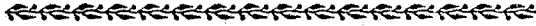


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# Patterns in Comparative Religion



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by

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That they are sacred implies at once a cosmological theory and a clearly defined conception of the dialectic of hierophanies. "The Arabs adore stones," wrote Clement of Alexandria.<sup>1</sup> Like his monotheistic predecessors of the Old Testament, the Christian apologist, by the purity and intensity of his own religious experience (based on the revelation of Christ), was led to deny the old religious forms any spiritual value. Given the tendency in the spiritual make-up of Semites to confuse God with the material object representing him or displaying his power,<sup>2</sup> it is very likely that in Clement's time the greater number of the Arabs "adored" stones. Recent research, however, shows that the pre-Islamic Arabs venerated certain stones called by the Greeks and Romans *baytili*, a word taken from the Semitic and meaning "house of God".<sup>3</sup> And such sacred stones were not venerated in the Semitic world only, but by all the peoples of North Africa even before their contacts with the Carthaginians.<sup>4</sup> But bethels were never adored simply as *stones*; they were adored in as much as they manifested a divine presence. They represented God's *house*, they were his sign, his emblem, and the repository of his power, or the unchanging witness of a religious act performed in his name. A few examples from the Semitic world will serve to make their meaning and function clearer.

On his way to Mesopotamia, Jacob went to Haran. "And when he was come to a certain place, and would rest in it after sunset, he took of the stones that lay there, and putting them under his head, slept in the same place. And he saw in his sleep a ladder standing upon the earth, and the top thereof touching heaven; the angels also of God ascending and descending by it; and the Lord, leaning upon the ladder, saying to him: I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac. The land, wherein thou sleepest, I will give to thee and to thy seed. . . . And when Jacob awaked out of sleep he said: Indeed the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. And trembling he said: How terrible is this place!

<sup>1</sup> *Protreptica*, iv, 46.

<sup>2</sup> Vincent, *La Religion des Judéo-Araméens d'Eléphantine*, Paris, 1937, p. 591.

<sup>3</sup> See Lammens, "Le Culte des bétyles et les processions religieuses dans l'Arabie préislamique", *Bulletin de l'institut d'archéologie orientale*, Cairo, vol. xvii.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Bel, *La Religion musulmane en Berberie*, Paris, 1938, vol. i, p. 80.

This is no other but the house of God and the gate of heaven. And Jacob, arising in the morning, took the stone, which he had laid under his head, and set it up for a title, pouring oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of the city, Bethel . . ."<sup>1</sup>

#### 80. STONE EPIPHANIES AND SYMBOLISMS

Zimmerman has shown that *Beth-el*, "house of God", is both a name for God, and one of the words for a sacred stone or bethel.<sup>2</sup> Jacob went to sleep on a stone, at the place where heaven and earth opened on to each other; it was a "centre" like the "gate of heaven". But the God who appeared to Jacob in his dream—was he indeed the God of Abraham, as the Bible text stresses, or was he a local divinity, the god of Bethel, as Dussaud thought in 1921?<sup>3</sup> The texts of Ras Shamra, which are invaluable evidence of the religious life of the Semites before Moses, show that *El* and *Bethel* are interchangeable names for the same divinity.<sup>4</sup> In other words, it was the God of his ancestors whom Jacob saw in his dream, and not a local divinity. But the bethel which he set up to consecrate the place was later venerated by the local population as a particular divinity, Bethel. The monotheist elite, faithful to Moses' message, struggled long against this "god", and it is that struggle to which Jeremias is referring. "We may take it as read that, in the famous story of Jacob's vision, the God of Bethel has not yet become the god Bethel. But this identification and confusion may have occurred quite soon among the ordinary people."<sup>5</sup> Where, traditionally, Jacob saw the angels' ladder and the house of God, Palestinian peasants saw the god Bethel.<sup>6</sup>

But we must remember that, whatever god the local population may have seen in Bethel, no stone ever represented more than a *sign*, a dwelling, a theophany. The divinity was *manifest* by means of the stone, or—in other rituals—*witnessed* and

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxviii. 11-13, 16-19.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Dussaud, *Les Origines cananéennes du sacrifice Israélite*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1941, p. 232.

<sup>3</sup> Dussaud, pp. 234 ff.; cf. Jer. xlviii. 13: "And Moab shall be ashamed of Chamos, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel".

