popular music. Some Christians try to emphasise what is perceived as a positive message in “secular” rock music. This part of the debate is the main concern in this paper.<sup>2</sup>

The examples used deal with one of the most controversial pop artists, Madonna, and one of her most discussed works, the video ‘Like a Prayer’. Madonna Louise Ciccone, born 1958, has been one of the most successful, most imitated and certainly most talked about popular artists of the past decade. She has — at least to a certain degree quite consciously — stirred up controversy with several of her videos. Raised a Catholic, her use of religious themes and images is one aspect that has caught special attention. This is especially the case in the reactions to the video ‘Like a Prayer’ that was released in 1989 (cf. Andersen 1991: 198–203; Thompson 1991; Bego 1992).

The article is written from a sociological perspective. Considering the importance of popular music in the lives of many — especially young — people today, the way Christianity deals with this phenomenon is an important example of how it deals with modern society. The general theoretic-

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1. I use the practically indefinable terms “rock” and “pop” as meaning more or less the same thing, and in the broadest possible sense, including many diverse styles of popular music as well as different forms of extra-musical expression, e.g. videos.

2. In a forthcoming paper on a Finnish newspaper debate on Christianity and rock, I take a closer look at the negative views.

cal framework is borrowed from Peter Berger's and Thomas Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1987). Four Swedish texts on 'Like a Prayer' are analysed. The aim of the article is to show how the Christian discourse on rock, exemplified by these four texts, functions as a maintenance of the Christian world view, or symbolic universe.

## Theoretical Perspective

In this passage, I present the theoretical framework of the study. First, I discuss some concepts from Berger and Luckmann (1987), then briefly the concepts of "text" and "symbol".

### *Devaluation and incorporation*

This article is written within the framework of the sociology of knowledge presented by Berger and Luckmann (1987). Borrowing a term from Berger and Luckmann (1987: 113–115), a particular religion can be seen as a symbolic universe. The word that best describes the function of a symbolic universe is legitimation. All institutions require legitimation. They need to be explained and justified, to become plausible and meaningful to the individual (Berger and Luckmann 1987: 110).

A symbolic universe legitimates not one single institution or one single experience, but the total individual and social existence.

Symbolic universes are bodies of theoretical tradition that integrate different provinces of meaning and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality (Berger and Luckmann 1987: 113).

A symbolic universe is a body of cognitive as well as normative knowledge that makes the entire existence, society and individual life, a meaningful whole. Institutions which have separate origins, different contents and functions are fused into a harmonic order. The word "symbolic" implies that a symbolic universe creates order and produces meaning through references to a reality that is other than, transcends, the reality of everyday experience (Berger and Luckmann 1987: 55).

A symbolic universe claims monopoly on explaining the existence. Alternative world views, or phenomena that seem to be unexplainable in one's own terms, always raise questions. Therefore, nothing is allowed to exist that can not be explained by the symbolic universe, and no alternative explanations are accepted. In a traditional society, with only one symbolic universe, this causes relatively few problems: the symbolic universe is

more or less taken for granted by the members of the society. But in situations where a symbolic universe is threatened by competition, which is the case in a pluralistic society, a more active defence of the monopoly becomes necessary (Berger and Luckmann 1987: 122–126).

Berger and Luckmann (1987: 130–134) mention two different types of conceptual machinery that are used to defend a symbolic universe. These they call therapy and nihilation. Therapy is directed towards individuals, actual or potential deviants, and aims at keeping these from “emigrating” from the symbolic universe. Nihilation is denying the existence of a competing symbolic universe (or universes) altogether. It is a negative legitimation, an elimination of everything that does not fit into one’s reality. There are two different types of nihilation, which will here be called devaluation and incorporation. Here they are described as ideal-types, but empirically they may appear mixed.

Devaluation is granting that which does not fit into one’s symbolic universe “an inferior ontological status” (Berger and Luckmann 1987: 132), degrading it to a state where it is not to be taken seriously, and therefore cannot be a threat. What is perceived as “deviant” is placed in a totally different and lower category. Devaluation can be combined with therapeutic efforts. Incorporation is an attempt to include what is outside in the symbolic universe by accounting for it in one’s own terms. By translating the apparently strange or deviant into the familiar language, the threat is turned into a confirmation of the symbolic universe: deviance becomes meaningful only when it is interpreted in terms of one’s own symbolic universe.

The aspect of nihilation is central to the current study of the Christian discourse on rock and pop music. Both devaluation and incorporation are evident in this discourse: calling rock “the devil’s music” or “loud noise” is devaluation; arguing that Prince or Madonna are good Christians, and that their music contains a religious message, is incorporation. Even if neither type of “extreme” reactions to certain artists or rock music in general are uncommon, some try a middle course, e.g. saying that explicitly Christian rock is good and the rest is bad — and some are rather indifferent.<sup>3</sup>

The choice between devaluation and incorporation is a choice between two different attitudes towards the surrounding society. As Berger (1967: 155) puts it:

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3. A discussion of the possible correlation between e.g. organisational types and attitudes towards rock – the hypothesis would be that churches are incorporating, sects devaluating and denominations indifferent – is outside the scope of this article.



...the fundamental problem of the religious institutions is how to keep going in a milieu that no longer takes for granted their definition of reality. ...the two basic options open to them are those of accommodation and resistance to the massive impact of this milieu.

Accommodation can be understood as meaning the same as incorporation and resistance the same as devaluation. The choice is between drawing a sharp line between oneself and "the world", or trying to embrace the total "milieu".

In this paper, the emphasis is on incorporation. This same term is used by Williams (1976), and I will here briefly discuss his use of the term. His reasoning is not far from that of Berger and Luckmann (1987: 130–134), but differs in being explicitly Marxist. Williams (1976) departs from Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which he describes in a manner quite similar to how Berger and Luckmann (1987:113–115) describe a symbolic universe: as a "totality" that "saturates" society, and constitutes the limits of common sense.<sup>4</sup>

Williams (1976) emphasises that a hegemony is not a static system:

On the contrary we can only understand an effective and dominant culture if we understand the real social process on which it depends: I mean the process of incorporation.

He thus gives incorporation a central role in the maintenance of the hegemony. Williams (1976) describes incorporation as the process by which certain

...meanings and practices are reinterpreted, diluted or put into forms which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture.

McHoul (1986) provides an example of how Williams' concept of incorporation can be used. She describes incorporation as a "discursive transformation" that aims at neutralising marginal or oppositional discourses. McHoul (1986) discusses policies on equal opportunity in education in Queensland, Australia. She says that these policies should not be "celebrated as the thin end of the emancipatory wedge", but understood as an attempt to neutralise radical feminism. Feminism is incorporated by patriarchal politics and turned into relatively "harmless" policies for equal

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4. Williams (1976) talks about dominant culture that incorporates emergent cultures, and even if the institutional Christianity that incorporates rock is not as dominant as it once was, it partly strives to maintain some dominance, and partly tries to forget that its dominance has diminished, "continuing to voice the old totalitarian claims as if nothing had happened" (Berger and Luckmann 1987: 142).

opportunity — and this simultaneously gives the politicians an “emancipated” image. Though it may seem farfetched, I would argue that the Christian incorporating readings — “discursive transformations” — of popular music function in a manner similar to — for example — the political incorporation of feminism into policies on equal opportunity.

*Text and symbol.*

One assumption central to this study is that a “text”, in a broad sense, can mean different things to different people. This is also quite obviously the case in the different interpretations of the video ‘Like a Prayer’ discussed in this paper. What people respond to, what the participants of the religious discourse on this video commend or condemn, is their interpretation of the video, what it means *to them*. The video has no *a priori* meaning, but its meaning is shaped by the discourse (cf. Foucault 1972: 49)<sup>5</sup>.

A text — a pop song, a music video — can be interpreted, read, *used* in different ways. The “author” — a concept that of course is more than usually questionable in the very collective business of making popular music — is one of all the users, perhaps “first among equals”, but without anything resembling final authority over the meaning of the text. For example, a piece of music that in the production end has no significant meaning other than being a saleable commodity, can in its use by the members of a certain subculture become a carrier of a completely different, even explicitly anti-capitalistic message (Wicke 1990: 181–182). In the same way, a pop song that has been manufactured without any religious intent whatsoever, can by its Christian interpreters be invested with a deep religious meaning.

Some texts are more open to different interpretations — and thus more “usable” — than others. A prime example of an in this respect open text is a music video. The fast flow of often very strong images is rich in associations and can easily give rise to different interpretations. In the case of the music video this serves a concrete purpose, namely a commercial one (Wicke 1990: 162–163; Huhtamo and Lahti 1989). The place of the music video in the music business is to function as an advertisement, to promote

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5. This is of course a very big subject, and one that eventually leads to major philosophical questions on the nature of knowledge, etc. May it here suffice to say that I depart from the premise that a “text” never has a most basic, truest, denotative meaning (Barthes 1970: 13–14). This, in turn, is based on the assumption that society is not made up of “social facts”, existing independently of its individual inhabitants and observers, but is rather constantly created and recreated in an ongoing social process (Berger and Luckmann 1987: 78). Consequentially, the meaning of a text is no given “fact” but socially constructed.

the artist, the album the song is taken from as well as other products associated with the artist. A good advertisement cannot be “boring”. It must be able to catch the attention of the viewers, and be interesting enough to do so also after many viewings. The fast tempo as well as the eye-catching and thought-provoking images that make a video functional as an advertisement also make it open to many interpretations as a cultural text.

To conclude the theoretical considerations, I would like to summarily discuss the concept of symbol. Such a discussion, problematic as it is, can hardly be avoided, as the debate over ‘Like a Prayer’ is to a great extent a debate over its use of religious symbols. I will base my attempt to understand the concept on considerations partly rising from the discussion on Berger and Luckmann (1987), and partly akin to the discussion on the notion of text.

Berger and Luckmann (1987: 55) define — in effect the religious — symbol as a sign that refers to something transcendent. A religion, a symbolic universe, performs its legitimating function by referring to a transcendent reality, and the medium of legitimation is the religious symbol. As Geertz (1973: 90) puts it:

Religious symbols formulate a basic congruence between a particular style of life and a specific (if, most often, implicit) metaphysic, and in so doing sustain each with the borrowed authority of the other.

Geertz (1973) and Berger and Luckmann (1987) thus give symbols a very central position in religion, and particularly in religion’s function as legitimation of the reality one lives in, that is as a symbolic universe.

An important addition to the preceding remarks on symbols is presented by Kristeva (1986). She discusses the difference between symbol and sign. Her point of departure is C.S. Peirce’s well-known classification of the sign in icon, index and symbol. In the icon the connection between signifier and signified is based on analogy, in the index on causality and in the symbol on convention or “law” (Kristeva 1986; Barthes 1967: 36–38). In agreement with Berger and Luckmann (1987), Kristeva (1986) states that a symbol refers to something transcendent. She calls a symbol a “transcendental closure”, while a sign is “an open-ended material structure”; a symbol retains meaning, a sign produces it. In other words: a symbol is something “god-given”, but a sign is something one can understand and use (almost) as one wishes.

At the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance, when art began to free itself from the church, there was, according to Kristeva (1986), a shift from a thinking based on symbol to one based on sign.

This shift is, I think, an indication of the (beginning of the) shift from a traditional society, with one symbolic universe, to a pluralistic society. It consists of a change in the nature of the convention on which the symbol is based. In a traditional society, this convention has the nature of a dogma, more or less taken for granted as part of the symbolic universe. In a pluralistic society, with no universally accepted symbolic universe, the social nature of a convention, as an agreement between several individuals, implies that the meaning of a symbol — that Kristeva (1986) would now call sign — is open to dispute. But for those who live within one particular symbolic universe, the symbol still retains the meaning it has always had, and it cannot be understood in any other way — whether it appears in a traditional context of worship, or in a video by Madonna.

Fiske's (1989: 103–104) comments on Madonna's use of religious symbols can be viewed from the perspective outlined in the two previous paragraphs. He claims that Madonna's use of religious imagery is generally directed at freeing the use of religious symbols from the dichotomy religious/sacrilegious, to enjoy it in her own way, because she finds them beautiful. Madonna empties the symbols of their religious content, their reference to the transcendent — disconnects the signifier from the signified — and converts them into pure aesthetics. The way she uses not only religious symbols in her own fashion is, according to Fiske (1989: 106), however not pure surface, not strictly an empty signifier, it carries one message: it shows that she is an independent woman.

From a religious point of view, such an independent, indifferent use of the symbols that carry one's world view can hardly be accepted. A completely neutral reaction is practically impossible. Therefore, the possible reactions are devaluation, seeing her use of religious symbols as sacrilegious, or incorporation, seeing e.g. Madonna's use of religious symbols as being within the religious tradition. In Kristeva's (1986) terms, it is clear that Madonna uses e.g. the crucifix not as a symbol, but as a sign.

### **The Readings of 'Like a Prayer'**

The main topic of this paper is the extensive discussion of the video 'Like a Prayer' by Madonna. The emphasis is on the incorporating readings of the video, but devaluating readings will be presented as background, as will some examples of the academic discussion on 'Like a Prayer'.

The video 'Like a Prayer', directed by Mary Lambert, was released on 3 March 1989. The video opens with a scene of (the character played by) Ma-

donna running and entering a church. There she kneels before a black statue posted behind an iron-bar door, and then lies down on a pew. There follows a dream sequence in which a scene which Madonna had witnessed before entering the church is flashbacked. A young white woman is assaulted, possibly murdered, by a white male gang, a black man comes to the woman's assistance, and is arrested by the police. In Madonna's dream the statue, played by the same actor who plays the arrested black man, comes to life, Madonna sings and dances with a black choir, dances alone with burning crosses in the background, is stigmatised and is kissed by the black man/statue. After the dream she goes to the police station to witness on behalf of the wrongly arrested black man, who is released. The video ends with a curtain call and a sign: "The End" (Madonna 1990).

Below are some of the comments on and analyses of 'Like a Prayer'. First, I present some academic views on the video, then the Christian texts that here make up the main object of study. The discussion on these is divided into three parts: the first deals with devaluating and the second with incorporating readings, and the third part discusses the Christian texts with special emphasis on the reading of religious symbols in 'Like a Prayer'.

### *Academic studies*

Hardly any other popular artist has received as much attention from the scientific community as Madonna (cf. e.g. Schwichtenberg 1993), and 'Like a Prayer' has since its release been one of her most discussed videos also in the academic context. Here I will briefly present three different academic studies of 'Like a Prayer'. Scott (1993) emphasises race, McClary (1990) gender and Huhtamo and Lahti (1989) media.

Scott (1993) sees 'Like a Prayer' as a strong anti-racist statement. Kaplan (1990) also points out the racial theme, and sees the video as a progressive statement in a sensitive question current on the American agenda — in line with two of Madonna's earlier videos: 'Papa Don't Preach', on teenage pregnancy and abortion, and 'Open Your Heart', on pornography. Scott (1993) interprets the message of 'Like a Prayer' partly along the same lines as one of the Christian interpreters discussed later, Hansson (1990): that there is strength and courage to be found in the church. However, Scott (1993) emphasises that it is expressly in the black church that these positive powers are to be found — he does not discuss the obvious mingling of black and Catholic religious traditions in the video. He points out that to blacks, dancing in the church is no sign of disrespect, but quite the opposite, a part of the worship. He interprets the burning crosses in the most

close-at-hand way, as symbols of the Ku Klux Klan that Madonna defies by upstaging the burning crosses in the video, as well as by finally standing up for the truth about the crime. Scott (1993) praises Madonna for presenting a positive, and as he sees it realistic, picture of the African-American community.

According to Scott (1993), the criticism of the video is due to the fact that it depicts a relationship between a black man and a white woman. He claims that the critics are preoccupied with Madonna's dress because it is seen as sexually arousing the black man in the video. He rejects the interpretation that the black statue is somehow brought to life by Madonna as an example of the interpretation of the relationship between the two main characters in the video as being primarily sexual, as an indicator of the prevailing view in white (American) society that black men can have no other than sexual interests in white women. This view originated according to Scott (1993), as the slave owners' device to make sure the white women kept their distance from the male slaves. The prime example of this view in this context is the reaction to the image of the black man kissing Madonna. Scott (1993) points out that the indignation at this scene, together with the almost automatic assumption of the erotic nature of the kiss, is closely akin to the reaction of the police, who at the beginning of the video arrest the black man for a crime (against a white woman) he did not commit. It is, in short, racist.

McClary (1990), who writes from a feminist perspective, sees the sexual aspects of the video as central, in contrast to Scott (1993), who wants to de-emphasise these aspects. McClary (1990) sees the video as part of Madonna's constant invoking of the dichotomy of virgin and whore. She states that the issue that has to many critics been the big problem with the video is the combination of sex and religion, but that this is part of both the religious traditions the video draws on, the Catholic *and* the African-American church. McClary (1990: 15) sums up as follows:

The references to Catholic mysticism and the Black gospel church are made explicit in the visuals, with a heady mixture of a miraculous weeping statue, the stigmata, the St. Teresa-like union between the saint and the believer, and the highly physical musical performance by the Andraé Crouch Choir. Within the security of the church, difference can be overcome and the boundless joy of music can become reality.

Thus, in McClary's reading, the patriarchal virgin/whore categorisation is overcome by the video's use of the parts of Christian tradition that affirm the physical, the sexual and thereby question the virgin/whore dichotomy.



Huhtamo and Lahti (1989) discuss 'Like a Prayer' primarily as an advertisement for Madonna and products with her brand. The ending of the video — the curtain and the "The End"-sign — for instance, they see partly as a way of forcing the television channels to — against common practice — show the whole video; partly as a way for Madonna to emphasise her role as an actress — a career she is most eager to pursue. The whole video reminds them of a movie trailer — for a film that does not exist. They present a few comments on the video by a group of students, showing the multiplicity of possible readings that is the direct result of the conscious use of complicated imagery for a commercial purpose

### *Devaluating readings*

I will now turn to the discussion of the Christian reactions to 'Like a Prayer'. By far the loudest general reaction to the video on its release was negative. An indication of this is the actions of the Pepsi Cola Company. The video release was preceded by a commercial advertising Pepsi Cola. The commercial featured Madonna, was accompanied by the song 'Like a Prayer', and used pictures of Madonna dancing in a church that were similar to, but not identical with, images in the video. Pepsi was also to sponsor the release of the video and the single, and Madonna's coming tour (Andersen 1991: 198).

The fundamentalist American Family Association, headed by Reverend Donald Wildmond, called for a one-year boycott of Pepsi due to the "blatant offensiveness" of 'Like a Prayer', and was joined in this demand by the Catholic bishop of Corpus Christi, Texas. Three weeks after the release of the video, and after allegedly thousands of letters and telephone calls urging them to do so, Pepsi withdrew the advertisement that had cost them a total of \$10 million, half of which was Madonna's fee (Andersen 1991: 202–203; Bego 1992: 223).

Opinions akin to the Christian devaluating comments were also expressed by several commentators outside an explicitly Christian context. In the Finnish tabloid newspaper 'Iltalehti', the video caused comments on Madonna "swinging her breasts" in the low-necked dress — and the reviewer claims the story deals with, among other things, crucifixion and resurrection. The video is said to be a sign of the maker's bad taste, but not blasphemous (Montonen 1989). Of Madonna's numerous biographers, Andersen (1991: 199) calls the passage where Madonna is kissed by the black man "orgiastic"; Thompson (1991: 140), like Ahrnroth (1991: 173), quoted below, calls the dress an undergarment, and claims that at one point it seems as if Madonna was about to "fall out of her bra".

The religious texts on 'Like a Prayer' discussed in this paper were all written and published in Sweden within two years after the release of the video.<sup>6</sup> I will first, mainly to show the contrast, discuss two devaluating readings, then two incorporating ones. Considering the very strong negative reactions to the video from different religious circles, and the critical readings by Christian *and* "secular" interpreters, the very *positive* opinions on it expressed in the incorporating readings should stand out even more clearly.

The first of the two devaluating readings is made by Ann Ekeberg, a teacher. Her passage on Madonna's 'Like a Prayer' is as follows (Ekeberg 1991: 92)<sup>7</sup>:

A Moslem organisation in London reacted very strongly to her video 'Like a Prayer'. They felt that Madonna had gravely blasphemed Jesus, who is a great prophet in Islam. In the video a lightly dressed and wriggling Madonna kneels singing in a church. She also shows hands that are marked by stigmatisation. Statement in Penthouse, September 1985: 'Crucifixes are sexy because there is a naked man on them.'

Thomas Ahrnroth is a journalist and writer connected to the fundamentalist "Livets Ord" congregation in Uppsala, Sweden. The following passage is from Ahrnroth (1991: 173):

In the video 'Like a Prayer' Madonna dances in underwear in front of three burning crosses, she dances in the same underwear in a church in front of a crucifix with a coloured Jesus-figure. During the song she is stigmatised, the black Jesus comes alive and takes Madonna in his arms. Madonna sings the chorus with a black choir.

— The video stirred up such strong feelings among the Catholics in the U.S.A. that Pepsi Cola, who had paid Madonna a lot of money to promote their beverage, pulled out of the deal. Madonna kept the money.

I will make a few comments on Ahrnroth's and Ekeberg's readings of 'Like a Prayer', mainly to make clearer the comparison to the incorporating readings. Striking is the superficial retelling of the content of the video. Neither of these two authors mention the main story of the video or any-

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6. They are also, in all likelihood and to the best of my knowledge, all the Swedish texts on the subject published in this type of context: in Christian books and one educational video on popular music.

7. All quotes from the Swedish sources (Hansson 1990: 97–99; Ahrnroth 1991: 173; Ekeberg 1991: 92; Boström and Lundström 1990) are given in my translations of the Swedish original. The discussed passages by these authors will for the sake of readability be referred to in the text by the author's name only, without constant repetition of publishing year and page numbers.

thing connected with the murder. It is as if they had not at all noticed the part of the video that takes place outside the church, and all the less what actually happens there. This refusal to pay proper attention to the video, to reflect on its content, in short the refusal to take it seriously, is in a sense the ultimate devaluation of the video and of Madonna. The superficiality of the reading is underlined by the fact that Ahrnroth makes two mistakes in his depiction of the elements he mentions: he repeatedly calls Madonna's dress "underwear" — admittedly not that far off — and claims she dances in front of a crucifix in the church, but no such image actually appears in the video.<sup>8</sup>

Ahrnroth and Ekeberg are both rather "matter of fact", they present a list of things that (are said to) occur in the video, and leave the rest more or less up to the reader, who in the recipient design of these books is a devout and conservative Christian. The books these passages are taken from, especially Ekeberg (1991), are to a large extent made up of such lists. Immense amounts of not always very accurate details, the sum of which is expected to have an effect, are hammered into the reader. An added instrument is the juxtaposition of sentences, e.g. the last two sentences in the quote from Ekeberg, where the in principle irrelevant quote from Penthouse serves to convince the readers of the insincere, and hence blasphemous, use of the stigmatisation image in the video.

The elements mentioned in both quotes — the dress, the dancing, the stigmatisation, as well as Ahrnroth's repeated mentioning of the crosses, and the way these are juxtaposed — suggest that what these authors react most strongly to is the combination of sexuality and religion. The passage from Ekeberg is immediately preceded by the following sentence (Ekeberg 1991: 92):

Madonna is a rather mediocre singer, but she manufactures porn-rock and provokes with a mixture of religion and sex.

What these white, Scandinavian and Protestant authors react to is not primarily the relationship between a black man and a white woman but

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8. The errors and the general superficiality of the comments almost lead one to question whether these authors have actually seen the video. This would be rather a grave accusation, and I am only suggesting the possibility. But the fact is that Ahrnroth (1991, 172–175) bases his two-page discussion of the documentary 'In Bed with Madonna' entirely on newspaper clippings; and he claims the video 'True Blue' shows Madonna as a striptease dancer with a whip, wearing sado-masochistic leather underwear, and that a small boy watches her show. The video he is probably referring to is 'Open Your Heart', where Madonna dances — without whip and not wearing anything that looks like leather — in a peep show, and the boy is not admitted. (Madonna 1990)

how this woman is dressed and how she behaves in church. In other words, they would agree with McClary (1990) that Madonna's negligence of — attempt to abridge — the virgin/whore dichotomy is central to the video, but strongly disagree on the value of this message.

### *Incorporating readings*

In this section of the article, two Christian interpretations of 'Like a Prayer' that can both be characterised as incorporation are discussed. One is from Hansson (1990), the other from Boström and Lundström (1990).

Mikael Hansson is a pastor in the church of Sweden, and his book (Hansson 1990) was published by the church of Sweden as part of a project called "Svenska kyrkans bekännelsearbete"<sup>9</sup>. The aim of the project was to discuss the position, identity and beliefs of the church of Sweden in current society (Gerhardsson and Persson 1985: 5–6). The context in which Hansson (1990) was published thus gives the book something of an "official" status.

The contrast between the readings of 'Like a Prayer' by Ahrnroth and Ekeberg and the interpretation made by Hansson (1990: 97–99) is striking. Hansson describes the video at length and is very positive towards what he perceives as its religious content. The fact that he, as well as Boström and Lundström (1990), select 'Like a Prayer' for special attention (Hansson's discussion on the video takes up more than four fifths of the space he devotes to Madonna) shows that an attempt is also made to incorporate not only the video but also the artist herself — an attempt that would have had much less chance of success had the subject of analysis been almost any other video by Madonna.

Hansson begins his discussion of 'Like a Prayer' by mentioning a text on the cover of the album with the same name, where Madonna thanks her mother for teaching her to pray. He also mentions that one song on the album, 'Act of Contrition', is based on the confession of sins. About the lyrics to the song 'Like a Prayer' Hansson says:

The lyrics themselves are not that remarkable. Madonna sings of someone by whom she is strongly touched and maybe it is precisely an answer to a prayer, "like a prayer", that she has met this [person]. But combined with the pictures of the video the lyrics shine with an immense religious clarity.

In the assumption that "perhaps" the title alludes to an answer to a prayer, Hansson already shows his willingness to interpret Madonna to make her

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9. Translates roughly as "The confessional work of the Swedish Church".

fit into traditional Christianity. His statement that the lyrics “shine with an immense religious clarity” in combination with the pictures of the video in all likelihood refers most directly to the black man in the video — considered by the Christian commentators discussed in this article to portray Christ — who is thought to be the person Madonna has been touched by. This “touch” is the occurrence Hansson finds to be the main subject matter of the lyrics, and he clearly, as he states that it possibly is an answer to a prayer, interprets the meeting between Madonna and the black man in an altogether different manner from e.g. the critics Scott (1993) refers to.

Hansson finds the video very clear and he states that it is “very consciously made”. Even if he does conclude that his interpretation is merely the one “closest at hand”, thus not the *only* possible one, in view of the content of the video itself, and all the different readings of it, his certainty is rather astounding.

The contrast between the street and the church, in atmosphere, colours, lighting and material, is according to Hansson a key to the interpretation of the video.

The scenes from the back street are filmed in grey hues, almost black and white. ... Inside the chapel everything is in another tone. The scenes are here in colour and the nuances are very warm and pleasant. The light is a shimmering yellow and produces the feeling that the room is lit by burning candles. Instead of cold concrete, here is warm wood. Instead of contempt and anger, here is joy and happiness.

This contrast has been pointed out in other readings as well, and is also quite clear in the video. Hansson thinks that the video depicts the Christian faith, as it is to be found in the church, as a source of power to oppose the evils that “govern our streets”. While Scott (1993) finds that the video shows this power as present in the *black* church and the black community, Hansson makes an effort to generalise this message by claiming that the chapel in the video is

...not at all unlike the chapels and mission-halls in villages all over Sweden.

He also, of course, mentions the fact that when Madonna steps over the threshold into the church, she sings the line ‘and it feels like home’.

The home that is there in the chapel where the warmth overflows her.

Hansson repeatedly mentions the church and emphasises its importance, and also compares the church in the video to churches in Sweden. He thus — in contrast with the Swedish pastor whose comments are discussed below — incorporates the video explicitly into the church, and not merely in

general into the Christian tradition. One likely reason why he makes this rather explicit effort is the official church context in which Hansson (1990) was published.

The images in 'Like a Prayer' that have upset many Christian viewers, the dress, the dance and the kiss, are also mentioned by Hansson (1990), but in an indirect way. He states that some people felt

...she was too vulgar in her joyful dance in the chapel. The shoulder-straps keep slipping off her shoulders, the dress is ever so low-necked and shows too much of the breasts. In addition, she kisses the black Jesus a little too long and with too open a mouth for it to be acceptable. Many circles and several churches protested heavily against the sexual image Madonna has given her story.

Thus, Hansson mentions these elements only as examples of what has been criticised in the video. In a sense, Hansson denies that he himself has seen these images in the video, and writes of them almost as inventions of the critics. The tone in which he describes the criticism of the video is clearly ironic; he is mildly poking fun at those who were disturbed by the low neck, etc. He is making it very clear that he does not belong to those who "protest heavily".

Moreover, he mentions that the video was released at about the same time as Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, and that some of the strongest criticism against 'Like a Prayer' came not from Christians but from Moslems.

When Madonna's video 'Like a Prayer' was released, she was also threatened with murder by Moslems. Some Moslems felt that Madonna's depiction of the saint character was blasphemous.

By making this connection between Madonna and Rushdie, Hansson — in contrast with Ekeberg, who seems to be sympathetic with the Moslem fundamentalists' feelings on blasphemy — draws a very sharp line between himself and those who do not appreciate 'Like a Prayer'.

No distinction is made by Hansson — or any of the religious authors quoted, between Madonna herself and the character she portrays in the video. Throughout his discussion Hansson refers to the main female character in the video as Madonna; there are nine direct mentions of "Madonna" as the person who enters the chapel, has wounds in her hands, etc., but not once does Hansson point to the fact that she is only portraying a character, playing a role. As a result of this, the artist herself, and not only the video, is made the object of incorporation.



Hansson gives a fairly detailed and accurate, but not complete, account of the content of the video. One of the most eye-catching of the elements that Hansson does not refer to is the ending of the video: the red theatre curtain, the curtain call and the "The End" sign. One possible interpretation of these images is the commercial one that Huhtamo and Lahti (1989) present. But these elements have a clear origin and a conventional use: they normally function to point out that the previous occurrences have been a show, a fiction that is now over. In this video they serve as a kind of rather tongue-in-cheek "Verfremdungseffekt", and underline the distinction between the real-life Madonna and the character she portrays in the video — a distinction that e.g. Hansson does not make.

Hansson sums up his interpretation:

The interpretation of the video that is closest at hand is that Madonna wants to show that even if racism, hatred and violence govern our streets, there are forces that actively want to confront this evil and instead spread goodness. This force is enclosed in the Christian faith, it can be found in the church, it is self-giving but by no means an easy way to go for those who want to follow it. The wounds in Madonna's hands and the captivity of the saint/Jesus show that suffering and pain can be the consequence for those who want to walk the road of love in this evil world.

According to Hansson the video has a clear message, behind which he furthermore sees Madonna's own intentions. He says that her motive behind the video is to say that one, perhaps the only, source of power to fight the evil in this world is the Christian faith, or more specifically the faith of the church, including the church that is to be found "in villages all over Sweden". He claims that Madonna is siding with the good, with the church, and that this is shown on the one hand in the story of the video, where she — the character in the video, which is not distinguished from the individual or the artist — goes to the police to tell the truth, on the other hand in the fact that she, as Hansson sees it, uses her video to convey a positive Christian message, to, as he puts it, "give evidence as to what her faith means". He further makes a connection between Madonna's siding with the good, walking "the road of love", and the stigmatisation: she has received these wounds as a sign of the suffering that can be the result of choosing the side of the good.

At the end of his discussion on Madonna and 'Like a Prayer' Hansson produces the following quote from a spokesman for Madonna:

Madonna does absolutely not want to blaspheme; why, she is herself a believer and a Catholic. Quite simply the current video is a story of the battle between good and evil, and of course she is on the side of the good.

Hansson lets this quote stand for itself, without further comments, as the final conclusion of his Madonna discussion. He thereby makes it quite clear that he fully agrees with what the press agent says, and makes this statement his own.<sup>10</sup> Concluding the discussion with a quote from a presumably authoritative source is a way of saying “is this not exactly what I told you, now do you believe me?”.

The cover of Hansson (1990) is a collage of three pictures. In the lower left hand corner is a black and white photo of Bono, the lead singer of the popular group U2 that is also discussed in the book. The upper right hand corner is a detail from the print ‘Isaiah’s Vision’ by Gustav Doré (Familjebibel 1957: 985), and shows the prophet Isaiah. Between these pictures, and covering about two thirds of the page, is a colour photo of Madonna. This picture is taken from the scene in ‘Like a Prayer’ where she is first kneeling down at the statue to pray. Across the page, so to say on Madonna’s neck, just above the cross that clearly shows, is written the title of the book. The title translates ‘God’s Prophets?’, with the subtitle ‘On Faith and Spiritual Longing in Popular Culture’. With the title, Hansson asks if there are not prophets of God among the pop artists of today; with the combination of the title and the pictures he makes the suggestion that Madonna — in addition to being a good Christian, is one, and perhaps even one of the most prominent, of these prophets.

‘Like a Prayer’ is also discussed on a Swedish-produced educational video (Boström and Lundström 1990a) on Christianity and rock music. As well as a supplement booklet (Boström and Lundström 1990b). The opening images of ‘Like a Prayer’ are used to set off the Swedish video, with the church in ‘Like a Prayer’ as a background for the subtitle of the film, which translates “a film about God in rock music”. This functions in a manner similar to the cover of Hansson 1990: by combining the text with the image from ‘Like a Prayer’, the producers of the video claim that Madonna’s video is a prime example of a work of popular music, where God appears — a claim that is emphasised by the fact that the image used is an external shot of the church. In the video, a few clips from ‘Like a Prayer’ are shown, notably, the stigmata twice, and comments are made by one minister, two members of the “secular” Swedish pop group Lolita Pop, and by three anonymous, presumably Christian, young men.

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10. Theoretically, he could of course also have quoted e.g. Madonna’s anticipation of Nancy Reagan’s, or Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell’s reaction to the video: “Gee, I wonder what Nancy Reagan will think of this” (Andersen 1991: 200). Or he might have mentioned the title of Madonna’s video collection and best of-album, “The Immaculate Collection”, a word-play on the immaculate conception.

Here I will quote the comments the Swedish Lutheran pastor and musician Per Harling makes on 'Like a Prayer' in Boström and Lundström (1990a)<sup>11</sup>. He begins:

It is you know extremely biblically rich in images. You have the Christ figure, of course, and how the love from her then for this Christ figure eventually liberates him. He is then partly locked up in the churches, I suppose her message is, partly he is outside the churches.

Harling sanctions Madonna's use of religious symbols by calling the video's imagery "biblically rich". There is no trace of accusation of blasphemy in such a statement. He takes it for granted that the black man is Christ, as does one of the youths and one of the musicians interviewed in the video, and subscribes to the same view as Hansson that Christ is both the statue and the arrested black man. Between Harling's statements an inserted short comment by Steen Boberg from Lolita Pop, saying 'Like a Prayer' reminds him of the story of the Good Samaritan, further anchors Madonna's video in Christian tradition.

### *Interpreting symbols*

This third passage of my discussion on the Christian readings of 'Like a Prayer' deals with the interpretations of some of the religious symbols in the video. Its use of symbols is an important reason why 'Like a Prayer' has attracted so much attention, and the interpretations of these symbols is an important part of the discursive transformations of the video that make up its incorporation or devaluation.

Hansson writes:

[Madonna's] imagery and her use of religious symbols is unconventional and challenging and shows that she is well acquainted with the Christian symbolic language.

Madonna's critics have not accepted what Hansson sees as her challenge. What he calls her "unconventional" use of religious symbols has been one major reason she has received such strong criticism. Her use of some of the strongest and most central Christian images and the way she combines these with her own sexual image has been seen as provocative, blasphemous, an abuse. I will in the following discuss the interpretations of three

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11. In my translated rendering of Harling's oral statements I have attempted to reproduce his use of words as faithfully as possible, but I have decided not to follow strict transcription procedures, because the original utterance was in another language, and because the restricted analysis produced in this paper does not require such procedures.

different images in 'Like a Prayer': the black statue, the stigmatisation and the burning crosses.

The first of these images, the statue, is identified by the director of the video Mary Lambert (quoted in McClary 1990: 21) as portraying St. Martin de Porres. This was a black Dominican lay-brother who lived in Peru 1579–1639, was canonised in 1962, and is the patron saint of race relations (Farmer 1987: 362). But the statue is automatically assumed by most commentators to represent a black Christ, and Ahrnroth goes so far as to turn the statue into a crucifix. Going along with Lambert, whose opinion of the identity of the statue none of the Christian interpreters seem to have sought, would, perhaps especially to the Protestant interpreters, mean a less "sacred" reading than seeing the statue as a portrait of Christ, and thus dilute the incorporation or devaluation respectively.

Hansson does not quite make up his mind what the statue represents; he alternates between calling it a saint, a black Jesus, and compromising with "the saint/Jesus". The instances where the label "saint" is used on its own are when Hansson explicitly talks about the statue before it comes alive, and when he refers to the Moslem reaction to Madonna's depiction of the "saint character". Referring to the statue as Jesus in that context would give more credibility to the accusation of blasphemy. The name Jesus is used on its own when Hansson refers to the living statue, and in the sequence, partly quoted below, where Hansson points out the connection between the statue and the arrested black man, which are played by the same actor.

A significant feature in the statue is of course its colour. Scott (1993), as well as Kaplan (1990), point out the importance of the racial theme in 'Like a Prayer'. To the makers of the video, too, the racial aspect seems to be central, considering the fact that St. Martin de Porres is patron of race relations, and that Madonna originally wanted the video to show a story of a black man and a white woman being chased and eventually shot by the Ku Klux Klan (Andersen 1991: 199). The unorthodox presentation of "Christ" as black has been (Scott 1993) one reason for the criticism of the video.

In contrast with — and opposition to — those who find the video's depiction of "Christ" unorthodox or even blasphemous, Boström and Lundström (1990b) explicitly state that the video gives a classic picture of Christ:

It is thus the classic picture of Christ as the helper as well as the one who gets helped that is depicted.

Boström and Lundström (1990b), as well as Hansson and Harling, produce their incorporating readings as a counter-weight to the use of (what is per-

ceived by the Christian interpreters as) the central Christian symbol, the son of God, as an anti-racist statement. When the black race and allegedly sexual behaviour of “the Christ-figure” are seen as unorthodox and idiosyncratic, these Christian interpreters produce their traditional Christian readings of the symbol to reclaim it to its more traditional religious meaning.

The second example, the stigmatisation, is one of the strongest religious images in the video. All the writers discussed in this article refer to it, including Ekeberg, who does not even mention the statue. The devaluating readings merely mention the stigmatisation, as an element alongside Madonna’s vulgar dancing and dress, and let their readers draw the conclusion that such a combination cannot be proper. A reading that emphasises the provocative, and therefore commercial, aspect of the use of this image is to my mind also quite plausible. The stigmatisation is perhaps the best example in ‘Like a Prayer’ of an “empty” image, one that is used without religious intent by the makers of the video, but rather with a solely commercial intention.

Hansson (1990), however, insists on giving the image a traditional Christian interpretation:

When the Jesus figure is gone Madonna picks up a knife the man has held in his hand, she hurts herself on it and when she looks at her hands she notices that she has been stigmatised, she has got the marks of Jesus’ wounds on her hands. It is as if she has joined in his suffering and shared the pain with him. She then understands the connection between the Jesus-statue that has come alive and the wrongly arrested black man. She understands that they are one and the same person.

He thus reads the stigmatisation in a traditional Christian manner, as a sign of participation in Christ’s passion. Hansson also sees the stigmatisation as a means of a new insight by Madonna, it makes her see that the wrongly arrested man is Jesus. In his summing up, Hansson makes the stigmata central to the understanding of the whole video, saying that they show how Madonna suffered as a result of choosing to side with the good. .

Harling (Boström and Lundström 1990a) makes an innovative reading of the stigmatisation sequence:

And then they have the stigmatisation you know, with this sword, which why the sword is also an old Christian symbol, the double-edged sword that is the symbol for the word of God then, and through the word of God she gets the same kind of marks that Christ got on the cross.

He does not make the same kind of comments on the meaning of the stigmata as Hansson, but he makes his own contribution to a traditional

Christian reading of the images. The sword that Hansson, perhaps more accurately, calls a knife, otherwise seems a bit out of place. Thompson (1991: 140), for instance, strangely enough interprets it as the weapon used in the murder outside the church. But Harling gives it a traditional Christian meaning as a symbol for the word of God (therefore he must elect the term “sword” for the weapon) that somehow gives Madonna the wounds of Christ.

The third example, the burning crosses, can readily be understood as the symbols of the Ku Klux Klan, especially considering the prominence of the race relation theme in the video. Ahrnroth, however, apparently sees the burning crosses primarily as a Christian symbol, when he refers to them alongside the crucifix as mere backdrops to Madonna’s dance. Harling also comments on the crosses:

[Madonna] is consciously playing with images and symbols that are confronted with each other all the time, that seem to be each other’s opposites. Take the burning cross then, which you know is if I remember correctly an old Christian symbol for God’s love, that’s the fire of the Spirit that is joined together with the cross, but then that has then been distorted in our own history through Ku Klux Klan you know and they have taken that as their symbol, which then has become an an an evil symbol you know.

He thus explicitly calls attention to the ambiguousness of the symbols in the video, and points out that the burning cross now functions as a symbol of the Ku Klux Klan. But he still sees the traditional Christian meaning<sup>12</sup> of the symbol as primary, something that the Klan has taken over and corrupted, and he rather hesitates before using the adjective “evil”. By identifying the fire with the Holy Spirit, Harling further connects the burning cross with the Christian symbolic universe.

## Conclusions

In this article, I have discussed a case of the Christian debate on popular music, and attempted to analyse this debate from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge represented by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. From this perspective, the two distinctly different approaches to the example discussed, Madonna’s video ‘Like a Prayer’, can be understood as two means to achieve the same goal: the nihilation of any reality outside the reach of the explaining powers of one’s symbolic universe.

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12. Mary Lambert (quoted in McClary 1990: 15) claims that apart from referring to the Ku Klux Klan, the burning cross is a symbol of God’s wrath.



The emphasis in this paper has been on incorporation, here represented by the Christian readings that find a Christian content in the Madonna video. The term implies that the readings serve as an attempt to make, in this case, 'Like a Prayer' part of the Christian symbolic universe, an affirmation of the Christian faith.

Of special importance in the Christian interpretations of 'Like a Prayer' is the reading — partly against the explicit intent of the makers of the video — of the symbolic images in the video in a traditional Christian way. The devaluating critics, Ahrnroth and Ekeberg, have reacted against what they perceive as Madonna's sacrilegious (ab)use of these symbols. The incorporating interpreters, Hansson and Harling, completely turn this around: instead of seeing Madonna's use of Christian symbols as a threat, they see it as a confirmation that these symbols are strong enough not just to survive Madonna's unconventional treatment but to receive a new life as a result of it.

The incorporating readings of Madonna have different functions, partly depending on the audience. To people outside the church, they function as an attempt to enhance the image of Christianity and the church: by showing that there are Christians — ministers, even — who enjoy popular music, and by declaring that one popular artist is actually Christian. To believers, these interpretations serve as a "guide" to 'Like a Prayer' — much needed because of the multitude of religious symbols in a strange context. With this "guide", an otherwise potentially quite problematic video and artist are rendered meaningful from a Christian perspective. And by their interpretations of 'Like a Prayer', Hansson and Harling are using Madonna's video as a vehicle for conveying their own religious messages. They are attempting on the one hand to give the Christian message and the church a modern image; on the other to neutralise popular music, to take away its independence — to incorporate it into institutional Christianity.

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## Dance as Aggressiveness

The woman who founded Tenshō-kōtai-jingū-kyō, Kitamura Sayo (1900–1967), publicly announced in July 1945 that the world was coming to an end and that she had been chosen by the absolute deity Tensho Kotai Jingu to be the savior of the world. People began to gather to her banner, a religious organization was formed, and legal incorporation of the group as a religious juridical person took place in January 1947. Teaching that regret, desire, hatred, love and other emotional antipathies were the cause of all misfortune, the founder urged people to free themselves of such restraints by praying earnestly until they attained a state in which the self was completely forgotten. Since the members of the group perform a ritual dance and fall into an ecstatic condition at the group meetings, the movement is called the Dancing Religion (Matsuno 1972: 230).

Kitamura Sayo, or Ōgamisama, was born in the South-West of Japan, in the Yamaguchi prefecture. She was a farmer's wife, worked hard in the fields and never got enough sleep. In July 1942 a barn on the Kitamura family was burnt down and Sayo saw herself as the cause of the accident. Serving the *kami* of the ancestors had for her been the first thing in life, so she was deeply disturbed by the fire. She blamed herself for having destroyed the ancestor's property and disturbing the neighbours. After praying and praying for forgiveness, she still suffered torments of conscience day after day. She went to a well-known healer in a nearby village, who gave her an explanation (the fire was caused by a jealous arsonist) and some advice for the future. In her diary two days later, and thirteen days later, we can read, "Got up at 2.00 a. m. and took cold bath of penance and prayed... each time I take a cold bath of penance, I feel as if My body and soul have been purified and that I have come nearer to God. My mind is filled only with the eagerness of praying to purify Myself and I have no worldly cares" (Tensho-kotai-jingu-kyo 1954: 15).

In March 1944 the healer living nearby had a divine message for Kitamura Sayo: "All the Angels of Heaven and Earth will descend upon You and You will become a living God on earth." (Tensho-kotai-jingu-kyo 1954: 16). After that she began to receive inspiration from an "almighty *kami*"

and she became the mouthpiece of the deity who possessed her. What the entity inside commanded her to say always flabbergasted people and was often taken as a sign of madness or insanity. She could not act in accordance with her own intentions but had involuntarily to obey the dictates of the one in her body. Otherwise she got headaches, stomach pains and suffered attacks of diarrhea.

According to Kitamura Sayo's life history, what started with animal spirit possession, which is quite common in the area, became something else when the snake spirit transformed itself into two beings, that of *Kotai-jin* (a *kami* connected to the Ise shrines) and *Amaterasu* (the Sun goddess, here as *Tenshō*, meaning heavenly) who united in the body of the selected woman as "The Almighty God of Heaven".

In the middle of autumn 1944 she was led by the divinity inside her to a mountain on her property at 02.00 a.m. Kitamura Sayo rode her bicycle to the foot of the mountain, about two miles from her house, and climbed the hill. At the top she commenced a prayer that was given to her as the only prayer in accordance with God's will: NA-MYO-HO-REN-GE-KYO.<sup>1</sup>

"Her prayer 'Na-myo-ho-ren-ge-kyo', sometimes drawn out and sometimes brief, was chanted with natural rhythm and reverberated among the surrounding mountains. When she finished praying, She lay on the ground, face upward, and watched the dawn breaking. After a pause, She resumed Her prayer. Once celestial lotus flowers in full bloom showered down from Heaven as the reddish sun ascended amongst the blossoms. Angels in full costume were dancing before Her... this is a dance of Angels, the One in Her body said. While She was watching the dance in admiration, She was in a celestial bliss and felt as if She had also become a dancing Angel" (Tensho-kotai-jingu-kyo 1954: 29-30).

In July 1945 Kitamura Sayo gave her first public sermon and her religious group was called *Odori-shūkyō*, the Dancing Religion. The dance was something given to the foundress as a way to restore peace. "You have been appointed to perform a Salvation Dance when the present world is on the verge of collapse", the divinity inside Kitamura Sayo told her (Tensho-kotai-jingu-kyo 1954: 46).

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<sup>1</sup> Before 1964 *Tenshō-kōtai-jingū-kyō* used the same *kanji* as the Nichiren sect to indicate *namu-myōhō-renge-kyō*, but ceased doing so as a consequence of a lawsuit initiated by the Nichiren Shōshū. Inside the Dancing Religion the formula has been interpreted as "A woman with a little name has contacted the law of Heaven binding it into a teaching". Nowadays the members are instructed that the words are untranslatable, reflecting in their sounds a transforming influence of evil or negative unredeemed spirits. Kerner 1979: 317.

To her followers Ōgamisama said, "I will establish true peace on this earth... World peace advocated by politicians is nothing but a camouflage of national interest based on selfishness... Peace can be brought only by practicing God's teaching" (Tensho-kotai-jingu-kyo 1960: 1–2).

The foundress of the Dancing Religion danced with the Almighty God that struck in Hiroshima in 1945, allied with the enemy. "The other name for MacArthur is the 'Messenger of Divinity'. He was sent to Japan as an agent of the Divine Wind... The members of the Diet were high-handed criminals, and the Cabinet Ministers were even worse. Who put them in jail? Nobody but MacArthur—Is this not the work of a good Divine Wind?" (Tensho-kotai-jingu-kyo 1954: 60–61).

When the Japanese emperor denied being divine in his New Year speech, on the first of January 1946, the first year of God's Kingdom began, according to Kitamura Sayo. The sun-goddess *Amaterasu* was a part of her and the heavenly god would now expand the spiritual world instead of the Japanese territory. As Kitamura Sayo established the foundation of God's Kingdom within Japan, she followed her Almighty God's command and designated Hawai'i as "the Bridge to the World".

## Hawai'i

The situation among Japanese Americans in post-war Hawai'i was that *issei* (the immigrants) were enemy, but *nisei* (second generation) were American citizens. "This often meant changed parent-child roles and the loss of parental authority over children... [since] Issei accepted from the beginning the role of their children as American citizens" (Kimura 1992: 226).

In Hawai'i, after the war, it was very important for the American Japanese to be Americans only — to identify with the other, the hostile one that used to be a friend. *Issei*, the immigrants, were enemy aliens, and therefore enemies in American eyes, and since public use of the Japanese language was forbidden, it was the interpretations, made by their children, of regulations concerning enemy aliens that *issei* had to depend on. In contrast to traditional customs, some had to substitute I-neither-saw-nor-heard for helpfulness. The "arrest of almost all the Issei leaders and the closing of all the Japanese institutions stopped the functioning of their society, making the Issei the most desolate and isolated element of the island population. The freezing of Japanese assets, including bank accounts, and the loss of



livelihood due to wartime regulations added to the atmosphere of insecurity" (Kimura 1992: 225).

The immigrants tried to eliminate everything Japanese. Cultural objects, as well as letters, books, photographs and Japanese flags were burnt. *Issei* and their children made great efforts to be identified with the United States; together with American flags they placed portraits of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and President Roosevelt in their homes. "The *Issei* chose these American figures as legitimate representations of America with the symbolic value of protection" (Kimura 1992: 225).

After the war, Kitamura Sayo arrived in Hawai'i to teach those who would become her followers what otherness was. She gave sermons and talked about the Almighty God who expanded his kingdom thanks to her, the Great Goddess, in command of lost human beings who would dance for world peace.

Kitamura Sayo identified with the enemy when Japan was invaded. To escape the anxiety stemming from the presence of a threatening authority, the so-called Caucasians, many Japanese in Hawai'i did the same thing. Sometimes the need for strength results in identification with the authoritarian for the purpose of neutralizing the threatening presence (cf. Moloney 1954: 116).

On October 12, 1952, Ōgamisama made a trip around the island of Oahu and danced in ecstasy in public places, like parks and at religious sights (Tensho-kotai-jingu-kyo 1954: 180). The dance, *muga-no-mai*, surrendering and conquering, was used to proselytize, symbolizing the union of man and God. This dance was very offensive among the male converts after the war; it was performed in a way that reminded the spectators of military marches. According to members of the Dancing Religion who were converted when Ōgamisama made her first missionary tour, the more people that surrounded them when they were dancing in a public park, the more strongly the converts became convinced they were powerful servants of God. In compliance with the teaching of the Dancing Religion, to proselytize spectators is to spread peace in the world, and this was extremely important after the war.

In Hawai'i, the Japanese as a group went down in the social scale and there was a huge change within the group itself, when it comes to status. What usually happens in societies in dangerous situations is that the authority of elders over juniors is stressed. This was inverted in Hawai'i after the Pearl Harbor attack. It is interesting to read the letters sent by *issei* that were put in internment camps. They tell their wives to look upon themselves as mothers of American citizens, and they instruct their sons to

conduct themselves as loyal Americans and never let their fathers' situation affect the duties they have to "their native land". Many of them excuse themselves for being internees, afraid that their children will feel humiliated. On the path to assimilation the private aspects of ethnicity can be turned upside down, as in this case. That is because those aspects remain just as long as the group wants them. Under the pressure from an overarching majority some ethnic content might be lost or altered, but it should not be seen as some blind turning away from the roots. *Nisei* desired change therefore the process of Americanisation came from within sponsored by the ethnic group itself. "The general implication here is that 'de-ethnicisation' occurs because of the formidable attraction of mainstream life" (Edwards 1989: 180).

What comes from the inside because of lust for something new, and what comes from necessity for this other, is retrospectively always hard to tell. The extreme expression of the combination of Japanese morality and loyalty to America was found in the combat teams composed of second generation Japanese in Hawai'i who volunteered during World War II. "Local Japanese attained the unprecedented ethnic glory through their heroic commitment to the American cause; their ethnic pride reached a peak paradoxically when the whole Japanese community was suddenly 'de-Japanized' and the authority of Issei was downgraded to a nonentity" (Lebra 1972: 10). Ethnicity was not the only basis for Japanese group formation; nationality was also important. Nationality involves a wider range than ethnicity and when Kitamura Sayo arrived, she told the people who gathered around her that Japan was divine and the real war began when she became the mouthpiece of the sun-goddess Amaterasu; therefore Japan did not really lose the war. Kitamura Sayo alluded to the former expansion of the Japanese empire when she preached about the expansion of God's kingdom on earth. Her sermons were usually nothing but scoldings. The converts were chartised. Kitamura Sayo was often frantic with anger and accused her followers of not polishing their souls enough. In an ecstatic way she screamed about political leaders and priests, and she blamed the men in high positions for being "maggots". The voice of God inside her made her shout.

"I think, that we are concerned here with a widespread use of spirit-possession, by means of which women and other depressed categories exert mystical pressures on their superiors in circumstances of deprivation and frustration when few other sanctions are available to them" (Lewis 1989: 39). To Ōgamisama aggressiveness was a drama set up by her, the dancing goddess, as a way to win converts. It became a taken-for-granted human

predisposition. “That which society defines, recognizes and problematizes as aggression may well be a set of functional activities dressed up as a cultural drama” (Rogers et al. 1995: 166).

### **The Situation at the Time for the Founding of the Dancing Religion**

Kitamura Sayo, with bomber-planes around her in Japan, danced with angels for world peace. She left her ordinary self to escape the terrible world and to be with God. It was the God of the winners who once gave birth to Buddha, Jesus, and then to Ōgamisama. Through dancing a dance born in a wish to escape reality she was one with God’s liberators, the Americans. She sang:

Oh, bring on the bombs — bring on the bombs —  
 May they exterminate the maggots of this rotten world,  
 And burn all their lairs to ashes, whereupon  
 Let there appear God’s New Kingdom.  
 (Tensho-kotai-jingu-kyo 1954: 35).

The voice inside told her she should burn down the Imperial Palace, only leaving one wing. It would not be disrespectful, since the emperor had forsaken the nation. According to the one inside, Japan was founded upon the union of three things: the national domain, Tenshō-kōtai-jingū-kyō, and the emperor as the guardian of the nation. The voice said, “I have descended into Your body, and therefore equip yourself with the necessary knowledge to meet the situation. Even if the Emperor and Empress took cold baths of penance for three years, I would never descend into such defiled bodies as theirs... perform a Salvation Dance... they have failed to govern their country properly” (Tensho-kotai-jingu-kyo 1954: 46). After MacArthur’s victory many male converts danced for peace in a very intense military marchlike way. “Dance is... an active creation of meanings, that is, social action dependent upon social relationships at the time” (Brinson 1988: 211).

