

MYTHOLOGY AND THE  
HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

*Mitie e Leggende*

BY RAFFAELE PETTAZZONI

Vol. I, *Africa-Australia*; Vol. III, *America Settentrionale*.

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*La Religion dans la Grèce antique, des Origine à  
Alexandre le Grand*

BY RAFFAELE PETTAZZONI

Translated by Jean Gouillard. Paris: Payot, 1953. Pp. 268. (Original edition: *La religione nella Grecia antica fino ad Alessandro*. Bologna, Zanichelli, 1921. Pp. xii + 416.)

*La Religion populaire dans la Grèce antique*

BY MARTIN P. NILSSON

Translated by Frans Durif. Paris: Plon, 1954. Pp. 245. (Original edition: *Greek Popular Religion*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1940. Pp. xvii + 166.)

*Genèse de l'Odysée. Le Fantastique et le Sacré*

BY GABRIEL GERMAIN

Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954. Pp. 700.

Professor Raffaele Pettazzoni is one of the most illustrious historians of religion of our time. He belongs to a type of scholar which is unfortunately becoming rare and is perhaps headed for extinction: those who have taken as their specialty the universal history of religion. At first sight such an ambition might seem to pose an impossible task; the historico-cultural field has become so wide that no single mind could pretend to assimilate and master a quantity of documents that is increasing every day. Let us therefore avoid misunderstanding on this point: there is no question of the historian of religions attempting to replace the Americanist, the Sinologist, the Africanist, or to master their knowledge of philology in order to study and interpret the Chinese, Aztec and Bantu religions: it suffices for him to record the results of research carried out by the specialists and to classify and evaluate these results in a perspective which is exclusively his own: that of the general history of religion.

Unfortunately, this is a program which is rarely realized. If he specializes in one single broad sector, the ancient Near East, China, or Greece, for instance, the historian of religion no longer has the time nor the energy to follow and integrate the results obtained by his colleagues in other fields. Instead of studying problems as they emerge from all these special realms of research, the historian of religion usually adopts one of the currently fashionable hypotheses and orients his own studies with relation to it. For a whole generation, historians of religion sought—and found—“agricultural demons” almost everywhere; for another generation they applied themselves to seeking out the *mana* in innumerable religious structures. It is significant that the most striking hypotheses proposed within the past seventy-five years to explain the essence and the origin of religion have been the work of eminent scholars whose specialty was not the history of religion. It was Max Müller, an Indianist of genius, who founded naturistic mythology, and for twenty-five years the historians of religion taught that the Indo-European gods and their mythologies were nothing more than meteorological epiphanies. E. B. Tylor, an anthropologist, identified animism as the first form of religion; Sir James Frazer, an ethnologist as well as a classicist and folklorist, started two great fashions in the history of religions: the agricultural demons (borrowed, incidentally, from Mannhardt) and totemism. Finally, the most recent hypotheses on the origin and the first form of religion—the *mana* and pre-animism, mystic participation and the pre-logical mentality, the Oedipus complex or the archetypes of the collective unconscious—were proposed by sociologists, philosophers, and psychologists. Even the most important reaction against

such abusive hypotheses—we are thinking especially of religious phenomenology—was only the application of a well-known philosophic method.

This situation need not, however, be emphasized here. It should be recalled, nevertheless, that for many reasons the history of religion, as an autonomous field, has yet to find its methodology, while ethnology, sociology, and folklore already have theirs. Historians of religions are dependent, for the most part, on the methodological progress made in some neighboring field, especially in ethnology. One even suspects a tacit tendency to leave it to the ethnologists and the sociologists to construct a universal history of religions, which is understandable to a degree but not devoid of risk.

It is difficult, for example, to imagine a history of initiation, of secret societies and mysteries, or a history of Gnosis, constructed with the means used by ethnology or sociology or in their perspective. For, while tribal initiations and secret societies are well known to the ethnologist, these religious phenomena are prolonged and considerably amplified in the great historical religions; and alongside the Australian puberty rites or the Melanesian *men's societies*, there are Eleusis, the Greco-Oriental mysteries, the Indo-European or Japanese *Männerbünde*, Gnosticism, Hermetism and Tantrism, and so on. Often the study of these evolved forms gives a better understanding of the structure, the intention and the essence of an elementary initiation rite. This task of integration can only be the work of a historian of religion; he alone is able to bring together the results obtained by ethnology and Orientalism, by classicists and folklorists. (In the case of the men's societies, for example, folklore contributes materials of unequalled value.)

For the past half-century ethnology has tended more and more to become a historic discipline. This orientation has already been most useful to the history of religions. Distinction is rarely made between the primitives—the *Naturvölker* without a history—on the one hand, and the historical religions, beginning with that of ancient Egypt and ending with Islam, on the other. Whether or not they accept the theory of cultural cycles worked out by Graebner and Schmidt, ethnologists agree that every primitive people has a history and that this history is sometimes very complex. Hence the historian of religion no longer faces two radically separate universes: the historyless universe of the primitives and the historic universe of the great cultures; whatever be the form of religion under study, there is always a fragment of universal history involved. The progress of ethnology

has abolished the solution which depends on a continuity between the primitive world and ours: both are historical worlds.

