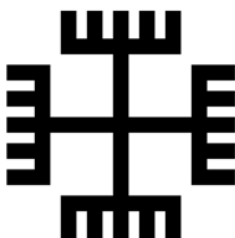
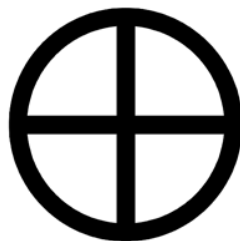


# WARHA EUROPE

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SVARTE PUBLISHING

Warha — also known as *R/y* rune in Icelandic Futhark or *k* in the Anglo-Saxon Futhork. In pagan traditionalism it is means death or end, including the time of the End of the World.

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Cover: Slavic traditional mask and festival character performed by «Окрута».

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## FOREWORD TO THE 2ND ISSUE

We are glad to welcome the readers of our almanac.

The “Warha” almanac has been published in Russia since 2015 and the latest issues are published once a year, summing up all the best texts about pagan traditionalism, as well as presenting fresh translations, interviews and original texts to the public. This fall will be the sixth issue.

The first English-language issue of the “Warha” almanac was released in 2017 and it was a trial attempt. And now, two years later, we are ripe for the second volume in English. This issue comes out in a difficult time of general fragmentation, fake-news and shameless propaganda from all sides. We conceived our almanac as a kind of bridge or a space of acquaintance, dialogue and exchange of opinions and skills between Russian-speaking pagans and traditionalists on the one hand, and Europeans and Americans on the other. We are different, the traditions of our peoples and in our lands sometimes differ very much. And there is nothing wrong with that. Nevertheless, we are all pagans, which means that we have something in common in the depths of our philosophy and mystical experience. And historically we have faced with similar threats, for example, with globalization and its iron pace of regional identity destruction. First globalization by the name of the Cross, then by the name of Technology, Market and Media. Therefore it seems to us that any platforms where are an opportunity to look at other pagans and see the general, see the grounds for dialogue, are already make sense.

In the Russian version we have published many translations of European and American authors. In the second edition of the English-language collection, which is much richer than the first, we collected a lot of materials from Russian authors, attracted the participation of our European friends and like-minded people from North America too.

Both versions of the almanac are volunteer non-profit projects from the very beginning. From year to year we invest money in it not really worrying about profit. Ideas for us at the first place. Therefore anyone can download this issue and share it with co-religionists. Or you can print any number of copies of this almanac by yourself and distribute it, if you are a publisher.

Unfortunately, such altruism has some inevitable downsides. So, we are forced to present you the texts in the author's edition such as they were provided by volunteers-translators. Therefore, we invite in our team of enthusiasts an interested proofreader for future editions.

Finally, we would like to separately thank all the authors and organizations who responded to our appeal from Russia, Europe and the USA. Together we have a good collection of articles. If we can repeat it this year, the English version of our almanac will also become annual. And we also invite new authors to participate. All our contacts are listed at the end of the volume.

Enjoy reading.

**Askr Svarte**

EUROPEAN  
TRADITIONS







## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE TRUE TO THE AESIR?

“Ásatrú” is a modern coinage meaning “true to the Aesir.” In Old Norse, Aesir is the plural of áss, which is usually translated “god.” In order to understand what it means to be “true to the Aesir,” we must put into question this translation into “god” and “gods.” Indeed, ultimately we must liberate ourselves from the idea of “god” in order to understand who the Aesir are, and our relationship to them. Throughout this essay, I will therefore avoid the very familiar terms “god” and “gods” and instead use “áss” and “Aesir.” This is in order to accustom my readers to the fact that we are dealing with an idea that has become quite foreign to us.

Some of us say that we “worship” the Aesir – though we will also have to put this idea into question as well. In any case, what may definitely be said is that adherents of Ásatrú relate to the Aesir as something other, and far greater, than themselves. Let us therefore begin by exploring what the difference is between human beings and the Aesir. We will find that this is not as easy to define as one might think.

Could we distinguish ourselves from the Aesir by saying that we are “mortals”? No, for the lore teaches us that the gods are mortal, too. We have mortality in common with them. It is foretold that several of them will die at Ragnarok – including Odin, Thor, and Frey. The idea that humans are “mortals” and gods “immortals” is Greco-Roman, and foreign to the Germanic tradition.

Indeed, in our tradition the Aesir are not only mortal, but vulnerable in ways that make them seem hardly different from human beings. Several times in the myths, various Aesir are captured, bound, and tortured (even Odin suffers this fate; see Grimnismal). Often they have to bargain their way out. Unlike human beings, the Aesir enjoy eternal youth. But they are not naturally endowed with it: they derive eternal youth from Idun’s

apples. As the famous story of the theft of the apples by the storm giant Thiassi illustrates, the Aesir will age if deprived of them. (Fundamentally, this is no different from human dependence on, for example, exogenous hormones.)

Could the difference between the Aesir and men be that the former possess special, occult powers and the latter do not? There are several major problems with this proposal. First, there are a whole host of non-human beings in Norse mythology who possess such powers. Thus, they are not exclusive to the Aesir. Probably the best example is the *jötnar*, usually translated as “giants.” The trouble here is that the giants are not giant; they are not gigantic in stature. In fact, their physical descriptions do not make them distinctively different from the Aesir (except that some of them – only some – are described as being particularly ugly).

The giants possess physical and supernatural powers that put them on a par with the Aesir. Indeed, they often get the better of the Aesir (at least temporarily). The giants and the Aesir are also capable of interbreeding. The two groups are so close, in fact, that one might as well speak of them as constituting just two different varieties of “gods” – like the Aesir and the Vanir. And yet we do not worship the giants. Other beings in Norse myth possess superpowers – including the elves and the Norns (who mark out the fates even of the Aesir).

A yet more significant reason to think that the possession of superpowers does not define the difference between Aesir and men is that men can actually acquire most of those same powers. In fact, based on what has come down to us, it is difficult to say with confidence which of the “divine” powers human beings cannot acquire.

Rigsthula tells the tale of how the áss Rig (aka Heimdall) sired the various social classes of humankind. The child of Rig, who is the first of the nobility, is named “Lord,” and we are told that Rig taught the boy runes (Rigsthula, 34). Of course, this could mean simply that he taught the boy how to write in runes, but later passages suggest more than this. The youngest son of Lord is called King (clearly the first of the royals, as opposed to the mere nobles). King “learned runes, runes of fate and runes of destiny, he learned spells to save lives and dull blades, to calm storms” (Rigsthula, 41).[1] We are also told that, like Sigurd, he learned “the language of birds.” And he

learned further spells “to put out fires, to calm sorrows and induce sleep” (Rigsthula, 42; the context implies that this is magical knowledge). Amongst the spells known by Odin, and enumerated in Havamal, are those used to dull blades, calm storms, and put out fires (Havamal, 148-154).

In addition to the *galdr* practiced by the Aesir, human beings can also learn *seithr*. Odin himself did not naturally possess knowledge of *seithr*, but had to acquire it from Freyja. *Seithr* may have involved shapeshifting, “astral projection,” and other “shamanic” powers. In *Ynglinga Saga* 7, we are told that Odin “often changed himself; at those times his body lay as though he were asleep or dead, and he then became a bird or a beast, a fish or a dragon, and went off in an instant to far-off lands on his own or other men’s errands.”[2] But there are numerous examples in the Scandinavian sources that have come down to us indicating that human beings are capable of acquiring this power as well.[3] We know, further, that human beings (at least some of them) possess the gift of prophecy. Odin himself does not prophesy, but has to rely on others to tell the future (see *Voluspa*, for example). For inspiration, humans partake of the poetic mead – but Odin requires it as well (indeed, he has to steal it from the giants).

Not only can humans acquire the powers of the Aesir, but more importantly they can also surpass them. Returning to *Rigsthula*, we are told that Rig “shared runes” with King, but that “King tricked him, and learned them better than he, and then he earned the right to call himself by the name of Rig for his rune-lore” (*Rigsthula*, 43).[4] Obviously, this can refer only to the magical uses of the runes, or at least esoteric knowledge of them. (It is most unlikely that the poem means merely that King learned to write runes better than Rig.) The idea that men can surpass the “gods” is quite unusual. We would have to look to the Indian tradition to find parallels to it. It is diametrically opposed to the attitude one finds in the Greek tradition, where human attempts to reach for the divine are “hubris,” and severely punished. Numerous well-known myths attest to this, such as the stories of Arachne, Cassiopeia, Icarus, Niobe, Phaethon, Salmoneus, and Tereus. Such myths are conspicuously absent in the Germanic tradition (the various stories in which Loki is punished for

this or that misdeed perhaps come the closest – but then he is not a human being).

So far, we have had little success in identifying an essential feature that differentiates the Aesir from men. And yet there is obviously a difference; the relationship between the two is clearly asymmetrical. Men “worship” the Aesir, at least in the sense of appealing to them and sacrificing to them, whereas the reverse is not the case. I would suggest that the reason for this asymmetry, and the difference between Aesir and men, is the simple fact that men come from the Aesir. The Aesir are “worshipped” because they are the progenitors of human beings. Further, this relationship is understood in a literal sense. The Aesir are my ancestors in the same way that my grandparents are my ancestors.

There is an objection to this suggestion, and it is an obvious one. In Voluspa 17-18, we are told that the gods created humans out of two trees:

Three gods, powerful and passionate, left Asgard for Midgard. They found Ask and Embla, weak, fateless, in that land. They had no breath, no soul, no hair, no voice, they looked inhuman. Odin gave them breath, Honir gave them souls, Loth gave them hair and human faces.[5]

(The account in the Prose Edda is similar, but the names of the gods, and their gifts, are different; see my essay “The Gifts of Odin and His Brothers” in *What is a Rune? and Other Essays*.)

This account, which is the most-discussed “anthropogenesis” story in Norse myth, certainly does not suggest that the Aesir “sire” human beings, or that they are our ancestors in a “genetic” sense. In response to this, however, I would make two points. First, the story of Ask and Embla does depict the Aesir as infusing human beings with their own traits. But it is my second point that is actually more important: in addition to the story of Ask and Embla, Norse myth and legend contain a number of accounts which clearly depict the Aesir as ancestors of men, in the more conventional sense.

Most important of these is the aforementioned Rigsthula, which involves Rig producing the different social classes of men, in each case via sexual intercourse with a human female. In this fashion, Rig sires “Slave” (whose mother is Edda, “Great-Grandmother”), “Freeman” (mother: Amma, “Grandmother”), and

“Lord” (whose mother is literally Moðir). Though all of these are the sons of Rig, the áss only calls Lord his “son,” giving him his own name (Rigsthula, 34). This is clearly due to Lord’s “noble” traits, which include his skills and his beauty: “His hair was blonde, his cheeks were bright, his eyes were as cruel as vipers” (Rigsthula, 32). (By contrast, Slave is described as downright ugly; Freeman as hardy but rough.) As we saw earlier, King, the youngest son of Lord, earns “the right to call himself by the name of Rig.”

We may note also the case of the Volsungs, a human clan sired by Odin as a tribe of elite warriors. The first of the Volsungs is Sigi, described as “a son of Odin.” In the subsequent tale, it is arguable that Odin intervenes a number of times in order to re-inject his own “seed” into the Volsung bloodline (e.g., the magic apple sent to Rerir, the sword plunged into the Volsung “family tree,” etc. – see my essay “An Esoteric Commentary on the Volsung Saga,” the first part of which appears here.) We should also mention the well-known fact that a number of Anglo-Saxon kings traced their lineage back to Odin.

In short, the preponderance of evidence indicates that the ancient Scandinavians regarded the Aesir as their ancestors, in a quite literal sense. The Aesir were “worshipped” by men because they were regarded as their forebears. But perhaps it is time to take the scare quotes away from “worship” and to understand what this means. The word comes from Old English *weorþscipe*, where *weorþ* is “worthy” in the sense of “honored” and “esteemed,” and *-scipe* means basically “state” or “condition of” (corresponding roughly to *-ness*, or *-dom*; “-ship” is cognate with German *-schaft* in words like *Gesellschaft*, “society,” or *Wissenschaft*, “knowledge”). Essentially, to worship means to honor. Due to the influence of Judaism and Christianity, however, the word now conjures images of prostrating oneself before the divine, as a slave does before a master. Needless to say, the relationship of the Northmen to the Aesir was fundamentally different. It was, again, the relationship of men to their ancestors, the forebears of their family and tribe. (The Vanir Njord, Freyr, and Freyja are worshipped because they have been incorporated into the tribe of the Aesir.[6])

This relationship did involve propitiating the Aesir through sacrifice and ritual actions of different kinds. In the main, however, the Aesir were honored by being remembered – for that is generally

the way ancestors are honored. The Aesir were remembered in the myths that were passed down from generation to generation. But so were our human ancestors, who were “worshipped” as well, just in the sense of being honored and remembered.

This is why it was so vitally important to record the actions of human beings in the vast saga literature, and to remember them in verse and song. This includes the tales of ancestors who straddled the divide between human and “divine,” who were more-than-merely-human; men like Sigurd. Of course, it could also be argued that every ancestor straddles this divide – provided they are male and died violently. Those ancestors live after death in Valhalla as the Einherjar, Odin’s army of the dead. There they prepare for Ragnarok, passing their days fighting and killing one another. At day’s end, they are magically regenerated, and feast upon a magically regenerating boar.

We may also note the importance that was attached to the naming of children. The Germanic tribes named their children after dead relatives, usually a direct ancestor. They believed that the “luck” (hamingja) of the ancestor would be passed along to the child. As Stephen Flowers has argued at length, this amounts to a belief in “rebirth”[7]. In sum, it is arguable that the ancestors (at least in some cases) attain the post-mortem status of supernatural beings, and are venerated as semi-divine.

So far, I have been arguing for a point that has been made by others: that Norse religion is essentially “ancestor worship.” However, I do not think this point is sufficiently appreciated by today’s adherents to Ásatrú. To be true to the Aesir is fundamentally nothing other than honoring one’s ancestors – the greatest of one’s ancestors, to be sure, but still one’s own flesh and blood. The Aesir are greater than we are, but the difference is one of degree, not of kind. The Aesir should be seen as a tribe of special, powerful beings, who gave rise to the human tribe (or, at least, to the tribe of “the Germans”). Further, as noted earlier, the lore makes it clear that the Aesir were only one tribe of special, powerful beings. To us, however, they are uniquely special because they are our ancestors.

It is also important to bear in mind that this religion does not just enjoin that we honor the Aesir, but other ancestors as well. This means not just honoring my ancestors, but our ancestors: the great

heroes, the demigods of the race. And this opens things up considerably. It means honoring an entire pantheon of kings, warriors, artists, philosophers, scientists, and explorers – men like Arminius, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Meister Eckhart, Paracelsus, Hans Holbein, J. S. Bach, Jakob Boehme, Copernicus, Johannes Bureus, William Shakespeare, Sir Walter Raleigh, Leibniz, Rembrandt, Schiller, Goethe, Beethoven, Brahms, Kant, Frederick the Great, Fichte, Schelling, William Blake, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Wagner, Nietzsche, Grieg, C. G. Jung, and Guido von List – to name a very few. Surely, whatever we do to honor or remember these “ancestors” constitutes a religious act in the spirit our heathen forebears would have understood. (For the further implications of what it means for this religion to, in effect, honor its people, see my essay “Ásatrú and the Political” in *What is a Rune? and Other Essays*.)

As a final consideration, let us explore the way in which our ancestors – the Aesir, and these others – stand before us, as well as behind us.

Imago is a Latin term associated with both entomology and Jungian psychology. In the latter, it was eventually replaced with the most well-known term in Jung’s work, archetype. In the former, it refers to the final stage of the metamorphosis of an insect (for example, the butterfly, fully formed from the larval caterpillar). This is also referred to by entomologists as the imaginal stage. The Romans used imago to refer (among other things) to any artistic representation, especially the *imagines maiorum*, which were wax masks of ancestors kept in the atria of prominent Roman homes.

Putting all of this together, we may note that the Aesir – and the ancestors generally – play the role of imagines, in much the same senses as just mentioned. Clearly, the ancestors are archetypes: they “represent” certain qualities or ideals in the sense that they exemplify them. This applies, again, to both the Aesir and our human forebears. We honor them by remembering them and by striving to be like them; to become exemplars ourselves. We have seen that human beings can acquire the special properties of the Aesir themselves – and even surpass them. It is as if our lives are a larval state, in which we are gestating toward the imago of a god. (At least, some of us are.) Recall *Rigsthula*, in which King, through his magical

attainments, “earned the right to call himself by the name of Rig.” In other words, he becomes identified with the god.

We may note that it is not just individuals who seem to be developing toward the imago of the Aesir, or ancestors, but sometimes whole families. In the case of the Volsungs, each succeeding generation of the family is (usually) stronger and more powerful than the last, culminating in Sigurd, the greatest warrior in Germanic legend. Recall also that Rig only claims as his “sons” the later generations of humans he sires, who are noble, beautiful, courageous, and learned (especially in esoteric matters). Further, we should note that, for some, the achievement of the “imaginal state” occurs with their deaths: it is in death that they are perfected and raised to the ranks of the Einherjar, and all become “sons of Odin” (Gylfaginning, 20). It is in death that the perfection of the warrior is achieved, and he becomes the subject of poetry, song, and saga.

The ancestors, including the Aesir, thus represent both the past and the future: an end toward which we are striving. In this orientation toward the ancestors, the past is constantly present to us, as an ideal. (See my essay “Ancestral Being,” the first part of which appears here.) To be true to the Aesir – and our other ancestors – thus means not only to remember them, but to live up to them. And, just perhaps, to surpass them.

**Collin Cleary**

*Notes:*

[1] The Poetic Edda, trans. Jackson Crawford (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2015), 154.

[2] Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, trans. A. H. Smith (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1990), 5.

[3] For examples, see Claude Lecouteux, *Witches, Werewolves and Fairies: Shapeshifters and Astral Doubles in the Middle Ages*, trans. Clare Frock (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 2003).

[4] Crawford, 154-155.

[5] Crawford, 5-6.

[6] Though we should note that Freyr and his wife, a giant, had a son named Fjölfnir (one of the mythological kings of Sweden), who then had human descendants.



[7] See Stephen E. Flowers, *Sigurðr: Rebirth and the Rites of Transformation* (Smithfield, Tx.: Rûna-Raven, 2011). Claude Lecouteux quotes the author of the Poem of Helgi: “Once upon a time it was thought that men were reborn. . . . It was said that Helgi and Sigrun lived again.” See Lecouteux, *The Return of the Dead*, trans. Jon E. Graham (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 2009), 163.

[8] Firstly published on <https://www.counter-currents.com/2019/03/what-does-it-mean-to-be-true-to-the-aesir/>

## A-I-U AND STILLNESS: A COMMENTARY ON HERMAN WIRTH'S STUDY OF THE YEAR-WHEEL

Without a doubt, there is much in the works of the Dutch-German scholar Herman Wirth that is highly controversial from the standpoint of both Pagan Traditionalism and academic scholarship. It was within and with the methodologies of the latter that Wirth sought to prove his theory of the Hyperborean origins, proto-religion, and proto-language of mankind.[1] The greatest doubts and criticism concern Wirth's views on ancient history, his revision of the origins of Tradition (the proto-religion), and the sources on which Wirth's studies relied. This is especially the case with the *Oera Linda Chronicle*, the dispute over which concerns the ratio between fragments reflecting an archaic heritage and the modern inserts, edits, and so on present in the text. Herman Wirth's views were close to the universalist Traditionalism of the Guénonian bent, albeit adjusted towards conceiving all individual traditions as regressive distortions of a Nordic Ario-Christianity.

Nevertheless, Julius Evola named Herman Wirth as one of his teachers, and Wirth himself, as a scholar, enriched Traditionalism with profound insights into the paradigmatic, metaphysical essence of the symbol of the polar Year, the so-called Celtic Cross, and its correspondences with the basic phonetics of Proto-Indo-European vowels.

The metaphysical hermeneutics of the Celtic Year-Cross lie, according to Herman Wirth's works, in the following: at the origins is a symbol, the archaic calendar, in the form of a circle divided by an upright cross into four sectors. The vertical and horizontal lines mark the four solar stations in the heavens - the Winter and Summer Solstices, and the Spring and Autumnal Equinoxes.

The Winter Solstice is the lowest point of the vertical line: Jul (“Yule”) or Joll in the Germanic languages. The Scandinavian forms Joll and Yule are derived from the proto-Germanic root *\*hweulō*, meaning “wheel.” [2] The supreme *áss*, Odin, bears among others the names *Jolfaðr* and *Jolnir*, i.e., the “Father of Yule” or the “Yuler” respectively. As the mid-winter festival, Yule reflects the sun’s station on December 20-22 at its lowest point in the heavens. These are the days of the longest and darkest night, which tradition discerned to be the days of the dying of the old sun and the birth of the new: the New Year. At the same time, the Year itself is expressed with the solar symbol of the wheel, which renews and gives birth to Yule, the very etymology of which means “wheel.” That is, Yule is the festival of all festivals, the matrix of all other annual stations of the sun, the beginning and the end of all, expressed directly through names associated with Odin the Father.[3]

From the lowest point of winter - the winter of the Year, the metaphysical Winter, the Nights of the Cosmos (the Great Winter, or *Fimbulvetr* according to tradition) - the sun begins to rise and ascend up into the heavens, passing to the first horizontal point of the Spring Equinox, balancing the time of day and night. Then the day begins to dominate the night, as light over darkness. This is the time of active becoming, maturation, growth, youth, spring, and so on. This is followed by the second vertical point, *Midsummar*, marked by the festival of the same name, or the Summer Solstice. Midsummer is the highest point of becoming and of the sun’s course through the heavens. The right half of the circle, from Yule to Midsummer, reflects the path of becoming, illuminating, growth, and the achievement of maximal distance from the point of death. It expresses the birth of the sun and the Year.

After Midsummer begins the second, left half of the circle. This is the path of descent, aging, the return to the point of Yule, the setting of the sun and the metaphysical day of the Year, the time of twilight. This path is marked by the point of the Autumnal Equinox, when night begins to dominate day, darkness over light. This is the time of aging and dying which ends with death by the point of Yule. The vertical division of the Year-Wheel into semi-circles of maturation and aging can be supplemented with an horizontal

division into an upper, light half, where day and light dominate, and a lower, dark half dominated by night and darkness.

This widest possibly variety of correspondences and combinations of the Year-Wheel's semantics presents the hermeneutical key to the cycle of the Cosmos, the metaphysical Year with its Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. This cycle also corresponds to the Four Ages enumerated by Hesiod, the actual agricultural cycle of the year, the daily cycle (sunrise, day, sunset, night), and the cycle of life from birth through youth, maturity, and old age to death. This cycle also corresponds to the sacred mapping of space, which designates the light North (ex Nord Lux), the dark South (*Surtr ferr sunnan* in the *Völuspa*), the rising sun of the East, and the land of the setting sun, the West. The cycles of the lifespan and extinction of Culture (and Culture's "cooling down" into Civilization) as described by Oswald Spengler can also be employed to describe the symbolism of the Year-Wheel.

In his linguistic studies, Herman Wirth compared the correspondence in semantics between the main Proto-Indo-European vowel sounds and the Celtic Cross. The main vowels include the five melodically harmonizing sounds - a-e-i-o-u, or simply the most basic three: a-i-u. We can see this arrangement of sounds and runes in one of the most famous illustrations from Wirth's works: [4]

The sound "a" is the first that follows birth (Jol). It begins many Indo-European alphabets and is pronounced with a maximally opened mouth.

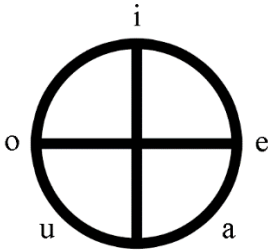
The sound "i" is the highest of the triad, as it corresponds to the peak of becoming and growth. The graphic representation of this letter - I - also coincides with the vertical axis of the Jol-Midsummar, and is phallically charged.

The sound "u" is the lowest. It can be pronounced with a closed mouth. It is the sound of fading, ending.

The sounds "e" and "o" are transients between the pairs a-i and i-u.

The Jol point has no phonetic correspondence, as it is soundless.





In his *Strahlungen* (*War Journals*) from 1941-1945, Ernst Junger offers the following interpretation of these sound - supposedly given to him by a soldier in their correspondences - which can complement these phonetic semantics:

*“A embodies expanse and height. Its most simple attestation is the sign  $\wedge$ , that is, two removed points meeting at a zenith.*

*E is the sound of infinity, of abstract thinking, of the world of mathematics. This is indicated by three uniform parallel lines  $\equiv$  connected with a vertical.*

*I is an erotic sign, which like [Sanskrit] Lingam expresses the relations of blood, love, and frenzied passion.*

*O is how the sound of light represents the embodiment of the Sun and the eyes*

*U, or as the ancients wrote it V, is the sound of the Earth sinking into the depths. It is also the sign that is most opposite to A.” [5]*

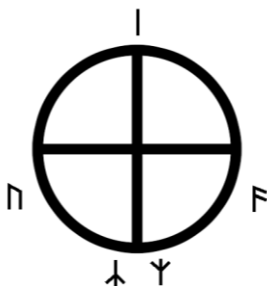
Adding on to these sacred phonemes, Herman Wirth also employed a Futhark rune sequence that “frames” the Year-Wheel. But it is here that Wirth committed a number of mistakes which contradict Germanic-Scandinavian linguistics and contradict scholarly data on the runes as a writing and magical system. Herman Wirth’s theories were popularized in Russia in the 1990’s with great zeal and creativity by Alexander Dugin. Unfortunately, Dugin did not check for or attempt any revision of errors in Wirth’s master-scheme, and nearly 20 years later, even in his new works, he has repeated the same mistakes. [6] Insofar as Wirth’s interpretation of the meaning of the runes is based on his own theories with which we cannot fully agree, we will have to embark anew upon the path of establishing correlations between runic semantics, phonetics, and the hermeneutics of the Celtic Cross. While following Wirth’s proposed direction, we must compensate for his mistakes while striving to preserve and correctly express his intuitions.

In the Elder Futhark, the sounds a-i-u correspond to the rune Ansuz (ᚱ), Isa (ᚱ), and Uruz (ᚱ). In Old Norse, the rune “ᚱ” means *óss*, i.e., the Æsir, as later this rune and word’s phonetic *ó* was ultimately replaced by *a/æ*, thus changed to *áss* and *æsir* (plural). Applied to the Year-Wheel and its phoneme *a*, it turns out that birth and the beginning of becoming emerge from the Æsir Gods as the source, and under their patronage. This is clearly indicated by Odin’s role as the Jol-Father, the Year-Father.

The rune “ᚱ” means ice. The representation of the sound “i” indicates the achievement of the static peak at the highest point, suggesting “freezing” as a metaphor and reference to the subsequent descent into winter.

The rune “ᚱ”, in Old Norse, means “rain” and “drizzle”, while in the Anglo-Saxon Futhark it kept the meaning of “bison” (or “aurochs”) [7]. The meanings “drizzle” and “rain” fit into the general semantics of aging and death as “falling” or “descent”, as in the German *Untergang*, “decline” or “sunset.” The rune’s phoneme - “u” - is passed into the consonantal sound “v”, which is reflected in the ancient letter-graphic as “v” and, for example, in the name of the giant Surtr (the Black): *Surtr* - *Svartr*. In Old Norse there is also the root “*val-*” (*valr*, *vallen*), meaning “falling”, precisely in the sense of a “downed” or “dead” warrior, hence the name of Odin *Valföðr*, and Freya’s name *Valkyrja*. In modern English, the word “fall” has an analogous semantic field: “fallen” can mean “fallen on the field of battle” (in German *Todesfall*), “Fall” as in autumn, “fall” as in “descent”, “precipice” or “fall” can designate heavy rain, “skyfalling.” The transition from “ᚱ” to “ᚱ” and death is the *Untergang als Valgang*.

The Celtic Cross presents the four solar points of the Year, but only three of the stages of becoming are phonetically expressed, and even the extended five-sound set does not fall into the field of Joll/Yule (compare to the phoneme *\*vl*), thus leaving it a voiceless vowel hidden by twilight. To shed a bit of light on this field (but in no way illuminating it entirely), we can add to this overall scheme two additional runes: ᚱ and ᚱ.



The first rune in the Anglo-Saxon Futhorc corresponds to the sound k[c], and in the Younger Futhorc, starting from the 10th century in the literature of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, it corresponds to the rune Yr, “r” or “y.” Today it possesses the meanings “death”, “the downwards branch”, and “tree roots.”

The second rune, Algiz, in the Elder Futhorc expresses the phoneme “z” as a sonorous variation of “s”, or, as AlgiR, the phoneme “R” at the end of words. In the Younger Futhorc, it bears the name *Maðr* – a person with raised arms, hence the rune’s graphic. It expresses the sound “m” and also means “yew tree”, from which bows and arrows were made. The rune’s shape is also evocative of a treetop and branches Y. In modernity this rune acquired the additional values of protection and life, forming a pair with A.

To express the idea of the “man raising his hands up” in the right half of the Year, and “man lowering his hands” in the left, Herman Wirth employed two symbols: “Y” and “T” respectively. The first runic symbol, Ka, according to Wirth, is a graphic variation of the rune Kano, <, or P, meaning “wound” or “disease.” This semantic field is far from and has nothing to do with the meaning that Wirth assigned to it. A similar situation can be seen in the rune “T”, Tyr, the solar áss Tiur, the God of War and justice. These meanings clearly do not agree with Wirth’s proposed semantics of descent, sunset, and autumn. The phonetics of these runes, the sounds “k” and “t”, also do not fit into the semantics and hermeneutics of the Year-Wheel that Wirth wanted to envision.

In proto-Germanic, it was typical to have an ending with “z”, whereas in Scandinavia an “r” was characteristic. As follows, these corresponding runes meet at the end of words, and in Latinized alphabets the runo-phonetic diversity of the semantics of death, sunset, and ending are localized at the end of the order:

In Latin script r-s-t-v-x-y-x-z

In Icelandic (only short with no endings) r-s-t-u-v-x-y

In German and English r-s-t-u-v-w-x-y-z. [8]



At the same time, the sound “a” is overwhelmingly found to be the first letter in these alphabets, thus opening the system. This corresponds to its annual and runic semantics: everything begins with the Gods, the Æsir.

The Futhark and runes were originally used as magic symbols. Later, like a blossoming flower, they became a writing-system. At the end of Latinized alphabets, we find groups of sounds which are not themselves but, being written in runes, coincide in their semantics relating to the end, the falling-down, the dying. Here the runes are translated from magic into a paradigmatic symbolism describing all stages of becoming.

The triad of vowel sounds a-i-u, written with runes as  $\mathfrak{F}-\mathfrak{I}-\mathfrak{U}$ , is framed by other, consonantal runes reflecting not so much phonetics as semantics, hence the form  $\mathfrak{Y}-\mathfrak{F}-\mathfrak{I}-\mathfrak{U}-\mathfrak{L}$ . We thus have the semicircle of birth, the going-out, and rising, *Aufgang*:  $\mathfrak{Y}-\mathfrak{F}-\mathfrak{I}$  And we have the semicircle of aging, return, and sunset, the *Untergang*:  $\mathfrak{I}-\mathfrak{U}-\mathfrak{L}$ . Taking into consideration the Icelandic runic poem which speaks of the rune Maðr  $\mathfrak{Y}$ , we can conclude that birth in itself, as a coming into the world, an entry into growth and becoming, is already the first step of descent, *Untergang*.

Man is an augmentation of the dust; great is the claw of the hawk.	(Maðr) er manns gaman ok moldar auki ok skipa skreytir.
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The fragment “*ok moldar auki*” can also be translated as “augmentation of the ash”, which even more directly suggests that all things that are born (beings) are mortal from their very inception. The whole runic-phonetic vowel semantic range of the Year-Wheel thus boils down to the pair Death-Birth. While the corresponding runes are not positioned strictly at the Yule point, they are as close as possible to it from the left (death) and from the right (birth, “the augmentation of the dust/ash”). Between them is that space of transition which is not of this world, but which is not yet otherworldly. Between  $\mathfrak{L}$  and  $\mathfrak{Y}$  is revealed not only silence, as the absence of sound, but stillness.

Tradition and contemplative thinking focus on the rapid transition, the leap from death to new birth. No stop is made in the space of the clearing between death and life, especially as modern man is incapable of properly contemplating the space between birth and death. Hence the silent stillness between Yr and Maðr. Hence the birth and ascension (Y) at the Yule point of the whole Year-Wheel, with its sacred sounds a-i-u. The Winter Solstice point, extremely saturated with symbolism, covers the space of the clearing in the circle of the Year, the Cosmos and its cycles. This is the space of exodus from the metaphysical, mythological oblivion to the ineffable Oblivion, inexpressible in words or sounds. This very point is the clearing, *Lichtung*, into which (and from which) goes the first sound, the first word, and the manifestation of the Cosmos and all things begins. It is at this point that we meet the Joll-God, the great Shaman-Father and the Wanderer-God, Odin.

Odin's epithets *Gangradr* or *Gangleri*, meaning "wanderer" or "traveler", are connected by the common root *gang* with the notions of ascent, *Aufgang*, descent, *Untergang*, and transition *Über-gang*. As the father who begets and is the patron of the manifestation of the world and the beginning of the year at Yule, Odin is also known by the names Jolfaðr and Jolnir. As a wanderer and wise elder heading towards death, towards "Being-Open-Towards-Death", he is also known by the name Valtyr, the "Fallen/Falling" Faller-God.

It is in this light that the myth of Odin's self-sacrifice, as a result of which the runes were revealed to him, begs attention.

The *Hávamál* ("The Lay of the High one") reads [9]:

138.  
 I know that I hung  
 On that windy tree  
 Nine full nights,  
 Spear-wounded,  
 Given to Odin,  
 Myself to myself  
 On that tree  
 That rose from roots  
 That no man ever knows.

138.  
 Veit ek, at ek hekk  
 vindga meiði á  
 nætr allar níu,  
 geiri undaðr  
 ok gefinn Óðni,  
 sjalfr sjalfum mér,  
 á þeim meiði,  
 er manngi veit  
 hvers af rótum renn.

139.

They gave me neither bread nor  
drink from horn

I peered down below

I clutched the runes,

Screaming I grabbed them

And then sank back.

139.

Við hleifi mik sældu  
né við hornigi;

nýsta ek niðr,

nam ek upp rúnar,

æpandi nam,

fell ek aftr þaðan.

The sacrificing of the king for the sake of prosperity in the new year is a well known archaic motif reflected in the most ancient mythological tales of the sacrifice of a primordial being, such as Ymir or Purusa and the creation of the world out of their flesh. In this myth, Odin presents himself as a sacrifice  $\lambda$ , dedicating himself to himself, by which he accomplishes a paradigmatic gesture which ensures the manifestation of the world in the new year from his birth  $\Upsilon$ , the attainment of the noetic, magical, runic, mystery of a-i-u. Kure Henning emphasizes in particular that Odin's obtainment of the runes is associated with a fall (a descent) from above to below - *fell ek aftr þaðan* - and concludes that the secret of the runes is associated with the lower worlds and death, from which Odin raises them up and brings them to light, into the world. [10]

The inclusion in this interpretation of Odin's names Jolfaðr, Jolnir, Valtyr, Alföðr, among many others, significantly expands the horizon of monism in the Germano-Scandinavian tradition. The Celtic Cross is the wheel, *\*hweulō*, which is revealed in language as Joll. It is born anew in and through Joll, it descends only to rise again. The Year is Joll, and during the Joll-days of the Year, the the Jolnir-áss-Jolfaðr manifests as the beginning of the new year. This is the birth of Joll out of Joll by the Father of Joll; it is the birth of the Sun of the Celtic Cross out of the World-Night, as light from darkness, and sound from silence.

All of these key moments associated with the manifestation of the universe are tied together in the figure of the transgressive, ecstatic God of Death and Poetry. They are manifest in the space of the metaphysical Winter-Night of the Year, the space of Death, as that towards which the being of the Germanic peoples was oriented

as warriors, poets, priests, and philosophers. The figure that unites all of these archetypes and functions in society is Odin. [11]

Death is the only important thing that provides authenticity for being, and meaning for all of history, becoming, and life. Life itself begins as the multiplication of dust/ashes for those who come into the world. Coming into life is coming into dying. Death surrounds and covers with winter twilight the space of the Emptiness of Oblivion as the Stillness, Silence, and descent towards Ginnungagap “in the depths of the unknown.”

“There can be no things where there is no word.” Thus rings the truth of the Norn in the verse of Stefan George. As follows, the tangible diversity of not only objects, but things and beings speaks to us of an uninterrupted flow of words. Thus the many are multiplied, *πολλὰ*. Ascending from the many to the One, it is logical to conclude that this ascent implies a gradual reduction of words and, in the end, leads to but one all-word, a sacred word which cannot be summated but which, like a seed, contains all the potentially possible and impossible diversity of being for all the future. In tradition, this secret word is almost always a name for God or a sacred, God-given mantra which is at times one of his names. The unifying name of God in the Germano-Scandinavian tradition is *Alföðr* or *Jolfaðr*. But these names contain two roots - *al* and *jol* + *faðr*, i.e., they are double-composed, “double worded”, and we are interested primarily in the one proto-word, the super-word. Such a name for God might very well be *Jol* or the derivative name for Odin, *Jolnir*.

In Edred Thorsson’s opinion, the Germanic all-word was *runa*, the mystery learned by Odin as a result of his self-sacrifice. All phenomena in the world can be explained and reduced to the runic system of the Futhark, and in turn to the name itself *runa*. A name, as a term (a border), contains both the essence of a thing and the pledge of its being. The essence of the runes is *runa*, or a mystery, a secret, something hidden. Among runic spells, one mysterious formula is known which to this day has no dominant, convincing etymological version: ALU, alu. One theory traces this formula back to the proto-Germanic root *\*aluh*, or amulet, since this formula is often found on pendants and bracteates. Another theory assigns such to the proto-Germanic root *\*alub*, that is beer or ale, the ritual, intoxicating drink of the Germanic peoples.

If we replace ƿƿ's consonantal runic phoneme ǀ with the vowel ǀ, then we obtain the formula of the Year, ƿǀ. The triad of AIU is the quintessence of the Celtic Cross, the mystery of life-becoming-death, the all-word which might very well be, as Herman Wirth thought, the name of the God-Year.

The phonetics of a-i-u can also be found in the maha mantra of Hinduism, *Aum* or *Om*. According to legend, Aum (Om) was the first sound of the yet cataphatically unmanifest Brahma, the mantra whose vibration created the world.

These phonemes mean the triad of creation, maintenance, and destruction. In Greek, we encounter this phonetic triad in the word αἰών - *aion* or *Aeon* - which means the age and life of a human or generation. It is the name of the God of Time. Αἰών and ƿ-ǀ-ǀ thus correlate on the axis of Hellenic-Germanic meanings. In the Neoplatonic view, the most detailed contender for the all-word is the name of the solar god Apollo, Ἄ-πόλλων, the “not many” or, to boil this name’s meaning down to a single word: ἓν (“One”),

The all-word, the arche-word (Greek ἀρχή means “supreme” or “highest”) is the closest of all to the Beginning, the First Principle. This principle, according to another meaning of ἀρχή - “to rule”, “to command” - rules and determines all further disclosure of beings as beings. The pre-Socratic philosopher closest of all to the Germanic peoples, Heraclitus, believed ἀρχή to be fire, close to the fire of the Thing of the Gods.

The first-word is the seed that bears its own essential fruit, the universe, its universal law of order (Wyrd), of man, and his path (the Year, the Aeon). In this lies the whole power of the arche-word, the Logos.

The Logos, as the first-word, is born out of the ringing silence of the apophatic Abyss of Oblivion. If this all-word is a mystery of tradition that is revealed to the initiated, then the mystery of this all-word itself, its reverse, is its closeness to the stillness and silence from which it silences itself off.

**Askr Svarte (Evgeny Nechkasov)**  
**Translated by J. M. A.**

*References:*

[1] See: Herman Wirth's *Der Aufgang der Menschheit* (1928), *Die Ura Linda Chronik* (1933), *Die Heilige Urschrift der Menschheit* (1936), and Alexander Dugin's *Znaki Velikogo Norda. Giperboreiskaiia Teoriia* [Signs of the Great North: The Hyperborean Theory, 2008].

[2] Among the Slavs this holiday was called Koliada, from the Old Slavonic root *\*kolo*, or circle, and *koleso*, or wheel which, like the Greek κύκλος and English “cycle” and “wheel”, is derived from the same Proto-Indo-European root as *\*hweulō*.

[3] This is yet another “hint” towards the Divine monism present in the Germano-Scandinavian tradition.

[4] Wirth, *Der Aufgang der Menschheit* (1928).

[5] The acronym AEIOU is widely known in Germany as the “Austrian slogan” of Friedrich II, “Austriae Est Imperare Orbi Universo” - “It is Austria's destiny to rule the whole world.”

[6] See Alexander Dugin's *Noomakhia* volume on the Germanic Logos: A. Dugin, *Noomakhia: Voiny Uma - Logos Evropy: Germanskii Logos: Chelovek Apofaticheskii* (Moscow, Akademicheskii Proekt, 2015). [“Noomachy: Wars of the Mind - The Logos of Europe: The Germanic Logos - Apophatic Man”].

[7] See: Martin Findell, *Runes* (Trustees of the British Museum, 2014). This meaning also corresponds to the shape of the rune, which resembles a “rising hump.”

[8] *V* and *w* can essentially be reduced to *u*, as can *z* to *s*. The rune *Yr* closes the Younger Futhark.

[9] English translation from *The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore* (New York: Penguin, 2011), p. 35.

[10] See: Henning Kure, “Hanging on the World Tree”, “Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes and Interactions”, international conference in Lund.

[11] See: Askar Svarte, *Priblizhenie i okruzhenie* [Approaching and Surrounding] (Svarte Publishing, 2017).

## NORDIC BRACTEATES: UNIQUE SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE ON NORDIC TRADITION

Among the Runic Art relics there is an absolutely unique category, which includes the artifacts, naturally, magic<sup>1</sup> ones. Such artifacts are at the same time, maybe, the first example of “standardization” in Nordic Magic, as well as are endlessly diverse when thoroughly studied. We are talking about the *Bracteates* – specific ancient jewelry, which was in due time the typical platform for the Runic Arts. Today the Bracteates are used to name peculiar medal-like round pendants (mainly gold ones), the face of which is covered with an image and surrounded in most cases with a runic inscription. Although there are also different types of bracteates. They were almost exclusively manufactured in Scandinavia (mainly in Denmark and in the South of Sweden) in V-VI centuries. Even more late Bracteates are known as well as the Bracteates manufactured or found in other countries (a Bracteate from Wellbeck Hill – Britain, a Bracteate from Wapno – Poland, etc.). In total today there are about 700 bracteates known, about a half of which were found in Denmark.

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<sup>1</sup> At least when leaving behind the latest imitations.



One of Danish Bracteates (Zealand), famous with its spell-“inscription”. A Runic inscription says:

**hariuha haitika : farauisa : gibu  
auja**

and ends, most likely, with a tripled Teiwaz. The inscription allows certain translation: “*My name is Hariuha, I know danger, I bring luck*”.

The term “Bracteate” originates from lat. *bractea*, which may be translated as “thin [metal] plate”; the shape of these perfect specimens of Scandinavian arts is also connected with Rome. Initially the first Bracteates imitated late Ancient Greek medals-“icons” portraying an Emperor; however having borrowed from the Romans the customs to wear such “icons” around the neck, Nordic people soon put their own meaning in it, thus changing the image of the Emperor for the image of one of the Gods (as a rule Odin), and Latin inscription was substituted with a Runic spell.

The fact that the Bracteates were mainly observed as magic power pieces is not doubted – naturally, it also showed the high status of its owner. Probably, magic efficacy of the Bracteates (talking about the graphics) based on the three elements. First, it was the use of runes and runic spells. Then the sacral symbols applied to the Bracteates, and they are quite diverse: swastika, triskele, various shapes of a cross, etc. And finally the central image itself, which, with no doubt, was considered as the one possessing magic power.

...The Bracteates are indeed quite fascinating artifact materials of the Nordic Tradition, the epoch of its peak which deserves our closest attention and is able to give us much for our understanding of sacral ideas of our ancestors. Let’s analyze the three specified components one by one – as fully as we can within the scopes of this moderate article.



## Runic inscriptions

So. Runic inscriptions in the Bracteates are very diverse: in their scale (from full spells to individual signs), and in the symbols used (from classic Elder runes to the symbols, evidently runic in their shape, but not readable) and obviously, in the “mission” of the inscription.



The Bracteate of Djupbrunn (Gotland), which runic inscription represents the sacral word **ALU**.

The most comprehensible are the Bracteates with “standard” runic sacral words. Most often it is a famous formula **ALU**; a bit less frequent is the formula **LAUKAZ**; there are Bracteates known with other sacral words well used in runic Arts: **LAÞU**, **SALU**, etc.

It is curious that in some cases the Master in process of the Bracteates creation used not one but two or even several runic sacral formulas, probably, following his own goal. Thus, for example, in the Bracteate from Skrydstrup (see lower) we see simultaneously **ALU** and **LAUKAZ**, and the inscription in the Bracteate from Skania, Denmark (Skåne 1) represents the most complicated runic spell from sacral words with the use of classic bind runes **GA (KA)**:

**laþu laukaz : gakaz alu**



Bracteate Skåne 1  
(Denmark)

Sometimes the runic formula **ALU** is used in combination with the person's name (for example, in the number of the Bracteates from Darum). Considering in this context **ALU** as wishing wellness, then a personal name here is, probably, the name of the person to whom the Bracteate belonged initially: it might be the Customer, or the one for whom it was ordered, or the master himself, provided he did the Bracteate for his own use.

One of the Bracteates, a runic inscription at which probably represents a combination of a personal name and the runic formula **ALU** (Darum, Denmark). In this case according to E.A. Makayev the name *Niujila* is provided (literally in the runic inscription – **niujil**).



Quite similar is the use of sustainable runic formulas, probably, also spelling ones, but – specific *exclusively for the Bracteates*. More or less one-line interpretation of such formulas is not possible, although there are various hypotheses. Thus, for example, in the combination popular in Gotland **eelil** (or **eehl**) they sometimes see either a basis “horse” (and a horse is a sacral animal for Nordic people), or a sophisticated “I, eril”. The later one does not hold water, the first one remains to be without proofs.

One more important group are the Bracteates carrying the list of Futhark runes, which as is commonly known, was considered in the Tradition as the most powerful (and, most likely, peculiar all-purpose) spell. About a dozen of such Bracteates were found; and sometimes they encompass the whole runic line, sometimes – only its part. The most famous artifact of such types is a Bracteate of Vadstena (Sweden), one of those few artifacts allowing not only restoring the order of Elder runes, but also stating its division in three attas.



Bracteate from Allmungs (Gotland)

The inscription in this Bracteate starts with runic spell **luwatuwa**; it is followed by Futhark divided into attas with spacers as two dots.



The Bracteate of Vadstena (Sweden)

In the most complicated cases a runic inscription in a Bracteate is a text spell; one example of such kind was already provided in the beginning of the article (“*My name is Hariuha, I know danger, I bring luck*”). The same magic word **auja**, “luck”, is used in the spell of the famous Bracteate from Skotborg (Denmark), which says:

**auja alawin**  
**auja alawin**  
**auja alawin j alawid**

The first part of the spell consists of three repetition “Good luck Alavin!”, where Alavin is evidently the name of the person for whom the Bracteate was made. Further goes Jera rune, having here not alphabetical but conceptual and magical nature, and the spell ends with the name Alavid, which can be understood as the name of

the Master, who made this amulet or as the name of another person somehow connected to Alavin.



The Bracteate of Skodborg  
(Denmark)

However such evident interpretations are not that frequent for the textual spells in Bracteates. Thus, for example, the meaning of the inscription in the Bracteate of Over-Hornbek (Denmark), which is fully readable and translatable, is still unclear:

**brtgb hagela ala a asulo alh**

or in normalized form:

**Pritugþ. Hagla alla a asulo alh**

“The thirtieth. All devoted ones by the temple of a precious Goddess”<sup>2</sup>

In some cases even reading long spells in the Bracteates turns out to be quite difficult. Such is, for example, the Bracteate from women tomb in Agedal (Norway): there are almost a dozen of interpretations relating to its inscription. Yet S. Bugge in 1903 suggested, for example, the following interpretation: “*Noble RīkiþiR possesses the treasure of the Leader. Uha cut out, wrote [and] provided [the image] of a woman-elf in it [i.e. in the treasure]*”. Today the most probable is considered to be the following interpretation: “... *a horse, full of Yule’s power, in the grass land. The fast one has a suit [of mares] in his...*”, but it also remains almost unprovable.

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<sup>2</sup> The first rune here can be Wunjo, instead of Thurisaz; when this is the case a number “thirtieth” disappears, but the reading and translation of the rest of inscription is quite definite.



The Bracteate of Over-Hornbek  
(Denmark)



The Bracteate of Agedal  
(Norway)

In reality text spells are also the inscriptions in the Bracteates, simply giving the name of the Master. We know that in the Runic Arts notation of eril's name ("I, the name, wrote the runes", for example), confirming the responsibility of the magician (and "enclosure" with it of own Power), being written with runes, itself becomes the independent acting factor. This is true also in relation to the Bracteates, of course; by this in many cases the spell applied to the Bracteate is limited with it. Thus for example, the inscription in the Bracteate from Femø (Denmark) simply says **ek fakaR f[ahido]** – "I, Fakaz, painted"; the inscription in the Bracteate from Skonager (also Denmark) – **araN ...tika...** – "They call me Arang"; in the unique Bracteate from Asum – **(e)he ik akaR fahi** – "Horse. I, Akaz, painted", etc. However, the signature of the Master can be also a part of quite long text, as we observe, for example, in the Bracteates from Halskov, Väsbu, Eskatorp (all in Denmark), etc..



The Bracteate from Väsbu (Denmark). In the text of the inscription we can clearly read the beginning (**fahide**, “painted”) and the ending (**erilaR**, “eril”); and in between there is for sure unreadable: alas, it is the name of eril and something more ...



The Bracteate from Asum (Denmark) – the biggest and the most complicated out of found Bracteates up to date. Here presented is the general view, the image of a part of the Bracteate and tracing of its central part.

And eventually a big number of Bracteates encompasses simply individual runes or their simple combinations; in the last case sometimes we are able to suggest their magic meaning (as, for example, in relation to the inscription in the Bracteate from Tjurkö – see the image), however in most cases such remains to be enigmatic for us ...



The Bracteate from Tjurkø (Denmark) with triadic runic spell



The Bracteate of Björnholm (Denmark) with individual runic symbols

### Central images

Naturally, *the images* in Nordic Bracteates had magical meaning not less significant than the runic inscriptions within, moreover than a part of bracteates (although, small one) had no runes at all; meanwhile the sacral images, with rare exceptions, were there for sure. We can even say that the Bracteates are icon-graphical; and to my mind Burkhard Gladigow absolutely correctly describes the Bracteate in one of its papers as a “*miniature of a temple or a God statue, carried on a body*”.

Except for that the images in the Bracteates are important for us also with that it is the last “splash” of an ancient style connected with the high-time of the Iron Age Tradition. This magical artistry and fantastic plastics, continuing the tradition of sacral images of late Stone and Bronze Age, shall not be observed in later European art.