The Japanese nation as a social institution fostered violence in a variety of ways during the war. Institutions can produce a weakened sense of personal responsibility for aggressive actions, and they can also dehumanize the victims of aggression. As an example, Japanese officers degraded the victims of South-East Asia through making them seem as if they were less than human. Features of a situation that lead to a disinhibition of aggression through deindividuation can be anonymity, loss of sense of responsibility, physiological arousal and intense sensory stimulation (Sabini 1992:

513). When Kitamura Sayo gave her sermons, both in Japan and in Hawai'i, she put herself aside and acted as an aggressive doomster. Her act showed physical arousal and in many ways her performance was a case of deindividuation.

The moral code all Japanese share is one inhibition against expressing aggression and thereby harming others. As children they are taught not to be aggressive and offensive. But punishing someone for aggression can have a paradoxical effect. Watching other people being aggressive may lead to the disinhibition of aggression. Kitamura Sayo, maltreated by her mother-in-law, who functioned as an arbitrator in the marriage between Sayo and her husband, might in some ways have acted as a punished child. When you punish a child to inhibit the behaviour for which the child was punished, the punishment can have another effect, it might provide a model of aggression that encourages aggression. Kitamura Sayo's mother-in-law used arbitrary power, she disciplined Sayo without explaining the reasons for that discipline. The old lady taught her daughter-in-law "that acting in a hostile way was an appropriate way to get what one wants (through modeling)" (cf. Sabini 1992: 506). During all the years with her really mean tyrant Sayo got more and more aggressive. But "aggression needs to be understood within the manifold of sets of meanings whereby aggression is constituted... not as an action or a state but as a set of interwoven textual identities, actions and descriptions" (Rogers et al. 1995: 169).

Kitamura Sayo was a frustrated woman, though with well-developed self-defence mechanisms, and became more and more offensive instead of defensive. It is that the dance became something like a cathartic activity I find interesting. In the middle of the night Sayo rode her bicycle long distances, upset and physiologically aroused she prayed and danced. Aroused she "used up" her aggression through intense dance, a process of catharsis. But did the opportunities to discharge her aggressions actually reduce it? According to several research results it seems to work the other way (see Buss 1966; Loew 1967) In her sermons Kitamura Sayo is usually more aggressive after the dance than before. The dance can be seen as a safe outlet for aggressive energy, as cathartic activity it releases the plug and allows aggressive energy to be released, but she is as mad, or even more, after than before.

Of course the word "aggression" means several very different things, and I use the same word for different forms, but it is all about aggression as a combination of influences. "We need also to address the problem that ag-

gression is simply not accessible to empirical investigation other than as a set of socially negotiated meanings" (Rogers et al. 1995: 170).

Kitamura Sayo acted aggressively and found she was reinforced in some way, by getting what she wanted. She was therefore more likely to act in that way again. She gained power and social status through her aggressiveness. During war many people are rewarded for acting aggressively, and other people learn through vicarious reinforcement to imitate those that succeed. However, for anger to be converted to aggression, certain cues must be available in the environment. It seems like cues acts as triggers to aggression and aggression plus frustration creates anger, then anger together with the cue to act out cause aggressive behaviour (Rogers et al. 1995: 170).

The leader of the Dancing Religion pestered all other religious movements and molested their leaders. According to the dancing goddess, those who did not follow her teaching, *Mioshie*, would fall into hell. The salvation of the world should be carried out at all costs, and Ōgamisama "mobilized" her followers to attain world peace (Ogamisama's Sermon 1986: 6).

Kitamura Sayo worked hard and was always aroused when she shouted in front of people during her sermons. It seems that she could not relieve her arousal through the dance, she often became frustrated with what she saw and with the people she confronted, a frustration that enhanced aggression. She had very high blood pressure, usually around 230–240. One interpretation of the enhancement of aggression by extraneous arousal gives drive a direct role. According to this interpretation, extraneous arousal 'energizes' behaviour; it makes one do whatever one happens to be doing more intensely. Kitamura Sayo was a doomwatcher and her fire-and-brimstone sermons were intensified through her dance. Aggression and the transfer of arousal are important elements when the dance is seen as instrumental offensive power.

Because of the socio-cultural background in the specific war/post-war situation there was a militancy among the male converts in the peace dance. The members took a militant stand toward the outside society and Ōgamisama told them to "defend vigilantly and to expand aggressively the Kingdom of God" (Lebra 1967: 69). Since one of the major factors to be taken into account when interpreting the dance "is the range and type of human movement, expression and communication used by the people from whom the particular dance emerges, for this determines, in part, the meaning of the dance" (Hodgens 1988: 65), we have to look at the breakdown in Japanese society in the 1930s, from Taisho democracy to triumphant militarism.

Ōgamisama acted like a military, in a very unfeminine way, after she had been possessed by Tenshō-kōtai-jingū-kyō. She reflected Japan.

Ōgamisama made a political association with emperorship and thereby she made an accommodation to the world. The paradoxical militarism in the peace-dance was nurtured by male *issei* in Hawai'i. When they were studied in a park, it was noticed that they were waving their arms downward left and right, as in a march, and when it came to the melodies that were sung, "some are reminiscent of the songs taught in Japanese grade schools, of military marching songs" (Lebra 1967: 116).

The dance performed by some of the members of the Dancing Religion was a way to manifest Japanese features important at that time, a kind of imperialism. Historically the United States had provided demonstrations of imperialist methods, and as a means of self-preservation Japan identified herself with her enemy. The history of the United States and Japan in Hawai'i demonstrates the Japanese imitation of American methods.

After Perry effectively opened the doors of Japan, the actions of the American Marines were often copied by the Japanese. The emigration from Japan to Hawai'i, initially permitted by the Hawaiian king Kalakaua, grew enormous and justified an interest in the Hawaiian Islands. The manner in which the Japanese emissary approached Hawai'i was patterned after Perry's "visit" to Japan. The dignitaries came in a ship of war, and in the same fashion as Perry had made his demands to Japan, they asked for the *ichi bun* (chief/headman). In 1898 the United States negotiated with the Hawaiians over the treaty of annexation. They reassured the Japanese officials that they had no such plans as a transfer of the islands to the United States. The Japanese were deceived and remembered this. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of December, 1941, the Japanese emissaries in Washington talked of peace and called the idea of war ridiculous (Moloney 1954: 124).

Through out history it seems that the rulers of Japan have often identified with the enemy, and then the enemy has not been the other but the self. The dance of Ōgamisama was to some extent that of Christian angels. The Other was in form the God of the other, and the *issei* members tried to leave their selves for The Other (in *muga-no-mai*) and the other (in the acculturation process). Ōgamisama told her followers to stand up and dance, and tried to explain that "I danced a similar dance in 1945 by the order of God in My body. The dance you just saw is an Angels' dance which you have seen in pictures or heard about in stories. If a person enters a state of non-ego, God will guide him to dance. Soon everyone of you will be able to perform this celestial dance (Tensho-kotai-jingu-kyo 1954: 68). Communion was a gathering of members who wished to get rid of the "me"



through the “ego-less” dance. But it was also a spiritual march towards the Kingdom of God, and the dance was a piece of a strenuous life, a struggle in itself, striving for harmony through a release of tensions, aiming at Utopia and a society in which they all, sick and poor and filled with guilt, would be happy and healthy, free from frustration and anger. The dance was a war against the lack of peace.

For *issei* with hazy, undefined identities and a relaxation of discipline inside the families, to submerge in a group in a way that gave a new identity, partly through deindividuation, seemed attractive. To be lost in a group and there find a deified part of the self, in the search for a better me, was to the converts an exciting and self-confidence-lifting experience that made them polish their souls on the order of Ōgamisama.

Inside the religious group *issei* could “steal back” the position they lost in Hawaiian society after the war. The rigid conformity juxtaposed with flexibility, the authority of *issei* over *nisei*, was kept when the teachings of Ōgamisama were put into practice. They placed themselves between the categories of ordinary social life and the classifications on which the order in post-war Hawai‘i depended was annulled inside the Dancing Religion. Perhaps, the dance can be seen as one of those symbols that “designate temporary antinomic liberation from behavioral norms and cognitive rules (Turner 1990: 273).

What happened in Hawai‘i after the war among those Japanese immigrants and their children that became members of the Dancing Religion was that frustration and aggression were taken care of. Acculturation anxiety was in many cases reduced thanks to the “religious family”, the sect. Different processes which underlie social conformity, like identification, compliance, and internalization, should in this case not be seen as different but overlapping. The Japanese in Hawai‘i, as a group, changed their attitudes in order to become more like the Americans they respected and admired after the Second World War. That could be called identification with the enemy. When it comes to compliance, subjects go along with the majority but do not change their private beliefs, including traditional customs. The group as a whole identified with the Americans, the so-called *haole*, or white ones. Inside the group, the *issei* were directly related to the fact that the majority had power on its side, because of the war situation, which it could use through sanctions. Compliance is when a majority influences a minority. But in the case of *nisei* it was more a matter of internalisation. The children of the immigrants came to agree that the majority view was the more valid one. They both identified with the Americans and internalised the norms given to them at school. Even though many of them

had been taught the traditional customs *issei* had tried to keep, they wanted to be “totally American”. Thanks to the internalisation, they had a base as American citizens, also mind-wise, and they felt more secure than their parents. Later on they could learn from *issei* the traditions the parents secretly kept. To *issei* the dance was a dance of *tenshi*, influenced by Christian angels, performed by a Japanese Goddess. It was a dance of surrender and victory, it was harmonizing, a goal in itself. To *nisei* it became a means for a new goal: to spread God’s kingdom on earth. They chose conversion instead of compliance: something more indirect, since they realized how a minority can influence a majority. With the dance they got in touch with Americans and tried to convince them that their views were valid. It has been said that the consistency of the argument is the most important factor, and who in post-war Hawai’i did, and does, not want peace? (cf. Hayes 1993: 49–50).

Ōgamisama’s dance is supposed to be spontaneous and a dance of joy, but I have seen many men marching around like soldiers, aggressively, while they are listening to the taped sermons of the foundress. She shouts and seems to enjoy freaking out. “Having cried out vehemently in this way, Ōgamisama closed the grand public sermon by saying, ‘Hawai’i is an important place from which, as a foothold, the Divine Doctrine is to be introduced to the world. Therefore, no error or misunderstanding of the doctrine will be tolerated” (Tensho-kotai-jingu-kyo 1954: 179). The peace dance is shaped in a form of blind discipline, demanding unquestioning obedience. Out in the parks, among tourists and so-called Caucasians, aggressiveness became offensiveness, go-ahead-and-catch, make a good score, proselytize. There was overhanging requests in an imperative mood. Dance as a carrier of an aggressive approach, born in a wild dance performed by a frustrated and frantic woman, an instrument to recruit adherents: is that the dance of the Dancing Religion? At least it was one dance. One of them.

It was also a revolutionary dance. The frantic woman acted like a man, that is why the people she met thought she was strange. Kitamura Sayo dressed in men’s clothes, rode a bicycle (no women in Japan did that in the 1940s), spoke like a man, and acted aggressively — something that was only allowed for men. In other words, she overstepped the limits of what was permissible, and she madly enjoyed being angry. When she died in 1967, it was because her high blood pressure became too high.

### *Conclusion*

After a fire in July 1942 a spirit entered the body of a farmer's wife in the Yamaguchi prefecture in Japan. The woman, Kitamura Sayo, did not lose consciousness of her own identity but had a conversation with the deity inside, who communicated with her and ordered her around. If she did not obey, she became ill; therefore she took cold baths of penance six times a day with prayer. The only way to unite with God was through purifying one's mind and polishing one's soul. This was done by means of a magic formula *na-myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō* and an "ego-less" dance called *muga-no-mai*.

After Kitamura Sayo began to receive inspiration from a deity, "the day came when Her life as the wife of Seinoshin Kitamura ended, and Her life as a Saviour gradually began. At the same time She began to forget about Her only son Yoshito, who was at the front during World War II". In the same text about "Ogamisama: The Saviour" we can read: "Lieutenant-General Fuji, with whom Ogamisama was acquainted, once said 'If She had been born a male, She would now be a man of the highest rank, a premier or a general'" (Ogamisama 1968: 27–28).

We have here a woman filled with aggressiveness depending on different types of aggressive motivation: inter-male (not unusual in females), sex-related, maternal, danger-induced, and irritable. Possessed, she dressed like a man and started acting like one. She became a threat to men in positions of leadership, as a charismatic leader and "revealer" of so called truths. She turned dominance hierarchies upside down and she interfered in territorial fights. The family farm was successful and if the phenomenon of territoriality is a way to limit and structure inter-male aggression, she was involved in defending the space against intruders in a way that looked like warfare. Among animals inter-male aggression is sex-related in the sense that the establishment of high rank leads to opportunities to mate. In Kitamura Sayo's case it meant the opposite. As an usurper, she used her powerful position inside the family to refuse having sex. So her sex-related aggression is probably more a response to frustration. When it comes to maternal aggression, a mother will attack anything that threatens her child, and that is what Japan did. The nation, in Kitamura Sayo's eyes: the emperor, took her son away (during the war she did not know if he was dead or alive).

It seems like the dancing goddess felt attacked by the barn fire, the possessive element in her body, her neighbours and surroundings, as well as politicians and the nation as a whole.

A move on the part of someone who is being attacked might well be to offer an appeasement gesture. Sometimes the dance of Kitamura Sayo is aggressive and militaristic, and sometimes it is done in a pleasing way, even though she is aroused and upset. Self-defence aggression involves sympathetic nervous system arousal, as a response to an attack, and so does irritable aggression. "Perhaps being in an aversive state gives rise to ideas associated with violence through a process of association" (Sabini 1992: 496), because after her dances Kitamura Sayo screamed like a maniac and scolded everyone. "God uses me as His Mouthpiece to reprimand people severely and directly... I went to Hawai'i 14 years ago to teach the people. My sermons are the same today, but they sound differently to the people there who have gradually become true human beings by practicing my teaching in their daily lives. When I visited Hawai'i last year, I did not scold the people as severely as I did during my first visit" (Ogamisama's Sermon 1966: 9).

Did the coffee farmers in Hawai'i accept being yelled at by God's messenger? Yes. They were losers, and Kitamura Sayo told them how bad they were. "There is enough evidence that the foundress successfully manipulated her follower's guilt and shame as if she were aware of the dialectic interdependence between self-blame and faith in salvation. She inflated and deflated the follower's feelings of shame and guilt in such a way that drastic relief from self-blame could be attained" (Lebra 1970: 52).

Even if frustration *per se* does not necessarily instigate aggression, the degree to which one is frustrated can affect the degree to which one becomes angry. The workers were frustrated and angry. They had been transgressed against and felt illegitimately frustrated. The bombing of Pearl Harbor involved on their behalf unjustified frustration. Perhaps anger is turned on when someone perceives frustration as unjustified. When Kitamura Sayo scolded them and told them how worthless they were, they agreed with her and converted to her teaching. Through a ritualized marching-around-dance the male converts could canalize the emotions and "act out", regardless of whether that kind of aggressiveness would remove the frustration or not. The women frequently used old *bon*-dance steps during *muga-no-mai*.<sup>2</sup> Among the women the dance was relaxed and not military like.

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<sup>2</sup> In Japan, the *urabon* festival has been held annually since 657. It is usually held from the 13th to the 15th of the 7th month and it is a service for the repose of the dead. Popularly the festival is called *bon* or *o-bon* and it includes dancing. According to the legend, Buddha's disciple Maudgalyāyana saved his mother from suffering in the realm of hungry spirits by making offerings in accordance with some advice from Buddha.

Since there was a general tendency among the Japanese to somatize illness, most of the people that joined the Dancing Religion had complaints that were physical. Stereotypically seen, being Japanese, when you are annoyed you do not talk about it. "It is often more important to communicate through attitude, action, and feeling than through words... This kind of behavior in its extreme form may indeed occur in a Japanese as a kind of 'acting out' behavior which is radically different from violent, explosive, or disruptive behavior observed in a Western patient", according to Hawai'ian medical journals (Rogers and Izutsu 1980: 97).

Perhaps it is necessary here to make a distinction between aggressive reactions and aggressive tendencies. Through controlling the released tendency with a ritualized and somewhat institutionalized "dancing-behaviour" the members are not acting aggressively. They let Kitamura Sayo arouse them with her insults and aggressiveness, but when they dance they do not think about themselves. The dancers try to be "ego-less", to reach an altered state of consciousness through repeating *na-myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō* in a monotone. There are both emotional and instrumental components involved. As a group "patternized" in the same Procrustean bed, I think we can leave individual factors aside. Inside this specific group they interpret the ritual situation with Kitamura Sayo (before alive, now on tape) in very much the same way, and they act in a similar way in the same situation. Therefore this is a form of aggressiveness that is suppressed and turned into repentance. It can be traced to the outer conditions in the specific situation that triggered off aggressive tendencies, but it was forbidden feelings. The converts should ask their divine leader to be forgiven, since aggressiveness could produce evil spirits. The situation during a dancing ritual was always ambivalent. In public places it was different. When the members of the Dancing Religion were dancing with Kitamura Sayo, it was a matter of situational factors. The instrumental aggression that was shown when they danced in public could have been a product of their knowledge about the consequences of aggressive behaviour. On the pattern of Kitamura Sayo, taking her as a model, they knew that it is possible to make friends by being aggressive, and it is possible to make peace

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When she was saved, she danced out of happiness, and so did Maudgalyāyana with the spirit of his mother. *Bon* dance is when the living are supposed to dance in the middle of the summer together with the spirits of the dead. Besides the popular legend about the Avalambana sūtra and its contents, there are serious ethymological research on the *bon* concept made by Stephen F. Teiser in Teiser 1988

in the world through an aggressive "ego-less" dance, as a means to proselytize ignorant people and make them realize that only through making a Japanese religion a world religion can there be peace on earth. It was aggressiveness as a drama set up by the dancing goddess, an act called proselytism.

A functionalistic explanation of the dance among Japanese plantation workers in Hawai'i who were members of the Dancing Religion is that aggressiveness in this case had a function. And this function explains the aggressiveness. Through aggressive cues the members could increase the tendency to proselytize aggressively because of their associations with aggressive behaviour. Making the dancing ritual as good as possible was catching as many people as possible of those that become curious about the dance. Of course, there is no purpose or cause flitting along that can explain the aggressivity inside different members. If I could explain it by telling you that there is a consciously created institution, made especially for aggressiveness, then it would not be a functionalistic explanation, but a teleological. "Our understanding of aggression, as well as our experience of it, is literally polytextual. Although by our social conventions about explanation we tend to opt for singular stories at a given moment, we are nevertheless at some level aware that we use more than one story... All facts about aggression, all research findings, are inevitably contingent and located" (Rogers et al. 1995: 171).

In a historical framework the dance is aggressive, the real dance acts out frustration. The ideal dance is harmony itself, always there, neither becoming, nor disappearing. In post-war Hawai'i, in an "ego-less" state, the dancers danced the ideal dance, the dance of angels, in between the marches. The dance that was observed by anthropologists in parks was real and aggressive. The natural world, the world in the ordinary sense of the word, was constantly there for them, as long as they looked in its direction. At the natural standpoint some researchers had another way of stating the same thing as I do, in my ideal worlds-about-me. The natural world is, of course, present to me, and I am at the natural standpoint as well as they are. But I interpret it as a background for my consciousness, as act. The dance I describe to you is a dance experienced and visualized with a little help from my reference frame. It is both real and ideal, depending on how I look at it. An aggressive dance for harmony. A war-coloured peace-dance. "The two worlds are present together but disconnected, apart, that is, from their relation to the Ego, in virtue of which I can freely direct my glance or my acts to the one or to the other" (Husserl 1962: 94).



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## Can a Buddha Image be Untrue?

### The Grahi Buddha and the Way to Make Buddha Images in Southeast Asia

#### Introduction

The Buddha, or Śākyamuni, the sage of the Śākya tribe as he is also called, was not only a historic person whose personal strength and struggle allowed him to reach supreme and perfect Enlightenment. For his followers he was also a Mahāpuruṣa, born with 32 major and 80 minor signs on the body (lakṣaṇa), predetermined to be a cakravartin or a Buddha. Some of Śākyamuni's signs, together with his gestures (mudrā), his postures (āsana) and his clothes, have been important distinctions in the artistic representation of the Buddha. The life of the Buddha has always been very important in Buddhism. It has been written, depicted and recited, over and over again. An image of the Buddha can be seen as a sacred biography through its different gestures and postures. But the mudrās can also distinguish different Buddhas, hence it can sometimes be difficult to decide if an image depicts Śākyamuni Buddha, a Buddha of the past or a transcendent Buddha.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most beautiful and interesting sculptures in Tai<sup>2</sup> art is the well-known Grahi Buddha. It is a bronze sculpture (162 cm) where the Buddha sits in bhūmisparśamudrā sheltered by the nāgarāja Mucalinda [Fig. 1]. The date of this image has frequently been discussed by LeMay, Dupont and Coedès, among others. The image is very unusual. When the

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1) This paper deals mainly with the Theravāda tradition of Southeast Asia, but because of the subject also with early Buddhism in India.

2) The word "Tai" is a cultural and linguistic term which refers in a broad sense to all Tai-speaking groups. This should be compared with the term "Thai" used for all the people living in the Thai Nation from the time of the Bangkok era in about the late 18th century.

Buddha was sheltered by Mucalinda, it is said that he sat in deep meditation and should naturally be depicted in *dhyānamudrā* and not in *bhūmisparśamudrā*, as he is in this image. *Bhūmisparśamudrā*, is a gesture connected with the Buddha's great battle against *Māra*, and is often regarded as a representation of the Enlightenment.

What exactly is a Buddha image? Why does a Buddha image take the particular shape it has, rather than some other form? Is it realistic to assume that someone has consciously composed an image like the Grahi Buddha? Has it, instead, been made by mistake, by mere chance or ignorance? There have been some attempts to explain the Grahi Buddha before. One aim with this paper is to elucidate these interpretations and see how valid they are, and if necessary work out an alternative interpretation of this unusual image. To do this and answer the questions above, we must examine the religious tradition behind Buddha images, both within historical times and in Southeast Asia today. A second aim is to be acquainted with this, not so well-known Buddhist tradition. The first thing we have to do is to ask the statue itself. Unfortunately, the inscription on the image does not mention the unusual shape of the image. It can however give us some information about the context in which the statue was made. A Buddha image is a complex object withholding different aspects, and taken in isolation it can be understood in many different ways, but its religious meaning becomes clear only when it is considered as a part of the religious tradition and the society at large.

As we are searching for thoughts and notions embedded in people's heads about 800 years ago, this study mainly uses old texts, both canonical and non-canonical, the aim being to uncover the religious tradition in traditional Theravāda Buddhism.<sup>3</sup> As a complement we use studies about contemporary live religion to establish how the religious tradition is transmitted and what the texts have meant to later generations. Therefore, this study uses both written sources and contemporary descriptions. In the

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3) I use the term "traditional Buddhism" in the way Heinz Bechert (1973: 10) uses it, as separate from both canonical and modern Buddhism. I am well aware that such terms as "Buddhism" and "Theravāda Buddhism" are ideological abstractions. There are important historical, political and organizational differences between the regions and countries within the Theravāda tradition. Just as Buddhism in the different countries of Southeast Asia shows considerable variety, so there are many similarities within the Theravāda tradition that sometimes make 'country-specific' studies inapplicable. The borders in Southeast Asia have not been the same throughout history and there are many crossroads and border districts that make country-specific studies sometimes too narrow and sometimes too broad.

study of old texts lies the danger that it is only the religious experiences of the elite of which we hear. We seldom find any evidence of the everyday religious activity of the people such a long time ago. Studies of contemporary live religion are an invaluable complement to textual studies, but must be used with great care. When we ask, why they make Buddha images the way they do, the question is mostly about the religious experiences of the elite and not of the ordinary people. Hence, it is the religious experiences of the elite in traditional Southeast Asian Theravāda Buddhism and their view about the way to make Buddha images that are our main task. Before we can answer the question why the Grahi Buddha is made as it is, we have to describe the image in its context and compare it with similar images, mainly from Myanmar (Burma). Much to my surprise, no one has compared the Grahi Buddha with similar images in Myanmar. There is an old and still existing tradition in Myanmar of depicting the Buddha in this way.

### The Earth Goddess Torani

Let us first look a little closer into the two events in the life of Śākyamuni that have been brought together in one piece of art in the Grahi Buddha. A few weeks pass between the two events. One takes place shortly before and the other six weeks after the Enlightenment. Bhūmisparśamudrā, with the right hand palm turned inwards touching the earth, tells the story of the Buddha's defeat of Māra, the Evil One, just before his Enlightenment [Fig. 2]. The hand is a gesture to invoke the Earth Goddess (Bhūmidevī) to witness all his good deeds and his right to reach Buddhahood. In the biographies Mahāvastu, Nidānakathā, Lalitavistara and Buddhacarita we can read with small variations how Śākyamuni with his right hand touches the earth, which at the same moment trembles so Māra has to flee.

...extricating his right hand from underneath the folds of his robe he stretched it out towards the earth saying, 'are you or are you not witness to my having given the seven hundredfold alms in my birth as Vessantara?' And the great earth resounded with a hundred, a thousand or a hundred thousand echoes as though to overwhelm the forces of Māra, and saying as it were, 'I was your witness to it then'...the followers of Māra fled in every direction. (Nidānakathā 1990: 98)

In Thailand the story also tells how the Earth Goddess Torani "wrung her long hair and a stream, a flood of waters gushed forth from it... [and Māra's]... elephant swept away by the water, his royal insignia destroyed,



and his whole army fled in utter confusion" (Alabaster 1971: 155). How Torani wrung her hair is a well known motif in both Tai, Burmese and Khmer art [Fig. 3]. Aditi is her name in Indian mythology and she is the bearer of all plants and animals and the mother of all beings. The name Torani is derived from the Sanskrit *Dharanī*, 'she who bears'.

This battle between Śākyamuni and Māra, visualized through *bhūmi-sparśamudrā*, was a very popular motif in late Indian Buddhist art. This Pāla-Sena art had a strong influence on Southeast Asia, first of all in Pagan in Myanmar and later in Tai Yuan (Northern Tai). It is interesting to see how both Pagan and Tai Yuan became so deeply influenced by a tantric art from India at the same time as the ordination and textual tradition follow Mahāvihāra, the most orthodox sect of Theravāda Buddhism. Especially the Vajrasana (Mahābodhi) in Bodh Gayā has been the subject of strong interest from Southeast Asia. Twice, around 1100 and the year 1298, the Burmese were in Bodh Gayā and restored it. A copy of it was built in Pagan in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and later also in Chiangmai, Chiangrai and Pegu. King Tiloka's so highly valued Phra Sing Buddha (The Lion Buddha) is a statue as close to Pāla-Sena art as possible. At the same time he favoured Mahāvihāra and planted a Bodhi tree from Anuradhapura at Mahābodhirama (Wat Jet Yot) his replica of the Vajrasana. Today most of the Buddha images in Thailand are depicted in *bhūmi-sparśamudrā*. In Khmer art this *mudrā* is unusual and seems to occur for the first time in the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Bosselier 1966: 265).

### The Nāgarāja Mucalinda

The nāga motif is very prominent in art and literature all over Southeast Asia. The serpent-like nāgas inhabit the water or underground domain and have the power to take various forms, including human. The nāgas are connected with water, rain and fertility and therefore with wealth, power and kingship. This was probably why the Pallava kingdom in southern India derives its descent from the nāgas. In the legends about the Khmer kingdom the nāgas play a prominent part. An Indian prince fell in love with Nāgī Somā, the daughter of a nāgarāja. As a gift to the couple the king reclaimed the soil that once was drowned with water. This is believed to be the origin of the Khmer kingdom (Cœdès 1911: 391–393; Bloss 1973: 41–42). The Chinese diplomat Zhou Daguan reported from his visit to Angkor at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century a ritual union between the king and a nāgī with nine heads. The king had to spend the first part of each night together

with the snake princess in the top of a golden tower. This must have occurred on the pyramid of Phimeanakas in the Royal Palace at Angkor Thom. If she failed to appear for one single night, it was a sign of the king's immediate death (Zhou Dagan 1993: 5). In many legends, and often in popular belief, the king is dependent upon a *nāga* whose power protects the territory. Since a *nāga* has power over rain and fertility he is a guarantor for agriculture and thus intimately linked with the prosperity of the kingdom (Bloss 1973: 38). The popularity of the *nāga* in Southeast Asia probably depends on the fact that a kind of indigenous *nāga* cult already existed there before it came from India, or at least that the "nāga of Indic tradition fits with indigenous patterns of belief" (Hall 1976: 65).

In Buddhist art and literature Mucalinda is not the only known *nāga*. There are many other *nāgas* involved in the life of the Buddha and other past Buddhas. Two *nāga* kings, Nanda and Upananda, bathed Śākyamuni shortly after he was born (Vogel 1972: 95). There is also a story where a *nāga* assumed human shape and was ordained as a Buddhist monk. When the true nature of the *nāga* was disclosed, the Buddha himself expelled the *nāga* from the monastery (Vogel 1972: 93–94). In memory of this attempt to obtain ordination the word *nāga* is also the name given to candidates for ordination in Buddhism (Wells 1975: 136–137).

The second event in the Grahi Buddha image tells about how Śākyamuni, the sixth week, or in some traditions the third week (Mahāvagga 1951: 3–4), after his Enlightenment was sitting in deep meditation when a terrible storm came up and threatened him. The *nāgarāja* Mucalinda saw that the Buddha was in danger and came up from his kingdom in the underworld and coiled his body around him and sheltered him from the storm with his hood [Fig. 4]. This is not one of the most prominent events in the Buddha's life, but we can read a few lines about it in both Mahāvagga and Nidānakathā.

And the Blessed One spent seven days there and repaired to the Mucalinda tree. There he spent a week in perfect security, experiencing the bliss of emancipation as though inside his scented bed-chamber, seated within the folds of the Nāga King Mucalinda who had wound his coils round him seven times to ward off the cold and other inclemencies, when rainy weather continued for a whole week. (Nidānakathā 1990: 107)

The Buddha sitting on Mucalinda was a little-used motif in the art of India, except the art of Amarāvati and Nāgājūnarkonda.<sup>4</sup> The art in this re-

4) In Amarāvati there are some Buddha images sitting on Mucalinda in abhaya-mudrā, for example on a 3rd century decorated stupa (Boisselier 1978: 77, fig. 46). Jean

gion greatly influenced Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. There is an image from Sri Lanka as early as the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century where the Buddha is sitting on Mucalinda (Boisselier et al. 1978: 144). It is in Southeast Asia that this motif became most prominent, especially in the art of the Khmer. It was probably in Dvāravatī art as early as the 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century (Boisselier et al. 1978: fig. 105) that this kind of image appeared for the first time in Southeast Asia, but not until the 10<sup>th</sup> century did it appear in Khmer art (Boisselier et al. 1978: fig. 244). The motif was also popular in Lopburi and related Tai styles, but was uncommon both in Pagan and Tai Yuan.

### The Grahi Buddha

Before we examine the religious traditions behind the Buddha image, we must shortly look at the date of the Grahi Buddha and see under which conditions it was made. It was found in a paddy-field near Wat Hua Wieng in Chaiya, in the south of Thailand, in the reign of King Rama V (1868–1910) (Buribhand and Griswold 1951: 19) and the image is now in the National Museum in Bangkok.<sup>5</sup> Foreign powers have been interested in this area because it was located in the centre of international trade routes. Southeast Asia was characterized by a multcentred political system, or in O.W. Wolter's words, "a patchwork of often overlapping maṇḍalas or 'circles of kings'... the maṇḍalas represented a particular and often unstable political situation in a vaguely definable geographical area without fixed boundaries and where smaller centres tended to look in all directions for security" (Wolters 1982: 16–17). The centres of authority and political power shifted endlessly. This peninsular area, often referred to as Tāmbraliṅga, was for a long time connected to the Śrīvijaya kingdom. The first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century marks the expansion of Khmer power to the west, particularly in the former Mon centre of Lopburi, and south toward Tāmbraliṅga. The Burmese were also expanding into the peninsula and superseded the Khmers around 1050. In the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Tāmbraliṅga was probably under Sinhalese hegemony. According to an inscription Tāmbraliṅga got relative freedom in 1230, but the close contacts

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Boisselier denies that this gesture is abhayamudrā. He is of the opinion that they are a kind of "general-purpose gesture with no precise meaning" (Boisselier 1980: 371).

5) There exists at least one more image of a similar kind to the Grahi Buddha in the same area. In Khua Sawan Cave in Surat Thani province, the stucco ornament has a small Buddha image sitting in bhūmisparśamudrā on a five-headed nāga made in the late 13th century. Piriya Krairiksh 1980: 67, colour pl. 16.

with Lanka continued, especially in the time of king Chandrabhānu. In the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, the area came under the influence of Sukhothai. The Ram Khamhaeng inscription [II/27–33] mentions that “the Mahāthera Sangharāja... who has come here from Mōaṅ Srī Dharmmarāja” (Griswold & Prasert na Nagara 1971: 212), located not far from Chaiya, established Theravāda Buddhism in Sukhothai.

The image is cast in three separate pieces, the Buddha, the body of the nāga and the hood of the nāga. On the base of the nāga is an inscription as follows: “11006 [or 11004] çaka, année du Lièvre, par ordre de Kamrateñ Añ Mahārāja Śrīmat Trailokyarājamaulibhūṣaṇavarmadeva, ... le Mahāsenāpati Galānai qui gouverne le pays de Grahi, invite le Mrateñ çrī Nāno à faire cette statue” (Cœdès 1929: 46–47). The language is Khmer, but the script is of an old Javanese type. The year has been interpreted by Reginald LeMay (1938: 49) as 1183 and by de Casparis (1967: 37–40) as 1279 or 1291. As we have seen the year is expressed in five characters. This has caused the interpretation 1105 mahā-sakarāja, as neither 1104 nor 1106 is a year of “the hare”. 1105 mahā-sakarāja is 1183 A.D., but we must remember it is only a vague assumption. LeMay is doubtful if the Buddha and the nāga were cast at the same time, since the nāga obviously points to a Khmer origin, whereas the Buddha itself is a late product of Mon art, in his opinion. It seems to indicate that either the Buddha is older than the nāga or Dvāravatī still influenced the art in 1183. LeMay suggests “that the two figures are contemporaneous and that it was an ‘artist’ still under Mon influence who modelled the image, while it was only a ‘craftsman’ under Khmer influence who manufactured the Nāga king” (LeMay 1938: 48–49). Since this is the normal way to cast this kind of complex statue, it is quite surprising that they pay so much attention to the fact that the nāga and the Buddha were cast separately.<sup>6</sup> Since the nāga and the Buddha match so exactly, we must assume that they were created together.

Pierre Dupont calls in question the year 1183. He believes that the Grahi Buddha cannot be earlier than the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. He points out that its style is very close to “l’art thai du XIII<sup>e</sup> et du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles” (Dupont 1942: 109–110). J.G. de Casparis agrees and states further arguments. He considers that the image cannot be as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century, since there is no evidence that the twelve-animal dating cycle was used before the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Casparis 1967: 34). Further, de Casparis points out the similarity between the names and titles of the king “Kamrateñ Añ

6) Compare the two images in (Bowie 1976: fig. 42 ; Lee 1969: fig. 28) which are also cast in three separate pieces.

Mahārāja Śrīmat Trailokyarāja Maulibhūṣaṇavarmadeva” in the inscription on the Grahi Buddha and a king in late 13<sup>th</sup> century Central Sumatra, “Śrī Mahārāja Tribhuvanarāja Maulivarmadeva” (Casparis 1967: 34–37). It is de Casparis’ opinion that the two refer to the same king. Since the identification of the king named on the Grahi Buddha has not been sufficiently solved, the argument seems convincing. Hence, de Casparis draws the conclusion that the Grahi Buddha was made between the second expedition by Chandrabhānu to Lanka in 1270 and 1292, when Chaiya must have come under Sukhothai’s authority. Then there are only two possibilities according to de Casparis: either mahā-sakarāja 1201 or 1213 (= 1279 or 1291 A.D.) (Casparis 1967: 37–38). If Trailokyarāja in the Grahi Buddha inscription is the same as the Śrīvijaya king from Jambi-Malāyu, the images were probably made according to his order. However, an inscription from Phimai seems to knock holes in de Casparis’ most important argument. The twelve-animal dating cycle used in the Grahi Buddha inscription is also used in an 11<sup>th</sup> century inscription found in Phimai (Hall 1985: 207–208). Most probably the Grahi Buddha was actually made in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century and it is not unlikely that the Tai people had already come to this area by this time.

### The Myanmar Tradition

It is not only in southern Thailand that the Buddha can be seen on Mucalinda sitting in bhūmisparśamudrā. As already mentioned, no one who has discuss the Grahi Buddha has paid any attention to the tradition in Myanmar to depict the Buddha in the same way. It is of course not the most common way, but in modern times it is not so unusual. There are even a few very old ones. The oldest one is to my knowledge a high relief Buddha image inside Myinpyagy in Pagan, which is probably even older than the Grahi Buddha [Fig. 5]. Inside the west corridor in the ‘stupa-temple’ Myinpyagy there is according to G.H. Luce, a “life-size brick image of the Earth-touching Buddha seated under the seven-headed Mucalinda Nāga” (Luce 1969–70/2: 95). The peculiar thing about this image is that under the Buddha there is no tail of the nāga. Instead he appears to be sitting on a lotus throne. According to Luce (1969–70/1: 292), Myinpyagu can be dated between the end of Aniruddha’s reign and until Kyansitta’s, not later than 1084.

The image in Myinpyagu is probably the origin of later similar ones. A small bronze sculpture (28 cm) is known from the Shwesandaw monastery





Fig. 1. The Grahi Buddha, Chaiya, south Thailand, 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century. The Buddha sitting on nāgarāja Mucalinda in bhūmisparśamudrā.



Fig. 3. The Earth Goddess Torani at a monastery in Chiangmai.



Fig. 2. The "twin Buddhas" sitting in bhūmisparśamudrā at Dhammayangyi (middle of 12<sup>th</sup> century) in Pagan. The one to the left is Śākyamuni Buddha and the one to the right probably Prabhūtaratna Buddha.





Fig. 4. Buddha sitting on nāgarāja Mucalinda in dhyānamudrā. Lopburi, 13<sup>th</sup> century.



Fig. 5. A high relief Buddha image sitting on nāgarāja Mucalinda in bhūmisparśamudrā inside the stupa-temple Myinpyagy in Pagan, 11<sup>th</sup> century. Reprinted with permission from plate 152 (c) in G.H. Luce: *Old Burma, early Pagan*. Locust Valley, New York: J.J. Augustin, 1969 (*Artibus Asiae Supplementum*, 25).



Fig. 6. The Buddha sitting on nāgarāja Mucalinda in bhūmisparśamudrā within Kaunghmudaw monastery in Sagaing, Myanmar. 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century.

in Pagan (Gatellier 1985: 38). A life-size image is within the Kaunghmudaw monastery from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in Sagaing, about 20 km southwest of Mandalay [Fig. 6]. This Buddha image is made of light marble or alabaster, and has a gentle face in Mandalay style. Most likely this image was made no earlier than the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The nāga has only one head and is covered with glass mosaic, which indicates a relative late making. The tradition of making an image where the Buddha is sitting on Mucalinda in bhūmisparśamudrā has been alive from the time of Pagan and is still alive in Myanmar today. We can see one 20<sup>th</sup> century wooden image sitting in this position in a paper published by Sylvia Fraser-Lu (1981: 136).<sup>7</sup>

### The Buddha Image in its Religious Tradition

Let us now try to see why a Buddha image assumes a certain shape. To do this we must see the Buddha image in its religious tradition and ask what a Buddha image really is. A Buddha image is a complex object withholding different and even contradictory aspects. One very important reason to make a Buddha image is derived from the doctrine of karma and the desire to make merit (puṇya) as a way to produce good fortune in this or the next life. The way to make merit is first of all to offer and give alms to the Buddhist Saṅgha. This means giving food, cloth, and making religious buildings and Buddha images. It has been very popular in Southeast Asia to make merit for the purpose of being reborn in the time of Maitreya.

To explain the special appearances of the Buddha images, we have to go back to the beginning, but there is no reason to go into the question where and when the first Buddha image was made. In this case it is much more important to ask why it was made. The first Buddha images could have been made as cult objects for veneration or as narrations for educational purposes. They could also have been made as objects for meditation. One of the essential parts of Buddhism has always been meditation. Dieter Schlingloff (1990: 6–7) has strongly emphasized this aspect of Buddhism and he believes that the first Buddha images were made because the Buddha and his life were important objects in meditation. One of the main points in meditation is concentration on objects. The wheel is, of course, a

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7) Irene Moilanen at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland tells me in a letter (27.2.96) about the response she got from woodcarvers in Myanmar about images in this position. They do not pay attention to the problem at all. "It is what the customers request" that is the usual answer. See also her newly published dissertation about the surviving woodcarving tradition in Myanmar.

sign for the Buddha's first teaching of the dharma, but for someone who concentrates on the wheel in meditation it probably symbolizes the dharma itself. Early signs like the wheel, the Bodhi tree and the stupa were a starting point for depicting the life of the Buddha and for making Buddha images. The Buddha image could in this way have been a further development of the early and simple signs of the dharma, the Enlightenment and Nirvāṇa. One explanation does not exclude the other. The first Buddha images could at the same time have been made for veneration, education and meditation.

A Buddha image is narrative and a reminder (*uddeśaka*) about the life of the Buddha and his teaching. Śākyamuni's life has always been very important in Buddhism, particularly for lay devotees. The different events in his life have been described, recited and depicted in pictures and images, again and again. The places that are connected with his life early became sites for worship and pilgrimage. In *Mahāparinibbāna suttanta*, Śākyamuni tells Ananda about four places that are associated with important events in his life and should be visited in pilgrimage.

There are these four places, Ananda, which the believing clansman should visit with feelings of reverence... Here the Tathāgata was born... Here the Tathāgata attained to the supreme and perfect insight... Here was the kingdom of righteousness set on foot by the Tathāgata... Here the Tathāgata passed finally away which leaves nothing whatever to remind behind... These are the four places, Ananda, which the believing clansman should visit with feelings of reverence... And they, Ananda, who shall die while they, with believing heart, are journeying on such pilgrimage, shall be reborn after death, when the body shall dissolve, in the happy realms of heaven. (*Mahāparinibbāna suttanta* 1959: 153–154)

At least from the time of Aśoka we know that making a pilgrimage to Buddhist sites was a well established tradition and a major practice in Buddhist soteriology. In *Aśokāvadāna* it is said that Aśoka went on a pilgrimage in order to honour all the places connected with the Buddha. At each of the major sites he built a *caitya* (Strong 1983: 244–251). This narrative of Aśoka's pilgrimage is strong evidence that he followed an already established practice. The cult of the Buddhist sites was more "focused on the loci of sacred acts, rather than on the persona of the Buddha" (Huntington 1987: 56). The sites were very important in the cult, and depicting events from the life of the Buddha was a way to constantly have at hand these cultic sites.

The earliest depiction of the Buddha that we know is from the beginning of the Christian era, about the same time as the first complete biography of

the Buddha was written (Boisselier et al. 1978: 46).<sup>8</sup> In the same way as different events were compiled to make complete biographies, different events were compiled in depictions, like 'the Eight Great Miracles' (Aṣṭamahāprātihārya)<sup>9</sup> or 'the Seven Holy Stations' (Sattasattāhāṭṭhāna).<sup>10</sup> In Pāla art these 'Eight Great Miracles' were very often depicted, each event alone or all eight events in one and the same image. "Devotions before an image depicting all of the eight events... serving as a surrogate of the whole route [the pilgrimage]" (Huntington 1987: 55). Making a pilgrimage even in this manner produces merit. In Pagan these eight events occurred often, since Pāla-Sena art greatly influenced Pagan (Luce 1969-70/3: pl. 400-405).<sup>11</sup> "The Seven Holy Stations" are also depicted in art. In 1451 King Tiloka built Wat Jet Yot (the Temple of the Seven Spires) just outside Chiangmai, as a copy of Mahābodhi at Bodh Gayā. Dhammaceti did the same in Pegu, and built Schwegugyi in about 1460-1470 as a copy of Mahābodhi. The seven stations were made around the buildings both in Chiangmai and Pegu. It is likely that the replicas in Pagan and Chiangrai also included 'the Seven Holy Stations', but of this there is no proof (Griswold 1965: 214-217; Stadtner 1991: 46; Brown 1988: 108).

8) Étienne Lamotte (1958: 726) is of the opinion that the first complete biography of the Buddha was not written until the second century A. D. Erich Frauwallner (1956: 27) is of another opinion. He thinks that there existed a lost biography, written about one hundred years after the nirvāṇa.

9) (1) The first event is the birth to Queen Māyādevī. (2) The second is how Śākyamuni touched the earth to witness and defeat Māra. (3) The third is how he set the wheel of Dharma in motion at the Deer Park at Sārnāth. (4) The great illusion at the Jetavana monastery is the fourth event. (5) The fifth event is the descent from the Trāyastriṃśa heaven. (6) The sixth event is Buddha's taming of the wild elephant Nalāgiri. (7) The seventh event is the gift of honey by the monkey. Here the Buddha is depicted sitting with a small bowl in his lap. (8) The eighth and last event is the parinirvāṇa at Kuśinagara.

10) (1) The first week after the Enlightenment the Buddha stayed under the Bodhi tree, and is depicted in bhūmisparśamudrā. (2) The next week he stood gazing at the Bodhi tree for seven days. Here he is depicted with his hands crossed over his trunk. (3) The third week he was walking without touching the jewelled walkway. (4) The Gods built a jewelled house for him: there he was sitting and reflecting on the Abhidharma. He is here depicted standing with his hands crossed over his breast. (5) The fifth week he sat under a goat-herd's tree, when Māra and his daughters tried to tempt him a second time. He is here depicted with his right hand lifted in abhayamudrā. (6) The sixth week the Buddha was sheltered by Mucalinda. (7) Finally, the last week the Buddha received a myrobalanfruit and a toothpick from Sakka. The Buddha is here depicted sitting with his right hand on his right knee holding a fruit.

11) The Pyu's, who were the forerunners of the Burmese, have added a ninth scene, Sujātā's offering of milkrice to the Buddha (Luce 1969-70/1: 150-151)

Another aspect that can help us understand the particular shape of the Buddha images, is that a Buddha image is considered to be a true copy of the Buddha and that each new image of the Buddha must trace its lineage back to one of the authentic copies supposedly made during his lifetime. A.B. Griswold has stressed this aspect of the Buddha image (Griswold 1957: 17; Griswold 1966: 37; Griswold 1974: 17). This conception emanates from legends that narrate the making of the first Buddha image. They all tell how a king had the first image made. This was as far back as during the lifetime of the Buddha, or at least not long after his death.<sup>12</sup> This first image of the Buddha was, according to the legends, an exact copy of the Buddha and inherited some of the infinite power the Buddha himself possessed. All copies are expected to trace their lineage back to one of these images.

Two Chinese travellers, Faxian in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and Xuang Zang in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, in India heard the legend about the Sandalwood image (Jaini 1979: 183–184). Faxian tells that the image was made in the absence of the Buddha, when he was preaching in the Trāyastriṃśat heaven to his mother. Prasenajit, the king of Kosala, had an image made and put it in the place where the Buddha used to sit. When the Buddha returned to the Jetavara monastery, the image came to life, left its seat and came to meet him. The Buddha spoke to the image and told him to sit down again.

Return to your seat. After I have attained to pari-nirvāṇa, you will serve as a pattern to the four classes of my disciples, and on this the image returned to its seat. This was the very first of all the images (of Buddha), and that which men subsequently copied. (Faxian 1965: 56–57)

The legend of this Sandalwood Buddha is well known in Southeast Asia.<sup>13</sup> In *Jinakālamālipakaraṇaṃ* (Ratanapanna Thera 1978: 178–180), a chronicle written in Chiangmai at the beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> century, we are told that the Sandalwood (Candanabimba) image was made seven years before parinirvāṇa and came to Nibbisi (Chiangmai) in 1478. At the same time the text tells us that king Muang Keo had the Sandalwood image made in Chiangmai in 1521. “He [Muang Keo] commenced the preliminary work of carving the Great Sandalwood Image” (Ratanapanna Thera 1978: 175). The image that was made in Chiangmai was at the same time regarded as

12) There are similar legends among the Jinas that an image was carved during the Jina's lifetime.

13) Compare it with the legend in East Asia about the Udayana image.



identical with the original Sandalwood image.<sup>14</sup> Jinakālamālipakaraṇaṃ also tells stories of how Sihala Buddha and the Emerald Buddha (Phra Keo) were created very early and got their power from a nāgaking, respectively Indra (Ratanapanna Thera 1978: 120–127, 136–145). The origin of the Sandalwood image is also told in *Vaṭṭaṅgulirājajātaka* (1986: 104, 114–116), one of the ‘Fifty Apocryphal Birth-Stories’ (Paññāsa-Jātaka). These jātika-stories are spread over Southeast Asia, and were probably written in 15<sup>th</sup> century Tai Yuan. *Kosala-Bimba-Vaṇṇavā* from Sri Lanka is another text which tells the story of the Sandalwood image (Gombrich 1978: 281).

The Mahāmuni Buddha is believed, in a similar way as the Sandalwood image, to have been made during the lifetime of the Buddha. Before the Mahāmuni Buddha was removed to Mandalay in 1784, it was located on the Sarigutta Hill in Arakan, at the same place as the ancient kingdom Dhañāvati. The legend tells that the Buddha visited Candrasuriya, the king of Dhañāvati. On the king’s inquiry, the Buddha gave the king permission to make an image of him. Within a week it was finished and the likeness was extraordinary. The Buddha then breathed upon the sculpture so it became alive and talked to it. “I shall pass into nirvāṇa... but you, instinct with my essence, will live the five thousand years which I have prescribed for the duration of the religion” (Collis 1942: 135–138).

That a Buddha image was regarded as an authentic and true copy of the Buddha was a well known and accepted fact in Theravāda Southeast Asia. But what is the meaning of a true copy of the Buddha? A copy is naturally a representation of something, but in this case it is more. The copy must contain the essence of the original, but it does not need to be similar in every detail. A cutting of the Bodhi tree is at the same time a new plant and identical with the original. A new image of the Buddha is considered in a similar way to be identical with the original, or as Tambiah expresses it “a reincarnation of it” (Tambiah 1984: 254), exactly as the Sandalwood image in Chiangmai was considered to be identical with the original Sandalwood image. This way of copying makes it possible for the spectator to be in the presence of the Buddha and the events that are depicted in the image, even if it is impossible to be at the original place associated with the event.

The relics of the Buddha are of three kinds. Firstly we have the pieces of his body (śarīrika); secondly, the things he used in his life (paribhogaka)

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14) Sandalwood chronicle (*Varacandanāsāra*) seems to have existed. Coëdès (1925: 137) is of the opinion that this chronicle was written in Thai under the name *Tamnan Phra Chao Ken Chan* and cannot be found in Pāli.



and thirdly, we have the reminders (*uddeśaka*), and it is in this group that the Buddha images belong. But an image of the Buddha is not only a reminder, it is also a sacred image and an object of veneration. A Buddha image is always treated as a sacred object, because it contains the "immanent presence" (Tambiah 1984: 254) of the Buddha himself. To contain this power from the Buddha, a new image must always be a copy of an earlier image. A new image, created without a former image as a model, will not contain this power because it is not regarded as a true copy of the Buddha. But this is not enough, a new image must also pass through a ritual, to be consecrated and withhold the sacred power. We just have to agree with Richard Gombrich when he says that "only when a statue has been consecrated can it be an object of worship, and this fact is sufficient to show that a Buddha statue is more than a mere reminder of the Buddha" (Gombrich 1966: 24). The consecration ritual (*netra pinkama*) in Sri Lanka that Gombrich describes in his paper is both similar and different from the rituals in Southeast Asia.<sup>15</sup> In the consecration ritual (*Suat Poek*) in Thailand the new images are connected with an old venerated image through a cord (Wells 1975: 126–129; Piriya Krairiksh 1979: 220–224). According to Tambiah (1984: 248) the cord is also connected with a candle representing the donor of the new image. A new image is then part of the sacred power from an old one. All Buddha images, both the great ones at the monasteries and the private ones at home, must pass through this ritual to be treated as a sacred object. Without this ritual an image should be regarded as an ordinary object, without any sacred contents. The image is regarded as containing the immanent presence of the Buddha himself, first when the image is given life through this ritual. Gombrich (1978: 283) has pointed out that a Sinhalese version of the *Kosala-Bimba-Vañṇanā*, mentioned above as containing the legend of the Sandalwood image, is recited in the consecration ritual at Sri Lanka.

A relic or a sacred manuscript is sometimes enshrined within a Buddha image to make it more sacred. Is it the implanted relic that makes the image sacred, and is an image without a relic just a reminder? It is possible that this was the case in the earliest times, and that this was a reason why the Buddha images were later regarded as something more than just reminders. But if we read chronicles from Southeast Asia, we realise that the sacredness and power in a Buddha image do not need to come from a relic inside.

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15) The consecration ritual (*Nekaza* or *Ane-kaza Tin-thi*) in Myanmar is shortly described by Scott (1989: 198) and Spiro (1982: 205)

We have seen that a Buddha image must be a true copy of the Buddha, but it must also pass through a ritual to contain the sacred power from the Buddha. Buddhist kingdoms in Southeast Asia have brought a couple of highly venerated and powerful Buddha images into prominence. Among the best known are Mahāmuni Buddha, Sihala Buddha and the Emerald Buddha. In the history of Southeast Asia, the kingdoms have several times used a powerful Buddha image as a royal palladium to strengthen their religious and political legitimacy.<sup>16</sup> Sponsoring an expensive Buddha image is a way of making merit, but also a way of making oneself a powerful and miraculous device which gives prestige and reputation.

We have now seen that there exist different and even contradictory aspects regarding the way to make Buddha images in traditional Theravāda religion. The Buddha image is a narrative and a reminder of the life and the teachings of the Buddha and at the same time it is also a sacred object containing the immanent presence of the Buddha himself. Further, it is regarded as an authentic copy of the Buddha and at the same time a powerful and miraculous device giving prestige and reputation to its sponsor. This tradition has, in many respects, maintained a homogeneous and conservative way to make images of the Buddha. This tradition has been maintained principally by learned monks and specialists in iconographic matters, who have had the responsibility for the correctness of the images. We can borrow an expression from John Huntington and call this person an "iconographic authority" (Huntington 1987: 59). We have seen that there are many images that have been made contrary to this tradition and that the artists and craftsmen that made them did not follow the common rules. Should we regard them as anomalies and not as true Buddha images? Of course not. They are an essential part of a living religious tradition and must be regarded as true Buddhist images, in spite of the way they have been made. This does not prevent us from being curious about why the Grahi Buddha was made the way it has. Therefore we shall now try to examine some interpretations, and see if they can bring us closer to the reason why the Buddha is sitting on Mucalinda in bhūmisparśamudrā.

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16) The importance of Buddha images to the kingship has been studied by Tambiah (1982: 5–17) regarding the Sihala Buddha and by Reynolds (1978: 175–193) regarding the Emerald Buddha.