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Dussaud, *Les Découvertes de Ras Shamra*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1941 pp. 97. 111.

<sup>5</sup> Vincent, p. 591.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Eliade, *Insula Iulii Euthanasius*, p. 117.

sanctified a covenant made near it. This witness consisted, in the minds of simple folk, in the divinity's being embodied in the stone; and, to the elite, in the stone's being transfigured by the divine presence. After completing the covenant between Yahweh and his people, Josue "took a great stone, and set it under the oak that was in the sanctuary of the Lord. And he said to all the people: Behold, this stone shall be a testimony unto you . . . lest perhaps hereafter you will deny it, and lie to the Lord".<sup>1</sup> God was also there as "witness" in the stones set up by Laban when he made a league of friendship with Jacob.<sup>2</sup> Such witness-stones were probably adored by the Caananites as manifestations of the deity.

The elite who held to the monotheism of Moses struggled against the frequent confusion between the *sign* of God's presence, and the *incarnation* of the deity in a given object. "You shall not make to yourselves any idol or graven thing [masseba]: neither shall you erect pillars [maskit], nor set up a remarkable stone in your land to adore it."<sup>3</sup> And in Numbers,<sup>4</sup> God commands Moses to destroy the stones of worship that he is going to find in Canaan: ". . . beat down their pillars, and break in pieces their statues, and waste all their high places." It is not a battle between faith and idolatry, but between two theophanies, two moments of religious experience: on one hand the primitive conception, identifying the divinity with matter and adoring it in whatever form or place it appeared; and on the other, a conception growing out of the experience of an elite, that recognized the presence of God only in consecrated places (the Ark, the Temple and so on) and in certain Mosaic rites aimed at strengthening that presence in the believer's own mind. As usual, the religious reform took over the old forms and objects of worship, altering their meaning and their religious significance. The Ark of the Covenant in which, traditionally, the Tables of the Law were kept, may well have also contained at the beginning certain religious stones made sacred by the presence of God. The reformers would accept things of this sort and fit them into a different religious

<sup>1</sup> Josue xxiv. 26-7.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xxxi. 44 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Levit. xxvi. 1.

<sup>4</sup> xxxiii. 52.

system, give them a quite different meaning.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, every reform is really directed against a defacement of the original experience; the confusion between *sign* and *divinity* had become very great among the simple people, and it was to avoid just such confusions that the Mosaic elite either abolished the signs (figured stones, carved images and the rest), or completely changed their meaning (as with the Ark of the Covenant). The confusion was not slow to reappear in another form, and dictated further reforms or, in other words, further restatements of the original meaning.

#### 81. SACRED STONE, *Omphalos*, "CENTRE OF THE WORLD"

The stone upon which Jacob slept was not only the "House of God"; it was also the place where, by means of the angels' ladder, communication took place between heaven and earth. The bethel was, therefore, a centre of the world, like the Ka'aba of Mecca or Mount Sinai, like all the temples, palaces and "centres" consecrated by ritual (§143 ff.). Its being a "ladder" uniting heaven and earth derived from a theophany which took place at that spot; God, manifesting himself to Jacob on the bethel, was also indicating the place where he could come to earth, the point at which the transcendent might enter the immanent. As we shall see later, ladders of this kind are not necessarily placed in a definite, concrete geographical spot; the "centre of the world" can be consecrated by ritual in innumerable points of the globe without the authenticity of one invalidating the rest.

For the moment I will simply note a few beliefs about the *omphalos* ("navel") of which Pausanias says:<sup>2</sup> "What the inhabitants of Delphi call *omphalos* is of white stone, and thought to be at the centre of the earth; and Pindar, in one of his odes, confirms this notion". Much has been written on the subject (cf. the Bibliography). Rohde and J. H. Harrison think that the *omphalos* originally represented the stone placed on the tomb; Varro<sup>3</sup> mentions a tradition that the *omphalos* was the tomb of the sacred serpent of Delphi, Python: *quem*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. for instance, A. Bertholet, "Ueber kultische Motivverschiebungen", *Sitz. Preuss. Akad. Wiss., Phil. Hist. Klasse*, 1938, vol. xviii.

<sup>2</sup> x, 16, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *De Lingua Latina*, vii, 17.

