

Religione Mediterranea

By UBERTO PESTALOZZA

Milano: Bocca, 1951, pp. 470.

It does not occur often, as far as I know, that a pupil is asked to review the work of his master. In just such a position *Diogenes* has put me by asking me to write on Uberto Pestalozza's *Religione Mediterranea*, the publication of which I supervised together with Mr. Untersteiner. However, since liberty of judgment is the law of the school from which I come, I did not hesitate to accept the invitation. Before going ahead, I should like, rather, to advise the reader of my personal responsibility for any typographical error that might have slipped into the book, while pointing out the asset to this edition of the sixty pages of double-column analytical index, a precious instrument of reference and methodical work.

The volume opens with two unpublished studies, 'Isis and the Pomegranate' and 'The Singular Sovereignty of Nut'. In 'Ardivi Sura Anahita' the author brings to light the pre-Aryan-European traits of the greatest goddess in the Iranian religion. The feminine members of the Greek pantheon are scrutinised in the light of Mediterranean mythology. 'The Silver-footed Thetis', 'Boopis Potnia Heres'; or specific images of divinity are examined: 'The Minoic Potnia, The Bull, and the Double-edged Axe', 'The Potnia in an Archaic Pithos'; or particular forms of sacred actions: 'Vegetables, Fruits, and Pastry in the Eleusinian Mysteries', 'The Athenian Thargelia', 'Youthful Priests and Priestesses in the Cult of

Athene and Artemis'; and, in the case of some Latin divinities, the myth—'Mater Larum and Acca Larentia'—or the ritual—*Juno Caprotino, Veneralia*—is clarified.

These are the most significant among his minor contributions to the field of Mediterranean studies. The inclusion of researches into Christian and Manichean subjects would have detracted from the organic character of the collection, which now gives a synthetic, practically complete view of the religion of the Mediterranean civilisation, and owing to this quality the book may well be of use to anyone who wishes to regroup the material in the form of a manual. It is the fruit of a long scientific life, consumed by the torment of research and the travail of recording it; but Pestalozza is always guided by that stern philological discipline which provides a solid base for research (and a guaranty for even the boldest hypotheses). It is this discipline that the young, or even those who are young no longer, try to shake off today; for haste bids them rush to a conclusion even if the word be left half-uttered, the critical examination unfinished. Philology is much indebted to Pestalozza for having clarified certain texts, till now obscure. His philological discipline was sharpened, if possible, by a growing inner demand for clarity, which cut his research down to the essential: the reader is referred to the 'Thargelia', written in 1931-2, which, with all the intricacy of that ritual, remains a first-rate piece of research; and then, right afterwards, to 'Vegetables, Fruits, and Pastry in the Eleusinian Mysteries', written in 1949: on the

whole, the same treatment; but twenty years later the touch is far more youthful. It is this youthful maturity which led Pestalozza to attempt a co-ordination of the various currents of research and thought (ethnological and linguistic, folk-lore and paleontological) and above all, to an awareness of the religious problem which is at the base of every expression of myth and cult. That is why myth and cult are equilibrated in his conception, while elsewhere research has been intent, till yesterday, on investigating the ritual and, nowadays, on reaching the core of religious meaning through myth alone. But if it is true that certain rituals can subsist without further experience of the divine to animate and justify them; and if it is true that often such experiences of the divine did not have an immediate echo in ritual, it is equally true that these cases are the exception and not the rule. Pestalozza has shown time and again quite clearly that myth and ritual form an indissoluble bond without which religion does not exist (cf. pp. 5 *et seq.*, 156 *et seq.*, 297 *et seq.*, 348 *et seq.*, and 369 *et seq.*). Leaving aside Brahmanism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism, which speak for themselves in this respect, the documentation of Malinowski, of Frobenius, or of Howitt on the ritual dances, the seasonal sacrifices, and the initiation rites in the Pacific area, in Africa as well as in Australia, prove that cult is a re-creation of oneself to God, because it is a re-creation of God: a re-creation, that is to say, of His gesture, His word, His story; which amounts to saying, His myth. All this lives in the rite, and the rite in it.

Reviews

The eternal femininity of the divine, a concept, inherited by the Aryan-Europeans from the Mediterranean peoples, which they both clearly accepted and dramatically contrasted, constitutes the dominant motif of these studies. The goddess, who providentially is mother, prostitute, and virgin, appears as the protagonist, together with her divine son and father, in a divine world whose stage-setting is the earth. The earth, still covered with woodland patches (whence the sacredness of the double-edged axe, pp. 181 *et seq.*; of the lions, pp. 57, 69, 141, 199, 215; of the bears, pp. 128, 236 *et seq.*; of the mountains, pp. 69, 87, 96); but by and large already tried by the plough (pp. 191 *et seq.*); enclosed between uncertain confines of sea and sky.

The sea—onetime kingdom of Thetis, who was not born a Nereide but was first a young mare and a centaur (p. 93); only, I remain sceptical with respect to that parade of roots, drawn into the picture to prove the origin of the

Centaur from Asia Minor (which surely can be proven in other ways).

The sky—whence Nut lately rose, freeing herself from the arms of Seb.—And in Egypt 'the sky was considered feminine' (p. 71).

It was owing to her chthonian character as well as to her overbearing femininity that the great goddess Isis became 'She of the Pomegranate', a name pregnant with mystical significance, as is the name of her who offers enigmatically the fruit; in the same way, Heres becomes a 'boopis', as are also Io and Ishtar (p. 151). And human epiphany becomes not the last but the most significant of the goddess' manifestations (pp. 29 *et seq.*). Woman among women, she knows and guides and protects the travails of all women from the first revelations of puberty to the fulness of maternity. Then comes death, which, discounted in the agrarian experience by a periodical rebirth synchronized with a divine resurrection, gives to these Mediterranean peoples the longed-for peace of the Elysian fields (p. 15).