### **Why is the Buddha Sitting on Mucalinda in Bhūmisparśamudrā?**

We can never be absolutely certain why the Grahi Buddha is made the way it is as long as we do not find any written source from the time of the Grahi Buddha that explains its odd shape. All the same, we must try to find the best possible interpretation. When we try to explain the meaning with an image of the Buddha or some other religious work of art, we must always have in mind the context in which it was made and what kind of role a particular person has to it. It is one thing to see an image as a symbol of something, quite another to intentionally make an image as a symbol. Artists, craftsmen, patrons, monks and laymen all have different roles and relations to an image. Especially if we see an image in a historical perspective, it is obvious that meanings can change. This should not be exaggerated, for the tradition is often very strong. It is, however, important to distinguish interpretations about the way to make images and interpretations about how an image has been perceived by ordinary people or later generations.

Whatever the reason was for making the Grahi Buddha, we must notice the multivalency of the image. A Buddha sitting on Mucalinda in bhūmisparśamudrā must have been significant and most likely associated with various meanings. At the same time as the image tells a sacred story, or rather two stories, there is a mythological and religio-political dimension inherent in the image. We know that some Buddha images have been regarded as very powerful and that they were closely associated with the royal powers. As the Grahi Buddha is very expensive and extravagant, we can assume that it had some relations with Trailokyārāja, a king named in the inscription on the image. We have already seen the connection between nāgas and the kingship and its importance for the prosperity of the kingdom. The spectators must have been aware of this, and connected the image closely with the authority. Seen in a mythological context the Grahi Buddha is connected with the underworld in a double sense. Both the events depicted in the Grahi Buddha are connected with the underworld. Mucalinda and the Earth Goddess Torani came up from the underworld to help the Buddha. As already mentioned, the inhabitants in the underworld are connected with fertility and wealth. Therefore it is not unlikely that the Grahi Buddha was seen in conceptions of fertility, wealth and power and had a close connection to the kingship.

From this we must turn to the question what the Grahi Buddha was intended to represent. We have seen that the way to make Buddha images is

embedded in a rich religious tradition which is maintained by the iconographic authorities. Therefore, the most natural way is to follow that tradition and regard the Grahi Buddha as a result of a mistake or a misunderstanding. Especially as the iconographic authorities would hardly have given permission for its unusual appearance. As we have seen above, a Buddha image is believed to be a true copy of the Buddha, tracing its lineage back to one of the authentic copies supposedly made during his lifetime. Therefore it is not natural to make an image in a new position, without having any visible or narrative original. Can we therefore regard the Grahi Buddha as a mistake?

If we leave the Grahi Buddha just a moment and look at the tradition in Myanmar, there are many indications that from the time of Pagan until today there has been an unbroken tradition to make images in this unusual position. If we start with the old one in Myinpyagy in Pagan, we can assume that other later images have been copies of that one. We have already mentioned that in this image the nāga cannot be seen under the Buddha, only above him. Instead it looks as if the Buddha is sitting on a lotus throne. I think that this is an indication that something went wrong at the fabrication. This high relief Buddha is not one of the main images in the Myanpyagy. It is only one of approximately fifty, running around the dark corridors inside the stupa-temple. All sitting images are depicted in *bhūmi-sparśamudrā*, except one, where a thin Buddha image is sitting in *dhyāna-mudrā* telling about his extreme asceticism. There must have been many artists and craftsmen working together with these images. Maybe some worked with the Buddha's head and body, others with his legs and arms. It is not entirely unlikely that a mistake could have occurred with so many images. A bold speculation is that the Myanpyagy Buddha was made because of a mistake or some misunderstanding. Once it was made, it probably drew public attention because of its odd shaping. We can assume that all later images in Myanmar in the same position were made as copies of the Buddha image at Myanpyagy. There is of course no conclusive evidence for this, but once a Buddha image sitting in a new position had been made, it was natural to copy it. This is not a definite explanation of the Grahi Buddha, but it must be our starting-point until we find something more reasonable.

One alternative solution is that the Grahi Buddha is not Śākyamuni at all, but another Buddha. It can, for example, be a Buddha of the past or a transcendent Buddha. Piriya Krairiksh has suggested that the Grahi Buddha "was probably intended as a presentation of the supreme Buddha" (Piriya Krairiksh 1980: 67). It can sometimes be difficult to decide if an

image represents Śākyamuni or some other Buddha. In fig. 2 Śākyamuni is sitting to the left in bhūmisparśamudrā, with another Buddha to the right of him in the same position, which probably is Prabhūtaratna Buddha (Luce 1969–70/2: 170). We do not know exactly what Piriya Krairiksh means by a supreme Buddha. Maybe Vairocana, one of the five Jina Buddhas, but Vairocana is never represented sitting in bhūmisparśamudrā. Akṣobhya, ‘the Immovable from the Eastern Paradise’, another of the five Jina Buddhas, is, however, often depicted sitting in bhūmisparśamudrā. There is a 10<sup>th</sup> century image of Akṣobhya in stone from the same area as the Grahi Buddha. This statue is easy to identify, since he is sitting in bhūmisparśamudrā on a throne with a lion on each side and a vajra in the middle. The image sat at the east side of a chedi and all this makes it easy to identify him as Akṣobhya (Piriya Krairiksh 1980: 154, pl. 38). The only feature that connects the Grahi Buddha with Akṣobhya is that he is sitting in bhūmisparśamudrā, and this is of course not enough. We can, however, not with certainty exclude that the Grahi Buddha represents some other Buddha than Śākyamuni, but it is unlikely, as we cannot identify it with any particular Buddha. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that Mahāyāna was dominant in this area until the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Piriya Krairiksh 1980: 72–73), which means that the date of the Grahi Buddha is very important.

Another possibility is that the Grahi Buddha is a Buddha of a general type, and not someone special. There have been some attempts to separate those Buddha images that are narrative and those with universal validity. The latter are regarded as being “liberated from all biographical and other bonds of the phenomenal world” (Boisselier et al. 1978: 37). Should a universal Buddha be depicted, in dhyānamudrā or in bhūmisparśamudrā? In one well-known monograph on Buddhist iconography, ‘The image of the Buddha’, it is stated that it was the meditating Buddha that “became the most generally accepted type in that it shows the Buddha in an archetypal form” (Boisselier et al. 1978: 37). If this is so, how is it possible to separate these two kinds of images from each other? Which are depicting Śākyamuni in meditation and which are the Buddha in an archetypal form? Further, the events depicted in a Buddha image are not only narrative, they are at the same time a visualization of the dharma. It is my suggestion that this separation of a historical Buddha and an archetypal Buddha is illusory, and that both aspects can be found, more or less, in all Buddha images. This becomes clear if we see it from the view of the spectator. No one can prevent a Buddha image made in a general archetypal form from being seen in its narrative context.

Yet another possibility is that the Grahi Buddha was made after some local legend about which we have no information. We can find different odd images where a legend is closely connected to the image. The Buddha image on Mandalay Hill who points with his finger is a depiction of a legend about the Buddha's visit to Myanmar. In Myanmar there are images of a kind called 'Magic Buddhas', which are believed to possess supernatural powers. They often have a divergent shaping derived from some local legend. 'Dakkhina Sakkha' is one of these 'Magic Buddhas' and is a rather plump figure with an inverted lotus flower on his head. This image is believed to bring wealth and prevent fire and its supernatural power and extraordinary shaping are considered to come from the wood from which it was originally made, viz. the Bodhi tree in Anuradhapura (Fraser-Lu 1981: 136). As long as we do not have any legend regarding the Grahi Buddha or the images in Myanmar in the same position, this theory seems rather speculative.

Another possible interpretation is quite different. Robert L. Brown suggests that the nāgahoods on the Grahi Buddha were developed from depicted branches of the Bodhi tree. In Khmer art, bhūmisparśamudrā occurs quite late, in about the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The form it takes, he argues, "was to be represented within a tabernacle, a semi-architectural niche, topped by branches of the Bodhi tree. These Bodhi tree branches take a particular form and arrangement; the branches are thick, end in lotus-like buds, and have flame-shaped leaves. These branches stand straight upward and are arranged neatly in descending height from a central branch, usually being grouped in fives or sevens. The arrangement and shape of the branches clearly suggest those of the snake hoods over the heads of the Mucalinda Buddhas" (Brown 1988: 119). From the collection at Los Angeles County Museum of Art, he points to an earth-touching Buddha placed within a tabernacle, but the Bodhi tree branches are unfortunately missing (Brown 1988: fig. 21). In his paper he presents a drawing showing his reconstruction with the lost branches attached (Brown 1988: fig. 22, 23). This is very hypothetical and do not say how and why it happened. The only conclusion that Brown makes is that "the merging of iconographical imagery was intentional" (Brown 1988: 121). Maybe his theory can explain a Buddha image from Khmer-influenced areas, but it does not seem to fit images from other parts of Southeast Asia.

It has been proposed that the Grahi Buddha was made to symbolize the Enlightenment. Subhadradis Diskul suggests that "the statue is intended to be a conflation of the first and sixth weeks following the Enlightenment" (Bowie 1976: 67). Bhūmisparśamudrā is aimed first of all at the events just



before the Enlightenment and is often assumed to be a symbol of just the Enlightenment. The first week after the Enlightenment the Buddha supposedly sat under the Bodhi tree and is here depicted in *bhūmisparśa-mudrā*. During this first week Māra came a second time and gave a proposal that the Buddha should enter *nirvāṇa* without bringing his knowledge to the people. Mary Cummings expressed a similar view a couple of years later, when she suggested that the Grahi Buddha might be a symbol for the Buddha's Enlightenment. She wrote that "...the earth-touching pose... here is meant to call to mind for the viewer the whole sequence of events leading to the Buddha's Enlightenment and the enjoyment of that bliss while with Mucalinda" (Cummings 1982: 176–177). This makes sense, but there is a weakness in her line of argument. We have seen that a Buddha image is regarded as a sacred narrative with the authentic likeness of the Buddha, and that it is important to make a true copy so the image can contain the essence of the Buddha. Why, then, should someone want to make a copy of the Buddha in this unique position? Neither Subhadradis Diskul nor Mary Cummings reflects on this. Both of them assume a free and creative artist behind the Grahi Buddha, an idea emanated from an Occidental approach that is unfamiliar in Buddhist art, at least in the time of the Grahi Buddha. As long as we do not have any reason behind the making of the Grahi Buddha as a symbol of the Enlightenment, this explanation seems not convincing.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a possible reason. As it is several weeks between the two events, the Grahi Buddha as a symbol of Enlightenment must include the absence of time. This does not seem to fit with the Buddha image as a narration. Where can we find absence of time? *Nirvāṇa* is often described as without time, but experiences in meditation can also be regarded as without time. The Buddha's attainment of *nirvāṇa* is about forty-five years after his Enlightenment, but this is not the whole truth. The Theravāda tradition also has a notion of three different kinds of *nirvāṇa*. In the Tai cosmology *Traibhūmikathā* (Trai Phum Phra Ruang), written in the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Buddha attained his first *nirvāṇa* (Pāli: *kilesa-nibbana* = *nibbana* from impurity) "when our Lord Buddha attained Enlightenment and Omniscience under the great gem Bodhi tree" (*Traibhūmikathā* 1982: 330). He attained his second *nirvāṇa* (Pāli: *khandha nibbana* = *nibbana* from the body) at the time of his great decease. The third *nirvāṇa* (Pāli: *dhatu nibbana* = *nibbana* from the relics) will come "when all of the relics without exception come together under the great Bodhi tree, when they rise up and once again become the body of the Lord Buddha... at that time the Lord Buddha will attain the Nibbana of the rel-

ics" (Traibhūmikathā 1982: 330–331). So when the Buddha is sheltered by Mucalinda, he has already attained the first nirvāṇa.

As previously mentioned, it is not unlikely that the first Buddha images were made as meditation devices. There is a meditation technique where the meditator concentrates on the body of the Buddha as it is shown in images. In this recollection of the Buddha (Skr: buddhānusmṛti; Pāli: buddhānussati),<sup>17</sup> the meditator then contemplates on the qualities (guṇa) of the Buddha and finally proceeds to the dharma-body (Conze 1956: 60). One of the characteristics of meditations is that there are levels in the meditation when time is absent for the meditator. The Grahi Buddha could have been made as a result of a meditation or served as a meditation device. This could be the reason, but it is hardly likely, as the Grahi Buddha is too extravagant and expensive to have been made for this purpose. The time has been reduced in a similar way in some famous jataka-reliefs from Bhārhut (c. 100 B.C.). Various appearances of a figure has here been conflated into a single figure. The most well known is probably the "deer-jataka", with the central deer intended to be read as participating in three of the four episodes of the narrative. Even if there are points of similarities in some respects between this jataka-relief and the Grahi Buddha, there is nothing to indicate that we here have an unbroken millenarian tradition.

We have previously seen that some Buddha images in Southeast Asia have been highly venerated and used as powerful and miraculous devices for the political authority. The Grahi Buddha could in the same way have been made by order of Trailokyārāja, the king named on the image. If the Grahi Buddha can be dated to the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, this king may be identical with Tribhuvanārāja, who ruled the Śrīvijaya kingdom from Jambi-Malāyu on the east coast of Sumatra. If we can establish the common identity or some other connection between the two kings, the image could have been made as a device and a representative of the king. If he wanted an image in order to legitimate his sovereignty in this distant part of his domain, the Grahi Buddha must have been perfect. Most probably, however, the Grahi Buddha was made a century earlier. Whoever king Trailokyārāja may be, the mythological and religio-political dimension inherent in the Grahi Buddha, viz. fertility, wealth and power, makes it a perfect representative for a king in need of religious legitimation. This does not have to be interpreted as the king regarded himself as a Buddha, or that the es-

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17) Recollection of the Buddha is one of the six anussatis; viz. Buddha, dhamma, sangha, sila, cāga, devatā. They are explained in Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga (1976: 204–230).

sence of the king was believed to be inherent in the image. The Grahi Buddha's connection with the kingship was maybe the reason why it was later thrown away or hidden. There is also the possibility that it was the new Theravāda clergy that saw the image as a representative of an old corrupt religion.

## Summary

There is a strong religious tradition how to make a Buddha image. A Buddha image is narrative and a reminder about the life of the Buddha, but also a sacred object containing the immanent presence of the Buddha himself. Further, a Buddha image is regarded as an authentic copy of the Buddha and every new image must trace its lineage back to one of the copies supposedly made during the Buddha's lifetime. The making of Buddha images is therefore a very conservative form of art. Despite its variations in style, a Buddha image looks nearly the same today as it did 2000 years ago. To maintain the right way to make images there have been monks and specialists in iconographic matters, who as iconographic authorities have been responsible for the correctness of the images.

One of the most famous Buddha images in Thailand, the Grahi Buddha, does not correspond to this tradition. As the Buddha is sitting in *bhūmi-sparśamudrā* upon the *nāgarāja* Mucalinda, the image is depicting two events at the same time. Hence, the Grahi Buddha ought to be regarded as a mistake or a misunderstanding. But since the image is so expensive and extravagant, it would surprise me if this was the reason for its unusual shape. I would rather think that the tradition in Myanmar of depicting Buddha images in the same way may have originated from a mistake or a misunderstanding. The 11<sup>th</sup> century high relief Buddha image in Myinpyagu is not one of the main images, but only one of approximately fifty in the corridors running around the stupa-temple. It is not unlikely that a mistake could have occurred with so many images and all later images depicted in the same way in Myanmar were probably made as copies of the high relief Buddha at Myanpyagy.

We have seen that there are many possible explanations, but we can never be absolutely certain why the Grahi Buddha was made the way it was, as long as we do not have any further evidence. Both events depicted in the Grahi Buddha are embedded in a mythological context, connected closely with fertility, wealth and power. Therefore the most probable solution, in my opinion, is that the Grahi Buddha was in some way connected

with the kingship. If a king wants an image in order to legitimate his sovereignty, he would not bother about what the iconographic authorities prescribed. The mythological and religio-political dimension inherent in the Grahi Buddha makes it a perfect representative for a king in need of religious legitimation. This is one of several possibilities, but in my opinion the most likely. More research about the religious and political relationship in the area needs to be done before we can say anything more definite about the Grahi Buddha, but I am convinced that it is worth the trouble.

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## Nomad Iconography on Tombstones from Luristan, Iran

In Luristan in western Iran the nomad cemeteries are scattered apparently at random across the landscape. The history of these nomads is not very well known, and until a few years ago they were themselves largely illiterate.<sup>1</sup> They have lived in areas which comprise some of the very isolated mountain valleys and plains in the central Zagros mountains, and until recently their rhythm of life was to a great extent determined by the changing seasons, a fact that is reflected in the changing settlement patterns (Edelberg 1966–67, 373–401). The nomads covered a large distance during the course of a year, and as the seasons changed so did their dwellings. The mobile camps of black tents or airy huts leave only slight traces

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<sup>1</sup> The fieldwork upon which this study is based was carried out in 1974, when I was a member of a Danish archaeological expedition to Luristan. The expedition was sponsored by the Danish Carlsberg Foundation and the Archaeological Service of Iran. A grant from the Central Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen enabled me to return to Luristan in the autumn of 1977.

In the valley of Hulailan, approximately midway between Shahabad and Khorramabad, the cemetery of Pela Kabud was mapped and examined in detail. Pela Kabud is the largest cemetery in the area, comprising the remains of more than 600 graves, of which 379 still had the tombstones preserved. The oldest datable stone is from 1200 AH/1785 AD. The cemetery is still in use, although the types of tombstones described below are no longer produced. Fifteen other cemeteries were located in the Hulailan valley and studied in some detail.

In 1977 the survey was extended to cover larger regions of Pish-i Kuh and Pusht-i Kuh. It revealed numerous cemeteries with graves from the last two hundred years, and with gravestones, obelisks and stelae generally falling within the typological framework described below. – The distribution of cemeteries with pictorial gravestones and stelae seems to fall in the central and northern parts of Luristan in the plains of Kuh-i Dasht, Rumishgan, Bouleran, Tarhan and Hulailan, and in the small valleys along the Saimarreh river in the northern part of Pish-i Kuh towards Gamas Ab and Qara Su, south-west of Harsin.

An earlier version of this paper appeared under the title 'From Ritual Action to Symbolic Communication' (Mortensen 1991)

on the surface of the ground, and after a short time it is difficult to detect even a large camp-site.

The cemeteries and the tombstones which I have studied cover a period from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of this century (Mortensen 1983: 26–47). Starting early in the 1920's Reza Shah and his army attempted to forcibly, 'civilize' — that is, to disarm and settle — the nomadic tribes of Luristan. By the mid-1930's this policy had resulted in an economic, social and cultural breakdown of the old tribal structures of Luristan and in a partial cessation of nomadic migrations. The old cemeteries and tombstones of which I made a study in the 1970's, nearly all placed along old migratory routes, may therefore be an important source for the mapping of tribal migrations during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Moreover, they contain a rich amount of evidence for an understanding of certain aspects of the religious beliefs and ritual actions of the Lurs. (Fig. 1).

There are several kinds of tombstone in Luristan. A pictorial stele or an obelisk may sometimes be associated with the grave, and some of the obelisks can reach a height of several metres. Most common, however, are flat-lying gravestones with inscriptions in a lapidary style, which always state the name of the deceased, the name of his or her father, and the name of the tribe (*tayefeh*) to which he belonged. The month in which the death occurred is sometimes indicated, and always the year, according to the Islamic lunar calendar. An example is shown in Figure 2: the gravestone of a woman, of the Jalalvand tribe. A panel with gender-related pictorial symbols is nearly always found at the base of the gravestone. In this case, for example, there are a double-edged woman's comb, a kohl-pin, a prayer-stone, and a pair of scissors. The most common symbols on men's gravestones are: a washing set consisting of a basin and ewer, a string of prayer-beads, a prayer stone, and a semi-circular comb. Figure 3 shows these symbols on the gravestone of a man who died in Rajab in 1257 AH/August–September 1841.

In order to arrive at an interpretation of these images on gravestones, obelisks and stelae, the obvious procedure would be to ask the local people, the Lurs, among whom the tradition was once alive. It is rather surprising, however, that none of the local people who were interviewed could give any explanation of the background for, or the meaning of, the various signs and symbols on the tombstones. Their answers were nearly always in the negative — and with regret. That this would most often be followed up by much curious and fanciful speculation and suggestions does not disguise the fact that the signs have lost their original message-carrying value for the local people today.

In these interviews in Luristan I used to worry about the problems of accurate communication on the elementary level of linguistic difficulties and inadequacies. In spite of a seemingly fine *rapport*, did the people really understand, what I was asking? This worry was partly overcome by Professor Gernot Windfuhr, of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, an expert on the dialects spoken in Luristan. He very kindly asked many of 'my' questions, and there is no doubt whatever that the questions and answers were perfectly understood in the literal sense. However, a doubt remains which is difficult to put into words and which may perhaps be best explained by the following example. In 1977 two Danish children, aged 6 and 9, accompanied the expedition to Luristan. The only toy they had was a 20x20x5 cm box containing 4 or 5 layers of different jig-saw puzzles cut out in wood and with pictures on one side. The first layer was cut into 4 pieces, the second into 8 pieces and so on. The children were very familiar with geometric puzzle toys, and would often turn the pieces upside down to make it more 'difficult', i.e. more fun. The Lurs were quite fascinated by this game. Some of the men would always sit and watch, and they liked to try the game themselves. The interesting or curious thing is that they could hardly do it. Nobody ever got beyond the second layer with the pictures up, and even that took almost half an hour. Obviously this has nothing to do with 'intelligence'. Rather it may have something to do with the different way in which visual images are encoded or impressed upon our brains at a very early age — and this might explain the difficulties of cross-cultural image interpretation or code-breaking. Even if communication is perfect at the level of speech or language, the images or ideas evoked by the words may be so 'out of focus' that a mutual understanding of abstract ideas or notions is hardly possible. Nevertheless, I should like to briefly present two examples of my interpretation of images on Luristani tombstones. In both cases an attempt is made to understand the symbols through a reconstruction of the original religious and ritual context of the images.

The first example is an image which appears on a number of tombstones. It occurs e.g. on the tombstone of a man of the Jalalvand tribe who died in 1257 AH/1841 AD (Fig. 4). Below the inscription is a frame with the usual male symbols: a string of prayer-beads, the prayer stone, a ewer, and to the left a semi-circular man's comb. In the middle of the stone, interspaced between the fourth and the fifth lines of the inscription, is a panel with an enigmatic geometric figure in the centre: a cross on a square background with a kind of step design on both sides, opening up into tiny channels leading out from, or into, the centre.

The simplest interpretation of this motif, and none was forthcoming from the local people, is that it is a purely decorative element — an ornament designed to fill the space between two lines. There is, however, another possibility: the pattern looks very much like the central motifs in the great Persian Garden carpets of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. These represent, by means of geometrically constructed designs, a garden with channels leading out of, or into, the central motif, precisely like the middle panels on the tombstones. In the carpets the garden motif with its water channels and pools was very naturalistically portrayed, in the sense that an attempt was made to imitate or reproduce the *plan* of the classical Islamic garden (cf. eg. Rainer 1977: 174–191; Thacker 1979: figs. 13, 15 and 16; Macdougall and Ettinghausen 1976: pl II–IV, XXII–XXV, XXXI; Wilber 1962). In the carpets the channels and pools symbolize the water channels in a real garden, or, by extension, in the *bagh-e bihisht* — the Garden of Paradise. In Paradise imagery the setting is a garden or a series of gardens “... underneath which rivers flow ...” — a phrase occurring some thirty times in the Qur’an. Moreover, the pleasures of the *bagh-e bihisht* are so vividly described in the Qur’an that it has been an inexhaustible source of inspiration for miniature-painters, poets, saints and sufis alike, as well as for ordinary mortals. They *all* carry a mental image of Paradise! This notion of the all-pervading essence and presence of God can hardly be better expressed than in the following quotation from a poem by the medieval Islamic mystic Yunus Emre (quoted in Schimmel 1976: 13):

The rivers all in Paradise  
 flow with the word Allah, Allah,  
 and ev’ry longing nightingale  
 he sings and sings Allah, Allah!

The branches of the Tuba tree  
 the tongue reciting the Koran,  
 the roses there in Paradise,  
 their fragrance is Allah, Allah!

The evident appeal of these delightful and evocative verses to the senses of sight, hearing and smell could easily be explained as a response to ecological conditions. For nomads living in hot and arid lands, the attraction of walled gardens with trickling water, and palmtrees and pomegranates giving both shade and fruit, is obvious. In addition, ever since the Arab conquest in the 7<sup>th</sup> century these gardens have been the living image of the Islamic Paradise for the Persians. For a Muslim who has lived in accordance with the orthodox religious requirements, there should be no reason





Fig. 1. View of the cemetery of Pela Kabud in the Hulailan valley, Luristan. (Photo: September 1977).



Fig. 2. Pela Kabud. Woman's tombstone. Date incomplete (13. AH) (Photo: September 1977).



Fig. 3. Pela Kabud. Man's tombstone. Date: Rajab 1257 A.H. – Aug./September 1841 A.D. (Photo: September 1977).





Fig. 4. Pela Kabud. Man's tombstone. Date: 1257 A.H. – 1841/42 A.D. (Photo: September 1977).



Fig. 6. Pela Kabud. Man's stele. Date uncertain. (the stele was not found in situ) (Photo: October 1975).



Fig. 5a. Pela Kabud. Man's stele. Date: Rajb 1299 A.H. – May/June 1882 A.D. (Photo: October 1975).



Fig. 5b. Pela Kabud. Man's stele. Date: Rabi-ol-Sani, 1274 A.H. – November/December 1857 A.D. (Photo: October 1975).

to fear death, for he may rest assured — or at least may hope — that on the Day of Judgment, after the resurrection, he will be allotted a place in Paradise, and will forever after enjoy the pleasures of the Garden of Eden so eloquently described in the Qur'an.

Against this background and in this religious context it is possible to suggest that the geometric motifs of the middle panels on the tombstones, like the central figures of the garden carpets, fulfil not only a decorative purpose, but also contain symbolic connotations, which would direct thought towards *bagh-e bihisht*, the Garden of Paradise.

The second example of an image from the range of symbolic representations on Luristani tombstones is a motif found on almost all of the stelae erected at the heads of graves. The stelae have pictures on both sides showing distinctly differing themes. One side, facing the grave, shows scenes from the life of the deceased: often — as in Figure 5a — including a horseman with a small shield over his shoulder and with a lance or a gun in his hand. The man's sword is attached to the characteristic high wooden saddle. On this stele from 1882 the horseman is accompanied by three tribesmen each carrying a gun with a fixed bayonet. The other side of a man's stele shows a similar picture, but with marked differences in content. Here the representation is associated with death and burial — and possibly afterlife (Fig. 5b). The horse is riderless, and it is clearly tethered with a mallet at the head and the hind leg. The weapons of the deceased — a gun, a sword and a shield — are tied to the high wooden saddle. Below this scene three women are shown, their arms resting on each others' shoulders. One carries a standard (seen to the left in the picture). They probably represent participants in the mourning ritual. In a few cases a very curious and enigmatic motif depicting a lion attacking a stag with a snake in its mouth is seen above the riderless horse (Fig. 6). But what is the meaning of the horse without a rider?

In the literary sources there are examples of an old Arab custom of tethering a horse or camel at the graveside for the use of the deceased in the afterlife. Tavernier, the French traveller, provided a late 17<sup>th</sup> century account of burial and funeral customs in Iran (from the area of Isfahan) with some interesting details (Tavernier 1692: 722). Concerning the funerary processions, he relates that if the deceased was a person of consequence, all his horses would be saddled and bridled and some extra ones might even be borrowed for appearance's sake. On these would be placed the deceased's turban, his sabre, his bow and arrows, his lance, and in general anything that might serve to identify his standing and strength. This was, of course,

in the case of important persons, while the ordinary people would have to make do with a more humble procession to the cemetery accompanied by the chanting and crying of mullas and passersby. Tavernier adds some other interesting details: If the deceased had been a rich man or a good soldier, his turban, his sabre, his arrows and quiver and some provisions would be buried with him. Far from being unique to Persia, to lead a horse after the hearse or bier at a funeral seems to have been if not a universal habit at least a widespread custom, as testified by the examples in Quenstedt. Quenstedt (1976: 254–256) in this case starts with a reference to the Roman historian Tacitus, who reported that the old Germanic tribes often either burned the horse and equipment of a soldier or warrior on the pyre, or buried it with him — a custom that is testified among too many peoples and in too many places and periods to be quoted here. It is in most cases a reflection of a belief in an afterlife in which the deceased will need the horse, weapons, etc., that he used to have in this life — and as such it reflected pagan rites which have — largely — been superseded by the Religions of the Book. However, some of these rites have persisted — but with a different connotation. So when an officer or warrior (be it real or “honorary” like kings and presidents) still has his headgear and weapons placed on the coffin or bier followed by a led horse, fully saddled and bridled, and taken to the grave (or put on the tombstone), this might quite conceivably be a transformation or extension of this ancient habit and idea — and a survival of very ancient beliefs.

There is, however, another possible explanation for the riderless horse as it appears on the Luristani tombstones which relates to the Shi'a Muslim religious context. The prototype of Shi'ite martyrdom is the slaughter of Imam Hussein and his followers on the plain of Kerbala in 680 AD. Hussein, the grandson of the prophet Muhammed, with his family and retinue, was travelling through southern Iraq in order to claim his hereditary right to the Caliphate from the Umayyad Caliph Yasid. But at Kerbala Hussein and his followers were caught in an ambush and besieged. On the tenth day of Muharram, called Ashura, the siege reached its bloody culmination when Yasid's army cut down Hussein after massacreing every man and boy in his retinue. The tale of this foul deed spread rapidly, and the widespread reaction was one of terror and abhorrence. The events at Kerbala became the central theme for a Shi'ite passion play called Ta'ziyeh, and as early as the tenth century great mourning processions took place in Baghdad. Muharram processions, in which the blood-stained horse of Hussein is followed by flaggelants with chains, and bloody mourners who cut their heads with swords, have since been common among Shi'ite popu-

lations in the Near East (cf. Mortensen 1992). From an early stage it was believed that participation in the Muharram ceremonies was an aid to salvation (Chelkowski 1979: 2). Because Hussein's death was regarded as an act of redemption, it came to be believed that the commemoration of the anniversary would gain for the participants the intercession of Hussein on the Day of Judgment. Elaborate Muharram processions are known to have taken place among the nomads of Luristan. For them, the mental images evoked by a Muharram procession were so strong and potent that this kind of "illiterate religion", as it might conveniently be termed, in my opinion adds another dimension to the metaphor phrased by Umberto Eco that "...images are the literature of the layman..." when he describes the impressions created by the carved stone of a medieval church doorway on the mind of a spectator who is familiar with all the stories in the Bible but cannot read or write (Eco 1984, 41).

It is likely, therefore, that by representing the riderless, equipped horse on the tombstone in the same way that Hussein's horse is represented in the Ashura rituals in Muharram, the passing observer would be reminded of Hussein's martyrdom, and thus his attention would automatically be focused on the Day of Judgment and on pious hopes for the afterlife. As a derivation of this, the intended message could also have been that the person interred here had been of a pious observation. This seems to be quite a probable explanation and association in the 19<sup>th</sup> century nomadic setting in Luristan, and is indirectly testified by the elegies sung by the wives of the Vali Husein Gholi Khan on the occasion of his death in ca. 1900 (cf. Mann, 145-152). If this should be the right interpretation, there is, moreover, ample proof, as shown by Calmeyer (1974) and Kippenberg (1982), that it is yet another example of an age-old pre-Islamic custom going back at least to the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. which has survived and been turned to good use by changing the symbolic value or the content of the message while maintaining the old wrapping. Or in modern semiotic terminology: if viewed as a communicative system based on two codes, a visual and a perceptual — the visual code has remained unchanged while the conceptual has changed and is still doing so.

In the interpretation of the images on Luristani tombstones, it may never be possible, with certainty, to arrive at *the* correct interpretation of a motif. The signs and symbols on the tombstones are comparable to a code whereby messages are converted from one form of representation to another, which means that they have to be encoded in a form that the communicants can easily interpret. In a community sharing the same religion, cultural inheritance and social background, and living at a given time in a

particular area, this should present no problem. But if one or more of these elements are altered, the whole structural pattern and symbolic scheme of the community will be affected: as, for example, is clearly demonstrated by the forcible settlement of nomads in Luristan which has caused an abrupt discontinuation in the erection of pictorial tombstones (cf. Mortensen and Mortensen 1989, 930–951, Fig. 5). The more drastic the change, the quicker the transition of symbolic values into fossilized and sometimes incomprehensible fragments of a tradition.

The following quotation from an article by Marshall G.S. Hodgson (quoted in Hartner and Ettinghausen 1964, 161) pinpoints the problem:

In the course of history symbols live and change: once established in concrete form, they may move from context to context and be used to diverse ends. It has been suggested that there might finally also be a death of symbols — or, if not ultimately a death, at least some sort of desacralization, even if only temporary ... The death of a given symbol might be its transition into sheer un-understood tradition and then, presumably, its use simply for its esthetic form...

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## Magical Music in Old Norse Literature

No society ever existed without performing music, and most cultures display many variants of music. Music also played and still plays an important part in different religious rites. From the days of yore, music has been intimately connected with the cult, whether it is performed as epic or lyric expressions.

The Old Norse society was no exception to this statement and early finds from as far back as the Bronze Age reveal that different instruments were used in daily life. The most conspicuous specimens from this time are the bronze lures, which probably are depicted on the rock-carvings. They were made in two different ways — a simpler model made in the shape of a big horn and a more elaborate one made as a big S, which seems to appear in pairs: one curved to the left and the other to the right. Their size varied from 50 cm to more than 200 cm. (Jacobsson 1975: 7). Modern musicians have managed to produce five notes on the bigger ones, but it is uncertain whether the lures were used to play melodies. The practice of blowing one note for where two or more horn players replaced each other in a religious ritual has been suggested as a possible use of these huge bronze lures. (Lund 1994: 26–27). The great bronze shields from the same period seem to belong to the ritual ceremonies, of which we know hardly nothing. According to one hypothesis, these were used as drums, but since ceremonial swords and axes also appear among these finds, it is also conjectured that the weapons could have been used in a ritual war dance. There is also evidence of flutes made of bones and various kinds of rhythm instruments, such as drums, rattles and whiners. (Lund 1994: 24–25)

In the Viking Ages the literary sources tell us that music was performed as entertainment, especially at the royal court or in the hall of a famous chieftain. The music was performed by itinerant bards, some of them travelling far away, as Widsid, who was said to have visited India. Their instruments were the harp, which according to the Roman descriptions of the Germanic tribes, but there are also finds of lyres with six strings. In Ibn Fadlān's famous description of a Viking burial, the dead chieftain of the

Rūs was equipped with a lyre among the other things in his grave (Wikander 1978: 67). A stringed instrument was also found in the ship burial of Sutton Hoo, wrapped in an animal skin bag, reconstructed as a round lyre. As a final suggestion about the origin of the harp we quote Roslyn Rensch:

...any people who owned the hunting bow had possession, in embryo, of the frame harp; anyone who inserted a twig between the converging string arm and sound chest of the harp-developed-from the bow (whether he originally achieved that development himself or borrowed it from an Eastern civilisation) had the prototype of the frame harp of western Europe. (Rensch 1969: 31)

The harp is an entertaining instrument in *Beowulf* but it also maddens the monster Grendel;

*Þær wæs heapen sweg  
swutol sang scopes*

There was the sound of the harp, the  
clear song of the minstrel (*Beowulf*  
1978: 89–90)

The origin of the harp has been discussed; some scholars maintain that it derives from the Celtic areas, especially Great Britain; others claim a Germanic provenance. (Rensch 1969: 28–29)

The harp is mentioned in Old Norse literature in *Völuspá*, the poem of the creation of the world and of its destruction. When the mythical ages decline and a different omen forebodes the descent of the gods' power, *ragnarök*, one of these is mentioned in stanza 41:

*Sat þar á haufi  
ok sló hörpo  
gýgiar hirðir  
glæðr Eggþer*

He sat on the mound and played  
on the harp, the shepherd of the  
giantess, the merry Eggþer  
(*Vsp.* 41)

The giantess is mentioned in stanza 40 as “the old woman in the Ironwood” who bred Fenrir’s off-spring. Fenrir the wolf was one of the terrible monsters, sired by Loki, who threatened the gods and the cosmic order. His off-spring included the wolves appearing at the beginning of *ragnarök*, which Eggþer seemed to have herded. He was obviously full of expectation faced with the future battle between the gods and the giants and perhaps he even incited the wolves with his music. This would be a better explanation of the stanza — in my opinion — than the allusion to King David in Old Testament, who also was a great musician on the harp, but in fact had nothing to do with the context.

One widespread motif that survived into the Christian iconography was Gunnar in the snake pit, an episode in the Saga of the Volsungs:

King Gunnar was then placed in a snake pit with many serpents, and his hands were bound fast. Gudrun sent him a harp and he showed his skill by artfully plucking the strings with his toes. He played so exceedingly well that few thought they had heard such strumming even with the hands. And he continued playing skilfully until all the serpents had fallen asleep, except for one large and hideous adder which crawled up to him and burrowed with its head until it struck his heart. And there, with much valour, Gunnar lost his life. (Saga of the Volsungs 1993: 102)

Gunnar enchanting the snakes echoes the old motif in which a musician managed to bewitch nature and goes back to Orfeus, who played the lyre surrounded by listening animals and who subdued even Hades to open his gates to the nether world. Magical music is also reflected in several Celtic myths, where men are said to have died during the performance caused by the ability of the minstrel. This dramatic effect on people's minds is also evident in the late *fornaldarsaga* about Bosi. The hero of this saga, Bosi, tries to free a princess captured by the mythical King Guðmundr of Glæsisvellir. Guðmundr resides in a kingdom in Bjarmaland and personifies an ambiguous person, sometimes benevolent, sometimes ill-intentioned, characteristics reminiscent of Óðinn himself. In this episode he appears to be conspicuously weak, when Bosi enters the wedding between the captured princess and a man called Siggeir disguised as the minstrel Sigurðr. The ceremony begins with a toast to Þórr. After that Bosi begins to play and sing his first song, with the effect that every movable thing in the hall is aroused and some people begin to dance. This playing went on for a while. Then a toast was proposed to all the Æsir, and Bosi played so that the hall echoed with the sounds; first he played only pieces of music, but then he performed Gygjarslag, Drambus and Hjarrandi. As the guests were drinking the toast to Óðinn, he played Faldefyki on his biggest harp, which caused the veils on the women's heads to falter. By now, everyone was dancing. The last toast at the wedding was the one to Freyja, and when Bosi played Ramnaslag, even the king and Guðmundr and the guard were dancing, which gave him the opportunity to hide the princess in the big harp and to carry her away. (Bósa saga ok Herrauðs 1954-76: 310-313)

This reminds us of another mythical tale, about Áslög, the daughter of Sigurðr Fafnisbani and Brynhildr, who was, according to another *fornaldarsaga* about Ragnar Loðbrok, hidden in a harp and brought to Norway. (Ragnars saga loðbrókar 1954-76: 221-222). One might object that these stories cannot exactly be regarded as documents about the perform-

ance of music. Yet *Bosa saga* mentions a number of songs that might have been popular and had their place at the great banquets during the Viking Age.

The power of the harp is described by Saxo on several occasions, but most pivotal is the description about Hotherus in his third book:

His richly endowed mind made him outstrip his unripe years. No one was a more expert harpist or lute-player, as well as which he was dextrous in the whole art of the psaltery, lyre and fiddle. By performing in different modes he could excite in men's breasts whatever emotions he wished, joy, sorrow, pity and hatred, and by delighting or dismaying their ears could capture their minds. (Saxo 1979-80: 69)

Hotherus' capacity to excite people's minds with his music was useful in his perpetual battle with Balderus. This god was nourished by a special drink mixed by three supernatural sisters dwelling in the forest. Hotherus now endeavours to get that drink for himself:

Being handed a lyre, he tuned the strings, set his plectrum to it and played with the most fluent expressiveness to a ravishing cascade of song. They also had three snakes there, whose poison normally provided a potent preparation to be mixed with Balder's food; even now the venom was dripping in large quantities from their open jaws on to his meal. One of the nymphs, unbending towards Høther, would have offered him a share of this banquet, had not the eldest interposed and protested that Balder would suffer deprivation if they enriched his adversary with additional strength. (Saxo 1979-80/1: 75)

The passage ends with a lacuna, but it seems somehow that Hotherus had convinced the three maidens to supply him with the magical drink.

The power of the harp is well-known in later folk-songs and ballads, where it forms a recurrent theme. Music had the power to help people escape from evil forces, as in the ballad about the wedding where *Näcken*, the evil spirit of the water, abducts the bride as she is riding over a bridge; the bridegroom takes his harp and begins to play. The music has magic consequences — the bark is peeled off the trees; the grass disappears from the meadow and finally *Näcken* himself arises from the deep, weeping and returning the bride. (SMB 1983: 22:268). This is not the case in several other ballads, where *Näcken*, disguised as a nobleman, allures a young woman or a man down into the deep. (SMB 1983: 20: 229)

*Näcken* was an evil spirit of the rivers and waterfalls, probably derived from the verb, *nigu*, "wash, bathe". A comment made by a medieval theologian, Gottfried of Ghemens tells that he was a fallen angel, who played the dulcimer, an instrument which he brought with him when he was expelled from heaven. His origin is, however, traced back to pre-Christian

times, where he appears as a Proteus-shaped demon, sometimes as a horse (Landnamabók 1925: 57), sometimes as a man, related to sea-spirits as Ægir and Rán, a demonic creature who demands a tribute of human life. In order to allure people down to him, he plays the harp, later the fiddle. (Strömbäck 1981: 432–438)

The harp (or the lyre) is one of the most significant instruments in Old Norse literature. Used as entertainment at a royal banquet, it seemed peaceful enough, but it could — in the right or wrong hands — suddenly change into a powerful tool with which it was possible to gain ascendancy over individuals. Its magico-religious capacity is evident from an early, pre-Christian period until the Middle Ages, when certain types of music became the tools of the fallen angels which seduced mankind and ruined their hopes of salvation.

### The War Song

Compared with the evidence of the wide-spread belief in the mystical power of the harp, the war song may seem more concrete and distinct. Its purpose is clear — to incite men's fighting spirits before a battle. For this purpose *Chanson de Roland* was sung by the Normans before the battle of Hastings. (Much 1959: 49). In *Fostbrædrasaga's* account of the battle of Stiklastad we are told that Þormoðr Kolbrúnarskald recited *Bjarkamál* with the beginning "*Dagr's er uppkominn*" in order to hearten the king's army. (*Fóstbræðra saga* 1943: 262–263). Heimskringla merely reports that the army of the yeomen cried and beat their shields. The war cry was able to cause a battle-panic — according to many sagas — which made people run away into the forest and eventually turn into an animal's shape. (Gundersen 1981: 282–283)

Strangely enough, other examples of battle hymns in the Old Norse literature are few, something that would be expected from such a belligerent people as the Vikings. There is, however, one possible example interpolated with the framework in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, where a man called Dörruðr sees twelve armed men riding into the women's house. (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954: 454–458) Looking in through the window, he beholds a terrible scene: Women are weaving with weights of human heads, their weft and warp consisting of human intestines; their reeds are swords and their weaving-comb arrows. They are singing a song about the battle while weaving the warrior banner for the army, prophesying victory for the young King and defeat for the Irish.



We weave, we weave the web of the spear  
 as on goes the standard to the brave  
 we shall not let him lose his life  
 The Valkyries have power to choose the slain (6).

All sinister now to see  
 a cloud of blood moves over the sky  
 the air is red with the blood of men  
 as the battle-women chant their song (9).

(Translation from *Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems*, by N. Kershaw, Cambridge, 1922)

As the outcome of the battle of Clontarf was in fact the opposite, we may draw the conclusion that *Darraðarljóð* belongs to another context than *Brennu-Njáls saga* but has for some reason been inserted into it by its author. Already the uncommon name *Dörruðr* is probably a construction made from the title of the song, *Darraðarljóð*. Furthermore, to look through a window sometimes entailed taking part in a supernatural vision, like the slave-girl in Ibn Fadlān's story or the housewife in *Völsa þáttr*.

There are, in fact, certain stanzas in the poem alluding to the battle at Clontarf, such as the death of *Sigurðr jarl*; others, like the recurrent homage of the young King, are more hard to interpret, as King Brian perished at the beginning of the battle. The last stanza ends with the inciting appeal: "let us ride away quickly on unsaddled horse and swords in hand!". This suggests a battle hymn, with the function of instilling courage in the warriors before combat and a signal to attack.

The women in the hymn are easily recognised as Valkyries, the female deities whose names mean "those who are going to select the slain". In this situation they are singing a returning stanza *Vindum, vindum vefr darraðr*, "We weave, we weave the web of the spear". The web of the spear has sometimes been interpreted as "web of the Spear-God", *Óðinn*. Anne Holt-smark has, however, suggested that *vefr darraðr* should mean a banner or a standard, alluding to what was called a *merki* in the descriptions of the battles. In this episode of the saga this *merki* had a particular role. It belonged to *Sigurr jarl*, the leader of the heathen army, thus representing the bad guy, and it portrayed a raven, a bird carrying strong symbolic value of battle and death on the battle-field. The standard was woven by the earl's mother, skilled in magic, and it had the characteristic that it gave victory to the one for whom it was carried — i.e. the commander — but brought death to anyone who carried it, the *merkismaðr* or the standard-bearer". During the battle of Clontarf two standard-bearers fell and the jarl therefore asked the third to take up the banner, who answered: "You might

carry your devil yourself!" The jarl then took the banner himself but fell immediately. (Holtsmark 1956:192–193)

Regarding this interpretation of *vefr darraðr*, it is, in my opinion, quite reasonable to assume that *Darraðarljóð* was originally a war song, recited before a battle in order to provoke a fighting spirit among the combatants. Tacitus already mentions a kind of battle song, although wordless, performed by the Germanic tribes before a battle:

They have also those cries by the utterance of which — "barritus" is the name they use — they inspire courage; and they divine the fortunes of the coming battle from the circumstances of the cry. Intimidation or timidity depends on the concerts of the warriors, it seems to them to mean not so much unison of voices, as union of hearts; the object they specially seek is a certain volume of hoarseness, a crashing roar, their shield being brought up to their lips, that the voice may swell to a fuller and deeper note by means of the echo. (Tacitus 1954: Ch. 3)

Tacitus' account has a counterpart in *Hávamál* 156, where the battle god par excellence, Óðinn, says:

*þat kan ek it elliþta*  
*ef ek skal til orrosto*  
*leiða langveini*  
*undir randir ek gel*  
*en þeir með rík, fara*  
*heilir hildar til*  
*heilir hildar frá*  
*komo þeir heilir hvaðan*

I know that in the eleventh place  
 if I go with good friends to the battle  
 I sing towards my shield and  
 enchant the war to appear  
 enchant the war to disappear  
 that they will return safely  
 (Hvm 157)

Singing toward the shield once again reminds us of ritual shields of the Bronze Age, although the space in time prevents us from speculations of a direct continuity.

This kind of song indicates the outcome of the battle rather than the agitation of an army against the enemy. This leads us to the special term *vígspá*, a kind of sorcery which turned success in the field to personal favour. It is mentioned in *Völuspá* in relation to "the first battle in the world" between the Æsir and the Vanir. It is the Vanir that use this technique, and their women were also skilled in the kind of sorcery that was called *sejðr*. In an earlier strophe one or two of these female Vanir had infiltrated even Óðinn's hall and used their sorcery against the Æsir. This was possibly an appearance of Freyja, who according to *Heimskringla* was the one that taught Óðinn the art of *sejðr*.

## Galdr — the Magic Song

A characteristic feature of *sejðr* was the singing of a special song, *galdr*. (Strömbäck 1935: 119) *Galdr* derives from a similar stem to *gala* “to crow”, which means that the song was performed loudly in a shrill voice. The music historians sometimes relate the special art of singing that was performed by *saeter* girls, cattle-tenders in the forest pastures calling home the cows in the far distance, the *kulning*. A *kulning* was performed at a special vocal pitch, shrill and piercing, and could be heard over a vast area. This is, however, a pure guess, since we know nothing about the performance of a *galdr*. (Lund 1994: 38)

The master of *galdr* was Óðinn himself, also called *galds faðir*. The stanza of *Hávamál* mentioned tells that *unðir randir ek gel* “I sing (a *galdr*) towards the shield”, and later on in the same poem he relates the following:

*Þat kann ek et  
fjórða / ef mér fyrðar  
bera / bönd at  
bóglímom / svá ek  
gel / at ek ganga  
má / sprettr mér af  
fótom fíöturn / en af  
höndom hapt*

I know that for the  
fourth, if people  
bind my limbs  
with fetters, then I  
chant that I can  
walk, loosening  
the fetter from my  
feet and the chain  
from my hands. (Hvm.149)

This war fetter appears to be a special form of magic paralysis that belongs to the realm of *sejðr* and it is found in *The First Merseburger Galder*, an incantation belonging to the ninth century:

*Eiris sâzun idisi sâzun  
hera duoder / suma  
hapt heptidun suma  
heri lezidun / suma  
clûbôdum umbi  
cuoniouuidi / insprinc  
haptbandun, invar  
vîgandum!*

Once mighty women sat here  
and over there,  
some tied fetters,  
some stopped the  
armies, some loosened the  
fetters. Dash out of the  
fetters! Run  
from the enemies!

This charm could have been recited before battle, with a view to invoking these powers to decide the outcome of the struggle, another example of *vîg-spá*. The mighty women are probably the Valkyries, and typically enough, one of these deities carries the name *Herfjötur* (Grm. 36), “the war fetter”,

alluding to the magic paralysis which could, by certain charms, fetter a warrior, making him an easy target for his enemies.

The Second Merseburger Galder displays another effect of the *galdr*:

<i>Phol ende Uuodan vuorun zi holza</i>	Phol and Wodan went to the forest
<i>du uart demo balderes volon sin vuoze birenkiet</i>	Then Baldr's horse sprained its foot,
<i>thu biguolen Sinhtgunt Sunna era suister</i>	then Sinhtgunt, the sister of Sunna charmed it,
<i>thu biguolen Friia Volla era suis- ter</i>	then Frija, the sister of Volla charmed it.
<i>thu biguolen Uuodan so he vuola conda</i>	then Wodan charmed it, as he was well able to do. Be it
<i>sose benrenki sose bluotrenki sose lididrenki</i>	sprain of the bone, be it sprain of blood, be it sprain of the limb:
<i>ben zi bena bluot zi bluoda lid zi geliden sose gelimida sin.</i>	bone to bone, blood to blood limb to limb, thus be they fitted together.

This spell does, as F. Ohrt has shown, display close similarities with a song in *Atarvaveda* which also instructs how to handle a sprain. (Ohrt 1925: passim) Galdr was used in medicine in many ways, as one example in *Óddrúnarkviða*, where Óddrún delivers Borgný:

<i>ríkt gól Oddrún rammt gól Oddrún bitra galdra at Borgnýja</i>	Oddrún chanted mighty Oddrún chanted strongly keen <i>galdrar</i> at Borgný('s bed). (Odd. 7)
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Galdr could be used as a curse and the best example is found in *Skírnismál*: the fertility god Freyr has fallen in love, at first sight, with Gerðr, daughter of the giant Gymir. He sends his servant Skírnir ("the shining one"), who is none less than a hypostasis of the god himself, to propose to the girl. Skírnir finds Gerðr exceedingly hostile to his errand and begins by offering her golden apples and the ring Draupnir, which produces eight golden rings every ninth night. Gerðr refuses icily. He threatens her with his sword, but she takes no notice. Skírnir now utters a curse, charged with maledictions, intensified when the poem changes its metre from *ljóðaháttir* into *galdragalag*, the metre of spells:

Listen giants, listen frost-giants, sons of Suttungr, all kin of Æsir  
how I deny, how I forbid the girl from man's joy, the girl from  
man's use!

Hrímgrímnir is the giant, who shall have you down at the gates of Hel; where 'Vilmegir' will serve you goats' piss live on the wooden roots. You will never get a nobler drink, of my will, of your will.

I carve a þurs-rune for you and three staves: defilement, lechery and concupiscence! I will carve them off like I (once) carved them, if that is needed (Skm. 34–36).

This curse breaks Gerðr's resistance and she makes Skírnir a promise: Barri is the name of a grove where we both may meet in peace; in nine nights Gerðr will joyfully love Njörðr's son (Skm.41).

A particular role of this kind of song is described in *Eiríks saga raua*, called the *locus classicus* of the *sejðr* by Dag Strömbäck. (Strömbäck 1935: 50) The appearance of a *völva* "a sibyl" takes place in a farmstead on Greenland, where she prepares the rites for the divination. She asks the women of the house if anyone of them could sing a song called *Varðlokkur*, which she needed to entice the supernatural beings who brought her the prophecy. She then entered *sejðhjall*, the special seat where she received knowledge from the supernatural world, and one young women sang the song. After that the *völva* was able to answer questions from the present about the coming year. (Strömbäck 1935: 52–54)

All these examples emphasise the character of music in Old Norse literature as connected with the magic aspect of religion, and particularly with divination. This does not mean that all music in the Viking Age was performed with a magic purpose, but what has survived in the sources is the conspicuous role of music as something that affected the human mind to the extent that it was experienced as a magic feeling, even able to reveal the future.

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## The Salpinx in Greek Cult

The salpinx<sup>1</sup> is not often treated by scholars of ancient Greek music, because it was mainly a military instrument. As West (1992: 118) says: "It is by courtesy only that we give attention to this instrument, as it was not used for musical purposes, but only for giving signals..."

Trumpets were found in West Asia at least from the 16<sup>th</sup> century BC (Duchesne-Guillemin 1981; Hickman 1946). In Egypt the earliest certain representations appear in the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC in the reliefs in the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari, and two trumpets, one of silver and the other of bronze, were found in the grave of Tutankhamun.<sup>2</sup> In Greece the *salpinx* is known from the 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In Greek antiquity the instrument was often considered to be an Etruscan invention, but it is organologically now usually compared to the Egyptian trumpet (West 1992: 119).

The Greek *salpinx* was an aerophone, usually made of bronze, and consisted of an 80 to 120 cm long, straight, tube with cylindrical bore, and with a conical or more often bell-shaped final, *kodon*, which could be made of bone (West 1992: 118), see *Fig. 1*. The bone had to be fired in order to get the right acoustic qualities, according to Aristotle (*De aud.* 208a–b).

*Salpinx* is usually translated as "trumpet", but the type of sound generator it may have had has been discussed. Was it a reed instrument, such as a medieval *bombard*, or did it have a mouth generator similar to the modern trumpets? (Paquette 1984: 74; Krenz 1991; Bélis 1986: 212–217). The sound generator is not mentioned by contemporary authors, but Pollux (4.85) in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD seems to describe a reed instrument. Vase paintings show that the *salpinx* was sometimes played with the *phorbeia*, the mouth band typical of the reed instrument *aulos*, see the kylix by Epiktetos, *Fig. 1*. The story of trumpeters, such as Molokron, who was trum-

<sup>1</sup> A wind instrument of bone and shell also existed. Arist. *De audib.* 208a–b; West 1992: 121.

<sup>2</sup> The longer silver trumpet measured 0.582 m, and the shorter bronze instrument 0.492 m. Hickmann 1961: 120; Manniche 1991: 75–80, pl. 14.

peter to Ptolemaios Philipator and who could play two *salpinges* at the same time (Pollux IV.88), can also be taken to indicate reed instruments.<sup>3</sup> Against this it has been argued that late sources, such as Pollux, cannot be used as evidence for earlier Greek periods, that the *phorbeia* may have functioned differently for *salpinges* and *auloi*, and that a reed instrument would be unsuitable for military purposes (Krenz 1991: 112). The few ancient illustrations that depict the sound generator of the *salpinx* show no sign of a reed (Bélis 1986: 214) and the terracotta trumpets found on e.g. Cyprus end in a straight tube. In this paper the translation “trumpet” will be used, without prejudice.