Depending from the composition of the images in the Bracteates, modern archeology and art history refer those to one of several classes, differing with the content of the portrayed (and its

sacral meaning), as well as with its origin. There are the following classes<sup>3</sup>.

**Class A.** Imitation of Roman coins/medallions portraying an Emperor (on a horse or en face head). In the number of cases we may supposedly identify the images with Odin.



Example of an A-class Bracteate – the Bracteate of Revsgard (Denmark). The imitation of Roman coins with an Emperor's profile is obvious, but... depicted person here holds in his hand a *ring* – the attribute of one and only Nordic God. Draupnir ring...

May the most typical example are the Bracteates, where on one side we see the image of a classic Scandinavian triad of Gods, and on the other – the illustration of the myth about Baldr's death. Such is, for example, the Bracteate from Gudme (see the image); the right figure here is naturally Odin: this is clearly underlined by the spear, which is his attribute, and a raven, flying over his head. The left figure in majority of cases is associated with Baldr: the figure is pierced with a stylized mistletoe branch, and holds a ring in the hands, the same Draupnir that Odin gave to his son on a death pile. It is not clear the origin and the role of the wings on the back of Baldr; it might be explained as follows: as Draupnir is *already* in the hands of Baldr then Baldr is depicted *already* being in the Other world? And finally the third central figure almost definitely might be associated with Thor: first of all it is a natural finalization of the triad (magic – fertility – war/storm), and secondly and most importantly, the figure holds a hammer in hands. And it is portrayed as if the hand is ended with a hammer, but it is normal for the artistic style of the Iron Age.

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<sup>3</sup> In the initial state this classification was developed yet in the middle of XIX century by a Danish H.J. Thomsen.



(By the way, when the image of the hammer in this Bracteate is arguable, in other Bracteates with the same plot the hammer is definitely distinguished – see the image)



The Bracteate of Gudme (Denmark).  
Tracing of the central part and general view

The hammer in Thor’s hands in another Bracteate (Zealand) with the same plot of Baldr’s death



353 b

The Bracteate of Tonder (Denmark). Most likely, the image is also devoted to the myth about Baldr’s death, but, so to say “from the other side”: here we observe Höðr shooting with mistletoe branch. And the meaning of absolutely fantastic creatures around him is not clear ...

Of the same interest are the images of single figures, where, in many cases, we also can see divine characters. Thus, for example, in the Bracteate from Skrydstrup (Denmark) with sacral runic words **LAUKAZ** and **ALU**, a figure is depicted, which we have the right to associate with Odin, I suppose – this is confirmed by the wolves and ravens in the image. Several Bracteates found in the continent also have unique images of the Goddess; most likely, we may associate her with Frigg. There are of course plenty of such Bracteates, where we simply cannot define the connection with this or that God ...



The image of Odin with wolves and ravens in the Bracteate from Skrydstrup (Denmark)



Two Bracteates from continental Europe with the image of the Goddess.

The Bracteate from Sadding (Denmark) with the image of an unidentifiable figure. A runic inscription in the Bracteate is read as

**ihhh(i)(d)uuRead(f)iiuhwsh\_aiiu**

**Rm(l)hpila(l)(u) ... R,**

which has no word meaning and is, evidently, a complex spell ...

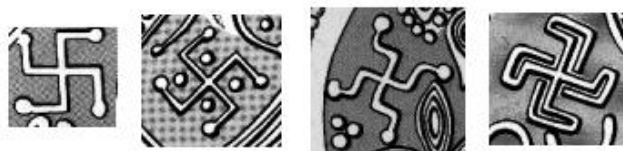


**Class C.** The image of Head, ruling the four-leg animal (horse, as a rule). Almost all the time it is identified as an image of Odin, which in many cases, is confirmed with a wolf and a raven by this rider (two wolves and two ravens). It is the most widely-spread class; we gave plenty of examples of such Bracteates above.

The Bracteate of Skonager (Denmark) is one of the multiple examples of C-class Bracteates. The first runic inscriptions – **Niuwila** – is a personal name. Regarding the second one there are several quite differing opinions; the author considers as the most natural to read it as **lwl** – three-part runic spell with a quite transparent meaning.



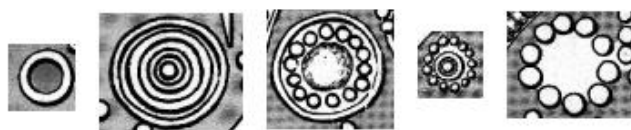
And finally the Bracteates of **D-, E- and F-class** have no runic inscription and images of the figures of Gods or people. There are the images of real and fantastic animals, sometimes – graphic elements of plants.



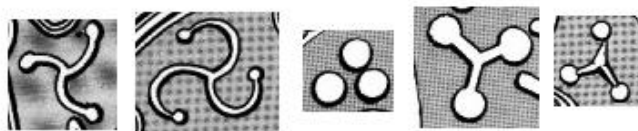
1



2



3



4



5

## Sacral symbols

Sacral – non-runic – symbols, presented in the Bracteates are more than diverse. In general, however, these symbols are typical for the second half of the Iron Age of Northern and Central Europe; probably there is no point to analyze here each of plenty of dozens of symbols, which we observe in the Scandinavian Bracteates – one small article shall be not enough for that. That is why I shall simply give the examples of such symbols, and, with the reader’s consent, shall refer to my own book that is fully devoted to this subject<sup>4</sup>.



The examples of sacral symbols in the images in Scandinavian Bracteates:

1 – four-leg swastika

2 – four-end crosses

3 – circles of various shapes

4 – three-leg swastika (triskele) and the combination of three dots

5 – other images

**Anton Platov<sup>5</sup>**  
**Translated by Vaverkina**

<sup>4</sup> Платов А. Сакральная символика Нордов. М., 2013. (A.Platov. Sacral Nordic Symbols).

<sup>5</sup> Firstly published in Russian asatru magazine “NordanVindr”:  
<https://nordanvindr.wordpress.com/blog/>

## WOTAN AND THE BLACK SUN

*Life is war. War is life.*

Before us a wasted and barren moorland, a land abandoned to itself, where our gods no longer walk, no longer sing, no longer fight. The war continues, no doubt, but not in Midgard. In Midgard we have peace, a clammy unpleasant peace, forged on slavery and indignity.

Our ancestors lived their way, no doubt about it. But their way was insufficient, the enemy of all free folks has been gaining ground till they became what their strange god told them one day they would be: kings of the whole world.

A few of our kind had fought, we continue the struggle. For those of us who had felt, from the darkest depths of our spirit, the call of Wotan, the harrowed scream of he who still hangs on Yggdrassil, the current situation is unacceptable. We will never assume such a thing as defeat, we will never live relaxed in a world that is not forged in our image and likeness. Either we play with our rules, or there is no game. That's the undomitable and childish spirit that inhabits our souls.

As warriors of Wotan we have a peculiar and hard responsibility, an specific mission: to restore in ourselves and our adjacent circles the antique and natural order of society. In the beginning the warrior function stood on the edge of the pyramid, wise warrior kings reigned over every european society, in charge of leading and elevating, they were the spearhead that entered the unknown, it appertained to them the enormous privilege of the terrible fight for transcendence; at their service, one step down, we had the sacerdotal caste, which was formed by lower men in both strenght and wisdom, but yet of noble blood, capable of push out into the mysteries of reality and worlds without getting themselves really involved on them. Underneath, there were the rest.

After a deep and long war, the caste conflict turned society's hierarchy, and put priests over warriors; that was the beginning of decadence. We don't know yet the reason, maybe the fatigue of the warrior caste; maybe the strange nature of Midgard, where matter seems to have a huge weight on the spirit; maybe the attrition of that same spirit, after having created decens of upermen in different civilizations; maybe destiny, preparing the battlefield to create the greatest warriors that our ancestors of other worlds could ever conceive. Ignorance is part of the path, we must assume it.

In that turn of events the modern world was starting being forged: before that the warrior lived in constant contact with the living forces of nature and the supernatural, being his job deeply essential, intense and hard to sustain, since it put in scene the self's essence of he who pushed out into such a heavy task; then the world was alive and flowed, the shapes the essences took were contemplated as temporary structures that must be overcome in order to achieve a much more intimate conexión with one's existence, with one's living force; for that reason the use of handwriting was limited, wisdom was a consequence of experience, and reason a mere tool used to estructure that wisdom in function of the instant. The priest, on the other hand lacks the strenght to live in that non stop tension, reposing his knowledge on the established shapes, rites and spells; when his was the power, the world started to mutate, everything that is beyond the rigid pattern that mattery permits started getting disconnected of Midgard, no more elves, no more dragons, no more magic nor trascendence, since all of them inhabitate much more subtile worlds, hardly compatible with the Midgard we all know. The same way a dream dilutes when vigil comes, everything that is supernatural diluted when man, buttress and reason of reality, walked away from himself, from his own depths, to rest on laws, rules and traditions.

Today we witness the culmination of that decadence: even though the sacerdotal caste still rules on the shadow, their most vulgar minions, the merchants, are the ones who control society, taking patterns rigidity to unprecedented levels in this version of reality. The system is becoming lifeless up to the point that we start contemplating symptoms of collapse, since everything that lose flexibility ends up

collapsing, because life is movement, and not even the darkest sacerdotal organization can stop the terrible impulse of life.

Therefore, it is our mission to create the foundations of organizations that can accelerate, with their mere existence, such collapse. Our work is both inwards and outwards. The symbol of those who fight alongside with Wotan is the Black Sun, and as the Black Sun we must be perfect, dynamic, and immovable. We don't have to learn from the world, but is the world who must learn from us, and for that we have to forge another level human beings, maybe those warriors that destiny was waiting for, and for whom it created such an unpleasant battlefield. And the only path for that is the intense concentration of energies and the intimate communion with what one really is.

The external circle of the Black Sun represents my limits, the contact between what I am and what it is.

The Sieg rays represent the world's movement incorporated through the symbol of victory, defeat the world within you in all its facets, and thou shall incorporate it.

The inner circle represents a much more diffuse limit, the huge distance between the shapes my spirit takes, and the living substance of itself.

The center of the Black Sun is a black hole. Do the shapes that hold the structure emanate from the hole, or is the gathering of the twelve rays that creates the existence of the infinite hole or maybe both phenomena are true and complementary?

To meditate on all these questions is the duty of all Wotan's warrior, since victory will not come from outside. Victory will come when one of this warriors finds Wotan within himself. When he gather with the Ace at the core of Yggdrassil, where he hangs triumphally after having conquered the World's Tree, where he waited patiently for millenia after having made himself the measure of everything that exists, where he crowned himself as King of Justice.

**Parsifal, Comunidad Odinista de España**



# THE SOURCES OF THE ROMAN PRIVATE RITUAL

## Introduction



It is possible to individuate two intertwined, but distinct, dimensions in the religious conception of Cult in Ancient Rome, the Public Cult, linked to the welfare of the Roman State, and Private or Domestic Cult. This presentation aims to briefly illustrate the ancient sources of the contemporary Roman Private Cult, showing its most significant elements. Before moving to the analysis of the various components of the contemporary Roman Private Cult we practice, few words must be spent on the nature of the sources we choose to mention in this excursus. Due to time restraint we shall mention *only* the most notorious and specifically relevant elements from the archaeological and literary material at our disposal. We hope to give

an overview of the ancient sources of the contemporary Roman Private Cult as much comprehensive as possible.

Our main focus will be on the Roman Rite ("Ritus"). The "Ritus" is considered the maximum expression of the Roman religiosity or "Pietas" and thus distinguished the private cult in ancient Rome. The "Ritus" is a performed form of pray and worship. It consists in the combination of "formulae" (words) and gestures (actions) that have to be repeated in specific patterns. The better the gestures are performed and the lines recited, the better the pray is. J. Champeaux confirms in her book "The Religion of the Romans" that the Roman "Pietas" demanded absolute respect of the rite which consists in the "exact recitation of the Prayer" and "impeccable execution of the Gestures" (Bologna, 2002, pp. 11-16). Following Aulus Gellius, the Roman jurist of the 2nd century, who, in his "Noctes Atticae", depicts the roman citizens who observed the "Religiones", the ritual acts and words, "really rigorous" and also "really prudent", we will now proceed to examine the salient components of the Roman Private Cult.

## Priest

The "Pater Familias", the senior male lead and head of the "familia", the Roman domestic nucleus, is invested with the highest religious authority for what the private cult is concerned. This bit of information is clearly stated by an earlier source Albius Tibullus, who is known for having composed "Elegiarum", I, X, 15-28, 1<sup>st</sup> century.

At the edge of the house, the venerated authority of Pontifex stops, the head of the family is the absolute arbiter: "Suo quisque ritum sacrificium faciat"; *Each one celebrates his Rite* (C. Terentius Varro, "De Lingua Latina", VII, 88).

"Separatim nemo habessit deos neve novos, neve advenas, nisi publice adscitos; privatim colunt quos rite a patribus acceperint. Ritus familiae patrumque servant" / *No one has special, new, or foreigner divinities unless they are publicly recognized; in private are cultivated the Cults that are received according to the Rite of the*

*Fathers. The Rite of the Family and of the Fathers is to be preserved* (M. Tullius Cicero, “De Legibus”, II, 8).



## **Ablutions**

The actual “ritus” is always preceded by ablutions. Those who would have performed the “ritus” are compelled to purify themselves. They literary have to wash themselves with water. The Romans believe that the water has the power to erase the past and restore, even if just for moments, the original purity of the ritual practitioners. Because water is believed to purify and regenerate, ablutions have to precede the religious acts, preparing the man to enter what is sacred.

Ablutions are common practice, for example they are performed before most kind of sacrifices (M. Eliade, "Treatise on the History of Religions", Turin, 2008, page 176). One of the most important testimonies is given to us by P. Vergilius Maro in the *Aeneis* (IV, 634-640): “*Bid her hasten to sprinkle her body with river water and bring with her the victims*”.

A. Theodosius Macrobius refers to ablution in several occasions: firstly, in *Saturnalia*. II, 1, 2 reminds us of Aeneas who, once washed in the water of the Tiber River is purified and so he can invoke Jupiter. Then in *Saturnalia* III, 2, 6: "... we know that, when someone is about to sacrifice to the Heaven's Gods, this one has to purify himself with the ablution of the body. On the other hand, when it is necessary to sacrifice to the Underworld's Gods, a simple sprinkling is considered sufficient".

P. Ovidius Naso in the *Fasti* (IV, 7, 78): "*Wash your hands in the river water*" for the pastoral ceremony in honour of the Goddess Pale.

### **Coverage of the head (velatio capitis)**

But let's enter the real elements of the "Ritus". First thing first, the *pater familias* has to cover his head with a strip of his toga (P. Chini, "Life and Customs of the Ancient Romans - The Religion", Rome, 1990, archaeological evidences page 75 photo 62, Relief with scene of sacrifice - National Roman Museum; page 54, photo 52, Augustus sacrificing with a saucer ("patera") - Vatican Museums).

Ploutarchos in his "Quaestiones Romanae", 22" referring to the imperial practice of *velatio capitis* states: " *They Sacrifice to Cronus (Saturn) with the head discovered perhaps because was Aeneas the man who had introduced the custom of covering the head and indeed Crono's sacrifice is very ancient*". But why do the Romans cover their heads while venerating the Gods? Ploutarchos provide us with an answer "In sign of humiliation or rather to avoid that some unhappy and insulting voice come to them from the outside while they are praying ". Or even to symbolize "*the disappearance and the concealment of the soul by the body*".

## Silence

The first formula of the Rite is the "Favete Linguis", command of silence. As Seneca explains in "De vita beata" (26, 7): "*When you will hear the sacred texts mentioned, keep silent.*" In the latin text Seneca uses the world "*favoriteci*" which derives from another important latin term which is "*favor*". In this case, the term doesn't mean favour or help, but it is an order that intimates silence, the silence needed to perform the sacred rite according to the prescriptions, alias without being disturbed by any profane voices ". We can find variants of this formula in Vergilius ("Aeneis", V, 71): "*ore favete omnes*", that means that all have to observe silence, and in Tibullus ("Elegiarum", II, 2, 2): "*The bystanders, men and women, have to observe a pious silence*" and (in II, 1, 1) "*keep silent all the bystanders* ".



## **Ignition of the sacred fire**

As soon as silence has been imposed, we read again in "Elegiarum", II, 2, 3 of Tibullus: "Sacred incense must be offered to the fireplace", implying obviously, the previous ignition of the sacred fire.

In the "Fasti" of Ovidius (VI, 291, 304) Vesta identifies herself as the flame of the domestic fireplace.

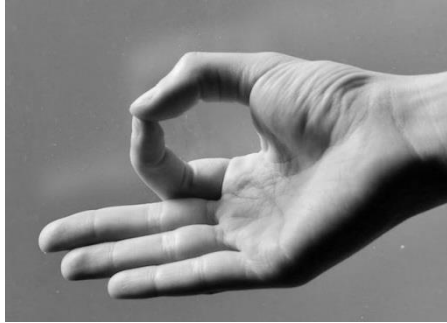
## **Delimitation of the sacred space**

Then, the place designated for the ritual has to be purified. A procession, led by the pater familias, followed by the participants to the rite, walked in an hourly circle around the space that has to be purified. This part of the ritual is a remnant of the more archaic magical-religious notion of the protective circle (J. Champeaux, "The Religion of the Romans", Bologna, 2002, page 84).



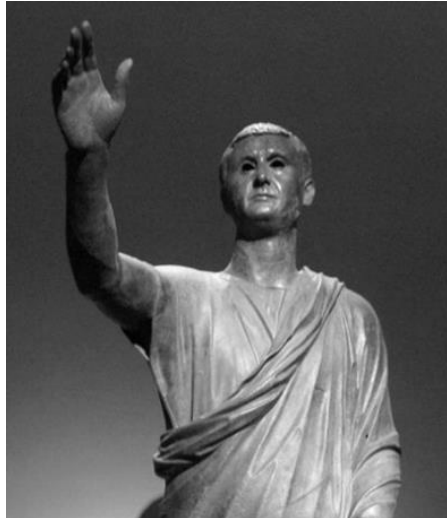
## Adoration (adoratio)

Right index and right thumb together are brought to the lips and they are softly touched with a kiss; then the right arm tends forward in greeting and/or touches the sacred image (Titus Livius, "Ab Urbe Condita", V, 22, 4 and Minucius Felix, "Octavius", II, 4).



## Greeting

The physical gesture is accompanied by different version of a common formula "Salvete Dii", "Salvete locurum Deos", "Salve Sancte Pater", "Salve Magne Pater salve". Many are the sources we could refer you to, but let's just mention Ovidius and his "Fasti" and "Carmina Epigraphica".



## Prayer

At this point, the pray begins. The Romans would worship one or more deities at one time.

The main source of roman prey ("Precatio or Preces") is the "Carmen", in which several formulae of invocation are repeated and grouped together forming a rhythmic prose.

M. Porcius Cato in his "De Agri Cultura" (141) provides us with examples of praying. One of the most famous formulae is: "Mars Father I'm asking and I'm begging you to be benevolent and propitious for me, for our house and for our family".

First of all the invocation specifies to which divinity it is addressed and secondly it draws the God's attention by calling him by his own name. The divine name is isolated and repeated. Then, we have the request formulated in an interactive, enchanting way: two pairs of synonyms, two verbs and two adjectives and immediately after three nouns to indicate the beneficiaries of the solicited benevolence (J. Champeaux, "The Religion of the Romans", Bologna, 2002, pp. 86-87).





Then we have the formula that accompanies the offer to God: *"for this purpose ... accept the offer of this bun..."* (A Giano). The Romans were known for their scrupulousness. They coined a formula, for the occasion in which they would be uncertain about the outcome of the rituals : "If nothing has satisfied you, take these (successive offers) for expiation".

They even had a formula "Sive Deus, sive Dea" - whether you are a God or a Goddess (Cato, "De Agri Cultura", 139), for the case in which the sex of the evoked deity was unknown. In order not to irate the "Nume", they would prudently include both eventualities (J. Champeaux, "The Religion of the Romans", Bologna, 2002, p.46).

There is a specific order in the invocations to group of Gods. Firstly they would invoke Janus God of every beginning. Immediately after Jupiter, father of all the gods, then the other minor deities would follow. Leaving Vesta, the goddess of the fireplace, as the last. : M. Tullius Cicero ("De Natura Deorum", II, 67): *"They wanted Giano to be the first in the sacrifices ... the power (of Vesta) concerns the areas and the fireplaces and therefore every prayer and every sacrifice end up there, indeed she protect everything that is intimate "*.



Apotropaically, during the Rite nothing is to be crossed as Ovidius wisely prescribes *"do not cross the legs on the knee"* ("Fasti", IV, 827-828).

Ritual prayer is based on the effective force of the word, for this reason errors, stuttering and the substitution of one word with another are factors that annul the Rite (G. Plinius Secundus, "Naturalis Historia", 28, 10; II, 74, in D. Forte , "The priest in Rome", Forli, 2015, p.41). We can find examples of private prayers in Tibullus, To Lari ("Elegie", I, X, 15, 28); in Cato, To Marte Silvano, To Giove, To Giano, To Marte, ("De Agri Cultura", 83, 131-132, 134, 139, 141); in the works of T. Maccus Plautus, To Fides, To Jupiter, To Apollo, To Domestic Lare, To Penati. Often the testimonies are also archaeological: epigrams on tombstones, inscriptions in verses on the herms ("Carmina Epigraphica", I-IV century): To Diana, To Silvano, To Camene, To Priapo; prayers of the Latin Anthology on codes of the III-V century: To Tellus, To Sole, To Marte, To Libero.

## Hymns

Several well known roman poets composed hymns to honour one or more Gods. Among them, we mention "to Venus" in T. Lucretius Carus ("De Rerum Natura", I, 1-49);

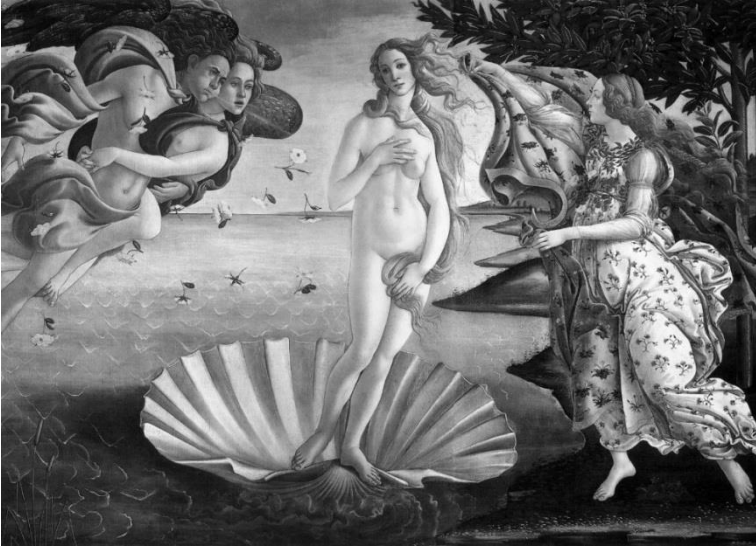
To Diana, Hymenaeus, Venus in G. Valerius Catullus ("Carmina", 34, 61, 36);

To Libero, Ceres, Mars, Flora and Pale - Ovidius ("Metamorphoseon", IV, 17-30, V, 341-661 and "Fasti", V, 549-598, V, 183-378, IV, 723-776 );

To Mercury, Apollo, Fortune, Bacchus, Faunus, Diana, Venus in Q. Horatius Flaccus ("Carmina", I 10, I 31, IV 6, I 35, II 19, III 25, III 18, III 22, I 30, IV 1;

To Aesculapius, Janus, Jupiter, Mercury, Nymphs, Saturn in M. Valerius Martialis ("Epigrammaton", IX 17, VIII 8, X 28, VII 60, VII 74, IX 58, XII 62);

To the Sun, to Minerva, to Juno in Martianus Capella "De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii", II 185-193, II 149, VI 567-575).



## Other formulas

Other famous formulae survived.

"*Quod bonum, faustum, felix, fortunatum, salutareque sit*" - 'be this thing good, auspicious, happy, lucky and healthy' as Cicero reports in "De Divinatione" (I, 182). In this work Cicero also explains how these words may bear prophetic value.

The Salii, the priests of Mars handed down for generations an archaic rhythmic chant addressed to Giano:

"O Zeul, ad oreso omnia, Verom ad patulcie, Cosmis es ianeos, Ianes es duonos, Ceros es Manos "; 'Oh Sun rise in the world! Oh You who are opening the Heaven's door! You are such as a kindly concierge, you are the good Giano, you are the beneficial governor".

It is difficult to understand it completely but, once adapted and translated, this is used in our private cult for the ritual consecration of the new cult objects.



## Offers

Three are the most common offers to the gods.

Incense : "Give me ... the honor of welcome incense ... around the fireplace" (S. Aurelius Propertius, "Elegie", IV, 6, 4-5). "And to me, I would like to celebrate the Patrii Penati and to offer incense to my old Lare every month" (Tibullus, "Elegiarum", I, 3, 33-34).

Wine : "Three times she pour limpid wine above the fire" (Vergilius, "Georgica", IV, 384) or "Pouring wine as you say these words" (Ovidius, "Fasti", II, 638).

Libation: "(Pouring) The wine from the amphorae to honor you, with copious supplications you associate with the Lares" (Horatius, "Carmina", IV, 5, 33-35).

They could be combined "I'm offering ... to you, Giano, wine and incense" (Ovidius, "Fasti", I, 172-173).

There were also other types of offerings:

"At the time of Calends a woman ... opens ... the Lari locked up ... covers the sacellas with flowers ... and the sabina grass (a

substitute of the incense) catches fire on the old fireplaces" (Propertius, "Elegiarum", IV, 3, 53-58) .

"At the God Terminus's feast... he threw three times wheat into the fire" (Ovidius, "Fasti", II, 651). It is recurrent the idea of burning the offerings to the gods. This suggests that the fireplace could become an aisle or domestic Altar.



It would be decorated with crowns and fronds and eventually washed down with daily libations. *"everyone quickly offer a libation on the table and pray to the Gods"* (Vergilius, "Aeneis", VIII, 278-279). On the days of Calende, of the Ides, of the None, Cato prescribes to adorn the fireplace with a crown of laurel and make offerings to the Lare, tutelary domestic deity ("De Agri Cultura", 143).

## Table – banquet (ara)

The banquet is transformed into a sacred domestic ritual of communion with the divine, and the table becomes an altar. Ploùtarchos ("Quaestiones Romanae", 64) reminds us that the romans would never eat everything that was served, the table was never to remain empty. He explains one should not allow a sacred thing to remain empty, and the table being sacred should not either.

Sacred images would have been placed on the table to make the deities present at meal (Ovidius, "Fasti", VI, 305-306). In festivities, such as the Saturnalia, sharing a meal was also part of the religious ceremony.



## Home altar (lararium)



The *Lararium*, is the shrine before which the private domestic ritual must be celebrated. Private shrines can be of different kinds: a small building at the bottom of the home garden; a closet with niches for the gods, a very little shrine or some underground votive rooms. The most common type is the shrine, closed with doors.

Inside the *Lararium* we would normally find the images of the deities and the objects necessary for the Rite.

Domestic deities.

The *Lares*. They are the patrons of a humanized space: e.g. they would dominate over a property, a house (*Lar Familiaris*), the sea once navigated (*Lares Permarini*), but also intersections (*Lares Compitales*), etc .. Originally, the *Lare* would always appear in the its singular form (Cato, "De Agri Coltura", 143). It was usually depicted as a dancing young boy with long hair, short tunic, mug in one hand and a sacuer called *pàtera* in the other.

The *Penates*. They are deities linked to people, protective of the dispensation of the house (*Penus*) and of the nourishment of the family; consequently they are the protector gods of the family.

The *Genius* is the guardian god of Pater Familias and he is depicted in an anthropomorphic way (man in toga) or as a snake.

The *Mani*, finally, are the deified ancestors who are to be honored.

### Artefacts and boxing memo



Numerous archaeological evidences as well as Vergilius, ("Aeneis", VI, 230), give us the list of votive furnishings that are used for the Rite.

Among these we find the thurible, the incense box and the *pàtera* we have mentioned before (which is a saucer to present the offerings to the Gods), the jug for wine and the aspersionum (the olive or laurel twig).



## Calendar



We would like to conclude mentioning the sacred character behind the Roman calendar, calendar codified by Julius Caesar and still current today in the world with the same names.

The Roman religious year begins with the month of March, sacred to Mars (God of war and dear to Romans because father of the Roman progenitor Romulus). It is considered the propitious season for the beginning of the wars and the time for warlike feasts.

In April (from the latin “Aperire”), the month sacred to Venus, the Goddess who blooms, agricultural feasts dominated.

May, sacred to Maia, Goddess of abundance, is the moment of the glories, but also the period for funerary procession.

June, sacred to Juno Goddess, with its ceremonies, prepares for the harvest.

In July, Iulius Caesar month, the demons of the woods and the deities connected to the water are venerated.

In August, the month dedicated to the first imperator Octavianus Augustus, in addition to the harvest feasts, beneficial heat is celebrated.

September, seventh month, is dedicated to equestrian games.

October, eighth month, marked the end of the war campaigns, then there are ceremonies of lustration of arms as well as feasts related to the harvest.

November, ninth month, is not important for agriculture and it does not contain any holidays.

In December, tenth month, the holidays are linked to sowing and to the sun.

January, besides being the month dedicated to Giano, it does not bear any particular characteristics.

In February, the month of purifications, dedicated to the God Februo, is the last month and is dominated by expiation ceremonies.

As a literary source it will be sufficient to mention the elegiac narration of Ovidius in the *Fasti*, which collect and illustrate with great erudition the legends and historical episodes linked to the individual occurrences of the Roman Calendar.

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# A TRAVEL TOWARD NEOPLATONIC MYSTICISM: A PHILOSOPHICAL ITINERARY

## **I. A Travel Toward Neoplatonic Mysticism.**

### **Introduction**

I don't remember how I happen to know the "Platonic Theology" by Proclus. I found that fat volume maybe for chance, maybe for fate, or for the will of a daemon. During my reading I found an incredible logic construction that was explaining the great divine metaphysics, revealing the philosophical aspects of every divinity of the classic world in the frame of the Neoplatonic Mystic. It was an ancient wisdom that was capturing and intoxicating my mind, like a good wine. Unfortunately, after the reading, I felt the same symptoms of drunkenness: amnesia, confusion, lack of clarity. What was going on?



Let's say it once and for all, Proclus and friends' texts are not the best for a relaxing evening reading. If on the one hand Plato's dialogues bring us smoothly to the heart of the philosophical thought, on the other hand Neoplatonic scripts are populated with abstruse terms like "substance", "participation", "power", "characteristic", "formal cause", making the text very hard to newcomers. Difficulty is also caused by words that today are in use with a different meaning. For instance, if we understand the word "power" used by Proclus as "capacity of a system for doing work" (physics), we misunderstand the whole subject. Therefore it is very important to use the correct definition and to exactly understand each term. This is the only way to enjoy the gigantic logic construction of the great minds of Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus and Damascius.

As a matter of fact, Neoplatonism is the synthesis of centuries and centuries of philosophic research, run in Phoenicia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, etcetera, giving life to the top philosophic synopsis of the whole ancient world. This is the reason why its vocabulary and its concepts require preparation. For similarity sake, studying Proclus without knowledge of the previous steps, is like trying to solve the integrals without knowing the multiplication tables.

With this consideration in mind, I start a review of the classic philosophy, with simplicity and humility, trying to identify the great themes that are useful for the understanding of the Neoplatonic Metaphysic. It is a hard task, my knowledge is very limited, but I hope to be able to solve the issue step by step. If you wish to come with me, it will be my pleasure to walk together along this path. I have nevertheless to point out that it will be a concise divulgation for newcomers, probably useless for the experts: the light rise of my path could be boring to an expert rock climber.

Does everything change? Does not anything change at all?

Neoplatonism is full of worlds, of layers of reality, one on top of the other. What is the origin of such an interpretation of the reality? Which was the first layer?

Two great thinkers before Plato presented positions that were apparently incompatible.

Heraclitus of Ephesus, the philosopher with obscure language, who lived between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, dwelling in the beautiful temple of Artemis the goddess in Ephesus, studied nature

and observed the eternal changing and transformation. He told that “you cannot descend twice into the same river”. Water keeps on flowing and is continuously replaced, like all the reality: everything flows like a river (πάντα ῥεῖ ὡς ποταμός).

Heraclitus extrapolated the value of his observations (everything changes) and made it a cosmological principle. As a matter of fact we are dealing not with a pure observation but with an extrapolation, because according to the knowledge of that time there were in nature objects that did not follow this always-changing rule, like for instance the stars and constellations in the sky that, during a human life span, look steady. It is strangely easier to support the Heraclitus’ principle today than in the past. Today, thanks to science, we can identify changes on temporal frames that are much longer than our own existence, like geological eras or cosmological time (billions of years). The Sun, once a symbol of uniqueness and eternity, today is understood as a general star, with typical evolutional process of birth, development and death.

Heraclitus’ view has a great importance also by a psychological perspective. We are all aware of the continuous transformation of reality. Also our cells, our thoughts, our ego, everything is evolving. It looks like trivial, but if I consider all the changes in my life with respect to my childhood, I realize that a lot of people disappeared, new people appeared, the grandparents are not anymore in my horizon, but now I have kids and there are nephews. I have changed ideas, trends, opinions, body, aspect. Reality does change and according to Heraclitus it is the result of a perpetual fight of contrasting forces. It is an eternal becoming. We need to accept it.

Heraclitus is thus stating no trivial consideration, but by extrapolating his observation he identifies a universal cosmological principle that is valid till today. Reality is becoming.

During the same years a contemporary philosopher started a controversy with Heraclitus’ view, presenting a completely different approach: Parmenides of Elea. A long time earlier than Heraclitus, the school of Miletus, with its famous philosophers Thales, Anaximenes, Anaximander, had been investigating the nature in search of a principle (ἀρχή) of everything, a substance as foundation of the world beyond appearance (sub-stance, this means what under

– stays everything, in Greek ὑποκείμενον), a steady cause against the continuous apparent changing of things. Thales proposed that water is not only the substance of seas, ice and vapors, but that is the substance of the whole universe. In other words that everything was made of water.

In a similar way, Parmenides accepted a unique principle, in opposition to the multiplicity of fighting principles of Heraclitus, but also in opposition with Pythagoras' school that was proposing a principle based on the plurality of numbers. The unique Parmenides' principle is not a substance identified by the observation of natural phenomena, but it is derived by a mental, logical deduction. We observe a great diversity in the world, but every observed object share a common characteristic: IT IS. This means it exists, and it can be thought of. An apple "is". A table "is". A cloud "is". The common characteristic is that every object is, exists, can be thought of.

Parmenides thus is the first philosopher to investigate the "being", or the "ontology" (from τὸ ὄν, "that which is" or "being"), the study of the characteristic of "being" as "being". With him, philosophy makes a huge step toward the abstraction. The philosophical method of Parmenides is completely new. First of all he logically defines the word "being" and then he applies the deductive method (using a lot of *reductio ad absurdum*) to gain new conclusions. The conclusions can contradict the empirical experience. Using the deductive method, he clearly separates the logic of "being" from the logic of "not-being", meaning that something either is or is not, without a possible halfway. The philosopher can express the characteristics of the "being": *the being is unchanging, motionless, indivisible and unique.*

For the sake of example on the type of logical reasoning applied by the philosopher, we can meditate whether the being is changing or unchanging. Let's imagine that the being is changing. This mean that in this moment the being is what it was not before, and before it was something that now it is not. If it were so, the being would have both the characteristics of being and of not-being, violating the complete separation of the being against not-being logic. This would be and absurd (*reductio ad absurdum*), therefore the being is unchanging.

Logic thus is more important than senses to grasp the truth of the world. Senses do not show the reality of the universe, but just provide means to get an opinion ( $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$ ), generally an illusory one. The changing of the world is an illusion, like the limit of our lives and the death itself. The truth lies within the eternity of the being, not in the illusion of the changing.

This approach is not far away from the Buddhist teaching, so we can say that today there are millions of people that would see this statement as a correct one.

Plato, between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, is facing a critical situation, seeing from one side the Heraclitus' philosophy of the pure changing, a kind of philosophy of chaos, and from the other side the Parmenides' approach that denounce the perceptible world as fake, a worthless illusion.

Plato finds the solution proceeding step by step, by confuting an opinion of the sophists that were asserting that the search for knowledge is impossible because:

If you already know the object you are investigating on, the search would be fruitless;

If you don't know the object you are investigating on, you cannot recognize it even if you find it, therefore the search would be fruitless either.

Plato rejects this argument with the theory of the anamnesis. He accepts the doctrine of the immortality and reincarnation of the souls (metempsychosis), from the Orphic religion and Pythagorean philosophy, and he affirms that the objects have been already known by the immortal soul before the birth, while the subject, during his life, recognizes the "forgotten" objects by remembering them in the depth of his soul.

The debate is gnoseological, related to the knowledge, but has important consequences also in ontology. In fact, in the cognitive process, our soul let us remember forms (or ideas) that are incorruptible, eternal, unchanging, this means much closer to the Parmenides' being than to the perceptible phenomena. These forms are absolute truth, absolute good, absolute beauty. How did our soul happen to learn the forms?

When our soul is free from the weight of the body, before incarnating, flies over the celestial sphere, in the hyper-uranium (that

means “over the sky”), where the forms abode. Once the soul is incarnated, she is prisoner of the perceptible body, but she remembers the forms and has, in this way, a spelling book for knowledge. If I see a tree (one in particular, the one under my window, tall and green a little bended toward east), the anamnesis let me identify it as a tree, as I remember the general form of the tree in my mind.

Forms are not only a spelling book for souls, but they are the basis of the world. The perceptible world is not just an illusion, but it is the reflection, in temporary and imperfect way, of the eternal perfection of forms, and it is for us an incentive to remember the forms, stored in our memory, in our soul. Perceptible world let us build up an imperfect knowledge based on the memory of forms, that are reachable in the hyper-uranium. In other words, Plato combines and harmonizes the philosophies of Heraclitus and Parmenides when he affirms (like Heraclitus) that in the physical world there is no a single principle as thought by the Milesian school, but it is ever changing; however the phenomenological reality is a reflection of eternal pre-existing forms. Matter does not become a cat by chance, but has to follow a pre-established cat-pattern, the perfect form in the spiritual world of the being.

In this way the multiplicity of the phenomena of the material world is not just an illusion, but it is somehow derived from the forms in the being. What we see in the material world are many imperfect imitations of the perfect forms. The latter cannot be seen by eyes or felt by perceptions, however can be glimpsed by the intellect.

Plato starts the verticality that we shall meet later in Neoplatonism, with matter in the inferior level and the forms in the upper level, the one of the being, with a dense relation between the two worlds.

In the next chapter we shall investigate more aspects of the innovative Plato’s thought.



## **II. A Travel Toward Neoplatonic Mysticism. The change introduced by Plato**

Before proceeding with other great figures of Ancient Philosophy, it is worth to make some more considerations on the epochal change introduced by Plato, a new understanding of the world that is still today challenging the post-modern materialism.

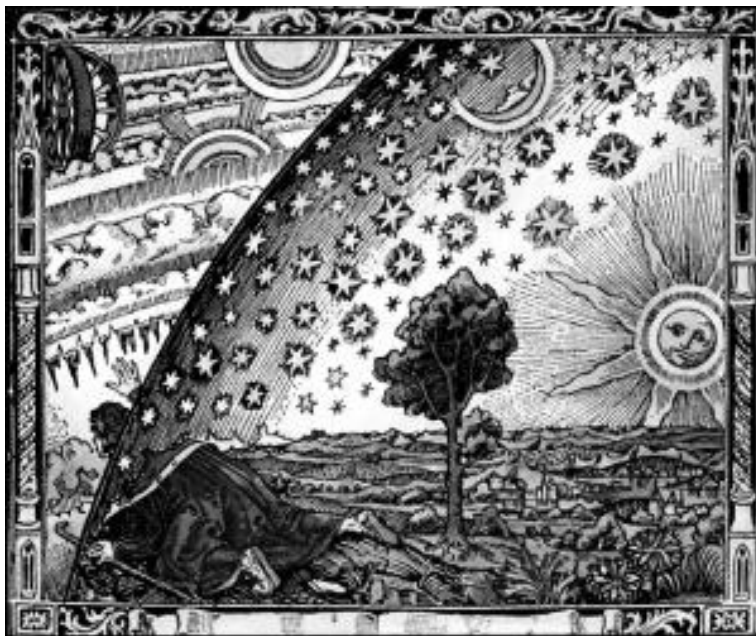
It is undeniable that the great achievements of the scientific method have had a huge positive impact on our civilization, not only for all the technological equipment present in our everyday life, but also for the rational and empirical explanation of the world, like the understanding of the structure of the matter with the current standard model, and like the evolution<sup>6</sup> of the universe with the formulation of the cosmic inflation. If in the one hand every human being, who has at a spark of the divine Ulysses' curiosity, is charmed by the challenge to identify the "Theory of Everything", on the other hand we risk to confuse the idea itself of Truth (by the capital "T" I mean the primary truth of all) with what it is scientifically proved. Unfortunately this kind of misunderstanding happens more and more in scientific environments, also because the philosophical culture is vanishing from our schools, that are more and more addressed toward a profitable utility and specialization.

The empirical knowledge proceeds by approximations or, we may even say, it is based on inaccuracy. A scientific theory, to be considered as such, has to be falsifiable (Karl Popper, Fälschungsmöglichkeit) or, in other words, it has to be possible to conceive an experiment whose results could negate the theory. With this mechanism, every scientific theory can in principle be superseded by new results and new theories. For instance, we can formulate an absurd theory like: "during moon eclipses the Nitrogen concentration in air raises by 0.05%". This theory is falsifiable, so it

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<sup>6</sup> The reference to evolutionist theories is given for the scientific idea related to natural philosophy. Plato limited his interest in natural philosophy, which investigates the world of appearances and mutations, related to opinion (doxa), in favor of metaphysics, the only discipline that can investigate on the Truth. Our Tradition is not based on "scientific proofs", as it is aimed directly at the metaphysical Truth of the "second navigation", rather than to the scientific doxa, which depends on the results of the last experiment.

is a good one, as it is possible to identify an experiment, during a moon eclipse, to measure the raising of Nitrogen concentration: if the raising is minor than 0.05%, then the theory is false.



*Second navigation*

The idea to catch the Truth by the observation of natural phenomena is not new in the history of human thought, because many pre-Socratic philosophers have already tried to do it. For instance, we can say that Anaxagoras was trying to introduce a theory of everything with the introduction of the *Nous* (Greek word for “mind”). In fact, Anaxagoras theorized that the universe is composed by a purely material homeomeris, small entities not very dissimilar from Democritus’ atoms. However Anaxagoras found difficult to explain how these homeomeris could simply join together to build up something that made sense, like a “cat” or a “tree”. For this reason he was forced to introduce another entity, the “*nous*” (in Greek it means “mind”) a kind of coordinator inside the material world, to prevent the homeomeris to wander chaotically

and aimless in the empty space. Anaxagoras' nous is not transcendental, but it resides in matter, it belongs to matter, it gets mixed with matter, because to Anaxagoras there is no place for a second level of reality. His nous is a material mind without will, it's a kind of software, of Matrix, that organizes the chaotic cosmic cloud into a harmonious world of planets, stars and sparrows that chirp in the morning...

Some years later, Plato changed the perspective by his work *Phaedo*, and founded the western metaphysics by examining the Anaxagoras' nous. Where does the order we see come from? There must be principle at a higher level to "organize" the perceptible world. The hypothetical organizing mind should be able to justify the "direction" of the organizing, the criterion by which a certain process is better than another. Where is the Anaxagoras' nous receiving the organizing criteria to obtain an organized and ordered world? It is necessary to introduce a new logical, mental level – namely "intelligible" – over the material world. This applies also to persons, where the necessity to look for an entity that is transcending the material body is even more evident: Socrates has acted according to his mind, that has chosen what is good and right, and not according to the perceptions of his body, that are rather a tool to act in the material world. This revolution of the western way of thinking goes beyond the materialism and discovers a new dimension for the philosophical quest: the mind.

Plato uses a metaphor to explain his philosophical search, comparing investigation to navigation. Natural philosophy proceeded with open sails on the information given by the perceptible world, but at a certain point could not proceed further in searching the truth, as it reached a dead calm sea, without any wind. At this point Plato explains that a second navigation method is needed (δεύτερος πλοῦς), and in order to proceed further it is necessary to row with the oars of intellect and logical mind, moving from the perceptible world to the super-perceptible one, which the mind is ruling on: the intelligible world.

Plato identifies a hierarchical structure of reality. This is based on two principles: the One and the Dyad. The One is the formal cause of everything, the supreme Good which everything refers to. The Supreme Unity that gives coherence to everything is. On the

other end, if there were only the One, everything would be static and there wouldn't be the multiplicity we see. For this reason Plato adds the principle of Dyad, the indeterminate and undefined Multiplicity, the reason for difference and multiplication. From these two principles, the One and the Dyad, a two levels reality is generated: the level of forms and the level of matter.

The level of forms has a certain verticality, because it has universal forms at the top and differentiated form on the bottom. The forms of numbers are among the superior ones and they are not the numbers that we use every day in our mathematical operation, but they are numbers "as numbers", like for instance the sole and only number three, which originates all the numbers three used in mathematical operations. Numbers used in mathematical operations are not forms of number, as they are practically used, however they do not belong to the material level, because they are anyway "mental": they represent a special halfway case between the forms and the matter.

The lower level is the perceptible and material one, which is the object of science and of the investigation of the first philosophers. This is the level of becoming, of transformation and changing and nevertheless it participates to the world of forms by reflection, even if the forms are there reflected only temporary. This level cannot exist by itself, but needs a cause, an Organizer, a Maker, who molds it from the forms and shapes it in the material world: the Demiurge.

To Plato, the Demiurge is the true God, the good God, that opens the accessibility of the eternal Good to the temporary becoming of the perceptible world, while the One is the superior principle but not a god.

Within this frame, human soul is continuously travelling between the perceptible and the intelligible worlds, participating to both. This is the reason why we live in the material world but at the same time we get troubled by its limits. Sometimes physical death looks like unnatural and difficult to accept, like if in us there were a natural propensity to eternity. Sometimes we are able of high abstraction and to model our world according to our ideas. But this is not all.

Plato explains that the very first soul molded by the Demiurge was not a human one, but the Soul of the World, called “Anima Mundi” in Latin. The Anima Mundi has a great importance in the Platonic cosmology, as she is the mediator between the intelligible and the material levels. Human souls have much in common with the Anima Mundi, but they are not the same. With this understanding, we can draw two conclusions.

First, all the World is “spiritual”. This is in perfect agreement with the polytheistic Roman Religion, which perceives the presence of divinity in the nature itself, in the form of numen, as a divine power that permeates the whole Universe.

Second, going back to the beginning of this article: the whole material world is modeled through Anima Mundi according to the same Intelligible which we participate to by our souls. Therefore the observed material world is obeying to the same logical rules we have in our souls, so that the material world can be object of quest by souls and by the thought raising from them as natural philosophy. Human souls can search and recognize in the material world the organizing action of Anima Mundi. What we see in matter is not the Truth, but its direct consequence.

The great love for research, the curiosity and the amazement in front of every incredible discovery of this fantastic universe are simply the movements of our soul, who is rejoicing by finding in her object of investigation the immortal symmetries of the cosmic intellect that dwell in her depth. The curious eyes stare at the high stars and like in a special mirror see the depth of their souls.

### **III. A Travel Toward Neoplatonic Mysticism. The Cosmology of the Timaeus in Plato**

A philosopher is not an isolated being projected into human history from a U.F.O., but a real person with flesh and bones, a person whose mind is inclined to understand the big picture. Even if the object of investigation is subtle and ephemeral, the philosopher uses his own set of knowledge, experience, beliefs, language and

common feeling. For this reason sometimes it is needed to study culture and scientific notions of ancient times in order to understand ancient philosophy, otherwise the argumentations may result difficult to follow. The philosopher often considers the scientific ideas of his time as universal and shared by everybody, therefore he does not spend a great effort to explain them in his argumentation. This is true especially when the philosopher is dealing with cosmology, as it is the case for the *Timaeus* of Plato.

Our ancestors were good observers of the sky, maybe because there was no pollution or because they were not distracted by televisions, mobile phones, and videogames. Their cosmology was not a fantasy job, but was indeed based on observations. They understood that there were two kinds of celestial bodies: the stars, which draw constellations and that rigidly move with the sky from east to west, like if they were glued to a sphere, and therefore were defined “fixed”; and seven special objects, which seem to wander over the background of the fixed stars, from west to east, and hence called planets (from the Greek verb *πλανῶ* = to wander). It seemed natural to imagine that each of the planets was tied to a dedicated sphere, each of them rotating around Earth, the privileged observation point. As the planets move independently from each other, the planetary spheres were thought to be separated from each other, and concentric around Earth. Moon and Sun, even if “lamps”, were considered planets. Nobody should be scandalized by this idea, as it is perfectly coherent with the definition of planet (wandering star) used in that time. The definition of planet was changed much later in time.

Let's suppose that each of the seven planets is glued to a sphere and that the various spheres have different dimensions with Earth in their center. How are the spheres arranged, from the smallest to the biggest? The motion of a planet can be simply characterized by measuring the time between two consecutive passages of the planet itself by the same star. This time is called “sidereal period”. Plato and his predecessors associated the dimensions of the spheres to the sidereal period of the respective planets, conferring the smallest sphere to the planet with the shortest “sidereal period” and organizing the rest by increasing periods. In this way they obtained the sequence of the planetary spheres: Moon (whose sidereal period

is 0.0748 years, i.e. around 27 days), Mercury (0.241 years), Venus (0.615 years), Sun (1 year per definition), Mars (1.881 years), Jupiter (11.87 years), and Saturn (29.45 years). The biggest sphere, which contains the others, is the one of the fixed stars.

This is the starting point for the mystic cosmology of the *Timaeus* of Plato. The concentric spheres rotate around Earth, from the sphere of the Moon, the closest to us, for which reason our world is defined “sublunary”, to Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. The most external is the sphere of the fixed stars.

What is causing the movement of the spheres? Plato considers the Psyche in its old definition of “movement”. But this psyche is a particular one, as she has the task to move the whole Body of the Universe. This psyche is the World Soul or, in Latin “*Anima Mundi*”. She is analogous to the human soul, with some differences. In *Phaedrus*, Plato describes human soul as a team of a three entities, and compares it to a charioteer, representing the rational part of the soul, on a chariot towed by two winged horses, one of them white, spiritual and with will, who tries to tow the chariot above the heaven, the other black, representing the perceptible part, who tries to drag the chariot down to earth. Human soul is right only when the charioteer, the reason, is able to steer both the horses. On the other hand, World Soul is purely rational and therefore always in harmony. The World Body is made of four elements: air, water, earth, fire. World Soul is not composed by the four elements but by a mixture of three very rarefied entities: the being, the principle of “identity” and the principle of “diversity”, which are wisely mixed by the Demiurge according to well defined mathematical principles. It is worth to check in detail these mathematical principles, because according to Plato they proof the link between the perfection of mathematic (ideal world) and the intrinsic rationality of the Universe.