*Pythonis aiunt tumulum.* Roscher, who devotes three monographs to this question, declares that the *omphalos* was from the first believed to be the "centre of the earth". Nilsson<sup>1</sup> is not satisfied with either interpretation, and believes the conception of the burial stone and of the "centre of the world" both came after, and took the place of, a more "primitive" belief.

But, actually, both interpretations are "primitive", and they are not mutually exclusive. A tomb, seen as a point of contact between the world of the dead, of the living, and of the gods, can also be a "centre", an "*omphalos* of the earth". To the Romans, for instance, the *mundus* represented the communicating point of the three spheres; "when the *mundus* is open, open too is the gate of the unhappy gods of the under-world", writes Varro.<sup>2</sup> The *mundus* is not, of course, a tomb, but the symbolism of it will give us a clearer understanding of the similar function fulfilled by the *omphalos*: that it first originated with burial does not contradict the fact of its being a "centre". The place where communication could be made between the world of the dead and that of the gods of the underworld was consecrated as a connecting link between the different levels of the universe, and such a place could only be situated in a "centre" (the manifold symbolic significance of the *omphalos* will be studied in its proper place when we come to analyse the theory and ritual function of the consecration of "centres", §145).

When Apollo superseded the ancient earth religion of Delphi, he took over the *omphalos* and its privileges. Pursued by the Furies, Orestes was purified by Apollo beside the *omphalos*, the supremely sacred spot, in the "centre" where the three cosmic zones are linked, in the "navel" which guarantees by its symbolism a new birth and a reintegrated conscience. The manifold significance of the "centre stone" is even better preserved in Celtic traditions. Lia Fail, "the stone of Fail" (the name is doubtful; Fail might mean Ireland), starts singing when anyone worthy of being king sits on it; in ordeals, if the accused is innocent, he becomes white when he gets on to it; when a woman who is doomed to remain sterile comes near, the stone exudes blood; when if the woman will become a mother,

<sup>1</sup> *Geschichte*, vol. i, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Macrobius, *Saturn.*, i, 16, 18.

it exudes milk.<sup>1</sup> Lia Fail is a theophany of the soil divinity, the only divinity to recognise his master (the High King of Ireland), the only one who controls the economy of fertility, and guarantees ordeals. There are also, of course, later phallic variants of these Celtic *omphaloi* (cf. the bibliography); fertility, above all, is an attribute of the "centre", and emblems of it are often sexual. That the Celts saw the religious (and implicitly the political) significance of the centre is evidenced by such words as *medinemetum*, *mediolanum*<sup>2</sup> which exist even today in French place names.<sup>3</sup> Bearing in mind what we learn from Lia Fail and some of the traditions preserved in France, we have good reason to identify these "centres" with omphalic stones. In the village of Amancy (district of La Roche), for instance, there can be found—proof positive of the "centre"—a "Middle-of-the-World Stone".<sup>4</sup> The Pierra Chevetta in the Moutiers district has never been covered by floods,<sup>5</sup> which seems to be a faint echo of the "centre" that the deluge could never engulf (§145).

## 82. SIGNS AND FORMS

The *omphalos*, in every tradition, is a stone consecrated by a superhuman presence, or by symbolism of some kind. Like Bethels and *masseba*, or prehistoric megaliths, the *omphalos* bears witness of something, and it is from that witness that it gets its value, or its position in the cult. Whether they protect the dead (like, for instance, neolithic megaliths), or become the temporary dwellings of the souls of the dead (as among many "primitives"), or witness a covenant made between man and God, or man and man (as among the Semites), or owe their sacred character to their shape or their heavenly origin (as with meteorites etc.)—whether, in fact, they represent theophanies, or points where the different zones of the universe touch, or images of the "centre"—stones always draw their religious significance from the presence of God transfiguring them, from extra-human powers (the souls of the dead) embodied in them,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dumézil, *Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus*, Paris, 1941, pp. 228-9.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, vi, 13: "media regio".

<sup>3</sup> Saintyves, vol. ii, p. 328, with the bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> Saintyves, vol. ii, p. 327.

<sup>5</sup> Saintyves, vol. ii, p. 376.

for human dwellings. The presence or absence of ants or mice may be a decisive sign of a hierophany. Sometimes a domestic animal, a bull for instance, is let loose; in a few days' time a search is made for it, and it is sacrificed on the spot where it is found, which is recognized as the place for building the town.