But even after he has assimilated and evaluated this discovery of the ethnologists, the historian of religions has not yet solved his own problem. His task is not over when he realizes that every religious form has a history and that it is an integral part of a well-defined cultural complex; he must still understand and clarify the meaning, the intention, and the message of his religious form. To go back to the example used above, even if one has reconstituted the history of initiations from the Australians to the Greco-Oriental mysteries or Tantrism, and has clarified their social and cultural implications, their spread, their transformations and degraded forms, one has not yet elucidated the deep sense of these ceremonies. A spiritual attitude of man is inherent in all these initiation rites. No one is better prepared to grasp, interpret and present it than the historian of religions, for no one else has the materials and perspective which he commands. In other words, the historian of religion is obliged by his own scientific discipline to deal with the timeless constants of religious experience and the structures which result from it, and which cannot be reduced to historic terms. He must decide whether the history of religion will keep its autonomy, or end by being integrated into ethnology or sociology, abandoning to the psychologists and philosophers, as a monopoly, the study of the structures and constants of religious life.

This long parenthesis has not led us so far from our subject as it might seem. The work of Professor Pettazzoni provides an excellent illustration of what the autonomy of the history of religion means. We said earlier that he had made the study of all religions his specialty. Indeed, after having begun as an archaeologist and a classicist, he has never ceased to broaden his field of research. Though his first vocation led to the writing of some excellent books (*La Religione primitiva in Sardegna*, Plaisance, 1912; *La Religione nella Grecia antica*, Bologna, 1921; *I Misteri*, Bologna, 1924), the greater part of his work is that of a non-specialist, that is to say, of a historian of religion who uses and integrates the results obtained by specialists in other fields. Although he is not an Iranologist, his *Religione di Zarathustra nella Storia religiosa dell'Iran* (Bologna, 1920) remained for a long time one of the best general works on Iranian religions. Assimilating the enormous mass of ethnological literature, Professor Pettazzoni published in 1922 the first volume of his *Dio. Formazione e Sviluppo del Mono-teismo nella Storia delle religioni (L'Essere celeste nelle Credenze dei Popoli primitivi)*, in 1930 the *Confessione dei Peccati* (this first volume was largely

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devoted to the primitives), and in 1948 the first volume of his *Mitti e Leggende* (Africa-Australia). Two other volumes of the great monograph on the confession of sins continue the survey to Oriental and Mediterranean religions; a *Mitologia giapponese secondo il Kojiki* appeared in 1929; finally, he has collected certain more specialized studies in two recent volumes (*Saggi di Storia delle Religioni e di Mitologia*, Rome, 1946; *Essays on the History of Religion*, Leyden, 1954) and has published in *Italia religiosa* (Bari, 1952) some synthetic studies on the Italian and Roman religions. He also founded, and has directed for thirty years, the review entitled *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni*, which in 1929 inaugurated a popular collection of texts on archaic religions, *Testi e Documenti per la Storia delle Religioni*, and has recently become director of the *Classici della Religione* series published by Sansoni of Florence. (The first volume contains a complete Italian translation of the *Edda*, by C. A. Mastrelli. The *Avesta*, the Taoist texts, and the Koran are in preparation.)

Professor Pettazzoni has carried on his scientific work side by side with his activity as an organizer and promoter of studies on the history of religions; it is chiefly due to his efforts that there is such a lively interest in the history of religions in Italy today. As for his theoretical position, it is, first of all, that of a historian who has deeply considered, and partially adopted, Croce's interpretation of history. In an article which recently appeared in *Numen* (Vol. I, Part 1, January, 1954), he wrote that "the only way to escape the dangers" of a phenomenological interpretation of religion "consists of constantly referring to history." We shall not discuss here the tension between what the Italian scholar includes under the name of phenomenology, and history. Professor Pettazzoni's work seems to us more instructive than his theoretical position, and it proposes a sort of exemplary goal to every historian of religion who is conscious of the dangers which threaten his science (the dangers of specialization, first of all).

He addresses himself to the broad cultivated public in the magnificent series of *Myths and Legends* of which the first volume has just appeared. The texts were chosen and translated according to the best ethnological sources, and most of them are annotated, though always with care not to detract from the reader's pleasure. For the author never for an instant loses sight of the general intention of his work: to obtain the largest possible audience for the productions of this oral sacred literature of the primitives. Each ethnic group is presented in a short introduction, which constitutes almost a résumé of the present state of knowledge on the questions involved, and is completed by an essential bibliography. In the case of

Africa (Vol. I) the groups presented go from the Boshimans to the Berbers and Pygmies and include the Hottentots, the Damas, the various Bantu groups, etc. In the case of North America the groups include the Eskimos, the Californians and the Pueblos, Pimas and Papagos. The first volume also includes a selection of Australian myths and legends (pp. 460–480). We reviewed this first volume in an article in *Critique* (April, 1948, pp. 708–717).