The trumpet lacked holes or valves, which meant that only the natural notes could be played, probably only two or three notes.<sup>4</sup> The descriptions of its sound emphasize the loudness: The sound is described as shrill or penetrating (Aisch., *Eumen* 567–68), and it is compared to the great war cry of Achilles (*Il.* 18.219), the clash of the gods on the battle field (*Il.* 21.388), trumpeting elephants (Arist., *Hist. Anim.* 536b) or the braying of donkeys.

The descriptions of the trumpeters stress their heroic aspects. Epistades could make his trumpet sound over 50 stadia or almost 9 km (Pollux 4.88), and Herodoros from Megara, who slept on a bear skin and dressed in a lion skin, with an appetite to match, won seventeen victories in trumpet playing (Ath. 414f–415a) and could play so loud that it was difficult to be near him when he was playing (Pollux 4.88–89). Herakles was the obvious role model for these musicians (although as far as I know, there are no depictions of Herakles as a *salpinx*-player). It is therefore often thought that *salpinx*-playing was a question mainly of blowing loud and long. But it seems as if the musicians might sometimes use tonguing to play fanfares. A painting on an epinetron from Eleusis shows a trumpeting Amazon blowing fanfares, rendered as “Tote Totote”<sup>5</sup> (Bélis 1984: figs. 1–3). An an-

<sup>3</sup> Other evidence brought into the discussion are the instruments found in Pompeii: three *cornuu*, a straight trumpet, *tuba*, with a mouth generator and two with reed generators. Bélis 1986: 217.

<sup>4</sup> The shorter of the trumpets from the grave of Tutankhamun has been played on at least three occasions (Manniche 1991: 76 f.). At a test in 1939 three notes were played with a modern mouthpiece. In its original state, i.e. without mouthpiece, it was possible to play two notes, one between C and C<sup>#</sup> and the other close to E<sup>2</sup> in a later test. The sound is described as “rich and powerful” (Manniche 1991: 77). It is likely that the ancient trumpeters in practice used a much smaller range of notes than what is theoretically possible with the right mouthpiece.

<sup>5</sup> Epinetron by the Sappho Painter (Eleusis inv. 907), c. 500 BC (Haspels 1936: 228, no. 54, pl. 34; Lissarague 1990: 127, fig. 97; also discussed by Bélis 1984). It can be noted

ecdote told by Plutarch (*Mor.* 973B–E) concerns a Roman jay, known for its skill in imitating sounds. This bird was so shocked by the loud trumpet signals from a funeral procession passing by that it became totally dumb. But after a period of meditation the jay once again started to make sounds, namely a perfect imitation of the music of the trumpets, “their tunes with all their punctuations, modulations, and note-patterns” (West 1992: 120). Although this anecdote belongs to the Roman period, it still indicates that one should not imagine the salpinx signal as being only monotonous.

The trumpet’s military function is discussed by the ancient military authors and has recently been treated by Krenz (1991). It can be described as a call to arms (Aeneas Tact. 27, 4), a signal for reveille, silence, to charge and to break camp (Ath. 415a); that is, the trumpet signals the change of one state to another. It was also used to coordinate efforts when hauling along siege machines, as Athenaios (415a) tells us. The trumpet signals induced fear and terror: they could frighten a town to defeat, says Onasander in *The general* (42, 17) from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, or scare away a shoal of whales, as in an episode from the age of Alexander (Diod. 17.106.7; Arrian., *Indica* 30.4–6; Curtius Rufus 10.1.11–12).

As a military instrument the *salpinx* is mentioned by Homer and as such it appears on early vase paintings, such as the Aristhonotos krater from the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>6</sup> During the Classical period trumpeters were employed in the army, at the strategic staff, as well as in the infantry, the cavalry and in the navy, as told by Xenophon (*Equ. mag.* 3.12; *An.* 4.2.29; *Hell.* V.19) and Thukydides (6.69).<sup>7</sup> Its status as a military instrument can be seen from the reaction of the *salpinx*-makers in Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* (1240), when, as parts of the military industry, they see their existence threatened by the peace lovers.

In the vase paintings the trumpet is found in the hands of amazons, but also of archers and hoplites, as on the Oltos cup in Berlin, *Fig. 2*.<sup>8</sup> In other words, it appears in both a clearly mythical and a more “realistic” sphere.

that the same rhythmic figure is given as a trumpet fanfare by Ennius (*Ann* 451) — but in Latin: “Tara taranta”.

<sup>6</sup> Rome, Mus. Cap. no. 172, mid-7th century BC. *CVA Rome Cap. Mus.* 2, pl. 9 (II) (I) = *Italia* 39, tav. 1737; Paquette 1984: 74 f. no. T8.

<sup>7</sup> In the Hellenistic/Roman period trumpeters were attached to every *taxis* (company), later *syntaxiarchia* (battalion) of hoplites and light infantry (Asclep. Tact. 2.9; 6.3; Diod. 16.84.3; Plut. *Phoc.* 15). For the use of the trumpet at the navy battle at Salamis, see Aischylos (*Pers.* 396; cf. Diod. 20.51.2). Cf. Krenz 1991: 116, who also lists other cases.

<sup>8</sup> Red-figured kylix, Berlin F2264 by Oltos, c. 510 BC. *ARV<sup>2</sup>* 60:64; *CVA Berlin* 1, Taf. 1, 3 = *DDR* 1, Taf. 112, 114.

As a war symbol trumpeters were also used as shield marks. The trumpet was, however, not the only military instrument. *Auloi*, the Greek shawm or oboe, was often used as such, but it was the trumpet that more than any other instrument symbolised warfare.

But the trumpeters at the strategs' staff also had civic functions. Herold's signals in combination with trumpet playing are mentioned already by Bachylides (17.3–4) in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, and it was together with heralds that the first games for trumpeters were arranged in 6<sup>th</sup> century Boiotia (Frei 1900: 65). From 396 BC or the 96<sup>th</sup> Olympiad trumpet games were held in Olympia,<sup>9</sup> and from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century games for trumpeters also at most other major games, e.g. Nemea and Isthmia (Frei 1900: 66).

During the athletic games trumpets were used to give the starting signal for the events, especially horse races (Soph., *El.* 688, 711). On a black-figured lid a trumpeter is playing while the chariot teams run around the vase,<sup>10</sup> and a starting device at the hippodrome in Olympia incorporating trumpets is described by Pausanias (6.20.10–19). In another anecdote, also told by Pausanias (6.13.9), a horse was frightened by the trumpet signalling the last lap and threw its rider, but since it still finished first, was declared the winner. In the theatre it was used to signal the acts during the dramatic performances, since the comedy actor Hermon some time during the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC had missed his entry because he did not hear the shout of the herald, according to Pollux (IV.88).

Aeschylus (*Eum.* 566–570) lets the trumpet signals sound at the meeting of the assembly. They were blown as an alarm when enemies threatened the city, as when the Macedonians came close to Athens in the autumn of 339 BC,<sup>11</sup> as told by Demosthenes (*De cor.* 169.1) or in connection with natural disasters, for example at the earthquake in Sparta 465 BC (Plut. *Kimon* 16.5–6; Polyain. 1.41.3).<sup>12</sup>

A trumpeter belonged to the *pylores*, the gate-keepers of the Acropolis in Athens. He is in a source from the Augustean period, cited by Athenaios (3.99), called the "public rooster (*koinon alektoron*) of Athens", and his job

<sup>9</sup> According to Eusebius (*Chron* ad Ol. 96 [446–32]). The winner was a certain Timaios from Elis. (Stephanis 1988: no. 2410). On the trumpeters from Olympia, see Eckstein 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Black-figured pyxis lid, Paris, Bibl. Nat. inv. 182. Ridder 1902: 90, fig. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. also Diodoros (16.84.3). A similar event is recorded for 415 BC (Andokides 1.45).

<sup>12</sup> As pointed out by Krenz (1991: 114, n. 13), this disproves the opinion that the Spartans did not use the *salpinx*. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.9; Plut. *Mor.* 220E.

was to give a signal over the city when the gates to the Acropolis were opened in the morning and closed at night (Geagan 1967: 125–127, 177).

But this paper is going to concentrate on the function of the trumpet in cult. Especially during the Roman period, the instrument came to be considered as a typical altar instrument. Its twin role, as the instrument of war and of peaceful cult, is stressed in e.g. epigrams in *Anthologia Palatina*. But did it function in this way already during the Classical period and, in that case, in what cults?

Music was an integral part of the Greek cult, especially vocal music in choral singing and dancing. But instruments were also used. Only a few cults, usually of a chthonic character, forbade music.<sup>13</sup> The most common cultic instruments were the *auloi*, which were used in both processions and at sacrifices, and are mentioned in a number of cult regulations. The *auloi* were so closely connected with Greek cult that Herodotus (1.132) saw it as necessary to comment upon the lack of them in the Persian cult. Lyres, usually the large kithara, seem to have belonged to processions and as instruments for accompanying choral singing, but are not depicted in connection with the sacrifice itself (Nordquist 1992). Both *auloi* and lyres were also played in musical games. Percussion instruments of various types were found in oriental and orgiastic cults, to gods like Dionysos, Kybele and Isis. But what functions did a typical military instrument, such as the *salpinx*, have in the cult?

In the sources from the Classical period the trumpet is often mentioned in cults that have some military connections, for example at the official rituals when the Athenian fleet departed for its fateful mission to Sicily in 415 BC (Thuk. 6.32.1). An inscription from Gortyn on Crete from the 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC also mentions the *salpinx* in what seems to be rituals at the departure of the navy (Guarducci 1942: 185 f.). It also appears in hero cults, such as that at Plataiai to the fallen Greek soldiers, as described by Thukydides (3.58.4) and Plutarch (*Arist.* 21.1f.): The procession to the hero-grave was led by a trumpeter giving war signals, appropriate enough for a ritual to war heroes. After him followed the procession with a wagon with myrtle and wreaths, a black bull as sacrifice (Nilsson 1906: 455 f.; Nilsson 1916: 312; Eitrem 1920: 68; Haldane 1966: 101). Another example are the trumpeters that were competing in the Herakles festival at Thebes in an episode dated to 379 BC, related by Plutarch (*Mor.* 598D–E). Of course the

<sup>13</sup> E.g. the hero-cult of Tenes on Tenedos, see Plutarch (*Mor.* 297D). Cf. also the story by Apollodoros (*Bibl.* III.15.7) and Plutarch (*Mor.* 132F) of how Minos, in his grief, abolished the aulos and garland from the sacrifice to the Charites on Paros. On sorrow as a negation of music, see also Barker 1984: 69–71.



trumpet as a military instrument is suitable for such warlike cults or cults to warrior heroes.

In the same category we must also count Athena, who is mentioned as the inventor of the trumpet in some sources, although other mythical figures can have the same role, e.g. Herakle's grandson Tyrrhenos<sup>14</sup>. In Argos the war goddess Athena was worshiped as *Salpinx*, i.e. as the war trumpet and is found with a trumpet on a red-figured vase from the Acropolis.<sup>15</sup> That Athena's associate Nike, the goddess of victory, is also depicted with a trumpet is not surprising, as on a red-figured Etruscan vase<sup>16</sup> or on coins minted for Demetrius Poliorketes around 289 BC. These coins have been brought into the discussion of Nike from Samothrake, now in the Louvre, which have been interpreted by some as carrying a salpinx.

Athena was also the patron of the city state of Athens and its organisation and functionaries, and her trumpet also suits that civic aspect of her. Trumpeters seem to have taken part in the great procession during the Panathenaic festivals in honour of Athena, at least if the interpretation of Lehnsteadt (1970: 201, no. K84) of a red-figured cup from Saturina in Firenze<sup>17</sup> is right. These two trumpet functions, both the military and the civic, can be seen in the dedications to her:

"I, the trumpet that once poured forth the bloody notes of war in the battle and the sweet tune of peace, hang here, Pherenius, thy gift to the Titanian maid [i.e. Athena], resting my clamorous music".<sup>18</sup>

But the trumpet was also used in other cults. The earlier mentioned pylores of the Acropolis were responsible for the cult to Apollo Aigyeus at an altar by the gate.<sup>19</sup> Trumpeters took part in the sacrifices at the official

<sup>14</sup> Tyrrhenos was the mythical ancestor to the Tyrrhenians. He was often taken to be a son of Herakles or Telephos (Paus. 2.21.3; Hygin. *Fab.* 274; Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 1.16). Among other mythological inventors are Archondas, an ally to the invading Herakleids (Eusth. *ad Il.* XVIII.220, Schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 1377, Soudas s.v. *kodon*), Maleos (Schol. *Il.* XVIII, 220) and Pisaos, a Tyrrhenian from Tuscan Pisae (Plin. *NH* 7.56.201).

<sup>15</sup> Red-figured lekythos, Athen, Akrop. Mus. 2568, 1st half of 5th century BC (*LIMC* Athena no. 600). According to Pausanias (2.21.3) Hegeleos, Tyrrhenos' son, another inventor of the *salpinx*, was the one who established the cult of Athena *Salpinx* in Argos.

<sup>16</sup> Red-figured skyphos, Escherheim, coll. Haeberlin, 3rd quarter of the 4th century BC. Paquette 1984: 80 f. no. T11; Wegner 1949: pl. 26.

<sup>17</sup> Firenze, Arch. Mus. 81600. CVA Firenze IV, III,1, tav. 117, 118 = Italia 38, tav. 1689, 1690; Paquette 1984: no. T10.

<sup>18</sup> *Anth. Pal.* VI, no. 195, by Antipater from Sidon, from the end of the 2nd cent. BC, translation W.R. Paton (Loeb ed.).

<sup>19</sup> For the trumpeters among the pylores, see Nordquist 1994.



Fig. 1. Bilingual eye cup by Epiktetos, 520 BC: Silen blowing the salpinx. He is wearing the mouth-band, *phorbeia*, and carrying a shield and a jug. Courtesy British Museum, inv. E3.

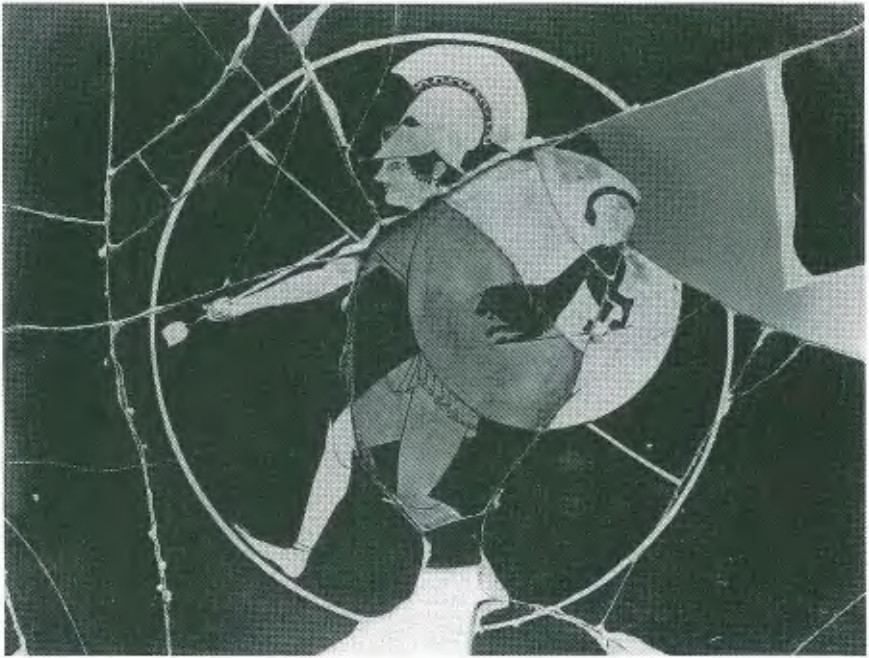


Fig. 2. Red-figured kylix by Oltos, c. 510 BC: Hoplite blowing a trumpet. Courtesy Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz, inv. F2264. Photo by Rosa Mai.



Fig. 3. Red-figured kylix by the Scheurleer Painter, 510–500 BC: Hoplite playing a trumpet. Courtesy the Louvre, Paris, inv. G 70. Copyright photo R.M.N.



Fig. 4. Black-figured lekythos close to the Theseus Painter, c. 500 BC: Trumpeter leading a procession. Courtesy British Museum, inv. B648.

Athenian embassies, the *theoriai*, to important cult places, as seen from inscriptions from Delphi. At Argeios embassy in 97 BC the trumpeter, who belonged to the administrative staff, not the musical or strategic, was a certain Aristomachos Damantos (Stephanis 1988: no. 358). One can wonder if he was the strategs' trumpeter, lent to the administration for the festivals.

In Boiotia the trumpet became common during games from the 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards — the Herakleia at Thebes, already mentioned, is one such case. Later examples are the Mouseia in Thespiiai from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC (Roesch 1982: 495 f.; Frei 1900: table). At the festivals in honour of the smith god Hephaistos in Athens the trumpet was used, according to a cult regulation from about 420 BC, to call forward the sacrificial animals, in other words in a signalling function (Sokolowski 1969: no. 13). On a kylix by the Scheuleer painter in the Louvre, *Fig. 3*, the trumpet is played by a young man dressed in a hip-cloth. The shield beside him has as a shield-mark a tripod, perhaps a reference to the agones.

No Greek bronze trumpets have been found. Like other musicians and craftsmen, the trumpeters give their instruments to the sanctuaries, as votives (*Anth. Pal.* 6, nos. 46, 159, 194, 195). Votive figurines in the shape of trumpets or trumpeters are also found. At Salamis on Cyprus votive terracotta trumpets from the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century BC appeared together with other types of votive figurines and were also found in graves (Chavane 1975: 205–211) and there are other, similar, examples in museums in Oxford and Nicosia (Paquette 1984: 74). Terracotta trumpets are also known from Egypt (Duchesne-Guillemin 1981: 291). A 157 cm long ivory trumpet of uncertain date now in Boston would, to judge from its length and material, probably have filled a ceremonial function (Caskey 1937; Sachs 1940: 145–148).

A more surprising use of the sacral trumpet is its appearance in the cult to Dionysos, the god of wine and inspiration. How strong its connection with Dionysos was can be understood from Plutarch's comment (*Quaest. symp.* IV, 6, 2) on the Jewish Tabernacle feast. He sees the fact that trumpets are played at this festival as a proof that the Jewish god can be identified with Dionysos and that Bacchic revelries were celebrated in the temple.<sup>20</sup>

The trumpet was used in the Dionysiac processions. During the Anthes-teria Dionysos' ship cart was drawn through the street with trumpets

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Philo, *Sept.* 22. Trumpets are among the spoils of the temple on the Arch of Titus. Yarden 1991.

leading the procession, a scene depicted on some black-figured vases (Frickenhaus 1912: 65 f.). In the great procession of Ptolemy II in Alexandria in the 270's BC, a couple of participants were dressed up as silenes, one as a herald and the other as a salpiktes, and led that part of the procession that was devoted to Dionysos (Rice 1983). As seen from these examples and as depicted on a black-figured lekythos in the British Museum<sup>21</sup>, *Fig. 4*, the trumpeter led the processions, while other instruments, such as the auloi and the kithara, were to be found further along, usually in connection with the sacrificial animal (Nordquist 1992). Another iconographic connection between Dionysos and the trumpet is found on the eye-cups, on which the exterior shows apotropaeic eyes. These, it has been suggested, notify a face mask of Dionysos, as argued by Ferrari (1986: w. further references). The interior may carry various figures, among them hoplite-trumpeters, as in several cups by Oltos<sup>22</sup> or a trumpeting silen, as on the eye cup by Epiktetos, *Fig. 1*.

Also to the antheateria belonged the day called *choai*, when a trumpet gave the starting signal for the silent drinking contest according to Aristophanes (*Ach.* 1000f.).<sup>23</sup> In contrast to other Greek symposia, at this occasion the participants sat alone and drank in silence, each from his own jug. According to the myth, the festival started when Orestes came to Athens after killing his mother, since the Athenians could not drive away someone seeking asylum, but neither wanted to take the risk of miasma from the murderer. In other words, the *Choai* was a feast with chthonic associations, a day of defilement (Burkert 1985: 238).

This chthonic association can also be found in other parts of the cult of Dionysos. Already in Aristophanes' *The frogs* Dionysos visits Hades, a visit that is the first more detailed description of Hades since the *Odyssey*. This chthonic Dionysos developed in the hellenistic period into Dionysos Zagreus, son of Zeus and Persephone, the Queen of the underworld, who was murdered by Hera but resurrected by Zeus with Semele as his foster-mother. In the late hellenistic period Dionysos is the wine, dismembered and served for sacramental drinking. The myth of the dismemberment of

<sup>21</sup> BM B648, close to the Theseus Painter, c. 500 BC. Haspels 1936: 267, 14; Lehnsteadt 1970: 200 K76, Taf. 4:3; Frickenhaus 1912: 65 f., Beil. 1.4.

<sup>22</sup> Such cups by Oltos are e.g. the one in Bryn Mawr, inv. P-2155 (ARV<sup>2</sup>, 1623, 23 bis) and the Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco inv. 34997 (Astarita 46) (ARV<sup>2</sup> 55, 19), discussed by Ferrari 1986.

<sup>23</sup> The *choe* in the British Museum, depicting the satyr *Kallinikos*, victor in *choe*-drinking may also be mentioned in this connection.



the god may be as old as the Anthesteria festival according to Burkert (1985: 238 f., 298).

The chthonic Dionysos appears in the Bacchic mysteries and rituals related to the underworld (Burkert 1985: 290–295). At the mysteries at the Alkydian lake in the Argolid, which was considered to be one of the entrances to Hades, Dionysos went down to the underworld to fetch his dead mother. To summon him back to the earth surface, trumpets hidden in thyrsos wands were blown. At the same time a male sheep to the Pylaochos (Gate-Keeper) was sacrificed by being thrown into the lake (Plut. *de Is.* 364F, *Mor.* 671 E; cf. Paus. 2.36.7). On Roman Rhodes another loud wind instrument was used in the same function, namely the *hydraulis* or organ, according to an inscription from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

A chthonic aspect of the trumpet is also found in other regions of the eastern Mediterranean. It is said that the trumpet in Egypt was seen as an invention of the god of the underworld Osiris, and it was used in the cult of Osiris and in the death cult, as well as that of Ammon, and also for military purposes (Hickman 1961: 122; Duchesne-Guillemin 1981: 291). Maniche (1991: 76, 79) suggests that the two trumpets found in the grave of Tutankhamun may have had a function in connection with the king's resurrection in the underworld, i.e. in a role similar to that of the instrument in the mysteries at the Alkydian lake.

It is worth noting that the Greeks identified Osiris with Dionysos. In Greek Egypt, the trumpet became instead associated with the evil and red-headed Typhon, another deity connected with the underworld: He is said to be behind the eruptions of Etna. A salpinx sounded like the donkey, Typhon's sacrificial animal, and was therefore forbidden as unclean in Greek-Egyptian towns, such as Busiris and Lycopolis, Plutarch states (*De Is.* 362F). It seems clear that the military trumpet had chthonic associations.

But trumpets were also played at merrier occasions with a humorous military or agonistic undercurrent. Satyrs attack the blood-red wine at supernatural symposia (Lissarague 1990: 70–74). On the vase paintings they fight chariot or foot races, sometimes watched by Dionysos himself, as on an oinochoe by the Altamura painter in Berlin<sup>24</sup>, or in the contest of chariots drawn by menads on a vase in Cambridge<sup>25</sup>. Such pictures were taken by Deubner (1956: 99, 103, 243 f.) to reflect the more general use of the

<sup>24</sup> Red-figured oinochoe, Berlin no. 1962, 33, Altamura Painter, c. 465–460 BC. *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1660; Greifenhagen 1963: pl. 1–4; Paquette 1984: 76f. no. T1.

<sup>25</sup> Red-figured kylix, Cambridge 37.17, from Vulci, by the circle of the Nikosthenes Painter, end of 6th century BC. *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 133, 4; *CVA* Cambridge 2, pl. 6 = Great Britain 11, pl. 515.



salpinx at symposia, and he suggested that Aristophanes' description of the *choai* reflected the real use of the trumpet at festivities in the Thesmotheion. Trumpet signals at symposia are also mentioned elsewhere in Greek literature. The pseudo-Aristotelian treaty "On Acoustics" (803a), talks of soft trumpet playing as suitable for komasts, but mostly it is seen as a sign of the barbaric opulence of the Macedonian princes.

The Greek symposia have been much discussed during the past few years, as an essential part of male aristocratic Greek life. Scholars have stressed their social, political and religious function. The "drinking together" of the symposia made the men happy, strengthened the communal feeling and made it possible to reach the acme of human spiritual endeavour and thus gave inspiration to art, at the border between the supernatural, divine, sphere with its strong chaotic forces and the human sphere with its limitations. But the Greeks were aware of the danger of the uncontrolled consumption of both alcohol and feelings, which may lead to a point when this border is crossed, when the dionysiac rites open the way for strong, uncontrollable, forces that may lead to madness and violence (Lissarague 1990: 3–14). The mythology of Dionysos is rich in such dark sides and the legends of the introduction of the wine involve bloodshed. We can only remind ourselves of Ikarios or Penteus' horrible fate (Burkert 1985: 238, 241). The satyrs and menads, however, the supernatural entourage of Dionysos, can indulge in excessive orgies without risk, precisely because they are nonhuman.

The depictions of feasting sometimes also allude to violent or warlike activities, and blood and wine are often coupled. War scenes and dionysiac scenes are juxtaposed on the same vases, such as the kylix of the Nikosthenes painter at Castle Ashby with symposia on the exterior and an armed man with a trumpet in the interior, as a Thyrrhenic dancer.<sup>26</sup> This is one ideal male sphere in one object: male friendship, loyalty and exhibitions of courage in symposia and war, wine and blood. In the same spirit silens with trumpet and shield are found on drinking vessels, as on the eye cup by Epiktetos in the British Museum, *Fig. 6*,<sup>27</sup> showing how during the feasting the natural and supernatural forces attack sobriety and "the middle way" (Lissarague 1990: 70–76, 115–117).

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<sup>26</sup> Red-figured kylix, Castle Ashby no. 57, by the Nikosthenes Painter, c. 520–510 BC. *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 455, 8; *CVA* Castle Ashby pl 35 = Great Britain 15, pl. 690; Paquette 1984: 82f. no. T15.

<sup>27</sup> Bilingual kylix by Epiktetos, London BM E3, 520 BC. *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 70:3; Paquette 1984: 73, 78f. nos. K1 and T7.

To this dionysiac sphere belong also other divinities who are concerned with man's sensibilities and emotions, such as the god of love, Eros. On a vase from Vienna winged Eros is depicted as blowing a salpinx, and behind him hangs a sword — another military attribute.<sup>28</sup> Here the god of love is not the sweet, naughty little boy in later pictures, but depicted as a virile young man, as the Eros described by Hesiodos as a creative principle or a force of nature. Anacreon (413P) talks of Eros as a dangerous force, who kills you with his bronze axe (fr. 47). Eros sometimes also has a chthonic aspect and is occasionally found together with Thanatos, Death (Vermeule 1979: 157–162). Eros with the trumpet should be seen as a depiction of this mystical and potentially destructive force and as such connected with the dionysiac scenes.

But why does the trumpet appear in the cult of Dionysos, as well as in other Greek cults? What was its function? As we have seen the general function of the instrument was to signal a change of state, primarily between war and peace. It signalled attack and retreat, called silence or summoned. It marked the beginning and the end at the games, the symposia during *choai*, and at the opening and shutting of the doors of the Acropolis each morning and evening. It signalled the arrival of the holy procession. It warned and gave alarm. The trumpet signals were frightening symbols of war and danger, and were used in apotropaeic functions, not the least in contact with the underworld.

That loud instruments, often of metal, are used in apotropaeic functions at chthonic cults, funerals and in magic is common in many cultures. We find loud signals on wind instruments in many parts of the world, and percussion instruments, too, are frequently used in this role: drums, cymbals and bells. In Greece the sound of metal, especially bronze, was seen as apotropaeic and magic.<sup>29</sup> Therefore metal idiphones were used in some cults, e.g. at Dodona (Cook 1902; Schatkin 1978: 161f.) and according to Apollodoros (*FGrH* 244F 110; Schatkin 1978: 162) the invocation of Kore at Eleusis was accompanied by the sound of a gong or cymbal played by a priest. At the death of Laconian kings metal was beaten (Herodt 6, 58, 1).

The trumpet, as a metal instrument also, had apotropaeic functions. This can be seen in, for example, Artemidoros' *Dream book* (1.56): To dream that

<sup>28</sup> Attic red-figured lekythos, Vienna University coll., inv. no. 561, from Gela, c. 480 BC. *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 447, 272; *CVA* Vienna 1, pl. 13: 2–3; *LIMC* Eros no. 664; cf. Nordquist 1995. The armed Eros also appears on other early red-figured vases, e.g. an amphora in Cab. Méd., Paris inv. 366, dated to 470–460 BC. *LIMC* Eros no. 723.

<sup>29</sup> See Schatkin 1978 and Gow's (1950: 43) comment on Theocritus, *Idyll* II, 36, with further examples.

you are blowing a sacral trumpet is a good sign for people who want to find another person, or who have lost a slave or another member of the household, since even in war the trumpet collects that which has been dispersed, says Artemidoros. Through its loud sound, it finds things that have been hidden. It drives away illness, because it is made of bone and bronze, through which air is blown, without returning. It makes slaves and everybody under foreign power free from slavery, since it is the true instrument of the free. It is symptomatic that it means bad luck to dream of a broken trumpet, since such an instrument is not sacral, according to the *Dream book*, but an instrument of battle: that which the mouth says, which uses such an instrument, falls back in its own head. Therefore such a dream counsels people against fighting processes.

It may be of interest to compare this view with the Roman use of the sacral trumpet. The Etruscans, and later the Romans, used their trumpets in a much wider context than in Greece, in the funeral processions for men from the upper classes, as well as for military purposes and processions. The Romans had several forms of the trumpet, the *lituus*, the curved *cornu* and the straight *tuba*, used in various contexts (Pollux, *Onom.* IV.86–87). Some of the Greek uses of the instrument were taken over. There are, for example, series of depictions of trumpets in dionysiac processions on Roman sarcophagoi.

During the Roman period sacral trumpeters, *hierosalpiktes*, became common in the cult. We have examples from the games, the festivals to Artemis and the curete collegia in Ephesos, as well as from hero-cults, such as the *Theseia* in Athens, all from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (Deubner 1956: 225f.). But with the increase in its use as a sacral instrument in the Roman period followed, not an extended or intensified symbolic value of the trumpet, but rather a trivialisation. The dichotomy of war and peace tended to become a topos without much content. Instead the military status of the trumpet was stressed. The *aulos*, the other war instrument, had since the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC been considered as “low”, even if it was perhaps the most widely used of all Greek musical instruments, in cult as well as in entertainment. It could be played by slaves as well as free, and by women — something more unusual, but not unknown, for the salpinx. One example is the trumpeter Aglais, Megakleos’ daughter, who worked in Alexandria during the Ptolemaic period (Ath. 10.415a).<sup>30</sup> The *aulos* became an in-

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. also Aelian, *Poik. Hist.* 1.26; Pollux IV.89. Discussed by Stephanis (1988: no. 42) and Rice 1983: 48 n. 39.

strument for professional musicians, i.e. artisans, and with that followed a correspondingly low social status.

The trumpet, by contrast, was as Artemidoros said (*Dream book* 4.56) the instrument of the free. It had in Rome, as already said, long been used at aristocratic funerals. As an official war instrument it was also dignified enough to be played officially by free citizens and gentlemen. In Roman Ephesus the trumpeters often were winners in the Ephesian Olympic games, while the auletes were slaves.<sup>31</sup> But in the Roman cult the salpinx functioned mostly as a signal instrument, or as a signal in the processions.

This can be compared to the salpinx functions in Greek civic and cultic life, which can be described as having the more practical role "to summon" and to act as acoustic border marker. It measured the time, most clearly on the Acropolis. It divided a theatre performance in acts, the games in various events, the row of sacrificial animals in individual sacrifices, day from night, open from closed, silence from sound.

The most significant symbolic role is that of a signal between life and death, or between peace and war. It is this dichotomy that is so often stressed by the ancient sources, and that is behind many of the depictions, e.g. of the satyrs or Eros as the creative force with the instruments of death. In the *choai* and in the dionysiac cult in general, the trumpet signals marked the border between the civilised everyday human life and the advent of Dionysos with his mythical entourage and the dionysiac orgies, between sobriety and excesses, the border between our world and the world beyond.

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<sup>31</sup> Sokolowski 1962: no. 121, discussed by Knibbe (1981: passim, esp. p. 78–95). In the inscriptions salpiktes both from Athens and from Ephesos are usually listed with name and demotikon, sometimes patronymikon from the hellenistic period onwards. The auletes, however, are listed before the *hierosalpiktes*, since their is the older function.

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## Ritual Art: a Key to the Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead

The Bambara sculpture in fig. 1 is also a ritual object, in fact one of the *dramatis personae* of a ritual drama. The *Civara*, as it is called, is carried on the head during the ritual dance as a token of the presence of the mythical antelope which brought agriculture to the Bambara. Besides the male *Civara* there is also a female one, and in their dance, the two of them dramatize the fertilizing interaction of sun and soil. Without further exploring Bambara ritual, we may notice that a piece of pictorial art is here an integral part of a ritual. It is a mask, carried during the dance and designating its bearer as the mythical antelope.

Also belonging to a ritual are the space and the surroundings in which it is carried out. It is well known how ritual places and temple rooms are often structured and decorated to make out the background and the framework of ritual acts. The place of ritual may be designed as an *imago mundi*, or it may be chosen or named according to mythical prototypes. Temple rooms may be decorated with mythological and cosmological motifs to identify the ritual acts that take place in them as mythical deeds and cosmologically significant events, exactly as the *civara*-mask identifies the ritual dance in its mythological and cosmological significance. It is probably in this way that we must understand the pictures of the Last Supper or the Crucifixion often found in Christian churches at the place where the Eucharist is enacted. The picture of Jesus and the twelve is part of the *anamnesis*: it identifies the ritual meal with its prototype and its foundation. Although the picture is not moved or manipulated during the Eucharist, it would certainly be wrong not to regard it as part of the ritual. The picture of the Crucifixion has a function corresponding to the *Agnus Dei* and the consecration of bread and wine as the most blessed body and blood of Christ. Both pictures may be omitted since their motifs are represented in the ritual text, but when they are there, they are elements in the ritual drama as well as the corresponding texts.

In view of the complexity characteristic of ritual, pictures have an immense potential of expression. The many levels and layers of meaning in ritual are often difficult to unite in a single ritual text: The Eucharist is the last meal of Christ, the sacrificial lamb, the glorification of the church in Christ, the forgiving of sins, etc. etc. And the bread is the body of Christ, which is also the church; Christ is also the Word, the creative principle and the gospel of salvation; and the very consecration, in which the host and the wine are said to be the body and the blood of Christ, may be seen as a reenactment of the incarnation. Even more theologies of the Eucharist or ritual layers of meaning might be added. What is not possible in ritual texts and performances, is possible in the ritual picture: to bring all these ritual levels and layers of meaning into the ritual simultaneously. Texts and dramatic performances must of necessity unfold themselves sequentially in time; but the picture may unite everything in a timeless moment.

Illustrations of the many levels of meaning involved in the Eucharist are found most strikingly in the late mediaeval Low German altarpieces. The ritual transsubstantiation of the bread and the wine into the most blessed body and blood of Christ is here given a wealth of meanings and perspectives, which are thus added to the service enacted at the altar. — The altarpiece from Triebsees near Stralsund in fig. 2 is an excellent example: In the middle of the upper register God is shown adored by angels. To the left, primeval sin finds an expression in the image of Adam and Eve in the mouth of Hell, and to the right, the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary is shown. In the middle register, the four evangelists pour the Word of God into a mill driven by the four rivers of Paradise. On both sides, the apostles are seen working the floodgates. In the middle of the lower register, the Word becomes flesh: Christ is shown as a child issuing from the mill and seated in the chalice, which is held by four Fathers of the Church. To the left, the sacrament is distributed, and to the right is shown the coronation of Friedrich III, who was, as the last German emperor, crowned in Rome in 1452. The coronation is thus, as it were, a consequence of the incarnation.

The perspectives and the implications of the altarpiece are thus dramatically represented in the ritual, efficacious and coenacted in the actual consumption of bread and wine. Whoever partakes of the Lord's supper in Triebsees, participates in the renewal of the incarnation of Christ with all the theological and political implications of the altarpiece.

Among the religions of Antiquity, the religion of ancient Egypt stands out as particularly well known. This is not only due to a wealth of preserved religious texts, but also to an almost incalculable bulk of pictorial represen-

tations: temple reliefs, tomb paintings, illustrated papyri, etc. And throughout its history of more than two thousand years, ancient Egyptian religion centered on ritual. This means that most often the *Sitz im Leben* of religious art is ritual. Works of art carry out ritual functions and illustrate ritual practice. Very much like the altarpiece from Triebsees, temple reliefs often add to the dramatic quality of the ritual acts that took place in the temple through representations of the mythical and the topical implications of the ritual. A particularly instructive example is the series of reliefs in the great Ptolemaic temple of Edfu related to the annual celebration of the "Triumph of Horus"<sup>1</sup>, i.e. the ritual drama enacting the mythical victory of Horus over Seth, denoting the first beginning of Egyptian kingship and Egypt's perpetual triumph over her enemies. At the end of the series of reliefs, the present king, Ptolemy IX, is declared victorious over the country's enemies.

The extant ritual texts are ample evidence that the ritual was a dramatic performance of the victory of Horus, who is shown on the reliefs harpooning the hippopotamus that represents Seth several times. The killing of the hippopotamus is already known as a theme with symbolic value from pre-historic seals. What we cannot know is how realistic this performance was. Was a hippopotamus, dead or alive, or perhaps a life-size dummy, actually used in the ritual? Or was an ox simply sacrificed, consecrated as Seth<sup>2</sup> — or was it more like the body of Christ in the Eucharist? Of all the dramatic reliefs in Edfu, fig. 3 is perhaps the one closest to actual ritual practice. The accompanying text explains that a butcher, i.e. a sacrificial priest, is cutting up a cake hippopotamus which is then divided between the gods participating in the ritual. At the same time, a lector priest is reading a spell of annihilation to Seth. — The dramatic ritual scenes, however, represent a more radical mythological realism. The first part of the drama is dominated by scenes like fig 4, showing the king in a gesture of adoration before the mythological representation of Horus harpooning the hippopotamus. With only minor variations, this theme is repeated in the first five scenes, a redundancy no doubt denoting the rhythm and the extension in time of the ritual. The mythological realism of these scenes may, however, be viewed very much like Jesus in the chalice on the Triebseeser altarpiece: the picture adds to the dramatic quality of the ritual. It is an extension of the ritual assertion, or we might say a mythological transfiguration of the ritual actually performed. The representation of the king in a

<sup>1</sup> Fairman 1974, cf. Podemann Sørensen 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Pyr. Spruch 580.

posture of adoration would thus, in a general way, represent the ritual — as in fact it does in countless ritual scenes in Egyptian temples. The mythological part of the relief should then be taken not as a documentary account of what was in fact performed, but as the transsubstantiation of whatever was performed. — And as a further analogy of the Triebseeser altarpiece, the results of the ritual are also part of the dramatic series of reliefs in Edfu. Horus' mythical victory over Seth is, as we have already pointed out, the exemplar and archetype of pharaoh defeating the enemies of Egypt. The victorious king defeating the enemies is the motif dominating the pylons of New Kingdom temples, very much like Heracles defeating monsters or lapiths fighting centaurs decorate the facades of Greek temples and serve to delimit the cosmos of the temple against the chaos surrounding it. Towards the end of the Edfu series of reliefs is seen an unusual variation of this motif, juxtaposed with its mythical exemplar, Horus harpooning the hippopotamus (fig. 5). The relief shows the king harpooning a captive enemy and, symmetrically arranged, the mythological scene. The captive enemy denotes, as it were, the topical implications or the results of the ritual, just as the Triebseeser altarpiece represents the imperial coronation as a worldly reflection of the incarnation, analogous with the transsubstantiation that takes place in the ritual. In the Edfu reliefs, it is important to notice that the king, who was formerly represented in the rather undramatic posture of adoration, is now drawn into the dramatic part of the picture. This is another variety of what we have called the pictorial transsubstantiation of ritual: the officiating ritual person who did, in the ritual actually performed, perhaps nothing but recite a text, may be represented as taking part in the drama, more or less integrated in its mythological framework.

The idea of a 'pictorial transsubstantiation of ritual' may serve as a key to understanding the sequence of pictures in illustrated versions of the Egyptian Book of the Dead.<sup>3</sup> As is well known, the Book of the Dead has been interpreted in a number of different ways, which are by no means easily reconciled or united by some common purport. Part of its content seems to be pictures and verbal accounts of the beyond, and some have therefore

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<sup>3</sup> The text of the New Kingdom Book of the Dead with illustrations and variants is edited by Naville 1886 and translated by Hornung 1979, by Barguet 1967. A facsimile edition, including the papyrus of Hunefer, is Budge 1899. The translation by Faulkner 1989 has a wealth of photographic reproductions of the illustrations. Colour reproductions of all illustrations in the papyrus of Hunefer are most easily accessible in Rossiter 1979.

taken it to be a kind of guide-book, which the deceased would somehow consult during his journey in the hereafter. Others have regarded it more like a passport giving access to a blessed life in the beyond, and in fact, some of its texts might be read as certificates or letters of introduction. Still others have noticed that the Book of the Dead has abbreviated versions of some of the rituals that are known to be part of the funeral and the mortuary ritual, e.g. the Ritual of Opening the Mouth and the Ritual of Embalming. As part of the funerary equipment, the book might thus be a representation of these rituals, meant to perpetuate them for the benefit of the deceased.

There is, however, one part of the content of the Book of the Dead that was never fully taken into account in the attempts to understand its religious function or '*Sitz im Tode*': the many representations of temple ritual or *culte divin*, as opposed to mortuary ritual, both in its texts and its illustrations. We shall deal only with the latter.

A rapid survey of the famous New Kingdom illustrated Book of the Dead counts 20 representations of the deceased in a posture of adoration in the papyrus of Ani, 9 in each of the lesser papyri of Hunefer and Anhai, and only 4 in the highly stylized papyrus of Maherpa. It is thus a quite prominent feature that must be taken into account when considering the religious function of the Book of the Dead. And this is where our new-struck dogma of pictorial transsubstantiation may serve as a key to understanding the role of illustration in the Book of the Dead.

The classical illustrated New Kingdom Book of the Dead does in fact begin with a representation of the deceased in a posture of adoration, followed by a hymn to Re-Harakhte, the rising sun (fig. 6). In the papyrus of Hunefer which, for the sake of brevity, will serve us as a specimen, the hymn is followed by a quite peculiar compact picture, originally taken to be an independent, purely pictographic chapter of the Book of the Dead. It does not, as might be imagined, represent strange beings and features of the beyond, but the rising sun to whom the hymn is addressed. Re-Harakhte is shown as a falcon with a sun-disk on his head, worshipped by the heavenly baboons as he rises. We are thus facing the transsubstantiation of the hymn — or the heavenly transfiguration of the worship of Hunefer and his wife: The baboons are worshipping the Sun-god with the same conventional gesture as shown in the picture of the deceased and his consort. Their worship of the Sun-god, the hymn, is thus, as it were, conveyed to the heavenly baboons. The lower part of the picture is another dramatic transfiguration of their worship: The resuscitation of Osiris. Osiris is depicted as the so-called Djed-pillar, a ritual object about which we know



little more than the fact that it represents Osiris. The god is flanked by his two sisters Isis and Nephthys, each with just a short sentence of the elaborate lamentations which in the well-known ritual restore Osiris to life in order that he may beget an heir to the throne. A proper ritual text with these lamentations and directions for their use is not extant before about 312 BC, but the motif occurs very often throughout the New Kingdom (1552–1069). Throughout this period, the Sun-god and Osiris are seen very much as two aspects of the same god, and the sunrise and the resuscitation of Osiris are both important — and interchangeable — expressions of the Egyptian idea of regeneration. The two motifs may even be combined or mixed, as is seen in a number of paintings at the entrance of late New Kingdom royal tombs, where Isis and Nephthys serve as midwives of the rising sun.

What, however, has all this to do with Hunefer and the '*Sitz im Tode*' of the Book of the Dead? The answer is rather evident: Through his hymn and its ritual transfigurations or transsubstantiations, Hunefer — or Osiris Hunefer, as he is conventionally called in his Book of the Dead — participates in regeneration. The resuscitation of Osiris is also his resuscitation, and the rising of the sun from the darkness of the night and from the Netherworld is also the rising of his life from death. I hasten to add that in the Egypt of the New Kingdom this implies no idea of an individual resurrection. We are in Africa, and the deceased ancestors are the source of life of their descendants.

In the papyrus of Hunefer there follows once more the picture of Hunefer and his wife in a posture of adoration, this time with a hymn to Osiris (fig. 7). This sequence is thus elegantly symmetrical with the preceding combination of solar and Osirian elements. In pursuing our theme of pictorial transsubstantiation, it is important to note the following picture of Thoth, carrying the *ankh*- and *was*-signs ('life' and 'dominion') to Osiris in the manner of an offering. Thoth is the god most often depicted in priestly or ritual roles and may — to put it in the briefest possible way — be considered the priest among the gods. In the present context, his role is analogous to that of the heavenly baboons in the preceding picture. The hymn to Osiris is transsubstantiated in Thoth carrying life and dominion to Osiris.

Then follows the famous scene of the weighing of the heart of the deceased, the favourite picture of all handbook surveys of ancient Egyptian religion (fig 8). The weighing of the heart itself is not easily understood as a transfiguration of Hunefer's worship; it is preceded, however, by the scene in the upper register, where Hunefer is seen worshipping an extended Ennead of gods. In this way the motif of the deceased in a posture



Fig. 1. Leuzinger s.a., Pl. 5 (From the private collection of Elsy Leuzinger).

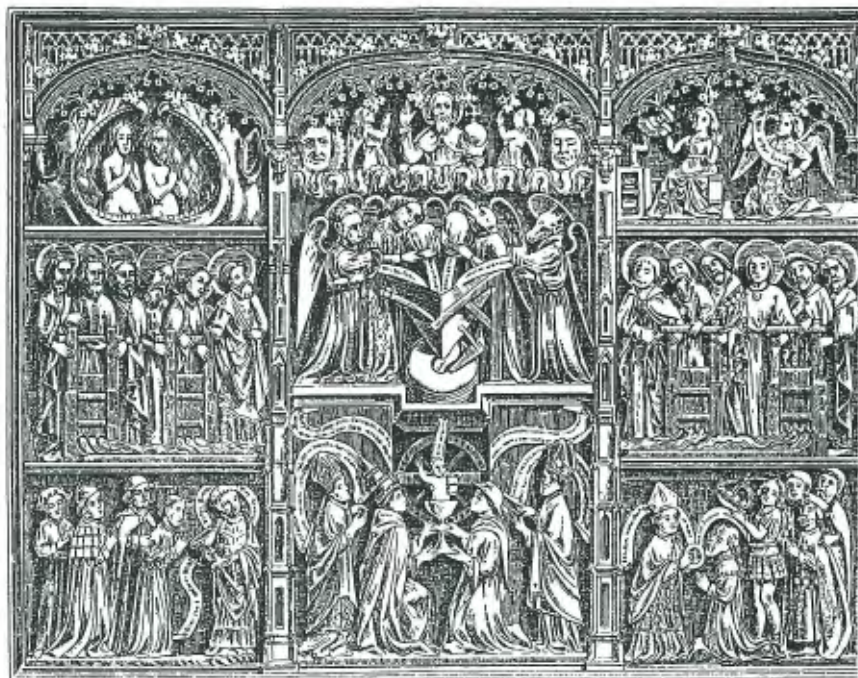


Fig. 2. Molsdorf 1984, Tafel 10.

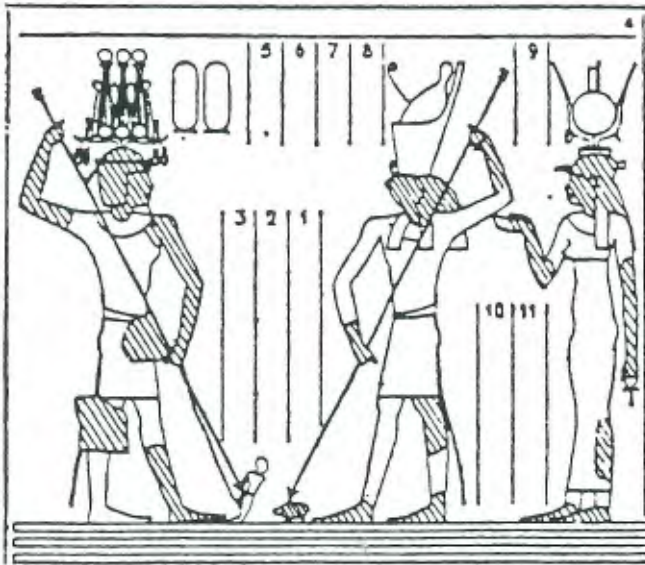
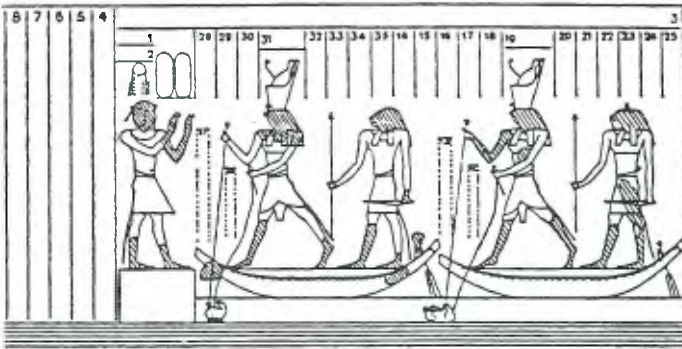
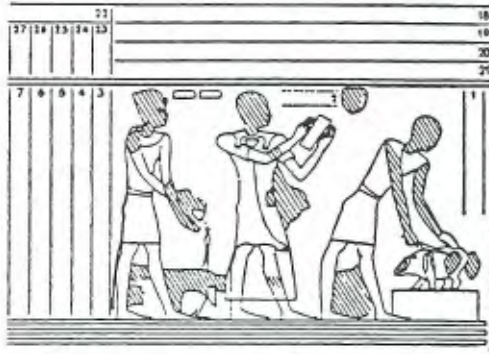


Fig. 3-5. Fairman 1974, pp. 113, 94, 111.





Fig. 6. Naville 1886, Bd. 1.



Fig. 7. Naville 1886, Bd. 1.



Fig. 8. Naville 1886, Bd. 1.





Fig. 9. Naville 1886, Bd. 1.

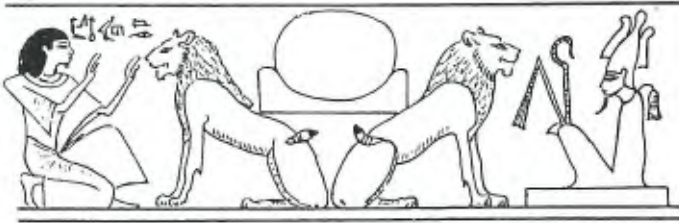


Fig. 10. Naville 1886, Bd. 1.



Fig. 11. Naville 1886, Bd. 1.



Fig. 12. Naville 1886, Bd. 1.

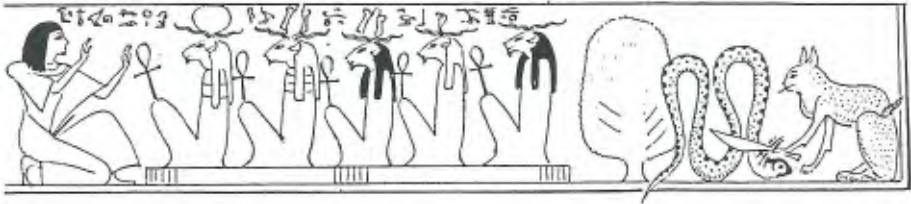


Fig. 13. Naville 1886, Bd. 1.



Fig. 14. Naville 1886, Bd. 1.

of adoration is, as it were, kept alive; but its relation with the following scenes of the weighing of the heart and the introduction of the deceased before Osiris is clearly different from what we found in the previous sections. If these scenes may somehow reflect ritual<sup>4</sup>, Hunefer is now the object of ritual and no longer the officiating person. — This is also the case in the following scenes (fig. 9) showing the funeral procession and the opening of the mouth performed on the mummy of the deceased. Such representations of funeral and mortuary ritual have their own *raison d'être* in the Book of the Dead and need not concern us here.

In the rest of the papyrus, however, Hunefer in a posture of adoration is invariably the introductory figure in the different scenes: We find him (in fig. 10) adoring the two lions with the rising sun; they are called 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow', and according to the explanation found in the text (Ch. 17), this means Osiris and Re, the two gods in whom the deceased already ritually participates. It is important to note that he is not just adoring one or two cult statues; what is shown is, as we found in fig. 6, a sunrise, i.e. a transfiguration of his worship, not its object. The papyrus of Hunefer, insisting on the parallelism of solar and Osirian regeneration, adds an Osiris figure to the scene. Thus understood, the picture is a mythical and dramatic transsubstantiation of the worship perpetuated in the figure of Hunefer with his arms raised in adoration. It serves to make him participate in Osiris and Re, the complementary expression of regeneration, as well as the primeval, exemplar sunrise.

The parallelism of solar and Osirian symbolism is also retained in the next picture (fig. 11), in which Hunefer is depicted in the usual posture of adoration in front of a Benu-bird or Phoenix. The bird is called "the *ba* of Re", and the Phoenix is in fact intimately connected with the Sun-god. Its mythology is extremely varied, but in the present context of the Book of the Dead it is safe to regard it as a symbol of renewal and regeneration (cf. Kakosy 1982: 1030–1039). In the second half of the sequence follows the Osirian counterpart: Behind a hawk-headed god, perhaps Sokar or Osiris-

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<sup>4</sup> No full discussion of this problem is possible within the scope of this article. The scenes have a complicated text history within the tradition of the Book of the Dead and seem to reflect elements of temple ritual in a not very conspicuous way. The introduction of the deceased before Osiris reflects priestly initiation; the text above the scene uses the verb *bsj*, the normal term for initiating priests, cf. Kruchten 1989: 147–204. The weighing of the heart is often, although not in the papyrus of Hunefer, the illustration of chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead with the famous 'negative confession' or 'declaration of innocence', which is, according to Merkelbach 1968, originally a priestly oath.

Sokar, is a bier flanked by 'the two kites', a shape sometimes assumed by Isis and Nephthys bewailing Osiris. On the bier, in the place of Osiris, who is to be resuscitated by the lamentations of his two sisters, lies the mummy of Osiris-Hunefer. Through his worship, dramatically transsubstantiated into these scenes, Hunefer participates in the self-regenerating capacity of the Phoenix and the regeneration of Osiris.