"All sanctuaries are consecrated by a theophany," wrote Robertson Smith.<sup>1</sup> But this does not mean that *only* sanctuaries are so consecrated. The remark can be extended to cover the dwellings of hermits or saints, and, in general, all human habitations. "According to the legend, the Moslem ascetic who founded El-Hemel at the end of the sixteenth century stopped beside a spring for the night, and stuck his stick in the earth. Next day he tried to pull it out to go on his way but found that it had taken root and was shooting buds. He saw in this an indication of the will of God and made his dwelling on the spot."<sup>2</sup> All the places where saints lived, prayed, or were buried are, in turn, sanctified, and are therefore cut off from the profane space around them by an enclosure or an embankment of stones.<sup>3</sup> We have already met (§ 75) these same piles of stones marking places where men died violent deaths (by lightning, snake-bite and so on); in that case the violent death possesses the value of a kratophany or hierophany.

The enclosure, wall, or circle of stones surrounding a sacred place—these are among the most ancient of known forms of man-made sanctuary. They existed as early as the early Indus civilization (at Mohenjo-Daro, for instance, cf. § 97) and the Ægean civilization.<sup>4</sup> The enclosure does not only imply and indeed signify the continued presence of a kratophany or hierophany within its bounds; it also serves the purpose of preserving profane man from the danger to which he would expose himself by entering it without due care. The sacred is always dangerous to anyone who comes into contact with it unprepared, without having gone through the "gestures of approach" that every

<sup>1</sup> *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, p. 436.

<sup>2</sup> René Basset, quoted by Saintyves, *Essais de folklore biblique*, Paris, 1923, p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> Examples of this in Morocco will be found in Westermarck, *Pagan Survivals in Mahometan Civilization*, London, 1933, p. 96.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the reproductions of Minoan and Mycenaean rings in Axel W. Persson's *The Religion of Greece in Prehistoric Times*, Berkeley (Cal.), 1942, nos. 6, 7, 15, 16, etc.



religious act demands. "Come not nigh higher," said the Lord to Moses, "put off the shoes from thy feet: for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."<sup>1</sup> Hence the innumerable rites and prescriptions (bare feet, and so on) relative to entering the temple, of which we have plentiful evidence among the Semites and other Mediterranean peoples.<sup>2</sup> The ritual importance of the thresholds of temple and house<sup>3</sup> is also due to this same separating function of limits, though it may have taken on varying interpretations and values over the course of time.

The same is the case with city walls: long before they were military erections, they were a magic defence, for they marked out from the midst of a "chaotic" space, peopled with demons and phantoms (see further on), an enclosure, a place that was organized, made cosmic, in other words, provided with a "centre". That is why in times of crisis (like a siege or an epidemic), the whole population would gather to go round the city walls in procession and thus reinforce their magico-religious quality of limits and ramparts. This procession round the city, with all its apparatus of relics and candles, was sometimes purely magico-symbolic in form: the patron saint of the town was offered a coiled waxen taper as long as the perimeter of the wall. All these defence measures were extremely widespread in the Middle Ages,<sup>4</sup> but are to be found in other times and in other places as well. In northern India, for instance, in time of epidemic, a circle is described around the village to stop the demons of the illness from entering its enclosure.<sup>5</sup> The "magic circle", in such favour in so many magico-religious rituals, is intended to set up a partition between the two areas of different kinds.

#### 142. THE "CONSTRUCTION" OF THE SACRED SPACE

The supremely sacred places—altars and sanctuaries—were, of course, constructed according to the traditional canons. But, in the last analysis, this construction was based on a primeval revelation which disclosed the archetype of the sacred

<sup>1</sup> Exod. iii. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Picard, *Ephèse et Claros*, Paris, 1922, p. 271, n. 3.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance, Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament*, vol. iii, pp. 1-18.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Saintyves, *Essai de folklorie biblique*, pp. 189 ff.