As Professor Pettazzoni remarks (Vol. I, p. x), a myth is always a true story because it is a sacred story. The account of the origin of the world, of the origin of the clan or of certain traditional customs is a true story, because it treats of essential realities—that is to say, of sacred realities. It is for this reason that among many primitives the myths may not be indiscriminately recited anywhere and any time—as is true of tales and jokes, which are *false stories*—but only during the night or during the seasons which are ritually richer (autumn and winter), or during the interval between religious ceremonies, etc. (*ibid.*, pp. viii–x), in other words, within a sacred lapse of time. To tell a myth is to proclaim what happened *in illo tempore*. “That is the way it was because it is said that that is the way it was,” say the Netsilik Eskimos to justify the validity of their sacred history and their religious traditions. The myth proclaims the appearance of a new cosmic situation or an event of primordial importance. Thus, through the simple fact of its manifestation, this situation or this event becomes a paradigm for the whole course of time.

One might prolong Professor Pettazzoni’s observations on the equation: myth = *true* story because it is a sacred story. Because of the very fact that the mythical event happened *in illo tempore*, under the effect of the creative virtue of the gods (or civilizing heroes, or ancestors, etc.), it is not only real, it is also exemplary with respect to all human action. “We must do what the gods did in the beginning,” says an Indian text (*catapata Brâhmana*, VII, 2, I, 4). “Thus the gods did, thus do men” (*Taittirîya Brâhmana*, I, 5, 9, 4). The principal function of the myth is thus to determine the exemplary models of all the rites and of all significant human activities (eating, procreation, work, etc.). It follows that the repetition of all these archetypes constitutes an abolition of profane time and the establishment of mythical, sacred time. (For the consequences which follow from the periodic abolition of profane time, see this writer’s *Mythe de l’éternel Retour*, Gallimard, 1949.)

African mythology—except for that of the northwest regions—is not particularly rich. Certain scholars are even inclined to doubt the mytho-

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poetic faculty of the African peoples: the absence of real cosmogonic myths is interpreted by Hermann Baumann as a rather important proof of the mythological poverty—if not sterility—of the Africans. But these are hasty conclusions, and Paul Radin recently had occasion to refute them (*African Folktales and Sculpture*, New York, Bollingen Foundation, 1952). What may be said is that the central interest of African mythologies is focussed on the first inhabitants of the world and their relations with the supreme beings and other divinities. This mythology is consequently anthropocentric rather than cosmocentric or theophanic. As Paul Radin says, “rarely has man been depicted as more completely and inextricably anchored in this world, more obsessingly earthbound” (*op. cit.*, p. 4).

North American mythologies, on the other hand, are dominated by cosmogonic and anthropogonic motifs, that is to say, by myths of origin. Professor Pettazzoni justifiably gives them the place of honor in his collection. It includes fine myths of the creation by supreme beings (sometimes a creation *ex nihilo*, through the force of concentration alone, in the manner of the *shamans*), the cultural adventures of the Demigod, and endless stories of the Coyote. Of exceptional interest are the Pueblo myths of the creation of men in the depths of the Earth Mother and their emergence into the light (pp. 533 ff.). These myths are all the more important for the historian of religions because their function as an exemplary model has been rather well kept: among the Navajos, for instance, the myth of the emergence is generally told on the occasion of certain ceremonies held to cure a sick person or initiate a new *shaman*, that is, when something must be *remade* (the health, the life force of a sick person), or made, created (like the new spiritual situation represented by the initiation of the *shaman* [cf. Mary C. Wheelwright, *Navajo Creation Myth*, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1942, pp. 19 ff.]).

The Earth Mother plays an important role in Signor Pettazzoni's conception of Greek religious history. It should be said immediately that *La Religion dans la Grèce antique*, of which we now have an excellent translation by Jean Gouillard, dates from 1921: the text has been only slightly revised, the footnotes have been abbreviated and the author has added a new introduction and up-to-date bibliographies. The introduction is particularly important: it sets forth very clearly Professor Pettazzoni's present point of view on Greek religious history and the history of religions in general. “Greek civilization,” he writes, “did not emerge from a void. There does not exist a timeless Greek spirit that revealed itself in historical times. Within the framework of history, every *phainamenon* is a *genomenon*.”