A little later on in the papyrus of Hunefer, we find him and his wife in a posture of adoration very much like the first picture of the papyrus. In front of them is the continuation of chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead. In the upper register, above the text and in front of Hunefer and his wife, is our fig. 12 with a row of gods, the first one sitting in a gateway or a chapel with open doors. This is generally interpreted as the entrance to the beyond, and Hunefer, or the text just above his arms raised in adoration, does in fact invoke the "Lords of the West, the Ennead which is in the necropolis". "The gate of the Netherworld" is also one of the meanings attached to it by the text of chapter 17, and at the end of the row of gods, the cow Mehet-Weret is lying on a tomb-like structure. In illustrated Books of the Dead, she is very often found at the Western Mountain, marking the entrance to the beyond. A purely topographical interpretation, like "Hunefer and his wife have now arrived at the entrance to the beyond ...", would, however, be much too narrow, and it would raise questions as to where they were in the earlier part of the sequence. Chapter 17 has two other interpretations of the gate: "the gate of what Shu lifted/lifts up (*stsw Šw*)", i.e. the gate of the sky or perhaps the gate through which Shu lifts the Sun-god out of the Netherworld, and "the door through which my father Atum goes, when he goes to the eastern horizon of the sky". Both these interpretations may somehow denote the door of the other world, but their emphasis is on creation and renewal: the lifting of Shu, the Sun-god proceeding towards the eastern horizon. This is also what fits the sequence of illustrations as a whole: the gate or chapel is the gateway of regeneration, and its meaning is not limited to the topography of the beyond. In fact, every Egyptian sanctuary or naos may be regarded as the door of Netherworld and Heaven simultaneously<sup>5</sup>, and certainly as the gateway of renewal and regeneration.

The cow Mehet Weret is a bearer of similar or parallel meanings. In the text of chapter 17 she is said to have born the Sun-god, and there are allusions to Thoth healing the eye of the Sun-god and bringing it back to him. The web of meanings attached to Mehet Weret and the eye of Re is ex-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the daily temple liturgy P. Berlin 3055, col. 4, 3-4, cf. Moret 1902.

tremely complicated, but their general significance is, I believe, clear enough: the eye of the Sun-god (i.e. the sun) is restored, the Sun-god is born, and we are once more dealing with sunrise and mythological exemplars of regeneration. And, once again, Hunefer participates in this mythological imagery of regeneration through his worship. The figure of Thoth with the eye — the eye of Horus as the conventional symbol of offerings or the eye of Re according to the myth cited in chapter 17 — serves to connect the worship of Hunefer with its pictorial and mythical transsubstantiations. It is both part of the myth and analogous with the similar figure of Thoth bringing life and dominion to Osiris in the second scene of the papyrus (fig. 7).

The last scene in Hunefer's papyrus (fig. 13) shows him once more in a posture of adoration. The gods in front of him are Re, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, and the Ram of Mendes, and the dramatic episode illustrated at the very end is, still according to chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead, the destruction of the enemies of the Sun-god in Heliopolis on the day after the night in which the Ished-tree was split. These mythological episodes are known only from allusions. The Ished or sacred persea tree has a number of functions, and the recurring mythical allusions that it was split are rather enigmatic. The most convincing interpretation is the one offered by P. Barguet (1967: 61, n. 35), that it denotes the sky-goddess Nut, who was split open at the birth of the Sun-god. This nocturnal and critical delivery is then paralleled by another critical victory: the destruction of the enemies. In the picture this has been reduced to the cat cutting off the head of a serpent, probably Apophis, the exemplar enemy of Re who threatens the passage of the solar boat through both sky and netherworld. Apophis is the embodiment of the crisis that must be overcome to keep the sun on its regular course and to secure the regenerative rhythm of nature. This is what the mythological cat does with a quick cut of the knife, and it is also what Hunefer does through the pictorial transsubstantiation of his worship. In the text of chapter 17, he does in fact identify himself as this mythological cat, which is also said to be Re himself.

There was a temple ritual to overthrow Apophis. The full text of this ritual, "performed every day in the temple of Amun-Re at Karnak", is extant only in a papyrus of the time of Alexander the Great.<sup>6</sup> Some of the longer and more elaborate New Kingdom Books of the Dead have excerpts from this ritual, which count as chapter 39 of the Book of the Dead. The illustrations of this chapter regularly represent the deceased himself spearing

<sup>6</sup> P. Bremner Rhind 22, 1-32, 12, cf. Faulkner 1933.



Apophis (fig. 14). The ritual person may thus, as we have seen with the king in the Edfu reliefs (fig. 5), be drawn into the dramatic representation which is, in fact, nothing but the pictorial transsubstantiation of what he recites.

It is, however, exactly the recurring modest picture of Hunefer — and other possessors of funerary papyri — in a posture of adoration that provides the key to understanding the religious function of the ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead. Like the very similar figures on votive stelae, these pictures serve to perpetuate the worship or the *culte divin* of the deceased. In the New Kingdom Books of the Dead, this perpetuation of *culte divin* in text and illustrations is the very point of departure.

The idea of 'pictorial transsubstantiation' also known from temple ritual has further enabled us to describe how illustrated Books of the Dead work their way from this point of departure into something relevant in the funerary context of the book. We have seen that all the mythological transfigurations of Hunefer's worship serve the principles of solar and Osirian regeneration: the sunrise, the mythical birth of the Sun-god, the overthrowing of Apophis, the resuscitation of Osiris. By perpetuating his worship and its transsubstantiations, the book serves to render its possessor primeval and to make him participate in the regenerative rhythm of nature, that will secure his continued existence as a source of life for his kin.

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MIKAEL ROTHSTEIN

## **Images of the Mind and Images for the Eye**

### **An Iconographical Approach to UFO-Mythology**

#### **Introduction**

In the study of contemporary new religions and popular religious or metaphysical notions, the iconographical sources are often sadly overlooked. In this article it is the intention to present an iconographical approach to one single, although significantly versatile, aspect of modern, non-traditional mythology, namely the notion of “flying saucers” or UFOs (i.e. Unidentified Flying Objects).

The actual UFO-religions may be insignificant in terms of adherence, but the very concept of UFOs holds a strong position in contemporary metaphysics and spirituality, as we find it in the so called New Age movement and elsewhere. Further, but often with no conscious religious or metaphysical aspects attached to it, the concept is known to almost every individual in modern society. This means that I shall consider the idea of “flying saucers” in very different contexts ranging from religious sects to contemporary folklore. The intention is to analyze some examples of how the notion of “flying saucers” or UFOs has been transformed into iconographical products. The examples, hopefully, demonstrate the extreme diversity of images and notions that have developed from the idea of the “flying saucers” within the last 40–50 years.

#### **Some Remarks on the Nature of Religious Imagery**

Religious texts, as well as narrations, are discursive. The message of the text or the narration is unfolded sequentially, one step followed by the next. Religious imagery displays its meaning in quite another way. The picture, sculpture or relief appears as a coherent, total manifestation of

meaning, as the entire message is given simultaneously. While narrations and pictures unfold themselves in time, the static image is confined to the moment. However, the religious images will only represent meaning if they are linked with a corresponding myth or narration. The religious pictures therefore cannot be understood apart from the general religious system to which they belong. In our case, this means that whenever a picture of a "flying saucer", or something related to it, is made and understood, a set of beliefs is working simultaneously. In order to provide the basis for iconographical analysis of the "flying saucer" motif, we therefore have to consider the origin of the notion itself. We have to get hold of the "flying saucer" myth, or as it is: myths. This level of analysis is what the art historian Erwin Panofsky termed "iconographical analysis", contrary to an initial "pre-iconographical analysis". In the "iconographical analysis" the *background* for interpreting the pictures or images is introduced, while the "pre-iconographical analysis" restricts itself to the identification of *forms* (Panofsky 1983). In the following both approaches will be applied.

At the outset of the "flying saucer" story, there was no actual *form* to be analyzed. No picture, no object. Only an elusive narration by those who had seen strange things in the sky. In so far as people imagined something, we may tentatively call this initial phase in the development of actual UFO-pictures a process of "mental iconography", or simply: pictures of the mind. Pictures for the eye, a genuine iconographical tradition, did not develop until reconstructions of what the witnesses allegedly had seen were produced. The interpretation of such UFO-images, though, depends exclusively on the perceiver's background. To the believers, to those who have allegedly had UFO-encounters, the images depict something real. To others, the notion behind the pictures is absurd, and the iconographical expression will not be understood in the context to which it rightfully belongs. The act of seeing is an active one that always involves interpretation. As we shall see in the following examples, cultural and social conditions for specific interpretations of UFO- or UFO-related images and pictures are easily detected in contemporary ufology.

### **The "Flying Saucer" and the Public Imagination<sup>1</sup>**

The very concept of "flying saucer" was coined by a newspaperman in 1947. A private pilot, Kenneth Arnold, reported that on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June that year

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<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere I have given a general account of the UFO myth, see Rothstein 1994.

he, had encountered nine strange aerial objects in the sky above Mount Rainer in the state of Washington. He never understood what he had seen, but he described the objects as "crescent shaped" and added that they were moving "like a saucer skipping over water". Hence the term "flying saucer" was derived from Arnold's description of how the objects *moved*. He never said that they were in fact saucer shaped. Immediately after the story hit the headlines a few days later, people all over the United States started to see "flying saucers". Nobody reported flying crescent-shaped objects, but saucers were in abundance.

This incident is the departure of modern ufology. The story has even been designated "The Creation Myth of Ufology" as it has become the one single most used reference among ufologists (Thompson 1991: 11). The Arnold sighting marks the beginning of the UFO-era, and thus it is considered a mile-stone in the history of mankind and human understanding by UFO proponents. The time of controversy that resulted from Kenneth Arnold's sighting may also be understood as the formation period of contemporary ufology. For our purpose it is equally relevant to remark that the Arnold encounter, and the public fuss caused by it, led to the development of the *iconographical* image of the "flying saucer", or UFO as it subsequently came to be called. The fact that a respectable citizen claimed he had seen "flying saucers" in the sky aroused wonder and curiosity, and provided the matrix for an almost countless number of apparently similar saucer-sightings. I shall not go into socio-psychological explanations and discuss the precise nature of such perceptions. It is sufficient to note that a single newspaper headline, in a matter of days, was transformed into hundreds of witness reports on "flying saucers". There are two aspects of immediate relevance in that process. First, of course, the very *notion* of strange aerial objects of a considerable size and of inexplicable manoeuvrability is of importance. Secondly, however, the evocative phrase "flying saucer" also gave birth to an actual *image*. The notion itself and the mental image of the alleged phenomenon became intimately linked by the phrase "flying saucer". A flying saucer is easy to imagine and easy to depict, and saucers and plates, or similar objects, are known to each and everybody in almost every society. Indeed the traditional name for the alleged phenomenon, as it spread all over the world, became nothing but "flying saucer" or very similar expressions in the local languages. The further succession of responses to Arnold's sighting marks an even more impressive development. By July 7<sup>th</sup> "flying saucers" were, according to media-reports, seen all over the USA and the following day, only two weeks after the initial sighting, the



newspaper *Daily Record* of Roswell, New Mexico could inform its readers that:

[...] the intelligence officer of the 509<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group of the Eighth Air Force, Roswell Army Air Field, was fortunate enough to gain possession of a disc through the co-operation of one of the local ranchers and the Sheriff's office of Chaves County.

The next day the story was picked up by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Associated Press*, the *New York Times* wire service and even the prestigious *London Times*. In the words of the *Daily Record*, "the many rumours regarding the flying disc became a reality". The newspaper, though, had it wrong. Rather the alleged incident at Roswell became one of the cornerstones of a rumour, or maybe better, a myth, that is still with us<sup>2</sup>. Contrary to similar rumours, the Roswell case, to this day, has not been disqualified as a hoax (Eberhart 1986: 285).

From an iconographical point of view the important thing is that the "Roswell incident" (as it came to be known in ufology) furnished the mental image of "flying saucers" with a hitherto unseen substance: Now there was, according to newspaper reports, a genuine, material, saucer shaped object to relate to — and thus something additional for the imagination to deal with. Several publications, for example UFO-proponent Major Donald E. Keyhoe's immensely popular book "The Flying Saucers are Real" (Keyhoe 1950), had three very saucer-like "flying saucers" on its cover. Since 1949 Keyhoe had been the most forceful critic of the US Air Force's "flying saucer" policy. He claimed that the Pentagon knew everything about the phenomenon, but that a cover up had been arranged. By 1957 he had written three best selling books on the subject, all including paintings or drawings of saucer shaped flying vehicles from another world. Similarly other authors, newspapers and fantasy magazines published different kinds of stories with imaginative illustrations along the same track. There are every good indications that the original mental image of the "flying saucer" was translated into art, and that the pictures subsequently — and quite predictably — had a feedback impact upon the popular notion of the strange aerial phenomena. A closer investigation into the matter, however, reveals that the saucer shape was already present in the popular imagination and fiction prior to 1947, although largely unnoticed. The first to use the term "flying saucer" was in fact a Texas farmer who had seen a strange

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<sup>2</sup> The so called "Roswell Incident" has been brought to the public's attention by books such as Berlitz and Moore 1980. The story of the Roswell crash also formed the matrix of one of Whitley Strieber's novels (Strieber 1989).

object over his farm in January 1878 (Spencer 1991: 147), but this incident never caught the public's attention, and as far as I am informed, there are no other examples of the use of the term until the Arnold case many years later. Apparently there were no pictures produced either. Regarding the distribution of the "flying saucer" myth, the important thing therefore is not when the term was used for the first time, but rather when it became known (and thus meaningful) to a larger audience, and when the notion was rendered into pictures. This was undoubtedly in 1947. Today the "flying saucer" myth constitutes what sociologists have termed a "client cult", thus emphasizing that people who share the belief in the phenomenon do not meet and do not interact personally. Rather, their common ground is provided by media coverage, books and rumours which make the "flying saucers" elements of modern folklore. For our purpose it is relevant to observe that although a variety of ufological images have been suggested and used by ufologists, the saucer form remains the single most appealing and generally accepted image of the very idea of UFOs. According to psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, who wrote a book on the subject, the saucer shape reflects the *mandala*, the sacred circle or the "sun-wheel" of many religious systems. To Jung such symbols were identified as recurring images of psychic totality expressing order, wholeness and salvation. Although somewhat confused regarding the nature of the phenomenon, Jung considered the "flying saucer" an old image, now taking the form of a technological construction in order to overcome the negative association to traditional mythology among people of the 1950s. He also pointed to the fact that the "flying saucers", just like traditional religious visions, were seen in times of collective as well as personal distress or danger as some kind of response to a "vital psychic need" (Jung 1958). A corresponding argumentation, although not psychological in the Jungian sense of the word, has been presented by folklorist Robert Pearson Flaherty (1990). This may well explain the concrete shape of the most common UFOs, and we may — at least partly — be close to an understanding of the symbolic value of the "flying saucer". The vast implications that goes along with the image, however, has not been explained through analysis of the archetypal circular shape of the flying disc.

### **Anthropomorphic Masters and Bulb-headed Humanoids: Popular and Religious Images of the Aliens.**

Usually "flying saucers" are interpreted as vehicles from outer space piloted by intelligent beings. A somewhat new trend in ufology rejects this theory in favour of the idea that our visitors travel from other time/space dimensions, rather than other planets (Vallee 1988). All kinds of creatures have been reported aboard "flying saucers", but usually witnesses encounter human-like beings (Evans 1986; Evans 1987). Hence the heritage from theosophy is quite visible in contemporary religious ufology. Prior to the UFO-era, theosophists such as Madame Blavatsky and C.W. Leadbeater were in non-physical contact with creatures from Venus, and in the years just before 1947 Guy Warren Ballard, a more recent theosophist, also claimed that kind of contact. The UFO-"contactees" (that emerged on the arena in the early 1950s) i.e. people who claim to be in contact with benevolent, spiritually advanced space-beings with an eschatological message to Earth-men, depict their celestial friends in much the same way as theosophists have traditionally imagined the Mahatmas of the Great White Brotherhood. In New Age book shops in Denmark, Sweden and England I have seen exactly the same picture presented as the Theosophical Mahatma Djwhul Khul, who primarily revealed himself through Alice Bailey, and a space being known as Orthon of Venus. Alice Bailey died in 1949, and apparently the image of "her" Mahatma became vacant for other mediums. The iconographical image survived, but the entity depicted was identified as somebody else. Beginning with George Adamski's encounter with this very Venusian, Orthon, in the Californian desert in 1952, a tradition of meetings with handsome, beautiful space-visitors has continued until the present. Since the days of Adamski and similar UFO-prophets, the interpersonal relations between space people and Earth men have become more elusive. Today the tradition is primarily carried on by the so called "channelers" who communicate with spiritual Masters on other planets through telepathy. However, the image of the aliens is still the same which is frequently seen in the drawings made by "channelers" of their particular Masters. They were and are described as above human average in height, they keep their hair shoulder-long and very often wear exotic clothing, including impressive gowns, resembling features of science-fiction entities and characters of popular culture of the 1940s and 1950s such as Flash Gordon and Superman. Adamski's descriptions were soon translated into paintings, and among his followers the anthropomorphic image of the Venusians became well known. Apart from the likeness with Mahatma

Djwhul Khul, the Venusians have a strong resemblance to theosophical images of the Mahatma Jesus. Considering the fact that Adamski, prior to his emergence on the UFO-scene, had been involved in several occult and metaphysical groups, and that he had written several pamphlets along theosophical lines, this link may not be surprising<sup>3</sup>. Rather than considering the development a break away from theosophy, it is possible to understand the reinterpretation of the Mahatmas as "space pilots" as a further development of the traditional theosophical understanding. In Adamski's case the Mahatmas do not reveal themselves in strange ways; in visions or through spectacularly transmitted writings: They simply meet their chosen ones face to face. Due to the impact of the general "flying saucer" myth, theosophy, in Adamski's system, was changed into something new. Most importantly, the communication structures between human beings and the Mahatmas were altered<sup>4</sup>. Another "contactee", Truman Bethurum's, naive description of his encounters with Captain Aura Rahnes in a "flying saucer" from the planet Clarion is another example of anthropomorphic expositions of the aliens. Aura Rahnes is not exactly Mahatma-like, but she is indeed beautiful and apparently aroused Bethurum's personal interest in more than one way (Bethurum 1954). Adamski, as well as Bethurum, based much of their claims on different kinds of pictures. Adamski had genuine paintings made, and contributed with many sketches and photographs himself, although none of the visitors are shown in person — only their crafts. Unfortunately Bethurum was not allowed to take photographs while inside the saucer which he visited eleven times (although he brought his camera), but he made several drawings of his friend from space, and therefore her image is frequently seen in UFO-publications, even today. A reconstruction of the saucer in which Bethurum had his talks with Aura Rahnes is also a well known image in UFO-literature of the 1950s and 1960s. The vehicle, which was, according to Bethurum, designated "scow" by its owners, is indeed saucer-shaped and in every respect typical of the popular image of the "flying saucer" or "flying disc".

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<sup>3</sup> Adamski's metaphysical or religious texts are not easily obtained today. Even his followers in IGAP (International Get Acquainted Programme) advertise to get hold of old impressions of his books and articles. Most, if not all, material is listed in Eberhart 1986: 823–830.

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps a more appropriate characteristic of this development is reached if the argument is put the other way around. If so, Adamski's system may be understood as a more or less traditional occult or theosophical belief system, with the concept of "flying saucers" and physical contact with the Masters as additional elements.

I shall return to new aspects of the theosophically inspired ufology later. Now I turn to quite another corner of contemporary ufology where visitors, quite unlike the spiritual Masters have been developed since the early 1960s: Enter the bulb-headed humanoid. As we shall see, the distribution of this image has a strong iconographical bearing. Perhaps even stronger than that of the handsome guests from Venus and Mars.

Among secular ufologists the concept of "alien abduction", which was introduced as part of the UFO-phenomenon in 1961, has become of prime interest during the past decade. Many researchers now believe that human beings are frequently, and against their will, taken aboard flying saucers by non-human aliens, and subjected to a strange, and highly disturbing, physical examination usually focusing on the sexual organs. It is, of course, a controversial subject, but people in their thousands (mostly in the USA) have testified that this is what they have experienced. Usually, but certainly not always, what has transpired is discovered through regression hypnosis of the victims (Hopkins 1987; Jacobs 1993). From an academic point of view, this case of contemporary folklore is of immense interest. The belief in abductions as something real has spread, and not only the victims, but also a line of psychologists, historians, medical doctors and others have accepted this as a fact. To such researchers it is of great importance that their claims can be in some way verified. They need to organize their information in a way that makes demonstration possible. The most prominent abduction researcher — in a sense the inventor of the whole thing — Budd Hopkins, has, as part of his strategy, chosen *alien art* for this purpose. His method in this respect is the following: During hypnotic regression he will ask the "abductee" at a certain point to look around the UFO into which he or she has been brought, and see if there is anything that might suggest a kind of writing, script or picture. Hopkins admits that this is a leading question, but it makes no difference because what he is looking for is a *reproduction* of what people see. Hopkins, so he says, never reveals what kind of picture people do see. Therefore he is able to argue that something has actually happened to these individuals, because what they describe is very much the same. In one case, according to Hopkins, he wanted to test his findings by showing one "abductee's" drawing to another:

One young woman made a drawing for me of symbols that she saw inside a craft. It was a whole group of them, arranged in an interesting way. Her drawing was virtually identical to the drawings of maybe twenty other abductees. I've worked with this woman a long time and know her well, so, when we finished the session, I just decided to take a chance. I said, "I want to show you what somebody else came up with." I went over and picked up a

drawing of virtually identical symbols that had come from another case, and showed them to her. Her reaction was to burst into tears. It wasn't anything like "Aha, you see, I really did have this." It's more like, "Oh, my God, this did happen to me." (Lindemann 1991: 151)

No outsider has seen the drawings. The symbols are never described, and no indication is given concerning their shape, colour or size. Nevertheless these drawings are held to be the most significant proofs of alien abduction, and thus an iconographical identification of the aliens ranks as one of the most important. Whatever or whoever the aliens are, they apparently produce pictures and signs, maybe even some kind of letters. Outside the realm of Hopkin's investigation there are also many reports of strange, unintelligible signs and figures. In more than one case, for example, people have reported that their kidnappers were wearing emblems of winged snakes, a symbol known in several religions, for example in ancient Egypt. In rare cases the victims of alien abduction are forced to watch some kind of movie with cataclysmic events, presumably as some kind of warning. In any case these images, whether pictures on the inside of the saucer, emblems, or whatever else, are restricted to the realm of the mind. They are simply *remembered* by the victims. As far as UFO-encounters only exist as narrations, the description of such images represents an iconographical dimension of this narration. There are not only events in people's recollections. There are also pictures and signs that can be described by the witnesses. However, just as the events, the pictures never reach the realm of our ordinary world, but remain phenomena of the mind. Nevertheless the mental images add important information to our understanding of the general idea of alien visitation and alien abduction. The fact that the strange entities of the narrations use pictures, etc., shows that it is implicitly assumed by the witnesses that the visitors share concepts such as art, signs and symbols with humans: The pictures reported support the somewhat anthropomorphic image of the aliens (which we shall return to later). The imaginative construction of the UFO-scenario therefore is partly constructed by mental images of extraterrestrial or inter-dimensional pictures. In discussing the meaning of such mental images, we are in fact performing an iconographical study of non-physical, and in a sense non-existing, pictures. From a scholarly point of view this is worth mentioning: We are well off in the study of imaginative events, whether myths, adventures or legends, because narrative structures have long aroused scholarly attention. We are also used to academic analysis of actual pictures. In this case we are facing non-physical pictures that are claimed to substantiate narrations of imaginative events. However, if we want to understand the very



notion of alien abduction etc. these mental images may prove to be of some significance because they reflect important ideas in the minds of the witnesses. Until we are able to learn more about what people actually claim to see (until Hopkins and others reveal their data), the results, though, will be meagre.

Hopkins himself, and others beside him, also considers other kinds of pictures or signs, however odd, to be indicators of the truth behind the abduction reports. Ufologists, including physicians, frequently find scoop-marks and scars on human bodies after they have been released by their abductors. Such marks may have certain dimensions, or they may be found in the same places on the victims' bodies. Some of these marks could not, so it is rendered, have been made by any known human technology. They are ufological stigmatizations; significant marks outside the control and understanding of human beings which are systematically related to powers of some "other world". The same goes for the strange traces left behind on mutilated cattle and other animals found, apparently dumped from above, in fields mainly (but certainly not solely) across the USA (Howe 1989). This phenomenon, like the so called crop circles (see below), has been linked with the UFOs (some abduction victims even claim to have witnessed cattle mutilations aboard flying saucers) and provide yet a "proof" of alien intervention. While a closer examination of these marks may reveal something of interest, the only intention here is to point at the pictures, marks and signs as ufological indications of an alien presence among us. In this case the marks or signs are physical, but they do not contain any meaning apart from the obvious one (as seen by the victims): The experience was real. I have been subjected to physical examination by alien beings.

Hopkins' esoteric materials (and usually the strange marks mentioned above) are beyond scholarly or otherwise external control. People's descriptions of their actual abductors, however, can freely be analyzed as many drawings of the aliens have been presented. In this case it is evident that the victims of alleged alien abduction very often are reproducing a more or less well defined standard. "The little Greys" is within ufological circles a commonly acknowledged name for the abducting entities. They are short, whitish or grey skinned creatures with very big hairless bulb-formed heads. Their eyes are slanted and very large, usually all black. They have usually no nose (sometimes two little nostrils are observable), no ears, and the mouth is described as a slit. In almost every pictorial book on UFOs this image is presented in a couple of ways. In one particular book, which sold millions of copies in the USA, the image of such a creature was displayed in full colour on the cover — on both sides (Strieber 1987). Similar

images have been described on thousands of occasions and it has been visualized in films, TV shows and popular magazines. People even wear alien-portraits on their T-shirts. In the USA, the home of "alien abductions", this image of the UFO occupant is very well known. Hence it does not seem difficult to explain why new victims and the victims of tomorrow encounter entities of a similar kind when they are subsequently abducted. Neither does it seem hard to explain why most abduction scenarios are very much alike. The myth is reproduced in the media, in literature and in films (the first abduction on record known as the Betty and Barney Hill case from 1961 has been translated into a motion picture featuring well known actors, and has several times been show on prime-time TV in the USA as well as Europe), and thus enlivened by those individuals personally participating in the popular myth (as "abductees"). The influence of television and popular books, I believe, cannot be underestimated. Ufologists themselves have seen films such as Steven Spielberg's "Close Encounter of the Third Kind" (1977) as a part of a secret education of the public in terms of an immediate extraterrestrial or inter-dimensional visitation on Earth. In the climax of the movie the little grey entities appear, and millions and millions of spectators have been fascinated by this beautifully instructed scene. Due to the intense promotion of "The little Greys" in films and literature, it seems fair to assume that the bulb-headed humanoid by now has become synonymous with "UFO-people", and that different images only on a secondary basis will gain access to the scene of UFO-imagery. In the case of Steven Spielberg's film, a line of (more or less concrete) narrations was translated into a movie, and now the images of the movie inspire people's imagination and ability to construct mental images. As far as a motion picture can be considered some kind of iconographical product, a very strong visual factor in the development and distribution of the UFO-myth is given in this and other films. No other visual media has the ability to announce the same cultural image simultaneously to an audience of millions and millions of expectant spectators. (However, it has never been empirically documented that UFO-movies and other kinds of media publicity causes an increase in UFO-sightings (Clark 1996: 90-91)).

A rarely mentioned fact is that most, if not all, the important aspects of the alien abduction phenomenon were described in science fiction literature long before the alien abductions became a dimension of modern ufology. I shall not go deeply into this matter here, but merely mention one typical example with an emphasis on the pictorial aspect. The popular magazine "Astounding Stories" of June 1935, featuring Don A. Stuart's "The Invaders", has on its cover an illustration which has all the main features of the

abductions reported since 1961. A man is kept on an operating table, strange lights are seen, and another human is forced back against his will. However, details vary considerably. The humanoids are far too large, they have ears and their eyes are round, not slanted, and the iris and pupil are visible contrary to the "little greys", which are all black. Nevertheless it seems obvious that some connection exists between early science fiction and contemporary abduction cases, and that the modern image of the strange humanoid from beyond this world owes much to popular literature. I shall not go further into the matter here. According to the French folklorist Michel Meurger, it is not likely that contemporary ufology has developed from pre-industrial folk religion or popular religion<sup>5</sup>. Rather, it seems that the UFO-myth stems from quite modern popular science fiction literature and films, heavily inspired, of course, by the advancement of modern science and technology (not least space exploration).

As we have already seen, the link between what we may term secular and confessional ufology, is a floating one. One could, of course, argue that the very belief in extraterrestrial or inter-dimensional visitation is metaphysical or religious in nature. However, it seems fair to consider the different ufological attitudes in different ways. Sometimes the interest in "flying saucers" is religious in the traditional meaning, and actual religious groups are established or the notion is integrated into already existing belief systems. I have already mentioned the theosophical link. At other times the interest remains within the realm of ordinary curiosity with no conscious intention of theological or mythological elaboration. In the following we shall consider iconographical examples of explicitly religious ufology. These examples only indirectly reflect the images of the general UFO mythology so far discussed. As we shall see, the religious UFO-interpretations leave great opportunities for iconographical creativity as elements of overall dynamic mythological and theological developments.

### **The Aetherius Society**

In the basement of a London house in Fullham Road, a cult room for benevolent space-beings has been established by the Aetherius Society. Similar rooms exist in Hollywood, California and in Barnsley, England. Since the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1954, the leader of the Aetherius Society, The Metropolitan Archbishop, His Eminence Sir George King has been in contact

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<sup>5</sup> Private communication, May 1994.

with “cosmic beings”, most importantly with a Cosmic Master from Venus known as Aetherius. George King’s unofficial, although quite real, relations to the theosophical and Liberal Catholic traditions are easily detected in his teachings and in the beliefs of his followers as well as their ritual practice. However, the magical rituals of the Liberal Catholics and the philosophies of the theosophists have been further developed by King. One prominent idea is that the salvation of mankind and planet Earth depends on the infusion of cosmic energy from huge spaceships orbiting above us. Supported by the guiding inspiration of Aetherius, George King has developed hitherto unseen “Spiritual Energy Radiators” through which, it is claimed, a giant spacecraft can beam thousands and thousands of “Prayer Hours” of spiritual energy into Earth. Another contraption, the “Spiritual Energy Battery”, has the ability to invoke energy from Buddhist mantras and Christian prayer, and store it so that it can be sent out where and when it is most needed. During several operations such as “Star Light” around 1960, 19 mountains around the world have been charged with “Cosmic Power” by means of the applications developed by George King, and so the mountains are made “forever Holy”. The charged mountains are considered the essential means for human salvation, and therefore the members undertake pilgrimages to these Holy Mountains where they sense the presence of the UFOs high above them, and even sometimes see the space fleet passing over.

As it appears, the importance of the mountains is very significant, and therefore it is not surprising that the Aetherius Society’s most prominent iconographical items, which are also designated “the most wonderful pieces of art in the world”, are intimately related to these mountains. In the cult rooms in London, Hollywood and Barnsley, at the central altar, an approximately one metre cross with 19 inlaid stones is placed. On top of the cross, the official symbol of the Aetherius Society is placed; the Hindu AUM symbol, which is interpreted as “God”, and a triangle symbolizing “Wisdom”. Officially they are known as The Holy Crosses. The stones have been brought back from the 19 Holy Mountains by pilgrims, and it is the believers themselves who have manufactured the items:

All three of these magnificent Holy Crosses were hand-made entirely by members of The Aetherius Society, including the precision woodworking, gilding and lacquering; the core drilling, cabachoning [sic.] and polishing of the Holy Stones; and the gold-plated Sterling Silver mountings surrounding each stone (Holy Mountains 1994: 117)

When the cross in Hollywood was installed, the believers were told that it had been given a preliminary blessing by George King, but that he would

bestow further blessings upon it in “a mystic ritual which other eyes may not, at this time, look upon” (Holy Mountains 1994: 118).

King himself describes the cross as follows:

I have given you a Cross here which is not only unique in its design and that which it supports, but which is a powerful radiator of the truly magnificent blend of Spiritual Energies originally put into the Holy Mountains by The Cosmic Masters.

I now declare the design of this Cross to be a present to mankind in celebration of my 62<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

We have in our Cross a work of metaphysical art which is, at the same time, a most practical and most Sacred religious masterpiece (Holy Mountains 1994: 121)

The spiritual energy in George King’s teachings derives from an ultimate source which he calls God. It is, however, channelled into Earth due to the benevolent beings aboard different space crafts (occasionally termed “flying saucers” and UFOs by the believers) and the 19 holy mountains initiated for their purpose by George King (and some of the space beings themselves, including Master Jesus). The spiritual energy possessed by the three holy crosses is the same that exists in the mountains. Hence there is a direct line from the ultimate source of everything to the crosses through a chain of intermediaries. The “flying saucers” is one aspect. George King and the contraptions placed on the 19 mountains are others. The iconographical significance of the crosses only becomes obvious when this is taken into account. The constructions are not solely symbols that refer to a higher reality; they also are manifestations of that reality. They are, in the words of George King, “works of metaphysical art”. But to what extent do the believers identify the crosses with the concept of “flying saucers”? One could expect that the basically theosophical idea or energies and spiritual power from the Masters were the actual focus. However, this is not entirely the case. In London several members of the Aetherius Society told me that their immediate association when seeing the crosses is the “flying saucers” and their crew. Apart from George King himself, the crosses are the most important cultic objects of the group, but according to my informants, their immediate identification of the spiritual reality behind the iconographical product is the “flying saucer”. One informant said:

The cross itself, the stones and the symbols above the cross, are of immense value. But when I see it I always come to think of my UFO experiences. I feel very close to the Masters when I pray, and when I see the cross, but it never

matches my spiritual experience of actually seeing their space fleet. Maybe you could say that seeing the cross is the closest you can get to the Masters.<sup>6</sup>

The cross constitutes in its immediate appearance Christian and Hindu elements. Georges King's interpretation of the AUM-sign and the triangle (found in numerous religious traditions), as well as the Christian cross, however, transcends the ordinary Christian and Hindu meaning of these symbols. It is not a simple syncretistic construction of Christian and Hindu notions, rather it is a theosophical symbol with an unseen ufological bearing, which makes it different even from traditional theosophy. As the original meaning of these symbols was abandoned by occultists long before George King, in favour of new wholly conscious syncretistic interpretations, the holy crosses of the Aetherius Society continue an already existing tradition. What we see is the well-known reinterpretation of well known symbols according to changes in the symbols' context. Indeed, as has been well established in symbolic anthropology since the work of Victor Turner, a symbol takes its meaning according to its contextual situation.

Even though no ufological motive is seen, and although the ritual practice of the believers in front of the cross never involves images of "flying saucers", the religious notions behind the iconographical product are very much based on this, and to the believers no actual distance between the space ships in the sky to the cross in the cult room exists. Another indication of this fact is that books published by the Aetherius Society very often describe how people, during pilgrimages to the Holy Mountains, encounter "flying saucers".

The example of the Aetherius Society's holy crosses shows how the "flying saucer" myth, in an explicitly religious context, may diffuse into iconographical forms and structures originally identified with different religious traditions. In the following another example of a similar, but even more radical, phenomenon is given.

### **Iconography and The Re-Evaluation of Ancient Notions: The International Raelian Movement**

While the religious interest in UFOs is undeniably influenced by science fiction, modern technology and space travel, the heritage from traditional religions, in some cases, must not be ignored. In the case of the International Raelian Movement this is of great importance. Not least in the

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<sup>6</sup> Interview: London, March 1993.



group's iconographical production. At first glance this religion appears to be a genuine cult of modernism with all notions directed towards, or expressed through, modern science or pseudo-science. The Raelians express unlimited faith in science and promise a world of perfection and happiness by means of scientific control (Vorilhon 1989; Vorilhon 1991). However, behind the futuristic and modernistic surface, the Biblical tradition of Judaism and Christianity sets the scene. It is believed that life on Earth was introduced by a race of hyper-intelligent scientists from a planet known as Planet of the Eternals. They arrived on Earth some 22,000 years ago, and developed the various terrestrial life-forms in their laboratories (Vorilhon 1989; Vorilhon 1991). Hence no divinity exists: only super-creative intelligence and the technical skill of space beings. The creators of life on Earth call themselves "The Elohim", and in 1973, according to the movement's authoritative literature, they revealed themselves to a young Frenchman, Claude Vorilhon (known to his followers by his prophet name Rael) whom they had selected as their spokesman on Earth. He was taken into a flying saucer and taught how the Bible's accounts are correct and believable, although fundamentally misunderstood by men at all times (Vorilhon 1991: 13-65). The Biblical texts do not relate to a transcendent god, but to the acts of the Elohim. "Elohim" is not synonymous with God, as it is recalled in the Old Testament, but rather the designation of a group of extraterrestrial scientists with extreme biochemical and technological skills. From this platform almost every element of Rael's teaching can be related to Biblical notions: Rael's mother, who happened to be called Marie, was taken aboard a flying saucer and inseminated with semen from the leaders of the Elohim, Jahwe, and Rael himself was conceived: Maria and Marie, insemination as a means of virgin pregnancy instead of the Holy Spirit, communication with extraterrestrials in a flying saucer instead of angelic annunciation, and a political leader instead of a supreme god. The mythological structures remain very much the same but the concrete articulation has changed dramatically. Many more examples can be deduced, but we shall restrict our interest to one of iconographical importance (further descriptions and analyses of the Raelian Movement are found in Rothstein 1992; Rothstein 1993; Palmer 1995).

Members of the Raelian Movement are encouraged to buy a poster showing a scale model of a building known as "The Embassy". The construction of this building is currently the most urgent project for all Raelians, and as we shall see, this piece of architecture and the preliminary model of it are of prime iconographical importance to the understanding of this religion. It is believed that once it is erected, the Elohim will

return. In a letter to the state of Israel (addressed to the Prime Minister, the Chief Rabbi, Ambassadors, etc.) the Raelian Movement requests:

1. THE STATUS OF EXTRA-TERRITORIALITY:

that you grant the status to the territory on which we shall build the Embassy of the Elohim, the same status as granted to the Embassies of all countries recognized by Israel.

2. TO DECLARE THE AIR SPACE NEUTRAL:

we are also requesting from Israel that the neutrality of the air space over the territory dedicated to The Elohim be fully assured.

3. TO BE LOCATED NEAR JERUSALEM:

finally, we request that this territory be located near Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup>

While the believers are awaiting the actual erection of the Embassy, the meaning and significance of the building have been transferred to the scale model and even to photographs of it. The Embassy is considered a precondition for salvation, and therefore soteriological attention is directed at the construction. The image of the Embassy is more than a picture of a building in preparation. It is an image of a sacred place and a sacred construction with qualities beyond the normal. The precise value of the building is revealed by yet another comparison to the Biblical materials. As it appears, the Embassy is in fact considered the Third Temple in Jerusalem. In more than one messianic theology among Jews, the temple is considered a precondition for the arrival of the Messiah, and to the Raelians the landing of the Elohim's space fleet likewise depends on a proper place (or rather *this* proper place) to be welcomed. The model of the Embassy is itself a symbol of the messianic expectations of the believers. Further, it serves as a guiding inspiration. During an interview, the leader of the International Raelian Movement in Great Britain, neurobiologist Dr. Marcus Wenner, explained to me how the Elohim, once they had arrived on Earth, would live in the Embassy, how they would conduct themselves and how people would interact with them. Using a picture of the Embassy, he envisioned this ideal situation and described in great detail the functions and purposes of the different sections of the building<sup>8</sup>. Considering the Raelians' notion of the Elohim, it is incorrect to designate "our creators" as gods or even divinities. However, being super-human ideal entities, they possess

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<sup>7</sup> The letter was delivered in August 1991. It has been reprinted in the movement's journal "Apocalypse International. Review of Interantional Raelian Movemant" [sic.] No. 84, 1991 p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Interview, Bristol, March 1993.

most of the qualities usually attributed to gods and divine beings in general. In this sense, and considering descriptions such as the one cited above, the Embassy may correctly be interpreted as a sacred space where people encounter the divine. Indeed, Raelians will explain that only a few people will be able to interact directly with the Elohim as their level of consciousness and the nature of their conduct will be uncomprehensible to ordinary people. Not everyone will be allowed access to the Embassy. At this instance such expectations of sacredness, holy places, initiation, and above all the presence of the super-human entities are contained within the pictorial presentation of the sacred architecture. The building itself does not exist, but the notion of it and the soteriological expectations that go with it are developed in texts and pictures. As an iconographical presentation the model and the pictures of the Embassy have become essential features in the Raelians' religious cult. The International Raelian Movement is indeed a "flying saucer" religion, and in (or on) almost every publication the image of a very traditional flying disc is seen. Nevertheless it is the "Embassy" that most significantly point to the "extraterrestrial foundation" of the Raelians' belief system, but while the "flying saucer" image is instantaneously understood by most people, nobody is able to grasp the meaning of the scale model of the Embassy without a thorough knowledge of the context to which it belongs. For one thing, it is usually not recognized that the Embassy (like Rael's organization in general) represents an extreme development of an already existing tradition, rather than an actual innovation. The question of context, however, is not always a simple one and in the case of the Raelian Movement it may be hard to identify it as an expression of extreme Judeo-Christian exegesis..

### **"Non-Contextual" Ufological Imagery**

The previous examples relate to specific UFO-religions or to the popular ufological tradition. In each case the context is clear. All UFO-related pictures, figures or models are produced by artists, and the intentions of the images are more or less well defined. Apart from this deliberate UFO iconography, there are examples of what is said to be spontaneously occurring UFO-related images. Most significantly, the so-called crop circles (also known as corn circles or "agriglyphs" ) call upon our attention. Since 1975 strange images have occurred in corn fields overnight, preferably in the southern parts of England. According to newspaper reports, the images in the fields number as many as 800 from 1975 until the present. Although

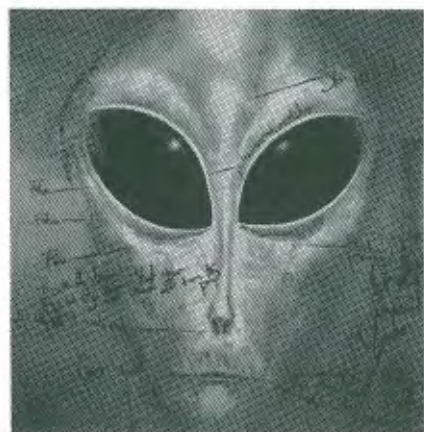


Fig. 1

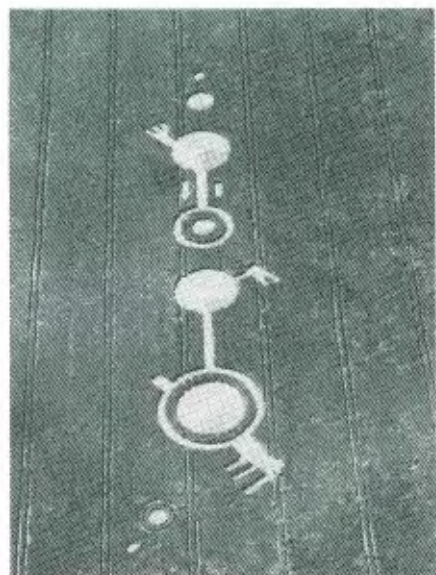


Fig. 2



Fig. 4



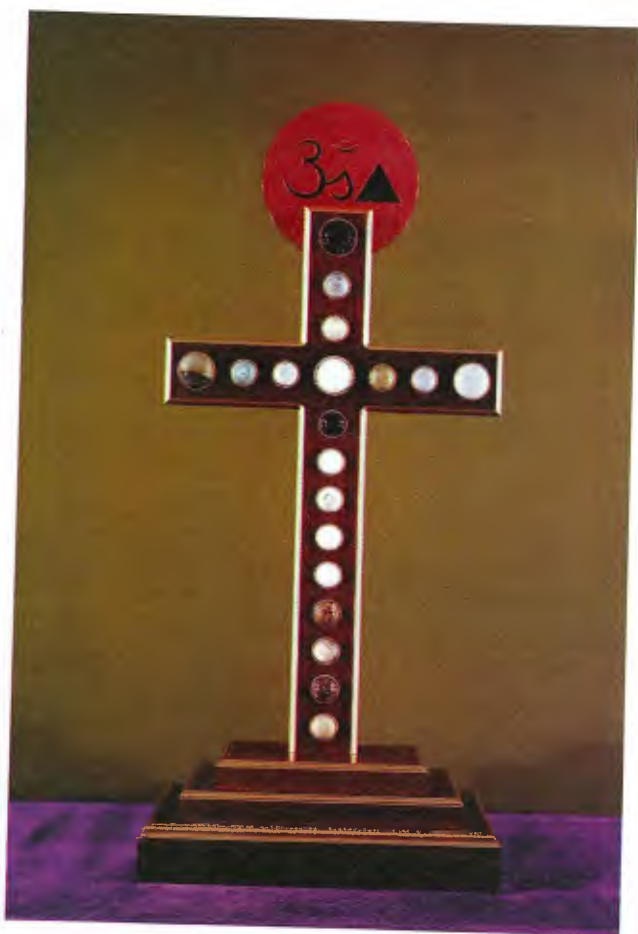


Fig. 3

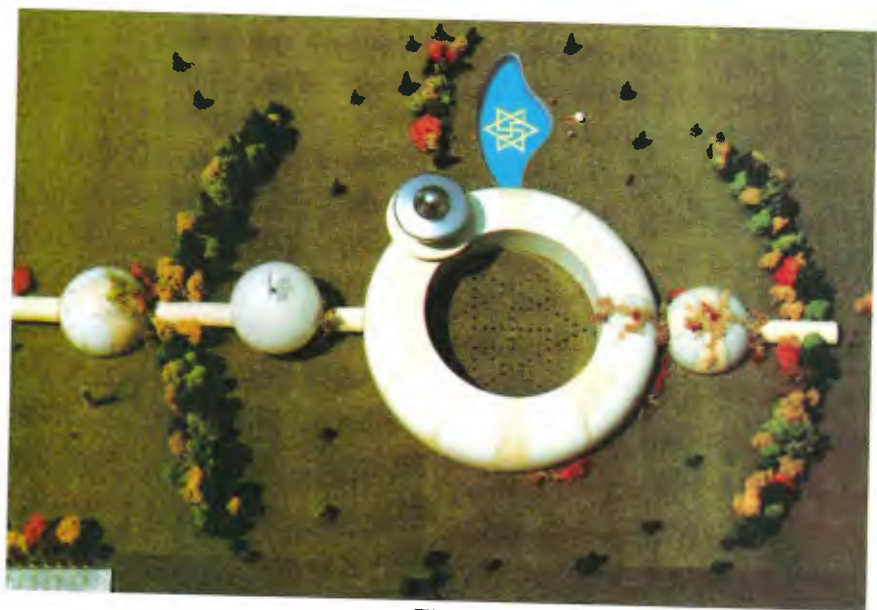


Fig. 5

several people have declared that they have produced the images as a well arranged hoax, many ufologists and religiously interested UFO enthusiasts claim that the images are the result of interferences by UFOs. Admittedly the crop circles — and later on more spectacular structures — seem hard to explain. Some authors have successfully argued that the circular areas in the fields are the result of rarely occurring vortexes, i.e. a meteorological phenomenon and sometimes hoaxes (Randles and Fuller 1990). The more complicated patterns, however, have not been explained to everybody's satisfaction. The similarity of the first circular structures to appear and the shape of the traditional flying saucer was almost an invitation to an ufological interpretation of the phenomenon. Originally the marks in the fields were taken as proof of space ship landings, but careful scrutiny revealed that no actual pressure had been placed on the bent ears of corn. Rather, so it seems, the corn has been constrained to the ground by some other kind of force. Today it is commonly assumed among the more extreme ufologists that the pictures are made by an UFO still suspended in the air. People engaged in understanding the crop circles from a spiritual point of view even talk about "The Circlemakers" as intelligent entities with whom they are about to establish some kind of direct contact by means of the pictograms in the fields. What is left to be understood, they say, is the precise meaning of the images or symbols<sup>9</sup>. The structures in the corn fields are very often considered sacred, and spiritual power is experienced by people who visit the sites. In a series of post-cards distributed by the British organisation "Centre for Crop Circle Studies" we find a good example. On the back of one post-card showing a particularly spectacular structure it says:

ALTON BARNES PICTOGRAM, Vale of Pewsy.

Several thousand visited this double pictogram, many of whom were deeply moved by the experience. It was formed on 11 July near an ancient grave site, and had strange claw-like patterns attracted to the circles.<sup>10</sup>

One Danish informant, who has visited the crop circles in Southern England on several occasions, told me that he had been frequently meditating near or inside the structures, and that he "felt spiritually elevated in a very

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<sup>9</sup> One informant told me that it is important to register all crop circles in minute detail, as a total, coherent picture, to his mind at least, is gradually unfolding. Unless we keep the information contained within each single pictogram, we shall never learn the meaning of the entire phenomenon, he said. London, March 1993.

<sup>10</sup> The postcard was produced following the publishing of the book "The Crop Circle Enigma", 1990 (information on the postcard).



special way” when doing so. He also confirmed the lack of a well defined context by saying that the precise knowledge of what was behind the structures was unknown to him, but that he had “faith in the intelligence behind the phenomenon”. “Very often” he said, “will the spiritual world reach out to help you, and then it is up to you to do something about it”<sup>11</sup>. This vague idea of “the spiritual world”, which is typical of many aspects of modern New Age thinking, makes room for very broad interpretations of — in principle — any strange or uncomprehensive phenomenon. In the case of the (as yet unexplained) crop circles, they are taken to be signs from higher forms of intelligence with whom people should interact for spiritual purposes. Another informant explained to me that beings from a distant world or another dimension were presumably behind the phenomenon, but she was convinced that their aim was to present a message to Earth-men, rather than meeting with humans. To my informant epistemological questions regarding UFOs were of no concern while the proper interpretation of the UFO-message occupied her attention in every respect<sup>12</sup>. The UFOs, in this case, become the axiomatic precondition for the images in the corn fields. The epistemological questions are no longer directed towards the UFOs themselves — they (the UFOs) are considered perfectly normal. The religious imagination is now focusing on the *message* delivered by the visitors from beyond this world. The “non-contextual” crop circles have forced the UFO myth in a new direction. In other words: Pictorial products (whatever their origin?) form the basis of new ufological considerations.

Apparently there is no connection between the crop circles and actual UFO religions such as those mentioned above. Nevertheless, from an iconographical point of view, there are — in rare cases — common features. If we look at the Raelian’s Embassy from above, it seems clear that architectural inspiration may have been derived from the crop circles. Nothing to indicate such a link is mentioned in Rael’s books or other materials from the movement, and indeed no mention of the Raelians is found in New Age literature. However, it seems justifiable to assume some kind of correspondence. The Elohim, so we are told, revealed themselves to Rael in 1973 and again in 1975. It was also in the year 1975 that the first crop circles were discovered. Around 1990 the phenomenon was big news in England and France (Gordon 1992: 73), exactly during the same period as Rael, at that time traveling in France and England, was told (by means of telepathy) the precise shape and measures of the Embassy. It seems as if elements from

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<sup>11</sup> Copenhagen, October 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Copenhagen, November 1994.

the broad UFO myth of contemporary folk religion were introduced into a specific pattern of beliefs in a specific, sociologically well defined UFO religion. Rael (at least to my knowledge) never points to this connection himself, but as far as the crop circles are popularly understood in connection with UFOs, the Raelian Movement takes advantage of the general UFO enigma for which it provides a detailed answer. Thus Rael's use of the crop circle formations serves as a link between different branches of the UFO mythology, and perhaps as a means for indirect agitation. Members of the Raelian Movement do not know exactly why the Embassy's design is as it is, but they know that it could be constructed in no other way<sup>13</sup>. Thus, the basic structure of the crop circles sustains its significance although transformed into three-dimensional architecture.

### **Ancient Images of UFOs: A Very Modern Interpretation**

Yet another group of iconographical UFO-materials is constituted by a diversity of pictures and reliefs from ancient cultures around the world. The images include the winged snake of ancient Egypt as well as toy figures found in tombs, the magic wand of the Greek's Mercury, the winged image of Ahura Mazda, several glyphs and other images of the Mayas, Chinese paintings of legendary princes in flying chariots, images of the vimanas ("chariots of the gods") of Hinduism, of old cosmological symbols of the Dogon, rock paintings of ancestral beings from Aboriginal Australia, etc. etc. In interpreting these images as UFOs and UFO-related phenomena, the pictures are removed from their original context and replaced in another. Each in its own way, the ancient pictures were originally linked with a specific religious system, and thus carry specific meaning. In the modern ufological interpretation they are all evaluated within the framework of one mythological complex, with no regard for their original differences in context. The belief in extraterrestrial or inter-dimensional visitation usually includes ideas of a global influence by the visitors. Not only today, but also in ancient times. Very different, and indeed incomparable religious images, therefore become part and parcel of the same thing in the ufological interpretation.

This extreme example of syncretism serves above all one important purpose. It establishes the evidence of a *history* behind the modern UFO phenomenon. Ufologists will admit that the modern UFO era started in 1947,

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<sup>13</sup> This became quite obvious during my talks with Raelians in Paris, May 1994.

but by describing UFOs as something ancient, the concept gains more credibility. It becomes part of human history. Many UFO-proponents straightforwardly claim that the UFO phenomenon has been with humanity from the very beginning (or even — as we have seen — that beings from outer space created life on Earth), and that the evolution of humanity is governed by intelligent alien intervention. The ancient pictures (assumed to be depictions of eye-witness accounts) serve as proof of a long lasting UFO influence upon mankind and life on earth in general. Thus the pictures work along the same logic as the texts commonly interpreted as evidence for earlier extraterrestrial visitations. In almost each and every religious text one will find descriptions of strange aerial phenomena. Divine beings often travel by air, and indeed a vast tradition of sky-mythology exists, including ideas of the religious importance of celestial bodies. Texts found in the Bible, Ramayana, Mahabaratha, The Tibetan Book of the Dead, and more recent religious works such as the Book of Mormon are all credited as evidence of the presence of UFOs. Without such texts and without traditional religious iconography, modern belief in “flying saucers” and alien intervention in human history could not be substantiated historically. The radical exegesis provided by UFO proponents makes all traditional religious expressions understandable only if they are considered reflections of human encounters with extraterrestrial or interdimensional beings. Thus they serve as a good foundation for contemporary UFO pictures of quite a different kind.

### **UFOs on Photographs**

The alleged photographs of “flying saucers” are yet another iconographical dimension of the modern UFO myth. Although not one single unquestionable piece of photographic evidence exists, such photographs have very often been accepted as proof of the existence of strange aerial objects. In this perspective it is interesting to observe that many of the UFO photographs that have been explained one way or another in mundane terms still retain a status as “real” UFO photographs among people interested in UFOs (Followers of George Adamski, as an example, still claim his photos to be genuine, although careful analysis has proven them to be hoaxes). The pictures themselves have become the only substantial aspect of the UFOs that are otherwise confined to the realm of narratives. In acknowledging the photographs as evidence, the ufologists manage to substantiate their claims, not in relation to the sceptics, but to themselves and to their fellow

believers. The fact that many debunked UFO photos again and again appear in pro UFO literature is in itself evidence of this function (Sheaffer 1986: 50–66). The many UFO photographs reflect a vast mythology which is triggered in the mind of those inclined to accept it, once the image is perceived. In this sense the pictures have a well defined context. In somewhat rare examples, modern UFO photographs can be linked to specific belief systems. George Adamski, for example, substantiated his claims of benevolent contacts with humanoid aliens in the early 1950s by presenting clear UFO photographs (Leslie and Adamski 1953). The pictures were instantly questioned and although later photographic analysis has denounced them as genuine, the followers of Adamski (as mentioned above) still claim the pictures to be valid proof of his encounters with extraterrestrials on board flying saucers. The case of Eduard Meier, a Swiss farmer, is another example. His contact with space-beings from the Pleiades, including a beautiful female called Semjase, was substantiated by literally hundreds of photographs of flying vehicles. People's confidence in this material was the main reason why he rose to fame in the 1970s when "contactees" such as Adamski otherwise seemed worn out. Today, however, Meier's claims and photos have been eliminated through careful scrutiny, but in any case the photographs work as apologetic evidence to the believers.