<sup>5</sup> W. Cooke, *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, London, 1894 vol. i, pp. 103-42.

space *in illo tempore*, an archetype which was then indefinitely copied and copied again with the erection of every new altar, temple or sanctuary. We find examples everywhere of this construction of a sacred place following an archetypal pattern. We will look at only a few—taken from the Near and Far East. Take, for instance, the Iranian *maga*. Nyberg, breaking away from the previous interpretations of this term (Geldner translated it by *Bund*, *Geheimbund*), relates it to the *maya* of the *Videvdāt*<sup>1</sup> (which indicates an act of purification performed in a consecrated place with nine ditches), and sees in it the sacred place where all impurity was done away with and the union of heaven and earth made possible.<sup>2</sup> It was in this carefully marked space that the experience of the group Nyberg calls the "Gatha community" took place.<sup>3</sup>

The erection of the Vedic altar of sacrifice is more instructive still in this matter. The consecrating of the spot followed a twofold symbolism. On one hand, the building of the altar was conceived as a creation of the world.<sup>4</sup> The water with which the clay was mixed was the same as the primeval waters: the clay forming the altar's foundation, the earth; the side walls the surrounding atmosphere and so on.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the building of the altar was a symbolic integration of time, its "materialization in the very body of the altar". "The altar of fire is the year. . . . The nights are the stones surrounding it and there are 360 of them because there are 360 nights in the year; the days are the *yajusmati* bricks, for there are 360 of them; and there are 360 days in the year."<sup>6</sup> The altar thus becomes a microcosm existing in a mystical space and time quite distinct in nature from profane space and time. To speak of building an altar is, in the same breath, to speak of a repetition of the creation of the world. The profound significance of this repetition will appear in a little while (§ 151 ff.).

The same sense of a cosmogony is also apparent in the construction of the *mandala* as practised in the Tantric schools.

<sup>1</sup> 9, 1-33.

<sup>2</sup> *Yasna*, 53.

<sup>3</sup> *Die Religionen des Alten Iran*, Leipzig, 1938, pp. 147 ff.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. *Satapatha-Brahmana*, vi, 5, 1 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Sat.-Br.*, i, 9, 2, 29, etc.

<sup>6</sup> *Sat.-Br.*, x, 5, 4, 10.

The word means "circle"; the Tibetan renderings of it are either "centre" or "what surrounds". The thing itself is a series of circles which may or may not be concentric, inscribed in a square. Inside this diagram, outlined on the ground with a coloured thread or trails of coloured powder, images of the various Tantric divinities are placed. The *mandala* is both an *imago mundi* and a symbolic pantheon. The initiation consists in the neophyte's penetration into the various zones or stages of the *mandala*. The rite may be looked on with equal justice as the equivalent of the *pradakṣiṇā*, the well-known ceremonial of going round a temple or sacred monument (*stūpa*), or as an initiation by way of ritual entry into a labyrinth. The assimilation of the temple with the *mandala* is obvious in the case of Borobudur<sup>1</sup> and the Indo-Tibetan temples built under the influence of Tantric doctrine.<sup>2</sup> All these sacred constructions represent the whole universe in symbol: their various floors or terraces are identified with the "heavens" or levels of the cosmos. In one sense, every one of them reproduces the cosmic mountain, is, in other words, held to be built at the "centre of the world". This symbolism of the centre, as I shall show, is as much involved in the building of towns as of houses: every consecrated place, in fact, is a "centre"; every place where hierophanies and theophanies can occur, and where there exists the possibility of breaking through from the level of earth to the level of heaven.

Any new human establishment of any sort is, in a sense, a reconstruction of the world (§ 151). If it is to *last*, if it is to be *real*, the new dwelling or town must be projected by means of the construction ritual into the "centre of the universe". According to many traditions, the creation of the world was begun in a centre and for this reason the building of towns must also develop round a centre. Romulus dug a deep trench (*fossa*), filled it with fruit, covered it again with earth, and having set up an altar (*ara*) over it, traced a rampart round it with his plough (*designat moenia sulco*).<sup>3</sup> The trench was a *mundus*, and as Plutarch points out,<sup>4</sup> "they gave the name of world [mundus]

<sup>1</sup> P. Mus, *Barabudur*, Paris-Hanoi, 1935, vol. i, p. 320.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. G. Tucci, "Il Simbolismo architettonico dei Templi di Tibet occidentale", *Indo-Tibetica*, Rome, 1949, vols. iii and iv.