The Greek civilization—that is, the Greek spirit in its objective reality—came from the meeting of two pre-existing civilizations: one, the *Mediterranean*, present *in situ*, and the other, the *Indo-European*, which was added” (pp. 18–19). The Mediterranean civilization is known through its monuments, especially those of Minoan Crete; the Indo-European civilization, on the other hand, can be reconstituted only through hypotheses drawn from its linguistics. “Hence a double current among scientists: some, especially the archaeologists, tend to exaggerate the role of the Mediterranean factor in the elaboration of Greek civilization; others, the linguists, are inclined to give the advantage to the Indo-European factor. Both tendencies have the same fault, an exclusivism which is inadmissible in the eyes of history. From the point of view of historical realities, the basic fact is the essentially different character of the two civilizations. On the whole, the Indo-Europeans represent a patriarchal pastoral society, the Mediterraneans, a matriarchal agricultural civilization” (pp. 19–20).

Similar encounters between a civilization of the patriarchal and pastoral type and a matriarchal and agricultural civilization have also been noted elsewhere: in Egypt, in Mesopotamia, in India, in China, in pre-Columbian America (p. 21). As the author takes the precaution to remind us, “there is no question of explaining the Greeks through the Aztecs”; the aim is simply to understand the originality of Greek civilization in the ensemble of universal history “instead of trying to detach it, solitary, in an inaccessible zenith” (p. 21). Now as religion is also an aspect of Greek civilization, the initial dualism of this civilization “is likewise shown in religion” (p. 22). Zeus and the majority of the Olympian pantheon belong to the patriarchal civilization of the Indo-European invaders; Demeter (the Earth Mother) and Dionysos with all his companions—Maenads, Satyrs, Silenes—represent the aboriginal matriarchal Mediterranean religiosity; they were not admitted to the Olympian pantheon until rather late.

This concept of Greek civilization and religion seems to us correct and, above all, useful; it has the great virtue of both outlining the structures of the Greek religion and retracing their history (or, more exactly, their pre-history). As Signor Pettazzoni clearly shows, a similar religious and cultural polarity can be verified elsewhere: Hinduism, for example, represents a synthesis between the aboriginal, pre-Aryan traditions and the tradition brought by the Indo-Europeans. Obviously “this schema, like all schemas, is conventional, and its terminology too” (p. 20). Indeed, it must not be forgotten that the tension between two traditions—a tension followed by reconciliation—has already been noted among the Indo-



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Europeans; Georges Dumézil has shown that in the social and religious tripartition of the Indo-Europeans the third class was represented chiefly by the farmers, that is, by ethnic elements who had been reduced to submission and integrated into a later synthesis.

However, one final remark in the introduction might give rise to misunderstandings: "It is not enough to learn these new hypotheses; we must understand them, and understand them historically. Above all, they must lead to a deepening of our historic consciousness" (p. 29). It must be remembered that, since Croce, *storia* and *storicismo* mean something different in Italian from what they are usually taken to mean with us: for Croce, history is philosophy, and his philosophic system has received the name of *storicismo assoluto*. But as this identification of *storia* and *filosofia* has not yet been widely accepted beyond the frontiers of Italy, the sense of the expression "historical consciousness" ought to be defined. Otherwise one might believe that in Signor Pettazzoni's eyes the only possible value of a myth, a symbol, a divine figure, etc., is that of its own history, that is to say, in the last instance, the discovery of its "origin" and the description of its development (since "every *phainomenon* is a *genomenon*").

We, however, cannot believe that one may still, in the middle of the twentieth century, thus mutilate the significance of a spiritual value (of any spiritual value, not only of magicoreligious values). To reduce the significance of Dionysos to his origin and his history (Mediterranean god of vegetation, worshipped by conquered and subaltern populations) would be a little like reducing the *Divine Comedy* to the biography of Dante. Signor Pettazzoni fears that "the deepening of our historical consciousness"—the task which he proposes to the historian of religions—may have no other alternative than "a more or less exclusive psychologism" (p. 29). However, in the article in *Numen* in which he set forth a program, he opposed to history not psychologism but phenomenology; thus the alternative between history and psychologism does not seem inescapable. It is true that as soon as he suspects abandonment of the historical plan, Professor Pettazzoni fears a fall into the abstract and the intemporal, an attitude which may be explained by Croce's inability to work out an adequate conception of time. But everywhere in the history of religions the "intemporal" serves as a model for time. As for the danger of psychologism, it is perhaps less serious if one is to judge by the direction taken very recently by the psychology of the depths. A historian of the stature of Arnold Toynbee admitted that he would have reached an understanding of history more rapidly if he had known the work of Jung. And a

whole book was written recently to analyze the relations between history and the structures of the deep psyche (Ira Progoff, *Jung's Psychology and Its Social Meaning*, New York, 1953).