The Demiurge obtains from the mentioned mixture two numerical sequences based on powers of 2 and 3, starting from 1, i.e.: 1, 2, 4, 8, and 1, 3, 9, 27. Let's consider the interval between 1 and 2 and let's fill it with the arithmetic mean, that is  $\frac{3}{2}$ , and with the harmonic mean that gives  $\frac{4}{3}$  (for more details see note 1).

*Timaeus*, on the dialogue, identifies a special relation between the arithmetic and the harmonic mean of 1 and 2. By dividing  $\frac{3}{2}$  by  $\frac{4}{3}$ ,  $\frac{9}{8}$  is obtained. Then it is verified that the same result,  $\frac{9}{8}$ , is

obtained by dividing the arithmetic and the harmonic mean along the whole sequence.

Multiplying 1 by  $\frac{9}{8}$  and then again the result, it is obtained:

1  $\frac{9}{8}$   $\frac{81}{64}$ . Now, in order to reach  $\frac{4}{3}$  a different factor is needed:  $\frac{256}{243}$ . The series then continues with intervals of  $\frac{9}{8}$ , but the last one that is again  $\frac{256}{243}$  to reach 2.

Sequence:  $1 * \frac{9}{8} * \frac{81}{64} * \frac{4}{3} * \frac{3}{2} * \frac{27}{16} * \frac{243}{128} * 2$

Intervals:  $* \frac{9}{8} * \frac{9}{8} * \frac{256}{243} * \frac{9}{8} * \frac{9}{8} * \frac{9}{8} * \frac{256}{243} *$

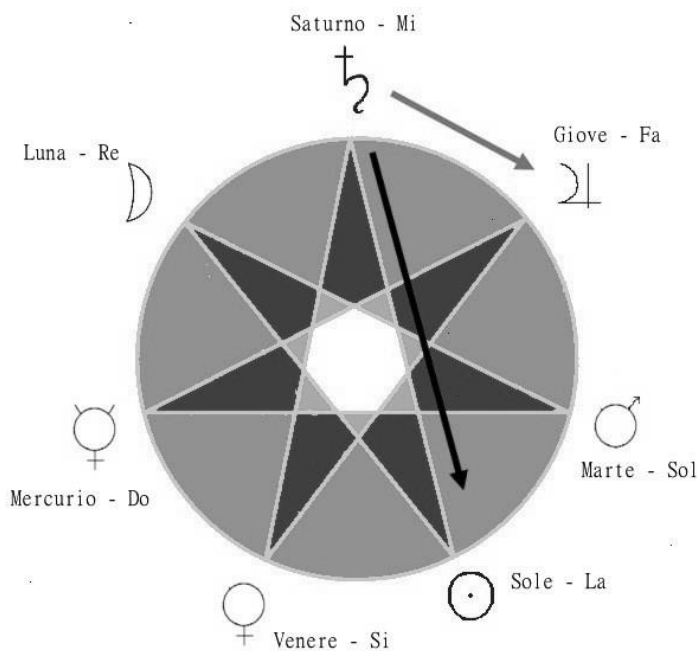
This progression is repeated with the same pattern along the whole series 1, 2, 4, 8. The very characteristic of this series is that  $\frac{9}{8}$  corresponds to the frequency leap of a musical tone, while  $\frac{256}{243}$  to a semitone leap. In other words, this progression is the major musical scale by Pythagoras, C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C (see note 2).

Summarizing, Plato showed that with a few basic operations it is possible to build up an ordered sequence, periodic and matching with the perceptible world through music. The beauty and regularity of the sequence are an argument to affirm that the order of the Demiurge is good and rational. The Demiurge introduces the intelligible order in the perceptible world, dominating chaos. Logic is intrinsic in World Soul, and it is manifested as harmony. The World Soul therefore brings the cosmic order we see in the natural laws that are object of the modern physics.

How happens that the Universe moves? This is the explanation on how the intelligible logic moves the spherical structure of the Universe. Let's imagine the just explained mathematical-harmonic sequence developing along a cosmic piano keyboard, replicating the musical scale for an infinite length (note 3). We cut the cosmic keyboard along its length in two stripes. The two stripes gets closed on themselves forming two circumferences, one external and the other internal, tilted with respect to each other (astronomers know that the angle between the two circumferences is  $23^{\circ}27'$ ). The external circle is the Celestial Equator and it is called "circle of identity", as per the principle of Anima Mundi. This circle defines the celestial sphere of the constellations and rotates from east to west, this means according to the direction of the movement of the stars in the night skies. The inner one is the "circle of diversity", and is astronomically related to the Ecliptic, rotating in the opposite direction with respect to the outer circle. The diversity circle then is



divided in seven concentric circles with radius proportional to the original sequence of the powers of 2 and three, i.e. 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 27 corresponding respectively to Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. According to Pythagoras, the motion of the celestial bodies generate a sound that no human ear can hear, but that is related to the seven notes of the major scale. Every planetary god was then characterized by its own note or musical scale, and this fact was widely used during theurgic practices of the late ancient world.



*The harmonic sequence of the days of the week*

*The figure is in Italian and displays the correspondence of the musical notes (in Italian, Do=C, Re=D, Mi=E, and so on) the respective planets according to Neoplatonic tradition. The green arrow, from Saturn to Jupiter proceeding in clockwise direction,*

*show the musical scale associated to the planetary spheres, in this case from the external to the internal. The black arrow, joining Saturn to Sun, follows the interval of fifth (or forth, depending on the direction): following the profile of the arms of the star it is possible to identify the sequence of the days of the week. Monday (day of Moon), Tuesday (day of Tiw, associated to Mars), Wednesday (day of Woden – Odin – as Mercury), Thursday (day of Thor, as Jupiter), Friday (day of Frige, as Venus), Saturday (day of Saturn), Sunday (day of Sun).*

The point of this teaching is that there is a regular mathematical path in the very space-time structure of our world, a cosmic order that is the reflection of the world of forms and that is intrinsically present in the World Soul thanks to the providential action of the Demiurge. The world is not only a body, but also a soul and a mind (the same logic). As we human beings have a soul that shares the same principles, we can understand the regularity and the logic of the world. Moreover, we aim to it, and we rejoice when we find it. This understanding of the world explains the reason of our innate propensity to knowledge. This is a great result of the Platonic philosophy. If we look at the sky, we see the providential action of the Demiurge in the harmony of the spheres, that generates time from eternity.

An unknown neoplatonic philosopher, some centuries later, imagined that time should be generated cyclically from the motion of the planetary spheres, following the most harmonic of the musical intervals, the fifth. In this way the following sequence was generated: Moon => Mars => Mercury => Jupiter => Venus => Saturn => Sun. This sequence generated the weekly progression: Lunae Dies, Martis Dies, Mercurii Dies, Jovis Dies, Veneris Dies, Saturni Dies, Solis Dies. This progression is still recognizable in Neo-Latin Languages and is well reflected in English, where correspondent divinities of Germanic pantheon have been used (for instance, Tuesday derives from Tiw's day, where Tiw is the god of war in German mythology, to be compared with Roman Mars).

The Demiurge has given us the perfection via the World Soul. The understanding of the Universe has never been so deep, the time has never been so harmonic.

*Notes:*

(1): *The harmonic mean was widely used in ancient architecture and sculpture, and mathematically is the reciprocal of the mean of the reciprocals, i.e. given two numbers A and B, their harmonic mean  $C=2/(1/A + 1/B)$ . It is harmonic because C is that number that exceeds A by the same proportion it is exceeded by B. In the text, if we use in the given formula  $A=1$  and  $B=2$ , we obtain  $2/(1+1/2) = 2/(3/2)=4/3$ .*

(2): *Actually this is the major scale of Pythagoras, used till the Middle Age. Afterwards, on the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it was slightly modified to obtain the modern 12-tone equal temperament. At Pythagoras' time, philosophers characterized the physical property of a note by the length of a pipe or of a string, rather than the frequency.*

(3): *It is worth to mention that in modern cosmology there is a theory which is based on infinite length "strings" that cross the universe and vibrate.*

#### **IV. A Travel Toward Neoplatonic Mysticism. The Other Philosophers**

Theology is a kind of afterthought of the divine using a philosophical approach. The religious sphere is interpreted under the light of reason, of logos, in a philosophical way. The philosophy of Plato and his followers analyzed critically the ancient mythology and generated a new understanding of divinity through theology. This article introduces the first steps of this long process, that will lead to the creation of the majestic "Platonic Theology" by Proclus and other important texts.

Before the time of philosophy, men of wisdom tried to answer to the great questions by mythical and poetical explanations, taking as reference the works of Homer or Hesiod, that were understood as authoritative texts for the interpretation of the world. Natural phenomena like earthquake, floods, and famines were explained via religion and mythology. For instance, in the first book of Iliad, the plague that is exhausting the Greek army is explained as the

intervention of Apollo, after Achilles' request. Similarly, each plague was understood as an aversion of one or more gods against the part that was suffering. People was fighting back sickness by rituals, sacrifices, and offerings.

Early philosophers of the Milesian school changed this approach by looking for an explanation of the phenomena in the internal mechanisms of nature itself, rather than in a divine intervention. In this way they created philosophy and in particular the very same concept of "natural phenomenon". In the early centuries of philosophy, when the thought became free from the religious schemes, it became a powerful tool to investigate over the world. A new lexicon was gradually built up with concepts like first cause, becoming, the reality and appearance of things, the being, the nous, the logos and the psyche.

As soon as the philosophers moved their main interest from the material world to the sky, they started investigating on the divine. In the works of the first philosophers that were studying the nature of the divine, we can identify at least three types of arguments: 1) the critic to the traditional religious paradigm; 2) the introduction of new paradigms; 3) the reinterpretation of tradition with the new paradigms. Although the first appearance of these three types occurred in a temporal sequence which reflects the order presented above, the three types existed together in the centuries along the whole philosophical discussion of the polytheistic world (1).

Xenophanes of Chalcedon (570 – 475 BCE) is generally associated to the Eleatic school, nevertheless he focused his research mainly toward theology, while the other thinkers of the Eleatic school were more interested on ontology (it is sufficient to remember the Parmenides' Being). Xenophanes criticized the traditional Homeric conception of the Gods, for the reason that he considered a mistake their anthropomorphic representation, not only for their physical appearance, but also for their feeling, their personality, their illicit behaviors and smart tricks. He considered absurd also the tales on the birth of Gods, because they would logically imply that the Gods do not live in eternity but in a temporal dimension, and therefore one should accept also their death. As the Gods live out of the realm of time, it is not possible that they move from one place to another (in physics the velocity is the relation between the space and

the time needed to cover it, so there is no movement without time). As a consequence, mythology cannot be true about divinity, or at least cannot be accepted word by word, without an interpretation.

Xenophanes started a new conception of the Divine through a criticism to the traditional paradigm, however he was not able to progress in the ontological direction and in the proposition of a valid alternative model.

Plato accepted the thesis of Xenophanes about the criticism to the traditional conception of divinity and, moreover, introduced new myths. The Myth of the Cave is a metaphor of the knowledge of the reality and, in contrast with traditional myths, it is developed on a philosophical idea. Similarly the Demiurge is introduced by a reasoning on the universe, as a divinity necessary for the order of the universe. Also the models of human soul and of the World Soul are presented as an ordered mythological entity after a deep philosophical thought. Philosophy, with Plato, happened to build a cosmological structure that could be used in place of the traditional one. Plato never attempted to reconcile the classic tradition with philosophy, with the exception of the identification of its “own” Demiurge with the traditional Zeus. With Plato, anyway, we can state that there was a preparation for the reinterpretation of the tradition through new mythological models.

When Plato died in 347BCE, his nephew Speusippus became the leader of the Academia for eight years. Speusippus developed a philosophy with substantial difference from Plato, and rejected the doctrine of forms. Xenocrates, who left the Academia during Speusippus’ lead because of conflicts, succeeded him in 339BCE and led the Academia for 25 years. Xenocrates restored the doctrine of forms as divine and separate cause. Besides, following a Pythagorean approach, he considered the first ten numbers as ideal and origin of all the other numbers. In particular, he considered the Monad as the unitary-identity principle and the Dyad as the diversity-multiplicity principle. He also started a reinterpretation of the religious tradition with the new philosophical models.

What is the meaning of the Platonic and Neoplatonic reinterpretation of religion by philosophy? In general, metaphysics defines a layered structure of reality, from a unique supreme principle down to the infinite multiplicity of matter. Along the

emanation process it is possible to identify some functional entities, i.e. entities with a clear function in the coherent metaphysical and cosmological structure, like for instance the psyche, the World Soul, the Demiurge and the Nous. The theological reinterpretation consists in finding the relevant correspondences between the traditional mythology and the rational philosophical thought.

Xenocrates anticipated the Neoplatonic cosmology by stating that the whole universe is full of divinity, from the Gods at the superior levels, down to the daemons that operate at the sublunary world, or in other words at our level. He also stated that there is a divine presence also in matter itself. He divided reality in three worlds: 1) The world external or over the sky vault, called hyperuranium; 2) the sky vault or uranos; 3) the world under the sky vault. These three worlds reflect the different way of knowledge. The hyperuranium can be known by the pure noetic knowledge or, according to Plato's lexicon, by episteme. The Sky Vault represents the empirical knowledge, in other words the doxa. The world below the sky is the world known by the senses, the perceptible world. Besides, he associated the three Moirai to the three worlds just described. The eldest is Atropos (unturnd), who inflexibly decides the fate and cut by her scissors the yarn of life of the mortals. She represents the hyperuranium, the intellegibile realm. Lachesis (allotter) is identified with the celestial vault, while Clotho (the spinner) is the perceptible world.

Besides, Xenocrates stated that the Monad had male characteristics, with the role of Father of the Sky, the odd principle, the first god, and identified him with Zeus; and he stated that the Dyads, principle of generation, had female characteristics and considered her as Mother of Gods and of the planets below, and Queen of whatever is under the sky, the World Soul.

The Hyperuranium is under the supremacy of the Monad-Nous-Zeus, while the Dyad-World Soul-Mother Goddess rules the world below, also the sublunary one. However the Dyad dwells also in the Hyperuranium where she is ruled by Monad-Nous-Zeus, so that she is also a channel between the Nous and the whole universe, according to Plato's vision. In this way the Demiurge is ruling the world even if he is dwelling in the eternal realm in hyperuranium.

In this sacral universe full of divinity, daemons have an important role of mediation between humans and Gods, and they participate also in sacrifices and in oracles. Daemons are not necessarily good, as there are also evil ones. This fact would explain the constant presence at our level of the fight of good against evil. Daemons may be also human souls that after death are free from the bodies. This inclusion of daemons in metaphysics had a great influence in the later philosophy, especially in Porphyry, Iamblichus (especially the work *On the Mysteries* - Περὶ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων μυστηρίων), and Proclus.

The new theological interpretation of divinity had no consequences on the religious plane. The orthopraxis of the polytheism left full liberty of interpretation and was peacefully living together with the different theological interpretation, generally in a tolerant environment. Later neoplatonic authors were not only great philosophers and theologians, but also ascetic and theurgians, in a profitable union of tradition with rational investigation. For this reason, still today, we are entitled to talk about philosophy and theological interpretation in a website like this, knowing that the discussion does not diminish the religious praxis but, on the contrary, adds value to the understanding of our position in front of divinity.

*Notes:*

*(1) When Christian monotheism and its theocracy took the power, any serious theological discussion was cut off. In fact, if the whole classic philosophy is based on the principle of reason – or logos – by which we can understand not only the whole universe, by our affinity with the World Soul, but we can also reach the Universal Mind, on the other hand Christianity deconstructed philosophy and reason by conferring, as in the John's gospel, the logos to a semi-divine mortal (Jesus), whom faith is the only access to. In a dry summary: do not think, just believe! Due to its lack of serious philosophical arguments, Christianity was rejected as superstition by many educated thinkers.*

## **V. A Travel Toward Neoplatonic Mysticism. Aristotle's Etiology and Ontology**

Plato was a great visionary, a revolutionary of philosophy, a valiant captain crossing the Ocean of Knowledge. He dared to leave the natural philosophy of the perceptible world and to reach the verticality of the world of forms. He understood that earlier philosophy was not dealing with reality, but with an incomplete and deluding representation of reality, a sort of hologram. We must remember Plato as a philosopher, a lover of Sophia, and not as the chief of a religious sect. The basis of Plato's thought is the free investigating mind. For this reason, we should not be surprised if his disciples were not proposing again and again his teaching. As a matter of fact, they often refuted important parts of his doctrine and started new paths. For instance, according to some authors, when Speusippus, Plato's nephew, succeeded the Master in the lead of the Academy, he actually denied any link between ideas and material world, which was a fundamental postulate of platonic philosophy.

We have already seen that Xenocrates left the school because of a quarrel with Speusippus. Xenocrates was not the only one opposing the new ruler of the school, as also another philosopher left, someone who had been one of Plato's followers for around twenty years and who was to draw a lasting mark on the history of philosophy: Aristotle.

Aristotle is often presented as an opponent to Plato, because he founded the Lyceum or Peripatos, a school that was in competition with the Academia. However he was a real follower of an important part of Plato's philosophy, keeping on investigating on metaphysics with an incomparable analytic approach. Actually Aristotle deeply analyzed the implications of Plato's "second navigation", and took care of defining rigorously the metaphysics itself, enriching it with meanings and providing a logical frame. As Neoplatonism, and in particular Proclus' work, used some important concepts from Aristotle's philosophy, it is useful to review the main ideas of the great philosopher about metaphysics, starting from the fundamental question: what is metaphysics?





According to Aristotle, metaphysics deals with what is beyond natural philosophy (metaphysics can be literally translated as “what lays beyond the natural world”). Metaphysics is pure knowledge, with an absolute value, different from every other kind of knowledge that can be related to some utility or gain. Metaphysics is a knowledge for pure love of knowledge (philo-Sophia) by the enquiring mind, so it is divine and, therefore, it is also theology.

Aristotle said: “All the other sciences are more necessary than this one, but no one is superior” (note 1).

Aristotle defined metaphysics in a rigorous manner according to four kinds of research objects:

- 1) Metaphysics of the first causes, or Etiology;
- 2) Metaphysics of the being, or Ontology;
- 3) Metaphysics of the essence, or Ousiology;
- 4) Metaphysics of divinity, or Theology.

Historically, the four objects of metaphysics appeared in the order shown above. The first philosophers of the Milesian school dealt with the research of *arkhé*, or the first principle, the cause of everything. Then Parmenides introduced the Being as the first cause, founding the ontology, that it is the second object of metaphysics. Later, several philosophers investigated on the Essence or Substance (*ousía*) that is in everything (homeomerics, atoms, etcetera). The last kind of object is the divine, studied by all the philosophers, but by Plato in a special way.

In this article we briefly review the first two objects of Aristotle’s metaphysics: etiology and ontology.

### *Etiology (Metaphysics of the First causes)*

The first object of metaphysics is the research of the first causes. According to Aristotle a first cause, or principle, is what provides the base, the structure and the foundation. Causes need to be finite, as it is not acceptable to have an infinite sequence of “because”. In our world, which is characterized by continuous transformation, causes are reduced to the following four: 1) formal cause, 2) material cause, 3) efficient cause, 4) final cause.

Formal and material causes are “static”. An example can clarify more than a long explanation: let’s consider a car, whose formal cause may be its project or design, as an idea before material realization. Its material cause is then all the matter (car body, engine, electronics, etc.) that actually constitutes the final product. If we consider the becoming of the world, then we can wonder on the reason why a car appeared in a certain point in time (because it was manufactured by a plant) and for which reason (in order to be sold and used), that are respectively the efficient and the final causes. The

four kinds of causes are still in use today in several types of analyses and are important definitions to understand Neoplatonic mystic, and in particular Proclus' theology.

### *Ontology (Metaphysics of the Being)*

Plato affirms that the Being is transcendental and universal. Sometimes it has the characteristics of a realm or of a dimension. This doctrine troubled his successors with the problem on how to connect the material world and its multiplicity and becoming with the eternal and transcendental Being. Neoplatonic authors faced the great distance between the Being and the perceptible world and tried to define a bridge, by introducing several halfway levels, making smoother the passage from one level to the next one. But Aristotle followed a different approach. If, on the one hand, Plato affirms that the Being is transcendental and universal, Aristotle believes that what was historically treated by various authors as “the Being” (τὸ ὄν) actually was a set of analogous meanings that are pointing to a unitary concept, the “ousía” (οὐσία), the ultimate reality of everything. Note that the term ousía was introduced by Plato himself.

We need to define a good translation of “ousía” and to understand the differences with respect to the Being. Cicero translated the Greek word into Latin “essentia”, from which term we derive the English “essence” that we are going to use. However Boethius uses also “substantia”, in English “substance”, to translate hypostasis (ὑπόστασις = sub-stantia), which Aristotle uses as synonym of ousía. The usage of the term “substance”, which has to be understood as “what remains under the apparent mutation of quality of phenomena”, can be misleading as sometimes “substance” is also used for the philosophical term ὑποκείμενον, that we will translate as “substrate”. For the sake of clarity we are using here and in the following articles preferably essence as translation of ousía and avoid the usage of substance, unless really related to the more material aspect of the essence.

Aristotle believed that only the Being-in-itself coincided with essence, i.e. the truth itself of the reality of things, while in general the word “being” in philosophy indicated a set of different concepts related to essence. Essence is defined by Aristotle as τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι,

that can be translated as the Being of what is, meaning what remains beyond any transformation.

Considering this difference between Being and Essence, the various meaning of Being can be summarized as follows: 1) Being as per Categories; 2) Being as potentiality and actuality; 3) Being as true or false; 4) Being as accidental.

Being as per categories. Aristotle identifies ten categories that represent the way of being. Actually the first category, the essence, is the fundamental one, while the rest are different meaning of being in relation to essence: quality, quantity, relation, action, passion, place, time, belonging, laying. Essence and its characteristics define a grid of coordinates on which every existing entity can be expressed: this is the base of everything.

Being as per potentiality and actuality. Aristotle introduces a very important concept for our journey in the Neoplatonic mysticism: potentiality (*δύναμις* = *dynamis*) and actuality (*ἐνέργεια* = *energeia*, or also *ἐντελέχεια* = *entelekeia*) are two way of being, two polarities. Being in actuality is the visible way of being. Being in potentiality is the capability to be in actuality. By this idea Aristotle introduces the becoming in the being. Potentiality and actuality are not categories of being. They are two polarities that can be manifested in each category. The concept of potentiality has been widely used by Proclus, resulting in a fundamental aspect of the cosmological structure of propagation from the One down to the matter.

Being as True or False. This way of being is related to logic, the discipline invented by the Aristotle to study the logos as abstract reasoning function.

Being as Accidental. This is the weakest form of Being, fully in the becoming. It is an occasional condition in which the matter happen to be in a certain moment.

At this point it is clear that Aristotle, dealing with these four typology of the Being, needed to find a unify factor. In the following article the Essence and it metaphysics will be presented.

*Notes:*

(1): *ἀναγκαιότεραι μὲν οὖν πᾶσαι ταύτης, ἀμείνων δ' οὐδεμία* (Aristotle, *Metaphysics I*, 983a).

## **VI. A Travel Toward Neoplatonic Mysticism. Aristotle's Metaphysics: Ousiology and Theology**

In the previous article we have introduced Aristotle's Metaphysics and its division in four disciplines: Etiology (search of the first causes), Ontology, Ousiology, and Theology.

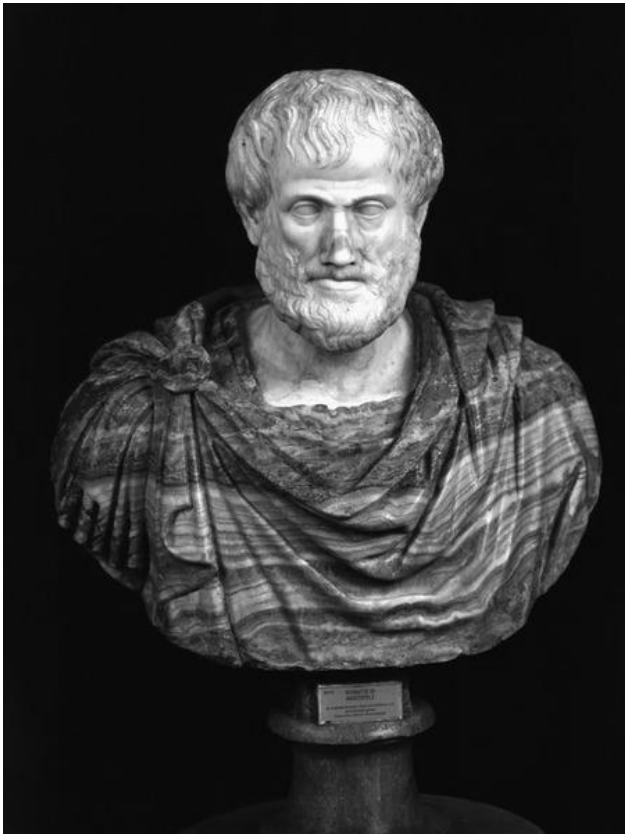
As we have already treated the first two, in this article we complete this introduction to Aristotle's Metaphysics introducing Ousiology and Theology.

### *Ousiology*

Let's present Ousiology with the example of a cat. The messy and chaotic matter, in its infinite multiplicity and continuous transformation, could not become a "cat" without an external principle. We can imagine to include in a tank all the chemical components of a cat in the right proportions: hydrogen, carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, iron, calcium, etc. We can close the tank and shake it well. I am sure that even if we would shake it for as long as a billion years or more, the contained atoms would not ever casually combine to shape a cat. Hence, matter by itself is not enough to generate complex and coordinate structures. Plato therefore identifies the need to introduce in his system a "form" of cat, or an idea of cat, whose function is to organize matter (see note 1). According to Plato, in a metaphysical hierarchy of reality there is a functional flow of ideas from the top, where the most abstract, most general, and purest ideas abide, down to intermediate levels of more detailed and particular ideas, and further down to the bottom level, where the ideas are applied to matter.

Aristotle took a different approach. Let's consider Fuffy. He is a cat. The cat is a feline. A feline is a mammal. A mammal is a vertebrate. A vertebrate is an animal. We could detail this classification even more. In this process of multiplication of levels we should ask ourselves if it is proper to associate to each grade a more general and purer form. In other words: does a metaphysical entity "idea of vertebrate" really exist, which generates an idea of mammal, which contains the idea of feline, which is followed by the

form of a cat, that eventually is materialized in Fuffy? According to the Areopagite not all the ideas we meet in the intellective process have an ontological value, but they are γένος (genos), genre, that means **abstract terms with a logical function rather than a metaphysical value**. These abstract terms are called **universals**: they are not platonic ideas but abstract entities that are even less real than Fuffy himself.



*Aristotle*

Universals are useful to the human cognitive process, which is studied for the first time by the new logic of Aristotle, the new discipline whose subject is the *logos*. The approach of Aristotle is in contrast with Plato because it confers more reality to multiplicity and reduces the reality of general terms as universals. However we need to observe that according to Aristotle the human soul is confirmed to be a platonic form and to have her own ontological value: in conclusion it is not correct to believe that Aristotle is a materialist in opposition to Plato. Instead it is more correct to say that Aristotle adds to the metaphysic and deductive top-down approach, an empirical bottom up approach, as a spontaneous result of our intellectual process, which is based on the perceptible world.

Universals therefore, as pure logical terms, are not entitled to be essence. But if we discard the universals, which is the essence of reality, which is the substrate, the substance which “is”? Is it the **matter** (the materials that are composing Fuffy), the **form** (cat) or the **gathering of matter and form** (the embodiment of the cat-form in matter)? Aristotle does not reject any of the three possibilities, but he analyzes them separately. He confirms that form is the fundamental essence of everything: the soul for the man, the perceptible soul for the cat, and so on for every animal. However, considering the objects and the living being in the perceptible world, they would not be here without matter that can receive forms. Hence, the matter itself, in a weaker way with respect to forms, is also to be considered essence. Besides, the gathering of form and matter, this is εἶδος ἐϋλη, called hylomorphic or *synolos*, is also a kind of essence. Recalling the difference between potentiality and actuality, we can affirm that matter is being in potentiality (because it can receive forms), while hylomorphic is the being in actuality (as it has received the form).

Aristotle considers three kinds of essence (form, matter and hylomorphic) in the frame of the investigation on the perceptible word, using a kind of empirical approach, in disagreement with Plato. However when Aristotle approaches essence under a metaphysical point of view, beyond natural phenomena, the result is different. In metaphysics, form is the cause of hylomorphic, and matter is a support, therefore **the real essence is form**, and this is in complete agreement with Plato. In other words, considering the

question “what is essence?” Aristotle has two answers, depending on the frame: for physics and the investigation on the perceptible world, essence are form, matter and hylomorphic, while for metaphysics essence is form and there is no space for matter and hylomorphic as essence. A materialistic approach would have considered matter a necessary condition for essence, rejecting the immaterial and supersensible world. Aristotle is not a materialist, as he just confirms that in the perceptible world matter is needed in order to let the things be. Some centuries later Porphyry embraced a big deal of Aristotle’s theory and developed an explanation of the incorporeal entities. These are divided between being and not-being. Beings exist in an independent matter with respect to matter, as intelligible substances, while not – being need the support of matter for their existence in the sensitive world, and therefore they exist as synolos.

Eventually Aristotle conduces a rigorous systematic approach, starting from observation of the perceptible world, and is able to postulate the existence of a supersensible essence, which is necessary to justify the essence of divinity on a supernatural or metaphysical level.

### *Theology*

Following the logical approach of Aristotle, the justification of the supersensible essence opens the possibility to Plato’s second navigation. To be precise, Aristotle identifies three substances (we remind that substance and essence are here used as synonyms). At the bottom level there are the perceptible substances, vulnerable to change, to generation and destruction, made of water, air, earth and fire (i.e. matter). In the middle level there are perceptible but incorruptible substances, that forms planets, stars, made of the fifth element, the ether. At the top level there are the motionless substances, eternal and transcendental, that is God – the Unmoved Mover and the entities that cause the motion of the planetary spheres. These substances are immaterial, this means that they are not composed by ether or by the other four elements.

Aristotle’s arguments for the introduction of motionless, eternal, transcendent substances, are based on the search of the first cause, before time and movement. Hence such a cause needs to be



eternal to transcend time, and motionless to transcend movement. Besides, this cause has to be purely in actuality, because if it were also in potentiality it could transform and move. Therefore the cause is the Unmoved Mover, which moves everything without moving , the final aim of the universe.

Aristotle, inspired by the works of the astronomer Callippus from Cyzicus, introduced in his cosmological model fifty-five celestial spheres, moved by the same number of supersensible substances, that were second-rank divinities with respect to the Unmoved Mover, in full agreement with the polytheistic ancient vision.

### *Conclusion*

Plato's disciples have considered for long time the theories of Aristotle, accepting some of them and rejecting others, in a continuous reinterpretation process. Aristotle was sometimes considered the first philosophical opponent to Plato and sometimes the most authentic disciple, as confirmed by Diogenes Laërtius. However the school founded by Aristotle left the versatility of the master and abandoned the metaphysics in favor of physics and the new sciences like zoology and botanic. It is worth to mention that also the school of Plato, at the same time, lost a lot of the inventive of its founder. The society was radically changing after the conquests of Alexander the Great, while the Greek polis was overwhelmed by the new world organization based on oriental monarchies, where people were not free citizens in the agora, but subject to the king. Culture, mind, world perception chanced. Greek language was not immune to this transformation. Eventually, philosophy changed completely field of research, but this will be discussed in the next article.

#### *Notes:*

*(1) Today we know that DNA codifies everything lives, however DNA itself is not the design of the cat but the support on which the idea of "cat" is transmitted, in the same manner as the letters C-A-T are a linguistic support for the transmission of the idea of cat.*

## **VII. A Travel Toward Neoplatonic Mysticism. Stoicism, a Roman way of life**

*Only when the reason of a man is perfect, there is good for him. But what kind of good is it? I'm telling you: a free soul, noble, able to rule everything, and being ruled by nothing.*  
*Seneca*



*Marcus Aurelius*

Our life depends on Fate, which drags us without compassion, sometimes hitting hard on our faces. In front of everyday difficulties and of the perspective of an indisputable death, happiness is a precious good, very difficult to be reached and to be preserved. In our society we live with the great misinterpretation that it is enough

to “have” in order to be happy. The material goods ostentation or the show of our social position is confused with a happiness that is evanescent like a castle of paper, whenever the Fate brings us back to reality. Then, we remember the divinity, that was forgotten since a long time, but only to complain about the bad luck and to long for the past season of happiness.

Or maybe there is a huge misunderstanding, maybe we should go back to the beginning and reprogram our way of thinking and the interpretation of our whole life. Maybe there is a sober way of living that can shield us from the inflexibility of Fate and that can provide us with the serenity of the Gods, to an inner harmony with the universe and the divinities, a way that can propose the ideal of the Pax Deorum at personal level. Well, such a way does exist, not only in the oriental wisdom of the Zen doctrine and of Buddhism in general, but here, in our land, in the Roman Tradition. This way was proposed by a philosophical school that became pragmatically Roman, with representatives like Seneca, Epictetus, and one of the best emperors of Rome: Marcus Aurelius. We are speaking about STOICISM, the ancient Roman way toward lasting happiness.

Let's go back to the previous article, when we were flying high in the ample spaces of the high metaphysics of Aristotle and Plato, while we were almost forgetting our everyday earthly condition. As a matter of fact, after the birth of Metaphysics with Plato and its affirmation with Aristotle, philosophy changed abruptly its route. Already Antisthenes, who was a follower of the Socratic method and a contemporary of Plato, argued with the latter, explaining that he could see horses but hardly any idea of horseness (ἵππον μὲν ὁρῶ, ἵππότητα δὲ οὐχ ὁρῶ), in other words rejecting the world of forms. After Plato, philosophy changed its objectives also as a consequence of the new global order set up by Alexander the Great, where the Greek polis lost its meaning in the frame of the vastness of the new kingdoms. Greek citizens, that once were active part in the politics of the polis, became meaningless grains of sand in the immense world, hence losing their interest for politics and directing their attention to their individuals. The philosophy of this period, called Hellenistic, reflects the new needs of people: the principal three philosophical schools of that time, i.e. Cynicism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism, were not interested in politics, but in

personal ethic and behavior, leaving the metaphysical quest, as it was considered useless for the necessity of people. The second navigation of Plato was abandoned in favor of a materialistic approach. After the death of Plato we need to wait till the half of the first centuries of the vulgar era to find a new progress in metaphysics, with Middle Platonism.

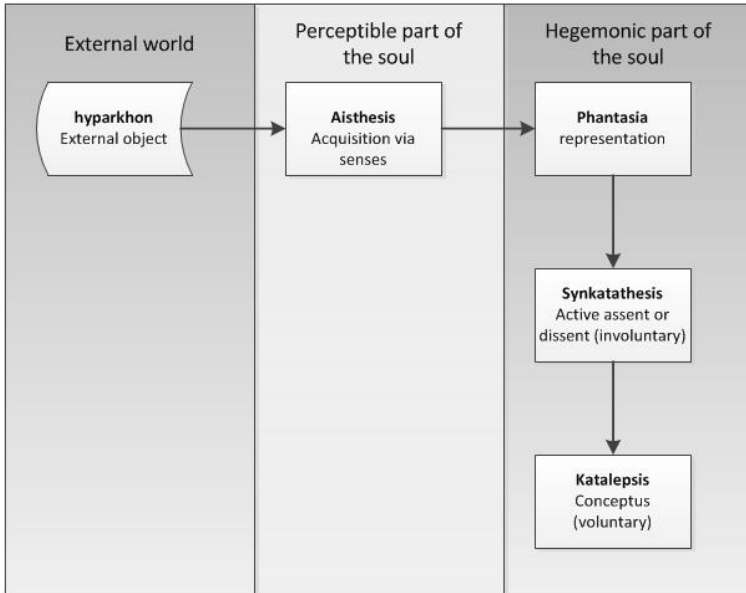
Even though from a metaphysical point of view we could simply leap over the centuries dominated by the materialistic movements and start again from Numenius of Apamea, however it is interesting to stop by the Stoicism, for at least two reasons: first for its capability to understand the Roman nature and adapt itself to Roman pragmatism, second because in its late stage it was dialoguing with Middle Platonism, contributing to the formulation of henotheism, ethic and tranquility (today we would say mindfulness), which the very same Plotinus considered important in order to reach the contemplation of the One.

Just to provide a historical frame, we remind that the founder of Stoicism was Zeno of Citium (336/335 – 263 BCE). He moved his attention from the metaphysical cosmology to the quest for a method to obtain the inner peace, using reason, or better LOGOS, to overcome the impact of the world events on the people and to control the destructive passions. He refused Plato's second navigation and every transcendence and considered ideas as pure mental representations.

**In Stoicism there is no psychic dimension, so that everything is material, immanent, bodily: not only the whole universe with its stars, but also souls, and even gods and goddesses.** Matter, however, is not the same as per the chaotic atomism, but on the contrary it is matter with order and aim (telos), **impregnated with logos**, the universal immanent mind, which gives rationality, divinity, life. According to the very ancient philosophy of Heraclitus, everything is divine for the presence of logos (pantheism), everything is alive for the logos (hylemorphism), all is unified through the logos. We human are privileged for the presence in us of logos' sparks, which let us understand the universe we belong to. This is the base of Stoicism since the times of the ancient Stoa (so the first school was called, as the lesson were held under a portico, called in Greek stoa), and this has been preserved also

during the Roman period. Roman Stoicism emphasized the moral meditation, accepted some religious principles and got influenced by Neoplatonism, to such an extent that the stoic philosopher and emperor Marcus Aurelius accepted the existence of a cosmic Nous, renouncing de facto to the original materialism.

**Stoicism does not accept metaphysics, nevertheless it tries to explain the knowledge mechanism and the ethical process by an interesting physical model.** According to Stoicism, everything is material and everything contains logos. Hence, man can know everything as he share the same logos with the world. Knowledge has an empirical nature, and is acquired through senses. The soul is also material and has no innate ideas or representation but initially it is like a “tabula rasa”. The first step to know something is the **perception** (aisthesis), that is the impression of an object as passively perceived by the sense organs. The perception is transmitted to the material soul as a **representation** (phantasia). A material imprint of the object is written on the soul. This imprint occurs in a more or less automatic way and depends on the object. Then we have to consider whether the received representation matches or not with the object. This step, which is driven by the logos in the soul, and that often occurs in an involuntary way, is the **active assent or dissent** (synkatathesis). By this step our logos controls the objective evidence of the representation. The voluntary part is the one which drives the ethic in Stoicism, although it is marginal in the process of knowledge. This parts occurs in the **judgement of the representation**, which can be of assent, dissent or suspension (judgement postponement). We are true when we assent the evidence and dissent the non-evidence, we are wrong when we assent the non-evidence and dissent the evidence. In other words, in order to be in the truth we need to accept the objectivity, otherwise we are dragged by it (Seneca used to say: *uolentem fata ducunt, nolentem trahunt* = fate accompanies whoever want it, and drags whoever does not want it). When we give the assent to a representation with objective characteristics, we have the apprehension (katalepsis) e the object becomes fully understandable (**φαντασία καταληπτική** or, according to Cicero, conceptus). An akataleptic representation on the other hand does not correspond to reality.



Zeno compares the whole cognitive process with a set of position of the hand. The right hand, when open, symbolizes the representation; when the fingers are a little curled up, the hand symbolizes the assent; a fist represents the catalepsy; while the right fist firmly grasped by the left represents the knowledge of the wise.

The original Greek stoicism used to consider society as something unworthy to deal with, mainly for the decline of politics in the Hellenistic world. Stoicism was introduced to Rome by **Panaetius** from Rhodes (around 185 – 109 BCE), who was frequenting the Scipionic circle. The Roman Stoicism resulted to be adapted to the Roman mentality, changing its content with respect the doctrine of Zenon and being later identified as Middle Stoicism. Probably the most peculiar change is related to its attitude toward society. If the crisis of the polis had caused the disinterest of people toward politics in favor of individual needs, Panaetius finds a victorious Rome with a full developing society, so that he gets convinced to recover the meaning of politics and reject the possibility to reach happiness through apathy, as suggested by the ancient sages.

The acceptance of politics in the practice of Stoicism was developed through a reformulation of the concept of “action”. At the time of Zenon, there was a dichotomy in the vision of good and evil. According to the original doctrine, as nature is full of Logos, a life according nature coincides with a life according virtue and with the same happiness. The Stoic practitioner, whose ethic is driven by virtue, becomes self-sufficient and wins happiness, because virtue can influence every moral attitude, not only in the rational sphere but even in the subconscious. **However only and exclusively an action toward virtue is effective.** This kind of action is called *katorthoma*, or “perfect action” (*κατόρθωμα*, plural *katorthomata*) and is driven exclusively by reason, even at the risk of violating common morality. An action that goes against virtue is defined **vice**. All the rest of actions are considered irrelevant: the world is black or white with no grey in the middle. It is to remark that Stoicism does not value actions by their results, but by the intention they are carried on. A clear consequence of this approach is that no fool can perform a perfect action. In any case, the purist stoicism of the origins was not considering actions that were not in then sphere of the *katorthomata*, but this stringency made the practice of Stoicism hardly viable.

Later, Stoicism became more oriented toward normal life and considered also the actions that were not virtuous in absolute meaning but that were anyhow beneficial for everybody. These actions were defined *kathèkon* (*καθῆκον*, plural *kathékonta*). Beyond moral actions (virtuous or vicious), actions may have a relative value or disvalue if are related to the body. There are convenient actions or duties, and their opposite, inconvenient actions, and also indifferent actions. In this way stoicism started dealing with common actions.

Panaetius introduces in Rome this new conception of action as he does not restrain his attention to perfect actions, but he considers also the intermediate actions, the *kathékonta*, emphasizing the interest for duties. He classifies virtues in two categories: the theoretical and the practical ones. A theoretical virtue is related to knowledge, or *Sophia*, and coincides with the knowledge of Logos. Practical virtues instead are fortitude, as the capability to stay on one’s own purposes; temperance, that is the capability to temper one’s passions by rationality; justice, as desire to preserve harmony with the community and the state. The latter is introduced in stoic

philosophy as a Roman innovation with respect to the original Stoa doctrine, providing a partial retrieval of the moral themes of the polis. The sense of harmony is not bounded anymore to what is strictly natural, but also to the right relation of the individual with the State and its laws. In this way duty is introduced among values. Duty is very important in the Roman way, as the happiness of the citizen requires also the fulfilment of the duties of a citizen, for belonging to a society.

Stoicism during its late stage received some Medio-Platonic concepts. The stoic philosopher Musonius introduces the concept of man in the divine image and explains that practicing philosophy means to worship Jupiter, anticipating the Neoplatonic aim of divine assimilation through imitation.

A hundred pages would not be enough to describe even superficially the treasure of the stoic Roman philosophers as Seneca, Musonius, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius and others. Philosophy abandons the abstraction and becomes a medicine for the soul. According to Seneca, the abstract problems of philosophy do not help us to be virtuous but just to be learned, while only a path of simplicity can lead us to wisdom. Happiness, even when difficult to obtain, can be achieved by a living based on nature in interior harmony with the world. A happy man is the master and maker of his own life, because he remains unperturbed by external events, as he is based only on himself and on his capabilities, and he is ready to bear all the consequences of his actions. Therefore, happiness is not the fruit of virtue, but corresponds to the very same virtue.

The last stoic philosopher of the Roman world was Marcus Aurelius (26th April 121– 17th March 180 CE), one of the greatest emperors of Rome. He practiced stoicism in an adogmatic and eclectic form, embracing some concepts from Medio-Platonism, from Epicureanism and also from Skepticism, following a moral philosophy with high religious references. An important point in Marcus' philosophy is the transience of world. The whole world with its continuous transformation is worth nothing to the wise. The wise learns through philosophy how to get the right meaning of everything and also to give little importance to the temporary rules we are playing during our life. Everybody has his own duty, who was born slave, who noble. But the wise can distinguish between the emptiness



of the role that he is playing and the ethical meaning to carry on his own duty with a stoic responsibility. The meaning of life is given by the One-All (retrieved one century later by Plotinus), the source that redeems every individual from the nothingness. Under an ethical and anthropological perspective, the moral duty offers the meaning of life. It is evident that with Marcus the stoic materialism loses the original dogmatism in favor of an ethic valid for everyday life, even though it maintains part of the original physics. Our emperor used to say: If you grieve for some external object, actually it is not the object itself to cause distress, but your way to judge it. These words are coherent with the *katalepsis* and are valid still today. The Emperor of Rome, considering his power position as accessory in comparison to the meaning of life, is speaking to us from the past, not like an oriental king, out of reach in his golden throne, but like a *Pater Familias* sitting at the dining hall with his family. Not like a worn garment, but like a human being. A real human being. The lesson of the Stoa is to be remembered.

### **VIII. A Travel Toward Neoplatonic Mysticism. Numenius from Apamea**

“We can understand material objects by comparison to similar objects, looking at the similarities of the surrounding things. But concerning the Good, there is no way to know it, neither by comparison with material objects nor with any perceptible thing that could resemble it. Hence, we need a different approach. Like when a person observes the sea from a panoramic viewpoint and suddenly sees the ship of a lonely fisherman, isolated, carried by waves, so in the same way we need to retreat from the perceptible world and to converse with the Good in solitude; there is no man, no living being over there, no big or small body, just a certain divine and unspeakable loneliness, simply beyond words: the Good abides there, happiness and feast, in a benevolent peace, Serene, Supreme, dwelling over the essence. But if anybody, stubbornly rooted on perceptible things, believes he can fly to the Good, and then he can

live voluptuously, sure of the obtained success, well, he is completely wrong”.



By these words, on the 2nd century CE and after a long domination of the great materialist movements, like the Epicureanism and the Stoicism, Numenius from Apamea introduces the mystic union with the Good that will be picked up by the whole Neoplatonic world, together with a new philosophical paradigm that would grant him the title of Father of Neoplatonism.

Who was Numenius? Even if John the Lydian considers him a Roman, maybe because he was teaching for some time in Rome, actually he is a Greek-speaking Syrian. In philosophy texts, he is generally presented as a Neo-Pythagorean because he used to define himself a Pythagoras' disciple. However, he affirmed that Plato was not second to Pythagoras and reintroduced the Platonic “second

navigation". He wrote a text in favor to Plato, "About the dissent of scholars from Plato", in which he criticized Plato's followers because they had not understood their master's revelations and because they drifted toward materialism. He particularly argued against Stoic philosophers and their doctrines. Numenius was not criticizing their ethic, but the poor metaphysical support due to the refusal of metaphysics.

Numenius retrieves, combines and develops concepts from Plato, Aristotle, and also from mystic-religious lines of thought of his time. The Being of Numenius is very different from the first definition by Parmenides. Numenius' Being is transcendental thanks to the "second navigation" of Plato, who is considered the prophet of a momentous revelation, the attic Moses (as Numenius said) who offers the great revelation of the First God. The introduction of religious and redemptive aspects is fully in line with the mindset of the late ancient world, from the 2nd to the 5th century. The philosophy of that time was enriched by a religious syncretism, fed by Egyptian, Greek-Roman, Judaic, Babylonian traditions. In that time both the Chaldean Oracles and the Hermes Trismegistus were composed. Philosophy was transformed into a religion. The Neoplatonic masters were interested in the techniques to reach the ecstatic union with the Good, through the convocation of daemons or via theurgic practices. The religious aspect is central in the philosophies of Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus.

Numenius, however, after having deified the Being, needed to solve the problem of the relation between a perfect, motionless, fully transcendent God, and the demiurgic work that, on the other hand, was getting his hands dirty with the material world. In other words, Numenius had to solve the mechanism of Aristotle's Unmoved Mover to explain how it could be motionless and, at the same time, move the whole Universe. The solution proposed by Numenius is actually very similar to the Amon-Rah-Ptah Egyptian theology and to the description of the Chaldaic Oracles: God has three different functions, presented as different divinities, according to *proskhrēsis* (πρόσχησις) or usage theory, that we now present.

At the top of everything there is God, who is also the Being, completely separated from the Becoming, according to Plato's *Timaeus*. In fact, the Being is intelligible, while the Becoming is not.

The Being is in the domain of the incorporeal, permanent, eternal, as stated by all the religions of all nations. On the contrary, the Becoming is in the domain of the corporeal, unstable and changing in time, ruled by the matter. God – Theós – is the top principle. It is convenient to talk in terms of a Triple God when focusing on his intrinsic nature, or in terms of a hierarchy of First, Second and Third God when focusing on his manifestations in the material world. God in himself is the First God, which is also the very Being and the Good.

The First God, who is intelligible as thinkable Essence, is the father, the cause of the thinking intellect, which knows the essence. Intellect, who knows the Essence, is the Second God. This function has the total vision of the ideas of its own intellectual order and is associated to the Platonic Nous. It has also the demiurgic function, as the legislator that distributes souls, using the ideas to model the world.

The Third God is the universe, the meeting point between the providential psychic action of the Nous and the Necessity of the material world, also known as discursive intelligence.

God uses (proskhrēsis) his subaltern aspects, his mind or universal intellectual activity to exercise the function of Demiurge and to realize the cosmic plan by modeling the matter. Plotinus will introduce three hypostases, that exist by themselves, originating three levels of reality, while we can say that Numenius introduces only one hypostasis with three usages. Nevertheless, Numenius laid the foundation for the triad Being-Nous-Psyche of Neoplatonic philosophy.

Besides, Numenius introduces the concept of the procession that will be later used by Plotinus and then by all Neoplatonic scholars. According to this principle, the divine gives power to the lower levels without losing power. This concept is called emanation.

In this frame, matter allows the incorporation of the divine essence and the essence of the perceptible universe. Matter is disorganized and chaotic, and exist before the world because it does not have a temporal origin, as it starts its existence as a mix of Nous and Ananke (necessity). Matter tends to extend indefinitely but it is kept restrained by the intellectual order of God. The Demiurge restrains it by the forms. Hence, matter is ordered by the work of the

Demiurge with the Soul. The perceptible world is given by the interaction between divinity and matter and it extends from the sphere of the fixed stars till to the Earth, the central and bottom place of the universe. Numenius abandons the stoic Logos by retrieving the divinity. On the other hand, he keeps two principles, matter and God, following the Platonic dualism (Monad and Dyad). Plotinus instead lets matter derive from the One, proposing in this way a complete Monism, which is the final passing from the Middle Platonism toward Neoplatonism.

From what we have written, it is possible to see that Numenius anticipated a great deal of Neoplatonic philosophy. Numenius also formulated the idea that everything is present in everything according to its essence, that is one of the central points of Plotinus' philosophy. Gentilianus Amelius, Plotinus' assistant, copied all Numenius' works (sometimes in the Ancient World the only way to have a copy of a rare manuscript was to copy it by hand). Plotinus used to cite them continuously so that somebody was accusing him of plagiarizing Numenius' philosophy. Amelius then wrote a work titled "on the doctrinal differences between Numenius and Plotinus" in order to defend his master.