<sup>3</sup> Ovid, *Fasti*, iv, 821-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Romulus*, 12.

to that trench as to the universe itself". This *mundus* was the point of intersection for the three cosmic spheres.<sup>1</sup> It is likely that the primitive pattern for Rome was a square inscribed in a circle: the twin tradition of the circle and the square was so widespread as to suggest it.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, the chthonic significance of the circular monuments of the Greeks (*bothros*, *tholos*, *thymele*, etc.) so forcefully brought forward in F. Robert's recent research,<sup>3</sup> must not mislead us. It has not yet been shown whether this single interpretation is not, in fact, the result of an Aegean "specialization", for sacred monuments of every kind, even funeral monuments (cf. the Indian *stūpa*), normally offer a far wider cosmological meaning—an intersection of all cosmic levels—which turns every such construction into a "centre". Africa displays, in this matter, an example from which we can learn much, in which the chthonian element does not disguise the cosmogonic inspiration. It is the ceremonial for founding towns used by the Mande tribe, which Frobenius describes<sup>4</sup> and which Jeanmaire<sup>5</sup> and Kerenyi<sup>6</sup> compare with good reason to the ceremonial of the founding of Rome. This African ritual, while including chthonian and agricultural elements (the sacrifice of a bull and erection of an altar, phallic in form, over its generative organ), is based on a cosmogonic idea. The founding of a new town repeats the creation of the world; once the spot has been confirmed by ritual, a square or circular enclosure is put round it with four gates corresponding to the four points of the compass. As Usener had already shown,<sup>7</sup> towns are divided into four in imitation of the Cosmos; in other words, they are a copy of the Universe.

#### 143. THE "CENTRE OF THE WORLD"

As I have devoted several earlier works to the symbolism of

<sup>1</sup> Macrobius, *Sat.*, i, 16, 18.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. H. Allcroft, *The Circle and the Cross*, London, 1927.

<sup>3</sup> *Thymélé*, Paris, 1939.

<sup>4</sup> *Monumenta Africana*, Frankfurt, 1929, vol. vi, pp. 119-24; *Histoire de la civilisation africaine*, p. 155.

<sup>5</sup> *Couroi et Courètes*, Paris, 1931, pp. 166 ff.

<sup>6</sup> C. G. Jung-K. Kerenyi, *Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, London, 1951, pp. 24 ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Götternamen*, pp. 190 ff.

the "centre" and its cosmological implications<sup>1</sup> I will give only a few examples here. To take in all the facts in a single broad view, one may say that the symbolism in question expresses itself in three connected and complementary things:

- (1) The "sacred mountain" where heaven and earth meet, stands at the centre of the world;
- (2) Every temple or palace, and by extension, every sacred town and royal residence, is assimilated to a "sacred mountain" and thus becomes a "centre";
- (3) The temple or sacred city, in turn, as the place through which the Axis Mundi passes, is held to be a point of junction between heaven, earth and hell.

Thus, in Indian belief, Mount Meru stands in the middle of the world, and the polar star shines above it. This idea is shared by the Uralo-Altaics, Iranians and Germans;<sup>2</sup> it is found even among such "primitives" as the Pygmies of Malacca<sup>3</sup> and seems also to be part of the symbolism of pre-historic monuments.<sup>4</sup> In Mesopotamia, a central hill (the "mountain of the lands") joins the Sky to the Earth.<sup>5</sup> Tabor, the name of the mountain in Palestine, may well have started as *tabbur*, meaning "navel", *omphalos*<sup>6</sup>; and Mount Gerizim was known as "the navel of the earth" (*tabbur eres*).<sup>7</sup> It was because Palestine was so high—near the summit of the cosmic mountain in fact—that it was not covered by the Flood.<sup>8</sup> To Christians, Golgotha was the centre of the world; it was both the topmost point of the cosmic mountain and the spot where Adam was created and buried. The Saviour's blood was therefore sprinkled over Adam's skull buried at the very foot of the cross, and thus redeemed him.<sup>9</sup>

In the matter of temples and towns being assimilated to the

<sup>1</sup> *Cosmologie si alchimie babiloniana*, Bucharest, 1937; *Comentarii la legenda Mesterului Manole*, Bucharest, 1943; *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, London, 1955, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> Schebesta, *Les Pygmées*, Paris, 1940, p. 156.

<sup>4</sup> W. Gaerte, "Kosmische Vorstellungen im Bilde prähistorischer Zeit", *APS*, 1914, vol. ix, pp. 956-79.