If he limits himself to historiography, the historian of religion runs the risk of seeing himself replaced one day by the man who is a historian and nothing more. If Greek religion is nothing but one aspect of Greek civilization and Greek history, then the historian can very well present it along with the social, political and economic history of Greece, or (what amounts to the same thing) the study of Greek religion will eventually be considered one of the numerous *fields* of classical studies: a man will become a historian of Greek religion as he becomes, by vocation or as a result of circumstances, an epigrapher, archaeologist or historian of economics. This would be equivalent to the disappearance of the history of religions as an independent science. Fortunately, by its mass and its rich complexity, all Signor Pettazzoni's work protests against such a hypothesis. The question may perhaps be reduced to a quarrel of words: what Signor Pettazzoni means is that the historian of religions must never forget that every religious phenomenon is at the same time a historical phenomenon—in other words, that it is conditioned by history—and on this point everyone agrees. The problem is to know whether the task of the historian of religion ends with the detection and analysis of historical conditionings or if he must go further.

The *opus maximum* of Professor Martin P. Nilsson, his great *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* in two volumes, has already been presented to the readers of *Diogenes* (see Olof Gigon's review in No. 3, July, 1953, pp. 128–131). But the activity of the Nestor of the history of religion is prodigious: while composing his *Geschichte*, the eminent Swedish scholar has published a large number of studies, among which—besides his *Religion populaire dans la Grèce antique*—we must note the second edition (increased by about a hundred pages) of *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion* (Lund, 1950), the second edition of *The History of Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1949), the two volumes of the *Opuscula Selecta* (Lund, 1951, 1952), and a volume of hitherto unpublished studies, *Cults, Myths, Oracles and Politics in Ancient Greece* (Lund, 1951). The little book which has just been translated into French is a work of popularization in the best sense of the term: Professor Nilsson outlines briefly the results of the long and difficult research carried out by a whole generation of scholars on religious life in the rural districts of ancient Greece. He thus shows us aspects of religiosity which classical

mythology or the works of the scholars of antiquity generally overlooked. The description of rural beliefs and superstitions makes extremely profitable reading, especially the clear, condensed accounts of seasonal festivities (feasts of the dead, May days, etc.) which still survive in the Christianized folklore of modern Greece. Interesting, too, is the excellent introduction to the study of the mysteries of Eleusis (pp. 69 ff.), "the finest and most perfect flowering of popular Greek religion." Most aptly, the author recalls that "the silence imposed on the mysteries was well kept" and that "concerning the essential rites attached to the grade of *epopteia*, we have only general notions" (p. 70; see also p. 75). All that is known is that the Eleusinian mysteries were linked with the Thesmophoria, which proves that both ritual scenarios "were agrarian rites intended to foster the fertility of the grain planted in the earth" (p. 81). As for the myths of Demeter, Kore, Pluto and their relations with the mysteries of Eleusis, the author resumes the interpretations which he had already proposed in the first volume of his *Geschichte*: Demeter, the wheat mother, and Kore, the grain maiden, symbolize the old and the new harvest (pp. 84 ff.). In a few fine pages he analyzes "the moral and social consequences of agriculture" (pp. 95 ff.)—consequences which are illustrated by the opposition between the ideal of Homer's warrior knights and the ideal of the peasants expressed in the work of Hesiod. "I might even speak of an Eleusinian piety founded on the idea that agriculture engendered a civilized and peaceful life worthy of human beings" (p. 96).

All this is true and excellently said. The genetic relations and the relations of morphological structure between agriculture and the mysteries of Eleusis have been known and exploited by the majority of scholars. But since Professor Nilsson has already reminded us (p. 75) that we know nothing precise about "the essential rites attached to the grade of *epopteia*," we hesitate to follow him when he states that at Eleusis "there was no doctrine, but only a few simple, fundamental ideas concerning life and death—represented by the new harvest coming from the old" (p. 105). We know now that such "simple, fundamental ideas concerning life and death" may have great spiritual fecundity: the initiation rites of the primitives are an example. The fact that these ideas may have been, as Professor Nilsson believes, linked with "the new harvest coming from the old" does not in any way diminish their significance as great theoretical syntheses. The agricultural peoples, the *Urpflänzer*, as German ethnologists call them, worked out an admirable system of metaphysics on the basis of the connection which they discovered between food, death and sexuality. (See, in

Ad. E. Jensen's *Das religiöse Weltbild einer frühen Kultur*, Stuttgart, 1948, pp. 66 ff., the discussion of the mysteries of Eleusis apropos of C. G. Jung and Karl Kerényi's *Das göttliche Mädchen*, 1941.) We must note that what is meant is really a system of metaphysics and not a simple *Weltanschauung*, for among the *Urpflanzer* the link between the primordial murder of a divinity, the appearance of edible plants, and the necessity of sexual reproduction to assure the continuance of the human species which is menaced by death constitutes the explanation of ultimate reality as well as the justification of the present condition of life; the myth fulfills at the same time a cosmological, an ontological and a moral function. Professor Nilsson doubts whether there was a doctrine at Eleusis, and he is probably right if he is thinking of a doctrine in the sense in which the term may be applied to the teachings of the Orphic theologians or the pre-Socratic cosmologists—that is, a systematic explanation of the ultimate realities. But a doctrine may also be found, though in an implicit form, in myths and symbols. Professor Nilsson remains faithful to the rationalistic method and language of his generation, and this is no reproach; but it obliges us to qualify his analyses by translating them into less dogmatic terms. On the other hand, certain statements seem to us difficult to defend: for example, his assertion that “the offering of the first fruits is pre-deistic, earlier than the cult of the gods” (p. 46). Now, among the primitives, a very large number of offerings of first fruits are consecrated to the gods. Some ethnologists even think that this type of offering is the oldest sacrifice of which we have any knowledge. The validity of this general explanation may be disputed; but the existence of offerings of first fruits destined for the gods can no longer be denied.