Besides, according to Proclus, also Porphyry was deeply influenced by Numenius, at least for his interest toward the Chaldean Oracles. The Trinitarian scheme of Numenius was taken by Plotinus and Porphyry. The Christians, who were charged with polytheism by Jewish because of the introduction of the "Son of God" in their pantheon, took the pagan Trinitarian theory to justify the divinity of Christ. The Trinity became a dogma of the church, in other words, an obliged undiscussed doctrine, because Christians were not capable to accept a free thought. In 1600, around 1300 years after Numenius, another philosopher known as Giordano Bruno was burnt because of his heretical opinion on the Trinity. But this belongs to the dark history of Galileans, and not to the brilliant philosophic period of Polytheistic Neoplatonism, which we will write on next article about.

## **IX. A Travel Toward Neoplatonic Mysticism. At the dawn: Chaldean Oracles**

During the reign of Marcus Aurelius, Julian the Theurgist, son of Julian the Chaldean, received a series of divine messages that were later referred to as the Chaldean Oracles (χαλδαικὰ λόγια) for their Mesopotamian style and that became soon an essential component to the nascent Neoplatonism. These texts, written in Greek hexameters, exposed poetically a doctrine of profound wisdom, by describing a complex cosmological structure. Unfortunately, part of the work has gone lost during the centuries, but we have a series of fragments whispering an exciting page of mystery and spirituality.

The flickering of the oil lamp flame was casting a shadowy dance on the candy linen cloth on the "bomos", the altar where various objects for theurgic practice were placed with a meticulous order, together with the rich offerings to the goddess Hecate. Julian, stood barefoot in front of the "bomos". He was dressed in a long white coat, and immersed in a dense cloud of incense, while he was raising his arms to the sky, repeating rhythmically ancient formulas in arcane languages. His soul had left the body, forgetting of the senses that complained of the cold floor under bare feet, as well as the hunger for the purifying fast, or the burning eyes for the acrid smoke of the offerings. He had learned the art of astral traveling by exercising his "ochema", his psychic vehicle, and was ready to accept the divine light and to hear eternal words. Detached from the corporal prison, wandering toward an indefinite point of consciousness, suddenly his thoughts stopped, perhaps in the imperceptible break between two formulas of the ritual, or in a moment of flame immobility, at a time when there was no tension or attempt to understand anything: Julian transcended himself by caressing the abyss with his intuition, with the Flower of Intellect, and he instantly gained infinite knowledge.

After many hours of intense theurgic practice, he eventually came back exhausted to the reality, to the dark material basement where he used to celebrate his rituals. He felt cold at his feet that were freezing, and he felt hungry and even thirsty, wrinkling his

eyes, trying to recover his blurred sight. Then he stretched the backbones to fight an incipient backache for the long-held posture. After storing the sacred objects, rearranging the bomos, relocating his dress to the closet, preparing a glass of water, wine, and honey, he went to the desk to write down everything he learned during his psychic journey, just before the sun could erase his memory:



*"There is something you must grasp with the flower of intuition, for if you focus your intuition toward it, and conceive it as if you expect to intuit something determined, you will not catch it. It is like the power of a radiant force, which dazzles with intuitive spikes. You needn't grasp it vehemently, but with the subtle flame of a subtle intuition that can measure everything, but not it directly; and you mustn't intuit it with intensity, but you should stretch the pure look of your soul towards it, trying to imagine it, like a void, because it dwells outside the intuition."*

During Noumenia nights, in the deep darkness of the new moon, when the distance between the material world and the higher worlds fades, when the mind is more receptive to psychic impressions, he goes back to work on the bomos, to probe those ineffable truths and to hear the voice of the goddess Hecate. During the draining theurgical practice, he discovered that above all reality, there is a single principle out of time, the Transcendent Fire, the Sovereign, but also the Father, or even the Father's Mind. This is essentially unknowable, indeed, it is called "the End of Knowledge", "the Silence". Yet, despite the invaluable distance, that Being does

not inspire fear, but radiates persuasion and trust, such as the Good of Plato. The Being-Monad is not just an unknowable point. In fact, since it contains everything in itself, it also contains the potential of being everything. The Father expands beyond the abyss of ignorance because of his total possibility, or power, of intellectual revelation. This possibility of knowledge is what is termed "the Intelligible". Here everything is in power, hidden in the senses. This power is the Dyad, the multiple feminine principle, the Bride of the Father's Mind. The Dyad is therefore with Him. But this power is not manifested yet. It is not the universe yet. The Dyad is the detonator of the sequence, but it is not the very sequence of emanation.

According to the oracles, the first step occurs after the Power: "The Power is in Him, but the Mind is from Him". In fact, the Power is the Intelligible, which does not have an intellectual motion because it already contains everything. However, as it can be thought of, it starts the cognitive chain. The universe and the perceptible world are generated by the demiurgic action of the energy of the Mind that at this level, acting as the Architect of Matter, is called the Mind of Mind, or the Mind of the Daughter of the Mind or more simply the Son. The Mind of Mind then proceeds from Father's Mind through Power. The described entities constitute the trinity of Giuliano. Proclus, a few centuries later, identifies the Father with the *ousía* or the substance (*hyparxis*), the Mother with Life (*Zoē*), or with the Power (*dynamis*), and the Son with the operation or the actualization (*energeia*). The Monad, the unitary principle, contains in itself the power of multiplicity as Dyad and holds unity as a Triad. While two is the number of differences, the number three represents the first synthesis of unity and difference. Father's Mind is linked to Plato's design because the thoughts of the Father's Mind coincide with Platonic ideas.

The power in the triad is the source of emanation and causes each term to originate its own triad so that a multidimensional, crystalline cosmic structure is generated. So there are three triads, respectively tied to the Father, to the Power, and to the Father's Intellect. The Father's Intellect is self-generating in his knowledge of himself. Likewise, he lives by living and exists by existing, distinct from the Father, even though for his perfection there is no insuperable limit to the Father, but he is reflecting Father's structure



with a trinity. This is called the Second Intellect and has the following functions: the generating power that organizes and controls the multiplicity present in the divinities called synokhēis (συνοχή, control), the function of identity with the Father through the divinities called iynges (ἰγγες), the intellectual function of initiators or teletarchai (τελετάρχαι), who direct themselves to ideas and support the creating agents, by making the mind manifest in the universe.

The Paternal Intellect, facing the cosmos, is manifested as the triad of cosmic guides. The cosmic guide called "Once Beyond" reflects in its own intellectual trinity the unity of the Paternal Intellect as contemplation. The second term of the trinity of cosmic guides is Hecate, the Cosmic Soul, who reflects the operating intellect, his mind, his creative will, and the execution of his design. In Hecate's maternal breast there lies the "Twice Beyond", which generates what is contemplated by the "Once Beyond". The cosmic guides are the sources of the universe and are found in the supermundane or hyper-cosmic world. Below them, there is the boundary of the universe, divided too in ternary form. The power that keeps the cosmos united, while preventing its disintegration, proceeds from the synokheis through the iynges. The teletarchais bring the souls to the far end, to the breast of Hecate, the Cosmic Soul. The souls can come to Hecate if in their active part there are all the three components of faith, truth, and love. The soul's functions can thus be in balance with the original source of being, of living (power), and knowing (intellect).

The souls, when they travel to the earth for the incarnation, go through the heavens and cover themselves with thin layers that constitute a wrapper called "the vehicle" (ochema). This vehicle is fully formed before the soul meets the body. In the polytheism of the first centuries, the existence of the vehicle was taken for granted. Actually, the vehicle was the basis of many important theurgic exercises: those who wanted to learn to travel out of their own body had to master the art of the astral journey on their psychic vehicle. This theurgic practice is used still today.

According to the Chaldean Oracles, the theurgist receives help from the goddess Hecate, the central figure of the whole system, who was later considered the goddess of magic and witchcraft for

centuries. In fact, the daughter of Jupiter and Demeter is much more than this. Hecate is the personification of the World Soul that envelops everything and that nourishes the universe with the precious life. She is the intermediary between the Silence, the totally transcendent God, who dwells in the hyper-cosmic region beyond the world, and the universe itself.

Hecate, the Great Mother, is virgin and fruitful. Her head lies in the "once beyond", where she contains all the archetypal truth, all the ideas or forms proceeding from the paternal intellect as the fruit of self-contemplation. But her hands lie in the "twice beyond", where the agent and demiurgic intellect are active as vitalized by the Goddess. From here it is clear that Hecate is the goddess of life, the source of cosmic and hyper-cosmic life.

The message of the Chaldean Oracles is powerful and universal. Even today it is disconcerting to see how the Dyad-deity has manifested herself in different places in the world. Hecate, the goddess who propagates life from the One to the universe, the guide that raises the theurgist along a magical path, has been revealed in India as Śakti, the personified Divine Energy, who constantly vivifies the whole universe and opens the doors of mysticism to those who practice the Tantra and the way of the left hand.

We conclude this brief introduction to the Chaldean Oracles with "the hymn to Hecate and Janus" by Proclus the saint. Philosophical reasoning will follow in the next articles. In this, let's be inspired by the Flower of Intuition toward ineffable truths.

### *To Hecate and Janus<sup>7</sup>*

*Hail, many-named Mother of the Gods, whose children are fair*

*Hail, mighty Hekate of the Threshold*

*And hail to you also Forefather Janus, Imperishable Zeus*

*Hail to you Zeus most high.*

*Shape the course of my life with luminous Light*

*And make it laden with good things,*

*Drive sickness and evil from my limbs.*

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<sup>7</sup> Proclus Diadochus (410-485 AD), Hymn VI: To Hekate and Janus. E. Vogt "Procli Hymni" Weisbaden, 1957.

*And when my soul rages about worldly things,  
Deliver me purified by your soul-stirring rituals.  
Yes, lend me your hand I pray  
And reveal to me the pathways of divine guidance that I long for,  
Then shall I gaze upon that precious Light  
Whence I can flee the evil of our dark origin.  
Yes, lend me your hand I pray,  
And when I am weary bring me to the haven of piety  
with your winds.  
Hail, many-named mother of the Gods, whose children are fair  
Hail, mighty Hekate of the Threshold  
And hail to you also Forefather Janus, Imperishable Zeus,  
Hail to you Zeus most high.*

## **X. A Travel toward Neoplatonic Mysticism. Plotinus: the founder of “Neoplatonism”**

By the middle of the third century, the times were ripe for the foundation of Neoplatonism. Plotinus had certainly captured the legacy of his master Ammonius Sacca, who, like Socrates, had left nothing written, but probably had positions very close to Plotinus' Neoplatonism. Numerous writings of Numenius of Apamea were also circulating, which Plotinus used to quote. Initially Plotinus, following the example of Ammon, had written nothing, but his disciple Porphyry, who had a great mind, systematically re-ordered the notes of the lessons held in Rome by the master, recompiling them neatly, writing the *Enneads* (Ἐννεάδες), a work organized in six volumes of nine treatises each.

We do not exaggerate by saying that Plotinus is one of the highest minds not only of ancient thought but also of the philosophy of all time. He is the founder of a complete and sound doctrine, which not only does not rely on any religion, characteristic that any good philosophy should meet, but which also provides a valid logical support to both polytheism and monotheism, to such an extent as to be defined a philosophy of religions, transcending the interreligious

differences. Nobody else but Plotinus in history has been able to formulate such a definite doctrine. In the field of polytheism, all those who followed took full control of his cosmological vision and structure, integrating it with the religion of the Gods and with the popular magic practices, creating a wonderful philosophical work with ample spectrum.



*Plotinus*

Here we briefly look at the basic principles of Plotinus' metaphysics, which are the pillars of Neoplatonism and which will be the basis for discussions on the next authors.

From the times of Parmenides, the problem had been to relate a perfect Being, superior to everything, immobile and eternal, with a chaotic world in perpetual temporal evolution. The excellent minds of the past had until then found two coherent solutions, leading to extreme consequences the logical thought to one way or to the opposite:

Only the Being is true, while becoming is illusory. This is the line followed by Parmenides, and partly by Plato, for example in the myth of the cave. At this extremity are the philosophies that place the emphasis on mind and thought. Buddhism itself states that everything is Mind, while matter and becoming are illusions.

Only becoming is real while there is no place for metaphysics. This is the approach of Hellenistic philosophies, mainly related to

materialism, such as Epicureanism and Stoicism, as well as the many versions of modern materialism.

We define these two positions as coherent because they are supported by a clear and crystalline logic. A third path, conciliatory and all-encompassing of matter and being, was undertaken by Aristotle. Certainly, Aristotle, the founder of logic, had not presented an "illogical" model, yet in the face of the simplicity of the first and the second solution, complicated the description of reality by introducing categories and various distinctions, such as the definition of essence, which could range from ideas to matter, passing through the "synolon". Actually, the great Aristotelian construction could not resolve the problem of the relationship between the Perfect Being (Unmoved Mover) and the becoming over time, even though it anticipated a great conception that would then be resumed by the Neoplatonism.

Plotinus has been the first to present a perfectly logical and crystalline philosophical system, covering both matter and being. The Being, which coincides with the Intellect, has to contain a multiplicity within it, represented by ideas, as otherwise, the whole derived cosmos would remain frozen without any degree of freedom. On the other hand, the first cause cannot contain multiplicity within it, because if a different case the causal chain would diverge to infinity instead of converging. This reasoning prompted Plotinus to support the existence of a single "super-essential" and "super-intellectual" principle, a principle transcendent of Being and at the same time its foundation or essence, or, in other words, hypostasis. This principle is the One, unity and absolute simplicity without any multiplicity. It is infinite, with an endless power of generation. It is eternal because otherwise it would be subject to becoming and would not be the first cause. It is singular and without multiplicity, because otherwise, it would not be a definite cause. He does not need anything, he is self-sufficient and has no external cause, but is caused by itself, *causa sui*. It is what it wants to be. It is the first hypostasis of Plotinus, the principle of all things, present in all but possessed by nothing. The mathematical accumulation point of all reality.

The introduction of the One as an over-essential and supra-intellectual entity is the first of the three fundamental steps of Plotinus' philosophy, which, if it were limited to the first step, would

not go far beyond the achievements of Parmenides, falling again victim to the immobility of perfection. The second step arises from the following question: why would something so perfect generate anything other than itself? Here comes the second step of Plotinus' philosophy: beside the hypostases, he hypothesizes *an energy flowing from the One* through the whole chain of progression. The entire formation of the universe is related to the propagation of this energy. In detail, according to Plotinus, every hypostasis has an "internal" activity (in Greek: "energeia") that makes it what it is. This internal activity is accompanied by an "external" activity, which derives from the first and which follows the first in all respects, but which differs from the original subject. This activity is not yet organized in anything and is similar to the shapeless matter of the perceptible world, with the difference that it is eternal and subtle. This sort of transcendent matter is defined as intelligible matter. The third step is to understand how intelligible matter can give rise to the formation of another hypostasis beyond the One, thus transmitting not only energy and chaotic propagation but also the cosmic order. External activity, when it turns toward its source, realizes to be split into subject-object and becomes a new entity, the Intellect or Nous. These are therefore the ingredients of the formation of the metaphysical hierarchy: internal and external activity (energeia), progression (prohodos) and conversion (epistrophé). In other words the One, in the One, is the pure subject that self-realizes (internal activity). As the One sees itself, the subject-object duality rises, which being duality, is now beyond the One itself: this is the exact point where the new hypostasis and the multiplicity of the world begins, where it begins the Intellect, the Nous.

The Nous is the thinking One, the second hypostasis. In Nous, Plotinus combines the thinking God of Aristotle with Platonic doctrine of ideas, since he defines the ideas as the contents of Nous' thinking. Thus, ideas are real entities generated by Nous' activity, turning toward its hypostasis, the One. Ideas are the very basis of the Being, so it can be stated that for Plotinus the Nous coincides with the Being. Nous, manifesting multiplicity in thought, embodies in itself the variety of Being in ideas, generating REALITY, what we human can grasp with the conceptualization of what surrounds us. Numbers, harmonic properties, logic, geometry, all originate in this

infinite reflection of the Nous towards the One. The Nous, or the Being, is in a dimension of eternity. As the Nous contains in itself multiplicity and movement possibility, it is considered Life Eternal Perfection. In fact, for the ancients it was synonymous with life.

But it is not all yet: as it happens for the One, also for the Nous there is an internal activity, related to the formation of ideas, and an external activity, that turning toward its source gives rise to the third hypostasis, the Psyche or the Soul. In fact, observing the cosmos, we realize that it is not stable, it is not purely composed of ideas. There are animals and plants that live, grow, and there are volatile and fleeting sensations and perceptions. Psyche is the living cause of the perceptible world, the dynamic nature of the universe. The Soul explains the becoming, the movement and the consciousness of the world. The Soul itself is timeless, eternal, but acts in the temporal dimension with the direction from the past to the future. Psyche makes eternity as an orderly succession of temporal moments. As the Psyche takes on eternity as a model, the generation of the cosmos takes place perpetually with a flow from Eternity in temporal dominion. The Soul justifies the harmony of the Universe, the existence of regularity, symmetries, and physical laws, which the countless individual souls could not explain. Anima Mundi and all the individual souls are generated from the hypostasis Psyche. Psyche interacts with the material world, which is the combination of matter with rational principles, the so-called "logoi", immanent to the perceptible world, which guide matter. The logoi, with their immanence on the matter, are a legacy of stoic conception. So the formations in the perceptible world and every relative change are guided by the power of separate forms. This world is the farthest from the One and thus shows many defects but also shows the full variety of colors, qualities, combinations. At this level, we can see the development of Being to the extreme.

The "Logoi" interact with matter, which alone is formless or chaotic, and is unable to add quality to the original form. The perceptible matter is the ground reflection of the intelligible one, but at its level, the energy originated from the One and passed to the Nous and then to the Psyche has now weakened to such an extent that it cannot perform any further external activity and is devoid of the characteristic Power of the One. As the matter has no feature of

the One, Plotinus considers it as evil, in the sense of absence of good, almost a non-being, not intended as a negative contrast, but as a lack of quality. The matter is therefore produced by the Psyche, not by its top part, in contact with the Nous, but by a flap of the Anima Mundi, from which the Nous appears far away. It is to be noted that several centuries later Proclus derives matter directly from the One, as a special case, re-evaluating its function. We have just exposed the frame of reality according to Plotinus, with three hypostases, hierarchically ordered, where the upper level transcends the lower one as a formal cause, and where the lower level naturally tends to the upper one by the epistrophé. We humans can elevate ourselves with the practice of virtue and contemplation towards higher hypostases, until we reach the ecstatic union with the One or, as we would say in Zen Buddhism, the *satori*. It is important to emphasize that ecstasy is not a gift of divinity, but a natural feature of the soul.

Concerning the Roman Religion, it is clear that when we mortals are distracted in the chaos of everyday life, then we lose our true psychic aspiration and direct our efforts towards matter, which is thus evil, not as an active negative principle but as a mere absence of good. Evil means being incapable of driving the matter in orderly form, it is like dust on a neglected lararium. Instead, when we listen to our immortal souls, we feel the tension towards the greatest principle, the Nous, and the One, thanks to the principle of epistrophé. Religion, therefore, practiced in a virtuous life, with a pure heart, and with a serene mind, makes us turn to the Gods, the sweet origin of our existence, helping our elevation to the Good. But this conception already belongs to the later authors.



## **XI. A travel toward Neoplatonic Mysticism. Porphyry's legacy**

### ***The reaction of the polytheistic tradition against globalist Christianity***

*“The crap of the gospels should be taught to old ladies and not to reasonable people. Anyone who takes the trouble to examine the facts told by Christians with a little of attention would find thousands of similar stories but without a shred of meaning” — Porphyry: Against Christians*

In Madrid, on a warm morning in 2012, the zealous teacher of my daughter's kindergarten concluded the introduction of the school year explaining, as if it were an irrelevant detail, that thanks to the new school regulations the hour of Catholic religion had become optional. To my question about what activities a student would do if he had not followed the lesson, a brief, embarrassed silence followed, and a surprised look: “If some child does not want to follow the religion hour, we will have them draw something in the corridor. However, in the end, it is only an hour of ethics, of Christian ethics, *but we know that there is no other ethics outside of Christianity*”.

... and I thought of Socrates, Plato, the great philosophers of the past who had coined the term "ethics", and I thought of the giants of Roman history, men, and women who embodied the virtues. I also thought about the enormous slice of humanity that had not known Christianity for temporal or geographical issues: Buddha, Confucius and billions of people. All labeled as "without ethics". From her in whose hands I placed my daughter's education.

Without blaming too much the teacher and looking at things from the top of history, we realize that this is the result of centuries of a continuous brainwashing, which at times in the ages seemed to give up but then returned in waves with renewed vigor, transforming in appearance but remaining in substance the same. Christianity in history has clung to power and destroyed first the sacred images of the Gods and the texts of the ancient religions, then eliminated the polytheists from the cities, destroying the temples, with whose stones

it built its churches. Then Christianity called the survivors, who were practicing the ancient religion in the countryside, "pagans", which means peasants. Finally, Church stole our memory, transforming our benevolent deities into devils and demons, the omnipotent Gods and protectors into false and liars, and subtly justifying the possibility of a pagan era prior to Christianity as a primitive season of spiritual preparation for monotheism. And we are children of this lie, victims of this perpetual brainwashing, from the cradle onwards. I myself, many years ago, attended the classical high school, without understanding the true soul that fed that eternal flame that was still talking through a thick glass of cultural incomprehension. Monotheism was the only voice to be taken seriously for the affairs of the soul. A voice that I kept listening to for many, too many years. I too was hunting for witches.



*Porphyry (on the right)*

However, sometimes chance, fate, the Gods, philosophy or, according to some Catholics, the misfortune of not having spoken with the friar on duty makes us go back to our roots, to our pride to be wolves and not stupid lambs, afraid in the night, waiting for an elusive shepherd. We rediscover the traditional values of our Land when we go through the polemic between national and traditional polytheism against an internationalist and globalist monotheism, disrespectful of the ancient customs and ready to accuse the Western

culture of all the faults of the planet. Diabolically, it is appropriate to say, many of these faults have to do with ethnic and cultural cleansing occurred precisely because of Christianity, such as the forced conversions of entire peoples in the Americas.

In reality, the heated confrontation between Christian monotheism and polytheism began two thousand years ago. Not with Judaism, which celebrates its traditions under its own ethnic god, but with Christianity that wants to impose itself as a Catholic (καθολικός = universal) and take spiritually the place of traditional polytheism and politically take possession of the empire. Porfirio, a disciple of Plotinus, besides being a fine Neoplatonic philosopher, was a champion of polytheism against Christianity, of which he knew very well the scriptures, namely the Old and New Testaments. He composed many excellent works, including a work in 15 books "Against the Christians", obviously burned by the recipients, not very accustomed to criticism. However, even if now the ashes of the work have been dispersed in the four cardinal points of the world, the Jesuit zeal with which the so-called church fathers were careful to counteract the whole work, point by point, allows us to rebuild much of the original arguments and resume the diatribe from where it was left.

Why is Porfirio arguing against Christians? In his day Christianity was rapidly gaining power and strength. The Christians defined their religion as the only true and disqualified each other, introducing a factor of religious intolerance that characterized our history from Constantine onwards. As if this were not enough, some Neoplatonic philosophers had converted to Christianity and were forcing philosophy for their own purposes, regardless of the logical blunders that they were selling as revealed truth. If polytheism had harmonically accepted that Jupiter could be the Demiurge of the Cosmos, Christians placed their God directly as the Being. A Being who intervened in history, who walked in the Garden of Eden with men, but who then punished his own creation, a God who sided capriciously in the battlefields, which raged if all the enemies of Israel were not exterminated, women and children included (1). A God who represented the opposite of an uncontaminated idea of Good and transcendence. His progeny, moreover, in the figure of Jesus, was identified with the Logos himself, with the claim to have a

human being cover the role that Sofia had in the philosophical saving process.

It would be worth reviewing all of Porphyry's arguments against Christian superstition, specific topics addressed to defined sections of the Christian canon, ranging from metaphysical reflections to concrete examples of the inadequacy of Peter and Paul to cover any sensible religious or philosophical role. It would be worthwhile, because I am sure that the opportunities to remember these topics would not be lacking, considering all the zealous teachers, bigoted friends, the popes or the good-willed friars who want to bless the house, invading your private sphere.

Let us go to the point of the controversy with some examples. In Genesis 2.17 God says: "*but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*". One of the cornerstones of Neoplatonic thought is the identification of the One, the hierarchical top of everything, with Plato's Good. The knowledge, understood as Sophia, helps to discern and recognize the true good in a continuous tension towards the One, while the lack of knowledge, or ignorance, is the cause of ethical evil (we remember the cave of Plato). In fact, the ethical evil is the behavior that goes in the direction opposite to good, towards the multiplicity and the chaos of becoming (metaphysical evil). If in part one could understand that a God forbids the knowledge of evil, how can one affirm that He forbids the knowledge of Good to human beings? A humanity immersed in total ignorance of good and evil could not make any correct ethical choice and would be condemned to drift by the One. It should be noted that this subject was similarly proposed also by Celso and by emperor Giuliano. *A God who forbids the knowledge of Good is evil*. How could it be that the fathers of the church, with their Neoplatonic background, did not realize this contradiction? Generally, the Christian world overcomes these difficulties by the crutch of faith or, in other words, by *killing philosophical argumentation*.

From the first letter to the Corinthians, 7.31 we read: "and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away". What does Paul mean by stating that the form of this world must pass? Precisely, what should you go through and why? If the Creator is the cause of

this "passing", then he would be guilty of causing the change to something solidly established. And if he wanted to make an improvement in the world, then he would still be guilty of the ignorance of having generated in his creation an imperfect world destined to disappear. In short, it would be like admitting that the creator made a mess. And if we need to wait for the end of time to have a perfect world, we must object that the creator himself is the source of all suffering and misery of this world. *The Creator would have violated the rational principle of nature by creating a fiasco of creation.* Such a philosophical mess cannot be accepted by anyone who seriously wants to do philosophy and theology.

Another great point of disagreement takes place on ethics. For centuries Christians have been explaining that heathens not only did not have any spirituality but also that they were without ethics. Because of this brainwashing, even today a bigoted teacher feels comfortable by expressing thoughts worthy of Torquemada. In reality, traditional polytheists have been accusing Christians of impiety and atheism with valid arguments. In the Neoplatonic world, the way to the Good is characterized by a constant daily exercise of virtues, of piety, of meditative contemplation. Porphyry, besides, promoted abstinence from meat to keep body and soul uncontaminated by animals. He also presented Pythagoras as an example to follow for those wishing to take the long path to Good. Only a few indefatigable saints can reach the contemplative vision of the One, after a hard daily exercise and a long religious, virtuous and theurgic practice. Christians, on the other hand, do not need to imitate a model like Pythagoras, as they have a shortcut. In fact, the first letter to the Corinthians recites (1 Corinthians 6:9-11): "neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." When Paul says "such", he speaks about human dregs, to sinners par excellence, bandits, bandits, ignoramuses, exploiters, thieves, murderers, perverse, and so on. They, who have never meditated, who do not respect the laws nor exercise the virtues, when they submit to the so-called baptism, they suddenly become pure and

free from sin. Porphyry rightly wonders who would not prefer a life of corruption simply on this promise, who would not devote himself to the most wicked vices, sure to get away with at the very last moment, thanks to the forgiveness of the judge of the dead and the living. This kind of promise encourages those who live in sin and ignorance. This type of doctrine produces an attitude of rebellion towards good customs and virtues. We conclude with the words of Porphyry: "Christians would lead us to a lawless society, they would teach us not to fear the Gods. This arrogant teaching of their scriptures speaks volumes, as it states that all guilt and vice can be washed away simply by baptism ".

This is the real argument that even today is troubling us, polytheists. We seek the divine in all the verticality of the cosmos, looking into the depths of a well of water, observing the planets and the smoke of incense on the altar, admiring the rays of the sun at dawn as Janus, reasoning on the immortality of the soul, on the celestial Gods and on the Unspeakable One, the ineffable Silence of the Silences. We approach the path of virtue, aware that it is long and impervious. We look for the Beauty in the statues of the deities, we admit Eros and Amor as a force of the Universe and we remain ecstatic whenever the world manages to bring out, even for a moment, the reflection of a perfect form, a spark of Nous. They tried to reduce this spirituality to ashes. But the fact that we are still talking about it shows that they did not make it because, as Plato teaches us, Ideas are immortal. Thank you, Porphyry, we collect your legacy. The Roman tradition rises renewed, also thanks to you.

*Notes:*

*(1) Samuel, 15:2-3 This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. 3 Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy[a] all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys'.*

## XII. A Travel toward Neoplatonic Mysticism. The Theurgy



**"I have studied more than you":** this is, in a nutshell, the recurring point of today's disputes over Religio. I have seen it a thousand times in a thousand ways, in the academic sphere, between associations, among people. However, we should note that this characteristic is present only today, as it is not evident that in ancient times there was this attitude of morbid attachment to the theoretical knowledge of religion. This leads to the paradox that at some point the cognitive effort that we make to approach the original practice, in reality, moves us away from the authentic attitude that the religious people of the past had.

If we consider for a moment our situation and our times, we understand that there are at least three factors at the origin of our cultural approach.

First factor. Generally, we polytheists of the 21st century belong to a first generation that rebelled against the Christian religion, which, at least in Italy, was the official State religion until 1984, even if it continues today to exert a political pressure on politics. Not everyone is able to break with the religion taught by grandparents and parents and imposed by the school system and society in general. Even when I served my country in the army, I was continuously exposed to Catholic priests and nuns, crucified Christs,

and statues of the Virgin. We needed to be determined and have a good knowledge to counter the many questions that the surrounding world was posing when we detached from Christianity. Consequently, **our first generation of polytheists is mainly composed of prepared people: people who read, study and get informed.** It is rare to meet among us a "non-practicing polytheist", someone born polytheist but with disinterest in the temples. We are a group united by the culture that has freed us from the scarecrow of eternal Christian damnation and has shown us the ways of Janus. We are an informed and active minority, with a good dose of cultural antibodies.

Second factor. We are the first polytheist generation after centuries of persecution and oblivion. One of the church's worst accusations, even between opposing factions of Christianity, was and still is that of "paganism". Christianity has transformed our Gods into evil devils and has transformed the polytheistic garden of the classical world into an arid desert. Our religion, its sacred writings, its temples, its statues, its rites, can be reborn only by digging and unearthing the ancient buildings, then rebuilding the new ones in a consonant way. If we do not follow this approach, we risk to lose our specificity and to water down our identity with a generic New Age polytheism. Besides, according to Neoplatonic philosophers, we risk also the exposure to chaotic demons, by a wrong approach to the divine dimension.

Third factor. We are children of our time and we need evidence and evidence. Archeology is a sophisticated science that relies on the interdisciplinary of various advanced technologies. Our way of thinking is precise, logical, and rational. If the source is not clear, we prefer not to lose weight and be cautious in statements about rituals and Religio. As much as we can try to deny it, we are children of our time, of the rationality of our days, of technology and of research.

In summary, the lack of an uninterrupted tradition forces us to reconstruct something lost, but this must be done with the help of modern research on the ancient world.

Let us face it: we are a first generation whose parents have not taught anything about the Roman Religion. We are passionate on every stone and base our practice on archeology, having great hopes



that one day a papyrus will come to the surface bearing important lost details about religious practice. Beyond this, we are hostile to innovations for a sense of tradition and for a sacrosanct prudence.

However, is this the way of the Gods? An experiment of archaeological reconstruction?

Well, first we need to remove the forced scientific objectification of every problem from our minds. The deities that inhabit the cosmos at every level are not the object of the Roman Religion. They are the subject. Moreover, as a subject, they direct the action that we are responsible for recognizing. This consideration opens up new perspectives, as it forces us to confront the divine dimension, not only as informed people who can speak on the subject, that is theologians, but as theurgists.

Julian the Chaldean or his son introduced the term "theurgist" in the frame of the Chaldean Oracles, as one who evokes and acts on the Gods. Porphyry, the first Neoplatonic philosopher to support the nascent theurgy as a method to approach the Gods, wonders in the "Letter to Anebo" if the Gods are forced by the theurgist to manifest themselves and to perform certain actions. In reality, this vision is still affected by ancient magical practices, classified as Goetia, where the invoked demon is forced to perform a certain action by the magician, as shown by the Greek Magic Papyri. The philosopher Iamblichus replied anonymously to the Letter to Anebo of Porphyry, clarifying that it is the theurge who rises to the divinity for a process of "sympathy", and not the divinity to lower himself to the human beings. With Porphyry, the theurgy began its journey and refined until it reached its maximum expression in Proclus. During the Renaissance, the theurgy re-emerged thanks to the Neoplatonic Circle of Florence, to continue until today in some restricted circles, even if deeply de-contextualized.

Theurgy has been defined as "white magic", according to a distinction from "black magic" related to goetia. Substantially, black magic is practiced to receive immediate and earthly benefits through the invocation of demonic entities. Porfirio warns about the dangers of black magic, which plays on the volitive and low energies of the soul, exposing them to the whims of demons. Theurgy, more than a magical practice, is a form of Western yoga, as it aims at raising the soul to higher states, closer to the invoked divinity. The theurgist

does not try to change the daily reality with theurgy (therefore he is not a magician), but he seeks the divine intuition through the *Nous*, to come closer to the Gods and to interpret the will in favor of his soul and the community. As we can understand, it is a mystical purpose that has nothing to do with the love filters of goetic practice, which points to the material needs and the earthly desires of the practitioner.

Historically, theurgic practice arose in a period of strong contrast with the nascent Christianity and has a strictly conservative character, with a proposal of rituals in the context of traditional polytheism, seeking contact with the deities. Theurgic rituals can broadly be divided into two subgroups: the telestial practices and the theophorics. The first, also called symbolic, take place through the consecration of objects and statues, to obtain above all the oracles from the latter. The consecrations, well known in the context of the Roman Religio, require complex rituals to make the object, typically a statuette, worthy of hosting the divinity. This is part of the neo-Platonic view of matter as a receptacle of eternal forms. The statuette, once consecrated, under certain conditions can accommodate the divinity and act as a vehicle for the revelation of divine messages, oracles. In the theophory, an officiant assumes the role of medium, entering into a trance and lending his voice to the God invoked. The complex ritual foresees the consecration of the medium as an earthly image of divinity (similar to the statuette), however, placing the medium safe from undesired demons and spirits through careful purification and invocation, as well as the preparation of defensive psychic barriers.

The Religio Romana of the origins was not at all foreign to the techniques of interpretation of the will of the Gods (see for example the excellent article by Paolo Casolari "*Templum: lo Specchio del Cielo*")<sup>8</sup>, just remember the aruspicina, the auspicia, and the use of various types of oracles, including those from Sibillini. The novelty introduced by theurgy, in line with the religious trends of the first centuries, is the attention to the individual with a soteriological

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.saturniatellus.com/2014/11/templum-lo-specchio-del-cielo-tecniche-significati-simboli-e-segreti-del-rito-romano-di-fondazione-della-citta/>

function: the theurgist seeks not only the good of the community but also and above all the salvation of one's own psyche.

Another feature of theurgy is its great attention to the ethical sphere, in agreement with the Neoplatonic philosophers. In fact, it is clear that without a correct ethics a theurgist cannot achieve important goals, as his soul would be disturbed and burdened by everyday life. Ethics protects it from disturbances generated by everyday worries. This aspect is also in full harmony with the Roman Religio<sup>9</sup>. Porphyry wrote "the life of Pythagoras" just to present the example of an ethical man. He was also an advocate of vegetarianism, citing the same arguments as the modern followers of Hinduism, namely that the flesh of the killed animal weighs down the vibrations of the theurgist's soul with its energy, thus precluding the possibility of rising to higher levels of consciousness.

The Religio Romana therefore, although it may today be based on archaeological research, still has excellent cards to play to recover the immortal lifeblood of its origins. Tradition can be revitalized by theurgy, provided it is not decontextualized by tradition and is accompanied by ethics.

Porphyry today questions us about our religiosity. There is a river of infinite manifestations of the divine, from the Supreme Silence of the Silences to the immortal Gods, to the high demons to the chaotic and lost spirits. If we do not take note, we are perhaps good budding archaeologists but not religious. Porphyry invites us to have more courage and to go back to listening to the Gods, not only through books and stones but directly from their voice, alongside the calendar rituals, but also in the first place through an ethical path to purify our souls and protect them from possible weightings, and then through theurgical practice, to learn the oracles of the Gods from the primary source. If we can direct ourselves directly to the eternal source, we will be the founders of the Religio Romana Renovata, in the wake of tradition, and we will give our children and future generations a regenerated religion.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.saturniatellus.com/2016/11/la-via-romana-e-innanzitutto-un-orientamento-etico/>

### **XIII. A Travel toward Neoplatonic Mysticism. Iamblichus' Theurgy**

According to the Platonic philosophy, the condition for the birth of a person is the encounter of a soul with a body. What is the relationship of the soul with the material world? Does it bind completely to the body after having crossed the seven planetary spheres? Or does a part of the soul remain uncontaminated, up there somewhere, waiting to be remembered by the person who is fighting in the daily life of the sublunar world? It is surprising how the answer to this question can have great implications for our religious practices.



*Iamblichus*

Plotinus maintained that the purest part of the soul remains in the heavens, detached from the body and from matter, which instead are a burden, an evil for the confusion provoked in the soul through perceptions. This thought, which was probably influenced by Gnostic cosmology, was not orthodox with respect to the Paideia of Plato, who otherwise believed that souls should live in their own place in the cosmos and seek, here and now, through their demons, peace, prosperity, and justice (dialogue "the Laws") and reconstruct on earth, or in the sensitive world, the golden age ("Republic"). Unlike Plato, Plotinus's philosophy did not consider the cosmos as a divine revelation. In this perspective, all that is material is devalued, including religious rituals, which are based on the calendar of the seasons of the perceptible world and use objects made of matter. It is no coincidence that Plotinus explained that the sage can reach the ecstatic union with the One without the help of any deity.

The great Porphyry continued, like his teacher Plotinus, to consider the soul not completely incarnate and, in practice, identified with the Nous. However, he probably realized that Plotinus' route led to the end of religion and tradition, for the benefit of a very small group of philosophers, while the people, deprived of their ancient religious reference points, were exposed to Christian superstition. Porphyry then, following his heart with a great impulse, recovered various aspects of the polytheistic tradition, adding the theurgical practices, amalgamating the contents according to the line of his teacher. At this point, however, there arose a problem of consistency that he could not solve: what was the use of religion and theurgy to a soul never completely incarnated when it could directly access the Nous? Porphyry, as an honest intellectual as he was, posed a series of questions in a real open letter, the "Letter to Anebo", where he suggested theurgical practice only to those who did not live up to philosophical perfection, stating: "The philosopher is the savior of himself "(De Abstinencia II, 49, 2). The utility of theurgical action was recognized only for non-philosophers with an effect limited to the purification of the lower part of the soul, the incarnated one, sometimes called "pneuma". From this perspective, Porphyry even criticized the sacrifices of the traditional religion, because they took place through the perceptible world and could attract, with the smell of the victims' flesh, the evil demons, but certainly not the Gods.

Obviously, at a time when the traditional religion was under the constant attack of the Christian media pressure, the questioning of the millennial practices was experienced with great delight precisely by those whom Porphyry was fighting against.

Iamblichus, a Greek-speaking Syrian philosopher, solved the problems presented by Porphyry by replaying anonymously with "The answer of the master Abammon to the Letter of Porphyry to Anebo". This letter historically deviated the course of Neoplatonism for centuries to follow. In the Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino translated it from the Greek into Latin with the title "De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum, Chaldaeorum, Assyriorum", otherwise known simply as "De Mysteriis".

The premise from which the whole doctrine of Iamblichus develops is the complete embodiment of the soul in the material world. Moreover, retrieving Pythagoras' theories and the materiality of Egyptian rituals, which are based on natural cycles, he clarifies that matter is not evil but is part of the divine plan, thus contradicting Numenius, Plotinus, and Porphyry. The perceptible world is the last frontier of the Demiurge: the paradoxical incarnation of an immortal soul in a mortal body offers the opportunity to continue the creative work on the material level and to carry out a soteriological function in the material world according to a divine plan.

In other words, what we do under heaven also has spiritual value. This is the cornerstone of the exercise of Virtus in the social context, of Religio in the exoteric context and of the theurgical practices in the esoteric context. In fact, if we deny the possibility of any effect of the material world on the psychic sphere, we get two possible alternatives: the first on the basis that one can not induce good from matter to the psyche involves withdrawal from the material world in favor of asceticism, approach followed by Plotinus and, only partially, by Porphyry. The second, logically symmetrical, on the basis that one can not induce evil from matter to the psyche is libertinism.

Iamblichus states that our action theater is the material world. If we believe that we are able to ascend without reckoning with our materiality, we live in delusion. Since the soul is completely incarnated, she can not return to the One without the help of the deities. The great lesson, in line with the Roman tradition, is that

spirituality takes place gradually, starting from demons (geniuses, lari, numina). According to the ancient mentality, the religious ritual can only take place with orthopraxis, the correct formal execution, using the objects, the offers and the pertinent formulas (synthemata) as a means to approach the divine, in order to awaken that affinity (philia ) which will allow the officiant access to the energy of the deity. Through the rituals and with the help of demons, the officiant moves gradually from the material to the divine plane.

The cult of the cosmic or worldly Gods, manifested for instance through the planets, takes place according to the laws of fate and its main expression: the calendar. Since the cosmic Gods are revealed by the demons, the latter must be involved in material rites. A fundamental psychological aspect is that demons are also the forces responsible for passions and carnal instincts, which are tempered and stabilized through rituals. Without this characterization, the soul of the theurgist can not ascend. Iamblichus exemplified the situation of Porphyry, who on one hand claimed to have lived the ecstatic union with the One, on the other, he suffered from depressive crises that drove him to suicide. This made it impossible to believe his henosis.

Iamblichus wrote that in order to ascend to the Demiurge and the One, it was necessary to honor all the Gods to regain inner peace. Iamblichus, who lived in the eclectic context of the Hellenistic period, did not follow the Roman Religio but honored the Hellenic and Egyptian pantheon, however according to his writings he had a traditional approach based on existing rituals, according to his citation of the "materiality of Egyptians rituals" and the use of the original language formulas. Thus, to Iamblichus, religion is consistent with the first level of theurgical work. Actually, it is the necessary condition for making esoteric action effective. In other words, religious orthopraxis along with virtuous behavior is consistent with the first degree of theurgy. This reading is consistent with a Roman tradition that sought Pax Deorum through traditional practice.

According to Iamblichus, a harmonized soul can reach higher levels of realization with theurgy. Above the tripartite soul functionally in thymos, epithymia and logismos, there is "to hen tēs psychēs", the one of the soul, its unitary principle. When "to hen tēs

psychēs" joins the hypercosmic or ultramundane Gods, following their own essential nature, the soul is liberated from fate. The hypercosmic Gods, however, do not act in our cosmos, so the following question arises: how can the soul rise up to them? The theurgist, using sacred material objects, symbols or synthemata of traditional religion, moves demons into the material world to rise to the cosmic Gods. Although the order of these is clearly separated from that of the hypercosmic Gods, there is an intermediate divine order that partially overlaps between the two, that of the Liberated or Liberating Gods (apolutoi), under the reign of Saturn, the Liberated Demiurge, who reigned on the cosmos in the gold age with a noetic providence. The Liberated Gods have a dual nature, which allows them to be present simultaneously in the cosmic order (at the top of it) and at the base of the hypercosmic order. Through the theurgy therefore the souls can aspire to the Liberated Gods to benefit from the liberating action and thus break the chains of fate.

It is therefore essential to recognize the function of demons as a first step. Iamblichus recognizes three types: those that help the Gods to repay the theurge of his efforts, those who administer justice by rewarding the virtuous and punishing the wicked, those who have neither logic nor judgment and who are in charge of certain powers at the head of natural functions. The true mission of souls is to use demons by imitating the Demiurge, ie acting righteously according to the laws of the Gods that shape the world. These laws are as biological as they are ethical, so that the effort of the incarnated soul includes eating well, exercise, the correct cycle of sleep and wakefulness, but also the right behavior towards other human beings and towards the Gods through the Religio. All this is exemplified by the figure of Pythagoras in the book of Iamblichus: "De Vita Pythagorica".

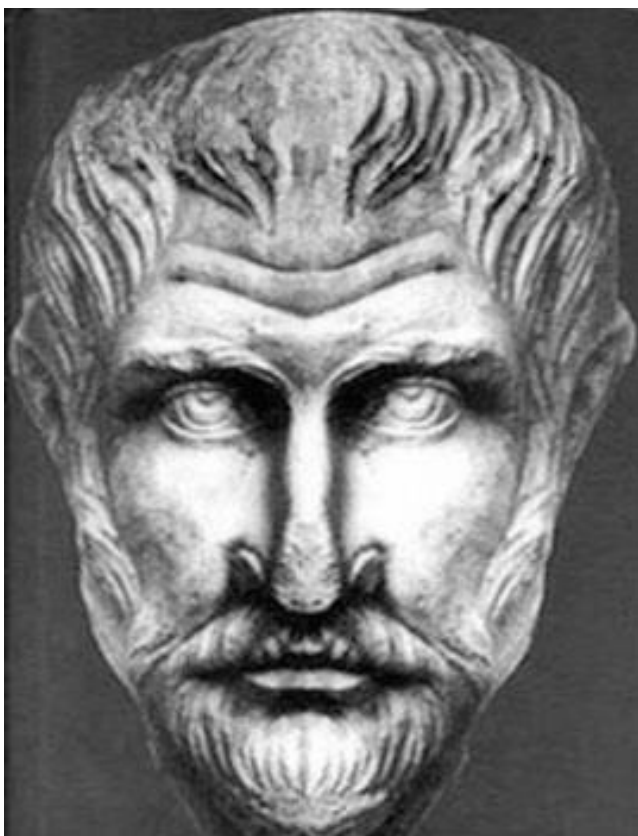
Esotericism without a solid traditional religious basis does not belong to the thought of Iamblichus. Now as it was then, performing an esoteric work without daily exercising the Pietas and the Virtus, or in other words without inner balance, besides being nefas, is illusory. Iamblichus offers a solution that is not limited to the great ascetic minds that can afford to live isolated from the world. The exercise of Virtus and the celebration of rituals are available to the Roman people. It is up to us to respond to this opportunity and to



seek out the divine philia with the Pax Deorum, for the manifestation of the demiurgic work in history.

*References: Shaw, Gregory. Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus. Angelico Press/Sophia Perennis.*

#### **XIV. A Travel toward Neoplatonic Mysticism. An exhibition, a statue: Proclus**



*Proclus*

In a dark winter Sunday of wind and rain I decide to visit a modern art exhibition in a museum close by my house. I cross the main entrance, I pay the ticket and go into the hall without having a good idea of what to expect. Around me, there is such a disharmony to initially make me believe that the building is undergoing maintenance, and I am reminded of various images of boxes of my last laborious relocations. Looking more carefully, I realize the misunderstanding: "that disharmony" is the exposure. To shy away from the stereotype of the average Italian who always flutters his unquestionable opinion abroad, I apply the stoic "*suspension of judgment*", to avoid entering into a vicious circle of indignation towards those works, certainly due to my ignorance. I look without understanding at first work with empty paint pots apparently abandoned in bulk on an old worn and frayed carpet; the second with an office chair broken into a fishing net; I stare at the third: a wall of plasterboard on which a Madonna was glued, sideways, similar to a bloody flop of a bungling wizard that was trying to saw his valley in two. There are a dirty boot and next to it a ready-to-use toilet and underneath, horror, the bust of the god Neptune with a trident (nonne nefas est?). By now my suspension of judgment falters and I almost lose my balance stumbling on a tire that leans uselessly on the other rubble.

I read a very pompous and authoritative explanation of what I have seen, on the demythologizing of the cultures that have conditioned and teased us, with a peroration of the freedom of the individual from his past. The destruction of art understood as an artistic moment. I think of the Buddha statues of Bamiyan blown up by the Taliban: it is easy to destroy, but to build well is another thing. My judgment is no longer suspended, now I am hostile to what I see ... I admit my limitations on the practice of stoicism. There's nothing here for me and maybe visiting this museum was not a great idea, so I could stop losing time and go home, rain permitting. I look up at the window on the other side of the room. It's already dark. Beyond the glass, in what looks like an inner courtyard in the open, almost an impluvium, I see a regal shape in the darkness. Intrigued, with a certain dignified urgency, almost like a smoker looking for a hidden corner where to light a cigarette, I close my coat and go out to see what it is.

Although modern, there is a majestic sculpture with a shield, helmet, hair, height, pride, and vibration: it is she, in the darkness, Minerva, impassive, apart from the chaotic nothingness of the exhibition. The face is only hinted at, she has no eyes, but I feel its blueness. Rain on my head and an embarrassed emotion to feel at home, after so much strangeness. Proclus, who had a great devotion to the goddess with the cerulean eyes, said that *the product retains within itself an attraction towards the cause that produces it*. What I feel in my chest is the desire towards the source, the return, the "*epistrophé*". Minerva, born from the head of Jupiter armed in all respects, or, in other words, that is *generated by the demiurgic Nous*, rises up there, before me.

I look around me, outdoors, on the patio: nobody. Inside: the crowd, around the works of the exhibition. The paths of chaos and cultural destruction are easier than Nous's research. Now the real revolutionary culture is the classical one because that pathetic materialism reminds me of heated and tasteless soup, of lazy rich kids who would not be worth even as stone bearers for the master Phidias. An episode of Proclus's life comes to my mind, as narrated by his disciple Marino. When he arrived in Athens for the first time, he immediately wanted to visit the Acropolis. At that time Greece was denying centuries of wisdom, dragged into the dogmatic spiral of Christianity, and the temples were gradually forgotten and then used as open-air quarries (destruction of the past, the theme of the exhibition). When Proclus arrived at the gates of the Acropolis he met the custodian who exclaimed: "Of course, if you had not come, I would have closed". What can we say? We modern polytheists all feel a bit like Proclus when we visit our places and our stones with an eye different from that of the tourist or the traveler, as we are moved by that desire for divinity, the return, the *epistrophé*.

The metaphysical construction of Proclus is nothing short of monumental. His work "**Platonic Theology**" is incredibly lucid, with cross references to the works of Plato and other great philosophers of antiquity. Let us look at the outline of the metaphysical depth of Proclus.

*The first cause of everything is the One*, in full agreement with the Neoplatonic tradition that identifies the One of Parmenides with the Good of Socrates. The One can be honored only with silence and

with the unification upstream of silence itself. Like every entity, the One is characterized by its own existence and its own energy. The existence of the One is the "*Principle of Limit*", its energy is the "*Principle of the Unlimited*". The Principle of Limit is what confers a limit and an identity to everything and in extreme geometric synthesis, we could associate it with the most basic definition of the universe: the point. Indeed, since it is not a participated entity, it is the "cause" of the point. The Principle of the Unlimited expresses the unlimited power of the One, the principle of unlimited expansion. These two principles appear in the mythology of Orpheus, respectively, as **Ether** and **Chaos**, and by combining they intertwine throughout the cosmos.