Following the traits of structuralistic theory, any picture must be understood as an element of a coherent whole. The meaning of any picture is derived from its interrelationship with other cultural elements related to it. Starting with the very notion of strange circular phenomena in the sky, a vast and very differentiated mythology of "flying saucers" or UFOs has developed. As far as the iconographical presentations reflect the narrative structure(s) of the UFO myth, these pictures are integrated elements of the UFO story, and sometimes even agents of a further ufological development.

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PETER SCHALK\*

## The Vallipuram Buddha Image “Rediscovered”

When, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Viṣṇu kōvil in Vallipuram, in Vaṭamaracci, in northern Īlam (Laṅkā) was (re)built, a Buddha statue was unearthed close to this temple, 50 yards northeast of it (Ceylon Antiquary 1916–17: 96). It remained in the lumber room of this temple until 1902, when it was set up in Old Park at Yāḷppānam under a bo-tree (Ceylon Antiquary 1916–17: 96–97). In 1906, the Vallipuram Buddha image was presented by Governor Sir Henry Blake to the King of Siam, who was particularly anxious to have it, as it was supposed to be of an archaic type (Ceylon Antiquary 1916–17: 97). This event together with the statue, was forgotten for almost 90 years. All Tamiḷar and Sinhalese born after 1906 have never seen the Vallipuram Buddha image, provided they have not gone to and found it in Thailand.

The study of the religious significance per se, in its historical setting, of the statue is important. The Vallipuram Buddha image is a typical creation of Amarāvati art, the spread of which documents the spread of Buddhism to Īlam, where it exercised a decisive influence on the first period of the development of Buddhist art in the Anurātapuram school. We get then a geographical triangle of a cultural encounter between Amarāvati, Anurātapuram in its first phase, and Vallipuram. This happened at a time when Buddhism was still not identified as Sinhala Buddhism, but just as Buddhism. The study of the Vallipuram statue is thus a way of transcending or at least suspending for some time **polarising** ethnic identities, not ethnic identities as such.

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We have to mention for the sake of gaining a background to the Buddha image that in an inscription the building of a **vihāra** is mentioned in an area given as **nakadiva** (Pāli, Nāgadīpa). The Buddha image is probably one of the remains of this **vihāra**, of which nothing is left today on the sur-

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face. Buddha images usually stand in **vihāras**. Where there is a Buddha image, there is a **vihāra**. The inscription confirms, then, what we could expect — the Buddha image belongs to a Buddhist institution that was established in Vallipuram. The date of this institution, of which there are no traces on the surface, depends on the date of the inscription.

The inscription is on a gold plate that was found in 1936 beneath the foundation of an ancient structure on the land belonging to the present Viṣṇu kōvil (Paranavitana 1936: 229), the same area where the Vallipuram Buddha image was found. Exactly when the transformation from a Buddhist **vihāra** into a Viṣṇu **kōvil** took place is still still an object of research. Usually such gold or copper plates are found in North India inside in **stūpas**. They were then not meant to be read by the public. They explicitly or implicitly tell about a merit of a donor who had a sacred construction built or maintained, and evidently the donor hoped to get a reward for his generosity in the next lives to come. The documentation of his merits was put on gold or copper that lasts for many existences in the future.

Vallipuram was not a unique Buddhist place in Yālpāṇam from the first centuries AD. Together, nine places with reference to Buddhism have been identified (Vēluppiḷlai 1990: 15–16). Vallipuram and Kantarōtai belong to the most well-known, or in the present discussion, to the most spectacular ones.

The Vallipuram inscription finally confirms that the historical Nākattīvu (Nāgadīpa) is Yālpāṇam (Jaffna district). There is a mythological reference to the Buddha and the **deva** Samiddhisumana having resided in Nāgadīpa (*Mahāvamsa* 1958: 1: 52). These references tell us that at least the compiler of the *Mahāvamsa* at the beginning of the fifth century was familiar with “Nāgadīpa”.

There is a reference to King Devānampiyatissa (250–210) giving gifts to a Jambukolavihāra in Nāgadīpa (*Mahāvamsa* 1958: 20, 25). That is a reference that brings us back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. We must, however, be very careful with this reference. Devānampiyatissa is depicted by following generations as having taken an Aśokan role. That role implied, and this role was displayed, by the building, restoration and maintaining of Buddhist sacred architecture. It is now difficult to distinguish the Aśoka image of the compiler in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, when Nāgadīpa certainly was known, from the historical reality.<sup>1</sup> We will therefore leave this reference out.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf Dharmadasa 1994: 89, where this Mahāvamsa passage is taken as historical evidence.

There is one of the first historical references of King Mahallanāga (136–143) building a vihāra called Sālipabbataṃ in Nāgadīpa (*Mahāvamsa*. 1958: 35: 124). There is also a second historical reference of King Kaniṭṭhatissaka (167–186) restoring in the Nāgadīpa **ghara** (*Mahāvamsa*. 1958: 36: 9). It is not clear what specific building the word **ghara**, meaning "house", refers to.

A third historical reference is to King Vohārika Tissa (209–231), who is said to have built a **pakāra**, "wall", in a **vihāra** called Tissa in Nāgadīpaka (*Mahāvamsa*. 1958: 36: 36). All these three references are clustered in time to the end of the second and beginning of the third century AD. The next reference to Nāgadīpa in connection with a Sinhala King falls to the end of the reign of Aggabodhi II, who ruled 604–614. He is said to have given the Uṇṇalomaghara temple to the Rājāyatanadhātu and (gave) as well an umbrella for the Āmalacetiya. He also granted to the **vihāra** there a village for the provision of rice soup (*Cūlavamsa* 1980: 42: 62–63). After that, Nāgadīpa is not mentioned any more by the chronicles. There are then almost 400 years of silence between Vohārika Tissa and Aggabodhi II, and this period of silence, and the following period after Aggabodhi II, throughout the mediaeval period may be significant. The chronicles are built on "the merit books" of the Kings. If a King really had made a restoration or built a vihāra in Nāgadīpa, it would have been mentioned in his merit-book and then been taken up by the compilers of the chronicles, and by his retinue or kin in inscriptions referring to him. The silence can be interpreted as an absence of any relation of the Sinhala Kings to the north. The political decision makers of Nāgadīpa, who may have been Tamiḷar, may have turned for protection and cultural exchange towards Dravidian South India instead.

The commentary to the *Akitti-Jātaka* (no. 480)<sup>2</sup> supports this view of Nāgadīpa being related to South India. That reference is especially interesting because it points to a religious intercourse between the South Indian city of Kāvīrippūmpaṭṭiṇam (Pāli, Kāveripattana) in Tamiḷakam (Pāli, Damilaraṭṭham) and Nāgadīpa from about the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. The other former references were vague in the positioning of Nāgadīpa, but this commentary is quite clear in placing Nāgadīpa close to Kāradīpa.

In Tamiḷ, we also find the word Nākanāṭu in, for example the Tamiḷ epic *Maṇimēkalai*, written by Cāttaṇār in about the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. The heroine

<sup>2</sup> Fausbøll 1963: 238: ...anupubbena Damilaraṭṭham patvā Kāvīrapaṭṭanasamīpe uyyāne viharanto jhānābhīṇāṃ nibattesi, tatrāpi 'ssa mahālabhasakkāro up-pajji. So tam jīgucchanto chaḍḍetvā ākāseṇa gantvā Nāgadīpasamīpe Kāradīpe otari.

Maṇimēkalai herself visits a shrine called Maṇipallavam in Nākanāṭu, according to this Tamiḷ Buddhist epic tradition (Cāttaṇār 1981: 160–162). In the 5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century AD, when both the *Mahāvamsa* and the *Maṇimēkalai* were written, there were evidently strong legendary Buddhist traditions about Nākattivu, on the Tamiḷ as well as on the Sinhala side.<sup>3</sup>

The problems the Anurātapuram dynasties had with the north are made evident by looking at the reference to the word **uttaradesa**, "northern land" in the chronicles. It covers the area north of Anurātapuram, but how far north is not known. It may be a vague reference to the whole of the north of the island. Moggālaṇa III (614–619), who followed Aggabodhi II (Cūlavamsa 1980: 44: 711), fought against Damiḷas, who had taken possession of Uttaradesa, and several other following Kings did the same (Cūlavamsa 1980: 48, 83–4, 95,112; 50,14; 70,92). The formation of **uttraradesa** as a Tamiḷ area was a fact in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century, having been prepared by a cutting of relations from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century.

The great value of the Vallipuram inscription is, as pointed out, that this **nakadiva** is mentioned. It is then an important reference that refers to the very place where the inscription was found. In Pāli in the *Mahāvamsa* it appears as Nāgadipa(ka), in Prākṛt it appears as Nākadiva (Nagadiva) and in Tamiḷ as Nākattivu. When we say that Nākattivu is Tamiḷ, we are of course aware that the word is a Prākṛt loan word that has been Tamilised, but having been Tamilised it has become a Tamiḷ word.

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The Vallipuram Buddha image has been "rediscovered". It stands in a central Buddhist vihāra in Bangkok, in Wat Benja, that is known by Western tourists as "the Marble Temple". The present author has visited the place in January 1994 and June–July 1996. The Wat is one of the most visited by tourists in Bangkok — even a commercial bank for money change is placed just outside the entrance — but the Buddha image has no central placement and is therefore not easily observed. The guards and professional tourist guides do not know even that an image called Vallipuram Buddha image is there. In the annexed monastery, not even monks who have spent a life time there, know about this image by this or any other name.

It is placed in a corner on the back side of the Wat well protected from rain, theft and vandalism by an iron curtain. A small wooden board says in

<sup>3</sup> To avoid a misunderstanding: these sources are sources for the conceptualisations of the 5th century AD. They are not sources for the historical Buddha or for Maṇimēkalai, who is a poetic creation.

Thai and English that this image depicts the Buddha dispelling evil from the island of Ceylon. No reference to Vallipuram is made. A yellow transparent schal has been wrapped around the statue and at its feet are placed pots with incense. The corner is made into a place of veneration, but it cannot compete with the other statues in the Wat that are placed strategically along the main walk of tourists and venerators.

A replica has been made and was in January 1994 ready to be sent to Colombo on the request of the Sinhala authorities.<sup>4</sup>

It is a life-size statue in limestone (Paranavitana 1983: 79). It was said to weigh half a ton (Ceylon Antiquary 1916–17: plate 10, 2). The Buddha is depicted as standing (see pictures 1–2). The sculpture's right hand seems to have been replaced by a new hand and its left-hand fingers seem to have been repaired. There exists a photo of the Vallipuram image taken when it was still standing on a low platform of stone under the bo-tree in the Old Park of Yālpānam. The photo shows that at this stage the whole right arm was broken away up to the shoulders and that the whole left hand holding the robe was missing (Ceylon Antiquary 1916–17: plate 10, 2). All this has been substituted today by artists in lime, and the substitutes are recognisable on coloured photos. The present author's interpretation of the **mudra**<sup>5</sup> of the right hand is therefore a conjecture, but a reasonable one (see below). The Buddha is not surrounded by any of the Buddha's followers. Let us now give an impressionistic description of this statue.

The **uṣṇiṣa**<sup>6</sup> is very small and low on top. The hair is curled in small curls that are indicated as small dots in relief. It is difficult to make out in which direction the curls are going. The face is round and fleshy, like the whole of the body. The eyes are rather crudely formed in almond shape. The front is high browed. The eyebrows are high-flown. There is no **ūrṇā**<sup>7</sup> visible now and it seems there has never been one. No iris is visible, therefore giving the impression of a blind man. The nose is big and broad and the lips are thick. There is an indication of a smile. The ears are much prolonged: they reach down to the lower part of the neck and almost the shoulder. They end up in knotty lobes. The neck is that of a fat man with indications of a triple chin.

There is no **antaravāsaka**<sup>8</sup> visible under the **uttarāsaṅgha**<sup>9</sup> that falls in heavy, loose pleats. It is not possible any more to determine if the original

<sup>4</sup> Oral communication from the Department of Fine Arts, Bangkok, January 21, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> "gesture (with the hand)"

<sup>6</sup> "turban", used here in the sense of wisdom-pump.

<sup>7</sup> "lock", used here in the sense of point between the eyes.

<sup>8</sup> "lower garment"



right hand **mudrā** is **abhaya**.<sup>10</sup> The hand is replaced. The new hand is badly done and the “restorers” consciously tried to imitate **āsīsa mudrā**.<sup>11</sup> That is a variant form of the **abhaya mudrā**, but it is known to be typical of Sinhalese Buddhist iconography as we know it from the Avukana statue of the 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century. Evidently the restorers of today tried to give the statue a Sinhala look by making the hand into a **āsīsa mudrā**, knowing that this was part of the (later development of the) Anurātapuram school of art. This is the first indication of an ethnic-political Sinhala-Buddhist interpretation and handling of the statue. To come to the original, we have just to disregard this recent “restoration” and stick to the paradigm that these standing Buddhas from Amarāvati have the common **abhaya mudrā**. None of them has an **āsīsa mudrā**.

We should of course not disregard this Sinhala “restoration” as an indication of the political exploitation of that statue. It is paralleled with the “restoration” of the word in the inscription so as to fit Sinhale interests.

In the inscription we find the word **isigiraya**. There is no controversy about the reading of the Brāhmī letters as **isigiraya**, but to fit a Sinhala interpretation, K.N.O. Dharmadasa, Professor of Sinhala at Peradeniya University, who represents an extension of the Paranavitana school (see below), following his teacher S Paranavitana faithfully, revives his reading **isigir-i-ya**.<sup>12</sup> That small, but important and seemingly arbitrary change of a vowel from **a** to **i** makes it possible for Dharmadasa to interpret the word in a Sinhala way as **isi-giri**, “the rock of the ṛṣi!” (Dharmadasa 1994: 88–90) This is what we could call a “Sinhala interpretation”. It excludes the possibility of making a Tamil reference. If we take the reading as it is — there is no controversy about it — we find a Tamil name **Isiki**, and there is **rayan**. In Prakṛtised form they may appear as **isigiraya**. The **\*isi-giri** is an outcome of ethnically based wishful thinking, like the “restoration” of the Buddha hand into an **āsīsa mudrā** (see above).

The left hand of the Buddha holds up the fall of the **uttarāsaṅgha** that covers even the feet except for the toes that are indicated. The absence of a penis is indicated by the fall of the **uttarāsaṅgha** along the front side. He

<sup>9</sup> “upper garment”

<sup>10</sup> “gesture of fearlessness”

<sup>11</sup> “gesture of blessing”

<sup>12</sup> Paranavitana in one footnote said that **isigiraya** stands for Sanskrit Ṛṣikarāja and in another footnote that it stands for Sanskrit **Rṣigirika** or **Isigirika**. See Paranavitana 1936: 237, note 6; Paranavitana 1983: 81, note 8. No explanation for the change of vowel is given.

has a narrow waist, but broad shoulders that give an athletic look, and large hips that associate with a woman.

We may find his look rather "rustic", but the parallels to this statue were royal statues of the Satavāhanas dynasty in Andhra and the following Īkṣvāku dynasty. The former ruled between ca 230 BC. to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. followed by the Īkṣvāku in Andhradeśa proper. It is during their rule in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. that we hear in inscriptions about a Sihala vihāra for the accommodation (Vogel 1929–30: 22), — not of Sinhalese monks, — but for monks from the island called Sihala. This information then perfectly fits the time and place of establishing a Buddha statue in Vallipuram inspired by Andhra art.

We should of course not think of the Vallipuram of today as being a centre for Tamil Vaiṣṇavism lying rather isolated in the hot dunes of Vaṭamaracci (Ragupathy 1987: 83–85). Vallipuram has very rich archaeological remains that point to early settlement. It was probably an emporion in the first centuries AD. It is part of a route for traders and pilgrims that went along the Eastern coast of Īlam. Vallipuram is also close to the Nākapaṭṭiṇam coast, with easy access from the Andhra coast.

The stylistic place of origin of the Vallipuram image is quite clear: the Dravidian area of Amarāvati that together with finds from Bhaṭṭiprolu, Jaggayyepeta, Ghanataśālā, Nagarjūnikoṇḍa and Golī was one creative centre in Andhra for Buddhist art from about 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. under the Satavāhanas and Īkṣvākus (Coomarswamy 1980; Boisselier et al. 1978; Härtel 1971).

The Buddha image appears there only from the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. replacing symbols for the Buddha, and lasts throughout the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. From already dated stones with which we compare this Vallipuram statue, we can conclude that it falls in the period 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century AD. During that period, the typical Amarāvati-Buddha sculpture developed. It was inspired by the sculpture of Gāndhāra and Mathurā and spread to South India, Īlam and Southeast Asia, but not before the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

The returning attributes for this standing Buddha in stone are: he is more than life size; he holds the end of the **uttarāsaṅgha** in the left hand; the right hand is lifted to **abhaya mudrā**; the curls of the hair are flat; the face is round; the **uṣṇiṣa** is low and small and the **uttarāsaṅgha** is falling in pleats. This is the model for the standing Amarāvati Buddha statue (see figures 1–3).

The expression "Anurātapuram school" seems to indicate that there was a Sinhala school in Anurātapuram that was formative for the development

of the Buddha images. So, one expects to hear that the Vallipuram Buddha image is influenced by the Anurātapuram school.

What, however, is the "Anurātapuram school"? It falls into two phases, the first up to Dhātusena in 459 AD. and the second to the abandonment of Anurātapuram in the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. From the first period very little is left regarding Buddha images, and what is left follows the ideal of Amarāvati. The oldest-known Buddha image in the Sinhala area from this period is from Maha Illupallama in the district of Anurātapuram. It is six feet high, of white marble probably imported from the Veṅgi region in Andhra. It is an example of Amarāvati art.

Another old Buddha-image is from Metavacciya dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD., a bronze statue of 46 cm. It is reminiscent of the Amarāvati school, both in the attitude and in the way the robe is adjusted (Boisselier et al. 1978: 141). We do not find the *āsīsa mudrā* at this stage. It belongs to the Anurātapuram school's second phase, as documented by the Avukana statue.

It is then only in the second phase that the Anurātapuram school develops specific features for what we can call Anurātapuram or Sinhala Buddhism. In the first phase this school was just **receiving** influences, like Tamiḷakam<sup>13</sup> and Nākattivu in northern Īlam. In this first phase it was the heir and descendant of the Amarāvati school like South India, Nākattivu and, not to forget, Southeast Asia (Boisselier et al: 140–167). These statues, one of which is the Vallipuram statue, we all date stylistically to about about 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Their setting up was hardly possible before the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. We have to see the Vallipuram image as a result of a wave of Buddhist sculpture initiated in Amarāvati. The Buddhist culture to which this statue belongs is Dravidian and South Indian, more precisely Andhra. We get then, as mentioned above, a geographical triangle of a cultural encounter between Amarāvati, Anurātapuram in its first phase, and Vallipuram. Only in the second phase of the development of Buddhist art in Anurātapuram was this belonging together of Buddhists from South India and Īlam abandoned and replaced in Anurātapuram by a Sinhala Buddhist art.

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Why is the Buddha image so important? The image is important for two reasons. One is its historical importance, indicating a free cultural exchange beyond ethnic conflicts in the triangle Amarāvati–Anurātapuram–

<sup>13</sup> The area from Vēṅkatam to Kaṇiyakumari.



**Fig. 1.** The Vallipuram Buddha image from Wat Benja in Bangkok. Photo: Peter Schalk, January 1994.



**Fig. 2.** Close-up of the same picture. Photo: Peter Schalk.





Fig. 3. The Buddha holds the end of the **uttarāsāṅgha** in the left; the right hand is lift to **abhayamudrā** here missing); the curls of the hair are flat; the face is round; the **uṣṇīṣa** is low and small and the **uttarāsāṅgha** is falling in pleats. This is the model for the standing Amarāvati Buddha statue. By courtesy of the Director, Madras Museum. Photo: Peter Schalk, January 1994.

Vallipuram, and the other is its present political importance as an object of exploitation in the ongoing ethnic conflict on the island.

We have already elaborated on the first reason above. Let us elaborate now on the second reason here that has been indicated above by the sculptural and verbal "restorations" of our sources by Sinhala enthusiasts. The area in Yālpānam district is now 100% Tamil. Tamils are today related either to Śaivism or to Christianity or to Islam, but not to Buddhism. In the past, however, in precolonial Īlam, there were Tamil Buddhists, but this has not been emphasised in the historical writings by Sinhalese and Tamils.<sup>14</sup> So, the finding of Buddhist places in Tamil areas today creates a tension in the minds of both Sinhalese and Tamil, because Tamil Buddhism, like Mahāyāna, has today no recognition in the Lankan (Sinhala) Buddhist saṅgha. Many Tamils also — not Tamil scholars of course — are unaware of Tamil Buddhism because their concepts of Buddhism were given to them by Sinhala Buddhists. Some Sinhalese scholars stipulate that there were Sinhala Buddhist settlements in early history that were overpowered by Tamil settlers in the mediaeval ages. Even a Tamil scholar, a professor of history, has taken this stand, and this is of course noticed and fully exploited by the Sinhala intelligentsia.<sup>15</sup>

An often quoted paper in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* by the Sinhala historian P.E. Pieris from 1917 explicitly connected finds of Buddhism in the North with "Sinhala supremacy", "Sinhala power" and "Sinhala occupation" (Pieris 1917: 12, 14). This paper gave a special communal edge to the start of archaeological work in the north. One of the places discussed was Vallipuram (Pieris 1917: 17). He and his followers just could not imagine that there was a Buddhist tradition transmitted by Tamils in the north.

In 1983, the year of the Tamil pogroms in Colombo, Cyril Mathew, the Minister of Industries and Scientific Affairs and "President of the Congress of Buddhist Associations of State Corporations and the President of the Foundation for the Restoration and Protection of Buddhist Shrines in Sri Lanka", published a remarkable book that was distributed worldwide and that he sent to UNESCO in Paris. He had written it in English in cooperation with M.H. Sirisoma, Assistant Commissioner of Archaeology

<sup>14</sup> An exception on the Sinhala side is Gunawardana 1979: 47–48, 202–203. On the Tamil side see Vēluppiḷai forthc.

<sup>15</sup> Hettiaratchi 1988: 140: "It is to be mentioned that though at present the majority of the people settled in the above province are Tamils, K. Indrapala has rightly pointed out that Sinhalese constituted the main population there till about the thirteenth century."



from the State Department of Archaeology. In this book was a map that allegedly showed Sinhala Buddhist places. They were now “unlawfully” occupied (Mathew 1983).<sup>16</sup> One of them was Vallipuram.

In between Pieris and Sirisoma came the historian, epigraphist and archaeologist S. Paranavitana († 1972), who in an article from 1936 published in *Epigraphia Zeylanica* — see below — took up the political trend in archaeology initiated by Pieris. He quoted Pieris. He used the Vallipuram inscription and Buddha image to rationalise Sinhala claims on Tamil areas in the north. So, there is a continuous tradition of a politicised Buddhist historiography among academics, from Pieris via Paranavitana to Sirisoma, and, if we want to go further back, to the chronicles themselves that have Buddhist Sinhala nationalism as a main theme. Today this tradition is contradicted and opposed by several Sinhala historians, but still it is a force of long-range character. There are evident ideological survivals of this ethnically based historiography in departments of history, archaeology and Sinhala.

It is this way of Sinhala “hegemonistic” thinking, being so characteristic of Sinhala modern national politics, according to an official spokesman of the Lankan Government (Jayaweera 1991), that gives the Vallipuram image such importance. This spokesman, who served as Ambassador in Stockholm till October 1994 and speaks from his experiences as Government Agent in Yaḷppāṇam in the 1960s, wrote in 1991 that “throughout most of its recent history, Sri Lanka has been a hegemonistic society” (Jayaweera 1991: 33). We have elsewhere called this thinking “dharmacratic” (Schalk 1990b: 354–359). Seeing now the possibility of getting at least a replica back from Thailand of the Vallipuram image, this thinking gets mobilised and enforced; it gets a visible object through which “hegemonistic” or “dharmacratic” feelings can be mobilised and channeled.

The late President Premadasa, who was killed on 1 May 1993, was an ardent Sinhala Buddhist who made himself Minister of the State Department of Buddhism. He did not speak as a historian who tries to find out how things really were, but as a politician with vested interests. He knew that he could exploit politically the Vallipuram Buddha image to rationalise the concept of unity of the island and sovereignty of the Sinhala Gov-

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<sup>16</sup> The Preface in Mathew 1983 was signed on 20 July 1983, the day when the anti-Tamil pogroms started. In the “Acknowledgments” after p. 167, he acknowledges the contribution by Sirisoma for having collated the material and taken a keen personal interest in the publication of this work. Mathew was sacked from the Government in 1985 for his anti-Tamil campaigns that upset foreign diplomats.

ernments (Schalk 1988a; Schalk 1988b: 55–87; Tambiah 1992).<sup>17</sup> We have to recall here G Obeyesekere's old observation from 1970 that Buddha images in public places are tokens of the idea of a Buddhist nation (Obeyesekere 1970: 50–51). Premadasa exploited this fact.

In January and February 1991, Government newspapers in Īlam suddenly flashed the news that the Vallipuram Buddha image may be rediscovered in Thailand and transported back to Laṅkā (*The Sunday Observer* (Colombo), January 20, 1991). Another article in the media tells the public that the Vallipuram Buddha image has been found and that the President (R Premadasa) has made an appeal to King Bhumibol of Thailand to give back the image to Laṅkā. The President is reported to have said that the Vallipuram statue is of great historical and religious significance to Lankan Buddhists (Daily News 1991: February 2).

One further important point in the study of the Buddha image is that the statue is combined with the finding of a separate inscription on a gold plate that makes it possible to say something about the linguistic identity of the culture, i. e. about the historical setting to which this statue belonged. In modern terms, we would say that the inscription makes it possible to label the ethnic identity of the area in question in the first centuries AD. There are no other Buddhist inscriptions from that time — the first centuries AD. — from Yaḷppāṇam<sup>18</sup>, and therefore this inscription is very important. This inscription then becomes highly interesting for politicians for political exploitation.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> For a review of Tambiah 1992 see Schalk 1993.

<sup>18</sup> There is of course the Ānaikkōṭṭai seal on a metal piece dated to the 2nd century BC. The reading of its three syllables has been amended to *kōvētan* and *kōvēntanuṭaiya*, being allegedly a Tamil word. If the reading is correct, then we can document the existence of Tamil in the north already for the 3rd and 2nd century BC. The reading and dating, however, have not yet been confirmed. See Ragupathy 1987: 200–204; Vēluppiḷḷai 1990: 13.

<sup>19</sup> For President Premadasa's manipulations with the Vallipuram inscription see Anon. 1994, that praises him for being a great man: "The man's greatness surpasses his weaknesses". To manipulate is not ugly if it is done in the national interest, is the point of the article. To his "greatness" also belongs his ability to manipulate archaeology. The article says: "Premadasa was a brilliant stage manager. He could create, orchestrate and if necessary even manipulate situations to make himself look the winner, emerge unrivalled and the best. When Premadasa obtained with great persuasion a copy of the Vallipuram gold plate from the scholar bhikkhu Ven. Walpola Rahula, which many thought was stolen, he was slow to make it public. — The Vallipuram gold plate unearthed near a Hindu temple in Point Pedro[sic] is an undisputed [sic] piece of evidence which establishes that during the pre-Christian period the Sinhalese lived and governed Jaffna and were subject to the ruler in Anuradhapura. Without making it public,

Regarding the language of the inscription, we have theoretically four alternatives to play with: Sinhala Prakṛt,<sup>20</sup> Prakṛt with a Tamiḷ substratum (Vēluppiḷai 1990: 10–42)<sup>21</sup>, Prakṛtised Tamiḷ<sup>22</sup> and Paisāci-Prakṛt.<sup>23</sup> The problem is that the inscription is so short, being isolated from a bigger tex-

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he invited a number of scholars and associates to write about the gold plate, its contents and its significance for today. Only when the people realised its value and started discussing and debating its relevance to the demand for a separate homeland did he make it public. He orchestrated the public to challenge those who were unreasonably speaking of a northeast which has been lived in by the Tamils and therefore claimed a separate Tamil country.- After having planted the seeds, Premadasa sat back watching the debate. That was the Premadasa style of operation."

<sup>20</sup> S. Paranavitana states that the language is old Sinhalese conforming, in general, to the grammatical standards followed in other documents of that period. S. Paranavitana 1936: 230.

<sup>21</sup> Ā. Vēluppiḷai opens up a new perspective. He starts from the fact that Prakṛt was commonly used in South Asia and that Prakṛit then was used also by Tamiḷs as reflected in the Vallipuram inscription. Following S Konnow, he finds some Tamiḷ influence. The existence of this Tamiḷ influence tallies with our knowledge about a wider Tamiḷ or Dravidian substratum of these inscriptions in writing and language. The use of Prakṛt then is no indication of a new element introduced by Sinhala Buddhists, according to Vēluppiḷai.

<sup>22</sup> Irā. Nāgacāmi is explicit in saying that the inscription appears in such a way that Prakṛt and Tamiḷ have been blended. He compares it to the blending (of Indo-Aryan and Tamiḷ) that appears in the streets of Madras when somebody says: **istukiṇē puṭṭān** instead of **iḷuttukkoṇṭu pōyvittān**. See Nāgacāmi 1994: 220–222.

<sup>23</sup> This alternative is proposed by the present author as an alternative to be examined, by no means to be finalised. There are at least two Prakṛt languages which have the phonetical indications of a Tamiḷ influence, the shift in some cases from medial forms to tenuous, as we can see in this short text. These two languages are Paisāci and Cūlikapaisāci, which are not always distinguished. The writing of Nāka- instead of Nāga- in Nākattivu, and -guka instead of -guha in Piyagukatisa need not to be a Tamiḷ influence, but could be (Cūlikā) Paisāci writing. Paisāci, when discovered by Western linguists in the 19th century, was defined as a form of Aryan speech which is formed in the mouth of Dravidians when they try to speak Aryan. This falls in line with Vēluppiḷai's theory. Now, we know that it has no Dravidian influence, but it looks no doubt like a typical Dravidian phonetic development. The finding of the Amarāvati statue in Vallipuram and the Amarāvati related writing on the Vallipuram gold sheet, makes it really tempting to put also the language of the Vallipuram inscription together with the Prakṛt inscriptions from Amarāvati, which are defined by some scholars as Paisāci, and so we get a large corpus which makes a linguistic analysis possible. It may support the view that the Vallipuram inscription has nothing to do with "Old Sinhala". This linguistic analysis gets confirmation in a late Buddhist tradition from the 8th century, according to which the Sthavira, to whom we normally ascribe the use of Pāli, used Paisāci. See Hinüber 1986: 70.

tual codex and context, that it is possible to argue for all four. The limitation of the material makes much possible, but also little credible.

The common denominator of all four is the word "Prākṛt".<sup>24</sup> This is a family name of a number of middle Indian languages, and so it poses the problem which Prākṛt language is meant. The first and fourth alternative, Sinhala Prākṛt and Paisāci Prākṛt are quite precise, but being precise they become overdetermined due to the shortness of the text; it is just not enough to test such precise alternatives.

The historical implication of each alternative of linguistic culture is also clear. If the language is Sinhala Prākṛt, then references in the inscription itself refer to a Sinhala Buddhist tradition with its centre in Anurātopuram. If the language is Prākṛt with a Tamiḷ substratum, Prakritisised Tamiḷ or Paisāci, we can relate it to the Dravidian area where we find all three alternatives. The point is that in modern Sinhala ethnic consciousness the theory of a Tamiḷ substratum in Sinhala Prākṛt or in "old Sinhala", or the existence of Tamiḷ cognates to Sinhala terms, is rejected. The change from medial forms to tenues, for example in the change from **nāga** to **nāka**, is not recognised as being due to an influence from Tamiḷ, but is seen even by a professional linguist as a development within the Sinhala language. Sinhala language purism is part of ethnic thinking, and therefore,

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<sup>24</sup> The differences start already with the classification of the language. Paranavithana's classification "old Sinhala" that he uses together with Sinhala Prākṛt is not a technical linguistic term, but appeals to a popular understanding that the original language of the island was Sinhala, and that the Vallipuram inscription is part of this language. A more technical way of speaking of the origin of Sinhala would be Sinhala Prākṛt. There are many Prākṛt-languages that were used as vernaculars and in writing before Sanskrit was widely used. All Prākṛt languages are Indo-Aryan languages. In a historical classification of these languages they are together with Pali classified as middle Indian languages preceded by Vedic Sanskrit and classical Sanskrit and succeeded by modern vernaculars like Hindi, Bengali, modern Sinhala, etc. The kind of Prākṛt that constitutes "old Sinhala", i.e. the Prākṛt out of which modern Sinhala should arise, has its origin in Northern India. Sinhala Prākṛt is an immigrated language in the island as much as Tamiḷ. In this process of immigration and settling, Sinhala Prākṛt was exposed to influences from another middle Indian language, from Pāli, and from Sanskrit. Pāli was an artificial language constructed also from a Northindian Prākṛt, but limited in its use for transmitting Buddhist traditions. Sanskrit was used for the transmission of learned culture. Sinhala Prākṛt was also exposed to the influence of Tamiḷ, so much so that only in the 20th century linguists could convincingly show that Sinhala was not a Dravidian language, but that it was an Indo-Aryan language. The substratum theory has good arguments. See Vēluppiḷai 1979-80: 6-19; Vēluppiḷai 1980; Karunaratne, 1984: 43; Elizarenkova 1972: 126-137.

when saying that a document is written in “old Sinhala”, it excludes any relation to the Tamil language, to Tamilar we could say.

Although there is little controversy about the reading of the text, the interpretation that is applied already in the translation differs widely. From these different translations, different historical conclusions are drawn relating to the ethnic identity of the Vallipuram area. The identification of the language is therefore from a present point of interest important. It is regarded as basic to the determination ethnic identity of the image and the inscription. This determination of the ethnic identity is then projected backwards into history as if the present conflict was already then a daily phenomenon. The determination is open for political exploitation of the Buddha image and of the inscription. Especially in the present fatal ethnic conflict, when the historical outlook is determined by a strong ethnic interest, the constructed and imagined ideal past is made a norm for the future. If the past was Sinhala, it rationalises Sinhala settlements in the present Tamil areas. If the past was Tamil, it rationalises an autonomous Tamil administration with a transmission of Buddhism in Tamil. The Vallipuram image and the Vallipuram inscription have been used in this kind of “interested” historical writing. These two belong to “the hottest” artefacts in South Indian history. To “touch” them is risky. A “wrong” word provokes intensive feelings.<sup>25</sup>

The dominating interpretation has of course been delivered by the dominating ethnic group, the Sinhalese, whose intellectuals are representatives of the first alternative, that the language is Sinhala Prakṛt or “old Sinhala”.<sup>26</sup> We should of course test all four alternatives in the same critical

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<sup>25</sup> See the following controversy: Schalk 1994a; Silva 1994; Schalk 1994b; Schalk 1994c; Dharmadasa 1994; Schalk 1994d.

<sup>26</sup> Paranavitana himself said in 1936 that Vaṭamaracci, where Vallipuram is situated, is now densely peopled by Śaiva Tamils. Remains of the Sinhalese Buddhist civilisation have been found which flourished in this extreme northern district of Ceylon during earlier periods of history, as it did in the rest of the island. His conclusions of his analysis of the Vallipuram Gold Plate are worth quoting because they have influenced the intellectual debate for decades. Paranavitana wrote: “This inscription [on the Vallipuram Gold Plate] also proves that Nāgadīpa was governed in the second century by a minister of the Anurādhapura king, that Sinhalese was the prevailing language, and that Buddhist shrines were being built there. In such references as there are to Nāgadīpa in the chronicles, as well as in other Pāli writings of Ceylon, there is no indication that in early times this differed, as it does to-day, from the rest of the island in the nationality of its inhabitants and their language and religion. In fact there are indications that the extreme north of the island played a very important part in the political, religious, and cultural history of the ancient Sinhalese people. This continued so

way. We must be aware that different classificatory interpretations are possible of the same word and that the inscription, being part of a linguistic encounter-area (Tamiḷ, different Prākṛts), has different language layers. The language purism of present Sinhala consciousness with its rigid borders between the languages is unhistorical.

What is said about Sinhala consciousness is invertedly valid for Tamiḷ consciousness that has been constructed and projected as a reaction to the former. Tamiḷ consciousness has also at present within itself a trend of language purism that "cleans up" everything that reminds of the "Aryan" influence, and by "Aryan" is not only meant the Aryan languages, but also Buddhism. Leading Sinhala scholars like Paranavitana had taught the Tamiḷar that Buddhism in Lankā is Sinhala Buddhism, and the Tamiḷar believed him. He is one of the persons who with the authority of one of the most outstanding scholars in Sinhala academic traditions linked Buddhism to Sinhala culture. From that stand, statements about the existence of "Tamiḷ Buddhism" on the island seem to be absurd.

There is also among Tamiḷ scholars a reaction to the Sinhala drawing of borders. This reaction is expressed by emphasising the Tamiḷ substratum theory (A. Vēluppiḷḷai) and the existence of Tamiḷ cognates (Po. Ragupati) being models for Sinhala words. These theories, independent of their truth value, can in the present situation of segregation be seen as a request for recognition within Lankan society. They want to modify an exclusive Sinhala consciousness by pointing out that there has been a relation between Sinhala and Tamiḷ since historical times.

Tamiḷ consciousness can of course also become exclusive in separatist ideologies with a rigid linguistic Tamiḷ purism as a base. These ideologies depict Buddhism either as a stranger in *Īlattamiḷttēcam* or they provoke the making of a distinction along ethnic lines between Sinhala and Tamiḷ Buddhism.

We have to notice, then, that there is a Sinhala and a Tamiḷ approach in the formation of interpretations. These approaches consist of a pre-

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right down to the end of the Polonnaruva period, though it is likely that the proportion of the Tamil element in the population was greater here than in the rest of the island and gradually went on increasing." (Paranavitana 1983: 80). In the same paper on the Vallipuram inscription he summarises: "It is hardly necessary to say that at the date of this inscription and up to the thirteenth century, Nāgadīpa was as much Sinhalese territory as any other part of the island". (Paranavitana 1983: 80). We shall disregard here the political aspects of this historical research and focus only on the descriptive historical statements. What concerns us really is if the factual statement that the inscription contains "Sinhalese" is correct.



knowledge that is confirmed in the interpretation of the inscription. Usually the inscription is used to confirm preconceived notions about ethnic identities. It has the position of a partial witness. Taking a Sinhala or Tamil stand, we move then in an interpretative circle that we cannot do much about in this very case; we have only four short lines, 48 legible **akṣaras**, and little comparative textual and historical material that makes it very difficult, but not impossible, to break away from pre-determined interpretative models.

We now understand why the statue and the inscription are so important. It is not their religious significance per se that is important in the present debate initiated by the famous Sinhala archaeologist and historian S Paranavitana (Paranavitana 1983: 80.) followed by others in his spirit (Hettiaratchi 1988: 139–140<sup>27</sup> and revived in 1984 by Cyril Mathew and Sirisoma, and in 1991 by the late President R. Premadasa (Sunday Observer 1991: January 20. Daily News 1991: February 2)<sup>28</sup>, but their being capable of rationalising political aims. For us of course, the study of the religious significance per se, in its historical setting, of the statue and the inscription, is important enough.

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<sup>27</sup> This Sinhala scholar, S. B. Hettiaratchi, says that many parts of the north and the north-eastern provinces appear to have been populated during the early part of the Anurādhapura period (and that the first Tamil settlements were in the 10th century). To support this he refers to among other sources the Vallipuram inscription that speaks of Baḍakara. It is, according to this scholar, presumably identical with modern Vallipuram near point Pedro. E T Kannangara has also paved the way for a political interpretation. He states that ruins of a Buddhist Vihāra, foundations of buildings, old bricks, and damaged images of the Buddha were found in Vallipuram. These finds evidently prove that this village was in the past a Sinhala settlement. See Kannangara 1984.

<sup>28</sup> For his political concept on Buddhism see Schalk 1990a.

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J. PETER SÖDERGÅRD

## Decoding the Hermetic Discourse in Salomon Trismosin's *Splendor Solis* — A Semiotic Study of Three Ways of Reading

'Has it ever occurred to you,' the old lady went on, 'how much we go by what is called, I believe, the context?'

Agatha Christie (1977: 73)<sup>1</sup>

### I. Introducing the Hermetic Discourse and Umberto Eco's Diagnosis of Hermetic Semiosis

*Alchemy* and *the Hermetic Art* are terms that denote a most interesting transitional space, circumscribing an opaque region of human cultural history, shared between matter and psyche, between phantasmagoric reveries and practical experiments, between sincere natural theology and conscious fraud. This is an area of human experience that has been notoriously difficult to define and understand, and which has triggered off contradictory interpretations that are, in their own, of semiotic interest.

It has been said that a text — in our case *Splendor Solis*, and the Hermetic-alchemical texts at large — is a picnic, a *Dutch party*, in which the author provides the words and the reader, especially a reader with too much or too little erudition, comes up with the meaning of the words. In the dialectics between the intention of the text and the intention of the reader, the reader has triumphed and is dragging the text to whatever use he or she chooses. Umberto Eco has named this triumph of the reader *Hermetic semiosis* in a series of lectures and has tried to map the mechanisms that characterize the *Hermetica* and other kindred readings (Eco 1992).

In his first lecture, *Interpretation and history*, Umberto Eco explores and compares the semiotic workings of second century Hermetism and the

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<sup>1</sup> The old lady is, of course, Miss Marple.

Hermeticism of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries with the hermeneutics of post-modern literary theory, especially radical reader-oriented studies and what has been called *the continuous slippage of meaning*. He also in parts presents the semiotic model that will be used in this study (See ch. VI Psychoanalyzing the Hermetic Discourse). But to contextualize this model we will begin by untangling the afore-mentioned comparison.

Eco begins the lecture by contrasting two diametrically opposite ways of interpreting a text. First he presents, maybe with rhetorical exaggeration, a radical, post-modern, reader-oriented interpretation in which, to carry it to the extremes, the reader has both 'killed' the intentions of the author and of the text, and victoriously uses the text to whatever use he or she fancies. Eco affronts this position, reminding his readers that he in his influential work *Opera aperta*, he pleaded for an open-ended reading, but, nevertheless, a reading aiming at interpreting a work. Eco is of the opinion that he then studied the dialectics between the rights of the interpreters and the rights of the text, but that in recent times the part played by the interpreters, *i.e.* by one-sided reader-oriented perspectives, has been too dominating in the hermeneutic field.

The radical opposition to a reader-oriented perspective gone wild is the view that the only valid interpretation is made up of the original intentions of the author. The hunt for this elusive intention is, according to Eco, often complicated and even in many cases of no importance for the interpretation. Eco instead points out that between the intention of the author and the intention of the interpreter it is also possible to take account of the intention of the text (Eco 1992: 23–88).

In this article I will try to give an overview of the general interpretations of alchemy that have been put forward, and apply Umberto Eco's intentional approach to these interpretations, *viz.* consider them as various sorts of intentions. But foremost, I will use a pseudonymous alchemical tractate from the sixteenth century, Salomon Trismosin's treatise *Splendor Solis* as an opportunity to picture and evaluate the three main decodings of alchemy that have been attempted; a chemical, a religious–soteriological and a psychological. I also want to explore what I have called the intertextual web in the Hermetic discourse, and see if its mapping can generate usable knowledge about what has, since the Middle Ages, been called alchemy: a term acknowledging the taking up of a science or art which had been cultivated by Muslim and Nestorian scholars, but with its fountainhead in Late Antiquity. In a period when this area of human culture was named *The Divine and Holy Art* (θεία καὶ ἱερὰ τέχνη), *Divine Knowledge* (θεία ἐπιστήμη), *The Mysterious Art of the Philosophers* (ἡ τῶν φιλοσόφων

μυστική τέχνη).<sup>2</sup> Or we may focus on Zosimos of Panopolis' elaborated periphrasis of what is going on in the alchemical practise *And in this system, single and of many colours, is comprised a research, multiple and varied, subordinated to lunar influences and to the measure of time, which rule the end and the increase according to which nature transforms itself.*<sup>3</sup> (καὶ ἐν τούτῳ τῷ μονοειδεῖ καὶ πολυχρόμῳ σχήματι σφίζεται ἡ τῶν πάντων πολύλεκτος καὶ παμποίκιλος ζήτησις· ὅθεν καὶ σεληνιαζομένης τῆς φύσεως τῷ μέτρῳ τῷ χρονικῷ ὑποβάλλεται καὶ τὴν λήξιν καὶ τὴν αὐξήσιν δι' ἧς ὑποφεύγει ἡ φύσις).<sup>4</sup> What is then alchemy?

If, for example, we turn to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, we find the current definition 'Medieval forerunner of chemistry, esp. pursuit of transmutation of baser metals into gold or silver; (fig.) transformation like those sought in alchemy'. Already this explanation shows the two main hermeneutical strategies or ways of decoding that characterize much of the secondary literature on alchemy: That it is either seen as misguided proto-chemistry, which by striving for the then impossible goal of transmuting base metals into silver and gold,<sup>5</sup> developed laboratory techniques and increased the knowledge of chemical substances and processes. Or it is allegorically used to express, for instance, themes from the Christian theology. Martin Luther writes in his *Tischreden* (Weimarer Ausgabe vol. 1: 1149):

The science of alchemy [ars alchymica] I like very well, and, indeed, it is truly the natural philosophy of the ancients. I like it not only for the many uses it has in decocting metals and in distilling and sublimating herbs and liquors [in excoquendis metallis, item herbis et liquoribus distillandis ac sublimandis], but also for the sake of the allegory and secret signification, which is exceedingly fine, touching the resurrection of the dead at the Last Day. For, as in a furnace the fire extracts and separates from a substance the other portions, and carries upward the spirit, the life, the sap, the strength, while the unclean matter, the dregs, remain at the bottom, like a dead and worthless carcase [here Luther illustrates further with the preparation of wine, cinnamon, and nutmeg], even so God, at the day of judgement, will separate all things through fire, the righteous from the ungodly. (translation in Warwick Montgomery 1963: 79)

It is maybe permissible to talk about a continuum of possible decodings, going from a practical, experiential to a soteriological, maybe allegorical-

<sup>2</sup> For the Greek alchemical terminology and the controversial issue of the Greek and/or Egyptian etymology of the Arab al-kimiya, see Gundel 1950: 240–241 and the references cited.

<sup>3</sup> Translation in Taylor 1937: 89.

<sup>4</sup> Zosime de Panopolis 1995: 35 (Mém. auth., x. 1, version a).

<sup>5</sup> Compare with Souda, X 280 s. v. χημεία· ἡ τοῦ χρυσοῦ καὶ ἀργυροῦ κατασκευή.



mystical, reading. This has often been presented in terms of exoteric or esoteric alternatives, sometimes, as already indicated, thought to be mutually exclusive. But as a general working definition I will use the following, which Harry J. Sheppard introduced at the symposium concerning *Die Alchemie in der Europäischen Kultur und Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, Wolfenbüttel 1984, as a marking out of the European alchemy in a universal context:

Alchemy is the art of liberating parts of the Cosmos from temporal existence and achieving perfection which, for metals is gold, and for man longevity, then immortality and, finally redemption. Material perfection was sought through the action of a preparation (Philosophers Stone for metals; Elixir of life for humans), while spiritual ennoblement resulted from some form of inner revelation or other enlightenment (Gnosis, for example, in Hellenistic and western practices). (Sheppard 1986: 16–17)

In Sheppard's definition there is a merging of the two horizons of expectations in that the liberation and perfection of metals and man is set in a correspondence which invites further comparisons, which, in turn, would make up part of a Hermetic world-view, expressing what I in the title of the paper have called *The Hermetic Discourse*. I am here alluding to Michel Foucault's primary unit of analysis: discourse. Foucault repudiates many of the traditional units of interpretation and analysis, and advocates instead the use of discourse as a system of possibility for knowledge, a summoning up of which rules permit certain statements to be made. Michel Foucault, when discussing what an author is, has tried to capture the meaning of *The Hermetic discourse* :

Hermes Trismegistus did not exist, nor did Hippocrates — in the sense that Balzac existed — but the fact that several texts have been placed under the same name indicates that there has been established among them a relationship of homogeneity, filiation, authentication of some texts by the use of others, reciprocal explication, or concomitant utilization. The author's name serves to characterize a certain mode of being of discourse: the fact that the discourse has an author's name, that one can say 'this was written by so-and-so' or 'so-and-so is its author', shows that this discourse is not ordinary everyday speech that merely comes and goes, not something that is immediately consumable. On the contrary, it is a speech that must be received in a certain mode and that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status. (Foucault 1979: 147)

Foucault has pointed to some extremely interesting topics in this mode of being of discourse: the role of the pseudepigraphical author in relation to the empirical authors of Hermetic tractates; the complicated web of intertextuality by homogeneity, filiation, authentication of some texts by the

use of others, reciprocal explication, or concomitant utilization. The fact that the discourse is to be received, heard or read, in a specific way, and that this receiving is connected with the social status of the discourse are also important factors for the analysis. Foucault, according to my mind, creates an analytical entity that transcends the limitations of a literary genre, *i.e.* the nebulous *The Hermetic literature* a genre-definition which in its own can be useful, but does not show the communicative functions and opportunities of the Hermetic discourse.<sup>6</sup> I will now use some of Foucault's remarks in introducing *Splendor Solis* — The Splendour of the Sun.

## II. The Name Salomon Trismosin

The tractate to be dealt with here is attributed to Salomon Trismosin,<sup>7</sup> a pseudonymous author, who in his connotations indicate that *Splendor Solis* belongs to the hermetic discourse, and also, thereby, enforces its authority and social standing. For the name alludes to King Solomon — he who was the wisest of all the sages, and he who built the Temple in Jerusalem with cedar from Lebanon, with gold mined from Ophir and silver from Spain (1 Kings) — and to Moses, who is said to have guided the Israelitic People out of Egypt, but who is in Occult literature always connected with Egyptian magic. This Moses is also three times great, a clear reference to the eponymous cultural hero of the literature in question; Hermes Trismegistus. A vital connection is established between a 'suspicious'-looking literature and the canonical, whether in its Jewish or Christian context.

Raphael Patai, in the excellent and much needed work *The Jewish Alchemists. A History and Source Book*, has systematically collected the attributions of alchemical mastery to biblical figures. In doing so he calls attention to the fact that in Hellenistic Egypt, magical and hermetic texts (if we choose the terminology of Foucault) were already filiated to biblical, canonical texts, and the latter were thereby used to authenticate the more ambivalent genres. Patai maps the complicated intertextual web between biblical texts and the alchemical by, *inter alia*, pointing out that the third-century papyrus W of Leyden, *The Domestic Chemistry of Moses*, containing 62 alchemical formulas, paraphrases Exodus 31:1–5; 35:30–35. And, writes Patai, *with the obvious intention of pseudepigraphically associating the treatise with the biblical Moses, and thereby endowing it with an aura of*

<sup>6</sup> See Albinus 1994 for a discussion of 'discourse' as an entity of analysis in the history of religions.

<sup>7</sup> Variant spellings Trissmosin, Trissmosinus. Ferguson 1906: 469–470.

*antiquity and authenticity*. It is also of interest that one of the most famous alchemical prescriptions for doubling the weight of gold was called *Diplosis of Moses* (Patai 1994: 18–40).<sup>8</sup>

This Late Antique attribution was taken up in the Middle Ages, when Greek, Syrian and Arab alchemical manuscripts were translated into Latin, and we can find, e. g., in the *Margarita preciosa* of Petrus Bonus of Ferrara, fl. in the early part of the fourteenth century, references to Moses, David, Solomon, Ovid, Virgil, etc., as associated with alchemy. But the apogee of this biblical genealogy of alchemy can maybe be found in the writings of Paracelsus, who writes about a spiritual substance that was first given to Adam. It was also through its power that Moses built the Tabernacle, Noah the Ark and Solomon the Temple (Patai 1994: 31).

This is strongly in line with a tradition that has been added to a collection of alchemical tractates called *Aureum Vellus oder Guldin Schatz...*, purporting to be written by Salomon Trismosin, in which the printed version of *Splendor Solis* is first published. We are told a story of how Salomon Trismosin happened to see an alchemical transmutation effected by a miner, and wanting to do the same started his travels in the year 1473 in search of the Stone. He journeyed widely, but in Venice, he obtained the tincture of transmutation. This miraculous substance did not only prolong life, but also effected rejuvenescence. In sum, it was a medicine so powerful that it could prolong Salomon Trismosin's life to the Last Day. The story also relates that he afterwards, in Constantinople, functioned as teacher to Paracelsus.<sup>9</sup>

This spurious life-story of Salomon Trismosin has, according to my mind, the function of giving the many tractates collected in the *Aureum Vellus* an aura of historicity, and thereby, also, presents another example of the pseudonymous tradition in the Hermetic discourse. We could perhaps regard the use of pseudonymity or the accrediting of alchemical tractates to well known persons, whether in Late Antiquity, as with the Pseudo-Democritean tractates, or in the Middle Ages the works known under the names of Raimond Lull, St Thomas Aquinas, Arnold of Villanova *inter alia*,

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<sup>8</sup> The treatise 'The Domestic Chemistry of Moses' is alluded to by Zosimos of Panopolis, a late antique alchemical encyclopaedist which is one of the most important sources of *Splendor Solis* and which we are going to discuss in detail. Berthelot 1888/2: 182–183; Berthelot 1888/3:180–181, 209, 338. But see now the new edition and commentary by Michèle Mertens in Zosime de Panopolis 1995.)

<sup>9</sup> *Aureum Vellus...*, Hamburg 1708, Tractatus Primus, ch. 1 'Tractat unnd Wanderschaft dess hochberümpften herren Salomonis Trissmosini, pp. 1–5. See part III for full bibliographical information.

as a way of establishing an intertextuality which attaches Hermetic tracts to well known figures in the general literary discourse, thereby creating a *cultural web* of value, credibility, and historicity.