Of primary importance is the methodological lesson to be drawn from Professor Nilsson's work. He wanted to give us a brief but complete description of certain little-known aspects of Greek religiosity, and he has acquitted himself brilliantly of the task. His position in regard to the two sources of Greek religion is also significant: he tries to strike an even balance between the partisans of the primacy of the Mediterranean elements and their adversaries. In the first edition of *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and Its Survival in Greek Religion* (which dates from 1927), he rather strongly emphasized the importance of the Mediterranean elements, but rectified this position in the first volume of his *Geschichte* (pp. 481 ff.), and critics of the pro-Mediterranean school promptly made themselves heard (see, for example, Giovanni Patroni in the *Athenaeum*, N.S., XX, 1942, pp. 127–138; Umberto Pestalozza, *Religione mediterranea*, Milan, 1951, pp.

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191 ff., and *passim*). It should be noted in this connection that the importance of the *Nordic* elements (which Sir Arthur Evans's momentous discoveries had thrown into the background) has again been emphasized by the authors of certain recent works (cf., for example, Rhys Carpenter, *Folk-Tale, Fiction and Saga in the Homeric Epics*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1946; Karl Meuli, *Griechische Opferbräuche*, in *Phyllobolia für Peter von der Mühlhll*, Basel, 1946, pp. 185-288; E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951).

M. Gabriel Germain's rich and absorbing work is addressed as much to the Hellenist as to the historian of religions and the literary critic. The author devotes the first part of his *Genèse de l'Odyssee* to the "prehistory of some Odyssean themes" (pp. 11-390): archaic rituals (a royal ritual of the steppes: the bow of royalty and the "marriages by competition"; a pastoral ritual: the Cyclops and the cult of the Ram; an agrarian ritual: Circe's swine); metallurgical techniques and beliefs (the bronze dwellings, Aeolus and the bellows); magic and Yoga (the cattle of the sun and the magic of the huntsmen, beds and magic, magic plants, the food of forgetfulness and sacred poisons, the marvels of Yoga); certain supernatural beings (Circe, the peoples who eat no salt, the subjects of King "Strength-of-Mind," clairvoyant animals); archaic speculations (the journey to the land of the dead, the Sirens and the temptation of knowledge).

These examples show the breadth and the interest of the comparative research undertaken by M. Gabriel Germain in connection with "the prehistory of Odyssean themes." The author puts together series of facts which it would take too long to discuss properly within the limits of a review, but we may summarize some of his results.

In Book XXI of the *Odyssey*, Penelope "promises to marry whichever one of the suitors triumphs in an archery competition. The contestants will have to draw Ulysses' bow—a hero's weapon which it take superhuman strength to use—then send an arrow with one shot through twelve axes placed in line. A queen and a kingdom will be the prize for this exploit" (p. 11). Now—and this fact seems to have escaped modern Hellenists—a similar episode is recounted in the two Hindu epics. On the occasion of the *svayamvara* (marriage by personal choice) of Draupadi, the contestants must draw a bow (so stiff that none, save Arjuna, can use it) and hit a target placed on the summit of a scaffolding. Similarly, in the *Râmâyana*, Râma succeeds in bending a giant bow and breaking it in the middle. Finally, in the *Lalita-Vistara*, the Bodhisattva wins a similar victory: he