The power of the One has, as its effect, a participated class of individual characteristics of unity, *the Henads*, which give unity to the universe. These are divided into independent units, which are *Gods*, and dependent on space and time, which are their *divine representations*. Its effects participate to every God, thus generating an updraft current that constitutes providence. The Gods are therefore the participation of independent entities (Being, Life, Intellect, Psyche, Nature, Soma) to the Henads, therefore they reflect the ontological characteristics of the Henads in the entity in which they live. The Gods are above Being (super-essential) and also above the Life entity, (super-vital), beyond generation and multiplication. The Gods also reside beyond the Intellect (super-intellectual) entity, i.e. they transcend the Mind itself. Since the Gods are close to the One, they have the characteristic of being unitary, because the One is the absolute Unity, of being good, because the One is also the absolute Good, of being divine, because the One is the absolute God.

In each order, different functions of deities are identified. The God or the Gods who preside over the unparticipated cause, representing the essence of the cause itself or its permanence, are the *Fathers Gods* (πατέρες) and identify the "paternal" series. The Gods who preside over the activity of the cause or its progression and who then preside over the process of differentiation and production are the *Mother Goddesses* (μητέρες) and identify the "generating" series. The Gods presiding over the Effect or the return are the *Sons Gods* (γεννήματα) and identify the "perfecting" series. In the minor orders, there is a fourth series participated by the internal Energy of the

unparticipated Cause, the series of *Guardian Gods* (φρουρητικός). In other words, each unparticipated cause (Being, Life, Intellect, Psyche, Nature, Soma) identifies a divine order and within each order, there are three main series of Gods, the paternal one, the generating one and the perfecting one.

The first order under the Henads is the Being, where  $3 \times 3 = 9$  noetic (intelligible) Gods dwell. Then follows the order of Life, with  $3 \times 3 \times 3 = 27$  noetic and noeric (intelligible and intellectual) Gods. The Mind follows, with a total of 72 noeric (intellectual) Gods. Among these, Saturn is the Father God of Mind, or the pure, permanent, unmixed Mind. When a soul comes to rise at the level of Saturn, she lives the mystical experience of henos, lasting peace, the Safe Harbor. It is not surprising that in the Saturnalia, the golden age of perpetual happiness is celebrated. The progression of the Mind is the Goddess Rea, which represents the generating vitality of the mind itself, the potentiality of generating thought. The activity of the Mind is Jupiter, the Demiurge, the one who can access the purity of the forms and copy them below, in the cosmos.

Most of our spiritual activities take place in the order of Psyche. The highest Gods are transcendent, not directly reachable. They are called hypercosmic because they do not dwell in our universe, but metaphysically above it, beyond the celestial vault. Among them there is the paternal or demiurgic triad, made up of Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto, which at the top level is unified in the noetic demiurgic Jupiter, then the life-giving triad called Core, consisting of Diana - Hecate, Proserpine and Athena (female triad linked to the Life or maternal series), and the rising triad of Apollo - Elio and the immaculate triad of the Corybantes.

Under the hypercosmic Gods, still in the order of Psyche, there are the simultaneously hypercosmic and cosmic Gods. These Gods have the characteristic of being able to be simultaneously in our cosmos and in the hyper cosmos, so they are the Gods to whom our rituals are naturally addressed for their characteristic of being a bridge. We recognize the series of the Gods of Olympus among them: the demiurgic triad consisting of Jupiter, Neptune, and Vulcan, the guardian triad from Vesta, Minerva and Marte, the life-giving triad from Ceres, Juno and Diana, and the rising triad composed of Mercury, Venus, and Apollo.

Below there are also numerous cosmic gods, such as the planets, and again, under the gods, the demons who are in charge of many functions, like the natural ones of necessity, but also in leadership roles when they help the theurgist to rise to the gods.

The gigantic work of Proclus can absorb us so much that it generates the great misunderstanding that it could be sufficient an intellectual effort to approach the Gods. Actually, Proclus, with his production of hymns and with the example of his own life, sends us a completely different message: theology is not enough, theology supports the religion but does not replace it. It is from here that we must start. According to Proclus, everything naturally intones a hymn to return to the origin, even the heliotrope and sunflowers participate, raising a "physical hymn" when they play in the wind or when they turn to the sun. Everything is connected, everything is an imitation of the higher level. Rituals in the physical world attract the gods who move us towards the high spheres: the kind of lightness in the heart that is felt after having participated in a good ritual.

A sudden gust of wind brings me back to earth, in front of the statue. I wonder whereto a chain of thoughts has brought me. I do not know if I stayed there, dazed, two seconds or twenty minutes. The statue seems to smile. I smile too, almost accomplice. Yes, it is from here that we must start, from the direct experience of the divine, in a clear and organized structure, which rises above chaotic thought. I greet the Goddess thanking her for the thoughts I had. In that exhibition, I felt lost, but now I can go out safely, in an ordered and divine universe. Awareness is the first step towards the way back.

## **XV. A Travel toward Neoplatonic Mysticism. After centuries, the return: Gemistus Plethon**

In the fifteenth century the Italians were divided into more than a dozen states, often at war with each other, each with its own history and customs, but the same root. Perhaps thanks to this common root the spirit of our ancient classical tradition re-emerged, giving rise to a cultural movement that forever changed the spirit of

the Western world, redeeming it from a millennium of darkness. The Renaissance changed forever the course of our history and that of Europe, which did not understand how from a peninsula without a unitary political plan could manifest the Italian genius with the innovative architectural forms, the elegant frescoes, the amazing inventions and a humanism which resulted in utopia. History did not fall from the sky, but was incarnated by famous people and perhaps fortuitous encounters, perhaps desired by Fate. Among the various figures of importance, there is one that often is missing in our scholastic texts, a philosopher who not only favored the birth of the Italian Neoplatonic movement, but who was the author of the first Renaissance utopia, anticipating several decades the most famous one by Tommaso Moro.

Georgius Gemistus known as Plethon (Γεώργιος Πλήθων Γεμιστός) was born in Constantinople before 1360 and visited Italy as a councilor of the Byzantine delegation on the occasion of the Council of Ferrara and Florence, held in the years 1438-1439, whose main objective was the rapprochement of the church Orthodox and Roman. In those years the philosophy officially accepted by the church of Rome followed the path traced a century and a half earlier by Thomas Aquinas, who had recovered Aristotle as a support for Christian theology. Thomas had not had an easy time for using a pagan philosopher in his theological studies, but in the end, his thought had been accepted by the church and Thomas himself had been canonized saint about a century before the coming of Gemistus. The philosophy of the time, called scholastic, was, therefore, a Christian reinterpretation of Aristotle, while Plato remained on the margins or out of the philosophical discussion.

Gemistus, already the author of various works, including a commentary on the Chaldean Oracles, during his stay in Florence, wrote a "Treatise on the differences between Aristotle and Plato", clearly in favor of Plato compared to Aristotle, and held various lessons of philosophy obtaining a great consensus from the secular world. After his death in Mistra in Greece in 1452, he published his work "The Laws", which took up the utopian visions of the "Republic" of Plato, with the presentation of a new polytheist theology and a project for the foundation of a new pagan religion, so to speak "reformed", thus taking back the ancient idea of emperor

Julian, who was aware of the structural and organizational weakness of pagan cults in front of the compact structure of the Galileans. "The Laws" of Gemistus were burned at the stake by one of his Christian opponents, but fortunately some copies were saved. The work of the years spent in Italy left an indelible mark and planted the seed of Renaissance Neoplatonism.



*Gemistus Plethon*

Sigismondo Malatesta, lord of Rimini and Fano, carried the remains of Gemistus, who had died in Greece, and had him buried in his Malatesta Temple in Rimini. Marsilio Ficino in 1490 stated that



the lessons of Platonic philosophy of Gemisto had given the impulse that would have opened, twenty years later, the Platonic Academy of Florence through the support of Cosimo de Medici.

From the earliest writings of a political nature, Gemistus affirmed that the prosperity of a state is the consequence of the virtue of its laws. In turn, the laws have a divine order character and therefore must be understood in a metaphysical framework, similar to what Plato explained in the Republic. As for Greek politics, it was Gemistus's opinion that Byzantium could only survive by rediscovering its own Hellenic roots, reconnecting with its own history and culture. Gemistus invited Byzantium to rediscover the Hellenic national roots, now watered down or forgotten in the crumbling remains of the empire. If on the one hand it can be said that Gemistus was the first Greek nationalist, on the other he had a strong respect for the Roman culture, considered similar to the Hellenic, and listed the king Numa among the great sages of antiquity, proposing a Hellenic-Roman front against barbarism.

Gemistus's political and ethical works are based on his overall vision of reality, that is, on his metaphysics, which is structured according to the Neoplatonic scheme, but without the magical-theurgical part developed by Porphyry, Giamblico, and Proclus. Because of its simplicity, it can be compared to Plotinus, with an unusual development of the theological part concerning the identification of the deities with the various metaphysical entities. On the other hand, in full harmony with the thought of Plato, Gemistus denounced the fallacy of the mythological and poetic language of tradition and preferred to introduce new schemes at the service of philosophy, even if this meant a departure from traditional mythology.

According to Gemistus, the reality is hierarchically divided into three levels. As expected, on the upper level is the First Principle, the Over-essential One. He is identified with Zeus, the Father-King, the completely transcendent Demiurge. He can be guessed with the Flower of Intellect, the thinnest part of our essence. Zeus is the Creator of the Platonic forms, which in turn are "super-celestial" deities. The forms are divided into two categories. To the first belong the Gods and the Goddesses, who are the creators of

eternal bodies, while the second belongs to the Titans, who generate temporary bodies and which are inferior to the first category.

The second order of reality, equivalent to the *Nous* of Plotinus, is therefore constituted by the super-celestial Gods, which are pure forms. They are the creators of the entities of the sensitive cosmos and as just mentioned they are divided into Gods and Titans. In all divinities one identifies both a masculine principle of form and activity, and a feminine one of matter and passivity. Above all the gods reign Poseidon, the second demiurge, and his wife Hera. Under the divine couple are Apollo, the principle of harmony and unity, and Artemis, division and difference in unity. Following is a triad linked to the concepts of identity, progression and return (*monè*, *proodos*, *epistrophè*) identified respectively with Hephaestus, Dionysius and Athena. Then there are the super-celestial Gods who generate the celestial Gods who dwell in the cosmos: Atlas ruling the stars in general, Tithonus, who is the god of the planets, Dione the goddess of the stars, Hermes who rules the terrestrial demons and Pluto that does not just takes care of the place where souls live after death, but it is also their patron, with a positive function. Below these, there is a group of Goddesses in charge of the creation of the elements: Leto creates ether, heat, and separation, Hecate generates the cold and the connection, Tethys the water and the dissolution, Hestia the dry and condensation. These deities are the legitimate progeny of Zeus, under which there is the group of his illegitimate sons: the Titans.

At the head of the Titans, with a function similar to that of Poseidon, we find Cronus, which however does not act on the raw material, represented by Hera, but on the unstable under the lordship of Aphrodite that ensures the succession of forms between generations. Pan is responsible for the irrational forms given to the animals, Demetra similarly for the shapes given to the plants. Core or Persephone is the patron of our mortal part. She is kidnapped by Pluto under the order of Zeus, offering a singular connection between Tartarus and Olympus, so that a connection is established between soul (Olympic and immortal) and body (titanic and mortal).

At the third level of reality is the perceptible cosmos, shaped by Poseidon in the image of the intelligible world of forms (*Nous*). The bodies of the perceptible cosmos are therefore called "sons of the sons of Zeus" re-echoing the theology of the Chaldean Oracles.

The gods of the third order are called worldly and create mortal objects and beings. These gods are rational and immortal beings, they have infallible souls and incorruptible bodies. Basically, they are the stars and the planets. The matter of bodies is supplied to the eternal entities of Hera, while to the temporary ones of Aphrodite.

The reformed polytheism of Gemistus is based on a sober recitation of hymns and formulas. According to the philosopher, the excess of religiosity is to be condemned as a wicked human attempt to bend the divine will to earthly demands. There are five short daily prayers, one in the morning, three in the afternoon and one in the evening. The style of the formulas is similar to the Proclus hymns or the Emperor Julian's Sun Prayer. The proposed calendar is inspired by the lunar ones used in classical Greece. The year begins with the first new moon after the winter solstice and the first of each month coincides with the new moon, identifying months of 30 or 29 days. They are thus identified twelve or thirteen months between two winter solstices.

The months, which do not bear Greek names but are numbered sequentially, are divided into four weeks plus an extra day for the months of 29 and two days for the months of 30, so the first day of the new month always coincides with the first day of the First week. The first week is dedicated to Zeus, the second to Poseidon, the third to the gods of the second order, the fourth to the Titans, the Sun and the rest of worldly Gods and to Cronus.

The feasts are repeated monthly: the first of the month is dedicated to Zeus, the 2nd to Hera, the 3rd to Poseidon, the 15th to the gods of the second order, the 29th to Pluto, the heroes and the dead, the 30th to introspection and error correction. An annual celebration is also reported on the third day before the end of the year, dedicated to Pluto and the dead.

In the fifteenth century, there was a group of people who discussed polytheism, utopias, national roots and laid the groundwork for a reintroduction of polytheism. We can imagine that in narrow circles forms of philosophical paganism were professed while defending themselves from the mortal arm of the church. This at least is attested not only for the aforementioned Platonic Academy of Florence but also for the Roman Academy of Pomponio Leto, famous among other things for the celebration of the foundation of

Rome (Dies Natalis) on 21 April. Despite the ruthless clerical repression, which punished with death every person suspected of polytheism, the flame of tradition continued to shine without ever extinguishing to this day.

Reading the texts of Gemistus today makes us reflect. Before the decadent Byzantium, before the fall of the city by the Turks, he asked the regents to return to national roots, rediscover their identity and reform the state by introducing just laws, looking for an ethic in harmony with the divine. This appeal is still valid for many countries today! The idea of a national polytheism at the base of a new Renaissance is certainly utopian, but the ideas, when they are pure, are not the result of a cold calculation on their success but are the point of attraction of eternal aspirations of men and women who dare to dream. To dream big.

With this article, we end our journey along the metaphysics of the classical world.

Certainly, the Roman Religio does not need metaphysics, but the points of discussion and understanding offered by philosophy have been impressive.

We hope that reading has been an opportunity for discovery and thought.

May the immortal Gods be propitious to you.

**Mario Basile, Movimento Tradizionale Romano (M.T.R.)**

## THE METAPHYSICS OF CHAOS

The modern European philosophy began with the concept of Logos and logic order of being. During two thousand and some hundreds years this concept was fully exhausted. All the potentialities and the principles laid in this form of logocentric way of thinking were now exhaustively explored, exposed and abandoned.

The problem of Chaos and the figure of Chaos were neglected, put aside from the very beginning of this philosophy. The only philosophy we know at present is the philosophy of Logos. But the Logos is something opposite to Chaos, its absolute alternative.

From the XIX century with most important and most brilliant European philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger and up to the contemporary postmodernists the European man affirm began to suspect that Logos was approaching to its end. Some of them dared to affirm that from now on we are living in the time of the end of logocentric philosophy, approaching something else.

The European philosophy was based on the logocentric principle corresponding to the principle of exclusion, the differentiating, Greek diairesis. All this corresponds strictly to the masculine attitude, reflects the authoritative, vertical, hierarchical order of being and knowledge.

This masculine approach to the reality imposes order and principle of exclusivity everywhere. That is perfectly manifested in Aristotle's logic where the principles of identity and exclusion are put in the central position in the normative manner of thinking. A is equal to A, not equal to not-A. The identity exclude non-identity (alterity) and vice versa. There we see the male who speaks, thinks, acts, fights, divides, orders.

Nowadays all this logocentric philosophy has come to an end and we should think about the other possibility of thinking not in the logocentric, phallogocentric, hierarchical and exclusivist way.

If not any more Logos satisfies us, fascinates us, mobilizes us, so we are inclined to try something else and to address the Chaos.

To begin with: there are two different concepts of Chaos. The modern physics and philosophy refers to complex systems, bifurcation or non-integrating equations and processes using the concept "chaos" to designate such phenomena. They understand by that not the absence of order but a kind of order that is difficult to perceive as such, so it rests to be the order but very complicated one, that seemsto be not order at all, but in the essence it is. Such «chaos» or «turbulence» is calculable in nature but with more sophisticated theoretical and mathematical means and procedures than the instruments the classical natural science is dealing with.

The term "chaos" is used here in the metaphoricalmanner. In modern science we are continuing to deal with an essentially logocentric manner of exploring the reality. So the "chaos" here is no more than a dissipative structure of Logos, the last result if its decay, fall, decomposition. The modern science is dealing not with something other than Logos but with a kind of post-Logos, the ex-Logos, the Logos in the state ultimate dissolution and regression. The process of the final destruction and dissipation of Logos is taken here for "chaos".

In the reality it has nothing to do with Chaosas such, with the Chaos in original Greek sense of term. It is rather a kind of utmost confusion. René Guénon has called the era we are living through now, a era of Confusion. The Confusion means the state of being that goes next to order and precedsit. Thus we should make a clear distinction between two different concepts. On one hand we have the modern concept of chaos that represents post-orderor a mixture of contradictory fragments of being withoutany unity and order, linked among them by highly sophisticated post-logical correspondences and conflicts. Gilles Deleuze has called this phenomena a non-co-possible system composed by the multitude of the monades(using the concept of monads and co-possibility introduced by Leibnitz) becoming by Deleuze "thenomades". Deleuze describes postmodernity as a sum of non-co-possible fragmentswhich can coexist. It wasn't possible in the Leibnitz's vision of reality based on the principle of co-possibility.But within the postmodernity we can see excluding elements coexisting. The non-ordered non-co-possible

monades («nomades») swarming around could seem to be the chaotic, and in this sense we usually use the word chaos in the everyday talk. But strictly speaking we should make difference.

So we need distinguish two kinds of chaos, the postmodernist “chaos” as an equivalent to the confusion, a kind of post-order and the Greek Chaos as pre-order, as something that exists before the ordered reality has come into being. Only the latter can be considered as Chaos in the proper sense of the word. This second (but actually the original) sense the concept of Chaos should be examined carefully in the metaphysical way.

The epic vision of the rise and fall of Logos in the course of the development of the Western philosophy and the Western history was exposed by Martin Heidegger who argued that in the context of the European or Western culture Logos is not only a main philosophical principle but also the basis of religious attitude forming the core of Christianity. We can also notice that the concept of kalam or intellect is in the centre of Islamic philosophy and theology. The same is valid for Judaism (at least in The Philo the Jew vision and above all in the Medieval Judaism and the Qabbalah. Thus in the high modernity where we are living we assist the fall of Logos accompanied by the corresponding the fall of classical Greco-Roman culture and the monotheistic religion as well. These processes of decadence are completely parallel to that Martin Heidegger considers the present condition of the Western culture in whole. He identifies the origin of this state of thing in of some hidden and hardly recognizable error committed at the early stages of the Greek thought. Something went wrong in the very beginning of the Western history and Martin Heidegger sees this wrong point precisely in the affirmation of the exclusivist position of exclusivist Logos in the thinking as such. The shift was made by Heraklites, Parmenides but above all by Plato from the thinking to the philosophy that was equal to the installing of two level world vision where the existing was perceived as the manifestation of the hidden. Later the hidden was recognized as the Logos, the idea, the paradigm, the example. From that point the referential theory of truth proceeds. The true is the fact of the correspondence of the given immediately to the presumed invisible essence (“the nature that likes to hide” according to the Heraklites). The presocratics were in the beginning of the philosophy. The

unfettered explosion of the modern technique is its logical result. Heidegger calls it "Gestell" and thinks it is the reason of the catastrophe and annihilations of the mankind that inevitably approaches. According to him the very concept of Logos was wrong so that he proposed to radically revise our attitude to the very essence of philosophy and the process of thinking and to find another way which he called "the Other Beginning".

So Logos appeared first with the birth of the Western philosophy. The earliest Greek philosophy arose already as something that excluded Chaos. Precisely at the same time Logos has begun to flourish revealing a kind of mighty will to power and the absolutisation of masculine attitude to the reality. The becoming of the logocentric culture ontologically annihilated the pole opposite to Logos itself – i.e. the feminine Chaos. So the Chaos as something that preceded the Logos abolished by it and its exclusivity was manifested and dismissed by the same move. The masculine Logos ousted the feminine Chaos, the exclusivity and exclusion subdued the inclusivity and the inclusion. So the classical world was born stretching its limits for 2 thousands and 5 hundreds years – up to the Modernity and the rationalistic scientific era. This world has come to its end. But nevertheless we are still living in its outskirts. At the same time in the postmodern dissipating world all the structures of order are degrading, dispersing and confused. It is the dawn of Logos, the end of order, the last chord of the masculine exclusivist domination. But still we are inside the logical structure but not outside it.

Stating this we have some basic solutions concerning the future. First one – the return to kingdom the Logos, the Conservative Revolution, the restoration of the male "full scale domination" in all realms of the life – the philosophy, the religion, the everyday life. It could be done spiritually and socially or technically. This way where the technique meets the spiritual order was fundamentally explored and studied by Ernst Junger, the Martin Heidegger's friend. The return to the classicism accompanied by the appeal to the technical progress. The effort to save falling Logos, the restoration of traditional society. The eternally new Order.

The second way is to accept the current tendencies and to follow the direction of the Confusion involving more and more in the dissipation of the structures, in the post-structuralism and trying to



get the pleasure of the comfortable glide into the nothing. That is the option chosen by the left or liberal representatives of the Post-Modernity. It is modern nihilism at its best – originally identified by F.Nietzsche and explored thoroughly by M.Heidegger. The concept of nothing being the potentially present in the principle of the identity proper to the Logos itself is here not the limit of the process of the fall of the logic order but rather constructed rationally realm of the illimitate expansion of the horizontal decay, inculcable multididues of the flowers of putrefaction.

However, we could choose the third way and try to transcend the borders of Logos and step out beyond the crisis of the Post-Modern world, literally Post-Modern, i.e. laying beyond the Modernity, where dissipation of Logos reaches its limit. So there the question of this very limit is crucial. Seeing from the standpoint of Logos in general, including the most decayed one, beyond the domain of order lays nothing. So cross the border of being is ontologically impossible. The nothing is not: so speaks after Parmenides all logocentric Western ontology. This impossibility asserts the infinity of the outskirt ob Logos and grant to the decay inside the realm of order eternal continuity. Beyond the border of being lays nothing and the movement to this limit is analytically infinite and unending (here is fully valid aporia of Zeno of Elea). So nobody can cross the frontier into the non-existent not-being that simply is not.

If we insist nevertheless in doing this we should appeal to the Chaos in its original Greek sense, as to something that precedes being and order, something preontological.

We stand in front of a really important crucial problem. Great number of people today isn't satisfied with what is going on around us, with absolute crisis of values, religions, philosophy, political and social order, with the Post-Modern conditions, with the confusion and perversion, with the age of utmost decay.

But considering the essential sense of the becoming of our civilization to the present state we cannot look to the precedent phases of the logocentric order and its implicate structures because it was precisely the Logos itself that has brought the thing to the state where they are now, bearing in itself the germs of present decay. Heidegger identified with the extreme credibility the roots of the

technique in the presocratic solution of the problem of being by the means of the Logos. In fact Logos can not save us from the conditions installed by itself. The Logos is of no use here anymore.

So only the preontological Chaos can give as a hint how to go beyond the trap of the Post-Modernity. It was put aside on the eve of the creation of the logical structure of being as a corner stone. Now it is its turn to come to the play. Otherwise we will be doomed to accept the postlogical dissipated Post-Modernity that pretends to be eternal in some way because it annihilates time. The Modernity has killed eternity and Post-Modernity is killing time. The architecture of the Post-Modernworld is completely fragmented, perverse and confused. It is a kind of the labyrinth without exit, folded and twisted as the Moebius trip. The Logos that was the guarantee of stictness of the order serves here to grant the curvature and crookedness, being used to preserve the impassability of the ontologically border with nothing from the eventual trespassers.

Sotheonly way to save us, to save humanity and culture from this snare is to make a step beyond the logocentric culture, addressing to the Chaos.

We could not restore the Logos and the order addressing to them because they bear in themselves the reason of their eternal destruction. In other words, to save exclusive Logos we should make an appeal to the alternative inclusive instance that is Chaos.

But how could we use the concept of Chaos and base on it our philosophy if philosophy has always been for us something logical by definition?

I order to resolve this difficulty we should approach the Chaos not from the position of Logos but from that of Chaos itself. It can be compared to the feminine vision, the feminine understanding of the figure other that is not excluded but, on the contrary, included in the sameness.

The Logos regards itself as what is and as what is equal to itself. It can accept the differences inside itself because it excludes the other that itself outside itself. So the will to power is working. The law of sovereignty. Beyond Logos, Logos asserts, lays nothing, not something. So the Logos excluding all other than itself excludes Chaos. The Chaos use different strategies – it includes in itself all that it is but at the same all what it is not. So the all inclusive Chaos

includes also what is not inclusive as it and more than that what excludes Chaos. So the Chaos doesn't perceive the Logos as the other as itself or as something non-existent. The Logos as the first principle of exclusion is included in Chaos, presents in it, enveloped by it and has a granted place inside of it. So the mother bearing the baby bears in herself what is a part of it and what is not a part of her at the same time. The man conceives the woman as external being and seeks to penetrate her. The woman considers the man as something internal and seeks to give him a birth.

The Chaos is eternal nascency of other, that is of Logos.

To sum up, the chaotic philosophy is possible because chaos itself includes Logos as some inner possibility. It can freely identify it, cherish it and recognise its exclusivity included in its everlasting life. So we come to the figure of the very special chaotic Logos, that is completely and absolutely fresh Logos being eternally revived by the waters of Chaos. This chaotic Logos is at the same time exclusive (and it is why is properly Logos) and inclusive (being chaotic). It deals with the sameness and otherness differently.

The Chaos can think. It thinks. We should ask him how it does it? We have asked the Logos. Now it is the turn of the Chaos. We should learn to think with the Chaos and within the Chaos.

I could suggest, as an example, the philosophy of Japanese thinker Kitaro Nishida, who has constructed "the logic of basho" or the "logic of places" instead of Aristotle's logic.

We should explore other cultures rather than the Western one to try to find the different examples of the inclusive philosophy, the inclusive religions and so on. The chaotic Logos is not only the abstract construction. If we seek well we find the real forms of such intellectual tradition. In archaic societies as well as in the Eastern theology and mystical currents.

To make appeal to the Chaos is the only way to save Logos. Logos needs a saviour for itself, it couldn't save itself, it needs something opposite to itself to be restored in the critical situation of Post-Modernity. We could not transcend the Post-Modernity. The latter can't be overcome without appeal to something that has been prior to the reason of its decay. So we should resort to other philosophies than the Western one.

In conclusion, I would like to say that it's not correct to conceive the Chaos as something belonging to the past. The Chaos is eternal, but eternally coexisting with time. So the chaos is always absolutely new, fresh and spontaneous. It could be regarded as a source of any kind of invention and freshness because its eternity has in itself always something more than was, is or will be in time. The Logos itself cannot exist without Chaos like fish cannot live without water. When we put a fish out of water, it dies. When the fish begins to insist excessively that it is something other than water around it (even it is true), it come to the shore and dies there. It is a kind of a mad fish. When we put it back in the water it jumps again. So let it die this one if it wants. There are other fishes deep in water. Let us follow them.

The astronomical era that is coming to the end is the era of the Fish constellation. The Fish on the shore. The dying one. So we need water now very badly.

Only the completely new attitude to the thought, new ontology and new gnoseology can save Logos left water, on the shore, in the desert that grows and grows (as Nietzsche foresaw).

Only the Chaos and the alternative philosophy based on inclusivity could save the modern humanity and the world from the consequences of the degradation and decay of the exclusivist principle called Logos. The Logos has expired and we all can be buried under its ruins unless we make the appeal to Chaos and its metaphysical principles and use them as basis for something new. This is maybe “the Other Beginning” Heidegger spoke about.

**Alexander Dugin**

SLAVIC  
PAGANISM





## NUANCES OF THE RUSSIAN TERM “ЯЗЫЧЕСТВО”

There are many special words to name and identify pagan traditions in European languages: paganism, heathenism, folkism, native faith, indigenous beliefs/faith, gentile and etc. All of them are synonyms for one religious phenomenon. But every word also shows and highlights the different aspects or edges of the one object, one thing. This nuance lies in the words etymologies and semantics. The term “pagan” refers us to Latin “pagus” meaning “the village”, antonym for “urbus”, the city (German “burg”). So, therefore pagans are who lived in the villages and saved the old traditions now known as folklore. Or the word “heathen” rooted in German “heide” means “steppe” or “weald”, with this word connected Old-English “hæþen” and Old Norse “heiðr” and from them we have the modern “heathen” and “heiðni” in English and Icelandic. But these words no more related to top villages and Medieval opposition between pagus and urbus.

So, here in Russian and in other Slavic countries and folks, we have one special old word to express the “paganism” phenomenon. This word is “язычество” [yazychestvo]. This word came to Old-Slavonic language as loan translation of Greek word “ethnos” means people or folk. As a result this form was created “языцы”. The word “языцы” is a plural form from “язык” = ethnos, folk, but not in modern meaning of the term “nation” which refers us to French Revolution of 1789 year and absolutely new & modern paradigm of thinking. In Russian language word “язык” bound with its form “язык” [iyazyk] means “the language” or “native tongue”. So we have a semantic shades which are uncuttable bounded in one term: язык=язык=народ – язык=language=folk.

Moreover, from the origin of this word in Old-Slavonic till now it always means “pagans”, those who don’t believe in Christianity and keep the old traditions. Its another major edge of semantics of this word. Christians use this term for humiliation pagans, but they were blind and didn’t see all shades and depths of this word.

Finally, all lines converge at one point, Russian term “язычество” contains and express at the same time the several major aspects of paganism phenomenon as it is:

- a) the folk or deep ethnics roots of any heathen tradition;
- b) the native language or something like linguistic purism or imagination the language of the folk as the sacred language of prayers and Gods;
- c) the tradition as it its or religion of any folks expressed and scripted on their own languages.

This three points (really there are more than three of course, but we focused on this points now) creates the basic structure of paganism and Russians and another Slavic folks have a language miracle – they all have a strong word to name themselves.





Sadly that we haven't got the similar rich word in European languages, the word which will contain all this semantics. And it makes troubles with translation of course. In our humble opinion, the good words to transfer the meaning of "язычество" are "folkism" or "folkish"/"volkish" words where the connection with a folk is highlighted (but bound with a language is lost, yes).

And as final result we can conclude that following to the etymology of the words shows us that we cannot be the Universalists haters at all. Our tradition deeply rooted in our native folk, our native language and our Gods and rites. It is not our fantasies, it is a truth grounded and expressed by our essence called язычество.

**Askr Svarte**

## STATEMENTS OF SLAVIC-RUSSIAN RODNOVERY

We are Rodnovery, russian pagans:

1) Our Gods manifestate themselves in all nature. All things that we can sense (physical objects, emotions and ideas) are the forms of the Gods.

2) Our Gods are our first ancestors. We praise our Fathers because we know that our blood is the thread that relates us with the Gods.

3) First of all, we honour three Gods united in Triglav, like the three principles of world existance.

4) We praise Svarog the Heavens Smith. He has created the world, he is the Father of all Gods and people, he is the teacher of crafts and any creative activity.

5) We praise Perun the Heavens Warrior, the Prince of Gods and the God of princes. He protects the world created by Svarog, he has maked the border between our world and other world. He is the bearer of might and courage.

6) We praise Veles the Horned One, God of cattle, wealth, music and wisdom. He is the guide from life to death and from death to life.

7) Paganism is the unique language of our mentality. Our Gods are the reason of the existance and the rituals are tools to maintain the sacredness of the world.

8) Russian identity was driven by Gods all the time. The culture itself is the form of comprehension of pagan heritage.

9) Even in the time of christianity remnants of paganism has big influence on russian people. Every child knows the folk holidays and basics of mythology. So the main task to preserve russian identity is to purify culture from external layers and give life space for tradition.

The first tool of identity is the original philosophical and religion thought. We have turned to russian thinkers and found the unique world perception. That's why paganism is the best shield of identity. Pagan choose carefully and select most inherent thoughts and ideas.

The second tool is the material culture. We keep our traditional dress, ancient songs and legends, ornament and lifestyle. Children living in the traditional environment have more unique ways to tradition and their life in surrounding of ethnicism fosters identity.

Russian paganism related with chain of holidays which keep the sacredness of life. First of all there are four holidays in solstices and equinoxes.

In the day of Winter Solstice, called Kolyada, we praise the birth of the Sun and the new year. Late at night pagan slavs go to forest and perform a ritual there, further finds the deadwood that represents the old year, they feed, water and decorate it and than burn it with good wishes. After that they ignite the big wooden wheel (kolovrat or kolo) symbolizing the Sun or the year with spokes-holidays.

Kolovrat (Коловрат) from Slavonic word “коло” – a wheel, circle, Sun and verb “вращать” – to rotate around. Kolovrat is a modern swastika-like solar symbol. Ancient slavs haven't got the symbol with this graphical view, but they have had a similar ones. The modern Kolovrat based on them too, but this look became the most popular and linked with Dobroslav (A. Dobrovolsky) activity in early 1990-s in Russia. Rodnovers say that this modern symbol reaches the deep archetypes of Slavic aesthetics and that's why it is so wide known and often used.



In the day of Spring Equinox, called Maslenitsa, the Sun take strength and defeats the Winter. This is the day of great joy and

happiness and the time of big feasts. At the day of Maslenitsa slavs perform a ceremonial fight of “forces of winter” and “forces of spring” – storm the snow fortress. From there they take the doll of Morena. Then as a sign of winter ending rodnovery burn this doll.



The symbol of Morena is Mar`in kryzh (Мар`ин крѣж) from Slavic Goddess of Death and Night Mara (Мара/Морена) and word “крѣж” – a cross, the Cross of Mara. Old authentic symbol of the Goddess Mara or Morena. In modern Rodnovery Veles and Mara are often appears as husband and wife, a couple of Gods of Death and Wisdom.



Symbol of God Veles. Veles (Велес) is a Slavic God of Beasts (Livestock) and Wisdom. This is another modern symbol which hit the archetype too. It is based on bullhead with horns graphic.

One week before Maslenitsa slavs make bird-shaped cookies, symbolizing the souls of ancestors. In Slavic-Russian Rodnoverie the ancestors

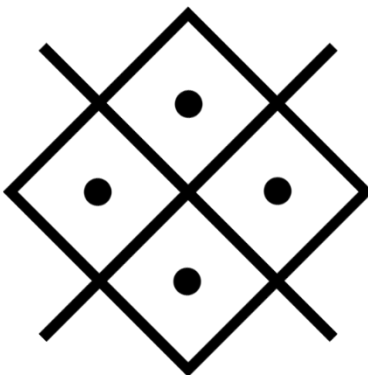
live in the Irii, world of good souls, and come to the Earth in spring to live among their children.

In the day of Summer Solstice russian pagans perform biggest and the most famous holiday called Kupala. This day is the center and the highest point of the year. After this day the night becomes longer, so this is the day when in the most light and warm time pagans see the future winter and death of the year. That's why Kupala is the magic night of unity of opposite elements, when the day meets the night, fire meets water and man meets woman. In this night

rodnovery make the huge fire called Kupalets with Kolo made of green branches, dance and sing around it, and then roll the burning Kolo to the river.

The day of Autumn Equinox is the holiday of harvest and abundance. This day slavs sum up the results of the year, appreciate Earth and Gods, and make straw birds that symbolizes the souls of ancestors that went to the Irii this day.

Makosh (Макошь) is a Slavic Goddess of Earth and Fertility, the Mother-Earth. Her symbol means the prepared field with seeds from man or Father God Svarog or Daszhd`bog (Giving God). She is deeply linked with agrarian culture.



**Lihoslav (Лихослав)**

## rites of Slavic Paganism

*The unity and integrity of a nation and a tribe is most dependent on the uniformity of the norms of behavior, the perception of the general picture of the world and its individual elements, the presence of shared memories. For each ethnic culture there are different ideas about the degree of importance of each component, but if any of the above is missing, society and ethnicity may be doomed to collapse.*

*Our Ancestors were characterized by two types of behavior: everyday (in the intervals between significant events) and ceremonial (dedicated to a particular event).*

Every rite is a transformation through a series of actions of a crisis situation, which is a consequence of the imbalance between “ours” and “alien”. As a result, the lost balance in the community’s existence is restored, and this restoration is at the same time a transformation that is most often understood as death-rebirth: in the ritual, a certain new reality is artificially created instead of the old one that has outlived itself for age or other temporary reasons. A rite is capable of combining and reducing long-term life processes into one point, putting a certain line under age-related or calendar events.

Common to many rituals is the division of space into two areas: “ours” and “alien”. “Ours” belongs to man, it is mastered by him. “Alien” - non-human, belonging to Gods, natures and spirits, death. The balance between these spheres is maintained by exchange: sacrifices, offerings. The situation of an imbalance between them is resolved with the help (and in the course) of the rite in which direct contact is established between the representatives of “ours” and “alien”.

In everyday life, the various categories of “alien” are arranged in such a way that the characters of higher levels (Gods) are further than the characters of lower levels, and the person is in contact with

various creatures (brownies (domovoy), wood goblins (leshiy), etc.). With the highest representatives of the other world, communication is usually carried out with the help of the rite, which from this point of view is a kind of regulated way of communication between people and Gods. The higher these or those characters in the “alien” system, the farther they are from the person and the more difficult the ceremonies associated with them. Communication with the lower categories of “alien” in everyday life also has its ritual.

Two main types of space used in the rite can be distinguished: in one of them the actions are directed mainly to the vertical plane, in the other - to the horizontal one.

Vertical plan has calendar rites. Particular importance is attached here to the idea of the center, the ability to focus on a single point in time and space, through which the forces of the universe pass. At the same time, “ours” is concentrated around this point on the earth, and the “alien” - in the sky and / or underground. Interactions between the world of people and the world of Gods and Ancestors are realized vertically. Such relationships in the rite are intensified by fame, glorification, and spell. Glorification is a specially composed text that differs from ordinary spontaneous speech in the presence of rhyme and rhythm. The unusual text is achieved with the help of a system of substitutions, allegories, and other construction. Sounds that fill the rite of the essence of the “message”. It is important to hear and correctly understand them.

Rites, the action of which unfolds mostly horizontally (mainly rituals of the life cycle), have a certain plot, as their main characters cross the boundaries of worlds. And the need to perform such a ceremony is caused by the violation of the spheres of “ours” and “alien”. In one case, “strangers” are among “ours”, in the other – “ours” among “strangers”. The purpose of the ceremony is to restore disturbed order and strengthen the border between the adjoining worlds.

For enclosing “ours” territories from the penetration of “alien” commit various ceremonial actions. For example, bypasses a house, yard, village, or temple, plowing soil and snow (in the case of ritual “plowing” around villages in order to prevent the introduction of diseases and the subsequent death of cattle in settlements). To protect the home, they resort to putting signs on doors, windows, and gates.

Thus, the boundaries between “ours” and “alien”, between light and darkness, are strengthened.



In order to connect “ours” and “alien”, top and bottom (heaven and earth, the world of Gods and Ancestors and the world of human physical existence) in calendar ritualism such actions are carried out as: the construction of mountains of rolling on Maslenitsa (vernal equinox); burning fires and installing a swing on Kupala (summer solstice); climbing on the roof of the house, bouncing, tossing various items on Zaklichki (spring meeting), etc.

Ritual Fire - is a channel of communication between one's own and another world, people and Ancestors, between whom incessant intensive exchange takes place; this is the intersection of two worlds. For the Ritual Bonfire is important the material from which it is collected. If a bonfire is built from old, outdated things (Kupalo, Kolyada (winter solstice)), then the fire for the bonfire should be new, “alive”. “Alive” fire is mined in the ancient way - by rubbing a tree against a tree. Thus, the ceremonial bonfire was a combination of the old and the new, in which the victory is gained by the new. Getting new fire is a rite of transformation of the old (weak, worn out, lost its power) being in the new, full of strength and opportunities for further prosperous existence.



The unity of a person with the surrounding space and the restoration of his (human) integrity comes through rituals and purification of the elements of earth, water, fire and air and the expulsion of the “alien” that has penetrated into the body. Fumigation of grass and plants with smoke (mainly, sagebrush and juniper) allows you to remove negative layers, to make space for pure forces. On the one hand, smoke is perceived as a continuation of fire, on the other hand, it has a greater penetrating power, envelops and heals, this is the element of air.

In order to facilitate the transition from one level of reality to another, a ritual musical instrument, such as tambourines (bubens) and drums, can be used to establish a connection between the “ours” and the “alien” in rites. The thing is that the low sound amplitude of the monotonous battle helps calm the mind, tune in to the frequency vibrations of the invisible Worlds, removing the barrier between the perception of the material world and the reality of the spirit. As a result, a kind of bridge appears between the worlds, the process of attunement and unity with another world is underway.

During the ceremony, as I have already mentioned, communication takes place between the real world and the other world. One of the various forms of such communication are fortune-telling. In divination forms the main question: what will happen next? Any fortune-telling is a ceremonial way of determining the share of a person in the next stage of his life. In order to obtain the necessary information, the diviner makes an exchange, sending certain objects, products, and food to the sphere of “alien”.

In the monthly cycle, the most suitable time for divination is before the new moon, on the weekly cycle - Friday (in some areas - Thursday), on the daily one - evening, closer to midnight. The significance and accuracy of divination, dedicated to a particular date, may vary. When divination, confined to the summer and winter solstice, it is assumed to communicate with representatives of the Another World (Nav’), so they are recognized as the most reliable.

The person who performs divination moves from “his/ours” habitat to “alien”. “Alien” space is usually a non-residential building on the outskirts (bath, barn); the boundaries of the house, yard, village (doors, gates, hedges); roads, intersections; cemetery, water, well.

A guessing person moves away from “his own” not only in space, but also by signs, that is, he loses those that indicate his belonging to the world of the living: full or partial strip (in many cases, the obligatory removal of the belt); hair blooming, silence, a ban on the reproduction of any sounds. An interesting option is presented in the divinations “prophetic dreams” when they go to bed without undressing, having previously “formulated” their request. In this case, “moving” is done in a dream, and going to someone else is symbolized just by deliberate “dressing” - after all, the deceased is usually left dressed at night in the house.

Varieties of special behavior within one event are games (“Rucheek”, “Yashcher”, “Konyashki”). This is an integral part of most holiday rites. The game is just as important and necessary as the rite itself. There are no strict restrictions in games, in contrast to the main rite, there are no instructions on playing behavior, self-expression is allowed and encouraged.

Lost connections, which are thought mostly as vertical, are also restored with the help of victims or offerings. The world is becoming habitual: “ours” is separated from the “alien”, between them a strong bond has been established, the sacrifice is the pledge and embodiment of which. The first products prepared or received from animals have a clear purpose - they, according to custom, are used as sacrifice, for example, the first baked pancake or the first milk product is always given to the Other World. Just as the first independent products of the child needed to be burned (that is, sacrificed). The first is the share of Gods and other representatives of the other world, it does not belong to man.

The sacrificial animal is a widespread symbol of the world. Its separation, dismemberment, is usually perceived as the final stage of the disintegration of the Cosmos, and gathering, addition, restoration of wholeness - as the creation of a new/young World. Therefore, the sacrificial animal must be prepared whole. It should not be cut, only broken (the permissible method of distributing the shares among the participants in the ceremony). And no less important: the bones are not thrown away, but are collected and buried.

Bloodless sacrifices are symbols that are associated with ideas of wealth, fertility, and well-being. For example, wool - grain - money (or something made by hand).

The symbol that is present in almost all rites, regardless of their purpose - grain. They are guessing at the grain, they are showered with the young, the new house, the Ancestors “feed”, the women in labor is “cleaned”. The high symbolism is explained by the fact that the grain is an ideal reflection of any cyclic process that can be described as life – death – rebirth. The life of a grain is likened to a person’s life, and vice versa.

In ceremonial actions, the offerings are sent up or down (less often): hanging from a tree, going to the ritual fire, tossing, spilling on the ground. Gods and spirits take their part of the sacrifice on another level. For example, the Brownie eats not the bread brought to him as a gift, he eats only what is his food in the bread, and the mouse or bird eats the bread.

And so in everything and everywhere.

Each holiday ceremony ends with a feast, which is an integral part of it, and not the usual meal. This is the unity of the whole community, in which people, and Ancestors, and Gods, and the elements - all participants of our world. Depending on the event, to which the rite is dedicated, dishes, activities and behavior during the feast differ.

The main feature of the treats used in the rite is that they belong not so much to people as to Gods and Ancestors.



It is important that the actions of cooking, distribution and eating food be a full cycle: the transformation of the original products into ready-made dishes, filling them with ritual meaning and their role in the rite and destruction. Both parties take part in the preparation and distribution of food. The participation of representatives of another world is expressed not only in the fact that they receive their share (steam or demand to be brought to the fire), but also that they “communicate” about their attitude to people, giving certain form to prepared food, as well as contributing to or interfering with cooking. Food steam is the favorite food of the Ancestors.

One of the ways to consolidate the new status of the world and man is the fractional distribution of the object, symbolizing the world, between the participants in the ceremony. Bread-loaf - a kind of image of the world, a joint share, the embodiment of the idea of wealth, abundance. It must be made as large as possible, with images of symbols of the sun, stars, month, animals, birds. Our Ancestors' loaf was a joint creation of the whole community. The process of its manufacture was realized as the collection of separate initial elements (products for making loaf: flour, oil, eggs, water) to create a single whole, symbolizing the total share of participants in the ceremony. Thus, each participant in the rite of their personal share and thought is poured into the general message.

In the ritual distribution of a loaf (one of the symbols of the image of the world), each participant in visible and invisible worlds gets his part, his share of the life force. Hence the exceptional importance of the ritual feast, which is a form of offering, exchanging, strengthening the former, as well as the approval of new connections and relationships.

In the setting of the rite, the spatial appearance of the world, the form of organization of the community and the nature of communication change. There is a switch from one type of reality to another, the main feature of which are signs. From the beginning to the end of the ceremony, its participants are in a certain space, and everything that comes from outside (from the sphere of “alien”) is considered as a message with its sender (various signs and other messages of another world). The rite gives a feeling of unity, cohesion, openness for any interactions, the contact of each

participant with various characters is possible. In the rite, with the help of all five senses, a comprehensive check is made of the existing connections and relationships. As a result, a person is updated perception of the world, fixing those changes, which are focused on the ceremony.

One of the main meanings of this feeling is, apparently, in the transition from physiological perception to understanding, from natural to cultural. There is a spiritual mastery of the world. The ceremony reflects, as it were, that side of things, actions, phenomena that are not visible in everyday life, but in fact often determine its essence and purpose. The ability to be one in everyday life, and completely different in the rite, provides a switch from the level of daily worries and routine to another level, values. Here spiritual aspirations find their realization, a person reveals his inner essence, his thought, ability to create. In everyday life, a person is primarily concerned with the satisfaction of his vital interests, acting according to the custom - the rules of behavior in his society.

Customs regulated daily life, a retreat from them could affect the offender, but did not affect the well-being of the whole community or family. The rite also has a connecting function, which is that the community periodically updates and asserts itself, its unity. The rite is necessary for the realization of solidarity and interconnectedness of the community members. It is in the rite that common feelings and moods take possession — something that may be absent in everyday life. Moreover, in the ritual, people communicate not only with each other, but the connection between Ancestors and descendants, past and present, is restored.

The rite has a reproducing function, which is aimed at maintaining the custom, norms, values of the community. With the help of the rite, the community periodically renews their experiences, their faith and, ultimately, their social significance. Actually, the rites are performed in order to restore the past, to make it real.

Daily life (between calendar rites) can be presented as a gradual transition of the world from one state to another. The ties and relations between different spheres of being, between “ours” and “alien”, are weakened. Exhausts stock of energy, vitality. The processes occurring in society and in nature, are inconsistent with

each other. Then they begin to talk about the “aging” of the world and the need for its “renewal” in the rite.

In the natural plane, the world is constantly changing, but in structural terms it remains the same (as it was recorded by the last ceremony). The task of each of the following rituals is to eliminate this discrepancy, how to “legitimize” the changes that have occurred and thereby approve a new state of the world. The ceremony has a certain self-dependence and independence from the processes occurring in the world of our physical reality. There is a division of time with the help of rites. In order for one period to be replaced by another, another ritual is needed. In other words, the world does not change by itself, gradually or spontaneously, as it appears to the man in the street.

The calendar rite in the traditional culture of our Ancestors did not necessarily follow nature. The spring meeting could occur when the winter was still real. Conversely, after the ceremony, whatever the winter weather, it was considered spring. These changes are not dictated by natural processes, but are given by rites. They were the key time points in the time matrix. Time focused and intensified in the rites.

Natural change, understood as the “aging” of the world, is a destructive principle. The world is losing its usual look, shape, spatial organization. This is expressed in the fact that the borders disappear, and first of all the border between “ours” and “alien”. All space is endowed with features that are inherent in the border. Figuratively speaking, the world takes on the appearance of an intersection. The consequence of such a world perception was widespread ideas about the activation of the characters of another world precisely at this border time (orgy of evil spirits in Kolyada and Kupala). There is a dialogue with the characters of another world, everything is in close proximity, the behavior is regulated.

It is possible to assert with all certainty that it is not necessary to chronologically follow the rite after the event. An event (for example, death or birth) may occur, but a person is considered dead and born only after performing corresponding rites with him. In a normal life, when everything goes “as expected”, the rite is primary regardless of what happens “at the level” of nature. What is interesting, it is reflected in modern everyday life. For example,

according to their physiological data, a person can be counted as an adult, but until receiving a passport (or until a certain age is reached) is not considered as such. According to the law of our state, the person whose death is documented (regardless of whether he is actually alive or dead) is considered dead.

The rite is able to replace the event (to be an event), but it is also able to “stretch” the event, give them the character of the process (this applies primarily to birth and death), and on the other hand, the ability to “compress” the long-term processes of the calendar and life cycles give them the status of events.

The object (Badnyak (ritual log), Maslenitsa scarecrow, Yarilya doll), over which the ritual actions of destruction are to be accomplished (burning, tearing, drowning, giving to the earth, etc.), is understood as an image of an “aged” world or a host of evil spirits. Its destruction is a natural step for transition to a new state. The calendar character, as a rule, is created from old things, and he symbolizes, if not old age, then over mature, which manifests itself, for example, in the apparent redundancy of attributes in the big breasts of Maslenitsa or hypertrophy of the genitals of the Yaryla doll. The forms of destruction of the ceremonial object usually correspond to the main forms of burial: burning, surrendering to earth, water.

During the life of a person several times there is a need to eliminate inconsistencies between his biological state and social status. The discrepancy begins immediately after the next “leveling”: in physiological terms, a person is constantly changing, while his social status remains the same. For a period between these moments of human existence, there is a balance, but gradually the discrepancy increases, the contradiction escalates, the destructive processes reach a critical level, and the need for another biological and social alignment arises. So, the birth itself is only an episode in the structure of the birthing ritual. The ritual of the birth of a child begins much earlier than the birth, and ends a very long time after birth. Ritual preparation for death (for example, making clothes and other attributes) sometimes begins long before old age, and in some traditions from childhood (the custom is to collect nails and hair that is put in the coffin to their owner throughout their lives). Deaths are usually preceded by “omen”: parting with loved ones, dressing up

and other ritual acts. A person is finally dead after many years (for example, according to the beliefs of Belarusians, nine years after biological death).