<sup>5</sup> A. Jeremias, *Handbuch d. altorientalischen Geisteskultur*, Berlin, 1929, p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> E. Burrows, "Some Cosmological Patterns in Babylonian Religion", in *The Labyrinth*, ed. S. H. Hooke, London, 1935, p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> Judges, ix. 37.

<sup>8</sup> Wensinck, *The Ideas of the Western Semites concerning the Navel of the Earth*, Amsterdam, 1916, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> References to this in *Cosmologie si alchimie babiloniana*, Bucharest, 1937, p. 35.

the creation" takes place.<sup>1</sup> According to the tradition handed on by Dimashki,<sup>2</sup> the king proclaimed: "This is a new day of a new month of a new year; all that time has worn out must be renewed!" It is on that day, too, that the fate of men is determined for the whole year.<sup>3</sup> On the night of the Nawroz, innumerable fires and lights are to be seen,<sup>4</sup> and libations and purifications by water are performed to ensure plenty of rain in the coming year.<sup>5</sup>

At the time of the "Great Nawroz", too, everyone sowed seven sorts of grain in a jar, and "drew from their growth conclusions as to the year's harvest".<sup>6</sup> This is a custom similar to that of "fixing lots" in the Babylonian new year, and exists even to-day in the new year celebrations of the Mandeans and the Yezidis. Again, it is because the New Year repeats the creation that the twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany are still looked on as foreshadowing the twelve months of the year; peasants all over Europe judge the temperature and rainfall to be expected during each of the months to come by the "meteorological signs" of those twelve days.<sup>7</sup> The rainfall for each month was also decided in this way during the Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>8</sup> The Indians of Vedic times thought of the Twelve Days of the middle of the winter as an image and replica of the whole year,<sup>9</sup> and this same concentration of the year into twelve days also appears in Chinese traditions.<sup>10</sup>

#### 154. REPETITIONS OF THE CREATION ATTACHED TO PARTICULAR OCCASIONS

All these things we have been looking at have one trait in common: they presuppose the notion that time is periodically regenerated by symbolic repetition of the creation. But the

<sup>1</sup> Albiruni, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*, trans. Sachau, London, 1879, p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> Christensen, vol. ii, p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> Albiruni, p. 201; Kazwini, in Christensen, vol. ii, p. 148.

<sup>4</sup> Albiruni, p. 200.

<sup>5</sup> Albiruni, pp. 202-3.

<sup>6</sup> Albiruni, p. 202.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Frazer, *The Scapegoat*, London, 1936, pp. 315 ff.; Dumézil, *Le Problème des Centaures*, Paris, 1929, pp. 36 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Wensinck, p. 163.

<sup>9</sup> *RV*, iv, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, p. 107.

repetition of the creation is not narrowly bound up with communal ceremonies for the New Year. In other words, "old", "profane", "historic" time can be abolished and mythical, "new" regenerated time established by repeating the creation even during the course of the year and quite apart from the communal rites mentioned just now. Thus, for the Icelanders, the taking possession of land (*landnama*) was equivalent to the transformation of chaos into cosmos<sup>1</sup> and, in Vedic India, taking possession of an area was confirmed by the erection of a fire altar, regarded in fact as a repetition of the creation. The fire altar, in effect, reproduced the universe, and setting it up corresponded to creating the world; and whenever anyone built an altar of this sort, he was repeating the archetypal act of creation and "building" time.<sup>2</sup>

The Fijians called the ceremony of inaugurating a new chieftain the "creation of the world".<sup>3</sup> The same idea can be found, though not necessarily so explicitly, in more developed civilizations, where every enthronement is equivalent to a re-creation or regeneration of the world. The first decree the Chinese emperor promulgated on his accession to the throne was to determine a new calendar, and before establishing a new order of time, he abolished the old.<sup>4</sup> Assurbanipal saw himself as a regenerator of the cosmos, for, he said, "since the time the gods, in their friendliness, did set me on the throne of my fathers, Ramman has sent forth his rain . . . the harvest was plentiful, the corn was abundant . . . the cattle multiplied exceedingly".<sup>5</sup>

The prophecy of the Fourth Eclogue, *magnes ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo* . . . can in a sense be applied to every sovereign. For with every new sovereign, however insignificant he may be, a "new era" is begun. A new reign was looked upon as a regeneration of the nation's history, if not of the history of the world. We should be wrong to reduce these high-sounding formulæ to what they came to be only as

<sup>1</sup> Van der Leeuw, *L'Homme primitif et la religion*, p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Satapatha-Brahmana*, vi, 5, 1, ff.; "The fire-altar is the year" . . . *ibid.*, x, 5, 4, 10; "Of five layers consists the fire-altar [each layer is a season], five seasons are a year, and the year is Agni [the altar]", *ibid.*, vi, 8, 1, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Hocart, *Kingship*, Oxford, 1927, pp. 189-90.