draws a bow which no one could pick up, and the arrow pierces five shields, then seven trees and an iron figure in the form of a boar. "We are far from Ulysses' bow," wrote Ph.-Ed. Foucaux when he compared Râma's exploits with those of Buddha. But M. Germain's analysis points out clearly the elements which are common to all these stories: the hero wins his wife (or, in the *Odyssey*, wins her back), by winning an archery contest which includes the piercing of several successive targets (p. 24). The author also furnishes parallels to show that archery is part of the inaugural ceremonies of royalty (p. 45). In conclusion, he thinks he can discern the following stages in the diffusion of the theme: "1. The nomads of central Asia (Turco-Mongols or Iranians) invent the reflex bow before 3000. By this date the weapon is known in Mesopotamia. It probably reaches a part of the Indo-Europeans, future Hellenes or Aryans (in the precise sense of the term) before they are dispersed by the great migrations of the end of the third millennium. The story of the sovereign who wins his wife and his kingdom through his skill as an archer—which also comes from the steppes and is linked with known practices in the Indo-Iranian world—enters the aristocratic traditions of the future inhabitants of India and Greece. 2. It appears in literature for the first time, with the *Odyssey*, in the Greek world; later it appears with the epics and hagiographic stories of India. 3. One version penetrates Russia with the Mongols or Turks and survives orally to the middle of the 19th century, when it is picked up" (p. 53). One may wonder if specialists in the various historical disciplines would accept such a hypothesis. For our part, we wish to note only one important fact: in the *Rig Veda* there is a myth centered around the drawing of a bow. With his bow Indra looses an arrow which flies across a mountain and kills the boar which, on the other side of the mountain, is guarding the "treasure": a bowl of rice. Now, as F. B. Kuiper has recently shown, this myth is East Asiatic in origin even though it was assimilated by the Indo-Aryans as early as the Vedic period. Even the vocabulary is East Asiatic: the words for bow (*drumbhâli*), arrow (*bunda*), a bowl of rice (*odanâ*), the name of the boar (*Emusâ*) are of Munda origin. The historico-cultural perspective in which the episodes of the Hindu epic and of the *Lalita-Vistara* must be seen is consequently modified. As for the meaning of the contest, there seems no doubt about its role as an initiatory test: a "treasure," a wife, or a kingdom, rewards the hero. The fact that, in myths as well as in tales, such initiatory tests are linked with a *svayamvara* seems to indicate, as a historico-cultural context, the passage from a dying matriarchy to a society dominated by the ideology of the *Männerbünde*.

Apropos of the role of the Cyclops (pp. 55–129) M. Germain opportunely recalls the role of ogres in initiations: the terrible voice of Polyphemus is not lacking in resemblance to the great uproar that is produced in the initiatory hut (p. 82); the flight under the ram's skin might represent the departure of the initiate after he had symbolically become a ram in a cult dedicated to that animal (p. 86). After having reviewed the ram cults in the Mediterranean world (pp. 86 ff.) and in North Africa (pp. 103 ff.), the author concludes that "a relationship between Greek and Lybian facts, in the religious realm, does not seem *a priori* impossible" (p. 114). Though it has fallen into the domain of legends, "the episode of the Cyclops describes the initiation into a ram cult, of a very archaic character" (p. 128).

Circe's swine appear in the schema characteristic of an old agrarian ritual; the relations between the wild or domesticated pig and the forces of vegetation are abundantly shown (pp. 130–150). The author comes back to this question when studying the figure of Circe (pp. 249–275). Amidst her tamed beasts, Circe resembles Artemis, the Mediterranean and Asiatic *Potnia theron*; the isle of Circe recalls the Semitic sanctuaries surrounded by a sacred barrier, a paradise in the etymological sense of the word (p. 262). However, Circe does not seem to be, as M. Hiquily claims, "a goddess of mysteries": "the theme of the swine shows characteristics which are more folkloric than mystical" (p. 273). But even without accepting M. Hiquily's hypothesis one may observe that, among numerous *Urpflänzer* populations, swine are related to initiation ceremonies (cf. Jensen's *Das religiöse Weltbild*, mentioned above).

The two chapters devoted to metallurgical techniques and beliefs (pp. 159–191) are rich in new suggestions. "Bronze dwellings" often appear in tales of the supernatural, and they seem to be the dwellings of divine or extraordinary beings. The author goes on to say that the day iron came into current usage, bronze received the ritual value of stone (p. 173). As for Aeolus, he would seem to be the archetype of the blacksmith king. The story of the bellows and the winds is derived from metallurgical techniques; as he works his bellows, the smith draws the air into a bladder at will and expels it. The indication that the king's six sons married their six sisters bears an Egyptian imprint (p. 191). Apropos of the cattle of the Sun (the hides that move, the meat that moos while it is on the spit), M. Germain recalls a certain magic belief of hunting peoples according to which the animal is reborn from its own bones (pp. 196 ff.). Among the "marvels of Yoga" he classes Proteus, whom he considers comparable to "sarcastic gurus," Milarepa, for instance (pp. 232 ff.). "The spiritual master

reveals himself only to the one who seems to him capable of supporting the weight of knowledge" (p. 236). It would have been still more exact to say that all these tests have an initiatory character. The author compares the "winged sandals" to certain results of Indo-Tibetan Yoga (pp. 238 ff.), and the pilotless ships remind him of the chariot Puçpaka which, in the Râmâyana, went wherever its master directed his desire (pp. 243 ff.) Comparing the adventure of Ulysses to the well-known Egyptian account of the shipwrecked sailor (pp. 299 ff.), he finds many points in common, but "it must not necessarily be concluded that our episode has its origin in the version of the skipwrecked sailor which has come down to us" (p. 305). The ritual interpretation of the whole episode proposed by M. Mireaux (an agrarian fecundity rite celebrated at the beginning of spring) does not seem to him convincing (p. 314).