The rite can be attributed to the conditional type of behavior, but among the Ancestors there was no choice whether to perform the rite or not. One of the main functions of the rite is that with its help absolute, unconditional biological processes (such as, for example, death and birth) are transformed into conditional categories. By the way, it is for this reason that it is possible to “stretch” death and birth in time, and on the other hand, “reduce” such lengthy processes as maturation into one “point”.

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In the traditional Slavic worldview, everything in nature is filled with meaning and soul. The external world is filled with beings of a Different, inhuman nature and implies “mutual understanding”, provided that they interact correctly. Constant dialogue of the person with the natural environment is a characteristic feature of our Native faith. In this respect, differences in the principles of mastering the external world are indicative: if modern society with its aggressive production activities is focused mainly on “conquering” the external world, then traditional Slavic culture is characterized by cooperation with it, learning its “answers”. In this interaction, there is a sense of inseparable connection and the desire to act not in spite of, but in harmony with nature, this is the key to success in any sphere of human activity. People, Gods and the world are merged into a single whole and the orderliness of our world depends on their interaction.

**Maxim Ionov (Beloyar)**



## BABA YAGA THE BONY-LEGGED, THE ANCIENT DARK FOREST MOTHER OF SLAVIC MYTH

Baba Yaga the Bony-legged is one of the most well-known characters in Russian folklore, and perhaps every child from any of the multiple Slavic peoples knows who she is, where she lives and how one is supposed to behave around her – whether she is being called Yaga, Yezha, Yazia or Jedza. Old as the world itself, ugly, half-blind, scary, living deep in the dark forest, capable of gobbling up the hero and rolling around in his bones, she is, at the same time, an ally, indispensable for the development of the fairytale plot. In the tales and cartoons of the modern Slavic countries her image has shifted towards that of a not-so-frightening, but still malignant elderly forest witch who hinders the good heroes, but in the end turns out to be kind-hearted. In western cultures she is often either a powerful wizard, a necromancer, definitely on the side of evil, or conversely, a wise and good-natured forest-dwelling advisor.

However, in folk tales her image is not clear-cut, and one cannot decisively name her good or evil: Yaga is multi-faceted and capable of turning her various sides to the hero: she can be a helper, an initiator, a gift-giver, a pursuer, a warrior adversary... Vladimir Propp's 'Historical Roots of the Fairy Tale' says about her: "Yaga is a character that is hard to analyze. Her image is composed of a number of details. Those details, pulled together from different tales, never conform to one another, never fit together, never blend into a singular image..." And that is entirely true: while possessing of a number of common, recognizable traits, repeated from one tale to the next, Yaga behaves differently in different scenarios, picking a course of action only she knows. Such a diverse functionality, however, is never out of place when it concerns the deities of any tradition – but is confusing for those researchers who believe Yaga to

be merely a character of lower mythology. While behind other Russian folk characters researchers eagerly picture the images of ancient gods (for example, Chernobog behind Koschei the Deathless, Veles behind the Sea King, Saint Nickolas or Saint Blaise, Mokosh behind Saint Paraskeva (Saint Friday) etc.), Yaga is always left out of such parallels – she is hardly remembered at all other than in fairytales or incantations. Thanks to Vladimir Propp, the image of Baba Yaga nowadays is prone to invoke the traits of an ancient, pre-Slavic goddess of death, which, I believe, is not entirely accurate. Yaga has numerous qualities that point to her functions other than (and often contradictory to) those of a mistress of the Underworld, and Propp himself stresses several times that she stands *at* the gates of death, not *behind* them – which is, indeed, an important distinction: the image of a gatekeeper, a guardian of such gates is present in many mythological systems (the Scandinavian Modgud/Móðguðr, the Hellenic Cerberus/Κέρβερος, the Mesopotamian Neti, gatekeeper to Ereshkigal’s kingdom, etc.), but death’s gatekeeper and death’s master are never the same character, and Yaga, despite all of her links to this area, cannot be seen as death personified. But to reduce Yaga to merely the image of a guardian of the threshold is by no means possible, either – she has other functions as well.

As mentioned above, the range of Yaga’s functions in folk beliefs is exceptionally broad: she is the trial master testing heroes’ worth against their demands and ambitions, she is the owner of magical creatures and items, she is the wise advisor, the powerful sorceress, she is the one who can bestow a blessing, kill or punish – and designating her as an unremarkable, ‘minor’ mythological character is impossible, even though that is the place she appears to occupy in folklore. So who is Yaga after all?

Her very name, or part of it to be precise, can give us the first clue, a key to understanding. The first part of her name, ‘baba’, is not a proper name, but a term referring to a woman. In Yaga’s case it is often said that ‘baba’ is an indication of age, pointing to how old she is (the modern Russian word ‘babushka’<sup>10</sup> originates from the same root, and the word ‘baba’ itself is at times used in the same meaning,

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<sup>10</sup> Granny, grandmother

while in fairytales Yaga is often described as an old hag), but originally ‘baba’ did not necessarily mean an old woman, but was used more often to describe a woman of any age who had children and fulfilled her reproductive ability. While rarely seen in adapted fairytales, their ‘unrefined’ versions do sometimes mention it – they can, for instance, say ‘in the cabin lies Baba Yaga, legs stretched corner to corner, tits hanging across the curtain rod, small kids sucking on them’. In other tales Yaga is a mother to numerous daughters, each called Yagishna after their mother and, like her, possessing magical abilities; or she can be described as the mother of mythological serpents.

One of the key features of the Crone archetype in myth is her infertility resulting from her old age, but we see Yaga as far from being infertile, and capable of giving birth and nursing children. Besides, in descriptions of Yaga her sexual qualities are often accented, which is a very characteristic of mythological characters linked to fertility, but completely non-typical for those that embodying old age. Yaga has enormous breasts – so big she slings them back across her shoulders, or props them up with something – hanging them from the curtain rod or winding them around a hook. Sometimes there’s not even enough room for them in Yaga’s cabin, and they get left outside the door. Some tales mention Yaga’s other sexual traits (“firm ass, wet cunt”), or in cases when Yaga dies (or is killed) it is said that the spots where her sexual organs fall on the ground the soil becomes a swamp – and the swamp is not only the embodiment of danger, but also a place of an exceptional fertility. Can such an effect be caused by the genitals of a Crone, let alone a character that personifies death? All these exaggerated traits related to physical gender, birth and nursing are a clear indication of her links to the forces of life and reproduction. In this regard Yaga’s image turns out to be connected to the concept of an ancient, possibly deific, ancestral mother, who has given life to numerous beings.

There are also tales where Yaga is not only named a ‘baba’, but also an aunt or a mother-in-law (in the case of male tales), that is, an elder female relative – and in those tales it is nearly always assumed that the kinship comes down the female line, – and although it is not often a close kinship, it is still pointed out, so the human

heroes of the tales end up being linked to her through blood or family.

The same traits are seen in female tales mentioning Yaga – when a girl or a young woman goes to Yaga’s house for whatever reason, and sees that her home is rich and bountiful, and has plenty of everything. This is present, for example, in the tale of Vasilisa the Brave and Baba Yaga, where Vasilisa’s servitude in Yaga’s house has her doing typical female work: laundry, cleaning, weaving and spinning, cooking. When Vasilisa starts cooking, she sees that all the panniers, coffers and chests in the house are full and there’s no lack of anything. At the same time, Vasilisa eats those meals herself and then comes back to the human world, so it is obviously not otherworldly food that keeps mortals, after tasting it, from coming back to the human world.

The second part of her name, Yaga, can be considered a proper, identifying name. Max Vasmer traces her name back to the proto-Slavic *\*(j)ęga*, which is the origin of a number of words in Slavic languages: the Bulgarian *езá* – ‘torment, torture’, the Serbo-Croatian *jéza* – ‘terror’, *jězuv* – ‘dangerous’, the Slovenian *jéza* – ‘anger’ and *jezíti* – ‘to make angry’, the old Czech *jěžě* – ‘lamia, blood-drinking witch’, the Czech *jezinka* – ‘forest witch, evil woman’, the Polish *jędza* – ‘witch, baba-yaga, evil woman’ and *jędzić się* – ‘to be angry’. Collation is also possible with the Lithuanian *ėngti* – ‘to strangle, to torment’. Alexander Afanasyev back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century suggested tracing her name to the proto-Slavic root *\*ož*, which he believed to be close to the Sanscrit *ahi* (‘serpent, snake’), the pre-Slavic *\*ęga*, the Lithuanian *angis* and through to the Slavic *\*ožь* (‘grass snake’) – but even though Yaga’s connection to snakes is present in folklore, from a strictly linguistic standpoint Afanasyev’s theory is somewhat questionable (see for example Anatoly Zhuravlyov’s ‘Language and Myth’). Similarly questionable is to trace Yaga’s name to *ягáть*, meaning ‘to scream’ – and Vasmer’s etymology appears to make the most sense. Thus, Baba Yaga is, apparently, a wrathful, furious, dangerous forest woman, otherworldly, possessing magical ability and inspiring terror – such is the approximate meaning of this character’s name. Fairytales fully confirm this: even in her benevolent forms Yaga remains frightening.

Yaga's connection to the Otherworld and/or the realm of the dead is undisputable, in spite of her many other functions. She lives in the forest, which is the border between the two worlds, one of her legs is normal and the other one is bony, i.e. dead (in fact, Yaga's leg can be made of a range of materials: bone, clay, iron, tin, pig iron, gold, silver – but whatever the material, that leg is not alive) – which is a visible indication that she stands with one foot in the world of the living, and the other beyond the threshold of life. Sometimes the bone of her leg is associated with the folk beliefs of the 'Nav bone' (a bone that appears in a person's body because of some transgression and becomes the cause of their death), but considering the different possible materials her leg can be made of, that is unlikely to be correct. Yaga's lameness is a reference to general perception of chthonic, ancient characters, for whom being lame or one-legged is a common trait.

Yaga is somewhat weak-sighted, and impaired visual clarity is a characteristic ascribed to the dead and certain other otherworldly creatures. However, weak-sighted does not mean blind, and many tales say she is able to see. She has a sharp sense of smell, and tales often describe her smelling the hero as opposed to seeing him/her ("Fie, fie! The Russian smell was never heard of nor caught sight of here, but here it is, the Russian smell, coming to me by itself" or "Yaga rode up to the gate and, sniffing the air around herself, cried: 'Ugh, ugh! I smell Russian blood! Who is there?')", she has sharp long teeth and claws (often made of iron, by the way – a trait that was often transferred to the walking dead), but at the same time it's impossible to agree with Propp's conclusion that Yaga is dead herself. For one, Propp writes that Yaga "never walks. She either flies or lies down, i.e. behaves outwardly like a corpse"<sup>11</sup>, but that is not accurate – a number of tales show her as being perfectly able to walk. For example, tale 103 in Afanasyev's collection has the following: "Baba Yaga waited; she walked over to the window and asked: 'Are you weaving, my niece, are you weaving, my darling?' 'I am, auntie, I am!'" In the tale 'Baba Yaga' from the same collection: "Baba Yaga came walking back. 'So, have you finished all the work?' she said. And the girl had everything ready." And the tale

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<sup>11</sup>V. Propp "Historical Roots of the Fairy Tale".

about Lutonyushka says: “Having seen that, Yaga Baba went to that spot and started calling him with the same words as his mother did.”

Propp’s other argument for Baba Yaga’s dead-like nature is the way she takes up the entirety of the room in her cabin. “Why does Yaga fill her entire house? Nowhere is she described or mentioned as a giant,” he writes, and from this draws the conclusion that the small cabin is a coffin or a sepulchral structure. True, she is never named a giant per se, but still in many tales Yaga is described as being large. For example: “He entered the dark forest and followed a trail to a clearing. In that clearing there stood a cabin, a small one. He goes inside the cabin; inside is an old woman, large and very scary<sup>12</sup>”. Or: “The cabin stopped, they went up inside it, and there was Baba Yaga: feet in one corner, head in the other, lips on the lintel, nose poking the ceiling. ... She gave them to drink and to eat and put them to bed” (from the fairytale ‘Milk of Wild Beasts’). The tale’s heroes are always able to enter Yaga’s cabin, and it is big enough for them – while Yaga is large and takes up a lot of space: she is tall (“nose stuck in the ceiling”); when she lies down her head and feet prop up the opposite walls; when she sits her feet are in different corners. Folk tradition often imbued other female magical characters with great height and large size as well, up to and including Paraskeva the Saint Friday (Paraskeva Pyatnitsa), who could also sometimes be seen as a scary, demonic character.

The main point against Yaga being dead is the fact that her house always has a stove. The underworld in folk beliefs is cold, the dead have nothing to keep them warm, which results in various memorial rites where the souls of the dead were warmed in one way or another, given the warmth they lacked in their otherworldly existence: heating up a banya (steam bath), putting hot food on the table for the death feast etc. Yaga, on the other hand, has her own stove and fire – which are preeminently attributes of the living, not the dead – and she readily uses that stove, stoking the fire to cook her food. There are other features to distinguish her home from a dead person’s last abode – windows, for one.

Thus, Yaga, while being close to the underworld and knowing ways to get there, is not, however, a part of it. But even though she

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<sup>12</sup> CharadzejnyjaKazki. Chastka II [Fairytale. Part II]. № 1, p. 28

has items common for the living in her home as well – she is not part of humankind, either.

Baba Yaga's non-belonging to humanity is pointed out, in fact, by each of her attributes. To start with her very dwelling: a cabin standing on hen's legs, or ram's horns, or a dog's paw. Yaga's home is like its owner, being connected to both the world of the living and the world of the dead. On the one hand it is a wooden structure, and on the other it is partially alive: standing on a living foundation, it is capable of turning around, its locks and bars are disembodied hands and legs that behave as if they are alive – so Yaga's cabin combines living parts with inanimate ones, life with death (the idea of her home's 'aliveness' is, by the way, elaborated upon in modern fairytales and animation).

Yaga's cabin is situated in a forest, and the forest (any forest, not just the one where Yaga lives) in fairytale realm is a transitional space: you never know where the mundane woods the hero entered end, and the otherworldly ones, filled with magic and inhabited by magical creatures, begin. It is in the center of that forest, on the border between this world and another, that Baba Yaga's cabin stands. Other locations given for her abode also indicate its border-straddling nature: she is also said to live near the fiery Smorodina River, which is often seen as an obvious, visible border between the human world and the Otherworld, or the otherworldly Thrice-Ninth Kingdom.

Yaga is often linked with iron. She can have iron claws or teeth which she keeps sharpening, an iron leg, an iron nose. Unlike Celtic mythology, for instance, where 'cold iron' is an obvious attribute of humankind, in Slavic myth iron is, on the contrary, often an attribute of the otherworld, being antagonized to living nature: it is cold, immovable, it does not grow, it is extracted from underground (initially from swamps, which are hostile to humans and densely populated by magical creature) etc. If a text describes a character with parts made of iron – an iron-feathered raven, or a wolf with iron fur or teeth, or an iron-clawed cat sitting atop an pillar, or a pikefish with iron fins, a witch with an iron nose – it is, on the one hand, an indication of those characters' elevated sacral status, and on the other, shows how far removed they are from the living, human world. However, iron body parts were a privilege of 'high-ranking'

magical creatures, while for the lesser beings iron was anathema similarly to the Celts' 'little folk', and many rites have been preserved where iron was used to ward off a vodyanoy (a male water spirit), an upyr (a vampire or ghoul), a snake or a hedge witch. Thus, Yaga's abundance of iron emphasizes her as being far from a lesser, run-of-the-mill character of Slavic myth.

The mortar Yaga rides in, and the pestle she uses to steer, are, incidentally, also often described as being made of iron. But while the mortar is mentioned in multiple tales as being an attribute of hers, the pestle is by far more sacral item. Andrei Toporkov, for example, described the pestle as her primary attribute, since pestles are also seen in folk beliefs of witches, of rusalki (female water spirits), of the 'Iron Baba', where pestles are depicted as both their implements and their weapons, which can be used to bludgeon to death a random person who has trespassed into their territory without knowing the rules of dealing with them. In rites to banish Cow Death (the personification of lethal diseases afflicting cattle en masse), which were performed exclusively by women, the pestle is one of the possible tools they threaten to use to beat down the disease. Yaga also uses her pestle as a weapon: "Baba Yaga rode her mortar up to the old man and started cursing him... she hit him with her pestle and he fell down..." or "a mortar ran along the road with Baba Yaga sitting in it; she rode up to the young man and his horse, hit them with her pestle, and they became two rocks." (The folk fairytale 'The Grateful Dead' from Nikolai Onchukov's collection.) The pestle does not only show up as a women's weapon in Slavic myth – it is also worth mentioning are Hellenic maenads, who beat Orpheus to death with pestles, or the Nereids, also of Greek myth.

On the other hand, also to note the folk rites and superstitions where a woman's sitting on a mortar or pestle was linked to conception (sitting on a mortar was for giving birth to a daughter, and a pestle for a son), so there's another motif separating Yaga from death goddesses and shifting her towards ancient Birth-Giving Mothers.

On top of that the mortar and pestle are also symbols of transformation: grain goes into the mortar and flour comes out. Folk rites (healing ones, f.e.) have examples of 'pounding' one thing into another, like sickness into health. Thus it is fitting that Yaga,



considering how meeting her always transforms the tale's hero in one way or another, possesses these implements.

To cross over from the world of the living into the world of spirits or the dead, the hero always has to pass some kind of a test, where a mistake can result in real, unavoidable death. Fairytales have preserved rather clear instructions on how to behave around Baba Yaga to prevent her from killing the hero and have her help them instead, and the first and foremost requirement is politeness. The Russian word for 'polite' – 'вежливый' – goes back to the old Russian *въжса*, meaning a knowledgeable, well-versed person, one who knows how to do things the correct way. That is an important connection, considering that Yaga herself at times breaches the norms of civility with the hero (threatening to eat them on the spot, for example), and only by knowing the right way of doing things can they bring her back to a certain behavioral scheme. If the hero were impolite (and thus, ignorant), their ignorance of the rules would get them eaten before they could even start their test, and, obviously, before they could attain their goal. Even more than that – without knowing the rules the hero cannot even enter Yaga's house, because to have her cabin turn its entrance to the hero, they had to know a certain formula ("Cabin, cabin, stand like you used to, the way your mother put you – your back to the forest, your front to me"), and sometimes 'appease' the guardians of Yaga's home in some way – by giving the guard dog a treat or pouring oil under the gate etc. Yaga's other trials can vary widely, and they are very different in male and female fairytales, but Yaga will only reveal those if the first test – the trial of politeness – has been passed. Any one of those trials can end with the hero being dead and becoming the main course on Yaga's dinner table. As Nikolai Novikov writes, "no fairytale antagonist<sup>13</sup> manifests cannibalistic qualities with such prominence and consistency as Baba Yaga." This is an interesting notion that shows that Yaga is capable of sending a human to the Otherworld in two ways: as an incorporeal spirit of a dead person, or alive and in the flesh. The heroes, of course, want the latter option, since they intend to come back to the human realm, but it is important that what

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<sup>13</sup>Meaning eastern Slavic fairytales. Quoted from N. V. Novikov's "Characters of the Eastern Slavic Fairytale".

Yaga is offering is not the inescapable embrace of death. She offers a way to go there and come back again.

A number of fairytales follow a sequence of actions that allow the hero passage into the Thrice-Ninth Kingdom. Yaga feeds the hero – and in some unadapted folk tales the food is quite specific and far from human. Giving the hero otherworldly food is a frequent motif in various myths, making hero a part of the world whose meal they partake of. The second motif is the banya, which Yaga prepares for the hero. There are a number of rites linked to the banya in Russian tradition, including purification and ‘steaming out’ disease. Yaga ‘cleanses’ the hero so that he does not ‘smell of Russian blood’ anymore and can continue on his way through the world of magical creatures without attracting too much attention. And finally, Yaga gives the hero a guide to show him the way in places he has never been before: a magical ball of guiding thread, or a fairy horse that knows the way, or a magical towel that unrolls into a path that leads the hero straight to his destination. Without such help hero’s chances of attaining his goal would be slim.

In female tales Yaga behaves differently, but the heroine is still required to undergo some trials, proving her capabilities and transforming from an adolescent girl into a rich and skillful bride, endowed, on top of that, with magical knowledge that can only be acquired in Yaga’s abode, as well as magical items, which Yaga generously bestows upon the polite, smart, deft and good-natured girl.

One cannot fail to mention the animals that often accompany Yaga in fairytales. Those can be the beasts living in her home and serving her – a cat, a dog, a raven, sometimes an owl, or mice – or they can be magical horses Yaga breeds. Those are the rare tales, where Yaga is a herd-keeper with the best horses in the world, and, for example, Koschei the Deathless speaks of having served Yaga for three days (or three years), herding her horses without losing a single one, and for that Yaga has gifted him a colt that has grown into Koschei’s magical horse that goes seven miles in one stride. Sometimes a human hero serves Yaga in a similar fashion to acquire a magical bogatyr’s horse. Also widely known are the magical swans and geese (*gusi-lebedi*), Yaga’s avian servants. But she is not limited to these particular animals: in some tales Yaga is shown as being

able to command any beast, for example: “The old woman stepped out on her porch, shouted in a loud voice, and as if out of nowhere, all kinds of beasts came running to her, all kinds of birds came flying,” or “Down the road lives my elder sister, she may have your answer, she has advisors: her first advisors are the beasts of the forest, her second advisors are the birds in the sky, and her third advisors are the fishes and the snakes in the waters”. This power over beasts clearly shows attributes of the Potnia Theron, the Mother and mistress of all animals, who has absolute power over them (traits of this beast mistress are evident, for example, in the Greek Artemis – also a forest goddess, – as well as the Phrygian Cybele, etc.). Considering how sacred certain animals were for the Slavs – so much so that there are hypotheses about Slavic beliefs in blood connections to certain animals (totemism), – it could explain why in some tales Yaga is called a relative – an aunt, a mother-in-law, or a grandmother.

The concept of the Divine Mistress of Animals is very ancient, primeval, merging together with that of the Great Mother (not just of animals, but of the entire Earth, the humans and the Gods – the Mother of All), and that is apparently what some of the traits in Baba Yaga’s image lead back to. But worshipping such Mother Goddesses goes back to an era when there were no Slavs, or any other of the ethnolinguistic groups we know now – which means there is no certainty that Yaga was seen as a Goddess at any point in time in Slavic culture. Still, echoes of that pre-Slavic worship are seen to this day. Gods of this kind hark back to the era of hunting and gathering, when humans were dependent on the forests and nature – and as such, their power wanes with the advent of agriculture. It was a time of matriarchy, and perhaps that is why, like other ancient goddesses, Yaga has children and possess prominent female sexual characteristics – but there is never a husband or a man at her side.

Yaga’s connection to snakes also possibly leads back to those ancient times. In some tales she is the Zmeikha (female Serpent), the Mother of monstrous many-headed serpents that attack Rus’, or of their wives. In this role Yaga is truly enormous, able to turn into a mountain, a storm cloud, a dark and impassable forest or an endless wall, she can open her maw so wide the lower lip is on the ground and the upper is in the clouds. In this form she is linked to the

Underworld: being wounded by a bogatyr, she falls through the ground and into her realm, which is logical for Slavic myth – beliefs in the close connections between snakes and the earth (even those two Slavic words *земля, zemlya* - earth and *змея, zmeya* - snake are cognate), as well as the idea of the underground ‘snake realm’ are well-preserved.

Yaga has other interesting traits as well. For instance, she is connected to wind and storm. When she rides her mortar, a strong wind rises, causing century-old trees to bend like grass; Yaga’s whistle can cause the forest to quake, and besides, by whistling she can summon winds that obey her the same way animals do<sup>14</sup>. Winds in the Slavic tradition are demonic characters, unseen but obviously manifested forces which live either in dark forests, like Yaga herself, or in caves, old wells, chasms, pits (compare with the Underworld, the habitat of the Zmeikha-Yaga), and are related to the mythic flying serpents. Sometimes, Yaga turns out to be the owner of a great giant bird (an eagle, for example<sup>15</sup>) – such birds are usually in the purview of the master wind. Besides the winds, Yaga sometimes manifests other qualities of a world keeper: she can hold the keys to the Sun and the Moon, or, as in the tale of Vasilisa the Brave, the Bright Sun, the Dark Night and the Clear Day could all be said to be her faithful servants. Vasilisa witnesses those horsemen (the Sun, the Day and the Night) in flesh, that can indicate where Yaga’s house is – on the border of creation, where the sky meets the earth. These are also ancient divine qualities, going back to the archaic beliefs of the Mistress and the Mother of the World.

The number and diversity of Yaga’s forms are truly astonishing. In fairytales we see her in different roles: an ally and an adversary, an adviser and a disruptor, a ferocious warrior rider, a devourer of children, a wise ‘old aunt’, the keeper of fire, the mother of snakes and horses, a sorceress and the mother of all witches, a gift-giver, an old forest hermit, the mistress of the earth and celestial bodies, the mistress of beasts, an initiator, an ancestor... Such diversity indicates a character both very ancient and vested with authority and power. It is most often the case that the older a deity is,

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<sup>14</sup>For example, in the fairytale “The Enchanted Princess”.

<sup>15</sup>Afanashev, 128

the broader is the range of their functions. But where to look for this particular deity's place in the Slavic pantheon, the information on which is so scarce?

No Slavic texts of 'high mythology' have been preserved, nothing like the Scandinavian Eddas, or the structured, meticulously written-out Hellenic and Roman myth. But that does not mean that the Slavic mythology is lost and dead. Slavic 'sacred books' are the fairytales, folklore and ethnographies, and it is the fairytales in particular, which we all hear and absorb in early childhood, that give us the keys to the myth: they contain information on the mythological structure of the world, the magical creatures and the magical places connected to them, on where the transitional spaces from the human world to the Otherworld are located, the rules for communicating with the supernatural. The body of Slavic folk texts is enormous, and it is sufficient to grasp this mythological complex with its sacred geography and characters, to understand where 'Thrice-Ninth Kindgom' lies, whom we can meet there, and to learn how we should behave to avoid being devoured or destroyed by creatures far more ancient and powerful than ourselves.

Unlike many other systems, the Slavic myth often lacks a clear-cut duality, an opposition of light and darkness, which is, incidentally, not only characteristic of Christianity with its radical separation of the light and the dark, but also, for example, of Hinduism, where there is a clear division of the 'fierce' and the 'peaceful' forms of divine beings. In the Slavic world every deity embodies a force or an element which in itself is neither good nor evil. You cannot label a thunderstorm as good or evil: for someone hit by lightning it is likely to be evil, but for the one whose fields it saturates with rain, it is good. In a similar vein, you cannot judge the sun, the moon, the wind, the day and the night, the earth and the sky, fire and water, field and forest. Essentially, every element and every part of creation, in its purest form, is by default hostile to humans. We get burned by the fire, we drown in the water, we cannot stay aloft in the air and while the earth is our mother, she is not the kindest of mothers. But man knows how to deal with each element to benefit from the interaction and not get harmed by it. Every element has a dark and a light side, as does every deity, and even those Slavic Gods that are now considered Dark never exclusively take the dark

or evil side of the cosmos. Without darkness there is no light, without death there is no life, and destruction is as important as creation – everything is a boon for the world in one way or another.

Behind the fairytale Yaga one can see the same manifold power of the unrestricted elements, impossible to scale in terms of good and evil, light and darkness. But by dealing with those elements, as with any others, one must display knowledge if one is to get help as opposed to get devoured. In myth, Yaga is connected first and foremost to the earth and the forest, to snakes, animals and birds, and her image is that of a Mistress of the Forests, most fitting for the ‘realm’ she presides over. The forest is dangerous and unpredictable for someone who doesn’t know how to survive in it, nothing there is the same as in human world, nothing is safe or familiar. In a wild forest it is easy to get lost or injured, to encounter a wild beast, to poison oneself with unfamiliar berries or mushrooms, to drown in a swamp or to step on a viper. But for those who know their ways around the forest it is an endless source of boons that no other space can give: from food and firewood to knowledge and wisdom that can be found in the wild woods. The forest is fertile and bountiful, it keeps secrets that are unattainable from outside its borders, it is full of life, but it can also bring death. The forest has the treasures which cannot be received from any other source – and that is its uniqueness.

Such is Baba Yaga of Russian fairytales, the Ancient Dark Forest Mother of ancient myth.

**Shuya (Natalya Nickolskaya, Shellir Lirian)**  
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# CLOSER TO THE FOLK, NATURE AND GODS: PAGAN DOWNSHIFTING EXPERIENCE IN THE UKRAINIAN STEPPES

## **Introduction**

It is one of the most urgent problems for contemporary Pagans – to reconcile their religious views with their actual way of life. Someone tries to live in the megalopolis and to worship the Gods of Nature. Someone takes position of semi-atheist, who doesn't search the sacred supersensible experience and considers his or her Paganism only by an aspect of personal identity. One more group of contemporary Pagans feels heavy dissonance between their worldview and their way of life. Probably, me and my wife, Alyona, had belonged to this group until the spring 2018 e.v.

Discussions about moving to the village took place in Odesa Pagan (Ridnovir) Society “Mokosha” since the year 2013 e.v. There were two dozens of interested people, and initially we thought to found small Neo-Pagan community somewhere in Odesa region. But anybody of us was enough radical to move from the city immediately. Feeling desperate of our comrades, me and my wife decided to begin the moving by ourselves, to set an example.

This essay is an annual report of our downshifting experience. It must be noticed from the very beginning that we are not entirely downshifters, who has run away to the forest, has broken all relations with the Post-Modern world. No; maybe, our experience wouldn't be impressive for the reader, but I consider it as an ordinary experience of the “neo-peopleist”, who wants to establish a resource-base outside the megalopolis. The base, which should pull out perspective



(from our point of view) people and inspire them against the technocracy and uprootedness.

First of all, let's get acquainted with conditions of the Ukrainian Steppe. Odesa region takes middle position in the rate of population density (72 persons per square km), but in some districts, especially along the Tylihul river, density is much lower, 20-40 persons per square km. In the hilly steppe there are many small villages and little steadings for few families (*khutor*), united by the web of auto-roads and one railway. Soviet collective farms (*kolkhoz*) were abandoned in the most of settlements, somewhere, perhaps, their production capacities were appropriated by private farmers and new landlords. Intensive farming, using chemical fertilizers and heavy machinery, doesn't need a lot of working hands, that's why employable inhabitants and the youth particularly move out to the district and regional centers. It seems, as if the megalopolis sucks the strength out of the countryside.

As regards climatic conditions, in Tylihul valley there is hot, sometimes-arid summer, mild winter with average temperature near 0°C, rare frosts and few snow days. Few days per every month also are very windy. Acacia, walnut, poplar and birch are the most common among trees. The Tylihul river is very marshy, overgrown by reed in its wide estuary. There are no harmful industrial productions, that's why environment is relatively healthy.

## **Organization of life**

To take our roots we chose village Maryanivka in Berezivka district, with population near 150-200 persons, in 70 km from Odesa and in 15 km from the district center with railway station. The main issue for such semi-downshifters, as we are, is a new job<sup>16</sup>. If we decide to create our lives by ourselves, it shall be directly connected with our interests and opportunities, it shall be a job for pleasure and

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<sup>16</sup> Many downshifters sell their city apartments or live on the rent from them. But because our parents still live in Odesa, we can't seize this strategy. One more popular decision is organic farming, permaculture or dairy products.

for good. Insofar as our education relates to Humanities (in the moment of the moving I was postgraduate student in Ethnology and Alyona is Ph.D. in Philosophy), the most essential employment in the village for us is green / ethnographical tourism business. The Tylihul valley has quite capacity for such enterprise: transport infrastructure, healthy environment and, for example, unique for the steppes ski resort near Berezivka. We made a plan of the “living history museum”, which could combine ethnographical exposition with traditional crafts performance and outdoor excursions to the former German and Czech colonies. I.I.Mechnikov Odesa national university agreed to help us with exhibition.

In March 2018 e.v. we bought a steading with two houses (one living and another for the museum), two dozens of young fruit trees in the garden and a field of 0,4 hectares. Living house is relatively new, equipped with electricity, gas for food cooking, firewood stove for heating and bathroom inside<sup>17</sup>. The second house, used previously as a barn, needed renovation in plenty of aspects. Because we don't want to have a deal with banks and have very small budget, we haven't finished the renovation yet, after 9 months after the moving.

In spring and summer we were busy with garden and field woks, hosted several families of tourists, but in autumn found out that it would be better to have extra income. Two or three days per week I began to give private lessons in History in Odesa and Alyona became a distant SMM manager in one of Odesa educational centers. So we didn't manage to bust up with the megalopolis, and this is a problem.

However, moving to the village brings a huge flow of new experience in everyone's life. Here, among the reed jungle, there is no plumber to repair your water tap, no janitor to remove the fallen leaves or snow. To saw and to chopping the wood, to mow the grass, to clean the stove and to repair the roof – that is small part of all uncommon for the former city dweller exercises. What about bread, if there is no delivery in the village shop today? During the life in the megalopolis it was a kind of dream to bake our own bread. Now it is

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<sup>17</sup> There are many houses in Ukrainian villages (and in Maryanivka too) with toilet outside and without connection to central gas system.

ordinary action, with local, but not our own, flour. Next step would be to pass all phases from the grain to the bread. Few words must be told about the garbage. Of course, in the village all organic waste forms the compost as great fertilizer or is eaten up by animals. Inorganic waste we take out to the district center (usually it is one small pocket per week), where is an “official” dump, as well as bins for recycling rubbish. But only reducing the quantity of consumed plastic, polyethylene etc. you can solve this problem. “Zero waste” conception is interesting, but it requires some assertiveness and strong consciousness.

Moving to the village means that you must know clearly, how to give the first medicine aid, and have an adequate medicine chest in your steading. Especially if you also have children.

Concerning the transport, firstly we walked 3 km by feet to the highway in the direction of Odesa, used local bus, taxi or neighbor`s car to go to Berezivka. When I began to give private lessons, I bought a bike and reached the railway station in 40 minutes. Finally, when the winter has come, we bought an old Soviet “Lada” (1988 production year). It`s funny that the most widespread car in Post-Soviet countryside has a name of Slavic Goddess. Broken country roads and changeable weather require cheap and easy in repairing car mechanism. Electric car is a bad idea for the Ukrainian village.

## **Relations with people**

Soviet radical modernization, including physical terror against the peasantry, ultimately undermined traditional life of Ukrainian village. However, almost everywhere you can still find semi-closed local communities with great importance of the kinship relations and mutual aid.

Maryanivka is ethnically homogenous village. Most of people identify themselves as Ukrainians and speak a common mixture of Ukrainian and Russian languages (so called *surzhik* – initially it meant “bread of different groats”). Also they identify themselves as Orthodox Christians, but most of them aren`t religious – there is no church here and in neighboring villages. The locals maintain some

traditional semi-Pagan beliefs and customs (for example, they hang a ritual towel – *rushnyk* – on the steading’s gate for 3 days after someone’s death in this family). But their lifetime has no sacred periods, even New Year and Soviet holiday “Victory’s day” on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May seems formalistic and boring.

Thus, the main goal for the downshifter, in our opinion, is to create healthy mutual relations with his or her neighbors. If you want to live in the village for a long time, it’s necessary to join the local community. Especially contemporary Pagan, moving to the village, can turn to an outcast or to a trendsetter and the center of the village’s renovation (glory of a weirdo is guaranteed in any case). It is not about drinking vodka with the locals, rather about joining the local exchange network.

Mutual aid is normal and common for any village community and in any community you can find some kind families, who introduce local customs and orders for the newbie. Different families in the village are often considered as masters in certain crafts and arts: Ivaniuck<sup>18</sup>, for example, can repair electrical network, Petrynenko delivers firewood, Vasylchenko is beekeeper etc. Such relations can be found on a commodity-money principle or on the mutual credit: next time you would help your neighbor in some business. For example, we asked for some specific physical help and helped neighbors’ children with English lessons or with some Internet-services.

Good relations include greetings to any passer-by on the street, acquainted or not, short talk with him or her, using local (dialect) vocabulary and speech. The locals perceive “clear” Ukrainian or Russian language with some suspect. From the “alien” position it is easy to move to the “outcast” position or to the “apprentice” position. Former urbanite, who study country-life for him- or herself is attractive image for the locals (precisely, for a part of them). A preacher, aspiring to turn the locals in his faith, would suffer from ostracism inevitably. In contrast to this, gradual relations’ cultivation would give an opportunity to have unobtrusive influence in the

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<sup>18</sup> All surnames are fictitious. In the village community more usable are “street nicknames”. If you are given such nickname – it means that the community have accepted you as a member. After 9 months we haven’t received the nickname yet.

future. At least, it has the meaning to convince the local children get an education, but return and create the world of their dreams in their native landscape.

One more group, with whom relations are unpreventable, are local authorities: a head of a village council, district state administration, different communal services. Usually they are suspicious to the migrants from the large city, but in some cases can help to perform your project or to start business. Depending on the project's specific, there is sense to try normalize relations with them or to minimize contacts.

Finally, there is a group of friends and like-minded people, from Odesa Pagan community and other affinity groups. From the very beginning of our moving to the village we host them in our steading during the whole all the time. We have established a rule that everyone at *The Khutir* should teach something the others, or study, or help us in the house works. In addition, a strict prohibition for any alcohol has been imposed; an exception is homemade vine in ritual order (during some sacred calendar holidays, for example). In summer 2018 e.v. with our friends, mostly from faculty of History and Philosophy of I.I.Mechnikov Odesa national university, we held an ethnographical expedition in Maryanivka and four other villages of Berezivka district. In one week more than 50 interviews were collected, as well as some interesting antique things for our museum. We don't want to create a commune inside one steading, but to inspire our comrades for the downshifting (in any form) – this mission seems possible and necessary.

## **Relations with Nature**

Moving to the village, we had clear awareness that Nature must be considered not as resource repository, but as a space of self-supporting life forms. Every ecosystem is a community of plants, animals and spirits, and a human can be a guest, a neighbor or a partner, but not a master of them. That's why we try to build our relations with Nature on the principles of organic agriculture (refusal

of synthetic fertilizers, crop rotation, recycling of biological elements as much as possible) and Pagan ethics.

Our new neighbors were quite surprised, when in spring we invited a horse to plow our field with traditional iron harrow (*borona*). The quality of plowing was good. Unfortunately, in June and July we were absent for a much of time, so the field was easily occupied by different weeds. Quite less surprising, I think, was our decision to mow the hay by a hand scythe – it's normal practice in Ukrainian village for today. One more principle decision was to annihilate Colorado beetle on potatoes and tomatoes by our hands, hard work under the steppe's sun. In our point of view, to saturate your own world by your hands is better, than delegate to somebody or something your duty. By the way, we had average harvest of all main crops: potatoes, tomatoes, cucumbers, corn, onions and pumpkins. Given the fact that we haven't ever been engaged in horticulture, this is a reason for joy for us.

As fertilizers we used woody ashes from our stove, tried to use mulch and humus. Plants' stalks (their corpses), in their turn, formed the humus for the oncoming years or turned into ashes.

It must be noticed that every fieldwork we began with prayerful speech to Mother Earth and spirits, which were taking care of the field. Also we spoke with the trees in the garden, thank them for good harvest or scolded and frightened the bummers (that is traditional Ukrainian practice in the period of Christmas holidays).

In May we have bought five young hens and one cock, in September they began to carry eggs. However, one hen was stolen, the second died during the period of our absence and one more dislocated her leg and in a month died of infection. So our household now, in winter 2019 e.v., consists of two hens, one cock and two cats, also local.

As far as we are neither vegans nor vegetarians, it was important to find a source of meat and milk products. We began to buy the latter from one neighbor family (there are many cow-keepers in the village, but a large part of them sell their milk to the middlemen). Concerning meat, the village prompts to decrease its consuming. Having no choice, we buy it in local shop or sometimes exchange neighbor hen or duck.

We haven't tried fishing or hunting yet, but if we did that, it would be done not for pleasure, but according to the ritual principles, connecting us with the Sacred and not destabilizing the ecosystem.

## Relations with Gods and spirits

During our life in the megalopolis, one of the most oppressive experiences was inability of sunrise and sunset watching. Worship rites in the park zone seemed poor and insufficient. Someone asserts that the Pagan worship could be performed everywhere, including a market crowd or asphalt jungle. I feel a great doubt about it.

Traditional village is the place, saturated by directly presence of the Sacred. Here it's obvious that besides sensual forms around us there are plenty of invisible<sup>19</sup> forms of being, such as spirits, elementals and Gods.

Housewarming in Slavic traditional culture is connected with the housekeeper spirit (*Domovyk*) obeisance. Our housewarming in March 2018 e.v., unfortunately, seemed higgledy-piggledy, we hadn't found enough time to say greetings words to Domovyk. The first twenty-four hours were really crazy and full of despair because of different flaws and breakages in our new house. When we finally honored Domovyk with ritual bread (*korovay*), large part of our misfortunes stopped by themselves. Several times my wife and our best friend saw Domovyk in traditional image of a strange hairy man (in a dream and as a shadow). Every time we go away for a day or more we ask Domovyk to look after our steading.

Three times we invited our friends from Odesa for celebration of important Pagan holidays: spring equinox (*Velykden*), harvest (*Obzhynky*) and winter solstice (*Kolyada*). First of them took place in a neighbor forest, the second and the third – on the territory of our steading. The last one turned out, as we had dreamed about it in the past years: with many guests (including one girl from Kiyv and one –

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<sup>19</sup> This word isn't correct, but I use it because it notices the most understandable feature.

from Dnipro), forceful mystery, traditional dances, carols (*kolyadka*) and joy for children.

Alyona and I also performed individual spiritual practices, meditations (*radinnya*), sometimes spontaneous, sometimes planned. Because of sufficient private space that open air practices can be performed without warning of accidental eyes. In the future we are going to build a small private sanctuary in our garden, as our friends from Ternopyl did.

In Pagan social networks many discussions of everyday ritual practice take place. It's correct that you should be Pagan not only on holidays and at sanctuary (*kapishche*). Especially I every day meet and see off the Sun with a pray, as well as fire in the stove, at the family table we aspire to sanctify each meal. But everyone should remember that the rites are not the aim by themselves. The true aim is live direct experience of the Sacred, life sanctifying and saturating it by the highest sense.

During the year have we never regretted about the moving to the village. This experience is great, sometimes hard and tedious, but it is worth to be cognized.

Best regards from the Steading-among-the-reed (*Khutir v ochereti*).

**Valentyn Dolhochub (Vedoslav)**



# SPIRITUAL SELF-KNOWLEDGE IN MODERN SLAVIC PAGANISM

## **The tree steps of Comprehension**

1. The one who follows the Teaching of the Great Nav passes the three steps of Comprehension

- Comprehension of the Mighty Wisdom;
- Comprehension of the Wise Might;
- Comprehension of the True Will.

2. Usually a willing man starts with comprehension of Wisdom, while a willing wife— with comprehension of Might. It becomes possible during initiatic transubstantiation of knowledge into Wisdom (for a man) and feeling and emotions into Might (for a wife). The True Wisdom is always mighty, because it opens the Might of Infinity; The True Might is always wise, because it opens the Wisdom of Infinity beyond the words.

3. True Will might be open, only when Veles and Morena merge in human being TOGETHER in the Love Knot, i.e. when Wisdom and Might are balanced and inseparable, when there is no difference and walls between Spirit («Father») and Matter («Mother») in the form of conditional thoughts and passions.

## **The Trap of «Comprehension»**

1. When someone says, that he «discovered» или «recognized» his True Nature, — perhaps, he has fallen into the trap of his own mind. Perhaps, the mind of this man has some vision of how he used to call «himself» or how he used to identify «himself», some «self»-description, which is the subject of his «Comprehension».

2. Meanwhile none of «self»-description can bring close to comprehension of True IDENTITY— the Great Nav ,the Indescribable Void of UNBORN. According to dharma of the Great Nav , our True Nature might be comprehended, when mind, figuratively speaking, has found its «tomb» in the Heart, and the has been crashed by the Ice Hammer of Realization.

3. We, our True Nature — are THAT, WHAT vainly tries «realise» our mind. The true SELF-realisation comes, when «I-realising» or «I-comprehending»after a long Path dies by The Gates of Silence and mind can not never pass beyond this Gates. We are primordialy THAT, WHAT can not be «discovered» or «reached», WHAT we can not be in the hustle of our being.

## **Our True Nature**

Though our True Nature is always the same-the Void of UNBORN beyond the dreams. followers of the Teaching of the Great Nav speak about three levels of its manifestation:

- manifestation of True Nature all being and all creatures no matter Awakend they are or not;
- manifestation of True Nature of the one who has consciously taken the Path;
- manifestation of True Nature of Awakened.

2. Precisely speaking they mean not only different manifestations of our True Nature but also different points of view on IT. So in the first case it speaks about speculative recognition of ITS equal «existence» in all being. In the second case it speaks about state of turned mind, wich has to internal Search . In the third case it speaks about state of turned mind, wich has stepped out the limits of illusion of "searching" itself.

3. Only in the third case when the mind of man is no more occupied by the pursuit of «achievement», we can speak abut true Achievement (whithout «I-achiever»), when man sees the true Nature равно equal in all being and all creatures whithout dividing, comprehending IT in himself.

## **Divine obsession**

1. According to the Teaching of the Great Nav, a man who stand on the Path of Spiritual Self-cognition, sooner or later faces the need to see clearly and distinguish all those Forces that act through him in this World.

2. If on the Path of Removal (the Right Hand path) man learns to use the Might of the Gods for the creation of self-identity, then on the Path of Returning (the Left Hand path) he learns to disengage with all masks, «forged» him on the Right Hand path wich he had previously been inclined to consider «himself».

3. When a person understands that almost all of his actions are not manifestations of his True Will, but the consequences of influences from the outside (Perun has "commen" — man wants to fight; Lada has "commen" — wants to love; Dazhdbog has "commen" — man wants to "shine" like the Sun in front of others, etc.) — he begins to comprehend the meaning of the expression "Divine Obsession"...

## **The Great Darkness**

1. The Great Black Mother Morena, according to the Teaching of the Great Nav, in Her Primordial Supra is Herself the GREAT NAV, or the pre-eternal Darkness of ETERNITY over Time.

2. Unlike the Nav, as the "Lower" World of the Three-Worlds, representing, so to speak, the "under side" of the Yav World, the GREAT NAV is the Void of the UNBORN on the other side of the Three-Worlds: not only of Yav and Nav, but even on the other side of the balancing them Prav.

3. Out of the great Eternal Darkness- the GREAT NAV- borns conditioned Light which, in turn, becomes triple Manifested World, manifests itself as the Manifested Three-Worlds Yav–NAV–Prav. DEMIURG — "God the Creator" in the beliefs of the mainstream religions — there is nothing like impersonification of this Light, emerging as a "false self" of the Great Darkness. The Demiurg

dominates all over the revealed Order, or Cosmos, and only over the Spiritually Awakened—who have comprehended their True Nature, or the GREAT NAV he has no power.

## **The Teaching of Great Perfection**

1. The Teaching of Great Perfection is the top of the dharma of the Great Nav. To follow the Path of the Great Nav, it is first necessary to leave the level of religious formalism and narrow-minded fanaticism. In order to follow the Path of Great Perfection, or the Path without a path, it is necessary to go beyond the conditioning of the very idea of the "path".

2. In fact, there is no «removal» from ONESELF, as well as no «returning» to ONESELF and no «path» to ONESELF, because for the one who «goes», moves, seeks to «reach» is our mind, while WE OURSELVES remain outside of his movement, initially being in the Natural State of the Primordial Basis. We are WHAT WE ARE, the Indescribable Void of the UNBORN beyond all becoming.

3. Even when we speak of Spiritual Self-Cognition, we should not be misguided, separating the «cognitioner» and THAT( aspect of our mind which cannot go beyond itself) WHAT it seeks «cognize». Non-involvement in this kind of mind games and not deviation from the Natural State of the Fundamental Principle — that, in short, what can be called the essence of the "practice" of the dharma of the Great Perfection.

## **The three levels of practice**

1. According to the Teaching of the Great Nav, there are three levels of Spiritual practice:

- at the first level of practice, a person needs a physical solitude, being alone, when all external obstacles to Spiritual Self-Cognition are absent or minimized;

- at the second level, a person learns to practice in «unfavorable» places that cause horror, disgust or anxiety in ordinary people (strong anxiety of the mind) - these are the practices committed in «dead places» or geopathogenic zones, in cemeteries, in places where there was a murder, etc.;

- at the third level, it does not matter much where to practice, because his Life itself, in a certain sense of the word, becomes a continuous practice, performed without effort.

2. As long as a person is forced to make an effort to stay in his True nature — the UNBORN — his practice is not perfect. Only when the practitioner does not deviate from his or her True Nature without making an effort to maintain himself or herself in this state. it can be said that the practice is trully successful.

3. The human mind, wishing to "possess" all kinds of states, including the so called altered States of Consciousness, is forced to make efforts to retain the acquired or to keep itself in one or another conditioned "state". Meanwhile, any state that requires retention is not a Natural State of the Primordial Basis — our Primordial State beyond all conditioned "States." What we can "possess" is not OURSELVES and sooner or later we will have to part with everything we have acquired. And the unceasing remembrance of Death — one of the most important Spiritual practices on our Path — teaches us not to hold on to the transient and to turn our Hearts and thoughts to the Eternal.

## **The True Will**

1. Our True Will is the Will to die. The fifth (V) paragraph of the Chaotic "Creed" reads:

My true Will is the Will to Die. < Comment: > Death is not destruction, but the removal of covers, the exposure of the True Nature of Reality. The will to Die is the Will to know the Ultimate Truth, the call of the spirit to return home. The fascination that movent of this World can manifest as attachment to the good things of Life, and attraction to decay and decomposition, but both in equal

measure is a consequence of conditionality, affections of the soul, but not the Insight of the Spirit.

2. On a relative level, the True Will of man is the Force that determines the Pattern of his Path, regardless of his personal desires, likes and dislikes. On the absolute level the True Will is reconceptualization Excitement to the UNBORN, not to the individual but to the Entity, not caused, but to the Eternal.

3. The symbol of the True Will is the Black Sun burning inside — this is the "attraction" of the Immortal Essence, expressed in the Prophetic Call, calling a person to return to the Source, the wave — to reunite with the Sea, the wanderer — to return Home. According to the Teaching of the Great Nav, our True Homeland, our Eternal Home —the Great NAV, the Void of the UNBORN, our True Nature.

**Veleslav Cherkasov (V.L.S.L.V.)**  
**Translated by Strider**

## WE BORN TO DIE

We born to die. It means that a man appears in this world without a final goal of his stay on the planet Earth to die physically or the future cremation or interment of the bones, but to go through a great deal of transformations. Changes, which are the death of the old condition, give the beginning of the new stage. The demonstrative example of the transformation is the process of the larva becoming the nymph and then the butterfly. The death of the larva gives the life to the nymph; the death of the nymph gives the life to the butterfly. This example does not mean that a man has a strictly limited amount of transformations. And there is a big amount of them. Only through a big amount of transformations, not through the state of petrification in the same granite position, the progress, and evolution and moving on are possible. Without passing through a big amount of deaths and births during the life, a man creates a swamp with stagnant, dead, rotten water. Plunging into stagnation and fixing in the same constant state a person is poisoning himself, but what more terrible is the poisoning of the spirit and soul, with their subsequent, not death, but rather extinction. When a man stops to go through sequence of regenerations and transformations, he becomes if not a clay golem, in which the bible god inspirits the life, but the walking corpse died in life with the extinguished internal fire and the sun – zombie. The man, who passes the endless cycle of his regenerations, seeks for the improvement of this world. To go out of the slavery of the existing program and matrix. To go out by himself and when it is possible to give a chance to reset the conscience of the surrounding people.

