

Diogenes and Shamanism

The interest of *Diogenes* in shamanism was already signaled in its first issue, published in November, 1952, when Éveline Lot-Falck reviewed Marcel Bouteiller's *Chamanisme et guérison magique* and Mircea Eliade's *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase*. The publication, forty years later, of a special issue devoted to shamanism, is but testimony to the magazine's continuing interest in the subject.

In January, 1957, *Diogenes* (in issue number 17) published the text of a lecture, delivered by Anatoly Levitsky at the Collège de Sociologie on March 7 and 21, 1939, entitled "Mythes et rites du chamanisme." Levitsky, a colleague of Michel Leiris at the Musée de l'Homme, was the source of a great deal of stimulating material for the reflections of those who, like Roger Caillois, endeavored to examine the question of the individual's ability to "struggle against the natural order of reality," and who simultaneously sought to outline a "kind of exhaustive classification" of "the diverse manifestations of the life of the imagination."¹ Because of the war, Levitsky's text had not been published. Nor had he been able to complete his work on Siberian shamanism, since he was executed in 1942 for his collaboration with a resistance network active at the Musée de l'Homme.² Using the notes Levitsky had left behind, Lot-Falck, in 1953, was able to bring to publication his book *Les rites de chasse chez les peuples sibériens*. Caillois, managing editor of *Diogenes* and co-founder, with Georges Bataille, of Le Collège de Sociologie, continued to investigate the questions first posed in the pre-war period, not the least important of which was the relationship between religion and power. These questions were central to issue number thirty-four of *Diogenes*, published in the spring of 1961. It

1. Caillois, Roger, *Le Mythe et l'homme*, Gallimard, Paris, 1987, p. 10; first edition 1938.

2. Denis Hollier was able to obtain and publish this text in *Le Collège de Sociologie*, Idées, Gallimard, Paris, 1979, p. 421–446. This work, reviewed and corrected, is soon to be republished by the same publisher.

was of course only natural that a magazine that had declared itself in favor of both interdisciplinary and cross-cultural studies should take an active interest in a subject that justified this approach to the highest degree.

The study of shamanism lent itself quite readily to “diagonal” studies, so important to Caillois. Shamanism could be observed on several continents and was of interest to a wide spectrum of academic disciplines, including the social and medical sciences. In addition, its transformations and manifestations in some contemporary industrial societies (North America and South Korea, for example) provided valuable material for the investigation of contemporary forms of the sacred.

The task today, however, is not a total synthesis, in the manner of Eliade and Caillois, capable of integrating all the various approaches to a phenomenon as complex as shamanism. Instead, as the table of contents shows, we can see the fruitful and necessary character of diagonal studies, ranging from the psychoanalytic to the ethnographic; and the afterward by Roberte Hamayon firmly underscores their achievements.

THE EDITORS