<sup>4</sup> Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Jeremias in Hastings, *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. i, p. 187 b.

importance, not only to man's magico-religious experience, but to his experience in general. Whatever its context, a symbol always reveals the basic oneness of several zones of the real. We have only to recall the tremendous "unifications" effected by the symbols of water or of the moon, whereby so many biological, anthropological and cosmic zones and levels are identified along various lines. Thus, firstly, symbolism carries further the dialectic of hierophanies by transforming things into *something other* than what they appear to profane experience to be: a stone becomes a symbol for the centre of the world, and so on; and then, by becoming symbols, signs of a transcendent reality, those things abolish their material limits, and instead of being isolated fragments become part of a whole system; or, better, despite their precarious and fragmentary nature, they embody in themselves the whole of the system in question.

At best, a thing that becomes a symbol tends to become one with the Whole, just as the hierophany tends to embody all of the sacred, to include *in itself* all the manifestations of sacred power. Every stone in a Vedic altar, by becoming Prajāpati, tends to become identified with the whole Universe, just as every local goddess tends to become the Great Goddess and finally to take to herself all the sacred powers possible. This "imperialism" among religious "forms" will be more clearly seen in the companion volume I shall devote to those "forms". For the moment, let us note that this tendency to annexation can also be found in the dialectic of the symbol. This is not merely because every symbolism aims at integrating and unifying the greatest possible number of zones and areas of human and cosmic experience, but also because every symbol tends to identify with itself as many things, situations and modes of existence as it can. The symbolism of water or the moon will tend to take to itself whatever concerns life and death, that is all change and all "forms". And a symbol like the pearl will tend to represent both these systems (moon and water) at once by embodying in itself almost all the manifestations of life, femininity, fertility and the rest. This "unification" is in no sense a confusion; the symbolism makes it possible to move from one level to another, and one mode of existence to another, bringing them all together, *but never merging them*.



We must realize that the tendency of each to become the Whole is really a tendency to fit the "whole" into a single system, to reduce the multiplicity of things to a single "situation" in such a way as also to make it as comprehensible as it can be made.

I have dealt elsewhere with the symbolism of bonds, knots and nets.<sup>1</sup> There I considered the cosmological significance of Vṛtra's "binding" of the waters and the cosmocratic significance of Varuṇa's "bonds"; the "binding" of one's enemies either magically or with actual ropes, the imprisoning of corpses, the myths in which the gods of the underworld catch in their nets men or the souls of the dead; the symbolism of the "bound" or "chained" man (India, Plato), of the untangling of the maze of thread and the solving of a problem of living. And I showed that we are always faced with the same symbolic pattern expressed more or less completely at the many levels of magico-religious life (cosmology, the myth of the Terrible Sovereign, aggressive or defensive magic, the mythology of the underworld, initiation dramas, etc.). In every case there is an archetype seeking expression at every level of magico-religious experience. But, more significant still, this symbolism of "binding" and "loosing" reveals man's specific situation in the universe, a situation that no other hierophany by itself would be capable of revealing; one might even say that it is only this symbolism of bonds that fully reveals to man his ultimate situation and enables him to express it to himself coherently. And, further, the articulations of this symbolic system make clear how identical are the situations of all who are "conditioned" (the "captive", the "bewitched", or simply man in the face of his own fate), and how inevitably they find their symbols.

#### 172. THE LOGIC OF SYMBOLS

We have, therefore, every reason to speak of a "logic of symbols", in the sense that symbols, of every kind, and at whatever level, are always consistent and systematic. This logic goes beyond the sphere of religious history to rank among the problems of philosophy. Indeed (and I have said this

<sup>1</sup> "Le 'Dieu licur' et le symbolisme des nœuds", *Images et Symboles*, ch. iii.