The point of all religions and confessions, excluding paganism and traditionalism, is that the human must prepare for the afterlife and the future reincarnation on the Earth. And the main

mistake of the most of people that they peck on this bait and don't pass during the life through the necessary transformations and regenerations. The people stop to create new and just imitate progress and evolution. The result of it is general degradation and moving to it with terrible speed. Without any doubt striving for degradation is also a forward movement, but opposite to creation of new. By degradation, the humanity creates copies and clones, but in view of the fact that copies are made from copies, which were also made from copies, enormous perversion and distortion of reality is going. But everything isn't so sad, and there is an exit out of this situation. Because the primary matter is lost, and the attempts to reproduce it through copies, imitations, cloning will not be successful and will not give it back to the life, its return is possible only through the new creation with the blank sheet. It will happen if the old, existing system dies (so called matrix, human processor and etc.) and the new one is born.

It turns out that the existing ruling order inspires people to be conformal and to fear the death for its security and stability. When people stop to fear the death, they will begin to fulfill their direct task with joy and pleasure. The man must pass through a big amount of regenerations going out of the prison of the system of mind, sense and intellect.

The samsara wheel exists, but it is present here and now, not in some future lives and regenerations. It rotates if the man transforms and lives through the countless sequence of births and deaths in the process of his existence and awareness. The samsara wheel stands still if the man gets stuck in the matrix networks and is covered with a swamp moss like one of the hillocks. And till this wheel is immobilized, nothing will threaten the system of values of the modern world.

Only when people stop to have fear of the death and begin to live through the death of the old guises, masks, states, stages and the birth of the new one, humanity will get a chance. The chance for the creation of something new and exit from the system of golems and clones, where the main task, which is required from the



people, is their labor and production of new resources, including the reproduction of their copies.

A man, who is scared and horrified of his death being old, does not wish also his own new birth. Moreover, the process of endless transformations is probably the basic goal not only of the human's life, but also of the whole nature.

We are endlessly born to die countless times during a lifetime.

**Cheslav Vyatich**

## VICTIM AND SACRIFICE: TRADITION AND MODERNITY

In the modern world, such definitions as victim and sacrifice lose the meaning, which our European ancestors gave them. And sometimes they even opposed to each other. They were no exception and were also petrified in materialism like the others. Victim and sacrifice do not symbolize any more interaction with energy-information fields and energy flows, internal work and transformation. Rejection of something unnecessary, obsolete, hindering further growth and ascent. In the world of the dominant cult of consumerism and the evaluative system victim turns to just one of the many terms from the science of criminology and the definition, which means the part of any commodity-money relations or manipulations.

Nowadays victim is associated with people caught in unpleasant, life-threatening, and sometimes death-causing circumstances and situations. It is not important if the person got the victim of the circumstances or of the other people's actions. Next, the dualistic human mind does an even more interesting thing. It divides and splits the victim into the innocent and undeservedly abused by a criminal like the Lamb of God, in the first case by opposing to it the image of the victim who suffered and received deservedly punishment and retribution, which according to the ignorant majority, it deserved by itself and provoked with its behavior and actions. So far as everything is more or less clear with the first case, it is worthwhile to pay attention a bit to the second one. There is a definition «victimization» in the criminology, which means predisposition of a person to the role of the victim and search for the possible ways to avoid this fate. Here again the topic of fear manipulation comes to the surface. The system, thereby, can expose the victim of a crime in any most favorable light. In the case when for the masses information is presented in such way, that the victim

is guilty of violence against itself, the criminal receives justification and sometimes the approval of the society. And no one, almost no one, wonders if only the victim is really to blame and if the villain has a pathological thirst to the constant transition beyond the norms of behavior, constant striving for destructive movement, development of qualities in himself that cause troubles, suffering and pain to others. In such cases, the public masses indulge the criminal and grant him the role of executioner, who makes deserved and rewarding justice. People bring all their "righteous anger" to the victim, responding to the manipulation of exiting of anger and desiring the human justice. People do not even think that they may be in exactly the same situation when an unlawful act is committed against them and they are declared guilty of it in the appendage ,or maybe just they can't think about it or don't want it.

Here the manipulation of groups and crowds and the difference between human justice and the justice of nature and the universe turn on.

The next association with the victim is related to the dominant commodity-money relations. This imposes the need to choose from two evils the less one and the need to be content with small and much more. But there is no even half of the hint that in the case when neither of the two options suits you, there is an opportunity to choose or create a third one, your own. In this framework, for example, a person is explained that in order to get a rusk, he must refuse the candy, or even completely abandon both and be content with a crust of stale bread and a mug of water so as not to stand out and be like everyone else. By creating an illusion of the possibility of achieving the goal through the rejection of something attractive for a person, sacrificing, abandoning the goal, the object, for the sake of the things, which society considers more valuable, but for the sacrificing what he refuses can occupy a much higher level of priority hierarchy than in the public one. Appeals for sacrifice of personal goals, objectives and priorities for the benefit of society are also possible.

The manipulation of the sacrifice and sacrifice also should be noted. People blame others for not appreciating the sacrifices made for them, listing for what they refused for - the good of friends, acquaintances, partners, trying to manipulate them in this way. In fact, such a sacrifice is made because of the banal thirst for

possession and profit, desire to possess someone or something, to bind a person to yourself, to make him dependent on his manipulations, to enslave his will and mental energy. However, modern Pagans, for the most part, refer to victim and sacrifice from the position of materialism. The victim is perceived from the position of the principle “you give me - I give you” and “bash for bash”. They bring and impose demands on the gods in order to buy or receive any necessary benefits as a result of the physical exchange. In this case, the need for internal transformation and work on oneself is rejected. It can be assumed that the rite and the ceremony at the temple are only the visible part, the final logical conclusion. This may be an evidence of the completion of any action, the decision to follow a new path, the acquisition of a new intention or the accomplishment of an old one, the completion of an internal transformation. Thus, the sacrifice is not only purely mechanical and unconscious action after book reading, action as per instructions, as soulless robots, reproducing exactly the information received, and blind copying. We must not forget that all rites, sacrifices, and ceremonies for them were preceded by inner work, concentration of energy and thoughts. The ceremonial action is obtained as a part of the whole, an obvious part of it, and, as a result, creates new thoughts, ideas, a new level, and readiness for new achievements. It may be appropriate to compare with childbearing. If the preparation for the explicit ceremony was not carried out in full, carelessly, not properly, then the ceremonial action will look like a premature or stillborn child, no matter how rich and colorful it may be. Sacrifice does not consist in the willingness to die physically or to break down with something in the name of a great goal or great ideals, for the good of the native land, for the sake of the prosperity of the people or society. There is the definition "patriotism" for such things. Victim and sacrifice is the willingness to move to a new level, the desire for development, to sacrifice usual and ordinary, to commit an act, an action that were imposed with a taboo by the collective intelligence. Performing such a rite, a person sacrifices his former way of life, way of thinking, carries out the alchemical process, and catalyzes qualitative changes and transformation in itself, its psyche and consciousness, approaching the creation of its own philosophical stone and the attainment of the Grail.

Sacrifice to the gods is not just strict observation and performance of the ceremony and mechanical repetition of the actions, putting on the prescribed pattern of clothing or bringing the rites strictly prescribed by the instructions. These are external obvious manifestations of internal processes. Certainly, for the majority they are important and necessary. However, only the one explicit, manifest, is not enough to fully interact with energy-information fields, egregors and connect to them. It is also necessary to pass the way of preparation for the rite, to prepare internally, to make an internal adjustment, to prepare yourself not just for renounce of something old that a person considers no longer necessary, not just to abandon the mundane and go to the monastery. The completion of the process of internal preparation and transformation is expressed in the readiness to accept events, their causal relationships, the laws and regularities of the world order, the circulation of energy flows without trying to change them or crush them, not trying to manipulate them, but to interact. Through accepting them and becoming aware of working with your own assemblage point and picture of world perception. Perhaps this is the true and faithful concept of victim and sacrifice. It is necessary to strive for a combination in the definitions «victim» and «sacrifice» of the spiritual and material components of the rite.

**Cheslav Vyatich**

## RECONSTRUCTION AND REGENERATION

What way for person is better to choose in the modern world: the way of reconstruction or the way of regeneration?

The reconstruction by itself is copying, repeating and reproduction of the once used by a person articles, clothes, customs, habits, events; copying like on the tracer paper things, which other people do long ago, their lifestyle. In view of the fact, that process of reconstruction does not provide the opportunity of adaptation of the old times to the modern world, it excludes using of the modern technologies and experience. The deeper people are absorbed in the process of reconstruction, the more they become the slaves of subjects and authenticity. For a person such things get more important as to have a well-made coat, to be able to dance mazurka and the other elements of the blind copying. The person forgets that not only these trumpery and sham are important. It is equally important to be imbued with the spirit of that time, to understand and feel its essence. It is possible to be a preacher of “white guardsman”, European, other national traditions and customs without the “Kornilov’s” coat in the wardrobe, Celtic or Scythian dress or embroidered shirt with the national pattern «yarga». Getting involved in the process of the reconstruction is necessary to remember that a person’s immersion in another era is not necessary in order to run away from reality and hide from it for some time in the space created by its imagination. Getting into the depths of past centuries, people, above all, need to extract the experience of previous generations and the possibility of its use in modern conditions by transferring the experience of the past to the modern world through its living in modernity. Thus, it takes shape through action and is reborn as a phoenix from the ashes, and does not become just a description of an era from another book, just like words, that acquire magical power and an image only when each word is experienced and meaningful, and live like an independent image. Revival rejects primacy of

material fetishes. The symbols of the spirit and willpower are of overwhelming importance, and each era can have its own and change. It is important what moves the era and sets in motion a series of events in the world. It is necessary to learn to interact with the spirit of the age and not with the wrapper, although lovers of authenticity can throw snot and rubbers for such a statement.

Blind copying of manners and customs does not full the vessel completely. You can copy exactly Kornilov or Vrangel remaining inside Bolshevik or internationalist. The break between inside and outside is remarkable by a big amount of reconstructors. And that's not surprising, because most people in this world are ready to shudder from breaking things, but not from oppression and enslavement of spirit and will. Every so called "re-" word throws people back or opposes human masses. It forces them to walk in a vicious circle, preventing them from breaking its boundaries and breaking free from its limits.

Reconstruction without regeneration and rebirth of spirit and will is just a wrapper, albeit bright and tempting, but without content, heartless.

**Cheslav Vyatich**

## MODERN PAGAN RATING OF RUSSIAN HISTORICAL FIGURES (FROM FIELD STUDIES)

For the third year in a row, representatives of the research laboratory New Religious Movements in Modern Russia and the Countries of Europe, Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University named after Kozma Minin, conduct a questionnaire survey among representatives of Russian pagan communities and unions gathering for the Kupala holiday near the village of Ignatievskoye, Maloyaroslavetsky district, Kaluga region. According to the organizers of the holiday — the community of communities "Veles Circle" — about 1,400 people took part in the event of 2015 (June 19–21).

The 2015 questionnaire consisted of five question blocks containing both open and closed questions. This article discusses the features of the data block number 1, aimed at disclosing the "social portrait" of ordinary pagan proselytes and sympathizing with the movement, and the open question of block number 5 (5.3), dedicated to determining the primary historical figure of Russia, according to participants Kupala. In the 2015 survey, 429 respondents took part. 38 people completely abandoned the questionnaire: 24 men and 14 women.

The first block of the 2015 questionnaire consisted of eight questions, the purpose of which was to disclose the personal data of the respondents. This block is conditionally designated by us as "Factual".

In the first question, respondents were asked to indicate their gender, only 1 respondent (2% of respondents) refused to answer the question asked. The data obtained showed that the male component prevails quantitatively over the female. Of the 429 respondents, 257 were males, which accounted for 60%, by 40% of women,



respectively (171 respondents)<sup>20</sup>. This proportion is confirmed in the national historiography. Modern Russian paganism is traditionally associated with the “male movement” [Ginder 2004: 98–99].

The second questionnaire questionnaire was aimed at identifying age groups characteristic of the environment of domestic polytheists. As it turned out during the survey, two people under the age of 14 attended the Kupala holiday (0.2% of respondents). In addition, 3% of young boys did not reach the age of majority (13 people). The age group of 15–29 years old made up 42.9% of respondents (184 people), which is much higher than an average picture of the country<sup>21</sup>. The age group of 30–49-year-olds in the pagan wing is represented by one hundred and ninety-seven participants in the celebration, which amounted to 45.9% of the total number of respondents<sup>22</sup>.

About 5% of people (25 respondents) gathered at the pagan festival who overstepped the fifty-year barrier. This figure is almost five times lower than the All-Russian, where the age group of fifty is 34.5% (49,622 thousand).

Thus, the upper age limit of pagans and sympathizers who took part in the survey was 11 years, the lower — 67 years. The average age of the group was 28.7 years<sup>23</sup>. However, the rejuvenation

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<sup>20</sup> This gender ratio is not typical for the territory of the Russian Federation, where in 2014 the proportion of the female population exceeds the male one by 8%: 54% of women (77.1 million people) account for 46% of men (66.6 million people) [Demography ]. However, the designated «sexual» proportion of 60/40 was preserved compared to 2014, where the sex ratio was as follows: 138 males (59% of 234 respondents), female - 93 people (39.7% of 234 respondents) [Shizhensky., Shlyakhov 2015: 211].

<sup>21</sup> According to Rosstat data for 2014, the number of citizens of this age category is 20.5% (29,449 people) [Demography].

<sup>22</sup> The interest earned is higher than in the country, which in 2014 was close to 29% (41213 people) [Demography].

<sup>23</sup> The data obtained only partly coincide with the age characteristics of pagans, established by representatives from the research community. So, A. Gaidukov notes that the most popular «Paternal» age of 17–35 years [Haidukov]. S. V. Ryazanova and A. I. Tsoleva talk about increasing the proportion of young people under the age of 35 in the neo-pagan movement [Ryazanova, Tsoleva 2015: 104]. It should be noted that the age of the respondents in 2015 is almost two years lower than the age

of the Kupala pagan movement was not due to a cumulative increase in the proportion of young people (from 14 to 30 years), which decreased from 53.4% in 2014 to 47.3% (203 respondents) in 2015, but due to the redistribution of age groups inside the "youth" category. Thus, the number of young speakers aged 14 to 21 increased by 1.4% (from 7.7% in 2014 to 9.1% in 2015). The share of pagans, whose age is between 22–30 years old, on the contrary, decreased by 7.95%: for example, 46.15% of pagans of the designated 2014 age category accounted for 38.2% of Kupala 2015.

The age of 31–50 years old was 42.9% (184 people) against 40% in 2014 [Shizhensky, Shlyakhov 2015: 211]. The most popular pagan age is 31 years: it was indicated by 30 respondents, which accounted for 7% of the respondents from the general population. It should be noted that the most popular age of Kupala-2014 was 28 years old (almost 10% of respondents).

The third question of the questionnaire was aimed at determining the level of education among the representatives of the new pagan religiosity. The column "higher education" has become the most widespread. It was selected by 63.9% (274 respondents). Secondary specialized education - 98 pagans (22.8%). Secondary general education received 27 respondents (6.3%). The main common in 11 respondents (2.6%). It is noteworthy that 8 adepts (1.9%) have a scientific degree. This question caused difficulty for 11 respondents (2.6% of respondents)<sup>24</sup>. Thus, despite a certain chronological interval (the gap in terms of 5 years), the level of education of modern heathens of Kupala in 2015 is almost three times higher than the national indicators.

In the fourth question of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to choose the type of professional affiliation according to the classification of E. A. Klimov [Klimov 1996]. The majority of respondents (143 people, which made up 33.3%) indicated the type

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of the similar group of the Kupala holiday of 2014 [Shizhensky, Shlyakhov 2015: 211].

<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting that, according to the data of the all-Russian population census of 2010, only 27.5% of Russians have a higher education, an average full 21.5%, a secondary specialized 6.7%, a post-graduate education only in 0.7% of respondents [All-Russian Population Census 2010].

“person - person”. The next “polarity” option was “man-nature”, 23.1% of respondents (99 respondents) preferred to point it out. In the third place in this typology is the module "man - equipment", it was indicated by 21.4% of pagans (92 respondents). 17.7% of respondents (76 adepts) associate themselves with the type of “person - artistic image”. At the last position in the list, with 3.3% of the votes, is the module “person - sign system”, it was preferred by 14 respondents. Difficult to question this questionnaire caused only five respondents, which accounted for 1.2% of the total population.

Thus, based on the above, it can be said that among the native pagans, the prevailing types of activity is the extravertive, anthrop-oriented professional model “person-to-person”. The direct subject of labor is the individual<sup>25</sup>. The “man-nature” type is also in demand among the representatives of non-Auramii religiosity, which largely explains the specific nature-centeredness of the movement. The minimum percentage of the “person is a sign system” module is caused, in our opinion, by a certain type of perception of reality among representatives of the new religiosity, whose world-wide potential is directed more towards an empirically creative, rather than a rational-transforming vector.

In the fifth questionnaire, representatives of the Kupala holiday were asked to indicate their occupation. This question caused difficulty for three respondents (0.7% of respondents). The professional activities of the other respondents were distributed as follows: 29 pagans (6.8%) called themselves top managers (directors, etc.). The middle managers are 59 respondents (13.8%), slightly less among the adherents of the movement of representatives from the business environment: 56 people (13.1%). Employees became the most numerous professional group - 17.9% of all respondents (77 respondents). Also the working contingent is widely represented - in the amount of 67 people (15.6%). Students are 28 people (6.5%), 5 are pensioners (1.2%) and 12 unemployed (2.8%). Twenty-six respondents (6.1%) indicated housekeeping as their main activity. 67

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<sup>25</sup> It is noteworthy that the movement's researchers are inclined to give a palm to the professional orientation of domestic nativeists or «techies», or single out the contribution of the humanities only at the initial stage of the birth of the diaspora [Ginder 2004: 99].

people (15.6%) chose another option as their professional activity. This category includes the following answers: teacher (11 people, 2.56%), craftsman (7 people, 1.6%), schoolboy (5 people), programmer, musician (4 answers each), researcher, artist (3 answers each), military, engineer, freelancer, psychologist, photographer, florist (2 answers each). Among the single answers were: media worker (questionnaire No. 7), magician (questionnaire No. 169), healer (questionnaire No. 170), warrior (questionnaire No. 173), doctor (questionnaire No. 122), beekeeper (questionnaire No. 341), museum employee (application form No. 75), tattoo artist (application form No. 284), biotechnologist (application form No. 275), worker on the call (application form No. 383), artist (application form No. 371), director (application form No. 299).

The sixth question of the questionnaire aimed to determine the place of residence of the respondents. Among representatives of alternative religiosity, 250 people (58.3%) live in cities of federal significance, 85 people (19.8%) are residents of regional centers. Sixty-one respondents live in the district center (14.2%). Eighteen pagans indicated a settlement of urban type as their place of residence (4.2%), thirteen - rural areas (3%). Only two respondents declined to answer this questionnaire, which amounted to 0.5% of all respondents. Thus, one can observe a significant prevalence of the share of the urban population at a pagan holiday: 96.5% of the polled respondents are urban residents<sup>26</sup>. The data obtained during the answers to the question fully corresponds to the characteristics of the modern Russian pagan movement, the emergence and spread of which representatives of Russian religious studies find in the activities exclusively of representatives of the urban environment [Kopysov 2000: 36; Shnirelman 2001: 13; Cherva 2004: 434–442; Zdorovets, Mukhin 2005: 229].

In question 7, respondents were asked to characterize their religious views in one word. This question put in difficulty 11.2% of pagans (accordingly, 48 respondents did not give an answer to it).

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<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note that, according to Rosstat, the share of the urban population in Russia as of mid-2014 was 74%, against 26% of the rural [Demography]. Thus, we can say that the component the urban population among the representatives of the new pagan religiosity is much higher than the national average.

The most popular among the representatives of this diaspora was the version of the self-name “rodnoverie” (native faith): 111 respondents lost the call for it, which was 25.9%. In the second place in terms of popularity is the name “pagan” - this is how 110 respondents answered (25.6%)<sup>27</sup>. Thirty-two out of 429 respondents identify their world view with an atheistic one (7.5% of respondents). One hundred and twenty-eight respondents (29.8%) offered other answers, among which the following are particularly interesting, in our opinion: the Orthodox (16 people 3.7%)<sup>28</sup>, the agnostic (11 people 2.56%), the Christian (8 people 1.86%), traditionalist (5 people 1.16%), Vedism, shamanism, cosmism (3 answers each), natural faith, realist, pantheist, Buddhist, animist, cosmopolitan, Slav, I believe in God (2 answers each)). The number of single answers included: anarchist (questionnaire number 427), Russian warlock (questionnaire number 208), pastafarianan (questionnaire number 205)<sup>29</sup>, materialist (questionnaire number 17), odinist (questionnaire number 266), student (questionnaire No. 284), New Age follower (questionnaire No. 97), Shaivist (questionnaire No. 82), Gnostic (questionnaire No. 78), haognostik (questionnaire No. 262), witch (questionnaire No. 282).

The question related to the terminology of the modern variation of Russian paganism is currently very far from being resolved both among the media and in the scientific circles studying

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<sup>27</sup> Two people consider themselves to be pagan Rodnovers (questionnaires No. 39, 398). It is worth noting that, compared with a similar question from the 2014 questionnaire, the share of those who associate themselves with «Rodnoverie» decreased from 30% to 25.9%, the number of self-proclaimed pagans also decreased from 34% to 25.6%. But at the same time, the number of respondents who choose «atheism» as a characteristic of their ideological orientations increased by 1.5% (from 6% in 2014 to 7.5% in 2015). The number of neo-pagans who offer other answers also increased (18.8% of those surveyed in 2014 accounted for almost 29.8% of Kupala 2015).

<sup>28</sup> The difficulty in determining the percentage of Orthodox Christians participating in this festival lies in the use of terms that is common among followers of alternative religiosity. Given this feature, the definition of «Orthodox» can act in the sense of - «Praise praising», etc.

<sup>29</sup> Pastafarianism is the church of the flying pasta monster.

this worldview [Beskov 2014: 12–14; Smulsky 2014; Mikheev 2010; Shizhensky 2010]. However, recently the definition of “rodnoverie” defended by a part of the pagan diaspora is also included in the scientific revolution, creating competition to the term “neo-paganism” rejected by part of the pagan community [The circle of the Pagan Tradition; Russian spirit 2007: 2; Zobnina etc.]. The concept of “Rodnoverie” and self-name derived from it - “Rodnovers” has a very ambiguous history of origin. According to the point of view of G. S. Lozko (Volkhvinya Zoreslava), the head of the ORU, the definition “rodnoverie” is only an abstraction, a scientific form of the term “native faith”.

For the first time, the concept of «Ridna Vira» was used by V. Shayan, the founder of modern Ukrainian paganism at the beginning of the last century, in his religious searches. Almost at the same time, the “native faith” - “Rodzima Vyar” - through the efforts of J. Stachniuk is also included in Polish "Pagan Lexicon" [LPA 1: Oct. 2010]. It should be noted that on the pages of Internet forums there is a version of the Polish origin of this term - “Rodzima Vyara” (Rodzima Wiara), the appearance of which is associated with the XIX century [Slavic Rodnoverie]. In addition, one of the participants in the discussion believes that the Russian version of the concept - “rodnoverie” - appeared in Russia as a result of the mediation of Ukrainian pagans. Polish “Rodzima Wiara” - Ukrainian “Ridna Vira” - Russian “Rodnoverie” [Slavic Rodnoverie].

A different version of the origin of the term suggests Magus Ryazan pagan community “Troesvet” Bogumil (B. A. Hasanov). He believes that the birth of Rodnoverie was laid in 1997 during the creation of the Union of Slavic Communities. Due to the active position of Bogumil, one more part was added to the name - the Slavic Native Faith. As the spiritual head of Troyesveta notes, this step was taken to concretize the ethnic and religious component of the future union. However, B. A. Hasanov admits that when creating the term he was guided by the Polish tradition. The transformation of the “native faith” into the definition of “rodnoverie,” according to Bohumil, occurred at the turn of the millennium. Veleoslav (IG Cherkasov), the sorcerer of the community "Rodolyubiye", introduced the term into the modern Russian pagan environment [LPA 2: aug. 2011].

Thus, when considering the terminology of this worldview phenomenon of the XX – XXI centuries, it is worth paying attention to the fact that the term “rodnoverie”, used as a self-name and often acting as a counter-dictator in relation to other definitions (in particular, to “neo-paganism”), has undergone a certain semantic transformation, acquiring the features of an exoethnonym of new religiosity. A reduction in the share of respondents using this definition as a self-name may indicate its exclusion from narrow pagan circles to the scientific level<sup>30</sup>.

A possible explanation for a significant percentage of respondents who chose the option “atheism” as the answer may be a violation of cause-effect relationships (“non sequitur”). That is: a non-theistic position can be interpreted atheistically. One of the forms of pantheism is the dissolution of the divine in the naturalistic, rather close in its denial of a personified deity of a higher order to idealistic atheism. In addition, this assumption can largely explain the sharp increase (by 11%) in the number of proselytes of the movement, who offer other answers when characterizing their worldview. This can also explain why this question became the most “difficult” question of the first block of the questionnaire: 48 respondents did not answer it (11.2% of all respondents against 5% of the last year’s sample).

The last question of the first block set as its goal the determination of the communal status of those present at the Kupala celebration. This question caused difficulties for 47 respondents (11% of the total population). The predominant number of pagans - 321 people (74.5%), are not members of the community structure. Accordingly, only 61 respondents (14.2%) are members of a pagan organization. At the same time, 52 respondents indicated the name of their community structure, 9 people chose not to disclose this information. Turning to the analysis of the structures presented, it is necessary to single out two forms of organization of pagan communities: communal and union. According to the materials of the

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<sup>30</sup> The «legality» of the definition of «rodnoverierodnoverie» has been recognized in a number of research works [Aitamurto 2011; Sheremetyeva 2014; Gaidukov 2012; Kavykin 2007; Elbakyan 2014]. It is noteworthy that in the last two editions the definitions of «rodnoverie» and «neo-paganism» appear as synonyms.

questionnaires, representatives of the three unions were present at Kupala 2015: the Community of Veles Circle communities, the Union of Slavic Communities of the Slavonic Native Faith, the Circle of the Pagan Tradition. The first organization in their questionnaires was allocated 18 respondents (4.2%). At that, both the full name of the community “Veles Circle” and the abbreviation of the organization - “VC” were noted. With the second union, in terms of counting membership, the research group had problems with respondents' abbreviations of the name of the organization. The adopted abbreviation - “USC SNF” did not appear in the questionnaires, but the following combinations were encountered: “USC” - 2 respondents, “OOU SC” - 2, “USC NF” - 1. If the listed names are attributed to the desired union, then the total number of community members of "USC SNF", who participated in the survey will be 5 people (1.16%). It should be noted that in the questionnaires met the names of specific communities belonging to unions. So, the noted communities: “Rodolad”, Astrakhan, “Troesvet”, Ryazan, “Svarozhichi”, p. Yaiva (Perm Territory) (3 answers), “Rodolyubie”, Moscow, “Round Dance”, Kostroma, are Veles Circle. Accordingly, the total number of community members of this community, according to personal data, was 25 people (5.8%). The names of the groups included in the SSO SRV, in the collected material was absent. The “Circle of Pagan Traditions” on Kupala near Maloyaroslavets was represented by the communities “Vesiesie”, Moscow (6 people) and “Vyatichi”, Dolgoprudny (1 person) - only 7 respondents (1.6%). In addition, among the single answers there were the following: the military-historical club “Knyazhiy svyag” - Kolomna -?<sup>31</sup>; Historical and Ethnographic Club "White Stone" - Moscow; Yarga community - Nizhny Novgorod; "Svarga" - Moscow; Yarga - Moscow -? "Rodnover" - ?; "Yara Svarga" -?, "Vezha" -? "Makosha" -? Association "House of Ash" - Moscow. Among the "non-traditional" answers: "Certain isoteric group" (questionnaire # 218), "UFO worship society" (questionnaire No. 291), "Chingachguk" (questionnaire No. 397).

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<sup>31</sup> The question mark here and hereafter noted the organization, reliable information about which was not the author at the time of this writing.



Certainly, the peculiarity of the composition of the participants of the holiday from the communal-union environment is a very modest share of the latter in the total number of arrivals to Kupala<sup>32</sup>. The reasons for the observed individualization have yet to be understood both by the researchers of the phenomenon and by the followers of paganism of the 20th – 21st centuries<sup>33</sup>. However, based on the above, we can talk about a certain erosion of religious and ideological orientations among the representatives of modern pagan religiosity. The observed terminological bricolage characterizing the religious views of the respondents, in our opinion, is directly related to the weak institutionalization of Slavic paganism, which again testifies to the diversity and heterogeneity of this phenomenon both in form (in the form of a developed community structure) and in content (in the form of the absence of the majority of adepts, both dogmatic and ritual components of dogma).

According to the program of applied sociological research on discourses of the Russian pagan diaspora of the Russian Federation, the research questionnaire included an open-ended question on the definition of historical personalities that played the greatest role in national history. In accordance with hypothesis No. 2 put forward at the time of the field survey, within the framework of the designated problem field, most of the respondents' answers should correspond to the following constant: “Prince Svyatoslav Igorevich played the greatest role in the history of Russia”.

Accordingly, this question: “Which historical figures, in your opinion, played the greatest role in the Russian history?” Received 947 answers. The question caused difficulty among 68 respondents (15.9% of 429). In addition, 16 people (3.7% of 429) gave very non-specific answers, among which are the following: “all (many)” -5

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<sup>32</sup> Very indicative is the insignificant percentage of «community members» from the organizers of the Kupala holiday – Veles Circle.

<sup>33</sup> For example, one of the ideologues of modern Russian paganism N. N. Speransky (Magus Velimir) believes that the reasons for the unwillingness of potential community members to unite into organizational forms lie in fears of the priestly-Volkhov dictatorship, encroaching on spiritual freedom, and in possible intracommunal monetary requisitions, already affecting the material wealth of the heathen [Velimir].

people (1.2% of 947); "It is difficult to say, because the history of Russia is distorted" - 1 respondent; "Officers of the Russian Empire" - 1 person; "All the people" - 1 person. Negatively answered the question as one of the respondents.

The data, in accordance with the specifics of the issue, is divided into the following subgroups: "rulers (princes, kings, emperors, etc.)", "commanders", "representatives from science", "political figures", "mythological characters", "clergy".

The most massive in terms of answers was the subgroup "rulers". Princes, kings, etc. were noted 738 times (78% of 947 - the total number of answers to the question). Accordingly, in this first subgroup, according to the obtained personal data, the princes of Kievan Rus are most popular. The names of the latter were recorded 198 times (27% of 738 or 21% of 947 (total)). The leader of the group became Prince Svyatoslav Igorevich (marked 119 times - 60% from 198, 46% from 429). The appearance of Vladimir Svyatoslavich, the Baptist of Russia<sup>34</sup> in the second place, was quite unexpected, taking into account the respondent's field. This Kiev ruler was listed 51 times (26% of 198, 12% of 429). The third place of the subgroup was shared by Princess Olga and Yaroslav Vladimirovich (the Wise), scored on 10 "votes." The "Kiev bloc" is closed by the princes Igor and Vladimir Vsevolodovich (Monomakh) - 4 mentions in the questionnaires.

In the second subgroup "kings and emperors" (194 references, 20.5% from 947), the most popular ruler is Petr Alekseevich (Peter I) (122 people - 63% from 194 references, 28.4% from 429). In the second place, the participants of Kupala put the Empress Ekaterina Alekseevna (Catherine II) (35 votes - 18% from 194, 8.1% from 429). Following are: Nikolay Aleksandrovich (Nikolai II) - 13 references (6.7% from 194 references 3% from 429), Alexander Nikolaevich (Alexander II) - 11 people - (5.7% from 194 mentions

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<sup>34</sup> According to the narratives of the majority of leaders from the camp of alternative religiosity, Vladimir Svyatoslavovich is one of the main antiheroes of modern paganism. First of all, for the second religious reform - the baptism of Russia, and the Semitic, according to a number of enlighteners from paganism XX-XXI centuries. Origin. Speaking thus as the antipode of his father, Svyatoslav [Shizhensky].

2.6% from 429), Alexander Pavlovich (Alexander I) - 6 references (3.1% of 194 references 1.4% of 429), etc.

The third largest subgroup included the names of the USSR leadership (161 references, 17% from 947). The leader in the list was I. V. Dzhugashvili (Stalin)<sup>35</sup>. This country's leader was noted 100 times (62% of 161, 23.3% of 429). The second and third places respectively were taken by V.I. Ulyanov (Lenin) - 49 mentions (30.4% from 161, 11.4% from 429) and M. S. Gorbachev - 11 mentions (6.8% from 161, 2, 5% from 429). One vote was given for L. I. Brezhnev.

Among the rulers of Moscow Rus (97 responses, 10.2% of 947), the largest number of times was noted by Ivan Vasilyevich (Grozny) - 81 references (83% of 97 answers, 18.9% of 429).

Then follow: Dmitry Ivanovich (Donskoy) - 9 people (9.3% of 97 answers, 2.1% of 429), Ivan (Kalita) - 4 answers, Ivan III - 3 answers.

The leadership of the most recent country has chosen 44 pagans (4.6% from 947). Thirty-eight times in the questionnaires appear the name of the current president V. V. Putin (86.3% from 44, 8.8% from 429), six - the first president of Russia B. N. Yeltsin (13.6% from 44, 1, 4% of 429).

The smallest number of times in the questionnaires were noted by the founders of the old Russian state - 23 mentions (5.4% from 429. Oleg - 18, Rurik - 5) and princes of the feudal fragmentation era - 21 answers (4.9% from 429. Alexander Yaroslavich (Nevsky) - 19, Andrey Yuryevich (Bogolyubsky) - 1, Vsevolod Yuryevich (Large Nest) - 1).

Thus, according to the data obtained, the following personalities enjoy the greatest popularity among the neophytes of modern paganism, the proselytes of this outlook and the mass of sympathizers who gathered in Kupala near Maloyaroslavets in the category "rulers": Peter Alekseevich (Peter I) - marked 122 times; Svyatoslav Igorevich - marked 119 times, I. V. Dzhugashvili (Stalin) - marked 100 times, Ivan Vasilyevich (the Great) - marked 81 times.

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<sup>35</sup> E. L. Moroz [Frost 2001: 42–43, 48] wrote about the positive attitude of some groups of pagans, in particular, the «Union of Wends», to the figure of the «leader of nations».

The second category of answers to the open-ended question included lists of the names of commanders, people who, to one degree or another, were "famous for their weapons." Representatives of military affairs were selected 53 times (5.6% of 947 - the total number of answers to a question), which is significantly inferior to the number of those who "voted" for the rulers of the state. Of the submitted answers, the most common is the surname of Generalissimo A.V. Suvorov - 16 (30.1% of 53, 3.7%, of 429 - the total number of answers to a question) are named. Marshal of the Soviet Union G. K. Zhukov was noted in 7 questionnaires (13.2% of 53, 1.6% of 429 - the total number of answers to the question). The third place was given to the organizers of the second national militia — Kuzma (Kozma) Minin and Dmitry Pozharsky (6.3 mentions each, 11.3% of 53%, 1.4% of 429 - the total number of answers to the question). Then follow: Stepan Timofeevich Razin - 3 mentions, Nestor Ivanovich Makhno, Ermak Timofeevich, Fedor Fedorovich Ushakov - 2 mentions each, Tamerlan, Emelian Ivanovich Pugachev, Mikhail Illarionovich Kutuzov, Alexey Petrovich Yermolov, Pavel Stepanovich Nakhimov, Ichchoffs, Ichimoff, and I, I, I'm martyrs. , Peter Nikolayevich Krasnov, Kuznetsov Nikolai Gerasimovich - by 1 mention. Literary and scientific figures were marked 36 times (3.8%, from 947 - the total number of answers to a question). Three leaders were: M. V. Lomonosov (marked 11 times 30.5% of 36, 2.5% of 429 - the total number of answers to a question), A.S. Pushkin (marked 9 times 25% of 36%, 2 , 1% of 429 - the total number of answers to the question), L. N. Tolstoy marked 3 times 8.3% of 36, 0.7% of 429 - the total number of answers to the question). Other figures who gained one voice each include: V. V. Nabokov, M. A. Bulgakov, B. L. Pasternak, I. P. Pavlov, and others.

Even fewer respondents opted for representatives of the political sphere. Only 32 answers (3.4% of 947 - the total number of answers) to the question: "Which historical figures, in your opinion, played the greatest role in the history of Russia?" Contained data on political leaders. It should be emphasized that the names of only two politicians formed the basis of this group of answers. Thus, the surname of Peter Arkadyevich Stolypin appeared in the questionnaire 14 times (43.8% from 32, 3.3% from 429), Adolf Hitler - 8 times (25% of 32, 1.9% of 429). Regarding the last answer, it is

noteworthy that the interviewees, in an attempt to explain such an odious answer, emphasized that we are talking about the desire to live precisely under "our own Russian Hitler." Among other political figures, for which one vote was given, were: Alexander Danilovich Menshikov, Alexey Petrovich Bestuzhev-Ryumin, Sergey Yulyevich Vitte, Lavrenty Pavlovich Beria, and others.

The group of mythological characters (a total of 12 people answered 1.27% of 947) is mainly represented by the semi-legendary Ryazan hero Evpatiy Kolovrat (7 respondents 58% of 12 people 2.8% of 429). In addition, Ilya Muromets, Bus Beloyar, Taras Bulba, Velez and Khvitserk scored one answer at a time.

The final list by its very existence emphasizes the presence on Kupala, under Maloyaroslavets, of representatives not only of the Russian pagan diaspora, but also of a certain percentage of dissenters. This circumstance confirms the thesis of the organizers about the gradual transformation of the initially religious event into a festival. So, the group "clergy" got five personalities, of which the leader in the number of mentions in the questionnaires was Sergius of Radonezh - five answers out of 8 (1.9% from 429). Further, one vote was given for Seraphim of Sarov, Nikon, Dalai Lama<sup>36</sup>.

Returning to the open-ended hypothesis, we find that the historical figure who played the greatest role in the history of Russia is not the intended prince of the questionnaire, the Kiev Prince Svyatoslav Igorevich, but the Russian Emperor Peter I<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> The appearance of Orthodox saints in the answers finds parallels in the creative heritage of the pagan authors A. V. Guselnikov, S. N. Udalova. As V. A. Shnirelman notes: «The authors respectfully referred to the Russian Christian holy hermits, Sergius of Radonezh and Seraphim of Sarov, but not calling them Christians, but portraying as inhabitants of deaf thickets, close to the true nature and, obviously, involved in» Russian Vedic heritage «[Schnirelman 2012: 179]. In addition, the figures of both Sergius of Radonezh and Seraphim of Sarov acquire sacred features in the close, according to N. Chanyшева, organization - «Bazhevskoy Academy of Intimate Knowledge» [Chanyшева].

<sup>37</sup> Despite the popularity of Svyatoslav in the modern pagan environment, at present, some leaders of organizations attribute this historical figure to the camp of the opponents of our country. The problems associated with the rule of the prince were described in the «Word of False Greatness» and the Internet was made public in 2014 by the drafters of the appeal, official representatives of the Union of Slavic

It should be noted that when comparing the answers to an open question “Kupala Questionnaire 2015” with the existing research baggage collected in a predominantly desk research environment, we can state the presence of both identical and opposite concepts. To a certain extent, these assumptions of the research community are correlated with personal data. However, there are diametrically opposite conclusions obtained. For example, the archaeologist L. S. Klein, arguing about the ideological paradigms of modern Russian pagans, comes to the conclusion that some of them are striving to create

“National idol and hard hand, and not European, not Peter's” [Klein 2004: 123]. As noted above, at least, the pagans of Kupala, it is in Petra that they see "Hard hand". The conclusions of the scientific community about the most significant historical figures of Russia also fit into this “scheme of partial coincidence”. The most respected character of the considered worldview phenomenon, domestic researchers call the Prince of Kiev Svyatoslav Igorevich [Shnirelman 2012: 175, 177, 216]<sup>38</sup>. However, the leader of the Kupala survey, Peter Alekseevich, the interested research team does not single out as a young-language “historical banner”<sup>39</sup>.

Of course, the final conclusions explaining the priorities of the pagan historical choice are premature today. At the same time, I would like to draw attention to one of the possible reasons for the “concentration” of respondents on strong rulers who have drastically changed the internal and external political field. In our opinion, this choice is determined by the very specifics of both the rank and file and the leadership of the modern Slavic pagan diaspora of the Russian Federation, aimed at fundamental changes and transformations of the existing Russian, wider - European world order. The most successful term characterizing the state of theoretical

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Communities of the Slavic Native Faith and the Circle of the Pagan Tradition. In 2015, the evidence base of the fallacy of the Russian cult of Svyatoslav from the network forums migrated to the pages of the Rodnoverie magazine [Gavrilov, Kazakov 2015].

<sup>38</sup> Ukrainian researchers take a similar position [Lozko 2007: 13–14].

<sup>39</sup> For example, O. I. Kavykin in his monograph limited himself to quoting the pagans themselves about the rulers of the Russian state, including Peter the Great and another leader of the poll, Ivan the Terrible [Kavykin 2007: 129].

and practical searches of Russian youthpagans is “excessiveness” (from English. Excess). At present, the operationalization of this concept, as applied to new religious movements, is being developed by the theologian L. I. Grigorieva, and we are confident that it is the pagan environment, with the drive that is characteristic of its members, will be the ideal research field for testing the representativeness of the approved indicator system.

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ASIAN  
PEOPLES





# THE KALASH PEOPLE AND THEIR IDENTITY

*This text was written as the answer for special request from Kalashs pagan dissidents to European pagan traditionalists. Their story is very exemplarily for European pagans and folks, so we decided to add it here too.*

Kalash are an autochthonous people of the Chitral valley, Pakistan.

Kalash are people on the verge of extermination. The radical Islamists (Taliban, Pashtuns, etc.) and the government of Pakistan are exterminating the Kalash people. Because kalash from time immemorial preserve their pagan tradition, their culture, language and identity. Kalash are exterminated because they do not want to accept Islam. The one who accepted Islam can no longer maintain the way of life accepted by the people and falls out of it.

To date, representatives of Kalash remained ~4,200 people.

## **We and You**

Despite the fact that there is a huge geographical distance and strong cultural differences between Europe and the Chitral valley in Pakistan, one can see something in common and similar in the situation in which the peoples of Europe and the people of Kalash have appeared.

Almost two thousand years ago a new Eastern religion came to Europe - Christianity, the elder brother of Islam. It's behaved aggressively, planting faith in their God with fire and sword, slaying those who remained faithful to their native Gods and customs (infidels, "kafirs"). Christianity was and remains a religion of exclusivity; the gentiles were blind people: sinners, blind men, and

pagans. While Christianity established its power in Europe, the younger offspring of Abrahamism - Islam - seized the East and Asia, coming to the lands of Afghanistan, India and modern Pakistan. What the local peoples of Dardas, Nuristanis and Kalash encountered is comparable to our past.

And today Europe is experiencing a real Islamic occupation, the invasion of another one Abrahamic religion of hatred for original traditions and peoples. But what Europe has faced today, for Kalash has long been an everyday reality. The modern tragic situation of this people is a bright and vivid image of what Europe and European traditions are waiting for in the near future.

Here in Europe, we fight for the faith in our native Gods, for our peoples and identity. And in the distant mountains of the HinduKush and Karakorum, the last Kalash survive under the permanent threat of genocide and extinction. What threatens to us is for them the reality of today, and therefore we cannot fully understand the state of the spirit of their people. Similarly, all our stories about the horrors of Islamism and terrorism sound to them differently than for us, because they have experienced and are experiencing far greater upheavals and catastrophes. Europe is big and it still has hidden reserves, but the Chitral is small. But the peoples of these lands do not surrender. And we, the Europeans, want to share some thoughts on how to preserve your own identity and what actions can be taken to achieve this goal. Finally, we will present some reflections on why radical Islamism is hostile to all indigenous peoples and their traditions on the Earth. (Although, for the pagan peoples of Pakistan, such reflections yield to their immediate experience of terror: they do not need to explain anything, they have already experienced everything on themselves.)

We hope that our words will find a response from the people of Kalash and all the others who found themselves in a similar situation in this region and neighboring countries (for example, in the valley of Kashmir, where the brilliant teaching of Shivaism was expelled); among all those whom the Islamists forced to flee to the mountains, bury their relatives and abandon their Gods and customs. We hope that our thoughts will benefit you. Although we are different, but there is one threat over us.

## Polytheism and Islam

Kafiristan or the Land of the Infidels, is one of the earliest and well-known names of the mountainous region of Pakistan, inhabited by many people's with different languages, cultures and religions. The Chitral valley refers to Kafiristan.

In Islam, the infidel (كافر) means a "heterodox" or "infidel" – a person who does not follow the truth of the Koran and professes another religion, most often pagan. In Islam, polytheism is one of the most serious sins. Polytheism in Islam is called shirk (شرك). Shirk is the worship of someone or something equal to Allah and both with him, just as much as God or the glorifying of many Gods, as well as the ancestors, the spiritual owners of the mountains, rivers and ravines.

The pathos of Islam rests on a radical and irreconcilable confrontation between Islamists and all who have not yet accepted Allah as their God. Islam makes a very simple choice: rejection of one's native religion or execution.

Historically, the Kafiristan region was inhabited by peoples with their unique and rich religious culture. Islam began to suppress them and turn to their faith by force, but it was possible with difficulty. The mountainous region is very difficult to access. Hence the common name for these lands appears – the Land of the Infidels. The country, which by default is populated by people, enemies and potential slaves.

The name of the country and the peoples inhabiting it, as well as the pressure of Islamists, lead to the formation of a special identity of "kafirs" – it's a state of the people who are in transit from their culture to Islam. On the one hand, they are still polytheists (infidels, shirk), on the other their culture and language have already experienced by a serious influence of Islam. The Nuristanis called themselves "kafirs" until they gradually converted to Islam, in order to avoid harassment and threats. In this regard, it is instructive to recall the second name of the country of Kafiristan as Nuristan (Nurestān) or the Country of Light, which it received after successful conquest by Muslims. Now Nuristan is a province of Afghanistan, but not all of Kafiristan. It is very significant that infidels can become "light" (bright) only after the conquest by Muslims. The path from the "Land of the Infidels" to the "Land of Light" lies through the rejection of one's religion, customs and culture.



*The map of the Kafiristan*

We want to emphasize this point especially. By adopting Islam (or any Abrahamic religion) it is impossible to save fully one's own identity: culture, language, way of life, customs and, even more so, religion. Islamization = creeping arabization: the sacred text of the Qur'an is written in Arabic and should be studied only on it; key terms of religion came from Arabic and Persian languages; Many of the Shariah and Sunnah regulations come from the life and customs of the Arab people, which means they are not universal; the holy places of Islam (Mecca, Medina, the birthplace of the prophet) are on the Arab peninsula, that is, geographically Islam is inextricably linked with the Arab world.

Any people (or person) that accepts Islam are gradually begins to acquire Arabic features, words, norms of behavior from the Sharia and the verses (ayahs) of the Koran. And their own native and ancient customs are either forgotten, or their perception changes to a different, often worse side. A person who from now on lives according to Sunnah and Sharia cannot perform customs and rituals native to his people, which means that he falls out of the body of the people, from the clan of his family and becomes a stranger to his Gods. The people expel him from himself, or he himself leaves his people, acquiring intolerance towards his past relatives, known now as kafirs.



Thus, Islam is always against people's identities and religions. Inside Islam, only fragments and parts of a common whole can be preserved; Only that which does not contradict the dogmas of this rigid religion.

Abrahamic religions are always a way to loss of themselves.

Nevertheless, we know one kind of the interesting practice: pagan peoples, who are under threat of destruction and terror, begin to mask their tradition under the guise of Islam in order to smooth out the severity of confrontation and differences. They mimic and/or adapt purely externally. Meanwhile, within the people there is a more rigid so-called "quiet opposition", the groups of those who are tough against Islam and with all their might advocate the preservation of their culture, their people, their traditions and their way of life. These are those who stand and fight for their freedom. This is the Resistance. And with them we want to share the following thoughts, arranged in several paragraphs.

## **Saving the Identity**

**Religion.** Religion is the basis of everything, of all customs, taboos, rules and rituals flows from it. Preservation of religion is the preservation of oneself, of identity. Religious practice is extremely important: rites, cleansings, sacrifices, funerals, rituals, prayers. All this must be preserved and passed on to the children. The Gods never die, but the people can forget about their Gods and their altars, stop sacrificing goats, bringing food to them and offering prayers. So the folk lose their holiness, lose their soul and sense of their existence.

**Language.** Language is extremely important. The language or languages of the folk is the matter of their thinking and the preservation of religion and traditions. Language is the connection of a person with his family and folk, this is the language of prayer and the language in which the names of Gods and spirits are pronounced.

**Records of texts.** One of the options for preserving your heritage is the maximum record of everything that is possible.

Yes, the Chitral and Kafiristan regions have been studied by scientists for almost a hundred years and they have compiled many

detailed descriptions of the life, culture and religion of the Nuristanis, Dardas, Kalash, Pshowar and other folks. But they are carriers of a different way of thinking from a different culture, and they describe what they see as observers. Their position is outside point of view, so they lack the important and subtle nuances and inner sacred experiences of Kalash. They come on time, they are not threatened with extermination so they do not see everything and do not understand everything. But you are inside, everything is available to you. Therefore, we are not talking about the records of scientists, but about your own chronicles, sacred texts, stories, and so on. These would be texts saturated with living experience that your descendants would understand better than dry descriptions of scientists.

**Education.** Teaching young people the basics of their culture, language, religion and customs is what is called "soft power" and very well combines with the internal opposition (quiet opposition). Modern European or Islamic education will not bring anything good, it is a path of forgetting one's religion and loss of identity. Do not get dreamily affected by the West in any way.

Moreover, modern standards of education directly contradict the life and year rhythm of Kalash. Due to education, children are excluded from ritual life, religion and the spirit of the people are declining. Therefore, it is very important to develop your own education system, which will be flexible and convenient for young people (in general, the rate on youth and children is the most important), and will also broadcast the culture of kalash and form the folk in the light of traditional values.

**Culture.** Culture in the broadest sense refers generally to everything and speaking about education, religion and language, we actually spoke about it. But also should pay attention to the material culture: crafts, things of life, styles of wood carving, embroidery on clothes and the costumes themselves, the architecture of buildings.

It would be important to describe all the variety of things in everyday life and in the religion of Kalash in their connection with the myths, legends, taboos and holiness that surrounds them. Not as scientists do, but from within and in all whole diversity of them.