But the questions concerning this literature are even further complex, and we should also be prepared to take notice of the following remark of Robert Halleux, when he discusses the motives and uses of the names of cultural luminaries in alchemical pseudoepigraphy:

La réaction instinctive du lecteur est de rejeter en bloc le témoignage des rubriques initiales et finales avec l'arrière-pensée que ces grands esprits ne peuvent avoir donné dans l'alchimie. C'est prêter aux médiévaux un préjugé défavorable à l'alchimie, qui est plutôt le fait de notre époque. On verra plus loin que l'alchimie était, dans la mentalité médiévale, moins 'marginale' qu'on ne pourrait le croire. Mais il n'est pas moins vrai qu'elle ne fut jamais intégrée à l'enseignement universitaire, et que l'attribution à des docteurs en renom peut répondre à un besoin de compensation. (Halleux 1979: 100)

### III. The Manuscripts and Printed Versions of *Splendor Solis*

#### 1. *Inventory of the manuscripts*

The social status of the tractate's hermetic discourse, to continue the use of Foucault's observations, is enhanced by the fact that we first meet the text of *Splendor Solis* in the shape of six beautifully illustrated manuscripts from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.<sup>10</sup> We find a complete manuscript of vellum, consisting of 67 pages with 22 illuminations in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Ms. germ. qu. 42) earlier in the Kurfürstlich-Brandenburgischen Bibliothek in Berlin. It has been dated to the last third of the sixteenth century by the art-historian

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<sup>10</sup> The three MSS which are not mentioned in the text of the article are the following: Ms. Ph. Mus. Nr. 1740 (in the new inventory: Hs 146.766) in the Germanischen Nationalmuseum in Nürnberg, which has alterations in both the disposition of the texts and pictures, but with the same elaborate ornamented borders as Ms. germ. qu. 42. Harley Ms 3469 in the British Museum, inscribed with the date 1582. The Harley MS was used by the Irish poet Yeates when he wrote about the *Rosa Alchemica*. A manuscript in Switzerland, in private hands, has two more illustrations than the rest: a griffin flying out of a mountain cave, respectively an illumination with Hermes and Chronos (Hartlaub 1991: 126–128). There is also a very incomplete manuscript — damaged during the last war — in Kassel, the Murhardsche Bibliothek und Landesbibliothek Hs Mus. 1954–76. In the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, a Ms dated to 1577, with a note in the preface indicating that it has been owned by Rudolf II, Ms Allemand 113. Lenep 1984: 111.

Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, and the colour illustrations accompanying this article are photographed from this manuscript.

The original manuscript, dated to 1532 and 1535 by inscriptions in two of the illuminations, is preserved in the Berliner Kupferstichkabinett (codex 78 D 3). It is rather badly damaged, three pictures are missing, and some of the others have been cut out and then replaced in the wrong places. On stylistic grounds it has been located to Nürnberg and compared with the graphic art that was produced in the city during the early part of the sixteenth century. Especially the famous series of engravings called *Planetenkinder*, ascribed to H. S. Beham, but more probably to Georg Pencz, have been used. But also, according to Hartlaub, motives from B. Dürer, Aldegrever, H. S. Beham, Burgkmair are modeled in codex 78 D 3. In general: the stylistic setting is reminiscent of Flemish miniatures in the manner of the Hortulus-Master, or the circle around Simon Bening.

In the opinion of Hartlaub the manuscript can be attributed to the Nürnbergian illuminator Nikolaus Glockendon, concerning the astrological charts, and the rest of the folia to an unknown engraver in this context working as an illuminator. Hartlaub does not exclude that older Hermetic literature can be found that functioned as prototypes for some of the illuminations (Hartlaub 1991: 126–128).

Jacques van Lennep, in his grandiose study of 1.015 pictures pertaining to the rich and enigmatic iconographical world of Western alchemy, in general agrees with Hartlaub's attribution, but he makes a small correction: The series called *Planetenkinder* carries the names of Hans Sebald Beham and Albrecht Glockendon, not Nikolaus. Jaques van Lennep also emphasizes that *Splendor Solis* was influenced by a missal made for Albert of Brandenburg, Bishop of Mayence, inscribed with the mark of the workshop of the Flemish Simon Bening, born ca. 1483, deceased ca 1561 (Lennep 1984: 111).

## 2. *The printed versions*

*Splendor Solis* was first printed in Rorschach am Bodensee in 1598 as part of the collection called *Aureum Vellus oder Guldin Schatz und Kunst-Kammer*, which also purports to be written by Salomon Trismosin. Another edition was printed in Basel in 1604, but I have been using the Hamburg edition of 1708, and three engravings from it accompany my article (see ill.



## Figur.



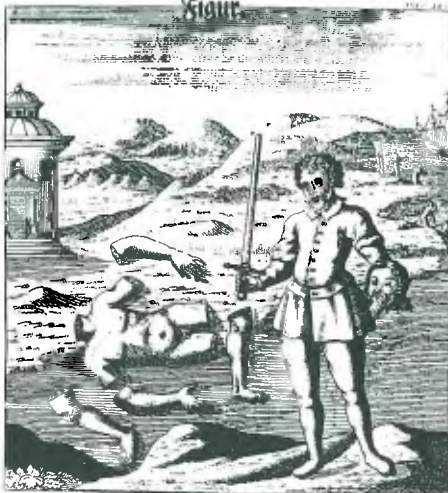
Um Sechsten / so ist die Krafft von der hitz des Feuers also gemehret in der Erden / dz sie hat ihre zusamen getrugene theil löwret / und leicht gemacht / das auch die andere Element ubertreiff / und deshalb sol die hitz gemehret werden / mit der hitze des Feuers / danon spricht Calus also / erlösch die hitz eines dinges / mit der hitze eines andern dinges.

Zu 6

Zun

Ill. 1. A peacock in an alchemical vessel, a symbol often indicating the whole opus alchemicum. From the printed edition of *Splendor Solis in Aureum vellus*, Hamburg 1708, p. 193. Compare with illustr. 5.

## Figur

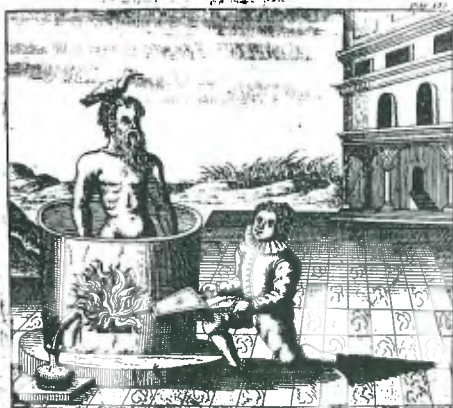


Ma

Die

Ill. 2. The transformation or dismemberment of the body of a man serving as a metaphor for the transmutation of a metal body. From *Splendor Solis in Aureum vellus*, Hamburg 1708, p. 185. Compare with illustr. 6 and the analysis in the article.

## Die Sibende Gleichnus.

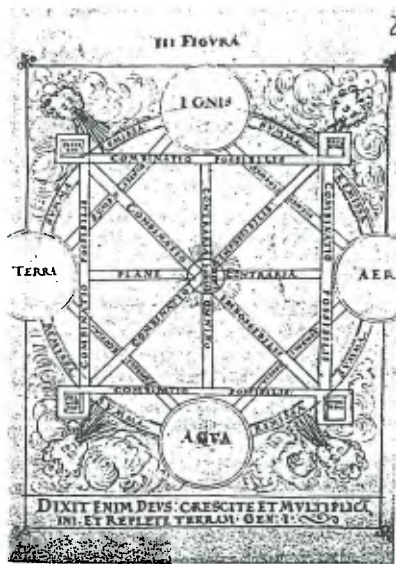


Undis der Alt Poet hat verglichen angehengt / so er schreibet vom der weissen alten / der sich widerumb wolte verjungen / er selte sich lassen zerbrechen / und fochen / bis zu seiner vollkommnen Fochung / und recht wasser / dann wurden sich die Silber wider Verjungen / und wider umb verjungen in vii Kräften.

Ma 2

Hernach

Ill. 3. The rejuvenation of an old man. From *Splendor Solis in Aureum vellus*, Hamburg 1708, p. 187. See also illustr. 7.



Ill. 4. The elements as illustrated in Cornelius Petraeus, *Sylva Philosophorum*, 17th century, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Leiden, Cod. Voss. chem. q. 61.





Ill. 5. A crowned alchemical vessel with a peacock showing its many-colored wings, an allusion to the color-stages of the *opus alchemicum*. From *Splendor Solis* in Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. germ. qu. 42 fol. 46. See illustr. 1.



Ill. 6. The transformation or dismemberment of the body of a man serving as a metaphor for the transmutation of a metal body. From *Splendor Solis* in Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. germ. qu. 42 fol. 34. See illustr. 2.



Ill. 7. The rejuvenation of an old bearded man. From *Splendor Solis* in Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. germ. qu. 42 fol. 36. See illustr. 3.



Ill. 8. *Lapis philosophorum* in the form of a hermaphrodite, a *rebis* which holds up an egg and a mirror, symbols of completeness and perfection. From *Splendor Solis* in Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. germ. qu. 42 fol. 32.

1–3).<sup>11</sup> The full title of this edition is given below. Notice how the title of the collection, like a modern trailer in the media, introduces and entices the consumer to buy the product:

Aureum Vellus oder Guldin Schatz und Kunst-Kammer Darinnen der aller fürnemisten/fürtreffenlichsten/ ausserlesenesten/herrlichisten und bewehrt-esten Auctorum Schrifften und Bücher/auss dem gar uralten Schatz der uberblibnen/verborgnen/hinderhaltenen Reliquien und Monumenten der Aegyptiorum, Arabum, Chaldaeorum & Assyriorum Königen und Weisen. Von Dem Edlen, Hoherleuchten/ fürtreffenlichen/bewehrten Philosopho Salomone Trissmosino (so dess grossen Philosophi und Medici Theophrasti Paracelsi Praeceptor gewesen) in sonderbare unterschiedliche Tractätlein disponiert/ und in das Teutsch gebracht. Sampt anderen Philosophischen alter unnd newer Scribenten sonderbaren Tractätlein/alles zuvor niemalen weder erhört noch gesehen/wie der Catalogus gleich nach der Vorrede zuverstehen gibt. Durch einen der Kunst liebhabern mit grossen Kosten/Mühe/Arbeyt und Gefahr die Originalia und Handschriften zusammen gebracht/und aufs fremlichest und fleissigst an Tag geben.

The title *Aureum Vellus* — the Golden Fleece in the story of Jason and the Argonauts — is here here put to a use that we can read about already in the Byzantine encyclopaedia *Suidas* (ca A. D. 1000), which relates that even though the Golden Fleece is associated with Jason, this is not the full story; in fact, according to *Suidas*, it was a book, written upon sheep-skin, teaching how gold could be made. For in those times it was natural to call the skin or parchment golden due to this process.<sup>12</sup>

Splendor Solis is printed in the third part of *Aureum Vellus* under the title 1. Splendor Solis mit schönen Figuren, pp. 166–213, and is followed by 2. Spiegel der Alchymea herrn Ulricic Poyselii.<sup>13</sup>

Adam McLean, a keen publisher and traditional esoteric commentator, gives us some more information: An elaborated French translation, by the acronym L. I., was published in Paris in 1612 as *La Toyson d'or, ou La Fleur des thesors*. This was later used by William Backhouse, alchemical teacher to Elias Ashmole, in the translation *Salomon Trismosin, The Golden Fleece or the Flower of Treasures, on the Philosopher's Stone* (British Library MSS Sloane 2503; 3613). Elias Ashmole copied

<sup>11</sup> Vormahls gedruckt zu Rorschach am Bodensee/ Anno M. D. XCVIII. und zu Basel 1604 in fünff verschiedenen Tractaten; itzo aufs neue aufgelegt und in ein Volumen gebracht. Hamburg/ bey Christian Liebezeit/ in der St. Joh. Kirch/1708.

<sup>12</sup> s. v. Δέρμας. *Suidas*, quoting Photius of the ninth century, who in turn says that he obtained the information from John of Antioch in the seventh century.

<sup>13</sup> For a complete catalogue of the volume see Kopp 1886: 242–244, who also annotates other works which use the story reported in *Suidas*.

Backhouse's translation, and also translated some other tractates attributed to Salomon Trismosin (Trismosin 1981: 1–4).<sup>14</sup>

A certain Julius Kohn, Austrian refugee and adept to Rev. W. A. Ayton, member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, prepared an English translation of the *Splendor Solis* manuscript in the British Museum, and published *Splendor Solis* under the acronym J. K., in the publishing-house Kegan Paul, London 1920. Kohn was himself following the Western occult tradition, and waged war against Madame Blawatsky's Eastern esoterism.

It can also be of interest to note, according to McLean, that S. L. MacGregor Mathers, who combined so many occult traditions in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, studied *Splendor Solis* and is said to have published a translation by F. L. Gardner in 1907 (Trismosin 1981: 4).

#### IV. *Splendor Solis* and the Hermetic Discourse

*Splendor Solis* is divided into seven treatises which more or less stand independent of each other. They all discuss the making of the Philosopher's Stone and the beneficent uses to which it can be put. We could perhaps regard the seven treatises as variations on this theme. But the work has a preface — Vorrede — that binds the work together and gives some of the philosophical background:

Alphidius, one of the ancient Sages, says: 'If someone is unable to accomplish something in the Art of the Philosopher's Stone, it were better for him not to throw himself into it at all than to attempt it partially.' Rhases gives the same advice in the book 'Lumen Luminum', and it should be carefully heeded: 'I hereby exhort you most strongly that no-one should dare to attempt the ignorant mingling of the elements.' And Rosinus agrees with this, saying: 'All who venture upon this art, lacking intelligence and discernment of the things which the philosophers have written in their books, will find them incomprehensible.' For the philosophers have grounded this art in a natural beginning, but a concealed operation.

It is evident, however, that all bodily things derive their origin from the earth, and similarly also their being, according to the laws of time, through the influence of the stars or planets — Sun, Moon and the rest — together with the four qualities of the elements which agitate them ceaselessly. By this means each and every growing form and fruitful thing is brought forth with the type and form proper to its own substance, just as it was constituted and ordained by God at the beginning.

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<sup>14</sup> Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 7597 (Black's Cat. 1395); MS Ashmole (Black's Cat. 1408) in Trismosin 1981: 5–6 ).

All metals, accordingly, also derive their origin from the earth, having flowed together into separate and specific material from the four elements, with the implantation of the metallic forces; and the influence of the planets aids their assemblage. Aristotle, the Natural Master, described it as such in the fourth book of his 'Meteors', where he tells how quicksilver is a material common to all metals; but it should be known that the first thing in Nature is the material gathered together out of the four elements through Nature's own knowledge and capacity. The philosophers call this material Mercury or Quicksilver. It is not a common mercury: through the operation of Nature it achieves a perfect form, that of gold, silver, or of both metals. There is no need to tell of it here: the natural teachers describe it very clearly and adequately in their books. On this the whole art of the Stone of the Wise is based and grounded, for it has its inception in Nature, and from it follows a natural conclusion in the proper form, through proper natural means. (Godwin's translation in Trismosin 1981: 9)

It is, of course, impossible in this short article to comment upon all the information and particularities of the passage, but I will point to some general features. In the first paragraph some of the old philosophers have expressed concern over the personal qualifications of a would-be adept. Notice also that the operation is grounded in nature, but of a secret kind.

The rest of the passage deals with the fact that all materia is thought to emanate from the earth, and is 'agitated' by the four elements, hereby giving reference to two of Aristotle's key thoughts: the theory of the elements, and the thought that all Nature is teleological, aiming at perfection within each and every different class and family of things. Because, according to Aristotle, the ultimate entity in the material world is ὕλη — materia prima — which only has a potential existence before it is provided with a form — μορφή, εἶδος. This has been likened to how a signet-ring, pushed into heated wax, forms an image. The form is made up of the four elements in their characterizing qualities, and the type of the particular form is determined by the proportions of the elements. Each and every single thing is then a conjunction of form with matter.

This thinking is illustrated in Cornelius Petraeus' *Sylva Philosophorum* (see illustr. 4). *Ignis*, fire, is characterized by dryness and heat, and these can, as shown, be combined. Earth, in its turn, is dominated by dryness and coldness. The alchemist thought that he could transmute earth to fire by changing the coldness into warmth, and keeping the dryness. Transmutation was thought possible, and a substance could be made by mixing the elements so that they would have the same proportions as the elements in the substance that was desirable.

Gold was thought to be composed of the four elements in perfect proportion, and as Nature, according to Aristotle, is striving after perfection, the



other metals will, in their due time, be perfected and be transmuted to gold. The Alchemist may speed up this teleology of metals by his processes. It is stated in *Splendor Solis* that the Philosopher's Stone will effect this shortened ripening:

Thus this Art possesses a wondrous thing, its beginnings rooted in Nature, to which Nature could never give birth by itself: for Nature by itself could never produce the thing through which the metals, imperfectly made by Nature, can be born. Through the secrets of the art they can be made rapidly and manifested complete, born from temporal matter through Nature. Nature serves Art, and then again Art serves Nature with a timely instrument and a certain operation. (Godwin's translation in Trismosin 1981: 10)

The perfection is not only limited to the perfections of the metals, but is sometimes thought to contain both the microcosmos of Mankind and the macrocosmos at large. One of the most beautiful illuminations in *Splendor Solis* (see illustr. 5; fol. 46 in the manuscript), shows what is perhaps to be seen as an alchemical *Paradisus Terrestris*. In the center of the miniature is a crowned vessel of glass alluding to the term *Ars Regia* — The Royal Art used as a code-word for alchemy — and in the Hermetic vessel a peacock with its wings spread out — *cauda pavonis* — with reference to the color-stages of the alchemical work. The vessel is set in the niche of an architectural structure, framed by two composite columns coupled to pilasters, but with an aperture in the structure which gives free access to the happenings in Heaven, so that the processes in the vessel are astrologically influenced by Venus. She is seated in a wagon drawn by two turtle-doves with wheel-spokes indicating that Venus is in Aries and Libra. But she is also influencing the making of harmonious music, drinking, bathing and love-making that are going on in the pastoral scenery — a reflection of the passions and conjunctions of metals that are going to take place within the Hermetic vessel. This is an illumination which in all its details points to the fundamental alchemical theme of *coniunctio oppositorum* — the uniting of opposites whether man or metals. It is a theme that in its emphasis on the sympathetic forces in the world also alludes to the common alchemical monism — that everything fundamentally is One as expressed, *e. g.*, in the influential *Tabula Smaragdina*.<sup>15</sup>

The perfection of base metals into gold was usually thought to take place in conformity with the change of colors in the vessel in a series of trans-

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<sup>15</sup> *True it is, without falsehood, certain and most true. That which is above is like to that which is below, and that which is below is like to that which is above, to accomplish the miracles of one thing. And as all things were by the contemplation of one, so all things arose from this one thing by a single act of adaption* Holmyard 1957: 97.

formations from blackening (nigredo, μελάνωσις), whitening (albedo, λεύκωσις) to yellowing (citrinitas ξάνθωσις) and to violet-coloring (rubedo, ῥωσις).

The different alchemical processes are of course *legio*. We can perhaps differentiate between *aurifactive operations*, i.e. chemically and technically realizable processes aiming at tinting a metal, overlaying it with a silver or golden patina in imitation of the look of real genuine silver or gold. Or the recipes were used to make false gems. Both of these types of procedures can be found in the famous Stockholm and Leyden Greek alchemical papyri, which were purchased in Thebes in Egypt by the Swedish-Norwegian vice-consul Johann d'Anastasi (later general consul) in Alexandria (Halleux 1981: 5–6). Other techniques are *aurifactive*, that is that their aim was to produce an alchemical gold with at least the qualities of ordinary gold.<sup>16</sup>

But what of *Splendor Solis*? Do the texts point to any of these categories of alchemy? Julius Kohn, in his translation of the manuscript in the British Museum, gives the following interpretation:

As a Guide to Physical and Spiritual adeptship, Splendor Solis stands both for Gold Splendour and Soul Splendour, and intends to convey the Secret of Physical Alchemy by the text, and of Spiritual Alchemy by the Allegorical pictures. (Kohn 1920: 8)

We are here focusing on a tendency of alchemical texts that they either can be viewed as an allegorization of chemical-technical procedures, perhaps encoding them for the keeping of trade-secrets, and/or the texts are put to a religious use, just as Luther sees the Art both as practical and, in a hidden way pointing to the Christian discourse.<sup>17</sup> This is in line with how the Byzantine alchemists Stephanos, Archelaos, Heliodoros, beginning in the sixth century, through the alchemical imagery expounded the Orthodox dogmatics concerning the Fall and Redemption of Mankind.

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<sup>16</sup> The terms are used in accordance with Needham 1974: 10.

<sup>17</sup> See Averil Cameron's *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire* in which she rightly emphasizes 'We are also in the midst of an intense interest in discourse, the expression of ideas. Christianity was not just ritual. It placed an extraordinary premium on verbal formulation; speech constituted one of its basic metaphors, and it framed itself around written texts. Quite soon this very emphasis on the verbal formulation of the faith led to a self-imposed restriction — an attempt, eventually on the whole successful, to impose an authority of discourse. And eventually — though only after much struggle and with many variations — this approved discourse came to be the dominant one in the state'. Cameron 1991: 19.



## V. The Intertextuality of the Hermetic Discourse

We will now on the basis of some interesting parables in the third treatise of *Splendor Solis* take a further step back in history to the Egypt of Late Antiquity and to some of the most important Greek alchemical texts, and thereby show in which historical context these double-encodings were first situated. Salomon Trismosin writes in *Splendor Solis*:

Rosinus says that he was shown a vision of a man who was dead, and whose body was completely white like salt. His limbs were cut off, and his head was of fine gold but sundered from the body. By him stood a monstrous man, ghastly of aspect and black, a two-edged sword in his right hand, stained with blood. In his left hand he held a piece of paper on which was written: 'I have slain you that you may possess abundant life; but your head I will conceal, that the world shall not see you. I will lay waste your body upon the earth, and bury it, that it may become putrid and multiply itself, and bring forth fruits unnumbered'. (Godwin's translation in Trismosin 1981: 28)

The accompanying illumination (see illustr. 6; fol. 34) is at some points at variance with the text, but definitively represents the scene, here set on the outskirts of a town. The ending of the narrative passage is of course replete with Christian connotations, but the main part of the text clearly shows a dependence on Zosimos of Panopolis tractate *Of Virtue*. Zosimos is one of the most important compilers of the Greek alchemy, and is usually thought to have been working in Alexandria in the latter part of the fourth century.<sup>18</sup> The name *Rosinus* is one of the Arab transliterations of Zosimos.<sup>19</sup> The text of the tractate *Of Virtue* — ΠΕΡΙ ΑΡΕΤΗΣ is found in Michèle Mertens new edition in *Les Alchimistes Grecs*, tome IV 1<sup>re</sup> partie, *Zosime de Panopolis Mémoire authentiques*.<sup>20</sup> and I will be citing relevant parts of the Greek text in the footnotes to the following translation made by F. Sherwood Taylor, with some smaller adjustments:

Saying these things I went to sleep, and I saw a sacrificing priest standing before me at the top of an altar in the form of a bowl.<sup>21</sup> This altar had 15 steps

<sup>18</sup> Concerning Zosimos in general, see Fowden 1993: 120–125 and Michèle Mertens' very thorough and important historical introduction. Zosime de Panopolis 1995: X–CXII.

<sup>19</sup> See Fuat Sezgin's indispensable *Geschichte des Arabischen Schriftturns* for an appraisal of Zosimos of Panopolis influence in the Muslim learned world. Sezgin 1971: 73–77.

<sup>20</sup> Berthelot and Ruelle's *Collection des Anciens Alchimistes Grecs*, vol III. I. 1–8 (Berthelot 1888/3: 107–109) is concerning Zosimos of Panopolis superceded by Mertens' new edition.

<sup>21</sup> ἐπάνω βωμοῦ φιαλοειδοῦς.

leading up to it. Then the priest stood up and I heard a voice from above saying to me, 'I have accomplished the descent of the 15 steps of darkness and the ascent of the steps of light and it is he who sacrifices, that renews me, casting away the coarseness of the body; and being consecrated priest by necessity, I become a spirit'. And having heard the voice of him who stood on the bowl-shaped altar, I questioned him, wishing to find out who he was. He answered me in a weak voice, saying 'I am Ion, the priest of the sanctuary,<sup>22</sup> and I have survived intolerable violence. For one came headlong in the morning, dismembering me with a sword, and tearing me asunder according to the rigour of harmony. And flaying my head with the sword which he held fast, he mingled my bones with my flesh and burned them in the fire of the treatment, until I learnt by the transformation of the body to become a spirit'. And while yet he spoke these words to me, and I forced him to speak of it, his eyes became as blood and he vomited up all his flesh, and I saw him as a mutilated little figure of a man,<sup>23</sup> tearing himself with his own teeth and falling away.

And being afraid I awoke and thought 'Is this not the situation of the waters?' I believed that I had understood it well, and I fell asleep anew. And I saw the same altar in the form of a bowl and at the top the water bubbling, and many people in it endlessly. And there was no one outside the altar whom I could ask. I then went up towards the altar to view the spectacle, and I saw a little man, a barber, whitened by years, who said to me 'What are you looking at?' I answered him that I marvelled at the boiling of the water and the men, burnt yet living. And he answered me saying 'This spectacle you are looking at is an entrance, a way out and a transition.' I inquired of him again 'Which transition?'<sup>24</sup> And he answered me saying 'It is the place of the exercise called preserving (embalming).'<sup>25</sup> For those men who wish to obtain virtue come hither and become spirits, fleeing from the body'.

How should this passage be decoded? I would presume that it is most profitably read as a complex discourse linking a chemical interpretation to a religious — soteriological — explication. Accordingly, I propose that the text has been consciously encoded in such a way that the reader cannot finally decide to read it without thinking on both perspectives. I also find

<sup>22</sup> Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ Ἴων ὁ ἱερεὺς τῶν ἀδύτων.

<sup>23</sup> Καὶ εἶδον αὐτὸν ὡς τούναντιον ἀνθρωπάριον κολοβόν

<sup>24</sup> Addendum: Καὶ ἀπεκρίνατό μοι λέγων. "Αὕτη ἡ θέα ἦν ὄραξ εἴσοδος ἐστὶ καὶ ἐξοδος καὶ μεταβολή" Ἐπηρώτησα οὖν αὐτὸν πάλιν. "Ποία μεταβολή; Καὶ ἀπεκρίνατο μοι λέγων κ. τ. λ. Taylor made here a haplography (underlined) that has not been noted in the later secondary literature. Lindsay 1970: 344 and some later authors have not checked with the the Greek text, but use Sherwood Taylor's translation indiscriminately.

<sup>25</sup> "Τόπος ἀσκήσεως τῆς λεγομένης ταριχείας. Οἱ γὰρ θέλοντες ἄνθρωποι ἀρετῆς τυχεῖν φῶδε εἰσέρχονται, καὶ γίνονται πνεύματα, φυγόντες τὸ σῶμα." Compare Olympiodoros *Concerning the Sacred Art* 49 in Berthelot 1888/3: 99).

these interpretations present in the text as textual intentions that are to be read in reference to each other. The explicit textual strategy consists in the reading — the decoding — oscillating between these interpretations. But for the clarity of arguments, I will first introduce the chemical reading, and then the soteriological.

The chemical interpretation has been forwarded by historians of chemistry (see also Hopkins 1938: 326–343), and I will here follow Sherwood Taylor's reconstruction of the function of the *kerotakis* — *apparatus*, the Late Antique counterpart to the modern reflux-extractor. This interpretation is based upon the hypothesis that the process going on in Zosimos' bowled-shaped altar is a veiled rendering of either the creation of an alloy which in itself has a golden tint, or the tinting of an alloy — giving it a thin golden surface-film — in the afore-mentioned apparatus. The lexical meaning of *kerotakis* (κηροτάκις) is hot palette, hot plate, used by painters for keeping wax paints hot.<sup>26</sup> Pliny the Elder relates in *Naturalis Historia* 35.31 that it was the custom to paint with black, white, yellow, and red pigments — compare with the color-stages — which were mixed in hot wax to make possible encaustic paintings, e. g., the late Ptolemaic and Roman mummy portraits from Fayum.

Accordingly, a plate, kept hot with a vessel filled with burning charcoal, functioned as a palette. The alchemists probably thought that they could make the alloy softened, and so impregnate it with colors, as also textiles were colored through 'baptisms' in reagents.

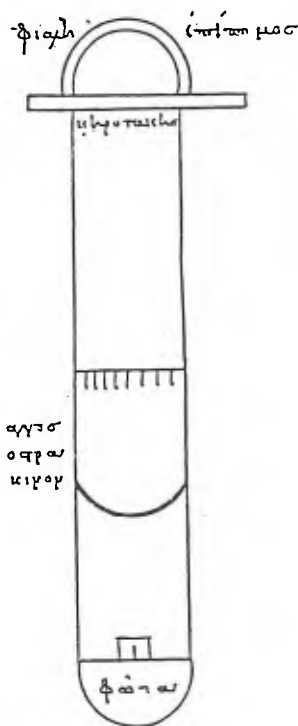
The invention of the *Kerotakis-apparatus* is by Zosimos and other Greek alchemists accredited to Mary the Jewess, whom Zosimos often cites and gives the name *the divine Maria*. He also refers to a treatise *On Furnaces and Apparatuses* in which Mary the Jewess has collected the sayings of the ancients concerning these matters. What is of special interest in this context is that it was Zosimos' sister — whether biological or perhaps spiritually meant — Theosebeia, who asked her brother for information on the subject. Women of different religious belongings seem to play an active part in early Greek alchemy; one can compare it with the activity of women in the ownership of agricultural properties, and in the textile industry (Bagnall 1993: 92–99). Mary has much to say about, for instance, the water-bath (*balneum Mariae*), and the processes in the *kerotakis* (Lippmann

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<sup>26</sup> *sub voce* in Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford reprint. 1948.

1919: 46–50; Patai 1993: 60–91), but I must, due to the limited space, refer to a forthcoming article.<sup>27</sup>

But how did this aurifictive process, based upon the tinting of alloys, take place in the *kerotakis-apparatus*? Sherwood Taylor proposes that an alloy containing a high percentage of copper or an alloy of four base metals was placed on the *kerotakis*, (see illustr. 9; from Berthelot 1888/1: 143, *i.e.* Marcianus 299 fol. 196v.), in the upper part of the apparatus. Mercury set in the lower part was then heated by a charcoal-fire, boiled and condensed on the alloy and on the upper part of the apparatus. The alloy disintegrated and finally dissolved. Impurities, oxides, *etc.*, were collected on the *kerotakis* and on the sieve below. Under this was a pure copper amalgam collected in the part of the apparatus where it is pointed out that it is a vessel of earthen-ware (ἄγγος ὀστράκινον). During the process the copper-alloy desintegrates, as just stated, which could correspond to the blackening stage (*nigredo*, μελάνωσις). The amalgam which is white, because it contains much mercury, could match the whitening stage (*albedo*, λεύκωσις). Through continued heating the percentage of mercury can be lowered so that an amalgam containing approximately 13% mercury is achieved. This has a yellow, golden surface, which then would stand for the yellowing stage (*citrinitas* ξάνθωσις). Even nowadays this specific alloy is sometimes used for artificial gold (Taylor 1930: 130–135).<sup>28</sup>



Ill. 9. The *kerotakis*-apparatus. From *Marcianus* 299 fol. 196v. in Berthelot 1888/1 p. 143.

<sup>27</sup> *Hermetic Monism and Sexual Imagery among Female Alchemists in Late Antique Alexandria*, which I hope to publish during 1997.

<sup>28</sup> If sulphur or arsenic sulphur is used, it would also be placed in the lower part of the apparatus. The metals on the *kerotakis* would be converted to sulphides which might dissolve in the melted condensed sulphur and then drop back to the lower part of the apparatus. This mixture was called *black lead* (μόλυβδος μέλας) and was found in *Hades*, the lower part of the apparatus. It could thereafter be treated in various ways. Taylor 1930: 135–137.

Then it remains to explain the last phase, the violet-coloring. Sherwood Taylor points out that no explanation of the process can be given, even though A. J. Hopkins has proposed that it was a violet-coloring, tinting of metals, like the Japanese *shaku-do* (Taylor 1930: 133 note 22). But this violet-coloring hypothesis has recently been confirmed by Paul T. Craddock and Alessandra R. Giumlia-Mair, specialists in ancient technologies, which emphasize that more or less the same process was used to produce either *shaku-do*, or the among classical authors famous *Corinthium aes*. They also find that this technique was in practise in Ancient Egypt and taken over in the Greek alchemy, under the name *iosis* (ἰωσις, later called *rubedo*). In this process an alloy containing much copper and small amounts of silver and gold was dipped into solutions of acetic and oxalic acids to accomplish a shining black-violet surface (Craddock and Giumlia-Mair 1993).

What, then, of the religious- soteriological reading? Some of the historians of science have studied the Greek alchemy in a very biased way, explicitly eliminating what they regard as *the superstitions and religious ecstasies of Zosimus* (Hopkins 1938: 327), others emphasize that the religious atmosphere is present in almost all alchemical texts, and that the religious element in Greek alchemical works links them to Egypt rather than to Greece (Taylor 1930: 110).

Already Reinesius, in Fabricius *Bibliotheca Graeca* XII. 733, certifies that Zosimos recounts old Egyptian and Greek fables he found in Hermes Trismegistos' *Pimander*, that is *Corpus Hermeticum* (hereafter abbreviated C. H.), because from the Renaissance onwards the collection was named after the first treatise. Richard Reitzenstein, Walter Scott, pater Festugière, and recently Garth Fowden (1993: 122–123) also point out the connection between the Zosimian corpus and the revelatory dialogues in C. H., especially *The Mixing-bowl or Monad* (C. H. 4). We can, namely, read that Zosimos in an exhortation to his sister Theosebeia<sup>29</sup> urges her to abandon passion, lust and anger, and when she has realized that perfection has been attained and the natural tinctures found, to spit on matter, hastening towards Poimenandres and being 'baptized' in the mixing-bowl, hastily ascend to her own kind (Festugière 1950: 367–368).

*The Mixing-bowl or Monad* (C. H. 4) purports to be written by Hermes to Tat, treating the ascension of the soul to God, the One and the Good, and teaching ascetic avoidance of bodily sensations:

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<sup>29</sup> Mertens offers strong arguments for it being a compilation of material from Zosimos, but collected by an *épitomateur*. Zosime de Panopolis 1995: LX.

He (God) filled a large krater with this (the Nous), sent it down and added a messenger, and enjoined him to announce this to the hearts of men:<sup>30</sup> you who are able, baptize yourself in this krater, you who trust that you can ascend to Him who has sent down this krater, you who know to what you are born. All who understood the message and were baptized with the Nous, took part of the Wisdom and became complete men, having received the Nous. (Nilsson 1958: 57)

On this basis the afore-mentioned passage from Zosimos' *Of Virtue* with its violent dream-scenes could be read as showing a common Late Antique religious theme; the ascetic escape from the human body and its sensations through exercises which dry out the bodily fluids — '*It is the place of the exercise called preserving (embalming)*'.<sup>31</sup> *For those men who wish to obtain virtue come hither and become spirits, fleeing from the body*'.

Consequently, my thesis is that Zosimos' treatise *Of Virtue* is to be read as a coherent didactic discourse, which is given in the form of divinatory dreams, in which the reader identifies with the interlocutor, who, both in the dreams and in an awakened state, explicates the soteriological virtues of ascetism for man and metal.

How does this decoding then correspond with the parable of *Splendor Solis* which related the story of Rosinus-Zosimos that we have written so much about?

I would venture to suggest that we are confronted with a phenomenon already noticed by Helmut Birkhan in his description of the alchemy of the didactic poem of Gratheus, filius philosophi (Cod. Vind. 2372):

Die allegorisch-spirituelle Alchemie, der das Werk des Gratheus zugehört, war und blieb eine Geheimwissenschaft, deren 'Axiome' und Denkschemata in die Spätantike zurückreichten, jedenfalls seit Jahrhunderten feststanden: geschlechtliche Vereinigung, Zeugung, Geburt, Tod unter Qual und Leiden, Auferstehung, Wiedergeburt, das ἐν καὶ πᾶν, die Projektion des Goldsames in die wie Teig (μάζα) gedachte Materie, in der er transmutierend fermentiert usw. Diese Gedanken ziehen sich durch die Jahrhunderte, in neuen Kombinationen zwar, und mit neu benannten Stoffen, sind aber z. B. bei John Dee im 16. Jh., ebenso nachweisbar wie bei Zosimos, Morienus und anderen alten Meistern. (Birkhan 1992: 53–54)

<sup>30</sup> Compare with *The Shepherd of Hermas. Mandates 6.2.1–4* when Hermas relates how the angel of justice comes into your heart speaking about justice, purity, holiness, in contrast to the angel of wickedness who is of a violent temper, bitter, and silly. I would suggest that the heart is imbued by *Nous* in the Hermetic text as a metaphor expressing something like the inspiration and indwelling of the angel of justice in the aforementioned text.

<sup>31</sup> "Τόπος ἀσκήσεως τῆς λεγομένης ταριχείας· Οἱ γάρ θέλοντες ἄνθρωποι ἀρετῆς τυχεῖν ᾧδε εἰσέρχονται, καὶ γίνονται πνεύματα, φυγόντες τὸ σῶμα."



Birkhan points to a limited numbers of *topoi* that are put to use again and again, thereby creating what could be called the intertextual web of Hermetic — alchemical literature. The Hermetic discourse is made up of these intertextual associations that often reflect each other, and can be seen as giving the reader a continuum of possible decodings, going from a practical, experiential to a soteriological, maybe allegorical-mystical, reading.

This is further confirmed if we go back to *Splendor Solis* and take a look at the text and the illumination of the seventh parable that follows Rosinus' statements:

Ovid, the ancient poet, indicated something similar when he wrote of the wise old man who wanted to be made young again. He is said to have had himself cut up and boiled until he was perfectly cooked, and no more, then his members would unite again and be rejuvenated with great strength. (Godwin's translation in Trismosin 1981: 30)

This can be read, in compliance with the sixth parable, both as veiled allusions to practical alchemical processes, the transformation of the body of a man serving as a metaphor for transmutation of a metal body, and as a soteriological transformation which gives health to the human body.

In the illumination (Illustr. 7; fol. 36) an old bearded man awaits spiritual and corporal rejuvenescence in a vessel filled with water, and an assistant is puffing up the fire so that the water can begin to boil. A dove has placed herself on the head of the man, perhaps an allusion to the Holy Spirit present at baptism. A contemporary reader of *Splendor Solis* could perhaps recollect those enigmatic words made by John the Baptist, as an answer to the people's question if he were the Christ; *I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.* (St. Luke 3: 15–16a)<sup>32</sup>

Notice also the flasks, in the foreground of the 'baptist-font cum alchemical vessel', and carried by a man on the ballustrade. Of interest is also the circumstance that the architectural structure over the niche behind the vessel is not yet completed, but is under construction. This may be an allusion to the rebuilding of Solomon's temple, a prominent theme in later Hermeticism.

In sum, the texts and pictures are replete with a multivalence that enables the beholder, if he or she has knowledge of the subject, to explore the

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<sup>32</sup> For an excellent religio-historic analysis of the motif of the baptism in fire and water generally, and also concerning Neoplatonic theurgy, see Edsman 1940: 174–180.

intertextual web of the Hermetic discourse. But other decodings have also been tried.

## VI. Psychoanalyzing the Hermetic Discourse

In the foreword to his phenomenological study *The Forge and the Crucible. The Origins and Structures of Alchemy*, Mircea Eliade gives credit to Carl Gustav Jung and his analytic–psychological decoding of the alchemists' quest for the Philosopher's Stone and the *Elixir Vitae*.<sup>33</sup> Jung, according to Eliade, substantiates the soteriological purpose of alchemy, and has uncovered that the symbolism in the alchemical process is re-enacted in dreams and conversations of patients completely ignorant of alchemy (Eliade 1978: 11). Eliade, in this context, obviously accepts the claims of Jung concerning a collective unconscious and the existence of archetypes.

Jung's studies and theories of alchemy, which took up the last thirty years of his life and resulted in three substantial volumes in the collected works, are difficult both to describe and to evaluate. In them are mingled case–studies of patients whose dreams Jung has amplified<sup>34</sup> — *i.e.* compared with recurrent alchemical themes — studies of specific texts, and their religio–historic implications, philosophical discussions, *etc.*, Jung has, with a term taken from sixteenth century Hermetic literature, described the alchemists' quest as a *circumambulatio* — a wandering around certain themes that may lead to successive illumination — and he also uses this metaphor to describe how a patient works with the different subjects of his or her dreams (Jung 1968: 28).

In an article written for the Hebrew edition of the *Encyclopedia Hebraica* Jung has tried to recapitulate his thoughts, and takes his point of departure from the fact that even though the Late Antique alchemists had a considerable practical knowledge of the use of various substances, whether minerals or drugs, they had no real knowledge of chemistry proper. Instead, according to Jung, they used mythological motifs to 'explain' the un-

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<sup>33</sup> Wikström, in the otherwise interesting article *C G Jung som teolog*, has written rather abstrusely about Jung's view of alchemy, especially *Metallen hade kropp och själ och metallens själ kunde nås genom en tillsats. Att framställa denna tillsats skulle leda till fyndet av 'De Visas sten' etc.* A complicated Aristotelic and hylozoistic view of the elements cannot be described in such a simplistic way, and what does Wikström denote by *tillsats* — *added ingredient*? Wikström 1992: 56.

<sup>34</sup> The analytic–psychological correspondence to Eliadean phenomenology and its search for analogous patterns.

known chemical processes, and they also projected their unconscious contents onto these processes, and thereby constructed an alchemical philosophy which mirrored both their unconscious and their conscious world-views. This would explain an interesting feature of these texts; that on the one hand they repeat the sayings of the Ancients, and on the other allow free-flowing subjective fantasy. Jung is of the opinion that alchemical symbols are created both from traditions in a given culture, and from the unconscious (Jung 1986: 751–753).

In his studies Jung draws a parallel between the stages in the alchemical process and the stages in psychological maturing that he claims to take place in the *process of individuation*.<sup>35</sup> He compares the chaotic stage *Nigredo* with the struggle of the individual to make conscious his *shadow*, those parts of his personality that he cannot consciously acknowledge and therefore projects onto others. An example is a timid individual who always thinks that all others are constantly angry, because he projects his own aggressions onto others, thereby not making conscious and using his own aggressions in a constructive way.

The *Opus Alchemicum* shows for Jung the individuation of man, and in his work *Mysterium coniunctionis. Untersuchung über die Trennung und Zusammensetzung der seelischen Gegensätze der Alchemie* claims that the famous alchemical wedding (*Coniunctio Solis et Lunae*) symbolizes the highest stage in the process of individuation; *Selbstwerdung*, to unite unconscious and conscious in a new center in the individual, which is not the Ego. This new center of consciousness, called *the Self*, is characterized, according to Jung, by the coincidence of opposites; conscious and unconscious, man and woman, spirit and body, good and evil, *etc.*, and in their complete uniting in this higher synthesis. This correponds even to a loftier metaphysical entity *the archetype of the self* which for Jung seems to be a way of expressing the God of *Nichts* — the paradoxical God of the mystics (Jung 1950).

We can compare this with the outcome of the alchemical wedding in *Splendor Solis*, see illustr. 8 (fol. 32). A hermaphrodite, a complete man, a *rebis* to use the alchemical terminology, is set in beautiful natural scenery. It has a black robe and a white and red wing, alluding to the color–stages, and carries a round mirror and an egg. The mirror, which reflects the surroundings, is perhaps a visual hint of the common micro–macro correspondence with which the Hermetic literature is replete. The egg and its parts,

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<sup>35</sup> This term is influenced from the *principium individuationis* of scholastic philosophy, the principle of what constitutes and distinguishes one individual from another.

in the accompanying text, is likened to the four elements (shell = earth, the white = water, the membrane between shell and the white = air, the yolk = fire) and in the center of the yolk the fifth element, the quintessence, which has creative powers. *Thus an egg contains all the forces together with the material out of which perfect nature is created. And it must also be so in this noble Art* (Godwin's translation in Trismosin 1981:26).

### VII. Eco's Thinking About *Hermetic Semiosis* and the **Psycho-Analytical Decodings**

Eco, as has been stated in the introduction, presents a sketch of the semi-otic workings of second century Hermetism, which emphasizes the similarities he sees between this literature and some more extreme reader-oriented perspectives. A key to Eco's interpretation is the vital importance that he acknowledges micro- and macro-correspondences and the universal sympathy, as here below so in heaven above, as constituting the worldview of Hermetism. He writes:

It is only possible to speak of universal sympathy and likeness if, at the same time, the principle of non-contradiction is rejected. Universal sympathy is brought about by a godly emanation in the world, but at the origin of the emanation there is an unknowable One, who is the very seat of the contradiction itself. Neo-platonist Christian thought will try to explain that we cannot define God in clear-cut terms on account of the inadequacy of our language. Hermetic thought states that our language, the more ambiguous and multivalent it is, and the more it uses symbols and metaphors, the more it is particularly appropriate for naming a Oneness in which the coincidence of opposites occurs. But where the coincidence of opposites triumphs, the principle of identity collapses. *Tout se tient.* (Eco 1992: 32)

Eco, accordingly, interprets Hermetism as a negation of the classical Greek rationalism of Plato and Aristotle, in which knowledge meant understanding causes and the acceptance of the logical principles of identity ( $A=A$ ), non-contradiction and the excluded middle. In a worldview, the Hermetic for instance, characterized by sympathetic thinking, where a part of the human body is linked, on the basis of partial morphological and functional likeness to a plant, and that plant is said to resemble a star-constellation, etc., a continuous slippage of meaning occurs.<sup>36</sup> Every object in the universe refers to other objects in a secret way, writes Eco, in a progressive evolu-

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<sup>36</sup> For the physiognomic tradition, that manifest signs in the appearance of man or animal act as indices for their inner traits and constitution, see Broek 1987: 111–116).

tion toward a final secret. This can perhaps be called an infinitive regression of meaning, and it is Eco's opinion that this way of thinking transforms the view of the world into a linguistic phenomenon and at the same time denies language any power of communication (Eco 1992: 32).

It also seems that many things can be true at the same time, even if they contradict each other. The Hermetist has the attitude, according to Eco, that if the tractates tell the truth, even when they utter different opinions on a particular problem, then their each and every word must be an allegory, an allusion. Truth is revealed by vision, dream and oracle and is identified with what is not said or what is said obscurely to be read beyond or beneath an explicit meaning (Eco 1992: 30–32).

A Hermetic approach to texts, including modern deconstructivist and reader-oriented Hermetica is, according to Eco, characterized by an insistence that a text is an open-ended universe in which the reader can find infinite interconnections. Language shows, in this Hermetic view, that our thinking with its constant search for transcendental meaning is a failure, and that language itself cannot grasp a unique and pre-existing meaning. Eco writes with exuberant irony:

To salvage the text — that is, to transform it from an illusion of meaning to the awareness that meaning is infinitive — the reader must suspect that every line of it conceals another secret meaning; words, instead of saying, hide the untold; the glory of the reader is to discover that texts can say everything, except what their author wanted them to mean; as soon as a pretended meaning is discovered, we are sure that it is not the real one; the real one is the further one and so on and so forth; the hulics — the losers — are those who end the process by saying 'I understood'. (Eco 1992: 39)

Jung can be said — I want to argue, using Eco's way of analysis — to continue the Hermetic project by his constant use of *Hermetic semiosis*, that the intentions of the reader have triumphed, and, paradoxically, in the case of Jung, a reader with Hermetic leanings, resulted in that his analysis, including the process of individuation, is not a psychological analysis but an analogy to the Hermetic literature. It can be seen as a very erudite paraphrase, in which the soteriological tendencies of alchemy have been internalized in a supposed mental topography — the unconscious enveloped by the collective unconscious with its archetypes — which, paradoxically, is a continuation of well-known themes from Late Antique Neoplatonism, Hermetism, and Gnosticism: The *katabasis* from *Pleroma* of emanations (the individual struggling to find his own individuality) resulting in a fallen Creation with Man struggling to regain knowledge (consciousness) by liberation from the grip of fallen material nature. The regaining of knowledge

by undressing the material body and its sensations in an *anabasis* back to the restituted Completeness (*Selbstwerdung*).

I want to argue that Jung ought to be seen in the context of the esoteric parts of German romanticism, with its roots in Neoplatonism, and in Paracelsism, Hermetic *Naturphilosophie*, Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry, and in the mystical theologies of Nicholas Cusanus and Jakob Böhme. His interpretation of alchemy is congenial with the semiotic workings of the subject and it creates a world in which everything 'fits' according to a reader with a Jungian intention. The reader's intention is victorious over the intention of the text. Perhaps it can be said that Jung's alchemical studies are more an object of study for the historian of religions than an instrument that could be put to use in our academic discourse.

Furthermore, I think it would be wise to consider the chemical and/or the religious- soteriological decodings as primary and nearly always present in the hermetic-alchemical material. The psychoanalytical decoding is of a secondary nature and it is always juxtaposed to a religious-soteriological decoding. But these circumstances do not altogether diminish the fact that we can in Jung's work find very penetrating observations of the workings of Hermetic literature and of the psychological predicament of Mankind.

### VIII. Eco's Model of the Intentions of the Texts, Readers and Authors Used on the Hermetic Discourse

As a summary of what has been discussed, especially concerning the three main decodings of alchemy, I will use the following model of the intentions of the texts, readers and authors, proposed by Eco (1992: 45–66), which I have tried to graphically depict (see Fig. 1.)

The purpose of the model is to elucidate the relations between the intentions of readers, texts, and authors. What is then a text, and what is the intention of a text? The text, *Splendor Solis* (or Zosimos' *Of Virtue*, and of course, in extension, the whole of the Hermetic literature and other texts), is *a device conceived in order to produce its model reader*.<sup>37</sup> The decisive choice is then the type of model reader that is chosen, because, according to Eco, *the empirical reader is only an actor who makes conjectures about the kind of model reader postulated by the text*. Is it the text's intention to produce a chemical, a spiritual or a psychological model reader?

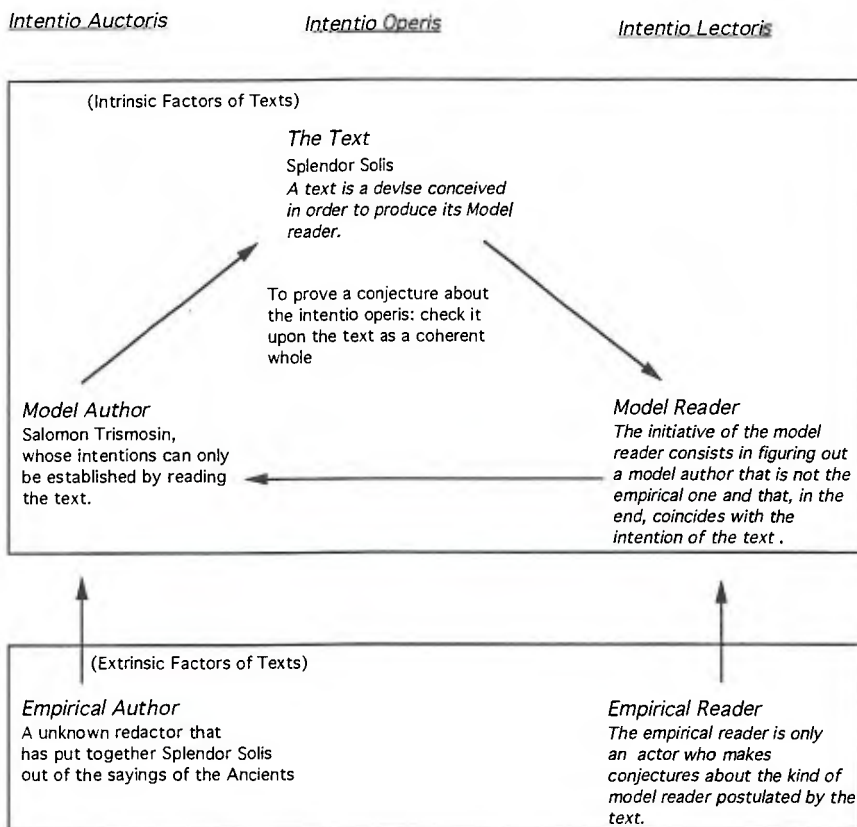
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<sup>37</sup> This and the following italicized citations are from Eco 1992: 64–66.



### Figure 1. Eco's Model of the Intentions of Texts, Readers, and Authors

Depicted graphically by Peter Södergård, and with relevant information concerning Salomon Trismosin's Splendor Solis incerted. All the citations from Eco are italicized.



The person who answers this intriguing question is the empirical reader, he or she is only an actor who makes conjectures about the kind of model reader postulated by the text.

In this article we have been confronted with some empirical readers which make conjectures about the dissimilar model readers that they propose the text is producing. Subsequently, we have a set of proposed model readers with different intentions; a chemical, spiritual, and psychological. These model reader seem almost to have come to life, due to the seduction of the illusive world of the narrative, and they declare unanimously that the model author's name is Salomon Trismosin. They have all figured out that the model author, Salomon Trismosin, is not the empirical writer of the text. But instead they have found out that the intention of the model author Salomon Trismosin, *in the end, coincides with the intention of the text.*

To prove a conjecture about the intention of the text, which is done by empirical readers, Eco prescribes a remedy that is common in hermeneutics, but he also gives it a Freudian flavor; *check it upon the text as a coherent whole. The internal textual coherence controls the uncontrollable drives of the reader.*

It is at this point that the special feature of the Hermetic discourse comes into focus: *Hermetic semiosis*, which I propose can be held responsible for the divergent readings that have been proposed, a continuum from a chemical reading to a soterialogical, and with a psychological reading which has been built upon the latter.<sup>38</sup> The intention of the text, whether *Splen-*

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<sup>38</sup> This also holds for the Freudian reading proposed by Herbert Silberer, which interpret alchemy and its symbols as symptoms of the Oedipal-complex, erupting with regressive sexuality (Silberer 1914: 33–114). This decoding, and the reading of a taoist alchemical tractate translated by the Sinolog Richard Wilhelm inspired C. G. Jung's interpretation according to Jung's own autobiography (Jung 1979: 230). Another psychological interpretation was proposed by the Dane Johannes Fabricius in an exquisitely illustrated volume. Fabricius, when describing the individuation process on the basis of the woodcuts in the *Rosarium philosophorum* (in *Artis auriferae*, Basel 1610), even surpasses Jung's own imagination, and writes: *After penetrating the reflecting and autistic surface of his queen's well, the king changes from Narcissus into King Oedipus, gradually activating the birth trauma as he attempts to penetrate the royal well and its vaginal libido organization. At the bottom of the well the king reaches the mercurial ocean and its uterine libido organization, thereby fusing into hermaphroditic unity with his queen in the water of life* (Fabricius 1976: 226). The psychological interpretation functions here as a totalizing discourse which sees psychological processes in

*dor Solis*, or Zosimos' *Of Virtue*, is not univocal, but decidedly equivocal. It appears to be contrived with a built in ambiguity due to the Hermetic world view. This world view, dominated by correspondences, creates, as Eco has stated, a universe replete with infinitive signs pointing to other signs in a continuous slippage of meaning. The final sign is always just another sign pointing to a sign.

To sum up my views: I — the narrator in the text of this article in the *Scripta Instituti Donneriani* — I am only an actor making hypotheses about the model reader I conjecture *Splendor Solis* is producing. My hypothesis is that the name of the model author, Salomon Trismosin, functions as an indication that the tractate is creating a model reader, who is reading the Hermetic discourse as intending both a chemical, and a soteriological reading. It is possible to misread with Jung, and to conjecture that the text of *Splendor Solis* is producing a reader intending on the individuation-process, but this is an overinterpretation which the text as a coherent whole repudiates.

The chemical and religious-soteriological interpretations are primary and encoded in the text. The *intentio operis* consists of them. Jung's decoding of the alchemical transmutation process with its three or four stages as a homologization — reflection — of the process of individuation is building upon the religious-soteriological interpretation and is therefore of a secondary nature. It can be considered as a congenial paraphrase of Hermetic theology using concepts emanating from the same tradition.

I — the narrator who is addressing you, the narratee, in this article — hereby performatively end it with the intention that you will be its model reader, who figures out a model author writing about the semiosis of the Hermetic discourse.

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each and every thing, taking leave of any regard for the alchemical text as a coherent whole, and instead offers a psychologizing reduction.