A rather long chapter is devoted to the *Nekya* (pp. 329–381), to which the nearest Oriental parallel is Gilgamesh's journey to meet Up-napishti. The author thinks he can see the influence of Asiatic pessimism (p. 351). However, "one cannot escape the final impression that the poet felt the grandeur of his subject but that he did not develop it either in an entirely epic or an entirely religious way" (p. 370). This is one of the general conclusions of the work: the *Odyssey* abounds in Oriental and archaic elements, but the poet seems to have neglected or ignored their religious significance. The raft of Ulysses has an Egyptian form (pp. 403 ff.), and Hornell has shown that Egyptian shipbuilding is related to that of the Indian Ocean, not to that of the Mediterranean. Like Hesiod, Homer seems to owe a great debt to earlier—and thus Oriental—cosmogonic ideas, which were also common to Orphism (p. 522). Between the *Odyssey* and the epic of Gilgamesh there exists "a succession of episodes which certain characteristics bring together" (p. 422), but there also exist differences: Ulysses, in the *Nekya*, is hunting for practical information, not the secret of life (p. 423). "The difficult thing is not to find a mystic significance behind an Odyssean episode. Almost all have their sources in traditions whose origins go back to practices or speculations of a religious nature. The difficulty begins when one feels the need of organizing them into a whole animated by the same spirit and tending to show a coherent sense" (p. 630). The problem could not have been better expressed. But is the coherence of myths and traditional stories of a rational nature? The author continues: "In these real tales that are formed by the episodes of the Lotus Eaters, the Cyclops, Aeolus, Circe, the island of the Sun, one cannot find the slightest indication that the poet ever considered



them otherwise than as good stories. In the revelation of Achilles, the temptation of the Sirens, we believe we caught the reflection of higher thoughts, which go back much further than our author and are foreign to the traditions of his people. But it seemed to us that he did not himself perceive all their value" (*ibid.*). Here M. Germain raises the very delicate problem of the interpretation of literary works: to judge the value of a literary work, must one limit oneself to what the author consciously wanted to say or thought he was saying? It is not certain that this is M. Germain's thought: quite aptly, he speaks (pp. 511 ff.) of the Odyssean "world of the imagination," which must not be opposed only to the geographic world in the narrow sense of the term, but also to every "profane" world—that is, every world which draws its significance only from the conscious level. One wonders, then, whether the episodes of the Cyclops and Circe can have been considered by the poet merely as "good stories." After two centuries of rationalism, a modern critic finds it difficult to consider them as such; it is hard to see why Homer would have been more rationalistic than our contemporaries. M. Germain speaks of a "progressive fall, from transmission to transmission, from the rite to the tale, from the sacred to the supernatural" (p. 634), and that is true. But one must also remember that the "supernatural" prolongs and disguises myths, even in a society which, like ours, has lost its sense of the sacred.

Studying the "world of the imagination," M. Germain has written some fine pages against the "intrepid localizers"; he has also shown the non-historical structure of mythical time, the importance of conventional numbers (cf. also his complementary thesis, *Homère et la Mystique des nombres*, Paris). One regrets, however, that he did not treat the problem of the genesis of the epic, the passage of myth and legend to oral literature. "Preliminary work would have to be done around many other epics in order for us to know what weight must be given to these parallels and whether, in this way, some truth of a general and permanent nature might be reached" (p. 677). But this work has already been done by Kershaw and Nora Chadwick in the three enormous volumes of their *Growth of Literature* (Cambridge, 1932–1940). It would have been interesting to know what M. Germain thinks of the general hypothesis of the two British scholars on the origin of the epic. Similarly, one would have liked to know what he thinks of the Italian pro-Mediterranean school, of the work of Patroni, Pestalozza, Momolina Marconi on Circe, Calypso, etc., and especially of the *Commenti mediterranei all'Odisea di Omero* (Milan, 1950), the voluminous, prolix but brilliant work of Giovanni Patroni. Though

M. Germain's information seems rather rich, one has the impression that for his comparative research he used chiefly manuals and works of synthesis (which is always dangerous for the student of comparative religions or literatures who is preoccupied with some special problem). Specialized reviews, even those in the field of Hellenism, are rather parsimoniously cited. The author warns us in his preface: "The difficulties of documentation in a country which is very unevenly equipped in these fields, like Morocco, where we planned and carried out our work; the isolation into which the war plunged it even more completely than it did Europe; the difficulty of communications in the years which followed the end of hostilities—all this delayed and complicated the final elaboration. Some of the gaps in our work have no other cause" (pp. 5-6). In these few lines it seems to us that we read the threat of a very great danger: on the one hand, except for a few cultural centers, students run the risk of having only out-dated information at their disposal; on the other hand, if one does not appeal to the collaboration of scholars working in various fields, all comparative research, however laborious, runs the risk of being incomplete and even distorted. The whole future of the history of religions depends on rapid circulation of exact information and broad cooperation among the specialists in numerous fields, from prehistory and archaeology to ethnology and folklore.