It is useful to publish your own newspapers or leaflets in your native language, in which to talk about Gods, rituals, culture and news in the community. They should be understandable and pleasant.

**Dangers of tourism.** The influx of scientists, tourists and their money was the factor that halted the oppression of the Kalash people by the authorities. Kalash became a "reservation" with the help of which the government earn money.

This is a dual position. On the one hand, tourism today is a guarantee of the existence of Kalash and a financial source; there was a tourist status-quo. On the other hand, tourism is a form of degradation of folk culture. Once sacred dances, crafts and actions turn into a show, performances and play before the ignorant public for money. The sacred meaning of ritual actions is lost, only the external form remains, often also distorted. A completely analogous situation occurred with some small indigenous folks in Russia: from their tradition there were only a tourist festivals and theatrical productions, the meaning of which no one already knows or understands. Identity is lost.

But tourism also provides a potential plus for Kalash: Pakistan government make profit on tourism, it brings money. So, in the hands of kalash there is a lever of pressure on the government - the money for tourism. You can gently, softly blackmail the authorities through restrictions on tourism or prices, so they make concessions to Kalash and expand your rights. Once tourism in the Chitral became the factor that stopped the Islamic invasion, which means it's worth something.

In this situation, we cannot give any specifics. We understand the importance of tourism as a factor in the survival of Kalash, but we want to emphasize that it carries many negative aspects. There is no single-valued solution for today.

**Strengthen the self-sufficiency.** This item includes everything that can be done to ensure that the Kalash people depend as little as possible on the Muslim environment and the state of Pakistan. As we know, the lands of Muslims for Kalash are unclean, dirty. Therefore, all economic ties with the "outside world" of Islam should be minimized, as far as possible. Than the more independent Kalashi will be in matters of economics, water, food, and the like, then the less leverage will be for radical Islamists to pressure your people. It is also very important to slowly but surely seek to expand your own lands: valleys, slopes of mountains, rivers and gorges. Territory = pastures, water, plants, trees, food and space for families.

And very important to make a connections with those from kalash who are

It is also very useful to attract the attention of the world community and human rights organizations that can organize humanitarian assistance and draw attention to the violation of rights and crimes against Kalash from the side of Islamists.

**Two more perspectives.** First: Is it possible to move the people of Kalashi to another, more tolerant region? For example, to India (as was once done by residents of the Kashmir valley) or to hard-to-reach mountain regions of neighboring areas? This is a very difficult and radical decision, but in the face of the threat of a final extermination and loss of the sacred light this may be the only one way out.

Second: The people have a "quiet opposition" to Islam and a movement to protect their own identity and the freedom of their people. It is necessary with the help of "soft power" to gradually raise the voice in defense of themselves. Recall that once Chitral was completely the land of Kalash. That once Kalash and other peoples lived perfectly and freely without Islam. It is necessary to establish contacts and links with the opposition to Islam among the neighboring and distant peoples of Kafiristan, creating a united front of Resistance. This will give moral support, communications, information, shelter to refugees and support. We know that once Kalash were warriors and widely celebrated victories. Today is the time when it makes sense to take your neighbor not as an enemy, but as an ally and stand together for the freedom of your people against the hateful religion of Muslims.

This is also a difficult prospect, but it must be studied and considered in the most serious way.

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**And let Balumain spill grace&light over your kins!**

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For European audience we can advice the good book by Karl Jettmar: «The Religions of the Hindukush», 1986.

**Generation Identity Russia**

TRIBUNE





## RECLAIMING THE TRUE EUROPEAN IDENTITY

Europe is a continent that for centuries has given birth to many notable cultures, ethnic traditions and civilizations, the common characteristics of whom were the dignity and self-determination of the human being, the quest for virtue and for the truth, reverence for the sacred, respect towards nature, the lifelong affirmation one's personal worth and the esteem that comes with it, as well as the ideal of freedom.

Unfortunately, this tapestry of diverse yet similar and complementary polytheistic cultures, ethnic traditions and civilizations, ceased to exist when an eastern, strange, expansive and intolerant religion moved in forcefully and demanded the total disappearance of everything that people knew, held as sacred and preserved as social and spiritual values. What followed this unprecedented invasion in Europe, is more or less well known. Absolute cultural and cognitive collapse, barbarity, monotheism, superstition, hatred for everything that existed previously, political autocracy and an insane, all invasive theocracy, moral decline, abasement, genocide and ethnocide, and of course the flames. Flames that sprang and consumed unlucky human beings, masterpieces of art and literature, everything that was directly or indirectly representing the old "pagan" world that the new rulers craved to exterminate.

The worst consequence of all these calamities was the destruction of the self-awareness of the polytheistic "ethne" of Europe and the gradual erasure of their ethnic memory. Numerous generations of unlucky people spent all their lives with no real notion of identity, or who their ancestors were and how they viewed themselves, unaware of the history of the land they occupied. They had even forgotten the term "patris" (patria, fatherland), and for many centuries, the continent witnessed her children living completely alienated from her soul, made to believe that they had

been “civilized” due to the bloody swords of Constantine, Charlemagne and other monotheist slaughterers, and praising the darkness as light. They even went as far as to export their barbarity and intolerance, first in the form of bloodthirsty crusades towards the East, and, later, in the form of bloodthirsty “explorations” to the, according to their own vocabulary, “new worlds”.

Glimpses of the lost light of the pre-Christian times, came back to our beloved Europe only in the last centuries, and only through a long and painful sequence of reinstatements, revivals, revolutions, movements of enlightenment and, of course, through the gradual re-acquirement of the abandoned genuine identities by some intellectual vanguards of the various European “ethne”. Since the 19th century of the chronology of the arrogant religion who dared to bisect the human History itself, most of the people of Europe are aware that they are not a rootless and amorphous human mass under the Cross or the Koran, but the descendants of historically existent and, most of them, glorious and advanced ancient “ethne”.

Some of these Europeans though, including us, have developed a deeper insight on the subject. All who perceive the flow of the time as circular and not linear, know quite well that History has no final destination but it simply follows the trends and tensions created inside her by the historical subjects at every single turn of the wheel of Eternity. And they also do know, quite well, that for someone to win the title of the “historical subject”, they must be able to have their proposals and ideas alive and attractive on the table, each time humanity is called to choose its next course inside the infinite fractal of History.

For us, each single actuality is a link. Every single moment revives the entire past and comprises the dynamics of the entire future. Seeing things in such a way, we, the representatives of the native, ethnic, indigenous, ancient but still alive Traditions and Religions of Europe, work hard to turn the issue of our complementary collective identities from a spiritual privilege of an enlightened vanguard, into a proud awareness and identification of all the Europeans, in front of this admirable mosaic of the genuine cultures, ethnic traditions and civilizations of their ancestors. We reclaim the European identity. We reclaim our true value systems and our true ways. Our purpose is clear, to restore the once defeated



but not extinct, cultures of joy, freedom, polytheism, dignity, piety and uprightness, and, being a Hellene, please let me ad, of reason, humanism, eunomia and polyarchy.

May God Apollo's light always shines on you.

Thank you very much for your attention.

**Vlassis G. Rassias**  
**Speech at the «2014» European Congress**  
**of Ethnic Religions (ECER),**  
**at the Lithuanian Parliament (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas),**  
**in Vilnius, Lithuania on July the 9th «2014»**

## ASKR SVARTE CONVERSATION WITH WODFRÆCA WEREWULF

**W. W.:** Hailaz, you have published several books in your country, Russia, and one of your books, *Gap*, devoted to odinism, was published in English. Could you introduce yourself as well as your work and your spiritual journey?

**A. S.:** Hail. I have been engaged in the revival of pagan traditions for ten years: the development of theology, philosophy, mysticism, publishing books & brochures, translating articles and making interviews, creating websites, videos, graphics, organizing lectures, events, rituals and other projects on this field. I think that among the Western audience I principally known as the author of articles and books on the Left Hand Path in Odinism and the related mysticism and aesthetics. But my views and interests are much broader and deeper than just the LHP or pagan spirituality. I try to follow many processes in the world and society in various fields and interpret everything that happens from pagan positions.

**W. W.:** You are called Svarte Aske, a clear reference to the Germanic and Scandinavian traditions as well as to the creation of man and woman with two tree trunks. Explain to us the reasons for choosing your name, which ultimately subjects you to Odin.

**A. S.:** Almost all of my ancestors ascend to the ethnic Germans from Swabia and Bavaria, who migrated to the Russian Empire under Catherine the Great. My great-grandmothers even spoke little Russian when they were exiled by Stalin to Siberia. And now some of my relatives live in Germany, which I visited in 2016. I view this situation as a long journey of a family name through time and geography. Therefore an appeal to the German-Scandinavian

tradition is, among other things, a link with the distant homeland, its land and sky.

Regarding my name. The name is a very subtle thing, it is not very correct to say that the name is rationally chosen, rather it is found, detected through internal resonance. At one time I did not think that the Icelandic name Askr was akin to the Old Testament Adam (the first created man), with all the pathos inherent in this. Many facets associated with the interpretation of this myth and name in the light of Odin's were revealed to me in personal practice and worship much later. However, when I decided to call myself and sign my works in this way, I performed a couple of relevant rituals in order to not be unsubstantiated neither for myself nor for the Gods. The second part of the name Svarte/Svartr was added a couple of years later when it came to the LHP.

**W. W.:** You are traditionalist and odinist. Nowadays, a large number of people declare themselves odinist, wotanist, asatruer, pagan, etc. What is your own vision of Odinism and how do you differ from other self-proclaiming Odinist or Wotanist movements?

**A. S.:** Words mean a lot. The word "wotanism" is usually associated with German occultism, with Guido von List, and later with the figure of David Lane, who popularized the term in the USA. G. von List and D. Lane are not my idols, I am very critical of the German quasi-pagan occult of the late XIX and first half of the XX centuries. The word Votanism itself sounds very good, but because of its context, I hardly use it.

Another matter with word "Asatru" – it is a very conventional, succinct and good term. But he is too "herbivorous" for those ideas that interest me and which I develop. May the asatruas forgive me, for in any case we are all on the same field of the Northern Tradition, we speak to the same Gods and refers to one culture, only from different points of view. I am not against the term Asatru, if I need to somehow quickly and succinctly describe my basic ideas.

However, the word Odinism expresses my views most closely and precisely. I do not in any way wish to turn the Northern Tradition into monotheism, but the supreme God Odin/Wotan is a truly inexhaustible universe for comprehension and interpretation. I

think, within the German Logos he is the cornerstone figure for everything. Therefore, it causes me the greatest respect and interest. I have devoted hundreds of pages to the analysis of this figure. So when I say “Odinism” I want to emphasize precisely this aspect. I don’t deny the other aesir and vanir, and I recall them on occasion.

**W. W.:** You have created in Russia your own community, named Svarte Aske. What is the purpose of this community? How was your community welcomed in Russia?

**A. S.:** You can find our Community Charter in English on our website:

[http://askrsvarte.org/pub/downloads/svartearske\\_com\\_eng.pdf](http://askrsvarte.org/pub/downloads/svartearske_com_eng.pdf)

And another one document “The Basics of the Odinic Faith” (Russian) on the stand alone site: <http://www.odinism.ru/basics/>

In them we formulated our views in the simplest and most accessible form. In short, the main focus of our attention is on the problem of eschatology, the end of time and how this fact affects paganism and spirituality in our days. What opportunities and ways appear, and which ones leave irrevocably.

Over the past few years we have become a closed community. It means we practically do not conduct open public rites and rituals. But we are actively engaged in all the rest of the work on the promotion and development of paganism in the outside world, we shaping the order of the day and discussions in the pagan environment.

Moreover, the Northern Tradition is one of the parts of our ideology. More broadly, we develop and promote the philosophy of pagan traditionalism and theology, which is useful and interesting for the pagans of any tradition, since it is fundamental and in a manner sense universal.

**W. W.:** I understand that your community is also present in various countries: USA, Serbia, Australia, Spain, United Kingdom and Kazakhstan. Some of these nations still have a strong, intimate connection with their traditions. Some of these nations have a recent history because they have been heavily colonized in recent centuries like the USA. How was the integration of these communities into

their respective nations? And what is the «profile» of members? Native people, descendants of Europeans who migrated centuries ago, who are they?

**A. S.:** Our community present only in Russia. We have many friends and friendly organizations in Europe, the United States and around the world, with whom we have common views on issues and worldview. In order to become a member of the community, it is necessary to fully understand and accept our views and decisions (which is obvious) and as well as to know us personally. Therefore, if someone from Europe or another country wants to join us, then this person will have to come to Siberia personally or arrange a meeting on his side. Nevertheless, we are completely open to cooperation on a partnership and friendly basis with free-minded comrades.

Since we are talking about the Northern Tradition and Slavic-Russian paganism, we welcome representatives of European and Indo-European peoples who remember their roots.

**W. W.:** In Russia, there is a traditional belief called Rodnover, which we could perhaps call Neopagan reconstructionism. Is it an «ethnic nationalism»? Have you been a member of the Rodnovers community?

**A. S.:** Yes, Rodnover is very widely represented in Russia and I am personally well acquainted with this tradition. Less than a year I attributed myself to Rodnover before I finally became rooted in Odinism. However, in our community and among our friends, the traditionalist rodnovers is approximately 50/50. Slavic-russian Rodnover can be safely attributed to what is called “folkish paganism” in the West culture, so this is obviously an ethnocentric tradition, yes. Regarding reconstruction, then in Rodnover there are several different currents or schools with different degrees of freedom regarding precisely the reconstruction credibility. In my opinion today the neophyte have a lot of ways to choose from. But the problems are exists, of course.

**W. W.:** You wrote a consequent book, *Polemos: the pagan traditionalism*, devoted to the pre-Christian faith. Have you established links between the Germanic-Scandinavian tradition, the Rodnovery and other European peoples, maybe Oriental?

**A. S.:** Yes, this book provides a broad analysis and comparison, where it is possible, of Indo-European traditions. There are three geographic reference areas: East (mainly India), Russia and Eastern Europe (Slavic tradition in diversity) and Western Europe (German-Scandinavian, Greco-Roman and Celtic traditions). Based on the fundamental works of Georges Dumézil, Mircea Eliade and Julius Evola, on the philosophy of structuralism, linguistics, phenomenology and comparative mythology, we can find many structural parallels and common or “primordial” if you like. But among other things, each tradition has its own unique features and structural elements that are not present and which, in my opinion, cannot be transferred in principle from one tradition to another. For example the “runic yoga” or the “slavic runes” are obvious excesses, in the same way the problem of Ragnarok is not as actual for Hindus as it is for the Germans.

**W. W.:** Moreover, concerning tradition, the God Thor is represented armed with his hammer, thus a tool, which is curious for a warlike God since Thor never created anything or manufactured. And in a story, we observe that the thundering God performs a ritual that seems to be of shamanic origin, when he raises his two goats he had killed the day before to eat with Loki at a farmer. What is your point of view about this «shamanic» rite that seems to be related to the bony soul, a concept of the soul that we find among other things in Siberian shamanism?

**A. S.:** Thor is a God-Defender, this is his most famous and revered hypostasis and he generally fits into this archetype. Regarding shamanism, here it is necessary to make a reservation. Among the Siberian peoples, the shaman is a special person in the community, which deals with healer, healing and rituals, so to speak professionally. Even the word “shamanism” is not entirely correct to use if we are not talking about a person who occupies a special place

in society. But let's take this term a little wider. If we talk about ecstatic practices, ritual dance, drums and singing, talk about the journey of the soul while the shaman is sleeping or lying like a deadman, then we will find all this in the figure of Odin, in his myths. Wotan travels in all worlds, Snorri writes that at this time he can lie like a corpse. He practices seidr and he is the sovereign of ecstasy of warriors and wiseacres. Therefore, of course there is a shamanic element in the Northern Tradition and this is good, it is necessary to study it and do it correctly, following the logic of the tradition itself.

**W. W.:** And concerning the hammer of Thor, many researchers now question that his hammer is not his original weapon, and designates an ax as its first weapon, replaced over the centuries by the hammer. Do your researches devoted to the pre-Christian tradition also relate to this kind of investigation?

**A. S.:** The hammer is the same archaic symbol as the simplest axe. I can't say absolutely exactly about Thor, but here in Slavic mythology his "brother" God Perun, also a Defender and Thunder-God, is portrayed with an ax – this is a fairly common amulet, an analogue of Mjölfnir. So I honestly do not see an emergency problem here. Let it be the Hammer, so.

**W. W.:** The LHP in Russia is called "Шуйный путь", developed by Volhv Veleslav, that you met. What is the role of "Шуйный путь", in your concept of odinism? What distinguishes "Шуйный путь" from other LHP movements?

**A. S.:** The term "The Left Hand Path" is actually a very large umbrella-term for various occult and spiritual teachings and schools, from India (Vamachara) to Europe and the USA. Sometimes these are so different teachings that between them there is nothing at all in common, except for some dark depressive aesthetics. "Шуйный Путь" of the sorcerer Veleslav is the modern fruit of his personal spiritual experience, which he expresses and describes in the language of the Slavic-Russian tradition. In his books you can find traces of Tantrism, Buddhism, Gnosticism, European occultism and

Alchemy, the magic of Chaos and, of course, of the deep insights into the flow of Rodnovery. I will not say that I agree with everything in his works. For example, I am not a supporter of Gnosticism and am skeptical about European occultism of the XX-XXI centuries. However, these are all just forms and outer shells. If you do not like one thing, then on the next page Veleslav will tell about the same thing in the language of a completely different tradition that is closer to you. He has passages about the Northern Tradition as well. But the most important thing is what is behind the words, what is hidden in the Darkness of Silence and Quietness. This insight into the deepest Nothing (Abyss, Abgrund) certainly had a great influence on me for a better understanding of what the Left Hand Path is.

It seems to me – here I will only say my opinion – that in the West, the Left Hand Path is understood more as a quasi-satanic, dark aesthetics and an attempt to justify the individualism in the Postmodern hedonistic way. And I also see too much bias towards operational magic, but not towards to true self-knowledge and spiritual transformation. There are authors such as Collin Cleary and Stephen A. McNallen, I think they understand well what is the Left Hand Path and Odinism.

Finally, a couple of years ago, Veleslav's first English language book "The Great Perfection Doctrine" was published with my foreword by "Fall of Man" publishing house, so now anyone who wishes can familiarize himself with his ideas directly.

**W. W.:** Tell us about your meetings with Volhv Veleslav and his role in traditionalism.

**A. S.:** I met with the articles and books of Veleslav even at the dawn of my formation, it was close to ten years ago for sure. Later, in 2011, we met personally and I handed him one of my first books. Since then, we have been friends and collaborate often.

The British historian Mark Sedgwick has a book "Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century" about the history of traditionalism as a school of thought. In it, he proposed to divide traditionalists into two directions: those who strictly denied the modern world, its culture



and values (hardline or hardcore traditionalism), and those who led a soft apology for the sacred, spirituality and Tradition in academic science, literature and culture (soft traditionalism). Veleslav can be attributed to such as soft traditionalists, although, I repeat, his views are wider than any one particular school of thought. Regarding Rodnovery, Veleslav's early works are a vivid example of the unspoken adaptation of many of the provisions of traditionalism to the Slavic-Russian tradition, its mythology and language. So the followers of the school of Veleslav in modern Rodnodery always stay by one foot in traditionalism.

Personally I hold very tough positions on this issue, but I recognize the great positive role of "soft traditionalism" in philosophy and the humanitarian studies.

**W. W.:** Your odinism advocates an ambivalence among the gods, both bright and dark, contrary to the divine Christian myth. How does this ambivalence manifest itself, how does this duality appear in the German / Scandinavian gods, for example Loki, and perhaps Slavs?

**A. S.:** In German mythology the ambivalence of the Gods is not very clearly represented. There is a "Lokasenna" where Loki "reveals" that each of the aesir and vanir were hides in itself something not very acceptable. In general, it fits into a logical and sometimes archaic idea of ambivalence. For example, the Goddess of Fertility/Earth in agrarian myths often acts as the Goddess of Death. The earth at the same time sprouts the fruits and receives dead bodies. Or Eros in Plato's dialog "Symposium" or according to Julius Evola: he can transcend to a higher Oneness (akin to the coition of Shiva and Shakti) or he can throw a person into the abysses of physical obsession and vulgarity. Many things carry their creative and destructive side. In the case of Odinism, two figures can be mentioned: Odin and Loki.

There is a common notion that Odin is the God of the warriors, the All-Father, and he decides the outcome of the battle, feasts in Valhalla and generally focuses entirely on the warlike side of being. This is an aspect of the Right Hand Path and the one side of the coin. On the other hand, Odin is the dying God, he is the God of Wisdom,

Poetry, Ecstasy [Rapture] and Obsession, the God of Death who throughout his mythology pursues some hidden goals. In some places he behaves completely incomprehensible, surrounding his secret with darkness. These are aspects of the Left Hand Path. At the same time it is difficult to say that it is a question of polar ambivalence, rather the militant side of Odin complements and disguises its internal shamanic aspects. That is like one flows into another.

The situation is much more difficult with Loki. What is usually said about him? God of Deception, trickster, God of Fire. These are all surface ripples on the water, the situation is much more complicated. Firstly, Loki is not God at all. For many this is already a true revelation. His kin traced to the jotuns (titans) and his children are also titanic monsters. (Another revelation: Hel is not the Goddess of Death, but only the mistress of one of the afterlife worlds.) He is not from aesir or from vanir, he is from a kind of chthonic powers. Nevertheless, he is accepted into the family of the Gods because he fraternizes with Odin himself. And they consider him as “their” among the Gods because it is sanctioned by Odin the All-Father. If we recall the myths about Baldr and Lokasenna, we will see that Loki betrays the Gods and opposes them. Theomachism is a typical and apriority trait of the jotunns, this is the definition of titanism par excellence.

The specific brotherly relations of Odin and Loki show us the Supreme God, who sovereignly realizes what he has conceived, and his dark double (Doppelgänger) in the person of Loki. All that Odin does is leads him to his goals. All that Loki does is cause problems or fails. Although their methods are identical. By this I want to say that the figure of Loki is actually much more complicated than the primitive patterns. I met with such an opinion among odinists that Loki is the German “Satan”, but this is also a primitive solution to the problem.

Loki is much closer to the Greek Prometheus or to Mephistopheles from Goethe's “Faust”. But if someone thinks that Prometheus brought people the light of progress and intelligence, he is deeply mistaken. Prometheus, like Mephistopheles, brings only deception and enmity between Gods and people.

In Russian I have a book “Forthcoming and Encirclement” [or “Approximation and Encirclement”], in it I take a very detailed look

at Loki's figure, his relationship with Odin and his connection with Prometheus. I think it's possible to write many more pages about it.

**W. W.:** What do you think of the belief put forward by some groups that Odin is considered the mad demiurge that emerged from the Ginnunga gap and created the world in which we live under duress?

**A. S.:** Here again it is necessary to clarify the terms. A demiurge is a scientific term that literally means "creator", so that is a God or Gods who create an orderly cosmos. In this case, Odin is definitely one of the demiurge Gods who creates the world and mankind.

On the other hand, there is Gnosticism and there the Demiurge is a fool, this is a mad bad tyrant God, a usurper of souls in the dungeon of this world. But how the Semitic-Christian Gnostic sects have related with the Northern Tradition? I think no how and in no way. If someone is sympathetic to Gnosticism, then let him accept Christianity, become Cathar (καθαρ). I consider such a mixture a product without basis and it has nothing to do with paganism.

The relationship between Odin and Ginnungap (the Abyss, Chaos) is also far from simple, it is one of the main themes of the book "Approximation and Encirclement". Manichaeism radical dualism is not peculiar to the German Logos; we have a place for war in the spirit of the polemos, which Heraclitus of Ephesus spoke about.

**W. W.:** Dark germanic heathenism is developing in recent years, especially in the black metal milieu, with the veneration of the Thursars, the primordial gods, spawners of Ases and men. And you said: "Nowadays, it is common to introduce the cult of titans, Jötunn and Thurs, as well as various lower spirits, as part of the path of the left hand; the so-called Thursatrú or Rëkkatrú. I think it's a naive hobby of housewives and wiccans at best. The people who are committed to it and who praise it do not understand the logic of the myth and the militant component of the German-Nordic tradition, the military ethos and the culture of the German gods. These are striking

examples of the moment when the path to the left turns clearly in the wrong direction”. Could you expand on your words about Thursatru?

**A. S.:** Yes, these are my words and this is the case. Although the question is actually much more complicated. I will try to answer briefly.

Thursars are not Gods, this is an axiom. Secular scientists who relate to our tradition as an object and do not believe in what they study and describe, love to ascribe the status of “God” to one or another mighty being. This is a mistake that the neophytes in our tradition repeat after them. Although it is enough to carefully read the sources themselves, even the Elder and Younger Eddas.

Thursars belong to the primordial titanic powers, really powerful and fundamental, the oldest. But this is not the Gods. Here it is appropriate to draw a parallel with the Greek tradition and titanomachia. I highly recommend Friedrich Georg Junger’s book “Griechische Mythen” for understanding this issue.

Further, in my assessment of such phenomena as Thursatru or Rökkatru, I rely on what I see in the Russian-speaking environment. In almost 100% of cases, the adherents of these trends are a mixture of teen-satanism, LGBT + SJW, wicca and the fan club of the disgusting Marvel movies. Obviously, there is nothing to seriously talk about.

Among English-speaking authors I see a more serious approach to this topic, including music and aesthetics. Why this topic is used in the black metal genre is understandable and I think that there is no contradiction and problem. Although if you immerse yourself in the atmosphere of the book “Gap: the Left Hand Path approach to Odinism”, then you can find in it another source for the lyrics in this genre.

I do not want to use the term “Satanism” in relation to Thursatru if we are talking about this idea seriously. In paganism there are no such concepts. But I would like to dwell on your words: “Thursars, the primordial gods, spawners of Ases and men”.

There is such an idea that Thursars were the original Gods, who were overthrown and forgotten by the young generation of aesir, led by Odin. That is, aesir and vanir are the usurping Gods again, and the real elder ancient Gods (Thurs) are forgotten. I find this a very

bad retelling of the Gnostic model using the language of Northern Tradition. If we believe that the Supreme Gods are false Gods, then all mythology, all folklore, the whole structure of society, all crafts and even language is false too. Because the Gods that created this order are false. So we come to the denial of the world as such and conspiracy. Once upon a time I was interested in such view of things too, but very quickly left this theory as unsatisfactory.

The juxtaposition of Gods and titans (jotuns and thurs) creates a positive tension of conflict in the world, that is it launches and supports dynamics and becoming of everything. When the material is balanced and illuminated by spiritual, the world lives in harmony. The problem is excessive boldness and emancipation of the chthonic (ǫðrlic). And there were no cults and worships to the titans or Loki in the German-Northern past. If adepts of Thursatrú want to be original nonconformists they also should take a closer look at Odin.

Overcoming the differences in the One, in the Abyss – what we are talking about in the book “Gap”, for example, – does not mean that in our middle world everything will suddenly become bright and peaceful, like a hippie. War is the father of all things. And looking from the One, we see no contradiction between the Abyss, which embraces everything, and dualism in Midgard. For everything is in its place and coordinated in the hierarchy.

**W. W.:** Your book, Gap, offers three distinct parts to access the left path of Odinism: Gangraðr's Words, Vegtamr's Words, Kvasir's Words. Explain to us these three words.

**A. S.:** This structure was made specifically for the English edition and for the second Russian-language release of this book. In short, the essence is:

Words of Gangraðr (one of the names of Odin, “Counselor in the Path”) – this section describes the theoretical part of the teaching, its basic message and symbols.

Words Vegtamr (another name for Odin, “Accustomed to the Path”) – In this section I describe some practices that help us understand what is at stake and achieve changes in the thinking and perception of the world. Now, already years after writing this book, I consider that the most useful practices are: correct thinking

(philosophy) and the most archaic ecstatic rituals. In the books they are not described.

Words of Kvasir are parables, notes and descriptions of my own impressions of the practices and spiritual transformation. This evidence and the continuation of the teachings, only in a more literary form.

**W. W.:** You have read Varg Vikernes's book, Vargsmal's name, how did it influence you to turn to Odinism?

**A. S.:** Yes, Varg`s books are very impressive, especially if you are a young man. But when I reread them already at a more conscious age, I realized that there are a lot of mistakes in them and this are weak works. I believe that as a pagan Varg revealed himself in the field of music – here I have no comments on his work, only delight. You may didnt read Varg`s books, but listen his music it necessarily. I do not follow his current activity, but I wish him good health and that the authorities of France and Norway leave him alone.

**W. W.:** Finally, your book is above all an awareness of self-knowledge, to truly know yourself. How is this process and awareness taking place? And how did your knowledge of yourself unfold?

**A. S.:** I think a good analogy for this process is stripping the skin from oneself. However, I cannot say that I have gone this way to the end. The movement continues and the final horizon is already flickering lightning.

**W. W.:** You made a film called “Hellas - bitter visits to Hades”, in Greece, dedicated to the places and traditional Greek myths. You therefore consider ancient Greece as the intellectual homeland of Europe. Tell us the genesis of this film?

**A. S.:** Ancient Greece is the intellectual homeland of Europeans. This fact will confirm you any philosopher.

We went to Greece in the summer of 2018 to make a pilgrimage to this land and to glorify the local Gods: Zeus, Apollo, Dionysus, Hades, Eros, Demeter and Persephone. We were in Athens, Eleusis and Delphi.

Modern Greece unfortunately is in an incredible decline and causes bitterness and grief for its former greatness.

Nevertheless, we met and did a good interview with the head of the Greek pagans of YSEE Vlassis Rassias, and later in Rome another interview with Daniel Liotta, head of the Italian traditionalist movement (M.T.R.). I am glad that there are such people.

**W. W.:** Modernity and paganism, can they coexist? Or is it possible for a pagan to live his faith in this modern world?

**A. S.:** It is the most important topic. This is what I wrote about the huge work “Polemos: Pagan Traditionalism”, over 800 pages. In English there is a small “business card” of this book: <http://en.polemos.ru/about-book/>, there you can see the table of contents. The book touches upon almost all current trends in their connection with the pagan revival: symbolism, theology, anthropology, science, technology, politics, feminism, history, Christianity, Judaism and Islam, virtual reality, New Age simulacra, Left Hand Path and much more. All this is exemplified by the ancient and modern paganism of America, Europe, the Caucasus, Russia and Asia. This work is still waiting for the English-language publisher.

Returning to your question. We live in the XXI century and talk about paganism, which means that it somehow lives in modernity. I believe that the ancient paganism that we know from history cannot exist in the modern world unchanged. The modern world is a total degradation and degeneration of everything that was positive and sacred. Therefore, modernity poses serious challenges and problems for paganism. This is one of the dimensions of the Left Hand Path, the only adequate variant of the existence of tradition in the era of Ragnarok (Kali-Yuga).

For an example, see my article “The Pagan Identity in XXI century”. It is available in English and Spanish:

[http://askrsvarte.org/eu/blog/pagan\\_identity\\_in\\_21\\_century\\_eng/](http://askrsvarte.org/eu/blog/pagan_identity_in_21_century_eng/)

There I on one example clearly show the fundamental difference between modernity and tradition.

By the way, returning to the topic of Tursatrú. The true adepts of faith in Thursars are Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Henry Ford. Because we are talking about pure materialism, industrial manufacture (the opposite of poetry), the hungry desires of the flesh and the fundamental denial of Gods and metaphysics. You can also add to the line the programmers or Elon Musk too.

But modernity has positive features. One of them is time. In modern times, we have a lot of time that we can devote to spiritual growth and philosophy. The problem is that the media, the Internet and all modern culture are engaged in taking our time away from us, forcing us to spend it on absolute nonsense, and not on themselves. The second is that, from the point of view of Tradition, the modern world is the Iron Age, that is, the eschatological epoch. Therefore, modern paganism should put in the center of the cult and the sacred Gods of Death and Ragnarok. The LHP in Odinism is a modern phenomenon.

**W. W.:** Is there a form of censorship or repression by the authorities, the media, against your community?

**A. S.:** Russia is an oligarchic authoritarian country. Unfortunately. Usually this is opposed to democracy and liberalism, but this is a mistake. Liberalism is another form of even more rigid totalitarian thinking and dictatorship. This is not like comparing black (authoritarianism) and white (democracy), since black is both.

Paganism in Russia is subject to repression and demonization in the media, a lot of fake news spreads by the Orthodox Church.

In 2011, the authorities tried to disrupt the presentation of my book, but unsuccessfully. In 2013, the security services were interested in the visit and lectures of Veleslav which we arranged in Siberia. Also to no avail.

In general, I think that in Russia and the same in the West everyone is under a cap.

**W. W.:** In the Scandinavian tradition there is North European shamanism – which some call witchcraft – called seidr and the



Finnish tradition teaches us the existence of shamanism called noaidevuhta, what do you think of these practices? And do you practice them in your community?

**A. S.:** This is a very interesting topic, I support it. In our community we pay attention to this, including from the Slavic point of view too. The nuance lies in the fact that we practically do not do magic/witchcraft or healing people (this is mandatory work for Siberian shamans). Our efforts are focused on the transformation of thinking and mindset. Ecstatic practices, masks, drums and trance help in this.

**W. W.:** In the Warha # 4 almanac, in the presentation, you state: «Paganism must be intellectual. « What do you mean ? Does traditionalism irremediably lead to a questioning of oneself and the modern world, a philosophical spirit in a way?

**A. S.:** The “Warha” almanac is definitely a diamond among pagan magazines in Russia.

Paganism must be intellectual. Recall that the great Greek thinkers who laid the whole of European philosophy were pagans. Today's pagans objectively lag behind their ancient ancestors. This does not mean that absolutely every pagan should be a deep thinker as Heraclitus or Plato, but such thinkers should be. And that is what we advocate and promote everywhere. Many pagans intellectually still live in the Enlightenment, in the philosophy of deism. They think that the Gods created evolution, progress and the laws of nature or mechanics, like watchmakers. Sorry, but this is complete nonsense. In the world of philosophy, modern pagans so far cannot say anything fundamentally original or even just their own. Names like Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard or Theodor Adorno and Quentin Meillassoux – what do pagans know about these thinkers whose ideas have shaped the modern world? What can they object to and what can they agree with? I know several authors all over the world who are able to reason and talk about it. Most pagans are generally in a deaf black box when it comes to such questions and problems. They know nothing, even less they understand. This is a huge misfortune. Therefore, paganism must become intellectual

simply in order to finally become a subject and know itself. Almost all our colleagues agree with this.

You ask: “Does traditionalism irremediably lead to a questioning of oneself and the modern world, a philosophical spirit in a way?” Yes, this is generally a basic prerequisite for removing the covers of illusions.

**W. W.:** What is your news?

**A. S.:** We are currently working on the next issues of the almanac “Warha # 6” and “Warha Europe vol.2”. I am engaged in several pagan projects within Russia, as well as working on a new book.

**W. W.:** We leave you the last word of this interview.

**A. S.:** Do not be afraid to say a tough “No” to modern culture in all its manifestations. Do not settle for intellectual compromises. Paganism is a challenge and a jump without guarantees, but not the souvenirs in the form of Mjölñir.

**W. W.:** Thank you

**A. S.:** Thanks for the interesting conversation. For the Glory of the Gods.

# LIBER NIGER SOLIS: AN AEONIC ASTROCHYMICAL GRIMOIRE OF THE BLACK SUN<sup>40</sup>

**Reviewed by Richard Rudgley**

The original edition published in 2009 was subjected to a somewhat savage attack by ‘Boris Balkan’ in his blog on modern grimoires and related texts. I have not had the opportunity to see this earlier version but understand substantial revisions have been made for this current edition.

Theion is to be heartily congratulated on a finely bound, beautifully produced and meticulously proof-read volume. 560 copies of the standard edition and 60 of the auric edition were printed and are already sold out making both collector’s items almost immediately after publication. There are a number of illustrations including some by Hagen von Tulien, a high-ranking member of the *Fraternitas Saturni*.

Eva Kingsepp’s comprehensive and authoritative introduction is a fascinating account of the history of the symbolism of the Black Sun showing, among other things, how it encompasses esoteric terrain far wider and deeper than the sensationalist and Neo-Nazi ghettos to which it is all too often limited.

The main body of the text consists of works produced by two occult orders the *Arcanus Ordo Nigri Solis* (AONS) and the *Ordo Hermeticum Sinistrum* (OHS) both expounding the alchemical and magical implications of the Black Sun. The OHS texts also involve a highly complex astromantic exposition on the subject. The language used by both groups is essentially hermetic in that, like traditional alchemical texts, references to the ‘everyday world’ and ‘concrete

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<sup>40</sup> Edited by Victor Voronov, Germany, Theion Publishing 2013 – 288 pages.

*reality*’ are almost entirely absent and the texts are to a large extent self-referential and require the reader to familiarize themselves with an arcane and exacting terminology. Despite this stylistic debt to historical alchemical literature there are some very modern traits that break with tradition. The various texts often seem to waver between a post-modern stance akin to chaos magic with its essentially nihilistic variant on a well-known formula (page 48): “everything is false, but nothing is forbidden” and a post-modern position which, potentially, seems far more substantial and interesting in “desist[ing] from the games of postmodern relativism” (page 122). In this very vacillation it is possible to see a sign of our times as the spirit of post-modernism shows signs of fatigue and its energetic and as yet unidentified successor looms in the darkness.

For all its ‘otherworldliness’ *Liber Niger Solis* does contain passages which have metapolitical ramifications. There are a number of such striking passages and insights – for example the viewing of the modern world’s current descent into the lower depths of Kali Yuga as a kind of collective nigredo; a socio-political eclipse on a grand scale.

There is no question that these writings are the work of highly intelligent people who are well-versed in numerous occult traditions. This book is also one of very few works which probe deep into the outer lands where the respective imaginal cartographies of the hermetic, Saturnian and Nordic paths cross. It also displays hints of the nascent ‘Vidarism’ that I have alluded to in my own published writings - witness this striking passage (page 94):

“Vidar vanquishes the enemies of the Aesir, and Baldr arises sovereign from Hell, but only because Fenrir swallowed the All-Father while his kin devoured the sun and moon”.

The book represents a major challenge to much of contemporary heathen thought that has barely begun to articulate itself or attend to the pressing need to arm itself with intellectual arguments and insights in order to properly dialogue with the ‘folk without’ and the wider world beyond.

# REMAKING THE SUTTON HOO WHETSTONE: THE ANSELL-ROPER REPLICA AND ITS CONTEXT<sup>41</sup>

**Review by Richard Rudgley**

It is rare for a single artifact to be the subject of a whole monograph but this is, in fact, the second book to be devoted solely to the object usually described as the Sutton Hoo whetstone-scepter. It was unearthed from the seventh century Anglo-Saxon ship burial contained in Mound One at Sutton Hoo, near Woodbridge a small town in Suffolk. Its purpose remains an enigma and its dual identification as both whetstone (emphasizing its apparent functional aspect) and scepter (symbolizing regal and/or spiritual power) makes this abundantly clear. Much ink has been spilt arguing over whether it is a whetstone or a scepter at all.

In addition to being an invaluable contribution to archeological and Anglo-Saxon studies this book has an added value for the modern heathen as it concerns a singular ritual object that is usually assumed to have belonged to Rædwald the apostate king of East Anglia. This artifact literally embodies the waning power of Anglian paganism confronted by the ascending spiritual and temporal power of Christianity. It is notable that both Rupert Bruce-Mitford and Martin Carver (the two archaeologists who led the successive digs at Sutton Hoo) were both rather dismissive of the aesthetic coherence of the scepter; the former calling it ‘barbaric’ and the latter branding it ‘a ridiculous conceit’. I find these views hard to

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<sup>41</sup> Edited by Paul Mortimer & Stephen Pollington, Ely, UK, Anglo-Saxon Books 2013 – 196 pages.

reconcile with the object itself which I have always felt was a perfectly harmonious composition in metal and stone.

Remaking the Sutton Hoo Whetstone describes the actual production of a faithful copy of the original object and includes an extensive discussion of both its meaning and cultural ancestry. The Ansell-Roper replica (named after the master mason and metallurgist who made it, both of whom also contributed to the text) was commissioned by Paul Mortimer who, along with highly regarded Anglo-Saxon specialist Stephen Pollington, co-edited the book. The chapters dealing with the making of the replica may be too technical for the taste of some readers but are essential parts of the story and directly inform the construction of the main arguments by, among other things, eliminating theories which can be refuted by experimental archaeology. Furthermore the actual process of faithfully reproducing the object by attempting to follow the chaîne opératoire of the original maker(s) gives a rare, albeit limited, opportunity to truly replicate the experience of an individual from the Anglo-Saxon era.

The importance of this highly distinctive and complex artifact has encouraged numerous attempts to find possible sources, influences and parallels as far afield as Scythia and back in time as far as the Bronze Age. Among these is the ‘Celtic origin’ thesis of the aforementioned earlier monograph (by Michael Enright) which is effectively dismantled by the authors of the present volume. One of the least plausible suggestions that made up this theory was that the Anglian king who had the scepter fashioned did so because he saw his Celtic counterparts with such objects of power – Enright even calls this ‘scepter envy’! Surely this is a conscious allusion to the Freudian theory of penis envy and its phallic symbolism is clear.

Other previous attempts to decipher the meaning of this artifact are given a more positive treatment and the most interesting of these include Sydney Cohen’s ideas relating the (two sets of) four heads on the scepter to the four-fold symbolism of some Northern European sanctuaries that had gates at each of the cardinal directions. Cohen suggests that it is likely that a wooden pillar was present at the centre of these sanctuaries and that the four faces that were carved on them looked out to the four cardinal directions. It seems that the Sutton Hoo scepter was deposited in the mound in an upright

position which could mean that the scepter was a miniature version of the sacred pillar, the Irminsul of Germanic tradition for which parallels also exist in both the Slavic and Baltic religions. Cohen also connects the four-fold symbolism of the scepter and the sanctuaries to Thor (Thunar) and his symbol, the swastika. Other commentators, including the present authors, offer plausible cases for identifying the object itself or the faces upon it not only with Thunar but also Tiw, Ing and Woden – either separately or collectively since these gods are by no means necessarily mutually exclusive given the skein of Anglian polytheism.

Cohen's work on the importance of numerical symbolism has been greatly expanded on by the authors for whilst measurements of the various artifacts were, of course, included in the original excavation reports their possible symbolic significance was not dwelt upon exhaustively by Bruce-Mitford. When Brian Ansell measured the stone part of the scepter he found that the curves that give the bar its shape have a diameter of 16 feet 4 inches which is very close to the length of the Anglo-Saxon unit of measurement known as a rod. The rod is known to have been used in the construction of Anglo-Saxon buildings such as those of the village of West Stow. This shows a further correspondence between buildings and the scepter which augments rather than replaces Cohen's earlier observations on numerical symbolism. The authors further reveal some very apposite data from early documents concerning this surveying staff and its linguistic relationship with the king's control over his land.

It seems highly likely that such correspondences have a cosmological symbolism and if, as one source the authors cite suggests, the Anglo-Saxons used a measuring staff in constructing their buildings then this staff could have been a counterpart to the mythological and symbolic pillars of Germanic lore. That both traditional dwellings and temples are often microcosmic representations of the macrocosm is a well-known motif known to all students of religion and ethnology. We are reminded that the post used by the Anglo-Saxons to tie their sacrificial animals was likely called an *os*, a word that means both 'pillar, beam of wood' and 'god, divine ancestor' (its Old Norse cognate being *áss*, plural *Æsir*). The authors also suggest that the Church steeple of later times is a survival of the Germanic world pillar. Perhaps the jewel in the crown

of their survey of this symbolism is the observation that the curved length of the segment creating the scepter equates to 1/27th of the circumference of the circle that would be drawn based on that curvature. In other words the height of the scepter is 1/27 of the circumference of the circle. 27 being 3x9: numbers which are both of paramount importance in ancient Germanic cosmogony, cosmology, law and ritual.

The authors have approached the question of cultural provenance from a common-sense point of view by looking primarily for the object's lineage within the Anglo-Saxon sphere though parallels with other related cultures are also shown to be illuminating. Towards the end of the book there is a Gothic twist to the tale in the form of a possible blood connection between the Anglian royal line of Rædwald and the Ostrogoths or, at least, some desire on the part of the Anglians to make symbolic connections with their more southerly cousins.

This book is a remarkable and thorough survey of its subject and its value extends far beyond the whetstone-scepter per se and unearths a treasure trove of archaeological, linguistic, symbolic and mythological data for the reader's perusal. No final answer to the meaning of the whetstone-scepter is given but none was expected – least of all by the authors themselves. As they point out in conclusion it may well have had multiple meanings as befits its pagan origins. What the authors have done is to reveal a deeper layer of symbolic meanings embodied in the object and convincingly placed it in its true cultural context. They have also posed a new set of questions for others to pursue but I for one hope that they too will have more to say on this matter in the future.



# THE SEED OF YGGDRASIL: DECIPHERING THE HIDDEN MESSAGES IN OLD NORSE MYTHS<sup>42</sup>

**Review by Richard Rudgley**

The Norse deities have, perhaps, suffered the corrosive effects of modern parody more than any other European pantheon. Many people first encounter them caricatured in American comic strips or video games as secularized superheroes. These recent anthropomorphic depictions echo the representations of the gods and goddesses as they appear in the paintings and fantasy literature of nineteenth century Europe. Undoubtedly this treatment of the Norse myths has obstructed a more rounded approach to their meaning – philosophical, metaphysical and esoteric interpretations have been the exception rather than the rule and much still needs to be done to restore their dignity to the level enjoyed by their Classical counterparts. Euhemerism takes its name from Euhemerus the Greek commentator who theorized that myth could be reduced to history and gods to glorified but merely human heroes. Despite this many other views of the Greek myths continued to thrive. The effect of this approach seems to have been more damaging in the case of the Norse myths and this is surely in large part due to the paucity of surviving sources.

It is for this reason that modern heathens often display mixed feelings about Snorri Sturluson. On the one hand they acknowledge how impoverished our knowledge of the ancient myths would be without his Prose Edda but on the other criticize him for the euhemerism in his prologue to the same in which he depicts the gods as having their earthly origins in Troy. Among a number of

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<sup>42</sup> By Maria Kvilhaug, Denmark, Whyte Tracks 2013, Hardcover Edition – 712 p.

important departures from received wisdom that Maria Kvilhaug makes is a reassessment of his intentions. She argues that Snorri, in order to best preserve the pagan myths in a hostile Christian environment, deliberately masked the gods through the device of euhemerism thereby making them appear innocuous. Kvilhaug also suggests that he may have been a secret believer in the old ways. Of course it is highly unlikely we will ever be certain of his motives but her view is perfectly plausible.

The feminine mysteries encoded in the Norse myths are brought forth in a more inspired and comprehensive way in *The Seed of Yggdrasill* than they have been perhaps since the time of the Vikings themselves. Kvilhaug recounts how she has encountered repeated resistance to her assertion that the creation story in the *Völuspá* professes a female First Being. Among other things she has been accused of being ‘Wiccanized’. Branding someone a Wiccan is apparently an insult within both academic and (some) heathen circles. Since Kvilhaug remarks that she has had next to no contact with Wicca itself this is a ridiculous and spurious charge which simply fails to engage with what is a striking and stimulating notion.

The book contains very useful summaries of both the Poetic Edda and the Prose Edda and her translations are accompanied by the original texts thus allowing the reader to make their own conclusions about her often controversial interpretations of words and her heterodox etymologies. The book also includes transcripts of numerous YouTube videos presented by the author which add considerable color to her rendering of the myths and her interpretations of their meanings. Central to her exposition of the myths is the idea that gender is an integral and fundamental part of the code. Female characters in their various guises (such as goddesses, valkyries, family members, lovers) symbolize the hidden nature of things. Importantly she highlights a number of understudied feminine aspects of the northern mysteries including the recurrent motif of nine mythical women and connects this to their better-known Indo-European cousins the nine Greek muses. Kvilhaug also explores aspects of the traditional world-view other than the nine worlds cosmology familiar from most primers on the Norse myths. She notes that there is a twelve world model that augments this and

in doing so she reminds us that sacred numerology is more complex than it first appears.

The author further suggests that the Norse myths embody a Mystery Tradition akin to those of Late Antiquity most notably the Mysteries of Isis as revealed by Apuleius in the Golden Ass. The myths, if correctly decoded, reveal rites of initiation that need to be enacted on the way to knowledge. This path to pagan gnosis is contrasted favorably with Biblical teachings that admonish the seeker of knowledge as a sinner. Kvilhaug in describing her approach states that it is not the details of the stories but the underlying structure that is of primary importance, but this is in no way comparable to the sterile structuralist approach to myth of Lévi-Strauss. She is concerned with unveiling the patterns of initiation encoded in the myths not in compiling an arid intellectual inventory.

The main strength of her work is to be found in a pantheistic interpretation of the Norse myths and her forays into cross-cultural parallels produce mixed results. Whilst noting that the Norse pantheons make for a poor fit with Dumézil's tripartition theory Kvilhaug does make use of Indo-European comparativism with regard to the sacred mead. She sees parallels with the ambrosia of the Greeks as well as the Indian soma and Iranian haoma. However, her suggestion that wild rye could have been the source of a Viking entheogen analogous to that of the Indian/Iranian traditions seems to be based on a mistaken identification of wild rye with wild rue (the latter, containing the psychoactive alkaloid harmaline, is known to have been used for its drug properties by the Iranians and their Central Asian neighbors). She does note some interesting parallels too with the Tantric tradition for example between the chakras and the subtle anatomy hinted at in Norse myths. Since the early twentieth century a significant number of heathens have experimented with 'rune yoga' and analogous psycho-physical exercises and it is good to see this subject explored in this book. The book also explores the apparent correspondences that exist between Iron Age myth and modern scientific cosmology. Ancient myth gains no kudos from its accidental or partial crossover with modern science, myth as a repository of ancient (sacred) science seems a much better path to follow and is the main thrust of *The Seed of Yggdrasil*.

A personal revelation detailing her interaction with the Norse deities reminds us that this is not only a book of decoding and analysis but also a work inspired by the author's pantheistic submersion in the ancient lore. She tells us that Odin appeared to her as a 'Watchman' or guardian figure from the age of fourteen in both dreams and in the liminal state between sleep and wakefulness. Subsequently she identified most closely with the goddesses Hel and Freyja the latter of whom seems to have helped Kvilhaug to envision her work in a wider context of awakening the souls of her people:

Somehow, I felt that the frozen warriors were looking to me for a purpose and for freedom. This disturbed me – who was I to take on such responsibility? And then I realized that I was not me, but I was looking through the eyes of the waking goddess. As she came closer, she began to blow gently on them, and the warriors began to defrost. It felt like they were melting, softening, and healing. As I woke up, I felt that my work is part of a greater purpose, and that there is a great need to defrost the souls of all those who have become frozen in fear.

The Seed of Yggdrasill is a controversial and insightful exploration of Norse myths from a pantheistic perspective. Maria Kvilhaug is to be congratulated for bringing the ancient tales alive again, both for those who already know them and for those who have yet to drink from this inexhaustible well. This is a valuable work for the student of myth and an essential one for those who would revive the Northern Tradition. It is a literary treasure chest and one I will be re-opening again and again.

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