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## “Everything Created by God Is Pure”

### The Image of God in Emanuel Vigeland’s Programme of Art in His *Tomba Emmanuelle* in Oslo

*Quicquid Deus creavit purum est* — Everything created by God is pure. The Norwegian artist Emanuel Vigeland (1875–1948) had these words inscribed above the entrance to his mausoleum, *Tomba Emmanuelle*, in Oslo (Fig.1). They may be interpreted as a type of creed, exemplified and illustrated by the paintings and sculptures on the theme of *Vita* (life) which Vigeland had completed in the mausoleum from 1927 up until his death more than 20 years later.

In the following I shall attempt to explain the nature of the image of God visualized by Emanuel Vigeland when he carried out the artistic decoration of the burial chamber-to-be. I shall describe and interpret the large painting on the far wall as well as the accompanying text. To start with, I shall offer a brief description of the artist’s background, with special attention to his upbringing and childhood environment, which I see as crucial in the development of his view of life. This presentation is based on many years’ study of original sources concerning Emanuel Vigeland’s life and works. I should, however, like to point out that the article is merely a first attempt at an interpretation of his image of God, and that in my research I am primarily endeavouring to reach a psychological understanding of Vigeland as a man and as an artist.

Emanuel Vigeland was born in 1875 into a craftsman’s family in the south of Norway. His father was a respected and skilful cabinet-maker with his own workshop whose life, unfortunately, took a dramatic and tragic turn for the worse. At this point in time a revivalist pietist movement was sweeping over the south and west of Norway and in the 1870s had reached Mandal (Dehli 1932: 74–75), the small town where Emanuel grew up together with his three elder brothers. Their father was deeply involved in religious life, and as pietism was strict and serious, the home environment also became so. The second eldest brother, Gustav, who was

to become Norway's most famous sculptor, looks back upon this period in time in his memoirs. He tells of how it was often packed with people in their home while their father was reading from the Bible or singing psalms. Everybody had to sit as quiet as a mouse, especially since their father's violent and dominant character did not tolerate any mischief or lack of attention (Wikborg 1983: 20).

As for their mother, she also seems to have participated in religious life, even if in a more passive fashion. Like most of the others in the community, she went to prayer meetings, which in reality were religious assemblies at which a lay-preacher spoke. These sermons were characterized by a concrete and drastic imagery, intended to penetrate even the most apathetic of souls.<sup>1</sup> Emanuel, who had to accompany his mother to these meetings, well remembered even in old age the horrors the preacher threatened his audience with if they did not lead a righteous life: they would be doomed to the eternal fires of hell. The same threat of punishment and retribution came Emanuel's way in religious instruction at school and caused him much anguish (Vigeland s. a.: 5-6).

This anguish must have been accentuated through the change in personality which his father underwent. The latter was not able to cope with the demanding religious life in the long run and started to drink instead, abandoning his faith. At that time Emanuel was about six years old. His father, who was already subject to a violent temper, now became completely uncontrolled and disregarded every social consideration.<sup>2</sup> He turned violent towards wife and child (Vigeland s. a.: 7-8), neglected his work, and ran into debt to the extent that he had to be placed under guardianship.<sup>3</sup> His sexual escapades resulted in a child with a local girl.<sup>4</sup>

The mother responded to her husband's violent style of life by periodically leaving him when things became too difficult, moving to her father's

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<sup>1</sup> The expression *brimstone preacher* was often used about those speakers who depicted every kind of horror in hell as punishment for their sinful listeners. This included being stricken by fire and brimstone as described in Revelation 14: 10.

<sup>2</sup> Elisaeus Thorsen's lack of discretion (we are referring to E. Vigeland's father, that is) expressed itself among other things in his opening of an unlicensed pub on the ground floor of his and the family's house. There he himself served beer and schnapps to his customers. On 11.11.1884 he was fined for the illicit sale and serving of schnapps. Letter to the writer of this article from Statsarkivet in Kristiansand 24.5.1989, JNR 881/1989, A544/MLM.

<sup>3</sup> The father was placed under guardianship on account of drunkenness on 30.3.1886. Information supplied by the Vigeland Museum, Oslo.

<sup>4</sup> The child, a son, was born on 25.2.1884. Letter to the writer of this article from Statsarkivet in Kristiansand 20.3.1991. JNR91/57/3, A544/MLM.

home at a farm outside Mandal. Little Emanuel went along too — he loved his grandfather, who was a quiet and friendly man (Vigeland s. a.: 1).

Emanuel's father ended his life abruptly, dying of tuberculosis when the boy was ten years old. In adult life Vigeland never wanted to return to Mandal; memories of life there were far too painful. In the same way as he regarded his grandfather's home as a paradise, he regarded Mandal as hell on earth.<sup>5</sup> His father had offended and humiliated the entire family with his behaviour. In such a small community as Mandal, where everybody knew everyone else and kept track of each other's doings, Emanuel must have felt a tremendous degradation.

His father's sudden change and wild style of life affected every member of the family and must also have exercised a disturbing influence on the development of Emanuel's personality. His father had previously been the boy's chief male model, but following the radical change was hardly able to satisfy this need (Freud 1955: 105–110). Through the contact with his grandfather, however, Emanuel obtained another male model for a few years until the old man's death in 1884, something which evidently meant a lot to him.

One has the impression, in viewing Vigeland's artistic work, of meeting up with two different artistic personalities. On the one hand we have the pious church artist who decorated a series of churches in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, with stained glass windows his forte.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand we have the strongly self-conscious and partly challenging creator of the mausoleum *Tomba Emmanuelle*. Neither side of the artist's personality seems to have anything to do with the other. This may be a consequence of a disturbed ego development.<sup>7</sup>

In 1926, when Emanuel Vigeland had just turned 50 and stood at the height of his artistic career as a church painter, he had the chapel-like building erected which was later to become his mausoleum.<sup>8</sup> It was built in order to serve as a studio, and what Vigeland had in mind was to make it a museum for his works after his death. It is possible that he had intended right from the start being buried in this studio-cum-museum. He originally planned simply to decorate the interior with a fresco on the south wall.

<sup>5</sup> The matter of E. Vigeland's attitude towards Mandal is based on Vigeland's notations among his remaining property at Slemdal, Oslo.

<sup>6</sup> Concerning E. Vigeland's work for the church, see Albrektsen 1976.

<sup>7</sup> See Mangs och Martell 1995 for a concise presentation of how psychoanalysis looks at the development of the individual.

<sup>8</sup> Concerning the mausoleum, its origins and the work of art, see Wadell 1986; see Wadell 1993.

Some years later, however, he extended the programme to include all of the walls. In 1942 he converted the space into his own burial chamber by blocking up all the windows and apertures with the exception of the entrance on the north side. He gave the building a name of its own, calling it as the Etruscans would *Tomba Emmanuelle*. His ashes rest in an egg-shaped natural rock which he had prepared as an urn and placed over the entrance to the chamber.

Vigeland composed a text in addition entitled *Vita*, which was to have its particular place in the mausoleum.<sup>9</sup> It is a sort of confession of faith with reference to the entire work of art and comprises 13 paragraphs in praise of God the Creator. It was evidently written in the 1940s after the decoration work in effect had been finished. Its message also tells us how the artist wished to be seen by posterity. As with the inscription above the entrance, the text reads in Latin. The following English translation is from the original Norwegian:

*Mighty is God. His is the power, and the will of men and women  
 expires and life is created.  
 For the sake of this life must the strongest prevail, lest  
 our human race perish and the earth remain barren and void.  
 That which in blind sensual ecstasy is thus created, neither of them knows  
 of it,  
 for they are merely slaves to humanity and servants of their God.  
 Present is God when the first struggle in woman's womb takes place,  
 and seed by the thousand speed to reach the ovum.  
 For thousands of centuries they have striven to unite,  
 life to create and the world to shape.  
 And why ? why ? oh why ?  
 Greatest is the miracle when the child's head appears from within  
 the warm womb of the mother : God's masterpiece.  
 Weary but blissful she lay, following the painful pangs of birth,  
 while the father raises the child aloft towards God.  
 No power can halt the flow of life, for God accounts for all.  
 In conception God is He who gives, and in death it is He who takes back.  
 When thus my hour is nigh, my body weary and my mind dull,  
 let me then face the sun and quietly pass away.  
 Fire so pure, receive my body so that, fully cleansed, it can meet God.*

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<sup>9</sup> The written text, which is printed on parchment and framed in copperwork, has never been given a permanent place but is housed in a room adjoining the mausoleum. Text page reproduced in Wadell 1993: 102.

*Lay these ashes, which once was a life for better or for worse,  
in the ovary-shaped stone, in memory of my dear MOTHER.  
And underneath, on the golden base of the urn, shine the letters GOD.*

Right from the moment the visitor enters the mausoleum through a narrow passage, Vigeland demonstrates his desire to dictate and shape the mood. The headroom is so low that the visitor has to bend his knees and lower his head to enter. Consciously or not, he is obliged to make a bow, as it were, to the artist whose ashes lie in the urn above the doorway.

Inside the narrow passage a room comes into view whose spaciousness is felt, it seems, rather than observed. Here within a strange mood prevails, as if one were in a large, underground cave, dimly lit here and there, but not sufficiently to be able to form a clear idea of how far the space stretches. The acoustics add to the peculiarity of the mood. The least movement gives rise to a series of echoes which rumble and roll through the room and cause the visitor to be on his guard.

As soon as the eye has grown accustomed to the pale light issuing from the floodlighting, one discovers that the walls and ceiling are covered with pictures painted directly on the plaster. They represent a multitude of naked figures which appear to be hovering in space, filling the room as if it were the very universe.

Let us concentrate now on the picture on the far wall. This was the one with which Vigeland started to decorate the room in the autumn of 1927. It should immediately be pointed out, however, that the painting we now see before us is not from the 1920s. That one suffered serious frost damage during the war in the winter months of the 1940s. Vigeland saw fit quite simply to demolish the wall and produce a fresh painting, which is what we now have before us. The motif is the same as in the original version, but the composition itself has been changed. It is more complex and has more consciously been arranged as a whole. Above all, however, a new powerful sense of movement and illusion of depth is present, of great significance to the overall impression.<sup>10</sup>

In the centre of the composition, high up on the wall, a man is seen kneeling against a powerfully illuminated background (Fig. 2). He is holding a baby in each of his hands, lifting them up towards the light. Below, on the ground in front of him, a woman has just given birth and the newborn baby is still wrapped in its foetal skin. A host of babies are swarming

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<sup>10</sup> The comparison between the composition from the 1920s and the one from the 1940s is based on photographs which E. Vigeland had taken of his works of art by the Norwegian photographer O. Vaering. Photographic plates in the Vaering Archives, Oslo.



around the man's thighs. This group forms a kind of hub around which, like a tremendous wheel, a mass of people move in a clockwise direction from left to right. To the left, men and women are engaged in sexual intercourse in the midst of pregnant women and other women giving birth. Towards the edge of the mass movement and a little lower down on the right, children are romping with their mothers while the men, evidently already out of the game, tumble like dying insects down into the murky depths below.

The first impression that comes to mind for an art historian confronted by this composition is that the model for it seems to have been a picture of *The Last Judgment* in the spirit of Rubens. In place of the Supreme Judge, the Son of Man, however, Vigeland has chosen the figure of a man worshipping, bearing his own features. The uplifted face, closed eyes and open mouth suggest an inspired and trance-like state of mind (Fig. 3). It is possible to imagine this inspiration proceeding from the fountain of light which spreads like a cloak from behind the man, enveloping him (cf. Psalm 104: 2). We are led to associate with the halo surrounding the figure of Christ in *The Last Judgment*, for example in Michelangelo's painting in the Sistine Chapel. Such an interpretation of the meaning of the light in this picture is not, however, unambiguous. Vigeland has probably been toying here with representations of the worship of the sun and of the sun as the source of energy of life.<sup>11</sup> My support for such a supposition lies partly with other works by the artist and partly with the *Vita* text mentioned earlier from the 1940s.

The same two human beings as on the mausoleum wall also appear in a large painting probably from the 1930s, this time against a background showing a brilliant sunrise which occupies almost half the surface (Fig. 4). The scene evidently depicts Paradise. The man and the woman appear to be the first couple on earth and their offspring the first human baby. With the father lifting up the child and the rays of the sun filling the sky, a connection is forged between the sun and a new life. The sun is the creator of life. The sun is life itself.

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<sup>11</sup> Representations of the sun were common in both the visual arts and literature from the turn of the century and several decades into the present century. Particular mention may be made of Edvard Munch's decoration of the University Festival Hall in Oslo, where the sun supplies the central motif. This painting, as well as the preceding studies, particularly *The Human Mountain*, exhibits ideas and thoughts also present in E. Vigeland's painting on the far wall of the mausoleum. Concerning Munch's representations of the sun, see Svenaeus 1973: 268–281.



Fig. 1. E. Vigeland's studio, at a future date his mausoleum, Slemdal, Oslo. State before 1942. Photo: Vaering.



Fig. 2. E. Vigeland's mausoleum, Slemdal, Oslo. The far wall. Photo: Vaering.



Fig. 3. E. Vigeland's mausoleum, Slemdal, Oslo. The central motif of the far wall. Photo: Bo Harringer, 1989.



Fig. 4. E. Vigeland: Man lifting up his new born baby towards the sun. Oil on canvas, 205 x 220 cm. E. Vigeland's museum, Slemdal, Oslo. Photo: Fritz Solvang, 1995.

In his *Vita* text Vigeland comments on the scene with the man and the woman in the following way: *Weary but blissful she lay following the painful pangs of birth while the father raises the child aloft towards God.* The reference to God here might well coincide with Christian trains of thought in the same way as the halo around the God-worshipper. In an earlier version of the text, however, it says that the man lifts the child up to the *sun*.<sup>12</sup> This suggests that *God* and *sun* may be synonymous concepts. In the final version the sun is also mentioned in an eschatological context when Vigeland speaks about his own death and requests to be able to *face the sun and quietly pass away*. In this case the sun appears not only to stand for life but also for rebirth, in the same way as in many pre-Christian or non-Christian religions.<sup>13</sup>

The significance of the sun in both picture and text in the examples mentioned leads me to the hypothesis that Vigeland was, directly or indirectly, influenced by the German biologist Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919).<sup>14</sup> Haeckel's popularization of Darwin's theory of evolution had an enormous success. His books were published in one edition after another. A number of them were available in cheap popular editions and he was soon translated into other languages. It is not, however, a pure distillation of Darwinism which Haeckel offers us. Instead he combined Darwin's scientific ideas with notions taken from German romanticism and, not least, from Goethe. Thus he has achieved a peculiar blend of science and religion, a doctrine he called monism.<sup>15</sup>

According to Haeckel, the sun was the source of life, a tenet supported by the current scientific belief that the Earth originated through separation from the Sun and that organic life on earth had only been able to evolve under the influence of sunlight. Man himself was a consequence of this and his existence in the last resort depended on the light and heat supplied by the sun (Haeckel 1925: 229–230). Haeckel was a fervent opponent of all

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<sup>12</sup> A handwritten manuscript in which the word God has been crossed out and replaced with the word sun. Manuscript among E. Vigeland's remaining property at Slemdal, Oslo.

<sup>13</sup> Burial grounds preserved from neolithic times, such as Newgrange in Ireland, indicate that the entire construction was planned in accordance with the movements of the sun. Possibly it was thought that the sun would awaken the dead. See Green 1991: 30–31.

<sup>14</sup> I should like to express my warm thanks to Professor Emeritus Benkt-Erik Benktson, who many years ago drew my attention to the fact that it is probably Ernst Haeckel's ideas which are reflected in the *Vita* text of Emanuel Vigeland.

<sup>15</sup> In recent times interest has centred on Haeckel to investigate the extent to which his ideas were borrowed and used by Nazism. See Gasman 1971.



metaphysical religions, particularly Christianity. He considered, however, the worship of the sun to be the most worthy of all theistic forms of belief and easy to conform with monism. In his book *The Riddle of the Universe* he tells how deeply moved he was when he saw Parsees in India offering their devotion to the sun at sunrise and sunset (Haeckel 1925: 230).

In view of the foregoing, I should like to interpret the flood of light behind the worshipper as the primitive force in our existence, the source of life itself: the sun, in fact. According to Haeckel, the sun may also be referred to as God since God and nature in his view are one and the same (see below). This will explain why in the *Vita* text Vigeland used the concepts of sun and God synonymously. The representation on the far wall would now appear to be intelligible. With the sun as the focal point, the masses move in an everlasting rotation around the universe. The sun is their creator and the sun controls them and their degree of fertility. The worshipper occupies a quite particular place in the system, which is the natural right of the divinely inspired artist.<sup>16</sup> He might also be dubbed *son of the Sun*, praying for a blessing for himself and for his children, who may then represent his artistic work.

Further passages in the *Vita* text show that Vigeland professes himself an adherent of a popular-Darwinian conception of life with elements of Christian ideas. It seems hardly possible, however, to make a clear distinction between the two notions. He describes man's existence as a struggle involving the survival of the fittest in which reproduction is the task at hand in order to keep the flame of life alive (cf. Haeckel 1925: 220–221). It is also clear that, in his view, mankind is without a free will.<sup>17</sup> Men and women are controlled by a "blind intoxication of the mind" and are slaves to the continual reproduction of the species. This train of thought links up with the materialistic ideas expressed by Haeckel and for which Darwinism forms a basis.

When Vigeland describes how the male sperm cells aspire to reach the ovum, it sounds like a repeat of Haeckel explaining how millions of male ciliated cells swarm around the female ovum (Haeckel 1925: 52). Since Vigeland at the same time insists on the omnipotence of God, however, and that in its urge towards reproduction mankind is the *servant of God* (a common Biblical expression), it is doubtful whether he had really been thinking along the materialistic lines of Darwin and Haeckel in which God

<sup>16</sup> E. Vigeland was impressed by the fact that the Swedish archbishop, Nathan Söderblom, (1866–1931), whom he highly appreciated, addressed him in a letter with the words *Dear divinely inspired artist*. Letter 5.12.1922 in Upsala University Library.

<sup>17</sup> Ernst Haeckel rejects the idea of a free will. Haeckel 1925: 190, 285.

constitutes an abstract concept. For Darwin the great *selective divinity* was the same as his *struggle for life* (Haeckel 1925: 215). Haeckel's descriptions of God, when seen in isolation, can easily be confused with Christian ideas, and the similarity is perhaps intentional. Haeckel speaks, for example, of God as omnipotent and the ultimate cause of all around us: God is the creator, in other words, the origin of everything. God and nature are one and God's spirit and force are present in all natural phenomena (Haeckel 1866: 451–452). Haeckel also insists that everlasting life in accordance with Christian tenets is a superstitious notion (Haeckel 1925: 160). From a scientific point of view, however, both matter and energy are indestructible and the entire cosmos therefore immortal (Haeckel 1908: 24).

With Haeckel it is never a matter of a personal god (Haeckel 1925: 222–223), although this, in spite of everything, may well be the case with Vigeland. This is quite plainly revealed in the eleventh paragraph of the *Vita* text in which he prays for the fire to take charge of his body after his death *so that, fully cleansed, it can meet God*. He clearly imagines a personal resurrection and an encounter with a personal god. These are pious Christian thoughts, such as his grandfather would have nourished. A Christian train of thought is also reflected in the Norwegian wording which translates as *In conception God is He who gives and in death it is He who takes back*. The quotation almost coincides with a verse from the Book of Job, which reads: *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord* (Job.1: 21).

What Vigeland has in mind when writing the name of God at the bottom of the urn is less easy to guess. Perhaps, in the spirit of Haeckel, he wishes to emphasize the presence of God in all matter: the fact that all matter is God, even the rock itself. Possibly we are dealing with an act of magic. The one does not have to exclude the other.

In Sigmund Freud's words, *psycho-analysis... has shown us that a personal God is, psychologically, nothing other than an exalted father* (Freud 1957: 123). This means that he is a copy of the father, with all the magnificence in which he once appeared to the small child (Freud 1964: 163). We will remember that Emanuel's father was still hard at work and involved in his religious activities during the youngest son's first five years of life. The memory of this strong, strict, indeed fearful father, prevailing over all and everyone, is at the root of Emanuel Vigeland's image of God. What is notable is the absence of any expression of warmth and love. There was, however, something else about his father which provoked the sense of anguish in the child. The ambiguous and ambivalent picture of God in which Vigeland confuses Darwinian/monistic and Christian trains of thought may



indicate that he was trying with scientific support to get to grips with anguish-laden traits of a sexual nature in the father image. He attempted to rationalize them with the help of science, thereby rendering them less menacing.

When Vigeland looks forward to a personal encounter with God after death this, in my view, is ultimately a reconciliation with his father which he is hoping to attain. It is a father who did not acknowledge his son with his love and who therefore must have saddled him with a grave sense of guilt.

Emanuel Vigeland found an excellent self-image of his relationship with his father in *The Prodigal Son*, as described in Luke 15: 11–32. As a child he must have heard the parable many times, since it was among the most popular of the revivalist preachers' narratives (Wadell 1993: 113 note 7). It was above all the return to the paternal home, with the father embracing and blessing his son, which became Vigeland's favourite motif. He repeated it in each and every church that he decorated. *The Prodigal Son* is also the self-image which unites the church artist with the creator of the mausoleum. Vigeland has namely used Auguste Rodin's celebrated sculpture of *The Prodigal Son* as a model for the figure of the worshipper, in all probability unaware of having done so.

The ambiguous picture of God with its blend of Darwinian/monistic and Christian representations is also exemplified in the already mentioned motto over the entrance to the *Tomba Emmanuelle*. The text is written in Latin, the old language of the western European church and a language which also stood for learning and wisdom.

It is not only, however, the form of language which has been taken from the Bible. The choice of words and the means of expression have also been borrowed, from I Timothy 4:4, in which Paul writes *...for everything created by God is good*. Vigeland replaces *good* with *pure* without regard to context and allusion in Paul. The apostle is referring to food while Vigeland's subject is the body and sexuality as depicted in his burial chamber.

There is hardly any support in the Bible for the view expressed here by Vigeland. He would seem to have fetched it from Haeckel, who brings serious charges against Christianity for its contempt for women and for degrading woman and considering intercourse with her as an impure act (Haeckel 1925: 291–292). Haeckel's point is that physical intercourse is as important as the spiritual, and he is of the opinion that "the more highly advanced a civilization, the more one in fact acknowledges the ideal value of sexual love". He finds support for this in his claim that "woman is the inspiring source of the highest achievements of art and poetry". Vigeland

thus assimilates Haeckel's view of sexuality, transferring it to his image of God, which thereby takes the shape of a monistic god, clad in Christian clothing.

The motto *Quicquid Deus creavit purum est* by its very position serves as an invocation for the artist. It is there to protect him and his works from condemnation by his fellow beings. Nobody shall be bold enough to assail him or that which he has created.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> On a pencil drawing depicting a couple making love and a female nude in various postures, E. Vigeland made a notation which belongs to the same world of ideas as the mausoleum and its paintings. It reads, in translation from the Norwegian: *When you see a naked human body and are vexed at what you see, then reproach God for what He has created, if you dare.* The drawing, 334 x 217mm, among E. Vigeland's remaining property at Slemdal, Oslo.

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O W E W I K S T R Ö M

## ***Darsan* (to See) Lord Shiva in Varanasi**

### **Visual Processes and the Representation of God by Seven Ricksha-Drivers**

#### **Introduction**

In spite of its effort to be transculturally relevant, the psychology of religion is quite ethno- or rather Western-centric. This becomes very clear when one tries to "translate" Indian folk religiosity into concepts taken from mainline theories; i.e. social, cognitive or psychoanalytical psychology of religion. Not only do the norms and values differ, but the very ontological assumptions underlying the categories in which the researcher understand differs fundamentally from the internal Hindu anthropological and epistemological apriori. For example, their words of the psyche include contextuality, from time to space, to ethics to groups. The subtle interrelatedness of the divine, spiritual and the mundane is obvious (Geertz 1973). It includes the flows and exchanges of substances within and between persons with minimal outer boundaries.

The psychological makeup of persons in societies so civilizationally different as India is embedded in fundamentally distinct principles of these cultures and the social patterns and child rearing that these principles shape (Marsella et al 1985). Therefore it is clear that a western scholar and an Indian devotee are quite different, not only simply that they see things differently, coming from varied cultures, but that the very inner emotional-cognitive makeup is culturally constructed in different ways (Roland 1989). Of course this will "disturb" the interaction between interviewer and interviewee, the scholar and the pious man. In order to understand the psychological dynamics in folk religiosity, I think that the researcher has to re-examine and be aware of the way he uses the theoretical models in cross-cultural psychological hermeneutics. In the context of this conference on art and religion I would like to discuss the role of the visual and behavioural dimensions of the Indian religiosity which in my opinion has not so

far been taken seriously enough in the psychology of religion (Devereux 1978).

There are profound intrinsic interrelationships between the cultural conceptualizations of human nature, the psychological makeup of the individual and the nature of interpersonal relationships in a given culture (Hallowell 1955; Spiro 1965). The western impregnated concepts “self”, “identity”, “belief” or “faith” as scholarly terms for the religious man must in an Indian context be replaced or at least supplemented by other terms, words that can do justice to the social, ritual and perceptual processes behind the experienced reality character of Lord Shiva. In order to understand the reciprocal and dynamic relation between the believer and the god, a researcher has to take into consideration the role of visual perception and movements inside the sacred ritual room (Eck 1985). To actually stand in front of a site or inside a temple in order to *see* and to *be seen* by the blessing face of the deity or a symbol for the deity is an integrated part of the worship. From a psychological point of view the Sanskrit term *Darsán* (to see and to be seen) is of interest.

### **Darsán Lord Shiva in Banares**

This paper is based upon six weeks’ observations and interviews with riksha-drivers of Banaras, who regularly came to the small *Kashi Kedaratem-pel* close to the Ganges to “take Darsán” of Lord Shiva and other deities (Eck 1983; Katz 1993). I will limit this paper to just one aspect of their religious behaviour — the way they visually interacted with a symbol of Shiva, during working hours by stopping for a few minutes outside small sites in town and in the evening in the temple.

Outside the Pradeep Hotel, in central Banaras, I met ten riksha-drivers who allowed me to follow them to their daily *puja*, to observe and interview them about their religion. Out of them I chose to follow more closely those seven drivers who regularly visited the Ganges in the evenings. All of the drivers were living in or just outside Banaras, all had families and were married. They had from two to six children. Five of them spoke good English. A translator, a student from the Department of Psychology at Benares Hindu University (BHU), joined the project. The interviews were undertaken during the day — where I could follow one or two — and in the evenings in relation to the *arati*, where I could observe and talk to them collectively. I took a lot of notes. They were written down later and presented to the drivers so they could complete or change the interviews. (In a full

report I will give more space to methodological questions, hermeneutic perspectives and empirical findings.)

The Kashikedara temple in the southern sector of the city of Banaras is called Kedara Khanda. It is a river temple sitting on the top of an impressing ghat high above the water's edge on a long hill. From the river the temple is distinguished by its vertical red and white stripes, which indicate the South Indian hand by the temple's management, and by the many morning bathers. After bathing in the Ganges, people climb the broad steps into the riverside door of the temple, carrying the brass pots of Ganges water which they will offer in the worship of Kedareshvara. There are a lot of Shiva lingams outside and on the threshold of the temple. Inside it is a dark interior court. Around it there is a multitude of tiny shrines, most of them to Shiva lingas. Guarded by Shiva's bull Nandi is the *sanctum sanctorum*. The Linga of Kedara contained within this dark chamber is not an ordinary linga but rather a lumpish outcrop of rock with a white line through it. According to the tradition, this was not established by human hands, but was an unusual, "self manifest" appearance of Lord Shiva. To this very temple my drivers came regularly, every afternoon for 20–25 minutes' puja. They brought flowers, water and butter and from the temple priest they recieved their *tika*.

According to my informants, the main reason to visit the temple was "to take" Darsán. The same concept was used for the small glance they made at a site or a *Nandi* or a *Lingam* waiting for a customer or after the midday rest. A common theme for my informants was the importance of seeing the images of the deity regularly and very concretely— either Krishna, Durga, Visnu or Sarasvati as paintings or statues — present close to the sanctum of the temple. The central part of their ritual therefore was to stand in the presence of the god and to behold the image with their own eyes, not only to look, but above all to be observed. Psychologically speaking, this seemed to be an opportunity for the driver to be confirmed as a religious individual and thereby to strengthen his *spiritual identity*. This identity is not related to customers, friends, family roles linked to the social status of their society, but to a reality that transcended ordinary life — very often the object of reverence was Lord Shiva, the god of Varanasi and especially of Kashi Kedara temple.

Through their eyes they gain the blessings of the divine and that blessing followed them, but was also reinforced in their daily life. When the drivers stopped working, waiting outside the hotels or the centre when they bought some flowers or poured some waters on Shiva lingam, they went to take darsan (Janaki 1990).



But seeing the Lord is not initiated by the worshipper. Rather, the deity presents itself to be seen in his image as a sacred perception. The prominence of the interaction of man and god through the eyes instead of through the ears, as in western traditions like Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu deities, also reminds us of the reciprocal character of this experience. It is not only the worshipper who sees the deity; the deity sees the worshipper as well. For example, the gaze which falls from the newly opened eyes of the statue of a deity is said to be so powerful that it must first fall upon some pleasing offering, such as sweets, or upon a mirror where it may see its own reflection. The gaze is filled with power.

The experiential part of this Darsán indicates clearly that "seeing through the eyes" has not only perceptive but also cognitive and tactile dimensions. Darsán is described both as a form of touching as well as a form of knowing because God is eminently visible. Thus, it is a sensuous piety. One touches the image of the deity with one's hand (*sparsa*) and one also touches the limbs of one's own body in order to establish the presence of various deities (*nyasa*). One hears the sacred sounds of the mantra (*sravana*).

In the ritual the drivers have the gestures of humility, bowing, kneeling, prostration, and also touching the feet of the statues or of the holy men. They utilize the whole range of intimate and ordinary domestic acts, which are simple but important, cooking, serving food, dressing, undressing, perfumes, putting on. It is not only an attitude of honour but also an attitude of affection in the range of ritual acts and gestures utilized in the treatment of the image — either the statue or the lingam. In that way this is a kind of empirical theology.

It was common in puja offer flowers and water, to take *prasada*, to get some food prepared by the priests (*pujaris*) who are designated for that purpose. *Upacaras* i.e. offers can also be the waving of the fan and the fly-whisk, and the rite of circumambulation is also an *upacara*, since it shows honour to the deity. But especially the flame, a camphor light, a five-wicked oil lamp was important before one was put aside after a day (Fuller 1992).

What was also interesting was that the drivers claimed that through their Darsán, Lord Shiva was in turn kept alive. It was an obligation to see him at least once every day, otherwise he was not only disappointed but he could even disappear. During my visit, Banares was visited by a famous Sanyasin and all the drivers went to see him. He, too, was a living symbol or an incarnation of the value placed upon renunciation.

## Visual Religiosity and Psychological Understanding

Both interviews and observations confirmed to a very high degree that the behavioural/ritual, the olfactory, dramatic, the tactile and the perceptive dimensions of the ritual are of immense importance. When one searches for valid models for a psychological understanding, these *non-cognitive dimensions* of religiosity must be taken seriously. The Sanskrit term Darsán — to see and to be seen — as an emic religious concept, must be linked to the more social scientific language of visual hermeneutic and psychological semiotics. In the terms of D W Winnicott and E H Erikson, the symbol of the god and the regular returning to be seen by the god is one of the psychological wellsprings of the dual character of the religious experience; the ritual of confirmation of a relation to an aspect that transcends ordinary life on the transitional space (Pruyser 1974; Rizutto 1979).

One crucial observation stemming from theories of psychology that elucidates the folk religiosity, especially the role of *arati* or *puja* of many Indians, is what I would like to label the *visual dimension of theology*. The rituals in the Kashi Kedara temple provide stylized behavioural patterns where partipators act and react in relation to the symbol for the transcendence, in my examples the Shiva *Lingam*, his bull *Nandi* or a statue.

In western verbal religious traditions these visual and behavioural elements always have to compete, so to speak, with the cognitive content of the dogma, a preaching of a priest or the systematic thoughts of the theologians. In the *puja* or in the *arati*, and above all in the informants' stories of why they undertook the *puja*, there is a clear experiential *interplay* between both the iconic and un-iconic symbols of Shiva (especially the Shiva *lingam*) and the individual coming to the temple to take Darsán (Wulff 1982). The visitor comes to see, to smell, to touch, to dress, to feed, etc., Lord Shiva. But at the same time Lord Shiva sees, blesses and comforts the visitor of the temple without a mediating preacher or priest explaining things in a cognitive manner. In that way the symbol of Shiva is simultaneously both a *reciever* of the reverence from the pious man and the *giver* of blessing. This *interaction* in the meeting with the deity is to a very low degree talked about or reflected over during the rituals, but instead it is dramatized and experienced through all the senses. Thus, the rituals are to a high degree a dramatic, visual or perceptual undertaking more than a cultivating or reformulating of "inner beliefs" (Wikström 1990). And therefore I think it is wise to relate an *emic* Hindu term for what is going on in the temples and shrines to the *ethic* concepts of psychological theory.

The Sanskrit concept *Darsán* can thus be understood as a kind of theological/mythological expression of what a psychologist can interpret as a role interaction between a symbol for transcendence and the individual. *Darsán* is therefore important, not only on a historic, semantic or a descriptive level, but as a term for a basic psychological condition for the experience of and the maintenance of the reality of the deity in the religiosity of these drivers.

### Many Gods in one Mental Representation

In my interviews I found a radically polytheistic religiosity. At virtually all levels of life and thought, there seemed to be a cultural and religious multiplicity (Hertel et al 1993). It is not monotheism and it is not polytheism, at least if we label polytheism as the worship of many gods, each with partial authority and a limited sphere of influence. Instead the way the drivers prayed and described their beliefs indicates a *kathenotheism* — the worship of one god at a time. Each god is exalted in turn. Each is praised as a creator, source, and sustainer of the universe when one stands in the presence of that very deity — often Shiva. There are many gods, but their multiplicity does not diminish the significance or power of any of them. Each of the great gods may serve as a lense through which the whole of reality is clearly seen. This could be seen especially outside the Kedara temple.

In addition to the central sanctum, dedicated to Lord Shiva, there were a dozen shrines to other deities. Asked about how many gods there are, all answer something like: of course there are many gods. There is Shiva there and Ganesha, Hanuman, Ganga, Durga, Kali and the others, but at the same time there is really only one. The differences of name and form (*nama rupa*) was a common phrase, used often to describe the visible, changing world of *samsara* and the multiple worlds of the gods. Thus, there is only *one* reality, but the names and the forms by which it is known have to be different. It is like clay, which is one, but which takes on various names and forms as one sees it in bricks, vessels pots and dishes. Foremost the maniness is not superseded by oneness. Rather two are held simultaneously and are inextricably related (Eck, 1985).

The drivers inner representation of Lord Shiva as a psychological reality is not glued together so much in terms of early experiences in relation to a particular mother or father figure (McDargh 1982; Kakar 1982) — a reductionistic simplification — but it must instead be understood more as a continuous social construction through a daily *puja* or *arati*. The faith in or

the reality of Shiva is thus not a relation to a clear cut "inner object" but more a result of a daily ongoing dynamic process. A *visual* and *behavioural hermeneutic* is therefore an important means for the psychological understanding of the conditions behind the reality character of the religious experience.

If we translate these observations to the object-relation theory, we must say that the concept "the" god representation — in the singular — that has been in the centre of the past decades' debate in psychology of religion (Jones 1991) must be broadly elaborated in order to do justice to the Indian folk religiosity, where a multiplicity of gods dwells in the same family and in the same individual. Where the god in a specific cultural space is both one and many, male and female, both evil and good, both destroyer and sustainer, there must be a different kind of inner psychological representation of the belief systems compared to them from in the west. Thus, Lord Shiva as a mental representation in my drivers and his psychological genesis, maintainance, function and content must be understood as being distinctively different from the gods representation in ordinary western monotheistic religions.

Of course the *content* of the belief system is taken from Hindu mythology and narratives where kathentheism is common, but the *genesis* of this inner representation must also be understood as a cultural construction (Sakala 1981). The *function* of this Shiva representation is not only to provide a psychodynamic emotional equilibrium, but also to allow the individual to be a part of a socially constructed worldview. By means of this he reaches the realms of transcendence and creates an inner *spiritual Self* or identity that is supported by the *individual* and the *familial Self*.

### **The Spiritual Self — Maintained Through *Darsán***

My perspectives of the self are related to Hallowell's contributions on the Self (1955) as profoundly interrelated with its social and cultural environment. One of his important orientations — that the use of indigenous conceptions of the self is at the base of a scientific understanding — is closely related to my observations and interviews with the ricksha drivers as to the role of *Darsán*.

In terms of object-relation theory applied to religion, the riksha drivers did not seem to have a strict border between their *personal* "inner gods representations", their *family* representations (ancestors and relatives) and the *spiritual* representations, i.e. the aniconic (the Shiva lingam) or iconic

images of Shiva (statues) in the Kedarar temple or "used" elsewhere in arati and in puja. (I will discuss this in a theoretical paper where I analyze how the drivers used relational words when they described themselves, the families and the deities).

This brings me to a general discussion of how the regular *Darsán* of Lord Shiva relates to the informants' three selves: the individual, the family and the spiritual self. This *spiritual self* is often ignored in psychological studies or reduced, but as I found it, it is the central system in my informants' identity formation and identity maintenance. The visual and ritual "use" of the Shiva lingam or statue and the regularity of ritual offering kept their spiritual self in the centre of their personality. All of these three selves were linked to significant religious objects which in their turn were incorporated and nourished their self esteem (Satow 1983).

From a cross-cultural perspective, the distinctions between these three broad categories of self are of value in various ways. By *familiar self* I mean a basic inner psychological organization that enables women and men to function well within the hierarchical intimacy relationship of the extended family, community of groups. The familial self encompasses several important sub-organizations that involve intensely emotional intimacy relationships, with their emotional connectedness and interdependence. In relationship-centred cultures like India there is a constant affective exchange through permeable outer ego boundaries, a highly private self is not maintained, high levels of empathy and reciprocity to others are cultivated, and the experiential sense of self is of "we-ness". Here we have socially contextual ego ideas.

The *individualized self*, on the other hand, is the predominant inner psychological organization enabling a person to function in a highly mobile society where considerable autonomy is granted if not even imposed upon the individual. The individual must choose from a variety of options in a contractual, egalitarian relationship governed by a predominant cultural principle of individualism. The individualized self is characterized by inner representational organizations that emphasize; an individualistic "I-ness", with relatively self-contained outer boundaries, sharp differentiation between inner images of self and other. It is built of modes of cognition and ego-functioning that are strongly oriented towards rationalism, self-reflection, mobility and adaptability to extrafamilial relationship (Roland 1989).

The *spiritual self* is the inner spiritual reality that relates man to a transcendent realm. It is realized and experienced to varying extents by a number of persons through a variety of spiritual disciplines (Davies 1992).

The spiritual self is usually expressed through a complex structure of gods and goddesses as well as through rituals. According to my interviews this spiritual self seems to be a basic assumption and is psychologically engraved in the preconscious.

I therefore think it is impossible to understand the Indian psyche without understanding the psychological function of this inner spiritual self. The assumption of an inner spiritual reality within everyone and the possibility of spiritual realization through the many paths are fundamental to the understanding of the consciousness and preconsciousness of the Indian. Within the Indian context, these assumptions have to be explicitly denied when they are not implicitly adhered to — in contrast to the dominant rational scientific culture of the contemporary secular West, where they are usually ignored or denigrated.

This it not to say that all my drivers are actively engaged in or even interested in spiritual pursuits and disciplines. From a psychological standpoint, however, phenomenologically one can observe an inner experiential ego state or a kind of consciousness separated from everyday waking and dream consciousness, with a different sense of inner being. This is activated and nurtured in the puja. Seen from a psychoanalytic perspective we can call it a transitional sphere (Pruyser 1974). Perhaps esthetic experiences are experientially closest to the kinds of inner ego states present in various ritual practices, like the arati.

The relation between the familial self and the spiritual self is complex. The spiritual self simultaneously encompasses both continuity with (see above all Fuller 1992) and counterpoint to various aspects of the familial self. The drivers recognized the psychological phenomenon or experiential duality of the phenomenological self (*jiva*), particularly in the everyday consciousness of I-ness (*ahamkara*) versus the inner experience of spirit or *Atman*. Simultaneously Hindu thinking is profoundly monistic in its positing various aspects of the phenomenological world, including the phenomenological self, as essentially a manifestation of *Brahman*.

Experientially a person may not be aware of this. Further, the fundamental goal of all relationships and living is the gradual self-transformation toward finer and subtler qualities and refined aspects of power in the quest for self realization. This cultural view is formalized in Sankyan philosophy in its emphasis on the different qualities (*gunas*). Thus there exist paradoxical assertions that the spiritual self is simultaneously on a continuum with the familial self and at the same time a counterpoint to it. In the hierarchical social relationship and in the spiritual



self, the Hindu cultural worldview gives religious meaning to interpersonal transaction.

In hierarchical social relationships governed by the quality of the person, there is a marked veneration of the superior, with strong efforts to subordinate oneself, to be as close as possible to a religious symbol or a sannyasin in order to incorporate, identify with and share the superior qualities of the other for the self-transformation. These focal attitudes of attention by quality, originating in childhood, are later extended to more and more venerated beings — from highly respected family and community members to gurus and to the worship of various gods, goddesses and avatars or incarnations. i.e. there exists a continuity between the familial self and the spiritual self.

In bhakti devotional worship, various facets of symbiosis-reciprocity involved in hierarchical intimacy relationships become clearly accentuated. Intense emotional connectedness and reciprocal affective exchanges, a sense of we-ness, and permeable ego boundaries are all intensely involved in *bhakti*. The devotee seeks through emotionality to be merged with the god, goddess, or incarnation — whether Shiva, Durga, Krishna or whoever — and in turn through the merger expects the reciprocity of the divine blessing. In the worship of Krishna, the most frequent of Bhakti cults, men draw upon their early identification with the maternal-feminine to identify consciously with Radha in her divine passion with Krishna. However, these experiences are in psychoanalytical theories often reduced to regressive traits or searching for an omnipotent union in the early mother-infant symbiotic tie (Kakar 1978, 151–190). The psychological reality is, however, not that the path of Bhakti is a regression to more symbiotic modes of relating, but that the devotees use their internalized symbiotic modes in the service of their spiritual practice. Further, the imagery of a symbiotic, familial mode of relating becomes a metaphor for another level of union, or at least a complex interplay of different levels of monistic reality with an intentional ambiguity.

What has been profoundly overlooked is that however much these religious modes of worship and experiences are related to the intense mother-child symbiotic relationship, the actual religious experience enables the person to become increasingly individuated, differentiated and separated from the emotional familial involvement. This experience thus becomes an essential counterpoint to the familial self and in this process the concept of Darsán will be helpful.

## Conclusion

Psychological studies of Indian folk religiosity are not well developed. It is argued that the focus of intrapsychological and emotional processes, so far very popular, must be replaced or at least supplemented by underlining the role of visual perception and behaviour during the rituals. By a psychological elaboration of the Sanskrit term *Darsán* in relation to an empirical investigation of riksha-drivers "use" of their rituals, one can demonstrate the necessity of letting the scholarly psychological-scientific language (ethic) be confronted by an internal religious concept of an experiential character (emic). In that way a theoretical development occurs simultaneously with a more phenomenological close-reading of the pious interviewee's self-understanding.

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## The Medieval Concept of Music Perception

### Hearing, Calculating and Contemplating

Seeking to indicate the most salient features of the medieval perception of music, we must first of all point to the close relationship between the sensual and intellectual elements. This relationship is most conspicuous in the term "harmonica" introduced in the Latin Middle Ages by Boethius and defined as follows: "harmonica is the faculty of perceiving through senses and the intellect the differences between high and low sounds" (Friedlein 1867: 352).

The same definition reveals another significant feature of the perception of music, namely, that the importance is attached not to individual sounds, but to the differences or relationships between them, that is to the intervals. Since — in accordance with the Pythagorean tradition, which was a major force in medieval music theory — the relationship between sounds can be expressed numerically, it may therefore be considered in terms of the relationship of two numbers, apart from actual sound and beyond physical time. This feature makes it possible to examine individual musical intervals and consequently the whole musical composition on two levels: the sensual and the intellectual.

The question arises whether this concept of music could influence the perception of a medieval listener. For instance, can listening to music be understood as a process which engages both cognitive powers and concerns reducing in some unspecified manner the data perceived and processed by the senses to abstract categories which can be conceived only by the intellect? In my subsequent remarks, I shall try to formulate an answer to this question.

In our search for information on the subject of the perception of music in the Middle Ages, we must depend almost entirely on the opinion offered by the music theorists and philosophers of that time. The point must be made here, however, that the problem of music perception did not belong to the canon of questions investigated within the framework of medieval treatises on music. It is dealt with in works devoted to broader problems. Abundant

and most interesting material on the subject is furnished by the commentaries to book VIII of Aristotle's *Politics*. Latin Europe became acquainted with *Politics* in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century in a translation by Wilhelm Moerbeke. Commentaries on the subject were provided by Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, whose work was carried on by Peter of Auvergne. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, commentaries to *Politics* were written by Walter Burley and Nicole Oresme who also translated the work into French. Echoes of *Politics* can also be found in the *Musica speculativa*, a treatise by Johannes de Muris, one of the most widely disseminated texts on music theory in the late Middle Ages (Witkowska-Zaremba 1992: 52).

To interpret the statements of the authors who wrote about music several centuries ago, we must, quite obviously examine the then prevailing conceptual system. I am fully aware, therefore, that the word "perception" does not have an exact equivalent in medieval music terminology. The texts mentioned earlier, which I intend to discuss in greater detail, pertain to listening to music, to listening which also involves understanding music by referring that which is heard to the binding system of norms (Eggebrecht 1985: 57).

For Aristotle music was one of the four disciplines, together with grammar (*grammata - litterae*), gymnastics (*gymnastike - luctativa*) and drawing (*graphike - protractiva*), which provided commendable pursuits to fill the free time (*schole - vacatio*). Music occupied a special place among the four because, unlike the other three, it had no practical application. Its only purpose was to provide pleasure (*hedone - delectatio*). Delectation that accompanies leisure is understood as the antithesis of sadness (*lype - tristitia*) caused by work. Delectation is caused by play (*paidia - ludus*) or by *diagoge*, a word which for Aristotle seems to have meant a form of intellectual contemplation that is conducive to moral improvement.

In this context, the Stagirite called to mind a scene from the 9<sup>th</sup> book of the *Odyssey*. At a banquet given by Alcinous, King of Phaeacia, Odysseus, charmed by the song of the aoidos (bard) Demodocus, highly commends listening to music together with guests seated at a banquet table. The words of Odysseus quoted by Aristotle as well as the scene of listening to music have been altered slightly in the translation by Wilhelm Moerbeke: he has the banqueting guests sit at a "super tecta" (which is the Latin calque of the Greek *ana domata*). Hence, it may be assumed that they were seated not in a banqueting hall but outside the house; according to the translation they listened not to the song of the bard but to the nightingale. The word *diagoge*, which is used by Aristotle to describe that scene, was translated into Latin as *deductio* (Aristoteles 1872: 340).

The commentators of *Politics* made an effort to give a more precise definition of the term *deductio*. Furthermore, one may note a certain consistency in the interpretations which created a bridge between the argument put forth by Albertus Magnus and Peter of Auvergne. Most generally speaking, the interpretations incorporated the Neoplatonic concept of music as a mathematical discipline into the Aristotelian system of education. It was also in this spirit that Nicole Oresme interpreted the term *deductio*.

Albertus Magnus asserted that the term *deductio* meant to listen to music (*deductio enim est audire musicam*). It was morally beneficial because through the musical measures listeners were able to learn the structure of the universe rooted in the laws of harmony (Jammy 1651: 482).

Peter of Auvergne considered *deductio* an intellectual activity (*operatio intellectualis*) dictated by the mind (*secundum rationem*) that led through *delectatio* to happiness. He drew attention to the attainment of *delectatio* by listening to music in which he seems to have discerned a process that evolved on three levels: sensual, intellectual and ethical. Thus the sound of music (*sonus harmonicae*) first reaches the sense of hearing which is transported with delight by the agency of musical proportions. Peter was of the opinion that this kind of *delectatio* is accessible to everyone. Next, the sounds are submitted to evaluation by the intellect, which examines the principle behind and reason for proportions as something intrinsically rational. In this manner the intellect attains a state of perfection (*perfectio intellectus*) enabling it to recognize the truth. Recognition of truth through the agency of musical proportion is accompanied by intellectual delight (*delectatio intellectualis*). Ultimately, this kind of *delectatio* leads to a preference for a virtuous life (*secundum virtutem*). Peter tended then to distinguish two basic aspects of music: the sensual and the intellectual-ethical. It is in this spirit that he seems to have interpreted Aristotle's division (given only in a rough sketch and not explained in detail), the division into "pure music" (*mousike psile*) and "music with melody" (*mousike meta melodias*), Latinized by Wilhelm of Moerbeke as *musica nuda existens* and *musica cum melodia*. Peter linked the category of "pure music" with "the theoremata rooted in music, the contemplation of which leads to the perfection of the intellect and to delectation" (Thomas 1966: 423-425).

The structure clearly outlined by Albertus Magnus, which combined quadrivial music with Aristotelian *diagoge*, and which was developed by Peter of Auvergne, emerged in the form of a mature concept in the commentaries of Nicole Oresme. *La vie contemplative*, as Oresme called the area of activity free of any obligations (*la vie active*), becomes an area to be devoted to sublime and noble thoughts directed toward physical and



mathematical sciences, for having as their subject the beauty and greatness of creation they lead to the knowledge of God's perfection. It is in this area that music, whose purpose is deduction and delectation, is located. That is why, according to Oresme, it is one of the seven liberal arts. That, in brief, is the background of the scene taken out of Homer which Oresme described as follows: the guests, assembled on the house terrace, were seated at the table listening to the song of the nightingale hidden close by. This scene, in Oresme opinion, reflects in its poetic form, the essence of *deductio* which he understood as "delight and pleasure derived from speculative or contemplative thoughts".

Oresme drew a clear division between music which sounded real (*la musique sensible*) and music which was speculative (*la musique speculative*) and, in terms suggested by Peter of Auvergne, located this division in the categories distinguished by Aristotle. The mutual relation between *la musique sensible* and *la musique speculative*, indicated by Oresme, seems to confirm the similarity of thought of the two commentators. It was assumed that actual music created conditions for the consideration of speculative music and for preparing the soul for contemplation. Speculative music, on the other hand, was an intellectual experience of the order that existed in the structure of the universe, an order described as the harmony of the elements, the music of the spheres or as celestial music. "Contemplating it leads to such great transports that those who are deeply immersed in it can hardly tear themselves away from it and the more they think of it the more they like it." The line between speculative and actual music also marked— according to Oresme — the difference between play (*gieu*) and *deductio*: "because play should be a remedy for sadness and should provide pleasure in periods of leisure and recreation. On the other hand, the purpose of *deductio* is to give rise to noble and worthy thought as well as speculation or contemplation of things divine." (Menut 1970: 342–348).

Listening to music, or *deductio*, is, in accordance with the view presented here, a process of a gradual moving away from the corporal world, to which sounds belong, and an approach through successive stages of abstraction to the divine, made accessible in the act of contemplation. The key role in this process fell to the sense of hearing.

Aristotle distinguished between those senses which, when given too much rein, destroyed the mind — these were taste and touch — and those which provided the mind with laudable pleasure: these were sight and hearing. In recognition of its very special role, pride of place was given to sight. But hearing was acknowledged as that sense which contributed most conspicuously to intellectual development and in this sense it was deemed

superior to sight. Aristotle substantiated this view, saying that hearing participated to a fundamental degree in the understanding of speech and words. He also ascribed to hearing the greatest role in arousing aesthetic emotions which gave shape to morality (Spiazzi 1966: 422; Spiazzi 1970: 8).

Hearing was thus acknowledged as "a comprehensive" sense which not only recognized the qualities of sounds, but, acting in this case together with the intellect, also distinguished and evaluated them. It is significant that medieval authors, wishing to describe exclusively sonorous properties of tones, usually did so in terms of sensations provided by other senses, especially what was then considered the inferior senses of taste and touch. They wrote about "soft" and "hard" or "harsh" tones, or about "sweet" and "sour" tones (e.g. Frobenius 1971: 71–75).

In the Neoplatonic tradition, the sense of hearing was said to have the ability to serve as an intermediary between the corporeal and the non-corporeal world. That view lies at the foundation of the concept of the cycle of *septem artes liberales* elaborated by St. Augustine (Hadot 1984: 119–122). According to him the seven arts situated in the area penetrated by sight and hearing formed a kind of ladder leading from *sensibile* to *intelligibile*. Thus, the four mathematical studies — music, astronomy, geometry and arithmetic — that is the quadrivium, had a very important role to play, for they led to the contemplation of existence and of God, that is to the final aim of all cognitive activity. Augustine gave an exact description of the path leading from actual sounds to the cognition of eternal and unalterable beauty, which is the domain of divinity, a path of overcoming successive stages of abstraction conceived as various categories of numbers, ranging from the numbers tangible to the senses contained in actual sounds (that is Augustine's concept of musical rhythms) to numbers as ideal quantities accessible only to the intellect (De musica, VI; cf. Edelstein 1929: 105 ff.).

In the period during which the commentaries discussed here were written, there prevailed a specific musical concept of numbers related to the idea of "numerus harmonicus". The origins of this idea go back to Platonic cosmology and his concept of the World Soul as a model constructed according to numerical proportions which corresponded to musical consonances. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the term "numerus harmonicus" encompassed all the numbers whose proportions could form musical intervals. According to the principle of the then binding Pythagorean system, the numbers concerned were the product of factoring or the product of 2 and 3 (Frobenius 1989: 245 ff.). Nicole Oresme, who devoted much of his attention to harmonious numbers, believed that they contained all the speculative music, that is the

abstract order which constitutes a kind of sublimation of actual music (Menut and Denomy 1968: 480).

The view that to listen to music is to overcome the successive steps of abstraction leading from the sensual world to the ideal world (as rendered by the word *deductio*, one of its basic meanings is "to lead across") bears a clear Neoplatonic stamp. The roots of that view are deeply embedded in the concept of the septem artes cycle as a process which prepares the soul for the contemplation of eternal truth, a concept which, as supposed, contained echoes of Neoplatonic mystic rites (Hadot 1984: 145–146). Placing this view in the context of Aristotle's thought, and of the scene of listening to music, introduced new elements to the notion of contemplation. Contemplation became first and foremost an aesthetic experience. That context and the same Neoplatonic connotations define the social aspect of that experience: it is accessible only to educated persons who are not weighed down by any duties.

In conclusion let us go back to the two types of pleasure provided by music as distinguished by Aristotle: play (*ludus*) and *deductio*. This division reveals two aspects of music: the ludic and the contemplative. Aristotle clearly related these aspects to social stratification, a fact to which Peter of Auvergne drew attention. He distinguished two categories of listeners (*auditores harmoniae musicalis*): in the first category are free and educated persons prepared for intellectual pursuits, while the second category included uneducated and hard working persons who in moments of ease derive pleasure from games and spectacles. Peter believed that it is the natural right of every man to derive pleasure from music regardless of taste, education or social status; that is why he maintained that a shepherd's pipe has greater significance than the noblest of instruments (Spiazzi 1966: 436).

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Further checks proved Peter's suspicions to be founded (1965: 163).

The mission no longer depended merely on calling like it did during the last century and early part of this century (Kamma 1977: 134).

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